

Composing America at Syrian Protestant College

With Ghada Seifeddine (translator, Arabic to English) and Yasmine Abou Taha (Arabic-language transcription)¹

Since 1899, students at Syrian Protestant College (SPC) “published a magazine or newspaper for part of or almost every year,” and “in 1906 alone, the students published sixteen different papers, the largest output in any given year of the school’s existence” (B. S. Anderson, 2011, p. 22; see Appendix B for a full list of SPC student publications between 1899 and 1920). As one student writer explained in the introduction to the first issue of *الحظ* (*al-Haz*), or *Luck*, magazine (published 1901–1903), newspapers went “viral” on campus at the turn of the 20th century (I. Attieh, 1901).² This chapter builds upon the previous two chapters to show that a decolonial understanding of the history of writing studies is fundamentally transnational and translingual. The evidence presented

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2 A note on the Arabic-English translations throughout this chapter: I have presented the original passage in Arabic prior to each translation in English. My rationale is three-fold: First, I believe including the original Arabic highlights the students’ original voices, making them accessible to readers familiar with Arabic. Additionally, presenting both English and Arabic emphasizes the transnational nature of the students’ writing education. Finally, making multiple languages visible throughout the text disrupts scholars’ tendency to discuss multilingual students and subjects in a single language. At times, the English translation does not match the exact wording of the Arabic original, because the translation aims to capture the contextual meaning of the passage rather than present a word-for-word or line-by-line translation. Because Arabic is read from right to left, all passages in Arabic are aligned to the right directly before the English translation. Titles of the publications are presented in the original Arabic (with the Arabic’s transliteration in parentheses), next to the title’s translation in English. I hope my presentation of the student texts and their translations serves to model the kind of multilingual academic convention that is necessary for transnational scholarship.

here illustrates students' construction of identity through writing, because and in spite of SPC's Americentric literacy curriculum and policy. I trace how SPC students negotiated identity in relation to their geopolitical positioning in nearly 50 English- and Arabic-language student magazines and newspapers published between 1899 and 1920 (for a complete list, see Appendix B). SPC student publications at around the turn of the 20th century operate as markers of linguistic, national, cultural, and political identity, not only in terms of their subject matter, but also in terms of their materiality as well as the languages in which they were written. In these publications, SPC students sought out the responses of their peers, drawing upon their multiple linguistic resources and engaging with diverse imagined and real audiences in rhetorically savvy ways. Additionally, as will be shown, SPC students' language use—in Arabic, English, and sometimes in French or Armenian—is central to the decolonial analysis presented here, exemplifying how understanding the history, present, and future of the field of rhetoric and writing studies can change when the monolingualism upon which much knowledge has been built is contested.

The reason(s) for the emergence of these student-authored publications—or even the prevalence of their circulation, who authorized their publication, and who read them—is not immediately clear, though there are occasional hints in the content of the individual publications themselves. It is likely that students chose to write because of the rise of print media in the local and regional community, as well as the legacy of the college itself. At the time, the newspaper industry was increasingly prevalent in Beirut, Damascus and—as the Ottoman Empire placed restrictions on the local press—Cairo, where journalists enjoyed more freedom thanks to Egypt's autonomy (Dajani, 1992, pp. 26–31).³

As print media proliferated, so too did the promotion of what is commonly referred to as Arab nationalism and identity—what is known as *النهضة* (*al-Nahda*), which translates to “the awakening” or “the renaissance” and is often called “the Arab Renaissance.” Throughout the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire struggled to maintain its colonial influence and power over much of the Arab world; Rasha Diab (2024) described this period as

marked by Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt and Syria, and a massive regional, national, and intellectual awakening. The military suffers from resounding defeat; the whole region becomes a proxy battlefield for British and French mercantile

3 Hourani (1983) identified two new kinds of periodicals in the region emerging around the 1870s: The first were independent political newspapers, and the second were literary and scientific periodicals, the latter of which translated European and American ideas and inventions into Arabic. Most of these periodicals were written by Lebanese Christians who were educated in French and American schools in Syria (p. 245).

and political rivalry; the colonization of Arab nations piles on a palpable cultural gap. (p. 36)

Ideologies of Arab nationalism—or “the idea that the Arabs are a people linked by special bonds of language and history (and, many would add, religion), and that their political organization should in some way reflect this reality”—gained traction (Khalidi, 1991b, p. vii). Christian and Muslim writers from across the region helped articulate a nationalist self-view, largely in comparison with, or in contrast to, “the West.” The discourses emerging at this time and in this context can be framed through a decolonial lens as a form of what Raewyn Connell (2020) called “Southern theory,” or theory produced outside of the Global North.

Throughout the *al-Nahda* period, “presses and magazines thrive[d] and literary salons proliferate[d] hold[ing] the space for envisioning, deliberating, and advocating for varied transformations” (Diab, 2025, p. 209). Elizabeth Kassab (2010) explained that the writing published during *al-Nahda* revolved around questions related to civilizations’ “rise and fall,” political justice, science, religion, and gender (pp. 20–22). Importantly, the *al-Nahda* movement cannot be understood as divorced from Western epistemology. In fact, as Hourani (1983) explained, Arab nationalism was also tied to colonial ideas about universal truth and knowledge (although Hourani did not label these ideas as colonial). The publications circulating throughout the region

lay certain positive ideas about what truth was, how it should be sought, and what the Arabic reading public ought to know. That civilization was a good in itself, and to create and maintain it should be the criterion of action and the norm of morality; that science was the basis of civilization, and the European sciences were of universal value that they could and must be accepted by the Arab mind through the medium of the Arabic language; that from the discoveries of science there could be inferred a system of social morality which was the secret of social strength; and that the basis of this moral system was public spirit or patriotism, the love of country and fellow countrymen which should transcend all other social ties, even those of religion: it was largely through the work of these periodicals that such ideas later became commonplace. (Hourani, 1983, pp. 246–247; see also Khalidi, 1991a)

In many ways, the circulation of print media and the rise of Arab nationalism was a response to coloniality, represented not only by the Ottoman Empire

but also by Western powers that were increasingly influential in the region (see Chapter 2 for a more extensive discussion).

At around the turn of the 20th century, SPC students would have been well aware of *al-Nahda* writers' calls to "reclaim [Arabic] history and language as pivotal elements defining who they were" (B. S. Anderson, 2011, p. 12)—these calls were published in local and regional newspapers and magazines. Additionally, by the time student-authored publications began to flourish at the college, a number of the college's graduates, including Jurji Zeidan, Faris Nimr, and Ya'qub Sarruf, had become professional writers in their own right (Holt, 2016, p. 273). Student writing then, circulated in a deeply transnational context.

This chapter builds upon the analysis of student protests presented in Chapter 4 by showing how SPC students used language(s) for different purposes in their everyday writing. As evidenced in the student publications examined here, SPC students often used Arabic to identify themselves as a part of the Arab local and regional community as they spoke directly to their peers and other native Syrians (such as their Syrian instructors, who were not considered faculty at SPC at the time). Their use of Arabic drew upon and responded to central themes of the *al-Nahda* movement, often in order to critique and praise their homeland. In contrast, students' writing in English (which would have been accessible to faculty and administrators at SPC) was often more neutral in describing the problems facing their local and regional community or accounting for Western history and culture. Sometimes, English was used to explicitly praise the West or to denigrate Arab society. In other words, students made rhetorical choices about content, tone, and audience depending on the language. Noticing this contrast can help scholars better understand how America was imagined by students in and through language, as English was the language of instruction and was therefore tied directly to the American identity of SPC as an institution as well as its administrators and faculty and the cultural citizenship that they were implicitly called to perform (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, the use of Arabic tied writers to the Arab identity of many SPC students, staff, and the local and regional community in which SPC was located though not always a part. Students' negotiation of identity through writing, in other words, is especially clear when considering the languages in which students chose to write. The analysis presented in this chapter substantiates the value of making language(s) visible in the history, present, and future of rhetoric and writing studies and the ways in which such analysis can push to *delink* the field from its colonial base.

I begin this chapter by providing a general overview of the student writing published at SPC between 1899 and 1920, providing a sense of the

publications' diversity in terms of genre, purpose, and audience (see Appendix B for a full listing). I highlight three magazines that help illustrate SPC students' approaches to, and beliefs about, writing across languages. This overview provides context for the analysis that follows, in which I show how much of the student writing captured in these publications explicitly connects language with identity. To accomplish this, I first provide an initial overview of the interactions among student writing, language ideology, and identity by showcasing instructive examples from a representative range of publications. Then, to further illustrate how these interactions manifested, I focus on an example of marginalia composed in Arabic and English found in one student publication, the *SPC Commercial Paper* (published 1904). Finally, in the latter part of this chapter, I outline how the student publications help scholars better understand students' imagined America in relation to their Arab identity and multilingualism. Specifically, I highlight three rhetorical strands—a rhetoric of nationalism, a rhetoric of resistance, and a rhetoric of Occidentalism—that shaped how students navigated identity in and through these publications. This chapter shows how SPC student newspapers and magazines allowed students to identify themselves in relation to their geopolitical context as well as to negotiate with peers, faculty, and the broader community through writing. Additionally, this chapter challenges the Americentric and monolingual “structuring tenets” (Cushman, 2016, p. 239) upon which much of the discipline of rhetoric and writing studies has been based.

Overview of SPC Student Writing

According to educational historian Betty Anderson (2011), SPC students wrote in English, Arabic, French, and even Armenian for a variety of reasons—for student societies or class assignments, on their own or in groups (pp. 22–23). In their writing, students explored a wide range of topics, many of which aligned with *al-Nahda* themes, centering on questions about religion and morality, social and cultural behaviors and practices, politics and national identity, gender and education, and progress and modernity. They wrote in a multitude of genres—editorials, short informational essays, biographies, personal anecdotes, fables and allegories, poetry, fiction, photo essays, and more. The archives suggest that student publications were overseen by members of the faculty, but it is not clear what role faculty played in monitoring or censoring the content of each issue; due to most faculty members' lack of fluency in Arabic, Arabic-language publications were likely only read or reviewed by Arabic-speaking staff and students.

Between 1899 and 1920, nearly 50 English- and Arabic-language SPC magazines and newspapers were published by students (see the list of these publications in Appendix B). The publications proliferated in the first decade of the 20th century, with a slowdown, probably due to a shifting geopolitical landscape and World War I, between 1910 and 1920. A small number of publications were published in two languages, with one including a section in French as a “supplement.” Many of these publications are preserved, in full or in part, in the archives at the American University of Beirut today.

The purposes and positioning of these publications varied. Some of the student writers were enrolled in the Preparatory Department—such as the authors of *صدى الاستعدادية* (*Sada al-Isti'dadiyah*), or *Elementary Echo* (published periodically between 1902 and 1908), and *Prep Progress* (published 1911)—whereas others were clearly writing from more advanced perspectives as students in the Collegiate Department or the School of Commerce—such as the authors of *Seniors of the SPC* (published 1906), *Chemical and Industrial Gazette* (published 1906), and *The Business Amanuensis* (published 1906–1907).

As mentioned previously, the documents preserved in the archives do not clearly reveal the context in which the publications were composed—that is, the student authors do not often explicitly state why they have decided to produce a given publication. However, it is clear that the publication of various magazines and newspapers was a relatively popular activity for students in the college, pushing some students to articulate a specific purpose. For example, in the first issue of *The Business Amanuensis*, an unnamed author distinguished the publication from others, writing,

Another strictly student paper is about to be launched [it] will carry a cargo of a little different nature than other student papers of the College It is the purpose of the *Amanuensis* to be a Commercial man's paper and to be such a good commercial paper that no business man can be without it: to be such a good paper that the time invested in reading it, will bring a profit or interest of a large percent. (“Introduction,” 1906)

Iskander Makarius, the author of the bilingual and multimodal publication *The Kodak* (published 1903–1904), positioned himself as a student with specific abilities in photography and language that he wanted to showcase and share with others who might have similar interests. Others, such as the editors of *الغادة* (*al-Ghada*), or *Grace* (published 1903), and *الدائرة* (*al-Daa'ra*), or *Circle* (published 1903–1904), critiqued each other regularly within their articles,

implicitly suggesting that these students and others like them saw their work in conversation and sometimes in competition with each other.

Students conceived of their audiences—and the interactions they expected from their audiences—in different ways. Many of the publications directly instructed their peers. For example, in *Life of Service* (published 1907–1908), the unnamed editors acknowledged that their “English is not what it might be,” but they told their readers to “please overlook or at least refrain from using either pen or pencil on the pages of the magazine” if they found mistakes (“Editorial,” 1907).

Additionally, a number of the periodicals invited contributions from readers. In *المنتھون* (*al-Muntahoon*), or *The Terminators* (published 1905–1906), the unnamed editors, though ostensibly addressing teachers, in fact asked students to consider what teachers might say in response to this question:

أيها الأستاذ!
ما هي صفات أفضل تلميذ في إدارتك؟

Hey Teacher!

