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Arabic and Aramaic in Iraq: Language and Syriac Christian Commitment to the Arab Nationalist Project (1920-1950)

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Chapter 5

Across communal lines: secular journalism

Thanks to the *nahḍa*, Christians, Jews, and Muslims had found common ground in the use of the Arabic language by the end of the nineteenth century, and a shared intellectual space was created. In the previous chapter, we saw the results of this through the employment of Standard Arabic and the shared medium of journals. But like the scribes of the manuscripts and the Assyrian intellectuals, these authors primarily wrote with other Syriac Christians in mind, using the networks within their churches to do so. In this chapter, I discuss authors who actively stepped beyond their communal lines, either by working together with non-Christians or by publishing in secular journals without ever referring to their religions. After looking at the situation before World War I and before the creation of the state of Iraq, I discuss three of the most important Syriac Christian authors who belong to this category: the well-known linguist and author Anastās al-Karmalī, the prominent journalist and politician Rafāʾil Buṭṭī, and the only woman active in journalism in this period, Paulina Ḥassūn. The three authors were Christians from Syriac heritage, but all three went beyond the boundaries of their churches. Anastās al-Karmalī was a Carmelite father, and as such he was obviously a religious person. However, with his linguistic interests in the Arabic language, he had an audience in mind that was broader than (Syriac) Christians. Rafāʾil Buṭṭī is known to be of Syriac Orthodox descent, but actively opposed the influence of religion within Iraqi society. Paulina Ḥassūn,

who left the country after a short period of journalist activity, wrote for a general audience of women and men.

In 1908, the Young Turks took power in Istanbul and reinstated the Ottoman constitution. The constitution allowed a greater freedom of speech, and while the effects in the longer term were limited, causing a boom of literary and journalist activity and a genuine optimism among intellectuals throughout the empire.¹ This immediate effect was also visible among Syriac Christian authors in areas that were later to constitute the state of Iraq. The late Fā'iq Buṭṭī, Iraqi historian and son of the famous Rafā'il Buṭṭī, writes in his recent Arabic-language *Encyclopedia of Syriac Journalism in Iraq*, published by the Iraqi Kurdish Ministry of Culture and Youth, that the role of the Syriacs (*al-Suryān*) was similar to the "role of the great men of culture and journalism among the Arabs and the Kurds."² Buṭṭī mentions the year 1869 as the start of Iraqi journalism with the publication of the journal *al-Zawrā'*. The first Syriac Christian engagement in Syriac journalism in Iraq took place in 1902, when the Dominicans started the journal *Iklīl al-Wurūd* ("Crown of Roses") in Mosul. From that year onwards many Syriac Christians were involved in journalism as editors or authors of journals and newspapers. For Buṭṭī, the first who took part in the "field of general Syriac journalism" was the Chaldean author Dāwud Ṣālīwā (1852–1921), who published the journal *Ṣadā Bābil* ("Echo of Babylon"). With "general Syriac journalism" he probably meant journalism for a general audience instead of a religious journal. *Ṣadā Bābil* ran from 1909, shortly after the Young Turk revolution, until the beginning of World War I.³ This journal was highly political, arguing against Turkification and in favor of the use of the Arabic language. While the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution came with a sharp increase of freedom of expression, Dāwud's views on the Ottoman language policies were apparently too extreme to be uttered freely, as Buṭṭī mentions that he was arrested several times and eventu-

¹Keith D. Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 68ff.

²Buṭṭī, *Mawsū'at*, 8.

³Fā'iq Buṭṭī, *Mawsū'at al-ṣaḥāfa al-suryāniyya* (Encyclopedia of Syriac journalism), 11.

ally banished to Kayseri (Anatolia) in 1914.⁴ Nevertheless, the years of his journal's publication clearly show the existence of commitment to the Arabic language and Arabism as opposing the Turkifying policies of the late Ottoman Empire among Chaldeans in Iraq before World War I.

Journalism in Iraq dramatically expanded after the war. In Buṭṭī's earlier general book on journalism in Iraq, which aimed at giving a comprehensive overview of what was published, he mentions for the period 1914–1921 the establishment of 68 new periodicals, for the period 1922–1930 72, and for the period 1930–1939 96 new periodicals, excluding satirical publications.⁵ Some of these were published for a short while, others for multiple decades. After this period the number of periodicals becomes extremely high. The Syriac Christians significantly contributed to this.

Ideally, this chapter should also have discussed some of the Iraqi communists with a Syriac Christian origin. Hanna Batatu and, more recently, Orit Bashkin list various Christians in their discussions of Iraqi communism, but without giving details about how the fact that they were Syriac Christians influenced their positions in communist circles and how they identified. Batatu only mentions that most Christians were “Arabized Chaldeans.”⁶ Unfortunately, the type of sources that I used do not allow for a study of this topic, but a detailed look into the lives of some of the prominent Syriac Christian communists may fill in this gap in the future.

The circle around Anastās al-Karmilī: Arabic linguistics

Anastās al-Karmilī (1866–1947) is known as a famous linguist of the Arabic language, but he was also a priest. His ecclesiastical adherence

⁴Ibid, 12. Kayseri was a common place of banishment. Noémi Lévy-Aksu, *The Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire: The Aftermath of 1918* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 74.

⁵Fā'iḳ Buṭṭī, *Al-mawsū'a al-suḥufiyya al-'irāqiyya* (Damascus: Al-Madā, 2010).

⁶Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 424.

is rarely mentioned in his biographies. Al-Karmilī's parents had different backgrounds: his mother was from current Iraq and belonged to the Chaldean Catholic Church, while his father was a Maronite from current Lebanon.⁷ His parents met in Baghdad, which is also the place where al-Karmilī was born and where he eventually died.⁸ His commitment to the Arabic language is unanimously acknowledged by Muslims and Christians alike. However, he was certainly interested in his Syriac heritage.

Anastās al-Karmilī was born in Baghdad in 1866. He received his education at the Carmelite school devoted to Saint Joseph and at the Catholic *Madrasat al-ittifāq al-kāthūlikī*, both in Baghdad. After his education, he started teaching at the Carmelite school at the age of 16. When he was 20, he left Iraq for a long time, first going to Beirut to teach Arabic and learn Latin and Greek. He later became a monk in Chèvremont close to Liège, which was an old center of pilgrimage where a Carmelite monastery was built in 1874,⁹ and went to the Sanctuaire Notre-Dame de Laghet in the extreme southeast of France, which was a Carmelite monastery until 1903,¹⁰ and Montpellier. In 1893 he became a priest and a year later he returned to Baghdad to teach Arabic and French at the Carmelite school in Baghdad. In this period, he started to write linguistic articles about several ancient and modern languages of the Middle East.¹¹ In 1911 he started with the publication of *Lughat al-ʿArab* (Language of the Arabs). When the war broke out, he was banished to Kayseri in Anatolia. After having returned to Baghdad, he started a new publication, the weekly journal *Dār al-salām* (House of peace). This journal appeared for three

⁷Fāṭima al-Muḥsin, *Tamaththulāt al-nahḍa fī thaqāfat al-ʿIrāq al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2010), 359.

⁸Asmā' Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, "Shakhṣiyyāt Baghdādiyya: Anastās Mārī al-Karmilī... riḥlat ḥayāh ḥāfila wa-dhikrā khālida", <http://www.iraqnla-iq.com/baghdad%20memory/shakseat27.htm> (accessed 4 November 2015).

