

In the Hall of Mirrors: The Arab Nahḍa, Nationalism, and the Question of Language

By

Nadia Bou Ali

St Antony's College

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Abstract

The dissertation examines the foundations of modern Arab national thought in nineteenth-century works of Buṭrus al Bustānī (1819-1883) and Aḥmad Fāris al Shidyāq (1804-1887) in which occurred an intersection of language-making practices and a national pedagogic project. It interrogates the centrality of language for Arab identity formation by deconstructing the metaphor “language is the mirror of the nation,” an overarching slogan of the nineteenth century, as well as engaging with twentieth-century discussions of the Arab nation and its Nahḍa. The study seeks to challenge the conventional historiography of Arab thought by proposing a re-theorisation of the Arab Nahḍa as an Enlightenment-Modernity construct that constitutes the problematic of the Arab nation.

The study investigates through literature and literary tropes the makings and interstices of the historical Arab Nation: the topography of its making. It covers a series of primary understudied sources: Bustānī’s enunciative *Nafīr Sūriyya* pamphlets that he wrote in the wake of the 1860 civil wars of Mount Lebanon and Damascus: his translation of Robinson Crusoe, dictionary, and encyclopaedia. As well as Shidyāq’s fictional autobiography, linguistic essays and treatise, and travel writings on Europe. The dissertation engages with these works to show how the ‘Nahḍa’ is a constituted by inherently contradictory and supplementary projects. It forms a moment of fracture in history and temporality – as does the Enlightenment in Europe – from which emerges a seemingly coherent national narrative.

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Introduction

Language was perceived by nineteenth-century Arabic-speaking intellectuals of the waning Ottoman Empire as the plank on which they could stay afloat the treacherous seas of modernity. The value of language was, for them, inseparable from the then newly formed conception of time as the acceleration of progress. During Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and Buṭrus al-Bustānī's lives, society had entered a process of nationalisation. Although not strictly territorial, the nation form had begun to preside over the lands of the Empire as the only possible form of social mediation. The past was increasingly regarded only in as far as it continued to reproduce the present.¹

In the face of the ruptures induced by modernisation, such as the civil wars of 1860 in Mount Lebanon, intellectuals like Shidyāq and Bustānī held up the mirror of language and in it they sought refuge. As time quickened and accelerated, chasing down the tracks of 'progress', they rushed to collect and order words and their meanings, fearing their destined loss. However, like every other attempt to stabilise language as the memory of a people it was already too late. Language usually lags behind the event it seeks to represent. However, the idea of a unified Arabic language beckoned a nation of Arabs into modern history. In fact, it instituted the very idea of history for the 'Arabs' – one into which they always already arrived too late. From within this "linguistic modernity", the idea of *Nahḍa* emerged as the governing myth of the Arab nation.

The *Nahḍa* has since become the overriding paradigm for representing history for Arab Nationalists. Analogous to modernity, the *Nahḍa* carries within it historically specific perceptions of time and society and reproduces them through a narrow identitarian

¹ Yasir Sulaymān presents an analysis of this shift in Chapter 3, "The Past lives on", in *The Arabic Language and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 38-68.

logic. It is not my aim in this dissertation to historicise the Nahḍa, rather to show how as an inherently contradictory paradigm it constitutes the very idea of history for the Arabs. In his commentary on Napoleon's coup d'état of 1851, Karl Marx wrote that

men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. ... In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.”²

Arabic speaking-intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire took on precisely this task of creating themselves anew in the face of modernity. This dissertation carries the burden of this past generation and seeks to critique their works for the purpose of relieving the present from their cumbersome weight. My aim here is to expose the ideologies of the Nahḍa and show their inadequacy for thinking of possibilities of a different future for Arab societies today.

This study has a twofold trajectory: One that addresses the question of Nahḍa as a *mythistorical* construct which emanates from modern society's capacity to generate and sustain an assemblage of discourses, thoughts and histories that can serve simultaneously for the potentials of its self-alteration and re-production, and one that delves deep into a series of nineteenth-century foundational texts by Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq with which to analyse the terms of their discussion of

² Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, *The Marx-Engels Reader* edited by Robert C. Tucker, (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 437.

language and nation-hood from the onset of modernity in the disintegrating Ottoman Empire.

Although there are many grievances – rooted in nineteenth-century positivism – held towards bringing in the psyche to historical work, the subject matter of this dissertation, the Arabs, their nation and their respective Nahḍa, imposes on us a framework that is neither merely historical nor simply a matter for social sciences. The pertinence of language and literature for the formation of a modern conception of Arab identity demonstrates that in order to approach a subject matter such as the Nahḍa we need to engage with theory from intellectual history, literary theory, and the philosophy of history. Hence, my choice of bringing myth into the discussion is premised on the argument that myth is neither false nor is it simply a representation. Rather, myth is really about power; it is an expression of modern society's capacity to imagine itself across time. However, I do not intend to suggest that myth is totalitarian or that identity is a tautological transcendental subject from which there is no escape. On the contrary, by positing the Nahḍa against itself and bringing into analysis texts that have been forgotten from the national memory of the Arabs, I seek to demonstrate that myth has a historical specificity to modernity although it appears trans-historical.

The main underlying trope of the Nahḍa myth is that at a specific moment in history the 'Arabs' awakened to their own historical significance as a civilization and they held up the mirror of language in order to discern the topography of their nation. Mirrors leave everything else forgotten besides the image which they reflect. The mirror as a metaphor for self-perception is constitutive in the history of philosophy of the story of being. In the mirror, the dialectical relationship between the being and its existence is established through the reflection as well as the mirror itself. Ultimately, the mirror is

alienated from the reflection and recedes into the background as a totality is formed between the reflected image and the self. Reflection as a posture for self-realisation or self-interrogation makes the object of knowledge seem farther away at every attempt to come near it. Reflection as a cognitive process makes the relationship between the subject and its object irreconcilable. The mirror possesses the onlooker, captivating his gaze and capturing him in time. Seeing one's self in the mirror for the first time engrains an image, a representation, which is at once a self and an other.

The use of the mirror metaphor is abundant in philosophical traditions. In Ovid's myth, Narcissus was cursed to love, and fail to command what he loves, after he had scorned all those who loved him. He was cursed to thirst after his own image in a still water pond and to love a bodiless dream. Narcissus unknowingly came to desire himself; he would plunge his hands into the deceptive pool trying to embrace his self but all that he could catch was water. Like a fool, he attempted to catch a fleeting image that was nowhere to be found in vain. He wondered in disbelief how it is that he could be kept apart from his true love by only a little water.

Although the mirror metaphor has been used in various mystical and theological traditions to engage with time and God, in the nineteenth century it took on an even more abstract meaning because it was invoked in thinking of collective identity. Far from Ibn-Arabi's philosophical use of the mirror, for instance, as a disruption of the dualism between subject and object and cause and effect³, nineteenth-century writers like Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq invoked the mirror to describe language as the mirror of the Arab *waṭan* (nation) as a modern object of desire. Their approach is distinctly different from previous Arabic and Islamic ones because they

³ Refer to Michael Sells article, "Ibn 'Arabi's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event", *Studia Islamica*, No. 67 (1988), pp. 121-149.

engage it with themselves and the ‘Arabs’ as modern historical subjects. Arab identity forms in their works as an abstraction, a pure concept that is supposed to denote historical consciousness as well as supersede it.

Although I use the word *nation* throughout to translate the nineteenth-century term *waṭan*, it is important to keep in mind that like every translation this one betrays the meaning of the original. Translations inherently problematize the meaning of words and the nation as a concept of analysis has already been imbued with a set of meanings by scholars like Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and others. The “nation form” has thus been distinguished from other forms of collective identification by implying a national solidarity of a people that is invested in common institutions of the state. It has been analyzed as a secular project with the historical trajectory of a shift into “homogenous empty time” in which nationalism emerges as a unifying imposing whole. By choosing to pursue the foundational discourses of identity, belonging, and selfhood as they emerge in the late nineteenth-century I seek to problematize this conventional analysis of nationalism and to point to the contradictions and incommensurabilities underlying individual as well as collective experiences at the onset of modernity.

The term *waṭan* is invoked by nineteenth-century intellectuals as a site of contestation: their use of the word in various contexts to denote a multiplicity of meanings such as: homeland; paradise or utopia; a territorial as well as non-territorial space if anything points to the fluidity and transformability of the nation. The differentiation between the terms *umma* and nation, although helpful at times, remains to be based on a specific association of the former with piety and the latter with secularism. This dissertation does not accept that distinction nor does it seek to reinforce it. Buṭrus al-Bustānī when

speaking of the *waṭan* or nation does not do so in strictly secular terms. He incorporates his own eschatological protestant perspective with the more modernist perception of national belonging as an exchange of citizen duties and responsibilities with a governing authority. I thus point to the usage of the word *umma* as sovereignty or as nation at certain instances but do not supply it with one specific translation throughout.

The politics of translation are explicit in my analysis of Shidyāq and Bustānī's text throughout the dissertation: in both my choice of words and theirs. Rather than paying tribute to the original as a dutiful translator would, I learn from Shidyāq and Bustānī's own performative gestures to forefront the ambiguities and disarticulations of the original concept itself.

Shidyāq and Bustānī wrote and thought from within the problems of historical knowledge in the nineteenth century, although they are not considered historiographers of their time. Their engagement with historical knowledge is implicit in their belief that language is the true sign of civilization. They sought to represent what 'Arabs' are through describing what they thought the Arabic language was. The urge to do so was entirely a modern one because the nineteenth century was made to signify by these authors a fundamental change in historical imaginations. It was often described by them and their contemporaries as an 'age like no other.'

The idea of the nineteenth century being an age like no other, I argue, represented a deep shift in structures of experience; it impinged upon individual narratives, collective histories, and on the entirety of the social imaginary. Bustānī and Shidyāq, as well as many others, gained a specific historical consciousness, one that was committed to a certain belief in the idea of progress and scientism – although they at times did question it. In seeking here to elucidate how they formulated a specific ideology of history and

identity that was essentially alienating and reifying of lived experience I do not simply intend to show the shortcomings of their ideas and their contradictions. In other words, I am not interested in carrying out a post-structuralist critique. Rather, I am interested in bringing to light the modern makings of Arab historical consciousness as a structure of experience for the purpose of arguing that there is an urgent need to engage theoretically with the history of Arab nationalism as a construct of capitalist modernity.

The relationship that evolves between reality and consciousness, and the subject and the object, as separate and opposing entities, is a product of a specific historical context. As such I do not propose that the nineteenth-century formulas for identity are trans-historical or ontological in nature. Rather, I argue that they are embedded in specific material conditions of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire that were characterised by technological advances such as the printing press and steam engine, more centralised governance, developments of educational curricula through nationalist pedagogies, and the shift of Ottoman agricultural and industrial production and trade into an expanding world market. Most importantly, the nineteenth century witnessed the Ottoman modernisation reforms which began the gradual adoption of the primary tenets of civil law thereby introducing the notion of minorities in the Empire and the need for their protection.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire had entered into the capitalist world market through its trade and monetary relations with Western Europe. The empire underwent serious changes at the time in its taxation policies and monetary values. By 1863 the Imperial Ottoman Bank had been established to regulate interest-bearing paper money, which was funded largely by external loans from Great Britain. The Crimean War over-shadowed the various riots and uprisings that took place in the

Empire in Aleppo, Mount Lebanon, Greece, and the Balkans.⁴ The ruptures of violence and sectarianism around the Empire were symptoms of the breakdown of an Imperial order, through modernisation reforms that further integrated the empire into the rapidly expanding world market. Educational reforms were carried out in an accelerated form in the second half of the century as the Empire witnessed the spread of nationalism and the expansion of the state.⁵ Ottoman Beirut, one of the loci Arab of intellectual production,

emerged as neither driftwood on the sea of world-economic forces or as the natural product of Ottoman imperial *fiat*. Rather it was a city of its own making. ... At that, the making of a provincial capital was central to the forging of an urban identity and solidarity that utilised the Ottoman reform discourse and targeted urban rivals in the region. Beirut's campaigners were not only conscious of their own urban milieu; they demanded the capital status of their city.⁶

Amidst these accelerated changes Arabic speaking intellectuals became increasingly interested in formulating a distinct national identity with its own history in their attempts to forge a place for themselves within the modernising Empire. Due to their encounters with European and American Enlightenment thought, they sought a position in what was presented to them as world History. Moreover, they actively engaged in reproducing the discourses of modernity, as a distinct political economic project, in the Arabic speaking communities of the Empire. This dissertation explores the strategies and narratives that reproduced modernity in nineteenth-century texts through the central medium of language and literature. By interrogating the formation of national thought

⁴ Refer to the seminal volume *East Meets West: Banking, Commerce, and Investment in the Ottoman Empire*, edited by Philip L. Cotrell (London: Ashgate, 2008), for the discussion of the integration of the Ottoman Empire into the world economic system. For a more specific case study also refer to the article by Bruce Masters "The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An Aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the Capitalist World", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Feb., 1990), pp. 3-20.

⁵ Refer to Benjamin Fortna, Eugene Rogan, and Usama Makdisi's scholarship on the matter.

⁶ Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siecle Beirut*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 53.

through language ideologies and practices I elucidate the epistemic grounds from which the idea of the Arab nation is founded.

The metaphor of the mirror of language as a mirror for the nation motivates the life-long preoccupation of nineteenth-century intellectuals like Shidyāq and Bustānī with the Arabic language. I show in the subsequent chapters how their narrative strategies instituted specific perceptions of language, time, history, and society. These perceptions, while having been based on a quest for autonomy, sovereignty, and freedom of expression, seem to have reproduced the very same conditions of heteronomy and alienation that nineteenth-century Arabic speaking intellectuals wrestled with.

Once the onlooker gazes into the mirror they engage in an act of deception. This ‘deception’ is the one also at work when the subject of modern psychoanalysis looks at their own image – whether in the mirror or in the face of mother – and it produces the first representation of an *I*. Life is spent in pursuit of this ideal *I* that is unattainable because it does not correspond to the infant’s physical experience of a fragmented and un-unified body. This process that Jacques Lacan has called “the mirror stage”, in which narcissism and aggressiveness are correlates, induces a tension between the self and the *I* and the self and the other. It underlies the identification of a subject with itself and its surroundings. Lacan equates the mirror stage with “*identification . . . namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image*”, what in psychoanalysis is termed the “*imago*”. Though the infant and yet-to-be subject is “still trapped in his/her motor impotence and nursling dependence”, the image would seem to exhibit “the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to

being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.”⁷

Thus, the mirror reflects an image of a double: of a heterogeneous reality. It establishes the relationship between an infant or a yet-to-be subject and his image as that between an imaginary and a real. The mirror image gives the subject a sense of fixity, of an *I*, it reflects the mental state of the onlooker more than it does his body and the multifarious processes going on within it. As such, it functions as a mediating object between the subject and reality. Most importantly it serves as the “drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation”⁸ and manufactures a series of fantasies. The mirror image marks the subject with an alienating identity right at the moment of self-identification. The alienation is not limited to the subject’s own self-perception but is implicit in the entire process of mirroring as a cognitive process which implies some form of totality, of homogeneity between the subject and its reflection.

Once the subject goes through the mirror stage, Lacan tells us, it comes into social relations and begins to mediate itself through others. The illusion of autonomy, however, is up kept through the mirror representation of the subject. Lacan called this illusion an originary neurosis that is at the core of the formation of selfhood. It is an inert passion, like Narcissus’s reflected image of his self revealed a tragic truth of irreconcilable love the mirror metaphor in nineteenth-century Arabic works reveals the crisis of subjects in a society undergoing nationalisation and coming into a unified world history. It is, therefore, not surprising that mirrors and mirror images took on central roles as metaphors for understanding society and selfhood during the nineteenth

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, (USA: Norton, 2006) p. 76.

⁸ Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 78.

century at the same time that the idea of an ‘Arab nation’ began to ossify into a historical form. Due to the increasing metaphorical and practical use of mirrors, the word *Mir’āt* (mirror) even required a definition from Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī in 1884.⁹ In an article in his *al-Ṭabīb* magazine, Yāzījī described mirrors as signs of civilization for societies. Yāzījī in an almost literal sense of the “mirror stage” used a mirror to draw his own self-portrait.¹⁰ The split subject that forms in the mirror stage at the intersection of nature and culture is, in fact, the only subject imaginable in modern civilized society. This study is interested in elucidating the “imaginary knot of servitude”¹¹ that ties the national subject in Arab writings.

The printed press flourished in the nineteenth century and was established by figures like Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq under the presumption of it being a mirror of truth in which the readers could observe their world as an image. Language had to have the words and meanings adequate for the representation of reality and a body of regulators and legislators to organise and fix the means by which words could be made and used correctly. For Shidyāq, *naḥt*, the creation of compound neologisms, and the diligent pursuit of mistakes were the only ways for language and Arab thought to progress in history. For Bustānī encyclopaedic and lexicographic methods held the promise of true progress and civilization. Both men could only envision civilization in Arabic because they believed that as a language it reflected the true nature of those who spoke it. Arabic for them was a *Gestalt*; it carried within it more than the sum total of

⁹ Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī, “*al-Marā’*” (Mirrors), *al-Ṭabīb*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.) p. 273-274.

¹⁰ The image is inserted at the beginning of a 1984 edited collection by Nadhir Abūd of Yāzījī’s articles in *al-Ḍiyā’* journal on *Iṣlāḥ al-fasād fī lughat al-jarā’id*, [Corrections of Corrupt Language Use in Newspapers and Journals], re-titled *lughat al-jarā’id* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.). The first compilation of these articles was published in 1925 by an Arabic Literature teacher at the teacher’s college in Damascus, Muḥammad Sālim al-Jundī (Damascus: *Matāba ‘at al-Ṭarīqī*). The subscript of the image describes Yāzījī wearing a “Lebanese Costume.”

¹¹ Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 78.

its words and meanings. As well, language for them carried a transformative significance. Bustānī and Shidyāq wrote again and again that civilization was only possible under the Arabic language.

Bustānī stated in many of his writings that “*adab* is the mirror of the nation” and “language is the mirror of the nation”, at one instance Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī, a younger contemporary of Bustānī’s, claimed that not only was language the mirror of the nation, it was the nation itself. Moreover, he argued that “language, in fact, constitutes the human being as an individual as well as a nation. It is the mirror image of the mind and the translator of the meanings of the heart.”¹² The mirror of words became in the nineteenth century the central preoccupation of thinkers and writers who had begun to carve out an idea of an Arab nation that reflected a uniform conception of language and culture. Language carried for nineteenth-century writers a restorative aspect and the identity of the Arab subject, after going through the mirror stage of self-identification in the nineteenth century, was to be structured through language and literary tropes. It was through language that the Arab self mediated the realms of the imaginary and the real, society, and nation.

The central argument that I propose throughout this study is that the nation as a historical form imposes upon personal and collective experiences, using language as its tool of mediation. By exploring the literary corpus of these two figures, this study seeks to elucidate the formative episteme of national thought. It also seeks to interrogate the paradigm of Nahḍa into which these writings have been shoehorned. Moreover, the

¹² Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī, “*Āmālī al-lughawiyya*” (My Ambitions for Language), *al-Ṭabīb* (The Doctor), Vol.1 (April 15, 1884), p. 49, in the published collection of the journal’s full editions from 1884-1885. The journal was established by Yāzījī, Dr. Beshāra Zalzal Zalzal, and Dr. Khalīl Ṣa’da. Albeit short lived, it contains seminal articles on medicine, language, science, and politics.

study offers new insight to the existing scholarship on the nation as a historic form and a symbolic field of imagination by proposing that the idea of nationhood in the ‘Arab world’ preceded and superseded the existence of territorial nation-states and organised a definition of ‘Arab culture’ through specific ideologies of language, literariness, taste, womanhood, manhood, childhood, habit and customs, with the West as an other to Arabness.

The imaginary idea of the Arab nation –besides being very real and posing as a challenge to the opposition between the real and imaginary – is formulated through contradictory and incommensurable projects, yet continues to impose great control over the historical imaginary of Arabic speaking societies. Although at many times Arab nationalism was antithetical to Imperialism and the colonial project, we cannot ignore the ideological symmetry between anti-colonial nationalist projects and colonial ones. This is not meant to reduce all nationalisms into one but is meant to aid in providing an aid to answer the increasingly difficult question: What is nationalism?

In this study I argue that nationalism forms as an idea during the late nineteenth century and transforms the very meaning of history and society amongst Arabic speakers of the Ottoman Empire. Within Arab parts of the Ottoman Empire, the idea of the nation was increasingly resounding in the second half of the nineteenth century, even before the formation of nation-states as a direct result of colonisation. The nation, *al-waṭan*, came to signify as a ‘social imaginary’ a substance, an essence of Arabness, and a shared common history. The nation had real functions and played an essential role in collectivising identification in people’s consciousness. Far from being mere mystification, nationalism weaves a mythology that structures real experiences and imposes upon individual and collective experience. By extending the analysis of Arab

nationalism further into the nineteenth century, I mean to argue that the nation is not simply an abstraction that results from material forces, such as the territorial state; rather, it actually constitutes material forces.

While Arab Nationalism had proved to play an important role in the first half of the twentieth century, the decline of authoritarian states, which had embodied the tenets of this project during the past century (as evident in the United Nations Human Development Report of 2002) and in contemporary times, attests to at least two central shifts. One is attributable to the transformations in the world economic system and the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production, and that the other can be attributed to the failure of national liberation projects in attaining true emancipation for their followers. The tendency to attribute the misery of Arab societies to external forces such as the West and *ifranja* in the late nineteenth century and Israel and the “Jews” in the twentieth century has co-opted most ideological discussions of identity, history, and progressive politics.¹³ I am inclined to argue that this is largely due to a strong discursive hold of Nahḍa ideology, which remains to be reproduced to this day and continues to be used for the strive for further political and economic modernisation in the shadow of the spectre of Europe as the only solution for Arab societies, while overshadowing any true discussions of social change.

Being the essential product of Enlightenment and Modernity in Europe, and Nahḍa in the Arab world, the nation, as a historical form, is born out of contradictions and incommensurabilities and continues to be reproduced through them in real historical time. In this sense, we must consider Arab Nationalism as a particularity within a wider range of historical formations pertaining to Enlightenment-Modernity in its political-

¹³ Refer to Moishe Postone’s “History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism” in *Public Culture* 18:1 (Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 93-110.

economic project. The Arabic language and the nation that it mirrors become ideological structures in which figures like Bustānī and Shidyāq ground their entire existence. They dedicate their whole lives to language making and writing for a virtual community of readers, which they themselves conjured and imagined.

Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and Buṭrus al-Bustānī have often been called “the founders of modern Arab literature” and “the founding fathers of an Arab Nahḍa.” Tens of scholars have defined them as ‘pioneers’ and ‘founders’ of the Nahḍa. Their leading engagement with the Arabic language, its ideologies, lexicography, and syntax has been pointed out by many, and is evident in the bulk of works that they have left behind.¹⁴ The choice of Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and Buṭrus al-Bustānī is primarily based on the complexities that their works, connections, writings, and lives present to the narrative of Nahḍa itself.

