

On Eastern Cultures: Transregionalism and Multilingualism in Iraq, 1910–38

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This chapter considers the journalistic works of Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani (1884–1969), who edited the journal *al-‘Ilm* (est. 1910 in the city of Najaf), and the short stories of Iraqi writer Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid (1904–37), in order to reflect on the politics of transregionalism, translation and multilingualism in Iraqi culture in the early twentieth century. I challenge a national narrative which held that the Iraqi state rejected the nation’s Ottoman past and its multilingual and multi-ethnic cultures. I likewise attempt to undo the notion that Iraqi culture was typified by isolated and isolationist groups, whose reading and translation practices were targeted at and limited to specific sectarian groups. *Al-‘Ilm*, I suggest, points to the multilingual and transnational milieu that existed in Najaf in the 1910s, while al-Sayyid’s works underscore the fact that transregional networks and multilingualism survived under the mandate, in a space where Arabic, Turkish, Hindi, Persian, French and German works informed the writings of key intellectuals.

In the 1910s and 1920s, and to a certain extent in the 1930s, the Iraqi reading public depended on publications coming from Istanbul, Teheran, Cairo and Beirut. Since many members of the Iraqi elite received their initial education in Ottoman schools, Ottoman Turkish was an essential language for Iraqi intellectuals, who read both original and translated works in Ottoman Turkish. Persian was a common language in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, where many students from Iran resided, and where new literary and cultural texts originating from Iran circulated. Thus, while al-Shahrastani and al-Sayyid seem very different to each other – the former being a Shi‘i *‘alim* while the latter was a Sunni socialist writer of prose fiction – both were shaped by the fact that Iraqi society was characterised by a *mélange* of cultures, languages and translations. Moreover, the late Arab-Ottoman print market cultivated important dialogues between

Sunnis and Shi'is and inspired shared conversations relating to modernity, colonialism, constitutionalism, nationalism, and various kinds of reform (Islamic, social and cultural). Both authors, then, reflected on imperial and global affairs shaped by transregional intellectual and commercial networks connecting Iraq to the Ottoman Empire, Iran and India.

Pan-Islamic Transregional Knowledge: al-‘Ilm

The year 1910 saw the first appearance of an Arabic newspaper in the city of Najaf: it was titled *al-‘Ilm* (Knowledge, or Science) and was edited by one of the city's most original thinkers, Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani. Born in Samarra in 1884, al-Shahrastani studied with leading *mujtahids* in Najaf. In 1909, he published his book *Astronomy and Islam (Al-hay'a wa-l-islam)* in which he tried to establish that certain Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions convey modern scientific knowledge about the solar system, and more generally, that a careful reinterpretation of the Muslim tradition could lead to harmonisation between science and religion. Significantly, the text referenced works of Sunni philosophers like Ibn Sina (d. 1037) and contemporary works on science by Lebanese Christian intellectuals Iskandar Ma'uf (1868–1956) and Butrus al-Bustani (1819–83), as well as articles published in the prestigious Lebanese (and later Egyptian) cultural magazine *al-Muqtataf*. Al-Shahrastani supported the Ottomans during World War I, which he saw as a pan-Islamic battle against imperialism. He was likewise involved in setting up pan-Islamic associations in the Middle East and India. He participated in the anti-British 1920 Iraqi Revolt and was consequently imprisoned and sentenced to death, but eventually released. Al-Shahrastani served as minister of education for a short time (1921–2) but resigned due to the government's pro-British policies. He later served in the Shi'i Court of Cassation (1923–34) and acted as the parliamentary deputy for Baghdad (1934–5).

Al-Shahrastani was one of the first Iraqi Shi'is to exploit the emerging Middle East print market. He read Ottoman, Persian and Arabic works, and published a variety of books on philosophy, theology, history and education. Throughout the Hashemite period, his intellectual milieu was not exclusively comprised of Shi'i *‘ulama* for it included also poets, journalists and writers from various sects.¹

Al-Shahrastani's journal *al-‘Ilm* illustrated how ideas discussed by a variety of Sunni, Shi'i and Christian intellectuals, in a variety of languages, were adapted in the Shi'i and Najafi milieu. *Al-‘Ilm* was published in the years 1910–11. Its readers were mostly Shi'is from the two Shrine Cities, although we find letters and items written by Shi'is from Baghdad and

Lebanon, as well as ones written by Sunni Iraqis (mostly editors of newspapers). The journal's aims were to study history, literature, medicine and philosophy and to spread science and knowledge.² Al-Shahrastani argued that *al-ʿIlm* meant to demonstrate that religious knowledge correlated with scientific knowledge, to support Iran, to serve Islamic unity, and to enlighten the public in Najaf by presenting them with a wide array of Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Indian journals, and some books in European languages (although al-Shahrastani admitted that he did not know any European language himself). The journals in Persian and Turkish to which he had access, however, provided him with ample translated material from European works into other Middle Eastern languages.³ Although the journal published items about themes relevant to the Shiʿi community, al-Shahrastani hoped that his publication would also strengthen the connections of Najaf to the rest of the Islamic world, and inform Muslims elsewhere about events in the Shrine City. He noted, in fact, that readers from Algeria were interested to learn more about the Family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), and that his journal might fill this void.⁴

Al-ʿIlm referenced and reprinted news-items and essays from a large number of journals and newspapers, such as *al-Ittihad al-ʿUthmani*, *al-Bashir*, *al-Iqbal* and *al-Haris* (from Beirut), *al-Manar*, *al-Muʿayyad*, *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf* (from Cairo), *al-Hadara*, *al-Rabita* and *al-Kawkab al-ʿUthmani* (from Istanbul), *al-Athar* and *al-Muqtabas* (from Damascus) and *al-Zuhur*, *al-Raqib* and *Sada Babil* (from Baghdad), as well as the publications *al-Akhaʿ* (Hama), *Islah* (Bombay), *Iqaz* (Basra), *Habl-i metin* (Calcutta), *Majlis* (Taheran), *Abu Nuwas* (Tunis) and *al-Hind al-Hurra* (Paris). Al-Shahrastani thanked the editors of Arabic journals in Baghdad for assisting his own journal. Addressing his Iraqi fellow intellectuals and writers, he expressed his gratitude to all those who seek knowledge in the Iraqi land (*al-quṭr al-ʿiraqi*), and especially in Najaf, for their warm reception of *al-ʿIlm*. *Al-ʿIlm* also celebrated the activities of the publishing houses of *al-Manar* and *al-Hilal* as institutions promulgating knowledge and science.⁵

Arabic, Persian, Indian and Turkish newspapers were important mediums through which al-Shahrastani received new ideas about Islamic reform. He was keenly aware of the publications of contemporary religious reformers, in particular of the Egyptian Sunni reformer, Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and his Syrian disciple, Rashid Rida (1865–1935).⁶ Al-Shahrastani published articles in Rida's influential journal *al-Manar*, exchanged letters with ʿAbduh and Rida, and was attentive to their attempts to trace the roots of elected and constitutional governments in the practice of consultation.⁷ ʿAbduh was mentioned a few times in *al-ʿIlm*.

