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## On Anticolonial Time:

### Encountering archival traces in a haunted present

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#### Abstract:

This article explores anticolonial memory and anticolonial archiving as entry points into broader questions of time, temporality and the politics of the present. Thinking with Egypt's project of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century, I demonstrate the varying ways in which anticolonial pasts express themselves in the present, and what this might suggest about the future. I think through two forms of anticolonial memory: one fleeting and fragmented, the other institutionalised and material, and ask how these different forms of memory constitute different types of anticolonial archives. Both forms of memory and practices of archiving appear in the present, albeit in vastly differing ways.

The first form is a series of vignettes around Gamal Abdel Nasser and Patrice Lumumba, and the connections between them, their families, and anticolonial Egypt and anticolonial Congo during the 1950s and 1960s. These vignettes are fragmented, ranging from a family's oral history to faded street signs, and do not produce a strong or sturdy archive; yet they have much to tell us about both the crisis of anticolonial politics as well as the contemporary moment of crisis in Egypt. The second form is the practice of economic nationalisation that was a central pillar of Nasser's project in Egypt throughout the 1950s and 1960s. I show the ways in which this practice lives on in the present, in particular through strikes by industrial workers in the 2000s leading up to the 2011 revolution. In some ways, this second form of memory is more institutionalised and 'traceable' through policies, documents, and people, constituting a different type of anticolonial archive. Through these two forms, demonstrate both the urgency of the past and the present in Egypt, as well as the ways in which the crisis of the anticolonial past has structured the crisis of the postcolonial present.

Keywords:

Anticolonialism; archiving; Egypt; temporality

## *Introduction*

The spectre is not just a figment of the imagination, an illusion, or a superstition. In the ethnographic space and time in hand, phantoms and ghosts appear or linger in a slice of territory in the form of non-human objects.

—Yael Navarro-Yashin, *The Make Believe Space* (2012, 13)

Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.

—Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History* (1989, 8)

Anticolonial revolutions across the Global South brought about monumental shifts to global politics, economics, society, culture, and, just as importantly, how people felt about the present and the future. The time after a revolution is a heavily affecting one, made up of feelings and affective registers that are political, economic and historical realities in and of themselves (Million 2009). In this article, I explore time and temporality as part of this ‘felt archive’ animating the aftermath of revolution.<sup>i</sup> I look at Egypt’s anticolonial revolutionary project, the start of which is often dated to 1952 when Egypt became an independent nation and the Free Officers, a group within the military, founded Egypt’s postcolonial project. I argue that this anticolonial past expresses itself in the present, widely understood to be a time of crisis and hopelessness, through traces and fragments that have inscribed themselves into the materiality of space and popular memory, which can be read alongside and against more institutionalised archives.

This move allows for more affective forms of history to produce a felt archive, which in turn documents anticolonial time as a form of temporality constituting the present. In other words, I connect the feeling of crisis in the present to the memory of hope in the past to unpack broader questions of crisis and temporality that this special issue raises. This reading complicates ideas and feelings of historical time, bringing into the frame anticolonial archival traces and temporalities that do not reside in the past but constitute the present. I understand the present time of crisis through David Scott’s diagnosis of the anticolonial aspirations that have turned into “postcolonial nightmares,” (Scott 2004, 2). In Egypt, a sense of contemporary crisis is felt through the afterlives of both anticolonial aspirations of the 1950s that turned into a “postcolonial nightmare”, as well as the revolutionary aspirations of

2011 that paved the way for continued and intensified military dictatorship. This crisis is felt through increasing police and military repression, rising economic inequality, geopolitical tensions across the region, a sense of hopelessness after an attempted revolution, and a lingering sense of melancholy and loss after earlier anticolonial struggles (Gana 2018).

Egypt's anticolonial moment was animated by various movements, made up of workers, feminists, liberals, nationalists, and beyond, culminating in the 1952 revolution and official decolonisation from Britain. The first postcolonial state project, led by Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser and referred to as Nasserism, was created by and flourished within a particular historical moment characterised by Third Worldism, non-alignment, Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism, very much part of the global socialist imaginary dominant at that moment. In many ways the Nasserist project pre-dated Nasser; it was formed in the 1950s but drew on anticolonial mobilisation from across Egyptian society as well as the broader Middle East and North Africa. Because of the centrality of nationalism to almost all social movements in the decades leading up to 1952, the groundwork for the Nasserist project was already in place when it was officially established. Various radical movements had already articulated many of the ideas that would become attached to the Nasserist moment, and tragically, the Nasserist project had the effect of de-radicalizing some of these ideas and repressing the social forces that produced them. The project itself was centred around independent economic development, welfare, industrialisation, and national capital, aiming primarily to break with the infrastructure of extractivism that had defined colonial rule.

This moment of anticolonialism is both absent and present in everyday life in Egypt, and this absence/presence is mediated through fragmented ideas, emotions, attachments and memories of what the past promised. Many of these revolve around Gamal Abdel Nasser; in Egypt and across the Middle East, images of Nasser appear in the back of taxis, on the walls of small, cramped shops, and occasionally in street protests above a sea of chanting faces. We often only see these in the form of fragments, many of which show us just enough of his face for us to know it is him. Some are in black and white, some are in colour. Some show a young, smiling general, others an older statesman. These traces of Nasser seem to haunt contemporary Egypt, even as—or perhaps because—they are hidden away in the landscape. Moses Ochunu has noted that the fragmentation we see in relation to postcolonial archives across Africa presents an opening “for imagining a new kind of history writing in which the concept of the bureaucratically organised archive is passe, inadequate,” (Ochunu 2015).