⁹"La Basilique de Chèvremont," <http://users.skynet.be/jchoet/chevrehist.htm>, accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁰Henri Costamagna, "Historique du sanctuaire de Notre-Dame de Laghet," *Nice historique* (2000): 70. Available online: <http://www.nicehistorique.org/vwr/?nav=Index&document=3403>

¹¹Rafāʿil Buṭṭī, "Al-mahfā al-ʿIrāqī al-jadīd / La nouvelle académie arabe de Mésopotamie," *Lughat al-ʿArab* 4:7 (1926): 387–88.

years until 1921, when he travelled to Europe and the United States to acquire materials for a printing press.¹²

For our purposes, the most important publication by Anastās al-Karmilī is *Lughat al-‘Arab*, which already started before World War I but was then interrupted (1911-1914), and which continued many years later, after the war, in the years 1926–1931. In total, nine volumes came out. We have already seen this journal in Chapter 1, as it gave a description of what the word “Iraq” meant before World War I and the creation of the state. *Lughat al-‘Arab* was however primarily a linguistic journal dealing with all kinds of issues concerning the Arabic language and its origins.¹³ I have not been able to see issues of *Dār al-salām*. According to Fā’iq Buṭṭī it was set up by the British authorities for reasons of propaganda after their occupation of the country.¹⁴

Lughat al-‘Arab, both before and after World War I, was in the first place a purely linguistic journal. It published articles about classical and colloquial Arabic, and about the ongoing reform of classical Arabic because of its modern needs—as we would say, the emergence of Modern Standard Arabic. The journal also featured reviews of linguistic and literary works inside and outside Iraq. Both Christian and Muslim authors wrote in it, including important Muslim authors such as the Egyptian Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī.¹⁵ Much attention was given to the correct way of using Arabic, for which it contained a question and answer section. The focus on purity is not different from the common line of thought in discourse surrounding the Arabic language in this period, including the goals of the Arabic language academies. The anxiety to do it right is visible in an article that printed the Arabic text of the agreement between Turkey, Iraq and Britain about Mosul, which was signed in 1926. A footnote warns the reader that while there are strange words in these texts, they have not been corrected because

¹² Anastās al-Karmilī, “*Sanatunā al-rābi‘a* / Notre ive année,” *Lughat al-‘Arab* 4:1 (1926): 1.

¹³ The pre-war issues of *Lughat al-‘Arab* are available at the Bibliothèque Orientale in Beirut. The full journal was furthermore digitized and is available on the website *al-Maktaba al-waqfiyya lil-kutub al-muṣawwara*: <http://waqfeya.com/category.php?cid=132>.

¹⁴ Fā’iq Buṭṭī, *Al-mawsū‘a al-suḥufiyya al-‘irāqiyya*, 43.

¹⁵ Fā’iq Buṭṭī, *Al-mawsū‘a al-suḥufiyya al-‘irāqiyya*, 34–35.

this would not do right to history.¹⁶ Apart from its linguistic articles, its post-war edition contained a monthly update on general news in Iraq. This news was mainly political without criticizing the government and frequently contained news about the King. The journal's only language was Arabic, but throughout its existence many article titles were provided with a translation into French.

Two of the journal's main contributors were the Syriac Orthodox Rafā'īl Buṭṭī and Yūsuf Rizq Allāh Ghanīma. Rafā'īl Buṭṭī is discussed below. As a contributor of *Lughat al-‘Arab*, he shows more than in his later more political publications his interests in the Arabic language and literature. Yūsuf Ghanīma (1885–1950), was a Chaldean author from Baghdad who was from the generation above Rafā'īl Buṭṭī but who was like him politically active. For some time he taught Iraqi history at the *Dār al-Mu‘allimīn* in Baghdad.¹⁷ He should not be confused with Mār Yūsuf VII Ghanīma, Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church in the period 1947–1958.

An article in the fourth year mentions the project of setting up a language academy in Baghdad, of which Anastās al-Karmilī was elected to become one of the founding members, together with the well-known Muslim poet Ma‘rūf al-Ruṣāfī, who was inspector for Arabic instruction in government schools at the time and who is generally seen as a liberal poet who was also a forerunner of women's rights.¹⁸ By 1926, the Ministry of Education had allocated money for this project. This language academy (*majma‘ lughawī*) was probably modelled on the famous Language Academy of Damascus, which was founded in 1919, but it was established earlier than the Language Academy of Cairo, which foundation happened in 1932.¹⁹ However, after its official establishment not much has been heard of this initiative, and the establishment of a real academy had to wait until 1948,

¹⁶ “*Al-mu‘āhada al-‘Irāqīyya al-Inklīziyya al-Turkiyya al-muta‘aqqida fī Anqara fī 5 Ḥazīrān sanat 1126* / Traité Iraquo-anglo-turc,” *Lughat al-‘Arab* 4:1 (1926): 26.

¹⁷ Haytham al-Jabūrī, “*Al-Nashaṭāt al-thaqāfiyya li-al-mukawwin al-masīhī fī al-‘Irāq: min awākhir al-qarn al-tāsi‘ ‘ashar ḥattā ‘ām 1939*,” *Majallat markaz al-dirāsāt al-insāniyya* 5:2 (2015): 79.

¹⁸ Rafā'īl Buṭṭī, “*Al-mahfā al-‘Irāqī al-jadīd* / La nouvelle académie arabe de Mésopotamie,” 385–98. About Ma‘rūf al-Ruṣāfī, see Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 115.

¹⁹ Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, 226–27.

when the Iraqi Academy of Sciences (*al-Majma' al-'ilmī al-'Irāqī*) was created.²⁰

The journal gives little information about the political position of the authors. The high number of references to the state of Iraq and its institutions, as well as its continuous focus on the Arabic language, indicates its support for the state of Iraq and its developing Arab character. Apart from that, it appears to take a neutral stance. A moderately pro-British attitude could be distracted from an obituary of the British traveler and archaeologist Gertrude Bell, who died in 1926 in Baghdad and who had great influence on the British policies in Iraq. This may be seen in connection to the fact that Anastās al-Karmilī's earlier journal *Dār al-salām* was funded by the British for propaganda purposes. In addition to that, Rafā'īl Buṭṭī mentions in his memoirs that he used to have arguments with Anastās al-Karmilī about his political views, which Rafā'īl considered too pro-British. If not pro-British, *Lughat al-'Arab* cannot be seen as an Arab nationalist journal in any case.

Despite the lack of clear political expressions, *Lughat al-'Arab* was a true example of a linguistic and literary common ground for Muslims and Christians and more than *al-Najm* or (*Lisān*) *al-Mashriq* a product of the Arab literary *Nahḍa*. The journal shows that the Christian Anastās al-Karmilī was recognized as an expert on the Arabic language, given his inclusion in the Iraqi language academy and the consultation of his journal in a question and answer rubric on questions about the correct and pure use of the Arabic language. Together with Rafā'īl Buṭṭī, Yūsuf Ghanīma, and other Syriac Christian authors who wrote for the journal, they took pride in the Arabic language and showed that it was not "owned" by Muslims. The journal did not directly discuss religious issues, but it did not eschew either Muslim or Christian religious themes whenever those were relevant for linguistic purposes, such as the Dominican printing press or Islamic terminology in the Arabic language.

