passed through – as the legal and everyday blur into one another. El-Enany demonstrates how 'street and state racial terror are thus mutually reinforcing', prefiguring how the Covid-19 pandemic has seen far right groups increasingly positioning themselves in Britain as an auxiliary police and border control force, protecting colonial statues, patrolling the English Channel, and attacking those they deem 'illegal'. It remains to be seen how this may mutate in the aftermath of Britain's departure from the EU, but specific policies like the Dublin Regulations will presumably be re-drawn, creating heightened contexts for racist violence on the ground, but also room for anti-racist counter-arguments that must avoid a romanticisation of EU law.

In a wider sense, Theresa May's Hostile Environment policies were an extension of the way that British governments have repeatedly used vague and shifting immigration controls as a tool to encourage a sense of 'good' citizenry as predicated on the everyday policing of borders, in ways that go far beyond the actual terms of legislation. As the recent narratives around 'activist lawyers' prove, the government is well aware that law is a contingent and shifting thing, though it operates through a pretence of fixity, with the effects of new legislation (of which there will be plenty by the start of 2021) percolating through people's everyday lives, as much as through the grand halls of law. Contesting such moves through the domain of immigration legislation alone will only allow the state to continue to position itself as both arbiter and moral critic of an ahistorical 'law', that, when it comes to force, gunboats and border guards, it will always control. While recent 'left' push-backs to the unending so-called 'migrant crisis', have been to call for more safe legal migration routes, a return to 'free movement' (for some) within the EU, or for variants of an exclusionary 'civic nationalism' – the need for a far more ambitious, anti-racist, internationalist and critical approach is clear. *(B)ordering Britain* is a vital building block for a such a project, demonstrating how any vision of a truly 'post' colonial future must reckon with the violence, exclusion and extraction that has sustained the British state since its inception.

Joel White

The sociality of theory

Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). 280pp., £83.00 hb., £21.99 pb., 978 1 47800 616 9 hb., 978 1 47800 675 6 pb.

A Flood in Baath Country, the 2003 documentary by Syrian filmmaker Omar Amiralay, opens with a stark confession on the director's behalf. His career had begun in the early 1970s with a panegyric to the Baathist project of modernisation glorifying the construction of the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates, near the northern Syrian city of Raqqa. Revisiting his directorial debut, Amiralay assumes personal responsibility for echoing the state's once alluring rhetoric of progress: 'I blame myself for what I did', he reflects forty years later. This acts as the premise for his return to the towns and villages neighbouring the dam, half of which – in a poignant allegory for the history of Syria under the Assad dynasty – now languish underwater due to the deliberate flooding caused by its construction. Far from idiosyncratic, Amiralay's self-critique chimes with the dominant sentiments of those Arab intellectuals, militants and artists whose political coming of age intersected with the high tide of postcolonial state-socialism of the 1950s and 60s.

Whilst the director might have sought atonement for his self-avowed complicity in state violence, the organisational legacy of democratic centralism, paired with a lingering theoretical economism, were the object of no less remorse from members of more outwardly oppositional groups in Syria, Egypt and Lebanon, who began processing their failure to deliver on the promise of postcolonial emancipation at the start of the 1990s. The recently translated memoirs of the Egyptian Marxist feminist Arwa Salih are but the most recent example of this retrospective clairvoyance and anguish, rendered all the more painful if read against the backdrop of the brutal reaction that swept Syria and Egypt in the second half

of the last decade. Inaugurated by successive military defeats at the hands of both Israel and ascendant Syrian proxies, rather than through direct pressure by the repressive state apparatuses of neighbouring states, the demise of the Lebanese left, which began in the early 1980s, generated a similar affect of introspection among the ranks of its former conscripts.

Given the ubiquity of these tropes of defeat and self-criticism, it would be tempting to read Fadi Bardawil's recent work, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, as another episode of this transnational story of radicalisation, militancy, defeat and despondence. But the life and work of the young cadres that formed the group *Lubnan Ishtiraki* (Socialist Lebanon) in the mid-1960s is atypical of the trajectory of left-militants in this period, and whilst the political present in which their work is revisited – in Lebanon, at least – teeters between revolutionary openings and the intractability of recent decades, the unprecedented popular uprising of the past year cannot but lend a renewed urgency to the collective's theoretical output.

