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Macalester at Home and Abroad, Reel 1

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Macalester College Archives
Audio Reel #13
Minnesota Private College Hour:
“Macalester at Home and Abroad, Part 1”

[00:00]

[Bells ringing]

This is the Minnesota Private College Hour.

[Music]

Tonight the Minnesota Private College Council representing the fifteen liberal arts colleges in our state welcomes you again to a half hour of television for the discriminating viewer.

[Music]

[Speaker?]: Macalester College in St. Paul presents, “Macalester at Home and Abroad.” In this series, Dr. Yahya Armajani visits with faculty members, students, and campus guests participating in Macalester’s extensive program of International Studies. Dr. Armajani.

YA: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome again to this program of, “Macalester at Home and Abroad.” In keeping with the program that we have at Macalester for international spirit and studies, there has been developed in the past three years a special chair which is called the Barclay Acheson Professorship of International Studies. The only requirement is that the professor who is called to this chair will have to be from one of the foreign countries who will come with us and teach and lecture at the college and the campus for a year. We’ve had on this lectureship, on this professorship, a man from Mexico and also a man from Japan. This year we

are greatly honored and privileged to have a scholar from the Arab world with us. Not only a great scholar but also a diplomat, Dr. Fayez A. Sayegh, a graduate of the University of Beirut and Ph.D degree in Philosophy from Georgetown University, member of the Advisory Council Committee in relationship with the countries of the Arab world in the United Nations, and member of [the] Arab League Office of Information here in this country. A lecturer of great popularity and note. And after many years in this work, he went back to his first love which is academic life. For the past two years he was visiting professor at Stanford University. We are fortunate to have him here with us and after one year with us, he is expecting to go to Oxford in England. Dr. Sayegh, we welcome you here to Macalester, I know you've been here [in] St. Paul before and we'd like to welcome you to be with us for a year.

FS: Thank you very much.

YA: Now, will you, I think first of all, will you on the map or by word explain what is this Arab world in distinction to the Middle East?

FS: Well, of course the term Middle East itself is rather vague and not very clearly defined, but the countries that belong to the Middle East and do not belong to the Arab world are Turkey, Iran, and Israel. The other countries in this area are all the Arab countries which are part of the Arab world as well as of the Middle East. And they extend also into North Africa, covering not only Egypt and below it in Sudan and Libya, but also Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. So these

North African Arab countries and the Arab countries other than Turkey, Iran, and Israel in what is called the Middle East, jointly form what is known as the Arab world.

YA: Now, what is it that they have in common?

FS: Basically it's their language, and of course whatever language indicates by way of a common culture, common political experience, common history under Ottoman rule, but primarily the most distinguishing characteristic, that which immediately lets you know if a man is an Arab or a non-Arab, is his language.

YA: When were you back [unclear]?

FS: About a year and two months ago I came back from my last visit to the Arab world.

YA: Now, as a person who had been here for four or five years before you went, and you went over there, which is one of the most important things which impressed you and what is happening in the Arab world?

FS: I think the most impressive single aspect of the picture in the Arab world, is the fact that a region that had been changeless for centuries suddenly took on a very fluid, a very flexible character. It has been gripped by forces of change so suddenly, and the suddenness and the

contrast between current change and very recent changelessness, make a very impressive picture of development, of progress, of revolution, of ferment in the area.

YA: What would you say were the causes of this sudden change?

FS: I think the occasion for the change was the fact that we became independent. For four hundred and more years, we were under Ottoman rule and later under British, French, Spanish, or Italian rule. Now, as soon as World War II was over, within ten years almost the entire area, ending with Algeria just last summer, became independent. So the removal of foreign rule and the opportunity that that provided for the people of the region to determine their own fate, is the biggest singular occasion for change. But an occasion is not always a cause. I think in addition to the fact that the causes which had been obstacles to change in the past were removed in addition to that particular occasion, there is the fact that throughout the world, the underdeveloped continents of Asian and Africa, a new force of transforming traditional systems and institutions of life, has been unleashed. And we were not immune to that in the Arab world. We are receiving the same impetus as Asia and Africa as a whole are receiving.

YA: And this impetus, has it had anything to do with Western civilization, Western culture?

