Marx and Engels on the Procrustean Bed: Translating *The Communist Manifesto* in 1970s Beirut

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Contents

Note on translation and transliteration 3

1 Introduction 4

Apologia 13

2 The *Manifesto* and its geographies 14

3 The two Marxes 23

4 Translation and universality 41

5 Conclusion: Traveling theory 50

Bibliography 54

Note on translation and transliteration

I use the common spelling for names familiar to English-speaking audiences (i.e., Beirut instead of Bayrūt and Gamal Abdel Nasser instead of Jamāl ʻAbd al-Nāṣir). Otherwise, I follow the Library of Congress (LOC) Arabic transliteration system. Texts translated into Arabic are attributed to the author's transliterated name (i.e., Anṭūnīū Ghrāmshī rather than Antonio Gramsci).

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

Introduction

Two months into the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), a small publishing house in Beirut printed a new Arabic translation of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Al-ʻAfīf al-Akhḍar's *The Communist Manifesto: In the First Unfalsified Translation* (Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī: Fī awwal tarjamah ghayr muzawwarah) numbers some 362 pages, on many of which footnotes crowd out the translated text.[1] In the introduction, entitled "Why this new translation?," al-Akhḍar (1934–2013) admonishes his predecessors, recalling Marx's attentiveness to translation before issuing a call in his name: "Burn these translations!"[2][3] The *Manifesto*, he laments—in the 127 years since its birth and 50 years since its first rendering into Arabic—has suffered a series of forgeries and falsifications, rendering it impotent in the hands of the Arab reader. This new translation, he writes, will finally "enable the conscious worker… to put the weapon of the *Manifesto* in its appropriate place in the arsenal of Marxian theory… destroying that hateful gap between thought and action, between possessing the weapons of revolutionary theory and putting them to use in the critique of daily life."[4] It bears the signature of a militant Tunisian intellectual, now twice displaced: "Al-ʻAfīf al-Akhḍar—Paris, June 1975."[5]

The translation, al-Akhḍar writes, was born of the experience of the Palestinian resistance in Jordan in 1969, whose fighters "tried in vain between military operations to decipher the hieroglyphics of the two translations available at the time.”[6][7][8] But it was also the result of a personal disappointment. Soon after his arrival in Beirut in 1966, al-Akhḍar had begun writing for the journal *Dirāsāt ‘Arabīyah* (Arab Studies) and found a home in the intellectual circle of its publisher, Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah.[9] He developed a close working relationship with its director, Bashīr al-Dā‘ūq (1931–2007), who published six of his books in three years. But in 1973 al-Akhḍar had a violent falling out with al-Dā‘ūq and Jūrj Ṭarābīshī (1939–2016), a fellow translator and director of the journal, after they declined to publish two of his manuscripts.[10] He was effectively expelled from the group, and wandered between smaller publishing houses until the outbreak of the war, when he fled to Paris. It was one such house, Dār Ibn Khaldūn, that published his translation shortly thereafter.[11]

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[1] Kārl Mārks and Fridrīk Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī: Fī awwal tarjamah ghayr muzawwarah*, trans. al-ʻAfīf al-Akhḍar (Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 1975).

[2] Ibid, 8.

[3] On al-Akhḍar, see Ismael (1976, 105–106). He writes:

> "Al-Akhdar's writing reflects the frustrations of many independent Arab leftists. He is in rebellion against existing ideologies… Although he is publicly viewed as a Marxist-Leninist, he surprised many observers by once stating that he is 'Marxist BUT NOT LENINIST!' In brief, it seems that he views himself as the only leftist not only in the area, but, perhaps, in the whole world."

[4] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī*, 19.

[5] Ibid, 21.

Not long before al-Akhḍar’s expulsion, Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah had published its own translation of the *Manifesto*.[12] Signed “Zāhī Shirfān,” this translation draws al-Akhḍar’s greatest ire in his introduction. Shirfān, he reveals, is a pseudonym for the “opportunist” Waḍḍāḥ Sharārah (1942–).[13] Al-Akhḍar recalls his enthusiasm upon learning of al-Dā‘ūq’s intention to publish a new translation, one that might rectify some of the damage dealt to the *Manifesto* by earlier attempts. To his dismay, he writes, this latest translation “was in fact the final blow dealt to the heart and head of the *Manifesto*."[14] In the introduction, Sharārah and Ṭarābīshī, whom al-Akhḍar alleges is also implicated in the "disgrace," are likened to a Mamluk sultan, Muḥammad bin Qāyitbāy, in a retelling of the bed of Procrustes (in fact, Sharārah's partner was al-ʻAzīz al-ʻAẓmah [1947–], writing under the name Qāys al-Shāmī). "In 1497," al-Akhḍar writes,

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[6] Ibid, 18.
[7] Al-Akhḍar writes that his “intention” to translate the *Manifesto* dates to 1969. Agbaria (2020) suggests conflicting dates: 1966 in his article but 1968 in the corresponding footnote.
[8] Dār al-Taqaddum (1933) and Dār Dimashq (1965). Yāsir (2008) credits the first Arabic translation to Mīkhā’īl Khaṭāyā, a Syrian who died in Moscow in 1924; more common is Khālid Bakdāsh’s with Dār al-Taqaddum in 1933. Dār al-Taqaddum was the Arabic division of Progress Publishers in Moscow. Suhayl Ayyūb translated the *Manifesto* for Dār Dimashq in 1965.
[9] Ṣaqr Abū Fakhr, “Sbīnūzā al-‘arab al-‘Afīf al-Akhḍar: Min al-thawrah ilá al-iṣlāḥ fa-al-taṣāluḥ,” *al-Safīr*, December 18, 2010, https://www.almadasupplements.com/view.php?cat=8147.
[10] On Ṭarābīshī, see Agbaria (2020) and (2022).
[11] al-‘Afīf al-Akhḍar, “Shahādat ta’rīkhīyah: Naqd al-dīn, naqd al-dīktātūrīyah al-ḥizbīyah, naqd tazwīr al-tarjamah,” *al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin*, June 14, 2013, https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=364055.
[12] Kārl Mārks and Fridrīk Injilz, *Bayān al-Ḥizb al-Shuyū‘ī*, trans. Zāhī Shirfān and Qays al-Shāmī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah, 1972).
[13] Bardawil (2018) describes Sharārah as “a leading theoretician of the Lebanese New Left in the 1960s and early 1970s.” For a study of his work, see Bardawil (2020).

> "the Sultan forced one of his accused to become his own executioner. He was to cut off his left hand and right foot with his right hand in the presence of the Sultan, whom, finding himself facing not a copy but a real individual (*fard ḥaqīqī*), was terrified. His fear would not abate until he twisted this real individual into another, false individual (*fard muzwwar*), at odds with this real individual—that is, until he twisted him into his own person."[15]

In precisely this way, he writes, the "sultans" of the Dār al-Ṭalīʻah translation have erased from the *Manifesto* any trace of the real Marx and Engels.

In reality, the translation was part of a much larger project undertaken by Dār al-Ṭalīʻah to introduce Marxist political concepts into the Arabic public sphere. The project was characteristic of both the internationalist spirit of the global New Left and the cosmopolitan publishing scene in Beirut on the eve of war. The *New Left* refers to "the formation of a transnational, though diversified, revolutionary culture" in the 1960s and 1970s that "gave birth to a new epistemological framework that addressed from the periphery the issues of revolutionary movements and the transformation of political subjectivities."[16] Its emergence at a crucial juncture of the Cold War is best understood as a rejection of the bipolar world order and choice between Western capitalism and bureaucratic Soviet-style socialism. In the Arab world, it was the product of a particularly complex "interplay between global and local practices," where revolutionary Marxist groups charted a path between—on the Left alone—Arab Nationalists and the old Moscow-oriented communist parties.[17] The position of the New Arab Left, Laure Guirguis writes, was "a double bind: from the changing stance of the USSR on this issue in theory and practice, and from the original sin, so to say, of post-World War II internationalism that ultimately relied on nationalist claims since it took shape in the decolonization processes."[18] The New Left was not an internationalist solidarity in a vacuum: it was situated in a "matrix of war" that "shaped all political and ideological stances; it governed the definition of a set of shared references and of a discursive logic."[19]

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[14] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī*, 18.

[15] Ibid, 10.

[16] Laure Guirguis, "The Arab New Left and May '68: Transnational Entanglements at a Time of Disruption," *Critical Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 88–89, https://doi.org/10.1086/713518.

Generative of this logic was a web of intellectuals and publishers who facilitated the global exchange of literature and theory. Along with the rejection of the Stalinist doxa came the need for new modes of authority, derived from the ruthless critique of any and all inherited practices. Unlike the Old Left, whose bureaucratic structures stifled critical thought, the New Left was characterized by its horizontal organization around private journals, publishing houses, and informal political circles. This decentralization and relative freedom of expression gave birth to a generation of politically committed autonomous intellectuals. Nowhere in the Arab world was this more evident than in Beirut, where "Lebanese publishing had managed to transform itself into the crossroads of Arabic intellectual production. Unlike its competitors elsewhere in the Arab world, Lebanese publishing enjoyed a striking degree of autonomy from the State and was held almost entirely in private hands."[20]

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[17] Ibid, 90.

[18] Ibid, 89.

[19] Ibid, 90.

[20] Franck Mermier, *Le livre et la ville: Beyrouth et l'édition arabe* (Paris: Actes Sud/Sindbad, 2005), 52; translated in Robyn Creswell, *City of Beginnings: Poetic Modernism in Beirut*, Translation/Transnation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 4.