I use fragments and traces interchangeably throughout this article. That said, 'trace' to me conjures up a deeper sense of temporality: something is a trace when it survives from an earlier time, or is used to remember, speak about or piece together something that happened in the past. 'Fragment,' on the other hand, is more spatially located, bringing to mind a piece broken off from something larger, a piece that is not whole, or incomplete. Gyanendra Pandey has explored the question "fragments" and "traces" and how they might differ from facts or narratives: "The 'traces', 'fragments', 'voices from the edge,' to which we have referred, should not be thought of as nuggets, buried beneath layers of predatory meaning-construction, that can be prised out by the more diligent (or lucky) amongst us to automatically reveal their worth and meaning. What is in question here, as I have already said, is the ability to 'hear', especially to hear that which we have not heard before, and to transgress in situating the text or the 'fragment' differently," (Pandey 1995, 227). The fragments, or traces, that I think with in this article are both material in that they exist in the environment around us, and ephemeral in that they reside in memories. If we consider these traces part of an archive of anticolonialism, we need to be conscious of reading them from the present: "An archive may be largely about 'the past' but it is always 're-read' in the light of the present and the future: and in that reprise, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, it always flashes up before us as a moment of danger," (Hall 2001: 89).

This article argues that thinking of time and temporality as part of a felt archive is an invitation to think theory otherwise by searching for what haunts us from past moments. Work on haunting, from Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* to Arwa Salih's memoir *The Stillborn*,<sup>ii</sup> help think through the blurry edges between time and space, "keeping an eye out for shadows, ephemera, energies, ethereal forces, textures, spirits, sensations," (2017: xx). There is a challenge here to what we consider to belong inside an archive, as well as a challenge to the idea that anticolonial pasts reside in the past.<sup>iii</sup> On the one hand, searching for what haunts us is an invitation to clarify how the legacies of anticolonial projects across the region have afterlives that are not always visible or measurable as 'empirical' material. On the other hand, haunting provides a framing through which to understand how we feel when we encounter traces of the anticolonial past in the present, often unexpectedly. How can we think through these feelings as political, constituting an anticolonial archive both felt and material? The idea of haunting allows for a blurring of time, crucial for this article's illustration of how the power, promise, hope and (im)possibilities of anticolonialism seep into

the present, both accentuating the crisis of the postcolonial state and creating a sense of political urgency.

In the traces I explore here, haunting appears as hope, promise, melancholy and nostalgia; affective registers that bring to the surface both violence and loss, as well as the promises made in a distant past. As such, the article is in conversation with the special issue's interest in crisis as the beginning, rather than end, of a story. The present moment of crisis in Egypt, accentuated by a military coup in 2013 and accelerating free market capitalism, is an entry-point into the story of anticolonial hopes and defeats. Lisa Lowe has noted the importance of imagining what could have been, as it pushes us to begin from a different starting point: "A thinking with a twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science, *and also the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods,*" (Lowe 2015: 40-41). Imagining what could have been, it seems to me, is what we encounter when we come across unexpected anticolonial traces in the present; this imagining, in turn, can lead to a whole range of feelings. These feelings are evidence that these traces *do something* in the present, interacting with other affective states resulting from contemporary crisis, such as anxiety, fear, exhaustion, despair, and paranoia.

In the introduction to this special issue, Eugene Brennan writes that the present is constituted by many temporalities, and Egypt is no exception. Both the past and future appear in the present, even as we may experience the present as fleeting, or as something to be escaped or distracted from. Reading the present through what haunts it allows us to demonstrate the multiple temporalities of the present while simultaneously demonstrating that the the past is never in the past, as scholars of haunting and hauntology remind us; acknowledging this is the first step towards bringing to life the "fraught and contradictory experiences of historical time," (Brennan, this issue). Haunting is the "domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment when things are not in their assigned places, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away," (Gordon 2008: xvi). Exploring how anticolonialism haunts and thus lives in the present through traces that provoke affective responses, we begin to pull apart the notion of periodisation that locates contemporary Egyptian crisis in the present.

The first part of the article, made up of two parts, takes a series of vignettes around Gamal Abdel Nasser and Patrice Lumumba, exploring the connections between them, their

families, and anticolonial Egypt and anticolonial Congo during the 1950s and 1960s. These vignettes are fragmented, and the traces they look at range from a family's memories to faded street signs. They do not produce a strong or sturdy archive; yet they have much to tell us about both the connections across anticolonial Africa as well as the ways in which memories and material remnants produce feelings of urgency in the present. The second part turns to evocations of anticolonial economics in the present, through looking at labour strikes across Egypt in the 2000s. This second form of memory is more institutionalised and 'traceable' through policies, documents, and people, constituting a different type of anticolonial archive. Writing about these traces collectively and as part of an archive of anticolonialism allows for a theorisation of anticolonial temporality that is both affective and urgent.

