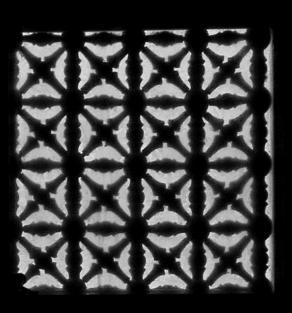
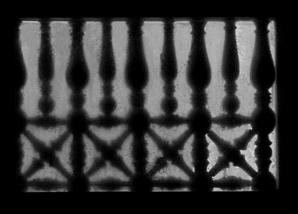


COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTERS | AMMAN

# COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY TIES WITH ARABS & THE ARAB WORLD







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# COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTERS | AMMAN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY TIES WITH ARABS & THE ARAB WORLD

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# **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

i	FOREWORD
ii	INTRODUCTION
vi	ABSTRACTS
1	THE COLUMBIA(N) GAZE: READINGS OF THE ARAB WORLD LIDIA HELOU
27	OVERCOMING ORIENTALISM: AMONG COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S EARLIEST ARAB ALUMNI KEVIN PETERSEN
43	THE ARAB WORLD ON LOW STEPS: COLUMBIA CAMPUS CULTURE AMIDST 20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CONFLICTS EMILY KOHN
67	A MAN OF MULTIPLE SELVES: EDWARD SAID & HIS LEGACY AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IONA TAIT
77	FEMINISM ACROSS THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE: COLUMBIA ACADEMICS AS BUILDERS OF THE 'BRIDGE' SUHANI CHAUDHRY
89	TEACHERS COLLEGE AND EDUCATION REFORM IN JORDAN ALAA QAROONI
99	THE POWER OF PROXIMITY: HOW THE COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTER IN AMMAN EMPOWERED COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH & SUPPORT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

**SOPHIA FULTON** 

# **FOREWORD**

This collection of student essays, a project arising from Columbia Global Centers | Amman, thoughtfully explores facets of Columbia University's ties with Arabs and the Arab world. The Amman Center was one of the first of the University's Global Centers, established to expand research and education, promote cultural exchange and understanding, and engage more fully with global partners. This publication exemplifies this mission. The students have researched and explored issues both historical and contemporary, across a wide geographic terrain, including Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and other regions.

Each student selected for the yearlong project identified their own research topic and, under the supervision of the Columbia Global Centers | Amman, interviewed key figures and investigated and interpreted texts found in archives, databases, and libraries. The result is unique scholarship that captures, preserves, and expands upon the University's complex historical relationship with the Middle East and covers topics as diverse as Orientalist thinking, feminism across cultures, to how events in the Arab world have intertwined with campus culture.

When Columbia Global Centers | Amman opened in 2009, Jordan offered vast opportunities for research and engagement, and provided easy access to the rest of the Middle East. From the outset, the Amman Center has established productive partnerships that benefit students, researchers, scholars, and society at large. Its ongoing alliances with the ministries of Planning and International Cooperation, Social Development, Higher Education and Scientific Research, and Health, along with numerous local, national, and international organizations, have had an enduring impact on child and family welfare, sustainable development, juvenile justice, poverty alleviation, teacher preparation, scientific research, public health, and other areas.

This publication demonstrates that Columbia Global Centers | Amman provides students opportunities to broaden their education beyond the confines of the lecture hall. They are engaging with academics, experts, and practitioners, and have cast a critical eye on decades of history, reconciliation, and acceptance. They address the preconceptions and biases that the west—which of course includes Columbia University—attaches to Arabs and the Arab world. As such, by documenting and analyzing the University's role and impact, these students have furthered the mission of the Columbia Global Centers: exchanging knowledge and sharing experiences in order to create better understanding.

This work is the embodiment of the Columbia ethos of the student as an active participant and global citizen. We thank these scholars for their contributions to scholarly research, and to improving cross-cultural understanding.

### **SAFWAN M. MASRI**

Executive Vice President for Global Centers and Global Development, Columbia University *June 2022* 

# INTRODUCTION

# THE COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTERS | AMMAN LAUNCH

Columbia Global Centers | Amman was established in 2009 as one of the first Columbia Global Centers - a major initiative launched by Columbia University to expand its international presence. The Center was launched under the Patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah and was created as a response to Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger's realization that Columbia needed to learn more about the world around it and engage more fully with global partners.

The launch event, held on March 22, 2009, drew more than 200 participants from around the world and featured panel discussions by internationally renowned speakers. It represented a major announcement to the regional and international academic community about the creation of the Columbia Global Centers and the Amman Center's foundation in the Middle East.

In addition to keynotes by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah, Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger, and Professor Safwan M. Masri, speakers included:

- Lisa Anderson, Provost of the American University in Cairo (from 2008 2011)
- Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of Columbia University's Earth Institute (from 2002 2016)
- Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Arab Studies, Columbia University
- Jim Muir, BBC's Middle East Correspondent
- Rajenda K. Pachauri, Chairman of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Discussions were organized around several topics such as environmental sustainability and the potential impact U.S. former President Barack Obama would have on the Middle East. The launch helped draw international media coverage from outlets such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about the establishment of the Global Centers.



Courtyard reception during the Columbia Global Centers | Amman launch on March 22, 2009



Panel session during Columbia Global Centers | Amman launch activities. *In the photo*: the late Peter Awn, former Dean of School of General Studies and Director of Middle East Institute, Naif Al-Mutawa, the Serial Entrepreneur and Clinical Psychologist Naif Al-Mutawa, and Prof. Safwan M. Masri *(from left to right)* 

The Center also hosted the first-ever Middle East Alumni Symposium in March 2009, in collaboration with the Columbia Alumni Association. The event included panel discussions, networking events, dinners hosted by alumni, and a trip to Petra. Panel sessions focused on themes such as media perspectives on the Middle East, sustainability and consumption, and Islam in the 21st Century. The symposium helped strengthen the University's connections to alumni throughout the region, increase awareness about the Global Centers among members of the Columbia community, and provided a foundation for ongoing alumni engagement at the Center. This network was a base of support for the Center's activities and helped broaden connections to potential partners in the Gulf and throughout the Levant.



Professor Monette Zard, Director of the Program on Forced Migration and Health (PFMH) at Columbia, in discussion on the research study *In My Own Hands: A Medium-Term Approach Towards Self-Reliance and Resilience of Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan*, a collaboration between Durable Solutions Platform and PFMH at the Columbia Global Centers I Amman on February 6, 2020.



The Columbia Organization of Rising Entrepreneurs (CORE) High School Social Entrepreneurship Summer Workshop in August 2018, as part of the Columbia Global Centers | Amman's Soraya Salti Youth for Youth Series.

At the time of the launch, the Center was already a recognized institution committed to the advancement of scholarship and had started to deliver impact already through a number of programs, research initiatives, and partnerships. For almost two years prior, Teachers College had been involved in upgrading the skills of Jordanian public school teachers, a partnership that ultimately led to the creation of the Queen Rania Teacher Academy. The Graduate School of Business formed an alliance with the Young Presidents' Organization to offer a portfolio of executive education programs. Faculty from Columbia's School of Social Work had already offered the first in a series of courses to nearly 100 Jordanian social workers. This was the genesis of what would become one of the Center's flagship programs, the *Jordan Social Work Education for Excellence Program* (JSWEEP), a collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development and a number of other local entities to support the establishment of the social work profession in Jordan and build the capacity of a robust cadre of frontline workers and supervisors.

# **ABOUT THE COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTERS | AMMAN**

The Amman Center serves as a hub for programs and educational initiatives throughout the Middle East; providing Columbia faculty and students with opportunities to collaborate with partners from the region to expand their research and scholarship, but also as a conduit for knowledge exchange and skill development with local and regional academics, experts and practitioners. The programming has revolved around a number of focused themes that include:

### **ARCHITECTURE**

Studio-X Amman Lab (2009 - 2021), a joint initiative by Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (GSAPP) and the Amman Center, operated as a regional platform for conversations and research in architecture and experimental design in the Arab region, dedicated to investigating the future of cities.

# **ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION**

In collaboration with a wide range of local, regional, and international institutions, the Amman Center works on thematic areas ranging from language and archaeology to film and history.

### **CLIMATE**

Through interdisciplinary partnerships with Columbia University, the Amman Center brings together local and regional experts, academics and practitioners to reflect on climate-related challenges and solutions in the MENA region, close knowledge gaps, and find modalities to influence policy and programming.

### **ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND YOUTH**

With the support of Columbia Engineering and the Columbia Business School, the Amman Center develops programs in Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco to nurture entrepreneurial culture and innovation among young people in their pursuit of developing business ventures through a unique model based on supporting a national and international peer network of shared learning, knowledge advancement through mentor development, and startup exposure.

### **FORCED MIGRATION**

The Amman Center is a hub on forced migration and displacement at both an academic and policy level. This is achieved by partnering with operational actors to set research agendas and produce evidence-based data, providing a neutral convening space to engage decision makers in policy debates directly with operational partners, building capacity of humanitarian actors, providing scholarship opportunities for refugee students on campus, and offering fellowships for emerging displaced scholars at the Center.

### **GEOPOLITICS**

Strategically positioned in the Middle East, the Amman Center has the advantage of drawing from the diverse array of regional socio-political structures. The Center engages with experts and scholars to advance research and discussions on the intersection of historical and current affairs, international relations and the protection of human rights, as well as power dynamics among religion, society, and politics.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH**

Partnering with the Mailman School of Public Health (MSPH) and the Columbia School of Nursing, the Amman Center continues to build local and regional capacity with local and international institutions in health, nutrition, and child protection by developing new partnerships, offering training workshops to address current gaps, providing technical assistance, and supporting operational research.

### **SOCIAL WORK**

Over the past decade, the Amman Center partnered with the Columbia School of Social Work on several projects such as skills development and capacity building programs, professionalizing the occupation of social work in Jordan, institutionalizing juvenile diversion and foster care programs within the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development, monitoring and evaluating programs to improve quality of social work interventions, and advancing knowledge through research and the production of evidence-based data to inform policy.

# ABOUT THE COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTERS

The Columbia Global Centers promote and facilitate the collaborative and impactful engagement of the University's faculty, students, and alumni with the world, to enhance understanding, address global challenges, and advance knowledge and its exchange. The Global Centers, as envisioned by President Lee C. Bollinger, were founded with the objective of connecting the local with the global, to create opportunities for shared learning, and to deepen the nature of global dialogue.

The nine Global Centers are located in Amman, Beijing, Istanbul, Mumbai, Nairobi, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, and Tunis. This network forms the core of Columbia's global strategy, which is to expand the University's ability to contribute positively to the world by advancing research and producing new knowledge on the most important issues confronting our planet.

# **ABSTRACTS**

# P. 1 THE COLUMBIA(N) GAZE: READINGS OF THE ARAB WORLD

**LIDIA HELOU** | Dual Master of Arts/Master of Sciences in International and World History at Columbia University joint with the London School of Economics, Class of 2020.



Quran - Opening pages (Sura 1 and Sura 2), Accessed August 4, 2021, Photograph, Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions Undated & unsigned (possibly 1600-1800 CE).

Exploring Columbia University's history with Arabic script and the Arab world begins with an analysis of the late-nineteenth-century fascination with the "Orient" and the implications of Columbia's reading, or *misreading*, of Arabic texts. Next, a focus on Philip Hitti, Columbia alumnus and precursor of Arab Studies, uncovers a pivotal moment in Columbia's relation to Arabic textuality and its evolution. Tracking Columbia's gaze on the concept of the Arab world and its reading of it subsequently examines the different routes of study taken at the University since Hitti. The trajectory Columbia followed to be a leader of postcolonial thought is narrated and includes the way it achieved this progression from having first been unable to read its own collections to eventually becoming home to a constellation of scholars and thinkers of the Arab World.

# P. 27 OVERCOMING ORIENTALISM: AMONG COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S EARLIEST ARAB ALUMNI

**KEVIN CARL PETERSEN** | Bachelor of Arts in Economics with a concentration in Modern European Intellectual History from the School of General Studies, Class of 2022.

Throughout the twentieth century, Orientalist thinking largely obscured the diversity of Columbia University's international students from the Middle East. To help correct this past trend, this paper highlights the political, religious, and gender diversity that was present among Columbia's earliest Arab alumni through the life stories of Khalil Abdallah Totah, Mohammed Fadhel Al-Jamali, and Alice Mitri Kandalaft. Additionally, I show how Columbia University became more cosmopolitan, in part, because of the persistent presence of these students on campus. By telling these stories, the monolithic characterization of "Oriental" students so commonly used throughout the past century is challenged, in order to restore the individuality of the Arab students that Orientalism denied.



Harry Almond, Al-Jamali and Sarah Powell Wedding Picture, 1933, from the Al-Jamali Family Collection, 1993, Photograph, Iraqi Statesman: Portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali.

# P. 43 THE ARAB WORLD ON LOW STEPS: COLUMBIA CAMPUS CULTURE AMIDST 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CONFLICTS

**EMILY KOHN** | Bachelor of Arts Double Major in Political Science and Linguistics from Columbia College, Class of 2023.



Patrick Schultz, Rally for Peace: Over 700 Columbia Students Marched to the U.N., 1991, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

Three key periods of Middle Eastern twentieth-century history are presented through the lens of Columbia Uni-versity students to shed light on how events in the Arab World became intertwined with campus culture. Using multimedia archives from *The Columbia Daily Spectator*, the University's oldest daily student paper, along with university reports, Columbia student life during the formative eras of the Arab world's history is reconstructed. Columbia has been home to protests, speeches by prominent leaders, celebrations, fights, controversies, and more. The three eras of 1919-1939, 1955-1975, and 1990-2010 come together to paint a portrait of how the Arab world found its way onto campus and how students have engaged with these issues over the decades.

# P. 67 A MAN OF MULTIPLE SELVES: EDWARD SAID AND HIS LEGACY AT COLUMBIA

**IONA TAIT** | Dual Master of Arts/Master of Sciences in International and World History program at Columbia University joint with the London School of Economics, Class of 2023.

Elevated to an academic celebrity during his time as Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, Edward Said was one of the most renowned public intellectuals of the past century. His reputation extended far beyond the confines of Columbia: his 1978 *Orientalism*, an examination of the 'Orient' as an imperialist construct, catapulted him to fame. He was also a celebrated essayist, a critic of U.S. foreign policy, and an advocate for the Palestinian cause — all within the public sphere. This paper will focus, however, on his legacy at Columbia, examining his secular humanist values within the context of academic freedom as well as the strong imprint his increased interest in Middle Eastern politics and history left on academic life at Columbia. Moreover, this paper will examine how his political engagement was not without its ironies - like many parts of his life.



Jean Mohr, Edward Said with Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 1986, Photograph, Getty Images.

# P. 77 FEMINISM ACROSS THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE: COLUMBIA ACADEMICS AS BUILDERS OF THE 'BRIDGE'

**SUHANI CHAUDHRY** | Visiting Student completing a non-degree program at Columbia College, Bachelor of Arts in Social Anthropology from the London School of Economics, Class of 2022.



Lila Abu-Lughod, Writing Women's Worlds (15th Anniversary Edition), 2008, Book Cover, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Feminism has evolved in both academia and public narrative over the last five decades. Several academics at Columbia have not only played a role in, but galvanized, this metamorphosis. Edward Said, Lila Abu-Lughod, Nathalie Handal, and various others have brought perspectives of their diverse disciplines and shed light on the disjuncture between how women from the Middle East are perceived and what their lived realities are. Their contributions in building a metaphorical bridge between the East and West contributed to breaking down polarizations and essentializations. They have laid the brickwork for the transnational feminism of tomorrow and their work paints a picture of progress and egalitarianism - work that demands recognition for its contemporary relevance.

# P. 89 TEACHERS COLLEGE AND EDUCATION REFORM IN JORDAN

**ALAA QAROONI** | Dual Master of Arts in Islamic Studies and Muslim Cultures from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Class of 2023.

Teachers College has enjoyed a historical connection to the Middle East since its inception, hosting many academics and educators from the region who have gone on to be influential figures worldwide. With the launch of the Columbia Global Centers Amman in 2009, Teachers College was able to be more involved in advancing education in the Middle East by initiating the School Network Learning Project through its Cons-ortium for Policy Research in Education, in partnership with the Queen Rania Teacher Academy in Jordan. The project sought to build a network of schools that are linked by the principles of collaboration, professional development, and research-based instruction. It reached almost 3,000 educators and school leaders upon its conclusion in 2015, and implemented a sustainable educational model that I argue has the potential to last for years to come.



Columbia Global Centers / Amman Headquarters, Photograph, Columbia University.

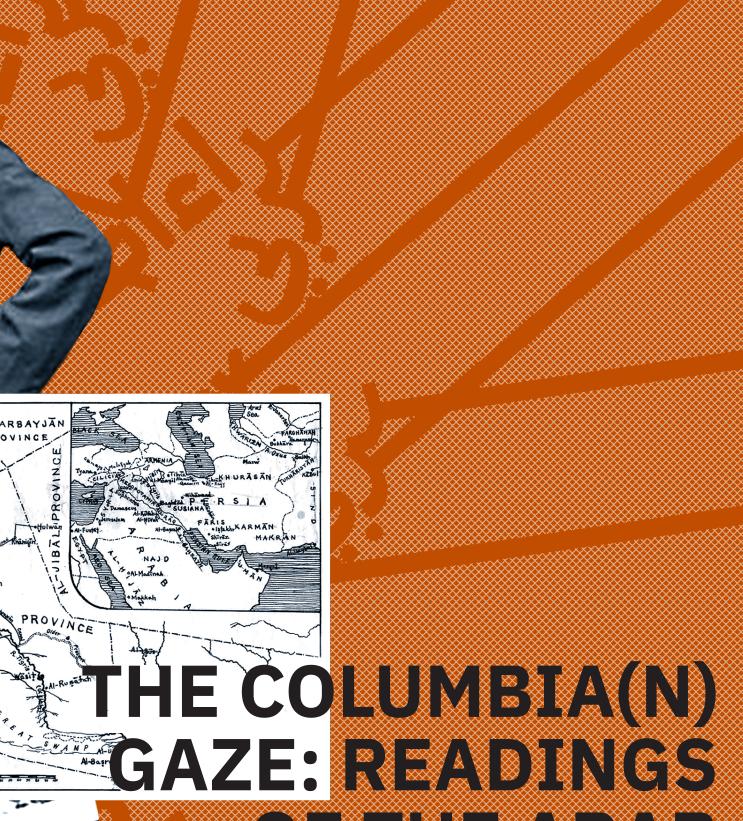
# P. 99 THE POWER OF PROXIMITY: HOW THE COLUMBIA GLOBAL CENTER IN AMMAN EMPOWERED COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH AND SUPPORT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

**SOPHIA FULTON** | Master of Public Administration (International Security Policy and the Middle East) from the School of International and Public Affairs, Class of 2023.



Adeline Guerra, Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan - Oxfam, Photograph, CBS News.

Proximity to a crisis sometimes matters most in meeting humanitarian needs. Columbia University's ties to the Middle East, including physical proximity through Columbia Global Centers Amman, allowed faculty and students to respond effectively to crises, such as the Syrian civil war. Faculty have used this network to develop culturally aware and effective policy recommendations and programs. This includes the formation of multi-year Columbia-led projects to support Syrian refugees in collaboration with partners on the ground in the region, such as the *Impact of Separation on Refugee Families* report and the Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students. These projects and their impact serve as models for academics, practitioners, and individuals hoping to contribute to humanitarian causes effectively and positively.



OF THE ARAB
WORLD

LIDIA HELOU

# THE COLUMBIA(N) GAZE: READINGS OF THE ARAB WORLD

"Arabic is not intrinsically more difficult. It's just different," said Columbia alumnus and former lecturer Professor Philip K. Hitti (1886-1978, Ph.D. Columbia) in a 1971 interview with Aramco. Philip Hitti's life mission had been to rebrand Arabic as a pedagogical tool and popularize the teaching of both the language and the History of the Arabs, the namesake of his influential 1937 book.<sup>2</sup> Neither a region nor a period, the "Arab world" escapes definition and espouses its own polysemy. This paper takes Hitti's insight to occasion a literary promenade that tracks Columbia's gaze on the concept and its reading of it. This exploration starts in the Butler Library stacks with Columbia's "hidden" manuscript collections, makes stops between Beirut and Morningside Heights at biographical crossroads before landing in Amman for a contemporary observation of Columbia's ability to promote and produce knowledge that does not reify a region's or language's identity.

Researching the notions of a Columbia(n) gaze and how Columbia scholars have read the Arab world inform this paper's tripartite structure, the first part of which explores Columbia's Arabic manuscript collections, and specifically, the way Arabic script was read, or misread, from the late 1890s to the mid-twentieth century. During this period, Columbia's leading position in Middle Eastern Studies depended on the accumulation of *materia arabica* and the late nineteenth-century philological quest for the "original" or "asli." Hence, the first section analyzes how Columbia has treated, *mis-cataloged*, and defined those manuscripts, often conflating categories such

as religion and language, aesthetics and text. The second act follows Professor Philip K. Hitti's career as the inaugural moment that emancipated the Arab world from its broader parent field: Semitic Studies. This focuses on Hitti's time at Columbia and the way the institution inspired both his *opus magnum* and a subsequent generation of Levantine students and scholars. Finally, the third part looks at the multiplication of loci for Arab Studies at Columbia and the diversification of Arab thought on campus. This last section explores the political origins of research institutes and initiatives, their trajectories, and attempts at de-orientalizing the study of Arabic-speaking communities.

# **READING THE ARAB WORLD**

An atmosphere of literary exotica and mystique shrouds Columbia's "hidden" collections: the Arabic script manuscripts.

The adjective "hidden" has often been used in this context to refer to a collection of over 800 manuscripts collected between the 1890s and the 1960s at Columbia through the travels of peregrinating academics caught in the throes of Orientalistic ambitions. However, several of these collectors could not read Arabic, as underlined by Columbia University librarian Jane Siegel. Columbia's history with the Arab World is, hence, also a history of Arabic literature long locked in arabesques. The preclusion of a readership for these manuscripts in the early years of Columbia's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> John R. Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti," *Aramco World*, 22, no. 4, 1971, 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field", in *The Art* 

Bulletin, 85(1), 2003, 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> *Asli* is a transliteration of the Arabic word أصلــيّ, which means "original."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Jane Siegel, in discussion with Lidia Helou, March 2021.



**Figure 1.** Columbia -- Mr. Dhalla, H.Y. Clews, Djelal Munif Bey and A.V. Williams Jackson. June 3, 1914, Photograph, The George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

Oriental Studies raises the question of agency and propriety when it comes to the act of reading a text. Can someone own a book they cannot read? By following this train of thought, this paper examines how the accessibility of a document is intrinsically linked to its visibility, its presence on a catalog, and what stakes its occlusion might entail. As Siegel eloquently pointed out, "Librarians make texts visible." 5 Crossing geographies, time periods, and academic borders, Columbia's Arabic-script manuscripts have by now lived many lives. Their most recent milestone is the collaborative "Manuscripts of the Muslim World" project, which aims to digitize over 500 manuscripts, mostly written in Arabic script, "from the Islamicate World at large." With this end in sight, the following section follows Columbia's voyage through Arabic and an Arab World long stuck between the pages of unread astronomy treatises and illuminated Quran pages.

### **GENESIS**

Columbia's first Arabic teacher was the German Lutheran pastor Johann Christoff Kunze, who taught "Oriental Languages" from 1784 until 1799 when the state of New York discontinued an annual grant for salaries, which forced Columbia Trustees to terminate Kunze's professorship. In his History of Columbia's Department of Semitic Languages, its founder, Prof. Arthur Jeffrey, remembered pastor Kunze and described the long hiatus that Arabic teaching at Columbia went through from 1799 to the 1880s.

While in 1857, the newly established School of Letters required that instruction of Oriental languages be provided "as far as possible," Arabic remained highly peripheral. Through a renewed Biblical interest in the "East," Semitic languages, including Arabic, were established as courses of instruction between 1886 and 1887 with the hiring of Columbia College alumni, Dr. Richard J. H. Gottheil and Dr. Abraham. V. Williams Jackson. Gottheil was a specialist in Semitic languages, while Jackson taught Indo-Iranian languages. Their lectures were to be "kept free from all religious bias" and pre-approved by the College's president. Both professors were active members of the American Oriental Society (AOS),

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Siegel, in discussion with Lidia Helou, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "Manuscripts of the Muslim World," *OPenn*, accessed June 28, 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Jacques Barzun & Arthur Jeffery, "The Department of Semitic Languages," in A History of the Faculty of Philosophy, Columbia University, 1957, 185..

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Jeffery, "The Department of Semitic Languages,"185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and Gottheil served as the American School of Oriental Research director in Jerusalem in 1909-1910 before being considered for the role of ambassador to Constantinople by President Woodrow Wilson. 12 Gottheil's diplomatic-academic endeavors opened the path for Columbia's presence in the region and our current consideration of the proximity between academics & policymakers. The professor's attachment to this region extended its branches into his family tree through his marriage to Beirut-born Emma Léon, an important figure of New York's academic landscape owing to her acclaimed lectures on French Literature. 13 This connection highlights Columbia's nascent relation with members of the Arabic-speaking diasporas, including Levantine historian Philip K. Hitti and Iranian scholar Reverend Abraham Yohannan, both students of Gottheil and Jackson.14

### **ARMCHAIR ORIENTALISM**

Columbia's signature lies in its level of self-critique, so this paper similarly does not shy away from a healthy dose of post-orientalist introspection as well. In the quest for manuscripts and curiosities, Jackson and Gottheil traveled across the Near East, bolstering the formation of an impressive collection but also precipitating the attendant displacement of the archive from the region. Their status as nomadic intellectuals tied them to the cliché of an "armchair scholar of Oriental languages" who, "armed with a dictionary[...], could decipher all that was important about the culture and character of Orientals."15 This quest for absolute expertise in world religions and affairs characterizes the late-nineteenth-century transformation of global empires marked by their growing propensity towards research for textual truths and philological origins. 16 Gottheil and Jackson were, in this regard, truly men of their epoch. Their academic ranks gave them an often ill-founded legitimacy to comment on political events and cultural shifts outside the realm of their philological expertise. A fascinating article in a 1910 September issue of *The* Columbia Daily Spectator narrated Gottheil's "visit of the Orient": it revealed the professor's views on "migrations to the Holy land," his perspective on The Young Turks, Germany's far-sighted support to the group, and Egypt's "recognition" of Britain's alleged role in advancing the nation's progress. 17 Gottheil's ability to write with the authority of a political expert while being a philologist illustrates the dangerous permeability between expertise and presumption

that often characterized the armchair Orientalists Professor Edward Said would later expose. In a similar *Spectator* article published the following month, Jackson was praised for a conference on "Oriental development," whose title itself could have ignited the spark of postcolonial studies.<sup>18</sup> These monolithic readings of the Orient enmeshed past and contemporary times together and tainted Gottheil and Jackson's curricular aspirations with a teleological narrative of progress.

Gottheil believed that the knowledge of "these cultures" was not only necessary to the formation of young minds, but that it was also exclusively enclosed within manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> This stance museumified the study of Arabic-writing societies and entailed the apparent denigration of contemporary Arabic works in Columbia's collection in favor of older texts.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 2.** William J. Whittemore, *Portrait of A.V. Williams Jackson by His Friend, the Artist William J. Whittemore* (1860-1955), Photograph, Encyclopedia Iranica.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Kaoukab Chebaro, "Columbia University Libraries," Global Studies Blog, May 28, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> "Mrs. R. J. Gottheil: A Zionist Worker," *The New York Times*, June 13, 1947, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Dagmar Riedel, "Islamic Books," *Islamic Books*, accessed February 30, 2021.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Charles Kurzman and Carl W. Ernst, "Islamic Studies in U.S. Universities," *Review of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 1, 2012, 30.
 <sup>16</sup> Marwa Elshakry, "Afterword," *Philological Encounters* 5, no.

Marwa Elshakry, "Atterword," Philological Encounters 5, no 3-4, 2020, 451.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> "Gottheil Visits Orient," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, September 28, 1910, 54 edition, sec. 1, 2.

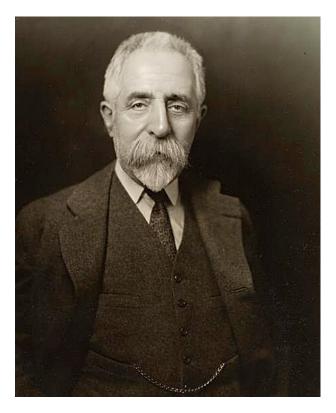
 <sup>18 &</sup>quot;Conference on Oriental Development," Columbia Daily Spectator, October 3, 1910, 54 edition, sec. 5, 1.
 19 Kaoukab Chebaro and Jane Rodgers Siegel, "A History of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Kaoukab Chebaro and Jane Rodgers Siegel, "A History of the Muslim World Manuscript Collection at the Columbia University Libraries," *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 3-4, 2020, 266.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Dagmar A. Riedel, "Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Near Eastern Studies in North America: The Manuscripts in Arabic Script of the Columbia University Libraries," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 6, no. 2-3, January 2015, 280.



**Figure 3.** Walter Damrosch at Columbia, June 4, 1914, Photograph, *The George Grantham Bain Collection*, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C., New York. Photograph shows Walter Damrosch, and the third man on the right is possibly Richard Gottheil.



**Figure 4.** Portrait of Richard James Horatio Gottheil circa 1916 - 1936, Photograph, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

This devaluation corresponds to the mirage of the "asli" or "original" and the obscured value accorded to primeval examples of literature or art. Columbia Professor of History Ahmet Tunç Şen provided an excellent critique of this phenomenon, underlining that many of these century-old manuscripts were used as active pedagogical tools until the twentieth century in their native contexts and only gained this mystified character once they reached Euroamerican collections.<sup>21</sup> To a certain extent, by losing their pedagogical essence and becoming more artifacts than texts, these manuscripts were initially misread or *misused* when they first reached Columbia's Butler Library (formerly known as South Hall).

### **COLLECTING THE ARAB WORLD**

The art dealer Samuel P. Avery (1822–1904) and the businessman Alexander S. Cochran (1874–1929) were among the benefactors who gave Columbia some of the most "spectacular" Arabic-script manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> In 1897, following the inauguration of the Oriental Languages Department, a repository was created

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ahmet Tunç Şen, in discussion with Lidia Helou, May 2021.

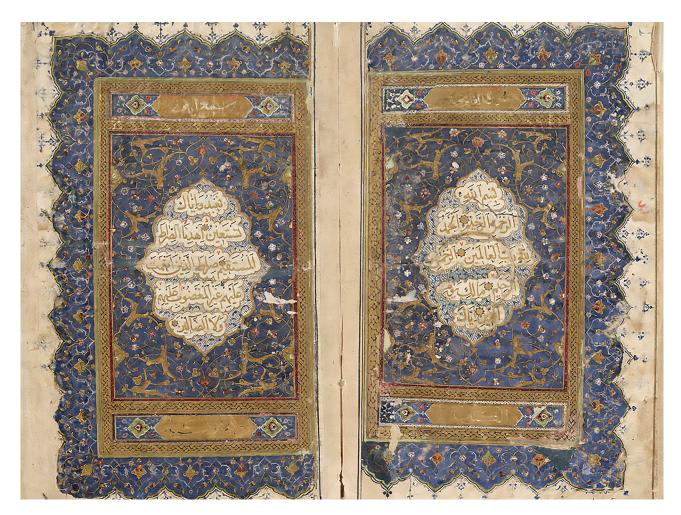
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Riedel, "Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Near Eastern Studies in North America," 289.

for the University's growing literary and philological ambitions: Low Library.<sup>23</sup> While other grand libraries such as Avery and Butler would soon follow, this architectural gesture illustrated Columbia's drive for both the material accumulation of knowledge and its spectacularization. In the spirit of philological investigation, an acute interest was generated around "the Bible lands" and their scholarship. A 1959 article of the *Columbia Library Columns* authored by Isaac Mendelssohn, then Associate Professor of Semitic Languages, alluded to this:

Although Columbia University has not participated in excavations of Ancient Near Eastern sites, [...] Butler Library possesses a small but valuable collection [...] purchased by the University back in 1896.<sup>24</sup>

This passage references the substantial donation made by Alexander I. Cotheal (1804-1894), traveler,

Orientalist, and translator of one lesser-known tale of One Thousand and One Nights, as highlighted by Columbia head librarian Dr. Kaoukab Chebaro. 25 In this vein, the Cotheal Fund, one of the oldest continuously active endowed funds at Columbia, was established for the purchase of more "Oriental books." 26 The subsequent contributions made to the collection until the 1950s were referred to as the "X collection," in reference to the variety in subjects, languages, and provenances of these manuscripts.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Chebrao adds another interpretive lens to the letter "X" by attributing it to Columbia's unfamiliarity with non-Roman scripts and librarians' inability to catalog Arabic-script documents.<sup>28</sup> Following Cotheal's initial donation, Columbia's collection was broadly divided into four subcollections constituted by Columbia friends or faculty such as Mathematics Professor David Eugene Smith. Barnard College Trustee George Arthur Plimpton, Near Eastern Studies Professor Arthur Jeffrey, and other Friends of the Columbia University Libraries.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 5.** Quran - Opening pages (Sura 1 and Sura 2), Accessed August 4, 2021, Photograph, Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions. Undated and unsigned (possibly 1600-1800 CE).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Chebaro, "Columbia University Libraries," *Global Studies Blog*, May 28, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Isaac Mendelsohn, "Cuneiform Tablets," Columbia Library Columns, May 1959, 8 edition, sec. 3, 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Chebaro, "Columbia University Libraries," Global Studies Blog, May 28, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Riedel, "Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Near Eastern Studies in North America," 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Chebaro, "Columbia University Libraries," Global Studies Blog, May 28, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Chebaro, "Columbia University Libraries," 2019.

