

“History without Documents”: The Vexed Archives of
Decolonization in the Middle East

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IN SONALLAH IBRAHIM'S 1981 NOVEL *The Committee*, an unnamed protagonist is tasked with writing a report on the greatest “Arab luminary.” After obtaining access to the archives of a national daily newspaper through a personal recommendation, the narrator receives a much-sought-after file and recounts: “I opened the folder, my fingers trembling from excitement. It revealed a white sheet of paper with a date from the early '50s at the top and nothing else. I turned it over and saw a similar sheet of paper. Quickly, I examined the sheets of paper in the file and saw that they all lacked everything but a date.”¹ Jotting down the dates listed, the protagonist then cross-references them with other, more publicly available information in an attempt to reconstruct a narrative of events—piecing together what an Egyptian historian once referred to as a “history without documents.”²

Ibrahim's literary parable demonstrates two senses of the phrase “history without documents.” One references what Achille Mbembe calls the chronophagy of the state, the way it devours the past through either the material destruction of archives or the presentation of a history purified of antagonisms and embodied in empty commemorative accounts.³ The second sense refers to the history that we might seek to reconstruct because of, and despite, the absence of access to such documents. The archive thus functions as an “instituting imaginary” that seeks to reassemble and inter the traces of the deceased—always incomplete, always unknowable, and always, at least partially, the projection of our own desires.⁴

How, then, might we conceptualize the archives of decolonization in light of the problematic of “history without documents”? We might start by focusing on the two

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¹ Sonallah Ibrahim, *The Committee*, trans. Mary St. Germain and Charlene Constable (Syracuse, N.Y., 2001), 45–46.

² Ibrahim 'Abduh, *Tarikh bila Watha'iq* (Cairo, 1975).

³ See Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michèle Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh, and Jane Taylor, eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht, 2002), 19–27, on the archive as both a modality of power and an imaginary.

⁴ *Ibid.*; Brian Connolly, “Against Accumulation,” *Journal of Nineteenth Century Americanists* 2, no. 1 (2014): 172–179; Harriet Bradley, “The Seductions of the Archive: Voices Lost and Found,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 107–122.

senses of the term, first by exploring the material inaccessibility of particular post-colonial state archives, and second, and more importantly, by questioning the compositional logics of archival imaginaries, the "conditions that allow something to be archived and archivable."⁵ As Ann Stoler remarks, the archive "may serve as a strong metaphor for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections."⁶ In what ways, then, have historians remembered, forgotten, or appropriated the various intellectual traditions that belonged to the era of decolonization in the Middle East?⁷ What compositional logics enable certain individual thinkers to be archived as part of the history of decolonization and others not? The uses and abuses of both paper and what we might term non-documentary archives have led to "subjugated knowledges," "excluded socialities," and aporias, the implications of which we have yet to fully explore.⁸

AS JEAN ALLMAN HAS NOTED, much of the literature on archives has focused on the colonial archive, even while scholars of the postcolonial world have grappled with the substantial limitations of state archives in formerly colonized regions and their methodological implications.⁹ Historians have become increasingly accustomed to openly discussing the very material difficulties of accessing archives, which are so intensified in postcolonial contexts—the tortuous security clearances, for example, or the impossibility of archival access in times of war or revolutionary upheaval.¹⁰ For historians of the Middle East, such questions have reached a heightened pitch

⁵ Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives," *differences* 22, no. 1 (2011): 146–171, quotation from 152. For Povinelli, such compositional practices contribute to or inhibit "the endurance of specific social formations" (152–153). On the postcolonial archive as less an empirical object than a hermeneutical maneuver and a form of cultural melancholia, see Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, "Postcolonialism's Archive Fever," *Diacritics* 30, no. 1 (2000): 25–48. See also Harvey Neptune's contribution to this roundtable, which focuses on rethinking the archives of decolonization as a historiographical, rather than positivist, intellectual exercise.

⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in Hamilton et al., *Refiguring the Archive*, 83–101, quotation from 87.

⁷ I should point out that my focus is predominantly the Arab world and, to a lesser extent, Iran, areas that experienced either direct colonial rule or semicolonialism.

⁸ Povinelli, "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall," 151. As Jordanna Bailkin notes in her contribution to this roundtable, we need to question who counts as an "agent" in the histories of decolonization.

⁹ Jean Allman, "Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History-Writing," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (February 2013): 104–129. For a discussion of the colonial archive as a network of habits, sentiments, and knowledge practices that betrayed epistemic anxieties about empire, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, N.J., 2009); Anjali R. Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, N.C., 2009). On the notion of a vernacular archive as complementary, rather than antithetical, to official colonial archives, see Charu Gupta, "Writing Sex and Sexuality: Archives of Colonial North India," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 4 (2011): 12–35. For complex accounts of the use of oral histories in colonial and postcolonial contexts that do not merely counterpose "local remembrance against authorized accounts," see Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995); Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001). On postcolonial archives as themselves sites of decolonization and sovereignty, see the contributions of Sarah Stein and Todd Shepard to this roundtable.

¹⁰ See Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C., 2005); Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2006).

as scholars face the prospect of ever-diminishing access to archives and national libraries in the region in the wake of recent political convulsions.

Nothing has highlighted these difficulties more than the highly acrimonious debates surrounding the legality of the acquisition of Iraqi state documents pertaining to Saddam Hussein's regime, which were seized by the U.S. in Baghdad after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and are held by a Media Processing Center and storage facility in Qatar and by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Archivists have debated the political, ethical, and legal repercussions of the seizure of Iraqi documents during the war, as well as the contrasting notions of cultural property embedded in different viewpoints regarding their repatriation.¹¹ Yet, despite their vexed and tainted nature, the Iraqi Ba'ath Party records, which contain millions of pages of documents, have already yielded invaluable studies of Ba'athist Iraq, exploring the architecture of the party apparatus, as well as the normalization of war in Iraq under the last twenty three-years of Ba'athist rule.¹²

Disputes similarly exist over the Nasir era in Egypt, during which the regime attempted to coopt historians, who were cast as participants freed from a monarchical and colonial past in a national struggle toward postcolonial revolutionary sovereignty. The archives of the period—many of which are reported to be in the personal possession of Nasir's close associates, and some of which are widely dispersed across various personal, governmental, and archival locations—have been contentious sites of dispute.¹³ As historians have demonstrated, the question of archival compilation, management, and availability has been a perennial feature in the Egyptian press, particularly since the reorganization of the Egyptian state archives in 1954.¹⁴ It was the dire nature of this situation that prompted Egyptian historian Ibrahim 'Abduh's cynical use of the phrase "history without documents" to refer to the attempt to write the history of the Nasir period.¹⁵ Such disputes about the nature