The publishing houses served the New Arab Left in two important respects. First, they gave militant intellectuals a platform from which they could "disseminate ideas, normalize new idioms, and help formulate new world views."[21] Often unrecognized in assessments of the intellectual scene in Beirut is the interplay between respectable publishing houses and clandestine Marxist groups; publishers gave militants the chance to reach far wider audiences than they otherwise could have hoped for. One such relationship was between Dār al-Ṭalī'ah and Socialist Lebanon (Lubnān al-Ishtirākī), an underground Marxist circle that distributed an eponymous pamphlet and regularly contributed to *Dirāsāt 'Arabīyah*. Sharārah founded the group with a handful of friends in 1964.[22][23] But second, and perhaps antecedent to the first, the publishing houses served as a forum whereby intellectuals formulated among themselves "'schemata,' 'theme,' 'a way of analysis,' and 'a cultural expectation.'"[24] The influence of the publishing houses projected to a greater extent inward than outward; they provided a space for "sustained debates" that left a lasting impression on the intellectual scene in the city. Often publishers would fulfill this role simply by existing as a physical space where intellectuals could meet, or as a forum where they could engage with one another's work. But the most important conversations took a rather different shape: translation series, in which large quantities of foreign texts were put in conversation with one another and endogenous Arab thought.

No project was quite so ambitious, or influential, as Dār al-Ṭalī'ah's. The house embarked on a massive and systematic program of translating Marxist theory whereby,

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[21] Ahmad Agbaria, "Dār Al-Ṭalī'ah and the Question of Arab Authenticity in the 1960s," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 52, no. 1–2 (2021): 248, https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341425.

[22] Fadi A. Bardawil, "Sidelining Ideology: Arab Theory in the Metropole and Periphery, circa 1977," in *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 167n12, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108147781.011.

[23] Socialist Lebanon published in *Dirāsāt 'Arabīyah* under the name "Ḥalq Dirāsāt Lubnān al-Ishtirākī" (Socialist Lebanon Study Circle). For studies of the group, see Bardawil (2016) and (2020); Browers (2021); Favier (2004); and Guirguis (2020) and (2023).

[24] Agbaria, "Dār Al-Ṭalī'ah," 248.

"Between 1972 and 1982, more than 67 works of leading Marxist theorists made their way to Arabic."[25][26] Al-Dāʻūq, Ahmad Agbaria writes in the only existing study of Dār al-Ṭalīʻah in English, "prioritized translation (*tarjamah*) over composition (*taʼlīf*)."[27] The approach encouraged prolonged engagements with diverse strands of leftist thought. The urgency with which al-Dāʻūq and his circle approached translation reflected the political imperatives of the moment. For the Arab Left, 1967 had been a defining rupture. For one, it marked the defeat of the Arab Nationalists, the ruling status quo in much of the Arab world since the early 1950s. But at the same time, in what should have been their moment of ascendancy, the New Arab Left "felt beleaguered, stranded and secluded as the French Left, their natural allies, had put its weight behind Israel, giving up on Arabs' demands to view Israel as a case of settler colonialism in Palestine."[28] For much of the Third World, but particularly the New Arab Left, May '68 was not the idealistic high tide of solidarity that it remains in the Western public imagination. It was marked instead by a disillusionment with postwar internationalism and its hierarchies, which presumed the Western metropoles the places of theory and the periphery of its application, or of practice. Their sense of betrayal prompted a turn "away from European Leftist epistemologies and toward the East, where China, more than the Soviet Union, experimented in radical Marxism."[29]

In these Third-World struggles, Arab Marxists found both new interlocutors and the impetus for a "*retour aux sources*," a return to the *ummahāt* or mother-texts of the tradition. In the words of Aḥmad Bayḍūn (1942–), a member of Socialist Lebanon, this was an effort to establish a “*Marxisme Marxien*, a fundamental Marxism that used to be nourished through a direct relationship with the texts of Marx… A direct affiliation to *Capital* and the *Manifesto*.”[30] “Until now,” Ṭarābīshī wrote in 1964, reflecting a similar sentiment, “we have understood Marxism through whatever was written about it, not through Marx’s own [writings].”[31] His observation signals not simply a desire to translate Marxist works from European languages into Arabic, but to break from those European epistemologies that captured readings of Marx in those languages. “There was no place where this call for difference and the rejection of the authority of the past could be more vividly seen than in the socialist circle in Beirut,” Agbaria writes. “…Indeed, one can even speak of a wholly ‘new Marx’ who made his appearance in Arabic during the 1960s.”[32]

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[25] Ibid, 244.
[26] For an index of Dār al-Ṭalīʻah's publications, see Fāḍil (1999).
[27] Agbaria, "Dār Al-Ṭalīʻah," 244.
[28] Ibid, 240.
[29] Ibid.

Who was this new Marx, and on what terms did he enter the Arabic public sphere? He represented, I argue, not only a break from the “old Marxes”—of the Soviet and European types—but the renunciation of an “original” or “authentic” Marx altogether. The New Arab Left sought to reground his immanent authority not in the Marx of a particular time or place but instead in an analytic framework that they believed still had potency in their present. This was not a novel effort but a unique episode in the struggle against axiomatic or nominally “scientific” socialism in the Marxist tradition. The New Arab Left’s practices of translation constituted this new Marx by what Franck Mermier calls a “‘double anchoring,’ that of oppositional or subversive thought developed outside of the Arab world and that of the mediation of this corpus with new endogenous forms of thought, new ‘Arabic languages of the present.’”[33] Beirut’s publishing houses facilitated this double anchoring in a way that remains as yet underappreciated in scholarship. Finally—as the two translations demonstrate—while the new Marx was perhaps a common dream of the New Left, he was not, in practice, an uncontested figure. Waḍḍāḥ Sharārah, al-ʻAzīz al-ʻAẓmah, and al-ʻAfīf al-Akhḍar translated with such urgency precisely because they recognized the stakes involved. For reasons I elaborate in the following section, these translations of the *Manifesto* are the best points of reference by which we can understand who it was, bearing the name "Marx," that arrived in 1970s Beirut, and how.

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[30] Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation*, Theory in Forms (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 62–63, https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478007586.
[31] Ahmad Agbaria, “The Making of a Social Critic: Jurj Tarabishi,” in *The Politics of Arab Authenticity: Challenges to Postcolonial Thought* (Columbia University Press, 2022), 172, https://doi.org/10.7312/agba20494.11.
[32] Agbaria, “Dār Al-Ṭalī‘ah,” 239.
[33] Mermier, *Le livre et la ville*, 64.

Following a digression on the *Manifesto* and its geographies, I uncover the two Marxes that appear on the pages of the Dār al-Ṭalīʻah and Dār Ibn Khaldūn translations. I engage the Dār al-Ṭalīʻah translation as a product of and companion to an earlier engagement, "An Introduction to Reading *The Communist Manifesto*," (IRCM; Madkhal li-qirā'at al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī) first published in *Dirāsāt ʻArabīyah* in May 1969 and then with the 1972 volume.[34] Whereas the Dār Ibn Khaldūn translation launches into a defense of developmentalist interpretations of Marx's theory of history, I find Dār al-Ṭalīʻah's more in line with typical New Left readings of the *Manifesto* which tend to develop conceptions of world-system and dependency theory nascent in the text. In the second section, I extend this analysis to the two translations' conceptions of translation, universality, and the relationship between theory and practice. The Dār al-Ṭalīʻah translation, I argue, reflects a sophisticated view of theory, practice, and universality that recalls Antonio Gramsci, whose work Sharārah and al-ʻAẓmah engaged with around the same time. It is attentive to its own temporal and geographic displacement, which it tries to capture in its mode of articulation. Dār Ibn Khaldūn's, on the other hand, represents a sort of anti-humanist reaction to Dār al-Ṭalīʻah's, on the developmental and textual levels. Al-Akhḍar touts his reference to the

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[34] Ḥalq Dirāsāt Lubnān al-Ishtirākī, "Madkhal li-qirā'at al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī," *Dirāsāt ʻArabīyah* 5, no. 7 (May 1969): 38–79.

German “original,” granting it an authority to which Marx and Engels themselves demurred. I conclude with a discussion of traveling theory and the public sphere. Ultimately, I hope to answer the question: Why revisit the *Manifesto*, with its temporal and spatial binds, at such a critical juncture? Why *tarjamah*, and not *ta’līf*?

Apologia

Just as Fadi A. Bardawil writes of Socialist Lebanon's labors of translation, this thesis is "driven by the impediment of practice."[35] This is tongue-in-cheek but I gesture toward the difficulties of unearthing a historical moment whose archives remain undigitized in the private collections of its surviving participants in Beirut. The inaccessibility of Dār al-Ṭalī'ah's translation of the *Manifesto* is one such impediment. As a result, I owe a debt of gratitude to Bardawil and Michaelle Browers, upon whose work this thesis relies for much of its understanding of that translation and its discursive environment. I nonetheless hope to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of the questions I ask, through close readings of several texts: the Dār Ibn Khaldūn translation, of course; Socialist Lebanon's IRCM; Sharārah's comments in *Al-Islām wa-al-ḥadāthah wa-al-ijtimā' al-siyāsī*; and the Dār al-Ṭalī'ah excerpts I have had the good luck to find.

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[35] Fadi A. Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth: Socialist Lebanon's World and Ours," *Boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (2016): 328, https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-3572854.

The *Manifesto* and its geographies

> “The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot derive its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has shed all superstitious belief in the past. Earlier revolutions needed to remember previous moments in world history in order to numb themselves with regard to their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead in order to arrive at its own content. There, the phrase exceeded the content. Here the content exceeds the phrase.”[36]

The world of Marx’s “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” written in the winter of 1851–52, would have been unrecognizable to the Marx of just four years earlier who composed the *Manifesto* with Engels. The revolutions of 1848, which had tried to realize the revolutionary promise of that document, were crushed. In the “Eighteenth Brumaire,” Marx takes up the task of assessing the defeat and defending the continued relevance of the *Manifesto*. More accurately, his task is to save the communist idea itself, an act repeated again and again in the two centuries since.

The revolution in France, Marx argues, had failed because it tried to imitate the revolution of fifty years earlier. Just the same, the great revolutions of the past had taken as their image earlier ones. But the conditions of the modern world demanded a new kind of revolution—one fashioned in the image of a future that it itself hopes to bring about. The modern revolution would “derive its poetry” from the future in an act of *poesis*, or making. The poetics Marx describes would reach into the future, and in doing so realize itself in the present: it would *manifest* the revolution. Marx’s new literary form aimed not merely to describe or interpret the world, but, much like his philosophy, to change it.[37] The manifesto's authority over the present derived not from the past but the "anterior future," from the changes that it itself set out to create.[38]

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[36] Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx and Engels: 1851–53*, Collected Works 11 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), 106; quoted in Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Translation/Transnation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.

