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**Title of Current Research Project:**

**Institutional Affiliation: The University of Houston**

**Research Narrative:**

*Research Question:* I am currently in my first semester of work on a dissertation project addressing the role of the United States and US power, in West Asia and globally, in Palestinian revolutionary thought and political practice spanning from the 1950s to the 1970s. How did analyses of the US as a political, economic, and military power change in the Palestinian revolutionary movement over time? What differentiated projections of US power from the methods of earlier empires in the region, such as Britain and France? More broadly, what were the central debates about the US in the Palestinian revolutionary movement and how did those debates shape contesting political practice and revolutionary strategies? These primary research questions are supplemented in my project a number of sub-questions. What was the role did the US play in the global capitalist system generally and in the Arab world specifically? What was the precise nature of the relationship between the US, the Zionist movement, and the State of Israel? Or between the US and Arab states—both the monarchies and the Arab nationalist regimes? Finally, how would the outcome of these questions affect strategy—was the need to create strong independent state blocs paramount, or was it more urgent to convene an all-encompassing guerrilla war? Furthermore, what kind of alliances were deemed to be the most crucial—regional, including pan-Arab, or international?

*Research Methods:* My project aims to bring together a number of emergent as well as established bodies of literature: on the Arab Left; on transnational solidarity throughout the anti-colonial and decolonization struggles of the 1950s and 60s, along with South-South relations in general; on the 1970s as a period of systemic transition for global monetary policy, particularly in the realm of dollarization, and corresponding changes in international security arrangements and commodity markets; and finally, on the “US and the World,” particularly the sub-literature on the “US and the Middle East.” These literatures come together through my unique treatment of the last body of literature. Whereas studies of the US in the world tend to emphasize the decision-making processes in the halls of US power, the point of my project is to reverse the vantage point: how have the victims of US power understood its mechanisms and its strategic goals? My subject is, in short, the United States as seen through the lens of the Palestinian Revolution; and in turn, the Palestinian Revolution as a major site of international struggle against US hegemony.

Tentatively, my project is divided by a series of “flashpoints” for the US’s relationship to West Asia: the advent of US-Israeli relations; the entrance of the US into the Baghdad Pact and the implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine; the US role in the breakup of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the July 1967 War, and the rollback of Nasserism; the war on Vietnam as the bloody cornerstone of US presence in Asia; and the resolution of a dual power situation in Jordan in 1970 decisively in favor of the Jordanian monarchy and Israel as the result of US intervention. By organizing my project according to these major events, I am by default highlighting and exploring several of the major debates within the Palestinian Revolution about the United States. My approach combines intellectual, political, and social history to arrive at a view of the revolutionary process through a single key question *at the levels of both theory and practice.* In order to be as specific and comprehensive as possible, to give justice to the revolution’s organizational breadth and its theoretical depth, I am turning to both archival and oral sources at the levels of leadership, official party propaganda and publications, and the grassroots. I aim to register the transition of Palestinian mobilization from the general struggle for Arab unity in the 1950s and 60s into a popular struggle for the liberation of land from settler-colonial domination in Palestine (engendering concepts such as national liberation and People’s War) by studying the radical experiments of PLO factions in the refugee camps in Jordan. It was within the camps that Palestinians taught themselves the fundamentals of political participation and launched popular political education, providing refugee communities with the means by which to follow updates on the US policies to which the fate of their revolution was inextricably tied.

In contributing to the history of a revolution, I am guided by my advisor Abdel Razzaq Takriti’s challenge to Charles Tilly’s definition of a revolution as combining a “revolutionary situation” with a “revolutionary outcome.” By contrast, Takriti shifts focus from the outcome of a revolution to its process. In employing this definition, it becomes possible to view the Palestinian national movement as its participants experienced, understood, and defined it: as a revolution that might not have met the narrow criterion of achieving state power, but did nonetheless erect a number of its own civic institutions that challenged the authority of old regimes and dramatically transformed social relations and values, popular knowledge, and the overall political landscape of the region. Takriti’s scholarship on the Dhufari Revolution additionally provides a model for writing the history of revolutions dialectically. That is, wherever there is a revolution, there can be found a counterrevolution, and Takriti accounts for this relationship by including both colonial sources from the British archives and revolutionary sources (most of them in Arabic) in the form of pamphlets, posters, newspapers, magazines, bulletins, memoirs, speeches, and oral interviews. While the bulk of my contribution hinges on Arabic-language sources from the revolutionary side, I will undoubtedly have to consult US state sources in order to establish the strategic decisions to which the revolution responded.

