

## Transcript

00:00:00 Eugene Rogan

Good evening, and welcome to the 47th George Antonius Mavorian Lecture.

00:00:08 Eugene Rogan

Over the course of the past half century, the Antonius Lecture has earned its place as the flagship event of the Middle East Center and the culmination of the year's rich harvest of lectures and seminars.

00:00:23 Eugene Rogan

Indeed, over the past academic year, we've hosted over 50 events in the center, but the Antonius

00:00:30 Eugene Rogan

has always stood out.

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It's perhaps the fabled community who came together to establish this lecture series that gives it its special aura.

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The AUC archaeologist and former research fellow of St.

00:00:45 Eugene Rogan

Antony's, Professor George Scanlon, along with Albert Hourani and Roger Owen and Derek Hopwood and Robert Mavner, who frequented the house of Katie Antonius in Mahdi, Caro suburb,

00:01:00 Eugene Rogan

in the 1960s and 70s, who collectively came up with the idea of this lecture series to remember the great George Antonius, author of *The Arab Awakening*, and to honor his memory with a lecture series here in Oxford.

00:01:17 Eugene Rogan

Katie Antonius made it to the first few lectures.

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Their daughter, Soraya, was a regular right through the 2010s.

00:01:25 Eugene Rogan

And after her lamented passing in 2017,

00:01:29 Eugene Rogan

Soraya left to the Middle East Center her family's library, their art, which had made its way from their home in Jerusalem to Beirut and Nicosia, and now is here in the Middle East Center, all preserving the Antoni's collection in Oxford down to the present day.

00:01:48 Eugene Rogan

The special aura that glows over this annual lecture is certainly a reflection.

00:01:55 Eugene Rogan

of those who have taken to the Antonius podium in the past.

00:02:00 Eugene Rogan

The inaugural lecturer was George Mektasi, Professor of Arabic at the University of Pennsylvania in 1976, followed the next year by Albert Hirani in the year of his retirement, whose lecture was on the Arab awakening 40 years after.

00:02:22 Eugene Rogan

Distinguished students of the Middle East Center, like Andre Raymond or Afaf Lukfiyasaid Marceau, followed, as did distinguished friends and scholars of the region, like Magdi Wahba and Mahmoud Manzalaoui.

00:02:35 Eugene Rogan

In keeping with George Antonius's connection to Jerusalem, the lecturers welcomed the cream of Palestinian intellectuals, with Ibrahim Abulurad coming in 1980.

00:02:48 Eugene Rogan

Edward Said in 1989, and Rashid Khalidi in 1990.

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We've had statesmen like Lebanon's Hassan Tweni, Tunisia's Monset Marzouki, and Palestinian Saad Aliket.

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We've welcomed legendary journalists like Eric Hourou and Robert Fisk.

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We've heard from creative personalities like architect Zaha Hadid,

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who gave the 2003 lecture, and of course, designed both this lecture theater and the building in which it is housed.

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And the courageous Egyptian novelist, communist, persecuted by the Egyptian regime, Sanallah Ibrahim, who gave the 2005 Antonius.

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Many past fellows of the Middle East Center have followed Hourani's example and given an Antonius from retirement, Moussafa Badawi, 1992,

00:03:43 Eugene Rogan

Roger Owen in 1998, Derek Hopwood in 2001.

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I think we might even have one or two Antonius lecturers with us tonight.

00:03:53 Eugene Rogan

I can't see Marilyn Booth out there.

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Marilyn, are you with us?

00:03:56 Eugene Rogan

Should be.

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And Avi Shleim should be.

00:04:01 Eugene Rogan

There he is.

00:04:04 Eugene Rogan

Welcome back, Euravinus.

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We have had some stellar cancellations.

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but for which today's event would actually be our 51st.

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Jeremy Bowen was forced to give the Antonius a pass when in 2011, he was called away by the BBC to cover that breaking news story called The Arab Spring.

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Lebanese novelist Huda Benakhat was unable to come in 2020, prevented by the COVID-19 epidemic.

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We didn't even try to book anyone in 2021 for the same reason.

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And last year, 2025, Palestinian stateswoman Hanan Ashrami was prevented from travel by the ongoing conflict in Palestine.

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Now, these aren't easy acts to follow.

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Indeed, the honor of the invitation to give an Antonius lecture might feel a bit like a poisoned chalice.

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Lesser luminaries might balk at the pressure.

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Fortunately, tonight, we're honored to welcome Professor Charles Tripp as the 47th George Antonius Memorial Lecturer.

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And few scholars in recent decades can match Charles Tripp's impact on our field.

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Born in Sudan, one might say that Charles had been born into the profession.

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After taking his BA from Oxford,

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He continued his studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he completed his doctorate on Egyptian politics in the last years of the monarchy.

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He returned to SOAS to teach Middle Eastern politics, where he rose to the right to professor in 2007.

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In 2012, he was elected a fellow of the British Academy, where he's played a particularly important role in promoting the academy's international outreach.

00:06:00 Eugene Rogan

The breadth of his erudition is revealed in the books he's published over the years,

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starting with his co-authored Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order in 1996 with Shahrar Moushavi.

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His classic History of Iraq, first published in 2000 and subsequently reissued in updated editions to follow the fast-paced history of that country's last years under Saddam Hussein.

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In 2006, he published Islam and the Moral Economy, the Challenge of Capitalism.

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His most recent work, The Power and the People, Paths of Resistance in the Middle East.

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Charles has also made a huge impact on the field through editing Cambridge University Press's influential series in modern Middle Eastern studies.

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Thanks to his book on Iraq, Charles is recognized as Britain's leading authority on the modern history and politics of that country.

00:07:02 Eugene Rogan

Excuse me.

00:07:05 Eugene Rogan

When Britain and America were planning to go to war with Iraq, Charles is one of six scholars invited to brief then-Prime Minister Tony Blair and his foreign secretary, Jack Straw, in November of 2002.

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The gap between academic and political engagement could not have been starker, as he later wrote in a celebrated article in the London Review of Books.

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And I quote, Straw thought post-Saddam Iraq would be much like

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post-Soviet Russia, and could thus be easily pigeonholed as that strange creature, a quote, transitional society.

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More ominously, Charles continued, Blair seemed wholly uninterested in Iraq as a complex and puzzling political society, wanting confirmation merely that deposing Saddam Hussein would remove evil from the country.

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Well,

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When confronted with those views, perhaps the politics of 2002 were not so different from those of 2026, as we used to think.

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As anyone in the field will confirm, Charles Tripp wears his laurels lightly, that he is the most generous of colleagues.

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We in Oxford have benefited regularly over the years when Charles has accepted to speak in our seminars, take part in our workshops, to share his own research and analysis.

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I still remember chairing a joint seminar with Charles and Venicia Porter, in which we got into a fantastic rap about the role of Western universities in Arab arts, an argument in which I have to concede Venicia retained the upper hand all the way through.

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And most recently, Charles has contributed to the Hassam and Gassam Oxford-Tunisia exchange, reviewing applications and interviewing candidates with a generosity

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that left even the unsuccessful candidates feeling good about the experience.

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Such a friend of our community and a beacon to our field need not fear accepting the invitation to give the George Antonius Memorial Lecture.

00:09:14 Eugene Rogan

His title is Spectral Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: The Afterlives of Violence and the Force of Memory.

00:09:22 Eugene Rogan

Will you please join me in extending the warmest welcome?

00:09:37 Speaker 2

Eugene, thank you very much indeed for the outrageously flattering things you've just said about me, but also for the invitation itself.