¹¹ On the seizure of Iraqi archives and the debates surrounding their potential repatriation, see John Gravois, "Disputed Iraqi Archives Find a Home at the Hoover Institution," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, no. 21 (2008): A1–9; Gravois, "A Tug of War for Iraq's Memory," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, no. 22 (2008): A7–10; Michelle Caswell, "Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back: Cultural Property and the Fight over the Iraqi Baath Party Records," *American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 211–240; Douglas Cox, "National Archives and International Conflicts: The Society of American Archivists and War," *ibid.*, 451–481; Bruce P. Montgomery, "Immortality in the Secret Police Files: The Iraq Memory Foundation and the Baath Party Archive," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 18, no. 3 (2011): 309–336; Montgomery, "Saddam Hussein's Records of Atrocity: Seizure, Removal, and Restitution," *American Archivist* 75, no. 2 (2012): 326–370; Montgomery, "US Seizure, Exploitation, and Restitution of Saddam Hussein's Archive of Atrocity," *Journal of American Studies* 48, no. 2 (2014): 559–593. According to Montgomery, a hundred million pages are in storage in Qatar, and the Hoover Institution holds seven million pages of Ba'ath Party records that were subsequently taken by the Iraq Memory Foundation, "a private Washington, D.C.–based group that entered Iraq as an American defense contractor to preserve the records of Saddam Hussein's regime." See Montgomery, "Saddam Hussein's Records of Atrocity," quotation from 326; cf. <http://www.iraqmemory.org/en/>.

¹² Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge, 2011); Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge, 2013).

¹³ Gamal Nkrumah, "Safeguarding Nasser's Legacy," *Al Ahram Weekly Online*, July 18–24, 2002, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/595/sc4.htm>; Nkrumah, "Chasing the Paper Trail," *Al Ahram Weekly Online*, July 2–August 1, 2007, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/855/eg2.htm>.

¹⁴ Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation* (London, 2003), 74–78; Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, Calif., 2009), 289–298.

¹⁵ 'Abduh, *Tarikh bila Watha'iq*; Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt*, 76.

of state archival collections and scholarly access have come into sharp relief in the wake of Egypt's 2011 revolutionary uprising, as historians have argued the need for easier access to the Egyptian National Archives, admittance to which requires a time-consuming and labyrinthine security clearance, and as they have critiqued the powerful local and international heritage industry interests invested in the Library of Alexandria project.¹⁶

While, to borrow Joanna Sassoon's phrasing, "chasing phantoms in the archives" may provide "an opportunity to write histories of the absence of evidence in the archival records," the consequences of such obstructed access have been manifold.¹⁷ Within Middle East historiography, it has led to the resourceful use of oral histories and interviews, family holdings and private collections, published memoirs and letters, press reports, and foreign archives.¹⁸ In many instances, then, the historian's ability to forge relationships with individuals with genealogical connections and generational bonds to historical personages has replaced the oft-fetishized "allure of the archives" and the tactile nature of brittle documents.¹⁹ It has even led to the creation of counterfactual or fictitious archives, as in the work of Walid Raad, a contemporary visual artist born in Lebanon, and the Atlas Group, an artistic project created by him that challenges the "boundary between historical and fictional narration," while it grapples with the reconstruction of the Lebanese Civil War in the near-complete absence of documents.²⁰ And yet, one could argue that the obstruction of post-independence official state archives has tended to make the workings of the colonial

¹⁶ Mary Mourad, "Historian Fahmy Argues for Easing Access to Egyptian National Archives," *AhramOnline*, June 24, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/P/18/74745/Books/Historian-Fahmy-argues-for-easing-access-to-Egypti.aspx>; Joshua Hersh, "The Battle Of The Archives: What Egypt's Intellectuals Lost," *The New Yorker*, September 4, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-battle-of-the-archives-what-egypts-intellecutuals-lost>; Lucie Ryzova, "Mourning the Archive: Middle Eastern Photographic Heritage between Neo-liberalism and Digital Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 4 (2014): 1027–1061.

¹⁷ Joanna Sassoon, "Chasing Phantoms in the Archives: The Australia House Photographic Collection," *Archivaria* 50 (2000): 117–124, here 123.

¹⁸ Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt*, 77. See, for example, Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Oxford, 1991); Lucie Ryzova, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Collector, Dealer and Academic in the Informal Old-Paper Markets of Cairo," in Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz, eds., *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World* (Farnham, 2012), 93–120; David Stenner, "Networking for Independence: The Moroccan Nationalist Movement's Global Campaign against Colonialism" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 2015). Hoda Elsadda discusses the Women and Memory Forum's efforts to create an oral history archive of Egyptian women's memories and experiences of, and engagement with, the Arab uprisings in "An Archive of Hope: Women's Narratives of Change" (unpublished ms.); see <http://www.wmf.org.eg/project/archive-of-womens-voices/>.

¹⁹ Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven, Conn., 2013); Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2002).

²⁰ Walid Raad, "The Loudest Muttering Is Over: Documents from the Atlas Group Archive" (lecture/performance, University of California, Davis, January 14, 2008); Sarah Rogers, "Forging History, Performing Memory: Walid Ra'ad's The Atlas Project / Fabriquer l'histoire, mettre en scène la mémoire: Le Atlas Project de Walid Raad," *Parachute* 108 (October/December 2002): 68–79, quotation from 70; André Lepecki, "'After All, This Terror Was Not without Reason': Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 88–99; Kassandra Nakas and Britta Schmitz, eds., *The Atlas Group (1989–2004): A Project by Walid Raad* (Cologne, 2007); Achim Borchardt-Hume, Alan Gilbert, Blake Stimson, and Hélène Chouteau-Matikian, *Walid Raad: Miraculous Beginnings* (London, 2011). See also <http://www.theatlasgroup.org>. On the archive as an act of imagination, see Dore Bowen, "This Bridge Called Imagination: On Reading the Arab Image Foundation and Its Collection," *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* 12 (May 2008), http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_12/bowen/index.htm.

state far more visible than the operations of the national states that succeeded colonial rule.²¹ In other words, the archive has functioned as a dense locus of post-colonial power, and its impermeability has often masked the precise nature of the political and social debates that went into the consolidation of regimes in the aftermath of decolonization.

