

UC Davis

UC Davis Previously Published Works

Title

Introduction: Thinking SWANA in Asian American Studies

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/00k99674>

Journal

Journal of Asian American Studies, 26(2)

ISSN

1097-2129

Authors

Maira, Sunaina

Shirazi, Roozbeh

Publication Date

2023-06-01

DOI

10.1353/jaas.2023.a901061

Peer reviewed

Table of Contents

Introduction: Thinking SWANA in Asian American Studies

Sunaina Maira and Roozbeh Shirazi

“Thinking SWANA from the -stans: Armenia and Spivak’s *Other Asias*”

Thomas Simsarian Dolan

Reorienting the Asian/American International

Soham Patel

Affects of Solidarity: Remapping Asian America in Theory and Practice

Manijeh Moradian

I am Asian”: Kurdish Diasporas and Asian America

Stanley Thangaraj

Keywords as Frameworks for Liberatory Pedagogy and Praxis:

Meeting SWANA and Asian American Studies

Ida Yalzadeh with: Ryan Doan-Nguyen, Chloe Shawah, and Maryam Tourk

Arab American Curriculumwork

Beshara Kehdi

Rooted in the (Youth) Movement, Onward to Liberation:

Toward Radical Definition and Demands for a Critical SWANA Studies

Sophia Armen

Introduction: “Thinking SWANA” in Asian American Studies

This special forum on Activist Scholarship responds to the questions posed for the field of Asian American studies by the grassroots organizing around the category “SWANA,” or South-West Asian and North Africa, that is transforming activism, teaching, and scholarship. Asian American Studies has made important contributions to theorizing the historical legacies and contemporary formations of Western (settler) colonialism, racial formations, and transnational social movements countering imperial power in Asia and elsewhere. It is important to acknowledge that for decades the “Middle East” has been a significant laboratory for US empire: sanctions, proxy wars, regime change, drone warfare, carceral practices, and support for settler colonial violence against indigenous peoples. Therefore, enjoining SWANA with Asian American Studies deepens some of the foundational political commitments of the field and expands it in new and necessary directions.

Historically, the region known as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)—one that spans Africa, Europe, and Asia—has been imagined as a distinct political and cultural entity, excised from Asia and from the actual geographies upon which it lies, homogenizing the incredibly diversity of its peoples as well as its diasporas.¹ This formation has been challenged by academic as well as activist critics of the imperial cartographies that have shaped area studies and also infused ethnic studies frameworks, and of the legal whiteness and ambiguous racial classification of SWANA communities. The move to “SWANA” and away from the nomenclature of MENA, or even identity-based categories such as Arab and Muslim, and towards Southwest Asia and North Africa is significant for Asian American studies and presents important questions for the field. What are the spatial and especially political contours of Asia and North Africa in SWANA? Is Asian American studies capacious enough to engage with SWANA diaspora studies? How has

1
2
3 the field engaged with Southwest and West Asian diasporas? Why are we seeing the
4
5 (re)emergence of SWANA as a rubric in this particular historical moment, in the academy and in
6
7 social movements?
8
9

10 The post-9/11 moment saw new infrastructures of knowledge production in Arab and
11
12 Muslim American studies and new, evolving rubrics of identification and solidarity. The special
13
14 issue of *the Journal of Asian American Studies* (JAAS) in 2006 addressed the potential of West Asian
15
16 American studies to offer a radical political (re)imaginary of the field. Revisiting that call, we argue
17
18 that SWANA diaspora studies could help us move beyond a liberal response to Islamophobia since
19
20 9/11 and a recuperative Islamophilia that has emerged in tandem with the well-worn disciplinary
21
22 strategy based on the bait-and-switch of the model minority/good Muslim and “bad” Muslim
23
24 subject.² This has consolidated in some contexts the notion of Muslim-ness as a master category,
25
26 erasing nuances of race/nationalism and shoring up liberal solidarities and the post-9/11
27
28 interfaith industry, despite the emergence of critical Muslim studies. There have also been crucial
29
30 political contestations related to West Asia in the university and beyond that have driven the shift
31
32 to SWANA over the last fifteen years, some of which are addressed by the essays here.
33
34
35
36
37

38 This forum engages these issues in a different moment and shares reflections by scholars
39
40 that bring new perspectives, grounded in activist scholarship from diverse locations and
41
42 disciplines, while also highlighting generative debates. Using various registers of writing,
43
44 including poetry, the authors generate a critical conversation about the stakes as well as tensions
45
46 in thinking SWANA in Asian American studies in this political moment.
47
48
49

50 **The Polyvocality of SWANA**

51

52 We are writing this introduction in the midst of a popular feminist uprising in Iran—a historical
53
54 moment that speaks powerfully to the need for this intervention. This movement is an inflection
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 point around state repression, imperialism, and violence against women's bodily autonomy here,
4
5 in the US, and there. The death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a Kurdish Iranian woman, in September
6
7 2022 in Tehran due to violence by Iranian state agents sparked an uprising led by women and
8
9 girls who chanted the slogan, "Zan, Zendegi, Azaadi" (woman, life, freedom). This was actually
10
11 translated to Persian from "Jin, Jiyan, Azaadi," the revolutionary Kurdish women's slogan that
12
13 moved from Turkey to Syria (Rojava) and then to Iran. Life, or "jiyan" (Kurdish) is the central
14
15 term and poignantly, Amini's Kurdish name, Jina, means life or life giving. It is inspired by the
16
17 [slogan used by Kurdish women leftists](#) that expresses their revolutionary insistence that "life is
18
19 resistance" ("*Berxwedan jiyan e*") to patriarchy as well as the ravages of capitalism.³ The
20
21 underdiscussed genealogy of these cross-border movements highlights the need for thinking
22
23 beyond the state as a locus for politics, as well as focusing on the imaginaries of resistance by
24
25 stateless peoples. The practice of translation opens multiple fronts to express rage against the
26
27 violations of women's bodily sovereignty as well as economic oppression that is also a lived
28
29 struggle for sovereignty across borders. The slogan "Zan, Zendegi, Azaadi" encapsulates radical
30
31 feminist resistance as tied to life, and it has echoed around the world in protests by Kurds,
32
33 Iranians, and Afghans, as well as others in diaspora and exile—a profound call led by women for
34
35 liberation in body and in life.⁴

36
37
38 We highlight the polvocality of this slogan from (South-)West Asia as a radical invitation to
39
40 rethink geographic boundaries through the protests that have reverberated internationally. The
41
42 movement labeled #MahsaAmini or #jinjiyanazaadi was a site of mourning and protest that
43
44 illuminated transnational feminist solidarities, infusing US feminist protests in a moment of
45
46 rightwing attacks on reproductive justice here. In fact, the women's uprising in Iran was arguably
47
48 the first mass feminist movement in 2022, if variously appropriated by liberal or state-sanctioned
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 discourse and reframed by competing diasporic agendas as it evolved.⁵ But we also want to add to
4 this discussion of solidarity with (South-)West Asian insurgencies a note that the word “zindagi” is
5 also used in Urdu, borrowed from the Farsi “زندگی” (zendegi). Furthermore, in Kashmir, protestors
6 against the Indian military occupation—that borrows tactics and technologies from Israeli
7 counterterrorism—have used the slogan, “Azaadi,” and also stand in solidarity with the Palestinian
8 struggle in their intifada for self-determination. So there is an amplification of struggle through
9 these polyvocalic connections across resistance movements—even if not always intentional—linking
10 histories and narratives when there is more than one trajectory.

11
12 We argue that the cross-border struggles spanning West Asia and its diasporas necessitate
13 a narrative shift that is also exemplified by the move to SWANA. The reflections here illuminate
14 epistemic ruptures in scholarly as well as political discourse that can be sites for “methodologies
15 of possibility,” proposed by Manijeh Moradian, and what Shirazi calls “pedagogies of the
16 meanwhile.”⁶ The essays highlight the anti-imperialist, internationalist, and pan-ethnic approaches
17 in which the concept of SWANA is embedded, that are both new and also aligned with the
18 founding principles of the Asian American movement. The authors discuss strategies of resistance
19 as well as methods of analysis that deepen our analysis of the lineages and movements producing
20 SWANA, including West Asian solidarity activism in the US. This does not mean, as Beshara Kehdi
21 suggests, letting go of other hard-fought for terms such as “Arab” that are important to uphold in
22 antiracist and indigenous struggles for sovereignty, namely, the Palestinian liberation struggle
23 that has long been suppressed in the US, including in the academy. For example, the impressive
24 new reader in Arab American studies includes the term SWANA in its title, suggesting a
25 “both/and” nomenclature, and featuring a body of work that by now has thoroughly critiqued the
26 racial ambiguity of Arab-ness in the US political and legal context—paralleling that of

1
2
3 Iranian-ness.⁷ The polyvocality of terms and of struggles is important for life in diaspora and for
4 transnational acts of solidarity, given the settler colonial context we inhabit that aims to erase and
5
6 eliminate indigenous and disposable peoples. These expressions of solidarity are not simple,
7
8 however, and can be vexed in linking refugees, settlers, and migrants, as Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi
9
10 and others have shown.⁸
11
12
13

14
15 We are mindful of the oft-invisible location of North Africa in region-making: some campus
16
17 formations and student groups have used the term “MENASA” to include North Africa, but there is
18
19 often an excising of North Africa from African/African American studies. SWANA does not always
20
21 resolve this subordination of North Africa—and what Kyla Tompkins describes as a “moving and
22
23 motile racialization” of a region that “strangely falls out of history, space, and language”— and the
24
25 tensions and differences among histories of colonialism, diaspora, and indigeneity.⁹ There is room
26
27 to deepen these linkages in future work, including through what Olivia Harrison excavates as
28
29 routes of transcolonial identification spanning the Maghreb and Mashriq (West Asia) that also
30
31 linked North African anticolonial struggles to Vietnam.¹⁰ As Thomas Simsarian Dolan observes,
32
33 there is a painful history of erasure of Armenians and its diasporas, which works to consolidate
34
35 imperial racecraft and undermine radical ethnic studies organizing and cross-racial solidarities.
36
37 Despite the tendency to fortify sanctioned cartographies, we are reminded by the slogan from the
38
39 Iranian uprisings of the possibilities of radical solidarity across borders in response to state
40
41 violence in our lives here and those of peoples overseas.
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 We argue SWANA offers a language of possibility for a new internationalism in inquiry and
49
50 activism, extending the legacy of the Third Worldist politics and movements resisting imperialism
51
52 and militarism foundational to Asian American studies. For example, Soham Patel highlights a
53
54 largely unknown history of radical Japanese American women’s solidarity with the Palestinian
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 freedom struggle in the 1960s-1970s that provides a basis for current framings of SWANA
4
5 internationalism, arguing that imperial violence in Palestine, Afghanistan, or Yemen is also a form
6
7 of anti-Asian violence that can undergird militant transnational solidarities. Moradian foregrounds
8
9 Japanese American solidarity with diasporic Iranians, building on her research on Iranian leftist
10
11 students who participated in the Third World Liberation Front protests at San Francisco State
12
13 University and solidarity actions with the Black Panthers, as well as in the Palestine justice
14
15 movement.¹¹ While this history of radical West Asian activism remains largely unknown, even in
16
17 ethnic studies, contemporary movements such as Ferguson to Gaza and Black Lives Matter
18
19 solidarity with Palestine have highlighted resistance to transnational regimes of policing and
20
21 carcerality linking the US with SWANA regions. The Black Lives Matter movement has also
22
23 propelled complex conversations about anti-Blackness within SWANA communities as well as
24
25 organizing by Black SWANA communities who unsettle dominant US racial paradigms.¹² US
26
27 policing, deportation, surveillance, and incarceration regimes have long targeted SWANA and
28
29 Muslim communities, and Moradian and Patel's essays vividly demonstrate that anti-Iranian
30
31 racism (coupled with anti-Arab repression) has been a key element of the counterterrorism
32
33 regime well before 2001 and even before 1979, persisting in the post-9/11 era in conjunction with
34
35 US imperial policies. As Stanley Thangaraj eloquently writes in his poem on diasporic Kurds, these
36
37 histories illuminate a politics of solidarity and struggle "in times of wars, bans, and dreams."
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 **Pedagogies and Affects of Solidarity**

49
50 There is an affective dimension to these unexpected or counterhegemonic solidarities across
51
52 SWANA's borders, what Moradian calls "affects of solidarity." Thangaraj invokes the notion of
53
54 "Asia as intimacies," drawing on the experiences of stateless Kurds in the US to offer the profound
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 notion of “Asia as not a a map, not a place,” even as he connects Kurds as indigenous people in
4
5 exile to native peoples in Turtle Island: “stacking indigeneity upon indigeneity/as blocks for home
6
7 and homing.” The deconstruction of epistemic foundations of region-making and linkage of
8
9 SWANA to queer diasporas is demonstrated by Moradian and Dolan. In this context, it is important
10
11 to note that it was transnational solidarity in queer community organizing where the term
12
13 “SWANA” as a political framework first emerged to our knowledge, with the formation of
14
15 SWANABAQ (SWANA Bay Area Queers) in the Bay Area in 2000, as noted by Sophia Armen.
16
17 SWANABAQ was a social as well as political collective that engaged in solidarity activism with
18
19 asylum seekers from Iran as well as queer groups in Lebanon and included members active in the
20
21 Palestine justice movement. In Maira’s interview with the queer Lebanese cofounder of
22
23 SWANABAQ, Bassam Kassab recalled that the group included not just Arabs but also Iranians,
24
25 Azerbaijanis, and Afghans; they were mindful that Amazigh queers from North Africa may also
26
27 want to join, so they intentionally created an inclusive rubric: “South-West Asia and North Africa.”
28
29 While SWANABAQ became dormant after a decade, a new generation of queer activists in the Bay
30
31 Area is working on reviving it because they identify with SWANA as a fundamentally decolonial
32
33 category, as did Kassab and others. Here, as also argued by several authors, we can see how
34
35 SWANA hails new political constituencies and creates new identity-based categories while also
36
37 troubling a politics of liberal inclusion.
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 Pedagogies of organizing and spaces of knowledge production also figure prominently in
46
47 the reflections of the contributors. The essays by Yalzadeh and Armen offer intimate reflections of
48
49 how engagement with SWANA in ethnic studies may be a contentious political terrain, as well as
50
51 how young activists and students produce epistemologies reimagining disciplinary, conceptual,
52
53 and institutional boundaries in the classroom as well as in social movements. Here, Armen offers a
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 vital insight: “It is in the process of *doing* SWANA, that SWANA is and has been made and given
4 meaning.” Armen’s processual analysis highlights two important contexts for the (re)turn to
5
6 SWANA in the past decade, animated by different political frameworks: one, the Boycott,
7
8 Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement that brought together diverse student activists in
9
10 solidarity with Palestine, based on anti-colonialist and antiracist organizing. Two, the SWANA
11
12 checkbox campaign in the University of California (UC) led to the institutionalization of this
13
14 category in admissions and student affairs programs in the UC (which sometimes use “SSWANA”
15
16 or “SWANASA” to include South Asians); although this was to some extent driven by a politics of
17
18 recognition, Armen shows how these two movements overlapped and included some of the same
19
20 political actors. Armen and Dolan both suggest that the political capaciousness and movement-
21
22 driven category of SWANA need not be reduced to an additive model based on neoliberal
23
24 multicultural inclusion of inevitably imperfect categories. The political logics underlying the shift
25
26 to SWANA are interwoven threads not dissimilar to the demands inherent to the creation of pan-
27
28 Asian American rubrics and the debates in an earlier era about civil rights as national inclusion
29
30 and state recuperation alongside radical internationalist demands for Third World studies.¹³
31
32
33
34
35
36
37

38 These debates continue in the current culture wars and curricular reckonings with US
39
40 imperial formations in which SWANA is entangled. The essays by Armen, Dolan, and Kehdi all
41
42 address the relation of SWANA organizing to battles over the new ethnic studies requirement for
43
44 K12 education in California, which has been an important terrain for enacting SWANA. In
45
46 reflecting on the creation of the first K12 Arab American studies teacher institute in California,
47
48 Kehdi highlights that what is at stake in the inclusion of Arab American studies in the ethnic
49
50 studies requirement is not simply liberal recognition but creating pedagogical spaces that
51
52 challenge US exceptionalism and the state’s collusion with settler colonial policies.¹⁴ Given the
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 ongoing regulation and repression of the Palestine question and policing and surveillance of
4
5 SWANA communities and struggles, SWANA diaspora studies represents an important terrain for
6
7 winning a Gramscian war of position, as demonstrated by all of the essays; that is, an important
8
9 shift in discourse or narrative indebted to social justice movements.
10
11

12
13 Yet all of these interventions also co-exist with currents that are mainstreaming SWANA, as
14
15 Armen notes, and are variously complicit with consumption and capitalist marketing. The
16
17 category SWANA has by now circulated beyond the academy and social movements and been
18
19 taken up by artists, liberal politicians, food chefs, Bay Area Democrats, and even winemakers. In
20
21 this respect, we agree with Dolan that “SWANA offers a break and a challenge”--to the former, the
22
23 production of SWANA through political practice has been driven by those who are often
24
25 positioned outside of the hegemonic imaginings of the region and its (diasporic) peoples, allowing
26
27 for a more progressive, even radical, intersectional understanding of collective histories, struggles,
28
29 and solidarities. To the latter, labels--however capacious-- do not resolve the many complex
30
31 questions and concerns raised by our contributors. Rather, as Yalzadeh and her students propose
32
33 based on their “collective theorization” in the ethnic studies classroom, re-imaginings of SWANA
34
35 even in the belly of the beast or contested spaces within elite institutions made possible “a field of
36
37 study that prioritized historical processes rather than geographical delineations.” As Lisa Lowe
38
39 has argued, the “intimacies of four continents” has been obscured by area-studies models that
40
41 carved up Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas and reproduced the racial taxonomies of liberal
42
43 colonial governance; understanding how systems of slavery, settler colonialism, and (labor)
44
45 migration were imbricated reveals “less visible forms of alliance, affinity, and society among
46
47 variously colonized peoples” through emergent intimacies.¹⁵ This forum extends these imaginings
48
49 of emergent intimacies, and is an invitation for scholars to follow the work of youth, activists,
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 artists, and a new generation of scholars in articulating decolonial possibilities and insurgent
4
5 struggles for collective life, flourishing, and freedom.
6
7
8
9

10
11 ¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Pantheon), 1978.

12 ² Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (New
13 York and London: NYU Press, 2012); Mamdani, Mahmood, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim:
14 America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004); Andrew Shryock,
15 “Introduction: Islam as an Object of Fear and Affection,” in *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond
16 the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Indiana and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) 1-
17 25.
18

19 ³ “Revolt in Iran: The Feminist Resurrection and the Beginning of the End of the Regime. (See
20 Appendix by Kurdish Left Feminists),” CrimethInc. September 28, 2022.
21 [https://crimethinc.com/2022/09/28/revolt-in-iran-the-feminist-resurrection-and-the-beginning-of-](https://crimethinc.com/2022/09/28/revolt-in-iran-the-feminist-resurrection-and-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-the-regime?fbclid=IwAR1bSqfID2aqz_kDLq4oifySkT5Zee0orEtJp5VPgBmSQJcZ3NKw_0poz2U;)
22 [the-end-for-the-](https://crimethinc.com/2022/09/28/revolt-in-iran-the-feminist-resurrection-and-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-the-regime?fbclid=IwAR1bSqfID2aqz_kDLq4oifySkT5Zee0orEtJp5VPgBmSQJcZ3NKw_0poz2U;)
23 [regime?fbclid=IwAR1bSqfID2aqz_kDLq4oifySkT5Zee0orEtJp5VPgBmSQJcZ3NKw_0poz2U;](https://crimethinc.com/2022/09/28/revolt-in-iran-the-feminist-resurrection-and-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-the-regime?fbclid=IwAR1bSqfID2aqz_kDLq4oifySkT5Zee0orEtJp5VPgBmSQJcZ3NKw_0poz2U;)
24

25 ⁴ Madelyn Evans, “‘Women, Life, Freedom’: The Feminist Revolution of the Kurdish YPJ.”
26 *McGill Journal of Political Studies*, XI. Link at: [https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2021/04/11/in-brief-ep7-](https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2021/04/11/in-brief-ep7-womenlife-freedom-the-feminist-revolution-of-the-kurdish-ypj/)
27 [womenlife-freedom-the-feminist-revolution-of-the-kurdish-ypj/](https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2021/04/11/in-brief-ep7-womenlife-freedom-the-feminist-revolution-of-the-kurdish-ypj/).
28

29 ⁵ Narges Bajoghli, “Woman, Life, Freedom: Iran’s Protests are a Rebellion for Women’s Bodily
30 Autonomy,” *Vanity Fair*, September 29, 2022,
31 [https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/09/mahsa-amini-irans-protests-rebellion-bodily-](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/09/mahsa-amini-irans-protests-rebellion-bodily-autonomy)
32 [autonomy](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/09/mahsa-amini-irans-protests-rebellion-bodily-autonomy).
33

34 ⁶ Manijeh Moradian, *This Flame Within: Iranian Revolutionaries in the United States* (Durham,
35 NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

36 ⁷ Louise Cainkar, Pauline H. Vimson, and Amira Jarmakani, eds., *Sajjilu Arab American: A
37 Reader in SWANA studies* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2022).

38 ⁸ Evyn Lê Espiritu, “Vexed Solidarities: Vietnamese Israelis and the Question of Palestine.” *Lit*
39 28, no. 1 (2018): 8-28.

40 ⁹ See Kyla Tompkins, “On Being North African,” November 11, 2022,
41 <https://outoforder.substack.com/p/on-being-north-african-etc-etc-etc>.

42 ¹⁰ Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization*,
43 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

44 ¹¹ Ibid.

45 ¹² See, for example, *Mizna* 23.2, “The Black SWANA Issue,” ed. Safia Elhillo.