²⁰ Muḥammad al-Bakā', "Al-majma' al-'ilmī al-'Irāqī: bidāyat al-nash'a wa-al-ahdāf," *Al-lughat al-'arabiyya: ṣāhib al-jalāla*, http://www.arabiclanguageic.org/view_page.php?id=1932 (accessed 30 March 2018).

Rafāʾil Buṭṭī: identification as an Arab

Rafāʾil Buṭṭī (1899–1956), the father of the above-mentioned historian Fāʾiq Buṭṭī, was considered by many the “father of Iraqi journalism,” and indeed his pioneering role is evident from the large number of his publications.²¹ He is one of the few Syriac Christians in Iraq of the early twentieth century who regularly come up in histories that do not focus on Christianity. He was a very active intellectual, and also played a role in Iraqi politics, as he accepted a post as a Minister of State in 1953.²² Rafāʾil Buṭṭī is a relatively well-known figure in Iraqi historiography, both among Arab and Western historians. As an influential politician, outside and inside parliament and even as a minister of state, he is one of the main figures in Peter Wien’s important work on the variety of political tendencies in Iraq in the 1930s.²³ In this work, Rafāʾil’s Arab nationalism and tendency towards the right-wing ideology of the *al-Ikhāʾ al-waṭanī* party are stressed, and while being an Arab was an inseparable part of his identification, his Syriac Orthodox roots should not be ignored. He is important in this dissertation because he is one of the few Syriac Christians in this period who deliberately retreated from the Christian environment that they grew up in, leading to frequent clashes with the clergy. He had clear ideas about the position of (Syriac) Christians in Iraqi society. There are a considerable number of places in his publications where he expresses these views. Equally important is the publication of his memoirs and notes in 2000 by his son Fāʾiq Buṭṭī.²⁴ The notes and memoirs come from the notebooks and agendas he had left after his death, and most of the notes are not dated. The large amount of texts have been edited and provided with context about his life by Fāʾiq Buṭṭī.²⁵ As such, they should be used with caution. Nevertheless, many of the notes speak for themselves and are extremely insightful and tell us much about Rafāʾil’s ideas about (Syriac) Christianity. In the following sections, I give a short biographical introduction and then focus on the question

²¹<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=235578>

²²Matthew Elliot, *Independent Iraq: British Influence from 1941–1958* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 177.

²³Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*.

²⁴Rafāʾil Buṭṭī, *Dhākira ʾIrāqīyya*, two volumes (Damascus: Dār al-Madā, 2000).

²⁵Buṭṭī, *Dhākira ʾIrāqīyya*, volume 1, 5ff.

how Rafāʿil combined his Arab nationalism with his Syriac Christian origins, based on these memoirs and his work as a journalist.

Rafāʿil was born in Mosul in 1899 as the son of a weaver.²⁶ He was lucky to receive his primary education at the Dominican primary school in Mosul, which he finished in 1913, just a year before it was closed because of World War I.²⁷ In the same year he started working at his very young age of 13 as a teacher in a school belonging to the Syriac Orthodox church called Mār Tūmā, where he was appointed thanks to his knowledge of French and Arabic. With the money he earned he contributed to the sustainment of his family.²⁸ He continued doing this until 1919.²⁹ The director of this school was Nematalah Denno, whom we already encountered in Chapters 2 and 4. In addition to Arabic and French, the subjects that were taught in this school included Syriac, Turkish, liturgy and religious education according to the Syriac Orthodox faith, in addition to subjects like arithmetic and geography. After his father died in 1917, he went to Baghdad in 1919 to enter the well-known boarding school called *Dār al-muʿallimīn* (House of teachers), where he was to receive training as a teacher.³⁰ At this time he already showed an interest in journalism, even though—as he wrote—it was just because journalism in Baghdad would allow him to make some money on the side. Searching for work, he met Anastās al-Karmilī,³¹ who agreed that he could work for him by writing for his weekly journal *Dār al-salām*. He also started writing for the daily newspaper *al-ʿIrāq*, starting his journalist career. In addition to that, he supplemented his income by teaching Arabic to

²⁶He grew up as a Syriac Orthodox in a large religious family under poor circumstances. Buṭṭī, *Dhākira ʿIrāqiyya*, volume 1, ed. Fāʿiq Buṭṭī (Damascus: Dār al-Madā, 2000), 39.

²⁷Ibid., 42. The Dominican school was reopened in 1935—see Chapter 1.

²⁸Ibid. This is the type of communal schools that were taken over by the Iraqi government in 1920—see Chapter 1.

²⁹Ibid., 55.

³⁰Ibid., 48. About half of the teachers of this school were Egyptian. A list of students in his cohort shows that there was a mix of Muslims and Christians from various places in the country. This institution, in English rendered as Teacher Training School, was reportedly established in Baghdad already in 1918. Walther Björkman, “Das irakische Bildungswesen und seine Probleme bis zum zweiten Weltkrieg,” *Die Welt des Islams* 1 (1951): 181.

³¹Ibid., 48.

a French-speaking person.³² After finishing his education in 1921, he wanted to stay in Baghdad because he saw no future for himself in Mosul. His mother and siblings came over, despite his doubts whether he was able to support them in Baghdad.³³ He had to find a job now, and he started as a teacher of Arabic in place of Anastās al-Karmilī in the Carmelite school of Saint Joseph, although it did not take long until he was fired because he had used a text about Islam for teaching Arabic (see below). From 1924 onwards, he was affiliated to the literary journal *al-Ḥurriyya* “Freedom.” While he is not mentioned as owner or editor of either publication, various sources mention him as coeditor. In the same year, he started studying law in the Law Faculty in Baghdad, despite his wish to study abroad in Europe or the United States. Rafāʿīl mentions that he initially did not get permission to study law, because he had no secondary school diploma, and that Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī, who was general director of education, personally intervened to prevent the permission from being granted. Eventually the ministry granted his permission after it was established in court that the Dominican school in Mosul was “among the superior preparatory schools” according to the former Ottoman administration.³⁴ After he finished school in 1929, he received the title of lawyer, which he said helped him being taken more seriously; however, he never became active as a lawyer.

In 1929 he started publishing his own daily newspaper called *al-Bilād* “the Country” together with the Armenian journalist Jibrān Malkūn, who came from Syria,³⁵ for which they ordered a printing press from London. The personal importance of this project for Rafāʿīl’s career is stressed in his memoirs.³⁶ *Al-Bilād* was a general political newspaper and highly critical of both the British mandate and the ruling government. Between 1930 and 1932, publication was suspended a number of times by the government and it sometimes operated under different names. In March 1932, a few months before the in-

³²Ibid., 49.

³³Ibid., 54.

³⁴Ibid., 61.

³⁵Anonymous, “*Maḥaṭṭāt fī ḥayāt al-ṣuḥufī al-mukhaḍram Sajjād al-Ghāzī*,” February 24, 2016, *Al-Madā Supplements*, accessed September 8, 2018, <http://www.almadasupplements.com/news.php?action=view&id=14965>.

