

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean

Late 19th Century until the 1960s



Edited by
Christoph Schumann

BRILL

Liberal Thought in the Eastern
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On the cover:

- 1) A post-1908 postcard, showing the resurrection of the Ottoman Empire by the constitution from Wolf-Dieter Lemke's collection
 - 2) A patriotic procession on its way to the Monument of Liberty in Constantinople in 1912—as a reaction to the authoritarian rule of the Young Turks since 1908.
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Dedicated to Thomas Philipp
teacher—colleague—friend

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume is an effort to shift academic attention from all-too-familiar topics such as fundamentalism, radicalization, authoritarianism, and terrorism to a theme that is seemingly absent in both the past and present of the Eastern Mediterranean: liberal thought. Current efforts to democratize the Middle East from within and without the region tend to underestimate the fact that liberal and democratic ideas have resonated with positive and negative experiences and memories since the late nineteenth century. On the positive side are the individuals, organizations, and movements that advocated civil rights, communal tolerance, progress by education, and liberal constitutionalism. Most of the time, these demands became clearest and most outspoken as a reaction to negative experiences such as the autocratic rule of Abdülhamid II, the European Mandate system, or the rise of authoritarian ideologies and regimes since the 1940s and 1950s. In this sense, liberal thought is rooted, to a large extent, in the criticism of illiberal realities. For this reason alone, it cannot be regarded as the exclusive preserve of the West. Concordantly, the authors of this volume do not look at liberal thought as a result of “Westernization” but rather as a contingent outcome of historical processes within a certain region and in a global context.

The present volume results from the latest of four conferences held at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany. Thomas Philipp established this tradition in 1989 with a conference that focused on “the common and the specific of the historical experience of the Syrian Land”, or rather Bilad al-Sham, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ A second conference, in 1995, which was organized by Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäbler, took a more structuralist approach by discussing the “processes of integration and fragmentation” in the same area, in the first half of the twentieth century.² Later, Thomas Philipp and I directed our

¹ Thomas Philipp, ed., *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century: The Common and the Specific in the Historical Experience*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner 1992.

² Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schaebler, eds., *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilad al-Sham from the 18th to the 20th Century*, Stuttgart: F. Steiner 1998.

focus to the “processes of identities and ideologies” developing during the period of transition from the Bilad al-Sham to the modern states of Syria and Lebanon.³ With the encouragement of our colleagues and friends, I decided to organize the fourth conference alone—and this time in honor of Thomas Philipp. I consciously avoided the traditional German idea of a *Festschrift*. A *Festschrift* is usually a thick volume to which a great number of colleagues contribute—excluding the honored person—and which has no other focus than the connectedness of the authors to that person. Instead, I wanted to put into practice what I had learned from Thomas Philipp, namely to organize an academic conference as a social event where young and established scholars meet and engage in the discussion on a topic of common interest. In this fourth conference I kept the geographical focus on the Bilad al-Sham, but expanded the perspective by including Egypt, Turkey, and Iraq. Since it was not possible to include all the papers given at this conference in a single volume, a second book is planned, with the title *Nationalism and Liberal Thought in the Arab East*.

Apart from organizing conferences and editing conference volumes, Thomas Philipp has contributed by his research to an astounding variety of topics in the history of the Syrian Land and Egypt—among them the history of ideas, such as in his writings on Jurji Zaydan, the study of Arabic autobiographies, novels and historiography, the society and culture of the Mamluks, the development of cities and infrastructure, economic history, and migration. Although he specialized in the history of one particular geographical region, his writings show the awareness of wide regional contexts, modes of dependency and penetration, and the Arab demand for self-determination. Beyond this, Thomas Philipp served Syrian and Middle Eastern Studies, connecting scholars from various countries and different backgrounds. In doing so, he always tried to include young scholars. In this wider sense, his contribution to the field also comprises all the letters of recommendation he wrote for his students and other young scholars, all the drafts he read and commented on, and all the book reviews he published. For all this, I would like to thank Thomas warmly, and I do this also in the name of a number of young colleagues.

³ Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds., *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, Würzburg: Ergon 2004.

In addition, this volume owes gratitude to a number of other persons and institutions. First of all, I would like to thank our colleagues in Erlangen over the last few years. Dr. Arsuzi-Elamir has contributed much to our shared interest in the history of nationalism in the Syrian Land. On top of this, she has gained particular merits during the last years by building up an institutionalized form of cooperation between the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg and the University of Damascus. I am also grateful to Sibylle Appelt, who worked as a secretary in Erlangen for many years. She died unexpectedly and much too early in 2007. Sibylle Appelt organized the practical parts of the last three conferences. During the conference a number of younger colleagues and students were extremely helpful. Among them, I would like to mention particularly Thomas Demmelhuber and Jens Kutscher. Here in Bern, I would like to thank particularly Sibylle Wertenschlag, who helped me to finalize the manuscript.

The conference itself would not have been possible at all without the financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) and the Bavarian State Ministry of Sciences, Research and the Arts, for which I would like to express my gratitude.

I also owe gratitude to several persons who helped me to create the cover of this book. The first picture is taken from a historical postcard owned by Dr. Wolf-Dieter Lemke, whom I thank for permission to reprint it. It shows the “resurrection of the Ottoman Empire by the constitutional revolution of 1908.” The Young Turks used this postcard to legitimize their government in the following years. The second picture is a photograph of a demonstration against this government in 1912. My dear friend Stefan Weber helped me to find this picture, and I thank the Library of Congress for supplying it. Drawn together into one collage by the designers at Brill, the cover reflects the complexity and ambiguity of liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In addition, I would like to thank Brill Publishers, particularly Trudy Kamperveen and Willy de Gijzel, for their editorial and technical assistance.

Furthermore, I owe very special thanks to Mary Starkey, who edited not only the volume in hand, but also the previous conference volume. It is to her credit that we brought the present volume into proper English and into a consistent form. All remaining flaws of this book go certainly back to my own lack of attention.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife, Silke, for supporting me in many ways. She gave birth to our son Benedikt in 2005, one day before the conference started. The two events shaped my life in the aftermath considerably and they will always remain connected in my memory as two extraordinarily joyful experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Christoph Schumann

Looking at the political realities in the Eastern Mediterranean today, the project of publishing a volume on liberal thought seems to be daring, to say the least. Over the last couple of years, the American campaign for “democratization” in Iraq appears to be ending in a military quagmire, elections in Egypt and Palestine have led to victories for Islamist parties, and the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah has not only shaken the fragile political system of Lebanon but threatened the security of the region as a whole. The most tangible experience that nearly all the inhabitants of the region can connect with the word “liberal” is “economic liberalization,” and of course the idea that economic liberalization would almost magically lead to political liberalization, or even democratization, has proved no more than a “grand delusion.”¹

Nevertheless, there has been no dearth of debate on democratization and liberalization in the Middle East before and after the American invasion of Iraq, both in the media and among scholars. However, many of these discussions are based on a number of obvious misconceptions. First, the concept of “democratization” is often reduced to a functioning electoral process, and “liberalization” to economic deregulation. Fareed Zakaria has, however, pointed out that elections alone do not make a democracy, let alone a “liberal democracy” based on the division of powers, the rule of law, limited government, and respect for human and civil rights.² Similarly, it can be said that economic liberalization does not necessarily create a society based on liberal values.

Second, there is a general tendency to overlook historical experiences with liberal thought and democratization in the region—with the exception of Israel and (to some extent) Turkey. However, a brief glance at the past shows that constitutions, elections, party systems, and political struggles for rights and liberties are not at all alien to the

¹ Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt*, London: I. B. Tauris 2001.

² Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company 2003.

region. In fact, freedom of expression and opinion was included in most constitutions of the pre-revolutionary era. Although these constitutions have been suspended time and again, ever since the Ottoman constitution was established in 1876, the principle of constitutionalism, once introduced, has never been seriously called into question. Today, opposition movements throughout the region, far from requiring the abolition or amendment of constitutions, demand the removal of restrictions imposed on them.

A third widespread misconception centers on the tendency to overestimate Islam as *the* formative factor of the region's political culture. Although most area specialists will probably disagree with the thesis that Islam or Islamism per se are obstacles to democratization and liberal thought, the words "Islam," "Islamic," and "Islamist" have become part of the titles of many books, perpetuating this misconception. Titles such as *Liberal Islam* or *Islamic Liberalism*, for instance, presuppose that a clear distinction can be made between an "Islamic" and a "secular" liberal discourse.³ This raises the question of the nature of the relationship between the "two sides": is intellectual exchange possible across the religious-secular divide? Can we understand one side without being aware of the other? Are there any common intellectual roots? Do secular and Islamic liberals have common experiences, shared concerns, and compatible agendas? And, most important, are there norms and rules that are acceptable to both camps despite their different modes of justification?⁴

In order to avoid these pitfalls, this volume takes a historical approach and looks at the current political situation in the Eastern Mediterranean as a contingent outcome of history. In other words, the societies of the regions *are* what they *became*. Just as in Western societies, history has two aspects: the *factual* legacy of past events, institutions, and structures, on the one hand, and the *perceived* discursive legacy of collective experiences, memories, and lessons drawn from this past, on the other. In this sense, liberal thought is fundamentally rooted in the complexity of the region's history, with all its highs and lows. The positive example of the Ottoman constitution of 1876, for instance,

³ Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998; Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: Critique of Development Ideologies*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1988.

⁴ I am thinking of John Rawls's concept of an "overlapping consensus," in *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press 1993, chapter 4.

and the negative experience of the Hamidian authoritarianism that followed, were of equal importance for the rise of liberal thought in the late nineteenth century.

Equally, this volume does not attempt to excavate the philosophical roots of liberal thought by tracing ideas, notions, and concepts back to their alleged “origins”—whether in the “Western” or “Islamic” tradition. Rather, it situates these roots in the social and political contexts that provided the ground for the emergence and decline of liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean from the late nineteenth century until the 1960s. The editing process of this book started with the rather open heuristic notion of “liberal thought,” leaving room for the contributors to define their own theoretical concepts and methodological approaches. We have consciously avoided the notion of “liberalism” in the sense of an allegedly consistent entity of ideas with a particular historical genealogy. Neither did we want to limit ourselves to groups or persons who term themselves “liberal.” Instead, we started with the assumption that liberal ideas could be found historically in all ideologies and schools of political thought, such as nationalism, Islamic populism, and socialism. In many cases, they coexisted with illiberal ideas within the same parties, institutions, and journals—and sometimes even in the writings of a single person. Of course, this causes logical contradictions, but only philosophers and scientists find it difficult to accept contradictions—ordinary people easily accommodate to these inconsistencies in their everyday lives.

Despite this open, heuristic approach, a set of liberal ideas and themes emerged as important during the era under investigation and, hence, in all the articles in this volume: modernity (as opposed to tradition); progress (as opposed to stagnation or retardation); reform (as opposed to revolution); individualism (as opposed to collectivism); constitutional rule (as opposed to authoritarianism); the demand for rights for marginalized groups such as workers and women; human civilization and democracy. Albert Hourani was certainly right with his caveat in 1983 that these were not the only influential concepts during the era that he famously called the “liberal age.”⁵ Of course, the ideas of “national strength and unity and the power of governments” occupied the minds

⁵ See Albert Hourani’s “Preface to the 1983 Reissue” in his *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press 1983, iv.

of most intellectuals. There can be no doubt, however, that liberal ideas were influential—if not even hegemonic—during the period under investigation, and that this influence evaporated at some point in the middle of the twentieth century. Yet this decline of liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean was noticeable throughout all political and ideological camps. Most parties and organizations had consisted of two wings, generally at odds with one another—one authoritarian, and the other more liberal. Yet the authoritarian wings prevailed, along with the intensification of the political struggles, after World War II. In consequence, ready-made solutions based on elitism, revolution, control, and reform from above gained ground, and succeeded almost everywhere.

The book is in three parts. The first focuses on the impact of the West in the form of Protestant mission, the mandate system and education policies. The second turns to the autochthonous factors: the struggle for political and constitutional rights and the realities of constitutional government. The third points to some of the immanent ambiguities of liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean: the concept of nation and civilization, individualism and subjectivity, and, last but not least, freedom of opinion and the simultaneous proclivity of some intellectuals to fall prey to its utmost opposite: authoritarian ideologies.

The impact of the West: mission, mandate, and education

The rise and decline of liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be explained without reference to the impact of the West. The models of European and American societies inspired reformers throughout the region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many journals and magazines, such as *al-Muqataṭaf*, *al-Hilāl*, *al-Manār* in Cairo or *al-Ḥadīth* in Aleppo (see the chapters by Dupont and Sing), saw it as one of their purposes to popularize and indigenize Western knowledge and values. However, these ideas did not come alone, but were accompanied by Western interventionism, colonialism (see the chapters by Sluglett and Provence), and a degree of contempt for indigenous cultures and religions (see Makdisi's chapter). The Mandate system was an example of this contradiction. Colonial proponents justified their actions under the pretense of leading the colonized populations toward democracy and independence, but put their goals into practice by military force because the majority of the people resented foreign rule. For this reason, many of the institutions founded and laws enacted by the

mandatory powers tended to lose a part of their legitimacy because they came to be seen as serving European interests, or to be simply “alien.” It is still often the case that their opponents accuse secular liberals of being agents of the West.

Ever since the publication of George Antonius’s *Arab Awakening*, there has been the historical myth that liberal thought was brought to the Levant by Western—particularly American—missionaries. Ussama Makdisi sheds new light on the mindset of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions before and after its encounter with Ottoman society. He argues that the American missionaries modeled their self-perception and their goals on the basis of previous experiences proselytizing among the Native Americans, and had little knowledge of, or interest in, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Makdisi describes their attitudes as “paternalistic rather than racist, intolerant and emphatically not liberal.” Seen from this perspective, Butrus al-Bustani’s call for toleration and mutual respect of all religions after 1860 was not an attempt to emulate Western models, but was instead the result of the interaction between Americans and Ottoman Arabs.

The Mandate system, which was imposed on the region of Greater Syria after World War I as an effort to implement Western ideas of democracy and liberal government, was based on a paradoxical reliance on military intervention and colonial rule. Peter Sluglett analyzes the inherent contradiction between high ideals and illiberal practices in the cases of Iraq and Syria. He argues that the new states created by France and Great Britain were not mirror images of the European states, but rather sub-standard versions of them. Nevertheless, these states at least provided a legal framework and a political arena in which local political actors could operate. In addition, the liberal pretensions of the Mandate system, particularly the constant references to democracy and representative government, constituted a yardstick against which the opposition could criticize actual realities. In the end, the mandated states failed precisely because of those realities; the Mandates did not fulfill the basic functions of a nation-state—to integrate their citizens economically and socially and to provide an accepted framework for political decision making.

Pursuing a similar line of argument, Michael Provence investigates an incident that took place during the Great Syrian Revolt. In August 1925, revolutionary tracts calling for armed resistance against the French military authorities were pasted on walls in the Syrian city of Homs. Officers of the Service des Renseignements questioned several young

boys and students, and four of them were eventually convicted under the French Code of Military Justice and sentenced to prison terms and harsh fines. Quoting Ranajit Guha, Provence argues that French rule in Syria was “domination without hegemony.” Although mandatory rule was justified in liberal terms, the French authorities resorted to authoritarian practices whenever they encountered popular resistance.

Abdul-Karim Rafeq presents a different aspect of French policy in Syria during the Mandate era by emphasizing the significance of the Syrian University of Damascus for the development of liberal ideas. He acknowledges that the French Mandate authorities, although generally eager to crack down on any kind of political and intellectual resistance, did not infringe too much upon the internal affairs of the university. They did not try to transform it into a French institution, nor did they attempt to replace the Arabic language with French. In addition, they remained generally concerned to keep the standards of teaching and learning as high as possible, a policy appreciated by both students and professors. Nevertheless, the university’s campus became a forum for political debates and agitation against French rule. Students staged demonstrations, particularly during the Syrian Revolt of 1925 and the general strike of 1936. Rafeq argues that quality academic education, as well as the relatively free political atmosphere on the campus, were formative for a whole generation of political leaders of the post-independence era.

From a different angle, Betty Anderson shows that the interaction between Western ideas and pretensions and the realities of Arab society also left a mark on Western institutions in the region. The history of the Syrian Protestant College, which later became famous as the American University of Beirut, was molded by its twofold connections with other institutions of Protestant education in the United States, on the one hand, and with the students and the local society in the Levant, on the other. In line with the development of a liberal Protestantism in America, the teaching of a holistic Truth with the goal of conversion gave way to the idea that education should lead to the formation of a certain type of personality, one whose character relied on tolerance, patriotism, morals, and a sense of duty. The students, however, took the notion of “liberal education” more literally. They criticized the university’s paternalism and demanded more freedom to express their opinions and concerns, both on and beyond the campus.

Constitutionalism, revolution, and liberal thought

The history of constitutionalism in the Eastern Mediterranean started well before the era of European colonialism. Although the first Ottoman constitution of 1876 was clearly inspired by European models, particularly the Belgian constitution of 1830 and the Prussian constitutional edict of 1850, Muslims and non-Muslims alike welcomed it. Its suspension between 1878 and 1908 did nothing to diminish its popularity. On the contrary, its restoration by the Young Turks was warmly greeted in the streets and by the press throughout the empire.

Anne-Laure Dupont provides an in-depth analysis of the reactions of two prominent Syrian intellectuals resident in Egypt, Jurji Zaydan and Muhammad Rashid Rida. Although Zaydan and Rida are frequently associated with very different intellectual traditions, with the former labeled a “secular Christian” and the latter a “Muslim reformist,” Dupont stresses their biographical and intellectual commonalities. Both came from the same homeland, edited well-known magazines (*al-Hilāl* and *al-Manār*), loved the Arabic language, and had a similar perception of the intellectuals’ role in society. Both of them welcomed the Young Turk constitutional “revolution” (*inqilāb*) and regarded constitutional rule by the sultan as the most appropriate and legitimate form of political unity for Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as for the various ethnicities and peoples in the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, they rejected violent “revolts” (*thawra*) and all forms of religious or nationalistic “fanaticism” (*ta’aşşub*). Rida in particular warned against pitting the *sharī’a* against the constitution.

In order to be disseminated and to gain social relevance, political thought needs to be rooted in movements, groups, parties, or institutions. In the first years of the twentieth century, a remarkable network of radicals, socialists, and anarchists, stretching from Egypt over Beirut to Syria, came into existence. It was concentrated around two periodicals founded by Daud Muja’is: *al-Nūr* in Alexandria and *al-Ḥurriyya* in Beirut. Examining the political thought and practice of the intellectuals connected to this network, Ilham Khuri-Makdisi argues that they represent a neglected part of the *nahḍa*’s history. They shared the same social background, the same cultural milieu, and even most political concerns with the better-known “moderate” *nahḍa* reformers. At the same time, however, they empathized with the disenfranchised and destitute classes, and hence merged their ideas with elements of the international socialist and anarchist movements.

In the following chapter, Hasan Kayalı reconsiders the years between 1918 and 1923, the brief period of transition from the rump Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. He argues that this interlude has remained a blind spot in the historiography between the two grand narratives of World War I and the Turkish “national struggle.” Like the constitutional revolution of 1908, the years of the rump empire witnessed a blossoming of newspapers, magazines, and a broad variety of civic, professional, and cultural associations after the armistice of 1918. The weakening of the state apparatus apparently went hand in hand with a thriving civil society. However, the territorial integrity of the region became increasingly threatened by the European powers and a group of secessionist movements. In addition, political life was polarized between Istanbul, the seat of the sultan, and Ankara, the center of the national movement and, later on, of the Grand National Assembly. After Mustafa Kemal had led the national movement to victory, he subjugated civil liberties to his project of enforced modernization from above.

Syria received its first constitution under French rule in 1930. Eyal Zisser argues that historians have not paid adequate attention to the drafting process, but rather have focused too much on the national struggle for independence. He points out that the constitution was not simply imposed by the French, but resulted from a process of dialogue and the realities of the conflict between the French Mandate and local powers. As a legal document, the constitution made fundamental statements about the state, the institutions of government, and the relationship between the state and its citizens which reflected a genuine, liberal discourse prevalent in Syria in this period. During the drafting process, French officials clashed with Syrian nationalists over the state’s international borders and the political status of minorities. Nevertheless, a consensus emerged over the idea that Syria should become a “democratic, liberal, and Western-style republic.”

Taking the case of Lebanon, Raghid El-Solh focuses on the Arab and Syrian nationalists and their perception of the principle of “consociational democracy” during the era of the French Mandate. With reference to Arend Lijphart’s concept of consensus democracy, El-Solh defines the need for segmental autonomy, a grand coalition, proportionality, and a mutual veto as the central features of Lebanon’s consociational democracy. He shows that Syrian and Arab nationalists rejected the idea of a separate Lebanese state alongside Syria during the 1920s, and particularly resented the French role in creating Greater Lebanon, its annexation of Syrian territories for the new state, and the use of political

sectarianism to ensure French domination. In the following decades, these attitudes about the Lebanese state and consociationalism changed, as El-Solh shows by analyzing the discussions during the meetings of the Conference of the Coast—a loose framework of Arab nationalists in Lebanon. Arab nationalists took the concerns of the Lebanese Christians more seriously, and sought to develop a common scheme based on Lebanese independence from France and the preservation of its identity as an Arab state along the lines of secular democratic Arab nationalism.

Liberal thought and its ambivalences

Modern thought in the West and the problem of “Westernization” have fascinated and haunted Middle Eastern intellectuals and scholars of intellectual history ever since the nineteenth century. A number of intellectuals—many of them Christian—have been depicted as “Westernized.” Such a label is a crass oversimplification, for two reasons. First, Muslim and Christian reformers alike tried to connect the universal aspects of what they deemed to be modern with a particular concept of identity—“Arab,” “Muslim,” or “Eastern.” The common intellectual theme of the period under investigation in this book was not “Westernization” vs. the rejection of “Westernization” but the difficult combination of a *universalistic* concept of modernity with a *particularistic* concept of identity. Second, there is, of course, no monolithic Western intellectual tradition, but rather a diversity of traditions. Hence, any adoption of Western thought in the Middle East always came accompanied by questions of what to select and what to reject.

The notional dichotomy between the “Western” and “non-Western” civilizations, as used by Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis, shapes today’s discussions on liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean to a considerable degree. In my own contribution to this volume, I question this conception. The imperialist penetration of the Eastern Mediterranean by the European states and the mass migration from there to the Americas created a “transcultural space” of cultural, political, and economic exchange, albeit on unequal terms.⁶ I use Ameen Rihani

⁶ Almut Höfert and Armando Salvatore, “Beyond the Clash of Civilisations: Transcultural Politics between Europe and Islam,” in Almut Höfert and Armando Salvatore,

as an example of an intellectual who spent one part of his life in the United States and another in the Arab world. His work was influenced by multiple sources and experiences, and therefore cannot be simply attributed to the “East” or the “West.” This is reflected particularly in his use of the word “civilization” (*ḥaḍāra*). Its meaning oscillates between a multitude of “civilizations” that enrich one another by exchange and a single human “Civilization” that progresses in multiple ways: culturally, economically, politically, and intellectually. Although Rihani’s terminology is not entirely consistent, he sheds both the essentialism of a monadic concept of civilization and the teleology of a linear process of modernization.

The rise of a modern conception of individualism and subjectivity in the Eastern Mediterranean was connected to the popularity of the literary genre of memoirs and autobiographies. Marilyn Booth investigates a peculiar kind of biographical writing that she calls “ventriloquized memoirs”: a narrative that pretends to be an “authentic” autobiography, even though the narrator and the author are obviously two different persons. This literary form allows for a male author to assume the persona of a woman, or for a middle-class intellectual to empathize with a worker. By doing so, the authors are able to construct the voices of those who cannot or do not speak for themselves in the public sphere. Booth argues that these stories contain a twofold critique. They use the ideal of the free individual as a yardstick to criticize restrictions on personal liberties as a result of social inequalities and patriarchal traditions; and, in a wider sense, they criticize their nation’s lack of freedom from colonial rule.

Liberal thought was not only contested in public, but was very often also ambiguous in itself. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu, Manfred Sing argues that intellectuals are usually united in defending the freedom of the “literary field” against political, social, or religious interferences. Yet, at the same time, intellectuals are also involved in keen competition with one another, thus increasing their tendency to take up political causes—some of them completely illiberal—in order to attract attention. Using Sami al-Kayyali, the editor of the literary review *al-Ḥadīth* (Aleppo), as a case in point, Sing shows how Kayyali’s thought changed—very much in line with the political circumstances—from a liberal phase during

eds., *Between Europe and Islam: Shaping Modernity in a Transcultural Space*, Brussels et al.: PIE Lang 2000, 13–37.

the 1920s and 1930s to a nationalist mode of thinking in the 1950s and 1960s. In the end, however, his journal became a victim of 'Abd al-Nasser's regime after Syria's unification with Egypt: *al-Ḥadīth* was shut down in the name of the progressive Arab nationalism al-Kayyali had promoted before.

In conclusion, it can be said that no comprehensive and widely accepted theory of liberalism has yet emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean, and it seems unrealistic to hope that such a theory will come into existence any time soon. This volume shows, however, that there are multiple roots of liberal thought and practice that deserve to be uncovered and rediscussed in light of the current situation. Since these ideas and concepts were not restricted to any particular party, sect, or social group, it seems evident that liberal thought was and still is compatible with the region's varied cultures and religions. Of course, liberal politics cannot be imposed from outside. It needs to grow from below while drawing from both domestic and global experiences. The central elements of liberal thought and practice include political moderation and mutual tolerance, constitutionalism and the rule of the law, representative institutions and limited government, the dignity of the human being, and the region's full participation in a universalistic and humanistic civilization.

PART ONE

THE IMPACT OF THE WEST:
MISSION, MANDATE, AND EDUCATION

CHAPTER ONE

THE QUESTION OF AMERICAN LIBERALISM AND THE ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN BOARD MISSION TO THE LEVANT AND ITS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ussama Makdisi

Cultures clash, and, in our own time, nowhere more obviously than in the American intrusion into the Arab world. But this process does not continue unceasingly and predictably. Long before the first American tanks rolled into Iraq to free its people, American missionaries sought to liberate the millions of supposedly perishing souls who lived in the vast Ottoman Empire. In both instances, Americans arrived in ancient lands uninvited; in both, they were guided by an obliviousness to local realities, and possessed of an almost unshakeable self-righteousness. And in both, American audacity was checked by the swiftness of local reaction. But to draw too straight a line between past encounter and present strife is to miss the variability of history and to obscure the profound changes that have transformed, almost beyond recognition, Americans and Arabs in the intervening two hundred years. To understand not simply that cultures clash, but how and why they did so at a specific historical moment should be a principal goal of historians of the modern Middle East. To historicize is to recognize that what is at stake today is no more a timeless civilizational clash between great monolithic blocs of people, between Islam and the West, than it was when American missionaries first embarked on their fantastic errand to convert the world.

For far too long historians of American missions to the Orient—indeed, historians of Western intellectual influence on the Middle East more generally—have allowed a central, unstated assumption to stand unchallenged. In thinking about the problem of liberalism in the Middle East, they have often accepted or assumed a narrative of Enlightenment in a supposedly emancipated West.¹ Nowhere is this tendency more

¹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, London: Oxford University Press 1962.

apparent than in the writings on American missionaries who have for far too long been identified as the harbingers of liberalism in modern Syria because of the institutions of higher education such as the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), founded in the mid-nineteenth century. The truth of the matter, however, is more complex. And the historical record of the American missionary commitment to liberalism in the Arab world is in need of serious and urgent reconsideration. Rather than assume that the SPC is the beginning of the American mission, or at any rate, conflating it with the mission, it is crucial that we begin to grapple with the earlier, unappreciated history of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions—one that will almost certainly discredit uncritical celebrations, as well as thoughtless condemnations, of American missionaries and, of course, shed new light on the question of liberalism in the Arab world.²

The mission and the martyr

As pioneering missionaries of the American Board, the largest and most influential foreign missionary society in the nineteenth-century United States, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons set out in 1819 to reclaim the lands of the Bible from what they described as an empire of sin. They believed themselves to be the vanguard of a historic civilizational clash that would pit true Christianity against one of its most implacable foes, Islam. The Americans at first eschewed any comparison with the Crusades, not out of any concern with the hearts and minds of the people they had come to convert, but out of a genuine conviction that their militancy was spiritual in nature. They were the artillery of heaven, certain of victory as time flew forward to its much-anticipated end. Their first Arab convert, a young Maronite Christian subject of the Ottoman Empire by the name of As'ad al-Shidyaq, was also their first martyr. Won over by the missionaries after five years of fruitless effort, As'ad was persecuted by his native church. His name, and with it his place in local society, was obliterated. Labeled *Rab Shayul* (Syriac, "Lord of Hell"), he died,

² Here of course I have to acknowledge the pioneering work of A. L. Tibawi, the most important historian of American missionaries to the Levant and whose work *American Interests in Syria: 1800–1901*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1966, contained an essential criticism of American missionaries that later historians of the Middle East have not amplified sufficiently.

tortured and imprisoned, abandoned by family and community, in a secluded convent in Mount Lebanon, sometime in 1830.

His tale is an American tragedy: it tells of a young life extinguished in a futile quest to graft a bold but uncompromising American puritanism on an implacably multi-religious world. More than anything else, this clash of cultures revolved around the meeting of two very powerful currents of American and Ottoman history. The first current was represented by an expansive missionary movement conditioned by the signal victory of white Americans over Indians on the eastern seaboard of the United States, and defined by the millennial expectations thrown up in a revolutionary era. For the missionaries caught up in this current, unconstrained individual freedom of conscience would inevitably lead to an evangelical Protestantism, and no accommodation with other religions could long be tolerated. They not only refused to coexist with other faiths, they deliberately and willingly engaged themselves in a war whose outcome was to be the annihilation of all other religions. The second current emerged out of an Ottoman-Arab orthodoxy that regarded the mutual recognition of different religious communities as a guarantee of order and harmony in a profoundly unequal multi-religious Islamic society. Far from being a story of self-evident tolerance against intolerance or modernity against tradition, the story of the first American missionary encounter with the Ottoman-Arab world very much represented the contradiction, and struggle, between different and fundamentally antithetical temporalities that defined the relationship between ideals and facts. The first reflected a fantastic determination to refashion the world on evangelical terms at a time of ascendant Anglo-American power; the second, a violent refusal to accept these terms.

A cultural clash

That this clash unfolded at the margins of two worlds—overseas from the American perspective and in rural Mount Lebanon from the Ottoman point of view, among Protestant missionaries and Maronite Christians—should make us appreciate how cultures (broadly defined here as readings of the world mediated by shared assumptions about time and place) are always in context. Nowhere were the Protestant missionaries more “American” than when they came into contact with an obviously foreign Ottoman society; even as they were identified locally as “English,” and allowed this fiction to stand because of a lack of US

diplomatic presence, nowhere else could these Americans represent the antebellum United States in so evangelical and so uncontested a manner.³ That I am insisting here that Maronite Christians represented a face of a vast Muslim empire underscores both the degree to which the accommodation of religious difference under Muslim primacy was central to pre-Tanzimat Ottoman rule and the extent to which Maronites were inextricably integrated into a highly stratified world of Ottoman Lebanon that privileged rank over religion, and high over low. As such, my argument flatly rejects the myth of so-called “dhimmitude,” the egregious articulation of a Western obsession with Christian and Jewish minorities that has long plagued the study of the Middle East. This bias, much in vogue in certain neo-conservative and Zionist circles in the United States today, is based on an idea of perpetual hostility between minorities and an oppressive monolithic Muslim majority.⁴ This is not to say, as Muslim apologists have done ever since the nineteenth century, that there was no oppression in Islamic societies, or that the roots of liberalism and democracy can be found in Islam.⁵ It is, however, to make a crucial distinction between the vagaries of an imperial policy of *tolerance* and a far more localized history of *coexistence* whereby different religious communities historically lived together, and accepted the fact of doing so in a socially discriminatory and deeply conservative social order. It was upon such a local world, on the fringes of Muslim imperial concern, that American missionaries radically impinged in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The narcissism of American historiography...

From the outset, missionary accounts of this history evoked a biblical as much as an Ottoman landscape, with missionaries playing the part of ancient prophets chastising and cajoling errant flocks to obedience and order. In these nineteenth-century legends, good men, like good

³ See for instance, John A. Andrew III, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America*, Athens: University of Georgia Press 1992.

⁴ Robert Spencer's *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims*, Amherst: Prometheus Books 2005, is the latest example in this egregious but, alas, resilient form of orientalist scholarship.

⁵ See the criticism of this apologetic approach in Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, ed. Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague, Boston: Beacon Press 2002.

things, flowed from the land of supposed Christian fulfillment to that of ancient promise. For all their time spent in the region, for all their detailed accounts of the manners and customs of the local peoples, for all their Christian emphasis on the common humanity of all men, for all their efforts to master Arabic, men such as Isaac Bird, Eli Smith, William Thompson, and Henry Harris Jessup—to name but four of the most prominent American missionaries—upheld the civilizational and racial hierarchy symbolized in the original seal of the American Board: an obviously dark native kneeling down before, and gratefully accepting the Bible from, a white missionary amidst tropical palm trees. As'ad, of course, was precisely such a native—"the first Protestant martyr," as Thompson curiously asserted in his famous *The Land and the Book*. As'ad's story was quickly transformed into a classic missionary hagiography, and took its place among those of other celebrated natives such as the Cherokee Catherine Brown and the Hawaiian Henry Obookiah; his death was deliberately presented as a martyrdom that encapsulated both the inherent fanaticism of the Muslim East and the underlying desire and possibility of its people to be liberated. More recent historians of American religious or diplomatic history have reproduced, in admittedly less evangelical terms, this missionary perspective of unilinear movement, from dynamic West to stagnant East, and thus have continued to overlook the actual histories and archives of the Ottoman-Arab world.⁶ For them the setting might as well have been the Sandwich Islands as Syria; the Maronite As'ad Shidyaq might as well have been the Cherokee Catherine Brown, and the Ottoman sultan, the Hawaiian queen Keopoulani. The astonishing irrelevance of actual local context—native culture and history—to the grand narrative of missionary work is not simply a question of ignorance or parochialism. Rather, it reflects the longevity of a reading of the world that has its origins in the first Enlightenment-era evangelical missionary publications such as William Carey's 1792 *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians* or Gordon Hall

⁶ James A. Field, Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World 1776–1882*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, is typical in this respect. The most interesting recent work on Americans in the Middle East has come not from historians but from those in literature and American studies such as Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East 1945–2000*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2001, and Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999, but even these do not take up any but American archives.

and Samuel Newall's 1818 *Conversion of the World*.⁷ This latter volume, passionately and militantly written by two American Board missionaries, encapsulated in seventy-six pages the universal scope of distinctly American missionary labor and outlined the essential hopeless similarity of all perishing heathen. Historians have since then, with very few exceptions, typically reproduced not simply the rhetoric but also the structure of classic missionary memorials, moving from center to periphery, from light into darkness, and from white to non-white.⁸ The abundance of missionary sources and the relative paucity of indigenous ones, of course, facilitates this almost effortless embrace of missionary perspective, but does not entirely explain it. Nothing in the literature on American missionaries to the Levant—indeed, on American missionaries more generally—approaches the theoretical sophistication of work on missionaries in the British Empire.⁹ Partly this has to do with the fact that missionaries and questions of conversion do not occupy the same salient historiographical space for the nineteenth-century United States as they do for the British Empire, be it the American colonial era or later in non-American parts of the empire. It is also due to the defensiveness evident in the more missiological approach to the missionaries, which has privileged evangelism over secular historical analysis.¹⁰ The fact that missionaries wrote prolifically in English, and that their archives are readily accessible, clearly adds to the dramatic imbalance inherent in such accounts.¹¹ The seminary education of the American missionaries to Palestine and Syria encouraged them to keep extensive

⁷ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, London: Leicester, Printed and sold by Ann Ireland 1792; Gordon Hall and Samuel Newall, *The Conversion of the World, of the Claims of Six Hundred Millions and the Ability and Duty of the Churches Respecting Them*, 2nd ed., Andover: Flagg & Gould 1818.

⁸ William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987, is the most obvious example of this.

⁹ For example, the work of Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991, and *Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997. See also Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003.

¹⁰ See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1991.

¹¹ Even Catherine Hall's remarkable *Civilising Subjects* falls short in this domain, with the black Jamaicans in her narrative remaining fairly opaque.

personal diaries as an integral expression of their own Calvinistic faith. Their missionary training, moreover, encouraged them to provide more general, descriptive, and anthropological accounts to record the variety of human conditions that they as missionaries would encounter in their incredible quest to convert the perishing heathen before the imminent end of time. In short, the American missionaries have left a paper trail that *humanizes* their world. It is, therefore, far easier, *at first glance*, to record history from “their” perspective, and it is for this basic reason that so many missionary histories are understandably written from a missionary point of view.

...and the pitfalls of nationalist historiography

The answer to this historiographic problem is not, or at least not only, to write from a so-called native perspective, to switch vantage points, or to valorize local resistance. To be sure, there remain a plethora of stories to tell, histories to reveal, narratives to be created about the countless “native helpers,” “hopeful converts,” and “bigoted fanatics” who constitute the largely anonymous local color of missionary portraits. To piece together the forgotten humanity at the heart of the missionary world—the converts and their societies in as much complexity as possible—is certainly an important endeavor, and surely more easily done for the literate modern Middle East than for the broken remnants of pre-Columbian America subjected to genocidal Western imperialism. That it has not been done is testimony to the fact that the missionaries to the Levant are remembered more for their later secular educational work associated with the SPC and Robert College than for their initial overtly evangelical enterprise.¹² But it is also due to the fact that the study of missionaries has long been out of favor among historians of the region, who have focused instead on rehabilitating the historiographic reputation of the nineteenth-century Ottoman state, which missionaries—Catholic as well as Protestant—did much to sully. It is telling indeed that the last major work on American missionaries to the Levant was written in 1966 by A. L. Tibawi, and that while there are dozens of studies of the Jewish communities of the empire, there are virtually none of its Protestants. To the extent that missionaries and those

¹² See for instance the chapter of Betty Anderson in this volume.

who orbited their worlds have maintained a historiographic presence, it is due to the work of historians interested in tracing the Ottoman response and resistance to Western cultural imperialism.¹³

Missionaries, of course, have been particularly vulnerable to the charge of cultural imperialism—whether in British India, Africa or the West Indies, Spanish America, Puritan New England, or the Ottoman Empire. The remarkable similarity of their writings on heathens whatever the locale, as well as their zealotry, has made them obvious targets for satirists and novelists from Mark Twain and Herman Melville to Chinua Achebe and Amin Maalouf. But simply to emphasize resistance and to consider the missionaries in the Ottoman Empire as “cultural imperialists” is to misconstrue the resiliency of the Ottoman and Arab worlds. The Ottomans, after all, were not Tzvetan Todorov’s Aztecs, and the Americans were not traveling in the company of conquistadores. Most studies of missionaries are invariably set in clearly colonial settings where the balance of power was tilted overwhelmingly in favor of the Europeans. The early nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, however, was not colonized. It boasted its own imperial tradition based on the accommodation of religious difference, the ambivalences of which both Maronites and missionaries exploited. Just as there was no single “colonizer,” there was no single “native” side in this encounter.¹⁴ Later in the century, perhaps, when missionaries worked more directly in collaboration with Western colonial powers in the region, particularly in British-occupied Egypt or in French-occupied Lebanon, the charge of cultural imperialism becomes more tenable, but certainly not at the outset of the mission, when two, and then four, men wandered across Mount Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine for several years pleading and preaching their version of the word of God in a multi-religious empire

¹³ See Jens Hanssen, *Fin de siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2005; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire*, London: I. B. Tauris 1998; and Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press 2002. The same cannot be said from Jesuit history, which has seen the remarkable work of Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la réforme Catholique: Syrie, Liban, Palestine XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles*, Rome: Ecole française de Rome 1994, and *Hindiyya: Mystique et Criminelle*, Paris: Auber 2001, for which there is no comparable English language work.

¹⁴ See Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution. Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness* for an elaboration of this point in a far more stereotypical colonial frontier.

still confident, if no longer certain, of its ability to withstand Western encroachment.

Expectations: Americans, Indians, and Arabs

Undeniably, the American Board was constituted with imperialism in its marrow. Founded in 1810 as part of an explicit Congregationalist reaction to the rise of liberal Christian thinking in Boston, it deplored both the secular and racist tendencies of the American revolution. It was opposed to both the diversity of religious sects that flourished in late eighteenth-century New England—from Methodism and Baptism to Universalism and Unitarianism, and finally to Quakerism and Catholicism—and to the appalling race-thinking that was to become hegemonic in nineteenth-century America. It celebrated its Puritan ancestry, and was utterly convinced of the righteousness of the Christian conquest of America. But even as it actively participated in what it regarded as the “inevitable” destruction of Indian culture, the American Board recognized and condemned the relentless oppression of the native Americans themselves.¹⁵ Indeed, it emerged at a moment when many in the new nation, especially those who inhabited northern states, considered Indians to be a “vanishing race.” Southern states such as Georgia were actively trying to expropriate and expel the remaining Cherokee (and would eventually succeed with the passage in 1830 of the Indian Removal Act). The American Board, however, still believed in the possibility of civilizing and assimilating Indians into a new evangelical republic, and thus established missions to the Cherokee and Choctaw in the same era as it did to Palestine and the Sandwich Islands.

While it was Paul who provided the biblical template, and British missionaries in India who offered the literary one, it was the avaricious “nominal” white Christians of their own country and the broken remnants of the native American heathen who constituted the most obvious historical model for foreign missions. American missionaries to Palestine, for example, firmly believed that the “heathen” abroad would welcome the message of “true Christians” just as Indians in America supposedly had done and still did; although they also admitted that Islam, by then firmly identified in American apocalyptic thinking as

¹⁵ For details, see Andrew, *From Revivals to Removal*.

one of the Beasts in Revelation, would be a far more tenacious enemy than the native Americans had ever been. They also firmly believed that Providence had given American Protestants at the turn of the nineteenth century the unique opportunity to atone for both US history—specifically its unnecessarily cruel treatment of the Indians—and mankind’s general depravity. They believed that not since the age of the apostles had God made possible a more propitious time to convert the world, given how advanced technology was, with railroads and printing presses, extensive geographical knowledge, and how astonishing Anglo-American domination was across huge swathes of the globe. Not since Paul traversed the Roman Empire had such a moment arisen to propagate Christianity and to pull down the empires of sin, abroad as well as at home.¹⁶

Realities: Ottomans, Americans, and Arabs

Paternalistic rather than racist, intolerant, and emphatically not liberal, the American Board and its missionaries embarked on a project to reshape the world in an image of evangelical America that did not actually exist—or, more accurately, that existed in defiance of competing secular and racist trends that the missionaries decried. The dynamic of the missionary encounter overseas saw this strand of American history collide with, and gradually relent before, the imperatives of a different, Ottoman-Arab, time and place. From this crucible, in which As‘ad Shidyaq was the principal victim, Americans and Maronites grudgingly came to recognize their inability to win total victory over each other.

As the Ottoman state underwent its major nineteenth-century reformation to transform hitherto disparate and unequal subjects of a premodern Muslim dynasty into citizens of a modern state based on the equality of all religions, it experienced unprecedented sectarian strife—indeed, the emergence of what I have called elsewhere a culture of sectarianism. At this turning point in Ottoman history in 1860, the story of As‘ad was revived in its Arabic telling by a veritable child of this missionary encounter, Butrus al-Bustani.¹⁷ Bustani, himself a Maronite

¹⁶ Lyman Beecher, *A Comparison of the Apostolic Age with the Present in Respect to the Facilities for Conducting Missionary Operations*, Cincinnati: Truman & Smith 1834.

¹⁷ For more on Bustani, see Ussama Makdisi, “After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform, and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34

convert to Protestantism, crafted his narrative of Shidyāq as an urgent and deliberate break with missionary and Maronite orthodoxy, and with their mutually exclusive narratives of purity. He pleaded for a new, more tolerant, more secular, and more liberal world that neither the Americans nor their local opponents had initially envisioned or advocated. Thus even as American missionaries continued to construct the story of Shidyāq as an unqualified celebration of American benevolence and unreserved condemnation of Eastern fanaticism, and even as the Maronite church continued, absurdly but utterly seriously, to pretend that he had never existed, Bustani resurrected Shidyāq as a martyr for a liberal modernity he never witnessed.¹⁸ The attempt by Bustani to write the story of Shidyāq in 1860 as a story of individual conscience, coupled with his better-known *Nafīr Sūriyyā*, the anonymous pamphlets he authored in the wake of the events of 1860 in which he called explicitly for secularism in the Ottoman Empire, and his National School of 1863, which was premised on explicit toleration and mutual respect of all religions, was undoubtedly a product of mission. But what does this actually mean? Certainly not that the American missionaries advocated secularism or the mutual respect of religions. Nor that the Ottoman state advocated those either. Only that the genesis of a form of Arab liberalism represented by individuals such as Bustani was a result of dialectical interaction between various American and Ottoman Arab currents. It was not, therefore, a mere emulation of some mythical Western original.

The need for a new historiography

A new historical imagination is clearly needed to uncover the nuance and richness embedded in a cross-cultural missionary encounter that began on the very eve of this modernity. It is clear that historians of both America and the modern Middle East have been far too steeped in their respective disciplinary and historiographic traditions to narrate

(2002), 601–19; see also Hanssen, *Fin de siècle Beirut*; and Stephen Sheehi, *Foundation of Modern Arab Identity*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida 2004, 15–75; and A. L. Tibawi, “The American Missionaries in Beirut and Butrus al-Bustani,” *St. Antony’s Papers*, no. 16, Middle Eastern Affairs, no. 3, 136–82, London: Chatto & Windus 1963.

¹⁸ Butrus al-Bustani, *Qiṣṣat As’ad al-Shidyāq*, Beirut [American Mission Press of Beirut] 1860.

an episode of history that is at once American and Arab, and that by its nature demands a historiographic openness that neither tradition has afforded. For far too long historians of the Middle East have, wittingly or unwittingly, affirmed the central assumption that has animated a spurious politics of comparison between the Middle East and the West—one that views Ottoman or Arab history as the problem to be analyzed, leaving uninterrogated key episodes of American and Western history, from surging anti-Catholicism in the United States to increasingly stark racial thinking and policies in both European empires and the United States. The idea, of course, is not to caricature American history in the manner that Middle Eastern history has often been—and is still being—caricatured, and still less to “defend” the Ottomans by pointing to the obvious discrepancies between the rhetoric and reality of freedom in the American past. It seems clear, however, that the only way out of an impoverishing historiographical pitfall that compares the assumed with the actual, and that leaves untold at least half the story of a cross-cultural encounter involving American missionaries and the Ottoman empire, is to enlarge the scope of inquiry dramatically. It is to see how relevant histories unfolded simultaneously, if distinctly and unevenly, in the Ottoman Empire and the United States, to compare historical process with historical process, and to understand the implications of their juxtaposition brought about by the missionary intrusion into the Ottoman Empire. It is literally to unravel history’s different strands first woven together by these missionaries in so fervent a manner.

To wit, Bustani’s account is significant not so much for what he said about As’ad Shidyaq, which in and of itself was essentially hagiographic, but the context within which he said it *and the manner in which he might be read today*. That his plea for a secular liberalism was far in advance of his missionary peers should make us reconsider the traditional missionary narrative which moves seamlessly from evangelism to secularism, and even more tendentiously claims modernity to be its own unique heritage—something fixed, that can be bestowed by American charity or rejected by Arab folly, something evident in one location but not quite so in another. Bustani’s determination to eulogize an ordinary man in a new medium also indicated his awareness that the missionary encounter had produced a new moment, and that self-criticism—knowledge—was essential to reap its benefits and to lay the foundation for a new kind of society, based not on privilege and rank alone, or on a denial of the past, but on a coming to terms with it and moving on. Perhaps most importantly, to read Bustani is to see clearly

what is left out of later nineteenth-century missionary accounts of As'ad Shidyaq, such as Isaac Bird's *A Martyr of Lebanon* or Henry Harris Jessup's *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*.¹⁹ By this I do not mean simply that his history contains information that theirs do not, but the way both encumber a single episode of history with extraordinary significance. If Bustani used the narrative of Shidyaq for a frank plea for freedom in a world that he knew did not yet possess it, and for the underlying equality of cultures, the missionaries portrayed the story as a prelude to the supposedly inevitable and barbarous 1860 massacres, and as one more instance in their irredeemably hierarchical vision of the world, never once pausing to consider that at roughly the same time the USA plunged itself into a massive civil war over the question of slavery. The humanism and self-criticism so evident in Bustani underscored the absence of both—indeed, it emphasized the racialism and hubris of the late nineteenth-century missionaries. It also emphasized how much the nature of the American mission—and indeed the United States—had changed: the open, if spiritually belligerent, defiance of an emerging racist American order of things that was so pronounced at the outset of the mission was entirely missing and muted by the turn of the twentieth century. The missions to the Indians had long since been abandoned, and they had been forcibly moved in the name of civilization; and the missionaries had fully embraced an American manifest destiny that privileged race over religion.

¹⁹ Henry Harris Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, 2 vols., New York: Fleming H. Revell 1910; Isaac Bird, *The Martyr of Lebanon*, Boston: American Tract Society 1864.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MANDATE SYSTEM: HIGH IDEALS, ILLIBERAL PRACTICES

Peter Sluglett

It is almost never when a state of things is the most detestable that it is smashed, but when, beginning to improve, it permits men to breathe, to reflect, to communicate their thoughts with each other, and to gauge by what they already have the extent of their rights and their grievances. The weight, although less heavy, seems then all the more unbearable.¹

This quotation from de Tocqueville expresses some part of what I want to say, though not quite all of it. The other sentiment that I want to capture, and add to what de Tocqueville is expressing here, is that of arriving at a state of mind in which, when one had thought that some new and better state of things was within one's grasp, there comes the realization that the longed-for change will not in fact take place—or, in more grandiose terms, that the forward march of humanity has been halted. In the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century and in their successor states in the early twentieth, this probably happened at least twice: first with the introduction, in 1876, followed two years later by the abrogation, of the Ottoman constitution; and later with the bright promise, followed soon afterwards by the far less glittering reality, of the introduction of forms of representative government in Egypt and the mandated states in the 1920s.

The first of these disappointments was largely reversed some thirty years later with the restoration of the constitution in 1908–09, but the evident inadequacy of the allegedly democratic systems introduced into the region in the 1920s left an enduringly bitter taste in people's mouths, the sense that “we were promised such and such, and we have been fobbed off with something very inferior.” By a not entirely logical process of extrapolation, this has sometimes led to the conclusion that

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville to Pierre Freslon, September 23, 1853, in Roger Boesche, ed., *Alexis de Tocqueville: Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1985, 296.

there must be something inherently wrong with liberal political systems; consider, for instance, Khomeini's resentment (in 1943–44) at the extent to which representative government had been subverted in Iran, which, it should be remembered, had had a constitution since 1906:

Look at this country and see what infamy is perpetrated in the name of ministries and representation, and what intrigues and illegalities are carried out in the supposed cause of service to the country and law... there have been 14 elections in Iran, and everyone has seen that, whether in the period before the dictatorship [of Reza Shah] or during that disgraceful time, or afterwards, that is the present, representation has not been a means of spreading justice and freedom.²

But to return to the Arab world: I am not of course suggesting that the people of the Arab Mashriq actually *chose* to be governed by regimes professing the slogans of Arab nationalism or Arab socialism, but it does seem that disillusionment with the objective experience of parliamentary government in the immediately pre- and post-revolutionary periods³ reached such a height that, at least at the time, there were few to mourn its passing. Also, there seems to have been a general preparedness in the 1950s and 1960s to forgo pluralism, at least for the time being, partly on the basis that “the good is national cohesion, the evil, division,”⁴ and partly because of the initial—and perhaps even sincere—expressions of disinterestedness on the part of those who seized power, along the lines of “let us clean up the mess and then return to the barracks.”

The Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908–09 evidently stimulated a high degree of expectation on the part of those who lived through those stirring times. When the Young Turk Revolution took place in 1908, it was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm in the cities of Greater Syria⁵ as signifying the dawn of a new era in which the

² Ruhullah Khomeini, *Kashf-i Asrar*, n.p., n.d., 290, 180–81, quoted in Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of the New Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris 2003, 106–07. Of course, there is no sense here—and this can be confirmed by a look at the system he approved after the Iranian revolution—that Khomeini was throwing the baby out with the bathwater; he wanted *constitutional reform*—not a dictatorship.

³ That is, in Egypt until 1952, Iraq until 1958, Syria until 1963, etc.

⁴ Maxime Rodinson, “The Political System,” in P. J. Vatikiotis, ed., *Egypt since the Revolution*, London: Allen & Unwin 1968, 88.

⁵ Michelle Campos, “A Shared Homeland and its Boundaries: Empire, Citizenship and the Origins of Sectarianism in Late Ottoman Palestine, 1908–13,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University 2003; Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006. There is similar evidence from Basra; see Reidar Visser, *Basra*,

Ottoman Empire would be able to take its rightful place as a member of the club of the nations of the modern world. An important indicator of the “new freedom” in Iraq was the sudden flowering of newspapers and magazines in Baghdad: some thirty-six Arabic newspapers were published in 1911.⁶ Although it used to be more or less taken for granted that by 1914 the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire had long been straining to throw off the Ottoman yoke by 1914, more recent work has shown that this version of events is very much open to question. While the *nahda*, or movement for Arab cultural regeneration, originated in the 1860s or perhaps even earlier,⁷ the self-other dichotomy seems primarily to have been the Arabs vis-à-vis the West rather than the Arabs vis-à-vis the Ottomans.⁸ Thus, while ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi inveighed against Ottoman tyranny, and believed that the Arabs were uniquely placed to save Islam from decay, his writings are more about reforming Islam and its structures than about defending what might be described as the “national interests” of the Arabs against the Ottomans.⁹

In time, of course, the Turkification policies adopted by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) turned out to be increasingly unacceptable to the population of the Arab provinces,¹⁰ but even so, the principal goal of the leaders of the “Syrian opposition” during the years immediately before World War I appears to have been the restoration of a more palatable form of Ottomanism—reconstructed, certainly, in the general direction of a greater degree of administrative decentralization. In general, until its defeat in 1918, “the [Ottoman] empire, for most Muslims and even some Christians, was simply seen

the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq, Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005, 38–43.

⁶ Philip W. Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, London: Jonathan Cape 1937, 230.

⁷ Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida 2004.

⁸ See e.g. Sulayman al-Bustani, *‘Ibra wa-Dhikrayāt*, Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah 1978, which extols the virtues of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, and is dedicated to the memory of Midhat Pasha. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1839*, London: Oxford University Press 1993, 264.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of al-Kawakibi’s politics, see Peter Sluglett, “Der Mythos der Monarchie in der arabischen Welt,” in Hartmut Fändrich, ed., *Vererbte Macht: Monarchien und Dynastien in der arabischen Welt*, Frankfurt: Campus 2005, 17–36.

¹⁰ Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908–1918*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1997.

as the only remaining political force capable of forestalling European colonial ambitions.”¹¹ Speaking of the young journalist ‘Abd al-Ghani al-‘Uraisi, editor of the Beirut newspaper *al-Mufid* and one of the “martyrs” subsequently hanged by the Ottoman authorities at the behest of the *wali* Jamal Pasha in May 1916, Rashid Khalidi says:

In spite of [their] outspoken convictions, al-‘Uraisi and most of his fellow-nationalists do not seem to have wanted to renounce all links with the Turks and the Ottoman Empire—certainly not before late 1913... [in an editorial on May 8, 1911 he wrote] “It is a lie that there is a misunderstanding between Arabs and Turks: there is a family discussion over some of the national bonds which join them.”¹²

Samir Seikaly makes the same point in a study of Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali’s *al-Muqtabas*:

Although, wisely after the event, he reviled the iniquities of Hamidian autocracy, and although he was frequently critical of the bureaucratic inefficiencies and capricious excesses of subsequent “constitutional government,” Kurd ‘Ali directly and by allusion always insisted upon the crucial necessity for [*sic*] the endurance of the Ottoman Empire as a viable and stable political order.¹³

Finally, Bassam Tibi has an interesting discussion of the different discourses of nationalism taking place in Egypt, on the one hand, and in Greater Syria, on the other, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Obviously, the introduction of the Ottoman constitution in 1876 was enormously exciting, and its abrogation two years later a great disappointment, but it will be clear from what has been said already that the main focus of the struggle against “Hamidian despotism” was centered round the reinstatement of the constitution, rather than the *overthrow of the Ottoman state*. Tibi sees the main distinction between Egyptian and Greater Syrian nationalism in the latter part of the nineteenth century in the fact that some Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals were willing to collaborate with Britain or France to free

¹¹ Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 176.

¹² Rashid Khalidi, “‘Abd al-Ghani al-‘Uraisi and *al-Mufid*: The Press and Arab Nationalism before 1914,” in Marwan R. Buheiry, ed., *Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890–1939*, Beirut: American University of Beirut Press 1981.

¹³ Samir Seikaly, “Damascene Intellectual Life in the Opening Years of the Twentieth Century: Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali and al-Muqtabas,” in Buheiry, ed., *Intellectual Life in the Arab East*, 150.

themselves from Ottoman rule, presumably “since they did not realise the full implications of the phenomenon of colonialism, and could not distinguish between the emancipating features of European culture and European colonial ambitions.” On the other hand, in Egypt (which had been under British occupation since 1882), many nationalists, including Ahmad ‘Urabi, and Mustafa Kamil after him, generally expressed a desire for some sort of reintegration into the Ottoman Empire. Kamil in particular “condemned the pan-Arab nationalists for their cooperation with Britain and for their conspiracies against the Ottoman empire.”¹⁴ Let us now turn to what was hoped for in the mandated states, and what actually materialized.

The postwar settlement and the mandate ideal

It is a curious irony that the tortuous and involved McMahon-Husayn correspondence and the Sykes-Picot agreement, together with the Balfour Declaration, are still held up as the outstanding examples of Britain’s perfidy to the Arabs. In contrast, the Anglo-French Declaration of November 7, 1918, a shorter, simpler, and much less equivocal document, has somehow escaped equal censure. The text of the declaration, which, as its title implies, came immediately into the public domain (like the Balfour Declaration), and which was issued by both parties after the end of the war—that is, when the outcome was not in doubt—is short and to the point. On the issue dealt with in President Wilson’s Twelfth Point, which promised “absolutely unmolested autonomous development” to the ex-Ottoman territories, it asserted that “Far from wishing to impose any particular institution on these lands, they [i.e. the Allies] have no other care but to secure by their support and effective aid the normal workings of the Governments and Administrations which they shall have adopted of their own free will.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*, London: Macmillan 1981, 153. Unfortunately, Tibi does not give sources for the “cooperation” and “conspiracies,” so it is not clear what is being referred to—at least not before the Arab Revolt. The “Egyptian side” is also discussed in Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: the search for Egyptian nationhood, 1900–1930*, New York: Oxford University Press 1986, chapter 1. Kamil was also something of a pan-Islamist, seeing pan-Islamism as “an expression of anti-colonial solidarity”: *ibid.*, 155.

¹⁵ Secretary of State for India to Political, Baghdad, November 29, 1918 (quoted in Ireland, *Iraq*, 151), and Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, October 28, 1918: copy

Britain and France created the mandated states in the Middle East, not quite as mirror images of their own constitutional selves, but more as hand-me-down copies of them—a chain-store version rather than the designer model one might find in the pages of *Vogue*. In other quasi-colonial situations, the colonial powers either took what they chose to recognize as traditional arrangements and adapted them in ways that best suited them—one thinks of the states of northern Nigeria, the principalities of Malaya, or the Moroccan sultanate as incorporated into the French protectorate—or, in the case of regions where the colonizers could not find, or could not easily subvert, recognizable pre-existing political arrangements, imposed their own versions of direct rule (Britain in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, France in sub-Saharan Africa).

The original notion of the Mandates was serious and high-minded; they were to form part of a “sacred trust of civilisation.” The idea seems to have been linked to a speech to the US Senate given by Woodrow Wilson in January 1917, in which he outlined his vision of the post-war world: “No peace can, or ought to, last which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and no right anywhere exists to hand people about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property.”¹⁶

In Toby Dodge’s words, “The Mandates marked the end of a world order organized by European imperialism—by territorial annexation and domination based on notions of cultural and racial superiority,”¹⁷ although, as he goes on to say, the USA’s retreat into isolationism for most of the interwar period and the convulsions taking place in the Soviet Union at the same time meant that it took some time before the true nature of this new world order became apparent.

In December 1917, nine months after the British capture of Baghdad and eleven months after Woodrow Wilson’s speech, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, the senior civil servant at the India Office dealing with Iraq, already had an inkling of what the future might hold:

of telegram from S/S Foreign Affairs, to HM Ambassador, Washington, October 23, 1918: “...it has become essential to make some public declaration in order to allay the suspicions and misgivings of the Arabs and Syrians which may be dangerously exploited by our enemies: it has therefore been decided to issue an Anglo-French Declaration...,” quoted in Jukka Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East, 1914–1920*, London: Athlone Press 1969, 80–81.

¹⁶ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied*, New York: Columbia University Press 2003, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The Turkish menace has apparently been removed. But another has taken its place, of a different kind, and one which, I think, makes it imperative for us to get to work. What I mean is that we must at least consider the possibility of a peace which will not give us the absolute political control of Mesopotamia that we should like to have.¹⁸

In essence, Hirtzel was right; the USA's determination to change the nature of the international system after World War I proved hard to withstand, and full-blown colonialism was no longer an option. (As I have suggested elsewhere,¹⁹ the British came to terms with the idea more rapidly than the French.) The term "Mandate" itself seems to have been invented by George Beer, an academic colleague of Woodrow Wilson, in the specific sense that the relationship between any particular "backward people" and the power responsible for invigorating them politically and economically after the war should be embodied in "an international mandate embodied in a deed of trust." Later, the concept was reformulated by the South African Jan Smuts (and redefined so that the A, B, and C mandates were applied to territories at different stages of political development), and the various arrangements became subject to an international regulatory body, the Permanent Mandates Commission of the newly created League of Nations.

The mandate system in practice

Although I do not agree with all the details of his chronology, Toby Dodge suggests in *Inventing Iraq* that as far as Iraq was concerned, British policy underwent a series of shifts in the 1920s. The original intention to annex Basra, if not the whole of Iraq, was replaced by the introduction of a form of constitutional monarchy in 1921, in which the country was ruled by a king, assisted by a council of ministers. For various reasons (cost, the Chanak affair, and so on) the British presence in Iraq became so unpalatable to British public opinion in the early 1920s that full-scale evacuation was still being considered by the Bonar Law

¹⁸ Quoted Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, London: I. B. Tauris 2007, 15.

¹⁹ 'Les mandats/the mandates; Some reflections on the nature of the British presence in Iraq (1914–1932) and the French presence in Syria (1918–1946)', in Peter Sluglett and Nadine Méouchy, eds., *The British and French mandates in comparative perspectives/Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 103–28.

government as late as 1923. This was only avoided by an agreement to cut back British commitments and, echoing events in our own time, strong advocacy of the claim that withdrawal would lead to anarchy and negative repercussions throughout the Muslim world. Dodge considers that increasing Iraqi resentment of British control, and increasing British domestic resentment at Britain's commitments to Iraq—accompanied by the Iraqi political elite's calls for greater autonomy, which came to a head with the demand in 1928 that Iraq should be allowed to enter the League of Nations—effectively put an end to Britain's attempts at state-building. It was thus decided in London and Baghdad that much less exacting criteria than had been envisaged previously would qualify Iraq for League entry in 1932. In this context, and given that members of the British High Commission in Baghdad engaged in a protracted and very substantial cover-up of the Iraqi government's failure to fulfill a number of important undertakings which Britain had entered into on its behalf, particularly in the Kurdish areas,²⁰ it is difficult to find a kinder word than “ramshackle.” So much, then, for the sacred trust of civilization.

The experience of Syria and Lebanon was somewhat different. In the first place, given that much of World War I was fought on French soil, there was only a handful of French troops in Syria before the war ended, and the postwar occupation was carried out by the British until mounting French pressure obliged them to evacuate in September 1919. Responses to the King-Crane Commission (charged with asking the inhabitants of Greater Syria about the future form of government which they would like to have) indicated that a French presence, in whatever form, would be unwelcome to the majority of the inhabitants, with the exception of some Maronite Christians.

In the matter of the establishment of democratic institutions, neither of the mandatory powers had a particularly inspiring record. One hears a great deal these days, from Bernard Lewis and others, to the effect that Islam (whatever that means) and democracy are incompatible, and/or—to quote the subtitle of one of Lewis's recent books—that there is a “clash between Islam and Modernity” in the Middle East,²¹ or a clash of civilizations—to use the phrase which Huntington apparently bor-

²⁰ Ibid., chapter 5.

²¹ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2002.

rowed from Lewis—to an extent that, it is implied, no real reconciliation is possible. Let me try to unravel this a little, and to point out that a more truthful picture of the situation was that local demands for representative and democratic structures were regularly thwarted by the colonial powers—often aided and abetted, it is true, by the powers' local clients.

The emergence of a public sphere in the mandated states

An interesting aspect of the situation in Iraq and Syria is the beginning of the emergence of a fairly vibrant public sphere during the Mandate. As I have already mentioned, this process had already started in the Mashriq in the late Ottoman period, when a variety of clubs, associations, and newspapers had come into being. In Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s, some members of the small but growing educated and professional middle class actively pushed for more liberal and democratic institutions (free elections, freedom of association, a free press), although it is difficult to estimate the extent to which these efforts found an echo in the society at large. Since the construction of a genuinely representative parliamentary system would have worked to the advantage of the more liberal forces, one does not have to be a believer in conspiracy theory for it to have made sense for Britain and its local Iraqi allies to provide a system which offered the shadow rather than the substance of a genuinely democratic and liberal polity.

Nevertheless, the essentially unrepresentative and undemocratic nature of the Iraqi state did not necessarily mean the total absence of civil society—by which I mean a complex of autonomous institutions—economic, religious, intellectual and political—essentially distinguishable from family, clan, locality, and the state. In addition, the new state was in the hands of a fairly heterogeneous grouping drawn from the middle and upper echelons of Iraqi society, and, apart from some key ex-Sharifian officers, did not constitute an especially uniform or exclusive body of vested interests. This was especially true in the 1920s when the state was gradually taking shape. Furthermore, embryonic political organizations—whether based on community, political association, or both—were able to mobilize public opinion and influence and pressurize various governments in different ways through extra-parliamentary political action.

In the aftermath of World War I, when active opposition to the British occupation spread, the mobilization and organization of resistance was located primarily within long-established social networks and mechanisms of the urban quarter, the locality, the mosque, and the shrine cities (*'atabāt*), and was based largely on personal, family, and tribal connections. Iraqi society was as yet relatively undifferentiated, and the state was still in the process of formation in terms of both institutions and the territory over which the government's writ actually ran. In an important sense, the state was still not all that far removed from society; society had not yet been individualized and old forms of communal solidarity had not been dissolved. Political actors could feed on these solidarities and mobilize them into political activities which gradually came to transcend the "pursuit of narrow communal interests."²²

In the course of the 1920s the new state gradually began to take shape. Its parameters were set by the British authorities, whose principal concerns were to safeguard imperial communications and access to the territory's presumed but still largely unproven oil reserves. Relations between Britain and Iraq were regulated first by the treaty of 1922, which was narrowly passed by the first chamber of deputies in 1924, and subsequently by the treaty of 1930, which was scheduled to come into force when Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations in 1932. A rather active form of constitutional monarchy was established, in which the king approved the prime minister and also vetted members of the cabinet. Parliament took the form of a bicameral legislature, the upper house being a senate nominated by the king and the lower house elected by indirect suffrage (in which primary electors elected secondary electors who voted for the candidates). These arrangements were embodied in the organic law or constitution, which came into force in 1925.

²² Sami Zubaida, "Community, Class and Minorities," in Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, London: I. B. Tauris 1991, 198. For a more general discussion of this theme see also Jean Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," *Social Research* (1985), 681–82, where she points out that Charles Tilly shows that the communal solidarities of the famous intermediary bodies of the *ancien régime*, along with the contentious gatherings specific to these structures of everyday life in "pre-modern" (i.e. eighteenth-century) France, were replaced by "new forms of solidarity, association, power resources and modes of contestation on the terrain of modern civil society." Tilly regards these as being "more autonomous" than those typical of the eighteenth century, in contrast to Foucault, who posits the abolition of all means of effective autonomous solidarity with the development of techniques of individualization ushered in with modern forms of power.

Britain's Middle Eastern policy had been laid out at the Cairo conference in March 1921. As far as Iraq was concerned, four main principles were established. First, the candidature of Faysal, the son of Sharif Husayn of Mecca, who had been expelled from Syria in July 1920 and who had been courted in London during the autumn, would be supported for the throne of Iraq. Second, the defence of Iraq would be assured principally by the Royal Air Force. Third, to sweeten the bitter pill of the "mandate," its provisions would be embodied in an Anglo-Iraqi treaty. This would not be an agreement between equals, but, on the other hand, it would have to be ratified on the Iraqi side—first by the new monarch, and then by some form of parliament or constituent assembly which would have to be convened for the purpose, so that "public assent" to the arrangement would be obtained. Finally, the number of British officials originally envisaged as working for the Iraqi government would be greatly reduced, and effectively limited to advisors to key ministries and to advisors to some provincial governors.

In the late spring of 1921 Faysal came to Iraq, accompanied by some of the Iraqi officers who had fought with him in the Arab Revolt, and an elaborate charade was enacted which resulted in his being deemed to have been acclaimed king of the new state. After his coronation in August, the central issue of Iraqi politics remained the country's relationship with Britain and the nature of the political system which Britain had undertaken to establish. Although the idea of a constitutional monarchy had been accepted, the country had as yet no constitution or electoral laws, the powers of the king vis-à-vis parliament and the legislature had still to be defined, and Iraq's northern border was not yet settled—for a variety of reasons mostly beyond Britain's control, the latter issue was to remain outstanding for several more years. The organs of the state itself (the chamber of deputies, the senate, and the royal court) became important arenas for debates which continued to centre on the issue of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty throughout the period between 1921 and 1924, and these three years, until the ratification of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty by the constituent assembly in 1924, saw a series of often acrimonious negotiations.

Two points should be made here. First, in spite of the evident inequality in the power relations between the two sides, Faysal and his circle were not without some freedom of manoeuvre, since it could be argued with some justice that much of their credibility would be lost if they were obliged to act too overtly as British puppets. This telegram by Sir Percy Cox, the high commissioner, recording Faysal's opinions

in August 1921 sums up some of the main ambiguities in the relationship, where Faysal points out that the practical limitations of his own position provide greater security to Britain than any number of formal undertakings:

His attitude is practically this. He says "Apart from my personal ideas in direction of Arab nationality I am an instrument of British policy. HM Government and I are in the same boat and must sink or swim together. Were instrument to fail and in consequence they left Iraq, I should have to leave too. Having, so as to speak, chosen me, you must treat me as one of yourselves, and I must be trusted as HM Government trust you... I undertake to be guided by your advice in all matters and the mere fact of your presence here and that of Advisors should be sufficient guarantee to those whom it may concern of preservation of your interests."²³

Second, the issues were sufficiently self-evident to be the subject of widespread public comment and discussion in the press and among the politically conscious sections of the population. In consequence, although the arrangements finally arrived at inevitably reflected those demands on which Britain felt unable to compromise, their political form and nature were constantly contested on the Iraqi side and formed the subject of active public participation and debate, resulting in the formation of constantly shifting alliances and bargaining positions on the part of those nearest to the centre of power.

Structures of opposition

This period also saw the formation of opposition parties, particularly al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī (National Party) and Ḥizb al-Nahḍa (Renaissance Party), both established in 1922. As the nature of the forthcoming treaty was likely to be crucially affected by the powers vested in the king, the composition of the cabinet, and the way in which parliament was to be elected, questions on the nature of the new political system were regarded as central to the political debate and affected the kinds of alliance being struck by the various groups. These opposition parties were not powerful organizations; they were grouped primarily around

²³ High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Telegram 397, August 17, 1921: CO 730/4/41616.

prominent personalities, who continued to base their activities largely on their communal and other social networks. In addition, as most biographies of Iraqi politicians show, political activity was not confined to political parties, although their headquarters were important meeting points, but was also a reflection of close personal contacts between individuals who often had quite disparate political views and interests. Hence political networks were not exclusive and might consist of individuals very close to the newly forming political elite, of others who were inclined to compromise and to make use of the new opportunities, as well as of men of principle who were not prepared to compromise.

Hence, although it is important not to exaggerate the extent to which this took place, and in spite of the evident novelty of the idea of an “Iraqi nation-state,” notions of national sovereignty and the desirability of free elections and representative government developed remarkably quickly. In addition, although the system as it actually evolved was neither democratic nor representative, the very existence of a purportedly democratic framework—and the notion that a degree of consent was involved—constituted a legal umbrella and a political space in which political actors could operate and express their demands. That is to say, since the new state based its authority on the notion of parliamentary democracy and representative government, this norm could be used as a yardstick by those in opposition to it. Political actors used this space and this yardstick on a number of levels, by taking their own vision of political and social ideals outside parliament and by basing themselves on old communal and personal networks as well as on more modern forms of political organization. A new “national political field”²⁴ was established, which became the focus of political action.

Of course, most of the apparatus and style of the newly created national governments was imported from outside, and a whole network of interdependencies was constructed in order to maintain them. This was a fairly universal feature of colonial rule: in a few places, perhaps most notably in India, the imported institutions seem to have worked reasonably well,²⁵ but in others—probably the majority—they clearly did

²⁴ Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, London: Routledge 1992, 5.

²⁵ In some parts of India embryonic parliamentary institutions had been introduced with the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919.

not. However, the ethical basis of the Mandates rested on some notion that the new institutions formed part of a “sacred trust of civilisation,” implying a degree of moral duty or expectation on the part of the powers. In addition, the new governments had to be able to present themselves as a fully integrated part of the national state and capable of taking responsibility for the conduct of affairs.

Especially during the early years of the Iraqi Mandate, this fiction proved difficult to maintain. On their own, Iraq’s national defence forces could not conceivably have held off the *Ikhwan* of Najd and the combined Turkish and Kurdish forces at the same time, so the gap was, of necessity, filled by the British military presence. Furthermore, as well as having created the Iraqi government, the British authorities were also concerned to maintain and widen the government’s area of influence. Such extension of control was strongly resisted, particularly in the Euphrates area and Kurdistan, which had never really known Ottoman rule. The aeroplanes of the Royal Air Force were indispensable to the very survival of the new government, a fact which was readily apparent both to the government itself and to those who opposed it. The government was in no sense “popular” or representative: it was almost entirely composed of members of the Sunni Arab urban communities, who, although more sophisticated and educated than most Shi’is and Kurds, formed a minority, probably less than a quarter, of the total population. On the other hand, an important element of its support came from the tribal shaykhs and landlords of the south (most of whom were Shi’is), whose powers had been greatly enhanced during the course of the British occupation, and from the British authorities themselves. In view of recent events, it is important to point out that at this stage the terms “Sunni” and “Shi’i” were more important as social(-class) and geographical indicators than as sole, or even principal, markers of identity. The Ottoman Empire had been a Sunni institution, and its representatives in Iraq, whether “Iraqis” (recruited locally) or “Turks” (sent from the metropole as members of an imperial civil service), were, and had always been, Sunnis. For various historical reasons, and also partly because they were generally less well educated and constituted the majority of the rural population, few Shi’is chose to enter government service, and this remained the case until the expansion of both education and government employment in and after the 1920s. Hence, when the British came, and especially when it became accepted that the existing administrative machinery should not be tinkered with except when absolutely necessary, almost all those who knew how it worked

were Sunnis, and for a while at least, this was not regarded as anything extraordinary.²⁶

National integration

As a case study of the workings of the Mandate machinery, let us look at British and French attitudes to “national integration” in Iraq and Syria, since the mandatory power was supposed to maintain its tutelary role until such time as the mandated state should be able to “stand alone.” In the first place, the creation of the mandated states, and the states that bordered them, was an almost entirely arbitrary process which took very little account of *economic* realities. These are less exciting and more humdrum than *national myths*, but they are important nevertheless. To simplify a more complex reality, the transition from the Ottoman Empire to ‘Republican Turkey and the mandated states’ fragmented what had previously been a *Zollverein*, an economic community which embraced the whole of the region. In addition, although the eastern Mediterranean had become increasingly integrated into the “world system” in the course of the nineteenth century, it was still the case that until World War I, with the exception of a few purely export commodities like Lebanese silk and Iraqi dates, agricultural and industrial production in the region was directed principally towards satisfying the needs either of the local, or of the Ottoman domestic, market.²⁷ In the case of Aleppo, the city’s hinterland extended to central and eastern Anatolia and across to Mosul, and, though this was more true of earlier periods, into Iran and further

²⁶ While some Sunnis either looked down upon or were suspicious of the alleged “fanaticism” of Shi’is, particularly those in the Holy Cities, the divide was probably perceived at the time as more “functional” than “religious” (or sectarian), and thus to a large extent part of a fairly long-established “natural order of things.” Compare, for instance, the sectarian affiliation/division of labor among business houses in Aleppo in the period before World War I: “While Muslims dominated politics, landowning, and large parts of the wholesale grain trade, Christians and Jews continued to control banking, finance, and textiles in northern Syria, until, and, it turns out, well after, the world depression of the late 1920s and 1930s” (Peter Sluglett, “Aspects of Economy and Society in the Syrian Provinces: Aleppo in Transition 1880–1925,” in C. A. Bayly and Leila Fawaz, eds., *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, New York: Columbia University Press 2001, 57.

²⁷ Frank Peter, “Dismemberment of Empire and Reconstruction of Regional Space: The Industries of Damascus between 1918 and 1946,” in Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 415–446, and Sluglett, “Der Mythos der Monarchie.”

east. Mosul had similar connections with Anatolia and northern Syria. Much of the prosperity of Damascus had been based on the trans-desert trade (and, until a combination of the construction of the Hijaz Railway and the wider introduction of trans-Mediterranean shipping, on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca); Basra was part of a trading nexus which included India and the Gulf, and so on. If one were to make a rough sketch of the commercial circuits of the major cities in, say, 1900, they would mostly not coincide with the *political entities* which emerged after World War I. Hence the creation of Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Transjordan, as well as Republican Turkey, produced six entities where the “natural” forces of political and economic integration were not highly developed and were in many ways quite problematic. To a very great extent, these states were artificial, and were constructed to suit the convenience of Britain and France rather to fit in with anything that might be described as local aspirations.

As the Mandate wore on, the people of Syria gradually became obliged to accept the structure of the Syrian state as bestowed upon them by the French, and politicians from Aleppo (which had been a provincial capital, and had never been subordinate to Damascus) gradually joined the National Bloc, the main “secular” national independence party that emerged in the late 1920s. The Bloc was largely a continuation of the old politics of notables, and consisted, as others have noted, of the landowning and high bureaucratic office-holding bourgeoisie. With a little assistance from some of their more astute contemporaries, the more powerful Bloc members came to see the advantages of adopting or appropriating a nationalist discourse of a very basic “Syria for the Syrians” variety, as a way of mobilizing national sentiment in their favor against the French “other.”²⁸ Whatever else was true, the indigenous notable leadership, which had never been seriously undermined by the Ottomans, could easily get crowds on the streets to demonstrate against the French, and could also present itself as a reliable or at least familiar alternative (‘you know this guy’) to foreign rule. This tactic actually worked reasonably well until more ideologically based forms of politics began to question the right of the so-called traditional leaders to lead.

There seems little doubt that this is what happened, but one would like to understand the mechanics of it better. There was no Atatürk, no Reza Shah, to forge the Syrian or Iraqi nation, and more vicious

²⁸ Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*.

military dictators would not come along for several more decades. Presumably the notables of Damascus and Aleppo who took part in the Syrian congress initially thought that supporting Faysal offered them their best chance of maintaining their traditional influence, and when they saw that the French were not prepared to enter into this partnership, they settled for the longer endgame of setting themselves up as rulers instead. How was this conclusion reached? At what point did Aleppines, and which Aleppines, realize that their destiny was better secured with Damascus, and how were the links built? As Nadine Méouchy and Michael Provence have shown,²⁹ a secular notable version of “the nation” was by no means universally accepted, and was not, for instance, high on the agenda of many of the participants in the Syrian revolt of 1925–27. As late as 1948, a group of Aleppine notables, by this time mostly entrepreneur notables, were supporting an admittedly rather half-baked scheme to reunite Syria with Iraq in order to further the city’s commercial interests.³⁰ One wonders, yet again, in which ways “national sentiment” played a part in this, and indeed, what the notion actually means.