46 ¹³ Gary Okihiro, *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press,
47 2016); Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham:
48 Duke University Press, 2011).
49

50 ¹⁴ Louise Cainkar. (2021) “Palestine—and Empire—are Central to Arab American/SWANA
51 Studies,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 50:2, 4-21,
52

53 ¹⁵ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacy of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015) 2, 8,
54 21.
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 **“Thinking SWANA from the -stans: Armenia and Spivak’s *Other Asias*”**

11 Starting before the pandemic, I worked with a coalition of Armenian and West Asian American
12 scholars, including co-contributor Sophia Armen, to support Armenian Americans’ inclusion in a
13 California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum mandated by the California legislature.
14

15 Emphasizing communities who have been racialized together for centuries--Armenians, Turks,
16 Afghans, Arabs, Persians, Kurds Assyrians, and others--we pushed for expanded content and
17 meaningful inclusion of these marginalized communities. Collaborating with political lobbies,
18 community organizations, and scholars, drafting curricula, and making public comment, we
19 worked to ensure that a century of our stories in California, including those of my family, were
20 not erased. California’s large Armenian American community was particularly galvanized:
21 political lobbies the Armenian National Committee of America and Armenian Assembly of
22 America endorsed the inclusion of Armenians within Asian American Studies, and Armenian
23 American public comments were among the highest of any ethnic group.
24

25
26 However, despite youthful activists’ and some Asian American Studies scholars’
27 investment in coalitional organizing and intentionally centering West Asia in Ethnic Studies,
28 SWANA peoples were especially fraught subjects. Predictable critics on the Right parroted
29 Trump, coming out against an “un-American” curriculum that courageously exposed histories of
30 white supremacy, indigenous genocide, chattel slavery, and fault lines in juridical whiteness the
31 administration sought to obscure by quashing a “MENA” (Middle Eastern or North African)
32 category on the 2020 census. Meanwhile, many Zionist organizations instrumentalized several
33 ethnic communities, including Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Koreans, and Hindu nationalists,
34 in a bad faith campaign to exclude Arabs. Preying on community members’ lack of familiarity
35 with Ethnic Studies, these groups shamelessly signed Armenian groups onto statements without
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 their consent and demonstrated the cynical--but effective--assumption that to include one group
11 is necessarily to exclude another.

12
13 At the same time, many academics and politicians extrapolated from a few popular data
14 points, such as the ubiquitous Kardashians, to reason that Armenians were unequivocally white,
15 Christian, and therefore, globally privileged. In public statements, even some progressive
16 scholars fumed that to include peoples like Armenians, Iranians, Copts, or Afghans would dilute
17 Ethnic Studies by distracting from federally recognized minority categories, while others
18 dismissed our efforts as “multiculturalism” or “that inclusion bullshit,” using opposition to a
19 multiculturalist politics of recognition as an alibi for their uneasiness and devaluation of certain
20 issues, identities and struggles. To make matters worse, many “claimed” North Africa as
21 squarely within African(a) Studies, or falsely conjured the Middle East as homogenously Arab
22 and Muslim. In addition to ignoring millennia linking West and Central Asia with North Africa,
23 these scholars and activists were either ill-equipped or uninterested in acknowledging the
24 multiple humanitarian crises facing Armenians; Russian and Turkish efforts to rebuild their
25 empires; or the fact that Arab nationalist and Islamic regimes --like any other--are frequently
26 oppressive. Drawing on idiosyncratic expertise, experience, and empathies, these elite scholars
27 and politicians parsed whose suffering was legible, and even more fundamentally, emphasized
28 suffering, authenticated by institutionalization, as the warp and weft of Ethnic Studies. At one
29 point, rather than deal with this political maelstrom, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed the Ethnic
30 Studies bill outright, casting doubt on whether there would be a curricular requirement at all.¹

31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44 After initially excluding Armenians, subsequent drafts referred to us solely in relation to
45 the Armenian Genocide, then in relation to political upheaval in the Middle East, and ultimately,
46 in an appendix as Americans who have decried genocide and fled communism. Though this
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 | ~~platitudinous blurb~~ was technically a “win,” it rendered Armenians legible *only* in terms of
11 | suffering and exceptionalism telegraphing US investment in human rights and anti-Communism.
12 |
13 | This exclusion was a particularly galling ~~rebuff~~, since it occurred at a moment of accelerating
14 | crises: the shattering of Armenian neighborhoods in the 2020 Beirut port explosion, the
15 | existential terror of full-blown war with Azerbaijan, and a series of hate crimes against Armenian
16 | churches and schools *in California*.²
17
18
19

20 | I don’t rehearse this litany of injuries to score political points, but these conflicting,
21 | messy examples of Armenians’ status and simultaneous suppression of painful experiences of
22 | inclusion *and* exclusion should give scholars pause. These contradictions uncomfortably suture
23 | foreign and domestic concerns long swept under the rug: a deferred reckoning with whiteness,
24 | religious intolerance, greed (especially for oil), and a global economy of
25 | suffering. Provocatively, these blind spots index concerns Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak diagnosed
26 | in her ~~1994~~ essay “Will Postcolonialism Travel,” later centered in her ~~2003~~-volume *Other Asias*.
27 | In response ~~to then students~~ David Kazanjian and Anahid Kassabian’s question, *Why is there no*
28 | *Armenian postcolonialism?*, Spivak argues that the institutionalization of Area, Ethnic and
29 | Postcolonial Studies has emphasized hyper-specialization and received knowledge, rather than
30 | theory adequate to confront post-Cold War neoliberalism.³ Intentionally juxtaposing Armenia ~~---~~
31 | *Hayastan* ~~--~~ and Afghanistan, Spivak’s ~~collection~~ shows how these nation-states challenge
32 | truisms advanced by demographically significant diasporas (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian,
33 | and Arab), and the consequences of consolidating identities, disciplines, and ethical
34 | commitments in the US, without broader disciplinary and geopolitical visions. Specifically,
35 | Spivak hoped her work would spur an epistemic reimagining of “Asia” and “Postcolonialism”
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 that would give them enduring political and analytic purchase by transcending the limits of
11 identity-based organizing and scholarship.

12
13 History repeats, or at least rhymes, and 2020 brought Hayastan and Afghanistan back into
14 focus, when the autonomous Armenian polity of Artsakh (and Armenian Republic) faced
15 invasion from Azerbaijan—armed to the gills by Turkey, Israel and jihadist irregulars—and
16 the Taliban retook Afghanistan following nearly 20 years of US occupation. These catastrophes
17 were the backdrop for the California Ethnic Studies curriculum; ~~however, but~~ some Ethnic
18 Studies scholars' resistance, if not hostility to Armenians, and tepid, sporadic concern for
19 Afghans demonstrates how the "comparative victimage," US-centrism, and methodological
20 nationalism Spivak diagnosed have only become more entrenched.⁴ Thus, more than twenty
21 years later, we might ask: *Why is there no Armenian in Ethnic Studies?*

22
23 Transposing Spivak's analysis onto the California Ethnic Studies fight ~~helps provides~~
24 ~~fertile ground to~~ scrutinize cynically reified boundaries in American, Area, Ethnic and
25 Postcolonial Studies. Reading this problematic through Armenians' erratic racialization, I shed
26 light on frequently glossed assumptions around race, religion, nationalism, and empire ably
27 addressed by "Thinking SWANA." This ~~reading~~ requires theorizing the blurry lines between past
28 and present, home and homeland, understanding that "over there" is never that far from "over
29 here." I take as a given that the treatment of ethnic communities in their countries of origin—
30 their geopolitical stature—has always informed claims to opportunity and inclusion in the US.
31 Moreover, the way the US government, academy and society treat ethnic subjects here indexes
32 how our foreign policies engage these groups abroad, such that how we do, or don't, understand
33 the world underwrites how we narrate lives of all backgrounds. Although Spivak sidesteps North
34 Africa and examines the Armenian *Republic* as opposed to the Armenian homeland across the

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 | MENA region, I examine blind spots identified by Spivak's insights ~~into~~ 1) the consolidation
11 | of Asianness through diasporic "shared Americanism," and 2) scholars' often melancholic
12 | backwards glances toward Third World decolonization, in which Armenians uncomfortably fit.⁵
13 |
14 | Finally, I extend Spivak's analysis to undercut entrenched assumptions about empire stemming
15 | from the hallowing of thinkers like Edward Said, to argue for an epistemic rupture that sides with
16 | the weak, rather than powerful.

19 | **Armenians and Ethnic Studies**

20 |
21 | Because our homeland straddles the geographic constructs of Anatolia, Caucasus, Levant and
22 | Mesopotamia, and our diasporas crisscross the globe, Armenians have often challenged
23 | conventional categorization and been subject to erasure when they don't fit within master
24 | narratives about religion, race, and indigeneity. Moreover, our long history as subjects of empire
25 | ~~---~~Persian, Byzantine, Arab, Ottoman, Russian, British, French, and American~~---~~ means that
26 | hasty assessments of our identities ignore the entangled histories of power, white supremacy,
27 | ethnic violence and foreign policy at the core of what I have elsewhere labeled "trans-imperial
28 | racecraft."⁶

29 |
30 | In the late nineteenth century, Armenians were central players in Ottoman dramas of
31 | difference, contestations that intimately engaged American racism and geopolitical imaginaries.
32 | Explicitly linking Armenians to Chinese migrants and Native Americans, the Ottoman state
33 | framed Armenians as an undesirable, alien race, and replicated US settler colonial logics by
34 | displacing and exterminating Armenians in waves of violence culminating in the World War I
35 | Armenian Genocide. In the US, politicians insisted immigration quotas be judiciously applied to
36 | Armenians~~---~~the "Jews of the Orient"~~---~~and nearly every country in the Western hemisphere
37 | listed Armenians as undesirables. Fetishized as persecuted Christians but marginalized as not
38 |
39 |
40 |
41 |
42 |
43 |
44 |
45 |
46 |
47 |
48 |
49 |
50 |
51 |
52 |
53 |
54 |
55 |
56 |
57 |
58 |
59 |
60 |

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9 quite white, Armenians were sometimes excluded from church membership by White co-
10 religionists who proselytized to and advocated for them abroad. Naturalization and anti-
11 miscegenation cases, restrictive land covenants and informal school segregation contested
12 Armenian whiteness in the legal sphere, while slurs like “Fresno Indian,” “dirty Black
13 Armenian,” or “low class Jew” reiterated Armenian difference, especially in places like Fresno
14 where they constituted a demographic “threat.” Sometimes mislabeled “Semitic,” Armenians
15 were denigrated as progenitors of the “Armenoid” race, a swarthy, hook-nosed archetype that
16 *persists* in white supremacist literature to the present day.⁷ The threat of deportation loomed over
17 Armenians during the Depression, and [the](#) Bureau of Investigation (later FBI) surveilled the
18 Armenian American community because of “suspect” ties to the Soviet Union and Orientalist
19 assumptions about its inherent violence.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

29 By the time I was born in the 1980s, the US government had not only quashed claims for
30 genocide recognition and reparations for generations, but had also labeled the Armenian Secret
31 Army for the Liberation of Armenia and Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide terrorist
32 organizations. Composed in no small part of Armenian Americans, these organizations took up
33 histories of militant, anti-colonial resistance (and political repression), by targeting Turkish
34 diplomats and collaborating with Kurdish and Palestinian forces like the PLO.⁸ Moreover, while
35 Armenians emigrated to the United States following the Lebanese Civil War, Iranian Revolution,
36 and 1988-1990 pogroms in Azerbaijan, many continued to face discrimination through programs
37 like NSEERS (National Security Entry-Exit Registration System) after September 11, whose first
38 iteration included Armenia ~~in the interminable War on Terror~~. By following this (il)logic [in the](#)
39 [interminable War on Terror](#), the US state reiterated centuries of racializing Armenians as
40 “Middle Eastern,” “Muslim,” “Semitic” and/or “Oriental” in ways that overlapped with multiple
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 subjects from across Asia and Africa, even though Armenians are often excised from
11 conversations that focus on a generalized “Muslimness.”

12
13 Under Trump, these abuses accelerated, beginning with his infamous “Muslim ban,”
14 which impacted core Armenian communities in Iraq, Iran and especially Syria. As the US State
15 and Justice Departments quietly acquitted Turkish nationals who had beaten dozens of
16 Armenian, Turkish, Kurdish, Assyrian and Greek American protesters in Washington, D.C.; in
17 2017, Trump’s uncritical endorsement of Turkey and ~~3,000 percent~~ increased ~~d-in~~ military aid to
18 Azerbaijan led to violent conflicts and war crimes across the region. Simultaneously, the lack of
19 umbrage at Turkish dictator Recep Erdogan’s denigration of Armenians as “leftovers of the
20 sword” tacitly endorsed his vision of a neo-Ottomanist empire built on ethnic cleansing. Clearly,
21 eBut empire abroad is empire at home: genocide denialist and close Erdogan associate Dr. Oz
22 nearly won the race for Pennsylvania’s open Senate seat.

30 Other Asia-s

31
32 ~~Honing in on the Armenian Republic nearly three decades ago,~~ Spivak’s analysis nearly three
33 decades ago prefigured many of these fault lines in relatioin to Armenia, including
34 oversimplified dyads of East and West, White and Non-White, Colonizer and Colonized.
35 Shepivak notes that since the new state of Armenia “could not fit the discursive axiomatics of the
36 already-existing postcolonial model,” it “offers a crucial lesson in contemporary globality” that
37 could “pluralize our Asia-s.”⁹ More trenchantly, Spivak argues that to “wrench it [Ethnic
38 Studies] away from becoming a study of comparative victimage, we must investigate its vision
39 of a paradoxical post-nationalist continuity, now operating in the new name of continentalism.”¹⁰
40
41 I read this call for a new continentalism as support for the kind of thinking “SWANA” enables,
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Commented [SM1]: I found this fact so interesting but deleted just to trim details that are not super necessary. It’s a powerful analysis!

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 within more inclusive and flexible Asian American and Ethnic Studies that constantly
11 deconstruct their own epistemic foundations, especially categories of race, nation and empire.
12

13 In this regard, Spivak notes the fundamental geographic ambiguity of Armenia, “where
14 ‘Eurasia’ will break...the fulcrum, even more than Turkey, geographically the cape of Asia into
15 Europe.”¹¹ ~~Shepivak~~ incisively comments that Armenia’s place has been complicated by the fact
16 that the Soviet Union bridged Eurasia and “appropriated the dream of international socialism”
17 even as it replicated “the old Russian imperial formation.”¹² For Russian and Soviet overlords,
18 Armenians were undesirable subjects, designated “national minorities” by Stalin alongside
19 Muslim ethnic groups, in need of tutelage by more civilized (and European) Bolsheviks.¹³
20 However, during the Cold War when Ethnic Studies was born, the Soviet Union positioned itself
21 as a liberatory, decolonial force allied with ~~US American~~-Leftists and radicals of color, rather
22 than an ~~out and out~~ empire engaged in social engineering and ethnic cleansing.¹⁴ In contrast,
23 Spivak hones in on tensions illuminated by the unraveling of Soviet Armenia and Afghanistan,
24 insisting, “Armenia...teaches us that, if we want globalization to be more socialist than capitalist,
25 we must negotiate nationalism better than merely suppress it, as did the Soviet Union.”¹⁵
26

27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35 Similarly, the dispersal of the Armenian nation across several imperial formations and the
36 ambiguities of its identities and nationalisms have only been amplified by the extensive Turkish
37 ~~endowments of program of generously endowing~~ research programs and chairs in Turkish
38 Studies, ~~whiche~~ have readily marginalized Armenians. Profiting from the reductive assumptions
39 that to be Muslim is to be disadvantaged, and to be Middle Eastern is to be Muslim, this
40 dovetailing of Turkish propaganda and well-intentioned assumptions frames Armenianness itself
41 as suspect, reactionary, colonialist, or bourgeois. Thus, ~~in addition to Spivak’s insight that~~
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 ~~“Kemalism [like Bolshevism] is widely coded as liberatory,”~~ a moratorium on discussing the
11 Armenian Genocide at MESA *outlived* a similar gag rule on Palestine.¹⁶

12
13 Spivak critiques this oversimplified thinking used to identify meritorious, ethnic subjects
14 by self-critically tracing her own faulty assumptions and scholarly positionality:

15
16
17 ...as an Indian, our sense of the general Armenian tradition... is of the first ‘Europeans’
18 on our soil, intermarrying with other Europeans, making treaties with the East India
19 Company... and, in 1935... asking the British Government in India for full European
20 status against the indignity of the limited rights of the Eurasians... Understandable
21 gestures from a small community looking to protect itself. But bad press for US
22 postcolonial theory.¹⁷

23 This reference to US-centric postcolonial theory demonstrates the belated framing of Armenians
24 as subjects of anticolonial liberation, built on assumptions about Armenians’ racial status both in
25 India and the US. Nonetheless, Spivak identifies diaspora as the “distinctive property that lies at
26 the base of US Ethnic Studies,” and notes that “English is the cultural cement of Asian-
27 American,” a construct also reliant on “shared Americanism.”¹⁸ Similarly in her essay on
28 Afghanistan, ~~in~~ “Foucault and Najibullah,” her essay on Afghanistan, Spivak posits diaspora
29 as a site of pitfall and possibility, charging that “the line between colonizer and colonized is
30 indeterminate, especially when the informant is the colonial subject, today’s ‘diasporic,’ rather
31 different from the merely ‘ethnic.’”¹⁹ Highlighting the *American* locus where communities
32 consolidate “ethnic” identities, she Spivak underscores that “Armenian-Americans are being
33 similarly assimilated into the map of minorities in the United States,” but rather than advocate
34 for an endless politics of inclusion, Spivak warns against ethnic navel-gazing, universalizing
35 local contexts, and frankly, a stingy vision of liberation.²⁰

36
37
38 Finally, the “traveling” in Spivak’s title references her late colleague Edward Said, and
39 while she builds on his work, her distillation of Postcolonial Studies offers an implicit
40 corrective.²¹ Said’s outsized influence produced not only an epistemological revolution ~~in~~

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 **epistemology**, but also an idiosyncratic definition of empire that, as he acknowledged,
11 conformed to his lived experience of empire as overseas, Western, and colonizing a “Middle
12 East” he strategically constructed as Arab-Islamic. Important as his work has been in fighting for
13 Palestine in the face of multilateral attempts to destroy it, the institutionalization of this vision of
14 the “Middle East” and Palestine as a citational practice is fraught with problems—identified
15 **partly in part** by Said himself. On the one hand, the centrality of Palestine in progressive activism
16 mirrors its place in the US mainstream—where it is demonized, distorted, and coupled with
17 Israel, largely as a result of the Israel lobby. On the other hand, academic fetishization often falls
18 short of a substantive politics, and can silence concerns about Syria, Yemen, Kurdistan,
19 Lebanon, Iran, Armenia and other SWANA places. Moreover, articulating Palestinian Arabness
20 as *the* normative “Middle Eastern,” “MENA,” or even “Muslim” identity—as in the California
21 Ethnic Studies fight—papers over the multiplicity of SWANA peoples and pasts, marginalizing
22 non-Arabs and/or Muslims, whose ideological bona fides, race, and even existence are subject to
23 scrutiny. As importantly, adopting a narrow focus on solely British, French and American
24 empires obscures the expanse and typology of empire, very much alive and well—and
25 wreaking havoc—across the globe.

37 CODA

38
39 ~~After two semesters at the American University in Cairo and just before I joined relocating to a~~
40 Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies in the US, I organized a group of queer
41 Armenians to see *Kite Runner* on Broadway to support cast members I knew: an Afghan
42 American with whom I serve on the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and
43 Radio Artists “National MENA Committee”; an Indian American I met producing *I Am Not Your*
44 *Terrorist*; ~~a revue sponsored by Actor’s Equity~~; and two Armenian American cast members,
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 including the eponymous “Kite Runner.” Over drinks, this actor and I cycled through the
11 inevitable Armenian icebreaker: *Where is your family from?* While I recited Fenesse and
12 Diyarbakir (by way of Aleppo and Cairo), he discussed learning Dari for the show despite his
13 parents’ origins in Iran. Grounded in ~~the Spivak’s insights and~~ conviction that the personal is
14 political, we noted that Armenians and Afghans share many of the show’s melancholic themes--
15 --war, loss, genocide, refugeedom – and that “coincidence” often glosses deeper historical
16 processes and propinquities.
17
18
19

20
21 Edified yet alienated by our compulsory cosmopolitanism, I was reminded of the same
22 linkages in the Armenian American press: Stepan Piligian underscored Turkey’s joint military
23 exercises with Azerbaijan and Pakistan, administration of the Kabul airport, and materiel support
24 for the Taliban.²² A post on *reddit Armenia* asking “What can we learn from the Taliban?”
25 garnered nearly 400 comments, and ~~was subsequently written up by~~ Raffi Elliott ~~who~~ suggested
26 the Afghanistan war provides “answers to questions that Armenians have been reeling over since
27 last autumn’s war.”²³ ~~And~~ Edmond Azadian opined, “Those of us who believed that
28 Afghanistan is a faraway country and events there do not concern us will soon realize just how
29 close Afghanistan is to Armenia.”²⁴
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 It is indisputable that Armenians, Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Iranians, Sephardic and Mizrahi
38 Jews, Assyrians, Afghans, and other SWANA communities share histories and have been
39 racialized together. Moreover, including Armenians and other SWANA groups within Ethnic
40 Studies is neither multiculturalism, nor importing into non-Whiteness those who sometimes can
41 and do pass for White. Instead, blind spots around these communities’ marginalization--and
42 the cognitive dissonance they produce – trace how oppression and identity are multivalent, ad
43 hoc and global. These ambiguities index the limits of Ethnic Studies bringing US-centric
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 frameworks to bear on the rest of the world, rendering a vast littoral from Morocco to
11 Afghanistan “White” in ways that make little or no sense. By treating the codified categories of
12 White, Black, Asian, Native American, and Latino as descriptive or ascriptive rather than
13 pedagogical and performative, some scholars who benefit from these framings fail to do justice
14 to liminal subjectivity, parsing identity and justice with little generosity or nuance. These
15 structural boundaries either obscure SWANA peoples through the epistemic violence of
16 omission, or shoehorn us into facile, colorist critiques that collapse difference, suggest
17 unidirectional oppression, and calculate identity as zero-sum games of either/or, neither/or,
18 North/South, White/of color.