Manifestos resemble what J. L. Austin calls *performative speech acts*, utterances which seek not merely to state but to enact.[39] Saying "I do" on the altar, for example, cannot be said to be true or false but rather enacts marriage. In order to enact, however, speech acts rely on three kinds of force. The utterance's *locutionary force* is its ability to pick out a referent which others can identify, or convey meaning; its *illocutionary force* is its performative function, that it intends an action; and its *perlocutionary force* is, contingent on others' recognition of that action, its effect.

Other kinds of political speech acts work in a straightforward way: they issue a declaration from a position of authority, where that authority has the credibility to enact what is intended and is thus recognized by its interlocutors. The manifesto, however, immediately encounters a problem in that it lacks the present authority from which its perlocutionary force would derive, and even the identity from which its illocutionary force is intended. At the heart of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto* is the theory of history as class struggle, with varying classes assuming at different times the mantle of the "progressive" driving force of change. The heroic class of the first chapter of the *Manifesto* is, perhaps surprisingly, the bourgeoisie, whose "most revolutionary" overthrow of feudalism "has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment.’”[40] The great achievement of the bourgeois revolution, according to Marx and Engels, is that it has finally unveiled the exploitative class relations that had always been cloaked under “religious and political illusions.” The result—and here Marx and Engels shift from present perfect to present tense—is the emergence of a final revolutionary class, the proletariat, whose overthrow of the bourgeoisie results in the abolition of class altogether.[41]

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[37] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Marx and Engels: 1845–47*, Collected Works 5 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 5.

[38] Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 24.

[39] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, The William James Lectures ; 1955 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Having identified the new driving force of history, it is *from* the proletariat that the *Manifesto* seeks to speak. But it is quickly realized that the proletariat not only lacks the present authority to dictate the future, but does not yet *exist*, at least not as a discrete identity from which a speech act can be intended. By 1848, a nascent proletariat has emerged in the advanced industrial countries of Western Europe. But it is not yet conscious of itself as a class, and therefore not capable of acting as a historical agent. The proletariat is a class in itself, but not yet for itself.[42] The Manifesto thus undertakes a dual movement of creating historical agency and then speaking from it. Inevitably, the motion is not a complete one but a process; not an accomplished identity but an act of identification.[43] It is this very act that the famous preamble describes: “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism”—and then, “Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself.”[44] The *Manifesto* makes what is spectral material, what is latent realized. And then, from that position of historical agency, it speaks.

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[40] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Marx and Engels: 1845–48*, Collected Works 6 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), 486–87.

[41] Ibid, 505–506.

[42] Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 30.

[43] Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, ed. François Matheron, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1999); Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 30.

[44] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 481.

The *Manifesto* is the first and archetypal example of what Martin Puchner names a *Marxian speech act*, which derives its authority by constituting an identity in a certain time and place and then speaking from it to manifest an imagined future.[45] But from this arises the concern that Marx, while imagining a universal future (the abolition of class marks it definitively as such), intends his speech act from a particular, geographically and temporally bounded space—a few countries in Western Europe at a time when in those places, and only in those places, an advanced industrial working class existed. From and for whom can the *Manifesto* speak? For its perlocutionary effect to be universal, so must its illocutionary place of articulation be universal or universalizable. In other words, the locutionary force upon which it stakes its universalist claims—its theory—must be universally applicable, i.e., capable of being rearticulated from different positions with the same illocutionary force. Marxian speech acts must speak for—or initiate a motion toward speaking for—a universal subject constituted on the basis of its own theoretical strength.

If such a problem arises when the *Manifesto* speaks for the non-industrialized European countries, it is even more profound when it tries to speak for the periphery. Marx and Engels' manifesto speaks from a metropole, or metropoles. The proletariat it speaks for—"represents"—is a metropolitan one which occupies a privileged position in the international division of labor.[46] When the *Manifesto* addresses the periphery, it is not representing but "re-presenting," to borrow Gayatri Spivak's formulation; theory from the metropole addresses the peripheral subject not as a "representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately)" but one whose consciousness is there to be transformed.[47] The *Manifesto* is no longer intended from the class that is constituted but rather to it. "Regrounding or reorienting the manifesto" in the periphery, in other words, "triggers a crisis of articulation."[48]

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[45] Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 23.

[46] Spivak (1988, 272) characterizes the relationship between subject in core and periphery: "The subject-production of worker and unemployed within nation-state ideologies in its Center; the increasing subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from the realization of surplus value and thus from 'humanistic' training in consumerism."

The *Manifesto* is preoccupied with the problem of its own geography. Its response is a turn toward language in which it compares the globalized exchange of commodities to that of theory: "In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property."[49] The globalized capitalist mode of production produces the mutual exchange of theory—translation—and just as with the proletariat, in doing so it produces its own gravediggers. The global exchange of theory-as-commodity "cuts from under its feet" its own foundation, leaving a "total translatability"—a universality equivalent to the abolition of classes accompanying the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.[50] Translation, for Marx and Engels, makes possible the production of theory that speaks for/from a universal subject.

Marx and Engels work toward such a total translatability by undermining the distinctions between original and copy. The preamble to the *Manifesto* recounts the creation of the document, for which "Communists of various nationalities" assembled in London to "sketch" a text "to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages."[51] Speaking of a simultaneous publication in these six languages, the preface erases translation as a part of the document's creation. The 1888 preface, Puchner notes, reflects a similar attitude by celebrating the publication of a French edition translated not from the German original but Samuel Moore's English translation. "Reference to the original," Puchner writes, "has been replaced by a total translatability… they seem to suggest that we do not have to accord this 'first' formulation of a text in a given language the privileged status of an original invested with the aura of untranslatability, copyright, and authority."[52][53]

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[47] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 275.
[48] Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 270n26.
[49] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 488.
[50] Ibid, 496.
[51] Ibid, 481.

Indeed, the conspicuous ordering of languages in the preface suggests a geographic privileging of the text's editions where market reach and conceptual immediacy take precedence over authorship. On an individual level, Marx and Engels are entirely absent from the first several editions of the *Manifesto* and those distributed as pamphlets during the February Revolution. "The *Manifesto*," Puchner writes, "appeared to be a text arising from the revolution even as it sought to trigger the revolution"; it appeared at once to speak to and from the revolutionaries.[54] This other kind of translatability—from an anonymous theoretical universality to concrete, revolutionary particularity—is made possible precisely by the text's authorial and linguistic ambiguities. It demonstrates how a radical conception of translation can aid a speech act's rearticulation in a different place than the one from which it originates.

Similar ideas appear throughout Marx's oeuvre, where he employs translation as a critical practice. The *1844 Manuscripts*, Dermott Ryan argues,

> "are an exercise in a limited form of transnational literacy. Marx is reading the works of French political economists, transcribing excerpts from Jean-Baptiste Say and Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy. He reads David Ricardo and Adam Smith in French. He transcribes the French translations of these English authors and also translates them into

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[52] Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 52.

[53] Puchner (2006, 55) writes: "[Marx and Engels] are totalizing translation to the point of eliminating the original language as a privileged point of reference entirely. One might say that they are trying to undo Babel."

[54] Ibid, 33.

> German. He shifts from a transcription of Smith in French to his own translation of Smith into German, often in the same paragraph… The process of reading aloud is a constant rewriting of what went before."[55]

An older Marx would adopt the same practices reading the Russian populists in the 1870s.[56]

What logic underlies these practices? Marx, J. Hillis Miller argues, shares a basic theoretical orientation with Paul de Man in that he seeks to suspend the "taking for granted of the sign system in question" and analyze that "given sign system's generation, the way value and meaning are produced and established within it."[57] The products of man's labor, Marx writes, once brought into relation with one another as values, take on the form of commodities. Marx's *Capital* aims to uncover the nature of this commodity-form, which distorts how value is created.[58] Value, according to Marx, represents a homogenization of the various kinds of human labor. This homogenization is given physical form when the products of that labor are brought into relation with each other. But we do not see it as such: in exchanging commodities, we intend not to exchange quantities of homogenized labor, but to equate different products to one another in exchange as values. Without realizing, in doing so we equate our different kinds of labor. Thus exchange, which appears to us as a social relation between objects, is actually a material relation between human beings.

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[55] Dermot Ryan, "Marx's 'Universal Passport'; or, Critique as a Practice of Translation," *Boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (2016): 116–17, https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-3572442.

[56] Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "the Peripheries of Capitalism,"* History Workshop Series (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 7.

[57] J. Hillis Miller, "Promises, Promises: Speech Act Theory, Literary Theory, and Politico-Economic Theory in Marx and De Man," *New Literary History* 33, no. 1 (2002): 7, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2002.0007.

[58] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Ben Fowkes, Penguin Classics. (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990), 164–67.