An essay about the importance of purifying Islam from unwanted religious innovations (*bid'at*) and myths (*khurafa*) cited 'Abduh as a source of inspiration. The context of the essay was Iraqi and Najafi, since it portrayed superstitions and myths unique to Iraq, like the belief in a local demon called Tantal. Nonetheless, the essay's argument, namely, its call for religious reform based on harmonisation between reason and revelation, was unmistakably inspired by 'Abduh.⁸ Rashid Rida was also considered as a man whose journal, *al-Manar*, demonstrated the vital connections between Islam and modern civilisation.⁹ Although *al-'Ilm* appealed to the reading public in Najaf, whose members saw the Wahhabi backing of the salafi movement in very negative terms,¹⁰ it quoted articles from *al-Manar* on a variety of occasions. *Al-Manar*, al-Shahrastani wrote, was a progressive Arabic journal, whose exegesis was well known, and whose editor, Rida, was a great *mujtahid* and reformer.¹¹ Similarly, the Egyptian national activist and journalist, Mustafa Kamil (1874–1908), was quoted in *al-'Ilm* as saying that the sultans and caliphs of Islam had always disapproved of violence and espoused justice, knowledge and culture.¹²

Not only Sunni intellectuals, but also Christian thinkers were discussed in the journal. Al-Shahrastani alluded to the works of Shibli Shumayyil (1850–1917) (to validate his conservative position that women were mentally and physically inferior to men)¹³ and the works of historian and publisher Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), who was noted for his great contribution to the study of Islamic civilisation. The journal's articles looked at Zaydan as a man whose works, especially his magnum opus, *The history of Islamic civilisation (Ta'rikh al-tamaddun al-Islami)*, were in service of the Islamic faith. *Al-'Ilm* also referenced the fact that Zaydan's historical studies could be purchased in Iran, the Ottoman Empire and Iraq. This item intimated that it was not only al-Shahrastani who benefited from the multilingual milieu of the early 1910s; it was in fact, the entire Islamic community.¹⁴ The paper also noted that Arabic newspapers in Beirut assisted the nation with their useful articles, citing *al-Bashir*, a journal affiliated with the Jesuits, as an example.¹⁵

Even when readers did not agree with prominent Arab intellectuals they still felt the need to address their arguments. *Al-'Ilm*, for example, posted a review of the articles published in *al-Muqtataf* by a prominent Egyptian Coptic intellectual, the Fabian thinker Salama Musa (1887–1958). Musa, whom the review defined as an Egyptian philosopher, materialist and socialist, was criticised for propagating dangerous ideas which were disrespectful of the traditions of the East, denied religion its central role in public life, and ignored the Islamic responsibility to protect the rights of the weak and the needy. Pointing to his writings on the concept of the

superman, Musa was reproached for his adoration of power and for his lack of compassion for the sick and powerless. The author of the review was undoubtedly furious with Musa and wanted to deter readers from reading his works. Simultaneously, however, the piece indicates the significance of secondary translation published in *al-Muqtataf*; while it is doubtful that readers of *al-‘Ilm* had actually read Friedrich Nietzsche’s reflections on the *übermensch*, they learned about the *übermensch* from this review. At the same time, this review could be considered part of a greater body of pan-Islamic critique of Western materialism and secularism, here represented as antithetical to Islamic religious values which provided social stability and granted rights for the needy elements in society.¹⁶ Similar to Rashid Rida and Muhammad ‘Abduh who attacked European materialism, *al-‘Ilm*’s review zoomed in on one Egyptian writer, Musa, in order to convey similar ideas and, while doing so, introduced to its readership new ideas about German philosophy, as channelled by Musa.

The list of journals and thinkers referenced in *al-‘Ilm* indicates that in the Iraqi era of (somewhat modest) mechanical reproduction, Shi‘i readers utilised the Arab, Ottoman and Persian presses as a venue to learn about Islamic reform. While scholars contended that the challenge of Wahhabism activated the Iraqi cultural domain of the time,¹⁷ we see that developments in Istanbul, Teheran, Egypt and Syria were no less significant to the readers and writers of *al-‘Ilm*. In fact, Egypt was deemed so important that the works of a secular Copt, Musa, caused some alarm among the readership of a journal published in Najaf. Moreover, despite al-Shahrastani’s objections to materialism, positivism and social Darwinism, he was highly interested in the works of Christian secularists relating to science and technology.

The multilingual and translational outlook was connected to the politics of pan-Islam and the espousal of constitutional reforms. Al-Shahrastani believed in Islamic unity as a political and ideological tool to combat Western colonialism.¹⁸ *Al-‘Ilm* promoted this pan-Islamic agenda. Stories about the Muslims of tsarist Russia, the Muslims of the Sudan and Egypt under British occupation, and the Muslims of North Africa under French occupation painted a gloomy picture of the current state of the Islamic community. Moreover, colonialism was repeatedly depicted as the most momentous threat to the Muslim world. England and Russia were consequently represented as two greedy empires whose aims were to deter the progress of Muslims, and as two powers imperiling both the Ottoman Empire and Iran, whose natural resources they coveted. Within this realm, the thinking of pan-Islamic thinker and activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97), an intellectual whose own sectarian affiliations are a matter of

much controversy, assumed great importance.¹⁹ *Al-‘Ilm* praised Afghani’s activities, and printed his critique of the contemporary leadership of Muslim countries that neglected the rights of Muslims, while favouring British and Russian commercial interests.²⁰ Interestingly, al-Shahrastani’s devotion to the ideas of pan-Islam and the anti-colonial struggle during his visit to India earned him the title of ‘Jamal al-Din al-Afghani the second’.²¹

The answer to colonialism was Islamic unity, a unity between Turks, Arabs, Iranians and Indians, as well as a condemnation of ethnic solidarity (*‘asabiyya*). Quoting Sunni Syrian writer Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli (1893–1976), *al-‘Ilm* alerted its readers that the Islamic community had reached a state of stagnation due to internal divisions between Arabs and Turks, Turks and Kurds, and Sunnis and Shi‘is.²² For this reason, the paper called for safeguarding the independence of *both* Iran and the Ottoman Empire and preached for cooperation between the two political entities.²³ Quoting the Egyptian journal *al-Mufid*, *al-‘Ilm* likewise suggested that had the Muslims in India, Sunnis and Shi‘is alike, been united, the British could not have achieved their colonial goals in this land.²⁴

One of the means by which *al-‘Ilm* attempted to demonstrate the purported great powers of a united Islamic community was by providing statistics on the numbers of Muslims in the world: in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The mere mentioning of numbers gave the impression that Islam, numerically, was a significant power, and thus, if the Muslims united, they would be able to confront their colonisers. *Al-‘Ilm* also printed stories about the lot of Muslims in various parts of the world. It reported on the effects of the Ottoman constitutional revolution within the Russian Muslim community, on Muslims in Africa, Japan and China, and on their societies and their schools. An immediate hazard to all Muslims came from missionary groups, although there was hardly any danger that these groups would ever be active in Najaf. The paper thus posted the denunciation printed by the Egyptian journal *al-Mu‘ayyad* of the missionaries in the Sudan, and championed the use of Muslim propaganda against them.²⁵ Al-Shahrastani, moreover, argued that since the colonisers employed religious societies, schools, libraries, publishing houses and journals to spread their faith, Muslim reformers could use the same means in order to raise interest in Islamic civilisation, and encourage discussions concerning reason, knowledge and culture.²⁶ Creating a Muslim public sphere, via the activities of societies for Islamic learning in a variety of languages, was subsequently deemed an essential aspect of the anti-colonial struggle.