Tens of books have been written on the central role they respectively played in modernising the Arabic language and their engagement with modernity. They are usually placed amongst the first generation of Nahḍa thinkers after that of al-Jabartī and Ṭaḥṭāwī along with Nāṣif al-Yāzījī and Shaykh Yūsuf al-Asīr. My choice of these two thinkers is based on the amount of works they have left behind in lexicography, journalism, social commentaries and reform projects, as well as literature. The corpus of primary sources that Shidyāq and Bustānī leave us with offers valuable insight into the foundational Nahḍa discourses of the nineteenth century. Most importantly, figures like Shidyāq and Bustānī took it as their task to engage head on with the questions posed by modernisation and in their own individual life trajectories embodied the tensions of modernisation in the late Ottoman Empire. I elaborate on my choice of

¹⁴ Refer to Ḥasan Qubaysī, *Al-matn wa-al-hāmish*, (Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqāfī al-‘arabī, 1997) and Aḥmad Bayḍūn, *Kalamun* (Beirut: Dār al-jadīd, 1997)

these two further in Chapter 3, where I bring attention to their religious conversions and discuss their respective literary corpus and its relevance to the Nahḍa.

The imagined community of Arabic speakers exists only in as far as it is imagined by subjects like Bustānī and Shidyāq. As pedagogues, literary writers, and reformers, both men expressed an urge to become citizens in their writings. Bustānī dedicated his works to national progress and frequently signed his essays as “a lover of the nation” and Shidyāq used irony and humour to propose his criticism and reformist ideas for society. Their dedication to language making was simultaneously a dedication to a nation that was yet not there. “By passing into citizenship through inscription in the National symbolic of the body politic that expresses her/him, the citizen reaches another plane of existence, a whole, unassailable body, whose translation into totality mimics the nation’s permeable yet impervious spaces.”¹⁵ National identity in a colonising effort undertakes the “translation of the historical subject into an “Imaginary” realm of ideality and wholeness, where the subject becomes whole by being reconstituted as a *collective* subject, or citizen.”¹⁶

Taking on the role of lexicographers and intellectuals to carry the plight of defining civilization, society and the meanings of words, Shidyāq and Bustānī identified with the very idea of an imagined community – of a nation that simultaneously alienates its subjects by relegating their individual spaces into “larger impermeable sites.” It is important to note that the nation does not dissolve “micro-spaces” of living in society

¹⁵ *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

but transforms them into “internal boundaries”, which further legitimise and buttress the nation’s “promise of sovereignty”.¹⁷

Arabic as a national language served as the tool for introducing a sense of contemporaneity and a sense of territorial simultaneity to the experience of citizens to be like Shidyāq and Bustānī. The need to speak and write correct Arabic, which they sought to fulfil through their lexicographic and literary works, was a fulfilment of the national fantasy. Guarded by both words and calendrical time, the nation to which Shidyāq and Bustānī addressed their respective daily printed press transformed the very experience of time for its citizens.

These two authors wrote about society from a vantage point of an observer and identified with society as a specular other, one which they both desired yet regarded as eternally doomed to corruption from the beginning of time – Bustānī from an eschatological Protestant perspective and Shidyāq from a more secular one. The 1860 wars of Mount Lebanon only made Bustānī feel “shamed and embarrassed” while, in his autobiographical account, Shidyāq wrote in his fictional autobiography that he felt like a *khunthā*, [a she-male], and a *faryāq*; in Shidyāq’s words it is “a mythical creature that might not have ever existed.”¹⁸ Rather than reading Shidyāq’s autobiographical work *al-Sāq ‘alā al-Sāq* as an example of the turn of the century belief in a “constructive meaningfulness”¹⁹ of the modern world and human evolution (an analysis that Thomas Phillip provides in his work on Arab autobiographies), I suggest that the

¹⁷ Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Fāris al-Shidyāq, *Kitāb al-sāq ‘alā al-sāq fī ma huwwa al-fāryāq: aw ayyām wa-shuhūr wa-a ‘wām fī ‘ajm al-‘arab wa-al-a ‘jām*, (Beirut: Dār al-ḥayāt, , n.d.), p. 105.

¹⁹ Thomas Philip “The Autobiography in Modern Arab Literature and Culture”, *Poetics Today*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Modern Period I (Autumn, 1993), pp. 573-607.

sense of irony and satire invoked by Shidyāq offer other avenues of analysis. Irony claims “to speak of human matters as if they were facts of history. It is a historical fact that irony becomes increasingly conscious of itself in the course of demonstrating the impossibility of our being historical.”²⁰ Paul de Man explains how irony is premised on duplication. It is a “relationship, within consciousness, between two selves, yet it is not intersubjective.”²¹ In other words, it is not between man and man. When employed by Shidyāq as a literary trope, irony is not a relationship between him and himself, but between him and the state of the world as nature – two distinct and different essences.

Language surfaces as the tool, or material, through which heterogeneous reality is made real. It transfers Shidyāq, as well as his readers, into a non-empirical world, into the world of language. By writing his own autobiographical account using irony as the main genre, Shidyāq did not merely recognise the promise of progress and adhere to it; rather, he sought a cure in language for his self that was lost in the alienation of its own melancholy. I show in the coming chapters how the more that Shidyāq and Bustānī wrote for society, the more they felt alienated from themselves.

In their works, Shidyāq and Bustānī, acting as dutiful archivists, regulated and fixed language and chased after its mistakes. However, as they worked towards mastering the language, they made the perfection of Arabic an unattainable end but for a select few. This expresses the *mis-en-scene* of their desire to bring both the language and its speakers to order while wanting to make constant innovation and progress based on the mastery of the language possible. This study explores the triad of language, nation, and

²⁰ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight, Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, (UK: Routledge, 2005), p. 211.

²¹ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 212.

society through their works to elucidate how the ontic and epistemic grounds of Arab national thought are based in the rupturing experience of modern capitalist society.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the formation of national fantasy and how it came to depict ‘Arabness’, ‘Eastern-ness’, and ‘Syro-Lebanese’ identities. The nation in question here is not only the one formed through national symbols and rituals but also the one that is present in the daily life of citizens through language, narratives, discussions of culture, and daily life. It is articulated through notions like *turāth*, tradition, habit, *‘āda*, *al-lugha*, language, *adab*, culture and literature. I use the category of ‘literature’ throughout the dissertation to broadly define a wide range of written text – texts on science, short stories, novels and novellas, speeches, essays and treatises, journalistic pieces on a variety of topics ranging across discussions on the meanings of “progress”, *taqaddum*, and “civilization”, *tamaddun*, treatises on society and national belonging, human cognition, philosophy of language and other discussions of linguistics, grammar, and syntax. The nation presides over nineteenth-century discussions of womanhood, manhood, and bodily practices. It looms in the horizon outside geographical territorial space and is created through a set of (often contradictory) logics and meanings that order knowledge and language.

Shidyāq and Bustānī’s gate keeping of the Arabic language and their focus on literature, *balāgha*, (high rhetoric or magniloquence) and *faṣāḥa* (eloquence) was an act that recognised the power of literature and the literary in refashioning reality. In analysing the significance of their works, I have had to remain guarded by the challenge of maintaining a separation between the ideas they proposed and those that underlie the Nahḍa, which they have been declared representative of. I have come to realise that the Nahḍa is only possible retrospectively. It is continuously being

reproduced by society as a myth in the present. Even the recent uprisings in the Arab world have been read as an awakening. In other words, Nahḍa is not archaic nor is it of times past. The Nahḍa dictates the past and makes possible a specific narrative of Arab history, one that is compelled by rises and falls, awakenings, and slumbers. Shidyāq and Bustānī's writings submit us to an idiomatic process in which there is no possibility of separating intrinsic elements in the texts from the historical times in which they have been placed.

However, in what follows, the analysis of their texts shows that, although the Nahḍa seems to be one body of discourse that can be addressed by its proper name, its foundational texts prove to contain incommensurable and contradictory notions. Thus, as a concept the Nahḍa is only real insofar as it is a myth that professes to explain the nature and history of the 'Arabs' as a nation. The underlying totality of the logic of Nahḍa is the same one at work in modernity at large. Henceforth, I argue that the Nahḍa produces a specific logic, a unique understanding of history that had been relevant to the social and economic context at the turn of the nineteenth century but which, since the mid-twentieth century, has proven to be inadequate as a framework for thinking of autonomy and sovereignty for the Arab subject.

Chapter breakdown

In Chapter 1, I discuss key contemporary works on the Nahḍa in Arabic sources. After the end of the nineteenth century the Nahḍa was reproduced in the writings of twentieth-century Arab intellectuals as the myth of the Arab nation. In this chapter I explain the use of myth and fantasy in the analysis of Nahḍa and nationalism by elaborating on enduring links between Enlightenment and Nahḍa on one hand and myth and Enlightenment on the other. Underlying the Nahḍa myth is the story of alienation,

which is formulated in the mid-twentieth century through discourses of underdevelopment and failed nationalisms. What had begun as a lexicographic and encyclopaedic project in the nineteenth century transforms into an ideological construct that always already defines the terms of politics for the Arabs. In this chapter I trace the formation of the trope of Arab Awakening and the ‘Arab Mind’ in the social imaginary through twentieth-century works and I argue, based on a review of relevant scholarship, that the problem of the *Nahḍa* is, in fact, the problem of the nation for the Arabs.

In Chapter 2, I begin to undertake the reading of *Nahḍa* against itself. In it I describe Shidyāq and Bustānī’s lives and works and explain the choice of these two figures. As well, I bring forth their position as converts and translators in the nineteenth century. I argue that the idiom of conversion is embedded with an Enlightenment logic and I show how through conversion, Bustānī and Shidyāq, acquired a sense of responsibility as citizen-subjects who were ready to sacrifice in their private lives for the sake of the nation. In this sense, their religious conversion was secular in nature. For instance, Shidyāq’s laments about his unemployment are usually followed by his claim that being a writer was a sacrifice that had to be undertaken for the sake of the preservation of the language which carried the essence of Arab-ness. I propose that both men’s conversion is correlated to their stance as reformers and that it attests to the transformation of power and law during the nineteenth century into the transcendental sphere of individual obedience. Although law usually dominates the field of discussion of citizenship as the regulator of rights and duties, the nation also regulates other aspects of social life by impinging on desires, beliefs, affect, experience, and language. The nation, as a symbolic form, harnesses all these aspects in order to create a political space that is not necessarily territorial and that impinges on the individual and collectivity for its propagation and consolidation. Shidyāq, for instance, frets that in this

new nationalised world of the nineteenth century he would turn into a she-male or a mythical creature.

The plot, which unfolds in the subsequent chapters, begins in Chapter 3 at the 1860 moment of shipwreck and crisis from which the unitary narrative of the nation emerges – the sectarian wars of Mount Lebanon and Damascus. Bustānī, having been translator of dispatches to the American consulate and as acting as a spokesman of an imaginary nation wrote in the fury of events a series of eleven nationalist pamphlets *Nafīr Sūriyya*, *The Clarion of Syria*, which he signed as an “Anonymous lover of the nation”.

As he wrote the nationalist pamphlets, Bustānī was also translating Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, *al-Tuhfa al-bustāniyya fī al-asfār al-krūziyya* (1860). The chapter interrogates his use of the metaphor of Crusoe in his eleven enunciative nationalist pamphlets as an allegory for his fellow countrymen to show how Bustānī imports the logic of cultural historicism and political economy as tenets of national thought, and how he sets the ground for the discourse on sectarianism as a ‘remnant from a traditional past’, thereby mystifying the historical conditions that had lead to the violence of 1860 and reproducing the logic of sectarianism as an obstacle to progress rather than positing it as it really is – a contradiction implicit in modernisation itself.

The crisis that emerges in Bustānī’s depiction of the 1860 events later consolidates in his lexicographic project where his urge to taxonomise and collect words and meanings is attributed by him to a national duty. Chapter 4, “Lexicography and Nationalism”, discusses both Bustānī and Shidyāq’s differing positions from lexicography and encyclopaedia making. In this chapter, I analyse the definition format of Bustānī’s encyclopaedia and the tropes he alludes to in defining notions such as civilization, history, and knowledge. I show how the prolepsis that is present in the encyclopaedic

approach to knowledge is also present in Bustānī's attempts to write the history of the Arabs. I argue that the 'encyclopaedic mirror' into which Bustānī looks to see the history of his nation stabilises processes that are actually in flux. Consequently, knowledge, language, and history for Bustānī are only given attention incidentally; they are merely ideas that are means for contemplating something else – namely, identity. In contrast, I discuss Shidyāq's fixation on the miraculous nature of the Arabic language and his romanticist approach in revealing its hidden secrets. I argue that, although Shidyāq writes the *Spy on the Dictionary*, a critique of Arabic lexicography, his logic remains supplementary to Bustānī's in the same way that Romanticism and Enlightenment complete each other. Using Derrida's notion of supplementarity, I argue that Shidyāq and Bustānī, from their distinct and different positions, generate a narrative of mastery of the language – one that oscillates between the character of the pedagogue and that of the genius poet.

Chapter 5 of the dissertation takes us back to the metaphors of Shipwreck through the idea of surviving. The "endless sea of language and Shidyāq the spectator" elaborates on the paths not taken in the analysis of nineteenth-century thought. I foreground and analyse Shidyāq's use of irony, metaphor, autobiography, and allegory in his writings. Shidyāq's literary jumps and cartwheels constitute a performative space for his negotiation of national identity and contemplations on life and existence in a modern world. Shidyāq constructs his enunciative prose with the aim of revealing the "true civilization of the Arabs in their language", ironically by producing a 700-page work on the contradictions and fallacies of Arabic lexicons from the 9th century onwards. This book, which is immensely difficult to traverse, reveals an anti-Saussurean understanding of language that evolves into a 'philosophy of language' as a 'philosophy of thought'. Shidyāq's discussions of *adab* and language as a writing in

solitude, rather than public speech, and his perception of the original and the copy complicates the function of language as a catalyst for identitarian politics.

This last chapter explores Shidyāq's perception of language being prone to decadence as social life is. It explores the implications of importing a natural metaphor, of organic decadence, into a cultural and social realm through elaborating on Shidyāq's notions of taste, *dhawq*, and eloquence. While Bustānī had chosen Crusoe as a metaphor for thinking of society, Shidyāq leaned more towards Don Quixote as an ironic figure who embodied the crisis of subjectivity in modern times. I approach Shidyāq's tensions in dealing with the question of women and femininity as an expression of the crisis in manhood induced by the onset of notions of citizenry and nationhood during that time. Shidyāq's use of irony and humour, in depicting his own life-narrative, is also a focus of this chapter, where I argue that in order to comprehend modernity Shidyāq had to come to terms with the fact that, as an Arab or as a speaker of Arabic, he was only a historical subject in as far as he always felt a stranger in his own time and place.

This dissertation seeks to contribute a critical analysis of Nahḍa sources as well of the Nahḍa itself as a historical concept for the historiography of the Arab world. In it I bring the discussion of Nahḍa into the wider debates on nationalism and modernisation theory. By arguing that the problematic nature of the Nahḍa is, in fact, the same as that of the nation as a historical form, I seek to bring the Nahḍa into contemporary debates on the nature of nationalism and identitarian politics. Moreover, I try to show in this study that there is an urgent need for moving in different directions in the study of Nahḍa – one that has an eye on the present while thinking of the past and future, and another that can be critical of the Nahḍa discourses that continue to reproduce hegemonic structures of experience in society. Besides bringing into analysis

untouched primary sources from the nineteenth century, I seek to challenge the conditions under which such sources are normally read. Thus, rather than merely writing the history of the Arab nation in what follows, I seek to elucidate the problematic and contradictory ways through which the *nation makes history possible* for the case of the Arabs.

Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to challenge the notion of historiographic writing as a mere interpretation of narrative, and it proposes that there is an urgent need for an immanent critique of Nahḍa identitarian politics for the purpose of bringing contemporary analysis of the Arab world closer to the lived realities of its peoples, realities that are becoming more internationalised every day. The Nation is a global phenomenon with far reaching implications and varying guises. Above all, its autoscopic nature lures theory and scholarship to separating the past from the present and reality from experience. It is this separation that I seek to reconstitute in what follows.

Chapter 1

Nahḍa as Enlightenment Logic

The modern history of the Arabs has come to anchor around the trope of the nineteenth century as an ‘age’, often declared as ‘one like no other’. It is, in fact, possible to suggest that the ‘Arabs’, as an identitarian category with a natural history, came to be during the 1800s. This is, of course, a time in which most modern nations were consolidated as part of a ‘world history’ and during which the age of empires gradually came to an end. ‘The age of invention’, ‘the age of liberty’, ‘the age of revolutions’, ‘the age of colonisation’, and ‘the age of science’, are but a few names for these times. By the end of the eighteenth century, with Kant, the Enlightenment had equated time with history and propounded that the former would now follow the latter. Europe was declared the gatekeeper of history, in whose path other nations’ times would have to tread.

Time accelerated in the nineteenth century and the concepts of progress and delay came to define the lives of societies. Ultimately, ‘the frame of progress’ was instilled and “according to which the whole of history came to be interpreted universally.”²² This universalised notion of history allowed for the existence of what Reinhardt Koselleck has called ‘contemporaneous non-contemporaneities’. By the end of the eighteenth century, with the opening up of the globe by steamships, communication and trade, it became possible for Enlightenment figures to formulate the “postulate of acceleration from the point of view of those left behind.”²³ This shaped the idea of progress, which consolidated into one term around 1800: *Neuzeit*, or the modern age. For the Arabs,

²² Reinhardt Koselleck, *Future's Past, On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 249.

²³ Ibid., p.249

Neuzeit translated into *taqaddum*. It is the story of those left behind that I wish to bring into consideration here. In particular, I am interested in addressing the question of how those who were left behind made a history for themselves through a language and a ‘tongue’. And, if possible, why do they choose language to do so?

Amongst Arab historians, it is generally agreed that the Nahḍa, as an Arab national project, occurred between the mid- nineteenth century and mid-n twentieth century.²⁴

Within Western scholarship on the matter, the schism is clear between two groups of historians; some, such as Albert Hourani, denote the beginnings of Arab Nationalism in the nineteenth century, while others like Zeine Zeine, Ernest Dawn, and Hasan Kayali, locate the beginnings of what they call Arabism or proto-nationalism after the dissolution of the Empire. This latter group of scholars speak from within the presumptions of Euro-centric historiography that, to my mind, eludes a rigorous comprehension of the phenomenon of nationalism around the world. For the sake of protecting historiography in the disciplinary divide, these scholars have avoided dealing with the nation as paradigmatic of the Enlightenment project. The fact that the Nahḍa, as a discursive construct, carries within it the troubled Enlightenment’s concerns and ambivalence is overlooked when severing its ties with Arab nationalism. It is these ties that I seek to elucidate and then deconstruct here.

Although numerous nationalists have translated the Nahḍa into ‘Arab renaissance’, that yet awaits its Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, these views remain uncritical of the involvement of the ‘spectre of Europe’ in the formation of ideas on progress and

²⁴ Muhammad Arkun, in his book *Al-fikr al-‘arabī, La Pensée Arab* (P.U.F., Paris 1975; 6th edition, 2002), suggests that the Nahḍa ended with the Free Officers Movement in 1952 in Egypt. Other scholars have suggested that the Nahḍa came to end by the establishment of the state of Israel. I discuss Muḥammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī’s work in particular in a coming section of the dissertation.

national identity on one hand, and underestimate the epistemic hold of the Nahḍa logic that continues to be reproduced in contemporary discussions and conceptions of Arab identity and in the reading of nineteenth-century texts such as those at hand here. By bringing the Nahḍa into the sphere of Enlightenment we subject the very history of 'Europe' to scrutiny, and in doing so submit the 'Arabs' to the same inquisition.

The mediating realm through which the myth-making capacity of the Enlightenment and the Nahḍa becomes possible is specifically language and literature. From here, I suggest that the re-thinking of the Nahḍa historically requires an elaboration on the relationship between language and history. Reinhardt Koselleck offers valuable insight on this topic. Koselleck points out that since the historian no longer partakes in the events recorded nor in oral transmission, history is always an explanation *post facto*, post experience. This explanation is always re-interpretable as it had to partake in the historian's present. Thus, "the difference between a past reality and linguistic explanation"²⁵ will be hard to overcome. In this sense the Nahḍa is inseparable from what has been said about it. This is why in this study I return to what are considered Nahḍa texts in an effort to investigate into the interrupted history instituted by modernity and explain the nation form that emerges from it.

The Nahḍa is like an archive that produces a *natural history* of the nation and carries within it the dimensions of the Arab national imaginary. It is in it that "the cultural continuity so necessary for the institution of the nation is produced and safeguarded."²⁶ It is where the nation – Benedict Anderson would say – is made contingent by being both past and present. I undertake this engagement with the Nahḍa "archive as subject

²⁵ Reinhardt Koselleck, "Linguistic Change and the History of Events", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Dec., 1989), pp. 650-666.

²⁶ ? ²⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance," *Archival Science*, Vol.2 (2002), pp.87

rather than as source”²⁷ to show how the lexicographical turn that occurs in the nineteenth century is the first instance of formation of the modern imaginary institution of the nation for the Arabs. Thus, I am interested in approaching the archive not as a source of evidence of a Nahḍa that has happened, but as a process through which society re-thinks itself at the cross-section of colonialism, modernity, and nationalism.

While some historians have overlooked the epistemic complications instilled by the project of modernity and adopted the traditional/modern double binds,²⁸ others have been working on the inequalities instilled by the project of modernity born out of Enlightenment thought through the study of colonialisms, nationalisms, race, gender, or language inside and outside Europe.²⁹ Although this research is not strictly limited to the investigation of modernity, the question of modernity and its persistence as an

²⁷ For an example of a proponent of this logic refer to Hisham Sharabi’s *Arab Intellectuals and the West: the Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), and Philip Khuri Hitti’s, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, first pub. 1963).

²⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), idem, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Sarubh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube “Critical Questions of Colonial Modernities” and Walter D.Mignolo “The Enduring Enchantments (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to go from here)” in Sarubh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube, eds. *Unbecoming Modern, Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2006), pp. 1-28, pp. 228-254. See also Bruno Latour *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

²⁹ I strictly mean the nineteenth century to be a phase which falls at the centre of the Enlightenment contrary to common historiographic accounts that draw an end to the phase with the French Revolution, as though the latter somehow culminates the logic of the Enlightenment. Many have contested this issue, Brian Singer for one, and I am more inclined to the existing claim that attests that the Enlightenment is indeed not finished, nor is the project of secularization in Europe or the world at large. The French revolution merely displaced the “metaphysics of power” and produces them inside society, this being far from de-sacralisation – one can argue an impossible task. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century “Romanticism” that is portrayed as a reaction to Enlightenment rationality strikes me as a *central* phase in the Enlightenment project itself rather than being outside it. I come back to this in a later section of the dissertation.

overarching paradigm in the study of Arab history needs to be addressed. The Arab Nahḍa, as a discursive construct, shares common grounds with the Enlightenment³⁰ and the relationship between them is far more complex than being an exportation-importation one.

