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**Finding Palestine in America: The Impact of the Arab-Israeli  
Conflict on Arab-American Identity and Activism**

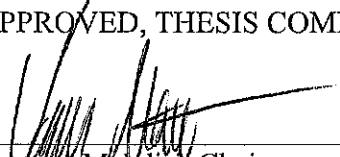
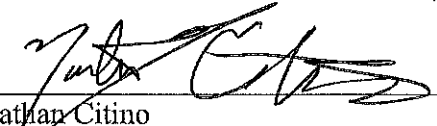
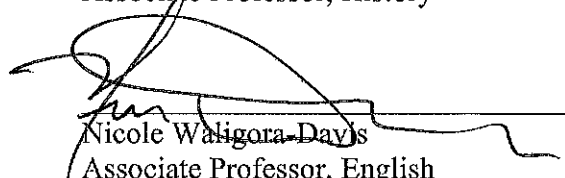
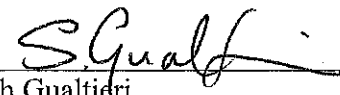
by

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## ABSTRACT

### **Finding Palestine in America: The Impact of the Arab-Israeli Conflict on Arab-American Identity and Activism**

by

**Suraya Khan**

This dissertation investigates how the issue of Palestine nurtured Arab-American identities across three waves of Arab immigration to the United States. Departing from much of the existing scholarship on Arab-Americans, this project traces activism related to Palestine on regional, national, and transnational scales. The first two chapters analyze activism and discourse about Palestine in segments of the Syrian-American press and intellectual diaspora circles from 1924 to 1948. Although early Syrian-American attempts to influence mainstream American perceptions or policy failed, I argue that advocating for Palestine helped unify elements of the fragmented Syrian immigrant community in the U.S. and laid a foundation for the development of an Arab identity. The effects of the establishment of an Israeli state in Palestine in 1948, including the rise of the Palestinian refugee crisis and the expression of new forms of nationalism, reverberated across the diaspora. Thus, chapter three interrogates how Arab immigrant communities in the U.S. engaged with the question of Palestine from the 1948 *nakba*, or “catastrophe,” to the 1967 War. In particular, it analyzes the ideologies and activism of two groups – members of different waves of Arab immigration – to investigate how Americans of Arab descent and Arabs studying in America conceived of themselves in relation to the U.S. Cold War project, the Arab nationalist movement, and the question of Palestine. Finally, chapter four focuses on the extensively politicized immigrant generation after the Arab defeat to Israel in the 1967 War. By surveying the work of new activist institutions and their ties to the Third

World, it argues that the Arab-Israeli conflict fostered the creation of an Arab-American intellectual generation. Exploring both the experiences of Arab migrants in the U.S. and their return and engagement with the Middle East challenges traditional assimilationist narratives of Arab-American identity construction and contributes to scholarship on the intersections between politics and migrant identity formation.

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I have benefited from the assistance of the archival staff at several institutions. My extended research trips at the Arab American National Museum were especially fruitful due to the help of Matthew J. Stiffler and Kirsten Terry. I would also like to express my gratitude to the many archivists and librarians I encountered while conducting research in collections located at the University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, Columbia University, the

New York Public Library, the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, the University of South Dakota, and the Jafet Library Special Collections at the American University of Beirut. I would not have had the opportunity to travel so widely for my research without financial support from the Immigration History Research Center, the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, the Society for Historians of Foreign Relations, Abba P. Schwartz Foundation through the John F. Kennedy Library, and the Arab American Studies Association. At Rice, I would like to especially thank the Humanities Research Center, the Wagoner Fellowship, and the Department of History.

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## Explanation of Abbreviations

### Organizations

AAUG	Association of Arab-American University Graduates
ADC	American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AFME	American Friends of the Middle East
ANL	Arab National League
IAAA	Institute of Arab American Affairs
NAAA	National Association of Arab-Americans
OAS	Organization of Arab Students
PHRC	Palestine Human Rights Campaign
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

### Archive Abbreviations

AANM	Arab-American National Museum
EMU	Eastern Michigan University Archives
IHRCA	Immigration History Research Center Archives
LOC	Library of Congress
NMAH	National Museum of American History

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**Introduction**  
**Finding Palestine in America: The Impact of the Arab-Israeli Conflict on Arab-American Identity and Activism**

*“Lebanese and Syrians...are not only from the white race, but from the cream of that race.”*  
– Naoum A. Mokarzel, 1920<sup>1</sup>

*“We saw American support for colonialism as white power, because, except for Japan, all the global powers were white. We also saw this imperialism as a mixture of antagonism towards Islam and colored peoples. In the politics of this era, we were Arabs.”*

– Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, on Arab identity in the 1950s<sup>2</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, migrants who left the Ottoman province of Greater Syria for the United States typically journeyed across the Atlantic in pursuit of economic advancement. Like many other immigrants, they did not find the path to American citizenship easy in a society where race determined national belonging. These predominantly Christian migrants thus fought to be defined as “white” to gain access to citizenship, occasionally even making claims such as Naoum Mokarzel’s that asserted the racial superiority of Syrians over other whites. Although the federal government eventually classified Syrians as white, Middle Eastern immigrants who arrived in the United States were often popularly perceived as “brown,” particularly during the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The statements of Naoum Mokarzel and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, two intellectuals who emigrated from the same region in 1898 and 1948, exemplify the very different ethnic and racial identities that immigrants constructed in the US: early migrants represented themselves as Syrians and white, while later groups proudly proclaimed their Arab ethnicity. However, these categories were not as clearly defined as some

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<sup>1</sup> This letter is quoted in Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Hisham Ahmed-Farajeh, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return* (Palestine: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at Birzeit University, 2003), 83.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this change in racial identity, see Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, *Race and Arab-Americans before and after 9/11: from Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2008) and Lisa Suhair Majaj, “Arab-Americans and the Meaning of Race,” in Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

scholars have assumed. Furthermore, as this project reveals, a key factor in the shift from white and Syrian to Arab was the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the rise of American support for Zionist settler-colonialism.

This dissertation investigates the ways in which the issue of Palestine nurtured a spectrum of identities in the *mahjar* – the diaspora of migrants from Greater Syrian, a region encompassing modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. It pays special attention to the experiences of intellectuals and activists who promulgated secular nationalist ideologies. The historiography on Arab-Americans is typically segmented by waves of migration to the United States. Most research focuses solely on one of three eras: the first wave of migrants (1870s–1920s), the second wave (World War II–1960s), or the third wave (1970s–present). Although the demographic composition and experiences of each wave of migrants varied considerably, this dissertation examines how the evolving conflict in Palestine served as a catalyst for identity construction and political activism across all three waves of Arab migration into the United States.

Arab-American historiography has frequently utilized a classic immigrant paradigm that was first articulated by the Chicago school of sociologists – a narrative that begins with migrants entering the U.S. and concludes with their assimilation.<sup>4</sup> However, I conceptualize diasporas as “deterritorialized nation states” because emigrants often participate in constructing nationalism outside of their home states’ borders.<sup>5</sup> Exploring both the experiences of Arab migrants in the

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<sup>4</sup> Oscar Handlin exemplifies this paradigm in *The Uprooted* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1955). The resurgence of assimilation theory in the work of Ewa Morawska, Elliot Barkan, and other historians well into the 1990s was also a trend in Arab-American historiography. See Abdo Elkholy, *The Arab Moslems in the United States* (New Haven, CN: College and University Press, 1966); *The Arab-Americans: Studies in Assimilation*, ed. Elaine Hagopian and Ann Paden (Wilmette, IL: Medina University Press International, 1969); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Linda Basch, et al., *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Amsterdam, 1994). My project benefits from the transnational approaches of these studies on first and second generation migrants: Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in*

U.S. and their return and engagement with the Middle East thus challenges purely assimilationist narratives of Arab-American identity construction. By tracing activism related to Palestine on local, regional, national, and transnational scales, my research contributes to scholarship on the intersections between politics and migrant identities.

Heretofore, scholars have held that the Israeli defeat of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan during the June 1967 War brought about an Arab-American identity for immigrants who witnessed the demise of Arab nationalism and the ascendance of Israeli military hegemony in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> However, scholars largely have failed to analyze the ways in which the Arab-Israeli conflict affected earlier migrant communities. Existing scholarship has also neglected studying the transnational identities and political organizations of migrants who were closely engaged with events in Palestine after the 1967 War.<sup>7</sup> Instead, most scholars who have worked on the era have conducted ethnographic research on Arab micro-communities in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> Thus, my dissertation investigates important figures and movements across a broad temporal frame in order to contextualize and historicize the post-1967 consolidation of the term “Arab-American.” Combining an area studies focus on the Middle East with U.S. migration history allows me to explore the transnational networks that were created, charted, traveled, and lived.

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*Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, and Hani Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Naff's *Becoming American*, Eric J. Hooglund, *Crossing the Waters* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), and *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. Ernst McCarus (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Orfalea, *The Arabs in America* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> For examples of important works on specific Arab-American communities, see *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1983), Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab-American Women in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997); *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael Suleiman (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab-Americans in New York City*, ed. Kathleen Benson and Philip Kayal (Museum of the City of New York, 2002). Nadine Naber challenges the assimilationist framework of Arab-American studies by investigating more recent transnational cultural politics among middle-class Arab-Americans in the Bay Area. See *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

Historians have increasingly called on using transnationalism as a tool to overcome the limits of studies that almost exclusively examine how immigrants integrate themselves into a new society. Ian Tyrrell argues that historians should not assume the primacy of the “national” over people’s lives but must also recognize the influence of ideas, technologies, and institutions that move across national boundaries. Although Tyrell recognizes that the “transnational identities of humans are less tangible” than national identities, they are “not insignificant.”<sup>9</sup> In order to fully explicate these identities, this project heeds the calls of Tyrell and Richard White to engage in inquiry on different scales: the local, regional, national, and transnational.<sup>10</sup>

Historian Donna Gabaccia has additionally focused on the transnational character of migrants who forge their own “foreign relations” by virtue of their enduring connection to “the people and places they supposedly left behind when emigrating.” The immigrants that this project examines consciously forged political and cultural connections overseas by engaging in transnational movements and organizations. As Gabaccia suggests, “no one understands better than immigrants the continuing power of national governments to draw borders and to set rules for crossing them.” Migrants from the Middle East – particularly refugees from Palestine – experienced this most viscerally as they faced the realities of Zionist expansion and migration policies regulating their movement in the US and Middle East. Thus, Arab-Americans engaged in a particular form of “immigrant foreign relations” that included political mobilizations within the United States and transnationally.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Richard White, “The Nationalization of Nature,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No. 3, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History: A Special Issue” (Dec. 1999), 976-986.

<sup>11</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 2-3.

Though nation-states are constrained by borders, the process of constructing nationalism often involves imagining a community that transcends these borders.<sup>12</sup> Akram Khater, a historian of Syrian and Lebanese emigration, has noted that more research needs to be done on the idea of the nation as it developed in the *mahjar* because studies of Arab, Syrian, and Lebanese nationalism often focus on the Levant. He argues that these works ignore the important nationalist debates that took place in “Brazil, Argentina, and the United States, where the emigrant community was confronted with an identity connected to the mythical structure of the nation, a kind of identity they had not encountered before. This encounter obliged some of them to start defining a countervailing national identity.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, this dissertation investigates how Arab migrants articulated nationalist ideologies in the *mahjar*, particularly in relation to the question of Palestine. The first wave emigrated from Greater Syria while the Ottoman Empire attempted to move from a model of imperial subjecthood to national citizenship. These migrants thus emerged within an Ottoman context that foregrounded ethno-religious identities even as the Ottoman regime sought to propagate a civic “Ottomanism” that ostensibly transcended religious affiliation.<sup>14</sup> Like many other migrants, they did not find the path to American citizenship easy in a racialized society where proximity to whiteness determined national belonging. At the same time, naturalized Syrian immigrants and their descendants occupied a unique position as U.S. citizens, which afforded them access to bodies of power that were not necessarily available to people in Syria. Therefore, many migrants advocated for issues concerning their homelands both within the United States and at various

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<sup>12</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Khater, *Inventing Home*, 195.

<sup>14</sup> Rashid Khalidi, “Ottomanism and Arabism in Syria Before 1914: A Reassessment” in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, et. al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

international commissions that would determine the fates of their homelands during the Mandate period and beyond. The vibrant Syrian-American press in the first half of the twentieth century thus played a significant role in shaping national and transnational identities among migrants, whether in the U.S. or across the globe.<sup>15</sup> Exploring both the experiences of Syrian migrants in the U.S. and how they returned and engaged with the Middle East thus challenges traditional assimilationist narratives of Arab-American identity construction.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly interrogated the relationship between nationalism and race among Arabic-speaking immigrants to the U.S. In 1988, sociologist Alixa Naff published her seminal work *Becoming American: The Early Immigrant Experience*. Naff's social history, based on interviews and sources that she personally collected, examined the first wave of the Syrian diaspora in the United States until 1948. Because early immigrants sought to be categorized as white in order to naturalize, Naff argued that they largely assimilated into mainstream American culture. Consequently, she claimed that immigrants did not develop a pan-Arab identity until the second wave of migration in the aftermath of the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. In the years since Naff's account, however, scholars have demonstrated that early Syrians in America often did conceive of themselves as part of a greater national community, even if they did not primarily identify themselves with the term "Arab." Assimilation was not necessarily the most potent force in migrants' lives. Sarah Gualtieri, for instance, has shown that while many Syrian-Americans embraced whiteness as a path toward being granted citizenship, they did so in a complex manner that allowed them to use their new legal status to maintain ties with their homelands. Wail S. Hassan has further complicated the narrative of Syrian

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<sup>15</sup> See Stacy Fahrenthold, "Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the Mahjar and Emigrant Activism during World War I," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 1, No. 1 (Spring 2013), 30-54; and Reem Bailony, "Transnationalism and the Syrian Migrant Public: The Case of the 1925 Syrian Revolt," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 1, No. 1 (Spring 2013), 30-54.

immigrants' attempts to redefine themselves as white by analyzing how they conceptualized Orientalism alongside race. Hassan writes, "As with race, Orientalism represented an opportunity and a threat to early Arab immigrant writers by condemning them to an inferior position in the cultural hierarchy, but it also afforded them an entry into the American scene," because they could act as interlocutors between the "East" and "West." Hassan notes that early diaspora writers such as Khalil Gibran and Ameen Rihani implicitly claimed that they were more qualified to interpret the Orient than European Orientalists. Borrowing from Evelyn Shakir's work, Hassan contends that these interlocutors attempted to make their foreignness respectable by critiquing various aspects of Orientalism while contributing to the discourse and affirming certain tropes.<sup>16</sup> Many of these same *mahjar* intellectuals would similarly seek to interpret issues facing the Arab World, such as Zionism, to the American government and public.

Although most immigrants in the U.S. would not identify being "Arab" as their most salient identity, Sarah Gualtieri has shown that the first strands of "Arabism" amongst Syrian-Americans arose in response to the intensely Turkish nationalist Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which reigned during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. Though scholars have often taken it as a given that diasporic Syrians sought to extricate themselves from Ottoman hegemony, many initially endorsed Ottomanism's inclusionary multi-ethnic citizen ideal while also invoking a Syrian identity. However, once the CUP ramped up its World War I-era "Turkification" policies and refused to grant Greater Syria the degree of autonomy it had previously promised, Syrians in the United States generally dissociated themselves from the empire. They began to contrast the supposed modern character of the Syrian population with the backwardness they ascribed to Turks. Gualtieri notes that these immigrants, like other

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<sup>16</sup> Wail S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab-American and Arab British Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21, 41.

proponents of nationalism, asserted both their newness and antiquity; they insisted that they were more developed than Turks or even other Arabs (such as those in Iraq or Arabia) while assuming an ancient Phoenician or Aramaic past in the vein of Philip Hitti's 1924 work *Syrians in America*. Gualtieri also acknowledges that the increasingly urgent Palestine question also contributed to a growing sense of nationalism, as it was an issue "on the mind of many Syrians in New York" who would later form the Palestine Anti-Zionism Society.<sup>17</sup> As such, this dissertation investigates how Syrian Americans wrote about the burgeoning conflict and organized in defense of Palestine. Although early *mahjar* sources and newspapers indicate that the immigrant community was quite fractured, Syrians in diaspora often expressed concern over the fate of Palestine under a British mandatory regime that would reconstitute it as a Jewish homeland or nation. Many immigrants who were opposed to Zionism had no qualms about identifying as Syrian or Arab (or at the very least, as "Arabic-speaking") in an era when European colonial powers redrew the map of the Middle East.

My project also benefits from the insights of two works that focus on political activism among the first generation of Syrian-Americans. Lawrence Davidson's *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood* diligently surveys anti-Zionist activism in the U.S. from 1917 to 1948. Davidson's description of immigrants' anti-Zionist activity occasionally mentions the nascent Syrian and Arab nationalism that undergirded their activism, but he largely overlooks the question of ideology. Instead, Davidson's account privileges American perceptions of Palestine without deeply analyzing the lives and thought of the Syrian immigrants themselves; this lapse results from relying on a source base consisting principally of mainstream American newspapers, rather than the productive Syrian-American

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<sup>17</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*. For more on Syrian engagement with Ottomanism, see pp. 87-93; refer to p. 104 for a discussion of Palestine and proto-Arab nationalism in the *mahjar*.



press or activists' archival papers. While Davidson ends his narrative in 1948, my dissertation extends the story into the more politically volatile period ranging from the 1950s to the 1980s. Hani Bawardi's 2014 book *The Making of Arab-Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (University of Texas Press) serves as an important counterpart to Davidson's work because Bawardi uses a broader source base to investigate the development of a political, nationalist consciousness among early Arab-American groups. While Bawardi's account ends in the 1950s, my project examines subsequent decades and additional political organizations.

### **Sources and Archival Practice**

This dissertation examines Arab-American engagement with the emergent Palestine question based on material found in over fifteen archives. Some of the archives I consulted are canonical to Arab-American studies, such as the Naff Collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. I also utilized newer collections, like the Michael Suleiman Collection at the Arab-American National Museum, that were not available to researchers in past decades. The latter collection includes not only Michael Suleiman's personal papers, but also a trove of primary sources on Arab-Americans that Suleiman collected throughout his academic career. I am fortunate to write at a time when archival collections dedicated to specific organizations have become available, such as the Association of Arab-American University Graduates papers at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). I have also benefited from the fact that many activists across the twentieth century have entrusted their personal papers to archival institutions; for instance, I looked at the papers of Ameen Rihani in Washington, D.C., Philip Hitti in Minneapolis, Edward Said in New York City, Senator Jim Abourezk in Sioux Falls South Dakota, and Abdeen Jabara in Ann, Arbor. I traveled to cities such as Boston, Chicago,

and Philadelphia to use other archives. Finally, I conducted research in several collections at the American University of Beirut and in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. From each of these archives, I amassed an array of organizational materials such as correspondence, newsletters, and out-of-print publications. I used both English and Arabic sources for this project because Arab-Americans communicated and left records in both languages; in doing so, I hope to tell a story that is attuned to both the local and transnational contexts.

Engagement with new Arab-American archives has allowed scholars to increasingly critique traditional narratives. For instance, Keith Feldman and Sarah Gualtieri have both engaged with the AAUG archives at EMU; in the process, they have reinterpreted Edward Said's intellectual genesis, and postcolonial studies more broadly, around the Arab-American experience of exile. Sarah Gualtieri notes that while the AAUG collection may be located at EMU in Ypsilanti, it is not "solely an American archive, but a transnational Middle East one." As such, the AAUG papers reveal "the sustained flow of information and people across the Americas and the Middle East."<sup>18</sup> The AAUG archive is not alone in its transnationalism. I found, for instance, clippings of the New York newspaper *Mira'at ul-Gharb* from the 1940s in archival collections at the American University of Beirut, and publications such as *Falastin* and *Al-Ahram* in the papers of James Ansara at the University of Minnesota. In numerous collections, I found evidence of a vibrant exchange of letters and information spanning North America, South America, Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East.

This archival work was complemented by oral history interviews I conducted with eleven individuals that engaged in activism from the 1950s onward. While I am aware of the limits of

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, "Edward Said, the AAUG, and Arab-American Archival Methods," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, No. 1 (2018), 21-29; Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2015).

oral history due to the fallibility of an individual's memory, I purposely chose to utilize oral history methods because they can complement the limits of the archive. This was useful for several reasons, especially when trying to trace the history of organizations that do not have their own archives, such as the Organization of Arab Students or the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.<sup>19</sup> Conducting interviews with past members of the AAUG – an organization whose papers have been collected, catalogued, and made available to researchers – further revealed the ways in which oral histories are essential. I discovered that individuals sometimes represented their opinions differently than what is reflected in archival material, even if they had a hand in the production of the archive. These incongruities can often demonstrate significant shifts in thinking over time. Oral history can also shed light on archival absences by allowing scholars to interrogate the self-policing involved in creating an archive. It is important to recognize that during the eras I examine, Arab-Americans experienced intense surveillance and infringement upon their civil rights because of their association with the Arab world and opposition to Zionism.

Another reason my project emphasizes oral history is because archival institutions are often gendered to highlight men's contributions and marginalize women. This is further complicated by the fact that scholars often seek to fill the gaps left in institutional archives by relying upon the personal papers of individuals; more often than not, archives seem to collect the personal papers of men rather than women. Thus, utilizing oral history as a methodology can allow more female voices to be captured.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For more on conducting research on those without official archives, see Omnia El Shakry, "History without Documents: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (June 2015), 920-934.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of work that historicize archives in light of their gendered gaps, see Charu Gupta, "Writing Sex and Sexuality: Archives of Colonial North India," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 4 (2011), 12-35; Cheryl McEwan, "Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory and Citizenship in Post-apartheid South

## Chapter Summary

Chapter One analyzes discourse about Palestine in segments of the Syrian-American press and intellectual diaspora circles from 1924 to the 1940s. It seeks to engage in longstanding tradition of interrogating the rise of nationalism in the Middle East toward the end of the *nahda*, or the Arab renaissance that took place from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. However, what my project adds is a perspective outside of the Middle East itself. Arab nationalism imagined a national identity that transcended the borders imposed by Ottoman or European colonial powers. It is thus only natural that these identities were shaped, debated, and reshaped in the Greater Syrian *mahjar*. My analysis of this period is indebted to Hani Bawardi's work on early Syrian nationalist groups. Like Bawardi, I analyze how the burgeoning Palestine problem fostered Syrian and even Arab identities. I have additionally traced the ways in which early expressions of Syrian and Arab nationalism echoed among the Arab immigrant community even after 1948.

Overwhelmingly Christian, the Syrian-American community often divided along political, nationalist, and sectarian lines in the interwar period; yet, many in the diaspora expressed striking solidarity over the question of Palestine. After the issuance of the Balfour Declaration and the creation of British and French mandates in the Greater Syria region, Syrian-Americans grew concerned that Zionist settlements would spread in the new states of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. They discussed these issues in a variety of Syrian-American press outlets, including the *Syrian World*, a magazine and newspaper that was aimed at both early immigrants and their English-speaking descendants. The *Syrian World* featured writings from

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Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29 (2003), 739-757; and Marika Cifor and Stacy Wood, "Critical Feminism in the Archives," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017).

*mahjar* luminaries such as Ameen Rihani as well as lesser-known authors such as Habib Katibah. These intellectuals encouraged leaders of the nascent Syrian community to organize into groups such as the Arab National League, which lobbied the U.S. government against Zionism and British colonialism in Palestine, and engage in information campaigns about the question of Palestine. Although these activists were unable to affect mainstream American policy, they acted as the first counterparts to the growing Zionist lobby in the U.S. Furthermore, the work of Arab activists during the 1920s and 1930s demonstrates that Palestine helped unify elements of the fragmented Syrian-American community, which laid a foundation for the development of an Arab identity in the U.S.

The first organization to call itself “Arab-American,” however, would not arise until after World War II. Chapter Two investigates the work of pro-Palestinian activists from 1944 to the period immediately following the creation of Israel. In 1944, a group of Syrian immigrants in the U.S. formed the Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA) to forge better relations between America and the Arab World. Most of the IAAA’s work focused on advocating for a secular independent Palestinian state, a cause it argued before the U.S. Congress and the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. It also worked closely with the Arab League’s offices in Jerusalem, London, and Washington, D.C.; some IAAA members even represented Arab states at the inaugural United Nations conference in San Francisco.

Because the advent of immigration restrictions in 1924 stymied the flow of Syrians to the United States, many scholars have neglected to study the lives of immigrants during the post-World War II era leading up to the repeal of quotas. Chapter Three, therefore, takes up this important period for Syrians migrants and their American-born descendants who struggled to find a place for themselves in American society while maintaining ties to their homeland.

Scholars such as Naff have argued that Syrian assimilation into mainstream white society reached its peak at this period, but they have often ignored the high rates of return travel and communication among those in the diaspora. Although early Syrian immigrants sought to be defined as white in order to become naturalized U.S. citizens, the activists discussed in Chapter Three, including members of the Syrian-Lebanese Federation, did not generally identify as white. They also sometimes argued that “Syrian” were a distinct race of Semites, or emphasized their linguistic, ethnic, and national identities. This trend is even more prominent in the second half of the twentieth century because the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 abolished existing racial prerequisites for immigration and naturalization.

The Syrian-Lebanese Federation of America formed in the late 1920s as assemblage of ethnic associations and clubs across the U.S. It was largely a vehicle for building community within the Syrian-American community; however, during the 1950s, the East Coast branch and the National Association focused on continuing the kind of immigrant foreign relations that characterized the work of the – by then defunct – Institute of Arab American Affairs. Moreover, the National Association of the Federations arranged numerous “homegoing” tours of the Middle East during which its members not only visited historical sites and their ancestral villages, but also met with leaders of the Arab nationalist movement and dispossessed Palestinian refugees. Many of its members returned from this trip resolved to advocate for Arab issues in America; in particular, they urged the U.S. government to adopt a more “evenhanded” policy toward Israel that would compensate Palestinians and return them to their land. Although many in the *mahjar* began to identify more narrowly as “Syrian” or “Lebanese,” the work of the Federation demonstrates that some immigrants could identify more broadly. Even if they had emigrated from the Middle East decades ago, many Federation members were captivated by the Arab

nationalist movement that was itself very much based on the question of Palestine.

The 1950s witnessed a slow but steady trickle of new emigrants from the Arab World, most of whom came to the U.S. on student visas. Chapter Three also focuses on the Organization of Arab Students (OAS), which formed in 1953 as a pan-Arab association based in the U.S. It was one of the first groups to critique Israel's existence and practices on a large scale across the U.S.; it held events and published literature that frequently focused on Palestine and decolonization. The establishment of OAS chapters in numerous universities signaled the intensification of activism among the Arab intellectual population in America and reflected the use of the more expansive identifier "Arab," which became common as Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism reached its peak. This period also witnessed the rise of Western media references to "Arabs," a term that some Americans used derogatorily due to a growing perception of Arabs as aggressors against Israel.<sup>21</sup> Historians cannot comprehensively assess the rise of Arab nationalism and Nasserism in the 1950s without also analyzing how Arabs in the United States perceived, shaped, and responded to debates about nationalist ideologies.

Chapter Four turns its attention to the extensively politicized generation of migrants after 1967. By this era, it was commonplace for migrants to identify themselves along new national lines and also use the broader term "Arab." The demographic makeup and experiences of second and third wave Arab migrants differed in many ways than those of the first wave. Later migrants were often more educated and prosperous than the peasants who came during the first wave. The second and third waves also included a larger proportion of Muslims.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, both

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<sup>21</sup> See Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 2005); Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); and Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Second Edition (Olive Branch Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Gregory Orfalea, *The Arabs in America: A History* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 153.

groups found themselves grappling with redefining their identity as Arabs in response to events in Palestine. Israel's victory over the Arab states of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt during the 1967 War deeply affected the Arab-American community in the United States, leading to unprecedented activism amongst the migrant and native-born population.

Some historians have who have analyzed Arab-American politics and identity after 1967 have reinforced the immigrant paradigm by focusing on assimilation. For instance, in a study of various Arab-American groups from 1967 to the late 1980s, sociologist (and activist) Nabeel Abraham argues that Arabs resorted to ethnic denial, ethnic isolation, or ethnic integration to cope with the marginality they encountered in American society. Abraham's early works, though foundational in Arab-American studies, perpetuated methodological nationalism by focusing on integration and assimilation as the goal of most migrants. The tendency of migrants to participate in "Americanization" or "isolation" establishes an either/or scenario of immigration and identification, a dichotomy that Alixa Naff's work reinforced.<sup>23</sup> However, more recent work, such as that of Salim Yaqub and Pamela Pennock, have situated Arab-American activism firmly within the American left, while also recognizing its transnational character.

In Chapter Four, I examine how organizations such as the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) fostered Arab-American identities. I contend that Arab activists in the U.S. after 1967 were not isolationists, but full participants in American society; they simultaneously attempted to build a

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<sup>23</sup> Nabeel Abraham, "Arab-American Marginality: Mythos and Praxis," *Arab-Americans: Continuity and Change*, edited by Michael W. Suleiman and Baha Abu-Laban (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc., 1989), 28. For instance, he misinterprets a social gathering ("hafla") as "the highest form of political praxis for the isolationists" and the convention to be the equivalent form among integrationists. These are not two disparate and exclusive social or political engagements. Numerous Arabs engaged in both activities; participation in certain cultural activities does not necessarily indicate an immigrant's conscious attempt to self-isolate. Refer also to *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, ed. Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000).



community in the United States as well as bolster their connection with the Arab world.

Immigrants and their descendants used their status as academics or professionals to advocate for a change in perceptions and policies related to Arabs, emphasizing their American, Arab, and even Palestinian identities. This transnational effort transcended loyalties to micro-communities or any single nation-state in the Middle East. Arabs of Christian and Muslim backgrounds united in a movement that was both secular and political.

A persistent theme throughout the writings of members of the AAUG and ADC was the anguish that Arab-Americans felt at the losses of 1967, which meant that many could no longer return home. The 1965 Immigration Act repealed exclusivist immigration quotas and abolished racial prerequisites for naturalization, making it easier for immigrants of this generation to eschew referring to whiteness as a source of identity. Arab-Americans also faced increasing political racism, which made them feel distinctly “not white” and encouraged a sense of association with others in the Arab diaspora.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the experience of exile and marginalization within the borders of the United States at the height of the Cold War provoked a more capacious association with the greater Third World, especially as many Arabs professed their support for the struggle against neocolonialism – not only in Palestine, but also in South Africa, Angola, and other decolonized areas. They made transnational connections by engaging with resistance movements domestically and throughout the world, ranging from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Many prominent Arab-Americans first became involved in the leftist student movement while attending American universities and modeled their activism on existing radical advocacy that pushed for racial equality or an end to the Vietnam War. The AAUG particularly forged close

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<sup>24</sup> Helen Hatab Samhan, “Politics and Exclusion: The Arab-American Experience,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter 1987).

ties with the radical bloc of the civil rights movement by inviting prominent black activists such as Stokely Carmichael, Shirley Chisholm, and Shirley Graham Du Bois to speak at their conferences; later, the ADC was an outspoken supporter of Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns and participated in his National Rainbow Coalition, which welcomed political participation from voters of all ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds.

To adopt a concept that Jean-François Sirinelli has utilized to discuss intellectuals in France since the Dreyfus Affair, these activists constituted an "intellectual generation."<sup>25</sup> Sirinelli cites Jean Luchaire's definition of a generation as "a collection of individuals marked by one big event or by a series of such events." Such an event may have influenced an entire society, but it brings a specific generation into existence when it is "the *determining* event" in the lives of those who had not been fundamentally influenced by a prior event. Intellectuals and activists in the AAUG, and even the ADC to some extent, were a group of similarly aged individuals who may not have ascribed to the same ideologies but emerged in a similar cultural and educational milieu: they received their primary, secondary, and often even undergraduate education from institutions in the Middle East but then studied at prominent universities in the United States for advanced degrees. The "event" that was responsible for bringing the "generation" into existence was the rise of Zionism during the British mandate and the consolidation of Israeli military hegemony in the Middle East after the wars of 1948 and 1967. Thus, it would be more appropriate to view the defining event as a longer process occurring during a period of Zionist encroachment that began after the 1917 Balfour Declaration and reached its pinnacle in 1967.

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, "The Concept of an Intellectual Generation," in *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 86-87.

It is additionally important to recognize the role that the United States government played by supporting Israeli expansion while also enacting new immigration policies to accept masses of new migrants from the destabilized Middle East. The immigrants in this period exemplify how institutional and foreign policy can intersect to make the shared experience of a generation in exile a reality.

As the Arab-Israeli Conflict raged on in the 1980s, many immigrants originally from Palestine began to invoke a Palestinian identity over an Arab identity. Such immigrants believed that America and the Arab world had ignored or betrayed Palestinians. They also felt alienated from the increasingly diverse immigrant population that hailed from the Gulf and North Africa because newer migrants were often more concerned with their own national issues or improving their position within the US. By the 1980s, many Arab-American organizations capitulated to some members' appeals to shift their focus away from Palestine. Thus, Chapter Four discusses how immigrants who remained dedicated to the Palestinian cause moved into greater engagement with other transnational organizations, including the Palestine Liberation Organization's legislative body, the Palestine National Council.

Like the early Syrian-American anti-Zionist groups, Arab-American political organizations largely failed to achieve their goals: they were unable to stem the tidal wave of anti-Arab sentiments that predominated in mainstream American views, and conflict only increased between Israel and the Arab world between 1967 and the late 1980s. The organizations' public information campaigns could not persuade the larger American public to vote for politicians who would combat the influence of Israel's lobby in the U.S. They were also

unable to convince the U.S. government that supporting Palestinian rights would be more in its national interest than enabling Israeli hegemony.

Despite these apparent failures, however, the political activist organizations achieved several important goals: they helped create unprecedented levels of consciousness among Arabs who were disillusioned by the losses of 1948 and 1967. These groups were an outlet for intellectual and cultural work among Arab-Americans who witnessed increasing strife in the Middle East and the United States. Moreover, earlier Arab-American activists laid a foundation for efforts to build solidarities across racial, religious, and ethnic lines. The conclusion notes that the significant, albeit modest, successes of the modern Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement in the U.S. were not achieved in a vacuum. As early as the 1950s, pro-Palestinian Arab-American activists sought to build alliances with anti-Zionist Jews, organized labor, and people of color in the U.S. and abroad. The reflections of earlier generations of activists on their successes and failures offer invaluable guidance to activists in the present who are waging a two-fold battle against racism and oppression in the U.S. and Israel.

The story of Arabs in America is too complex to fit a narrative that assumes either the complete abandonment or retention of cultural roots. Migrants from what would become known as the Arab World thus forged a new multifaceted identity, one that was based on their old heritage, asserted their acceptance of American culture and citizenship, and also supported new movements in the Middle East that fostered Arab and then Palestinian solidarity. These immigrants were often closely engaged with events in their homelands, which faced nationalist struggles against colonialism and Zionism throughout the twentieth century. As such, Arabs in America engaged in movements to pressure civilians and the government in their new homes to effect change in the Middle East. By examining Arab-American engagement with the Palestine

problem throughout the twentieth century, this project seeks to analyze the shifting meanings of race, ethnicity, nationalism, and transnationalism in the U.S. and the Middle East.

## Chapter 1

### Overcoming the Divide: Syrian Americans and the Nascent Palestine Problem, 1924-1950

#### Introduction

After World War I, the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of European mandates in the Levant provoked intense debates about national identities throughout the Middle East. Emigrants who left the Ottoman province of Greater Syria to settle in the United States during this era participated in these debates while also struggling to gain U.S. citizenship. All the while, the issue of Palestine evoked passions and tensions among the diasporic communities, particularly in the United States.

This chapter explores how Syrian immigrants in the U.S. articulated the question of Palestine in both their writing and in their activism.<sup>1</sup> Focusing specifically on a journal-turned-newspaper titled the *Syrian World*, I trace the intellectual trajectory of the paper as its editorship changed hands between 1926 and 1935. The lives and works of its editors Salloum Mokarzel and Habib Katibah offer case studies on the different ways in which migrants made sense of events in their homeland and represented the changing Middle East in the *mahjar*. Katibah, an Arab nationalist, and Mokarzel, a supporter of Christian Lebanese nationalism, espoused widely opposing views on nationalism and ethnicity. However, during their tenure at the *Syrian World*, both recognized the importance of a unified Syrian identity in the face of Zionism. This chapter then turns to analyzing instances where Syrians in the U.S. engaged in activism to educate Americans about issues in the Middle East and stem the rise of pro-Zionist thought. Intellectuals such as Ameen Rihani, Fuad Shatara, and Habib Katibah engaged in tireless transnational

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<sup>1</sup> In Arabic, “*mahjar*” refers to both the place of emigration and the field of literary production among the diaspora of emigrants from Greater Syria.

activism during the 1920s and 1930s. They spoke before American, European, and Arab government officials; published pamphlets and held conventions as part of the Arab National League of America; and even toured the U.S. to represent the Arab case to the American public. The pages of the *Syrian World* and other immigrant press outlets closely covered such activism and educated their readers about the rising conflict in Palestine. By investigating the question of Palestine in the *Syrian World*'s literary community and activist circles, I seek to illuminate the evolution of a three-fold identity. Emigrants from Greater Syria embraced their new American citizenship, invoked nationalisms of various mandate states overseas, and occasionally endorsed an inchoate form of pan-Syrian – and even pan-Arab – nationalism when advocating for Palestine.

Scholarship on identity formation has focused extensively on the ways in which identities are constructed within, not outside, difference.<sup>2</sup> As Benedict Anderson argues, nationalisms entail an “other” because they inherently distinguish one community from another based on “the style in which they are imagined.”<sup>3</sup> Scholars of the modern Middle East have long recognized that Zionist colonization and British and French imperialism served as an “other” that helped define early Arab nationalist identity in the post-Ottoman Middle East. Although the inhabitants of present-day Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine were subjects of the Ottoman empire and generally did not participate in Arab nationalist movements during the nineteenth century,<sup>4</sup> powerful nationalist movements emerged after World War I after Britain and France established mandates over Syria and Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq.<sup>5</sup> This nascent Arab

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Rashid Khalidi, 2010. *Palestinian Identity: the Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> These states were also influenced by efforts to end the British presence in Egypt. See *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. by James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

nationalism was particularly opposed to the British-backed project of Zionist settler-colonialism, as enshrined in the terms of the mandate over Palestine.

The diverse views found in *mahjar* newspapers, including the English-language *Syrian World*, reflected a community that was often fractured along religious or nationalist lines during the interwar period. In her seminal survey of first-wave Syrian migrants in the United States, Alixa Naff portrayed early migrants as exceptionally individualistic, sectarian, and concerned with assimilating into white American culture.<sup>6</sup> While this chapter benefits from Naff's insights about these divisions, her work overstates the absence of political and ethnic commonality and national identity among Middle Eastern migrants. Her scholarship relied upon a classic immigrant paradigm by focusing primarily on the process of assimilation.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Naff claimed that immigrants did not develop pan-Syrian or pan-Arab identifications until the second wave of migration in the aftermath of the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. However, more recent scholarship has recognized that Syrian-Americans used their recognition as white (albeit, foreign-born) citizens to travel and send remittances back home, engage with others in the diaspora, and advocate for issues within the United States.<sup>8</sup> Such work demonstrates that the first generation of Syrian-Americans often did identify as part of a greater community of Syrians and Arabs.

One arena that allowed otherwise diverse Syrian-American groups to bridge their internal sectarian and religious divisions was their growing solidarity regarding the question of Palestine

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<sup>6</sup> Naff, *Becoming American*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1955) is a quintessential example of the immigrant paradigm. The resurgence of assimilation theory in the work of Ewa Moraska, Elliot Barkan, and other historians well into the 1990s was also a trend in Arab-American historiography. See *The Arab-Americans: Studies in Assimilation*, ed. Elaine Hagopian (Wilmette, IL: Medina University Press International, 1969); *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1983); and Eric J. Hooglund, *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see the works of Akram Khater, Sarah Gualtieri, Wail S. Hassan, and Hani Bawardi.



and their deep opposition to the British mandate's support of Zionism. Coalescing around a single overseas cause was not unique to Palestine among the Syrian community. Migrants engaged, for example, in debates about the 1925 Syrian Revolt, when the *mahjar* press attentively covered the uprising against French hegemony in Syria. Numerous Syrian-American activists supported or opposed the revolt, but both factions urged the U.S. government to pressure the League of Nations to take a strong position on the massive uprising in the Syria mandate.<sup>9</sup> Such activism facilitated immigrants' identification with the new mandate states. As early migrants developed a new nationalist consciousness, they began to fear that Zionists would not only settle in Palestine, but also expand into neighboring Syria and Lebanon. Furthermore, they were concerned about the economic fate of Greater Syria because the new borders that separated the mandates of Syria and Palestine stifled trade.<sup>10</sup> Leaders of the nascent Syrian community thus lobbied the U.S. government against Zionist colonization and British imperialism in Palestine.

Palestine was a cause that Syrian-Americans of all religious backgrounds could rally behind. Their support was not necessarily strident, but it was ubiquitous if layered. Although in 1945 Salloum Mokarzel briefly explored a potential alliance between the Zionist Jewish Agency and the Christian Lebanese nationalist movement, he generally supported Palestinian rights as part of the struggle for self-determination throughout Greater Syria, particularly in the decade after World War I. Similarly, migrants of different backgrounds - including Habib Katibah, a Muslim from Yebrud in Syria, Fuad Shatara, an Orthodox Christian from Palestine, and Ameen

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<sup>9</sup> Bailony, "Transnationalism and the Syrian Migrant Public."

<sup>10</sup> In his discussions with locals during his 1922 tour of Syria, Charles Crane found that many Syrians were frustrated by the demise of the previously lucrative textile trade with Palestine due to the new borders. Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 122-123.

Rihani, a Maronite Christian from Mount Lebanon – represented themselves as mediators between the United States and the mandate governments. Despite these four figures' diverse and evolving views on how to identify within the *mahjar*, they all engaged with the issue of Palestine and framed their arguments in terms of self-determination and anti-sectarianism. While leaders of Syrian-American intellectual circles portrayed Zionism with nuance, their discourse was largely sympathetic to the Palestinian question. Ultimately, these activists and intellectuals failed to influence mainstream American perceptions or policy. Nevertheless, advocacy for Palestine and other national causes helped unify elements of the fragmented Syrian-American community and laid a foundation for the development of an Arab and Arab-American identity.

Few scholars have explored the *mahjar*'s response to events in Palestine during the interwar years. Sarah Gualtieri acknowledges that the increasingly urgent Palestine question also affected national allegiances in this period, stating that it was an issue “on the mind of many Syrians in New York” who would later form the Palestine Anti-Zionism Society.<sup>11</sup> The works of Lawrence Davidson and, more recently, Hani Bawardi have also recognized that Palestine was an issue that drew first-wave migrants into debates in their homeland and led to unprecedented activism.<sup>12</sup> In a study of Syrian nationalism among four early Arab-American organizations, Bawardi critiques the absence of scholarship on Arab-American political history before 1967. He notes that the formative works of Arab-American studies were written in the aftermath of the 1967 War in order to combat unprecedented cultural hostility toward Arabs. Thus, academics and activists understandably focused on their own generation while neglecting the stories of the

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*; see p. 104 for a discussion of Palestine and proto-Arab nationalism in the *mahjar*.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001). While Davidson's description of Arab immigrants' anti-Zionist activity occasionally mentions ideology, he is primarily interested in their actions and does not explore Syrian and Arab nationalism, which evolved in part as responses to Zionism in Palestine. Moreover, Davidson mostly uses mainstream American newspapers without closely analyzing the Syrian-American press.

earliest Arab-American communities. Bawardi's research demonstrates that Arab-American communities formed vibrant political organizations that espoused Syrian nationalism as early as 1915.<sup>13</sup> Examining the question of Palestine specifically among the *mahjar* press, Edmund Ghareeb and Jenab Tutunji have argued that the views of immigrant intellectuals, such as Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy, on Zionism transformed during the interwar period; although they initially rejected the Balfour Declaration in totality, by the 1930s they increasingly accepted "a Jewish home in Palestine so long as it did not aspire to transform this haven...from a refuge into a Jewish state."<sup>14</sup> Through a case study of the *Syrian World* and its scholarly-activist community, this chapter builds on existing scholarship by analyzing how the burgeoning Palestine problem fostered migrant activism and Syrian or Arab identities.

### **The Emergence of the *Syrian World***

The *Syrian World* was one of the few prominent *mahjar* periodicals to be written in English during the interwar period. Its editor, Salloum Mokarzel, emigrated from the village of Frieke during the first wave of migration from Mount Lebanon to the United States in 1890. Naoum Mokarzel, Salloum's older brother by almost two decades, established the second Arabic-language newspaper in the United States, *al-'Asr* ["The Time"]. After its demise, Naoum tried his hand at journalism once more by starting *al-Hoda* ["The Guidance"] in 1898; the paper became popular and circulated for the next seventy years. While assisting his brother with editorial duties, Salloum adapted the linotype machine to Arabic, making it easier for *al-Hoda* to expand the size of its issues. Salloum eventually started a moderately successful local periodical

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<sup>13</sup> Hani Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Ghareeb and Jenab Tutunji, "Arab-American Writers, the Mahjar Press, and the Palestine Issue," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 38, No. 1 (Winter 2016), 419.

titled *al-Majallah al-Tijariya al-Suriyah al-Amrikiyah* [“The Syrian-American Business Journal”]. However, by 1926 Salloum decided to publish a journal that would allow him to explore a wider range of interests.<sup>15</sup>

The *Syrian World* thus emerged in 1926 after the institution of restrictive migration laws virtually cut off all Syrian immigration into the United States.<sup>16</sup> The Immigration Act of 1917 banned “undesirable” migrants, particularly anyone born in the “Asiatic Barred Zone,” which extended from the Polynesian islands to the Levant. Furthermore, the Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act) instituted quotas that severely limited Southern European and Eastern Mediterranean immigration. Although regional courts sometimes classified Syrians as white, as in the *Dow v. United States* decision in 1915, there was no national policy on their racial position until 1941.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the prevalence of racist and Orientalist views meant that Syrians did not always reap the social benefits that whiteness afforded other “Caucasian” immigrants.<sup>18</sup> In 1929, for instance, Senator David Reed, the co-author of the Immigration Act of 1924, described Syrians as “the trash of the Mediterranean” Such perceptions incited the 1929 lynching of Nola Romey, a Syrian grocer in Lake City, Florida.<sup>19</sup> In this era of growing nativism and hostility toward Middle Eastern, Asian, and Southern and Eastern European immigrants,

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<sup>15</sup> Salloum previously started his own Arabic newspaper in 1910, titled *Al-Barid*, until his brother convinced him to cease publication lest it detract from *Al-Hoda*’s readership. Mary Mokarzel, *al-Hoda, 1898-1968: The Story of Lebanon and its Emigrants Taken from the Newspaper al-Hoda* (New York: al-Hoda, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> For more on these restrictions, see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2005). The French Mandate state of “Syria and the Lebanon” had a quota of 123 immigrants, while all other Middle Eastern states were granted a quota of 100 individuals once the 1924 Act went into effect in 1929.

<sup>17</sup> See Louise Cainkar, “The Arab-American Experience: From Invisibility to Heightened Visibility” in *The Routledge Handbook of Asian American Studies*, ed. Cindy I-Fen Cheng (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Wail S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab-American and Arab British Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For more on ethnicity vs. whiteness, see Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> On the racialization of Syrians as a distinct “Other” and the Nola Romey lynching, see Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*.

Salloum Mokarzel conceived of the *Syrian World* as a journal targeted at the American-born children of the first migrant generation. With content written in English to make it accessible for those with a tenuous grasp of Arabic, the journal aimed to foster the new generation's pride in their Syrian heritage. The *Syrian World* also sought to facilitate the integration of existing Syrian immigrants into American society. Salloum Mokarzel outlined these goals in the inaugural issue by writing,

It shall be our aim to have this publication serve as a forum for the discussion of existing problems among Syrians in America in an effort to arrive at their best solution, while striving, on the other hand, to give a judicious and adequate presentation of conditions of life as they exist in Syria; a comprehensive analysis of Syrian political and economic affairs, and of Syrians' achievements in the fields of art, science and literature; an account of their commercial activities which are now attaining stupendous proportions practically throughout the world and which bid fair to gain for them that position of eminence which was once their forefathers', the Phoenicians, in past times; and, finally, to publish interesting and illuminating bits of history which will give them a broader vision of their racial heritage; and all of this to the end that our Syrian-American generation will come to better understand the country of their parents and appreciate more fully their racial endowments which constitute a valuable contribution to the country of their birth.<sup>20</sup>

The journal thus reacted to the exclusionary atmosphere of the mid-1920s by encouraging Syrian-Americans to cohere their ethnic identity as “civilized” Syrians as a means of seeking inclusion in U.S. society. Gaining citizenship allowed them to maintain strong ties to their homeland; such ties allowed Syrians to represent themselves as experts on the Middle East and attempt to shape American policy in the region, as they would with the issue of Zionism. While they did not overtly challenge the race-based system of citizenship in the U.S., they largely eschewed whiteness as a primary source of identity and instead highlighted their cultural and ethnic – rather than racial – heritage. With coverage focusing both on the migrant community and the homeland, the journal does not fit the typical “assimilation” or “cultural retention” binary

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<sup>20</sup> Salloum Mokarzel, “Foreword,” July 1926, *Syrian World*, 1-3. See also John G. Moses, *Annotated Guide to The Syrian World, 1926-1932* (Saint Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, 1994), xi.

that is employed in many immigration studies. As Hani Elayyan has argued, the *Syrian World* did not merely recount day-to-day news about immigrants' lives; it was an "active participant in creating that community" and reflected shifting ideas about what it meant to be Syrian and American.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Syrian Race vs. the Syrian Nation**

Debates about identifying as "Syrian," "Lebanese," or "Arab" often dominated the discourse of the *Syrian World*. Immigrant writers who contributed to the journal imbued these terms with both racial and national meanings. Such discussions must be read in light of their post Johnson-Reed Act context. As Mae Ngai argues, "the legal boundaries of both white and nonwhite acquired sharper definition" after 1924 because the Quota Act "constructed a white American race."<sup>22</sup> Because the exclusionary U.S. immigration system conflated "national origins" with race, Syrian immigrants participated in what sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant call a "racial project": an effort "to shape the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified, and the reciprocal ways that racial meaning becomes embedded in social structures."<sup>23</sup> Since access to American citizenship was structured around race *and* nationality, many Syrian-Americans embraced a racialized discourse to portray themselves as worthy of American citizenship. At the same time, Akram Khater argues that the Syrian

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<sup>21</sup> Hani Ismael Elayyan, "The Syrian World in the New World," in *Arabs in the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora*, ed. Darcy A. Zabel (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 46. While my inquiry deals specifically with perceptions of Palestine and national identity in the Arab-American press, Elayyan's article focuses extensively on the poetry, stories, and other cultural works published in the *Syrian World*. For a comprehensive analysis of the *Syrian World*, refer to Helen Regina Hatab, "Syrian-American Ethnicity: Structure and Ideology in Transition," (Master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Mae Ngai has argued that "the legal boundaries of both white and nonwhite acquired sharper definition" after the 1924 Quota Act because it "constructed a white American race." Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 13.

emigrants that settled in Latin and North America were largely unfamiliar with identities structured around the nation; this encounter “obliged some of them to start defining a countervailing national identity.”<sup>24</sup> Syrian Americans thus participated in a racial project that at times identified themselves as white, but ultimately highlighted their ethnic, linguistic, and national identities. To better understand this process, this section analyzes the ways in which Syrian-Americans used the pages of the *Syrian World* to elucidate their racial and national positions in the U.S. and Syria.

More than a decade after George Dow, a Syrian-American migrant, was classified as a “foreign-born white” in a 1915 citizenship appeal case, debates in the *Syrian World* reveal that immigrants did not wholeheartedly embrace their racialization as white; instead, they constructed a Syrian identity that occasionally utilized racialized terms but was not predicated on being “white.”<sup>25</sup> In doing so, they unseated the hegemony of whiteness by recognizing their distinctiveness when asserting their Syrian ethnicity and national identity. And, most importantly for the purposes of my argument, they conceived of Palestine as part of the “nation” of Syria. Syrian immigrants claimed high levels of American patriotism in order to assert their right to citizenship. Similarly, Syrians would also emphasize their American identity while advocating for the U.S. to follow a certain policy in relation to the Middle East, such as opposing Zionism in Palestine.

Salloum Mokarzel’s foreword to the first issue of the *Syrian World* set the tone for the journal when he argued that Syrian-Americans possessed “racial endowments” that allowed them to contribute to the United States, and that his journal would encourage young Syrians who were born in America to gain a “broader vision of their racial heritage.” These endowments included

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<sup>24</sup> Khater, *Inventing Home*, 195.