25 I have read Spivak here as offering just the corrective “Thinking SWANA” offers to
26 sharpen Ethnic Studies: shedding light on indigenous peoples like Armenians, long without a
27 state and now desperately clinging to a sliver of one overlooking stolen lands across the Middle
28 East. “Thinking SWANA” undermines the methodological nationalism of various disciplines,
29 and resists states’ ability to often quite effectively co-opt subaltern political projects. It
30 “Thinking SWANA” honors Ethnic Studies’ methodology and carries it into new territory by
31 embracing the generative messiness of peoples at the margins, disparate across American strata
32 by virtue of citizenship, class, white-passing privilege, education, and violent attacks on Islam. It
33 is not my wont to be optimistic, but at its best, “Thinking SWANA” allows us to mobilize
34 different critiques, affinities, connections, challenges and relationalities that currently seem like
35 afterthoughts. This maneuver against institutionalization *is* the Spivakian, deconstructionist, and
36 Marxist move, to tirelessly litigate against the cruel optimisms of the state’s sanctioning of
37 difference.²⁵

Commented [SM2]: I do love the rhythm of the repetition but deleted to tighten and I think this is powerful as it stands!

1:

I hope this essay both documents a moment of struggle, and takes seriously the activists² “break” and challenge of activists seriously: *Are we ready to discard hegemonies, and to decry imperialism, ethnic cleansing, oppression whenever and wherever they occur? Are we committed, as Said exhorts, to instinctively find ourselves on the other side of power?*²⁶ *Are we committed to a new Leftism worthy of the present?* We must be, since this moment of crisis demands we place contradictions at the center, not margins, of our analysis, and commit to a fundamentally different vision of liberation that insists, “There's room for everyone at the rendezvous of victory.”²⁷

¹ Ultimately, Newsom signed Assembly Bill 101 Ethnic Studies into law, amending the earlier AB 331. A. B. Bill 331, Sess. 2019-2020; and building on earlier AB-2016 Pupil instruction: ethnic studies.

https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB331; A.B. 101, Sess. 2020-2021.

https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB101

²Nora Mishanec. “3 Incidents at Armenian church, school now considered hate crimes.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. September 23, 2020. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/3-incidents-at-S-F-Armenian-church-school-now-15591677.php>; Leeza Arakelian. “Armenian Schools in California Vandalized with Turkish Flags.” *The Armenian Weekly*. January 29, 2019. <https://armenianweekly.com/2019/01/29/armenian-schools-in-california-vandalized-with-turkish-flags/>. For related but unsettling attacks on Chaldean Churches, which were similarly unreported, see “Vandals attack Chaldean Church in California.” *Union of Catholic Asian News*. September 28, 2002. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/vandals-attack-chaldean-church-in-california/89679>

³Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Other Asias*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008). 99; David Kazanjian and Anahid Kassabian. “You Have to Want to be Armenian Here’: Nationalisms, Sexualities and the Problem of American Diasporic Identity.” *Armenian Forum 1* (Spring 1998) 19-36

⁴ Spivak 217

⁵ Spivak 107, 124

⁶Thomas Simsarian Dolan. “Unusual Figures: Race, Empire and Unseeing the Global Middle East.” PhD Diss. George Washington University, 2021

⁷Berge Bulbulian. *The Fresno Armenians*. (Fresno: The Press at California State University Fresno, 2000); John Tehranian. *Whitewashed*. (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Janice Okoomian. “Becoming White: Contested History, Armenian American Women, and Racialized Bodies.” *MELUS*. Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 2002). 213–237; Peter Balakian. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003).

⁸ The most famous of these freedom fighters was Monte Melkonian. See Markar Melkonian. *My Brother's Road: An American's Fateful Journey to Armenia*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Monte Melkonian. *A Self-Criticism*. transl. Seta Melkonian, ed. Gregory Topalian. (London: Gomidas Institute, 2010).

⁹ Spivak 7, 99, 97

¹⁰ Spivak 217, 226

¹¹ Spivak 103

¹² Spivak 232

¹³ On Marx, Engels and Luxembourg's divergent views of Armenian nationalism, see Anahide Ter Minassian. *La Question Arménienne*. (Roquevaire, France: Editions Parenthèses, 1983). 81, 82. See also Spivak on Lenin, 112-114

¹⁴ For reference, see Gerald Horne's corpus, Erik S. McDuffie. *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism and the Making of Black Left Feminism*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Mary L. Dudziak. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Spivak 100-101

¹⁶ Spivak notes that a fundamentally Eurocentric (yet Europhobic) telos strains to attend to "the specific history of the ruthless treatment of Armenians in the Kemalist period in Turkey." Spivak 112. Spivak also pries apart "the inevitable coupling of nation and state," and Eurocentric "concept of *nation* that coded and backed up the dynamics of a capitalist state," rightly noting "The Armenian intellectual cannot stage the nation-state within 'the scholarship of nationalist movements' which requires the script of industrial capitalist colonialism → imperialism as the master model for reactive and imperfect nationalism," Spivak 107.

¹⁷ Spivak offers these perceptions only to correct them, noting "Armenians have always had a lukewarm press in the West," and that "the British played them false repeatedly in the Indian theater," before indicating that "Indian nationalism joined hands with Armenian nationalism," to emphasize historical solidarities, however marginalized. Spivak 111, 112

¹⁸ Spivak 217, 215, 124

¹⁹ Spivak 144, 217

²⁰ Spivak 124

²¹ Spivak is closer to Said than she acknowledges since her call for generalism is akin to Said's notion of amateurism, and emphasizes the creation of a broadened community of concern and ethics of solidarity that acknowledges but transcends certain forms of difference.

²² Stepan Piligian. "Wolves in sheep's clothing are still wolves." *The Armenian Weekly*. 15 September 2021. <https://armenianweekly.com/2021/09/15/wolves-in-sheeps-clothing-are-still-wolves/>; Vahram Ayvazyan. "Pakistan Deploys Turkish and Chinese Drones in Afghanistan." *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*. 14 September 2021. <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/09/14/pakistan-deploys-turkish-and-chinese-drones-in-afghanistan/>; Yeghia Tashjian. "Turkey's Pivot in Central Asia: A Calculated Risk?" *The Armenian Weekly*. 17 February 2021. <https://armenianweekly.com/2021/02/17/turkeys-pivot-in-central-asia-a-calculated-risk/>; Dion Lim. "Bay Area Teen Creates Club to Tutor Refugees from Afghanistan and Beyond." *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*. 16 September 2021. <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/09/16/bay-area-teen-creates-club-to-tutor-refugees-from-afghanistan-and-beyond/>

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11 ²³ r/Armenia. "What can we learn from the Taliban?"

12 https://www.reddit.com/r/armenia/comments/p56srh/what_can_we_learn_from_taliban/;
13 Defiantly, but stereotypically, Elliott framed Armenians and Afghans as "Mountain people,
14 combined with resolve around a shared goal and patience...impossible to overcome." Raffi
15 Elliott. "Lessons for Armenia and Artsakh from Afghan Debacle." *The Armenian Mirror*
16 *Spectator*. 17 August 2021. [https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/08/17/lessons-for-armenia-and-](https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/08/17/lessons-for-armenia-and-artsakh-from-afghan-debacle/)
17 [artsakh-from-afghan-debacle/](https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/08/17/lessons-for-armenia-and-artsakh-from-afghan-debacle/)

18 ²⁴Edmond Azadian. "Afghanistan on Armenia's Political Agenda." *The Armenian Mirror-*
19 *Spectator*. 2 September 2021. [https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/09/02/afghanistan-on-armenias-](https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/09/02/afghanistan-on-armenias-political-agenda/)
20 [political-agenda/](https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/09/02/afghanistan-on-armenias-political-agenda/)

21 ²⁵Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Patchen Markell.
22 *Bound by Recognition*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

23 ²⁶Edward Said. "I find myself instinctively on the other side of power". Interview with Joan
24 Smith." *The Guardian*. 10 December 2001.

25 ²⁷This quote from Aimé Césaire was one of Said's favorites. Edward Said. "At the rendezvous of
26 victory." *Edward Said, Culture and Resistance: Interviews with David*
27 *Barsamian*. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003). 159-196
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Reorienting the Asian/American International

1
2
3
4
5
6 In critiquing imperialism from the perspective of Asian American Studies, this forum
7
8 essay provides insights into how SWANA Studies and Critical Muslim Studies opens up the
9
10 possibility to contend with and think through the Global War on Terror and anti-Muslim racism.
11
12 Indeed, in transforming the (South-)West Asian American political imaginary, SWANA offers
13
14 Asian American studies an expansive analytic to examine the race-making at the center of US
15
16 empire—a process that has been central to an imperial world order that has marked various
17
18 communities across the world for domination, exploitation, and elimination. Moreover, SWANA
19
20 affords us the possibility to think through anti-Muslim racial logics particularly as it relates to
21
22 US imperialism in the “Greater Middle East.” Thus, in highlighting how the figure of “the
23
24 Muslim” cuts across disciplinary boundaries as well as geographic and temporal cartographies,
25
26 this essay explains why Muslims and Islam must be central to Asian American Studies, SWANA
27
28 Studies, and other critical fields that examine race-making and coloniality today.
29
30
31
32

33 SWANA is vital to expanding Asian American Studies’ political scope in disrupting its
34
35 spatial, temporal, and intellectual borders. Yet, if the latter was constituted through anti-
36
37 imperialist politics, then how can SWANA expand its political imaginary to refute and resist the
38
39 imperial racism that targets Muslims within the SWANA region and beyond? I take up this
40
41 question of reframing Asian American internationalism by exploring the complex racialization of
42
43 Muslims and the histories of East Asian solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. In doing so, I not
44
45 only expand the scope of Asian American Studies and anti-Asian violence but also offer a
46
47 critique vis-à-vis SWANA and the racialization of Muslims as a way to expand our field’s
48
49 historical and political commitments.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 In a 2018 essay entitled, “No Muslims Involved: Letter to Ethnic Studies Comrades,”
4
5 Junaid Rana draws upon the scholarship of Sylvia Wynter to invite comrades in both critical
6
7 ethnic studies and Asian American studies to critically rethink our “inability to challenge racism
8
9 and white supremacy for its dehumanization of Islam and Muslims.”¹ For Rana, this invitation to
10
11 “forge a more expansive political and intellectual agenda” is very much at the center of
12
13 Asian/American studies and is “part of the field’s intellectual strength to include cross-racial
14
15 spaces of alignment and solidarity.”² His provocation arrived during a critical conjuncture within
16
17 US politics where white nationalists were doubling down on the ongoing American settler
18
19 colonial project by invoking the racial figure of the Muslim to further securitize, militarize, and
20
21 police borders and cities. At the time, scholars like Rana were situating critical inquiry within a
22
23 wave of social movements responding to these racialized conditions. Protests against the Muslim
24
25 Ban, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and police killings of Black Americans brought many
26
27 communities into intimate contact with one another—reigniting discourses and practices of
28
29 building solidarity in and across the United States, and to different parts of the world, especially
30
31 Palestine.

32 33 34 35 36 37 **Palestine Solidarity and Asian American Movements**

38
39
40 These movements and conversations did not fade quietly into the background as the
41
42 world dealt with disease, economic precarity, and death in the aftermath of the COVID-19
43
44 pandemic. In fact, as we all know now, the pandemic exacerbated these conditions to the point
45
46 where communities erupted in protest across US cities in the spring and summer of 2020.
47
48 Moreover, the pandemic also revealed that anti-Asian racism had not quite faded away either.
49
50 With the surge in anti-Asian violence, which peaked in March 2021 in the Atlanta Spa shootings,
51
52 Asian American scholars and activists campaigned domestically to #StopAsianHate, disavowing
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 the structural and imperial aspects of Asian racialization. A year into the pandemic, Palestine
4 also re-entered the frame of public discussion as Zionist forces evicted Palestinian families from
5 Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem and stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of
6
7
8
9
10 Ramadan.

11
12 Asian/American activists and scholars, particularly during the Third World Liberation
13 movements of the 1960s, have found ways to forge solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for
14 liberation from the illegal Zionist occupation by Israel. While this intellectual and political
15 history is best captured by Yuri Kochiyama and her meetings with the Palestinian Liberation
16 Organization in the late 1960s and 1970s, another but less-known Japanese communist and
17 founder of the Japanese Red Army, Fusako Shigenobu, spent 20-years in prison in Japan for her
18 commitment to Palestinian liberation. Released in May 2022, Shigenobu worked closely with the
19 Marxist faction of the PLO, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), building
20 solidarity and providing support to the “Palestinian people through humanitarian, artistic, and
21 grassroots efforts.”³ After it became known to the Israeli government that Japanese activists were
22 participating in PFLP operations in the early 1970s, Shigenobu was targeted by the Zionist state
23 and INTERPO and forced on the run. Her fugitivity, capture, and eventual imprisonment
24 signifies how international forces colluded to contain and eliminate a possible pan-Asian
25 internationalism that has essentially been forgotten and silenced. Even though this radical history
26 of militant activism has largely been excised from dominant narratives in ethnic studies, the
27 commitment of Shigenobu and Kochiyama to Palestine, among many other struggles,
28 demonstrates not only East-West Asian solidarity, but also the radical potentiality and threat this
29 political formation poses to global white supremacy and Zionism.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Beyond these two figures, the question of Palestine has also fostered important debates and interventions within the field of Asian American Studies. Scholars such as Diane Fujino, Sunaina Maira, Magid Shihade, Junaid Rana, and more recently Loubna Qutami, Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, and Jennifer Lynn Kelly have reinvigorated the field's robust comparative, relational, and global analyses of settler colonialism, US empire, and decolonization.⁴ Similar to previous scholarship, this younger generation of radical scholars has not simply carried on an anti-Zionist tradition, but have *invited* us—to borrow from Kelly—to structure our critiques of empire, militarism, and displacement in and through the ongoing occupation of Palestine. In many ways, SWANA Studies provides a potent avenue for Asian American studies to expand its political and intellectual horizons by building and creating space for struggle and solidarity against greater imperialist and Zionist forces. However, as Louise Cainkar explains, despite the marginality that SWANA Studies and Arab American Studies continues to face within the academy, “the facts on the ground reveal another story: robust and expanding solidarity movements locally, nationally, and globally that do not bend to—indeed, on principle, would not bend to—pressures to exclude Palestinians and Arabs.”⁵ Social movements, as Robin D. G. Kelley repeatedly reminds us, are the “incubators of new knowledge.”⁶ These movements on the ground have opened up “spaces of alignment and solidarity” that have produced a generation of scholar-activists who are driven to create new forms knowledge that not only push the intellectual borders of Asian American Studies, but to also pursue a tradition that is challenged by the neoliberal university.

Critical Muslim Studies and SWANA Diasporas

SWANA diaspora and Arab American Studies provides our field with an avenue to contend with and think through Palestine, the Global War on Terror, anti-Arab racism, US

1
2
3 sanctions on Iran, and contemporary immigration restrictions. However, a critical Muslim studies
4
5 approach stretches the borders of these academic disciplines and their questions even further.
6

7
8 While Muslims have historically been a faith-based community, critical Muslim studies scholars
9
10 foreground the racialization of Muslims to reveal how anti-Muslim racism shapes the lives of not
11
12 only SWANA and South Asian diasporas, but many other groups that have been racialized as
13
14 Muslim as result of the Global War on Terror.⁷ In this way, foregrounding the figure of the
15
16 Muslim opens a new horizon of possibilities and solidarities for Asian diasporas.
17
18

19
20 While Arabs, Palestinians, and others from SWANA region have been racialized by the
21
22 logics of terror, it is the racial figure of the Muslim that also haunts the US and Western
23
24 imaginary. Long before the War on Terror, Islam in the US was widely understood through its
25
26 relationship with Blackness, Black protest, and global anticolonialism. Between the 1940s and
27
28 1960s, some Black Muslims began forging internationalist anticolonial political alliances with
29
30 other Muslims and non-Muslims throughout the Third World, including with the Palestinian
31
32 struggle.⁸ This internationalism of Black radicals and the political intimacies forged with the so-
33
34 called Muslim world became the greatest security threat to the United States. The United States
35
36 responded to these internationalist political alliances by containing and domesticating the
37
38 insurgent energies of Black radicals through Cold War liberal policies, policing, security, and
39
40 prisons—giving shape to the “Black criminal.” While the rise of the “Black criminal” curtailed
41
42 the radical internationalist political formations, simultaneously the global emergence of the
43
44 “Muslim terrorist” supplied the United States military the ideological and political capital to
45
46 intervene and dominate the so-called Muslim world.
47
48
49
50

51
52 What’s more, leftist Arab and Iranian diasporic student activism emerged alongside these
53
54 insurgent Black internationalist movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, especially in the
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israel War. In an effort to curtail heightened anti-Zionist activity on
4 college campuses, the national security state identified Arab as well as Iranian student groups as
5 potential terror threats. According to historian Pamela E. Pennock, the FBI and CIA began
6 investigating student groups as potential terror threats for allegedly having connections to not
7 only revolutionary groups in the United States but throughout the Third World, including
8 Palestine.⁹ In this forum, Manijeh Moradian also reveals the effects of the political climate on
9 Iranian diasporic students in the United States. In her research, Moradian argues that prior to the
10 consolidation of Muslims and Islam as a menacing threat to US empire, anti-Shah Iranian student
11 activists in the United States were also racialized by the logics of Cold War anticommunism. In
12 organizing one of the largest transnational anti-imperialist student groups, the Confederation of
13 Iranian Students (National Union), Iranian diasporic students “rejected Cold War assimilation
14 and embraced Third World internationalism as a mode of resistance” during the same era.¹⁰

15
16
17 To this end, while the racialization of Arab and Iranian students in the United States as
18 “terrorists” developed in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, anti-Shah movements, and
19 global anticolonialism, it was in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution where racialized
20 discourses of terror began to be systematically expressed through Islam. Moradian explains how
21 the 1979 revolution shifted the anti-communist fears of the American public to the a racial-
22 religious narrative that “whipped up fears of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist.”¹¹ The Iranian
23 revolution along with “long-standing orientalist notions of Islam” inherently structured Muslim
24 racialization in the decades to come.¹² Consequently, producing a unique “racial-religious” form
25 of Muslimness as not only being despotic, irrational, and immoral—to recall Edward Said—but
26 also unruly and rebellious.¹³

1
2
3 The national security state began expanding and crafting a new language of “terrorism”
4 to describe this political threat within the milieu of radicalism amongst Black, Arab, Iranian, and
5 other diasporic formations. In addition, many state surveillance programs, such as
6 COINTELPRO, that had targeted, intimidated, and silenced Black radical groups, expanded to
7 monitor the anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist political activity of Arab and Iranian students.¹⁴
8 Even after COINTELPRO was dismantled in 1971, the Nixon administration continued to bring
9 attention to the necessity of surveilling Arab and Iranian diasporic communities, especially after
10 the 1972 Olympics incident in Munich. Some of these programs that Pennock details were for
11 “screening more closely visa applications of potential terrorists” and aimed to “tighten controls”
12 over groups that have connections with ‘movements advocating or practicing political terrorism,
13 e.g... groups of Arab and Iranian students in this country’; and increase protections for Israelis in
14 the United States.”¹⁵ Other programs, such as the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism and
15 Operation Boulder were direct militarized responses to Arab American political dissent against
16 Zionist occupation and its intimacies with US empire.
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 The state production of the racialized terror threat through these historically contingent
36 surveillance programs developed a public consensus for defining, and therefore making legible,
37 what constitutes terrorism, who embodies it, and what are its consequences. For Black, Arab, and
38 Iranian radicals the consequences entailed surveillance, harassment, deportation, and sometimes
39 death. However, the expansion of the category of terrorism to include not only political violence
40 but also political dissent has had wide ranging and detrimental effects on social protest
41 movements, especially movements that have challenged US empire, white supremacy, and
42 Zionism.
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 While in the previous decades radical Black, Arab, and Iranian student activists had been
4 racialized as terrorists, in the post-9/11 era these same groups, among many other diverse groups,
5 have been racialized as Muslim. Part of what structures this form of Muslim racialization, and
6 makes it unique from other racial processes, is the racial-religious understanding of Islam as a
7 pathological religious system that shapes the monstrous and rebellious sensibilities of Muslims.
8 According to this logic, Muslims are not simply racially different because of their skin color, but
9 they are targeted by an entire security infrastructure for what they may become in the future: a
10 terrorist. Within mainstream discourse, Bernard Lewis's "The Roots of Muslim Rage" essay in
11 *The Atlantic* (1990) and Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilization" thesis in *Foreign Affairs*
12 (1993) have been cited as exemplary Orientalist thinking of empire. However, less critiqued are
13 liberals who have taken a valiant anti-Muslim position themselves—even self-identifying
14 Muslims, such as London's first Muslim mayor Sadiq Khan. Appearing in an interview on
15 CNBC in 2016 and echoing the racial panic driving the question, "Why do they hate us?" in the
16 immediate aftermath of 9/11, Khan commented, "We have to recognize that what these terrorists
17 hate about us is our way of life. We respect each other. We embrace each other. We celebrate
18 each other."¹⁶ Khan's self-Orientalizing discourse reproduces a similar clash of civilizations
19 logic that valorizes the West as a site of multiculturalism and diversity distinct from the rest of
20 the world, particularly the global south. In fact, his statement falls precisely in line with
21 Mahmood Mamdani's "good Muslim, bad Muslim" thesis: that Muslims are "now under
22 obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against 'bad Muslims.'"¹⁷

23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
Khan echoes the logic of the Western security state and its necessity to respond to this
unpredictable threat—a threat that has said to have "no borders" and has its political roots in
Black protest and pan-Asian internationalism. In our day and age, the racial figure of the Muslim

1
2
3 terrorist has become “neither national, transnational, nor regional, but global, whereby being
4 everywhere and nowhere at the same time.”¹⁸ In this way, the racial figure of the Muslim is
5
6 unbounded to any geographical or temporal cartographies as well as disciplinary boundaries.
7
8 This tension between the global and domestic makes the racial figure of the Muslim central to
9
10 the practices of white supremacy and global empire.
11
12
13

14 **Conclusion**

15
16
17 By centering anti-Muslim racism as a global phenomenon—and not just a domestic or
18 regional one—there is a possibility to rekindle an internationalism that I argue has to some extent
19 been contained since the origins of our field. In just our current moment, analyses of anti-Asian
20 racism have become exclusively domestic. Furthermore, while having been theorized as the
21 “forever war,” in many ways the Global War on Terror has become the “forgotten war.”
22
23 SWANA and the emergent field of critical Muslim studies offers possibilities to expand the
24 intellectual and political commitments of critical ethnic studies scholars and activists alike. In
25 doing this, we may begin to make connections across geographies and regions, and collectively
26 mobilize against the dominant global forces that have expanded their settler colonial and
27 neocolonial projects—whether in India, Palestine, or in North America. Is violence against
28 Palestinians, Indian Muslims, Afghans, Iraqis, Yemenis, and others from the SWANA region
29 who have been subjected to anti-Muslim violence also not a form of anti-Asian violence? To
30 exclude these populations, and to limit the subjects of violence, forecloses the possibilities of
31 connection, intimacy, and solidarity that is at the center of the political and intellectual
32 commitment of Asian American studies. Yet, it is in the genealogy of Asian American
33 internationalism where we find such formations of dissent, protest, and radicalism in and
34 alongside Muslims across the world.
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

¹ Junaid Rana, “No Muslims Involved: A Letter to Ethnic Studies Comrades,” in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 101.