### *Avenues of dreams*

Patrice Lumumba and Gamal Abdel Nasser were undoubtedly two key figures of anticolonialism and Third Worldism, connected through constellations and networks of decolonisation which have been documented through archives made up of conference proceedings, private correspondence, surveillance reports, documentation of official visits, and more. These archives have been crucial in tracing how the events of decolonisation unfolded. In this section I am interested in how this history might be felt in the present, when it is encountered through fragments and traces. What kinds of traces document this history in ways that make space for its affective registers, constituting a 'felt archive'? How might these traces illustrate the ephemerality and temporality of anticolonial archiving? And finally, how might these traces recover histories of connectivity between Lumumba and Nasser, and by extension anticolonial Egypt and anticolonial Congo, that otherwise fall out of view because of the dominant tendency to read Egypt in relation to the Middle East rather than Africa?

I focus on two types of traces that we encounter in the present: street names and family histories. Street names are a material trace that is both present and absent: it exists and is invoked, yet because we often memorise street names this invocation is not always a conscious recognition. Family memories, on the other hand, are less tangible; they represent a more ephemeral trace that is highly affective. The street names and family histories I focus on demonstrate the connections between anticolonial Egypt and anticolonial Congo;

connections that no longer exist in the same way and yet that continue to be encountered through the materiality of city spaces and conversations about family histories. Where the present is marked by crisis in both Egypt and Congo, and where in both countries the promises of an independent Africa seem fixed firmly in the past, encountering these traces demonstrates the multiplicity of present time by showing how past affective registers exist in the present. These traces, part of an anticolonial and felt archive, are thus disruptive (Pandey 1995) of the idea of a singular present that designates anticolonialism firmly as past, allowing us to transgress and hear differently.

In an evocative photo essay book entitled *Avenue Patrice Lumumba*, Guy Tillim travels across Southern and Central Africa in search of traces of Lumumba in the architectural landscape (Tillim 2008). Among the many material markers he looks at, street names emerge as one form of memory that is topographical. As Derek Alderman writes, “commemorative street naming is an important vehicle for bringing the past into the present, helping weave history into the geographic fabric of everyday life,” (Alderman 2002: 99). Importantly, the very act of naming says something about an attempt to inscribe meaning into an everyday space, asking for something to be remembered (Rose-Redwood 2008: 435). Across the world, anticolonial figures had streets named after them, an attempt to fix in place the dramatic changes that were happening. Describing his attempt to document such material traces, Tillim writes:

These photographs are not collapsed histories of post-colonial African states or a meditation on aspects of late-modernist-era colonial structures, but a walk through avenues of dreams. Patrice Lumumba’s dream, his nationalism, is discernible in these structures, if one reads certain clues, as is the death of his dream, in these de facto monuments. How strange that modernism, which eschewed monument and past for nature and future, should carry memory so well (ibid).

Sifting through the book of photographs, I am especially struck by the ones that show statues and busts of former anticolonial figures, often covered, broken, or rusted. From Kwame Nkrumah’s armless statue in Accra, Ghana, to Agostinho Neto’s wrapped up statue in Sumba, Angola, to a rusted image of Kabila lying sideways on the ground in Likasi, Congo<sup>iv</sup>, these are statues in ruin. They are often juxtaposed to the fading allure of the postcolonial cities they live in, highlighting the process of ruination that have taken over both the memory of their legacies as well as the material cities they used to rule over.

The juxtaposition of ruined statues and faded street names on the one hand and encountering them in the present on the other is a striking one. They do not dominate the landscape, but they are certainly alive and agential. Ruins are sites that condense “alternative senses of history” (Stoler 2013: ix) and it is precisely the faded nature of these statues or street signs that gesture faintly to these alternative senses and alternative possibilities. They might orient you suddenly to the past, while simultaneously bringing the future that past had hoped for into view through the notion of *what could have been*. Yet these affective responses are felt through faded signs and broken statues, objects we might understand as residues, almost invisible. It is here that the power of these traces can be felt: they do not dominate the landscape, or take up space. Their power lies precisely in their unseen nature, the way they blend into the landscape, until they are noticed and activated.

Tillim’s project captures a political past too. In a different and moving review essay, Leora Maltz-Leca writes:

Looking at Tillim’s photographs, it seems that for every dream of revolutionary struggle, there is an avenue Patrice Lumumba. As Tillim finds and refinds Lumumba’s ghost in the thoroughfares named for him, his photographic essay draws together these dispersed avenues into a spectral cartography of liberation, uniting a network of scattered locales through their identification with this iconic figure. Such an imaginary cartography – a route linked by a name – highlights how naming, as Paul Carter has eloquently argued, is bound up with the writing of the landscape into history (Matlz-Leca 2009).<sup>v</sup>

The act of place-making is an act of remembrance, of bringing the past into the present, and thus writing history into the landscape. Calling avenues named after Lumumba “avenues of dreams,” Tillim gestures towards a utopian future, while capturing the momentous emotional registers of anticolonialism and decolonisation. Street names, then, have much to tell us about space, history, memory and the future.