<sup>25</sup> See Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White* for more on the Dow case.

achievements in art, science, literature, business, and politics.<sup>26</sup> Later issues featured Reverend W. A. Mansur declaring that Syrians were “perhaps the most law-abiding, liberty-loving, and industrious-living of the races in America.” Mansur portrayed the Syrian community as even greater proponents of Americanism than certain U.S. politicians who slandered the “Syrian race.” Responding to an American senator’s derogatory statements about Syrians, the journal featured a “speech” from Reverend Mansur in which he advised Congress to distrust anyone who would promote “the division of America on the basis of race, color, or creed.” By appealing to the Constitution, Orientalist scholarship praising the “Syrian race,” and belief in God, Mansur argued that Syrians must be granted the same citizenship rights as any other group.<sup>27</sup>

On the debate over race and nation, the *Syrian World* frequently cited the view of Princeton professor Philip Hitti that Syrians were a “mixed Semitic race,” the remnants of ancient Phoenician and Canaanite tribes, although Hitti recognized that Syrians shared a common Arab heritage and cultural identity.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Ameen Rihani argued that Syrians were “of mixed blood,” even if some “politicians or patriots will not admit this” while defending their nationalist causes. In a three-part essay for the *Syrian World* in response to a question from a Syrian student at Oklahoma University, Rihani recognized Syrians’ Aramaic and Phoenician heritage but also argued that emigration from Arabia to Syria had left an indelible mark on Syrian culture. Rihani concluded:

Whether Muslim or Christian, therefore, the Semitic Syrian, descendant of Aram or of Abraham, has acquired through the centuries and by virtue of the successive foreign occupations of his country, such a variety of strains as to make his blood rich indeed. He

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<sup>26</sup> Editor, “Foreword,” *Syrian World* I, No. 1, July 1926, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Rev. W. A. Mansur, “Imaginary Speech to the Senate,” *Syrian World*, Apr. 1928, 14-22. Mansur further explains his conception of Syrian-American patriotism in “Problems of Syrian Youth in America,” *Syrian World*, Jan. 1928, 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924), 21.



is unique in the colorful array of his ancestry; he may claim kinship with every people of importance in the history of the world.<sup>29</sup>

As the first editor of the *Syrian World*, Salloum Mokarzel also defined Syrian identity broadly. In the journal's 1926 inaugural issue, Salloum Mokarzel used the term Syrian "in the all-inclusive geographical sense which would embrace Palestine, Transjordan, and Mt. Lebanon."<sup>30</sup> Although the mandate regimes subsequently consolidated their hegemony over the newly divided Middle East, Mokarzel reiterated in 1930 that the name "Syrian" should remain despite the "internal divisions in the mother land" that separated Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. He lamented that "except among ourselves, and in cases requiring clarification, we would not approve of the term Lebanese or Palestinian Syrians, nor of the term Syrian-Arab," and recognized that Syria is "an independent, geographical entity which we are bound to recognize." This is notable because, two decades later, he would express alarm about the possible reunification of even those three states. Although Mokarzel viewed the idea of unifying under the term "Arab" with hostility, at this point in time he applauded the construction of an identity that would transcend Greater Syria's divisive new mandate boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the diversity of identity expressed in the pages of the *Syrian World*, Palestine was generally considered to be an integral part of Syria. Therefore, Zionism was not only a threat to the inhabitants of the mandate state of Palestine, but to an entire "race" and community of "Syrians."

### **Salloum Mokarzel's Many Contradictions**

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<sup>29</sup> Ameen Rihani, "Who are the Syrians? Part 1," *Syrian World VIII*, No. 31 (Nov. 1934), p.2; and "Part III," *Syrian World VIII* No. 32, (Dec. 1934) p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Mokarzel, *Syrian World*, July 1926, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Mokarzel, "What's in a Name: Syrian vs. Arab," *The Syrian World*, June 1930, 9.

Salloum Mokarzel's views on Palestine during his tenure as editor of the *Syrian World* from 1926 to 1932 are not easily discernible. Under his leadership, the *Syrian World* often featured editorials that disparaged the British mandate regime's handling of Palestine. Mokarzel also did not seem vehemently opposed to an ecumenical Arab nationalist ideology during the *Syrian World*'s early years; although he viewed Greater Syria as a separate national entity and rejected identification with "the Arabs," he nevertheless featured Arab proverbs and even quotes from Islamic traditions in the journal.<sup>32</sup> Thus, articles discussing Syrians' Phoenician heritage and history would often share page space with Quranic verses or sayings of Muhammad and early Muslim figures.

The content of the journal, however, belied the more sectarian views Mokarzel expressed by the 1940s. During the early 1930s, Mokarzel took on his older brother Naoum's mantle as a leader of the Lebanese nationalist movement in the *mahjar*. As the founder of *al-Hoda* and a member of *Hizb al-Ittihad al-Lubnani*, Naoum Mokarzel advocated first for Lebanese reform within and then independence from the Ottoman Empire. *Hizb al-Ittihad al-Lubnani*, or the Lebanese Union Party, was formed in 1909 by two Syrian emigrant intellectuals, Yusuf Sawda and Antun al-Jumayyil, who feared that the Ottoman Empire would abandon the 1864 *Règlemente Organique* and institute more direct control over Lebanon. Naoum was "*Ittihad Lubnani*'s closest American partner," for years, but in 1911 decided to form his own reform party called *Jama'iyyat al-Nahda al-Lubnaniyya*, or the Lebanon League of Progress. Like *Ittihad Lubnani*, *Nahda Lubnaniyya* initially sought to maintain Lebanon's privileged administrative status in the Ottoman Empire but began advocating for complete independence upon the onset of World War I. In the process, Naoum galvanized many other Syrian-Americans

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<sup>32</sup> Salloum Mokarzel, "Editorial Comment: Are the Syrians Arabs?" *Syrian World*, May 1930, 41-43.

to lobby not only Ottoman officials but also Western powers, which was a departure from the methods of *Ittihad Lubnani*.<sup>33</sup> *Nahda Lubnaniyya* advocated for Lebanese separation even from Syria and was against the Syrian Revolt from 1925 to 1927.<sup>34</sup> While Salloum was also opposed to the Syrian Revolt during his tenure as editor of the *Syrian World*, he did not ardently espouse Lebanese separation until he took over *al-Hoda* and *al-Nahda* after his brother Naoum's death in 1932.

As the end of the French mandate over Lebanon and Syria approached in the 1940s, Salloum Mokarzel and many other Maronites grew anxious that Lebanon would lose its "Christian character" due to pan-Arab efforts to create a unified Greater Syria. In the words of Salloum's daughter Mary Mokarzel, Salloum sought to combat an alleged "propaganda drive urging Syrian-Lebanese unity" throughout the United States. This campaign for the absorption of Lebanon into Syria, according to Mary Mokarzel, was particularly popular among the younger generation but had also attracted many among the older generation.<sup>35</sup> Mary Mokarzel's own words demonstrate the sway that pan-Arab and Greater Syrian identities had in the *mahjar*. Despite Salloum Mokarzel's alleged opposition to Arab and Syrian identity by this time, he remained cordial with Arab nationalists such as Ameen Rihani (whose sister had married Naoum) and Jamil Beyhum. From 1938 to 1939, Beyhum toured the United States with Emil el-Ghouri as representatives of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin El-Husseini, to galvanize support from Arabic-speaking immigrants and other Americans for an independent, secular Palestine.

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<sup>33</sup> Fahrenthold, 36-38.

<sup>34</sup> On the Lebanon League, see Andrew Arsan, "'This Age is the Age of Associations': Committees, Petitions, and the Roots of Interwar Middle Eastern Internationalism," *Journal of Global History* (2012), no. 7, 166-188.

<sup>35</sup> Mokarzel wrote this in a volume commemorating *Al-Hoda*'s seventieth anniversary in 1968; therefore, it is important to note that she castigated "Syrian-Lebanese unity" in the aftermath of several failed movements that had sought to unite Lebanon and Syria into a Syrian or Arab nationalist state. This may explain her dismissal of the "unity" movements as being "divisive." Mary Mokarzel, *Al-Hoda, 1898-1968: The Story of Lebanon and its Emigrants* (New York, NY: al-Hoda, 1968), 54.

Beyhum recalled that prior to meeting Mokarzel, he had been told that *Al-Hoda*'s editor did not support the cause of Palestine and refused to change his mind. Nevertheless, Mokarzel and other Lebanese separatists met with Beyhum in New York City and engaged in a respectful dialogue over the question of Palestinian independence. Mokarzel later publicized Beyhum's tour in *Al-Hoda* and, according to Hani Bawardi, "enthusiastically addressed a farewell gathering on January 7, 1939."<sup>36</sup>

However, as the cause of an independent, Christian-oriented Lebanon appeared increasingly in peril, Mokarzel became amenable to promises of aid from unlikely allies. In 1945, almost twenty years after founding the *Syrian World*, Mokarzel allegedly forged ties with the Jewish Agency's representative to the U.S., Eliahu Epstein (who later adopted the surname Elath). According to recollections in Elath's journal, Mokarzel allegedly described himself as a "friend of Zionism because of the mutual interests of the Jews of Palestine and the people of Lebanon – the 'national home' of Christian Arabs."<sup>37</sup> In Epstein's view, the future of Christians in Lebanon depended "to a large extent upon the future and success of the Jewish national home in Palestine."<sup>38</sup>

Mokarzel had been drawn into contact with Eliahu Epstein through Epstein's connection with the Maronite Patriarch. During the mid-1940s, the Patriarch sent several representatives from Lebanon on tours throughout the United States and Mexico in order to advocate for Lebanese Christian separatism from Arabism.<sup>39</sup> According to Epstein, these representatives were

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<sup>36</sup> Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*. See p. 64 for Ameen Rihani's relationship with the Mokarzel family and p. 204 for a description of Jamil Beyhum's meeting with Mokarzel based on Beyhum's memoirs.

<sup>37</sup> Eliahu Elath, *Zionism at the UN: Diary of the First Days* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1976), 198-200.

<sup>38</sup> Eliahu Epstein to Members of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Oct. 15, 1946, Central Zionist Archives: S25/7488, courtesy of Laurie Eisenberg.

<sup>39</sup> Laurie Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994).

funded by the French but never effectively represented their francophone Maronite cause, instead engaging in what amounted to a self-aggrandizing publicity tour. In his capacity as the head of the Lebanon League of Progress, Mokarzel hosted the representatives but eventually distanced himself from them. Epstein followed these events closely and reported the following to the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine:

Mr. Mokarzel complained bitterly about the harm done him by some of the Patriarch's envoys having involved him in a campaign which almost ruined him, without giving him any chance to serve the cause properly. Msgr. Antoine, and later Msgr. Maluf, representative of the Melkite Patriarch, were more concerned with their own selfish interests than with the Christian cause, and they did material and moral harm not alone to the cause but to Mokarzel personally, to his newspaper, and to the League of which he is President. Mokarzel told me that he had decided not to do anything more to help future delegations from the Lebanon unless he feels himself on safer ground than in the past.<sup>40</sup>

Contact between the two ceased in 1947. Aside from Eliahu Epstein's accounts, Mokarzel's views on Zionism during this period are difficult to ascertain. Mokarzel's descendants have stated that they have no recollection of his purported allegiance to Zionism. His daughter Mary recalled that Zionist figures often contacted her father to ask him to support Zionism as a prominent Lebanese American; however, Mokarzel reportedly spurned these overtures because he did not feel comfortable supporting Zionist claims to Palestine in order to facilitate the Lebanese cause.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the Jewish Agency's experiment with Salloum Mokarzel and the Lebanese-American community largely amounted to nothing. The 1948 *nakba* ("Catastrophe") in Palestine the following year would dramatically change the situation within Palestine, Lebanon, and Arab-American communities; it would later become nearly unthinkable

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<sup>40</sup> Elias Epstein to Members of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, "Memorandum No. 11: Conversation with Mr. Salloum A. Mokarzel, President of the Lebanese League in the United States and Editor of Al-Hoda newspaper, New York," CZA: A263/18, courtesy of Laurie Eisenberg.

<sup>41</sup> Author interview with Helen Hatab Samhan (the niece of Mary Mokarzel), December 8, 2014, Washington, D.C.

for Zionist forces to publicly attempt to ally themselves with members Lebanese American community.

In light of this brief communication with the Zionist movement, Mokarzel's tenure as editor of the *Syrian World* from 1926-1933 becomes even more fascinating due to the views he expressed toward Palestine during this period. Mokarzel never backed Zionist claims to Palestine in his editorial notes; on the contrary, he often expressed concern about Zionism and disturbances in the region. In 1929, he visited Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, and wrote a series of reports that described the strife resulting from Zionism and the British regime. He also featured the voices of many prominent anti-Zionists who expressed pan-Syrian or even Arabist sentiments, including Ameen Rihani, and Habib Ibrahim Katibah, and Philip Hitti. Thus, Mokarzel's time at the *Syrian World* offers a glimpse into a moment when Arabic-speaking intellectuals formulated competing visions for the new Middle East. In this moment of flux, even figures who would eventually become stalwart proponents of Christian Lebanese separatism could perhaps imagine an alternative and more inclusive ecumenical Syrian identity, one which imagined Palestine as a vital part of Syria.

### **“The Spirit of the Syrian Press” and the Question of Palestine, 1927-1932**

The *Syrian World* is not only a useful source base for its own editorials and news items; it also is valuable for aggregating the diverse views of the Arabic press in the U.S. For the first five years of its publication, the *Syrian World* included a section called the “Spirit of the Syrian Press.” This regular feature collected articles from various Arabic periodicals in the U.S. and translated them into English for younger readers who might not have been able to read the original Arabic. Selections from *Mir'aat ul-Gharb*, *al-Hoda*, *al-Sayeh*, *Kawkab Amreeka*, *al-*

*Bayan*, *al-Sameer*, *al-Nisr* and other papers reflected a wide range of perspectives on Syrian-American identity and political developments overseas.<sup>42</sup> Despite the diversity of perspectives expressed in excerpts from the Arabic press, one can identify certain recurring themes that reflected prevalent beliefs in the migrant community.<sup>43</sup> The unremitting coverage of Palestine in the Syrian-American press suggests its importance among the migrant community.

Numerous editorials in the *Syrian World* censured Zionist and British policies while favoring Palestinians. Even news briefs that simply reported on events in Palestine provide additional insight into how immigrants came to sympathize with Palestinians. First, the amount of detail describing Palestinian incidents often exceeded that of other countries' coverage. The periodical dedicated copious space to discussing Palestinian revolts, trials of Arabs charged with disturbing peace or opposing the British, the 1929 Western Wall (or "*Buraq*") Uprising, the Shaw Commission's investigation into the cause of the 1929 riots, changing policies on Jewish immigration, Zionist settlements, a pan-Arab economic exhibition in Palestine, and many other subjects.

Second, although many of these articles did not come out firmly in favor of Palestinians, they typically quoted statements made by fiercely nationalist Arabs or by British and American figures who were sympathetic to the Palestine and Arab cause. These newspapers frequently reproduced statements from Zionist organizations in the United States and in mandatory Palestine in order to inform their Syrian-American readership about the sway of Jewish

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<sup>42</sup> These papers often featured many harsh disagreements between editors. For more on the Syrian-American press and the various communities or sects they represented, see Michael Suleiman, "Introduction: The Arab Immigrant Experience," in *Arabs in America*, ed. Michael Suleiman (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999) and "Chapter Two: The Syrian Nationalism of the Mahjar Press" in Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*.

<sup>43</sup> Due to the selective nature of this sampling, it is impossible to make a conclusive argument about the entire migrant community; a closer analysis of each paper would be the most methodologically sound way to gauge the views of Syrian-Americans on Palestine. Nonetheless, these excerpts feature *mahjar* periodicals that have not been well preserved but expressed important views on Palestine.

nationalism among American audiences. When the sources for the articles are juxtaposed with the almost unanimously pro-Palestinian editorials that the *Syrian World* published or reprinted from other Syrian press outlets, the newspaper endorsed and contributed to a narrative that Zionists were aggressors against Palestinians, Syrians, and Arabs in general. However, the writers in these publications generally specified that they did not oppose settlers' Jewish faith, but the settler-colonial project of Zionism as enabled by the British mandate. Likewise, writers emphasized the importance of overcoming sectarian differences among Syrians, whether in diaspora or in Syria, as a way of opposing imperialism. Political opposition to Zionism and efforts to overcome sectarianism thus went hand-in-hand in many *mahjar* press outlets.

### **The Revival of the Syrian World under Habib Katibah**

In 1932, Salloum Mokarzel departed from his position as editor of the *Syrian World* to take up publishing *Al-Hoda* after the death of his brother Naoum. This move marked the point at which he took up Naoum's intense agitation for a separate, Christian Lebanon.<sup>44</sup> Paradoxically, Mokarzel left the *Syrian World*, which was aimed at a younger generation, in the hands of a devoted pan-Syrian nationalist: Habib Ibrahim Katibah.

Born in Yebrud, Syria and educated at the American University of Beirut and Harvard, Habib Katibah built an extensive career as a journalist and expert on the Middle East. The *Syrian World* was his initiation into *mahjar* literary circles and allowed him to achieve renown in the Syrian-American community. Katibah had assisted Mokarzel in establishing the *Syrian World* as a journal and was featured in its first issue. Katibah then took on the position of "publisher and editor" in 1932, with Salloum Mokarzel's daughter Mary serving as the business manager. As

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<sup>44</sup> For more on Naoum's Lebanon League of Progress, see Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*, Bailony, "Transnationalism and the Syrian Migrant Public," and Fahrenthold, "Transnational Modes and the Media."



editor of the *Syrian World*, Katibah spearheaded the transition away from a journal format by adopting a weekly newspaper layout. He explained to Ameen Rihani in 1932 that “such is the level of mentality of most of our second-generation Syrians in this country that we had to discontinue the magazine and publish it in the more popular form of a newspaper.”<sup>45</sup> The paper began to include fewer literary pieces and highlighted more local community developments in its social columns. Nevertheless, under Katibah’s leadership the content focused increasingly on foreign matters. He dedicated greater coverage to Palestine than ever before; his emphasis on the issue reflected mounting Syrian-American frustrations with the inept and oppressive colonial rule of the mandates.

### **Building an Ecumenical Syrian/Arab Identity in the face of Zionism**

A common theme in the *mahjar* press was the encouragement of unity among Syrians – whether in Syria proper or in Lebanon and Palestine – as a way to combat colonial exploitation. Katibah’s rhetoric often sounded distinctly pan-Arab. In a 1934 editorial column, Katibah wrote an illuminating response about Syrian culture to an anonymous letter writer who asserted that the Syrian “race” would hardly have been known to the “Christian world” without their good fortune to be located in the Holy Land. In response, Katibah forcefully argued against a teleological conception of national identities: “Our honest critic must have a naive idea of history and geography. He must have thought that countries and boundaries were first fixed and labeled by some supernatural Providence and given their particular aura and characteristics, then different nations allotted to these countries.” Katibah faulted the writer of the aforementioned letter for having an unsophisticated understanding of nationalism and described him as naiver than “a half

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<sup>45</sup> Salloum Mokarzel, “*Syrian World* Changes Hands,” *Syrian World*, Oct. 20, 1932, 1; Habib Katibah to Ameen Rihani, Aug. 18, 1934, Box 3 Folder 2, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

literate chronicler of the tenth century A.D!” He promoted a broad definition of “Syrian” and showed his concern for Palestine by writing,

Possibly our critic thinks that Syria is a country quite distinct and separate from Palestine, that its racial heritage is different, that its people have nothing in common with the people of the little spot of land called the Holy Land. If so, he is utterly mistaken, and will find no solace or support from any serious biblical scholar. The history of Palestine and Syria are so intertwined that often it is hard to determine where one begins and the other ends.

In defending Syria and its inseparability from Palestine, Katibah pointed out that the concept of the “Holy Land” had only emerged because Jesus had lived and died in Palestine two millennia earlier. Thus, he invoked a common source of pride: that Syria had produced some of the most prominent religious figures in history. Katibah endorsed a nuanced view of culture as “something so illusive and rarified that it is not difficult to see how one confuses progress in inventions, etc. with culture.” Although the Syrians may have lagged in what could be defined as “civilization” in the scientific laboratory, Katibah argued that Syrians possessed an abundance of culture and had greatly influenced the rest of the world.<sup>46</sup>

Just as Syrian nationalist sentiment grew in response to the push for unity on the issue of Palestine, so too did an early form of Arab nationalism. While most diaspora writers, including Katibah, continued to use “Syrian” as an all-inclusive name for different Levantine groups, many immigrants saw no problem with using the term “Arab” since it was a marker of shared linguistic heritage among Arabic-speakers. When Naoum Mokarzel asked Philip Hitti to authoritatively answer whether Lebanese are Arabs, Hitti reinforced his view that “the Lebanese are biologically, racially, of native Syrian stock.” However, he stressed that “their Arabic language and culture are vital bonds that unite them with the other nations of the Arabic-speaking world.” After *Al-Hoda* published Hitti’s essay in Arabic, Salloum Mokarzel directed the editorial staff of

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<sup>46</sup> Katibah, “Syrian Culture or No Syrian Culture!” *Syrian World*, Feb. 9, 1934. 5.

the *Syrian World* to translate it and republish it in full in 1931, reinforcing Hitti's claim that the "significance and importance of this [Arabic] linguistic and cultural heritage of the Lebanese should never be underestimated."<sup>47</sup>

The *Syrian World* and other *mahjar* intellectual outlets emphasized that anti-sectarianism was the most effective way to protect Palestine. An October 1929 update on political developments in Syria argued that "recent events in Palestine have had the effect of rallying the Arabs to the defense of their threatened rights and of promoting a spirit of unity between Moslems and Christians as never before." The article discussed an Arab congress meeting during which "a Moslem imam and a Christian priest embraced each other publicly as a token of lasting amity and union between the followers of the two religions in defense of their common cause."<sup>48</sup> The conflict in Palestine thus cultivated unprecedented ecumenicalism in Greater Syria.

Another instance of nascent ecumenical Arabism can be found in the *Syrian Eagle* (*Al-Nisr*), a Brooklyn daily that the *Syrian World* frequently excerpted. One editorial favored the "omens of Arab unity" that it observed in recent activism responding to the crisis in Palestine. In addition to linguistic unity, the *Syrian Eagle* discussed another recurring theme in the Syrian press: the importance of overcoming sectarianism in order to defend Palestinian and other anti-imperial causes. Its author assumed that Muslims, Christians, and Druzes were "now working side by side for the success of the universal Arab cause" – proof that there was "no further excuse for anyone to insist on the division of Arabic-speaking countries, especially Syria."<sup>49</sup> Another editorial from the *Syrian Eagle* argued that the press played a role in perpetuating divisions, which was a "sad commentary on the mentality of a people who claims the right of

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<sup>47</sup> Hitti, "Are the Lebanese Arabs?" *Syrian World*, Feb. 1931, 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>49</sup> "Omens of Arab Unity," *Syrian Eagle*, Oct. 15, 1929 in "Spirit of the Syrian Press," *Syrian World*, Sept. 1929, 47.

independence.” For Arabs to be truly free, they first needed to free themselves from the “pernicious” influences of geographical and religious considerations to join hands in “matters affecting the national welfare.”<sup>50</sup> Because a persistent justification for British and French hegemony over the Middle East was the need to provide stability and protect religious minorities, nationalists who wanted to eradicate colonial rule censured sectarianism and encouraged religious cooperation.<sup>51</sup>

This rhetoric of religious tolerance was not only reserved for discussions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews indigenous to the Middle East. In the *mahjar* press’s coverage of the conflict between Arabs and Zionists in Palestine, many writers took great pains to emphasize their belief in religious harmony with all Jews, including Jewish European migrants to Palestine. Some newspapers, such as *Al-Bayan*, included content that could be perceived as anti-Semitic.<sup>52</sup> However, numerous authors wrote articles and editorials in diverse outlets asserting that they were not opposed to Judaism or Jews, but were concerned with the negative effects of Zionist nationalism because it infringed upon the rights of the existing inhabitants of Palestine. Naoum Mokarzel’s paper *Al-Hoda* even occasionally exhibited Zionist inclinations by supporting the right of Jews to migrate to Palestine. One 1929 editorial, for instance, commended Jewish

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<sup>50</sup> “Religious Prejudice Our National Evil,” *Syrian Eagle*, July 1, 1930 in “Spirit of the Syrian Press,” *Syrian World*, June 1930, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> For an example of anti-Semitic articles, see “Arab Overtures to Jews Reported,” Dec. 19, 1929, *Al-Bayan*, in “Spirit of the Syrian Press,” *Syrian World*, June 1930, 43-44. In this article, the author asserted that a Zionist New York Times correspondent reported that, in spite of the Arab boycott of Jewish business in the cities of Palestine, Arab peasants were “beginning to show repentance” and ask for Jewish refugees to return to plow the land. The writer argued that this was false, reasoning that “The Jews are the ablest people in inventing lies and harping on imaginary occurrences in an effort to influence public opinion. Their whole history testifies to the truth of this statement.” The author also contended that the report was meant to garner continued Jewish support for Zionism because “the Jews are miserly and unwilling to spend anything unless they have complete assurance against loss.”

migrants' recent success at overcoming persecution, reclaiming underutilized land, and fostering the prosperity of Palestine.<sup>53</sup>

While other Syrian-American newspapers did not portray Zionist immigration as positively as Naoum Mokarzel's *Al-Hoda*, they nevertheless attempted to engage in a nuanced discussion of the issue by distinguishing between Jews and Zionists. Reporting on events in Palestine prior to the Balfour Declaration, the *Syrian World* asserted that before the Balfour Declaration, Jewish immigrants had freely sought refuge in Palestine without evincing anger from the Arab population; it was only "aggressive Zionism" that sought to establish "a national home for the Jews with a distinct political status" that had caused conflict. This report even contended that if the Zionist establishment would abandon its political aspirations and seek only a cultural homeland in Palestine, the Arabs would "offer no objection."<sup>54</sup> The (unfortunately unnamed) author thus emphasized that the conflict was not inherently religious.

Similarly, in 1934, the *Syrian World* quoted the founder of the Palestine Independence Party, Awni Abdul-Hadi. He spoke of a new trend in the "Arab movement in the country": people were privileging purely national considerations over sectarian ones. Abdul-Hadi additionally encouraged the preservation of Jewish lives during the fight against Zionism, a sentiment that Katibah had shared in an earlier editorial titled "Bleeding Palestine."<sup>55</sup> Katibah wrote in the shadow of the October 1933 riots, when Arab protests against unprecedented numbers of Jewish migration resulted in clashes between British police forces and protestors. He said that his feud was not with Jews, who he admitted had "brought blessings to Palestine and the Palestinians with their wholesale immigration." He simply opposed their mass immigration and

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<sup>53</sup> "The Right of the Jews to Palestine," *Al-Hoda* (New York), Nov. 22, 1929 in "Spirit of the Syrian Press," *Syrian World*, Oct. 1929, 46.

<sup>54</sup> "Political Developments in Syria," *Syrian World*, Oct. 1929, 50-51.

<sup>55</sup> "'We are Not Enemies of Jews or English,' Says Awni Abdul-Hadi," *Syrian World*, Apr. 21, 1934, 3.

political aspirations because they went against the wishes of the existing inhabitants, who feared “their ruin and pauperization.” Katibah continued, “The Arabs have no quarrel with a cultural Zionism that seeks to build in Palestine ‘a home for the spirit of my people.’” Many allegedly even welcomed such a home as long as the Zionists would “seek to live in peace and harmony without maneuvering to rob the Arabs of their inalienable constitutional rights by high pressure salesmanship.” It is noteworthy that in this article, which was written months before his aforementioned discourse on the distinctness of “Syrian culture and race,” Katibah eschewed referring to Palestine solely as a Syrian problem and unreservedly used the term “Arab.” He demonstrated that he could use the term interchangeably with “Syrian,” particularly in discussions of national matters.

In this essay, Katibah’s commentary reflected other migrants’ suspicions that the British had orchestrated the crisis in Palestine with malevolent intentions for both the existing Arabs and the Jewish immigrants. Condemning the thinly veiled colonialism of the British mandate, he argued, “The fears of the Arabs in Palestine will not be assuaged until both Zionists and British imperialists make it clear just what they want. It is quite possible, we believe probable, that the aims of the latter harmonize no more with Zionism than with Arab nationalism.”<sup>56</sup> Salloum Mokarzel previously expressed this view in an article he wrote after being barred from Jerusalem while touring the Middle East in 1929. Due to rising tensions during the August 1929 uprising, Mokarzel was forced to stay in other Palestinian towns, where he interviewed many Arab and Jewish residents. In Jaffa, a German Jew described to Mokarzel a meeting of Jerusalemite Jews who had sent a telegraphic petition begging the League of Nations to give the Palestinian mandate to either the United States or Italy. When Mokarzel expressed his surprise that Jews

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<sup>56</sup> H. I. Katibah, “Bleeding Palestine,” *Syrian World*, Nov. 3, 1933, 5.

would choose an Italian mandate even though the British were the first to support Zionism with the Balfour Declaration, the man explained, “England is the instigator of all these troubles. She is now performing in Palestine the role she played in India. She is inciting one faction against another to weaken both sides and strengthen her hold on the country. England never wished the Jews well.”<sup>57</sup> Many Syrian-Americans recognized that the problem was not simply Zionism, but British duplicity.

Members of the Syrian-American community often portrayed Jews and even Zionists sympathetically – not only in the press, but also in the press and in their statements before Congress. While testifying before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on the question of Palestine in 1945, Philip Hitti recognized that Jewish refugees had a right to migrate seek new homes in Palestine – although he also suggested that the U.S. Congress allow Jewish refugees to settle in “the unoccupied plains of Arizona or Texas.” Hitti argued, however, that the reconstitution of Palestine as a Zionist State would likely spark a civil war, which could “endanger the lives of Jews throughout the Muslim world” in Syria, Iraq, and Arabia.<sup>58</sup> Consistently making a distinction between Judaism and Zionism served as a tool for Syrians to legitimate their concerns and argue in favor of Palestinians using nationalist, non-religious arguments. The secular tone to the growing Arabist movement lay in stark contrast with Zionist claims to Palestine, which were ultimately predicated on the land’s religious significance for Jews.

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<sup>57</sup> Salloum Mokarzel, “Through Palestine During the Recent Uprising,” *Syrian World*, Sept. 1929, 32.

<sup>58</sup> In this instance, Hitti argued that Arabs wished to see a democratic Palestine was both “reasonable” and “responsible.” He noted it was only fair for the state to be founded on the basis of “equality and cooperation among citizens” instead of privileging Jewish identity. For more on his testimony, refer to Chapter 2 of this dissertation and Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs. Hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res. 419 Relative to the Jewish National Home in Palestine, 78th Cong., 2nd sess., February 8, 9, 15, and 16, 1944, 242.

Fuad Shatara, a New York surgeon and a prominent Palestinian-American critic of British policy on Zionism, frequently contributed to the *Syrian World* and other *mahjar* publications. In 1922, Shatara represented the Palestinian cause at the U.S. House of Representatives twenty years before Hitti's aforementioned testimony. During his statements, he stressed the need for self-determination in Palestine and an end to sectarianism.<sup>59</sup> A few years later, Shatara wrote an editorial in the *Syrian World* that castigated Zionist "leaders and propagandists" who had described the 1929 uprisings as the product of religious fanaticism. By citing the Shaw Commission recommendations and the Simpson Report, which suggested limiting Jewish immigration and described the abject conditions of Arab peasants affected by Zionist colonization, Shatara supported his objections to Zionism with more than religious claims. He hoped that reflection on recent developments would convince Jewish leaders that "the only hope for the future lies in the abandonment of political Zionism, the full recognition of Arab rights, and the pursuit of a policy in which Arab and Jew Palestinian can live and work together in harmony as they did before the ill-advised Balfour Promise."<sup>60</sup> Thus, Shatara did not equate ending Zionism with eliminating a Jewish presence in Palestine. This editorial is additionally notable because Shatara used the term "Arabs" without additional qualifications. He referred to immigrants in New York, Palestinian villagers, and leaders of various Middle Eastern countries as "Arabs"; for Shatara, state divisions were secondary to the more inclusive and transnational Arab identity.

Zionism was not a concern that ended at the borders of Palestine proper. During the early mandate years, inhabitants of Lebanon and Syria feared the expansion of Zionism in their new

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<sup>59</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Con. Res. 52, "Expressing Satisfaction at the Re-creation of Palestine as the National Home of the Jewish Race," 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., April 18, 19, and 21, 1922.

<sup>60</sup> Fuad I. Shatara, "Defining New British Policy in Palestine," *The Syrian World*, Nov. 1930, 9.



nations as well. The Syrian-American press thus featured prolific accounts of Zionist attempts to buy land in Syria and Lebanon. As a Beirut correspondent to the *Syrian World* reported in 1933, “the suspicions and fears of many Lebanese that Zionists will capitalize” on the Maronite patriarch’s supposedly humanitarian sympathies for Jewish Zionists had begun to assume a “disquieting reality.” According to an allegedly well-informed source, “the vanguard of Zionism” was planning to buy extensive lands between Beirut and Mar Elias Brinah to build another Tel Aviv. Rumors churned that Zionists would “stop at no expense to secure these and other lands in Lebanon and Syria proper.”<sup>61</sup> Subsequent reports criticized any sale of land to Jews, often asserting that certain pieces of land were sold at suspiciously low prices.

The *Syrian World* did not limit its unease about the spread of Zionism to Syria and Lebanon alone. One article also censured the sale of land for colonies in Transjordan, arguing that Zionists had even infiltrated the Arabic press and induced prominent tribal Arab leaders to make uncharacteristically positive statements about Zionism.<sup>62</sup> Such fears were not unfounded; as Salloum Mokarzel’s own experiences with the Jewish Agency ambassadors would demonstrate over a decade later, Zionist diplomats especially attempted to forge ties with Maronite Lebanese nationalists. While the Zionist Agency’s Eliahu Epstein assumed that Lebanese Christians would naturally support Zionism to bolster their claim to a Christian nationalist Lebanon, most Syrian immigrants in the United States seemed to view the potential expansion of Zionism to the borders of their home countries with suspicion. After witnessing a decade of strife in Palestine, it is no surprise that immigrants from Syria, including Mount Lebanon, became more ardently pro-Palestinian by the early to mid-1930s, to the point that Mokarzel would ultimately rebuke Zionist overtures. Opposition to Zionism was not simply

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<sup>61</sup> “Zionists Set Foot in Lebanon: Offer \$600,000 for Village on Borders,” *Syrian World*, Aug. 4, 1933, 1.

<sup>62</sup> “Zionism Seeks to Invade Lebanon and Syria,” *Syrian World*, June 23, 1933, 2.

reactive; it was also constructive in that it fostered a shared identity among all Arabic-speaking peoples whose homelands were occupied.

*Mahjar* newspapers also frequently included the voices of another distinct group: Jewish critics of Zionism. One of Shatara's editorials cited a quote from the Jewish-American ambassador Henry Morgenthau, who characterized the Zionist movement as "economically unsound, wrong in principle, and impossible of execution."<sup>63</sup> The *Syrian World* also published the statements of a Jewish editor, M. Vilanski, after a visit to Palestine in 1930; he criticized Zionists for causing much of the country's political unrest and urged them to "substitute pro-Arab policy for the existing one."<sup>64</sup>

In addition, the *Syrian World* chronicled dissent within Zionist ranks, particularly those who were in favor of a cultural but not a political Jewish homeland in Palestine. The *Syrian World* regarded the Hebrew University Chancellor Dr. Judah Magnes highly, reporting in October 1929 that Magnes and his supporters were ready to renounce the idea of "political domination" in Palestine. An unnamed writer contended that Arabs would accept the solution proposed by Dr. Magnes if Zionists abandoned their political goals; however, "as would be expected, the militant Zionists in America were loud in their denunciation of the heretical proposal by Dr. Magnes." Nevertheless, the author asserted that cultural – rather than political – Zionism was becoming more prominent in even the most ardently Zionist circles.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the *Syrian World* covered infighting among the Labour Party in Palestine, and disagreements between Revisionist and Orthodox Jews on the creation of a Jewish state. Articles described the

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<sup>63</sup> Shatara, "British Policy in Palestine," *Syrian World*, Nov. 1930, 9.

<sup>64</sup> "Jewish Editor Urges Zionist Cooperation," *Syrian World*, Aug. 11, 1933, 2. See also Stuart Knee, "Jewish Non-Zionism in America and Palestine Commitment, 1917-1941," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Summer 1977), 209-226.

<sup>65</sup> "Political Developments in Syria," *Syrian World*, Oct. 1929, p. 51.

strife between factions at the annual convention of the Zionist Organization of America, political disagreements among the Jewish Agency, and the assassination of a Labour activist in Palestine.<sup>66</sup> Including articles about divisions among Jews and Zionists not only served to legitimate Arab claims against Zionists, but also reminded readers about the importance of unity in the oft-divided diaspora community.

### **The Demise of *The Syrian World* and the Rise of the Arab National League's Activism Against Zionism**

The animated discourse about Syrian or Arab unity and the struggle for Palestine was not limited to the Syrian press but was also manifested into activism. Some scholars have contrasted the dramatic successes of the pro-Zionist lobby with the “non-existent” Arab opposition and asserted that the former went uncontested throughout the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> However, Michael Suleiman, Lawrence Davidson, and Hani Bawardi have shown that Arabs made numerous attempts to educate Americans and influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly on the issue of Zionism. Arabist groups organized immediately after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration and continued to agitate for the Arab-Palestinian cause for the following decades.

The *Syrian World* often reported on anti-Zionist activist groups the United States and the activism of Arabic-speaking individuals such as Ameen Rihani, Reverend Abraham Rihbany, Fuad Shatara, and Habib Katibah. One of the earliest US-based pro-Palestinian groups was the Palestine Antizionism Society, formed in 1917 by Fuad Shatara and Habib Katibah, who later

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<sup>66</sup> “Calls on Zionists to Back Labor” and “Dissension Sets Among Zionists: Stavsky Verdict Stirs Palestinian Jews, Divided into Two Hostile Camps,” *Syrian World*, July 6, 1934, 2 and 7.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); John. J Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 141-142.

edited the *Syrian World*. After the Balfour Declaration was issued, the Palestine Antizionism Society arranged a demonstration with the Ramallah Men's Society in Brooklyn that attracted 500 Syrian-Americans, including Philip Hitti. In addition to publishing and disseminating Katibah's *The Case Against Zionism*, the society sent representatives such as Abraham Rihbany to the Paris Peace Conference to represent the Arab point of view and advocate for self-determination in Syria, including Palestine. Lawrence Davidson notes that the Palestine Antizionism Society changed its name to the Palestine National League between 1919 and 1921 in an attempt to "accentuate what the group stood for rather than what it stood against."<sup>68</sup> This name change is symbolic of the incipient nationalist ideologies that Syrians in the United States had begun to embrace. The "other"-izing influence of Zionism may have been the impetus for the group's formation but engaging in community activism facilitated identification with more positive, Arab nationalist terms. Many activists in the League did not hail from Palestine, but they united over the Palestinian cause on the basis of their shared experience as migrants who viewed themselves as Syrian and/or Arab. The activists highlighted this shift once again in 1936, when the Palestine National League was reborn as the Arab National League (ANL).

The *Syrian World* followed such activism for Palestine closely, particularly the Palestine National League and its successor, the Arab National League. In 1934, the *Syrian World* described a debate between Shatara and Elias Ginsburg, the head of Revisionist Zionists in America. "Many Syrian and Palestinian Arabs were represented" among the spirited debate's audience, which was reportedly disappointed when the chairman of the debate was unable to decide whether Shatara or Ginsburg carried the day.<sup>69</sup> On another occasion, the *Syrian World*

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<sup>68</sup> Lawrence Davidson, "Debating Palestine: Arab-American Challenges to Zionism, 1917-1932," in *Arabs in America*, ed. Michael Suleiman, 228-232.

<sup>69</sup> "Heated Arguments at Zionist Debate," *Syrian World*, Sept. 28, 1934, 2.

published news of a cable that the Young Men's Moslem Association (YMMA) sent to the League of Nations. The New York YMMA chapter protested "against the British policy in Palestine and against the use of force and cruelty in preventing peaceful demonstrations by Palestinian nationals."<sup>70</sup> The Young Men's Moslem Association was closely allied with the Palestine National League and the New Syria Party in the U.S.<sup>71</sup>

Katibah hoped that under his tenure as editor, the *Syrian World* was "doing its bit" to further the cause of justice in the Arab world and was pleased that a large number of readers were interested in such matters. He privately lamented, however, that "still a large number don't know what it is all about," resolving that "we have to be patient, for it is just our lot to suffer the consequences of the negligence and indifference of the Syrian parents in this country." Although Katibah regretted that many of the earlier Syrian immigrants were generally inactive and unaware of the issues facing the Arab world, he hoped that the second generation was becoming more aware of the "fundamental problem" of colonialism in their homeland.<sup>72</sup>

Despite Katibah's efforts to attract more readers by changing the paper to a weekly newspaper format, subscriptions to the *Syrian World* were perilously low by 1934, perhaps due to the ongoing economic depression.<sup>73</sup> For a brief moment in early 1935, Katibah reported that while the paper was "still in the red," it was "making slow and steady progress" and seemed set to "clean our slate of the old debts."<sup>74</sup> However, these hopes did not come to fruition; in November 1935, the *Syrian World* ceased publication. Katibah's close friend E.J. Audi later confided in Ameen Rihani that Katibah "went through hell financially with that paper"; he was

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<sup>70</sup> "Moslems of New York Protest to League," *Syrian World*, Nov. 10, 1933, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Davidson, *America's Palestine*, p. 102. For more on the New Syria Party, see Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*.

<sup>72</sup> Katibah to Ameen Rihani, Aug. 18, 1934 and Jan. 10, 1935, Box 3, Folder 2, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>73</sup> Moses, *Annotated Index to the Syrian World*, xi.

<sup>74</sup> Katibah to Ameen Rihani, January 10, 1935, Box 3, Folder 2, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

pleased to report, however, that Katibah had begun work as a translator for the Egyptian legation in Washington D.C.<sup>75</sup> Katibah subsequently moved on to other intellectual pursuits, namely translating Arabic books into English, publishing articles in numerous news outlets, and writing a book he titled *The Spirit of the Arab Lands*.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Arab National League**

In 1936, Shatara recruited Katibah to officially work for the newly-renamed Arab National League. He asked Katibah to take the lead in establishing a headquarters for the ANL, an effort that Shatara noted had been hindered by certain “ignorant members who cannot see the value of an office.” Shatara contended that supporters of the Arab cause in the U.S. were solely interested in sending monetary donations to Palestine, although he allowed that “there are a few who are determined to carry on and we hope we will have money to do so.”<sup>77</sup> Katibah soon assumed leadership of the League. Under his tenure, the ANL published numerous works on the question of Palestine and Arabism and engaged in political and humanitarian activism.

Hani Bawardi has written extensively about the Arab National League’s work in the U.S. and abroad. He contrasts the ANL with earlier immigrant organizations such as the New Syria Party, which was established in 1926 to advocate for the continued unity of Greater Syria in the aftermath of the post-World War I dismemberment of the former Ottoman province. While the New Syria Party and the movement for Greater Syria remained important to many Arabic-speaking immigrants in the U.S. during the 1930s, Bawardi argues that “practical efforts toward Syrian unity were superseded by the exasperating and politically charged crisis in Palestine.”

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<sup>75</sup> E.J. Audi to Ameen Rihani, March 19, 1936, Box 1, Folder 8, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>76</sup> Katibah to Abdul-Rahman Shahbander, Aug. 14, 1937, Box 12, Folder 6, Faris and Yamna Naff Arab-American Collection, Archives Center, Smithsonian National Museum of American History (NMAH).

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Shatara to Katibah, September 20, 1936, *ibid*.

With the rise of political Zionism and increased Jewish settlement in Palestine, Arabic-speaking activists in the U.S. relied on “an Arab consciousness to have any hope of responding.”<sup>78</sup>

The ANL’s first Arabic pamphlet, “Bayan al-Jami’ah al-Arabiyyah,” or its “Statement of the Arab [National] League,” emphasized that its founding in New York in service of the “Bilad al-Suriyah” would make it possible to draw on its “American atmosphere – the most advanced democratic atmosphere in the world” to support the economic, political, and social aims of the Arab world. The declaration emphasized the value of the diaspora and urged Arab immigrants to join its efforts:

You may think to yourself: even with great numbers, what good can a group do thousands of miles away from Arab countries? It is a distance that places loyal nationalists in an excellent position to render true service to the homeland free of personal and financial gains.<sup>79</sup>

In 1938, the ANL claimed 10,000 members across the U.S. (according to the *New York Times*), though the number of active members were significantly lower.<sup>80</sup> Its work was transnational in orientation yet centered on engaging the American public and government. Although the ANL did not successfully attract support from the Syrian-American masses, its engaged numerous intellectuals who defended the cause of Palestine during the interwar period, including Faris Malouf, Philip Hitti, and Ameen Rihani.

### **Rihani’s Activism for Palestine**

Perhaps the most well-known American spokesperson of both the Arab nationalist movement and the question of Palestine was none other than the “Philosopher of Frieke,” Ameen

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<sup>78</sup> Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*, p. 5. Refer to Bawardi’s book for a more complete overview of the ANL’s activities.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*, 190-192.

<sup>80</sup> “Leaders here Hail Palestine Parley,” Nov. 10, 1938, *New York Times*.

Rihani. While scholars have long recognized Rihani's impact on the landscape of both Arabic and Arab-American poetry, literature, philosophy, several studies have more recently placed him within a more politically-oriented transnational context. Nijmeh Hajjar argues that "regardless of Rihani's dual Arab-American identity and his humanist outlook, the Arab cause, especially the quest for progress, democracy and liberation from foreign rule, remained at the heart of his engagement with East and West."<sup>81</sup>

During his famous travels of the Arab world in the 1920s, Ameen Rihani became more passionate about defending the cause of Palestine. In 1927, he traveled to Palestine and connected with leaders of the High Islamic Council, Christian Youth Association, Islamic League, and secular nationalist political organizations. It was during this trip that Rihani first came into contact with the mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Al-Husseini. On his return to the U.S., Rihani became one of the most outspoken pro-Palestinian advocates. While he was affiliated with many Arab organizations during this time period, including the Arab National League, he was a leader in none. Instead, he spoke independently on the issue of Palestine before crowds in the U.S. and in the pages of numerous publications geared toward the West.

As scholars Edmund Ghareeb and Jenab Tutunji have noted, Rihani's views on Zionism evolved in the decade after the Balfour Declaration. He went from first opposing it completely to indicating his acceptance of a cultural, although not political, Zionism.<sup>82</sup> As such, he typically emphasized the fact that Arab animosity to Zionism was not based on "religious or racial feeling," but a response to a new manifestation of foreign colonialism.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Nijmeh Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani: The Humanist Ideology of an Arab-American Intellectual and Activist* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Ghareeb and Tutunji, "Arab-American Writers, the Mahjar Press, and the Palestine Issue."

<sup>83</sup> Rihani, "The Roots of the Arab Jewish Conflict in Palestine," *Current History* 31, No. 2 (Nov. 1929), p. 278.



In 1929, in the aftermath of the Wailing Wall riots, Ameen Rihani wrote an article for *Current History* entitled “The Arab-Jewish Conflict in Palestine.” The New York Times carried excerpts of both Rihani’s piece and a response from an American Zionist writer in October 1929, which served to expand the article’s audience.<sup>84</sup> Before delving into the contemporary strife, Rihani briefly sketched the history of Arab nationalism not only in the Arabian Peninsula, but in the Arab “North,” which included Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. He compared the more recent European subjugation of the native population with the Turkish rule over the Arab provinces, and then argued that Zionism was a similar form of “conquest.” Rihani argued that the Balfour Declaration had specified that “Jews shall have a right to build a national home in Palestine not to have Palestine for a national home.” He drew the reader’s attention to this significant difference, “for a national home in Palestine does not mean that they can have the whole country for the purpose. A right to a room in a house cannot be interpreted as a right to the whole house.” Rihani then presciently envisioned the fate of Palestine under Zionist rule:

But how can you crowd a nation into a room? For if the success of Zionism equals the expectations of its leaders there should be, within the next twenty years, a million Jews in Palestine. Which means that the Arab population will be completely driven out, since the country cannot support more than that number of inhabitants. (Its present population is about 800,000.)

Let us concede that this success will be achieved within the next twenty years and that the Arabs will be driven out of the country east and north to Transjordan and Syria. Let us also concede that this will happen peacefully. What will then happen? The millions of Zionists, by the law of progress, will draw to them another million in the course of time, and instead of happy Zion Palestine will become a country of ghettos, unless more territory is acquired.

Thus, twenty years before the *nakba* and the creation of Israel, Rihani predicted a future in which Palestinian Arabs would be expelled from their homes and made refugees in the

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<sup>84</sup> “Rights in Palestine of Jews Debated: Ameen Rihani and M.W. Weisgal Discuss Subject from Opposite Viewpoints,” Oct. 27, 1929, *New York Times*.

surrounding countries. In their place, Zionists would attract more immigrants to the country and allow Palestine to become a “country of ghettos.” Rihani concluded that the Zionist leadership’s ultimate goals were to expand to the surrounding areas of Syria, Transjordan, and even Iraq. As proof, he noted that there had been a rumor that the “French Mandatory Power in Syria was considering the cession of a part of the Druse country to Palestine.”<sup>85</sup>

The same issue of *Current History* also published a piece by Meyer Weisgal, a prominent Jewish editor and leader of the Zionist Organization of America, as a rebuttal to Rihani’s argument against political Zionism. Like Rihani, Weisgal recounted the various agreements that the Allied powers made with the Arab leaders; he did so, however, to argue that the European powers had indeed fulfilled most of their promises to the Arabs. Weisgal quoted a *New York Times* article stating that seventy-five percent of the Allied pledge to the Arabs had been redeemed because the Arabs of Iraq, Hejaz-Najd, and Yemen were independent, and the other twenty-five percent in Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan, were in the process of achieving sovereignty under the guidance of the French and British. Weisgal thus argued that the same people “who clamor for the fulfillment of 100 per cent of the British pledges to the Arabs” should also seek to fulfill the pledges made to the Jewish people, from the Balfour Declaration onward. Moreover, Weisgal cited correspondence between Emir Feisal of Iraq and Chaim Weizmann as proof that Arab leadership in fact did not oppose Zionism. Finally, Weisgal claimed that Palestine could indeed absorb more immigrants to work its land and that in no way would Zionists force out the existing population. Weisgal scoffed at the view of Rihani and other Arabs that Zionists should seek only a “spiritual” home in Palestine. He contended that “spiritual centres do not exist in the air. They are born of political freedom and economic security,” which

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 272-278.

depended on the right of a people to engage in commerce, industry, and agriculture. Weisgal thus asserted that the civilizing mission in Palestine necessitated Jewish control of the state, which would in turn enable “the spiritual and economic development of the Arabs.” Jewish settlement and development “would provide just that forward impetus which apparently [the Arabs] are unable to produce out of themselves.”<sup>86</sup> Although Rihani was unable to respond directly to Weisgal’s argument in the journal, he dedicated himself to engendering the “forward impetus” Weisgal thought the Arabs were incapable of producing.

Rihani further advised the State Department on several policies regarding Palestine and the Arab world. In September 1929, Rihani led a delegation of Arabic-speaking Americans before Secretary of State Henry Stimson. Peter S. George, Elias Joseph, George Sadak, Frank C. Sakran, and Ally Joudy joined Rihani as spokespersons from the Palestine National League (the forerunner to the Arab National League), the New Syria Party, and the Young Men’s Moslem Society. As representatives of the people of Palestine in the U.S., they beseeched the U.S. to recognize the national aspirations of the Arabs because they had occupied the country continuously for 1,300 years; although the Arab population had tolerated Turkish rule, they had sought to realize their aspirations on the eve of the World War. They noted that Sir Henry McMahon had recognized these national wishes by signing a British agreement with King Hussein to allow the formation of an Arab Empire in exchange for Arab support of the Allies. Rihani and the delegation argued that Syria and Palestine had been included in these boundaries, and also cited the text of the Balfour Declaration, which stated that “nothing shall be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish population of Palestine.” Ten years had elapsed since that statement, and the delegation contended that these assurances had

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<sup>86</sup> Meyer W. Weisgal, “Zionism as a Spiritual Ideal and a Blessing to Palestine,” *Current History* 31, No. 2 (Nov. 1, 1929), 279-285.

not been realized because a national home for the Jews in Palestine “constituted a government within a government” that could “only be established by putting the Arabs out of their own homes.” Their statement thus resolved:

Here is the fundamental cause of the present uprising in Palestine. Religion has nothing to do with it. Racial feeling has no part in it. It is a conflict between the Arab nationalism of the native majority and the Zionism of a small minority of Jews.

We deplore the acts of violence. We mourn the dead of both the Arabs and the Jews. We especially regret that there have been Americans among them.

That this catastrophe shall not recur again we request that our government use its good offices to secure for the people of Palestine the following demands:

1. The revocation of the Balfour Declaration
2. The restriction of Zionist immigration to Palestine.
3. The establishment of a national representative government in accordance with the pledges and promises of the Government of Great Britain.