³⁶Ibid., 64.

dependence of Iraq, Rafāʿil Buṭṭī was arrested together with the well-known author Fahmī al-Mudarris (1873–1944), after the publication of an article that heavily criticized the government: he was banished to Koy Sanjaq and to Kirkuk consecutively, and was able to return after almost two months.³⁷ The journal continued until 1963, after Rafāʿil's death, when it lost its permit.

According to Peter Wien, he was an important person among the “Young Effendia,” young intellectuals and army members who obtained political influence in Iraq from the 1930s onwards. They had come of age in postwar Iraq under the British mandate, and caused a paradigm change as they started to replace the “Sherifian officers,” who had served in the Ottoman army and who had come to power thanks to the British. Born in 1899, Rafāʿil came to adulthood in the time that the Iraqi state was being established. In the young republic, he became convinced that Arab nationalism was the future of the country, and together with the other Young Effendia, he spent the rest of his life to the advancement of this idea. It was through his journal *al-Bilād* that Rafāʿil exerted an important part of his political influence. The journal endorsed the right-wing Arab nationalist *al-Ikhāʾ al-waṭanī* party when it was created in 1930, and included articles by a number of other nationalist authors among the Young Effendia.³⁸ Apart from that, the journal did not have a consistent political line beyond the support of Arab nationalism.³⁹ Rafāʿil himself could not be seen as a consistent supporter of the *al-Ikhāʾ al-waṭanī* party either,⁴⁰ but he certainly shared its strict Arab nationalist world view, as we see below. Apart from his activities as a journalist, Rafāʿil's political career consisted of his membership of Parliament for multiple terms from 1935 onwards.⁴¹ Between 1946 and 1948 he stayed in Egypt. Eventually, he became minister of propaganda for a year in 1953.

³⁷ Buṭṭī, *Mawsūʿat*, 66–67.

³⁸ Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 53.

³⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁴¹ Anonymous, “Rafāʿil Buṭṭī: amīr al-ṣaḥāfa al-ʿIrāqīyya,” *ʿIrāqīyyūn min zaman al-tawahhuj* 1489 (2009): 2.

In conflict with the clergy

Rafāʿil Buṭṭī occasionally expressed his views about Christianity in Iraq. He regularly expressed his dislike of religious fanaticism (*taʿaṣṣub dīnī* in his words), among some Christians in the country. Occasionally, his opinions caused him to clash with ecclesial authorities. This clash was related to his secular ideas and his positive attitude towards Islam.

The conflicts started when he was in his twenties. Sometime between 1921 and 1923, when he replaced Anastās al-Karmilī in the Saint Joseph school, he had published an article about the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad in *al-ʿIrāq*, which he used for teaching in class. In his memoirs, Rafāʿil writes how it caused his dismissal:

After the students had spread throughout the school the matter of my article and the fact that I had taught it to them in class, and after some of them had passed the matter on to their families, including people who were strict in their Christianity (*naṣrāniyyatihim*), tumult rose in the monastery of the Carmelite fathers and the councils of Christian clergy in Baghdad. I was removed from teaching and deprived from 150 rupees monthly above my salary with the *al-ʿIrāq* newspaper.⁴²

His choice to include a text about Islam in his Arabic lessons was clearly not appreciated by the religious leadership of the school. Rafāʿil interprets this here as a symptom of the strict religious views of some of the students.

His frustration with the role of religion in education is visible in the attacks against him in the religious journal *Nashrat al-aḥad*, the Catholic journal edited by the Syriac Catholic priest ʿAbd al-Aḥad Jurjī. While I have not been able to consult this journal, one of these attacks is narrated in Rafāʿil's memoirs. After a speech he delivered in 1923 to the yearly assembly of an institution called the Education Forum (*al-Muntadā al-tahdhīb*), which was a nationwide institution, he had apparently gone too far according to the clergy represented by this journal, as they wrote:

⁴²Ibid., 56.

Nobody deviated in their speech except the author Rafāʿil Afandi Buṭṭī, because he spoke about freedom of thinking and religious fanaticism (*al-taʿaṣṣub al-dīnī*) and took all religions for one and descended together from heaven, while we all know that the religions are different.⁴³

Despite their sharp criticism, Rafāʿil is recognized as an *adīb* (intellectual) despite his rather young age of 23. In Rafāʿil's (written) response he writes that he has been quoted inaccurately about saying that all religions were one, but stresses his view about how differences in religion should not cause difficulties in society:

I said the following in this regard: "Our land in the East is the land of the prophets. For that reason, our fate is—thank God (*wa-al-ḥamdu lillāh*)—[that we have] many different religions. Nevertheless, this difference has become the reason of our misfortune and our decline, because we have adopted it as a means to fight and quarrel, even though [the difference] does not justify to take these differences in religion as an excuse for segregation (*al-tafarruq*) and for planting the seeds of schism; to the contrary, it should improve with us the agreement about the work that will benefit the country and elevate its cause." Which means:

The majority of the religions prevailing in Iraq are religions of the *muwaḥḥidīn* (that is, those who believe in the existence of one god), which are religions that have descended from heaven, and all of these are one in their objective of human happiness and elevation of their cause, and all of them teach us tolerance and sincerity with our brothers, children of one homeland (*abnāʾ al-waṭan al-wāḥid*), to live in peace and to reach our goal of the sophisticated dear life, in which there is no religion telling us to separate."

...

⁴³ Ibid., 57.

That is all I told on the topic of religions and our unity, witnessed by hundreds of listeners. As for your admonishment to me that I said “It is not necessary to separate between us by difference of religion, *milla* (I think that you mean with this word the *ṭāʾifa*, because it does not have this meaning in Arabic)⁴⁴ and *madhhab*, because we are all of one race (*ʿunṣur*),⁴⁵ from one Father, from one piece of clay, from one homeland (*waṭan*), and we aim at one goal,” I said this indeed and even went further than that, and those who heard the speech support this statement.⁴⁶

What exactly was the line Rafāʿil crossed here? Coexistence between the different religions in Iraq as such was not frowned upon as such by the clergy, or at least not by those Catholic clergy who took part in Iraqi public life, which included the editors of *Nashrat al-aḥad*. It was certainly not a problem for Anastās al-Karmilī, who was active in the same kind of circles, given his collaboration with Muslim authors. The key to this issue may rather be sought in his appreciation of other religions than Christianity. The fact that he openly “thanked God” for the existence of multiple religions in Iraq may have been a bridge too far. The issue was possibly more problematic because Rafāʿil was not only a Christian, but also started his intellectual life with help of the church, because of his primary education in the Dominican school in Mosul, his work as a teacher for the Mār Tūmā school, and his journalistic activities for Anastās al-Karmilī. More

⁴⁴The word *milla* here reflects the Ottoman Turkish term *millet* and can even be considered a loan from Turkish. In the course of the emergence of Modern Standard Arabic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many Arabic words for political institutions and phenomena were created by taking over the Young Ottoman terminology in Ottoman Turkish, which often consisted of older loans from Arabic. While the word *millet* eventually comes from the Arabic *milla*, it was not used in that way in Arabic and only obtained this meaning in Ottoman Turkish. While, as Kees Versteegh notes, this term “never gained currency in this sense in Arabic political terminology,” unlike words such as *ḥukūma* from Turkish *hükümet*, it should be no surprise that the generation who was raised with knowledge of Ottoman Turkish occasionally used this word in its Ottoman Turkish meaning. Rafāʿil corrects them, and at the same time he shows that the Arabic *ṭāʾifa* can be considered a synonym of the Ottoman Turkish *millet*. Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, 223.