Ahmad ‘Arif al-Zayn’s (1884–1960) cultural magazine *al-‘Irfan*, which was established in Beirut in 1909 and then moved to Saida the

following year, was far more important to Arabic-speaking Shi'is, because of its wide circulation and the intellectuals it attracted. *Al-^cIrfan*, in fact, was probably the model for *al-^cIlm*, which referenced the former's items. *Al-^cIlm* was more Najafi in nature, since it allowed local writers to express local concerns pertinent to Iraq, without being fearful of Lebanese editors who might find these items not relevant to their border Arabic Shi'ic readership. At the same time, the nature of the paper's imagined community of readers was both Najafi/local and Islamic/global. Al-Shahrastani hoped that the paper's Shi'ic readership would realise that it was a part of an Islamic world, in which both Sunnis and Shi'is shared similar political and cultural concerns. The paper therefore referenced Iraq as a land to which readers belonged (*qutr*),²⁷ but also spoke of Iran and the Ottoman Empire as part of 'our country' (*biladuna al-^cuthmaniyya wa-l-iraniyya*),²⁸ and wrote about 'our Islamic nation' (*watanuna al-islami*)²⁹ and the Muslim people, using a term normally used to signify national or ethnically defined polities (*sha^cb*).³⁰ In other places, the Islamic community was seen as a national community (*qawmiyya*)³¹ that ought to communicate similar social norms (*sunan ijtimaiyya islamiyya*).³²

Al-Shahrastani's perception of Islam was very similar to its understanding within Sunni reformist circles, namely, as a system of beliefs in which reason and revelation coexisted in harmony. Our nation (*watan*) could progress, explicated one of *al-^cIlm*'s editorials, by the propagation of science and knowledge.³³ This notion was captured on *al-^cIlm*'s cover page which was decorated with prophetic traditions in praise of knowledge. Islam, according to many articles, was once a civilisation that treasured knowledge, science and learning and was capable of achieving great cultural accomplishments, which were later adopted by Europe. Al-Shahrastani's writings, however, also reflect on writings in European languages and his desire to know why Europeans study Arabic, Turkish and Persian and why they translate works from these languages into their own. He sought to assure readers that, despite Europeans' representations of Islam as an extremist religion, or a creed fitting the nature of the Easterner, Islam was a religion that had not lost its vitality.³⁴ In fact, he wrote, European Orientalists, who visit the East, take keen interest in Islamic writings, and upon their return to their homelands teach Islam in academic institutions of high repute.³⁵ Other Europeans, however, were anxious about the aptitude of Islam to attain knowledge and civilisation and wished to sabotage its powers.³⁶ Often, al-Shahrastani did not specify which of these European translations he was referring to, and yet the pan-Islamic press was very interested in translations of Islamic works into European languages and in acquisition of Islamic manuscripts by

European libraries. Al-Shahrastani knew the important Middle Eastern languages of his day, namely, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Persian. With the knowledge of these three languages he could have accessed translations of European works on Islam which pan-Islamic intellectuals like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani referenced in his journal *al-^cUrwa al-wuthqa*, and other works which appeared in journals like *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf*. In other words, through Arabic newspapers and journals that integrated European works and secondary translations, *al-^cIlm* presented its readers knowledge of the west, global politics and the Western representations of the Islamic world. Thus, despite the fact that *al-^cIlm* hailed the spread of education, especially of Islamic education based on religious reform, as the most useful venue for the revival and progress of Islam and for the guidance of the community,³⁷ it still praised Germany and Japan for the great might of their educational institutions that promoted national cohesion and solidarity.³⁸ Articles about Japan's successful reform circulated in *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Hilal* and *al-Manar*, following the Russian-Japanese war, and the Japanese victory. Japan was perceived as part of the East revolting against the anti-colonial West. These views now found their expression in *al-^cIlm*.

As part of this reformist agenda, al-Shahrastani promoted the curbing of the power of autocratic rulers by constitutional means, especially after the constitutional revolutions in the Ottoman Empire (1908) and Iran (1905). *Al-^cIlm* called for the limiting of the sovereign's powers by constitutional reform and in consultation with the *^culama*. Consequently, the paper reported that Muslims all over the world received the constitutional revolutions in both Iran and the Ottoman Empire with great enthusiasm, as they saved the nation from a state of tyranny. Information about constitutional politics was thus to be found in newspapers in Persian and Ottoman Turkish, and al-Shahrastani relied on these newspapers to glean information about the most important constitutional challenges at the time.³⁹ His translations from Ottoman Turkish and Persian were intertwined into local discourses about the virtues of constitutionalism and coloured the Iraqi print media of the years 1908–9 following the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution. Al-Shahrastani himself earnestly supported the 1908 revolution and initially supported the Committee of Union and Progress in Najaf.⁴⁰

Al-^cIlm's avid coverage of pan-Islamic and constructional themes teaches us much about Iraqi cultural politics during the early 1910s. Al-Shahrastani suggested that Iraqis, as Muslims and as Ottoman subjects, shared their cultural and political anxieties with other Muslims, and that vital connections existed between Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Later in his career, al-Shahrastani faulted the policy of the Young Turks for

privileging the Turkish subjects of the Empire over their fellow Arab Muslims. *Al-‘Ilm*, nonetheless, constantly advocated unity between Arabs, Turks, Kurds and Indians, regardless of their sectarian or ethnic identities. Al-Shahrastani’s attitude might have been shaped by his own background as a domiciled Iraqi resident of Persian origins.⁴¹ In the Shi‘i context, al-Shahrastani argued that the questions of modernity, reform and the challenges of colonialism affected both Sunnis and Shi‘is, and that Shi‘is ought to seek the advice of Sunni reformers. The oft-quoted expression ‘selective borrowing’, which usually designates the cultural adaptation of certain Western ideas in Iran, the Ottoman Empire and its Arab provinces, could also be applied to the Shi‘i community, in which ideas from both the West *and* the Sunni world were adjusted to fit the needs of modern Shi‘is. Despite much attention to Iranian affairs, the paper’s articles about the Muslims of Russia mostly reflected an Ottoman discourse, while the writings on England were not limited to the Iranian context, and covered its politics in Egypt, Sudan and India. In spite of the fact that Najaf was not directly threatened by colonialism, we observe the centrality of the theme in *al-‘Ilm*. Al-Shahrastani’s sense of peril was a result of his reading of Arab, Iranian, Ottoman and Indian journals, and possibly also the outcome of the presence of Indians (mostly pilgrims) in the Shrine Cities themselves.

Al-Shahrastani’s views should not be understood as representing ‘*the Shi‘i community*’. Undoubtedly, the illiterate southern Shi‘i tribes were more interested in questions relating to taxation and conscription (or more precisely, in avoiding them both). Some of his reform-minded rulings were not even supported by fellow Shi‘i *mujtahids*. While *al-‘Ilm* was read and written by and for Shi‘is, it referenced articles written by Sunnis, especially in the Salafi press, and on many occasions, promoted a pan-Islamic worldview that was nonsectarian in nature. Through relying on secondary translations, and an Arabic, Turkish and Persian shared print market that grew during the *nahda*, *al-‘Ilm* advanced a localised vision of what it meant to be a modern Shi‘i in a globalised world. And while today the idea that Shi‘is and Salafis could be of the same intellectual network seems utterly impossible, for the small groups of educated Iraqi-Shi‘i readers that were interested in *al-‘Ilm*, al-Shahrastani’s views seemed to have made much sense. And they carried these views into the mandatory period.

Iraqi Literature and World Literature

References in Iraqi periodicals to Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian and Indian works did not cease in the 1920s, when Iraq was under a British

mandate or even in the 1930s, when it gained its independence. This is evident in the transregional and transnational character of the works of socialist intellectual Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid. Born in 1904 to an Arab father who worked as an *imam* in the mosque of Haydar-khana and a mother of Indian-Afghani origins, al-Sayyid travelled to India in 1919, where he was influenced by socialism and Marxist thought. His experiences were later on described in his novel, *Jalal khalid* (Eternal glory, 1929). During World War I, he supported, albeit not actively, the Arab revolt, but then turned his political and social interests leftwards, because of his friendship with the socialist Husayn al-Rahhal (1900–71), a son of an Arab trader turned Ottoman bureaucrat. Rahhal's father was stationed in Berlin in 1919, where he witnessed the communist *Spartakusband* revolution. In 1924, al-Rahhal, now a student in the Baghdad school of law, formed a group intended to promote progressive ideas. Al-Sayyid joined this group and contributed to its journal, *al-Sahifa* (The paper). They took inspiration from the British *Labour Monthly* and *L'Humanité* of the French Communist party. The paper presented what its writer perceived as modern and socialist objectives, such as the need to form a new social consciousness among the peasants and the working classes, the obligation of intellectuals to liberate Iraqi women and the necessity to reformulate a post-*shari* rational legal mechanism. Although they met in an inner room of the Haydar-khana mosque in Baghdad, al-Sayyid's neighbourhood and the place where his father worked as an *imam*, the group was soon deemed heretic and sacrilegious by *ulama*. In 1926 the group established *Nadi al-tadamun* (The solidarity club), which lasted for two years.⁴² Al-Sayyid was a prolific writer and published several collections of short stories,⁴³ in addition to an earlier publication, which he termed *masrahiyya* (a play), titled *Fi sabil al-jawaz* (For the sake of marriage; Baghdad, 1921). He was similarly very active in the journalistic field and published essays, reviews and short stories in newspapers like *al-Istiqlal*, *al-Yaqin*, *al-Misbah* and *al-Hadith*. He is considered the first Iraqi ever to write novels in most studies on Iraqi literature published in Arabic; these are *Masir al-du'afa*⁷ (The lot of the weak, 1922), focusing on the struggles of Arabs in the Ottomans in Iraq, and *Jalal khalid* (Eternal glory, 1929), an autobiographically based text, depicting the stay of a young Iraqi in India.⁴⁴