In response, Stimson equivocated, “it would not be proper for me to comment open the views which you have set forth concerning the future of Palestine.” However, he expressed hope that as soon as order was restored, the “competent and responsible authorities animated by a sincere desire to do justice to all parties concerned” would establish a cooperative peace. Stimson also asserted that the Arab-American delegation would serve an “eminently useful and an eminently American purpose” by emphasizing the qualities of “moderation and thoughtfulness.”<sup>87</sup>

Rihani may not have been able to convince the U.S. government to support Arab nationalism. However, his most notable – yet largely overlooked – contributions to combating Zionism involved a series of speaking tours across the U.S. and Canada from 1929 to 1931, and again in 1937, 1938, and 1939. Rihani detailed his travels across the world in his memoir of his time in Mexico entitled *In the Land of the Mayas*, in a manuscript about *Kurdistan* (1932), and in

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<sup>87</sup> “Arabs Ask Stimson to Aid in Palestine,” Sept. 7, 1929, *New York Times*.

his well-known travelogues *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1931) and *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930). While Rihani wrote much about his experiences as an immigrant in the U.S., he did not live to complete a full account of his lecture tours across the United States, which were largely focused on defending the cause of Palestine. However, the Rihani family posthumously published a book titled *The Fate of Palestine*, a collection of Rihani's lectures and essays on the conflict in Palestine.<sup>88</sup> Rihani's personal archives have also have left a plethora of sources with which to piece together the story of Rihani's cross-country tours.

In 1929, the New York-based Foreign Policy Association suggested that Rihani embark on a lecture tour to inform Americans about Palestine and the Arab World. From January 1929 to March 1931, Rihani traveled to places as varied as Montreal, Canada; Waterville, Maine; Boston, Worcester, Norton, and Malden in Massachusetts; Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania; Providence, Rhode Island; Hartford, Connecticut; New York City, Staten Island, Chatauqua, and Buffalo, New York; Princeton and Montclair, New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Daytona Beach, Florida; Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Gambier, Ohio; Chicago and Urbana, Illinois; Kansas City, Missouri; Spokane, Washington; Portland, Oregon; as well as Riverside, Los Angeles, and San Diego in California.<sup>89</sup>

During his Foreign Policy Association engagements, Rihani often spoke on a panel that included British and Zionist representatives. Feedback on the lecture tours often lauded Rihani for his "forceful and yet retrained tone" while discussing the situation in Palestine during events featuring numerous Zionist speakers.<sup>90</sup> During a 1929 Foreign Policy luncheon in Boston, a British speaker, Henry Nevinson, made a particularly dehumanizing comment about Palestinian

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<sup>88</sup> Ameen Rihani, *The Fate of Palestine: A Series of Lectures, Articles, and Documents about the Palestinian Problem and Zionism*, (Beirut: The Rihani House, 1967).

<sup>89</sup> See Box 1, Folder 1 of the Rihani Papers, LOC on this tour.

<sup>90</sup> Olivia C. Holt to Ameen Rihani, Nov. 7, 1929, Box 2 Folder 5, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

Arabs before Rihani. Harvard Professor William Ernest Hocking wrote the following tribute commending Rihani's patience when responding to Nevinson:

Mr. Rihani...is doing a very courageous and rather lonely piece of work. He gave his views on Palestine at the Boston luncheon meeting with Mr. [Jacob] De Haas and Nevinson, when Nevinson, speaking of the skills of the British in getting on with backward peoples so unhappily illustrated his point by adding 'as we get on well with horses and dogs: we say, "Down, Towser, down," and they keep quiet'!! Rihani kept his temper admirably; and the occasion served him *very* well, for it illustrated how unconsciously a very good Englishman can touch the pride of an alien race."<sup>91</sup>

Rihani's efforts on behalf of Palestine were also lauded internationally. Newspapers in Beirut wrote about Rihani's tours of the U.S. on occasion, and *mahjar* papers that circulated in the Arab world, such as *Mir'aat ul-Gharb* and *al-Hoda*, featured not only news about Rihani's work, but his written word on the subject.<sup>92</sup> In 1930, Hajj Amin Al-Husseini asked Rihani to serve as a member on a Palestine delegation to negotiate with the British mandatory regime. Rihani declined because he could not afford to pay for his travel to London and would not accept payment for his services.<sup>93</sup> While corresponding with Rihani on the matter, H.A.R. Gibb regretted that Rihani would be unable to represent the Palestinian position in London; yet, he commended Rihani for his lecturing work in the U.S.: "I believe that your assistance would have been valuable to the Arab delegation that arrives today – if they were willing to be guided by your experience." Gibb continued, "However, you have a task of no less importance in America – and even better qualifications for that."<sup>94</sup>

As Rihani's tour wrapped up in the spring of 1931, some of his contacts from the Foreign Policy Association suggested that Rihani lead a tour to "Palestine, Syria, and the Desert." The

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth P. McCallum to Ameen Rihani, January 31, 1930, Box 2, Folder 5, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>92</sup> Albert Rihani to Ameen Rihani, Mar. 6, 1929, Box 3 Folder 7, Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>93</sup> Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani*, p. 64.

<sup>94</sup> H.A.R. Gibb to Ameen Rihani, March 30, 1930, Box 2, Folder 6, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

itinerary would involve visits to Jaffa, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Tiberius, Damascus, Palmyra, Baalbek, and Beirut. The Foreign Policy Association's Frances J. Pratt opened a letter of invitation discussing the tour as follows:

Would you like to travel in the Near East as an honored guest instead of a tourist? Many have dreamed of such an opportunity, and next spring it will be possible, as Mr. Ameen Rihani has been persuaded to take with him a few Americans, at the end of his present lecture tour in this country. Before retiring to his hilltop in the Lebanon, Mr. Rihani will travel through Palestine and Syria, calling upon his friends and will share with you the welcome from officials and private citizens."

Pratt described Rihani as occupying "the unique position of interpreting the Near East to America and America to the Near East."<sup>95</sup> It is unclear whether the tour with Americans came to fruition, but Rihani soon returned to the Arab World. After spending some time in his home in Frieke, Rihani again traveled to Jerusalem to gauge the conditions in Palestine in 1936.<sup>96</sup> He returned to the U.S. with reignited passions to advocate for a secular democratic solution in Palestine.

In 1937, Rihani again reprised a lecture tour across America, but this time did so under the auspices of the Institute for International Education; he did, however, continue to make appearances before branches of the Foreign Policy Association, churches, and other organizations. The Institute of International Education's "Cooperative Lecture Plan" sought to educate Americans about foreign affairs by arranging for "foreign speakers" to speak at institutions of higher education. From February to May 1937, Rihani traveled to major research universities, teaching colleges, military academies, and small liberal arts colleges in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Indiana. He generally divided his time between two or more colleges each week, during which he had up to six speaking engagements, including lectures and informal

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<sup>95</sup> Letter from Frances J. Pratt and "Palestine Syria, and the Desert Itinerary," 1931, Box 1 Folder 1, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>96</sup> Edgar Fisher to Ameen Rihani, Nov. 17, 1936, Box 3 Folder 1, Rihani Papers, LOC.

discussions with students and locals. The venues ranged from University of Notre Dame to Morehead State Teachers College in Richmond, Kentucky; and from Purdue University to the Culver Military Academy in Indiana.<sup>97</sup> The fact that a renowned author, philosopher, and activist such as Rihani – who had ten years prior negotiated a peace among the leaders of Arabia – was now spending his time speaking to students in small Appalachian towns was not lost on the organizers or the attendees. Faculty and administration at the Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College were reportedly impressed with “the excellence of his discussions,” whether with eight smaller class group or before the entire student body consisting of 1,200 students. The college’s president wrote to the Institute of International Education, “I am afraid we worked him too hard, but he was such an interesting gentleman and had so much to tell us about Arabia and the Oriental countries.” Similarly, the president of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana wrote the following note to the lecture organizers:

Mr. Rihani left us on Thursday and we were sorry to see him go. Many of the students as well as teachers still speak in glowing terms of his appearances here. To the students in this small and rural school, contact, formally or informally, with him was a stimulating experience. It probably gave them for the first time a real glimpse into international affairs. To some of us in the teaching force who find in our surroundings a lack of mental stimulus, his visit was most refreshing. Thank you for including us in his itinerary.<sup>98</sup>

Although Rihani received accolades from many, he also experienced intense pushback on the tour. In contrast to his Foreign Policy Association speaker tour almost a decade prior, Rihani experienced more opposition to his pro-Arab message because anti-Zionist views were increasingly portrayed as anti-Jewish in the years leading up to World War II. The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith made several complaints to the Institute of International Education regarding Rihani’s arguments during his lectures. Responding to reports from a

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<sup>97</sup> “Cooperative Lecture Plan: West Virginia, Kentucky, and Indiana,” July 23, 1936 and Mary Waite to Ameen Rihani, July 24, 1936, Box 3 Folder 1, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>98</sup> “Cooperative Lecture Plan: Comments of Colleges,” undated, Box 1, Folder 1, Rihani Papers, LOC.



lecture that Rihani gave in Louisville, Kentucky, the ADL's New York office secretary, Leonard Finder, contended that "Mr. Rihani's attitude revealed a very strong prejudice, not merely in favor of the Arabs, but against the Jews, and that his position generally resembled closely that of the anti-Semite." Finder later apologized to Rihani after realizing that the ADL's correspondent who had attended the lecture had misrepresented some of Rihani's views.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, several of Rihani's lectures were canceled due to such controversy. The Institute's assistant director, who received the bulk of complaints after Rihani's speeches, wrote to Rihani in February 1937 to apologize for these cancellations, noting that he regretted these "difficulties...on account of the high feeling in this country at the present time due to the Jewish persecution stimulated by the Nazi regime."<sup>100</sup>

Rihani's public affairs representative, W. Colston Leigh, seemed to be particularly adept at arranging Rihani's speaking engagements outside of his lecture tours. Leigh, who represented the likes of Eleanor Roosevelt, also happened to represent a number of Zionist speakers. As such, Leigh often arranged for Rihani to participate in independent symposiums on subjects such as "Who Shall Rule Palestine?" alongside some of his Zionist clients. For instance, in 1938 Rihani spoke on panels in California and elsewhere alongside speakers who represented the "English" and "Jewish position."<sup>101</sup> The following January, Rihani continued to lecture in New England and Canada.<sup>102</sup>

During the course of these lectures, Rihani not only informed thousands of Americans about the issue of Palestine from the Arab perspective, but also helped put them in touch with

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<sup>99</sup> Leonard V. Finder to Edgar J. Fisher, June 7, 1937, and Leonard V. Finder to Ameen Rihani, June 16, 1937, Box 2, Folder 5, Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>100</sup> Edward J. Fisher to Ameen Rihani, Feb. 20, 1939, Box 2, Folder 5, Ameen Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>101</sup> W. Colston Leigh to Ameen Rihani, Sept. 6, 1938, Box 3 Folder 3, Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>102</sup> Albert Rihani to Ameen Rihani, Dec. 28, 1938, Box 3 Folder 7, Rihani Papers, LOC.

groups such as the Arab National League and the American Friends of the Arabs, organized by Eliahu Grant and Harry Snyder, that could mail them additional literature on the conflict. Fuad Shatara joked in 1937 that he hoped Rihani was making headway into his “sales talk” for the Arab cause so that “you may rightfully win for yourself the epithet, ‘The traveling Arab salesman.’” Shatara’s letter referenced the common Syrian immigrant occupation of peddling; unlike the earliest immigrants who peddled household goods and sewing notions, Rihani sought to sell Americans on the Arab case for Palestine.<sup>103</sup>

To recognize Rihani’s efforts, the Arab National League held a banquet in his honor in New York City on June 5, 1937. The WNYC Radio station broadcasted Ameen Rihani’s keynote speech and remarks by ANL president Fuad Shatara. Other speakers included Boston street commissioner and Syrian-Lebanese Federation leader Faris Malouf; Harvard Professor William Ernest Hocking; Arab Office of London head Izzat Tannous; and Reverend John Howland Lathrop of Brooklyn. The event took place in Manhattan’s Town Hall Club and attracted 300 guests.<sup>104</sup> But the event was not without controversy; some Jewish New Yorkers protested that WNYC had aired anti-Semitic views by carrying a program that criticized Zionism. These complaints prompted the New York Board of Alderman to investigate the municipal radio commissioner and WNYC’s program director. The furor did not die down until WNYC broadcasted a counter-program featuring Zionist voices such as Rabbi Stephen Wise; Wise, to his credit, told the *New York Times* that the charges of anti-Semitism against the ANL’s broadcast were “absurd.”<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, an ANL pamphlet later reported that the man who had

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<sup>103</sup> Fuad Shatara to Ameen Rihani, Apr. 16, 1937, Box 4 Folder 1, Rihani Papers, LOC.

<sup>104</sup> “Zionism Decried by Arab Leader,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1937.

<sup>105</sup> For a complete summary of the backlash to this event, see Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*, 198-199. See also “Anti-Jewish Bias on WNYC is Denied,” Jun. 16, 1937, *New York Times*.

arranged the WNYC broadcast was dismissed from the radio station. It decried the debacle as an “un-American” act of “censorship.”<sup>106</sup>

Faris Malouf’s introductory remarks at the event were especially cognizant of the danger Zionism posed not only to Arabs but to Jews in Palestine. He noted that establishing a political homeland for Jews in Palestine was “an abuse of both the Jews and the Arabs, for it is dangerous for the former and oppressive to the latter.” He spoke highly of Jewish contributions to religion, science, literature, and culture, and concluded, “my realization that they and the Arabs are racial cousins makes sincerely love them and wish them well” – to much applause from the audience. He continued, “in this spirit however, establishing a homeland in Palestine is a costly and mistaken path.” Fuad Shatara also emphasized his opposition only to political Zionism. The same man who had founded the Palestine Antizionism Society in 1917 now indicated that he would accept the Balfour Declaration if it was interpreted to support a cultural, but not political, homeland for Jews in Palestine.<sup>107</sup>

Rihani’s speech likewise included his constant refrain that anti-Zionism did not entail opposition to Jews. He argued yet again that the primary Arab demands were to stop foreign immigration to Palestine and establish a national representative government that would recognize “the equal rights of the Arabs and Jews, who would submit to the same laws and enjoy equal rights.” Rihani suggested that if Zionists were unhappy with their national representation in a Palestinian government, “they can and ought to establish a national home somewhere else – and

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<sup>106</sup> “An Appeal to American Justice and Fair Play on Behalf of the Palestine Arabs,” Arab National League (New York: 1938), p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Faris Malouf and Fuad Shatara, *Prelude to Ameen Rihani Speech*, June 5, 1937, New York City, recorded by the Ameen Rihani Organization and remastered by the Moise A. Khayrallah Center, <https://soundcloud.com/khayrallah-center/prelude-to-ameen-rihani-speech>.

why not a national home in the United States?” After all, he noted, “one quarter of the state of Texas is many times the size of Palestine.”<sup>108</sup>

As the master of ceremony for the event, Shatara emphasized the longstanding relationship between the Arab world and the West. He gave a toast to “the recent Arab renaissance that is reawakening the Arab world. May its consequences in the educational, cultural, economic, and political fields be as far reaching as that great renaissance of the seventeenth century which received its incentive from Arab civilization.” He expressed his gratitude to many American institutions in the Middle East that had made this most recent Arab movement possible, such as missionary schools. Finally, Shatara toasted Ameen Rihani for his own work in bridging the East and West and fostering the Arab renaissance. “May its progress be ever forward,” Shatara wished, “unhampered by foreign imperialism, religious fanaticism, political Zionism, or any other ills.”<sup>109</sup>

The progress of the Arab movement in the U.S., however, was largely thwarted by 1940. Ameen Rihani continued his strenuous lecture tour in the U.S. until 1939 and returned to Lebanon in 1940. In September 1940, he sustained multiple injuries from a bicycle accident in Frieke; he died on September 13 from skull fractures and an infection. Rihani was mourned across the world by both students and kings, and numerous periodicals carried his obituary.<sup>110</sup> His death was a blow to the Arab cause in the U.S., as was the death of Fuad Shatara two years later in 1942. According to Bawardi, Shatara’s work at the Long Island College Hospital was hindered by accusations that he was anti-Semitic in the early 1940s. “When Shatara was forced

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<sup>108</sup> Ameen Rihani, Town Hall Speech, June 5, 1937, New York City, recorded by the Ameen Rihani Organization and remastered by the Moise A. Khayrallah Center, <https://soundcloud.com/khayrallah-center/rihani-speech-cleaned>.

<sup>109</sup> Faris Malouf and Fuad Shatara, Prelude to Ameen Rihani Speech, June 5, 1937.

<sup>110</sup> “Ameen Rihani Biography,” undated, The Ameen Rihani Organization, <http://www.ameenrihani.org/index.php?page=biography>.

to take an indefinite leave from work by a hostile colleague, the pressure may have been too much,” Bawardi contends. The New York Police Department deemed his death to be a suicide, and Shatara’s daughter believed that “being denied practicing his profession” contributed to her father taking his own life. While other Syrian-American activists continued to defend the cause of Palestine in the early 1940s, they found their task all the more difficult because support for the Allies, including the British, became paramount in the early days of World War II. Criticism of British policy in Palestine thus came to be seen as unpatriotic. The Arab National League ceased to operate on the eve of the American entrance into the War.<sup>111</sup>

## Conclusion

After the demise of the ANL in the early days of World War II, Katibah worked as the senior editor of the Arabic section of the Office of War Information. He, along with Philip Hitti, Faris Malouf, Khalil Totah, Ismail Khalidi, and others would later form the Institute of Arab American Affairs in 1944, which the following chapter discusses. This intellectual community also worked closely with other Arab and Arabist intellectuals in the U.S. and abroad.

Although Salloum Mokarzel embraced an increasingly sectarian Lebanese identity, he noted that the late 1930s and the 1940s witnessed an upswing in Syrian nationalist or Arabist ideology among the Syrian-American community. In 1947, Eliahu Epstein summarized Salloum Mokarzel’s views on the “growing pan-Arab propaganda” in the U.S. after meeting with him. Epstein wrote that Mokarzel believed such propaganda was “being conducted in various ways and through many channels other than the Arab Office and the Arab Legations; such as, for

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<sup>111</sup> Bawardi, 230-238.

instance, many American organizations friendly to the pan-Arab cause.”<sup>112</sup> Mokarzel also expressed unease that very few organizations in New York identified as Lebanese, preferring instead to use the label Syrian or even Arab.<sup>113</sup> Mokarzel’s concerns demonstrated the growing power of pan-Syrian and pan-Arab nationalism in the mandate and World War II-era. These ideological shifts were made possible by Syrian publications, such as the *Syrian World*, that covered events in Palestine closely while encouraging their readers to engage in activism for justice in their birthplace and adopted homeland.

This chapter has demonstrated that from 1926 to 1940, Syrian-Americans engaged in a sustained campaign to educate both Syrian immigrants and Americans about the issue of Palestine and support the creation of a secular, independent Palestine. Ultimately, their activism failed to shape American policy or even reach the American masses. But this failure has to be seen in the context of an important success: it lay the foundations for cooperative work that eventually led to the emergence of Palestine as central to Arab-American identity. Early Syrian-American activism was made possible by the growing solidarity between migrant groups from the Middle East, which was in turn fostered by vibrant diaspora press outlets such as the *Syrian World*. Despite fractures in the Syrian-American community, different immigrant intellectuals and institutions united in some way over their sympathy for the dispossession of Palestinians at the hand of Zionism.

Support for Palestine among Syrian immigrants did not indicate a narrow attachment to events overseas or detachment from American society. On the contrary, Syrians often proudly affirmed their Americanism by co-opting and redefining American racial ideology. At the same

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<sup>112</sup> Elias Epstein to Members of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, “Memorandum No. 11,” February 3, 1947 CZA: A263/18, courtesy of Laurie Eisenberg.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Mokarzel, *Al-Hoda, 1898-1968*, p. 53-54.

time, they crafted transnational identities, imagining themselves as not just transplants in the U.S. but as American counterparts to their brethren in Greater Syria, which was itself fractured into the separate states of Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. These identities demanded from Syrian-Americans complex and interlocking allegiances. Thus, Syrian immigrants emphasized their affinity with Western culture when seeking American naturalization or shifts in U.S. policy in the Arab world. They also highlighted their Syrian – and increasingly Arab – identities when defending the cause of Palestine in the U.S. and abroad. They exercised their right to free speech by cultivating a vibrant press and engaging in civic activism, confident in their ability to report on and impact movements in their homeland. This work laid a foundation for subsequent generations' advocacy for Middle Eastern issues in the U.S. In spite of fragmentation among the first-wave Syrian-American community, Palestine provided an area for unification.

## Chapter 2

### **“Palestinitis”: The Institute of Arab American Affairs’ Advocacy for Palestine, World War**

#### **II to 1948**

This chapter analyzes the activism of Arabic-speaking immigrants in the U.S. on the issue of Palestine leading up to the 1948 War. In 1944, a group of Syrian-American immigrants formed the Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA), a non-sectarian organization with a mission to forge better relations between America and the Arab World.<sup>1</sup> Its members engaged in what historian Donna Gabaccia has termed “immigrant foreign relations” by facilitating political and cultural connections between their adopted homes and their homelands overseas.<sup>2</sup> Following World War II, emigrants from the Middle East witnessed Zionist propaganda gain a foothold among the American public and political circles, while indifference – or antipathy – to Arab aspirations abounded in the U.S. Some of the most active immigrants who sought to counteract the influence of Zionism settled in the U.S. to escape escalating strife in Palestine or pursue educational opportunities; others had emigrated from the Greater Syria region decades earlier but maintained a close relationship to their homeland. The IAAA galvanized Syrian-Americans to urge the United States and other global powers to take demands for self-determination in the Middle East seriously. Its members served as advisers and intermediaries between political institutions in the West and the Arab World. By focusing on the Institute of Arab American Affairs’ advocacy for Palestine, this chapter demonstrates that the Palestine question unified

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute of Arab American Affairs was largely overlooked in Arab-American historiography until recently. Hani Bawardi’s seventh chapter of *The Making of Arab-Americans* provides an excellent overview of the Institute’s work. Refer also to the epilogue of Sarah Gualtieri’s *Between Arab and White* and Denise L. Jenison, “*In Accordance with the Best Traditions of American Democracy*”: Arab-Americans, Zionists, and the Debate over Palestine, 1940-1948 (Kent State University, Ph.D. diss., 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 2-3.



diverse segments of the Syrian-American community and laid a foundation for the development of both Arab and Arab-American identities.

1944 was a year that witnessed unprecedented activism from both Zionists and anti-Zionists on the question of Palestine in the United States. In 1939, the British mandate issued a White Paper that set March 31, 1944 as the date to end Jewish immigration into Palestine without Arab consent. With both the White Paper immigration deadline and the 1944 elections approaching, Zionists lobbied the U.S. Congress with renewed fervor to support increased immigration to Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state. At the same time, the American public became more aware of the Third Reich's atrocities against Jews in Europe. In this environment, James A. Wright (a congressman from Pennsylvania) submitted Resolution 418 to the House of Representatives on March 31, 1944. Ranulf Compton (representing Connecticut) then reproduced this language in the identical H.R. 419. The resolutions cited an earlier resolution that the House had passed in 1922, which expressed support for the Balfour Declaration by favoring "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" under the condition that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of Christian and all other non-Jewish communities in Palestine." However, the 1944 resolution additionally cited the horrors of the Holocaust in order to advocate not only for a Jewish home in Palestine, but a Jewish commonwealth:

Whereas the ruthless persecution of the Jewish people in Europe has clearly demonstrated the need for a Jewish homeland as a haven for the large numbers who have become homeless as a result of this persecution: Therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the United States shall use its good offices and take appropriate measures to the end that the doors of Palestine shall be opened for free entry of Jews into that country, and that there shall be full opportunity for colonization, so that the Jewish people may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth.

On February 1, five days later, Senators Robert F. Wagner and Robert A. Taft submitted their own resolution to the U.S. Senate that likewise favored continuing Jewish immigration and reconstituting Palestine as a “Jewish commonwealth.”

Many observers viewed these resolutions as misguided, ill-timed, and fraught with dangerous consequences for both the American war effort and the future of Arab sovereignty. Arab immigrants in the U.S. were disappointed that the burgeoning Zionist lobby had persuaded the American political establishment to show unparalleled support for a Jewish state, and immediately sought to represent their case against the resolutions before Congress. The Arab World also took notice of this newfound call for a Jewish state by the legislative bodies that supposedly represented the views of a majority of Americans. For an Arab population in the midst of supporting the Allied war effort across the Middle East and North Africa, the resolution belied the U.S.’s alleged support for self-determination.<sup>3</sup> Arab leaders said as much to American officials in the State Department and in their own written appeals to members of the U.S. Congress. Moreover, many American officials, businessmen, missionaries, humanitarian workers, and others who lived in or were acquainted with the Arab world appealed to Congress, President Roosevelt, and the State Department to oppose the resolution – or at the very least, postpone – considering it until the conclusion of the war.

Several Arabs in the U.S., representing either an organization or themselves, wrote to Congress expressing their objections to the resolution. For instance, Jabir Shibli, a professor at State College in Pennsylvania, sent a letter to the Committee on Foreign Affairs on February 12, 1944, protesting the resolution on the basis of his identity “as an American citizen of Arab descent.” Acknowledging the plight of the Jewish refugees, he declared, “to sympathize with the

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Arabs who opposed a fascist Axis presence in the Middle East and collaborated with the Allied effort, see Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (London: Saqi, 2010).

suffering Jews and wish to give them asylum is praiseworthy; but to oppress the Arabs and violate their natural right to their native land in order to relieve Jewish distress, is tyranny.” He expressed his appeals as an American worried that Congress would betray American ideals by supporting a Zionist state, as establishing a Jewish commonwealth would necessarily entail aggression against the non-Jewish, “innocent” indigenous people. “I am not worrying about the Arabs,” Shibli stated, for he believed that they could “take care of themselves” and would one day repel “Jewish invaders and determine the destiny of Palestine.” However, he was concerned primarily with America: “I am jealous for American honor and integrity. No group, however mighty and aggressive, should be allowed to lead Congress away from the American tradition of justice and fair play.” Shibli ended his statement by exhorting, “let it not be said that while Zionists were exerting subtle and terrific pressure to perpetrate wrong and injustice against the Arabs, there was no opportunity given to hear the Arab voice. Please do not rob us of our admiration and love for America and her institutions.”<sup>4</sup> Shibli sent a copy of this letter to Congress to Philip Hitti. In an addendum, he asked Hitti to send him the names of any senators who were “not afraid of the Jews” so that he could appeal for their support.<sup>5</sup>

Michel G. Malti, a Lebanese professor of engineering at Cornell University, echoed Shibli’s views in his own telegram to Congressman James W. Wadsworth, noting that the resolution was “anti-democratic, anti-British, anti-Arab and fraught with danger to the Jews themselves, to our war effort, and to the future peace of the world.”<sup>6</sup> Both Shibli and Malti requested to testify before the committee on the implications of the resolution, but did not receive invitations to do so.

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<sup>4</sup> Jabir Shibli to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, February 12, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 7.

<sup>5</sup> Jabir Shibli to Philip Hitti, undated from 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 7.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Michel G. Malti to Philip Hitti, February 15, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 7.

However, two of their “compatriots” ably represented their views to Congress: Philip Hitti, a professor of Near East Studies at Princeton University, and Faris Malouf, a Bostonian lawyer and co-founder of the Eastern branch of the Syrian-Lebanese American Federation. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs held hearings on Resolutions 418 and 419 from February 9 through 16, 1944. Sol Bloom, a Democratic congressman from New York who supported Zionism, presided over the hearings as chair. Over four days, the committee heard mostly from witnesses who were sympathetic to the Zionist cause and used liberal, religious, and humanitarian arguments to further the passage of the resolution. The committee did not hear about the Arab point of view from a person from the Middle East until Philip Hitti spoke on the second-to-last day of the hearings. He began his testimony,

From the Arab point of view political Zionism is an exotic movement, internationally financed, artificially stimulated, and holds no hope of ultimate or permanent success. Not only to the fifty million Arabs, many of whom are descendants of the Canaanites who were in the land long before the Hebrews entered Palestine under Joshua, but to the entire Moslem society, of whom the Arabs form the spearhead, a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine appears as an anachronism.<sup>7</sup>

Hitti then emphasized that Arab opposition to political Zionism did not spell anti-Semitism, even declaring that “of all the major peoples of the world, the Arabs perhaps come nearest to being free from race prejudice.” Speaking to an American audience whose history was entrenched in racial thought, Hitti perhaps sought to emphasize that in the Arab world, the construct of race had not historically been a relevant source of identity. Instead, language, religion, ethnicity, and social class were more significant. As further proof that Arabs did not engender any “race prejudice” toward Jews, Hitti identified Arabs as also a “Semitic people.” In

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res 419, “The Jewish National Home in Palestine,” 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), p. 241. See also Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations, 1820-2001* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 191-184.

addition, he argued that throughout medieval and modern times, Jews had been treated better in Muslim and Arab lands than anywhere else. “So welcome were American Jewish ambassadors to the Sublime Porte at Constantinople,” Hitti claimed, “that our Government appointed three of them in a row: Strauss, Elkus, and Morgenthau.”

With the question of prejudice addressed, Hitti turned to the matter at the crux of Zionism: the meaning of the term “Jewish homeland.” He contended that the Balfour Declaration had not intended to make Palestine into a Jewish state but merely sought immigration to create a safe haven for Jews. He cited the words of Dr. Judah Magnes, president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, that establishing a Jewish commonwealth instead of a Jewish national home would be unacceptable to any Arab and thus untenable. During the question portion of the hearing, committee members asked Hitti to return to this point and clarify the difference between constructing a Jewish state and a Jewish home. Hitti responded that the 1939 White Paper promised to establish a constitutional government that would speak for all of Palestine’s inhabitants. He believed the British Government had fulfilled its promise to facilitate a “home,” as it had never declared that it wanted “to constitute Palestine a Jewish commonwealth.” Furthermore, he argued that if Jewish immigrants had not sought to create an exclusionary Zionist state, the Arab population would not have necessarily opposed to their seeking refuge in Palestine. Hitti recalled his time teaching in Beirut from 1920-24, when many Armenians and Assyrians who had been persecuted by Turkish troops immigrated to Greater Syria, where they “were all received with open arms.” On the other hand, “everyone was eying the Jews with suspicion” as Jewish immigrants entered Palestine. Hitti contended, “so far as I am concerned I would like to see more Jews in Lebanon and Syria, with the idea of cooperation with natives, not controlling them.” However, he voiced his concern that the Zionist movement would incite

animosity toward existing Jewish communities throughout the Arab, “Moslem” world. “There are 40,000 Jews in the heart of Arabia proper,” Hitti said. “Their lives will be in danger, and in Syria and Iraq too.” Hitti resolved, “the Jews and Arabs were getting along all right until the political Zionists of New York came in.”<sup>8</sup>

Another argument that Hitti made was that Axis powers would capitalize on the U.S. resolution for their benefit during the ongoing war – as they had done with the Balfour Declaration in World War I. Hitti cautioned the U.S. against depleting its “reservoir of goodwill” in the Middle East, because German leadership would hold the resolution before Arabs “as a sample of the kind of Anglo-American ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ for which this war is fought.” He feared that passing the resolution would also “assure the Arabs that the Zionist control of Palestine is but the prelude to the Jewish control of Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Arabia - the camel's head intruding into the tent about which they read in their Arabian Nights.” He warned, “this is no time to turn old friends into potential enemies.” Hitti concluded his statement by arguing that passing the resolution would be “inimical to the best interests of the Arabs, the Americans, the British, and even the Jews.”

In subsequent questioning, however, Hitti found that his appeals had fallen mostly upon deaf ears. Congressman Eaton asked Hitti to “locate himself a little more fully,” and Hitti explained, “I was born at Mt. Lebanon. I am presently professor of Semitic literature at Princeton. I was educated in American high schools and the American University of Beirut. I went to Columbia and I have been connected with Princeton since 1926.” Unsatisfied with this answer, Eaton asked more pointedly, “If it is not too personal, are you an Arab?” Hitti responded

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

that the term Arab was misleading as it had linguistic but not ethnic connotations. He noted that he himself was a Christian and was descended from Christians from time immemorial:

I claim I am a descendant of the ancient Canaanites or Phoenicians, who also occupied Palestine. Palestine was not empty when the Moslem Arabians went there. It had the Philistines on the east coast. There were people in Palestine before the Jews ever came. There were people in Palestine after the Jews left the country, and those are the people we call Arabs. They are descendants of old stock who have maintained themselves for ages there, remained; they are the forgotten men. Nobody should deprive people who have been on the soil in their country for centuries of their soil. Their fathers and mothers are buried there. We call them Arabs only because they speak the Arabic language, but they are descendants of the ancient Semitic people.

Hitti thus introduced the committee to identity issues that had split not only the Syrian migrant community, but people across the Middle East.<sup>9</sup>

When Massachusetts Congresswoman Edith Rogers asked Hitti to elaborate on his statement that he would favor increasing Jewish immigration to the United States, Chairman Bloom deemed the question to be out of order because it concerned the matter of domestic immigration. Bloom declared, "I think the witness has contributed all he knows." Although not given the opportunity to respond during the hearings, Hitti later wrote an article expounding upon this point. In early April 1944, the *Princeton Herald* published a piece by Albert Einstein and Erich Kahler that criticized Hitti's arguments before Congress and described them as "one-sided." The *Herald* also published Hitti's response, in which he reiterated that, as an American citizen, he wished to see legislation admitting Jewish refugees to the United States. Hitti again contended that legislators and officials had seen fit to sign several "Zionist manifestos" but appeared to be "hypocritical" because none of them appeared "willing to raise a finger to lift the bars of immigration into the United States." He lamented that instead, they were content to encourage the British to allow further immigration into Palestine until the Zionist population

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 246, and Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 191-184.

became a majority and could create a state – “their easy solution to one of the world’s knottiest problems!”<sup>10</sup>

On February 16, the final day of the hearings, the committee called upon Faris S. Malouf, the Boston attorney who represented the Eastern Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs. Like Hitti, Malouf emphasized that he spoke as “a citizen of the United States” when questioning the wisdom of adopting the resolution. He argued that despite supporting “good-faith efforts” to solve the Jewish problem, average American citizens would not want to involve themselves in the Palestine controversy. On the previous day, Rabbi Stephen Wise of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) had testified that an overwhelming majority of Americans would vote for the resolution if given the opportunity. Malouf disputed this and suggested that, as the ZOA was very influential and widespread across the U.S., he would like to see the organization attempt to raise this resolution in localities “to test the will of the people.” Malouf optimistically believed that Americans would “not want to impose on a free people an artificial religious foreign state.”

Malouf’s testimony described Palestine as an important region of Syria over the last twenty-five centuries, until “international chicanery and Zionist-British schemes separated it from her motherland.” That Malouf spoke on behalf of the Syrian-Lebanese Federation of Eastern States is particularly notable, as this indicates that members of this wide array of groups, regardless of their burgeoning national identification with the new states of Syria and Lebanon, considered Palestine to be integral part of their homeland. Malouf explained that he and others saw the 1917 Balfour Declaration as invalid because it had been undertaken without Arab

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Hitti, “Palestinian Arabs Descended from Natives Before Abraham,” in *Papers on Palestine: A collection of Statements, Articles, and Letters Dealing with the Palestine Problem* (New York: Institute of Arab American Affairs, 1945), p. 16.



awareness and completely disregarded the principle of national self-government. Furthermore, he believed it fundamentally impossible to establish a commonwealth for Jews in Palestine without prejudicing the rights of the people already there, which was a condition of the Balfour Declaration.

Instead, Malouf urged the United States to take other steps to save his suffering “cousins, the Jews.” When Chairman Bloom interrupted to ask whether he had called Jews his cousins, Malouf responded, “Yes. I am proud of it,” and clarified that he viewed Jews as his Semitic brethren. Furthermore, he argued that he understood the meaning of freedom and opportunity because he was an American immigrant, and neither the Balfour Declaration nor the resolution before the committee would afford such rights to the existing Arab population. Malouf described how he had arrived “penniless” in the U.S. thirty-seven years prior and “trudged the dusty roads of Alabama and Georgia peddling.” He spoke of his encounters on the road with “some of my Jewish cousins peddling too,” leading him to conclude that “I have learned the true American spirit and the American way of life the hard way.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to describing his immigrant narrative as fundamental to his American identity, Malouf highlighted his Christian faith to explain why the resolution was both un-American and un-Christian. Malouf quoted Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House from Texas, who had previously testified before the committee urging the passage of the resolution because the plight of the two million homeless European Jews was a “challenge of all kinds of justice, particularly Christian justice.” To this religious and humanitarian argument for Zionism, Malouf responded: “O Lord! How many iniquities have been committed in Thy name? Will it not be more within the right and privilege of the majority leader to offer part of his own country to the Zionists than

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res 419, “The Jewish National Home in Palestine,” 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 285-287.

to be so humane, Christian and generous at someone else's expense?"<sup>12</sup> Malouf, in his defense of the Arab cause, thus stressed his own belief in God and his view that Christian humanitarian efforts should not impinge upon others.

When he later described his testimony in a letter to Hitti, Malouf mentioned that the committee had instituted a new rule immediately before he went up that limited speakers to ten minutes of testimony and ten minutes of questioning. Malouf contested this time limit and was eventually allowed to read his prepared seventeen-page testimony, which he elaborated upon at times. Malouf described his experience testifying as almost transcendental, stating that he had "lost all consciousness" of himself but did not lose his temper or raise his voice. Yet, only two pages into his statement, he found himself interrupted by Congressman Bloom. Like Hitti the day before, Malouf also faced strong opposition in questioning. His testimony was immediately followed by Emanuel Neumann, who had already testified the day prior but had not received time for questioning. Neumann took the place of another Zionist leader, Judge Louis Levinthal, who had to leave early. Although he read part of Judge Levinthal's statement, Neumann devoted most of his time to rebutting Malouf's arguments. Malouf requested that he be given a chance to respond after Neumann, but the committee did not allow it.<sup>13</sup> However, Representative Frances Bolton of Ohio later expressed her appreciation for Malouf's words. "She was sick at heart and told me so," wrote Malouf to Hitti. "After the meeting, she brushed by me and pressed my hand with all her might and said, 'Well done, well done, Mr. Malouf. I am glad you did what you did.'"<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res 419, "The Jewish National Home in Palestine," 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 289.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-307.

<sup>14</sup> Faris S. Malouf to Philip Hitti, February 19, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 7.

That same day, the committee heard from the likes of Karl S. Twitchell, an American engineer who worked for Abdul Aziz Al-Saud to survey mining and agricultural resources across the Arabian Peninsula. After expressing his concern for the plight of Jewish refugees, he stated his disagreement with the proposal and followed up with suggestions for alternative Jewish homelands in areas that were less burdened by a large population and exhausted resources. He noted that not only were a million Arabs concerned with the matter in Palestine, but that “300 million Moslems throughout the Near East and India” were also vitally invested in the matter. Just as Hitti had in his own testimony, Twitchell expressed fear that there would be a great deal of bloodshed in Palestine, as recent events had demonstrated, and even outside of it. For instance, he worried that “the Moslems in Yemen, Arabia might annihilate the 40,000 Jews now there. I wonder if they might not be viewed as hostages and in a similar matter the 100,000 Jews now in Iraq who have lived there peacefully for over 1,300 years.” To this claim, Judge John Kee questioned whether “the Jews can be given any more trouble than they are already in.” Twitchell replied, “Yes, indeed,” explaining that while Jews had lived in peace across Yemen and Iraq for centuries, he feared that this treatment would not continue if there “were a strong anti-Jewish movement.” Kee scoffed that Twitchell sought to avoid passing the resolution in order “to avoid trouble for a few Jews in other countries.”<sup>15</sup>

Anti-Zionist Jews also made their views known to the committee, although they were outnumbered by Zionists. Early in the hearings, the committee heard from Lessing J. Rosenwald, the president of the American Council for Judaism. On the final day of the hearings the committee heard from two reform Rabbis: Morris Lazaron of Baltimore and William Fineschreiber of Philadelphia. Malouf later wrote that Lazaron and Fineschreiber had spoken

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res 419, “The Jewish National Home in Palestine,” 279-283.

eloquently against the resolution – “even better than [Stephen] Wise.”<sup>16</sup> All three of them described political Zionism as anachronistic and criticized the resolution for taking advantage of a humanitarian crisis to bring the American people into the “field of international political controversy” on a matter that deeply divided the Jewish-American community. They also took the proposed resolution to task on one fundamental issue, as summarized by Rosenwald:

The proposal...speaks of the establishment of a free and democratic “Jewish commonwealth.” I stress the word “Jewish.” It does not say the establishment of a free and democratic “commonwealth.” It specifically uses the word ‘Jewish,’ a word which has essentially a religious connotation only, although it has been used in a racial sense by the Nazi enemies of the Jews and of democracy.

But the concept of a theocratic state is long past. It is an anachronism. The concept of a racial state - the Hitlerian concept - is repugnant to the civilized world, as witness the fearful global war in which we are involved.<sup>17</sup>

On the contrary, Rosenwald, Lazaron, and Fineschreiber supported only a cultural-economic Zionist program. Like their Arab-American counterparts, they also highlighted their own American identity throughout their testimony. During questioning, Fineschreiber criticized the usage of the term “Jewish homeland” instead of a secular democratic “Palestine commonwealth,” noting, “is not America a Jewish homeland for a great many Jews?”<sup>18</sup> Rosenwald also gestured at the ramifications that a Zionist state could have on American Jews in an article he submitted to the committee. This piece, published in *Time* in 1943, argued that the creation of a Jewish state would foster the misconception that there is a “Jewish bloc” and would consequently raise “the question of dual allegiances” for Jews across the world. Rosenwald concluded, “this would be especially unfortunate in America, where the Jew has found a security

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<sup>16</sup> Faris S. Malouf to Philip Hitti, February 19, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 7.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res 419, “The Jewish National Home in Palestine,” 122.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

greater than has ever been known in all the long history of Israel.”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, such nuanced views were drowned out by the more numerous statements of Zionists of different backgrounds before the Committees. Hearings concluded on February 16.

Beyond the steps of Congress, however, several actors attempted to dissuade the House Committee from passing the resolution. Arab leaders in Iraq, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon in particular sought to make their views known. Their letters to American officials emphasized that the resolution was immensely unpopular in Arab countries, as Arabic newspapers often covered the activity of the U.S. Congress as it related to the Arab world. In response, antipathy toward the American government rose, to the effect that even subscriptions to the Arabic version of *Reader's Digest*, *Al-Mukhtar*, fell due to its American association. As the editor of *Al-Mukhtar* told immigrant communities during a visit to the U.S., the magazine's circulation plunged in particular across Palestine after the American Republican and Democratic parties became more outspoken in favor of a Jewish commonwealth in 1944.<sup>20</sup> Recognizing the dangers of this American political turn, Jamil al-Madfai, the President of the Iraqi Senate, and Muhammad Ridha Shabibi, the President of the Iraq Chamber of Deputies, sent telegrams to Senators Taft and Wagner on February 15 and March 3, 1944. In their letters, they offered views that concurred with Hitti and Malouf's testimonies, noting that Nazi propagandists were already using the resolution to “inflame Arab opinion” against Jews and all the Allied states. They also described the United States' hypocrisy in limiting the entry of Jewish refugees:

It is generally recognised that few Jews would migrate to Palestine if they could find asylum in the United States of America. Taking advantage of the refusal of the United States to admit more than a small proportion of these refugees the Zionists have raised the cry “Palestine for the Jews,” and pretended that every refugee Jew wanted to settle in Palestine and establish a Jewish state there. We cannot believe that the responsible body

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>20</sup> Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs, Vol. 1 (No. 3), September 15, 1945, *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection*, Part 2, Center for Research Libraries, p. 1.

over whom you preside seriously contemplates the undertaking by the United States of such a dangerous policy.... If the United States does intervene in the manner suggested by this resolution it will read like a sentence of death to the Arabs in Palestine and cause despair and distrust throughout the Arab and Muslim Worlds.<sup>21</sup>

These appeals seemed to have some effect of the U.S. State Department. Throughout the congressional hearings, the U.S. Department of State reassured Arab leaders that these resolutions did not represent the U.S. government's view. On several occasions, Secretary of State Cordell Hull promised Emir Abdullah of Transjordan and the Egyptian Minister, Hassan Bey, that "no decision altering the basic situation of Palestine should be reached without full consideration with both Arabs and Jews."<sup>22</sup> Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy wrote a memorandum to General George Marshall stating that the congressional resolutions "necessarily upset the Arab peoples and states," and that the passage of the resolutions would require the U.S. to station garrison troops to in areas where people might react negatively to a Zionist state. On February 23, therefore, General Marshall spoke before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (which did not have a secretary on hand and made no record of the meeting). He conveyed the State Department's views that the resolution would "be fraught with very serious possibilities regarding military operations" and successfully convinced the members of the committee to vote against the resolution.<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote to Chairman Sol Bloom to persuade him that these resolutions to be "prejudicial to the successful prosecution of the war." Thus, on March 17, 1944, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives issued the

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<sup>21</sup> Cable from Jamil Al Madfai and Muhammad Ridha Shabibi to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, to Senator Taft, to Senator Wagner, and to the Iraqi Legation, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

<sup>22</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1944, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, the Far East, Volume V (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), 596-599.

<sup>23</sup> *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, Vol. 4, "Aggressive and Determined Leadership," June 1, 1943-December 31, 1944 (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 315-316, <http://marshallfoundation.org/library/digital-archive/memorandum-for-mr-mccloy-4/>.

following statement: “Advice and information given to us by those responsible for the conduct of the war, have convinced the Committee that action upon the resolutions at this time would be unwise.”<sup>24</sup> Secretary of State Hull sent this statement to several Arab embassies to assure them that neither of the resolutions had been passed and would not likely be acted upon at that time.<sup>25</sup>

Although the resolutions were defeated due to the expediencies of war and not their appeals to Congress, American defenders of the Arab cause could hardly have hoped for such a success. This experience impressed upon many Syrian Americans the importance of organizing. Michel G. Malti, writing to Hitti immediately after the resolutions were proposed, had declared, “the Zionist lobby is extremely strong and well organized. I doubt if we can do anything without organization. This our good compatriots are unwilling to do. I have made up my mind that as individuals we do well. As an organized closely knit community we are hopeless. Well we shall learn and in learning suffer.”<sup>26</sup> In an attempt to avert further suffering, a group of Syrian-Americans inaugurated a new phase of organizing the immigrant community later that year.

### **The Institute of Arab American Affairs**

In May 1944, Philip Hitti, Joseph Sado, Afif Tannous, Shukry Khoury, Habib Katibah, and Ismail Khalidi decided to invite leaders of different “Arabic-speaking” organizations across the United States to gather and consider creating a bureau in Washington. Hitti wrote that the bureau’s goal would be to promote relations between the people of the United States and the Arabic speaking countries, and that it could play an important role in achieving several goals:

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<sup>24</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearings on H. Res. 418 and H. Res 419, “The Jewish National Home in Palestine,” p. 505.

<sup>25</sup> Telegram, The Secretary of State to the Minister in Egypt (Kirk), Washington, March 17, 1944, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, p. 591.

<sup>26</sup> Michel G. Malti to Philip Hitti, February 15, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 7.

(1) it would tend to crystalize our public utterances and views on highly delicate issues; (2) it would centralize and unify our approach to any issue, with a view to achieving an intelligent and enlightened understanding of such issues; and (3) it would serve as an essential medium to aid and facilitate the war effort.<sup>27</sup>

Attendees first met at the Baghdad Restaurant in New York City to elect a provisional committee that included Philip Hitti, Faris Malouf, Essa Bateh, E. J. Audi, Kaid Barakat, and Ali Mahadin. In Fall 1944, leaders of different immigrant groups from Boston, Detroit, New York, and Washington met once more to plan a “general meeting of the Arabic-speaking communities” in the U.S. and Canada. The committee invited representatives of organizations across the country to attend a conference New York City on November 25, 1944. This assembly would seek to identify ways to “cement American relations with the Arab world,” to analyze issues – including Zionism – that Arab countries faced, and to establish a bureau of information that would promote “our people’s welfare and interests” and “make our people in the United States and Canada better and more favorably known.”<sup>28</sup>

From its onset, the provisional committee signaled its transnational orientation: it made clear that the conference and any national organization that would arise from it would be geared toward serving the interests of both the Arabic-speaking people in the western world and the immigrants’ “native lands.” The Institute also sought cooperation with a wide array of Arabs who lived and worked in the Arab world – not only academics and politicians, but people of all professions. In the lead up to the conference, Philip Hitti highlighted his transnational vision for the incipient group when he suggested to Ismail Khalidi that some of their representatives should meet with Syrian and Lebanese delegates to the International Air and Business Conferences that

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<sup>27</sup> Philip Hitti to unknown persons, undated, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

<sup>28</sup> Mass mailing from Provisional Committee, November 1, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.



were being held in Chicago, Rye, and New York in order to explain the state of the Palestine controversy in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

Although the committee sought to address matters relevant to two constituencies – immigrant and homeland communities – its leadership clearly viewed Palestine as the fundamental, most pressing issue facing *all* Arabs. As Faris Malouf told Jabir Shibli in his personal invitation to the forthcoming conference in New York, many committee members intended to “widen the purpose” of the group and “not limit it only to the present Palestine controversy. Palestine, however, will presently command our immediate attention.” He also paid homage to the Arab National League’s efforts throughout the 1930s, recognizing that “worthy men among us in the United States have attempted in the past to organize for the purpose of combating the Zionists.” Although he believed they had done well, Malouf recognized that their limited resources and scope of action had led to results that “were less than they themselves and all of us have desired.”<sup>30</sup>

After months of discussion, the conference finally took place in November 1944 and resulted in to the creation of the Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA). During this inaugural meeting, held at the McAlpin Hotel in New York City, delegates chose Philip Hitti to act as temporary director, with Habib Katibah serving as Editor, Ismail Khalidi as the Arabic Secretary, Farhat Ziadeh as the English Secretary, and Essa Bateh as Treasurer.

Participants recognized the important role that the United States would play in the newly reshaped Middle East as World War II drew closer to a conclusion. At the conference, attendees seemed confident that the United States would use its rising influence in the region to cooperate

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Hitti to Ismail Khalidi, November 15, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

<sup>30</sup> Faris S. Malouf to Jabir Shibli, November 14, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

with local actors and advance “the cause of progress and democracy.”<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Institute’s first monthly bulletin declared that American educational institutions in the Near East had been an “important factor in the Arab renaissance and the awakening of the national spirit of the people.” The writer thus concluded that American interest in the Middle East was “free of the sordid greed and political machinations which have marred the relations of some other powers,” namely Britain and France.<sup>32</sup> Thus, while outspoken about their transnational, Arab nationalist outlook, members of the IAAA also sought to emphasize their American identities and patriotic views of the U.S. In doing so, the IAAA’s rhetoric about the U.S. often reproduced a logic of American exceptionalism.

The usage of the term “Arab-American” in the group’s name was significant because it reflected a turning point in the debate over self-identification among the immigrant community.<sup>33</sup> After the creation of the IAAA, many Syrian immigrants and their descendants increasingly accepted the label Arab or Arab-American. Nevertheless, in an effort to include Syrian-Americans of all backgrounds in its membership, the IAAA occasionally used the term “Arabic-Speaking” instead of “Arab” or “Arab-American,” as was the case when the Institute published a 1946 pamphlet entitled *Arabic-Speaking Americans*. Habib Katibah, who had previously edited the *Syrian World* and helped found the Arab National League of America, wrote the pamphlet alongside Farhat Ziadeh, a Palestinian lawyer who taught Arabic in the Army Specialized Training Program at Princeton during World War II. Farhat Ziadeh later remarked that “this was the first time that Arab-Americans were identified as such. Previously they had been referred to

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<sup>31</sup> Institute of Arab American Affairs, “Aims, Achievements, Prospects,” undated, *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries.

<sup>32</sup> Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs, Vol. 1 (No. 1), July 15, 1945, *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 165-168.

as Syrians or even Lebanese.” When recalling his efforts to chronicle the history and accomplishments of Arab immigrants in the U.S., Ziadeh noted, “the name 'Arabic-Speaking' in the title of the pamphlet was a compromise, because some Lebanese associated with the newspaper *al-Hoda* in New York objected to the appellation ‘Arab-American,’ and Professor Hitti sought to pacify them.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the Institute facilitated the adoption of this hybrid, Arab-American identity.

To further emphasize the importance of uniting over an Arab, or “Arabic-speaking,” identity, future IAAA president Khalil Totah clarified that the Institute’s task ahead, aside from informing Americans about Arab issues, was to create a “new consciousness of solidarity.” Recognizing that there were many communal divisions, Totah asserted that speaking Arabic was a unifying force. It was not only the “mother tongue” and the tongue of their ancestors, but also a language that had been enriched by the poetry and literature of “Jubran, Rihani, Arida, Madi” and other *mahjar* luminaries who “have made us more proud of it on this side of the Atlantic.” Across the ocean, Arabic also united Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Iraqis, Egyptians, and others. In addition to language, Totah declared that “our love and yearning for our old country binds us together. Our hospitality, manners, customs, and courtesy draw us together.” He declared that Arabs in the U.S. had much to contribute to America because they were “neither beggars nor gypsies but people of ancient culture, civilization, and glorious past.” In this way, Totah again utilized the traditional depiction of Syrian immigrants as self-sufficient peddlers, successful businessmen, or reliable industrial workers, to emphasize the worth of Arabs to their new home:

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<sup>34</sup> Farhat Ziadeh, “Winds Blow Where Ships do not Wish to Go,” *Paths to the Middle East: Ten Scholars Look Back* (Syracuse: SUNY Press, 1993). At the time, Salloum Mokarzel was the editor of *Al-Hoda* and a staunch Lebanese Nationalist.

