

STACY D. FAHRENTHOLD, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). 240pp. \$74.00. ISBN 9780190872137.

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The stories narrated in each chapter of Stacy D. Fahrenthold’s *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908–1925* take place before, during, and in the six years after the First World War. Taken as a whole, the book examines frontiers as much as it explores migrants’ experiences navigating the politics of their homelands whilst in the diaspora and moving between legal statuses, social relations, and nationalist (sometimes Wilsonian in scope) hopes for the future of Ottoman Greater Syria. As Fahrenthold illustrates, these migrants inhabit the margins of Ottoman history, First World War history, and Arab nationalist history. These margins doubled as significant frontier spaces, both discursively and geographically. In the decade prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the Ottoman government viewed the *mahjar* (the diaspora) as an “overseas frontier”: a source of economic development and a space within which strategic diplomatic relationships could be fostered. By the end of the war, groups of migrants active during the conflict reorganized themselves into political committees that saw the same *mahjar* as a political frontier to be claimed for the purposes of post-Ottoman state building. Some of these groups presented Syria as “the next American frontier” for expansion and reconstruction, while the work of others helped France to delineate the borders of its own colonial frontiers between Syria, Lebanon, and Asia Minor.

The central aim of *Between the Ottomans and the Entente*, recipient of the 2019 Khayrallah Prize in Migration Studies, is to analyze the ways through which Arab activists in the diaspora in the Americas envisioned their roles in the shaping of post-Ottoman politics of Syria and Lebanon, national politics, national borders, nationality laws, and

even citizenship norms as they attempted to stake political claims on their places of origin. Both the *mahjar* and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire loom large in the experiences of those individuals, communities, and associations portrayed in the book. Both spaces intersected to shape the landscape of the pre- and immediately post-1918 diasporic national identities.

The First World War's significance for the Syrian and Lebanese Arab diaspora cannot be understated; in particular, this significance lies in what the book shows that the diaspora's young men received – or did not receive – in exchange for their service during that war. The promises of American naturalization, French travel documents, and a liberated homeland spurred the diaspora's leading figures into action and activity on behalf of the Entente. As the chapters of the book demonstrate, the legal statuses received by Arab soldiers, or perceived by the end of the war to soon exist, impacted the fates of these men and that of their homelands. For some, it served to break down the hyphenated identities and reinforce the postwar need to choose one nationality. For others, the war and service to the Entente, either at home or on the battlefields of Europe and the Ottoman Empire, led to a reconsideration of what the homeland meant and which homeland the *mahjar* should collectively strive to build.

Fahrenthold shows that nationalist politics and visions for what became Syria and Lebanon cannot be properly understood without taking the *mahjar* into account. The epicenters of this diaspora in the early twentieth century can be found in New York City, Boston, Buenos Aires, and Sao Paulo, huge metropolises in the three countries where over half of Ottoman Syria's emigres resided. A less-metropolitan history of the diaspora's experiences, while hugely significant to understanding the full picture of *mahjar* aspirations, is not uncovered here. Syrian emigres served as diplomatic conduits that the Ottoman government used for its own interests in expanding foreign relationships with governments in the Americas.

The book opens with the impact of transformations brought by the revolutionary ideals of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman Empire and returns to this event throughout the chapters. The movement brought to power the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), whose policies toward emigrants “illustrate a desire to domesticate the diaspora while simultaneously refracting Ottoman imperial power into the Americas” (33). Indeed, 1908 is essential to our understanding of why and how the *mahjar* participated in a new activism during and after the First World War. As Fahrenthold

convincingly argues, the Arabists' turn away from the CUP came once the government failed to make good on the promises of the 1908 revolution. Initially, diasporic groups like the United Syrian Society endorsed reform and decentralization. It would be the policies of Cemal Pasha at the outbreak of the war that fundamentally changed relations between the Empire and its Syrian emigres.