Writing in an era where Iraq shifted from Ottoman to British imperial control required al-Sayyid to reformulate notions of world literature. Initially, al-Sayyid was impressed by the 'West' and deplored the fact that 'we do not imitate the West in our ethics, sciences, philosophies and art, and in our [definitions of] manhood'.⁴⁵ The remedy for Iraq's problems

was therefore to mimic the West and the Arab intellectuals who adopted the ways of Europe:

The Syrians and the Egyptians were the first amongst the Arabs to take the initial steps in the way towards progress, science and culture . . . they translated from the Western literature as much as they could, and summarised, as much as they could, from Western science and knowledge . . . We, the sons of Iraq, have remained in the rear, and could not follow their footsteps . . . Indeed, we are remote and faraway from the West.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, in the mid-1920s, he conceptualised a new characterisation of the 'Western'. To him, the world was divided into two parts – of the colonised and of the colonisers. In consequence, attitudes to the masterpieces of English and French literature needed to be revisited.

Yes, we slur Gustave Le Bon, we disdain Shakespeare; we are contemptuous of Dante, despise Voltaire, and moreover, we disassociate ourselves from their world . . . They are the enemies of true humanity and the clerics of the horrendous school of imperialism.⁴⁷

Al-Sayyid, therefore, showed no respect for the local intellectual elite who derived 'strange, wicked ideas and information . . . taken from some French philosophers' that reflected 'contempt for the East and the Eastern race'.⁴⁸ This European literature, alleged al-Sayyid, could not find ways to the hearts of Arab readers. 'After the war', he writes, 'there were modernists, from the Francophile school and from the Anglophile school, who did not feel any association with any nation or any ideology' although they monopolised the clubs and the literary salons.⁴⁹ Indeed, al-Sayyid regarded Gustave Le Bon as his most serious enemy. This was no easy decision, given Le Bon's significance in al-Sayyid's intellectual milieu.⁵⁰ Al-Sayyid was certain that a philosopher who produced such a trivial and one-dimensional description of the East could not be considered a true man of letters.

This book, on the secret of the progress of nations, was written by Gustave Le Bon, one of the most extreme French nationalists . . . Our friend equates the black and the Japanese! . . . Answer this, the petty philosophers of our country . . . Is it accurate . . . that no matter how much Japan had progressed and advanced it is still on the same level as the Africans because Japan is considered one of the nations of the East? . . . What awaits us, then, in the future? What is our goal in our lives, as we are sharing the same Eastern identity as Japan?⁵¹

The text, naturally, exposes al-Sayyid's own racism and his objection to be categorised in the same rubric as the blacks. Japan was a significant emblem to Arab and Muslim intellectuals, who took great interest in the Meiji restoration and the Japanese victory over Russia (1904–5),

which forced Russia to abandon its expansionist policy in the Far East. Japan, thus, became the first Asian power in modern times to defeat a European power. Japan's politics of restoration had stirred admiration throughout colonial Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, reports on Japan appeared in numerous Egyptian periodicals, such as *al-Manar*, *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf*, which found their way into Iraq. In Iraq, the writer Taha al-Hashimi commented on Japan's willingness to transform itself into a modern nation state. In Egypt, the national intellectual Mustafa Kamil defined the Japanese nation as an Eastern nation and perceived its military triumphs as the perfect symbol of patriotism and loyalty to the motherland. Famous neoclassical Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi composed a *qasida* glorifying the reforms in the status of Japanese women. Syrian novelist Jurji Zaydan included the Meiji among his list of famed Eastern monarchies. Rashid Rida published articles concerning the likelihood of converting Japan into Islam. The Ottomans were preoccupied with the topic as well. The Ottoman poet Mehmed Akif wrote about the Islamic spirit of the Japanese warriors while the linguist Mehmed Zeki pondered on the possible conversion to Islam of the Meiji monarch.⁵² Japan, then, became a familiar discursive touchstone in this region-wide Arabophone discourse, of which al-Sayyid was a part.

Al-Sayyid, however, adopted an entirely different view of the Africans, articulated in his critique of the movie 'The Daughter of the Moon' which was shown in Baghdad in 1922:

The pictures are moving. The music is playing. The people are clapping with happiness and wonder. Why are they clapping? Is it because the white is attacking the black? It is because the Western steps with his shoes on the Eastern. It is because an American officer ridicules an African ruler. This is the hero . . . This is the mode desired by the writer of the script and the company that produced the movie . . . But you, Easterners, how can you look and not understand? Why are you laughing at yourselves?

Disgusted by the response of his fellow Iraqis, al-Sayyid decides to go back to the cinema, now embracing a new technique of gazing. Instead of siding with the American officer, he would side with the Africans:

I came with two of my friends . . . we were silent when people cheered and cheered when silence took over . . . We clapped because those black Africans have fought against the last of the white men and defended their caves and their ruins till the last sparkle of life.⁵³

This description is parallel to another description of watching Tarzan in a colonial setting, this time provided by Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skins, White Masks*:

Attend showings of a Tarzan film in the Antilles . . . and in Europe. In the Antilles, the young Negro identifies himself de facto with Tarzan against Negroes. This is much more difficult for him in a European theater, for the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the savages on the screen. It is a conclusive experience. The Negro learns that one is not black without problems. A documentary film on Africa produces similar reactions when it is shown in a French city and Fort-de-France . . . I will go farther and say that Bushmen and Zulus arouse even more laughter among the young Antilleans. It would be interesting to show how in this instance the reactional exaggeration betrays a hint of recognition. In France a Negro who sees this documentary is virtually petrified. There he has no more hope of flight: He is at once Antillean, Bushman, and Zulu.⁵⁴

Al-Sayyid and Fanon begin with a similar assumption. The viewers in a colonised territory respond favourably to the distorted images of Africans projected to them by the film industry. Al-Sayyid is likewise aware of the institutions involved in the production of such images as the movie studios. Al-Sayyid, however, feels as if he is *already in the metropole*, primarily because the presence of the British in Baghdad obliges him to position himself against the white. He therefore decides to separate himself from the other audience members, in order to serve as an example of a subversive viewer who persistently tries to combat the images projected to him. He knows that his behaviour will attract attention, and prefers to focus attention on viewers and their responses than on the pictures shown on the screen.⁵⁵

Films in Baghdad, and in the Middle East more generally, offered newer forms of translation. Iraq in the interwar period had no film industry of its own and its viewers relied on Indian and Egyptian films, which circulated in an Eastern movie market. At the same time, Baghdadi cinemagoers watched films from Hollywood, which were reviewed in the local Iraqi Arabic press. At times, films like *Tarzan* or *King Solomon's Mines* were based on English novels. Dubbing did not exist, and the Arabic subtitles, if they existed at all, for both talking and silent films, were produced locally in Baghdad and were rolled at each cinema separately. The cinema, then, became a source of information about the world, about novels (now seen as cinematic adaptations), and about the ways in which Europe perceived the East. And yet, if the cinema offered to its Arab audience an opportunity to resist Orientalism *collectively*, as moviegoers resented the images they saw, al-Sayyid had to develop different techniques for intellectuals to offer alternatives to French and English written texts, as he suggests here:

One of the duties, which our intellectuals should perform, is to offer us, the readers, by translation, summaries or interpretations, a sample of texts written

and published in world literature, and particularly, the eastern literatures, from Russia and Turkey and their neighboring countries. This is because such texts correlate with our taste, and the psyche of their heroes is not distant from the mentalities of our people, as it is the case with these French stories, [currently] being translated by silly authors.⁵⁶

In his novel *Jalal khalid*, al-Sayyid lists a few names of writers, intellectuals and politicians the novel's hero learns to read and love: from Turkey, Abdullah Cevdet and Reshad Nuri as well as the journals *Thevret-i-funun* and *Ijtihad*; from Russia, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the works of Gorky 'the writer of the workers', and everything written by and about 'the most important Russian intellectual, the comrade Lenin'.⁵⁷ I have discussed the novel elsewhere, but it should be noted that these names are repeated in other stories, in addition to Ireland's Arthur Griffith. Al-Sayyid intended to publish a collection of Turkish stories he had translated, but he was never able to finish the project.⁵⁸

Of all Russian writers, Tolstoy was taken as a supreme example of both a novelist and a social thinker because he depicted in his works a panorama of classes and places, and subsequently presented to his readers all the facets of 'the social life in the capital of the Tzar, the Caesar of the Oppressors'.⁵⁹ The idea of portraying every aspect of the community's life in literature was associated in al-Sayyid's mind with the works of Egyptian writer Mahmud Taymur, who chose his subjects from popular Egyptian milieus. To al-Sayyid, writing in a Tolstoy/Taymur fashion enabled writers to reflect social concerns in their prose as a way of championing a battle against oppression. Tolstoy conferred some hope to al-Sayyid, by suggesting that even in the most oppressed society writers can produce the greatest masterpieces. Moreover, the merit of Tolstoy's texts is not so much their content, but rather the influence they have upon readers. They can prompt anger, induce readers to reflect upon their own quandaries and to rebel. Even when al-Sayyid critiqued Tolstoy's writing, and especially his return to religion, he marvelled at his work, which he envisioned as part of an Eastern canon.

It was the very same Eastern canon that provided al-Sayyid with images of Tolstoy. Al-Sayyid did not read Russian, but translations of Tolstoy were available in English, and partly in Arabic. Intellectuals like Egyptian political theorist and journalist Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872–1963) and the pan-Arab thinker Sati al-Husri (1880–1968) wrote about Tolstoy's works on the Russian peasantry, on social harmony and on education. Palestinian writer and novelist Khalil Baydas (1874–1949) engaged in translating Tolstoy's literary works into Arabic. Tolstoy himself corresponded with Muhammad 'Abduh in Egypt. In this sense, then, Tolstoy's

works were part of the print market al-Sayyid cherished and wanted to engage in. The circulation of Tolstoy in the Arab world meant, for al-Sayyid, that Tolstoy's writings could trigger revolution not only in Russia, but also in the Arab world and elsewhere, as its topics are pertinent to each of these bodies of readers. Arab and Iraqi intellectuals, subsequently, should follow this example.

Al-Sayyid, however, was not always faithful in his resolve to wholly avoid reading British and French writers as part of his anti-colonialist agenda, since he recurrently mentions his favourite philosopher Rousseau, the British writers Graham Wallas and Bernard Shaw⁶⁰ and especially the French novelist Émile Zola, 'the leader of Realism'.⁶¹ He believed that one could not comprehend the Russian and Turkish realistic literature without understanding Zola. Furthermore, he argued that Zola, together with Balzac, Flaubert, Renan and Sand, should be emulated as a group of intellectuals and critics who had reformed their society. Al-Sayyid almost never used direct questions from these writers and it seems that he often relied on translations. Those were indeed available in his print market. Émile Zola's works were covered in the Arab press. During the Dreyfus affair, for example, Arab socialist Farah Antun (1874–1922) hailed Zola's positions against anti-Semitism in his journal *al-Jami'a*. Jewish Palestinian writer Esther Azhari Moyal (1873–1948), who translated dozens of novels and short stories from French into Arabic, wrote Zola's biography in Arabic. Rousseau's works were reviewed and commented on by a number of writers. Earlier works were referenced and translated by Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–73), but were also key to the political theories of Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and, especially, Egyptian thinker Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888–1956). Nevertheless, there is no comparison between the large number of translated Turkish works he published, which al-Sayyid did read in the original, and the relatively fewer essays written by al-Sayyid concerning French literature.

The formulation of this Iraqi version of 'third world literature', the creation of this world of the literary 'East' that was factually comprised of everything which was not British or French, enabled al-Sayyid to carve out a domain that allowed him to speak a language of modernity, by quoting from Lenin and Griffith, for example, and yet to claim anti-Western authenticity by falling back on Indian and Turkish writers. It is worthwhile to note here that such multiple cultural strategies were also espoused by al-Sayyid's interwar Shi'i colleagues, who were associated with the journals *al-Hatif* and *al-Irfan*. They aspired to create an Eastern philosophy that would be Islamic and at the same time would speak the language of the metropole: hence, they chose to read the

works of Kant in conjunction with the works of Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi.⁶²

The need to know other languages and cultures, al-Sayyid suggested in other texts he composed, originated from the exilic location of many Iraqi intellectuals. Unable to live in Iraq under British rule, they were forced to leave; they had to learn about other languages and cultures, then, because staying in their homeland became impossible. 'I shall emigrate from Baghdad, in the same manner that the people of al-Andalus emigrated after it was conquered by the Christians', says the protagonist in al-Sayyid's short story 'al-Amal al-muhtim' (The doomed hope).⁶³ This compelling historical metaphor explains the necessity of immigration. Just as Arabs were forced to depart from the multicultural context of Muslim Spain, because it had ceased to be the tolerant land which combined the cultures of Muslims, Christians and Jews, Arab youngsters are presently forced to leave Iraq, because the land has irreversibly changed.

Iraqis suffered, many of al-Sayyid's stories suggested, because they belonged to a weak state. The notion that Middle East states were weak and therefore unable to fight for their rights in the world governed by British and French mandates was common at the time, but al-Sayyid made this into an existential problem. Like al-Shahrastani, he was interested in the definitions of strong and weak in society; and he turned to translations to reflect on the weak intellectual living in a weak state. He presented to his readers summaries of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, and compared Nietzsche's views to George Bernard Shaw's hypothesis that humanity is the latest stage in an eternal evolutionary movement of the 'life force' toward ever-higher life forms.⁶⁴ Like al-Shahrastani, however, he remained critical, negating the importance of survival, and elevated the weak to be the most useful components in society.

In some of his writings, al-Sayyid called on fellow writers to leave civilised spaces altogether. Abandoning civilisation was associated in al-Sayyid's mind with Rousseau's concept of the original man. Al-Sayyid maintained that he was one of the devotees of 'the philosophy of return to nature, championed by Jean Jacques Rousseau' and regarded himself as one of Rousseau's students. The vices of men, for Rousseau, begin when men form societies, protect their properties and engage in conflicts. Al-Sayyid's view of Rousseau originated from the transnational world of translations of which he was a part. He testified that he felt in awe of the Egyptian writer al-Manfaluti's (1876–1924) (abbreviated) adaptation of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788),⁶⁵ the story of two children whose love blossoms in an untouched natural island.⁶⁶ Let us consider again the chain of translations here: Manfaluti did

not know French and adapted *Paul et Virginie* into Arabic based on secondary translations. Al-Sayyid used the adaptation of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre by Manfaluti in order to learn more about Rousseau. Al-Sayyid, it appears, also adopted Rousseau's perception of property as the manufacturer of society's inequality given the various mechanisms men formulate for its protection. His representations of the weak intellectual, then, were not only an outcome of political discourses at this time about weak Arab nations, but also were deeply rooted in European romanticism and in romantic works that appeared in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish translations.