So—was “Syria” just a clever concoction of the old social classes, making astute use of the structures created by the French? Another instance of nature abhorring a vacuum? Was it simply that the elites appropriated the “alien creations” called Syria and Iraq, giving them a reality and instrumentality of their own to act as a not-so-subtle means of substituting indigenous for foreign rule? And how did the notables of Aleppo slip into the National Bloc? And how, exactly, did the notables convince their clients, in Aleppo or Damascus, that the interests of the elite were synonymous with the interests of “the masses”?

The Iraqi case is even more complicated, since the cleavages were so much more obvious; whatever else was true of the Syrian Republic, 75 percent of its population were Sunni Muslims; the French singled out the minorities in Syria for their favor because they feared the seductions of the nationalist movement. It is not inaccurate to regard the British in Iraq as actually *constructing* national sentiment, of course in ways

²⁹ Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2005; Nadine Méouchy, “Le Mouvement des ‘isabat en Syrie du Nord à travers le témoignage du chaykh Youssef Saadoun (1919–1921),” in Méouchy and Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 649–72.

³⁰ Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945–1958*, London: Oxford University Press 1965, 29–32, 77–83.

which would be most likely to ensure their own continuing influence. In spite of its original artificiality, it became relatively easy for nationalists in Syria to foster national sentiment and national integration. Hence, while there is still, in the early twenty-first century, a lot of talk—and, I would say, rather ill-informed talk—of Iraq falling apart into its Kurdish, Sunni and Shi'i fragments, no-one thinks about Syria in those terms. It is also of some interest that with the exception of Jordan, the various monarchies invented, reinvented, or reoriented by Britain during or after World Wars I and II (Egypt, Iraq, and Libya) have all collapsed (and been replaced by republics) while the republican structures of Syria and Lebanon were never seriously challenged.³¹

In February 1919, two Iraqi Ayatullahs, Muhammad Taqi Shirazi and Shaykh al-Shari'a al-Isfahani, wrote a letter to Woodrow Wilson, then attending the Paris peace conference, soliciting his help in the construction of a future Iraqi state:

The desire of the Iraqis, as a totality and as a Muslim nation, is that they should be accorded the freedom to choose a new and independent Arab and Muslim state, with a Muslim king assisted by a national assembly. As far as the question of a [British] protectorate (*wiṣāya*) is concerned, it should be left to the national assembly either to accept it or reject it, after the peace conference.³²

The word “Arab” should be taken as reflecting the authors’ milieu rather than anything exclusively ethnic, since both were of course Persians; a year or so later, Shirazi became one of the leading figures in the national rising of 1920. The attachment of Mosul to Iraq was on the agenda of all the political actors in Iraq at the time, including the Shi'i religious establishment, who regarded the Kurds as Muslims and thus saw no reason why their political and other needs would not be properly catered for in an independent *Muslim* state of Iraq. Of course most Kurds were Sunnis, and most Shi'is were Arabs, but there were also Turkmen, Kurdish and Persian Shi'is in Iraq.

The Iraqi Sunni elite, on the other hand, saw its salvation in an almost seamless transfer to the British of the loyalty which it had only recently confided to the Ottomans, and could therefore sleep more easily with the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Quoted in Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La Formation de l'Irak contemporain, le rôle politique des ulémas chiïtes à la fin de la domination ottomane et au moment de la construction de l'état irakien*, Paris: Editions du CNRS 1991, 379–380 (my translation of the French text).

notion of an *Arab*, rather than an *Islamic*, state. For clarity, it is worth saying that the kind of state that these Shi'i *'ulamā'* envisaged was only Islamic in the sense that the Ottoman state had been, or in the sense set out in the Persian constitution of 1906, of a political entity promoting Islamic values, broadly defined, and as creating the backdrop against which the good Islamic life could be lived.³³ Constant references by the Sunni elite to Iraq's "Arab" identity and to its links with the "Arab nation" (as well as Nuri al-Sa'id's promotion of various more or less fanciful schemes of "Fertile Crescent Unity") served to obfuscate matters and produced the topsy-turvy result in which the Shi'is, who were at least 60 percent of the population then as now, came to play the role of the minority. The unwillingness of the Shi'i religious establishment to endorse the notion of an "Arab" state in 1924 (when they issued *fatwās* denouncing participation in the elections), combined with the Sunni elite's dependence on Britain for the continuation of Sunni rule, eventually led to the expulsion of several leading *'ulamā'* from the country in 1924.³⁴

Throughout the rest of the Mandate, the question of political liberties and constitutional rights (*al-ḥuqūq al-mashrū'a*) was constantly taken up by the press and the opposition.³⁵ This continued through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, especially with the introduction into the region, however clandestinely, of ideological political parties which competed increasingly seriously with the "old social classes," and chipped away at their power and authority. These years also saw the mushrooming of extra-parliamentary underground activities and the increasing radicalization of the opposition, but this is too large a subject to deal with here. What is certain, however, is that although their manifestations in

³³ That is, rather than anything comparable to the post-1979 Islamic Republic of Iran.

³⁴ Ibid. and Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Le Mandate britannique en Irak, une rencontre entre plusieurs projets politiques," in Méouchy and Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 361–84.

³⁵ Thus on September 4, 1931 al-Ḥizb al-Waṭani published a "declaration to the people of Iraq" accusing the government of violating the constitution and the people's fundamental rights, of mismanaging the country's finances, and of upholding the interests of a foreign power by its acceptance of the 1930 treaty. When repression and surveillance of the press and political life increased once more under Nuri's government in the autumn of 1931, the opposition parties sent a letter of protest to the king. al-Ḥizb al-Waṭani eventually broke its pact with the Ḥizb al-Ikhā' al-Waṭani, and when Rashid 'Ali became prime minister in March 1933, he pursued policies very similar to those of his predecessor; see 'Abd al Amir al-'Akkam, *al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya fi l-'Iraq, 1921–1933*, Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Adab 1975, 400–09.

the World War II period were more impressive and more spectacular, aspirations toward civil society and democracy were already firmly rooted in the minds of the politically conscious from the very earliest years of the existence of the Iraqi and Syrian states.

Conclusion

Let me return to the quotation from de Tocqueville with which I began:

It is almost never when a state of things is the most detestable that it is smashed, but when, beginning to improve, it permits men to breathe, to reflect, to communicate their thoughts with each other, and to gauge by what they already have the extent of their rights and their grievances. The weight, although less heavy, seems then all the more unbearable.

In the 1920s and 1930s various constitutional and political arrangements, unequal treaties, and so forth were imposed on the mandated states of Syria/Lebanon and Iraq, and on Egypt, by France and Britain. Although the new arrangements created a democratic façade, they were in many ways an imitation of democratic structures rather than the real thing: of course, if they had been the real thing, the voters in these states would soon have used the ballot box to get rid of the British and French connection, which the parameters of the political arena did not permit them to do. However, even the very cautiously framed institutions which were introduced had the almost certainly unintended effect of assisting in the creation of new organisations of civil society, independent of the state, which were often highly critical of the state, and thus gradually heightened social awareness. It cannot be said that the peoples of these countries are or were incapable of living with, or being ruled by, democratic institutions; the fact is that they have generally been prevented, first by the imperial powers, and then by home-grown dictatorships, from ever having them. It is not entirely surprising that they would come to reject the models which had been foisted upon them, largely because, in their eyes, these institutions had been so manipulated as to be meaningless. In Khomeini's words, 'whether in the period before the dictatorship [of Reza Shah] or during that disgraceful time, or afterwards... representation has not been a means of spreading justice and freedom.' Unfortunately, as Churchill famously—if somewhat inelegantly—remarked in 1947—and it is more than ironic

that the forms of government in Britain's Middle Eastern mandates were initially set up on his watch: 'No-one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.'³⁶ In spite of the wide contrast between the loftiness of the ideals and the shabbiness of the practices, including some of Churchill's own practices, he was, and still is, ultimately correct.

³⁶ Sir Winston Churchill, speech in the House of Commons, 11 November 1947.

CHAPTER THREE

“LIBERAL COLONIALISM” AND MARTIAL LAW IN FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA

Michael Provence

Introduction

Imperialism has dramatically returned to the Middle East. For many in the region, particularly in Palestine, the age of colonialism never ended, but some intellectuals in Europe and America have welcomed a new age of muscular imperialism. Niall Ferguson, for whom the principal lament of today's neo-imperialism is that Winston Churchill can no longer lead its charge and Rudyard Kipling can no longer sing its praises, writes widely from his endowed Harvard chair.

Many glib commentators like to blame all the problems of the Middle East today on British and French imperial maneuvers to fashion dependencies out of the lost provinces of the Ottoman Empire—as if malicious European diplomats somehow invented the ancient fissures between Shiites and Sunnis, or willfully encouraged Jewish settlers to colonize Palestine.¹

European diplomats of the interwar Middle East may not have been malicious, but widespread ignorance, short-sighted incompetence, and self-delusion certainly bequeathed a miserable inheritance to the post-colonial era. Colonial authorities zealously exploited and deepened sectarian and class cleavages in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. More than encouraging Jewish colonization, British politicians quite literally deeded Palestine to Europe's Zionist movement, and in so doing gave the world the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the Middle East, endless suffering and misery are widely viewed as the colonial legacy of the twentieth century. American policymakers and academics, on the other hand, prescribe colonial occupation not as a source of the region's real and imagined ailments, but as a cure, apparently confident that “Western

¹ Niall Ferguson, “History, Democracy and Iraq,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2005.

values” can only be conveyed, or indeed defined, by the self-appointed heirs of the Enlightenment, and delivered with military force and staggering violence. The Iraq adventure will do little to burnish the record of Euro-American imperialism in the Middle East.

The balance sheet for Middle East colonialisms, however, remains contentious. Beyond wars and borders, the enduring traces of colonial rule are more elusive. The Mandates of the former Ottoman Arab lands in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq were based in part on the evolving international legal structures of the League of Nations. Legal arguments not less than racialized theories of European supremacy legitimated the French and British presence in the Middle East between 1920 and the 1950s. The influence of European legal theory and so-called liberal imperialism on the post-colonial state is rarely examined, except in normative law codes or the presence of secular constitutions. This chapter examines a single episode in the history of mandatory Syria to suggest some of the more subtle traces of European occupation.

France occupied Syria and Lebanon in 1920. Agitation against the post-World War I Middle East settlement was widespread in the region, and each of the new French and British colonies, carved from the former Ottoman realms and euphemistically styled “Mandates” under nominal League of Nations supervision, was roiled by massive revolts. In every case the revolts were suppressed with the techniques of industrialized violence innovated during the war in Europe, including air power, poison gas, and mechanized artillery against civilian populations. The mandatory states and the challenge posed by nearly continuous insurgencies also spawned large police-state intelligence structures, which the post-colonial states generally inherited after independence in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine.

In August 1925, during a major revolt in Syria, a revolutionary tract appeared in Homs, the Syrian Mandate’s third-largest city. The posters called for armed resistance against the French military authorities. Mandate intelligence quickly arrested and interrogated a number of well-connected boys and young men. Several were tried and convicted in a closed military court. The investigation and trial led to a lengthy secret file. The documents provide a rare look into the functioning of the colonial security state, as well as providing a glimpse into the production and dissemination of agitation against Mandate rule. During the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925–27 there were dozens of such tracts posted in public places in all Syrian towns and cities. They were usually anonymous, and Mandate intelligence rarely found anyone responsible

for such postings.² The appearance of the Homs tracts is thus a window into the thoughts and actions of those who rejected mandatory rule at a time during which such documentary traces are very scarce.

The normative sources for the Mandate in Syria are rich and include memoirs of colonial officers, the records of the League of Nations, and the proclamations of French Mandate authorities. Also now available are the voluminous reports and documents compiled and archived by the various mandatory intelligence services. The contrast between normative sources and secret intelligence documents illustrate what Ranajit Guha calls “domination without hegemony.” Colonialism in Syria and elsewhere was legitimated—or, more crudely, sold—to the metropolitan population by claims that it fostered a series of ideas like democracy, secularism, and freedom for the colonized population. In practice, colonial rule was based on a preponderance of force. Regarding British rule in India, Guha writes: “The metropolitan state was hegemonic in character with its claim to dominance based on a power relation in which the moment of persuasion outweighed that of coercion, whereas the colonial state was non-hegemonic with persuasion outweighed by coercion in its structure of dominance.”³ Colonial claims to rule were based on military domination rather than on consent. This chapter seeks to ask: what were the long-term prospects for “liberal” state institutions introduced in an atmosphere of profoundly illiberal rule, and designed to legitimate, or shroud, authoritarian military government?

French Mandate rule

A small but tenacious group of Frenchmen in government, politics, and business whose influence over imperial issues was far out of proportion to its size, capitalized on the “defensive patriotism” wrought by World War I to commit France to military occupation of Syria in 1920. But seizing Syria by force was one thing; governing the country was quite another.⁴

² See Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives Diplomatiques-Nantes (hereafter, MAE-Nantes), carton 1704, BR 140 Damas, August 3, 1925 and carton 1704, BR 155, August 28, 1925, for examples of other similar tracts. Some of the tracts turned up in newspapers in Cairo, Paris, London, and Detroit, as well as the British, French, and League of Nations archives. See for example, *L'Humanité*, September 9, 1925.

³ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge, MA 1997, xii.

⁴ Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987, 44.

By 1920 France had been busy for decades building an empire on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. The disruptions of World War I, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and wartime agreements with Britain made the expansion of French rule possible in what became the French League of Nations Mandate of Syria and Lebanon. France had long had regional commercial and cultural influence in the silk and cotton trade, in railroad construction, in missionary educational institutions, and as the self-appointed protector of the Maronite Christians.

Many in France embraced the sense of imperial mission and destiny. Jacques Stern, an official in the French government defeated in 1940, wrote a fierce defense of France's colonial mission from exile at Princeton University. Stern had been minister of colonies from 1936 to 1940 in the Radical Republican government of Albert Sarroul, and while sharing the liberal and anti-clerical attitude of his party, he was also a defender of France's historical mission as cultural beacon and bearer of civilization. Stern's book sought to explain France's historical role as a colonizing nation and rebut American arguments that decolonization should follow the war.⁵

"France had been colonizing, in the noblest sense of the term, for a thousand years," he wrote. The Crusades had been an early expression of French Christian civilization on the march, and yet, in North Africa, Syria, and Lebanon, France had continued the crusade up to the present day.⁶ According to Stern, France's colonizing zeal had never been harnessed for the purposes of exploitation or aggrandizement, but had always aimed to "liberate populations subjected for centuries to the Black Flags, the Siamese despots, Turkish domination, or the slave merchants of Central Africa, and to raise them to the civilization of Pascal, Claude Bernard, Pasteur, [and] Branly."⁷ Furthermore, in Syria, North Africa, and elsewhere, French rule was necessary to stunt inborn fanaticism and protect the minority groups from the Muslim majority. It would bring rule of law, and respect for order. "The gratitude and

⁵ Jacques Stern, *Les Colonies françaises: passé et avenir*, New York: Brentano's 1943, trans. as *The French Colonies: Past and Future*, New York: Didier 1944. The translation had a new introduction attacking 1940 Republican presidential challenger Wendell Wilkie's popular book, *One World*, which called for decolonization, equality between nations, international cooperation, and an end to war.

⁶ Stern, *French Colonies*, 13–15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

loyalty of the children of France’s Empire would never fail her, not even after her defeat.”⁸

Down the centuries, the peoples of Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, have repeatedly called upon the French and the British to help them, to free them from the Turkish yoke, from an inferno in which the only civilizing influence, from the time of the Crusades, was the French religious orders and their educational institutions.

What the French and British administration brought was order, freedom, honest finance, railroads, public works, and hygiene, not through brutal assimilationist methods, but with full consideration for native beliefs and traditions. They brought mutual understanding, also, and widespread employment. What these thousand-year-old nations need is to have their racial pride softened, their fanaticism and exacerbated nationalism silenced. Hastily granted independence would intensify their stubborn nationalism and bring pogroms and civil wars to their peoples. A real war of races would break out.⁹

Despite such cultural justification, French expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean was also driven by material aims, and the efforts of powerful advocates in Paris. Industrial lobbies, most particularly textile and cloth manufacturers, coveted Mount Lebanon silk and Cilician and Syrian cotton. Oil companies sought access to fields near Mosul. The political right, including much of the military, coveted the Eastern Mediterranean region for reasons of strategy and French national prestige. The sense of imperial mission was widespread, however, and even the socialist prime minister Aristide Briand claimed that possession of Syria was a matter of “life and death for France’s Mediterranean policy” and declared that “the gulf of Alexandretta is an important thing in the Mediterranean; its possession is essential to the future of France.” He further noted that it was the terminus of the Mosul oil pipeline, and that access to petrol had been the most important issue of the war.¹⁰ Right-wing French politicians argued that France required a durable military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean to match its presence in North Africa. Some went so far as to claim that the security of France

⁸ Ibid., 26. The translated text reads “The gratitude and loyalty of France’s Empire [*sic*] children would never fail her, not even after her defeat.”

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Briand in *Journal Officiel*, Dets., June 26, 1920, quoted in Stephen Henry Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870–1925*, London: P. S. King & Son 1929, 591–92.

itself depended on its possessions on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.¹¹

There was some informed opposition to French colonial policy. A few French academicians and orientalisists argued that France should foster the development of a unified Arab national community, but the prevailing viewpoint among military and colonial officials dictated a sectarian system of fragmented religious populations.¹² Colonial advocates needed a reliable client population to make sense of and lend purpose to the imperial mission. Despite internal divisions of class, education, and ideology, Arabic-speaking Christians comprised this privileged client population. French colonial civil servants created Lebanon to reward the Christian population, and insure a reliable core for the French presence.¹³

Many Europeans recognized the role imperial competition had played in the catastrophe of World War I. New structures of international law emerged to delineate the relations between and constrain the behavior of existing states. Under pressure from American president Woodrow Wilson, the League of Nations was devised and charged with adjudicating disputes between the Great Powers and dulling the edges of their imperial contests outside Europe. The League of Nations agreed that some of the domains of the defeated Central Powers and Ottoman Empire would become League of Nations Mandates. Britain and France reluctantly agreed to accept the modest limitations imposed by the mandatory regime in return for the realization of their imperial goals and secret wartime agreements. Representatives of the victorious powers drafted the League of Nations Covenant covering the Mandates in mid-1920 in Geneva. At approximately the same time, in July 1920, French forces marched inland from Beirut to Damascus. The French colonial army met organized armed resistance, which it crushed at the battle of Maysalun outside Damascus, and disorganized opposition in all areas of the country. From this beginning, a gap appeared between the idealism of Mandate rule and its implementation.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 592.

¹² See for example, Gérard Khoury, "Robert De Caix et Louis Massignon: deux visions de la politique française au Levant en 1920," in Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 165–84.

¹³ See Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1988, 130–31.

Among ordinary French citizens, who had suffered most in the recent war, the expansion of the French empire, whatever the current euphemism, was less popular. France had already invaded and occupied Algeria in the first half of the nineteenth century, Tunisia in 1881, and Morocco in 1912. Algeria had been annexed as a settler colony. Native functionaries and French military officers governed Tunisia and Morocco as protectorates. The Mandate for Syria was controversial from the start and calls to fulfill the colonial mission in the French states of the Levant were less compelling in the wake of World War I. Parliamentary leftists noted the absence of strong economic interests, and asked, “was France to be the gendarme of the world?”¹⁴ In the 1920s, during a series of massive anti-colonial insurgencies in North Africa and the Levant, the French left gradually abandoned its opposition to the colonial enterprise. Popular culture and film depicted the sacrifices of brave French couriers of civilization arrayed against uncomprehending and ungrateful savages. Such representations helped to sever the association between left-wing metropolitan politics and anti-imperialism, and cement a racialist narrative of European civilization against the fanaticism and irrational violence of the colonies.¹⁵

The paternalistic ideal of the Mandate immediately confronted various forms of indigenous resistance. Mandatory legal and intelligence structures evolved under the imperative to employ mass violence against armed and generally hostile populations. The League charter had vaguely stated that the wishes of the people under Mandate were to be a primary concern of policy. The mandatory power was further required to submit yearly reports to the League Council, later to become the Permanent Mandates Commission. The Commission would “explicitly define the degree of control, authority, or administration exercised by the Mandatory.”¹⁶ While relations between League of Nations members were theoretically constrained and adjudicated by international law and the new Permanent Court of International Justice, there were no structures for presenting the grievances of the populations under Mandate to the international bodies. The mandatory powers were able to filter

¹⁴ *Journal Officiel*, Deps., December 7, 1921, quoted in Roberts, *French Colonial Policy*, 593.

¹⁵ David Henry Slavín, *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919–1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, and Settler Myths*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001, 4–5.

¹⁶ British Foreign Office, *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, London 1935.

out any indigenous opposition to their policies. Annual reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission naturally reflected French policy, and Syrian opinion was unrepresented.¹⁷

In July 1922 the League of Nations published a more detailed description of the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon. French colonial functionaries and officials drafted the terms of the Mandate without serious criticism or contribution from members of the League or the nine members of the Permanent Mandates Commission. The terms called for a constitution, “framed in agreement with the native authorities,” within three years, local autonomy, “as circumstances permit,” and the right of France to maintain military forces and raise local militias, the costs of which were to be supported by whatever unrestricted revenues the mandatory was able to extract from the territories under Mandate. France was free to use “ports, railways, and all means of communication for the passage of its troops and of all materials, supplies, and fuel,” and was entrusted with the “exclusive control of the foreign relations of Syria and Lebanon.” The mandatory power claimed unrestricted control over taxation and the granting of concessions for natural resource exploitation or any type of commercial development. The establishment of a judicial system in Syria and Lebanon was entirely under the control of France.¹⁸ Former British mandatory official Stephen Longrigg noted that the French were “prepared sincerely to spend life and treasure, and to face local unpopularity, in order to produce a regime which they and the world could approve and admire.” And yet, Longrigg wrote, the mandatory was invested with “virtually unlimited powers.”¹⁹ These unchecked powers would be used again and again.

The Mandate charter required the election of a constitutional assembly within three years, or by 1923. French authorities had little enthusiasm for elections or a constitution, but there was pressure from the Permanent Mandates Commission, and from Syrians themselves. The constituent assembly was postponed first by a succession of high commissioners committed to direct military rule, then by the outbreak and costly suppression of the Great Syrian Revolt between 1925 and 1927, and finally by fears that a constitution would diminish French control. Elections took place in summer 1928, but contrary to the wishes and

¹⁷ Stephen Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1958, 110–11.

¹⁸ League of Nations, *Official Journal*, August 1922, 103–17.

¹⁹ Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon*, 111–12.

efforts of the Mandate authority, they returned nationalist politicians, including assembly president and Homs delegate Hashim al-Atasi, rather than those favored by the high commissioner.²⁰ The assembly wrote a draft constitution unacceptable to the French government. Paris ordered the high commissioner to adjourn the assembly for a period of three months. The adjournment stretched to two years. The controversial articles included the right of the president to grant pardons, conclude international treaties, form an army, declare martial law, and the guarantee of the territorial integrity of Syria.²¹ The high commissioner finally accepted the constitution in May 1930, with the addition of a new article claiming France's right to suspend any part of the law at will. The British consul in Damascus wrote, "The effect of this procedure is to endow Syria with a very liberal Constitution, which cannot fail to earn applause at Geneva, and will remain inoperative at the High Commissioner's pleasure."²² The constitution had arrived seven years late and the next day the high commissioner exercised his prerogative and dissolved the constituent assembly.

Mandate legal and intelligence structures

Advocates of the colonial mission claimed a special rationality in contrast to what they described as the arbitrary despotism of Ottoman rule. In the French conception, tyranny would be replaced by a system of law and order and defined rights and legal structures. It quickly became clear, however, that an elaborate Ottoman legal structure already existed, and that halting French efforts at reform would have to work through the existing structures.²³ France first created a legal justification for the partition of the various parts of the mandatory territory, based on the policy of dividing the region by sect and preventing the emergence of inter-sectarian nationalist opposition. Lebanon was separated from Syria, and Syria was divided into semi-autonomous "statelets" of the state of Jabal Druze; the state of the Alawites; the state of Syria, centered around

²⁰ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 336.

²¹ British Foreign Office (FO) 371/4310, 13548/69, Damascus, August 15, 1928.

²² FO 371/4310, 13843/156, Hole to Henderson, May 27, 1930.

²³ Youssef Takla, "Corpus juris du mandat français," in Méouchy and Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, 63–100; Milen Petrov, "Everyday Forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864–1868," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, 4 (October 2004), 730–59.

Damascus; and the state of Aleppo. Most of the population opposed the partitions, but the policy evolved in order to manage and divide a hostile population, and because separation by sect conformed to French prejudices about Arab society.²⁴

Family and civil law retained its grounding in religious law—albeit with French intervention in areas of gender and communal rights.²⁵ Commercial law came to be adopted from French codes, and criminal law traced its origins to both French codes and, less prominently, Ottoman secular law or *nizāmiyya*. Judges were drawn from the ranks of Syrian and Lebanese lawyers and scholars, supervised by appointed justice ministers, and ultimately by French advisors. While a nominally liberal legal system was created and fostered by French colonial rule, under the stress of mass opposition to the Mandate regime, almost everything reverted to martial law, arbitrary secrecy, government decree, and the ever-present threat of state violence.

Martial law decrees rendered structures of liberal civil law inoperative. Early in 1925, months before the outbreak of the Syrian Revolt, High Commissioner General Maurice Sarrail signed a series of decrees extending military jurisdiction into all areas of life. From the time of the initial occupation of Lebanon and inland Syria, martial law and military jurisdiction had never actually been lifted, but Sarrail's decrees further codified military prerogatives. All local police forces and civil authorities were completely subordinate to the jurisdiction of the French military. The military authority had the right to search the home of any citizen, day or night, without prior notice or arrangement, to remove suspects from their homes or from local jurisdiction and detain them without charge or explanation, to seize arms and ammunition, to interdict rights of speech and of the press and of public association at will, and to seize the property of any citizen without explanation or compensation.²⁶ "All individuals who have committed an act against the security of the French army or its interests will be placed under the jurisdiction of the French military." Intelligence officers immediately referred the case of the tracts

²⁴ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, London: H. Hamilton 1938, 204–98.

²⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press 2000, 115–16.

²⁶ Haut-Commissariat de la République française en Syrie et au Liban, *Recueil des actes administratifs du Haut-commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban*, vol. VI, 1925, Beirut 1925, Arrêtés nos. 4/S and 5/S, 6–11.

in Homs to military justice for prosecution in a military court under the martial law decree.²⁷

Military officers occupied a place of prominence in the theory and practice of French colonialism.²⁸ The Mandate *Service des Renseignements* (SR), or intelligence services, formed the elite among the colonial-military vanguard, but the Mandate was a military undertaking at nearly all levels; from the high commissioners down, most officials were current or former army officers. Metropolitan French officers led Syrian minority recruits and colonial troops drawn from other French possessions in policing the Mandate. Serious disturbances or major uprisings were suppressed by the Foreign Legion or, in truly dire situations, by emergency units of the regular French army. Actually running the Mandate, in times of calm, or during frequent revolts, fell to the self-contained and autonomous officers of the SR.

The investigation into the Homs tract occurred during the Syrian Revolt of 1925–27. The uprising was sparked in part by the policies and unsupervised actions of a single SR officer. In late July 1925, Captain Gabriel Carbillet helped to provoke a revolt among a religious minority in the south of the country. The Druze of Jabal Hawran rose in protest to a combination of arrogance and humiliating punishments meted out to local leaders. The uprising spread to most of the territories of the Mandate, and eventually incorporated various forms of the new language of nationalism and independence. It was suppressed with the harshest means imaginable, and when it was all over two high commissioners had been replaced in disgrace, the SR had expanded its staff, and the secret intelligence structures on which the Mandate relied were stronger than ever.²⁹

Liberal language and legal structures characterized French mandatory rule. From the beginning, however, there was an irreducible contradiction between liberal ideals and the imposition of a system of colonial rule by violence or threat of violence. When Mandate functionaries encountered resistance from the population, the predictable response was an abandonment of liberal theory and recourse to military

²⁷ MAE-Nantes, carton 1593, tracts divers, justice militaire, 1.012, August 19, 1925.

²⁸ Jean-David Mizrahi, “Pouvoir mandataire et insécurité en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920: le service des renseignements du haut-commissariat français au Levant,” Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris, 2001.

²⁹ Martin C. Thomas, “French Intelligence Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920–1940,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, 1 (2002), 11–12.

suppression, secrecy, and attendant undemocratic practices. Liberal language shrouded illiberal practice and established habits of rule that endured beyond the end of the Mandate. The idealism of French liberty and republicanism could not withstand the periodic imperative to employ mass violence against a hostile population. It was at such a moment that the boys from Homs were arrested, interrogated, secretly tried, and imprisoned.

Suppression

On the morning of August 14, 1925 intelligence officers working in the French League of Nations Mandate for Syria and Lebanon recovered the following poster, which had been pasted the previous night on walls in the market place in Homs, Syria's fourth largest town, in between Hamah and Damascus:

To all Patriots:

The time has come to rise from our slumber and cease our silence. The hour of vengeance, of sacrifice, and of liberty has arrived. We shall cast off the chains of silence and gain our liberty by spilling our blood to save our homeland from the clutches of the tyrants and give voice to independence and liberty...

Long live Syria, independence, and liberty.³⁰

The authorities immediately identified and sought seven boys for writing and posting the tract. The commander-in-chief of the SR received a telephone report from the SR chief of Homs:

Four young men, one of whom was 'Adnan, son of Hashim Bey al-Atasi, were arrested by local authorities for writing tracts posted in the town on the night of 13 August. Three other young men are implicated in the plot. All belong to the Atasi family. Four have confessed. Investigations continue. The *Mutaşarrif* has requested that the accused be transferred to his custody. [end transcription]³¹

³⁰ MAE-Nantes, carton 1704, BR 149, August 17, 1925. The individual entry in this intelligence bulletin was dated July 18, 1925, while all other entries are dated August 17. The date of July is probably an error, and other intelligence documents indicate that the accused were arrested in mid-August, days after the tract appeared.

³¹ Handwritten phone message, and typed transcription, August 17, 1925: MAE-Nantes, carton 1593, tracts divers, commandement superieur des troupes du Levant,

August had already been a desperate month for the Mandate authority. In July the revolt had broken out in the southern countryside, and on August 1, two weeks before the appearance of the Homs tract, insurgents had destroyed an entire French relief column of 3,000 heavily armed troops. They captured vast quantities of weapons including artillery and machine guns, and the column's second-in-command had killed himself on the field of battle when his troops fled the rebel charge. The Mandate government tried to seal the southern region, and prevent the news of the catastrophe from spreading, but the attempt was totally unsuccessful, and spectacular rumors of the French defeat spread through Syria, Lebanon, and beyond almost immediately.³² Military garrisons all over Syria and Lebanon were mobilized and transferred to the southern region around Damascus, and towns and villages like Homs enjoyed the first respite from military street patrols since 1920.

SR intelligence officers immediately investigated the revolutionary posters. The municipality, or *mutaşarrifiyya*, attempted to assert legal jurisdiction, but mandatory intelligence took control of the investigation. The local SR officer telephoned the Damascus SR chief, who conveyed the tract and initial report to Mandate SR headquarters in Beirut. Suspicions centered on young men of the prominent Atasi family, eight of whom the SR and police detained on August 15. Interrogations took place during the night of August 15–16, and police seized and interrogated five more suspects on August 16.³³ Several of the young men were questioned more than once, and the inquiries took place over the course of three days. Many interviews were conducted at night, and suspects were detained in the Homs police station. Intelligence officers took handwriting samples from several boys for comparison with the handwriting on the unsigned tracts.³⁴

The secret interrogation transcripts of the investigation were translated into French and preserved. The original Arabic transcripts were

Justice Militaire, no. 2993/J.M., April 29, 1926. This file is a 22-page documentary history of the case, including interrogation transcripts.

³² See Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2005, 62–64.

³³ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1704, BR 149, August 17, 1925, pp. 4–5. The translated tract and initial telephone report was included in the general intelligence bulletin for August 17, 1925. The final intelligence file included also file MAE-Nantes no 1993/J.M.: see FN 31.

³⁴ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, p. 13 of 22.

not preserved, and while the documents contain what purport to be the actual testimony of the young men being questioned, the interrogators are silent; their questions, techniques, and actions are completely absent from the record. In many places, drastic changes in a single testimony are only separated by a paragraph break. The reader is left to wonder what made the young interview subject suddenly contradict all his preceding testimony. The breaks and dramatic reversals within many of the statements suggest torture or violent coercion, and while there is no direct evidence in the investigation record, such methods were a regular feature of Mandate rule.³⁵ There were no lawyers present.

The investigation illustrates the subversion of the supposed legal structures of the Mandate. In theory, investigatory jurisdiction lay with the *mutaşarrifiyya*, or local government, and the local police. When the governor, or *mutaşarrif*, determined that a crime had been committed, jurisdiction to prosecute lay with civilian criminal courts. The martial law decrees, however, had established military authority above civilian authority at the discretion of the high commissioner, and military courts above civilian courts, which had effectively ceased functioning for criminal cases during the revolt.³⁶ SR intelligence officers took custody of the Homs suspects from the municipal police, conducted interrogations without lawyers present, and tried the accused, without legal representation, in a secret military court. The local governor, and the boys' families, repeatedly requested that they be placed in civilian custody, but this request was merely recorded and ignored.³⁷

The investigation initially focused on law students from the Atasi family. It was summertime and students from Damascus University were home on holidays. Investigators targeted 'Adnan al-Atasi, son of nationalist politician Hashim al-Atasi, later president of the 1927 constitutional assembly, but the first interview was with 'Adnan's cousin, Murad Taq al-Din al-Atasi. Both were law students. During a series of interrogations, the students managed to avoid incrimination, and the

³⁵ See Bennett J. Doty, *The Legion of the Damned: The Adventures of Bennett J. Doty in the French Foreign Legion as Told by Himself*, New York: The Century Co. 1928; John Henry Harvey, *With the Foreign Legion in Syria*, London: Hutchinson 1928; Alice Poullea, *A Damas sous les bombes: journal d'une Française pendant la révolte Syrienne, 1924-1926*, Paris: [no publisher] 1926.

³⁶ Haut-Commissariat du mandat français, *La Syrie et le Liban sous l'occupation et le Mandat français, 1919-1927*, Paris [1928?], 51-57.

³⁷ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, "tracts divers," DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, August 17, 1925.

younger boys, especially members of the Atasi family, were at pains to shield their older cousins. Not all, however, shared the goal of deflecting attention from the more prominent boys.

Ahmad Chalabi, who worked at his father's shop, vigorously protested his innocence. Ahmad declared that he did not know who had distributed or posted the tract, and it was not he who did it. On Friday [Thursday?] night he had gone to the Sakar café. He stayed until 4:30, when he went home to sleep. He did not leave his house again till morning. If he had been seen on the streets, it was only while he walked from the café, where he spent every evening. His testimony consisted of insistent denials of any knowledge or role in the plot, and then suddenly and inexplicably, he admitted his involvement with other boys in printing and posting the fliers. Ahmad claimed not to know who had actually written the tract, but he suggested Murad or his brother 'Abd al-Hay. The interrogation transcript contains no explanation for Ahmad's abrupt confession, and the following paragraph is startling in its divergence from his initial account.³⁸

Last Wednesday, at 9:30, we met together at the al-Farah café. 'Abd al-Hay, Samih, I, and five or six Atasi family boys were there, one of whom was 'Abd al-Muhaymin and another was 'Adnan. Samih declared “on Friday night we will post the tracts in the closed quarters.” Samih said 15 copies had been printed from the original identical to the polished negative Samih had. We left immediately. Thursday, at the same hour, we met again at the al-Farah café, and we chose a place for our meeting that night, during which we would paste the posters to the walls. At 2:00 a.m. Samih and 'Abd al-Hay came bringing with them 25 or 30 posters. We went together to the *sūq*. We went from the center to the Suq al-Hassa where we pasted close to 10 posters on the walls. We used a kind of glue from a bottle Samih brought. He coated the back of the posters with glue and I pasted them to the walls. We pasted others in various places [a list of locations]. While we were working one of my comrades passed by and advised me to leave, so as not to suffer bad consequences that might result. I took this advice.

I read the posters and I knew what they said. No one but myself, 'Abd al-Hay and Samih led me to take part in the operation. I don't know who instigated it, and I understood from Burhan that the desired goal was to remove the military regime at Damascus. On Friday morning I met Samih, 'Abd al-Hay, Burhan, 'Abd al-Muhaymin, and the other Atasi boys at the Grand Mosque. We left together to see the posters, but they had all been

³⁸ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, 14–15 of 22.

<i>Order</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Education/ vocation</i>	<i>Sentence</i>
1	Murād al-Atāsī	25	Taqī al-Dīn	Law student	Released
2	‘Abd al-Ḥay al-Atāsī	18	Taqī al-Dīn	Agricultural student	3 years and 3,000FF
3	Aḥmad Chalabi	20	Muṣṭafā	Apprentice merchant	2–1/2 years and 3,000FF
4	‘Adnān al-Atāsī	20	Hāshim	Law student	Released
5	Samiḥ al-Atāsī	16	Badī‘a	Carpenter	2 years and 3,000FF
6	Riyaḍ al-Atāsī	15	Hāshim	Preparatory school student	Released
7	‘Abd al-Muḥaynim al-Atāsī	12	‘Ādil	Preparatory school student	Released
8	Sayyid al-Atāsī	17	Ibrāhīm Muḥammad	Preparatory school student	Released
9	‘Abd al-Razzāq Khānkhān	17	Muḥammad	Preparatory school student	Two years and 3,000FF
10	Nadīm al-Mūṣalī (<i>Nazīm</i>)	25 (17)	Ibrāhīm	Law student (<i>Preparatory school</i>)	Released*
11	‘Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Malūḥī	18	Najīb	Preparatory school graduate	Released ³⁹

* Figures in parentheses indicate SR biographical details. Nadim Ibrahim al-Musali evidently convinced SR officers he was his younger brother. According to Jurj Faris’ biographical dictionary, he was 25 or 26 years old in 1925. He was born in 1899, and graduated as a lawyer from the College of Law in Damascus in 1926. Like ‘Adnan al-Atasi, Nadim went on to become a professor of law at Damascus University. His brother, Nazim Ibrahim al-Musali was a 17-year-old secondary school student. For Nazim see [no author], *Mawsū‘a a’lām Sūriyya fī l-qarn al-‘ishrīn*, Beirut 2000, 302.

³⁹ Table based on biographical information found in MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, MAE-Nantes and Jurj Faris, *Man huwa fī Sūriyā, 1949*, Damascus: Maktab al-Dirāsāt al-Sūriyya wa-l-‘Arabiyya 1950, 435–36.

removed and we learned that the police had peeled them off the walls. That is the reason we never pasted the remaining posters.

As the plot began to unravel, interrogators went back to work on boys interviewed earlier. ‘Abd al-Hay tried gallantly to protect his companions and himself. He admitted that he and Ahmad had posted a few tracts in various places in the town, but he insisted he posted the tracts only for fun and laughs. They were, after all, he said, written and posted by children.

I do not know who drafted the original, or who printed them, but I [copied] one in my own hand that evening at the house of [Samih’s father]. The gelatin negative had already been prepared and used. At that time, Wednesday evening, only Samih and I were in the house.

The next day, I found myself at al-Farah café. Also there were Ahmad Chalabi, Burhan al-Atasi, ‘Abd al-Muhamaymin, and others I did not know. I was playing billiards when Samih came and told me to make him a copy of this tract. So I went with him to his house and [copied] it. We had no goal for the posters apart from fun and amusement. We were not instigators.

My brother Murad was never a part of the group. The handwriting on the posters is mine, not his. I can prove it by writing a copy that you can compare with the tract.⁴⁰

The SR officers conducting the investigation had a particular interest in privileged young law students and yet they failed to collect evidence against any of these young men. Interrogators next interviewed 20-year-old ‘Adnan al-Atasi, who like Murad, was a student at the college of law at Damascus. Despite the zeal of the SR officers in pursuing him he was not charged and was released shortly afterwards.⁴¹

Interrogators next questioned Samih Badi‘a al-Atasi, a 16-year-old carpenter. Samih was from a less prominent branch of the Atasi family than either Murad or ‘Adnan. Ahmad Chalabi had already implicated Samih, and he provided new details.

⁴⁰ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, 16 of 22.

⁴¹ For background on the more prominent members of the Atasi family see Faris, *Man huwa fi Sūriyya*, 13–16. Hashim and ‘Adnan have the longest entries. See also ‘Abd al-Ghani al-‘Itri, *‘Abqariyyāt wa-i‘lām*, Damascus: Dār al-Bashā‘ir 1997, 11. Valuable information and family trees are found at <http://alatassi.net/familytree.php>.

Every day we had a meeting between the people you already know of, with the exception of ‘Adnan and Murad al-Atasi, who are not in our group. We met at the al-Farah café. Wednesday, while I was with ‘Abd al-Hay, Ahmad Chalabi, Burhan, Riyad, son of Hashim Bey, and ‘Abd al-Muhaymin, we conferred about pasting the posters on walls in the town. ‘Adnan and Murad were always together in the café, but they are older than we, and they never have anything to do with us. We each agreed to draft a poster and paste it on the walls Friday night.

Ahmad Chalabi drafted the tract. ‘Abd al-Hay al-Atasi copied it onto a gelatin negative. I printed it at my house. ‘Abd al Hay brought the negative. Some of the tracts were finished Wednesday, the rest on Thursday. The poster was made by all of us and we all approved of it. Our goal, as Burhan declared, was to help in the removal of the military government in Damascus, and the closure of the armory and garrison at Homs. 25–30 were printed. While [others] put up posters, I was busy opposite the shop of Sharabati. Ahmad and ‘Abd al-Hay put up posters in other places, unknown to me. I saw them put up one in Bab Hud street near the municipal ovens. I brought the jar, and ‘Abd al Hay and Ahmad brought the paste. On Friday we went to the mosque for mid-day prayers and found that our efforts had been for nothing, since all the posters were gone. ‘Adnan and Murad did not attend the meetings on Wednesday or Thursday and no one forced us to make the posters and put them up. It wasn’t I who brought the gelatin negative, but rather ‘Abd al-Hay. Ahmad wrote the draft and ‘Abd al-Hay copied it and we all contributed. ‘Abd al-Hay and Ahmad kept the ones we didn’t put up.⁴²

Samih apparently shared with other Atasi boys a determination to protect ‘Adnan, and Murad. Notably, Ahmad Chalabi, who was not a member of the Atasi family, and who had a more modest mercantile and educational background than the others, placed ‘Adnan with the plotters at the al-Farah café, and suggested that Murad had written the tract. By contrast, Samih claimed Ahmad had written it—a claim that seems unlikely given his education, since he was the only boy to have received only an elementary traditional religious schooling.

More interrogations followed during the night, and more boys blamed Ahmad for writing the tract. As investigators questioned a succession of boys ranging from 12 to 17 years old, the details of the plan gradually unfolded. Twelve-year-old ‘Abd al-Muhaymin ‘Adil al-Atasi declared he was at home with his parents during all the times in question. He had never visited the al-Farah café, and he reminded investigators that a

⁴² MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, 7 September 1925, 18 of 22. Testimony of Ahmad Chalabi.

café was not a place for a child. He had heard of the posters, but knew nothing more.

The interrogation transcript concludes with a summary of the case. The investigators surmised that the idea for the posters was launched during a heated discussion at the city park on Wednesday. Three boys at the park convinced two of the younger Atasi boys to produce and distribute a revolutionary tract with the goal of encouraging a revolution and aiding the rebels of the south in expelling French forces from Syria. “They came and told us, ‘At this moment there are no soldiers in the town. It is the perfect time to raise a revolution.’ They requested that we meet in the café and prepare a poster to put in the town.”⁴³ A number of boys then attended a series of meetings at the al-Farah café. The planning for the posters took place at these meetings. ‘Abd al-Hay al-Atasi, Samih al-Atasi, and Ahmad Chalabi printed and then affixed the posters in the early morning hours of Friday, August 14, 1925. Among the conspirators, only Ahmad placed the young law students ‘Adnan and Murad al-Atasi at the planning meetings.

SR officers suspected law students of inspiring and planning the agitation in Homs. They were, however, unable to incriminate any of the three young lawyers questioned and accused—only two of whom were actually known to Mandate intelligence. The boys questioned insisted that the law students had played no role in the plot. Apparently unknown to investigators was the fact that one of those present at the garden at the beginning of the plot was 25-year-old law student Nadim al-Musali, who they mis-identified as his younger brother, a 17-year-old preparatory student. It follows, then, that law students were present at each of the crucial meetings involving the inspiration and planning of the posters, despite the fact that younger boys had actually produced and posted the tracts. The investigation uncovered nothing about who had actually written the tracts.

Ultimately four boys were tried, and all the others were released “due to lack of evidence and in consideration of their young ages.”⁴⁴ A closed military court found ‘Abd al-Razzaq Khankhan, Samih al-Atasi, Ahmad Chalabi, and ‘Abd al-Hay al-Atasi guilty of acts of provocation against the Mandate. Notably the boys tried and jailed were clearly from

⁴³ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, September 7, 1925, 18–19 of 22; testimony of 17-year-old Sayyid Ibrahim Muhammad al-Atasi.

⁴⁴ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, “tracts divers,” DROGMANAT: Beyrouth, August 17, 1925, 22 of 22.

the most modest families among those questioned. Only 17-year-old 'Abd al-Razzaq Khankhan was still a student; all the others, including 16-year-old carpenter Samih al-Atasi, had been working in trades. They were each sentenced to between two and three years in prison and fines of 3,000 francs.

The trial took place on December 3, 1925, by which time they had already been in prison for three-and-a-half months. The court was convened under article 150 of the French Code of Military Justice, which covered crimes committed under martial law and allowed for the suspension of civil law with its attendant legal guarantees. The boys were charged with crimes under articles 87, 89, and 91 of the French Penal Code, number 24, of the Law of July 29, 1881. These articles covered crimes against internal state security—specifically, efforts to overthrow the government by incitement to armed revolt against the state, punishable by imprisonment; and incitement to civil war, massacre and pillage, punishable by death.

In late April 1926, after eight-and-a-half months in jail, the four boys were released. Commander-in-chief of the French Army of the Levant, General Maurice Gamelin, had written to the minister of war and the director of the Bureau of Military Justice, arguing that the political interests of the mandatory government would be best served by releasing the four prisoners. The political prominence of their relatives doubtlessly played a role, and the timing of the release request corresponded with the launch of a massive French counterinsurgency campaign in the regions held by rebel forces south of Damascus. The release of the four prisoners was approved shortly thereafter by a presidential request conveyed via the minister of war in Paris.⁴⁵ The sentences were commuted, but their families had already paid the 3,000 franc fines, which was a colossal sum of money in 1925, sufficient to finance tuition, room, and board for four years at Damascus University.⁴⁶ While the case of the Atasi boys had obviously received special attention, hundreds of other Syrians received perfunctory military trials in late 1925 and 1926.

In 1926 alone the Damascus military court sentenced, condemned, and executed 355 Syrians without any legal representation. Public hangings were a regular spectacle. Hundreds were tried and sentenced

⁴⁵ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1593, "tracts divers," Commandement Supérieur des Troupes du Levant, Justice Militaire, no. 2993, April 29, 1926.

⁴⁶ See Abdul-Karim Rafeq's chapter in this volume.

to death in absentia. Scores more were sentenced to varying terms including life at hard labor.⁴⁷ Between 1925 and 1927 Mandate troops summarily executed hundreds and perhaps thousands of Syrians in their villages, towns, and urban quarters. Mandate military forces publicly displayed the mutilated corpses of “bandits” in the central square in Damascus and in villages throughout Syria.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Mandate intelligence blamed the appearance of the Homs tracts on privileged young law students. And while the investigation and trial eventually focused on younger boys of more modest origin and education, the law students and the elite families of Homs remained in the background. It would appear from other information, apparently unavailable to Mandate intelligence that three young law students were more intimately involved with the tracts than authorities realized. It is impossible to say if the investigation and trials were part of a government campaign to silence and terrorize some among its most prominent critics, or conversely, if the very prominence of the Atasi family served to protect its young men from harsher punishment. Perhaps some deal was struck to offer up younger boys for punishment, and protect the town’s most promising young men.

All the Middle East Mandates of the interwar years were challenged by revolts. The uprisings mobilized humble members of society, particularly former Ottoman army officers and conscripts. All the revolts featured eloquent appeals to nationalist struggle, human rights, and patriotic sacrifice in the form of anonymous postings and leaflets. Many of the leaflets evoked the Rights of Man, the ideals of the French Revolution, rights of free association and religion and the wish for constitutional law.⁴⁹ At the same time as the appearance of the Homs tracts, Mandate

⁴⁷ Haut-Commissariat du mandat français, *La Syrie et le Liban*, 53. See the Great Revolt Mixed Court files at the Syrian National Archive, al-muḥakamāt al-mukhtalifa, Markaz al-Wathā’iq al-Tārīkhiyya, Damascus.

⁴⁸ “Un splendide tableau de chasse,” headline in the French-language official newspaper *La Syrie* quoted in Poullea, *A Damas sous les bombes*, 80–81, and *The Times*, “Parade of Corpses,” October 27, 1925.

⁴⁹ The best example among many is the rebel manifesto signed, but probably not written, by Sultan al-Atrash on August 23, 1925: MAE-Nantes, Carton 1704, BR 155, August 28, 1925. It appeared in the archives of France, Britain, and the League of Nations, as well as newspapers in Cairo, Paris, London, and Detroit.

intelligence surmised that such postings in Damascus were the work of university law students, and yet none were caught, or even identified. Syrian elites were generally unsympathetic to the rebellion. But the young, particularly former and current law students, were, according to a special Mandate intelligence report on elite Syrian opinion, “unable to contain their enthusiasm and were imbued with ideas of revolution and independence.” Young law students saw the revolt as part of an international struggle against European colonialism. They wrote to newspapers and sympathetic political organizations in Europe, and eventually several young lawyers joined the rebels.⁵⁰

The role of radical lawyers in anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century is obvious and well known. It should thus not be a surprise that revolutionary agitation in Syria was not the work of rebellious peasants and army veterans, but rather of intellectuals of a new and radical generation, raised under colonial rule after the end of the Ottoman state. Just as legal structures legitimated French Mandate rule, the Mandate’s most sophisticated critics used legal arguments to attack the hypocrisy and violence of France’s empire.

French Mandate legal and constitutional structures were not designed to protect the rights of mandatory citizens. As observers noted at the time, so-called liberal imperialism was designed to earn praise from the international community, affirm French national prestige, and dull leftist criticism back in France. Under the imperatives of mass opposition to Mandate rule, however, the cosmetic façade of liberal and constitutional rule fell away, to be replaced by hasty structures of military rule, mass violence, arbitrary detention, and secrecy. Actual mandatory practice undermined the application of the rule of law and constitutional legal structures at every juncture. Colonial advocates and civil servants offered liberal structures and language as a justification for the imperial project, not as goals to be achieved by mandatory government. It is certainly not a coincidence that many such practices have been lasting features of Syria’s post-colonial governments.⁵¹

Syrian lawyers challenged the colonial security state with arguments for durable democratic and constitutional structures and the application of legally guaranteed rights for citizens. It seems likely that the experi-

⁵⁰ MAE-Nantes, Carton 1704, BR 328, December 2, 1925.

⁵¹ On this point see Hāshim ‘Uthmān, *Muḥākamāt al-siyāsiyya fī Sūriyya*, Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li-l-Kutub wa-l-Nashr 2004.

ence of military occupation and colonial rule cemented an aspiration for constitutional government and the rule of law. At least two of the young men named in the Homs investigation, ‘Adnan al-Atasi and Nadim al-Musali, went on to illustrious careers as legal scholars and political activists. The father of ‘Adnan al-Atasi, Hashim al-Atasi, was soon elected president of Syria’s constitutional assembly. Hashim al-Atasi was among the authors of the 1928 constitution, and later twice served as democratically elected president of independent Syria.

‘Adnan al-Atasi was scarcely less accomplished. He completed his law degree at Damascus University in 1925 and, after study in Geneva, became a professor of international and constitutional law at Damascus University. Back in Syria, Atasi was a founding member of the League of National Action, a political federation made of young nationalists critical of the cooperative attitude of the Syrian National Bloc—a political grouping made up mostly of men of their fathers’ generation. Immediately after independence, Atasi was among the main authors of the Syrian constitution of 1949. He won election to parliament and became a forceful advocate for progressive democracy and rule of law and wrote books critical of military government and undemocratic practice.⁵²

In 1956, after ten years of independence from France, the chief of Syrian military intelligence accused ‘Adnan al-Atasi of treason. Atasi and a number of other politicians were accused of discussing plans for a union with the pro-British Iraqi government. After the Suez crisis of 1956, and the US-British attempt to overthrow the elected Syrian government, such associations became poisonous, and military officers used the crisis to discredit civilian political rivals. A military court, under the legal precedent of the Mandate, sentenced Atasi to death. President Shukri al-Quwwatli commuted his sentence to life in prison in 1958, and in 1960 United Arab Republic president Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasser pardoned Atasi. He withdrew from politics and spent the rest of his life in exile, as Syria came to be ruled by a succession of military dictatorships.⁵³

⁵² See for example, ‘Adnan al-Atasi, *al-Huqūq al-dustūriyya*, Damascus: [no publisher] 1947, *al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-taqaddumiyya wa-l-ishtirākīyya al-thawriyya*, Beirut: [no publisher] 1965, and *Azmat al-ḥukm fī Sūriyā*, n.p. 1953. Also Faris, *Man huwa fī Sūriyya*, 16. A well-researched biography of ‘Adnan and Atasi family trees are found at <http://alatassifamily.net>.

⁵³ Biography of ‘Adnan al-Atasi in Arabic at <http://alatassi.net>; Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945–1958*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965, 279, and ‘Uthman, *Muḥākamāt al-siyāsiyya*, 223–44.

The French Mandate and its debasement of political culture have had lasting influence on Syria. Façades of liberal rule masked illiberal practice as intelligence and security bureaucracies intruded into every area of life. Martial law decrees, emergency laws, extra-judicial detention, and habits of military rule trace their roots to the Mandate and continue to subvert the rule of law and meaningful constitutional government. And today, as in 1925, Syrian lawyers and human rights advocates are at the forefront of the struggle for a state governed by laws.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SYRIAN UNIVERSITY AND THE FRENCH MANDATE (1920–1946)

Abdul-Karim Rafeq

Introduction

The nucleus of the Syrian University was the Ottoman school of medicine established in Damascus in 1901 by Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). Geographical Syria (Bilad al-Sham) already had two foreign universities established by Christian missionaries in Beirut: the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), established by American Presbyterians in 1866, and the French St. Joseph University, established by Jesuits in 1875. The SPC opened a school of medicine in 1867, which taught in Arabic, and St. Joseph University opened a school of medicine in 1883, which taught in French.

In 1882 Edwin Lewis, professor of chemistry at the school, gave the commencement speech in Arabic about the Darwinian theory of the origin of human beings. The speech angered the Presbyterian missionaries as well as the local religious communities, both Christian and Muslim. Lewis had to resign. In solidarity with him and in support of free speech, a number of American medical professors, who taught medicine in Arabic, submitted their resignations. A younger generation of American medical professors who did not know Arabic replaced those who resigned. The language of instruction in the school of medicine then shifted from Arabic to English.¹

¹ About the shift of the language of instruction from Arabic to English in the school of medicine at the SPC, see Shafiq Jiha, *Dārwin wa-azmat 1882 bi-l-Dā'ira al-Ṭibbiyya wa-awwal thawra ṭullābiyya fī-l-'ālam al-'arabī bi-l-Kulliyya al-Sūriyya al-Injillīyya*, Beirut: American University of Beirut Publications 1991 [English translation: Shafiq Jeha, *Darwin and the Crisis of 1882 in the Medical Department and the First Student Protest in the Arab World in the Syrian Protestant College*, trans. Sally Kaya, Beirut: American University of Beirut Publications 2005]; Jurji Zaydan, “Tārīkh awwal thawra madrasīyya fī-l-'ālam al-'arabī,” *al-Hilāl* (1923), 3: 271–75, 4: 373–76, 5: 516–20, 6: 637–40; Donald

Credit goes to the SPC in Beirut for being the first institution in modern Syria to teach medicine in Arabic. Muhammad 'Ali Pasha of Egypt had established a school of medicine in Cairo in 1827 which taught in Arabic. But the language of instruction in this school shifted to English after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. What made it easy for the American medical school in Beirut to teach in Arabic was the presence of several American Presbyterian missionaries who were medical doctors and had learned Arabic to preach in it.² The introduction of an Arabic printing-press by the Presbyterians in 1837 for publishing the Bible and other religious literature in Arabic benefited the medical school in that its textbooks were published by this press in Arabic. The irony of this is that the Ottoman school of medicine in Damascus taught medicine in Turkish until the end of Ottoman rule in Syria in 1918. Under the Arab government in Damascus (1918–20), the language of instruction in the schools of medicine and law shifted to Arabic and continued so under the French Mandate and during independence.

Several factors prompted Sultan Abdülhamid II to establish a school of medicine in Damascus. Pressure by influential Syrians who occupied high positions in Istanbul, persistent requests from Muslims in Syria who were reluctant to send their children to Christian schools in Beirut, and the sultan's need to rally Muslim public opinion behind him in his capacity as caliph and advocate of pan-Islamism caused him to establish the school of medicine in Damascus. Sultan Abdülhamid also had a special personal connection to Damascus. He belonged to the Sufi Shadhiliyya *ṭarīqa*, and was a *murīd* (disciple) of the master of the order, Shaykh Mahmud Abu al-Shamat, who resided in Damascus and with whom he kept up a correspondence. Other factors that helped the establishment of the school of medicine in Damascus were the increased presence of the Ottoman army in Syria and the simultaneous spread of cholera, which required additional medical care.³

Sultan Abdülhamid's decision to establish a school of medicine in Damascus in 1901 coincided with the beginning of the building of the Hijaz railway, which connected Damascus to Medina. The sultan

Heath, "Darwinism in the Arab World: The Lewis Affair at the Syrian Protestant College," *The Muslim World* 21, 2 (April 1981), 85–98.

² For information about the American professors who taught medicine in Arabic at the SPC, see Stephen Penrose, Jr., *That They May Have Life: Story of the American University of Beirut, 1855–1841*, Beirut: American University of Beirut Press 1970, 32–43.

³ For more details about the establishment of the school of medicine in Damascus, see Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi'a al-Sūriyya: al-bidāya wa-l-namūw, 1901–1946: Awwal jāmi'a ḥukūmiyya fī-l-waṭan al-arabi*, Damascus: Librairie Nobel 2004, 32–34.

hoped to enhance his image in the Muslim world by facilitating travel to the holy places. During World War I the Hijaz railway was used for the transportation of Turkish and German troops and war materials to the Hijaz.

The Ottoman school of medicine in Damascus began teaching in 1903–04. It included medicine and pharmacy. An Ottoman school of law was added to it in 1913, but this was based in Beirut. The two schools formed the core of the Syrian University under the Arab government and the French Mandate.

The Arab government, under pressure from students who were in their final year when the Ottomans quit Syria in November 1918 and the Ottoman schools of medicine and law were closed, agreed to open both schools in September 1919. Several students in their final year had been able to graduate in June 1920, a few days before the French occupied Damascus on July 25. The diplomas issued in medicine and pharmacy on June 16, 1920, for example, carried at the top the words *al-Mamlaka al-Sūriyya* (the Syrian Kingdom), flanked on the right by the words *al-Jāmi'a al-Sūriyya* (the Syrian University), and on the left by *al-Ma'had al-Ṭibbī* (the School of Medicine). The two signatures that appeared at the bottom of the diplomas were those of Sati' al-Husri, minister of education, and Rida Sa'id, president of the university and dean of the school of medicine. *Al-Āšima*, the official newspaper of the Arab government, referred to the university at the time as "*al-Jām'iyya al-'Ilmiyya al-Sūriyya*." A booklet about the school of law dated 1919 also refers to the university as "*al-Jām'iyya al-'Ilmiyya al-Sūriyya*."

*The establishment of the Syrian University under the
French Mandate*

The two schools of medicine and law reconstituted under the Arab government continued to function under the French Mandate. The French had conflicting opinions regarding the need for establishing a Syrian university. A report dated December 28, 1921 by Professor Chassevant, professor of medicine at the University of Algiers and head of the commission sent to Beirut to examine the graduating students in the school of medicine at St. Joseph University, gives mixed opinions about the feasibility of the Syrian school of medicine. Noting Syria's limited financial and academic resources, Chassevant stated that the Syrian school of medicine needed a major overhaul. He also recommended the closure of the school and the establishment of a French

medical school headed by a French president and placed under the control of the French high commissioner. Chassevant called for the appointment of French professors on the faculty and suggested that students complete their final year in the school of medicine at either St. Joseph University or the American University in Beirut (AUB). The Syrian students, according to Chassevant, should take the same board exams as the students in Beirut.⁴

Another call to close the school of medicine in Damascus came from Louis Jalabert, the Paris representative of St. Joseph University in Beirut. In a letter dated October 10, 1922 addressed to the French prime minister and foreign minister, Jalabert maintained that there was no need for a school of medicine in Damascus because there were two in Beirut. A school of medicine in Damascus, he argued, would become a strong rival to the St. Joseph school of medicine, which was already suffering from competition with the American school of medicine with its large budget. Jalabert also raised political concerns by indicating that a school of medicine in Damascus teaching in Arabic would attract Arab students from North Africa, who would give up French education and eventually contribute to the growth of opposition against the French.⁵

The French administration in Syria did not heed any of the recommendations that urged either closing the school of medicine in Damascus or turning it into a French institution. In a letter to the French prime minister and foreign minister, dated September 10, 1921, General Gouraud, the French high commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, emphasized the importance of the Damascus school of medicine for the Muslim world. He acknowledged, however, that the standard of education in the school was low and called for the appointment of French professors and administrators to improve education in the school. Gouraud's recommendation was based on a letter dated February 12, 1921 by his delegate to Syria, General Catroux, who indicated the importance of keeping the Damascus schools of medicine and law and the establishment of an Arab university in Damascus that would give France much influence in the Arab and the Muslim worlds.⁶

⁴ Ministère des Affaires étrangères (MAE), Paris, Série E, Levant, 1918–1940, Carton, no. 108, "Rapport sur la Faculté de Médecine de Damas par Monsieur le Professeur Chassevant de la Faculté de Médecine d'Alger, Président du Jury d'Examen de la Faculté de Médecine de Beyrouth, Alger le 28 décembre 1921."

⁵ MAE, Paris, Série E, Levant, 1918–1940, Carton, no. 376, Paris le 12 octobre 1921.

⁶ MAE, Paris, Série E, Levant, 1918–1940, Carton, no. 108, Paris le 10 avril 1920; MAE, Nantes, Instruction Publique, Carton, no. 8, Fonds Beyrouth, Damas le 12 février 1921.

The creation of the Syrian Federation (al-Ittiḥād al-Sūrī) on June 28, 1922, which included the states of Damascus and Aleppo and the Alawite territory, facilitated the establishment of the Syrian University. On June 15, 1923 Subhi Barakat, head of the Syrian Federation, issued a decree, no. 128, establishing the Syrian University, which included the two schools of medicine and law, the Arab Academy, and the museum. The French high commissioner, General Weygand, endorsed the decree on June 28, 1923.⁷

The school of medicine was well served at the time by the hospital in Damascus, which had been built in 1898–99 under Sultan Abdülhamid II, and was known after him as al-Mustashfā al-Ḥamīdī (the Hamidian Hospital). It was also called Mustashfā al-Ghurabā' (the Hospital of Strangers), apparently because many of its patients were Muslim immigrants in Damascus. Under the Arab government, the hospital became known as al-Mustashfā al-Waṭanī (the National Hospital).⁸

Two foreign hospitals were built in Damascus at about the same time. An English hospital (al-Mustashfā al-Inklīzī) was built by Scottish missionaries in 1899 in the eastern section of Damascus, on the road leading to Baghdad. This hospital still stands, but has become a government maternity hospital called al-Mustashfā al-Zuhrāwī. A French hospital, Hôpital Saint Louis (known in Arabic as al-Mustashfā al-Ifransī) was built in 1904, close to the English hospital. It was run by the French order Filles de la Charité. An Italian hospital, which is still active in Damascus and run by Les Soeurs Salesiennes, it began as a dispensary and also included a school. In 1926 it became a full-fledged hospital.⁹

Challenges to the university

The major challenge to the Syrian University under the French Mandate was the non-recognition of its medical degrees by Egypt and Palestine, both of which were under British rule. Many Egyptian and Palestinian students came to Syria to study medicine. Jordanians and Iraqis did

⁷ The French text of the decree is found in MAE, Nantes, Instruction Publique, Carton, no. 87, Fonds Beyrouth.

⁸ For a detailed description of the Hamidian Hospital, see Ekmeleddin Ihsan Oghlu, *al-Mu'assasāt al-sihhiyya al-'uthmāniyya al-ḥadītha fī Sūriyya: al-mustashfāyāt wa-kulliyāt tibb al-Shām*, translated from Turkish and published in Amman: Manshūrāt Lajnat Tārīkh Bilād al-Shām, University of Jordan Press 2002.

⁹ Rafeq, *al-Jāmi'a*, 16–19, 272–78.

likewise, but Jordan and Iraq, even though under British rule, recognized the diplomas of the Damascus medical school.

The Syrian University called upon the Syrian government and the French high commissioner to intervene with the Egyptian and Palestinian governments to recognize its medical degrees. The university pointed out that both countries had in the past recognized the degrees of the Ottoman school of medicine in Damascus, and that much improvement had taken place since then in the programs and the quality of students at the Syrian University. The establishment of the Syrian Baccalaureate in 1928, for instance, had brought better students to the university. On the other hand, the presence of French professors on the faculties of the schools of medicine and law contributed much to their higher academic standards. The French committee that annually examined the graduating students at the French and the American schools of medicine in Beirut through the colloquium began to examine the graduating students of the Syrian University as well. The committee always praised the high academic standards among the Syrian graduates. The Syrian University also pointed out to the Egyptian and Palestinian authorities that the French government and universities recognized its degrees in medicine.

After prolonged correspondence between the Syrian and French authorities, on the one hand, and the Egyptian authorities, on the other, the latter finally agreed to recognize the medical degrees from Damascus in the same way as they recognized those of the St. Joseph University and the AUB. The graduates of the school of medicine in Damascus were thus allowed to take the Egyptian board exam that permitted them to practice medicine in Egypt. In a letter dated June 3, 1939, the Egyptian consul in Beirut notified the Syrian University of the Egyptian decision to recognize its medical degrees, although this applied to medicine and pharmacy only. Dentistry, which had been established in Damascus in 1922, was not accorded recognition, apparently because it was not on the same level as medicine and pharmacy.¹⁰ The Palestinian authorities, however, continued to deny recognition to the Syrian medical diplomas. It is not known exactly when this situation was resolved.

Unlike the Egyptian students, who almost all enrolled in the school of medicine in Damascus, the Palestinian students enrolled in both medicine and law. The Palestinian authorities imposed tight restrictions

¹⁰ Ibid., 199–206.

on the graduates of the Syrian school of law before they were allowed to practice the profession in Palestine. The Palestinians who graduated from the school of law in Damascus were required to sit for additional exams in Palestine in subjects they had already studied and been examined in. They were also asked to do a year of practice in a Palestinian law firm in addition to the year of practice they did in Damascus. These conditions, however, eased after 1936 when the graduates of the Syrian school of law were required to take the same colloquium exam as the graduates of law at St. Joseph University in Beirut. The exam, administered by a French commission, enabled the graduates of the Syrian school of law to pursue doctoral studies in France.¹¹

The challenges encountered by the Syrian University made the university authorities more determined to implement reform. A new decree, no. 283, dated March 15, 1926, replaced the earlier decree no. 132, dated June 15, 1923, which had established the Syrian University. According to the new decree, the Arab Academy and the museum were separated from the Syrian University, leaving it only the schools of medicine and law. The new decree was issued by Pierre Alype, the delegate of the French high commissioner in Syria, who was in control of Syria's affairs, between February 9 and April 27, 1926, when the Syrian revolt was raging and no Syrian government was formed.¹²

The decree of March 15, 1926 allowed the president of the university and the deans of the schools of medicine and law to stay in office for three renewable years instead of the one-year tenure that had been assigned to them in the earlier decree of 1923. The prolonged tenure for the university officials was indeed an improvement because it ensured more stability in the administration of the university. But it also made the university more tied to the minister of education, who had increased authority to oversee the decisions of the university and introduce changes into them before submitting them to the prime minister for endorsement. The new decree thus deprived the university of a great part of its autonomy and independence, especially in financial matters.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 123–68, 186–98.

¹² For more information about the administration of Pierre Alype, see Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987, 189–90, 197.

¹³ Decree no. 283, of March 15, 1926 is found in MAE, Nantes, Instruction Publique, Carton, no. 96, Fonds Beyrouth, Damas le (?) mars 1926.

The separation of the Arab Academy and the museum from the Syrian University was a subject of controversy among French officials. Alype argued that the separation would make the university more homogeneous and focused on promoting its academic standards. It would also minimize any potential rivalry for the position of president of the university between two strong rivals, Dr. Rida Sa'īd, the president of the university, and Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, the president of the Arab Academy, who was interested in the presidency of the university. The rivalry between these individuals came out into the open on more than one occasion.

Gabriel Bounoure, French advisor to the Syrian Ministry of Education, criticized the separation of the Arab Academy and the museum from the university, arguing that this would loosen the ties between the educational and the cultural institutions, create rival administrations, and split their financial resources. He cited as an example the creation of separate libraries for the Arab Academy, the museum, and the university instead of having one central, well-equipped library at the university to which all the resources would be directed. Bounoure also suggested the appointment of a French delegate to sit on the university council who would vote only when the votes in the council on controversial issues were equal.¹⁴

A doomed school of arts at the university

While struggling to acquire recognition for its degrees and opposing attempts to increase state control over its affairs, the Syrian University witnessed attempts to establish a school of arts and a school of *sharī'a* (Islamic law). The first attempt was made in 1925 by a distinguished member of the Arab Academy, Shaykh Bahjat al-Bitar. In a series of articles published in the Damascene newspaper *al-Muqtabas*, Shaykh Bahjat called for the establishment of a school of Arabic language and literature and a school of *sharī'a*. Arguing in favor of these schools, Shaykh Bahjat recalled that Arab civilization was predicated on three principles: Islam; the Arabic language; and the crafts. A year later, Faris

¹⁴ For the discussion between Alype and Bounoure about decree no. 283, see MAE, Nantes, Instruction Publique, Carton, no. 46, Fonds Beyrouth (Note sur le projet de reorganization de l'Université Syrienne).

al-Khuri, minister of education in the cabinet headed by Subhi Barakat, called for the establishment of a school of arts and sciences in the Syrian University. Both attempts, however, failed.

Muhammad Kurd 'Ali as minister of education in the cabinet headed by Taj al-Din al-Hasani succeeded in 1928 in establishing the Madrasat al-Durūs al-Adabiyya al-'Ulyā (School for Higher Literary Studies). The name of the school was changed in 1929 to al-Madrasa al-'Ulyā li-l-Adab (Higher School of Arts).

The Higher School of Arts included three sections: Arabic literature; French literature; and philosophy. Like the school of law, it consisted of three years of study, at the end of which the graduate received the degree of *licence ès lettres*. Unlike the school of law, however, the students in the Higher School of Arts were of two types: regular students preparing for the *licence*; and auditing students who paid tuition but were not given the *licence*. In the course of time, however, the auditing students asked to be given the *licence* as they paid for the same tuition as the regular students and satisfied the same requirements. Their request was granted. The director of the school at the time was Shafiq Jabri, a Damascene literary figure, who had studied in the French Lazarist school in Damascus and later, in the 1950s, became dean of the faculty of arts.

Unlike the school of law, which did not have women students until the early 1940s, several women, most of them teachers, enrolled in the Higher School of Arts. Their aim was to improve their professional skills. The school of medicine, on the other hand, had the first female student in 1925, a Christian called Laurice Maher. When Maher graduated in 1930 she was given a standing ovation in the commencement.

The Higher School of Arts was attached to the Syrian University but not integrated into its system. Its budget was separate and its professors were not tenured. When the ministry of Taj al-Din al-Hasani resigned in 1931, the school lost the support of Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, who had established it. Lacking a regular budget and specialized faculty and housed temporarily in the school of law, the Higher School of Arts was eventually abolished by a government decree on November 16, 1933. To allow its students to graduate, the school continued functioning until phased out in 1934.¹⁵ The next successful attempt to establish a faculty of arts occurred in 1946 after Syria had become independent.

¹⁵ For more information about the Higher School of Arts, see Rafeq, *al-Jāmi'a*, 82–83, 115–120.

The school of Islamic law, which Shaykh Bahjat al-Bitar had called for in 1925 and minister of education Muhammad Kurd 'Ali had put among his priorities in 1928, had to wait until 1954 to be established in the Syrian University under the name of Kulliyyat al-Sharī'a. The reason for the delay in establishing this school may be explained by the fact that Islam had not been the dominant political force at the time either among the intellectuals or the masses. The dominant doctrines were patriotism, liberalism, nationalism, and the struggle for independence. The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in Egypt in 1928, reached Syria in the early 1930s brought there by Syrian students studying in Egypt. But it did not become a political force to reckon with in Damascus until the late 1930s and the 1940s. Aleppo, however, had a strong Muslim party at the time, known as Shabāb Muḥammad (the Youth of Muhammad). But its influence among the university students was rather limited. Religious public opinion in general in the 1920s and the 1930s was of a philanthropic nature centered around charitable religious societies, such as al-Jam'īyya al-Gharrā' (the Esteemed Society), Jam'īyyat al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī (Society of Islamic Civilization), Jam'īyyat al-Hidāya al-Islāmiyya (Society of Islamic Guidance), and Jam'īyyat al-'Ulamā' (Society of Muslim Scholars). These societies did not have a political program to spread among the students. The students, on their part, were fully engaged in political agendas, such as the independence and unity of Syria, the Palestine question, and the Alexandretta problem. The fight against the French, whether among the students or the public at large, was not motivated by religious fanaticism directed against infidels. The motivation, the political discourse, and the slogans were dominantly nationalistic.

Academic activity at the university

While struggling to acquire recognition for its degrees and standing firm in the face of increasing state control over its affairs, the Syrian University did not neglect its academic responsibilities. In 1924 the university began the publication of a monthly medical journal under the name of *Majallat al-Ma'had al-Ṭibbī al-'Arabī* (*Journal of the Arab School of Medicine*). Its editor was Dr. Murshid Khater, professor of surgery in the school of medicine. The journal published articles by professors and graduate students, reported the news of the medical profession in Syria and abroad, covered the proceedings of medical conferences that were

held in Syria and elsewhere, and had a permanent section for the translation of foreign medical terms into Arabic. The journal continued to be published, with minor interruptions during World War II, until 1947 when it stopped publication.¹⁶ Another journal that also contributed to the translation of foreign scientific terms into Arabic was *Majallat al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī*, which began publication in Damascus in 1921 under the editorship of Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, president of the Arab Academy.¹⁷

The *Journal of the School of Medicine* was first published in private printing-presses in Damascus, including that of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Following the example of the American University and the Jesuit University in Beirut, each of which had had its own printing-press since the nineteenth century, the Syrian University established its own printing press in 1931 in al-Takiyya al-Sulaymāniyya, which also harbored the dental school, the preparatory year in the sciences for the medical students, laboratories for the sciences, and the library. The Syrian University thus began to publish the books of the professors and other publications on its own printing-press.

To promote knowledge about surgery among medical doctors and lay people alike, the Syrian University in 1934 established al-Jam'iyya al-Ṭibbiyya al-Jirāhiyya (the Society of Surgical Medicine).¹⁸ The founding members of the society numbered 31, 10 of whom were French physicians employed either by the university or by the medical services of the French army of the Levant stationed in Syria and Lebanon. Dr. Rida Sa'id, president of the Syrian University, dean of the school of medicine, and professor of ophthalmology, was chosen as president of the Society of Surgical Medicine. The society aimed at exchanging information with Arab and European surgical societies, inviting speakers, and holding conferences. Its proceedings were published in the *Journal of the Arab School of Medicine*.

With the growth of Syria's population, the university hospital, known as al-Mustashfā al-Waṭani (the National Hospital), together with the English, French, and Italian hospitals that operated in Damascus, could

¹⁶ The *Journal of the Arab School of Medicine* is available in the library of the University of Damascus and the National Asad Library. It is, however, not complete in either place.

¹⁷ For the *Journal of the Arab Academy*, see Ahmad al-Futayyih, *Tārīkh al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī*, Damascus: Maṭbū'āt al-Majma', Dār al-Taraqqī 1956.

¹⁸ Details about the establishment of al-Jam'iyya al-Ṭibbiyya al-Jirāhiyya are available in *Majallat al-Ma'had al-Ṭibbī al-'Arabī* 9, 6 (December 1934), 9, 7 (January 1935).

no longer satisfy the increasing demand for their services. A maternity hospital known as Dār al-Tawlīd was built on the university grounds and was inaugurated in January 1945. It highlighted the growing concern about the health of women.¹⁹

The most important attempt to provide medical care at very little cost to the people was the establishment of the Mustashfā al-Muwāsāh (Muwāsāh Hospital) in Damascus. The initiative was taken by a charitable society known as Jam'īyyat al-Muwāsāh al-Khayriyya (Charitable Society of Consolation), which was established in Damascus in June 1943. The head of the society was the president of the Syrian University, Dr. Husni Sabah. Its aim was to raise money through public contributions to build a large hospital, to be known as the Muwassat Hospital, in imitation of a hospital with a similar name and objective in Alexandria, Egypt. The hospital was to provide free medical services to the people at large. Work on building the Muwassat Hospital began in July 1946, at the beginning of Syria's independence. The hospital still functions as a university hospital for training medical students.²⁰

In 1929 the university built its administration building which contains the amphitheater. The architecture of the building, designed by D'Aranda, the Spanish consul in Damascus, combines Arabic and European features. The amphitheater is still used today for public meetings and lectures.²¹

The major reform undertaken by the Syrian Ministry of Education to put an end to the confusing diversity of schools and the different levels of students who enrolled in the university through an entry exam was the establishment of the Syrian Baccalaureate in 1928. It became the primary requirement for admission into the university. The credit for introducing the French system of education into Syria goes to Monsieur Ragey, the French advisor to the Syrian Ministry of Education. The French system was composed of three levels, each culminating in a diploma. These were: the Certificate diploma at the end of the elementary phase; the Brevet at the end of the intermediate phase; and the Baccalaureate at the end of high school. In the farewell party held by the Syrian University on September 7, 1930 in honor of Monsieur Ragey at the end of his mission in Syria, Dr. Rida Sa'īd and other top

¹⁹ The history of the building of Dār al-Tawlīd is reported in *Majallat al-Ma'had al-Ṭibbī al-'Arabī* 19, 9 and 10 (March–April 1945), 209–18.

²⁰ *Majallat al-Ma'had al-Ṭibbī al-'Arabī* 21, 3 and 4 (1946), 89–98.

²¹ *Les Echos de Damas* (July 13, 1929).

Syrian officials praised Ragey for his effort in unifying the education system in Syria by introducing the Baccalaureate program.²²

The student body

It is difficult to know the number of students in the Ottoman school of medicine in Damascus. However, the number of graduates in the period between 1903 and 1904, when teaching started, and 1918, when the school closed, is estimated at 240 in medicine and 289 in pharmacy. A French report in December 1921 estimated the number of graduates from the Damascus school of medicine since 1918, apparently throughout the period of the Arab government (1918–20) and until December 1921, as 69 in medicine and 25 in pharmacy.²³

The following table gives the number of students in the schools of the Syrian University in different years chosen at random:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Medicine</i>	<i>Pharmacy</i>	<i>Dentistry</i>	<i>Midwifery and Nursing (All women)</i>	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Total</i>
1919	118	32	—	13	—	—	163
1925	78+1 ♀	34	33	3	—	110	259
1933	164+1 ♀	19	23	25	42+ 4 ♀	223	501
1938	111+4 ♀	9	32	22	—	167	345
Total	477	94	88	63	46	500	1268

The number of students in medicine and law increased in 1933, only to decline in 1938. The decline is to be explained by the measures taken by the university to limit the number of students in order to maintain a higher standard of education, especially in the school of law. Women students at the time preferred medicine and arts over law.

High tuition fees were a major impediment for many students. The rising cost of living caused by the world economic depression in the

²² Rafeq, *al-Jāmi'a*, 141–44; *al-Qabas* (August 22, 1930).