What are the qualities of the best student under your supervision?

The editors explained,

نرجو من كل معلمي الكلية ان يبدي رأيه في الاجابة عن هذا السؤال
فان اطلاع التلامذة على الصفات التي يرغبها الاستاذ و التي يراها في
افضل تلميذ عنده قد يحثهم على إحراز تلك الصفات.

Again, we wish for all teachers at the college to provide us with answers to this question, as disclosing the qualities that the teacher desires and sees most clearly in his best student in class might urge other students to attain these qualities. [Question Directed to the Teachers, 1905])

Both *The Commercial Triumvirate* (published 1906) and the *Miltonian* (published 1903–1904) indicated that they would like to receive contributions from students. In *The Commercial Triumvirate*, the editors wrote that they would “be glad to publish any articles sent ... from students, provided they are bearing on commercial, social and economical subjects, either in English or Arabic” (“The Triumvirate Will Be Glad,” 1906). The *Miltonian* saw itself as an avenue for “our [Milton Society] members and of any

other student ... to display their ability in the use of the English language” (“Editorial,” 1903).

And some of the publications presented implicit and explicit criticisms of readers, imploring them to adjust their habits. In *حسناء الكلية* (*Hasnaa' al-Kulliyah*), or *Beauty of the College* (published 1903–1904), the unnamed author discussed the purpose and value of magazines and newspapers in general, moving to the student magazines published at SPC in particular. Explicitly criticizing students in the Medical Department, he wrote,

و لا بد لي من كلمة انتقاد على فجقراء [sic] [قراء] الجرائد من تلامذتنا
الاطباء. و ذلك أن [الوسط] الأعظم من رفقاءنا التلامذة لا يستحسنون
أهم جرائد العربية لعدم وجود نكت مضحكة و أقوال هزلية. على أن عدم
وجود مثل هذه الاقوال في الجرائد لا يتألى عن قصر [أو] باع محرريها
انما إعراضاً عنها لعدم فوائدها. و إني في خجل لما قد كتبته في هذا
الصدد إنما حقوق الصداقة و واجباتي أجبراني على ذلك.

I have to add a few words of criticism directed to the medical students, particularly those who read magazines. The majority of our fellow classmates do not find value in major Arabic magazines due to the absence of funny jokes and comic sayings in them, knowing that the presence of this type of content does not stem from a shortage or weakness on part of its writers; on the contrary, it reflects the magazine's opposition to include these sayings because they are of no benefit. I feel embarrassed about what I wrote with regards to this point, but the laws of friendship and my sense of duty force me to do so. (الجرائد [Magazines], 1903)

Similarly, the editor of *Cedar* (published 1919) provided a stern-sounding reminder to his peers about the importance of their continued participation in the publication of the newspaper, writing,

This is our Class Gazette. It stands for us. It is considered as part of what we are. Let us therefore strive not to lessen the enthusiasm for the first number. But to keep the fire burning slowly and surely. If we can do that, it shows that there is a reserve cool, sure and steady, which we can depend upon. Remember it is our gazette, and it is up to every man of us to see that its standard is kept high. If we could only cultivate the spirit of unity and interdependence which it stands for, we would be the gainers thereby as well as those whom we hope to interest and amuse. (Awad, 1919)

Viewed together, a range of purposes and approaches toward writing are seen in these publications. Clearly, students approached this extracurricular writing as a professional activity. Some exhibited playfulness and experimentation in their writing. Others saw writing as a collaborative and interactive activity, soliciting responses from their peers and teachers. Students also saw their writing as a way to position themselves as leaders of behavior, thinking, and writing on campus. Additionally, some of the publications offered a way for student writers to model the performances that they understood to be valued at the college. As I will explain throughout this chapter, the language(s) in which students wrote also proved important to what and how they communicated, as well as the audiences to whom they presumed to be speaking.

Reasons to Write: Three Notable Examples

With this general overview of the publications in mind, in this section I call attention to a few specific examples—*I.O.U. 5 Minutes* (published 1902), *The Kodak* (published 1903–1904), and *Happy Days at SPC* (published 1903–1905)—that illustrate the ways in which at least some students conceived of writing at SPC. Although there were a wide variety of publications produced by SPC students during this period, the examples I present here suggest that students saw writing as invitational, pedagogical, process-based, and sometimes collaborative. Further, these examples highlight the labor that student writers put into their publications; the ways in which students conceived of language as inclusionary and exclusionary; and the imagined and actual uptake by readers.

Taking a closer look at these three publications helps contextualize the excerpts of other publications that I analyze in the latter part of this chapter and perhaps helps better explain how and why students used these publications to express their positioning and identity in relation to the larger geopolitical context. The examples I present later in the chapter, of students' depictions of the West and American-style schooling when writing in Arabic, suggest that students' different language choices gave them space to express and support different epistemologies.

I.O.U. 5 Minutes

The only issue of *I.O.U. 5 Minutes* that remains preserved in the archives was published in June 1902 and was written wholly by a student named Selim M. Zein enrolled in the Preparatory Department. Although no other issues of the magazine survived, this issue references previous issues, so evidently it

was part of a series. The magazine is subtitled *A Monthly Review of "Criticism" closing with a "French Supplement" and an "Arabic" one*. The issue is entirely handwritten with an introduction titled "Last but not 'Least'!", a proverb, several anecdotes and allegories, a relatively lengthy "French Supplement," and an "Arabic Supplement." Several other publications are preserved from the same year, but all of them were written in Arabic. *I.O.U. 5 Minutes* is, in fact, the earliest English-language student magazine that is saved in the archives.

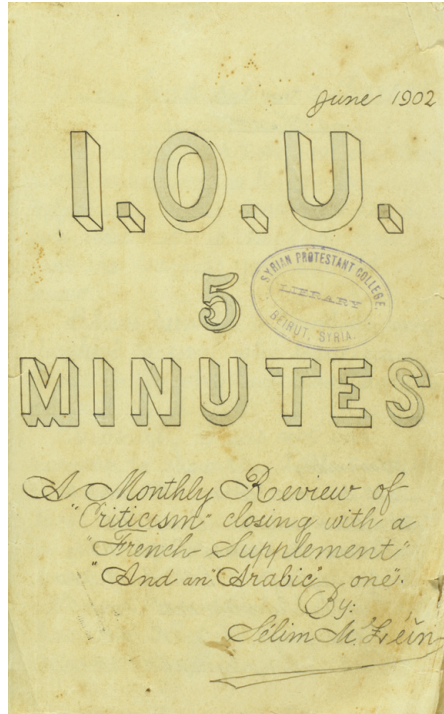


Figure 5.1. *I.O.U. 5 Minutes* (Zein, 1902). Permission to publish granted by AUB Libraries.

The introduction, reproduced in full here, provides some important context for how Zein (1902) conceived of the magazine:

Last but not "Least"!

This is the last time when our poor magazine will appear before you, most dear friends as you were!! ... It is the last but not the least as you should know!

I have been for a long time very thankful to you who have paid attention to what we have written in it.

Evidently it was not our purpose to show how little English that we know! Oh! Not in the least!! Our purpose has been only to encourage students in making practice in that language which till now students who have graduated from the Collegiate Department can not utter a few words without hesitating and making lots of mistakes. Doubtless you should not contract what is plainly known to you all.

Now it is time for you, Dear Friends, to write essays not minding whether they are poor in English or not because Rome was not built in a day, and Napoleon was not made Emperor from the first time over France? And infallibility is not expected in a beginner.

Look again to that French man. He was first a simple officer, then became general, and so on by his hard work he was made Emperor. It is so with you, at first, you would make many and many mistakes while you are young, but after that you would make no more when you would be men in the Collegiate Department.

I myself would never cease thanking the one who first had encouraged me to that work and till now I still remember his friendly advice saying to me:

“Go on, Selim, you would succeed if you work hard and I, myself, he said, would correct you all the little and big mistakes that you would make and help you more in making an English Club composed of all the strong Fourth Form students in English and call it the “Story Writers’ Club” which till now goes flourishing and this being due to his care.

Oh! That man source of kindness how our College would have succeeded if it had many persons who would follow his example!!!

And now when I can address no more to you I close my speech in that number saying to you: Goodbye till we meet again! And may God accompany you in that vacation where, who knows, if we would all meet again in that Alma Mater which had fed us for a longtime from its moral and physical knowledges; and now Good-bye again, I hope you will have a good and pleasant vacation.

In this introduction, Zein indicated that the issue was the last in a series and was produced as part of his membership of an “English Club” or “Story Writer’s Club” for the fourth-level students of the Preparatory Department at SPC. We can see, too, in this introduction Zein’s deep engagement with imagined readers; he constructed an audience who would be attentive and appreciative of his message, and he also imagined himself as a teacher of sorts, providing encouragement for others at his level who were developing their language skills as they worked toward entering the Collegiate Department in the near future.

Zein’s (1902) references to the French and Roman Empires—particularly his use of Napoleon’s hard work as an example for fellow English-language learners to follow—provides a sense that students at the time held positive attitudes about Empire and colonization. However, he may have chosen to glorify colonizers and the West specifically because he was writing in English—perhaps such glorification seemed a particularly appropriate rhetorical strategy for writing in the English language for English-speaking readers such as his professors. Likewise, Zein’s praise of the unnamed “man,” who was likely his English-language teacher and perhaps assigned students to produce magazines such as this, seems similarly strategic and perhaps self-serving—it is difficult to imagine Zein praising an instructor in a language that the instructor couldn’t read.

Toward the end of the issue, just before the “Arabic Supplement” at the end, readers encounter the following:

A free page.

I beg all those who find mistakes in my magazine, to note them down here in this page and put under their corrections their names, because politeness does not allow in our time, boys or gentlemen, to write with a pencil on any magazine, some mistake left by the editor without attention. By: Selim Zein (Zein, 1902)

The rest of this “free page” is blank; no one provided any responses in the empty space. Ironically, on the back cover of the issue, someone scrawled—without the requested identification—“Please look in a dictionary before you write.” This “free page” indicates that Zein imagined his readers to be engaged and supportive of his efforts. He did not see his work as finished; rather, he invited his peers to help him improve his writing. However, Zein’s “polite” imaginary audience is thrown into sharp relief against the reality of a sarcastic, unhelpful, and anonymous response on the back cover of his magazine, eerily similar in spirit to the marginalia found in the *SPC Commercial Paper*, which is discussed later in this chapter. It remains unclear why Zein’s peers

did not respond in the way he imagined—in all likelihood, Zein's peers simply found it easier to criticize than to contribute.

The two language supplements Zein (1902) created seem to serve as outlets through which he could practice and demonstrate his proficiency in languages other than English while also serving the purpose of entertainment for his readers. The French supplement, which spans 18 handwritten pages, contains a series of humorous anecdotes and proverbs. The Arabic supplement is much shorter—only two pages—and contains two love poems.⁴

The Kodak



Figure 5.2. *The Kodak* (Makarius, 1904). Permission to publish granted by AUB Libraries.

4 Since the majority of the student writing preserved in the archives was in Arabic and English, I have focused my analysis in this chapter on Arabic and English only. I note other languages as present, but I did not have materials that were written in other languages translated.

The Kodak was published between 1903 and 1904 and was authored completely by Iskander Makarius, a student likely enrolled in the Collegiate program but for whom there is no other information available. The journal is striking in the level of care with which it was created—it is clearly handmade: The front cover of two of the issues (three have been preserved) are collages of text and image overlaying each other. On the issue published in January 1904, images of opened books are pasted in the center of the page, with the title of the journal overlaid in large, black letters and the name of the journal and other information presented in red and black lettering on the edges of the book images. On the issue from March 1904, what looks to be a newspaper image of a camera and a faded red-and-white triangular banner are pasted. Arabic-English text with the title of the journal and its date of publication is laid over the center of the camera picture. This design illustrates the care with which the author approached this project. Additionally, readers are given a hint, from this cover, of the interweaving of multiple languages and modes within, which is part of what makes this publication so special.

The Kodak is completely handwritten, and many photos appear alongside the essays contained therein. As indicated by the Arabic and English text on the journal's covers, Makarius (1903–1904) presented most of the journal's essays in both languages, the Arabic and English versions of each essay laid out in columns side by side, with the Arabic in one column and the English in the other. The issues primarily consist of informative essays about local places, like "Bridge El-Kadi" and "Up the Beirout River," and short reports about events, such as the visit of the Beirut "Wali," or governor, and the college's field days. Additionally, each issue contains several short instructive essays or brief tips about the hobby of photography, such as "Dangers of Flashlight," "How to Make a Ground Glass which will serve for Focussing," "Sizes of English Plates," and "The Dark Room and its Fittings."