Al-Sayyid's image of Rousseau is interesting once compared with another intellectual who adopted Rousseau as a literary model, namely the novelist Muhammad Husayn Haykal. Like al-Sayyid, Haykal was impressed with Rousseau's call for social equality in opposition to the French conservative surroundings (*bi'a*). Akin to al-Sayyid, Haykal presented Rousseau as the abolitionist of private capital, a champion of simple, uncivilised life and the founder of a just, socialist community based upon natural instinct and inspiration. However, whereas Haykal accentuated Rousseau's notion of harmony and order to apply it to the Egyptian homeland, al-Sayyid adopted his idea of return to nature to highlight the benefits of exilic existence as an escape from a world governed by colonialism and capitalism.⁶⁷

Within this romantic framework, al-Sayyid often tried to portray himself to reading audiences as a quixotic writer, borrowing from the vocabulary of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774), which had appeared in Arabic, translated by Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, in Egypt in 1920 (Zayyat translated the work from the French). Goethe's semi-autobiographical narrative of unreturned love enthused a host of imitators; it likewise appealed to al-Sayyid, whose own protagonists are often sensitive, young thinkers who do not find a place in society. One such romantic thinker is found in the story 'al-Daftar al-azraq' (The blue notebook). The character is a young socialist, committed to 'saying something significant about the social order [*al-nizam al-ijtima'i*']'. His efforts, nevertheless, end with a nervous breakdown 'due to tremendous and violent psychological efforts' as well as to mental illness inherited from his grandfather.⁶⁸ His intellectual friends would sometimes see him, on their visits to the mental hospital: 'if they remembered him at all, one of them would sadly say: See what the profession of literature does.' Others remarked, 'Our friend wanted to have a revolution with his poems, but he should have thought how to make a living first . . . this is our lot, the people of the East, the slaves of imagination and visions, we look at the stars and forget ourselves.'⁶⁹ Additionally, some heroes in

al-Sayyid's stories contemplate suicide (like Goethe's Werther). Suicide is both the ultimate outcome of staying in a society, which slowly kills its sensitive creators, as well as the ultimate form of exile and seclusion from civilisation.⁷⁰

Al-Sayyid's romanticism also manifested itself in performative ways. Al-Sayyid marketed himself as the romantic, sad, rejected thinker. He would wear black clothes and refer to himself as 'the sad youth' (*al-fata al-ba'is*), and he refrained from laughter. Things became more serious when he told fellow Iraqi journalist Rafa'îl Butti that he had considered suicide himself because he could not bear living like this. Butti published the news in the Iraqi press, declaring that an Iraqi intellectual wished to commit suicide. Al-Sayyid was very angry about this incident. Nonetheless, the incident shows how this romantic image of the tormented intellectual also conflicted with the fact that the intellectual became somewhat of a celebrity in a national context in which Arabic print products circulated. But let us also admire this translational incident, noting how one local news item in the Baghdadi press could be inspired by an Iraqi intellectual who read an Egyptian translation of a German work which he deemed fitting to the mandatory era of the modern Middle East and to his own sufferings within that milieu.⁷¹

Sometimes, however, al-Sayyid indicated that knowing a mixture of languages, or rather pretending to know a few languages, was rather hazardous. His story 'Talib Effendi' begins in the spring of 1929, when 'Abd al-Hamid returns from a long journey in the West. 'Abd al-Hamid, who used to frequent coffee houses,⁷² learns that a tribal shaykh, Talib, is staying in his hotel.

After two days, the night when our story begins, Talib took off his turban cloth (*'amama*) and wore the modern Iraqi hat (*sidara*); he felt the taste of wine in a nightclub that was not at all common (*baladi*) and he called himself effendi after he had been known as a *mulla*. A conservative man of ancient times, he was nowadays civilised; he had entered the world of the modernists (*'asriyyun*) and the Westernised, had become a member of the upper and the middle classes, on that night. The jazz music [in the hotel's nightclub] moved his heart . . . and he felt in his inner soul a beastly desire and anxiety.⁷³

The story, then, frames the entry of the conservative shaykh into the middle classes and his becoming an effendi. The professional middle class (*afandiyya*) was the class to which al-Sayyid belonged and the class that consumed the multilingual print products al-Sayyid appreciated and produced. The shaykh seeks to be part of this world. The hotel also hosts, in addition to Talib and 'Abd al-Hamid, an older Turkish-Christian dancer

(by which I take al-Sayyid to mean an Assyrian or Armenian refugee), who had never settled in one permanent place and whose speech ‘was a jumble of Arabic, Turkish and French’. She is about to be deported from Baghdad, and hence is determined to deceive Talib. Although Talib ‘used to think she was a dancer or a French tourist, since, actually, he saw no difference between the two’,⁷⁴ the dancer reveals to him that she is

a respectable woman, of honorable origins . . . of *shami* origins. She had traveled to Anatolia when she was twelve, with her father, General Akram Pasha, who was one of the great commanders of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid. Unfortunately, her father died in Istanbul, and she had been forced to return to Syria, after forgetting her mother tongue, the customs of her grandfathers and the traditions of her people. She married and was divorced, for she could not bear children. She now has come to Iraq to visit an Arab land.⁷⁵

After spending the night with Talib, the dancer is taken by the police and exiled. Talib, regrettably, discovers that the noble Arab daughter was a prostitute. Concurrently, he discovers that his money is all gone.

Situating the rich albeit highly ignorant peasant in a sophisticated urban space is a well-known strategy in Arabic literature (as well as in European literature). It is brilliantly utilised, for example, in Muhammad al-Muwaylihi’s *Hadith ‘Isa ibn Hisham*.⁷⁶ Various urban charlatans and swindlers often dupe these urban peasants. Interestingly, the peasant in our story is duped not by an urbanite, but by a female refugee. Anxieties concerning female refugees entering into Iraq and fears about women’s sexuality and sexual powers, turn the qualities al-Sayyid once hailed – multilingualism, exchange of culture and ideas, and shared anticolonial battles – into something one ought to fear rather than celebrate. In other words, when a woman is multilingual, namely, when she is a refugee who knows how to speak (rather than write) in many languages, she can dupe and manipulate fellow men. Mastering a few Eastern languages and cultures, then, has turned into a mishmash, street talk, which typifies the way the dancer speaks. Al-Sayyid deplored the beastly atmosphere that characterised the Baghdadi nightclubs and censured the dancers and singers who found their living there, and the wine consumed by the nightclubs’ guests. Such places of desire signified to him the moral deficiencies that destroy the fabric of Iraqi society. His early works denounced such establishments and were part of what some Iraqi critics called ‘the campaign against prostitution [*al-hamla ‘ala al-bugha’*]’. His articles consequently dealt with hygiene and the dangers of wine, and in 1930, he even lamented the addiction of the youth to sad, primitive, *eastern* music. These gendered concerns, then, eliminated any concerns of multiculturalism and shared

Eastern cultures. Al-Sayyid was by no means unique here. The Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi press published campaigns against moral corruption and printed articles discussing the concerns for the future of the heteronormative household endangered by nightclub-culture and prostitution, the effects of such nocturnal activities on the male body, and the ways in which such practices endangered the future of marriage and the very fabric of society. Iraq, however, witnessed the arrival of female refugees, Armenian and Assyrian in particular, after World War I, who survived the genocidal Ottoman campaigns against their communities. In addition to fears of female sexuality, the story therefore connotes fears of these female refugees, whose multilingualism was rooted in their experiences of exile, displacement and poverty.⁷⁷

The story could also constitute a political observation about the leadership of Iraq since tribal shaykhs often acquired positions as representatives of their districts in the Iraqi parliament. The text, subsequently, echoes the contempt felt by urban intellectuals for such leaders, by alluding to their moral corruption and inability to handle the fraudulent urban sphere. The inability of the shaykh to fully understand these foreign languages, and the fact that the dancer has no real language, mark them both as outsiders in the eyes of al-Sayyid.