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And the audience will hear from the list of names that Eugene went through, why I find slightly apprehensive about accepting such an invitation.

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And in fact, one might argue that both the life that he has described for me, but also the

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long line of succession that I join by giving the Antonius lecture could be an extended out-of-body experience.

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So this may be where the idea for my talk came from.

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But it wasn't quite that, although it seemed to fit quite well.

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In fact, originally, the idea comes from the work I'm doing with a colleague in Tunisia, Larissa Chomiak, on the politics of memory in Tunisia after the revolution.

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in which ghosts have played their part, as I'll mention when I start talking about the substance of the talk itself.

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So I hope that you'll bear with me.

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I know it's the wrong season for ghost stories, but as you will discover from my talk, in politics, any season is ghost season.

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So you don't have to worry about that.

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But I wanted to start you off, as it were, to warm you up, perhaps chill you down.

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with a particular ghostly story from the Middle East.

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This is the story of the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Zeytun in northern Cairo in 1968, in April 1968.

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And you'll see that there is a picture, a snap of what was to become more clearly the Virgin Mary.

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And this is over the church of St Mary in Zeytun.

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And she appeared, first is this strange light, but then a much more defined appearance started to emerge.

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And she appeared, in fact, over some three years.

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So there was an initial burst of appearances where so realistic was she that the garage owner opposite, when he first saw her,

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shouted out, lady, lady, don't jump.

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She thought she was about to commit suicide.

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But it turned out that she was identified as the Virgin Mary.

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And in fact, she became such a phenomenon that something like 250,000 people would turn up to see her.

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She would appear quite regularly in the dark of night.

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The Cowro municipal authorities turned off all the street lights.

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so that you could get a better look at her and make sure there was nothing, no hanky-panky going on.

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Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt, came and saw her at one point.

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And within a month, she was certified as the real thing by Pope Kirolos VI as the Coptic Pope and supplemented by the State Ministry of National Guidance, who authenticated that she was indeed

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the Virgin Mary and who had appeared several times.

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And she now has her own website, the Top Shot.

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But what I couldn't resist showing this one is that the three prelates from rather different religions, the Catholic and the Orthodox, had I think slightly skeptical expressions on their faces as they hear about it.

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But the ghost story isn't just to

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entertain you, as it were, with an extraordinary and actually still very much unexplained phenomenon in Cairo in 1968.

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But to give you a sense of why it's interesting politically, what is the political context, what is the afterlife, if you like, of the Virgin Mary in Cairo at that time?

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Well, the context is that only eight months before, Egypt had suffered a terrible defeat in June 1967.

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at the hands of the Israeli armed forces, and that the national humiliation had sparked or triggered a general disillusionment with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the towering president of Egypt who had dominated the scene for so long.

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And there was a lot of soul-searching in the aftermath of 1967 for the reasons for the defeat.

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So

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Many blamed the government and military incompetence, and in fact, in February and March of 1968, there were massive student and worker demonstrations against the government, against the administration, against the fact that nobody seemed to have taken any responsibility for the scale of the defeat, and they were suppressed very violently by the armed forces.

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Others were scapegoating the Coptic Christians at the time.

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They're saying, well, there's an explanation for the

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the defeat because our Christian co-citizens were not as enthusiastic, maybe they were even working for the other side.

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So much so that Gamal ibn Nasser, who up to that point had not talked about religion that much at all as a public figure, he went out of his way to make a speech extolling the courage, the bravery of Christian Egyptians in the fighting.

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So he had sensed that there was something really amiss.

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And I suppose what one has to think about now, thinking about the context of this, is the interpretations of that phenomenon and why it's interesting politically.

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The interpretations then, which we largely thank Cynthia Nelson, who was a professor at AUC, an anthropologist, who did the only thing that an anthropologist can do in April,

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1968, was to rush down to the scene and interview as many people as she possibly could.

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And it's thanks to her interviews with ordinary people who are all seeing this vision, this apparition on the Church, that we get some sense of what people were thinking about when they saw it.

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So many saw it as a sign of victory, that victory was coming.

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But after the defeat, the appearance of the Virgin was an omen of victory.

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It gave hope for some.

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Some Copts saw it as a sign that all Muslims in Egypt would soon be converted to Christianity.

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So again, it was a very particular way of looking at it.

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But others, and this is the interesting thing about the 200,000 people or so who used to turn up to see it, they were Muslim and Christian.

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And others saw it as a sign that Egypt had lost its way in terms of religion, and that's why it had been defeated in 67.

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So what the Virgin was doing was reappearing to remind Egypt

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of its religious destiny.

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Interpretation now, thinking back upon it a bit, not just of the people who were involved in it there and then, is of course that the ghost appears at a moment of profound crisis for the state and for the society, a collective experience that coincides with NASA's effort to seize the initiative, to try and seize the initiative after the riots, after the defeat in 67.

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One way he does this is through the 30th of March program, which he introduces just before the Virgin reappears, promising liberalization, promising to destroy the centers of power that was the fiction that was created to explain the defeat, and to reassert the strength of the central state.

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And I would argue very strongly, and this will come back in the talk in one form or another, as another kind of goes, to reassert

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the awe of the state, the dread of the state, as a force to which people should pay unquestioning obedience.

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He was also, as I suggested in terms of his reference to the Copts, he was using religious references much more in his speeches.

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He was stressing the importance of religion in the life of society.

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He was also talking about it as important in the destiny of Egypt and how Egypt was protected by divine forces.

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So again, the appearance of the Virgin didn't do any harm to that view of Egypt.

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It was giving a kind of glow of sanctity.

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And of course, he was trying to stress national unity between Copts and Muslims, a real fear that there would be a sectarian rift in some form or another.

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So many of these, as it were, surrounding reasons, I'm not saying that it was constructed by the state,

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But the state then made use of it in one form or another in quite obvious ways.

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Although, again, and I'm stressing this, the mystery of the appearance was quite interesting because Cynthia Nelson, when she went down as a good anthropologist, sceptical background, she said that she couldn't actually see the Virgin, but what she could see was strange lights all around.

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And the sort of the first blob-like picture that I showed rather demonstrated that in some ways.

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So

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She said that there was something that couldn't be explained so easily, but what people then saw in it, I would argue, comes out of exactly the societal trauma that people were going through in 1967 and 68.

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So it's the power of collective imagination and belief.

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It should also be said, of course, that the Virgin has appeared in several other places in Egypt since then, in Shubra in 1986, in Assut in 2000,

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and in in 2009, there was never, people saw her, but there was never the same outpouring in a sense, the combination of circumstances were not the same and therefore less powerful as a focal point, if you like.

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So having said that, thinking about the politics of that appearance, not the appearance itself, which one, again, has to

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go along with and realize that many people who saw it believed what they saw and believed that they saw something that looked like a virgin.

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What interested me is more about the spectral politics behind this, that in a sense, thinking about more generally ghosts and what do they do politically, what do they add to our understanding of politics and history.

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And what I want to set out in the talk is

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three arguments about spectral politics in the Arab world.

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The first will look at the state and its ghosts.

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The second will look at the phenomenon of ghosting the powerless, and I'll explain what I mean by that.

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And the third will look at the spectres that haunt the present but point to the future, and how that's had a powerful shaping influence at various moments.

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So the state and its ghosts, and I think one has to admit, one of the problems

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or one of the features of the state across the Arab world is that the ghost in the machine of the state is the colonial state.

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It is the colonial state reproduced, its practices, its ethos, its authoritarian, non-consultative, discriminatory and violent.