Aside from speaking Arabic and loving our old home in the East, we love America. We want America to know our former lands and see them in their vast light and we want our Arab lands to know and love the best that is in this country.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Work of the IAAA**

Early in the Institute's existence, officials from Arab states discussed collaborating with the Institute to advance certain mutual goals. Amr Hassan Bey from the Egyptian Legation met with several IAAA leaders, such as A. Joseph Howar, Joseph Sado, and Shukry Khoury, to reiterate that Egypt was devoted to the question of Arab unity and combatting Zionism. Bey asked them if his government could assist the Institute financially, but the IAAA summarily refused such offers, as receiving contributions would require registering under the American Alien Registration Act. Around the same time that the IAAA was established, the Egyptian government explored starting a joint bureau with Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and other Arab League states in order to distribute pro-Arab propaganda in the United States. Musa al-Alami, a leading Palestinian lawyer and nationalist, had first suggested the idea of opening information centers in Western capitals to combat Zionist views at the November 1944 Preparatory Conference on Arab Unity in Alexandria.<sup>36</sup> After the Arab League was founded at a meeting in March 1945, Egypt failed to follow through on their promise of funding, and most of the financial backing for the bureau came from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>37</sup> Although the IAAA would not accept funding from Arab states, its leadership indicated that it was amenable to collaborating with an Arab bureau by sharing "necessary information."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Khalil Totah, "Our Job at the Institute," 1945, in Joyce Hilden Totah, *A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator and Activist* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Walid Khalidi, "On Albert Hourani, the Arab Office, and the Anglo-American Committee of 1946," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn 2005), 66.

<sup>37</sup> Joel Beinin, "Arab Intellectuals, the Arab Office, and the Partition of Palestine: A Study in Frustration," in *Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Territorial Separatism*, edited by Arie M. Dubnov and Laura Robson (Stanford University Press, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> "Sanger" to Philip Hitti and Faris Malouf, December 8, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

However, the IAAA's connections to these Arab causes made it suspect in the eyes of the American wartime intelligence apparatus. For instance, in December 1944, just weeks after the creation of the IAAA, an individual from the State Department who signed his name only as "Sanger" wrote to Philip Hitti and Faris Malouf. It is likely that the writer was Richard H. Sanger, who in 1944 worked for the Department of State as a foreign service officer in Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Africa. Sanger warned them to be more careful when discussing plans for the Institute because "every move that you have made so far has been reported to all government agencies throughout the medium of the Office of Strategic Services." The writer concluded that there was an informer within their ranks: "Whoever he is, he must be eliminated before you get on with your main work particularly if the other [Arab states] bureau materializes." The letter writer noted that he had his own suspicions about who the informant was but first needed to confirm his opinion with another colleague. However, he concluded that "the question of 'security' must receive topmost consideration in your future plans. And this calls for action by a very small group at the top in making plans and conducting liaison" with the new Arab bureau.<sup>39</sup> This alleged informant was not again mentioned in available archival sources about the IAAA. However, the Institute consistently reiterated its identity as an Arab-American (with the emphasis on American) organization to contest the notion that it was a foreign interest group.

After months of Arab League planning, the Arab Office finally opened in Washington, D.C. in 1945 under the leadership of Ahmad Shukairy. Like its counterpart in London and Jerusalem, the D.C. branch of the Arab Office operated independently of the Arab League. Its leadership consisted of several notable Arab intellectuals who had received extensive Anglo-

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<sup>39</sup> "Sanger" to Philip Hitti and Faris Malouf, December 8, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

American education and could thus promote the Arab cause to the West effectively.

Nevertheless, according to Farhat Ziadeh, the Washington Office relied on assistance from the IAAA because its staff of “several bright young men were not conversant with American ways or sources of information.” Although the Arab Office did indeed consist of mostly men, it also employed Najla Abu Izzeddine, a Lebanese scholar who completed her doctorate in History from the University of Chicago and went on a cross-country tour addressing the American Association of University Women.<sup>40</sup> Despite knowing that Zionist and American parties were closely scrutinizing the Institute, IAAA leaders helped the Arab Office establish contacts and spread information about the Palestinian point of view.<sup>41</sup>

The IAAA opened its own office in on June 1, 1945 at 160 Broadway in Manhattan, and it was largely operated by Habib Katibah, Farhat Ziadeh, and Ismail Khalidi.<sup>42</sup> Katibah and his wife, Litia Namoura, recruited their Lebanese-American friend Selwa Jeha to work for the newly established Institute. Although she was already employed as an editor with a magazine that paid a generous salary, Selwa decided to accept their offer after visiting the office. It was there that she met Ismail Khalidi, her future husband. True to the organization’s secular Arab nationalist mission, its office staff was composed of both Muslims and Christians; this was mirrored by its membership.<sup>43</sup> The organization also sought to open chapters in places as varied as Detroit, Lansing, and Flint, MI; Toledo, OH; Chicago, IL; Washington, D.C.; Worcester, MA, Binghamton, NY, and Jacksonville, FL. Many of the planned branches never materialized, but the Boston and Flint branches were particularly active; the latter hosted annual meetings of the

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<sup>40</sup> “Summary of a conference on women's clubs contacted in Washington, March 14 1946,” Central Zionist Archives, Archive of Maurice Borkstein.

<sup>41</sup> Ziadeh, “Winds Blow Where Ships do not Wish to Go.”

<sup>42</sup> Ismail Khalidi, “Monthly Report of Progress on the IAAA,” November 1945, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.

<sup>43</sup> Alixa Naff highlighted the fact that Selwa Jeha was Christian and Ismail Khalidi was Muslim in “Memo to be added to file about IAAA,” November 8, 1993, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.

Institute's board of directors. As a membership-based organization, the IAAA made clear that "every member should have an equal share in the Institute no matter his contribution or country of origin."<sup>44</sup>

One of the Institute's first orders of business was to grapple with efforts to revive pro-Zionist resolutions in Congress. In December 1944, the IAAA Washington Chapter's chair, A. Joseph Howar wrote to Senator Tom Connelly, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, requesting that his group be permitted to speak before the Committee.<sup>45</sup> However, although Senators Robert Wagner and Robert Taft reintroduced their Senate resolution in October 1945, the Committee did not invite IAAA representatives to speak. Nevertheless, the IAAA sought to connect with members of Congress outside the halls of the Capitol. When Representative Frances Bolton of Ohio, who had responded sympathetically to Faris Malouf's testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs the previous year, asked the Institute to send her their literature that fall, the IAAA office staff quickly obliged and thanked Congresswoman Bolton for her "great interest in the Arab lands."<sup>46</sup> Less than two months after being proposed, the resolutions passed in both the House and the Senate with a voice vote.<sup>47</sup> The IAAA could take comfort, at least, in the fact that the new resolutions had omitted language urging the reconstitution of Palestine as a "Jewish" Commonwealth; they instead called for increasing Jewish colonization in order to establish Palestine as a "free and democratic Commonwealth in which all men regardless of race or creed shall enjoy equal rights." Although the Resolution did not in essence change its demand for increased Jewish immigration into

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<sup>44</sup> Ismail Khalidi, "Monthly Report of Progress," November 1945, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5. For more on the Detroit and Flint chapters, see Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*.

<sup>45</sup> A. Joseph Howar to Tom Connelly, December 5, 1944, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 12, Folder 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ismail Khalidi, "Monthly Report of Progress on the IAAA," November 1945, Naff Collection.

<sup>47</sup> Michael T. Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 67.

Palestine for the purpose of colonization, it did attempt to dispute the anti-Zionist charge that Zionists sought a “racial and theocratic” state.<sup>48</sup>

From its inception, the Institute focused on putting out numerous publications, particularly in the form of informational pamphlets. Its first work was a 1945 pamphlet entitled *Papers on Palestine*, in which the Institute republished the testimonies of Philip Hitti, Faris Malouf, and Karl Twitchell before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs from February 1944. This booklet also included articles and letters that Jabir Shibli, William Ernest Hocking, Stuart Dodd, and others wrote to promote the Arab case to the American government and public. In 1946 the Institute published its third pamphlet, “The Palestine Reality” by Jabir Shibli, and followed that up with an analysis of Arab development in a 1947 pamphlet on “Progress in Palestine” by Khalil Totah. It continued to publish new volumes from its *Papers on Palestine* series until at least 1948.

In addition to producing scholarly works, the Institute attempted to shape American and international policy more directly. For instance, it had a hand in convincing the United Nations to issue an invitation to Syria and Lebanon to attend its Conference on International Organization in San Francisco. Once it discovered that the two nations had not been included, the Institute made appeal to the Department of State to invite the “two sister republics.” When recounting this matter to its members in its first monthly bulletin, the Institute reaffirmed its belief “in the democratic principles for which our Government stands.” This appeal was successful and the IAAA and the Syrian Prime Minister, Faris Bey al-Khoury, later acknowledged the Arabic-speaking community’s efforts to facilitate Syria’s participation.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 50-56.

<sup>49</sup> Institute of Arab American Affairs, “Aims, Achievements, Prospects,” undated, *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries.



The IAAA also represented the views of its own members before the newly-formed United Nations at the San Francisco Conference. Faris Malouf spoke, this time representing the IAAA instead of the Syrian-Lebanese Federation of Eastern States (as he had before the House of Representatives the previous year). Philip Hitti served as an advisor to the Iraqi and other Arab delegations, and George Barakat was also in attendance. The three IAAA members organized a liaison committee to establish a united front among the Arab delegations at the conference. They also fulfilled other roles, such as advising on legal issues, interviewing heads of other delegations, speaking to newspaper correspondents, and arranging for a broadcast of the Arab viewpoint in various media outlets.

While they addressed issues relevant to all Arab countries in attendance at the conference, the IAAA members sought to convince the Arab delegations to amplify the Palestine question at the UN. In preparation for its first foray into international activism, the IAAA issued “A Manifesto on Palestine” that it distributed to delegates and journalists at the conference. This manifesto detailed many of the same arguments Hitti and Malouf had made before the U.S. House of Representatives. It contested the legitimacy of the Balfour Declaration and went on to explain that regardless of its legitimacy, the Balfour Declaration had been “more than fulfilled” because Jews did now have a national home in Palestine. It attempted to point out America’s hypocrisy by refusing to accept more Jewish refugees, calculating that if the U.S. had accepted immigrants “in the same proportion per square mile as Palestine had done, we would have welcomed in the last ten years 80,920,000 Jews!” Furthermore, the manifesto contested increasingly common Zionist calls to convert the whole of Palestine into a Jewish national state. Its conclusion, which the Arab leadership echoed in their own speeches before the conference, highlighted Winston Churchill’s assertion after the Yalta Conference that Arabs had “rendered

good and meritorious service” to democracy throughout the World War. Finally, the manifesto emphasized once more that innumerable Arabs opposed anti-Semitism and fascism by stating, “all the national resources of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon have been at the disposition of the United Nations. Arab fighters are today with our [American] forces that have penetrated the citadel of Nazism.”<sup>50</sup> In this way, the IAAA and the Arab delegations argued that Arabs had *earned* their right to independence by virtue of their service during the war.

As the San Francisco UN Conference demonstrated, the IAAA regularly acted as an interlocutor by welcoming and assisting Arab leaders in the United States. Participating in events that the Syrian, Lebanese, and Iraqi legations held in Washington, D.C. gave them access to both Arab leaders and their influential American guests.<sup>51</sup> Many IAAA members went as far as serving as translator for visiting dignitaries, as when Afif Tannous traveled with Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia across the United States.<sup>52</sup> During the San Francisco UN conference, Philip Hitti spoke at a banquet in honor of the Arab delegates, and his speech was mimeographed and circulated. Likewise, in June 1945 the IAAA held a banquet at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York in honor of Prince Abdullah of Iraq. Many notable Arab figures were in attendance, such as Nuri as-Sa'id Pasha (a former Iraqi prime minister), as were officials from the Department of Near Eastern and African Affairs. William Phillips, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, gave a speech at this banquet in which he boasted of how highly the United States viewed its relationship with the Middle East. He furthermore praised the recent creation of the League of Arab States and the “determination of the Arab people to reestablish their independence and play

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<sup>50</sup> “Manifesto of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” Naff Collection, National Museum of American History (NMAH), Box 38, Folder 5.

<sup>51</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” July 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 1), Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5, p. 4-5.

<sup>52</sup> James Howard and Afif I. Tannous, *Interview with Afif I. Tannous*, March 9, 1944 (Accessed May 15, 2017), Retrieved from Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001160/>.

a role in world affairs to which they feel themselves entitled by reason of their brilliant past and their talents and industry.”<sup>53</sup>

The IAAA’s leadership recognized that, as its members were proud U.S. citizens, their most guaranteed path to success would be to influence the American government. They often sent letters and memorandums to President Truman, including one on Syria and Lebanon during the summer of 1945. The IAAA memo criticized the French government’s efforts to maintain special privileges in Syria and Lebanon and the news that it had sent additional troops to reinforce military garrisons, which then clashed with local forces. The memo thus thanked the U.S. for maintaining a strong stance against continued French interference. The IAAA, gratified that its government had once more defended the cause of Arab freedom, met with Acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew to express appreciation to the U.S. for “taking a firm stand in the Levant crisis.”<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, the Institute was frustrated by the U.S. government’s vacillating stance on the Palestine problem and sent memorandums to President Truman about the matter several times, including before he left for the “Big Three” conference in Potsdam, Germany in the summer of 1945. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes subsequently assured the Institute with a letter from Postdam on July 27, 1945 that “the views of the Institute were welcomed” and “they will receive every appropriate consideration.”<sup>55</sup> The IAAA sent telegrams to Truman on several other occasions, such as on October 15, 1945 with a similar message that decried the imperialistic nature of the Zionist program and warned against damaging the “high regard with

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<sup>53</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” July 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 1), Naff Collection, National Museum of American History, Box 38, Folder 5.

<sup>54</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” July 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 1), Naff Collection, National Museum of American History, Box 38, Folder 5, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” August 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 2), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 5.

which the people of the Near East hold the American people.”<sup>56</sup> These appeals must have had some impact on the American president; in May 1946, Truman advised the British Prime Minister Clement Atlee to consult with the IAAA, among other Arab organizations, before deciding the question of Palestine.<sup>57</sup>

The Institute even sought to influence U.S. state governors. Although statewide officials played a negligible role in formulating American foreign policy, the IAAA recognized that it needed a multipronged approach in order to reach the larger American population. On July 4, 1945, thirty-seven state governors met at the Governors’ Conference at Mackinac Island, MI and issued a petition to President Truman with language echoing past Congressional resolutions: they urged allowing mass immigration to Palestine and transforming it into a Jewish commonwealth. Afterward, the Institute embarked on a campaign to reach governors who represented IAAA members and inform them of the consequences of a Zionist state. They received replies from several governors who thanked them for sharing their views. Some indicated that they had not fully comprehended the issue: Edward Martin, the governor of Pennsylvania, wrote, “This is the first time the Arabs’ position has been called to my attention,” and Ralph F. Gates of Indiana responded, “I am certain that few of us in America understand the situation.... It is for this reason that I appreciate deeply your [sic] having sent me this literature.” Others, such as Millard F. Caldwell of Florida and Ellis Arnall of Georgia responded that they did not concur in the petition to Truman.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” November 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 5), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries.

<sup>57</sup> Rory Miller, “More Sinned Against than Sinning? The Case of the Arab Office, Washington, 1945-1948,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2004), p. 310.

<sup>58</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” August 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 2), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 7-8.

In October 1945, the IAAA concluded a productive first year. Philip Hitti had successfully helmed the budding organization despite working in Princeton away from the IAAA's New York headquarters. With the end of the British Mandate approaching rapidly, the IAAA board decided to appoint a more hands-on director: Dr. Khalil Totah. Totah was a Palestinian educator who had received his Ph.D. from Columbia University, served as the Principal of the Arab College in Jerusalem for six years, and headed the Society of Friends in Palestine for eighteen years.

Totah sought to maintain the academic reputation Hitti had helped establish by expanding the Institute's presence in field of publications, speaking, and other modes of spreading information on Palestine. Totah particularly encouraged the Institute and its members to submit editorials to different publications. The Institute published editorials in nationwide outlets such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, and the *New York Herald Tribune*. Many smaller publications and local newsletters, such as the *Christian Register* and *Christianity in Crisis*, also published IAAA members' letters or articles. The IAAA also wrote to avowedly Zionist outlets, such as the New York daily *PM*, although their views were not always published.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the IAAA, often in cooperation with the Arab Office, sponsored advertisements in major publications when finances allowed. Philip Hitti first suggested buying an ad in the New York times to Ahmad Shukairy of the Arab Office.<sup>60</sup> The quarter-page ad, which ran on November 7, 1945, sought to disprove common Zionist claims and also quoted the promises that Presidents Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman had made to Arabs that democratic

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<sup>59</sup> "Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs," October 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 4), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries; Ismail Khalidi, "Monthly Report of Progress on the IAAA," January 1946, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.

<sup>60</sup> Ahmad Shukairy to Philip Hitti, October 8, 1945, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRC, Box 9, Folder 7.

principles would be applied to their new nations. The IAAA described the significance of this ad in its monthly bulletin:

It has been observed by many that the *New York Times* ad was the first big gun of enlightening publicity fired by the Arabs in the United States. More guns of this sort will make it unnecessary to fire actual guns, and will clear the atmosphere of the miasma of innuendoes, half-truths, and outright lies about the Arabs that abound in many quarters in this country, and which have invaded even the sanctuaries of American democracy.<sup>61</sup>

The Institute subsequently paid for an advertisement taking up a third of a page in the *New York Times* on February 19, 1946. Again seeking to explain to the American public that Zionism was not the solution to the Jewish problem, the ad stated “Arabs Want Peace in Palestine, So Do the Jews, but Political Zionists are Bent on Violence!”<sup>62</sup> Over the next two months, the Institute received more than 300 requests for literature – including an air mail letter from Holland. The advertisement also led to increased contributions from people across the U.S.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, the Institute participated in public debates and forums on the issue of Palestine. In March 1946, Ismail Khalidi spoke before 500 people at the Newark branch of the Zionists of America, where he contended that “many who attended” were surprised to “find that there is another point of view.” On March 7<sup>th</sup> on New York’s WEVD station, Khalil Totah and Rabbi Elmer Berger participated in a debate with Frank Gervasi, where they presented the Arab and Jewish anti-Zionist perspective. Afterward, the IAAA office received “many favorable comments on the debate.” IAAA members dedicated countless hours to trying to win Americans over to the Arab cause.

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<sup>61</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” November 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 5), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries.

<sup>62</sup> “Display Ad 83: Arabs Want Peace in Palestine,” *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Feb 19, 1946, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> Ismail Khalidi, “Monthly Report of Progress on the IAAA,” March 1946, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.

The IAAA also sought to provide a social network for Arab students who began to travel to the United States for education. Early in 1946, a “whole shipload of two hundred youthful scholars disembarked in New York,” and the Institute arranged for a committee to welcome them. The Institute then held a dinner reception for the students at the Biltmore Hotel. In 1942, the hotel had most notably been the site of the Biltmore Conference, where political Zionists embarked on a new campaign to demand the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine – four years later, the IAAA banquet in the hotel signaled the birth for a new generation of Arab activists opposing Zionism in the U.S. At this dinner, members of the Arab intellectual and business community of New York and surrounding areas met with students to advise them on American institutions and practices. Many of these students arrived in the U.S. without the full assurance of admission to some universities, and were thus helped by the many professional and academic members of the Institute. These students would go on to join the IAAA, engage with local chapters in the cities that they attended university, and even organize events where Institute leaders would speak. They maintained contact with each other thanks to the Institute’s up-to-date database of Arab students’ whereabouts, which it provided to newcomers to the U.S. Many of these students later participated in the Organization of Arab Students in the 1950s. The IAAA thus sought to meet the educational demands of different groups: university students, academics, politicians, and members of the media.<sup>64</sup>

### **The IAAA and the Anglo-American Committee**

The end of the IAAA’s first year also coincided with the conclusion of the Second World War. As the Allies began to reckon with millions of displaced persons across Europe, Zionists

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<sup>64</sup> Khalil Totah, “My Four and a Half Years in New York,” in Joy Hilden Totah, *A Passion for Learning*.

increasingly demanded that Palestine be made into a refuge for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.<sup>65</sup> Thus, at the end of 1945 the British and American governments announced that they would launch an Anglo-American Committee to review the question of Palestine and Jewish refugees. The IAAA closely watched every appointment to the committee, recognizing that its recommendations could critically alter the shape of Palestine and the Arab World. The Arab community in the U.S. found the inclusion of James G. McDonald on the committee to be particularly egregious because of his avowed support for the Zionist movement. McDonald had previously served on the editorial staff of the *New York Times*, the board of the Foreign Policy Association, and was at the time working as the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Reporting on McDonald's appointment, the IAAA *Bulletin* noted that protests occurred among "the Arabic American press of New York, the Moslem community of the same city, the Canadian Arab Friendship League," and, naturally, the IAAA.<sup>66</sup> Khalil Totah subsequently visited the Department of State on November 19, 1945, where he was assured that the American members of the Anglo-American Committee "would be selected from an impartial list."<sup>67</sup>

As a measure of its impartiality, the Anglo-American Committee extended invitations to four IAAA members to present the Arab – and Arab-American – perspective on Palestine: Philip Hitti, Faris Malouf, Khalil Totah, and John Hazam. The hearings commenced on January 11 at the Department of State building in Washington, D.C. The IAAA described the exchange between its delegates and the Anglo-American Committee as "held in an atmosphere of

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<sup>65</sup> Cohen, *Truman and Israel*.

<sup>66</sup> "Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs," December 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 6), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 7-8.

<sup>67</sup> Ismail Khalidi, "Monthly Report of Progress on the IAAA," November, 1945, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.



cordiality and cooperation.” The IAAA Bulletin further noted that its members received especially courteous attention and questions from the heads of both the American and English committees, Judge Hutcheson of the Fifth Circuit Court of Houston, and Sir John E. Singleton, Judge of the King’s Bench Division of the High Court of Justice in London.

Philip Hitti testified first, reiterating and expanding upon many of the arguments he had made before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs two years prior. Once more, Hitti asserted that Palestine had historically been an inseparable part of Greater Syria, that Jewish control of Palestine had lasted only 400 years from the time of King Solomon to the fall of Jerusalem, that the rights of the existing population to the land far exceeded Jewish claims, and that the religious argument of Zionists were flawed and contradicted the views of most Arab Jews living in the Arab world. In response, Judge Hutcheson quoted part of the Institute’s submitted memorandum that condemned political Zionism’s usage of genuine humanitarian concerns to subordinate the Palestinian majority. Hutcheson then asked whether the Arab population would ever accept an arrangement in which Zionists no longer insisted upon a Jewish state, but only sought refuge for their immigrants. Hitti responded frankly that most Arabs would not accept increased immigration in light of the decades of strife and the already large population of foreign refugees who were agitating for a Jewish state. A summary of Hitti’s statement appeared in the IAAA *Bulletin* alongside a passage where the editor presciently noted that Hutcheson and Hitti’s exchange indicated that the Committee might reject the creation of a Jewish state but nevertheless recommend the resettlement of a huge bloc of Jewish immigrants.

After Hitti, Dr. John Hazam, a professor of history at City College of New York and a member of the IAAA executive committee, began his testimony declaring that he had prepared a “rather provocative statement” and expected a similarly provocative rejoinder.

Consciously or unconsciously the Balfour Declaration was predicated on the curious notion of the white man's burden, which seems to be still prevalent in certain quarters, the latest adherents of this cause being the Zionists. The British seem to have been woefully unaware and quite misjudged the growing strength of the Arab nationalist movement. The Arabs, being a so-called backward, Orientalist people were regarded as incapable of self-government, and as having few rights which a European imperialist power need fully respect....

The IAAA bulletin claimed that Hazam's description of the Balfour Declaration – “a wedding gift to the Zionists upon the marriage of Jewish nationalism to British imperialism” – had “nettled” the British delegation and made Sir John Singleton sit up in his seat.

But Khalil Totah's following testimony seemed to mitigate Hazam's strong condemnation of the British regime. The *Bulletin* likened the IAAA Director's statement to “the clear sky after the storm,” as it was “punctuated with mentions of friendly exchanges of visits and tea parties between the veteran Arab educator and Jews and British in Palestine” during the twenty-five years he had lived in the region. While Totah could hardly praise the British role in the conflict, he sought to dispel Zionists' rising antipathy toward the British Administration for scaling back its support of a Jewish state. He observed, “I see statements printed in many different places to the effect that it is the British officials who are always inciting Arabs against the Jews. So far as my knowledge goes, I think that is absolutely false.” Totah explained that the Arabs need not be incited by the British or anyone else, because the fault laid at the feet of certain Zionists who dispossessed and even attacked Arabs. He also challenged the notion that the Axis powers had spread anti-Semitism across the Arab world to encourage Arabs rioting against Zionists, because the Arabs had opposed Jewish colonization “long before the Axis Powers had appeared.” Totah's statement, therefore, reinforced the notion that Arabs, and the

Arab-Americans he represented, were supportive of the Allies and expressed confidence that they would grant Palestinians sovereignty.<sup>68</sup>

The IAAA's President, Faris Malouf, was also scheduled to appear before the committee. However, he became ill after traveling to Washington and spent the hearings bedridden in his hotel. Upon returning to Boston, Malouf was hospitalized for a coronary thrombosis. In a letter to the IAAA staff, Malouf diagnosed his heart ailment not merely as a blocked artery, but as "Palestinitis." A later IAAA report noted that its members had wished Malouf a speedy recovery so that he could continue "his patriotic work," and also mused, "we hope that we will not all of us contract 'Palestinitis.'"<sup>69</sup> Although Malouf was unable to make his case in person, he submitted a paper to the Anglo-American Committee on the legal rights of the Arabs to Palestine.

Several other pro-Arab speakers testified before the Committee in Washington: IAAA Advisory Board member Wilbert Smith, who had worked as a YMCA missionary worker in the Arab world; Reverend Charles T. Bridgeman of Trinity Church in New York and former Canon of the Collegiate Church of St. George in Jerusalem; Reverend T. F. Summerhays of Toronto's Church of England in Canada; and M. S. Massoud, the secretary treasurer of the Canadian-Arab Friendship League. Many others submitted memorandums to the Committee, such as Harvard Professor William Ernest Hocking, Dean Virginia Gildersleeve of Barnard College, Metropolitan Antony Bashir of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America, and Muzafar Ahmed of New York. Ahmed's memorandum sought to present the views of Muslim Indians in support of Arab

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<sup>68</sup> For all IAAA members' testimonies, see "Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs," January 15, 1945, Volume 1 (No. 7), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries.

<sup>69</sup> Ismail Khalidi, "Monthly Report of Progress on the IAAA," January 1946, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.

claims to Palestine. The Institute hoped that these diverse memos would demonstrate the scale of academic, ecumenical, political, and humanitarian support for the Arab cause.<sup>70</sup>

As the Anglo-American Committee traveled from Washington to London, Cairo, and finally Jerusalem, the IAAA intently observed and reported on the mission's developments. It reprinted *The IAAA Bulletin* described the tense atmosphere of the Jerusalem hearings: "As each side presents its case in the capital of that distraught country...one becomes ominously aware that the box gloves are now discarded and the opponents are ready to rush at each other with bare knuckles."<sup>71</sup> Although supporters of the Arab cause spoke at each of the hearings and met with several committee-members who traveled across the Middle East on fact-finding missions, the committee ultimately thwarted the cause of Arab sovereignty.

The Anglo-American Committee issued its report on May 1, 1946, causing an outcry among IAAA members and Arabs across the world. The report recommended the admission of 100,000 additional Jewish refugees into Palestine, with no provision to end future immigration. The IAAA issued its own written response two days later that described the committee's findings as fundamentally flawed and laying the ground for a future Jewish state. Although the committee had recommended that Palestine be regarded as neither an Arab or Jewish state, the Institute believed this was problematic because it did not recognize the Arab majority's right to sovereignty and would prevent Palestine from joining the Arab League. The IAAA also rejected the report's counsel to continue the mandate, arguing in its own statement that the committee failed to "fathom the depth of Arab opposition to an arrangement which sought to foist Western imperialism upon the Arab countries." Emphasizing its opposition to the report not only as

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<sup>70</sup> "Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs," January 15, 1946, Volume 1 (No. 7), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 4-7.

<sup>71</sup> "Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs," March 15, 1946, Volume 1 (No. 9), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 1.

Arabs, but as war-wearied Americans, the Institute also warned that implementing the Committee's recommendations would likely require U.S. intervene in the Middle East. The IAAA statement concluded with its own recommendations:

1. That the United States recognize the fact that Palestine has been and is an Arab country.
2. That Palestine be given its independence now.
3. That the authority to control the immigration policy of Palestine be given to the people now in Palestine, with the application in Palestine of the same guarantees of the rights of minorities which apply to all members of the United States.

The IAAA distributed this statement to over 500 newspapers, news agencies, and radio news commentators across the U.S. and Arab world. The New York Times even published a large portion of the Institute's release. Members, such as John Hazam, further appeared on radio program ranging from a local New York station (WHOM) to CBS in order to debate the issue and explain Arab opposition to the report.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, the IAAA cooperated with the Arab Office's efforts to protest the Anglo-American Committee recommendations. This widespread opposition led Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson to meet with the leaders of different Arab delegations in D.C. to declare that the U.S. would maintain the late President Roosevelt's pledge to consult both Arabs and Jews before allowing any changes the administration of Palestine.<sup>73</sup> The Department of State later asked the IAAA to write a memorandum in addendum to its initial statement on the Anglo-American Committee report. In this memorandum, the IAAA praised some of the report's "constructive suggestions," such as its recommendation that more nations open their doors to Jewish immigration because Palestine alone could not solve the refugee problem. However, the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 1-4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

memo reiterated the IAAA's rejection of the report's principal conclusions and the "condescending spirit," in which they were made.<sup>74</sup>

After the outcry from both Arabs and Jews in response to the Anglo-American Committee Report, the British government decided to wipe its hands clean of the Palestine imbroglio. It passed the responsibility of administering and determining the future of Palestine over to the United Nations.

### **Partition and War**

On May 15, 1947, the UN created the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to investigate how to proceed in Palestine. This Special Committee included Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia. UNSCOP embarked on yet another fact-finding mission, visiting Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, and Austria. Because the Arab Higher Committee boycotted UNSCOP, however, the committee heard primarily Zionist viewpoints. After returning to Geneva, UNSCOP issued recommendations in two forms: a majority report that eleven members of the committee supported, and a minority report prepared by three members. Australia abstained from voting on either. Both reports recommended a partition of some sort. The majority report recommended that sixty-two percent of the land should be established as a Jewish State, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem forming an "international zone," and the remainder of the territory becoming an Arab State. The minority report recommended creating a federal union consisting of an Arab and Jewish state, with Jerusalem as a shared capital. While the minority report suggested that a council made up of Arabs, Jews, and U.N. representatives could

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<sup>74</sup> "Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs," August 1946, Volume 2 (No. 2), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, p. 7.

determine immigration, the majority report urged that 150,000 Jewish refugees be allowed to immigrate into Palestine within the following two years.<sup>75</sup>

Arabs across the world, as well as anti-Zionist Jews, rebuked the reports for granting unprecedented credence to a Jewish national state. The Arab Higher Committee immediately issued a statement describing the report as “absurd, impractical, and unjust.” The IAAA reprinted these words alongside an address that Musa al-Alami, the Director-General of the Arab Offices, gave in London, where he excoriated the proposal to partition Palestine as “no more workable than in 1938 when it was rejected by the Woodhead committee as impracticable.” The IAAA *Bulletin* argued that UNSCOP had legitimated “the right of the conqueror (in this case Great Britain) to dispose of land and people as suits its imperial needs.” Days after the reports were issued, the *New York Times* published a letter from Khalil Totah in which he declared that UNSCOP’s plan “is not partition but confiscation and dispossession.... It is like an intruder breaking into a house, making himself comfortable on the main floor and relegating the owner to a corner of the attic.” Noting that the Middle East needed consolidation and not partition, he described the recommendations as “the negation of statesmanship and common sense.” Totah also published an editorial in the *New York Herald Tribune* arguing that there would be no acceptable “middle ground” in the Palestine problem.<sup>76</sup>

After the UNSCOP announcement, the IAAA became more determined to make contact with Arab leaders and gain support for their work in the U.S. With those goals in mind, the Institute sent Ismail and Selwa Khalidi on a mission to the Arab world in August 1947. Ismail Khalidi arranged for Azzam Pasha, the Egyptian diplomat and secretary-general of the Arab

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<sup>75</sup> United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, Supplement No. 11, September 3, 1947, A/364, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/07175DE9FA2DE563852568D3006E10F3>.

<sup>76</sup> *Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (September 15, 1947), 2-5, 7.

League, to send letters of invitation to several leaders of the Arab states. Early in their trip, they attended cultural and archaeological conferences in Beirut and Damascus that were sponsored by the Arab League in order to “meet practically everyone worth meeting” in connection to their work.<sup>77</sup> When Ismail finally secured a meeting with Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, he found himself in a predicament; his older brother, Dr. Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi wanted Ismail to carry a personal message to the King on his behalf. Ismail Khalidi reluctantly agreed. In Amman, King Abdullah “listened politely but without great interest” to Ismail’s “glowing description” of the Institute’s efforts to change American opinion on Palestine. Because the King had long ago allied with Great Britain, he was not greatly concerned with the American role in determining the future of Palestine and was thus uninterested in supporting the Institute. The meeting ended disastrously after Ismail relayed his brother’s message to the King: that Dr. Husayn al-Khalidi and the Arab Higher Committee had refused the King’s offer of *wasaya*, or guardianship, over the Palestinians. This enraged the King; he had already been unimpressed by the IAAA, but delivering this message ensured that Emir Abdullah would refuse any request from Ismail Khalidi and his associates.<sup>78</sup>

Despite its failure in getting support overseas, the Institute forged ahead with efforts to inform the American public of their view. Recognizing that its *Bulletins* and lectures were not enough, the IAAA decided to issue new pamphlets to address the unprecedented events of 1947. It published *Papers on Palestine Part II* in May with the subtitle, “A Collection of Articles by Leading Authorities Dealing with the Palestine Problem.” This volume was dedicated to “the memory of Dr. Fuad I. Shatara, in recognition of his devoted zeal, far-sighted leadership, and most unselfish service to the Arab cause.” The pamphlet featured writings by prominent

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<sup>77</sup> Selwa and Ismail Khalidi to Habib Katibah, August 24, 1947, Box 12, Folder 7, Katibah Papers, Naff Collection.

<sup>78</sup> Rashid Khalidi, unpublished manuscript on his father’s visit to King Abdullah, shared via email, September 2017.



American academics and religious leaders. Virginia C. Gildersleeve, dean of Barnard University and the sole American representative before the 1945 U.N. Conference in San Francisco, wrote the pamphlet's forward. She lamented the widespread American ignorance of the "forty million Arabs" who had passed on "culture and enlightenment...to a darkened Europe and to which our Western civilization remains deeply indebted." Gildersleeve also noted that the recent "Arab Awakening" had been due in part to "the stimulus and fertilization given by American teachers and American colleges in the Near East." Echoing arguments that the IAAA continually made, she cautioned against sacrificing this "friendly bond" between Arabs and Americans. She further argued that the Americans had misdirected their admirable sympathy for displaced Jews after the Holocaust toward the cause of political Zionism, which allowed "a few Americans" to "evade our own responsibility for these Jews by pushing them all into Palestine."<sup>79</sup> The following twelve articles, written by the likes of Kermit Roosevelt, Charles R. Watson, W. T. Stace, and Ann Putcamp, advanced similar arguments.

In November 1947, a month after President Truman had verbalized his support for a "viable Jewish state," the IAAA published its third *Papers on Palestine*. This volume featured the writings of several "distinguished Jews who oppose political Zionism": Arthur Hays Sulzberger, President and Publisher of the New York Times; Morris R. Cohen, Philosophy Professor at CUNY; Henry Morgenthau Sr., the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913-1916; Rabbi Irving F. Reichert from the San Francisco Section of the National Conference of Christians and Jews; I. M. Rabinowich, Canadian scientist and medical specialist; and Benjamin H. Freedman, a "well-known industrialist." Its foreword identified two significant

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<sup>79</sup> *Papers on Palestine II: A Collection of Articles by Leading Authorities Dealing with the Palestine Problem*, Institute of Arab American Affairs Pamphlet Series, No. 5 (New York, May 1947), 1-2.

traditions of Judaism: an exclusivist, institutional foundation that would urge a theocratic state, and an ethical, universal tradition that had laid the foundation for modern civilization.

Those who value the ethical and universal tradition of Judaism are at last aroused and alarmed by the threat which political Zionism represents. In the pages which follow are set down the sentiments of distinguished Jews who are proud of their cultural inheritance and who do not wish to see the faith which cradled the democratic idea revert to a stage of evolution which the rest of mankind is struggling to get past.<sup>80</sup>

As in the first *Papers on Palestine*, the treatises by Jewish authors reiterated their opposition to political Zionism, while occasionally allowing room for continued immigration to Palestine as long as the country would become an independent, non-sectarian, and multi-ethnic state. Morris Cohen, in an addendum to the republished piece he had written for the *New Republic* twenty-six years prior, declared that laws discriminating against any creed were “abhorrent to the conscience of liberal humanity,” referring simultaneously to Hitler’s Nuremberg laws, British laws limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase in Palestine, and U.S. immigration quotas. On the latter point, he describes the passage of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act as the moment that the U.S. had replaced its tradition of “allowing free entry to the oppressed and downtrodden of the Old World” with a “policy of limiting immigration on the basis of so-called national origin.” He continued,

It abandoned the liberal faith for a form of ancestor-worship based on demonstrably false racial theories. In taking this step, we not only curtailed the rapid expansion of or national prosperity, but gave world currency and prestige to racist legislation in fields of immigration and in other fields as well. It is a small step from excluding Jews or East Europeans from a country to excluding them from a profession or trade. Tribalism is a creed that leads to grief and massacre, whether it bears the label of Zionism, Aryanism, Anglo-Saxon America, or Pan-Islam.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Papers on Palestine III: A Collection of Articles by Distinguished Jews who Oppose Political Zionism*, Institute of Arab American Affairs Pamphlet Series, No. 6 (New York, November 1947), 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27. For more on the 1924 Immigration Act inspiring anti-Semitism in the U.S. and abroad, see James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

Ultimately, such appeals had little effect on the American delegates to the UN when the question of Palestine came to a vote. On November 29, 1947, a two-thirds vote passed the resolution to partition Palestine. The IAAA reiterated its rejection of partition. In its *Bulletin*, issued a month and a half after the UN vote, the IAAA cheered Congressman Lawrence H. Smith for insisting that Congress open a probe into American conduct related to the U.N. vote., arguing that the Assembly meeting had purposely been postponed twice in order to ensure that there were enough votes to pass it. Smith opposed partition on the grounds that it would lead the U.S. “down the road to another war” and that it had “sabotaged” the U.N. The *Bulletin* detailed Smith’s assertion that “the decisive votes were cast by Haiti, Liberia and the Philippines. These votes were sufficient to make the two-thirds majority. Previously, these countries opposed the move. Do not forget that they are considered satellites of our own country.” Smith concluded, “the pressure of our delegates, by our officials, and by private citizens on the United States constitutes reprehensible conduct against them and against us.” The Institute concurred with Smith’s view, noting that “a most reliable observer” in the Philippines had informed the IAAA that the Institute’s publications had influenced the Filipino delegate’s initial opposition to the partition of Palestine. “Many of the statistics quoted by the Philippine delegate, which he received in the form of official cable instruction from his government in Manila, came originally from the Institute’s office.” The IAAA’s *Bulletin* regretted, however, that “despite the cogency of the Filipino stand,” the “newly created Asiatic republic was reportedly forced, under threat of American political pressure, to change his country’s logical and moral position.”<sup>82</sup>

The IAAA, echoing Smith, also utilized a cold war rhetoric by arguing that the Soviet Union would take advantage of the Palestinian conflict to compete with the United States in the

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<sup>82</sup> “Bulletin of the Institute of Arab American Affairs,” January 15, 1948, Volume 3 (No. 7), *Library of Congress Arabic Pamphlet Collection, Part 2*, Center for Research Libraries, 1-4.

new postwar world order. Smith believed that the Soviet Union had only voted to support partition because it would be obliged to send its troops to enforce the partition, just as the U.S. would have to do. “Consider the paradox,” Smith said. “In western Europe we seek to defeat communism; in the Middle East we undercut that policy and make it possible for Russia to gain control of the entire area, not only in Palestine but adjacent thereto.” The IAAA concurred that this would be a threat to American national security, arguing that reports from Washington indicated that State Department officials were “alarmed over the possible entrance of Communist agents into Palestine.”<sup>83</sup>

Notwithstanding their early success at rallying elements of the immigrant community and spreading information on Palestine, the vote to partition Palestine marked the moment that the IAAA’s faith in the American establishment began to fade. On May 14, 1948, the British mandate officially ended with the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the Zionist state of Israel. The readiness of the United States delegation to the U.N. to recognize the provisional government of Israel further discouraged the Institute. But as war broke out in Palestine, the IAAA worked in overtime to counteract the pro-Zionist messages that predominated in the media. The IAAA may not have had much clout in mainstream American political and academic circles; nevertheless, its work encouraged American Zionists to step up their own efforts to discredit Arab activists in the U.S.

### **Backlash from Zionist Americans**

In the midst of the IAAA’s campaigns to prevent the partition of Palestine, the Institute’s work was closely scrutinized and occasionally characterized as foreign propaganda and anti-

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<sup>83</sup> “Communist Infiltration into Palestine Foreseen,” *Ibid.*, 6.

Semitic – two charges it had worked so hard to distance itself from since its inception. The Jewish Agency for Palestine and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith both kept close watch over the Institute, with Jewish Agency informants regularly reporting on both the activities of the Institute and prominent Arabic-speaking intellectuals in the U.S.<sup>84</sup> During Khalil Totah’s tenure at the IAAA, he was often harassed at lectures; he was frequently outnumbered by Zionists on panels and “heckled and threatened by blocks of Zionists planted in the audience to cause travel.” A mail bomb was even sent to the IAAA’s New York office, although it did little damage.<sup>85</sup>

Habib Katibah’s long history of anti-Zionist activism and his association with the IAAA particularly made him the target of racist smear campaigns. In May 1947, the *Daily Mirror*, a New York tabloid, published a column making false claims about Katibah and others who opposed political Zionism. In response, Katibah filed a lawsuit alleging that the *Daily Mirror*; its owner, the Hearst Cooperation; its publisher, Charles B. McCabe; author Walter Winchell; and other “unknown” individuals had engaged in a conspiracy to discredit him.<sup>86</sup> Katibah’s statement to the Lower Manhattan Summons Court argued,

The criminally libelous article complained of willfully represented that the complainant [Katibah] was one of, or was associated, cooperating and in league with “Arabastards,” “Arabianazis”, a “wicked clique” of real war “criminals”, “men hostile to the Allies”, and was a flunky or imported sympathiser of men referred to as an “Iraqeteer”, “Arabilbo”, “Arabum” and “Arabigot” and was an associate with the “pro-Nazi Iraqislings”, “Arabandists”, “Asiatic Knights of Ku Klux Klan”, “phoney [sic] Arabian Knight”, “Middle East undercover men” from a “burrow in Asia”, “carpet-baggers” and so forth and so forth “part and parcel of the Nazi propaganda and military machines”....

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<sup>84</sup> See folders A136/29, A330/480, A370/575 in the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem; for more on the ADL and IAAA, see Bawardi, 274-279.

<sup>85</sup> Khalil Totah, *My Four and a Half Years in New York*, in Joy Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, Loc. 3606.

<sup>86</sup> Winchell, the author of the column, often found himself the subject of defamation lawsuits due to his vehement support of Zionism. Emile Ghoury, while visiting the United States on a delegation of the Arab Higher Committee, declared that of all the Zionist “propagandists,” Winchell was “the most vicious writer.” See “Libel Suit Upheld Against Winchell: High State Court Holds Prof. Hartmann of 'Peace Now' Has a Cause of Action,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1947; and “Holy Land Arabs Demand Boycott,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1947.

The statement went on to declare that in actuality, Katibah and his “co-defamees” were “men of culture and refinement,” for they had served as delegates to national assemblies and the UN, worked as ambassadors, and were church leaders. Furthermore, Katibah had “never written a line or spoken a word offensive to any religiously minded or unqualifiedly loyal American,” but had consistently advocated for a more “realistic approach” to matters in Palestine.<sup>87</sup>

During the trial that followed, the defense did not attempt to deny the epithets the *Daily Mirror* had used to describe Katibah, but instead maligned his associates and sought to establish anti-Zionist activism as inherently anti-Semitic. In response, Katibah’s lawyer, Hallam M. Richardson, submitted into the evidence the IAAA’s *Papers on Palestine III*, featuring writings by Jews critical of political Zionism, as proof that there was a strong Jewish tradition that opposed the creation a religious, racial state. Quoting the likes of *New York Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger and the diplomat Henry Morgenthau, Sr., Richardson questioned why the defendants should be “immune from the law when they deliberately defame a distinguished American of Syrian Semitic origin,” particularly when Katibah held the views of many “distinguished Jews” in North America.

The trial at times devolved into a referendum on whether the Arab National League (ANL) of the United States, an organization in which Katibah had been active during the 1930s, and the IAAA were sufficiently “American.” The defense sought to paint the IAAA as a revival of the ANL, which was problematic because the defense portrayed the ANL as a supporter of Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem. Although the ANL had once been in contact with Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, it disbanded months before the U.S. entered World War II and, most importantly, before the mufti of Jerusalem had fled to Germany. Katibah had gone on

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<sup>87</sup> “Memorandum,” New York City Magistrates’ Court of the City of New York, Lower Manhattan Summons, Borough of Manhattan, 1947, Naff Collection, Box 14, Folder 1.

record multiple times arguing the he, and the ANL as an organization, had not supported the mufti's sympathetic views toward Nazism and his willingness to take shelter in Berlin.

Moreover, the IAAA had not formed until the war was nearing its end, and it had always been highly critical of Al-Husseini. Katibah's lawyer sought to differentiate the ANL and IAAA, noting that despite some of the overlapping leadership and membership, they were formed for different purposes. Nevertheless, he maintained that both groups were entirely lawful. Both the ANL and IAAA openly championed their allegiance to the U.S., and many of its members had assisted the American war effort – including Katibah, who had worked for the Office of War Information. Furthermore, Richardson noted that an author of one of the defendants' own pieces of evidence on exhibit had admitted that his organization had been keeping track of Katibah for years but “could not point out one word which was seditious, subversive, un-American, fascist, or pro-Nazi.”<sup>88</sup>

The result of the trial remains unclear. However, by bringing it to court, Katibah was able to publicly defend himself – and organizations such as the IAAA that were associated with him – from defamation. Throughout the trial, Katibah and his lawyer reiterated that he was not an Arab propagandist, but an American author and journalist. One of their legal statements decried the notion that an immigrant of Arab extraction was a lesser American, noting, “We have many distinguished citizens of foreign birth, but we do not refer to our Irish-Mayor, English-Magistrate, Italian or Hungarian Judges, or Austrian Justices.”<sup>89</sup> While always cognizant of his Syrian, Arab background, Katibah sought to be regarded as a legitimate American journalist and

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<sup>88</sup> “Reply Memorandum,” People of the State of New York on the complaint of Habib I. Katibah against The Hearst Corporation, Charles McCabe, Walter Winchell, and others, City Magistrates Court of the City of New York, Lower Manhattan Summons Court, in Naff Collection, Box. 14, Folder 1.

<sup>89</sup> “Memorandum,” Naff Collection, Box 14, Folder 1.

activist. However, his outspoken stance against Zionism made it easy for his critics to paint him, and other Arab activists, as both anti-Semitic and anti-American.

### **The Nakba**

The *nakba* – the “catastrophe” of the 1948 war in Palestine, the creation of the new state of Israel, and the mass expulsion of Arabs from their homeland – left Arab-Americans aghast. 1948 was a turning point not only for the Arab world, but for Arabs in the diaspora and their organizations. As more immigrants began to focus on providing humanitarian support to the new Arab refugees, the Institute found it difficult to keep its membership engaged and cover its own operating expenses.<sup>90</sup> Khalil Totah made many more trips across the U.S. and even Latin and South America to seek funding from the diaspora, but found the *mahjar*’s faith in the Arab cause, and the Institute, diminished.

Thus, throughout 1948, Habib Katibah wrote to Arab leaders stating that Arab-Americans were exhausted; it was now necessary for the Arab states to initiate a new phase of “Arab propaganda” in the United States, as the only remaining pro-Arab messages came from anti-Zionist Jews and “the reserved and modest production of the Institute.”<sup>91</sup> In Katibah’s view, the Arab League or the Arab Higher Committee would need to establish an information center in New York because the Arab Office in Washington, D.C. was barely functional. He explained that such a bureau could still influence the American position on the Palestine question; although Truman had won the 1948 presidential election, Katibah believed that he wasn’t entirely “indebted to the Zionists,” because many Jewish Zionists had voted against him and the new

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<sup>90</sup> According to Hani Bawardi, from 1946 to 1947, the Institute received donations totaling \$24,863.68, or “more than \$258,000 in 2012 dollars, exceeding those of its contemporary Arab-American organizations, but it faced a Zionist machine capable of raising millions.” Bawardi, *Making of Arab-Americans*, 272.

<sup>91</sup> Katibah to Fares Bey al-Khoury, Nov. 1, 1948, Naff Collection, Box 13, Folder 5.



Israeli leadership seemed to be turning toward the East rather than the West for support.<sup>92</sup>

Katibah envisioned this new Arab bureau as engaging in a multilayered campaign that would establish Arab trade and the exchange of private capital among Americans who imagined Arabs with “horns and cloven hoofs.” He also hoped that the bureau could enlighten Americans about intellectual, social, and industrial progress occurring in the Arab world despite the recent setbacks. His experience in the IAAA had taught him that an official Arab state presence in New York could be more influential than an Arab-American institute. The immigrant activists were too strapped for funds and too vulnerable to personal smear attacks to complete all the work that was needed. “The Arabs have hit bottom,” Katibah wrote, “but this is just the time when they should show spunk and rise again. Our greatest enemy is despair and kismet.”<sup>93</sup>

In September 1948, Khalil Totah echoed this view in a letter he sent to IAAA members. Recognizing that the membership was devastated by the *nakba*, Totah sought to rally Arab-Americans to continue their efforts. Totah enclosed an interview that *Al-Ahram* had conducted with Jamal al-Husayni, who argued that Americans were still eager to listen to the Arab viewpoint and could be swayed by an extensive Arab information campaign. He wrote that in the Institute’s opinion, “there was never a more opportune time than the present to push the program of Arab-American understanding. It is easy enough to be optimistic and happy when things are in one’s favor. But it is defeat which tests one’s character. This is no time to give way to a spirit of defeatism. This is the time to brace up and stand for what you believe is right and just.”<sup>94</sup>

Despite Totah’s entreaties, few were able to overcome the “spirit of defeatism” and the Institute struggled to stay open. Although some chapters, namely those in Flint and Boston,

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<sup>92</sup> Katibah to Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, Nov. 6, 1948, in Naff Collection, Box 13, Folder 5

<sup>93</sup> Katibah to Fares Bey al-Khoury, Nov. 1, 1948, in Naff Collection, Box 13, Folder 5.

<sup>94</sup> Khalil Totah letter, September 27, 1948, Naff Collection, NMAH, Box 38, Folder 5.

remained active, Totah considered the IAAA branches in Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to be “organizational failures” because of their internal divisions and cynicism.<sup>95</sup>

In Spring 1949, Totah visited Venezuela in an attempt to raise enough funds to keep the Institute operating. He reported to the IAAA staff that after a week in Caracas, Venezuela, the response was “disappointing” as only a dozen people attended one of his events. He described the community as “split into a thousand smithereens among themselves” lamenting that although the immigrants were wealthy, “their interest in Arab affairs and in intellectual matters is not much.”<sup>96</sup> A week later he wrote from Maracaibo, Venezuela:

You have not been hearing from me because there is not much to tell. It is a sad tale of frustration, disillusionment, resentment, and despair on the part of the Arabic-speaking communities. They remind me of a licked, demoralized and retreating army. They accuse Arab states of treason, theft, incompetence, and insincerity. They believe the Arab cause is lost and it is futile to do anything about it. They say that they sent lots of money to Damascus and Beirut and the *mufti* but it was all pocketed. So what can you say to them? In the last place, Barquisimeto, the community was mostly from Zahleh. They are well off. I asked for a meeting at their club, but they refused.... One said that they have sworn an oath not to do a thing ever for the Arab cause.<sup>97</sup>

He continued his tour westward to Colombia, and then traveled north to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala in Central America. Totah had hoped he would have better luck when meeting with a community of Palestinian emigrants from Bethlehem, but he found their reception to his mission to also be “*distinctly hostile*.” When he asked to speak to the locals, the community’s leaders replied that a crowd wouldn’t come. “All I meet is defeatism, shame, and despair,” he wrote, which was compounded by people’s belief that the Arab leaders had given up on fighting, “recognized Israel,” and were “drinking champagne with the Jews.” In Colombia, Totah found the most hostile crowd of Arab emigrants. The leaders of Baranquilla had

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<sup>95</sup> Joy Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, Loc. 3658.