FS: Yes, certainly as far as the Arab world is concerned. The first seeds for the desire for change were perhaps planted in the Arab mind about a century and a half ago by European and American missionaries, educators, philanthropists, and by contact with Western society.

YA: [Unclear] contact, they can't help it. Now, let us spell out some of these changes, which one of these you want to take first? Well we are educators, you and I, let's take education. Is there, is there any appreciable change in that field?

FS: Yes, very significant. First of all, the fact that now education has been made compulsory to all boys and all girls of school age in almost every Arab country. It is a very significant change. The fact that it's not only compulsory, but also free on the elementary level, and in many countries in the Arab world, on the high school level. And in one Arab country, namely Egypt, the United Arab Republic, on the university level as of last summer, that too is an important change. Not only do you force parents if they don't have the desire to do so on their own, force them to send their children to school. But you also make it possible for them to send their children to school because you have removed the tuition fees and all the financial difficulties that in the past had prevented many of them from sending their children to school.

YA: Now, is this a great desire for education, do you see any difference in the past ten years when the Arab world became free than in the previous, let us say twenty-five, thirty years when the Arab world was by and large under the domination of one foreign power or another?

FS: Yes, I see two differences. I think we can call them differences of quantity and differences of quality. In terms of quantity, until we became independent, we didn't have enough schools for everybody, only those who were fortunate enough to gain admission, and whose parents were

fortunate enough to be able to afford the tuition fees, could go to school. So naturally now that compulsory education and free education are the norm, there are more students going to school than in the past. So that's the quantity difference. The qualitative difference is in the fact that under colonial rule, the emphasis in educational opportunities and facilities was on certain "functional" concepts in education. The British government, say, in Egypt or in Palestine, or the French government in Lebanon and Syria, wanted policemen, wanted bookkeepers, wanted functionaries in one form or another. So education was geared to this end; the limited end permitted by the colonial self-interest in the area. Whereas now we have a society that wants education in all fields. Our educational institutions have branched out to take all areas of education and not only those that were serviceable to colonial self-interest in the past.

YA: [murmur of agreement] Now, I think it occurs to me to ask the question, we've had a great deal of literacy in the Arab world. Is there anything being done, did you notice, about making illiterate people literate?

FS: Surely, whatever is being done to today's school generation, to make education possible and obligatory for them, that in itself is a removal of illiteracy among the generation of today, the children that are of school age. But in addition to that, we are also trying to combat illiteracy retroactively, as it were, by programs of adult education, where evening school programs or rural area programs in which university students go during the summer, for example, to the rural areas and set up shop for teaching the adults reading and writing and so on. The programs differ from one country to the other, but on the whole every country has some kind of an adult education

program to combat education among those that will not be affected by compulsory and free education laws of today.

YA: Alright, let's go to some other changes, some other fields.

FS: I think one very important field is the emancipation of women. I think the word emancipation of women may be misleading, the woman in Arab society has always had a very respectable position in private life. It was in public life that she was more or less a negligible...quantity of significance. Today I think that women in the Arab world have been given all of the political rights and many of the social rights that man enjoys. I say all of the political and many of the social because there are some social rights which man enjoys not by virtue of governmental decree but by virtue of traditions. It takes longer to change traditions than it takes [for] legal restrictions.

YA: Now, you're not going to say all the Arab world is this way, did you?

FS: No, the countries of the Arab world in which women do not enjoy political rights are countries in which men do not enjoy political rights also. [chuckling]

So, I would say all, and this qualifies some. Wherever man has political rights, woman has come to have the same political rights. And this has been in a matter of ten years, a very brief period of time.

YA: I like to pause here to tell our viewers that usually when people talk about the Arab world, they always talk about either oil or politics and so on, and I think some of these changes we are talking about really are most significant for the long run life and prosperity for the people of those countries than any political change. So I think these are very important questions that we are dealing with.

FS: I think you are right. After all our oil has been burnt out and the political problems have been solved, the things that matter tomorrow is what is happening today are these changes.

YA: And now, you have heard, I have heard travelers who go there and come back and they have seen, and I'm sure they have seen, land plowed in the same way as in the Bible times. Any changes in that field, in the whole field of agriculture and food?