IF THE MATERIAL INACCESSIBILITY OF state archives in places such as Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus has rendered the decolonizing state less discernible, so too has an imaginary that has archived the era in terms of received narratives that occluded key elements of the history of decolonization from our view. Among these has been what Samah Selim terms the *nahda/naksa* (awakening/catastrophe) narrative, which conceptualized Arab cultural history in terms of a fin-de-siècle cultural renaissance partly inspired by contact with Europeans, and a tragic post-1967 decline brought on by the Arab defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel.²² The murky and nonlinear process of decolonization, so often overshadowed by the troubled history of the present as well as increased U.S. military intervention in the region, began to appear to many as simply reversible. Decolonization in the Middle East, one might be led to think, was a tragic enterprise that, in Abdallah Laroui's words, failed to bring "finally to a close the long winter of the Arabs" and instantiated a "melancholic historicism."²³ A second, and perhaps related, narrative has been the assumption of an

²¹ As Rashid Khalidi has noted, the postwar period has not received as sustained attention by historians of the Middle East as the earlier period. Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston, 2009), 6. This is evident in the overwhelming historiographical focus on colonial modernity, for example, Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, N.J., 1987); Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, Calif., 2007); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, N.C., 2011); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, 2000); Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J., 2005); Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, Calif., 2009); Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900–1950* (Berkeley, Calif., 2009).

²² To be sure, there is a distinction to be drawn between academic historians, on the one hand, and militant Arab intellectuals writing in the post-1967 period who oftentimes deployed a language of political despair, on the other. This distinction is at times complicated by the fact that these categories may overlap, as is the case with Abdallah Laroui, himself both an academic historian and an engaged intellectual. On the *nahda/naksa* narrative, see Samah Selim, "Literature and Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 3 (August 2011): 385–386. For representative examples of the declensionist narrative, see Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*, trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley, Calif., 1976); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London, 2004); Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Political Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 2009); Aaded Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, N.J., 2003); Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*, revised ed. (Cambridge, 1992).

²³ Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*, 177. I borrow the term "melancholic historicism" from Anjali Arondekar, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 25, no. 3 (2015): 98–122.

"incommensurable divide" between Islamism and secular nationalism in the era of decolonization.²⁴

Yet what if we thought of decolonization as an ongoing process and series of struggles rather than a finite event, as regional as well as national, intellectual and cultural as well as political, and religious as well as secular? We might then shift our attention away from dominant and declensionist narratives of decolonization as a state-driven and secular political process, to include members of the intelligentsia, social scientists, and religious thinkers who were bypassed in or excised from traditional archives. How, then, might we reimagine the archives of decolonization?

Thomas Osborne notes that the heuristic value of the concept of the archive lay precisely in its elasticity, oscillating between literalist and idealist notions. Beyond their figuration as literal places—centers of storage and libraries—archives, he argues, can be viewed as centers of interpretation that require epistemological and ethical credibility. In other words, archives are sites "for particular kinds of knowledge, particular styles of reasoning."²⁵ If, as Foucault argues, the archive constitutes the limits and forms of the sayable, as well as its memory and appropriation, then what currents of thought and intellectual traditions belong to the archives of decolonization? How have individual thinkers been archived or appropriated within historiographical debates and public thought in ways that reinforce a melancholy historicism that pits Islamic thought against liberal or revolutionary secular ideals?

In "THE BODY AND THE ARCHIVE," THE late Allan Sekula spoke of "a *shadow archive* that . . . contains subordinate, territorialized archives: archives whose semantic interdependence is normally obscured by the 'coherence' and 'mutual exclusivity' of the social groups registered within each."²⁶ Sekula's musings on the semantic interdependence of our archival categories are productive for rethinking the categories of decolonization. To date, scholarship on the Middle East has not sufficiently placed secular and religious thought within "a single analytic field"; nor has the heuristic value of these ideologically charged categories, perhaps themselves the product of the colonial encounter, been sufficiently questioned.²⁷ Take, for instance, Egypt's

²⁴ Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2009): 836–862.

²⁵ Thomas Osborne, "The Ordinarity of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 51–64, quotation from 53. As Michel Foucault states, "The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events." The archive thus refers to "enunciative possibilities and impossibilities." Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), 126–131, quotations from 129.

²⁶ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 3–64, quotation from 10, emphasis in the original. Although Sekula is referencing the material archive of nineteenth-century photography, his insights can, I believe, be fruitfully applied to the *idealist* archive of the historiography of decolonization.

²⁷ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 4. For noteworthy attempts to place the secular and religious within a single analytic field, see Alain Roussillon, "Trajectoires réformistes. Sayyid Qutb et Sayyid 'Uways: Figures modernes de l'intellectuel en Egypte," *Egypte/Monde Arabe* 6 (1991): 91–139; Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, N.C., 2007); Michael Ezekiel Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, Calif., 2009). For a genealogical exploration of the emergence of the category of religion in the West, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993).

Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), who has generally been viewed through the prism of Islamism, that is, as the progenitor of radical Islamic thought concerned with reshaping both polity and society.²⁸ Scholars have thus referred to him as “the most significant thinker of Islamic resurgence in the modern Arab world,” and “by far the greatest ideologue and thinker of the Muslim Brothers’ movement,” whose global influence rivaled or surpassed that of Ayatollah Khomeini—a “martyr” whose “text-icon” has swayed multiple radical Islamist groups in regions as far-flung as Chechnya and Pakistan.²⁹ Qutb’s prolific and erudite body of writing, which includes poetry, autobiography, journal articles, full-length books, and multi-volume Qur’anic commentaries, has led scholars to focus, virtually in isolation, on his writings, debating the provenance of his ideas and their orthodox, heterodox, or “fundamentalist” tendencies in an effort to corroborate or refute his influence over radical jihadist groups.

To be fair, some scholars have acknowledged the anticolonial tenor of Qutb’s corpus, his critique of “intellectual and spiritual colonialism,” and have even noted resonances between his thought and that of revolutionary anticolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon.³⁰ In some instances, they have argued that Qutb is best understood as a theorist or theologian of freedom, in contrast to Western media representations of him as “the philosopher of Islamic terror.”³¹ While such accounts have immeasurably enriched our understanding of Qutb’s work and demonstrated his thought as the complex product of local social and political forces as well as biographical experiences, they have not situated him within a sufficiently complex and symbiotic local ideological landscape.³² In particular, they have assumed the mutual exclusivity of Islamic and secular social groups.