In failing to recognize this, Marx argues, classical political economists are ventriloquized by commodities, attributing to them a sociality which is in fact a character of the labor for which they are a form of appearance. The commodities, he writes, "speak through the mouth of the economist" in their own "language of commodities."[59] The critique of political economy is in this sense an act of translation. Marx, according to Ryan, believes that "ideological distortions in the discourse of political economy arise because economists translate the appearances of bourgeois society into a set of pseudoscientific concepts and categories."[60] His acts of translation are corrective—not merely of "bad translation," but of "translation that does not recognize itself as such."[61]

"Value," Marx writes in terms even more reminiscent of de Man (and indeed of al-Akhḍar), "transforms every product of labor into a social hieroglyphic," leaving to critique the task of "deciphering" them.[62] This hieroglyphic, Miller points out, "works just as de Man says all 'texts' do, among them literary texts, that is, as a 'figure (or system of figures) and its deconstruction.' The relations of substitution, equivalence, and exchange among commodities within capitalism as Marx describes them in the first volume of *Capital*, are, it is easy to see, a tropology or 'system of figures.'"[63] Marx's critique of political economy therefore "contributes to a philosophical problematic concerned with the generation and logic of systems of signification," the same space much of de Man's work occupies.[64]

In the *Manifesto*'s radical conception of total translatability we find the beginnings of an answer to the problem of "translating" theory from the core. But it is not a fully developed one—

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[59] Ibid, 177; 143.
[60] Ryan, "Marx's 'Universal Passport,'" 110.
[61] Ibid, 108.
[62] Marx, *Capital*, 167.
[63] Miller, "Promises, Promises," 2.
[64] Ryan, "Marx's 'Universal Passport,'" 109.

the document does not sufficiently confront the problem of the world-system and subsequent multilateral pathways of development that mark the experience of the periphery. In fact, it would be *against* some of the core Marxian dogmas of the nineteenth century that the peripheral proletariat would have to revolt. Shortly after the October Revolution of 1917, Gramsci would declare the Bolshevik victory "a revolution against *Capital*," against the unilateralist assumptions undergirding Marx's critique of political economy and, similarly, the *Manifesto*.[65] Marxism is to Gramsci a rather different thing, and to achieve it would mean "translating" Marx for the periphery: "Even if the Bolsheviks renounce certain of Marx's assertions in *Capital*," he writes, "that does not mean that they renounce the deeper message which is its lifeblood. All that it means is that they are not 'Marxists'; they have not used the Master's works to compile a rigid doctrine, made up of dogmatic and unquestionable claims. They are *living* out Marxist thought."[66]

Can translating the *Manifesto* amount to a revolt against it? In some sense, translation is necessarily revolt: it involves *displacements of meaning*—geographic and temporal—that change the text's meaning. To translate is to hold a certain tension between the authority of the original and repudiating it. I return to this discussion later. But in the following section, I identify some of these displacements, particularly in the realm of evolutionism and Marx's theory of history. How do the Lebanese translators of the *Manifesto* manage them?

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[65] Antonio Gramsci, "The Revolution Against 'Capital,'" in *Antonio Gramsci: Pre-Prison Writings*, ed. Richard Bellamy, trans. Virginia Cox, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39–42.

[66] Ibid, 39–40.

The two Marxes

What immediate, practical purpose did translating the *Manifesto* serve in 1970s Beirut? For the New Left, it offered a path by which to navigate the upheaval of the June 1967 defeat. In the power struggle that followed, they faced not the Right but their greatest rivals on the Left—the Arab Nationalists and old communist parties in Moscow's orbit. The *naksah*, or setback, dealt a devastating blow to the Arab Nationalists' anticolonial pedigree, who were now in decline across the region. It was into this void that groups like Socialist Lebanon—which in 1970–71 would become the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL; Munaẓẓamat al-ʻAmal al-Shuyūʻī fī Lubnān)[67]—sought to step, and it was up to the intellectuals surrounding Dār al-Ṭalīʻah to provide the theoretical justification for their program. To do so, they needed to find new, positive grounds for their authority, which would affirm their status as rightful agents of historical change. At the same time, it had to undercut their nominally fellow Marxists in the Lebanese Communist Party, a major force in Lebanese politics. As Marxists, that authority could only come from one figure.

Translating Marx, then, served first of all to authorize the New Arab Left's autonomous political practices as against the established forces on the Left. Its primary expression was the rejection of "evolutionist" readings of Marx's theory of history, ones which dictate a unilinear progression through the various stages of capitalist development. It takes after that most famous of expressions, by which Marx, having recounted England's industrial development, forewarns the countries of continental Europe: *De te fabula narratur!*—the tale is told of you.[68]

Evolutionism amounts to one of the pillars of the "Stalinist doxa" which captured the Arab Left until the late 1960s. History, it dictates, progresses through five predetermined stages:

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[67] Bardawil, "Sidelining Ideology," 167.
[68] Marx, *Capital*, 90.

"primitive communism, slavery, capitalism, and lastly communism, socialism being the first stage (or transitory phase of the latter)."[69] Setting aside the irony of such a message coming from the Bolsheviks—who serve as their own best counterexample[70]—in the Arab world the schema raised a myriad of questions regarding which classes could assume the leading role in history, and when: "What role could be found for the anti-colonialist nationalists?," or, "What road should the 'revolution' follow: a capitalist path, a move towards socialism, or a third way that involved gradual change?"[71] The main ideological contests of the 1960s, Faleh A. Jabar writes, centered around questions such as these, over whether Arab Marxists should regard the National Bourgeoisie as a progressive and hence tolerable historical force, or whether they ought to "burn stages" and take revolutionary action. "Was the National Bourgeoisie, as a social class, capable of carrying out the required tasks?," he writes, "And if so, to what extent should it be supported? Or if this class was impotent, should the working class step in as it had done in the October 1917 revolution to undertake both democratic (i.e. capitalist) and socialist tasks at one and the same time?"[72]

Socialist Lebanon's IRCM, Bardawil writes in his study of the document, "Dreams of a Dual Birth: Socialist Lebanon's World and Ours," "commits itself unequivocally to "the 'now' as 'the temporal horizon of political action.'"[73] It seeks to free the *Manifesto* from its past and future binds and, in doing so, reassert its authority in the present. In its two appearances, it does so in two slightly different ways; this is not so consequential, but I detail it briefly here. It first appeared in the May 1969 issue of *Dirāsāt ʿArabīyah*, a journal dedicated to dissecting current events and political struggles around the world. Juxtaposed with articles like “Why Can’t Colombia Become a New Vietnam?,” “Dimensions of the Resistance in Palestine,” and “A Report on the Structure and Problems of the Lebanese Economy,” it introduces the *Manifesto* not as a historical artifact but rather in light of, and in an attempt to elucidate, the particular situation in Lebanon. Dissecting the *Manifesto* here is not an academic exercise but a basic critical orientation and mode of analysis. *Dirāsāt ʿArabīyah* concerns itself with literature, its editorial board writes, “not for its own sake, but to serve the cause of the progress of the Arab people… of forming a unified, socialist, democratic, modern society.”[74]

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[69] Faleh A. Jabar, "The Arab Communist Parties in Search of an Identity," in *Post-Marxism and the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 1997), 93.
[70] "The Russian Bolshevik revolution was the first anachronism," Jabar (1997, 93) writes, "—a working-class revolution supported by the peasantry and aimed at a mixture of tasks: enhancing the small, peasant ownership on the one hand, and nationalizing domestic and foreign capital on the other."
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid, 93–94; quoted in Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 322–23.
[73] Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 323.

But for *Dirāsāt ʿArabīyah* this service is an analytic one. No figures exist on the journal’s readership, but though it certainly had some among the general public, its audience was primarily an intellectual one. Its bringing the temporal horizon of political action to the present was not itself armed struggle but an urgent and politically committed critique. The IRCM thus serves as a call to the militant intellectuals of the Dār al-Ṭalīʿah circle to define for their present the conditions of revolutionary struggle.

As a preface to the Dār al-Ṭalīʿah *Manifesto*, the IRCM’s present is perhaps an even more urgent one. Freeing the speech-act from its binds is not enough; it must be iterated. Having completed the IRCM, the reader is not left with an invitation to seek out the *Manifesto* but confronted with it on the very next page. And, very likely, that reader is not an intellectual one but a member of the public, to whom such a volume would have been marketed. To an extent, its purpose remains to help him conduct an analysis of his political circumstances. But its call to action is no longer a primarily analytic one. Its object is to convince the reader that the

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[74] Hay’at al-Taḥrīr, “Taqdīm,” *Dirāsāt ʿArabīyah* 1, no. 1 (November 1964): 2.

Manifesto's present is his present; that the proletariat for/from which it speaks is his class; and that that class remains the sole agent of historical change.

Whichever audience the IRCM speaks to, its freeing the *Manifesto* from its binds is done via a double movement that mirrors that of the original itself. The first defends the *Manifesto*'s analytic authority; the second enacts by constituting a historically-active proletarian identity in its present. The first paragraph of the IRCM takes on this task with what Bardawil describes as a "reflexive move." Its aim is to relieve the *Manifesto* of its supposed "predictive quality," one which it argues has been hoisted upon it in the years since its composition.[75] They write:

> "What is taken for granted is that *The Communist Manifesto* did not treat the problems we are suffering from, nor did it 'predict,' as it is said, the enormity of the problems that colonized countries (those colonized by the West) would face. Rather, those countries are only mentioned in the *Manifesto* in rare places, and with a name that is not considerate at all: 'The barbarian countries'! And [the *Manifesto*] was not written on the eve of a national liberation revolution but a month before the outbreak of the 1848 revolution in France, that is, on the eve of the first workers revolution that destroyed the bourgeois monarchy and laid the foundations for the Second Republic (the First Republic [had lasted from] 1792 to 1804). Moreover, the *Manifesto* was written in the mid-nineteenth century, that is, in a period when European industry had yet to witness most of the transformations that would change the face of Europe and the globe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Besides, the workers' movement had not yet traversed the great number of experiences that it would endure during the next fifty years."[76]

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[75] Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 326.

[76] IRCM, 38; translated in Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 326.

In distancing the world of Marx and Engels from their own, Socialist Lebanon reject the conception of "Marxism as a direct translation of a transhistorical body of theory to disparate particular situations… passive recipients of a 'revealed' universal discourse." Instead, the *Manifesto* serves as "a powerful analytical tool that helped them understand their colonial modernity."[77] The power of the *Manifesto* is not that it anticipated every single class development in every country around the world since 1848—nor did it try to! Instead, it serves two purposes, as we have already detailed, the first being to help the working classes of various countries to realize themselves as historical agents and understand the basic contours of their society, so that they could change them. It sketches the basic historical pattern from which an analysis of society in terms of class contradictions can be taken.

Its second purpose, and the second half of the IRCM's double movement, is then to engage in precisely that analysis with regard to the most pressing questions of the time. For Socialist Lebanon, this means a refutation of the "five-stage Stalinist schema" which consigns the proletariat to the "waiting room" of history, an expression Bardawil borrows from Dipesh Chakrabarty. "The positions calling for a historicist logic of stages," Socialist Lebanon argues, "predicated on an economic reductionism, are not authorized by Marx's text."[78] They write:

> "The point of view adopted by the *Manifesto* regarding the succession of political stages is of crucial importance. It rids Marxism of the charge of evolutionism [*al-taṭawwurīyah*], which dominated Marxist writings for a long time and is still prevalent in a number of works by communist parties. And perhaps the most significant position premised on evolutionism is the one that calls for the support of the national bourgeoisie because the history of the society in which the communist party is militating hasn't passed through all

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[77] Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 326.
[78] Ibid, 323.

