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TITOLO/TITLE: Islamists, Leftists, and the radical battlefield in the MENA region: encounters, convergences and contaminations

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Notoriously, in the past century, radical political thought and praxis in the MENA region developed within the framework of two main ideological streams. On the one hand, the Islamist stream, composed by the heterogeneous ensemble of organizations and intellectuals searching in the Islamic body of knowledge the answer to the capital questions of the national and social emancipation of Arab societies. On the other hand, the equally heterogeneous Leftist stream, basing its world visions and emancipatory projects on a structuralist vision of society and international relations.

Throughout history, the two ideologies' visions, agendas, and practices have evolved and mixed up about the changing local, regional, and international contexts. So did the mutual intellectual and political interconnections, which were seldom exclusively in competition, and resulted in a variety of transformative encounters between ideas, practices, individuals, and organizations.

To give some examples, during the so-called long-1960s, the questions of class struggle and anti-imperialist emancipation earned increasing influence in the Islamist agenda, as a reaction to both the historical changes affecting the Arab region, and the coeval expansion of the Lefts. After the Iranian revolution, the migration of Arab leftists toward Islamism increased, epitomized by figures of “Islamicized” revolutionaries who attempted to merge Third Worldism and Islamism. Then, in the first decade of the XXI century, Western pressures for democratization and globalization, regime restructuring in response to international and domestic pressures, and the US renewed military interventionism in Afghanistan and Iraq conjured another propitious moment for rapprochement and “concordisme” between the main ME ideological currents. Various instances of tactical convergences, alliances, and coalition building between Islamists and Leftists emerged during the 2000-2010 decade in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and elsewhere in the ME.

Against this backdrop, scholarship on Islamism and the Arab Lefts predominantly developed according to two parallel and self-centered streams which, some important exceptions notwithstanding, while suggesting the operationality of some forms of mutual influence, cooperation, and cross-fertilization, reserved little attention to disentangle and historicize the dynamics of convergence between the two poles at the local, regional, and transnational level.

By bringing together original case-studies from different polities and historical periods, the following panel aims at moving a step forward in this direction.

Contrasting the *Oslo Zeitgeist*: between rejection and loyalty: The left and islamist in the post-Oslo Palestine

Mattia Giampaolo, Sapienza University of Rome

In 1993 in the backyard of the White House in Washington DC, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Declaration of Principles, known as the Oslo Accords. The accords were signed in an international political climate that was characterized by the willingness of the USA to shaping a *new world order* in the framework of a new *zeitgeist* drawn on the economic neo-liberal assault and *liberal peace* (Abrahamsen 2000; Haddad 2016). Despite the participation in the new asset of this new phase of the peace process of the Palestinian leadership, opposition to the accords has been represented by the ‘rejectionist bloc’ formed by the left-wing organizations and the Islamist ones (Hamas and the Islamic Jihad). In this respect, the formation of the Alliance of the Palestinian Forces (Taḥāluf al-quwa al-Filasṭīniyah) was one of the attempts to unite forces in order to contrast both the Accords and the Israeli occupation.

“A Family Business”: The Family and Political Relationships between Communists and Islamists in Najaf in the long 1960s (1956 – 1979)

Pietro Menghini, Scuola Superiore Meridionale

During the period leading up to the long 1960s and throughout it, the city of Najaf saw a growth in participation in the Iraqi Communist Party, even by members of important Najafi religious families. This phenomenon led to a response by the religious milieu, with the formation of movements and parties of Islamic inspiration, particularly the *Ḥizb al-Da‘wa al-Islāmiyya*. In turn, the creation of these parties led to a close confrontation between the leftists and the Islamists, both politically and intellectually. These clashes happened in a close-knit context, where exponents of opposite sides often had strong social and family ties. Such relationships frequently brought unexpected exchange of ideas or alliances and mutual help in specific situations. This presentation will thus explore these collaborations, trying to nuance and problematize the opposition and engagement between the two groups above, often depicted as in stark conflict. In particular, we will focus on moments when the opposition between the two factions gave in to momentary and informal alliances to deal with specific situations and how family ties played a central part in forging these collaborations. We will consider the period from 1956, with the nationalization of the Suez Canal and its repercussions in the region, to 1963, with the first Ba‘athist coup. The presentation will draw on memoirs of members of the Communist Party from Najaf with a religious background to explore the aforementioned events

The ‘Left’ and the Islamists in post-2003 Iraq: the rising of a protest movement and the challenge of building up a popular basis.

Daniela Pioppi, University of Napoli L’Orientale; Gennario Gervasio, University of Roma Tre

The presentation focuses on the emergence of “progressive social and political actors” (Majed 2020) in post 2003 Iraq and their relationship with the Islamists, and namely with the Sadrist trend which, in different ways in the last 20 years, had a relevant role in Iraqi political life often represented as the political organization with the largest popular following. The research will consider the gradual emergence of a significant protest movement in the country (protest cycles 2011, 2015-16, 2018-19) and, at the same time, the difficulties encountered by progressive activists in building up their own political and social base. Instances of tactical alliances with the Sadrist trend (ex. the 2018 protest movement and elections) appear not to have been successful. However, they left a mark on the leftist internal debate while the Sadrist trend is still a movement to be reckon with both in terms of political strategies and dynamics. Besides existing secondary sources and political documents, the research will mainly rely on interviews with activists trying to represent at best existing perspectives in the leftist camp as well as the activists’ personal reflections.

Revolutionary fields: Communists, Shaikhs, and the making of the tobacco Intifada in the South of Lebanon

Rossana Tufaro, Sapienza University of Rome

From the late 1960s up to the outbreak of the Civil War (1975-1990), Lebanon experienced the widest and most longstanding wave of social conflict in its post-colonial history. Amid this unprecedented upsurge, combative peasant movements emerged and activated from the deep north to the deepest south, becoming an integral part of the process of transgressive activation of Lebanese subaltern groups upon which the domestic dynamics leading up to the Civil War (1975-1990) sedimented and found expression. Among them, a prominent position was occupied by the tobacco growers of South Lebanon, whose mobilization against the Régie monopoly for better purchase prices and licensing policies turned quickly into a broad-based accusation act against the organic relation between political and economic power defining the nature and the articulation of the Lebanese post-colonial state. On another level, the tobacco question became a pioneering terrain of cooperation between Communist militants and progressive Shia clerics of Najafi formation, who played a leading role in process of mobilization and organizing of the peasants. Using the vantage point of social history, the following presentation aims at disentangling the dynamics of convergence between these two groups of actors and how the latter anticipated the future political development of South Lebanon.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

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