Qutb’s complex oeuvre, however, did not delineate a new discursive field, but rather shared the same discursive terrain as those of his so-called secular colleagues.³³ In short, he too belongs to the archives of decolonization, archives that cannot be conceptualized merely as a Manichean battle between secular nationalism and Islamism. Indeed, our historical evidence belies the “mutual exclusivity” of these social groups. In many instances, intellectuals writing between the 1940s and 1960s, such as Qutb and the “secular” sociologist Sayyid ‘Uways (1913–1989), were struc-

²⁸ The literature on Qutb is vast. A few key texts are John Calvert’s comprehensive and erudite intellectual biography *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York, 2010); William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of “Social Justice in Islam”* (Leiden, 1996); Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany, N.Y., 1996); Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, N.J., 1999); Ellen McLarney, “American Freedom and Islamic Fascism: Ideology in the Hall of Mirrors,” *Theory and Event* 14, no. 3 (2011); Sayed Khatab, *The Power of Sovereignty: The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Qutb* (London, 2006); Olivier Carré, *Mysticism and Politics: A Critical Reading of “Fi Zilal al-Qur’an” by Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966)*, trans. Carol Artiges (Leiden, 2003); Sharif Yunis, *Sayyid Qutb wa-l-Usuliyya al-Islamiyya* (Cairo, 1995).

²⁹ Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, 93; Carré, *Mysticism and Politics*, 15.

³⁰ Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, 133; Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, 226–227.

³¹ See Paul Berman, “The Philosopher of Islamic Terror,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 23, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/magazine/23GURU.html>. For a critique of Berman and a discussion of Qutb as a theologian of freedom, see McLarney, “American Freedom and Islamic Fascism.”

³² Roussillon, “Trajectoires réformistes,” and Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, are notable exceptions.

³³ I offer here what Dominick LaCapra refers to as a non-canonical and non-canonizing reading of canonical texts; LaCapra, *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal Violence* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009), 15.

turally homologous figures, whether in terms of social class or in terms of their oblique and antagonistic relationship to political power, figures who took their societies as an "object of knowledge and horizon of reform."³⁴ They were "the 'men,' until yesterday the 'object' of study, and, henceforth, sovereign 'subjects,'" hailed as the new agents of decolonization in Anouar Abdel-Malek's groundbreaking 1963 critique of Orientalism.³⁵ Significantly, they sought to construct a just society in the aftermath of a brutal and essentially European war, arguing, as did Sayyid Qutb, that capitalism embodied the universal negative of Western modernity.³⁶

Qutb, along with some of the religious scholars he drew on, conceptualized the Islamic program as a bulwark against imperialism.³⁷ In so doing, they often shared "the same conceptual field" or "problem-space" with other secular thinkers who were equally concerned with the place of the committed intellectual activist, the rethinking of the assumptions of progress and the temporal framework of the West, the reevaluation of the *nahda* as a cultural and intellectual project, and the re-imagination and reform of the postcolonial polity.³⁸ The decolonization of the Arab intellectual heritage for Qutb, much like the decolonization of Iranian society for the intellectual and activist 'Ali Shari'ati (1933–1977), was thus inextricably linked to harnessing the "catalytic power of religious imagination" toward the revolutionary ends of decolonization.³⁹ Indeed, Qutb and Shari'ati would come to share a view of Islam as an ideological totality, a dialectical inversion of the Marxist totality.⁴⁰ Both

³⁴ Roussillon, "Trajectoires réformistes," 95. Indeed, the categorization of thinkers as either religious or secular is itself oftentimes problematic, but is retained here to signal their figuration within the wider literature.

³⁵ Anouar Abdel-Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," *Diogenes* 11, no. 44 (1963): 103–140, quotation from 104. On Abdel-Malek's impact, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge, 2004), 148–151.

³⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'rakat al-Islam wa-l-Ra'smaliyya* (Cairo, 1951); Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam* (Cairo, 1960); Roussillon, "Trajectoires réformistes," 116. As Aimé Césaire famously framed it in the aftermath of the Second World War, "'Europe' is morally, spiritually indefensible"; Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (1972; repr., New York, 2000), 32.

³⁷ Muhammad al-Bahi, *al-Fikr al-Islami al-Hadith wa-Silatuhu bi-l-Isti'mar al-Gharbi* (Cairo, 1960). Al-Bahi's text—which formed the basis of much of Sayyid Qutb's *Khasa'is al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa-Muqawwimatuhi* (Cairo, 1965)—can easily be read as a polemic against the West and an attempt to purify the cultural realm of "Western" elements. Nevertheless, its argument mobilizes the very concept of ideology that it sought to critique and distinguish itself from; al-Bahi, *al-Fikr al-Islami al-Hadith wa-Silatuhu bi-l-Isti'mar al-Gharbi*, iii.

³⁸ David Scott defines a "problem-space" not only as a discursive context, but also as "an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs." What defines the problem-space, therefore, are "the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of answers that seem worth having . . . a problem-space is very much a context of dispute, a context of rival views, a context . . . of knowledge and power." Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, N.C., 2004), 4; on the conceptual field and the discursive formation, see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 126–131. Despite this, as Zvi Ben-Dor Benite points out, historians continue to "struggle with the place of religious Muslim intellectuals and clergy in debates about modernity in Islamic societies"; Benite, "Modernity: The Sphinx and the Historian," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 638–652, quotation from 649.

³⁹ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, 213. See also Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London, 2003); Buck-Morss, "The Second Time as Farce . . . Historical Pragmatics and the Untimely Present," in Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *The Idea of Communism* (London, 2010), 67–80. For a critique of the dichotomy she creates between Qutb and Shari'ati as exemplars of an autochthonous immanent critique of the West, on the one hand, and of Arab Marxism as a derivative discourse based on unidirectional translations, on the other, see Fadi Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth: Socialist Lebanon's World and Ours," *boundary 2* (forthcoming 2015).