In Egypt, there are two streets named after Patrice Lumumba. In Cairo, located in the neighbourhood of Heliopolis, Lumumba Street was previously named after Jean-Baptiste Kléber, a French general active in the colonisation of Egypt (El Wakil 2021). In Alexandria, it was Nasser himself who renamed a street after Lumumba: the street on which the Belgian Consulate could be found. These names invoke a faded history of Egyptian and Congolese anticolonial connectivity, as well as a history of Egyptian African anticolonialism that saw Egypt as part of the broader Pan-African project. They recall historical moments such as the

massive demonstrations that broke out in Cairo after Lumumba's assassination, during which the coat of arms at the Belgian embassy was replaced with portraits of Lumumba. Indeed just before his assassination at the hands of Belgium and the CIA, Lumumba's children were able to escape from Congo and taken to Egypt where they were brought up (a story I turn to next).

The presence of streets named after anticolonial figures across Africa and the Global South is one way of tracing how the anticolonial past exists in the present. These street names do not necessarily signal that there is a powerful anticolonial narrative structuring the landscapes of these cities or countries, or even that there is a conscious attempt by governments to bring *that* particular past into the present—a present that is, after all, not only very different from that past but can also be understood as a betrayal of it. It seems to me that they instead signal to the impossibility of erasing these traces from both the landscape and from public memory; they remain fixed in place, part of everyday life, reminding those in the present that there was the possibility of an alternative present. Here Pandey's description of fragments as *disruptive* or even disturbing is productive; changing these street names would undoubtedly be more attention-grabbing than letting them be; yet letting them be means they remain as traces of a past that can never be quite forgotten.

These street names gesture to a past during which anticolonial Egypt and anticolonial Congo were part of the same constellation, during which Pan-Africanism extended across the continent, and during which solidarity was etched into the materiality of the city. Through encountering these material traces in Cairo, Alexandria or other spaces, the anticolonial past—otherwise faded, distant, forgotten, invisibilised—appears in the present, disrupting our sense of time and collapsing the temporal boundaries between past and present (and future). As shown through Tillim's photographs and the streets named after Lumumba in Cairo and Alexandria, encountering such traces in the present evokes a whole range of affective registers such as nostalgia, melancholy, or maybe just a fleeting sense of *déjà vu*. It is these affective responses that makes these traces agential; though they may appear to be ruined, faded, or in decay, their presence *does something*. I argue that seeing these traces as central to an archive of anticolonialism allows for a more complex sense of anticolonial temporality as both making up the present and as made up of a multiplicity of connections, struggles and events, a multiplicity that does not emerge from institutional or state archives. This multiplicity disrupts the notion of a present disconnected from the anticolonial

aspirations David Scott writes about, seeing them instead as something that exists in the present as a haunting spectre.

### *Escape to Cairo*

Just months before Congo gained independence, an Egyptian diplomat named Mohamed Abdulaziz Ishak was traveling between Cairo and Leopoldville, looking to set up a connection between Egypt and Congo based on Nasser's support for Lumumba (Shaker and Ballout 2021). After getting to know Lumumba and becoming concerned about the threats facing him, Ishak suggested that Lumumba's three children would be smuggled out of Congo to Egypt if anything were to happen to him, and that they would be raised in Ishak's home. They developed an escape plan, and soon after, on October 28, 1960, the plan was put into action following increasing threats to Lumumba's life. This is how Lumumba's three children—Patrice, François and Juliana—ended up spending most of their childhood in Cairo.

I came across this story while researching the history of streets named after Lumumba in Egypt, and was immediately interested in this more intimate connection. I knew that Kwame Nkrumah and his Egyptian wife Fathia Nkrumah's son—Gamal—lived in Egypt, but had not known that Lumumba's children had also spent time in Egypt. When I began to look for more information it became clear that there was little documentation on how this trajectory came to be. Eventually I came across an episode made by *Kerning Cultures*, a podcast about contemporary issues in the Middle East. The episode, entitled *Escape to Cairo*, recounts the story of the escape planned by Lumumba and Ishak that brought Lumumba's children—Patrice, François and Juliana—to Cairo. It includes memories from both Tahia Abdel Nasser, Nasser's grand-daughter, as well as Bahgat and Nour-Shams, Mohamed Abdulaziz Ishak's son and daughter. In this sense, we find out about this momentous moment through the intimate memories of family members of those involved. The episode is interlaid with audio clips from speeches by Lumumba and Nasser, interviews with Juliana Lumumba, analysis from academics, and clips from anticolonial protests. It draws your senses into not only the story being told, but the moment that is being recounted; the past is operative in the present.

Speaking about the escape plan and how it began, Tahia Abdel Nasser recalls:

They [Lumumba's children] didn't know what was happening, and when they last saw their father, he held them, kissed them and said, take care of one another. And you're going to your father. He said, you know, they were going to Gamal Abdel Nasser. He would be their father and he would take care of them, but just study, you have to complete your education. And he embraced them and went with them to the Jeep. And after they got in, repeated more than once: take care of one another, take care of one another. And he kept repeating that farewell until the car drove away (Shaker and Ballout 2021).