FS: Yes, I think there are some changes in agriculture which have taken place, again in every Arab country depending on how far the situation I am going to talk about applied there. And these changes apply to the land-tenure system. You know we had a feudal system in the Arab countries. The Ottomans wanted to repay chieftains in the Arab society who were loyal to them by giving them whole villages, and in some cases whole districts, and their children came out to be owning large portions of the land, the cultivable land of the country. Egypt had a situation where 5% of the people owned 95% of the land. Now as soon as the revolution took place in Egypt, a land-redistribution program was immediately initiated, the same thing in Iraq, the same thing in Syria. And this is incidentally not confined to the Arab world. After Ayub Khan in

Pakistan made his revolution, the first thing he did was land-redistribution. In every underdeveloped country where feudalism exists, one of the first transformations that this period of change brings about is the radical transformation of the land-tenure system. Rights to property are respected in the sense that the feudal lord's land that is taken away from him is not confiscated, but he is paid compensation for it. But at the same time social justice is respected in that a man needn't have the quarter of the land in a given country while a quarter of the population have no land at all.

YA: I have another question. We have to move faster for a little bit. Now these changes naturally bring social changes, changes in social custom and so on, which is perhaps more subtle and harder because of the tradition. Is there any problem in this field, or is there anything you want to say?

FS: Yes, I as an Arab from that area lament some of the results of modernization. For example I believe that the family tie in a traditional Arab society was something worth preserving.

YA: Hmm [murmur of agreement].

FS: Now, unfortunately, however much leaders may want to preserve that kind of a tie, under the impact of modernization much of the solidarity of a family gets loosened and lost. This is just one illustration of a casualty of modernization, which is regrettable and unfortunate. I think also the drift from the village to the town is another unhappy development. The rural areas are

constantly losing some of their more pioneering, their more farsighted youth because once these get education, they cease to find the village a sufficient scope for their initiative. They move to the city. And in the city they just, they are another statistic added to the anonymity of urban life.

YA: In my own talks about my own native land Iran and other parts of the Middle East, I've always said that the most important thing desired by the people is change. I'm sure you agree with me on this from what you've said. Now this change can come in at least two ways: evolutionary change and revolutionary change. Do you have any ideas on this?

FS: Yes, I come from an area that has thirteen countries, and these thirteen countries are almost evenly divided between those that have sought the quicker, quicker path of revolution and those have followed the slower and less coercive path of evolution. I personally feel, however, opposed to violence as such. It may be that the evolution of the school of thought will sooner or later run against the facts of life. Sooner or later, you're going to come face-to-face with the problem of a king and a feudal oligarchy that are not prepared to surrender privilege and power simply because someone asks them to. And there you either have to accept a limited change, limited by the overall presence of vested interest and privilege of monarchy, feudalism, and so on, or you have to challenge these institutions. I for one favor the regimes in the Arab countries that have found out that you cannot get sufficient change by coexistence with the kings and feudal lords and that you therefore have to do away with the kings and the feudal lords.

YA: Now, you have one historical argument on your side that so far at least I don't know if the Arab world, or in any other world, that the king has actually changed his role, or his color. You're right in that. But, when you have a revolution, isn't there a danger that the person who has, who has started the revolution, to become another king, or a new modern king and a dictator, for instance?

FS: Well, when we look at it in the sense that when man has engineered a revolution, the danger would exist. But actually when man cannot engineer a revolution, he cannot get away with it, if it does not respond to a deep-rooted desire on the part of a vast number of people, including political parties, the press, the educated youth, and the army. Where you don't have, among all these groups—the army, the press, the intellectuals, and the laboring unions and so on—the desire for change, you don't get the change, that revolutionary change I am talking about. Now, if there is this force behind the one man that is a leader or the figurehead of the revolution, then this same force will be our guarantee that the man cannot depart too far from the path of the purposes of the revolution.

YA: Now, do you, do you argue the same way with this phenomenon that we have not only in the Arab world commonly called the one man-one party democracy? Like Algeria for instance, do ah have an example?

FS: Algeria, also Egypt.

YA: In a way Egypt, yes.