⁴⁰ Qutb's shift from a romantic idea of the Qur'an as an expressive aesthetic experience capable of

sought to refashion Islam as an ideological contender within the modern postcolonial polity. Both mobilized language that resonated with Marxism: an activist organic vanguard, as well as the language of dynamism, realism, revolution, and freedom from servitude.⁴¹

It would be a mistake, then, to view these figures differently from some of their literary counterparts. They, too, belonged to an intelligentsia who had launched a war of position in the 1940s and 1950s against intellectuals of the previous generation—those who, to their younger peers, symbolized the all too eager appropriation of the West. Such debates can be tracked in the short-lived literary journal *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, founded in Egypt in 1945, and in the journal *al-Adab*, founded in Lebanon in 1953, which in its inaugural manifesto called for the “imperative for every citizen . . . to mobilize all his efforts for the express object of liberating the homeland, raising its political, social and intellectual level.”⁴² Scholars have explored the question of commitment (*iltizam*) in the Arab literary scene as part of “the larger literary iconoclasm and political radicalism that swept the Arab world,” leading to the creation of “new narrative languages adequate to the experience of the contemporary subject”—an agenda, one might argue, that was not entirely dissimilar from that of Qutb, and later Shari’ati.⁴³ I am not suggesting, of course, that Qutb’s or Shari’ati’s oeuvre be thought of as merely epiphenomenal to the political context or objective of decolonization. They were, to be sure, rooted in a longstanding Islamic discursive tradition.⁴⁴ At the same time, we can no longer afford to think of decolonization as a purely secular affair.

Placing the religious and the secular within a single discursive field is not merely

subjective transformation (an Islamic sublime) to a view of Islam as an ideological totality or conception (*tasawwur*) was thus in a sense comparable to Shari’ati’s shifting mobilization of Islam in the Iranian context. Sayyid Qutb, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur’an* (Cairo, 1963); Qutb, *Khasa’is al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa-Muqawwimatuhu*; ‘Ali Shari’ati, *On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Calif., 1979); Shari’ati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique*, trans. Richard Campbell (Oneonta, N.Y., 1980); Arash Davari, “A Return to Which Self? ‘Ali Shari’ati and Frantz Fanon on the Political Ethics of Insurrectionary Violence,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 1 (2014): 86–105.

⁴¹ Much like Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who both drew from and departed from surrealism in their fashioning of negritude, Shari’ati and Qutb drew from and departed from Marxist materialism. Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley, Calif., 1983); Senghor, *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Melvin Dixon (Charlottesville, Va., 1991); Qutb, *Khasa’is al-Tasawwur al-Islami wa-Muqawwimatuhu*; Ali Shari’ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*; Shari’ati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*.

⁴² As cited by Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1885–1985* (London, 2004), 138. Selim discusses the generation that came of age during the Second World War as a new intelligentsia who rejected the liberal models of intellectual engagement of “foundational intellectuals (*fil al-ruwwad*)” (130–139). Although occupying an earlier generational space, Qutb similarly partook in the struggle against the old guard.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138, 134; see also Verena Klemm, “Different Notions of Commitment (*iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq,” *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 3, no. 1 (2000): 51–62; Yoav Di-Capua, “Arab Existentialism: A Lost Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 2012): 1061–1091; Elizabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt* (London, 2006); Richard Jacquemond, *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, Society and State in Modern Egypt*, trans. David Tresilian (Cairo, 2008); M. M. Badawi, “Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature,” in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 23–44.

⁴⁴ On the idea of Islam as a discursive tradition, see Talal Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 1–30.

an intellectual exercise in denaturalizing our conceptual categories. Rather, it may be the very condition of possibility for a postcolonial politics, as the bloody events of Egypt in the summer of 2013 and the subsequent violent attempts to excise Islamists from the body politic have shown.⁴⁵ Perhaps, as Anouar Abdel-Malek suggested, the central task of decolonization lay in the innovative synthesis "between these radical and convergent wings of the two great tendencies of contemporary Arab thought."⁴⁶

ARGUABLY, THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY INTELLECTUAL most widely associated with the archives of decolonization in the Middle East is Frantz Fanon, who remains the paradigmatic archetype of the decolonizing intellectual, even when he is deeply problematized. Yet he may not have had as illustrious a career in the Middle East as elsewhere. Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* was translated into Arabic as *Mu'adhdhabu al-Ard* by Sami al-Durubi and Jamal al-Atasi shortly after its publication in French and was republished in 1967–1968 in Damascus, Syria, under ministerial auspices.⁴⁷ We know very little of the original context of its translation in the Arab East, for instance; nor do we know much about its reception in the wider Arab world, other than that its impact was marginal, and that the text was read by some members of the Left.⁴⁸ In fact, the preface to the Arabic edition registers disagreements with Fanon's conceptualization of the "national question," arguing that the book was written first and foremost for Africa, albeit with wide-ranging resonances for the colonized Third World intellectual in search of the end of colonialism through violence and the pursuit of freedom and dignity.

Yet there were at least two exceptions to this lukewarm reception of Fanon in the Middle East. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Fanon's notion of the salvific and liberatory effects of violence resonated strongly with Fatah, the Palestinian liberation orga-

⁴⁵ For an insightful discussion of political identity (secular and Islamist), sovereignty, and contemporary events in Egypt, see Talal Asad, "Thinking about Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today," *Critical Inquiry*, http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/thinking_about_tradition_religion_and_politics_in_egypt_today/.

⁴⁶ Anouar Abdel-Malek, ed., *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, trans. Michael Pallis (London, 1983), 7.

⁴⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Mu'adhdhabu al-Ard*, trans. Sami al-Durubi and Jamal al-Atasi (Damascus, 1967–1968). The first Arabic translation appeared in 1963 in Beirut. Yasser Munif is researching the Arabic translation and reception of Fanon, including the passages that were omitted in the original Arabic translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*; personal communication with the author, September 23, 2012. Tellingly, Fanon, and his critique of the nationalist elite in particular, has undergone a revival during the Arab uprisings; see Yasser Munif, "Frantz Fanon and the Arab Uprisings: An Interview with Nigel Gibson," *Jadaliyya*, August 17, 2012, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6927/frantz-fanon-and-the-arab-uprisings_an-interview-w; and "Interview with Dr. Sadiq Jalal al-Azm: The Syrian Revolution and the Role of the Intellectual," *The Republic*, January 10, 2013, <http://therepublics.net/2013/04/27/interview-with-dr-sadiq/>.

