

Khalil, Osamah F. 2016. *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State*. Harvard University Press, 440 pp. \$ 36.00 (Hardcover)

The headline “America’s Dream Palace” alludes to an almost idyllic place, contrary to the usual images of harsh violence and suffering refugees. Having in mind numerous conflicts and the protracted violence in the Middle East, one could also conclude that there is something inherently and unchangingly wrong with the Middle East, that there is an innate inclination to conflict in a series of failed, mostly autocratic states that cannot co-exist in peace with one another. Although drowning in Orientalism, these conclusions are not far from the image that critical scholarship in international relations, sociology, and generally in humanities have been trying to deconstruct since the 1970s. Osamah Khalil’s book could be considered to be a significant contribution to the critical approach in Middle Eastern studies and history, as well as, security studies concerning the construction of knowledge about the Middle East in the US.

Despite being a contribution to critical Middle Eastern studies, this is not a book about the construction of knowledge per se. One will not find a detailed textual or discourse analysis inside these pages. Instead, a reader will find a historical account about institutions and individuals that participated in the production of knowledge and informed American affairs in the Middle East. This book is a published version of a Ph.D. dissertation in history, which directs its focus on significant people and specific events that shaped the production of knowledge. For that matter, this book studies the pathways through which institutions and discourses enabled the specific foreign and military policies of the US in the Middle East. Through every chapter, the book stipulates that discourses are used, as well as created and re-created through institutions, which in the end, inform and produce foreign and military policy.

The book is organised in 8 main chapters plus an introductory chapter and an epilogue. I am going to present a sentence-long scope of every section followed by a more detailed discussion of author’s key points organized through three chronological units. The first chapter deals with the American experience in the Middle East during World War One, followed by the second chapter dealing with American military and intelligence engagement during World War Two. The third chapter deals with the synergistic agency of academic institutions and the intelligence community in establishing Middle Eastern Studies. The fourth chapter explains the role of American Middle Eastern universities in

Beirut and Cairo in foreign policy. The fifth chapter describes the emergence of area studies through the National Defence Education Act, while the next connects modernisation theory and Middle Eastern foreign policy. The seventh chapter explains the decline of area studies through the increased significance of think tanks, followed by a chapter about the outcomes of think tank led policy in the Middle East. An epilogue follows the same line of thought as chapter eight and analyses American reaction to the Arab Spring.

The manner of reading I am going to propose is based on the difference in chronological units covered in every chapter. Three larger chronological units emerge. The first two chapters represent the first unit, which is production of knowledge about the Middle East before World War II. For this period, it is characteristic that academics (and missionaries) are key producers of knowledge in the context of ad hoc intelligence institutions. The second chronological unit deals with the emergence of area studies and modernisation theory, which are devised in chapters 3, 5 and 6; this period spans 1947–1973. The main characteristic of this period is the institutionalisation of the intelligence community, as well as an expansion of academic endeavours concerning the Middle East. The fourth chapter is thematically close to this unit, but it covers a larger chronological span 1922–1962, and it does not fully resemble the explanation of knowledge production about the Middle East; it explains the role of American political use of development and democracy narratives in the Middle East as a part of Cold War strategy. The third unit covers the period 1973–2009 in the seventh and eighth chapters. The characteristic of this period is the decline of academic expertise in informing the Middle Eastern policy and the increased significance of think tanks and a new wave of the privatisation of knowledge.

Organising the overview of the book in this manner could indicate that two following and parallel processes occur. The first process is the institutionalisation of intelligence in the US. The second process is the swing between private and public production of knowledge. It is important to remember that private does not necessarily carry the same meaning over time. In the period prior to the beginning of the Cold War, private meant that academics and missionaries inform policy as private individuals, whereas privatisation of knowledge production during the 1970s meant that private interests gained more power via think tanks to influence US state policy in the Middle East. The swing between academic and private knowledge deconstructs yet another relation. In the period before the 1970s, Khalil's research depicts a strong influence of national security institutions in influencing the establishment of academic centres and programmes related to the Middle East. Furthermore, Khalil notices that these programmes were constantly evaluated in terms of their outcomes and harmony with the state aims. Private foundations (notably Ford and Rockefeller) served to support, not to create state policies.