The Nahḍa and Enlightenment are co-incidental in that they occupy the mutual space of *national mythology*, yet belong to different and non-chronological temporalities. The Nahḍa is mythological in as far as we paradoxically understand myth as anti-myth – as an essentially performative realm, but not a realm of closure. In this sense, by suggesting that the Nahḍa forms a mythological structure I do not intend to mystify it. The mythical nature of the Nahḍa does not attest to it being fictional or un-real. On the contrary, as Hans Blumenberg puts it, myth is a mode of knowledge that generates symbolic forms through forming autonomous domains (like literature, science, and reason) and emerges as a response to the “absolutism of reality”³¹ in the modern world. In other words, myth “transforms reality into a fantasy object.”³² This explains for instance the choice of dreams and time travellers by Arab writers when approaching the topic of Nahḍa. Blumenberg critiques theories of myth that relegate it to past and archaic modes of thought, arguing that myth largely constitutes societies in the post-enlightenment world. His work has shown that the historicity of myth accounts for its continued presence in Enlightenment.³³

³⁰ Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985; orig. pub.1979), x.

³¹ From Stathis Gourgouris’s discussion of Blumenberg’s concept of myth in *Does Literature Think, Literature as Theory for an Antimythical Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 40.

³² Refer to Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, (MIT Press, 1991).

³³ Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, p. 117.

Blumenberg, like Adorno and Horkheimer, seeks to expose the mythology of Enlightenment, beginning with the Cartesian school of thought that dismissed myth from the world of man (in which he was said to have conquered nature) and leading to German Idealism and the Jena School. Blumenberg argues that Enlightenment “myth has always already passed over into the process of reception, and it remains in that process no matter what violence is applied in order to break its bonds and to establish its final form.”³⁴ Building on Levi Strauss’s contention that we must look at myth in its totality, Blumenberg suggests that histories of influence need to be discarded. In this sense, the parts of a myth (the Enlightenment and Nahḍa in our case as part of the myth of modernity) constitute it outside causality. The continued projection of myths, in fact, relies on this a-temporality; the notion of progress is an example of this. Muhammad Arkun argues that during the nineteenth century “Arab and Islamic thinkers – exactly like their European counterparts – celebrated historicisation by denying mythology and its functions.”³⁵

Moreover, myths are not explanations used by societies to fill a lack in knowledge, they do not in this sense precede science, rather, “nothing surprised the promoters of the Enlightenment more, and left them standing more incredulously before the failure of what they thought were their ultimate exertions, than the survival of the contemptible old stories – the continuation of work on myth.”³⁶ It is not a matter of coincidence that the spread of interest in the classics and the ‘myths of the Greeks’ multiplied in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, whereby the lay public could engage with Greek texts, even as amateurs. It is also not coincidental that Sulaymān al-Bustānī translated

³⁴ Muhammad Arkun, *Tārīkhīyat al-fīkr al-‘arabi*, (Beirut: *al-Markaz al-thaqāfī al-‘arabi*, 1998) p. 32.

³⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, p.120.

³⁶ Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, p. 121.

the *Illiad* in the late nineteenth century, and then launched into a series of modern translations of Greek poetry into Arabic. This is certainly linked to the recognition of the European Philhellenic myth of modernity's origin, thereby opening the position of the Arab as a translator and a medium for the transference of human knowledge in the history of civilization.

Blumenberg points to the issue of reception. He says that “the inexhaustibility of the mythical image becomes manifest in its reception, but not in the manner of something simply being made visible which may already have reposed, pre-formed, within it. It is a real epigenesis.”³⁷ Thus, we can locate the beginnings of the myth of progress in the capitalist modern era of human history, which seems to presume a known end of history itself. And we can see moments of its reception and reiteration or epigenesis. Myths can only be seen in their totality (beginning and end) through other “final myths.”³⁸

For the case of the Arabs, the myth of progress seems to consolidate in the notion of an “Arab Mind.” The project of *Nahḍa* in the twentieth century could have undergone serious closure had it not been for the introduction of the trope of an ‘Arab Mind’ by Muḥammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī and others in the second half of the twentieth century. Further, the main contention of a myth is that, although it does not provide answers to all questions, it makes it seem as though there is nothing else to ask about. The *Nahḍa* like the Enlightenment propagates a narrative of progress that necessitates a corollary

³⁷ Ibid., p.121.

³⁸ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab*, Jafet Library, American University of Beirut, NBMVA Mic-A: 548, p. 39.

“The Nineteenth century” has become a categorical expression which reflects both ways, for people who saw themselves as part of “an age” or “an era” like Buṭrus al-Bustānī for instance [tradition leading up to Marx and Weber] and for those who commit to the conception of modernity as a radically new age of humanity.

historicisation of the Arabs as having slumbered up to the nineteenth century yet managed to attain hold on a classical ancient knowledge (inherent in the language's grammar and syntax). The nineteenth century, "the age like no other", ³⁹ as Buṭrus al-Bustānī called it, brought to the Arabs the promise of dispelling myth and superstition with the advances of science and the promise of progress – "the age of knowledge and Enlightenment [*al-ma 'rifa w-al-nūr*], the age of inventions and discoveries, the age of literature and science, the age of industry and art!"⁴⁰

The nineteenth century is portrayed by Bustānī as a messianic time which carries with it an eternal promise of progress, of paradise on earth. Fāris Nimr, a contemporary of Bustānī and co-founder of *al-Muqtaṭaf* science journal,⁴¹ in his own speech at the commencement ceremony of the all girl Evangelical School in Tripoli in 1884, began his oration with a stanza that carried the same 'secularising' sentiment. In order to progress Nimr argued that "We, the sons and daughters of the nation, ought to focus on being able to name the flowers of this world rather than ponder on the bounties of heaven. We ought to walk in the paradise of worldly gardens rather than in the gardens of paradise."⁴²

The invocation of paradise and the heavens as the antithesis of worldly existence is another idiom of these times. While European philologists had been wondering what language Adam and Eve spoke in the Gardens of Eden they strayed down the paths of

³⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁰ Established by Ya'qub al-Sarruf and Fāris Nimr (1867-1952). It was printed in Beirut by the American Press until 1882 when it moved to Egypt. Refer to my MPhil thesis "Performing the *Nahḍa*: Science and Progress In the Nineteenth-century *Muqtaṭaf*" presented to the Anthropology Department at the American University of Beirut (2008).

⁴¹ *Asmā ' al-zahr am zahru al-samā ' fī jināni al-rawḍ am rawḍ li-jinān.*

⁴² Refer to Maurice Olender's *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Arthur Goldhammer. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

racial classification, taxonomy, and comparison.⁴³ Ernest Renan and Herder looked to the Bible and the Hebrew Testament as the roots of the story of human civilization. They, along with Leibniz, saw language as a mirror of human nations. Etienne Condillac had gone as far as proclaiming language as the reflection of the ‘genius’ of a people. In this sense every language bore the traits of its people. Now, given the ancient origin of Arabic and its ‘Semitic’ lineage, its speakers are placed in an anachronistic position under the philological gaze, they are both ancient and immutable, ill-fitted for their times, in need of reform and most importantly in need to rethink their relationship with their paradise through translation.

As though taking heed from the people of Babel, who, in the Biblical myth, were scattered across the world and whose tower was destroyed by God when they attempted to make one tongue and one name for themselves, nineteenth-century intellectuals and Arab thinkers willingly relinquished paradise and opted for the translation that was their fate. Bustānī exclaimed, in 1862, that his nation, *waṭan*, will not become a Babel of tongues as it was of religions.⁴⁴ Bustānī and his other contemporaries frequently invoked the story of Babel. This myth is one of many pertaining to Nahḍa thought. For, the Nahḍa, like the Enlightenment, takes over and organises myth. Babel becomes a metaphor for teaching and instruction. It can be manipulated by Bustānī for the purpose of furthering yet another myth of Enlightenment – perpetual progress.

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that Enlightenment draws a mythical narrative of the birth of the modern world, beginning in the Olympian tradition and leading to the

⁴³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Naḥḍ al-Sūriyya*, Pamphlet Ten, Jafet Library, American University of Beirut, MICNA 0035:1860-Sep-Apr.

⁴⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 24.

Renaissance, Reformation, and bourgeois atheism.⁴⁵ They contend that the “enlightenment regresses to the mythology it had never been able to escape”.⁴⁶ The Enlightenment’s engagement with the mastery of nature and disenchantment of the world, the homogenisation of culture, the celebration of reason and science as replacements of magic and spirits is shared by nineteenth-century thinkers as evident in Bustānī and Nimr’s ‘secularising’ perceptions of knowledge. This is not a matter of “exportation of enlightenment”, but a record of the true mythical capacity of the project of modernity.⁴⁷ In other words, the problematic aspect of modernity does not emerge from its importation, hence the fallibility of Huntington’s clash of civilizations narrative.

The ‘Arabs’, ‘Indians’ and ‘Greeks’ did not fail to internalise the logic of modernity. Thus, their regression, rather the very logic of modernity, is itself inherently polemical, conflicted, and disguised. “Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalised. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo. Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the ‘outside’ is the real source of fear.”⁴⁸ The Nahḍa is very much like the Benjaminian angel of history propelled by a storm from paradise “with such violence that the angel can no longer

⁴⁵ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Refer to the digital recordings available online of a series of sessions at the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University entitled “Exporting Enlightenment.” <http://www.nyu.edu/ipk/events/series.php?id=7> Moreover, the logic of science as progress is in itself inherently conflicted. Many studies in the history of science have shown its enmeshment in and production of structures of social inequality on one hand and its involvement in occult practices and its enduring links with theology on the other. For an example of these studies, refer to Snobelen, Stephen D., “‘The true frame of Newton’: Isaac Newton, Heresy, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy”, in John Brooke and Ian Maclean, eds., *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 223-62.

⁴⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations* (New York, Schocken Books: 2007), p. 258.

close his wings. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.” This storm, declared Benjamin in 1940, is “what we call progress”.⁴⁹ The very same storm overtook the imaginary societies of the ‘Arab world’ and continues to brew in the discourse of development and under-development.

That the nineteenth-century thinkers shared similar burdens to the European ‘moderns’ like John Locke, Francis Bacon and Jean Jacques Rousseau, could be as a result of the natural progression of cultures in time and their immersion in questions that reflect humanity’s mode of being. However, this view is in itself a modernist metaphor that bases itself on the tautological assumption of the creation of some kind of unitary sequence out of real events while, in fact, the literary discussions of modernity, progress, past, history, future, and meaning – by being based in literature – primarily occur in a synchronous juxtaposition due to the very nature of the “literary text as entity and not event.”⁵⁰ It is important to keep in mind the literary nature of the texts that have been shoe horned into the Nahḍa paradigm and the latter’s centrality for thinking of Arab identity as I move from nation to literature throughout this dissertation.

The Nahḍa interlocutors: From Arab nation to Arab mind

Muḥammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, in the introduction of his book, *The Arab Renaissance Initiative: a Critical Review*, begins by imagining what a time traveller from the

⁴⁹ Paul de Man makes this distinction in *Blindness and Insight*.

⁵⁰ Mohammed ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, *al-Mashrū‘ al-nahḍawī al-‘arabī murāja‘a naqdiyya*, [The Arab Nahḍa Project, a critical assessment], (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya, 2009). Here ‘Ābed al-Jābirī translates *Nahḍa* as *renaissance*.

nineteenth century would say when seeing the world in the present.⁵¹ He purports that the images of the present world would invoke a sense of bewildered loss and deep thinking on part of the time-traveller (whose voice seems to overlay Jābirī's own in the text; they seem to share the same loss). The time traveller tells himself that he must differentiate between dreams and reality⁵² (*bayn al-ḥilm wa-al-wāqaʿ*). He must be realistic and see the tremendous challenges faced by the Arab Nahḍa and its race against three projects: European modernity; international socialism; and Zionism.⁵³ Yet, the traveller, Jābirī tells us, is not surprised to see that “the concerns that had formed the Arab Nahḍa in the past century continue to constitute the demands and ambitions of Arabs at the turn of the twentieth century. His astonishment will increase when he realises that the world has turned upside down in one hundred years time.” Jābirī adds, “he will understand that the ‘enlightened Europe’ that had prophesied freedom, progress, and peace for itself and all other peoples under the slogan of ‘modernity’” has been driven by the winds in other directions and has driven the winds in other directions – opposite to the core values of European modernity in the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ The metaphor of time travel, as used by Jābirī, is premised on the participant (the Arab subject) de-realising him/herself and observing a reality as though s/he was not really part of it. This conception is characteristic of utopian fantasies that often culminate with the participant “reducing themselves to a pure de-substantialized

⁵¹ ʿĀbed al-Jābirī, *al-Mashrūʿ al-nahḍawī al-ʿarabī murājjaʿ a naqdiyya*, p. 10.

⁵² Ibid., p.10.

⁵³ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, (London: Verso, 2011), p. 82.

⁵⁴ ʿĀbed al-Jābirī, *al-Mashrūʿ al-nahḍawī al-ʿarabī murājjaʿ a naqdiyya*, p. 20.

gaze ignored by the objects of the gaze.”⁵⁵ Modernity is depicted as a utopian entity from which the Arab subject is barred.

Jābirī argues that the failure of the Arab Nahḍa had not been caused by internal regressive elements within Arab society but from the destructive force of European modernity, which was represented in its core values of ‘power’ and ‘competition’.⁵⁶ Jābirī, unique amongst other contemporary Arab intellectuals, suggests that the French Revolution’s ideals failed in Europe during the nineteenth century by the expansion of the colonial project. For the case of the Arabs, Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt (argues Jābirī) signified the death of Enlightenment ideals. For him, the problem of modernity is initiated by the consolidation of an idea of a unified Europe in the nineteenth century as a superior nation.⁵⁷ Like many other post-colonial scholars, Jābirī believes that colonialism corrupted an originally progressive Enlightenment project that was born out of the eighteenth century. In a revealing moment, in his text on European Modernity, Jābirī posits that the nineteenth century witnessed a “replacement of God with world History. As well, the leader of History and the representation of the apex of its progress came to be Europe and Europe became God’s chosen nation.” Tacitly, Jābirī adds between parenthesis, “(like the Jews consider themselves God’s chosen people so did Europe).”⁵⁸ Jābirī argues that Darwinian evolutionary theory was the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁶ ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, *Mashrū‘ al-nahḍawī al-‘arabī murāja‘a naqdiyya*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.30.

⁵⁸ The attack on Marx for his analysis of colonialism in India has been often used by conservative secular nationalists and Islamists in the Arab world. Mehdī ‘Āmel provides an excellent rebuttal of the claim that depicts Marx as an Orientalist in *Munāqshāt wa-aḥādīth: fī qaḍāyā ḥarakat al-taḥarur al-waṭanī wa-tamayuz al-mafāhīm al-mārksiyya ‘arbiyyān* [Discussions and Conversations: on national liberation movements and the use of Marxist conceptions for the Arab world] (Beirut: *Dār al-fārābī*, 1990)

natural corollary of the hegemonic project of European modernity. It is important to point out the weaknesses underlying Jābirī's account and his allusion to the example of Jewish hegemony as parallel to the European one.

Primarily, Jābirī claims that Zionism was “the first moment in which European modernity contradicted itself.”⁵⁹ He argues that Zionism formed as a reaction to the failures of European modernity to fulfil its own promise of equality and secularism for its own Jews and that Zionism simultaneously fulfilled the colonial hegemonic project of European modernity. Jābirī contends that the primary adversary for the Arab Nahḍa and its national project was that of Zionism. Rather than complicating the very meaning of sovereignty of nations in an increasingly globalised world economy, Jābirī picks his fight with Zionism as the main adversary for Arab Nationalism. Thus, he misses that both projects are in many ways born from the same Enlightenment paradigm.

The guise under which Zionism infiltrated European thought, argues Jābirī, is the demand of equality and freedom for the Jews as though they had been a subjugated minority. He posits that international Zionism planned and infiltrated European politics and held control of “the world economic and monetary system” and took control of “socialist ideologies in Europe.”⁶⁰ Jābirī then proposes that the second opponent of the Arab Nahḍa and one of the causes of its demise was international socialism. He relegates all of socialist thought to the category of St Simonian thought and attacks Marx for his defence of English colonisation of India.⁶¹ He also argues that the international socialist project was blind to the colonial reality of societies outside

⁵⁹ ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, *Mashrū‘ al-nahḍawī al-‘arabī murāja‘a naqdiyya*, p. 50-51.

⁶⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p. 82.

⁶¹ Moishe Postone, *History and Helplessness*, p. 99.

Europe. Jābirī claims that, although European workers gained their rights, they continued to gain wealth and power from the colonisation of other working classes. However, although this is a direct result of the nationalisation of working classes Jābirī continues to call for the national unity of all Arabs. The crowning achievements of modernity are for him “democracy, freedom, the demand for social equality, the aim to achieve civilizational, economic, and technological progress, and the establishment of the tenets of human rights discourse.”⁶²

It is clear that Jābirī does not question the core meanings of democracy or even human rights; these, for him, remain unquestioned. I come back to a detailed discussion of human rights discourse and its fallacies in Chapter 3. He argues that there have been successes that can be attributed to the Nahḍa, “cultural unity, *waḥda thaqāfiyya* ... a unified language from the ocean to the gulf”, and “the limiting of the expansionist project of Zionism in Israel.”⁶³ Jābirī’s theses deserve a much more expansive analysis. However, for the purposes of this dissertation I wish to point out the most salient problems of this representative contemporary discourse on Nahḍa. To begin with, Jābirī’s understanding of Zionism remains largely anti-Semitic and therefore limits any imminent critique of this hegemonic project of modernity.

Jābirī attributes a power to Jews that is abstract, universal, and global. He seems to understand the abstract hegemony of modernity as an economic and political system, in terms of a domination of an international Jewry over European Enlightenment thought. Thus, for Jābirī, it is almost as though the Arab subject is jealous of the position in which the Zionist subject has been placed. Anti-Semitism is largely characterised by a

⁶²Ibid., p. 99.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 99.

jealous fantasy or a political jealousy. “In jealousy, the subject *creates/imagines a paradise from which he is excluded*.”⁶⁴ This jealousy is underlined by a utopian understanding of the nature of society.

Moishe Postone argues that a persisting problem within Arab Nationalism is this anti-Semitic attitude. He contends that “anti-Semitism can appear to be anti-hegemonic. This is the reason why a century ago August Bebel, the German Social Democratic leader, characterised it as the socialism of fools. Given its subsequent development, it could also have been called the anti-imperialism of fools. As a fetishised form of oppositional consciousness, it is particularly dangerous because it appears to be anti-hegemonic, the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination.”⁶⁵ Postone argues that anti-Semitism “is a fetishised, profoundly reactionary form of anti-capitalism” that has resurged in the Arab world in contemporary times.⁶⁶

Accordingly, anti-Semitism emerges as an ideology and conceals the real reasons for an increase in the decline of the Arab/Muslim world. Postone attributes this decline to the shifts in the world economic system to a post-Fordist mode of production in which authoritarian states that professed Arab Nationalism could no longer control their own economies. He argues that while East Asia has been successful in absorbing the shifts in the world system, “less well known is the steep decline of the Arab world, which was

⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, “A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams” In Sigmund Freud, *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, The Pelican Freud Library, vol.11 Trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1984) p. 231.

⁶⁵ Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation, Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) p. 30.

⁶⁶ Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, Muḥammad Arkūn, Ṣadiq Jalāl al-‘Azm, and many other writers and thinkers of the Arab world have recently established the “League for Rational Arabs” (*Rābiṭat al-‘aqliiṁ al-‘arab*) that prophesies its purpose as “attaining a secular rational enlightenment culture.” Refer to their website www.alawan.org.

dramatically revealed in the *United Nations Arab Human Development Report* of 2002, according to which per-capita income in the Arab world has shrunk in the past twenty years to a level just above that of sub-Saharan Africa. Even in Saudi Arabia, for example, the per capita GDP fell from \$24,000 in the late 1970s to \$7,000 at the beginning of this century.”⁶⁷ According to Postone, this decline has triggered a weakening in Arab nationalism and a rise of Islamic ideology that purports to explain the decline and political despair of Arab people. This has been accompanied by a tendency in the Arab and Muslim world to attribute decline and failure to an external evil enemy. For Postone, Sayyid Quṭb represents this salient discourse. Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, as a secularist, can be seen to have taken a similar path to Quṭb.

For Jābirī, like Quṭb, Israel and Zionism are the spearheads of international hegemony. Moreover, international socialism remained for him Eurocentric and in opposition to the national liberation project of the Arabs. The main problem with Jābirī’s analysis is that it remains reactionary in essence. It circumvents any real appraisal of the hegemonic force of the project of modernity and remains ambiguous at its core to the problematic inherent in national thought. Thus, in his aforementioned quote “Europe had been driven by other winds” away from the core values of modernity, Jābirī claims that there is a transhistorical immutable core for Enlightenment and modernity that lies underneath all the corrupting historical processes of Zionism, International Socialism, and Colonialism. This core of modernity could only be described by Jābirī as having been concealed by uninvited tempests.

⁶⁷ I borrow here Jeffrey Sacks translation of Elias Khuri’s words from *al-Dhākira al-Mafqūda*. Beirut: Dār al-Adab, 1981. Jeffrey Sacks. "Futures of Literature: *Inhitat, Adab, Naqd*." *diacritics* 37.4 (2007), p. 34.

Moreover, by claiming that the successes of the Nahḍa can be summarised in the unification of both language and culture Jābirī wholly reproduces the Nahḍa dream of homogenisation of society and the nationalisation of communities. It is a dream in the Freudian sense because it expresses the desires of a national imaginary in an iconographic representation. The fantasy of linguistic and cultural unity is the objective content of the dream which, according to Freud, is “a projection: an externalisation of an internal process.”⁶⁸ Not only is the dream of an Arab nation a form of interpretation of the social-imaginary it is open to constant deferred interpretation. “As form, the Nation is fundamentally unintelligible. Or, more precisely, *a nation cannot be read as a text; even if it were to make sense, we would distrust it.*”⁶⁹

This precisely why the nation is like a dream. Thus the texts that bear the marks of the nation, such as Jābirī’s here, are descriptions of a dream that cannot be simply described as narration. In other words, the Arab nation is more than the sum total of all the texts that speak of it (Jābirī’s included). It cannot be reduced to a set of narratives that can be entered into and contained in history because the nation institutes history as well as being instituted by it. In other words, the Nation is located within history and at the same time appropriates history. The nation makes possible for the social imaginary a ground from which it can fantasise and recreate itself because it carries a sacred promise of immortality. However, this is at the cost of violence directed at an ‘internal other’, whether it be the irrational, un-enlightened, pre-modern subject within the nation itself or the external enemy mirrored in an internal subject.