²³ MAE, Paris, Série E, Levant, 1918–1940, Carton, no. 108 (Rapport).

late 1920s and early 1930s and the worsening economic situation during World War II rested heavily on the majority of the population. The university authorities responded favorably to the students' demands for the lowering of tuition and other fees. The university also exempted up to 20 percent of the students from half of the tuition fees provided they could establish their economic need and prove that they were of good academic standing.²⁴

The cost of a university education in Syria, compared to salaries of government employees and the cost of living, was rather high even by French standards. A study done in 1935 about the cost of university education in France, Beirut, and Syria gives the following estimates in French francs:²⁵

<i>Degrees</i>	<i>Cost in France</i>	<i>St. Joseph in Beirut</i>	<i>Syrian University</i>
Medicine, 6 years	2,945	7,478	6,300
Pharmacy, 4 years	2,855	7,554	4,700
Dentistry, 4 years	5,295	5,226	4,780
Law, 3 years	1,590	4,590	3,400
Total	12,685	24,848	19,190

The average cost for a university degree in Syria was 1.51 times more than that in France. The cost at St. Joseph University in Beirut was about 1.95 times its amount in France. France apparently subsidized university education at that time, as it does now. The presence of French professors at St. Joseph University, who apparently were paid high salaries, might explain the high cost there. The Syrian University had a few French professors, but the cost of education there is also high compared to what the average people earn and to the cost of living. This explains why 20 percent of the students in the Syrian University were eligible for a 50 percent cut in tuition. The university received an annual subsidy from the state to balance its budget. The major expense in the university was that of the hospital which was attached to the school of medicine and whose expenses far outweighed its revenues.

²⁴ Rafeq, *al-Jāmi'a*, 179–80.

²⁵ MAE, Nantes, Instruction Publique, Carton, no. 121, Fonds Beyrouth (Note pour Monsieur Bounoure, Damas le 21 avril 1935).

The budget of the Syrian University in 1935, for example, totaled 132,976 Syrian liras (2 liras equaled 1 French franc), which was 13.8 percent of the budget of the Ministry of Education. The budget of the ministry in turn constituted 13.4 percent of the state budget.

The students' demand for lower tuition fees was not their only concern. They staged demonstrations in support of political issues, such as the unification of Syria, which was initially divided by the French into the four states of Damascus, Aleppo, the territory of the Alawites, and the territory of the Druzes. When on June 28, 1922 the French administration formed the Syrian Federation, which included the states of Damascus and Aleppo and the territory of the Alawites, students and politicians alike demanded the unity of all Syria. The French administration responded on January 1, 1925 by forming the state of Syria, which included the states of Damascus, Aleppo, and the territory of the Alawites. The students, however, continued to demand the annexation of the territory of the Druzes to Syria. General de Gaulle, the leader of Free France, promised in 1941 to give independence to all of Syria if the French Vichy government was ousted from Syria.

A major 50-day strike was launched by students and the public in 1936 in support of the treaty of independence that Syria negotiated and signed in Paris with the socialist French government of Léon Blum, but the French parliament declined to ratify it. The students also demonstrated in support of the Palestinians in their struggle with the Zionists in Palestine. They likewise protested against the separation of the *sandjak* of Alexandretta from Syria and its annexation to Turkey in 1939, contrary to the charter of the League of Nations.

In addition to supporting the independence and unity of Syria, the university students wrote petitions to the authorities protesting against greedy merchants who made fortunes through profiteering and the hoarding of food products during World War II. The students also urged the people to promote local industry by buying locally produced goods. In recognition of their effort, local merchants offered the students discounts on the purchase of their products. Discounts were also given to the students on public transport and on admission to movie theaters.²⁶

Lacking space on the university campus for gathering in anticipation of demonstrations, the students and their supporters from secondary

²⁶ For more details about the political and social activity of the university students, see Rafeq, *al-Jāmi'a*, 102–04, 154–57, 227–40.

and professional schools usually gathered outside the university on the spot known as al-Marj al-Akhḍar where the Directorate of Antiquities is now located. Women students, mostly from the women's teachers' college, joined male students there and made speeches urging the gathering crowd not to give up on their demands.²⁷ When the demonstrators wanted to rally larger sectors of the people behind them, they gathered outside the Umayyad Mosque and called on worshipers to join them.

The students also acted as ombudsmen in the university, checking irregularities in the administration. After the establishment of the Baccalaureate system in 1928 which made the Baccalaureate the only acceptable diploma from Syrian students for enrolment in the university, some students who failed the Baccalaureate acquired the nationality of other Arab countries where the Baccalaureate was not established but whose students were accepted in the Syrian University through the old system of obtaining a school certificate indicating that they had satisfied the school requirements. The university students vehemently opposed the enrolment of those students on the grounds that they would compromise the value of the university degrees.

The university students exchanged visits with students from other Arab countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq. In April 1936, for example, 75 students from the Syrian University made a trip to Beirut. The AUB hosted a number of them while the rest were hosted by the Islamic Charitable College of al-Maqasid. At a meeting in the American University, Professor Assad Rustum spoke to the students about the formation of the first Arab society to call for independence from the Ottomans in 1873. At a banquet hosted by President Bayard Dodge of AUB, a professor spoke about the history of the American university and its role in spreading education and promoting Arab unity.²⁸ Reaching out to the Arab students at large, the Syrian students called in 1938 for a pan-Arab student conference to lay out the strategies for common action.

Before political parties penetrated the ranks of the students in the 1930s, the students acted as one whenever the need arose for collective action. The spreading of political parties among the students weakened their solidarity and put them in opposition to one another. The major

²⁷ Zafer al-Qasimi, *Maktab 'Anbar: ṣuwar wa-dhikrāyāt min ḥayātinā al-thaqāfiyya*, Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malāyin 1964, 112.

²⁸ For details, see *al-Qabas* (February 27, 1937).

political party in Syria during the 1920s and the 1930s was the National Bloc (al-Kutla al-Waṭaniyya), which had a paramilitary group of youths known as the Iron Shirts (al-Qumṣān al-Ḥadīdiyya). The National Bloc was active in both Damascus and Aleppo, controlled discussion in parliament, and protested vehemently against French rule by organizing general strikes. In 1936 it formed the government and negotiated the aborted treaty that year with France. As the vanguard of the national movement, students and professors supported its policies. Another party that attracted the students was the League of National Action (‘Uṣbat al-‘Amal al-Qawmī), which had branches in major Syrian cities and was also active among students in Lebanon. The students were less enthusiastic in cooperating with bourgeois landowners’ parties that revolved around a principal individual, like the People’s Party (Ḥizb al-Sha‘b), founded by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar in 1925. The members of this party were known as Shahbandariyyūn, but they were a minority among university students.

The doctrinal parties which had social and economic platforms were still groping for power at the time. The Communist Party, for example, was more active in Aleppo than in Damascus because the Armenians in Aleppo constituted a majority in the party. However, Khalid Bakdash, who monopolized the office of secretary general of the party for decades, led the party in Damascus in the 1930s when he was a student in the school of law at the Syrian University. The French government banned the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon in 1939, but it went underground. The Syrian Social National Party (al-Ḥizb al-Sūrī al-Qawmī al-Ijtīmā’ī), established by Antun Sa‘ada in the early 1930s, was more active in Lebanon than in Syria. It was targeted by the French authorities and the Lebanese government because it called for the unity of Syria and Lebanon.

The political platform that attracted many of the university students was that which called for Arab unity and the renaissance of the Arab nation. It was advocated from the late 1930s by Greek Orthodox Christian Michel ‘Aflaq and Sunni Muslim Salah al-Din al-Bitar, both from Damascus, who formally established the Ba‘th Party in 1947. Zaki al-Arsuzi, an Alawite Muslim from the *sandjak* of Alexandretta, who was a prominent member of the League of National Action, withdrew from the League in 1939, after Turkey annexed the *sandjak* of Alexandretta and joined the advocates of the Ba‘th. Another doctrinal party that advocated socialism and attracted university students was the Party of Youth (Ḥizb

al-Shabāb) established by Akram Hawrani. Hawrani joined the Ba'ath in the 1950s, and added socialism to its name and program.²⁹

The leftist intellectuals in Damascus were represented by the journal *al-Ṭalī'a* (the Avant-garde), which was published in Damascus in the mid-1930s. It published articles about socialism and against fascism and Zionism. Influenced by the French leftist paper *l'Humanité*, *al-Ṭalī'a* attacked capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and the big landowners.³⁰

The University and the state: autonomy or control

The administrative and financial autonomy of the Syrian University had always been a matter of primary concern for its authorities. Decree no. 132, of June 15, 1923, which established the university under the French Mandate did not encroach on the financial and administrative prerogatives of the university president and councils. The state was routinely notified of the decisions taken by the appropriate university councils and it automatically endorsed them.

The state annual subsidy to the budget of the university was the main means for state intervention and control of the university. A show of strength between the state and the university over the budget occurred in 1929 when Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, minister of education, reduced the state subsidy to the university by 75,000 Syrian liras. The exact amount of the subsidy is not known, but this amount constituted 37 percent of the university budgets that year. To make up for this cut, the university would have to increase the tuition fees and cut other expenses, which would affect the budget of the hospital. Higher medical fees would then have to be applied to make up for these cuts. Kurd 'Ali argued that the amount of the cut would be used to open a number of elementary schools to combat illiteracy. The university administration, the students, and the public at large protested the cut. Under overwhelming pressure, Kurd 'Ali backed out and the subsidy was reinstated.

Other administrative measures that restricted the autonomy of the university were taken by Muhammad Kurd 'Ali in his capacity as min-

²⁹ For a short account of the political parties and the university students, see Rafeq, *al-Jāmi'a*, 232–39. For the activities of the Communist Party in Syria in the 1930s, see MAE, Nantes, Syrie-Liban, Carton, no. 737, Beyrouth le 6 mai 1939.

³⁰ MAE, Nantes, Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique, Carton, no. 873, "Notices sur le journal damascain al-Talī'a 'L'avant-garde,'" Damas le 5 décembre 1935.

ister of education. In a series of decrees issued on September 16, 1929, Kurd 'Ali introduced major changes into decree no. 283, of March 15, 1926, which reconstituted the university statute. According to decree no. 1409, of September 16, 1929, the three-year tenure accorded to the president of the university was abolished and no time limit was set up for his tenure, meaning that the president of the university could be replaced at any time. It was also stated in the same decree that the president of the university could be chosen from among the university professors at large. Previously the president had been either the dean of the school of medicine or the dean of the school of law. The decree, however, fixed the deans' tenure in office for five years and stated that they were to be chosen by the state from a list of three candidates submitted by the university for each dean, rather than being elected by the university council. These new regulations gave the minister of education more control over the affairs of the university.

State control over the university peaked after the retirement of university president 'Abd al-Qader al-'Azm in 1940. The minister of education acted as interim president in addition to his ministerial duties. This situation continued until the end of 1942, and was legalized by a government decree, no. 327, of January 30, 1942, which stated that until the appointment of a new president for the university the minister of education or his deputy would fill in the position.

Syria was going through major political problems at the time. In July 1940 the French Vichy government took control of Syria, and the Free French government in exile, headed by General de Gaulle and supported by Britain, tried to regain control. This was achieved in July 1941 after deadly clashes between the Vichy French and the Free French. A plate at the French cemetery in Damascus where the dead French soldiers from both parties were buried reads "Morts pour la France."

Both professors and students called for an end to the appointment of the minister of education as interim president of the university, as this constituted a breach of the autonomy of the university. There were also other voices from outside the university calling for the appointment of the president of the university from among individuals outside the university.

On January 20, 1942, the university students sent a petition to the minister of education in his capacity as interim president of the university asking him to abolish the position of interim president, which had caused the decline of the university. In another petition dated February 10, 1942 the university professors protested the non-appointment of

a president and called upon the government to respect the university laws and uphold its autonomy. The professors mentioned that the legal and moral standing of the university would be affected if a president was not appointed. The problem was eventually resolved when the government agreed to the appointment of Dr. Husni Sabah, dean of the school of medicine, as president of the Syrian University on March 30, 1942. Sabah remained in office until fired by the minister of education in August 1946.

The confrontation between the government and the president of the university flared up again after Syria gained its independence. In 1946 'Adil Arslan, a non-academic, was appointed minister of education and entrusted with the task of reforming the university. Arslan called upon experts from Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon to advise him in the matter. University president Husni Sabah, who was also dean of the school of medicine, considered the invitation of medical doctors from outside Syria to advise the minister about reforming the school of medicine an insult to the Syrian professors, who were better informed about the needs of their school. The university at the time was considering opening new schools for arts, sciences, and engineering. Arslan accused Dr. Sabah of obstructing reform and opposing what had already been agreed to with regard to the full-time job of the university president, and fired him from all his positions on August 26, 1946. About eighteen months later, Arslan relinquished the Ministry of Education and his successor issued a decree on November 3, 1947 reinstating Dr. Husni Sabah as president of the Syrian University. Thus the university won a major round in its confrontation with the government.

The tug-of-war between the government and the university over the university's autonomy continued later on. In 1949, Husni al-Za'im, the leader of the first coup d'état in Syria, fired Husni Sabah from the presidency of the university and appointed in his place Dr. Constantine Zurayk, who had served as Syria's diplomatic representative in Washington. Zurayk at the time was vice president of the AUB. During his presidency, which lasted until 1952, Zurayk introduced major reforms into the Syrian University.³¹

³¹ For Zurayk's presidency of the Syrian University, see 'Aziz al-'Azmeḥ, *Qustantīn Zurayq: 'arabi li-l-qarn al-'ishrīn*, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīniyya 2003, 59–73.

The French Mandate and the Syrian University: a balance sheet

The French administration in general repressed the nationalist movement in Syria and dealt high-handedly with uprisings whenever and wherever they occurred. Its record in the field of education in Syria, however, was completely different. The French officials attached to the Syrian Ministry of Education, as well as the high commissioners, including General Gouraud, who defeated the Arab army at Maysalun in July 1920 and occupied Damascus, understood the importance of a Syrian University with its programs in Arabic in introducing the French as promoters of Arab-Islamic culture. The French authorities, therefore, did not attempt to transform the Syrian University into a French institution like the Jesuit university in Beirut, which was known as the French university, nor like the University of Algiers, which was basically a French university serving the French community and Algerian Francophones. Nor did the French administration in Syria substitute French for Arabic as the language of instruction in the Syrian University. The French, it is true, tried to promote the French language alongside Arabic, but not in its place. Furthermore, the French administration throughout its rule in Syria did not appoint a Frenchman as president of the Syrian University. Dr. Rida Sa'id, for instance, remained president of the Syrian University for thirteen years (1923–36) and had an excellent working relationship with the French administration. His successors were likewise Syrians who never clashed with the French mandatory powers, even during the Syrian uprisings, which were met with brute force by the French military authorities.

On the other hand, the French professors who taught in the Syrian University, whether in medicine or in law, played major roles in improving the curriculum, teaching basic courses in French and preparing graduates for the colloquium examination. French professors Lecercle and Trabaud, for instance, promoted the program in the school of medicine, while Estève was very active in the school of law. Other French professors, coming from the universities of Paris and Lyon, administered the colloquium examination for the graduating students in the universities of Cairo and Beirut as well as Damascus. The French examiners spoke highly of the degree of knowledge acquired by the Syrian students and the efforts made by their Syrian teachers. In fact, the positive reports of the colloquium committees facilitated the recognition of the Syrian diplomas by France—and eventually Egypt, which resisted recognition until the late 1930s.

Two French advisors to the Syrian Ministry of Education, Ragey and Bounoure, played major roles in promoting the standard of education in Syria, including the university. Ragey was instrumental in establishing the French system of education, culminating with the Baccaalaureate diploma. The implementation of this system in 1928 insured uniformity in the system of education in Syria between the private and the public schools and enabled the university to recruit better students. Ragey also helped in establishing the Council of Education, which set the policies of the Ministry of Education, and the Higher School of Arts as part of the university. He also played a vital role in sending students on French scholarships to France. Those students eventually formed the core of the teaching faculty in the high schools and the university. Ragey's mission in Syria came to an end in 1930. At a farewell reception in his honor, Dr. Rida Sa'id recounted Ragey's many contributions to the education system in Syria, which could not have been implemented without his effort and dedication.³²

Ragey was succeeded by Gabriel Bounoure as advisor in the Syrian Ministry of Education. Bounoure had formerly been director of education in the French High Commissariat in Beirut. Like Ragey, Bounoure was very supportive of the university's effort to improve the quality of education and make the university's diplomas obtain full recognition abroad. Bounoure also was instrumental in supporting the autonomy of the Syrian University. In 1940 'Abd al-Qader al-'Azm, president of the Syrian University, acknowledged Bounoure's efforts in this regard. The university, 'Azm stated, owed a lot to Bounoure, the advisor to the Ministry of Education, for his support and clarity of vision which enabled the university to continue its mission.³³

By supporting the Syrian University with its Arabic curriculum, administration, and faculty, the French proved to be realistic. Although the university was essential to the embodiment of Syria's national pride, it also enabled France to pose as the promoter of Arabic culture and liberal thought, which earned her the admiration of the Syrian and Arab intellectuals in the region and beyond.

³² For a description of Ragey's farewell reception, see *Les Echos de Damas* (September 13, 1930); *al-Qabas* (September 9 and 11, 1930).

³³ 'Azm's statement regarding Bounoure is rendered in French on official stationery of the Syrian University: see MAE, Nantes, Instruction Publique, Carton, no. 163, Fonds Beyrouth, Université Syrienne de Damas, no. 454/134, Damas le 8 avril 1940.

The university students, for their part, were free to express their concerns by writing petitions and demonstrating whenever the need arose. The university students, together with secondary-school students, played a major role in the mobilization of public opinion and the staging of demonstrations and strikes against French policies in matters of national interest. The students' exercise of their right to express themselves peacefully and forcefully strengthened their role as defenders of civil rights and enabled them to be the future politicians of their country. Liberal thought thus had become deeply rooted under the French Mandate.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIBERAL EDUCATION AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT (AUB): PROTEST, PROTESTANTISM, AND THE MEANING OF FREEDOM

Betty S. Anderson

In the 1897–98 course catalogue, the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) General Statement declared for the first time that “the Collegiate Department gives a liberal education in language and literature, science, history, and philosophy, leading to the degree of Bachelor of Arts.”¹ In the 1950–51 academic year, the school, called the American University of Beirut (AUB) since 1920, more formally codified its curriculum goals when it chose the Columbia University General Education curriculum as the liberal component of its program. In that year, the term “liberal” did not appear in the catalogue; rather, the foreword by the president describes the educational goals of the AUB by saying: “This education is essentially a training in true scholarship, a training which inspires men to think freely, to value truth in all phases of human experience, and to live by principle rather than by expediency.”² Procedurally, these statements meant that the SPC/AUB required of all students that they complete a core set of social science and humanities courses in the first years of study. These were designed to provide students with a general educational foundation before attending classes in their specific majors. More importantly, when the administrators and faculty members of the SPC chose to adopt the liberal model they not only made decisions concerning the long-term curriculum goals of the school, but also entered the contentious educational debates taking place at American Protestant universities in the second half of the nineteenth century. As such, at the SPC/AUB, between 1897 and 1950, “liberal” did not mean merely instilling in students the right to free inquiry, an ability to

¹ *Catalogue of the Syrian Protestant College*, Beirut, Syria, 32nd Year, 1897–1898, 2, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

² *American University of Beirut including Intermediate Section of International College—Catalogue*, 1950–51, 6, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

critically analyze information, and to gain access to an accepted base of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities, as an AUB task force wrote in 2004.³ Underpinning this new conception of liberal education lay deeper questions about the sources of knowledge, of the interchange between science and religion, and of the relationship between Protestantism and American culture. Furthermore, it also brought up for debate the role of the university in the development of students' characters; the proliferation of sources of authority put into doubt the moral certitude that had always accompanied religious sectarian academic control.

The institutionalization of liberal education at the SPC/AUB, and the concomitant expansion and secularization of the curriculum, succeeded spectacularly in altering the religious basis of the school and in making its graduates competitive in the new, more specialized and industrialized economies of the Middle East and America. Much of the AUB's reputation, even today, is based on the uniqueness of the American curriculum structure and the high-ranking positions of its graduates. The educational atmosphere that emphasized thinking freely made the AUB famous for allowing an unprecedented freedom of expression to flourish among its students and faculty. As Munif al-Razzaz said about studying at the AUB in the late 1930s:

Our minds were opened, but not only by reading books and articles. This was a cultured air ... [and the encouragement of] participation in all elements of life, things not obtainable in the classroom alone. There was an air of discussion, in all possible discussions, and in all world topics. What we understood and what we did not understand, the interchange between all types of study and specialties and the interchange between students from most areas of the eastern Arab world, with some inoculation of foreign students ... All of that left in myself a new influence. It took my life and ideas and my mind into a new direction, similar to what happened to many of the other students.⁴

The SPC/AUB's policy of liberal education created a space in which this kind of intellectual growth and discovery could take place; the fragmentation of religious and academic sources of authority made it possible.

³ "Institutional Self-Study: Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools," Beirut: American University of Beirut 2004.

⁴ Munif al-Razzaz, "Munif al-Razzāz Yatadhakkar: Sanawāt al-Jāmi'a," *Ākhar Khabar*, 3–4 January 1994. Al-Razzaz was born in Syria, but spent the bulk of his life in Jordan. After graduating from the AUB, he became a leader of the Ba'ith Party.

Inadvertently, the inauguration of liberal education also opened something akin to the mythical Pandora's box because, as al-Razzaz shows, inquiry could not be contained once opened. In fact, the AUB became so famous for the political demonstrations that broke out on its campus, particularly after 1948, that the situation could even be satirized as typical of the AUB experience. In the 1952 April Fools' Day issue of the student newspaper, *Outlook*, annually called *Lookout* on that day, the editors posted a notice calling on the students to come out to air their grievances:

There will be a demonstration this afternoon at 3 in front of the Medical Gate to object against everything[.] All those interested please report there promptly five miuutes [*sic*] before time. The demonstration promises to be very exciting—tear gas will be used, and the slogans are simply delightful. If all goes well, police interference is expected. If not to join, come and watch.⁵

The administration reacted to the real demonstrations, catalyzed in large part by the ethos of freedom they themselves disseminated, by punishing the perpetrators as traitors to the SPC/AUB's central tenets. While seemingly in contradiction, the freedoms and punishments distributed on campus were contained, for the school's leaders, within a cohesive ideology about the goals of a liberal university. Prior to the inauguration of liberal education, evangelical Protestant sectarianism, with its strict delineation between sin and morality, had automatically required that the university served *in loco parentis* to the students, charged with guiding their moral, as well as intellectual, development. With the freedom of inquiry that accompanied liberal education, all the Protestant American universities had to discover a new *modus operandi* in this regard, with SPC/AUB deciding to maintain its supervision of student personal development. For, as Daniel Bliss (president, 1866–1902) pronounced at the inauguration of his memorial statue in 1904, “No block of marble was brought to us to be worked upon, but living boys and living men came to us from the East, from the West, from the North and from the South, to be influenced for good. They were all human and consequently imperfect; they were all human and consequently

⁵ “Important Notice,” *Lookout*, March 29, 1952, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

capable of perfection.”⁶ Bliss and his successors hoped, initially, to mold men within the evangelical model and then, after the inauguration of liberal education, men who could truly understand the responsibilities that came with intellectual freedom.

In contrast to the views expressed by the presidents, students continually identified a contradiction they felt existed between the freedom so clearly enunciated and the focus on character that apparently limited their sphere of action. The SPC/AUB message about thinking freely meant to them the right to not only debate all intellectual subjects in the classroom, as liberal education called on them to do, but also to demand that the right to freedom of inquiry extend beyond those walls. They also rejected the paternalistic control over character the SPC/AUB leaders claimed as their legitimate and unilateral right. In conflicts throughout the first half of the twentieth century, students decried the administration’s failure to live up to the mantra of liberal education so assiduously disseminated as a defining element of the SPC/AUB’s life. At the same time, they declared that they had become the men SPC/AUB wanted, that they were the men of character who understood the extents and limits of their freedoms and who thus had the right to a voice in the decision-making process at the school. In these crises, both the principles of liberal education and the SPC/AUB discussion of character formed the bases for the students’ demands for rights. They did not want to overturn or reject these programs; rather, they wanted to see the school’s commitment to liberal education grow to its logical fruition. In essence, liberal education itself served as the means for the SPC/AUB’s educational success and as the core element generating conflict between the administration and the student body.

Liberal education and liberal Protestantism

The oldest universities in the United States had been founded by established Protestant denominations, and church leaders remained directly involved in the universities and in the curricula they disseminated. They were aware that they were not primarily training religious officials at

⁶ Daniel Bliss, *Reminiscences of Daniel Bliss, Edited and Supplemented by his Eldest Son*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company 1920, 222. Egyptian alumni paid to have the statue made in Bliss’s honor.

these schools, but were equally determined to make their own religious tenets the basis for the students' education. Prior to the Civil War in the 1860s, religious and academic leaders presented knowledge at American Protestant universities, including the SPC, as an established, holistic Truth. That Truth, with a capital T, successfully defined the organic connections between religion, science, the humanities, morality, and ethics.⁷ Students attending these American Protestant universities usually completed a prescribed set of identical courses, the goal being to transform these young men into well-rounded, educated, and moral citizens. School leaders unquestionably understood that they had to guide their young charges toward a religiously moral life before and after graduation.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, new influences, such as those brought on by scientific research and the Industrial Revolution, pressured university academics to expand their curriculum to offer courses not just in the Scriptures and the classics, but also in more scientific subjects. Opening up the university gates to scientific research and the proliferation of new disciplines forced academics to ask questions about the sources of knowledge and to inevitably accept the idea that future work could potentially unearth answers that did not conform to the Truth that had come hand-in-hand with Protestant denominational beliefs. As Charles W. Eliot, Harvard president (1869–1909) and leader in the move toward liberal education in America, said of the role of teachers in this atmosphere:

The notion that education consists in the authoritative inculcation of what the teacher deems true may be logical and appropriate in a convent, or a seminary for priests, but it is intolerable in universities and public schools, from primary to professional. The worthy fruit of academic culture is an open mind, trained to careful thinking, instructed in the methods of philosophical investigation, acquainted in a general way with the accumulated thought of past generations, and penetrated with humility.⁸

A separation of church and state carried into the scholarly realm with the severance of the Protestant churches from the academic pursuit of knowledge. The study of religion was thenceforth researched and

⁷ Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000, 35.

⁸ Charles William Eliot, "Charles William Eliot, Inaugural Address as President of Harvard, 1869," in Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith, eds., *American Higher Education: A Documentary History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1961, 606.

taught within a separate department, alongside and equal to the new ones established for fields such as biology, philosophy, and history. Rather than in religious precepts and classical education, the universities now educated men for the newly industrialized economy. Yet they could not completely give up the idea that every student should become familiar with a basic set of knowledge. A compromise, of sorts, was established whereby students at most universities completed a general set of humanities and social science courses in the first years, courses required for a major in the last two, and with at all times slots available for electives. University men—and, to a smaller extent, women—could acquire the basic set of knowledge that university academics deemed particularly important, while also receiving training in more professional subjects. The oil greasing this new system was freedom of inquiry because new truths could be uncovered only if students and academics placed before themselves all the scientific and philosophical theories currently available.

To make these changes possible at all the American Protestant universities, religious sectarian divisions had to be sacrificed. Protestantism, as taught in the classrooms and in the chapel services, would thenceforth identify the shared tenets of the disparate denominations as the foundation stones for university curricular and educational goals. As George Marsden reports of American Protestant universities: “By the early decades of the century, exclusivist elements of the heritage had been abandoned, and Christianity was defined more or less as a moral outlook. It promoted good character and democratic principles, aspects of the old Whig ideals that were potentially palatable to all Americans.”⁹ Morality and good character no longer stemmed solely from religious precepts, but could be acquired and learned from science, from practical experience in life, and from the intellectual interaction provided by liberal education. Marsden has called this transformative process “a shift from a relatively narrowly defined Christianity to a broadly defined liberal Christianity that could be equated with civilization itself.”¹⁰

⁹ George M. Marsden, “The Soul of the American University: A Historical Overview,” in George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, 27.

¹⁰ George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994, 5.

The American Social Gospel and Progressive Movements, both hitting their peak in popularity in the years leading up to World War I, articulated programs starkly similar to those now emerging in the university curricula and show how Protestant Christianity and American civilization had come to mesh so well together. Richard Hofstadter has said, “The key words of Progressivism were terms like *patriotism, citizen, democracy, law, character, conscience, soul, morals, service, duty, shame, disgrace, sin, and selfishness*—terms redolent of the sturdy Protestant Anglo-Saxon moral and intellectual roots of the Progressive uprising.”¹¹ These words sum up the liberal Protestantism propagated on campuses as well. Education, religion, morality, and the nation became practically synonymous when transferred on to the university campus. Morality and service to the nation, religion and democracy, served interconnected goals. They all came under the rubric of liberal education, and its concomitant commitment to freedom of debate about the sources and consequences of these terms.

The SPC/AUB transformed itself alongside its American counterparts, accepting the fragmentation of knowledge and the tenets of liberal Protestantism as elements necessary for integrating new fields of knowledge. The only real difference with the process undertaken at a place like Harvard is that at the SPC/AUB its *modus operandi* had to change not from sectarian Protestantism, but from evangelical Protestantism, a movement primarily geared toward converting people to the faith. Even before the advent of liberal education, however, this transformation had already begun because the missionaries affiliated with the SPC discovered that very few people in the region were interested in converting to Protestantism. The missionaries who founded the school had to subsequently shift their primary focus from proselytizing to the more general goal of civilizing and educating the peoples of Syria.¹² At the SPC, an uneasy balance was established between an increasingly secularized curriculum and ever more stringent religious requirements for the faculty and student body. In the most pointed example, in 1882, the “Darwin Affair” saw

¹¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1955, 318.

¹² For more information about this process, see William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987; Ussama Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity,” *The American Historical Review*, 102, 3 (1997), 680–713; and James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*, vol. III, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company 1906.

the more liberal professors leave the school because the more conservative refused to have Charles Darwin's theories presented to the students.¹³ Thenceforth, all new faculty members had to sign a declaration of their allegiance to evangelical Protestantism; proselytizing remained, at least on paper, the guiding light of the institution.

With the promotion of Howard Bliss to the presidency in 1902, with the switch to the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1920, and then the long presidency of Bayard Dodge (1923–48), the college and university's outlook and curriculum were transformed under the influence of the American Social Gospel and Progressive Movements and the changing basis of American university education. Both the curriculum and the school's goals became more clearly secularized, erasing much of the ambiguity evidenced in Daniel Bliss's term. This process could not have happened if Protestant precepts had not evolved sufficiently to accept the idea that freedom of inquiry could strengthen both the faith and the students who came under its curricular umbrella.

Howard Bliss summarized his views on religion at the SPC in 1920 in his famous last article, "The Modern Missionary," for *The Atlantic Monthly*. In it, he clarified the meaning of the word "missionary" in a time of expanding American contacts abroad, in a new atmosphere of intellectual inquiry, and with increasing doubts at home about the validity of religion in modern life.

Missionary, I repeat, for this College of which I have spoken, the Syrian Protestant College of Beirut, is a distinctly missionary institution, typical of other missionary colleges and missionary enterprises. It has not, to be sure, the earmarks of the traditional missionary project. But while bending every endeavor to give its students a sound, modern education that shall make them efficient doctors, dentists, pharmacists, teachers, merchants, engineers, trained nurses, it does not consider its task as really begun—certainly not as ended—until it has made known to its students that which it holds to be of supreme worth in life: the adoption of the Christian Ideal as the best means of fitting a man to play a worthy part in the great drama of life.¹⁴

In this statement, Bliss acknowledged the altered intellectual and religious atmosphere of the period by recognizing the fragmentation of

¹³ See Shafik Jeha, *Darwin and the Crisis of 1882 in the Medical Department*, Beirut: American University of Beirut Press 2004, for the most comprehensive discussion of the "Darwin Affair."

¹⁴ Howard Bliss, "The Modern Missionary," *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 1920), 665–66.

moral guides the students could follow and by emphasizing the need for modern educational training alongside that of Protestantism. By so doing, Bliss had come to the realization that he could not reasonably maintain the view that One True Christianity stood up against the falsities of all the other faiths. He wrote in his “Modern Missionary” article that he and his colleagues could no longer use the terms “heathen” or “pervert” to describe non-Christians and non-Protestants; rather, they would take on the task of showing their students how they could integrate the Christian ideal into their lives, as part of their particular religious faiths. The school’s leaders also understood, as Bliss wrote, that “He does not believe that Christianity is the sole channel through which divine and saving truth has been conveyed”; as a result, “All men who are themselves seeking God and who are striving to lead others to God become his companions and his fellow workers.”¹⁵ Christianity still provided the basic framework for the discussion of morality and character, but, in the classrooms, professors and students would no longer be limited by the scriptural exhortations of evangelical Protestantism. They could now discuss and debate different sources of knowledge and the differing opinions of the participants. In Bliss’s use of the term, the Christian ideal had started to blend into the more broad-based liberal Protestantism then taking shape. The basic tenets of this liberal Protestantism, as delineated by Hofstadter—such as *democracy, law, character, conscience, soul, morals, service, duty*—were not merely Christian attributes but were natural elements that any educated and modern person should embrace.

As the newly named American University of Beirut (AUB) entered into the interwar years, the tone and parameters of faith became yet broader. Procedurally, religious requirements on campus eased up during this time, providing clear spiritual alternatives; religious academic studies became equal to and separate from the other branches of knowledge. Bible-study classes had now become voluntary, and a new phrase appears in the 1920–21 catalogue that accentuates the school’s broader toleration for other faiths: “For such students as have conscientious objections to taking a part in the distinctly religious life of the University, a series of alternative exercises are arranged which they may attend instead. In these exercises the moral and spiritual aim

¹⁵ Ibid., 667.

of the University is presented without the use of any religious form.”¹⁶ Both the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the new West Hall Brotherhood provided voluntary religious and spiritual activities for those students interested in pursuing either the Protestant faith of the YMCA or the multi-faith spiritual discussions of the Brotherhood. By transferring the scriptural focus of religion into the voluntary realm, the school had essentially acknowledged that the denominational basis of religion was no longer an integral part of the university structure, but was available for those who chose to partake of it as an extracurricular activity. The school would thenceforth recognize the study of religion as a professional field, but would not require chapel attendance as a prerequisite for maintaining a student’s status on campus. Ethical and moral precepts, as well as scriptural references, appeared in many of the classes and in forums such as the yearly Commencement speeches, but a separation of church and the academy had occurred, procedurally, at the AUB.

On March 28, 1927, Professor James Stewart Crawford gave a morning chapel address entitled “The Religious Policy of the AUB.” In it, he set forth the school’s religious policy, as seen in the following excerpts:

- I. We believe that the first great essential for our experiment is Freedom. We grant the fullest freedom for the mind, for the conscience, and for individual growth. This means that there is genuine freedom to think differently from one another, on religion, and to develop on different lines.
- II. The second essential for our new missionary experiment is that we all—teachers and student together—cultivate cooperation in religious fellowship and activity. This cooperation must be made possible in spite of the differences in our beliefs. Half of our students, at least, will always be non-Christian. We insist on promoting a genuine unity of spirit amid our outward diversity of creed.
- III. But there is a third essential to the great religious experiment of the AUB and that is the unquestioned fact that our University has a distinctive Christian contribution to make to our mutual experience of religious freedom and cooperation.¹⁷

As seen through these excerpts, the religious policy still recognized the Christian religious goals of the AUB in 1927, but with the addition

¹⁶ *Catalogue of the American University of Beirut*, Beirut, Syria. 1921–22, 26, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

¹⁷ James Stewart Crawford, “The Religious Policy of the AUB,” *al-Kulliyya* 13, 7 (1927), 192–95, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

of the greater level of tolerance engendered by both liberal education and liberal Protestantism. Freedom of inquiry, as the basic source of liberal education, carried over into faith, as students were enjoined to maintain their beliefs while freely asking questions of those around them. Toleration for religious difference became axiomatic under liberal Protestantism because its tenets had become so broad—even synonymous with civilization, as Marsden described it—that every faith could fit within its precepts.

The image that the SPC/AUB acquired during this curricular transformation is of religious toleration and the free exchange of ideas. Few graduates or observers of the university, even in the present day, fail to mention these two elements as defining components for which the SPC/AUB has always stood.¹⁸ This narrative is unique in an Arab world that has come to be dominated educationally by universities founded by authoritarian states and by the focus on professional training to the detriment of general education. The SPC/AUB provides an arena for open intellectual debate, while simultaneously training students for jobs in ever-changing economies and states. If Protestantism had remained sectarian and scripturally based in the academic arena, at the SPC/AUB and back in America, no space for toleration or free exchange could have been allowed within the classroom. Liberal Protestantism combined under its umbrella the fundamental elements of faith, morality, intellectual growth, and democracy that proved so appealing in bringing Protestants and non-Protestants into the SPC/AUB's educational project. Protestantism would not be the obstacle to toleration and freedom of inquiry, but its liberal variant would, in fact, be the vehicle for making the SPC/AUB such a distinctly productive space for all the denominations of the Middle East.

Making AUB men

Simultaneously, Protestantism served as the basic foundation stone for the strongest conflicts that the SPC/AUB's administration and students encountered over the years. For the school's presidents, freedom of

¹⁸ The author has conducted a number of interviews with graduates who attended the AUB between the 1930s and the 1970s, and these two answers came up most consistently when the author asked the interviewees to sum up the AUB's most important legacy to the region.

inquiry, so essential to the new liberal educational curriculum, did not negate the vital role the school must play in forming the moral character of its students. Teaching meant not only imparting the newest research in science and the humanities, but also instructing the students in how to live in a productive and ethical way. As the presidents said in their many speeches, freedom could not function properly without the simultaneous teaching of liberal Protestant doctrines. The man to be developed under this mantra would serve his nation and make religion a practical tool for uplifting his society. To master these tenets, students had to learn from those who had already embraced this new kind of liberal religious life.

In this iteration, freedom and character could not be separated; the only question was just how the students would acquire that character. Of all the American Protestant universities, Harvard went the furthest, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in initiating a system of electives for the students. Far more so than at any other university, the students could choose their own course of study, with little input from the school authorities. For this system to be successful, the school could not take on the role of the parent, but had to accept that the students would achieve maturity without such supervision over their actions. As Eliot said at his inauguration:

A University must permit its students, in the main, to govern themselves. It must have a large body of students, else many of its numerous courses of highly specialized instruction will find no hearers, and the students themselves will not feel that very wholesome influence which comes from observation of and contact with large numbers of young men from different nations, states, schools, families, sects, parties, and conditions of life.¹⁹

Eliot's contemporary at Princeton, James McCosh (1868–88), offered a university world in stark contrast to that presented by Harvard. In rebuttal to Eliot's statements, he said:

I hold that in a college, as in a country, there should be government; there should be care over the students, with inducements to good conduct, and temptations removed, and restraints on vice. There should be moral teaching; I believe also [in] religious teaching—the rights of conscience being always carefully preserved. But one part of this instruction should

¹⁹ Charles William Eliot, "Charles William Eliot Expounds the Elective System as 'Liberty in Education,' 1885," in Hofstadter and Smith, eds., *American Higher Education*, 713.

be to inculcate independence, independence in thinking, independence in action and self-control. The student should be taught to think for himself, to act for himself.²⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, Woodrow Wilson became president of Princeton (1902–10) and future AUB President Bayard Dodge attended as a student. Earlier, as a professor at the school, Woodrow Wilson had given a speech, “Princeton in the Nation’s Service,” in 1896. In this new transformation, student character was no longer a specifically individual quality, but one that should be utilized for the good of the nation at large. Wilson, as he stated in the following excerpt, said:

Unschooling men have only their habits to remind them of the past, only their desires and their instinctive judgments of what is right to guide them into the future: the College should serve the state as its organ of recollection, its seat of vital memory. It should give the country men who know . . . the tendencies which are permanent from the tendencies which are of the moment merely, who can distinguish promises from threats, knowing the life men have lived, the hopes they have tested, and the principles they have proved.²¹

In this view, the newly designed university campus should teach a man to think and act for himself by providing exemplary guides for him to follow. Liberal education, thus, came with cautionary elements. Freedom could not be exercised except by those who had proven themselves worthy of its responsibilities; only careful supervision and instruction could teach the students how to follow that path.

The SPC/AUB, because of its missionary roots, hewed, up until the 1950s, to the more conservative view of the university role in students’ lives. When its presidents called on their students to embrace a manly character, a paternalism shines through their words. They fully embraced their role *in loco parentis* and configured the students as children who must be taught to understand the tenets and responsibilities of liberal Protestantism and liberal education, lessons that could only come to fruition after four years of successful study at the school. The SPC/AUB’s presidents articulated no recognition of a conflict between the liberality of thought espoused in their classrooms and the need for a clear-cut

²⁰ James McCosh, “James McCosh Attacks the New Departure and President Eliot, 1885,” *ibid.*, 727.

²¹ Woodrow Wilson, “Princeton in the Nation’s Service,” in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. X: 1896–1898, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971, 23.

model of manhood for their students' characters; they saw them simply working in a complementary progression.

As early as the first president, Daniel Bliss, the leaders of the SPC/AUB articulated the goal of creating men at AUB. As Bliss said

We do not aim to make Maronites, or Greeks, or Catholics, or Protestants, or Jews, or Moslems, but we do aim to make perfect men, ideal men, God-like men, after the model of Jesus Christ, against whose moral character no man ever has said or can say aught. Opinions may differ about His origin, His nature, His death, His resurrection, His future and a thousand other questions that cluster about His great Name, but the Image of God in man, the breath of God in the soul, man's moral nature must recognize in the moral life of Jesus Christ the perfect model of human conduct.²²

In the midst of the transition to liberal education at the turn of the twentieth century, Howard Bliss, in answering complaints from the Muslim and Jewish students in 1909, reiterated a similar message by saying, "The aim and purpose of the College is to develop character, that is, it seeks to develop in its students the love of truth and the desire to do right, and it believes that this should be the aim and the result of all true education."²³ Bayard Dodge said in his inauguration speech in 1923 that "we must never lose sight of the fact that this intellectual growth may become a curse rather than a blessing, unless it be accompanied by moral development. It is our aim to train men of culture and efficiency, but a still more fundamental purpose is to train men of character."²⁴ Stephen Penrose, president from 1948 until his sudden death in 1954, said: "Throughout its history, the University has served the Arab World and the Near East by training men of knowledge, character and public spirit."²⁵ For Bliss and his successors, acquisition of the character the school hoped to mold would enable the graduates to be men who could think freely while in the classroom setting and who would then utilize their liberal educational experiences in practical and successful careers after graduation. Those careers, just as importantly,

²² Bliss, *Reminiscences*, 223.

²³ *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Syrian Protestant College to the Board of Trustees 1908-1909*, 7, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

²⁴ Bayard Dodge, "Inaugural Address Delivered by Bayard Dodge at the American University of Beirut June 28, 1923," *al-Kulliyah* 9, 8 (June 1923), 127, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

²⁵ S. B. L. Penrose, "Message to the Students of the American University of Beirut and International College," *University Senate Minutes* 12 (1948-52), American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

would not be for self-aggrandizement, but geared toward the good of the nation, with the SPC/AUB men sacrificing their own desires for larger national and regional projects. For the school's presidents, the fragmentation of intellectual truth made it even more imperative that the students accept the cohesive truth of character development; that alone would enable them to understand the inherent limits placed on freedom in any moral society.

The school itself, as represented by the words of its presidents, had the sole right to determine what that ideal man should be. These presidents took it as a given that they alone would recognize this character when they saw it, that no diversity of such character would be acceptable. No discussion would be allowed concerning the parameters delimiting, or the principles underpinning, this man. Howard Bliss stated in "The Modern Missionary" that a single truth could not be gleaned from the Protestant Scriptures, that it could arise from many different sources. Bayard Dodge could say in a 1923 article that the essential functions of the university are to impart "the great content of modern, scientific learning, which fits men for active life and professional service," and "a broad culture, which produces liberality of thought and a well balanced judgment".²⁶ In saying these words, neither would find any contradictions between the liberality of truth necessary for liberal education and liberal Protestantism and the hard-and-fast truth associated with the character they wanted to mold. These men did not see any contradiction because they believed, as did many of their counterparts back in America, that freedoms carried with them responsibilities that students needed to be taught. Only a student mature enough to take on those responsibilities would have the intellectual acuity to understand the information presented to him. In the SPC/AUB incarnation of liberal education, students could not acquire this solely through their own experiences; they had to come under the tutelage of their elders. The presidents of the SPC/AUB also faced the very practical problem of trying to maintain a calm academic atmosphere amidst the political and religious upheaval they faced in the Middle East. Strict discipline in response to student transgression served as a viable option for the presidents, and one perfectly befitting their own ideology about the elements making up liberal education.

²⁶ Bayard Dodge, "Article for *Al-Kulliyah*" (February 28, 1923), in *Articles, Speeches and Sermons*, vol. 3, 4, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

On the other side, the students continually recognized a conflict, seeing it as a failure that the school's leaders did not fully embrace what they were preaching. In keeping with the lessons they imbibed, the students wanted to extend liberality of thought beyond the classroom so that they could debate and demonstrate on behalf of their own religious and political goals. They wanted a voice in the administrative process of the school because they felt they had become the men who understood the responsibilities associated with it. They did not see the need to wait until graduation in order to practice such responsibility and liberality; they felt they had earned equality while students, and bemoaned the fact that they were not being trained for the real life awaiting them outside the main gate. Mohammed Dajani, a student leader in the early 1970s, summed up the students' perspective by saying:

Part of the education [that] what we used to get in the class contradicts what we used to have outside. For instance, this is a university that teaches values like democracy, but when you practice outside you don't get...

Dajani paused to clarify his thoughts, then continued by saying:

They are not teaching us how to practice democracy and that was our point at the time... My message then was: we would like to have a say. Why should we have encounters, why should we have wars? Let us have peace, but give us a space, and give us respect, dignity. That's very important to have dignity and if you don't teach us dignity here, how are we going to have dignity outside, and if you are not teaching us how to practice democracy here, how are we going to practice democracy outside?... So basically that's part of the dilemma...²⁷

The 1909 controversy regarding obligatory religious services and the political demonstrations that broke out after the 1948 war illustrate the language the students used to fight against the conundrum they felt they faced.

Beginning in January 1909, almost all the Muslim and Jewish students on campus refused to attend the obligatory chapel sessions and Bible classes. In their petitions to the administration, they used the language of liberal education they had learned in their own classes, and mixed that with the new discussion of freedom and democracy swirling around the area as a result of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. In selections from *Mufid*, signed by "The Office of the Society for the

²⁷ Author interview with Mohammed Dajani, Beirut, Lebanon, December 21, 2005, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

Liberty of Religions” in July 1909, the authors enunciated the primary arguments they had against obligatory religious requirements, and the administration’s subsequent rejection of their demands:

Do you advise [the student] to kill his conscience and come out in a mute machine, submissive and abused? O RESPECTED FACULTY: You were once known to be liberal and indulgent to those who differed with you in belief, while the Jesuits and Friars were described as being bigoted and unfair. Why is it now the reverse? They leave their Jewish and Moslem students unmolested in religious matters unconstrained to enter a church or read a religious book, associating with their brethren without bitterness of spirit, while you have been increasingly arrogant and deaf to all remonstrances. How do you compare with them, you Americans who claim to be above all nations in civilisation and liberal mindedness?

O RESPECTED FACULTY: Do you now mind the breaking of our Constitution which enjoins respect of personal freedom in all its bearings on belief and conduct, where it does not trench upon the like freedom of others? You claim that your college is your own, and that you are therefore free to make any regulation you please. Do you not know that the age of imposition is past, and that the people understands now your sophistry? You are only free within the circle inscribed for you by the law, and the law forbids you to trench upon the religious freedom of the student. By making regulations to that effect you are only free within the limits of this sacred article of the law. Awake, therefore, from your sleep, and take notice.²⁸

The students had turned the definition of freedom back on the administration, calling on its members to live up to their own rhetoric. Howard Bliss responded to the students’ demands by refusing to alter any of the religious requirements on campus, saying:

The College believes that the highest type of character cannot be developed, or for any length of time maintained, without the aid of religion, and for that reason we say to every student that he has no right to neglect his religious life, whatever the form of religion his conscience leads him to adopt. Thus we seek to make him a conscientious and God-fearing man.²⁹

Bliss promised, in his own words, to treat the students “with a spirit of indulgence” as long as they signed a pledge to return to chapel and Bible class and “to disclaim everything that suggests the spirit of disloyalty

²⁸ As cited in John M. Munro, *A Mutual Concern: The Story of the American University of Beirut*, Delmark, NY: Caravan Books 1977, 59.

²⁹ *Forty-Third Annual Report*, 7.

or disobedience or conspiracy against the authority of the College.”³⁰ In his view, disobedience to the religious policy of the school automatically meant that the perpetrators were not SPC men; by their protest, they had illustrated their inferior and immature natures. They had not acquired the character necessary for the successful liberal Protestant man. The students attacked the administration for not allowing them to practice the liberality the SPC preached. They demanded that they be recognized as the SPC men, who would be allowed to practice their faith in the fashion they saw befitting an educated student. They rejected the belief that character could be imposed upon them.

The students expressed similar sentiments in the years immediately following the 1948 war, when protests over the Palestinian situation and the intervention of the Western powers raged throughout campus and the city of Beirut. By extending their political discussions well outside the classroom walls, the students demanded that the administration recognize their right to freedom of action, not just to freedom of inquiry. Whereas the 1909 controversy had seen students punished for disobeying the religious policy of the school, the 1950s saw punishments imposed for political activity.

After years of demonstrations, the administration issued in *Outlook*, on March 15, 1952, the pledge students must make in order to remain in good standing at the university:

As long as I am a student I agree to obey all the University regulations as established and interpreted by the Faculty of the University. I will neither individually nor with a group take any action which will disturb the academic functioning of the University or interfere with the rights of other students to pursue without interruption their course of study. Furthermore, if I feel that I cannot conscientiously obey the regulations of the University at any future time I will withdraw from the University quietly and of my own volition.³¹

While reaffirming that the life of the university community is “dependent upon its freedom—freedom of inquiry, freedom of discussion, freedom of learning and freedom of teaching,” the University Disciplinary Committee also stated that “the matriculation of a student in this University, as in any private University, is a privilege not a right.”³²

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹ “Suspended Trio Appeals; Gains Read [*sic*] Mittance,” *Outlook*, March 15, 1952, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

³² *Ibid.*

In a complementary message, President Stephen Penrose published a statement in *Outlook* in 1953, calling on students to

Have the courage to support your convictions, but be sure that your convictions are right. See that they are acquired by objective reasoning and not by any form of prejudice. Your convictions are not necessarily right just because they are yours. If you hold them only for this reason then you must expect and allow anyone else to be just as determined concerning his own personal views. This kind of rock-ribbed and wooden-headed individualism leads to atomism, not unity. In the student body of AUB unity is to be treasured especially because at times it has been so rare. I hope we may this year seek it seriously, for the greater good of all.³³

In these pronouncements, the school's administration stated that enrollment at the AUB was a privilege and that all students signed a virtual contract upon entrance, a contract that they must fulfill or risk expulsion or suspension. From one perspective, character trumped freedom. Discipline and tutelage maintained the societal structure on campus and allowed classroom instruction, the main function of the university, to continue. From another perspective, these words exemplify the connection between freedom and character that the presidents so assiduously sought to disseminate to their students. Freedom could not be wielded, in the classroom or in any kind of political arena, without the requisite understanding of the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon a person educated within the liberal educational structure. In their self-professed role as parental supervisors, the presidents naturally saw demonstrations as an attack against their definition of freedom and the very work of education they saw themselves undertaking.

For the students, the symbiotic relationship between character and freedom did not appear as clear-cut, as they saw the university vacillate between freedom in one realm and paternalism in another. In a pointed critique of the school's inability to eliminate the ambiguities in its policy concerning freedom of action, Omar Adra wrote an editorial in *Outlook*, saying, in the following excerpts:

Regulation 3 says: "No demonstrations or strikes may be called, or organized, or held, partly or wholly on the university campus." To the ordinary student that means demonstrations outside the AUB campus are allowed partly or wholly. The handbook says, on another page, the following: "...any student's conduct which is considered DETRIMENTAL

³³ "From the President to YOU," *Outlook*, October 17, 1953, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

to the welfare and repute of the university will be subject to expulsion...; in other words, demonstrations or strikes could not be held, or organized partly or wholly, neither on campus nor off campus...

Further we would like to quote another statement: "The university encourages freedom of thought and expression of political matters, but expect[s] that this freedom be used with intellectual honesty and with a sense of responsibility commensurate with the right enjoyed."

Would it not be better to prohibit in black and white all public political expressions and political groupings and change the statement to "The university encourages freedom of thought and expression regarding religious and social matters"?³⁴

Mirroring what Mohammed Dajani said in his interview, a 1955 *Outlook* editorial stated, in the following excerpts:

The words democracy, responsibility and freedom are common passwords or cliches [*sic*] on campus. We hear about them in lectures, in chapel talks and over the coffee tables at nearby cafes. Nevertheless, students have little chance of proving what they have so far learned.

It is the university's function to train us, its students and future spokesmen of our countries, to face the problems of everyday life. How can we do that when we are only here to attend lectures and take notes? How can we be the future liberators of our respective countries if we are not taught how to practice the basic important factors that lead to freedom from oppression?

Students should have the right to voice their own opinions in matters that concern them. They should be able to give the administration their own side of all their problems, for the way the faculty members and the way the students see these same affairs could differ greatly.

We, the student body, are not puppets. We do not like to be drawn by strings which we have no right to control or even influence in any way. We think. That is why we are here. We have our own life to shape. That is what we have come to learn how to do. We have our own voice to express. That is what we hope to do.³⁵

John Racy even addressed the issue of making men head on, when he asked, "Should A Utopia B?"

"We want to make men," said President Penrose in his inaugural address when he assumed office as head of this institution.

³⁴ Omar Adra, "Quo Vadis..." *Outlook*, October 23, 1954, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

³⁵ "We Want to Learn," *Outlook*, November 19, 1955, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

Two years have passed since. Has any attempt been made to produce men?³⁶

These editorials sum up the desire by the students to have some control over their own educational experiences, of taking the message of the SPC/AUB and putting it into practice. The SPC/AUB opened a Pandora's box when it fragmented truth in only one arena—the classroom—but tried to serve paternalistic goals in others. The school's leaders did not express their own ideological consistency sufficiently for the students to understand it. The students, as seen in the many demonstrations against the university's policies and in recognition of the political events taking place throughout the region, found holes in the argument. They sought to embrace the freedom defining the school but not the control mechanisms that came along with it.

The presidents envisioned graduation as the culmination point for character development; they pictured their students heading out with four years of SPC/AUB experience, ready to reform their nations. However, the SPC/AUB could not function in a political vacuum. As Munif al-Razzaz said, the AUB was a place where minds were opened to every imaginable political and intellectual current. The students saw events such as the Young Turk Revolution and their protests of 1948 as complementing the work done in the classroom, as vital parts of their ongoing educational experiences. They did not want to wait until graduation to show that they understood how to become involved in the political processes around them; they faulted the university for not granting them the authority to establish a reciprocal relationship between their studies and the experience gained from the political events taking place around them. In their protests, the students refused to allow the school's leaders to be the sole arbiters of the definitions of freedom and liberality. They wanted those definitions to be broad enough to incorporate not only the administration's position but their own beliefs and convictions. They rejected the administration's attempt to make liberal education a unilateral imposition; they demanded that they be active participants in the process of establishing freedom's outer boundaries.

³⁶ John Racy, "Should A Utopia B?" *Outlook*, March 3, 1951, American University of Beirut/Library Archives.

Conclusion

Liberal education contained a host of components when the SPC adopted its motto in 1897. Assuredly, it meant, as the 2004 task force proclaimed, freedom of inquiry and a curriculum designed to inculcate general subjects along with more specialized and professional training. However, this American model of education could not have emerged if not for the changes underpinning the very bases of knowledge on Protestant American campuses. Denominational Protestantism had to give in to the demands made by a changing society and accept the inevitable fragmentation of knowledge that came along with freedom of inquiry. Liberal education also created a debate about the goals of higher education in America because just as intellectual truth fragmented, so too did the control the universities wielded over their students.

The SPC/AUB successfully transformed itself, and became the flagship university of the Arab world in the twentieth century by adopting the new American religious and intellectual bases of liberal education. It succeeded so well, however, that it could not contain the process it had gestated. The freedoms underpinning liberal education contained both cautionary and liberating elements. The presidents represented belief in the former as they saw supervision and freedom working in tandem; their words exposed the latter because freedom, by its very nature, allows for multiple definitions. The students attending the school embraced a broader definition of freedom than the administration, and sought to prove that they had earned the right to express their opinions far outside the classroom walls. The development of the liberal educational curriculum at the SPC/AUB established a well-known persona for the school that extols freedom of inquiry, but simultaneously formed the basis for the conflicts that have arisen over freedom's parameters.

PART TWO

CONSTITUTIONALISM, REVOLUTION,
AND LIBERAL THOUGHT

CHAPTER SIX

THE OTTOMAN REVOLUTION OF 1908 AS SEEN BY *AL-HILĀL* AND *AL-MANĀR*: THE TRIUMPH AND DIVERSIFICATION OF THE REFORMIST SPIRIT

Anne-Laure Dupont

The return of the Ottoman constitution in 1908 was immediately perceived as a revolution (*inqilāb*), and was widely commented in the Arabic press—not only in newspapers but also in cultural and educational reviews such as *al-Hilāl* (The Crescent) and *al-Manār* (The Lighthouse), both edited in Cairo by Syrian Ottoman subjects, Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935). Until then, Zaydan and Rida had not been directly involved in political matters but, as advocates of the reform (*iṣlāḥ*) and progress (*taqaddum*) of society, they felt encouraged in their mission by the advent of a constitutional regime in Istanbul and the granting of new rights. They actually saw in these the triumph of their ideas and ideals. Both were very typical of the modernist or reformist movement in Egypt and the Arabic provinces of the Ottoman Empire, of its shared values as well as its various trends. Zaydan and Rida claimed to educate individuals and society. They had roughly the same views on Ottoman politics, and evolved simultaneously from opposition to Abdülhamid to the celebration of the constitution, and from Ottomanism to Arabism. Yet, despite their numerous similarities, they had different sensitivities. Rida was much more of a politician than Zaydan, whose first interest lay in history and literature. Furthermore, Rida wrote and worked as a Muslim, while Zaydan never pretended to be a spokesman for Christianity. Rida linked reform and modernity to Islam when Zaydan aimed to build a secular society. These differences, which had always existed, were emphasized by Rida on the eve of World War I when Ottomanism ceased to unite him with Zaydan and the political future of the “Arab world” started to be discussed.

The Ottoman revolution was a turning point in the history of the reformist movement. The ideas of reform and progress and the related concept of liberty spread considerably and were widely discussed,

assuming a more political color. At the same time, just because its supporters were getting involved in politics, the movement started to diversify. Different concepts of reform and liberty appeared.

*Two Ottoman Syrian journalists in opposition to the
Hamidian regime*

Jurji Zaydan and Muhammad Rashid Rida belonged to the same generation, born during the 1860s. They were both of Syrian origin and emigrated to Egypt, where they worked as writers, journalists, and editors, founding two widely read Arabic reviews, *al-Hilāl* and *al-Manār*.¹ Jurji Zaydan was a native of Beirut. He was born in 1861 into a Greek Orthodox family which had fled Mount Lebanon in the 1840s, to escape from poverty and sectarian violence. His parents were illiterate and life was difficult, but they were integrating into the growing city that Beirut was at that time. Jurji's father had regular work as a cook and owned a small restaurant—a *locanda*, as the Beirutis said, using an Italian word.² He also sent his children to school, securing them the primary instruction he had been deprived of. Yet he did not consider secondary instruction to be necessary, and Jurji had to study alone, reading the various cultural reviews and scientific textbooks newly edited in Beirut. His social ascent started in 1881 when he was admitted to the medical school of the famous Syrian Protestant College (SPC), founded in 1866 by American Presbyterian missionaries. His studies were soon interrupted,³ and in 1883 he chose to leave his

¹ This chapter is based upon the reading of *al-Hilāl* and *al-Manār*, especially in the years 1908–09. It is a development of my work about Jurji Zaydan, *Ġurġi Zaydān (1861–1914), écrivain réformiste et témoin de la Renaissance arabe*, Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient 2006. The other secondary sources are, about Jurji Zaydan and *al-Hilāl*: Thomas Philipp, *Ġurġi Zaydān: His Life and Thought*, Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 1979; about Muhammad Rashid Rida and *al-Manār*: Werner Ende, “Rashīd Riḍā,” in *Encyclopédie de l’islam*, new edition (*EP*), vol. VIII, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 461–63; Jacques Jomier, “Al-Manār,” in *ibid.*, vol. VI, 344–45; Nadia Elissa-Mondeguer, “Rachid Riḍa, al-Manār et le sort de l’Empire ottoman (1898–1914),” *mémoire de Diplôme d’études approfondies (DEA)*, sous la direction de Gilbert Delanoue, Paris: Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO) 1993 (unpublished).

² This is the word Zaydan used in his autobiography: cf. *Mudhakkirāt Jurji Zaydān*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, Beirut: Dār al-Jil 1968.

³ Zaydan left the college during the second year of his medical studies (1883) after having participated in a students’ strike caused by the dismissal of a member of the

provincial city and to move to Cairo where he could hope for a good job, even without having graduated. Yet the SPC was a major step in his career because it was the only place in which he received an academic education, and he established lasting relationships with other students and teachers there. The college, as well as the cultural associations that were linked to it and Freemasonry,⁴ were the basis of his intellectual and professional network. Jurji Zaydan settled in Egypt in 1887 and devoted himself to writing. In 1891, in order to publish his books more easily, he founded his own printing press, and the following year he started *al-Hilāl*, a scientific and literary review, which was quickly successful and is still published. He became a professional writer, famous for his 22 novels dealing with the history of Islam and for his erudite works such as *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī* (History of Islamic Civilization, 5 volumes, 1902–1906) and *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughā al-‘arabiyya* (History of Arabic Literature, 4 volumes, 1911–1914).

Muhammad Rashid Rida had a different social and educational background and personality. Born in Qalamun, near Tripoli, in 1865, into a pious family of rural notables, he was educated as an *‘ālim* (religious scholar) with an inclination to modern sciences. After having been to the traditional *kuttāb* (elementary school), he benefited from the first attempts made in Tripoli to renew Islamic religious teaching. He received his primary instruction in an Ottoman state school. Then he studied in the new Madrasa al-Waṭaniyya al-Islāmiyya (the National Islamic

faculty known as a Darwinist. About this strike and its meaning for Jurji Zaydan, see Shafik Jeha, *Darwin and the Crisis of 1882 in the Medical Department*, Beirut: American University of Beirut 1991 (in Arabic); Dupont, *Ġurġī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 187–198. The true reason for Zaydan’s departure from the college was probably financial: he could not pay the registration fees.

⁴ We’re thinking in particular about the Association Shams al-Birr (Sun of Charity), a local branch of the YMCA, and the Majma’ al-‘Ilmī al-Sharqī (Oriental Academy), whose members also belonged to Masonic lodges in Beirut and later in Cairo. Many of Zaydan’s fellows in the SPC, later prominent Arab journalists and intellectuals, were Freemasons: Ya‘qub Sarruf (1852–1927), Faris Nimr (1856–1951), Shahin Makaryus (1853–1910), Iskandar al-Barudi (1856–1921), Jabr Dumit (1859–1930). See, for both Shams al-Birr and al-Majma’ al-‘Ilmī al-Sharqī, Jurji Zaydan, *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughā al-‘arabiyya*, vol. IV, Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl 1914 (new ed. by Dr. Shawqī Ḍayf), 70, 73. About the Freemason intellectuals, see Suhayl Sulaymān, *Athar al-bannā‘in al-aḥrār fī l-‘adab al-lubnānī (1860–1950)*, Beirut: Nawfal 1993. Zaydan himself was affiliated to Freemasonry. See Anne-Laure Dupont, “Usages et acculturation de la Franc-maçonnerie dans les milieux intellectuels arabes à la fin du XIX^e siècle à travers l’exemple de Jurji Zaydān (1861–1914)”, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 72 (June 2006), 331–352 (special issue about “la Franc-maçonnerie en Méditerranée (XVIII^e s.–XX^e s.)”, edited by the Centre de la Méditerranée moderne et contemporaine, Université de Nice.

School), founded in 1879 by Shaykh Husayn al-Jisr (1845–1909), a former student at al-Azhar, where he had been influenced by Shaykh Husayn al-Marsafi (ca. 1815–1890) and a group of enlightened *‘ulamā’*.⁵ The next decisive steps in Rida’s life were his meetings with Muhammad ‘Abduh in Tripoli and his introduction to the famous newspaper *al-‘Urwā al-Wuthqā*, which the latter had edited in Paris with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in 1884. He became one of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s most fervent disciples, and worked for the diffusion of his ideas. He joined him in Cairo in 1898 and started *al-Manār*, on which he worked until his death in 1935. He devoted himself totally to the expansion of the reformist spirit and the religious orientation of the Muslims as well as to Islamic and Arabic politics.

In Cairo, Muhammad Rashid Rida and Jurji Zaydan were bound to meet. They had the same homeland, the same profession, the same love for Arabic language and culture, the same acquaintances in the Syrian and Egyptian reformist circles in Cairo such as ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849–1902), who lived there the last four years of his life, Rafiq al-‘Azm (1865–1922), and Shaykh ‘Ali Yusuf (1863–1913), editor of the Egyptian daily newspaper *al-Mu’ayyad*. But there is some evidence that they never became close friends. Between Rashid Rida—the Muslim scholar, the advocate of a renewal of Islamic religion and an ardent militant—and Jurji Zaydan—the self-made man, the admirer of the Christian missionaries’ educational work in the Ottoman Empire, and the popular writer in search of a consensus—the contrasts were as numerous as the similarities. Rida felt these differences more than Zaydan, perceiving him as a competitor rather than as a companion.

A reason for this competition was the major role they both ascribed to the press and what they considered to be their mission. Conceiving of the press as a “school” (*madrasa ta’līm wa-irshād*,⁶ *madrasa tahdhībīyya*),⁷ they considered themselves as teachers or “guides” (*mur-*

⁵ About the reformist trend in Al-Azhar in the nineteenth century, see Gilbert Delanoue, *Moralistes et politiques musulmans dans l’Égypte du XIX^e siècle (1798–1882)*, 2 vols., Cairo: IFAO 1982.

⁶ “Ḥurriyat al-qawl ‘unwān irtiqā’ al-umma,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 1 (October 1, 1908), 48.

⁷ “Kayfa nasta’milu-l-ḥurriyya,” a speech made by Sayyid Husayn Wasfi Rida (Muhammad Rashid’s brother) in Beirut, *al-Manār* 11, 7 (August 27, 1908), 547. The comparison between the press and a school was very common. See for instance an article on the press in the Shi’i reformist review *al-Irfān* (Knowledge) 2 (January 12, 1910), 28–29; its first words are: “the press is the daily school of the nation” (*al-ṣiḥāfa madrasat al-umma al-sayyāra*).

shid, *qā'id afkār*) for both the “masses” (*āmma*) and the “community” or “nation” (*umma*). They conceived of their function as a double one: lobbying the political authorities on one hand, and education (*tarbiya*) or orientation (*irshād*) on the other. While advising the authorities and pressing them to launch various reforms,⁸ they taught the individuals a new *adab*, i.e. what to know and how to behave in a changing world. They pretended to open a new path between *al-muqallidūn*, the imitators of custom and traditions, and *al-mutafarnijūn*, the imitators of Westerners. Their final aim was a collective one: they urged the *udabā'*, the newly educated individuals, to work for the progress of society—and, in the case of Rida, Islam—by expanding sciences and fighting poverty. Simultaneously, they demonstrated to them that they belonged to an *umma*, either in the sense of the Islamic community or a nation that was still to be defined.

This program had, though indirectly, strong connections with politics, because Rida and Zaydan defined their role in relation to the state (the Egyptian colonial state or the Ottoman state) and tried to establish the limits between the sphere of their own activities and that of the state. They expected the latter to create favorable conditions for the realization of their program. Their main expectations were the freedom of the press, of writing and teaching in their own language (Arabic), and of association and enterprise.

Consequently they paid great attention to the political situation in the Ottoman Empire.⁹ They were generally confident in the spirit of the Tanzimat, and first saw Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) as able to keep it alive. This is obvious in the first volumes of *al-Hilāl* (1892–1894). The title itself, *al-Hilāl*, refers to the Ottoman crescent. Zaydan chose it as the symbol of the Ottoman Empire, under the patronage of which he had decided to create his enterprise.¹⁰ He did not consider then that Abdülhamid's reign had interrupted the reform and development of the

⁸ In Zaydan's case, for instance, the foundation of a university in Cairo or an academy of Arabic language.

⁹ For a general view of the political context in the Ottoman Empire from the Tanzimat to the Turkish Liberation War (1839–1914), I refer particularly to Robert Mantran, ed., *Histoire de l'Empire ottoman*, Paris: Fayard 1989, 459–647 and François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II, le sultan calife*, Paris: Fayard 2003. I studied Zaydan's perception of Ottoman political life and its evolution in a special chapter of my *Ğurğ'i Zaydān (1861–1914)* mentioned above: chapter 11, “Conscience arabe et ottomanisme,” 543–626. For Rida, I used Nadia Elissa-Mondeguer's unpublished memoir (see note 1).

¹⁰ *Al-Hilāl* 1, 1 (September 1, 1892), 2.

Ottoman Empire. He did not believe that the suspension of the constitution in 1878 meant the end of the Tanzimat. The legal dispositions of the *hatt-ı hümayün* published in 1856 had not been abandoned: equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, all subjects of the sultan, was still asserted, and different religious communities had their privileges reinforced. As caliph, Abdülhamid was supposed to defend Islam as well as to protect the *ahl al-kitāb*, Christians and Jews. Furthermore, his Islamic policy was an Arabic one: as noted by Zaydan in his review, he paid special attention to the Arab provinces and the Holy Places where Islam was born.

The image of Sultan Abdülhamid started to deteriorate in the middle of the 1890s after the massacres of Armenians and the beginnings of repression against any kind of opposition, including the new Young Turks movement. From this time, both Zaydan and Rida realized that the spirit of the Tanzimat had vanished: Ottoman unity was a myth; non-Muslims had reason to fear for their security and Muslims for the reputation of Islam as a tolerant religion; the government was clearly dictatorial; there was no freedom of the press; the population was under police surveillance, the famous “spies” (*jāsūs*); the sultan was not “modern”: he lived in seclusion in Yıldız Palace in Istanbul and remained aloof from the people.¹¹ Abdülhamid’s religious policy was being criticized. The way he used the Sufi brotherhoods for his propaganda, his lack of interest in reform of the religious *madrasas*, and censorship were not what the advocates of a real *aggiornamento* of Islam expected. The foundation of *al-Manār* itself in 1898, far from Ottoman Syria where there was no freedom, was a sign that a new religious reformist trend was spreading, apart from the traditional religious institutions as well as against them.

Zaydan and Rida expressed their opposition to the regime gradually and nearly simultaneously, even if more visibly in *al-Manār* than in *al-Hilāl*. They took a notable step in 1902 and 1903 when Rida published al-Kawakibi’s last polemical book, *Umm al-qurā* (The Mother of Cities—Mecca), which reported on an imaginary Islamic congress in Mecca and proposed the appointment of a new Arab caliph. Zaydan had also been influenced by Kawakibi’s personality and works. He mentioned his death in *al-Hilāl* and published a very laudatory bio-

¹¹ Cf. François Georgeon, “Le Sultan caché. Réclusion du souverain et mise en scène du pouvoir à l’époque de Abdülhamid II,” *Turcica* 29 (1997), 93–124.

graphy of him.¹² From 1905 to 1906, Rida and Zaydan felt encouraged in their condemnation of despotism by three major regional events: the contestation of autocracy in Russia; the defeat of the latter in its war against Japan; and the Constitutionalist Revolution in Iran. They started to develop the themes of “constitution” (*dustūr*) and “consultation” (*shūrā*), together with the denunciation of “despotism” (*istibdād*). Rida created the Jam‘iyyat al-Shūrā al-‘Uthmāniyya,¹³ while Zaydan praised “constitutional government” (*al-ḥukūma al-dustūriyya*) as superior to “despotic government” (*al-ḥukūma al-istibdādiyya*).¹⁴

Under these conditions, the return of the constitution in 1908 could not but please them, and they greeted it warmly, publishing numerous articles about it. It also had an impact on their personal lives and work. Zaydan immediately started to learn Turkish and, for the first time, traveled to Istanbul during his summer vacation in 1909 in order to observe the political changes in the empire and to meet their facilitators.¹⁵ His journey to Istanbul was a sign of a new conception of journalism: he visited the imperial capital as a political journalist investigating the place where the future of the Ottomans and the Arabs was being decided. Rida for his part took advantage of the liberalization of the regime to come back to Syria after ten or eleven years of exile. He visited the main cities (Beirut, Tripoli, Baalbek, Damascus, and Homs) in order to support the advocates of social, religious, and political reforms.¹⁶ He also went to Istanbul, and spent a full year there (October 1909–October 1910), hoping for the support of the Young Turks government in the foundation of a modern Islamic institute.

¹² *Al-Hilāl* 10, 19–20 (July 15, 1902), 594–96.

¹³ See *al-Manār* 9 (February 1906–March 1907).

¹⁴ “Al-Ḥukūma al-dustūriyya,” *al-Hilāl* 15, 1 (October 1, 1906), 18–24. In the previous year, in his book *al-Abbāsa ukht al-Rashīd* (‘Abbasa, Harun al-Rashīd’s Sister), Zaydan had already used the history of Islam and the novel to criticize despotism.

¹⁵ He reported on this journey: see “al-Istāna al-‘ilya” (“The Noble Istanbul”), *al-Hilāl* 18, 1 (October 1, 1909), 3–38; 18, 2 (November 1, 1909), 67–107; 18, 3 (December 1, 1909), 131–65.

¹⁶ An account of his journey was simultaneously published in *al-Manār* 11, 9 (October 25, 1908), 706–716; 11, 11 (December 24, 1908), 874–79; 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 936–53; 12, 2 (March 22, 1909), 150–59. Rida also published the various speeches he made in Syria. Their great lines are presented in *al-Manār* 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 904–10 (“Khuṭab wa-durūs ṣāḥib *al-Manār*”). There is a new separate edition of this report (together with the report on Rida’s second journey to Syria): al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Riḥlatāni ilā Sūriyya, 1908–1920*, ed. and presented by Zuhayr Aḥmad Zaza, Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-‘arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr/Abu Dhabi: Dār Sūwaydī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘ 2001.

Naming the revolution

For Zaydan, Rida, and their contemporaries the events of July 23 were an authentic revolution. A new atmosphere was immediately created with the announcement of elections, the lifting of censorship and the abolition of the secret police, giving them the consciousness of living through a radical, political change, an *inqilāb* whose model in history, according to them, was the French Revolution. Zaydan and Rida felt that they had moved from the *ancien régime* to a new, enlightened era. The feeling that an *inqilāb* had occurred is reflected in their very contrasted vocabulary: *al-istibdād* (despotism)/*al-ḥurriyya* (liberty); *al-zulm* (tyranny)/*al-‘adl* (justice) or *al-qānūn* (law); *al-fasād* (corruption)/*al-taraqqī* (progress) or *al-iṣlāḥ* (renovation, reform); *al-fitna* (division, discord)/*al-ittiḥād* (union); *al-jahl* (ignorance)/*al-‘ilm* (science), etc.

An important thing for them was that this *inqilāb* happened without *thawra*, that is to say without violence, civil war or *futun* (clashes inside the religious or national community [*umma*]). In Zaydan's writings, the word *thawra* is always negative: it refers to the Indian Muslims' great revolt in 1857 which the British suppressed very severely; to the explosion of violence against the Christians in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in 1860; and to the sedition of Colonel Ahmad ‘Urabi Pasha against the khedive of Egypt and the war he declared to England in 1882, whose result was foreign occupation.¹⁷ As for Rida, he used the word *thawra* to describe the military and religious uprising against the parliament and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in April 1909, of which he disapproved. For him, the *thawra* in Istanbul was becoming a *fitna* in Adana, where the Armenians were being attacked.¹⁸ In other words, it introduced a clash inside the Ottoman *umma*. In this case, the *thawra* was synonymous with reaction: it was the opposite of an *inqilāb*, a counter-revolution.

The difference between *inqilāb* and *thawra*, which one can deduce from reading Zaydan and Rida's writings, was clearly expressed in an essay that both *al-Hilāl* and *al-Manār* published in the autumn of 1908. Its author was the Palestinian intellectual and politician Ruhi al-Khalidi (1864–1913), a member of the CUP, elected soon afterwards

¹⁷ Dupont, *Ġurġi Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 48, 237–38, 241–42, 254–55, 582.

¹⁸ “Al-Dustūr wa-Jam‘iyyat al-Ittiḥād wa-l-Taraqqī wa sā‘ir al-jam‘iyyāt,” *al-Manār* 12, 3 (April 21, 1909), 237, 240.

to the Ottoman parliament as a deputy for Jerusalem.¹⁹ Khalidi defined *inqilāb* as “a major change (*taghayyur*) in the state government and a complete transformation (*qalb*) of its laws” and *thawra* as “disobedience” (*‘iṣyān*) and “rebelliousness” (*al-khurūj ‘an al-tā’a*).²⁰ Consequently he proposed renaming the French Revolution *al-inqilāb al-faransāwī* instead of *al-thawra al-faransāwiyya*, and suggested a new translation of the famous words that King Louis XVI and the duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt exchanged just after the people of Paris took the Bastille on July 14, 1789:

- *C’est une révolte* (This is a revolt), the King said: *Idhan hādhihi thawra*.
- *Non Sire, c’est une révolution* (No Sir, this is a revolution), the Duke answered: *‘Afwān ya Mawlāy, bal hādihā inqilāb*.²¹

It is clear that Khalidi as well as Zaydan and Rida perceived *thawra* as an illegitimate revolt, a riot, a sedition. It meant violence, anarchy, division, all of which they, as reformists, hated. In contrast, *inqilāb* was considered beneficial to the nation. It was a legitimate revolution.

In the following years, however, the meaning of the word *thawra* started to change. In a speech made by Amin al-Rihani (1876–1940) in Beirut in 1913 and published in *al-Hilāl*, *thawra* was used to mean “revolution” in its noble sense. Entitled “Rūḥ al-thawra” (The Spirit of the Revolution), the speech presented *thawra* as an instrument of political and social change (*inqilāb*).²² Rihani’s idea was that habits and mentalities had to be transformed (*inqalaba*). This was possible only with reform (*iṣlāh*) as well as complete political change (*inqilāb*), initiated by a revolution (*thawra*). In his view, only change and revolution (*inqilāb wa-thawra*) were lasting in humanity and were the reason for its progress; they were in conformity with the law of evolution: “Revolution is the hand of change,” he said, “and the law of evolution is the spirit of the revolution.”²³

¹⁹ Ruhi al-Khalidi “al-Maqdisi,” “al-Inqilāb al-‘uthmānī wa-Turkiya al-Fatāt,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 2 (November 1, 1908), 67–83; 17, 3 (December 1, 1908), 131–71; and *al-Manār* 11, 9 (October 25, 1908), 606–72; 11, 10 (November 23, 1908), 743–65; 11, 11 (December 24, 1908), 842–59. *Al-Manār* soon re-published the text in a separate book with an introduction by Husayn Wasfi Rida: see 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 919–23. About al-Khalidi, see his biography in *al-Hilāl* 22, 2 (November 1, 1913), 152–53, and “Nuwwābunā fī majlis al-mab’ūthān,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 3 (December 1, 1908), 177–82.

²⁰ Al-Khalidi, “al-Inqilāb al-‘uthmānī,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 2 (November 1, 1908), 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “Rūḥ al-thawra,” *al-Hilāl* 21, 9 (June 1, 1913), 544–52.

²³ “Al-thawra yad al-inqilāb wa-nāmūs al-nushū’ wa-l-irtiqa’ rūḥ al-thawra.”

The revolution of the “educated”

Zaydan and Rida legitimated the Ottoman revolution because, in their views, it was in total accordance with their reformist project. They first praised its actors, i.e. the members of the CUP and the military officers who supported them. The members of the CUP were young and educated. They were medical doctors, journalists, lawyers and so on. In addition, they were very well organized: they had prepared for political change in secret committees or through educational and philanthropic associations, understanding that strength lay in unity.²⁴ In a word, they were exactly the kind of *udabā'* Zaydan and Rida wanted to educate through their writings—highly educated individuals involved in society and willing to serve their country.

As for the officers, Zaydan and Rida's views on them were more complex. In principle, they did not want them to interfere in political life: this is why Rida recommended, immediately after the constitution was restored, that “the swords would be put back inside the sheaths” and that the army should return to its previous position.²⁵ Later in April, he again denounced the officers' political influence everywhere in the country, underlining that their main task was a military one.²⁶ Zaydan, for his part, had suggested in previous writings about 'Urabi's sedition in Egypt that the army had to support the regime in power and to enforce its legitimacy but was not supposed to have power itself.²⁷ As shown before, they feared *thawra*, *thawra* 'askariyya or military sedition, which was in their opinion the opposite of a legitimate revolution against despotism and injustice (*inqilāb*).