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And in a sense, that was the colonial state.

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That was the model of the state that was developed.

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It was overdeveloped coercively, underdeveloped in terms of accountability.

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The gap was filled by violence,

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and by the so-called dread of the state, the awe of the state, Hebeta Daula.

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Both aspects, I would argue, have their afterlives.

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Both the ghost of the state itself, of Hebeta Daula, and the ghosts of its victims.

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And those are what I'll be talking about in the first part of the talk.

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The second feature, ghosting the powers, what do I mean by that?

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The ghost in this sense is an outcome of what I call performative ghosting.

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That is, people are turned into ghosts

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through the language used about them.

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Prejudices, racism, sectarianism, misogyny, classifying them as not fully or even at all human.

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And so in a sense, they are ghosted already in one form or another.

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And it's performative because it determines the treatment that those who are so described are then receiving.

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They're treated, they're categorised as less than human, as alive, barely on the margins of life,

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but often with real and terrible consequences.

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And this has been used to justify the violence to which they've been subjected, turning them from ghosted humans into ghosts of the dead.

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The third area that I shall talk about, the final one, is thinking about the spectres haunting the present and pointing to the future.

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That is the ways in which the imagination of

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what the future will look like becomes a spectre that motivates people both to follow it, but also, of course, to act against it.

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And this is taking it from Marx's use of the spectre, the spectre of communism that haunted Europe in the Communist Manifesto that so fascinated Jacques Derrida and

his spectres of Marx, where he developed this notion, and it comes out better in French, as Antonlegy.

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as a kind of play on words, which he loved, but it meant the study of absence.

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The study of things that weren't there, but had a huge effect on the way in which people acted.

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In other words, here the ghost comes from memories of what once was and what might have been and also what might yet be.

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So in the Arab world, you could argue that specters of revolution, nationalist, socialist, Islamist, have haunted the landscapes.

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And these have imaginative power.

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They can move people.

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They can also provoke others into ferociously violent reactions to the future they want to see happen.

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And what I want to try and do is to illustrate these three facets or these three aspects of the spectral of the ghosts across the Middle East, across the Arab world in particular, through a number of cases, not by any means exhaustive cases, since we appear here for a very long time.

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as people say, every part of the world is teeming with ghosts and the Middle East is no exception.

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But what I'm going to start with is the state and its ghosts, the way in which the state is held up as an example, but also has behind it a memory of what it was and what it should be, possibly a false memory.

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But nevertheless, we're looking at the state as a bringer of order and a bringer of violence.

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So

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The ghost of Heba to Dauna, of awe and the dread of the state, is, what's meant by this is awe and unthinking obedience to the state and those who run it, clearly was lost in the uprisings of 2010, 2011.

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It swept across much of the Arab world, overthrew some regimes, and terrified others.

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They realized that in a sense, something they had relied upon, often through the use of violence,

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to keep people in awe of the state no longer worked.

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And what you begin to see, of course, are the ways in which governments seek to invoke a lost authority of the state, repressing those who think it should be otherwise, and of course, eliminating the ghosts of the uprisings at the same time.

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And a fair example of this is in Egypt, where in April 2021, there was the

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what's called the Pharaoh's Golden Parade.

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What it meant was that the remains of 18 kings and four queens were taken from the Cairo Museum, the one on Tahrir Square, to the newly built National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Festad.

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Tahrir Square was cleared of people, as you can see, there's no one in Tahrir except the guards.

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And

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The very people in a sense that celebration was aimed at were cleared out.

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It was also become a parade ground, Tapiria Square, from being the centre of the revolution in 2011.

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And in its place there is now an obelisk of Francis II.

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And that, I showed a picture of the obelisk that was used in the uprisings of 2011, which is an obelisk listing all those who have been killed.

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by the security forces in the course of the revolution.

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That, of course, has vanished into who knows where, but the granite obelisk of Ramses II remains.

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And waiting for the remains of the kings and queens of Egypt was, of course, President Sisi, who had organized the whole thing, and who said,

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at the time, that this spectacle is further proof of the greatness of a unique civilization that extends into the depths of history and, of course, culminates in the rule of himself.

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This was reinforced, of course, by several government videos that were put out with quite well-known Egyptian actors talking about how the ancient civilization that they were invoking was the first model of a strong state based on science and faith.

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Another actor was wheeled out to talk about how the army protects the people and the land.

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And the whole thing, I don't know if anyone has seen this wonderful film that's come out recently by Tarek Saleh called Eagles of the Republic, but it's certainly worth seeing and it's a kind of, you can see where he got those ideas for an actor caught up in the way in which power projects itself.

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And in that sense, the ghost of Hebita Daula haunts all of these efforts in one form or another.

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At the same time, at the museum, President Sisi was presented with a golden statue of King Tutankhamun, and the person presenting it underlined the point, saying that he was presenting it because it shows Tutankhamun

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striving to destroy evil in order to found a strong state.

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So you could say it's a bit obvious what's being, right, in fact actually it's to become hunting ducks, but I mean that's another matter, but the impression given is something else.

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So in any way, pointed by this loss of authority, I would argue, the regime is presenting itself as reviving a strong state through the army and bringing it back from the brink of extinction, introducing new glories,

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and erasing any alternatives to the current regime.

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Not all Egyptians agreed with that, as you can see from this rather disturbing cartoon picture by Ganzia, where the slogan on each of them, the army protected the revolution, of course, are all people who are either killed or mutilated by the Egyptian armed forces during the course of the revolution.

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So in a sense, it wasn't the

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the one story that was coming out to try and revive the ghost, as it were, of Haybud al-Dawla wasn't convincing everyone by any means.

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But there was another place, you could argue, that was also disturbed by, despite it having quite a successful, some would argue, revolution, which was Tunisia.

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But again, there was a certain class also traumatized in Tunisia by the overthrow of the regime,

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of Ben Ali and the way it was done.

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And again, one could argue a similar impulse to reassert the awe of the state once again.

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It was presided over by then President Veji Tai Sevsi, who had been elected in 2014, and he did it not by the military means that Assisi had used, but rather to try and

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reenact or summon up the ghost of President Bourguiba, who was said to be the founding figure of, and certainly a dominant figure, of the Tunisian state.

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What the Tunisian historian Khamar Bandana has called this ever-present giant, this still living phantom, was called into existence.

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And

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Sepsi did this in a number of ways.

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He dressed like Gurgiba.

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He was a minister for a new, so he used the same glasses as Gurgiba.

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He sometimes used the same mannerisms.

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He sometimes used the same expressions.

00:30:22 Speaker 2

He even when he was condemning a series of riots, he stood at the same desk as the one used by Gurgiba when he was condemning the bread riots of 1983.

00:30:33 Speaker 2

So there was a sense in which

00:30:36 Speaker 2

As one of the enthusiasts said, Bourguibism has returned in strength.

00:30:41 Speaker 2

It wasn't simply nostalgia.

00:30:44 Speaker 2

It was a sense of moral compulsion.

00:30:47 Speaker 2

And one of the things in which he helped to do this was to reinsert, reinstall these equestrian statues of Bourguiba that had been made during Bourguiba's lifetime, but removed hastily after the Ben-Ani coup when Bourguiba was deposed.

00:31:03 Speaker 2

And they hadn't been melted down, but they were put in far places, and they were now reinserted into the central squares of a number of Tunisian cities.

00:31:14 Speaker 2

But the point is that there was an attempt to recapture what was said to be the greatness of Bourguiba at the time.

00:31:21 Speaker 2

That is a sense of moral compulsion, but also a sense that Tunisia had lost something in losing Bourguiba.