<sup>96</sup> Khalil Totah to James Batal, Feb. 17, 1949, Caracas, Venezuela, in Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*.

<sup>97</sup> Khalil Totah to James Batal, February 25 and 29, 1949, Maracaibo, Venezuela, in Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*.

“practically mobbed” Totah, heckling during his speech and refusing to donate money. They especially bristled at “the notion of sending money to New York of all places.”<sup>98</sup> Totah could not easily convince other Americans to fund the Institute’s information campaign’s in New York. He did not come away from this tour with much funding, although he did contract dysentery.<sup>99</sup>

In June 1949, Ali Mahadeen, one of the institute’s founding members, corresponded with Katibah about an upcoming meeting of the Board of Directors. Although Katibah could not attend the meeting as he would be in Washington, D.C., he instructed Mahadeen to vote on his behalf for the new board members. He also emphasized that the board first needed to decide whether they truly believed in the Institute, and, if so, to support its continuation. He emphasized that the Institute’s priority should be publicity, which one well-equipped person could do. By this time, it appeared that some within the Institute had become disenchanted by Khalil Totah’s inability to raise funds; Katibah told Totah directly, and Mahadeen in writing, that he believed Totah should continue his position only if he could assure the members that he would raise enough money to sustain the Institute. “At any rate, the prospects of raising money should be the main item on your agenda,” Katibah concluded. “All other items are relatively unimportant.”<sup>100</sup> Totah remained in his post as executive director, with John Hazam serving as the President for the second year in a row.<sup>101</sup>

Yet, over the next year, the board was unable revive the Institute. By June 1949, Habib Katibah lamented that the Institute’s office was “practically closed” even as the bills kept “piling up.” Katibah paid half of the expenses out of pocket until his own funds ran low, and then sought

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<sup>98</sup> Totah to James Batal, March 4, 1949, Baranquilla, Colombia, in Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*.

<sup>99</sup> Totah to James Batal, March 3, 1949, Baranquilla, Colombia, in Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*.

<sup>100</sup> Katibah to Ali Mahadeen, June 9, 1949, Naff Collection, Box 13, Folder 5.

<sup>101</sup> Hilden Totah, Appendix, Chapter 4, B, Loc. 6167. As early as 1947, Ismail and Selwa Khalidi indicated that they hoped that Totah would resign as director of the Institute. See Selwa and Ismail Khalidi to Habib Katibah, August 24, 1947, Naff Collection, Box 12, Folder 7.

financial assistance from Fares Bey al-Khoury, the Syrian Representative to the U.N. and the Speaker of the Parliament of Syria, for the remaining balance. Recognizing that the Institute would not be around for much longer, Katibah also began seeking out job opportunities with al-Khoury and Constantine Zurayk in the hopes that he could return to Syria to conduct research for a year.<sup>102</sup>

That fall, IAAA President John Hazam represented the Institute before the Senate Judiciary Committee as it considered revising the Displaced Persons Bill, S. 311. He requested that the U.S. allow a “limited number” of Arab refugees to enter the country, just as the Bill allowed for refugees from Europe.<sup>103</sup> He was joined by George Barakat, who was once active in the IAAA and was currently the executive director of the newly-formed American Middle East Relief, and Mrs. Louis Nassif, a Red Cross volunteer who had worked in Arab refugee camps. Hazam and Barakat argued that Arabs should be allowed to enter the U.S. because Israeli troops, with the assent of the U.S., had terrorized Arab villages in order to displace civilians. Nassif described her wrenching experience in the camps, calling the Arabs “the most unfortunate of all Displaced Persons.”<sup>104</sup> This appearance before the Senate would be the IAAA’s last.

In January 1950, the IAAA’s Board of Directors decided to suspend its activities due to a lack of funding and support. The various individuals who were sympathetic to the Institute’s activity, including American investors in the Middle East and Arab businessmen on the East Coast, had not actually followed through with financial or moral support. “Among the relatively few who made donations,” the Institute’s January 1950 *Bulletin* asserted, “many gave only

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<sup>102</sup> Katibah to Fares Bey al-Khoury, July 13, 1949, Naff Collection, Box 12, Folder 3.

<sup>103</sup> Totah Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, Loc. 3592.

<sup>104</sup> “American of Arab Descent Appear before Senate Subcommittee; Slander Israel’s Troops,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Sept. 11, 1949, <http://www.jta.org/1949/09/11/archive/americans-of-arab-descent-appear-before-senate-subcommittee-slander-israels-troops>

grudgingly and sometimes in mortal fear of economic consequences on their business.” In the end, “vociferous Zionists and their well-meaning but ignorant fellow-travelers” had stifled the alternative narrative that the Institute had offered Americans.<sup>105</sup>

As Hani Bawardi argues, the IAAA activists realized that their push for democratic government in Syria and Lebanon and their commitment to an independent Palestinian state had placed them on “the wrong side of U.S. strategic interests.” By 1948, the American government openly signaled its opposition to Arab nationalism while also supporting partition in Palestine.<sup>106</sup> The U.S. government would continue to suppress Arab – and Palestinian – nationalism throughout the Cold War. Just as the Arab National League shuttered in the heated years leading up to America’s entry in World War II, the Institute found that it could no longer operate in the midst of the burgeoning Cold War. Many of its members, moreover, found themselves afflicted with “Palestinitis,” Faris Malouf’s appellation for the exhaustion and distress that had precipitated his heart attack before he could testify before the Anglo-American Inquiry in 1946. One year after the Institute closed, Habib I. Katibah also experienced a heart attack. Katibah died on February 16, 1951, perhaps another victim of “Palestinitis.”<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, the Institute’s work is remarkable in many ways. It was one of the first organizations to rally its members around both an Arab (or at the very least, “Arabic-speaking”) and American identity. It is notable for trying to influence both American and Arab political circles. Moreover, it consistently advanced the notion that immigrants in the U.S. had just as much right as anyone else to criticize and attempt to change American policy overseas. The Institute’s well-educated members, primarily immigrants working in academia and professional

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<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*, 291.

<sup>106</sup> Bawardi, *The Making of Arab-Americans*, 37.

<sup>107</sup> “Habib I. Katibah, 59, An Expert on Arabia, Dies,” *New York Times*, Feb. 17, 1951.

fields, represented themselves as more qualified than traditional Western Orientalists to inform the American public and government about the Arab world. IAAA members also made important alliances with anti-Zionist Jews such as Elmer Berger and Alfred Lilienthal, who spearheaded a Progressive Jewish movement against Zionism and Israeli hegemony. Moreover, these activists often went on to serve in other organizations during the 1950s, such as American Middle East Relief or the Organization of Arab Students. Finally, the Institute's leaders mentored the newest wave of Arab immigrants to the U.S. after the 1924 restrictions had all but closed American borders to the East. The hundreds of Arab students who traveled to the U.S. to study during the late 1940s adjusted to life more easily thanks to the Institute's initiative in connecting them with local immigrant communities and academic institutions. The growing number of students who continued to arrive until the 1960s built on this foundation to create their own student organizations. As in the case of the IAAA, the question of Palestine was the prevailing issue of the time. However, these newer immigrants did not engage in the same debates around labeling themselves as "Syrian," "Lebanese," or "Arabic-speaking." With the rise of Arab nationalism, the new immigrant generation identified itself resoundingly as "Arab."

### Chapter 3

#### **Between *Nakba* and *Naksa*: Arab-Americans and the Crisis in Palestine**

The disappearance of the Institute of Arab American Affairs in 1950 left a void in the *mahjar* community in the United States. This chapter analyzes several cultural and political groups that sought to fill this void, most notably the Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs and the Organization of Arab Students in the United States. The effects of the establishment of an Israeli state in Palestine in 1948, including the rise of the Palestinian refugee crisis and the expression of new forms of nationalism, reverberated across the diaspora. Thus, this chapter interrogates how Arab immigrant communities in the U.S. engaged with the question of Palestine from the 1948 *naksa*, or “catastrophe,” to the 1967 *naksa*, the “setback.” In particular, it investigates the ideologies and activism of two groups – members of two different waves of Middle Eastern migration to the U.S. – to analyze how Americans of Arab descent and Arabs studying in America conceived themselves in relation to the U.S. Cold War project, the Arab nationalist movement, and the question of Palestine.

Historical work on Arab immigrants during this time period is scant for several reasons. Because the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act stymied most new Syrian immigration into the United States, scholars have assumed that by the 1940s and 1950s, Syrians fully integrated into American society. However, such narratives have often omitted the transnational connections that immigrants maintained with their homelands during this period. Additionally, scholars such as Gary David have emphasized the sectarian Lebanese identities that solidified in the diaspora after the establishment of a Lebanese state; he argues that the historiography on Syrian and Lebanese immigrants has critically failed to account for the experience of Maronites who

embrace a Phoenician instead of Arab identity.<sup>1</sup> David rightfully notes that many Lebanese Americans in this time period were disinterested in – or even opposed to – the Arab nationalist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. However, many immigrants or second-generation Americans who did not rally for Palestine occasionally found themselves affected by the issue nonetheless. As anti-Arab views proliferated in the U.S. after 1948 and especially after 1967, many Americans of Middle Eastern descent found themselves – whether by virtue of their names, their ancestral homelands, or their religious practices – to be associated with the Arab world even if they did not personally identify as Arabs.

Another overlooked aspect of this time period is that numerous Lebanese nationalists allowed space for the Palestinian issue to coexist with their concerns about the Lebanon and the Arab world more generally. As mentioned in previous chapters, Philip Hitti was a Maronite Christian academic who spearheaded the effort to inform Americans about the Arab world as early as 1924; he was particularly active after World War II on the problem of Palestine in the Institute of Arab American Affairs. After the Institute dissolved in 1950, Hitti became involved with American Middle East Relief, which provided aid to Palestinian refugees, and American Friends of the Middle East, which engaged in activities similar to the IAAA. Orthodox Christian Lebanese Americans who were not Maronite, such as Frank Maria and James Ansara in Massachusetts, were also outspoken critics of Israel and engaged in organizations that supported Palestinians. This rapprochement was possible because the Maronite-dominated Lebanese state formally embraced the cause of Palestine at the United Nations under the leadership of Charles Malik in the late 1940s.<sup>2</sup> These shifts were reflected in leading immigrant institutions such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Gary C. David, “The Creation of Arab-American: Political Activism and Ethnic (Dis)Unity,” *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 5-6, 833-862.

<sup>2</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 206; “The Question of Palestine at the UN,” (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 2008),



Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs, particularly its branches on the East Coast and in the Midwest.

During the 1950s, various cultural groups that had arisen during the first wave of Syrian migration debated how to self-identify: were they Syrian, Lebanese, Arab, or Arab-American? While grappling with these questions of identity, members of the Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs became increasingly concerned with the question of Palestine. Although most Federation members were not especially politically active on foreign affairs, the leadership of the Federation closely followed events overseas and sought to educate the immigrant community about issues in the region that had previously been known as Greater Syria. Many first-wave immigrants and their children were unable – or unwilling – to advocate for changes in American positions on Palestine; however, they spearheaded extensive fundraising campaigns to send humanitarian aid to refugees and others dealing with the effects of warfare and displacement in the Middle East. Furthermore, many of these Arabic-speaking individuals represented themselves as spokespeople of the U.S. to visiting dignitaries from the Middle East and on their own journeys to their homelands.

Although in many ways the Federation movement accepted American Cold War ideology, its members – particularly at the national level – were also avowedly anticolonial. Recent historiography has extensively discussed the ways in which “homegrown” American activist movements have been tied to transnational imaginaries and institutions. Penny Von Eschen, for instance, argues that Black Americans who engaged in larger African diaspora politics from the 1930s to the early Cold War Era crafted an identity that was defined in relation to Africa. Claiming a shared history provided room for the belief that independent African

nations would aid the struggles of African Americans. The solidarities that black Americans formed were, according to Von Eschen, “necessarily racial” because they viewed race as the driving force behind numerous processes in the modern world: enslavement of Africans, colonial exploitation, and racial capitalism.<sup>3</sup> In similar ways, migrants in the Syrian diaspora who settled in the U.S. identified themselves in relation to the decolonizing states of their homeland. However, these solidarities were not based on race as much as their ethnic heritage and affinity for the new anticolonial nationalist states that had emerged in the Arab world.

It is important to recognize that many Syrian-Americans had fought to be classified as “white” in order to gain US citizenship in the era of immigration restrictions. White supremacy had been codified in American naturalization law since the passage of the Nationality Act of 1790. In 1952, however, the McCarran-Walter Act abolished the racial requirements for naturalization.<sup>4</sup> In this new era, identifying as white was no longer essential to becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. Thus, Arabic-speaking Americans in this period largely eschewed self-identifying as white (if they had ever done so) and instead embraced a cultural Arab identity that allowed space for more specific nationalisms: Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and so on. They thus engaged in activities that kept their cultural roots alive in the U.S. A desire to maintain a relationship to their homeland also prompted some immigrants to advocate for changes in American foreign policy and to inform Americans about the issues in the Arab World – particularly the problem of Palestine.

### **Defending Palestine in the U.S.**

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<sup>3</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

The IAAA was notable for being spearheaded by Arab-Americans to advocate for a change in American perceptions and policy relating to the Middle East. However, the 1950s witnessed the rise of other advocacy groups with Arabist sympathies, if not Arab membership. In 1951, Rabbi Elmer Berger, journalist Dorothy Thompson, and a steering committee of over twenty interested persons formed the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) in order to educate Americans and Arabs their “common spiritual heritage.” In addition to education, AFME’s mission entailed supporting new nationalist movements in the Middle East and engaging in anti-Zionist activism in the U.S.; most conveniently, these goals paralleled with the prevailing Cold War objectives of the U.S. State Department and intelligence agencies. Historian Hugh Wilford has thoroughly documented AFME’s ties to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency under the leadership of Kermit Roosevelt II and Allen Dulles. Elmer Berger of the American Council of Judaism had been working as a part-time consultant for the CIA in 1951 when he first suggested founding the organization to the acclaimed journalist Dorothy Thompson on her return from a tour of the Middle East. Five months after its founding, the CIA sent a case officer to the New York offices of AFME, and by the end of 1951 the organization received an “anonymous” gift of \$25,000 that likely came from one of the CIA’s shell foundations. However, the rank and file of the organization were likely unaware of these connections with the U.S. government; although the organization was exposed in 1967 as one of several “CIA fronts” during the Cold War era, it engaged in work that in many ways was a continuation of the IAAA.<sup>5</sup>

Like the IAAA before it, AFME recognized that the Arab-Israeli Conflict was a key obstacle to better Arab-American relations. As such, AFME produced numerous publications to educate the American public on the issue while also corresponding and meeting with American

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Wilford, *America’s Great Game: The CIA’s Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 113-132. See also Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 239-240; 266.

officials. It also advocated for Arab students in the U.S. and facilitated trips that allowed Americans to visit the Arab World. In 1953, it even opened up field offices in the Middle East, demonstrating that Americans were invested in cultivating a better relationship with the Arab World.

However, AFME did not attract grassroots support and participation from many Arabs in the U.S. Philip Hitti and a few other prominent Arab-Americans served on the National Council of AFME, but the organization was largely spearheaded by white East Coast elites. In Hitti's case, for example, his main involvement in AFME involved allowing his name to be signed on telegrams to American officials on issues relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>6</sup> The National Committee included the names of several other Arab immigrants, many of whom had been active in the IAAA, but they were not closely involved in the day-to-day running of the organization.

Instead, Arab immigrants had turned to other efforts, namely the Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs and Middle East relief organizations.

### **The Federation Movement**

The Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs formed in 1932 as a way to connect diverse ethnic organizations on the East Coast.<sup>7</sup> A Midwest Federation soon followed in the East's footsteps. After a meeting in Chicago during November 1949, the East and Midwest Federations decided to cooperate as a National Organization. Their successes soon inspired the formation of Federations on the West Coast and in the South, although both branches were more independent and oriented around their local member clubs. While the member clubs in the four Federations were largely apolitical community-based organizations, the National Association

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from William Z. Cline to Philip Hitti, March 8, 1957, Box 4, Folder 5, Philip Hitti Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>7</sup> Naff, *Becoming America*, p. 318.

sought to become involved in changing American perceptions about the Middle East and urge the U.S. to adopt a friendlier policy toward Arab World. This work evolved to include demonstrating to the Arab World that the U.S. would be a valuable ally. The Arab states had their own political ambassadors in the U.S., but the National Association believed its members could act as cultural ambassadors. As such, the 1951 constitution of the National Association of Syrian and Lebanese American Federations made the following revision to indicate its more expansive and inclusive program: “We, American citizens of Syrian, Lebanese, and other Arabic-speaking stock or extraction, deeply conscious of our common ethnic heritage and our close blood and cultural ties, are desirous of uniting our efforts and pooling our resources for...Educational, Cultural, and Philanthropic purposes.”<sup>8</sup>

The Federation of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs counted among its members hundreds of clubs in cities and towns across the U.S. The National Organization often publicized the fact that its membership was not limited to the countries of Syria and Lebanon, but was “open to any American of Arabic-speaking origin, regardless of any current political subdivision of the Arab world they or their ancestors came from.”<sup>9</sup> However, due to the demographic makeup of the earliest wave of migrants and the lack of newer immigrants after the 1924 restrictions, most affiliated clubs identified as Syrian or Lebanese. Nearly every state in the Union had at least one organization that was affiliated with the National Association. In 1950, for instance, Ohio boasted membership from twenty-one different clubs, including the Junior Kirby Club, The Round Table, Al Bakoorat ud-Durzeyet, United Aramoon Society, Syrian

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<sup>8</sup> “Constitution of the Eastern Federation, as amended by delegates at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Atlantic City, N.J, October 4-7, 1951,” Box 1, Folder 1, James Ansara Papers, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

<sup>9</sup> “National Association of Federations Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs: Outstanding Promoters of Arab-American Friendship Specializing in Pilgrimages to the Middle East,” *USIS Feature* (1960), Box 1, Folder 7, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

Women's Club, The Young Maronites, Syrian Lebanon Junior League, Al-Shebobat Society, Aitaneet Brotherhood Club, Phoenician Club, Lebanese American Club, Lebanese American Women's Club, St. Maron's Club, Victor Club, Syrian Capricornian Club, Kappa Chi Fraternity, Mid Syrian Lebanon Club, and the Royal Young Women's Organization. The diversity of groups who made up just the Ohioan contingent of the National Association indicated the inclusive potential of Federation: affiliates could be organized around age, religion, gender, education, location, and charitable causes; moreover, the terms "Syrian" and "Lebanese" were employed as both national and ethnic identifiers.<sup>10</sup>

Under the leadership of James Ansara of Lowell, MA, the Federation opened its first national headquarters in Washington, D.C. in 1952 in order to "administer a national program of cultural, educational, civic, and philanthropic activities for the welfare and progress of the Syrian-Lebanese American community and the promotion of better American-Arab understanding." Ansara had first risen to prominence in the Eastern Federation, which he joined in 1941. He took over the national office and its publication, the Herald, in 1952, and later served as the national executive director and public relations manager. The National Association's mission concerning promoting American-Arab understanding is reminiscent of the IAAA's mission in the previous decade.

The National Federation – and more specifically the Eastern Federation – also resembled the IAAA in its leadership. It counted many members among its ranks who had previously been active in the IAAA, such as Joseph Sado (who served as the Federation's president in 1951),

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<sup>10</sup> "List of Member Clubs, 1949-1950," Box 1, Folder 3, Ansara Papers, IHRCA. Many Orthodox Church organizations, while showing interest in the Federation, were "prohibited to affiliate with any organization" by their clergy, according to Federation meeting minutes. George Barakat spoke with Boston's Orthodox Archbishop Beshir, who confirmed to them that while many supported the Federation, they could not officially join it. Nevertheless, many Orthodox individuals were active in the ranks of the Federations. Ibid., Box 1, Folder 5.

Faris Malouf (whose family endowed a Federation scholarship in his memory after he died in 1957), Shukri Khouri (who had worked with both the IAAA and the Arab Office in D.C.), George Barakat (an IAAA representative for the Arab states at the UN), James Batal (the Federation executive secretary in 1951), Michel G. Malti (who served as an advisor for both the IAAA and the Federation), and Joseph Samaha (who worked in the IAAA office and was the Federation's Arabic secretary in 1959).



The Eastern States' seal featured the word “al-tahalluf,” meaning “federation” in the middle with the “Syrian and Lebanese Americans in the Eastern States” written in in Arabic. Around the text were many symbols of the Arab world: a mosque with minarets and a courtyard, the ruins of Ba'albeck, men on camels dressed in keffiyehs in the desert, and a Phoenician ship

steered by sails and rowers. These images of the Middle East were juxtaposed with the United States Capitol building.<sup>11</sup> The Federation's program of activities and its own imagery thus situated it as a link between two worlds.

### **The Federations and Arab-American Friendship**

The National Association's earliest opportunity to play this role came soon after its creation. On October 3, 1951, eleven representatives from the Federations met with President Truman to discuss their seven-point program for accomplishing peace in the Middle East. Truman had reluctantly agreed to the meeting after the acting Secretary of State James Webb convinced him that "it would be advantageous" in light of "the precarious state of our relations with the Arab countries." Webb assured Truman that the meeting "would be a simple courtesy call; publicity of the event by overseas news, radio and information agencies would have a favorable impact on the Arab world." Truman was seemingly unimpressed by Faris Malouf's argument that the U.S. should take the lead in finding a "generous and final" solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. Malouf also spoke of the Federations' desire that the U.S. government not allow its foreign policy to "be influenced and affected by domestic considerations," referring to Zionist voting blocs. The meeting did not last longer than ten minutes; Webb had promised a brief meeting and delivered.<sup>12</sup>

Two years later, however, the Federation and an array of Arabist organizations in the U.S. were pleased that the White House was occupied by the Eisenhower administration, which seemed particularly open to Arab views and not beholden to pro-Zionist Jewish voters. The National Association thus collaborated with American Friends of the Middle East on occasion to

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<sup>11</sup> Box 1, Folder 4, James Ansara Papers, Immigration History Research Center Archives, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab-Americans: A History*, 158, 448-449.



try to shape American policy. For instance, George Barakat of the Eastern Federation arranged for Arab-American leaders to join AFME in meetings with American officials and even President Eisenhower “to discuss our relations with the Arab countries and a possible new orientation.” Barakat hoped that such meetings would be more than ceremonial, which was clearly a reference to unproductive meeting with Truman the year prior; he hoped they would stimulate “a serious exchange of views regarding the problem of the Near East.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite these attempts to directly shape American foreign policy, the branches of the Federation decided to devote themselves to pursuing different routes for a change in American-Arab relations. In October 1952, the Eastern Federation urged the National Association to adopt a “public relations program for the dissemination of information about the Near East” that would be funded by member Federation and voluntary contributions. The board recognized “the need for a better informed American public opinion that would be more sympathetic to the problems of the Arab Near East, being fully appreciative of the salutary effect that such a sympathetic understanding would have upon Arab-American relations.” The following year, Joseph Sado, the chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Eastern Federation, joined George Barakat and James Ansara at a conference held by AFME. As part of its relationship with the American Friends of the Middle East, in 1952 the Federation held a seminar at the American University of Beirut to facilitate exchange between American and Arab students. Barakat continued to request funds for the Public Relations Advisory Committee in order to engage in a sustained public relations campaign about the Arab World.<sup>14</sup> It also raised money to provide scholarships for Arab students to attend schools in the U.S.

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<sup>13</sup> “Minutes of Executive Board Meeting, January 31, 1953,” Box 1, Folder 5, Ansara Papers, IHRCA. I have not been able to find clear references to a Federation presence at meetings with Eisenhower.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, in the early 1950s the Eastern Federation became interested in cooperating with the Arab League. In 1953, it recommended the preparation of a memorandum to the Secretariat of the Arab League that would embody “the point of view of Americans of Arabic-speaking extraction, represented by the Association, with reference to the problems arising out of Arab-American relations.” In addition, it requested that more attention be devoted to the Near East at the annual conventions, and it invited speakers such as the Lebanese Ambassador Charles Malik and Syrian Ambassador Farid Zeineddine to discuss the Arab world at yearly conventions.<sup>15</sup>

Just as the Federations sought to connect Arab communities within the United States, the National Association tried to encourage exchange between migrants and people who had remained in the Arab World. As such, the National Association arranged “pilgrimages” to the “Old Countries” for its members in cooperation with the Arab governments. It held its first Overseas Convention in 1950, which more the 220 American members attended. In 1955, it held a second convention that attracted more than 500 Arab-American participants from twenty-nine states and 126 cities. While these trips were presented as a homecoming, the conference organizers also believed it would facilitate American-Arab friendship. The U.S. government seemed to harbor similar hopes; throughout the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration emphasized the potential of “People-to-People” diplomacy, in which ordinary Americans and Arabs could meet and exchange ideas to facilitate mutual understanding.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the Federation’s members were Americans of Arab descent made them particularly qualified to engage in this work. On the eve of the 1959 Overseas Convention, U.S. Secretary of State Herter

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Wilford, *America’s Great Game*, p. 181. See also Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

wrote to Cosmo Ansara, the president of the National Association, to applaud “the visit of this large number of Americans of your Association to the lands of their forebears.” He believed that this journey would “serve as a living manifestation of the warm sentiments of friendship and respect which the people of the United States hold for the people of the Arab countries.”<sup>17</sup>



*The United Arab Republic issued two commemorative stamps to mark the occasion of the Arab emigrants' visit in 1959.*<sup>18</sup>

After the conclusion of the 1959 tour, the National Association wrote to the State Department describing the welcome reception that the Arab governments and civilians had accorded to the delegation. This report stated that this warm welcome was not just a demonstration of Arab hospitality to emigrants, but a symbol of Arab hopes for Arab-American

<sup>17</sup> “National Association of Federations Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs: Outstanding Promoters of Arab-American Friendship Specializing in Pilgrimages to the Middle East,” *USIS Feature* (1960), Box 1, Folder 7, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>18</sup> Box 1, Folder 14, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

friendship. Despite hearing “sometimes sharp” criticism of American policies and intrigues in the Arab world, the attendees found that most people they met – whether in refugee camps, royal palaces, governmental offices, or the streets of ancestral villages and modern cities – seemed to be amenable to Arab-American friendship.

However, the report noted that the largest obstacle to this relationship was American “partiality to Israel.” “The Arabs are convinced,” read the 1959 report, “that this persistent Israeli and Zionist Anti-Arab influence upon American institutions and government poison [sic] American-Arab relations,” preventing a mutually beneficial relationship. Once again, the Federations urged the U.S. to rethink its policy on supporting Israel. The delegates were also impressed by the popularity of Arab nationalism in every place they visited – “to some extent even in Lebanon.” Thus, the Association urged the U.S. to accept and support Arab nationalism and work with Gamal Abdel Nasser. It assured the State Department that Communism was largely unappealing to Arabs and that a solid alliance with the United States would be preferable in the eyes of both the Arab-Americans and most civilians in the Arab World; due to existing geopolitical affairs, however, the policy of “neutralism” was the best that the U.S. could expect at the time. The report thus urged the U.S. to accept neutralism as a corollary to Arab nationalism, confident that “the Arabs will politically resist the Communists internally as well as externally.” Most importantly, however, the report impressed upon the State Department that the Arab populace held the U.S. responsible not only for the creation of the refugee problem but its continued existence, which was a primary obstacle to American relations with the Arab World. The report stated that “our most distressing experience” was visiting Palestinian refugee camps

in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza.<sup>19</sup> Under-Secretary of State Raymond Hare later responded to this report with approval and stated that the Federation's National delegation had contributed to improved American-Arab relations at the end of 1959.<sup>20</sup>

While the tours that occurred in 1950, 1955, and 1959 were successful, James Ansara lamented that they had largely attracted older Arab-Americans and immigrants who were primarily interested in seeing their ancestral homes and relatives, instead of using the experience to engage in sustained activism on Middle Eastern issues upon returning to the U.S. Many of the functions – such as arranged tours of historic sites, meetings at political institutions, and conferences that focused on the countries' "progress and problems" – were not well-attended. Ansara believed that this was due to most participants having mostly a "sentimental interest in their countries of origin." In Ansara's view, these trips were more "pilgrimages" than occasions for promoting better American-Arab understanding. Thus, in 1960, the National Association sought to recruit younger participants who were interested in education and politics. In order to make the trip accessible to its target audience, the Association utilized cheaper travel arrangements and arranged for the governments of the United Arab Republic, Lebanon, and Jordan to subsidize more of the lodging, meals, and transportation costs. As in previous years, the Arab governments organized lecture series and conferences to facilitate dialogue between the travelers and local officials and cultural leaders. Clearly, the governments of the Arab states recognized that their brethren in diaspora could serve an important purpose as the U.S. played an increasingly prominent role the Middle East. The United States likewise saw the value in the tour, as the Department of State enthusiastically endorsed it. One of the State Department's

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<sup>19</sup> Cosmo Ansara, "Report of the National Association of Federations of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs to the Department of State on its 1950 Overseas Convention and Pilgrimage in the Middle East," Nov. 13, 1959, Box 1, Folder 12, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>20</sup> "\_\_\_\_," *Caravan*, April 14, 1960.

“Near East Experts” even traveled to New York the night before the chartered flights embarked to discuss the problems of the Arab countries and American-Arab relations with the group.<sup>21</sup>

The 1960 tour attracted ninety-three members who were “a cross-section of the Arab-American community.” There were roughly equal numbers of men and women, and seventy percent of the participants were forty-five years old and under. While most were Christian, members of “all the faiths of Americans of Arab origins” were represented: Maronites, Orthodox, Melkites, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, and Druze. In stark contrast with previous delegations, over eighty percent of the participants were American-born, and the rest were visiting students, immigrants, and naturalized American citizens. Participants were mostly of Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, and Jordanian descent. Wherever they traveled they were greeted as official guests of the Arab governments. Ansara described the success of the trip as follows:

In each of the countries, the group was received by the head of state: in Lebanon by President Chehab at his palace in Zouk and on its second day in the country; in Egypt, by President Nasser on July 26, at the San Stephano Hotel in Alexandria; in Syria, by Vice President Kahalla at a banquet on August 2 in Eludan; in Jordan, by King Hussein at his royal palace in Amman on its first day. In every case, the Presidents and King formally welcomed the group to the country in a speech, then received and shook hands with each one individually, graciously submitting to the inevitable photographers and autograph seekers. Then, on July 27 U.S. Ambassador Rhinehart in Cairo received the group at a cocktail party in its honor at the Embassy.

The arrival of the group was widely hailed by the newspapers, radio and television of each country, and its activities daily reported in all the media. Everywhere and almost daily the leaders and members of the group were interviewed by all media for their views, opinions, and impressions; and their pictures became a common sight. Everywhere they went, always escorted by motorcycled police or jeep-full soldiers, people lined the streets and roads to welcome and applaud them. For four weeks, the “American Cousins” and “Moghtarabeen” – Emigrants, were the most important and feted visitors in the Middle East.

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<sup>21</sup> James Ansara, “1960 Tour and Conference in the Middle East Report,” Box 1, Folder 7, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

After the conclusion of the tour, most of the “American Cousins” stated that they tour had helped them understand existing problems in American-Arab relations and the need to improve the relationship between their governments. While most came away with a better understanding of the importance of Arab nationalism and its appeal to local populations in the UAR, Lebanon, and Jordan, many believed it to be a divisive rather than a unifying force. Paradoxically, many also believed that “the development and future of the Arabs depended on the unity of all Arabs under strong leadership.” All of the tour members felt that the tour made them more aware of the Arab refugee problem and the “explosive” Arab-Israeli issue; Ansara reported that some felt that the U.S. or U.N. should play a bigger role in settling the issue, while others believed that “the problem will be resolved only after the Arabs become united and force a solution.”<sup>22</sup>

However, much of the Federation’s attention was focused squarely on the U.S., which was recognized by a letter from President Eisenhower in which he wrote:

As Americans of Syrian and Lebanese ancestry, you have done much to bring about closer understanding between the peoples of the United States and the Near East. And as loyal American citizens you have won renewed regard and respect for the ancient and majestic heritage you represent.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Federations and the American Front**

In addition to their focus on the Middle East, Syrian-Americans in the Federation advocated for changes in American immigration policy. In 1952, a member of the Eastern Federation put forth a resolution in opposition of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act on the basis that the immigration quota for the Middle East should “be substantially increased.” However, the proposal didn’t seem to go anywhere after the executive committee asked the

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<sup>22</sup> James Ansara, “1960 Tour and Conference in the Middle East,” Box 1, Folder 7, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

proponent, Joseph G. Lian, to further research the provisions of the act.<sup>24</sup> A more successful endeavor came the following year when the U.S. Refugee Relief Act passed in 1953; a U.S. Information Service publication recognized the role that the National Association of Federations played in ensuring that 2000 Arab refugees were granted visas. Although the Federation did not testify in any congressional hearings about the Emergency Refugee Relief Act of 1953, it found partners in the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S., the National Lutheran Council, the Russian Orthodox Church of North America, and a few members of Congress such as Walter H. Judd of Minnesota, who supported the inclusion of 2000 refugees in Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon in the act.<sup>25</sup>

The Federation was very swept up in the Cold War, anti-Soviet atmosphere of the 1950s. The 1952 Immigration Act and the 1953 Refugee Act both prioritized accepting migrants fleeing communism; debates around these bills thus emphasized the importance of vetting all potential immigrants to limit the entry of Communist sympathizers. In 1952 the Eastern Federation's Resolution Committee requested that the National Association's delegates in their ranks consider two resolutions, put forth by Joseph Ayoub. The resolutions asked that the Federation "expel from its membership members of the Communist Party or advocates of Marxism-Leninism" and that all local affiliates be recommended to take the same action among their members. While the Federation's leadership responded that it could not accept such resolutions because it had no control over individual members, it did suggest that the committee rewrite the resolution to "read as a policy of the Federation to oppose communism."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Minutes of Executive Board Meeting, January 31, 1953," Box 1, Folder 5, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>25</sup> United States Congress, House Committee on the Judiciary (1953), Emergency immigration program: Hearings before Subcommittee no. 1 of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Eighty-third Congress, First Session on H.R. 361 ... [et al.] and a Committee print (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O.), 117, 124, 231-234.

<sup>26</sup> "Motions, Resolutions, Constitutional Amendments, and Recommendations Adopted by the Eastern Federation at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Atlantic City," October 16-19, 1952, Box 1, Folder 5, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>26</sup> Cosmo Ansara, "An Open Letter," Box 1, Folder 21, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.



The Federations also undertook meetings with leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties before elections and invited candidates (or their representatives) from both parties to speak before their conventions.<sup>27</sup> In 1960, members of the Federations also formed a new committee under the auspices of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to support the Democratic Party nationally by voting for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket and Democratic candidates at the state level. As the chairman of the DNC's "Syrian and Lebanese American Committee," Cosmo Ansara sent a letter urging people of Arabic-speaking descent to vote for the Democratic ticket. He argued that the Democratic party was "truly the Party of the Minority Groups" and would modify immigration laws to allow larger numbers of Arabs into the country; he also argued that the Democratic Party cared about both the civil rights of all Americans and those in the Middle East, as it was "the only party that can really bring about a peaceful and equitable solution of the Arab-Israeli problem with full recognition of the rights of both sides."<sup>28</sup> That same year, twenty-eight Syrian and Lebanese clubs sent representatives to participate in Richard Nixon's "American Nationalities for Nixon" campaign.<sup>29</sup> In this way, Syrian-Americans asserted their national belonging in the U.S. and their interest in local affairs.

### **The National-Local Disconnect**

While the National Association engaged in significant transnational endeavors throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s, it constantly encountered tension between the local affiliates and the national organization. In 1953, James Ansara suggested that while the Federation's Conventions, awards, scholarships, publications, cooperation with other

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<sup>27</sup> "Minutes of Executive Board Meeting, January 31, 1953," Box 1, Folder 5, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>28</sup> Cosmo Ansara, "An Open Letter," Box 1, Folder 21, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>29</sup> "Demos Appoint Ansara Group Leader" and "Lebanese-Syrian Americans Launch GOP 'Win' Drive," *Star News Pictorial* (Los Angeles, California), October 20, 1960, in Box 1, Folder 21, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

organizations, and interest in Arab-American relations had allowed the organization to attain “a position of respect and prestige,” more could be done to make the organization valuable for its local affiliates and membership:

Our present activities are, too often, beyond the understanding and interest of many of our members. I suspect that some of our members and member-clubs feel that many of the Federation’s activities and projects are of no immediate value or concern to them personally, and I would not be surprised if many wonder how much the Federation really has to offer them.... We must remember that our membership and our people are no different from the membership of most organizations and from people in general, and most people are not naturally interested in or concerned with international affairs, idealistic pursuits, and intellectual achievements. No, we are no different from other American peoples, and the Federation has no right to demand or expect our general membership or people to find satisfaction in our rather strongly rarified atmosphere.<sup>30</sup>

In Ansara’s view, Arab-Americans were no different than other Americans in being mostly disinterested in international issues. A Syrian-American who had lived across the Midwest and settled in Los Angeles echoed this view in her own recollections of the ethnic club movement. In an interview with historian Alixa Naff, Wedad F. recalled that she and her friends had joined a Syrian-American club “to be social – to find husbands or wives.” In fact, her club joined the Midwest Federation in 1939 for the same reason; it turned out to be a successful move, because she met her own husband in 1941 at a convention. She contended that the Federation was largely unsuccessful at encouraging an awareness of Arab culture, history, and politics among its rank-and-file members. “Maybe the officers had some such notion in mind and wrote letters to the president of the United States on behalf of Lebanon or Syria,” Wedad F. said, “but it didn’t get through to the membership. We wanted to have fun and we did.”<sup>31</sup>

To facilitate a more “fun” and locally-oriented agenda, Ansara suggested that the Federation adopt three new projects: an Educational Program, a Sports Activities Program, and a

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<sup>30</sup> James Ansara, “Mid-Annual Report of the Executive Secretary,” May 29, 1953, Box 1, Folder 5, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Naff, *Becoming American*, p. 318.

Social Welfare Program. These programs would not only advance the goals laid out by the Federation's Constitution but would also stimulate the interest of the member clubs and community. Ansara wrote this proposal after spending two years trying to muster up additional membership and keep the *Herald* circulating, a task he deemed almost impossible. Of his suggestions, the Federation adopted only the Education program. It decided not to intervene in social services as it was too difficult to do at the national level, and local clubs often engaged in that kind of work. It also encouraged sports at the local level but decided not to arrange an interstate league due to logistical obstacles. But as part of its increased focus on education, the Federation founded a Lecture bureau that drew speakers from its membership, representatives of Arab countries in the U.S., U.S. government officials, and AFME.

### **Overseas Humanitarian Aid vs. American Information Campaigns**

Although the Federations increasingly focused on serving local communities, they nevertheless continued to fundraise to send aid to the needy overseas. The Eastern Federation, for instance, raised funds to assist several projects in the Arab world, such as providing clothing and food relief to Palestinian refugees. On another occasion, it raised funds to ship 5000 medical and technical books to the Syrian University Medical School in Damascus.<sup>32</sup> However, many members who were specifically interested in the Arab-Israeli conflict flocked to organizations that focused specifically on easing the plight of Palestinian refugees.

George Barakat, who was closely involved in the Eastern Federation, formed a philanthropic organization in 1948 called American Middle East Relief (AMER). This group

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<sup>32</sup> "National Association of Federations Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs: Outstanding Promoters of Arab-American Friendship Specializing in Pilgrimages to the Middle East," *USIS Feature* (1960), Box 1, Folder 7, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

focused on providing aid to Palestinian refugees and counteracting pro-Israeli policy in the U.S. In the mind of many of its leaders, the two causes were closely intertwined. Speaking as the director of AMER before the Eastern Federation's 1958 conference, Barakat repeated the warning that Arab-Americans had issued for years: that antipathy toward the U.S. was growing among the Arab refugees because of its role in prolonging the crisis. The task of Arabs in the U.S., Barakat argued, was not just to fundraise, but to combat Zionist propaganda by informing Americans about the refugee crisis so that they could influence their political leaders to return Palestinians to their land and provide compensation to their losses.

At this same Federation conference, similar calls for a change in American policy came from an unlikely source: Salom Rizk. His 1943 bestselling book *Syrian Yankee* was a rags-to-riches tale that highlighted the backwardness of Syria while embracing the myth of the American dream. Fifteen years after his paean to the United States was first published, Rizk told a different tale:

When I was in the Middle East recently I had to say I was an Arab – I was ashamed to say I was an American. Twenty or thirty years ago the word America was as sacred as the word God among Arab peoples. But America has repudiated the great ideals and standards for which it was known.... This is not just a Middle Eastern crisis, it is a human crisis. We have become so accustomed to thinking in terms of nations, groups, nationalities that we have forgotten the central issue – the human being. I used to think that the solution to all the problems – the Jewish problem, the Russian problem, the Middle Eastern problem – was found 180 years ago when this republic was founded.... I say in sorrow that the Zionists are infected by the very disease from which they suffered. The greatest problem is to educate the very literate Jews and Americans to devote themselves to the interests of all mankind, and not those of the Zionists alone.<sup>33</sup>

Rizk's words demonstrate a notable shift that occurred in fewer than two decades. During World War II, Reader's Digest had sponsored Rizk to travel the U.S. on a speaking tour to espouse the virtues of American freedom and opportunity. He served as the "quintessential

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in "Arab Refugee Hatred of U.S. Said Growing," *Springfield Sunday Republic* (Springfield, Mass), Oct. 19, 1958, in James Ansara Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

immigrant” who only came to appreciate the United States’ bounties after returning to the Middle East and finding it loathsome in the lead up to the Second World War. While Rizk had spoken favorably about the U.S. for almost decades, he now criticized his adopted nation’s repudiation of its ideals and its inability to treat Arabs fairly in the face of Israel. Conversely, he more openly identified as Arab because he was ashamed of being associated with the present America. He thus exhorted his Arab-American audience at the Eastern Federation Convention to educate Jews, whether Zionist or not, and Americans of all backgrounds about the Arab world, particularly the struggles of the refugees.

Others also hoped that the Federation would use its rising cache among the American domestic and international political scene to participate in a renewed effort to advocate for the Arab refugees’ return to Palestine and a more even-handed approach to American policy on the Middle East. In 1955, Garland Evan Hopkins of the American Friends of the Middle East indicated that the tide of American opinion on Zionism was beginning to turn, and that it was more important than ever to form a pro-Arab lobby. In correspondence with Awni al-Khalidi, Hopkins argued that AFME could cooperate with the Federations of Syrian-Lebanese Clubs in the U.S. and the newly established Arab Information Office to spur a new anti-Zionist offensive. He noted that Zionists had set up a new “non-tax-exempt political lobby,” in Washington with the purpose of educating and influencing Congress, referring to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Hopkins believed that Arabs should do the same immediately. He indicated that while the efforts of the IAAA and the Arab Offices in the 1940s to influence the general public had been commendable, they had not utilized resources effectively. In Hopkins’ view, gaining the sympathy of Congressmen, high government officials, and leaders in various fields was the most promising method. “What the Arabs need,” Hopkins wrote, “is a direct approach to

the Americans who make decisions.” This would necessitate a full-time outfit, perhaps under the auspices of the Arab-Palestine Refugee Office and the leadership of Izzat Tannous; Hopkins believed that Tannous’s reputation among prominent Christians would make him an attractive leader. AFME, the Middle East Institute, and the Syrian Lebanese Federations “could help locate the proper kind of volunteers” and “help in supplying literature at cost.”<sup>34</sup> However, the Federations did not seem particularly interested in engaging in this activity and the work of educating Americans fell to others. A lobby that specifically targeted American members of Congress and other politicians would not form until after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Nevertheless, groups such as AMER continued to disseminate pro-Arab information and engage in relief work to aid the victims of the loss of Palestine. Nine years after its founding in 1948, American Middle East Relief had raised more than nine million dollars of aid to the Palestinian refugees. While most members were Americans with business, educational, or missionary ties to the Middle East, AMER’s membership also included Americans of Arab descent, many of whom were active in the Federations; seventeen of the forty-five members of AMER’s Board of Directors were Arab-American.

Much like the Federations, AMER fundraised successfully by tapping into predominant Cold War narratives and also appealing to the humanitarian nature of individuals and foundations that were Arabist in orientation. From 1956-1957, Philip Hitti served as the vice president of American Middle East Relief. In February 1956, Hitti wrote to the leaders of prominent donor organizations such as Cleveland Dodge and Eliahu Grant to inform them that the U.S. government was planning to expand its distribution of American food surpluses that had been collected by voluntary organizations. “This means we could get millions of pounds of

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<sup>34</sup> Garland Evan Hopkins to Awni al-Khalidi, March 22, 1955, Box 45, Folder 1, Frank Maria Papers, IHRCA.

butter, cheese, milk, wheat, flour, rice, beans, and oil for the 900,000 Arab refugees and needy people in our Area,” Hitti explained; however, he noted that the U.S. government had stipulated that “American field representatives should be employed by the organization to supervise the distribution” of the foodstuffs, an undertaking that would require the American Middle East Relief to raise \$40,000. To Dodge, Hitti specified, “Hence this respectful appeal to you or through you to the Dodge Foundation for a contribution. It is made with the full realization that no family in America has been more generous than the Dodges in their responses to the educational and philanthropic needs of the Middle East and that their generosity should not be overtaxed.” Yet, Hitti felt compelled to ask the Dodges to provide more aid because of the “immediate urgency” of the Arab refugees’ needs. Couching his appeals to Dodge and Grant in anti-Communist rhetoric, Hitti stated that the situation was all the more urgent due to “our knowledge that Communist Russia is making a new bid for Arab friendship, and our suspicion that a Communist-dominated front-organization is planning to tap certain resources to meet the needs of Arab refugees and underprivileged as a spearhead to winning sympathy of the entire area.”<sup>35</sup>

### **The Legacy of the Federations**

As a conglomeration of immigrants who sought to unite their efforts for “Educational, Cultural, and Philanthropic purposes,” as stated in the Federation’s 1951 Constitution, the Federations of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs achieved many small victories. Members participated in movements to raise money for Palestinian refugees and improve American relations with the Middle East. To the end of this latter goal, the Federation made clear to the

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<sup>35</sup> Hitti to Dodge, February 7, 1956, in Box 9, Folder 9, Hitti Papers, IHRC.

U.S. that it needed to change its stance on Israel. Although it operated firmly within an anticommunist Cold War framework, the Federation also increasingly supported Arab nationalism and favored expanding Arab immigration to the U.S. As such, it emphasized the importance of encouraging Arab students to succeed in the U.S. In the 1950s, the Federations sought to build a support network for the new Arab students. In Boston, for example, its leaders spoke at Arab student events. Branches of the Federation even endowed scholarships in the names of prominent Arabists such as Philip Hitti, Faris Malouf, and Bayard Dodge to encourage Arab students to attend schools and universities in the U.S.<sup>36</sup>

For an organization representing a population that historians have often described as extraordinarily sectarian, conservative, thoroughly assimilated, and hostile to Arab nationalism, the Federations of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs engaged in several activities that were distinctly opposed to religious, ethnic, racial, and national divisions. Its members also warned the U.S. government that it needed to change its path in the Middle East to support Arab nationalist regimes and oppose continued Israeli colonization in Palestine. By adapting to its Cold War context but still maintaining an anticolonial stance, the Federation movement mirrored a transformation that took place in other American minority organizations in during the 1950s, such as the NAACP.<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, the Federation asserted that its members were thoroughly American despite their transnational ties and ethnic identities; in this way, its members were able to effectively lobby for changes in immigration policy to allow newly displaced Arabs from Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East to find refuge in the U.S.

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<sup>36</sup> "Press Release," undated, Box 1, Folder 5, Ansara Papers, IHRCA.

<sup>37</sup> See Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire* for the ways in which the NAACP mediated its anticolonial views during the early years of the Cold War. See also Carole Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation*, for her argument that while the NAACP's rhetoric became less openly anticolonial during the decade of the 1950s, it nevertheless maintained an anticolonial stance in its activism.



This new generation of Arab immigrants would more openly challenge imperialism and colonialism in the Middle East and Third World. Freed of the racial immigration restrictions under which previous generations had lived, new immigrants could also challenge racial hegemony in the United States.

### **The Organization of Arab Students**

The remainder of this chapter investigates the work of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) in the United States during the overlooked period between the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952 and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. It analyzes the links its members made with other American leftists, as well as their relationships with leaders of the Arab nationalist movement and the nascent Palestine Liberation Organization. In doing so, I argue that Arab student advocacy for Palestine in the U.S. laid a foundation for the more extensive organizing that emerged after the Arab defeat in the 1967 War.

Many historians have neglected to interrogate a significant change after 1948: the rise of a second wave of immigration from the Middle East to the U.S. While first wave migrants from Greater Syria to the U.S. were 90 percent Christian, second wave migrants were 60 percent Muslim. Palestinians, Jordanians, Iraqis, and Egyptians increasingly made up a larger proportion of the immigrants. They largely came from the upper classes and were better educated than the first immigrant generation; they were also more Arab nationalist in outlook.<sup>38</sup> Many hoped to return to their home states to facilitate its development; in this way, they weren't so different than the earlier migrants who had left Mount Lebanon in the hopes of making enough money to return to their village and live a comfortable life. Instead of peddling or working in factories,

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<sup>38</sup> Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab-Americans: A History* (Northampton, Mass: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 152-153.

however, these young students hoped to secure a degree and enter professions on their return to the Arab world to improve the lot of their family and nation.

Historian Nathan Citino has argued that during this time period, Arab modernizers simultaneously criticized American policy and utilized the idea of America to advance particular development agendas. Arab students participated in this modernization movement while attending colleges in the U.S., which the U.S. government encouraged under the belief that educational exchange would facilitate the transfer of American developmental modes to the Middle East. However, “the presence of Arab students tended to confirm the centrality of the conflict over Zionism in U.S.-Arab relations,” argues Citino. This in turn “undermined the supposed propaganda value of hosting” Arab students in the U.S.<sup>39</sup> Observing American sympathy for Zionism firsthand generally encouraged Arab students in the U.S. to become more openly pro-Palestinian.

The Organization of Arab Students formed in 1953 as “an independent, cultural, educational, and non-profit student organization in the United States of America.” The OAS largely served a support group for Arab students who were studying at American universities. However, it was invested in political action from its start. During its first decade, the OAS was thoroughly enamored of the rising Third World movement and inspired by Afro-Asian cooperation as exemplified by the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung. By the late 1950s, the OAS also became increasingly active on the issue of Palestine. Although based in the United States, OAS members consciously forged transnational connections with other Arabs in diaspora, Third World peoples, and people of color in the U.S. While doing so, they articulated the

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<sup>39</sup> Nathan J. Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in U.S.-Arab Relations, 1945-1967* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 19, 33-34.

Palestine question as central to Arab nationalism; they also identified it as an issue that should concern the greater Third World and a new generation of Arab-Americans.

Thus, the Organization of Arab Students devised a narrative that ran counter to the message of the more “Americanized” Federations of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs. The Federations’ members generally employed a Cold Warrior argument for the right of the Arab states to be independent and non-aligned. Its American members played their parts by representing the U.S. when visiting their ancestral homes; once they returned stateside, they generally argued that the Arab world wanted to ally itself with the U.S. – or at least would not ally with the Soviet Union – because it was naturally opposed to Communism. However, the Organization of Arab Students welcomed participation from Arab students of different ideological backgrounds as long as they were committed to the anticolonial Third World. While the OAS and the Federations operated within different ideological frameworks, both emphasized the importance of Palestine in their representations to the American public and government. They sought to educate their members about the Palestine question using lectures and publications in both Arabic and English. Furthermore, they encouraged the Americans they met on campuses and elsewhere that the United States needed to be more critical of Israel if it ever wanted to win back the goodwill of the Arab world.

Recalling his time as a graduate student and young professor in the era before 1967, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod noted that many Arab immigrants had been engaged in leftist activism on U.S. campuses by protesting the Vietnam War and civil rights infringements against African-Americans. According to Abu-Lughod, in these Arab students’ minds, the issue of Palestine fit logically alongside other movements of oppressed people. They also recognized the connection between racism and colonialism. “We saw American support for colonialism as white power,

because, except for Japan, all the global powers were white,” said Abu-Lughod. “We also saw this imperialism as a mixture of antagonism towards Islam and colored peoples. In the politics of this era, we were Arabs.” While proclaiming their Arab identity, OAS members professed their support for the struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism not only in Palestine or Algeria, but also in South Africa, Angola, Vietnam, and elsewhere.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1950s, the OAS generally viewed the Palestine question as part of a larger Arab struggle that entailed action from Arab students in the U.S. Thus, its early newsletters and conferences sought to encourage students to transcend their insular studies and participate in the larger Arab revolution. Its newsletters, which were usually published monthly during the academic year, featured articles from intellectuals such as Dr. Fayez Sayegh, a prominent Palestinian intellectual and civil servant. In one series of articles that was based on his address before the OAS national conference, Sayegh discussed the status of “Arab student in the United States.” He devoted pages to analyzing how these “three elements” – being an Arab, being a student, and being in the United States – were not only a state of being but a call to action.