> the required stages:… feudalism, capitalism, socialism… And since this society hasn't passed through the capitalist phase, and its bourgeois political leadership, this means that the ambition of any group that belongs to the working class or the petite bourgeoisie to constitute the leadership of the period is illegitimate because its aim is not consistent with the [logic of] succession of stages… It is clear that the *Manifesto* does not adopt this style of thinking at all, since it does not say that the bourgeoisie's stages of evolution have to necessarily subscribe to the following order: the commune, then the independent urban republic, and finally the bourgeois republic, and that every political bourgeois development has to pass through all these stages."[79]

The effect of this realization is to authorize class struggle against the supposedly "anticolonial," "progressive" National Bourgeoisie. As if the identity of their National-Bourgeois target was not clear enough, they add: "Socialism is not 'the society of sufficiency and justice' [*mujtamaʿ al-kifāyah wa-al-ʿadl*]."[80] Socialist Lebanon's attack is not just on Gamal Abdel Nasser but the theoretical assumptions underpinning the entire Arab postcolonial project. The aim is to translate the *Manifesto*'s subject-constitution into the Arab context by addressing the peripheral proletarian not in his relation to the metropoles—as the Arab Nationalists sought to do—but to those elements of his own society that sought to establish a postcolonial status quo where hierarchies remained, where class struggle was subsumed by national struggle, where the unjust arrangement of productive forces was veiled under "sufficiency" and "justice." Marx and Engels, they point out, write that "the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle."[81]

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[79] IRCM, 47–48; translated in Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 322.

[80] IRCM, 74; translated in Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 322.

[81] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 495.

What the IRCM never seeks to do is to set out a detailed program of action or overarching, universal theory of revolution. It seeks to set actors—inside or outside Socialist Lebanon/OCAL's circle—free from the theoretical binds that stifle revolutionary practice. It means not simply to replace those old blinds with new ones, perhaps Arab ones but no less confining to the particularities of the present. Neither does the *Manifesto* itself, in Socialist Lebanon's interpretation. Instead, it identifies what of the *Manifesto* is lost in its rearticulation in the present. What displacements of meaning, what ruptures occur in its new place of articulation? It finds those ruptures, finds within them threads of continuity, calls attention to them, reaffirms them, makes sense of them. Finally, it prepares the reader to seek from the document some kind of authorization, and attempts to shape the broad contours of that authorization without being too restrictive. For Socialist Lebanon recognizes, as I discuss later, that theirs is also a document that will experience displacements of meaning. Their theory, too, is traveling theory.

The differences we find between the Dār al-Ṭalīʿah and Dār Ibn Khaldūn translations roughly fall into the two moments of this "double movement," the junctures of the *Manifesto* that experience displacements and dislocations as it moves: first, the charge of evolutionism and Marx's theory of history; second, the temporal horizon for action and the classes for which that action is authorized, i.e., to what extent the proletariat acts independently, or, alternatively, self-consciously. Socialist Lebanon's IRCM and al-Akhḍar's footnotes make such an analysis possible, but they are more than contextual clues by which we can understand their translation choices. They were, and are, integral parts of the *Manifesto*'s articulation as speech-act; they are discursive features that put the manifestos in conversation with one another and their surroundings. In our case, those surroundings are the body of work through which the new Marx appeared in Beirut.

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Al-Akhḍar shares Socialist Lebanon's impulse to "return to the mother-texts," but believes that the Arab Left has failed to bridge the gap between theory and practice not because of an unwillingness to adapt Marxist thought but because of an infidelity to his original insights. Necessary to once again make the document a living text, useful in the hands of Palestinian militants, is an absolutely unmediated relationship with the original, unmediated even by the rest of Marx's corpus and the later trajectory of his thought. For al-Akhḍar, this first of all means recourse to the "German source" (*al-aṣl al-Almānī*). The result, he claims, is a translation that is "better than the current French translations and at least comparable to the English translation that Engels himself revised."[82][83] This falls in direct contrast to the francophone Sharārah and anglophone al-'Aẓmah, for whom the

> "labors of translation from translations driven by the impediment of practice… bypassed the distinctions between original and copy, universal and particular. The question of linguistic difference, of fidelity to the original language, mattered less than the capacity of accessing, interpreting, and putting to practical use authoritative discourses about the analysis of class, imperialism, and guerrilla warfare."[84]

Al-Akhḍar's claim to authority on the basis of the German "original" is a strange one because it seems to afford the language a privileged position that Marx and Engels themselves denied it, as the exclusive place of entry of such an authoritative discourse into the Arabic language.

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[82] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyū'ī*, 18.

[83] According to Abū Fakhr (2010), al-Akhḍar had moved to East Germany in 1967 "so that he could read Karl Marx in his original language." He cut his studies short in March 1968 to join the Palestinian resistance in Jordan.

[84] Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth," 328.

These attitudes, briefly outlined, form the basis for Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah's and Dār Ibn Khaldūn's readings of Marx's theory of history. As described, Socialist Lebanon/Sharārah and al-‘Aẓmah's position can be characterized by its opposition to *taṭawwurīyah*, or developmentalism, a logic of development that posits a unilinear or universal progression of countries from feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, and then within capitalism from commune, to independent urban republic, to bourgeois republic. Al-Akhḍar's position, on the other hand, is a difficult one to decipher, for he assails previous translations for their alleged sympathy toward the petit bourgeoisie and centralized state (i.e., Arab Nationalist regimes) before defending exactly such a logic of stages in footnotes that continue for several pages. He even does so in the context of the "barbarian countries"—by which Marx refers to countries on the periphery—which Socialist Lebanon disavows in the IRCM. "It grieved their souls [Sharārah and Ṭarābīshī's]," al-Akhḍar writes, "for the *Manifesto* to describe the nations of the underdeveloped world as 'barbaric.'"[85] Their response, so he claims, is to abandon wholesale Marx's theory of history. But what al-Akhḍar provides in its place is an exceptionally crude reading of the *Manifesto*'s logic, perhaps so crude as to be unmediated by Marx himself. It is more characteristic of a Millsian theory of development, from whom, as al-Akhḍar acknowledges, Marx derived his own. He writes:

> "Barbarism [*al-hamajīyah*] in the Marxist historical conception refers to the *stages of historical development that all peoples went through* before reaching the stage of civilization. It is characterized by a very low degree of human control over his natural surroundings and rule in the style of tribal monarchy. Civilization is the stage that follows the upper stage of barbarism. It is characterized by a higher degree of human control over

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[85] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyū‘ī*, 64n22.

> nature and the emergence of the state. The *Manifesto* uses the descriptor of 'barbarism' for the underdeveloped nations—which is borrowed from John Stuart Mill—in the sense of non-industrial nations, to distinguish them from the civilized Western nations, i.e., the industrial bourgeoisie."[86]

What is notable is not only al-Akhḍar's defense of the term "barbarism" but his translation of it, *hamajīyah*, which is perhaps the most pejorative rendering of the word in the Arabic language. He opts against *barbarīyah*, the Latin cognate and perhaps the most obvious translation, which refers more specifically to the Berber people of the Maghreb and generally to a state of linguistic deficiency or backwardness. He also forgoes *ajnabīyah*, a more neutral word which denotes foreignness or otherness in relation to a hegemon—capturing the core-periphery relation of which "barbarian countries" is an early attempt at articulating.[87]

In general, the Dār Ibn Khaldūn translation exhibits a reluctance to read the Marx of the *Manifesto in light of* the later Marx, or to view his corpus as a cohesive whole, in which the multilateral conceptions of development that are nascent in his earlier works are more fully articulated. The Dār al-Ṭalī'ah translation takes the opposite approach, acknowledging the development of Marx's thought from the *Manifesto* to his correspondence on Russia while rejecting Louis Althusser's notion of an "epistemological break."[88] What was left of the developmentalism in Marx's thinking, Teodor Shanin argues in *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "the Peripheries of Capitalism,"* was subverted by his exchange with Russian theorists who advocated "'bypassing the stage' of West-European-like capitalism."[89] Similarly,

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[86] Ibid, 64–65n22; emphasis added.
[87] Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Languages Services, 1994).
[88] Ryan, "Marx's 'Universal Passport,'" 112.
[89] Shanin, *Late Marx*, 9.

Ryan argues that his later writings “undo rather than support a universalizing narrative of world history.”[90] Both, however, emphasize the continuities in his methodology, refuting Althusser’s “epistemological break” theory.

Socialist Lebanon, it seems, shares this view. This is evident in spite of their familiarity with Althusser’s *Reading Capital* in which he posits the idea, which would become a major doxa of New Left thought.[91] Indeed, Socialist Lebanon’s Marxology is a sophisticated one which preempts the consensus on the trajectory of Marx’s thinking that would emerge in West in the 1980s. What it effectively means for their context is that they can “rescue” the early Marx without reverting to a crude developmentalism as al-Akhḍar does. Further, adopting the view of Marx’s theory of history as purposefully ambiguous, where the roles of classes in particular positions in the world-system are not rigidly defined, allows them to “translate” a manifesto for the Lebanese context that makes sense in light of its particular class history.

This is exemplified first by the naming of classes in the *Manifesto*, and then the description of their relationship to one another at certain historical junctures. Marx and Engels most clearly spell out these relations in describing the ascendancy of the proletariat, whereby, for a time, they share with the bourgeoisie a historical purpose. “At this stage,” Marx and Engels write,

> “the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition. If anywhere they unite to form more compact bodies, this is not yet the consequence of their own active union, but of the union of the bourgeoisie,

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[90] Ryan, “Marx’s ‘Universal Passport,’” 121.

[91] Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment*, 67.

> which class, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion, and is moreover yet, for a time, able to do so."[92]

There is a stage, Marx and Engels express quite clearly, at which the interests of the bourgeoisie are the interests of the proletariat; at which it is in the interests of the proletariat to see to it that the bourgeoisie triumphs over the class formations that proceed it, so that they in turn can realize their historical destiny. The agency afforded to the bourgeoise, the celebration of its revolutionary role, is a peculiar feature of the *Manifesto* that I have already noted. In its first section, "Bourgeois and Proletarians," paragraph after paragraph begins with "the bourgeoisie" as its active subject.