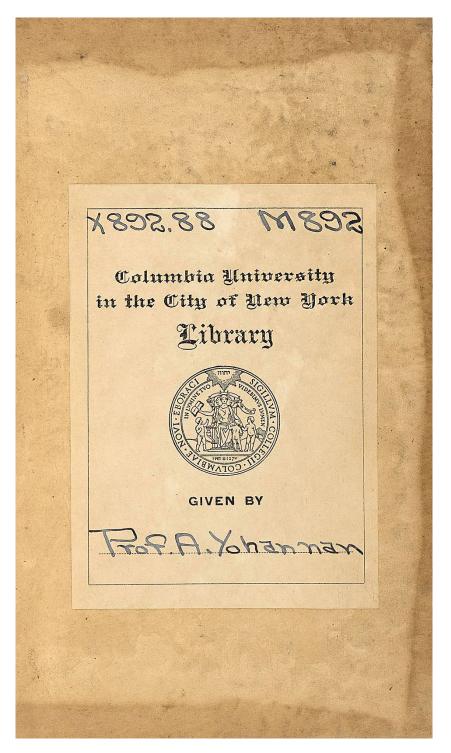
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 6.** Quran - Opening pages (Sura 1 and Sura 2), Accessed August 4, 2021, Photograph, Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions. Unsigned and undated (possibly before 1300 CE) complete copy of the Quran.



**Figure 7.** *Quran - Sura 1 and Sura 2, Section of the Surat al-Kahf, Colophon*, Accessed August 4, 2021, Photograph, *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*. Colophon signed by Ismāʻil b. Ibrāhīm, dated 1175/1761-1762 (Ottoman Empire).



**Figure 8.** Persian Book property of Prof. (Rev.) Abraham Yohannan, Photograph, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, X892.88 M892.

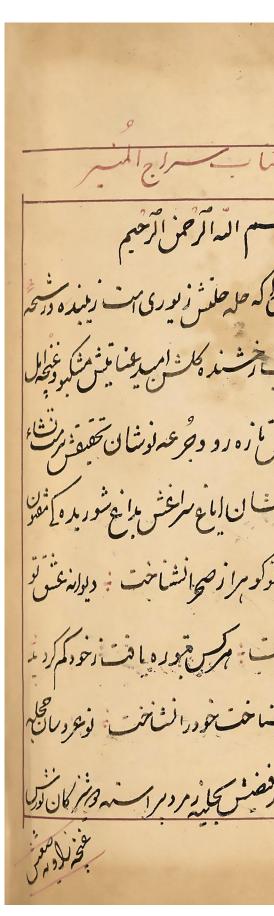
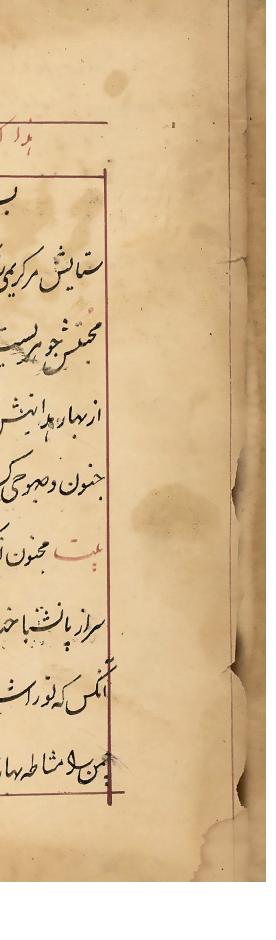
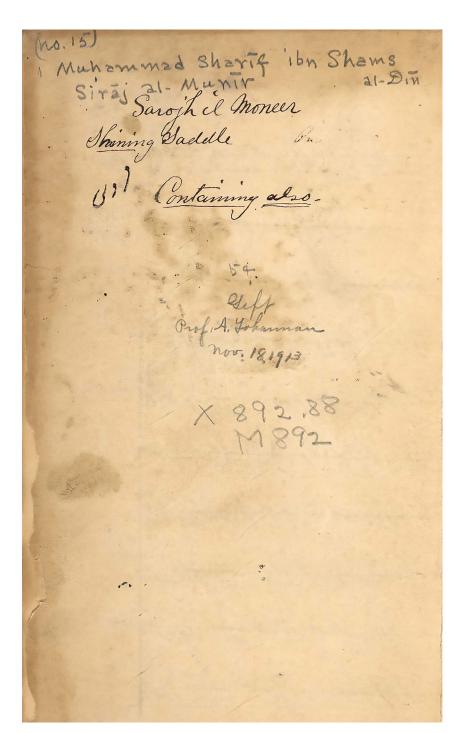


Figure 9. Persian Book property of Prof. (Rev.) Abraham Yohannan, Photograph, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, X892.88 M892.



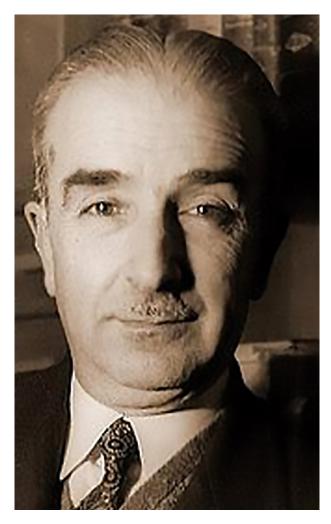


**Figure 10.** Persian Book property of Prof. (Rev.) Abraham Yohannan, Photograph, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, X892.88 M892. Three works in Persian bound together and copied in different hands, produced between 1825 and 1830.

### **MAKING ARABIC VISIBLE**

At the turn of the century, the collections continued to grow while their readership remained highly limited. The "hidden" collections could only be made visible through the effort of dedicated cataloguers, such as deaf librarian Mary Lyon McClure (1870-1956).

Miss McClure has devoted much of her time outside the library this year in studying Arabic & Sanskrit and has done a great deal of work on the old and new collections.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 11.** Undated photograph of A.Süheyl Ünver, Photograph, Üsküdar University.

This quote from Columbia librarian Harriet Prescott's 1914-1915 Annual Report illustrates McClure's

relentless effort to self-learn Arabic and make texts accessible to scholars and students.<sup>31</sup> While McClure's work tremendously advanced the knowledge and access to these collections, errors and mistranslations were inevitable and non-Roman script remained an exotica at Columbia as long as these words, or worlds, were seen and not read.<sup>32</sup>

A compelling 1959 article by Egyptology Professor Arthur Schiller attested to this inability to read the Arabic world stored in the library's Papyrus Gallery. Schiller regretted the reduction of texts to their static graphic marks and the resulting deprivation of their semantic content:

[...] among a much larger group of Arabic manuscripts. There were no records of accession [....] The Coptic texts were framed and photostated; what has become of the Arabic texts, I do not know.<sup>33</sup>

It seems as though Columbia only cracked these texts later that year thanks to Turkish historian, medical practitioner, and savant Ahmet Suheyl Unver who spent the fall semester of 1958-1959 at Columbia.<sup>34</sup> Unver completed a new catalog of the Arabic-script manuscripts at Butler Library and dedicated much of his time to the "personality" of those texts.<sup>35</sup>

When I wanted to examine the Oriental works [...], I found, [...] the catalog cards which had been given to me, [...] were inadequate and contained many errors.<sup>36</sup>

Unver counted 375 manuscripts at Butler Library written in Arabic.<sup>37</sup> Going beyond both text and paratext, the visiting scholar inscribed those texts in a *context*, presenting them with a renewed political value and impact. Unver's writing was anchored in Republican-era Turkey and his reading was thus tinted by Mustafa Kemal's fundamental principles, including nationalism that glorified Turkey's past and cultural particularism as differentiated from neighboring Arabic-speaking nations and societies.<sup>38</sup>

Although the language is Arabic, [...] to classify the manuscripts according to the language in which they are written might give the impression that the Arabs have produced more than they did.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Harriet Prescott, "Private Report to Librarian concerning recommendations for advanced salary, Catalog Department," typed manuscript, 19 March 1912, p.3 in Jane Siegel, "Women in the Stacks," Women in the Stacks, May 27, 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Jane Siegel, in discussion with Lidia Helou, March 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Jane Siegel, "Women in the Stacks," Women in the Stacks, May 27, 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> A. Arthur Schiller, "Coptic Papyri," *Columbia Library Columns*, May 1959, 8 edition, sec. 3, 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> A. Tunç Şen, "Authoring and Publishing in the Age of Manuscripts:

the Columbia University Copy of an Ottoman Compendium of Sciences with Marginal Glossing," *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 3-4 (2020), 354.

 <sup>\$5</sup> Sen, "Authoring and Publishing in the Age of Manuscripts,"
 36 A. Süheyl Unver, "Islamic Manuscripts in the Columbia Libraries,"

Columbia Library Columns, May 1959, 8 edition, sec. 3, 31. <sup>37</sup> Şen, "Authoring & Publishing in the Age of Manuscripts," 355-356.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> John C. Dewdney and Malcolm Edward Yapp, "Kemalist Policies," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Unver, "Islamic Manuscripts in the Columbia Libraries," 34.



**Figure 12.** *Quran, Sūrat al-Fatīha and Sūrat al-Baqara (Sura 1 and Sura 2),* accessed August 4, 2021, Photograph, *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions.* Donated by David E. Smith, 1931. Opening pages of the complete copy of the Quran with Persian interlinear translation. Colophon signed by Muhammad Muhsin al-Isfahānī, dated Ramadān 1154/November 1741.

This idea of national belonging hints at the shifting identities of these texts. We observe the manuscripts' transition from image to text to the (political) narrative. Yet, if the language is Arabic, the workmanship Turkish, and the readership absent at Columbia, who did these manuscripts pertain to? As elegantly put by Professor. Sen, the social lives of manuscripts are themselves part of the manuscripts' identity. 40 Professor Avinoam Shalem further underlined this idea in his essay on Columbia's Tashkent Quran: "[...]the inability to read the Arabic text [...] incapacitates its owner from claiming ownership."41 Unver's interrogations demonstrate Columbia's role not only as a locus of intellectual questioning and reconsideration but also a place where the attribution of textual identity was constantly renegotiated. Further along in the same article, Unver meandered around nomenclatures:

It would be scientifically correct to classify these manuscripts under a general name such as 'Islamic Manuscripts,' taking the three languages of the Near and Middle East together, while at the same time distinguishing among them manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.<sup>42</sup>

### **ENCAPSULATING THE ARAB WORD**

However, these collections also contained Syriac manuscripts and other texts that pertain to a world not necessarily anchored in Islam's textuality. For this reason, Unver also raised the question of the religious identification of texts. Nevertheless, as Middle East historian Dr. Riedel underlined, not all Arabic manuscripts are religious, just as not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ahmet Tunç Şen, in discussion with Lidia Helou, May 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Avinoam Shalem, "On Original and 'Originals': The 'Copy' of the Tashkent Qurān Codex in the Rare Collection Books at the Butler

Library," *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 3-4, February 2020, 307. <sup>42</sup> Unver, "Islamic Manuscripts in the Columbia Libraries," 34.

all Muslims are Arabs, and vice versa. 43 Riedel interpreted Unver's statement as a call for a common (religious) foundation that is primarily projected, or presupposed, rather than empirically verifiable.44 In a way, Columbia's "Islamic Manuscripts" collection is a microcosmic representation of the Arab World's existential problems, with issues of being misread, misrepresented, unseen, owned, or disowned heavily anchored in the prevailing rhetorics of/on the Arab World. This brings us to the contemporary moment and the "Muslim World Manuscript" project evoked earlier. There seems to be growing momentum for the study of manuscripts against the domination of policy-oriented concerns by social studies and area studies, even as nomenclature remains an unanswered and contested question. Indeed, how do we regroup manuscripts whose common foundations are neither language nor religion, provenance or subject? Siegel proposed the "Arabic-Script Manuscripts Collection" as an alternative, more accurate title. 45 Nevertheless, one of the virtues of Columbia's digitizing movement is the return of texts as quotidian pedagogical tools.

Arabic-script collections at Columbia stopped progressing around the 1960s, ironically with the beginning of accurate cataloging. 46 Area studies and the fascination with exactitude within the social sciences had stolen the spotlight away from the attachment to the handwritten word within the humanities.<sup>47</sup> However, while Arabic manuscripts might have been relegated to the stacks, Arabic and its worlds went through a political renaissance initiated, among others, by a Columbia alumnus: Philip K. Hitti. While Edward Said remains the principal figure of Columbia's remodeling of Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic literature in the 1970s, the postcolonial movement seems to have had semantic roots in Hitti's work and his ambition to make Arabic a pedagogical medium in American universities: from the American University of Beirut (AUB) to Columbia.

# SEMANTICS OF ARABNESS & HITTI'S EMANCIPATION OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

Following our exploration of Columbia's relationship with the Arab World, it seems fitting to meditate for a section on a "voice in the desert" whose echo still resonates in the American academic landscape.<sup>48</sup> Born in 1886 in Shemlan, a small village south of Beirut, Philip Hitti rose to become the father of Arab-diaspora studies, first at Columbia and then at Princeton. This section tells his odyssey through "Arabness" and academia.

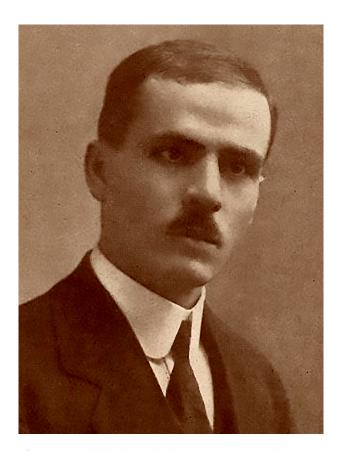


Figure 13. Philip Khuri Hitti in 1914, Accessed May 04, 2021, Photograph, University of Minnesota Libraries, Immigration History Research Center Archives.

### FROM SHEMLAN TO COLUMBIA

A series of fortuitous events pushed Hitti into history and its arcane detours, leading him to the AUB (then known as the Syrian Protestant College), where he earned his degree in 1908 and started teaching Arabic, Bible studies, and "imagine, a course in physiology!" 49 In 1913, Hitti's mentor, University President Howard Bliss, sent his protégé to the USA as a delegate to an international students conference.50 Armed with a letter of introduction, Hitti embarked on his first transatlantic trip. 51 After touring different Ivy League universities, Hitti opted to stay at Columbia for a few months to observe the American educational system. The reasons behind this decision are multiple, including the developing Oriental Studies Department at Columbia, the mentorship of Gottheil and Jackson, and maybe most notably, New York and its Levantine community "on Washington Street

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Dagmar Riedel, in discussion with Lidia Helou, March 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Riedel, "Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Near Eastern Studies in North America," 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Jane Siegel, in discussion with Lidia Helou, March 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Riedel, "Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Near Eastern Studies in North America," 282.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> John R. Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti," Aramco World, 1971, pp. 21-31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti," 23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

in lower Manhattan."52 A phenomenon around this diaspora caught Hitti's attention and fostered a careerlong interest: the various inaccurate terminologies used to refer to the Arabic-speaking newcomers who had disembarked at *Kees al-Khardal* (Castle Garden) in lower Manhattan: "Turks," "Assyrians," or "Arabs." 53

The outbreak of World War I prevented Hitti from returning to Beirut, who then started working at Columbia's library and studying to earn a Ph.D.<sup>54</sup> Ironically, he was not assigned to Arabic-script books - but to magazines.55 Hitti eventually majored in Semitic Languages and minored in History and Sociology, earning his Ph.D. in 1915 with the thesis that would later become his groundbreaking *History* of the Arabs in 1937. When he graduated in 1915, the War was still raging on the other side of the Atlantic, and famine was ravaging Lebanon, forcing Hitti to

extend his stay at Columbia as a lecturer in Semitic languages. 56 During those years, he met his wife, Mary George, who was part of the Lebanese diaspora and an habituée of Columbia's library. 57 This Columbian connection with the Arabic-speaking diasporas brings to mind the ensemble of Arabic-speaking intellectuals who were gradually coalescing around Columbia. Hitti's stay and work at Columbia marked the début of Columbia's involvement with the politics of the Arab World from an Arab perspective in contrast to the otherwise profuse displays of armchair Orientalism. This represented a crucial step in Columbia's history as a leading institution in Middle Eastern Studies. As underlined by Dr. Riedel, it is interesting to note that the official conversation and negotiation of this academic collaboration was pursued in French, shedding light on the more overtly diplomatic nature of such enterprises.58



Figure 14. Syrian Pushcart Food Vendor on New York City Street, 1916, Photograph, Bain News Service, New York.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Philip K. Hitti, "The Syrians in America, With an Introduction by Talcott Williams," G.H. Doran, 1924, 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti," 24.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti,"24.
<sup>58</sup> Riedel, "Islamic Books," *Islamic Books*, accessed February 30, 2021.



**Figure 15.** *Syrian Women*, Photograph, Bain News Service, September 18, 1916. Library of Congress, New York.

# A VOICE IN THE DESERT

During his time at Columbia, Hitti remained devoted to the political fights shaking the Levant region, particularly those in Palestine. In 1918, following the Balfour Declaration of 1917, Hitti and other intellectuals organized a famous protest in Brooklyn to support Palestinians and developed an acerbic critique of the "betrayal of the Arabs." The New York

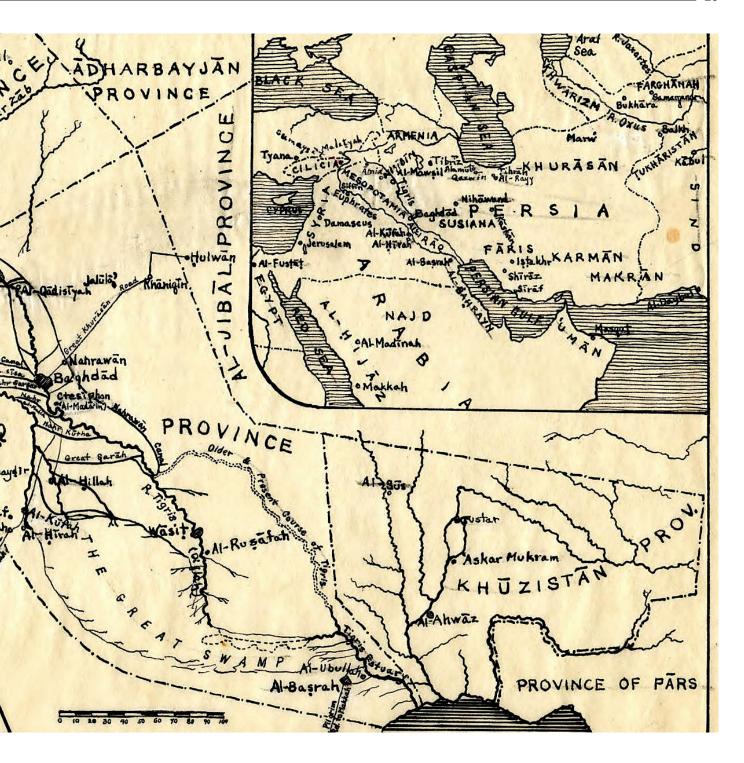
**Figure 16.** Philip Hitti, *Map of the Syro-Mesopotamiam desert*, Accessed May 04, 2021, Photograph, *University of Minnesota Libraries*, Immigration History Research Center Archives.

Times covered the protest and published resolutions co-penned by Hitti, the journalist Habib Ibrahim Katibah, and Fuad Isa Shatara, President of the Arab National League of America, among others. 60 While there was no Center for Palestine Studies yet, Columbia was already a locus of intellectual effervescence regarding the status of Palestine.

Khalid's Desert Journey THE SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN DESERT Showing Khālid's conjectureds route.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Gregory Shibley, "Revisiting Hitti's Thoughts on Palestine and Arab Identity," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2019): 153.

<sup>60 &</sup>quot;Oppose Zionsit Plan: Syrians Adopt Resolutions of Protest at Brooklyn Meeting.," The New York Times, November 9, 1918, 4.



At the end of the War in 1919, Hitti returned to AUB. He became the first scholar to teach a "History of the Arabs" course, which he had conceptualized while at Columbia. 61 In its alumni book, AUB described Hitti as an "Orientalist," nodding to his influence in the realm of "Oriental Studies," where he was actually a pioneer in the de-homogenization of Arabness and its protode-orientalization. 62 Interestingly, a few pages later in the same alumni book, we find Ismaïl Raghib Khalidi, former UN official, recipient of a Ph.D. in "the History of the Near Eastern countries" from Columbia, and

father of Columbia's current Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies, Rashid Khalidi.63

Per Hitti, "the History of the Arabs should be taught in Arabic."64 This stance reinforces his insistence on Arabic as a legitimate pedagogical medium. In 1926, following the visit of Princeton Arabic-manuscripts collector Robert Garett, "[who] didn't know the difference between Aleph and Ba' - between A and B," Hitti departed for Princeton, where he developed the Department of Near Eastern Studies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti,"21-31.
<sup>62</sup> Alumni Association Beirut, "The American University of Beirut Directory of Alumni 1870-1952," April 1953, 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Alumni Association Beirut, "The American University of Beirut Directory of Alumni 1870-1952," 281.

<sup>64</sup> Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti," 21-31.

he had imagined while at Columbia. 65 While his work remained "peripheral" up until the late 1940s, the publication of History of the Arabs in 1937 gave Hitti's "voice in the desert" a profound echo. 66 In a way, Hitti initiated his own Ivy-League Nahda, and his work became a rite of passage in Middle Eastern studies and literature in the United States. The work that Hitti started at Columbia University allowed for the creation of an entire scholarly field: Arabic Studies. In this sense, alongside the plethora of revolutionary Arab world scholars that Columbia has hosted, it also gave this pioneer his first tribune and motivated the writing of History of the Arabs. It was also at Columbia that Hitti, in turn, first developed his careerlong program for reading Arabic as an expansive language encompassing numerous cultures, politics, and histories rather than just empty calligraphy, or alternately, a compendium of religious values. It would be no far stretch to argue that the spirit of Hitti's pedagogical agenda, if not his scholarly output,

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**Figure 17.** Philip Hitti's notes for a lecture on Lebanon, in the English language, 1966, Accessed May 04 2021, Photograph, University of Minnesota Libraries, Immigration History Research Center Archives.

continues to provide the impetus for much post- and anti-Orientalist scholarship today. That Hitti could find in Columbia an intellectual atmosphere to launch a counter-tradition to the very same Orientalism that it, to a great extent, generated and facilitated warrants a closer look.

### **DEFINING THE ARAB**

Hitti's work is complex & not exempt from contradiction s and biases. He developed his thesis of linguistic versus ethnic identity based on Columbia lecturer Rev. Yohannan's work on the Arabic-speaking communities of Washington Street. 67 His study of the "most leaderless" immigrant group [Syrians] in the USA" brought to light the intricacies of and oppositions between Levantine and Arab nationalisms. 68 Hitti's Syrians were "Arabicspeaking, Arabic-writing, Arabic-thinking non-Arabs," with "Arabness" anchored in religious and racial factors instead of linguistic ones. 69 In Syrians of America, published in 1924, he wrote, "culture, and not a strain of blood, is the determining factor in the identification of the race," and "Religion [is] a sort of nationality."70 For all his work towards complexifying the region, Hitti's thought nevertheless remained rooted in late-nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific categorizations and its epochal emphasis on religious definitions of races, geographies, and disciplines.

While aspects of Hitti's thought belong to another century, his defense of the Arab World's plurality remains highly pertinent. In a 1943 New York Times book review of Zionist writer Eliahu Ben-Horin's The Middle East: Crossroads of History, Hitti penned an incisive critique of intellectuals such as Ben-Horin, who pretended to offer "A remedy for Arab Troubles."71 The eerily contemporary echo of this piece can be found in the following statements: "The Arab is the villain of the piece," and Palestine is the eternal "pièce de résistance." 72 Hitti pointed out the numerous mistranslations of words which in turn galvanized mistranslations of entire stories, historical evidence, concepts, and ultimately, the existence and "firstness" of peoples in the "Bible Lands."73 Hitti chastised the author's ignorance of the regional feminists and *modus vivendi* Ben Horin was a supposed expert of, and Hitti accented the writer's shortsightedness in his description of the Druzes as a people only to be found "in deepest Syria."<sup>74</sup> Hitti wittily underlined that an illustrious Druze newspaper's headquarters were only a few blocks away from the printing press where Ben Horin's book was published.75

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Hitti, The Syrians in America, 1924, 20.

<sup>68</sup> Philip K. Hitti, The Syrians in America, With an Introduction by Talcott Williams (New York, New York: G.H. Doran, 1924), 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Gregory Shibley, "Revisiting Hitti's Thoughts on Palestine and Arab Identity," Arab Studies Quarterly 41, no. 2 (2019): 157.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Hitti, The Syrians in America, 1924, 20; 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Philip K. Hitti, "Bridge Between Two Worlds; THE MIDDLE EAST: CROSSROADS OF HISTORY. By Eliahu Ben-Horin," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1943, 15.

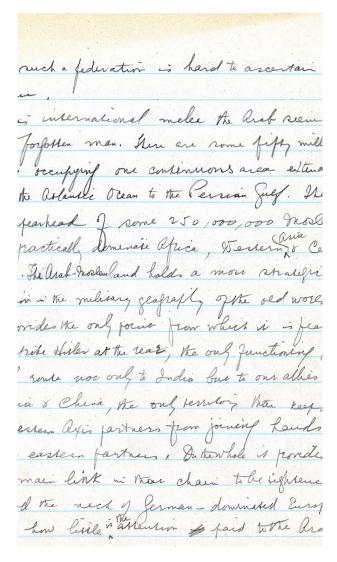
<sup>72</sup> Hitti, "Bridge Between Two Worlds,"1943, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

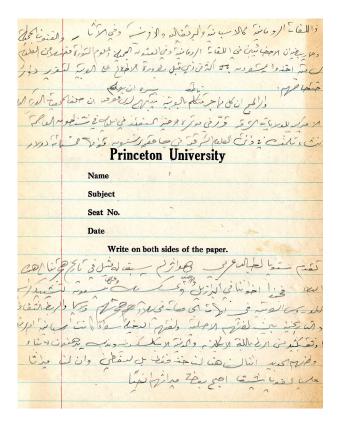
<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ibid.

In another unique piece of writing for a World War II lecture. Hitti formulated the idea of the necessary politicization of a field to guarantee its renaissance in academia. "In the International mêlée, the Arab seems to be the forgotten man."76 Hitti wrote these words in reference to the lack of consideration given to Arab troops and their importance in the world conflict, which was reflected in the lack of academic interest in Arabic-speaking societies. Hitti's cry for a governmental interest in Arabs and Arabic ironically ignited the movement that led to the former President of Columbia University and then-United States President Eisenhower's introduction of area studies and the popularization of Arabic as a political tool that would decades later divert attention away from manuscripts.



**Figure 18.** Philip Hitti's notes "In the International mêlée" for a lecture on Arab culture, Accessed May 04, 2021, Photograph, University of Minnesota Libraries, Immigration History Research Center Archives.



**Figure 19.** Philip Hitti's notes in Arabic, Accessed August 04, 2021, Photograph, *University of Minnesota Libraries*, Immigration History Research Center Archives.

### A GUIDE TO SYRIAN STUDENTS

One final incursion into Hitti's Columbia-inspired scholarship is his 1921 Guide to Syrian Students. In this piece, it was Hitti's reading of Columbia that put into words the Arab experience in America. At the Syrian Educational Society's request, Hitti wrote a detailed handbook explaining student life in the USA.77 This companion book aimed at preparing Syrian students for an émigré life in America. The Syrian Educational Society was a sponsor-based group created around 1915 to help Syrian students in the United States achieve their goals by providing financial and moral support. The Society motto was, "The future of the Syrian people lies in its youth. And the hope of the youth is its education."78 This guide was commissioned following a surge in Syrian student enrollment in American universities, which coincided with Columbia's admission of its first "Ottoman" cohort between 1910 and 1914. Per Hitti's research, in 1919-1920, the United States counted around 10,000 international students around the country, among which 43 were from Syria.<sup>79</sup> While the number might seem like a meager drop in the ocean, the Syrian Educational Society saw in it an omen for future Syro-American collaborations. 80 After enumerating all the intricacies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Philip K. Hitti, "Philip Hitti's Notes in English:Philip Hitti's Notes for a Lecture on Arab Culture, in the English Language, on a Princeton University Notepad Paper."

<sup>77</sup> Philip Khuri Hitti, "Educational Guide for Syrian Students in the

U.S." Sheffield Academic Press, 1921.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Hitti, Educational Guide for Syrian Students in the U.S, 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 33.

and complexities of American life, Hitti emphasized the need to comply with local etiquette and recommended that all prospective students read W.C. Green's A Dictionary of Etiquette to be the most impeccable Syrian cultural ambassadors in each and every situation. Through the publication of this book, Hitti's experience at Columbia as both a student and then a lecturer framed the experiences of countless Levantine students who approached studying in America through the lens given by an illustrious Columbia alumnus.

Hitti was passionate about bringing the study of Arabic-speaking societies to the spotlight; his ambition was that every university in the U.S would offer an introductory course on the Middle East by the end of the century. His conviction that this would be accomplished through "area studies" allowed Columbia to become a precursor in the field. Hitti, as the father of Arabic studies, was shaped and could, in turn, have an impact because of Columbia's ability to invest in histories of the Arab World. The next section follows Hitti's legacy by tracing the establishment of Columbia's modern reputation as a center for Middle Eastern Studies and analyzes its loci as a mosaic of numerous visions of Arabness.

# FOR SYRIAN STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES BY PHILIP K. HITTI, Ph. D. ISSUED BY THE SYRIAN EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK CITY 1921 THE SYRIAN-AMERICAN PRESS NEW YORK

**Figure 20.** Philip Khuri Hitti, *Educational Guide* for Syrian Students in the U.S, 1921, Photograph, Sheffield Academic Press.

# MOSAICS OF THE ARAB WORLD

The previous two sections looked at the way Columbia's relation to Arabic and Arabic-script evolved from an aesthetical - somewhat passive - appreciation of texts to the revival of Arabic not only as a living language, but a world to study in all its depth as spearheaded by Hitti. The following section explores the different routes the study of the Arab World has since taken at Columbia University.

# AREA STUDIES AND STRANDS OF ARABNESS

Before delving into Columbia's history of the contemporary study of the Arab World, it seems relevant to look at the context in which area studies came to be. As mentioned earlier, Hitti defended the fact that for Arabic to become an independent and serious academic field, it needed to demonstrate its political value. In other words, why did it matter to study the Arab World?



**Figure 21.** Dwight D. Eisenhower saying goodbye to Columbia University, January 16, 1953, Photograph, Columbia University Archives.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>82</sup> Starkey, "A Talk With Philip Hitti," 1971, 25-26.



**Figure 22.** Christopher Caldwell, *Dwight Eisenhower Greets Students & the Press from the Steps of Low Library Shortly after His Appointment as Columbia University President in 1948*, 1948, Photograph, *Columbia University Archives.* 

The late-nineteenth-century and early-twentiethcentury rearrangement of academic departments created momentum around Morningside Heights to realign political and academic interests. The impetus of area studies, or the specialization of disciplines according to geographical regions with an added political lens, started in the 1930s. After World War II, President Eisenhower, who was elected President of Columbia in 1945 and then President of the United States in 1952, allowed the same vision that led to Columbia's political redesign of academic departments to echo nationwide. Eisenhower encouraged the creation of the School of International Affairs (SIA) in 1946 and within it, the Middle East Institute (MEI) later in 1954.83 The MEI was created for instruction in "less" commonly taught" languages and was tightly related to policy objectives, shifting the tide away from the attention to textuality that animated Hitti's early days of study. In 1958, the Title VI of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which supported research on area studies at universities, confirmed this position

regarding American security agendas.<sup>84</sup> This was an example of Hitti's conviction that politicization was necessary for the field's prosperity.

The new Department of Near and Middle Eastern Languages was founded the same year as the MEI.85 From there on, we can observe two strands in Columbia's Middle East Studies program: a division of academic labor was achieved with SIA, which would attract policymakers, journalists, and financial advisors; meanwhile, philologists and linguists flocked to the Near and Middle Eastern Department. This division between security studies and the humanities remained highly tenable up until the "academic awakening" of the mid-to-late 1960s, which was provoked by world movements that succeeded in highlighting the intimate connections between power and knowledge as well as the overarching biases that controlled access to these spheres.86 This opened the path to Edward Said's work and the subsequent disillusionment in academic Orientalism.87

<sup>83</sup> Chebaro; Siegel, "A History of the Muslim World Manuscript Collection at the Columbia University Libraries," 2020, 277.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Lockman, Field Notes: a History of Middle East Studies in the United States, 2016, 264.

<sup>85</sup> Chebaro; Siegel, "A History of the Muslim World Manuscript Collection at the Columbia University Libraries," 2020, 277.

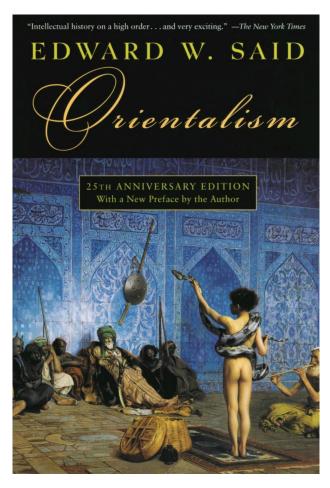
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Riedel, "Islamic Books," Islamic Books, accessed February 30, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Riedel, "Islamic Books," 2021.