00:31:30 Speaker 2

It was captured, the mixed results of this are captured by a film by Hisham bin Amar called The Return, in which he interviews 2 ordinary Tunisians as they watch the statue being reinstalled in Afnu Bogiba, and they are far from flattering.

00:31:45 Speaker 2

Some are enthusiastic, but obviously, like anyone, there are a whole mixture of views.

00:31:50 Speaker 2

The one on the right uses the same image, but of course it comes from this rather one-sided

00:31:59 Speaker 2

website called Bourguibism Will Never Die.

00:32:03 Speaker 2

And what I like is the quotation from Bourguiba at the top where if Bourguiba is mortal, Bourguibism remains forever.

00:32:12 Speaker 2

I like the if Bourguiba is mortal because some would say he had questions about that too.

00:32:18 Speaker 2

So the return of the ghost is an important part of it, but you don't return the ghost alone.

00:32:27 Speaker 2

the ghost comes with other ghosts.

00:32:29 Speaker 2

And this is the point I'm trying to make, that in a sense, Sefsi was trying to recreate Heba Dadar of the Dreg the State, but of course what it did was also bring back the ghosts of those who had been the victims of the state.

00:32:42 Speaker 2

And Hisham also wrote this, produced this very moving and grim film, Memoir Noir, the Black Memory, of the torture and imprisonment of the leftists in Tunisia under Bourguiba.

00:32:55 Speaker 2

So

00:32:56 Speaker 2

What I would describe as a battle of the ghosts ensued in Tunisia, provoked by the elite's attempt to resurrect Goriba in one form or another, the myth woven around the Hebet of Dawla, and the notion that the state was a beneficent force.

00:33:17 Speaker 2

And this was done in various ways in Tunisia.

00:33:20 Speaker 2

These are a project that stationed images of the martyrs

00:33:25 Speaker 2

in different places around the Tunisian capital to remind people that actually Hebe de Doula has its price.

00:33:34 Speaker 2

The price seen by the persecution of the leftists, but also by those who were killed during the revolution.

00:33:40 Speaker 2

So there was a sense in which the people were reminded of the pain and the violence and the deaths caused by the attempt to construct the Hebe de Doula.

00:33:53 Speaker 2

It was also, in a sense, haunting the members of parliament and others as the relatives of those who'd been killed demonstrate with their portraits, with their pictures in one form or another.

00:34:05 Speaker 2

And you could argue that at the same time, this narrative, not the census narrative, was being reinforced by the 2014 to 2019, there was a Truth and Dignity Commission

00:34:21 Speaker 2

sitting in Tunisia, which was seeking to explore the human rights abuses, not just of the previous regime, but of Bourguiba's regime as well.

00:34:31 Speaker 2

Some would argue it was an impossible task, and in many ways it was a flawed procedure.

00:34:35 Speaker 2

But nevertheless, what it meant was that on television, very often, there were harrowing public testimonies of those who had suffered under Bourguiba's rule at the very moment when Essebzi was trying to invoke his spirit and to bolster his own political authority.

00:34:51 Speaker 2

It was in a sense a counterpoint to Assebsi's portrayal of Bourguiba and what Bourguibaism meant, the cruel realities of the state, where Assebsi himself, as Director of National Security and Minister of Interior in the 1960s, was complicit.

00:35:07 Speaker 2

So again, a very different picture emerging.

00:35:11 Speaker 2

Unsurprisingly, Assebsi hated the sessions of the Truth and Dignity Commission and

00:35:19 Speaker 2

precisely because it did summon the ghosts of a past of those who'd been violated from the state, by the state and erased from its history.

00:35:27 Speaker 2

So the image that emerged was much closer to the vision, the versions of Tunisia's past and present coming from below in the process and outrage of the families of the victims of state violence.

00:35:40 Speaker 2

These were, in many ways, the specters that haunted Tunisia after the revolution, despite the efforts of those in power to, as it were, create a rather more beneficent phantom in Hyper Dawla.

00:35:55 Speaker 2

But equally, another similar set of struggles are continuing in a place where it wasn't the victims of state violence, but the victims of non-state violence.

00:36:09 Speaker 2

that came to the forefront in many ways.

00:36:12 Speaker 2

So in many ways, a similar spectral battle as happened in Tunisia was happening in Lebanon, where it wasn't the state so much as the non-state that had, for the years of

the civil war, and after sometimes as well, killed and kidnapped and disappeared people.

00:36:37 Speaker 2

So the fear here in Lebanon was slightly different from that in the other countries, is that the fear that the ghosts of the murdered and of the disappeared will re-emerge as activists in some form, if not addressed.

00:36:50 Speaker 2

So they'll push people into action to take revenge, leading to a revival of cycles of violence.

00:36:56 Speaker 2

And 2 very different approaches to memory and the ghosts of the civil war began to emerge.

00:37:02 Speaker 2

in Lebanon.

00:37:03 Speaker 2

One was official amnesia, state-led forgetting, amnesties, and amnesia, partly because so many of those responsible for the worst of the atrocities were still around in positions of power, but also partly because some believed that by not remembering, it would be a better way of ensuring social peace than by otherwise bringing back these memories.

00:37:28 Speaker 2

And of course, there was a tendency to blame everything on outsiders.

00:37:33 Speaker 2

All Lebanese were victims, and this was all constructed by outsiders.

00:37:36 Speaker 2

But there was another form of, if there was official amnesia, there was unofficial remembrance, a rich vein of partisan memorialization of martyrs, trauma, and conflict from below, from social and political organizations, neighborhoods, associations, families.

00:37:54 Speaker 2

And what they did was produce distinct and haunted versions of the violence of the civil war.

00:38:00 Speaker 2

And many feel that both these processes, both the official amnesia from the top and the unofficial but very lively remembering from below, are dangerous and likely to summon the ghosts of the dead to repeat the horrors of the civil war.

00:38:17 Speaker 2

And what they want to do is to make Lebanese come to terms with the violence of those years, hoping to exorcise thereby the ghosts of the civil war.

00:38:29 Speaker 2

Rassan Halwani has done an extraordinary film called *The Arrays, The Ascent of the Invisible*, where he peels, literally peels, the posters of the walls of Beirut, finding underneath it the pictures of the disappeared as they have aged, as it were, by having things laid on top of them.

00:38:50 Speaker 2

And it's a very moving film, but it was to try and exactly mobilize people around that.

00:38:55 Speaker 2

Another activist, sadly, killed himself in February 21, 2021, was Lachman Slim, who founded the Uman Documentation and Research Organization, and talked about the mass graves and tried to campaign for the discovery of the mass graves that litter the Lebanese countryside.

00:39:18 Speaker 2

There are estimated to be some like 400 mass graves across Lebanon.

00:39:23 Speaker 2

and the government has yet to give any permission for them to be officially unearthed, precisely because of the fear of the potency of the ghosts that will come back with them.

00:39:34 Speaker 2

And therefore, in some senses, it becomes, in Lebanon, a much more urgent case, a sense of urgency.

00:39:41 Speaker 2

The ghosts of the dead surround them, and the fear is that they will take their revenge in some form.

00:39:48 Speaker 2

So these, in a sense, are looking at

00:39:51 Speaker 2

various aspects of the ghosts of the dead and who acts for them and what they mean in the politics of Egypt, of Tunisia and of Lebanon.

00:40:02 Speaker 2

But I want to now turn to the other aspect of the talk, which is the ghosts of what I call the ghosted, another kind of spectral politics.