Another important reference for me in writing about revolutionary history is Rosemary Sayigh’s conception of “people’s history” as opposed to “official history.” In her own scholarship on the Palestinian Revolution, Sayigh encountered practical obstacles stemming from Israel’s destruction and seizure of Palestinian archives and the inability of traditional methodologies to give justice to the historic social base of Palestine’s revolution in its peasantry. Sayigh argues that the peasantry had provided the historic motor for the 1936 uprising against British colonial rule, but that narrow access to literacy and publishing in Palestinian society had privileged the narratives of official leadership and a small number of notable families in written histories. Sayigh sought to remedy this problem by interviewing ordinary people in the refugee camps in Lebanon in the 1970s, the “peasants, workers, and the small bourgeoisie,” the classes of Palestinians lacking cushions of protection and thus most devastated by the 1948 Nakba. My source base will thus include oral interviews with Palestinians who took part of the revolution, along with the official organs of parties: the Ba’ath Party’s *Al Thawra;* the Movement of Arab Nationalists’ *Al Tha’ar;* Fateh’s *Filastinuna* and *Sawt Filasteen*; the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine’s *Al Hadaf;* and the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine’s *Al Hurriya*. I will also turn to official PLO document; the memoirs and writings of key leaders and figures such as George Habash, Nayef Hawatmeh, and Mohammed Oudeh; and pamphlets circulated in the camps by Fateh, the PFLP, and the DPFLP.

*My Tentative Schema:* First, I want to establish the ideological role of Protestant Zionism in the establishment, expansion, and fortification of the United States in North America. This part will require not only an overview of early American Zionism in colonial settlement, but more recently (and closer to the exact period on which my research focuses), the relationship formed between representatives of the Zionist movement and US policymakers as the former party moved to establish the State of Israel through the United Nations following the Second World War. Second, I want to trace early impressions of (or, for that matter, absences regarding) the US in the writings and statements of anti-Zionist activists and movements in the 1950s. Those movements include Nasserists, the Ba’ath Party, and the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN). This was a period in which Palestinian and Arab investigations into the loss of Palestine would have been formative, driven by a fundamental desire to understand the reasons behind their seemingly overnight destitute conditions in refugee camps, and even more fundamentally, the Arab desire to reclaim Palestine and the Palestinian desire to return there. I hope in this section to pay special attention to regional reception of the Baghdad Pact. The eventual participation of the US in this regional security arc marked the first major flashpoint of US policy in the Cold War as it pertained to the Arab world. It was likewise the impetus for a number of demonstrations and hunger strikes on campuses in the region, organized by emergent student movements coalescing around Arab nationalism.

Third, I want to account for the appearance of United States as a major military force and strategic consideration in the major debates about the United Arab Republic and the June 1967 Naksa among the major Arab nationalist movements and parties in the 1960s. During this period, Gamal Abdel Nasser transitioned from his earlier position of positive neutrality towards the United States to one of overall tension, a change forced by both the US’s refusal to assist the Egyptian Republic in the construction of the Aswan Dam and the Soviet Union’s comparatively generous offer of military aid. Given his prominent placement at the head of a state-led effort to herald a new era of Pan-Arab ideals, Nasser’s changing attitude towards the United States forced its role onto the respective agendas of grassroots activists, particularly in MAN, who entrusted Nasser with the future of Palestine and believed the UAR’s attempt to realize Arab national unity across the divide of Sykes-Picot borders to be the answer to Arab peoples’ problems. Instead, the UAR project collapsed after only three years and Nasser was forced to admit publicly that he lacked a plan for Palestine. The 1967 Naksa further damaged the popular prestige of Nasser. It also marked a pivot point at which the US began to invest increasingly astronomical direct military aid to Israel. The debates around the 1967 war led to radical new forms of organization and areas of focus: the rise of Palestinian liberation efforts as an area of concentration; the formation of guerrilla militias capable of carrying out military operations, particularly Fateh; and the introduction of stinging critiques of Nasserism and “petit bourgeois nationalist regimes” based on class analysis and Marxist thought.

Fourth, I intend to pair the emergence of Marxist thought in the left wing of the Palestinian Revolution with new conceptions of internationalism through the analysis of the US’s war on Vietnam produced across the organizations comprising the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Indeed, the war so moved revolutionaries committed to the liberation of Palestine that the PLO convened roundtable discussions to comprehend the US intervention “against the Vietnamese revolution and against the Vietnamese people” as well the successes of the resistance waged against it. The PLO aspired to produce and distribute original analysis of the war on a collective basis; apply its lessons to the Palestinian situation by demarcating similarities and differences in the conditions facing the Vietnamese and Palestinian Revolutions; and establish appreciation for the significance of the war in its military and global dimensions. The unique role played by the US in both situations—as a technologically superior deliverer of death from the sky in Vietnam and as the chief funder for the same in Palestine through the Israeli military—pushed many Palestinian and pro-Palestinian Arab revolutionaries to incorporate analyses of imperialism as a world system and place the Palestinian Revolution into a new context of Third World revolutions against it. These discussions about Vietnam have much to impart about originality of Palestinian interpretations of Marxist theory, shaped as they were by the unique historical moment in which the revolutionaries found themselves. Far from being a catalyst for material abundance and advanced production, capitalism came to Palestine in the 20th century in its imperialist stage, uniting Palestinians with other Third World nations in a common experience of mass destruction wrought by advanced technologies of violence.