### **EDWARD SAID**

A paper on Columbia's ties with the Arab World would not be complete without a reference, even if superficial, to Edward Said and the turning point he created in global scholarship. Said was appointed Professor in the English and Comparative Literature Department at Columbia in 1963. It was, as Professor Khalidi pointed out in a recent article, the 1967 Israeli-Arab War that triggered Said's postcolonial spark.88 Witnessing the conflict unfolding from the West may have pushed Said to write about the western-fabricated reification of Arabness and Islam around clichés anchored in exoticism. Orientalism was published in 1978, followed by The Question of Palestine just a year later. The companionship between these two intertwined themes marks the main tenets of Said's scholarship.

*Orientalism's* publication marked a watershed in postcolonial literature and led to a scholarly cataclysm of global proportions.



**Figure 23.** Edward W. Said, *Orientalism, 2003*, Photograph, *Vintage Books*, New York.

The strength of *Orientalism* lies in its examination of western societies and the obsessive pursuit of preconceived notions of the "East." In doing so, Said exposed the distorted reality in the works of Orientalists and offered a critique of the discipline, setting the ground for alternative narratives, transdisciplinary reconsiderations of the field, and a necessary methodological introspection. Not only has *Orientalism* been translated in a multitude of languages and is found in the reading lists of universities all around the world, but Said's office in Philosophy Hall at Columbia has also become the object of impromptu postcolonial pilgrimages. In this sense, both Hitti and Said created diametric tools of understanding despite having both been committed to deconstructing Orientalist attitudes towards the Arab World. While Hitti's Guide for Syrian Students was written to help 1920s diaspora students navigate America and abide by its etiquette, Said's Orientalism offers a guide to instead deviate from an idea of Middle Eastern adaptation to the western narrative and advocates for a reading of history that does not exoticize the "Orient," but emanate from it. It is not the West that reads the East anymore, but the East(s) that tells its story.

Professor Şen raised the idea of the word "Orientalist" as being a quasi-taboo in post-Saidian context, but noted that the word might have more stories to tell, nodding to Columbia's enduring intellectual activity in the field.89 The value that Edward Said brough to Columbia and its stance regarding Middle Eastern Studies lies primarily in allowing for its emancipation from fabricated certainties. Said's political work cements him as the enduring North American figure for the Palestinian cause and its defense. In step with Said's legacy, Rashid Khalidi, current Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies, whose father we evoked earlier with Philip Hitti, has written abundantly on Palestine and the history of the Arab World, and incarnates a continuation of his predecessor's academic and political fights at Columbia University. Khalidi's latest book The Hundred Years' War on Palestine mixed genres between autobiographical snippets and Chicago-style footnotes offering a brilliant example of both Columbia's and Said's signature courage to break disciplinary and stylistic barriers. Today, Columbia celebrates Edward Said's memory through annual lectures, dedicated archives, but also more consistently through the work of the Center for Palestine Studies (CPS), founded in 2010. In fact, the literary estate that Columbia inherited from Said, the Edward Said reading room in Butler Library, and the impressive multimedia archive collected by the CPS guarantee Columbia's place as a hub for post colonial scholarship.90

<sup>88</sup> Rashid Khalidi, "The Worldly Exile Edward Said's Life and Afterlives.," *The Nation*, May 5, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Ahmet Tunç Şen, in discussion with Lidia Helou, May 2021.

<sup>90 &</sup>quot;Edward Said Archival Collection - Center for PALESTINE STUDIES: Columbia University," Center for Palestine Studies Columbia University, accessed July 30, 2021, http://palestine. mei.columbia.edu/said/archival-collection.



**Figure 24.** Edward Said, Photograph, Columbia University Center for Palestine Studies.

### **RENAISSANCES**

Following the allusion made earlier to a rivalry between the SIA (known today as the School of International and Public Affairs, or SIPA) and the Near Eastern Department, it is interesting to notice that in 2009, MEI changed its administrative home from SIPA to the School of Arts and Sciences, distancing itself from the former's security-oriented mission. In a similar vein, the Near Eastern Department changed its name multiple times; to finally the Middle East, South Asian, and African Studies (MESAAS) in 2009. These changes are testimonies of a will to increase interdisciplinarity while embracing postcolonial studies and its Saidian principles in nomenclature as much as in content. When asked, Professor Lisa Anderson, former Dean of SIPA and director of the MEI, evoked the benefit of having a foot in both camps, speaking to both the future governing individuals (at SIPA) and their critics (at MESAAS), acknowledging the rivalry between the

Schools and the schools of thought alike. 91 In this sense, Columbia's longstanding history of divergent readings of Middle Eastern and Arabic studies is illustrated in the various strands of scholarships that its various Institutes and Centers pursue. For Professor Anderson, while the risk to homogenize exists in umbrella institutes, the juxtaposition of different "areas" is also a source of intellectual enrichment. 92 Columbia's manuscripts, on the other hand, showed the inherent problems of nomenclature and terminologies when bringing under the same heading texts pertaining to different languages, subjects, and traditions.93 Could this apply to MESAAS? Professor Kathryn Spellman Poots, a founder of the Center for the Study of Muslim Societies at Columbia (CSMS), raised similar concerns regarding terminologies and naming practices, specifically bearing the empty signifier of "Islamic studies" in mind, for example.94



**Figure 25.** Karim Jabbari, *Middle East Institute (MEI) banner for UNESCO's World Arabic Language Day*, 2020, Photograph, *Columbia University Middle East Institute*, New York.

<sup>91</sup> Lisa Anderson, in discussion with Lidia Helou, May 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Anderson, in discussiwon with Lidia Helou, 2021.

<sup>93</sup> tasnif el ulum means classification of sciences or knowledges, in the Ottoman and Islamicate tradition. See A. Tunç Şen, Authoring

<sup>&</sup>amp; Publishing in the Age of Manuscripts: the Columbia University Copy of an Ottoman Compendium of Sciences with Marginal Glossing," *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 3-4 (2020), 353-377. Yellow Kathryn Spellman Poots, in discussion with Lidia Helou, May 2021.

# CONCLUSION

This exploratory essay followed Columbia's voyage from late-nineteenth-century fascination with the "Bible Lands" and the aesthetical conditioning of Arabic-script manuscripts, to the University's ability to question its own history, and welcome stellar scholars and linguists from the very regions being studied. The essay situated these developments within the intellectual and personal trajectory of Philip Hitti, his often forgotten Columbian contributions and his Morning-side inspired quest for academic renewal. Today, Columbia maintains its leading position engaging the Arab World and its necessary study with around 30 specialists (in over ten departments) in the core fields of Islamic studies and over 80 scholars and 14 language lecturers concerned with various aspects of Muslim societies and Arabic textuality. Along with already available works, Gottheil's, Jackson's,



and others' unread manuscripts are currently being digitized at Columbia. We could say that Hitti's late-century ideal is underway to being realized. However, others still remain "hidden" at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library.

Columbia's relation to the Arab World and its surroundings has evolved from an unreadable archive to the multiplication, diversification, and institutionalization of readings via the University's Global Centers and Institutes. Yet, these loci have had largely different impacts. While MESAAS remains the most, one could say, pedagogical locus, MEI was at the origin of the Special Commission on Ethics and Social Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa. CPS carries the duty of keeping the Palestinian cause alive in American academic circles while strengthening the bonds between Palestinian scholars worldwide. CSMS, the last entry in Columbia's academic landscape, seems to play the role of Hermes, bringing cohesivity to this constellation of thoughts and scholarships. If rivalry exists, it is of a highly intellectual degree since it is mainly the same faculty members who contribute and circulate from one mission to the other. However, it would certainly be very à la Columbia to be in competition with one's self. The proliferation of sites, and their respective approaches and tools for studying the various languages, cultures, and histories grouped under the term "Middle East" reflects the inherent undecidability and necessary incompleteness of one overarching cohesive frame. The differences, subtle or distinctive, between these Institutes illustrate the plural visions for how to best approach a region and its particularities. To an extent, these contrasts are different answers to the question of what kind of relation Columbia seeks to maintain with the Middle East. Some, like Hitti, tried to walk the line between academia and politics; but is that still possible today? Was it ever?95

Columbia's progression from housing unread Arabic sources to the politicization of the Arab World, passing through the Saidian turn, is an odyssey through contextual evolutions, charismatic scholars, and vital librarians. This essay forged a path through America, the Levant, Arab diasporas, and yet, one question remains: how do we express this knowledge, in English or in Arabic? Decades later, Hitti's prescient call remains unaddressed.

<sup>95</sup> Thanks to Mohamed Kouta's inspired reflection and help for this section.

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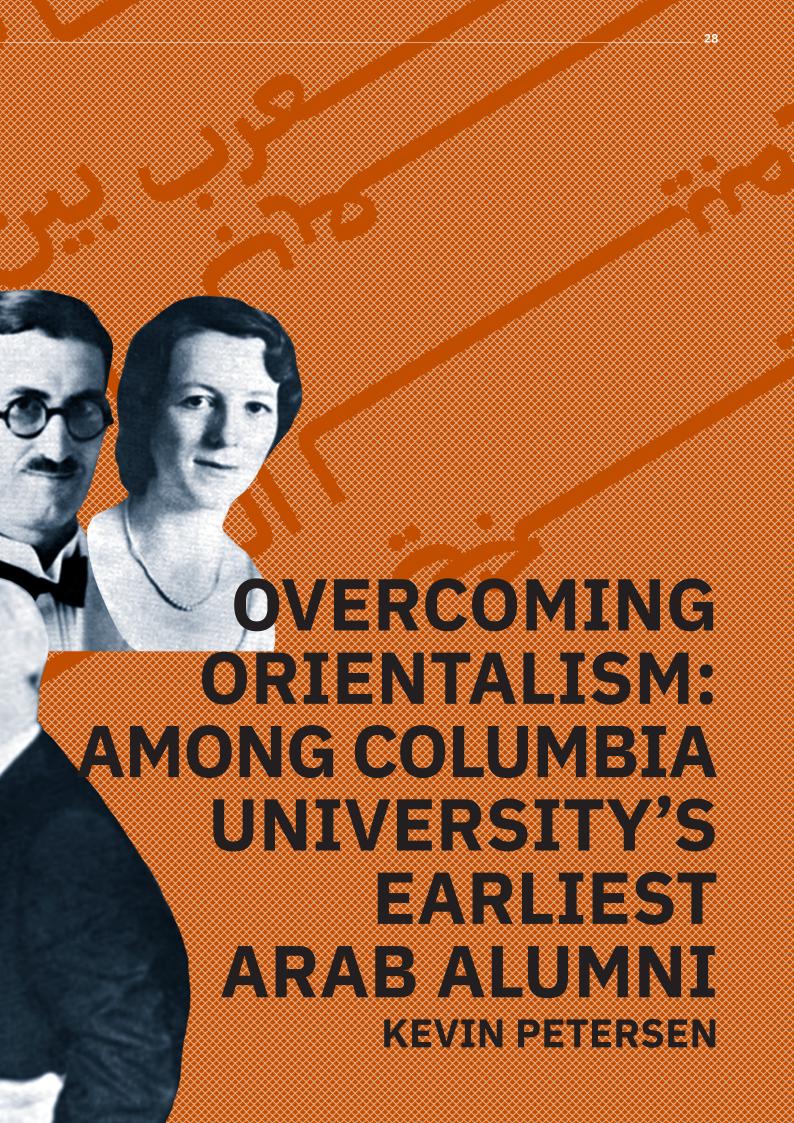
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## VERCOMING ORIENTALISM: **AMONG COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S** EARLIEST ARAB ALUMNI

Arab students have been present at Columbia University since at least 1892, when that year's Annual Report of President Low to the Trustees recorded one Syrian and one Egyptian studying on campus.¹ Due to the Western cultural attitude that Edward Said, the esteemed Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, later called 'Orientalism,' these early Arab students likely passed through campus largely overlooked by their peers. As Said wrote, "the limitations of Orientalism are... the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region."2 Consequently, this cultural attitude subsequently "[conceived] humanity either in large collective terms or in abstract generalities."

This frame of mind was especially present in an early twentieth-century article of The Columbia Daily Spectator when, on February 8th, 1911, it reported on an incoming student delegation from the Ottoman Empire with an article succinctly headlined "Five Turks at University." 4 While it was true these students were coming from Turkey - all of the applicants wrote their application essay in Ottoman Constantinople - a later paragraph in the same article reveals that not all of them were ethnically Turkish as the headline suggested. According to one of the essay's examiners, "of the four [who] placed first," two were Greek, one was Armenian, and only one was actually Turkish. Of these candidates, just one Greek and the Turk received a scholarship while a third student, another Turk, "was chosen from the next best candidates." 5 And as for the last two students? Nothing specific was mentioned of them besides the article's even more vague subtitle of their foreign condition as "Oriental Students Coming."6

Considering that many thousands of international students would later follow this delegation to Columbia University, it is unfortunate this article is part of a long trend of Orientalist depersonalization on campus. In 1922, a Spectator story reported on a banquet meant to honor the University's "Oriental guests" while never specifying the actual nationalities of the celebrated students.7 A decade later, a 1931 Spectator article described a round-table discussion of Christianity where students from countries as different as China, India, Korea, and the Philippines were grouped together under the familiar designation of "Oriental students."8

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "Annual Report of President Low to the Trustees 1892," Columbia University Press, 1892, 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Edward Said, "Orientalism," *Vintage Books*, 1979, 108. <sup>3</sup> Edward Said, "Orientalism", 1979, 154.

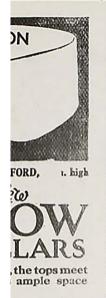
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "Five Turks at University," Columbia Daily Spectator, February 8, 1911.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Five Turks at University," 1911.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "Grads to honor Oriental guests," Columbia Daily Spectator, December 5, 1922.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "Oriental students to discuss Christianity," Columbia Daily Spectator, March 31, 1931.

#### COLUMBIA SPECTATOR



dy& Co., Makers

### FIVE TURKS AT UNIVERSITY Oriental Students Coming

Five Turkish students will be added to the enrollment at Columbia University on February 11, when the Mauretania, on which they will sail, arrives here on that day. Three of these will have scholarships offered to the Turkish government by Columbia, and all will pursue studies in English. This is the first time in the history of the University that students have come from Turkey under such circumstances, and it is believed by the authorities at the University and by the Turkish government that it will go a long way toward increasing the friendliness between the two countries.

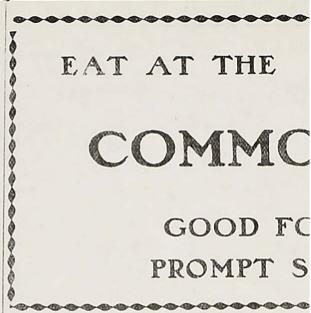


Figure 1. Five Turks at University, February 8, 1911, Columbia Daily Spectator.

Even as recently as 1989, the *Spectator* reported that students at the School of General Studies would have to take courses about foreign cultures like "Oriental music" or "Oriental civilizations" to graduate, with no mention as to what was actually meant by "Oriental" besides the equally nebulous qualifier "non-Western."

Given this long persistence of Orientalist rhetoric, one can only imagine just how many Arab students might have passed through campus similarly overlooked and misunderstood since their initial appearance in 1892. To help correct this record, in this paper, I tell the story of three Columbia University alumni who, together, illustrate the religious, political, and gender diversity of Arab students that Orientalism masked: Khalil Abdallah Totah, a Palestinian Quaker who dedicated his life to international Palestinian activism; Mohammad Fadhel Al-Jamali, a Shi'a Muslim from Iraq who served as his country's Foreign Minister and Prime Minister; and Alice Mitri Kandalaft, an Orthodox Christian feminist who was one of Syria's first representatives to the United Nations.

After all, had these three individuals been a part of that 1911 student delegation from the Ottoman Empire, they too would have been simply labeled as "Oriental students." Consequently, their stories - which are but a few from among the thousands of Arab students to pass through campus - deserve to be told.

#### KHALIL ABDALLAH TOTAH (M.A. 1912, PH.D. 1927), TEACHERS COLLEGE

Coming to the United States from a peasant family in Palestine, the lack of money had long been a challenge in Khalil Abdallah Totah's life. After all, his dream of attending Haverford College ended when he did not receive a scholarship to pay tuition fees. Instead, he had to wash dishes, mow lawns, and clean houses in order to support himself through his years at Clark College. Yet, a successful stint as a kitchenware salesman gave him more than just the financial means to enjoy his last year at Clark College without working: it also revealed his ability to persuade others to his side - a skill he used throughout his life in his passionate pursuit of Palestinian independence.

On May 20, 1886, Khalil Abdallah Totah was born in the town of Ramallah in the country that was then known as Ottoman Palestine. His parents, Abdallah Totah and Azizeh Mughannam, were Christian Quakers after converting from the more regionally common Orthodox faith years earlier. Like many other peasant families of the time, Totah endured a rather lean upbringing as his father eked out a meager living weaving men's clothing. Unfortunately, this lower standard of living

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> "School of General Studies may change requirements," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, February 15, 1989.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Thomas Ricks, "Khalil Totah: The Unknown Years," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2008, 56.

was very evident in Totah's family life: out of his eight sisters and three brothers, only four sisters and two brothers survived into adulthood. 11

Growing up in a devout Christian family, Totah's early education revolved around the study of the Holy Bible. 12 As he began formal schooling, he transferred between several public and church schools until 1899, when he was given permission to study at the nearby Girls' Training Home, a women's Quaker school founded by American missionaries in 1888. Two years later, he transferred to the newly established Boy's Training Home as one of its first students. 13 After another two years there, in 1906, he transferred to the Brumanna Friends School in Lebanon before finishing the last year of his early education in Jerusalem at the Church Mission Society English School.<sup>14</sup>

Upon returning to his parents' home in Ramallah after his high school graduation, Totah quickly began to chafe under his lack of financial and social independence. Naturally, he began looking for an opportunity to gain this desired independence. As it turns out, his close relationship with American missionaries while growing up inspired him to look west to the United States for precisely such an opportunity. Unsurprisingly, his parents were not as excited about the idea of him moving across the world as he was. But with the help of an American missionary friend, Totah was eventually able to persuade them. On July 16, 1906, he left his home in Palestine for the long journey to Vassalboro, Maine, to attend high school at the Oak Grove Friends School. 15

Much like his school years in the Middle East, Totah excelled in his studies in the United States. After earning an American high school diploma from the Oak Grove Friends School, he completed a college degree in 1911 from Clark College in Worcester, Massachusetts. The next year, he moved to New York City for a postgraduate program at Columbia University's Teacher's College. 16 At this time, Totah possibly was the only Arab student on campus since the University's 1912 Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees mentions no students from Arab countries among a total of 256 international students.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, it is evident that Totah was eager to leverage his personal experiences in his studies: during that year in Morningside Heights, he wrote a thesis about American Quaker high schools. After graduating with a master's degree in 1912, Totah then returned to Ramallah to work at his alma mater.

the Boy's Training Home, which had been renamed the Friends Boys School. 18

Perhaps just as important as Totah's academic achievements in the United States was his acculturation into its society. While he long felt like an outsider as an Arab in early twentieth-century America, he did develop an admiration for the country's ideals. 19 So much so that a few years later, in 1918, he enlisted into the United States Army as a non-combatant despite having already served in the Ottoman Army for three months in 1914.<sup>20</sup> And like many other foreign intellectuals involved with the war, President Wilson's post-war endorsement of the right to self-determination legitimized Totah's long-simmering passion - the independence of his home country of Palestine. 21 After around a year of service with the 79th Infantry Division in wartime Paris, he returned to Palestine in 1919.<sup>22</sup>

Next, Totah worked for a few years as the principal of the British Men's Elementary Training College in Jerusalem. He got the chance to begin working on this passion when he returned to Columbia University's Teachers College in 1925 for a Ph.D. program.<sup>23</sup> The student population grew substantially since 1912, when he first arrived at Columbia, to a reported total of 622 international students on campus - including four students from Syria and four from Palestine.24 Even though his program was focused on education, Totah was able to center his studies around his interest in Palestinian independence. In his dissertation, "The Contribution of the Arabs to Education," he challenged Western stereotypes of Arab civilizational inferiority and backwardness.<sup>25</sup> After graduating with a Ph.D. in 1927, Totah returned again to Palestine to work in its public education system.



Figure 2. Joy Hilden, Khalil Total Portrait, 1945, 2016, Photograph, A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Ouaker Educator and Activist.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Thomas Ricks, "Khalil Totah: The Unknown Years," 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Joy Hilden, "A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator & Activist," Bloomington: Xlibris, 2016, 7.

13 Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 54. <sup>16</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> "Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1912," *Columbia University Press*, 1912, 214.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Amy Smith, "Dr. Khalil Totah: Arab-American Quaker Educator and Palestinian Nationalist Crusader, 1914-1948," PhD diss., University of Maine, 2018, 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 58. <sup>23</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1927," Columbia University Press, 1927, 366.
<sup>25</sup> Colin Rutherford, "The Education of Dr. Totah," Master's thesis,

California State University, 2010, 63.



**Figure 3.** Joy Hilden, *Postcard of Totah, 1909, 2016*, Photograph, *A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker, Educator and Activist.* 

Despite his full-time work in education, Totah's involvement with Palestinian activism quickly intensified during this period of his life. In 1932, he published an essay, "Education in Palestine," where he analyzed the educational system of Mandatory Palestine.<sup>26</sup> In 1934, he served as a delegate to the London Yearly Meeting of Friends, where he brought up the question of Palestinian independence to the Quaker church. Then, in 1937, he testified before the Peel Commission about the viability of Mandatory Palestine, where he "declared that the Arabs of Palestine were entitled to their own country."27 In the years following this testimony, he continued to split his time between working to improve the educational system of Palestine and raising international support for Palestinian independence through tireless letter writing and public activism. All of this effort eventually culminated into a full-time job in 1944, when he was invited back to New York City to head the Institute of Arab American Affairs. He spent the next three years traveling the country, giving speeches, and participating in debates about Palestinian independence.<sup>28</sup> Fittingly with this position and his love for his adopted country, Totah became an American citizen in 1946. That same year, he also testified in front of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry regarding Mandatory Palestine.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 4. Joy Hilden, Totah in Doctoral Robe in 1943, 2016, Photograph, A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator and Activist.



Figure 5. Joy Hilden, Totah in Army Uniform in 1914 and 1918, 2016, Photograph, A Passion for Learning: The Life Journey of Khalil Totah, a Palestinian Quaker Educator and Activist.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Hilden, *A Passion for Learning*, 2016, 298. <sup>28</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Hilden, A Passion for Learning, 2016, 302; 198.



Given his lifelong dedication to this cause, it is unfortunate that his efforts would end in disappointment. With the 1947 decision of the United Nations to partition Palestine came Totah's disillusionment. Three years later, in 1950, the Institute of Arab American Affairs closed its doors in New York City due to financial troubles and Totah retired from public life. He spent the last few years of his life out west in Whittier, California; however, Palestine never did leave his mind. In 1955, Totah published his last book, *Dynamite in the Middle East*, where he discussed the future of his country in the post-World War II Middle East.<sup>30</sup> He died that year, on February 24, at the age of 69.

Totah lived in New York City three times during his life. During the first period, in 1911, he was a master's student at Columbia University's Teachers College studying public education administration. He then later returned to the same school in 1925 as a Ph.D. student, where he wrote his thesis on Arab contributions to education. With the benefit of retrospect, it must be noted how these two stays distinctly marked the two phases of his professional life: his first degree directly led to his first career as a school administrator in Palestine; the second initiated his career as a public intellectual raising support for Palestinian independence. It is perhaps fitting that his final return to New York City in 1944 would combine his first two careers into one. As the Executive Director of the Institute of Arab American Affairs, he was both its chief executive and lead activist. Not only did Columbia University play a role in preparing him for each of his first two careers, but it also prepared him for a third career that only somebody like Totah could have fulfilled.

#### MOHAMMED FADHEL AL-JAMALI (M.A. 1930, PH.D. 1934, DHUMLITT 1954), TEACHERS COLLEGE

Looking back on his life, Mohammed Fadhel Al-Jamali certainly did a lot to be proud of. Among the numerous degrees he earned and books he wrote, he helped found the Arab League, signed the Charter of the United Nations as his country's representative, and served as Iraq's Prime Minister.<sup>31</sup> He even gained so much international renown that, when the 1958 Iraqi military coup d'état sentenced him to death, no less than King Mohammad V of Morocco, the United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold, and Pope John XXIII rallied for his release.<sup>32</sup> Despite

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ricks, "Khalil Totah," 2008, 71.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfgang Saxon, "Mohd Al-Jamali, 94, of Iraq; A Founder of the Arab League," New York Times, May 29, 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Alan Rush, "Obituary: Mohammed Fadhil Jamali," *Independent*, June 2, 1997.

these impressive achievements, however, not much of his modest upbringing would have indicated such a finale as one of the Middle East's prominent leaders.

Sometime in 1902, Mohammed Fadhel Al-Jamali was born in the Kadhimiya neighborhood of Baghdad, Irag. His family was particularly conservative and religious. His father was a prominent Shi'a sheikh who had studied Islam in the sacred city of Najaf for twenty years, while his mother - the daughter of a famous female mullah - had a similarly high religious standing in her community.33 In a later memoir about his upbringing in a strict Shi'a household, Al-Jamali recounted how as a child, he "cherished a negative attitude against the Sunnite Muslims... [and] was taught that all non-Muslims, although [he] had rare occasion to see any of them, were unclean and untouchable."34 Knowing this, it is not surprising that Al-Jamali's later disinterest in following his father's professional footsteps - perhaps a consequence of the severe corporal punishment he suffered at his religious elementary school - created a great deal of conflict in his household.35

Thankfully, a later switch to a Persian school better fit his personality, and he discovered an interest in teaching that offered him a path to the independence he desired. Consequently, his high academic performance landed him a seat at the Baghdad Teacher Training College at just 15 years of age. 36 After finishing his studies, he taught elementary school for a few years before earning an opportunity to continue his studies at the American University of Beirut, which was then known as the Syrian Protestant College. His father, understandably scandalized by the thought of his son attending a Christian school, forced his son to first receive permission from the prominent Sheikh Mahdi al-Khalisi. After an initial denial, the sheikh finally relented when Al-Jamali promised that his studies in Beirut would eventually, in some way, serve Islam.<sup>37</sup>

It was in this collegiate environment that Al-Jamali began to challenge his inherited conservative instinct. Two aspects of his experience at the Syrian Protestant College prompted his adoption of political liberalism that would later define his public life. The first aspect was his participation in an inter-religious organization called the Brotherhood Society, & the second was his studies in science, in particular the theory of evolution. Consequently, he later recalled that he graduated from the University with "a spirit of tolerance, openmindedness and critical-mindedness" that did not exist in his younger self.<sup>38</sup>

After graduating from the Syrian Protestant College,



**Figure 6.** Harry Almond, Al-Jamali and Sarah Powell Wedding Picture, 1933, from the Al-Jamali Family Collection, 1993, Photograph, Iraqi Statesman: Portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali.

Al-Jamali spent a few years teaching at his alma mater, the Teachers Training College in Baghdad - until he won one of the first-ever awarded Josiah Macy Foundation grants to pursue postgraduate education at Columbia University's Teachers College in 1929.<sup>39</sup> The grant of \$1,000 a year was awarded through the International Institute of Teachers College, and the Institute's President, Dr. Paul Monroe, became Al-Jamali's faculty advisor. Al-Jamali was so set on studying in New York City that he even turned down an appointment to tutor the Crown Prince of Iraq full-time.<sup>40</sup>

His time at Columbia University was an especially intellectually formative period of his life. One particular aspect of this experience that Al-Jamali

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Harry Almond, *Iraqi Statesman: Portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali, Grosvenor,* 1993, 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Mohammad Al-Jamali, "An Arab Faces the Modern World," Remembering Childhood in the Middle East, ed. Elizabeth Fernea, University of Texas Press, 2002, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Almond, Iraqi Statesman, 1993, 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Almond, *Iraqi Statesman*, 1993, 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Al-Jamali, "An Arab Faces the Modern World," 2002, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Almond, *Iraqi Statesman*, 1993, 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Christopher Tudico, *The History of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation* (New York City: Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 2012), 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Almond, Iraqi Statesman, 1993, 24.



most cherished was the opportunity to interact with students from all over the world. Although during that year, he would have been only one of two Iraqis out of the 18 students from the Middle East (one from Egypt, two from Iraq, twelve from Palestine, and three from Syria), the 1929 Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustee indicates that he would have encountered 570 international students on campus from 62 countries. Additionally, he interacted with and learned from students from 68 different countries while staying at the nearby International House New York, giving him a cosmopolitan perspective of the world.

Beyond the social aspect of Al-Jamali's time at Columbia, his studies at Teachers College greatly prepared him for his long career in education administration. In particular, his dissertation on the unique challenges of educating Iraq's Bedouin population, "The New Iraq: Its Problem of Bedouin Education," foreshadowed the type of work he would

undertake later in his service in Iraq's Ministry of Education.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps even more important than his professional development was his marriage to Sarah Powell, a Canadian-American and fellow Columbia University graduate whom he met while taking summer courses at the University of Chicago.<sup>44</sup> This cross-cultural relationship solidified his passion for searching for the common humanity of people despite cultural differences.

After five years in New York City, Al-Jamali completed his Ph.D. in 1934. He returned to Iraq married, credentialed, and ready for his new job in Iraq's Ministry of Education. He worked there for eight years before being appointed Iraq's Director of General Education, where he oversaw Irag's school system. 45 Among the many influential reforms he implemented in this position was a system of scholarships for Iraq's most talented students to study abroad.<sup>46</sup> After all, he cherished the opportunity he had received to study in Lebanon and the United States, and he wanted to offer the same experience to other young Iraqis. Notwithstanding his faithful work in the Ministry of Education, he was suddenly transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1943 because of his international background.



Figure 7. Harry Almond, Al-Jamali signs United Nations Charter for Iraq, 1945, Photograph, Iraqi Statesman: Portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1929 (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1929), 473.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Almond, *Iraqi Statesman*, 1993, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Almond, Iraqi Statesman, 1993, 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Almond, *Iraqi Statesman*, 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ibid, 44.

Despite his initial displeasure with the move, Al-Jamali ascended through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ranks even faster than he did in his previous job. By 1944. he was made the ministry's Director-General. He was promoted next to the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary in 1945.47 Fittingly with his meteoric diplomatic rise, his debut onto the world stage was no less significant than the organizational meeting of the United Nations later that same year, where he signed the Charter of the United Nations as an official representative of Iraq.<sup>48</sup> A short while later, he was appointed Foreign Minister of Iraq. In 1953, he finally moved back to domestic policy when he first served as Iraq's Speaker of Parliament before being appointed to serve as Prime Minister by King Faisal II.<sup>49</sup> Much like his earlier tenure as the Director of General Education, he spent his two years as Prime Minister reforming Iraq's educational system and social welfare system. 50 For his various accomplishments in the international sphere, Columbia University honored Al-Jamali with an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in 1954.51

**Figure 8.** Lisa Larsen, Fadhil Jamali of Iraq (L) and Toshikazu Kase of Japan, at UN general assembly meeting. 1957, Photograph, LIFE Magazine.

Al-Jamali's public career was cut short just a mere four years later in 1958 when a military coup d'état took over Iraq, imprisoned him, and gave him a death sentence. An unexpected release from prison in 1961 forced him to spend the last part of his life in exile. Despite the circumstances, Al-Jamali eventually found refuge as a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tunis, where he published his most influential book, Letters on Islam, which contained reflections of his personal struggles as a political prisoner. This book finally fulfilled the promise Al-Jamali made to Sheikh Mahdi al-Khalisi many decades earlier. On May 24, 1997, he passed away at the age of 94.



**Figure 9.** Harry Almond, Al-Jamali with Tunisian President, 1933, from the Al-Jamali Family Collection, 1993, Photograph, Iraqi Statesman: Portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali.

In later reflections on his life, Al-Jamali often emphasized how his beliefs changed throughout his personal development. It is also evident that a large part of his intellectual development was owed to his time at Columbia University. In a 1992 essay, "Promotion of World Peace," written when he was 90 years old, Al-Jamali recommended that an "International University" be established to foster international brotherhood.<sup>54</sup> He asserts,

If diplomats and statesmen of the world were to have the same educational background, there would be a much better chance for international understanding and cooperation. This belief is based on my personal experience as a Macy Fellow of the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929-1931, and as a student living at the International House... during the same period. 55

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Almond, *Iraqi Statesman*, 1993, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Almond, Iraqi Statesman, 1993, 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Michael Eppel, "The Fadhil Al-Jamali Government in Iraq, 1953–54," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34, no. 3, July 1999, 423.

<sup>50</sup> Rush, "Obituary."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Al-Jamali Alumni Card.

<sup>52</sup> Almond, Iraqi Statesman, 1993, 140.

<sup>53</sup> Almond, *Iraqi Statesman*, 161.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Mohammad Al-Jamali, "Promotion of World Peace," *International Journal on World Peace*, 1992, 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Al-Jamali, "Promotion of World Peace," 56.

#### ALICE MITRI KANDALAFT (B.SC. 1926, M.A. 1927), **TEACHERS COLLEGE**

For Alice Mitri Kandalaft, born in nineteenth-century Damascus, the opportunity to be a leader and one of her country's first representatives abroad was inconceivable due to many factors. Yet, her lifelong activism to promote education and feminism prepared her for such an improbable opportunity when she was later appointed to be Syria's representative to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women after Syria gained independence from French control in 1946.



