

HANI J. BAWARDI, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). Pp. 397. \$65.00 cloth, \$34.95 paper. ISBN 9781477307526.

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Hani Bawardi's book, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship*, is an important contribution to the scholarship on Arab American history and the early experiments with organized advocacy that provides for a fuller appreciation of Arab American identity development. The hypotheses that Bawardi posits on the relationship between four seminal early Arab American organizations and the extent of their influence on each other and on the later development of Arab American organizations and Arab American identity will (or should be) the stuff of much further debate and scholarship.

Bawardi's book is clearly not for the casual reader. A brief book review cannot do it full justice. Scholars of Arab American history and ethnicity who undertake a serious reading of the book should be familiar with Arab history, the *Mahjar* writers, and the Arab American historical narrative. This book is a necessity for scholars interested in Arab Americans and their connections to Arab national thought across international borders. This book is part of emergent scholarship on the political activism and the ideology of early Arab Americans that is only now attracting interest in the US.¹

As Bawardi examines the political activity of the early wave of Arab Americans, he puts forth several new conceptual frameworks outlining the impetus, duration, and veracity of advocacy by the early Syrian immigrants. He challenges the mistaken narrative that the early wave of Arab Americans (then referred to as Syrians from what was the Greater Syria region of the Ottoman Empire) was not politically active. Bawardi takes into account the recent scholarship on early Arab

American agency, however, he goes further by tracing such advocacy prior to World War I and leaves little doubt that it was formal and inextricably tied to the roots of Arab awakening or *Nahdah*. He challenges the common misconception held for decades that Arab American activism began only after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, with the establishment of the AAUG, the Association of Arab American University Graduates (i). In addition, the scholarship on Arab American identity implies that Arab American identity was suddenly birthed after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, with little explanation of the precursors and mechanism of the transformations from early Syrian immigrants to politically active Arab Americans. Bawardi's book provides valuable insights and detailed information from extensive first-hand sources into this transformation from early Syrian nationalists to Arab American activists, and he does so by expanding his research to include key events in the Middle East. Therefore, Bawardi explains how each major political event in the Levant was matched by an attempt by the immigrants to become involved in politics commensurate with structural integration. For example, the Palestinian revolt of 1936 and the start of World War II in Europe in September 1939, accounted for the establishment of the Arab National League and a formal declaration at the League's Fourth National Convention that the immigrants are Arab Americans (chapter 6).

Bawardi has provided extensive research using primary Arabic-language sources. Often the language barrier has made much of this material inaccessible to scholars who are not adequately literate in Arabic. The major primary sources of information for the book, as outlined by Bawardi, include: the letters and papers of activist Ameen Farah, the papers of scholar-activist Dr. Khalil Totah, an untranslated book by Father Kherbawi, audio tapes of Dr. Fuad Isa Shatara, the writings of Habib Ibrahim Katibah, and a large number of original copies of early Arab American newspapers, as well as interviews with many relatives of these individuals. The individuals listed above are among some of the most significant political activists of the early Syrian population in the United States. Through his research, Hani Bawardi was able to find ties between these early organizations and the Mahjar/Pen League (*Ar-Rabitah Al-Qalamyiah*) writers like Mikhail Naimy, Naseeb Arida, Elia Madey, Gibran Khalil Gibran, and others. Bawardi fleshes out these sources with extensive quotes from their writings and reports from the mainstream American newspapers that substantiate the degree of political activism of these Syrian immigrants. He backs up his assertions via the use of US mainstream newspapers

and the early Syrian immigrant press. It is clear that Bawardi has amassed information from a large body of well-documented previously unutilized primary Arabic-language sources.

Bawardi's text is broken into seven body chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. After setting the scene for the reasons underlying the rise of the *Nahdah*, Bawardi introduces connections between Syrian nationalism in the Arab World, anti-Ottoman sentiment among the Arabs, and Syrian nationalism in many quarters of the *Mahjar* (immigrant) press. Bawardi posits that, despite the occasional sectarian spats by editors – primarily instigated by Na'um Mokarzel, publisher of *Al-Hoda*, says Bawardi – in the early Syrian newspapers, there was a larger anti-Ottoman, Syrian nationalism that predominated and crossed Christian, Muslim, and Druze religious lines in the broader early Syrian population in the United States.

Chapter Two sets the stage for the formation of anti-Ottoman and pro-Syrian nationalist organizations in the United States through the press. We see that these organizations began, of necessity due to real Ottoman threats, as secret organizations. This chapter continues to illuminate the connections between the Syrian immigrant newspaper publishers, the *Mahjar* writers, and the early Syrian activism. In this chapter, Bawardi paints a picture of the connections between newspapers in the Arab world and the Syrian immigrants in the United States, and provides new information on the scope, reach, and sophistication of the Arabic language press in the United States (57).