⁴⁵This word may also mean “species.”

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 57–58.

than other secular authors, Rafāʿil explicitly departed from ecclesial life.

In addition to that, the clergy may have been at unease with Rafāʿil's apparent view that religion should be of no importance for one's position in society. This becomes more visible in a lecture he delivered at the same assembly of the Education Forum in 1926. At that time, he spoke about the necessary changes the people in Iraq had to make in order to move society forward. In the lecture, which was published in the non-confessional journal *al-Ḥurriyya* of which he was the co-editor, he explicitly speaks to the audience as "sons and daughters of Iraq." He calls the "recent past" (*al-ams al-qarīb*) of Iraq the "age of darkness" and "the black age," referring most probably to the Ottoman era. He denies that the Iraq of his days is the same as that of the recent past, and that while there is much unemployment, there is now at least hope.⁴⁷ After expressing the need for people to have "the courage to say the truth and [to have] honesty in speech," blaming journalism in Iraq to be cowardly and uncritical, he speaks about the necessity of educational reform:

The third subject in the curriculum of the new life is the reform of education. It is not possible to reform education without making the schools social (*ijtimāʿī*) and pure. I mean, schools have to be taken away from sectarianism (*ṭāʾifiyya*), the sectarian (*madhhabī*) and religious (*dīnī*) teachings have to be removed from it, and these teachings have to be restricted to religious institutions.⁴⁸

This last statement was apparently too much for part of the audience, as the following footnote is added:

Among the people who were present at the party was his beatitude Mar Yūsuf ʿImmānūʿīl, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, and a group of clergy from the different

⁴⁷ Buṭṭī plays here with the similarity of the Arabic words *ʿamal* "work" and *amal* "hope."

⁴⁸ Rafāʿil Buṭṭī, "*Minhājūnā fī al-ḥayāh al-jadida: al-khuṭba allatī alqāhā Rafāʿil Afandī Buṭṭī fī al-ḥalqa al-sanawiyya al-kubrā al-muntadā li-al-tahdhib fī Baghdād 2 ayyār 1926*," in *al-Ḥurriyya* 2:10 (1925–1926): 563.

Christian sects (*ṭawāʿif*). I did not say my last words before the Patriarch left the foyer of the meeting place, and the clergy present followed him...⁴⁹

The rejection from the side of the Chaldean patriarch to accept even to listen to an appeal to separate religion from education shows the sensitivity of the issue. These responses from clergy are similar in strength to his removal from the Saint Joseph school, which we saw above.

Not affected by the departure of the clergy, Buṭṭī goes on to speak about the role of women in society. After arguing for mixed-gender education, which was not common in Iraq until far in the 1940s (see Chapter 1), he devotes an entire paragraph to the need for women to take part in society like men. The last part of Buṭṭī's speech concerns the necessity for the people of Iraq to study Western languages. Calling Western civilization the "highest human culture" that he knows, he states that "everyone who is interested in true knowledge certainly has to be educated in the western languages, at least one of them," in order to be able to adapt Western knowledge. Here, a sharp dichotomy between east and west comes to the fore. Buṭṭī stresses explicitly that he regards Iraqis as "easterners" (*sharqiyyūn*), and sets it off against "westerners" (*gharbiyyūn*).⁵⁰

In Rafāʿīl's whole speech, he never speaks of any religion explicitly. By doing this, he might have wanted to express more convincingly that these categories are irrelevant. At the same time, Rafāʿīl refers to Iraq and the Iraqi people several times, suggesting that for him people of all religions and languages are equal, being Iraqi citizens. While Iraq's "recent past," or the Ottoman era (see above), is "the dark age," which is only useful to talk about in order to learn from mistakes, the "remote past," meaning the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, has its value in providing a common history for the sake of nationalism. Even though

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ This is in contrast to the idea of many contemporary Egyptian nationalists, who regarded their country as part of Europe. For example, as Yasir Suleiman points out, to the Coptic Egyptian nationalist Salāma Mūsā (1887–1958), it was clear that Egypt belonged to Europe rather than to the East, and that "the ascription of an Eastern identity to Egypt is an absurdity which must be resisted and ridiculed." Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity*, 180–1.

Rafāʿīl recognized that using ancient civilizations for modern-day nationalism is “on the pretext that we are grandsons of these peoples,” and that “these claims need much evidence,” Rafāʿīl the value of referring to ancient civilizations was its usage for nationalist purposes in itself.⁵¹ In other words, while referring to ancient origins may compromise the truth, it has a function in nationalism and therefore it may be justified.

From Assyrianism to radical Arab nationalism

While Rafāʿīl was Syriac Orthodox, there was no doubt for him that identified as an Arab and that this was of great importance to him. In his memoirs, he writes: “I feel that I am Arab from a noble Arab origin connected to al-Ḥīra and its inhabitants and maybe his chiefs. But I do not understand why I have these thoughts, even though I cannot prove it, nor do I put value into descent.”⁵² The idea that his origin was from al-Ḥīra, which he acknowledges to be unfounded, is significant: this was the most important city of the pre-Islamic Arab Christian Lakhmid dynasty. An implication of this is that he considered himself of Arab origin rather than Arabized.

Rafāʿīl had a very high esteem for the Arabic language, which is clear from the way he talks about the language in his memoirs. He enjoyed teaching the language and its literature. In the period that he replaced Anastās al-Karmilī as a teacher of Arabic, he wrote: “I make the boys drink the love of the Arabic literature. They devote themselves to the study with urgent desire and laudable activity; they get acquainted in their life with the eloquence of the Arabic language.”⁵³ He also acknowledged its connection to Islam. According to his son, he “started his day by reading some *āya*-s from the “wise account” (*al-dhikr al-ḥakīm*), because the Noble Quran is a great teacher of philology, teaching us how to write in Arabic.”⁵⁴ Rafāʿīl’s identification as an Arab came to the fore in his political and journalist activities as well, as we have seen above. In this section I show how Rafāʿīl went from

⁵¹ Rafāʿīl Buṭṭī, “*Minhājūnā fī al-ḥayāh al-jadida*,” 560.

⁵² *Dhākira ʿIrāqīyya*, part 1, 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

identifying as an Assyrian to a form of nationalism that was so strict that it seems to contradict his progressive ideas about religion and education of women.

Rafāʾil Buṭṭī did not grow up with Arab nationalism. Instead, in his youth in Mosul, he was influenced by Assyrianism for some time, as he admits in his diary, partly writing about himself in the third person:

I am by virtue of my origin a Christian (*naṣṣrānī*) in Mosul from a middle class that had become poor, who was born from illiterate parents, and who entered the well-known missionary school of the Dominican fathers, and then before graduating started to teach at the praised school of the *ṭāʾifa* (the Mār Tūmā school of the Syriac Orthodox)⁵⁵ under the protection of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and who learned the Syriac language (*al-lughā al-suryāniyya*) and taught it to the children, and attended the church to pray two times a day with the students, and who lived some years in a religious atmosphere and with the Christian Syriac Orthodox sectarian (*ṭāʾifiyya*) limitations. His [Rafāʾil's] teacher and deacon Nematallah Denno⁵⁶ had the greatest influence on him in directing the intellectual and cultural inclinations—even though he was by nature different from it in doubt and freedom of thought and inclination toward rebellion, so that he took over from this intellectual life that the Syriac Orthodox are the descendants of the ancient Assyrians (*al-Āthūriyyīn*) in Mesopotamia (*fī arḍ bilād al-nahrayn*).⁵⁷

This passage shows that there was an inclination towards Assyrianism at the Syriac Orthodox school of Mosul at the time when Rafāʾil taught there. This was in the period 1913–1919 before the establishment of the state of Iraq, mainly comprising the years of World War I, in which Assyrianism among Syriac Orthodox Christians was indeed at a high point. It also shows that Rafāʾil, who gives a rare insight into the Syriac Christian element of his identification in this passage,

⁵⁵Part of the Arabic text.