Yet, unlike those who suspected the Ottoman military officers of serving their own interests without being true liberals,²⁸ both Rida and Zaydan saw them as guardians of the constitution whose sincerity was proven by the sufferings they had endured under Abdülhamid's rule.

²⁴ “Al-Inqilāb al-siyāsī al-‘uthmānī,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 1 (October 1, 1908), 37–38; “al-Inqilāb al-siyāsī al-‘uthmānī hal huwa ṣāḥih thābit?” *al-Hilāl* 17, 4 (January 1, 1909) 247–49. For the theme of associations in Rida's articles, see below.

²⁵ “Al-Jum‘a 25 jumādī al-ākhira/11 tammūz/23 yūlyū: ‘id al-umma al-‘uthmāniyya bi-ni‘mat al-dustūr wa-l-ḥurriyya,” *al-Manār* 11, 6 (July 28, 1908), 420.

²⁶ “Al-Dustūr wa-Jam‘iyyat al-Ittiḥād wa-l-Taraqqī,” 236, 238.

²⁷ See particularly a novel, *Asīr al-Mutamahdī* (The Mahdi's Prisoner), published in 1892, and a long article entitled “Aḥmad ‘Urābī, za‘īm al-thawra al-‘urābiyya.” This article was published in the fifth volume of *al-Hilāl* (1896–1897), 41–48, 82–90, and 122–34. See Dupont, *Gurḡī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 241–42.

²⁸ “Al-jum‘a 25 jumādī al-ākhira,” 422.

They had shown that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for the purpose of liberty. Rida compared the army's role in 1908 with that thirty years before, in February 1878, when it had supported the sultan's decision to close the first parliament. The army had then been on the side of oppression. But since 1878 the situation had changed, thanks to "enlightened" (*mustanirūn*) officers who had helped the liberals. The army, Rida suggested, had become a defender of the constitution after having fought it.²⁹ Zaydan might have noticed the same transformation. Apparently, for both the change in the army was a very encouraging sign: it meant that the educational level had improved. A new generation, they thought, the generation of the "educated" (*al-udabā'*), now had power in their hands. In these conditions, while the military officers' visible political influence was to be condemned, a "hidden link" between them and the CUP, as Rida said, was legitimate. The latter could call again for the army's help if the constitution was threatened, as happened in April 1909.³⁰

For Rida and Zaydan, the most concrete sign of the advent of the *udabā'* was the granting of the freedoms they needed and expected: freedom of expression (*ḥurriyyat al-qawl*) and freedom of action (*ḥurriyyat al-'amal*). Interestingly, it is just in this context that they insisted on the educational role of the press and defined it as a "school."³¹ As for freedom of action, it meant in particular freedom of association (*ijtimā'ī*). This is an omnipresent theme in Rida's writings and speeches after the revolution. When he was in Syria during winter 1908–09, he urged the notables in Beirut and Tripoli to raise money and found associations (*jam'iyyāt*) with two aims: opening schools and fighting poverty. The associations did not just need freedom to exist; they were a symbol of freedom. They could fight despotism through political or educational action. The CUP itself was an example of this. Once they got together, the liberals had been able to overthrow despotism. This had to be imitated: new associations should be founded in order to educate people and to destroy all traces of the old regime.³²

²⁹ *Al-Manār* 11, 11 (December 24, 1908), 839, 863–64 (we refer here to various speeches made by Rida in Tripoli on December 17, 1908, the day the new parliament opened).

³⁰ "Al-dustūr wa-Jam'iyyat al-Ittiḥād wa-l-Taraqqī," 236, 238.

³¹ See above, notes 6 and 7.

³² See in particular Rashid Rida's speeches in Tripoli in December 1908, the opening day of the parliament in Istanbul: *al-Manār* 11, 11 (December 24, 1908), 836–41, 860–61. Zaydan was also very interested in the work of cultural and philanthropic associations,

Rida and Zaydan were thus encouraged in their view of a liberal and moral society promoted by individuals and philanthropy. At the same time, not surprisingly, they rejected socialism³³ and what Rida called the “radical democracy.” To be more specific, while speaking to the notables of Tripoli, Rida criticized the “radical liberals” (*al-aḥrār al-mutaṭarrifūn*) or “those who exaggerate in supporting democracy” (*al-mutaṭarrifūn fī l-dīmūqraṭiyya*).³⁴ He had two main fears: “direct democracy” or, in other words, popular mobilizations against the parliament or any official institution; and the shift of social authority and patronage (*al-za‘āma*) from the notables to the *sha‘b*, the common people.³⁵ In Rida’s speeches and writings in this period, *sha‘b* meant ignorant or uneducated people, still living under the despotism of tradition and custom. They were the opposite of the *udabā’*. No renaissance could be yet expected from them. To summarize, both Zaydan and Rida believed in education but feared social change. They wanted “a revolution without a revolution,” one which would give power to the newly educated elites and let them achieve their reformist program.

and often mentioned it in his reviews (cf. Dupont, *Ġurġī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 437–40). He also was convinced of the necessity of opening schools and fighting poverty, the Salvation Army being one of his models: see for instance an article entitled “Ḥāribū-l-faqr bi-l-ta’līm, riqqū li-‘āmmat al-juhalā’ fa yakthuru ‘adad khāṣṣat al-‘uqalā’,” *al-Hilāl* 19, 1 (October 1, 1910), 41–42.

³³ Jurji Zaydan’s main articles about socialism are in *al-Hilāl* 6, 8 (December 15, 1897), 290–94; 16, 5 (February 1, 1908), 265–82; and 20, 8 (May 1, 1912), 466–75. The review also published a story of socialism in England. Its author was the young Egyptian journalist Salama Musa (1887–1958), who was an advocate of Fabianism: see *al-Hilāl* 18, 6 (March 1, 1910), 335–38. For more developments about Zaydan’s views on socialism, see Dupont, *Ġurġī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 440–46. For a general approach on the first debates about socialism at that time, see Donald M. Reid, “The Syrian Christians and Early Socialism in the Arab World,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (1974), 177–93.

³⁴ *Al-Manār* 11, 11 (December 24, 1908), 862, 865–66; 12, 2 (March 22, 1909), 153–54.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Rida himself witnessed a popular demonstration against the *wālī*’s residence in Damascus in January 1909. He was partly involved in it because the riot occurred after a Sufi shaykh who had disturbed his conference in the Mosque of the Umayyads was arrested. See Rida’s account in *al-Manār* 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 941–52. For the context of this complex affair, connected with the Damascene opponents to the CUP, see David Commins, “Religious Reformers and Arabists in Damascus: 1885–1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18 (1986), 405–25.

An Ottoman revolution

Another reason for Zaydan and Rida to celebrate the constitution was that it had been welcomed by all in the empire, and it therefore anticipated the rise of a brotherly society. They could not find enough words to laud Ottoman fraternity and call for the rise of the Ottoman nation. They noticed that every people and every religious community in the empire associated themselves with the event and praised it. Ottomans of different “races” (*ajnās*) and religions but unified in “Ottomanism” (*‘uthmāniyya*)³⁶—Turks, Syrians, Armenians, Muslims, Christians, Jews—fraternized in public or private meetings organized in or outside the empire to celebrate the constitution and congratulate the instigators of the revolution. In Cairo, for instance, Ottoman citizens gathered in a coffee shop, the Splendid Bar, near the Azbakiyya Garden in the new city center, or later in the Armenian church. Rida was among them, and his speeches in Arabic joined those in Turkish or Armenian.³⁷ “The shaykh and the priest embrace” (*yata‘ānaqu al-shaykh wa-l-qissīs*) was one of the favorite slogans used after the revolution.

Yet, through these common slogans (“Ottoman nation,” “Ottomanism,” “the shaykh embraces the priest”), there are visible differences between Rida and Zaydan’s appreciations of the Ottoman brotherhood. For Zaydan, “the shaykh and the priest embrace” meant that the shaykh and the priest were equal, while Rida considered that the shaykh accepted equal status with the priest, and was therefore the initiator. Rida used the theme of Ottoman brotherhood with an apologetic purpose, to demonstrate that Islam was the most tolerant religion in the world, against the background of the fate of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. He wanted to exonerate Islam from the massacres in East Anatolia during the 1890s or in Adana in April 1909. For this reason he always insisted that the liberal Muslims were the first to embrace

³⁶ This concept can be found for instance in *al-Manār* 11, 6 (July 28, 1908), 465; 11, 7 (August 27, 1908), 546. Jurji Zaydan also used it, particularly in very interesting letters to his son Emile on October 31 and November 10, 1908: He saw the *tarbush* that Emile had decided to wear as a symbol of his “ottomanity.” Yet the son, born and educated in colonial Egypt, was not as sure as his father of what “ottomanity” was, and the latter had to give explanations. See Philipp, *Ġurġī Zaydān*, 110, and Dupont, *Ġurġī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 580–82.

³⁷ “I‘ādat al-qānūn al-asāsī wa majlis al-mab‘ūthān fi-l-dawla al-‘ilya,” *al-Manār* 11, 6 (July 28, 1908), 464–68; “Iḥtifāl al-Arman bi-dhikrā shuhadā’ al-ḥurriyya al-‘uthmāniyyin,” *al-Manār* 11, 8 (September 25, 1908), 630–33.

non-Muslims or to shake their hands, because it was commanded by their religion.³⁸ In other words, he remained convinced of the superiority of Islam. As one of the American missionaries in Beirut would have said, he behaved as “the eldest brother.”³⁹

The appearance of fraternity made Zaydan and Rida confident in the advent of an Ottoman nation (*al-umma al-‘uthmāniyya*). Both considered themselves Arabs thanks to their genealogy (*nasab*), language, and cultural tradition. Furthermore, they had contributed through their writings to the shaping of a new linguistic Arab identity and claimed to belong to the Arab “people” (*qawm*) or “community” (*umma*). In a word, they already had a national Arab consciousness. But in the period of the Ottoman revolution, they did not consider the Arabs to be ready for independence, because they lacked the Turks’ political experience. Both Zaydan and Rida used the concept of *maṣlaḥa* (public welfare): it was in the Arabs’ interest to remain united with the Turks.⁴⁰ As Ottomans, the Arabs belonged to a great state and a respected nation, especially after the despotic government had been overthrown. Zaydan and Rida considered the reformed Ottoman Empire as a protection. In the event of its defeat and the advent of inexperienced Arab government, Zaydan mainly feared new sectarian troubles. Rida, for his part, was afraid of clashes inside the Islamic community and European colonial domination. For Zaydan, in these circumstances, Ottoman unity (*al-jāmi‘a al-‘uthmāniyya*) was the best guarantee of non-Muslims’ security. He based this analysis on his own situation as a Christian Syrian. A Christian Syrian, he explained, could show solidarity with various groups. Between him and the “Franks” (*al-ifranj*) as well as the Copts, there was

³⁸ “Al-Umma al-‘uthmāniyya wa-l-dustūr,” *al-Manār* 11, 7 (August 27, 1908), 539–40; “Iḥtifāl al-Arman bi-dhikrā,” 631–32; Rashid Rida’s journey in Syria in *al-Manār* 11, 9 (October 25, 1908), 706–16.

³⁹ This expression did not concern Rida specifically. It was used by Professor Edward Nickoley, a member of the faculty of the SPC, in an unpublished report to President Howard Bliss on the Muslim students’ protest against the religious rules in the college (American University of Beirut, Library Archives, Crisis of 1909, MSS AUB 38 2/3, January 20, 1909, folio 10). The questions underlying this very interesting controversy were the meaning of religious freedom and the status of foreign schools in the Ottoman Empire in the context of the restoration of the constitution in 1908–09. I have an article on the topic: “Une école missionnaire et étrangère dans la tourmente de la révolution constitutionnelle ottomane: la crise de 1909 au Syrian Protestant College de Beyrouth,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 75 (December 2007), 39–57.

⁴⁰ “Riḥla ṣaḥīb *al-Manār* fī Sūriyya-Dimashq al-Shām,” *al-Manār* 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 937; “al-‘Arab wa-l-Turk qabl al-dustūr wa-ba’dahu,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 7 (April 1, 1909), 412–13.

a “unity of religion” (*al-jāmi‘a al-dīniyya*); between him and the Muslim and Jewish Syrians, a “unity of fatherland” (*jāmi‘at al-waṭan*), between him and the Muslims in Egypt, Hijaz, Maghrib, and Iraq, a “unity of language” (*jāmi‘at al-lughā*); between him and the Turks, Greeks and Armenians, a “unity of state” (*jāmi‘at al-dawla*); between him, the Indians, and the Persians, a unity of Easterners (*jāmi‘at al-sharq*).⁴¹

Zaydan was obviously concerned about the non-Muslims’ integration. He demonstrated that a Christian Syrian was not an isolated individual, but belonged to various large groups: Christendom, Syria, the Arab world, the Ottoman state, the East. Each group, each form of unity, should be favored depending on the circumstances. Now that equality had been proclaimed between all faiths and all peoples in the empire, the most beneficial unity was Ottoman unity (*al-jāmi‘a al-‘uthmāniyya*).⁴²

In Rida’s perception, the questions of identity and Ottoman unity were probably much simpler. For a Muslim Syrian like him, unity with other peoples in Egypt, Hijaz, and Maghrib, or with Turks, Indians, and Persians, was first and foremost unity of Islam. He considered the newly reasserted Ottoman unity as a form of this fundamental unity. Rida distinguished between two types of “nationality” (*jinsiyya*): Islamic nationality (*al-jinsiyya al-islāmiyya*) and “territorial,” or “ethnic,” nationality (*al-jinsiyya al-waṭaniyya*), which was for him a pure imitation of Westerners.⁴³ He disapproved of any nationalism based on “race” or ethnicity (*jins*), and saw it as “racial fanaticism” only (*al-ta‘aṣṣub li-l-jins*), which was even worse than the “religious fanaticism” (*al-ta‘aṣṣub li-l-dīn*). He felt that nationalism broke the Islamic community (*umma*) into pieces.⁴⁴ On the other hand, he called for the formation of an Ottoman nationality (*al-jinsiyya al-‘uthmāniyya*), in which the nationalities of the various peoples in the empire (*jinsiyyāt al-shu‘ūb*) would dissolve.⁴⁵ It would be a way of keeping Islamic unity safe and preserving the links between Arabs and Turks. Ottomanism, in his perception, was a civil and political form of Islamic unity. Yet there was a place for non-Muslim Ottomans in so far as Islam was a tolerant religion. But if Ottoman unity eventually vanished, then Arab unity should be favored as a new sign of Islamic unity.

⁴¹ “Al-‘Arab wa-l-Turk qabl al-dustūr wa-ba‘dahu,” 412–13.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Fātiḥat al-sana al-ḥādiyya ‘ashara,” *al-Manār* 11, 1 (March 3, 1908), 3–4.

⁴⁴ “Al-‘Umma al-‘uthmāniyya wa-l-dustūr,” 541.

⁴⁵ “Al-Jum‘a 25 jumādī al-ākhirā,” 421.

The Ottoman nation being Islamic, Rida was preoccupied with the sultan's role in the new regime. He had been an opponent of Abdülhamid, but thought he had to be treated gently out of respect for his office—and because he knew that the sultan was still influential and that any affront to him would undermine the CUP's position, as in April 1909. For this reason, he pleaded immediately after the restoration of the constitution for an accommodation between the sultan and the nation.⁴⁶

While calling for the development of a strong and unified Ottoman nation, both Rida and Zaydan were still very conscious of the diversity of the empire. They knew the vigor of national feelings inside the empire, but believed that the immediate interest of its various peoples was to search for unity. If Jurji Zaydan acknowledged the political supremacy of the Turks and, even more, recognized their language as the “language of the state,” he asserted at the same time that the empire would not survive without the collaboration (*i'tilāf*), cooperation (*ta'awwun*), and solidarity (*takāṭuf*) of its different components (*'anāṣir*).⁴⁷ Rashid Rida voiced a similar opinion when he wrote that “Ottoman unity” would not be realized without harmony between the various peoples.⁴⁸ As for Husayn Wasfi Rida, Rashid's brother, he could greet the Syrian people and celebrate Ottoman unity in the same speech.⁴⁹ As a matter of fact, these men were wavering between different identities, or different nationalities, which had appeared simultaneously. They felt Arab and Syrian as well as Ottoman: they were culturally and linguistically Arab, politically Ottoman. In their view, the restoration of the constitution was a unique opportunity to combine these identities in a balanced and harmonious way. But many ambiguities remained. They hoped for the advent of the Ottoman nation-state but simultaneously perceived the empire as a multi-national one.

In these conditions, one may wonder what the concept of “sovereignty of the nation” (*ḥukm al-umma li-nafsihā* or *sulṭat al-umma*)⁵⁰ meant in their writings and speeches. In Tripoli on December 17, 1908, the opening day of the parliament, Rida insisted publicly that from now on the

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, 420–21; “I‘ādat al-qānūn al-asāsī,” 465, 468; “al-Dustūr wa-Jam‘iyyat al-Ittiḥād wa-l-Taraqqī,” 236, 238.

⁴⁷ See in particular Zaydan's account of his journey in Istanbul: “al-Istāna al-‘ilya,” *al-Hilāl* 18, 3 (December 1, 1909), 131–65.

⁴⁸ “Khuṭab wa-durūs ṣāhib *al-Manār*,” *al-Manār* 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 907.

⁴⁹ “Kayfa nasta‘milu-l-ḥurriyya,” 545–48.

⁵⁰ “Sulṭat al-umma” is the title of an article by Yusuf Karam which was published in *al-Hilāl* 17, 4 (January 1, 1909), 222–30 and 17, 6 (March 1, 1909), 350–91.

nation would govern for itself and by itself (“ṣārat al-umma ḥākīmatan li-nafsihā wa-bi-nafsihā”): it was a sovereign nation. But at the same time, he mentioned the deputies as the representatives of the “Ottoman peoples” (*al-shu‘ūb al-‘uthmāniyya*).⁵¹ Here, the concept of “nation” is ambiguous. Is the nation composed of the Ottoman citizens, equal in rights and duties, or of the various Ottoman peoples? This question refers to how Rida and Zaydan interpreted equality and fraternity: who were supposed to be the brothers? Were they the individuals regardless of their social affiliation, or were they the confessional and ethnic groups? This leads us to our previous claim that it was difficult for Zaydan and Rida to think about social change and democracy. They were more concerned with equality between Ottoman “components” than between individuals and social groups.

No mercy for the enemies of the constitution

Rida and Zaydan, in short, analyzed the return of the Ottoman constitution as a revolution without violence—a revolution of *udabā’*—the reign of freedom, the advent of an Ottoman nation able to challenge European nations. This explains why they were so attached to the constitution. This led them to defend the CUP against accusations of anti-religious feeling or Turkish chauvinism. The first enemy of the CUP was the Muhammadan Society (*al-Jam‘iyya al-Muḥammadiyya*), or Society of Muhammadan Union, whose propaganda had been responsible for the counter-revolution in April 1909. It accused the Young Turks of tendencies toward secularism and Westernization, and called for the establishment of a true Islamic regime. Rida did not agree with this. The Muhammadan Society cannot be supported, he wrote, even if its program is the foundation of a government based on the Islamic law (*sharī‘a*).⁵² Rida suspected it of using religion as an excuse for fighting the constitution, and accused it of basing its claims and actions on traditional Hanafi jurisprudence. As a matter of fact, the Muhammadan Society was characteristic of everything he hated: the spirit of imitation (*taqlīd*) and “doctrinal fanaticism” (*al-ta‘aṣṣub li-l-madhhab*).⁵³ In his

⁵¹ *Al-Manār* 11, 11 (December 24, 1908), 861.

⁵² “Al-Dustūr wa-Jam‘iyyat al-Ittiḥād wa-l-Taraqqī,” 239.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

opinion, it embodied a conservative Islam. He thought, on the contrary, that the constitution was in accordance with the “true” Islam and the Quranic principle of consultation (*shūrā*).

Both Rida and Zaydan also disapproved of those who accepted the constitutional principle but accused the CUP of monopolizing power and of having a centralized and unionist policy beneficial only to the Turks. Until 1909–10, they kept their distance from Prince Sabaheddin and the Liberal Party (*Ḥizb al-Aḥrār*), who were in favor of decentralization. For these liberals, liberty should correspond to new relations between the central power and the provinces. In Rida and Zaydan’s opinion, this demand was not dangerous for the constitution, but came too early. Neither the state nor the nation was ready for it. The new regime first needed to be firmly established.⁵⁴ Rida and Zaydan’s criticism was even more severe with the *Jam‘iyyat al-Ikhā’ al-‘Arabī* (Committee of Arab Brotherhood), founded in Istanbul in August 1908 by Arab officials who were afraid of losing their positions under the new government and wished to assert the Arabs’ political rights within the empire. After the parliamentary elections in December 1908, they accused the CUP of favoring the Turkish element regardless of Ottoman fraternity.⁵⁵ For Rida and Zaydan, the Committee of Arab Brotherhood acted against Ottoman unity, and was responsible for alienating Arabs and Turks from each other.⁵⁶ Rida called it the “Committee of Division and Corruption” (*Jam‘iyyat al-Iftirāq wa-l-Tadallī*), as opposed to the Committee of Union and Progress (*Jam‘iyyat al-Ittiḥād wa-l-Taraqqī*).⁵⁷

Rida and Zaydan were conscious that the CUP had hegemonistic tendencies and had made errors, such as alienating the sultan. But let us repeat that they first considered it as the guardian of the constitution, together with the Ottoman army. For them, undermining the CUP was undermining the constitution. For this reason, they urged it to take measures to protect itself and the constitution, even if personal rights might be threatened by such a policy. Rashid Rida wrote in February 1909 that the most important reform the parliament should undertake

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 241; “al-Istāna al-‘ilya. Ḥālatuhā-l-siyāsiyya,” *al-Hilāl* 18, 3 (December 1, 1909), 147.

⁵⁵ Cf. Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements*, London: Frank Cass 1993, 61–65.

⁵⁶ See the report of Rida’s journey in Syria: *al-Manār* 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 936–53, and Zaydan’s article “al-‘Arab wa-l-Turk qabl al-dustūr wa-ba‘dahu,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 7 (April 1, 1909), 414–15.

⁵⁷ *Al-Manār* 11, 12 (January 22, 1909), 948.

was the reform of the police. He considered the new regime too tolerant of the criminals responsible for public disorders and of the dismissed officials who plotted against the constitutional government.⁵⁸ Zaydan went further. He explicitly justified the dictatorship of the CUP in the name of the constitution. His model was the revolutionary government in France in 1793. For him, the dictatorship of the CUP was virtuous: it was “the wise and fair men’s dictatorship” (*istibdād al-‘uqalā’ wa-l-‘ādilīn*) as well as a collegial dictatorship.⁵⁹ Consequently, for those who opposed Virtue, there was no means but Terror. After the events of April 1909, Zaydan legitimated repression against the enemies of the constitution. He did so in the name of the “public safety,” explicitly referring to the French main revolutionary *comités* in 1793–94: the Comité de Salut public and the Comité de Sûreté générale, in Arabic Lajnat al-Najāt wa-l-Amān. Zaydan considered that those who were responsible for anti-constitutional rioting deserved death or exile and that the police surveillance on the adversaries of the regime, in other words the “reactionaries” (*al-irtijā‘iyyūn*), was fully justified. In his opinion, this was not a return to the espionage (*al-tajassus*) that had characterized the Hamidian era, and that he had criticized: only those who had initiated espionage should be spied on.⁶⁰ Despite his justifications, Zaydan demanded exactly what he had condemned in the previous regime. The defense of the constitution was his priority because it could preserve what he considered even more important than freedom: the harmony between the various components of the empire. Repression and martial law were not good in principle, but they were, in his opinion, the only means to keep the new regime safe.

Such opinions were, of course, debated. Zaydan himself admitted in *al-Hilāl* that he had been criticized for his analogy between the French Terror and the situation in the Ottoman Empire in 1909, and for his justification of martial law. Was it in accordance with the constitution?, some readers wondered. Yet Zaydan did not change his opinion until at least 1910.⁶¹

⁵⁸ “Al-İslāh al-ahamm al-muqaddam fi-l-mamlaka al-‘uthmāniyya,” *al-Manār* 12, 1 (February 21, 1909), 27–31.

⁵⁹ “Al-‘Arab wa-l-Turk qabl al-dustūr wa-ba’dahu,” 416.

⁶⁰ “Jam’iyyat al-Ittihād wa-l-Taraqqī wa-l-inqilāb al-‘uthmāni,” *al-Hilāl* 17, 8 (May 1, 1909), 491; “al-Istāna al-‘ilya,” 158–60.

⁶¹ See “al-Ḥukm al-‘urfī wa-l-‘Arab” (“The Martial Law and the Arabs”), *al-Hilāl* 18, 5 (February 1, 1910), 285–89.

Interestingly enough, in the period when freedom was restricted in the Ottoman Empire in order to keep the new regime safe, control over the press in Egypt was reinforced because of violent attacks against the new prime minister, Butrus Pasha Ghali. These attacks came especially from *al-Liwā'*, a very influential newspaper founded in 1900 by the father of Egyptian nationalism, Mustafa Kamil (1874–1908). Butrus Ghali was unpopular in Egyptian nationalist circles because he had signed the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium agreement in Sudan in 1898 and presided over a special court created in 1906 to judge Egyptian peasants responsible for the death of a British military officer in Dinshaway. As he was a Copt, the attacks against him had a religious slant and were particularly violent. He was assassinated in 1910. This opposition was used to justify, as early as March 1909, the reactivation of an old press law adopted in 1881 at the time of 'Urabi's rebellion.⁶² In private, Zaydan, though himself a journalist, agreed with this decision because some of the press had carried insults and slanders to excess.⁶³ Rida had roughly the same views, but was more critical. Like Zaydan, he condemned *al-Liwā'*, whose attacks against the Egyptian government encouraged violence and insecurity. But he also worried about the journalists' independence, and indirectly criticized the British occupiers, whose only positive contribution in Egypt, the freedom of the press, was being threatened.⁶⁴ Drawing on the Egyptian experience, Zaydan and Rida mainly feared a "wrong use" of freedom, if not "the excess of freedom" (*al-taṭarruf fi'l-ḥurriyya*). This expression was very ambiguous: it could justify repression. But Zaydan and Rida also understood that journalists had to respect rules and, more generally, that people had to be educated to experience true freedom.

⁶² For a general view of this period in Egypt, see P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 1991, 4th ed. About the press law of 1881, see *ibid.*, 208; Jurji Zaydan, "Ḥurriyyat al-ṣiḥāfa fi Inkiltirā wa-Miṣr," *Mukhtārāt Jurji Zaydān*, vol. III, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Hilāl 1921, 119–20 (an article first published in *al-Hilāl* in 1907); 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi'i, *al-Thawra al-'urābiyya wa-l-iḥtilāl al-inglizī*, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Nahḍa 1937, 161–62.

⁶³ Jurji Zaydan's letter to his son Emile, March 25, 1909 (unpublished).

⁶⁴ "Tanbih al-jarā'id al-sūriyya ilā-l-i'tibār bi-tārikh al-jarā'id al-miṣriyya," *al-Manār* 12, 1 (February 21, 1909), 32–40; "Qānūn al-maṭbū'āt wa-taqyid al-ṣiḥāfa bi-Miṣr," *al-Manār* 12, 2 (March 22, 1909), 160.

*From supporting the Committee of Union and Progress
to Arab nationalism*

Jurji Zaydan's support for the CUP ceased during the 1910s in the context of Tripoli and the Balkan wars and the development of Jewish colonization in Palestine.⁶⁵ Rida's support might have stopped earlier, after his project of opening an institute of an Islamic institute in Istanbul failed. Their perspectives started to change: instead of the Ottoman Empire, they began to identify with what they now called the "Arab world" (*al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī*). Rida became an advocate of Prince Sabaheddin's ideas about decentralization and, in late 1912, was a founder of the Administrative Decentralization Ottoman Party (*Ḥizb al-Lāmarkaziyya al-Idāriyya al-Uṭhmānī*) in Cairo.⁶⁶ Zaydan went through a similar evolution, but never became a member of this party. As usual, he kept aloof from direct political involvement and just lobbied for economic and cultural reforms in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. His interest in cultural and economic matters led him nevertheless to express a very clear opinion about two major questions for the future of the Arab world: the Lebanese and Palestinian questions. He demanded that the autonomous *sandjak* of Mount Lebanon also include the Mediterranean coastal plain and the Biqa', and highlighted the dangers of Jewish colonization in Palestine.⁶⁷ In these matters, his opinions did not differ from those of other reformers involved in politics. Interestingly enough, an article he wrote about the history of Zionism was reproduced in *al-Manār*.⁶⁸

Yet it is during this period, in 1912, that Rida organized a campaign against Zaydan's major book, the *History of Islamic Civilization* (*Tāriḫ al-tamaddun al-islāmī*), which had first been published ten years earlier, in 1902. Rida did not himself criticize Zaydan's book. This was done by Shibli Nu'mani (1857–1914), a prominent Indian 'ālim from the

⁶⁵ Dupont, *Ğurğī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 604–26.

⁶⁶ For a general view of the party's action and program, see Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements*, 121–34.

⁶⁷ "Jabal Lubnān," second part, *al-Hilāl* 21, 6 (March 1, 1913), 323–32; "Filastīn," *al-Hilāl* 22 (October 1913–June 1914), 43–48, 123–31, 177–88, 264–72, 345–54, 513–21 (see particularly 518–20).

⁶⁸ "Al-Şahyūniyya: tāriḫuhā wa-a' māluḥā," *al-Hilāl* 22, 2 (November 1, 1913), 92–97; *al-Manār* 17 (1914), 385–90.

Seminary of 'Ulamā' (Nadwat al-'Ulamā') in Lucknow,⁶⁹ whom both Zaydan and Rida knew well. Zaydan and Nu'mani had met when the latter had visited Cairo in 1892, and they had kept in touch since that year.⁷⁰ Rida himself has just been in Lucknow when Nu'mani's attack against the *History of Islamic Civilization* was published in *al-Manār* during the first semester of 1912. He was visiting the Seminary of 'Ulamā', whose aims were very close to those of the Seminary of Mission and Guidance (Dār al-Da'wa wa-l-Irshād) he himself had just founded in Cairo.⁷¹

Nu'mani's criticism of Zaydan's work was very long and polemical.⁷² It was actually more an attack than a literary or scientific criticism. The debated issue was the attitude of the Umayyad dynasty toward Islam. This was not only a historical issue, but also a political one regarding the relations of the emerging Arab nation with the other Muslims, especially the Turks.⁷³ Nu'mani did not agree with Zaydan's interpretation of the Umayyads as Arab chauvinists. If the Umayyads had been as Zaydan described them, Nu'mani argued, they would have acted against Islamic unity, which was inconceivable from the first Arab Muslim dynasty. Zaydan was accused of deliberately distorting history and of despising the Arabs. He was finally accused of being one of the hated *mutafarnijūn* because he ignored the methodology of Islamic sciences and imitated the Orientalist scholars. For Nu'mani, Zaydan was nothing but a creature of the Europeans. Nu'mani rejected his right to write about Islamic matters altogether.

Rida had never been so critical of Zaydan, but he fundamentally shared Nu'mani's opinion. He had always believed that Zaydan lacked the appropriate education to write about the history of Islam. In the context of the 1910s, his fear was that the Turks would use the *History of Islamic Civilization*, which had just been translated into their

⁶⁹ Christian Troll, "Muḥammad Shibli Nu'mānī (1857–1914) and the Reform of Muslim Religious Education," in Nicole Grandin and Marc Gaborieau, eds., *Madrassa. La transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman*, Paris: Editions Arguments 1997, 145–57.

⁷⁰ Dupont, *Ġurġi Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 301–02, 663–64.

⁷¹ See *al-Manār* 15, 3 (March 19, 1912), 225–26.

⁷² It was published in several issues of *al-Manār* between January and June 1912: *al-Manār* 15 (1912), 58–67, 121–28, 270–80, 342–52, 415–27.

⁷³ See Werner Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte: Die Umayyaden im Urteil arabischer Autoren des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Beirut: German Oriental Institute 1977.

language,⁷⁴ to accuse the Arabs of undermining Islamic unity and to justify an anti-Arab policy. In his opinion, it was becoming clear that Zaydan could not be a member of that “*Ḥizb al-Iṣlāḥ*” or “Reform Party” the rise of which he observed in the Islamic countries.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The Young Turks Revolution in 1908 led men of the *nahḍa* to develop their ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity in connection with their main concerns: the reform and progress of society. For Jurji Zaydan and Rashid Rida, liberty was first of all a state of mind. They insisted on “intellectual freedom” (*ḥurriyyat al-fikr, al-ḥurriyya al-fikriyya*) and “the reopening of the doors of the legal interpretation” (*ijtihād*). This meant rejecting the spirit of imitation (*taqlīd*) and examining religious issues in the light of science and reason. Liberty was also a political matter. Reformists (or reformers) demanded rights in order to achieve their program. They needed freedom of the press and freedom of association. They also needed the freedom to found private schools. They were involved in the shaping of a “nation which claimed power and sovereignty. But as “nation” was not a well-defined concept, they did not have yet a clear idea of what the national representation was.

While expecting liberty, they also feared it. They did not consider the “uneducated” (*al-juhalā*), the “masses” (*al-‘amma*), or the “common people” (*al-sha‘b*) ready to use it. They feared social disorder, popular mobilization, moral corruption, and atheism. They were afraid of anarchy as well as ethnic and religious troubles in the Ottoman Empire. These fears could lead them to justify repression and the restriction of personal rights. They were partly conscious of these contradictions: They admitted that martial law was not in accordance with a constitutional regime, and felt that the new army’s influence in the political life could be dangerous for freedom.

⁷⁴ A translation of the two first volumes had been published in 1910–11 in the *Ikdām*, one of the most famous dailies in Istanbul.

⁷⁵ On the “*Ḥizb al-Iṣlāḥ*,” see Nu‘mani’s necrology in *al-Manār*: “*al-Shaykh Shibli wa-Ḥizb al-Iṣlāḥ bayn al-jāmidīn wa-l-mutafarnijīn*,” *al-Manār* 18, 3 (April 14, 1915), 233–38. For further developments about this affair and Rida’s general perception of Zaydan’s works, see Dupont, *Ḡurḡī Zaydān (1861–1914)*, 650–74.

One reason why it was difficult for them to define liberty and democracy was the diversity of the Ottoman Empire: they were less concerned with the equality of individuals than with that between ethnic and religious “components” of the empire. Their fears were also linked to the moralizing nature of their mission. They hated the imitators of the past as well as the imitators of the Westerners. They rejected customs and traditions but created new intellectual and moral standards in order to keep their national or religious identity. This is particularly clear in Rida’s thought. He was often more critical than Zaydan, and was more polemical. But he was also an apologist for Islam. He acknowledged that tradition could be criticized, but not the sources of Islam. He was not ready to accept the scholarly credentials of someone like Zaydan, whose studies of the history of the Arabs and the Muslims were not based upon the methodology of the religious sciences.

Inside the reformist modernist movement, various trends were appearing, and polemics were growing, varying according to the extent to which a break with tradition and the imitation of the Westerners was acceptable. A liberal train of thought was emerging, alongside Islamism, and both were confronted with new ideologies such as socialism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NAHDA REVISITED: SOCIALISM AND RADICALISM IN BEIRUT AND MOUNT LEBANON, 1900–1914

Ilham Khuri-Makdisi

Setting the stage: the Ferrer play of 1909

In the last days of October 1909, a play celebrating the life and work of Francisco Ferrer was performed in Beirut.¹ A Spanish social and political activist whose ideas combined elements of anarchism and socialism, Ferrer had been executed three days earlier. A pedagogue, he had created a modern curriculum and established modern schools in Barcelona based on the principle of “class harmony,” a project very similar to the ideas behind the popular universities that appeared in France and Italy at the same time.² Ferrer’s ideas enjoyed tremendous popularity throughout the world,³ both in terms of his pedagogy and his ideology, which combined freemasonry, freethinking, a strong class consciousness, anarchism, and anticlericalism. He became an icon of the world’s leftist movements in 1909, when he was falsely accused by the Spanish church and condemned to death for his alleged involvement in an anarchist “terrorist” attack. His trial and conviction triggered demonstrations and protests throughout the world, from Italy to Argentina.⁴

In Beirut, the project of a play commemorating Ferrer’s life and condemning his death was improvised on the spot. Written in four hours by Daud Muja’is and Emile Khuri,⁵ the script was promptly memorized by

¹ “Li-Ferrer,” *al-Hurriyya* (October 30, 1909), 230.

² The first school established by Francisco Ferrer opened in Barcelona in 1901.

³ Including parts of the Ottoman Empire. In Salonica, a big demonstration took place in solidarity with Ferrer in October 1909. See Paul Dumont, “Naissance d’un socialisme ottoman,” in Paul Dumont, *Du socialisme ottoman à l’internationalisme anatolien*, Istanbul: Les Editions ISIS 1997, 73–84.

⁴ For an analysis of this episode, see René Bianco, *L’Affaire Ferrer*, Paris: Centre National et Musée Jean Jaurès 1989.

⁵ “Masrahiyyat Francisco Ferrer,” *al-Hurriyya* (November 13, 1909), 253–8.

the actors. Remarkably, the cast consisted of 60 people, most of whom must have been non-professional actors recruited locally. The leading role, however, was played by ‘Aziz ‘Eid, a well-known Syrian actor based in Egypt who had a predilection for controversial roles.⁶ The play, which Muja‘is proudly branded the first of its kind throughout the world, was performed by Jam‘iyyat Iḥyā’ al-Tamthīl al-‘Arabī on the stage of the New Theater.⁷ According to the organizers,

it was greatly appreciated by the people who filled its seats... the history of the last Spanish revolution was acted and that of the martyr Ferrer, his imprisonment and condemnation, with an explanation of his principles and those of true socialism... the play was written by two local authors so that it serve as a school for the people (*al-sha‘b*) who still ignore everything about the principle of general freedom (*ḥurriyya ‘umūmiyya*), and of general brotherhood.⁸

In the first act of the play, “Ferrer” appeared on stage draped in a banner covered with slogans (“Liberty, Fraternity, Equality,” “No poor man ever hungered without a rich man profiting from it,” and “Long live the free popular schools”).⁹ During that act, “Ferrer” gave a speech on socialism (*khuṭba ishtirākiyya*) that lasted around ten pages, while “the people” on stage “kept interrupting him with screams of excitement... asking for freedom and justice, and protesting against the Marrakech campaign.”¹⁰ At one point, the battle between the “soldiers” and “the people” on stage became so heated that some actors were slightly injured.

Public intellectuals gave speeches during intermission and after the play.¹¹ The poet Shibli Mallat, owner of *al-Waṭan* newspaper, recited a poem entitled “The Eternity of Ferrer” (“*Khulūd Freira*”); Felix Faris, owner of *Lisān al-Ittiḥād* and a well-known member of the Committee of Union and Progress’s local branch, explained what socialism was.

⁶ For more information on ‘Aziz ‘Eid, see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, “Theater and Radical Politics in Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria, 1860–1914,” *CCAS Occasional Papers* (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Fall 2006).

⁷ This was highly unlikely; in fact, there was a “Ferrer” play performed at Gaité Montparnasse in Paris in October 1909, and there were probably quite a few performances in Spain, Italy, and South America that preceded the Beirut play. See Bianco, *L’Affaire Ferrer*, 20.

⁸ “Masraḥiyyat Francisco Ferrer.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 254. The “Marrakech campaign” referred to the Spanish-Moroccan war launched by Spain in 1908 and against which there had been many demonstrations in Spain in July 1908.

¹¹ All seem to have been in *fushā* rather than colloquial Arabic.

There were other speakers as well. The audience was delighted; “the play,” we are told, “had won a place in their emotions and thoughts which no other play before had ever achieved.”¹² The troupe was asked to perform it again on November 21, upon the request of a large audience of literati.¹³ It is unclear whether this second performance ever took place. What is known, though, is that members of the clergy—most probably the Maronite clergy and the Jesuits, although they are not directly named—were extremely upset by the performance’s strong attack on the Spanish clergy for its persecution of Ferrer; it even seems that “il y eut de nombreuses protestations; et acteurs et auteurs furent cités devant le tribunal correctionnel, qui les acquitta. L’affaire eut du retentissement.”¹⁴

The performance of the Ferrer play in Beirut was not an isolated expression of support for leftist ideals.¹⁵ Rather, as this chapter will show, it was the work of an entire network of radical leftist intellectuals in Syria that emerged in Beirut and Mount Lebanon in the first years of the twentieth century, and was active there until around 1914. By “network,” I mean local and transnational institutions, organizations, and personal connections, which established a system for the circulation of people, information, and ideas. Such a concept suggests intersections, overlaps, exchanges, and encounters between members of the same and different networks. It incorporates both the formal and the informal, the local and the international, and, while it implies a certain cohesiveness among its members, it is one which is not overly deterministic, but rather leaves room for human agency. By the time of the Ferrer play in 1909, members of this network were actively promoting ideas of social justice, had developed a discourse that viewed workers, if not as a class per se, at least as a prominent social category or sub-category deserving special attention, were fiercely anticlerical, identified with leftist European icons and internationalist symbols—for instance, by celebrating International Workers’ Day on May 1—and generally viewed themselves

¹² “Masraḥiyyat Francisco Ferrer,” 258.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Khairallah T. Khairallah, *La Syrie*, Paris: E. Leroux 1912, 110.

¹⁵ On the emergence of the theater as a central organ in the formulation and dissemination of radical leftist ideas, and, more generally, the nature of the relationship between social and political contestation and the theater, see Khuri-Makdisi, “Theater and Radical Politics.”

and were viewed as radicals and/or socialists.¹⁶ This network recruited members in Syria and beyond, and had the ability to disseminate its views locally and globally through its periodicals, *al-Nūr* (Alexandria, 1904–08) and *al-Hurriyya* (Beirut, 1909–10?). Furthermore, throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, it had the power to move from theory to practice by sponsoring theatrical performances, establishing free reading-rooms, founding schools for workers, and mounting industrial and agricultural exhibitions that promoted local labor.

Before analyzing the ideas and activities promoted by members of this network, it would be useful to explain what this chapter means by radicalism, and to contextualize it within a larger framework. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of radical ideas began circulating among various segments of the populations of Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, and many other cities within the Ottoman world and beyond. These ideas, which are best described as selective adaptations of socialist and anarchist principles, included calls for social justice, land redistribution (and the seizure of church property), workers' rights, mass secular education, and a general challenge to the existing social and political order, at home and abroad. Significantly, such causes were usually combined with seemingly less radical demands, such as the establishment of a constitutional and representative government, freedom of speech, the curbing of religious and clerical authority, and a criticism of European political and economic encroachments. Topics of social justice that constituted central themes in radical thought were almost never tackled independently or in isolation from larger issues, but rather went hand in hand with a broader reformist agenda that included many of the aforementioned causes.

The reasons for the articulation and popularity of certain radical discourses are complex and multifold. Suffice it to say, at this point, that in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as throughout the world, radicalism was linked to the emergence of new social classes—the middle class and intellectuals—and the attempts by some of their members the working class, and especially intellectuals, to forge an alliance with the work-

¹⁶ See, for instance, *Lisān al-Ḥāl*'s criticism of local newspapers for "taking Ferrer's side without knowing anything about his life except that he is a symbol of anarchists." The paper insinuated that the local publicists and intellectuals who celebrated Ferrer's life achievements and mourned his death (i.e. *al-Hurriyya* and the organizers of the Ferrer play) had specific political sympathies and biases that were well known: *Lisān al-Ḥāl* (10 November/28 October, 1909), 1.

ing classes. It emerged out of the struggle for the right of non-elites to interpret and position themselves vis-à-vis contemporary local, as well as global, social, and political movements and events. Radicals explicitly challenged existing class structures and the right and legitimacy of the “traditional” ruling classes to rule, a challenge that took on a very specific form as the formation of this middle class in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and elsewhere occurred concomitantly with the emergence of mass politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, this chapter will show that, while this local dimension is central to understanding the emergence of radicalism, the articulation of, and engagement with, radical ideas in Beirut and throughout the world was undeniably connected to global trends.

And now to go back to the network that is the subject of this chapter. The ideas and praxis of this network’s members shed light on a hitherto unexplored aspect of the *nahḍa* or more generally the “Liberal Age,” and challenge the standard teleological “classification” of the intellectual ferment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as comfortably constituting “the antechamber of nationalism” in which radicalism, socialism, and leftist movements were absent in Syria before 1919. In fact, judging from the ideas and activities of this one specific network, radicalism seems to have been alive and well in fin-de-siècle Beirut and Mount Lebanon, with individuals and networks generating and responding to a hybrid and impure form of leftist radical worldview—some kind of “package” combining elements of socialism, anarchism, scientific positivism, and notions of social justice—that was in fact quite comparable to that articulated in many other parts of the world, and especially in the “semi-periphery” around the Mediterranean or in South America.¹⁷

This chapter analyzes this radical package promoted by the group that put on the Ferrer performance. It focuses on the network’s treatment of certain key themes—among them, workers’ education, exploitation, social justice, class consciousness, and anticlericalism—and these themes’ progressive radicalization. It argues that, by 1910, the group in question had inclined more consciously to the left, fine-tuning its ideas to contemporary European and international leftist ideologies and symbols.

¹⁷ For more information on Beirut, as well as on the radical scenes in Alexandria and Cairo, see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories: Radicals and Radicalism in Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria, 1860–1914*, Berkeley: University of California Press forthcoming.

At the same time, the chapter underlines the very local dimension and resonance of certain themes promoted by this network: its criticism of local clergies and missionaries; its views regarding the specific administrative status of Mount Lebanon between 1900 and 1914; the effects of the 1908 constitutional revolution in the Ottoman Empire; and European economic and political encroachments in Syria. But before analyzing the ideas put forth by this network, let us begin by introducing its members, and drawing a sociological portrait of this group.

An introduction to the members of this network

The main protagonists of this network revolved around Daud Muja'is and the two periodicals he founded and directed, *al-Nūr* and *al-Ḥurriyya*. Virtually nothing is known about Muja'is himself, and almost all the information on him and on this leftist network emanates from his publications.¹⁸ One of the very rare exceptions is Khairallah Khairallah's *La Syrie* (1912), whose author, who had at some point been a member of the same network before distancing himself from it by 1912, devoted a mere five pages to "socialist ideas [which] had their echo and their partisans [and] had, for a moment, their popularity and their triumph" in Syria between 1904 and 1912.¹⁹ As for Faris Mushriq, the owner of *al-Nūr*, the only known facts are that he had emigrated to the United States but had come back to Mount Lebanon in the first few years of the century and established "Şannīn," its first Masonic lodge, in 1904.²⁰

¹⁸ Philippe de Tarrazi, whose bibliographic reference on periodicals and their contributors is rather comprehensive, mentioned Muja'is fairly briefly and provided minimal information about his two periodicals. However, Tarrazi quoted Muja'is's sayings on the press in the first few pages of his compilation of the Arabic press. Assuming Tarrazi's order reflects a hierarchy in the author's mind, then Muja'is and many other members of our leftist network ranked fairly high. See Philippe de Tarrazi, *Tārīkh al-ṣaḥāfa*, vol. I, part 1, Beirut: Dar Sadir n.d. [1913], 9–14.

¹⁹ Khairallah, *La Syrie*, 110.

²⁰ By 1904, there existed at least two Masonic lodges in Beirut: the first one (which was also the first in the region) had been founded in 1862 under the patronage of the Grand Orient de France, while a second Beirut lodge was established in 1889, this time following the Scottish rite. These lodges were extremely popular with both Beirut and Lebanese literati and liberal elites regardless of their denominations, and they "functioned as a sort of social and cultural club where they could meet, get to know each other, and exchange and discuss ideas": Carole Hakim-Dowek, "Origins of the Lebanese national idea, 1840–1914," D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1997, 260. See also Shahin Makariyos, *Tārīkh al-māsūniyya al-'amaliyya*, n.p.: n.d. [1984].

The network in question included a number of individuals who contributed articles to *al-Nūr* or *al-Ḥurriyya*, or whose works and ideas were cited on the pages of these periodicals. Among them were Jirji Niqula Baz²¹ and Khairallah Khairallah;²² Ameen Rihani [Amin al-Rihani] was also involved with this group, while in America, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, or Egypt. Rihani was in touch with most of its members, corresponded with them, and shared and inspired many of their ideas.²³ In fact, *al-Nūr* and *al-Ḥurriyya*'s main intellectual figures of references were Ameen Rihani, Farah Antun,²⁴ and Leo Tolstoi.²⁵ The first two figures were part of the leftist "canon" in Syria and Egypt at the time. As for Tolstoi, his writings and ideas were popular and familiar in the Arab world through Arabic and French translations, and were regularly discussed in "mainstream" reformist, as well as more radical, periodicals.²⁶ He

²¹ Jirji Baz was a doctor and a graduate from The Syrian Protestant College (SPC) (M.D. graduate of 1883). The author of various biographies and the founder of the periodical *al-Ḥasnā*, he regularly contributed articles to a number of periodicals, including *al-Muqataḥ* and *al-Hilāl*. Baz was a prominent member of various social organizations in Beirut.

²² Other members included Iskandar 'Azar, who had been a member of the Beirutī Lijnat al-Isḫāḥ (Reform Committee), founded by Miḍḥat Pasha in the 1870s; Shibli Mallat, a poet and founder of *al-Waṭan* (Beirut), and the author of a long poem on Ferrer; Felix Farris, founder of *Lisān al-Ittiḥād* (Beirut) and a participant in the Ferrer affair, with whom the authors of *al-Nūr* and specifically *al-Ḥurriyya* constantly engaged, but did not always see eye to eye; Sayyid Husayn Wasfī Rida (*al-Ḥurriyya*'s correspondent in Cairo), the brother of the prominent Muslim reformer Rashid Rida; and Shibli Damos, founder, in 1898, of the periodical *al-Isḫāḥ*, which came out in New York (date unknown). He had resided in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the early 1900s. See Khuri-Makdisi, "Theater and Radical Politics."

²³ See Rihani's correspondence with these various figures, in Amin al-Rihani, *al-Rihānī wa-mu'āṣirūhu: rasā'il al-udabā' ilayhi*, collected and introduced by Albert al-Rihani, Beirut: Dār al-Rihānī fi al-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr 1966; as well as Amin al-Rihani, *Rasā'il 1896-1940*, ed. Albert al-Rihani, Beirut: Dār al-Rihānī li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1959. See also "al-Tamthīl al-'arabī," *al-Ḥurriyya* (October 9, 1909), 180-81, and "Ṣadiqunā Amin effendī al-Rihānī," *al-Ḥurriyya* (November 6, 1909), 242-43. Although critical of some of Rihani's ideas, this second article clearly reflects his influence and the degree to which the network around *al-Ḥurriyya* engaged (and sometimes disagreed) with the well-known author.

²⁴ Members of this network dedicated articles and speeches to Farah Antun. See, for example Jirji Baz's lecture entitled "al-Ādāb," *al-Nūr* (October 15, 1904), 284.

²⁵ Much of Tolstoi's work was available to members of the network in French as well as Arabic. By 1904, at least one Arabic translation of Tolstoi's main writings (that of Salim Qab'in) had been published in Cairo in 1904, under the title *Injīl Tolstoi wa-Diyānatuhu*. See Yusuf Iliān Sarkis, *Mu'jam al-maṭbū'āt al-'arabiyya wa-l-mu'arraba*, Cairo: Maṭba'at Sarkis 1346-49 [1928-30], 1492. Other translations were published by Syrian immigrants in Brazil.

²⁶ See Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories*, chapters I and II.

was generally venerated throughout the world by members of various radical leftist movements, and most specifically anarchists.

This group was more than the sum of its parts: its power and identity did not emerge solely from the *individual* weight of its members, but also from the group as a unit. Indeed, its members seem to have functioned as a group socially, intellectually, and politically.²⁷ It is also almost certain that each of these figures was affiliated to a Masonic lodge; they also were affiliated to the Shams al-Birr society, which seems to have been a progressive Christian Sunday school not devoid of Freemason connections.²⁸ Most of these individuals belonged to the same social class: an educated elite, but a class “educated beyond its financial means,” since its members were not independently well-off and seemed to lack the opportunity to become so, and sometimes even to find regular employment. Like many *nahḍa* figures, most members of this group did not belong to the merchant class, although they often found patrons to subsidize their literary and political endeavors. Rather, they themselves were occasionally teachers at one of Beirut’s numerous schools, or clerks at a bank or a company; their chances of landing a job that would allow them to use their skills beyond clerical or journalistic paths seem to have been very limited, since, in order to make ends meet, they offered their services for writing, editing, and translation.²⁹

One important characteristic of this group is that its members had the power to disseminate their ideas. First, as individuals, they were very much connected to a broader reformist network in Beirut and

²⁷ For instance, they all gathered in Beirut in 1910, at a ceremony attended by 250 people commemorating the life and death of Salma Nasif Trad, a highly educated woman and a passionate defender of women’s rights. During this event, virtually every person associated with the Ferrer play of 1909 gave a speech. See Tarrazi, *Tārikh al-ṣaḥāfa*, vol. 1, section 2, 184.

²⁸ According to Philipp, Shams al-Birr was the Beirut branch of the YMCA. Founded in 1869 by Nimr and Makariyos, it counted many SPC students among its members, as well as Jurji Zaydan, Cornelius Van Dyck, Edwin Lewis, and Ya’qub Sarruf. See Thomas Philipp, *Ḡurġi Zaidan: His Life and Thought*, Beirut: Orient Institut 1979, 22. Whether or not it was connected to Freemasonry, Shams al-Birr does not seem to have been a “conventional” YMCA, since at one Sunday school meeting, various lectures were given on the constitution and people’s support for it (including a speech by Shibli Damos). See *al-Ḥurriyya* (February 5, 1910), 440.

²⁹ See, for instance, the following advertisement that appeared in *al-Ḥurriyya* in 1909: “This office is prepared to translate and draft various letters and articles, legal, commercial or political, to and from Arabic, Turkish, French, English and Italian. The administration of this periodical will be the go-between with that office”: *al-Ḥurriyya* (January 1909), 360. This advertisement appeared time and again on the pages of *al-Ḥurriyya*, and in more than one language.

Mount Lebanon, and Jirji Baz and Iskandar ‘Azar in particular were constant presences on the Beirut literary, social, and cultural scene, giving numerous talks during school plays, and inaugural speeches for charitable institutions and ceremonies honoring various literati. They moved as comfortably between social and intellectual elites as between more common mortals and, in that sense, were public intellectuals of a middle caliber who were equally visible in low-profile social gatherings and on the grander, high-brow *nahḍa* literary scene. From their activities in benevolent societies, they seem to have come in contact with members of the working classes, and were often able to disseminate their ideas to them through speeches and lectures. The picture that emerges, therefore, is certainly not that of a marginal or marginalized group, but rather of a close-knit one with ties to a much larger network with established intellectual and social legitimacy, whose own members were very visible on the social activist scene of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, constantly moved between these two social and geographical spheres, and founded and sat on committees for various benevolent institutions, be they educational, “moral,” or medical.

In many ways, then, members of this group were intellectually and socially close to more mainstream *nahḍa* figures, and shared many features with them: they contributed to periodicals and also founded their own; they profoundly believed in the theater as one of the highest forms of social art, wrote plays, and often acted in amateur performances;³⁰ they participated in trans-communal projects;³¹ and they adhered to the credo of *nahḍa* reformists urging a general reform that focused, first and foremost, on the need for an Ottoman constitution as well as educational, social, and religious reforms. Hence, the basic premises of this group were deeply familiar in their promotion of a “reform package” to the more mainstream *nahḍa* reformists, and this must have insured a certain receptivity of this group’s ideas among larger *nahḍa* audiences. And yet, as we shall see, members of that network were clearly more radical in the elaboration and application of their thoughts.

³⁰ *Al-Nūr* was a passionate promoter of the theater and conceived of it as the artistic form with the highest social relevance. See “Taqrīd wa-intiqād,” *al-Nūr* (July 15, 1905), 30–32.

³¹ The Christian Iskandar ‘Azar, for instance, made donations to the Beirut Muslim benevolent association al-Maqāshid. See [no author], *al-Fajr al-ṣadiq li-Jam’iyyat al-Maqāshid al-Khayriyyah fi Bayrūt: a’māl al-sana al-ūlā*, Beirut: Maṭba‘at Thamarāt al-Funūn 1297 [1880], 10–26.

The emergence and development of a discourse on workers

When *al-Nūr* was first published in 1904 in Alexandria,³² workers initially appeared on its pages (and later on *al-Ḥurriyya*'s) as subtexts to three main rubrics that remained central topics of discussion until 1910: the call for the establishment of secular and free educational institutions; the need to remedy a local economy in crisis; and the desire to warn against and try and curb European encroachment and vested interests in Syria politically, economically, and religiously.³³ In fact, these three projects were deeply connected. By 1904, *al-Nūr* had begun supporting the establishment of night schools for the education of "youth whose work does not allow them to study during daytime."³⁴ Although workers were not yet named (or conceived of) as constituting a distinct class or even category, this was the first articulation of a discourse that, if it did not exactly single them out, at least carved a discursive space in which to place workers and workers' education. Significantly, *al-Nūr*'s views on mass education differed somewhat from

³² Why would a self-described "Lebanese" periodical, presented as loyal to the Ottoman state and whose main interest initially lay so blatantly in Mount Lebanon, be issued in Alexandria, while its director and owner were in Mount Lebanon and it maintained an administrative office there? There are many possible explanations for this choice. First, by issuing their periodical in Egypt, Syrian radicals would remain free to publish whatever they wished in it, rather than be constrained by restrictions imposed by the *mutaṣarrif*, or face the wrath of the Maronite clergy and the Jesuits. See "Bayn al-manāzir wa-l-manāra," *al-Nūr* (April 15, 1906), 450. Second, *al-Nūr* wished to be a periodical for Syrians and Lebanese throughout the world; in fact, it seems to have succeeded in being so, judging from its subscribers in Brazil, Haiti, and Mount Lebanon. It was therefore very important for it to insure the regular delivery of its issues throughout the world, as well as have access to Syrian periodicals from the *mahjar*. The various postal services in Alexandria were more capable of offering such a guarantee than their Beirut counterparts, since they were not under the severe scrutiny of the *maktubji* (the Ottoman censor). Thus, Egypt was to *al-Nūr* what it was for a great many Syrian periodicals: it partly served as an extension of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, allowing for the creation of a forum of discussion and action that transcended the geographical boundaries of Syria. Of course, Egypt was a great deal more, though, as Syrians there were deeply immersed in its life, and their ideas, even when they pertained exclusively to Syria, were profoundly shaped by their Egyptian context.

³³ A word about the nomenclature pertaining to workers (*al-'ummāl*) on the pages of *al-Nūr* and *al-Ḥurriyya*: the singular *'āmil* and *fā'il* were used interchangeably to refer to a worker. The term *ṭabaqa 'āmila* ("working class") was in use by 1910. See K. Khairallah, "Risāla fi uṣūl al-'umrān," *al-Ḥurriyya* (March 5, 1910), 501. I do not recall seeing this term used earlier. Another term in usage was *abnā' al-sha'b* ("the people's sons"), but it had a different, more populist, connotation.

³⁴ As reported in the night school's manifesto: *al-Nūr* (December 1, 1904), 444.

the standard *nahḍa* views on the matter. Unlike other *nahḍa* reformists who generally called for the education of “society,” an amorphous and unspecified general audience, *al-Nūr*’s network made it clear that, by establishing night schools, it specifically targeted the education of workers and their children. However, “workers” were placed in a category dependent on two other categories in need of education: the poor and the middle classes. Indeed, workers were to be educated primarily for two reasons: first, because they were poor and the poor needed to be educated; and second, because workers were part of an unnamed and vague entity whose second half was the middle class. The fate of the working class was hence connected to that of the middle class, and educating one necessarily entailed educating the other.

From the beginning, *al-Nūr* displayed a certain social awareness which, while not class based, was to a certain extent quite progressive and critical of social inequalities. The call for educating both the urban and rural poor, and specifically the working poor, was made on the pages of *al-Nūr* from 1904 onward and remained a constant topic throughout the period under study. Almost every issue carried an article arguing for the need to reform education, establish free and civil schools in order to educate the poor, and found associations to help the needy. One article published in 1905 reminded *al-Nūr*’s readers of society’s real prerogatives: “we are in need of real schools that teach us our needs and how to respond to them; we are in need of shelters (*malāji*) and hospitals, and most pressingly for industrial and agricultural associations to decrease the number of poor.”³⁵ In fact, by 1907, *al-Nūr* was even suggesting a taxation plan and a new budget that would allow for the establishment of schools specifically for needy students.³⁶ This discourse can partly be explained given the context of a perceived economic recession. We know from a number of contemporary sources that businesses in Beirut and Mount Lebanon had gone bankrupt and that the number of poor was visibly on the rise. However, it should be pointed out that the picture of economic recession so vividly painted by *al-Nūr*³⁷ was somewhat

³⁵ “Al-Awqāf,” *al-Nūr* (July 15, 1905), 6–7.

³⁶ See “Swisra fi Lubnān,” *al-Nūr* (January 1, 1907), 8.

³⁷ The number of articles on pauperism and bankruptcy that appeared in *al-Nūr* around 1905 is indicative of a general sense of economic malaise in Syria, and specifically Beirut. See for example the article “Ma’rad al-iflās” (“The exhibition of bankruptcy”), *al-Nūr* (July 15, 1905), 6–7, or the rubric “Miskīn al-ḍa’if” (“pity the weak”) which appeared regularly, as well as the rubric “al-Masākīn,” on poor migrants from the countryside. The language used to describe poverty could be quite graphic. In one case, the

inflated, in the sense that poverty and bankruptcies were not exactly new in the early 1900s. In fact, *al-Nūr* might have “rediscovered poverty,” just as poverty had been rediscovered in late Victorian England by Charles Booth and a number of social reformists.³⁸ Furthermore, the reality of this recession is itself questionable: indeed, it seems that various parts of Syria, and especially Beirut and Mount Lebanon, both of which had been integrated into the world economy, were in fact generally experiencing a boom between the mid-1890s and 1907. What is more significant, though, is this perception of a recession, and the very real and strong sense of economic unease and insecurity. It is in this context of malaise that *al-Nūr*’s conception of a local economy began taking shape.³⁹ Accompanying it was a discourse emphasizing the need to remedy it, and salvaging the local economy hence became *al-Nūr*’s priority. However, while this prioritization implied that improving the fate of the working classes was subservient to more pressing needs, at the same time it guaranteed the working classes some attention, since they clearly had a role to play in boosting local production.

Indeed, if *al-Nūr*’s mission of salvaging the Syrian economy was to be successful, the working classes had to be prepared, for they held a central role in the rescue mission. Not only did the network around *al-Nūr* construct a discourse on the need to educate workers, it actually pioneered many didactic projects that specifically targeted workers via the establishment of night schools and reading-rooms, and the promotion and organization of industrial and agricultural exhibitions. Although the details remain unclear, the periodical most likely had a

author wrote that he “saw the monster attacking the weak and eating the poor: “Miskīn al-ḍa’if,” *al-Nūr* (September 15 and 30, 1905), 138. This vivid depiction of poverty and strong condemnation of it was not unique to *al-Nūr*. Other contemporary sources also regularly deplored the state of poverty in Beirut at that time.

³⁸ Walter Arnstein, *Britain Yesterday and Today: 1830 to the Present*, 6th ed., Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath & Company 1992, 192–93. In fact, Arnstein mentions the political and discursive shift by which “the Poor had become Labour and Labour had become the People, a power which could not be ignored” in England starting in the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s (*ibid.*, 197). It is strikingly similar to the shift taking place in *al-Nūr*’s discourse a few years later.

³⁹ I am using *al-Nūr*’s terminology. It is important to underline the Ottomanist component of this call for reviving the economy; in 1904, it certainly was not linked to a call for any form of “independence,” but was part of a call to rally the population of the region and mobilize it for defending its economic, cultural, and political spheres from European encroachment. Hence, by *al-Şinā’a al-dākhiliyya*, the network around *al-Nūr* was referring to the local Syrian economy, with the understanding that Syria constituted a region and an integral part of the Ottoman Empire.

hand in founding, in 1904, a night school in Shuwayr, an important village in Mount Lebanon.⁴⁰ The purpose of this establishment was to attract “all students regardless of their religious denomination,” and “spread sound manners and knowledge (*al-tahdhīb wa-l-‘ulūm*) among the youth whose work does not allow them to study during daytime.”⁴¹ Arabic, mathematics, geography, and music courses were offered there, as well as rudiments of French and English. All these disciplines were taught for free, and needy students were given the necessary school equipment. In its first year, the Shuwayr night school had 25 students aged 15 or above.⁴² Other night schools were expected to follow the example set in Shuwayr, including one in Muhaydtha, a village in Mount Lebanon.⁴³

Another project devised to educate the working classes (as well as the middle classes) was the establishment of free reading-rooms.⁴⁴ Reading-rooms were more or less public libraries, some of which were established by the Ottoman state while others were the fruit of local initiative, individual or institutional. Often but not always affiliated to an educational institution, they put books as well as local and international periodicals at their readers’ disposal. The campaign for establishing reading-rooms was launched by *al-Nūr* from the very first year of its publication. In virtually every issue from then onward, the periodical would extol their social benefits and the civilizing effect of libraries generally.⁴⁵ When a committee was established for the foundation and eventual management of reading-rooms in 1904, it was headed by none other than Faris

⁴⁰ A hypothesis further supported by the fact that *al-Nūr*’s mailing address was in Shuwayr. The opening of a night school in Shuwayr was decided by Jam‘iyyat al-Khayr al-‘Āmm fi al-Shuwayr in late 1904, and was reported by *al-Nūr* (December 1, 1904, 444). The night school received enthusiastic support on the pages of *al-Nūr*, which printed its program, rules, and regulations twice within the span of four months (December 1904 and March 1905).

⁴¹ As reported in the night school’s manifesto. Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. The March report on the school mentions 30 students who registered in the first month of the school’s existence, their ages varying between 15 and 40: “Taqwīm Jam‘iyyat al-Khayr al-‘Āmm,” *al-Nūr* (March 15, 1905), 639.

⁴³ “Al-Faqīr wa-l-madrassa,” *al-Nūr* (September 15–30, 1905), 182.

⁴⁴ Starting around 1880 or so, reading-rooms mushroomed in many regions of Egypt and Syria—and specifically Mount Lebanon. However, while reading-rooms had existed before 1904, *al-Nūr*’s network seems to have been among the first—if not *the* first—to promote their establishment “en masse” and systematically.

⁴⁵ One long article, appearing over many weeks, traced great libraries in history from ancient to modern times, emphasizing the link between libraries and civilizational achievements. See Jirji Niqula Baz, “al-Muntadayāt al-‘arabiyya wa-l-makātib al-‘umūmiyya,” *al-Nūr* (July 31, 1905), 52–54.

Mushriq, the owner of *al-Nūr*, and figured among its members Jirji Baz.⁴⁶ The committee's efforts were to bear fruit, and the first reading-room was inaugurated in Shuwayr in September of that year. The example was followed in Beirut and even in remote villages of Mount Lebanon. The reading-room founded by *al-Nūr*'s group carried

over five hundred volumes, among the best literature, history and religion books, most of them in Arabic. There is also a set of maps... and a big one of Syria and Lebanon. Five Egyptian newspapers are offered to it, and three magazines, nine newspapers from the *mahjar* [countries of immigration], fifteen local newspapers, and *The Times* and *Le Matin*... It also receives telegraphs on a daily basis; has the portraits of all of the Mutašarrifs of Lebanon, as well as that of the great sultan, and a history tree with the most important historical figures [*sic*], from Adam to Jesus... and another *silsila* of all the Ottoman sultans. [It is estimated that] over 1,800 people read there.⁴⁷

Most significantly, *al-Nūr* saw in the reading-rooms a space and tool that would benefit society generally, as well as workers specifically, since it would “inculcate good manners to the men of the future, and [would] expand the skills/knowledge of today's workers (*madārik al-'ummāl*).”⁴⁸

At the same time, workers' education was becoming even more imperative as their status was changing within *al-Nūr*'s discourse. Not only were workers to “save” the local economy through their labor, but, starting around 1906, they also specifically came to be conceived of as constituting one of the most potent bargaining powers for the local economy in the face of increased European encroachment. Whereas, in 1904, the exploitation of local workers by foreign companies had been criticized, it had not really been at the center of *al-Nūr*'s concerns. More precisely, the network's writings on workers' exploitation had then served as mere illustrations of a larger phenomenon of European domination.⁴⁹ However, if the exploitation of local workers was rather secondary in 1904, and if *al-Nūr*'s real concern had been larger than that—namely,

⁴⁶ “Ghuraf al-qirā'a al-'uthmāniyya,” *al-Nūr* (October 31, 1904), 296–301. Jirji Baz would give an inaugural speech: *al-Nūr* (May 1, 1907), 284.

⁴⁷ “Ghuraf al-qirā'a al-majjāniyya,” *al-Nūr* (April 30, 1905), 709.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 296–301; my emphasis.

⁴⁹ An article written in 1904 perhaps most clearly illustrated this trend: deploring, in passing, the injustice behind foreign workers' wages being three times higher than those of local workers, the author swiftly generalized his argument on the unequal power relationship between Europeans and locals, and ended up writing predominantly on foreign missionaries' attempts to educate indigenous Christians about “true” Christianity. See *al-Nūr* (November 15, 1904), 321–28.

European political, religious, and economic encroachment—a marked change of tone began to appear on the periodical's pages around 1906. Indeed, rather than merely deploring the injustice of differentiated salaries between local and foreign workers, *al-Nūr* began arguing that the dependency that existed between foreign companies and local workers was in fact reciprocal. This argumentation served two purposes: first, it “reminded” foreign companies of their reliance on local workers; and second, it “informed” local workers of their intrinsic power vis-à-vis foreign companies:

We need them [foreign companies] and they need us [but] we do not realize it; among these, the railway company... employs [indigenous labor] for its most important tasks, most difficult positions and hardest jobs. Despite all that, it prefers the foreign coal burner or the doorman to them; and if there are foreigners and locals to be found in the same post, the foreigner's wages are higher and so is his rank... *our intention is not to... trigger a rebellion (fitna) or a strike (i'tiṣāb) between the company and its workers...* but we ask the company's board of administration to assist these poor people (*masākīn*), look at them with a just eye, give them what they deserve, and make their rights equivalent to their obligations. We are not demanding that it return the blood of those it exhausts in its service, and are not pressuring it to consider national blood equivalent to foreign blood... we are asking for justice for those who stay up all night and work all day and... whose lives are constantly threatened by machines.⁵⁰

Labor had thus become an intrinsic part of the local economy, but this time, in an economy under siege from foreign capital, it could serve as bargaining power—in fact, perhaps as the most potent bargaining power for the local economy's defense. Hence, workers had gained significance within that discourse, and their labor had acquired value not only in and of itself, but as capital to be used against European penetration. This conceptualization of workers as bargaining power was the result of two trends: on one hand, it was a realization of very *locally* rooted facts, namely the specific economic situation of Syria and the realities of Western penetration; on the other, it marked in many ways the transcending of this very local reality (or the universalization of the local) since it was tied to the articulation of a *more abstract conception of labor*, which indicated a more sophisticated grasp of economic principles.

⁵⁰ “Sikkat al-ḥadīd wa-mustakhdīmūhā,” *al-Nūr* (February 15, 1906), 340–41; my emphasis. In fact, the disclaimer made by *al-Nūr*, in which the periodical clarified that its intention was not to trigger strikes, sounds more like a veiled threat.

Both these discursive developments would push the conceptualization of workers in a more radical direction.

Indeed, starting in 1906, *al-Nūr*'s writings on the exploitation of local workers began to shift from a purely moral to an increasingly and self-consciously economic perspective.⁵¹ Labor emerged as a significant force to be reckoned with not only socially, but economically as well, as an integral part of capital. Exploitation was thus broached as a problem of economic inefficiency rather than sheer immorality, to be contrasted with the path to economic optimization, which lay in "the balance between the power that workers spend [on their work] and the power they get out of their work... if these two forces are in equilibrium, then work becomes long-lasting and profitable."⁵² The development of a more theoretical and abstract conception of workers and labor was accompanied by the formulation and adoption of a new language concerning labor: terms such as *al-yadd al-ʿāmila* (labor, literally *main d'oeuvre*) and *ra's māl* (capital) began appearing on the pages of *al-Nūr* and especially *al-Ḥurriyya*. These terms and others were duly explained week after week on the pages of *al-Ḥurriyya* and, in January 1910, the periodical began publishing a series of articles by Khairallah Khairallah, and introducing its readership to basic economic notions ranging from capital, profit distribution among owners and workers, to balance of trade.⁵³ After objectively explaining various economic concepts and policies, the author would take a stand, and argue for one economic

⁵¹ At the same time, while *al-Nūr* pushed forth this abstract economic perspective on labor and exploitation, it did not entirely abandon its moral condemnation of labor exploitation; in fact, the depiction of workers' exploitation had, if anything, become more graphic with time. In one article, the author compared the way the superintendents treated workers in silk factories to "the way a pig herder treats pigs... the worker has to accept all sorts of abuses and insults." "Ma'āmil al-ḥarīr wa-ʿamalatuḥā," *al-Nūr* (February 1907), 125. Two years later, *al-Ḥurriyya* wrote about "those who snatch away the last morsel soaked in blood from the mouth of the orphan, or... take the harvester's harvest or the worker's salary by force, those are the sons of Nero and Abdūlhamid." "Alā l-ru'ūs al-mutamarrida," *al-Ḥurriyya* (July 28–August 15, 1909), 81.

⁵² "Ḥālatunā al-ʿilmiyya wa-l-ṣināʿiyya," *al-Nūr* (April 1, 1906), 420.

⁵³ See for instance, Khairallah's sequence of articles entitled "On the origins of civilization." One of his articles explained what "capital" (*al-ra's māl*) meant, and its relation to labor: "Risāla fī uṣūl al-ʿumrān: fī ra's al-māl," *al-Ḥurriyya* (January 15, 1910), 385–87. In another article, the author explored the pros and cons of gain distribution among workers, capitalists, and the intermediate person: "Dhayl fī taqsim al-ʿarbāḥ," *al-Ḥurriyya* (January 22, 1910), 398–99. In a third article, he explained the mechanisms of supply and demand, import and export: "Risāla fī uṣūl al-ʿumrān," *al-Ḥurriyya* (January 29, 1910), 415.

policy over the other. Among the policies Khairallah favored was profit distribution between workers, factory owners, and intermediaries.⁵⁴

Khairallah's articles thus illustrated this network's radical turnaround concerning workers. To begin with, it had developed an abstract language with which to describe labor and was promoting it on the pages of its periodical. More so, it had moved away from viewing workers and labor relations primarily from the perspective of a simple dichotomy between local and foreign. Indeed, rather than depicting labor as being the result of European oppression, *al-Ḥurriyya* had begun presenting it as the outcome of *class* dynamics and negotiations between workforce and capital. Furthermore, the group was continuously engaged in educating workers; however, by 1910, it sought to teach them ways of improving their work conditions—rather than showing them how to work: from the benefits of establishing emergency funds (*ṣundūq iḥtiyāt li-waqt al-ḥāja*) and savings funds,⁵⁵ to the advantages of actively fighting for the codification of labor laws.⁵⁶ Perhaps more importantly, this group wished to inculcate workers with the value of their labor in negotiations with their employers.

The vision promoted by Khairallah was one of a classless society, and it was with this goal in mind that he wrote his articles: “it is time that there be justice . . . true justice, and not justice built on selfishness . . . but one built on fraternity . . . with which we will create a fraternity in rights, *no poor and no rich, no worker and no capitalist (mutamawwil)*.”⁵⁷ A fairer treatment of workers by employers, which included dividing the profits between them, was one step towards this utopian society. At the same time as he seemed to be addressing workers and giving them “instructions” for improving their work conditions, Khairallah wished to convince the middle classes—his main readers, after all—of the merits of this classless, or at least more just, society. As previously mentioned, Khairallah repeated time and again that fair labor conditions and profit distribution would lead to a more efficient economic system, and hence to the employer's benefit.⁵⁸ Finally, not only was this gentle form of

⁵⁴ Khairallah, “Dhayl fi taqṣīm al-‘arbāh,” 398–99.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Khairallah also exposed the advantages of establishing savings funds for workers in another article, in which he emphasized the fact that this practice was widespread in “civilized countries.” See Khairallah, “Risāla fi uṣūl al-‘umrān,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (March 5, 1910), 500.

⁵⁶ Khairallah, “Risāla fi uṣūl al-‘umrān,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (March 12, 1910), 511.

⁵⁷ Ibid.; my emphasis.

⁵⁸ Khairallah, “Dhayl fi taqṣīm al-‘arbāh,” 398–99.

socialism, or at least the promotion of a more equal economic system, more efficient to the middle classes, it also pointed to a higher degree of *civilization* than one based on injustice and exploitation. Indeed, as befitting intellectuals obsessed with reform and ultimately civilization, Khairallah's articles appeared under the rubric "Letter on the Origin of Civilization" (*Risāla fī uṣūl al-'umrān*) in *al-Ḥurriyya*. While the road to civilization had taken various paths, Khairallah followed a number of eminent reformists who had argued that social justice and wealth distribution ought to be taken as indexes of civilization, and his intellectual lineage included illustrious thinkers such as Salim al-Naqqash and Shibli Shumayyil, as well as more obscure writers such as Khalil Thabit.⁵⁹ For a variety of reasons, Khairallah's network had the potential of actually fleshing out their thoughts on the topic, and implementing various projects that could pave the way to a more egalitarian society.

The radicalization of connected discourses

Throughout the years between 1904 and 1910, the radicalization of the network's discourse on workers was accompanied by and connected to a more radical coverage of a number of issues. This radicalization affected all the interconnected themes dear to Muja'is and his network: on a local level, it manifested itself in a shift from secularism to blatant anticlericalism, as well as a strong attack against the Unionists and the Mutaṣarrifiyya regime in Mount Lebanon in the years following the constitutional revolution of 1908.⁶⁰ On a global level, it was accompanied by an increased interest in and explicit identification with international leftist movements such as socialism and anarchism. These themes were interconnected and linked to concepts of social justice that were in the process of being reformulated by this network.

The network's radicalization was perhaps most vividly expressed through its changing views on the local church. Whereas *al-Nūr* had

⁵⁹ See Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories*, chapters II and III.

⁶⁰ Nonetheless, antagonism toward the CUP did not emerge immediately after the 1908 revolution. Indeed, the group around *al-Nūr* was quite favorable to the Unionists in 1908, and Muja'is and Mushriq were both members of the "Radical" party, which was vocally anticlerical and received the Unionists' support. However, by late 1909, members of the *al-Nūr/al-Ḥurriyya* circle, like many Syrian reformists and radicals, had become disenchanted with the Unionists. See Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories*, Chapter IV.

always advocated secularism, the content and tone of its advocacy was becoming increasingly vociferous in the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1907, *al-Nūr* had ceased being “merely” critical of the clergy and had become frankly anticlerical. The periodical had always been wary of certain aspects of organized religion; from 1904 onwards, it had constantly warned against religious intolerance (*al-ta‘aṣṣub al-dīnī*), that “divisive disease that has generally attacked the hearts of Lebanese.”⁶¹ However, until roughly 1907, the main focus of its attacks had been Western clergies and missionaries, which it accused of spreading the seeds of sectarian divisions and seeking to impose a monolithic and foreign interpretation of Christianity on the local population.⁶² The local clergy—Greek Orthodox, and especially Maronite—had initially been criticized for its impotence in “protecting” the local population and truly catering to its needs.

Progressively, however, *al-Nūr* moved from criticizing the local clergy’s impotence to actively suggesting ways of reforming it,⁶³ before frankly attacking it, accusing it of maintaining the population in a state of ignorance;⁶⁴ abusing its authority and increasingly violating people’s rights; and stealing and mismanaging a fortune that was not rightfully its own to begin with.⁶⁵ By the time the Ferrer play was performed in 1909, members of this network could bluntly attack both local and foreign clergies; the former, because it had forgotten its original duties and needed to be reminded “that the money of the people is for the people, for its education in order to eliminate poverty, and for the

⁶¹ “Al-Ta‘aṣṣub al-dīnī,” *al-Nūr* (July 15, 1905), 9–13.

⁶² “Dayf ka-l-mushīb,” *al-Nūr* (May 15–June 2, 1904), 19–23. See footnote 49 of this chapter.