To al-Akhḍar, this is plain evidence that Marx's theory of history entails a succession of stages through which proletarians of all nations must pass before engaging in revolutionary struggle on their own behalf. First must come the bourgeoisie, who must triumph absolutely and unequivocally over the feudal system. It was the failure of this stage, al-Akhḍar argues, at some indeterminate moment in Arab history, that stalled the progression of stages in Lebanon and foreclosed the possibility of a proletarian revolution. In the introduction to the Dār Ibn Khaldūn *Manifesto*, he writes:

> "The continuity of the centralized state, i.e., its non-disappearance for an entire historical period of dynamic feudalism of the European type, is primarily responsible for the continuity of the Islamic bureaucratic bourgeoisie and its chronic inability to realize a radical revolution of the kind of the European bourgeoisie, which devoured what came before it and shook from its shoulders the burden of its heritage, which it hanged alongside its kings."[93]

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[92] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 492.

[93] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʿī*, 20.

Thus for al-Akhḍar, the failure of revolution in the Arab world does not refute but rather affirms the logic of stages. The Arab bourgeoisie, he argues, never managed to fully overthrow the feudal system like their European counterparts did. For this reason, the predetermined progression of stages, from feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, was never realized. But al-Akhḍar's analysis gives little consideration to the relation *between* countries, to whether a country's position within the world-system might alter its course of development. It recalls Robert Brenner's of the Brenner-Wallerstein debate,[94] an argument over the transition from feudalism to capitalism that played out in the West during the 1970s and 1980s. The disagreement between Brenner and Immanuel Wallerstein, the originator of world-systems theory, was over the appropriate level of analysis to determine how the capitalist mode of production triumphed over feudalism in a particular country at the particular time that it did. Whereas Wallerstein argues that the emergence of capitalism in a country "can be understood only as a manifestation of the development of capitalism on a world scale," for Brenner "Each individual country is viewed as being a virtually impermeable unit within which all relevant data necessary for the explanation of events reside."[95]

Al-Akhḍar seems to take this position at least at the regional, i.e., Arab, if not national level. It ignores, or at least downplays, the subordinate position of the Arab countries in relation to the European ones within the world-system, where a global division of labor keeps the Arab proletariat from accruing the same degree of leverage that its European counterparts once had. In a volume in which footnotes often run for pages at a time, he does not so much as afford one for the one sentence in the *Manifesto* which expresses such a formulation: "Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns," Marx and Engels write, "so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, *the East on the West*."[96] Moreover, al-Akhḍar's position is a strange one because it seems to preclude the possibility of revolution in the present, even as he offers his *Manifesto* as a "weapon" to the Palestinian resistance, whose temporal horizon of political action is so assuredly in the "now."

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[94] On the Brenner-Wallerstein debate, see Aston and Philpin (1985).

[95] Robert A. Denemark and Kenneth P. Thomas, "The Brenner-Wallerstein Debate," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1988): 53–54, https://doi.org/10.2307/2600412.

Regardless, the question naturally arises of *for whom* precisely the temporal horizon of action is to be the present. For al-Akhḍar, once again, the answer is quite a straightforward one: it must be the proletariat, and the proletariat alone, who undertake revolutionary action for their own sake. The question of the revolutionary organization of the proletariat was something of an obsession for al-Akhḍar, who translated numerous collections of Marx and Engels' works on the subject. It was the rejection of one such volume, *Communist Organization* (Al-Tanẓīm al-Shuyū'ī), that led to his dispute with al-Dā'ūq and Ṭarābīshī and expulsion from Dār al-Ṭalī'ah.[97][98] It is for perhaps this reason that al-Akhḍar so vehemently objects to Sharārah and al-'Aẓmah's (in his belief, Ṭarābīshī's) translation specifically as it regards to naming the classes and how they organize at revolutionary junctures.

"At this stage," Marx and Engels continue from the earlier passage, "therefore, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies."[99] Who are these *enemies of their enemies*, these classes opposed to the proletariat and yet whose interests also oppose the bourgeoisie's? According to Samuel Moore's English translation, they are "the remnants of absolute monarchy, the landowners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeoisie."[100] This is so because they are classes for whom capitalism, i.e., the bourgeois mode of production, threatens their very existence. "The lower strata of the middle class," Marx and Engels write, referring to the petty bourgeois in particular,

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[96] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 488; emphasis added.
[97] Kārl Mārks and Fridrīk Injilz, *Al-Tanẓīm al-Shuyū'ī*, trans. al-'Afīf al-Akhḍar (Bayrūt: Dār al-Quds, 1974).
[98] al-Akhḍar, "Shahādat ta'rīkhīyah."
[99] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 492.

> "—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production."[101]

It is here that Sharārah and al-‘Aẓmah make a decisive intervention in the Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah translation, which al-Akhḍar singles out for perhaps his harshest criticism in the introduction. "At this stage, the proletarians do not fight their enemies, but the enemies of their enemies," their translation reads, "the remnants of absolutism, *the big landowners*, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeois [*baqāyā al-ḥukm al-muṭlaq wa-kibār al-malāk al-ʻaqārīyīn wa-al-būrjuwāzīyīn ghayr al-ṣināʻīyīn wa-ṣighār al-būrjuwāzīyīn*]."[102] This, to al-Akhḍar, is the most grievous of Sharārah and al-‘Aẓmah's "falsifications," and the one which betrays their class loyalty to the petty bourgeoisie and against the interests of the proletariat. He writes:

> "As petty bourgeois themselves, the sultans of the Arabic translation resented that the real Marx and Engels observed a stubborn historical reality, that the workers—in their disorganization—do not fight their direct enemies, the bourgeoisie, but rather the enemies of their enemies, the landowners—without specification for the big or exception for the

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid, 491–92.
[102] Mārks and Injilz, *Bayān al-Ḥizb al-Shuyūʻī*, 113; quoted in Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī*, 12; emphasis added.

> small. That is why they decided, Sultan-like [*sulṭānīyan*], in order to honor their shabby little class, to force the Arabized Marx and Engels to be kind to the small landowners.”[103]

Al-Akhḍar’s accusation, that Sharārah and al-‘Aẓmah’s loyalties lie with the petite bourgeoisie, recurs throughout the Dār Ibn Khaldūn translation. But it is also possible, given the attitudes expressed in the IRCM, that this bracketing represents something more substantial. I argue that in doing so Sharārah and al-‘Aẓmah *proletarianize* the small landowners, a class which occupies a pivotal position in Lebanese society.

Al-Akhḍar also takes exception to a related passage where Marx and Engels describe *who precisely* organizes against the bourgeoisie. Remarking on the unique character of the proletarian revolution in the history of class struggle, the English Marx and Engels write: “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the *self-conscious*, *independent* movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”[104] Moore’s translation, al-Akhḍar notes, takes the interesting step of adding “self-conscious” where in the German *Selbständige*—independent—stands alone. The French edition, equally curiously, substitutes for independent *spontané*—spontaneous. Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah and Dār al-Taqaddum in some sense complete the transformation initiated by the English, dropping “independent” altogether and opting for “self-conscious” alone: *wā‘iyah li-dhātihā* in the former and *qā’imah bi-dhāthā* in the latter.[105] On the philological level, this indicates on the part of Sharārah and al-‘Aẓmah either a reliance on the Dār al-Taqaddum translation, or, more likely, al-‘Aẓmah’s anglophone influence prevailing over Sharārah’s French. In any case, the choice to drop “independent” is of obvious significance. Al-

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[103] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyū‘ī*, 12.
[104] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 495; emphasis added.
[105] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyū‘ī*, 95n47.

Akhḍar, true as ever to the “original,” uses *mustaqillah*—independent in the same sense as the German, “independent” as in “self-standing” or “self-supporting.” He retains the German in-text.[106]

These choices are significant insofar as they indicate whether—if the small landowners (*ṣighār al-malāk al-ʻaqārīyīn*) in Lebanon are to be considered potential allies—the proletariat should organize with them against the bourgeoisie, i.e., in their particular context, with the industrial workers and Palestinian resistance against the National Bourgeoisie, big landowners, non-industrial bourgeois, imperialists and so on. “The workers themselves must exercise and lead [the revolution],” al-Akhḍar answers Dār al-Ṭalīʻah, quoting Marx and Engels from his own *Communist Organization*.[107] To a certain extent, one feels that al-Akhḍar is merely settling scores with Sharārah and al-ʻAẓmah, saying: *here are the real contents of the* Manifesto*, and you refused to publish what would have elucidated them!*

But we need not rely on al-Akhḍar’s good intentions to recognize genuine theoretical differences over the character of revolution in the periphery. The Dār al-Ṭalīʻah and Dār Ibn Khaldūn translations engage with one another with Lebanese class history always in mind, though they have different conceptions of its meaning in their present. Al-Akhḍar’s translation can be characterized as a humanist reaction to what it sees as Sharārah and al-ʻAẓmah’s translatory excesses, but one that by recourse to the *Manifesto* in the most “original,” decontextualized sense, tries to undercut it not for rejecting the developmentalist National-Bourgeois logic but for being too kind to it. It is a strange position to take against the Dār al-Ṭalīʻah translation, and one that relies upon an anachronistic analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the Arab world. Sharārah and al-ʻAẓmah’s translation, on the other hand, exhibits a more sophisticated reading of Marx's theory of history, one that acknowledges Lebanon's position within the world-system and authorizes revolutionary practice in the present.

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[106] Ibid, 95.
[107] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Tanẓīm al-Shuyūʻī*; quoted in Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyūʻī*, 95n46.