⁵⁶For Nematallah Denno, see Chapter 2.

⁵⁷Rafāʾil Buṭṭī, *Dhākira ʿIrāqīyya*, part 2, 158.

considered it necessary to explain why he was influenced by Assyrianism. The ironic tone in which it is written, talking about himself in the third person throughout the fragment, can be explained by the lengths he went to denounce his former Assyrian identification and in his account on what problems it caused later in his political and journalistic activities. He describes that his secret became known because he had written the phrase “the Assyrian Library” on all books that he had acquired when he lived in Mosul, which he then sold to others. In addition to that, in the period immediately after moving to Baghdad where he attended the school for teacher training (see above), he still identified as Assyrian:

And what is more that some who do not have ethics took into consideration that I wrote on the student form at the *Dār al-mu‘allimīn* to the question about religion and school (*madhhab*) that I was an “Assyrian Syriac Orthodox Christian” (*masīḥī suryānī urthūdhukṣī āthūrī*) with all naivety and good intentions...⁵⁸

This story was later revealed as he became active in politics and was used to mock him. Apart from his later conviction that an Assyrian identification was not correct, he gave the following main reason why he did not want to be identified as Assyrian:

Especially because those who call me thus do not mean to call me Assyrian in the sense that I am from the ancient Iraqis who lived in Mesopotamia in bygone times, but they insinuate that I am Assyrian, meaning *Tīyārī*,⁵⁹ who are the emigrated Christian nation (*al-qawm al-naṣārī*) of Nestorians who came together with the British campaign occupying Iraq in World War I, under leadership of their Patriarch Mār Shim‘ūn, whose origins were from some regions of Iran and the Ottoman Empire. (The government of Iraq had granted a vast land and the well-known events of 1933 had happened—the manoeuvre of the Assyrians.) I have indeed written against the abuses of the

⁵⁸Rafā‘il Buṭṭī, *Dhākira ‘Irāqīyya*, part 2, 159.

⁵⁹Tīyārā is a region of Hakkari, where many of the Assyrians in Iraq had fled from during World War I.

foreigners in these days an article in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Jihād* of the *Wafd*⁶⁰ while I lived in Cairo, defending the Christians of Iraq and their freedom and identity under the protection of the flag of the Iraqi state ... Like I am Mosuli from the Syriac Orthodox, the Assyrians are Nestorian Chaldeans. The difference between the two races (*al-ʿunṣurayn*) is enormous.⁶¹

Rafāʿīl was therefore most concerned by the risk of being identified as one of the Assyrians who had come from the Hakkari and Urmia regions. This tells us two things. First, also in his own time there was confusion about the meaning of the word Assyrian. When Rafāʿīl wrote on the registration form of the teacher seminary in Baghdad that he was an “Assyrian Syriac Orthodox Christian,” he had an Assyrian identification in mind, by which he used the same identification as the Assyrians from the Hakkari and Urmia regions, without being one of them. In other words: the way he used “Assyrian” here was much broader than what we see elsewhere in Iraq in this period and included the other Syriac Christians with their origins within Iraq. As he speaks of the Assyrians as a race (*ʿunṣur*) in the last part of the fragment, this suggests that after embracing an Arab identification, he did not deny the existence of an Assyrian race, but denied being part of it, seeing his former identification as a mistake. By the time that Rafāʿīl was accused of being an Assyrian, the word had become so much associated with the Assyrians from the Urmia and Hakkari regions that its wider interpretation was almost forgotten by Iraqi society at large. Second, this fragment shows how harshly Rafāʿīl thought of the Assyrian leadership in the period leading towards the Simele massacre of 1933. In line with nationalist thought, he portrays them as foreigners who worked together with the British and who, despite everything they received from the government, started a campaign against Iraq. This leads us to another set of fragments, in which Rafāʿīl explains his ideas about what it meant to be an Arab and what Iraq should do with people who do not identify as such.

Who are the Arabs? The Arabs are those whose language is Arabic or who live in the Arab country (*al-bilād al-*

⁶⁰This newspaper was published in the years 1931–1938.

⁶¹Rafāʿīl Buṭṭī, *Dhākira Irāqiyya*, part 2, 159–160.

‘*arabiyya*), and, in both situations, without any loyalty (‘*aṣabiyya*) that prevents them from integration in Arab nationalism (*al-qawmiyya al-‘arabiyya*).⁶²

In this passage it becomes clear that Rafā‘īl’s definition of the word Arab was close to the definition of Sāṭi‘ al-Ḥuṣrī (see Chapter 1), and that of George Antonius, with a great emphasis on the Arabic language, and at the same time wider: those who do not speak Arabic but live in an Arab country are also included. In addition to that, Rafā‘īl includes an important condition: the loyalty of an Arab should be with the Arab nation, and only the Arab nation. Without mentioning any groups explicitly, he creates room to include speakers of other languages than Arabic who were nevertheless loyal to the Arab nationalist project, such as some Kurds and Aramaic-speaking Syriac Christians. Rafā‘īl then goes on to define the borders of the “Arab country,” which included all countries where Arabic was spoken including the countries of North Africa, and to mention the merits of Arab culture. It becomes more interesting if he makes explicit what he expects from those with people with foreign, i.e., non-Arab, loyalties:

The nationalist culture is a tool for Arabization (*ta‘rīb*): Arab nationalism imposes that in the Arab homeland (*al-waṭan al-‘arabī*) no groups organize with a foreign nationality (‘*unṣuriyya ajnabiyya*), who feel a loyalty different from the Arab loyalty even though they carry the nationality of the state (*jinsiyyat al-dawla*). These groups must Arabize if they wish to stay in this homeland, and the Arabs must make it easy for them to fulfill this for unity and harmony between all citizens. The culture of Arab nationalism is a means that guarantees the requested Arabization.⁶³

In other words, the non-Arabs of Arab countries must Arabize if they want to remain in the country. The word use for “Arabization” (*ta‘rīb*) is formed in the same way as the word for Turkification (*tatrīk*) against which Arab authors in Mesopotamia and elsewhere on the eve

⁶² Ibid., 196.