² Ibid.

³ May Shigenobu, “Fusako Shigenobu, an Open-Ended Revolution,” *The Funambulist Magazine*, April 13, 2022, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/decentering-the-us/fusako-shigenobu-an-open-ended-revolution>.

⁴ Diane Fujino and Junaid Rana, “Taking Risks, or The Question of Palestine Solidarity and Asian American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2015): 1027-1037; Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S.,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9, no. 2 (2006): 117-140; Loubna Qutami, “Censusless: Arab/Muslim Interpolation into Whiteness and the War on Terror,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23, no. 2 (2020): 161-200; Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022); Jennifer Lynn Kelly, *Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism across Occupied Palestine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).

⁵ Louise Cainkar, “Palestine—and Empire—Are Central to Arab American/SWANA Studies” *Journal of Palestine Studies* (2021): 8.

⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 8.

⁷ Soham Patel and M. Bilal Nasir, “The Asianist is Muslim: Thinking Through Anti-Muslim Racism with the Muslim Left,” in *Who is the Asianist? The Politics of Representation in Asian*

1
2
3
4 *Studies*, eds. Will Bridges, Nitasha Tamar Sharma, and Marvin D. Sterling (New York:
5
6
7 Columbia University Press, 2022).

8
9 ⁸ Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom*
10
11 *Beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being*
12
13 *Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (New York: New York
14
15 University Press, 2018).

16
17
18 ⁹ Pamela E. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight*
19
20 *against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s-1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,
21
22 2017); Pamela E. Pennock, "From 1967 to Operation Boulder: The Erosion of Arab Americans'
23
24 Civil Liberties in the 1970s," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2018): 41-52.

25
26
27 ¹⁰ Manijeh Moradian, "'Down with the Shah!': Political Racialization and the Iranian Foreign
28
29 Student Revolt." *American Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2022): 716.

30
31
32 ¹¹ Manijeh Moradian, "'Down with the Shah!'" 730.

33
34
35 ¹² Ibid.

36
37
38 ¹³ Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim*.

39
40
41 ¹⁴ Pamela E. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left*; Pamela E. Pennock, "From 1967 to
42
43 Operation Boulder."

44
45
46 ¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

47
48
49 ¹⁶Christine Wang. "London Mayor: Terrorists Hate Our Way of Life." CNBC. September 19, 2016.
50
51 <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/19/london-mayor-terrorists-hate-our-way-of-life.html>.

52
53
54 ¹⁷ Mahmood Mamdani. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and The Roots of*
55
56 *Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), 15.

57
58
59 ¹⁸ Patel and Nasir, "Asianist is Muslim."

1
2
3 “Affects of Solidarity: Remapping Asian America in Theory and Practice”
4
5

6 Manijeh Moradian
7
8
9

10 The category Asian American has been contested and expanded ever since it came into
11 use in the late 1960s to name a new coalitional formation organized against racism and
12 imperialist war. Instead of maintaining the primacy of separate ethnic or national identities, the
13 term “Asian American” gave voice to a political identity that brought activists together across
14 ethnic, linguistic, religious and national lines.¹ The development of the term SWANA (South-
15 West Asia North Africa) is part of this ongoing process by which new ways of naming and
16 identifying arise from lived experiences of and political responses to the dialectic between US
17 imperialism abroad and domestic regimes of racialization and state repression. This article
18 argues that visceral, embodied reactions to this dialectic—in particular, the desire to resist the
19 many forms of resulting violence—generate “affects of solidarity” as the animating force behind
20 SWANA and as the basis for situating SWANA in Asian American Studies.
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 SWANA, like the term “Asian American,” disrupts imperial divisions of land, culture,
36 and people by rejecting the geographical mappings of imperial spheres of influence and interest,
37 such as “Near East” and “Far East.” SWANA, like Asian American, relies on an “affective map”
38 of affiliation based on shared feelings about what it has been like to be on the target end of
39 specific modalities of US empire.² These include military interventions and occupations, the
40 imposition of brutal dictatorships, collective punishment via economic sanctions, forced
41 migration and displacement, internment, special registrations and other forms of state
42 surveillance, and even the pressures that produce model minority assimilation as a means of
43 dividing racialized populations in the US. My argument is that these imperial modalities are
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 lived and felt at the level of the body, as visceral sensations and energies that have no inherent or
4 pre-determined ideological or political direction. They linger as memory, as bodily potential. The
5 role of social movements is to channel these affective intensities towards certain interpretations
6 and away from others, to offer what the sociologist Deborah Gould has called “an emotional
7 pedagogy for how to feel and what to do in light of those feelings.”³ Affects of solidarity, then,
8 can be understood as both a driver and an outcome of the knowledge produced and disseminated
9 through social movements.
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 As Sunaina Maira has shown, in the aftermath of 9/11, such a wide range of impacted
20 communities organized in opposition to attacks on their civil rights that “it was virtually
21 impossible to name a single category for political mobilization that could encompass Muslims as
22 well as non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, Middle Easterners and non-Middle Easterners.”⁴ An
23 affective approach to understanding these mobilizations suggests that overlapping desires to
24 resist the racist, Islamophobic backlash in the US and the new era of military interventions
25 abroad overflowed existing identity categories, crossed established borders of identity, and
26 facilitated new manifestations of what Maira calls “political community.”⁵ Distinct from
27 allyship, pity, charity or guilt, affects of solidarity emerge from and describe an embodiment of
28 social relations in which the freedom and futures of different groups of people are felt and
29 understood to be linked.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44 As I have argued elsewhere, affects of solidarity made Third World internationalism
45 possible in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Asian American Movement came into being, as a
46 worldview in which, for example, the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam was understood to be
47 a victory for liberation movements globally or when freedom for Palestine was a rallying cry
48 around which other anti-colonial movements could unite.⁶ As the Iranian revolutionary
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Shokrollah Paknejad said when he was put on trial in Tehran in 1969 for attempting to join the
4 guerilla wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, “Palestine is a turning point in the anti-
5 imperialist struggle in this region; and the secret of the final defeat of imperialism is to be found
6 in these wars of liberation.”⁷ In this example, the political alliance between the Shah, the US and
7 Israel made it possible for the desire to liberate Iran from imperialism to fuse with the desire for
8 a free Palestine. The resulting orientation towards regional solidarity became a powerful
9 mobilizing force for Iranian leftists, both inside and outside of Iran.

19 Affects of solidarity continue to circulate through contemporary transnational and
20 internationalist affiliations, including through what Gayatri Gopinath has called “queer
21 diaspora.”⁸ Queer diaspora, she argues, enacts a “queer incursion into area studies framings of
22 ‘Asia’” by placing disparate experiences of oppression in relation to one other, charting the
23 connections between distinct forms of state repression, specific modes of racialization, and
24 particular deployments of gender and sexual regulation and domination.⁹ The affects of solidarity
25 that circulate among queer diasporas can fuel feminist challenges to heteronormative, nationally
26 bounded histories and cultural or religious essentialisms and open up non-identitarian ways of
27 situating one’s own experience. Rather than feeling caught between discourses of ethnic/national
28 authenticity on the one hand, and westernization/assimilation on the other, the space of queer
29 diaspora offers a vantage point from which to critique the compulsory heterosexuality and rigid
30 gender binary that shores up dominant cultures in both host and home countries. It is no
31 coincidence that the term SWANA was first developed by queer and feminist coalitions.¹⁰ While
32 affects of solidarity can traverse many different types of borders, they do not guarantee equal
33 relations within coalitions. They can reproduce existing hierarchies or challenge them, or some
34 combination, but they nonetheless form a vital and powerful basis for collective organizing.¹¹

1
2
3 As an affective formation, SWANA endeavors to channel the fear, grief and rage
4
5 generated by the 21st century “war on terror” towards a shared political project. As the SWANA
6
7 Alliance, an activist network with chapters in several US cities, explains, its name offers a new
8
9 geographical framework and a political orientation:
10

11
12 S.W.A.N.A. is a decolonial word for the South West Asian/North African
13
14 (S.W.A.N.A.) region in place of Middle Eastern, Near Eastern, Arab World or
15
16 Islamic World that have colonial, Eurocentric, and Orientalist origins and are
17
18 created to conflate, contain and dehumanize our people. We use SWANA to speak
19
20 to the diversity of our communities and to forward the most vulnerable in our
21
22 liberation. (SWANAalliance.org/about)
23
24
25

26 “SWANA” is thus a rejection of colonial categories and classifications and also de-emphasizes
27
28 the nation-state as the sole unit by which self-determination is measured in favor of a broader
29
30 commitment to liberation for the heterogenous populations of a border-crossing, continent-
31
32 crossing region. In this sense we might understand SWANA as a supranational “queer region,”
33
34 providing what Gopinath has argued can be an alternative to national and imperial
35
36 cartographies.¹² The regional delineation of SWANA works to destabilize the “heteronormative
37
38 and patrilineal underpinnings of conventional articulations of diaspora and nation,” moving away
39
40 from nostalgia for lost origins and model minority assimilation and towards diasporic desires for
41
42 a liberation that is expansive and intersectional.¹³ Such affects of solidarity render SWANA more
43
44 than just another imperfect term for an unwieldy geo-political terrain, and instead highlight a
45
46 lived and felt desire for a political collective unbounded by any single identity category or by a
47
48 normative authenticity that props up patriarchal gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality. In
49
50 the post-9/11 context of activism against Islamophobia, state surveillance, and war, the concept
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 of SWANA became a site for the accumulation of affects of solidarity, and in turn, helped to
4 inspire the affiliations it describes.
5
6

7
8 But as the SWANA Alliance statement above also illustrates, the intention “to speak to
9 the diversity of our communities and to forward the most vulnerable in our liberation” is a
10 recognition that internal hierarchies must be confronted to make solidarity meaningful.
11
12 Reckoning with regional systems of domination also means responding to regional imperialisms,
13 the marginalization and repression of ethnic and religious minorities, and the pervasiveness of
14 gender and sexual oppression throughout SWANA. For example, Iran’s ongoing military
15 interventions in Syria and Iraq and Morocco’s ongoing occupation of the Western Sahara make
16 clear that there are violent competing interests between peoples and states that cannot be
17 addressed only through opposition to US and European imperialism. In other words, the affects
18 of solidarity articulated through the conceptual decolonial framework of SWANA are a starting
19 point from which we must address imperial and also national, religious, racial, ethnic, gender and
20 sexual inequalities that are enacted by local groups or state actors, whether or not they are US
21 allies. This approach, what I call “intersectional anti-imperialism,” situates “SWANA” within a
22 genealogy of anti-racist, anti-imperialist feminism and queer of color critique that includes
23 several generations of Asian American feminist and queer interventions into ethnic male
24 nationalism as the dominant mode of opposing racism and empire.¹⁴
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

47 **Asian American Affects of Solidarity**

48

49 Despite the connections noted above, the parts of world gathered under the SWANA
50 umbrella have remained peripheral to Asian American Studies. The obvious geographic location
51 of some Arab countries and of Iran and Afghanistan within the Asian continent has not been
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 enough to merit inclusion in most departments, anthologies, and syllabi. This is despite the
4
5 publication of ground-breaking scholarship that addresses this erasure directly, such as Sunaina
6
7 Maira and Magid Shihade's 2006 article, "Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking
8
9 Race, Empire, and Zionism in the US." These authors explained that "[i]mperial power operates
10
11 by obscuring the links between homeland projects of racial subordination and minority co-
12
13 optation and overseas strategies of economic restructuring and political domination."¹⁵ We can't
14
15 understand how this dynamic works unless "we expand our frame of analysis" to look at how US
16
17 support for Israel and the US war on terror shape domestic policies of discrimination, detention,
18
19 surveillance, etc. If Asian American Studies fails to take seriously the impacts of US empire in
20
21 Arab countries and the resulting repression of Arabs and Muslims in the US, Maira and Shihade
22
23 argued, the field will be operating without a theory of empire in an age of renewed imperial
24
25 warfare, reduced to a nationally bounded mode of analyzing racial identity that easily collapses
26
27 into liberal multiculturalism and American exceptionalism.¹⁶
28
29
30
31
32

33 Almost twenty years later, the project of bringing Arab and other SWANA diasporas
34
35 fully into the purview of Asian American Studies is still quite far from where it could be and
36
37 ought to be given the dire need to respond to anti-Asian and Islamophobic violence and the
38
39 multi-faceted threats posed by US imperialism across Asia, the Pacific Islands and North Africa.
40
41 In order to aid in the process of placing SWANA and Asian American Studies within a shared
42
43 framework of solidarity, I offer two examples in which established Asian American institutions
44
45 and individuals were compelled to add Iranians, Arabs and Afghans to their "affective maps" of
46
47 affiliation and concern.¹⁷ The first occurred during the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis that
48
49 upended US-Iran relations in 1979, while the second is from the post-9/11 period.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 When the Iranian Revolution overthrew the US-backed Shah of Iran in January 1979,
4 there were more than 50,000 Iranian foreign students in the United States whose fate was
5 suddenly as uncertain as that of their homeland. As I have illustrated elsewhere, public opinion
6 about the presence of so many Iranians in the US went from overwhelmingly favorable or
7 agnostic to bitterly divided as early as November 1977, when a protest by thousands of anti-Shah
8 Iranians outside the White House erupted in violent clashes with pro-Shah demonstrators.¹⁸ Two
9 years later, in November 1979, a different group of students in Tehran stormed the US embassy
10 and took hostages, driving the anti-Iranian sentiment that had already been building across
11 different sectors of US society to ferocious new heights. Among the many manifestations of this
12 backlash was a new policy instituted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)
13 requiring all Iranians to report for interviews to determine their immigration status.¹⁹ A
14 precursor to the “special registration” program that would be implemented against people from
15 Muslim-majority countries after 9/11, this policy was accompanied by calls from politicians and
16 pundits for the mass detention and deportation of Iranians.²⁰ There were anti-Iranian rallies
17 across the US, open discrimination against Iranians at business and on campuses, and a string of
18 violent attacks on Iranian nationals.²¹ This widespread popular animosity, what Mohsen
19 Mobasher has called “Iranophobia,” tracks precisely with the 1979 revolutionary rejection of US
20 influence over Iran and starkly illustrates the link between racialization within the borders of the
21 US and US imperial relations in West Asia.²²

22
23
24 Among the few voices objecting to the hostility towards Iranians in the late 1970s, were
25 several prominent Japanese Americans for whom the special registrations program and the wave
26 of verbal and physical assaults against Iranians brought back painful memories of “the anti-
27 Japanese fervor” that accompanied mass internment during World War II.²³ Yoshio Nakashima,
28
29
30

1
2
3 a San Francisco community leader, told the *Washington Post*, “The first thing that came to my
4 mind [in the current crisis] is it’s happening all over. Just because you’re an Iranian it’s
5 automatically assumed you’re sympathetic with the Iranian government.” Nakashima called this
6 “[g]uilt by association or guilt by race” and noted this “is not what this country is based on.”²⁴ Of
7 course the fact that Nakashima’s initial reaction was “it’s happening all over” exposes the gap
8 between the ideals of American immigrant inclusion, summarized by his statement that racial
9 persecution is “not what this country is based on,” and a set of exclusionary practices that are
10 recurring. This contradiction shows why it is necessary to place the experiences of seemingly
11 disconnected ethnic or racial groups in relation to one another in order to fully understand how
12 populations are rendered “rightless.”²⁵ The empathy Nakashima felt with the plight of Iranians
13 found expression as solidarity, the desire to act on behalf of another because of a compelling
14 sense of commonality irreducible to narrow constructions of racial, ethnic or national identity.
15 Affects of solidarity made palpable and legible new connections between the racialization and
16 persecution of different Asian populations in the US that revealed the contractions at the heart of
17 American exceptionalism.

18
19 For some Japanese Americans, the affective resonance between their own traumatic
20 childhood memories and what they saw happening to Iranians provided the impetus to speak out.
21 Steven Doi, an attorney in San Francisco, told the *Post*, that attacks on Iranians were “a chilling
22 reminder ‘of the public’s treatment of Japanese-Americans during the war.’”²⁶ Doi remembered
23 “the ‘dirty looks’ he got from fellow students in his eighth-grade class after Pearl Harbor was
24 bombed, and the signs that went up in the local barbershop warning of ‘accidents’ that might
25 befall Japanese-American customers. “The sort of hatred toward Iranians, whether U.S. citizens
26 or not, whether pro-shah or anti-shah, is very similar to the feelings against Japanese-Americans

1
2
3 then,” Doi said. “People didn’t care who you were or what you felt. I know exactly how they [the
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Iranians] are feeling right now.”²⁷

Affects of solidarity as expressed explicitly by Doi served as conduits through which memories and emotions could travel across time and place, and between populations with roots on opposite ends of the Asian continent. Some Japanese Americans tried to intervene directly to stop Iranian students from being targeted based on their nationality. Yori Wada, a member of the University of California board of regents at the time, demanded that administrators at all campuses “protect Iranian students from harassment by [INS] officials and fellow students.”²⁸ Michael Yasutake, a leftist activist who was also the faculty advisor to a Chicago-based chapter of the anti-Shah Iranian Students Association (ISA), organized to defend ISA members from the Chicago police, college administrators, the FBI, the CIA, the INS and agents of SAVAK, the US-trained secret police.²⁹ The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) condoned the prosecution and deportation of Iranian students who broke the law, but worried that Iranians as a group were becoming the targets of discrimination. A mainstream organization dedicated to Japanese American patriotism and model minority inclusion in the US, it was significant that the JACL was moved to act, sending a telegram to President Carter in defense of Iranian’s civil rights and publicly supporting a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union to block “an unconstitutional ‘selective enforcement’ of immigration laws against the Iranians.”³⁰ While the JACL’s approach was indicative of the minority US nationalism it had long espoused, the experience of Japanese internment meant that the JACL also knew what the US government was capable of and could not look away. The affects of solidarity mobilized here were in excess of the actual politics of the organization, opening up the potential for

1
2
3 more radical interpretations of the backlash against Iranians as an iteration of the dialectic
4
5 between racist persecution in the US and US imperialism in Asia.
6

7
8 While the mass incarceration and deportation of Iranians did not come to pass in
9
10 1979, the concerns of the Japanese Americans cited above turned out to be well founded. A
11
12 secret INS document, titled “Alien Terrorists and Undesirables: A Contingency Plan” was
13
14 leaked to the press in 1987. The plan entailed the use of CIA and FBI intelligence to surveil,
15
16 round up, and detain nationals of seven Arab countries and Iran in a concentration camp in
17
18 Oakdale, Louisiana.³¹ A spokesman for the INS attempted to explain the document to the
19
20 *Los Angeles Times* by saying, “Its roots go back to the Iranian hostage situation.”³² The
21
22 affective and emotional responses of some Japanese Americans to the targeting of Iranians
23
24 thus reflected the scale of the threat more accurately than the general public knew at the
25
26 time.
27
28
29

30
31 As this “Contingency Plan” illustrates, Iranians and Arabs were constituted within the
32
33 same category of threat by the US government long before the 9/11 attacks. The spy agencies
34
35 charged with managing national security were well versed in the longer historical arc of
36
37 exclusionary tactics, such as internment, and able to adapt them to new populations. In the
38
39 aftermath of 9/11, there were renewed and expanded efforts to surveil, detain and deport Arabs,
40
41 Iranians, Afghans, Pakistanis and other/diverse groups of Muslims. But the “axis of evil” against
42
43 which President George W. Bush had declared war also included North Korea, a reminder that
44
45 those charged with pursuing US imperial interests were drawing their own maps of supposed
46
47 enemy nations and peoples across the Asian continent.
48
49
50

51
52 In this atmosphere of Islamophobia, racism, and open-ended war after 9/11, new
53
54 generations of activists, writers and artists from targeted populations found their voices and
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 began to challenge the policies and representational practices arrayed against them.³³ In 2008,
4 the Association of Iranian American Writers (AIAW) was founded in Berkeley, California by
5 Persis M. Karim to amplify diverse perspectives that could challenge the Orientalism and
6 demonization to which Iran and Iranian people are routinely subjected and which support the
7 logics of the “war on terror.” Karim had already edited two collections of Iranian American
8 writing and felt it was time to organize what had previously been an informal network.³⁴ I had
9 the honor of becoming the co-director, a volunteer position that involved supporting Iranian
10 American writers in New York City where I lived. My primary task was to organize public
11 readings for our members so their voices could reach wider audiences.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24 We/AIAW held readings at a range of venues, from bars to college campuses, but we
25 often found ourselves at the Asian American Writers Workshop (AAWW), a well-established
26 institution in New York already in its second decade of operations. Even though it is rare for
27 Iranian Americans to identify themselves as Asian Americans, my own affective and political
28 disposition oriented me towards coalition, rather than ethnic/national separatism. Still, I wasn't
29 sure how the idea of hosting a group of Iranians would be received the first time I approached
30 AAWW in 2008. The response from then director Ken Chen and then programs director Nina
31 Sharma was immediately positive. Neither of them questioned whether or not Iranians were
32 Asian, perhaps a reflection of a more expansive notion of Asian American already in operation,
33 one that was not confined to a conventional East Asian focus and already included Filipinx and
34 South Asian writers. No one at AAWW seemed concerned with policing the boundaries of the
35 category “Asian American.” Quite the opposite: Iranian American writers were welcomed, as if
36 we were finally showing up to a place where we belonged. We did multiple readings at AAWW,
37 always to packed crowds as we clearly tapped into a widespread desire for more complicated
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 narratives about Iran and Iranian Americans among fans and practitioners of Asian American
4 literature. Beginning in 2009, some of our members become regular participants at AAWW's
5 literary festivals and other events. AAWW also served as a gathering space that facilitated new
6 collaborations between AIAW, the Association of Afghan American Writers and the Radius of
7 Arab American Writers.
8
9