In the two later issues of *The Kodak*, Makarius (1903–1904) commented on his goals for the journal and also what he expected of his readers; in the preface to the January 1904 issue, he explained,

It has been my intention since a short time to introduce into the collection of papers in our Library a new Photographic paper. After deciding its issue, I came to the formation of the following sketch which shows how the paper shall appear.

Its name shall be the Kodak because its editor is a Kodak amateur and the Kodak is his favorite.

The "Kodak" shall appear at the end of each month.

The language to be used in the “Kodak” is simple, clear and to the point.

Articles in the Kodak deal only with photography or with subjects the photos in the number may arise.

A dozen photos, at least, shall appear in each number.

Photos are going to be of four kinds: -

I Landscape

II Cities, villages, buildings

III Athletic sports and games

IV Groups & portraits

Beneath this explanation of how he envisioned *The Kodak's* content, Makarius wrote the following in red pen:

I most respectfully, present this Review to Dr. H. Porter Ph.D. who will lay it in exhibition to the students, in the Library of the Syrian Protestant College. And shall remain there as a souvenir to the College after the Editor's departure.

Here, Makarius provided a rare explicit reference to what must have been a somewhat standard practice in the college—he expected one of the faculty members to put the journal on display for students in the library to peruse. He also imagined that the journal would be kept and preserved, as it ultimately was.

At the end of the same January 1904 issue, Makarius (1903–1904) provided instruction for his readers about how they should approach the journal. First, he invited readers to “kindly excuse him for the mistakes and errors he has done.” Further, in contrast to Salim Zein's (1902) invitation in *I.O.U.* for readers to correct mistakes on a “free page,” Makarius (1903–1904) asked “that if any corrections are to be made or criticisms to be said they should all be directly sent to the Editor.” He concluded this final page with an imploration in red pen: “Readers are very kindly requested to handle the ‘delicate’ ‘Koda’ as Carefully and as gently as possible because it has cost ... [periods in original; no monetary amount given] and work.”

Finally, at the end of the last preserved issue of *The Kodak*, from March 1904, Makarius (1903–1904) commented on his readers' disinclination to read the content of the journal and instead focus on the photographs integrated throughout. He wrote, “Some people are discouraging me in not reading the articles. They ask to see the KODAK for the sake of the pictures only. If so, I

shall feel that pictures in it should become less or even, should be left in my room.” In other words, Makarius wanted his words to hold as much weight as his pictures—even as much as he loved photography.

From these excerpts we can see that Makarius (1903–1904) had a clear sense for what he imagined *The Kodak* to be and what his readers would gain from it. He hoped to connect with readers who were interested in photography, like him, and he apparently saw value in intertwining English, Arabic, and visual communication. His instruction to the college to keep and preserve his work beyond his time there demonstrates his conviction that the project was inherently valuable. Makarius saw himself through the journal as a pedagogue—someone and something that should be respected and valued—though he did not invite response and did not apparently receive any, beyond praise for his photographs.

Happy Days of SPC

Happy Days of SPC was published between 1903 and 1905. Eleven issues are preserved in the archives, and the contents are written in English, although some contributions were ostensibly—according to authors’ notes—translated from other languages, including Italian, Armenian, French, and Arabic. Unlike the other two publications featured in this section, which were written by individual students only, *Happy Days* was edited by a “board” of student writers and editors; the board’s membership changed between 1904 and 1905. The contents of the magazine are varied and include allegories, historical and informational essays, reports on student organizations, poems, and a selection of riddles and proverbs.

Many hand-drawn visuals appear in each issue, though the drawings are more frequent and colorful in the magazine’s second year; the same artist, Armenag Terzian, is listed for each issue. Unlike the visuals contained in *The Kodak*, where photographs served to illustrate the Arabic and English essays, the drawings included throughout *Happy Days*—though intricate and engaging—are not generally related to the written content in terms of subject matter.

At the beginning of the first issue, in December 1903, the editors described their plans for the magazine, writing that it would “be published on the 1st and 15th day of each month. Occasionally small illustrations will appear, drawn by our Artist.” Later, in the issue dated January 1905—the first issue published since May 1904—the editors, who were mostly new, updated their plans to say that *Happy Days* would be published “on the first day of each month” and each issue would “have at least two illustrations.”

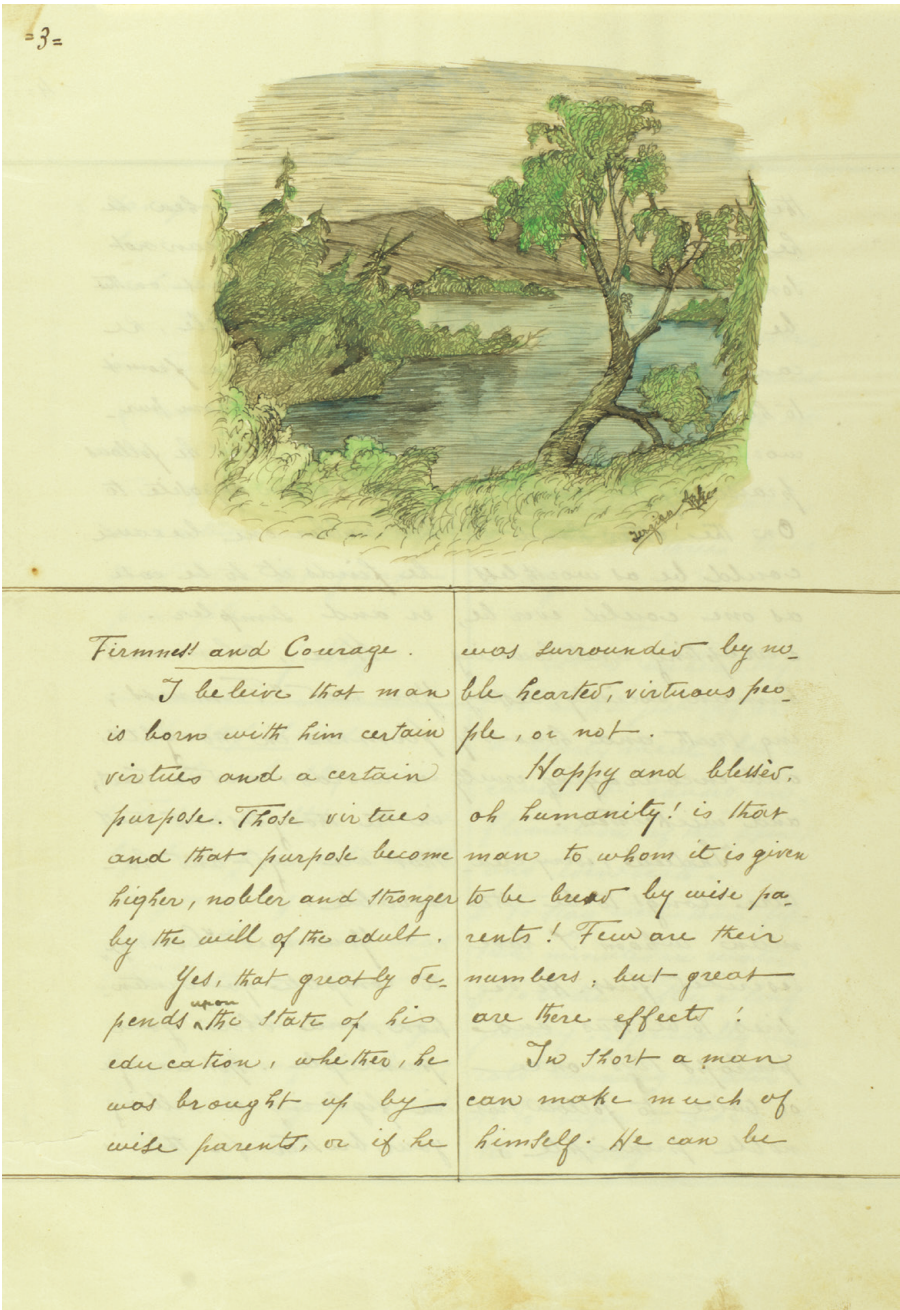


Figure 5.3. Happy Days of SPC (1905, Jan.). Permission to publish granted by AUB Libraries.

Further, the editors invited contributions from readers and described the process of submission and review. In the first issue of December 1903, they wrote that:

All students are eligible to contribute stories, puzzles, riddles, or any interesting information. All contributions to be addressed to the Editor or one of the Assistant Editors, who will revise them, and if necessary, they will be corrected by Mr. Nikula Tabit [Chief Editor]. They will then be copied by the Copyist into the Review.

In the January 1905 issue, it becomes clear that some students—"the special members of 'Happy Days'"—were "obliged to hand in at least an article of two small pages every month." In this later issue, no review process was specified. The editors explained in this issue how they envisioned the new version of the magazine to improve upon the first year, writing,

Last year by writing simple articles our object was to make "Happy Days" a pleasant interesting paper, but this year as we have more members and as they are too eager to go on with articles about ethical, historical, religious, and, literary subjects we will try to make it better and give it a higher standing.

Friends, we want to do something this year; and that thing is to go forward in mind and in spirit. Let us not say that we are weak, and that we are ashamed to write because of the fun which the others make of us. No! Let us not say that. Every one of us has some talent in a particular line, and he can do something useful, in his little sphere. I hope every one of our members according to his promise will begin this work with devotion and enthusiasm.

The encouragement to readers and potential contributors found in the January 1905 issue of *Happy Days* is reminiscent of the encouragement found in Zein's (1902) *I.O.U. 5 Minutes*. However, the difference is that Zein's publication was authored only by him, whereas *Happy Days* required collaboration to be successful, making this encouragement all the more significant for intended readers.

What's more, just as Iskander Makarius (1903–1904) warned students against making corrections directly in the pages of *The Kodak*, so too were "Readers" of *Happy Days* "requested, if they should notice any mistake, to report the same to the publishers, and not to make the corrections themselves" (December 1903). In a much later issue, dated March 1, 1905, the *Happy Days* secretary addressed

contributors, noting, “We can not publish any article, which is not corrected by Greiner, and which is not written in clear penmanship.” Here, we have some evidence that the magazine may have been published by and for an English class, as—at least in later issues—students were “obliged” to contribute, and Otto Greiner, an English instructor, was referenced as a person outside of the editorial board who reviewed all content. It is difficult to say whether or not the magazine was initially formed as a class project, but it seems that, at least in its later instantiations, it may have been a part of a class. While features such as requests for polite corrections may suggest that *The Kodak*, *I.O.U. 5 Minutes*, and *Happy Days* were all written in similar contexts, *The Kodak* stands out as the publication among the three that seems markedly independent of the classroom, in that it does not make reference to the English-language classroom or a teacher creating the impetus for its publication.

The details about *Happy Days*’ regular publication schedule, submission process, and instructions about corrections are not presented in every issue. The most regular feature is the magazine’s “Editorial,” one of which was published in nearly every issue. These editorials were directed toward readers and were pedagogical in nature, providing advice or encouragement on a central (usually abstract) idea or issue, such as happiness, with the description, “the feeling that comes in the successful use of our energies for the best ends” (December 15, 1903); the passage of time and seasons of life, with the advice, “Regret not the past with its faded hopes, its dismal failures Build for the future on the failures and success of the past” (March 1, 1904); and conscience, with the observation, “Any free voice of conscience will push the man forward and onward. Generals, Statesmen, bishops and priests have left their names in History, simply because they have done things, which they have thought was right” (March 1, 1905).

In *Happy Days of S.P.C.*, we see a publication produced by many hands. While the magazine may have been mandated by a teacher or teachers, its production appears to have been led by motivated students who were intent on developing their English-language education. They also hoped to engage their peers and solicited submissions from classmates. In spite of the collaboration of peers, the magazine’s contents, including visuals, do not cohere according to a single theme or overall message. The contents, on the whole, appear to serve dual purposes—they provide instruction or advice and also provide entertainment for readers. *Happy Days* also provides a sense of what students were expected to *do* with the publication—although they were not invited to provide corrections or respond to the magazine’s contents directly, it is clear the editors hoped that students would be inspired to contribute their own writing to the publication.

Taken together, these three publications—*I.O.U. 5 Minutes*, *The Kodak*, and *Happy Days*—can help us understand, more broadly, the beliefs that SPC students held about what writing might do and how they might use writing, in multiple languages, to construct and convey their identities. In each of these examples, students positioned themselves as learners as well as facilitators of learning, and their publications operated as sponsors of literacy for their peers. The authors and editors of these publications were aware of the role they might play in the development of their peers, and they also seem to have been cognizant of the other possible audiences their work could attract.