The plan was high risk because photographs of the Lumumba children were already all over the newspapers, and Lumumba believed that after they killed him they would also kill his family. Bahgat, Ishak's son, speaks about the journey to the airport: "My father had cases of whiskey in the back of the jeep. And he distributed that on the checkpoints, on Mobutu's insurgent soldiers' checkpoints, so that they would let him in," (Shaker and Ballout 2021). They found a group of Danish officials waiting at the airport, and had to show them Ishak's passports, to which pictures of Lumumba's children had already been added. Although the Danish official was suspicious of the claim that Lumumba's children were really Ishak's, especially because pictures of Lumumba's children were all over the news, he eventually allowed them to board the plane, seemingly unnerved by the number of Egyptian officials travelling with Ishak. The plane took off, and they eventually arrived at Ishak's house in Cairo.

Shams, his daughter, recounts that even Ishak's wife had no idea of the plan:

My mother didn't know anything about it until they arrived to her doorstep. And when she opened the door to find him with the three kids, two boys and a girl hugging her and kissing her and calling her Mama Zizi. She was astonished and not knowing what to do. And she looked at him and then he told her, I'll tell you later, but these are the kids of Patrice Lumumba (Shaker and Ballout 2021).

On living together, Bhagat recalls: "We shared beds, we could talk together. We could play together. And, they became our siblings, our brothers and sisters. We did not need a language. As children, there were so many things we were doing before they came, and when they came we continued doing the same things. Maybe some mischievous stuff with Magdy (Ishak's other son) and François, playing football in the street and so on. But Patrice and I mostly watched TV. So this is how natural the thing is without language," (Shaker and Ballout 2021). Tahia Abdel Nasser adds: "The children stayed for two years with Ishak and in the time they spent in his house, they saw many African leaders. And there were many African students

and scholars living in Egypt,” (Shaker and Ballout 2021). Indeed in an interview Juliana Lumumba was to give later, she recalled:

The gentleman who helped us escape from the Congo, Mr. Abdel Aziz Ishak, he created the African Association in 1948, just to let you know the environment in which we grew up. It was the heart of the African fight. So we grew up in that atmosphere. An atmosphere of struggle, of conversation around freedom, of conversation with everyone who fought for freedom, and that was the atmosphere of our home. And that made sure we never forgot who we are. And I give credit to all those people, who, even though we were going through difficulties far from home, we were still surrounded by affection from our Egyptian parents (Shaker and Ballout 2021).

Shams and Bahgat noted that there was a lot of press coverage and media attention around this story, “for Egypt to show the world that we are supporting African nationalism. Of course, because there was a feeling also that Lumumba was a hero. So that was the feeling in Egypt at the time,” (Shaker and Ballout 2021).

Here the story of Egyptian anticolonialism is told as an African story. Ishak’s house was one that was frequented by many African anticolonial activists and leaders, given his particular investment in connecting the Egyptian struggle to other struggles around the continent. The Lumumba children also met African students who were studying in Egypt, and as Juliana later recounted, they felt in that home an “atmosphere of struggle and freedom.” Juliana also speaks to how this allowed the Lumumba children to “never forget who we were” and to always feel the “African fight.” We thus see how affective memories have much to tell us about how these constellations—in this instance between Egypt and Congo—were created, maintained, and experienced, even though such affective memories are only available as traces or fragments.

Through their memories, a past Cairo is evoked, a time when the Egyptian press and Egyptian political actors and movement were invested in what was happening in Congo. Shams and Bahgat, for instance, recall the many photographs of the Lumumba children and their Cairo childhood, and understand this attention as symptomatic of that particular historical moment, where Egypt wanted to demonstrate its support for African independence and Pan-Africanism. Lumumba was seen as a hero in Egypt, and indeed when Lumumba was assassinated Nasser gave a speech and protests broke out across Cairo, centred around the Belgian embassy. Bahgat notes, “that was the feeling in Egypt at the time.” Here again the

affective—filtered through childhood memories—helps to piece together an understanding of the connections that formed Pan-Africanism, Third Worldism and anticolonialism.

Juliana and François eventually went back to Congo, while Patrice stayed in Egypt for 34 years, leaving in the early 2000s. All three siblings stayed in touch with the Ishak family, as recounted by Bahgat: “He was online with me on Skype and all that. And we used to talk and laugh and tell stories and memories and all that every day. He was my soul brother. He was not only my adopted brother. I mean, I would be telling him something and he would say, I feel the same. And what about so-and-so? And so on, I say it is exactly the same. So for us, we were like twins, Patrice and I, and I miss him very much,” (Shaker and Ballout 2021).

As with the streets named after Lumumba, these vignettes connecting anticolonial Egypt and anticolonial Congo gesture towards a past that feels very distant and yet whose appearance in the present evokes a whole range of affective registers. Through these affects, the past disrupts the present, bringing to life connections that have otherwise faded from memory. Recent work has recovered some of the connections between anticolonial Egypt and other anticolonial struggles across Africa. In Reem Abou El Fadl’s translation of *An Egyptian African Story* by Helmi Sharawy, whose role was to organise state support for African liberation movements during the presidency of Nasser, we see a different history of Egyptian anticolonialism. Sharawy writes of the necessity of “entering the world of Bandung” which included an Egyptian focus on solidarity with other African countries:

I wanted to note first my delight at meeting figures who were renowned leaders in their own countries. My modest knowledge of English allowed me to talk to them, even those who spoke French, and who also used a modest English for communication, such as Félix Moumié, champion of the armed struggle in Cameroon, and leader of the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon Party, or Ignatius Musaazi, leader of the Uganda National Congress Party, or Joshua Nkomo, leader in Southern Rhodesia and of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union, as well as leaders from Kenya and South Africa. At the same time, popular delegations began to come to Cairo, some of whom were Muslims from countries such as Nigeria; even the leaders of the Ashanti Muslims in Ghana came to the city (Sharawy 2021).