Chapter Three goes into detail about the founding of the Free Syria Party before World War I and its transnational connections. Major players in the formation of this organization were *Mahjar* authors among them, Naimy, Arida, and Muhammad Muhaisen, for a time, editor of *Al-Difa al-Arabi*. In addition, in this chapter, Bawardi goes into the role that the Syrian immigrant volunteers in the armed services in World War I played in the development of Americanism and a Syrian American identity.

Chapter Four discusses the concept of Syrian nationalism in the context of emergent feelings of pan-Arabism amid European encroachment in the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I. Bawardi navigates what most scholars of the Middle East consider to be a complex web of events. He adds a new level of complexity by introducing Arab immigrants' responses to Middle East regional political events on two tracts: 1) Zionism, and 2) French and British colonialism. While Bawardi marks the beginnings of responses to

Zionism, he defers the major discussion of it to Chapter Six, when the Arab National League built on these early responses in the mid-1930s. In Chapter Four, Bawardi also tells the story of the New Syria Party, as the last large organized attempt to rescue geographic Syria (Greater Syria) by the Syrian/Arab diaspora in North and South America. The information provided in this chapter, Bawardi writes, is the most complete record on the NSP from the organization's only surviving papers in the author's possession. Bawardi illustrates the grassroots connections between the activists from Flint and Highland Park, Michigan with what was taking place in the Arab World from hosting dignitaries from the Arab World, to organizing charity aimed at aiding communities in need in their countries of origin, to the work that went into sponsoring the first convention of the New Syria Party in 1927 in Detroit. The breadth of the organizing of the New Syria Party reached Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina (149).

Bawardi's evidence shows that the New Syria Party sent delegations to conferences in Egypt and to the League of Nations. This again illustrates the degree of transnationalism that existed in the early Syrian organizations. This is a theme that will be revisited again in the discussion of the Arab National League and the Institute of Arab American Affairs in the engagement of Arab immigrant scholars with other Arab dignitaries in their efforts to play a role as intermediaries in international affairs concerning Arab interests while also trying to educate US politicians and citizens about the Arab World.

Chapter Five takes the reader through the interwar years and the debates over Syrian identity itself amid unprecedented pressures to acculturate, as a new generation of Arab Americans awakens to the new geopolitical reality. Bawardi takes on additional new strands of inquiry, for example, the debates over encroaching Lebanese-ness and "vociferous" Lebanese separatism of Na'um Mokarzel. Relying on original documents and translations, Bawardi proposes that sectarianism was not a factor precluding continued political advocacy. He also proposes that the label, Lebanese, was added to the names of major social clubs and federations reluctantly, and only after extensive debates. The Arab National League was the culmination of reinvigorated advocacy by an earlier generation of activists, Shatara and Katibah. Shatara established the Arab Palestine Renaissance Society but suspended its operations until members of the NSP rallied behind the Syrian Revolt from 1925 to 1927. The Great Depression retarded many political activities, Bawardi reminds the reader, until the events in Palestine in 1936 jolted the Syrian Americans into action.

Bawardi goes on to demonstrate how these activists (Rihani, Shatara, — until his untimely death—Habib Katibah, Phillip Hitti, and others) worked tirelessly in opposition to partitioning Palestine, just as they had opposed the breakup of Greater Syria after the Second World War.

Palestine, Bawardi argues, became increasingly the core issue for the emergent Arab Americans since the days of the Arab National League (1936–1939). Bawardi indicates that, as the breakup of Greater Syria occurred under the Mandates, there was a shift from Syrian identity to Arab identity among Arab immigrants and subsequent Arab generations in the United States. We again see Arab American activists touring the United States as part of speaking tours, discussing issues in the Arab world, engaging with the Arab League in the Middle East and hosting Arab leaders in the United States. This chapter takes the reader through the heyday of the Arab National League in the United States in their efforts to counter Zionist propaganda, unchecked Jewish immigration to Palestine, their favoring of a bi-national state in Palestine, and the degree of antagonism they faced in the course of their political work.

