

For Immediate Release



AUB Professor Khalaf publishes book on Protestant missionaries and their role in secular education in the Levant

Beirut, Lebanon- 24/08/2012 - AUB sociology professor Samir Khalaf has released a new book on Protestant missionaries and their role in developing secular and liberal education in the Levant, including their part in the founding of the American University of Beirut.

Protestant Missionaries in the Levant: Ungodly Puritans, 1820-60 (released by Routledge on July 26 in its special series, Studies in Middle Eastern History), follows two books by Khalaf published in the winter and spring of this year.

While the two earlier books are the outcome of current research and writing, *Ungodly Puritans* has been a long time in the making. The research and writing began in 1990 while Khalaf was enjoying an extended research leave at Princeton University. A generous three-year Lilly Endowment grant allowed him to explore the impact of New England Puritanism and its evangelical imagination as a cultural transplant. The early envoys were experimenting with different strategies for winning the hearts and minds of “native” groups. The book explores the socio-historical forces which account for the initial failure in converting the communities they had hoped to evangelize. This failure, however, led to a later success in reinventing themselves as agents of secular and liberal education, welfare, outreach programs and popular culture. Through special efforts not to debase local culture, the missionaries laid the foundations which allowed large sections of society to become protestantized without being evangelized.

By focusing on this seminal but overlooked interlude in the encounters between American Protestantism and the Levant, and by relying on previously unexplored personal narrative accounts, the book exposes some of the accidental and unintended socio-historical circumstances which ultimately led to the creation of the Syrian Protestant College, which would later become AUB. One striking feature of the book is the way it attributes the emergence of the puritanical imagination - sparked by sentiments of American exceptionalism, manifest destiny and “soft power” - to a century before it was commonly assumed.

Earlier in the year, *Arab Youth: Social Mobilization in Times of Risk* (London, Saqi Books), was published. Jointly edited with Roseanne Saad Khalaf, the volume is a collection of 20 essays presented at an international conference held at AUB in May 2009. As the manuscript was being prepared for publication, the momentous 2011 events of the Arab Uprising were prefigured in some of the major premises and findings of the book.

Although it is too early to speculate on the ultimate outcome of the uprisings, one auspicious feature stands out: despite differences, the genesis of a new generation sparked by the desire for civil liberties, advocacy for human rights, and participatory democracy are the underlying demands. Both conceptually and empirically the essays explore some of the antecedents of the upheavals while anticipating alternative venues of resistance that marginalized youth - from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine to Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Iran - can mobilize to realize emancipatory expectations. Themes covered include the forging of meaningful collective identities in times of risk and uncertainty; youth militancy, neighborhood violence and youth gangs; the surge of youthful activism and youths’ expressive outlets through popular arts and street music.

In *Lebanon Adrift: From Battleground to Playground* (London, Saqi Books), published in January, Khalaf focuses on some of the escapist and narcissistic maladies afflicting postwar Lebanon. Against a background of protracted and surrogate hostility, in times of uncertainty and reassertion of spatial and communal solidarities, the book explores the excesses and dislocations of unresolved violence, rampant consumerism, kitsch and its appetite for nostalgia seasoned with collective amnesia.

In graphics and impassioned prose, Khalaf demonstrates how ordinary citizens, burdened with the consequences of an ugly and unfinished war, persisting regional rivalries, economic deprivation and diminished prospects for well-being, find meaning and coherence in a society that has not only lost its moorings and direction, but also its sense of control. Despite its bleak message, the book ends on a note of optimism and renewal, appropriate for Lebanon's Youth, who display - through a vibrant social media and voluntarism - a penchant for altruism, a quest for civil society and appreciation of authentic lifestyles, decency and the joys of small delights.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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