Student Writing, Language, and Identity

The student magazines and newspapers at SPC appear to have served multiple purposes, including the promotion of Arabic, practice in English, celebration of the promise of science and literature, and cultural or social critique. What's more, student writers imagined engaged and responsive audiences that included their peers and instructors, and possibly a world outside the college. This broader understanding of the range of student publications circulating between 1899 and 1920 at SPC helps frame this section's introduction to representative examples that show how student writing was connected to language ideology and identity. On the whole, these publications exemplify a geopolitics of writing, in which translingual writing practices are tied to the political and cultural realities of the region, including the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of Arab nationalism, and the West's growing influence. The analysis presented here helps illustrate what is gained when we push beyond some of the discipline's "structuring tenets" (Cushman, 2016, p. 239) that presume the history of rhetoric and writing studies is a monolingual and Americentric one. Here, I explore the pluriversal possibilities that emerge through a transnational and translingual examination of this history.

In the introduction to *النهضة الإصلاحية* (*al-Nahda al-Islabiya*), or *The Reformist Movement* (published 1909–1910), the unnamed writer(s) articulated a desire to use the journal—whose title refers to the larger *al-Nahda* movement—as a way to encourage the use of the Arabic language even as they saw it declining at SPC:

قد جئنا بهم جديدة نطلب الاصلاح و نعمل ما في وسعنا لترقية اللغة العربية التي صار من شأنها و شأن تعليمها ما صار في الكلية. فالنهضة صوت صارخ في الكلية انهضوا اللغة العربية و اجعلوا سبل تعليمها مستقيمة. و انها تقبل مساعدة كل من اراد ان يتحفها بشائن[sic]

افكاره و دُرر نظمه و نثره فهي باب مفتوح لكل من اراد الولوج فيه
لتدوين خير ما عُنَّ على الفكر من مقالات علمية او مباحث ادبية او
ملاحظات لغوية بل من كل العجالات الاصلاحية ميدانٌ يتجارون فيه و
يشحذون [القرائح] و يقدحون زناد الافكار

Now reform has come again, and we are working with determination to elevate the Arabic language that deteriorated in status and its teaching at the college. This reform is a piercing voice in the college that screams “elevate the Arabic language and make way for proper methods of teaching it; give power to it!” Arabic language accepts the help of anyone willing to use it to share his thoughts and write poetry and narration; it is an open door for whoever wishes to step in and nourish it with intellectual thoughts in the form of scientific articles, literary research or language observations. In fact, all reformist movements open up space to compete for ideas, steer the mind towards deeper awareness, and let go of marginal thoughts. (مقدمة [Introduction], 1910)

The editors of this publication presented the practice of the Arabic language as a step toward necessary social and cultural improvement.

At the same time, English-language publications were often seen as means through which students could practice English, the language most privileged at SPC. For example, another student publication, *The Business Man* (published 1911) emerged as an extension of the English language classroom; the editors described the magazine’s origination as follows:

Every member of the sophomore class has been contributing articles to an imaginary magazine in the English Class. Why not start a real magazine ourselves? This idea struck some of the students of the Sophomore Class and in a class meeting this matter was presented and carried by a majority vote. A committee of five was appointed to look after the magazine and in its first meeting the committee decided to run the magazine by the name of “The Business Man.” (“Introduction,” 1911)

The editors of the magazine were members of the School of Commerce and wrote about regional and global politics, government, and business issues. That students wrote about these topics in English suggests that they saw English as integral to their professional futures and acknowledged the

growing influence of the West in local and regional contexts.

Some writers articulated a desire to share their understanding of literature, history, philosophy, and science and to share their observations, opinions, expertise, and news with peers. This desire manifested itself in both Arabic- and English-language publications, and centralizing the role of language in deploying the intended message is necessary to understand exactly how language politics played out in the SPC and larger Syrian context. Those writing in Arabic, however, may have been explicitly working against the dominance of English at SPC. Evidence from the Arabic-language publications—such as students' discussions of Western history and politics—suggests that students hoped to present all of their knowledge in the Arabic language so as to revitalize its use at the college.⁵ For example, Isaac Attieh (1901), the author of *الحظ* (*al-Haz*), or *Luck*, wrote,

أما انا ليس لي مقصد و غاية سوى نشر معارفكم في هذه المجلة التي أوقفت نفسها على خدمتكم و خدمة الأدب و العلم. و إني مستعد ان أنشر ما يعرفه فردكم ليقراه جمعكم و بهذا أخدم الآداب و الإنسانية «طوبى لمن يخدمون العلم و الادب» راجياً ان تساعدوا العاجز الساعي الى خير الجميع بنفثات أقلامكم الدرية و لطيف عباراتكم الجوهريّة فأكون واسطة لا يصال معرفة شخص الى عدة اشخاص و إني أستعين بمن تستمد منه المعونة إنه لقدير.

I have no reason or purpose to expand your knowledge about this magazine you are reading, which is only made to serve your preferences as well as varied literary and scientific needs. I am ready to write what one individual of you knows for all of you to read; in this sense, I would be serving literature and humanity. Praise to those who spend their whole lives serving science and literature. I beg of you to help those in need by writing valuable truths and meanings with your pens and minds. I am but a messenger who wants to transmit knowledge to people, with the help of others who can write as well.

In addition to personally promoting literary and scientific knowledge, Attieh (1901) praised scholars and implored readers to share their knowledge as well. He and the other authors who created these Arabic-language publications did so in part because they opposed the dominance of the West as evidenced on SPC's campus, and writing in Arabic was one way to reclaim some of the

⁵ See, for example, one anonymous student's article in Arabic that discussed another student's speech on the topics of William Gladstone, Napoleon, and the Transvalian War in *الحظ* (*al-Haz*) or *Luck* (تنبيه الضمير [Warning to the Conscience], 1901).

space they perceived as lost. This practice is similar to the ways in which the student protestors discussed in Chapter 4 strategically used their linguistic resources to engage with a variety of audiences.

While the influence of these publications cannot ultimately be known, the vast majority of editors and authors recognized that their primary audience would be comprised of SPC students, even if at times they had aspirations that their words would go beyond the college. Some authors and editors, such as those who published the English-language journal *Al-Kulliyah*, or *The College* (published 1910–1914), idealistically imagined that their work could spread beyond SPC campus itself. They explained, “To keep those who are still interested in their Alma Mater informed in regard to the life and growth of the College, and to stimulate all phases of wholesome College life, is the aim of *Al-Kulliyah*” “(With this opening number ...,” 1910). More commonly, however, student writers spoke directly to their peers, demonstrating that this was the primary audience they imagined, as seen in this excerpt taken from the introductory article of *المنتھون* (*al-Muntahoun*), or *The Terminators*:

ها مجلتنا ننشرها أمامكم فتصفحوها و انتقدوها املأوها مما يفيض
من غزارة فضكم و مكنون أربكم و يكفيننا جزاء أن تكونوا مسرورين
بمشروعنا مرتاحين إلى عملنا.

This is our newspaper. We publish it in your presence. Scroll through its pages and criticize it. Fill it with an overflow of your abundant thoughts and hidden ambitions. It would be enough reward if you are content with our project and satisfied with our work. (مقدمة [Introduction], 1905)

Students also composed social and cultural critique, and this critique was launched primarily—though not exclusively—in Arabic. The focus of the critique varied (both the East and the West were subject to criticism), but it nearly always served the purpose of promoting national and cultural identity. Compare, for example, the ways in which two magazines, published 15 years apart, highlighted the role of education in order to critique how national and cultural identity was promoted or dismantled in and through schooling: In *غادة الفكر* (*Ghada al-Fakr*), or *Graceful Thought* (published 1899–1901), the editor blamed Syrians for the dearth of schools administered by locals:

هذه بيروت أهم مدينة في سوريا و مع ذلك فمعظم مدارسها أجنبية و
هي تكاد تخلو من مدرسة كلية وطنية تسد بحاجة أبناء الوطن. و هل
نتتظر من الأجانب أن يربوا أولادنا و يغرسوا في قلوبهم حب الوطن.

This is Beirut, the most important city in Syria! And yet, most schools in Beirut are foreign, and the city no longer has many national schools for its country's youth. Do we wait for foreigners to come raise our children and plant patriotism in their hearts? (Fouad, 1900b)

In *الثمرة (al-Thamra)*, or *The Fruit* (published 1914–1916), author Bahaa Al-Din Al-Sabbah (1915) praised the high quality of education in the region during the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad (750–1517 CE), in order to underline the role of schools in spreading nationalism, writing:

فالمدارس التي كانت العامل الوحيد لنشر آداب العرب و مدنيّتهم و
حفظ الملك و المملكة فإذا أردنا النجاح فلا سبيل إلا بالمدارس حيث
تنقلب عقول الناشئة الجديدة و تجعلهم أبناء أولئك الأبطال الذين خلد
و سيخلد اسمهم التاريخ اسماً خالداً لا يفنى ما دام في الأمة رجال
أعمال فألى المدارس إلى المدارس [sic] أيها الناشئة وإلى العلم إلى
العلم [sic] أيتها الأمة فبهذا تنجح.

Indeed, the schools were the only factor to spread the morals of Arabs and their civilization and preserve the power of the king and his kingdom. There is no means to success except in schools that transform the minds of its youth and raises them to become the sons of the immortal heroes whose names will forever be ingrained in history and never fade away. The nation will succeed as long as there are educated men. Oh rising youth, to the schools, to the schools you must go. Oh nation, seek knowledge, seek all the knowledge, for that is how you succeed.

Both excerpts seem to implicate contemporary society and culture for failing to promote Arab identity generally and Syrian identity specifically. Although similar critiques were also offered in English-language student publications, most of this kind of critique was levied through the Arabic language. By writing about these topics primarily in Arabic, student authors seem to have been intent on excluding readers unfamiliar with Arabic, which would have included many SPC administrators and faculty. Importantly, local instructors and staff at SPC, who were excluded from faculty status or rights before 1920, would have had access to the arguments made by students in these publications and would perhaps have been more sympathetic to the students' critiques. These examples demonstrate that students were deeply engaged in local and regional politics and that they were highly aware of the colonial epistemology brought to the region through the West and represented in and through Western education. Students understood how to deploy their

linguistic resources to position themselves in relation to the coloniality that threatened a growing sense of Arab identity.

A Geopolitics of Student Writing—A Case Study

We can see more vividly translingual exchange at work in, through, and—in this case—*on* student writing by focusing on a single page of one student-authored publication, which attracted the attention of several SPC students. The May 1904 issue of the *SPC Commercial Paper* covered a variety of topics loosely related to world events and other news relevant to students in the School of Commerce, including “Exports of Egypt during the Month of March for the Year 1904,” the “Treatment of Jewish Travellers in Russia,” and “How Can Agriculture Make Syria Famous.” This issue, with a front cover designed by hand but with the rest of the contents typed, is the only one preserved in the archives; however, the authors, who wrote in English, made reference to previous issues, suggesting that this was one of a series.

The *SPC Commercial Paper* does not stand out as a particularly provocative publication—the largely informative essays were written by several different students and like many of the student publications preserved in the archives, it is unclear how the publication circulated among SPC students, staff, and faculty. At the same time, the publication’s typed contents—unusual when compared to other student magazines and newspapers published at around the same time, which were handwritten—suggest that the authors wanted the publication to be understood as “final,” not open to revision. The *SPC Commercial Paper* did not issue any explicit invitation for a response from its readers. In other newspapers and magazines published at around the same time, only a few responses by students are found—usually very brief comments or minor grammar corrections, handwritten in pencil.

However, readers *did* respond to the *SPC Commercial Paper*, and they scrawled their responses across a page toward the end of the May 1904 issue containing two poems authored by student Michael Risgalla. The poem that elicited response is titled “My Dearest Japan” and addresses the Russo-Japanese War, which had begun just a few months earlier, in February 1904. Comprised of six stanzas, each four lines with rhyming couplets, the poem expresses support for Japan, characterizing the nation and its people as brave in the face of “a jealous nation [that] wants [Japan’s] decay.” Most assumed that Russia would win the war because it was a major European power, and the Japanese would have been seen as victims in the conflict. However, the Japanese eventually prevailed, maintaining their independence at a time of widespread colonization; at the time, it was the first Asian victory against a European power.