Chapter Seven covers the birth and life of the Institute of Arab American Affairs that occurred during the lead up to the creation of the state of Israel. This chapter covers the period of activism from the 1940s through early 1951. The focus of the Institute of Arab American Affairs was also on Palestine, including extensive speaking tours, widely disseminating information on the issue, creating strong ties with anti-Zionist Jews and anti-Zionist Americans, and attempting to stop the partition of Palestine. This included efforts by Arab American activists to influence presidents Hoover, Roosevelt, and Truman as they fought Zionist counter efforts. The information Bawardi provides, based on primary evidence, also indicates the efforts of Arab American activists to make sure that the newly formed Arab states were represented in the United Nations. After World War II, these activists faced an overwhelming sea of Zionist organizing that, in the end, contributed to the demise of the Institute of Arab American Affairs.

Bawardi leaves us with the problems that the Cold War and the rise of Nasserism played in Arab American and Arab organizing due to the fact that Arabs were being cast as partial to the Eastern bloc, further complicating activism of that time. Lastly, Bawardi posits possible connections between the Institute of Arab American Affairs and the creation of the Association of Arab University Graduates, and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, but leaves the proof to future scholarship.

In the conclusion of the book, Hani Bawardi sums up the consistent theme demonstrated throughout the book that there are threads of continuation from the early Arab American activists that shaped Arab American identity and activism. Bawardi repeatedly states that further research is needed to extend this work to a fuller understanding of the present reality of Arab American organizations.

As this is the first book by the author, over-emphasis on minor writing issues may mar the overall importance of the book in the eyes of some readers. This is a generally well-written text, even as one may quibble over minor statements or syntax here and there. The density of this text, resplendent with primary sources, provides ample materials for future debate and research. Clearly, there may be future debate on whether Bawardi overstates Syrian nationalism. Such debates cannot ignore the highly advanced nature of political advocacy by Syrian immigrants from 1915 through 1951. The degree of Syrian nationalism versus the opposite focus on the depth of sectarian divisions among the early Maronites, Druze, and Muslims in the early Syrian immigrant communities will also be questioned to determine which of these two perspectives represents the reality of the degree of early Syrian unity or disunity. For his part, Bawardi is emphatic about the need to use aggregate and varied translations of writings, and to avoid selective quotes. We can wonder, thanks to this work, whether or not the image of sectarian division is an Orientalist perspective resulting from the image of the divided Arab world desired by the European powers. Bawardi makes a good case for a strong component of Syrian nationalism among the early Syrian immigrant activists. Whichever it may be, the idea that the Arab Americans were not politically active prior to 1967 has surely been laid to rest by this text.

The disturbing question that Bawardi presents to current Arab American scholars and activists is why most of this early political organization has not come to light before now. Although he has provided more concentrated evidence in a single text than any other scholar on this topic to date, substantial pieces of the early Arab American organizing were in plain sight prior to this book. For example, Lawrence Davidson, Bawardi noted, made use of the resources in the English-language press. So why hasn't anyone traced the names of individuals and organizations to government records, for example the Office of Strategic Services, or the massive body of literature in Arabic-language press, or the archives in the homes of the activists themselves as Bawardi has done? The question of how much

we knew about Arab American activism prior to 1967 is a question that each scholar on Arab Americans needs answered.

To begin to take up this challenge, I knew of some of the early activism and political organizing from the jackets of Ameen Rihani's books and his biography. Dr. Khalil Totah was the principal of my father's high school, the Friends School in Ramallah, Palestine. If not for Khalil Totah putting up the bond for my father to stay in the United States in 1952, I would not have been born an American citizen. Surely, I grew up with the name of Khalil Totah in our household. As I digested Bawardi's chapters on the Institute of Arab American Affairs, the names of Judah Magnus, Elihu Grant, and so many others came flooding back to me from tracts that we had in my own home in Texas. The early organizing of the Arab American activist should have been obvious to me. I believe that in my brief stint as national Vice President of the AAUG that there was no deliberate intent to be deceptive about the early organizing that preceded the AAUG. I believe that the founders of the AAUG truly wanted to believe that they were doing something new that had not been done before. (Bawardi, it should be mentioned, poses these questions while also recognizing the contributions of members of AAUG). As a result of our enthusiasm, all of us involved in the AAUG may have developed myopia about the past. It may also be true, as Bawardi intimates, that some Arab Americans were forced to contend with the degree of transnational politics that cast doubt upon the degree of Americanism among Arabs in the United States just when the country entered WWI alongside the French and the British. Although Bawardi provides a historical context and detailed account of the immigrants' political activity, this assertion must be more thoroughly researched. However this myopia may have happened, I personally take to heart Bawardi's assertion that Arab Americans obscured a part of our own past that now needs further excavation. This book is a mighty step in that direction.

NOTES

¹ For instance, see: Nijmeh Hajar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani: The Humanist Ideology of an Arab-American Intellectual and Activist* (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).