10
11
12
13
14
15 What was it that enabled the leadership of AAWW, and its audiences in New York City,
16 to embrace Iranian American literature as an emergent and legitimate part of Asian American
17 literature? As a 2010 article by Asian American studies scholars argues, "critics have avoided
18 defining and categorizing what exactly hallmarks, embodies and characterizes Asian American
19 literature, suspending any boundary making precisely because the contours of the racial
20 community continue to change."³⁵ The article declares the term "Asian American" inherently in
21 flux, and calls for the corresponding literary terrain to "remain malleable and mercurial, open to
22 continued critical negotiation."³⁶ The AAWW was named in this same article as an example of
23 how literary practices were often ahead of the academy in enacting a more capacious
24 understanding of Asian American literature. Co-authors Sohn, Lai and Goellnicht rooted these
25 developments in the particular historical moment: "The racial formation of the South Asian
26 American in the post-9/11 context has also culminated in questioning the Western boundary of
27 Asian American literature."³⁷ They cited AAWW's resulting "politic of maximal inclusion" as
28 the key that opened the door "to the addition of Arab American writers to their events and
29 readings."³⁸ Iranian Americans and Afghan Americans did not make it into the article, however,
30 as I know from first-hand experience, we did make it onto AAWW's stage.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 I understand AAWW's "politics of maximal inclusion" as a manifestation of affects of
52 solidarity circulating in a moment of intensified racialized repression. Literature, an art form that
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 thrives on the affective power of language, drove practices of affiliation that transcended
4 traditional definitions of “Asian American” and even the current self-identification of most
5 Iranian Americans.³⁹ Less important than the precise geographic location of where a writer was
6 born, or where their families migrated from, was the affective resonance across time, place and
7 ethnic/national identity, an embodied sense that we shared something in common despite the
8 nuances of our distinct histories. The affective power of literature to contend with legacies of
9 migration, racialization and state repression—and their re-invented and expanded modalities—
10 enables what Lisa Lowe has called an “immanent critique” of American exceptionalism and
11 empire. Participation in this shared affective, political and literary project made it possible for
12 Iranian, Afghan and Arab American writers to come together under the AAWW umbrella.⁴⁰
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27

28 **Conclusion**

29
30
31 The unexpected affiliations described above illustrate my central argument for an affective
32 approach to thinking SWANA in Asian American Studies. Theorizing affects of solidarity as the
33 basis for the creation of new political identities and activist formations can help us move beyond
34 imperial and academic borders of knowledge production and challenge conventional,
35 heteropatriarchal forms of diasporic nationalism, including the categories that many community
36 members may endorse. As the dynamics of 21st century US imperialism placed South West
37 Asian and North African populations and their diasporas in the crosshairs, mobilizing discourses
38 and policies that are distinctive but also iterative of previous eras of American empire, they also
39 generated overlapping affective responses. Embodied experiences of persecution, fear, grief and
40 the refusal to submit generated new “affective maps” charting new collective desires to resist.
41
42 This is, I argue, quite similar to the process that brought an “Asian American” political formation
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 into being in the late 1960s as a response to generations of domestic racism and the brutal US
4
5 war in Vietnam.
6

7
8 SWANA thus becomes legible as a way of channeling affects of solidarity towards new
9
10 political orientations that people feel are necessary to respond to the gender, sexual, religious,
11
12 and racial violences of our current imperial era. When it comes to the politics of naming,
13
14 SWANA offers a more capacious framework than terms such as “Middle Eastern,” or “Muslim-
15
16 American,” or “Iranian/Arab American,” because it is not defined by, and indeed transgresses the
17
18 borders of, national, colonial, and religious categories. The formation of SWANA as a political
19
20 category can strengthen the anti-imperial underpinnings of Asian American Studies and
21
22 challenge the pull of model minority exceptionalism that divides our peoples from each other and
23
24 from other racialized groups. Rather than seeking assimilation within an unjust system, the
25
26 affective impulses behind SWANA, like those which motivated the Asian American movement,
27
28 can transform the iterative links between different modes of racial/imperial domination into a
29
30 powerful source of solidarity.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

39 ¹ “Introduction: Reframing the Movement” in Maeda, Daryl Joji. *Rethinking the Asian American*
40 *Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2011, 1–8.

41 ² Jonathan Flatley’s concept of “affective mapping” refers to the situating of affects in historical
42 context and in relational to others. See *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of*
43 *Modernism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

44 ³ Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS*. Chicago:
45 University of Chicago Press, 2009, 28.

46 ⁴ Sunaina Marr Maira, *The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror*.
47 New York: NYU Press, 2016, 14.

48 ⁵ Maira, *The 9/11 Generation*, 13.

49 ⁶ See Manijeh Moradian, *This Flame Within: Iranian Revolutionaries in the United States*,
50 Durham: Duke University Press, 2022, 128–175.

51 ⁷ Shokrollah Paknejad, “The ‘Palestine Group’ Defends Itself in Military Tribunal,” Dec. 1970,
52 20. Parviz Shokat Papers. Hoover Institute. Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
- ⁸ Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018, 6.
- ⁹ Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*, 6.
- ¹⁰ Maira, *The 9/11 Generation*, 14.
- ¹¹ For a crucial discussion of anti-Blackness within SWANA, see Rayya El Zein, ed., *Journal of Cultural Studies Forum: Cultural Constructions of Race and Racism in the Middle East and North Africa / Southwest Asia and North Africa (MENA/SWANA)*, Issue 10.1, Spring 2021.
- ¹² Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*, 19–58.
- ¹³ Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*, 6.
- ¹⁴ Moradian, *This Flame Within*, 215-246.
- ¹⁵ Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S.,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 2006): 3.
- ¹⁶ Maira and Shihade, 3–4.
- ¹⁷ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 2.
- ¹⁸ Manijeh Moradian, “‘Down with the Shah!’ Political Racialization and the Iranian Foreign Student Revolt.” *American Quarterly*. September 2022.
- ¹⁹ David Rosenzweig, “Directive on Foreign Students Criticized,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1979.
- ²⁰ “Iranian Deportations Asked,” *Washington Post*, January 4, 1979 and “Bell Will Shake Up Immigration Unit: Angry at Iranian Students’ Unrest, He Seeks Deportation Reform,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1979.
- ²¹ Mohsen Mobasher, *Iranians in Texas: Migration, Politics and Ethnic Identity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012, 34–38.
- ²² Mobasher, *Iranians in Texas*, 57.
- ²³ Paul Grabowicz, “Acts Against Iranian Students Disturb Japanese-Americans,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1979, A21.
- ²⁴ Grabowicz, “Acts Against Iranian Students,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1979, A21.
- ²⁵ A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
- ²⁶ Grabowicz, “Acts Against Iranian Students,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1979, A21.
- ²⁷ Grabowicz, “Acts Against Iranian Students,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1979, A21.
- ²⁸ Grabowicz, “Acts Against Iranian Students,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1979, A21.
- ²⁹ Diane C. Fujino. *Nisei Radicals: The Feminist Poetics and Transformative Ministry of Mitsuye Yamada and Michael Yasutake*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020, 78-80.
- ³⁰ Grabowicz, “Acts Against Iranian Students,” *The Washington Post*, Nov 23, 1979, A21.
- ³¹ Jeanne A. Butterfield, “Do Immigrants Have First Amendment Rights?” *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Vol. 29, Fall 1999. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer212/do-immigrants-have-first-amendment-rights>
- ³² Ronald L. Soble, “INS Labels Terrorist Emergency Proposal Just “an Option Paper,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 7, 1987.
- ³³ On post-9/11 youth activism, see Maira, *The 9/11 Generation*.
- ³⁴ Persis M. Karim and Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, eds. *A World Between: Poems, Short Stories, and Essays by Iranian-Americans*. New York: George Braziller, 1999; and Persis M. Karim, ed., *Let Me Tell You Where I’ve Been: New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora*. Fayetteville, AK: The University of Arkansas Press, 2006.

1
2
3
4
5 ³⁵ Steven Hong Sohn, Paul Lai, and Donald C. Goellnicht, "Introduction: Theorizing Asian
6 American Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 4.

7 ³⁶ Sohn, Lai, and Goellnicht, 5.

8 ³⁷ Sohn, Lai, and Goellnicht, 6.

9 ³⁸ Sohn, Lai, and Goellnicht, 6.

10 ³⁹ For many of the Iranian American writers invited to speak at AAWW, the thought of
11 identifying at Asian American was new. Thus, there was a pedagogical component to the process
12 of holding our events in that space for Iranians as well as for the diverse audiences drawn to
13 Asian American literature.

14 ⁴⁰ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke
15 University Press, 1996, 32.

16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For Review Only

1
2
3 **"I am Asian": Kurdish Diasporas, Interconnected Racial Geographies, and Asian America**
4

5 The cold skies, freezing bone and skin,
6 even for the people of the mountains.
7 "Mountains are our only friends,"
8 these North Dakota mountains
9 offer refuge
10 partial and fleeting
11 for refugees.
12 Building Kurdistan in the Dakotas
13 layers upon layers
14 palimpsests of history, desires, and hopes
15 stacking indigeneity upon indigeneity
16 as blocks for home and homing.
17 Settling and resettling
18 while encountering agents of state
19 white saviors on Indian land¹
20 saving brown people
21 mark and categorize the Kurd as "white."
22 Tongues of children
23 the conduits of communication
24 embedded with experiences of the continent
25 carrying intergenerational knowledge and place
26 loosening and challenging Western geographies
27 speaking back, "I am Asian."
28
29
30
31

32 Asia confined, bound, and restricted,
33 with gatekeepers among the state, the academy, and practitioners
34 assembling contours, lines, and colors
35 failing to address Asia as ambiguous, ambivalent, political, and mobile.
36 Kurdistan and Asia float across Kurdistan, North Dakota, and little Kurdistan
37 in Nashville, Country Music, Tennessee, USA.²
38 "So we had to apply for section 8, which is a housing program, you know, for low income
39 families.
40 I attended a high school that was 95% African American."³
41
42
43

44 Asia is a collaboration, with silk threads across landscapes
45 connecting peoples, colonizers, freedom fighters, capitalists, and imperialists.⁴
46 Asia is not a map, not a place.
47 Asia as connections, Asia as histories, Asia as intimacies,⁵ Asia as Asians,
48 self-identified,
49 exceeding, engaging, and redrawing the maps
50 rerouting the roots that grow in our books, our worldviews, and our fields.
51 "I remember looking up to some of the figures, like Muhammed Ali, he was my role model,
52 And Hakeem Olajuwon because I liked basketball, I was playing basketball with my mom.
53 I started listening to Tupac Shakur because I could relate to his lyrics,
54 I found myself in the game of rap music a lot."⁶
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 Asia, Asian America, and Kurdish diasporas
5 feet on always shifting ground
6 roots that move, expand, and constrict
7 refusing maps as apolitical, refusing maps as truth.
8
9

10 Asia, standing firmly, from white ivory towers, always to the East
11 an Asia not experienced, felt, and embedded in all histories
12 an Asia of exclusion, not one of cross-pollination, movements, routes, and many roots.
13 Nashville's Kurds, in the south, claim their Asia, out West in Asia too,
14 Kurds redraw home
15 challenging the Middle East, disrupting the geographies of MENA, and expanding Asia,⁷
16 an Asia as extension of the self in relation to other selves,
17 in relation to other politics, in relation to land, marked through movement
18 marked through migration, marked through struggle, marked through displacement.⁸
19 "I think you know as a Kurdish American, I realized early on how Kurds continue to be
20 neglected
21 how our stories have always been denied,
22 how it was not as highlighted as many other stories.
23 Being a refugee, I felt how the silence had killed my people in the late [19]80s and 1990s,
24 there is still a lot of silence about the injustices we faced,
25 [It] was really hurtful and at the same very motivating, for me
26 to get involved and do my activism work."⁹
27
28
29
30

31 Indus Valley and Mesopotamia
32 connected and yet disavowed
33 from our histories and cartographies¹⁰
34 Brown on Brown
35 Brown writing with Brown
36 cross-pollinations across the sands of time
37 different shades of history
38 connected through the "Muslim"
39 connected through the "terrorist"
40 South Asians and Kurds
41 I, the Christian Tamil American,
42 offer questions
43 and politics
44 conversing with Kurds
45 from all four corners
46 of Kurdistan
47 and spread across the United States.
48 Asia is an extension of the body, pulling Kurds, Southern values, Muslim lives
49 to Arabs, Egyptians, Bhutanese, Myanmar, South Sudanese, and South Asians.¹¹
50 I, Brown, South Asian, "Muslim-looking"¹²
51 Find connections with Kurds through activism, struggle, and challenge
52 during times of surveillance, expulsion, detention, and invisibility.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 “And why should the bus driver refuse [sic] to take my daughter and my wife because of their
4 scarf?”¹³

5 We

6 South Asians, Kurds, Arabs, Iranians, Latinx

7 Muslims

8 too are visible, yet invisible in claiming belonging, in claiming rights.

9 We are an Asia, we are Asian, through alliances, histories, and politics

10 in times of wars, bans, and dreams.
11
12
13

14 **Social Background on Kurds in the US and Acknowledgments**

15
16 This poem emerges as a result of the engagement with Asian American Studies, SWANA

17 Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies. As stateless communities

18 experiencing forms of on-going colonialism and constant state violence and erasure, the stories

19 of Kurds are always multiple and complex. Thus, I wanted to take poetry to also highlight the

20 textures and rhythms of life that standard academic writing cannot always capture. It is to write

21 in ways that engage with the creativity, voices, art, and poetics within Kurdish America.¹⁴

22
23 Poetry is an intervention with very personal ramifications as well. Poetry is an important part of
24 my life and I am joyfully reconnecting with this form of writing.
25
26
27

28
29 This poem reflects the lives of Kurds in the United States and it is part of my newest
30 ethnographic project on Kurds. Although my investigation into Kurdish diasporas in the US
31 begins in the late 1800s, the poem engages with my contemporary ethnographic research on
32 Kurdish diasporas in Nashville, Tennessee, New York City, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode
33 Island, and Massachusetts. I started studying Nashville’s Kurdish community in 2011 and then
34 Kurds in the northeastern US states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island in
35 2015, continuing my research through 2021. The Kurds in Nashville were mainly Kurds from
36 Iraq, with a few from Iran, and were mostly Sunni Muslim; there was a mix of formally educated
37 and not formally educated communities, and a considerable portion of them came as refugees
38 and asylees. Although only a small number of Iraqi Kurds were settled in Nashville in the late
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 1970s, thousands of Iraqi and hundreds of Iranian Kurds who were settled in other places such as
4
5 North Dakota, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Michigan, Illinois, Arizona, Texas, and
6
7 California made secondary internal migrations to Nashville in the late 1980s, early 1990s, and
8
9 late 1990s. Nashville had a strong Kurdish enclave and infrastructure of support for newly
10
11 arriving Kurds. The Kurds in Nashville were connected with Muslim American communities and
12
13 a wide group of other refugee, immigrant, and racial minority communities. They were very
14
15 committed to a politics of solidarity with other communities of color, immigrants, and refugees.
16
17
18

19 The Kurds I met in the northeastern US were mostly immigrants who came on student or
20
21 business visas. These communities of Kurds were deeply connected to issues of Kurdish
22
23 sovereignty, were often secular with some Jewish and Alevi Kurds, and their numbers were quite
24
25 small in comparison to those in Nashville. The Kurds in the northeastern US were mostly from
26
27 Turkey and Syria. All these Kurds shared experiences of state violence, the marginalization of
28
29 Kurds, and the erasure of Kurdish sources, history, and culture. I offer a bibliography of the
30
31 scholarly material pivotal to the socio-historical context of SWANA communities, Asian
32
33 American Studies, and Kurdish diasporas.
34
35
36
37

38 I am so thankful to Sunaina Maira and Roozbeh Shirazi for giving me the opportunity to
39
40 present a poem. I am most appreciative of their most insightful and generous commentary.
41

42 Constancio R. Arnaldo Jr. inspired, motivated, and supported me on this poetic journey and I am
43
44 grateful for our brotherhood. Hadi Khoshnevis, Laura Leisinger, and Asale Angel-Ajani were
45
46 such great interlocutors. I love you Alena, Jeya, and Louis Thangaraj.
47
48
49

50 ¹ Thomas, Sonja. "Cowboys and Indians." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 1 & 2 (2019): 110-131. Thomas
51 engages with the presence of non-white, non-Indigenous Others on Native land in Montana and serves as a useful
52 way for me to think about longer histories of Kurds in the Dakotas and in Montana.

53 ² Thangaraj, Stanley Ilango. "'We share the same ancestry': US Kurdish diasporas and the aspirational and
54 ascriptive practices of race." *American Anthropologist* 124, no. 1 (2022): 104-117; Thangaraj, Stanley. "Kurdish
55 Diasporic Matters: Signaling New Epistemologies of Difference." *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2
56
57
58
59
60

(2019): 1-10; Arpacik, Demet. "Redefining Kurdishness in the US Diaspora: The experiences of Kurdish Students and Their Parents in Nashville Schools." *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 44-56.

³ Ajna offered this quote. She is a Kurdish woman who came to the US at a young age from Iraq. She and her family were escaping the Ba'athist party's attack on Kurds in Iraq. Her family fled to refugee camps in Turkey before coming to the United States and eventually settled in Nashville. Her parents were not formally educated and thus she and her siblings were the first in her family to go to college. She identifies as an activist. Her parents escaped Iraq in the late 1980s and arrived in the US in the early 1990s.

⁴ Açık, Necla. "Re-defining the Role of Women within the Kurdish National Movement in Turkey in the 1990s." *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Conflict, Representation and Reconciliation*, 114-136, 2013; Aciksoz, Salih Can. 2020. *Sacrificial Limbs*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020; Kapadia, Ronak. *Insurgent Aesthetics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

⁵ Lowe, Lisa. *Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015

⁶ Ajna offered this quote. See also Thangaraj, Stanley Ilango. "'We share the same ancestry.'

⁷ Demir, Ipek. "The Global South as Foreignization: The Case of Kurdish Diaspora in Europe", *The Global South*, vol. 11 no.2 (2001): 54-70.

⁸ Demir, Ipek. "Shedding an ethnic identity in diaspora: de-Turkification and the transnational discursive struggles of the Kurdish diaspora." *Critical Discourse Studies* vol. 14 no.3 (2017): 276-291; Lukasik, Candace. "Economy of blood: The persecuted Church and the racialization of American copts." *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 3 (2021): 565-577; Khoshnevis, H., 2019. A home to which I don't belong: Geopolitics, colonialism and whiteness in the experience of Middle Eastern and North African citizens in the United States. *Postcolonial Studies*, 22(4), pp.506-522.

⁹ Bisma offered this quote and is also a Kurdish activist in Nashville. Her family, like that of Ajna's, fled the Iraqi state's attack on Kurds and the subsequent chemical warfare. She is very active in the Kurdish community and she and her siblings were the first in their family to go to college.

¹⁰ Mohammadpour, Ahmad, and Kamal Soleimani. "Silencing the Past: Persian Archaeology, Race, Ethnicity, and Language." *Current Anthropology* 63, no. 2 (2022): 185-210.

¹¹ For the far-reaching racial hysteria as well as coalitional politics and possibilities post-9/11, see Maira, Sunaina. *The 9/11 Generation*. New York: New York University Press, 2016; Maghbouleh, Neda. *The Limits of Whiteness*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017; Naber, Nadine. *Arab America*. New York: New York University Press, 2012; Cainkar, Louis A. *Homeland insecurity: the Arab American and Muslim American experience after 9/11*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2009; Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013; Rana, Junaid. *Terrifying Muslims*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011; Salaita, Steven. 2006. "Beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia: 9/11, Anti-Arab racism, and the mythos of national pride." *CR: The New Centennial Review* vol.6 no.2 (2006): 245-266.

¹² Thangaraj, Stanley. *Desi Hoop Dreams: Pickup Basketball and the Making of Asian America*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.

¹³ Ali came on a business visa to New Jersey in 2000. He grew up in Turkey and lived for a long time in Istanbul before coming to the United States. He was very aware of Turkey's continual assault on Kurds. As a result of his light skin and very light eyes, he often passes as white and did not endure post-9/11 racial profiling as did his dark-skinned brother and his children and wife.

¹⁴ See Beizar Aradini (<https://www.beizararadini.com/>), Nuveen Barwari (<https://nuveenbarwari.com/>), and Brifkani, Zaid. *The Mountains We Carry*. Independently Published, 2021.