These connections between Lumumba and Nasser, some inscribed into the city, others remembered in intimate family records, gesture towards what Sharawy calls an ‘Egyptian African story.’ This does not mean romanticizing the anticolonial past, nor imagining that fractures did not exist; this history comes after a long period of the Arab slave trade, as well

as the domination of Sudan by Egypt, for instance.<sup>vi</sup> Rather, it is an invitation to think about a moment during which Egypt, like other North African countries such as Algeria, imagined themselves as part of a Pan-African story.

It is above all an invitation to think about how such traces form part of an anticolonial felt archive that seeks to remember anticolonialism in and through its affective registers. Encountered in the present, these traces *do something*, largely through how they might make people feel. They push us to “grapple with the difficulties of periodisation” as Eugene Brennan writes (this issue), and to explore the many temporalities that constitute the present. The anticolonial past is disruptive of a particular understanding of time whereby the past is distant and removed from the present. Illustrating the way these archival traces operate in the present through activating alternative forms of struggle, connection, and futurity, we see the multiplicity of present time, rather than viewing it as singular. The tension these anticolonial archival traces activate offer glimpses of a different way of thinking, in this instance, of Egypt’s place within Africa. Rather than view the prospect of an Egyptian African anticolonialism as lost or in the past, I instead suggest that this prospect exists in the present, however faint it might seem, through the tangible material traces and memories discussed here.

### *Striking against capital*

The previous section traced how faded street signs and nostalgic memories haunt the present through the promises anticolonialism made and connections that have been lost from view, suggesting that haunting can capture how the past’s existence in the present can produce a whole range of affective responses. In this section I continue with the focus on haunting, turning instead to strikes by Egyptian workers as a space in which anticolonial promises crop up in a present constituted by economic crisis. I centre the practice of economic nationalisation that was a central pillar of Nasser’s postcolonial project in Egypt through the 1950s and 1960s, exploring the ways in which this practice lives on in the present through strikes led by industrial workers in the 2000s. These strikes were largely in response to the rapid privatisation of industry in the 1990s and 2000s in response to increasing pressure of the IMF and World Bank and a shift within Egypt’s ruling class towards a faction formed by businessmen. This new faction, headed by then president Hosni Mubarak’s son Gamal

Mubarak, built on the major changes brought about by Anwar el Sadat, who was president from 1970 until 1981, when Mubarak took over. Sadat oversaw what has been called *infitah*, or Egypt's transition to an open market, which included wide-ranging privatisation, cuts to social services, a shift to finance capital as the basis of economic power, and closer economic ties to the US. Reversing the economic policies of Nasserism, *infitah* was one of the first neoliberal programs in the postcolonial world.

In response to the rapid privatisation of their factories, Egyptian workers mobilised certain ideas around how the economy should be organised, ideas they often dated back to the time of Nasser. These ideas proved powerful in conjuring a future that was not separate from the past, but that instead demonstrated that the past was already in the present, disrupting linear temporality. In doing so, the anticolonial past became performative, challenging the neoliberal present—understood as a moment of economic crisis—as well as gesturing towards a future beyond neoliberal privatisation and beyond precarity. This form of memory can be seen as more institutionalised and 'traceable' through policies, laws, documents and people, constituting a different type of anticolonial archive from the ones in the previous section. Yet it is an archive that is equally haunted by the anticolonial past, through which it invokes a present made up of multiple temporalities. What we see here is an archive that creates a sense of political urgency, primarily through calls to stop the rapid privatisation of factories before it is too late. The anticolonial past is called upon to intervene in the neoliberal present, to show that other ways of organising the economy have existed. In this way, the present moment of crisis, created through the rapid privatisation program, is not the end of a story but rather the entry point into an exploration of anticolonial economics and how its promises haunt the present.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida writes that at a time when a new world order was attempting to install neoliberalism, "no disavowal had managed to rid itself of all of Marx's ghosts," (Derrida 2012: 46). In Egypt, we might read this in relation to Nasser's ghost, who continued to haunt the country after his death and especially after the introduction of neoliberal restructuring in the 1970s. Sadat, as noted above, spent much time engaging in what Derrida called the disavowal of what came before—Nasserism and its specific socialist orientation—all while never quite managing to get rid of Nasser's ghosts. In particular, Nasserism's alignment of capitalism with a state-led project of decolonisation produced a form of economic organisation that continues to haunt the present. Where the Nasserist

project was built up around state-led capitalism, industrialisation, a strong public sector, and social welfare, what we see from the 1970s onwards is a redirection of capital away from the public and towards the private. Sadat's project of *infitah* was very much a project of redirection, which in turn opened Egypt to unravelling neoliberal forces in the West. The ruling class itself shifted, stretching to include more businessmen, speculators, financiers, and bankers. The state itself was not defunded, but rather its services were also redirected to this new project. As Timothy Mitchell writes, "The reform program's main impact was to concentrate public funds into different hands, and many fewer. The state turned resources away from agriculture and industry. It now subsidized financiers instead of factories, cement kilns instead of bakeries, speculators instead of schools," (Mitchell 2002: 462). By the 2000s, finance capital had come to dominate Egypt's economy, and privatisation had rapidly accelerated. Even sectors that had been traditionally dominated by public capital, such as construction and transportation, were by then largely in the hands of private capital (Abdelrahman 2014). The emergence of a small number of family-owned monopolies meant the further entrenchment of private capital (Kandil 2014: 353).