Figure 10. The first Syrian woman at the UN Alice Kandalaft at her home in Beirut in the 1970s, Photograph, Alice Kandalaft Library.

Given her tremendous life, it is unfortunate that few details of Kandalaft's early life are recorded. We know that she was born sometime in 1895 in the al-Qaymariya neighborhood of Damascus - a neighborhood known today as the 'Old City.' Finally, her last name suggests a relationship to the Damascene Greek Orthodox community, a connection that could explain the last little bit that is known of her childhood - her early education in Orthodox schools.56

It was during her young adult years that her life started to become more defined, at the same time as it became immensely more interesting. After completing her secondary education in Syria, Kandalaft moved to Beirut to continue her undergraduate studies at the Syrian Protestant College. Sometime during those years, she met Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, a brilliant Syrian Protestant College-trained medical doctor who was heavily involved in Syrian nationalist politics.<sup>57</sup> (So much so, that later in 1932, Shahbandar was seated next to Mohammad Fadhel Al-Jamali during a luncheon when Al-Jamali visited the Iraqi Consulate in Damascus as Iraq's Director of General Education.)<sup>58</sup>

Thankfully for Kandalaft, Shahbandar was highly trusted by Syria's short-serving king, Faisal bin Al-Hussein. When Henry King and Charles Crane of the American King-Crane Commission arrived at Syria in 1919 to investigate the case for Syrian independence, Shahbandar served as King Faisal's personal translator. While, unfortunately for Syrian nationalists, this inquiry ended in total disappointment as the French successfully maintained their mandate over the country - the investigation did bear some positive fruit for Kandalaft. When King Faisal I told Shahbandar that President Woodrow Wilson wanted to sponsor two Syrian students to earn their master's degrees in the United States, Shahbandar knew just the right people to recommend. 59 He nominated two women for the opportunity, Kandalaft being one of them, as he cited Syria's need for more graduate educated women. 60 And thus, one more unexpected but critical stop was added to Kandalaft's journey from Damascus - to Columbia's Teachers College.

When Kandalaft arrived at Morningside Heights in 1922, Teachers College was still a relatively new institution that had only gained its affiliation with Columbia University about two decades earlier. Despite its relative novelty, however, Kandalaft would have encountered a large and diverse campus with respect to nationality and gender. Across the undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools, there were 10,951 students on campus. 61 Of those, 2,238 students were enrolled at Teachers College specifically.<sup>62</sup> Among the entire student body, there were 557 international students from all over the world.63 And while Kandalaft would have been one of only two Syrian students at Columbia University, there were plenty of women studying with her as 5,045 women were present on campus.64

Kandalaft's five years at Teachers College were a particularly productive time in her life. First, she completed a Bachelor of Science degree in 1926

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> M. Wassouf, "Alice Kandalaft, the first Arab woman at the UN,

representing Syria in 1948," *The Syria Times*, August 18, 2019. <sup>57</sup> Kamil Mansur and Leila Fawaz, *Transformed Landscapes*: Essays on Palestine and the Middle East in Honor of Walid Khalidi, American University in Cairo Press, 2009, 35.

Salmond, Iraqi Statesman, 1993, 36.
 Dima Mansour, "أليس قندلفت السيدة العربية الأولى في الأمم للتحدة", [Alice Kandalaft, the First Arab Woman at the] United Nations and Syria's Representative]," Emarat Al Youm,

July 13, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Marefa Foundation, "اليس قندلفت [Alice Kandalaft]," Marefa.org. 61 Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1922 (New York City: Columbia University, 1922), 273.

<sup>62</sup> Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1922, 188.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1922, 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Ibid, 273.

before completing a Master of Arts degree the following year. Her 243-page master's thesis, "Readings in Psychology for Normal Schools in Arabic Countries," is an impressively comprehensive investigation into the various factors that determine educational outcomes.65 Her intention to translate education theory into practical use is prominent, as the thesis opens up with this inquiry:

> The question that every Arabic speaking student here at Teachers' College asks himself is this, "After getting acquainted with the best of current educational theories and methods on the various subjects or school activities, I am interested in... what am I going to do when I get to my specific situation? What books or materials am I going to use with my Arabic pupils or students, and in an Arabic-speaking community?66

As can be expected from the topic of her thesis, after her graduation from Columbia University, Kandalaft went on to work in school administrations throughout Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.<sup>67</sup> In particular, she focused on expanding the quality of, and access to, education for local women.68

While education was always a priority in Kandalaft's life, she also became heavily involved in various political causes - chief among them were Arab feminism and Syrian nationalism. In 1933, she spoke at the International Congress of Women in Chicago, where she denounced the French Mandate of Syria. 69 In 1938, she served as the chair of the Arab Women's Congress for the Defense of Palestine. 70 In 1942, she opened a salon in the Umayya Hotel of Damascus, where many of Syria's most famous writers and politicians met to converse, debate, or even start political parties that later greatly influenced Syria's history. 71 Three years later, in 1945, she helped found the Arab Women's National League and served as its first president. A year after that, she was the only woman to testify at the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine in Washington D.C. in 1946. The following year, in 1947, she returned to the United States on a teacher's fellowship from the Institute for International Education. 72 During that fellowship, she went on a nationwide tour where she spoke at various universities about feminism, Palestinian independence, and the Middle East in general.73

Perhaps her greatest accomplishment was her 1947 appointment to be one of Syria's representatives

Figure 11. The first Syrian woman at the UN, Alice Kandalaft with the representatives of India - 1948, Photograph, Alice Kandalaft Library.

to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Shortly after its founding, the United Nations decided to continue the work of the League of Nation's inquiry on women's rights with this new commission.74 Kandalaft was the perfect candidate for this job as she had an impressive education at the Syrian Protestant College and Columbia University's Teachers College, extensive professional experience in school administration throughout the Middle East, and many years of dedication to the Arab feminist movement.<sup>75</sup> Over her four years in that position, she worked extensively on the expansion of women's political rights in Arab countries.76

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Alice Kandalaft, "Readings in Psychology for Normal Schools in Arabic Countries," Master's thesis, (Columbia University, 1927), I.

<sup>66</sup> Kandalaft, "Readings in Psychology for Normal Schools in Arabic Countries," I.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Nova Robinson, "Sisters of Men": Syrian and Lebanese Women's Transnational Campaigns for Arab Independence and Women's Rights, 1910-1949," PhD diss., (Rutgers University, 2015), 465.

<sup>68</sup> Robinson, "Sisters of Men" 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Leila Rupp, "Challenging Imperialism in International Women's

Organizations, 1888-1945," NWSA Journal, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 16.

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, "Sisters of Men," 2015, 390.

<sup>7</sup>¹ Wassouf, "Alice Kandalaft," 2019.
7² Robinson, "Sisters of Men," 2015, 390.
7³ Robinson, "Sisters of Men," 397.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid, 398.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Robinson, "Sisters of Men," 2015, 389.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Robinson, "Sisters of Men," 2015, 78.



**Figure 12.** Alice Kandalaft, the first Arab woman at the UN, representing Syria in 1948, Photograph, Alice Kandalaft Library.

Unfortunately, her involvement in Syrian politics would come to a sudden end in 1958 with the founding of the United Arab Republic and the subsequent union of the Syrian and Egyptian governments. President Gamal Abdel Nasser's assumption of political leadership over Syria effectively closed off the majority of opportunities for public involvement in politics. Consequently, Kandalaft spent the last years of her life in Beirut, where she passed away sometime in the 1960s.<sup>77</sup>

Kandalaft was deeply saddened by the death of her friend, Shahbandar, when he was assassinated on July 6, 1940.<sup>78</sup> After all, besides their decades-long personal friendship, she had him to thank for the Columbia University scholarship he recommended her for 21 years earlier in 1919. This opportunity at Teachers College provided the intellectual and professional development that helped nudge her onto a unique career path in school administration and feminist activism that culminated in her appointment

to the United Nations. It is unfortunate, then, that Shahbandar did not live long enough to see Kandalaft leave for New York City once again in 1947. Not only was she already one of the most prominent public figures in the Middle East, but she left for New York City as the international representative of a newly independent Syria - a lifelong goal of his as well.

#### CONCLUSION

As one might expect, given the early twentieth-century setting of this paper, researching the lives of Totah, Al-Jamali, and Kandalaft was no simple task. For one, the 1,500 pages of the *Columbia University Alumni Register* 1754-1931, while comprehensive, did not lend itself to easily identifying the Arab alumni. Although there is a section that categorizes alumni by country, the use of their first and middle initials

<sup>77</sup> Mansour, "Alice Kandalaft," 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Marefa Foundation, "Alice Kandalaft," 2019.

requires painstaking cross-checking to verify the identity of each student with a second alphabetical listing containing full names. Next, after making an initial list of Arab alumni, I searched through various secondary sources for information on their backgrounds. This involved examining countless books, master's theses, Ph.D. dissertations, and newspaper clippings until I was able to form a picture of each student. Finally, the inevitable challenges of searching through sources in Arabic as a non-native speaker - or even just working around the English transliterations of Arab names, as was especially the case with Alice Mitri Kandalaft - made the task of researching all the more difficult.

This account of my research process, however, then brings up the question of subject selection. Why did I ultimately choose to write on Totah, Al-Jamali, and Kandalaft, out of the many other Arab alumni I encountered in my research? Ultimately, there were three main reasons: first, the availability of readily accessible research on their lives, since many alumni listed in the Columbia University Alumni Register had little to no accessible research on their lives; second, their compelling life stories, which is perhaps the impetus for having such research about their lives readily accessible in the first place; and third, the religious, political, and gender diversity they showed between them, given my intention to showcase the diversity of Arab students that was masked by campus Orientalism. Although I had to limit my writing to these three individuals, I found many other Arab alumni whose stories are just as deserving of further research or storytelling. Such examples include Amir Boktor, a 1924 Egyptian graduate of Teachers College who wrote a book on Egypt's educational history;79 Raja Howarani, a 1930 Syrian graduate of Teachers College who served as the secretary to a Syrian Prime Minister;80 and Bulus Khauli, a 1905 Lebanese graduate of Teachers College who was a renowned professor and Lebanese nationalist intellectual at the American University of Beirut.81

As I progressed in my analysis, I slowly noticed that my research objectives were also shifting as well. While I initially started this study with the intention of highlighting the diversity of Arab students attending Columbia University, I realized that I was also effectively documenting how Columbia University changed because of such alumni as well. In 1892, the first year I could identify any Arab students at Columbia University, there were only 31 international students from 21 countries on campus.82 By 1929, the year Al-Jamali started his master's degree, there were 570 international students from 62 countries.83 And

today, the latest report from Columbia University's International Student and Scholars Office indicates that there are 10,172 international students from 145 countries enrolled.84 Alongside this diverse student body, Columbia University currently hosts 47 different cultural clubs and student associations, teaches 54 foreign languages, and invites foreign dignitaries to campus every winter to participate in its World Leader's Forum. Even the boundaries of the University's footprint have expanded beyond its campus in New York City, as Columbia University has opened Global Centers in China, Turkey, India, Kenya, France, Brazil, Chile, Tunisia, and Jordan.

Such a transformation, I believe, was not the product of an arbitrary change of University policy to open its doors to the wider world. Rather, I consider it was the gradual, decades-long inflow of international students to Morningside Heights that slowly changed the culture of Columbia from within. After all, with those students came the student associations, languages, and diversity that makes Columbia University the uniquely global institution it is today. Consequently, while I was able to show snapshots of this change through the lives of Totah, Al-Jamali, and Kandalaft - a truly thorough account of Columbia University's cosmopolitan transformation would have to be shown through the lives of a great many more of the thousands of international students who have passed through its 116th Street gates over the course of its history.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> "Columbia University Alumni Register 1754-1931," Columbia

University Press, 1932, 84.
80 Souad Lazkani, "Meet the 19 AUB graduates who helped establish the United Nations," *The 961*, June 16, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Samir Khalaf, "Letters, Links and Bulus Khauli," International College Newsletter (Winter 2018): 6.

<sup>82</sup> Annual Report 1892, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees 1929 (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1929), 473.

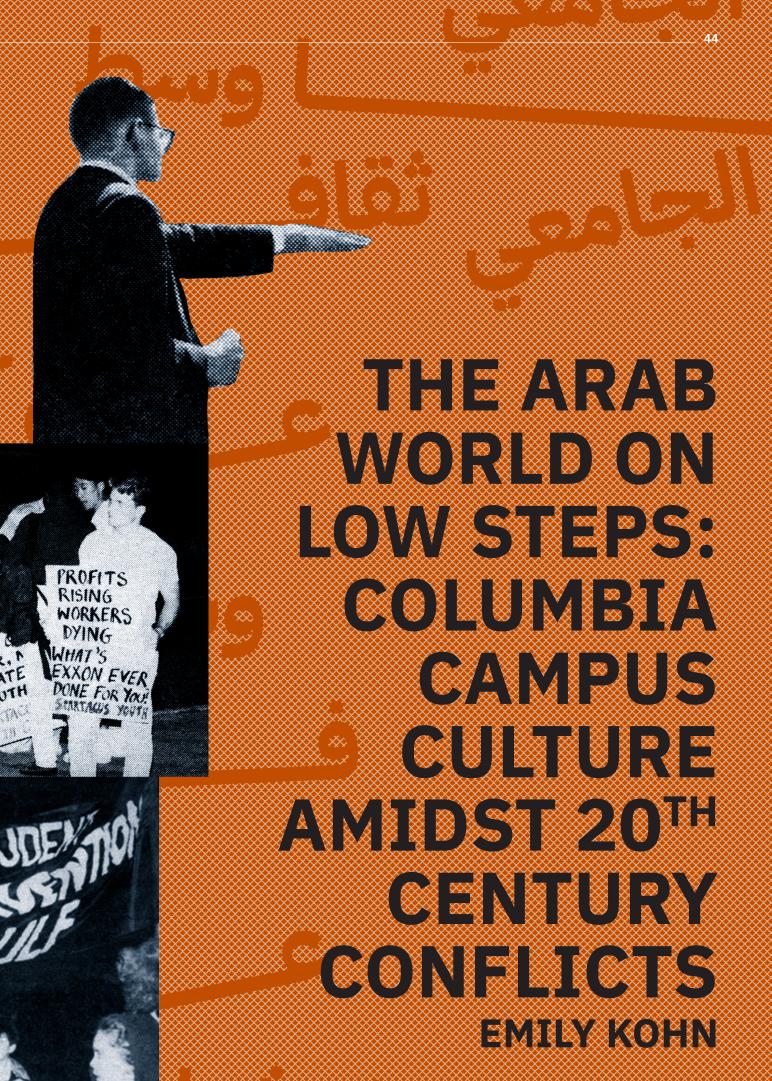
<sup>84 &</sup>quot;Statistics," Columbia International Students and Scholars Office, Columbia University.

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## HE ARAB WORLD ON COLUMBIA CAMPUS CULTURE AMIDST 20TH CENTURY CONFLICTS

Officially named Columbia University in the City of New York, the University takes on many of the city's defining traits, including the globalized character that makes it a hub of intercultural discussion. As an international institution with progressiveminded students, dialogue on world issues can often be found at Columbia. Regarding the Middle East, Columbia has been at the forefront of conversations about the region in the past century, with the establishment of institutes such as the Center for Palestine Studies and the Middle East Institute, as well as student protests and student news writing reacting to conflicts in the Arab world. These reactions provide insights into how a diverse student body in a powerful city interacts with regional complexities on the other side of the world. In light of the ongoing activities at Columbia relating to the Middle East, examining student activities during the most formative periods of the Arab world's relationship with the U.S. helps shed light on the roots of dialogue and conflict on campus.

To understand the campus culture of past decades, one must look at the changing attitudes of the students passing through Columbia's 116th Street gates each year. The Columbia Daily Spectator, the second oldest college daily newspaper in the United States (U.S.), has been run entirely by Columbia students,1 providing the perfect opportunity to explore students' views on the world as it changes. By examining the newspaper's multimedia archives from three key periods of modern Middle Eastern history, it is possible to perceive these events through the lens of Columbia students and to understand how the Arab world seeped into campus culture. Supplemented with reports from the Columbia University Archives, one can reconstruct the impact on student life in three different twenty-year spans.

First, illuminating the interwar period (1919-1939) when the modern Middle East emerged reveals how Columbia became a globally-minded center for discussions on imperialism, multiculturalism, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "About Us," Columbia Daily Spectator, Accessed 2021.

power in the Arab world. Next, spotlighting mid-20th century tensions (1955-1975) between Arab nations amidst the Cold War illustrates how Columbia became home to protests, scuffles, and speeches surrounding the Arab world. Finally, reviewing the more recent Gulf Wars (1990-2010) shows how wartime brought conversations about the Arab world and Columbia students' relationship with it to a critical point. These three periods come together to paint a portrait of how the Arab world has found its way to Columbia's Low Steps and how students have engaged with these issues.

#### THE INTERWAR PERIOD: UNDERSTANDING **IMPERIALISM AND NATIONALISM AT COLUMBIA (1919-1939)**

After World War I, the modern Arab world began to take shape while Americans were developing more global awareness. Starting with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 that carved up the Middle East into British and French influence,2 Western powers exerted their imperial influence over the Arab people and crafted the boundaries of their world. The following year, the British committed to establishing a home for Jewish people in Palestine and facilitating self-determination for Palestinians,<sup>3</sup> sowing the seeds for future conflict. The Paris Peace Conference saw the Arab world officially cut up into a colonial mandate system, as France took control of Syria and Lebanon, and Britain took Palestine, Egypt, and what would become Iraq.4



Figure 1. Low Memorial Library, Photograph, Columbia Undergraduate Admissions, New York.

Nascent Arab nationalism developed in response to colonialism, such as the 1919 Egyptian resistance against British control that led to independence in 1922. Iraq similarly revolted against the British in 1920 and was granted independence in 1922. Meanwhile, French-controlled Syria resisted colonial power but in 1925 was bombed into temporary submission.5 These Arab resistance movements and others captivated American audiences who were newly knowledgeable about conflicts outside of the West. They set the scene for a postwar Columbia student body to engage with ideas of nationalism, self-determination, imperialism, and colonialism.

#### **SPEAKER EVENTS ON ARAB NATIONALISM AND IMPERIALISM**

Campus engaged with these themes throughout the interwar period, as imperialism and nationalism in the Arab world started permeating academic life more. One of the first opportunities for exposure to these issues was in 1920 when the Institute of Arts and Sciences featured a lecture series by foreign policy expert Jackson Fleming on Egyptian nationalism to engage with ideas of nationalism, self-determination, imperialism, and colonialism. politics. In 1922, the Institute of Arts and Sciences hosted a lecture from S. K. Ratcliffe on "England in the Orient,"7 focusing on Egypt's nationalist movements after the revolt. That same year, Dr. Arthur E. Bestor gave the inaugural lecture in a campus series about "Near Eastern problems" on French control of Syria8 and spoke the following year about "Arabs and Zionists in Palestine." Columbia Professor Edward M. Earle, a prominent historian of the region, also gave several lectures to the Institute on the penetration of the Near East by colonialism, how nationalist movements threatened it, and how America benefits from closer Near Eastern ties. One particular lecture in 1925 became infamous after Earle contended that the U.S. would have acted the same way as the British in Egypt; he denounced British policy in Egypt for making Egypt servile and argued that "Egypt claims that the British are there through no moral right, but only by force, and this is true to a certain extent."10 Even at the 1929 senior class banquet in John Jay Hall, the Arab world found its way to the students' ears when Columbia College Dean Hawkes gave a speech on his travels to the Near East and Egypt. 11 Columbia students were given many opportunities to learn about Middle Eastern issues.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "The Middle East and the West: WWI and Beyond." NPR.Org. Accessed July 25, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Youssef M. Choueiri, "The Middle East: Colonialism, Islam & the Nation

State," Journal of Contemporary History 37, no. 4 (2002): 649–63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "The Middle East and the West: WWI and Beyond." NPR.Org. Accessed July 25, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "Whistled Bird Songs Entertain Institute." *Columbia Spectator.* January 20, 1920.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "Ratcliffe Gives Last Lecture to Institute," Columbia Spectator, February 3, 1922.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "Lecturer Will Talk Tonight," *Columbia Spectator*, November 25, 1922. <sup>9</sup> "Bestor Will Talk Tonight," *Columbia Spectator*, January 6, 1923.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> "Sees Pre-War Imperialism Revived in England's Ultimatum to Egypt Professor Earle Believes, However, That U.S. Would Have Acted in Same Way," Columbia Spectator, January 15, 1925.

<sup>11 &</sup>quot;Hawkes Addresses Graduating Class at Final Banquet," Columbia Spectator, May 8, 1929.

#### EARLE LISTED TO SPEAK ON CAMPUS TOMORROW

Problems Club Announces Him as Speaker in Open Forum—To Be Held in Schemenhorn.

**Figure 2.** Earle Listed to Speak on Campus Tomorrow, 1925, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

VOL. LXX (49th Year) No. 6

# IMPERIALISM CALLED SELFISH DOMINATION FOR EUROPE'S PROFIT

Dr. Gibbons and India's Leading Journalist, Syud Hossain Agree on Definition.

DR. SHATARA ASSERTS
ARAB POINT OF VIEW

Charges Double-Dealing—Lieu States China Won't Submit Much Longer.

Four peculiarly individual views

**Figure 3.** Imperialism Called Selfish Domination for Europe's Profit, 1925, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

Students were also introduced to these ideas via speaker events held by student clubs, although these did not pick up until the mid-1920s. The Social Problems Club, which focused on student engagement with global issues, organized many events that transformed campus dialogue. In response to the fighting in Syria in 1925, the club held a forum entitled "Nationalism and Imperialism in the Arab World" with Professor Earle, who criticized French "stupidity" in their colonial administration and explained that "[friction], between the Arabs in Syria and the French, was almost inevitable," as the struggle was an "irreconcilable conflict of interest" because of Arab nationalism. 12 The following month, the club hosted a panel in Earl Hall with four speakers on "Imperialism in the Orient." One of them, an Arab alumnus of the University named Dr. F. L. Shatara, represented the "Arab point of view." 13 Dr. Shatara argued at the panel that "promises made to the Arabians and the claims of the Allies that mandates would be used for the benefit of the Arabs proves that imperialism does exist in the Eastern world."<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Avukah, a Zionist student organization, hosted Dr. Enzo Sereni in Hartley Hall for a 1937 discussion about Jews and Arabs living in harmony amidst nationalist fervor. 15 The University Christian Association held discussions on the Arab world in their weekly open houses in Earl Hall, with one in 1939 featuring prominent Middle East scholar Dr. Arthur Jeffery. 16 These lectures hosted by student clubs suggest students were more actively interested in these issues by the late 1920s and 1930s.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF AN ARAB STUDENT BODY

The First World War also introduced a new awareness of international identities and a spotlight on Arab students on campus. In the 1919-1920 academic year following the war, the Columbia University President's Annual Report recorded no students from Arab countries. 17 However, in the coming decade, the Spectator and registrar reports repeatedly mentioned Egyptian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Syrian students enrolled at the University. These students were integrated into campus life with the help of the Cosmopolitan Club, which held an annual reception for international students. During the 1920-1921 reception, a roll call of nations listed students from Palestine, Egypt, and Syria, and the program opened with a Syrian piano player. 18 When Columbia Professor Monroe spoke to the group of 300 students, he called the reception of Columbia students a literal "League of Nations" and expressed hopes for international unity. 19 Arab and Middle Eastern students were finding their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> "French Stupidity Blamed By Earle for Syrian Tangle," *Columbia Spectator*, November 13, 1925.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Imperialism Called Selfish Domination for Europe's Profit," Columbia Spectator, December 18, 1925.

<sup>14 &</sup>quot;Imperialism Called Selfish Domination for Europe's Profit," Columbia Spectator, 1925.

<sup>15 &</sup>quot;Sereni Advocates Moderate Policy in Arab Problem," Columbia Spectator, April 16, 1937.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "Campus Notes," Columbia Spectator, February 16, 1939.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> "Annual Report of the President of Columbia University to the Trustees," Annual Report, Columbia University, June 30, 1920, Columbia University Archives.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> "Big Foreign Fete Held on Campus," *Columbia Spectator*, July 19, 1920.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> "Big Foreign Fete Held on Campus," *Columbia Spectator*, 1920.

voices on campus as well. In 1923, the Cosmopolitan Club hosted a concert for Near Eastern students, <sup>20</sup> and three years later, the 'Eastern Students Union' was founded on campus. <sup>21</sup> When promoting the group, a student wrote,

[The Eastern Students Union] will necessarily be an instrumentality [sic] through which Columbia University students will have opportunity to acquaint themselves with the cultural background which underlies the social, political, and economic life of the East.<sup>22</sup>

## MANY LANDS MEET AT COLORFUL FETE

Students from Fifty Countries
Gather at Cosmopolitan
Club Reception

HOLD NATIONS' ROLL CALL

Every Corner of Globe Answers as Secretary Damlamian Goes Thru List

**Figure 4.** Many Lands Meet at Colorful Fete, 1921, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

The secretary of the club, an Iraqi student named Mr. Akrawi, spoke in an Eastern Students Union meeting about how the League of Nations was drowning out the voices of Iraq, Palestine, and Syria and strengthening Western power over them.<sup>23</sup> Around then, the *Spectator* interviewed Amir Boktor, Columbia's only Egyptian student at the time, about his adjustment to New York City and asked him to discuss Western influence in Egypt.<sup>24</sup> Although larger student ethnic groups had a more prominent presence on campus, Arab students were more visible due to the international spirit brought along by the war.

#### STUDENTS FROM EAST ORGANIZE FIRST UNION

Recently the Eastern students of Columbia University organized the Eastern Students Union which promises to be a strong factor for the furtherance of better understanding among different races. Moreover, it will necessarily be an instrumentality

**Figure 5.** Students from East Organize First Union, 1926, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARAB WORLD

With this newfound visibility of Arab students, this period saw more efforts among the student body to engage with the Arab world and the issues defining it outside of lectures. A dinner at the International House in 1925 brought Professor Earle's history class students together with distinguished Syrian, Iraqi, and other Arab scholars to contribute to "international understanding." Meanwhile, the Teachers College Student Council organized a Near East Educational Relief drive the following year for students to donate supplies and funds to children in several countries, including Syria. Other clubs held events that touched upon the Arab world, such as an Il Circolo Italiano student meeting in 1935 that compared Italian and British imperialism in the Middle East and Africa.

The writing in the *Spectator* itself, as a student-run paper, is equally as telling on how students felt about these issues. A 1922 anti-war Christmas poem referenced the Egyptian independence movement in the satire column: "Prussia spits and snarls at France. France retorts with bitter curses. England eyes the Turks askance. Egypt shrieks that Britain worse is."28 Not only does this line suggest that the student body is aware of Egypt's political situation, but it also recognizes the tension between Western powers and the Arab world. Student writers also shared their views on the Arab world directly. A 1937 blurb on Palestine told of British attacks on civilian Arab homes. Most of the report is factual, but the article's last line reads, "It is a warped sense of justice that commands the punishment of the innocent,"29 arguing that the

<sup>20 &</sup>quot;Cosmo Club Arranges Concert for Saturday," Columbia Spectator. April 13, 1923.

<sup>21 &</sup>quot;Students from East Organize First Union," Columbia Spectator, July 26, 1926.

 <sup>22 &</sup>quot;Students from East Organize First Union," Columbia Spectator, 1926.
 23 "Asiatic Students Speak At Meeting." Columbia Spectator. August

<sup>11, 1926.

&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "Egyptian Student Tells of Stories That Intensify Native Superstition," *Columbia Spectator*. October 17, 1923.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> "Near Easterners Forget Jealousies As They Dine With College Students" *Columbia Spectator*, January 16, 1925

Students," *Columbia Spectator*, January 16, 1925.

<sup>26</sup> "Contributions to the T. C. Christmas Chest May Be Made This Week, 'Participation Week," *Columbia Spectator*, November 30, 1926.

 <sup>27 &</sup>quot;League Seen as an Agent of England By Italian Students Discussing Crisis," *Columbia Spectator*, October 14, 1935.
 28 "Christmas Poem," *Columbia Spectator*, December 18, 1922.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> "The Troubles of Empire," *Columbia Spectator*, October 21, 1937.

violent nature of British imperialism was unwarranted. Although the Middle East is mentioned more frequently in later Spectator issues, these articles demonstrate a growing interest in the Arab world.

The permeation of the Arab world's themes of nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, and selfdetermination into campus life demonstrate how the University's newfound global identity influenced student interest in Arab issues. With speaker events, club meetings, and international gatherings, the student body gained significant exposure to the Middle East, setting the scene for a complex future relationship between the Arab world and Columbia students.

## The Off-Hour

#### CHRISTMAS POEM

Prussia spits and snarls at France. France retorts with bitter curses. England eyes the Turks askance. Egypt shrieks that Britain worse is. Smyrna is an earthly hell. Ireland is a bloody fen. Ring the merry Christmas bell! Peace on earth, good will to men!

Figure 6. Christmas Poem, 1922, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

#### THE COLD WAR: NAVIGATING **ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN, & EGYPTIAN TENSIONS ON CAMPUS (1955-1975)**

During the Cold War, easier access to news meant that campus life was more centered around the chronology of world events. The Middle East had largely solidified into independent nations by the 1940s and 1950s. Israel declared statehood in 1948, sparking a war involving Arab states against Israel to defend displaced Palestinian Arabs.30 The U.S. was the first country to recognize Israel's sovereignty.31 In 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, which motivated the U.S. to be more proactive in the Middle

#### THE 1950s: STUDENTS FIND THEIR VOICE ON ARAB ISSUES

Compared to the interwar period, a record number of speakers came to campus to discuss the Middle East in the 1950s. Part of this was due to the founding of Columbia's Middle East Institute in 1954, designed to promote dialogue on Middle Eastern and North African countries in line with student interests in these regions.<sup>34</sup> Speeches were hosted in spaces more accessible to students, and students also took a more active role in forums and panels. In 1956, a Political Assembly meeting in Columbia's Hamilton Hall engaged Dr. Basheer, the press attaché to Egypt's United Nations (U.N.) delegation. After he was questioned by Columbia's Student Zionist Organization (SZO), a reporter wrote,

> Dr. Basheer warned that "there will be no peace in the Middle East" until Israel accepts the original 1947 partition plan and admits the Arab refugees who were displaced by the Arab-Israeli war.35

## Israeli Consul Hits Arabs' Implacability

Demands They Recognize Jewish State's Right to Existence with Neighbors

Figure 7. David Zlotnick, Israeli Consul Hits Arabs' Implacability, 1956, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

Pan-Arabism made up a large part of campus dialogue. The Political Assembly hosted another talk by a representative of the United Arab Republic about Arab unity. The representative was badgered by "antagonistic questions" from students about Israel, which got so out of hand that the representative

East and caused Cold War competition to seep into regional politics.32 The U.S. provided economic and military assistance to Israel, while the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) sent aid to Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. This helped contribute to tense Arab-American relations. Furthermore, in 1958, Egypt and Syria built upon pan-Arab ideals to establish a union called the United Arab Republic. 33 All of these tensions, exacerbated by the Cold War, found a home on Columbia's campus.

<sup>30</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" Accessed July 29, 2021

<sup>31 &</sup>quot;What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" 2021. 32 Council on Foreign Relations, "What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "The Arab League," Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> About MEI," Middle East Institute Columbia University, Accessed August 14, 2021.

<sup>35 &</sup>quot;Egyptian Blames Suez Canal Crisis on Dulles Policies," Columbia Spectator, December 5, 1956.

stormed out of the meeting.<sup>36</sup> The campus saw famous speakers like Eleanor Roosevelt, who spoke at Columbia about U.N. actions in the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Smaller clubs hosted various Middle Eastern officials. These topics were also accessible over the radio. In 1955, the Columbia student radio, WKCR, hosted an interview with Israeli and Egyptian press attachés, who both defended their respective nation's arms buildup and expressed mistrust of the other side.<sup>38</sup> The campus became a negotiating ground for Israeli and Arab leaders to voice their opinions on the conflict with Columbia students as their audience.

Columbia students also developed their own opinions on the conflicts of the decade. Starting in 1956, the Columbia University Student Council founded a monthly Hyde Park event, where students could participate in "unrestricted free speech" on College Walk. Arab-Israeli tensions were clearly on students' minds, as the first Hyde Park turned to the conflict. SZO sent a speaker to the event, and once his speech touched upon Egypt, the Spectator reported that arguments broke out among Israeli and Arab students in the audience.<sup>40</sup> In 1957, a student poll found that only 35% of Columbia students thought that peace was possible between Arab nations and Israel within the next 10 years.41 SZO conducted the poll and therefore likely showed some bias. At Hyde Park two years later, the Student Council held a student debate on Low Plaza with the topic: "Resolved: That the United States should support Arab Nationalism."42 The 1950s showed a departure from the interwar



David Segal '59, emphasizes a point while speaking at yesterday's soapbox forum on "Arms for Israel."

Figure 8. 'Hyde Park' Draws One Speaker, 1956, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> "Speaker Walks Out on P.A. Discussion," *Columbia Spectator*, April 25, 1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Douglas Eldridge, "Mrs. Roosevelt Sees US Tardy in Mideast Moves," *Columbia Spectator*, March 8, 1956.

<sup>38 &</sup>quot;Arab-Israeli Attaches Discuss Middle East Situation on KCR," Columbia Spectator, October 10, 1955.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> "'Hyde Park' Draws One Speaker," *Columbia Spectator*, April 6, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> "'Hyde Park' Draws One Speaker," Columbia Spectator, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> "Half of Students Polled Deny Israeli Treaty Possibilities," Columbia Spectator, December 5, 1957.