⁴⁸ See Ilyas Murqus, *al-Marksiyya wa-l-Masa'la al-Qawmiyya* (Beirut, 1970), 245. Murqus mentions the disputes about the accuracy and completeness of the translation. Tareq Y. Ismael notes that *The Wretched of the Earth* resonated with small sections of the Arab left; see his *The Communist Movement in the Arab World* (London, 2005), 103. Jurj Tarabishi discusses Fanon in the preface to his translation of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, *al-Insan dhu al-Bu'd al-Wahid*, trans. Jurj Tarabishi (Beirut, 1988). See also Bardawil on Fanon and the militants of Socialist Lebanon in "Dreams of a Dual Birth."

nization formed in the late 1950s that centered on revolutionary armed struggle.⁴⁹ Similarly, in the early 1960s, the Iranian intellectual ‘Ali Shari‘ati, then pursuing his doctoral studies in Paris, became enamored with *The Wretched of the Earth*, which he translated into Persian along with two of his colleagues. Although Shari‘ati’s engagement with Fanon left an indelible mark on his lectures and influenced his view of the insurgent events in 1960s and 1970s Iran as part and parcel of Third World struggles, he remained acutely critical of Fanon’s view of religion as an atavistic remnant that should play little substantive part in decolonization struggles.⁵⁰

Writing in 1967, the Moroccan theorist and historian Abdallah Laroui critiqued the assumption among Western intellectuals that Fanon’s ideas were universally applicable to the Third World, arguing that they did not address the specificity of the Maghreb and Arab world.⁵¹ Indeed, while Fanon’s writings have been viewed as exemplary of an internationalist call to revolutionary decolonization, the relationship between national liberation, social inequalities, and regional or internationalist agendas had been widely addressed by local scholars in the Middle East, but was little discussed in Western writings. An erudite and woefully understudied figure, a Marxist scholar from Latakia, Syria, named Ilyas Murqus (1929–1991), is part of a crucial chapter in what we might term the lost archive of Arab Marxism.⁵² Murqus, despite a prolific and wholly original corpus of writings centered on the comparative history of Marxism-Leninism, the history of the Communist parties in the Arab world, and the critique of nationalist thought, has yet to be translated into English, which may account for his neglect in the Anglophone literature.⁵³ The few Western scholars who have addressed Murqus have tended to focus on his encyclopedic cataloguing of

⁴⁹ See Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford, 1997), 87–92. A summary of Fanon’s philosophy can be found in the Fatah series *Dirasat wa-Tajarub Thawriyya*, pamphlet no. 3: *al-Thawra wa-l-‘Unf Tariq al-Nasr* [1967?]; see Walid Khalidi and Jill Khadduri, eds., *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: An Annotated Bibliography* (Beirut, 1974), 629.

⁵⁰ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari‘ati* (London, 1998), 119–120, 126–127; Davari, “A Return to Which Self?”; cf. Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York, 1993), chap. 2; H. E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (London, 1990), 68–84.

⁵¹ Abdallah Laroui, *L’idéologie arabe contemporaine: Essai critique* (Paris, 1967), 5; Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*, 125–126. On the “heroic narrative” and Fanon’s Manichean vision of decolonization, see Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1516–1545.

⁵² I am grateful to one of the *AHR*’s anonymous reviewers for this formulation. For other episodes from this archive of Arab Marxism, see Samer Frangie, “Theorizing from the Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi ‘Amil,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 465–482; Bardawil, “Dreams of a Dual Birth”; Abu-Rabi‘, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 318–343; Yoav Di-Capua, “Arab Existentialism”; Yoav Di-Capua, “Homeward Bound: Husayn Muruwah’s Integrative Quest for Authenticity,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44, no. 1 (2013): 21–52.

⁵³ Among Murqus’s key texts are *Tarikh al-Ahzab al-Shu‘u’iyya fi al-Watan al-‘Arabi* (Beirut, 1964); *al-Marksiiyya fi ‘Asrina* (Beirut, 1965); *Naqd al-Fikr al-Qawmi ‘ind Sati‘ al-Husri* (Beirut, 1966); *al-Marksiiyya wa-l-Sharq* (Beirut, 1968); *al-Marksiiyya wa-l-Mas‘ala al-Qawmiyya*; and *Nazariyat al-Hizb ‘ind Linin wa-l-Mawqif al-‘Arabi al-Rahin: Hawla al-Darura al-Tarikhiiyya li-Nushu‘ Hizb al-Brulitarya al-‘Arabi* (Beirut 1970). There are numerous posthumously published interviews available, including *Hiwar al-‘Umr: Ahadith ma‘a Ilyas Murqus*, ed. Jad al-Karim al-Jiba‘i (Damascus, 1999); *Jadaliyyat al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-Siyasa: Hiwarat ma‘a Ilyas Murqus*, ed. Jad al-Karim al-Jiba‘i (Damascus, 2011); and *Ilyas Murqus: Hiwarat Ghayr Manshura*, ed. Talal Ni‘ma (Doha, 2013). The secondary literature in Arabic is still small; see al-Majlis al-Qawmi li-l-Thaqafa al-‘Arabiyya, *Ilyas Murqus wa-l-Fikr al-Qawmi* (Rabat, 1993); Mustafa al-Wali, *Kharj al-Sirb: Ilyas Murqus, Yasin al-Hafiz* (Latakia, 1997); Hisham Ghasib et al., *Falsafat al-Taharrur al-Qawmi al-‘Arabi: Fi Fikr Mahdi ‘Amil, Ilyas Murqus, Samir Amin, wa Munif al-Razzaz* (Amman, 2003).

Arab Communist parties and movements more than on the substance of his thought or his own contribution to the broader history of Marxism and decolonization. Even while acknowledging the "great impact" of his writings on "the new Arab Left," in other words, they have treated Murqus as symptomatic of larger geo-historical trends in the era of decolonization, whether as a response to a postcolonial "malaise" of the Arabs or a reaction to local neopatriarchy.⁵⁴ As such, he has been folded into a declensionist narrative of Arab modernism's failure to address decolonization, rather than viewed, like Fanon, as simultaneously an actor and an original *theorist* of an *ongoing* project of decolonization.