⁶⁸ Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-‘aql al-‘arabī*, *The Constitution of the Arab Mind* (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya, 1991) p. 17.

⁶⁹ ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, *Mashrū‘ al-nahḍawī al-‘arabī murāja‘a naqdiyya*, p. 65-66.

⁶⁹ Malik Bin Nabī, *Shrūṭ al-nahḍa*, , *The Conditions for an occurrence of Nahḍa*, (Damascus: *Dar al-fikr*, 2006)

The demarcation of the boundaries of exteriority and interiority within the national fantasy is embedded within colonial politics. In fact, it can be said that the Nation colonises its own subjects by nationalising them. However, Jābirī's analysis proves that it is hard to simply denote the nation as a nineteenth-century invention. His works, along with other twentieth-century thinkers, demonstrates that the logic of nationalism is reproduced through the very logic of modernisation. The 'core' of modernity, an ever elusive entity, remains to be coveted by Jābirī, Jurj Ṭarābīshī, Ṣadīq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, and hundreds of other contemporary Arab writers, thinkers, and academics.⁷⁰ This core or essence is broadly defined as "rational, secular, and enlightened."

There exists today in the 'Arab world' a movement called *al-Awān*, The Time to Come, which was established by intellectuals who claim to represent 'Arab thought' like ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma, Ṣadīq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, and Jurj Ṭarābīshī. This intellectual movement aims at moving Arab society "towards a secular, rational, and enlightened culture" (*thaqāfa ʿilmāniyya, ʿaqlāniyya, wa-al-tanwīriyya*). The main goal of the movement is secularisation as the only solution to the dilemma that plights the Arab world. According to these intellectuals, it is the opposition between religion (*dīn*) and reason (*al-ʿaql*), and the resistance to reason due to 'traditional religious' thinking, that has caused the Arab plight of under-development. Rather than questioning the tenets of modernity from which Arab realities are actually made, Arab intellectuals who have written on the Nahḍa have generally reified the plights of their societies into cultural and identitarian ones. Needless to say, attributing the plights of modernity to the shortcomings of tradition is not only reifying but, in fact, reproduces the myth of Nahḍa.

⁷⁰ Anīs Nṣūlī, *Asbāb al-nahḍa al-ʿarabiyya*, , The Causes of the Arab Nahḍa. (Beirut: Tabara Press, 1926).

It seems that the desires of nineteenth-century thinkers have gained momentum across the years to become a largely uncritical project that delimits critique as a mere “writing upon writing, and language upon language.”⁷¹ Criticism as such becomes an inheritance that repeatedly draws the same boundary over and over again between the past and the present, and institutes the ontology of Arab being as an interruption repeated endlessly. Arab writers have been diligent in propounding this Nahḍa narrative to the present day. Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, in his book *al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* (The Arab Mind), argues that the three cultures, the Arabs, Greeks, and Europeans, “alone practiced theoretical rational thinking which allowed for the emergence of modern scientific and philosophical knowledge that breaks with mythology and fantasy.”⁷²

The Nahḍa logic propagates the same claims as the Enlightenment; both propound reason over myth, yet regress into mythmaking. The Nahḍa is carried out by twentieth-century thinkers through their elaboration on the notion of Arab consciousness, *al-dhihn al-‘arabī*, or Arab consciousness, as Jābirī calls it. Although the Nahḍa, in its Arabic meaning of rising, empowerment, and responding to action, fits entirely in the logic of Enlightenment modernity, it continues to be wrongly translated as Renaissance

⁷¹ Refer to Elizabeth Thompson’s work on the interwar period in Syria and Lebanon, *Colonial Citizens* (New York: Columbia University Press: 2000).

⁷² George Antonius’s *Arab Awakening* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938) is the nationalist telling par excellence of the Arabs as a nation. Antonius’s book has been critiqued as a source of historical analysis mostly by proponents of the idea that Arab nationalist were part of a grander Islamic Reform movement (like Ernest Dawn, Elie Kedourie, and Sylvia Haim). These critiques, although not baseless, miss the crucial insight from Antonius’s enunciative work. The *Arab Awakening* reveals the challenges posed by its real happening to international politics and foreign interest, a matter that remains so today. I read the trope of awakening as a disruption and occultation of history read through national identity logic that in its most inner core seeks to appropriate a “monotheistic desire” (Gourgouris: 1996, 27). Antonius’s telling of an Arab history at the moment when Arabs were most prone to social schism (inter-war period, occupation of Palestine, British and French colonialism, and changing social and economic structures) is almost a dream’s telling of national continuity and resurrection.

to this day.⁷³ To translate the word *Nahḍa* into Renaissance, as tens of scholars have done, wrongly suggests that: 1) the Arab renaissance begets or calls upon its logical inheritor (from a historicist perspective) its Industrial Revolution and; 2) it also awaits an Enlightenment, which is yet to come, hence the endless debates on the “causes of Arab failure.” This failure is the cause of developmentalist logic and Orientalist notions, its other major result is analysis of ‘Arab’ societies according to the ideas of centre and periphery.

Jābirī was not the first to posit the notion of an Arab Mind. Before him, Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, on April 11, 1977, wrote in *Rūz al-Yūsuf* journal, an article entitled “The Arab Mind is Regressing.” After the 1967 defeat, Arab intellectuals became increasingly interested in the very nature of ideological thought and invested much of their efforts in elucidating the reasons for the Arab defeat in Arab thought itself. This reification of historical events into conditions of thought provided a fertile ground for modern Islamist movements to gradually replace the more secular Arab nationalists. The answer of the Islamists to the question of “why have the Arabs failed” was because they had strayed from *turāth*, tradition. *Turāth*, none the less, became a notion that carried the meaning of ‘origins’ and *uṣūl* Mālik bin Nabī, for one, calls for an ‘Islamic Awakening’ to promote the progress of the Arab peoples.⁷⁴ The most underlying theme in the discussion of the plight of the Arab and Islamic people is colonialism. For countless authors it was colonialism that ruptured the Arab people’s experience and alienated them from their past origins. The emphasis placed on colonisation as the reason for Arab and Islamic societies’ regress delimits the debate to cultural terms. The

⁷³ Nṣūlī, *Asbāb al-nahḍa al-‘arabiyya*, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnsī, *Muqdimat kitāb aqwam al-masālik fī ma ‘rifat aḥwāl al-mamālik*, (Beirut: Dār al-Talā‘i, , 1978), p. 105.

Arab or Muslim must reach back into pre-colonial times for the solutions to the problems based in their post-colonial present. The insistence on the uniqueness of Arab and Islamic cultural identity overlooks the real material forces that caused a sense of alienation in society in the first place. Cultural difference thus becomes the coveted aim of discussants of the state of Arab societies. The claim to cultural difference, in fact, reifies immediate felt inequalities (to which writings on *Nahḍa* are addressed) to a transhistorical status, thereby ignoring the ongoing conflict between societies and modernity as a distinct political economic project.

Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, along with countless other intellectuals, continues to analyse the position of the Arab through *Nahḍa* conceptual grounds that never escape the spectre of Europe. As such, the *Nahḍa* is reproduced through ideological tropes. It becomes a foundational myth which imposes an epistemological hold on notions like *umma*, *waṭan*, *qawm*, *qawmiyya*, *taqaddum*, *ḥaḍāra*, *tamaddun*, *siyāsa*, *adab*, and *‘ilm*. This hold gathers its strength, I argue, from the constant reproduction of an interrupted reading of history that has come to define the limits of Arab identitarian discourse.

Through the *Nahḍa*-as-Renaissance lens history becomes for the ‘Arabs’, a comparative subject, a struggle to attain the standards of civilisation and progress set by the West that continues to hold the reigns of Modernity. At the most, through the *Nahḍa* as a reading of history, the ‘Arab’ or the ‘Muslim’ can play the role of the different yet necessary other to the West while continuing to adhere to the rules of the market. Ultimately, the *Nahḍa* as a paradigm for reading ‘Arab’ history is under the aegis of the idea of tolerant pluralism as a solution for existing inequalities. Its persistence in

scholarship keeps up the illusion of ‘alternative modernities’ and permits the existence of an illusion of difference.

Tracing the history of a concept

The common narrative of the initiation of an ‘Arab Nahḍa’ begins with Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt in 1798. It was then when the ‘Arabs’ proposed the need for ‘progress’, *taqaddum*, based on the looming presence of European colonialism and its knowledge-as-power claims on the world. The Napoleonic encounter with the Arabs befits the myth of modernity. In this sense, it is not that the Arabs were actually regressed (or existed as a modern category before this) but their engagement with world history, as any other national category in modern times, had to anchor on a fracture which is signified by Napoleon’s campaign. Thus, the notion of progress from the onset of this encounter bears a history of decline, positing itself as the only true sovereign of modernity. The metaphor of Crusoe employed by Bustānī for the education of society elucidates this process and will be discussed in a forthcoming chapter.

One of the first discussions of the Nahḍa was put forth by Anīs Nṣūlī in 1924. Nṣūlī wrote *The Causes of the Arab Nahḍa* in response to a call put out by the American University in Beirut for the Howard Bliss Prize, which specified that contestants submit treatises discussing the reasons behind the occurrence of an Arab Nahḍa. By then, the occurrence of a Nahḍa as awakening was already being proposed as a reality. The American Missionaries proposed the trope of awakening based on their own conception of history as a series of phases of religious revival in America from the 18th to 19th centuries. The idea of ‘awakening’ as such is based on an evangelical worldview. Anis

Nṣūlī described the nineteenth-century Nahḍa as the age in which “we [the Arabs] achieved the greatest feat of progress.”⁷⁵

It is worth noting that most of the reprints of Nahḍa literature happen in the first half of the twentieth century when national sentiment was at its strongest, before the establishment of colonial states and the introduction of the crisis of Palestine. Thus, we see a proliferation of reprints between the 1900s and the 1940s of Nahḍa works and a gradual diminishment of their printing towards the middle of the twentieth century. The increase in reprints in the colonial period – at least in Lebanon and Syria – can be attributed to the increasing tension between the colonisers and colonised. It is also a period of great uneven economic development, changing gender roles, and class changes.⁷⁶ One can argue that the narrative of an Arab Nationalism was propagated in society as a dream of unity amidst all the fractures that began to emerge in the post-colonial states. Narratives on the Nahḍa tend to change after the 1960s, due to the 1967 defeat of Abed al-Nasser and manifestations of beginning ‘failures’ of Arab nation states in the region.

The transformations of Nahḍa discourse in the twentieth century remain to be studied. However, it is worth noting that the 70s and 80s and 90s witnessed the publication of countless books and volumes on *al-ḥadātha*, modernity, and the failures of the Arab

⁷⁵ Raḍwān Ziāda, *Idūlūjīat al-nahḍa fī al-khiṭāb al-‘arabī al-mu‘āṣir* [The Nahḍa Ideology in Contemporary Arab Discourse]. (Beirut, *Dār al-ṭalī‘a*, 2004). p. 156.

⁷⁵ Ziāda, *Idūlūjīat al-nahḍa*, p. 167.

⁷⁵ Ḥamīd Khalīl, *‘Azmat al-‘aql al-‘arabī*, [The Plight of the Arab Mind]. (Damascus: *Dār al-kina ‘ān*, 1992).

⁷⁵ ‘Abed al-Jābirī’s works are abundant with this kind of discussion.

⁷⁵ Ibrāhīm Badrān and Salwā Khamāsh, *Dirāsāt fī al-‘aqīla al-‘arabiyya al-khrāfa*, [A Study in Arab Mentality: Mythologies], (Beirut, *Dār al-ḥaqīqa*: 1988) p. 8.

⁷⁶ Ziāda, *Idyulujiya al-nahḍa*, p. 179.

Nahḍa. By then, the notion of failure had come to underline Arab nationalist regimes while the model of the religious revolution in Iran gradually took over as a model of success. Although this thesis does not propose to analyse the changing reactions to the Nahḍa, it is worth noting this here for future investigation.

In the early twentieth century, Nṣūlī and his contemporaries had described the Nahḍa as the “modern awakening of the Arabs” and as the “age of awakening from deep slumber.”⁷⁷ The period before the Nahḍa was depicted as an age of “chaos, bandits, feudal lords, religious despotism, and ignorant shaykhs and priests.”⁷⁸ The frequently referred to metaphor of the Arabs rising from sleep is not haphazard either; it fits neatly into the array of metaphors invoked when approaching the Nahḍa, such as dreaming and emerging from sleep, stupor, or blissful ignorance.

These metaphors have become the epistemic tools that belong to, as well as form, the ‘Arab social imaginary’ and they have had an enduring hold on it since the nineteenth century. The question of when the Nahḍa occurs or when the moment of origination and termination took place has been discussed by many Arab writers and historians. Some view the Nahḍa as a reaction to the ‘sudden impact’ of Europe on the ‘Arabs’, with Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt in 1798, the spread of the printing press, the arrival of missionaries in the Levant and Egypt, and the travel of Arab figures like Jabart, Ṭaḥṭāwī, and Shidyāq to Europe, and the literary corpus they left behind.

Albert Hourani argues that Rifā‘ al Ṭaḥṭāwī embodied the questions of the Nahḍa in his adoption of the slogan “love of the nation.” Hourani compares Ṭaḥṭāwī’s statement to Montesquieu’s discussions of *l’amour de la patrie*. He proposes that Ṭaḥṭāwī

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.179.

⁷⁸ Ziāda, *Idyulujiya al-nahḍa*, p. 163.

realised that the roots of European Civilization or *tamaddun* originated in the love of the people for their country, a love that is religious in nature. Ṭaḥṭāwī, like many after him, became immersed in the question of revealing the “secrets of European civilization.” Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq pursued a similar feat in his *kashf al-mukhabba ‘an tamaddun urūbba*. The explicit aim in these pursuits of the secrets of Europe for these intellectuals was the progress of their own society. The implicit aim was the expression of an underlying anxiety provoked by the paradoxes of modern civilization and identity and difference.

Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnsī published, in 1867, his *aqwam al-masālik fī ma ‘rifat aḥwāl al-mamālik* – a comparative treatise of the “progress and regress in the ages of civilizations” because “we cannot realise our own state without understanding the state of those who are different from us.”⁷⁹ The nineteenth century bore the ‘Arab’ and Arabic as a comparative subject and as an identitarian category in the modern historical narrative of ‘world civilization’. Moreover, it allowed for the production of hyphenated categories like, the Muslim-Arab, the Christian-Arab, and the Arab-Jew as part and parcel of the distinctly modern relationship between religion and politics, as posited by the Enlightenment and French and American revolutions.

Raḍwān Ziāda in *The Ideology of Nahḍa in Contemporary Arab Discourse* suggests that the return to the question of the Nahḍa in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, might be based in the failure of various political projects in the Arab world, whether Marxist, Socialist, Nationalist, or perhaps one can today add Islamic. Ziāda argues, based on his recollection of the nuances of the debate from the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twenty first century, that the Nahḍa is necessarily an ideological

⁷⁹ Nṣūlī, *Asbāb al-Nahḍa al- ‘Arabiyya*.

construction that signifies the commitment of Arab intellectuals to *taqlīd*, copying tradition, rather than *naqd*, critique.⁸⁰ Ziāda suggests that across the Islamic, Marxist, and Ba’thist analysis, the discussions of Nahḍa have produced a series of binary oppositions that seem to bring writers back to the same question: Why have the Arabs regressed and the West progressed?

The culmination of these discussions can be seen in ‘Ābed al-Jābirī’s project of the “Critique of the Arab Mind” (*Naqd al- ‘aql al- ‘arabī*), a work that Ziāda analyzes as a resort to Cartesian metaphysics and the notion of a cogito. After two centuries of production and re-production of stagnant oppositions, Arab writers sought the presence of the ‘Arab identity’ in the construction of a reductive notion of an ‘Arab mind.’⁸¹ The ‘Arab mind’ according to those who propagate this narrative is either plagued by *turāth* or tradition⁸², by religious thinking,⁸³ superstition,⁸⁴ or it is in need of religion. Thus, the trope of (for instance) ‘Islamic Mind’ by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tarīrī, Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Fayumī, and Abū Yu’rub al-Marzuqī was introduced. This notion of an ‘Arab mind’ has gradually replaced the discussions of Nahḍa and displaced them into the realm of a fictive construction, an imaginary mind “that carries within it the possibilities of Nahḍa as liberation, the promise of a unified Arab nation state, a national democratic socialist union, independence from Imperialist

⁸⁰ Refer to ‘Azīz al- ‘Aẓma-’s work on the role of the Arab intellectual.

⁸¹ For an excellent discussion of the shortcomings of post-colonial theory refer to E. San Juan, *Beyond Post-colonial Theory*, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999).

⁸² On Barak “Egyptian Times: Temporality, Personhood, and the Technopolitical making of Modern Egypt, 1830-1930.” Dissertation submitted to the Department of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University (2006), p. 8.

⁸³ On Barak, “Egyptian Times”, p. 19.

⁸⁴ On Barak, “Egyptian Times”, p. 8.

globalisation, and above all that, the defeat of the Zionist project.”⁸⁵ Ziāda sarcastically exclaims, “The Arab mind is a gargantuan giant waiting to be released from its fetters and chains for us to achieve all what we have longed for.”⁸⁶

In an extensive discussion of the trends of thought concerning the idea of Nahḍa, Ziāda argues that “we can perhaps say that the real Nahḍa begins once we stop attempting to reclaim the age of Nahḍa.”⁸⁷ Another assertion that Ziāda makes, and I agree with here, is that the notions of Nahḍa and an Arab Mind need to be read as political projects constituted by ideologies that are complicit in the production of an ‘Arab’ reality. In other words, the invocation of a distant Nahḍa in the past, in the nineteenth century, as a remedy for current times is an ideological coup that arrests the possibilities of a rethinking of a politics for the present.

As such, the Nahḍa is not an originary moment in history from which these binaries emanate; rather it is constantly imagined and re-imagined as the very condition of believing in a national belonging of what it is to be an Arab. It is re-imagined through the works of Anis Nṣūlī,⁸⁸ George Antonius, Muḥammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī, Salāma Mūsa, Abdallah Laroui, Jurj Ṭarābīshī, Muhammad Arkun, Abū Yu’rub al-Marzuqī, Mālik Bin Nabī, Anis al-Makdisi, George Antonius and, last but not least, Albert Hourani, all of whom have engaged with the question of the Nahḍa and linked it in one way or another to the problem of modernity and enlightenment. I wish to argue that *the problem of the nation* (as nation state) *is itself the problem of the Nahḍa*, in as much as it is one of the main contentions of the European Enlightenment.

⁸⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 35.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.35.

⁸⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 45.

⁸⁸ Elias Khoury, “The Unfolding of Modern Fiction and Arab Memory”, *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1990), p. 4.

The distance between the majority of intellectuals who work on the Nahḍa – and the complicity of many of them to Arab tyrannical regimes – from their social reality is most evident in the events pushing for real democratic change in Arab countries.⁸⁹

Where does the ‘Arab Mind’ that has been incapable of liberation, incapable of attaining a much desired Nahḍa and Enlightenment, according to so many nationalist scholars, reside in the reshaping of politics in the Arab world today? There is an urgent need for a reading of Nahḍa against itself, with the hope of elucidating its transcendental lure for the Arabs. In this sense, I attempt to circumvent the trap of the Nahḍa narrative as it is discussed by twentieth-century writers here by interrogating some of the foundational texts from the nineteenth century. The basis of these discussions of ‘Arab identity’ was rooted in the idea of a shared language as grounds for a common Arab civilization. How is it that the notion of a shared language as a basis for identity politics transforms into the notion of an ‘Arab mind’? In other words, what are the traces that have been carried forth from the nineteenth century and what does their presence say about the narratives of fracture and modernity? Furthermore, will the Nahḍa reveal, once it is read against itself, that the nation of the Arabs was really meant to be their language? If so, what does the ‘empire of language’ say to the nation, what are its terms of politics, and what is the realm of signification that it produces?

The Nahḍa as national fantasy

The nation is reproduced by the vacuous ‘social imaginary’ and replaces previous notions of subordination in colonial times. Although globalisation has re-allocated relations of production, the nation-state persists to exist because of its role as the main

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 4.

conduit through which national and local capital is placed in the market. Thus, it is insufficient to simply write a ‘post-colonial’ critique of the nation as a historical form. This kind of critique is generally guided towards an emphasis on notions like ‘hybridity’, ‘indeterminacy’, and ‘fragmentation’, and it bases itself on a liberal contention that stresses the ‘cultural value’ of societies and their indigenous forms of existence. This approach celebrates difference and thereby can be seen to carry a belief in the liberal ethos of individualism.

What is lacking from such post-colonial critiques of the nation is an attention to the material conditions that make indeterminacy and hybridity central tenets of the capitalist economy around the world.⁹⁰ Within this field of ‘things’, structural transformations are sanitised and made to be discussions of notions like ‘desire’ and ‘ethics’. It is, thus, not the aim of this study to describe local agency in the face of global hegemony. Rather, by proposing that the *Nahḍa* is intrinsically linked to the Enlightenment and Modernity as a distinct political economic project I argue that, on the contrary, Arab nationalism was a corollary of the formation of a Fordist world system that relied on an international division of labour.

On Barak’s recent dissertation on nineteenth-century Egypt discusses the narrative of technological modernisation and its concurrence with heterogeneous temporalities of Egyptian society.⁹¹ Barak states that he does not look at de-centring the narrative of technological modernisation but on interrogating its ability to produce a homogenous empty time of modernity (where Benedict Anderson elsewhere places the nation), in

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 4. The prophetic mode can be identified in Nāṣif al Yāzījī’s *Mujama’ al-Baḥrain*, for instance, in which he writes sixty *Maqamāt*, emulating al-Ḥarīrī and al-Hamadhānī. Yāzījī also wrote an incomplete book on al-Mutanabbī which was continued by his son Ibrāhīm.

⁹¹ Khoury, “The Unfolding of Modern Fiction and Arab Memory”, p. 4. Khoury argues that it was only until the Mahfouzian novel that the form was “liberated from the mirror”; the form emerged from the formless.

which the Egyptians were somehow always one step behind. The key insight in Barak's analysis is the possibility, initiated by the colonial context (which is, in turn, inseparable from the technological advancements of the modern world being constituted by them and constituting them), to have a 'differential simultaneity', in which the Egyptian experience of modernity is paradoxically born from comparability and difference.