<sup>42 &</sup>quot;Debaters Discuss Mid-East Question," Columbia Spectator. November 14, 1958.

period when students were starting to engage with Middle Eastern politics; the Columbia students of the Cold War era were more knowledgeable about these issues and wanted to debate them with their peers.

#### Hoffman Deplores Militarism, Lack of Religion in Israel

By Henry Ebel "Heartsick," "ashamed," and 'humiliated" were words used resterday by Rabbi Isidor B. Hoffman, Counselor to Jewish students, to describe his reaction to conditions in the State of Srael.

Speaking before a meeting of he Seixas and Menorah Societies, Rabbi Hoffman spoke of "a very great jingoism and chauvinism" n Irsael. "If Israel is to be just a Jewish Bulgaria or Rumania," ie said, "it's a terribly disillutioning, saddening thing."

The Israelis, he sāid, "still have, as the main part of their national policy, retaliation."

Speaking of his "admiration or the courage of the people," Rabbi Hoffman commented that those Israelis will rather die



**Figure 9.** Henry Ebel, *Hoffman Deplores Militarism, Lack of Religion in Israel,* 1956, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive,* New York.

The 1950s were also the start of what would be a staple of the Cold War era: controversy. Over the decade, there were several flurries of Letters to the Editor in the Spectator as students submitted arguments about the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1956, a graduate student named Aly Raafat wrote a Letter to the Editor about a talk given during a Students for Democratic Action club meeting. Raafat claimed that the speaker, who worked in the Israel Consul General, "was underestimating the capacity of students to view the facts objectively;"43 This prompted a spate of letters responding to Raafat in an open letter forum, with the majority written by pro-Israel students with colorful titles like "The Right to Negotiate," "Blood and Oil," and "Even if They Hurt. "44 The letters commented on "archaic" Arab states 45 and disagreed about who was responsible for Palestinian refugees. Although the letters exposed anti-Arab sentiment in the student body, it was not the only controversy in 1956. That year, when Rabbi Hoffman spoke at a Seixas Menorah, a Jewish student organization, a Spectator article reported on his criticism of Israel's

treatment of Palestinian Arabs and hope for Israeli-Arab brotherhood.<sup>46</sup> Students who attended the meeting submitted their reactions to the article in defense of Israel's treatment of Arabs or in support of Hoffman's criticism of Israel; some letters blamed the *Spectator* for stirring up Arab-Israeli controversy when the majority of Hoffman's talk was on Russia. By the end of the decade, several more letter controversies showed that the *Spectator* was an established place for students to voice views on Arab-Israeli tensions.

### THE 1960s: A CHANGING WORLD AND A CHANGING CAMPUS CULTURE

The 1960s brought more change for the Middle East, and the way students interacted with the region changed as well. The United Arab Republic collapsed at the turn of the decade, 47 and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964, 48 transforming the landscape of the conflict. The arms race of the 1950s came to a head in 1967, when the Six-Day War wreaked havoc on Arab-Israeli relations and borders, with Israel occupying East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, while Egypt closed the Suez Canal. 49

Student organizations hosted several speakers that changed how students viewed the conflict, with more speaker events portraying the Arab point of view than in earlier decades. The Arab Student's Club, founded in the 1960s, hosted several events, including talks on the Arab-Israeli conflict by the former Special Representative of the U.N. Conciliation Commission for Palestine<sup>50</sup> and an advisor to the embassy of Kuwait.51 Eleanor Roosevelt revisited campus for a Model U.N. conference, where she received a question about the Israeli-Arab conflict from the delegate representing the United Arab Republic.52 She told the student that the "Arab-Israeli conflict could be decided if the nations involved used maturity."53 Other talks on campus by prominent politicians focused on Palestinian refugees, the coexistence of Arabs and Jews, and nationalism.

Outside of speaker events, students were developing their solutions to the conflict. Student Council held a Model U.N. conference in 1960 that discussed Palestinian refugees and the Suez Canal.<sup>54</sup> The conference was the first of its kind to have students represent their own nations and featured representatives from the United Arab Republic, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Israel; they cooperated to resolve their disagreements peacefully.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Aly Raafat, "Israel's Threat," *Columbia Spectator*, January 12, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Stanley B. Kusher, "Even If They Hurt," *Columbia Spectator*, January 16, 1956.

<sup>45</sup> Stanley B. Kusher, "Even If They Hurt," Columbia Spectator, January 16, 1956.

Ebel, "Hoffman Deplores Militarism, Lack of Religion in Israel."
 Council on Foreign Relations, "The Arab League," Accessed

July 29, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>49 &</sup>quot;What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" 2021.

 <sup>50 &</sup>quot;Arab Student's Club at C.U." Columbia Spectator, March 16, 1967.
 51 "The Arab Students Club Columbia University Presents Dr. Fayez A. Sayegh." Columbia Spectator, April 29, 1968.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Mel Gurtov, "Model U.N. Delegations Hear Mrs. FDR." Columbia Spectator, April 4, 1960.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Lee Schwartz, "CUSC Conference - Model United Nations Seeks UN University." Columbia Spectator, April 5, 1960.

#### OPEN LETTER

An open letter by the Israeli students at Columbia appeared in the Thursday, April 24 Issue of The Spectator, in connection with a teach-in on "Arab Liberation vs. Imperialism-Zionism" held on Friday, April 18, and sponsored by several organizations including ours.

With regard to the interpretations, misconceptions, and implications contained therein, we wish to make the following observations and remarks:

It was apparent to the sponsors of the event that the telegram sent by the Israeli students was intended as a "feeler" within the framework of what turned out to be a preconceived strategy that had the ultimate objective of disrupting the teach-in. The tactics subsequently employed prior and during the teach-in provided conclusive evidence to this effect. These included:

 A large massing of Israeli-Zionist elements at the entrance of Harkness Theater in advance of the scheduled time for the teach-in, with the intended purpose of occupying the largest number of seats.

2) Large scale heckling and other acts of disruption.

3) The spreading of bomb scares and the alerting of guards to alleged fire hazards.

It is indeed curious that the Israeli students, seeking to inject their side, should remind the public that "there is more than one side to the Middle East question" when it is specifically their side that is constantly and unabatedly projected in this country, certainly in this city.

Seen in this light therefore, the claim that what they aimed at was seeing that their side is heard is a dubious one. We submit, rather, that their efforts were most definitely intended to prevent the other side from being heard.

Finally, we would like to note that it had been made quite clear at the teach-in that the event was intended as an act of solidarity with the Arab liberation struggle. It was not intended as a dialogue, discussion or debate, although we would have had time for questions as was originally intended, had the would-be disrupters not slowed us down.

We stand ready for a  $\underline{\text{debate}}$ , however, organized by impartial sponsors.

The Organization of Arab Students at Columbia University

**Figure 10.** The Organization of Arab Students at Columbia University, *Open Letter*, 1969, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive*, New York.



## Model U. N. Delegations Hear Mrs. FDR

#### Stronger U. N. Favored By Eleanor Roosevelt

By Mel Gurtov

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt called for the strengthening of the United Nations through a better informed public, in an address before a Model United Nations conference last Saturday in Low Library Ro-

**Figure 11.** Douglas Eldridge, *Mrs. Roosevelt Sees US Tardy in Mideast Moves*, 1960, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive*, New York.

ARAB STUDENT'S CLUB AT C.U.

Presents

#### ARAB vs. ISRAELI

Speaker: Dr. Joseph E. Johnson, former Special Representative of the U.N. Conciliation Commission for Palestine

Harkness Theatre (Butler Library) Friday, March 17, 8 p.m.

Figure 12. Arab Student's Club at C.U., 1967, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

This approach was also displayed in Letters to the Editor, with one student writing that the Arab-Israeli conflict was "not a black and white issue" and that students should avoid characterizing it as such. 55 Other opinion articles saw students proposing plans for resettling Palestinian Arab refugees.

Similarly, there was a hunger for activism. In 1969, when an Israeli plane was hijacked, six Columbia students joined a sit-in at the Syrian mission to the U.N. to demand the release of two Israelis held in Syria.<sup>56</sup> That same year, the Organization of Arab Students at Columbia University co-hosted a teach-in protest entitled "Arab Liberation vs. Imperialism-Zionism." 57 The event, held in Butler Library, featured Arab and American speakers. Shortly after, an open letter signed by "Israeli Students of Columbia" appeared in the Spectator, denouncing the event for not being a "balanced presentation." 58 The Organization of Arab Students responded with their own letter, arguing that the teach-in was designed as an act of solidarity with Arab liberation rather than a dialogue. 59 They further accused Israeli students of disrupting the teach-in and creating chaos by filling up seats, heckling the speakers, spreading bomb scares, and reporting "fire hazards" to security.60 The students wrote,

It is indeed curious that the Israeli students, seeking to inject their side, should remind the public that 'there is more than one side to the Middle East question' when it is specifically their side that is constantly and unabatedly projected.<sup>61</sup>

Another student's Letter to the Editor the same week agreed that they felt campus culture was predominantly pro-Israeli and defended the Arab student group's right to protest. Et al. There were numerous pro-Israeli speakers and events during this period, which could explain why Arab students may have felt their voices were being drowned out. These disagreements over free speech and representation would resurface in the next decade.

## THE 1970s: THE HEIGHT OF CONTROVERSY AND ACTIVISM

The 1970s saw more heated controversies on campus against the backdrop of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.<sup>63</sup>

The war changed the U.S.'s relationship with the Arab world again. Arab nations imposed an oil embargo that impacted the U.S., while U.S. and U.S.S.R. tensions within Middle Eastern conflicts were heightened.<sup>64</sup> In 1975, Egypt reopened the Suez Canal, marking the beginning of Arab-Israeli negotiations and a calming of Cold War tensions.

Compared to the past two decades, Columbia was home to fewer but more disorderly speaker events about the conflict in the 1970s.<sup>65</sup> Even so, there were balanced events as well, such as a 1973 teach-in on the Arab-Israeli war that involved Columbia professors with Arab and Israeli points of view.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the *Spectator* did not report on many speakers during this decade because the space was dedicated to students themselves interacting with issues.



**Figure 13.** Dan Dolgin, Sharp Debate At Mideast Forum, 1970, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York. Picture features a representative from the Palestine Liberation Organization at SDS Forum.

Several student-led debates were hosted by clubs like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a left-wing student group, and Kadimah, a moderate Zionist club, that featured arguments about the war and Palestinian refugees. Meanwhile, Dr. M. J. Mehdi, a notable scholar of Arab-American relations, accused the University of bias in 1974 for hosting the former Foreign Minister of Israel, Abba Eban, as a professor. In response, Dean Picker of Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs announced an intention

<sup>55</sup> Tom Divine, "No Simple Solutions," Columbia Spectator, October 27, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Juris Kaza, "Columbia Professor Recounts Hijacking." *Columbia Spectator*, December 4, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> "Teach In: Arab Liberation vs. Imperialism-Zionism." *Columbia Spectator*, April 17, 1969.

<sup>58 &</sup>quot;Open Letter from Israeli Students at Columbia." Columbia Spectator, April 24, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> The Organization of Arab Students at Columbia University. "Open Letter." Columbia Spectator, April 30, 1969.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> The Organization of Arab Students at Columbia University. "Open Letter." Columbia Spectator, 1969.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Robert J. Gruszka, "Exchange of Ideas?" Columbia Spectator, May 7, 1969.

<sup>63</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "The Arab League," Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Scott Gordon, "Rabin, Israeli Ambassador, Speaks on Peace in Mideast." *Columbia Spectator*, November 12, 1970.

<sup>66 &</sup>quot;Teach-In 'The Crisis in the Middle East," Columbia Spectator, October 19, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Scott Gordon, "SDS, Kadimah Debate Middle East." Columbia Spectator, October 29, 1970.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Kit Stolz, "Diplomat's 'Narrow Eyes' Arab Organization Demands Lecturer to 'Balance' Eban." Columbia Spectator, September 18, 1974.

to bring an Arab scholar to campus.<sup>69</sup> This garnered student support and criticism, expressed in letters. One student who had taken Eban's class claimed it was not biased and that the Dean "underestimate[d] Columbia students if he thinks they accept what professors teach, at face value,"<sup>70</sup> while another student argued that "no matter how scientific and academic [Eban] tries to be, he will not be able to raise himself to the required degree of objectivity."<sup>71</sup> These arguments show how the Arab-Israeli conflict had nestled its way into campus conversations by the mid-1970s.

#### **TEACH-IN**

"The Crisis in the Middle East"

Experts will discuss Arab and Israeli points of view on the war.

#### Panelists (tentative list)

Arthur Hertzberg, aadjunct professor of history
Jacob C. Hurewitz, director of the Middle East Institute
Seymour Melman, professor of industrial engineering
Sidney Morgenbesser, professor of philosophy
John Ruskay, PhD. candidate in Middle East affairs
Edward Said, professor of English and comparative literature
Sami Al-Banna, professor of engineering

Law School Rooms A & B Tues. Oct. 23, at 8pm Council of Jewish Organizations

**Figure 14.** Teach-in on 'The Crisis in the Middle East,' 1973, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

#### One Hundred Support Arabs At Downtown Demonstration

By MARC LIPSCHER

**Figure 15.** Marc Lipscher, *One Hundred Support Arabs At Downtown Demonstration*, 1973, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

Students were also interested in sharing their views beyond campus. In 1973, the Barnard-Columbia Attica Brigade, an anti-imperialist club, joined a pro-Arab march downtown at the CBS News building to protest the media's distortion of the Middle East. Protestor signs read, "Self-determination for the Palestinian nation" and "Arab land, Arab oil for the Arab people." However, during the 1973 War,

when pro-Israeli students raised money for Israel, the Arab-India student club was hesitant to do something similar. An anonymous Arab student told the *Spectator* that Arab students were less vocal because they feared retaliation from anti-Arab factions on campus.<sup>73</sup>

The fear of anti-Arab retaliation on campus seems incongruous against the mostly peaceful backdrop of the past, but the 1970s saw rising tensions and violence. The most infamous incident occurred in 1970, when David Farhi, a former Israeli government official, came to speak at the Columbia Men's Faculty Club. SDS students organized a pro-Palestine picket line in response, while pro-Zionist student members of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) tried to stop them. When Farhi gave his speech inside the club, over a dozen members of JDL physically fought with several members of SDS and other clubs outside. The *Spectator* reported,

JDL members were armed with clubs, lead pipes, and belts, while the radicals used makeshift bludgeons, flagstaffs, and picket signs... [The] crackling of loudspeakers and the chanting of both groups of demonstrators could be heard in the lecture hall throughout most of [Farhi's] talk.<sup>75</sup>

The brawl caused a backlash on campus from both sides, with Professor Edward Said, the renowned postcolonial scholar, even weighing in with a Letter to the Editor. He expressed outrage that those "supporting the Palestine liberation struggle were... harassed" and concern over Columbia hosting Farhi, a colonial official in charge of "Arab affairs" in Palestine.<sup>76</sup>

In 1973, the Arab and India Clubs sponsored a Butler Library forum entitled "Human Rights in the Middle East," featuring Arab and Israeli speakers. During the event, 25 members of JDL disrupted one of the speakers. An officer of the Arab Club responded, "Please, we are trying to generate a dialogue... Nobody is better than anybody here, please give him his chance." With chants drowning them out, the event grew so heated that campus security shut it down early. An Arab Club spokesman accused JDL of racism, admonished security for using "their authority to do exactly what the JDL wanted," and claimed that their forum was designed to "point out and speak about the human rights of all the peoples in the Middle-East."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Jonathan Mishkin, "SIA Dean Launches Search for Arab Scholar." *Columbia Spectator*, September 24, 1974.

Jennie A. Freiman, "Eban, Mehdi, and Picker." Columbia Spectator, September 30, 1974.
 Bassam Namani, "Eban and Mehdi," Columbia Spectator,

<sup>71</sup> Bassam Namani, "Eban and Mehdi," Columbia Spectator, October 8, 1974.

Marc Lipscher, "One Hundred Support Arabs At Downtown Demonstration," Columbia Spectator, October 17, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Louis De Stefano, "CJO Collects Over \$1000 for Israel," Columbia Spectator, October 9, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Louis Dolinar and Jerry Kopel, "SDS, JDL Brawl at Pro-Arab

Rally Israeli Speaks at Men's Faculty's Club- One Arrested During Fighting Outside," *Columbia Spectator*, October 8, 1970.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Dolinar and Kopel, "SDS, JDL Brawl," *Columbia Spectator*, October 8, 1970.

<sup>76</sup> Edward W. Said, "Palestinian Liberation," Columbia Spectator, October 9, 1970.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Dan Dolgin, "25 Members of JDL Disrupt Campus Middle East Forum." Columbia Spectator, April 10, 1973.

 <sup>78</sup> Dolgin, "25 Members of JDL Disrupt Campus Middle East Forum." 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Ibid



Young Socialists bar Jewish students from meeting in Hamilton Hall.

## Socialists, Jewish Activists Clash at Hamilton Meeting

**Figure 16.** Ted Green, Socialists, *Jewish Activists Clash at Hamilton Meeting*, 1974, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive*, New York. Picture shows YSA Members guarding the door from seated JDL Members during a YSA Meeting.

The JDL students were eventually disciplined, but the Spectator saw an outpouring of student letters in response, some with fears that the University was becoming a campus of restricted speech.80 The following year, JDL students grappled with the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) after being barred from a Hamilton Hall meeting about socialist Arab states.81 By the mid-1970s, it was clear that the nature of campus dialogue around the Arab-Israeli conflict had metastasized into fierce debates. It is particularly notable that Arab students felt their voices went unheard on these issues, as this would change in the coming decades.

#### THE GULF WARS: **RE-IMAGINING COLUMBIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MIDDLE EAST (1990-2010)**

Revisiting campus culture in the 1990s and 2000s revealed a new relationship with the Arab world, primarily because the two Gulf Wars involved the U.S. directly in the region. In 1990, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and took over its oil supply, which prompted other Arab nations to ask for assistance. That year, the U.S. organized Operation Desert Shield, building up troops and weapons for Operation Desert Storm in January 1991.82 A U.S.-led coalition drove Iraq from Kuwait, advanced into Iraq, and reached a ceasefire that left Hussein in power by February 1991.83 A decade later, the September 11 attacks in New York wreaked havoc on the U.S. and on Americans' perception of the Arab world. In 2003, the U.S. initiated the Iraq War and invaded Iraq.84 The war dragged on for years, lost public support, and resulted in 4,700 U.S. and allied troop deaths and over 100,000 civilian deaths.85 In 2010, the U.S. officially ended its combat mission in Iraq.86 Unprecedented antiwar and anti-Arab sentiments permeated these years, and the effects were felt within Columbia's gates.

#### A CAMPUS ADJUSTING TO WARTIME

What made the Gulf Wars period so different on campus was how much stake students had in the conflict. The Columbia War Memorial reports that there were many current and former students serving in both wars and that Columbia has had the largest number of returning Iraq War veterans in the Ivy League.87 Along with a growing number of Arab students on campus, Columbia was redefined as a place for students grappling with war. In January 1991, when the U.S. attacked Baghdad, an article by several student reporters began, "After an evening of shock and confusion, Columbia students, faculty, and administrators yesterday began to accustom themselves to the idea of being at war."88 Four undergraduate student councils organized a sevenhour information session on the war in John Jay, attended by 300 undergraduates.89 They hosted professors, government officials, and Middle Eastern consular representatives and provided materials for concerned students to write letters to politicians and soldiers stationed in the Gulf. 90 The 1994 Columbia College class president Shawn Landres told the Spectator that the councils "wanted to take some sort of leadership action that doesn't take some sort of pro-war or anti-war position because the campus is so divided on this issue."91

## CCSC to hold info session on Persian Gulf Monday

Figure 17. Danny Franklin, CCSC to hold info session on Persian Gulf Monday, 1991, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

A core theme of campus life was that students were eager to gain as much understanding as possible. A 1990 panel of the Columbia Coalition Against Intervention in the Middle East, moderated by Professor Said, was flooded with student attendees. 92 The Persian Gulf Support Awareness Center was established in the dorms with newspapers and prayer space. 93 Students crowded floor lounges to hear President George H.W. Bush announce the air attacks on Iraq on television; faculty and staff held discussions about the war in residence halls, answering students' concerns about terrorism and the draft.94 Like earlier decades, Columbia students became a sounding

<sup>80</sup> Steve M. Schonfeld, "Eyewitness." Columbia Spectator, April 16, 1973.

<sup>81</sup> Ted Green, "Socialists, Jewish Activists Clash at Hamilton Meeting," Columbia Spectator, December 5, 1974.

<sup>82 &</sup>quot;The Gulf War 1990-1991 (Operation Desert Shield/ Desert Storm)," Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Alan Taylor, "Operation Desert Storm: 25 Years Since the First Gulf War," The Atlantic, Accessed July 29, 2021

<sup>84</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "The Iraq War," Accessed July 29, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "The Iraq War," 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87 &</sup>quot;About The Wars | The Columbia University War Memorial" Columbia University War Memorial, Accessed August 1, 2021.

<sup>88</sup> The Spectator Staff, "CU Reactions to New Crises in Persian

Gulf," Columbia Spectator, January 18, 1991.
89 Danny Franklin, "CCSC to Hold Info Session on Persian Gulf Monday," Columbia Spectator, January 17, 1991

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Berke, "CCSC Organizes 7-Hour Gulf Information Session," Columbia Spectator, January 18, 1991.

<sup>91</sup> Danny Franklin, "CCSC to Hold Info Session on Persian Gulf Monday," Columbia Spectator, January 17, 1991.

<sup>92</sup> Jorge Peredo, "Gulf Panel Criticizes US Involvement," Columbia Spectator, October 24, 1990.

93 The Spectator Staff, "CU Reactions to New Crises in Persian

Gulf," Columbia Spectator, January 18, 1991.

<sup>94</sup> The Spectator Staff, "CU Reactions to New Crises in Persian Gulf," 1991.

board for world leaders. When U.S. Secretary of State Christopher spoke at Columbia in 1993 on Middle Eastern peace, University President Rupp told Christopher that he addressed "not only the nation, but an entire future generation of world leaders who've come here to study."95

## STUDENTS REACT TO THE GULF WARS WITH ACTIVISM

These future leaders took action in campus life: two pro-peace clubs merged into the Barnard-Columbia Anti-War Coalition (BCAWC), pro-war students formed the organization of Students Mobilized Against Saddam Hussein (SMASH), the Arab Association alongside other student groups created a Committee to Stop United States Intervention in the Middle East, and Israeli students held a night-time vigil for slain Israelis. <sup>96</sup> The *Spectator* published a joint statement from the Ivy League schools against the war. <sup>97</sup>



**Figure 18.** David Shimkin, *Protestors Rally against U.S. Role in Middle East,* 1990, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive,* New York. Picture features students protesting Colin Powell's alleged arrival on campus.

The campus tradition of debates persisted, with Columbia's College Democrats club holding a debate against SMASH about whether war was necessary. As in controversial times before, Letters to the Editor poured in as students reckoned with both Gulf wars. In one letter entitled "A Prayer for Order," a student wrote, "I pray for a quick end to the

military activities in the Middle East."99 Another later letter in 2008 denounced the large number of displaced people as a result of the Iraq War. 100 Student opinion was especially divided, with students knowing soldiers or leaving to fight themselves. One student told the Spectator he was worried for his friends stationed in Saudi Arabia: "I wish it would have worked diplomatically, but the war has begun and it's time to support our troops."101 There were so many pieces expressing pro- and anti-war sentiments within campus that one Spectator writer commented on how war permeated student life, "All around campus, all around town, all around the world, the talk is of war."102 Interestingly, there was more of an immediate reaction to the Gulf War than the Iraq War, with fewer student opinion articles on the latter, suggesting the student body had grown accustomed to being at war by then.

Columbia students were eager to build upon the student activism of earlier decades. In 1990, protests started with a small rally at the Columbia sundial in response to a flyer that falsely advertised that U.S. Secretary of State Powell was coming to speak. Progressive campus groups protested until they found out the flyer was fake, then switched to protest the Gulf War in general. 103 The following semester during spring registration, the Columbia/ Barnard Coalition for Peace in the Middle East manned a table at Barnard to sell tickets for an anti-war march on Washington. 104 Around the same time, the Caribbean Students Association (CSA) held a rally that almost 2,000 people attended to bring attention to the disproportionate number of minorities serving in the war. The club's Political Chair, Catherine Lawton, explained, "CSA felt there were a lot of other forces at play that resulted in a disproportionate number of minorities in the Marines... We wanted the U.S. to explore every option possible because our lives weren't worthless." 105 This concern galvanized students to create a new anti-war group, Students of Color for Peace, in which they supported anti-war protesters of color in the city<sup>106</sup> and hosted anti-war speakers in a rally at the sundial.<sup>107</sup> Columbia students brought their protests to New York again, with 700 students leading a city march to the U.N. to protest the start of the war. 108

<sup>95</sup> Joe Whitlock, "Christopher Delivers Address in Low - Secretary of State Calls for Support of Mideast Peace Accord," *Columbia Spectator*, September 21, 1993.

<sup>96</sup> The Spectator Staff, "CU Reactions to New Crises in Persian Gulf," Columbia Spectator, January 18, 1991.

<sup>97 &</sup>quot;Ivy League Makes Gulf Statement," Columbia Spectator, November 26, 1990.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Kokmen, Leyla, Nekesa Moody, and Eric Roston, "Columbia Reacts as Time Runs out for Persian Gulf War CU Students Have Mixed Opinions on Gulf Tensions," *Columbia Spectator*, January 16, 1991.

<sup>99</sup> Jennifer Airo, "A Prayer for Order," Columbia Spectator, January 30, 1991.

Geoff Aung, and Ugo Aniukwu. "Remembering the Iraq War's Displaced Peoples," Columbia Spectator, April 17, 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Kokmen, Leyla, Kristina Nye, and Eric Rosten. "CU Students Lead NYC in Spontaneous U.N. Protest," *Columbia Spectator*, January 17, 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> "Sidelined by War," Columbia Spectator Archive , January 18, 1991.

David Shimkin, "Protestors Rally against U.S. Role in Middle East," Columbia Spectator, September 11, 1990.

Leyla Kokmen, Nekesa Moody, and Eric Roston, "Columbia Reacts as Time Runs out for Persian Gulf War CU Students Have Mixed Opinions on Gulf Tensions," Columbia Spectator, January 16, 1991.

<sup>105</sup> Kokmen, Moody, and Roston. "Columbia Reacts," Columbia Spectator, 1991.

Nekesa Moody, "New Group Discusses War from Minority Viewpoint," Columbia Spectator, January 28, 1991. Displaced Peoples," Columbia Spectator, April 17, 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Nekesa Moody, "Minority Students Rally at Sundial," Columbia Spectator, February 11, 1991.

Leyla Kokmen, Kristina Nye, and Eric Rosten, "CU Students Lead NYC in Spontaneous U.N. Protest," *Columbia Spectator*, January 17, 1991.



THE BEST PARTY SINCE '68: About 2,000 people attended a rally yesterday to voice varied opinions as the deadline for war approached.

**Figure 19.** Patrick Schultz, *The Best Party Since '68: About 2000 people attended a rally,* 1991, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive*, New York.



SPECTATOR/PATRICK SCHULTZ RALLY FOR PEACE: Over 700 Columbia students marched to the U.N. last night, where they were joined by over 2000 New Yorkers protesting President Bush's decision to begin a war with Iraq.

**Figure 20.** Patrick Schultz, *Rally for Peace: Over 700 Columbia Students Marched to the U.N.*, 1991, Photograph, *Columbia Spectator Archive*, New York.



WAR AND PEACE | Students, professors, and locals gathered on Low plaza to call for the removal of troops from

## PROTESTORS DEMONSTRATE AG

**Figure 21.** Key Nguyen, War and Peace: Students, Professors, and Locals Gathered on Low Plaza to Call for the Removal of Troops from Iraq, 2007, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.



m Iraq at the Columbia Coalition Against the War's strike.

## AINST IRAQ WAR

The Iraq War drew similar activism from students. In 2007, Columbia's Coalition Against the War held a massive strike and rally at Low Library, with Columbia professors, union leaders, and others involved. The crowd chanted, "What the hell is Congress for? Stop the funding, stop the war!" 109 The Gulf Wars brought the activism of the Cold War decades at Columbia to a new height.

## THE VISIBILITY OF ARAB STUDENTS ON CAMPUS

During these decades, the Arab student body at Columbia grew and became more vocal. The Columbia President's Five-Year Report of 1993-1998 listed students from Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Yemen alongside the earlier-represented Arab nations. The *Spectator* interviewed several Arab students in 1991 for an article on negative stereotypes during the Gulf War. One anonymous student explained, "The Gulf crisis poses a difficult question for an Arab-American, whose loyalty is often split." Another student, Nezar Andary, said, "Being an Arab-American is hard because one foot is there and one foot is here... Media coverage of Arab issues contains negative stereotypes which seem to be growing more intense." 112

Arab students tied these wars to other issues in the region. Tina Musa, the founder of the thenunrecognized Filasteen student group, told the Spectator in 2007, "If you're going to look at the Middle East, you have to look at Lebanon, you have to look at Palestine."113 Compared to previous decades when Arab students were hesitant to share their views, many Arab students were now unafraid. In 1991, the Arab Association at Columbia University, a rebranded version of past Arab student clubs, published a letter in the Spectator that presented their views of the war and criticized the media for anti-Arab sentiment. 114 They also presented a list of steps that they felt were necessary for peace, such as ending foreign intervention, restoring the sovereignty of the Arab states, and solving the "Palestinian question." 115

George Erik Rupp, "Columbia University President's Five-Year Report 1993 - 1998," Annual Report, Columbia University, 1998.

<sup>112</sup> Kokmen, Moody, and Roston, "Columbia Reacts as Time Runs out for Persian Gulf War CU Students Have Mixed Opinions on Gulf Tensions," 1991.

<sup>113</sup> Tom Faure, Caroline Kao, and Melissa Repko, "Protestors Demonstrate Against Iraq War Anti-War Coalition Rally Draws Over 300 to Low Library Plaza," Columbia Spectator, February 16, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Arab Association at Columbia University, "Arabs Take Stance on Mideast Crisis," *Columbia Spectator*, February 18, 1991.

<sup>115</sup> Arab Association at Columbia University, "Arabs Take Stance on Mideast Crisis," Columbia Spectator, 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Tom Faure, Caroline Kao, and Melissa Repko, "Protestors Demonstrate Against Iraq War Anti-War Coalition Rally Draws Over 300 to Low Library Plaza," *Columbia Spectator*, February 16, 2007.

Leyla Kokmen, Nekesa Moody, and Eric Roston, "Columbia Reacts as Time Runs out for Persian Gulf War CU Students Have Mixed Opinions on Gulf Tensions," Columbia Spectator, January 16, 1991.

# Arabs take stance on Mideast crisis

### By the Arab Association at Columbia University

After weeks of relentless bombing of Iraqi and Kuwaiti cities and massive civilian casualties, the Arab Association of Columbia University feels it necessary to present an Arab viewpoint on the Gulf War.

ries in which popular opinion is allowed to be expressed, including Jordan, Algeria, and Tunisia. These countries have consistently opposed U.S. intervention in the Gulf, and the countries whose governments supported this intervention are witnessing mass public demonstrations which will make this unpopular policy increasingly difficult to sustain. As thou-

Figure 22. Arab Association at Columbia University, Arabs Take Stance on Mideast Crisis, 1991, Photograph, Columbia Spectator Archive, New York.

In general, the Columbia student body was more aware of anti-Arab sentiments and the experience of Arab students after the 9/11 attacks. A 2003 Spectator article covered a campus controversy where non-immigrant Muslims, including many international students at Columbia, were required to register with the federal government through the National Entry-Exit Registration Program. Columbia students brought their class schedules, CUID cards, and other evidence of their student status to register. One Syrian student reported that he waited in line for four hours. 116 Discussions were sparked around civil rights, privacy, and anti-Islamic/Arab sentiment on campus.

Wartime forced students to develop informed opinions on the Middle East while still navigating everyday student life, making Columbia a place for students to interact with the Arab world. The Gulf Wars sparked an unprecedented saturation of the Arab world into campus because it was the first time the Columbia student experience was directly affected by the region's conflicts. The fact that the Spectator was covering the experiences of Arab students, in contrast with earlier decades when they took minimal space in the newspaper, demonstrates how war ushered in awareness of the Arab student experience at Columbia and a stronger desire on the part of Arab students to make their views heard.

## CONCLUSION

Although Columbia is recognized as an international institution, it took time for global issues and ideas to permeate campus fully. Starting with the attendance of a handful of Arab students at Columbia in the interwar period, the 20th century was a time for Arab students to gain visibility on campus and influence. By the early 2000s, the experiences and opinions of Arab students at Columbia became an integral part of campus conversation. Activism about Arab political issues were nearly nonexistent at the beginning of the 20th century; however, by the mid-20th century, dialogue at Columbia surrounding these issues was thoroughly intertwined with student activities and protests. Speaker events, debates, club meetings, protests, dorm gatherings, and more have combined to create a campus culture of inquiry, controversy, and appreciation for the Arab world. This helps explain the foundations of current campus dynamics as student engagement with the Middle East continues to develop.

While there are fewer student groups than during the Gulf Wars, present campus groups are taking stands like Students for Justice in Palestine, Students Organize for Syria, and Students Supporting Israel, as well as groups appreciating the Arab world, like Turath, a nonpartisan undergraduate student association founded to promote Arab culture on campus. 117 As former University President Rupp said, Columbia students are "an entire future generation of world leaders."118 Examining campus culture as it engages with the Arab world is critical to understanding how generations of students and leaders to-be have engaged with the region. Campus dialogue about the Arab world was not always positive or popular, but the fact that it was consistently happening over the past century shows Columbia students' dedication to understanding the world around them.