1
2
3 **Keywords as Frameworks for Liberatory Pedagogy and Praxis: Meeting SWANA and**
4 **Asian American Studies**

5 Ida Yalzadeh, Ryan Doan-Nguyen, Chloe Shawah, and Maryam Tourk
6

7
8 This contribution to the Special Forum argues for understanding the classroom as a site of
9
10 activist scholarship through the pedagogical intervention of keywords. In my capacity as
11
12 instructor and facilitator, I instrumentalized “keywords” to destabilize disciplinary boundaries
13
14 and center SWANA diaspora studies in our survey of Asian American Studies. This piece was
15
16 written in collaboration with some of the students from the course to illustrate the work of
17
18 “collective theorization” that allowed us to construct a field of study that prioritized historical
19
20 processes rather than geographical delineations.
21
22

23
24 As a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard, I (Ida) am tasked with teaching one self-designed
25
26 undergraduate seminar per year offered in the Committee on Ethnicity, Migration, and Rights
27
28 (EMR). The project of this program—effectively, the institution’s answer to Ethnic Studies—
29
30 gives me the freedom to play with content while also articulating an intellectual project based in
31
32 institutional critique and revision.¹ The course I chose to teach this past spring, called “Meeting
33
34 Asian/Arab American Studies,”² was inspired in purpose and stakes by the 2006 *Journal of*
35
36 *Asian American Studies* article of the same name by Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade.³ In this
37
38 course, we explored, expanded, and questioned the disciplinary boundaries between Asian
39
40 American and SWANA diaspora studies. Grounded in converging critiques of U.S. empire, we
41
42 collectively asked: what are the possibilities and limitations of linking these two fields in shared
43
44 struggle and solidarity? What can each field give to and take from the other, and how are they
45
46 already intersecting?
47
48
49

50
51 The course had two distinct pedagogical interventions. First—as is the case for many
52
53 Ethnic Studies courses—it reflected my own desire to cultivate an “engaged pedagogy” in the
54
55

1
2
3 classroom, a concept introduced by bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), which relates
4 hooks' own experiences of teaching at elite institutions as a woman of color and remains a
5 seminal text for its critical pedagogical interventions. Through an “engaged pedagogy,” she
6 contends that the work done in the classroom can be liberatory for students and teachers who
7 practice vulnerability with ideas and each other.⁴ That is to say, an engaged pedagogy is a way of
8 undertaking an activist mode of scholarship by collaboratively building the vocabulary and
9 relationships we need to carry ourselves toward collective liberation.
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 Second—and most critical to this Forum—the course sought to reimagine Asian
20 American Studies through a frame that *included* and *prioritized* SWANA diaspora studies in its
21 composition. During the 2020-2021 academic year, as a Visiting Assistant Professor in
22 Northwestern’s Asian American Studies Program, I assigned readings pertaining to SWANA
23 diaspora studies in my courses alongside more traditionally recognized subjects in Asian
24 American Studies. I was met with questions from my students in the course’s mid-quarter
25 evaluations: “Why are we talking about Iranian foreign nationals in an Asian American Studies
26 course?”⁵ These questions, of course, came from a place of curiosity, and to me were reflective
27 of the ways in which Asian American Studies is currently geographically disciplined and
28 institutionalized. I realized that in future courses I would need to prioritize the thematic linkages
29 of these cases to relegate the role of geography in building the field for and alongside my
30 students.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

47 With my course, then, I focused on designing a syllabus that would center lived
48 experience through a shared vocabulary that we would work to collectively define. Rather than
49 structuring the course around periodizations that are commonly found in Asian American Studies
50 courses, I imagined our work through the “keywords” that make up the field. I used entries in
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ, and K.
4
5 Scott Wang, to provide a contextual and historiographical foundation for each session.⁶ Inspired
6
7 by Raymond Williams’s seminal text that sees keywords as a process of “shaping and reshaping”
8
9 meaning, the editors “envisioned and prioritized keywords that capture the contours of multiple
10
11 scholarly disciplines and that resonate with our pedagogical methodologies.”⁷ In other words,
12
13 keywords of any given field are concepts that we need to continually reinvestigate. They are not
14
15 carved in stone, but by their very nature invite us to play with the contours of a given field.
16
17
18 Keywords, taught differently, could be used to uphold a canon or the way in which a field has
19
20 been institutionalized. Instead, I chose to use keywords to transgress traditional understandings
21
22 of Asian American Studies and build SWANA diaspora studies into our current
23
24 conceptualizations for the field. Ultimately, this transgression opens the politics of knowledge
25
26 production to prioritize—rather than silo—these shared histories, relationships, and experiences.
27
28
29

30
31 As a result, I chose keywords for the course based on two criteria: first, their foundational
32
33 role to the field of Asian American Studies, and second, their ability to speak directly to the
34
35 themes of SWANA diaspora studies—like Orientalism, transnationalism, race, and resistance, to
36
37 name a few. Our weekly discussions, then, directly addressed how we could “think SWANA
38
39 diaspora studies in Asian American Studies.” This semester-long pursuit—what I call collective
40
41 theorization—had students become co-producers of knowledge in a way that pushed current
42
43 conceptualizations of Asian American Studies as operating only within the geographical
44
45 boundaries of East, Southeast, and South Asia. Indeed, at the end of almost every course (and
46
47 without my prompting), the students worked to collectively define what each keyword meant
48
49 anew, taking into consideration the assigned texts that spanned geographical boundaries.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 As an extension of this practice to collectively theorize, I invited my students to
4
5 contribute to this Forum by writing their own reflections on specific keywords that we discussed
6
7 during our semester together. Their contributions illustrate the ways in which keywords can both
8
9 move beyond traditional frames of Asian American Studies and contextualize their lives outside
10
11 of the classroom. It was no coincidence that all but one of my students identified as part of an
12
13 Asian or SWANA diaspora. This act of collective theorization, then, speaks to the ways in which
14
15 theory can serve as “a liberatory practice,” one which engages personal praxis and lived
16
17 experience as a necessary component to intellectual understanding that is ethical and self-
18
19 healing.⁸ This tie to lived experience is critical, as the intellectual work we do within the field of
20
21 Ethnic Studies is knowledge for “shaping and reshaping” the systems that make meaning of our
22
23 lives.
24
25
26
27

28 **Exclusion, by Maryam Tourk**

29
30 Predicated on a mindset that sees people in a duality of "us" and "them," Exclusion
31
32 denotes the systemic barring of groups from accessing certain societal rights, such as
33
34 documented migration and citizenship. In connecting Asian American studies to SWANA
35
36 diaspora studies, our examination of exclusion centered on U.S. immigration policy, which is
37
38 historically embedded in ideologies of gatekeeping and national identity formation based on
39
40 whiteness.
41
42
43

44
45 In class, we paired our exploration of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 alongside
46
47 present conceptions of sanctuary, or the right to movement, in SWANA diaspora studies.⁹ We
48
49 discussed the dueling concepts of “good” migrants—those who are highly skilled and seeking
50
51 better opportunities and “bad” migrants—refugees and other displaced people. These formations
52
53 are inherently linked to exclusion, with the idea that only good migrants are deserving of
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 inclusion and that bad migrants should be turned away. While the Chinese Exclusion Act is no
4
5 longer upheld, the throughline of desirability continues to be a fixture of our current migration
6
7 system. Systems of asylum and traditional sanctuary institutionalize this binary, accepting good
8
9 migrants and rejecting bad ones. To undo these systems of exclusion, we must pursue models of
10
11 abolitionist sanctuary—connecting border violence to broader phenomena of carcerality and
12
13 white supremacy—that challenge these conceptions.
14
15

16
17 To build upon these theoretical frameworks, in class we talked about our personal
18
19 experiences with exclusion. Hearing each other's stories about academic, familial, and social
20
21 exclusion complicated our understanding of the term and introduced mixed feelings. While we
22
23 condemned exclusionary systems that work against people of color, we acknowledged that, as
24
25 students at elite institutions, we have often participated in these systems to succeed today. Our
26
27 experiences forced me to confront the notion that exclusion is not restricted to the neat confines
28
29 of an academic definition covering legislation or sanctuary; it is directly tied to the personal
30
31 experiences of people, including students like us, who interact with systems shaped by exclusion
32
33 and feel their repercussions, something academia often does not provide space to process.
34
35
36

37
38 In a moment of meta reflection, we also sought to understand how the context of our
39
40 elite, private institutional setting contributes to exclusivity. We were all aware that the venue of
41
42 our dialogue was a Harvard classroom—a space that has historically excluded the presence of
43
44 marginalized groups. This awareness influenced our conversations, as we acknowledged who has
45
46 had the ability to contribute to scholarship in the past and how that impacts our present reality.
47
48 Despite each of our diverse ethnic, racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as Harvard
49
50 students, we hold huge privileges, including the ability to have such discussions and academic
51
52 resources. Our pressing concern was that holding space for these sorts of dialogues an
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 institutional maneuver to evade any structural change that would address the root causes of
4
5 Harvard's exclusionary practices. While the seven students in the seminar were lucky enough to
6
7 take part in a semester of transformative learning, without a permanent Ethnic Studies
8
9 department and tenure-line faculty, this experience will not have the opportunity to be replicated
10
11 for others at Harvard.
12
13

14 **Orientalism, by Chloe Shawah**

15
16
17 I enrolled in Professor Yalzadeh's course in my last semester at Harvard. Over the
18
19 previous seven semesters, courses related to Ethnic Studies had forced me to do a lot of
20
21 unlearning. My high school U.S. history courses taught at best only part of the story; viewing the
22
23 United States as an empire, for example, was a new idea. Course by course, new concepts
24
25 supplemented and altered my worldview. By the time I arrived in this class, I thought I knew
26
27 many of the terms on Professor Yalzadeh's keyword-centered syllabus.
28
29

30
31 As it turns out, I knew many of these words in the way you "know of" that other student
32
33 you took one course with in your class year: narrowly, and in theory only. The keyword from
34
35 this course that I came to know most intimately was Orientalism. The term was coined by
36
37 Palestinian American scholar and activist Edward Said—who earned his PhD from Harvard—as
38
39 a critique of the imperial West's construction of its own identity in contrast to an imagined
40
41 inferior, backwards, and exotic East. It is this Orientalist worldview of the West as superior to
42
43 the East that justified European and U.S. imperial projects and continues to exclude and
44
45 stereotype an Eastern "other."¹⁰
46
47
48

49
50 As an Arab American, learning about this theory excites me as much as it disturbs me
51
52 because it gives me a language to understand, articulate, and connect what I have noticed around
53
54 me. It helps me make sense of why foreign policy treats war in the SWANA region as not just
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 tolerable, but natural; why Arabs on TV and movie screens are always violent; why news
4
5 reporting drastically changes tone when the perpetrator is thought to be Muslim; why the U.S.
6
7 turns a blind eye to Palestine.¹¹ In bringing theory back to practice, I see U.S. Orientalism as a
8
9 framework to understand lived experiences of SWANA diasporas in the United States.
10
11

12 Orientalism as imperial critique binds SWANA diaspora studies to Asian American
13
14 studies, as the same Orientalist worldview has affected European and U.S. perspectives and
15
16 actions towards people in the regions between Morocco and Japan: the fetishization of “exotic”
17
18 women, the dehumanization of refugees, the uninvited interventions of foreign military. At its
19
20 core, critiques of Orientalism reject drawing an arbitrary boundary to justify the exploitation of
21
22 an other. To that end, we must also be wary of other arbitrary distinctions. If, as a prime
23
24 example, we allow SWANA diaspora studies to be siloed from Asian American studies, we will
25
26 miss many opportunities for connection, solidarity, and productive scholarship in service of
27
28 combating imperialism in all its forms.
29
30
31

32 33 **Refugee, by Ryan Doan-Nguyen** 34

35 Raised by South-Vietnamese war refugees—boat people from the Exodus of 1978—I
36
37 always thought I knew what it meant to be a refugee, or at least the child of one. It meant coming
38
39 out of the womb forever tied to an exact moment in time. It meant fear of almost everything and
40
41 everyone spreading through family branches like wildfire fueled by racing winds. And it meant
42
43 the world painting your community as helpless, vulnerable, and “in need.” I had never thought to
44
45 question this status quo, and frankly, I didn’t have a grasp on the concepts needed to do so.
46
47
48

49 After “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies,” my first-ever introduction to Ethnic
50
51 Studies, these assumptions changed. I emerged from the course with the understanding that the
52
53 refugee plights of both the Asian and SWANA diasporas aren’t mutually exclusive: they bleed
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 into one another across a mosaic of concepts. Through our placing of Asian and SWANA
4 struggles alongside one another, I reevaluated the suppositions I've come to hold about the term
5 Refugee and, in so doing, examined my own legacy as the son of Vietnamese refugees.
6
7

8
9
10 I used to wonder why Google searches of my community always returned grainy images
11 of women and children crowded in small vessels. Weren't we more than that? It was frustrating
12 to observe this dissonance in refugee representations but not have the means to articulate and
13 scrutinize it; that's why when we learned about the gendered aspect of the refugee through Y'ên
14 Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong, it felt like I was letting out a tremendous breath I didn't know I was
15 holding.¹² I finally understood the psychology behind the 1972 photo of "Napalm girl" Phan Thi
16 Kim Phúc and the 2015 photo of drowned Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi; fixation on the most
17 extreme parts of their stories allows for the romanticism of their trauma and their neat
18 categorization as war victims.¹³ I finally understood that this media wasn't an outlier, but
19 intertwined with the other theories we explored in class: empire, racialization, and the
20 institutionalization of knowledge. I finally could put into words that *orientalism* shapes the way
21 my family is viewed by the world.
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37
38 Moreover, I notice that my experiences at Harvard reflect how U.S. empire influences
39 institutional decisions in responding to crises that produce refugees. When the current war
40 between Ukraine and Russia started, and millions were displaced, Harvard pledged unwavering
41 support for Ukrainians. Harvard's stance has been undeniably clear: University President
42 Lawrence Bacow publicly declared support for the Ukrainian people and hoisted a Ukrainian
43 flag above the John Harvard Statue. Nearly every University department issued a statement on
44 the matter. However, when a country that had suffered devastating consequences due to U.S.
45 imperialism was faced with a crisis, Harvard was less willing to make a similar statement. For
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 instance, when the Taliban captured Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, displacing hundreds of
4
5 thousands of Afghan refugees who had already suffered from a long history of U.S. imperial
6
7 intervention in their country. Harvard was silent on the matter. If it weren't for the critical
8
9 approaches we honed, I might not have drawn this parallel between Harvard's disjointed
10
11 response for wars in which the U.S. has no accountability compared to those with histories of
12
13 U.S. imperial intervention. I might not have understood that acknowledging such disparities
14
15 would entail accepting responsibility.
16
17

18
19 Through the process of meeting Asian American and SWANA diaspora studies, I've
20
21 tapped into a dynamic understanding of the refugee that stretches far beyond my own family—
22
23 beyond the Vietnamese experience. I no longer see the refugee as fixed in time and place but as
24
25 traversing borders, surviving through a host of powers and circumstances, and belonging to the
26
27 most distinct of communities. For me—as an activist, as president of Harvard's Vietnamese
28
29 Association, and as an aspiring scholar of the changing world—such a framework is
30
31 revolutionary.
32
33

34 35 **Conclusion**

36
37 Taken together, these reflections speak to two major themes that emerged from the
38
39 course: first, the mapping of students' lived experience onto "keywords," and second, the
40
41 recognition, interrogation, and (ultimately) sustained critique of their surroundings. While no one
42
43 course can do the work of reimagining an entire field, the work of "keywords" provides a useful
44
45 framework from which to re-evaluate the building blocks of a field in order to serve us more
46
47 fully in the present. Indeed, as is shown to us by Chloe, Maryam, and Ryan, the frames that exist
48
49 right now within the field of Asian American Studies speak far beyond the constituencies that are
50
51 traditionally associated with the field. By binding their reach to particular cartographies, then, we
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 make it harder to draw affinities and solidarities among groups. By prioritizing convergence, we
4
5 are developing frameworks that speak to the reality of lived experience, particularly in the post-
6
7 9/11 context.
8
9

10 While this course did allow for moments of reshaping within the space of our semester
11
12 together, I recognize that creating epistemic shifts within the academy is a years-long (perhaps
13
14 decades-long) process. Assigning a text or assignment to a single group of students is not enough
15
16 to reorient a field. Even in writing this essay, I had to confront my own pedagogical missteps in
17
18 framing this course—most noticeably, my framing of the course as pairing Asian American
19
20 Studies with “Arab American Studies,” although we thought beyond the latter throughout the
21
22 course. While I chose the name in large part to honor the article from which it came, I now hope
23
24 to reflect in my title (and language use throughout the course) the ways in which I hope the
25
26 future of this field will take shape.
27
28
29

30
31 Nonetheless, I feel that this course was one of my most sustained and collectivized
32
33 attempts to think SWANA diaspora studies in Asian American Studies. I recognize that this is
34
35 merely a starting point—that there are aspects of the course that I still need to unpack and think
36
37 through to serve my future students. Yet, I do not anticipate a time in my life when this will not
38
39 be the case—that this recursive reflection, indeed, is the nature of teaching and learning. It seems
40
41 only right, then, to rethink the boundaries of a field through pedagogical practice.
42
43
44
45

46
47 ¹ In many ways, the course I taught at Harvard was a way for me to intervene in the reproduction of a curriculum
48
49 that many students here to pursue—one in which they become unquestioning participants in the perpetuation of
50
51 capitalist and imperialist hegemonic systems, many of which were set up by individuals who also passed through
52
53 Harvard’s gates. I am aware of the irony in designing a course that pushes the boundaries of Asian American Studies
54
55 at an institution like Harvard that does not have a formal Ethnic Studies program to begin with. More than that,
56
57 though, there is a deeper irony in the fact that this pedagogical work is at odds with the legacy of the institution in
58
59 which it was held. For further discussion, see Lorgia García Peña, *Community As Rebellion: A Syllabus for*
60
Surviving Academia as a Woman of Color (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).

² I would briefly like to address the divergence between the course title, “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies,”
and the title of this Special Forum, *Thinking SWANA Diaspora Studies in Asian American Studies*. Teaching this

1
2
3
4 seminar indexes a moment when I wanted to honor the article from which the course took its inspiration. In teaching
5 the course and in coming to co-develop this piece with my students, though, I realized that the title could have
6 instead reflected a larger desire to widen that original piece to consider the cartographic and linguistic barriers with
7 which it was still contending. Though the course's title used the sub-disciplinary distinction of "Arab American
8 Studies," our course looked beyond the Arab world to consider subjects in a broader SWANA diaspora.
9 Additionally, in the conversations I've had with my students in writing this piece on SWANA diaspora studies,
10 we've talked through the politics of disciplinary naming, which is why their contributions reflect the language of the
11 special forum. In other words, what you are seeing between the course title of Spring 2022 and this very piece is the
12 progression of my own pedagogical awareness and the iterative nature of disciplinary reflection—two elements I
13 believe to be at the heart of the work in Ethnic Studies.

14 ³ In their thought-provoking article, Maira and Shihade suggest creating a conscious link between Asian and Arab
15 American Studies to both strengthen critiques of U.S. imperialism and "to challenge the arbitrary boundaries of
16 ethnic and area studies that are tied to Cold War-era policy interests and current neo-colonial ventures abroad as
17 well as multiculturalist co-optation at home," (121). Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, "Meeting Asian/Arab
18 American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S.," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9, no. 2
19 (2006): 117–40.

20 ⁴ bell hooks, *Teaching To Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

21 ⁵ This particular remark was made in an evaluation of my course "Transnational Asian/American Activism," in
22 which we read an article on "gender sameness" among Iranian student activists in the United States. Manijeh
23 Nasrabadi, "'Women Can Do Anything Men Can Do': Gender and the Affects of Solidarity in the U.S. Iranian
24 Student Movement, 1961-1979," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3/4 (2014): 127–45.

25 ⁶ Keywords for this course included: Orientalism, Exclusion, Labor, Race, War, Refugee, Assimilation, Citizenship,
26 Resistance, and Transnationalism, all of which are in the *Keywords* text. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ,
27 and Kevin Scott Wong, eds., *Keywords for Asian American Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

28 ⁷ Schlund-Vials, Võ, and Wong, 3; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, New
29 Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xxxv.

30 ⁸ bell hooks, *Teaching To Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 75.

31 ⁹ Erika Lee, "The Chinese Are Coming. How Can We Stop Them?," in *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical
32 Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 143–67; Sunaina Maira, "Freedom to Move, Freedom to
33 Stay, Freedom to Return: A Transnational Roundtable on Sanctuary Activism," *Radical History Review* 2019, no.
34 135 (October 1, 2019): 138–59.

35 ¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

36 ¹¹ Jackie Reem Salloum's short film, *Planet of the Arabs* (2005) provides many examples of this violent portrayal of
37 Arabs and Arab Americans.

38 ¹² Yên Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and
39 Syrian Refugee Art," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 3 (March 2018): 587–615.

40 ¹³ In her memoir, Tima Kurdi spells her nephew's name as "Alan," rather than "Aylan," which was commonly used
41 in media reporting. Tima Kurdi, *The Boy on the Beach: My Family's Escape from Syria and Our Hope for a New
42 Home* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019).

Arab American Curriculumwork

This issue on movements for a SWANA (South-West Asian and North African) framework and pedagogy highlights activist scholarship at the forefront of the movement. While published self-reflections run the risk of sounding arrogantly pedantic, I am humbled by the invitation to pause and reflect upon my recent organizing experiences.¹ I am a Lebanese-American organizer and educator. For over 15 years I have worked with teachers and Arabic and non-Arabic speaking immigrant and refugee young people in a variety of arts, literacy, and empowerment programs in and out of schools. In summer 2022, I organized and facilitated the first teacher institute for Arab American Studies in the K-12 Classroom in California. Nearly three dozen elementary, middle, high school and higher education educators participated virtually, including kindergarten teachers in San Leandro, early childhood education teachers in New York City, third grade teachers in Sacramento, high school social studies teachers in San Diego, ethnic studies teachers in Berkeley and Daly City, and university professors. They spent 30 hours of their time-honored summers learning about core concepts and frameworks in Arab American studies, making them applicable to their classrooms. The institute was, above all, an invitation to become members of a community of educators and to imagine and co-create liberatory curricula for an Arab American and ethnic studies classroom.

The institute responded to a need for teacher training. It also took place against the backdrop of a multi-year Zionist-led campaign to warp, malign, and erase the presence of Arab and Palestinian diaspora studies in the California Board of Education's original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), for the new ethnic studies requirement in public high schools. The ESMC will serve as a model for Ethnic Studies (ES) implementation in districts across the state. ES courses must be offered by the 2025-2026 school year, becoming a graduation requirement

1
2
3 starting 2029-2030.² In response to the attacks on the ESMC, a “Save Arab American studies”
4 campaign was launched to uphold the integrity of the original curriculum.³ However, the
5 California Board of Education sanctioned edits in the final ESMC version in 2021 that distorted
6 and gutted Ethnic Studies broadly, and Arab American studies specifically.⁴ Against the 2025
7 deadline, a race to prepare teachers and design curricula and ethnic studies programs across the
8 state ensued. So did the struggle over what is meant by ethnic studies. It is being waged now at
9 the district, school, department, teacher, student and community levels across the state.
10 Organizations such as the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium comprised of
11 the original ESMC writers have emerged to assert authority over what constitutes proper Ethnic
12 Studies and professional development, but so have others.⁵ In this context, it felt imperative to
13 begin creating a community of educators with the intellectual and curricular resources,
14 inspiration, and support to teach Arab American histories in their classes and schools.