Finally, the dispute raises more general questions about the universality of Marxist theory and its translation on the periphery only briefly touched upon in this section. In what follows, I engage in a more focused discussion of what these translation choices mean for Dār al-Ṭalīʻah's and Dār Ibn Khaldūn's *ethics of translation*, or their thinking on what translation *does* in the Marxist tradition and what their practices of translation as militant intellectuals *ought to be*. What is lost in translation, and what is potentially gained? What is the relation between original and copy, universal and particular? What does it mean to remain attentive to the particular while at the same time rising above it to constitute a universal political project? Such is the task of translation as Sharārah and al-ʻAẓmah conceive of it, a view that I argue derives from a sustained engagement with Gramsci in the years preceding the Dār al-Ṭalīʻah translation.

Translation and universality

> "Failure to translate is to transform Marx's oeuvre to a *lettre morte*… translations are generative and constitutive not only of Lebanese Marxism but of the communist tradition of thought and practice… In [Socialist Lebanon's] interpretation, Marx's oeuvre constitutes the foundational text of the tradition, which authorizes socialist political practice and thought. It does not, however, stand as the untroubled transhistorical universal to the particular glosses that come in its wake. Rather, Marxism cannot be separated from the circulation and translations across time and space of Marxist works, including the numerous returns to Marx's oeuvre itself. The universality of Marxism is constituted through, and is a product of, the multiple acts of translations and does not precede them."[108]

What does it mean for an theoretical tradition with universalist claims, such as Marxism, to be attentive to the particular? This was a question that troubled Socialist Lebanon, and particularly Sharārah and al-'Aẓmah as intellectuals who translated not just as a means to an end but concerned themselves with its theoretical problematics. If "translation" in the broadest sense means the *transfiguration* (to borrow a term from Bardawil) of ideas from one milieu to another, is not any text that takes its mode of analysis, i.e., Marxism, from another time or place a translation of some kind?

The Marxist tradition seems generally to take this approach. Antonio Gramsci is perhaps its greatest theorist in this respect, whose writings on the relationship between the industrial north and underdeveloped south of Italy form the basis for the "core-periphery" analysis that would emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century. Mediating between the particularities of the two halves of his country, and grappling with the supposed universality of Marxist theory, Gramsci adopts the language of translation and *translatability*. Translatability in the Gramscian sense refers to “translation between *praxes* and not merely between linguistic forms, structures and so on.”[109] What on a surface level appear as relations between “linguistic structures” according to Gramsci “express more profound dialectical reciprocal actions, that is, social-political-historical interactions, across time and space.”[110] Thus he recalls Marx, who recognized the parallels between systems of signification and the material relations they refer to, but in some sense goes beyond him by arguing that translation involves going beyond the praxes of “‘science’ (i.e. knowledge) and ‘life,’ ‘scientific’ language and culture, ‘*senso comune*’ and ‘philosophy,’ ‘practice’ and ‘theory,’ ‘structure’ and ‘superstructure’ and so on.”[111]

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[108] Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment*, 73.

The significance of translatability for Gramsci lies in the “immanence” of one element of a dialectical pair within the other. *Praxis*, the unity of theory and practice, in this view occupies the space between “the ‘practical’ (or ‘ideological’, ‘political’ and therefore historical) power of theory and the ‘theoretical’ (and ‘linguistic’) power of practice and politics” and makes possible “their reciprocal ‘translation.’”[112]

In 1970, Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah published an Arabic translation of Gramsci’s “The Modern Prince” (Al-Amīr al-ḥadīth: Qaḍāyā fī ‘ilm al-siyāsah fī al-Mārkisīyah),[113] a selection of essays from *The Prison Notebooks* on revolutionary organization and the relationship between theory and practice. Its translators are the very same Zāhī Shirfān and Qays al-Shāmī. It marked the entry of one of the great European Marxist theorists into the Arabic public sphere (or at least, the entry of one of his major works). But I argue its greatest impact was on the translators themselves, many of whose attitudes toward translation and universality can be traced back to this text. Much of Sharārah and al-ʻAẓmah's work around this time, and perhaps even the *Manifesto*, can be seen as attempts to *think through* its contents.[114]

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[109] Rocco Lacorte, “Translation and Marxism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Politics*, ed. Fruela Fernández and Jonathan Evans, Routledge Handbooks in Translation and Interpreting Studies (London; New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 17.
[110] Ibid, 18.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid, 20.
[113] Anṭūnīū Ghrāmshī, *Al-Amīr al-ḥadīth: Qaḍāyā fī ‘ilm al-siyāsah fī al-Mārkisīyah*, trans. Zāhī (Waḍḍāḥ Sharārah) Shirfān and Qays (al-‘Azīz al-‘Aẓmah) al-Shāmī (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah, 1970).

In "The Modern Prince," Gramsci theorizes an inductive, as opposed to axiomatic Marxism. "It is the task of the Marxist theoretician," he writes, "to 'translate' into theoretical language [*'tradurre' in linguaggio teorico*] the elements of historical life."[115] Marx's corpus serves as an interpretive framework that *authorizes* and assimilates the experience of the particular. "The theoretical claims of Marxism," Gavin Arnall writes, "in other words, are to be understood as historically determinate translations of concrete situations and not as eternal formulas that can be applied to any and every historical context: hence, Marxism *as* translation, as a method of translating elements of historical life into theoretical language."[116]

But in what sense can an inductive theoretical body be said to be *universal*? Universality, as it is commonly conceptualized, refers to *universal applicability*, i.e., the ability to apply a set of axioms to a particular and yield an analysis of it. In this typical sense the axioms are unchanged by their application to disparate situations. Gramsci's conception of universality, on the other hand, is a quite different one which attends not only to how theory elucidates a particular situation but how theory itself is transformed by this application. He writes:

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[114] See Browers (2021).

[115] Antonio Gramsci, "The Modern Prince," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. Quintin Hoare, First edition, New World Paperbacks, NW-169 (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 200; quoted in Gavin Arnall, "The Many Tasks of the Marxist Translator: Approaching Marxism as/in/with Translation from Antonio Gramsci to the Zapatistas," *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory* 30, no. 1 (2022): 101–102, https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-12342037.

[116] Arnall, "Many Tasks of the Marxist Translator," 102.

> "The problem arises of whether a theoretical truth, whose discovery corresponded to a specific practice, can be generalized and considered as universal for a historical epoch. The proof of its universality consists precisely 1. in its becoming a stimulus to know better the reality of a situation that is different from that in which it was discovered…; 2. when it has stimulated and helped this better understanding of the effectual reality, *in its capacity to incorporate itself in that same reality as if it were originally an expression of it.* It is in this incorporation that its concrete universality lies… In short, the principle must always rule that ideas are not born of other ideas, philosophies of other philosophies; they are a continually renewed expression of real historical development… It can further be deduced that every truth, even if it is universal, and even if it can be expressed by an abstract formula of a mathematical kind (for the sake of the theoreticians), owes its effectiveness to its being expressed in the languages [*linguaggi*] appropriate to particular concrete situations. If it cannot be expressed in specific terms [*lingue particolari*], it is a byzantine and scholastic abstraction, good only for phrasemongers to toy with."[117]

A theory's universality, in other words, corresponds to its application in a concrete particularity. Echoing precisely Socialist Lebanon's formulation, Gramsci argues that universality *is a product of, and does not precede,* the rearticulation or translation of theory in new times and places. "To say this," Arnall writes, "is to challenge a long, metaphysical tradition of thinking that approaches universality as a static and invariable condition that can be posited in advance (e.g. philosophical axioms, first principles, eternal forms). Gramsci instead works within a dialectical tradition of thinking that insists on the *historical movement of universality,* its passage from the abstract to the concrete."[118] Following the materialist dialectic, for Gramsci theoretical claims are not invariably but *historically* true. In the Marxist theoretical tradition, where intellectuals seek not merely to interpret the world but to change it, this means that texts, though they may be articulated as universal, need not be and indeed cannot be so until they are historically realized as such. Gramsci thus mirrors Marx's move from the anterior future in the *Manifesto*, where a speech-act initiates a movement toward realizing its own universality.

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[117] Gramsci, "The Modern Prince," 201; quoted in Arnall, "Many Tasks of the Marxist Translator," 105; emphasis added.

More concretely, for Gramsci the "modern Prince," or revolutionary party, translates. The organization of the communist movement, he writes—that is, the creation of a universal revolutionary subject—"could neither be achieved through formal identities presumptively existing in language or set within formal/artificial languages, nor by simply relying on the so-called 'objective' conditions independently of their political-cultural elaboration and organization."[119] Instead, it is the responsibility of the modern Prince to mediate between the languages—*linguaggi*—of different countries, or within a country of different revolutionary classes in "thoroughgoing translations" that capture the specific terms—*lingue particolari*—of reality.

Once again, we recognize an almost exact repetition of Socialist Lebanon, for whom "Communist politics," Bardawil writes,

> "are given their coherence, overall general direction, and particular shape by an analysis attentive to the particularities of its present. The absence of this capacity for analysis, whose aims are simultaneously to rise above the particularities of disparate problems (say, in the syndicalist militancy of the student, worker, and peasant sectors) and to unify them in a general political project grounded in the specificity of the situation, results in

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[118] Arnall, "Many Tasks of the Marxist Translator," 105; emphasis added.
[119] Lacorte, "Translation and Marxism," 25.

> the disintegration of revolutionary practice. ‘The practice that pulls together all the isolated issues, and highlights the condition of their political realization,’ affirms Socialist Lebanon, ‘is theoretical practice or political analysis [*al-ʻamal al-naẓarī aw al-taḥlīl al-siyāsī*] (we are momentarily using the two expressions interchangeably).’ If the analysis of the particular characteristics of the present are foregone, the party will be transformed into ‘splintered sectors, each working on its own without any relation to the others but attending central committee meetings and discussing the general “line” that does not generalize anything but a bunch of slogans that should work in Bolivia and Sudan as well as in Lebanon, which means that they are not valid in any country.’”[120]

Additionally, Gramsci’s notion of reciprocal translation affirms Socialist Lebanon’s multidirectional practices of translation while calling into question al-Akhḍar’s commitment to the “original.” The theorization, Arnall writes, “posits a relationship of reciprocal movement between languages rather than a relationship of origin and *telos*, source language and target language.”[121] The aforementioned “distinctions between original and copy, universal and particular” are subverted by the dialectical movement/reciprocal translatability between theory and practice.