 <sup>116</sup> Kathleen Carr, "Foreign Students React to Registration Requirements," Columbia Spectator, March 12, 2003.
 117 "Student Groups," Columbia College and Columbia Engineering,

Accessed August 14, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Joe Whitlock, "Christopher Delivers Address in Low - Secretary of State Calls for Support of Mideast Peace Accord," Columbia Spectator, September 21, 1993.

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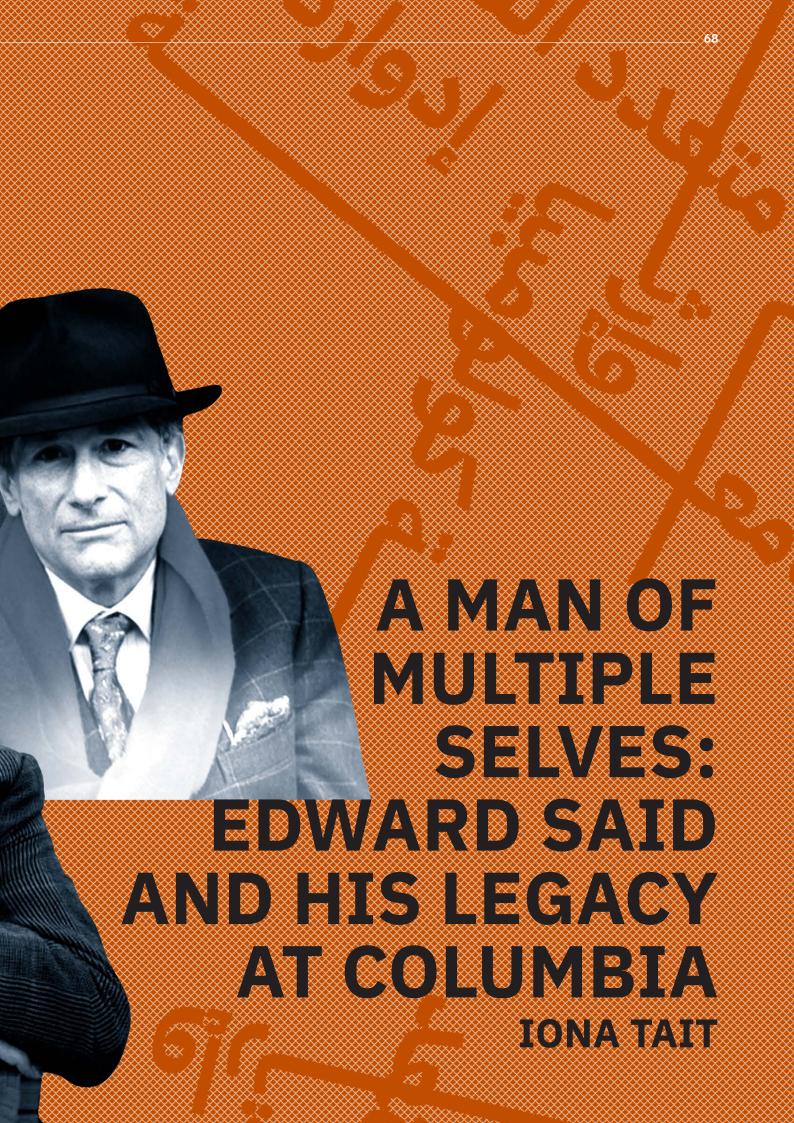
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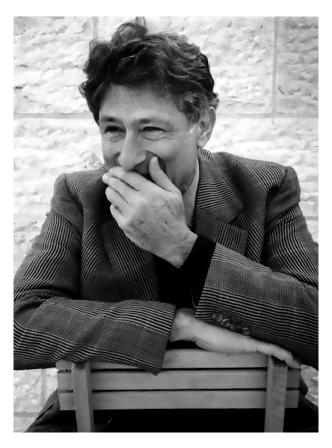
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# رجل متعدد الصفيات! إدوارد سيعبد وإرثيه في جامعة كولومبيا

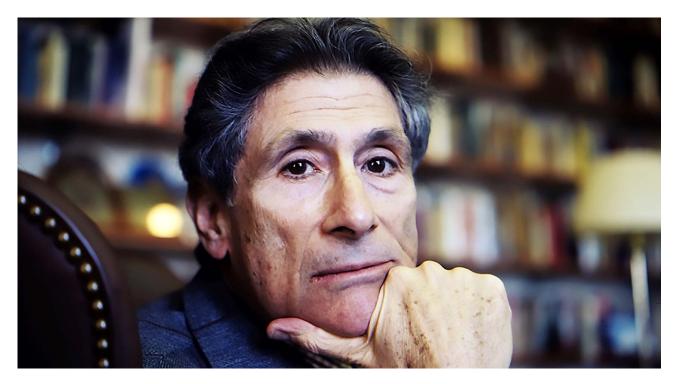
# A MAN OF MULTIPLE SELVES: EDWARD SAID AND HIS LEGACY AT COLUMBIA



**Figure 1.** Photograph from *Edward Said: The Last Interview*, Directed by Mike Dibb. New York: Icarus Films, 2004.

Literary critic, author of more than twenty books, educator, committed advocate of the Palestinian cause. musical theorist and accomplished pianist - Edward Said was one of the first academic celebrities. Claiming that there was "no such thing as a private intellectual" in Representations of the Intellectual (1994), Said believed that the intellectual was by definition always public. 1 Joining the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in 1963, he would spend the rest of his academic career there. His prestige, however, was confined neither to the premises of this department nor to the University. A renowned essayist and critic of U.S. foreign policy (and, famously, the Oslo accords), Said's academic work and political commitments were inextricably intertwined. His contradictions and ironies have been the subject of much literature: he is an intellectual who eludes easy categorization. Acknowledging Said's enduring and multifaceted presence in a range of fields, this essay is predominantly an exploration of his legacy at Columbia. An examination of his views of the university as a place for academic freedom, his impact on postcolonial studies, on Middle Eastern history and politics, as well as on the political climate at the university will further illuminate the many paradoxes of Edward Said and will celebrate his legacy at Columbia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, "Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures," *Vintage*, 1996.



**Figure 2.** Jean-Christian Bourcart, *Edward Said in his office at Columbia University*, 2003, Photograph, *Getty Images*, New York.



**Figure 3.** Alex Levac, *Edward Said outside the Philosophy Hall at Columbia University*, Photograph, *Haaretz*.

#### **ON THE UNIVERSITY**

Edward Said needed the university: "[O]nly there could collective learning and the development of knowledge occur." Said stated this in his 'On the University' article, based on a lecture given at the American University of Cairo. A committed secular humanist, it was only in the academy that he could feel free enough to develop

his literary ideas and political beliefs. Acknowledging that "there is something hallowed and consecrated about the academy," he had a profound understanding of the missions of the university.3 He believed in the special status of academic freedom, describing the search for academic freedom as becoming "more important, more urgent, more requiring careful and reflective analysis." Articulating these thoughts in Humanism and Democratic Criticism (2004), published posthumously, in which he defends secular humanistic ideals and calls for a more inclusive literary canon, Said regarded the university as an exemplary place for doing and saying things that would not be accepted in popular culture. Cherishing the right to speak, write, and think, and the capacity to dissent which were guaranteed by academic institutions, Said wrote, "The American university remains the one public space available to real alternative intellectual practices: no other institution like it on such a scale exists anywhere else in the world today." 5 These views were not uncontroversial. Gauri Viswanathan, professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia and former student of Said's, informs me that many are critical of Said's views on the American university as expressed in Humanism and Democratic Criticism for glorifying it and obscuring its shortcomings.6 Said's extolment of the university perhaps is shown in his admiration of his older colleagues - especially Lionel Trilling, by whom he is said to have been "dazzled."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, "On the University," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 25 (2005), 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Said, "On the University," 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Columbia Themes in Philosophy, *Columbia University Press*, 2004, 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Gauri Viswanathan (Professor of English & Comparative Literature at Columbia University), in discussion with Iona Tait, 8 December 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, in discussion with Iona Tait, 8 December 2021.

Even though Said's reputation eclipsed Trilling's, Said maintained his awe and admiration for him and was very proud of his first Lionel Trilling award for *Beginnings* (1975) for it bore the literary icon's name; he would win his second for *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).8

But as suggested in a 2013 memorial lecture by Lila Abu-Lughod, professor of anthropology at Columbia and daughter of Said's great friend and fellow Palestinian activist, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "the university [...] showed great integrity when Said was alive in upholding the principles of academic freedom and free speech" - perhaps referring to the Columbia's decision to protect Said in the name of academic freedom following the emergence in 2000 of photos depicting Said throwing stones across the Lebanese-Israeli border. In a personal interview, Rashid Khalidi, the Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia, informs me that Said "valued the University in serving him." 10 Citing his canniness in avoiding administrative and academic responsibility whilst teaching at Columbia, Khalidi's comment points to the importance of the academy in protecting his right to be an original scholar as well as a public intellectual. Viswanathan's reflections on Said's legacy at Columbia supports this: she tells me that Said came to Columbia when the culture was very different - he would not have gotten away with eschewing administrative responsibility now. 11 During Said's time at Columbia, there were two categories of professors: the celebrities and those who did the work. Having acquired celebrity status, he was not burdened with many administrative obligations, notably never Chair of the Department, but he ran the Comparative Literature program before it became an institute as it has become today, and he started a university seminar in literary theory. 12 Although Said's ties to the University were strong, it is important to recognize that Said's life work was not tethered to Columbia or New York. Esmat Elhalaby, professor of transatlantic history at the University of Toronto Scarborough, writes in an article in Boston Review that "in New York but not of it, Said's life cannot be contained by the clichés of campus novels and parochialism of the U.S. literary establishment."13

# POSTCOLONIALISM AND ITS AMBIVALENT FATHER

An examination of how the West created the idea of the 'Orient' to justify and further imperialist domination,

Said's seminal Orientalism, published in 1978, catapulted him into the limelight and, in its wake, encouraged a new generation of scholars to explore the cultural legacy of colonization and to undertake a theoretical analysis of European imperial power.<sup>14</sup> Becoming the foundational text for the burgeoning postcolonial studies, Orientalism made him the father of the infant field and started a process of upending the Anglo-American academy. Said not only had a lasting impact on postcolonial studies but also on world literature, with many of his students and colleagues developing an interest in the new fields, such as Timothy Brennan, Gauri Viswanathan, Rob Nixon, and Anne McClintock, who all studied under Said as part of the same cohort. In fact, some of the most important texts of postcolonialism, which was beginning to crystallize as a field in the 1980s and 1990s, were written during this period at Columbia, such as Gayatri Spivak's In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (1987), Said's Culture and Imperialism (1993), and McClintock's Imperial Leather (1995). 15 As Said began to move away from the fiveld, subaltern studies and a resurgence of interest in nationalism began to dominate postcolonial studies. Spearheaded by the totemic Gayatri Spivak, a colleague of Said's in the same department, subaltern studies built on Said's analysis of the power and continued dominance of Western ways of intellectual inquiry, seeking to displace studies of class with the study of colonialism. The Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, founded in 1988 by Spivak, is an example of the position that postcolonial studies and world literature, both indebted to Said's work, assume at the University. It is Said, along with a host of postcolonial scholars, who helped to set the precedent for calls to decolonize the curriculum which reverberate today. A more direct testament to his lingering legacy, Orientalism is still taught to undergraduate & graduate students at Columbia & beyond.

Although *Orientalism* and the subsequent *Culture* and *Imperialism* generated immense interest in postcolonial studies, Said's relationship with the discipline was definitively uneasy. Timothy Brennan, author of *Places of Mind*, the recent biography of Said, and former student of his, asserts that postcolonialism's methods drifted far from Said's own efforts to critique imperialism. Said's ambivalence towards the discipline also grew as he moved away from the theory that underpinned his magnum opus and scorned the preoccupations with personal identity that were becoming increasingly central to postcolonialism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Edward W. Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism, 1st Vintage Books ed, Vintage Books, 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> "The University Responds: On the Matter of Edward Said," *Columbia Spectator*, Accessed 2 January 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Rashid Khalidi (Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University), in discussion with Iona Tait, 16 November 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, in discussion with Iona Tait, 8 December 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, in discussion with Iona Tait, 8 December 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Esmat Elhalaby (Professor of Transatlantic History at University

of Toronto Scarborough), "The World of Edward Said," *Boston Review*, May 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Edward W Said, "Orientalism," 25<sup>th</sup> ed, *Vintage Books*, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York: Routledge, 1988); Said, Culture and Imperialism, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Timothy Brennan (Author and Former Student of Edward Said), Places of Mind: A Life of Edward Said (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021). 220.

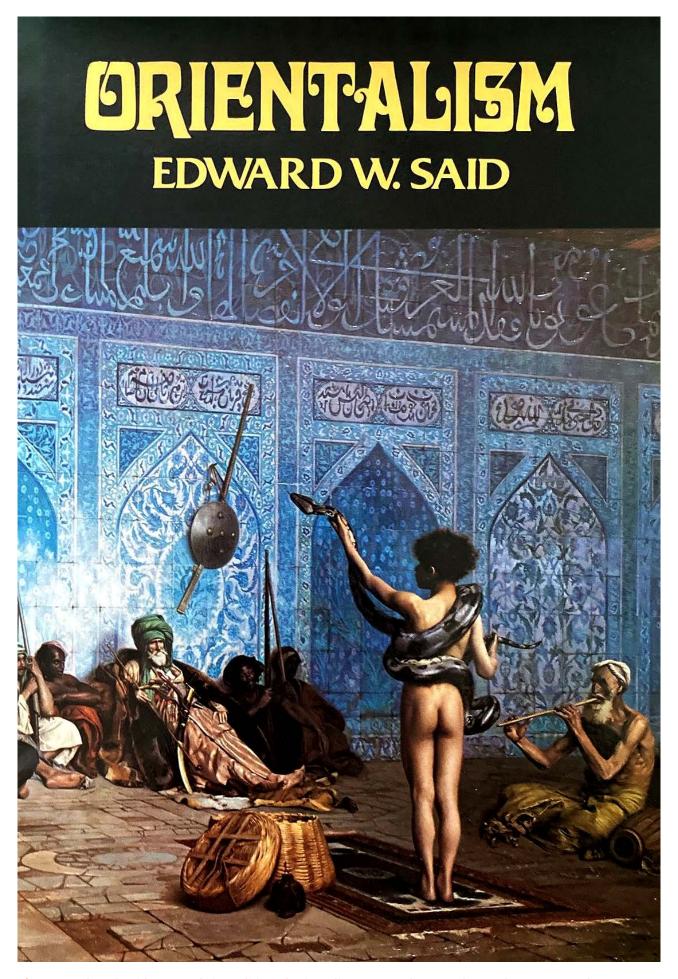


Figure 4. Edward Said, Cover of First Edition of Orientalism, 1978, Photograph, Pantheon, New York.

His daughter, Najla Said, illustrates Said's ambivalence with an amusing anecdote. Having told him that she is taking a class on postmodernism (the definitions of postmodernism and postcolonialism being conceptually ambiguous), Said informs her it is a waste of time. She guips that he does not even know what it is, to which he replies, "Know what it is, Najla? I invented it!"17 He never saw himself as an advocate for a particular school of thought. Interested as he was in the history of representation of the non-Western world, he did not think of his work as a negation of Western culture - something that bothered later postcolonial theorists. "Unabashed" in and "never apologetic" for his belief in maintaining the existence of a canon, Gauri Viswanathan says that some of his later followers disapprovingly felt that he was not willing to relinquish his love for the classic texts. Rashid Khalidi states that Said's attitude towards postcolonial studies was more than just ambivalent. Describing it as "negative," Khalidi confides that Said "rejected his putative protégé," with the 'post' in 'postcolonial' implying an end to colonialism and imperialism that Said questioned and eventually refuted. 18 "I don't think the 'post' applies at all," Brennan cites Said's confession to a colleague - you can only be 'post' in the safe confines of Columbia. 19 Following the 1967 war, when many New York intellectuals exhibited a turn towards the right and a more pronounced support for Zionism, he developed a greater interest in academic studies of the Middle East which predated his negativity towards postcolonialism. In this light, it would be inaccurate to regard Said's increased interest in the Arab world as the cause of his ambivalence towards postcolonial studies. His words in a 1992 interview sum up his attitude towards his own intellectual trajectory: "It seems to me that whereas, say, ten years ago I might eagerly look forward to a new book by somebody at Cornell on literary theory and semiotics, now I'm much more likely to be interested in work emerging out of concern with African history."20

### SAID AND STUDIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

After Orientalism, area studies, including Middle Eastern studies, started to interrogate its colonial and orientalist foundations - the very foundations of area studies were intellectually shaped by the U.S. At Columbia, Said's mark on Middle Eastern studies is tangible. Although many traditions postdate his presence, Columbia carries on his legacy through the offer of the Edward Said Chair in Middle Eastern Studies in 2002 to Rashid Khalidi and the establishment of the Center for Palestine Studies in 2010. Along with Khalidi, professors such as Joseph Massad and Nadia Abu-El

Haj form a network of scholars who continue to pay homage to Edward Said through a critical examination of studies of the Middle East and its colonial ties and through prioritizing study of and commitment to Palestine. The Center for Palestine Studies was the first center in an academic institution in the United States to dedicate academic research to the study of Palestine. Launched in honor of Edward Said, the center is an embodiment of Said's enduring legacy at the University and of his efforts to make Palestine a term of scholarly discourse. Both inside and outside the academy, he strove to make the term Palestine acceptable - the Question of Palestine was one of the first major books published in the United States to make Palestine the subject of serious scholarly debate, published in 1979 after a great struggle with a series of resistant publishers and calls from his colleagues to fire him.<sup>21</sup> Said's unrelenting advocacy for Palestine was to give him a number of enemies, not least Bernard Lewis with whom Said had a series of warring debates in the public sphere. An acknowledgment of Said's commitment to Palestine is not, however, to overlook the efforts and achievements of other professors outside of Columbia who also played a critical role in bringing Palestine into American discourse, such as Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Said's own mentor and "guru."22



Figure 5. Jean Mohr, Edward Said with Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 1986, Photograph, Getty Images.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Najla Said (Daughter of Edward Said), "My Father, Edward Said," Salon, August 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Rashid Khalidi, in discussion with Iona Tait, November 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Places of Mind*, 2021, 220.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Edward W. Said, Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said, ed. Gauri Viswanathan (New York, NY: Vintage

Books, Random House, 2002), 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Edward W. Said, "The Question of Palestine," Vintage Books,

<sup>1980;</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Places of Mind*, 2021. 210. <sup>22</sup> Edward W. Said, "My Guru," *London Review of Books* volume 23, no. 24, 13 December 2001.

Perhaps, as suggested by Hussein Omar, lecturer in modern global history at University College Dublin, in a review of Timothy Brennan's biography in *Baffler*, Said is best understood as a translator, bringing to the English reader ideas of the Arab writers who wrote before him.<sup>23</sup>

#### **PALESTINE AND POLITICS**

Beyond the academic curriculum at Columbia, Said's perennial impact can be seen in political discourse amongst students at the University. To separate Said's academic interests from his political interests seems a facile exercise as he loathed attempts to juxtapose culture and political action. Hussein Omar writes that, in Said's world, "the political and the aesthetic did not belong to separable domains."24 That said, Said's political impact certainly extended beyond the classroom and into campus discourse. Amongst the Ivy League universities, Columbia stands out, along with Brown, in fostering open dialogue and in having a more progressive student body and faculty with regard to questions on Palestine. In comparison, the University of Pennsylvania, Yale, Princeton – where Bernard Lewis's influence lingers - and Harvard - where there is much pro-Israeli



sentiment amongst faculty, Rashid Khalidi tells me – are generally conservative on this issue.<sup>25</sup>

Following in Brown's 2019 footsteps as the first Ivy League school to pass a student vote on divestment from companies that work in Israel, Columbia's undergraduate body passed the vote in 2020, continuing Said's battle for Palestinian liberation and building on his own support of divestment and boycotting of Israeli settlements later in his life.<sup>26</sup> Despite the historic referendum at Columbia, the University's statement that it "should not change its investment policies on the basis of particular views about a complex policy issue" is a dismissal of the results and demonstrates a lack of respect towards Said's legacy.<sup>27</sup> In a continuation of disrespect towards Said's legacy vis-à-vis Palestine, it is disheartening to see the number of reviews of Timothy Brennan's new biography that merely refer in passing to Said's Palestinian identity and advocacy.<sup>28</sup> Brennan himself references the erasure of Said's Palestinian identity during his lifetime:

It was always difficult for many of his critics to think of Said as authentically Palestinian. His detractors never missed a chance to paint him as a New Yorker playing the ethnicity game.<sup>29</sup>

A shame, then, that this narrative prevails.

Said's political engagement has been the subject of much scrutiny and is an example of the many paradoxes of the great intellectual. Although Said was undoubtedly politically committed, he had his blind spots. Brennan details his elitist tendencies and skepticism towards student activism. American popular culture was certainly one of his academic weaknesses - Said declared that "popular culture means absolutely nothing to me."30 But it is his reticence towards activism and political organizing that is the most striking. Citing examples of how Said did not partake in campaigning against the Vietnam War and how he called the campus police on student protestors when they stormed his class, Brennan reveals that his political engagement had limits: not only did he see himself as removed from student politics, but also his lifelong commitment was to Palestine.31

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Hussein Omar (Lecturer in Modern Global History at University College Dublin), "Unexamined Life," *The Baffler*, 5 July 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Hussein Omar, *Unexamined Life*, 5 July 2021

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Rashid Khalidi, in discussion with Iona Tait, November 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Places of Mind*, 2021, 342.

<sup>27 &#</sup>x27;President Bollinger Comments on College Student Vote on Israel | Office of the President'. Accessed 2 January 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> See: Dwight Garner, 'A Study of Edward Said, One of the Most

Interesting Men of His Time', *The New York Times*, 22 March 2021; Ayten Tartici, 'The Restless, Eclectic and Contradictory Passions of Edward Said', *The New York Times*, 25 March 2021; 'Review | 'Places of Mind: A Life of Edward Said' Explores the Full Spectrum of Sources That Shaped the Scholar's Ideas,' *Washington Post*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Places of Mind*, 2021, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Brennan, Places of Mind, 49

<sup>31</sup> Timothy Brennan. Places of Mind, 2021, 123-125.



Figure 6. Leonardo Cendamo, Edward Said in Moderna, September 2001, Photograph, Getty Images, Italy.

Khalidi corroborates this, explaining that he was not particularly interested in student organizing and unions as well as not being enormously progressive in his personal politics.<sup>32</sup> Although he supported a national student strike in 1968 and did not hold classes on campus in solidarity, he "found the protesters' blanket anti-authoritarianism misguided" and disapproved of students who "adopted the unearned pose of guerilla fighters."33 He was concerned with foreign policy and, above all, Palestine – when it came to his commitment to Palestine, he "was not above the sweat and noise of campus organizing."34 He was on the side of progressive forces in the Middle East, with a fervent anti-autocratic position in the Middle East and antiimperialist in America, but rarely would he be found handing out leaflets. In spite of his lack of engagement with student politics, Said's work has been embedded into today's student politics: "His image, tweeds and all, did not prevent him from being routinely downloaded from the internet, photoshopped onto the T-shirt of an intifada militant, and placed on demonstration posters from London to Lagos."35

## CONCLUSION

A man of multiple selves, it is important to see the many facets of Edward Said's work and personality the aesthetic and the political – as in deep dialogue with each other. The ironies of Edward Said are glaring – he shunned the very discipline he is said to have founded, and he was politically committed yet unusually elitist. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) his contradictions, Said was a colossal intellectual both on campus and beyond, what might be called an academic celebrity. A wonderful example of his tangible presence at the University is the Edward W. Said Reading Room in Butler Library, the largest of Columbia's libraries. Opened in 2010, the room houses all of Said's personal library collection. Access to someone's private library is one of the most intimate ways to learn about someone's academic pursuits and interests. Students and faculty at Columbia have the privilege to read his books and engage with his eclectic interests. His presence can certainly be felt at Columbia today, from the thriving disciplines of world literature and postcolonial studies, the Middle East Institute and the Center for Palestine Studies, and the political climate surrounding Palestine. The establishment of Edward W. Said Fellowships for postgraduates in the humanities interested in Said's archives is a marked demonstration of Columbia's engagement with his legacy and of Said's enduring appeal across disciplinary boundaries.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Rashid Khalidi, in discussion with Iona Tait, November 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Brennan, Places of Mind, 124-125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid, 126.

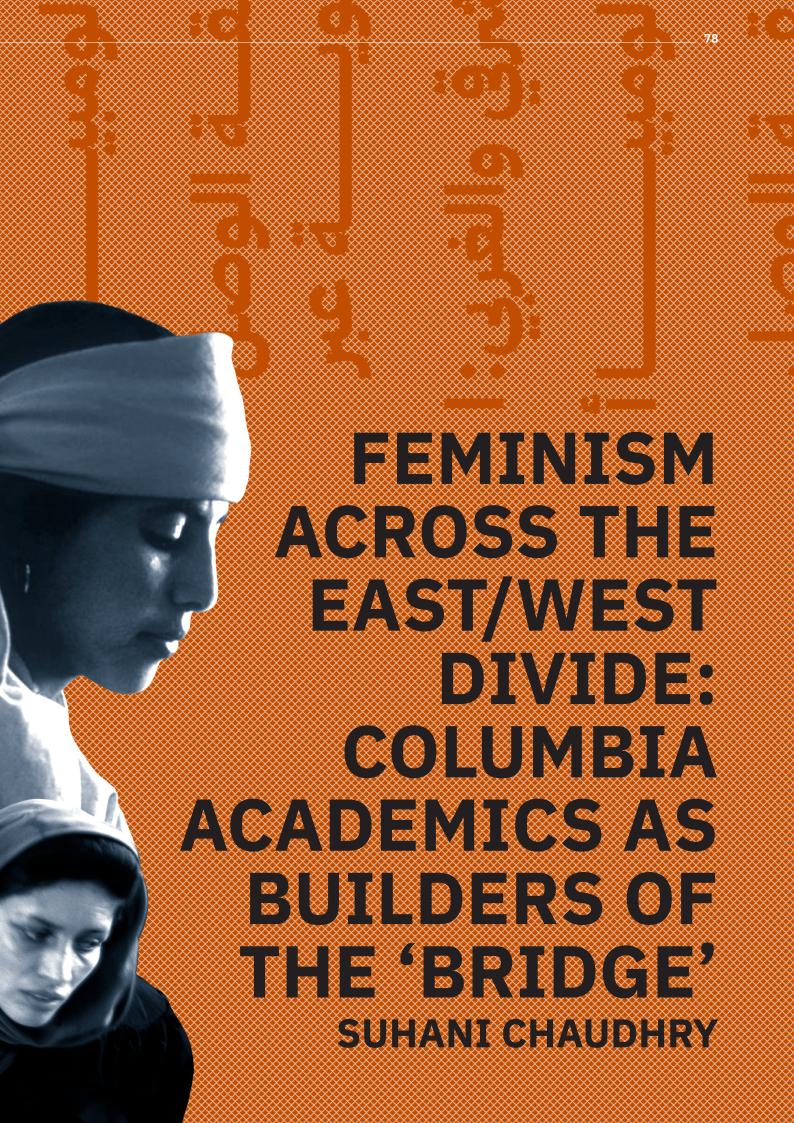
<sup>35</sup> Ibid, xviii.

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# FEMINISM ACROSS THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE: COLUMBIA ACADEMICS AS BUILDERS OF THE 'BRIDGE'

Feminist theorization in the last century has seen rapid development and astounding progress. Yet, many scholars have found that theoretical frameworks have historically been, unintentionally, just as "othering" as colonial and patriarchal narratives. Traditional feminist frameworks generally applied only to white, middle-class women, leaving all others to be defined by popular narrative and scholarship. This issue remains relevant today as people continue to contend with their sense of self infringed on by stereotypes and preconceptions. The focus of this paper is to look at the misrepresentation of women from the Middle East in global narratives and scholarships, the ways in which these misrepresentations have been and are being corrected, and how new spaces are being opened up for selfrepresentation. This paper aims to trace the metamorphosis of narrative and scholarship over the last four decades as contemporary theor-ization moves away from eurocentrism and towards reflexivity.

It will explore the disjuncture between perceptions, inscribed identities, and lived realities - but more specifically, the role that Columbia aca-demics have played in striving to bridge this chasm.

Columbia's faculty has been - and is still today - composed of academics at the top of their fields. These are the kinds of academics that have made waves and completely changed how global thought and narratives progress. Given that these two factors are so deeply connected to this topic, it is important to acknowledge the work that has allowed for transformation as well as those behind the change. Academics like Edward Said, Lila Abu-Lughod, Nathalie Handal, and all those highlighted within this paper, as well as the many others who are not featured, have not only made tremendous contributions to their fields, but also inherently helped to change the way in which gender in the Arab world is thought and talked about.

# **MISREPRESENTATIONS** OF ARAB-WOMEN

### **WESTERN FEMINISM AS** THE AGENT OF DIVISION

The 'West' has long imposed on Arab women its brand of liberal feminism. Western liberal feminism aimed at creating equality through political and legal reform; however, in this pursuit, it marginalized women who came from contexts in which these institutions were inextricably linked with other social and cultural environments. Historically, narratives were shaped by Orientalist perspectives that rendered Arab women as passive victims of backward ideas and institutions - all of which were often exclusively perceived as Islamic. This resulted in crude stereotyping, propagating the demonization of Muslims in the media, which, sadly, was reflected in the academic literature of the time.2 Sensationalized and misused media images, unnecessarily fixated on veiled Arab women, only heightened political antagonisms.3 Essentially, this created an atmosphere of condescension and marginalization - issues that different groups continue to have to contend with today when it comes to identity politics.

On top of being rendered invisible in discourse, Arab women's identities were generally imposed upon them. Arab women might be made into silent "non-subjects of feminist history" because they were perceived as upholding and propagating the same patriarchal domination that Western feminists were fighting against.4 Certain variants of women's movements in the Arab world simply do not fit into the Eurocentric feminist framework of notions of equality. 5 Those from the West could be misreading the sources of Eastern resentment, while authentic Eastern voices remain unheard.6 Western feminists inadvertently seem to have carried out the same 'othering' and discrimination towards Arab women that they were fighting against.

The 1980s saw a shift in theorization; feminist debates of the time revolved around the heterogeneity of Arab women's experience, criticism of Islam as the determining variable, and the importance of alternative categories of analysis such as socioeconomics, colonial legacies, and nationalism in shaping Arab women's lives. 7 With the emergence of "transnational feminism" in the 1990s, discourse became situated in local contexts and cultural processes.8 However, even today, Arab feminists "are all put on the defensive by some activities of feminists abroad and by the Western media's sensationalism when presenting Islam and women." Worse still, they are often represented as having abandoned their own culture for the Western one. 10 By challenging the frameworks used for interpretation and the power structures that reify, Arab feminists, scholars, and activists continuously negotiate women's relationships to nationalist as well as hybrid identities of Arab women. 11 What theorists now seek is a framework that progresses beyond the Eurocentric and allows Arab women to establish their indigenous identities as well as their economic and legal rights. 12 This project is an extremely important one due to the tendency of the latent effects of colonialism to surface even in the modern world.

#### 'ORIENTALISM': THE LAUNCHPAD

Whatever way that Arab women try to define themselves and project their identity, they face the harrowing prospect of being denied self-representation and instead receive a collective label that corresponds to the pre-existing cultural and ideological expectations. 13 Identity politics implicate notions of the "Self" and the "Other" - these, in turn, implicate "Orientalist" discourse which emanates from the West. 14 Sharify-Funk claims that "instead of remaining just academic discourse, Orientalism became a political process of homogenizing thought about Eastern 'others,' particularly but not exclusively, in the Middle East and the Islamic world."15 Perhaps the greatest contribution to this topic has been made by the late Columbia Professor Edward Said. Said's Orientalism has been considered the jumping-off point which led to the rise of feminist poststructuralism. 16 It was not meant to be feminist scholarship or theory, yet it generated feminist scholarship and debate in various disciplines and opened up theoretical avenues regarding gender and sexuality and how they have been mediated by Orientalist discourse. 17 Said's work led to a "historical recovery of feminism in the Middle East" as well as a re-examination of East/West politics.18

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Theresa Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millennium," Signs 25, no. 4 (2000): 1087.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Nadje Al-Ali, "Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis by Haideh Moghissi," Women's Studies International Forum 23, no. 2 (2000), 264.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Meena Sharify-Funk, "Mixed Messages and Multiple Agendas: The Politics of 'Women and Islam," Encountering the Transnational: Women, Islam and the Politics of Interpretation, 1st ed, 2008, 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Saba Mahmood, "Women's Piety and Embodied Discipline: The Islamic Resurgence in Contemporary Egypt." Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1998, 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Theresa Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millennium," 2000, 1090.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Meena Sharify-Funk, "Mixed Messages and Multiple Agendas: The Politics of 'Women and Islam," 2008, 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Meena Sharify-Funk, "Mixed Messages and Multiple Agendas: The Politics of 'Women and Islam," 2008, 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Theresa Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millennium," 2000, 1088. 9 Lila Abu-Lughod, "Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies,"

<sup>2001.101.</sup> 

<sup>10</sup> Meena Sharify-Funk, "Muslim Woman as Self/Other: The Politics of Identity," Encountering the Transnational: Women, Islam and the Politics of Interpretation, 2008, 143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Theresa Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millennium," 2000, 1087. <sup>12</sup> Theresa Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millennium," 2000, 1088.