00:40:10 Speaker 2

And these are not the ghosts of the dead, but the ghosts of the not yet dead.

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And what I mean by that

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is ghosts here become the people who have been ghosted by the powerful and the privileged.

00:40:25 Speaker 2

That is the marginalized, the subaltern, the unconsidered.

00:40:29 Speaker 2

The powerful look through them, they do not see them as human, and so they deprive them of any rights they might have had as fully human.

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They're ghosts, in other words, that are not simply the reminders of the dead, but symptoms of a certain kind of power that uses violence with impunity,

00:40:46 Speaker 2

and opens the way for what I might call double ghosting.

00:40:50 Speaker 2

You kill those you who have already ghosted because they are already ghosts.

00:40:55 Speaker 2

Linked to something equally insidious and disturbing that has been identified by a writer called Chris Manjapra, which he calls the ghost line, which is the division between

those who are acknowledged as present, fully human, and those who are designated as society's present absences.

00:41:16 Speaker 2

the half human.

00:41:17 Speaker 2

The ghost line, to ghost line and to ghost line people's history, is to systematically ignore the meaning of their collective experience generation after generation.

00:41:26 Speaker 2

And ghost lining becomes the practice of unseeing what has been taken from them and unhearing their historical demands for reparative justice.

00:41:35 Speaker 2

And there's one place in which that becomes a very real and terrible phenomenon, that is in Palestine.

00:41:44 Speaker 2

And

00:41:45 Speaker 2

ghosting Palestine's historical presence and the ghosts of the map that come part of it.

00:41:51 Speaker 2

Raja Shahadi, in *Palestinian Walks*, observed very relevantly that Palestine had been colonised by the Western imagination long before the British mandate.

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What had happened was biblical imagination and the Orientalist gaze had looked through

00:42:09 Speaker 2

or didn't see the actual inhabitants of Palestine and turned them into ghosts in someone else's landscape.

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Most infamously, it was expressed in the early 19th century Christian Zionists saying, a people without a country and a country without a people, which became a slogan taken up by 19th century Zionists of a land without a people for a people without a land, because the people had been ghosted in many senses.

00:42:35 Speaker 2

And it's also echoed in the wording of the Balfour Declaration,

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where the Palestinians are referred to simply as the non-Jewish communities of Palestine.

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More disturbingly, as recently as 2024-25, another famous British institution, the British Museum, continues this tradition of ghosting the Palestinians by removing Palestine from the labels in its panels in its Levant Gallery, which existed up to 24 and disappears thereafter.

00:43:08 Speaker 2

So again, ghosting becomes this way of denying existence.

00:43:12 Speaker 2

Google, when you Google Palestine on the map, there is no Palestine there.

00:43:17 Speaker 2

There's West Bank and Gaza, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt and Syria.

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But they do put a little bit from Wikipedia on the left, as it were, to sour their conscience.

00:43:27 Speaker 2

But curiously, they don't find it necessary to put Palestine on the map itself.

00:43:31 Speaker 2

So the ghosting of the map of Palestine, and the point about this is that the ghosting of the map is not just

00:43:37 Speaker 2

a feature.

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It actually has real material effects.

00:43:42 Speaker 2

So that's why I call this form of ghosting a performative element.

00:43:47 Speaker 2

The material outcome in 1947-48 for the inhabitants of that non-placed Palestine was, of course, obvious in the Nakba that began in '47, leading to 700,000 Palestinians fleeing the country and being driven out.

00:44:03 Speaker 2

and 400 villages destroyed.

00:44:06 Speaker 2

So there's a sense in which it's not just that you don't see them, you, as it were, act as if you don't see them and they are no longer seen in one form.

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But then the same thing happens even in the occupied territories and in Israel itself.

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In this example in the Negev, 36

00:44:28 Speaker 2

existing but unrecognized Palestinian villages are marked there, which never appear on any Google map and never appear anywhere else.

00:44:37 Speaker 2

But more importantly, for the inhabitants of those villages, because they're not officially recognized by the Israeli authorities, they're denied building permits, lack basic services, and are subjected to the potential forcible transfer of the populations under the various plans that the Israeli governments have come up with.

00:44:57 Speaker 2

But

00:44:59 Speaker 2

Ghosting the Palestinians and the consequences of that ghosting has been possibly most notably obvious in the Gaza genocide, a grim example of what you do, what happens when you ghost a population.

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In other words, as people have detailed, the language of dehumanization by Israeli officials and the military after October the 23rd, after the 2023 attacks,

00:45:27 Speaker 2

associated with mass violence against Palestinians.

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Amnesty International has cataloged the number of instances in which senior officials and others and members of Knesset since 7th of October 2023 have used language that dehumanizes the Palestinians or calls for or justifies genocidal acts against them.

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And the Israeli historian, Viv Modified, has done it from the other direction, which is looking at the ways in which

00:45:57 Speaker 2

the dehumanization of Palestinians is pervasive and obvious in the hundreds of images and videos uploaded, videos uploaded to social media, often by members of the Israeli armed forces.

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So ghosting is politically performative in that the use of language licenses the devastating use of violence.

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And most obviously in Gaza since 2023, but also before that, from 2008 onwards,

00:46:23 Speaker 2

Thousands of Palestinians in Gaza were killed.

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In the occupied West Bank, the violence continues.

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Since 2020, Israeli courts have not handed down any jail sentences for Jewish settlers who killed Palestinians.

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In the period between 2023, October, and May 2025, over 1,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed either by settlers, by the armed forces, by the police, often in combination with each other.

00:46:54 Speaker 2

Equally, shockingly for some people, but in a sense, in line with the ghost lining that I've been talking about, the death penalty has been introduced in Israel for Palestinians only, convicted by military courts of killing an Israeli.

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Well, there's the ghost line in operation, clearly.

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And equally, it's not just the killing, it's the abuse.

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So that's why in April, the UN blacklist for sexual

00:47:23 Speaker 2

violence and conflict, Israel was added to that for their treatment of Palestinian men and women from Gaza and the West Bank.

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And I would argue that happens precisely as a result of ghosting that population already in one form or another.

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There's another aspect of ghosting, which is something that's not certainly a feature of the Arab world and the Middle East,

00:47:53 Speaker 2

which is a grim feature of ghosting evidence that is represented by the nature of the ghost houses.

00:48:02 Speaker 2

And the ghost houses are effectively sites where you can mistreat people who have no rights, without hope, treating them as you wish, by whatever violence you want to deploy.

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It was in Sudan that it was first used, the ghost houses.

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under the rule of Hassan Turabi and Omar Bashir in the 1990s.

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But equally, you see how that actually operates.

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These are places that people were detained, disappeared to, tortured in, never emerged from, sometimes did, sometimes didn't.

00:48:38 Speaker 2

There's a very brave and luckily surviving prisoner, Dr.

00:48:41 Speaker 2

Mohammed Al-Ghadi, who in 2014

00:48:44 Speaker 2

was detained and dragged off to one of these ghost houses in Khartoum and was mocked.

00:48:52 Speaker 2

He recalls being mocked by his captors who told him, the president has given us free rein because you no longer exist.

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And it was because at that very moment, President Omar Bashir was going on television denying that ghost houses existed in Sudan and that there were any political prisoners

00:49:11 Speaker 2

or torture being implemented.

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So in a sense, it became something that was a feature of Sudanese politics and the way in which it was administered.

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It was very much in evidence in 2018-19 and the overthrow of Mahomed Bashir, and it's been in evidence since as well.

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Notoriously, it was clearly a key part of the administration of Assad Syria, the two Assad Syria.

