

Foreword

This volume represents the final outcome of the research project *Islamists, Leftists, and the Radical Battlefield in the MENA (1960s-2010s)*, funded by Sapienza University of Rome through its competitive grant program “Progetti Grandi”.¹ The project, which ran from 2022 to 2025, was the result of the research questions presented in the introduction to this volume, but it was also the product of the intellectual exchange between us, the two editors, representing two generations of researchers in Middle East politics.

Our intellectual “encounter” was supported by the friendly interest of a group of Italian researchers in Middle East studies, who first met in Rome at Sapienza University in May 2023 for a brainstorming discussion of the research question and the architecture of the research. In the continuation of the project, some of the envisaged research areas could not be developed as initially imagined. This was particularly the case for the more cultural section of the project, which should have researched the literary and artistic traces of encounters between leftists and Islamists. Nevertheless, we want to thank here the interest and contributions of our colleagues at Sapienza experts in contemporary Arab literature: Ada Barbaro and Arturo Monaco, to the development of the project.

We then looked up the authors of the project’s case studies and we were lucky enough to form a diverse and brilliant group of researchers with varied backgrounds and expertise, including young researchers and more experienced authors from different nationalities and affiliations. We also sought researchers who contributed to creating an archive of documents of the political movements and parties involved in encounters between Islamists and leftists, which we analyzed through case studies.

Once the research group was formed, the authors began diving deep into their research. Then, the 7 October 2023 Hamas’ attack on

¹ Progetto Grande di Ateneo Sapienza 2022 / *Islamists, Leftists, and the Radical Battlefield in the Middle East and North Africa* / prot. n. RG122181679E22E5PP.

Southern Israel from Gaza and the ensuing genocidal Israeli military assault on the Palestinian Strip completely changed the conditions for our research. Contributing authors who were conducting research in the Palestinian West Bank, in Lebanon, and in Iraq had to abruptly end their fieldwork. In the face of an unpredictable, devastating war raging across multiple fronts, reorganizing the individual and overall research structures was not easy.

But we made it with the help of the authors in the research group. In February 2024, we gathered for our first online workshop to discuss the common framework of the research and the outlines of the different chapters. Then, in October 2024, the first drafts of the research chapters were circulated in preparation for an international conference at Sapienza University on November 15. In the conference, the different case studies were discussed in depth among the research group and an informed public of students and scholars, with the help of a small and generous group of academic discussants: Nathaniel George (SOAS), Daniela Melfa (University of Messina), and Andrea Teti (University of Salerno).

The elaboration of the documentary archive for the research was entrusted to Dr. Zhaleh Nayeboossadrian, an Iranian researcher in Ancient Near Eastern history and an expert in digital humanities. The preparation of the archive, too, was subject to some important, although less dramatic, sudden changes, but it finally found a home in the EU Zenodo open research repository. The documents in the in-progress archive, mainly rare Arabic-language Islamist and leftist political publications, are now open to further research.² Documentary research was carried out primarily by Dr. Alessia Carnevale and Dr. Pietro Menghini, who explored various Tunisian and Iraqi archives, respectively, and identified and reproduced relevant publications to add to our database. We also express our gratitude to Dr. Hossam El-Hamalawi and Dr. Martina Biondi for donating part of their private archives to the ILEMED database.

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² The ILEMED open-access documentary database created within our research project is a work in-progress and is accessible at the Zenodo EU documentary repository at: <https://zenodo.org/communities/sapienza-iso-ilemed/>