15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31 I use the terms “Arab American” and “Arab American and SWANA” interchangeably in
32 this reflection. A SWANA framework is an implied reality in Arab American studies, even while
33 terms like “Middle East and North Africa” endure. During the institute, some participants were
34 curious as to what terminology to use to describe people from the SWANA region. Rather than
35 be prescriptive, I wanted them to begin learning and unlearning Orientalist histories behind
36 geopolitical terms like Middle East, Near East, Arab, and Arab American, as well as the
37 institutional forces and political movements behind them, starting to give an inventory to these
38 repertoires.⁶ While some scholars have pivoted to solely use SWANA, I chose to frame the
39 institute using “Arab American studies,” centering Arab-Asian/Black/Latinx/Native American
40 solidarities against oppression.⁷ Given the attack on the original ESMC delegitimized its critical
41 Arab and Palestinian content, the field, its scholars and institutions, normalizing anti-Arab and
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Palestinian racism, the institute was a direct and comprehensive challenge to this framing to
4
5 demystify and historicize it.
6

7
8 SWANA has multiple genealogies and futures. Activists from the SWANA region in the
9
10 US increasingly use it as an organizing principle, in lieu of an Arab-centric framework, which
11
12 focuses on geographic closeness and shared histories, thus lending itself to political coalitions
13
14 amongst regional kin or neighbors. Within the field of Arab American studies an implicit
15
16 SWANA framework, one that interrogates the category of “Arab American” and broadens
17
18 research beyond it, has oriented many seminal publications. Furthermore, the term “Arab” itself,
19
20 Suad Joseph reminds us, is generative and a complex site of contestation.⁸ Michael Suleiman’s
21
22 *Arabs in the New World*, Joe Kadi’s *Food for Our Grandmothers*, and Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn
23
24 Asultany, Nadine Naber’s *Arab & Arab American Feminisms* exemplify this ethos.⁹ They situate
25
26 Chaldean, Armenian, and others’ historical narratives in relation to the multiplicity and
27
28 heterogeneity of Arab American communities, as connected and bound experiences. Sarah
29
30 Gualtieri interrogates false colonial binaries about Arab/SWANA communities by viewing their
31
32 archives as palimpsests.¹⁰ The field is capacious and always in transformation, evidenced by the
33
34 new and seminal *Sajjilu Arab American: A Reader in SWANA Studies* which captures this
35
36 dynamism and self-reflexivity.¹¹
37
38
39
40
41

42
43 Within Asian American Studies, a SWANA perspective demands incorporating South-
44
45 West Asian and North African diasporic histories into curricula, as well as histories of Palestine,
46
47 Orientalism, Zionism and imperial expansion. Rather than continue “taking his flesh, and leaving
48
49 his bones,” what Maira and Shihade describe as using Edward Said’s thought on Orientalism and
50
51 empire and ignoring his Palestinianess, the field needs to systematically engage with imperial
52
53 history, settler colonialism, and race formation.¹² Palestine figures as a phantom in US culture
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and as the litmus test for an acceptable K-16 education. It is also becoming the litmus test for
4 ethnic studies credibility. As the curricular struggle is waged in tandem with national oppression
5 and liberation movements in Palestine, teaching about Palestinians and the broader historical
6 processes they and other transnational Arab and SWANA communities are enmeshed in is
7 essential.
8
9

10
11
12
13
14
15 Critical Arab American, Palestine and SWANA studies matter in the struggle for anti-
16 racist and anti-imperialist schooling. We might ask, how did the region we currently understand
17 as the Middle East get carved out of and torn from Asia, and why? Or what could have led the
18 late great Gil Scott Heron to observe that “Libya and Egypt used to be in Africa... they’ve been
19 moved to the Middle East?”¹³ Instead, we can examine maps and geopolitical regions
20 historically. We can situate anti-Iranian policies and sanctions, anti-Arab racism, Palestinian
21 resistance, and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan in relation to one another and what Gary
22 Okiehiro calls the “imperial republic.”¹⁴ In this way, SWANA as signifier and project reorients
23 political affiliation and solidarity to the third world, that liberation struggle continues, and how
24 we teach it is the future of our fields. Political orientation and pedagogy are Janus-faced.
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 **Arab American Studies in the K-12 Classroom: Teacher Institute Framework**

38
39
40 I planned the summer teacher institute around the idea of what I call Arab American
41 curriculumwork. I drew heavily from indigenous scholar and educator Jo-Ann Archibald and her
42 concept of “indigenous storywork,” the indigenous cultural processes, frameworks and protocols
43 cultivated in community that signal it is time for the work of story to begin.¹⁵ To get to
44 indigenous stories and engage with them historically, thematically and respectfully, we need to
45 be story ready, attentive to the whole being of those present, with an understanding of
46 indigeneity in relation to enduring legacies of colonialism. Archibald’s framework links learning
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and teaching, content and methodology through the seven foundational principals of reverence,
4 respect, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy.¹⁶ I felt that this holistic
5 and relationship-based approach was essential to Arab American studies, to curricular creation,
6 and to educational design and professional development.
7
8
9
10

11
12 To approach Arab American and SWANA historical experiences from this indigenous
13 storywork perspective, I needed to build community with teachers of Arab American studies,
14 facilitate relationship building, and cultivate an attentiveness and critical consciousness of self
15 and the stakes of this work for these communities living on stolen native land. In order for the
16 teachers to create curriculum, they had to be curriculum ready. I think of Arab American
17 curriculumwork as a process of culturally and community responsive curricular co-creation.¹⁷
18 The institute's goal was to respectfully work together to design curricula. This process gave
19 teachers time to slow down, pause, and reflect after another long pandemic school year, to
20 wonder as well as to explore ways to make meaning with and through Arab American stories,
21 and to create holistic curricula that humanized them, their students, and their communities.¹⁸ The
22 "work" demanded imagining new spaces and new relationships, informed by the particular forms
23 of exclusion that Arabs and Palestinians in the US face, and pedagogies that repair and heal.
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 But first the community had to be gathered. I invited Arab American and Palestinian
41 organizations across California and the country, and individuals I respected to lead and present.¹⁹
42 I organized lesson plan themes and topics, gathering primary and secondary source materials so
43 teachers could engage with specific and multimodal sources, historical or fictional figures,
44 stories, alliances, moments, and concepts. I worked with children's books authors, scholars,
45 poets, activists, and experts specializing in each subject or in a particular teaching methodology.
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54 These 'content experts' were each paired with a group of teachers to support them as thought
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 partners in this process of curricular co-creation during the institute, incorporating teachers into
4
5 the political, imaginative and community project of Arab American studies.
6

7
8 The institute was organized as an interdisciplinary and multimodal crash course that
9
10 situated Arab American and SWANA subject positions at the heart of analysis and not as
11
12 multiculturally additive or peripheral perspectives. It was organized around core concepts and
13
14 theories fundamental to Arab American, Ethnic, and SWANA Studies, including colonialism and
15
16 settler colonialism, empire and imperialism, Orientalism, Palestinian and revolutionary
17
18 feminism, racism, racialization, transnationalism, displacement and diaspora. Each lecture,
19
20 presentation or workshop focused on one, or a constellation of terms and core concepts. I think
21
22 of core concepts as threshold concepts, essential for learners' entry into the discourse of a field
23
24 such as Arab American or ethnic studies broadly.²⁰ Scaffolding helped participants cross or work
25
26 through conceptual thresholds, so they could do so with their students.²¹
27
28
29

30
31 Rather than a celebratory or accomplishments-based framework that reiterates settler
32
33 colonial progress and US exceptionalism, the discussions in the institute emphasized processes
34
35 of structural displacement, survival, and survivance due to empire and colonialism, in alignment
36
37 with the "ARC" of Ethnic Studies.²² An anti-colonial conceptual approach grounded us in more
38
39 than just Arab American history, it opened links to histories of other racialized communities. It
40
41 also provided a shared vocabulary and an orientation to thinking and "problem posing" that also
42
43 empowered teachers to reframe political problems and offer curricular solutions.²³ This would
44
45 offer students models for redescribing and redefining the present, as well as global historical
46
47 processes, and for using history as a form of "liberating memory."²⁴
48
49
50

51
52 One of the realities of building learning communities is realizing that white supremacist
53
54 power dynamics, hierarchies, and patterns of behavior enter too, as they do everywhere else.
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Allison Tintiangco Cubales reminds us that effective ethnic studies pedagogy also means
4
5 designing programs that actively work to support teachers' racial identity development as a core
6
7 component of curriculumwork. Race consciousness affects how we show up in our classes and
8
9 spaces of learning, what and how we teach, our perceptions of our peers and students, and how
10
11 we respond to presenters and new information.²⁵ As curriculum and community builders, as
12
13 facilitators, design rather than identity is destiny. What we don't know or plan for does hurt us.
14
15 We all can improve. Humility and opening oneself up to community feedback are essential.
16
17

18 19 **Conclusion: Pedagogies of Possibility**

20
21 A critical Arab American and SWANA pedagogy responds to the present: its
22
23 contradictions, its seen and unforeseen possibilities. I want an Arab American studies that
24
25 necessarily expands and adapts to the political conditions of our time, seeks new alliances in
26
27 pursuit of freedom and produces new knowledge to imagine and inspire it. It is in Arab
28
29 American curriculumwork that this vision is animated most urgently. Teachers must answer for
30
31 themselves and their students the question that renowned Palestinian American poet and writer
32
33 Naomi Shihab Nye's muse asks of herself, "How can I teach them they belong to the stars?"²⁶
34
35 Nye prods us to see potential, possibility, power, and purpose in others that they don't yet see in
36
37 themselves or who have been convinced to see only pathology or pain.²⁷ While we gaze upwards
38
39 to the stars in awe, Iraqi-Canadian multimedia artist and author Sundus Abdul Hadi urges us to
40
41 cultivate "deeply rooted" young people, confident in themselves in history.²⁸ Our schools can
42
43 and should be filled with youth who are confidently developing visions of themselves, their
44
45 communities, and their pasts, that inspire new solidarities to move through and beyond the
46
47 colonial and epistemic violence of the present.
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

This is the task of Arab American curriculumwork, cultivating spaces where students and teachers have pride in who they are, but who do not accept uncritically the systems, categories and language imposed on them. Between roots and stars, imagination is activated or kibbled in the service of power. On this contested terrain, we as educators must make our stand.

¹ I'd like to thank Drs. Sunaina Maira and Roozbeh Shirazi for the opportunity to contribute to this pathbreaking and visionary special forum, their thoughtful revisions and generosity during these tumultuous times. Dr. Maira's insights and contribution to the Summer teacher institute was invaluable. Also, thank you to Dr. Omnia El Shakry who was integral to the success of the teacher institute, and for her generous review of this article. All of its shortcomings, however, are mine and mine alone.

² Ethnic Studies Professional Development. California Department of Education, last modified October 20, 2022, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ethnicstudiespdr.asp>.

³ Middle Eastern Communities Respond to California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, JIMENA, <https://www.jimena.org/ethnic-studies-model-curriculum-middle-eastern-and-north-african-communities-respond/>, July 10, 2020. Attacks on the ESMC were led by coalitions involving institutions like the California Legislative Jewish Caucus, 30 Years After, Assyrian Association of Southern California, JIMENA (Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa), Kurdish Community of Southern California, Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans, and others. While some of these groups unabashedly advocate for pro-Israeli policies and out of ideological commitments to Zionism, others were driven by a desire for representation in a multicultural curriculum. Also, see Save Arab American Studies, Arab Resources and Organizing Committee, 2020, <https://savearabamericanstudies.org/>. This was my response during the early debates, Curricular Justice: Arab American Studies and the Struggle for California's Schools, Jadaliyya.com, March 20, 2020, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/40791/Curricular-Justice-Arab-American-studies-and-the-Struggle-for-Californias-Schools>.

⁴ Even after groups of Arab American educators met with the California Board of Education leadership and the Instructional Quality Committee, and tens of thousands of people vocalized their support for the original uncensored curriculum, power wielders in the Department of Education capitulated to Zionist and right-wing demands.

⁵ Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium- LESMCC, <https://www.liberatedethnicstudies.org/>. The CA Board of Education ignored and railroaded their expertise as Ethnic Studies scholars and authors of the ESMC throughout the process of curriculum revision and public comment, so they formed the LESMCC in response. For an example of an anti-critical race theory, pro-Zionist, anti-Marxist "Ethnic Studies" coalition that formed to challenge the original ESMC, see Alliance for Constructive Ethnic Studies, <https://www.calethstudies.org/>.

⁶ Sut July, et al, *Edward Said On Orientalism*, Media Education Foundation, 1998, YouTube, video available at https://youtu.be/fVC8EYd_Z_g. For another digestible example of this, see Michael Gasper, "Why Can't You Find the Middle East on a Map?" In *Understanding and Teaching the Modern Middle East*, ed. Omnia El Shakry (University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17nmzqj>, 15–34.

⁷ While anti-Arab racism remains, non-Arab SWANA groups are also often positioned and position themselves in relation to Arabness in ways that reinforce or challenge it. This is a tension to run towards, as it forces us to uncover mechanisms of racialization, legacies of colonial and state violence, as well as dreams and shared political visions.

⁸ "There are Palestinians, Iraqis, Kuwaitis, Yemenis, Saudi Arabians, Bahreinis, Qataris, Duabis, Egyptians, Libyans, Tunisians, Moroccans, Algerians, Sudanese, Copts, Eritreans, and Mauritians; there are Maronites, Catholics, Protestants, Greek Orthodox, Jews, Sunnis, Shi'a, Druze, Sufis, Alawites, Nestorians, Assyrians, Copts, Chaldeans, and Bahais; there are Berbers, Kurds, Armenians, bedu, gypsies, and many others with different languages, religions, ethnic and national identifications and cultures who are all congealed as Arab in popular representation whether or not those people may identify as Arab." Suad Joseph, "Against the grain of the nation- The Arab," In *Arabs in America: Building a new future*, ed. Michael Suleiman, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999), 257–272. Also, many thanks to Dr. Joseph and her Middle East Seminar that brought so many wonderful colleagues and minds together in Davis, CA to create community and discuss current projects.

⁹ Nabeel Abraham and Sameer Abraham, *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, (Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University, Center for Urban Studies, 1983); Joe Kadi, *Food For Our Grandmothers:*

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists (Boston: South End Press, 1994); Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, Nadine Naber, ed., *Arab & Arab American Feminisms : Gender, Violence, & Belonging* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Sarah M.A. Gualtieri, *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020). Gualtieri sees these routes as central to identity formation, fluidly shaping an Arab Latinidad, while offering a method for reading both Latin America and Asia beneath and into early racial classifications of Arabs.

¹¹ Louise Cainkar, Pauline Homsy Vinson, Amira Jarmakani, ed., *Sajjilu Arab American: A Reader in SWANA Studies* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2022).

¹² Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, "Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S.," *Journal of Asian American studies*, 9(2), (June 2006): 130.

¹³ Gil Scott-Heron writer, Robert Mugge, producer, *Black Wax* (1983), Film, <https://archive.org/details/black-wax>

¹⁴ Gary Y Okihiro, "Imperial Republic" In *American History Unbound: Asians and Pacific Islanders*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 83-112

¹⁵ Jo-Ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

¹⁶ For a short compendium of Archibald's framework, see Sam Trsuruda and Melanie Nelson, "Conversations with Jo-Ann Archibald About Indigenous Storywork as Pedagogy and Methodology," Educational Studies Symposium 2018, <https://indigenoustorywork.com/resources/>

¹⁷ Thank you to Drs. Jessica Perea and Stephanie Maronie, and my cohort for workshopping this concept in our Mellon Public Scholars seminar. Also, see Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3) (August 1995): 465-49,1 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1163320>.

¹⁸ Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 43-70.

¹⁹ Special thanks to the Palestinian Feminist Collective, without whom the institute would not have been possible, as well as the National Arab American Women's Association, Arab American Studies Association, Arab Cultural and Community Center of San Francisco, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, and more. It takes a village. Drs. Loubna Qutami and Jennifer Mogannam were integral interlocutors, and Amanda Najib an indispensable co-facilitator. A complete list of institute contributors: "Program Description," <https://tinyurl.com/institutedescription>

²⁰ Savin-Baden, Maggi, and Gemma Tombs, eds. *Threshold Concepts in Problem-based Learning*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 26 Feb. 2019) doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004375123>

²¹ Susan Ambrose et al (2010). *How Learning Works: Seven Research-based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

²² "Access, Relevance, and Community. Access referred to providing students opportunities to receive quality education and urged educational institutions to open their doors to more students of color. Ethnic Studies defined quality education as one that is relevant and directly connected to the marginalized experiences of students of color. To connect these experiences, Ethnic Studies' purpose was to serve as a bridge from formal educational spaces to community involvement, advocacy, organizing and activism." Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales et al, "Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: Implications for K-12 Schools from the Research," *The Urban Review*, 47(1), (2015): 104-125, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0280-y>

²³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71-86

²⁴ Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word & the World* (Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1987):16

²⁵ Cati V. de los Rios, Jorge Lopez & Ernest Morell, "Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Race: Ethnic Studies and Literacies of Power in High School Classrooms," *Race and Social Problems*, 7(1) (2015): 84-96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-014-9142-1>

²⁶ Naomi Shihab Nye, *Red Suitcase: Poems* (Brockport, New York: BOA Editions, 1994): 26

²⁷ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3) (2009):409-428.

²⁸ Sundus Abdul Hadi, *Take Care of Your Self: The Art and Cultures of Care and Liberation* (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2020)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 ***Rooted in the (Youth) Movement, Onward to Liberation:***
11 ***Toward Radical Definition and Demands for a Critical SWANA Studies***
12

13 “Coalitions are built to collapse. We organize to put ourselves out of the job.”
14 -Quinn Ngyuen, UC Santa Barbara student organizer, 2010

15 “Solidarity is a doing thing. It is about what you do.”
16 -Sharif Zarkout, Lead organizer, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, 2016
17

18
19 SWANA is not merely a term, and it is not any one organization, department, or body.

20
21 SWANA is an identity, and it is a movement. And it belongs to the people. The central question
22 this personal reflection is concerned with is if SWANA (South-West Asian and North African)
23 has been useful, is useful, and if it will be useful, for *us*.¹ It does so by rooting SWANA in a
24 history of community organizing politics, led by youth. Indeed, SWANA came out of struggle. It
25 aimed to challenge and unlearn hegemonic and Eurocentric standards of community and
26 classification, and to organize and configure an “us” to change the material conditions of our
27 peoples. Thus, in the marred, fraught and contradictory politics of creating an *us*, can we
28 similarly demand of efforts toward a SWANA Studies to unpack its assumptions and to dream a
29 radical discipline that values and centers the knowledge production of community members as
30 experts of their own experiences? If there is to be a critical SWANA studies, it cannot exist
31 without engaging *us*.
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 To ground this discussion, this essay briefly explores a short People’s History of the
41 popularization of the term “SWANA” over the past ten years.² It brings from margin to center
42 young people’s inter-ethnic, inter-national, and inter-religious SWANA organizing to understand
43 how SWANA youth and community organizers have defined and configured *themselves* racially
44 and politically in the post-9/11 and War on Terror era. This essay also proposes the possibilities
45 and limits of “SWANA” as an organizing category, theoretical framework, and identity-focused
46
47
48
49
50

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 racial classification and names some of the many people who, and events that, enabled this
11 conversation to arrive at this juncture in academia. This is an attempt to ground current efforts to
12 create SWANA studies in the university in the youth, feminist and queer labor of organizing that
13 allowed for SWANA's entrance into popular movement, and now, academic discourse. I do so
14 especially as I am deeply suspect of the institutionalization of these knowledges and in order to
15 call in insurgent scholars of conscience within the imperial university to root any emergent
16 scholarly formation in collective liberation struggles.³

17
18
19
20
21
22 *SWANA is a decolonial word for communities of the South West Asian/ North African*
23 *region in place of terms such as Middle Eastern, Near Eastern, Arab World or Islamic World*
24 *that have colonial, Eurocentric, and Orientalist origins and are created to conflate, contain and*
25 *dehumanize our peoples. SWANA is also a praxis, and by that I mean it is a practice or a way of*
26 *organizing a collective of people(s) to build power. SWANA was popularized in and through the*
27 *movement. It is in the process of doing SWANA, that SWANA is and has been made and given*
28 *meaning; this is not merely a form of institutional classification or racialization⁵ by states and*
29 *agencies but by SWANA people, and historically SWANA youth organizers. In particular and*
30 *uniquely, the popularization of SWANA is thanks to radical youth organizing in the face of*
31 *racism, Zionism, imperialism, and cisheteropatriarchy. The forces of subversion and practical*
32 *decolonization⁶ within/without the University must flow within the current of these youth of*
33 *color-led movements, in ways that are reciprocal and lifegiving. Youth of color activism, as la*
34 *paperperson instructs, is the means by which another university is made possible.⁷ SWANA in*
35 *Ethnic Studies, and specifically, in Asian American Studies is being thought through at this*
36 *moment because of knowledges produced with/in deep social movements that I discuss here,*
37 *such as: the SWANA checkbox campaign, divestment for Palestine, the Irvine 11 trials of*
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9 student activists, anti-genocide and authoritarian activism,⁴ the work of the
10 SWANA/MENA/POMESAD Caucuses at the Student of Color Conference (SOCC), University
11 of California Student Association (UCSA), and United States Student Association (USSA),
12 queer and feminist SWANA convenings, and national and regional collectives and organizations
13 across the country.
14
15
16
17

18 Indeed, SWANA is a movement that is the product of the coalescing of many political,
19 educational, cultural and other forms of resistance in the United States that can be traced back
20 generations but, in the interest of space, I address the popularization of the framework in the
21 United States, and its proliferation in recent years. I argue that this can be traced to the early
22 efforts of young SWANA students in California in the early 2010s, who were primarily women
23 and queer people. SWANA emerged as a praxis from campaigns for representation, resources,
24 and solidarity amongst SWANA ethnic groups and with other people of color groups. I center
25 some of the names and experiences of organizers and organizations whose labor created this
26 current academic and social focus, and pose questions for further consideration. Drawing lessons
27 from the movement, I ultimately put forward some definition and demands for an emerging
28 SWANA studies.
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 The popularization of “*SWANA*” emerged as a demand, specifically, the demand(s) of a
38 student movement. These youth ignited what became a national and then global movement to
39 (re)claim one’s identity through a decolonial, anti-racist form of pan-identification, that was and
40 is always collective. To locate power,⁸ I name my positionalit(ies) in order to be accountable and
41 reveal that they have shaped my experience and lens for approaching questions that persist in the
42 emergence of a (potential) field of critical SWANA studies. Specifically, they shape my biases,
43 limitations, ignorance, and failings. I was a student organizer of SWANA descent at UC Santa
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 Barbara and UCLA, from 2009-2014 that was within or adjacent to many *collective* campaigns,
11 mobilizations and SWANA organizations in its messy, early years. I served as facilitator in
12 several SWANA/MENA caucuses at the UC Student of Color Conferences of UCSA and
13 POMESAD caucuses at USSA from 2009-2013, and rallied Southern California SWANA-
14 identified students to embrace the cause during the UC SWANA checkbox campaign. I was also
15 an organizer with the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) student movement led by
16 Students for Justice in Palestine; a UC Santa Barbara A.S. elected official from 2011-2013 that
17 co-sponsored the UCSB divestment resolution in 2012; an early member of SWANA-Los
18 Angeles; a co-founder of SWANA Alliance; and a convener of the Armenian-American Studies
19 Collective. With other organizers and educators I mobilized the “West Asian American Studies
20 Now!” campaign to bring these discussions to the K-12 curriculum in the State of California, and
21 currently serve as a Co-Director of Armenian-American Action Network, a grassroots
22 organization fighting for community-driven SWANA education initiatives. As a student
23 organizer in the University of California (UC) ten years later, I am frustratingly still part of a
24 fight to implement system-wide SWANA resources at the UC denied to us for so many years on.
25 What I share in this essay is a product of collective struggle over many years and can in no way
26 be attributed to myself, or to any one or handful of individuals. It was through the labor of being
27 in struggles with hundreds of other youth over the period of ten years that these ideas and
28 arguments were birthed into existence. It is to them that I am indebted, and know our struggle is
29 very much alive and being shaped in new, exciting, and important ways.