FS: They are to some extent. Not as a permanent system, one party democracy would be obnoxious to me. But I want to compare it with what was before it. Was there before it a multi-party democracy which it came to eliminate and limit? Or was there before no democracy at all? And I think in all instances, we are going to agree that what preceded this one party democracy was no democracy at all, therefore at least this is a step in the right direction. I don't accept it as a permanent feature, but as a transitional instrument to move us away from complete tyranny from a foreigner or a domestic tyrant, towards democracy in the future. I think it's an acceptable transitional instrument.

YA: You see the fear of many people I've talked to in this country. They always point to the Soviet Union. It's fifty years now they've had one party they call democracy and it's still there, and that is the kind of fear they have when they see Egypt, and Iraq, and Algeria, the same thing.

FS: Well, all I can say is that the Communist revolution was staged by a party already solid behind its convictions and its dogma. Whereas the Arab revolutions have been brought about by the spirit of revolution but not by a solid dogma, and this I think will make some difference. Another thing is the the Communist revolution took place forty-five years ago and we still don't see any signs of relinquishment of power. Last [unclear] revolution, the oldest in the Arab world, is only ten years old, and we already see in it indications of a concession to collective

leadership last month, prior to that concession to parliamentary democracy about eight months ago. These may not be perfect, but they are moves in the right direction of greater democracy.

YA: With that, we have four more minutes and [chuckles] I have to ask you the question that I asked in another program, Dr. Dodge. How socialistic is socialism, particularly [unclear] socialism that we hear a great deal about, especially by [unclear]?

FS: Well, if we understand by socialism a Marxist philosophy of economic, social, and political re-organization, I would say that Arab socialism is utterly non-Marxist and in some respects anti-Marxist. I'll give you concrete illustrations. Marxism rejects the right to private property in principle.

[murmur of agreement]

Arab socialism began by increasing the number of property owners in the rural areas. As I said before, instead of having five percent of the country land-owning, almost everybody in the country is due to become land-owning. So, we have increased private property, and [unclear].

Secondly, communism believes in confiscation without compensation. Arab socialism has never confiscated anything from a foreigner or a native without compensating him for the full value of the property which was taken away from him—and taken away, not for the thrill of taking away, but for the property to serve a more useful purpose through being administered in a more socially-minded program. Thirdly, Marxism is non-national. Arab socialism is primarily a nationalist movement, and this sets it apart from the socialism of Marxists.

YA: Now, in this socialism there is a great deal of what we commonly call capitalism.

FS: Yes, it's it's never solidly a socialist economy. We still have private enterprise, we have public enterprise, and we have an in-between zone in which private and the public sector join together to develop certain industries or certain services.

YA: Now, um, do you feel that there is any religious objection to this com...what's called Arab socialism? From the point of view of Islam.

FS: Well the kings who are opposed to it because they are afraid for their thrones of sources have tried to say that this socialism is opposed to Islam. On the other hand, the advocates of socialism have tried to say this is the full embodiment of the spirit of Islam. I believe that if you take Islam as any other faith, you'll find that it is indifferent to either system. Islam specifies principles. We must have love for one another, we must have justice in our dealings with one another. I believe these principles are more likely to be embodied under what is now being called Arab socialism than under what was being called Arab capitalism or Arab monarch.

YA: The reason I asked this is because in Islam we have the principle of private property, and so on, and I know that in Iran they have brought idea that to force someone to sell his land is against the principle of private property in Islam. I just wonder if they have this in the Arab world. On the other hand, to exploit someone else is against the spirit of Islam.

FS: Yes, yes.

YA: So, it's a toss up which value of Islam you want to subordinate to which.

Well, thank you very much. Our time is up. We are going to have Dr. Sayegh with us again next Wednesday, and we shall continue our discussion about the Arab world, not only their social and educational change, but also the relationship of one Arab country to another, and their plan for the future. I hope all of you will be with us next Wednesday evening at 8:30. Good evening.

[Music]

Tonight's guest on Macalester at Home and Abroad was Dr. Fayez A. Sayegh. Next Wednesday, Dr. Yahya Armajani will present another view of the Macalester program of International Studies.

[Music]

Tomorrow night at 8:30, the Private College series returns. Macalester College will present the celebrated pianist Donald Betts. And at 7:30 tomorrow evening, the Private College Hour presents "Area Study of the Far East" with Dr. G.W.C. Ross of the College of St. Thomas, discussing reform and reorganization in Japan during the 19th century.

[Music]