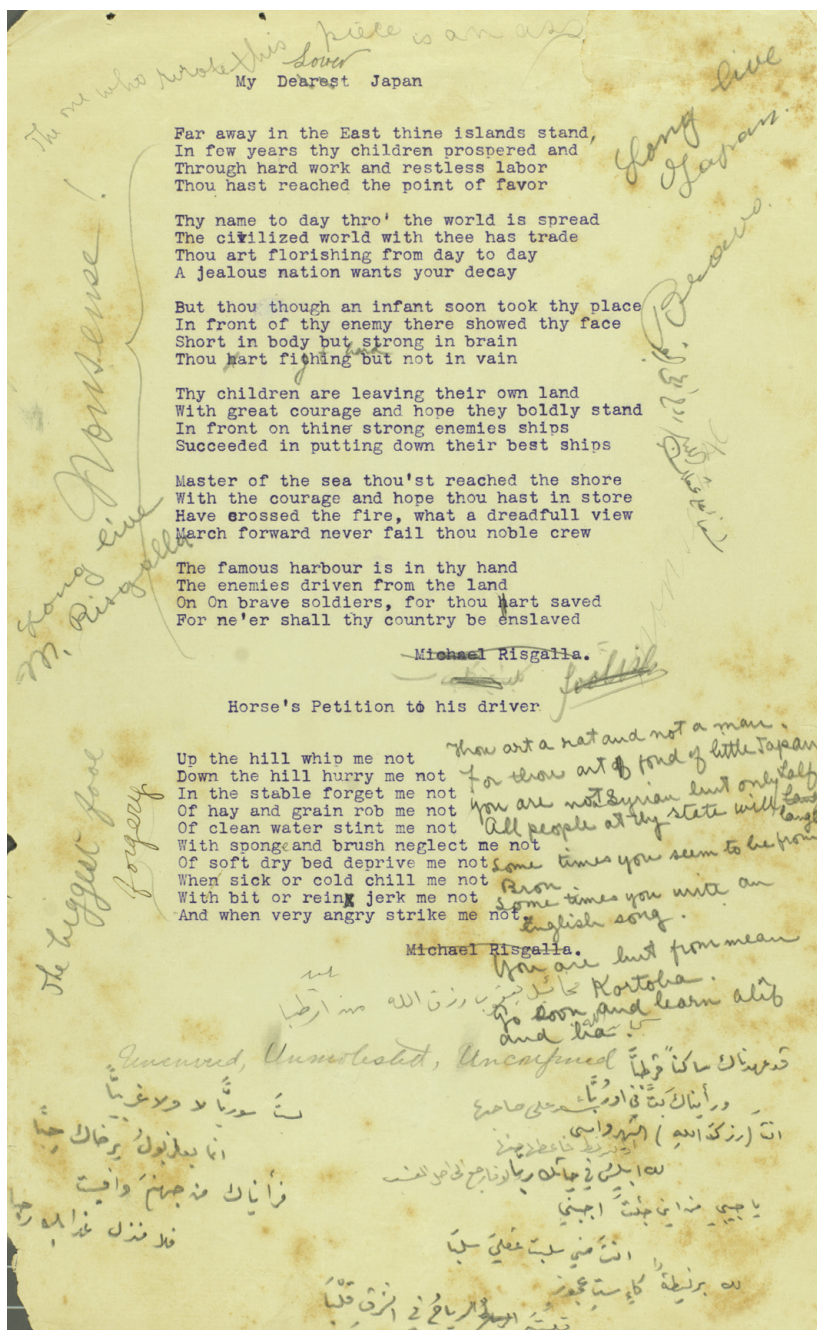


Figure 5.4. SPC Commercial Paper (1904, May).
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The sentiment expressed in the poem—support for the underdog Japan in the face of Russia—would not have been unusual in the local or regional context; Russia's long-standing antagonism toward the Ottoman Empire would have bred deep-seated contempt for Russia and much sympathy for a country like Japan in Greater Syria (Sharabi, 1970).⁶ In the same issue of the *SPC Commercial Paper*, in fact, a different student who went by the name of A. D. Karlvas (1904), wrote an essay titled "Current Events Throughout the World," in which he used two anecdotes about the war to present Japanese people as sympathetic characters.⁷ So, it is surprising to see the hostility expressed by some students in response to the poem and to Risgalla himself.

Around and across this poem, an unidentifiable number of students (perhaps two or four students) composed marginalia—handwritten comments and poems, some in English and some in Arabic, in all margins and even laid over the poem itself. A few of the responses appear to be positive (though, given their seeming hyperbole, they could be interpreted as facetious), such as "Long live M. Risgalla" (below the poem), "Long live Japan" (to the right of the poem), and "Bravo" (also in the right margin). However, the majority of the responses are explicitly negative; for example, next to "Bravo," there is a negative response written in Arabic:

آسف على عقلك و الله، روح ارعى البقر

This phrase, written in colloquial Arabic, translates to, "For the love of God, I feel sorry for your futile brain, go away and feed the cows," and suggests that Risgalla's peers viewed him as someone from a poor background, an outsider. The word "Nonsense!" is written to the left of the poem, as well as below it. At the top of the page, someone scribbled, "The one who wrote this piece is an ass." Someone crossed out the word "Dearest" in the poem's title, writing the word "Lover" above, so the poem's title became "My Lover Japan."

Also, to the left of the second poem, which is more mundane, someone wrote "Forgery," and another wrote "The bigger fool" next to it, perhaps in an attempt to refute the person who wrote the word "Forgery." The author's name at the end of both poems is crossed out. The word "foolish"

6 Sharabi (1970) provided evidence that Arabs generally supported Japan in 1905 when they defeated Russia: "When Japan defeated Russia in 1905 its triumph was joyously hailed throughout the Arab world. It was the first defeat of a western power at the hands of an eastern nation. It was not merely a Japanese victory, but in a psychological sense an Arab, Muslim victory as well" (p. 129).

7 The name A. D. Karlvas is not an Arab name and suggests that the writer was using a pseudonym, was born outside of Syria, or had family connections outside of the region. At the time, there were some SPC students who attended the school from outside of the region, though not many.

is penciled underneath the author's name for the first poem—but this word is also crossed out, presumably by someone else. Underneath Michael Risgalla's crossed-out name below the first poem is yet another a crossed-out word, this one in Arabic, that is not fully legible but may be كلب, or dog. And below the author's name under the second poem is a phrase in Arabic that reads:

مخائل يعقوب رزق الله من أرطبا⁸
سبحان الله

This phrase translates, in colloquial Lebanese Arabic, to “Michael Yaakoub Risgalla from Qartaba, *Subhan Allah* [a common Arabic expression that is similar to saying ‘Praise God’].” Although a literal reading of the phrase may suggest that it is positive or neutral, it in fact was probably meant to mock Risgalla, calling attention to his village of Qartaba (قرطبا), which is in the Lebanon mountains in Syria but has deep ties to France through the silk trade and also because of the Maronite Catholic identity of the villagers, which France protected during the 19th century.⁹ Because of these ties to France, most villagers would have spoken French and valued French traditions, making a student like Risgalla seem like an outsider within Syria, even at a school like SPC.

Below both poems, toward the bottom of the page, someone wrote lightly, “Unenvied, Unmolested, Unconfined”—a line from Oliver Goldsmith's epic poem, “The Deserted Village,” published in 1770 (2025). For context, this line in Goldsmith's poem comes in the middle of the poem, in which the author

8 In Syrian or Lebanese Arabic, the ق is often dropped from words and not pronounced. Although the word as written on the page reads ارطبا (pronounced *Artaba*), it is reasonable to deduce that the writer was transliterating the name of the village of قرطبا (pronounced *Qartaba*), as it can be pronounced in the Syrian or Lebanese dialect without the ق. In the Arabic-language poem transcribed later in this section, a different writer refers to Risgalla as hailing from قرطبا, further substantiating the assumption that the writer here simply dropped the ق to transliterate the pronunciation of the village's name in Syrian or Lebanese Arabic. An alternative reading could consider the place referenced to be Córdoba, Spain, but the context in this line and the later Arabic-language poem simply does not support such an interpretation.

9 Qartaba (قرطبا), Syria (present-day Lebanon) is tied to France in part for two reasons: First, until the mid-20th century, the village was home to seven silk factories that exported primarily to Lyon, France. Second, the vast majority of the village's residents were Maronite Catholic (and they still are—the most recent census recorded the village's population as 99% Maronite) (Qartaba, 2025). France had intervened to protect the Maronites during the 1860 war between the Druze and Maronites in Mount Lebanon, and when the French brought in its army (alongside other European powers) to reestablish order in the region, they gave power over the Mount Lebanon district to the Maronites. See Makdisi (2000) and Masters (2013), as well as my discussion of these relationships in Chapter 2 for a larger historical context.

reflects on the “spontaneous joys” (1770/2025, Line 254) of innocent rural village life and contrasts this with the impending and unwelcome changes brought on by the growing agricultural industry. For Goldsmith, these “spontaneous joys” are “unenvied, unmolested, unconfined” (Line 257). Perhaps this line was scribbled underneath Risgalla’s work to suggest a certain naivety in his poetry as well as his upbringing in a relatively isolated mountain village, and perhaps it was written to mock the “joy” he derived in publishing these poems, which are not, ultimately, all that good.

An overview of these initial pencil wars tells us that students, for whatever reasons, were *deeply* engaged with Michael Risgalla’s writing—as well as with each other as readers. While it is difficult to know how this publication was circulated among students, it was probably the only copy and may have been left for readers to peruse in a public space like an open area of the library. One can imagine the students returning to this page of the *SPC Commercial Paper* to read the accumulating marginalia, perhaps adding their own or at least telling their friends to read it themselves.

But even this description does not do justice to the full extent of the marginalia found on Michael Risgalla’s page of poetry. Two additional critical poetic responses to Risgalla’s poems are written on the right-hand margin of the page. These two poems, one in English and the other in Arabic, were written with a darker, more forceful stroke, which parallels the deep critique contained in each. The poem in English reads:

Thou art a rat and not a man
 For thou art fond of little Japan
 You are not Syrian but only half
 All people at thy state will laugh
 Sometimes you seem to be from Bron
 Sometimes you write an English song
 You are but from mean Kortoba
 Go soon and learn alif and ba

Here, the writer suggested that Risgalla could not fully claim a Syrian identity. According to this poem, Risgalla was “only half” Syrian—he was “from Bron” (a suburb of Lyon, France, to which the seven silk factories in Risgalla’s home village exported their silk) and later “from mean Kortoba” (Kortoba is another way to transliterate Qartaba [قارطبا]). In other words, the writer here clearly demarcated Risgalla not only as an outsider to Syria but also as someone who had a provincial, “mean” (poor) background. What’s more,

according to this writer, Risgalla wrote “an English song” and ostensibly did not even know *ألف و باء*, *alif* and *ba*, the first two letters of the Arabic alphabet. Although this poem suggests that Risgalla spoke English and French, these skills were seemingly not valued by the writer of this critique. The devaluing of these languages in the poem seem also to have been a resistance to or rejection of the West and its influence in the region. Risgalla’s “fond[ness]” for “little Japan”—coupled with his loose claims to Syrian identity and lack of proficiency in Arabic—marked him, for this writer at least, as an outsider to the college and the surrounding cultural and linguistic context.

The other poem, written originally in Arabic (with an English translation to the left), seems to directly address the author and reads:

We always knew that you lived in Qartaba	قد عهدناك ساكناً قرطباً
And we saw your arrival in Europe	و رأيناك بئ في أورباً [sic]
You, Risgalla, who announced and denied	أنت (رزك الله) أشهر و أبى
Chose the devil to be your God in this life	لك ابليس في حياتك رباً
My dear, when did you come back, answer me	يا حبيبي منذ متى جئت أجبني
You robbed my mind and drove me insane	أنت مني سلبت عقلي سلباً
You have a fedora [hat] like an old lady does	ست عجوز [sic] لك برنيطة كاء
The winds of the East perished you completely	تَبَّته الرياح في الشرق قلباً
You are not a Syrian nay, nor a Westerner	لست سورياً لا و لا غريباً
They torture you with your consent	إنما بعض يرضاك جباً [sic]
So, we saw you arrive from hell	فرأيناك من جهنم وافيت
And tomorrow you shall find no home to welcome you [in the East]	فلا منزل غدا بك رحبا

This poem appears to have been written by the same hand as the other critical poem, in that the size and style of the handwriting and force of the stroke appear similar on the page. Just as the critical poem originally written in English criticizes Risgalla for not being fully Syrian, this poem, too, suggests

that Risgalla was somehow in between, not truly Syrian *or* Western. Additionally, the line “You have a fedora [hat] like an old lady does,” seems to suggest that Risgalla was a phony bad writer who pretended to be European and did not write well in English; this interpretation is further supported by the same writer’s critical poem in English. The writer of this poem may have seen Risgalla as promoting the West’s views while on Syrian soil, as he implied that these views may corrupt, or “rob,” the Eastern mind. The writer of this poem was apparently so offended that he concluded the poem by explicitly saying that Risgalla was not welcome in Syria.