Of principal significance is Murqus's casting of decolonization as a world-historical process through a rethinking of Lenin's classic formulation in his 1917 pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Despite the scholarly impulse to represent Arab Marxism and Arab socialism as derivative incarnations of a purportedly pure Marxism of European provenance, Murqus was no mere ideologue, but an innovative theoretician and practitioner in his own right.⁵⁵ Having left the Syrian Communist Party, he remained an independent Marxist for much of his life, without party affiliations of his own even as he defended the role of political parties in the anti-imperialist struggle. Like other Marxists before him, Murqus theorized the significance of colonialism for any understanding of revolutionary struggle, arguing that unification was "part of the Arab national democratic-socialist revolution as it evolved and transformed into the struggle against imperialism . . . [S]ocialism is not the logical, historical, and strategic precondition for Arab unification; rather, it is unification that is the logical, historical, and strategic precondition for socialism and communism."⁵⁶ The rethinking of revolutionary struggle, therefore, necessitated a reconsideration of the role of national struggle, not as a series of parochial nationalisms, but rather as a project of Arab unification. While many Arab Communists had viewed pan-Arabism with a high degree of skepticism, Murqus viewed it as the antithesis of European imperialism, even as he critiqued what he perceived to be the naïve pan-Arabism of towering figures such as Sati' al-Husri.⁵⁷ The alleged universality of the national question, carried on the shoulders of the proletariat, would not replicate the Prussian or French models but would be specific to the contemporary

⁵⁴ Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Arab Left* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1976), 105; Ismael, *The Communist Movement in the Arab World*, 118–119; Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (Oxford, 1988), 110–112; see also Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought*; Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*. Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900–1963: Capital, Power and Ideology* (Albany, N.Y., 1997), 116–117, is an exception to this tendency. In "The World Republic of Theories" (unpublished ms.), Hosam Aboul-Ela discusses the inclination to view theory with a capital "T" as solely a Euro-American affair, while conceptualizing non-Western theorists as "intellectuals" who are merely the symptomatic product of historical conditions.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 80–90; Ismael, *The Communist Movement in the Arab World*, 102–123; Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror*. For what is still the best account of Arab socialism, see Sami A. Hanna and George H. Gardner, eds., *Arab Socialism: A Documentary Survey* (Leiden, 1969). They posit Arab socialism as a phenomenon that is local rather than imported, deeply rooted rather than superficial, and Islamic rather than secular.

⁵⁶ Murqus, *al-Marksyya wa-l-Mas'ala al-Qawmiyya*, 182–183; see also Haj, *The Making of Iraq*, 116.

⁵⁷ Skepticism toward pan-Arabism among Communists was related to the subscription to the Stalinist doctrine of revolution by stages, wherein the socialist revolution needed to be preceded by a bourgeois nationalist revolution (one that should focus on a national alliance with the bourgeoisie to achieve decolonization, rather than a regional coalition), as well as a belief that both Nasirism and Ba'athism were fueled by anti-Communist interests.

colonial reality of the Arabs; it would function simultaneously as a strike against empire and a path toward revolution and international class struggle.⁵⁸

Even in writings after 1967, therefore, Murqus saw no antagonism between pan-Arabism and the simultaneously national and international struggle of decolonization, once it was properly understood within a world-historical framework. His oeuvre represents a nuanced non-mechanistic, non-economistic, contingent dialectical materialism whereby material conditions set limits and allow possibilities but do not dictate outcomes. A figure critical of the Fichtean view of bourgeois nationalism, of the ideology of the Baʿth Party as representative of narrow class interests, of the Stalinist line of local Communists, and of the empty sloganeering of pseudo-Marxist intellectuals surely has much to teach us about the critical and complex positions and political disagreements on Nasirism, Baʿthism, and Communism that existed within decolonizing states.⁵⁹

At the same time, Murqus's lifework invites us to examine the very material conditions of the decolonizing state itself, conditions that historians have yet to sufficiently explore in depth.⁶⁰ For Murqus and other members of the intelligentsia, such as Sayyid Qutb and the activist and Syrian Muslim Brother Mustafa al-Siba'i (author of the widely read 1960 text *Islamic Socialism*), the question of decolonization could not be separated from the question of capitalism.⁶¹ Nevertheless, historians have barely grazed the surface of the history of economic thought and the attendant political economy of postcolonial state formation.⁶² Further exploration of these

⁵⁸ Murqus, *al-Marksīyya wa-l-Mas'ala al-Qawmiyya*, 175–185. One would need to add to this complex picture the political positionality of the Kurds and other ethnic and religious minorities. The Kurds represented an “interstate colony” that, while sympathetic to overcoming imperialist national borders, could not but oppose the ethnocentrism of pan-Arabism. See Haj, *The Making of Iraq*, 119; on Kurdistan as an “interstate colony” see Ismail Beşikçi, *Kurdistan: An Interstate Colony* (Sydney, 1988). I thank Caroline McKusick for bringing this source to my attention. Due to limitations of space, I cannot adequately address the minority question in the Middle East and its relationship to the archives of decolonization, but see Sarah Stein's essay in this roundtable; Saba Mahmood, “Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 2 (2012): 418–446; Ussama Makdisi, “The Sectarianism of Coexistence: Mythologizing Religion in the Late Ottoman/Modern Arab World” (lecture, University of California Davis, May 3, 2014).

⁵⁹ Murqus, *Naqd al-Fikr al-Qawmi 'ind Sati' al-Husri*; Ilyas Murqus and Muhammad Ali Zarqa, *Khiyanat Bikdash li-l-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya* (Cairo, 1959); Murqus and Zarqa, *Khiyanat al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-Suri* (Cairo, 1961); Ilyas Murqus, Jamal al-Atasi, and Yasin al-Hafiz, eds., *Fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi* (Damascus, 1963). In the Egyptian context, the quasi-Maoist analysis of Mahmoud Hussein, for example, faulted the Nasir regime for its bourgeois nationalist orientation and its complete avoidance of class conflict, and therefore of an anti-imperialist people's revolution. See Hussein, *Class Conflict in Egypt, 1945–1970*, trans. Michel and Suzanne Chirman, Alfred Ehrenfeld, and Kathy Brown (New York, 1973).

⁶⁰ Indeed, Murqus urged his colleagues to pay attention to the specific economic realities of the Arab states, arguing that Arab Marxists had focused too much attention on global economic flows between former colonial powers and colonized states, rather than on intra-Arab trade and economic relations that could lead to an integrated regional economy. See Murqus, *al-Marksīyya fi 'Asrina*, 348–361. It was for this reason that Murqus supported Egypt's union with Syria; see *Nazariyat al-Hizb 'ind Linin wa-l-Mawqif al-'Arabi al-Rahin*, 381–386.

⁶¹ Qutb, *Ma'rakat al-Islam wa-l-Ra'smaliyya*; Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam*; “*Al Takaful al-Ijtima'i* (Mutual or Joint Responsibility) by Shaykh Mustafa al-Siba'i,” in Hanna and Gardner, *Arab Socialism*, 149–171; Joel Beinin, “Islamic Responses to the Capitalist Penetration of the Middle East,” in Barbara Freyer Stowasser, ed., *The Islamic Impulse* (Beckenham, 1987), 87–105.