Finally, I want to approach the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s through the experience of the Palestinian Revolution in Jordan from 1968 to 1970. The PLO’s ability to bring about dual power in Jordan heightened contradictions within the revolution around questions of practice and strategy. With the sovereignty of the Jordanian monarchy openly challenged by independent organs of political, civic, and military authority in the refugee camps, the time came for PLO organizations to decide what to do with their newfound power and determine the strategic targets towards which the revolution would mobilize its resources. Disagreements hardened between organizations and within organizations about whether to adopt a position of non-antagonism with the Jordanian monarchy in order to escalate the military campaign against Israel, or to accelerate the pace of social revolution in the camps in order to overthrow the crown in Amman and replace it with a Palestinian republic. As this question played out historically, the US factor proved to be hugely important. PLO soldiers and intellectuals took note of the US logistical, military, and financial support to Jordan and Israel required to destroy the revolution in Jordan.

*Where I Am at in the Research Process:* My primary concern at the moment is completing the paper I am working on about the United States, Dual Power, and Black September in Jordan. The paper explores analyses of the political and economic role of the United States in the Arab world between the years 1968 and 1970 as forwarded by Palestinian and pro-Palestinian revolutionaries based on their experiences in the cities of Aljun, Jerash, and Amman in Jordan. This period spanned roughly from the Battle of Karamah, when Palestinian guerrilla groups resisted extended Israeli aerial and ground attacks in West Jordan alongside the Jordanian Army, to the fallout from Black September, the episode of civil war in 1970 between the dual power of the Jordanian monarchy and the guerrilla bases of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Over the course of those two years, the United States changed dramatically as a military and economic power, both in the Arab world and beyond. The US’s increasingly grisly and expensive war on Vietnam threatened to present a seemingly unsustainable deficit, prompting the Nixon Administration to turn to the Arab world as a focal point from which to rearrange the world order. Out of this turn, the US developed a number of new security arrangements in the region, including in Jordan, where it backed both Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan in an effort to defeat an ongoing regional revolutionary tide led by the Palestinian national movement.

In the eye of that revolutionary storm, the PLO had turned Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan into bases of revolution. The PLO thereby attempted to create within the destitute space of the camps new experiments in radical democracy wherein Palestinians, the majority of them from peasant and working class origins, could keep abreast of regional and global political developments and debate revolutionary strategy. Palestinian revolutionaries’ understanding of the US thus developed through a combination of everyday practice and focused theory production, a process shaped by intellectual exchange between internationalist, anti-imperialist movements and by first-hand experiences on the receiving end of US military machinations. Whereas previous scholarship on this period had tended to emphasize the decision-making processes of the US, Israel, and Jordan, this paper elucidates the perspectives within Palestinian organizations Fateh, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), drawing special attention to converges and divergences in their readings of US power and its significance to their respective revolutionary strategies.

To gain a grasp of these debates, this paper turns to the pamphlets and official publications of these major PLO parties, as well as to memoirs of and interviews with individual participants. An extended look at these debates, carried out during and after the Jordanian phase of the Palestinian revolutionary movement, reveals increased concern over the strategic links between imperialism and the Zionist movement; the global character of the system by which the Palestinian people and the Arab world are left under-developed and dependent; the relevance of “neocolonialism” to the Arab context; and the fundamental inability of “petit-bourgeois nationalist regimes” to meet the increasingly radical demands coming from the refugee camps.

*Personal Narrative:* I believe that my participation in the Political Economy Project Summer Institute will deepen my understanding of the United States’ role in the Arab world. The US, after all, is more than it might appear on a surface reading. It is, rather, the most powerful nation-state in a broader world-system; that is, it is the biggest imperialist power, but it is at the same time part of modern imperialism and not the sum whole of imperialism. Its military violence is the most devastating expression of its power, but is still nonetheless only one aspect of the total role it plays in upholding a world system built on global inequality and uneven development. This is especially true in light of the ways in which US officials molded international institutions according to their own image and demands in the wake of the Second World War.

In order for me to gain the necessary deep understanding of US imperialism for my research project, I must learn to appreciate how value is created in the Arab world and how the US drains that value. The first way in which I think this workshop will help me gain that appreciation is to provide me with a general, abstract theoretical bedrock for the critique of political economy. The second is to provide me with more knowledge about the concrete, exact details of US capital accumulation in the region. This knowledge might pertain to labor exploitation, including the use of migrant labor, for private expropriation by US-based multinationals or US-linked Arab regimes; resource extraction of raw materials and oil; US dollar reserves and black currency markets; and of course, industries of war such as arms and contractor companies.

I furthermore would like to develop a deeper knowledge of anti-imperialist critiques of political economy, such as world-systems theory, dependency theory, and the study of commodity chains. In addition to clarifying to me the relationship between rich and poor countries, these schools of thought are also the outcome of the anti-colonial struggles in which I am interested. There could not have been intellectuals in universities to take up the theoretical work of describing imperialism if not for the observations of imperialism’s victims on their own conditions. My ambition is to write a people’s history of the struggle against imperialism lightly guided by the theoretical work on imperialism as its persisted and grown since the height of the Palestinian Revolution. The unique cross-section of MENA-focused development sociologists, anthropologists, and historians whose guidance is on offer at the Summer Institute indicate to me that this is an optimal space in which my very specific needs, as junior scholar embarking on a long-term dissertation project, may be met.