The most important component of this second critical poem, perhaps, is the fact that it is written in Arabic. At the time of the *SPC Commercial Paper*’s publication, the study of Arabic was required of all Arabic-speaking students at SPC, and studying at least two languages other than English were required for all students; these additional languages were selected from Arabic, Turkish, or French (Syrian Protestant College, *Minutes of Faculty*, 1904–1905; Syrian Protestant College, *Catalogue*, 1905–06). Given this context, it is possible that Risgalla truly lacked proficiency in Arabic and was unable to read the poem in Arabic (tongue in cheek, the writer even instructed Risgalla—in Arabic—to find an Arabic teacher). If Risgalla were proficient in Arabic, then he would certainly feel attacked on a personal level. However, if Risgalla could not actually read Arabic—which the writer suggested was the case—then the writer must have been imagining a different audience, most likely Arabic-speaking peers. In this case, the writer’s criticism of Risgalla may have stood for more than Risgalla himself. Instead, we can imagine that Risgalla stood for what some may have perceived as outside threats to Syrian culture and identity, particularly as they manifested themselves in specific languages and ways of knowing.

This example of subversive marginalia in the *SPC Commercial Paper* highlights the ways in which students negotiated the politics of language and what it meant to “belong” to the educational, linguistic, and cultural context at SPC. The example of poems written in multiple languages in the margins of the publication also suggests that not all SPC students fully embraced the America presented to them through the English-language literacy education offered at the college. Indeed, Arabic remained a signifier for who truly belonged in Syria, suggesting that as much as SPC’s American faculty and administrators may have presented English as a signifier of cultural citizenship and belonging to a distant, imagined America, students may have been skeptical of its value in their specific geopolitical location. Student writing, in other words, reveals tensions between the value, or “weight,” of both English and Arabic. These tensions arose out of the inherently transnational

context of SPC, in which foreign exchange—of ideas, epistemologies, and language—was the norm and required constant negotiation. The example of *SPC Commercial Paper*'s marginalia makes these tensions visible. The remainder of this chapter explores these tensions as they emerge in and through SPC's many student newspapers and magazines.

Language, Identity, and Imagining America

The following sections present a closer analysis of the ways in which students negotiated their identities and leveraged agency in and through their writing. In particular, the remainder of this chapter demonstrates that the tensions that emerged in response to Michael Risgalla's (1904) poem in the *SPC Commercial Paper* were not uncommon—the student publications, it seems, worked as rhetorical spaces in which students could explore and express their identities as Arabs attending an American institution of higher education in a specific sociopolitical moment, at the end of the Ottoman Empire and the height of the *al-Nahda* movement.

Throughout the student publications, whether in Arabic, English, or other languages, students took up contemporary and historical issues, exploring them in both creative and mundane ways. As I explain in the following sections, SPC students drew on rhetorics of nationalism, resistance, and Occidentalism, revealing conflicting beliefs about language, identity, "the West," and America. I define these rhetorics as follows: A *rhetoric of nationalism* expressed praise for Arab identity, the Arabic language, Arab history, loyalty to Syria, or a related theme. A *rhetoric of resistance* presented a more skeptical or critical version of nationalism. While a rhetoric of resistance may appear to have critiqued nationalist views, it in fact used critique rhetorically to promote nationalism and Arab identity. Finally, a *rhetoric of Occidentalism* praised the "West" in order to highlight the current shortfalls of the "East" and/or Arab identity, while at the same time nodding toward the potential for a better future, one that could match or be superior to the "West."

Students' use of these rhetorics teaches us how they perceived their agency in relation to faculty and administrators, as well as how they made sense of—and sometimes resisted—their positioning at SPC, Syria, and the Ottoman Empire in and through writing. In turn, students' choice of language—Arabic versus English—in these publications corresponded in part, with the positions they took in their writing. The analysis presented in the following sections highlights the geopolitics of language and knowledge-making as central to the history of rhetoric and writing studies.

Language(s) and Nationalism

The earliest student-authored publications were composed in Arabic. Because most of the faculty and administrators at the time were not literate in Arabic, these early publications would have been read only by fellow students and local instructors, who did not have the same privileges or rank as foreign faculty at the college. Perhaps because they knew that those in power at the college would not have access to what they had to say, students promoted the study of Arabic in these early publications. What's more, students often promoted the study of and writing in Arabic in opposition to writing in English, which was presented as an activity that would detach students from their home culture and identity. These discussions of the value of language(s) relied on a rhetoric of nationalism, in which Arabic—both as a language and as the vehicle for student voices—operated as a signifier for Syria or the East more generally.

In 1899, for example, المبدأ الصحيح (*al-Mabda' al-Saheeh*), or *The Right Principle* (published 1899–1900), a student named Najib Boulous argued for the importance of the Arabic language in schools, writing that the study of foreign languages served as propaganda to make students dislike their home country and culture:

كيف ترجون النجاح من ولدٍ تدخلونه المدرسة لتبعدونه [sic] عن لغته الوطنية و تعبدوه للغة أجنبية و غاية ما تزرعون فيه من الأفكار. إن ذلك يفيد إذا تغرب إلى بعض الأقطار و يؤهله أن يكون ترجماناً للسياح في هذا الديار فلا يسمع حي العائلة و لا الوطن و لا سيستعد لمهنة من المهن فيخرج طائش الآمال غير مبال إلى شيء من الأعمال و أنه إذا تكلم أن [يتأسف] و يتأفف على بلاده التي لا يصرف فيها قدر ما تعلم و ما يقع وراء ذلك في طباع الشبان و لا يحتاج إلى بيان.

How do you expect your child to be successful if you enroll him in school only to keep him away from his native language and make him worship a foreign one and plant its ideology in his head? He might use the foreign language if he emigrates to some countries, and it will qualify him to be a translator for tourists visiting his home country. However, this language will not serve his family or country, nor prepare him for a future career. Instead, he will graduate with reckless hopes and disinterest in pursuing a profession. Still, you hear him regret and complain about his country. He believes he cannot make the same amount of money he spent on his education, among other juvenile thoughts. To him, there is no need for evidence to prove that he is right.

In making an argument for the importance of the Arabic language to cultural identity, Boulous (1899) also argued for the formation of public schools, which would *يوسوسونها على حب الدولة و الوطن* [replicate patriotism in the heart of its students]. In other words, Boulous located the nexus between cultural and national identity at the (public) school where Arabic was taught. By composing his argument in Arabic, Boulous imagined an educated local audience who held—or would hold—the power to make change along these lines.

In a different publication, a student named Fouad (no last name given; 1900a) introduced an article about the problematic “titles” (or honorifics) used in local newspapers by first reflecting on the value of reading Arabic-language newspapers:

لي رغبة شديدة في مطالعة الجرائد لأظنها إلا و توجد في كل طالب علم و فائده و إقبالي على قراءة العربية منها أشد منه على الأجنبية و ذلك لأمر شتى منها الوقوف على آراء أهل الوطن و مشربهم و ذوقهم و كيفية تقدمهم أو تأخرهم. كل ذلك يعرف على ما أعرف من الجرائد لأنها لسان حال الأمة و الباعث الأكبر على ترقيتها في مراقبي الإقبال و الكمال و من أقدم واجباتها سلوك مسلك تنتفع به قراؤها و يقتبسون منه عوائد و أساليب تبث فيهم روح النشاط و التمدن و حب التقدم.

As any student who seeks knowledge and its benefits, I possess a deep desire to read newspapers. Personally, I am inclined to read newspapers written in the Arabic language more than I would for those written in other languages. There are many reasons for my preference, including the need to learn about people’s opinions, tastes, and ways of advancement and regress in my country. I would gain more knowledge because the country’s newspapers in Arabic speak the truth about the nation’s situation and paves the road to reach better and more notable positions. Also, these newspapers’ most sacred duty is to choose the path that most benefits its readers and inspires them to acquire habits and practices that transmit productivity, styles of civilized living, and love for progress.

For Fouad, reading local Arabic-language newspapers kept him tied to his nation and culture; he implied that reading English-language newspapers may have had the opposite effect of distancing him from the same. He characterized Arabic-language newspapers as offering a kind of education that foreign newspapers could not—to him, local newspapers offered solutions to local problems and suggested ways in which the nation as a whole could improve. What’s more, Arabic-language newspapers, according to Fouad,

presented “styles of civilized living” appropriate for the local context and culture. Although the focus of the whole article did not remain on these points, in this introductory paragraph he further articulated the ideologies that SPC students at the time associated with the Arabic language—the language was tied, as both Fouad and Boulous demonstrated, to cultural and national identity. Fouad’s assertion, articulated in Arabic, underlined his own cultural and national ties, which would be difficult to communicate so strongly in a language other than Arabic. Further, readers without ties to the language or culture would have been unlikely to be drawn to Fouad’s argument, making Fouad’s choice of writing in Arabic especially important.

Another student, Najib Nassar (1903), admonished contemporary students for neglecting their study of Arabic in *حسنة الكلية* (*Hasnaa’ al-Kulliyeh*), or *Beauty of the College*. He urged his peers to pursue the study of Arabic because *المنزلة و رفعة الشأن و العلو ما كان لها من العلو و رفعة الشأن و المنزلة* or “it is surely of high status, importance, and prestige.” To make his point, Nassar held up Western teaching practices as ideal, in that *أول درس اللغة الأم ثم يزاول درس اللغات الأخرى* or “firstly, they learn the mother tongue, and then all the other languages follow.” In contrast, according to Nassar, Arab students:

إنهم ينددون بوجوب اهمالها و تركها في زوايا النسيان فيترفعون عن
درسها و الانصباب على مزاولتها صارفين معظم اوقاتهم في أحكام
اللغات الاجنبية و الميل الى طرسها و اتقانها دارسين تحت اقدامهم
معالم أوضاع لغتهم و حقّرين رجالها العظام.

are intentionally neglecting their language, calling for languages and learning their rules, all whilst stepping on the landmarks of their mother tongue and despising its great men.

In composing this argument, Nassar (1903) appealed to readers’ ostensible desire for an elevation in status, which seemed to be associated (at least implicitly) with Western practices and values, including the use of English. Like Fouad (1900a) and Boulous (1899), Nassar’s (1903) decision to write in Arabic seems particularly important to making an argument favoring the study of Arabic. His writing embodied the very practice he sought to promote in Syria. As such, we can identify a kind of linguistic economy within educational institutions such as SPC, in which certain arguments could be deployed to specific audiences through specific language choices. The choice of language, as in the example cases explored in this chapter, was combined with a rhetoric of nationalism through which these student authors insisted on, and demonstrated, the way in which their local language could be used to promote Arab identity and values.

Nationalism, Resistance, and Identity

As the previous section demonstrates, student publications allowed students to work with language, particularly the Arabic language, in order to articulate arguments about education that may have been unavailable to them otherwise. Students' discussions of education, the act of writing, and the interplay of language drew on rhetorics of nationalism to explore identity. Indeed, the SPC students' Arabic-language newspapers and magazines at the turn of the 20th century repeatedly took up questions of nationalism and identity in a way that the English-language publications generally did not. Further, many student writers in these publications used rhetorics of resistance to implicitly or explicitly critique their homeland, while at the same time expressing deep love for Syria and Arab culture more generally, as well as hope for the future of the country.¹⁰ In this way, these student writers drew from and contributed to the *al-Nahda* movement, in which progress and enlightenment was positioned dichotomously against the past. What's more, the rhetorics expressed in these Arabic-language publications paralleled the debates surrounding the 1909 SPC student protest, detailed in Chapter 4.

Student writers often coupled praise for Syria with implicit or explicit critique, as can be seen in an article titled حب الوطن, or "Patriotism," in غداة الفكر (*Ghada al-Fikr*), or *Graceful Thought*, by Fouad (the same student mentioned in the previous section). Fouad (1900b) exclaimed, هذه بيروت أهم مدينة في سوريا [This is Beirut, the most important city in Syria!] Then, he argued that تخلو من مدرسة كلية وطنية تسد بحاجة أبناء الوطن [devoid of a national collegiate school that will fulfill the needs of its country's youth], Syrian citizens no longer had patriotism because the schools were run by foreigners (Fouad, 1900b). Fouad (1900b) suggested that Syrians had placed responsibility for their children's education in the hands of foreigners; he posed a rhetorical question:

هل ننتظر من الأجانب أن يربوا أولادنا و يغرسوا في قلوبهم حب الوطن

Do we wait for foreigners to raise our children and plant patriotism in their hearts?

Student writers like Fouad (1900b) repeatedly placed local education on a pedestal because of the link they saw between schools and national identity

¹⁰ Students use the word "country" or "nation" repeatedly to refer to Syria, even though it was a territory of the Ottoman Empire at the time. Syria and Beirut were both "vilayets" within the Ottoman Empire, which enjoyed a great deal of autonomy at the turn of the 20th century (see Chapter 2). We might best understand these students' use of "country" as an informal reference to Syria's history and comparatively relative independence in the present context.

or loyalty. Noting that هذه الشيمة العربية, or “the character of an Arab,” still resided in the people, an unnamed speech writer in الحديقة (*al-Hadiqa*), or *The Garden* (published 1902–1903) argued that في ربوعنا أنوار التهذيب و التعليم, or “the fires of civility and education ignited in our homes.” For this writer, or “The utmost proof of Arabs’ determination is opening schools and adopting strong curriculum to revive the country” [ارتقاء التهذيب في سورية] (*Elevating Civility in Syria*), 1903). In other words, according to this writer, Arabs could reclaim their identity in and through the development of local schools.

