WHERE ARE THE ARABS?

on the limitations of Arab nationalism and charting an alternative path to liberation



a zine by lizar_tistry on the video essay "Where are the Arabs?" by Ayman Makarem

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ARAB NATIONALISM

Began as a reaction to divide and conquer tactics by western powers

Asserted reunification of SWANA* region as anti-imperialism

Reality: confronted racist exclusionary ideology with own to policies of conformity and division

Regimes feared actual unity because it would detract from own power

"Thus to the walls constructed by Zionism have been added walls constructed by a dogmatic, almost theological brand of Arabism."

Edward Said

*SouthWest And North Africa (none of that 'Middle East' bullshit)

LIMITATIONS OF THE NATION

Nations are not organic facts but "imagined political communities" (Benedict Anderson)

an active violent process designed and developed by certain individuals with something to gain politically or economically



political subjects who don't fit mold of the "ideal Arab" are met with violence



Who gets to decide?

WHY THE ARAB BOURGEOISIE ARE TRASH

You may have seen this clip of Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani:

"You don't mean exactly peace talks, you mean capitulation, surrendering...That's a kind of conversation between the sword and the neck."



But did you know in the same interview, he also said this?

WHY THE ARAB BOURGEOISIE ARE TRASH

"We consider the Arab governments two kinds. Something we call reactionaries who are completely connected with the imperialists, like King Hussein government, like Saudi Arabian government, like Moroccan government, Tunisian Government. And then we have some other Arab governments, which we call the military petite bourgeoisie governments, that's like Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, and so on."

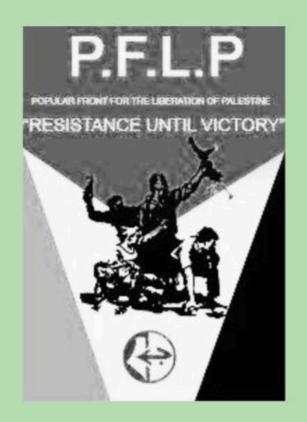
Ghassan Kanafani, 1971

Such class-based analysis provides a tool to understand regimes beyond nationalist, religious or mythic boundaries

PETITE BOURGEOISIE 101

The petite bourgeoisie are like middle class - they own some means of production (vs. peasants or workers) and their class interests are to become part of the higher bourgeoisie.

In their 1969 manifesto, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or PLFP, warned against the petite bourgeoisie:



"[The petite bourgeoisie] is antagonistic to colonialism and reaction but at the same time wants to keep the privileges which it enjoys."

These regimes have espoused Arab socialist economic policies but are functionally state capitalist - no attempts to abolish or collectivize private property.

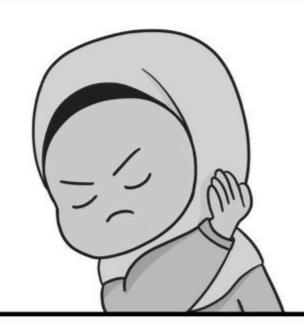
Instead, created carceral, militarized surveillance states that enriched small group of neocolonial elites while exploiting and dispossessing masses of people.

ABANDONING ARAB NATIONALISM'S FOCUS ON A TOP-DOWN STRATEGY

"We can't at the end of the 20th century return to some earlier ideal. A, because the ideal is irrecoverable, and B, because all such returns involve a new politics of domination, essentially authoritarianism, dogmatism.

Whereas I felt the role of the intellectual, the Palestinian movement, was effectively to present a new critical understanding of the contemporary world."

Edward Said



Palestine's liberation depends on the Arab national project of reunification.



Arab liberation from regimes is interconnected with Palestinian liberation from Zionism.

Leftist Arabs need to learn from and reckon with own history as Arabs to diagnose the roots of the problem.

Leftists need to move past old and tired strategies and tactics of past - including sentimentality for the Soviet Union.

STARTING ON THE LOCAL LEVEL FIRST TO CHANGE THE WORLD

"Do you guys ever wonder why you're trying so hard but making no moves?

About a decade ago someone asked me, 'What can we do for Palestine?'

I said, 'Work with your community.

Make sure your community is well taken care of. Make sure your community is educated. Make sure your community is healthy and well.'

Do you know why I said that? Because you can't fight when you're unwell."

Mariam Barghouti "The forces of reaction have penetrated so deep not only in our streets, but in our dreams as well. But as painful as it may be, we need to wake up.