⁶³ Beginning in the fall of 1905 and continuing throughout 1906, many articles were published in *al-Nūr* under the rubric “al-Ḥisāb al-ikliriki” (“The reform of the clergy”). Emphasis was placed on the need to reform both Maronite and Orthodox clergies. Specifically, the periodical argued for the need to reform the management of church *awqāf* (pious foundations), and suggested that the church sell its *waqf* properties and build income-generating establishments that would provide stable income and could not be meddled with: “al-Batrakiyya al-antākiyya al-urthuduxiyya,” *al-Nūr* (November 30, 1905), 299.

⁶⁴ See for instance Labibah Hashim’s article, in which she denounces “men of the clergy [who] want to keep the people’s eyes shut . . . and generally wish to treat us as if we were children”: Labiba Hashim, “Majlis al-sinūduṣ al-millī,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (September 11, 1909), 150.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Emile Khuri’s article on the clergy, in which he denounced the corruption reigning among members of the clergy and accused them of stealing from the poor as well as from the rich: Emile Khuri, “Min ajl al-dīn,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (November 27, 1909), 281–83.

education of orphans; it is not for the building of palaces and the purchase of silk and crosses inlaid with diamonds;⁶⁶ and the latter (both the Jesuits and Protestant missionaries), because “foreign priests are teaching us a lesson that kills our patriotism (*waṭaniyya*) in order to replace it by a foreign *waṭaniyya*... there might have been an excuse for this before the Constitution, [but this is no longer the case].”⁶⁷ This degree of anticlericalism was not confined to the network around *al-Nūr/al-Ḥurriyya*. I have elsewhere dwelt at length on that topic,⁶⁸ but what needs to be emphasized here is the connection made by this network between anticlericalism and social justice, and the fierce attack on the church’s wealth and financial management. Such attacks became even more pressing from 1907 onward, as the scope of expansion in agriculture and a general economic recession meant that employment opportunities had reached their limits. Repeated calls were made by members of our group, as well as others, to seize church property.⁶⁹ In the face of such challenges, the Maronite church seemed increasingly unable to preserve its authority.⁷⁰

Thus, by 1907, both local and foreign clergies were under equal fire from *al-Nūr*’s network, whose attack on the clergy as an institution was by then articulated in a more general and almost theoretical fashion. In this new discourse, divisions between local and foreign had become secondary, just as the local–foreign dichotomy in the discourse on workers had made way for a more theoretical understanding of labor. More accurately, a different conception of the local was being articulated, one that made the local synonymous with serving local interests. Just as the Syrian local upper classes had been dispossessed of their “locality” for failing to invest in projects beneficial to the Syrian economy (the local Egyptian upper classes had suffered a similar fate, as expressed in a number of contemporary popular songs and monologues),⁷¹ so the

⁶⁶ Felix Faris, “Min ajlihi,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (November 2, 1909), 283–85.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Khuri-Makdisi, “Theater and Radical Politics,” and especially *Levantine Trajectories*.

⁶⁹ Hakim-Dowek, “Origins of the Lebanese national idea,” 273.

⁷⁰ For example, as early as 1905, an edict by the Maronite patriarch, Mgr. Hoyek, condemning Freemasonry—which, as we have seen, was quite popular among a certain intellectual elite—and threatening to excommunicate “all the members of this society, its supporters, and those who did not report the names of their leaders” was met with “mocking public demonstrations of liberal groups in the streets of the villages and towns of Kisrawan, testifying to a significant loss of deference toward the Church and the person of the Patriarch in this traditional Maronite fiefdom”: *ibid.*, 265.

⁷¹ See Khuri-Makdisi, “Theater and Radical Politics.”

local church, by going against the interests of a population whom it maintained in a state of ignorance and dispossessed of its wealth, had turned into an “Other.”

The “othering” of the local church was furthermore intensified by the perceived cooperation between the Maronite church and the CUP after 1909, an accusation regularly mounted on the pages of *al-Ḥurriyya*.⁷² Such sentiments were not exclusive to this specific network. The aftermath of the Unionist revolution of 1908 was to accentuate anticlericalism overall, and push various groups that had been vaguely sympathetic to leftist ideas more towards the left. In Mount Lebanon and Beirut, the initial euphoria triggered by the proclamation of the Ottoman constitution was followed by disappointment, then disillusionment. By 1909, the gap between expectations and reality had begun to show: censorship was back, strikes had been banned, and misery was still rampant. What then had changed? Asked the contributors to *al-Ḥurriyya*:

What is the meaning of the constitution, if the peasant ignores it; what is the meaning of freedom, if the harvester in the field cannot enjoy it? . . . This [begging] boy walks in *Ittihād* square in front of the garden of Freedom, as if nothing has changed. . . the rebellious heads (*ru'ūs muta-marrida*) are still rebellious, and Abdülhamid has become one thousand Abdülhamids.⁷³

Equally worrisome, if not more, were certain measures taken in 1909 and 1910 by the local Ottoman authorities threatening the autonomous status of Mount Lebanon: the decision of the *Mutaşarrifiyya*'s administrative council to issue special identification cards to the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon, similar to those held by other Ottoman subjects throughout the empire, and its decision to draft Lebanese residing in Beirut. Another decision that caused great fear and commotion among the population of Mount Lebanon was the *mutaşarrif*'s decision to enforce a new press law passed by the Ottoman parliament, which would subject the press in Mount Lebanon to increased censorship.⁷⁴ Hence, all these issues—anticlericalism, Mount Lebanon's special status, mass education, workers' rights vis-à-vis foreign companies, and resistance

⁷² See for example Stefanieski effendi Polikivitch, “Falsafat al-qanābil,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (August 15, 1909), 86–87, in which the author attacks the “sanctity of the clergy, which sacrifices most of its people, leaders, God and his religion, in order to please a leader [the *mutaşarrif* of Mount Lebanon]”: *ibid.*, 87.

⁷³ “Alā al ru'ūs l-mutamarrida,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (August 15, 1909), 82.

⁷⁴ Hakim-Dowek, “Origins of the Lebanese national idea,” 324.

to European cultural, political and economic encroachment—were part of a general package of contestations and grievances that converged and overlapped after 1905, and were given an even stronger boost after the disappointments of the Unionist revolution. Among them figured a strong sense of regional identity and the wish to hold on to the Mountain's autonomous status, both of which were combined with the conceptualization of the local economy.

The international bent

Another radical development was the network's growing familiarity and identification with international leftist worldviews and ideas. In fact, I would even argue that the circle around *al-Nūr* became increasingly radicalized between 1905 and 1909, and that part of this radicalization was linked to and reflected in the network's awareness of the rest of the world, and specifically its increased familiarity with international leftist movements.⁷⁵ Until then, *al-Nūr* had paid very little attention to world affairs in the first few years of its life, and its articles dealt almost exclusively with local matters pertaining to Mount Lebanon and to a lesser degree, Beirut. This was somewhat paradoxical, given that *al-Nūr* purported to be self-consciously international, and targeted an international readership of Syrian emigrants spread all over the world. Until the end of the century's first decade, it remained very much a provincial periodical. In fact, one of the very few exceptions to this lack of interest in world events was the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, which was passionately and even obsessively covered by *al-Nūr* just as it had been by every other periodical in the Ottoman Arab provinces. From 1904 until roughly 1907, the circle's radicalism was thus very local; it did not align itself with international leftist movements, and did not even refer to them. This provincialism was perhaps better illustrated by *al-Nūr's* complete silence on the failed Russian revolution of October 1905. Indeed, for a radical periodical whose articles passionately called

⁷⁵ As previously alluded to (see note 32 above), the Syrian radical network's sources of information and inspiration, as well as its area of dissemination, were not limited to Syrian society in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, but spanned various parts of the globe, including North and South America, the Caribbean, and Egypt, where existing diasporic Syrian communities contributed to shaping *al-Nūr* and *al-Ḥurriyya's* worldview, and probably to expanding the network's horizons beyond purely "Lebanese" matters.

for the need to eradicate poverty, educate workers and the needy, limit European capitalist penetration, and curb the power of the clergy, this silence was in some ways indicative of *al-Nūr's* initial provincialism and of a worldview based on purely local references. The lack of interest in world affairs was particularly striking, given how tumultuous and revolutionary the years between 1905 and 1908 had been in the "East": from the failed Russian revolution of 1905 to the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1906, the introduction of constitutions and the challenges to state authority throughout the region. All these radical changes were felt very strongly by Ottomans reformists, who hoped that their state would be next.⁷⁶

Around 1907, the Syrian radical network began to venture beyond local matters and "tune" its ideology to that of international leftist movements. That year, its members organized a May 1 celebration, which was the first of its kind in Syria and, with the possible exception of Alexandria and Istanbul, one of the earliest throughout the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁷ The "*fête socialiste*," as it was described by its chronicler Khairallah Khairallah, was organized by none other than Daud Muja'is and two other people whose identity remains a mystery.⁷⁸ It brought together "une trentaine de jeunes gens d'élite, marquants pour leur instruction et leur position sociale" who, armed with a gigantic red banner, paraded and gave speeches on the shores of Dbayeh, a coastal village adjacent to Beirut.⁷⁹ Besides the May 1 celebration, there were other signs of identification and engagement with international leftist figures and ideologies. The intense coverage devoted by *al-Ḥurriyya* to the Ferrer affair and the performance of the play itself, the socialist speeches accompanying it, and the Jean Jaurès quotes published by the

⁷⁶ See Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001, 121; as well as Aykut Kansu, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey*, Leiden: Brill 1997, 3 and 52.

⁷⁷ According to Dumont, Salonica's first celebration of May 1 took place in 1909, which is surprisingly late, given that the city's socialists and workers' unions were quite militant. However, unlike the Dbayeh celebration that was conducted by a handful of "*gens d'élite*," a large number of people, including workers, participated in Salonica's May 1. See Dumont, "Naissance d'un socialisme ottoman," 76.

⁷⁸ Khairallah, *La Syrie*, 110. Khairallah wrote that all three organizers were forced to leave Syria: "l'un s'en alla en Amérique, l'autre vint s'abriter à Paris, et le troisième est perdu on ne sait où, sur les grandes routes du monde." It is possible that he himself was one of these organizers.

⁷⁹ Significantly, this event seems to have been very visible, since the gathering site was a popular relaxation place: *ibid.*

periodical all attest to the high degree to which our circle had come to identify and engage with the international left.⁸⁰ Another indication of this network's international bent was the adoption of a certain leftist economic jargon by *al-Ḥurriyya*, and the periodical's abstract conceptualization of labor.

Furthermore, around 1909, the Syrian radical network began to express interest, sympathy for, and identification with specific anarchist ideas and modes of actions. The Ferrer affair was one such display,⁸¹ and was in fact preceded by *al-Ḥurriyya*'s publication of a series of articles authored by a certain Stefaniski Polikivitch and entitled "The philosophy of bombs."⁸² Although the use of political violence—and in particular the planting of bombs—was certainly not confined to anarchism, the two were not exactly disconnected.⁸³ More to the point, Polikivitch's articles were clearly on revolutionary anarchist and nihilist practices. While information pertaining to the relationship between *al-Ḥurriyya*'s network and this mysterious character is lacking, we do know that the periodical's editors had "consulted" Polikivitch on the topic, and asked him to express his opinion on the "famous 'Aley bomb," in which the target of the bomb, the *mutaṣarrif* of Mount Lebanon, emerged unharmed.⁸⁴ Polikivitch seems to have been a seasoned revolutionary activist, and had, by his own admission, spent ten years in prison—most likely in Russia—for engaging in such actions.

What is significant about Polikivitch's article is that it was the first fairly sophisticated reflection on revolutionary praxis to appear on

⁸⁰ See Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories*, chapter II.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² "Falsafat al-qanābil," *al-Ḥurriyya* (August 1, 1909), 85. While we have no information about this character, he might very well have been part of a larger group of Russian revolutionaries who found their way to Mount Lebanon. Khalil Antun Sa'ada (1857–1934), who seems to have been affiliated to our network, claims to have come in contact with a Russian revolutionary who had fled from Russia after the failed revolution of 1905: Badr al-Hajj, *Khalil Sa'ada*, London: Riyad al Rayyis Books, 1987.

⁸³ See Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories*.

⁸⁴ The story behind the 'Aley bomb is draped with mystery and rumors. The official investigation yielded that the idea of planting a bomb in the summer residency of the *mutaṣarrif* was conceived by some Lebanese working together with the servants of the *mutaṣarrif*, at least one of whom was Greek. These so-called "conspirators" formed an organization called The Organization of Lebanese Nihilists In Spite of Themselves (Jam'iyyat al-Nihilist al-Lubnāniyyin Raghman 'Anhum) (*sic!*). The police also claimed that this organization was not purely local, but had members and contacts in some Syrian cities and even Istanbul. *Al-Ḥurriyya*'s mocking tone suggests that the official version on the 'Aley bomb was not entirely credible: "Falsafat al-qanābil," *al-Ḥurriyya* (August 15, 1909), 85–87 and "Li-nadhak," *al-Ḥurriyya* (October 16, 1909), 198–99.

the pages of *al-Ḥurriyya*. The main investigation concerned the use of violence for revolutionary purposes and the distinction between “revolution” and “chaos.”⁸⁵ Although the author’s main argument was not terribly original—he argued that violence (or more specifically “terror”) was legitimate, but only as a last resort—its elaboration was quite systematic. Examining in a comparative manner the degree of oppression that justified the use of violence in Russia and Spain, he then coldly assessed the pros and cons of various instruments of violence: the revolver, the dagger, and the bomb.⁸⁶ Polikivitch saw the bomb as

not the weapon which a sanguinary killer uses; rather, it is synonymous with the terrorizing [terrible] expression through which a pressured force releases itself from oppression... (*al-ta’bīr al-rahīb al-ladhī tuḥṣih bihi quwwa muḍghata ‘an ḡulmatihā*). And the expression (*ta’bīr*) is often just; it is the spirit of the present age, the necessary condition of which (*al-mashrūt fīhi*) is not to leave the realm of rights and not to harm the interests of others. The French revolution has announced these rights for the first time, and has done so with the blood of its king... and the Ottoman revolution has sanctified it (*qaddasathā*) by crushing (*taḥṭīm*) the throne of its oppressor.⁸⁷

The international brand of leftist thought that anarchism represented was to have a specific resonance, given local realities. First, members of the radical network and anarchists worldwide shared a common enemy, the church, which had been identified as a prime target by many European anarchists. In particular, the Spanish brand of anarchism that received attention on the pages of *al-Ḥurriyya* during the Ferrer affair had successfully called for the destruction of a significant amount of church

⁸⁵ To quote Polikivitch, “[I] hate any criminal anarchist act (*kull ‘amal jinā’i fawḍawī*) regardless of what it is, as long as there are legal ways (*turuq mashrū’a*) to change the condition of peoples (*ḥāl al-shu’ūb*) without resorting to terror. Terror should only be used in the most desperate situations as a defense tool against aggression—and this is an occasion for me to remind revolutionary authors (*al-kuttāb al-thawriyyīn*) of the need to distinguish between revolution and anarchy”: *al-Ḥurriyya* (August 15, 1909), 85.

⁸⁶ In Polikivitch’s words, the difference between “the dagger and the revolver on one hand, and the bomb: the first two are individual weapons, the second is a mass weapon (*silāḥ jamā’āt*)... it is the weapon of the oppressed masses in countries of increased oppression, such as Spain... and Russia”: *ibid.* In contrast, the Young Turks preferred the revolver over the bomb: “le revolver, lourd de toute une symbolique révolutionnaire, est d’ailleurs préféré [par les Unionistes] à la bombe. Il constitue la ligne de démarcation entre les Jeunes Turcs et les courants anarchistes. Il assure une mort propre et individuelle”: Hamit Bozarslan, “Les Courants de pensée dans l’Empire ottoman 1908–1918,” doctoral thesis, EHESS, 1992, 289.

⁸⁷ *Al-Ḥurriyya* (August 15, 1909), 85.

property. From the writings in *al-Hurriyya*, it is clear that members of the network in question were fascinated by this use of violence against the Spanish church and approved of it, describing it as retaliation against a particularly ruthless institution that had tortured and oppressed the Spanish poor for centuries.⁸⁸ Besides fitting well into the growing anticlerical movement in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, anarchism had yet another local appeal: it was viscerally feared and hated by the Unionists. As previously mentioned, there had been increasing opposition in Mount Lebanon to the government of the Young Turks and to their policies, as early as 1909. As Hamit Bozarslan points out, although many Young Turks had initially been attracted to anarchist ideas—mostly through their adoration of the French Revolution, their desire to dethrone and even kill Abdülhamid, and their embrace of biological materialism—they soon shed this attraction and developed a deep fear of anarchism and what it meant: empowering the masses, eliminating political parties, and destroying the state. As Abdullah Cevdet made it clear:

Les anarchistes sont un parti dont l'objectif est d'arracher, jusqu'à ses racines, toute sorte de gouvernement sur la terre. Ils attendent que leur gouvernement s'affaiblisse pour qu'il tombe plus facilement. Quant à nous, en nous employant à ce que le gouvernement ottoman regagne du pouvoir, retrouve sa place et sa grandeur, nous agissons d'une manière opposée aux idées des anarchistes. *Détruire l'Etat, nous? Nous voulons* [au contraire] *le renforcer*.⁸⁹

It is easy to see how radicals opposed to the Young Turks and their policies, in Mount Lebanon and Beirut, would be attracted to anarchism. While these two reasons, anticlericalism and opposition to the Young Turks, do not on their own fully explain the resonance of anarchist

⁸⁸ See for instance the very graphic descriptions of torture and oppression by the church, which had led to the attacks against the clergy hundreds of years later. "Many centuries later, the clerical oppression lit the fire of resentment... in the chest of the Spanish poor (*fuqarā' al-Isbān*).” As a consequence of this oppression, and the Spanish clergy's "monopoliz[ing] God and hid[ing] him from the Spanish people... the rebellion by the Socialists of Barcelona erupted, and they burned fifteen monasteries": "Kayfa thāra al-Isbaniyol," *al-Hurriyya* (September 15, 1909), 132–33. In fact, during the "Tragic Week" of July 26–August 1, 1909 which began as a protest in Barcelona against the military draft before turning into radicals rioting against the Catholic church, 80 churches and religious institutions were destroyed. See Juan Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organization: The History of the F.A.I.*, trans. Abe Bluedstein, Montreal: Black Rose Books 1986, 48.

⁸⁹ Abdullah Cevdet, "Almanya Imperatoru ve Sülтан Hamid" (1896), quoted in Bozarslan, "Les Courants de pensée dans l'Empire ottoman," 290; my emphasis.

ideas among our Syrian radical network, they certainly contributed to anarchism's growing appeal.

Conclusion

Hence, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the network around *al-Nūr* and *al-Hurriyya* had begun displaying interest for, and sometimes overt identification with, international leftist movements and ideologies, and especially with anarchist tenets and icons. As we have seen, this shift was accompanied by a general radicalization of this network's discourse on workers and the beginning of a social analysis that was more class based. This radical turn was also visible concerning a number of interconnected topics central to the network's worldview and linked to notions of social justice. But what exactly is the significance of such discoveries?

First, they serve to challenge the dominant historiographic narrative of absence: namely, the absence of radical, socialist, and leftist movements in Syria before 1919.⁹⁰ Not only do the discoveries exposed in this chapter point to a vibrant forum of debates regarding socialism, anarchism, and the like, as well as the articulation of ideas regarding these ideologies, they also show that, for a variety of local and global reasons, such ideas were in fact synthesized and incorporated into local political discourses and, more so, could be implemented as projects. Second, such discoveries shed light on a very specific moment in the history of Syria—one that, more often than not, has been described as constituting the antechamber of nationalism. Hence, in this grand narrative, Beirut and Mount Lebanon were “in anticipation” of nationalism before 1914. As a consequence of this overriding narrative, calls for social justice, workers' education, social reform, the eradication of sectarianism, the curbing of clerical power, resistance to European political and economic encroachment, as well as demands for increased

⁹⁰ See Khuri-Makdisi, *Levantine Trajectories*, introduction, for a discussion of various historiographical characteristics pertaining to the left in Syria and in the Arab world. On Syria specifically, see 'Abdullah Hanna, *al-Harakah al-'ummāliyya fī Sūriyya wa-Lubnān, 1900–1945*, Damascus: Dār Dimashq 1973; idem, *Min al-ittijāhāt al-fikriyya fī Sūriyya: al-nusf al-awwal min al-qarn al-'ishrin*, Damascus: Dār al-Ahālī, n.d.; Ilias Buwari, *Tārīkh al-ḥaraka al-'ummāliyya wa-l-naqābiyya fī Lubnān 1908–1946*, vol. I, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī 1980; and Jacques Couland, *Le Mouvement syndical au Liban 1919–1946*, Paris: Editions Sociales, 1970.

local autonomy vis-à-vis Istanbul, have all been taken as dots which, when joined, would inexorably lead to nationalism.

Rather than confirming this interpretation of the “unstoppable march towards nationalism,” and through the discoveries concerning this vibrant and active radical network, I hope to have underlined the historical contingencies of nationalism, both as it developed and ultimately “triumphed.” Indeed, all the causes embraced and defended by our radical network—mass education, Khairallah’s vision of a classless society,⁹¹ anticlericalism, and a strong critique of unionist policies in Mount Lebanon—were accompanied by various signs underlining the radical network’s allegiance to the Ottoman state, at least certainly until 1909–10. Such signs include *al-Nūr*’s definition of itself as an *Ottoman* periodical, the establishment of *Ottoman* reading-rooms, and the organization of *Ottoman* exhibitions in Shuwayr. The point is not to dismiss the strength of “proto-nationalism” or, ultimately, of nationalism (when chronologically appropriate). Rather, it is to emphasize the inextricable connection between the constructions of both radicalism and the brand of proto-nationalism being articulated, and, hence, to argue that their intermingling fundamentally shaped the development of both radicalism and nationalism in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. More so, the chapter offers a new vista onto “the Liberal Age”, one in which radical leftist, and especially anarchist, ideas were gaining popularity in Syria and being translated into various projects—just as they were in many other parts of the world.

⁹¹ One in which there would be “no poor and no rich, no worker and no capitalist;” Khairallah, “Risāla fi uṣūl al-‘umrān,” *al-Ḥurriyya* (March 12, 1910), 511.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LIBERAL PRACTICES IN THE TRANSFORMATION FROM EMPIRE TO NATION-STATE: THE RUMP OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1918–1923

Hasan Kayalı

Political history, with its emphasis on reigns, regimes, and real or imagined landmarks that point to the beginning and end of sequentially constructed eras, does not serve well the study of transition periods. Transitions are only occasionally recognized as periods intrinsically worthy of the historian's attention, namely as more than preludes or epilogues tagged to other—and in retrospect clearly identifiable—historical eras. Positing a transition as an interregnum tends to legitimate its examination in its own right, as in the case of some interregna in the literal sense of the word, namely periods of prolonged conflict or uncertainty about dynastic succession,¹ or interludes between two identifiably distinct political regimes.² Embedded in the notion of an interregnum is a degree of “freedom from customary authority.”³ This chapter addresses such an interlude in the rump Ottoman Empire⁴ between 1918 and 1923, a half-decade of ruptures and flux that followed the end of World War I and marked the transition from the empire to a Turkish

¹ As in Britain between the rule of Charles I and Charles II (1649–60) or in the Ottoman Empire between Bayezid and Mehmed I (1402–13).

² Thus, E. H. Carr devoted in his *History of Soviet Russia*, New York: Macmillan 1954, a volume to the “Interregnum” of 1923–24, the power struggle that ensued from Lenin's demise. The editors of a more recent compilation focusing on the Soviet collapse and its aftermath use the rubric of “interregnum” which “capture[s] something about the ill-defined and almost-impossible-to-define character” of the era from 1989 to 1999, suggesting that an interregnum is recognizable, even when it is not at all clear when and how it will end: Michael Cox, Ken Booth, and Tim Dunne, eds., *The Interregnum, Review of International Studies* 25 (December 1999), special issue. In his study of Ottoman Transjordan, Eugene Rogan refers to the two-and-a-half years between Ottoman and Hashemite rule (October 1918–March 1921) as an interregnum in *Transjordan: Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, 241.

³ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1182.

⁴ Ottoman territories not occupied by the Entente Powers during World War I.

nation-state. Situating this transition in historiography, it portrays a period ordinarily not associated with the flourishing of liberal practices as a unique era of liberal manifestations, as reflected in the expansion and diversification of associational activity, proliferation of the popular press, and revitalization of electoral and constitutional processes.

The postwar era as historiographical limbo

The immediate postwar years, from the signing of the Armistice agreement between the Ottoman government and the Entente representatives at Mudros (October 1918) to the conclusion of a peace treaty at Lausanne (July 1923), either fall through the cracks of the two distinct historiographical categories of empire and nation-state, or are seized by the latter. The period is referred to alternatively as the “national struggle,” “war of independence,” or “Armistice period.” These designations represent different perceptions, even contesting visions, of the postwar years in the rump empire. “Armistice period” foregrounds the postwar ambiguity in the political and diplomatic status of the empire between Mudros and Lausanne. “War of independence” stresses rejection of submission to the dictates of the Entente powers and resistance to their military encroachments. “National struggle” conceives of a Turkish nationalist assertion. It is also common to view the “Armistice period” as limited to the months leading to Mustafa Kemal’s emergence within the Anatolian movement in the summer of 1919, which then starts the “national struggle.” This study will employ the designation “Armistice period” in its inclusive sense (Mudros to Lausanne) as the rubric under which to examine broadening political pluralism and revival of constitutional and electoral practices.

The postwar years of the late 1910s and early 1920s have been appropriated by Turkish republican history and made to conform to the Kemalist construct of the unfolding of Turkish nationhood, which obscures much that does not conform to that conception, by privileging only certain facets of the postwar ferment. The centerpiece of this period’s history in the nationalist-minded outlook is the political consolidation of the resistance and the battles it coordinated against the Greek invasion forces. Mustafa Kemal’s own rendering of the narrative of these events in his 1927 “Speech” at the Republican People’s Party Congress has provided the template for historical accounts. The postwar

years are as such depicted as belonging integrally to the building of the Turkish nation and state, a process that Kemal declared as having started according to plan on May 19, 1919—the day he set foot on the soil of Anatolia, apparently to rally the Turkish people to the salvation of Turkish lands.

Western scholarship, long dominated by adherents of the modernization paradigm who are partial to the nationalist historical narrative that Kemalists have forged, has failed to throw adequate light on the countervailing tendencies of the broader context. The texture and diversity of political positions, outlooks, and agendas that preceded and accompanied the consolidation of an active resistance, and those that plagued the early Kemalist movement, received scant notice in the half-century following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Historians of Turkey have been fascinated by the achievements of a “national” war of liberation, and have written about it with a teleological selectivity. Thus, most studies of this transition are forward-looking and incorporate it as the prelude to the nation-state, obscuring both the range of political expressions and the endurance of empire within the multi-faceted political dynamics of the interregnum.

The Armistice period as liberal era in historical perspective

The Armistice period ushered in a combination of liberal practices not witnessed in the Middle East before (and, in many parts of the region, since). The end of World War I exposed opportunity spaces for the expression of political and intellectual liberties and the revival of liberal political institutions. While triggered by specific contingencies at this juncture, these practices were informed by an almost century-long tradition of liberal reforms and political experimentation. The contingencies had to do with the collapse of government together with its autocratic wartime practices, the attenuation of traditional authority under the constitutional monarchy since 1908, and the encroachments of an exogenous authority at the war’s end.

Opportunity spaces were particularly vibrant and multifarious in Istanbul and Anatolia due to the lingering uncertainties about and prolonged contestations over the fate of the rump empire, but they presented themselves in different parts of the Middle East. James Gelvin analyzed the multi-dimensional politics in postwar Syria during the window of

the “Arab government” from 1918 to 1920 by appraising the activities and outlook of newly emergent popular committees against those of traditional political elites. He demonstrates the contestation of ideas and collective self-views in an expanding public sphere that witnessed not only elections but also demonstrations, ceremonies, print campaigns, sloganeering, etc. Gelvin fits these contested visions into templates of two distinct nationalist strands nourished by old (elite) and new (popular) politics, both smothered by the French invasion in the summer of 1920 and the ensuing repression.⁵ The contestations within the expanding public sphere of the rump empire to the north came to be pegged in turn as “nationalist” and “anti-nationalist,” which is a framework that does not do justice to the multiplicity of articulated ideas and visions, as will be argued later.

Postwar liberal practices were catalyzed by a rupture with the past, but should be examined against longstanding liberal currents and transformations in the Middle East. The beginnings of the processes characterized as constituting facets of liberalism were in the familiar political reforms of the Tanzimat. The 1839 decree of *Gülhane* broached the much-hallowed personal liberties of life, property, and rule of law; and the 1856 Tanzimat decree confirmed and reinforced them. The champions of Tanzimat reforms, the high statesmen, were slow in effecting participatory political institutions. They bred their opposition in the very ranks of the bureaucracy that they were leading.

The first liberal movement of the Ottoman Empire was that of the New (or Young) Ottomans in the late 1860s and early 1870s.⁶ Most members belonged to the officialdom, but the movement emerged as a protest against the autocratic style of rule of the statesmen in office. The New Ottomans were attuned to Europe but also were the forerunners of Islamic modernism, which was to be articulated more systematically in Egypt a decade or so later.⁷ More than the imitative secular liberalism simultaneously advanced by another segment of bureaucrats/intellectuals, Islamic modernism became instrumental in the propagation of liberal principles. Islamic modernists pioneered the use of the press and literary genres (such as drama) in the dissemina-

⁵ James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1998.

⁶ Şerif Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1962.

⁷ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, London: Oxford University Press 1962, 103–92.

tion of liberal concepts, including popular participation in government and constitutional safeguards for liberties, even as they were forced into exile. They sustained a concerted opposition movement and prepared the ground for the declaration of a constitution in 1876 and the opening of parliament in 1877, when like-minded statesmen in the capital were able to work with the new sultan, Abdülhamid II, to launch consultative government. This was an effort to salvage the empire from revolt and separatism and to cater to European demands for the assurance of formal political rights to non-Muslim elements. Yet the social base of the liberal movement was not sufficiently broad to resist the sultan's dismantling of this new experiment within a matter of months on the grounds of war emergency.

The liberal discontents of the Hamidian period, the Young Turks, continued to be inspired by the New Ottomans and were subjected to even more formidable constraints on the freedom of expression at home. They therefore agitated and wrote in European capitals and Cairo. Their networks and organizational activity, particularly in the Ottoman military, played a direct role in the ultimate restitution of the constitution in 1908. Their activities in exile, however, contributed little to the expansion of the public sphere, which was strictly controlled by the sultan and his police in the service of his increasingly autocratic regime.

Such was Abdülhamid's repression that the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the sultan's deposition the following year were hailed as the beginning of a liberal era. Indeed, parliament reopened in 1908, amendments to the 1876 constitution curbed the sultan's powers, journalistic and literary activity exploded, and a multitude of new civic, professional, and cultural associations were formed. Political parties contested the elections held in 1908, 1912, and 1914. The liberalization of the public sphere for the first time reinforced the political reforms championed and implemented by officials and officers with modern education but of modest backgrounds. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) represented the reformist groups but gradually restricted many of the new freedoms in its quest to dominate the political arena. Wartime provided the pretext for the imposition of CUP single-party rule and the implementation of misguided policies that nullified liberal reform and led to devastating military adventures accompanied by domestic violence.

Similarities between the aftermaths of 1908 and 1918 are striking. Both periods witnessed the demise of autocratic regimes that had consolidated power after delivering early liberal reforms. In both 1908 and 1918,

political activity flourished inside the empire, whereas liberal movements had previously been able to find expression only in exile. A spate of riots in July 1908 undermined Abdülhamid's authority and forced him to open parliament and relinquish important royal prerogatives that he had secured in the constitution. In 1918, on the other hand, the regime succumbed to external forces that triggered a crisis of authority and introduced formidable uncertainties as to the future of the regions and peoples of the empire. Both in the fall of 1908 and the fall of 1918, there was an immediate relaxation of censorship and a proliferation of political activity. The liberalization had a logic in the restitution of the constitutional order, in 1908 with Abdülhamid's restoration of the 1876 constitution, and in 1918 with the removal of wartime curbs on it. Yet both junctures propelled conservative elements to high office. Due to lack of experience and confidence in administrative affairs the Young Turks left the reins of government in the hands of senior statesmen of the Hamidian era, under whose watch a counterrevolutionary current developed, only to be quashed by army units from Rumelia.⁸ In 1918, following the exit of the wartime cabinet, an old guard which included the very same individuals from the 1908 cabinet (such as Ahmed Tevfik Pasha) held the ministries, as Sultan Vahideddin dismantled parliamentary government. Restitution came again from cadres organized by army officers, this time in Anatolia, including some of the very same officers who had played a role in the suppression of the counterrevolutionary uprising in March 1909 (among them Mustafa Kemal).

The preoccupation of the Ottoman reformist elites had always been with the survival of the state. In 1908, differences about how to achieve this objective were fought out not just between the Young Turk opposition movement and the sultan and his conservative officials, but also among the Young Turk factions themselves. In 1918, however, there was no good sense of what could be salvaged from the empire and how. In the eyes of the sultan and his palace coterie, concern for the survival of the dynasty trumped the preservation of territorial integrity. The leadership cadres not connected with the palace were more broadly based than ever before but less cohesive as a collective group. Most maintained a link with the CUP, but many renounced this connection after the failures of the wartime CUP regime. Political programs remained vague until the resistance to occupation crystallized and Mustafa Kemal emerged

⁸ Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969, 18–42.

as its leader. Thanks to the breadth and depth of the Unionist organization and networks, those who had a stake in the salvation not only of the state but of their personal material possessions availed themselves of the intact provincial structures of the CUP.⁹ They mobilized around Muslim identity, decrying the imperialists' encroachments and harboring deep suspicion and distrust of those whom they viewed as indigenous proxies of Europe. The politically engaged, poised to grapple with the uncertainties that the fall of 1918 ushered in, were more numerous and vocal than ever before. No matter how fleeting, incomplete, and abortive the past experiments with democratization may have been, by 1918 there was now a generation—not merely a coterie—of officials, officers, or intellectuals, who were ready to play a role in the determination of their fate as a political community.¹⁰

Postwar contingencies and the expansion of the public sphere

The signing of the Mudros agreement on October 30, 1918 and its immediate aftermath were harbingers of seesaw changes. Mudros validated Ottoman defeat and the loss of territories occupied by the Entente Powers during the war. The Talat Pasha government had resigned in the weeks leading to the agreement; and in its wake he and other prominent Unionists fled to Europe. Before the end of the year, Sultan Vahideddin, who had ascended to the throne in July 1918 upon Sultan Reşad's death, and had found the opportunity at the war's end to reassert monarchical powers, disbanded parliament. Mudros not only heralded the separation of the Arab provinces from the empire, but also left the fate of the rest of Ottoman territories to European dictates and diplomacy. Having coupled the survival of the state with the survival of the Ottoman throne, Sultan Vahideddin seemed prepared to sacrifice imperial patrimony in return for recognition of a nominal sovereignty. The bureaucratic and military elites rejected such concessions and, with the support of provincial elites, sought ways of resisting foreign domination.¹¹

⁹ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905–1926*, Leiden: Brill 1984.

¹⁰ But not necessarily to establish a nation-state, contrary to what Tunaya suggests: Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiyede Siyasal Partiler: Mütareke Dönemi*, vol. II, Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları 1986, xxi.

¹¹ The "treachery" of Vahideddin and his demonization became a trope in the construction of Turkish nationalism in the 1920s, consistent with Mustafa Kemal's portrayal

The compromised authority of the palace, the collapse of CUP rule, and the closure of parliament signified a crisis of authority and activated debate and protest. The constellation of military, political, and economic circumstances fostered the expression of a multitude of voices in a variety of venues. During the Armistice period, the political fate of the empire was debated vigorously in a vibrant public sphere.

The comprehensive catalog of political groups compiled by Tarık Zafer Tunaya exhibits the plethora of self-views, aspirations, ideologies, and factions prevalent during the interregnum, albeit without an overall appraisal of this multi-faceted political activity. Tunaya published his *Türkiye’de Siyasi Partiler* (Political Parties in Turkey) in 1952.¹² The book was inspired by the democratic developments occurring in Turkey after World War II and published during the Turkish Republic’s transition to a multi-party system. Appropriating more than six decades of late Ottoman history to Turkey, the book lists political organizations that were constituted in the Ottoman Empire after 1859 and during the first three decades of the Turkish Republic. This descriptive compilation of political associations which had come into existence prior to the beginning of Republican multi-party democracy fills more than 600 pages, with close to one-fourth devoted to the extraordinary proliferation of political and associational activity during the period 1918–1923.¹³ A multiplicity of associations with diverse agendas surfaced at the war’s end, including political parties and societies, ethnic associations, benevolent societies, and local “defense” organizations. Some were survivals from the CUP era, now revived; but many were new and responded to postwar developments.

Political parties had started to splinter off from the CUP before the end of the war. Upon the dismantling of the CUP and conclusion of the Armistice, associational activity accelerated. The secondary echelons of the extant political leadership vied for a new identity in an attempt to escape the stigma of the CUP. The main regrouping of

of the sultan in his aforementioned 1927 speech. The tendency to rehabilitate Vahideddin and evaluate his actions in the context of the uncertainties of the Armistice period has found expression in a recent comprehensive history of the period. See Stanford Shaw, *From Empire to Republic*, vol. II, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi 2000, 663.

¹² Istanbul: Doğan Kardeş Yayınları 1952.

¹³ Tunaya expanded his book in the 1980s and devoted one of the three volumes that he was able to complete to the Armistice period (see note 10).

former Unionists took the name Teceddüd Fırkası (Renewal Party).¹⁴ The CUP's dissolution also brought to the fore its main opposition, suppressed since 1911, the Hürriyet ve İtilaf (Liberty and Entente Party). The polarization between the state-centric Unionists and decentralist Liberals, with roots as far back as in the Hamidian period, reemerged. In reclaiming its former position as the locus of the broader opposition to the Unionists, the Liberty and Entente depicted the post-CUP political formations as old wine in new bottles. While not far from the truth, this portrayal led them to reject political processes that entailed the participation of ex-Unionists, thereby depriving the Liberty and Entente of opportunities to forge links in the countryside, where the CUP's provincial organization was extensive and mostly intact. The Liberals, supported by a significant segment of the Istanbul press, were predisposed to accommodate an Allied occupation that would purge the Unionists. Some cooperated with the crony governments formed by Damad Ferid Pasha, the brother-in-law of Sultan Vahideddin and a prominent member of the Liberty and Entente in its earlier incarnation during the Young Turk period.

The defining political dynamic of the period following the Armistice was not the time-honored struggle of the Liberals and Unionists, but the emergence of a diverse array of other political, cultural, ethnic, and interest groups that coalesced to transcend the traditional tug-of-war between the two. The line between political parties and civic societies remained blurred. Indeed, the closure of parliament and the postponement of elections in December 1918 deprived political parties of their main function, while many civic associations took center stage in the political uncertainties of the period. Some have been noticed in nationalist history-writing, only to be quickly discredited and dismissed. A standard study of postwar associations examines political groupings under three rubrics: the “useful associations” (those groups that have been retrospectively identified as having contributed to Mustafa Kemal's nationalist project); the “harmful associations” (“those led by traitors to the country”); and those that started with good intentions but subsequently developed “in dangerous and harmful ways.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Bünyamin Kocaoğlu, *Mütarekede İttihatçılık: İttihat ve Terakki Fırkasının Dağılımı*, İstanbul: Temel Yayınları 2006.

¹⁵ Fethi Tevetoğlu, *Milli Mücadele Yıllarındaki Kuruluşlar*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi 1988. This utilitarian understanding of civic-political activity has been remarkably durable. For example, in an otherwise revisionist study of the role of

In fact, such was the threat of occupation and the magnitude of the political crisis that there were significant initiatives that sought to coordinate political parties and political and cultural associations within a broader organization. Best known is the umbrella movement known as the Milli Kongre (National Congress).¹⁶ It linked some 50 associations, but also included figures not clearly identified with any one group. Represented in this “National Congress” were some of the first political parties formed in the fall of 1918: the Osmanlı Radikal Avam Fırkası (Ottoman Radical People’s Party), an extra-parliamentary party led by opponents of the CUP; the Hürriyetperver Avam Fırkası (Pro-Liberty People’s Party), formed by deputies who resigned from the CUP before its dissolution; and the Renewal Party, the CUP’s unofficial legatee. Particularly striking was the role that civic associations played in the National Congress. These included the provincial associations formed to resist occupation (e.g., İzmir Müdafaa-ı Hukuk-u Osmaniye Cemiyeti [Izmir Defense of Ottoman Rights Society]); professional societies (the Press Association, the Teachers’ Association, the Lawyers’ Association); educational groups (alumni associations, the faculties of the departments of Law and Literature [Istanbul University]); and community groups such as the İslam Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyeti (Association for the Employment of Muslim Women) and Musiki Muhipleri Hanımlar Cemiyeti (Society of Women Music Lovers).¹⁷ Reminiscent of the Wafd in Cairo at the same juncture, the Congress sought representation at the Paris Peace Conference, but failed.¹⁸

The “harmful” organizations denounced in the histories of the period provide a glimpse into the dynamic pluralism of the postwar period. Among them was the Society for Wilsonian Principles. Wilson’s Fourteen Points provided the moral background and even the political impetus behind postwar pluralism, which may also explain the deft hand of the occupation authorities with respect to the freedoms of press and association. The society advocated economic independence, a reform program facilitated and overseen by an American commission for 15 to 25 years, neutrality in international relations, and full equality and proportional

religious elements in the struggle for independence, Bayram Sakallı accommodates this template: *Milli Mücadele’nin Sosyal Tarihi*, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık 1997, 11.

¹⁶ Tunaya, *Mütareke*, 150–54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁸ Taha Niyazi Karaca, *Son Osmanlı Meclis-i Mebusan Seçimleri*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi 2004, 34.

representation for the minority groups.¹⁹ It was launched at a time when modalities of maintaining European control in the Middle East were being assiduously examined at the peace conference. It was later discredited for having acquiesced in a mandatory arrangement, even though it was led by prominent intellectuals such as Halide Edib and Yunus Nadi, some of whom became leaders in the Kemalist movement. During the winter of 1918–19, when the society was active, the preference for a US overseership seemed to many, including the elements of the crystallizing resistance, to be the surest way of forestalling French and British neo-imperialism.

British and French sympathizers organized in societies in the political heat of the Armistice period. The proponents of these societies harked back to cordial relations between the Ottoman Empire and Western European countries until the collapse of the Concert of Europe; they invoked the sentiments of segments of the Ottoman elite in favor of forging alliances with Britain and France as late as the summer of 1914. The better known of these groups is the İngiliz Muhipleri (Friends of England) Society, formed in Istanbul in the spring of 1919.²⁰ Its leadership overlapped with that of the Liberty and Entente Party and included religious officials who saw the best interests of the caliphate in British goodwill as well as Liberals who were willing to cooperate with the occupation authorities, such as during the 1919 elections,²¹ to stem a Unionist revival in Anatolia. Both the Society for Wilsonian Principles and the Friends of England survived until the early military victories of the Anatolian movement against the Greek occupation forces.

After 1918, ethnic organizations, though not new in the Ottoman Empire, received a new impetus. Wilson's principles supported the right to self-determination, but did not uphold the self-determination of any specific non-Turkish peoples in the rump empire. The Fourteen Points had been formulated primarily with European peoples in mind, among whom ethnicity had already been politicized to a larger extent than in the Ottoman Empire. In the Middle East, Wilson's principles reinforced the wartime accomplished fact of separatism and imparted legitimacy

¹⁹ Alev Er, "Millî Mücadele'de Siyasi Kuruluşlar," in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. IV, Istanbul: İletişim 1985, 1125–26; Sina Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Millî Mücadele*, vol. I, Istanbul: Cem, 1992, 118.

²⁰ Tunaya, *Mütareke*, 472–83. The French counterpart was the *Türk-Fransız Muhipleri Cemiyeti* (Turkish–French Friends Society), which renounced political involvement: *ibid.*, 536–37.

²¹ Karaca, *Son Osmanlı Meclis-i Mebusan Seçimleri*, 250.

to Greater Syrian, Palestinian, or broader Arab political agendas. It awakened segments of other Muslim groups to self-determination on ethnic lines.

Kurdish leaders in Istanbul and Europe embraced the right of Kurdish self-determination. Kurdish intellectuals, some of whom had established and led cultural nationalist Kurdish organizations since 1908, formed the Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) at the very end of 1918. The leaders made common cause with the Liberals, who favored the maintenance of friendly relations with the Allies and sought the blessing and assistance of the occupation powers for the setting up of an independent entity. They met with the representatives of Allied governments in Istanbul to discuss boundaries for a new Kurdistan.²² In August 1920, the Sèvres Treaty stipulated an autonomous Kurdistan, but the anti-imperialist and anti-Christian reaction that the treaty galvanized among the Muslims of Anatolia, including many Kurds led by local leaders, frustrated this political scheme.

Even as Wilson's Twelfth Point stated that "the Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty," an ethnic Turkish identity was too vague as a locus for exclusive sovereignty in the rump empire at the war's end. Turkist cultural associations from the Young Turk period survived the end of the war, but self-avowed Turkish political associations of the Armistice period remained weak, inconsistent, and fuzzy in their programs. The Türk Teali Cemiyeti (Turkish Advancement Society), formed in October 1919, had a royalist tendency and decried the Anatolian movement for toeing the Bolshevik line.²³ The other Turkish organization, the Milli Türk Fırkası (National Turkish Party), entered the 1919 elections but produced only one deputy and was subsequently absorbed into the Anatolian movement.²⁴ During the Armistice period, Turkishness was conceived as a civic Muslim, rather than ethnic, identity in the rump empire, the area described as the "Turkish portion" in the Twelfth Point.²⁵ Despite its close consideration of religious and ethno-religious groups, the Lausanne Treaty overlooked Muslim ethnic identities. Muslim ethnicity was not politi-

²² Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2004, 82–83.

²³ Karaca, *Son Osmanlı Meclis-i Mebusan Seçimleri*, 252–53; Tunaya, *Mütareke*, 512–13.

²⁴ Tunaya, *Mütareke*, 532–33.

²⁵ Karen Barkey, "Thinking about Consequences of Empire," in Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Empire*, Boulder: Westview 1987.

cally irrelevant: socio-political struggles mobilized patronage networks rooted in specific ethnic communities.²⁶ Yet the notion that Albanians, Circassians, Turks, or Kurds were entitled to a separate political organization, in federation or individual statehood, was restricted to small groups at best. Ethnic Turkishness would be imagined, and increasingly imposed, as the exclusive political basis of Turkey in the early years of the Republic.²⁷

The decisive associational activity during the 1918–1923 period occurred in the provinces and was increasingly coupled with militia formation. The Mudros agreement included open-ended clauses that gave the Entente the right to occupy “important strategic points” should their security be threatened (Article 7), and the six eastern (i.e. Armenian) provinces (Article 24) in the event of disturbances. The security caveat in the agreement was used to justify immediate Allied military advances and occupation. The capital and its environs came under effective, if informal, occupation by the French and British forces. British troops moved into Musul immediately upon the signing, followed by a French landing in Alexandretta and Adana. The British also advanced in the Caucasus into areas that had been returned to the Ottomans by Russia at the Brest-Litovsk Treaty earlier in 1918.

Associations known as defense of rights societies (*müdafaa-ı hukuk*) were responsible for the popular mobilization and organization in the provinces. They aimed at warding off further occupation and preempting the return of displaced Christians under the Allied auspices. These associations emerged quickly by utilizing extant structures of the Union and Progress Party organization in the provinces, implementing plans contemplated by the CUP leadership for the contingency of post-defeat occupation.²⁸ The defense of rights societies became the engine of a bottom up-organization. Following the CUP’s decapitation and the signing of Mudros, they convened a series of congresses and, upon the Greek landing in Izmir, coalesced into an umbrella organization, the Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-ı Hukuk Cemiyeti (Anatolia and Rumelia Defense of

²⁶ Ryan Gingeras analyzes the dynamics of these networks in ethnically mixed north-western Anatolia in “Imperial Killing Fields: Revolution, Ethnicity and Islam in Western Anatolia, 1913–1938,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto 2006.

²⁷ Howard Eissenstat, “Metaphors of Race and Discourse of Nation: Racial Theory and the Beginnings of Nationalism in the Turkish Republic,” in Paul Spickard, ed., *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World*, New York: Routledge 2005, 249–51.

²⁸ Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor*, 80–81.

Rights Society). The formal occupation of Istanbul by the Franco-British forces in March 1920 resulted in the disbanding of parliament (opened following new elections at the end of 1919) and reinvigorated organizational activity in Anatolia which culminated in the Grand National Assembly (GNA) in Ankara. The pluralism of the immediate postwar period gave way to a more dichotomous political struggle as the battle lines were drawn between the Ankara and Istanbul governments after 1920. The polarization was best reflected in the press.

The burgeoning of newspapers and journals had to do with the relaxation of wartime censorship and the emergence of new political associations parallel to the attenuation and dispersal of political authority in a climate of ambivalent political legitimacy. Particularly in view of the dismissal of the 1914 parliament in December 1918, the press became the arena in which political agendas and outlooks were negotiated and promoted. Many newspapers served as the mouthpieces of political parties (e.g., *Serbesti* [Freedom], published by Mevlanzade Rıfat as the organ of the pro-Liberal Radical People's Party)²⁹ and associations (e.g., *Türkçe İstanbul* [Turkish Istanbul], published by Said Molla,³⁰ a founder of the Friends of England Society) or were subsidized by them (e.g., *Akşam* [Evening] and *Yeni Gün* [New Day] by the Renewal Party).³¹ The main cleavage was between the publications that acquiesced in the Allied role in the determination of the empire's destiny and those that objected to it, which increasingly supported the solidifying resistance in the countryside, particularly after the Greek occupation broadened in western Anatolia. The spectrum of orientations continued to be broad, and the press was not restricted to organs of political parties and associations or to political dailies and journals. After 1918, there was a proliferation of satirical and humor journals, newspapers and journals published for and about women, sports papers, literary journals, and religious/Islamist publications.³²

Even though Allied control over Istanbul was not complete even after March 1920, when the capital was formally occupied, the Allied administrators had the ability to monitor and curb associational and press activity more effectively. The relative permissiveness had in part

²⁹ Shaw, *From Empire to Republic*, vol. I, 168–69.

³⁰ Bülent Varlık, "Mütareke ve Milli Mücadele Basını," in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. V, 1202.

³¹ Tunaya, *Mütareke*, 97.

³² Varlık, "Mütareke ve Milli Mücadele," 1200–03.

to do with the dynamics of relations among the Allied powers and a diffusion of authority among occupation forces. There was also the longstanding British conviction, best displayed in Egypt,³³ that rigid restriction, even when practicable, could be counterproductive. Last but not least, the democratic principles touted by the USA militated against a draconian suppression of freedoms fundamental to the negotiation of self-determination. The freedoms of association and press were not unrestricted, however. In December 1918, the government restored press censorship. Whether this was dictated by the Entente Powers then in de facto occupation of the capital or conceived by the sultan's cabinet became a subject of discussion itself in the press. The stipulations suggest that both must have favored the new law. It prohibited news items on Entente military operations, publications disrespectful to the sultan as well as to Ottoman and foreign officials, incitement against the Great Powers, personal polemics, and advocacy of change of government or regime.³⁴ In February, Allied control over the press was tightened with a revision of the Press Law that subjected all publications to the censorship of the military and civilian authorities. Even the new measures did not muzzle the press. Only after the occupation of Istanbul in March 1920 did some of the Istanbul papers sympathetic to the Anatolian resistance have to leave the capital.

Public meetings were another venue for political propaganda and the mobilization of the populace. Since 1908, popular protest had been expressed in the form of celebrations (1908 restoration of the constitution), riots (1909 “counterrevolution”), and boycotts (Austrian goods after annexation of Bosnia). Public rallies had accompanied election campaigns, particularly during the 1912 elections. As the CUP governments became more authoritarian, public rallies became confined to protest against foreign intervention and aggression. In the postwar rallies, the size of the crowds, commensurate with the magnitude of the foreign threat or encroachment, dwarfed those that had preceded them.

The Greek landing in Izmir in May 1919 triggered a spate of public rallies. In Istanbul, protests started with the boycott of classes by the students of Darulfünun (the precursor of Istanbul University). The

³³ Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, New York: Oxford University Press 1995, 52.

³⁴ Sina Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Milli Mücadele*, vol. I, Istanbul: Cem 1992, 116.

largest public meeting was held on the site of the ancient hippodrome in Istanbul near the Sultanahmet Mosque one week after the invasion of Izmir. One of the main speakers was the novelist and educator Halide Edib, who described the meeting in her memoirs as follows:

These months were months of almost continuous public speaking for me. But the meeting of the revolution was to be in Sultan Ahmed... The minarets of Sultan Ahmed mosque rose into brilliant white flutes of magic design. From their tiny balconies high in the air the black draperies [hoisted in protest] waved softly... Down below, just in front of the mosque railings, rose the tribune, covered with an enormous black flag on which was inscribed in huge white letters, "Wilson's Twelfth Point." Not only the square but the thoroughfares... were blocked with a human mass such as Istamboul had never seen and will probably never see again. "Two hundred thousand," said the staff officers.

Besides this mass of humanity, hardly able to move, railings, domes, roofs, and the grand old elms in the yard of the mosque were filled with human bunches.³⁵

The meetings spread to provincial centers and continued after the Istanbul government cracked down on public rallies in the capital.³⁶ In the provinces, too, the mosque served as an effective venue to enhance political consciousness. A sermon by Mehmed Akif, who moved the printing press of his pro-resistance *Sebilürreşad* to Anatolia and became a deputy in the new Ankara assembly, exemplifies these meetings. Delivered in the Nasrullah Mosque in the North Anatolian town of Kastamonu, this vehement denunciation of the Sèvres Treaty was subsequently printed and distributed widely.³⁷

The resilience of constitutionalism

The royal decree that disbanded the last parliament of the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18) in December 1918 did not propose a timetable for renewed elections or refer to the constitutional stipulation that new elections should be held within four months of the closure of parliament. Instead, the decree pointed out that new elections should

³⁵ Halidé Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal*, Westport: Hyperion 1928, 30.

³⁶ Kemal Arıburnu, *Milli Mücadelede İstanbul Mitingleri*, Ankara: Yeni Matbaa 1951.

³⁷ Hasan Kayalı, "Islam in the Thought and Politics of Two Late Ottoman Intellectuals: Mehmed Akif and Said Halim," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 19 (2001), 329.

be considered only upon the resolution of the following matters: the return of the deportees to their homes, the completion of demobilization, and the determination of the political status of the provinces under occupation.³⁸ This was a list of all that the resistance movement was trying to prevent. Both the Anatolian congresses of the defense of rights groups and the National Congress in Istanbul demanded new elections. Intimidated by the increasingly coordinated resistance in the countryside, Vahideddin consented to elections in the hope that he could gain control over a parliament that would meet under his eye in the capital.

The staging of parliamentary elections as late as the end of 1919 illustrates differences between the experience of the Ottoman state and other defeated powers. When the Paris Peace Conference convened in January 1919, separate treaties with Germany (Versailles, June 28, 1919) and Austria-Hungary (St. Germaine, September 10, 1919) had accomplished the dismantling of these two empires. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, a final settlement was to wait until 1923. As the course and outcome of the elections were to reveal, despite the ferment of the last few years neither war nor the peace-settlement process had consigned the Ottoman state to the past.

It was obvious that the defense of rights organizations, composed of delegates hailing from the very provinces where elections were to be held, would attempt to influence their outcome. The Liberals declared their boycott of the elections in protest over the preponderance of the Unionists in the defense of rights organizations. Nevertheless, the last two months of 1919 witnessed a lively election campaign with the participation of the press, and 123 deputies were elected. When parliament opened on January 12, 1920, deputies trickled to Istanbul gradually.³⁹ Under the chaotic circumstances of occupation and incipient armed struggle in the west, southeast, and northeast, elections could not be completed everywhere, nor were all deputies-elect able to make their way to the capital. The elections were flawed, but nevertheless witnessed campaigning by diverse political groups and parties as well as political alliances, and produced a largely representative parliament. It soon became apparent that the new body was not going to be the tractable and malleable entity that the Istanbul government had hoped it would

³⁸ Karaca, *Son Osmanlı Meclis-i Mebusan Seçimleri*, 19.

³⁹ Shaw, *From Empire to Republic*, vol. II, 791–99.

be. On March 16, 1920, the Entente occupation forces entered the capital and raided parliament to arrest Unionist deputies. Parliament adjourned and dissolved itself.⁴⁰

Within two weeks of the closure of parliament in Istanbul, on April 23, 1920, the defense of rights representative council led by Mustafa Kemal convened a representative assembly in Ankara (the Grand National Assembly [GNA]), outside the sphere of Allied occupation. Kemal himself had been elected as deputy to parliament, but had chosen to stay in Ankara. He sponsored a newspaper, *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (Popular Sovereignty), a successor of the short-lived *İrade-i Milliye* (Popular Will) printed in Sivas after the congress as the propaganda organ of the defense of rights organizations.⁴¹ The initial declaration of the GNA reaffirmed the principle of popular sovereignty already enunciated by the earlier congresses in Anatolia. The assertion of popular sovereignty was to become the linchpin of the political movement led by Mustafa Kemal, the elected chairman (“president”) of the new assembly. The revolutionary potential of the declaration of the sovereign nation, however, was not apparent even as these resolutions were incorporated in 1921 into the first “Law of Fundamental Organization,” also known, somewhat misleadingly, as the 1921 constitution. The Fundamental Law posited the GNA as the ultimate expression of the people’s will, triggering a fierce debate within and outside the assembly about the meaning and desirability of popular sovereignty.

The deputies did not see the assembly as constitutive or permanent, but as a body taking over in the name of the people until the liberation of the sultan. Positing the principle of popular sovereignty in a basic law compromised the time-honored Ottoman monarchy. During the discussions of the draft law, many deputies supported a clause that safeguarded the rights of the sultan–caliph, but failed to push it through. Mustafa Kemal in turn favored a clause that would make the president of the assembly the ex officio head of ministers, each elected individually from the ranks of the assembly. This proposal signified the coalescing of executive and legislative prerogatives in the person of a single individual. Many deputies viewed with suspicion measures supported by Mustafa Kemal which would enhance his powers as the

⁴⁰ Nur Bilge Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation, 1918–1923*, Leiden: Brill 1999, 12.

⁴¹ Yücel Özkaya, *Milli Mücadele’de Atatürk ve Basım (1919–1921)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi 1989, 59–70.

president of an all-powerful assembly. In November 1920, he sponsored legislation mandating that the members of the cabinet would be chosen from among the deputies in the assembly as nominated by the assembly president.⁴² The measure was opposed, not just because ministerial candidates put forward by the president compromised the sovereignty of the assembly, but also because it all but equipped the president with the prerogatives of the sultan. The deputies failed to see an incompatibility between popular sovereignty vested in the assembly and the historical rights and privileges of the House of Osman as defined by the constitution, a separation of powers inherent in the constitutional monarchy.

The representatives of the first assembly had varied ideological leanings, but united around the goal of territorial defense. The issue of how much to concede to Mustafa Kemal's demands without jeopardizing the principles of assembly government was at the crux of factionalism. Mustafa Kemal decided to confront the differences. He identified a group of stable supporters as the Defense of Rights Group within the assembly. In an effort to deny Mustafa Kemal exclusive appropriation of the "defense of rights" designation, those left out called themselves the "other" defense of rights group, or the Second Group.⁴³

In the spring of 1923, Mustafa Kemal engineered the dissolution of parliament and forced new elections. None of the Second Group deputies obtained seats. The new assembly voted to bring to conclusion the peace negotiations at Lausanne, the territorial clauses of which had been unpalatable to opposition deputies. A greater degree of group discipline had to be established to be able to implement new agendas and foster loyalty. Mustafa Kemal formed a political party, the People's Party (*Halk Fırkası*), for this purpose in the spring of 1923. The party signaled the beginning of authoritarian rule, even as it spearheaded within months a measure to declare the new Turkey a republic.

⁴² Ergun Özbudun, *1921 Anayasası*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi 1992, 15–17.

⁴³ Ahmet Demirel, *Birinci Meclis'te Muhalefet*, İstanbul: İletişim 1994, 379–91.

Conclusion

The interregnum between the military collapse of the empire in October 1918 and the recognition of the boundaries for the new state of Turkey in July 1923 witnessed multifarious liberal forms and practices unprecedented in their combination and vigor. The establishment of the republic in the rump Ottoman Empire heralded a contraction of political liberties that had flourished in the volatile opportunity spaces of the immediate postwar period. The Kemalist regime was itself an emanation of the pluralistic opportunity structures of the Armistice period. Yet, even as this regime consigned a religiously sanctioned monarchy to history, it did not sustain the vitality of the Armistice period in terms of ideological pluralism, political debate, degree of freedoms of press/association/demonstration, or relatively free elections. The discourse of the modernization paradigm has glorified Kemalist modernity and its commitment to secularism, but obscured the liberal processes and contestations of the transition from empire to nation-state as the death pangs of a defunct empire. This selective historical viewpoint has erased much that would establish the postwar half-decade as a unique juncture of liberal political manifestations and a vibrant public sphere, emanating from longstanding political trends but also reinforced by novel contingencies. At a time when questions about democratization in the region are asked not only with little regard to history but also with particular understandings of what democracy should look like, there is merit in looking at liberal precedents and how and why they have been obviated by novel structures of authority.

CHAPTER NINE

WRITING A CONSTITUTION: CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATES IN SYRIA IN THE MANDATE PERIOD

Eyal Zisser

Introduction: spring in Damascus: is the season changing?

At the height of the winter months of the year 2000 spring weather began to be felt suddenly throughout the city of Damascus, and throughout all of Syria as well. For the first time since the Baʿth Party seized power in Syria in March 1963 the voices of Syrian intellectuals began to be heard, demanding the establishment of a democratic and liberal government in place of the Baʿth regime, which had been ruling Syria high-handedly for nearly forty years.¹

All over the country dozens of political and cultural forums sprang up, seeking to advance a reformist—and even liberal and democratic—agenda. However, this “Damascus spring” proved to be quite short-lived. In February 2001, the authorities decided to bring the “political spring” to an end, and “political winter” returned to Syria.

This short “Damascus spring,” which occurred at the beginning of the rule of the young president of Syria, Bashshar al-Asad, and with what seemed to be his clear blessing, aroused a great deal of interest among Syria watchers. Some argued, however, that not much significance should be attributed to this brief interlude. After all, the Syrian regime managed to end the affair in a very short time. Still, one might quite rightly wonder about the roots of this phenomenon. The scope and power with which these roots broke to the surface would seem to indicate the existence of a trend of liberal secular thought in Syria the like of which it would be hard to find in other Arab states. This trend

¹ For more on the Damascus Spring see Eyal Zisser, “A False Spring in Damascus,” *Orient* 44 (2003), 39–62; Alan George, *Syria, Neither Bread nor Freedom*, London: Zed Books 2003; Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar’s Trial by Fire*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press 2005, 57–98; David W. Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2005, 81–97.

would seem to be deeply rooted among the Syrian public, even if it raised its head only in recent years.

The events of recent years in Syria indicate, it would seem, the need to reexamine a number of conventional assumptions about the intellectual history of this state. There are many starting points from which one could begin such a reexamination. One of them, without a doubt, is the constitutional experiment experienced by Syria soon after its establishment, when this state was granted a constitution. This constitution contributed a great deal to the formation of the political systems and political life in Syria for many years, and, interestingly enough, it gave expression to liberal attitudes, echoes of which could be heard in Syria in recent years.

Writing a constitution: where to begin, what to ask?

In April 1928 elections to a constituent assembly were held in Syria. The elections took place in the shadow of the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925–27 and after the French mandatory power had given up any hopes of preventing the creation of a Syrian-Arab political entity. France now felt compelled to assist in establishing a mechanism that would create this entity, and perhaps even lead it to independence in the future. This mechanism included elections to a constituent assembly, whose task was to formulate a constitution.

The elected assembly held its first meeting in July 1928. In less than a month the delegates formulated a draft constitution for the Syrian state. However, this draft was rejected by the French, who claimed that it vitiated France's special status as the mandatory power in Syria. Nevertheless, two years later the French became reconciled to the idea and decided to ratify the constitution, although with certain alterations. This document, known as the constitution of 1930, thus became Syria's first constitution. It also became the basis for the constitutions that followed.²

² See Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989, 327–45; Peter A. Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria, 1927–1936*, Reading: Ithaca Press 1998, 5–84; Nathan J. Brown, *Constitutions in a Nonconstitutional World: Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government*, New York: State University of New York Press 2002, 67–69; see also “Dustūr: A Survey of the Constitutions of the Arab and Muslim States,” reprinted

The writing of the Syrian constitution during the French Mandate period has not been given the attention it deserves in the historical discourse and research devoted to the history of this state. It has generally not been treated as an independent historical topic, but rather as a secondary and marginal issue. The attention of the historical discourse has been focused on the Syrian struggle for independence from France, and as a result the question of the writing of the Syrian constitution has always been addressed through the prism of that struggle. Thus, for years this constitution was perceived in many of the historical studies merely as an instrument that both the Syrian nationalists and the French tried to exploit. On the one hand, there were those who viewed it as a document dictated by the French Mandate authorities to the local populations, and whose main aim was to create a legal and political framework that would make possible the continuation of French presence and influence in Syria. On the other hand, there were those who viewed it as a document composed, indeed, by local Syrian and Lebanese representatives, but with the aim of challenging the French Mandate and removing the basis of legitimacy of French presence in the Levant. It should be noted that both present-day research in Syria and memoirs and collections of documents published in Syria continue to focus on the struggle for independence from France as a point of departure for the historical narrative, ignoring other dimensions of Syria's history during those years.³

Recent studies have advanced and broadened the historical debate on the Mandate period in Syria. They have shifted the emphasis from the Syrian–French struggle to the domestic arena, and within it to the socio-economic dimension of political life in the Levant during the Mandate period. These new studies thus focus on analyzing the character of the society and the social forces operating in the Syrian arena. There is no question that in taking this approach they advance our understanding of the background to the writing of the constitutions in the Levant—by their emphasis on the fact that the writers of the constitutions came from

with additional material, from the 2d ed. of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: Brill Academic Press 1966, 59.

³ See for example Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, Beirut: Lebanon Bookshop 1958; N. A. Ziadeh, *Syria and Lebanon*, Beirut: Lebanon Bookshop 1965; Salma Mardam Bey, *Syria's Quest for Independence 1939–1945*, Reading: Ithaca Press 1994; see also Khayriyya Qasimiyya, *al-Ra'īl al-'arabī al-awwal: ḥayāt wa-awrāq Nabīh wa-'Ādil al-'Azma*, London: Riyad el-Rayyes Books 1991; Nassuh Babil, *Ṣaḥāfa wa-siyāsa: Sūriyya fī l-qarn al-'ishrīn*, London: Riyad el-Rayyes Books 1987.

the elite of the notable families, or the *zu'amā'*, that is, from among the social and political forces dominating Syrian society during the 1920s and 1930s, whose only aim, according to these studies, was to preserve their status by means of the state's constitution. As the constitution writers worked they demonstrated an apparent readiness to adopt, at least outwardly, Western—and even liberal—ways of thinking. They also showed, as might have been expected, a readiness to adopt the conceptual framework of a modern and liberal republic that the French mandatory power was offering them, if only they could preserve in this framework their traditional status in society and the positions of power they had held in the past. This condition, it is argued in many of the studies, was, in fact, met.⁴

However, it would seem that the debate about the writing of the Syrian constitution is still deficient. After all, a constitution is a statement-making document, and as such the Syrian constitution made a clearly democratic and liberal statement that found expression in every article having to do with the conception of the state and its governmental institutions, as well as the relations of the state with its citizens. It should also be remembered that the Syrian constitution was written by representatives of the local population and was not dictated, as for many years it was commonplace to assume, by the French mandatory authorities.

From this arises the question whether this constitution was written inside a bubble detached from reality—that is, by an elite detached from the general discourse, mood, and opinions of the Syrian public during those years or whether perhaps it reflected and gave expression to a liberal discourse or mood that was widespread among significant segments of the society and clearly among intellectuals active in Damascus, and other towns of Syria: It is especially important to find out if educated and intellectual circles, the press, and public opinion in the broad sense in Syria contributed anything to the constitution, and to what degree they did so.

At the base of this study, therefore, stands the argument that the Syrian constitutional debate enables us to deduce the existence of a liberal discourse in the Syria of those years. Expressions of this liberal discourse

⁴ See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*; see also Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press 1999.

or mood can be found in the public debate in Lebanon from a very early time, but it is particularly interesting to discover that such a discourse or mood was also characteristic of debates among intellectuals in Syria, at least until being pushed aside in the late 1940s and 1950s.

After all, every portrayal of the history of Syria emphasizes the radicalization that occurred on the street and in the political debate in that country since the early 1940s. Therefore every historical account focuses on the views expressed by the adherents of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (also known as the PPS) and, mainly, the Baʿth Party, or by other pan-Arab forces that antedated it, such as the League for National Action—views that prevailed in Syria for many years, and perhaps still prevail there even today. To this may be added the radicalization of the Islamic street in Syria during the 1970s and 1980s, the years of the Islamic rebellion against the Baʿth regime in Damascus. The terminology used when describing these views includes “fascist,” with regard to the PPS; “radical pan-Arab nationalist,” with regard to the Baʿth Party; “radical left,” with in regard to the Neo-Baʿth; “fundamentalist,” with regard to the views of the “Muslim Brothers,” and so on. Therefore the appearance of a liberal strain of thought in present-day Syria evokes surprise and wonder regarding its origins and roots. However, these, it would seem, go back to the 1920s and 1930s, the years to which the study is devoted.

With the above factors in mind, it would seem that focusing on the public debate that arose in connection with the Syrian constitution would make it possible to view the 1920s and 1930s differently than they have been viewed until now. In particular, such an approach might make it possible to distinguish additional dimensions in the political discourse in the Levant during that time, a discourse that was much more liberal-minded than it has often been perceived.

The Syrian constitution

The 1928 elections in Syria for the constituent assembly were held after France, the mandatory power, despaired of preventing the establishment of a Syrian state ruled by the local nationalist forces. Indeed, during the first years of the Mandate, French policy in the Levant had concentrated on breaking up the “Syrian Lands” into pieces, with the aim of ensuring the future of France’s domination there. Thus, the French had divided the region into a number of entities when it fell into their

hands at the end of World War I. These included the states of Greater Lebanon, Damascus, and Aleppo, as well as an autonomous Alawite state and an autonomous Druze unit. In addition, the French granted the Alexandretta area the status of autonomous region.⁵

However, mastering the “Syrian Lands” turned out to be a complicated task for the French. They were forced little by little to agree to the idea of establishing an independent Syrian state on most of the territory of the French Mandate in the Levant. Even worse, in the view of the French, they had to reconcile themselves to handing the rule over this state, even if only in a partial manner, to the nationalist circles that were the sworn enemies of the French presence in the area. The Syrian Revolt—or perhaps the Druze revolt—which took place in Syria in 1925–27 served as the last nail in the coffin of the French vision, or perhaps fantasy, about the future of the “Syrian Lands.” The rebellion convinced the French that they could no longer hold on to this region by means of a direct colonial regime.⁶

At first, in order to extricate themselves from their difficulties, the French set into motion a process intended to make it easier for them to preserve their status in the Levant in general, and in Syria in particular, even if they had to make significant concessions to the local forces and relax the policies they had pursued up to that time. As noted above, it was decided as a first step to hold elections for a constituent assembly. This assembly would be charged with drafting a constitution as a basis for establishing institutions that would activate the political system in the country and reduce somewhat the pressure on France to turn it into an independent state.

The Syrian entity was thus established on the basis of French interests and in accordance with perceptions and patterns of thought prevalent in France with regard to the ideal model of such an entity—that is, the republican model adapted to the Syrian situation, with the aim of assuring the continuation of French presence and influence in the region. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Syrian state should be viewed first and foremost as the result of a dialogue, sometimes a violent one, between the French and the local powers. From this point of view, the

⁵ See Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914–1924*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1981, 25–29; Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, 69–147.

⁶ See Michael Provence, *The Great Arab Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press 2005.

very establishment of a Syrian state with the borders it acquired, as well as the fact that it was established as a republic, were not the result of French coercion, but rather corresponded to a large degree to the desires of important political and social segments within the Syrian arena.

The elections to the constituent assembly were indirect and took place in two rounds, on April 10 and April 24, 1928. Before the elections the French decreed a general amnesty for persons who had been designated until then as bitter opponents of the French mandatory regime. Still, the French authorities published a blacklist of 64 persons who were prohibited from participating in the elections. These included, for example, Shukri al-Quwwatli, one of the future leaders of the National Bloc, and 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, who headed the People Party.⁷

However, Quwwatli was wise enough during the 1930s to find his way back into political life in Syria under the French Mandate. Shahbandar, in contrast, remained outside Syria for most of the period of the Mandate. He maintained his loyalty to pan-Arab views and remained active in political frameworks that fundamentally negated the existence of the Syrian entity in its present format, and consequently ruled out any cooperation whatsoever with the French. Such a stance tended to turn Shahbandar into an irrelevant factor in the situation that was developing in Syria during the 1930s. True, he played a significant role in Syrian politics at certain junctures, but this role lessened with the years. Toward the end of his life he linked up with the British and the Hashemite family, and eventually became a representative of Hashemite interests in Syria. However, as noted, Shahbandar's new role was more than anything an indication of how irrelevant he had become to the Syrian situation. From this point of view, his murder in June 1940 occurred long after a rich political career had reached a dead end.⁸

The elections of 1928 marked a significant achievement—although not an overwhelming victory—for the supporters of the National Bloc, the biggest and best-organized political force among the nationalist circles in Syria of those years. Thus, for example, of the nine delegates elected to represent the city of Damascus, seven belonged to the National Bloc. Only Shaykh Taj al-Din al-Husayni, who had been appointed by the

⁷ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 331–35.

⁸ For more see 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, *Mudhakkirāt 'Abd al-Rahmān Shahbandar*, Beirut: Dar al-Nashr 1967. See also Dhuqan Qarqut, *Tatawwur al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya fī Sūriyya, 1920–1939*, Damascus: Dār Ṭalās li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr 1989.

French to head the Syrian government on the eve of the elections, and Yosef Laniado, a Jewish merchant, were not counted among the members of the Bloc. The Bloc achieved similar success in other towns as well, such as Homs and Hama. However, on the whole it could count on the support of only 22 of the 70 delegates who were members of the assembly. This was because the Bloc did not enjoy the same degree of support in the rural areas and the periphery and among the minorities. The delegates elected from these constituencies were all local notables, and the great majority were subject to the influence, and even the control, of the French.⁹

Despite its relatively limited weight in the make-up of the constituent assembly, the National Bloc was the factor that dictated the tone in the assembly's debates. This was so thanks to its unity and also the assertiveness and devotion to their goal that its members demonstrated in face of the splits and divisions that reigned among the other delegates—traditional notables who, as noted, represented minority and tribal groups, or came from rural and peripheral areas. These latter found it difficult to unite around an acceptable and agreed-upon agenda, or around a leading figure from among their ranks, and in the end they found themselves led by the members of the National Bloc. Indeed, Hashim al-Atasi, of the National Bloc, was chosen as president of the constituent assembly, and not the candidate preferred by the French, Shaykh Taj al-Din al-Husayni.¹⁰

Thus, at the insistence of the representatives of the National Bloc the constituent assembly appointed a committee of 27 delegates to draft the constitution. Ibrahim Hananu, known for his struggle against the French when they conquered Syria in 1920, was placed at the head of this committee. Most of its members belonged to the National Bloc. This committee selected from among its members a subcommittee of three, including Fawzi al-Ghazi and Fa'iz al-Khuri, which within about

⁹ The rate of participation in the elections was not high. In Aleppo, for example, it was reported that only 35 percent of those with the right to vote actually did so, but in Homs and Hama the voting rate was close to 50 percent, while in Damascus it was close to 60 percent. See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 331–35; Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria*, 5–40.

¹⁰ For more see Itamar Rabinovich, "Between Nationalists and 'Moderates': France and Syria in the 1930s," in C. E. Bosworth et al., eds., *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times. Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, Princeton: Darwin Press 1989, 801–19. See also Michael G. Fry and Itamar Rabinovich, *Dispatches from Damascus, Gilbert Mackereth and British Policy in the Levant, 1933–1939*, Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies 1985, 28–41.

two months formulated a draft constitution containing 115 articles. The proposed constitution specified that the Syrian dispensation would be a republican parliamentary regime with an elected chamber, to be elected once every four years, by universal suffrage exercised in two stages.¹¹

As the committee carried out its work it maintained an ongoing dialogue with the French high commission's secretary-general, M. Maugras. The latter was known for his liberal views, and so he took a favorable view of the constitution that was taking shape. It can be assumed that he made his contribution to the document's spirit and language, although without using any coercion. The initial French response to the subcommittee's draft was essentially positive. They expressed their satisfaction especially with regard to the articles that promised equality for the members of all the religious communities in Syria, as well as freedom of religious practice and the right of schools of the various religious communities to exist and act freely. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the constitution specified that the president of the republic should be a Muslim.¹²

At first it seemed that France would accept the draft constitution as it stood. Indeed, the text of the draft was acceptable in principle to the French high commissioner to the Levant at the time, Henri Ponsot. However, some French officials and army officers at the Mandate high commission in Syria did not conceal their negative attitude toward the document. They argued that the whole procedure, crowned by the formulation of the constitution, was a disgraceful and far-reaching capitulation to the nationalist circles in Syria. They pointed in particular to the contradiction between some of the articles, on the one hand, and the obligations France had accepted as the mandatory power vis-à-vis the League of Nations, on the other. They also noted that other articles required the existence of a Syrian-French treaty regulating relations between the Syrian state that was destined to be established on the basis of the constitution and the French mandatory authority. Indeed, the constitution included six articles which many French felt were unacceptable. One defined the borders of Syria. According to it, the Syrian state included Lebanon, Transjordan, and Palestine. Another article specified that the Syrian state was one and indivisible. Others

¹¹ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 340–41; Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, 184.

¹² See Albert H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1946, 192–94.

dealt with the formation of a national army by the Syrian government and the right of the president of the republic to promulgate laws, receive ambassadors, and grant pardons, and also to declare martial law and a state of emergency.¹³

The French Foreign Ministry hastened to adopt a critical and disapproving position toward the constitution. Under great pressure from Paris, the French high commissioner therefore recommended that the constituent assembly revise the draft constitution in a way that would ensure that France could meet the international obligations it had taken upon itself. However, the constituent assembly refused to accept any changes in the text of the constitution. On August 3, 1928 the assembly began to discuss the draft that had been submitted to it, and fixed August 9 as the date for its ratification. In response, on August 11, 1928, the French high commissioner suspended the assembly for three months. When this period had passed he suspended it for another three months. Finally, on February 5, 1929, High Commissioner Ponsot ordered the dissolution of the assembly.¹⁴

This step evoked an angry response all over Syria, and ultimately the French were forced to back down and approve the constitution, although they did manage to insert certain modifications. Thus, in May 1930 Ponsot issued a decree ratifying the Syrian constitution, including the articles that were in dispute between the Syrian legislators and France. However, he added a paragraph, Article 116, which guaranteed France's status as the mandatory power. The article provided that the Syrian constitution did not, and could not, stand in opposition to the obligations France had taken upon itself regarding Syria, especially vis-à-vis the League of Nations. The article also provided that whenever the implementation of laws deriving from the articles of the constitution was liable to injure France's obligations to the League of Nations, such implementation was conditional upon France's consent beforehand.¹⁵

The constitution also gave statutory attention to the issue of Syria's borders. This included Article 2, which dealt with the indivisibility of Syria's territory. The revised wording of Article 2 defined Syria as a political unit not subject to division, and in essence the article amounted

¹³ See H. Miler Davis, *Constitutions, Electoral Laws, Treaties of States in the Near and Middle East*, Durham: Duke University Press 1964, 402–33; see also Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 342–43.

¹⁴ Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria*, 27–30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41–51; see also Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 338–42.

to a definition of the Syrian political entity that was established by the French. At the same time, along with the ratification of the Syrian constitution, the French published organic laws applying to the governments of Ladhahiyya, Jabal Druze, and Alexandretta, in an effort to ensure their independence, or separation, from Syria.

The adherents of the National Bloc refused to give their blessing to the constitution in the format in which it was ratified by the French, but in practice they agreed to take part in the Syrian political system that emerged, and which was supposed to be conducted according to the rules established by this constitution. The National Bloc refrained from boycotting the 1932 elections to the parliament. Moreover, the next elections that were held in Syria, in November 1936, resulted in a great victory for the National Bloc. Following these elections, the National Bloc representatives Hashim al-Atasi, Jamil Mardam, and Faris al-Khuri were elected as the president of Syria, the prime minister, and the chairman of the parliament respectively. Shukri al-Quwwatli and Sa'adallah al-Jabiri, National Bloc members and formerly bitter opponents of the French, were appointed as ministers in the government.¹⁶ The Syrian–French treaty was to lead Syria to independence. It was initialed in September 1936, and after the elections, in December 1936, it was signed in full. However, this treaty was never ratified by the French parliament.