At the core of the book lies a series of interviews with members of what Bardawil terms the Lebanese New Left, figures such as Waddah Charara, Fawwaz Traboulsi and Ahmad Baydoun, better known today as accomplished scholars and public intellectuals. Their upbringing was marked by parallel experiences growing up in and around Beirut during the 1950s, the aftermath of the *nakba* of 1948 having a particular effect on those, such as Charara and Baydoun, whose families hailed from southern villages with ties to Galilee and the northern Palestinian ports of Haifa and Acre. As students in Britain and France, Traboulsi and Charara worked with clandestine networks of Arab nationalist party officials, émigrés and exiles (the well-known *Réseau Janson* in France, for instance) coordinating support from the metropole to popular fronts in Algeria and Yemen. Almost all of the members of Socialist Lebanon were initially affiliated with the Ba'ath Party, but encounters with Marx, another defining feature of their experiences abroad, armed them for their return to Lebanon in the early 1960s, whereupon they identified and critiqued the party's opacity over the issue of private property.

The politics of nationalism were increasingly tainted by a slanted emphasis on independence from foreign domination at the expense of meaningful social change locally, but defection to the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) was not so straightforward for the rebellious young militants. Beholden as it was to Stalinist evolutionism, the LCP's insistence on the historic role of the bourgeoisie in laying the foundations for communist revolution represented the very denial of the autonomy of the working class which, as Bardawil explains, had exposed nationalism as an 'instrument of rule', rather than a 'tool for revolution'. It was this critical insight that brought Socialist Lebanon together.

Its best expression was found in their collectively penned *Introduction to Reading the Communist Manifesto (*1969); a '*retour aux sources'* in which the sphere of the political is endowed with the ability to develop the forces of production, authorising a politics of immediacy in which workers would no longer be condemned to wait for 'correct conditions' to seize power. The text also articulated the group's commitment to a dual process of translation; that of an increasingly eclectic corpus of theory into Arabic – Gramsci, Mao, Bourdieu; essays from the *New Left Review* and *Le Monde Diplomatique* – but also the conceptual formulations necessary to reanimate

the corpse of Marx from the stifling political alignments of the Arab communist parties.

By the mid-1960s, Socialist Lebanon had crystallised around a broader group of disaffected radicals who published regular bulletins and pamphlets critiquing the theoretical fallacies of the LCP and the excesses of the increasingly powerful Arab regimes in equal measure. Writing in 1966, the group observed that 'the rule of the Ba'ath in Syria is the rule of the rural segment of the petite bourgeoisie that appropriates surplus production through the army and the state apparatus', shifting analytical priority to the Arab regimes' military-bureaucratic ruling classes. This did not only allow Socialist Lebanon to expose the ways the socialist revolutions of Egypt and Syria reproduced relations of exploitation they claimed to be subverting; it also broke with the dominant left discourse of national independence, which, articulated in isolation from broader economic and social demands, only legitimated the regimes' revolutionary posturing.

Indeed, this ability to ground anti-imperialism in a consistent analysis of local configurations of power is what Bardawil points to as the most instructive aspect of Socialist Lebanon's collective *oeuvre*. The group's penchant for immanent critique is posited as part of a 'minoritarian tradition' in need of recovery in the wake of the revolutions of 2011, referred to by Bardawil as a similar (if far more generalised) moment of clarity, in which the primary object of political critique was no longer an abstracted imperial metropole but the local, authoritarian vassal.

With Lebanon playing an increasingly prominent role as a front in the Palestinian Revolution at the turn of the 1970s, Waddah Charara began a gradual withdrawal from quotidian political struggle, in stark contrast to many of his comrades, who played leading roles in integrating disparate leftist factions into a united front against Christian antagonism to the anti-colonial struggle maturing on Lebanon's southern border. In this period, Charara began to elaborate answers to questions that continue to define political struggle in Lebanon today: the relationship between sectarianism – enshrined into an arrangement of political power-sharing in the Lebanese National Pact of 1943 – and capitalism, and the proper form of organisation that might best lead to the overcoming of both. The Lebanese left of the 1960s and 70s considered sectarian solidarity a vestige of pre-modernity which hindered the development of class consciousness, and Bardawil notes the emergence of a mainstream strategy of constitutional reform to prevent its 'veil' from obstructing the interests of the exploited masses. Secular citizenship would rid sectarianism of its institutional scaffolding, thereby limiting its reproduction in society, the position dictated. Invariably, this was to be achieved with the help of an external agent; if the secularising tendencies of capitalist expansion could not render sectarian affiliation obsolete on its own, it was hoped that rallying around the Palestinian Revolution could, in Charara's words, 'eradicate the fragmentation of the popular masses by regional and kinship relations'.