00:49:42 Speaker 2

the notorious prisoner of Saint Naya, and which you saw very harrowing scenes after the overthrow of Assad, as people sought desperately some trace of relatives who had disappeared inside it.

00:49:53 Speaker 2

In Israel, there's a bizarre facility called 1391, which itself has been ghosted, in the sense it's been airbrushed from any satellite pictures, and it's been removed from any maps, but is actually

00:50:09 Speaker 2

based in one of the old, appropriately, Tegar forts built by the British in the 1930s to suppress the Palestinian revolt.

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Again, it's a ghost house, but has itself been ghosted to pretend it doesn't exist.

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Equally in Libya, there are centres set up to detain the elegance that EU is paying Libya to detain.

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And of course,

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with the eruption of the war on terror, so-called, the USA became very adept at these what were called black sites of ghost houses where people could be treated as they wished to treat them.

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The most startling image of one of those is, of course, from Abu Ghraib after the invasion occupation of Iraq, where the Americans and others were

00:51:05 Speaker 2

busy, as it were, detaining and terrifying people without rights at all.

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So they were ghosted in that sense.

00:51:13 Speaker 2

You could treat them as ghosts.

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And the British ran other Camp Nama with the Americans near the airport in Baghdad, and other ghost sites have been used by the CIA in conjunction with the Jordanian authorities, with the Moroccan authorities.

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across parts of the region.

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And you could argue that Guantanamo Bay itself is like a giant ghost site in which it's not in the Middle East, but of course, many of its detainees come from the region itself.

00:51:43 Speaker 2

So that's, in a sense, one aspect that I thought was worth bringing out, because it is about how people are ghosted and what happens when you ghost them.

00:51:54 Speaker 2

They become ghosts and you feel you have a license to make them such.

00:51:58 Speaker 2

Finally,

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there's the question of the spectres that haunt the present for future revolutions.

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This is the ones that so fascinated Marx and others.

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And what one looks like, so these four, these are not so much spectres of the dead, but sometimes they're spectres of ideas that have passed, but spectres who think their ideas are yet to be implemented in one form or another.

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So you have the times of

00:52:29 Speaker 2

upheaval, times of uncertainty.

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A spectre is something that acts without physically existing, but its impact can be seen in the power of the nationalist imagination, but also in socialist or Islamist imaginations, evidence at different times and places in the Arab world.

00:52:47 Speaker 2

And I'll just mention three spectres that have haunted the Arab world at various times.

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The first,

00:52:57 Speaker 2

is quite appropriately for the Antonius lecture, is Arab nationalism.

00:53:03 Speaker 2

And that is the, for many people, the spectre of the Arab relation, the spectre of Arab nationalism was embodied by Nasser of Egypt, haunted the political imagination and the political formations across the Arab world for much of the 20th century, but also came up against other spectres, sometimes in a fight to the death, as I know from my work on Iraq, where

00:53:26 Speaker 2

Arab nationalism encounters both Iraqism and Kurdish nationalism as forms of perspectives that haunt it in one way or another.

00:53:36 Speaker 2

Interestingly, reading George Antonius again, as I felt I should, having been invited to give a lecture in his name, and also because the notion of the Arab awakening has a kind of spectral quality to it.

00:53:49 Speaker 2

It's very much of the period when the idea was that the nation was sleeping

00:53:55 Speaker 2

The nation was in suspended animation and what it needed was to be brought back to life in some form or another.

00:54:02 Speaker 2

So George Antonius writes very poetically about how the nation can be reawakened by the Arabic language.

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He talks about the Arab national movement over 40 years, born slowly towards its destiny on the wings of a Renaissance literature.

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which has a rather wonderful ring to it.

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But of course, it has another facet in politics, which was the Ba'ath party, which was the Hezbollah Ba'ath, founded by one of the founders, Michel Aflac, is the party of the Arab Renaissance or the Arab Party of Resurrection, resurrecting the Arab spirit.

00:54:44 Speaker 2

And again, one might argue that the Ba'athist spectre haunted

00:54:48 Speaker 2

the Arab world for the last part of the 20th century, a spectre with force and compulsion that was very real and sometimes produced a very lethal politics across the region in one form or other.

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For some, it evoked that ethereal spectre of an Arab nation.

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For others, more disillusioned with it, another kind of ghost appeared.

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This is particularly the case of

00:55:18 Speaker 2

a rather disillusioned Jordanian Baathist called Munifa Razaz, who said in his memoirs, aptly named The Bitter Experience, he said, we thought we were making a new Arab man, but all we did was to revive the Mamluks.

00:55:34 Speaker 2

So in a sense, having become so disillusioned by military politics.

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But of course, the Mamluks snive on, you could argue.

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So these are interesting how aspects of that Baathi, whatever it was, aspect

00:55:48 Speaker 2

haunts Jordan still.

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These are shots from a Jordanian taxi, from a Jordanian phone cover.

00:55:54 Speaker 2

And when asked about why Saddam Hussein on these images, and many of the reasons are, in a sense, oh, because he was the one who stood up to Israel.

00:56:06 Speaker 2

He's the one who stood up to America.

00:56:07 Speaker 2

He's the one who represented the best of the Arab nations.

00:56:11 Speaker 2

These were

00:56:11 Speaker 2

notably people living outside Iraq, of course, but in a sense it's often the way.

00:56:17 Speaker 2

So the sense in which the specter of the Arab nation lives on as a specter, but it lives on personified in some rather curious ways as well.

00:56:27 Speaker 2

But there's another kind of specter too, which is the specter of Islamism or of political Islam.

00:56:32 Speaker 2

From 1970s onwards, disillusionment with pan-Arabism, with Arab socialism, an increasing

00:56:39 Speaker 2

popularity across the Arab world of what was called the Islamic alternative, takes on the coloration of local contexts in the Arab world and draws on different memories, different sources and authorities, but using them to fashion resistance to unjust power.

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A number of ghosts are recalled in the business of doing that, particularly, of course, for Hamas, Ezzeddine of Qassam brigades.

00:57:02 Speaker 2

He was the leader of Palestinian, or inspirer of Palestinian resistance against the British.

00:57:07 Speaker 2

and the Zionists in the 1930s and was killed by British armed forces in 1935.

00:57:13 Speaker 2

And Hassan al-Banna, who was the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and was murdered by the Egyptian government in 1949.

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So there are plenty of ghosts from the past to, as it were, animate that to give flesh to the spectre that emerges.

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But often what's interesting is the spectre that emerges

00:57:34 Speaker 2

begins to haunt established powers across the Arab world and beyond.

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And often it's a composite spectre of anyone looking down the Google search on the bookshelves and seeing the vast number of books on jihadism, somewhat uncritically written, some very good, some not so good.

00:57:54 Speaker 2

But it becomes a composite spectre that spooks the Western powers and haunted by the ghosts of pan-Islamism, of a kind of rather early

00:58:03 Speaker 2

early 20th century view.

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It's also, of course, used by a number of major regional allies of the West to gloss over the local histories of state violence and injustice and resistance that found a voice in Islamism.

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But once stripped of their spectral quality, they're shown to be rather more mundane.

00:58:22 Speaker 2

And of course, as we know from the behaviour of many of the members of units such as these, their very violent actions have been far from spectral.

00:58:32 Speaker 2

So the spectre here has been rather like the spectre of Bolshevism in the early 20th century, invoked sometimes to permit censorship, sometimes to permit repression.