⁶² For notable exceptions, see Cyrus Schayegh, “1958 Reconsidered: State Formation and the Cold War in the Early Postcolonial Arab Middle East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 421–443; Sherlene Seikaly, *Men of Capital in Times of Scarcity: Economy in Palestine* (Stanford, Calif., forthcoming); Robert Vitalis, *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995); Robert L. Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire*:

themes has the potential to contribute to debates about the history of non-Western economics, economic disagreements regarding the 1958 union between Egypt and Syria and splits between Ba'athists and Communists, disputes between Iraq's 'Abd al-Karim Qasim and Nasir, the history of the Sino-Soviet split in the Arab world, and the intensely contested nature of five-year plans.⁶³ In short, we know very little of this history, which might reveal the decolonizing state as the site of immense contestation and struggle rather than the locus of developmentalist platitudes. Tracing, in historically specific ways, the new modes of governance, expertise, and social knowledge that defined the era of decolonization may allow for a deeper and less reconciled understanding of the fraught nature of the postcolonial polity.

ILYAS MURQUS AND SAYYID QUTB were part of a group of thinkers and activists who conceptualized decolonization as simultaneously a question of political revolution (regional sovereignty and self-determination) and social revolution (eradicating social inequalities exacerbated by the intersection of colonialism and capitalism).⁶⁴ Both imagined decolonization as part of "projects that were explicitly anti-imperial yet neither reducible nor opposed to nationalism"; both thus imagined post-independence as a regional, rather than merely national, affair; and both actively engaged debates on violence and guerrilla warfare.⁶⁵ Both placed the question of Palestine, as an ever-present reminder of the incomplete nature of decolonization in the region, at the heart of decolonization—a question significant to all of the postcolonial Arab struggles to varying degrees.⁶⁶ They thus occupied the same discursive terrain or

State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya, 1945–1963 (Princeton, N.J., 1998); Ahmad Shokr, "Hydropolitics, Economy, and the Aswan High Dam in Mid-Century Egypt," *Arab Studies Journal* 17, no. 1 (2009): 9–31; Julia Elyachar, "Before (and After) Neoliberalism: Tacit Knowledge, Secrets of the Trade, and the Public Sector in Egypt," *Cultural Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2012): 76–96.

⁶³ Oral histories conducted by the Economic and Business History Research Center with Egyptian economists such as Fawzi Mansur, Ibrahim al-'Issawi, and Samir Amin are highly instructive with respect to political economic disputes over decolonization; for example, Fawzi Mansur, oral history conducted by Malak Labib (FM 1-2), March 2008, Economic and Business History Research Center, American University in Cairo. I owe special thanks to Randa Kaldas for providing me with access to these materials.

⁶⁴ Whether these two revolutions should occur simultaneously or be staged in succession was a dilemma faced by many anticolonial nationalists and was widely discussed at the Second Congress of the Communist International. See Vladimir Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International," in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th English ed., vol. 31: *April–December 1920* (Moscow, 1966), 144–151. Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir explicitly referred to the political revolution and the social revolution (*al-thawra al-siyasiyya wa-l-thawra al-ijtima'iyya*) in *Falsafat al-Thawra* (Cairo, 1953).

⁶⁵ Manu Goswami, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (December 2012): 1461–1485, quotation from 1461–1462; Goswami is referring here to colonial interwar internationalism, while critiquing the "depiction of decolonization as a linear transition from empire to nation" (1462). Thus, Sayyid Qutb noted that there was no contradiction between Arab nationalism and pan-Islamism; "Mabadi al-'Alam al-Hurr," *al-Risalah* 21 (1953): 14–16; Murqus, *al-Marksiiyya wa-l-Mas'ala al-Qawmiyya*. On violence, see Syed Qutb, *Milestones*, trans. S. Badrul Hasan (Karachi, 1981); Ilyas Murqus, *Afwiyat al-Nazariyya fi al-'Amal al-Fida'i* (Beirut, 1970).

⁶⁶ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, 99–101, 120–122; Ilyas Murqus, *al-Muqawama al-Filastiniyya wa-l-Mawqif al-Rahin* (Beirut, 1971). See also Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (1979; repr., New York, 1992); on Palestine as a model for political and aesthetic revolution in the postcolonial Maghreb, see Olivia C. Harrison, "Cross-Colonial Poetics: *Souffles-Anfas* and the Figure of Palestine," *PMLA* 128, no. 2 (2013): 353–369. Yet, as Yezid Sayigh has shown, political commitments to Palestine were belied by the realities of regional interstate rivalries and the desire to avoid

problem-space, namely the rejection of a centrist and reformist anticolonial nationalism in favor of a revolutionary mode of decolonization. To archive them separately would be to reify the distinction between Islamic and secular thought, and therefore to miss the opportunity to address the question of decolonization from the perspective of ostensibly vastly differing ideological positions.

In exploring the promise and possibility of a “history without documents,” we are reminded that the archive exists in both material and ideational iterations. While scholarly attention must remain focused on the continued destruction of archives in the Middle East amidst political and historical paroxysms, so too must attention be paid to our archival imaginaries—the ways in which the intellectual traditions of the era of decolonization have been appropriated, remembered, or forgotten. Thus I underscore the need to denaturalize the dominant categories and dystopic narratives of Middle Eastern social and cultural history, narratives of awakening followed by catastrophe or triumph followed by despair. Rather than search for the root causes of a present postcolonial melancholia, as tempting as that might be, we might be better served by the reconstruction of the disparate “horizons of expectation” and “indeterminate futures” that decolonization, as a complex series of both historical experiences and ongoing events, offers up.⁶⁷ This will require that we attend to archives both shadow and real, and conditions both intellectual and material, as we look to the textured local debates, endogenous forces, and minor literatures of the period of decolonization.

confrontation with Israel. With the collapse of the United Arab Republic in 1961 and along with it the anticipation of Arab unification as a pathway to Palestinian liberation, and the success of the Algerian liberation movement, a guerrilla Third World resistance ideology centered on a belief in armed struggle emerged within the Palestinian movement. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pt. I, especially chaps. 4–5. Palestine, one could argue, formed the limit zone between an ideological commitment to a decolonizing internationalism and the pragmatic realities of national liberation.

⁶⁷ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York, 2005); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass., 1985); Joan W. Scott, “History-Writing as Critique,” in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow, eds., *Manifestos for History* (London, 2007), 19–38; Todd Shepard, “‘History Is Past Politics’? Archives, ‘Tainted Evidence,’ and the Return of the State,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 2 (April 2010): 474–483.

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