Similar strains tying education to the growth or progress of Syria, and Arab culture more generally, continued in other publications, including in *Syria*, a bilingual publication published in 1906. In an English-language article titled “Patriotism vs. Syria,” the editor of the publication, Amin Butrus Hilal (1906), wrote, in English,

Let every educated Syrian—the educated, I say, on whom hangs the future development—let him stay in Syria and be a factor in its enlightenment. Let him apply the knowledge and principles that he has gained to the end of bettering the conditions of the community into which he is thrown. Let him work in his own limited sphere and in his own way, putting before his eyes the high ideal of service in the widest sense of the term.

Here, Hilal argued that educated Syrians who stayed in their native country had the ability to forward the country’s development—the implication being that staying was a gesture of patriotism. This argument was premised on the assumption that the state of Syria required improvement and suggested that many Syrians left the country after they had received an education, and perhaps they left *because* they had been educated.

Along similar lines, student Elias Attieh (1906), writing in the Arabic-language publication المنتهون (*al-Muntaboun*), or *The Terminators*, used a rhetoric of resistance to denounce writers who urged others to stay in Syria or speak Arabic but who themselves were ready to leave or to adopt the languages of the West:

يا أيها الكاتب التحرير الذي تدعوننا الى البقاء في سوريا لماذا [نرا] [sic] عندما تصير قادراً على تحصيل المعش [sic] تركب متن البحار تاركاً لنا صدى كتاباتك يرنُّ في الأذان و أنت أيها الشاعر المطبوع يا من إذا نثرت علينا درر أقوالك تهجيننا في تلك الساعة الى حب الوطن لماذا عندما تخرج لما نرى عليك غباراً ما كنت تدعوننا إليه و أنت يا

أدينا العزيز الذي تدعونا الى درس اللغة العربية و التكلم بها لماذا لا نسمع منك إلا بونجور بونسوار يا مونشار good morning و غيرها من المقتبسات الأجنبية كأن لغتك ضيقة بمثل هذه المصطلحات

To the newspaper editor, who encourages us to stay in Syria, you will be the first to sail away when you have the money for it, leaving us the echo of your writings to resonate in the ear. To the famous poet, who enchanted us with abundant words about patriotism in that hour, why is it that when you go out, we never see the dust of what you say on you? And you, our dear writer, who invites us to study the Arabic language and speak it, why do we only hear “bonjour”, “bonsoir,” and “good morning” among other foreign borrowings; it is as though your language is constricted to these terms.

In other words, he distrusted writers who romanticized Arabic but in fact were eager to leave it behind for the West. Elias Attieh's (1906) refusal to be swayed by these writers appears, on the surface, to have critiqued nationalism, but in fact the critique worked rhetorically to spur readers to act on their beliefs:

تصرفون الوقت في الافتكار و الكتابة فقط فيما يؤول الى خير البلاد و تنشرونه على رؤوس الإشهاد ظناً منكم أنه يكفي لإصلاحها و لكن لماذا لا نرى نتيجة لتلك الجمل البليغة و الأشعار النفسية.

You spend your time thinking and writing about the richness of this country and publish your declarations, believing your words are enough to bring reform, but we do not see the influence of all these eloquent words and sentimental poetry you give us.

Habib Khalil Sayegh (1902), an SPC student writing for *صدى الاستعدادية* (*Sada al-Isti'dadiyah*), or *Elementary Echo*, used a more forceful rhetoric of resistance to persuade his audience to improve Syria. In an article titled *وفاة الشرق* or *Death of the East*, Sayegh asked readers hyperbolically,

ما لي أرى لوائح الأسف تلوح على مجالكم؟ و لماذا لا أراكم تلوون سوى على البكاء و الخيب [sic]؟ كيف لا و قد فقد هذا الشرق العظيم؟ فهل لا يحق لنا أن نرثيه و ننوح على هذا الخطب الجسيم مدى الدهر و الآوان؟ فُقد الشرق!!! نعني بالشرق بحد سوريا القديم بحد ناطح السماء بعزه. قوة كانت ترتجف منها المكونة بأسرها. علم أنار العالم اجمع. و لكنه قد رحل و غادرنا نندب بعده مدى العهود. فو أسفي عليك أيها الشيخ الجليل.

Why don't I see grief on your faces? Why are you not crying and mourning? How can you not feel that when the great East is lost forever? Is the East not worthy of lament at its unfortunate fate and death? The East is lost!!! By East, I mean ancient Syria, this glorious heaven and powerful force that the cosmos used to fear. It is the same Syria that lit up the whole world [with knowledge]. However, it left us, and we have no one but ourselves to blame. Oh, wise leader, we grieve your loss.

Sayegh proceeded to lament the departure of Syrian writers and thinkers to Egypt, as well as what he perceived as an empty rhetoric of change in contemporary Syrian publications and speeches. Additionally, Sayegh noted the corrupting influence of the West, represented by a French woman who opened a liquor store near the SPC campus that employed and catered to “the East's youth.” In spite of his lengthy critique, Sayegh reassured readers in the conclusion of the article that, الشرق ولا أغار على الوطنية فهو في ضلال مبين و لرب , قائل يقول انني رجل من أعداء أم. فلنترك الشرق , بعيداً, or while “some readers may think [he is] an enemy of the East,” he was “just frustrated at the darkness that our East”—by which he meant Syria—“is trapped in.” He urged his readers to أم. فلنترك الشرق , بعيداً, or “leave the East”—by which he meant the version of the East he had criticized—and “step into the land of freedom, justice, equality, and peace,” which is how he imagined a reformed Syria.

Sayegh (1902) and the other writers highlighted in this section used a rhetoric of resistance to explicitly denounce the perceived failures of their homeland while expressing a belief that Syria could be redeemed. Importantly, students chose Arabic most often as the language through which to deploy this rhetoric of resistance—and this aligns with the rhetoric of nationalism described in the previous section. For both rhetorics, Arabic operated as the language that could best support students' messages, as well as their ability to appeal to their readers, with whom they constructed a shared Arab identity through language.

Imagining the West, Imagining America

As the evidence from the previous sections attests, SPC student writers did not hesitate to critique their homeland—their rhetorics of nationalism and resistance served the purpose of engaging with and improving Syria and its future. At the same time, some student writers adopted a rhetoric of Occidentalism in leveling critique, in which the “West” was presented as an ideal

against which the “East” and/or Arab culture or identity was contrasted negatively. This rhetoric shared a similar purpose to the rhetorics of nationalism or resistance previously discussed, in that the critique was intended to motivate Syrians to improve their social and economic situation. As we see in the rhetoric of resistance, the rhetoric of Occidentalism similarly suggested that Syria, and Arab culture more generally, could save itself. However, this salvation, it was implied, could only occur by turning to the “West”—not necessarily because Western practices were what would save the “East,” but because they served as educative examples from which Syrians could learn. As I explain in Chapter 1, this rhetoric is similar to what Conceison (2004) called a “discourse of Occidentalism,” and it can be understood as a response to the “domineering presence” of the West. As Stephen Sheehi (2004) pointed out, leading Arab intellectuals of the *al-Nabha* movement could not “have rejected European hegemony and formulated a sense of self that was separate from” this Western presence (p. 10). Similarly, SPC students were at once defined by, and defined themselves against, the West and an imagined America that was represented in the very college they had committed themselves to attending. This push-pull tension resulted in the rhetoric of Occidentalism that emerged in student writing at SPC. Analysis of this rhetoric shows how SPC students drew from their own agency to speak back to the West. In other words, Western colonial epistemology was not hegemonic, even as it demanded those who were in its shadow to engage with it.

Importantly, SPC as an institution represented the “West,” but not the European West, which was where most students focused their attention in critiquing Syria. Some student writing adopted a rhetoric of Occidentalism that praised America; this strand, which was most often presented in English, reveals how students imagined America and what it meant to *be* American, in and through their education in English at an American-style college. The rhetoric of Occidentalism found in some of the student writing ultimately reveals tensions and contradictions within discourses of Arab nationalism. What’s more, this rhetoric highlights students’ own perceptions of themselves as an “Other” in the discourse of the West, and likely also in the discourse of the college.

Some students, writing in Arabic and English, held up the (European) West as a standard by which Syria, or Arab culture more generally, fell short. For example, in an article titled *مفاخر الرجال* or “The Pride of Men” (1900), an unnamed author criticized the “East” for being more interested in reputation and influence than in taking action to help others, pointing out, in Arabic that:

... نرى أهل الغرب يعملون أعمالاً كثيرة خيرية ... فمن تلك الأشياء المدارس و التأسيسات الخيرية حتى في بلاد الأجانب كبلادنا مثلاً و

عدا عن ذلك تراهم متحدين قلباً و قالباً كل واحد منهم يريد خير الآخر
و بالعكس نحن الشرقيين فإننا لم نعمل بعد شيئاً يستحق الذكر بل انما
افتخارنا في ما سلفنا من الجود العظام وكل ذلك تهامل و من عدم
اتفاق. فلنهب و نفوق من غفلتنا هذه و لنشمر عن ساعد الاجتهاد و
لنتفق قلباً و قالباً فإننا قادرون على إجراء أعمال تفوق تلك التي يعملها
الغربيون بشرط أن نجتهد و نتفق كما قدمنا

... We see the people of the West committing to many human-
itarian contributions, including building schools and charitable
institutions, even in our Eastern communities. Besides that, you
see them united in mind and body; each of them wishing the
best for others. On the other hand, as Easterners, we have done
nothing worth mentioning. We only take pride in what our
great ancestors left us. This is all because of our negligence and
disagreement. We must wake up from our slumber, roll up our
sleeves and get to work. We must unite because we are capable
of excelling in works that exceed what Westerners are doing.
We can do this if we work hard and agree like we used to.

This writer pointed to the growth of foreign schools and other “charitable
institutions,” including by implication SPC, as an indicator that Western
practices and culture were superior to that of the East. At the same time, the
writer maintained a belief that the East had the potential to match and even
exceed what was seen in the West.

Similarly, Elias Afansar Abeed (1902) traced the evolution—or “deterio-
ration”—of the East in a lengthy Arabic-language article titled *حالتنا الحاضرة*
or “Our Current State,” in which he recalled the successes of the ancient
Phoenicians but noted that

و ما فتنوا سائرين في سبيل التقدم و الفلاح راقين طرافي العلاء و
النجاح حتى اخذتهم الفتن على غرة و داهمتهم العداوات.

They did not yearn to become the most successful and never
asked for excellence because they became divided and quar-
reled among themselves.

He urged readers to strive toward higher achievements, writing:

فهذه يا قوم حالنا شاهدة بما نفعل فقد بلينا بمصائب وويلات تثور
لها عواطف الاحزان و الاكادر من أعماق القلب و الفؤاد. مصائب تدك
الجبال و تذيب الجماد. فإلى متى نحن الشرقيون ناعمي طرف الفكرة
غير مباليين بما يحدث و يقع علينا من الافساد و حقوقنا من الاهتزام
و أموالنا من الانتهاب و لا بما يتهدد بلادنا من الخراب لابتزاز الغربي

أموالها و استنزاف دمهـا و استخراج كنوز ثروتها و خسف بدر رونقها
 كأنه لم يكن شيء ممّا هو كائن حولنا بل نحن في غفلة الغافل و رقدة
 الكسول لا نبدي حراكاً لدرء شرٍ او جلب منفعة غير اننا صابرون على
 ما هو احـرّ من الجمر قد سبقنا الغربيون في مضمار هذه الحياة مراحل
 كثيرة و نحن غافلون زاهلون عن السير في سبيلهم حتى أصبح ذلك
 متعذراً إلا بعد اجهاد النفس زمناً طويلاً للوصول الى ما وصلوا إليه الان
 من ذروة المجد و النعمة.

This is our current state of deterioration, a matter that evokes feelings of sadness in the heart and mind. We have been cursed with hardships higher than mountains and tougher than stones. Till when will the Easterners remain indifferent to the corruption happening around them? When will we realize that our rights are crushed, our money is robbed, and our country is threatened and destroyed because of the West? The Westerner took the East's money, sucked its blood, took its resources, and dimmed its light. Still, we act as though nothing has happened around us. We are in our deepest slumber and laziness. We do not take action when there is trouble, nor do we benefit ourselves. We stand by patiently and watch as the Westerners beat us in every track of life and on every level. We have become unaware and distracted from following their path, to the point where it will take immense hard work for a long time to reach what they now possess: a state of glory and bliss.

In this passage, Abeed referenced the West's appropriation and theft of the East's assets and culture—he seems to have blamed the West for the East's decline. However, he also argued that the West had succeeded where the East had not, and his rhetoric therefore positioned the East as subordinate to the West, but having the possibility to eventually reach “a state of glory and bliss.”