⁶³ Ibid., 197–98.

of World War I agitated so fiercely. It also partly resembles the Turkish assimilationist policies of the Kurdish population in the southeast of Turkey. One important difference is, though, where the Turkish nationalism of the early twentieth century had ambivalent views to its non-Muslim communities as regard to the question if they should assimilate or not, for Rafāʿil there was no question that Arabic-speaking and Arabized Christians would be able to participate equally within Iraqi Arab nationalism.⁶⁴ The message is probably mostly directed towards Assyrians and Kurds who refused to identify as Arabs. Although no Assyrian or Kurdish state exists, he considered their loyalty being directed to something foreign. About Syriac Christians like himself, who despite their non-Arab heritage willingly participated in Arab nationalism, there was no loyalty question at all. The above statement can be considered one of the strongest rejections of Assyrianism in this period of Iraqi history coming from Christians.

Paulina Ḥassūn: early Iraqi feminism

Paulina Ḥassūn (Arabic: Pūlinā or Būlinā) was born in 1865 in Palestine. Her father was from Mosul and her mother from Palestine, and she lived in Palestine and Egypt before she came to Iraq.⁶⁵ Like for Anastās al-Karmilī, her biographies never mention her ecclesial affiliation, but it is almost sure that she was Syriac Catholic or Chaldean. Paulina Ḥassūn was active in Iraq as a journalist for a very short time: from 1923 to 1925. The reason for her to come to Iraq was to work in Baghdad for a cousin from her father's (Iraqi) side, Salīm Ḥassūn, who had been writing for the Dominican journal *Iklīl al-Wurūd* (see above),⁶⁶ but who was now preparing a moderately nationalist jour-

⁶⁴For the ambivalence in Turkish nationalism of the early Republic of Turkey regarding the non-Muslims, see Emmanuel Szurek, "Minorities or Minoritization? Uncertainties Regarding the Politics of Names and Identity in Interwar Turkey," in *Arabic and its Alternatives: Religious Minorities in the Formative Years of the Modern Middle East (1920-1950)*, ed. Heleen Murre-van den Berg et al., forthcoming.

⁶⁵Ṣabīḥa Shaykh Dāwud, *Awwal al-ṭarīq ilā al-nahḍa al-nisawiyya fī al-ʿIrāq* (Maṭābiʿ al-Rābiṭa: Baghdad, 1958), 204.

⁶⁶Paulina Ḥassūn's cousin from her father's side was a relatively well-known author, of whom it is known that he studied in the Dominican school in Mosul and worked for the Dominican journal *Iklīl al-Wurūd*, of which one of the languages of publication was Neo-Aramaic. Ibrāhīm Khalīl al-ʿAlāf, "Salīm Ḥassūn 1871-1947 wa-

nal called *al-‘Ālam al-‘Arabī*, which was published from 1924 to 1952.⁶⁷ She started in 1923 the first journal for women in Iraq, named *Laylā*. After two years of publication, the journal ceased to exist in 1925 because of insufficient funds. After that, Paulina left Iraq back to Palestine and would not return anymore.

The first issue of *Laylā* appeared in October 1923.⁶⁸ The subtitle, printed on the front page, reads “Laylā, for the sake of the renaissance (*nahḍa*) of the Iraqi woman.” The date of publication was indicated both according to the Christian and Islamic calendar. It was published in what is indicated as a new printing press in Baghdad, belonging to “Ḥassūn, Murād and their partners,” which is probably the printing press of her cousin Salīm for which she came to Iraq. The second page of the first issue introduces the journal as “The first women’s journal that appeared in Iraq.” For the phrase “women’s journal,” the Arabic has *majalla nisā’iyya*, which could also be translated as “feminist journal.” It then explains the aims of the journal:

Discusses all what is useful and new related to knowledge, art, literature, society, and especially education (*tahdhīb*) of young women, raising of children, health, family, and all other things related to housekeeping.

Established for families, especially Iraqi families, for the sake of benefit and amusement of men, women and children.

[*Laylā*] is one of the representatives of the Arab women renaissance (*al-nahḍa al-nisā’iyya al-‘arabiyya*).⁶⁹

This type of comprehensive list of topics was also common for other journals, including the ones we saw before, but the topics related to “housekeeping” (*tadbīr al-manzil*) are special for this journal. The explicit inclusion of men in its audience suggests that it was meant

al-ṣaḥāfa al-‘Irāqīyya al-mu‘āṣira, *al-Ḥiwār al-mutamaddin*, March 14, 2009. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=165636> (accessed March 27, 2018).

⁶⁷ Butti, *Mawsū‘at*, 33–35 and Šabiha Shaykh Dāwud, *Awwal al-ṭarīq*, 204.

⁶⁸ The entire journal is available online as part of the *World Digital Library* of the Library of Congress and was digitized in cooperation with the Iraqi National Library and Archives. <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/3054/>.

⁶⁹ *Laylā* 1:1 (1923): 1–2.

to be more than a lifestyle magazine for women, and indeed, the journal surely had a certain degree of change in society in mind, especially concerning the call for education of women.

At the beginning of this issue, Paulina Ḥassūn starts with an opening word in which she explains why this journal is necessary. She immediately connects this cause with the future of Iraq:

Feeling for the heart of Iraq

Some of those people think that the appearance of a women journal in Iraq is “among the luxuries that we do not need at the moment, and [that] the call for a renaissance (*nahḍa*) of the Iraqi woman wastes our time...” And those people are used to do [things] without spirit, and maybe they are among those who are “buried alive.” (*al-wāʿidīn*)

But why [do they have] these reactionary thoughts? And why [illegible] the thunder of living voices calling for fresh renewal?

To God, oh heralds of life, and seekers of what is good for the country (*al-bilād*), you are the spirit of Iraq (*rūḥ al-ʿIrāq*)! You are the heart of Iraq!

The heart (*qalb*)⁷⁰ of Iraq is striving for a total and real renaissance, the renaissance of “all” (*al-kull*), which contains “for all” promotion, strength and happiness. The heart of Iraq knows that its rage will not be cured, unless the renaissance (*nahḍa*) comprises its girls. They will receive in full their right from societal renewal, to reform their situation, and with them the situation of the nation (*al-umma*).

The heart of Iraq has announced its feeling and ardent love, with a strong “beating.” Poets sing the bravest songs about it, and orators and authors keep on explaining its most precise senses with clear signs (*bi-āyāt bayyināt*).⁷¹

Paulina Ḥassūn, despite her recent arrival in Iraq, immediately connected the fate of the women in Iraq to the fate of the young Iraqi

⁷⁰May be interpreted as “spirit.”

⁷¹Paulina Ḥassūn, “Feeling for the heart of Iraq,” *Laylā* 1:1 (1923): 4–5.

nation as a whole. She frequently uses the word *nahḍa*, which can be understood as a renaissance of women on its own, but which in her case is connected to a more general *nahḍa*, because she writes “unless the renaissance (*nahḍa*) comprises its girls.” Her words contain numerous references to God, and despite her Christian origin, she does not even refrain from using typically Islamic phrases, such as the Quranic *bi-āyāt bayyināt* (with clear signs, or *āya*-s).⁷²

About the name of the journal, the woman’s name Laylá, she writes that it was inspired by a poem by the well-known Iraqi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī (1863–1936), a neo-classicist poet born in Baghdad with a Kurdish origin:⁷³

Immediately after my arrival in *Dār al-Salām*,⁷⁴ I was invited to give a speech at the assembly organized by the Education Council (10 June 1923) to honor the great poet al-Zahāwī. I saw and heard there, for the first time the great man. He recited his poetry with longing and yearning, and he screamed:

“I am in love with Laylá, and she is my home country (*mawṭini*)”

And both words “Laylá” and “my home country” descended in my heart with a descend of revelation. I was driven to adorn the journal with the name “Laylá,” while it was in my mind to call it “Girl of Iraq.”⁷⁵

The Laylá in al-Zahāwī’s poem is undoubtedly the same as the Laylá his closet drama *Laylá wa-Sumayr*, which was published later in 1927 in Anastās al-Karmilī’s *Lughat al-‘Arab*. In this piece, there is a love relationship between Laylá and the man Sumayr, which is disturbed by a man who wants to marry Laylá and who receives support from the state. The story is told as part of a political criticism of the Ottoman world order and an appraisal of the new country Iraq, where

⁷² *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān* 97.