In response, workers mobilised mobilized an idea of what the Egyptian economy should look like in their attempts to challenge privatisation and its chipping away of state-led capitalist development. There were early signs of resistance in debates that took place in the National Assembly in 1971, over a decision to set up a specialised company for hard currency foreign transactions (Cooper 1979: 488). Committees were set up to resist privatisation throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, at both the workplace and union level, and parliament became a key site of labour contestation, particularly over new *infitah* laws. Strikes intensified throughout the 2000s, and were undoubtedly one of the major elements leading up to the 2011 revolution. Some of the larger strikes, such as the 2006 and 2008 Mahalla strikes,<sup>vii</sup> were understood as uprisings that fed into expanding debates about political change in Egypt. Although workers often expressed their demands in terms of an end to privatisation, these were deeply political in nature. Workers were demanding a return to another time, an era during which privatisation was not the dominant logic of national development. This demand express a haunting that resurrected the ghost of Nasserism, recalling in the public imagination promises that had been made decades ago, including the centrality of the public sector and the idea that the state should care for workers' economic well-being. In some sense, it matters less that the promises were never fully fulfilled, but

rather that they were made at all.<sup>viii</sup> It is the promise on the one hand and the partial delivery on the other that rendered the Nasserist project one that could be remembered in that moment.

Haunting invites us to focus on loss, on paths not taken and alternatives left unrealised. In this sense, haunting pushes against the narrative that alternatives never existed at all. As Derrida writes:

Capitalist societies always heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished since the collapse of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and not only is it finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back (2012: 123).

Along these lines and focusing on Eastern Europe, Katherine Verdery writes that the erasure of the socialist era was seen as “history ‘resuming’ its former course and of taking the direction it would have taken were it not for the ‘aberration’ of the socialist period” (Verdery 1999: 116):

This practice reveals an interesting conception of time, in which time is not fixed and irreversible. One can pick up the time line, snip out and discard the communist piece of it that one no longer wishes to acknowledge, paste the severed ends together, and hey presto! one has a new historical time line. One has not accepted and incorporated the recent past, one has simply excised it (ibid).

Where the story of capitalism aims to bend time to its will—“snipping out and discarding” communist pieces of history—haunting serves as an ongoing reminder that other ways of life have been and still are possible. For Egyptian workers on strike throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, the ghost of Nasser appeared and reappeared as a representation of a different future, not simply a reference to the past. The ghost of Nasser was the possibility of an economy structured by the public sector, an economy with social welfare built into it, and an economy within which the state was responsible for preventing, rather than exacerbating, economic inequality. Undoubtedly these were shifts that did take place in the 1950s and 1960s; they were not simply a mirage or a set of empty promises. Yet they were also undoubtedly only partially fulfilled, and I wonder if this plays into the haunting: that there was still do much to do.

As with street signs of anticolonial figures and family memories of lost anticolonial connections, the legacies of anticolonialism haunt the present, demonstrating the multiplicity of temporality. Nasser and Nasserism belong to the past, yet their ghosts can be found in the present, gesturing to the possibility of alternative ways of organising society. The past here is not a warning, nor a failed project; it is a material force acting in the present. As Avery Gordon notes, the ghost *does things*, is *demanding something*. This is what creates a sense of urgency or a range of affective responses when we encounter these ghosts, or traces, in the present. Haunting is affective, something felt, but it is also a political force that gestures to different forms of temporality, one that produces different felt experiences of time. The past is no longer in the past, and the present suddenly opens up to the possibility of a different future.

### *The urgency of the past*

Throughout this article, I have argued that encountering the anticolonial past—through signs, memories, strikes or otherwise—provokes an affective response. What we encounter when we come across unexpected anticolonial traces in the present is a moment of rupture, during which we might imagine what could have been. This can, in turn, lead to a whole range of feelings: nostalgia, melancholy, sadness, grief, anger. It can also lead to a political urge, a need to engage in some form of politics that might speak to anticolonial promises (or failures). This response brings up a feeling of urgency, captured through the idea of haunting, a sensation by which the past demands something of us. It is through this that we can apprehend that anticolonial traces *do something* in the present, producing an archive that is living and demonstrating the multiplicity of present time.