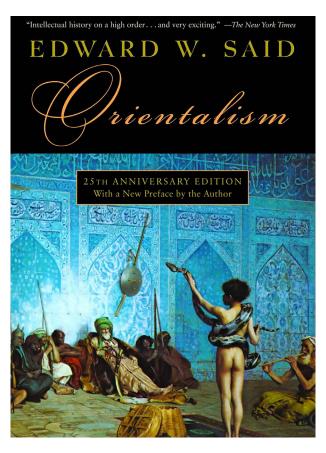
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Meena Sharify-Funk, "Muslim Woman as Self/Other: The Politics of Identity," 2008, 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Sharify-Funk, "Muslim Woman as Self/Other: The Politics of Identity," 2008, 141.

Theresa Saliba, "Arab Feminism at the Millennium," 2000, 2000.
 Lila Abu-Lughod, "Orientalism & Middle East Feminist Studies," 2001, 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Abu-Lughod, "Orientalism & Middle East Feminist Studies," 2001.

As one of the most significant contributions in Middle East studies, Orientalism revealed the mechanisms behind cultural production - even that which is academic in nature. It also exposed the trap that many theorists of gender and sexuality fell into, and continue to fall into, by confirming the conceptions of the West. Said's work highlighted how critique is situated in a global context and provided a starting point for theorists to think about gender and sexuality as integral aspects of colonialism rather than just as aforethought. His work led to the recognition of stereotypes as crucial to negative, disparaging narratives. It provoked many scholars to reveal the complex realities of gender and women in the Arab world; it prompted exploration into how Middle Eastern women represent themselves. 19 Orientalism highlighted that the division between the representations of East and West were subsequent products of the political and historical encounter of imperialism.<sup>20</sup> Said offered Middle East feminist scholars a model for their own academic engagement and path to move forward: the refusal of the tradition/ Western modernity, or rather the East/West divide.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 1.** Edward Said, *Orientalism 25th Anniversary Edition*, 2004, Book Cover, *Vintage Books*, New York.

# REPRESENTATIONS OF ARAB WOMEN

# CORRECTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION: LILA ABU-LUGHOD

Perhaps the most significant contribution to this topic has been made by Lila Abu-Lughod, Joseph L. Buttenwieser Professor of Social Science in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University. Abu-Lughod's main academic focus has been gender in the Middle East, and more specifically, bringing to light the misrepresentations and correcting the false perceptions that have been propagated by the West. Her work began in the 1970s and 1980s; it continues to be relevant in modern academia. Her Spring 2022 course is titled 'Women and Gender Politics in the Muslim World'. Abu-Lughod's career at Columbia has been punctuated by a series of accomplishments in and engagement with Women's and Gender Studies, including the directorship of the Institute for the Study of Sexuality and Gender. She is currently also a Director of the Religion and the Global Reframing of Gender Violence project that involves various other Columbia academics focused on gender and the Middle East, such as Nina Berman, Katheryn Spellman Poots, Katherine Pratt Ewing, and more. This project criticizes the conflation of religion and violence against women by the mobilization of "the collective experience, expertise, and creativity of an international group of critical feminist scholars, practitioners, activists, and journalists."22 The aim is to re-examine genderbased violence to develop more appropriate and effective strategies to combat it. By opening up crucial global conversations and introducing more nuanced analysis, a better understanding of the causal factors of this kind of violence can be found without being clouded by Orientalist framings of religion and culture. Projects like these exemplify the way forward for feminism and aim to rectify the misdirection of previous actions and narratives.

In her work, Abu-Lughod delineates several of these false constructions by pointing out that the consistent resort to the cultural and religious, rather than looking at political and historical explanations, artificially divided the world; the result was separate spheres along the imaginative geography of West versus East.<sup>23</sup> The dichotomy thus created is societies in which women speak to entire nations juxtaposed with those where women are silenced by burqas.<sup>24</sup> Female symbols were employed in the "War against"

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Tamer Marshood, "Religion and the Global Framing of Gender Violence," *Columbia Center for the Study of Social Difference*, 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002), 784.

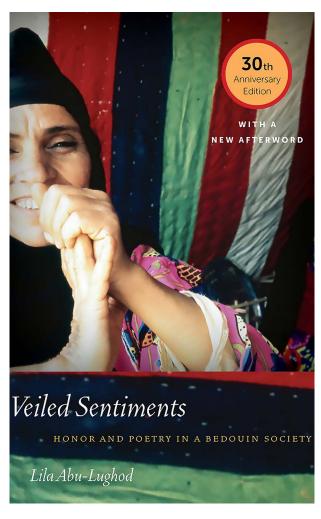
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" 784.

Terror" and fed into narratives of saving and liberating. What was not taken into account was the cultural perspectives and value systems attached to the burga, the hijab, and other veils - which not all Arab women would later shun, much to the surprise of some Western liberals.<sup>25</sup> The burga is the image that the West has chosen to stand for all the social. political, and economic issues that women in the Middle East have to contend with when it does not necessarily embody them.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes perceived as a lack of agency, it prescribed a certain conception of freedom that may not translate across different contexts.<sup>27</sup> Western feminists and wider narratives have historically failed to understand that many see the veil as liberating, a symbol of the separation of the public and private that invokes ideas of sanctity and protection.<sup>28</sup>

Colonial binaries continue to shape the thinking and the practice of feminist analysis regarding the East; attention must be paid to the way this limits feminist solidarities and unfairly binds women to larger state projects. Abu-Lughod edited a collection of essays, Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East. Through this work, she allows scholars to redefine women's gendered roles, experiences, and associations. Her numerous articles, as well as books such as Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving, Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories, Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society, etc., all bring to the forefront the contextualized experiences of women and feminism in the Middle East, aiming to correct the misrepresentation of Arab women.

Abu-Lughod proposes that it is strategically dangerous to continue to accept the cultural oppositions between East/West and fundamentalism/feminism.31 Failure to acknowledge and correct the ways that feminist political activism and analysis can reproduce forms of exclusion could lead to a never-ending cycle of imperialist othering. She has proposed that anthropology, a discipline that has been charged with understanding and managing cultural differences, is in a unique position to intervene and prevent the continuation of colonial feminism. 32 Abu-Lughod asserts that it is crucial to "interrogate the genealogy of feminism" and focus on a local conception of it rather than a universal one.33 Social scientists that focalize culture in their analysis can help to reterritorialize complexly gendered worlds.34 Abu-Lughod states,

"Much of the best recent literature in Middle East women's history and anthropology can be conceived of as working against universalizing discourses about patriarchy, Islam, and oppression." She suggests that such ethnographic work can, and does, change the parameters of public discourse. Rather than offering salvation, what individuals should offer is solidarity. By seeking to be active in the affairs of the Middle East, and doing so in the spirit of support, the focus can be on making the lives of the women (and men) that live in these communities better, rather than trying to make their lives the same as their counterparts in the West.



**Figure 2.** Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society (First Edition, Reissue, 30th Anniversary Edition)*, 2016, Book Cover, *University of California Press*, Berkeley.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," 2002, 785.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" 786.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid. <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 785.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Cross-Publics of Ethnography: The Case of 'the Muslimwoman," *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 4 (2016), 506.

<sup>30</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings & Postcolonial Conditions." Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East (1998) 4

<sup>31</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?

Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," 2002, 786.

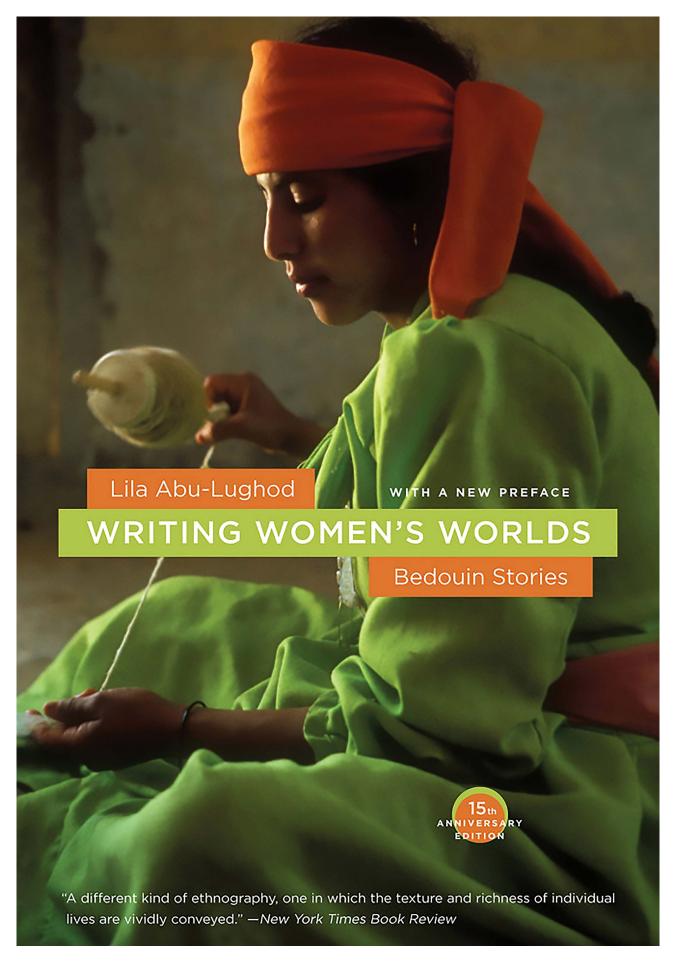
<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 784.

<sup>33</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings & Postcolonial Conditions." 1988, 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Introduction: The Politics of Feminist Politics," Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 35, no. 4 (2015), 505.

<sup>35</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings & Postcolonial Conditions." 1988, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Introduction: The Politics of Feminist Politics," 2015, 603,605.



**Figure 3.** Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds (15th Anniversary Edition)*, 2008, Book Cover, *University of California Press*, Berkeley.

# BRINGING FEMALE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES TO THE FOREFRONT

A lot of contemporary narratives are reminding the world that feminism is not an isolated phenomenon but rather occurs in particular historical and social contexts.<sup>37</sup> These women all come from diverse disciplines and bring with them different viewpoints, yet what unites them is that they purposefully stay away from essentializing the experiences of Arab women. In line with what Abu-Lughod proposes, these academics do not shy away from the difficult topics that must be contended with given the context; they choose to represent the viewpoints and lived realities of these women from a lens that is a complete contrast to that of the stereotyping West. They aim to show women's worlds, rather than picking and choosing the relevant facts. Columbia academics such as Nina Berman, Manijeh Moradian, and Jerusha T. Rhodes have been bringing female experiences to the forefront while rooting this in the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they have lived.

Nina Berman, Professor at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, is a renowned photojournalist whose work addresses American politics, violence, and resistance - all of which have been implicated in the project of "saving" Arab women. Among her work, Nina Berman has photo essays in the Middle East, such as Za'atari: Inside these walls featuring Syrian refugees displaced to Jordan. However, it is her *Under the Taliban* project which best represents her approach towards feminist projects. The project captured the lives of Afghan women under Taliban rule, utilizing images taken in Kabul in 1988 and Kandahar in 2000. Her comments on the context in which these photos were taken echo those of Abu-Lughod. Berman expresses how the justification given for the invasion of Afghanistan was liberation - and whether intentionally or unintentionally, the photographs speak to that narrative by drawing the focus away from imposing identities and towards simply showing the world on the ground realities.<sup>38</sup> Her interests, with regards to this project, lay in the way that women were used and violated in order to promote wider ideological agendas.<sup>39</sup> She said in an interview, "I suppose it speaks to the failure of military solutions in forcing progress on basic economic, cultural and gender issues."40 Her work, while focusing on women, extensively features the world around them and the environments they are submerged in. A stark deviation from the images in mainstream media that pander to the narratives of poor, oppressed women, she calls attention to the problems that must be addressed without invoking a savior complex. Her work speaks to many of the issues previously discussed regarding discourse and narrative to rectify them by looking not only at the women, but the politically and socially mediated world in which they live. She is quoted as saying what a tragedy it is that given the extensive cost of the war in Afghanistan, many of the images are mistaken for being contemporaneous.<sup>41</sup>

Another academic making contributions to historicizing and grounding narratives around Arab women is Manijeh Moradian, Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Barnard College of Columbia University. Her work, starting from 2011, examines memory, affect, and emotion in understanding marginalized experiences and knowledge. She teaches courses such as Gender Globalization and Empire as well as Affect and Activism. Moradian focuses on the way that gendered histories and diasporic identities function as crucial vectors in the formation of minority subjectivities, which are intimately connected with new Middle Eastern feminism. Aside from having published extensively on the subject - 'Women can do anything men can do': Gender and the Affects of Solidarity in the U.S. Iranian Student Movement (1965-1979), New Middle Eastern Uprisings: Gender, Class, and Security Politics in Egypt and Iran - she is also a founding member of the Raha Iranian Feminist Collective. Based in New York City, this group seeks to support democratic movements in Iran while opposing U.S. intervention by building alliances with grassroots movements for gender and sexual justice.42 They ground contemporary issues in their cultural context without conflating the two, allowing a shift in narrative from the neocolonial. They promote an extensive list of scholarship on everything from historical context to social movements in order to educate people without imposing Western biases. In doing so, the aims of the collective speak to the larger project of reclaiming narratives and the construction of identities. The progression from Western projects of salvation to projects of empowerment from within communities is embodied by the work of Moradian and the collective.

Jerusha T. Rhodes, Associate Professor of Islam & Interreligious Engagement at Union Theological Seminary, extensively employs feminist theology to reframe ethnocentric discourse on women and Islam so that theorization can escape from the trap of Arab women's essentialism. She has stated that work like hers comes with all the tensions to be expected from interreligious feminist theology and dialogue.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions," 1988, 23

Nina Berman, interview by Tricia Khutoretsky, 10 Years and Counting, October 4, 2011.
 Jamie Goldberg, "Jamie Goldenberg: Nina Berman's Under

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Jamie Goldberg, "Jamie Goldenberg: Nina Berman's Under Taliban, A Decade Later," *Guernica Magazine*, January 10 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Jamie Goldberg, "Jamie Goldenberg: Nina Berman's Under Taliban, A Decade Later," 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> "Under the Taliban: Nina Berman." *NOOR*. Accessed November 22, 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> "Liberation Comes From Below," *Raha Feminist Collective*, 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Lucy Schouten, "Divine Words, Female Voices: Beyond Poisoned Wells," *The Christian-Muslim Studies Network*, April 12, 2019.



Figure 4. Nina Berman, A Woman at a Birth Class, 1998, Photograph, Kabul, Afghanistan.



Figure 5. Nina Berman, A Woman's World through the Burka, 1998, Photograph, Kabul, Afghanistan.

She stresses the importance of learning about other people and their traditions directly and on their own terms. 44 This is both crucial to nuanced understanding as well as to represent authentic experiences of gender and religion accurately. In her work, Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology (2018), she argues that women have been harmed by both patriarchal norms and the contributions of Westen feminism which perpetuate negative stereotypes, while employing the work of Muslim women scholars and Islamic feminists to build a cohesive scholarship which negates the binary of the liberated West and the woman-oppressing East.<sup>45</sup> Rhodes proposes new approaches while critiquing old ones in order to challenge both Western frameworks as well as Eastern social structures; she urges that each generation, subsequently, challenge earlier assumptions and practices. The work of these academics is part of the 'new voices of Islam,' which are products of transnational and transcultural conversations, attempting to transcend the East/ West divisions and reflect the development of new discursive spaces amongst diverse individuals for the discussion of women's rights, identity, and society. 46



Figure 6. Monica Trinidad, 'Liberation Comes From Below' - Raha Iranian's Feminist Collective Statement on #NoWarWithIran, 2020, Illustration, Raha Feminist Collective.

# **SELF-REPRESENTATIONS** OF ARAB WOMEN

#### **MOVING FROM REPRESENTATION TO SELF-REPRESENTATION: NATHALIE HANDAL**

Other academics have built on this narrative and scholarly tradition and moved from presenting new discourse and representing Arab women to creating spaces for self-representation. Nathalie Handal, Adjunct Assistant Professor in English & Comparative Literature, is an award-winning poet, playwright, and editor. Her book, The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology, is an attempt to comment on Arab women's intellectual history. 47 Handal stated in an interview that poetry has the extraordinary ability to influence individuals and perspectives as well as to galvanize people into action.<sup>48</sup> She brings together the voices of Arab women from different nationalities and positionalities to highlight their subjectivities in a "counter to dominant colonialist Western feminist approaches that highlight "religion" (Islam) as the primary determinant of Arab women's identities."49 Handal created this anthology to "eradicate invisibility" and fill the gaps in the literary world by giving a voice to women who have been robbed of theirs by both the West and their societies. 50 Male poets and authors have fought for women's liberation, used female characters, and questioned the women's role in society; however, few have been able to capture women's psyche, emotions, and experiences.<sup>51</sup> The same could be said for Western feminists. Thus, Handal's anthology is a medium through which these Arab women represented their authentic voices and experiences; voices and experiences that have seldom been heard in the Arab world or the West.52

Handal mentions several historical pieces of literature that redefined notions of gender in the Middle East, and it could be argued that Handal does the same through this anthology. Many of the poets included in the anthology have Western influences but are not determined by them, marking a huge step for both feminism and Arab women. They provoke discussions on "religious identity within the context of intersecting coordinates of power [..] and historical circumstances."<sup>53</sup> They stand at a "crossroad between East and West," which gives both more accessibility to the other.<sup>54</sup> Poets present in the anthology, like Ghada al-Samman, broaden the view of Arab women and play important roles in feminism and sexual politics.<sup>55</sup> Handal's inclusion of Arab-American and Arab-Canadian women is a direct negation of the Western narrative and feminist perception that this paper has discussed. Arab-American poets remain virtually absent in feminist discourse, and Handal aims to rectify this because their work criticizes injustices and stereotypes. Handal allows them to affirm their Arab identity while simultaneously challenging perceptions and stereotypes.<sup>56</sup> While they have come a long way, Handal insists that they

<sup>44</sup> Schouten, "Divine Words, Female Voices," The Christian-Muslim Studies Network, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Meena Sharify-Funk, "Mixed Messages and Multiple Agendas: The Politics of 'Women and Islam," 2008, 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Rula Abisaab, "The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology, Edited by Nathalie Handal," Middle East Studies

Association Bulletin 36, no. 1 (2002), 76.

48 Jared Jackson, "The PEN Ten: An Interview with Nathalie Handal," PEN America, 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Nadine Naber, "Arab American Femininities: Beyond Arab Virgin/ American(Ized) Whore." Feminist Studies 32, no. 1 (2006): 89.

<sup>50</sup> Nathalie Handal, "Preface," The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology, XII.

<sup>51</sup> Nathalie Handal, "Introduction," 2015, 4. 52 Nathalie Handal, "Introduction," 2015, 7,31.

<sup>53</sup> Nadine Naber, "Arab American Femininities: Beyond Arab Virgin/ American(Ized) Whore." Feminist Studies 32, no. 1 (2006): 89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Nathalie Handal, "Introduction," 2015, 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ibid, 59.

require more recognition for the perceived duality that they, and so many other Arab women, embody: inhabiting both the role of feminist and Arab women. She provides both these women and the world a way to re-read misguided narratives and allows them the agency over their own identity, which they have so long been denied.



**Figure 7.** Rachel Eliza Griffiths, *A Portrait of Nathalie Handal*, 2016, Photograph.

The aforementioned scholars have been involved with the Middle East Institute (MEI) at Columbia University, representing viewpoints from a wide range of disciplines. The Institute promotes interdisciplinary study of geographical and global communities with rich social, cultural, and political histories. It aims to supplement departmental offerings and provide a forum for academics & students. The MEI is working to inform and educate the media, governments, and the public to lay the foundation for future change and progress. It plays a vital role in the modern world, where so much of the social, cultural, and political factors are inextricably linked. The significant female representation within the Institute is important given the nature of the topics and themes of the MEI. It helps embody so much of what the academics discussed advocate for.

## CONCLUSION

Columbia academics have made invaluable contributions across their fields in an attempt to reclaim the 'feminist' label and make it suit the individual subjectivities of women that have for so long been ignored or been homogenized. Their work remains just as relevant today, in a world that is dominated by power structures that have by no means disappeared, but rather become more obscure and hard to delineate from institutional mechanisms, as it was when women did not have the right to vote or the right to own land. The progression outlined by this paper can be summarized as one that has gone through the steps of misrepresentation, representation, to finally, the longawaited, self-representation of Arab women. This metamorphosis follows the chronological changes and developments thus indicating an overarching trend. The trend shows the movement of theorizations and public narratives towards more progressive and liberal ideas around identity, gender, and nationhood.

By looking at the work of women scholars in various fields, a recognition of the amplification of Arab women's voices becomes possible. It has become clear how they are both lending their voices and supporting others in raising theirs, prompting the shift from external theorization to internal expression. Structures of power have always, and still do, mediate the construction and perception of identities. However, the hope remains that identity politics will one day become the domain of the individual rather than the tool of socio-economic and political forces. The work of the Columbia academics mentioned above, and the many more that the scope of this paper could not extend and do justice to, are crucial in forging this path and building the bridge between perceptions and reality.

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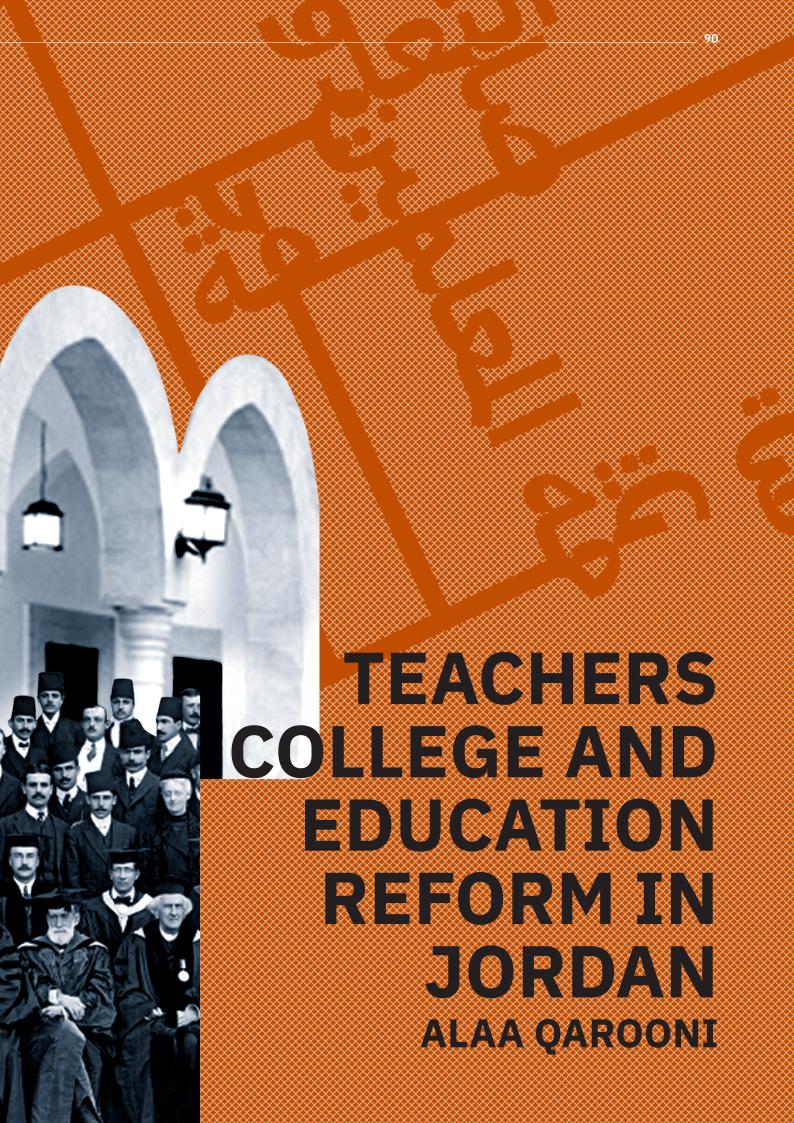
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# TEACHERS COLLEGE AND **EDUCATION REFORM IN JORDAN**

Columbia University's ties and influence in the Arab world interest me on many fronts as a student at the University – be it my background as an Arab student from Bahrain, or my studies in the history and politics of the modern Middle East, as well as my Columbia experience that spans two of its graduate schools (Teachers College as well as the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences). I have experienced the institutional strength of Columbia – in its global reach, its influence and positive impact worldwide firsthand through my studies there, as well as through my friends, acquaintances, and professors.

Understanding how an international, wide-reaching institution like Columbia University can be exemplified through a specific Jordanian project will reveal how its scholars left an important mark on the Middle East. The focus of this paper follows The School Network Learning Project (SNLP), a recent collaborative project between Jordan and Columbia's Teachers College, which was facilitated by the Columbia Global Centers | Amman.

The SNLP focused on the primary goal of enhancing Jordan's educational system by driving the professional development of teachers and improving the quality of public schools across Jordan. As of 2015, this project included the participation of 2158 teachers, 894 school leaders, and 104 other educators in Jordan totaling 3130 participants.1 After an analysis of the motivations, operation, and outcomes of the project, it becomes apparent that Columbia was able to achieve the following:

**1.** Create a modern teaching and learning infrastructure that relies on cutting-edge educational research.

- 2. Use robust knowledge to build effective, sustainable educational institutions and frameworks.
- 3. Rely on a well-qualified team of experts that can identify comprehensive strategies for sustaining the systems they developed.

The overall idea that I aim to communicate in this paper is that Teachers College expertise was essential to help create and sustain a culture of continuous instructional improvement. To begin, I would like to highlight an interesting historical figure who was involved in the field of education in the Middle East. In a way, his work is an early twentieth-century parallel to this early twenty-first-century project.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF **TEACHERS COLLEGE IN THE ARAB WORLD: BULOS KHAULI**

Teachers College has an interesting history in the Arab world. Many influential people from the region arrived at the College in the early twentieth century with an interest in improving educational institutions operationally (identifying structural issues and how to solve them) and ideologically (introducing new philosophical ideas or approaches to educational practice). Some of these students went on to become prominent members of their respective educational communities. Bulos Khauli was one such figure. He attended the College around 1905, and his experiences mirror those of Jordan in its involvement with Teachers College through The School Network Learning Project.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Marian A. Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," 2.

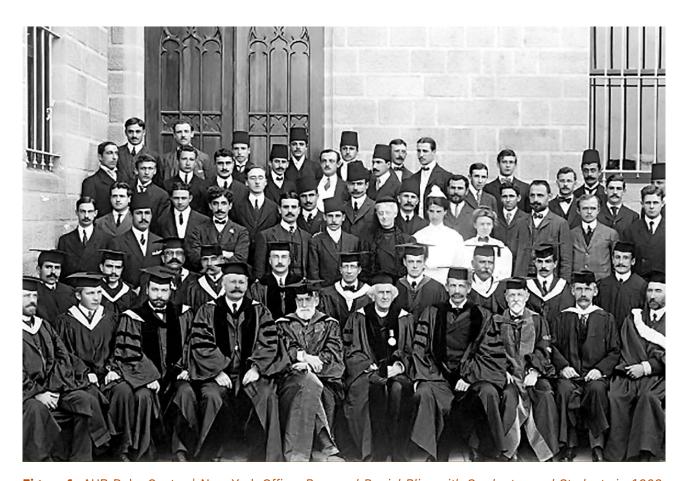
Bulos Khauli was an instructor at the Syrian Protestant College — now called the American University of Beirut (AUB) - prior to arriving at Teachers College. He, therefore, came to Columbia with a deep understanding of the issues and dynamics that defined education in the Ottoman-ruled Levant. Khauli was passionate about using education as a tool for reform. He appreciated the values that, in his opinion, Western education espoused.<sup>2</sup> Arrangements were made for him to spend a year at Teachers College. During his time there, he wrote about how fascinated he was to find a community committed to learning and the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Towards the end of his time in New York, he produced an important thesis that identified how education in the Arab world under Ottoman rule, specifically in the Levant, effectively served the purposes of further division, instead of unification, in a territory that was already divided along sectarian, ethnic and political lines. His conclusions, possibly because of his affiliation with the Syrian Protestant College, were that Protestantism and a Western-inspired education could regenerate the Empire and bring about a revival of learning.<sup>4</sup> Khauli's experience abroad at Teachers

College in New York led him to draw from Western ideas, philosophies, and frameworks. He used them to identify, deal with, and rethink the approach to education in the Levant region.

To learn more about Khauli's life, I recommend reading Chapter 19 of *One Hundred and Fifty*. This is an edited volume that was released to celebrate AUB's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and includes a discussion of Khauli's time in the Ottoman-ruled Levant, in New York in Teachers College, and after his return to the region. Further, a paper produced by another student (Kevin Carl Petersen) in this history publication discusses three prominent figures who arrived from the Middle East to study at Columbia around the same time as Khauli, all of whom also attended Teachers College; the reader can look into that for more information as well.

In a way, the SNLP, which occupies the remaining focus of this paper, is a project that could mirror Khauli's experiences: a local Arab entity identifies structural issues in its educational systems, and leverages Teachers College to bring in ideas and people to restructure and improve them.



**Figure 1.** AUB Debs Center | New York Office, *Reverend Daniel Bliss with Graduates and Students in 1908*, 2020, Photograph. Khauli with AUB students and faculty, copyright to AUB Library Archives.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Naufal, "A Useful Life: Bulus Khauli at SPC and AUB", 259-263.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Naufal, "A Useful Life," 259-263.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Nadia El-Cheikh, Lina Choueiri, and Bilal Orfali, "One Hundred and Fifty," AUB, 2016, Beirut.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> El-Cheikh, Choueiri, and Orfali, "One Hundred and Fifty," 2016.

# THE SCHOOL NETWORK LEARNING PROJECT IN **JORDAN**

#### **MOTIVATIONS AND BEGINNING STAGES**

Given the political and historical context of the MENA region, initiating robust, sustainable, and muchneeded development projects can be difficult.7 As such, in matters of development, the Jordanian government cooperates with international partners who could provide the necessary support to advance public institutions. A strategy was formed that revolved around identifying the resources to stimulate the Jordanian economy in the long-term and its need for a human resource-centered approach, which would give the country a competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy. Jordan found it important to develop its people's skills and relevant competencies through improving the country's different social systems and institutions, primarily in the education sector.8

Therefore, through a comprehensive reform initiative called Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE), the country began a process of modernizing and improving its educational system in the early 2000s. ERfKE is a multi-donor sector program that was first introduced in 2002 at the Vision Forum for the Future of Education in Jordan. This initiative was designed to provide the Jordanian population with life-long knowledge relating to current and future needs to ensure a continuously stimulated local economy through an educated population and workforce. The scope of the project covered the fundamental governance and administrative strategies that Jordan needs to reform at a foundational level.

The first phase of the project, ERfKE I, involved reorienting high-level decisions so that they are less "traditional, hierarchical and top-down, and more participatory, outcome-based and studentcentered," stimulating better coordination between different providers of educational opportunity at the system level, etc.9 The second phase of the project, ERfKE II, focused on the pedagogical and instructional issues that require ameliorating at the micro-level, such as decreasing class sizes, modernizing facilities, and developing teachers' skills, etc.<sup>10</sup> Prior to Columbia University's involvement in 2007, ERfKE was in its initial phase of capacity building, investments, and financial infrastructure development. The collaborating institutions then were primarily international financing institutions, such as the World Bank.

The SNLP was one of the educational projects that were facilitated through the Columbia University Middle East Research Center (now known as the Columbia Global Centers | Amman) and began with the coordinated establishment of the Queen Rania Teachers Academy (QRTA) in 2009 with the support and patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdallah. A nascent organization, the QRTA was founded in order to improve education in Jordan and across the Middle East. The SNLP took form through the introduction of a team of experts from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at Teachers College who, in partnership with the QRTA, would "implement comprehensive approaches to school improvement, effective professional development practices, and effective instructional practices."11 The SNLP began with the goal of "creating supported networks of schools in different regions of the country as vehicles for providing professional development of teachers [...] as well as leadership training for principals and education supervisors."12



Figure 2. Columbia Global Centers | Amman Headquarters, Photograph, Columbia University.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Akçali, "Introduction" 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Akçali, "Introduction", 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Jordan - Education Reform for Knowledge Economy Program Project, World Bank Group, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Development Coordination Unit, Second Phase of Education

Reform For Knowledge Economy Project (ERfKE II)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Pratt-Williams & Corocan, "Changing Classroom Practice: The Evaluation of the School Network Learning Project in Jordan," 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Pratt-Williams & Corocan, "Changing Classroom Practice: The Evaluation of the School Network Learning Project in Jordan," 2.

# FEATURES AND OUTCOMES **OF THE PROJECT**

To understand the project's role in aligning with Jordan's ERfKE initiative, it is important to review the features of the project, as well as the outcomes they induced. The project is composed of 3 key features:

- 1. School Improvement
- 2. Professional Development
- 3. Instructional Practices

I interpret these three features as broad strategies that target administrators / school leaders, educators, and students, respectively. The first feature focuses on how the partnership developed school improvement strategies on a broad, macro-level; the second and third features describe the nature of the school networks at a micro-level.