And it was this first element of identity – being Arab – that was most prominent in this time period. The OAS generally identified Arab unity as the primary means of resisting Israeli hegemony. It even covered seemingly minor symbols of Arab unity and resistance, such as an event that occurred at the White House in 1957. The White House's “Pageant of Peace” was an annual Christmas event for which individual countries decorated a shrub behind the White House with a message of world peace. That year, fourteen Arab states cooperated to write a single message about universal peace; they proceeded to address this message from the “Arab countries” to demonstrate their growing Arab unity. This phrase led Israel and France to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return* (Palestine: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at Birzeit University, 2003), 83, 97-98.

withdraw from the pageant, as the two colonial states were angry that Palestine and Algeria had been identified as Arab countries. After being pressured to amend the statement so that France and Israel would participate, the Arab states rephrased their message as coming from the “Arab peoples of...” each state. While some might have seen this as capitulation, the *OAS Newsletter* contended that this change was “for the better.” “By a strange stroke of fate,” the *Newsletter* editorialized, “we have to be thankful to France and Israel for the change – for it presents us to the world, in a true perspective, a united people rather than a loose assemblage of countries.”<sup>41</sup> In this way, the Arab peoples in the U.S. were included in this message of unity.



*Arab students, including representatives from the OAS, meet with President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1959.*

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<sup>41</sup> “The Pageant of Peace,” *OAS Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 1957), p. 4.

Because Arab unison was central to the organization, the OAS operated under the assumption that any organizations among Arab Students based on regional interests were “menaces to their national aspirations.” It commonly referred to its members as “brothers in Arabism,” although many women were involved in the organization too.<sup>42</sup> The OAS not only held conferences in different states to unite the Arab students across America, but also sought to connect its members with their counterparts in the Middle East. Thus, in March 1959, the OAS took part in an Arab Students Conference in Cairo. The Cairo conference emphasized Arab unity in the face of the problems of Palestine, Algeria, and the Gulf States. During this conference, several OAS members traveled to Cairo and met with President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who urged them to focus on two missions: first, to study hard in order to learn how to raise the living standards of the Arab people, and second, to “let the World know about the Arab world and its progress.”<sup>43</sup>

It was this second aspect of the mission – acting as representatives in the U.S. – upon which the OAS began to focus its efforts. OAS publications often declared that its members were both “students and ambassadors of goodwill to the American people.”<sup>44</sup> A column in the OAS newsletter, “Newsletter Salutes” regularly featured students who served as “a guiding light on the road toward self-betterment.” In its inaugural “Salutes” column, it highlighted the activism of Ghazi Khankan, a Syrian student at the University of Southern California who wrote prolifically about the Arab-Israeli conflict and even spoke about it on CBS News. On August 28, 1957, Ghazi wrote a letter to President Eisenhower in which he argued, “Americans must understand one thing very clearly: Zionism to the Arabs is exactly like Communism to the Americans.

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<sup>42</sup> Hameed Raghiba, “Ayyuha al-Akhuwat al-‘Uroobah,” *OAS Newsletter*, December 1957.

<sup>43</sup> “The Cairo Conference,” *OAS Newsletter*, Vol. 5, No. 6-7 (June-July 1959), p. 37. The above image is from the cover of this issue of the *Newsletter*.

<sup>44</sup> Ali Maghoub, “From the President of the O.A.S.,” *OAS Newsletter*, June-July 1959.

Therefore we do not trust the intentions of Israel! We have to defend ourselves by ourselves from any other future colonial attack in any form of aggression.” The OAS newsletter praised Khankan not just for his strong convictions but for his “untiring vigilance for their realization.” Khankan, however, noted that it was very difficult for students to work toward realizing their Arab nationalist principles while in the U.S. He said, “As students staying here for a few years, we cannot do much. We have no time for extra activities besides our universities and no ways and means to reach the press and the public to explain our hopes and aspirations and try to build a stronger and better American-Arab understanding.” In spite of these limitations, the OAS hoped that more Arab students in America would involve themselves in similar activities.<sup>45</sup>

As such, the OAS invited American students to participate in its own activities, like the “Arab-American Friendship Tour.” On several occasions, it organized group “homecoming” trips to allow Arab students to travel to their home countries at a discounted price. In 1965, the OAS also organized an Arab-American friendship tour, in which Arab students and Americans of any background went on a trip to the United Arab Republic, Lebanon, Jordan, and Libya.<sup>46</sup>

It would be impossible to detail the activities of its many chapters across the U.S., but by the 1960s the OAS had engaged in a significant amount of activity at the university, national, and international levels.

### **Anti-Arab Backlash**

One testament to the growing Arab student movement was the backlash it inspired in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Nathan Citino has shown that a Jewish American war veterans group reported on OAS proceedings to the Justice Department and sought to have it registered under

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<sup>45</sup> “Newsletter Salutes: Ghazi Khankan,” *OAS Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 1957), p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> “Arab-American Friendship Tour, 1965” *Arab Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 1965), p. 64.

the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The Justice Department's Internal Security Division collected information on the matter, but ultimately was dissuaded from charging the OAS to register after an appeal from the Department of State. During a meeting with the Justice Department, William Rountree, the Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs argued that registration would have an adverse effect on the U.S. A Justice Department official described the meeting to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover as follows:

During the course of the meeting Mr. Rountree was emphatic in stating that it was vital to the interests of this country that we do everything possible to maintain a friendly position with certain Arab governments, particularly Jordan, which was the principal sponsor of the subject organization and whose Ambassador delivered a note protesting the action by the Department of Justice in soliciting the Organization's registration.... Mr. Rountree pointed out that the US Government found it desirable to have within this country the several thousand Arab students studying at American universities and desired no action by this Government which would tend to make their stay embarrassing or uncomfortable. It was Mr. Rountree's belief that insistence upon registration would provide a propaganda issue for the United Arab Republic which would adversely affect this Government.

Although the Jordanian ambassador's intervention and the State Department's unwillingness to provide ammunition for anti-American propaganda won out over the demands of the Jewish-American veterans organization in 1958, the FBI and Justice Department surveilled the OAS's political and educational activities for years. Upon reviewing a Justice Department report on the OAS in 1960, J. Edgar Hoover determined that the OAS had received "aid and financial assistance from the League of Arab States, the Arab Information Center, the Arab States Delegations Office, and other Arab diplomatic establishments." He also believed that funds for a certain OAS lecture series had been furnished by individuals in the U.S. who were not associated with the speakers or the OAS. In Hoover's mind, the lectures qualified as propaganda activity and the funds were enough to require the OAS to register as foreign agents. However, he noted that it would be difficult to prove that a redacted speaker's statements had been made on behalf of a foreign government. Thus, in 1960 the FBI and Justice Department



decided yet again not to pursue registration. They tried once more in 1964, but the Justice Department deemed that the situation still did not warrant registration. However, it maintained close surveillance of the OAS's activities and its bank account.<sup>47</sup>

The aforementioned Jewish veteran's organization was not alone in alleging the foreign influence over the OAS. The Anti-Defamation League perceived the OAS as a threat to its own pro-Zionist activities on the U.S. On October 25, 1957, the Anti-Defamation League published a release in Chicago that portrayed Arab students who attended American schools as "propagandists engaging in political warfare against this country." In response to this charge, OAS president Fawzi Abu-Diab sent a press release to area newspapers, writing that he was hesitant to "dignify such inflammatory allegations" but had been "impelled to do so to set the record straight." In his defense of the students, Abu-Diab gestured to the American immigration apparatus that had dramatically restricted Arabs from entering the U.S. after the 1924 and 1952 immigration acts. He wrote that Arab students residing in the U.S. were "keenly aware of the nature" of the immigration laws that had permitted their entrance and that they only were in the U.S. to pursue their studies. Abu Diab insisted, "They are not here to engage in any efforts to 'propagandize' for any political parties or any governments." Nevertheless, he recognized that campuses facilitated the exchange of ideas by allowing students to discuss a variety of problems. Abu-Diab cautioned, "I hope no one, nor any organization, is proposing to stifle the practice of debating issues, political or otherwise, by students." Nevertheless, Abu-Diab contended that "maneuvers of this kind" would not "forestall the growing interest among all Americans in the

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<sup>47</sup> Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future*, p. 34. I am also grateful to Nate for sharing the following documents with me that discuss the Jordanian intervention and subsequent investigations: J. Walter Yeagley to FBI Director, October 22, 1958 and FBI Director to J. Walter Yeagley, March 12, 1965, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

Middle East” who desired to understand the problems of the region, particularly the issue of Palestine.

On this issue, the OAS found support from several Americans observers, such as G.W. Rosenlof, the Advisor to Foreign Students at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. After reading both the ADL and OAS releases, Rosenlof wrote to “substantiate 100 per cent the forceful statement of Mr. Abu-Diab” that these students weren’t propagandists and agitators. He asserted that there was no evidence on his campus or other locales that the efforts of the Arab students constituted “the work of a political activist group.” While reifying the notion that “political activists” could be equated with “propagandists,” Rosenlof attested that among the more than 250 foreign students he knew, “I have yet to find a single propagandist engaging in political warfare against the United States.” He insisted that “all Arab students consider themselves as being most fortunate in having the opportunity to further their studies in America’s great educational institutions,” and “wouldn’t think of repaying their hosts by issuing statements or making speeches that would place the United States in an unfavorable light.” The foreign student faculty advisor thus concluded that the ADL’s “unfortunate” statement was rife with “misleading accusations.”<sup>48</sup>

In 1959, the ADL also linked the OAS with the bombings of a Jewish temple in Atlanta; it apparently even spread rumors that Arab students in the south had been helping to suppress integration. Souheil Elia, the OAS president in 1959, argued that such charges were ridiculous, stating in the Arab world, “Judaism enjoys the same and identical freedom as Christianity and Islam,” and that Arab opposition to Zionism could not be equated to Anti-Semitism. As proof, Elia offered that to that date there had not been any attacks on Jewish religious institutions in the

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<sup>48</sup> *OAS Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 1957), p. 2.

modern Arab world; in contrast, he pointed out that the UN Reserves had attested that Israeli forces had bombed the Church of Holy Sepulchre, which included the tomb of Jesus and the Mosque of Omar. He continued, “As to helping fight integration in the South, I am sure, if any fighting is to be done, Americans in the south need no help from anyone.” He argued that most Arab students had made it a point to not take sides on the issue, as in their eyes it was a “purely internal American problem.”<sup>49</sup>

However, by the early 1960s the OAS would become more outspoken against segregation. The Austin branch in particular began to identify other minorities as their natural allies in the fight for justice. One year after Souheil Elia asserted that Arab students would not take sides in segregation, Ahmed Joudah joined the University of Texas as a doctoral student. After becoming UT’s OAS president, he made waves by holding one of the first desegregated events on campus. His tenure in the organization provides insight into how the OAS in the 1960s moved in a new direction: it was globally oriented but increasingly recognized its responsibility to advocate of issues affecting American society. It also began to highlight the Palestine problem more prominently.

Ahmed Joudah was born in the Palestinian town of al-Majdal near Gaza, which was subjected to ethnic cleansing during the 1948 War. As a high school student during the Mandate period, Joudah surreptitiously engaged in activism despite the British regime’s ban on forming student political unions. In 1947, he began cooperating secretly with the larger private high school in Gaza, where students were not as closely monitored by Mandate officials. After the *nakba*, he moved to Gaza and was finally able to engage in open activism; he and most students in his network were affiliated with *Usbah al-Taharrar al-Wataniy*, or the National Liberation

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<sup>49</sup> *OAS Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. \_ [MISSING CITATION]

League, which was a Marxist organization that sought to educate students about opposing Zionism. As an undergraduate student in Cairo, he also became involved in *Rabitah al-Talbah al-Falastiniyyeen*, which formally advocated for Palestinian students' needs but also covertly aided the Palestinian resistance movement. During his third year as part of *Rabitah*, Joudah met Yasser Arafat and became a member of the social activities committee. In 1953, he and three other students met with Arab League officials who were touring Gaza and asked them to assist displaced Palestinian students who were seeking education under difficult conditions. When Egyptian officials of the Arab League told them they didn't have funding, Joudah's colleagues wrote to UNRWA and finally, in 1953, convinced UNRWA to give each Palestinian student a stipend of twelve Egyptian pounds. They were also involved in humanitarian efforts for Palestinians, like convincing the Egyptian government to send "Mercy Trains" to distribute supplies across the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza during the harsh winter of 1952-1953.

Realizing that his educational and job prospects in the Arab World were limited due to his political activism, Joudah gained a student visa to study Business and Economics at the University of Texas-Austin. Out of the 250 Arab students who attended UT at the time, he was one of few to study Social Sciences. He quickly became their go-to speaker for events. At one point, there was such a demand for knowledge about the Arab world that he had twenty-four speaking engagements in just two semesters. The OAS would connect with others on campus and give talks to fraternities and sororities; Joudah even spoke before President Lyndon B. Johnson's daughter at her sorority. He became the president of the OAS Greater Texas chapter in 1962 and would push the organization to form alliances with people of color on campus.

One of the OAS Texas chapter's yearly events was a banquet called "Arabian Nights," which was open to the larger student body. On occasion, the OAS also held a pageant that sought

to crown a woman with the most beauty and knowledge of the Arab world and as the “Scheherazade” of the night. In 1962, an Arab student nominated a woman named Joan Hatfield to participate in the pageant. Hatfield was a black student worker at the Center for International Students, where she had befriended several Arabs. Her nomination caused an outcry among three Arab members of the OAS chapter, including a former president, who were against the participation of a black woman because UT’s student organizations were generally not integrated at that time. These detractors tried to convince other students to sign a petition to impeach Joudah. However, Joudah responded that he would rather sacrifice his supporters than participate in racial segregation. He also appealed to other Arab students with a more utilitarian argument: that their natural allies in Arab causes such as Palestine were liberal Americans – it was unlikely that they would convince conservatives of the worth of Palestinian liberation; upholding a backwards institution like segregation would never lead to support from such people anyway. Most OAS students sided with Joudah, and Hatfield happily participated in the pageant. While earlier generations of Arab immigrants had fought to identify as white, the Arab students of this generation clearly identified with people of color.<sup>50</sup>

The OAS often invited diverse speakers and guests to its events as part of the movement to stand up to racism in the U.S. and colonialism in the Third World. For instance, the University of Texas, University of Michigan, and Wayne State chapters of the OAS worked with members of the Iranian Student Association, Pakistani Students Association, and the Pan-African Union. The national organization continued this tradition more openly after 1967, as Stokely Carmichael gave the keynote address at the 1968 national conference. By that time, chapters in Michigan had especially began to ally themselves with Black and leftist student groups.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Author interview with Dr. Ahmed Joudah, Pearland, TX, January 2017.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the OAS and its Michigan chapter, see Pamela Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab-American Left*.

In January 1964, Joudah moved to Ann Arbor to pursue a Ph.D. in History at University of Michigan. He joined an existing network of active OAS students and helped organize lectures and events. They often invited Arab intellectuals like Constantine Zurayk and ambassadors such as Moustafa Kamel. They even arranged for the Palestinian artist Ismail Shammout to visit Ann Arbor and display his work in 1965.<sup>52</sup> When the UM Student Union sought to have Shammout's paintings exhibited at their World Fair event, a Jewish student group protested that the paintings were political statements and not art, leading the university to initially bar their display. However, the administration relented after many students protested the decision. In petitions to the university, they argued that a Palestinian artist was depicting his own lived experience. He could not help that dispossession was inherently "political."<sup>53</sup>

1964 marks an important turning point in the history of Palestinian resistance because of the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which increasingly made connections with OAS members and would recruit some of them to join their offices. For instance, the OAS's annual conference in 1964 was organized by Nabil Shaath, a University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. candidate who served as OAS president and would later become a prominent Fatah leader.<sup>54</sup> Many OAS publications and speeches at its events viewed the creation of the PLO as a sign that after sixteen years of dispersal, Palestinian liberation was close at hand.

1964 was also the year that the OAS began an academic-oriented publication entitled the *Arab Journal*. It did so in the hopes that the journal's "modest effort" would meet the needs of both Arabs and Americans who sought to understand the issues and accomplishments of the Arab world. That year, the *Journal* published an article by Fayez Sayegh based on his address

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from Ismail Shammout to Ahmed Joudah, 1965, provided by Joudah.

<sup>53</sup> Author interview with Ahmed Joudah, January 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Nabil Ali Shaath, *Hayati min al-Nakba ila al-Thawra: Sirah Dhatiyah* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar ul-Shuruq, 2016), Chapter 4.

before the twelfth annual OAS convention in Colorado. In it, he argued that the fate of the Arab nation was inseparable from the Palestinian movement, but he excoriated the Arab World's inaction by following the “traditional approach” over the previous fourteen years. Sayegh noted that “it is odd, to say the least, that...Arab policies pertaining to Palestine” since 1948 were devised by Arab governments with minimal genuine Palestinian representation. He clarified, “I am not bidding non-Palestinian Arabs to keep their hands off Palestine; I am summoning Palestinians to step forward and discharge their normal responsibilities.”<sup>55</sup>

Yet, by 1965, many Palestinians within the OAS began to feel that the Palestine issue was taking a backseat to other Arab concerns. Ahmed Joudah and several of his peers began to consider breaking off into their own organization; three out of the seven executive committee officers that year were Palestinian. But when Fayez Sayegh found out, he spoke to the Palestinian faction and beseeched them to remain within the OAS, or else the organization would completely fall apart. Just as he had indicated in his address a year prior, Sayegh believed that a focus on Palestine, as spearheaded by Palestinians with the cooperation of other Arabs, was the only path toward fulfilling the hopes of the Arab movement. Joudah agreed and decided to stay in the OAS.<sup>56</sup>

Many of the students in this era graduated by 1967. Some joined the PLO and worked for its offices in Washington and New York, such as Saadat Hassan, who directed the New York office. Others, like Ahmed Joudah, returned to the Arab World to use their educational expertise for the development of their homeland. Numerous OAS members, however, remained in the U.S. to continue their education or pursue professional careers. After 1967, many OAS members

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<sup>55</sup> Fayez Sayegh, “Palestine: A Challenge to the Arab Revolutionary Movement,” *Arab Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1964), 4-9.

<sup>56</sup> Author interview with Joudah.

would become the backbone of newer Arab-American organizations that advocated for Palestine in the aftermath of the *naksa*.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that during the understudied period from 1950-1966, there was a notable pro-Palestinian voice in the U.S. Although the 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the rise of new fractures among Arabic-speaking people in the U.S., many who did not identify as Arab nationalist in orientation nevertheless showed their concern for Palestine, especially the plight of refugees. Members of the Federations of Syrian and Lebanese American Clubs also sought to represent Arab causes before the American government and public. Moreover, they acted as ambassadors who could represent the best ideals of America to the Arab World and to Arab travelers – in the form of thousands of new students – in the U.S. Although the more activist phase of the Federations was short lived, it is important to recognize the ways in which Arab-Americans sought to represent their homeland to the U.S. and the ways in which overseas events affected their local American communities during the 1950s.

The new generation of Arab youth who studied in the U.S. also engaged in their own activism for Palestine. With its Arab nationalist student population, the Organization of Arab Students represented Arab causes on American campuses. They built transnational relationships with leftists opposed to colonialism and racism in the U.S. and abroad.

Although the work of the Federations and the OAS were not particularly effective in changing American policy and perceptions during the Cold War era, they represented some of the only Arab anti-Zionist activists in the United States during the Cold War era. It would take



the shock of the 1967 War, however, to incite a more extensive movement for Palestine among Arab-Americans.

## Chapter 4

### Beyond the “Setback”: Transnational Arab-American Activism after 1967

Never before have Americans of Arab background experienced the sense of alienation and bewilderment that they did in the Summer of 1967. The crisis was not simply the result of the defeat of Arab armies or the annexation of Arab territories, painful as these things may be. Rather, it was the consequence of a sudden awareness that a serious breakdown had indeed occurred in the political, ideological, and moral outlook of this country - a country we have adopted and loved. American jubilation over the Israeli victory...left most Arab-Americans aghast at the degree of insensitivity and even brutality that the U.S. had displayed. For a while, we all refused to believe that our country was capable of such inhumanity, yet we soon woke up to the reality of the situation and decided to adopt a positive rather than a negative response to the challenge.

- Fauzi Najjar<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting on the atmosphere after the Arab defeat to Israel in 1967, Fauzi Najjar described that summer as the darkest moment of the “Arab nation,” and the “lowest level of goodwill, communication, and understanding” in U.S.-Arab relations. Najjar, a political scientist at Michigan State University, viewed the 1967 war as more than the “naksa,” or “setback,” as it had become known. He recognized the losses of 1967 as transformative moment for all Arabs, and proof that the Arab nationalist movement was in crisis. Najjar also articulated the conflicted emotions that many Arab-Americans experienced as they made the United States their home while the U.S. strengthened its relationship with Israel.

Thus, in December 1967, Najjar and thirty-six Arab-Americans formed a nonsectarian organization with two goals: to promote an understanding of “the Arab case” to the American public, and to solidify “ties amongst Arab-Americans – of potential benefit to the Arab world.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “AAUG – The First Year,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (March 1971), 1.

<sup>2</sup> “Where Do We Go from Here?” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. III, No. 1 (March 1970), 2; “Minutes of the Ad Hoc Conference Committee meeting in the Chicago Theological Seminary Chapel, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois,” 9 December, 1967, Box 23, Folder 9, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

This organization became known as the Association of Arab-American University Graduates.

The AAUG was an organization that declared itself to be simultaneously Arab, American, and pro-Palestinian.

The AAUG also planted the seeds for other Arab-American organizations such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, an organization that has remained prominent to the present. In 1980, several AAUG members helped found the ADC. Unlike the AAUG, which engaged in a wide array of global and domestic projects, the ADC dedicated itself to protecting the image and civil rights of Arab-Americans. Meeting the needs of the Arab-American community required the ADC to defend Arab-Americans and Arab immigrants who were targeted over their pro-Palestinian views or activism. Furthermore, the ADC advocated for the civil and human rights of people in the Middle East.

This chapter focuses on this post-1967 moment of pronounced politicization, which inspired unprecedented Arab-American activism and academic production. It analyzes how members of the AAUG and ADC utilized their status as academics or professionals to advocate for a change in perceptions and policies related to Arabs and Arab-Americans. By surveying the work of these new educational and activist institutions, this chapter investigates the ways that the Arab-Israeli conflict fostered the creation of a transnational, non-sectarian, Arab-American intellectual generation.

To adopt Jean-François Sirinelli's term for intellectuals in France from the Dreyfus Affair to the Algerian Revolution, AAUG members represented an "intellectual generation."<sup>3</sup> They

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, "The Concept of an Intellectual Generation," in *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 86-87. Sirinelli cites Jean Luchaire's definition of a generation as "a collection of individuals marked by one big event or by a series of such events." Such an event may have influenced an entire society, but it brings a specific generation into existence when it is "the *determining* event" in the lives of those who had not been fundamentally influenced by a prior event. Another example of the birth of an intellectual generation is the rise of the "New Left" in 1956, a year that witnessed the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution and the British and French invasion of the Suez Canal in Egypt.

were a group of similarly aged individuals who may not have ascribed to the same ideologies but emerged in a similar cultural and educational milieu; they received their primary, secondary, and often even undergraduate education from institutions in the Middle East but then studied at prominent universities in the U.S. for advanced degrees. The “event” that was responsible for bringing this “generation” into existence was the consolidation of Israeli military hegemony in the Middle East, particularly after the Six Day War of 1967.

As new refugees and immigrants joined the existing Arab population after 1967, both groups grappled with the role that the U.S. government played in backing Israeli expansion while simultaneously enacting new policies to accept masses of Middle Eastern emigrants. Approximately 200,000 emigrants from the Greater Syria region settled in the U.S. between 1800 and 1924, but the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 severely limited immigration from the Eastern Hemisphere, including the Middle East. After World War II, however, the Displaced Persons Acts enabled a new wave of Arab immigration to the United States. The Refugee Relief Act in 1953 allowed 2000 Palestinian families to immigrate, and 985 additional families found refuge in the U.S. from 1958 to 1963. Moreover, various educational or labor concessions to existing immigration acts prompted large numbers of students and unskilled laborers to immigrate in order to attend American universities or work in manufacturing and agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Growing conflict in the Middle East and new educational and economic opportunities in the U.S. in the post-World War II era thus led to a second wave of emigration from the Middle East, particularly from the states of Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. A substantial third wave of

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See Stuart Hall, “Life and Times of the First New Left,” *New Left Review* 61 (January-February 2010), <https://newleftreview.org/II/61/stuart-hall-life-and-times-of-the-first-new-left>.

<sup>4</sup> “Arab-Americans: An Integral Part of American History,” *Arab-American National Museum*, Accessed November 7, 2016, [http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/umages/pdfs/resource\\_booklets/AANM-ArabAmericansBooklet-web.pdf](http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/umages/pdfs/resource_booklets/AANM-ArabAmericansBooklet-web.pdf).

immigration did not occur until the passage of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, which phased out the national quota system that had existed since 1924.

This small but burgeoning population in the U.S. found itself bewildered after the defeat of 1967. Because the Arab nationalist movement facilitated the idea of a united community of Arabs, if not an actual state or federation of nations, many emigrants from the Middle East and their descendants in the U.S. had begun to identify as Arab prior to the 1967 war. Afterward, Arab-Americans faced mounting political racism and intense government surveillance, which encouraged a greater sense of association with others in the Arab diaspora and the Third World. At the same time, the Arab world was plunged into debates about how to proceed after 1967, leading intellectuals to despair at the demise of secular nationalism while others embraced political Islamic doctrines.<sup>5</sup> Many immigrants recognized that Nasser's pan-Arab movement had failed when tested with military might. Palestinians in particular realized that their temporary exile in the U.S. may have become permanent.

Examining this period reveals a paradox of the immigrant experience: despite the explosion of anti-Arab sentiments in the U.S., many second and third wave migrants found that living in the U.S. provided a unique space to develop a critical secular, democratic Arab identity. While Arabs in the U.S. and in the Middle East both debated Arab nationalism and governance, intellectuals in the diaspora were less vulnerable to punishment that Arab regimes could mete out to critics who remained within the borders of the state. Nevertheless, Arab-Americans remained in a precarious position if their family members had not also emigrated. At the same time, being at the margins of society in the U.S. (as lower or middle-class immigrant workers and students)

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

or in an intensely Orientalist academic environment fostered this dialectic inquiry.<sup>6</sup> As intellectuals in the United States who remained closely engaged with the Arab World, AAUG members did not claim to reflect the entire Arab-American community's views. Nonetheless, this chapter demonstrates that they engaged in transnational debates and projects that shaped Arab and Arab-American discourse on Arab nationalism, identity, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is important to note that many second-generation Lebanese, Syrians, and Palestinians in the U.S. did not personally view themselves as Arab.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the rise of a cultural antipathy toward Arabs in the United States meant that they often did not find acceptance in mainstream American circles regardless of their level of assimilation. Thus, even very "Americanized" immigrants or descendants of immigrants in this period found themselves commonly identified as Arabs despite their own self-conception. While many attempted to further distance themselves from Arabs, others sought to reclaim and reframe the identity with the hybridization of "Arab-American." This is evident in the novel hyphenated identities expressed in the naming of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

The post-1967 era thus prompted a new phase of racialization for Arabs in the U.S. As noted in previous chapters, the racial identification of Syrian immigrants was constantly in flux and tied to attempts to gain citizenship. By the 1940s, Syrians had achieved a status as "probationary whites" in order to become naturalized U.S. citizens.<sup>8</sup> Although the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act eliminated racial prerequisites for U.S. citizenship, access to all

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<sup>6</sup> On economic struggles of some Arab immigrants in the U.S., see Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, *Arab Detroit: From Margins to Mainstream* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000). On the hostile environment for Arabs in American academia, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Gary C. David, "The Creation of 'Arab-American': Political Activism and Ethnic (Dis)Unity," *Critical Sociology* Vol. 33 (2007), 833-862.

<sup>8</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*.

of its cultural privileges was nevertheless reserved for Americans who were unambiguously “white.” As the U.S. became more involved in the Middle East and American media outlets increasingly portrayed Arabs negatively, immigrants from the region discovered that their status as nominally white did not actually grant them all of the opportunities they had hoped for. The 1967 War initiated a new phase of anti-Arab and Middle Eastern antipathy, which subsequent Arab-Israeli wars and the Iranian hostage crisis further exacerbated.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, first, second, and third-generation Arab-Americans began a new struggle after 1967. This time, it evolved not out of a fight for citizenship, but as a challenge to both anti-Arab prejudice in the U.S. and American foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestine question. This activity, however, made many Arab-Americans even more of a target of prejudice and discrimination. Helen Hatab Samhan has aptly described this phenomenon as “political racism,” which arose not so much because of an Arab ethnic background but because of Arab activity in the face of pro-Israeli sympathies.<sup>10</sup> After the 1972 Munich massacre, the Nixon Administration launched a surveillance and intimidation program known as “Operation Boulder.” In an effort to prevent Arab terrorist attacks on U.S. soil (which had never occurred at the time) the Immigration and Naturalization Service and Federal Bureau of Investigation surveilled the activities of thousands of Arabs and Arab-Americans. It resulted in the baseless deportation of many Arab immigrants and the rejection of many Arab visas.<sup>11</sup> Although

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<sup>9</sup> Melanie McAllister, *Epic Encounters Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Helen Hatab Samhan, “Politics and Exclusion: The Arab-American Experience,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Hagopian, *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2004) and Pamela E. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab-American Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Pennock notes that there are discrepancies in records about how many Arab students were affected by Operation Boulder. Estimates from 1973 indicate that of the 9000 Arab students who were in the U.S., the Immigration and Naturalization Service “had screened 3,500 of them and begun deportation proceedings.” The year prior, 78 Arab students were reportedly deported in a span of three months. See Pennock, p. 265.

Operation Boulder focused on politically active students, it had repercussions for numerous Arabs and Arab-Americans who were not outspoken on political matters; many were only deemed suspicious due to their Arab background. The period from 1967 to the 1980s is especially interesting because it demonstrates the ways in which the activism of a small portion of a community can affect the perceptions of an entire ethnic group.

This chapter begins by focusing on the inner-workings of the AAUG as exemplified by a few key members. It then analyzes the Association's extensive academic and activist undertakings, especially on the issue of Palestine. A persistent theme in many AAUG members' writings was the anguish they felt because they could not return home even if they so desired after 1967. As Edward Said wrote in 1984, "Much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals."<sup>12</sup> Living in a state of exile, whether forced or self-imposed, encouraged a sense of association with others in the Arab diaspora.<sup>13</sup> The experience of exile and exclusion in the U.S. at the height of the Cold War also provoked a more capacious association with both the black civil rights struggle in the U.S. and the greater Third World movement. Prior to and after 1967, many Arab immigrants were engaged in leftist activism on U.S. campuses that protested the Vietnam War and civil rights infringements across the nation. Thus, activism for Palestine fit logically alongside these other movements. For instance, during this period Ibrahim Abu-Lughod was the head of the African Studies Department at Smith College and encouraged students to protest the Vietnam

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile" in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the AAUG being an emotional and political outlet for Arab-Americans after 1967, see *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007). This special issue featured some of the most active members of the AAUG, including Abdeen Jabara, Elaine Hagopian, Janice Terry, Cherif Bassiouni, Naseer Aruri, Baha Abu-Laban, Rashid Bashshur, and Ghada Talhami. Reflecting on the organization's legacy, all of the writers noted the sense of isolation and exile they felt after 1967 that compelled them to join the AAUG.



War throughout his tenure. He often made common cause between Palestine and these other struggles, and as one of the founding members of the AAUG he shaped its transnational orientation.<sup>14</sup> The AAUG's members professed their support for the struggle against neocolonialism not only in Palestine, but also in South Africa, Angola, and other decolonized areas. They made transnational connections by engaging with resistance movements throughout the world, ranging from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the U.S. to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) overseas. They also dealt with the backlash to this activism by beginning to focus on Arab-American rights.

Later in the chapter, I investigate how the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee secured the support of new immigrants and descendants of earlier Arab immigrants to defend the statuses of both groups in the United States. Although the AAUG utilized grassroots organizing in its local chapters, its academic bent prevented it from attracting large-scale engagement from Arab-American communities. The ADC, however, galvanized new ranks of grassroots activists concerned with civil rights throughout the U.S. This organization's work represented the consolidation of Arab and Arab-American identities.

### **The Creation of the AAUG**

After the 1967 War, a group of scholars convened in Ann Arbor during the American Orientalist Convention to devise a response to the recent Arab defeat and the intense vilification of Arabs in the American media. They would form a new group called the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, a name that simultaneously proclaimed the founders' Arab-American identity and their academic orientation. The wide array of events that the AAUG

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<sup>14</sup> Hisham Ahmed-Fararjeh, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return* (Palestine: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at Birzeit University, 2003).

organized and the works it published featured some of the most prominent intellectual voices at the time and helped counteract the dominant discourse on Arabs and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Although historical works on Arab-Americans generally recognize the influence of individuals such as Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Edward Said, they have often neglected to analyze how the AAUG became an outlet for the frustrations of Said, Abu-Lughod, and countless other Arab intellectuals who watched their homelands descend further into warfare. The 1967 War and involvement in the AAUG fostered their Arab-American identities, provided an arena for scholarship and activism related to Palestine, and helped direct their different professional and academic careers in a similar direction of advocacy for Arabs, especially Palestinians.<sup>15</sup> While I will discuss the work of the AAUG in depth, examining a few of its members' lives and their roles in the organization provides an insightful glimpse into the Association.

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod was one of the AAUG's founders and remained active within the organization from the time he served as its president in 1969 until the 1990s. He organized the AAUG's first annual convention in Washington, D.C., which was a success despite a blizzard that impeded attendees' ability to travel. Abu-Lughod also wrote the text of an advertisement that the AAUG published in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* on November 2, 1969 – the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. The ad, entitled, "NEEDED: A NIXON DECLARATION FOR FIVE MILLION JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM PALESTINIANS," urged President Nixon to profess his support for a democratic, secular Palestinian state. The full-page ad caught the attention of many Americans and yielded new

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<sup>15</sup> Two recent works that discuss the role that AAUG played in Said's intellectual development and activism are Sarah Gualtieri, "Edward Said, the AAUG, and Arab-American Archival Methods," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, No. 1 (2018), 21-29, and Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2015)

members and financial contributions for the organization.<sup>16</sup> Although he did not occupy official positions in the organization after its first decade, Abu-Lughod consistently advised its leadership and remained active on many of its committees for almost thirty years.

As an undergraduate at Princeton, Edward Said first met Abu-Lughod (then a graduate student) while dispensing tickets to a university concert program. Being two of the few Arab - and Palestinian - students on campus, they quickly struck up a close friendship. Said later wrote, “Ibrahim introduced me to the subject and the experience, as it were, of Palestine. Seven years older than me, and more embedded in the life of Mandatory Palestine, he aroused in me and many others the wish to recapture long-buried memories of our early days, before the *nakba* changed everything.”<sup>17</sup> Said was not as tied to Palestine in his early life, always feeling out of place as “a Palestinian going to school in Egypt, with an English first name, an American passport, and no certain identity, at all.”<sup>18</sup> He maintained only sporadic contact with Abu-Lughod after leaving Princeton until the shock of 1967. But that summer, Said began to feel that “what happened in the Arab world concerned me personally and could no longer be accepted with passive political engagement, not least because at the same time that pan-Arabism lay in ruins, the Palestinian national movement emerged first in Jordan, then in Lebanon, then, more or less, wherever – including North America – Palestinians lived.” He recalled that many of his Arab friends from the 1950s were “suddenly galvanized into new and highly politicized activity.”<sup>19</sup> One such friend, Abu-Lughod, asked several AAUG members to contribute to a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Hussein Hamdan, Naseer Aruri, and Elaine Hagopian, “Annual Report: January-December 1969,” December 1969, Box 23, Folder 11, AAUG Papers, EMU.

<sup>17</sup> The *nakba* (“catastrophe” in Arabic) refers to the massive displacement of Palestinians that occurred during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Edward Said, “My Guru,” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 23, No. 24 (December 2001), accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n24/edward-said/my-guru>.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Said, “Between Worlds: Edward Said Makes Sense of his Life,” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 20, No. 9 (May 7, 1998), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v20/n09/edward-said/between-worlds>.

<sup>19</sup> Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. xiv.

special issue of the Arab League's *Arab World* journal in 1969; he solicited Said to write an article on "The Arab Portrayed." In it, Said examined cultural images of Arabs from the Middle Ages to the present. He expanded on this piece at the 1974 AAUG conference, where he presented a paper titled "Orientalism and the October War: The Shattered Myths." Said eventually developed this critique of representations of Arabs into his trailblazing book *Orientalism*.<sup>20</sup> Said's engagement with AAUG, as encouraged by Abu-Lughod, therefore inspired his first forays into writing about politics outside of his usual academic pursuits.<sup>21</sup>

In 1978, Said and Abu-Lughod also established the *Arab Studies Quarterly*, the interdisciplinary academic journal that the AAUG published.<sup>22</sup> They envisioned it as an alternative to mainstream, Orientalist-dominated publications; this journal would allow Arabs to contribute to the creation of knowledge about themselves. Said was co-editor with Fouad Moughrabi for a decade, building the foundation for a journal that continues to the present. Said also served as president of the New York chapter in 1970 and the national vice president in 1972, chaired the 1971 AAUG Convention, edited the organization's newsletter, worked on various committees, spoke at teach-ins, and presented at numerous AAUG events.<sup>23</sup>

Abdeen Jabara was an interesting counterpart to Abu-Lughod and Said. Unlike Arab intellectuals who left the Middle East in the post-1948 era, Jabara was born in the U.S. to parents who emigrated from Lebanon to Michigan during the first wave of Syrian migration. Although he was not fluent in Arabic and did not visit his parents' homeland until his twenties, he attempted to connect with his heritage by studying Arabic in college and getting involved with

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<sup>20</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 174.

<sup>21</sup> Said, "My Guru."

<sup>22</sup> As Said and Abu-Lughod wrote in the first issue's introductory article, the *Arab Studies Quarterly* was to be enlisted in the AAUG's task of "combatting ignorance and prejudice where knowledge of Arabs is concerned." Its boards of working and consulting editors came from the AAUG's ranks and it received financial backing from the organization. "Why ASQ?" *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1979), v-vi.

<sup>23</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 1970), 1.

the Michigan immigrant community. He consciously made an effort to engage with student organizations that were populated by foreign Arab students, such as the Organization of Arab Students (OAS).<sup>24</sup> During law school, he became involved in civil rights and anti-Vietnam activism. He then decided to travel to Lebanon to study Arabic in 1965. While living in Beirut, Jabara became more aware of the Palestine question and began conducting research and writing for the PLO's Palestine Information Office.<sup>25</sup>

Jabara returned to the U.S. in 1966 and opened a law practice in Detroit. After the 1967 defeat, University of Michigan professor Rashid Bashshur invited Jabara to his house for the founding meeting of the AAUG, where Jabara was the only "non-academic." Jabara served for years in the AAUG's ranks, in addition to working full-time as a lawyer. Jabara's involvement with the AAUG and the Organization of Arab Students made him a target of FBI surveillance as part of the Nixon Administration's domestic intelligence program titled "Operation Boulder."<sup>26</sup> After years of seeing his own rights infringed upon while trying to defend the civil rights of other Arab-Americans, Jabara refocused his activism in 1980 by partnering with Senator James Abourezk, another Lebanese-American, to lead the ADC (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee).<sup>27</sup>

Like Jabara, Elaine Hagopian was an American-born child of emigrants from Greater Syria. Her parents' migration story was a quintessential example of the transnational Syrian diaspora experience, taking them from Damascus to Brazil, Cuba, and finally the United States.

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the OAS, and Jabara's involvement in Operation Boulder, see Pamela Pennock, "Third World Alliances: Arab-American Activists at American Universities, 1967-1973," *Mashriq & Mahjar*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2014), 55-78.

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview with Abdeen Jabara, New York, NY, November 14, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> For more on Operation Boulder, see Susan M. Akram and Kevin R. Johnson, "Race and Civil Rights Pre-September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims" in *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims*, ed. Elaine C. Hagopian (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with Abdeen Jabara, New York, NY, November 14, 2015.

Hagopian's family settled in Cambridge, MA, where her father opened a grocery store. Although he was illiterate, her father often had her read the newspaper to him because he closely followed developments in the Arab world, particularly the unfolding conflict in Palestine. Elaine Hagopian recalls her father telling her, "My daughter, you can never forget Palestine because Palestine is all of us. It will define your integrity, it will define your character, it will define your decency, and your ethics." Although she did not understand these words as a child, she developed a new appreciation for the Palestine issue while teaching sociology at Smith College from 1962 to 1967. At Smith, Hagopian met Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and began a close friendship with him and his wife, anthropologist Janet Abu-Lughod. After the AAUG was founded in 1967, Abu-Lughod quickly recruited Hagopian to work in the organization.<sup>28</sup> Hagopian served as president in 1976, and worked in a variety of official and advisory capacities for its first two decades.

### **The Work of the AAUG in the U.S.**

In addition to the aforementioned academics and activists, the AAUG garnered the support of a variety of Arab-Americans who did not fit the academic mold, although most were well-educated. It attracted support from professionals in fields such as business, law, and especially medicine. Members who were physicians formed a "Medical Section" of the AAUG; during its early years, it put on several successful medical conferences, raised charitable funds, and organized humanitarian missions to aid impoverished or injured civilians in Palestine and Lebanon. Because the AAUG was outspoken on political issues, it alienated some of the more apolitical professionals in its ranks. As such, some members of the Medical Section departed from the AAUG and formed an independent professional organization, the National Arab-

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<sup>28</sup> Personal interview with Elaine Hagopian, Cambridge, MA, September 30, 2015.

American Medical Society [NAAMS].<sup>29</sup> Although the AAUG eventually disbanded in 2007, NAAMS remains active.

During the AAUG's first years of existence, chapters sprung up throughout the U.S. It established chapters in large urban areas with high concentrations of Arab-Americans, such as New York, Detroit, Cincinnati, and Los Angeles. In addition, active chapters formed in New England, Texas, northern California, Minnesota, and other areas with smaller or newer Arab communities. AAUG chapters played an important role for the national organization: they organized their own events, built ties with other local groups, and also provided resources and support for Arab student organizations.

Because members were spread across the U.S. and abroad, the AAUG conceived of a newsletter to link the national office with its members. The newsletter fit the mold of typical organizational circulations by including information on members, upcoming events, and policies. However, the newsletter also served as an alternative news source by publishing editorials and news coverage that members would not receive from mainstream American media outlets. Much like the *Arab Studies Quarterly* journal that was founded in 1979, the AAUG Newsletter provided a receptive space for young Arab-American and leftist scholars to publish articles and reviews.

By 1973, the Newsletter had evolved from a brief quarterly reaching sixty-eight people to a monthly publication sent to 669 subscribers.<sup>30</sup> That autumn, it focused extensively on the October 1973 War and the Arab-American response to it. Throughout the U.S., AAUG chapters partnered with other groups and organized protests against Israeli military action. The AAUG

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<sup>29</sup> Rashid Basshur, "Unfulfilled Expectations: The Genesis and Demise of the AAUG," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 29, No. 3 (2007), 7-13.

<sup>30</sup> "Membership Statistics," Box 77, Folder 10, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

Newsletter described this response as “the beginning of an unprecedented, historical ethnic Arab awakening in America, with about 60 major rallies in 34 cities in 16 states and the District of Columbia.” Many protestors faced attacks from the right-wing Jewish Defense League on the West and East Coasts, particularly in New York. Police also arrested twelve pro-Arab demonstrators in Texas and questioned others in Dayton, Ohio.

Interestingly, an editorial in the AAUG Newsletter argued that this wave of protests was inspired by the American public’s supposedly more critical perceptions of Israel:

With daily reports of Israeli forces ‘breaking the bones’ of Arab armies, and with Israel in occupation of vast Arab lands, it was hard to sell the American public - particularly the Jewish communities - that Israel's ‘survival’ was at stake. Most of the American public was further disillusioned with the Israeli-Zionist propaganda efforts in the United States when Zionists suddenly rallied behind Nixon's all-out support for the Israeli military campaign. The American public was confronted with the contradictions of seeing Nixon damned because of his roles in the Watergate scandals, inflation, the energy crisis, and years of pursuing an unpopular Vietnam war, and then suddenly being praised by Zionists for his aid to Israel. For this reason, there was a widespread cooling of American popular feelings towards U.S. aid to Israel, and outright opposition from grass-roots levels.<sup>31</sup>

These statements follow a brief discussion about Americans achieving unprecedented levels of education in 1973. The unnamed writer hoped that this education would encourage Americans to view the news critically and learn more about the Middle East. Furthermore, the editorialist argued, the American public’s disillusionment with Nixon’s track record had prompted them to be more critical of Nixon's close relationship with Israel. The author closed by writing, “The phenomenon of the American and Arab-American ‘awakening’ of October 1973” marked an important turning point in Arab-American relations. As was the case in 1967, a war over Palestinian territory inspired a new phase of Arab-American activism. However, the AAUG’s struggle to reach American audiences and inform their views on the Arab-Israeli conflict would not be as easy as this editorialist hoped.

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<sup>31</sup> “60 Rallies in 34 Cities: U.S. Aid to Israel Protested Nationally,” AAUG Newsletter,



Although AAUG members often participated in protests and grassroots activism, the national organization primarily focused on academic endeavors. Fauzi Najjar described the AAUG as “an organization where we can write. If you want a demonstration, there are other organizations to go to.”<sup>32</sup> AAUG members thus focused on writing and teaching as the most effective methods to incite change. In 1969, the AAUG started its own publishing outlet, Medina Press International, in order to publish scholarly works on the Arab world. At the time, scholars of the region found it exceptionally difficult to get published in both commercial or university presses.<sup>33</sup> Medina Press, and later the *Arab Studies Quarterly*, provided outlets not only for AAUG members’ works, but for a wide variety of scholars of the Middle East. The AAUG also published a series of monographs, position papers, and information pamphlets on a variety of topics, ranging from Arab-American assimilation to human rights of Palestinians.

Furthermore, the AAUG sought to combat orientalist and pro-Zionist narratives in teaching about Middle East and Islam in both public schools and universities. The AAUG North California chapter was particularly active on public school education under the leadership of Ayad Al-Qazzaz. It hosted annual workshops with titles such as “The Arab World: Its People and Culture” in California for elementary, middle, and high school educators; these programs provided teachers with in-service credits in numerous school districts.<sup>34</sup> Members of other chapters, such as New England and Minnesota, created videotapes and classroom materials for teachers. They sought to evaluate and correct misinformation in textbooks or educational

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Fararjeh, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return*, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Phone interview with Janice Terry, February 24, 2015. As an example of the difficulty of publishing works on the Arab World in America, Terry described the Rockefeller Foundation’s failed efforts to fund an English translation of Ishaq Musa Husayni’s book *The Muslim Brotherhood*. The Foundation was interested in publishing books about the Arab World that were aimed at an American audience. Despite the Rockefeller Foundation’s considerable clout, and the book’s seminal reputation as one of the first scholarly accounts of the Brotherhood, it could not find a publisher in the U.S. that would take on the translation. The English book was eventually published in Beirut.

<sup>34</sup> Program, “Third Annual Workshop for Teachers: The Arab World: Its People and Culture,” 1976, Box 31A, Folder 11, Michael Suleiman Papers, Arab-American National Museum, Dearborn, MI.

guidelines, and also supported the publication of a national Arab women's organization report entitled *Arabs in American Textbooks*. The Los Angeles AAUG chapter even protested outside the LA Board of Education's building because of its instruction that districts should celebrate Israel's thirtieth year and its "courageous fight against the Arabs." Janet Salem, the AAUG LA chapter secretary, subsequently won an election to chair the LA Board of Education's Committee on Social Studies. Finally, the Detroit AAUG chapter received a \$10,000 grant from the Arab League to establish programs in bilingual, bicultural education at all levels.<sup>35</sup> These activities were part of a long-term strategy to correct misinformation about Arabs and the Arab-Israeli conflict and foster a more critical American public.

### **Arab-American Women and the "Emancipation of Women in the Arab World"**

One unprecedented aspect of the AAUG was its theoretical commitment to the liberation of women as part of its Arab nationalist, Third World ideology. Unlike the Arab-American organizations prior to World War II, the AAUG boasted a large number of female members. Although the founders of the organization were all men, Elaine Hagopian notes that they were formally for women's rights and equality; many, such as Naseer Aruri, Baha Abu-Laban, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Edward Said, were especially principled on this matter and recruited women.<sup>36</sup> At least one woman was present on the board almost every year from 1969 onward. It also began a task force on women in the Arab World as early as 1972, led by Nabila Mango, to analyze social and institutional sex discrimination overseas.<sup>37</sup> However, with its focus on

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<sup>35</sup> "Education Outreach by AAUG Chapters," *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 12, No. 3, September 1978, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview with Elaine Hagopian, Cambridge, MA, September 30, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Abdeen Jabara to AAUG Members, January 25, 1972, AAUG Papers Box 38, Folder 22.

political issues such as Palestine, decolonization, and racial and ethnic justice, the Association often left women's issues at the bottom of its priorities.

In 1978, the AAUG embarked on an effort to highlight gender issues and encourage greater participation from women. At the AAUG Convention in November, a Women's Caucus met to discuss future steps for women in the organization. Out of this productive meeting, eleven women formed a Task Force to work in conjunction with (and eventually replace) the AAUG's existing Committee on the Status of Women. After the 1978 AAUG Convention, the Women's Task Force chairperson, Noha Ismail, sent a report to AAUG President Fouad Moughrabi. In it, she noted the difficulty she encountered while trying to chair the committee with "no guidelines, no formulated goals, no access to the services of the national office." She continued, "To tell you the truth, sometimes I felt like I was operating in a vacuum" and had found it "virtually impossible" to reach the membership with her limited resources. Fortunately, the AAUG Convention had presented Ismail with access to numerous "capable" and "highly motivated" women who did "not wish to be left behind." Mango urged Moughrabi to take the Task Force's efforts seriously and urge the board to do so as well: "Here you have a valuable, untapped resource – make use of it!"<sup>38</sup> In response, Fouad Moughrabi expressed his deep appreciation for her efforts and concurred that "more women should be active and should be represented." However, he defensively stated that the organization had always been inclusive of women. Moughrabi wrote that the "AAUG has made sincere efforts to involve more women in decision-making" and listed various women who served in important positions, including Hagopian, Mary Bisharat, Nabila Mango, Geneva Stoll, Suad Stratton, Faith Zeadey, Helen Hattar, and others.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Noha Ismail to Fouad Moughrabi, November 30, 1978, Box 88, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

<sup>39</sup> Fouad Moughrabi to Noha Ismail, December 6, 1978, Box 88, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

Noha Ismail did not see this professed support for women materialize during her tenure as an AAUG women's organizer, as the following incident demonstrated. Prior to the November 1978 AAUG Convention, Moughrabi promised Ismail that the AAUG would pay Professor Mona Mikhail's airline ticket from Cairo to present on a panel organized by the Women's Committee. Yet, months after the convention, Ismail was frustrated that Mikhail's airline ticket had not been reimbursed. Late in January 1979, Ismail wrote, "I was sincerely hoping that it would not be necessary for me to write this letter. I wanted so much to trust you and reinforce my faith in the organization I have served for the past seven years.... But you know as well as I do that there is a limit for everything." Although the AAUG generally expected members to provide for their own transportation, Ismail viewed Moughrabi's word that the AAUG would reimburse Mikhail as a sign that he was "anxious to help the Women's Committee organize a decent panel." Despite this arrangement and Mikhail's "outstanding" contribution to the conference panel, Ismail alleged that a member of the AAUG board publicly disrespected Mikhail and refused to uphold this financial obligation. "Unfortunately, [Mikhail] was later subjected to an extremely rude treatment by Mr. Samih Farsoun at the presidential reception, who vowed to her, and anybody else who cared to hear, that she will not get a penny out of him." Ismail continued, "Not only was his behavior an embarrassment to the organization but I also found it insulting to me and the Women's Committee." Although Moughrabi had seemed sympathetic and "promised that he would take care of the matter" during the convention, Mikhail was not reimbursed for three months afterward. In a letter to Moughrabi asking for the reimbursement, Ismail argued that Moughrabi "should have been more decisive" because Samih Farsoun had chosen to "shroud the case with controversy." This incident inspired Ismail to deliver a scathing criticism of the AAUG's treatment of women:

Frankly I feel that you have let me down and embarrassed me with Miss Mikhail. This sort of treatment is exactly what we are talking about when we accuse the organization of sexism. We are treated like children who can be coaxed and sweet-talked into doing whatever it is that you want us to do. If we get angry, we are accused of being emotional, super sensitive, and impatient. I am not talking about Elaine Hagopian and Faith Zeadey, I am talking about the rank and file who just don't seem to be taken seriously by any of you.

You claim that you are in favor of establishing an active women's working group and yet you are not prepared to support us when we need you. The AAUG has spent thousands of dollars on the convention this year and nobody questioned Mr. Farsoun's judgment or integrity. Still, we can't get by with a measly \$180 - being the only expense incurred by the Women's Committee for the whole year - without our judgement questioned and our behavior checked.<sup>40</sup>

Moughrabi responded to this controversy two months later by writing that the Board had met and "correctly reaffirmed established AAUG policy" by not reimbursing members' travel expenses. Instead, he paid for the amount himself, sending a personal check of \$180 to Ismail.<sup>41</sup> While Ismail was appreciative of his attempt to resolve the issue, she nevertheless remained disappointed in the board for failing to evaluate complex situations on a case-by-case matter. "I would have liked to see the Board take a more favorable stance not merely to please Miss Mikhail and honor a commitment, but more importantly to do so as a token of its support of the Women's committee and the budding aspirations of its Task Force."<sup>42</sup> Ismail continued to be active on women's issues in the AAUG until moving to the ADC in the 1980s.