The Syrian constitution: a liberal statement

The Syrian constitution of 1930 was a Syrian document, written by Syrian representatives—apart from Article 116, which differed conspicuously from the other articles and was added by the French. The most striking legislative statement in the constitution was its establishment of a republican regime, and in this regard it constituted a historic decision regarding the future of the system of government and the structure of the political system in Syria. The establishment of a republican regime was one of the fundamental changes the constitution brought to the state, which until the French Mandate had known only the Ottoman Empire and the short-lived monarchy of King Faysal. It should be noted that the committee that drafted the initial text of the constitution made

¹⁶ See Mardam Bey, *Syria's Quest for Independence*, 1–21.

use of constitutional models from both the Middle East (the Ottoman, Lebanese, Egyptian, Iranian, and Iraqi constitutions) and Europe (the Belgian and French constitutions).¹⁷

Syrian supporters of the Saudi monarch, Ibn Sa'ud, who opposed the idea of Syria becoming a Hashemite monarchy, enthusiastically advocated the establishment of a republic, but the main supporters of this republican approach were the adherents of the National Bloc, who opposed monarchy and favored the republican model as part of their worldview. They were concerned that a monarchical regime would create a powerful king who might take firm control over Syria himself, or even join up with the French, as had happened in Egypt between the king and the British.¹⁸

It should be noted that King Faysal of Iraq showed great interest in the constitutional debates in Syria and tried to influence their course. His emissaries to Syria—Rustum Haydar, Nuri Sa'id, and Yasin al-Hashimi—claimed before the French that the option of establishing a monarchy enjoyed wide support among the delegates to the constituent assembly, even though this was far from the truth. It goes without saying that the French showed no interest in or desire to further the interests of the Hashemites, and the French high commissioner, Ponsot, pushed for a republican regime rather than a monarchy. The French even derived a great deal of advantage from the controversy over the question of a Syrian throne, since the issue had a moderating influence both on the positions taken by the adherents of the National Bloc in their negotiations with the French and on the efforts by Faysal to ingratiate himself with the French. In practice, after he suspended the constitution in 1930, Ponsot even suggested to Faysal that they discuss the proposed constitution and the possibility of crowning him king of Syria. However, this move was made only for tactical reasons and with no bona fide intentions.¹⁹

In any case, the way that the question of the Syrian throne was addressed in the historical literature is but another example of the degree to which historical discourse has focused heavily on Syrian–French relations in its discussion of the 1930 Syrian constitution. The emphasis has been similar when discussing Syrian sovereignty, the ter-

¹⁷ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 351–59.

¹⁸ Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, 184–85.

¹⁹ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 351–59.

ritorial integrity of the Syrian state, and other issues, all referred to in the constitution. Even the question of granting equality to the members of the religious minorities has been discussed almost exclusively in the context of the Syrian–French relations, since this step was presented as being intended to conciliate Paris and make it easier for the French to ratify the constitution and grant Syria independence.

However, such discourse ignored the fact that the constitution reflected above all the worldview of the Syrian drafters and the legislators who approved it. The constitution also had great importance for the future of Syria, since it was the starting point of Syria's constitutional history. After all, if we discount the Ottoman constitution, Syria had no real constitution until 1930. During the reign of King Faysal the Syrian congress actually discussed the formulation of such a constitution, defining Syria as a monarchy. However, when the French conquered the country in July 1920 this attempt to formulate a constitution came to an end.²⁰

Indeed, the democratic worldview of the Syrian elite emanates from between the lines of the Syrian constitution of 1930, as does the worldview of the constitution's drafters, who saw themselves as constructing a modern state while being careful to learn the lessons of the past. True, the view of the leaders of the National Bloc was that of liberal elitism, as Philip S. Khoury has noted in his *Syria and the French Mandate*.²¹ From this angle it would seem that an identity of views existed between the Egyptian and Syrian elites of those days. However, the Syrian elite was interested in advancing the ideas of liberalism and reforms, and imagined Syria as a democratic, liberal, and Western-style republic. True, the writers of the constitution maintained an ongoing dialogue with the French high commissioner's secretary-general, Maugras, and they undoubtedly took his remarks—and even possible French reactions—into consideration. But in the end it was they who wrote the constitution.

Indeed, the democratic dimension of the Syrian constitution of 1930 can be found in many of its paragraphs: for example, in the drafters' approach to the question of sovereignty. Article 29 of the constitution

²⁰ See Khayriyya Qasimiyya, *al-Ḥukūma al-'arabiyya fī Dimashq, 1918–1920*, Beirut: al-Maṭba'a al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr 1987, 157–71; Yusuf al-Hakim, *Sūriyya wa-l-'ahd al-Fayṣalī*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahār li-l-Nashr 1966, 135–44; 'Ali Sultan, *Tārīkh Sūriyya, 1918–1920*, Damascus: Dār Ṭalās 1997.

²¹ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 340–41.

stated that the nation was the source of governmental power. It also stated that the Syrian state was sovereign and independent. The constitution also stressed the principle of the separation of powers, which is a clear characteristic of a constitutional regime. In fact, the constitution did provide for the separation of the legislative and executive powers (Articles 30 and 31), and it also stipulated that the Syrian parliament was to be elected in general and direct elections, and was to be composed of a single elected assembly. The president, as the head of the state, was to have no power to influence the composition of the parliament. He was also to head the executive branch, which was separated from the legislative branch and limited in its power to influence the parliament and the legislative process. However, the president was authorized to dissolve the parliament, although he needed the approval of the cabinet in order to do so. Furthermore, he had no authority to dissolve the parliament more than once on the same grounds.²²

The independence of the Syrian parliament was also evident from the oath of allegiance to be taken by its members, which referred to the constitution and the nation only (Article 46), and also from the parliament's monopoly on the right to legislate laws. The parliament had the power to amend the constitution by a majority of two-thirds—but only after one-third of the members, or the president with the authorization of the cabinet, so recommended (Article 108). The power of the parliament was also pointed up by the fact that it was to elect the president (Article 68). The relations between these two wings of government were thus based upon a system of checks and balances.

Indeed, most of the president's powers were limited by the parliament. Thus, for example, he had no authority to alter laws passed by the parliament, and every decree issued by the president needed the signature of the minister concerned. To be sure, the institution of the president created by the Syrian constitution still enjoyed great power, but it operated under significant legislative restrictions. Moreover, according to the constitution, the president belonged to the executive branch, in contrast to the king in the Iraqi constitution of 1925, who was a key player, standing outside and above the other branches of the country's government.

The liberal aspect of the Syrian constitution also stood out in the way it dealt with the questions of religion and state. The constitution

²² See Davis, *Constitutions*, 402–33.

refrained from defining Islam as the religion of the state, although it specified that the president must be a Muslim (Article 3). This was the minimum demand of the nationalists, who feared a backlash from the public and conservative religious circles. It should be noted that there was a convergence of interests between the religious circles and the adherents of the National Bloc, who were always careful to present themselves as defenders of religion and tradition. In some instances this defense of the religious establishment with regard to various religious matters was an expression of opposition to the French mandatory authorities.²³

Furthermore, the constitution stipulated that freedom of conscience was absolute and that the state would respect all the faiths and religions in the country and defend freedom of worship, which might be limited only by considerations of morality and public order (Article 15). The constitution made it possible for the various religious communities to maintain autonomous educational institutions, along with guaranteeing the rights of the communities, although without defining precisely what those rights were. The constitution also specified that all the religious interests and personal rights of members of minority communities would be respected (Articles 28 and 15).

The constitution had many defects, and its drafters were political figures with their own desires and interests. Khoury has pointed out some of the limitations of the constitution and its drafters:

On a more specific and practical level, the aims of the National Bloc in the thirties revealed bourgeois democratic tendencies. The leaders of the Syrian nationalist movement, having failed to dislodge the French, reorganized around the less radical demand for adequate consideration from the ruling system... The Bloc's fundamental demands were expressed in western political concepts and focused on democratic institutions which were more or less compatible with traditional ways of exercising political power and preserving vested interests... To most nationalist landlords, the constitutional route to independence and power was much safer and more attractive than one dependent on the mobilization of the masses.²⁴

Elizabeth Thompson in her *Colonial Citizens* on French colonialism in Syria followed the same approach:

²³ Ibid.; Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 340–41.

²⁴ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 264–65.

In sum, the regimes imagined in the constitutional texts were hardly democratic and barely republics at all. Such was the implicit contradiction between the realities of colonial rule and the vaunted republican ideas of the French civilizing mission...²⁵

This is not to say that the public espousal of republican ideals on both sides was insincere... Likewise, Syrian and Lebanese elites who prepared the constitutions had chosen republics to protect themselves from tyranny they remembered in the Ottoman sultan, and the abuses of power they currently observed by Egypt's king. But the protection they sought was from interference with their own class, tribal, and sectarian bases of power, not necessarily the protection of all citizens from all forms of tyranny... Elite nationalists adopted a paternal republicanism primarily as a weapon to expel their unwanted adoptive fathers, the French. But in the process, they unloosed principles chiseled into republican constitutions that their subordinates might use to challenge the nationalists' own privileges.²⁶

This critique is certainly justified to some extent, as is the criticism leveled even earlier, that the French Mandate authorities were not really committed to democracy and liberal values, and that the way in which they formulated the legal structure of the Syrian state was mainly motivated by France's political interests in the region. Still, it would seem that the "Syrian historical field" (a term borrowed from Israel Gershoni's book *Light in the Shade—Egypt and Fascism, 1922–1937*) is complex and deserving of further examination and inquiry.²⁷ First, no matter how defective and partial the democratic and liberal worldview that existed among certain circles in the Syrian elite and public of those days was, it is impossible to ignore it altogether.

Second, and more important, it is a mistake to view it as based entirely on the elite of the notables; it included other groups as well. It should be remembered that Syria in the 1920s and 1930s stood on the verge of revolutionary changes that were destined to make their mark on the following years. One of these important changes was the emergence of new social and political forces onto the political and public stage alongside the notable families.

Moreover, a middle class developed in the Levant during the years of the Mandate, and, as weak and vulnerable as it may had been, it is still deserving of our attention. Thus, for example, a public service

²⁵ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

²⁷ See Israel Gershoni, *Or Batzel: Mizrayim veva Fashism, 1922–1937* (*Light in the Shade: Egypt and Fascism, 1922–1937*), Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1999.

numbering nearly 15,000 employees arose and became established, and this was in addition to the local army of about 13,000 soldiers and officers. The education system developed, with part of it being based upon educational institutions that could boast a glorious past going back to the Ottoman period. According to French data, nearly 60,000 pupils studied in the public education system all over the Levant in the mid-1930s, while the teachers and staff numbered several thousand. In addition there were several thousand students in higher educational institutions operating in Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo.²⁸

In this connection it can be noted that the number of literate persons increased greatly. Among Christian males in Lebanon the rate of literacy reached about 67 percent toward the end of the French Mandate period, while among Muslim males in Syria it reached about 40 percent of the population.²⁹

The available data also reveal the burgeoning of hundreds of organizations and associations all over Syria and Lebanon. Some had a political character, some were youth or religious organizations, while many others were social organizations. Apart from all these, the blossoming of the press in Syria and Lebanon during the period under discussion should be mentioned in particular. It is known that several dozen newspapers and several hundred magazines were published during the years of the French Mandate. Not all were of equal importance, and not all lasted for a very long time, but they were substantial enough to testify to the existence of an extensive journalistic and publishing achievement. According to various estimations, hundreds of thousands of persons were exposed daily to newspapers of various kinds. In other words, the press items that appeared were disseminated in about 100,000 copies per day were read by about 250–300,000 persons.³⁰

²⁸ See Jāmi'at Dimashq, *Taqwīm Jāmi'at Dimashq*, Damascus: Maṭba'at Jāmi'at Dimashq 1961, 1966; World Bank, *The Economic Development of Syria*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1955; Elias Nacklie Bou-Nacklie, "Les Troupes Speciales du Levant: Origins, Recruitment and the History of the Syrian-Lebanese Paramilitary Forces under the French Mandate, 1919–1947," Ph.D. thesis, University of Utah 1989 and Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms 1989; see also Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 155–83.

²⁹ See World Bank, *The Economic Development of Syria*.

³⁰ See Mahmud al-Mashut, *Tārikh al-ṣaḥāfa al-sūriyya wa-l-'arabiyya*, Damascus: al-Maṭba'a al-Jadida 1986; Joseph Elias, *Taṭawwur al-ṣaḥāfa al-sūriyya fī mi'at 'ām*, vols. I and II, Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl 1983; Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995; see also Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 211–27.

The importance of this liberal mood for the future of Syria should not be underestimated, although it must be admitted that in the portrayal of Syria's history it has been pushed aside and obscured in the face of other trends that became dominant among the Syrian public later on—trends of a semi-fascist, nationalistic, or Islamic character.

Examination of the Syrian press during the years under consideration reveals the existence of a lively public debate on various questions of current interest and a clearly liberal discourse and mood among many of the writers.³¹ At the same time, it is clear that a further research of the cultural and intellectual fields in the Levant—and especially of Syria—during these years still needs to be carried out. However, even a partial and superficial examination reveals that the Syrian constitution of 1930 was more than a whimsey of the elite in an effort to preserve its status. Rather, it gave expression to a more broadly felt mood. This mood was subject to ups and downs, especially against the background of the events of the 1930s and in face of the rise of radical intellectual trends, but it never disappeared completely.

The Syrian constitution from 1930 and onwards

The Syrian constitution of 1930 remained in force for about nine years. It was suspended by the French from 1939 to 1943, following the outbreak of World War II. In 1943 it was reinstated in an effort to revive constitutional life in the Levant. In the wake of the renewal of legislative life in Syria, parliamentary elections were held and a national government was elected under the leadership of the National Bloc. In December 1943 the Syrian parliament unilaterally abrogated Article 116 of the constitution. With this step—which was taken following the constitutional crisis in Lebanon in November 1943—every reference to the French Mandate was now dropped from the Syrian constitution.³²

³¹ One of the leading cultural magazines in Syria at that time was *al-Hadīth*, which was published in Aleppo from 1928 up to the mid-1940s. See the chapter by Manfred Sing in this volume. Other magazines of interest are for example *al-Insāniyya* (Damascus); *al-Nāqid* (Damascus); *Majallat al-Tarbiyya wa-l-Ta'lim* (Damascus); *al-Thaqāfa* (Damascus).

³² See Aviel Roshwald, *Estranged Bedfellows, Britain and France in the Middle East during the Second World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, 122–47; see also Asher Susser, “Western Power Rivalry and its Interaction with Local Politics in the Levant, 1941–1946,” doctoral thesis, Tel Aviv University 1986.

The first challenge to the constitution in the era of independence came in the wake of the 1949 military coup led by Husni al-Za'im. The new leader established a committee to formulate a new constitution, with the aim of advancing various agrarian reforms. However, Za'im was quickly overthrown and murdered in another coup that ended his rule only 137 days after his rise to power. Sami al-Hinnawi, who stood behind the move to oust Za'im, decided to hold elections to a constituent assembly in November 1949. These, he thought, would make it possible to discuss once again the question of what was the most desirable government for Syria—a monarchy or a republic. Hinnawi was connected to pro-Iraqi circles in northern Syria, mainly in Aleppo, that wanted to advance the Iraqi Hashemite monarchy option. Hinnawi himself was removed from power by the army chief of staff, Adib al-Shishakli. However, the constituent assembly whose election Hinnawi had brought about was nevertheless convened in 1950, and it prepared a new constitution.³³

The constitution of 1950 marked a progress over the 1930 constitution. The process of drafting the constitution this time included suggestions from the public, and thus the constitution was formulated in the name of the people and in dialogue with the people. At the center of the controversy this time stood the question of the status of Islam in Syria, in the face of demands by local Muslim circles that the status of Islam in the constitution be upgraded. After a harsh debate it was agreed to preserve the principle enunciated in 1930, that the president must be a Muslim.³⁴

In 1951 Adib al-Shishakli carried out another coup, after which he suspended the constitution of 1950. In 1953 he called for a new constitution to be enacted. His intention, which was quite transparent, was to have greater power granted to the executive branch. The new constitution proposed by Shishakli received the approval of the public in a referendum held in July 1953, after which it came into force. However, in February 1954 Shishakli's regime was overthrown and the constitution of 1950 was reinstated. It remained in force until 1958. As a result of the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the

³³ See Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945–1958*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965, 73–99.

³⁴ See al-Dustūr al-Sūrī (Damascus, 5 September 1950); see also R. Bayly Winder, "Islam as the State Religion: A Muslim Brotherhood View in Syria," *The Muslim World* 44 (1954), 215–226. See also Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1996; Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military: 1945–1958*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1964.

union between Egypt and Syria in February 1958, the Egyptian constitution was applied to Syria, and the authority to rule the country was delegated to Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir.³⁵

After Syria's withdrawal from the UAR in September 1961, the constitution of 1950 was once again reinstated. However, in November 1961 elections were held to a new constituent assembly, which produced a draft of a new provisional constitution. It came into force in September 1962. After the Ba'th revolution of March 8, 1963, a provisional constitution was instituted in April 1964 that granted executive power to the Presidency Council and legislative power to the National Council of the Revolution (NCR). The provisional constitution specified that *shari'a* (the Muslim law system) was to be one of the sources of legislation, but not the only one. In May 1969, during the rule of the radical wing of the Ba'th party (the Neo-Ba'th), a new constitution was promulgated, which declared Syria to be a democratic socialist republic. In March 1973 Hafiz al-Asad instituted a permanent constitution similar to that of 1969. It stipulated that the president was to be a Muslim, that *shari'a* would be a source of legislation, that the Ba'th Party was to be the leading party, and that the president was to be the main source of power in the state.³⁶

With all these proceedings, it is clear that after 1963 the public and open debate in Syrian society ceased, and consequently the liberal trends that had existed previously in that society disappeared. The liberal public discourse was replaced by the expression of radical views. Such expressions were already evident in the 1950s in Syria, and in fact even earlier, but they cannot be characterized in those years as the dominant in the public debate. After 1963 only one voice could be heard in Syria, that of the Ba'th Party, and even within that party the more radical voices (of the Neo-Ba'th wing) prevailed over the others. Asad's regime, which came to power in Syria by means of a military coup in 1970, moderated, and indeed softened, these radical tendencies of his predecessors, but it

³⁵ See "al-Dustūr al-Sūrī," *al-Jarīda al-Rasmiyya* (Damascus), June 21, 1953; see also Hani al-Khayyir, *Adīb al-Shishakli*, Damascus: Maktab al-Fayḥā' 1994; see Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 118–31, 302–26. See also Gisbert H. Flanz and Albert P. Blausein, eds., *Constitutions of the Countries of the World: A Series of Updated Texts, Constitutional Chronologies and Annotated Bibliographies*, New York: Dobbs Ferry 1971.

³⁶ For the Syrian constitutions of 1969 and 1973 see *al-Thawra* (Damascus), May 3, 1969, February 1, 1973. See also Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946–1970*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1999.

did not fundamentally change the character of the political discourse in which it engaged.

Conclusion

The writing of constitutions in Syria at the end of the 1920s had less of an impact than might have been expected on the path this state took from then onwards. The constitution was suspended for long periods of time just at formative periods in the constitutional life of Syria. Furthermore, the constitution was altered rather quickly.

Nevertheless, the processes by which the constitution was drawn up and the debate over its content and authority deserve to be studied, because such study can cast light on a much more important and central matter—the fact that a liberal mood, and even a liberal public discourse, existed in Syria in the 1920s and 1930s. This liberal discourse was pushed aside by radical discourses that sprang up and dominated the Syrian arena. In addition, it has stood in the shadow of the struggle for independence from the French, and also in the shadow of the struggle—or, at least, social tension—between the old and weakened elite, on the one hand, and the social forces seeking break into the political arena and seize the old elite's place at the center of the political stage, on the other.

Nevertheless, in the Syrian constitution there were clear echoes of the liberal trend in the public debate, and indeed, this trend cropped up not only in the debate that took place as the constitution was being formulated, but also in the public responses evoked by their publication. However, much about this debate is still waiting to be revealed by historians, in studies like those devoted to the liberal public discourse in Egypt.

CHAPTER TEN

LEBANESE ARAB NATIONALISTS AND CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY DURING THE FRENCH MANDATE PERIOD

Raghid K. El-Solh

Introduction

An active member of a Lebanese human rights organization recently suggested organizing a conference on consociational democracy in Lebanon. The organization rejected the proposed conference. Using the term “consociational democracy” interchangeably with confessionalism, sectarian divisions, and disintegration, the organization argued that it is a sham democracy that undermines individual liberty, constitutional governments, and the rule of law.

The counter-argument usually presented by the Lebanese consociationalists maintains that, in spite of the deficiencies of consociational democracy, it is more capable of defending the values of freedom, constitutionalism, and the rule of law in the Arab world than other existing political systems in the region. It is true that consociational democracy, as attested by Lebanon’s history, failed to cement national cohesion in the country and provided, at certain stages of Lebanese history, fertile ground for civil wars, and hence for the occasional disruption of the development of the democratic system. However, consociationalists point out that this failure characterized the political development of other countries in the region with various systems, such as Iraq, Sudan, Algeria etc. In other words, from the consociationalist point of view, civil wars are not necessarily symptomatic of consociational democracy, but also of a variety of systems in the region.

Since I believe that there is some truth in this argument, it is deemed relevant to discuss consociational democracy in Lebanon in a book that focuses on liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, in preparing this chapter, I had to contend with two problems: First, the problem of having to describe the attitude of the Lebanese Arab nationalists throughout the French mandatory period—specifically the fact that for years the Arab nationalists of Lebanon

considered themselves “Syrian” rather than “Lebanese” nationals, aside from often being referred to simply as “Lebanese Muslims.” This meant that the Lebanese Arab nationalists were for the most part pursuing their aims jointly with other Arab nationalists, especially the Syrians among them, and that they were associated with the Muslim community. Hence the confusion between the Lebanese and non-Lebanese Arab nationalists, and between the Lebanese Muslims and Arab nationalists respectively.

In dealing with the first problem, I aim to identify the attitudes of the Lebanese Arab nationalists separately from the positions adopted by the Arab nationalists at the regional level, or jointly with the Syrian Arab nationalists, or by the Islamic community in Lebanon. Bearing in mind that these attitudes were discussed, defined, and made known to the public through a multitude of pan-Arab activities, forums, and initiatives, I should concede in advance that I will not be able to adhere very strictly to this task of “hair-splitting.”

The second problem pertains to having to identify the attitude toward consociational democracy during the period between the two world wars, though this concept was articulated, refined, and applied to Lebanon during the second half of the twentieth century.

For this reason, I will focus on those features of Lebanese politics during the assigned period that relate to consociational democracy. I am encouraged by the fact that this retroactive approach, as it were, has been tried before by several writers on democracy and consociationalism. Some have applied it to the Ottoman Empire itself, which was seen as a “consociational regime” in its own right.¹

To turn to the characteristics of consensus democracy, Arend Lijphart singled out four main ones: segmental autonomy; grand coalition; proportionality; and mutual veto. These usually characterize governments of an “elite cartel designed to turn democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.”² The emergence of this system presupposes the existence of a polity that develops as a result of an agreement among its various segments. The process of attaining and maintaining this political entity with a system of consociational democracy is described as “negotiated democracy,” which entails compromise,

¹ John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, London: Polity Press 2004, 128.

² Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*, London: Yale University Press 1984, xiv.

bargaining, and inclusiveness.³ Given these criteria, consociationalists suggest that until the mid-1970s, Lebanon's democracy was an example of consensus democracy.⁴

The attitude of the Lebanese Arab nationalists toward these basic features of consociational democracy was intertwined with their attitude toward the issue of minorities, Lebanon's independence, and Syrian and Arab unity. Consociational democracy was more relevant to a state such as Lebanon, where religious communities—namely Christians and Muslims—were almost equal in number; whereas in countries such as Syria with a Muslim majority, consociationalism would be less significant. Hence, even though consociationalism was not always explicitly mentioned by representatives of different generations of Lebanese Arab nationalists, it remained relevant to the debate in which they took part with regard to Lebanon's relations with Syria and the rest of the Arab region.

Though it may therefore be necessary to refer to certain features of this debate, the focus will remain on the attitude of the Lebanese Arab nationalists toward consociational democracy. Accordingly, in the following the attitude of the first and second generations of these Arab nationalists will be outlined; the changes in their attitude will be highlighted; and its significance will be pointed out. This endeavor will cover the interwar period when the Arab region and Lebanon were a terrain of important and political and intellectual turning points.

The first generation of Lebanese Arab nationalists

Leading figures among this generation came from varied social and religious backgrounds. Some of them belonged to what Albert Hourani described as "notables," coming from the ranks of 'ulama', the Ottoman civil and political establishment, and landowners.⁵ To these one should add merchants and members of the rising professional class, especially journalists. They were a mixture of Muslims and Christians

³ Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performances in Thirty-Six Countries*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1999, 2.

⁴ Lijphart, *Democracies*, 40. See also Leonard Binder, *Politics in Lebanon*, New York, London, and Sydney: John Wiley & Sons 1966, 304–08.

⁵ Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, London: Macmillan 1981, 44.

who resented the Turkish assimilationist tendency which threatened their religious and ethnic identities. They expressed themselves through clandestine movements such as al-ʿArabiyya al-Fatāt (The Young Arab Society) and al-Ahd (The Covenant Society), as well as political parties such as al-Istiqlāl (The Independence Party). The latter had rallied to the side of the Hashemite Prince Faysal, and helped him establish the Arab government in Damascus in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Their political experience was influenced by the Ottoman reform movement, especially the faction that called for the decentralization of the empire, recognition of the rights of the minorities, and inclusionary policies that took proportionality and segmental autonomy into consideration.⁶ In the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the mandatory system, they gave full priority to the establishment of an independent Arab state. This objective became the centerpiece of their activities and the benchmark for any other interests, including their attitude toward the issues of minorities, decentralization, and religious autonomy. This attitude was exhibited through two important forums that took place during the interwar period, namely the General Syrian Congress (GSC) and the Conference of the Coast (COC).

The General Syrian Congress

In pursuing these objectives, leading members of this generation played an active part in the GSC, which was planned to act as a representative assembly for the Arabs of “Greater Syria,” i.e. Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, and to uphold the objectives of the Arab nationalists led by Faysal. The GSC met for the first time in Damascus during July 1919 and comprised 85 members belonging to different religious communities. Significantly, the percentage of Christian representatives exceeded their numerical strength in Greater Syria. The number who came from the Lebanese territories totaled 22, which was more than a quarter

⁶ Hassan ʿAli al-Hallaq, *Mudhakkirāt Salīm ʿAlī Salām, 1868–1938*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Jamʿiyya li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr 1982, 146. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press 1961, 203–06.

of the total number of members.⁷ Among them, only a few members such as Riad El-Solh, Mohammad Jamil Beihum, Salim Ali Salam, Arif Na'mani, Rashid Rida, and Yousif Istfan could be described as active Arab nationalists. However, these members played an important role in the GSC, and later on in Lebanese and Arab politics.

The resolutions of the GSC dealt with several issues that were pertinent to Lebanon's identity, its political system, the attitude of the Arab nationalists toward constitutional arrangements and consociational democracy. The GSC "rejected any dismemberment of Syria" and any "separation of the coastal regions or Lebanon from the mother country." It also called for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Syria based on the principles of "democratic and broadly decentralized rule which shall safeguard the rights of minorities."⁸ The gist of these resolutions was further reiterated when the GSC convened on March 3, 1920 to declare Greater Syria an independent and constitutional state, with Faysal as its constitutional monarch, and the promulgation of the Basic Law of the Syrian Kingdom. The law provided constitutional safeguards for religious minorities by emphasizing the equality of Syrians before the law; individual liberty; full protection of religious freedom; and freedom of private education. The law also stated that the Syrian state would have a bicameral system, where one-fourth of the senate would be allocated to representatives of the minorities.⁹

The attitude of the GSC toward Lebanon was elaborated by declaring that, aside from implementing a decentralized system of government, the government of Greater Syria "should take into consideration the national aspiration of the Lebanese with regards to administering their Lebanese province within its recognized pre-World War borders, provided that it is immune from any foreign influence."¹⁰

The Lebanese Arab nationalists assumed—or rather, hoped—that the resolutions of the GSC, together with the experience of the common struggle against the Muslim Ottoman Empire, would provide the political and historical framework to solve the question of minorities within

⁷ Mohammad Jamil Baihum, *al-'Ahd al-mukhadram fi Sāriyya wa-Lubnān*, Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a n.d., 109.

⁸ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, New York: Capricorn Books 1965, 440–41.

⁹ Khairiyya Qasmiyya, *al-Ḥukāma al-'ārabīyya fi Dimashq*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi-Miṣr 1971, 291–309.

¹⁰ Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Yawm Maysalān*, Beirut: Manshārāt Dār al-Ittiḥād n.d., 262–65.

the Arab state, and that subsequent to this, the Maronites in Lebanon would join their Muslim compatriots in the quest for the emancipation of this state. However, the GSC's resolutions stopped short of clearly indicating what was meant by "taking into consideration the national aspirations of the Lebanese" and of responding to the aspirations of those among them who wanted not only separation from the Ottoman Empire, but also from any state with a Muslim majority. For these Lebanese, a Maronite-dominated state was deemed to provide a proper solution for the issue of the Christian minorities in Lebanon. This state would be a nation-state for the Lebanese, a homeland for the Maronites, and a refuge for the Christians of the Near East. A strong Maronite faction, led by the Maronite patriarch, Elias Howayyik, thought that Lebanon should be resurrected within its "natural and historical borders," which included the coastal region and the Bikaa valley.¹¹ Without these territories Lebanon would not be economically viable, and its inhabitants would not be able to resist the pressures of their Arab and Muslim neighbors.

Advocates of Greater Lebanon showed little interest in accommodating the Lebanese Arab nationalists and Muslims who wanted to be part of an Arab Syrian, rather than a Lebanese, state. Though aware of the difficulties involved in the creation of this state, the French authorities went along with the demands of the Lebanese nationalists and with a French pro-Greater Lebanon lobby by establishing this state in 1920. The Lebanese constitution inaugurated in 1926 was meant to provide safeguards for religious autonomy and proportionality, and hence a realistic and fair solution for the issue of the religious minorities in Lebanon through stating that provisionally and "for the sake of justice and amity, the sects shall be equitably represented in public employment and in the composition of the Ministry, provided such measures will not harm the general welfare of the state."¹²

The Lebanese Arab nationalists reacted negatively to the mandatory system in general, and to the breakup of Syria in particular. Their attitude toward the mandatory system developed along two stages of the mandatory period, with the year 1936 forming the dividing line, so to speak, between these stages. While the first generation of the Syrian

¹¹ Barjis Faris al-Gemayel, *Ḥizb al-Ittiḥād al-Lubnānī wa-Lubnān al-kabīr 1919–1922*, Beirut: al-Markaz al-Istishārī li-l-ʿIlm wa-l-Tawthīq al-Madrasī 1996, 327–29.

¹² *The Lebanese Constitution*, Beirut: Maktabat Khayāt 1960, 33.

unionists dominated the anti-mandatory struggle, the second generation brought in a different outlook and attitude toward Lebanon and its political system.

In the aftermath of the collapse of Faysal's government in Damascus, and the establishment of the French mandatory system in the Levant, the first generation of Lebanese Arab nationalists remained committed to the GSC's attitude toward Lebanon. They rejected the annexation of their territories to Greater Lebanon (the four *qadhas*, i.e. districts, and the Lebanese coast), and insisted on the reunification of these territories with the "interior"—meaning Syria. They considered themselves Syrians and hence ventured to express themselves through joint forums and organizations with Syrian Arab nationalists. Of special significance was the meeting that took place in Damascus on October 25, 1927, chaired by Hashim al-Atasi, a landowner and politician from Homs. The chairman of the meeting and the majority of its members came from Syria. It culminated with the foundation of the Syrian National Bloc (SNB), a broad alliance of Syrian and Lebanese nationalists who were opposed to the mandatory system.¹³

This Syrian nationalist attitude was exacerbated by the strict exclusionary anti-Arab nationalist policy pursued by the mandatory authorities. In line with this policy, Arab nationalist leaders and activists were subjected to continuous pressures, including marginalization, harassment, detention, deportation, and denial of taking part freely and fairly in the political process.¹⁴

The strength of the anti-Greater-Lebanon agitation might explain why some leaders belonging to the first generation of Arab nationalists—and who decided, for the sake of political expediency, to take part in the general elections—found it necessary to voice their support for Syrian unity from within the parliament.¹⁵

Ignored when Greater Lebanon was established in response to the demands of the Lebanese nationalists and French colonial interests, and excluded from the political process and the parliament, the first

¹³ Muhammad Harb Farzat, *al-Ḥayāt al-ḥizbiyya fī Sāriyya*, Damascus: Dār al-Rawwād 1955, 106–07.

¹⁴ Baihum, *al-'Ahd al-mukhadram*, 129–42. See also Bishara Khalil al-Khuri, *Ḥaqā'iq lubnāniyya*, vol. I, Beirut: Manshārāt Awraq Lubnāniyya 1960, 165; Yāsuf Mazhar, *Tārikh Lubnān al-'āmm*, vol. II, Beirut: no publisher, n.d., 976–77.

¹⁵ Hasan 'Ali al-Hallaq, *Mu'tamar al-sāḥil wa-l-aqḍiyya al-arba'*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Jam'iyya 1983, 162–68. See also Iskandar al-Riyashi, *al-Ayyām al-Lubnāniyya*, Beirut: Shirkāt al-Ṭab'a wa-l-Nashr al-Lubnāniyya n.d., 305–06.

generation of Lebanese Arab nationalists refused to recognize the Lebanese state and decided to boycott it as they perceived it to be a “colonial fabrication.”¹⁶ As an expression of this attitude, they refused to take part in the formulation of the draft constitution of the Lebanese Republic during the mid-1920s.¹⁷ It was even alleged that, in pursuing this policy, a number of these leaders stood behind the formation of a secret Beirut society which was involved in using violence against collaborators with the French authorities.¹⁸

Though the Lebanese Arab nationalists were actively involved with the SNB, practical considerations, such as the endurance of the Lebanese state and the unfavorable balance of power between the pro- and the anti-Greater Lebanon forces, led them to establish a Lebanese forum which was treated as an Arab nationalist “alternative parliament” to that of the Lebanese parliament. This forum was originally called the Islamic National Assembly, but since it developed into a forum for the anti-mandatory nationalists which included Christians, it became known as the Conference of the Coast (COC).¹⁹ The COC met three times throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It became an arena for debating the issues that were pertinent to the concerns of the Lebanese Arab nationalists, the articulation of a common stand between them, and for agreeing on the means to pursue their objectives.

The Conference of the Coast: first and second meetings

The first Conference of the Coast (COC) meeting took place in Damascus on July 23, 1928.²⁰ The majority of its members were Lebanese, but a number of them came also from Latakya. The meeting was chaired by ‘Abdul-Hamid Karami, who belonged to an established Sunni landowning family, and who later became the Mufti of Tripoli. The meeting declared

¹⁶ Antoine Seif, *Lubnān al-kabīr: min jabal Lubnān ilā Lubnān al-waṭan*, in *Dawlat Lubnān al-kabīr, 1920–1996: 75 sanah min al-tārīkh wa-al-munjazāt*, Beirut: Lebanese University 1999, 488.

¹⁷ Edmond Rabat, *al-Takwīn al-tārīkhī li-Lubnān al-siyāsī*, vol. II, Beirut: Lebanese University Publications 2002, 608–09.

¹⁸ Hassan Ali al-Hallāq, *Dirāsāt fī tārīkh Lubnān 1913–1943*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-‘Arabiyya 1985, 114.

¹⁹ Rabat, *al-Takwīn al-tārīkhī*, 664.

²⁰ Ibid.

unqualified support for Syrian unity.²¹ Of the 62 delegates present, 4 were Lebanese Christians. This was certainly a modest proportion, but considering the sectarian divide within the country, it was not an insignificant number.

The second meeting of the COC was held in Beirut in November 1933. Limited to the Lebanese, and focusing on Lebanese aspirations and on the situation in Lebanon, it developed during the 1930s into a purely Lebanese organization. It was chaired by Salim Ali Salam, a Beirut merchant who also belonged to an established Sunni family.

The two meetings were characterized by the lack of representatives of organized political groups. These groups, especially of the Arab nationalist variety, suffered two successive blows—first, by the Turks during 1916 when a number of leaders of the Arab nationalist movement were executed on the grounds of collaborating with the French and the British; and second by the French when, in 1920, the latter overthrew the Faysal-led Arab nationalist government in Damascus. These blows led to the demise of the movement during the subsequent period. The social and economic background and concerns of members of the conference were highlighted in a memo produced by the second meeting. This memo stated that participants in the conference represented “the vast majority of land and estate owners, industrialists, and merchants in Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, and Jabal ‘Amil,” and criticized the fragmentation of Syria which caused economic and social problems and injustices such as inflating the bureaucratic expenses of the newly formed states and entities; burdening the territories in question with 82 percent of the taxes while 80 percent were spent on Mount Lebanon; the economic hardship that afflicted Lebanon as a result of the 1929 international crisis; French control of the economy which “killed commerce and industry”; and “the greed of foreign companies.”²² To solve these problems, the COC reiterated during its first and second meetings the same position towards Lebanon as that taken by the GSC.

The concerns expressed by the COC reflected the significant role played by the Beirut merchants among the first generation of Arab nationalists in Lebanon. This role was emphasized before the conference by Omar al-Daouk, the head of the Beirut Chamber of Commerce

²¹ Al-Hallaq, *Mu‘tamar al-sāhil*, 162–68.

²² Al-Hallaq, *Mudhakkirāt Salīm ‘Alī Salām*, 293–96.

during the early 1930s. Daouk was quoted by *al-Ahd al-Jadid*, a mouth-piece of the Lebanese Arab nationalists, as saying:

Before...Beirut was a well placed trade centre, with a constant flow of merchants from the hinterland and the Arab Eastern regions...But now Beirut has lost its commercial position because of this political fragmentation and the consequent obstacles which have put an end to trade relations with these countries.²³

Throughout its period of activity, the COC dealt with the following themes, some of which were significant from both a consociationalist and a liberal point of view:

1. Since Greater Lebanon was a result of French colonial machinations, and since the issue of Christian minorities was invented or inflated by the French to justify their colonial interests in the Levant and their hostile attitude to the aspirations of the Arab nationalists, it was therefore necessary to put pressure on France itself to reverse this policy. As for the Lebanese nationalists, their Arab nationalist counterparts treated them simply as French puppets, and hence did not show special interest in soliciting their support in this endeavor.
2. Communalism, sectarianism, and, by implication, segmental autonomy undermined the unity and cohesion of the (Syrian Arab) nation.
3. Contrary to the idea of partnership endorsed in the 1926 constitution, the mandatory policy was oriented towards supporting sectarian domination and exclusiveness.
4. In contrast to the principles of equality and liberty, the mandatory authorities pursued an oppressive policy that targeted the nationalists.
5. These injustices could only be brought to an end through returning the so-called Syrian seceded territories back to Syria and through freeing it from foreign domination.

²³ Najla W. Attiyah, *The Attitude of the Lebanese Sunnis Towards the State of Lebanon*, London: University of London 1973.

The second generation of Lebanese Arab nationalists

This strand of thinking dominated the COC and its Arab nationalist and Muslim members until 1936. That year, an urgent meeting of the COC was held to deal with the prospects of signing Franco-Syrian and Franco-Lebanese treaties that were expected to establish the independence of both states.²⁴

The meeting took place during a period characterized by significant changes at the international, regional, and Lebanese levels respectively. Foremost among these changes were the Italian challenge to the Anglo-French mandatory system in the Eastern Mediterranean which brought the French authorities to reconsider its hard-line attitude toward the nationalist movement in the Levant;²⁵ the formation of a left-of-center government in France, which paved the way for a rapprochement with the Syrian Arab nationalists represented by the SNB; and the rise of strands of thought that encouraged state interventionism and the expansion of its social role even among some leading liberal thinkers.²⁶

On the regional level, the emergence of a new generation of Lebanese Arab nationalists and a resurgence of party politics in the Levant were landmarks of the mid-1930s. These changes came against the backdrop of an increased role in politics of the middle class, especially the urban intelligentsia. This was closely associated with the expansion of education, specifically the increasing number of graduates from foreign universities, which led to greater awareness of and involvement in politics by the middle classes and the upper stratum of the lower social classes. The rise of the middle class was bound to place it in direct confrontation with the dominant powers, which acted as the guardians of the status quo.

In Lebanon, and in the Levant in general, the dominant power was not perceived to be endogenous and oppressive social classes that were brought down by the rising middle classes, as in the West. Rather, for the Arab nationalists, it was a foreign power that was held accountable for the social and political conditions in the country. The French

²⁴ Kamal Al-Salibi, *Tārīkh Lubnān al-ḥadīth*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahār lil-Nashr 1978, 226.

²⁵ Ali 'Abdul-Mun'im Shu'ayb, *al-Ṣirā' al-Itālī al-Faransī 'alā Bilād al-Shām 1860–1941*, Beirut: Dār al-Fārābi 2002, 103–35.

²⁶ John Zvesper, "Liberalism," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*, David Miller, et al. eds., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000, 286. See also L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, London: Thornton Butterworth 1929, 138–66.

authorities had their local allies and supporters who belonged to old privileged social classes or to a rising bourgeoisie which gained its privileged position as a result of its relationship with the mandatory authorities but were perceived by the nationalist middle class as subordinate minor actors controlled or manipulated by the dominant foreign power. Thus, the rise of the middle class deepened and radicalized the national coloring of the political struggle in Lebanon.

This change brought about the formation of two new Arab nationalist organizations that affected the Lebanese political landscape: the League of National Action (LNA); and what was referred to as the Arab National Party (ANP) but at times also called the "Red Book Group."²⁷ The two parties were founded in Lebanon with considerable input from the Lebanese Arab nationalists, and spread to the rest of the Arab East during the first half of the 1930s. These regional and international changes were echoed, to a degree, during the 1936 COC, but more clearly so in its aftermath.

The two parties were similar, and were close to each other in many respects. They both focused primarily on the liberation and unification of Arab lands. All other concerns were regarded as subsidiary to these two cardinal priorities, including the political system of the prospective Arab state. They believed that sovereignty resided in the people, but were not clear about the kind of political system which they preferred. The ANP suggested that this should be left to the people to decide, since this is "relevant to the place and the time when this choice is made." However, the ANP advocated the separation of powers, especially that the judiciary should be "completely independent from the executive body," and the safeguarding of individual liberty, although they were aware that its shortcomings might "inhibit cooperation and self reliance."²⁸ As for minority rights, the two parties seemed to have a skeptical attitude to this concept. The LNA went as far as denying the existence of any minorities in the Arab region, and accusing the colonialists of exploiting this issue as a "pretext to justify colonizing independent nations."²⁹ Both parties opted clearly for a secular state.

²⁷ Jalal al-Sayyid, *Hizb al-Ba'th al-'Arabī*, Beirut: Dār an-Nahār 1973, 25.

²⁸ The Manifesto of the ANP, entitled "The Book of Arab Nationalism: Facts, Clarifications and Approaches," in *al-Shiraa*, May 9, 1983.

²⁹ Khattar Bousaid, *Uṣbat al-'amal al-qawmī wa-dawruhā fī Sāriyya wa-Lubnān 1933–1939*, Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies 2004, 252.

In spite of these similarities, the two parties had differences that were relevant to their respective strongholds and constituencies. The LNA was focused on Syria, where it had an expanding following, and where it ventured to provide an alternative anti-mandatory leadership to that of the SNB. The ANP was more focused on Lebanon during its initial stage and before moving its headquarters to Baghdad during the late 1930s. This explains the more radical position taken by the LNA toward political compromise and sectarian issues. The LNA strongly condemned the attitude of the SNB, which agreed to participate in elections and to form a national government while the mandatory system continued. The LNA was more categorical in rejecting sectarianism and any form of accommodating the demands of religious minorities. These differences were not so conspicuous and did not affect relations between the two parties in Lebanon, but they were to appear more clearly during the mid-1930s.

The Conference of the Coast: the third meeting

The 1936 COC comprised a variety of advocates of Syrian unity.³⁰ Some of them belonged to the newly emerging radical parties, such as the two Arab nationalist parties the LNA and the ANP, to the Syrian Nationalist Party (PPS) and the Syro-Lebanese Communist Party. Representatives of the two Arab nationalist parties were in the minority, whereas the majority of the members of the third meeting of the COC belonged to the “conservatives,” those who toed the line set by the GSC, and by the first two COC meetings.

In spite of the differences between the radicals and the conservatives, the COC was divided along different lines. In fact, its members were divided into three schools of thought:

- The first brought together conservatives such as ‘Abdul-Hamid Karami and radicals such as members of the PPS. Advocates of this school of thought called for full Syrian unity. Karami argued that Syrian unity should not be a source of anxiety or worry to the Lebanese Christians because it was nationally rather than religiously oriented. Salah Labaki, the son of a prominent Maronite and Lebanese nationalist

³⁰ For the proceedings of the COC, see al-Hallaq, *Mu'tamar al-sāhil wa-l-aqdiyya al-arba'a*, 43–70.

who represented the PSP in the COC, suggested that the majority of the Lebanese, including Christians, were for Syrian unity. Significantly, neither Karami nor Labaki called for a referendum on the issue of Lebanon's unification with Syria.

- The second was represented by 'Ali Nasser Eddine, a founder of the LNA and leader of its Lebanese branch, and by Youssef Ibrahim Yazbek, a founding member of the Syro-Lebanese Communist Party. Yazbek was not a member of the party at the time, but he echoed its line of thinking and its strategy.³¹ Nasser Eddine and Yazbek argued emphatically against the point of view advocated by the first school of thought, which practically tended to play down and overlook the issue of religious and national minorities within Arab, Syrian, and Lebanese contexts. Both acknowledged the strength of the opposition toward Syrian unity among the Lebanese Christians and nationalists, and concluded that the anti-colonialist struggle should be given priority over any Syrian unionist scheme. Like followers of the prevalent ideologies of the 1930s, they expressed a belief in progress, and hence suggested that history would eventually lead the Lebanese nationalists and Lebanese Christians to change their attitude toward Syrian unity.
- The third was represented by Kazem El-Solh, a founder of the ANP and publisher of the Arab nationalist daily *al-Nidā'* (The Appeal), which throughout the 1930s disseminated the ideas of "a non-sectarian and pragmatic" brand of Arabism.³² It was also represented by Shafik Lutfi and Adil Osseiran, two prominent Arab nationalist activists from South Lebanon who were associated with the ANP. These three refused to sign the resolutions of the conference. Unlike Nasser Eddine and Yazbek, who expressed reservations against the resolutions of the meeting but ended up signing them and endorsing the letter of the COC addressed to the French high commissioner, Kazem El-Solh and his colleagues refused to sign this letter. Having missed the opportunity to express his views inside the conference, Kazem decided to include them in a treatise entitled "The Problem

³¹ Raghid El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation*, London: I. B. Taurus 2004, 32.

³² Ghassan Tuani, Faris Sassin, and Nawaf Salam, *Kitāb al-Istiqlāl*, Beirut: Dār an-Nahār 1998, 195–96.

of Separation and Unification” published after the meeting.³³ Though the treatise summarized a number of ideas which were voiced during the meeting of the COC, it also broke new ground and managed to articulate a new approach to the Lebanese question. It thus came to be perceived as a cornerstone for the Lebanese National Pact and hence Lebanese consociationalism.³⁴

The approach suggested by Kazem’s treatise was based on the following observations and developed, more specifically, the following themes and positions:

1. The Lebanese state was not simply a product of colonialist machinations that responded to French imperial interests, as it was categorized by classical Arab nationalists, but was also a response to genuine interests and demands of the Lebanese nationalists and Christians. This second categorization of the Lebanese state was tantamount to a legitimization meriting a revision of the Arab nationalist attitude toward it. From a strategic point of view, the liberation of Lebanon from foreign rule did not necessarily lead to the withering away of the Lebanese state and its inclusion in an Arab or Syrian state. It follows that advocates of Arab unity should not concentrate solely on changing the attitude of the French authorities toward this objective and toward Syrian unity, but should also address the concerns and interests of the Lebanese nationalists and Christians separately from French colonial policy in Lebanon.
2. The Lebanese question would remain a thorny problem unless properly addressed by the Arab nationalists. Hence, the treatise argued that if the forces that were represented in the COC were able to bring the French authorities to annex the disputed territories to Syria, an anti-Arab, anti-Syrian, and pro-French mini-state would emerge in Lebanon which would pose a continuous threat to the Syrian state. Furthermore, if these forces were able to achieve the full integration of Lebanon within a Syrian state, this would pose a greater threat

³³ For a full text of “The Problem of Separation and Unification,” see *al-Nahār*, March 11, 1936.

³⁴ Rabat, *al-Takwīn al-tārīkhī*, 665. See also Kazim Al-Sulh, “Ṣiġhat al-mithāq al-waṭānī: Kāzīm al-Ṣulḥ alladhī awjadahā yarwī qiṣṣatahā,” *an-Nahār*, January 1, 1975; Hassan Saab, “The Rationalist School in Lebanese Politics,” in Binder, ed., *Politics in Lebanon*; Kamal al-Salibi, *Tārīkh Lubnān al-ḥadīth*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahār l-il-Nashr 1978.

to Syria since half the citizens—meaning Christians and Lebanese nationalists—of this state would be opposed to it.

3. It was true that the majority of the Lebanese Christians were skeptical of Arab nationalism and Syrian unionism. But this skepticism developed because these last two tendencies were—in the minds of the Lebanese Christians—associated with Islamic domineering and fanatical tendencies. However, the treatise agreed with the assessments of some participants of the COC, who suggested that an increasing number of the Christians and Lebanese nationalists were softening their skeptical attitude toward Arab unity. This was due to a number of factors, including the increasingly unpopular French colonial policy in Lebanon, and the non-sectarian policies pursued by the Arab nationalists in Lebanon and Syria. The treatise warned against overestimating the extent and the pace of change; yet it maintained that this was significant enough to develop an increasing potential for the creation of a broad-based non-sectarian anti-colonial movement as a prerequisite for strengthening the struggle against the mandatory system.

Against the backdrop of this vision, the treatise called on the Lebanese Arab nationalists to implement the following steps:

1. To fully and unequivocally recognize the Lebanese state. Looked at from a broad pan-Arab perspective, and similar to an Iraqi state, the Lebanese state would not harm the Arab cause, provided it was free and Arab. This entailed a shift of the focus of interest of the Lebanese Arab nationalists from Greater Syria and the seceded Syrian territories to Lebanon itself. From this vantage point, the issue of federating Lebanon with the rest of the Arab world would be similar to the issue of associating any other Arab state with such federation.
2. To cease addressing the Lebanese question within a Syrian unionist context that called for an immediate integration or reintegration of Lebanon or part of it within Syria, and start dealing with the long-term Lebanese and Arab contexts. This did not mean giving the question of liberation priority at the expense of the question of unification, nor the permanent postponement of the issue of Arab unity as insinuated by some members of the COC. Rather, it entailed the simultaneous pursuance of the two objectives, as maintained by the treatise.

3. To focus on solving the “Lebanese question” by developing Arab nationalism along clearer democratic and secular lines.
4. To collaborate with the Lebanese nationalists rather than dealing behind their backs with French colonialists. The collaboration should happen through a process of “Agreement, accommodation, negotiations and reasoning.” The treatise called for initiating a dialogue with the Lebanese nationalists, and hence for replacing the COC with a Lebanese forum for dialogue between forces representing different shades of Lebanese politics.

This new outlook started to gain ground among the Lebanese Arab nationalists when it was adopted by the ANP as an organization and by the LNA, and also when it was debated among Lebanese nationalist intellectuals such as a group led by Yusuf al-Sawda.³⁵ It continued to circulate within the Lebanese Arab nationalist intelligentsia until it was picked up by Riad El-Solh, described in an official British document as “one of the most influential leaders of the Lebanese Arab nationalist movement.”³⁶ Riad El-Solh, who was able to bridge the gap between the first and the second generations of Lebanese Arab nationalists, and who was deeply involved in Lebanese and Arab politics, played a key role in popularizing the new outlook and providing it with political significance among the Lebanese Arab nationalists.

Gradually, the old generation of Lebanese Arab nationalists came to adopt the point of view of their new counterparts. The increasing alienation of the Lebanese Christians from the French authorities opened the door for the hoped-for broad cross-sectarian alignment between supporters of Greater Lebanon and the Lebanese Arab nationalists. These shifts in attitudes, positions, and relations between these Lebanese groups entailed a reversal of the basic features that characterized the mandatory period, such as the policy of exclusion. This in turn entailed the need to devise a proper formula for the integration of the Lebanese Arab nationalists within the system.

The debate with regard to the cherished formula intensified during the early 1940s, especially before the general and presidential elections.

³⁵ El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism*, 122.

³⁶ Public Record Office, FO 371/23280, Record of Leading Personalities in Syria and Lebanon.

Segmental autonomy was guaranteed by an actual power-sharing formula agreed upon by the Lebanese nationalists, led by Bishara al-Khoury, and the Lebanese Arab nationalists, led by Riad El-Solh. Independent Lebanon, which emerged in 1943, was led by a grand or broad coalition of both sides, which brought the mandatory system and its exclusionary policy to an end, at least during the period of the 1940s. The two sides each had a de facto veto on major decisions that affected the future and the higher national interests of the country, such as Lebanon's involvement in regional schemes. Proportionality was also secured on various political, electoral, and administrative levels.

Conclusion

Though partners in power, the Lebanese Arab nationalists maintained their skepticism toward what stood for consociational democracy. Riad El-Solh, who became the first prime minister of independent Lebanon, emphasized in the ministerial declaration that "the moment in time" when it becomes possible to abolish sectarianism would be a "moment of a blessed, total national awakening in the history of Lebanon." He went on to say: "We intend to reach that stage in the near future."³⁷

This optimistic forecast seemed to have been predicated on a liberal belief in progress. It underlined the failure of the Lebanese Arab nationalists of the 1940s to predict what lay ahead. For within a decade, Arab nationalism came to be dominated by an authoritarian tendency that not only confirmed the worst suspicions of the religious and ethnic minorities of the region, but even alienated a wide array of the supporters of Arab nationalism themselves. Coupled with the emergence of authoritarian Arab nationalism was a sectarianism that was secularist only in form. This unpredicted turn of events contributed to the entrenchment of the Lebanese consociational democracy.

An attempt to dismantle the Lebanese political system through the al-Ta'if agreement which brought the civil war in Lebanon to a halt during 1989 was permanently bogged down and produced the same effects. The recent Lebanese elections indicated an unprecedented reli-

³⁷ Jan Malha, *Majmū'at al-bayānāt al-wizāriyya*, Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāt 1965, 22 (translation from Arabic into English by the author).

gious polarization and segregation, and hence the ongoing need for consociationalism.

To assess the degree of this entrenchment, one could probe into the ministerial crisis in Lebanon in December 2005, which brought ministers representing Hizbollah and Amal, i.e. the principle Shiite movements, to boycott the meetings and activities of the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, unless the principles of consociation were respected, and unless the government agreed to take the decision by consensus rather than through a majority vote.³⁸

Given the fact that the Shiite factions spearheaded the criticism of the system of consociational democracy, and the quest for its replacement with majoritarian democracy, and given the fact that the two factions became primary movers of the Shiite community, which used to be an important part of the Arab nationalist constituency in Lebanon, it is possible to conclude that Lebanese consociational democracy has outlived the once predominant Lebanese Arab nationalist movement, which predicted—or who hoped to replace it with—a majoritarian system based on citizenship.³⁹

³⁸ Michael Young, "Accept the Deadlock of Consensus Politics," *The Daily Star*, December 22, 2005.

³⁹ *Al-Safir*, December 21, 2005.

PART THREE

LIBERAL THOUGHT AND ITS AMBIVALENCES

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WITHIN OR WITHOUT? AMEEN RIHANI AND THE
TRANSCULTURAL SPACE BETWEEN THE “WEST”
AND THE “EAST”

Christoph Schumann

In plurality, multiplicity, a being merely exchanges itself for itself or for one of its many avatars. It produces metastases; it does not metamorphose.¹

In his interpretations of September 11, Baudrillard gives a rather pessimistic outlook on the twenty-first century. He analyzes how the globalization of markets, networks, and information transformed the normative idea of universalism into a pervasive, indifferent culture devoid of any specific content. This transition, following his argument, would bring with it a process of “constant homogenization” as well as of “endless fragmentation” that dissolves all former cultural, ethnic, and religious entities. With regard to the “West,” Baudrillard’s analysis sheds light on the underlying paradox of what is called “Western identity.” During the Cold War, the “West” defined itself by universalistic values such as democracy, human rights, and free markets. The moment these values became dominant on a global level, the “West” lost this basis of its particular identity. From this perspective, Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* appears to be a desperate effort to de-universalize Western universalism in order to re-essentialize Western identity.

With regard to the non-Western world, Baudrillard sees resistance and hatred arising. However, according to him, this hatred was “not based on the fact that the West stole everything from them and never gave anything back. Rather, it is based on the fact that they received everything, but were never allowed to give anything back. This hatred,” Baudrillard concludes, “is not caused by dispossession or exploitation,

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, trans. Chris Turner, London and New York: Verso 2001, 78.

but rather by humiliation.”² In this interpretation, the fundamental anthropological concept of the “gift”—as described by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss—is being turned into its opposite.³ While the anthropological function of exchanging gifts was to establish societal coherence by reciprocity, the unilateral gift, according to Baudrillard, was merely an act of power, no matter whether it comes as charity from the “Empire of Good” or as a suicide attack from a terrorist group. Both of these “gifts” are given without any possibility of being returned.

In this chapter, I will not be able to present a solution for what was described in Baudrillard’s terms as the dilemma of the “impossible exchange.” But I would like to challenge the prevailing dichotomies between the “East” and the “West” by going back to the historical point when this dichotomy was not yet reified and politicized in the way that is the case today. My theoretical starting point is the analytical notion of the “transcultural space” that was shaped by the interaction between European and Middle Eastern societies.⁴ Although the history of this transcultural space goes back to the Crusades and beyond, it entered a “crucial stage” during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ At that time, the driving forces of globalization—trade, migration, colonialism, and new technologies of communication—intensified mutual interconnectedness. Of course, exchange and communication have never been on equal terms.⁶ As a result, Europe was able to impose its self-image and, combined with it, its concepts of “civilization,” “progress,” and “modernity” on Middle Eastern societies. At the peak of this development, it justified direct intervention and even colonization with an alleged “civilizing mission.”

Some scholars have described the Middle East as a “penetrated system,” an allusion to the unequal power relations on the international

² Jean Baudrillard, “The Violence of the Global,” in Jean Baudrillard, *Power Inferno*, Paris: Galilée 2002, 63–83 (see http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=385).

³ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, London: Routledge 1990; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1987.

⁴ Almut Höfert and Armando Salvatore, “Beyond the Clash of Civilisations: Transcultural Politics between Europe and Islam,” in Almut Höfert and Armando Salvatore, eds., *Between Europe and Islam: Shaping Modernity in a Transcultural Space*, Brussels et al.: PIE Lang 2000, 13–37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*

plane.⁷ Yet history was not a one-way track; Western societies, particularly in the Americas, were “penetrated” by Middle Eastern immigrants during the same period. These immigrants fought successfully for wealth, citizenship, and recognition in countries such as the United States, Brazil, and Argentina. The impact of these emigrants and remigrants (!) on their homelands in the Middle East had until recently been widely underestimated.⁸ Western ideas, customs, products, and capital did not only come to the Middle East in the wake of colonialism and imperialist domination, but were also introduced by migrants. In 1911 Ameen Rihani—himself a migrant—commented ironically: “Emigration has introduced into Syria somewhat of the three prominent features of Civilization: namely, a little wealth, a few modern ideas, and many strange diseases.”⁹

This chapter will analyze the life and thought of Ameen Rihani (Amīn Fāris al-Riḥānī or al-Rayḥānī)¹⁰ by using the notion of “transcultural space.” Unlike most of his contemporaries, Rihani’s biography was shaped by constantly moving back and forth between the “East” and the “West.” This transcultural experience shaped his thought and left a distinct liberal imprint. Rihani knew the “West” and the “East” from within and he could look at both from without. On both sides, he appreciated some aspects and rejected others. For this reason, his idea of progress or “rise” was based on cultural exchange and cross-pollination rather than on a solipsistic “return to the self” by purification and resurrection. By analyzing two of his key notions, nation and civilization (*ḥadāra*), I will show that Rihani appreciated national and civilizational particularities, but only within a wider framework of universalistic humanism. Similarly, he supported the nationalistic call for independence from colonialism and the Mandate system, but he remained committed to the values of individualism and cultural pluralism rather than collectivism and nationalistic homogenization.

⁷ See L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984.

⁸ Akram F. Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920*, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 2001.

⁹ Ameen F. Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, 1st ed., New York 1911, re-edited by Albert Rihani, Beirut: Rihani House 1973, 156.

¹⁰ J. Fontane, “al-Rayḥānī, Amīn,” in *EP*, vol. VIII, 470f.

Ameen Rihani: biography and self-image

*We are not of the East or the West;
No boundaries exist in our breast:
We are free.*

*Nor Crescent nor Cross we adore;
Nor Buddha nor Christ we implore;
Nor Moslem nor Jew we abhor;
We are free.¹¹*

Ameen Rihani was born in the Lebanese village of Freike (al-Furayka) in 1876—the same place where he died in 1940. Rihani called this place and its surrounding valley his philosophical and spiritual resort in various articles; this helped earn him the epithet “the philosopher of Freike” in 1910 in a book review.¹² Nonetheless, he spent a significant part of his life abroad, notably during his long stays in the Syrian-American colony in New York and his extended travels through the Arabian Peninsula. His schooling started in Freike and continued in New York after he emigrated in 1888 together with his uncle ‘Abduh and his teacher, the eminent Syrian-American intellectual and publisher Naoum Mokarzel (1864–1932). As a consequence, he was prolific in both English and Arabic from early on, and he reflected upon the specific advantages and deficits of both languages in several letters and articles.¹³ More importantly, he contributed to both languages and cultures. He encountered, for instance, the free lyrical style of Walt Whitman in the United States and applied it successfully in his pioneering Arabic poems written in free verse. At the same time, he translated the *Luzumiyyat* of Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Ma‘arri (973–1057) from Arabic to English, rendering this classical Arab author accessible to Americans. In the political field, he published articles in American, Syrian-American, and Arab newspapers and magazines. Few other Arab intellectuals of that era were able to reach out to such wide and diverse audiences. With regard to

¹¹ Amin Rihani, *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems*, ed. S. B. Bushrui and J. M. Munro, Beirut: Rihani House 1970, 106.

¹² Salim Sarkis, “al-Riḥāniyyat,” *Majallat Sarkīs*, Cairo (April 1910). Cf. Amin Albirt al-Rihani, *Faylasūf al-Furayka: ṣāḥib al-madīna al-‘uzmā*, Beirut: Dār al-Jil 1987, 58; Albirt al-Rihani, ed., *Amīn al-Riḥānī: ta’ālīfuhu, ḥayātuhu wa-mukhtārāt min āthārihi*. Beirut: Maṭba‘at al-Riḥānī 1941, esp. 11–20.

¹³ E.g. Amin [Faris] al-Rihani, “Rūḥ al-luḡa,” in *al-Riḥāniyyāt fī juz’ayn*, vol. II, Beirut: Dār al-Jil 1987, 417–27; Amin al-Rihani, “Letter to Na‘ūm Mokarzel,” Dec. 31, 1906, in Albirt al-Rihani, ed., *Rasā’il: 1896–1940*, Beirut: Dār al-Riḥānī 1959, 104–06.

his public role as an intellectual and his ability to address both Western and Middle Eastern publics, one might dare to call him “the Edward Said of the interwar period.”

Like many other families of late nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon, the Rihanis ran a small workshop for silk textiles in Freike. Due to the worsening economic situation, his father decided to open a shop for textiles in Washington Street, the core of the Syrian colony in Lower Manhattan. He expected his son to help in this business, but Ameen felt more attracted to New York City’s cultural and intellectual opportunities. He worked in theater, studied law, and immersed himself in writing. In all, Ameen Rihani lived in the United States from 1888 until 1921, with the exception of two longer periods between 1897 and 1899, and from 1904 to 1910. During these interludes, he returned to Lebanon due to health problems or traveled in the Middle East. From 1921 onward, he again settled in Lebanon, but spent much of his time traveling in different parts of the Arab world, particularly Iraq, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula as well as in Europe and America.

It is difficult to classify Ameen Rihani as a particular type of intellectual, as he constantly crossed boundaries—geographical, linguistic, and cultural. Even religiously, he converted from Maronite Christianity to Islam, became interested in the Bahai religion, and, finally, advocated an abstract deism in his testament. In this sense, his writings were shaped by transcultural experiences rather than specific ideologies, belief systems, or intellectual schools. Rihani underlined the importance of these experiences in two autobiographical sketches: the introduction to his *Mulūk al-‘arab* (1924) and to the second volume of *al-Rihāniyyāt* (1923).¹⁴ There he describes, for instance, how he rediscovered his Arab and Islamic heritage through American authors such as Thomas Carlyle,¹⁵ and, in reverse, how he learned to look at the West through the lens of this particular cultural and spiritual heritage.

When I grew up reading the oriental literatures, while living in the diaspora (*mahjar*), I became convinced that the rational and material sciences of the West alone won’t benefit humans by generating steady growth—morally and socially. I saw that particularly Americans and Westerners in general are in need of some of the East’s spiritual and poetical beauty to soften their rational and realistic inclinations and modify their materialistic

¹⁴ Amin al-Rihani, *Mulūk al-‘arab: al-Juz’ al-awwal*, Beirut: Dār al-Jil 1978, 4–20; al-Rihani, *al-Rihāniyyāt*.

¹⁵ Al-Rihani, *Mulūk al-‘arab*, 5.

leanings. So I founded a company, of which I am the director and the accountant, in order to run steamships of reason and spirit (*bawākhir al-‘aql wa-l-rūḥ*) between the East and the West. They are loaded with what the former needs of the latter’s sciences, and what the latter needs of the former’s philosophy and spirituality. In this enterprise I see the author of *al-Riḥāniyyāt* as both a builder (*mu‘assis*) and a transmitter (*nāqil*). He is the owner of the ship and the owner of the cargo.¹⁶

At first glance, the all-too-familiar stereotypes of the “materialistic” and “rational” West versus the “spiritual” and “philosophical” East are eye-catching. More interesting at second glance, however, is the role Rihani assigns to himself as a traveler and merchant in the space that he creates by distinguishing the two civilizational realms. With a view to each one of them, one could describe Rihani as a “marginal man”¹⁷—marginal to Western and Eastern civilization, or to Anglo-Saxon and Arab culture, or to Lebanese Christendom and to Islam. From a different perspective, however, he appears as a central and “authentic” expression of the transcultural space itself that opened up between all these entities and through which he was moving during most of his life. He knew that these cultural experiences do not lead necessarily to personal excellence, but often to individual difficulties. He was also aware that individual freedom may be accompanied by a sense of uprootedness. Rihani described the predicament of a biography shaped in this transcultural space most aptly in his *The Book of Khalid*. It shall be analyzed in the following section.

The Book of Khalid

Written in English and published in New York in 1911, *The Book of Khalid* became Rihani’s first major success in the United States, and added to his growing reputation in the Arab world. Apparently, it had some influence on Gibran Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet* and Mikhail Naimy’s *The Book of Mirdad*.¹⁸ In fact, all three of these authors drew on the topic of the prophet coming from the East to the West. In addition, they wove autobiographical details into their narratives and, at

¹⁶ Al-Rihani, *al-Riḥāniyyāt*, 272.

¹⁷ Robert E. Park, “Human Migration and the Marginal Man,” in Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture*, Glencoe: Free Press 1964.

¹⁸ Gibran Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, New York: A. A. Knopf 1923; Mikha’il Nu‘ayma, *The Book of Mirdad: A Lighthouse and a Haven*, Beirut: Sader’s Library 1948.

times, even adopted the lifestyle and ethos of a (would-be) “prophet.” Geoffrey Nash has pointed out that their ideas emerged in response to a particular contemporary American environment that was fascinated by mysticism, transcendentalism, and, particularly, Eastern spiritualism.¹⁹ He even goes so far as to call Gibran a “consumer prophet.”²⁰

In *The Book of Khalid*, Rihani tells the life of Khalid, his main character, and his friend and scribe, Shakib. Both migrate together to America in a spirit of adventure and in search of the unknown. Like many other Syrian immigrants at that time they move into the cheapest possible cellar in New York and try to earn their living by peddling. Shakib works in a disciplined and targeted manner, and is soon able to open a bank account and save some money. Khalid, however, is plagued by moral doubts about the business of selling religious items allegedly coming from the Holy Land. Finally, he sets fire to his peddling box, turns to philosophy and spirituality, and becomes a self-proclaimed “dervish.” However, instead of purification and contemplation, he is drawn into a bohemian life charged by an atmosphere of lofty spiritualism and slippery eroticism. Even the narrator has to acknowledge that “Khalid’s immanent morality and intellectualism suffered an interregnum with the fairies.”²¹

After a while, Khalid becomes aware of this dilemma, and turns to American party politics. He is hired as a speaker and activist for an election campaign, but the moment he tells his boss in a letter that he would not be willing to accept any money or to propagate the “Noble Cause,” but only “Honesty and Truth,”²² he runs into trouble. In a conversation with a bluntly racist undertone, the boss tells Khalid that he has absolutely no appreciation of what Khalid calls “immanent morality”:

That sort of morality will not as much as secure a vote during the campaign, nor even help to keep the lowest clerk in office. That sort of morality is good for your mountain peasants or other barbarous tribes. But the free and progressive people of the United States must have something better, nobler, more practical. You’d do well, therefore, to get you a pair of rings, hang them in your ears, and go preach your immanent morality to the

¹⁹ Geoffrey P. Nash, “Mediums, Mystics and Messiahs: Rihani, Gibran and the East–West Cultic Milieu,” in Naji Oueijan et al., eds., *Kahlil Gibran & Ameen Rihani: Prophets of Lebanese-American Literature*, Louaize, Lebanon: Notre Dame University 1999, 29–38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

²¹ Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, 115.

²² *Ibid.*, 128. All words spelled in capital letters as quoted.

South African Pappoos. But before you go, you shall taste of the rigor of our law, you insolent, brazen-faced, unmannerly scoundrel!²³

Accused of misappropriation of public funds, Khalid is put in jail. “The orator-dream of youth—what a realization!” comments the narrator. It is only the help of his friend Shakib that gets Khalid out of his prison cell. This incident and their deteriorating physical health prompt the two friends to return to their homeland.

Back in Lebanon, Khalid has to endure even more. Curiously enough, the subsequent course of events mirrors the progress of his American experience: spiritual retreat, political activism, and persecution. Soon after arriving home, he is being accused by his father of atheism because he refuses to attend church services. In addition, he stirs the anger of the Maronite clerics by translating and distributing a booklet by Thomas Carlyle, whom they regard as a heretic. Finally, Khalid desires marriage with his cousin Najma, to which the church refuses its consent. The conflict escalates, and Khalid is excommunicated. Eventually, Najma is forced to marry someone else and Khalid retreats to the forests and lives near a hermit.

After a period of solitude and contemplation, Khalid turns back to society again. In a new fervor to promote justice and truth, he joins the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)²⁴ as a public speaker. Simultaneously, however, he engages in a spiritual relationship with an American convert to Bahaism, Mrs. Gotfry. Once more, he is torn between his spiritual and political vocations. In the end, he opts for politics, being eager to promote his new political vision of a united Arab empire that would be able to withstand the threat of colonialism. In line with this idea, Khalid embraces Wahhabism in a speech long awaited by the public at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Unsurprisingly, this adds a public storm of indignation plus the wrath of the Ottoman authorities to his unsolved problems with the Maronite clergy, and he has to endure political persecution as well as social isolation. At least he is able to re-connect with his beloved—now widowed—cousin Najma. So Khalid retreats with her, her son whom he adopts, his friend Shakib, and his spiritual associate Mrs. Gotfry into the desert between Libya and Egypt. Here, Khalid experiences some moments of true happiness,

²³ Ibid., 132. The vilification of Syrian immigrants by American political leaders was not unusual at that time.

²⁴ The political organization of the so-called “Young Turks.”

but soon Mrs. Gotfry leaves him. Then his adopted son dies after brain surgery, followed by Najma, who dies of a lung disease aggravated by her grief. At the end of the book, Khalid vanishes too, leaving only Shakib behind.

Ameen Rihani's own biography resembles the lives of both main characters, Khalid and Shakib, in some aspects, but not all. Rihani, too, had lived in America and returned to Lebanon; he had been interested in Bahaism; and had written articles supporting the CUP and, later, Arab nationalism. Other aspects of the story, however, correspond to the broader "collective memory" of Syrian immigrants in the United States: the hardships during the voyage, the entrance examination on Ellis Island, peddling, and poverty.

However, Khalid, unlike Rihani, fails in most of his life projects. His political activism leads him into conflict with powerful opponents twice, while failing to reach a broader audience. His spiritual search ends in a bohemian life while in America, and in solitude later on. His moments of inspiration are always on the edge of madness. Thus, he is not a convincing role model, either for an Arab nationalist or for a prophet. Furthermore, Khalid develops the idea of bringing East and West together in one personality,²⁵ but even the narrator remarks that Khalid would merely corroborate the "truism that no two opposing elements meet and fuse without both losing their original identity."²⁶ On the whole, the story of Khalid describes a problem without presenting much hope. Khalid is a thoroughly tragic figure, more like Tayyib Salih's hero Mustafa Said in his *Season of Migration to the North*²⁷ than the protagonist al-Mustafa of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*.

Diaspora and the transcultural space

At this point, I would like to widen the scope from individual experience to the socio-historical context. For this purpose, I shall explore the emergence of "transcultural space" as a result of Syrian emigration,

²⁵ Ibid., 260.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Al-Tayyib Salih, *Mawsim al-hijra ilā l-shamāl*, Cairo, Dār al-Hilāl 1969, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies as *Season of Migration to the North*, London and New York: Penguin 2003.

the establishment of a diaspora, and the latter's interaction with both their homeland and their new surroundings.

Throughout its history, the "Bilad al-Sham" (*Bilād al-Shām*)—today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine—has experienced much population movement. Early emigrants mostly followed the trade routes, with Egypt as the most important receiving country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It became a diasporic center of "Syrian" activities in the social, economic, and intellectual fields. Syrian emigration to the Americas started from the late nineteenth century, mainly among the lower middle classes.²⁸ Most of the emigrants hoped to earn some money and then return home. A considerable number of them did so,²⁹ while others settled down and built up their own infrastructure of community organizations, ethnic newspapers, and churches. Cultural exchange between Syrians at home and in the diaspora remained intact through the circulation of intellectual artifacts such as books, journals, and newspapers.³⁰ An illustrative example of this is the fact that Ameen Rihani's book *al-Rihāniyyāt* was published in Beirut in 1910, while Rihani himself was on his way to re-settle in New York. At the same time, one important review of the book came out in the Syrian magazine *Sarkīs*—published in Cairo.³¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Syrian journals, newspapers, and magazines were more likely to be run outside Syria rather than within it—in Cairo, Istanbul, Paris, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, or New York. Many well-educated Syrians sought to evade Ottoman censorship and wanted to leave "a narrow communal world behind."³² Arabic magazines owned by Syrians and printed in Egypt, such as

²⁸ Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America*, New York: George H. Doran Company 1924; Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *Syrian Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation*, Boston: Twayne Publishers 1975; Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 1985; Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, London: Centre for Lebanese Studies 1992; Adele Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic Peoples to the United States*, 1st ed. 1961, 2nd ed. New York: Center for Migration Studies 1995; Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920*, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 2001.

²⁹ Khater, *Inventing Home*, 108–45.

³⁰ This connection was interrupted, though, during World War I.

³¹ Salim Sarkis, "al-Rihāniyyāt," in *Majallat Sarkis*, Cairo (April 1910). Cf. al-Rihani, *Faylasūf al-Furayka*, 58; al-Rihani, ed., *Amīn al-Rihānī*, esp. 11–20.

³² Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt, 1724–1975* (Berliner Islamstudien, no. 3), Stuttgart: Steiner 1985, 102.

al-Muqataṭaf (founded in 1876), *al-Hilāl* (1892), and *al-Manār* (1898), became influential all over the Arab world. Yet, despite their Arabic-speaking environment, the Syrians in Egypt retained their distinct identity, even though Syrian writers emphasized their commonalities with the Egyptians, such as Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islam.³³ Jurji Zaydan, for instance, an eminent Syrian editor and writer in Egypt, argued that while Syrians and Egyptians were a single nation with regard to their common heritage and geographical proximity, they were also two distinct peoples in the context of the specific role of the Syrians in Egypt as tradespersons and intellectual middlemen.³⁴

The particularities of Syrian life in the United States in comparison to Egypt shed some more light on “transcultural space” and its importance for understanding Ameen Rihani’s intellectual background. To begin with, Syrians migrated to Egypt and the Americas for similar reasons. The majority were seeking new opportunities for work, trade, and business. Particularly during the authoritarian rule of Abdülhamid II in the Ottoman Empire, Syrian emigrants appreciated the greater intellectual and religious freedom granted in America and in Egypt under British rule. However, the “flight from religious persecution” became a dominant topic in the collective memory and thus in the self-perception of the Syrian community in America. Although scholarly research has called this into question,³⁵ the story of religious and political persecution fitted perfectly into the great American narrative of oppressed people coming to the United States from all over the world in order to build a new society.³⁶ The Syrian-American narrative is therefore more indicative of the relationship between the Syrian diaspora and its American environment than of the political realities of late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham.

Another important difference was, of course, language. Syrians in Egypt could immediately communicate with the host society. They were distinguishable by their accent, but their newspapers were printed in Arabic, thus addressing an Egyptian, a Syrian, and a broader Arab audience at once. In the United States, the linguistic difference added

³³ Ibid., 110.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Naff, *Becoming American*, 82–90; Khater, *Inventing Home*, 49–52.

³⁶ In a report of 1904, Lucius Hopkins Miller summarized the prevalent American view of Turkish rule: “The stupendous stupidity and moral obliquity of the Turk, together with the blight of Islam, have combined to produce a condition well nigh intolerable”: Lucius Hopkins Miller, *Our Syrian Population: A Study of the Syrian Communities of Greater New York*, San Francisco: R. D. Reed 1904, repr. 1968, 3.

to the cultural and ethnic ones. This may be one reason why the Arabic term *mahjar* (“place of emigration” or “diaspora”) refers to the Americas, but not to Egypt.³⁷ In the USA, the Syrian press faced a more difficult situation. By choosing Arabic as the dominant language for publication, the Syrian diaspora was able to preserve a cultural exchange with Syrians and Arabs elsewhere such as in Sao Paulo, Cairo, Paris, Istanbul, or Damascus. Yet direct interaction with a larger American public remained limited, notwithstanding the fact that the contribution of the Arabic press in the process of Americanization is widely acknowledged.³⁸ As time went on, the second and third generation of Syrian Americans increasingly lost their ability to read and write Arabic, and the lopsided connection with the Arab homelands threatened the unity of the diaspora community. Salloum Mokarzel’s (1881–1952) English magazine *The Syrian World* tried to remedy this situation between 1926 and 1932.³⁹ This magazine certainly marked a peak in the intellectual life of Syrian Americans, but due to its weak financial basis, it did not survive the Great Depression.

In this context, Ameen Rihani was one of the few Arab intellectuals able to contribute to American, Arab, and diasporic intellectual life. He even refused to write in Arabic for a while, after he had caused a scandal with an anti-clerical pamphlet in the Syrian colony in New York in 1903.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Rihani’s Arabic writings are very well documented and studied (particularly thanks to the editorial work of Rihani’s brother, Albert, and his nephew, Ameen Albert). His journalistic work in English, however, has not been edited at all. This bias reflects the fact that the Syrian-American diaspora has become established as a research topic in the field of Middle East Studies, but not yet in American Studies.

Between 1901 and 1932, Ameen Rihani wrote regularly for the Syrian press in America. According to Henry Melki’s bibliography of his

³⁷ ‘Abd al-Karim al-Ashtar, “al-Mahdjar,” in *EP*, vol. V, 1253–57.

³⁸ Alixa Naff, “The Early Arab Immigrant Experience,” in Ernest McCarus, ed., *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1994, 23–35.

³⁹ Cf. Michael W. Suleiman, “The Mokarzels’ Contributions to the Arabic-Speaking Community in the United States,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21 (1999), 71–88. Alixa Naff speaks of a “crisis in the use of Arabic” in “The Early Arab Immigrant Experience,” 34.

⁴⁰ Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, vol. III. Supplementband, Leiden: Brill 1942, 399–414, here 399.