Barak describes Ḥasan al-Bannā's discussion of time and it is worth showing how Bannā constructs a notion of 'Islamic time' and builds on the same metropolitan categories for his anti-colonial critique (that Barak singles out as being in itself colonial). In this way, what occurs is a production of a category that is "a simulation that discards its source, a replica that retroactively projects itself as origin."⁹² This process is autochthonous to modernity itself, in which "assimilation is often predicated on a-similarity, on stressing uniqueness and cultural specificity."⁹³ This 'simulation', a term coined by Jean Baudrillard in his work on modernity, occurs in the nineteenth century and it is through this stressing of uniqueness and cultural specificity that the Arab is formed as a comparable national subject for whom history needs to be written as *natural history* by an assimilation of what otherwise could be unrelated temporal events into a narrative of 'Arab history.'

Adorno and Horkheimer have shown how the Enlightenment makes it possible to project the roots of modern Europe to the myths of Ancient Greece. "The Odyssey as a whole bears witness to the dialectic of Enlightenment."⁹⁴ They argue that epic and myth, contra classical philology, diverge when subject to philosophical critique. They

⁹² Stathis Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think?* p. 43.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 43.

⁹⁴ Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think?* xvi.

contend that “Homeric discourse creates a universality of language” where “the hero of the adventure turns out to be the prototype of the bourgeois individual.”⁹⁵ Both epic and myth share the common grounds of power and exploitation with Enlightenment, they tell us, through dissecting Odysseus’s self fulfilling fears, which somehow become his strengths. His command of nature, from which he had tried to escape, avenges the very heritage he had originally denied. Similarly, bourgeois Enlightenment demands sobriety, reason, and correctness, and shuns magic, wishful thinking, universal prosperity, and happiness for the sake of unity. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that “the subjective mind, which disintegrates the spiritualization of nature, masters spiritless nature only by imitating its rigidity.”⁹⁶

Along the same logic, the Nahḍa’s roots are traced to its own Homer, al-Mutanabbī. Elias Khoury suggests that the obsession of modern Arab writers with a specific “poet-prophet or poet-king” like Mutanabbī as “the source of the pure language” serves “as a bridge to revive the poet/prophet relationship which in the classical poetic imaginary is based on the personality of Adam as being both poet and prophet at the same time.”⁹⁷ Khoury proposes that the choice of the Nahḍa to revive the sacred language does not come from the ‘nature’ of Arab culture but comes from the structure of the Nahḍa itself.⁹⁸ He asks, “Why Al-Mutanabbī and not the Arabian Nights? Why the Prophet and not the philosopher?” The reply to this question, he continues, “will come through

⁹⁵Ibid., p. xvi.

⁹⁶Ibid., p.xvi.

⁹⁷ Refer to the American Great Awakenings between the 18th and 19th century. It is interesting that in the early 1900s in America there is much talk of “awakening” as a new spirit for the age at the same time that “Nahḍa” was being proposed in Arab circles. Until 1983, in America, the Symposium of Sociological Analysis debated the existence of periodical awakenings in American society.

⁹⁸ For more on the idea of Awakening in American History refer to “The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795-1842” by Joseph Conforti, *Early American Literature*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1991), pp. 99-118.

rereading the socio-political and cultural structure of the Nahḍa. For it took modern Arabic literature a long journey to rediscover language as expression and not as a veil, and to re-establish the relationship between the spoken and the written, story and reality, writing as a journey and journey as a way of writing.”⁹⁹

Shidyāq’s *Sāq* and *Kashf al-mukhabba* began to tread the path of that journey. I will show how Shidyāq’s works continue to take us back to a construction of a national self “through the mirror of the other.”¹⁰⁰ The journey genre, argues Khoury, sets the ground for the later twentieth-century literary works to escape from the “formless other”, the mirror. It seems as though the road taken by literature (Mahfouz in mind) in the twentieth century is not trodden by identitarian politics where the mirroring persists as a constant interruptive force to the possibility of thinking of another politic for the ‘modern Arabs.’

Arab national politics produced by what I have called the “interruptive logic of the Nahḍa” forms the *mythohistoricisation* of modern Arabs as a distinct nation amongst the ‘league of world nations’.¹⁰¹ I borrow the concept of *mythohistoricisation* from Gourgouris. He argues that myth is always coincidental to history (unlike the usual claim that myth precedes history – a matter that Blumenberg, Adorno, and Horkheimer debunk). The process of mythohistoricisation is the process through which societies create and recreate representations of themselves and their others. “To speak of society’s mythohistorical foundations is to speak of a continuously shifting ground, whose path is

⁹⁹ Faisal Devji “Apologetic Modernity”, *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 1 (2007), p. 687.

¹⁰⁰ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Nafīr Sūriyya*, Pamphlet Eleven, Jafet Library, American University of Beirut, MICNA 0035:1860-Sep-Apr and his entry “On Civilization”, *al-Tammadun*, in *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, Vol. 6 p. 213-215,

¹⁰¹ This trend of thought is expressed in the works of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, the founders of modern political philosophy.

river like, explicable and yet unpredictable, because history and the social imagination are both limited by their *event* and yet limitless in their project.”¹⁰² As Enlightenment construct, the Nahḍa is autogenetic for society in the sense that it is constantly reconstituted and self altered from within the nation’s logos.

Arab nationalisms largely remain to be bound to the logic of the Nahḍa (or to the limits of its reason) and the nation-dream it projects. Although the Arab nation is not necessarily confined to a strict geography in history, it holds a place in the global geography of the world. Moreover, the image of the Arab nation has always exceeded the states that claim Arab-ness in their own constitutions. The demarcation of an Arab nation claims a topographical desire (a desire for an Arab nation ‘from the ocean to the sea’) and most importantly claims an Arab *native*, a subject deeply embedded in colonial discourse. Thus, it is not surprising that the recent national uprisings in Egypt and Tunis and other social movements in the Middle East have been again labelled as ‘Arab Awakening’ or ‘Arab Spring’.

Although myth is held as a suspicious category in much historical scholarship that remains firmly rooted in nineteenth-century positivism, this dissertation takes up the call to see myth as “historical through and through”¹⁰³ and to see through the mythical domain the literary process from which society produces representations of itself and the world. Stathis Gourgouris reworks Adorno and Horkheimer’s discussion of myth and proposes that “myth is not narrative, symbolic, and archaic but theatrical,

¹⁰² *Tarbiyat Salāma Mūsa*, (n.p: 1947) p. 267.

¹⁰³ Refer to their long debate that took place in the University of Egypt in 1930, published in *al-Majala al-jadīda*, (May 1930). Also the discussion of this debate in Kamāl ‘Abd al-Latīf’s *Salāma Mūsa wa-ishkalāt al-Nahḍa*, [Salāma Mūsa and the Question of Nahḍa], (Beirut: *Dār al-fārābī*, 1982) p. 156-158.

allegorical, and *contemporary*.”¹⁰⁴ He proposes myth is, in fact, “corrosive to the transcendental, mystical, and religious”¹⁰⁵ due to its performativity. And it is the very performativity of myth that, when we look at identitarian myths, allows us to cross over the transcendental authority of collective identity and explore the tensions underlying Nahḍa thought: the tensions inherent in the formation of an Arab identity presumed to be from the past yet fit for the future and the present that are always radically different from the past.

The Nahḍa’s myth making capacity

The Nahḍa as it has been constructed and re-invented over the past one hundred years is inherently conflicted and formulated through multivalent and opposing projects.

Regardless, it somehow has come to constitute a set of enduring propositions: 1) The Arabs, after receiving knowledge from antiquity, somehow lost it, hence the infamous narrative of ‘decline’ that has underlined almost all discussions of Arab identity in the past two centuries; 2) The Arabs assume the position of translators (and preservers) of knowledge in the history of world civilization. They are thereby ‘indebted’ to the Greeks (for knowledge of medicine), to the Christians, to the Europeans, and to serendipitous times; 3) The Arabs have been victimised by a series of unfortunate events (*ghadr al-zamān*, *surūf al-dahr* are often invoked by Buṭrus al-Bustānī, for instance), such as the burning of libraries (Alexandria, Baghdad), the invasions of others (Mongol, Crusaders, Turks, Europeans), and the progress of other civilizations in industry, science, and trade.

¹⁰⁴ Salāma Mūsa, *Intiṣārāt al-insān*, Achievements of the Human Being (Egypt: *Mu’asasat al-khānjī*, 1960) p. 30-31.

¹⁰⁵ Salāma Mūsa, *Al-yawm wa-al-ghad*, , The Present and the Future. (Egypt: *al-maṭba‘a al-‘aṣriyya*, n.d.) p. 256.

It is through the *Nahḍa* logos, that this *mythistoricisation* of the Arabs is formed, and constantly re-formed. From it the Arab is forever negotiated within a set of oppositions – modern/premodern, civilized/barbaric, developed/underdeveloped, secular/sectarian, tribal/civic, Islamic/Christian Arab and so on. The internal other, or the Arab-Christian, surfaces as a category of difference in the *Nahḍa*, whereby the Arab is constructed from the outset as a boundary of inclusion and exclusion, and discourses as a site of production of minoritarian politics. The role of the Christians in the *Nahḍa* has been celebrated over and over again throughout the twentieth century – at least until the more recent Islamicist interpretations of the *Nahḍa*’s corruptive force, such as the works of Fahmi Jeda ‘an, and earlier on Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s *al-Islām wa-al-naṣrāniyya* (1902). The Christian question within Arab nationalism can be seen as a case of minoritarian nationalism within the post-Enlightenment world on one hand, and as the case for the burgeoning sectarianisms and secularisms of the nineteenth century on the other.

The trajectory of formation of the word *Nahḍa* into a conceptual paradigm delimits any discussion of Arab identity or political thought to the assessment of the Arabs’ failure, or success, in internalising the accomplishments of Western modernity, which are summarised as political liberalism, democracy, and secularisation. Thus, the *Nahḍa* transforms what was the realm of politics (*la politique*, as direct engagement with society) in the nineteenth century into an overarching realm of ‘the political’ (*le politique*) for the Arabs. This idea of the political as society’s ontological realm forms, through the *Nahḍa* lens, a realm through which the “imaginary institution of society” – Arab society in our case – always seeks its foundational moment, whether in an ancient past or in the nineteenth century. It is necessary to point out the limitations of the

Nahḍa narrative at the beginning because I am interested in picking at this foundational myth through literature from its supposed time of occurrence.

The Nahḍa, similarly to the notion of progress as it evolved in Europe, is an ideological construct in the Hegelian sense, meaning that the best it can offer as a grounds upon which all engagements with Arab identity have anchored is a state of contradiction (between past and present, loss and empowerment, lack and progress), as a final state for the ‘Arab subject.’ In other words, Nahḍa insinuates a rising to a truth or an awakening to something that is already there, but has come to be known in a moment of realisation in a manner similar to when one finds or converts to a religion. I suggest that the influence of the Protestant Missionaries on the intellectual movement in Mount Lebanon can be adduced from the very word ‘awakening’, which carries within it an Evangelical undertone as a time of religious awakening.¹⁰⁶ The religious subscript of a concept of awakening¹⁰⁷ (which is inherent to conversion and proselytisation, the main aims of the missionaries in nineteenth-century Beirut) is retrieved in translation. In this sense, the Nahḍa itself becomes a moment of conversion, of translation of the self anew, a return to an Arabic language, and an awakening to its universal potential. Simultaneously, the Nahḍa becomes a moment of rupture and discontinuity.

This rupture or discontinuity that has been pertained to the nineteenth century in various parts of the world like India and Greece is a logic inherited throughout modernity from the Christian West. Faisal Devji’s work on Muslim ‘apologetic modernity’ points out that although the idea of rupture, or break from the past, as a trait of modernity is borrowed from the West by Muslim thinkers in the nineteenth century

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Masad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 1-51.

¹⁰⁷ See Phillip Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan Press, 1970), pp. 744-745, and Hisham Sharabi *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (USA: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

(as it is for Arab thinkers at the same time and, in fact, this link between Arab Nationalism and Muslim reformism has been pointed to by historians like Hourani), “the claim that Islam constituted the first of two moments of modernity is not only distinct, but also disengaged, from both the premises and the logic of the concept of the modern as something singular in nature.”¹⁰⁸ Then, when Bustānī and Shidyāq outline the history of Arab civilization (as part of world Civilization) and they suggest that the Golden Age of the Arabs passed the beacon of progress to Europe and dissipated into stagnation until its rise in the nineteenth century, they are proposing that there are two modernities, one past and one present. Furthermore, when Bustānī argues that Civilization was created by God since the beginning of time he *apologetically* disengages from the singularity of Western modernity. This later allows him to claim that Western progress “is but one branch of leaves of the tree of modernity that is destined to fall as all leaves do.”¹⁰⁹ As time passes, and as these discussions are inherited by twentieth-century writers, a paradigm of rupture is instituted and it has led intellectuals into reified categories that only serve a defensive purpose, such as the Arab mind and Arab consciousness.

Bustānī and Shidyāq had interrogated the very meanings of words like *tamaddun*, civilization, *taqaddum*, Progress, and negotiated ideas on authority, ethics, morality, and duty in their attempt to resist a unified coherent conception of politics as a state affair of running collective interest. I will show how their idea of public good was based on a specific understanding of the self and civilization as distinct and cannot be conflated with the Western other. They still sought to redefine the terms of their own ‘civilization’ thereby resisting the proposed narrative of a singular modernity and a

¹⁰⁸ Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 745.

¹⁰⁹ Salāma Mūsa, *Ma hiya al-nahḍa* [On the meaning of Nahḍa]. (Beirut: 1974), p. 108.

singular conception of politics. The terms of their debates are conflated into the discourse of Nahḍa and put to use by their successors from the beginning of the twentieth century and onwards, in terms of politics still defined by logic of European modernity (the call for a rational, secular, and Enlightened culture) and it defines politics as the people's secular right to liberty and property as a transference of a natural right (with which humans are born) recognised by reason to a government or a state.¹¹⁰

As a central concept in the philosophy of Arab history during the twentieth century, the Nahḍa empties the content of words proposed in the nineteenth century and moves to define history in terms of fracture and crisis, one from which the 'Arabs' can only break free by the adoption of ideas of liberal democracy, reason, and rationality as basis for social life or by a re-invocation of 'tradition', which is evident in the Islamic Arab voices like Abū Yu'rūb al-Marzuqī and Mālik Bin Nabī. This state of crisis has come to define the limits of the political realm by Arab intellectuals that are so detached from their societies that they have analytical tools to deal with the mass movements occurring in the Arab world today.

The spectre of Europe haunts Nahḍa discussions of identity and history. In 1909, while in London Salāma Mūsa wrote *Muqaddimat al-superman* (Introduction to the Superman), in which he speaks about eugenics, Darwin and Shaw, half-human half-animal creatures, and Nietzsche and Christianity. Following *Introduction to Superman*, Mūsa wrote another short book: *Socialism (al-ishtirākiyya)*, in 1913. His immersion in Western thought (and a great affinity for it) is proposed by him as a critique of his own

¹¹⁰ This trend is adopted by Arab Marxists an exemplary text would be *Mehdī 'Āmel 's Azmat al-ḥaḍara al-'arabiyya am azmat al-burjwāzīāt al-'arabiyya? ?* [Is it the crisis of Arab civilization or the crisis of the Arab bourgeoisie?] (Beirut: *Dār al-fārābī*, 1974)

Arab contemporaries. He says, “While I was writing *The Subconscious*, *The Theory of Evolution and the Origin of Man*, *Modern Eloquence*, *Freedom of Thought*, *Freedom of the Mind*, and *Gandhi and the Indian Movement*, others were writing books about the Abbasids, Umayyad, and Rashidun Caliphs. Yes, I was seeking new horizons and unknown grounds while they orated to their readers the principles of the verb in past tense!”¹¹¹ Mūsā represents one end of the spectrum of thinkers who were occupied by the question of modernity through an infatuation with Europe while propagating a certain understanding of the preoccupations of the time as anachronistic and illegitimate. His perspectives on the ‘universality of human society’ and his call for union of East and West under Western Socialist thought comes a few decades after Bustānī’s re-historicisation of the ‘Arabs’ and their ‘*adab*’, where he designates a place for them as in-between, as mediators, transient yet somehow resilient.

Mūsā’s writings, followed by a series of other works, like *Zaynab* for Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *A Bird from the East* for Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Qundīl Um Hāshim* for Yaḥya Ḥaqqī, and the *Latin Quarter* by Suhayl Idris, pick up from where Ṭaḥṭāwī and Shidyāq left off in their travel literature. In other words, the early nineteenth-century genre of the journey that was itself a way of *writing* the self and discovering it, by the early twentieth century, crystallised into the exploration of East and West as distinctly opposing entities. In 1930 Mūsā engaged in a ferocious debate with Islamic thinker ‘Abbās al-‘Aqqād¹¹² over the meaning of a stanza by Rudyard Kipling from *The Ballad of East and West*: “Oh East is east, and West is west, and never the twain shall

¹¹¹ Refer to ‘Abd al-Hādī Abū Ṭālib, *Mawqa‘ al-‘ālam al-islāmī min al-ḥiwār al-ḥaqāqī*, [The Position of Islam from the Question of Modernity] (Casablanca: n.p., 1985) and Muḥsin Mussāwī’s *Al-qarn al-ḥādī wa-al-‘ashrīn wa-al-baḥṭh ‘an al-hawiyya*, [The Twenty First Century and the Quest for Identity] (Beirut, *Dār al-hādī*: 1999).

¹¹² Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela W. Richter, “Crisis” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), p. 374.

meet.” Mūsa argued against ‘Aqqād who was in agreement with Kipling’s statement. Mūsa claimed that “the colonisers want the East to remain Eastern so it can continue to be exploited.”¹¹³ The way for East and West to come together for Mūsa is only through science and industry. Mūsa’s work deserves much more analysis and investigation. However, as one delves deeper into his liberal position, the binaries that emerge from his work are themselves shared by the Islamic thinkers themselves, and the broad range of discussants of Nahḍa.

While the Islamic thinkers saw that the East was the solution, Mūsa saw that the East was the problem (“I renounce the East and believe in the West” he exclaims¹¹⁴). I suggest here that both logics are ultimately supplementary – using Jacques Derrida’s description of the supplement as a necessary addition *and* replacement of an other – they always leave an ‘excess’ of signification, this excess is both sameness and *difference* which in turn signifies a postponement of meaning in language. In other words, the logic of the Islamic thinker and that of the secular Mūsa are indistinguishable at the level of meaning except through each other. The logic of Nahḍa, once read through these positions as presumably opposed, as such, becomes a failed exercise in language. Reading the texts of Mūsa versus ‘Aqqād, or Bustānī versus Shidyāq, as competing trends in ‘Arab thought’ (Islamist versus Liberal, pedagogic versus performative) is, in fact, a misreading.

The reproduction of presumed ‘Nahḍa oppositions’ (*thunā’iyat al-nahḍa*) has taken place in the past century in ‘Ābed al-Jābirī’s trilogy of *Naqd al-‘aql al-‘arabī*, Critique of the Arab Mind: *Formation of the Arab Mind* (1984), *Structure of the Arab*

¹¹³ Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela W. Richter, “Crisis” p. 376.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 377.

Mind (1986), *The Arab Political Mind* (1990), and Jurj Ṭarābīshī's *al-Muthaqafūn al-ʿarab w-al-turāth* (Arab Intellectuals and Tradition, A psychoanalysis of Collective Neurosis) (1991), *al-Maraḍ bi-al-gharb: al-taḥlīl al-naḥsī li-ʿuṣāb jamāʿī ʿarabī* (Afflictions with the West, A psychoanalysis of Arab Neurosis) (2005), *Naqd naqd al-aql al-ʿarabī* (Critique of the Critique of Arab Mind – as a rebuttal of al-Jābirī's thesis of an Arab mind). Ṭarābīshī considers that the Arabs do not have an embedded lack in their ontological makeup, as Jābirī concludes, but that they have regressed from the recent past, from the nineteenth-century Arab Nahḍa. ʿĀbed al-Jābirī in the 1980s had claimed that the Arabs carried with them their regression from eternal time, that this was endemic to their 'culture', rather than their Arab modernity.

Ṭarābīshī, in his contribution to this debate, has resorted to a psychoanalysis of culture to approach the question of Arab identity. Joseph Massad suggests that by the second half of the twentieth century, the debate on Arab decline, regression, and lack, came to levitate between economy and culture as factors of decline or progress until economics were somehow ousted from the debate by the late 1970s.¹¹⁵

The curse of lack and the crisis of underdevelopment

The Arab Nation is a force of discontinuity that is produced through the Nahḍa. The latter has been profusely discussed as a time of epistemological rupture, discontinuity, breaks and fractures. Philip Hitti and Hisham Sharabi's writings on the subject for instance are rich with images of impact, sudden awakening,¹¹⁶ and the "breaking with

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 391.

¹¹⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Khuṭba fī adāb al-ʿarab* (1859). I use Jeffrey Sacks' translation of the passage here.

the past.”¹¹⁷ This discontinuity that is so frequently picked on, but rarely ever scrutinised, occurs through the intersection of a national linguistic pedagogic project and an ulterior project of romanticised scepticism towards modernity and the commitment to an anthropological form of reflection on the state of both the self and the world.

The persistence of retrospective views of the Nahḍa as a break with the past unfolds to become narratives on failure, one of which is the Arab curse of underdevelopment, the “inability of the Arab to attain the core principles of modernity”.¹¹⁸ Another is the failure of the Arab to liberate from Western colonial imperialism,¹¹⁹ and the third (which is more recent and most present in Islamic revivalism of the twentieth century) position contends that the failure is in the very traits of modernity. Thus expressed is the need for a retraction to Islamic origins and revival of traditions that are presumed to be inherently antithetical to modernity.¹²⁰

Across this spectrum of analyses of Arab failures and shortcomings is a shared conceptual framework that burgeons from within the Nahḍa *logos*. This framework primarily takes industrialisation/modernisation to be homogenous, sought after, and rational. It invokes a fixation on development (*taṭawwūr*, *taqaddum*) and progress versus

¹¹⁷ Jeffrey Sacks, "Futures of Literature: *Inḥitat*, *Adab*, *Naqd*", p. 42.

¹¹⁸ With the exception of the United Arab Republic that was really a union between two states and not nations, Egypt and Syria, and whose purpose was truly to spread the influence of the Egyptian state. Refer to Eugene Rogan's discussion in *The Arabs, a History* (USA: Alan Lane, 2009) p. 308-309.

¹¹⁹ Refer to Michael Barnett's *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (Columbia University Press, 1998). Barnett sheds light on the dynamic of Arab nationalism within national borders of Arab states and in inter-regional relations during the twentieth century. Although his analysis of nationalism holds much critique, one of the major contributions of this book is the emphasis it places on the relationship between Arab Nationalism and ruling elites post-colonialism in the region.