00:58:46 Speaker 2

Finally, there's another kind of spectre which emerged in the sense that was why the Hebd al-Dawla was encouraged to counter it, was the spectre of the Arab left or what it seemed to represent.

00:59:01 Speaker 2

in one form or another.

00:59:02 Speaker 2

And you see that in the uprisings of 2010, 2011.

00:59:08 Speaker 2

In Egypt, for instance, where people have done some interesting work, Sarasalem, Ar-Saleh have done really interesting work on looking at the songs, the verses, the ideas, the slogans that emerged in Tahrir Square and elsewhere.

00:59:24 Speaker 2

And what they found in them was often

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memories of past struggles.

00:59:28 Speaker 2

So in a sense, the ghost, they would argue, of past struggles, including Nasserism.

00:59:34 Speaker 2

As he's saying, he makes his appearance, Gamal Abdel Nasser, in Taqir Square on Samar's hat.

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And in a sense, you see that also in the Tishrine movement in Iraq that emerged in October 2019, lasted until March 2020.

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And what the people demonstrating there were asking for was an end to corruption and an end to the mahasasa system.

01:00:02 Speaker 2

And the mahasa system is the system of the allocation of goods, profits, of government offices on the basis of sectarian identity or ethnic identity.

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And they were demanding an end to that.

01:00:16 Speaker 2

But what they were threatening that establishment of Iraq with was perhaps the most threatening specter of all.

01:00:22 Speaker 2

This is one of the slogans that they used in the Tishreen movement, which is, I'm taking back my rights.

01:00:29 Speaker 2

The language of rights is, of course, corrosive of anything that looks like the mohassassa and privileged systems of one form or another.

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Of course, that would explain why the vicious reaction took place in 2020.

01:00:45 Speaker 2

1921, over 1,000 protestors were killed, 26,000 were injured, and the killings went on in the aftermath.

01:00:54 Speaker 2

The movement failed largely because of the intractability of the system.

01:00:59 Speaker 2

And as you can see from this, this is the site of where, a few years later, where the demonstrators of Tishrin would gather.

01:01:09 Speaker 2

And this is now organized by the Hashtah Shahabi, by the

01:01:14 Speaker 2

government-supported militias to commemorate the deaths of Qasem Soleimani and Mohandis.

01:01:22 Speaker 2

So in a sense, it becomes, you can tell who won in that.

01:01:26 Speaker 2

But did they win?

01:01:27 Speaker 2

And that's the question which I suppose leaves one with an interesting idea about the specter for the future that might haunt the Middle East.

01:01:39 Speaker 2

There's a prospect, in a sense, of a permanent

01:01:43 Speaker 2

protest alongside persistent state failure.

01:01:47 Speaker 2

And interestingly, the former finance minister, Ali Alawi, who resigned in 2022, partly as a result of the outrageous behavior of some of his colleagues, in his resignation letter, he portrays the Iraqi state as a ghost in some ways when he says it exists in form but not in substance and can recreate itself despite its numerous contradictions.

01:02:13 Speaker 2

So that seems to be a pretty good description of a ghost.

01:02:17 Speaker 2

The state of Iraq has become a kind of ghost state.

01:02:20 Speaker 2

The real power lies elsewhere.

01:02:23 Speaker 2

So what conclusions can I come to after that rather speedy tour around the spectral landscapes of the Middle East?

01:02:32 Speaker 2

Well,

01:02:33 Speaker 2

It's not in the character of spectral politics to come to conclusions, as you will have gathered.

01:02:38 Speaker 2

They're always open-ended, but there are four, I think, observations or points that I think I'd like to just emphasize before I finish.

01:02:48 Speaker 2

One is, of course, politically, ghosts and the spectres that they invoke are unfinished legacies.

01:02:56 Speaker 2

They're unfinished in the sense that William Faulkner, who coined the wonderful phrase,

01:03:02 Speaker 2

The past is never dead.

01:03:03 Speaker 2

It's not even past.

01:03:05 Speaker 2

And in politics, it's kept alive by conflicts over versions of the past and whose past counts.

01:03:12 Speaker 2

History suggests that what is repressed does not disappear.

01:03:16 Speaker 2

It lingers at the edges of consciousness waiting to return.

01:03:19 Speaker 2

And one saw that in various moments in 2010 and 11.

01:03:24 Speaker 2

And these unfinished legacies suggest no neat endings, no conclusions, but a constant possibility

01:03:31 Speaker 2

of return.

01:03:32 Speaker 2

So I think one always has to bear that in mind, that there is always a ghost, a spectre, waiting to return.

01:03:37 Speaker 2

And the question is, what are the conditions that allow that to happen, even if not in the same form?

01:03:43 Speaker 2

The second is that, to ask the question about the politics and the timing of ghosts' appearance, as I asked right at the beginning of the lecture with the Lady of Zaytun, they return, when is the veil between the living and the dead at its thinnest?

01:04:00 Speaker 2

Now, some

01:04:01 Speaker 2

cultures believe it happens at a particular time of year, like 31st of October, 1st of November.

01:04:06 Speaker 2

For Celtic cultures, that's when the veil between the living and the dead is at its thinnest.

01:04:11 Speaker 2

But in politics, the wonder about politics is that actually it can be at any time of year.

01:04:17 Speaker 2

In politics, there's always an open season for ghosts.

01:04:20 Speaker 2

The triggers for the appearance of ghosts, and I think one's seen that in some of these examples here, are violence, trauma, state crisis and war, but also

01:04:30 Speaker 2

a breaking of the silence, new political order, revisionist histories, and a repetition of intolerable conditions that bring back the memories and return of those who have suffered.

01:04:42 Speaker 2

So in a sense, one can begin to see why and the conditions that lead to the repetition that have been seen as the re-emergence of the ghosts of the past.

01:04:54 Speaker 2

Third point I think we're thinking about is, are the methods of evoking political ghosts?

01:05:00 Speaker 2

And the features, in other words, can evoke memory and provoke a powerful response.

01:05:04 Speaker 2

Well, there's clearly, as I said, repetition of conditions, but there's also translation and recreation and reanimation in some ways for past trauma through literary texts, through memoirs, through creative non-fiction, through visual art and film and music.

01:05:22 Speaker 2

I'm not going to be talking about that.

01:05:23 Speaker 2

There'll be another three hours you'll be here.

01:05:25 Speaker 2

But clearly it's a fascinating and interesting and important area of how it is that the creative arts can bring back the ghosts of the dead, not just as a picturesque addendum, but as people, as beings that move others and then move them possibly to violence or do something that they wish to have done in their lives.

01:05:49 Speaker 2

So what they do is create presence.

01:05:51 Speaker 2

It's the sort of negative of the ghosting apparatus that has been so successful in erasing people and their rights from history.

01:06:00 Speaker 2

So to create presence, to recall the ghost, the memory, is an act of defiance and resistance in many ways against erasure.

01:06:07 Speaker 2

And transmigration from the page, the film, and memory to the spectral being creates a presence.

01:06:13 Speaker 2

So ghosts don't exist as aliens, I would argue, but as interior beings of the political imagination.

01:06:19 Speaker 2

and that is where their power lies.

01:06:22 Speaker 2

Finally, the other point to be made is that ghosts and their political waywardness are notorious, especially when trying to recruit them for a particular political project.

01:06:32 Speaker 2

Ghosts can be tricksters.

01:06:34 Speaker 2

Like the memories they embody, they may also embody a spirit of deception, of trying to conceal things, of rewriting history, of trying to shift and deflect great blame.

01:06:46 Speaker 2

And as with all human narratives,

01:06:48 Speaker 2

there's a potential for other versions of reality.