Many students took on the topic of education in their articles, comparing the state of education in Syria or the Middle East more generally against European or American models. For example, a student named Kamal Haddad (1906), writing six years later in the English-language publication *Zion*, urged his classmates to complete their degrees in order to meet the standards (and progress) of the West: “Indeed, if the Syrian young men want to race with the young men of Europe in science, art, etc., they must be well educated like them, and to be so they must at least have the B.A. degree.” For Haddad, in other words, Syrians needed to follow the example of Westerners by emulating their pursuit of higher education.

Student writers' discussions about education at SPC compared it to what they imagined occurred elsewhere, particularly in the United States. Importantly, this discussion took place most often in English and not in Arabic, and it drew upon a rhetoric of Occidentalism. Writing about SPC occurred most often in English likely because English was the language of instruction, making it logical to discuss the college in the same language. Additionally, students may have chosen to write about the college in English because they knew that their audience could then include English-speaking faculty, and they wanted to persuade them to take up their causes. Or, perhaps, in those instances in which they weren't criticizing SPC, students may have wanted to show American faculty that they belonged to the imagined America represented by the college and its teachers. The following examples help us understand how students conceived of American education, and America more generally, through their own educational experiences at SPC.

Some students compared the situation at SPC negatively against what they imagined happened at American colleges. For example, one of the editors of the English-language publication *Light*, Mohammed Abdus Sattar El-Khairi (1906), urged students to form a "Union Club," a debating club like those found in other universities throughout the world, and outlined the benefits of such a club, noting that having one would have prepared students to "stand up and thank Mr. [William Jennings] Bryan, on behalf of the students and show their appreciation of his memorable speech," upon Bryans' recent visit to SPC from America. In contemplating this missed opportunity, El-Khairi wrote, "We wonder, why such an institution [of a Union Club], which is the life and soul of college days, has been ignored up to this time. We cannot for a moment think that an institution of this sort does not exist in the big colleges of the United States." However, he suggested that SPC students had difficulty sustaining extracurricular activities after they began. Drawing on a rhetoric of Occidentalism by way of explanation, El-Khairi wrote,

We are very much ashamed, when we read or hear an American or a European say, among many ill-striking expressions, that an Oriental mind is incapable to keep a work go on well [*sic*]. It can start any work on a grand style and with great zeal and earnestness, but long before it loses all enthusiasm, and leaves the work take care of itself [*sic*].

Here, El-Khairi reproduced a rhetoric that "othered" himself, along with his fellow Arab peers. He suggested that the rhetoric of Occidentalism may have been true, based on his experience at SPC: "Are we like this?" El-Khairi asked

rhetorically, and he answered affirmatively, exclaiming “Shame! Shame!! Shame!!!”

Other students compared local teachers negatively against their foreign counterparts, particularly American teachers. In one issue of the English-language magazine *Pioneers of SPC* (published 1905–1906), an anonymous student writer who called himself simply “A Syrian” (1905) noted that:

Not few of the Preparatory students complain that the Syrian teachers do not treat them fairly, speak harsh words to them, and consequently have no sympathy with them. Indeed, the Syrian teachers are not half as popular as the Americans because the majority lack the qualities which characterize nearly all our foreign teachers. I mean gentleness and sympathy. This, besides all others, is the chief ground for discontent on the part of the student [“s” is added in pencil].

This excerpt, which creates a stark, generalized division between Syrian and American approaches toward education, suggests that students imagined that the Syrian culture itself produced bad pedagogy (and, by implication, that American culture produced good pedagogy). This kind of discourse positioned local students as at odds with their own culture; they imagined a superior culture represented in and through the Americans who happened to teach at their college.

As we can see in the foregoing excerpts of student writing, the rhetoric of Occidentalism, like the rhetorics of nationalism and resistance, critiqued students’ home region and culture, but this critique was delivered differently, as student writers used representations of the “West” and Western culture to construct their arguments. In this rhetoric, students drew upon their imagining of the “West” (which included, but was not exclusive to, America) in order to argue for improvements to Syrian culture and, in particular, education. The “West,” therefore, acted as a mirror through which the flaws of the region could be exposed—while also, in most cases, revealing paths toward improvement or salvation. And, as seen in the excerpt written by El-Khairi (1906) in his reference to “an Oriental mind,” as well as the anonymous *Pioneers* writer’s description of “Syrian teachers” (A Syrian, 1905), this rhetoric also adopted problematic representations of Syrians as the “Other” within Western discourse. Collectively, these examples also show that language(s) matter to the history of rhetoric and writing studies, as language(s) can produce different forms of knowledge: Paying attention to the role of language(s) in these discussions shows how important it is to resist taking English for granted in representations of what the discipline has been, is, and can be.

Conclusion

This analysis of almost 50 English- and Arabic-language student newspapers and magazines helps further establish the transnational, translanguaging history of rhetoric and writing studies. The proliferation and semi-public circulation of SPC student publications at the turn of the 20th century, and the rhetorics contained therein, teaches us that local literacy practices and instruction were grounded in the local population's diverse linguistic resources and specific geopolitical context. Further, evaluating the evidence presented here through a decolonial frame challenges key premises of rhetoric and writing studies, including assumptions that the discipline's history is primarily monolingual; that English, and America, are central to the discipline; and that writing instruction in the late 19th century was dominated by "current-traditional" approaches.

Journals such as *I.O.U. 5 Minutes*, *The Kodak*, and *Happy Days at SPC* illustrate that students were deeply engaged with writing; they anticipated and received engagement from their peers and teachers; and they believed their writing would make a difference on campus and beyond. Although there is no complete picture of how these publications circulated, it is clear that at least some student writing was publicly on display. And through references to students' teachers and classmates in the publications themselves, it can be inferred that instructors encouraged students to engage in writing for public consumption and for professional purposes. In other words, rhetorical education was alive and well at the turn of the 20th century in Beirut, disrupting historical narratives that assume "current-traditional" rhetoric and pedagogy overtook more robust writing instruction in the late 19th century (see Chapter 4 for a more extensive problematization of these historical accounts).

Further, this analysis adds to a larger understanding, developed throughout the chapters of this book, of SPC's role as an important site of writing instruction, a sponsor of literacy in the region, and a manifestation of an imagined America that was constructed for students in and through the college's curriculum, faculty, and administrators. For SPC students, writing across languages meant engaging across regional, political, linguistic, and cultural borders. As we see in the marginalia found in the *SPC Commercial Paper*, students' writing reflected the geopolitical realities that surrounded them, including the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Arab nationalism through *al-Nahda*, and the growing influence of the West.

Translation also proves to be an important yet seemingly mundane activity in many of the examples of SPC student writing discussed in this chapter. Whether translations were presented side by side, as in *The Kodak*,

mentioned in passing, as in *Happy Days*, or expected to be done by readers, as in the *SPC Commercial Paper's* marginalia, it is clear that cross-language work was central to SPC student literacy. Notably, student writers did not comment explicitly on the labor of translation, suggesting that the activity was such a normal and expected part of communicating that it did not need to be mentioned.

Student writing operated at SPC as an exploration and expression of students' identities as Arabs attending an American college in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20th century. Particularly in Arabic-language publications, students drew upon rhetorics of nationalism and resistance to signify their Arab identities and loyalty to their homeland. And students used English to measure their region and culture against the apparent success of the West and an imagined America. These publications offered students an important opportunity to negotiate competing epistemologies and develop identity through writing. At the same time, there was a marked difference between what students wrote in English compared to Arabic, suggesting that their ability to negotiate and express identity may have been facilitated by language itself.

As we have come to see through the evidence presented here and in earlier chapters, the literacy offered by SPC was complicated for students: Their writing in English and in Arabic demonstrates that they both drew upon and resisted what this literacy promised and promoted. Students' use of different languages reveals competing epistemologies at work, highlighting conflicts that can also be seen in the decision to change the language of instruction at SPC discussed in Chapter 3, as well as in the SPC student protests discussed in Chapter 4.

This analysis pushes us to consider the implications of this history for contemporary research, program administration, and pedagogy in rhetoric and writing studies: Examination of SPC student writing challenges the "tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism" that Horner and Trimbur (2002, p. 594) argued is problematically foundational to the contemporary discipline and that they traced to the decline of classical rhetoric and promotion of English rather than the study of multiple languages at late-19th century Harvard. However, as I argue in Chapter 3, Horner and Trimbur did not go far enough in examining the much longer history of colonialism and nationalism that drove Harvard and other institutions of higher education, in the US and elsewhere, to elevate English and tie it to the global production, circulation, and over-valuing of Western knowledge. Scholars, program administrators, and practitioners in rhetoric and writing studies have taken English for granted in part because of this longer history, as well as our own

failure to recognize translingual practices and transnational perspectives even in seemingly monolingual contexts such as the United States.¹¹ As this chapter attests, there is much to discover about how writing across languages has been and continues to be used to negotiate competing epistemologies and the conflicts that arise out of them. Monolingual ideology, as well as writing scholars' and teachers' own monolingualism, has worked and continues to work within the discipline to mask and devalue the rich and resourceful translingual practices that are exemplified in this chapter.

In order to uncover and place value on translingual practices that disrupt the centrality of English in the contemporary discipline, scholars, program leaders, and educators should consider the role of translation in both research and pedagogy. Cushman (2021) proposed decolonial translation as a methodology through which we might see "the gaps in knowing that were created by the colonial difference [and that] reveal[] the boundaries created by the imperial difference in an effort to include again the knowledges which have been lost or erased" (p. 203). In the context of archival research in rhetoric and writing studies, decolonial translation makes visible those discourses that have historically been suppressed through a prioritization of English-language literacy. This in turn shifts our understanding of the discipline's history as fundamentally translingual. As scholars, we should consider how to build up our own linguistic resources, including multilingual and intercultural knowledge, to more effectively account for literacy practices that cross languages, cultures, and epistemologies. In particular, when publishing about writing produced in languages other than English, we should present this writing in the language of the original whenever possible, as I have done throughout this chapter. Enoch and Ramírez's (2019) anthology of Spanish-language women's journalistic writing around the turn of the 20th century is a good example of writing studies scholarship that effectively *decentralizes* English in presenting the texts in their original Spanish, but which makes the work accessible to those of us without fluency in the language.¹² We must also be cognizant of the absences in the historical record that occur because of a prioritization of English: For example, much of my interpretation of the 1909 student

11 See Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of historiography that has accounted for, or elided, evidence of translingual practices and transnational perspectives.

12 It is important to recognize that this kind of translation work requires a great deal of labor, collaboration, and money. I could not have written this chapter without the assistance of two Arabic-language specialists, Ghada Seifeddine and Yasmine Abou Taha, who transcribed and translated the student writing in the archives for me, nor without grants provided by the American University of Beirut that paid them for this work. Enoch and Ramírez (2019) also discussed these components of the work explicitly in the acknowledgements and introduction to their book.

protests in Chapter 4 relies on English-language translations of newspaper articles that were originally written in Arabic; however, the original articles were not preserved, perhaps because they had been translated into English at the time and it was determined that English-language records were all that was needed for an assumed English-speaking audience. Additionally, we must consider how we fail to recognize translingual literacy practice(s) in the past or the present simply because we are not aware of language practices that we do not understand or use ourselves. In our classrooms, we can highlight the multiple linguistic resources that our students hold by engaging students in translation and critical language awareness activities such as those recommended by Laura Aull and Shawna Shapiro (2024), Nancy Bou Ayash (2021), Lu (2006), Julia Kiernan et al. (2016), S. Shapiro (2022), Xiqiao Wang (2020), and others.

Finally, this chapter's study of SPC student writing disrupts explicit or implicit assumptions that locate the history, present, and future of rhetoric and writing studies in the United States. Instead, this historical account highlights the deeply transnational nature of the discipline. SPC student writing exposes how representations of the West infiltrated local discourses and rhetorics in Syria, as well as in American higher education. Additionally, SPC student writing highlights how representations of "the East" entered local discourses and rhetorics and interacted with ideas about the West and the America imagined in and through the college. Flows of knowledge and exchange, in other words, are not unidirectional or hegemonic—transnational exchange itself shapes our identities and the literacy practices and possibilities available to us. When we as writing scholars, program leaders, and teachers reorient ourselves to a discipline that is fundamentally transnational, we can better recognize in our scholarship, programs, and pedagogy the multiple epistemologies and rhetorics that circulate, explicitly or implicitly, within literacy practices. What's more, recognizing transnational exchange allows for us to identify the unique challenges and opportunities afforded in contemporary English-language literacy instruction for multilingual and monolingual students alike. When we recognize the work of the discipline as transnational, we can identify the ways in which language and literacy education may determine the arguments and rhetorical positions actually available to students.