30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46 ***Legacies of the California student movement and the birth of a popular “SWANA”***

47
48 The first SWANA-defined collective on record that utilized the framework as a radical
49 politic was SWANA Bay Area Queers (SWANABAQ), founded in 2000—notably, before
50

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 September 11, 2001 and the ensuing emboldening of anti-Muslim and anti-SWANA policies and
11 attacks.⁹ As addressed in my larger community research project,¹⁰ those who are from or
12 descended from people in this region have long been trying to configure themselves racially,
13 collectively, including through “pan”-ethnic and decolonial categories before the 2000s. As Jo
14 Kadi’s (1995) rich discussion in the introduction to *Food for Our Grandmothers* demonstrates,
15 pan-ethnic, pan-cultural and pan-religious categorizations of people from this region are not
16 merely a product of post-9/11 contexts, but have much longer histories. Racism against SWANA
17 peoples in the U.S. did not begin after 2001 and also crosses many axes of oppression.¹¹

18
19
20
21
22
23
24 However, the popularization of the term SWANA as an identity category and organizing
25 ontology did originate in the War on Terror era. After almost a decade of anti-war and anti-
26 imperialist organizing throughout the Bush administration years, a newly invigorated *racial*
27 *consciousness* of SWANA peoples in the U.S. emerged that united communities and merged
28 with existing racial and organizing formations. This pan-ethnic organizing was created to meet
29 the material needs of our communities and the conditions faced during a time of great crisis. But
30 the burst of SWANA-specific activity actually came almost a decade after this period of
31 organizing, built on years of movement work in the early War on Terror era, specifically, due to
32 the organizing by students in California in the early 2010s. In 2011, Nairi Shirinian, a UC
33 Berkeley student, and Armenian-American woman whose family is from Egypt, initiated a UC
34 SWANA checkbox campaign for admissions to remove SWANA people from the category of
35 “white.”¹² The label proposed was originally NASWA: North African and South-West Asian.
36 Shirinian and early campaign leaders wanted to intentionally name “North Africa” because of the
37 ways that it was often marginalized and erased in terms like “Middle Eastern.”¹³ For Shirinian, a
38 SWANA checkbox on UC official materials would allow for gaining community access to data
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 about and accurately representing SWANA students in admissions, and enable the use of such
11 data in advocacy for SWANA student resources, as Asian American and Pacific Islander student
12 organizers who inspired her had been able to do.¹⁴ Shirinian built an impressive multi-tiered
13 campaign that she eventually took directly to the UC Office of the President (UCOP).
14
15

16 Along the way, Shirinian brought in Christina Mehranbod, a student of Iranian-Armenian
17 and Iranian-Persian descent who became another leader of the campaign. Now named
18 “SWANA” because it was easier to say in the grind of organizing, Shirinian and Mehranbod
19 organized the campaign across UC campuses, garnering support from students, and directly
20 negotiating the initiative at UCOP’s desk. Furthermore, in an important moment that united the
21 checkbox with other burgeoning student movements of people of SWANA descent, Shirinian and
22 Mehranbod brought the campaign to the UC Students of Color Conference (SOCC) in 2012, a
23 then annual gathering where critical student of color movements bloomed. In a room of student
24 leaders of SWANA descent, Shirinian asked organizers across campuses to support the
25 campaign. Shirinian and Mehranbod organized allies and organizations to pass student
26 resolutions at several UC campuses and word quickly spread throughout organizations of
27 SWANA students on campuses; SWANA caucuses became a new formation at student of color
28 initiatives across the state. After SOCC, a Facebook group entitled SWANA Coalition was set up
29 that would later serve as a network for further initiatives by SWANA-identified students,
30 including dealing with active repression by the UC administration of a parallel movement that, I
31 argue, was centrally important to expanding and shaping SWANA at this time: the divestment
32 movement in solidarity with Palestine.
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46 Indeed, the early SWANA student movement was engaged in cross-movement, joint
47 struggle, and feminist and queer methods of organizing. The SWANA checkbox campaign was
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9 also passionately taken up by students across campuses because the simultaneous organizing of
10 student resolutions for UC divestment from Israel involved many of the same SWANA leaders
11 and built pan-ethnic racial coalitions. A political consciousness was developing amongst
12 SWANA student leaders of their own racialization as they organized these efforts in
13 juxtaposition to white and other non-SWANA students organizing for Palestine. Students for
14 Justice in Palestine became a rare and unique meeting ground of SWANA-identified students
15 where pan-ethnic SWANA organizing was already happening; it helped unite the cause for
16 Palestinian liberation and the struggle against the racist attacks against all SWANA students.
17 Indeed, events like the Irvine 11 case¹⁵ and the repression of SJP activities under the charge of
18 “anti-semitism,” deeply politicized SWANA students at the UC and CSU campuses and were
19 part of the debates around the SWANA checkbox campaign.

20
21 Furthermore, Shirinian purposely reached out to and united students from ethnic-based
22 constituencies and organizations across the California higher education systems and in doing so
23 produced what I argue was powerful women of color theory through her praxis. The checkbox
24 united Afghan, Armenian, Iranian, Kurdish, Turkish, Druze, Arab, Chaldean, Yazidi,
25 Azerbaijani, Somali, Amazigh, Sudanese, Circassian, Djiboutian, Assyrian and many more
26 students in joint struggle to dismantle marginalization and oppression at the university and did so
27 through mobilizing the category of difference but with an aim of decoloniality. Indeed, SWANA
28 was always tied to feminist and queer theory and methods of organization. The erasure of
29 SWANA women, queer people, as well as non-Muslim and non-Arab peoples as the lead
30 strategists and organizers in accounts of SWANA organizing work is not accidental, in my view,
31 and must be righted in the making of critical SWANA studies in the post 9/11 era.¹⁶ If this work
32 is truly for our communities, it would have to bring in, interview and co-build with students and

community members, provide space for collective imaginings, and value movement histories. The field must emerge from, and sit at, the intersection of both organizing and scholarship, where a liberated Ethnic Studies lives.

The people, initiatives, and formations that were part of developing SWANA into a tangible and viable political intervention were numerous and cannot be fully nor accurately represented herein this recollection. I want to put on record, however, some early organizers although thousands of students have helped shape these movement(s) with which the academy is now trying to catch up. First and foremost, Shirinian and Mehranbod must be cited in any thinking through of SWANA as a category in organizing or scholarly endeavors, without whom none of the trajectory of these debates or initiatives would have existed in the spaces that they currently do. Additionally, there were many people and organizations that furthered this organizing including: Negeen Sadeghi-Movahed, Morris Sarafian, Sadia Saifuddin, and Lana Habib El-Farra who all dared to run for UC student government and put up for vote many of the initiatives listed amidst an avalanche of attacks on them. They and so many student organizers faced an onslaught of vile anti-SWANA racism and Islamophobic attacks from a range of forces, students, and state governments. Furthermore, Sabreen Shalabi, Jumanah Al-Bahri, Rahim Kurwa, Amal Ali, Jumanah Al-Qawasmi, Omar Zahzah, Sharif Zarkout, Hani Tajsar, Katlen Abuata, Ani and Areni Der Grigorian of Students in Justice in Palestine, Pouneh Behin and Zeena Aljawad, Ayda Haghightatgoo, Tina Guirguis, Ali Abboud, and Marina Eskander of SWANA-LA, Mehra Gharibian of SWANA Alliance, Megan Awwad of Tabla Conference, ¹⁷ Amani al-Khatahtbeh, Sophia Zaman and Chirag Bhakta of the POMESAD caucuses, Yahya Hafez of APIMEDA (Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, Desi American). Youth organizers gave 'SWANA' meaning through the work of thousands of campaigns, letters, statements,

Commented [1]: You added this sentence here, but it was already in the para above which is why I've deleted it there

Commented [2R2]: Ok now the first says women and queer people and this gets out the youth, and beyond the "Arab and Muslim" framework, SWANA challenges. As an Armenian I want this explicitly stated, because SWANA comes on the back of youth Armenian organizing labor, who are unrecognized in these constant "Arab and Muslim" frameworks, many orgs keep pushing. More regional hegemonies

Commented [3R2]: @sarmen@ucsd.edu Yes, absolutely! The issue is just that the larger point is that of erasure, so all of this can go in one sentence. I had merged those in the previous draft, and then I think you restored the previous version with the repetition, and then I just got muddled myself trying to cross check your different versions in a rush! . The problem is not with the ideas, it's how to state it concisely

Commented [4R2]: I've fixed this in the para above: important point!

Commented [5]: Added this here -- you mention several times just in this para that names must be cited and acknowledged, so deleted those :) point is well noted!

meetings, hearings, elections, and protests. At this point, an entire generation of youth organizers have debated, created, and challenged these ideas, often in ways that are and were both messy and painful, and yet beautiful.

Commented [6]: Eloquent note on which to end this section; it allows readers to pause and then move to next section

Lessons from the Movement: Possibilities and Limits of “SWANA”

From the everyday of movement work, several patterns, arguments, and tensions emerged that also reveal the possibilities and limits of SWANA as a framework. SWANA in some neoliberal multicultural iterations has been presented as merely a geography or an identity yet even this approach presents a set of inherent problems that SWANA exposes but also replicates in a radical framework. There are several burning questions that persist. How do we classify communities from a region that is unbounded, including physically? Is it possible to border and bound peoples in the name of decolonized study? How do you border while trying to smash borders? The project of Ethnic Studies is one that has historically contested power and centered self-determination in the face of colonial and imperial projects, and so SWANA migrants, refugees and SWANA Americans are defining themselves and their lives.¹⁸ Is there then a possibility for a liberated field free from the boundaries, contradictions, tensions and collapses needed in ‘disciplining’? Instead of merely recreating a new homogenizing category, I think we must confront the boundaries, contradictions, tensions, and slippages in order to dream anew. We must spend more time on foundational questions of SWANA racialization, rather than assuming the answers, such as: are there multiple racial classifications in SWANA? From my own experience, I would urge that the most generative starting point would be to engage the debates already happening in community organizing. In the face of violence, we must ask: how have communities organized *themselves*, and named community? Thus we can understand how *have*

Commented [7]: This notion is still not clarified here

Commented [8R8]: People are claiming SWANA is a new racial classification. But Blackness exists in SWANA as does multiple intersections. I am naming the plurality here by just saying within SWANA there may be multiple racial classifications. This is obvious and a really important question as we fight these boxes, and MENA checkbox right now!!

Commented [9R8]: Ok I took out "one" racial classification like you said in the original edit. I think it makes sense now and I know people who are Arab, Iranian, etc will get it Black SWANA orgs who are in the spaces org wise are firmly insisting this

Commented [10R8]: I think it is important to keep in and is what it says, are there multiple classifications in SWANA?

Commented [11R8]: Yes this is a key point for your analysis! It needed elaboration not deleting! The wording is slightly confusing (categories or classifications?). But we'll leave it as is and wait for copy editing

Commented [12R8]: This is a point you can also address in our AAAS session!

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 *we* engaged, and how *can we* sit with the most central tensions of a *we*. As learned in movement
11 spaces, we find definition and possibilities of SWANA through collective envisioning, processes,
12 and action.
13

14
15 SWANA was a challenge specifically to state-promoted area studies categories of the
16 “Middle East” and to multicultural inclusion. In its best iterations, SWANA in the US has
17 historically been an alliance of many groups and in many ways, I would argue, SWANA has
18 functioned in the War on Terror era like the term “Chicano” in the early days of the Chicano
19 movement. Like the pan-Asian American alliances of the 1960s, SWANA of the 2010s was a
20 tool to change the material conditions in which we and our loved ones lived. We were forced
21 together because we often faced the same systems—marginalization, refugeehood, migration,
22 surveillance, criminalization, hate crimes and racial terror, and needed to build power. SWANA
23 is a divestment from whiteness and is based on a commitment and call to anti-racism and anti-
24 imperialism, revealing both national and transnational dimensions in its past and present. Despite
25 early instances of describing SWANA as “apolitical” or merely a geography as strategy in the
26 SWANA Checkbox campaign, the life of SWANA as a coalitional formation in the face of
27 structures of racial oppression, as I have discussed, illustrates that SWANA is firmly a political
28 term rooted in social justice movements in this country. Thus, SWANA Studies necessitates a
29 transnational critique of systems of subjugation which historically have relied on tactics of divide
30 and conquer for SWANA peoples, including in the colonization of the region itself.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42

43 However, the limits of SWANA as a framework are numerous and in my experience, can
44 be violent, as I have personally witnessed in the movement. For one, just as the Middle East is an
45 imaginary, SWANA is the creation of an alternative imaginary which also replicates structural
46 violence and reinscribes subjugation(s). Indeed, the most important challenge and critique of
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 SWANA is its boundary and erasure—why and what constitutes South-West Asia and North
11 Africa and, in turn, the “we” it calls forth? Where does South-West Asia begin and end? Is South
12 Asia within South-West Asia? Why is North Africa separated from the rest of the African
13 continent? Why is the closeness of East Africa and West Asia not addressed nor centered in
14
15
16 **SWANA?** Indeed, these communities come from a large, unbounded region of heterogeneous
17
18 ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and yet even when labeled SWANA are collapsed
19
20 back into another category. The tensions are glaring and often reveal who is in the room shaping
21
22 what SWANA is and who is not. For example, why is SWANA Studies being called forth in
23
24 Asian American Studies foregrounding the “SWA” and not in African/African American/African
25
26 diasporic Studies, centering the “NA” of “SWANA”? Lastly, because SWANA emerged in a
27
28 North American context, its transnational utility can be limited especially outside the English
29
30 language. It is situated and thus, its histories and futures must be as well.

31
32 These fraught questions must be centered and help us illuminate the mechanisms of
33
34 power and central actors at work in these debates, especially now, when a definition of SWANA
35
36 is being assumed in the academy. Thinkers and organizers should confront these tensions as
37
38 opportunities for strengthening modes of resistance rather than obscure or evade them. This
39
40 discussion helps reveal the ways in which race is made, not just by state actors but also from
41
42 below, unearthing anti-Blackness, anti-indigeneity, and other global governing systems of race
43
44 that operate not only in the SWANA region but are also replicated and reconstituted in diasporic
45
46 organizations and studies. In other words, we must destabilize the *we*, while still trying to
47
48 forward a collective project. Furthermore, though the institutional politics of representation has
49
50 been historically challenged in many SWANA organizations, it is ultimately omnipresent, as
51
52 SWANA in practice has also been a form of cultural politics. But as Stuart Hall (1993) argues, a

Commented [13]: All excellent questions!

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

simplistic either/or binary of liberation and oppression, especially in the space of cultural strategies, is futile and lends itself to “two continuous grand counternarratives, either total victory or total incorporation, which almost never happen in cultural politics.”¹⁹

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to ground calls for a new SWANA Studies in Asian American and Ethnic Studies in lessons from the early SWANA youth movement and call for collective debates about the definition of SWANA and intergenerational community engagement. I conclude with some personal reflections, hopes, concerns and dreams for the future.

SWANA was/is a language of connection and of futurity. SWANA was embraced by many of us in early SWANA youth organizing because we were deeply yearning for it. It helped make sense of so many of our embodied knowledges that at the time had few names. We wanted desperately to feel affirmed in and have reflected back the many experiences in our daily lives and the ways we were understanding our identities. But most of all, in SWANA organizing we needed to do such intervention, such organizing, and such healing, *together*. In the early days of SWANA movement work I recall it was often asked: if the FBI knocks on your door, who will you call? SWANA in many ways was one attempt at that answer.

Indeed, *SWANA was and is a call to action to joint struggle. SWANA has been both revolutionary and furthered/reinscribed structural violence.* In the United States, since the mid-2000s, SWANA has been best used in the movement not to reinscribe the same homogenizing characteristics of racism(s), but actually to bring an *us*, of very different stakes, struggles and backgrounds, into to the same room, where we can learn from one another and teach each other our struggles to each other, take stock of and be challenged by our contradictions and complications, and to fight, including to fight it out amongst one another. This ultimately put us

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 not only in conversation together but in movement together, even if to be at odds. Efforts at a
11 critical SWANA studies must also do this.

12
13 SWANA cannot merely be a rejection of systems of power, it must put forward visions of
14 new worlds which require our sovereignty and self-affirmation as peoples. My dream for Ethnic
15 Studies is that we remember history, that Ethnic Studies is a field built through *the labor of*
16 *Black, Brown, and Asian American student demands*. It was and is their challenges, sacrifices,
17 and love. In this legacy, SWANA as a framework cannot be assumed, it must be built and
18 debated collectively, in forums that are as democratic and constituted with popular assembly and
19 co-thinking as much as possible. *We are the experts of our own experiences, and we demand to*
20 *define ourselves*. The people must demand a SWANA studies, if it is the people's will.

21
22
23
24
25
26
27 My dream is that the next generation challenges all of our work, that they find the holes
28 in SWANA, expose and dismember its violences, and even discard it for something bigger and
29 better than we can ever imagine. My dream is that future organizers feel the ways we have felt
30 our power against oppression in this country in whatever formation necessary, that they take
31 pride in their histories, and demand systems change, not further inclusion in existing systems, but
32 challenge their foundations. Radical youth SWANA organizing has the potential to save and
33 continue the radical heartbeat of Ethnic Studies as a liberatory project, one that is rooted in
34 histories and demands specifically of students of color, and that is constantly under threat. As the
35 organizing history instructs, a "we" is laborious and fraught. SWANA is contested, unfixed,
36 ongoing, emerging and unfinished. The only SWANA that is worth fighting for is one that
37 centers difference and enacts a politics that leaves no one's freedom behind. Many of us
38 organizing and writing about SWANA come from communities that face displacement, war,
39 criminalization, police violence, surveillance, militarization, and threats of annihilation. Our
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

reality is urgent. We have different and compounded stakes. In a country built on and perpetuating genocide, the question, then, comes around again and again: *Will we show up for each other?*

Notes

1. In this reflection I use “us” with both contours and not. I mean SWANA community members. I mean SWANA youth and movements rising up for collective liberation. SWANA is the fraught history of trying to define an ‘us,’ a collective. Thus, in scholarship, the “us” must be directly engaged and not assumed, beyond the siloing of academia and with SWANA people in and outside of the University.
2. I invoke Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*. Harper & Row, 1980) to demand the uplifting of a parallel histor(ies) other than hegemonic histories of record.
3. Chatterjee, Piya, and Sunaina Maira. *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, “Introduction,” Univ. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2014.
4. See “Writing into a Revolution” <https://www.dailyca.org/2019/02/15/writing-into-a-revolution/> an example of student engagement and the Arab Spring, “A.S. recognized Armenian Genocide” in student organization anti-genocide campaigns <https://sundial.csun.edu/693/archive/asrecognizesarmeniangenocide/>, and “BDS Campaign Sweeps UC Campuses” on the impact of Operation Cast Lead in the student movement <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc165/p3930/>
5. See Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Routledge, 2015.
6. la paperson in *A Third University is Possible* (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2017), advocates for decolonizing the university by “assembling decolonizing machines, to plug the university into decolonizing assemblages.” Student of color activism is one such decolonizing machine.
7. la, Paperson. *A Third University Is Possible*, 169.
8. Naber, Nadine. *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*, “Introduction,” New York University Press, New York, 2012.
9. Ibid.. p. 59.
10. Armen, Sophia, *A People's History of Middle Eastern American and Race*, (In Progress).
11. See Maghbouleh, Neda. *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race*. Stanford University Press, 2017., A., Gualtieri Sarah M. *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*. Univ. of California Press, 2009., El-Hanan, Lama. “‘Arab-Black’ Solidarity Shouldn't Erase Afro-Arabs & the Racism They Face in the Arab World.” *AFROPUNK*, 16 July 2021, “‘Our Histories’ Series.” *Collective for Black Iranians*, Abdulhadi, Rabab. *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*. Syracuse University Press, 2015.
12. Interview with Nairi Shirinian, 1.
13. Ibid., 1.
14. Ibid., 2.

Commented [14]: Sunaina we already talked about this and you said my each other was fine!! :) please please! we did this like three drafts ago! This is a speech I give in our orgs. and it means a lot to me!!

Commented [15R15]: @sarmen@ucsd.edu Sophia jan, I'm sorry we have worked on so many drafts by now, I can't remember! Grammatically, this should be "one another" if it's more than 2 people--written text is different from oral speeches. The paragraph itself is fine, and the sentiment great, even if it has been repeated already, but it's an eloquent ending note. At this point, yes, let's just leave it for the copy editor to review!

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 15. The Irvine 11 was a group of eleven Muslim male students from UC Irvine and UC
11 Riverside who courageously disrupted a speech by Israel's ambassador Michael Oren at the
12 University of California, Irvine and were subjected to what many deemed as a racist grand jury
13 trial and disciplinary action by UCI.

14 16. SWANA is and was a challenge to classifications that privileged hegemonies, including in
15 the region, and must.

16 17. Tabla Conference was a conference on SWANA queerness organized by Megan Awwad and
17 others where many of us built lasting relationship and feminist/queer interventions into SWANA.

18 18. See Yen Le Espiritu's definition of critical refugee studies which sees refugees knowledge
19 producers themselves by which we can understand larger systems, rather than 'problems to be
20 solved' (*Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*, Espiritu 2014: 4)

21 19. Stuart, Hall. "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture? - JSTOR." *Social Justice*,
22 1993, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29766735>. p. 106.
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60