Why the urgency? What is urgent about faded street signs and monuments, half-forgotten memories? I suggest that what makes them urgent is the present moment itself, and the accelerating forms of crises that we are experiencing globally as well as within Egypt. The present is a time of crisis; this is not to suggest that capitalist, climate, racial or gendered crisis have not existed for centuries, but rather that there seems to be an intensification in the present moment, deepened by the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, the crisis of the postcolonial state alongside the crisis of financial capitalism seems to me to be producing increasing interest in the anticolonial moment, which reappears as a time during which alternative futures were imagined as possible. We see this in attempts to revisit the socialist

underpinnings of anticolonialism in light of contemporary capitalist crisis; in a rethinking of the position of North Africa in relation to the rest of Africa in light of debates around anti-Black racism in the Middle East and North Africa; in calls to think through what internationalism looked like in the past, as distinct to forms of neoliberal cosmopolitanism or financialised globalization that we see around us today. Perhaps most clearly, we see in the slogans put forward by workers on strike a call to revisit a time when the state had a responsibility of care—however shaky—to workers, in light of the dramatic pace at which neoliberal restructuring has taken hold.

That said, this process of revisiting the past and thinking about the future does not mean a replication of anticolonial promises, particularly in light of the postcolonial states that often emerged from these projects. It is imperative that we think through anticolonialism critically, in light of what has happened—and the complicities of anticolonial thought and praxis in what has happened<sup>ix</sup>—as well as in light of what we are facing today. One reason for this critical approach is because we know of both the violences of the postcolonial project, as well as the erasures of the wide range of possibilities imagined during anticolonialism.<sup>x</sup> For instance, are there ghosts that we know nothing about? In an article entitled *Remembering the 1977 Bread Riots in Suez: Fragments and Ghosts of Resistance*, Nayera Soliman argues that the main participants in protests across Egypt (in this instance, protests against government austerity measures in 1977) are not accessible — they are *actively absent*: “They exist as ghosts in my interlocutors’ memories. Through these memories and the scant traces left behind in newspapers, articles, and books over the years, we can feel and see their effects, but we cannot see *them*. They only exist in memory as “the masses”: the marginalised; the street vendors; day-labourers; workers; and perhaps also foreign migrants to the city who came seeking opportunities after the war,” (Soliman 2021, 18). Here, Soliman asks us to think about *who* becomes a ghost, and how. Where Nasser might be a ghost in the sense that the immense power he wielded is evoked through representational traces still present in different geographies, those who were active during protests—including protests that can be understood as part of Nasser’s legacies—are rendered ghostly in a different way. They are ghosts because they have not—and could not have—left the same representational traces behind.

Traces, fragments and affective memories are by nature incomplete, often appearing without context or narrative. The traces we do have—and that we are only beginning now to

take account of—have much to tell us about the project of anticolonialism, its hopes and its failures, as well as what it means to experience this past in the present. If we think of these traces and fragments as part of a living archive, as well as an archive that is undefined, material and immaterial, affective and institutionalised, then we might think of archives in much more expansive and liberatory ways. This in turn might caution us against forgetting or excluding the traces we will never come across, simply because they do not exist, or the traces that have always existed but that were never meant to be found.

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<sup>i</sup> I build on Dian Million's writing about felt theory, extending it to think through the idea of felt archives (2009).

<sup>ii</sup> Salih uses the frame of haunting to underline the power inherent in such events and figures, as well as to bring out the urgency we might feel when these ghosts appear in the present.

<sup>iii</sup> Here I am thinking explicitly of the Egyptian context, rather than contexts where anticolonial resistance continues in the present, particularly against ongoing settler colonialism.

<sup>iv</sup> There are two photographs of Laurent Kabila in this book; the first is the one mentioned here, lying sideways and in a state of the ruin. The second is a framed photograph of Kabila in the Town Hall building in Likasi, hanging in the background above two typists. The juxtaposition of these two photographs of Kabila is interesting, one speaking to the reality of what has happened to postcolonial projects, while the second speaks to the continued forms of official memory that are required to be perpetuated through hanging images of state leaders across African cities.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.artforum.com/picks/guy-tillim-23457>

<sup>vi</sup> See: Powell 2012, 2003.

<sup>vii</sup> The Mahalla strikes of the mid-2000s took place in the province of Mahalla al Kubra, centring around the Mahalla al-Kubra Spinning and Weaving Company. In 2006, the strikes were in response to the government announcing a bonus and then withdrawing it, as well as continuing frustration with corruption within the company. At its peak, the strike included over 27,000 workers. Concessions were won from the government, which it then didn't follow through with, prompting more striking in 2007 that also called for restructuring wages, more investment into the company and increasing meal allowances and worker benefits. In 2008 there was another major strike, following the government's lack of action. This time, the demand of a national minimum wage was added. The 2008 strike was violent due to police repression, and three were killed. Although strikers did not achieve their demands, it was suddenly clear that challenging the government was possible, and some see these events as a rehearsal for the 2011 revolution (Sharnoubi 2013).

<sup>viii</sup> And perhaps even that they were half fulfilled.

<sup>ix</sup> As Julietta Singh reminds us in her magisterial *Unthinking Mastery*, "in their efforts to decolonize, anticolonial thinkers in turn advocated practices of mastery—corporeal, linguistic, and intellectual—toward their own liberation. Within anticolonial movements, practices of countermastery were aimed explicitly at defeating colonial mastery, in effect pitting mastery against mastery toward the production of thoroughly decolonized subjectivities" (Singh 2017, 2). For Singh, anticolonialism often entailed pitting one form of mastery against another, rather than doing away with mastery altogether.

<sup>x</sup> See Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery* (2017) for an incisive exploration of these questions.