Although this matter was resolved amicably, it was emblematic of larger issues within the organization. Policies such as a refusal to provide financial support for its members to travel ignored the structural burdens many women encountered. Because fewer women held positions

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<sup>40</sup> Noha Ismail to Fouad Moughrabi, January 26, 1979, Box 88, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

<sup>41</sup> Fouad Moughrabi to Noha Ismail, March 23, 1979, Box 88, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

<sup>42</sup> Noha Ismail to Fouad Moughrabi, March 29, 1979, Box 88, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

in academia than men, and women generally made less money than men, it was more difficult for women to secure the financial means and institutional support to travel to present at a conference.<sup>43</sup> While the AAUG boasted many female members in its rank and file, it nevertheless lacked representation of women at the Association's highest levels, who perhaps could have voted to make an exception to the board's policy in Mikhail's case.

Political scientist Mervat Hatem has analyzed similar barriers to women's participation in the AAUG during the 1980s and 1990s. She argues that in the 1980s, the AAUG subordinated gender and women's concerns to the matter of Arab nationalism. She cites its "fraternal power structure," a lack of women in higher ranks in the national organization, and the need to fundraise from (mostly Palestinian) businessmen during trips to the Gulf as proof of these exclusionary practices. Hatem contends that the Second Gulf War in 1991 and the financial crisis of the 1990s "contributed to the rise of women in leadership positions, the development of a more balanced discussion of Arab and Arab-American agendas, and the critique of the U.S. and Arab complicity in the reproduction of gender inequality."<sup>44</sup>

Elaine Hagopian disputes Hatem's view that women were willfully excluded from the organization. Hagopian first became involved in the AAUG in 1969 as the executive board secretary. In 1975, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod convinced Hagopian to run as a nominee for AAUG president although she had not considered it herself. She finally agreed but believed that she would not be elected, whether because she was a woman or a because she had an Armenian name and some members were "very ethnically nationalist." Yet, Hagopian was elected, which

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<sup>43</sup> Rhea E. Steinpreis, Katie A. Anders, and Dawn Ritke, "The Impact of Gender on the Review of Curricula Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates: A National Empirical Study," *Sex Roles*, Vol. 41, Nos. 8/8 (1999), 509-528; Ann M. Morrison, Mary Ann von Glinow, "Women and Minorities in Management," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (February 1990), 200-208.

<sup>44</sup> Mervat Hatem, "How the Gulf War Changed the AAUG's Discourse on Arab Nationalism and Gender Politics," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 55.2 (Spring 2001), 277-296.

made her realize that the membership recognized and appreciated her work. Hagopian argues that the disparity in the number of female and male leaders was due to women not wanting prominent roles during the early years of the organization: “Women were asked to be in leadership roles and many women agreed to be on the board.” As examples, she named herself, Margaret Pennar, Faith Zeadey, and Noha Abudabbeh. Janice Terry, a non-Arab academic member of the AAUG, concurred. She wrote that women were commonly nominated for positions of power. Terry recalled, “Indeed, an office manager later informed me that whenever women ran for the board, they were always elected by the membership.” In Terry’s view, the AAUG was not a patriarchy and stood in stark contrast with other Arab-American organizations. Instead, as Hagopian argues, most of the active women “didn’t really want to run for office.” Thus, they fundamentally disagree with Hatem that men in the organization blocked women.

Despite their positive assessment of gender equality within the AAUG, Hagopian and Terry have conceded that the structures were not always equal *enough*, particularly during the first decade of the organization.<sup>45</sup> Terry believes that women were “not represented in leadership positions in the numbers comparable to their membership.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Hagopian notes that some men did display sexist attitudes “at a personal level” by often “expecting us [women] to do everything.”<sup>47</sup> Both original AAUG documents and women’s recollections on the organization support this view. Although men such as Rashid Bashshur occasionally acted as secretary, the position was more commonly filled by the likes of Martine Lutfi, Flora Azar, and Nazik Kazimi. Many women served as secretary before moving into higher positions in the organization; for example, Faith Zeadey served as the board’s secretary in 1973, subsequently headed a variety of

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<sup>45</sup> Phone interview with Janice Terry, February 24, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Janice Terry, “The AAUG: Activist and Academic,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007), 131.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with Elaine Hagopian, Cambridge, MA, September 30, 2015.

committees, became vice president in 1977, and was twice elected president in 1988 and 1989. Moreover, Terry points out that while the AAUG conventions almost always had a panel on women's issues with presentations from primarily female scholars, men often did not attend them; on the other hand, the most popular "brunch panels" rarely included female speakers.<sup>48</sup>

Mariam Cortas Said, Edward Said's spouse, was involved in both the AAUG and ADC in a variety of formal and informal capacities. She too has suggested that many men expressed patronizing and sexist attitudes toward women during this era. Said further notes that a major factor in how certain men treated a woman in these organizations was whether she was an Arab immigrant or had been born in America of Arab descent. Said believes that some men looked down upon women who may have been educated in the Arab world and had accents when speaking English; they often showed these women less respect, assumed them to be less capable, and expected them to complete more bureaucratic, housekeeping types of tasks in the organization. On the contrary, Said suggests that men took Arab-American women who were primarily educated in the U.S. more seriously, perhaps because men perceived such women as "modern American feminists" who would not stand for overt sexism.<sup>49</sup> Said's perspective as a woman who was born and raised in Lebanon thus offers another layer to the divergent narratives about women's experiences in the AAUG. As Noha Ismail explained to AAUG President Fouad Moughrabi, she was disappointed by men's condescending, sexist attitudes toward "rank and file" female activists, not leaders such as Elaine Hagopian and Faith Zeadey – both of whom happened to be born in the U.S., of Syrian and Lebanese descent respectively.<sup>50</sup> Ismail, on the

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<sup>48</sup> Phone interview with Janice Terry, February 24, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Mariam Said, New York, NY, November 10, 2015; Interview with Mariam Said, New York, NY, November 18, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Noha Ismail to Fouad Moughrabi, January 26, 1979, Box 88, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.



other hand, was born in Hebron, Palestine and raised in Egypt.<sup>51</sup> Her background as an Arab immigrant thus might have colored her experiences while active Arab-American organizations.

Ghada Talhami, who served as AAUG President in 1991, has argued, “Some of the blame must also be assigned to the female members themselves, who, though highly educated and politicized, approached the gender question strictly from a Third World perspective.” Talhami recalls the quandary that women in the AAUG, like women in many other progressive movements, faced: “Simply put, they were willing to defer the gender battle in the interest of engaging in the most immediate political struggle against the forces of Zionism and imperialism alike. There were such battles to wage in the Arab World, as well as focusing on the fight against anti-Arab and anti-Islamic racism in the Western World.”<sup>52</sup> As Kimberlé Crenshaw argued when formulating her theory of intersectionality in the 1980s, women of color have often had to choose between activism on the issue of racism or sexism. Yet, intersectional feminism recognizes the multiple, intersecting identities that have encouraged women to fight simultaneous, interrelated forms of oppression.<sup>53</sup> Thus, women in the AAUG may have minimized gender matters to focus their energies on seemingly more urgent and consequential issues such as Israeli displacement of Palestinians or racism against Arab-Americans.<sup>54</sup> Gender was usually only brought to the fore as it related to women in the Middle East who experienced human rights abuses, or when Western media outlets perpetuated negative stereotypes about Arab women. Consequently, AAUG

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<sup>51</sup> C. Patrick Quinlan, “Personality: Mrs. Noha Ismail,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, September 8, 1986, p. 14b. <http://www.wrmea.org/1986-september-8/personality-mrs.-noha-ismail.html>

<sup>52</sup> Ghada Talhami, “A Cultural, Not a Political Lobby: The Mixed Legacy of a Grand Plan,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007), 133.

<sup>53</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989, No. 1, 139-167.

<sup>54</sup> Female AAUG members were not the first nor the last to confront this dilemma. For more on the struggles of Arab-American women activists, see Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber, eds., *Arab & Arab-American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

members did not usually examine the category of gender as it related to Arab women in America. The avowedly progressive, anti-sexist men and women of the AAUG often inadvertently reproduced the structural inequalities and sexism that pervaded most institutions in the 1970s, many of which continue to the present.

### **The AAUG's Transnational Commitment to the Arab World**

While the AAUG's work in the U.S. was significant, one of its main objectives was to "assist in the growth and development of the Arab world."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the Association developed a "Link Committee" with several subcommittees that attempted to connect Arab-Americans with the Arab World and Arab diaspora groups.<sup>56</sup> Because many AAUG members worked, taught, and traveled overseas often, they engaged with intellectuals in the Arab world and built ties with Arab institutions.

The Link Committee's greatest impact was on educational institutions. While teaching at Kuwait University during his sabbatical in 1973-1974, Palestinian-American scholar Naseer Aruri served as the chairman of the Link Committee and established contact with a variety of Kuwaiti intellectuals. Aruri encouraged representatives of the Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters to attend the 1974 convention in Cleveland, Ohio, where Dr. Hassan el-Ebraheem, a dean at Kuwait University, invited the AAUG to put on a special conference on "Issues in Human Resource Development in the Arab World." The conference took place in Kuwait during December 1975 and featured presenters and attendees from both the Arab World

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<sup>55</sup> "AAUG to Hold a Special Conference in Kuwait in December 1975," Undated, Box 23, Folder 5, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

<sup>56</sup> Husni H. Haddad to Naseer Aruri, 12 January 1974, Box 23, Folder 5, AAUG Papers, Eastern Michigan University.

and the West.<sup>57</sup> Michael Suleiman and several intellectuals from Beirut analyzed the educational needs of the Arab World, while Edward Said, Abdallah Laroui, and others debated Arab intellectuals' influence on cultural development. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Baha Abu-Laban discussed Arab immigrants' experiences in North America, their attitudes toward their homeland, and their prospects of returning to work in the Arab world. Kuwaiti and Lebanese academics and political figures took the lead in articulating the conference's concluding resolutions.<sup>58</sup> In a post-conference survey, a majority of the AAUG's delegates noted that they believed that the event had represented a worthwhile effort to aid development in the Arab world and fostered "mutual trust of the overseas and home communities in undertaking joint ventures." Despite some criticism that the speakers did not adequately represent the intellectual spectrum of the Arab world, participants responded very positively to the conference. Most AAUG attendees indicated that they came away with greater hope for more Arab and Arab-American cooperation.<sup>59</sup>

But the AAUG did not find it easy to fulfill these hopes. Because it was an educationally activist organization, conservative Arab monarchies were concerned that the AAUG would spread "radical" views throughout the Arab world. However, the Kuwait conference focused on development and was "just plain, professional help," according to Hagopian. She contends that nothing came out of it aside from the publication of conference proceedings. She and other AAUG organizers realized that "the Kuwaitis saw it more as a PR thing.... Much of the Arab world really didn't take Arab organizations seriously" despite the fact that the AAUG boasted a

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<sup>57</sup> "Background Sheet on Evolution of Special AAUG Conference to be Held in Kuwait in Late December 1975, Co-Sponsored by the Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters," August 1975, Box 23, Folder 2, AAUG Papers, EMU.

<sup>58</sup> "Conference Program, AAUG Special Conference on Issues in Human Resource Development in the Arab World," December 1975, Box 23, Folder 2, AAUG Papers, EMU.

<sup>59</sup> "Evaluation of the Kuwait Conference," AAUG Planning Subcommittee, 15 May, 1975, Box 23, Folder 3, AAUG Papers, EMU.

“wealth of professional knowledge.” She recalled, “It was a bit of a rude awakening to realize that they preferred Western companies.” Arab regimes or institutions nevertheless sought assistance from some Arab-Americans, particularly scientific experts and businessmen, under the belief that Arabs who worked in Western countries were desirable because they had met “Western credentials.”<sup>60</sup>

One of the AAUG’s most prominent transnational ventures was its work with institutions in the occupied Palestinian Territories. Between 1971 and 1972, the AAUG organized a nationwide textbook, magazine, and literature drive for Bir Zeit College.<sup>61</sup> The New York chapter leaders, Faith Zeadey and Margaret Pennar, arranged for the Church World Service to ship thousands of donations to the West Bank free of charge.<sup>62</sup> Four years later, the AAUG established a Palestine Subcommittee to help meet the educational and cultural needs of Palestinians living under occupation. It offered assistance in procuring educational books and equipment, teacher training, and academic job placements. Under Leila Meo’ and Basheer Nijim’s leadership, the subcommittee partnered with ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid) to gain access to intermediary organizations that could deliver collected materials.<sup>63</sup> In a 1976 update to AAUG President Elaine Hagopian, Nijim wrote, “A culture can be virtually wiped clean within a generation by simply not educating its youth, and I earnestly hope that such will not be the case in the Occupied Territories.”<sup>64</sup> Although the Palestine Subcommittee did not achieve much beyond 1977, the AAUG continued to support a variety of other efforts in Palestine.

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<sup>61</sup> “Letter from Edward Said to Salim Tamari,” 21 February, 1972, Box 5, Folder 1, Edward Said Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>62</sup> Faith T. Zeadey to Basheer K. Nijim, 16 August, 1976, Box 31A, Folder 5, Michael Suleiman Collection, AANM.

<sup>63</sup> John P. Richardson to Basheer Nijim, 17 June, 1976, Box 31A, Folder 5, Michael Suleiman Collection, AANM.

<sup>64</sup> Basheer Nijim to Elaine Hagopian, 31 August, 1976, Box 23, Folder 8, AAUG Papers, EMU.

The AAUG attempted to form subcommittees for other Arab states, namely Libya, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Like the Palestine subcommittee, they pursued initiatives aimed at promoting education and “reversing the brain drain.”<sup>65</sup> Staying true to the organization’s focus on Palestine, the AAUG aimed to help establish or bolster existing centers for Palestine studies in each of these states. However, this proved difficult due to U.S. regulations on American nonprofits’ cooperation with foreign interests. Efforts to cooperate between the Libyan Office for Scientific Research never progressed beyond the planning stage.<sup>66</sup> Serving as legal counsel to the Iraq Link Subcommittee, Abdeen Jabara advised against the AAUG’s plans to cooperate with the Baghdad-based *Journal of Arab Studies*, produce filmstrips for a Palestinian film festival in Iraq, and arrange workshops on public relations and teacher training. He feared that such activities would subject the AAUG to Alien Agent Registration. The Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 was designed to temper foreign interests’ efforts to promote favorable public opinion, policy, and legislation in the United States. Jabara noted that Zionist organizations had been able to circumvent this law by creating “multifarious organizations with obscure legal and financial relationships between them” and raising money for “informational” projects within the U.S.<sup>67</sup> The AAUG, however, had to tread more carefully because it was under close scrutiny in the U.S., just as the OAS had been since the 1950s. Thus, the AAUG did not accomplish much in Iraq after the initial planning stages, lest it damage its tax-exempt non-profit status.

The AAUG’s first decade of engagement with institutions tied to Arab regimes was therefore largely ineffectual. Hagopian recalled that she and other AAUG members “received personally, as part of the AAUG, invitations to go to meetings with Saddam Hussein and

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<sup>65</sup> “AAUG, Arab Institutions Study Ties,” AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 1, May 1975.

<sup>66</sup> Elaine Hagopian to Hadi S. Raghei, 25 May 1976, Box 23, Folder 5, AAUG Papers, EMU.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Abdeen Jabara to President, AAUG; Chairman, Resource Utilization Review Committee; Chairman, Iraqi Link Subcommittee, 29 March 1976, Box 23, Folder 7, AAUG Papers, EMU.

Gadhafi.... All expenses paid, trying to buy you.” However, she and most members refused to meet with them; instead, she described herself and others such as Naseer Aruri and Abdeen Jabara as “purists” who were “not for sale.”<sup>68</sup> Staying true to its leftist, secular orientation, the AAUG expressed its disapproval of most Arab regimes’ reactionary turn after their defeat in 1967. Its efforts to assist in the development of the Arab World came hand-in-hand with its commitment to analyzing and condemning Arab political and cultural decay. The AAUG's members participated in, and in many cases, led the call to a critique of contemporary Arab society. Ten years after 1967, Edward Said wrote in the AAUG newsletter:

Of the Arab world as a whole it does not take much insight to say that it is a profoundly depressing place. Speaking both as a Palestinian and an intellectual, I would have to say that in the Arab countries we have paid far too high a price in political culture, in intellectual development, in basic quality of life, for the almost total absence of freedom of thought and opinion presented to us as an axiom of national security. The effects of army rule, minority tyranny, party-line conformity and great power hegemony have been not only an utter mediocrity of performance in nearly every sphere of human endeavor, but a widespread apathy on issues of basic importance to the region as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

In the following issue of the newsletter, Nabeel Abraham commended Said for his courage to “tell it like it is.” Then a professor at the University of Algiers, Abraham wrote a piece that took Said's argument a step further by examining not only state affairs, but also social institutions such as family life and gender roles. He argued that the political and social critique of contemporary Arab society should become the “cause celebre” of the Arab-American intellectual community in North America. “After all,” he wrote, “honest Arab-American intellectuals need only ask themselves why they chose to live outside the Arab world to appreciate the need for a critical rethinking of Arab society and polity.” Abraham summarized explicitly what so many other AAUG members had previously argued: that the Arab-American intellectual community

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Hagopian.

<sup>69</sup> Edward Said, “Rhetorical Questions after 30 Years...?” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. XI No. 2 (June 1978), 13, 19.

should focus not on “celebrating” mediocrity but by working to extricate “the Arab world from its present depression by shaking it at its very foundations.”<sup>70</sup>

These views were not always kindly received in the Arab world. After Said published *Orientalism*, Sadek al-Azm publicly criticized Said’s depictions of the West as “Orientalism in reverse.” Al-Azm, a Syrian academic trained in philosophy, further argued that Said had made a “perilous assumption that the lamentable aspects and manifestations of the satellite relationship [between the U.S. and the Middle East] could be reformed and improved to the ultimate benefit of both the Arab world and the heavy American investment.”<sup>71</sup> Al-Azm had initially sought for his essay to be published in the AAUG’s *Arab Studies Quarterly*. However, he objected to the editorial board’s suggestions for revision and subsequently published his critique of Said in the journal *Khamsin*.

In an exchange of letters with al-Azm, Said bristled at the insinuation that his work played into the hands of U.S. imperialism. Writing to al-Azm, Said declared these accusations to be “beneath you, and not worthy of you.” Said argued that on the contrary, it was al-Azm who submitted to being “a willing, silent servant of the Syrian regime, which currently employs you and demands your silence.”<sup>72</sup> In these letters, Said criticized both the “sewers of the Beirut press”<sup>73</sup> and thinkers such as al-Azm whose scholarly contributions were undercut by the fact that their “customary antagonists” were despotic Arab rulers and systems. This intellectual

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<sup>70</sup> Nabeel Abraham, “Response to Edward Said,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. XI No. 3 (September 1978)

<sup>71</sup> Sadek Jalal Al-Azm, “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse,” *Khamsin* No.8 (1981), 5-26. Reprinted in Alexander Lyon Macfie, Ed. *Orientalism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 217-238.

<sup>72</sup> Edward Said to Sadek Jalal Al-Azm, November 10, 1980, Box 30, Folder 4, Edward W. Said Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York. The letters between Said and al-Azm were shared with me by Esmat Elhalaby.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

environment thus prohibited scholars from making substantive social critiques, as their polemical adversaries were not intellectuals, but “Oriental despots who use the sword.”<sup>74</sup>

At the heart of this tense exchange with al-Azm, Said formulated an argument about why living in exile was both compelling and didactic. Several years later, Said’s 1981 essay entitled “Reflections on Exile” would criticize the tendency to glorify exile due to the intellectual “achievements” of refugees. Yet, he argued, “Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.”<sup>75</sup> Such opportunities were not available to intellectuals, like al-Azm, who remained in the Arab World at the mercy of reactionary regimes.

Recognizing this, the AAUG took strong stances against Arab regimes’ neocolonialism and sectarianism; they also supported academics who remained in the Arab World and were persecuted for their intellectual stances and activism. AAUG presidents regularly sent cables to Arab leaders to register their protest of their actions. For instance, Abdeen Jabara sent cables to Anwar Sadat in 1973 in response to reports of rising religious conflict in Egypt. AAUG members consistently linked the rise in sectarianism and anti-Palestinian sentiments to imperialism and Zionism. The start of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 was especially distressing to the AAUG, as many of its members were from or had some kind of connection to Lebanon. In 1976, Elaine Hagopian sent cables to the Lebanese President Suleiman Franjeh and Premier Rashid Karami, one of which expressed the AAUG’s “horror at the general slaughter of the populations there, the attempts to force a partition of the country, and the Jordan-like assault on the Palestinian people and movement.” Speaking for the Arab-American community, she continued, “We are deeply concerned about the safety and security of all the innocent peoples of Lebanon.”<sup>76</sup> Although

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<sup>74</sup> Edward Said to Sadek Jalal Al-Azm, December 15, 1980, Box 30, Folder 4, Edward W. Said Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>75</sup> Said, “Reflections on Exile,” 147.

<sup>76</sup> “AAUG Voices Grief, Concern over Lebanon,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February 1976), 1.



these cables were ineffectual and most likely ignored, the AAUG's stance on these international issues established the organization as an outlet for the expression of a non-sectarian, secular Arab collective identity.

### **Third Worldism**

Said, Abu-Lughod, Hagopian, Jabara, and many others pushed the AAUG into a more transnational direction through a conscious commitment to the Third World. The concept of the Third World emerged in the context of Cold War interventions and it indicated the struggle against colonial and postcolonial marginalization. By the 1970s, the Third World movement additionally involved a struggle against neocolonialism. According to Third World intellectuals and revolutionaries, "neocolonialism" entailed indigenous postcolonial regimes using nationalist discourse and economic attachment to superpowers to betray their country's wellbeing and independence.<sup>77</sup>

AAUG members therefore occupied a unique position as recent migrants from the Arab world or second generation Arab-Americans who felt a connection to both the Middle East and the United States. Members of this generation closely monitored Israel's colonial practices and foreign engagements. They also disparaged Arab regimes that sought power by trading the welfare of their citizens for political or economic alliances with the U.S. or the Soviet Union. Moreover, the political marginalization that Arab-Americans encountered in American society in the years after 1967 provoked even greater empathy for those around the world who endured racism, dispossession, corrupt governments, and neocolonialism. From its inception, the AAUG refused to limit itself as an organization that solely advocated for a just resolution to the Arab-

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<sup>77</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 157.

Israeli conflict, although that was its first and dearest cause. The Association aligned itself with both the Palestinian revolutionary movement and the global postcolonial community.

Third Worldism is a persistent theme throughout the AAUG's publications, newsletters, and conventions. The Association closely followed and supported the activism of various American and foreign groups concerned with fighting colonialism and racism in the global Third World. For instance, the AAUG's second annual convention in 1969 centered on Palestinian struggles to regain their lands, which led the organizers to release the following position statement:

The Association believes that the ideological direction and premises of the Palestinian Revolutionary Movement are humanistic, progressive, and consonant with the best traditions of Man. That it has related itself successfully to the revolutionary movements of the oppressed people of the world is natural and has enabled it to receive their moral and material support. Just as the Palestinian Revolution has publically supported the just cause of the people of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Black Community in the U.S., the Association registers its gratitude for the continuing support of these communities to [sic] the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian People.<sup>78</sup>

The statement subsequently called on the American public to use their sway over their government to abstain from further assisting "Israel's expansionism and totalitarianism" in order to prevent the destruction of the United States' credibility in the Middle East and the World.

Later AAUG conventions often featured transnational themes, such as the third annual gathering in Detroit, titled "The Arabs and the World: Perspectives on a Troubled Relationship." An official statement from this conference adopted a more urgent tone as it noted with alarm that the United States was pursuing "a policy of duplicity and imperialism in the Middle East and the Third World." It condemned the U.S. government's support of "racist settler, colonial and fascist regimes" against the wishes of the majority of American people. The AAUG urged a revision of American policy toward various African Third World movements, arguing that U.S. military

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<sup>78</sup> AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 1, March 1970, 6.

support for “Israel, Rhodesia, and South Africa and to the colonial regime of Portugal lies at the heart of the continued success of these colonial/Fascist regimes in thwarting the principles of liberty, dignity, and equality.” The statement situated its appeals for a change in U.S.

government policy within a rhetoric that emphasized human rights, arguing that this military support was “an affront to the best ideals of the American people.”<sup>79</sup> The AAUG thus catered its Third World message to an American audience that read or watched segments about these conferences in several news outlets, including local NBC and CBS newscasts, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *New York Times*.<sup>80</sup>

During its conventions, the AAUG invited established scholars and political activists from around the world, but also encouraged its own members to contribute to the scholarly discourse on a variety of pressing subjects. In doing so, the AAUG provided a space for scholarly discussion that was perceived to be less hostile than other academic conferences focusing on the Middle East, such as MESA. In 1970, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Michael Suleiman debated how to best influence MESA become more inclusive of Arab participants and subjects. They ultimately decided that the most effective course of action would be to organize members within the association to vote against Zionist leadership and endeavors, rather than boycotting MESA.<sup>81</sup> This proved prescient, as MESA later became more amenable to panels and discussions about controversial political issues, like the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> “Final Statement,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Dec. 1970), 4 and 6.

<sup>80</sup> For more on this rhetoric, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2009). A discussion of the news coverage is found in the *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 4, December 1969, 2 and 5-6.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Michael Suleiman to Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, December 5, 1970, Michael Suleiman Collection, Box 31A, Folder 9, AANM.

<sup>82</sup> Phone interview with Janice Terry, February 24, 2015. For more on the AAUG and MESA, see Timothy Mitchell, “The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science,” in *The Politics of Knowledge*, ed. David Szanton (University of California Press, 2004); and Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Conferences often featured speakers who were not Arab-American or even Arab as a way to forge transnational connections with others in the Third World. During the second convention, the Pakistani-British leftist Tariq Ali was invited to give the keynote speech but was blocked from entering the United States because he had participated in a flag burning protest outside the U.S. Embassy in London. The news outlets that reported on the event focused on this reason for Ali's absence, which had prompted the conference organizers to make A. L. Tibawi his replacement. As Ibrahim Abu-Lughod recalled, the media left after Tibawi's somewhat dry address on education reform in Mandatory Palestine and did not hear the fiery speech that Eqbal Ahmed gave next. Ahmad, a Pakistani leftist intellectual whose apartment had been searched by the FBI while en route to the conference, asked the audience whether they knew why the U.S. had barred Ali. He waited for the audience to shout, "No, we don't know why," and then exclaimed: "Because they accuse him of burning the American flag! But that is a lie! He did not burn the American flag; he cremated the American flag!" Thus, in Ahmad's view, the U.S. flag and all it stood for had already been dead when Ali lit it on fire. Reflecting on the speech, Abu-Lughod said it spearheaded Ahmad's position as "the most important public speaker for the Arabs, especially the young generation, the students."<sup>83</sup>

It was at this conference that Ibrahim Abu-Lughod introduced Eqbal Ahmad to Edward Said, where they forged a lasting friendship. Said later dedicated *Culture and Imperialism* to Ahmed because his life "embodied not just the politics of empire but that whole fabric of experience expressed in human life itself."<sup>84</sup> Ahmad could also count on the AAUG for close

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<sup>83</sup> Hisham Ahmed-Fararjeh, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return* (Palestine: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at Birzeit University, 2003), 106-107.

<sup>84</sup> Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali, "Edward Said and Eqbal Ahmad: Anti Imperialist Struggles in a Post-Colonial World," *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World Newsletter* (2003), [http://www.bitsonline.net/eqbal/tribute\\_D55B74A2.htm](http://www.bitsonline.net/eqbal/tribute_D55B74A2.htm).

support throughout its first decade. When Ahmad was indicted for allegedly conspiring to kidnap President Nixon's national security advisor Henry Kissinger, the AAUG issued a statement declaring that the U.S. government had accused Ahmad without evidence in order to suppress "all advocates of peace in Vietnam." Its 1971 newsletter urged readers to donate to his legal fund and featured Abu-Lughod calling Ahmad a "friend of the Arab community" who was devoted to "the Arab cause in the United States."<sup>85</sup> Ahmed was eventually cleared of all charges.

The third annual AAUG convention also featured another notable South Asian speaker: Krishna Menon, who served as the Minister of Defense in India and a member of the Indian parliament. In his keynote address, titled "The Arabs and the Third World," Menon argued that all imperialism was "rooted in some form of superstition and in anachronistic racial and theocratic concepts. He further linked the Palestinian people's struggle to the Vietnamese."<sup>86</sup> Later AAUG conventions and publications continually highlighted these connections between anti-imperial movements and reiterated the importance of transnational solidarity.

### **The AAUG and the Creation of an Arab-Black Coalition**

During an era fraught with struggles for civil rights in the U.S. and self-determination in the decolonizing world, Arab-Americans increasingly recognized the intersections between racialization and colonization. Therefore, many Arab-American intellectuals and activists began to identify and cooperate with both Black Americans and Africans. While scholars have written extensively on Black positions on Zionism and the Arab-Israeli conflict, they have often paid insufficient attention to intercommunal work between Arab-Americans and African-

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<sup>85</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1970), 1.

Americans.<sup>87</sup> Salim Yaqub has most recently analyzed this subject from 1967 to 1980, arguing that scholars have failed to contextualize the evolution of Black Americans' criticism of Israel. He delineates a split on the issue along "radical" and "moderate" lines, contending that black moderates only began to criticize Israel once Palestinian leadership signaled their hesitant willingness to accept the Israeli state if it would return the West Bank and Gaza to sovereign Palestinian control. Yaqub, echoing Sarah Gualtieri, argues that the 1979 firing of Ambassador Andrew Young after secretly meeting with the PLO ignited a new era of Black-Arab cooperation.<sup>88</sup> Although Yaqub's thesis is persuasive, I argue that he overstates the dichotomy between both black and Arab radicals and moderates. These activists and intellectuals boasted diverse views that could not always fit squarely into one category.

Arab-American members of the AAUG represented themselves as kindred to African and African American activists. Elaine Hagopian, the 1976 President of the AAUG, recalled that most of its members were "involved in demonstrations across the country against [South African] apartheid. And most were strongly involved with African American protest groups and arguing for civil rights." Hagopian elaborated, "It was important to us to not become a one-issue organization. If you don't support other people's causes, why should they support yours? But it was more than just that; it was the commonality of the dehumanization. You have solidarity out of the commonality."<sup>89</sup> The transnational identities of AAUG members, even if they did not

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<sup>87</sup> For critical engagement with the literature on Black Americans and Zionism, see Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, NC, 2014) and Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine*. Lubin and Feldman shed new light on Black American leaders' engagement with Zionism and the Arab or Palestinian Nationalist movements. However, their works focus on the cultural production that arose out of Black American engagement with the Arab world. Lubin largely neglects Black American engagement with Arab-Americans, while Feldman's analysis of Arab-Americans is centered on Edward Said's scholarship. Refer to Gualtieri's epilogue of *Between Arab and White* for an overview of alliances between Arab-Americans (particularly the AAUG) and Black Americans.

<sup>88</sup> Salim Yaqub, "'Our Declaration of Independence': African Americans, Arab-Americans, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1979," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 3, No. 1 (2015), 21. See also Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 174-175.

<sup>89</sup> Personal interview with Elaine Hagopian, Cambridge, MA, September 30, 2015, 22.

grow up in the Arab World, thus allowed them identify with both the decolonizing Third World and other minorities in the United States. This is a notable shift in self-identity given the historical efforts of early Syrian-Americans to dissociate themselves from people of color in order to represent themselves as white and gain access to U.S. citizenship.<sup>90</sup>

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod's sway over the AAUG, beginning when he served as its second president, was evident in the organization's early concern with justice in Africa. In Abu-Lughod's view, unifying the study of the regions north and south of the Sahara was integral to understanding African history; he believed that promoting this analytical shift was his greatest contribution to the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University. Working with students during a politically volatile era, Abu-Lughod attempted to foster links among various liberation movements by showing how Israel, South Africa, and Vietnam were "all connected."<sup>91</sup>

Hagopian, Abu-Lughod, and likeminded AAUG members embodied this perspective in their support for decolonization and opposition to neocolonialism throughout the continent, not just in North Africa. For instance, AAUG members were invited to attend the Sixth Pan African Congress in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania in 1974.<sup>92</sup> In 1977, Palestinian historian Hisham Sharabi joined Abu-Lughod in representing the AAUG at an Afro-Arab symposium in Sharjah, UAE. This gathering issued the "Declaration of Sharjah," which affirmed historical links between Arabs and Africans and endorsed Palestinian, Zimbabwean, Namibian, and African Liberation movements' efforts to "dismantle the colonial-settler regimes of Rhodesia, South Africa, and Israel."<sup>93</sup> In 1979, the Washington, D.C. AAUG Chapter also organized a Day of Liberation of

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<sup>90</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*.

<sup>91</sup> Ahmed-Farajeh, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return*, 97-98.

<sup>92</sup> "Arab-American Community News," *AAUG Newsletter* 7, No. 1 (March 1974), 7.

<sup>93</sup> "Meetings in the Arab World: Afro-Arab Symposium at Sharjah, UAE," *AAUG Newsletter* 11, No. 1 (March 1977), 10.

Africa and Palestine with the All African People's Revolutionary Party. The Pan-African and Pan-Arab organizers arranged demonstrations, discussions, and films about the Palestinian struggle, and ending with a luncheon with Shafiq al-Hout, who was visiting from the Beirut PLO Office.

Notable black figures also spoke often at AAUG national conventions and other events. In 1970, the AAUG invited Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and Shirley Graham Du Bois, activist and widow of W. E. B. Du Bois, to address their annual convention's banquet. The crowd met their comments on Black Nationalism with vibrant applause.<sup>94</sup> Shirley Graham Du Bois' presence is especially noteworthy because of her deceased husband's previously sympathetic views toward Zionism.<sup>95</sup> Graham Du Bois' experience of living in Egypt after 1967 and her contact with numerous anti-Zionist thinkers transformed her perspective on Palestine. Three years after speaking to the AAUG audience, Graham Du Bois would tend to wounded Egyptian soldiers during the 1973 War in Cairo hospitals.<sup>96</sup> Seeing these crises firsthand prompted her to become a more vocal critic of Zionism. For instance, Graham Du Bois argued that the color line that stretched across America could be extended to the Middle East, where the "colored folk" were "battling with the 'white folk' of Israel."<sup>97</sup> Although at this point the PLO maintained a position that refused to accept the legitimacy of an Israeli state, Arab-American organizations were nevertheless able to garner the support of some black Americans who may have previously been supportive of (or at least indifferent to) the Zionist movement, like Shirley Graham Du Bois.

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<sup>94</sup> "Annual Convention Draws Record Attendance," 2, 4.

<sup>95</sup> See Benjamin Sevitch, "W. E. B. Du Bois as America's Foremost Black Zionist," in *The Souls of W. E. B. Du Bois: New Essays and Reflections*, ed. Edward J. Blum (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 233-253.

<sup>96</sup> Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (New York University Press, New York, 2000).

<sup>97</sup> Shirley Graham Du Bois, "Confrontation in the Middle East," *The Black Scholar* 5, no. 3 (1973): 32-37.



At the 1975 AAUG Convention, Stokely Carmichael argued that African-Americans shared a deep opposition to Zionism with both Arabs and Africans. His statements spoke to a conscious effort of some Black civil rights activists to distance themselves from elements of the Jewish-American population over the issue of Zionism. While many Jewish-Americans were generally progressive on civil rights issues, their growing support for the Israeli establishment's exclusionary policies led many Black Americans to eschew this once close relationship. Carmichael noted that pro-Israeli groups had featured statements of support from Black elected officials in advertisements in major U.S. newspapers because Zionists were "desperately aware that Black Americans increasingly condemn Israel as a racist state with political, economic, and military links with South Africa."<sup>98</sup> Carmichael later spoke at other AAUG events, such as a lecture on "Angola and the Struggle for Liberation in Africa" at the Washington, D.C. chapter in March 1976.<sup>99</sup>

Other Black American leaders furthermore emphasized the kindred relationship between Blacks and Arabs not just as victims of global imperialism, but as American minorities. In 1972, congresswoman Shirley Chisholm was the keynote speaker at the Washington, D.C. AAUG Chapter's annual banquet. Chisholm, a Democrat from New York, was in the midst of a difficult campaign to run as the first black woman candidate for president. Although her underfunded campaign failed to garner enough votes during the Democratic primaries, she nevertheless ran with vigor and refused to temper her support for the radical wing of the civil rights movement. Speaking to more than 200 guests, Chisholm disparaged the "treadmill of fruitless talks and new outbreaks of violence" that characterized American-Arab relations. She also predicted that American minorities would struggle with renewed fervor to gain true equality: "We are now

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<sup>98</sup> *AAUG Newsletter* 9, No. 4 (December 1975), 7.

<sup>99</sup> *AAUG Newsletter* 10, No. 3 (June 1976), 10.

entering an epoch that could bring the liberation of oppressed and deprived people of the world. There is now a social revolution in progress in this country. Black Power, Red Power, La Causa and La Huelga; and yes, Arab Power – these are a few of the slogans of that revolution.”<sup>100</sup>

In addition to inviting her to speak at their events, the AAUG closely followed Chisholm’s campaign in its newsletter. Major media outlets often ignored Chisholm’s campaign or described her in terms tinged with sexism by focusing on her “small stature” or calling her “feisty, pepper pot, or prim.”<sup>101</sup> The AAUG newsletter eschewed these patronizing descriptors and instead explored her commitment to human rights issues in its continued coverage of her work. The AAUG and other Arab-American organizations, such as the Action Committee on Arab-American Relations (led by M. T. Mehdi), were captivated by Chisholm’s willingness to bring the Palestinian issue to the fore.<sup>102</sup> Chisholm’s sympathy for minority youth who spent their early years in American ghettos extended to the Arab generation that had “grown up in the Palestinian ghetto.” As she wrote in a position paper that the *Newsletter* quoted in full, black Americans and Palestinians had both “made clear that they will no longer tolerate the injustice of their conditions.” Chisholm’s stance on the Middle East called for a renewed effort to resolve conflicts in the Middle East by focusing on the root cause: the dispute over Palestine. Being the child of Caribbean immigrants, Chisholm was committed to the rights of refugees and members of global diasporas. She declared, “In the midst of rejoicing at the creation of a national homeland for the Jews, the world overlooked the hardship and misery created for the Palestinians. The Palestinians have been forced to live in wretched refugee camps, their homes

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<sup>100</sup> AAUG Newsletter 5, No. 3 (July 1972), 6.

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Winslow discusses the media discourse surrounding the Chisholm campaign in *Shirley Chisholm: Catalyst for Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 116.

<sup>102</sup> For Mehdi’s endorsement of Chisholm, see Morris Fine, *American Jewish Yearbook, 1973* (Scranton, PA: American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 202.

gone, many of them stateless, living on U.N. relief supplies.” Although she sidestepped criticism of Zionism and Israel – “apparently for fear of alienating her Jewish constituency,” the AAUG newsletter speculated – Chisholm endorsed the inclusion of Palestinian representation in negotiations over the right of return and compensation, increased economic aid to the region, and a limit on arms sales.<sup>103</sup>

Chisholm’s support for Palestine was not simply a front that she put on for Arab-American voters. She maintained the same line of argument even when campaigning on one of her most difficult primary battlegrounds: Florida. While speaking to an entirely white, conservative, and male audience at a Miami Men’s Club luncheon, she was attacked for being pro-Arab. She insisted that she was “neither pro-Arab nor pro-Israeli, but rather against people’s suffering.”<sup>104</sup>

However, the AAUG was not as proficient at building ties with other black members of Congress. In June 1972, the Congressional Black Caucus released a pro-Israel statement in response to the National Black Political Convention’s radical critique of Zionism. At its Gary, Indiana meeting, the National Black Political Convention had called for the “dismantling” of Israel and a suspension of American aid to the state. Although 8000 black activists attended the convention and contributed to the resolution, the thirteen-member Black Caucus sought to distance itself from such sentiments. The Caucus statement described Israel’s creation as “a revolutionary development in the Middle East” and asserted that Israel had stimulated “the national inspirations of many Black people who were under colonial rule in Africa and the third-world nations in Asia.” It furthermore called “special attention to the cordial relationship Israel has maintained with the developing Black nations in Africa and the third-world” because Israel

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 1972), 1, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Shirley Chisholm, *The Good Fight* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 59.

had sent technical experts to many developing countries and allowed “hundreds of Africans” to travel to Israel for education.

Reporting on the matter, the AAUG noted that the Congressional Black Caucus statement included a “feeble attempt to appear impartial” by pointing out that the U.S. government had contributed more than one and a half billion dollars to the relief of Palestinian refugees. Abdeen Jabara, then the Association’s president, cabled the Caucus members to remind them of the similarities between the Israeli and South African regimes, as well as the recent Ugandan expulsion of all Israeli military and diplomatic personnel on charges of “subversive activities.” “We can understand the political considerations which led you to do this,” Jabara wrote, “but we request you reconsider in light of the moral and factual issues and sentiment among the rank-and-file in the Black Community in solidarity with the Palestinian people.” Although Shirley Chisholm was one of the thirteen members of the Caucus, she disavowed the position of the other legislators. She reassured Jabara that she did not agree with the resolution and objected to its method of issuance: “There was no vote taken, and if there had been, I would have voted against it.”<sup>105</sup>

The AAUG subsequently participated in a two-day meeting that the Congressional Black Caucus sponsored at the 1972 African-American National Conference on Africa. Delegates from the AAUG and a number of African-American organizations urged the passage of sanctions on investments in “minority, white-ruled states or those that serve as conduits for South African products.” It also requested that Africans gain control over the production, refining, and shipping of their own oil resources. The AAUG delegates requested a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai and the re-opening of the Suez Canal, since its closure had “diverted shipping to South

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<sup>105</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (June, 1972).

Africa and provided NATO with a pretext to provide military and financial aid” to the apartheid government in the name of protecting shipping routes. Finally, delegates encouraged a boycott of South African gems that were polished in Israel and sold throughout the US.<sup>106</sup>

The latter demand was also the focus of a symposium that the Ohio AAUG and OAS Chapters co-sponsored at Ohio State University the same year on boycotting diamonds that were produced in South Africa, cut in Israel, and sold in the U.S. market. At this meeting, representatives of Arab-American, African-American, and socialist organizations formed a steering committee to adopt and pursue a plan of action to research and expose collusion between businesses and the governments of South Africa, Israel, and the U.S.<sup>107</sup>

The AAUG backed up its claims about Israeli-South African ties with works from various advocacy groups and individuals. It welcomed news about other organizations that advocated for African decolonization, especially when such groups noted a connection between Israel and neocolonial regimes. In its March 1971 newsletter, the AAUG reported on a position paper that the Madison Area Committee on Southern Africa (MACSA) published about Israel and South Africa. In 1970, MACSA had led demonstrations at University of Wisconsin-Madison against the US invasion of Cambodia, and the National Guard suppressed the protests. While MACSA initially omitted Israel from its discussion of worldwide repression in a position paper that sparked the campus protests, it subsequently organized a meeting to educate its members about Israeli policies in occupied Palestine. The AAUG noted that MACSA’s resolutions were particularly newsworthy given the “active involvement of the US government and Israel in the

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<sup>106</sup> “Israel-South Africa Ties Exposed by AAUG Delegates at the Congressional Black Caucus,” AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 5, No 3 (July 1972), 1, 5.

<sup>107</sup> “Seminar on Israel, S. Africa Diamond Industries Held,” AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 5, No. 3 (July 1972), 4. The Arab-American representatives on the steering committee were Abdeen Jabara of the AAUG, Riyad Mansour and Haidar Al-Mustafawi of the Organization of Arab Students, and Hasan Husseini of the Arab-American Association of Ohio University.

oppression and exploitation of the African people.” The MACSA paper not only highlighted similarities between South Africa’s treatment of its black population and Israel’s treatment of indigenous Palestinians, but also explored the strong ties that Israel had forged with the South African regime. An AAUG member reported that Zionist and Israeli officials later asked MACSA to withdraw the paper from circulation: “The thrust of their objection was that it was ‘anti-Semitic’ not that the facts were wrong!”<sup>108</sup>

By the mid-1970s, the solidarity work between Arab-Americans and African-Americans reached unprecedented levels. In 1974 The AAUG again reported on the National Black Political Convention, which had taken place two years prior in Gary, Indiana. This time, the Convention attendees in Little Rock, Arkansas passed a resolution that condemned Congress and President Nixon for giving \$2.2 billion in aid to Israel while “ignoring the rights of Palestinian and African peoples struggling for self-determination and economic development.” During its October 1974 meeting in Chicago, the National Anti-Imperialist Conference in Solidarity with African Liberation also adopted similar resolutions that supported Arabs against Israeli colonialism. Speakers at its workshops compared Israel to Rhodesia, South Africa and Portuguese colonists, and portrayed the Arab struggle as “an integral part of the African continent’s struggle for Liberation.” The idea of imitating the South African Boycott-Divestment-Sanction movement to boycott corporations doing business with Israel and trade unions that invested in Zionist institutions began to gain prominence.<sup>109</sup>

In 1979, the AAUG invited a delegation of media representatives and leaders from the Black community in the U.S. to visit Lebanon. Its newsletter reported, “Members of this delegation, all of whom have been deeply involved in the political rights and community

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<sup>108</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 1971), 8.

<sup>109</sup> “Arab-American Community News,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 7 (March 1974), 7

organizing efforts of the Black and Latino communities, had expressed interest in clarifying the context in which Palestinian and Lebanese Arabs are struggling for their rights and security in the face of Israeli military devastation.” Jack O’Dell, a prominent civil rights organizer as part of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the head of Pacifica Radio, served as the chairman. Also on the delegation were Reverend Bennett Smith representing the SCLC; Pablo Sanchez and Lauri Parks, filmmakers from Washington D.C.; Alfonso Gaskins, a student leader at Howard University Law School; Herb Boyd, a community activist in Detroit; and Jaqueline Jackson, who directed Operation PUSH (People United to serve Humanity) with her husband, Jesse Jackson. This array of leaders met in Lebanon with PLO chairman Arafat and other PLO leaders such as Farouk al-Kaddoumi and Salah Khalaf. They then toured PLO SAMED (Palestine Martyrs Works Society) factories, Red Crescent hospitals, orphanages, and refugee camps near Beirut as well as in southern Lebanon. Jaqueline Jackson reportedly spoke of her “pain and embarrassment in realizing how much of the children’s suffering had been inflicted through weapons and policies originating in the United States.”<sup>110</sup> Jesse Jackson subsequently echoed his wife’s views and became more outspoken about Arab issues. The following year, the AAUG newsletter reprinted Jackson’s assertion at the 1980 PUSH convention that “Blacks have a vital interest in peace in the Middle East because in a hot war we will die first and in a cold war over oil, we will be unemployed and freeze first.”<sup>111</sup>

Other black leaders also went on delegations to the Middle East and returned as more vocal critics of American foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly on Palestine. The 1979 AAUG convention featured three advocates of Arab-Black solidarity: Reverend Joseph E.

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<sup>110</sup> “American Blacks, Latinos, and Educators Form Delegation to Lebanon,” AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 12, No. 2 (July 1979), 8

<sup>111</sup> “At the PUSH Convention: A Push for better Black-Arab relations,” AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 13, No. 3, Sept-Oct, 1980, 4.

Lowery, President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congressman Walter Fauntroy of Washington D.C., and Reverend Jesse Jackson. The spokesmen addressed a thousand participants at the annual convention with a message that could be summarized by Fauntroy's statement: "We are in Foreign Policy to stay." Lowery recalled his trip to the Middle East while speaking at the banquet. "When I was in Southern Lebanon, I saw 100,000 Black jobs flying faster than the speed of light over my head. We must turn these cluster bombs into biscuits. Foreign policy takes bread from the mouths of Black and Brown children."<sup>112</sup>

At the same 1979 AAUG convention, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat sent a message that Hatem Husseini, head of the Washington D.C. Palestine Information Office, read to the participants. In it, Arafat called upon the Arab-American population to continue to "forge links of solidarity with Black Americans and other minority groups" who supported the Palestinian cause. Arafat continued,

I personally extend my warmest greetings to all the AAUG leaders and black leaders who visited us in Lebanon and expressed solidarity. To brothers Joseph Lowery, Walter Fauntroy, and Jesse Jackson, I send revolutionary greetings and love. And I extend my hand to all of you to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and common struggle against imperialism, racism, and Zionism. I assure you that all of us, together and united, we shall overcome. We shall meet in Jerusalem and Palestine in peace.<sup>113</sup>

This represented a new era for the PLO, which had previously failed to build ties with mainstream Black American leaders. As Salim Yaqub has argued, the PLO was able to make more overt overtures to Black American politicians because by the mid-1970s, Arafat and other PLO leaders had begun to articulate a more conciliatory position on Israel that would accept the establishment of an independent state "in any Part of Palestine from which Israel will withdraw."

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<sup>112</sup> "Twelfth AAUG Convention Highlights," *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (December 1979-March 1980), 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> "Chairman Arafat Sends Message to Convention," *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 12, No. 3, September 1978, 3.



Yaqub interprets this statement as “implying that Israel could exist in the remainder,” a position that was “first unveiled in the summer of 1974.”<sup>114</sup>

Arafat’s message also indirectly gestured at the Andrew Young controversy of 1978. The U.S. ambassador had been fired after meeting with PLO contacts to discuss potential compromises between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. The U.S. policy against negotiating with the PLO was still in place, but the PLO’s willingness to meet with U.S. officials demonstrated this new openness toward a solution. This firing led to yet another area of common ground for Black and Arab-Americans.<sup>115</sup> The AAUG was especially vocal on the matter, with its Board of Directors issuing the following statement:

The [AAUG] is deeply anguished over the resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young, and views with deep alarm the circumstances surrounding his resignation. We deplore the fact that Ambassador Young's resignation resulted from his brief encounter with Mr. Zehdi Labib Terzi, the PLO's observer to the U.N. Not only was Ambassador Young unjustly reprimanded by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, but he was also subjected to a chorus of verbal abuse by certain anti-Arab, anti-Third World public officials and organized groups.

The statement went on to question the double standards that led to Young’s resignation after meeting with the PLO, while the Ambassador to Austria, Milton A. Wolf, had held talks with a similarly high-level PLO official in Vienna with no consequences. It asked, “Was he victimized because he chose to question the wisdom of sending millions of dollars in American arms to Israel as an inducement to peace in the Middle East? Was he victimized because he questioned Israeli annexation policies in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip?”<sup>116</sup> In the eyes of the AAUG leadership, Young was “victimized” because of his long history of standing against apartheid and racial inequality.

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<sup>114</sup> Yaqub, “Our Declaration of Independence,” 21.

<sup>115</sup> Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 175-177.

<sup>116</sup> “AAUG Statement on Andrew Young,” Vol. 12, No. 3, September 1978, 1

### **Engagement with the Homeland: The PLO and the PNC**

While the AAUG was active on a variety of Third World issues other than Palestine, its transnational orientation was most prominently on display with its early backing of the PLO and its decision-making body, the Palestine National Council (PNC). In the PLO, the AAUG saw a viable Third World movement with a credible guerilla struggle, if not a coherent ideology.<sup>117</sup> Yasser Arafat's aforementioned address-in-absentia at the 1979 Convention emphasized the important role that Arab-American intellectuals played both as representatives of the Palestinian position in the U.S and as Americans who could potentially shape U.S. foreign policy. Arafat thus declared:

Your thoughts and ideas reflect the aspirations of our Palestinian and Arab masses. We are confident that you will continue to raise your voices for the freedom of all our Palestinian prisoners in Zionist jails, for the defense of our civilian populations brutalized under Israeli military occupation, and for the support of our freedom fighters and Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in South Lebanon who are subjected to massive Israeli attacks with the most sophisticated American weapons.

The Palestinian leader further exhorted Arab-Americans to continue supporting the establishment of an independent Palestinian state by protesting Carter's "continued denial of our people's rights" and "continued support of Israeli aggression." The AAUG had already been a staunch, though often critical, supporter of the PLO throughout its first decade, but by the late 1970s it made more concerted efforts to strengthen ties with the PLO's leaders and new institutions, such as the Palestine National Council and educational initiatives.

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod was initially drawn to the Palestine National Council after meeting Yasser Arafat in Egypt during August 1970. Abu-Lughod had asked Arafat what role people like

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<sup>117</sup> Hisham Sharabi, *Palestinian Guerillas: Their Credibility and Effectiveness* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1970).

him could play in the Palestinian revolution, as he and other intellectuals lived on the outside while “working with ideas at institutions.” Arafat responded that before the start of the PLO, “we were Palestinians, sitting in Kuwait or Qatar,” who also wondered what they could do for Palestine. They had decided to organize and wage a revolution - but that was not the only path. Arafat concluded that it was up to Abu-Lughod and his friends to decide how they could best contribute to the revolution, since they also had ownership over it. Abu-Lughod then went to a Palestine National Council meeting, emboldened by the idea that that the PNC meetings he had read about in the papers were proceedings he could actually attend.<sup>118</sup> Abu-Lughod, Naseer Aruri, and Edward Said eventually joined the PNC in 1977 as independent members representing North American Palestinians. Though the PNC exercised only nominal influence in comparison to the PLO Executive Committee, these three AAUG leaders attended sessions of the Palestinian “parliament in exile” in Cairo, Amman, and Algiers.<sup>119</sup> They were often critical of the PLO and did not always agree with its actions, but nevertheless viewed it as an institution that had the potential to facilitate an end to the conflict.