Charara drew explicit connections between his dissatisfaction with the vanguardism of groups such as the Organisation of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL, which he and his comrades helped found in the early 1970s) and the poverty of their analyses. His assessment of the role of communal bonds in the peasant upheavals of Mount Lebanon during 1860s, published in *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon: The Right-Wing's Mass Line* (1975), to him demonstrated sectarianism's origins as an insurrectionary force; the same type of solidarity Charara would witness in his own time, when observing how 'familial [ties] are overturned against the factory owner... and workers use it as a strong pressuring measure on the factory owner'. This ambivalence could not possibly have been grasped, argued Charara, by a left which increasingly held its base at arm's length from its project of reform.

To be sure, Charara's contributions to a critical theory of sectarianism effectively marked the end of his engagement with politics. Bardawil is quick to observe that rather than devising ways of broadening its allegedly oppositional scope, Charara's insistence on the immediate validity of the masses' lived experience led him to explain Lebanon's fragmentation during the Civil War as an inevitability, transforming the once engaged militant-intellectual into a passive observer of foretold events. But as recent mobilisations in Lebanon have once again attempted to undermine sectarian relations Charara's theory of sectarianism as a resource – varyingly used by both power and people – helps clarify the specificity of this recurring object of resistance, whose very 'polyvalence' might well account for its tenacity beyond any formal abolition.

As tempting as it might be to draw parallels between the revolutionary moment of the early 1970s and the present day, these are certainly imposed by circumstances that have developed since the completion of this work, and are admittedly not its primary focus. Bardawil is motivated by an altogether different question: to what do we owe the relative absence of Charara and his comrades from the annals of Marxist theory? More broadly, what obstacles prevent us from reading political thought from the Arab world, and the Global South more generally, as critical theory in its own right? Echoing his teacher and collaborator David Scott, Bardawil identifies what he calls the 'metropolitan unconscious' of academic theory, which measures the sophistication of intellectuals in the periphery in terms of the latest theoretical innovations forged in the academy. Susan-Buck Morss' call to include Shariati and Qutb in the canon of twentieth-century theorists in her *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (2003), for instance, hinges on a characterisation of a Eurocentric Arab Marxist tradition which is epistemically irreflexive, and thus unable to provide the tools necessary to make sense of anti-imperialism after 9/11.

Paradoxically, this impulse of theory to invalidate radical secular thought from the postcolony is traced back to the afterlives of the work of Edward Said, whose most politically charged work was informed by the very same events that triggered Socialist Lebanon's militancy: the Arab regimes' defeat in 1967 and the ensuing Palestinian Revolution. Although written in political solidarity, the effect of Said's epistemological critique – ubiquitous in the West as it is in the Arab world – was often theoretically at odds with local radicals. Read uncritically, for instance, Charara's account of the persistence of communal affiliation might come under attack for its culturalist essentialism, an oft-repeated charge of Saidian critique.

Yet for Bardawil this disregards both the historicity Charara attributes to sectarianism, and, more importantly, his commitment to an analysis of the lived reality of the society in which he was embedded, whose demands were more urgent than those of academic fashion. The author thus claims to abstain from any retrospective appraisal of Socialist Lebanon's normative claims, exchanging an analysis of their work's 'political performative powers' for a thick description of how theory 'seduces intellectuals, contributes to the cultivation of their ethos and sensibilities, and authorises political practices for militants'.

For Bardawil, what limits conventional histories of intellectuals (and often precipitates their hasty dismissal) are narrow evaluations of the descriptive force of their theoretical tools, rather than a broader inquiry into how those tools either multiply or circumscribe their ability to *act* in the world. It is this tendency of theory to extend itself beyond its own analytical contours that Bardawil considers the major corollary to his historical narrative, and he wields this insight both in his critique of the interpretative failures of postcolonial theory, and in his repeated rejection of the impulse to canonise an 'Arab theory', which would likely reflect concerns markedly different to those originally articulated by its exponents.

But does a recognition of theory's largely autonomous 'social life' necessarily preclude a critical intellectual history which would seek to uncover, adapt and submit past thought to present concerns? There seems to be a tension that runs throughout *Revolution and Disenchantment,* in its attempt to encourage 'an intergenerational conversation' between the 1970s and the present day, and its investigation into theory's varied mechanisms of (in)validation amongst militants, intellectuals and academics. Implicitly, however, this is resolved through Bardawil's own use of retrospective judgement when pointing to Socialist Lebanon's heterodoxy – their ability to *distinguish* themselves from majority of the left of their day – as what qualifies their oeuvre for present consideration. More than just amounting to a defence of Socialist Lebanon against the condescension of posterity, his understanding of theory's sociality ultimately supplements his efforts to shed light on a localised tradition of thought that might well inform struggles currently unfolding, as well as those yet to come.

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