Strong state influence motivated by security concerns is in accordance with the rise of the US as a superpower. Such a situation changed during the 1970s with the rise of think tanks. Intermingling between state and think tanks, the same persona could influence the Middle Eastern Policies over long periods. According to Khalil, this swift replacement of academic knowledge production with that of think tanks happened due to the ability of

think tanks to provide information about the situation in the field that the US could easily use to justify its political manoeuvres. Further contextualisation is needed to understand this swing towards privatisation of knowledge production about the Middle East, which Khalil provides in fragments. The dynamics of the Cold War can provide a framework for such contextualisation. Until the 1970s a greater consensus in overall security matters, as well as, the Middle East was important as part of the strategy against USSR. Khalil illustrates this by writing about American Middle Eastern Universities and the relationship between centres for Soviet studies and Middle Eastern studies. Détente allowed the emergence of pluralism in policies concerning the Middle East. The 1970s were marked by the more liberal approach of the Brookings Institute.

In comparison, the 1980s and the 1990s were marked by neoconservative think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Hoover Institute, which managed to remain relevant policymakers despite the rotation of Democrats and Republicans in office. As a part of Cold War strategy, neoconservative policies turned to minimal involvement in conflicts, with no intention towards complete resolutions. This strategy was praised as cost-efficient and quickly gained supremacy over competing liberal strategy. The durability of the neoconservative approach in the 1990s is explainable by a unipolar moment in which the US could risk skyrocketing military expenses if trying to resolve numerous conflicts around the world. Most notably, the Israeli-Palestine conflict was the playground in which these policies were practised in the Middle East and Israeli-US relations a key conductor of these policies.

Apart from political and state influences on the formation of the Middle-Eastern scholarship, the author goes beyond that and depicts the internal dynamics of knowledge production. Even though in some places Khalil indicates that the key inquiry of the book is the formation of Middle Eastern studies, he managed to encompass broader knowledge production, which included policy-oriented think tanks strategies, or specific skills and terrain familiarity necessary for intelligence work. What binds this field together is the flow of persona, that were included in various aspects of knowledge production. Khalil's investigations carefully traced these changes and depicted an overlap between university, think tank and government staff. Despite the changes of institutional environment and leverage of specific institutions in knowledge production, the interconnectedness of their staff seems to be constant. For that sake, this book first and foremost answers the question who shaped American Middle Eastern knowledge production, and consequently policies. Various Orientalist notions seem to survive both institutional and personal changes and recurrently emerge in American Middle Eastern conduct. Answering the question who creates knowledge is an integral part of Khalil's answer to why such development of knowledge production occurs, besides the historical contextualisation and the major leading notions of American policy.

Still, reading the lengthy and dense history of the persona and the institutions that shaped knowledge production about the Middle East, readers are left with the impression that Middle Eastern studies are too organised around various demands, other than academic.

After reading Khalil's book one cannot doubt that the academic field until the 1970s was pretty much shaped by the state needs, but the author himself explains that academia was not always compliant with the state's needs. Furthermore, the rise of think tanks focused on depicting relations between think tanks and certain academics, leaving critical voices out. Even though this idea could rightfully suggest that scholarship to be policy-relevant has to be in accordance with state or private interest, according to Khalil, it seems that critical voices, not affiliated with a major think tank or government institution, have yet to emerge. Therefore, the analysis of critical scholarship, which would be entirely in accordance with Khalil's articulated intention of studying the formation of Middle Eastern studies is non-existent. What makes the lack of analysis regarding critical scholarship more puzzling is Khalil's reliance on Orientalism as a form of critical scholarship about the Middle East. For that matter, Khalil missed the opportunity to situate his work and relate it to the earlier scholarship that he has contributed to, and he missed another significant opportunity to make an assessment of the influence of Said's *Orientalism*, or broader post-structural and post-colonial thought on Middle Eastern scholarship.

What makes this book important to regional security studies is its focus on the construction of knowledge about regions. Even though the role of discourses and narratives was already highlighted, Osamah Khalil made his point with a focus on interconnectedness between institutions, individuals and interests. Furthermore, he managed to depict historical changes in these relationships, situating them in the context of historical events, as well as narratives that shaped the knowledge production about the Middle East. There is no doubt we can expect yet more interesting, historically informed output about the Middle East from this author in the future.

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