The anxieties regarding the inability to recognise one's true identity are also manifested in an eponymous short story about Safwat Effendi, a shady Arab who resides in London. His family is of unknown origins and therefore Safwat claimed, during the British military occupation of Iraq, that he was a Kurd. However, after being asked to provide documentation proving his origins, he denounced his Kurdishness. Soon after he chose to be an Iranian and an Aryan, since he esteemed the new Aryan revival (*nahda*) in Persia. Finally, he denied these origins, pretending to be a Caledonian admiring Iraq's pre-Islamic past under the influence of Egyptians who return to Pharaonism.⁷⁸

This story parodies national discourses and national imaginations of golden ages, particularly the Iranian return to the Sassanian past and the Egyptian return to the Pharaonic past. These are reduced to mere inventions that deluded local men tell the colonisers in order to make themselves look Western and modern. As noted, al-Sayyid was dependent on Egyptian publications. In the early 1920s, he read Egyptian literature and published articles about the Egyptian character. Furthermore, al-Sayyid's publishing house al-Matba'at al-'asriyya (The contemporary press) gained co-sponsorship from an Egyptian publishing house to produce his novel *Masir al-du'afa'*, probably because no place in Iraq was willing to undertake the economic risk involved in publishing a novel. However, in response to an

article published in *al-Istiqlal* (no. 899, 31 November 1926) which praised the Egyptian intellectuals and novelists Taha Husayn, °Abbas Mahmud al-°Aqqad and Ibrahim °Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, al-Sayyid unleashed a rather brutal attack on the three. As he perceived them to be emphasising the unique Egyptian past, he called them the enemies of Arabism. Rather than unity, then, the world of separated Arab states led to chaos, lies and deception. However, it was also the rise of more limiting forms of Arab nationalism in Iraq, in which Armenian and Assyrian women were perceived as dangerous to morality, which enabled al-Sayyid to mock the shifts from cultures and languages he so much admired as mere trickery used by unwanted elements in the homeland.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This chapter underlines the impossibility of looking at the Iraqi intellectual sphere as an isolated realm divided by sectarianism. While it is clear that in many cases both al-Shahrestani and al-Sayyid obtained abbreviated translations of a variety of texts, which appeared in *al-Hilal*, *al-Muqtataf* and the Persian and Ottoman press, let us not forget that both read and interpreted a variety of Islamic texts, which formulated their perceptions of society, and that thinkers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina also shaped their worldviews. What makes the texts authored by al-Shahrestani and al-Sayyid so interesting, however, is that they come from different sources, translations and abbreviations. They are part of an Eastern, pan-Islamic and Arabic canon, where Iraqis both needed and wanted to read publications written in Eastern languages (Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian and Urdu), which created new perspectives on the age of empires and offered new modes of resistance: from the writings of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani to the translations of al-Manfaluti. Many of these texts, then, were not merely simplified versions of Islamic or Marxist histories gathered eclectically. Rather they were works that deliberately reflected several traditions – European, Arab, Indian, Persian and Turkish. Both intellectuals authored extremely complex works, which echoed inner contradictions, tensions and the ambiguities characterising shifts between pan-Islamism and Eastern constitutionalism (in *al-°Ilm*) as well as the transitions between nationalism, socialism and third-world literature (in al-Sayyid’s fiction). Yet they remind us of the need to dig deeper, to go beyond European understandings of world literature, and not to limit the literatures and cultures of Iraq to one language, Arabic, cherished by the national elite, and to respect the profound and complex cultural choices of the intellectuals whose works we study.

Notes

1. On al-Shahrastani, see Werner Ende, 'al-Shahrastani, Sayyid Muhammad °Ali al-Husayni, known as Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill Online: www.encyislam.brill.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-6770; Orit Bashkin, 'The Iraqi Afghanis and °Abduhs: Debate over reform among Shi°ite and Sunni °ulama° in interwar Iraq', in Meir Hatina (ed.), *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: °Ulama° in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 141–64; Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Intellectuals and Culture in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 32–5, 59–60, 145; Muhammad Mahdi al-°Alawi, *Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani* (Baghdad: Matba°at al-adab, 1929); Baqir Ahmad al-Bahadili, *Al-Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani: Atharuh al-fikriyya wa-mawaqifuh al-siyasiyya* (Beirut, Mu°assasat al-fikr al-islami, 2002); °Ali al-Khaqani, 'Hayat al-mu°allif al-Sayyid Muhammad °Ali Hibat al-Din al-Husayni al-shahir bi-l-Shahrastani', in Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani, *Nahdat al-Husayn* (Karbala°: Rabitat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1969), 8–28. See also Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi°is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 193–7; °Udayy Hatim °Abd al-Zahra, *Al-Najaf al-ashraf wa-harakat al-tayyar al-islahi: 1908–1932* (Beirut: Dar al-qari°, 2005), 185–90; Meir Litvak, *Shi°i Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq: The °Ulama° of Najaf and Karbala* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110–11.
2. *Al-°Ilm* 1: 1 (1910): 6–11.
3. *Al-°Ilm* 1: 12 (1911): 577. This essay appears at the end of volume 1 in which al-Shahrastani sums up the aims of his journal.
4. *Al-°Ilm* 1: 12 (1911): 577.
5. *Al-°Ilm* 1: 6 (1910): 266–7.
6. On Rida, °Abduh and the *salafyya*, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 222–45; Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
7. On al-Shahrastani's publications in *al-Manar* and his relations with °Abduh and Rida, see Al-Bahadili, *Al-Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani*, 80, 92, 98; Nakash, *The Shi°is*, 55, 57–8; Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century, the Azhar and Shiism Between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 59; on his participation in journals affiliated with al-Azhar, 195. On the ways in which the Islamic practice of *shura* was turned into a debate about electoral process in the reform literature of the period, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 6, 144, 234–5, 300; on the problematic reception of the idea of *shura* in the Shi°i context, which points to the uniqueness of al-Shahrastani's ideas, see Roswitha Badry, 'Marja°iyya and shura', in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (eds), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 188–207.

8. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 2 (1910): 66–71.
9. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 10 (1911): 469–70.
10. See the reference to *al-‘Irfān* in *al-‘Ilm* 1: 10 (1911): 469–70.
11. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 11 (1911): 524–5.
12. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 5 (1910): 204–6.
13. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 11 (1911): 481.
14. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 11 (1911): 526.
15. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 9 (1910): 430.
16. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 12 (1911): 553. On Musa, see Vernon Egger, *A Fabian in Egypt: Salamah Musa and the Rise of the Professional Classes in Egypt* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986).
17. In the Sunni context, see in particular Hala Fattah, ‘Wahhabi’ influences, Salafi responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri and the Iraqi Salafi movement, 1745–1930’, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14: 2 (2003): 127–48; Basheer M. Nafi, ‘Abu al-Thana’ al-Alusi: An alim, Ottoman mufti, and exegete of the Qur’an’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34: 3 (2002): 465–94; Samer Traboulsi, ‘An early refutation of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s reformist views’, *Die Welt des Islams* 42: 3 (2002): 373–415.
18. ‘Abd al-Zahra, *al-Najaf*, 95–107, 207, 232–4; Al-Bahadili, *Al-Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani*, 131–40; Nakash, *The Shi‘is*, 55, 57–8; al-Khaqani, ‘Hayat al-mu‘allif’, 8–9. On the relationship between the Shrine cities, the Ottomans and the Hamidian regime, see Litvak, *Scholars*, 150–69.
19. Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani’: A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
20. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 8 (1910): 289.
21. ‘Abd al-Zahra, *al-Najaf*, 95–107, 207, 232–4; Al-Bahadili, *Al-Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani*, 131–40, 57–8.
22. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 8 (1910): 374.
23. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 10 (1911): 434–6.
24. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 4 (1910): 180–1.
25. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 5 (1910): 208.
26. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 12 (1911): 577.
27. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 2 (1910): 137.
28. *Al-‘Ilm*, 1: 7 (1910): 336.
29. *Al-‘Ilm*, 1: 7 (1910): 336.
30. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 4 (1910): 146–7.
31. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 9 (1910): 395.
32. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 9 (1910): 395.
33. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 4 (1910): 146–7.
34. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 6 (1910): 250; *al-‘Ilm* 1: 2 (1910): 51–8.
35. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 2 (1910): 51–8.
36. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 4 (1910): 154.
37. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 4 (1910): 150.
38. *Al-‘Ilm* 1: 5 (1910): 234–6.