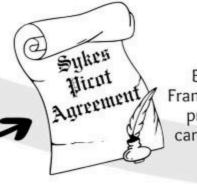
We need to first abandon nostalgia, abandon the myths of the past. Only then might a new rupture emerge. We have to find a way to dream, to have hopes, while keeping our eyes wide open, looking always ahead."

Ayman Makarem, Politically Depressed



Full video essay on YouTube at @fromtheperipherymedia.

1918 WWI ENDS Arab locals help Britain and France defeat Ottoman Empire in exchange for independence



Britain and France renege on promise and carve up region

independence struggles

state formation

with strong links

to empire

heavily repressed

1940s TO 1960s

POLITICAL EXPERIMENTATION

Nationalism

WHO ARE "THE ARABS"?

Socialism

Worldism

Gaza

¥ Islamist Nationalism

1942 MILITARY COUP OVERTHROWS KING IN EGYPT

followed by IRAQ LIBYA - 1 SYRIA SUDAN

all influenced by Arab nationalism

West Bank Jerusalem

NAKBA

- · Zionists expel >800,000 Palestinians
- 1st Arab Israeli War Israel uses myth of extermination by "Five Arab Armies" to justify but no real threat
- Arab regimes were uncoordinated and uncommitted

1967 NAKSA

Israel expands occupation to West Bank and Gaza Strip, Egyptian Sinai peninsula, and Syrian Golan Heights

PAN-ARAB LEADERS TURN INWARD TO CONSOLIDATE POWER WITHIN OWN STATES

West Bank

"GOLDEN AGE OF ARAB NATIONALISM"

Often looked back on with apolitical nostalgia that lacks any serious acknowledgement of limitations and failures of Arab national project



NATIONALIZES SUEZ CANAL

1957

NASSER

- Israel invades Egypt, followed by Britain and France
- Victory for Nasser and Arab national projects
- · Failure for European powers

*the sect, as a political entity, was a

tool for local bourgeoisie to take over

from French and continue system of

domination (Mehdi Ahmel)

1960s

"GOLDEN AGE"

but only wealthy elites

benefit while wealth

inequality skyrockets



LEBANON CIVIL WAR-

1920

GREATER LEBANON

state formation mirrors how Herzl described Jewish state, i.e. a colonial project to satisfy imperial interests in the region

coalition of progressive and leftist Lebanese forces allied w/ Palestinian groups based in Beirut

L.N.M. PROPOSES MODERATE REFORM PACKAGE

"The principle tactics of the LNM were to impose a new superstructure on the Lebanese oligarchy: 'bourgeois', modern and non-sectarian instead of its 'feudal', sectarian and underdeveloped' superstructure." -Fawwaz Traboulsi

PROPOSAL MET WITH

also antagonized other regional powers

Assad regime invades to support far right Phalange and attack Palestinians

1943

Lebanese elite declare independence & establish

SECTARIAN SYSTEM*

w/ disproportionate power to Maronite sect

OUT OVER

SYSTEM

1975 LATE 1960s

WAR BREAKS PROTESTS AND STRIKES SECTARIAN

as contradictions of proto-neoliberal economy surfaces

1978 & 1982

formal end to war with Taif Accord - no core issues resolved but codified sectarian system

"The foremost obstacle [to the sectarian system] was the mass of toilers who belong to the downtrodden 'sects' and live either in the countryside of in the clutches of poverty in the capital."

Mahdi Ahmel



"Lest we forget, the abolition of political sectarianism, secularizing the country, will explode all the Arab regimes, progressive and reactionary. Thus the Lebanese National Movement is a danger to all the Arab regimes."

Kamal Jumblatt, LNM leader

SIMILARITIES LEADING UP TO THE 2019 REVOLUTION

- · Same sectarian system and economic model, even more entrenched, with many of the same leaders
- · Protests were not just against specific government, but the decades-long system of exploitation and oppression
- Similar core demands to those of the L.M.N.
- Arab regimes proved more willing to kill protestors than to reform themselves; to kill Arabs than do anything to resist Zionism or Israel

INTENSE VIOLENCE

by hegemonic Phalange Party to protect status quo;

Israel invades to support Phalange and attack Palestinians; co-occupies with Syria



Against

Israel!



No, against each other.

Kassel Ya Watan (1978) dir. Mohammad Maghout