The support that Abu-Lughod, Aruri, and Said showed the PLO was also official policy for the AAUG during its first decades, when numerous PLO representatives spoke at AAUG conventions. In 1974, Arafat addressed the U.N. General Assembly with his famous “Olive Branch” speech, which had been drafted in Said’s Manhattan apartment.<sup>120</sup> Afterwards, the AAUG reaffirmed its commitment to “the liberation of the Arab world and the national and human rights of Palestinian people.” The AAUG’s affinity with the PLO was especially influential because the U.N. officially endorsed the AAUG as a non-governmental organization

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<sup>118</sup> Ahmed-Fararjeh, *Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: Resistance, Exile, and Return*, 115-116.

<sup>119</sup> Said, “My Guru,” *London Review of Books*

<sup>120</sup> Email exchange with Mariam Said, March 20, 2017.

and urged it to continue aiding peace and education efforts. The AAUG's work even lauded by the U.N. General Secretary in 1974, who asserted that "the only true realism in our world today is internationalism, and not selfish nationalism."<sup>121</sup> The AAUG's members did not only limit their activism to the borders of the US, but also helped organize a peaceful march in Lebanon for the rights of Palestinians. On behalf of Arafat, the PLO's Shafiq Al-Hout thanked those who marched from Sidon to Tyre. He viewed them as "a symbol of the good of America." "Unfortunately," he said, "we have got used to the ugly side of your country."<sup>122</sup>

In later years, AAUG members would increasingly see the "ugly side" of the PLO. Fouad Moughrabi believes that one of the Association's gravest failures was its hesitance to "launch a vigorous and fundamental critique of the role of the PLO in the region." AAUG members who disagreed with certain PLO decisions generally kept their criticism behind closed doors with the rationale that "we should not air our dirty linen in public," which would "give Israel and the enemies of the Palestinians more ammunition." Disappointed by the PLO's support of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, Said left the PNC in 1991, which allowed him to return to Palestine after being in exile for forty-five years. When the U.S. brokered the Oslo Accords in 1993, he openly disparaged the PLO's capitulations to Israel and called for Arafat's resignation; the PLO responded by banning his books.<sup>123</sup> Like Said, Abu-Lughod also resigned from the PNC when he decided to return to living in the Palestinian territories, which would require him to submit to Israel's jurisdiction.<sup>124</sup> Moughrabi argues that these moves against the Palestinian leadership came "too late," and that if the AAUG and Palestinian-American organizations had undertaken

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<sup>121</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 1974, 6.

<sup>122</sup> *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 3, August 1973, 8.

<sup>123</sup> *The Edward Said Reader*, ed. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), xxxi.

<sup>124</sup> Ahmed-Fararjeh, *Resistance, Exile, and Return*, 133.

an earlier campaign to openly critique the leadership, they could have had a greater impact.<sup>125</sup>

Regardless of whether the AAUG should have been more outspokenly critical of the PLO, it did not hesitate to condemn the reactionary policies of both Middle Eastern regimes and the United States. Like many of its founders, the AAUG would eventually distance itself from the Palestinian leadership during the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>126</sup>

### **The AAUG and Arab-American Civil Rights**

The AAUG's stance on Israel and its close relationship with Third World organizations and scholars did not endear it to mainstream American political circles. In the early 1970s, the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service began surveilling Arab-Americans and Arabs in the U.S. to "screen Arab residents in the U.S. who the Administration has reason to believe may be planning acts of terror." This campaign, titled "Operation Boulder," began before the Nixon administration orchestrated the surveillance of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate complex.<sup>127</sup>

Although the AAUG did not set out to focus on Arab-American civil rights, many of its members were targets of surveillance and harassment from the FBI and INS. Editorials in the AAUG argued that the Nixon administration was attempting to intimidate those who were "engaged in information campaigns and efforts to maintain friendly ties between the American and Arab peoples." Therefore, in 1972 the AAUG formed its Civil Rights Committee, with lawyers such as Abdeen Jabara, George Abdala, M. Cherif Bassiouni, William J. Gedeon, and others participating. This committee placed several advertisements in the New York Times

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<sup>125</sup> Fouad Moughrabi, "Remembering the AAUG," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007), 102.

<sup>126</sup> Phone interview with Janice Terry, February 24, 2015.

<sup>127</sup> "AAUG Defends Rights of Arabs," *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (March 1973), 1.

protesting the Nixon administration's "arbitrary, racist, and illegal restrictions and secret measures."<sup>128</sup>

Abdeen Jabara's work advising Arab students who needed legal counsel made himself a target of surveillance. In spring 1972, he discovered that someone was seeking information about his bank account, and that his name was on a list that a particular Detroit bank was circulating to "check with their branches about depositors." Jabara sued the bank and during discovery proceedings, the bank officials revealed under oath that they had been responding to requests for information from the FBI. Later, in the fall of 1972, the FBI visited his house as part of the new Operation Boulder measures. He then took his case to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). During the discovery process, the ACLU received documents that revealed the extent of the surveillance. Because the documents included references to the suit he had filed in 1972, Jabara's legal team realized that the FBI had been surveilling him until 1975, even during the court proceedings in his first case against the federal agency. Moreover, documents indicated that the FBI had passed information about Jabara to three "foreign governments," although they did not name specific governments. In addition, the discovery documents showed that a domestic Zionist organization had passed along information about Jabara to the FBI on eleven different occasions.<sup>129</sup>

Exposing the FBI's activities did not, however, temper infringements upon civil liberties. Numerous individuals found themselves to be the target of surveillance, deportation, or even extradition to Israel. Thus, the AAUG quickly expanded its organizational services by assisting several individuals' cases, most of which were in some way related to the person's connections

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<sup>128</sup> "Watergate Spies Used Against Arabs," "AAUG Defends Rights of Arabs, *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> "Abdeen Jabara Discusses Lawsuit against FBI," AAUG Newsletter, Vol. 7, No. 3, (September 1978), 6; Personal interview with Abdeen Jabara, New York, NY, November 14, 2015.

to Palestinian organizations. It also established a Palestine human rights task force in April 1977 to “undertake a concerted and multidimensional campaign in the United States around the issue of human rights of Palestinians. The AAUG board appointed Jim Zogby to lead this effort, and he formed a “Palestine Human Rights Coalition” that consisted of a diverse array of civil rights, church, and peace groups. Within several months, this Coalition evolved into a separate entity, the Palestine Human Rights Campaign (PHRC). Although it became an independent organization, the PHRC worked in conjunction with the AAUG to advocate for several individuals’ cases. The PHRC also initiated “Action Alert” mailings to encourage its members to quickly respond to civil and human rights abuses by writing to congressional representatives, government officials, and media outlets.<sup>130</sup>

In February 1978, AAUG President Fouad Moughrabi sent a letter to President Carter, Cyrus Vance, and Michigan representatives in Congress protesting human rights violations against Sami Ismail. Ismail, a native-born U.S. citizen, was imprisoned upon flying to Israel to visit his dying father, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1910 but retired to Ramallah in his old age. Ismail was interrogated and allegedly tortured by Israeli authorities for six days, after which he said he was forced to sign a confession that he was a member in the PFLF, which was an illegal organization in Israel. Ismail was not especially politically active in the U.S. or overseas, so the AAUG and Ismail's lawyer, Felicia Langer, argued that such charges were trumped up and that Ismail suffered torture and a denial of due process. Further complicating matters was the statement of a Michigan Democrat Congressman that “it was possible Israel was

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<sup>130</sup> The PHRC was especially effective at reaching its members and engaging in activism that caught attention. Abdeen Jabara recalled that during the Camp David meetings with Begin and Sadat, he and Zogby arranged for an airplane to fly over Camp David with a banner stating, “Palestinians have human rights too.” Author interview with Jabara, Nov. 16, 2015;

“Palestinians have Human Rights Too,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1977), 1; “Palestine Human Rights Campaign Continues Action,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (September 1977), 5.

alerted to Ismail's arrival by a U.S. intelligence report.”<sup>131</sup> Whether this was true is difficult to prove, but it highlighted Arab-American fears that the collusion between the U.S. and Israeli intelligence community facilitated the targeting of Arabs in both the United States and Israel. For Palestinian-Americans, this highlighted the instability of their position in the U.S.

The AAUG further took on the case of Elias Ayoub, a Palestinian citizen of Israel who received a student visa to study in the U.S. in 1976. When Ayoub transferred from Lansing Community College in Michigan to Ohio State University in 1977, the INS did not respond to his request transfer, which led to his student visa expiring. Once Ayoub became “out of status,” the INS set several departure date deadlines because he had “failed to establish a definite educational goal” after switching his major from philosophy to economics. Ayoub appealed these decisions with the support of Ohio State’s administration, but the INS refused to cancel the departure dates and merely postponed them. The INS subsequently conducted deportation hearings in May 1979 because he had remained in the U.S. two months past his final departure date. While fighting these deportation proceedings, Ayoub graduated with his bachelor’s from Ohio State University ahead of schedule and began a graduate program at the New School for Social Research in New York City. The AAUG and PHRC covered developments in the Ayoub case for years, urging their members to write to Ohio officials and contribute funds to his legal defense. The Ayoub defense argued that the INS was unfairly targeting Ayoub over his “advocacy of the political and human rights of his people.” By 1980, the INS also sought to deport Elias Ayoub’s sister, Antoinette. In a Freedom of Information Act request, Ayoub’s team discovered that the FBI told an INS officer in Cincinnati that Ayoub was engaged in “subversive” political activities on the issue of Palestine. Furthermore, the INS accused Ayoub

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<sup>131</sup> “AAUG Protests Ismail’s Case,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (March 1978).



of being a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in a memorandum to the U.S. Embassy in Israel.<sup>132</sup> Ayoub's case finally concluded once his mother was able to sponsor him with an "immediate relative" visa in 1982. The INS thus granted him permanent immigrant status.

The legal fight against the extradition of Ziad Abu Ein, however, did not end as fortunately as Ayoub's. The Israeli government alleged that in May 1979, Abu Ein had planted a bomb in Tiberias that killed two people and injured thirty-six. The Israeli courts based the case against Ziad on a confession Abu Ein's friend, Jamal Yasin, had allegedly signed under duress after weeks of interrogation in an Israeli prison. According to the AAUG's coverage of the case, the confession's signature was written in Arabic while the statement was in Hebrew, which Yasin did not understand. The Israeli government supported its case with a statement from an unidentified woman who said she had carried letters between Ziad Abu Ein and Jamal Yasin, as well as between Yasin and a Fatah official in Syria.

In June 1979, Ein flew to Chicago to visit his sister. Three months later, the FBI arrested him at the request of Israeli authorities. A number of lawyers and activists, including many AAUG members, formed the Ziad Abu Ein Defense Committee to fight his extradition back to Israel. By 1981, Abu Ein's case reached the U.S. Supreme Court. Abu Ein's defense made the case that the Israeli government's only evidence was the aforementioned confession by Abu Ein's friend Jamal Yasin. Yasin eventually recanted the confession twice and swore that it was extracted through torture. Furthermore, over fourteen individuals made sworn statements that on

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<sup>132</sup> "AAUG Supports Elias Ayoub," Vol. 11, No. 3 (September 1978), 4; "Protest the Deportation of Elias Ayoub: An Appeal from his Defense Committee," Vol. 12, No. 2 (July 1979); "Elias Ayoub update: INS Steps up Deportation Attempt," Vol. 13, No. 4 (November-December, 1980), 8; Stanley Diamond, Noam Chomsky, William Sloane Coffin Jr., Edward W. Said, et. al, "Facing Deportation," *The New York Review*, April 1, 1982, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1982/04/01/facing-deportation/>.

May 14, 1979, Abu Ein had been in his hometown of Ramallah, which is 120 miles away from Tiberias. These statements indicated that Abu Ein had tended his family's store and visited his brother's wife and newborn son in a hospital that day.<sup>133</sup> However, on December 12, 1982, Ziad Abu Ein was extradited from his Chicago prison cell to Israel. Abu Ein was the first Palestinian prisoner to be extradited from the U.S. to Israel. He spent decades in Israeli prisons before becoming a senior member of Fatah.<sup>134</sup>

Although the AAUG covered all three of these cases, it was not set up to fully devote itself to the defense of these three Arabs who were in some way targeted because of their connection to Palestine.

### **Rise of the ADC: Grassroots Arab-American Activism for Civil Rights and Palestinian Rights**

The October War in 1973 had been a major moment for the AAUG, galvanizing an “Awakening” across America for activists who opposed American support for Israel. However, the Arab oil embargo in response to the United States’ role in the conflict provided a new opportunity for American politicians, oil companies, and the Israeli lobby in the U.S. to scapegoat Arabs for a variety of economic woes.<sup>135</sup> Senator James Abourezk was elected to represent South Dakota in the U.S. Senate in 1973 during the midst of these rising anti-Arab sentiments.

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<sup>133</sup> *The Extradition of Ziad Abu Ein: A Dangerous Precedent for Americans*, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (Washington, DC: ADC, 1981).

<sup>134</sup> “Who is Ziad Abu Ein?” Feb. 13, 2015, *Middle East Eye*, accessed August 1, 2018. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/who-ziad-abu-ein-7242694>

<sup>135</sup> Melanie McAlister, *Epic Encounters*.

Abourezk's father, Charles, emigrated from Lebanon to South Dakota in 1898. The elder Abourezk began selling goods while traveling on foot, then peddled his wares with a horse and buggy, and finally saved up enough money to open a store in the small town of Wood on the Sioux Indian Reservation. Abourezk's father returned to Lebanon to marry in the village of Kfeir, began a family, and eventually moved his new wife and two children to join him in Wood. Jim Abourezk was born in this small town, which had a population of 100. While growing up on the Reservation, Abourezk witnessed the rampant racism that poor whites displayed toward even-poorer Indians. The Abourezk family was perceived as white in contrast to the Sioux, but Charles Abourezk had a good relationship with the Indian population and extended credit to the locals whenever they needed it.<sup>136</sup> Abourezk's recognition of his own racist perceptions of American Indians led to him becoming one of the foremost advocates for South Dakota Indians in his legal and political career.

Although Abourezk grew up immersed in his family's Lebanese culture and the Greek Orthodox Church, his parents and relatives did not concern themselves with political issues back home. Abourezk did not remember any discussions about Middle East politics, only talk of "the store business, the Orthodox Church and its leaders in New York, and the of the hardships endured by family members who remained behind in Lebanon."<sup>137</sup> Thus, he was not particularly aware of or concerned about issues facing the Arab world when he entered the U.S. House of Representatives in 1971. However, at the start of his term in the U.S. Senate, Abourezk decided to go on a tour of the Middle East in January 1973. During this trip Abourezk met numerous Arab leaders and civilians, including Clovis Maksoud, the Senior Editor of Egypt's *Al-Ahram*

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<sup>136</sup> Jim Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent: Memoirs of South Dakota and the U.S. Senate* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 1989), 7-13.

<sup>137</sup> Abourezk, *Advise & Dissent*, 18.

newspaper and a diplomat of the Arab League. While touring Lebanon with Maksoud, Abourezk mentioned that he believed Israel had a right to exist, to which Maksoud responded, “Under what terms?” Maksoud exposed Abourezk to the multiple dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict, leading Abourezk to take a more critical stance on the American relationship with Israel. After returning from the Middle East, he held a press conference to discuss his travels. Wolf Blitzer, who then worked for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), responded to Abourezk’s depictions of Israel with hostility. As editor of the AIPAC newsletter, Blitzer then published an article with the headline “Abourezk Sold Out to the Arabs.” Abourezk quickly became a consistent target of AIPAC; he likewise began to criticize AIPAC, and Israeli policies, at every opportunity.<sup>138</sup>

Abourezk served only one term as a senator, leaving Congress to practice law in 1979. However, in February 1980, the Abscam scandal broke into the public eye and prompted Abourezk to fight discrimination and prejudice against Arabs. Abscam was a sting operation in which FBI agent pretended to represent, and on occasion even impersonated, wealthy Gulf Arabs that offered money to politicians in return for favors. Seven congressmen, one senator, and five other public officials were convicted for bribery and conspiracy charges. Once the operation became public, members of both the media and FBI identified “Abscam” as short for “Arab Scam,” although officials later backtracked and argued that it was merely a truncated version of “Abdul Enterprises Scam.”<sup>139</sup> Regardless of the term’s etymology, Senator Abourezk believed that “the use of a phony Arab figure in Abscam was the direct result of a ten-year escalation, following the oil embargo, or an anti-Arab racism that was projected by the media and cheered

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Abourezk, Sioux Falls, SD, May \_\_, 2015.

<sup>139</sup> “Etymology of ‘Abscam’ Undergoes Revision,” *New York Times*, Aug 21, 1980.

on by the Israeli lobby.” In his mind, the result of this animus toward Arabs would be disastrous for all Americans, but especially for Arab-Americans.

Therefore, Abourezk decided to spearhead a campaign to fight racism against Arabs. In the mid-1970s, Abourezk had encouraged the National Association of Arab-Americans to start a committee on discrimination, but the business-oriented organization was not interested in taking action on such issues. That kind of work fell to the already overburdened AAUG. By 1980, however, Abscam galvanized a number of Arab-American leaders to form a new organization to combat racism against Arabs: The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC).<sup>140</sup> Jim Abourezk recruited Jim Zogby, who was an AAUG activist and the Palestine Human Rights Campaign’s chairman, to be a co-founder of the organization. Abourezk also brought on numerous AAUG members such as Abdeen Jabara for leadership positions. ADC’s own naming, with the “American” positioned before the “Arab,” signaled its unprecedented focus on the Arab population within the U.S.

Nevertheless, ADC’s work was inherently tied to issues in the Middle East, particularly Palestine. Many of the civil rights cases it took on involved individuals who faced immigration barriers and workplace discrimination because of their Arab heritage (especially if individuals were Palestinian) or advocacy for Palestine. It joined the AAUG’s efforts to prevent the deportation of Elias and Antoinette Ayoub and extradition of Ziad Abu Ein. Ziad Abu Ein’s case particularly commanded the ADC’s attention. Even after the U.S. State Department extradited Abu Ein to Israel in December 1981, ADC organized a meeting with the Undersecretary of State Morris Draper. The AAUG, Palestine Congress of North America, and National Association of Arab-American joined ADC in demanding “a full disclosure of the case, an apology to the Arab-

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<sup>140</sup> Abourezk, *Advise and Dissent*, 253-254.

American community, and the sending of American legal and medical observers” to Abu Ein’s trial in Israel. These groups, particularly the AAUG and ADC, closely covered developments in Abu Ein’s trial in an Israeli court and treatment in an Israeli prison. Felicia Langer, Abu Ein’s Israeli lawyer and a longstanding friend of the AAUG, reported that he was tortured in prison and that she had been forced to obtain an injunction to prevent the Israeli government from meting out “collective punishment” by demolishing Abu Ein’s family home.<sup>141</sup>

When Abdeen Jabara became president of the ADC in 1986, six years after its founding, he emphasized focusing on the Palestine issue because he understood that the defamation and stereotyping of Arabs stemmed “from the desire of the Zionists and their supporters in the United States to dominate the Middle East and to deny the Palestinians their rights.” It was for this reason, Jabara says, that Alex Odeh was assassinated. Odeh was Palestinian-American educator and activist who served as the director of the West Coast ADC for two years. On the morning of October 11, 1985, Odeh entered the ADC office and triggered a thirty-pound pipe bomb. Odeh died two hours after the blast.<sup>142</sup> Two weeks after the attack, the FBI implicated the Jewish Defense League, a right-wing domestic terrorist group, in the bombing. Jabara states, “they killed Alex Odeh because they didn’t want any kind of Arab-American organization to grow and they wanted to create fear among people. After Alex was killed,” Jabara notes, “we were dependent upon the FBI to solve the murder. Yet they were the ones that were...surveilling [Arab-Americans] and reporting people.” Jabara noted that after Odeh’s murder, ADC had a

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<sup>141</sup> “Defense of Ziad Must Continue,” *AAUG Newsletter*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 1982), 5.

<sup>142</sup> On Odeh’s murder, see the following: Richard Habib, “The Murder of Alex Odeh,” *The Link* 49, No. 3 (June-July 2016), <http://www.ameu.org/getattachment/cfb8c90a-8b85-4117-9c3a-b0629f8faeee/The-Murder-of-Alex-Odeh.aspx>; Abdeen Jabara’s interview on Law and Disorder Radio, November 25, 2013, <https://lawanddisorder.org/2013/11/law-and-disorder-november-25-2013>, and Esmat Elhalaby, “Los Angeles Intifada,” May 2017, unpublished paper. The murder case remains unsolved, although ADC, the NAACP, and a few members of Congress urged the FBI to reinstate their investigation in recent years. Ed Pilkington, “Renewed Push to Investigate Alex Odeh murder Begins 28 Years after Bombing,” *The Guardian*, Oct. 15, 2013.

“love-hate relationship with this government agency that was supposed to be assisting us.”

During the investigation, Jabara learned from the FBI that he, Jim Abourezk, and several other ADC activists were also on the “hit list” of right-wing Zionist organizations in the U.S.<sup>143</sup> The JDL and other right-wing Zionist groups often portrayed ADC as a Palestinian front organization. For instance, JDL’s chairperson Irv Rubin gloated about Odeh’s death to reporters, saying, “No Jew or American should shed one tear for the destruction of a P.L.O. front in Santa Ana or anywhere else in the world.”<sup>144</sup> ADC thus found itself tied to Palestine even though it did not initially set out to focus on the issue. Instead of distancing itself from the Palestinian question, however, ADC became an outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights and the rights of Americans to oppose Zionism. At great cost, ADC committed itself to the Palestinian cause under Jabara’s tenure and beyond.

Because ADC saw that its efforts to change perceptions about Arabs and affect American policy on Palestine were thwarted by AIPAC, it sought to mitigate the power of the Israeli lobby in the U.S. Thus, Abdeen Jabara and ADC’s legal experts orchestrated a court battle against AIPAC’s funding for American political campaigns. ADC conducted research and found plaintiffs to file a major lawsuit against the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for its failure to hold AIPAC accountable for violating campaign financing law. The suit argued that AIPAC had managed to exceed campaign donation limits by forming fifty-three smaller political action committees with nondescript names. Although the plaintiffs, who included former U.S. officials such as George Ball, Andrew Killgore, and Paul Findley, initially won the case in the U.S. Court

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<sup>143</sup> Author interview with Jabara, Nov. 16, 2015.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in Samuel Martinez, *International Migration and Human Rights: The Global Repercussions of U.S. Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 275.

of Appeals, the FEC appealed to the Supreme Court; the highest U.S. court then referred the matter back to the FEC as it was rewriting its campaign funding guidelines and the case ended.<sup>145</sup>

ADC's most successful early campaigns, however, combated negative cultural perceptions of Arabs. The stereotypes that emerged in the context of the 1973 Arab oil embargo had enabled the FBI's choice to use unethical "Arab oil sheikhs" in their sting operation. The ADC's first major campaign was decrying the use of Arabs in both the naming and coverage of Abscam. ADC complained that the trials that were conducted after Abscam became public "reflect poorly on the Arab people and perpetuate the old prejudices against the Arabs, even though they have no part in the charade concocted by the F.B.I."<sup>146</sup> Thus, when news outlets announced that they would broadcast the Abscam tapes in October 1980, the ADC issued a press release to urge the media to downplay the "Arab" dimension of the operation since no Arabs were actually involved. This release was carried by NPR and UPI wire service. The ADC also spoke to the three major news networks; while NBC was "not especially receptive to our intervention," ABC and CBS announced that they would note that the "Arab sheikh" was a fiction and be sensitive to Arab-American concerns.<sup>147</sup> ADC monitored media coverage of other Arab issues, such as a documentary entitled "The Unholy War," which ABC aired on *20/20* in April 1981. The ADC protested that program "ignored the history of Israeli terror against the Palestinian people and sought to intensify the propaganda war against Palestinians." After a letter writing campaign encouraged members to send thousands of messages to ABC, the ADC met with ABC executives and secured a spot on a new pilot feature entitled "Viewpoint." On this program, ADC had an opportunity to air its views on the Arab-Israeli conflict and "Arab

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<sup>145</sup> Author interview with Jabara, Nov. 16, 2015; Interview with Abdeen Jabara, Law and Disorder Radio, November 25, 2013; "AIPAC Accused of Violating Federal Election Laws," *Washington Post*, Jan. 13, 1989.

<sup>146</sup> "Etymology of 'Abscam' Undergoes Revision," *New York Times*, Aug 21, 1980.

<sup>147</sup> "ABSCAM" on TV and in the News, *ADC Report* 2 (December 1980), 5.



terrorism.” Although ADC celebrated its success in this instance, it continued to remain critical of “outrageously biased” ABC broadcasts.<sup>148</sup>

ADC also protested linguistic defamations of Arabs. In 1981, ADC began a campaign against Merriam-Webster including negative synonyms in its thesaurus entry for “Arab.” The entry was as follows:

**arab** *n* **1 syn** VAGABOND, clochard, drifter, floater, hobo, roadster, street arab,  
tramp, vag, vagrant  
**2 syn** PEDDLER, duffer, hawker, higgler, huckster, monger, mongerer, outcier,  
packman, vendor

Despite ADC’s appeals, G.W. Merriam Company defended its decision to use this entry well into the mid-1980s. ADC found more success with Roget’s Thesaurus, which also published an entry with negative synonyms for “Arab” in 1980. Its publishers promptly acquiesced to ADC pressure and changed the term in 1981.<sup>149</sup> Thus, the ADC found that its letter-writing and phone campaigns could have a large impact if properly coordinated. As of 2018, Merriam-Webster defines “street Arab” as a vagabond but does not include the above synonyms in its definition for “Arab.”<sup>150</sup>

ADC was wildly successful in reaching and cultivating a critical mass of activists across the United States to support its various campaigns during the 1980s. Chapters were established in cities that had active AAUG chapters, attracting both new members and the core activists who sustained AAUG chapters. Unlike the AAUG, which was primarily oriented around its national leadership, ADC was more successful at organizing local protests and communicating with

<sup>148</sup> “ABC’s Unholy War Against Arabs Continues,” ADC Report 8 (Summer’s End 1981), 3.

<sup>149</sup> *ADC Report* 8 (Summer’s End 1981), 10.

<sup>150</sup> “Street Arab.” Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed July 16, 2018. [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/street arab](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/street%20arab).

members. Under Zogby's leadership, ADC adopted electronic Mailgram "Action Alerts" to quickly communicate with members, who could then write to whichever elected official or media target they sought.

Although ADC continued to fight the defamation of and discrimination against Arabs, it became especially focused on transnational issues following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. ADC spearheaded a relief effort to "Save Lebanon," ultimately raising \$250,000 in aid.<sup>151</sup> It also discovered that the Israeli general Amos Yaron, who had been stationed at the Sabra and Shatila camps during the Phalangist massacre of Palestinian refugees, was appointed as a military attaché to the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. ADC led a campaign to have Yaron dismissed from his position at the embassy and even brought filed lawsuits against him on behalf of Sabra and Shatila victims for committing war crimes. Although U.S. courts dismissed the suits because Yaron had diplomatic immunity, the ADC campaign against the U.S. entertaining a war criminal resulted in him being recalled to Israel from his embassy post.<sup>152</sup>

The 1982 summer war also marked a turning point for the AAUG.

## Conclusion

1982 witnessed the Sabra and Shatila massacre in West Beirut and the expulsion of the PLO's leadership from Lebanon. Israel's invasion of Lebanon initially spurred an unprecedented amount of grassroots activism among Arab-Americans, who supported the AUG, ADC, and other humanitarian campaigns like never before. However, Gregory Orfalea argues that activism declined after the "shocking massacre of Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila by right-wing Lebanese Christians, the confusing turning on Arafat by the Syrians at Tripoli, which seemed to

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<sup>151</sup> Orfalea, 263.

<sup>152</sup> Author interview with Jabara, Nov. 16, 2015.

mimic Israel's own siege of Beirut, and the extraordinary terrorism and kidnapping of Americans and other Westerners that erupted from often faceless quarters."<sup>153</sup>

The conflict in Lebanon dominated AAUG conference proceedings, publications, and the newsletters. Edward Said and Fouad Moughrabi prefaced the Summer 1982 volume of the *Arab Studies Quarterly* with a statement about the destruction in Beirut, noting that "for our part, the situation calls for a full mobilization of resources to put an end to the cycle of death. It also calls for a major reevaluation of thinking and analysis." In the aftermath of the Israeli siege and indiscriminate bombing of Beirut, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod stated that he had experienced the sting of eviction for the second time, thirty-two years after he had initially left Jaffa.<sup>154</sup> Edward Said later reiterated Abu-Lughod's sorrow for Beirut, which had served as a surrogate home for Palestinians: "However much we go on about Lebanese corruption and superficiality and violence, we feel ourselves now to be sadly out in the cold. Beirut's genius was that it responded immediately to our needs as Arabs in an Arab world already gone repressive, drab, and insufferably mediocre."<sup>155</sup>

Reflecting on the 1982's impact on the AAUG, Ghada Talhami wrote:

In the early 1980s, we became intellectually and politically aware of the ramifications of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and their interjection into the Maronite-Palestinian struggle. We shared fully in the humiliation and anger resulting from Israel's first siege of an Arab capital, and we struggled emotionally to comprehend the tragic depth of the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Through the last-minute arrival of Dr. Fathi Arafat, President of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and brother of Yasir Arafat to the Montreal Convention of 1982, we were able to hear a first-hand account of the grim withdrawal of PLO fighters from Beirut. We were also regaled with stories of the heroic steadfastness of the civilian refugees who were left behind. It was truly a surreal moment when we felt at one with those fated to undergo another *nakba*, as well as, the horrifying experience of premeditated physical liquidation. The Montreal convention was perhaps the association's great moment of identification with the Palestinian struggle which we, here in the U.S., began to experience not only on an intellectual, but also on an emotional

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ahmed-Fararjeh, *Resistance, Exile, and Return*, 120-121.

<sup>155</sup> Said, *After the Last Sky*, 174.

level. We began to come to grips with the international dimension of this core national issue of the Arab World and its irresolvable nature. It was a period of pain, searching for answers, and sometimes of overwhelming despair.<sup>156</sup>

In their search for answers, many members of the AAUG turned elsewhere. The mass movement the AAUG represented largely disintegrated by the late 1980s as members left, or became less active in, the organization. Many of the AAUG's "old guard" went in separate directions to advocate for Palestinians and Arabs in ways they thought were most effective. For instance, while 1982 in particular encouraged Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Edward Said to engage in increased activism, their role in the AAUG diminished as they focused their work on other channels. Said retired as editor of the *Arab Studies Quarterly* in 1986 and became absorbed in other advocacy and academic work. Abu-Lughod was involved in an effort to create an Open University of Palestine and then joined other educational initiatives in the Middle East. Abdeen Jabara became engrossed in his activism in the ADC and led numerous delegations of the National Lawyers' Guild to the Middle East, which encouraged many members to be more critical of Israel and participate in legal advocacy for Palestinian rights.<sup>157</sup> In 1988, Elaine Hagopian and Naseer Aruri formed the Trans-Arab Research Institute to continue the kind of scholarly work on the Middle East that the AAUG had initiated but was no longer producing.

The AAUG's membership also declined because Arab-American communities fractured over political conflicts. According to Ghada Talhami, the Association's criticism of the Camp David Accords led many Egyptian members who had supported Anwar Sadat's unilateral move to withdraw from the organization. The divisiveness after Israel's invasion of Lebanon and the expulsion of the PLO in 1982 further resulted in an exodus of many Lebanese AAUG members.

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<sup>156</sup> Ghada Talhami, "A Cultural, Not a Political Lobby: The Mixed Legacy of a Grand Plan," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007), 131.

<sup>157</sup> Author interview with Jabara, Nov. 16, 2015. See also Box 12 of the Jabara Papers on the National Lawyers Guild correspondence and reports.

Talhami notes that “the association felt the impact of inter-Arab quarrels directly here in North America, as our dreams of nurturing a pan-Arab identity in exile suffered its greatest jolt with the substantial withdrawal of Lebanese and Egyptian members.” She concluded, “Having succeeded in implanting the Palestinian case in the consciousness of Third World intellectuals apparently did not mean that we have succeeded in transcending inter-Arab divisions, not even on an intellectual level.”<sup>158</sup>

Because the AAUG conceived its mission so broadly, it was perhaps inevitable that it would fall short of achieving its goals. The AAUG was unable to stem the tidal wave of anti-Arab sentiments that prevailed after 1967 and were exacerbated by every subsequent episode of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It could not impart enough knowledge to the larger American public to encourage them to vote for politicians who would combat the growing influence of Israel’s lobby. The vast majority of publications it produced would not meet the mainstream because of institutional obstacles that riddled the organization: its lack of funding, the overworking of its active members, and insufficient membership.<sup>159</sup>

Nevertheless, the post-1967 generation of activists engaged in unprecedented work, published prolifically, and facilitated a sense of belonging among disparate people who suffered from anti-Arab prejudice and felt distraught at the events occurring in the Middle East. Naseer Aruri, recalling the era after the 1967 war, believed that the AAUG ultimately brought Arabs immigrants to the U.S. and Americans born of Arab heritage together:

For the longest time, quite a number of us recent immigrants could not bring ourselves to admit we were Americans. When we referred to ourselves as Arab-Americans, we could

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Refer to some of the founders’ reflections, including Rashid Bashshur, “Unfulfilled Expectations: The Genesis and Demise of the AAUG,” and Elaine Hagopian, “Reversing Injustice: On Utopian Activism,” both in *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007).

almost hear the Arab part quite loud, while the American part following the hyphen was barely audible. Thus, we remained Arabs in America rather than Arab-Americans. However, our rights as U.S. citizens were compromised because of our ethnicity, and not simply because of our commitment to identity. Not only those of us who were born abroad had their rights as citizens compromised, but those in AAUG who enjoyed birth citizenship were hassled and seen by the powers as Arab more than American.

As Aruri's recollection demonstrates, transnational activism for Palestine and the Third World, and the backlash it inspired in the U.S., in many ways strengthened Arab-American identity.<sup>160</sup> Out of the ashes of the 1967 War arose organizations that were committed to Palestine and other anti-colonial movements in the Third World. These commitments also encouraged activists to engage in grassroots organizing to fight racism in the U.S. and engage with people of color, such as when the ADC participated in Jesse Jackson's "rainbow coalition." 1967 and subsequent moments in the Arab-Israeli conflict fostered the creation of a transnational intellectual generation that aligned itself with both the Palestinian revolutionary movement and the global south.

In 1993, Edward Said reflected that intellectual commitments are often tamed because intellectuals fear appearing too political or controversial. "You want the approval of a boss or authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; you hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board of a prestigious committee, and so to remain in the responsible mainstream."<sup>161</sup> Yet, many AAUG and ADC members withstood great criticism as continued to engage in their academic production and grassroots activism. In the AAUG, representatives of an Arab intellectual generation found like-minded individuals and created a community in exile. In the ADC, Arab-Americans built a large-scale grassroots organization that simultaneously challenged racism in the U.S. and supported Palestinian rights overseas.

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<sup>160</sup> Naseer Aruri, "AAUG: A Memoir," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 2007), 36.

<sup>161</sup> Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 100.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has shown that as early as 1924, emigrants from Greater Syria who settled in the U.S. were deeply engaged with the Palestine question. During every wave of immigration, Syrian-Americans maintained close ties with their homelands and engaged in transnational activism. This study challenges both assimilationist narratives of Arab-American identity formation and the oft-repeated adage that the Zionist lobby arose in the U.S. without any Arab opposition. On the contrary, as conflict in Palestine grew across the twentieth century, thousands of Arabic-speaking immigrants in the U.S. and their descendants sought to support the Palestinian national movement and counteract American support for Zionism. At the same time, immigrants navigated the complicated process of crafting identities that reflected both their adopted nation and the changing Middle Eastern states from which they had emigrated. They debated whether they were Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian, Arab, Arabic-Speaking, or a mixture of several of these identities. They also struggled to translate their ethnic and religious identities in a highly racialized American environment, where whiteness determined one's ability to become a naturalized citizen until 1952. Moreover, Syrian immigrants increasingly realized that regardless of their own self-conception, their association with the Arab world made them the object of scorn in the U.S. as support for Israel became a cornerstone of American foreign policy. In the process of engaging with the question of Palestine, Arab-Americans of different generations articulated political, racial, ethnic, and ecumenical identities across the twentieth century.

As I have shown through my analysis of the discourse about Palestine in the first English Syrian-American journal, the *Syrian World*, first-wave immigrants were not as divided upon sectarian lines as some scholars have assumed. Palestine provided an arena for unification

because diverse groups of immigrants could agree that British mandate had abused its power by supporting Zionism. Even if they were not Palestinian, immigrants ranging from Muslims born in Damascus to Maronites from Mount Lebanon also became concerned about Zionist expansion into their own homelands. These concerns encouraged a small but notable fraction of the immigrant population in the U.S. to engage in transnational activism to oppose Zionism. They testified before the U.S. Congress as early as 1922, hosted Arab leaders in the U.S., and spoke before international commissions that would determine the fate of Palestine and the post-Ottoman Arab World. Syrian-Americans formed the Arab National League in New York in 1936 not only to facilitate these transnational endeavors, but to educate average Americans about the danger that Zionism posed to secular democratic movements in the Arab World. Some of the most prominent diasporic Syrian literary figures, such as Ameen Rihani, engaged in tireless lecture tours and wrote numerous texts in order to combat the rising sway of Zionism over the American public. In doing so, these activist scholars, writers, professionals, and businessmen formulated an ecumenical model of Syrian-American identity that challenged religious, ethnic, and racial supremacy.

Although World War II dampened Syrian-American activism on Palestine, this dissertation has chronicled subsequent attempts to advocate for Palestine after the Allies won the war and the U.S. emerged as the only Western superpower. In 1944, Syrian-Americans continued the work that they had begun in the 1930s by forming the Institute of Arab American Affairs, the first organization to identify itself as Arab-American. Despite engaging in a flurry of activism before and after the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel, the IAAA ceased to operate in 1950. However, in the following decade, the Federation of Syrian-Lebanese American Clubs engaged in work that mirrored some of the IAAA's attempts to improve relations between



America and the Arab World. Through their engagement with the Federations, particularly the East Coast branch, many Syrian-Americans strengthened their ties with their ancestral homes and gained a new appreciation for the nascent Arab nationalist movement. The establishment of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS), a coalition of leftist, pro-Palestinian student groups at American universities, in 1953 further bolstered Arab nationalist thought in the U.S. The intensification of activism for Palestine from the 1940s to the 1960s also coincided with the rise of the term “Arab” over “Syrian.”

Finally, this dissertation has argued that in aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, a transnational Arab-American “intellectual generation” was born. The first major Arab-American organization to form after the 1967 War, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), faced two challenges. First, the Arab defeat exposed the ineptitude of the Arab states’ leadership; the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza dispossessed a new generation of Palestinians, which had far-reaching ramifications for Arabs across the Middle East and in diaspora. Second, Arab-Americans witnessed the explosion of anti-Arab sentiments in the U.S. as Israel, often perceived as the last bastion of democracy in the Middle East, became closely associated with American culture and identity. In response, the AAUG engaged in unprecedented educational and activist endeavors to promote the Palestinian case in the U.S.

The AAUG was a refuge for Arabs in the U.S. who were shocked by the losses of the Six Day War in 1967. It encouraged its members to engage in activism and intellectual output that would combat misinformation about the Arab World, particularly Palestine. While doing so, the AAUG sought to forge transnational connections overseas and bolster a sense of community among Arab-Americans. As intellectuals in the United States who were closely engaged with the Arab World, AAUG members did not claim to reflect the entire Arab-American community’s

views. Nonetheless, they engaged in transnational debates and projects that shaped Arab and Arab-American discourses on Arab nationalism, identity, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The AAUG was unique in its first decades because it positioned its advocacy for Palestine firmly alongside its commitments to anti-colonial movements in the Third World and anti-racist movements in the U.S. The transnational identities of AAUG members, even if they did not grow up in the Arab World, thus allowed them identify with both the decolonizing Third World and other minorities in the United States. This is a notable shift in self-identity given the historical efforts of early Syrian-Americans to dissociate themselves from people of color in order to represent themselves as white and gain access to US citizenship.

The dissertation has also chronicled the early years of the first Arab-American organization dedicated to civil rights: the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). ADC primarily sought to fight the defamation of Arabs in the U.S., but its mission was unquestionably affected by the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Because the issue of Palestine contributed to racialized American views of Arabs as backward extremists, Arabs in the U.S. who sought to fight defamation realized that they not only needed to combat negative perceptions of Arabs, but also oppose the Zionist lobby and support Palestinian rights abroad. By analyzing the AAUG and ADC, the final chapter demonstrates that 1967 and subsequent moments in the Arab-Israeli conflict fostered the creation of a transnational intellectual generation. This Arab-American generation aligned itself with the global south, people of color in the U.S., and the Palestinian revolutionary movement.

### **The Future of the pro-Palestinian Movement in the U.S.**

It has been sixty-one years since the 1967 War, seventy years since the 1948 *nakba*, and 101 years since the Balfour Declaration was issued. From the 1920s to the 1980s, Arab-American activists labored tirelessly under the belief that their work could combat the continued dispossession of Palestine and the West's disproportionate support for Zionism. The activists this dissertation discusses perhaps never imagined how much worse the plight of Palestinians would become in subsequent decades, or how the post-9/11 era would inaugurate an unprecedented rise in anti-Arab sentiments in the U.S. and American-led military excursions in the Arab World.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, these activists perhaps also never imagined the success that a new generation of activists would achieve in recent years in the fight to change Americans' minds about Palestine.

Between 1967 and 1982, pro-Palestinian intellectuals and activists largely realized that they could not place their hopes for liberation in the flawed Arab state system that had made the dispossession of Palestine possible. As Palestinian scholar and AAUG activist Ghada Talhami writes, "By 1982, we had shed some of our illusions as to the fraternal bonds of Arab intellectuals.... Perhaps the major obstacle to Palestinian liberation was not primarily the collusion of imperialist and Zionist forces, but also the very inherent divisiveness of the Arab state system itself." As early as the 1970s, activists began to see that the Arab League's economic boycott of Israel was riddled with loopholes and undercut by veiled attempts at economic cooperation.<sup>2</sup> The Camp David Accords of 1979 and the 1982 invasion of Lebanon

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<sup>1</sup> On the rise of anti-Arab racism after the September 11, 2001 attacks, see Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds., *Race and Arab-Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where it Comes from and What it Means for Politics Today* (Chicago, IL: Pluto Press, 2006), Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does it Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2008), and Louise Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab-American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Gil Feiler, *From Boycott to Cooperation: The Political Economy of the Arab Boycott of Israel* (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2011).

showed that the leaders of Arab states were unable and unwilling to defend the cause of Palestinians. The 1993 Oslo Accords demonstrated that even the Palestinian leadership would uphold occupation and abandon fundamental Palestinian demands in exchange for a modicum of power from the hegemonic Israeli state. Finally, any U.N. efforts to rein in Israeli occupation since 1967 have continually been blocked by Israel's closest ally, the United States.

In response to decades of Arab leadership abandoning the cause of Palestine, however, Palestinians and solidarity activists have spearheaded a new movement to create the conditions for liberation. As political scientists Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Abigail Bakan note, "In contrast to the failure of the United Nations effectively to sanction the Israeli state's defiance of international law, what could be seen as a 'United Nations from below' has taken the responsibility."<sup>3</sup> This activism from "below" has included the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other attempts at building international solidarity networks.

In 2005, representatives of Palestinian civil society – including social organizations, political parties, unions, and student groups – issued a call to boycott and divest from Israel, as well as impose international sanctions. In doing so, the coalition built on the work of the 2004 Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel and earlier calls for a comprehensive cultural and economic boycott.<sup>4</sup> 170 groups representing Palestinians under occupation, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Palestinian refugees in diaspora urged the following in their July 2005 statement:

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose

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<sup>3</sup> Abigail Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Palestinian resistance and international solidarity: the BDS campaign" *Race & Class* 51, No. 1 (June 2009), 49.

<sup>4</sup> "History," Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel, Dec. 21, 2008, [http://pacbi.org/pacbi140812/?page\\_id=2551](http://pacbi.org/pacbi140812/?page_id=2551).

embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.<sup>5</sup>

In the decade since the inception of the modern Palestinian BDS movement, activists and scholars have engaged in significant self-critique; they have questioned whether the movement's three demands (to dismantle the wall and the occupation of the territories taken in 1967, to recognize the rights of Arab citizens of Israel, and enable Palestinian refugees from 1948 to return) are ambitious enough. Many have criticized the fact that American activists often couch their appeals to Western allies in a liberal rhetoric that does not question the hegemony of the U.S. or the U.N., but instead focuses on reprimanding Israel for its "excesses," such as wars on Gaza and unruly settlers. By doing so, critics argue that modern activists have largely ignored Israel's fundamentally colonial nature; they also argue that by organizing based on the principles of international law, which the BDS call references, Palestinian solidarity discourse has devolved into a "question of rights" that challenges only the conditions – and not the existence – of occupation.<sup>6</sup> Although the Palestine BDS National Committee has at times reacted to such criticism as an "attack," members of the solidarity movement admit that "BDS alone cannot lead

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<sup>5</sup> "Palestinian Civil Society Calls for BDS," BDS Movement, July 9, 2005, <https://bdsmovement.net/call>.

<sup>6</sup> Mezna Qato and Kareem Rabie, "Against the Law," April 2014, Jacobin Magazine, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/04/against-the-law>. See also the New York City Students for Justice in Palestine, "The BDS Ceiling," October 4, 2015, <https://nycsjp.wordpress.com/2015/10/04/the-bds-ceiling/>; and Joshua Sperber, "BDS, Israel, and the World System," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, No. 1 (Autumn 2015), 8-23.

to a political transformation” that will “defeat the massive, US-sponsored system of Israeli oppression.”<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the debates around the methods and goals of the modern Palestinian resistance and solidarity movement, BDS has garnered the attention of growing numbers of Americans. Political scientists Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer argued in 2007 that the sway of the Israeli lobby is the principal reason that the U.S. provides Israel with “extraordinary material aid and diplomatic support.”<sup>8</sup> While many scholars have contested the notion that the lobby is the primary reason for American support of Israel, assorted Zionist lobby groups are increasingly concerned that American civilians, corporations, and educational institutions are beginning to divest from Israeli institutions, censure Israeli occupation practices, and reject the ideology of Zionism itself.

In January 2017, the Anti-Defamation League and the Reut Institute, an Israeli think tank, published a report entitled, “The Assault on Israel’s Legitimacy: The Frustrating 20X Question: Why is it Still Growing?” The report circled among Israeli lobbyist circles for months until it was leaked to the pro-Palestinian news site Electronic Intifada, which published it online. The ADL and the Reut Institute partnered in 2016 in order to combat the “delegitimization of Israel,” which their report defines as the “the singular negation of the right of the State of Israel to exist as the expression of the Jewish people’s right to national self-determination.”<sup>9</sup> The report identified the BDS movement as the “chief effort” to delegitimize Israel, but noted that even if

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<sup>7</sup> Palestinian Students’ Campaign for the Academic Boycott of Israel, Secretariat of Students’ Unions and Blocs – Gaza Strip, and Herak Youth Center, “BNC Statement: Palestinian Student Groups in Gaza Respond to Attacks on BDS by ‘NYC SJP,’” Oct. 8, 2015, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/palestinian-student-groups-gaza-respond-attacks-bds-%E2%80%9Cnyc-sjp%E2%80%9D>.

<sup>8</sup> Walt and Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> “The Assault on Israel’s Legitimacy: The Frustrating 20X Question: Why is it Still Growing?” ADL and the Institute by Reut, January 2017, p. 9, accessed July 20, 2018, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/leaked-report-highlights-israel-lobbys-failures>.

BDS was to become marginalized, the damage from delegitimization would only grow – particularly in the U.S. As such, it posed the “20X” question: “How can it be that the collective investment of the Jewish community in dealing with this challenge is estimated to be twenty-fold bigger over the past six years, yet results remain elusive?” The report estimated that Jewish American groups dedicated twenty times more resources to combating the delegitimization of Israel in 2016 than they had in 2010. “Nonetheless,” it continued, “the challenge and the fundamental legitimacy of Israel, presented among other aspects, by BDS campaigns, and the collateral rise in anti-Semitism, are growing around the world.”<sup>10</sup>

The report recognizes that a major reason for the rise of American antipathy toward Israel is the conservative Likud government’s own actions, including deadly excursions into Gaza, human rights abuses, and the construction of new settlements in the occupied territories; it did not, however, recommend a change in Israeli policy. Instead, the ADL-Reut report identified the shortcomings of the Israeli lobby in order to encourage it to ramp up its efforts against BDS. It lauded the fact that twenty-one states in the U.S. had passed anti-BDS legislation while lamenting that support for Israel was increasingly seen as a right-wing issue in the U.S., which had created an “unfavorable zeitgeist around Israel.” As such, it blamed the rise of the discourse of intersectionality for allowing activists to “frame the Palestinian struggle against Israel as part of the struggle of other disempowered minorities, such as African-Americans and the LGBTQ community.” Similarly, it denounced the “framing of Israeli-Arabs as a disenfranchised indigenous population that has been marginalized by legislation, government policies, and public discourse,” another linkage that has resulted from the “trend of intersectionality.” Moreover, it recognizes that a growing number of American Jews have become critical of Israel and are

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2.

alienated by the Jewish state, which has encouraged many to flock to organizations such as Jewish Voices for Peace.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Israeli lobby continues to outspend supporters of Palestine in the U.S., and the BDS movement's moderate success has not hindered Israeli occupation and disenfranchisement at all, this report is remarkable because it recognizes that the tide in American public opinion on Israel is beginning to change because the Palestinian cause is attracting new allies. Once could argue that the alliances that the OAS, AAUG, and ADC built during the 1960s and beyond paved a way for modern alliances that Palestinians have built with anti-Zionist Jews, people of color, and sexual minorities in the U.S. The fact that Arab-Americans have increasingly identified as a marginalized group – especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks – and not members of the white majority has certainly bolstered such linkages. As Chapter Four shows, AAUG and ADC activists avowedly supported the movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction the South African apartheid regime. They built some of the earliest coalitions between Blacks and Arabs in the U.S. Through their engagement with American activists opposed to South African apartheid, growing numbers of Arab-Americans embraced imitating the South African BDS movement to boycott global corporations, organizations, and unions that have enabled Israeli occupation.<sup>12</sup>

Although pro-Palestinian activism in the U.S. during the twenty-first century has faced innumerable challenges, its successes have come after a century of trial and error. As the late Naseer Aruri wrote in 2007, pro-Palestinian activists have begun to recognize that they cannot achieve justice in Palestine with “mere public relations and clever lobbying.” After decades of organizing, Aruri concluded:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5, 13, 16-17, 21-25.

<sup>12</sup> “Arab-American Community News,” *AAUG Newsletter* (March 1974), 7



We need to stop looking for fairness, much less justice from the West or the US, be it their media or governments. We need to stop playing their game. Nearly a century of the same side-show is far too long to have not learned the simple lessons: disband the Oslo process and its various apparatuses, including the PA [Palestinian Authority]; confront all the reasons which sway the Arab society towards dependency; refuse to accept outmoded blemishes such as apartheid and re-colonization anywhere in the Arab world in the age of de-colonization, insist that the Arab world can no longer lag behind in the world advance towards democracy, development and public security. Could things be any worse than they are now? Having played the West's game, shaking up the dynamic is not only desirable but a practical necessity as well....

For the sake of the people, we can no longer afford to have a group of people who merely seem to want to sit at a table in Washington, or seek a photo opportunity at the White House. We need to re-conceptualize and out-organize - not simply out-talk and pretend to out-fight the protagonist - the two endeavors in which we scored a colossal failing.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that a relatively small population of Arab immigrants have ever been able to sit at the table in Washington, D.C. is a testament to the work of many generations of Arab-American activists. But as Aruri noted, symbolic participation in the American political sphere has not brought about justice for Palestinians. In the view of Aruri and many other Arab-American activists of his generation, only a movement that engages in self-critique and utilizes methods that challenge the structures of occupation can change the fate of Palestine. While a century of transnational activism has in no way solved the crisis, Arab-Americans who have advocated for Palestine have had an important legacy. They were sometimes the lone Arab voices representing the Palestinian cause in the political and cultural landscape of the U.S. They formed groups that persist in fighting anti-Arab discrimination today. They also facilitated massive shifts in academia, forcing scholars to challenge Orientalist thought and engage in the postcolonial turn. Through their engagement with the Palestine question, immigrants from the region that was once known as Syria forged multifaceted identities that provided space for both their Arab cultural heritage and their adopted American nationality. While doing so, these Arab-

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<sup>13</sup> Naseer Aruri, "AAUG: A Memoir," 45-46.

American activists opposed racist structures in the U.S. and supported liberation movements in the Middle East.

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