¹²⁰ Fathi Ben Salama, author of *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009). From interview with Hikmat al Haj, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art>.

regression and decline (*ta'akhur* and *takhaluf*). In all cases of analysis, whether it is the modernisers or liberals, leftists, or the Islamicist reformers, the state of lack is endemic to thinking of the Arabs as a nation. This is of course not unique to the Arabs but has become a shared trait amongst 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' or 'third world' nations around the world. As Immanuel Wallerstein has argued, this trait is one of the bulwarks of the very existence of a 'world system.' In fact, to push the argument further, I argue that in light of Koselleck's work on the concept of 'crisis' and its role in the making of the concept of history in the European context this is endemic to modernity itself. Koselleck offers an explanation on why this is so. "It is precisely the exciting possibility of combining so many functions that defines the term [Crisis] as concept: It takes hold of old experiences and transforms them metaphorically in ways that create altogether new expectations. Hence, from the 1770s on [after the work of Diderot and Rousseau], 'crisis' becomes a structural signature of modernity."¹²¹

Koselleck traces the term back to the American Revolution and Thomas Paine's usage. Paine imbues the concept of crisis with the commitment to action, to the overcoming of crisis as a moral commitment. The universalisation of crisis or the transformation of it into a key concept in the philosophy of history occurs in the works of Chateaubriand and Saint Simon. By then, Koselleck argues that crisis takes on new meanings to its medical and theological references. "Crisis is now frequently used interchangeably with 'revolution.' Elastic in time, it becomes the supreme concept of modernity. Though largely driven by societal forces, crisis now encompasses as well religion, science, morality, and politics."¹²² When August Comte, for instance, discussed crisis, he produced a sociological positivist theory to deal with the concept to overcome it

¹²¹ 'Ābed al-Jābirī, *al-Mashrū' al-nahḍawī al-'arabī*

¹²² Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National fantasy*, p. 20.

through prognosis and planning. Koselleck contends that by this time and “while still reflecting its theological roots, ‘crisis’ nonetheless has emerged as a truly autonomous concept of history. A central cognitive category – according to the positivist belief – it now provides the possibility of envisioning, and hence planning for the foreseeable future.”¹²³ Koselleck’s exploration of the concept of crisis in European history extends into the economic sphere; he argues that “from the 1840s on, the economically-based concept of crisis permeates the growing literature of social criticisms-coming from all political and social camps-that had begun to flood the market ‘Crisis’ was well suited to conceptualise both the emergencies resulting from contemporary constitutional or class specific upheavals, as well as the distress caused by industry, technology, and the capitalist market economy. These could be treated as symptoms of a serious disease or as a disturbance of the economy's equilibrium.”¹²⁴ By 1856, and with the Gold Rush, the economic crisis was universalised and its causes had to be studied through the establishment of the concept of ‘world economy.’ This crystallises in the works of Marx and Engels where they read crisis as what necessarily begets revolution.

I recount this discussion to help elucidate the fixation on crisis for the Arab case. The coming chapters show that Shidyāq and Bustānī are no less vindictive in their discussions of the crisis of their society than twentieth-century intellectuals. However, it is the nature of the crisis that changes across time. In his *Jawā’ib* journal, he points out crisis, *khilāl*, after another in society – the dysfunction of markets, the decadence of the elite, the corruption in the language, the ignorance of Eastern mothers, the lack of means for knowledge acquisition by the populace, the vestment in form versus the lack of content (in language, dress, mannerisms, and ethics), and many others. Bustānī

¹²³ Ibid., p.20.

¹²⁴ Refer to Usama Makdisi’s *Artillery of Heaven*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008).

engages in the same crisis narrative. In his *Kuban* he exclaimed, “Where were the Arabs? And where are they today? The golden age of their literatures has passed and a dark age has settled over them. Where are the poets? Where are the doctors? Where are the orators? Where are the schools? Where are the libraries? Where are the philosophers? Where is the greatness of Baghdad? Where is that of Aleppo? Where is the adornment of Alexandria, the splendour of al-Andalus, the brilliance of Damascus?”¹²⁵

The persistence of these conditions of lack in Arab intellectual works is due to the inheritance of literature as always already in ruin. One can even argue that it is rooted in the failure to institute a field of productive Arab literary studies. As Sacks points out, “to speak of literature – to speak of *adab* – is to speak in a voice that interrupts itself. Arabic literary studies are instituted with and as the inheritance of that interruption.”¹²⁶ It is not because other cultures have advanced more than others that Arabic literature is in ruin, rather it is because language as (fetishised) object for Arab intellectuals is over determined by a lack. In other words, the fixation on *adab* or literature as the primary engagement with Arab reality circumvents any real engagement with political and economical questions. *Adab* becomes a ‘third space’, one in which temporality is arrested by a sense of indeterminacy. Thus, the engagement with the issue of crisis (that begins with the literary and spreads to all other aspects of life) in the Arab case is not

¹²⁵ Buṭrus al-Bustānī *Qīṣat As‘ad al-Shidyāq Munāzara wa-ḥiwār taltahib ḥawl ḥuriyat al-ḍamīr* (Beirut: Dār al-ḥamrā’, 1992). This book was originally published by the Protestant Missionaries in 1835 in Beirut and Bustānī published a re-edited version of it in 1860. Fāris al-Shidyāq, *al-sāq ‘alā al-sāq fī ma huwa al-fāryāq: aw ayyām wa-shuhūr wa-a ‘wām fī ‘ajm al-‘arab wa-al-a ‘jām*, (Beirut: Dār al-ḥayāt, , n.d.), p. 188.

¹²⁵ Refer to Usama Makdisi’s discussion of Bustānī’s writings on As‘ad in *The Artillery of Heaven, American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹²⁶ Refer to Mohammad Sawaie, *Rasā‘il Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, (Beirut: al-Mu‘asasa al-‘arabiya li-al-diras w-al-nashr, 2004), pp. 42-43.

due to the uniqueness of the Arab failures, but their actual universality. They are, in fact, produced by the world economy itself (much like sectarianism in the peripheries of the Ottoman Empire was an offspring of modernisation rather than primordial relations).

It is central to any investigation into the Nahḍa (and thereby decline or underdevelopment) to clarify its position from the discourse of progress. My work on the Nahḍa shares the impetus behind the works of Cornelius Castoriadis, Ernest Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe and their quest for the redefinition of autonomy and the understanding of “society as politics.” Rewriting the history of the Nahḍa is in a sense an attempt at comprehension rather than explanation, a comprehension *ex post facto* of its meanings. It is my contention that the question of autonomy that the Nahḍa claims to tackle through the issue of identity and self reflection is unattainable from within conditions of *heteronomy* that are themselves produced by the Nahḍa logos and also produced elsewhere by the Enlightenment. For this reason, the Nahḍa seems to be constantly reproduced from within the binds of the same logic that is stuck in the eternal paradox of post-Enlightenment societies’ quest for sovereignty on one hand, and equality before the law on the other.

Although the Arab Nation has never seen the light as a unified nation-state, the Nahḍa continues to propagate a myth of origin characterised by lack and failure, trans-nationally, across the ‘young nations’ that have emerged in the Near East and North Africa with the end of colonialism.¹²⁷ In the post-colonial era, the narrative of Arab nationalism has been used by political elites to further their own interests, whether

¹²⁷ Refer to Mohammad Sawaie, *Rasāʾil Ahmad fāris al-shidyāq*, p. 46.

strategic, economic, or political.¹²⁸ More recently, and in the events happening in the ‘Arab world’ today, we have witnessed many attempts at the re-mythification of the Arab through the propagation of the same narrative of ‘awakening’ as a description of societies uprising against tyrannical states in Egypt, Libya, Tunis, Yemen and Syria. All these states have, in fact, legitimised themselves based on one form or the other of Arab nationalism and have been formed by anti-colonial Arab nationalist ideologies and parties in the first half of the twentieth century, like *al-ba ‘th* party in Syria and Iraq. This narrative is a re-mythification because it reproduces the very same Nahḍa narrative that intransigently, even belligerently, has come to formulate the autogenesis of Arab identity that is forever bound to its inherent deficiencies, regressions, and belatedness. The concept of an ‘Arab mind’ has been elucidated as a notion that relies on a melancholic loss of the past. Fathi Bensalam describes this feeling of loss as almost a “refusal to end mourning.”¹²⁹

The myth of an Arab society that remains stagnant and resistant to change continues to be reproduced today. It is as though ‘Arab society’ somehow retains its same status from the nineteenth century. Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī has even concluded that because the Arabs continue to pose the same question with regards to modernity they have not changed since the early 1800s. In fact, I argue that the adoption of past terms of Arab debates into present times is responsible for this ‘stagnancy of thought’ not the real existence of an immutable culture and society. Jābirī argues that the Arab Nahḍa

¹²⁸ Such as Muḥammad al-Sanūsi, in *al-Riḥla al-hijaziyya* (Tunis: 1978-1981).

¹²⁹ John A. Haywood, “An Indian Contribution to the Study of Arabic Lexicography: The “Bulgha” of Muḥammad Ṣiddiq Ḥasan Khan Bahadur (1832-1890)” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 3/4 (Oct., 1956) pp. 165-180.

actually failed to fulfil the tenets of modernity.¹³⁰ I argue that on the contrary, the Nahḍa's reproduction of a status quo that is inherently contradictory and incommensurable is a true fulfilment of modernisation.

¹³⁰ Established by Bustānī and published by *Matba 'at a-ma 'ārīf* in Beirut between 1870 and 1886. With his son Salīm, who wrote most of the articles on politics. These made up the largest section of *al-Jinān* articles as the journal's index has fifty-four pages of entries under the heading *al-siyyāsa*, Politics. The majority of other topics that it deals with are education and child rearing, short stories, and novels published in parts.

Chapter 2

Translation and Conversion: Idioms of an Arab Modernity

One thing that Shidyāq and Bustānī had in common was the experience of religious conversion. Their respective conversions, into Islam and Protestantism respectively, were undertaken as political moves that would allow them to forge a place as intellectuals and men of letters in new social relations of production. Moving away from conventional understandings of translation as a process of copying, I argue that the idiom of conversion and translation illustrates the political experience of modernity. Translation, like conversion, pays homage to an origin even if it seems to move away from it. Translation, like conversion, signifies the ‘second death’ of the subject. Conversion, as such, is a displacement or an ‘economy of sublation’, in which one secret replaces another, and in which the subject has to embrace the real possibility of its own death.

Coming into language was, for these nineteenth-century figures, the same as coming into the mirror stage for the subject of psychoanalysis. There exists in both cases a secret forfeiting of one thing for another. Shidyāq and Bustānī’s conversions are thus not read as religious ones but as secular modern ones, which are occupied by a sense of responsibility on part of Shidyāq and Bustānī. This responsibility is expressed in their call for the mastery of written language as a condition for modernity.

Language became for them an ethical condition intertwined with the notion of *adab* as they posited it, encompassing morality, culture, literature, and knowledge. In their texts, Shidyāq and Bustānī compel their reader to *write* and *speak*, to exit the singularity of their existence, and become complicit in the construction of a generality. The problems with this process is that it calls upon the individual as a social subject,

and the singular as part of a generality, through a certain claim to universal ethic (of which *adab* is an example), while concealing the legal binds that make it real. It is the classical Kantian equation of transcendental logic, in which the free subject is only free once they become the legislators of the law. What this ignores is of course the complicity of any law to existing material conditions. The role of language as a synchronous body allows writers like Shidyāq and Bustānī to harness the diachronic nature of real time in the maintenance of the space between a word and its meaning, and the Arab and Arabic.

Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq was born as Fāris al-Shidyāq to a Maronite family from Ashkut in Mount Lebanon. He lead a life that took him from Beirut to Malta, Tunis, England, France, and finally Istanbul. His burial as Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq in 1887 created a confusion upon his return to his birth place. The Christian and Muslim communities are said to have been uncertain on where to place his body. Mārūn ʿAbūd in his biography of Shidyāq *Ṣaqr Lubnān* (The Eagle of Lebanon), made him a national figure *par excellence*. Shidyāq's death forced the Christian clergy and Muslim shaykhs to pray side by side over his grave. Shidyāq was finally buried in an Ottoman cemetery; he had returned from the Sultan's capital, Istanbul, after his self-enforced exile as a national figure because he carried the marks of co-existence in a society ravaged by sectarianism. It is interesting that his conversion was translated by ʿAbūd and others as a testament of the possibility of co-existence.

As a motto, coexistence is very similar to the idea of tolerance and the right to difference within the nation. Shidyāq's body was made to symbolise the question of political form and subjective experience. He became an icon in the national imaginary of Mārūn ʿAbūd, Ibrāhīm Yazbek, and more recently ʿAzīz al-ʿAẓma and Fawaz

Trabulsi. Shidyāq's double identity, Muslim and Christian, carried a metaphorical power; it embodied and performed the power of the 'law' in which "the accident of birth within a geographic/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of collectively held histories."¹³¹ The celebration of Shidyāq as a symbol of the nation testifies how the "historical nation aspires to achieve the inevitability of the status of natural law, a birthright."¹³² Ironically, however, Shidyāq had only gained that right in exile. His brother, who had converted while in the political topography of the nation, was condemned to isolation and death by his community.¹³³

A scribe by training, lineage, and circumstance (caused by the death of his father and the need to make use of a magnanimous library he inherits) Shidyāq established, in later stages of his life, one of the leading Arabic printing presses in Istanbul, *al-Jawā'ib* press. It printed and published hundreds of titles in language, philology, philosophy, Islamic thought, jurisprudence, Ottoman law, novels, and a political news paper that carried the same name *al-Jawā'ib* (1860-1884). Shidyāq fled Mount Lebanon after his brother As'ad was placed in solitary confinement by the Maronite

¹³¹ Although *naḥw* is generally translated into Grammar today I do not translate the word here because of the importance of this phase of time in actually reshaping the categories of Arabic language philosophy into translations or conversions of categories of linguistic study that are European based. This consolidation of world languages into comparative subjects that are presumed to share a universal logic occurs in the nineteenth century at the very moment of the birth of the science of linguistics. I suggest that this correlation was established based on Bustānī and his contemporaries' work on simplifying the Arabic language whereby *naḥw* slowly transformed into *ṣarf* which is the science that deals with the different forms (in the sense of syntax) of a word. It has been suggested that the study of *naḥw* has almost become extinct and it is worth noting that recent writing on *naḥw* skips the nineteenth century entirely.

¹³² Sarubh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube "Critical Questions of Colonial Modernities" and Walter D. Mignolo "The Enduring Enchantments (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to go from here)" in Sarubh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube, eds. *Unbecoming Modern, Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2006), pp. 1-28, pp. 228-254.

¹³³ Walter D. Mignolo "The Enduring Enchantments (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to go from here)" in Sarubh Dube and Ishita Banerjee Dube, eds. *Unbecoming Modern, Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2006) p. 235.

Patriarch in Qanubyn with the aid of the missionaries. As‘ad’s death in isolation infuriated Fāris in his exile. He wrote harsh denunciations of the clergy and the Maronite Church of Mount Lebanon.¹³⁴ Bustānī (also from Beirut) wrote an autobiography of As‘ad al-Shidyāq in which he denounced the death of As‘ad and claimed him as a martyr for free thought or *ḥurriyyat al-fikr*.¹³⁵

Shidyāq’s life reveals the events that would make for a great novel, arguably one that he has already written – his renowned *al-Sāq ‘alā al-Sāq* (*One Leg Over the Other*, 1855), which is simultaneously a memoir, autobiography, ethnography, and collection of *maqāmat*, written using irony, comedy, and allegory. Upon leaving Mount Lebanon in 1834, he began his exilic life that took him to Malta where he established the teaching of Arabic and translated numerous texts for the Protestant Missionaries. There Shidyāq also hosted and met with As‘ad al-Khayat, the author of the book *A Voice from Lebanon*.

He then visited Egypt, where he met his wife and, from there, went to Cambridge in 1848, where he worked with the philologist Samuel Lee on producing a translation of the Bible into Arabic. He also visited Paris and London, about which he wrote his *Kashf al-mukhabba ‘an tamaddun urūbba wa-al-wasita fī ma‘rifat aḥwāl Malta* (1881). Shidyāq visited Tunis in 1841 and, upon the advice of his acquaintances, wrote a poem of praise for the Bey of Tunis, who responded with a gift. Shidyāq then wrote another poem congratulating the Bey for his return from a trip to Paris in 1846. This

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.235.

¹³⁵ Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, pp. 6.

poem was translated and published into French and German – in France by the Orientalist Gustave Dugat, and in Germany by the Orientalist Fleischer.¹³⁶

Shidyāq, during this time, was suffering from a low income about which he often complained in his writing. The second letter he had sent to the Bey was full of Shidyāq's laments over his inability to make ends meet. In his letters to his brother Ṭanūs in 1843, he says that he had engaged in trade, "*ta ' ā ṭi al-sabab*"¹³⁷ in order to make ends meet in Malta. In these letters, Shidyāq complained that his family's situation abroad was not much better than that of his family at home. It is important to note that Shidyāq's writings were very much products of a specific economy of information that was forming trans-nationally and in which his skills as a writer and a scribe could be sold. It is noteworthy to highlight that Shidyāq often engaged in the nineteenth-century networks of ambassadors, consulates, merchants, and immigrants, sending by post (and via the people he knew) poems of praise to various figures of authority. Shidyāq even addressed a panegyric poem to Queen Victoria while he was in England.

Some authors have claimed that Shidyāq converted to Islam in order to be able to divorce his first wife.¹³⁸ The stories of his often tragic relationships with women are abundant in Arabic sources. Regardless of the reasons for his conversion, however, Shidyāq gained for himself an access into Istanbul soon after he had converted. His relationships with the Porte cannot be simply attributed to his conversion; however, it is

¹³⁶ Refer to Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (London: Penguin Books, 2005) as well as Jacques Derrida's *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret* trans. David Wells (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹³⁷ I borrow this analysis from a similar yet contrastable situation in the Philippines specifically to the work of Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting colonialism: translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule*, (USA: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 7.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

safe to say that his conversion hastened the expansion of his reputation among networks of intellectuals in the Empire. This is also largely due to poems of praise that he wrote for the Ottoman Porte, an example of which is one that he wrote during the Ottoman-Prussian War in 1854. The Ottoman Sultan invited Shidyāq to work in the Porte's Translation Council (*Diwān al-tarjama al-sultanī*). However, for multiple reasons Shidyāq lived in Tunis for another five years. He was offered a position that remains unspecified in the sources in Ḥalq al-Wādī in Tunis, yet none of the promises of funds for a printing press and journal ever came through. By 1859, according to Sawaie, Shidyāq grew impatient with waiting and he left to Istanbul, where he remained until his death in 1887.

The Bey of Tunis was Shidyāq's patron for his two books on Malta and Europe. Although his biographical details remain to be precisely recorded, the list of his acquaintances is very telling of the complexities of trajectories drawn out by nineteenth-century intellectuals in the Near East. Siddiq Hasan Khan Bahadur (1832-1890), the Nawwab and husband of Begum Shajahan of Bhopal and founder of *Ahl al-ḥadith* movement in India, was close enough to Shidyāq's circles to patron his lexicographic opus *al-Jasūs 'alā al-qāmūs* (The Spy on the Dictionary, 1882). The *Jawā 'ib* press published many of Siddiq Khan's seventy-four books in Arabic, the most important of which is the *Bulgha* (1879), which is said to be one of the most comprehensive modern lexicographic works on the Arabic language.¹³⁹ There has not been a thorough study yet of the *Jawā 'ib* printing press, but a few Arabic authors for whom it published included: al-Māwardī, al-Buḥturī, Ibn Durayl, al-Tha'ālibī, Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār, al-Ahdab, al-Muqrīzī, al-Ṣafadī, Yūsuf al-Asīr, al-Ḥarīrī, al-Hilālī, and Khalīl

¹³⁹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Naḥḥ al-Sūriyya*, Pamphlet 11.

Muṭrān. For the purposes of this dissertation, I explore Shidyāq's major works such as: *al-Sāq 'alā al-Sāq* (One Leg over Another, 1855), *al-Jāsūs 'alā al-qāmūs* (The Spy on the Dictionary, 1882), and the *Kashf al-mukhabba 'an funūn urūbba* (The Unveiling of European Civilization's Secrets, 1881). In all of these sources, Shidyāq engages an amalgam of literary tropes in addition to neology, taxonomy, and prose. I also look at a collection of essays and articles he had written in his *al-Jawā'ib* journal between 1861 and 1890 on topics ranging from politics to the workings of the human imagination.

Buṭrus al-Bustānī was born 1819 in Iqlīm al-Kharrūb (an area in Mount Lebanon close to the Shuf Mountains). Having excelled at the local seminary and being prolific in Syriac and Arabic he was accepted at the 'Ain Waraqa Maronite School. In 1840 Bustānī met Eli Smith, a Protestant missionary who had settled in the city in 1833. Soon after, Bustānī converted to Protestantism and established his National School in 'Abey. Bustānī produced a number of pedagogic texts on grammar, history, and he produced the first modern Arabic encyclopaedia, *Dā'irat al-ma'ārif* (1867-1882).

In 1863, Bustānī founded one of the first national schools in Syria which was specifically aimed at students from across sects and regions of the Arabic speaking Ottoman Empire. Bustānī was also involved in journalism to a large extent. He began publishing *al-Jinān*, a political, scientific, and historical journal in 1870, which was circulated twice a month.¹⁴⁰ In addition, he worked with his son on publishing *al-Janna*, "a trade and literary weekly periodical" from 1870 until 1883. In 1871, Bustānī and his son also edited and published a political and economic newspaper *al-Junayna*,

¹⁴⁰ Nadia al-Baghdadi, "The Cultural Function of Fiction: From the Bible to Libertine Literature. Historical Criticism and Social Critique in Aḥmad Fāris al-Šidyāq", *Arabica*, T. 46, Fasc. 3, Vers de Nouvelles Lectures de la Littérature Arabe / Towards New Approaches of Arabic Literature (1999), pp. 375-401.

The Garden or Eden, (with the intonation of a heaven on earth, Bustānī uses *al-Jinān*, *al-Junayna*, and *al-Janna* interchangeably to describe the Eden-like state of progressed civilization empowered by knowledge), which was circulated four times a week.

Bustānī authored books on Arabic grammar: *Misbāḥ al-ṭālib fī baḥṭh al-maṭālib* (The Learner's Beacon, 1854); *Miftāḥ al-misbāḥ* (The Key to the Beacon, 1868); *Bulūḡ al-‘arab fī naḥw al-‘arab* (Advancing the Heart's Quest in the Naḥw of the Arabs¹⁴¹, 1887), *Sharḥ diwān al-mutanabbī* (A Commentary on al-Mutanabbī's Diwan, 1860); a dictionary in two volumes, *Muḥīt al-muḥīt* (The Expanse of the Ocean, 1870); a summarised version of it *Qaṭr al-muḥīt* (The Circumference of the Ocean, 1870); and two books on calculus: *Kashf al-hijāb fī ‘ilm al-ḥisāb* (Unveiling the Secrets of the Science of Calculus, first published in 1848 and republished nine times by 1885); and *Mask al-dafātir* (On Accounting). Bustānī's public speeches at the Syrian Society have also been published, whether in his own journals, or in others like *al-Muqtaṭaf*. The most prominent of which are: *Ta’līm al-nisā’* (The Education of Women) in 1849, *al-Hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya, w-al-muqābala bayn al-‘awā’id al-‘arabiyya w-al-ifranjiyya* (On Social Organisation and the Comparison between Arab and European Cultures) in 1849 and *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab* (1859). Bustānī's most celebrated work is *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, (The Circle of Knowledge), the first Arabic encyclopaedia, of which he compiled and published the first seven volumes before his death.