The issue of the relationship between original and copy leads us to another theoretical giant of the Marxist tradition. “To imagine translation as mere derivation,” Nergis Ertürk and Özge Serin write in “Marxism, Communism, and Translation,” “is to leave it confined by what Walter Benjamin called ‘the bourgeois conception of language,’ which… abstracts from the source text a universalized or universalizable conceptual content and understands any given product of translation as an instance of such abstraction."[122][123] The bourgeois conception of translation, much like the axiomatic conception of Marxist theory, "establishes the relation between the universal and the particular as a relationship of essential identity."[124]

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[120] IRCM, 71; translated in Bardawil, “Dreams of a Dual Birth,” 325.
[121] Arnall, “Many Tasks of the Marxist Translator,” 107.

"Marxist translation," on the other hand, is "an event of iteration that is requested and anticipated by the 'original' works of the Marxist-Leninist corpus itself."[125] Drawing upon Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator," Ertürk and Serin conceive of translation as "a self-realization of the original text in its taking leave (of itself) and becoming an other." The sum of the "original" and its translations is thus "Not a closed, self-identical totality… [but] a whole comprised of its (realized and possible) translations." Marxist translation "marks a necessary 'relationship of the original to itself.'"[126] It mirrors Gramsci's theorization of translation as a posited universal realizing itself in its particular iterations.

"Translation issues from the original," Benjamin writes, "—not so much from its life as from its afterlife," referring to an anterior-future position similar to Marx's.[127] Benjamin's notion of textual "afterlives" would later be picked up by Jacques Derrida, who utilizes it in his own thinking on original and copy. "To understand a text as an original," he writes,

> "is to understand it independently of its living conditions—the conditions, obviously, of its author's life—and to understand it instead in its surviving structure… the task of the translator is precisely to respond to this demand for survival which is the very structure of the original text… the translator must assure the survival, which is to say the growth, of

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[122] Nergis Ertürk and Özge Serin, "Marxism, Communism, and Translation: An Introduction," *Boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (2016): 3–4, https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-3572526.
[123] For a comparative study of Gramsci's and Benjamin's thinking on translation, see Ives (2004).
[124] Ertürk and Serin, "Marxism, Communism, and Translation," 4.
[125] Ibid, 3.
[126] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock et al. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996), 260; Ertürk and Serin, "Marxism, Communism, and Translation," 4.
[127] Benjamin, "Task of the Translator," 234.

> the original. Translation augments and modifies the original, which, insofar as it is living on, never ceases to be transformed and to grow. It modifies the original even as it also modifies the translating language."[128]

Derrida's insistence that the very *survival* of a text necessitates its growth via translation echoes Bardawil's that failure to translate is to transform a living text into a *lettre morte*. It also recalls al-Akhḍar's introduction, in which he describes the *Manifesto*'s "starvation" by its lack of historical realization over the century and a half since its publication. "Publishing the *Manifesto* in its first faithful translation," he writes,

> "only partially solves the difficulties which the revolutionary worker has always had when he began to read the it… The successive defeats of the proletarian revolution to counter-revolution emptied it of its contents, blunting its revolutionary blade and rendering it a verbal ritual that does not threaten the global capitalist ruling class."[129]

Al-Akhḍar is clearly preoccupied with the problem of bringing the *Manifesto* to the present. But in doing so, he seems to want not to rearticulate but simply to *repeat* it. "Repetition," George Steiner writes in *After Babel*, "is the purest concentrate of translation. To repeat identically is to translate along the axis of time."[130] This "purest concentrate of translation," where displacements of meaning are managed and minimized, seems to be al-Akhḍar's objective in bringing the *Manifesto* to 1970s Beirut. Yet it is an objective that defies what Marxist theorists of translation believe the text in its "original" articulation calls for. Fundamentally, it seems to hold translation as an event where something is lost, rather than potentially gained. It retains Benjamin's "bourgeois conception of translation." It counteracts his desire to bridge "that hateful gap" between theory and practice, a maneuver that in Gramsci's formulation can only be achieved by a kind of reciprocal translatability. The Dār al-Ṭalī'ah translation, on the other hand, as a result of Sharārah and al-'Aẓmah's prolonged engagement with Gramsci, exemplifies his translation theory and puts it into practice to counter developmentalist readings of Marx's theory of history.

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[128] Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. Christie McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 122.

[129] Mārks and Injilz, *Al-Bayān al-Shuyū'ī*, 19.

[130] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 390.

Conclusion: Traveling theory

In the essay “Traveling Theory,” Edward Said attempts to describe how theory moves across time and space, integrating itself into new and diverse settings. In some sense, his formulation echoes Gramsci’s on translation. Perhaps this should not surprise us, as “translation” in the Gramscian sense is roughly equivalent to, or perhaps even broader than, Said’s notion of traveling theory. Said sets out four stages through which theory passes: first, “there is a point of origin, or what seems like one,” where an idea emerges in its original discursive environment; second, “there is a distance transversed,” a transfiguration, where the idea travels and experiences displacements of meaning; third, there are “conditions of acceptance” which confront it upon contact with the new environment; and fourth, the newly incorporated theory “is to some extent transformed by its new uses.”[131]

Said’s model can serve as our map as we chart the introduction of Marxist theory into the Arabic public sphere in 1970s Beirut. First, there is the original—a point of origin that texts in the Marxist tradition perhaps blur but doubtless exists. The *Manifesto* had authors, a time and place, and a language of origin, whether or not it wished it were so. If we are to take Gramsci’s word for it, it is not that Marxist texts do not originate from a particularity; it is not that texts can emerge from nothing as universal axioms; it is in the movement and historical realization that follows where their universality (potentially) lies.

And the *Manifesto* has traversed a distance matched by few other texts.[132] That distance can be measured temporally, geographically, or linguistically. Along all three axes, as Dār al-Ṭalīʻah and Dār Ibn Khaldūn acknowledge, the text experiences displacements of meaning that affect its immediacy in the present. Al-ʻAfīf al-Akhḍar and Waḍḍāḥ Sharārah and al-ʻAzīz al-ʻAẓmah grapple with these displacements in different ways, with one seeking to minimize their effect on the text and the other embracing it as part of a movement toward the universality of its theoretical tradition.

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[131] Edward W. Said, “Traveling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226–27.

[132] Bert Andréas, *Le manifeste communiste de Marx et Engels: Histoire et bibliographie, 1848–1918* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963).

The *Manifesto*'s conditions of acceptance in 1970s Beirut were mediated by the publishing houses, who played a crucial role in "disseminating social categories and cultural taxonomies."[133] Franck Mermier, whose book *Le livre et la ville: Beyrouth et l'édition arabe* (The Book and the City: Beirut and Arab Publishing) remains the only substantial study of Lebanon's publishing scene, writes:

> "More than 'mediating European culture' through translations into Arabic… militant publishing houses constituted new cognitive referents often breaking with the horizons of knowledge delimited by traditional and modern, community and state educational institutions. They thus profoundly marked the Arab intellectual landscape by a 'double anchoring,' that of oppositional or subversive thought developed outside of the Arab world and that of the mediation of this corpus with new endogenous forms of thought, new 'Arabic languages of the present' in touch with the problems of underdevelopment, political power, secularism, national construction, and the Palestinian question."[134]

Further, they provided the setting for "sustained debates," forums that Sabry Hafez argues "are vital for new ideas and innovative works to make their mark, familiarize the reader with their new artistic conventions, challenge and refute the arguments of their adversaries, and win them currency and 'symbolic capital.'"[135]

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[133] Agbaria, "Dār Al-Ṭalīʻah," 241.
[134] Mermier, *Le livre et la ville*, 64.
[135] Sabry Hafez, "Cultural Journals and Modern Arabic Literature: A Historical Overview," *Alif (Cairo, Egypt)* 37, no. 37 (2017): 11.

Hafez's article "Cultural Journals and Modern Arabic Literature" details the important role of cultural institutions in the Arab world in regulating/facilitating the introduction of new discourses. Transformations of the "public" or "cultural sphere," he writes, in Arabic *al-sāḥah al-thaqāfīyah*, meet resistance because they entail a devaluation of the old "symbolic capital," to borrow a term from Pierre Bourdieu, and the power structure it sustained. In the Arab world the uptake of new ways of thinking required that intellectuals gather in informal or underground groups to exchange ideas and comment on one another's work. "If the impact of these activities were to be felt beyond the realm of the group and acquire currency, turning into 'symbolic capital,'" Hafez writes, "they had to be disseminated to the wider public through journals."[136] Translation projects, like those undertaken by Dār al-Ṭalī'ah and the collective efforts of smaller, shorter-lived publishing houses like Dār Ibn Khaldūn played a similar part in disseminating new forms of thought.

Consequently, Ahmad Agbaria calls for a "recapturing [of] the semantic field within which the intellectual infrastructure (journals, publishing houses) shapes ideas and conversation." To unearth the discursive moment on the Left in 1970s Beirut, he writes, "one should start by accounting for the entrenching of new Marxist interpretations took hold of Arab intellectuals' imagination, always through the intense translations of Dār al-Ṭalī'ah."[137]

But by translating the *Manifesto* among dozens of other works, the New Arab Left was doing more than utilizing Marxist theory to elucidate their particular situation. Theirs was a project that, in Bardawil's words, was "generative and constitutive not only of Lebanese Marxism but of the communist tradition of thought and practice."[138] Marxist theory differs perhaps from other kinds of theory implicated in Said's model in that its foundational texts, if Ertürk and Serin's argument is to be accepted, request and anticipate their iteration across time and space. Any theoretical tradition for which universality is its ultimate aim, and for whom universality is a historical rather than a priori truth, seeks for its texts to be *living texts*, and thus for its theory to be *traveling theory*. Dār al-Ṭalī'ah's translation of *The Communist Manifesto*—"as/in/with" Gramsci, to borrow from Gavin Arnall[139]—as against Dār Ibn Khaldūn's, declares these objectives openly and pursues them with clarity and purpose. It is traveling theory *par excellence*.

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[136] Ibid, 10.
[137] Agbaria, "Dār Al-Ṭalī'ah," 249.
[138] Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment*, 73.

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[139] Arnall, "Many Tasks of the Marxist Translator."

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