Arabic articles,⁴¹ his first pieces appeared in the newspaper of his former teacher Naoum Mokarzel between 1901 and 1907. Then he switched to *al-Hudā's* main competitor, *Mir'āt al-Gharb* (1910–20), while also contributing to *al-Funūn* (1913–18) and *al-Sā'iḥ* (1915–21). His most committed relationship, however, was to the English-language magazine *The Syrian World* edited by Naoum's brother, Salloum Mokarzel, in which he published 36 essays between 1926 and 1932.

In an early article of 1902, entitled “We and our Newspapers,” Rihani analyzed the state of the Syrians and their Arabic press in America.⁴² Overall, his essay was a call for comprehensive reforms, starting in the American diaspora and led by the press. In his view, its ideal role was not only to criticize the rich and powerful, but also to work for the education and cultural refinement of its readers. While being extremely critical of the Arabic newspapers in the United States, Rihani presented the contemporary American press as a role model. Although one can assume that he was aware of the deficiencies of the American press, it is important to note that American society was, for him, a yardstick for the assessment of his own community. In contrast to this, he was rather skeptical with regard to his own cultural heritage, which he saw as both an asset and a burden.

Almost thirty years later, in 1930, Rihani published an article entitled “The Syrian in American Art” in *The Syrian World* in which he discussed the present and future of Syrian artists in America.⁴³ At that time, Rihani felt that the pendulum was swinging too far in the direction of cultural assimilation. While he had seen Americanization as a means of reforming the Syrian community in America at the beginning of the century, he was now afraid that they would give up their identity completely—by neglect or by ignorance. So he defined the “mission of *The Syrian World*” as teaching the new Syrian generation, which could not read Arabic, the culture and heritage of its motherland. This would give them “more self-confidence and self-respect, the knowledge that makes them better citizens, productive and creative in every walk

⁴¹ Henry H. Melki, “al-Ṣiḥāfa al-ʿarabiyya fī l-mahjar wa-ʿalāqatuhā bi-l-adab al-mahjarī,” Ph.D. thesis, Georgetown University, 1972, 196–200.

⁴² Amin [Faris] al-Rihani [Ameen Rihani], “Naḥnu wa-jarāʿidunā,” in Amīn Albirt al-Rihani, ed., *Shadharāt min ʿahd al-ṣibā*, Beirut: al-Muʿassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr 1980, 133–46. Rihani's analysis of the Syrian press takes the form of a personal letter to his friend Shabal Nasib Damus, but was published soon after.

⁴³ Ameen Rihani, “The Syrian in American Art,” *The Syrian World* 4 (Nov. 1929), 10–16.

of life—the knowledge, in a word, that will save them as Syrians and ennoble them the more as Americans.”⁴⁴

Either of these articles could be seen as showing Rihani either as an uprooted Christian intellectual who tried to impose the hegemonic values of the “West” on the “East” or as an early example of an ethnic leader who pursued a policy of “integration without assimilation.”⁴⁵ Yet both articles, if considered together, defy these interpretations. Despite the different contexts and approaches taken, Rihani treats “diaspora” in both cases as a situation where the experience of cultural differences is disturbing and inspiring at once. In his view, this should not lead to the emergence of a hybrid culture, but should rather open the way for a process of (re-)evaluating one’s own as well as alien traditions, resulting in civilizational progress and cultural refinement.

“Nation”

It is a truism to say that questions of identity and belonging gain a specific relevance in a diaspora situation. Rihani spent most of his life moving between numerous places in Lebanon, the United States, Egypt, and the Arabian Peninsula. He was exposed to French education in his early youth in Lebanon. Then he learned English in America, and discovered the Arab world mediated by books of American authors.⁴⁶ In addition to this, his life-span covers a period that witnessed reform, revolution, and disintegration in the Ottoman Empire, followed by the rise and decline of an Arab kingdom, the victory of Wahhabism on the Arabian Peninsula, and, last but not least, the establishment of the mandatory states in the region of Bilad al-Sham.

In the secondary literature of recent decades, Rihani has been portrayed as an advocate of Lebanese, Syrian, Arab, and, one could even add, American nationalism. Today’s readers must be puzzled, or even suspicious, when a scholar like Henry Melki translates the Arabic adjective *sūrī* as “Lebanese” in Rihani’s analysis of the Syrian-American press

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁵ See Nuwar Mawlawi Diab, “Ameen Rihani’s Vision of Globalization: A Matrimony, Not Hegemony” (www.ameenrihani.org/pdf/Rihani).

⁴⁶ See his personal account in the introduction to *Mulūk al-‘arab*, 4–20.

of 1902 (see above).⁴⁷ Yet this is not entirely absurd. Linguistically, this translation is certainly wrong.⁴⁸ However, the word *sūrī* used in the context of the Syrian diaspora in the United States in the year 1902 was contained connotations that were completely different from those of today. Back then, “Syrian” immigrants in America applied this notion to themselves, even though the overwhelming majority came from the narrower region of Mount Lebanon.⁴⁹ In addition to this, neither Syrian nor Lebanese statehood existed at that time, nor did the idea of “Arabism” or Arab nationalism.⁵⁰ Transcending a century of nationalism, an objective translation of the notions *lubnānī*, *sūrī*, and *‘arabī* became almost impossible.

For Ameen Rihani, the question of identity and belonging was apparently of high importance. He addressed the question “Who am I?” in a number of articles, but without, however, giving a final answer. In 1923, for instance, he wrote the lines quoted below as part of his introduction to the second volume of *al-Riḥāniyyāt*. By then, Syrians in the United States had successfully ended a long struggle (1909–14) in the American courts for racial classification as “Caucasian” rather than “Asian” and thus eligible for US citizenship.⁵¹ After World War I, and particularly following the establishment of the Mandate system in Greater Syria, a long debate started among Syrian Americans on the question of the racial, cultural, and ethnic differences between the Lebanese and the Syrians. In this context, Rihani described his personal background as follows:

⁴⁷ Henry Melki, “The Place and Influence of Ameen al-Rihani in Arab-American Journalism,” in Oueijan et al., eds., *Kahlil Gibran & Ameen Rihani*, 73–84. Cf. al-Rihani: “Naḥnu wa-jarā’idunā,” 133–46.

⁴⁸ Even more so the fact that Amin’s brother Albert changed *sūrī* to *lubnānī* in some of texts he edited. This, of course, is outright manipulation. See J. Fontaine, “al-Rayḥānī, Amin,” in *EI²*, vol. VIII, 470f.

⁴⁹ The expression “Syrian race” was quite common during the interwar period and is very rare today. Back then, it acquired the American connotation of “race” whenever it was used in an American context, and simply meant “people” whenever it was used in the context of the Middle East.

⁵⁰ Arabism and Arab nationalism did not reach the American diaspora until the 1950s. See e.g. Yossi Shain, *Arab-Americans in the 1990s: What Next for the Diaspora?* Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University 1996.

⁵¹ Asians were excluded from US citizenship from 1870. See Naff, *Becoming American*, 247–58; Sarah Gualtieri, “Becoming ‘White’: Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, 4 (2001), 29–58.

I am Lebanese by the place of birth (*lubnānī al-mawlad*), Arab by tongue and nationality (*‘arabī al-lisān wa-l-qawmiyya*), and in my veins runs Phoenician, Canaanite, Aramaic, and Chaldaean blood. If my heart is in Lebanon, my spirit is in all Arab countries. If I am a Maronite Christian, I have remnants of all religions and sects that are rooted in this nation (*umma*)...I am convinced that there is no life for the Lebanese except beside the Syrian, and there is no life for the Syrian except beside the Arab. [Finally,] there is no life for the Arab except by cutting the snares of the sects and the clannish loyalties (*‘aṣabiyyāt*) of the tribes and by embracing science and literature, of which the Syrians and the Lebanese are today the torchbearers.⁵²

Lebanese localism, a wider Syrian regionalism, Arab nationalism, and loyalty to the American nation coexist throughout Rihani's writings, while he ascribed different political meanings to these concepts at different times. Yet the quotation above also shows that there is always a thrust toward universalism whenever he speaks of particular political, religious, or cultural identities. In his view, international cooperation had to bridge national differences; monotheism and spiritualism had to transcend religious cleavages; and civilizational advancement and cultural refinement had to reconcile cultural differences.

Although Rihani was not consistent in his definition of what "nation" means and who belongs to it, he was clearer with regard to the normative prerequisites of this concept. For him, the foremost precondition for building a political community was freedom and individual rights. This aspect appeared early on in his writings and never ceased to exist. In his 1921 English book *The Path of Vision*, for instance, he designated one chapter to what he calls "Mine [*sic*] Own Country."⁵³ He starts telling his readers about his spiritual attachment to the Lebanese countryside. In describing his spiritual bonds with the "rugged splendor of the ancient Lebanons [*sic*],"⁵⁴ he refers to the American author Henry Thoreau arguing that this kind of attachment would create a strong sense of belonging. Simultaneously, he wonders why he is, in fact, still longing for Lebanon, even though America, the land of his "second birth," had become "more significant for him than the first."⁵⁵ With a sigh he remarks on his "Home or Mother-Country":

⁵² Al-Rihani, *al-Rihāniyyāt*, vol. II, 269–73, here 271.

⁵³ Ameen Rihani, "Mine Own Country," in *The Path of Vision*, ed. S. B. Bushrui and J. M. Munro, Beirut: Rihani House[1970], 93–101.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

I never had a chance to be a patriot, not even in the Johnsonian sense of the word. Moreover, in a land where the freedom of the spirit, even the freedom of the citizen, has not yet been realized, one can better serve one's country from a safe distance. I have often given it absent treatment with little or no result. My subject and I are not *en rapport*. Enough said of patriotism.⁵⁶

The second prerequisite—national independence and sovereignty—emerged as a topic in Rihani's writings together with his growing disillusionment with regard to French and British rule in the Arab East. In the aftermath of World War I, he had not been entirely opposed to the idea of Western assistance to the new states, but he resented the transformation of the Mandate system into a form of neo-colonial domination. The importance this issue had gained during the last decades of his life is most evident in the text *My Testament (Waṣiyyatī)*, signed in Freike in 1931.⁵⁷ The text consists of 20 brief paragraphs, starting with specific political confessions, moving on through humanistic questions, and ending with universalistic, spiritual, and religious issues. Within this framework, the first five paragraphs are devoted to the question of national independence:

1. The people's right (*ḥaqq al-shu'ūb*) of self-determination is a holy right (*ḥaqq muqaddas*) and I advise you to pursue the struggle for its sake (*al-jihād fī sabīlihi*) wherever it may be. 2. . . . 3. The strong and free nation does not deserve its freedom and strength as long as there are suppressed and dependent nations in the world. . . . 4. Mankind won't reach the highest stages of advancement (*ruqiy*) and empathy (*'atf*) as long as half of it is free and the other half is oppressed. You ought to know that the economic oppression in the free and wealthy countries is as evil as the political and economic oppression in the countries that are still under the rule of the foreigners. . . . 5. The mandate [system] as it was defined by Woodrow Wilson, the immortal American, is rational and acceptable. In practice, however, it is despicable and depraved. It is more evil than colonialism, and I advise you to struggle against it until it ceases to exist.⁵⁸

Ameen Rihani's anti-colonialism took a nationalistic form during the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, as can be seen in the foregoing quotation, his idea of nation is firmly embedded in a universalistic framework. In

⁵⁶ Ibid., 97. Rihani alludes to his engagement in organizing relief work for Lebanon in the United States during World War I.

⁵⁷ Amin al-Rihani, *Waṣiyyatī*, ed. Amin Albirt al-Rihani, Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr 1982.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 19f.

contrast to the discourse of radical nationalism in Syria and Lebanon that emerged during the 1930s, Rihani's idea of national self-determination is based neither on the solipsistic idea of "national integrity" nor on an alleged struggle between the nations. Instead, he regards colonialism as a problem of mankind itself rather than only a part of it. With half of humanity oppressed and the other half oppressing, neither progress nor cultural refinement nor peaceful existence could be reached.

Rihani's third prerequisite for the political life of a nation, beside individual liberties and national rights, is the existence of what we would today call a "civil society."⁵⁹ Rihani was aware of the danger that nationalism might end in just another exclusive group spirit (*ʿaṣabiyya*) replacing sectarianism and tribalism. Tolerance and peaceful coexistence should therefore be leading principles within nations as well as among them.⁶⁰ In addition, Rihani emphasized in *My Testament* that Arabs could not expect an "honorable future" except on the basis of "civil, democratic government" (*al-ḥukm al-madani al-dimūqrāṭī*). To realize this, the whole "East" from China to Palestine was in need of a "general transformation" (*inqilāb ʿamm*) and an "intellectual revolution" (*thawra fikriyya*)—not in a political sense, but ethically, educationally, and spiritually. In contrast to the rising generation of young radical nationalists, however, Rihani did not believe in the myth of a revolutionary moment that would resurrect the nation by transforming it from a state of fragmentation to unity and from alienation to authenticity.⁶¹

It is remarkable that Rihani failed to ascribe the leading role in this process to his own profession, journalism, as the rising new middle class was increasingly inclined to do,⁶² but to education. In a speech he gave on several occasions in Palestine during 1927, he laid out ten main

⁵⁹ Today's widely used expression *al-mujtamaʿ al-madani* (civil society) does not, to my knowledge, occur in Rihani's discourse.

⁶⁰ Nathan Funk, "East and West: The Life, Work and Outlook of Ameen Fares Rihani," in Oueijan et al., eds., *Kahlil Gibran & Ameen Rihani*, 175–96.

⁶¹ See Christoph Schumann, *Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon: Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung, 1930–1958* (Schriften des Deutschen Orient-Instituts), Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut 2001, esp. 298–312; Christoph Schumann, "The Experience of Organized Nationalism: Radical Discourse and Political Socialization in Syria and Lebanon," in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds., *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Beiruter Texte und Studien, no. 96), Würzburg: Ergon 2004, 343–58.

⁶² See Christoph Schumann, "The Generation of Broad Expectations: Nationalism, Education, and Autobiography in Syria and Lebanon, 1930–1958," *Die Welt des Islams* 41 (2001), 174–205.

principles for education. They shall not be discussed in detail here, but it seems worth noting that these points are not based on the idea of subordinating the individual to a larger “national community,” and thus none of them aims at imbuing children with a nationalistic or patriotic spirit.⁶³ Instead, liberal and ethical principles such as self-reliance, dignity of the human being (*karāmat al-nafs*), good thought about others, freedom of will, and ethical courage predominate (principles 1–5).⁶⁴

“Civilization”

The notion of “civilization” is a key word in Rihani’s discourse, and can be found throughout his works. If one regards his writings synoptically, however, the meaning of this term is even less clear than his use of the term “nation,” oscillating persistently between the particularistic and the universalistic. The first is based on the (ontological) assumption that a plurality of civilizations exists—most notably, of course, “Western” and “Eastern civilization”. To my knowledge, Rihani only gave very vague geographical descriptions,⁶⁵ and he never tried to determine a “civilization” by its “essence.” In fact, “Western” and “Eastern civilization” mostly appear as a twin concept, one side always defining the other on the basis of a binary opposition: the “strenuous West” vs. the “indolent East”; the “materialistic West” vs. the “spiritual East”; “individualism” vs. “collectivism”; “rationality” vs. “faith,” etc.⁶⁶

Parallel to this, the universalistic understanding refers to a comprehensive “human Civilization.” In this connection, again, Rihani didn’t present a definition of the term, and his use of it is not always consistent. Nevertheless, it seems possible to specify this concept a little. First of all, in Rihani’s use the notion of human “Civilization” does not refer to an alleged ontological entity that could be distinguished and related

⁶³ Cf., for instance, the idea of national education in the thought of Sati’ al-Husri: Bassam Tibi, *Vom Gottesreich zum Nationalstaat. Islam und panarabischer Nationalismus*, 1st ed. 1987, 2nd ed. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1991, 137.

⁶⁴ Amin al-Rihani, “Iṣlāḥ al-umma,” in Amin Albirt al-Rihani, ed., *al-A‘māl al-‘arabiyya al-kāmila*, vol. VIII, Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr 1983, 26–45, here 39.

⁶⁵ His description of the “East” as stretching from “China to Palestine” is more based on rhyme (“min al-Ṣīn ilā Filasṭīn”) rather than definition: *ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁶ Compare the broader discourse of the Syrian diaspora in America: Khater, *Inventing Home*, 104f.

to other commensurable entities. It is rather a procedural concept that refers to the idea of historical “progress”—or, rather, “advancement.” Yet in contrast to the sociological notion of “modernization,” Rihani does not posit a transition from one particular stage to another (e.g. from “tradition” to “modernity”). Instead, “progress” designates a gradual and qualitative improvement of mankind in several ways (e.g. growth, refinement, betterment, pacification) and in more than one field (e.g. science, arts, politics, education, religion, ethics).

At this point, I have to emphasize once more that it is not my purpose to criticize Rihani’s notional ambiguity or his lack of clear definitions. On the contrary, it is precisely this characteristic that helps him to avoid two common pitfalls. On the one hand, the ambiguity between his universalistic notion of “Civilization” and his idea of a diversity of “civilizations” creates a tension which prevents him from perceiving the “East” and the “West” as more or less closed entities engaging each other on the global stage in a “dialogue” or, in the worst case, in a “clash of civilizations.” Hence, it is the loss of this notional ambiguity that turned the word “civilization” into an ideological catchword in the “East” (e.g. Atatürk’s understanding of *medeniyet*) as well as in the “West” (e.g. B. Lewis and S. P. Huntington, recently).⁶⁷ On the other hand, his broad notion of “progress” includes such a wide variety of aspects and possible measurements that he never identifies one particular “civilization” as being the most advanced in the process of human “Civilization.” Therefore, he never establishes a hierarchy between “East” and “West” or advises the “East” to follow the path of the “West.”

In terms of his own experience, it would have been impossible for Rihani to conceive of “East” and “West” as two closed and mutually exclusive entities, since he had lived long enough in both realms. Although he identified himself with both, he never claimed to have reached a synthesis. Only his protagonist Khalid dreams once of a future

⁶⁷ Atatürk serves as an example for narrowing the idea of “progress” to an authoritarian project of modernization. On the opposite side, Lewis and Huntington are examples, today, for the construction of “civilizations’ as mutually exclusive entities: B. Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic magazine* 9 (1990) (<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/90sep/rage.htm>); S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1996. Curiously enough, Lewis and Huntington shared Atatürk’s vision in the 1960s: B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965; S. P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1968.

“superman”⁶⁸ who would be “nor of the Old World nor of the New.”⁶⁹ Yet, as was argued above, Khalid falls short of this ideal. Beyond this lofty idea of synthesis, Rihani’s experience in the transcultural space had a very concrete influence on his thought. His discourse is characterized by constant movement along two basic vectors. The first one goes back and forth between the “East” and the “West.” Thus, his experience in the “West” shapes his view on the “East”—and vice versa. Even more, his criticism and his admiration of the “West” is informed by his perception of the “East” and, likewise, his criticism and admiration of the “East” is informed by his encounter with the “West.” The other vector marks his movement up and down between reflections upon universalistic ideas such as “mankind” and particularistic concepts such as the “nation.” So his idea of “nation” is embedded into a more comprehensive idea of “humanity,” whereas his idea of “humanity” draws from the diversity of different “nations.”

Both “nations” and “civilizations” should pursue “betterment and progress” (*ṣalāḥ wa-ruqiy*) by two basic means: cultural exchange, on the one hand; and selection and adaptation of the best, on the other. Looking down from Brooklyn Bridge on the arriving and departing ships Rihani thinks:

You boats, transport to Europe, Egypt, Eden and India, textiles from New England, cotton from Pennsylvania, wheat from Texas, wood from Fremont. Why don’t you carry with you to the Red, Indian and Yellow seas, some of the teeming waves which will wash forever the feet of the statue of liberty? . . . Carry to the East the dynamism of the West and bring back to the West the Eastern quiescence . . . Spring on Egypt and Syria the outcomes of the engineering science, and come home with a stream of Arab deeds.⁷⁰

In nationalistic and Islamistic thought in particular, the idea of cultural exchange has been reduced to a mere (re-)adaptation of Western technology while retaining one’s own culture and religion. In contrast to this, Rihani wants to evaluate all fields of cultural production, and therefore finds inspiration in “Western” literature, creativity, and sense of liberty as

⁶⁸ Rihani explicitly contrasts his “superman” to (Nietzsche’s) “blond Zarathustra” or what Rihani translates as “overman”: Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, 135.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Amin al-Rihani, “Min ‘alā jisr Brooklyn,” in *al-Rihāniyyāt*, 86–90; the quotation follows the English translation of Nadine Houry, “From Brooklyn Bridge,” in Naji B. Oueijan, ed., *Ameen Al-Rihani: Excerpts from Ar-Rihaniyat*, Kasrawan, Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press Louaize 1998, 9–13, here 11.

well as in “Eastern” antiquity, spirituality, and wisdom. Simultaneously he criticizes the poverty of the Western working class, the shortcomings of American democracy, and a narrow belief in rationality in the West as well as the East’s paralysis by the rampant growth of traditions, its clannish and sectarian loyalties, and its lack of scientific curiosity.

From this perspective, human “Civilization”—or rather universalism—is beyond “Eastern” or “Western civilization,” though it comprises the best parts of both. In describing the universal, Rihani usually resorts to metaphors, particularly “nature,” “God,” and “arts.” His idealization of the Lebanese countryside, particularly the valley of Freike, has been already mentioned. Although admitting that different people experience nature in different ways, he felt that it is the contemplation of one’s attachment to a particular environment that may lead the individual to the idea of the universal.⁷¹ With regard to “God,” Rihani does not embrace one creed or another, nor does he advocate the abolition of the diversity of different sects, but he urges people in *My Testament* to agree on the “oneness of God” (*tawhīd*) as a unifying link beyond all differences.⁷² In the arts, he was even confident of finding an “international supermedium of expression and appreciation.” This would allow for expressing sentiments that are particular in origin and universal in scope.⁷³ By translating al-Ma’arri’s lyric into English he wanted to plant al-Ma’arri’s thought on American soil. Similarly, he wanted to see Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman flourish like “the terebinth and the nenuphar” in the valleys of Lebanon.⁷⁴ In this connection, he rejected the nationalistic argument of the alleged purity or “authenticity” of a “national” culture. As the success of Syrian artists in America had shown, he argues, the national and the foreign had to be reconciled in order to become truly universal:

⁷¹ See A. Rihani, “A Footnote of Nature”; “My Native Horizon”; “Mine Own Country,” all in *The Path of Vision*, 56–60, 86–92, and 93–101.

⁷² Al-Rihani, *Waṣīyyatī*, paras. 16–20.

⁷³ My paraphrase. The exact wording is: “The conviction is that only through the exchange of art and culture and the consequent creation of an international supermedium of expression and appreciation can there be better understanding and a better guaranty of peace and good will among the nations of the world. As for the tribute and the appeal, they are actuated by a sentiment that is racial in origin and inter-racial in scope”: A. Rihani, “The Syrian in American Art,” *The Syrian World* 4, 3 (Nov. 1929), 10–16, here 16.

⁷⁴ A. Rihani, “From Concord to Syria,” in *The Path of Vision*, 81–85.

A national art, no matter how distinct in vigour and manner, is seldom free from foreign influences, and when these develop in harmony with the native elements, it begins to have a universal appeal. The national spirit, in other words, gives art a voice; the universal spirit gives it wings... The foreign elements do not readily fit, do not easily fuse. They may be either too crude or too refined, too racial or too exotic to harmonize. The change must, therefore, be in the native expression as well as in the material for assimilation. It must be from *within and without*.⁷⁵

Yet since Rihani was not only an artist but also a political intellectual, art alone could not provide a sufficient answer to the question of how to reconcile the particular and the universal in a polity. In order to shed some light on this complex issue, I would like to juxtapose, once more, two of Rihani's texts in order to point out the normative cornerstones of his political discourse. The first text was actually a speech titled "The Greatest City" ("al-Madina al-'uzmā") given at Beirut's New Theater (al-Masrah al-Jadid) in May 1909. The event was organized by the Society of Ottoman Students of Science (Jam'iyat Ṭalabat al-'Ilm al-'Uthmāniyyin). At that time, Rihani's speech contributed tremendously to his growing intellectual reputation. The title must have reminded his audience of al-Farabi's (d. 950) book which is commonly known by the title The Virtuous City (al-Madina al-fāḍila). In fact, Rihani does not refer to al-Farabi explicitly, but like him he presents a utopian vision. Yet with regard to the historical context, it is striking to see how he reflected the expectations as well as the apprehensions raised by the Constitutional Revolution of 1908.

He begins by discussing the ambivalence of freedom (*hurriyya*), which could take the shape of a "divine king" or a "frightening snake." So oppressed people perceived freedom generally as a threat, and needed a long and slow process to appreciate it. Nonetheless, Rihani points out, freedom was the destiny of mankind, the prerequisite for advancement, and the main basis for a polity:

Whatever one may say about freedom it is the lost and desperately longed-for good of the human being (*ḍallat al-insān al-manshūda*) and the remotest goal of life. It is the natural state of the mind and the soul; it is nourishment for arts and sciences, and it is the basis for all aspects of advancement and Civilization (*al-ruqiy wa-l-'umrān*). I wish that the greatest city... would be called the City of Freedom and that its streets

⁷⁵ Rihani, "The Syrian in American Art," 10 (emphasis added).

would be named after the prophets and heroes of freedom from all times and all places.⁷⁶

He argued that none of the contemporary cities such as London, Cairo, or Beirut, nor the ancient ones such as Babylon or Nineveh could claim to be on top of the ladder of human advancement. Thus none of them would deserve the designation of the Greatest City. The way of gauging the cities was not the number of inhabitants, or their technical facilities, or their infrastructure. Instead, cities had to be assessed with view to their poets, artists, scientists, and craftsmen. The Greatest City would honor them and provide them the best conditions for their work. In the field of politics, it would detest political “intervention from foreigners.” Besides, it would see a ruler (*imru*) in each man while regarding the rulers as “servants of the people.” The schools would teach the children independence and self-confidence before anything else. And the freedom of speech and action would make research, arts, and literature flourish. So its artists and scientists would not live there in order to pursue wealth or fame, but only truth. It would be the city of the prophet Isaiah and of Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib and other people like them. “For the city,” Rihani concludes, “which harbors the most distinguished men and women is the greatest of the world’s cities, even if the number of its citizens does not exceed the size of Freike.”⁷⁷

In his essay “Change and Exchange,” published in *The Path of Vision* in 1921, Rihani took a global view, arguing sociologically rather than philosophically. “Whatever the characteristics of the age we live in,” he starts, “its principal tendency is one of exchange—exchange of culture as well as commodities.”⁷⁸ Contrary to Baudrillard’s post-9/11 dictum of the “Impossible Exchange,” which was discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Rihani argued, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that the world’s societies are bound together by this constant flow. At one point, even one’s own products would come back, albeit in a completely different shape. “Our luxuries come back to us as necessities; our enthusiasm, as firm resolutions; our ideals, as practical standards of living.”⁷⁹ Throughout the ages, the exchange has rarely been balanced. Yet even the mightiest current had faced a “counter-current of different

⁷⁶ A. al-Rihani, “al-Madīna al-‘uzmā,” in *al-Rihāniyyāt*, 136–41, here 137.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁸ A. Rihani, “Change and Exchange,” in *The Path of Vision*, 120–25, here 120.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

temperature which tempers the stream and moderates its speed.”⁸⁰ During the Middle Ages, for instance, exchange happened between Venice, the center of trade, Cordova, the center of reason, and Geneva, the center of intellectual freedom. The content of the exchange as well as the directions had changed by Rihani’s day, but it was remarkable that the West was experiencing a spiritual revival, while the East was simultaneously going through “the pains of nationalism and freedom.”⁸¹

In this process, Rihani maintained, traditions had to be scrutinized. Some of them could be kept, while others should be abandoned. However, the complete loss of tradition would mean the loss of the soul. So the task was to combine Eastern heritage with Western intellectual and spiritual progress without submitting to the “gods of materialism” and the “master of the Machine.”⁸² As a consequence, the national spirit would be based on the tradition and culture of each individual. America today, like Greece and Rome in the past, would receive immigrants and their traditions from all over the world. Despite all pressure of cultural assimilations—today’s readers might feel once more being reminded of the antipode S. P. Huntington⁸³—America would remain colored, shaded, and multifold:

And from these traditions, developing gradually into a homogeneity all-embracing, will spring the culture and the consciousness that will make America, not only a great national power, but, what is greater, an international entity. The Oriental will better recognize himself in it as well as the European. They will find their spirit reflected in its prismatic nationalism. And the American, by the same token, will be mistaken for an Oriental in the Orient, for a European in Europe, though not for any other but an American at home.⁸⁴

Rihani was convinced that cultural exchange and a re-evaluation of cultural traditions would lead to progress and cultural refinement. Personally, he derived this experience from dwelling and moving through the transcultural space between the “East” and the “West.” The most fertile ground for this exchange, he argues with view to the future,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 123.

⁸³ Especially Huntington’s plea for the assimilation of America’s immigrants to Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, in *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, New York et al.: Simon & Schuster 2004.

⁸⁴ Rihani, “Change and Exchange,” 124. Cf. Horace Kallen, “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” *The Nation* 100, 2590 (Feb. 18–25, 1915), 190–94, 217–20.

would be the cosmopolitanism of American society. It would integrate all kinds of cultural differences and antithetical elements in a peaceful coexistence—without, however, dissolving them. This society would not be perfect, but capable of realizing its potentialities. It would be neither a part of the “West” nor of the “East,” thereby rendering at least one distinction superfluous and meaningless: the alleged difference between the “East” and the “West.”

Conclusion: the roots of Rihani's liberalism

Ameen Rihani lived at the peak of a development during which the society of Bilad al-Sham was rapidly opening up from within and, simultaneously, was being opened up as rapidly from without. So, on the one hand, the Syrian lands have been penetrated by Western military interventions, Western economic power, and Christian missionaries. On the other hand, Syrians migrated to countries such as Egypt, Argentina, or the United States. As a result, intellectual, economic, and political activities of Syrians expanded to cities such as Cairo, Istanbul, Buenos Aires, Paris, or New York. While “mighty currents”—to use Rihani's wording—of Western commodities, technologies, and ideas poured into geographical Syria, this was accompanied by a “counter-current” of intellectual and religious contributions flowing out of Syria in more than one direction.

Rihani's thought was shaped in this “transcultural space” between the “East” and the “West.” As a consequence, his writings are characterized by his ability to look at the societies he lived in both from within and from without. Yet beyond this, his view on one society was always imbued with his experience of another. Metaphorically, one could say that he looked at the Arab world through the lens of Carlyle and Emerson; and he looked at America through the writings of al-Ma'arri. Eventually, he ardently embraced the culture, thought, and heritage of both the “West” and the “East.”

Rihani's writings, rather than providing comprehensive answers and comfortable identities, contain manifold ambiguities. He avoided clear-cut definitions, and shunned an exclusivist understanding of political identities such as the “nation” or the “fatherland.” Instead, his discourse oscillates between particularistic and universalistic concepts, with both constantly challenging and questioning one another. One obvi-

ous example for this is the bipolar meaning of civilization/Civilization in his discourse. This ambivalence opens an intellectual space for the exchange of ideas and the renegotiation of fixed identities.

This was even the case with regard to Rihani's adaptation of nationalistic discourse, particularly after World War I. His goal in doing this was mainly to fight the neo-colonial Mandate system and the imperialistic Western penetration of the Arab economies. The call for national sovereignty and self-determination therefore took a prominent place in his political and intellectual *Testament*.⁸⁵ Yet his idea of the "nation" remained firmly based on the requirements of personal freedom and individual rights rather than nationalistic loyalty or *'aṣabiyya*. He insisted that education should enable the young to develop their creativity and intellect rather than accept a collectivist ideology. Rihani agreed that national unity should prevail over religious or sectarian bonds, but he was not willing to sacrifice either his own Lebanese localism or his American citizenship to Arab nationalism. Over all, his multifocal identities saved him from narrow ideologies and political dogmatism.

Furthermore, his idea of the nation and his attachment to the homeland are embedded in a wider notion of humanity, universalism, and Civilization. Although he saw the (Zionist) shadow on the (Palestinian) wall, he did not believe in struggle between nations, but rather in peaceful coexistence. Cultural exchange, mutual stimulation, and a process of critical reassessment of both domestic and foreign traditions was the only path that would lead to civilizational progress, cultural refinement, and human advancement. While Rihani laid out a utopian vision in "The Greatest City," he emphasized that this depicted a state of society that could actually never be reached. Instead, "progress" was like a "ladder of life" on which people could climb or decline. Yet whatever stage they reached, Rihani continues, they would always find someone above them and someone else below.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Al-Rihani, *Waṣīyyatī*.

⁸⁶ Al-Rihani, "al-Madīna al-‘uẓmā," 137.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHO GETS TO BECOME THE LIBERAL SUBJECT? VENTRILOQUIZED MEMOIRS AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN 1920S EGYPT

Marilyn Booth

In February, 1920, two installments of a prose text entitled “Mudhakkirāt Hikmat Hānim” (Memoirs of Hikmat Hanim) appeared in the arts and politics newspaper *al-Sufūr* (Unveiling). The author, ‘Isa ‘Ubayd, was one of the young “renegade” writers clustered around this journal, whose title highlighted gender politics and simultaneously propounded “unveiling” as a metaphor for society-wide self-examination.

‘Ubayd was among the first writers in Arabic to publish fictional memoirs, but the genre proliferated through the 1920s. Some, like ‘Ubayd’s text, were presented overtly as fiction; others offered the coy referential feint of assigning an autobiographical authorial name to a life’s retrospective, and we later readers cannot always ascertain authorship.¹ My concern here, though, is the relationship between the rise of this genre of writing the “self” and contemporaneous debates on the state’s relationship to citizens which entailed assumptions about defining the individual as liberal subject. Perhaps the teasing fictionality of such “memoirs” was in itself thematically central to questions these texts posed about the status of the individual as putatively free citizen of an emerging constitutional state. Was that free citizen—that liberal subject—itsself a fiction?

Largely forgotten or ignored, and never part of the canon of modern Egyptian Arabic literature, these texts voiced explorations of individual and collective selves that challenged the polite discourse of elite liberal thinking, exposing contradictions in that outlook for the lives of the

¹ On games of authorship in these texts, see Marilyn Booth, “From the Horse’s Rump and the Whorehouse Keyhole: Ventriloquized Memoirs as Political Voice in 1920s Egypt.” *Maghreb Review* 32: 2–3 (2007): 233–61. Portions of this essay appeared in Marilyn Booth, “Un/safe/ly at Home: Narratives of Sexual Coercion in 1920s Egypt,” *Gender and History*, Special issue on Violence, Vulnerability and Embodiment, ed. Shani D’Cruze and Anupama Rao, 16 (2004), 744–68.

nation's less powerful subjects. Important to these texts is a construction of marginalized subjectivities: the young and those who serviced the emerging professional middle class, whether through a shadow economy of illicit activities or in a rising service sector. In constructing the voices of those usually unheard in public discourse, such texts seem to argue for a more inclusive imaginary to shape a newly (if partially) independent nation. These texts form a silenced element in Arabic fiction's history yet presage later novelists' focus on the individual as a product of the psyche and on that internally formed subjectivity as the speaker of histories.

Memoir as genre and feature

Before the 1920s the term *mudhakkirāt* signified "memoranda," and generally signaled school texts or legal-scientific texts of specific documentation—Nusayr lists 27 such titles appearing in Egypt between 1900 and 1926 and 36 from 1926 to 1940. In the 1920s the term came to signify "memoirs" as the retrospective writing of a life by the figure that lived it; this decade saw published translated memoirs of historical European and Turkish personages.² In the next, local politicians' memoirs appeared.³

If memoirs of historical personages infused the 1920s' cultural scene, the decade saw the use of "memoir" as a fictional rubric—the writing of "simulated memoirs" foregrounding the individual voice of personal history and yet—sometimes ambiguously, sometimes openly—placing that "history" under the sign of fiction: for the narrator of the memoir was not the acknowledged author of the text. Or, if she or he was simultaneously the "I" of the text and the authorial name on its cover, that authority was undermined or at least put in question by the clear editorial hand of other individuals. Was this signaled disjunction between inventor and controller of the narrative voice, on the one hand, and the character "behind" that voice, on the other, simply mimicry of a

² E.g., Von Hindenburg (1920), Ludendorff (1922), Madame Asquith (1922, 1926), Edward Cecil (1922). A few memoirs as *mudhakkirāt* had appeared before 1920 but it was the exception rather than the rule.

³ Qalini Fahmi (1934), Muhammad Shukri al-Qaradawi (1936), Ahmad Shafiq (1933–36).

form attested in European literatures, the fictional text as confessional “memoir”? Was it politically meaningful locally?

To judge by popular weeklies and publishers’ lists as advertised in periodicals and on back covers of cheaply printed books, memoirs were a popular draw, whether the lives inscribed therein were translated or local, attested or fictional. That this was a popular mode of writing is signaled not only by the sudden appearance of so many generically memoiristic books in this decade but also by the plethora of fragmentary “memoirs” in the lively journals of the time—to mention two journals from different ends of the publishing spectrum, *al-Kashkūl* and *al-Sufūr*. Those in *al-Kashkūl* were often verbal caricatures of either a known or supposedly “real” personality whose memoirs these were said to be. (In 1925, *al-Kashkūl*, popular for its caricature covers, featured [fictional] “Memoirs of Dr. Taha Husayn”; that year saw published the first volume of Taha Husayn’s autobiographical narrative, *al-Ayyām*, now a classic of the Arabic literary canon, and his ascent to the chair of Arabic literature at the Egyptian University. *Al-Kashkūl*’s “Memoir” was a hilarious send-up of the sonorous style for which Husayn was already known.) Or, the journal’s “memoirs” satirized generalized elite social types described by a non-elite narrator, as in *Mudhakkirāt ‘arbagī* (Memoirs of a Horse-carriage Cabbie) serialized in *al-Kashkūl*. Those in *al-Sufūr* were less lighthearted, offering serious social criticism through the voices of marginalized figures.⁴

Why memoir? Why fictional feint? Why then?

A crucial decade for Egypt as a modern nation struggling to emerge from imperial control, the 1920s was a time when constitutional questions and issues of self-determination were paramount. Notions of historical agency entailed not only pondering questions of collective action and collective memory but also the status of the individual subject. Following post-World War I discourses of self-determination, and even more

⁴ One fragment in *al-Sufūr*, titled simply “Mudhakkirāt,” carried a female signature, Nabila al-Sayyid, and the narrative began in a female voice. Yet immediately that voice offers the embedded, first-person “diary” of a young male, the first narrator’s erstwhile love, who narrates his anguish at her agreement to the marriage arranged by her family. As the marriage is consummated—or so he imagines—he takes his life by poisoning. The poison spreads through his body as he writes the last journal entry. Both narrators are implied to be the heretofore voiceless victims of dominant social practices.

following 1919's mass nationalist demonstrations protesting London's attempt to quash demands for full independence, questions about formation and agency were at the fore. Who was the subject of history? How was the modern Egyptian citizen to be constructed? Who, indeed, was "an Egyptian"? To what extent could peculiar markers of social identity be effaced in favor of the liberal subject's faceless equality? Significantly, it was a time also when the ways gender marked the individual subject's social performance was at the forefront of public debate.

If exploration of individual subjectivity seemed urgent, new notions of literature's proper subject were also emerging, putting questions of subjectivity at the center of art.⁵ It does not seem coincidental that memoir emerged as a popular genre, only to fade a decade later in an atmosphere of political disillusionment. Memoir offered an appropriate vehicle for exploring individual subjecthood "from the interior." But these particular memoirs also voiced new national subjects, those previously silent in written discourses of literariness and history. In contrast to translated memoirs of notable Europeans, what I call the "simulated" or "ventriloquized" memoirs of the 1920s focused disproportionately on non-hegemonic subjects, as I noted above: young women and men, possibly of elite background, and urban Egyptian non-elite or subalternized individuals. These are not voices from the political, economic, social center but cries from the margins, made more poignant by first-person voice—however fictional that voice is. These texts put in question the right of hegemonic masculine, economically privileged elites to speak for the emerging nation. They pass over the pertinence of traditional, collective history, asserting the importance of individual histories to the nation's formation. Thus, the sudden appearance of first-person "subaltern" memoirs in the 1920s is entangled in the history of the production of Arabic fiction as it was shaped by emerging notions of subjecthood and citizenship.

If liberal thought with its emphasis on the centrality and autonomy of the individual provided scaffolding for the writing of memoirs, the promises of liberal thought were interrogated in these ventriloquized memoirs of the socially and politically marginal. If the liberal individual was by definition free of tyrannical control, the subject of an

⁵ "The idea," notes Sabry Hafez, "that deep human experience was essential to any work of art": Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, London: Saqi 1993, 159.

independent, constitutionally defined state—and if this figure of the liberal individual was a focus of debate among Arab elites—these memoirs notate limits on *particular* individuals' freedom *from* coercion and equally, limits on their freedom *to* act. They link a critique of Egypt's unfree status to a critical portrayal of the patriarchal family as failing to foster responsible freedom in its young people of either gender.

Memoir and the (silent?) female subject

Central to the simulated memoirs—whether in journals or in published books—was the plight of the young woman between school and adulthood, portrayed as imprisoned in the family home, subject to the stern directives of her father and—also, as agent of the patriarchy, her mother, whose fears and admonishments bespeak her own history of subjection. The speaking subject—the narrator—is literally the recipient of trauma, of violence at her father's hands, both bodily violence and the violence of a coerced marriage to which she either accedes or from which she flees.

A notable example of memoirs focusing on the young woman as a sign of illiberal social organization at the nation's heart is *Memoirs of an Egyptian Lady's Companion* (*Mudhakkirāt waṣīfa miṣriyya*), which appeared serially in 1927 in several 30–40-page booklets, to be followed by *Secrets of an Egyptian Lady's Companion*.⁶ Both bear a female authorial inscription: the cover of *Memoirs* proclaims they were written by “the bold young woman Zaynab Muhammad.” Thus, these texts do claim to fulfill the autobiographical pact: to all appearances, author

⁶ Zaynab Muhammad, *Asrār waṣīfa miṣriyya*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nashr wa-l-Ta'lif n.d. [1927] (hereafter *AWM*). The first work is *Mudhakkirāt waṣīfa miṣriyya*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nashr wa-l-Ta'lif n.d. [1927] (hereafter *MWM*). The publication history of these texts is complex; they were issued serially and then in book form. It is not even clear how many parts came out. Eight or ten (comprising *MWM* and *AWM*) are claimed to have been published or to be in press, in the text itself. I have located seven (they are not numbered). Nusayr lists *MWM* as published once, in 1927, in seven parts, by Dār al-Ma'ārif; I have not found that version. My texts are the serial parts; each is numbered separately. See 'Aydah Ibrahim Nusayr, *al-Kutub al-'arabiyya allatī nushirat fī Miṣr bayna 'amay 1926–1940*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press 1980, 166. I treat these texts at greater length in “Un/safe/ly at Home”; and “Between the Harem and the Houseboat: ‘Fallenness,’ Gendered Spaces, and the Female National Subject in 1920s Egypt,” in *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, ed. Marilyn Booth, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2009.

and narrator are one. Yet a complex narrative of authorship frames the text. Each installment's cover announces that the work was "put into novelistic form, corrected and polished [or revised] by the famous writers Muhammad Bek Ahmad al-Buhaydi and Mahmud Effendi Kamil Farid." This acknowledgment suggests that "memoir" and "author" may be fictions, but ones that call on the experiential authority of memoir and assert a truth claim: only the *form* is "novelistic."

Whether these "memoirs" would have been accounted for as a fiction by an Egyptian audience contemporaneous with the texts' production remains an intriguing question. One of its "editors" was certainly a prolific writer of fiction and social commentary, and among his preoccupations was that of "fallenness."⁷ These texts did not emerge in a vacuum but rather were elements in a vast novelistic "entertainment literature" that scholars of the Arabic novel have traced from the nineteenth-century production of historical romance and translation of European novels into Arabic. 'Abd al-Muhsin Taha Badr, whose historical study of the Arabic novel remains influential, mentions *Waṣīfa* among "entertainment novels" which he distinguishes from novels of "artistic merit."⁸ Feminist literary critics have included Zaynab Muhammad among novelists, without examining the particular generic constraints or potential of "memoir" as a form that interrogates the division between "non-fiction" and "fiction," and without addressing issues of authorship and male "editors."⁹ In the absence of commentary in the 1920s press

⁷ Farid's *Secrets of the Streets and Palaces: A Contemporary Moral Egyptian Literary Narrative (Asrār al-shawārī wa-l-qaṣūr: Riwāya adabiyya miṣriyya akhlāqiyya 'aṣriyya*, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ma'āhid) bears no date of publication, but on its cover the "narrative" (or "novel") asserts the status of historical reportage—"Its astonishing events took place in the city of Cairo approximately 1916 to 1919 AD"—and a precise date opens the story. Constructed in the third person, the relatively greater distance of the text from "first-hand experience" perhaps incites this historical referentiality.

⁸ 'Abd al-Muhsin Taha Badr, *Taṭawwur al-riwāya al-'arabiyya al-hadītha fī Miṣr (1870–1938)*, 2nd printing, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1968, 418.

⁹ See Sawsan Najī, *al-Mar'a fī al-mirāt: Dirāsa naqdiyya li-l-riwāya al-nisā'iyya fī Miṣr 1888–1985*, Cairo: al-'Arabī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' [1989]. Najī discusses a "novel" by Zaynab Muhammad, *al-Sāqiya fī aḥdān al-razīla*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Hindiyya al-Miṣriyya 1927, as having "an expository style that bears no relation to fictional style" (16; also 102, 109), but does not address the question of whether the work was presented to readers as a novel. This may be an installment of *MWM* or *AWM* which I have not found. Buthayna Sha'ban discusses what is apparently the same text, calling it *Asrār waṣīfa miṣriyya*. She labels it an epistolary novel, as this section is written in the form of letters between two male friends about the fiancée of one of them. Sha'ban compares the novel to European epistolary novels, notably "Richardson's social novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*." She describes the text as aimed at "giving a moral lesson to young men," but notes astutely that the implicit message undermines this explicit aim, for,

on this work or its author, her (or his) identity remains a mystery. The issue of who the “real author” was—of whether “Zaynab Muhammad” is a fiction—is complicated by the fact that a collection of nationalist leader Sa’d Zaghlul’s “historical speeches,” edited by Zaynab Muhammad, is advertised at the end of one segment of these memoirs.¹⁰ But also, the authorial name, in juxtaposing two given names thoroughly saturated in Islamic history, seems to act as a citation of utter moral probity, a symbolic rejection of the very notion of “fallenness.” Did the symbolic valence of the name suggest that this was not a historical individual? Yet it is a perfectly ordinary name.

As they center issues of agency by constructing “autobiographical voices” that claim the right to narrate feminine experience, this and similar texts—even as ventriloquized, simulated voices—offer a different mapping of urban space than do polemics of the time on the moral status and social plight of young women. Such memoirs make a link crucial to liberal thought—the link between freedom to act and human dignity. They extend this to young women as responsible beings caught in unfree circumstances who suffer accordingly.

Memoirs of an Egyptian Lady’s Companion tells the story of its apparent author, Zaynab Muhammad, who begins, conventionally, with her genealogy: she is daughter of a *bek* (bey) of Turkish origin, she explains—thus, of Ottoman Egypt’s old elite. An elite on the way out, it signals a social origin that produced some of twentieth-century Egypt’s leading landowner and political families. Giving her birth date as 1896 (and, by giving a birth date at all, also acknowledging referential demands of the memoir genre), Zaynab as character represents the first generation of elite Egyptian daughters schooled outside the home. Her father, whom she describes as a senior civil servant, is presented initially as “modern” through the lens of gender politics, for he enrolls his daughter in school. “The bek” thus stands in for a first generation

“despite the men’s attempt to describe [Fikriyah] as an immoral woman and despite her not having a voice or opportunity to write or speak, she appears as a strong and self-confident woman while the men fall victims to their own naïve actions...”. See Buthayna Sha’ban, *Mī at ‘ām min al-riwāya al-nisā’iyya al-‘arabiyya*, Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb 1999, 70, also 71. Neither critical problematizes the *mudhakkirāt* form or has any further information on this author.

¹⁰ I have not been able to locate this book, announced at the end of part I of *AWM*, and Zaynab Muhammad’s name is mentioned as the editor: “Majmū’at khuṭab Sa’d al-tārikhiyya,” in “Yawmiyyāt tilmidh ‘āshiq,” *AWM*, 48. Zaynab Muhammad announces at the end of *AWM*’s final part that she will return to her readers with books on “social topics” in the very near future (“Dawlat wa-dawāhihā: al-Khātima,” *AWM*, 34). Is this bibliographic narrative simply a part of a fiction of female authorship?

of elite Egyptian men who schooled their daughters publicly, men who were praised in Egypt's turn-of-the-century press for doing so.

Indeed, the narrator's account of her childhood offers a tranquil scenario of emergent modernity shaped through traditional patterns, emphasizing her father's care and admiration, his attention to her home education by tutors, and her entry to the prestigious Saniyyah school:

There I entered a new life of knowledge, learned of many obligations, and was overjoyed to be in this great school. I went there each morning in my father's carriage; the driver returned home to drive my father to the Diwan. At four p.m. the carriage would be in front of the school entrance, and I would ride home.¹¹

These details are not extraneous. They map out acceptable space for girls of the elite. Riding in her father's enclosed carriage from the school entrance directly home—a route that is articulated as exactly parallel to the father's movement between home and his government office—Zaynab adheres to an extension of closed domestic space that made going to school thinkable and that constructs her as respectably “protected” (*maṣūna*, epithet for the respectable woman or postpubescent girl) by her separation from the life of the street. Paralleling her father's path as he does the work of the state, Zaynab does her work as a feminine subject, educatable yet—in her father's carriage—tractable, secluded.

But Zaynab's tranquil life is ruptured by patriarchal right: specifically, the father's right to unilateral divorce. Abruptly, the narrator nods to class privilege even as she evokes a gendered vulnerability that that privilege cannot undo. “My life was one that very few daughters of Eve enjoyed. I spent nearly two years at school until fate stunned me in the form of my father's divorce of my mother.”¹² This rupture cracks the walls of the home, exposing it as anything but a protective enclosure around women's and children's lives. With the father's remarriage to his first wife, Zaynab is placed outside the family circle. Her displacement and powerlessness are represented, stunningly, in her half-brother Nu'man's repeated attempts to seduce her.

The unspeakable threat of incest literally haunts Zaynab's dreams. On an allegorical level, the brother is the threat of “Western” practices, rupturing the nation, for his attempted seduction is spoken through erotic European postcards that he waves in his sister's face and insists

¹¹ Muhammad, “‘Āshiq ukhtihi,” *MWM*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

that she keep for him in her room. The chaste space of female virtue is thus invaded, against its inhabitant's will, by the cultural economy of "Westernization" in its most salacious forms. Yet this takes place only through the most local and intimate of agents, the (admittedly, *half-*) brother. And the brother's seduction is also spoken through a reading of ancient Egyptian history: "How beautiful were ancient times," exclaims Nu'man, "those eras in which brothers married their sisters. If only I had been with you in that time, I would have married you..." In response, Zaynab lashes back, labeling "those eras" as *ayyām al-jāhiliyya*, "the days of ignorance."¹³ The *jāhiliyya* separates pre-Islamic from Islamic time temporally; more importantly, it separates the two eras *morally* and thus timelessly. In the context of modernity, for Muslim subjects the concept of *jāhiliyya* came to signify perceived deviations from right (Islamic) practice. For Zaynab, the "protective" family home has become a space of *jāhiliyya*. Asserting bodily honor and a moral outlook based on her practice of her faith, Zaynab—whose very name signals the pious female descendants of the Prophet—must leave. That this rhetoric is voiced "on her tongue" intensifies the strength of the memoir as polemic "from inside." That Zaynab invokes a concept affiliated not with secularist liberal thinking but rather with the community of Islam may signal the latter's greater salience to the narrator (and "her" readers). This puts this text somewhat at odds with what scholars have seen as prevailing secularist outlooks in 1920s Egypt, which would shift in the 1930s to stronger emphasis on religious institutions as bases for national self-definition—an emphasis, however, which was not absent in the 1920s when one considers not simply famous writers but the broader discursive scene in which many writers and readers took part.¹⁴

Zaynab wards off her brother's attack in the family's walled garden—supposedly a "safe" extension of domestic space—and later in her

¹³ Ibid., 8–9.

¹⁴ This is complicated by a more sustained assertion in the second work (*AWM*) of a moral universe shaped specifically by Islamic precepts for the training and self-monitoring of the gendered subject. With regards to *jāhiliyya*, I am grateful to Manfred Sing for noting that while the term often is used to characterize women's behavior, here it appears aimed at male behavior; and that there may be a metaphorical parallel between the practice in pre-Islamic Arabia of burying baby girls alive—a practice later condemned as quintessentially *jāhil*—and Zaynab's "burial" in her home. Yet here I think the primary reference is to pharaonic Egypt as an illegitimate basis for modernity and nationhood, which is interesting in light of 1920s intellectuals' infatuation with the iconography and metaphoric possibility of pharaonism as a nationalist unifier and signifier.

bedroom. Nu'man is more successful in luring his father onto the street at the very moment when he has trapped his sister into a verbal exchange with one of his male companions, as she is descending from the carriage in front of the family home. This unprotected moment puts Zaynab's honor publicly into question and compels her father to lock her into her room, denouncing her as a "prostitute."¹⁵ The elite household does not protect but rather imprisons. Allegorically the text is available as a commentary on national honor, compromised by the "caring" threats of the paternalist imperium under the guise of a "protectorate" continued under other names, and then insultingly seduced by the pornography of imported cultural artifacts. The nation, like Zaynab, is not free to responsibly craft its own future. That the popular press was replete with visual images allegorizing Egypt as an imprisoned woman would have made this allegorical reading an obvious one, even to less educated readers. An ever-broadening literate population was learning, through myriad cultural forms, to read the nation in allegorical terms.

Yet, issues of how readers read—and of who read—remain elusive. Did readers take on this text as a "male fantasy," the soft-porn fantasy of the available, and ideally virginal, upper-class female whose moral failing—or social "fall"—has landed her in the brothel? What sort of narrative authority was at work here? Did readers read such texts as fictions? And did they emerge with a critique of gender politics?

Fourteen-year-old Zaynab escapes from her father's imprisonment and her brother's harassment, arming herself against starvation by stowing her jewelry on her body and wrapping herself (as the narrator is careful to note) in a *milāya baladī*, an all-covering cloak that offers both disguise and protection, signifying her own bodily integrity and honor. But, leaving her enclosure, Zaynab has no "safe" destination, for sequestration has left her without experience of the world, literally without a place to go. She is handily picked up by a woman who takes her in under the terms of filial protection, as a "daughter." Yet this woman's wealth of "domestic" space satirically spells a different trajectory—"three houses" does not signify a domestic hearth but rather is an unmistakable allusion to houses of prostitution, buttressed by the neighborhood to which they go, al-Baghghalah, a known red-light district.

Zaynab's real "education" now begins—in police stations, on the street, and in one of the Nile houseboats that were infamous as illegal

¹⁵ Muhammad, "Āshiq ukhtihi," *MWM*, 29.

elite brothels “protected” through the fiction of European ownership and hence immune to state prosecution.¹⁶ These were the antithesis of the domestic ideal, not only in their transgressions of honor but also as unpatrolled spaces beyond the control of the patriarchal state.

Memoir and the street

Public debate over legalized prostitution was at its height precisely at this time. It was a contestation over control of sexuality and national reproduction as well as involving the state’s international reputation at what was perceived to be a crucial moment in Egypt’s campaign for independent status. Zaynab’s narrative covertly encapsulates this political history of contestation: between Europeans and the Egyptian state, and between young girls and their elders, as voiced by the young, albeit fictionally. As Donna Guy shows in her study of prostitution and activism in Argentina, prostitution legislation there—as in Egypt—exposed a basic contradiction between the liberal nation-state’s presumptive guarantee of citizens’ rights (even non-political rights of those citizens disallowed the vote) in an individualistic structure where all citizens are putatively equal, and the restrictions placed on some citizens’ bodies as they serve others.¹⁷ Guy links this contradiction to the centrality of family to nation: prostitutes, the boundary limit on kinship definitions and metaphors that identify relations among citizens, are a danger in that their actions blur the boundaries of the nation and the kinship on which it rests. “Houses” of prostitution, again, are the antithesis of “home” as space of the family and repository of the nation.

Zaynab moves through urban space protected by her own sense of virtue. If, in these texts, personal experience as a marker—and monitor—of narrative authority intersects with pervasive concern about morals (*akhlāq*) as the foundation of national strength, it is the young woman rather than her father or brother who enacts nationally constructive *akhlāq* and who reveals such moral fiber in others. She takes on the casual position of roving reporter, conveying to the audience the

¹⁶ The text claims, between publication of one installment and another, to possess reformist efficacy, noting that a “house” (of prostitution) exposed in one installment was closed down before the next came out. See Booth, “From the Horse’s Hindquarters.”

¹⁷ Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1991.

“memoirs” of other women who tell her their stories as she encounters them in brothels and police stations. These embedded narratives evoke traditions of women’s oral storytelling while reversing, through satire, the moral compass of those socially sanctioned and safe stories. Introducing the issue of arranged marriage as a transaction between fathers and wealthy older suitors, the text aligns itself with a recent (in the 1920s) history of Egyptian and Arab feminist activism against coerced and early marriages. Implicitly, it also confronts those conservative men in the anti-legalized-prostitution movement who were calling for the reinstatement of early marriage as a way to take young Egyptian men off the sexual streets; who were, in other words, calling for a reinvention of the harem with its attendant patriarchal privileges.¹⁸ This is but one way that *Memoirs of an Egyptian Lady’s Companion* is construable as a response to debates among men on maintaining legalized prostitution. No wonder Zaynab’s story “voices” a critique of coerced and early marriage, implicitly naming it as parallel to prostitution, when men of government and of the official religious establishment were making statements like the following: “Early marriage was made lawful for no other reason than to protect society and immunize it against the need for prostitution. So propagate the idea of early marriage, call for good moral behavior, and desist from the shameful infamies of civilizations that lead one astray.”¹⁹ Concurrently, anonymous letters to newspapers were warning of the “danger” of women’s economic independence: “Independent with her earnings and her property, she will find she need not follow a particular man but rather can choose among the finest men who swarm around her.”²⁰ At the heart of the heated debate among men over the legalization of prostitution lay worries about women’s perceived emerging freedoms. As in the Buenos Aires of Guy’s analysis, “fallenness” was a status that tainted women who worked

¹⁸ See an article by the Azhar shaykh ‘Abd al-Baqi Surur Na‘im, first published in *al-Ahrām* and reprinted in Mahmud Abu al-‘Uyun, *Ṣafha dhahabiyya: Ārā’ wuzarā’ al-dawla al-Miṣriyya fi al-baghā’ wa-ārā’ rijāl mas’ūlin wa-Amīr min kibār al-umarā’*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif 1928, 63–66, esp. 66. I discuss MWM’s representation of coerced marriage further in “Un/safe/ly at Home” and I give more details on Abu al-‘Uyun’s campaign against legalized prostitution in “Between the Harem and the Houseboat.” See also ‘Imad Hilal, *al-Baghāyā fi Miṣr: dirāsa tārikhiyya ijtimā’iyya (min 1834–1949)*, Cairo: al-‘Arabī lil-Nashr wa-l-Ṭawzī 2001.

¹⁹ Na‘im, in Abu al-‘Uyun, *Ṣafha dhahabiyya*, 66. Implicitly, prostitution is, in this rhetoric, a specifically European institution.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

outside the home.²¹ Zaynab's narrative debunks these worries by showing "freedom" to walk the streets as rather a desperate flight from the house of the father, and prostitution as the resort of desperate women fleeing patriarchal coercion.

Moreover, such texts gesture to a contradiction in liberal thought itself which a long parade of scholars from Zillah Eisenstein to Wendy Brown has exposed—that between the doctrine of the autonomous subject and the politics of maintaining the patriarchal family, a tension classical liberal formulations do nothing to reduce. Though this topic is vaster than can be encompassed here, let us note briefly that "fraternity," for liberalism's formative thinkers, was precisely that; and the independence and autonomy of the liberal male subject depended on the unacknowledged unfreedom of females of every class, and on the maintenance of a domestic space through the work of middle-class women as well as servants, male and female. Similar assumptions run through liberal thinking in the Arab world. Despite the importance of "the woman question" to many male liberal reformers, this "question" in fact had to do centrally with *containing* possible consequences of new educational opportunities for women. The ventriloquized memoirs I present here raise questions about those consequences for women and girls rather than men. They raise questions about women's access to public spaces.

A contesting field of memoir

In the 1920s also, non-fictional personal narratives by elite Arab and Muslim women began to appear in Arabic, though fragmentary autobiographical narratives had appeared in print earlier. Such narratives were often essayistic "thoughts" (*sawānih*, also "good omens") rather than autobiographies or memoirs proper; perhaps *sawānih* were a more modest, more "veiled," first-person commentary, therefore respectable enough for women to publish under their own names.

²¹ Guy, *Sex and Danger*, 3. Interestingly, Guy's texts make connections between Argentina and "the Middle East" as much-discussed destinations of "white slavers"; she shows how imperial attitudes as well as interests shaped a discursive othering of prostitution's sites, occluding discussion "at home" about reasons why women (whether Europeans or, in this case, Argentinians) turned to prostitution—and the fact that many made choices to do so, albeit choices based on a lack of alternatives—and were not usually the passive victims that public discourse claimed.

The Turkish-Egyptian princess Qadriyya Husayn's *Sawāniḥ al-amīra* (Ponderings of the Princess) appeared in Arabic translation (from the Turkish) in 1920, while the celebrated Palestinian-Lebanese but Egypt-based writer Mayy Ziyada brought out her *Sawāniḥ fatāt* (A Young Woman's Thoughts) in 1922 (reprinted from *al-Hilāl* magazine). These highly discreet and intellectualized, if personal, musings constitute one elite generic form against which "simulated memoirs" such as *Waṣīfa* emerged. Putting women's lives of the mind into public purview such texts perhaps helped to break down gender-specific deterrents to young women's greater autonomy. Yet their elitist, intellectualized cast are in marked contrast to the popular, cheaply printed "memoir" or "diary" in a "female voice"—such as Zaynab's—which appear to offer textual "access" to women's lives, to promise glimpses of the forbidden, a gaze into the boudoir, while the referential feint of memoir seemed to offer "truth." The genre of "subaltern memoir" offered the reader-voyeur a journey into the underworld—not only into these brothels next door but also into the low-life sites of Cairo's urban fabric. These offered a different collective picture of Egyptian society. Not all were voiced by female narrators: among the most famous ventriloquized subaltern "memoirs" are several with narrators gendered male: *Mudhakkirāt laqīṭ* (Memoirs of a Foundling, 1923), *Mudhakkirāt 'arbagī*, and others.

Such texts, as I noted earlier, challenge and counter authoritative historical narratives that efface this non-hegemonic pressure on the system. They expose the liberal ideology of an equality of individual subjects as a fiction. Claiming autobiographical authority for subjects who were not "allowed to speak" in dominant discourses of the time, these texts intersect those discourses and sometimes echo them. Yet they highlight in the contours of their own narratives the silences of those more official discourses—whether those of state representatives, feminists, anti-prostitution activists, or liberal nationalists in opposition. If the emergent Arabic novel traced a local elite's concern with society-wide received expectations for female behavior, the simulated memoir took that concern a step further by constructing a first-person narrative voice claiming to speak from (and not only for) female experience.

If the narrating voices of these texts are those of subordinate subjects of the nation, their authors, likewise, are not among those who became leading literary (or political) voices. They have not been canonized, or even recognized. The simulated memoir, in a sense, represents a dead end in twentieth-century Arabic literature. I do not claim for these texts a central space in Egypt's literary history, yet they are fragmentary

voicings that form a part of the history of the Arabic novel in their investigation of “character”—in its dual meaning—and in their insertion of subordinate voices into a public dialogue that did produce the modern Egyptian novel.

In this connection, it is interesting that among early twentieth-century writers who now form part of modern Egypt’s canonical literary history, only one—and one who was in important ways socially and culturally marginal himself—seems to have experimented with this form, at least as far as we can judge by the public record of texts in print. This is the writer mentioned at the outset. ‘Isa ‘Ubayd (189?–1922), recognized by literary historians as a significant if not central contributor to modern Arabic letters, who perhaps, had he not died in his early thirties, would have become a more central figure, did publish one short text in “memoir” form and apparently wrote or planned to write a second text, a continuation of the first. From a Syrian emigrant family and apparently not well known or celebrated in Egyptian literary circles of the time, ‘Ubayd was in this sense similar to other writers of simulated memoirs.²² He was similar to some other Syrian writers in Egypt in his support for the Egyptian populist nationalist movement, and as Hafez notes, he was intent on portraying and celebrating Egyptian authenticity through a literature that would, he hinted, be as revolutionary in its implications as were the events of 1919.²³

With his interest in exploring human character, and especially his attested concern with foregrounding the psyche, it seems unsurprising that ‘Ubayd would explore the “memoir” as a literary form. Memoir offered the feint of access to the character’s inner world in a convincing manner. Memoir becomes a way to link that internal world with contemporary history. According to Hafez, ‘Isa and his brother Shihatah, in their theorization of the literary art of fictional prose more than in their own stories, “present a radical change in literary thinking” in foregrounding character and psyche over plot and verbal finesse.²⁴ If this is so, it seems significant indeed that ‘Isa was one of the first prose writers in Arabic to use this “simulated memoir”/confessional form. Perhaps

²² On ‘Ubayd and Egyptian literary circles see ‘Abbas Khidr, *al-Qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra fī Miṣr mundhu nash’atihī ḥattā sanat 1930*, Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li-l-Ṭabā‘a wa-l-Nashr, 1966. Sabry Hafez follows Khidr in many of the details he provides on ‘Ubayd’s life and literary writings.

²³ Hafez, *Genesis*, 179.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

this was part of his radicalism. Perhaps he was the stimulus from whom others got the idea, exploring it further as the decade went on. The text itself shows the malleability of the genre, or perhaps confusion over its boundaries at a point when it was new: “Mudhakkirāt Ḥikmat Hānim” is actually constructed as *yawmiyyāt* (dairy entries), dated, and written as if at the time, rather than retrospective *mudhakkirāt*.

Hafez and other critics before him (for example, ‘Abbas Khidr) emphasize ‘Isa ‘Ubayd’s thematic innovativeness. This attribute is surely linked to ‘Ubayd’s insistence on exploring character, perhaps to his exploration of memoir. That is, ‘Ubayd was among the first to speak from, as it were, the parlors and bedrooms of middle-class homes, and to emphasize female subjectivity. This had been attempted by female novelists of the late nineteenth century—‘Ubayd was not really “the first”—but his focus on the psyche raised the attempt to a new level, and he was more able (in terms of his gender and the 1920s, so different from the 1890s) to broach the sensitive subject of male–female romantic relationships “from inside.” If *Waṣīfa* suggested that “home” as a safe space for elite daughters was a chimera, ‘Ubayd’s “Mudhakkirāt Ḥikmat Hānim” broached the plight of the educated, post-school daughter as a bored and weary captive of middle-class seclusionary practices—a social issue that Egypt’s women’s press thrashed out. This is contemporary history that the fictional text encapsulates and almost allegorizes as the fallow, captive state of the still-colonized if emergent nation.

“Memoir” and the fiction of female experience

‘Ubayd’s “memoir” appeared in his first collection, *Iḥsān Hānim* (December 1921). Characterized by critics as a “short story,” the text may have been the germ of a longer text. Announcing upcoming publication of ‘Ubayd’s second collection, the back matter of *Iḥsān Hānim* says that the next volume includes “the memoirs of Hikmat Hanim after marriage.”²⁵ The announcement openly allegorizes this text: it “comprises the history of our national awakening, a study of its origins and elements, its progress and the personalities of its leaders, along with representation of our profound inner life.” This announcement defines the genre of

²⁵ ‘Isa ‘Ubayd, *Iḥsān Hānim: Majmū‘at qīṣaṣ miṣriyya ‘aṣriyya*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at Ra‘msis n.d. [1921], 92. I use the first published edition of this work.

mudhakkirāt as a form that offers both public and private histories; “the nation” and “our deep inner life” are inseparable. (*Iḥsān Hānim*’s publication history itself is captive to historical circumstances: the author notes he postponed “the end of” the narrative because the type of paper he had bought for publishing the book ran out, a reference to post-World War I paper shortages.)²⁶

That marriage is the dividing line between stages of this memoir strategizes a parallel with the nationalist movement, into its “prenuptial” (with the nation) excitement and its post-1919 realities. “Outside” the text, the lack of paper necessary to carry on with this private/public history seems an uncanny foreshadowing not only of the untimely end of ‘Ubayd’s career and life—“he died a youth and was mourned by youth,” said his obituary in *al-Sufūr*²⁷—but also of possibilities for post-1919 self-creation of independent citizens for a new Egypt.

‘Ubayd’s concern with portraying intimacy, an insistent note in his programmatic introduction,²⁸ emerges in his use of female focalization, whether in the epistolary form in the story “Iḥsān Hānim” or as memoir in “Mudhakkirāt Ḥikmat Hānim.” This choice of focalization parallels his critique—declaimed on the tongues of his female characters—of idealist writers who “ignore the bitter, harsh truths of life.”²⁹ To choose the intimacy of the memoir is significant to his social and literary outlook: probing the psyche, unveiling effects of trauma within the family as *Waṣīfa* does differently. The form and focus of “memoir” here seem to argue on behalf of a literature that confronts aporias in an ideology of liberal rights premised on the supposedly benign reign of the father.

This textual strategy also suggests an emergent visibility, voice, and mobility for characters at the text’s center. ‘Ubayd links women’s visibility in the 1919 demonstrations to his call for a new literature; *thawra* (uprising) and *nahḍa* (awakening) go together—“now that we have seen the secluded, veiled Egyptian woman go into the sphere of

²⁶ Ibid., 90. In his preface to *Iḥsān Hānim* ‘Ubayd links writers’ greater interest in composing plays for the Egyptian stage as compared to story to the lack of paper (3). Interestingly, on the cover of this edition, which gives the titles of all five stories in varying size fonts, “Mudhakkirāt Ḥikmat Hānim” is in the largest-size font (excepting the title of the work, but the story by the same name is repeated on the cover in much smaller type than either the collection title or “Mudhakkirāt”).

²⁷ The text reads: “māta shābban fa-bakāh al-shabāb”: “al-Marḥūm ‘Isā ‘Ubayd,” *al-Sufūr* 7, 305 (Oct. 8, 1922), 6.

²⁸ See ‘Isa ‘Ubayd, “Muqaddima: Kalima ‘an al-fann wa-l-adab al-ḥadith fī Miṣr,” *Iḥsān Hānim*, 4.

²⁹ “Iḥsān Hānim,” in ‘Ubayd, *Iḥsān Hānim*, 19.

action, demonstrating side by side with the man, with courage and boldness demanding the rights of her country.”³⁰ In “Mudhakkirāt Hikmat Hānim,” “woman” and “nation” coincide in the first entry’s dating as March 1, 1919, though in its first publication (in *al-Sufūr*) it was dated February 8, 1918. The parallel is signaled at the text’s inception; the protagonist looks out from the *mashrabiyyāt*, the window covered in wood latticework that allows the home’s female inhabitants to see without being seen. She moves from women’s conventional space, inside and invisible, to, later in the text, limited visibility in the public sphere, or rather movement through space in the mobile seclusion of a carriage (like Zaynab before her banishment from her father’s house). Critique of customary marriage practices takes place “from inside,” through the narrator’s ruminations: “I feel my life has grown empty . . . this happens to girls, and they want to change their lives. They yearn for a colorful life, or what they think will be a colorful life. I think that’s what makes us want to get married.”³¹ The narrator can only mitigate claustrophobia by ascending to the roof, while her mother’s outlet is chattering to the old nurse. There is a significant generational difference. The mother relies on oral stories of “Abu Zayd or Goha” as the narrator reads novels to assuage boredom, specifically Haykal’s *Zaynab* (1913), later emblem of canonicity, which she criticizes for attributing a “poetic touch” to “our illiterate young women.”³² She abandons reading to discuss, with her Syrian friend Mary Na‘um, “the freedom of women.” In this interfaith dialogue, the narrator defends “our eastern traditions that have preserved the purity of our morals” while Mary protests gendered separation: to sequester a girl, she argues, “keeps her naïve and strengthens her imagination . . . making it easy for young men to deceive her.”³³ Hikmat draws the conclusion that freedom has spoiled her friend. But what is freedom? The exchange, as dramatically unsatisfying as it is, enacts differences on gender, society, and rights of the (gendered) individual that infused the press. Contending ideological positions are at stake here, wherein young women’s status in public space is fundamentally an issue of defining a national community according to measurements of cultural “authenticity” and “progress.” These contending positions are put into the mouths of those whose lives the issue most directly affects.

³⁰ “Muqaddima,” in *ibid.*, 12.

³¹ “Mudhakkirāt Hikmat Hānim,” in *ibid.*, 75.

³² *Ibid.*, 76.

³³ *Ibid.*, 77.

The conversation constructs typified social groups, the “Westernized” Syrian Christian minority versus the Sunni Muslim majority, whose gender practices the narrator defends despite the clearly unhappy circumstances these have created for her. (Though ‘Ubayd features Syrians in many stories, this narrator is Muslim: the rarity of her father’s visits hints that her mother has a co-wife; criticism of polygyny emerges in Hikmat’s ruminations on her father’s coldness toward her.) If Mary’s “freedom” is corrupting, Hikmat and her mother’s lonely confinement is not the answer.

Differences separate ‘Ubayd’s fictional world from that of the other *mudhakkirāt* texts I have mentioned. Hikmat is ensconced in middle-class life: ‘Ubayd’s ventriloquized “memoir” is that of a “respectable” girl not even in danger of “fallenness.” Yet this text, like *Waṣīfa*, traces close boundaries of possibility around young middle- and upper-class women’s lives by constructing the fiction of first-person voice, by offering the immediacy and verisimilitude of “memoir,” by attempting to voice the tension between emerging senses of self and possibility among the young and marginalized, on the one hand, and the limits to that imagining of possibility, on the other. In both texts, the figure of the father as patriarchal tyrant hovers ominously through the focalization of young female narrators.³⁴ The home is not a space of protection or affirmation, but rather one of coercion, fear, restriction. The mother is absent or silent/silenced.³⁵ Female *khalā‘a* (wantonness) and *kayd* (duplicity), often popularly ascribed as innate feminine traits—for instance, in the popular oral literature that scholars have seen as one stream that fed the early Arabic “entertainment novel”—are constructed here as outcomes not of illicit sexual desire but rather of suppression, frustration, and social pressure.³⁶ This is not the ideal world described by elite nationalists, the world of caring fathers and companionate spouses,

³⁴ Similarly, in “Iḥsān Hānim” the epistolary form does this: pp. 21–22; indeed, this story parallels the theme of fallenness in *Waṣīfa* and other such texts, for, says the narrator/letter-writer, “had I dared to speak my thoughts, he [my father] would have considered me a fallen prostitute and killed me immediately, for love in their custom is a synonym for vice and prostitution”: “Iḥsān Hānim,” in ‘Ubayd, *Iḥsān Hānim*, 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁶ See “Anā laka” in ‘Ubayd, *Iḥsān Hānim*. But ‘Ubayd is inconsistent; at times, these appear as inherent female characteristics. By linking Mary’s *khalā‘a* to her mother’s insistence on marriage, ‘Ubayd undermines the dominant linkage of *khalā‘a* and *ibāḥiyya* (“permissive” behavior, profligacy).

but rather one of co-wives and absent husbands, domineering fathers and unhappy daughters.

This world is shaken up by the “unusual movement” in the streets wrought by the 1919 demonstrations—national politics as seen from behind the *mashrabiyyāt*. Hikmat’s friends arrive—female synecdoches of the nation’s diverse elite strands, extensions of their fathers’ occupational and social locations. With the privilege of a closed carriage, she ventures out. These are daughters of a new Egypt: the daughter of a “high nationalist officer” is wrapped in a cloak sewn from Egyptian flags—the nation literally drapes her body; the cross and crescent lie across her bosom.³⁷ The girls are part of the national body: the collective “we” organizes their exultation: “Let Egypt be a second Ireland! May England do as she wants with us, we are all ready to become martyrs to freedom!”³⁸ They are literally stuck amidst an evocation of Egypt’s unity—“lower-class women singing new national songs and dancing in the traditional way (*balādī*),” villagers led by drums as in a wedding procession, trams crowded with youths, palm-bearing students, and rumors of participation by Egyptian soldiers abandoning the barracks of ‘Abdin. Yet the narrator recognizes her and her friends’ peripheral status vis-à-vis that national body, as she invokes the inverse of her own constrained circumstances: what you could do, she thinks, if your soul resided in a man’s body!

The young women’s dialogue encompasses all classes of women and all regions in Egypt’s maternal body. The Sa‘idi maid Fatuma dances: patriotism has permeated all the nation’s veins when it reaches an illiterate female Sa‘idi domestic worker who has learned how to say “independence” as locally (regionally) inflected (*istiglāl!*). Like Zaynab, heroine of *Waṣīfa*, this narrator traverses the urban streets, though in rejoicing rather than in flight, and in the company of friends, rather than alone and in disguise. But elite female participation in the nation is carefully delineated in public discourse: the girls hear young men calling, “Long live the ladies of Egypt! Long live the mothers of the future!”³⁹ These are future mothers—foreshadowing the narrator’s future marriage—and mothers to Egypt’s future, giving birth to the nation that will not give them full citizenship, as voters, until after a much later

³⁷ “Mudkhakkirāt Hikmat Hānim,” in ‘Ubayd, *Iḥsān Hānim*, 81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

thawra, the revolution of 1952. Despite—or because of—this restrictive definition of nationalist femininity, the momentary visibility of women on Egypt's streets meets approbation, notes Hikmat, even by “the conservative turbaned group.” The tension between the narrator's self-image, as she struggles to clear a place for herself in the nation's public fora, and others' images of her and of her companions, recapitulates an enduring tension in Egypt's public discourse around females and public space, visible from the late nineteenth century in the daily press's reportage, a juxtaposition of anxiety and pride as the newspaper reports on schoolgirls and prostitutes—emblems of female presence in public urban space.⁴⁰

In her next “entry,” the narrator's political analysis leads her to conclude that “freedom is taken, not given.”⁴¹ An implicit parallel between the imperial relation and the family relations of patriarchy emerges. For an author who insisted on psychological verisimilitude, 'Ubayd's sequence of events is suspiciously programmatic. Hikmat decides to form a “women's party” with her friends, and declaims her newfound happiness as a product of learning “how to use [my life], and in a way that develops my talents.”⁴² But inopportunately, the specter of a groom appears, announced by the narrator's mother—“somewhat old for you—fifty—but well-off, a senior civil servant.”⁴³ Worrying that he might “interfere in my concerns, which my nationalism forbids,” Hikmat agrees to the marriage: this, she feels, is her “mother's only happiness.”⁴⁴ The published memoir ends on this poignant note of alliance, not a happy alliance, between two generations of women who must maintain a dependent family status to enjoy “respectable” futures.

Fictional memoir, historical epic?

As noted earlier, 'Ubayd's “Mudhakkirāt Hikmat Hānim,” or portions of it, first appeared in *al-Sufūr*.⁴⁵ This version differs from that in *Ihsān*

⁴⁰ Marilyn Booth, “Fiction's Imaginative Archive and the Newspaper's Local Scandals: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” in Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2005.

⁴¹ “Mudhakkirāt Hikmat Hānim,” in 'Ubayd, *Ihsān Hānim*, 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁵ *Al-Sufūr* 5, 14 (Feb. 5, 1920), 4; 5, 16 (Feb. 19, 1920), 4.

Hānim, in minor—and a few major—ways. The first several entries are dated February 1918; this, as well as announcement of a “post-marriage” part, suggest that ‘Ubayd was planning a longer text, one that would render contemporary history through the critical eyes of a subject marginalized by gender and age if not by class.

Al-Sufūr’s version contains an entry absent from the later published version, following the first four “diary entries,” after the narrator has endured an excruciating examination by a prospective mother-in-law. Upon awakening and sitting at her window, she finds the breezes suddenly carry to her a memory of childhood.

I recalled the sweet moments my cousin Rahmi and I stole, when we went to the gardens to pick flowers and chase bees and birds, or to collect the tiny fish that, numbed by the cold, floated on the glassy surface of the streams watering the fertile lands in Shibin. This memory led to others that had been buried in the folds of my heart... [sic] memories at once sweet and sad.