During the events of 1860 in Mount Lebanon, which I expand on in the coming chapter, Bustānī wrote and distributed a series of eleven broad sheets entitled *Nafīr*

¹⁴¹ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *al-Sāq ‘alā al-sāq* (Beirut: *Dar al-Hayāt*, n.d). For example, the lament of the Maronite church and clergy for their torture and incarceration of his brother Asaad for converting into and preaching Protestantism can be found in Chapter 19”, *Fī Nawḥ al-faryāq wa shakwāh*”, “The Weeping Sorrow of Fāryāq and his Laments”, pp. 184-198, and Fāryāq's discussions with a skeptical priest in Chapter 15”, *Fī Qiṣat Qisīs*”, “The Story of a Priest”, pp. 150-154.

Sūriyya, in which he called for national unity and proposed different notions related to the nature of conflict, politics, and belonging. I discuss this at length in Chapter 3. He was also one of the founders of the Syrian Society (1847-1852) and the Syrian Science Society in 1868. Bustānī also initiated the translation of the Bible with Eli Smith in 1847, which was completed by Cornelius Van Dyck and Nāsīf al-Yāziji (1800-1871) in 1864.

Shidyāq and Bustānī's works make up the bulk of the Nahḍa archive, and their writings represent a salient set of discourses, narratives, and meanings from their time. Their works on society, politics, ethics, and language are investigated here for the purpose of exposing the underlying tropes of national collective fantasy. To comprehend *waṭaniyya* and nationhood, they each adjudicate overlapping and different positions such as the local and the foreign, the collective and individual, law and morality, and manhood and the mastery of language. Moreover, these two figures uneasily inhabit the hyphen in the category of Arab-Christian.

The 'Arab-Christians' have been accredited by many historians for the formation of an Arab Nahḍa because, as a minority, they were somehow closer to Europe by virtue of a shared Christianity (this remains undefined in most if not all the literature). They have been said to have engaged in the formation of a 'secular' Arab identity for the purpose of carving out a space in an overwhelmingly Muslim majority of the Ottoman Empire. The categorisation along these lines is overwhelmingly problematic within the context of modernity. For it denotes the geopolitical division of the world according to the modern/colonial order into 'modern spaces' and 'enchanted spaces.' This division of space has been traced to the invention of both tradition and modernity in Europe by

Enlightenment thinkers, such as Hegel.¹⁴² ‘Modern spaces’ came to attest to the transformation from ‘Christianity’ into ‘Secular’ thought; i.e., the “epistemology was first Christian and then White.”¹⁴³ For ‘modern spaces’ their epistemology was first non-Christian and later with color.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, through this paradigm, both Christianity and modernity are discourses as a contingent pair, while Islam, Buddhism, other religions, and colours are not.

This perspective resonates in the continuous classification of Arab intellectuals as Muslim or Christian, the latter directly implying a natural tendency to be “forward looking”, “having a tendency to modernise”, and having a “positive reaction to the West and innovation.” The category of Muslim is seen as “fundamentally passive” and “hardly able to react to external stimuli, reactionary in character, with a backward looking stance.”¹⁴⁵ Shidyāq and Bustānī (though Arab-Christian by birth) resist such clear cut classifications. They problematise this issue further by both being converts.

In the mid-nineteenth century and its latter half there was a vested interest in comparing societies and human cultures that are presumed to have originated at one source, as there is an interest in comparing religions, skin colour, races, and most importantly

¹⁴² Nadia al- Baghdadi, “The Cultural Function of Fiction”, p. 376.

¹⁴³ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁴ Albeit, there have been some studies written by the classical Arabist Henri Peres and the ethnomusicologist Pierre Cachia, and a dissertation by Mohamad Alwan in the 1970s. There is a recent revival of interest in this figure, which has been cut out of much history, due to his resistance to quick categorization and his highly demanding Arabic prose. Radwa Achour has recently written a book on his *Sāq*, in which she argues for a revisiting of the “alternative modernity” Shidyāq represents, and for reading his book as the first example of a modern Arabic novel. I am not interested here in exploring his work on theories of the novel; rather, I am interested in the politics he puts forth in his lexicographic works.

¹⁴⁵ The matter is of course not that simple, for translation can itself become a hegemonic project as we witness with the English language today as a universal language. Similarly the Arab as translator transforms in the twentieth century into a no longer productive category of thought, as it was in the nineteenth century, but becomes a necessary corollary for the persistence of the narrative of modern Europe as the presumed home of all that is modern. This shift that occurs in time is a central preoccupation of mine throughout.

languages through translation. This comparative stance set the ground for conversion and translation together, as methods for making the ‘Arab self’ a place in world history and the history of civilization. Conversion signifies a surmounting, an overcoming and yet remains to be a second death – a second redemption from sin. It thus brings with it a sense of responsibility in secret.¹⁴⁶ Shidyāq and Bustānī, as converts, dutifully accept the passage into responsibility in their writings and calls for the reform of society. Their conversions, I argue, are bound to their adoption of roles that beseech a sense of historical responsibility, whether in their language ideologies, pedagogical works, or political essays. Ultimately conversion is not simply linked to the history of religion and faith, but also to the essence of modernity as an enlightenment construct, in which the ruse of power and law becomes transparent and embodied within the character of the citizen-subject. Shidyāq and Bustānī respectively inhabit that character within the fantasy of nationhood.

Bustānī’s conversion into Protestantism, as Usama Makdisi has noted, furnished him with a ‘language’ for conceptualising the colonial limits of missionary proselytising and their narratives of progress and the meanings of civilization. This religious conversion is to be read as an idiom that “shaped the terms of native surrender” while simultaneously “lending itself to the articulation of a popular resistance to a colonising

¹⁴⁶ Refer to the lists of words that Shidyāq created through *ishtiqaq* and *Naht* in Muḥammad ‘Alī al Zarkān’s *al-jawānib al-lughawiyya ‘inda Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, [A Study of the Linguistic Aspects of Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq]. (Damascus: *Dār al-fikr*, 1988).

¹⁴⁶ These essays have been collected in a volume dedicated to his centenary anniversary, *Mukhtārat Min Athār Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, Selected Works by Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, edited by Yusif Qazma Khuri (Beirut: al-Mu’asasa al-sharqiyya lil-nashr wa-al-ṭibā’a 2001) they are also present in the four volume *The Desirer’s Treasure From al-Jawā’ib, Kanz al-raghā’ib fī muntakhabāt al-jawā’ib*, that was edited by Salīm, Aḥmad Fāris’s son, after he had passed away. There is a lack of a date for most of these articles, and it has not been possible to locate a full collection of the journal’s editions. However, they are generally all written between 1860 and 1884.

power.”¹⁴⁷ I challenge this notion of resistance of colonisation on the part of Bustānī by arguing that he is equally complicit in generating a colonial discourse locally. Bustānī’s life works engage with missionary ideas in Arabic and use language to displace the authority of civilizational discourse but not to critique it. His encyclopaedia and *Nafīr Sūriyya* pamphlets, which I will focus on, re-imagine a social order based on the core of social consensus – language.

Although he seems to adopt a missionary language, a matter that Makdisi also points to, his act of submission to that narrative once read *vis-a-vis* his conversion and translation efforts happens “at the expense of marginalising the meaning and intent behind the discourse of authority”¹⁴⁸ propounded by the Protestant Missionaries and the civilizational project they represented in Beirut. In fact, Christianity, between the American missionaries and Bustānī the native convert, is irreducible to neither nor to both; its origins are always external to these worldly boundaries and intrinsically linked to modernity as a global political economic project. Similarly Arabic translations of central tropes of Western modernity – such as Civilization and Progress – institute a horizon of meaning that is external to both the West and the ‘Arab’ self – a horizon that

¹⁴⁷ Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

¹⁴⁸ For a thorough discussion of this process and the concept of nationalizing of society refer to Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology.” *Review: Fernand Braudel Center*, 13 (Summer, 1990), pp. 329-61. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai and Partha Chaterjee have, in the recent years, argued that the nation-state has failed to arbitrate between globality and modernity. Chaterjee has even suggested the globality and modernity, and globality and democracy are incommensurable once performed by the same set of nation-state institutions. This is an issue of ongoing debate within the West and outside it, however, the Nation, to this day, remains to be the location of consolidation of power and class struggle (and not simply economic logic dictated by the movement of capital) at the level of the world system. That said, we must also submit to the possibility that this might no longer be a functional relationship amidst increasing globalization and the spread of transnational capital. The events currently occurring in the Arab world might be symptomatic of this tension, the question remains is whether the power of the nation as a social imaginary can continue to make the consolidation and growth of Power possible. As Chaterjee has recently pointed out, “we may well be witnessing an emerging opposition between modernity and democracy that is between civil society and political society.”

both Shidyāq and Bustānī's works paint. This allows Bustānī, for instance, to propose the metaphor of a tree for human civilisation "of whose branches and leaves Western civilisation is but one"¹⁴⁹ and ultimately of whose branches the 'Arab civilization' is also but another branch.

Aḥmad Fāris's conversion into Islam draws another trajectory but remains to be within the same idiom of religious conversion, for it allows for Shidyāq a position within Ottoman reform, from Istanbul, using his *Jawā'ib* Arabic journal, to negotiate and redefine the meaning of reform, *iṣlāh*, the meaning of *tamaddun*, and freedom. Shidyāq attains a posture of a social commentator with what has been described as a 'libertine' attitude.¹⁵⁰ In his works, Fāris provides a satirical and harsh criticism of Christian clergymen in Mount Lebanon and thereby figures of authority in his society.¹⁵¹ He even writes in 1851 a controversial polemical treatise *Altercations of Interpretation. On Contradictions in the Gospel* (*Mumāḥakat al-ta'wīl fī munāqaḍat al-injīl*), which is meant to reveal the irreconcilable and contradictory discourses of Christian theology. Nadia al-Baghdadi has shown how Shidyāq's attack against the Maronite Catholic Clergy forms a cornerstone in his critical attitude and fits neatly within his other literary works. I show, here, how he used language as a site of production for social criticism, from which he picked out those aspects of 'tradition' (thereby making the very notion of 'tradition' in the process) with a 'modernist' attitude, all this shaping an image of him as a man of "shrewd and critical temperaments."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.24

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

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¹⁵² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 139.

Shidyāq's conversion to Islam positions him in a place from which to critique Christian authority figures and simultaneously engage in Muslim debates concerning modernity in the Ottoman Empire and the world. His relationship with the Berghum of Bhopal and Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan, one of the founders of *Ahl al-ḥadith* movement in India, illustrates this point. The Berghum was the patron of Shidyāq's *al-Jasūs 'alā al-qāmūs* (The Spy on the Dictionary) which he dedicated to her and her husband. And Shidyāq printed a large number of Khan's Arabic writings at the *Jawā 'ib* press in Istanbul. In addition Shidyāq's writings on the position of Islam from civilization are abundant and from them emerges his distinct critique of the idea of Civilization as being opposed to Barbarism. Unlike other Muslim thinkers though, Shidyāq called attention to the material aspects of civilization while having been ironically famous for his extravagance and enjoyment of 'worldly delights.' These reflect in his attitude towards the discussion of sexual matters and women. I discuss this matter further in the final chapter. It suffices to point out for now that Shidyāq in his own life and writings embodied the paradoxical relationship between individuality and collectivity, citizenship and nationhood. His eroticisation of the feminine subject together with his humorous and ironical comments on how "this age" of the nineteenth century had turned him, Shidyāq, into a 'she-male,' a *khunthā*,¹⁵³ expresses how the national fantasy harnesses affect, desire, and self-hood into its narrative. This analysis allows us to begin a discussion of 'Arab' notions of citizenship outside the usual technical definitions of rights, duties, and obligations.

I come back to Shidyāq's positions in more detail, but it is worth noting for now that his writings challenge the common perception of Nahḍa discourse in terms of

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 139.

East/West and progress/regress. It is thus not surprising that there has been little elaboration on this man's works.¹⁵⁴ His resistance to translating the Arabic language into Western linguistic classificatory terms makes his writings on the philosophy of language and lexicographic criticism – if one can imagine this category as Shidyāq did – hard to traverse. Thus, Bustānī, who explicitly writes on the Arabic language to make it “clearer and more easily attainable”, has been subject to much more attention. Albert Hourani has claimed that Shidyāq was a man who had no significant political thought. I suggests that the terms of modern politics where actually formed by thinkers like Shidyāq, through discussions of a wide range of topics like manhood, womanhood, food and digestion, and *adab* as morality and ethics.

One of the main characteristics of the literary output of the time, and the specific works of Shidyāq and Bustānī, is the many works of translation produced by them. In fact, translation provides the position from which they and their contemporaries could attempt to contest the hegemonic singular narrative of modernity that *tamaddun*, Civilization, stood for.¹⁵⁵ It is, as such, not a matter of coincidence that both men, who were neologists and taxonomists and to whom much of modern Arabic terms are indebted such as: *waṭan* (nation), *ishtirākiyya* (socialism), *al-dawla al-qanūniyya* (nation-state), *adab* (literature), *jumhūriyya* (republic), ‘*ajala* (wheel), *dabāba* (tank), *safinat al-nār* (steam ship), *mustashfa* (hospital), *bākhira* (steam ship), *mathaf* (museum)¹⁵⁶, were also religious converts. Words like *al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya* (the organisation of society), *waṭan* (nation), *dawla* (state), and *adab* (morality and literature) are discoursed in their works and made to carry meanings that continue to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

inhabit these words today. The word *waṭan*, for instance, was a subject of heated direct debates between Bustānī and Shidyāq in their respective journals.

The two men produced a number of major lexicographic and encyclopaedic works of the nineteenth century. Some of their works that I look at here have not been discussed in scholarship, such as Bustānī's eleven-volume Arabic encyclopaedia, *Dā'irat al-ma'ārif*, and his translation of Robinson Crusoe. In addition to Shidyāq's *al-Jasūs 'alā al-qāmūs*, *Sharḥ ṭaba'i al-ḥayawān*, a book on animal nature that juxtaposes Carl Linnaeus's (1707-1788) naturalist taxonomy with Muḥammad al-Damīrī's (1344-1405) classifications, and some of his collected essays that were published in *al-Jawā'ib*, specifically "On Civilization", "A Traveller's Tale: On the Unification of Muslims", "On the Imagination", "On the Principles of Politics", "On Taste", "On Adab", "On the Love of the Nation as an Act of Faith".¹⁵⁷ I thus explore their political writings alongside their linguistic and lexicographic works, two endeavours that have been approached separately by other historians.

There has been a growing interest in revisiting their texts, as evident in the work of Stephen Sheehi on Buṭrus al-Bustānī and the formation of a conception of a "national subject" in his *Nafīr Sūriyya* pamphlets and Usama Makdisi's re-discussion of Bustānī as a true indigenous liberal who sought common grounds for a divided society in 1860. Nadia al Baghdadi has written on Shidyāq and his 'libertine' positions in the nineteenth century; she argues that Shidyāq sets a genre of writing in his *al-Sāq* that is sceptical about the sources of authority for society, and argues that he was a serious proponent of the issue of the rights of subjects in society. I build on this scholarship, and depart from it, throughout the following chapters.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

I argue for the need to read their works and positions through their life histories, as they must have satisfied some allegorical or historical need of society. Thus, their writings are inherently tied to the circumstances of their writing. I stress that their positions, as converts, and their fixation on the question of morality and the different propositions for society they put forth, are linked to their work on translation and their argument for the translatability of the Arabic language. The issue of translation, like conversion, pays homage to an origin, even if it seems to move away from it – a matter I elaborate on in the coming chapter through the metaphor of Babel, which is employed by both men and almost every other canonical text on translation (from Walter Benjamin to Paul de Man). These positions are linked to the journalistic and literary spheres that they carve out, Shidyāq from Istanbul and Bustānī from Beirut, in which words and their meanings are debated.

The split self: Shidyāq the performer and Bustānī the pedagogue

I offer here a reading of the Arab nation from the literary output of Bustānī and Shidyāq as distinctly opposing, yet supplementing, figures of the Nahḍa. On the one hand, we have Bustānī who presents himself as a “loyal patriot” (*muḥib lil-waṭan*) in the introduction to his *Muḥīt al-muḥīt* dictionary, pushing for a national language that makes progress and science more attainable for the “commoners and the elites” (*al-‘awām w-al-khawās*) and other “students of the nation”. At the other end of the spectrum we have a cynical critical Shidyāq, who presents us with literary texts written during his exile from Mount Lebanon. In traversing their respective works, theories on language, and propositions for society, I show their contradictory and incommensurable projects somehow come together – the project of a philosophy of language that is rooted in the Enlightenment world view, and a national project of linguistics.

Bustānī and Shidyāq's works on language need to be juxtaposed with the Enlightenment discussions of language, exemplified in the works of Max Muller, Johan Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm Von Humboldt, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, and John Locke. The reasons for choosing this frame of reference, rather than, say, tenth century debates on the function of the Arabic language, is because these nineteenth-century 'Arab Nahḍa' and 'Enlightenment' thinkers have come to be read from within nationalist paradigms that, in turn, have produced the notions of Enlightenment and Nahḍa. In the Arab case, the Nahḍa becomes, in the twentieth century, the grounds from which to approach the reading of these texts. And, in the European case, the Enlightenment has come to generalise a large array of texts, restricting their readings as such.¹⁵⁸ This is due to the rise of nation states that produce a state of aporia when thinking of the past, picking and choosing what is suitable for their essentially mythical narratives.

Both Shidyāq and Bustānī, in their mixing of the performative and pedagogic roles of society, although having been conflated into the grand narrative of the Nahḍa, reveal the great perplexities of lived culture. Their texts produce a representational narrative of community and society while simultaneously being attestations of the incommensurability of national life and the problem of reading difference in cultural terms. Thus, I call attention to the complexities of writing a history of texts that are irreducible to one meaning and the hardship of resisting the compulsion to separate the present and the past that is endemic to history writing itself.

Just as the Enlightenment institutes a discontinuity in European history and thought the Nahḍa institutes a discontinuity in the Arab imaginary and its historicisation begs

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

attention. The Nahḍa constituted the tropes through which society was nationalised when it became involved in the reproduction of its own form and through which the formation of modern power became possible.¹⁵⁹ Its depiction as a unitary whole can only happen retrospectively through the lens of twentieth-century Arab nationalists and historians alike. Shidyāq and Bustānī's works show us that the Nahḍa is fragmented like the nation and perpetuates its own logic into reality – the logic of historicism for community (versus temporality in which locality actually lives) and the linear model that defines a people (Arab in our case), and a nation as empirical categories.

The people of the nation (*abnā' al-waṭan*, the term mostly used by Bustānī in *Nafīr Sūriyya*) are continuously interrogating two roles, the performative and pedagogic. This tension between the performative and pedagogic is never concluded as such, and it plays out in language discussions and debates. However, it remains to be the impetus for the call to reform and progress in the nineteenth century. I bring this discussion forth as one of the premises of thinking of the nation as historical form. Benedict Anderson describes the nation as what is “conceived as a solid community moving steadily up or down history.”¹⁶⁰ Consequently, he argues that it exists in “homogenous

¹⁵⁹ Anderson discusses the notion of homogenous empty time in the chapter “Cultural Roots” in *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 2000), pp. 9-36. He contends that national society is imagined as an anonymous whole existing in simultaneous activity and time and denotes print capitalism as a catalyst for the rise of nationalism. What is interesting, in our case, despite the lack of research on journals and books published in the nineteenth century, is that Bustānī and Shidyāq's journals or periodicals, and Bustānī's multi-volume encyclopaedia were subscribed to prior to their publication. In this sense, what occurs is that the writers see their books or writings as necessary for progress and public good, reject its status as an aristocratic object (inherent in the scribe-patron relationship that was in place in Mount Lebanon for instance) and see it as a profitable commodity. Thus, popular practices of sharing books and reading books in public coffee shops were deemed archaic and regressive by many Nahḍa writers of the time, like Ibrāhīm al Yāzījī and Sulaymān al-Bustānī (Bustānī's son). However, this shift turns acts of production that are critical of existing lines of patronage into a system of knowledge production that in itself relies on commodification. For more on this, refer to Robert Darnton's work.

¹⁶⁰ This is the core of Bhabha's critique of Anderson (1994), p. 159

empty time.”¹⁶¹ By recognising the nation as a constant state of ambivalence, as liminality, I add myself to a growing group of scholars who have questioned the historicity of the nation as a unity or a whole that is only opposed to ‘other nations’ and argue that the nation is in itself split along the lines of the heterogeneity of its population right from the presumed moment of its origination.

Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī begin to discuss a unitary nation or *waṭan* in the aftermath of the 1860 events in Mount Lebanon while Shidyāq satirically breaks down the motto “love of the nation is an act of faith”. The ‘novellas’ written during that period, like Khalīl al-Khurī’s *Oui, idhan lastu bi-ifranjī!* (*Oui! Then I am not a European!*, 1865), As‘ad al-Khayat’s *Ṣawt min lubnān*, (*A Voice From Lebanon*, 1811) and Salīm al-Bustānī’s (Buṭrus’s son) serially published love story in *al-Jinān* magazine, *al-Hiyām fī jinān al-shām*, (*Passion in the Heavenly Gardens of the Sham*, 1870) demonstrate the heterogeneity of a population at the moment of its declaration as one whole.¹⁶² Categories like *al-naṣāra* (Christians), *al-falāḥin* (peasants), *al-mar‘a* (woman), *al-muta‘anithīn* (effeminate men), *al-baduw* (Bedouin), begin to emerge as the ethnographic representation of the claimed homogenous nation that is projected on the past and future and remains to be imagined in the present. This dissertation does not undertake the discussion of the works mentioned above or their contradictions, although they beseech scholarly attention.

The Nation form is a “narrative strategy,”¹⁶³ closer to dream formation than simple narration. It is essentially ambivalent, constructed through the force of metaphor that

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.159.

¹⁶² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Tamaddun*”, *Dā‘irat al-ma‘ārif*, p. 213-215.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.214.

produces a “slippage in categories such as sexuality and class affiliations”.¹⁶⁴ Thus, for example, the emergence of the endless discussions on women and lower classes in the works of Shidyāq and Bustānī. Thus, I call for understanding the nation as the “measure of liminality of cultural modernity”,¹⁶⁵ by exploring the construction of the ‘otherness’ of the ‘Arabs’, through narratives and discourses produced in literary circles of the time.