The features are important to discuss for two reasons: firstly, the success of the project depends greatly on how the structures put in place benefit their



participants, in this case, the school educators. Secondly, such a consideration gives the experiences of those participants some much-needed importance. Many theorists of education, such as Paulo Freire and John Dewey, argue that thinking about the diverse subjectivities of learners and the values that such educational projects instill in them is what makes education what it is. 13,14 Examining how the SNLP "implemented... effective professional development practices and effective instructional practices" will reveal how the structures put in place for school educators helped transmit valuable experiences. 15

#### **FEATURE 1: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

School improvement involves designing a system of school networks to improve the coordination between schools and the overarching bodies that supervise them.

When it comes to this aspect of the project, the strategy taken by the CPRE team, according to the project's interim report, Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010, involves designing a 'school network' system, which is defined in the following terms:

> The Partnership is using school networks as vehicles for providing professional development for teams of teachers and their principals and education supervisors. Each network of schools is subject-specific and focused on the improvement of instruction. The theory holds that over time the norms of collaboration to improve practice will spread in a school, from the teachers in the initial targeted subject area to teachers in other subject areas. Each network is composed of 18-25 schools drawn from the same geographic region and / or directorate to support access to periodic professional development sessions and to encourage collaboration across schools. Each school is expected to support the participation of a group of teachers who teach the same subject. The goal is for up to 100 teachers to participate in each network. Support for each network is expected to continue for three years. 16

Establishing these networks of schools aims to create an organic system-level structure that benefits from a dynamic exchange of experiences and ideas between the participating teachers and schools. It revolves around planting the seed for self-sustaining communities of teachers to grow all across Jordan.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Dewey, "Experience and Education," 1997.<sup>14</sup> Freire, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," 2000.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Pratt-Williams & Corocan, "Changing Classroom Practice: The

Evaluation of the School Network Learning Project in Jordan," 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Marian A. Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," 8.

This falls in line with the framework that the ERfKE initiative is based on, that efforts at reforming the education system must shift away from hierarchical, top-down decision-making to a more participatory way of operating.

While I found this school network system quite clever, it is important to scrutinize whether the CPRE and QRTA had any long-term safeguards to periodically assess how the networks are performing and ensure that teachers will be continually supported. In other words, like any organized structure that has just been built, it requires periodic maintenance and supervision after the building phase is completed to ensure that it remains stable and functional. I find an important safeguard that the partnership has taken, in that regard, is the transfer of capacity to the QRTA. This transfer of capacity is the main outcome of the school improvement project goal.

#### **OUTCOMES**

The CPRE team was to leave Jordan in three years at the conclusion of the project, <sup>17</sup> and thus the QRTA is responsible for sustaining the networks and professional development workshops that were being done in collaboration with the CPRE. Since the QRTA was established with the launch of the SNLP, it needed a gradual build-up of capacity that coincided with the progression of the project. In that regard, the "CPRE team used an apprenticeship model," <sup>18</sup> to train the QRTA team how to carry out the professional development workshops for the initial cohorts of participating teachers, and as they progressed through the workshops they were gradually given more responsibilities for following cohorts (Table 1).

Furthermore, as part of the SNLP, each cohort of participating teachers were given anonymous surveys to provide feedback on the workshops. This was done as the project's leaders were gradually joining the QRTA as team members. Survey results have indicated that the quality of workshops remained consistent throughout its deliverance (Table 2).

With that said, there were goals placed for the sustainability and longevity of the project that were not met due to several reasons, the largest of which is geographical. Because of the long travel distance between QRTA's Amman headquarters and some networks of schools that are far from the capital, the QRTA was not able to reach "the goal of providing twelve hours of support for each school annually." There were also issues with attrition to the English Writing network; however, it seems that these were growing pains that could be attributed to the project's early phases.

Professional development involves transmitting 'highimpact instructional strategies' to Jordanian educators and creating systems that facilitate such transmission. Instructional practices, finally, involve using what is achieved in school improvement and professional development to improve in-class activities that benefit both the educators' ability to teach and the students' role in the educational process.

The reader will notice that I combined the remaining two project goals in this section. This is because the professional workshops were planned in accordance with the instructional practices that were intended to be transmitted through them - so the two goals are fundamentally intertwined and should be discussed as such. There are two important components of these networks that are most relevant: professional workshops and network meetings.

The professional workshops were split into three subject-specific categories in order to teach educators about research-based instructional strategies within their specific content areas (Math, Science, and English Writing). Each workshop was linked by five core practices that the SNLP sought to cultivate in the participating schools and teachers. These practices include lesson design, team-based instruction, academically focused and rigorous tasks, formative assessment and adaptive instruction, and studentcentered discussion. The choice of these five core practices arrived from an understanding that there are important approaches to education that needed to be improved in Jordan. These include education development theory and literature identified as fundamental, especially in relation to achieving a strong teaching and learning culture - for example, how to design lessons and formulate educative tasks before class time is as essential as the teaching strategies implemented during class time, and are deeply intertwined with them.

The intermingling of these practices meant that the workshops did not merely focus on directly training teachers on how to implement their training, but instead on what I call subject-specific pedagogical themes that cultivate these core practices collectively. For example, the science workshops aimed "to help teachers learn ways to design and structure inquiry-based lessons to make their instruction more effective... using the 5E Instructional Model... Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration and Evaluation." The math workshops sought to improve the teachers' "pedagogical content knowledge and ability to diagnose and address

FEATURES 2 AND 3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Pratt-Williams & Corocan, "Changing Classroom Practice: The Evaluation of the School Network Learning Project in Jordan," 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Marian A. Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," 2011, 18.

	COHORT 1 NETWORKS	COHORT 2 NETWORKS	COHORT 3 NETWORKS
QRTA Staff Role	Support Role	Co-deliver	Serve as
	in Workshops	Workshop	Team Leaders
	and Planning	Sessions	and Members
TC/CU Partner Role	Lead in Content	Co-deliver	Advise as
	and Delivery	Workshop Sessions	QRTA Leads

Source: Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010, 2011.

**Table 1.** Transitioning of Responsibilities to QRTA Staff Developers. Data from Marian A. Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," *CPRE Research Reports*, 2011.

	MATHEMATICS NETWORK			SCIENCE NETWORK			ENGLISH WRITING NETWORK		
Feedback Prompts	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
"The workshop was well-organized."	98.3%	95.7%	95.7%	99.0%	96.6%	98.3%	100.0%	98.7%	92.9%
"Time was used efficiently in the workshop."	92.5%	96.8%	96.8%	93.4%	93.5%	-	-	-	-
"The leaders of this workshop were knowledgeable about [my content area] math/science/writing."	98.2%	98.2%	98.2%	98.6%	94.6%	99.5%	100.0%	98.0%	95.2%
"What I gained from this workshop made it worth my time."	92.1%	95.7%	95.7%	95.9%	93.1%	93.6%	100.0%	93.3%	91.0%

Source: QRTA Workshop Feedback November 2010 to September 2012

**Table 2.** Average Teacher Views on the Organization and Facilitation of Network Workshops. Data from Jaunelle Pratt-Williams and Thomas Cocoran, "Changing Classroom Practice: The Evaluation of the School Network Learning Project in Jordan," *CPRE Research Reports*, 2015.

student misconceptions of specific mathematics contents and procedures... that are important to the *development of mathematical reasoning.*"<sup>21</sup> The English Writing workshop helps teachers adopt "the writing workshop model developed by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Workshop [that] supports student-centered instruction [and]...importantly... *develops critical thinking* as students learn to use more complex and precise language to express their ideas, experiences and opinions."<sup>22</sup>

Inquiry is an important pedagogical theme in science because science disciplines (like physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) are defined by an initial curiosity about a certain phenomenon and inquiring on how it should be properly examined through the scientific method. Additionally, mathematical reasoning is an important pedagogical theme in math, and critical thinking is essential for engaging with or writing texts in any language. As such, framing the workshops around these pedagogical themes allows the five core practices to be comprehensively covered because the teachers will understand what their teaching is meant to achieve. They can, therefore, more easily adopt specific strategies that address these core practices.

#### **OUTCOMES**

These professional development workshops were received quite well by the teachers, according to survey results indicating at least 85% or more of participating teachers holding positive views on the quality and usefulness of the introduced educational strategies.<sup>23</sup> Further, more teachers reported implementing these strategies in their own teaching practice, with most indicating that they used them in at least a moderate frequency.<sup>24</sup>

Workshops are not the only aspect that defined the school network system – 'network meetings' were also an integral part. These were meetings where participating teachers from nearby schools could gather and learn from each other. They discussed the strengths or weaknesses of the instructional strategies introduced in the workshops and how well they were able to use them in their practice. This is significant because, whereas the workshops were intended to transmit important knowledge and practices to teachers, the network meetings helped create a community of teachers who now have a platform to remain in constant communication and share their experiences. These meetings have also been well received, as survey results and personal

testimonies from the teachers indicated a generally positive outlook on the role that these meetings have played and can continue to play in their work as educators.<sup>25</sup>

# CONCLUSION

The evaluation report produced by the CPRE rests itself on three evaluation parameters: change in practice, transfer of capacity, and sustainability. With an educational system in need of reform and with the willingness of Jordan to enact such reform - The School Network Learning Project was able to satisfy this need effectively by transferring important educational principles from Teachers College. They also satisfied it by creating a robust local overarching framework for maintaining and sustaining such principles. The project triggered a change in practice by bringing international education experts to collaborate with Jordanian educators about important instructional strategies and how to implement them. It also involved a transfer of capacity by training qualified locals to keep the system of professional development workshops and network meetings going. The project also prioritized a sustainable educational system that nurtured a community of teachers that can exchange ideas and experiences to help with supporting a culture of continuous instructional improvement.

It is my belief that bringing in international expertise to collaborate with local institutions is essential for reform. Although the issues and problems that require solutions have local and idiosyncratic dimensions, they are also connected to broader developmental issues that can benefit from the resources of willing international actors. Khauli identified this need in the early twentieth century through his experiences in the Syrian Protestant College and Teachers College. Jordan identified and acted on it at the beginning of the twenty-first century with the ERfKE initiative and the consequent launch of the SNLP. The outcomes of this project all indicate that a strong and cohesive educational community is bubbling in Jordan, but it is important to not be too optimistic too soon, and to give the school networks system more time to find its footing and make a stronger impact on Jordan's educational system in the long-term. Producing another evaluation report of this project in the coming years might be an interesting undertaking that Teachers College or the QRTA, or even the Columbia Global Centers | Amman can pursue.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Marian A. Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," 2011, 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," 19-20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Robinson, "Growing School Networks," 38, 42, 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Marian A. Robinson, "Growing School Networks for Instructional Improvement in Jordan, 2009-2010," 2011, 51, 54-55.

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PROXIMITY: HOW
THE COLUMBIA
GLOBAL CENTER
IN AMMAN

EMPOWERED
COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY'S
RESEARCH
AND SUPPORT
OF SYRIAN
REFUGEES

SOPHIAFULTON

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# POWER OF PROXIM E COLUMBIA GLOBAL RSITY'S RESEA SUPPORT OF SYRIAN

Sometimes proximity to a crisis matters the most to help meet humanitarian needs. U.S. policymakers and activists alike often scramble to respond effectively and quickly to crises. With many conflicts on the other side of the globe, crisis response can feel sterile and inadequate. It is often those physically closest to a conflict that can provide the most effective and relevant assistance.

Consider the Syrian civil war. Since 2011, the war has triggered a humanitarian crisis, quickly sparking a mobilization of activists and policymakers to provide relief. Today, after over a decade of ongoing conflict, individuals and institutions continue efforts to provide long-term relief. The organizations that most effectively met humanitarian needs emphasized working with local partners and listening to the voices of those affected.

Columbia University's ties to the Middle East and the Arab world, largely through the Columbia Global Centers | Amman (CGC Amman) network, allowed Columbia faculty and students to respond constructively in regard to the Syrian civil war. From helping build research projects that informed policy to supporting displaced students who are unable to

complete higher education, Columbia's pre-existing connection to the region helped bridge the divide between academics and activism. This paper will look at two case studies of Columbia's work: the *Impact of Separation on Refugee Families* research project and the Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students initiative. CGC Amman and Columbia faculty have worked on numerous projects to support Syrian refugees, these two projects illustrate the power of Columbia's regional partnerships in providing the expertise and resources to create projects that help Syrian refugees.

Columbia's network enables faculty to build programs that addressed the needs of Syrian refugees by working with partners on the ground in the region and members of the refugee population instead of simply relying on academic assumptions about their needs. In the future, other academic organizations that wish to provide humanitarian support and effective research policies can learn from this model. By diving into the details of how these projects impacted the region following the crisis, potential researchers and activists alike can learn from the work of Columbia to help build better futures for those impacted by the Syrian civil war.

# BACKGROUND: THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR AND ENSUING REFUGEE CRISIS

The Syrian civil war sparked a refugee crisis that mobilized many activists and academics, including those at Columbia University. The war started in 2011 when anti-regime protests escalated into a full-scale war between the Syrian government and anti-government forces. In the decade since, fighting has erupted between the Syrian government and opposition forces, between the coalition to defeat the Islamic State and the Islamic State, and between the Syrian Kurds and Turkish forces. The conflict continues today along numerous fronts.

The civil war has had massive humanitarian ramifications. UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet reported in September 2021 that the conflict resulted in the death of over 350,000 individuals – both civilians and combatants – between March 2011 and March 2021. However, these numbers are likely a low estimate.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the conflict forced many to flee, leading to a massive refugee crisis. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates 6.6 million Syrian refugees exist worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Currently, more than 660,000 Syrian refugees live in Jordan.<sup>5</sup> The largest refugee camp in Jordan, Zaatari refugee camp, still hosts nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees as of 2020.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "Civil War in Syria," Council on Foreign Relations, Accessed January 2, 2022.



**Figure 1.** Adeline Guerra, *Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan - Oxfam*, Photograph, CBS News.

Refugees in Jordan and around the world face massive challenges, including lack of access to education and healthcare. Both the initial outbreak of civil war and the ongoing refugee crisis inspired many around the world, including Columbia faculty and students, to provide support and policy recommendations for Syrian refugees.

# COLUMBIA'S MIDDLE EAST CONNECTIONS AND FORCED MIGRATION

Even before mobilizing to research and respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, Columbia faculty and CGC Amman had begun building the network and foundation to address forced migration in the Middle East. CGC Amman's work on forced migration began in 2012 and initially focused on public health programming and research. CGC Amman's first partners on this topic included United Nations (UN) organizations such as the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).8

Since then, CGC Amman has created an extensive network throughout the Middle East focused on the thematic area of forced migration. CGC Amman and Columbia Global Centers | Istanbul (CGC Istanbul) organized a refugee symposium in 2016, hosting Columbia faculty and speakers from regional stakeholders, including UNHCR MENA, the Lebanese Ministry of Education, the World Bank, the International Labor Organization (ILO), Reaching All Children with Education (RACE), Carnegie Middle East Center and the Jordanian civil society organization Arab Renaissance

<sup>3 &</sup>quot;Syria War: UN Calculates New Death Toll," BBC News, September 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "Syria Emergency," *UNHCR*, Accessed December 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "Jordan: Zaatari Refugee Camp," UNHCR, Accessed January 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Paolo Verme, "The Welfare of Syrian Refugees: Evidence from Jordan and Lebanon," *World Bank Group*, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Columbia Global Centers | Amman, "Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students," Columbia Global Centers, Accessed 2021.

for Democracy & Development (ARDD) Legal Aid.9 The purpose of this symposium is three-fold; firstly, it looks at discussing the initiatives related to the refugee crisis at Columbia and the current research on how to improve refugees' access to health services, inclusive education, and sustainable employment opportunities. Secondly, it highlights developmental approaches developed and practiced in the context of past humanitarian crises in order to extract lessons and reflect on its relevance today. Thirdly, this symposium looks to ensure a robust scholarly exchange that enables partnerships between academic institutions such as Columbia University with MENA organizations that could inform future multidisciplinary interventions to support the Syrian refugees. Events like this symposium created partnerships across the region and helped Columbia faculty understand migration challenges from those closest to the issues.

Furthermore, Professor Safwan M. Masri, the then Executive Vice President for Global Centers and Global Development, led a University-wide initiative to create the Columbia University Committee on Forced Migration (CFM). This committee was founded in response to the growing number of forced migrants & migration crises around the world; as such, the CFM sought to further develop Columbia's role as a platform to engage, support, and share information on issues relating to forced migration across its community. This initiative coordinates collaboration and builds interdisciplinary networks among Columbia faculty, students, and staff on forced migration. 10 It is through the interconnected nature of the committee that allows for new approaches to addressing problems of forced migration. Masri emphasized that the Committee and Columbia faculty "are committed to researching into the myriad issues involved in forced migration, and to engaging meaningfully in providing solutions."11

Situated in the Middle East, within proximity to Syria, CGC Amman and affiliated Columbia faculty participated in first-hand research and projects to assist those most affected by the Syrian civil war to seek meaningful solutions to the challenges Syrian refugees faced. The programs soon expanded to research projects, advocacy, and workshops with a specific focus on Syrian refugees. Columbia partnered with universities, advocacy organizations, UN organizations, and government agencies throughout the region to produce research to inform policy in a nuanced, culturally appropriate manner. Humanitarian aid and research responding to crises can easily seem out of touch with the true needs of communities. However, in Columbia's case, by creating intentional linkages with local organizations and policy-focused institutions, Columbia provided an example of effective

humanitarian work. Outlined next are two case studies that demonstrated how Columbia, through CGC Amman, leveraged a network throughout the Middle East to support Syrian refugees.

# CASE STUDY: THE IMPACT OF SEPARATION ON REFUGEE FAMILIES - SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

In 2018, Columbia faculty and the UNHCR Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (UNHCR MENA) collaborated to research the challenges of family separation that Syrian refugees in Jordan faced. This study explored the impact of this reality experienced by many Syrian families across the Middle East and the world. The researchers conducted 85 interviews with Syrian refugees in Jordan and found five core themes about family separation:

- **1.** Family separation occurs at distinct times during displacement and exhibits a shared pattern across the sample.
- 2. Family separation has damaged or broken social connections and resulted in new and smaller networks with less capacity to support one another.
- 3. The absence of key family members exacerbates financial burdens in Jordan, resulting in increased stress, child labor, debt accumulation, and strained relationships with host communities.
- **4.** Admission and family reunification policies are keeping Syrian families apart.
- **5.** Syrian refugee perceptions about durable solutions are greatly influenced by the location of family members. 12

Through partnerships facilitated through CGC Amman, Columbia faculty, including Lead Principal Investigator Neil Boothby, worked with the UNHCR MENA Director's Office in Amman to research and write policy recommendations on family separation impacting Syrian refugees. This partnership represented a "strategic regional collaboration between academia and UNHCR MENA." According to Zahirah McNatt, one of the lead researchers of this project, the UNHCR MENA team asked Columbia to collaborate on this study so that they could utilize the research in policy discussions

Oclumbia Global Centers | Amman, "Refugee Integration: Developing a New Paradigm Symposium, Draft Agenda," Columbia Global Centers, October 2016.

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10 Columbia Global Centers, "Committee on Forced Migration,"
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Columbia Global Centers | Amman, "Impact of Separation on Refugee Families: Syrian Refugees in Jordan," May 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Columbia Global Centers | Amman, "Impact of Separation" May 2018.

with governments and regional organizations.<sup>14</sup> In an interview on the Columbia podcast *Conversations from the Leading Edge*, McNatt stated that this project "came at the request of UNHCR from their Middle East and North Africa Regional office," and the program "would help to identify areas for advocacy [and] areas for policy improvement." Because CGC Amman already worked in Jordan and with Syrian refugees, Columbia had the infrastructure in place to partner with UNHCR MENA and contribute to research used in policy discussions.

Furthermore, McNatt emphasized that the Columbia team, made up primarily of researchers and graduate students from the Mailman School of Public Health, collaborated closely with Jordanian researchers and UNHCR MENA team members to ensure that they understood the context of Syrian refugees in Jordan. This allowed them to ask effective and respectful questions when interviewing the displaced Syrians. "We all wanted to make sure we understood the context before we started meeting with families," McNatt emphasized. 16 The Columbia team and the Jordanian researchers cooperated to complete a demographic analysis of Syrian refugees in Jordan. Through their interviews with Syrian refugees, the researchers found that family separation creates significantly large financial, security, humanitarian, and social burdens on the separated families and their communities. UNHCR MENA could then utilize Columbia's data and qualitative findings to make policy recommendations for governments to reunite families and support Syrian refugees that experience family separation.

The relationships CGC Amman had built with researchers and practitioners based in Jordan allowed Columbia researchers to understand the cultural and historical context of the impact of family separation on Syrian refugees, ultimately resulting in a more effective research project relevant to humanitarian policy. Furthermore, by partnering with the team in Jordan, the Columbia team ensured that they conducted their interviews compassionately in a context-sensitive and culturally-aware manner so that participants felt respected during interviews. The researchers provided an example of how research projects in other countries can go beyond the required minimum when researching sensitive topics.

Despite the different cultures between academics and practitioners in humanitarian work, McNatt emphasized that academics must work in partnership with practitioners to ensure their work is relevant:

I personally really enjoy work in the academic space that's partnered with practitioners... There is a really important role for academics to play in the humanitarian setting and that is helping understanding context, doing the kind of research that evaluates the effectiveness of programs... there's a [large] role for academia and partnerships can be difficult because we tend to work quite differently so a lot of times we're learning the culture of the academic institutions & the culture of humanitarian response...These kinds of relationships are important if academics are going to be relevant in the humanitarian space. 17

For other academics hoping to make an impact in humanitarian work, partnering with practitioners active on the ground can model an effective way for academics to ensure their research helps solve humanitarian challenges.

Soon after this research collaboration began, UNHCR MENA and CGC Amman signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to increase future cooperation. At the MoU signing event in 2018, Masri emphasized the significance of collaboration between academia and humanitarian agencies. <sup>18</sup> The research project's success has encouraged other institutions to launch similar partnerships. Later in 2018, UNHCR MENA held its 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Roundtable on Enhancing Dialogue and Partnership between Academia and UNHCR on Regional Displacement Crises, informed by the work of the 2016 research symposium hosted by CGC Amman and CGC Istanbul.



**Figure 2.** David Azia, *Syrian Refugee Family,* Photograph, *UNHCR*, Jordan.

<sup>17</sup> Ibic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Meredith Smith, "Impact of Separation on Refugee Families, with Neil Boothby and Zahirah McNatt," *Conversations from the Leading Edge*, Podcast, August 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Smith, "Impact of Separation on Refugee Families" 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Columbia Global Centers | Amman, "Discussion on Regional Refugee Crises and the Role of Academia and the Official Signing of the MoU between UNHCR and Columbia Global Centers | Amman," 2018.

**Figure 3.** Executive Vice President for Global Centers and Global Development at Columbia University, Professor Safwan M. Masri, signs Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR's Regional Director for MENA, Mr. Amin Awad, May 2018, Photograph, Columbia Global Centers | Amman, Jordan.

Throughout the roundtable, participants emphasized the need for "better understanding [of] the role and relevance of academia in formulating evidence-based policies related to responding to the enormous displacement crises facing the region." <sup>19</sup>

Participants in the roundtable also highlighted the *Impact of Separation on Syrian Refugees in Jordan* as "a good example of effective partnership" and emphasized the need for creating other similar partnerships to support displaced persons.<sup>20</sup> This research project not only shed light on the unique challenges of Syrian refugees facing family separation but also showed UNHCR MENA and other institutions the power of partnerships between academic and non-academic organizations to develop policy solutions. CGC Amman's partnership with UNHCR MENA illustrates the power of local connections and partnerships to allow academia's work to impact humanitarian policy.

# CASE STUDY: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP FOR DISPLACED STUDENTS

In addition to research projects on Syrian forced migration, Columbia's network across the Middle East has facilitated direct support for refugees. Bruce Usher, the co-director of the Tamer Center for Social Enterprise at Columbia Business School, began planning for what would become the Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students in 2016.<sup>21</sup> I sat down for a conversation with Bruce Usher. Although he wanted to do more to help Syrians, he emphasized, "what I realized was there was very little I could do individually to help Syrian refugees here in New York."22 Usher remembered that his grandfather, who lived in Canada, took in "a refugee from Europe...a high school student who had lost his family during the [Second World] War."23 Usher described his conversations with the man and stated, "He had told me very clearly that one of the huge benefits of being able to come to Canada was that he got to complete his education."24 This experience sparked an idea for Usher that he could provide powerful support for Syrian individuals by providing access and resources for them to complete their education.

The conflict in Syria destroyed many universities and took away many Syrians' hopes for higher education. Thus, Usher gathered a team of Columbia Business School students to research how to help. They explored whether there was a significant number of Syrian refugees whose education was interrupted, whether it would be possible to find these students, and whether there was a model for funding their education. The team "concluded that the answer is, in theory, yes to all the above."

Usher and his team launched a pilot program to identify and eventually support the higher education needs of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> UNHCR, "Second Regional Roundtable on Enhancing Dialogue and Partnerships between Academia and UNHCR on Regional Displacement Issues", 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> UNHCR, "Second Regional Roundtable on Enhancing Dialogue," 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Kim Gittleson and Bruce Usher, "Higher Education for Refugees by Professor Bruce Usher and Kim Gittleson," *Columbia Global Centers | Amman*, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Bruce Usher, in discussion with Sophia Fulton, December 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid. <sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Syrian refugees. Jad Najjar, a student who worked on the initial pilot program, emphasized that "the lack of data was one of the main challenges" for the project.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the team utilized personal connections and the extensive CGC Amman network in Jordan and Lebanon to identify the populations they wished to empower. Usher and Columbia graduate student Kim Gittleson met with State Department officials, UN agency representatives, Jordanian, Lebanese, and Turkish government officials, educational institutions, and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to learn about the true learning needs of Syrian refugees. The stakeholders on the ground in these countries could give a nuanced, truthful account of the needs of Syrian refugees regarding higher education.<sup>27</sup> The team also went to CGC Istanbul to meet with informal partners in Turkey and gain additional perspectives.<sup>28</sup>

Meeting with stakeholders on the ground in the aforementioned three countries, Usher and Gittleson found that "the one clear message from all [their] meetings was that everyone in the region was desperate for help from US universities, with their extraordinary educational resources, to do something to curtail the tremendous loss of human and economic potential from the Syrian crisis." <sup>29</sup> Usher confessed the team was "very worried that the response would be [that our] solution is too small to be of any interest."30 However, reactions from the stakeholders in Jordan and Lebanon were overwhelmingly positive; "they said it's extremely important to send a message to those who have been displaced that there's still opportunity for them even if that opportunity is only for a very small number."31

Using their experiences conversing with individuals in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey closely tied to Syrian refugees, Usher and Gittleson knew they had to create a program to offer educational pathways for displaced migrants. They created a pilot program to cover the tuition fees, living expenses, and housing of Syrian refugees at Columbia. Once they raised the necessary funding from donors and rallied the Schools at Columbia to commit to waiving their tuition fees, they again used Columbia's network throughout the Middle East to promote the scholarship directly to refugees. In late 2016, they distributed the scholarship program application via regional partners in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey to find eligible Syrian refugees for a full-tuition scholarship to Columbia.32 Both CGC Amman and CGC Istanbul shared the

scholarship opportunity with their networks. The response was overwhelming, with many CGC-connected organizations in Lebanon and Syria, such as UNICEF in Lebanon, forwarding the opportunity along their networks. The scholarship launched its pilot program with four Syrian participants in the first cohort and seven in the second. The program faced challenges obtaining visas for refugees from outside of the United States, so the pilot program focused on Syrian refugees already in the United States on temporary protection visas.<sup>33</sup>

In 2018, the Scholarship for Displaced Students moved from the Tamer Center for Social Enterprise to the Office of the Columbia Global Centers in New York, whose global reach and local networks allowed the scholarship to expand from the initial cohort of seven displaced Syrian students to up to 30 refugee students each year. The Scholarship also extended to include refugees from and living in other countries with official documented status, those with U.S. asylum status (but without permanent resident status) or in the asylum process, those with Temporary Protected Status within the U.S., Internally Displaced Students, and Displaced Afghan students on Humanitarian Parole or with Special Immigrant Visas.34 As of Fall 2021, the Scholarship has now provided scholarships to 35 students representing 19 countries to attend 14 schools across Columbia.35

"Some people would say you save one life, you save the whole world," Usher noted.<sup>36</sup> This scholarship has transformed the lives of both Syrian refugees and now refugees and displaced persons from around the world. Usher asserted that "we wanted to change the perception of displaced people from individuals who need help, to individuals who can contribute to both education and society" while also providing a message of hope to refugees that there are still opportunities for them.<sup>37</sup> Through CGC Amman and Columbia's connections throughout the Middle East region, the Scholarship Program for Displaced Students was informed by conversations with experts in the region about Syrian refugee educational needs. The team then leveraged the regional connections to NGOs, UN agencies, and educational institutions to share the scholarship with eligible individuals who would not otherwise know about it. Columbia's ties to the region informed and aided in creating frameworks such as the Scholarship Program for Displaced Students that have improved the educational opportunities for Syrian refugees in the Middle East.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Jad Najjar, "Personal Essay," Columbia University Social Enterprise Summer Fellowship Program, 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Kim Gittleson and Bruce Usher, "Higher Education for Refugees by Professor Bruce Usher and Kim Gittleson," 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Gittleson and Usher, "Higher Education for Refugees," 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Bruce Usher, in discussion with Sophia Fulton, December 2021. <sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Kim Gittleson and Bruce Usher, "Higher Education for Refugees by Professor Bruce Usher and Kim Gittleson," 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students, "Frequently Asked Questions," Columbia Global Centers, Accessed 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Columbia Global Centers, "Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students", Accessed December 2021.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Bruce Usher, in discussion with Sophia Fulton, December 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Ibio

## CONCLUSION

The Columbia Global Centers have a unique mission to strengthen the ties between Columbia and global partners. Not only does this enrich the experiences and work of Columbia faculty and students, but it also provides unique opportunities to research, advocate for, and empower marginalized populations, such as the Syrian refugee community.

In Columbia's Impact of Family Separation on Syrian Refugees in Jordan project, CGC Amman's connections to UNHCR MENA allowed the researchers to partner with UNHCR. This helped contribute research to be used in policy discussions that directly impacted the lives of Syrian refugees. For Columbia University's Scholarship for Displaced Students, Columbia faculty and students accessed CGC Amman's networks again to articulate the academic needs of Syrian refugees and share the scholarship program with eligible students. Since then, CGC Amman has also launched the Mellon Fellowship Program in partnership with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This Fellowship Program supports emerging displaced scholars, including Syrian scholars, and connects them with the global network of academics and scholars associated with Columbia.38

These projects illustrated the power of proximity in addressing humanitarian crises & working physically on the ground with experts who understand the cultural context. By collaborating with local partners, Columbia faculty and students helped ensure their work did greater good than harm and respected the desires of the populations they serve. Columbia's academic resources and expertise, combined with the expertise and connections of local partners, allowed Columbia faculty and students to create initiatives that supported Syrian refugees.

Moving forward, the forced migration projects associated with CGC Amman can be used as an example for educational organizations hoping to create real change & create effective programs that provide humanitarian support and policy recommendations. These two projects demonstrate the power of collaboration between academic institutions, local partners, and subject matter experts. In a world with increasingly complex crises and humanitarian needs, these effective partnerships will help create a better future for vulnerable communities.

**Figure 4.** Associated Press/Syrian Arab News Agency, Syrian people gather outside of a destroyed university in Aleppo, 2013, Photograph, Syria.

The two projects outlined here are just two examples of how Columbia has used connections to the Middle East to better understand the needs of Syrian refugees. Other projects include the following:

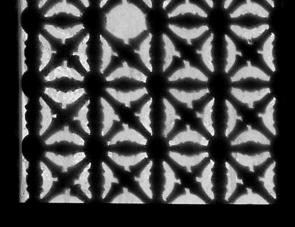
- Women Advancing Solutions in Policy Implementation, Research, & Engagement for Refugees (2017-2019)
- Changing Health Needs in Protracted Crises: Learning from the Case of NCDs in Syrian Refugees (2015-2018)
- Health Status and Reproductive Health among Postpartum Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan (2017-2019)
- Evaluating a Comprehensive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services for Vulnerable Refugees (2014)
- Workshop for Journalists on Early Childhood Development, Trauma, & Resilience (2019)
- Seminar on Improving Refugee Access to Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (2018)
- Roundtable discussion on the Needs of Children in the Syrian Refugee Crisis (2018)
- Workshop on Responding to Changing Health Needs in Protracted Crises: Learning from the Case of NCDs in Syrian Refugees (2018)
- Conference on Durable Solutions for Displaced Syrians: Perspectives from Syrian Civil Society (2018)
- The Role of Local Government in Addressing the Impact of Syrian Refugees: Jordan Case Study (2015)

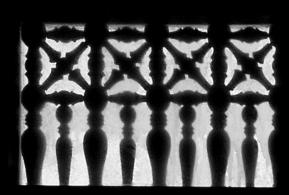
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Columbia Global Centers | Amman, "Mellon Fellowship Program," Columbia Global Centers, Accessed 2022.

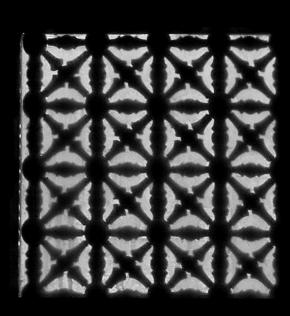
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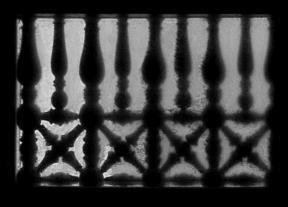
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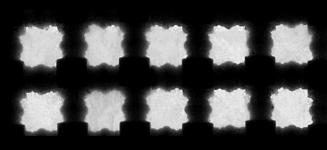
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