01:06:50 Speaker 2

So ghostly interlocutors may reflect the beliefs, concerns and values of those who perceive them, but this doesn't deny their power collectively, like nationalism itself.

01:07:00 Speaker 2

So all of this, I would argue, points to the indeterminacy of phantoms and ghosts, but also their value in diagnosing political struggle and in pinpointing the effects of unequal power.

01:07:32 Eugene Rogan

It would be understatement, Charles, to say that you lived up to the challenge.

01:07:36 Eugene Rogan

And without wanting to gild lilies or just flatter you, I think many of us take to a public lecture with the spirit of synthesis in mind.

01:07:48 Eugene Rogan

We kind of sum up things that are already out there.

01:07:52 Eugene Rogan

What I so appreciated in your lecture is the

01:07:55 Eugene Rogan

shocking originality of the framework you've given us.

01:07:58 Eugene Rogan

I confess that when I saw your title, it was an indulgence because I didn't know what you were on about with a reference to spectral politics.

01:08:08 Eugene Rogan

And yet what you have unfolded for us is a framework to be thinking about the past, the presence, the exercise of power, the role of the state, the place of society, what creative arts contribute to that dynamic in ways

01:08:23 Eugene Rogan

that we'll all be talking about.

01:08:25 Eugene Rogan

I mean, I can just hear the way we're all going to be bringing ghosts into what we talk about now because of what you provoked.

01:08:30 Eugene Rogan

And things change around here.

01:08:33 Eugene Rogan

And the ghosts of the Antonius's past, we're all spared a Q&A.

01:08:39 Eugene Rogan

But we will allow questions now.

01:08:42 Eugene Rogan

And I'm going to get us started.

01:08:44 Eugene Rogan

And then as soon as we're done with questions, there is a reception to go to.

01:08:47 Eugene Rogan

So don't let your questions go on forever.

01:08:50 Eugene Rogan

But I'll ask you first one to give you a moment to compose your ideas of what you'd like to ask our illustrious speaker.

01:08:57 Eugene Rogan

What I was struck with is the notion of ghost lines that you illustrate.

01:09:01 Eugene Rogan

And you talk about them more in sociological terms as dividing the fearful state and the exercise of abuse and violence on its marginal subjects.

01:09:12 Eugene Rogan

that one is on one side of the other of ghost lines.

01:09:15 Eugene Rogan

We had Jost Tilterman here a couple of weeks ago talking about a novel he's written based on his research into Anfal.

01:09:22 Eugene Rogan

He's novelized the experience.

01:09:24 Eugene Rogan

And Anfal seems to me to be an example of a ghost line that's two-dimensional, that it separated the relationship between the Baathist state of Saddam and the Kurdish community that he felt he could act on in that way and ghost, quite literally murder in a genocidal campaign.

01:09:42 Eugene Rogan

but also where you could almost trace a geographical line.

01:09:46 Eugene Rogan

And there was a line beyond which the state couldn't go or within which it operated while it could, that is part of the Kurdish community's reaction or experience of Anfal when it was practiced against them, and then whereas through a no-fly zone, it had to stop.

01:10:04 Eugene Rogan

And I just, I wonder whether there's more to be said about Iraq as a particular case study.

01:10:10 Eugene Rogan

of the operation of ghost lines.

01:10:12 Eugene Rogan

One could do the same in the South with the Shiite communities in response to their uprising as well.

01:10:18 Eugene Rogan

Can we make a geographic boundary out of ghost lines as well as the sociological one that you outlined for us?

01:10:24 Speaker 2

No, I think that's extraordinarily interesting because in some ways what I was trying to capture in ghost lines is what you've identified, which is people beyond that limit

01:10:34 Speaker 2

don't count, and therefore I can do whatever I want to them.

01:10:37 Speaker 2

So it could be a geographical line.

01:10:42 Speaker 2

It may be originally not a geographical line.

01:10:45 Speaker 2

It may be an ethnic or a sectarian or a class or a gender-based line, but you push people beyond that boundary so suddenly you can treat them elsewhere.

01:10:54 Speaker 2

So you could argue that the ghost houses that I was talking about are the creation of

01:11:00 Speaker 2

those who want to make sure that those people who have now been ghosted are brought together and can be treated as well.

01:11:07 Speaker 2

Concentration camps are a clear example of geographical boundary in that sense.

01:11:13 Speaker 2

In the Iraqi case, I think there are a number of areas, sort of physical areas, where the ghost line, as it were, the geographical layout coincides with prejudices,

01:11:28 Speaker 2

degrading views of people.

01:11:31 Speaker 2

You could see it in the treatment of the Marsh Arabs.

01:11:34 Speaker 2

The Marsh Arabs had for centuries or dozens of years, certainly in official Iraqi communication, had been denigrated as not properly Muslim, not racially pure, not, I mean, everything was thrown at them.

01:11:50 Speaker 2

And of course, what that meant is that when it came to see them as an inconvenient group of people who were harboring

01:11:58 Speaker 2

guerrillas or they were on the border with Iran, you could do what you wanted with them.

01:12:01 Speaker 2

And they did, horrendously.

01:12:03 Speaker 2

I mean, one, the Anfal, thank God, has been well publicized now, but in a sense, the appalling violence committed against the Marsh Arabs over

01:12:15 Speaker 2

decades.

01:12:16 Speaker 2

This is before the actual horrors of the Iran-Iraq War was something.

01:12:22 Speaker 2

And so, yes, you're right.

01:12:23 Speaker 2

I think in the Kurdish areas, and it depended again, it's the intersection of not just being Kurdish, what class you belong to, which area you lived in.

01:12:34 Speaker 2

And so in a sense, you could then be categorized as a real person.

01:12:41 Speaker 2

if you had the right family connections, but not if you didn't.

01:12:45 Speaker 2

And then you could do anything you wanted to them.

01:12:47 Eugene Rogan

Or these people, the Jash, who were the collaborators with the state acting against.

01:12:52 Eugene Rogan

He called the book *The Resurrected*, which evokes your ghost.

01:12:56 Speaker 2

Yeah, no, absolutely.

01:12:57 Eugene Rogan

It's a very spectral notion of those who come back from the dead.

01:13:00 Eugene Rogan

But also, as one looks at the ever-shifting yellow line in Gaza, and I'm glad you brought Gaza into your analysis,

01:13:07 Eugene Rogan

It is another striking example of where the abuse of power on a community is something that we have all borne witness to.

01:13:15 Eugene Rogan

But there is a framework in your analysis within which to see it.

01:13:19 Eugene Rogan

But you know, that yellow line in Gaza since the ceasefire, which was supposed to be 45% of the territory under Israeli occupation, now the Palestinian zone has reduced to 35%.

01:13:28 Eugene Rogan

Exactly.

01:13:29 Eugene Rogan

65%, a shifting invisible line that defines where

01:13:35 Eugene Rogan

It's a ghost line, in essence, where the people are marginally can be acted upon.

01:13:39 Speaker 2

Yes, yeah.

01:13:39 Speaker 2

And the treatment of the people who are then within that, they have been ghost-lined, in a sense ghosted, because they are the people without rights.

01:13:49 Speaker 2

They are the people without recourse.

01:13:50 Speaker 2

They are the people without claim on you, and you can do what you want to them.

01:13:54 Speaker 2

And actually, nobody's telling them not to do what you want with them.

01:13:57 Eugene Rogan

No, your ghost story is terrifying.

01:14:00 Eugene Rogan

I'm going to open the floor to your questions now.