⁷³ Wiebke Walther, “Camīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī: Ein irakischer Zindīq im ersten Drittel dieses Jahrhunderts,” *Oriens* 34 (1994): 430–450.

⁷⁴ *Dār al-Salām* refers to Baghdad.

⁷⁵ Paulina Ḥassūn, “Feeling for the heart of Iraq,” *Laylá* 1:1 (1923): 4–5.

this does not happen.⁷⁶ The combination of women's rights, of which al-Zahāwī was a staunch supporter, and Iraqi patriotism corresponds to the journal's motives, which was apparently the reason why Paulina Ḥassūn chose "Laylā" as the name of the journal.

The journal's activist position is clear from the beginning, calling for women's suffrage in the first issue. In 1923, many European countries did not yet allow women to vote and it was a few years after a U.S. constitution that allowed women's suffrage in all American states. Iraq itself only allowed women to vote in 1958.⁷⁷

And how many ignorant and miserable women [are there] who express [the wish] but not live up to the request [of women's suffrage]! In some superior countries a "new" sort of women appeared who themselves strive for equality with the men for all democratic rights. They are not satisfied with their natural or social position, and see, they risk their lives for participation in the elections and to take positions in the courts and councils.⁷⁸

With *Laylā*, Paulina Ḥassūn was part of a wider movement of women emancipation in early Iraq. This significant but short-lived movement was called *Nādī al-nahḍa al-nisā'iyya* (Women Renaissance Club) and founded in 1923 by a number of women, led by Asmā' al-Zahāwī.⁷⁹ Noga Efrati observes two views surrounding this movement: according to Ṣabīḥa Shaykh Dāwud it was an important movement bringing about change, while al-Dulaymī writes that the movement was ineffective.⁸⁰ For us, Paulina Ḥassūn serves as an example of one out of several authors whose Syriac Christian origin did not play any role in how she presented herself. Like Anastās al-Karmilī and Rafā'īl Buṭṭī, she worked together with people from outside her Christian community in journalism. Equally, like both authors, she had positive feelings for the newly established state of Iraq, which she proudly expressed.

⁷⁶ Walther, "Camīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī," 442–43.

⁷⁷ "Iraq Grants Suffrage To Women," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, March 27, 1958, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/148985120?accountid=12045> (accessed March 20, 2018).

⁷⁸ Paulina Ḥassūn, "The real woman," *Laylā* 1:1 (1923): 8

⁷⁹ Efrati, *Women in Iraq*, 120–23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 122–23.

Conclusion

The boundaries in Iraqi society caused by religious differences were strong, but did not prevent Muslims, Jews and Christians from working together. Already before World War I, the influence of the *nahḍa* together with the freedom provided by the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution in 1905 made it possible that intellectuals with different religious origins wrote in the same journals. Anastās al-Karmilī, Rafāʾil Buṭṭī and Paulina Ḥassūn are examples of a considerable but limited group of authors with a Syriac Christian origin who continued this tradition after the war. The fact that Anastās al-Karmilī served as a priest did not appear to be of much influence on what he wrote, while Rafāʾil Buṭṭī had actively broken out of the networks that the Syriac Orthodox Church provided—though not necessarily out of the church altogether—with clashes as result. The importance of religion in Paulina Ḥassūn’s life is unknown. Some differences in religious identification are visible in the works of these authors, but were of no apparent importance for the fact that they engaged in secular journalism.

A common feature of the three authors is that the church they belonged to is not referred to in their work: they do not identify with it. Their focus is somewhere else: they are Arabs and are primarily concerned with the advancement of their country as an Arab state. Having a Maronite father, Anastās al-Karmilī did not belong to a *ṭāʾifa* that was established in Iraq, and his partly Lebanese background makes that his Arab identification should be no surprise. For Rafāʾil Buṭṭī, a major transformation is visible. Despite the fact that he grew up in the relatively cosmopolitan city of Mosul, his early youth took place in an environment full of Syriac Christianity, especially as soon as he started teaching in the Syriac Orthodox school and was exposed to Assyrianism. After moving to Baghdad, he rapidly and radically changed his mind and adopted an Arab identification, possibly under the influence of his fellow students at the *Dār al-muʿallimīn* and of Anastās al-Karmilī, for whom he worked. Rafāʾil Buṭṭī shows that, despite the hesitation of the Syriac Orthodox clergy that we saw in the previous chapter, a person from his church could well be an Arab. Paulina Ḥassūn, too, leaves little doubt that she identified as an Arab, because the journal was meant for “Arab women,” and in this she was no dif-

ferent from her uncle, the editor of the moderately nationalist journal *al-‘Ālam al-‘Arabī*.

The authors were not the same in their political views, though. Despite Anastās al-Karmilī’s unambiguous identification as an Arab, he cannot be counted as an Arab nationalist. He was committed to the state of Iraq, but he was too close to the British authorities to be considered an Arab nationalist. That cannot be said for Rafā’īl Buṭṭī, who after his Assyrianist youth developed a radical form of Arab nationalism, rejecting any other possible identification to exist in the country. With an “assimilate or leave” attitude, he lets down the Assyrians because of their “campaign” against Iraq. The examples of both Anastās al-Karmilī and Paulina Ḥassūn show that a firm identification as Arab was possible for Syriac Christians without, like Rafā’īl Buṭṭī, going for an extreme and intolerant form of Arab nationalism. What is probably most striking, is the naturalness in which these three authors present their Arabness. Except for Rafā’īl Buṭṭī, who underwent a process of change in identification and who was reminded of his former identification for a long time after, the authors do not give the impression that their Syriac Christian origins caused any hindrance in the Arabic-speaking public sphere in which they took part.

Syriac and Neo-Aramaic play almost no role in the publications of these authors, despite the fact that Anastās al-Karmilī and Rafā’īl Buṭṭī grew up in an environment where Syriac was important, Paulina Ḥassūn, coming from Palestine, may not have had education in Syriac, but her uncle was educated in the Dominican primary school in Mosul. Anastās al-Karmilī’s engagement with Aramaic languages is limited to occasional linguistic discussions, and absent in the works of Rafā’īl Buṭṭī and Paulina Ḥassūn. Arabic is the only language used by the authors and plays a prominent role in the discourse of both Anastās al-Karmilī and Rafā’īl Buṭṭī. Anastās al-Karmilī was renowned as a scholar of Arabic and as a Christian he expressed some sort of “ownership” of the language. Rafā’īl Buṭṭī, on the other hand, recognizes the importance of Islam in shaping the language: for him, the Quran is authoritative for the correct use of the language, and his language is steeped in typically Islamic terms.