39. *al-‘Ilm* 1: 8 (1910): 298; *al-‘Ilm* 1: 10 (1911): 476; *al-‘Ilm* 1: 5 (1910): 194; *al-‘Ilm* 1: 6 (1910): 250.
40. On the debates about constitutionalism following 1908, see Al-Bahadili, *Al-Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani*, 126–31; ‘Abd al-Zahra, *al-Najaf*, 46–58; Muhammad ‘Ali Kamal al-Din, *Al-Najaf fi rub‘ qarn mundhu sanat 1908: Haqa’iq wa-watha’iq wa-mudhakkarat min ta’rikh al-‘Iraq al-siyasi* (Beirut: Dar al-qari’, 2005), 139–53; 7–8, 23–7; Nakash, *The Shi‘is*, 50–5.
41. Al-Bahadili, *Al-Sayyid Hibat al-Din al-Shahrastani*, 237–9; ‘Abd al-Zahra, *al-Najaf*, 237–8.
42. On al-Sayyid, see ‘Ali Jawad al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid: Ra’id al-qissa al-haditha fi l-‘Iraq* (Beirut: Dar al-adab, 1969); Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 389–403; Ja‘far al-Khalili, *al-Qissa al-‘iraqiya, qadiman wa-hadithan* (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-ma‘arif, 1957), 186–92; ‘Abd al-Ilah Ahmad, *Nash‘at al-qissa wa-tatawwuruha fi l-‘Iraq* (Baghdad: Dar al-shu‘un al-thaqafiyya al-‘amma, 1986), 193–236; ‘Umar al-Talib, *Al-Fann al-qisasi fi l-‘Iraq al-hadith* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Andalus, 1971), 195–6.
43. His collections of short stories include *Masir al-du‘afa’* (The lot of the weak) (Baghdad, 1922), *al-Nakabat* (The catastrophes) (Baghdad, 1922), *Hayakil al-jahl* (Temples of ignorance) (Baghdad, 1923), *al-Qalam al-maksur* (The broken pen) (Baghdad, 1923), *al-Tala’i‘* (The avant-guard) (Baghdad, 1929), *Fi sa‘a min al-zaman* (In an hour) (Baghdad, 1935).
44. All novels and collections of short stories were collected in 1978 in Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid, *al-A‘mal al-kamila li-Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, eds ‘Ali Jawad al-Tahir and ‘Abd Allah Ahmad (Baghdad: Dar al-hurriyya, 1978).
45. Al-Sayyid, ‘Qissat al-da‘if’ (The story of the weak), *al-A‘mal*, 160.
46. Al-Sayyid, ‘Qissat al-da‘if’, 160.
47. Al-Sayyid, ‘Bi wajh Shakespeare’ (In front of Shakespeare), *al-A‘mal*, 209.
48. Al-Sayyid, ‘al-Ma‘rak al-adabi’ (The literary campaign), *al-A‘mal*, 255.
49. Al-Sayyid, ‘al-Daftar al-azraq’ (The blue notebook), *al-A‘mal*, 488.
50. On Le Bon, see ‘Abd al-Hamid Rushdi, *Al-Zahawi: Dirasat wa-nusus* (Beirut: Dar maktabat al-hayah, 1966), 125; al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 121. On Le Bon in the Arab world, see also Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 3rd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 122–5; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 173.
51. Al-Sayyid, ‘al-Ma‘rak al-adabi’, 255.
52. On Japan, see Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 109–110; Michael F. Laffan, ‘Watan and Negeri: Mustafa Kamil’s *Rising Sun* in the Malay world’, *Indonesia Circle* 69 (1996): 156–75; Roxane Haag-Higuchi, ‘A Topos and its dissolution: Japan in some 20th-century Iranian texts’, *Iranian Studies* 29: 1–2 (1996): 71–83; Klaus Kreiser, ‘Der Japanische Sieg Über Russland (1905) und sein echo unter den Muslimen’, *Welt des Islams* 21: 1–4 (1981): 209–39.

53. Al-Sayyid, 'Riwayat bint al-qamar' (The narrative of the daughter of the moon), *al-A'ḥmal*, 230–1.
54. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), 152–3.
55. Al-Tahir refers to the fact that al-Sayyid believed that cinematic narratives were artistically equal to written narratives as he called both genres *riwayat*. The popularity of the genre among young Iraqis in the inter-war period must have motivated al-Sayyid to publish this article. See al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 119–20.
56. Al-Sayyid, 'Ba'ḍ qisas turkiyya' (Some Turkish stories), *al-A'ḥmal*, 434. See also al-Khalili, *al-Qissa al-iraqiya*, 196.
57. Al-Sayyid, *Jalal khalid*, *al-A'ḥmal*, 306; Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 162.
58. Al-Khalili, *al-Qissa al-iraqiya*, 196; Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 162.
59. Al-Sayyid, 'Hadithan' (Two stories), *al-A'ḥmal*, 429.
60. Al-Sayyid, 'al-Daftar al-azraq', 484–9; al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 119–20, 146–7.
61. Al-Sayyid, *Jalal khalid*, *al-A'ḥmal*, 306.
62. On 'Eastern' and 'Western' philosophies, see Muhammad Sharara, 'The will of power and its impact in life', *al-ʿIrfan* 19: 3 (March 1930): 294–302; and Muhsin Sharara, 'The ideal community', *al-ʿIrfan* 19: 3 (March 1930): 312–19. These articles appeared in Arabic but the notes from which this material is drawn do not give those titles.
63. Al-Sayyid, 'al-Amal al-muhtim', *al-A'ḥmal*, 356.
64. Al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 84–6.
65. Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti (trans./adaptor), *al-Fadila, aw, Bul wa-Firjini li-Barnardin di San Piyir (mulakkhkhassa)*, (Cairo: al-Matba'at al-rahmaniyya, 1923).
66. Al-Sayyid, *Jalal khalid*, *al-A'ḥmal*, 296.
67. Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 55–60. Al-Talib claims that his romanticism was influenced by the *mahjar* school of poetry. See al-Talib, *al-Fann al-qisasi*, 88.
68. Al-Sayyid, 'al-Daftar al-azraq', 484–9
69. Al-Sayyid, 'al-Daftar al-azraq', 488.
70. On al-Sayyid's views about suicide, see 'Awni's letter titled 'Fikrat al-intikhar' (The idea of suicide), *al-A'ḥmal*, 219.
71. Al-Khalili, *al-Qissa al-iraqiya*, 192.
72. Al-Sayyid, 'Talib Effendi', *al-A'ḥmal*, 523.
73. Al-Sayyid, 'Talib Effendi', 524.
74. Al-Sayyid, 'Talib Effendi', 525.
75. Al-Sayyid, 'Talib Effendi', 525.
76. Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, *Hadith ʿIsa ibn Hisham, aw fatra min al-zaman* (Cairo, Muhammad Sa'īd al-Rafi'i, 1923).
77. Al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 24–5, 148; al-Khalili, *al-Qissa*

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- al-‘iraqiya*, 191–2, Ahmad, *Nash’at al-qissa*, 224–8; Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 194.
78. Al-Sayyid, *al-A‘mal*, 545; *Masir al-Du‘afa*’s front page, *al-A‘mal*, 77; al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 75, 102–3.
79. Al-Sayyid, *Masir al-du‘afa*, *al-A‘mal*, 77; al-Tahir, *Mahmud Ahmad al-Sayyid*, 75, 102–3.