The Arab political activists discussed in the chapters of the book came to understand that Syria must be liberated from Ottoman rule, and that migrants were duty bound to work toward that goal. The means needed to achieve this end of liberation varied: liberation might come through affiliation with the United States to reconstruct Syria, armed resistance to the Ottoman Empire, support for French colonialism in Greater Syria, or by total and peaceful independence. The *mahjar* found itself pinned between competing expectations related to the post-Ottoman framework of Syria. The book untangles a web of archival documents originating from a variety of Arab committees, clubs, political parties, newspapers, and foreign consulates. A key contribution of *Between the Ottomans and the Entente* is the voice given to individuals and associations whose petitions and pleas for Syrian's future often went unanswered by the Great Powers because these voices did not fit with the ambitions of the postwar Wilsonian moment.

These voices varied. The New Syrian National League (NSNL), headquartered in New York City and Boston, concluded that some form of American intervention, or benign colonialism, could be an option for the region's reconstruction. It advocated America to be a "savior" of the Middle East. The league's slogan, "Syria for the Syrians, Independent and Undivided under American Guardianship," unambiguously embraced a vision for Syria in sharp opposition to that held by Emir Faisal, his Arab nationalist comrades, the Syrian National Congress in Syria, and the French.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book details military recruitment among the Arab communities in North America during the First World War. Recruiters, often from the Arab community, promoted military service as the means to achieve the liberation of Syria. Through enlistment campaigns, certain Arab leaders—sometimes in opposition—crafted links between their interests for the future of Syria to the interests of foreign governments. Most notably, some Syrian societies collaborated with the French in presenting the Légion d'Orient as the pathway through which recruits would liberate Syria and Lebanon. The recruitment process led to a substantial change for non-naturalized Arabs who wished to fight for their homeland and

remain citizens of their host states. In 1918, Congress drafted a new law to grant instant citizenship to migrant soldiers, leading to a wave of enlistments from Syrians in the US. An important story here is that of migrant recruit Gabriel Ward, whose experiences with the reality of trench warfare sat uneasily alongside claims of recruiters and Arabists that service in the foreign legion was an act of homeland liberation. A transition took place among nationalists by war's end: nationalists in the *mahjar* felt the pressing need to convince the US and European powers of Arab migrants' abilities to shape the territory, identity, and future of the post-Ottoman Middle East.

The subject of chapter four, "paper Syrians," Turkish and Kurdish migrants in the US repatriated back to their homelands inaccurately listed as Arabs, is one of the most fascinating elements of the monograph. Because the US wished to allow its Syrian migrants to enlist in the army during the war, US laws effectively ensured Syrian identity became a new national category separate from other, non-Arab Ottomans and based on race rather than geographical origin. Meanwhile, French consular officials in the US helped Arabs repatriate back to Syria and Lebanon by approving safe conduct (*sauf conduit*) passports for their return travel. This process allowed the French to reclaim Arab migrants as colonial subjects, which bolstered French claims to these migrants. However, because French clients in the US vetted repatriates, non-Arabs who could claim to be geographically from Syria received safe conduct passports and thus became French-protected persons by default. This meant consuls, migrants, and Arab community leaders mediated Syrian nationality in the *mahjar*, effectively playing a key role in who could return to Syria and Lebanon as well as where that homeland's borders might be situated. In this history of repatriation, immigrants and naturalized Syrians found themselves in between the US and the Entente and what remained of the Ottoman Empire: nationalist parties called upon Syrians to return home, while the US State Department pleaded in the Arabic press for them to stay.

This book will be welcomed by scholars of migration history and Arab American history. It should be a recommendation for any course on Middle East migration or on the formation of race in America with reference to migrants from the Islamic world. The archival research is rich and varied, offering accounts as to how the diaspora sat between oppositional forces that tried to pull its members in several directions. Arabic newspapers and regulatory documents feature as

prime pieces of information used to understand the physical and ideological trajectories of the *mahjar*.