

WOMEN VOTING IN GAZA IN 1922!

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Given the quest for Palestinian statehood, a greater knowledge about the history of Palestine is needed by all. The recent conference in Amman, Jordan at CUMERC, the Columbia University Middle East Research Center, examined 100 years of journalism of "Falestine," a Palestinian newspaper from 1911-1967.¹ The newspaper "Falestine" was a rich source of Palestinian history. It acted both as a mirror of society and helped forge a national identity, noted Rashid Khaalidi, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, in his presentation to the academics, journalists, students, and Palestinians (whose families' contributions were recorded in the paper). One of the panelists, Dr. Aida Bamia, Prof. Emeriti at University of Florida, showed a photo of a group of modern-looking Palestinian women medical volunteers in 1947 that included her mother. During the session on The Representation of Gender and Women in "Falestine", the novelist Sahar Khaliefeh explained how the paper reveals the respect for women in Palestine, who were better educated and more active in society, then were women in other Arab countries at the time. "Falestine"'s editorials urged women to become educated and involved in politics. A woman from Gaza in the audience reported that in 1922 women in Gaza were able to vote for the mayor, only 2 years after American women were enfranchised!

The myth of massive Palestinian support for Totalitarianism and Fascism was dispelled by René Wildangel, Congressional Fellow American Political Science Association, who pointed to the many editorials in Falestine that warned against the Nazis and predicted the outbreak of WW11. Falestine covered the growing persecution of the Jews in Europe with alarm. Ilan Pappé, Director of European Center for Palestine Studies, Exeter University, analyzed "Falestine"'s independent attitudes to Zionist colonization against the positions of Arab, Palestinian and Western opinions.

There is a great lack of records of Palestine's past; much of it has been destroyed including libraries and archives as well as buildings, homes, mosques and churches. Basem L. Ra'Ad in his book *HIDDEN HISTORIES* states that Palestine has seldom been free from colonization, and "there is a profound silence and suppression of knowledge" concerning its history that needs to be retrieved and revealed. This conference on the pioneering newspaper "Falestine" has made a major contribution to preserving Palestine's history and its significant contribution to culture & civilization.

Despite the censorship of the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate, and being closed 20 times by authorities, "Falestine" published continually from 1911 until its suspension by Israel in 1967, when it merged with a Jordanian newspaper still published today. "Falestine" was founded by 'Issa al 'Issa, from a prominent Christian family in Jaffa. This historic two-day conference with 24 presenters, was organized by his granddaughter Dr. Noha Tadros Khalaf, visiting Fellow at CUMERC. It was a major step in remedying the dearth and/or distortion of Palestinian history. A book with the proceedings will be published.

¹ "Falestine: 100 Years of Journalism," Conference at Columbia University Middle East Research Center (CUMERC), Amman, Jordan, June 7-9, 2011, Amman, Jordan.