There appeared... the farm, its verdant fields crowned by scents of cotton... the *sāqiya*... intoning its mournful tune that in certain sensitive souls stirs grief. Under the pregnant sycamores, I could see the hut we built of reeds and called our little house—the house of the newlyweds, for that is what we considered ourselves. An aural memory awoke in me: my ear rang with his childish words. Though twelve years have passed, my memory held the resonance of those words... I recollected Rahmi’s life, from beginning school to taking his secondary diploma, getting employment in the Diwan, and then suddenly marrying that French woman who caused him to forget our ancient love, the pleasing dreams that we built in our childhood and thought we would realize.

Aah! What made him prefer her to me? Knowledge, beauty, family lineage? No, no: she is ignorant, not pretty—I was told—and of a low, fallen origin. Through what power did that woman rule his heart? I wish I could fathom that secret.

Free spaces of nature; agricultural fertility; a space outside the city’s defilements—and outside the paternal home: This utopian space of freedom and love (but between cousins, conservatively culturally appropriate), occurring outside the city and in the past, gives way, for the masculine character, to the seductive and “fallen” power of Western consumption and, for the female, to incarceration in the home. Neither constitutes the liberal dream that was, in some public contexts, the organizing motif of post-1919 elite anti-colonial politics in Egypt. The text offers the dreamlike possibility of an alternative reality—one omitted from the later published version. Yet, look back from the longing narrator’s lonely vigil in the still air of her parental home, unable to feel

the garden breezes but aware that they swirl beyond her. Perhaps her waking dream suggests a romanticist nostalgia, or gothic impossibility, as the only refuge of the educated, elite young woman. But the scene she describes—streams inhabited by numbed and helpless fish (young females caught ineluctably in currents of social expectation?), a ruined hut, the moan of a water-wheel—seems ominous as well. Like Zaynab emerging unscathed but resigned from the dens of Cairo, Hikmet's attempt to form her own future according to her desires is blocked. And even those desires are shaped by the nationalist patriarchal script of marriage by parental guidance, if not force. If her dream offers an alternative to the imprisonment of home and social expectation, it is an alternative only available to the narrator's imagination, and therefore is all the more painful.

A few months before his death in October 1922, 'Ubayd published a critique in *al-Sufūr*⁴⁶ of the male Egyptian literary establishment (*rijāl al-adab fī Miṣr*), attacking them for insincerity and cowardice and accusing them of singling out for praise the weak later works of once-fine writers now past their prime. 'Ubayd's call for sincerity was in line with his program for literary creation itself: sincerity, depth, and attention to human sentiment. Perhaps, for 'Ubayd and others, simulated *mudhakkirāt* constituted a literary mode of sincerity critical to expressing, and trying to shape, contemporary history—even if that mode required a tactic of “insincerity” embodied in slippages between authorial signature and narratorial identity in a genre whose horizon of expectations entailed the meeting of the two.

In sum, it seems significant that these memoirs emerge in a period when popular hopes for independence are at an unprecedented peak and have not yet been dashed; when, in a sense, liberal values of constitutionalism, the efficacy and importance of the individual as a social and economic actor, and as a political being, are at their height. The memoir, delineating an individual's social authority and possibilities for agency, while defining the individual through social activity rather than abstracting her or him from the social environment, appears a perfectly suited genre for the era. Perhaps these memoirs' focus on the previously unvoiced, the marginalized by class, gender, and occupation, the new claimant to the efficacy of the liberal state, is peculiarly suited to the 1920s, when public education expanded for boys and girls, indigenous

⁴⁶ “Khaṭarāt,” *al-Sufūr* [7,] 291 (Mar. 17, 1922), 2.

liberal feminist activism was visible and vocal, and post-1919 hopes for national collective self-determination remained vibrant. There was some discursive flexibility—and ambiguity—concerning definition of the national patriarchal family; this could allow forms of critique “from the margins,” which, after all, held potential authority, as markers of the nation-state’s social borders. These ventriloquized memoirs trained spotlights on the social margins while asserting those margins in terms of individuals petitioning the state by means of autobiographical authority—the authority of experience.

Yet, to retain authorship from an (albeit expanded) cultural center was to maintain or reassert socio-political hierarchies. Zaynab Muhammad raises her voice through a reformist discourse that ultimately does not dismantle such layers of authority. When ‘Isa ‘Ubayd calls for “sincerity” on the part of the author, yet writes in the speaking voice of the young woman rather than inscribing “his own” memoirs, the “sincerity” or “veracity” which is his touchstone as social commentator is put in question. How can the writer’s “sincerity” coexist with the feint of ventriloquized memoirs? Is there an impossibility or deception or unrealized selfhood at the heart of this speaking-for, where a representative of a rising cultural center speaks for a subject who has no cultural authority?

But perhaps the teasing distance between the persona/hero of the memoir and the source of its authority as a text—the author—articulates something about the status of the individual in that era. Perhaps this feint recognizes the importance of certain social margins (and misrecognizes others, by defining the margins as *these* and not *those*). Does it offer recognition of limits to a nationalist individualism at a time when belief in independence holds sway but the realities of continued imperial authority amputate individual autonomy, or authority in the local political sphere, before these can fully form? Does the blunt social critique of these memoirs express lack of trust in the reader, as incapable of reading that critique into the text—another facet, perhaps, of incomplete autonomy? Such questions highlight the political fluidity of the 1920s and the changing composition of the reading public: these texts, raising such questions, convey an openness to, yet also an uncertainty about, the composition of this nation in formation. These texts respond not only to liberalism’s limitations but to liberal practice’s “dangerous” implications. Is it possible to encourage individuals to think about individual subjectivity and then expect them to happily heed warnings about the threat that new freedoms may pose to accepted norms?

These texts articulate that double bind not only by highlighting the discursive formation of subjectivities through the genre of ventriloquized memoirs but also by voicing issues of subjectivity and citizenship as linked intimately to questions of gender and family, and specifically the subjectivity-in-question of young females. In response to assumptions about liberal subjecthood and the state in 1920s Egypt, these “memoirs” counter with “memoranda”—in an era of heightened discourse on issues of body and the nation—on the importance of naming and therefore recognizing forms of violence against (female) individuals. They challenge discourses of protection—the home as inviolable space in which female lives were to be lived, even as more middle-class girls were going to school. They solicit recognition that not only was this discourse of protection a fiction but that (some) young women sought and needed protections afforded to other subjects of the state, protections not mediated by the father or the sanctity of home. They solicit the promises of liberal society even as they illuminate, however briefly, the inherent contradictions of patriarchal liberalism.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ILLIBERAL METAMORPHOSES OF A LIBERAL DISCOURSE: THE CASE OF SYRIAN INTELLECTUAL SAMI AL-KAYYALI (1898–1972)

Manfred Sing

In this case study, I will try to define what the “liberal” in Arab intellectual discourses of the twentieth century actually means. The case of Sami al-Kayyali stands as an example of how a liberal writer changed his thought and social position over the course of time. This chapter analyses how his liberal and secular discourse turned more overtly to nationalism, enabling it to embrace racism and violence, revealing the illiberal side of liberal discourses. My contention is that an understanding of “liberal” thought demands a structural and genetic analysis of liberal discourse, more specifically an analysis of its relations to leftist, conservative, and Islamist thought as well as an examination of the metamorphoses of the liberal discourse itself.

To begin, it is necessary to understand why Albert Hourani was at the same time wrong and right when he confessed—in his introduction to the 1983 reissue of *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*—his uneasiness with the term “liberal,” “for the ideas which had influence were not only ideas about democratic institutions or individual rights, but also about national strength and unity and the power of government.”¹ His description of the contradictory character of liberal thought was correct, but his uneasiness with the term was wrong. “Liberal,” like “modern,” does not stand for an all-encompassing good, democratic, and peaceful, but it is interwoven in the complex layers of social struggles, techniques of powers, and discursive strategies. In an attempt to define the group of intellectuals who called themselves “liberals” (*aḥrār*) it has to be remembered that the emergence of liberal intellectuals was interconnected

¹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789–1939* [1962], 2nd ed., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, iv.

with the establishment of a relatively independent literary field² in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The demand for the right to free discussion on every important issue without social, religious, or political restrictions is an individual right that can only collectively be acquired and defended. Such a structural definition of a “liberal” framework helps to understand that, with an increasing autonomy of the whole field, intellectuals were free to express different forms of truth which could either be described as opposing cultural hegemony or even conforming to it or producing it. “Liberal” writers are those who perceive their own (objective, scientific, rational) opinions to be liberated from political, social, or religious restraints; but the liberal framework does not exclude nationalist, illiberal, or even racist contents.

The establishment of a relatively independent literary field was a decisive step to a modern, individual society, because it curbed the power of religious institutions to regulate every single aspect of human life. Therefore, the mere establishment of a literary field challenged the power of Islamic authorities, because they were reduced to just another separate field in society. This was the deeper reason why they were hostile toward intellectual debates in general and to free debate on Islamic issues in particular. Islamic authorities could prevent neither the emergence of new disciplines and the changing structure of knowledge nor the establishment of an independent literary field that discussed these changes. However, they constantly tried to interfere in the debates, establish censorship, or cause state authorities to intervene, especially in the transitional phase after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and then again in the so-called “Re-Islamization” since the 1960s.

In the 1920s, three well-known conflicts had a deep impact on the formation and structure of the Arab literary field in the Near East: ‘Ali

² This term refers to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept; see Pierre Bourdieu, *Die Intellektuellen und die Macht*, ed. Irene Dölling, Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1991; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press 1993; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press 1996. For the logic of the “fields” in general, see Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1992, 94ff. An analysis for the Arab literary field like Joseph Jurt’s analysis of the French literary field (*Das literarische Feld: Das Konzept Pierre Bourdieus in Theorie und Praxis*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995) is still missing.

‘Abd al-Raziq,³ Taha Husayn,⁴ and—among other feminist activists—Huda Sha‘rawi⁵ were the main protagonists in the controversies that evolved around the questions of Islam’s true place in politics and literature and women’s status in society. Through the ensuing conflicts, the liberal group managed to acquire a central position in the literary field.⁶ These controversies not only crystallized lasting questions for Arab societies, keeping Arab intellectuals, politicians, and religious scholars busy throughout the twentieth century, they also divided the intellectuals into opposing camps and contributed to the shaping of the whole literary field. Therefore, these conflicts deserve the status of “conflicts of foundation”⁷ insofar as they contributed to the liberal intellectuals’ consciousness of their duty to fight collectively for their freedom and for the autonomy of the field as a whole in the face of external interventions from the religious and political authorities. The status of these three controversies is proven by the fact that they served as points of reference for the divergent groups: for liberal Arabs, the conflicts of foundation have always represented “heroic struggles”⁸ for freedom in the beginning, whereas conservative and Islamist opponents⁹ have always tried to delegitimize these struggles.

Under conservative pressure, the Arab liberals’ strategy aimed to unite their forces inside and outside Egypt at the end of the 1920s.

³ After the abolition of the caliphate by the Turkish parliament, ‘Abd al-Raziq (d. 1965) argued in his work *al-Islām wa-usūl al-ḥukm* (1925) that Islam did not provide a certain system of rule: see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 183–91. Although ‘Abd al-Raziq put his argument forward entirely within the Salafi framework, his work served as a point of reference for the liberal plea for a separation between religion and politics: see Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997, 85–96.

⁴ For the scandal that evolved around Taha Husayn’s (1889–1973) *Fi l-shi‘r al-jāhili* (1926) see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 327–33, and P. Cachia, “Tāhā Ḥusayn,” *EP*, vol. X, 95.

⁵ On the founder (1879–1948) of the Egyptian Feminist Union see Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton: University Press, 1995.

⁶ They can be set apart from religious scholars and Salafi thinkers, who also participated in the literary debates, but perceived themselves as custodians of Islam. Other sub-groups in the literary field were nationalist and socialist intellectuals who basically shared a common interest in the existence of a relatively independent literary field.

⁷ For the importance of the conflicts of foundation for the structure of the whole field see Jurt, *Feld*, 130.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ As an example see the attacks against Taha Husayn and others by Anwar al-Jundi, *al-Muḥāfaẓa wa-l-tajdīd fī l-nāthir al-‘arabi l-mu‘āšir fī mi‘at ‘ām 1840–1940*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣriyya, 1961.

Sami al-Kayyali's journal *al-Ḥadīth* (The Modern)¹⁰ was a spearhead of this trend.¹¹ Al-Kayyali, who was inspired by the Egyptian liberal intellectuals,¹² immediately took up the Egyptian discussions when he started to edit his journal in 1927.¹³ Although it was a literary journal founded to study classical Arabic literature as well as modern Arabic and European literature, its subtitle read, "it studies literature, history, and social sciences." From the first edition, al-Kayyali welcomed the Egyptian and Turkish reforms begun in the nineteenth century as examples for the whole Orient.¹⁴ In many articles, he revealed his sympathy and support for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his "social revolution."¹⁵ He also hailed Taha Husayn as the harbinger of science and intellectual freedom.¹⁶ And he spoke up for women's rights and unveiling (*al-sufūr*) in the 1920s, and printed Huda Sha'rawi's 1927 petition demanding women's rights from the Egyptian parliament, because he wanted to move the Syrian government to enact similar reforms.¹⁷

¹⁰ Co-founder Edmond Rabbath (1901–91) left the journal after a few months to finish his law studies in France. As a lawyer and politician, he played a decisive role in bringing about the Syrian–French treaty of 1936 that was never ratified by the French parliament. On Rabbath see Keith D. Watenpaugh, "Middle-Class Modernity and the Persistence of the Politics of Notables in Inter-War Syria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003), 257–86.

¹¹ Muhammad Kamil al-Khatib, *Takwīn al-nahḍa al-‘arabiyya 1800–2000*, Damascus: Maṭba‘at al-Yāzījī, 2001, 72. Following the foundation of *al-Ḥadīth*, other new journals emerged, including Isma‘il Mazhar's *al-‘Uṣūr* (1927/28), ‘Abd al-Raziq's *Majallat al-Rābiṭa al-Sharqiyya* (1928), Salama Musa's *al-Majalla al-Jadida* (1929), and Ibrahim Haddad and Salim Khayyata's *al-Dhuhūr* (1930). The example of *al-Ḥadīth* may also have influenced the foundation (and the style) of the Egyptian magazines *al-Risāla* (1933) and *al-Thaqāfa* (1939).

¹² The circle of intellectuals surrounding Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872–1963), the so-called "teacher of a generation," had a particular impact on al-Kayyali; on Lutfi al-Sayyid see L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "Luṭfi al-Sayyid," *EP*, vol. V, 838f.

¹³ The campaign against Taha Husayn was one of the main reasons for al-Kayyali to start his journal, in order "to give expression to liberal tendencies and to defend freedom of thought": Sami al-Kayyali, *Min khuyūṭ al-ḥayāt*, Aleppo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Tijāriyya, 1963, 45.

¹⁴ Sami al-Kayyali, "Fātiḥat al-qawl," *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 1 (1927), 3. Also Sami al-Kayyali, "al-Taḥawwul al-ijtimā‘ī fi l-sharq wa-naṣīb Sūriyya minhu," 2 parts, *al-Ḥadīth* 2, 6 (1928), 369–72 and 2, 7 (1928), 441–44.

¹⁵ Sami al-Kayyali, "Ittijāhāt al-inqilāb al-ijtimā‘ī fi Turkiyā," *al-Ḥadīth* 6, 1 (1932), 31–40; Sami al-Kayyali, "al-Ghāzī Muṣṭafā Kamāl fi riḥāb thawratihī l-tajdidīyya wa-inqilābihī l-fikrī l-khaṭīr," *al-Ḥadīth* 8, 8 (1934), 17–29.

¹⁶ Taha Husayn published his first article after the scandal of 1926/27 in *al-Ḥadīth*, the 100-page study *Bayna l-ilm wa-l-dīn* in which he criticized the enmity between science and religion. Its first part appeared in *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 2 (1927), 69–74.

¹⁷ "Maṭālib al-nisā‘ fi Miṣr," *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 1 (1927), 48–51; for the discussion see "Ṣadā lā‘iḥat Hudā Hānim Sha‘rāwī," *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 3 (1927), 172–75 and *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 4 (1927),

In opposition to his liberal viewpoints, a petition with 5,000 signatures demanded the closure of *al-Ḥadīth*, its editor's removal from his municipal post, and his trial and execution.¹⁸ However, this event had no consequences, and largely boosted al-Kayyali's stature. He managed to edit his journal for another 30 years until the press was nationalized during the time of the Egyptian–Syrian Union in 1959; al-Kayyali abstained from applying for a new license for the journal at this time, since it had reached “a stage where it could no longer fulfil its mission the way it should,”¹⁹ as he later explained.

To describe al-Kayyali's career path, I have identified three stages he occupied in the successive states of the literary field: The first stage, in the 1920s and 1930s, can be characterized as an Oriental mode of liberal discourse. It was followed by the transitional Oriental spiritual mode in the 1930s and 1940s, and resulted in a nationalist mode in the 1950s and 1960s. The description of these metamorphoses does not invite the conclusion that al-Kayyali was not an Arab nationalist in the 1920s and 1930s. On the contrary, it is quite clear that the intellectuals of the so-called “liberal age” (up to 1939, according to Hourani's wording) took part in shaping and legitimizing nationalism and state policy, even in a literary journal like *al-Ḥadīth*, although nationalism was overshadowed in the earlier stages by the liberal discourse. The categorization of the three stages should clarify that the discourse did not change overnight, but step by step; it describes how exclusive nationalism changed the liberal discourse fundamentally without replacing it completely. Since the transitions are fluent, it is not possible to draw lines of separation between each stage at a certain date. However, the aim of this sort of categorization is to show what kind of inner logic led from the discourse of the “liberal age” in 1920s and 1930s to militant nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, I shall present four theses to explain the drastic

238–41 and 374 by an author named F. Sālim. Al-Kayyali visited Sha'rawi and called on “intellectual Syrian women” to found a women's organization like hers: see Sami al-Kayyali, “Ma'a Hudā Sha'rāwī,” *al-Ḥadīth* 2, 1 (1928), 113–20. The journal also reported at length about the Mu'tamar al-Sharqī al-Nisā'ī (the Oriental Feminist Congress) in Damascus: see *al-Ḥadīth* 4 (1930), 529–40. In her obituary, al-Kayyali praised Sha'rawi as “a woman the Orient can pride itself on in front of the West”: Sami al-Kayyali, “al-Sayyida Hudā Sha'rāwī fī dhimmat allāh,” *al-Ḥadīth* 22, 1 (1948), 95.

¹⁸ Kayyali, in *Khuyūt*, 42–47, gives an account of the events. The protests started immediately after he had shown his sympathy for Taha Husayn. Premier Taj al-Din al-Hasani ignored the petition upon his visit to Aleppo.

¹⁹ Habib al-Sayqali, “Fihrist majallat *al-Ḥadīth*,” Master's thesis, Beirut: Lebanese University, 1971, 6.

shift more thoroughly: (1) the connection between the intellectual's discourse and his social location; (2) the violence inherent in the liberal discourse; (3) the relation of the liberal discourse to other discourses; (4) the two conflicting sides of al-Kayyali's liberal discourse, hybridization and purification. A more general aim of this kind of analysis is to explain why the liberal intellectuals in general failed to uphold their relative autonomy in the 1950s although they had managed to maintain it under similarly difficult circumstances in the 1920s and 1930s during the "conflicts of foundation."

Theoretically, my analysis of al-Kayyali's trajectory draws on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts for the study of intellectual praxis. I therefore define the intellectuals' tasks as being their struggle for autonomy (in opposition to political and religious forces) and their struggle for symbolic power among themselves.²⁰ The concept of *habitus* defines an intellectual's special place in these two struggles.²¹ To characterize al-Kayyali's *habitus* as "liberal" means to hint at striking differences from and striking similarities to other intellectuals. Since all agents in the literary field are involved in the competition for dominant positions, they struggle against each other in order to legitimize their positions and to acquire recognition from their competitors. In this framework, al-Kayyali's intellectual metamorphoses reflect a change of his *habitus* that is interconnected with his place in the literary field and in society in general. I interpret this shift as the feedback between his *habitus* and the changing conditions he encountered. As a result, "liberal" in the end meant something other than it had done in the beginning, although al-Kayyali's self-understanding still remained liberal. Yet his shifts were not determined by individual, social, or political changes alone, since his progress was the result of his intellectual endeavor to cope with new material and symbolic challenges. I proceed here from Bourdieu's assumptions that the literary field has its own rules and realities and that an intellectual's work is a self-reflective one, not a mere reflection of his origin, class, or affiliation. Although there is a certain correspondence between an intellectual's successive social and intellectual positions, intellectual shifts are caused neither by socialization

²⁰ The intellectuals' main task is not political activism. When Arab intellectuals were at the same time political activists, the analysis should carefully study how they acted in the literary and political fields in different ways.

²¹ In general, *habitus* refers to an individual's acquired social structures and his relations to other individuals.

nor by circumstances alone, because the latter cannot explain how and why an intellectual changed his position. On the contrary, I interpret an intellectual's position and his metamorphoses as a conscious strategy within the struggle for symbolic power under certain circumstances.²² The fact that al-Kayyali adopted or produced illiberal ideas in spite of his basically liberal convictions must be seen as an effect produced by the game of legitimization in which he was automatically involved and in which he actively participated. With regard to pan-Arab nationalist ideas in this context, I consider them as a source of legitimization (as well as of dissent) in the literary field. The overt expression of nationalist ideas can be seen as a conscious strategy in the struggle for social and symbolic power. Indeed, al-Kayyali's disposition to see things in a "liberal" light—his liberal, but changeable, *habitus*—did not prevent him from adopting racist ideas, but it had the effect of setting him apart from other intellectuals with whom he shared parts of the nationalist viewpoint (like, for example, Sati' al-Husri).

Social and family background

Sami al-Kayyali came from a family of religious jurists (*fuqahā'*): his grandfather Muhammad (d. 1904/05) and his father 'Ali (d. 1944), who became a *qāḍī ḥanafī* in 1920/21, had both studied religious law at al-Azhar University in Egypt. The family had direct links to one of the biggest clans of Aleppo, including many Sufi notables, religious scholars, and jurists. Its main branch belonged to the richest landowning family in the area and had its own brotherhood, al-Kayyāliyya, and a mosque with a shrine (*zāwiya*) in the center of Aleppo. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, many Kayyalis became active in the Arab nationalist movement.²³ Sami praised King Faysal in a poem when the latter visited

²² For another approach to "*habitus*," "intellectual," and "socialization" see Christoph Schumann, co-editor and a contributor to this volume, who traces the emergence of different Greater Syrian and pan-Arab nationalist activists back to a common (stable and acquired) "intellectual *habitus*" that he also holds responsible for "radicalization," "social group consciousness," "elitism," and a "shared feeling of eventual failure": Christoph Schumann, *Radikalnationalismus in Syrien und Libanon: Politische Sozialisation und Elitenbildung 1930–1958*, Hamburg: Orient-Institut 2001; Christoph Schumann, "The Generation of Broad Expectations: Nationalism, Education, and Autobiography in Syria and Lebanon, 1930–1958," *Welt des Islams* 41, 2 (2001), 174–205.

²³ Cf. Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920–1945*, Princeton: University Press, 1987, 106 and 186f., and James L. Gelvin,

Aleppo in 1920,²⁴ and he was one of the authors of a 1925 petition²⁵ directed at the French authorities in Arabic and French to demand “les droits sacrés des peuples” and “la réalisation des haut principes libéraux de la République” as well as the complete unity (*wahda tamma*) of natural Syria (*Sūriyya ṭabīʿiyya*). The journalist Sami and his cousin, the politician ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Kayyali,²⁶ shared key positions in the local and national elite: one as a producer of meaning, the other as a decision maker. Despite their different careers, they worked together to achieve similar goals. In a public meeting in 1927, they provoked a violent reaction on taking the stage together to plead for women’s unveiling and for political and social reforms.²⁷

Sami had attended the Ottoman state school (*al-madrassa al-sultāniyya*) in Aleppo, which paved his way to acquire a job in the telegraph bureau after graduation around 1917 and later on governmental jobs in the municipal and regional councils. He had to use his salary to subsidize the journal, which was unable to finance itself due to the low number of subscriptions.²⁸

His social and family background can be seen as a precondition for his liberal *habitus* and his editorship, as it provided him with economic and symbolic security to a certain degree as well as the possibility of developing intellectual independence through higher education. This social position between inherited and acquired independence fits perfectly well with his intellectual position that Arabs should neither totally throw their heritage overboard nor cling to it blindly. His opponents’ fierce

Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998, 85.

²⁴ Sami al-Kayyali, “Wa-ḥayyū l-jaysh wa-l-ṭān al-mafdī.” The poem was published by the “Arab Club” (al-Nādī al-ʿArabī) of Aleppo in a pamphlet named *Dhikrā ʿid al-istiqlāl al-sūrī*, Aleppo, 1920.

²⁵ The pamphlet *Lā ʾiḥat maṭālib al-umma allatī ḥamalahā l-wafd al-ḥalabī ilā fakhāmat al-General Serail* (“List of the nation’s demands that the Aleppine delegation submitted to General Serail”) was printed in Aleppo and bears the date of January 21/23, 1925.

²⁶ ʿAbd al-Rahman (1887–1969) was from the main branch of the family and a prominent politician both before and after independence. He had studied at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut and became a member of the Damascus Congress in 1919 and a founding member of the National Bloc in 1927. He held several posts as minister in the National Bloc government in the 1930s.

²⁷ See Suhayl al-Maladhi, *al-Ittijāhāt al-fikriyya fī l-ṣiḥāfa al-ḥalabiyya 1920–1946*, Damascus: Dār al-Yaʿrib li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī, 1996, 253f.

²⁸ The maximum circulation was between 1,000 and 1,400 copies: see Sayqali, “Fihrist,” 4; Juzif Ilyas, *Ṭaʿawwur al-ṣiḥāfa al-sūriyya fī miʿat ʾām 1865–1965*, Beirut: Dār al-Niḍāl, 1983, 390.

attacks in the conservative and Salafi press²⁹ against his journal in the 1920s and 1930s may reflect their indignation that Sami al-Kayyali came from a religious family background and spread liberal views which they considered atheist or heretical.³⁰ Concerning the conflicts of foundation in the literary field, al-Kayyali, like his fellow liberal intellectuals, had to face mainly three charges in the conservative press in Syria and Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s, put forward by al-Kayyali's opponents, whom he named "turban wearers" and "reactionary groups": that liberalism meant cultural Westernization; that the liberals misrepresented the Islamic past; and that women's emancipation destroyed the foundations of Islam. Muhammad Rashid Rida in his journal *al-Manār* accused al-Kayyali of following Salama Musa,³¹ Mahmud 'Azmi, and Taha Husayn, "who have no homeland (*waṭan*), no religious community (*milla*) and no nation (*umma*)."³² Rashid Rida counted the journal *al-Ḥadīth* among "the enemies of Islam,"³³ along with its Egyptian counterparts, *al-Siyāsa*, with its supplement *al-Siyāsa al-Uṣbū'iyya*, and *al-Hilāl*.

The conflict stemmed mainly from the fact that liberal intellectuals and religious-conservative circles struggled for hegemony over state and society by investing two different forms of cultural capital. In his first editorial, al-Kayyali laid claim to the superiority of the intellectuals' capital: "Modernization does not only treat literature, as every man of letters knows. By no means! It treats the sciences and arts, the customs and traditions, and all spheres of life."³⁴ According to al-Kayyali, Taha Husayn's achievement was at stake in the conflict with the "old," since he was the one who had pushed "the doors to science" wide open, had paved the way for Arab writers to "absolute freedom" (*al-ḥurriyya al-muṭlaqa*), and had encouraged them to liberate themselves from

²⁹ For the press in Aleppo see Maladhi, *Ittijāhāt*. The main opponents were religious scholars like 'Awnallah al-Ikhlasi and 'Abdallah al-'Itr, who directed the journal *al-Iṭīṣām* (1929–32?), Muhammad 'Ali al-Kahhal, the founder of *al-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya* (1929–58), and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Haffar, who directed the newspapers *'Alā Kayfika* (1928/29) and *al-Jihād* (1930–49).

³⁰ See for example Muhammad Rashid Rida's hint at Kayyali's family background in Muhammad Rashid Rida, "al-Taqrīz wa-intiqād al-maṭbu'āt," *al-Manār* 28 (1927), 715.

³¹ On Musa (1887–1958) see P. C. Sadgrove, "Salāma Mūsā," *EP*, vol. VIII, 919.

³² Rashid Rida, "al-Taqrīz," 715.

³³ Muhammad Rashid Rida, "A'dā' al-islām al-muḥāribū lahu," *al-Manār* 29 (1928), 118.

³⁴ Kayyali, "Fātiḥat al-qawl," 3.

all the constrictions that had confined them.³⁵ Here, science—and al-Kayyali's plea for it—was not only an expression of rational free thinking, progression, and modernity, but also a technique of power, just as clinging to Islam was not only an expression of tradition, belief, and higher truth, but also a quest for legitimacy. The ascriptions of being modern or traditional were merely symbolic rationalizations of the social conflict between the two camps—a fact of which al-Kayyali was well aware. He emphasized it by stating that it was impossible for sympathizers of the modern to be modern in every respect, just as no sympathizer of the “old” could nowadays be completely traditional.³⁶

The Oriental stage of liberal discourse

In the first, “Oriental”³⁷ or “Eastern,” stage of his discourse, al-Kayyali's diagnosed the Orient (*al-sharq*) as being in a stage of backwardness compared to the West and declared that the only way to progress was to adopt Western models in technology, science, society, politics, and literature.³⁸ Therefore, the efforts of the nineteenth-century *nahḍa*³⁹ had to be continued. Al-Kayyali pleaded for an “intellectual revolution” (*inqilāb fikrī*)⁴⁰ and a “social change” (*taḥawwul ijtīmā'ī*),⁴¹ that should

³⁵ Cf. Sami al-Kayyali, *Ma'a Taha Husayn*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1951, 112; Sami al-Kayyali, *Ma'a Taha Husayn II*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968, 35.

³⁶ Sami al-Kayyali, “al-Adab bayna anṣār al-qadīm wa-anṣār al-ḥadīth,” *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 8 (1927), 490–96. For the same argument see also Sami al-Kayyali, “Ittijāhāt al-tajdīd,” *al-Ḥadīth* 6, 8 (1932), 514.

³⁷ Today, the term “East” has mostly replaced “Orient” as a translation for *al-sharq*, perhaps because the latter reminds the reader of “Orientalism.” By using “Orient,” I want to hint at the fact that the liberals' Oriental discourse shared some features with the Western Orientalist discourse to a certain degree; for example, the acceptance of universalism and the superiority or advance of Western civilization.

³⁸ Cf. Sami al-Kayyali, *Shahr fī Ūrubbā*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-ʿAṣriyya, 1935, 187: “The East does not acquire any power if it does not take up the same method.”

³⁹ In his first editorial, al-Kayyali had already written that the *nahḍa* had not yet brought the desired results to the Arab world and that the Orient needed more progress: see Kayyali, “Fātiḥat al-qawl,” 2. Nada Tomiche defines *nahḍa*, in her article “Nahḍa,” *EP*, vol. VII, 900–03, as an attitude that strives “to reconcile traditional and modern areas of knowledge in a spirit of openness to world, without destroying the values of Islam and Arab identity.” The *nahḍa* can be seen as a lasting process of literary and intellectual production throughout the twentieth century: see Muhammad Kamil al-Khatib's afore mentioned book title *Takwīn al-nahḍa al-ʿarabiyya 1800–2000* (“The formation of the arab *nahḍa* 1800–2000”).

⁴⁰ See for example Kayyali, “Fātiḥat al-qawl,” 2 and 3.

⁴¹ See for example in Kayyali, “al-Taḥawwul al-ijtimā'ī.”

be directed against tattered traditions. This kind of Eastern discourse was widespread at the time.⁴² In general, al-Kayyali described the conflicts in society, politics, and literature as a confrontation between “old” and “new”; his criticism of the “old” did not aim to destroy heritage, but to understand it objectively in order to make it compatible with modernity and overcome the gap between East and West.⁴³

Al-Kayyali denounced the widespread tendency of looking backwards as a stagnant attitude unknown amongst the “forefathers” (*salaf*),⁴⁴ because they had been “renewers of faith” (*mujaddidūn*).⁴⁵ He therefore pleaded for “renewal” (*tajdid*)⁴⁶ and declared modernization to be part of the heritage. Thus, he also used the symbols of the Islamic signification system in new contexts. He coined terms such as “the messengers of science” using the word *rusul* (God’s messengers), or “the scientific struggle” using the word *jihād* (the struggle on the path to God).⁴⁷ Beginning with the second editorial in *al-Ḥadīth*, “freedom of thought” (*ḥurriyyat al-fikr*)⁴⁸ was a current expression.⁴⁹ Freedom was “the highest sanctuary” (*al-quḍs al-a’lā*) for al-Kayyali, and he called upon Syria’s youth to embrace “the religion of freedom” (*dīn al-ḥurriyya*).⁵⁰ By “the Eastern plague” (*miḥnat al-sharq*) he meant that the education of the younger generation lacked orientation “to the Ka’ba of the holy homeland” (*naḥwa ka’bat al-waṭan al-muqaddas*).⁵¹

⁴² Cf. Christoph Schumann’s chapter in this volume; Israel Gershoni, “Imagining the East: Muhammad Husayn Haykal’s Changing Representations of East–West Relations, 1928–1933,” *Asian and African Studies* 25 (1992), 209–51; and Israel Gershoni, “The Reader—‘Another Production’: The Reception of Haykal’s Biography of Muhammad and the Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 1930’s,” *Poetics Today* 15, 2 (1994), 214–75.

⁴³ Kayyali, “Fātiḥat al-qawl,” 3.

⁴⁴ See the same argument in Sami al-Kayyali, “Khitām al-sana al-ūlā min majallat ‘al-Ḥadīth,” *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 10 (1927), 585f.; Sami al-Kayyali, “Mawqif al-shabāb min al-naza’āt al-tajdidīyya,” *al-Ḥadīth* 7, 2 (1933), 134–50; Sami al-Kayyali, *al-Fikr al-‘arabī bayna māḍīhi wa-ḥāḍirihī*, Cairo: Maṭba‘a al-Ma‘ārif, 1943, 2ff.; and Kayyali, *Khuyūt*, 2f.

⁴⁵ The figure of a *mujaddid* appearing every century to renew the religion is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition: see Johannes J. G. Jansen, “Tajdid,” *EP*, vol. X, 61f.

⁴⁶ See for example Kayyali, “Fātiḥat al-qawl,” 2, and Kayyali, “Ittijāhāt al-tajdid,” 513–17. For the term and its Islamic tradition see Jansen, “Tajdid.”

⁴⁷ Kayyali, “Fātiḥat al-qawl,” 1.

⁴⁸ Sami al-Kayyali, “Ṣayḥa fī ādhān al-shubbān,” *al-Ḥadīth* 1, 2 (1927), 66f.

⁴⁹ For example, Salama Musa, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, and Isma‘il Mazhar wrote on freedom of expression in *al-Ḥadīth* 9, 1 (1935), 1–6, in response to a request from al-Kayyali.

⁵⁰ Kayyali, “Ṣayḥa,” 67.

⁵¹ Cf. Maladhi, *Ittijāhāt*, 105.

Al-Kayyali avoided talking about Islam as a cause of, or obstacle or solution to, the Eastern problem. He never dealt with the question as to whether new products in science and literature were in harmony with Islam; he only scorned the “old” classes who considered everything new to be against Islam and he also deplored that “reforming leaders” (*zu‘amā’ muṣliḥūn*),⁵² like those in Egypt or Turkey, were still lacking in Syria. He never expressed his own opinion about the abolition of the caliphate. He admitted that many critics considered some parts of the Kemalist reforms to be “atheistic,” but explained that the Turkish revolution, unlike the Russian one, was not directed against religion, but against “humbug” (*sha‘wadha*) and “errors” (*aḍālīl*), leading people to more freedom, as in Europe where a government was not subordinated to religion;⁵³ in the same way, the Turkish revolution would lead to a new understanding for the “spirit of the religion” (*rūḥ al-dīn*).⁵⁴

The Oriental spiritual stage

Al-Kayyali’s Oriental spiritual stage began after Muhammad Husayn Haykal, editor-in-chief of *al-Siyāsa* and a leading figure among the constitutional liberals in Egypt, had turned away from pharaonism and positivism to focus on Islam and spirituality at the end of the 1920s. As Israel Gershoni has shown, Haykal’s new line of thinking was directed against Eastern discourse in general and against the notion that an amalgamation of Orient and Occident was possible and desirable.⁵⁵ Haykal described the Occident as the aggressive counterpart to the Orient. He argued not only that modernity was compatible with Islam, but also that science needed spirituality and religion. Haykal’s move away from Eastern discourse changed the Arab literary field as a whole and caused different reactions: leftist and secular liberals were more than skeptical, while some liberals agreed with Haykal. Neo-Salafi circles showed different degrees of appreciation, while conservative religious scholars were opposed to Haykal’s rationalist interpretations of Islam.

⁵² Kayyali, “al-Taḥawwul al-ijtimā’ī,” 371.

⁵³ Kayyali, “al-Ghāzi,” 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵ Cf. Gershoni, “Imagining”; and Gershoni, “The Reader.” On Haykal (1888–1956) see also C. Vial, “Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal,” *EP*, vol. VII, 441.

Ironically, the conflict between al-Kayyali's Oriental and Haykal's post-Oriental discourses became apparent when Haykal delivered a speech at the Aleppo Club (Nādi Ḥalab) in 1932 at the invitation of al-Kayyali. Perhaps not yet aware of Haykal's shift, al-Kayyali still welcomed him as "one of the messengers of intellectual modernization."⁵⁶ But then Haykal told the audience that "our first duty" was to overcome the opposition between "old" and "new" by turning to "our heritage" in order to connect the two and create "a strong vitality" and "active spirit" on which every civilization was built.⁵⁷

Al-Kayyali's reaction to Haykal's new discourse was not positive, although their common aim was to overcome the old/new and Orient/Occident oppositions. Haykal's shift invested the "old" and the "Orient" (Islam) with a more positive connotation. But for al-Kayyali, the adoption of modern Western methods was paramount, since modernity was a reality no one could evade;⁵⁸ he therefore upheld the idea that the gap between East and West could only be bridged by a kind of harmonization between them, a modernization of the Orient,⁵⁹ not a return to the Oriental past or essence. In his critique of Haykal's *Thawrat al-adab* (The Revolution of Literature) in August 1933, al-Kayyali rejected Haykal's stance and accused him of having turned away from "the meanings of revolution."⁶⁰ Haykal answered al-Kayyali's critique in a letter⁶¹ in which he stated that, having thought 10 years previously in exactly the same way as al-Kayyali did now, he had come to the conviction that "there is no future for a present that has no past."⁶² The source for the *nahḍa*⁶³ was to be found in the (Islamic) past, because Muslims and Orientals were no less happy than Christians and Europeans although the latter claimed to hold the keys to life and happiness in their hands. Haykal

⁵⁶ Sami al-Kayyali, "Shakḥṣiyyat al-Duktūr Haykal al-adabiyya," *al-Ḥadīth* 6, 10 (1932), 678.

⁵⁷ "Khutbat al-Duktūr Haykal Bey," *al-Ḥadīth* 6, 10 (1932), 691. I am indebted to Israel Gershoni for drawing my attention to the importance of this speech for the whole context.

⁵⁸ See especially in 1935 Kayyali's last chapter "European Phenomena: The Oriental view of Western culture" in *Shahr fī Ūrubbā*, 182–88.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Sami al-Kayyali, "Kitāb Thawrat al-adab," *al-Ḥadīth* 7, 7 (1933), 601f. See also Maladhi's account of the quarrel, in *Ittijāhāt*, 115f.

⁶¹ Muhammad Husayn Haykal, "Min al-Duktūr Haykal Bey ilā ṣāḥib 'al-Ḥadīth,'" *al-Ḥadīth* 7, 8 (1933), 664–65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 665.

⁶³ Kayyali and Haykal both laid claim to the concept of *al-nahḍa*.

supported al-Kayyali's wish for rebellion against stagnation, but he stated that rebellion should also be against colonialism and its missionaries because they had occupied the Orient and aimed at destroying its basis of belief.

Al-Kayyali added a comment to Haykal's letter, once again expressing his disappointment about Haykal's thought.⁶⁴ He wrote that he had never disregarded the values of the Arab heritage, but that he had always called for its purification and a thorough study of its tenets. However, Haykal's search for the pillars of the modern *nahḍa* in the past was a way back to the past: "This kind of revolution never came to my mind."⁶⁵ The revolution should be directed against "the supporters of the old" (*anṣār al-qadīm*) and the religious councils such as the 'ulamā' at al-Azhar University that resisted progress; since Haykal was a free-thinking man he should not make common cause with them.⁶⁶

Al-Kayyali's critique shows a great deal of uncertainty about how to locate Haykal in the hitherto clear-cut camps of the "old" and "new." Two years later, after the publication of Haykal's groundbreaking *Ḥayāt Muḥammad* (1935), the situation had completely changed. Al-Kayyali had learned how to interpret Haykal's turning to Islam as a rediscovery of the Arab heritage. Now, al-Kayyali directed his criticism against those who had earlier, before Haykal's shift, attacked the liberals. In his positive critique in 1935,⁶⁷ al-Kayyali recounts how he once met a journalist in Cairo in 1927, apparently Rashid Rida, whom he described as the editor of a journal defending Islam against the *mujaddidūn*. This journalist had tried to convince him that the *mujaddidūn* would destroy the foundations of Islam, with Haykal as their leader. Al-Kayyali maintains that he had not only rejected this point of view in 1927, but that he had also been convinced, from the very day when he had visited Haykal in 1931 and found him reading "old" books on Quran and Hadith literature, that Haykal's writings on Islamic history would be very useful for the Arab culture and the *nahḍa* of the Arab people.

From then on, al-Kayyali never again mentioned his earlier reservations about Haykal's shift toward Islam and spirituality. On the contrary, he adopted elements from Haykal's discourse, so that al-Kayyali's texts now especially featured the terms "spirit" (*rūḥ*) and "faith" (*īmān*). In

⁶⁴ *Al-Ḥadīth* 7, 8 (1933), 665–67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 666.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 667.

⁶⁷ Sami al-Kayyali, "Ḥayāt Muḥammad," *al-Ḥadīth* 9, 5 (1935), 383–85.

this manner, al-Kayyali managed to interpret Haykal's shift as a turn to the "Arab" self, culture, spirituality, and faith,⁶⁸ while he himself still followed the idea that this Arab self had to adopt modern and Western methods. In 1940, al-Kayyali wrote his first and only editorial on Muhammad: "The power of faith in Muhammad's message."⁶⁹ This new focus on the Prophet's life was a common trend among liberals after Haykal's *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*.⁷⁰ Al-Kayyali depicted Muhammad as an enlightened reformer who had called "the Arabs" to brotherhood, freedom, and liberation from slavery, by so doing tapping into the slogans of the French Revolution.⁷¹ "Deep faith" stood in al-Kayyali's description not as a key element of religion but as the motor of Islamic history; faith had implanted into the Arabs' hearts the conviction that change and victory were possible. In another essay, al-Kayyali also drew a line from the past to the present, declaring that the prerequisite for achieving the "highest aims" was "faith, faith in the holiness of thought, faith in the holiness of love, and faith in the holiness of freedom."⁷² However, he did not become a "believer in the Orient" (*mu'min bi-l-sharq*), as he confessed in 1942:⁷³ Although he agreed that Islam was somewhere in the middle between capitalism and communism (citing Haykal and Louis Massignon), he could not believe that the culture of the future

⁶⁸ In the obituary, "Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal," *al-Ḥadīth* 30, 8–9 (1956), 332–39, al-Kayyali even wrote that Haykal's books on Islamic history had shocked not only reactionaries, but all those who did not understand *tajdīd* in a correct way. He also added that Haykal had once told him that he wanted to write a book on "the history of the Arab empire"; unfortunately, he did not write it, but if he had done so, it would have been the most voluminous and trustworthy work on Arab history: *ibid.*, 339.

⁶⁹ Sami al-Kayyali, "Quwwat al-īmān fi risālat Muḥammad," *al-Ḥadīth* 14, 10 (1940), 317–19.

⁷⁰ In this context, see the scholarly debate on the liberals' shift to Islamic subjects: Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961; Charles D. Smith, "The 'Crisis of Orientation': The Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 1930s," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (1973), 382–410; Israel Gershoni, "Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of 'Crisis of Orientation': *Al-Risāla's* Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933–1939," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999), 551–76.

⁷¹ This secular and Arab nationalist interpretation of early Islamic history is comparable to the way Ma'ruf Arna'wut (1892–1948), Taha Husayn, and Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (d. 1987) dealt with the Prophet's biography; it is slightly different from Haykal's spiritual Islamic understanding. See Martin Grzeskowiak, *Die Darstellung des arabischen Propheten Muḥammad bei Muḥammad Ḥusain Haikal, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm und 'Abbās Mahmūd al-'Aqqād*. Halle: Universität Halle, 1969.

⁷² Kayyali, *Fikr*, 96.

⁷³ Sami al-Kayyali, "Ḥaḍārat al-mādḍa wa-ḥaḍārat al-rūḥ," *al-Ḥadīth* 16, 1 (1942), 1–4.

would be Islamic in appearance and that Western culture would simply fade away. And although his criticism of the West became more severe and he even called the “Orient’s belief in the West” a “pagan belief” in 1946,⁷⁴ he continued to say that the Orient needed Western examples and science; but this idea did not mean to trust in Europe and the USA: “In order to live we have to take from the West its materialism but we must save our spiritual ideals.”⁷⁵ In the first editorial of 1948, during the climax of the Palestine crisis, he stated that following the West was the only way to a rebirth of the Arab nation, even if that meant following the West “in the tricks, cheatings, and lies.”⁷⁶

This argument deserves special attention. It represented a sort of last possibility to justify learning from the West. Since, in the liberal discourse, the West originally stood for the new and good, for progress and development, it certainly was somewhat contradictory to plead for the adoption of the wicked in order to justify the indispensable adoption of the good. In a condensed form, this argument reveals al-Kayyali’s consciousness that modernization was an ambivalent process with ambivalent results. This attitude is a clear-cut difference to the Muslim Brothers who—like Hasan al-Banna in a letter (in 1944) to Arab intellectuals,⁷⁷ among them al-Kayyali—tried to avoid the contradictions by ascribing them to the West solely and seeking purely Islamic solutions for state and society that would automatically eliminate such contradictions once and for all. A clear expression of al-Kayyali’s acceptance of ambivalence is his introduction to the collection of stage-plays and novels entitled *Anwā’ wa-ādḡwā’* (Hurricanes and Lights) from 1948, in which he states that “the narrative garment” for his “pictures from the center of society” and his “stories taken from the midst of life” was, like themselves, “sometimes vast and sometimes tight”:

It is literature that truly portrays these contradictions whether they are taken from the roaring cyclones or hurricanes or from the abundance of rays and lights, because life is a mixture of good and bad, truth and deceit, darkness and light, bliss and misery. These contradictions are the great

⁷⁴ Sami al-Kayyali, “Īmān al-sharq bi-l-gharb,” *al-Ḥadīth* 20, 7 (1946), 420. He deplored the fact that freedom, justice, and brotherhood meant different things in Europe and in the Arab world; the freedom that the Europeans enjoyed turned to slavery in the Orient.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Sami al-Kayyali, “‘al-Ḥadīth’ fi ‘āmihā l-jadīd,” *al-Ḥadīth* 22, 1 (1948), 2.

⁷⁷ For the contents see Hisham Sharabi, *Neo-Patriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 143–47.

pillar on which the truth of life is based. And as I said: The narrator is he who can truly record these colours without deviating from reality.⁷⁸

This fondness for contradictions is closely connected to al-Kayyali's self-imposed task of mediating between them. Contradictions are a prerequisite for mediation, and the greater and more dangerous they are, the more useful is a mediator. In his first editorial in *al-Ḥadīth*, al-Kayyali, who called himself "a partisan of the new," already admitted that "self-Westernization" (*tagharrub*) "has to cease at a certain limit."⁷⁹ He defined his journal's task as mediating "in the war between old and new," steering "a middle course" between both sides that followed "exaggeration or extremism," and thus reconciling "the partisans of both of the schools of thought."⁸⁰ This task fits both al-Kayyali's social position and his intellectual position in the Arab literary field,⁸¹ as he was situated between the different currents and between the generations. He criticized Muhammad Kurd 'Alī⁸² as a representative of the "old" school,⁸³ and Salama Musa⁸⁴ as a representative of the extremist "new" school, and he also found himself between Kurd 'Alī's generation and the younger, more radical generation of authors and free-verse poets⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Sami al-Kayyali, *Anwā' wa-aḍwā'*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1948, 5f.

⁷⁹ Kayyali, "Fātiḥat al-qawl," 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸¹ For a more detailed account of al-Kayyali and his journal's place in the literary field see Manfred Sing, "Between Lights and Hurricanes: Sāmī al-Kayyālī's Review *al-Ḥadīth* as a Forum of Modern Arabic Literature and Liberal Islam," in Horst Unbehaun, ed., *The Middle Eastern Press as a Forum for Literature*, Frankfurt/Main etc.: Peter Lang, 2004, 119–41.

⁸² Kurd 'Alī (1876–1953) was the president of the Arab Academy in Damascus, minister of public education twice, and a critic of the Egyptian liberals: see C. Pellat, "Kurd 'Alī," *EP*, vol. V, 437f.; Rainer Hermann, *Kulturkrise und konservative Erneuerung. Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī (1876–1953) und das geistige Leben in Damaskus zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1990.

⁸³ Sami al-Kayyali, *al-Adab al-'arabi l-mu'āṣir fī Sūriyā min sanat 1850–1950* [1959], 2nd ed., Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968, 34.

⁸⁴ Musa's inclination to a total Westernization was often discussed in *al-Ḥadīth* in 1927 and 1928. Kayyali expressed reservations about Musa's ideas: see his critical review on Musa's book *al-Yawm wa-l-ghad* in *al-Ḥadīth* 1 (1927), 514, and his introduction to an article written by Musa, in *al-Ḥadīth* 2, 1 (1928), 32.

⁸⁵ Some of them, like the surrealist Urkhan Muyassar, wrote articles for *al-Ḥadīth* from time to time, although al-Kayyali did not share their points of view on poetry. Yet, he mentioned them in his biographical collections, but admitted that he did not like their "chopped verses": Kayyali, *Adab*, 292. For his criticism of the free-verse-movement see also *ibid.*, 440, and Sami al-Kayyali, *Amin Riḥānī: Nash'atuhu—dirāsatuḥu—malāmih min ḥayātihī wa-kutubihī*, Cairo: Jāmi'at al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya, Ma'had al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-'Āliyya, 1960, 59–64. For further details see Sing, "Between Lights and Hurricanes", 130f.

who criticized al-Kayyali's generation for not having gone far enough in their efforts at liberation.⁸⁶ Thus, not only was *al-Ḥadīth* a meeting point of different literary currents, but al-Kayyali himself was a collector of these differences. In his biographical collection, he took it upon himself to judge the 58 most important Syrian authors of the past 100 years as impartially as possible.⁸⁷

The nationalist stage

His outspoken way of accepting contradictions in 1948, especially when it came to Western politics, seems to mark not only al-Kayyali's general attitude, but also a turning point for his Oriental discourse. Issues such as renewal (*tajdīd*), adoption, and imitation from the West disappeared from the pages of *al-Ḥadīth* after Syrian independence and the proclamation of the state of Israel. Instead, the third stage of the liberal discourse took another, nationalist and pan-Arab, direction. Al-Kayyali was now more interested in defining differences and identities. In the first stage he had pleaded for scientific and social progress in the Orient, and in the second he was concerned with presenting the new Arab culture as a combination of Eastern spirituality and Western materialism. Now, the term "spirit" increasingly became a signifier of difference. While in the 1930s al-Kayyali had described the historical Arab empire as a melting pot of many peoples,⁸⁸ he characterized every people by a special kind of "spirit" in the 1960s: "the spirit of revenge" was Persian; "the spirit of domination" Turkish; "the spirit of destruction" Mongolian; "the spirit of fanaticism and hate" European.⁸⁹ The Arab spirit was therefore incompatible with the "mechanical culture" that al-Kayyali identified with the West in general, and with Jews in particular. Although a few anti-Semitic stereotypes could be found in

⁸⁶ Kayyali repudiated these attacks that were mainly directed against Taha Husayn, in Kayyali, *Taha Husayn II*, 9 and 17–20. Cf. the debate on *iltizām* ("engagement") in literature between Taha Husayn and his younger opponents in Verena Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement im arabischen Nahen Osten: Konzepte und Debatten*, Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 1998.

⁸⁷ Kayyali, *Adab*. See Shafiq Jabri's acknowledgment, in his foreword to the collection (ibid., 8), affirming that al-Kayyali had succeeded at this task.

⁸⁸ See for example the chapter on Aleppo in Sami al-Kayyali, *Sayf al-Dawla wa-ʿaṣr al-ḥamdāniyyīn*, Aleppo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥadītha, 1939, 47–63.

⁸⁹ Sami al-Kayyali, *al-Adab wa-l-qawmiyya*, Cairo: Jāmiʿat al-Duwal al-ʿArabiyya, Maḥad al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿĀliyya, 1969, 68f. and 180ff.

his work in the 1930s,⁹⁰ his writing was full of them by the 1950s: he now called the Jews “leeches,” “cancer,” and a “tyrannical group.”⁹¹ He directed his invective not only against the Zionist project but also against the city of New York. He saw it as in Jewish hands when he visited the United States in 1953/54, and he wrote that New York was the town which “the Jews besmirched with the ugliest form of dirty materialism that is incompatible with spirituality.”⁹² He described New York as “a big machine” that turned around nothing else but work, with the Jews as the brokers controlling everything.⁹³

Another aspect of his nationalist tone was that his plea for intellectual revolution (*inqilāb fikrī*) was now accompanied by the call for an armed uprising (*thawra ʿaskariyya*). He welcomed violence as a political means, and in 1958 he called the murdered Iraqi king and president “dirty spies” and scorned the “ten Arab traitors” who had sold their souls to imperialism, against the will of millions of Arabs who wanted to live as masters not as slaves.⁹⁴

From the mid-1950s he also integrated Islam and Islamic culture into his Arab nationalism, so that Arab nationalism and Islam formed the pillars of opposition to Zionism and Judaism. His understanding of Islam came close to the Baʿthist definition of it as an Arab religion and culture. In order to condemn sectarian or confessional cleavages, he echoed sayings by Ameen Rihani⁹⁵ and Satiʿ al-Husri that the Arabs existed before Islam and Christianity and that Arabism stood before and above everything. He made it clear that while “Islam” was the spirit of Arab nationalism, it was not the dominant attribute of the Arab nation. Therefore, the Arab’s neighbor was not a (Muslim) “Somali or a Senegalese,” but “the brother who shares with us language, culture,

⁹⁰ Al-Kayyali published, under the title “Intiqām al-yahūd” (The Jews’ Revenge), in *al-Hadīth* 7 (1933), 250–56, a translated version of Giovanni Papini’s text “Le idee di Benrubi,” the seventeenth chapter of “Il Diario di Gog” (Giovanni Papini, *Tutte le Opere*, vol. VII, Mailand: Mondadori, 1959, 360–65). In this work, Heine, Marx, Freud, Bergson, Einstein, and Trotsky stand as examples of the Jews’ dual “vengeance”: they dominate the world economically as capitalists and destroy the people’s ethics by their ideas and theories.

⁹¹ Sami al-Kayyali, *Yawmiyyāt ʿarabī fī Amrikā*, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Anjilū al-Miṣriyya, 1959, 236–43; Sami al-Kayyali, *Širāʿ fī sabīl al-qawmiyya al-ʿarabiyya*, Aleppo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sharq, 1959, 107–11.

⁹² Kayyali, *Yawmiyyāt*, 243.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Kayyali, *Širāʿ*, 6f. For the Arab rulers as traitors see also *ibid.*, 25f. For Arab traitors residing in the USA see Kayyali, *Yawmiyyāt*, 120ff. and 220.

⁹⁵ Cf. Kayyali, *Amīn Rihānī*, 55.

race, and soil.”⁹⁶ In 1949, during the controversy surrounding the new Syrian constitution, al-Kayyali pleaded that freedom of thought was the only thing the constitution had to guarantee; he denounced the Muslim Brothers’ demand that Islam be mentioned in the constitution. While the Muslim Brothers argued that the world needed spirit and faith (*rūḥ* and *īmān*), al-Kayyali claimed that fanaticism for a sect (*madhhabīyya*) was against the spirit of nationalism (*rūḥ al-qawmiyya*).⁹⁷ Therefore, it would be wrong to state that al-Kayyali had given up his liberal *habitus* altogether. Instead, a decisive shift occurred concerning the three elementary conflicts in the literary field: Islam’s place in society; women’s liberation; and freedom of thought.

Al-Kayyali replaced the former positive picture of the secular Kemalist reforms with a negative image of the Turks. In the 1920s and 1930s, al-Kayyali had expressed reservations about some superficial tendencies concerning the revolution in Turkey,⁹⁸ but he had opposed the argument that the Turks just wanted to become Europeans,⁹⁹ and had posed the purely rhetorical question whether the Kemalists would manage to Westernize Turkey and whether they would cut all ties to the Orient.¹⁰⁰ But in the 1950s and 1960s he stated that the Turks were a people without culture or history.¹⁰¹ His assumption seemed to be that a people without culture could easily be Westernized in a superficial way, whereas the Arabs with their long history and deep-rooted culture could not follow such an example.

Concerning women’s emancipation, al-Kayyali insisted in his 1953/54 debate with “an American blonde” that Arab women were different because of their special care for family life and child rearing;¹⁰² he also repeated stereotypes such as women as the “mothers of the nation”;¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁷ Sami al-Kayyali, “Ḥurriyyat al-fikr wa-ḥurriyyat al-qawl humā kull mā nurīduhu fī l-dustūr,” *al-Ḥadīth* 24, 2 (1950), 103–07.

⁹⁸ Sami al-Kayyali, “al-Inqilāb al-ijtimā’ī fī Turkiyā,” *al-Ḥadīth* 3, 2 (1929), 141.

⁹⁹ Sami al-Kayyali, “Ittijāhāt al-tajdid,” *al-Ḥadīth* 6, 8 (1932), 517.

¹⁰⁰ Sami al-Kayyali, “Ittijāhāt al-inqilāb al-ijtimā’ī fī Turkiyā,” *al-Ḥadīth* 6, 1 (1932), 40.

¹⁰¹ See especially Kayyali, *Ṣirā’*, 14ff.; Sami al-Kayyali, “Wamaḍāt min tāriḫ wa-fatarāt dāmiyya min bad’ aṣr al-inhiyār,” *Revue de l’Académie Arab de Damas* 40 (1965), 476–91; Sami al-Kayyali, *al-Adab wa-l-qawmiyya*, Cairo: Jāmi’at al-Duwal al-‘Arabiyya, Ma’had al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-‘Āliyya, 1969, 184.

¹⁰² Kayyali, *Yawmiyyāt*, 174–79.

¹⁰³ Sami al-Kayyali, “al-Mar’a fī l-mujtama’ al-‘arabi,” *al-Ḥadīth* 20, 9 (1946), 549–51.

the woman as “an eternal riddle”;¹⁰⁴ the woman as the writer’s Muse;¹⁰⁵ and female sexuality as threat and *fitna* (seduction).¹⁰⁶ His support for young Arab female writers and activists¹⁰⁷ turned out to be restricted to the public domain. It is no accident that he almost never touched on issues such as male domination in family, religion, and family law. Like most liberal nationalists he supported equal rights for women in the public arena, while justifying gender hierarchy in society by pointing to cultural identity or Arab customs and values.

Additionally, al-Kayyali’s view of Taha Husayn’s writings had changed, from praising him as the hero of freedom in the Eastern stage of his discourse to portraying him as a devout nationalist from the 1960s onward. For example, Taha Husayn’s essay *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (1938) had stunned Islamists as well as Arab nationalists, who criticized its lack of Arab or Islamic consciousness because of its claim that Egypt was not Oriental, but part of the Mediterranean region.¹⁰⁸ Al-Kayyali defended Taha Husayn’s view with different arguments at different times. Having argued in 1943 that Egyptian regionalism was not incompatible with Arab nationalism,¹⁰⁹ al-Kayyali pointed out in 1968 that Taha Husayn’s writings and attitude had always been in perfect harmony with

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Kayyali, *al-Mar’a, hādihā l-lughz al-abadī*, Aleppo: al-Maṭba’a al-Mārūniyya, 1948.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3ff.

¹⁰⁶ Kayyali, in *al-Mar’a*, 61–80, commented positively on Tawfiq al-Hakim’s stage play *Praksa aw mushkilat al-hukm*, bringing female rule into derision. He also described, in *Yawmiyyāt*, 159ff., how he met and escaped a beautiful and seductive Bahai girl in the USA, and he was disappointed when “an old Negro woman,” not a “blonde girl,” woke him up in his hotel in the morning: *ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ In 1948, Kayyali opened the pages of *al-Ḥadīth* for 13 female writers to discuss Arab women’s social problems: see *al-Ḥadīth* 22, 1 (1948), 13–31, 98–105 and *al-Ḥadīth* 22, 2 (1948), 136–48, 206. Kayyali also was one of the few writers Mayy Ziyada (1886–1941) invited after her withdrawal from the public, although he was no personal friend of hers. After his visit, he refuted the rumor that she had become insane: Sami al-Kayyali, “Sā’atān ‘inda Mayy,” *al-Ḥadīth* 12, 6 (1938), 394–97. It is not astonishing therefore that the novelist Widad Sakakini (1916–91) twice praised Kayyali’s efforts for women’s liberation as a rare male example: in *Inṣāf al-mar’a* [1950], 2nd ed., Damascus: Dār Ṭalās, 1989, 179, and in *Mayy Ziyāda fī ḥayātihā wa-āthārihā*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1969, 194f.

¹⁰⁸ For the nationalist critique see William L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati’ al-Husri*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, 136ff.; for the Islamist critique see Jundi, *al-Muḥāfaẓa*, 401ff.

¹⁰⁹ Kayyali, *Fikr*, 69–72. He had already used the same argument in 1939, when he wrote about Egypt and pan-Arabism: “Miṣr wa-l-waḥda al-‘arabiyya,” *al-Ḥadīth* 13, 3 (1939), 224f.

Arab nationalism.¹¹⁰ The same change befell al-Kayyali's judgment of Taha Husayn's *Islāmiyyāt*. At first, al-Kayyali compared some of Taha Husayn's writings on Islamic history to Greek tales¹¹¹ and praised him for having ended the sanctification of Islamic history and making the first step toward writing an "Islamic mythology"; al-Kayyali wrote that "literary sciences" could only be put in order if language and literature were no longer "canonized."¹¹² But in the 1960s, al-Kayyali claimed that Taha Husayn had revealed the truth, the true spirit, and the aims of Islam like no one else before.¹¹³ While in the 1930s al-Kayyali did not care about harmony between science and Islam or between regionalism and nationalism, he later came to affirm harmony explicitly. This can be seen as an outcome of the competition with the Muslim Brothers who claimed Islam exclusively for themselves and as a result of the nationalists' rapprochement to Islam as an integral part of "Arab" culture.¹¹⁴

Another illuminating case for the nationalist fallacy and for the metamorphoses that befell al-Kayyali's discourse is how he portrayed the work of the outstanding Aleppine thinker 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (d. 1902).¹¹⁵ Throughout his articles and special editions on al-Kawakibi, al-Kayyali rarely mentioned the leading role of Islam and the 'ulamā' in al-Kawakibi's Salafi reform project.¹¹⁶ In all his statements of 1929, 1952, and 1957 the term "caliphate" was not even mentioned; only in 1968 and 1969 does it appear in a single sentence. Al-Kayyali generally depicted al-Kawakibi as a hero and martyr of freedom and liberation,¹¹⁷ and interpreted al-Kawakibi's favorite project, to separate the caliphate from the Ottoman sultanate, as merely an Arab revolt against the Turks.¹¹⁸ While

¹¹⁰ Kayyali, *Taha Husayn II*, 35–38.

¹¹¹ Kayyali, *Taha Husayn*, 79.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹³ Kayyali, *Taha Husayn II*, 75.

¹¹⁴ See Israel Gershoni, "Arabization of Islam. The Egyptian Salafiyya and the Rise of Arabism in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt," *Asian and African Studies* 8 (1979), 22–57 and W. Ende, "Salafiyya," *EP*, vol. VIII, 906–09.

¹¹⁵ For al-Kawakibi see Silvia G. Haim, "Alfieri and al-Kawakibi," *Oriente Moderno* 34, 7 (1954), 321–34; and Silvia G. Haim, "al-Kawākibi," *EP*, vol. IV, 775f.

¹¹⁶ Raz has already pointed out the important role of *al-Ḥadīth* for the secular reception of al-Kawakibi's thought: Ronen Raz, "Interpretations of Kawakibi's Thought, 1950–1980s," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32 (1996), 179–90.

¹¹⁷ Especially in Sami al-Kayyali, "Dhikrā l-Kawākibi," *al-Ḥadīth* 3, 6–7 (1929), 401–04.

¹¹⁸ Sami al-Kayyali, "Dhikrā l-Kawākibi," *al-Ḥadīth* 26, 9–10 (1952), 537–41; Sami al-Kayyali, *Muḥāḍarāt 'an al-ḥaraka al-adabiyya fī Ḥalab*, Cairo: Jāmi'at al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya, Ma'had al-Dirāsāt al-'Āliyya, 1956/57, 87–112; Kayyali, *Adab*, 118.

the attributes al-Kayyali had used in the 1920s to describe al-Kawakibi's multi-layered identity and message were only a few ("the East"; "the Arab East"), they multiplied in 1960s: "Syrian"; "Arab"; "nationalist"; "Islamic"; "Oriental."¹¹⁹ Al-Kayyali used these terms interchangeably for al-Kawakibi although they refer to different geographic spaces and identities. The nationalist vocabulary had become more apparent and more confused at the same time. This attempt at constructing national order was meant to diminish the multi-layered ambiguities, but did so at the cost of an increasing semantic disorder.

The complicated relationship between cultural and political Arabism not only remained unsolved, it appeared to be more contradictory, the more al-Kayyali affirmed harmony. From the very beginning, *al-Ḥadīth* helped to construct a cultural pan-Arab nationalism, since it was not restricted to Syrian authors, especially because of al-Kayyali's leanings to Egyptian liberals, writers, and poets. As early as 1933, Taha Husayn praised the journal on the grounds that it was neither Syrian nor Egyptian nor Iraqi, but that Arab authors collaborated in it every month although they had never met before.¹²⁰ In 1939, al-Kayyali started to write on political pan-Arab nationalism when he discussed the Egyptian politicians' attitude toward the Palestinian question,¹²¹ pleading for pan-Arabism (*al-jāmi'a al-'arabiyya*)¹²² from Morocco to Yemen. Later, he applied a kind of culturally pan-Arab and politically Syrian framework when compiling his biographical collections on "Arabic literature in Syria from 1850 to 1950" (1959)¹²³ and in Aleppo (1956/57).¹²⁴ He set out a guideline, not wanting to restrict himself to Syrian authors who wrote in Arabic, but to include writers who were born or had mainly lived in the region that later was to become the state of Syria. This guideline could include authors living most of their lives outside of Syria (such as Satī' al-Husri) or the Arab world (George Sayda), but it excluded Lebanese,

¹¹⁹ In *al-Adab wa-l-qawmiyya*, 109ff., he called al-Kawakibi a "Syrian" writer with a "nationalist spirit," who wanted to reform the "Islamic Orient" and the "Islamic world" in order to create a "Great Arabic Empire" and fight "foreign domination."

¹²⁰ According to the account of Sami al-Kayyali's son Ihsan al-Kayyali in his unpublished lecture *Baḥth 'an majallat 'al-Ḥadīth*, Aleppo 1984, 33f.

¹²¹ Sami al-Kayyali, "Hādihā 'adad 'an Miṣr," *al-Ḥadīth* 13, 1 (1939), 1–5; Sami al-Kayyali, "Miṣr wa-l-waḥda al-'arabiyya," 2 parts, *al-Ḥadīth* 13, 2 (1939), 143–48 and 13, 3 (1939), 221–27.

¹²² Kayyali, "Miṣr wa-l-waḥda," 222.

¹²³ Kayyali, *Adab*.

¹²⁴ Kayyali, *Muḥāḍarāt*.

apart from a few exceptions (Khalil Handawi, Widad Sakakini), and Palestinians (such as Muhammad al-‘Adnani).¹²⁵

These examples act as proof that the treatment and mediation of contradictions changed between the 1920s and the 1960s. While al-Kayyali accepted multi-layered realities up to the 1950s, he from then on produced a nationalist framework in order to affirm harmony between regional and Arab identities as well as harmony between his fellow liberals’ attitude and pan-Arab policy or Islamic spirituality. These affirmations of harmony are more than just remarkable; they are an important factor when explaining the impasse of al-Kayyali’s discourse and the crisis of the intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s during the Nasserist era in general.¹²⁶ It has to be remembered that one of al-Kayyali’s main motives in founding *al-Ḥadīth* was to activate the collective intellectual struggle against political and religious interventions. While the journal fought these interventions in the 1920s and 1930s and pleaded for a constitution that guaranteed freedom of expression in 1949, it was unable to oppose the encroachment of Nasser’s regime on literary freedom in 1959. Al-Kayyali’s struggle for literary autonomy was sacrificed for the Arab cause, after more than thirty years. He had always welcomed pan-Arab and Nasserist policy, but in 1959 *al-Ḥadīth* was shut down by the united Egyptian–Syrian regime. In this case, the freedom of the press was not curbed by conservative forces, but by the so-called progressive regimes with which many liberal intellectuals like al-Kayyali sympathized.¹²⁷

The explanation for this process is both external and internal in relation to the literary field. After independence, the liberal intellectuals often acquired state jobs, became more loyal to the state, and henceforth tended to justify its actions. They also subscribed to nationalist thought more openly, which inclined them to sacrifice personal and collective

¹²⁵ Story writer and literary critic Widad Sakakini accused al-Kayyali of not having mentioned al-‘Adnani in his collection of Aleppine writers. Al-Kayyali defended himself by stating that the poet was a Palestinian. He also claimed that Sakakini played the imperialist game, wanting to eradicate Palestinians by melding them into the other Arabs. This prompted Sakakini to point out al-Kayyali’s own guideline and she mentioned that al-‘Adnani was actually born in Syria into a Syrian family, had subsequently immigrated to Palestine, and returned to Aleppo after 1948. For the debate see Widad Sakakini, *Nuḡaṭ ‘alā l-ḥurūf*, Cairo: Dār al-Fīkr al-‘Arabī, 1962, 184ff. and 239ff.

¹²⁶ For the stance of liberal and leftist writers in Egypt see Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity. Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt, 1945–1958*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002.

¹²⁷ For the Egyptian case cf. *ibid.*

freedom. Both these factors weakened their willingness to fight for autonomy in the face of state interventions. After independence, liberal intellectuals failed to distinguish between their role as intellectuals and the Arab cause. They did not or could not defend their special interest in preserving intellectual autonomy, because they identified themselves with state, society, culture, and Islam. That *al-Hadīth* “could no longer fulfil its mission”¹²⁸ was at least partially a consequence of the editor’s willingness to subordinate his own freedom to Arab ideals, thus moving consciously from intellectual to national independence, from post-colonial contradictions to the search for Arab purity, and from self-criticism to the affirmation of state, culture, and society.

Conclusion

To summarize, I want to present four points explaining the inner logic between al-Kayyali’s liberal discourse and its illiberal metamorphoses:

- (1) The changing social position of the author played a certain role: Al-Kayyali was a state official from the 1920s, but he managed to become a cultural representative of the new Syrian state. In 1949, he moved from the regional administration to the official cultural field and became director of the public library and cultural center in Aleppo; in 1954, he was elected a cultural advisor for the Syrian delegation to the UNESCO Conference in New York. Furthermore, he was also appointed to the Egyptian “Society for Historical Studies” in 1950 and elected five times to the cultural committee of the Arab League in Cairo where he held several lectures; in 1970, he was appointed a corresponding member to the “Academy of the Arabic Language” in Cairo by its president Taha Husayn. He already sympathized with the nationalist movement that held power in the 1930s and which was involved in the nation-building process before and after independence in 1946. But his subsequent affirmation of harmonies between state and nation and between intellectuals and people was directly connected to this process of social climbing, identification, and representation that was afforded by the new state. Whereas al-Kayyali articulated provocative views in the 1920s, he

¹²⁸ Sayqali, “Fihrist,” 6.

represented cultural hegemony after independence. Therefore, he invested a lot of energy in his struggle for literary autonomy when faced with a “traditional” environment that he principally disagreed with in the 1920s and 1930s. Staying independent and critical was far more complicated in a political setting whose nationalist principles in the 1950s he essentially shared, but whose authoritarian character put an end to a free press. In 1964, al-Kayyali even justified censorship because of national interests. As a member of the literary committee for the state competition of young novelists, he explained that some erotic novels had to be excluded from the competition on the grounds that they were subversive, imitations of the West, and inappropriate for Arab literature and society.¹²⁹ In the 1920s and early 1930s, however, al-Kayyali had himself used erotic pictures and novels to spread a new culture and literature and to fight for his own freedom as an editor.¹³⁰

- (2) The illiberal is an integral part of liberal discourses: As Zygmunt Bauman has argued, modern intellectuals understand themselves as “gardeners” who clear off the weeds to purify wild nature in order to organize and control the “garden” of society.¹³¹ The promised freedom for all goes hand in hand with repression of two opposing forces: the threatening “other” and the uneducated “masses.” Enlightenment, civilization, and education almost everywhere are connected with exclusion, force, and violence. In this context, it is no accident that al-Kayyali permanently pleaded for education, saw the intellectuals as the nation’s “avant-garde,” and likened journals such as his to “circulating schools.” It was no mistake, but an inherent aspect of this “gardening” work that the logic of education, purification, and control could turn more violent. In the first editorial, al-Kayyali defined his journal’s task as “to destroy corrupt thought and pernicious theories” by using “scientific” methods and “right

¹²⁹ Kayyali, *Adab*, 457.

¹³⁰ Some editions of *al-Hadith* at the beginning of the 1930s displayed pictures and drawings of topless European girls (for example, *al-Hadith* 7 [1933], 460); see also the drawings and remarks on women and lovers in Paris, in Kayyali, *Shahr*, 69–76. The illustration of an Egyptian girl in a see-through negligee (*al-Hadith* 1 [1927], 356) for Mahmud Taymur’s erotic short story *al-Ushṭa Shahāta* caused a scandal, as Taymur (1894–1973) recalls: Mahmud Taymur, “Sami al-Kayyali... kayfa ‘araftuhu,” *al-Dād* 9–12 (1972), 500f. In this context Taymur sketches al-Kayyali’s general pleasure in evoking violent reactions by printing libertine pictures or sexual allusions.

¹³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *From Legislators to Interpreters*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1989.

criteria” in literature, historiography, and social sciences.¹³² Later, he justified eradicating not only theories, but also Arab “traitors” and Jews, and his understanding of revolution changed from an intellectual to a military one. Having failed as an independent candidate in the 1947 elections, he also deplored them as “a setback by decades” because the intellectuals were a minority in parliament where quantity had won over quality.¹³³ The uneducated, with “the brain of a cave-dweller,” had the same rights as someone with “the best certificates of the highest universities in the world”; these voters only understood the language of “fanaticism, submissiveness to power, and adoration of money.” It would be misleading to attribute al-Kayyali’s justifications of violence only to the loss of Palestine, because the combination of struggle and self-victimization can be traced back to the very beginnings of *al-Ḥadīth*. That one’s life is at stake is a well-known rhetorical trope.¹³⁴ In an article about his “school in life” in 1959, he confessed that the protests and obstacles in his first years as an editor had taught him to take “blows however hard they may be . . . because it is a human’s value—whoever he may be—to back ideas and opinions that serve his countrymen best, to work his whole life for them, and to fight for the best of his abilities, even if this struggle, his pertinacious struggle, will lead him to the worst fate.”¹³⁵ Here, al-Kayyali attempted to convince his countrymen that the avant-garde, which stands high above the illiterate masses, does not struggle against them, but for their sakes, their interests, and their progress. The intellectual tried to mingle his individual and his nation’s interests and transformed his sacrifices into symbols for the whole nation’s struggle. Thus, he evoked the impression of speaking for the masses in order to legitimize his stance.

- (3) For an understanding of the liberals’ position in the game of legitimization it is important to study their relation and distinction to other discourses: From the 1930s, three opposing discourses described the state of Muslim and Arab societies and proposed strategies of how they should deal with the world, the new, the strange, and the other: the Oriental (al-Kayyali’s); the post-Oriental

¹³² Cf. Kayyali, “Fātihāt al-qawl,” 3.

¹³³ Kayyali, *Khuyūt*, 224ff.

¹³⁴ It can also be found in al-Kayyali’s description of a number of those whom he called heroes or martyrs of freedom, such as al-Ma’arri, al-Suhrawardi, and al-Kawakibi.

¹³⁵ Kayyali, *Khuyūt*, 4. The article was first published in *al-Hilāl*.

(Haykal's); and the Salafi-Islamist (Rashid Rida's) discourse. The Oriental discourse included the idea that the adoption of European elements might change the whole Eastern system while a certain nucleus would stay the same. The other two evolved around the question of how identity might be preserved in the midst of change. To make the differences more clear, I suggest a comparison to biological models:

- a. The Salafi and Islamist discourse conceived Arab society as a kind of lymphatic gland system. In this discourse, the community has to defend itself against foreign viruses and germs. As it suffers from multiple symptoms of a malady, any further invasion from the outside will worsen the progress of the illness. In the search for a remedy, the *umma* has to fall back on its own cultural resources and discriminate carefully between good and bad foreign imports.
- b. Haykal's post-Oriental discourse was psychosomatic. He claimed that no real virus had invaded the societal body but that the disease had mainly mental roots. Muslims suffer from humiliation by comparing their culture to that of the progressive, materialist West, but they should not think that way. They should use rational means to change their materialistic situation but without losing their faith.
- c. Al-Kayyali depicted Arab culture and society as an "auto-poietic system."¹³⁶ The adoption of Western models is described in terms of food, with swallowing and digestion strengthening the Arab body without altering it essentially. Although al-Kayyali discussed the two other discourses and adopted parts of their argument, he always stayed within the framework of these "auto-poietic" significations; the "liberal" framework of al-Kayyali's discourse is inherent in this basic conviction, that the Arab self had to adapt to modernity since modernity would change but not annihilate it.

¹³⁶ The term "autopoiesis" was coined to define living organisms: Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition. The Realization of the Living*, Boston: Reidel, 1980.

- (4) The metamorphoses in al-Kayyali's liberal discourse can be explained by the coexistence of two fundamental elements that were present at all times, but whose relation changed: hybridization and purification. On the one hand, an Oriental secular discourse on modernity tends to hybridize. It overcomes binary oppositions and seeks to bridge the gap between East and West and to meld the Oriental self with the European superior. On the other hand, an Arab nationalist identity discourse tends to purification. It names friends, foes, enemies, and strangers and tries to re-erect boundaries between the old and the new, tradition and modernity, educated and non-educated people, Arabs and non-Arabs, spirituality and materialism. The Oriental side of the discourse represents an open concept, oriented to progress and to the future, but it is weak in identification, while the nationalist side of the discourse is closed and strong in identification, looking back at history and heritage. The cooperation of hybridization and purification takes different forms in the three stages, as hybridization dominated in the 1920s, while purification surged ahead in the 1950s. Al-Kayyali shifted his attention from cultural hybridization to military strength, from scientific progress to ethical and spiritual values, from the adoption of European models to claiming national rights.

The liberal paradox is not a result of the conflict between cultural adoption from the West ("Westernization") and political criticism of Western colonialism and post-colonialism, as is often suggested. Rather, the paradox lies more generally in the fact that the liberals subscribed to the notion of educating the nation and to one or the other form of nationalism whose symbolic power they "misrecognized" (Bourdieu). Since nationalism erects a clear-cut division between friends and foes, it identifies political enemies from the outside and inside and works against the liberals' own intentions and convictions such as cross-cultural hybridization and a common struggle for intellectual freedom. Therefore, politics does not only threaten the autonomy of the literary field from the outside, but also from the inside—something which is especially true for a cultural and literary critic such as al-Kayyali, who was not directly engaged in politics like other liberal intellectuals (Haykal and Taha Husayn). Though his case does not speak for all liberal Arab intellectuals, it can serve as an example of the range of meanings that the term "liberal" could cover. The entanglement of liberal discourses

with science, modernity, and progress found its expression in cross-cultural hybridism: but it also resulted in the search for Arab purity, the “gardening” work of educating the masses, and the symbolic power of nationalism. It could move the “liberal” under certain circumstances very close to the “illiberal.”

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