The purpose of this is not to locate and define the Western/Christian/European other that Edward Said deconstructed in his own works, but to work *within* the split narrative of nation-ness that articulates the heterogeneous nature of the nation’s own presumed interlocutors like Bustānī and Shidyāq.

The problem is not simply the ‘selfhood’ of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself. ... The barred *It/Self*, alienated from its eternal self generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is eternally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.¹⁶⁶

The nation is the liminal representation of a people, in which they must homogenise as “pedagogic objects” (learning subjects) and as “performative subjects” (repetitious recursive subjects)¹⁶⁷. It is in this “space of liminality, in the ‘unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty’ that we encounter the narcissistic neuroses of the national

¹⁶⁴ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya* (Beirut: Matāba ‘at al-ma‘ārif 1869), pp. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Introduction to Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s *Muḥīt* dictionary first published in two volumes in Beirut, 1870.

¹⁶⁵ Refer to Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*.

¹⁶⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Tamaddun*”, *Dā’irat al-ma‘ārif*.

¹⁶⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Ḥurriyya*”, *Dā’irat al-ma‘ārif* (Vol.6, pp. 2-3).

¹⁶⁶ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *Mukhtārat Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, p. 391.

¹⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida and Alan Bass, “The Linguistic Circle of Geneva”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 675-691.

discourse”¹⁶⁸ which I argue manifests in the discourse of Nahḍa. I discuss this ‘liminality’ of the nation through dissecting Shidyāq’s ethnographic gaze in his literature and commentaries on his own society and community. By reading the nation as liminal, it can no longer signify the “homogenous empty time of modernity”, as Benedict Anderson has contended. Rather, the nation becomes “an ethnography of its own claim to being the norm of social contemporaneity.”¹⁶⁹

Ethnography is characterised by its split-subject position whereby the subject has to be both subject and object, an insider and an outsider. Shidyāq, the marginal voice, represents the split-subject position within the nation that takes over a narrative position as an exile from Mount Lebanon. Shidyāq’s work on language problematises the notion of the arbitrariness of the sign, which Benedict Anderson has suggested breaks the sacred ontology of the medieval word and permits through the separation of language from reality the existence of a national temporality, “a homogenous empty time”. The fissure that Shidyāq’s works embody is a fissure at the core of the narrative of the nation. Based on linguistic discussions that extend to become discussions of society, Shidyāq’s writings become an entry point into the imaginary nature of the nation from an alienated position. This alienated position within the nation is precisely what Anderson misses and Bhabha calls attention to.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Bauman and Richard Briggs, *Voices of Modernity*.

¹⁶⁹ Refer to Ami Ayalon, “The Arab Experiment in Journalism”, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.28. No.2 (Apr., 1992), pp. 262. Besides the problematic approach to print itself, Ayalon’s discussions of Arab intellectuals is ideological and reductionist often. Ayalon does not interrogate the categories he uses and seems to presume that the Arabs fell short of their experimentation due to their inability to modernize. An example of this would be this statement for instance. Ayalon argues that one of the obstacles that the Arab press encountered “was the fact that the regular dissemination in writing of secular knowledge was incompatible with traditional cultural conventions.”

Anderson identifies the ‘arbitrariness of the sign’ – what underlines Saussurean linguistics – as what enables the national temporality of a *meanwhile*,¹⁷⁰ in which people live plural and autonomous lives. Then he extends the “momentary suddenness of the arbitrary sign”,¹⁷¹ by linking it to the emergence of the novel, which embodies a synchronous narrative. Anderson locates this uncanny epistemological shift whereby the ‘meanwhile’ of the people is made to be a-synchronous, existing without succession; it is, according to him, a homogenous empty time of imagination. What Anderson misses, and which emerges from the writings of Shidyāq, for instance, is the “alienating and iterative time of the sign”.¹⁷²

Shidyāq’s autobiographical yet fictional memoir *al-Sāq* ‘*al-ā al-Sāq*’ follows the ‘traditional’ genre of the *maqāma* and the style of *inshā*’ yet produces a troubled narrative of the self. In his *Sāq*, Shidyāq takes us through moments of his own life that become depictions of society and its ‘traditions’ and ‘habits’ – such as those related to clergy’s involvement in society, the teaching of Arabic language, lines of patronage, people’s changing habits, ethics and mannerisms of people, and commentaries on the economic and political life of society. Shidyāq’s personal life, which he narrates through a process of autogenesis, self-revealing as self production, between the reader and the third person narrator, who often sounds like an accompanying other in a self-dialogue would, becomes a space for the commentary on society and the ailments of identitarian belonging. Shidyāq’s fictionalised memoir, which I discuss in Chapter 5,

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Print Culture and Enlightenment Thought*, The Sixth Hanes Lecture (Hanes Foundation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1986), pp. 3.

¹⁷¹ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp. 2-4.

¹⁷² Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 1993). Paul Kroskrity, *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2000).

forms a narrative of belligerence to the pedagogic text that we will see is propagated by Bustānī, who is also a marginal figure of his time.

Bustānī was a Protestant convert and member of a group of rising literati that burgeoned outside the ‘traditional’ lines of knowledge production and worked hard to invent tradition in its headlock with the West and the tropes of modernity. From Bustānī’s language ideology a complex theologico-politics emerges in which Bustānī produces a narrative that has curious similarities to 16th century philological discussions of the Adamic origins of language in addition to his argument on the ‘Abrahamic’ origins of modernity *tamaddun*.

Under the definition of History in his encyclopaedia Bustānī wrote: “the revelation of the truth, biblical history is the greatest source for events and from which everything emanates and to which all returns, it is the history of the world not just the history of nations”.¹⁷³ He added, “Nations have been in conflict over the beginning of their histories; the safe path to conceptualising history is to acknowledge that, until the time of Abraham, it had been indeterminable.”¹⁷⁴ This logic is representative of the birth of the Arab as a comparative subject, who translates the nation form into another language and becomes an enduring link in “the grand chain of world civilization”.¹⁷⁵ The ‘Arabs’, like the Greeks, Indians, and Europeans, are created as categories with an imaginary relation to each other during the nineteenth century, they form central parts of a world civilization order that begins to shape then.

¹⁷³ Bauman and Briggs, *Voices of Modernity*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁷⁵ For instances of usage of these terms refer to the debate between Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq in Shibli Antonius, *al-Shidyāq w al-Yāzījī: munaqasha ‘ilmiyya adabiyya, sannat 1871*. (Beirut: Matba‘at al-Mursalin al-Lubnaniyyin, alShidyāq wa-al-Yāzījī: munāqsha ‘ilmiyya, ababiyya, sannat 1871. (Beirut: Maṭba‘a al-mursaliīn al-lubnāniīn, 1950).

Modernity as linguistics: an empire of words

Butrus al-Bustānī's dictionary, *Muḥīt al-muḥīt*, defines Nahḍa, as “rising”, “resisting” [*nahaḍa*], “responding to a call”, “energy”, “movement” and “power”. His dictionary of two parts published in 1869-1870 was largely based on Fairūzābādī's *Qāmūs al-muḥīt* with various additions and omissions and it was meant to make knowledge “more easily attainable”¹⁷⁶ by students. The term Nahḍa had not come to encompass the meanings it did by the twentieth century and the one it carries today for Arab intellectuals and historians and others alike – the meaning of rupture and discontinuity, of “awakening” or “renaissance” on one hand, and of “failure” and “regression” and *inḥiṭaṭ* on the other. Although in the nineteenth century there was a revisiting of an ancient Arab past that would be *made* to speak to the then present and, for that matter, any Arab present, the schism that is presumed to have taken place, severing the ties of the past and the future, is necessarily coincidental to the logic of Enlightenment modernity.

The presence of “Europe” or “the West” as a comparative other is evident in the nineteenth-century literature (literature as in the whole mass of written language like journal articles, essays, treatise, books, and speeches). The proposition was to face the civilizational challenge that ‘Europe’ came to embody for the ‘Arabs’, by the crafting of an independent realm of Arabic language, which was made to exist in an imaginary space and would conjure its own community of interpreters whose discussions of certain words and their meanings was to be read in itself as a form of political engagement. The nineteenth-century fixation on the Arabic language, which is most evident in the works of Shidyāq and Bustānī, and the overarching search for a

¹⁷⁶ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

relationship between a language of an elsewhere, of a glorious past, and a community of speakers in the nineteenth-century present, created language (*al-lugha*) as a space for which authority is always external, formed by a community of interpreters whose engagement with the Arabic language constituted the core politics of modernity of ‘Arab societies’ in the nineteenth century.

In similar, yet different ways, Bustānī and Shidyāq, like the European philologists and Enlightenment figures Condillac, Locke, and Rousseau, engaged with language because they perceived it as the trait that has been endowed to humans by divine will, and that attests for them being the most advanced beings created by God in this universe.¹⁷⁷

Bustānī argued, in 1859, that “God established the first civilization (*al-tamaddun al-awwal*) from which all of humanity originates, savage, barbaric, and civilized.”¹⁷⁸

Language is God’s gift to Adam, he added; “language, the jewel of reason, is possible because of human freedom. And through it, the mind is educated, thought is trained, and inventions are possible, thus the spread of civilization and culture [*tamaddun* and *adab*].”¹⁷⁹ Shidyāq on the other hand claimed that the “Arabs derive Civilization from their language while the Europeans derive their language from civilization.”¹⁸⁰

Enlightenment thinking on language in Europe bore the modern discipline of linguistics or, as it has been noted, bore “modernity as linguistics”.¹⁸¹ Contemporary reworking of linguistic arguments and the juxtaposition of language and philosophy as inseparable in

¹⁷⁷ I am indebted here to Faisal Devji’s analysis of Islamic thought and modernity in British India, and refer to his seminal article on this matter in which he discusses the above points, “Apologetic Modernity.”

¹⁷⁸ Faisal Devji, “Apologetic Modernity”, p. 64.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁸⁰ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khutba*, p. 32.

¹⁸¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Naḥḥ al-Sūriyya*, Pamphlet Eleven.

the history of Western thought teaches us not to over-emphasise the ideas of “breaks” or “ruptures” (that are oft celebrated as nineteenth-century watersheds), but to think in terms of openings and closures of certain modes of thought. By side stepping the idea of a possible “scientificity” of language study, of Cartesian linguistics, for instance, Derrida shows in his work on Rousseau and Condillac that the theological underpinnings they presume as origins of human languages are, in fact, the very grounds that produce an idea of Nature (and later on science) which in its turn precludes the idea of rupture in its own processes; speech and language are born in nature by God’s will to give man language.

The inclination in Western modern philosophy of language to purify language and cleanse it in such a way as to make it correlate words with clearly defined meanings is entrenched in the formation of a distinctly Western notion of science. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs have recently presented us with a preliminary discussion of the positions on language from John Locke to Franz Boaz to show how debates on language produce a discourse on tradition, science, modernity, and reason.¹⁸² Besides showing that what seems to be mere linguistic debates are actually discussions on the nature of society, human existence, and history, a key insight of theirs, relevant to the Nahḍa here, is their re-discussion of the question of print culture.

Within studies of the Middle East there has been much emphasis placed on the advent of a print culture as a catalyst for Arab ‘cultural revival.’¹⁸³ This analysis gains its impetus from the value given to print capitalism in the formation of ideas in modern

¹⁸² However, it is important to note that *‘ilm* did not strictly translate into science for them. At times it meant the whole of knowledge, at others wisdom, and sometimes in the sense of *scientia et sapientia* which is quite distinct from our modern understanding of science that is rooted in the late nineteenth-century experimental method and European science societies (like the Royal Science Society in England or the Hygienists in France).

¹⁸³ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, p. 149.

Europe¹⁸⁴ (the work of Elizabeth Eisenstein specifically). However, as Adrian Johns has argued, it should bring us to question our presumptions and attention to the importance of print itself.¹⁸⁵ Revisionist historians have suggested that print culture has to be seen as “the emergent construction of diverse and often competing parties who are economically and politically interested, socially positioned, and institutionally sited, it is not simply ‘culture’ in some value-neutral sense but ideology.”¹⁸⁶

Bauman and Briggs point out that what the revisionist historians themselves miss is “the focused investigation of concomitant processes by which print and its attendant discursive formations are constructed in *symbolic and ideological opposition* to other technologies of communication and modes of discourse.”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, they propound that the “ideological construction of modernity in terms related to print culture and its associated discursive formations is more fully and clearly explainable as part of a more comprehensive process that depended upon the construction of a contrastive past, characterised by contrastive technologies and modes of communication.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Devji, “Apologetic Modernity”, p. 66.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁸⁶ The non-linguistic aspect of these debates has been noted by Adrian Gully and Anwar Chejne. Refer to their respective works: Gully’s, “Arabic Linguistic Issues and Controversies of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 42, no. 1(Spring 1997), pp. 75-120, and Chejne’s *The Arabic Language, its Role in History*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969)

¹⁸⁷ Refer to my MPhil thesis, “Performing the Nahḍa, Science and Progress in the Nineteenth-century Muqataf”, p. 12.

¹⁸⁸ Established by Ibrāhīm al Yāzījī, Besāra Zalzal, and Khalīl Ṣa‘ada (1884-1885). The name of the journal, *The Doctor*, is interesting given its range of topics: language, grammar, chemistry, geology, astronomy, natural science, diseases, human life, and genetics. The idiom of the doctor that can provide prognoses for the ailments of society and offer cures to them is very present in the nineteenth century. The etymological meanings of the word are as varied as the Greek counterpart, *pharmakon*, meaning magic and medicine, cure and ailment. The use of the word by Yāzījī as by many of his contemporaries reduces the word to its scientific understanding, physiology-related, where knowledge is meant to cure society. Jacques Derrida’s re interpretation of the meaning of *pharmakon* dissipates the Enlightenment presumption of having dispelled the myths of the ancients by proposing one explanation. This

Bustānī and Shīyaq’s desire for an Arabic language from an ancient past that is made to exist outside its spoken vernaculars actually moves to *reinvent the spoken language as vernacular*. In Europe, oral tradition became the foundation of “a poetics of Otherness, a means of identifying the pre-modern other both within modern society (uneducated, poor, rural, female) and outside it (savage, primitive, ‘preliterate’).” In our case here, the language of learning came to be defined in terms of the language of *adab*, written *fuṣḥa* Arabic, versus pejorative categories that were proposed for the spoken language, such as “*lughā sūqiyya*” (street language) and “*lughā unthawīyya*” (feminine language).¹⁸⁹

Timothy Mitchell has suggested that the resistance to print in Egypt during the nineteenth century was based on an ideological opposition. “Printing was part of the general problem of the ‘spreading of words’ that seemed somehow the nature of the political crisis. Political authority, in turn, was associated with the authority of writing. Extending the authority of writing, through schools and proper learning, was the means to restore and make secure political authority.”¹⁹⁰

The discussions of Arabic language in the nineteenth century are embedded in a civilizational discourse precisely because it was through language that a political debate could happen in ‘autonomous’ terms. The Islamic and Arab thinking of modernity (and its effects, like printing presses) during the nineteenth century happened in “intellectual

reading aids me here to propose a re-interpretation of the discussion of ailments and cures as proposed by nineteenth-century writers. I suggest that this opens a path for a re-reading that eludes the modern presumption of dispelling myth from society. I expand on this further in the coming chapter, where I discuss Bustānī’s own proposition on ailments and cures and his escape to metaphors of intoxication and hallucinogenic.

¹⁸⁹ Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746) (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints: 1971) p. 285.

¹⁹⁰ Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, p. 93.

terms rather than in political terms”.¹⁹¹ Islam, as an all encompassing category, was born in the nineteenth century along with modernity, it has been suggested. Before the nineteenth century Faisal Devji argues “there was no idea of Islam as a totality of beliefs and actions that not only transcended the remit of specific authorities like those of clerics, mystics and kings, but could also become its own authority as an independent historical actor designating a new kind of moral community.”¹⁹² In a similar manner, I argue, the category of ‘Arab’ – and its consecutive hyphens, Christian-Arab, Arab-Islamic, Arab-Jew – is born as a unified whole, a national identification, with the very category of modernity in the nineteenth century and from within that century’s ‘fragmented modernist politics’, which are constituted by “the remnants of a pre-colonial past and cast-offs from the colonial [nineteenth century] present.”¹⁹³

Like ‘Islam’, the ‘Arabs’ emerged as an ethos, a characterisation that had a place in history and in the history of world civilization, but no real body of community to represent it – a matter that, interestingly enough, continues to exist today, for who could locate where the Arabs as a community truly exist besides the loose anachronistic identification of a people with a language. This category’s emergence necessitated the writings of Bustānī in the nineteenth century on the *adab* of the Arabs, in the sense of culture of the Arabs, as the civilization’s spirit.

¹⁹¹ Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, p. 95.

¹⁹² Stephen Sheehi, “Modernism, Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision” in *Discourse*. Vol. 28, Is.1 (Bloomington: Winter 2006), pp. 72-78.

¹⁹³ Stathis Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think?*, p. 7.

“The Arabs are well-inclined for knowledge”, Bustānī reminded his audience in 1859, “that is a central aspect of the Arab spirit.”¹⁹⁴ It is important to note that his treatises on the history of Arab knowledge production is but one example of the proliferation in the end of the nineteenth century, and during the twentieth century, of treatises and books on “Arab literature” and “Arab thought”. Arabic language provides the key to the “gates of civilization”,¹⁹⁵ Bustānī argued, because it is ancient (a language of paradise), it had to be ordered, taxonomised, and cleared from aberrations so it could become a language of science (‘*ilm*) and progress (*taqaddum*).

Language, for Bustānī and Shidyāq, was represented as a field that could no longer exist independently from ‘*ilm*.¹⁹⁶ For them, the question of language was truly a question of contested politics. Yet, Bustānī and Shidyāq did not really have a clear position from politics or from civilization (*tamaddun*). This ambiguity has been inherited into Arab intellectual debates today.

Shidyāq and Bustānī had no real political vision for community which in itself allowed them to craft another autonomous domain of language as *adab* in which issues of morality and *tahdhīb*, where debated as the spirit of the “Arabs”. Contemporary Arab intellectuals dutifully translated the realm of language into a realm of national belonging. In this sense, the nineteenth-century slogan of “language mirrors the nation” is refracted into “the nation mirrors the language” using a transcendental logic that is largely ideological in nature.

¹⁹⁴ This is the aim of Gourgouris’ work on literature “as theory for an anti-mythical age.”

¹⁹⁵ Buṭrus al-Bustānī “*al-Tamaddun*” in *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, Vol. 6, p. 213.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 213.

In his analysis of Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī's *An Essay on Eight Words*, (*Risāla fī al-kalām al-thamānī*), Mitchell points to the strong link between language and political authority in nineteenth-century Egypt. He argues that the “transformation that occurred in the nature of writing corresponded to the transformation in the nature of political authority. Both writing and politics came to be considered something essentially mechanical. Their essence in both cases would be considered a process of communication.

Communication and machinery might appear to be neutral and matter-of-fact notions. But it was these seemingly innocent processes, the mechanisms of the world-as-exhibition that served to introduce a modern and mysterious political metaphysics.”¹⁹⁷

Mitchell's analysis, although valuable, leaves us with a conclusion that is far from real.

It is, in fact, the fixation on the morality and culture of society that underlined nineteenth-century intellectuals' works. This is because men like Shidyāq and Bustānī uneasily inhabited the national fantasy themselves. Shidyāq often apologised to his reader for translating ‘useless’ world political news instead of focusing entirely on the language. These moments, in both his and Bustānī's texts, need to be taken seriously. In the next chapter, I discuss Buṭrus al-Bustānī's position from the 1860 events, showing how language and culture were construed as alternative domains of thought precisely because of the realisation of the violence of modernity – the striking example of which were the violent clashes of 1860. These events became a watershed and a position from which to discuss reform, *iṣlāh*, by writers like Bustānī and Shidyāq.

This discourse of reform used by ‘Arab’ writers is similar to the one proposed by Muslim reformers in India in the nineteenth century. Faisal Devji has argued that they

¹⁹⁷ ‘Azmī Beshāra, ‘*An takūn ‘arabiyyan fī āyāmina*’, (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya, 2009) p. 51

¹⁹⁷ ‘Azmī Beshāra, ‘*An takūn*’, p.52

“used reform in an apologetic sense, deliberately situated in the uncertain colonial zone between two proscribed passions: religion and politics.”¹⁹⁸ He suggests that thinking of reform was a form of meditation on authority “resulting from the luxury of modernism’s weakness”.¹⁹⁹

The intense debates on the meanings of words – from which ideas on the reform of language as the reform of the people emerged – that ensued between figures like Bustānī and Shidyāq, Shidyāq and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī, Yāzījī and Qasatqi al-Ḥumsī, as well as others, seem as if mere linguistic debates are essentially debates concerning the very idea of society.²⁰⁰ At the same time of these debates that ensued amongst writers in Syria, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Istanbul, Malta, and Egypt, Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī sought to discuss the meanings of eight words, *umma* (I suggest translating it as ‘sovereignty’ in addition to the common *Umma* understood as an Islamic body politic), *waṭan* (nation), *ḥukūma* (government), *‘adl* (justice), *ẓulm* (oppression), *siyāsa* (politics), *ḥurriya* (freedom), *murabbi* (educator), and *tarbiyya* (education). The lexicographic urge that drove Marṣafī is the same one that motivated Buṭrus al-Bustānī to write his dictionary and encyclopaedia and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq to write his critique of the dictionary and his other language lexica in the period between 1850 and 1890.

Bustānī, like Marṣafī, was one of the first national educators in the modern sense. He established a “National School” in Aley, Mount Lebanon, in 1863 and produced pedagogic material necessary for a modern-leaning education system divided along the disciplinary taxonomy of Western education and a newly formed corpus of texts on

¹⁹⁸ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 139

¹⁹⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP: 1973) p. 8.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

Arabic grammar, poetry, and prose. He was one of the main proponents for the modernist fragmentation of knowledge into distinct disciplines. The relationship between words and their meanings was of utmost importance for him. With the advent of European power and military forces to the Arab lands came a set of instruments (e.g. the printing press, the telegraph, optical tools like the microscope and telescope) that embodied, in their mechanics and output, a form of authority that struck many as a challenge, a gift from Western civilization, and an omen of the decreasing importance of local forms of knowledge.

I have shown in a previous study on the period between 1876-1896 how, in the renowned and long-lived nineteenth century science journal, *al-Muqtaṭaf* (1867-1952), Science (*al-‘ilm*), formed as a separate realm on which society had to rely for progress.²⁰¹ From the “fruits” of science society “receives nutrients and grows.” These metaphors were proposed by the contemporaries of Shidyāq and Bustānī, Ya‘qūb al-Ṣarāf and Fāris Nimr. In the time of a breakdown of patterns of authority that was largely due to modernising reforms, Western intervention, trade, and scientific and technological advances, the issue of *adab* and the *adab* of the Arabs became the main challenge for the learned of Arabic speaking societies.

The history of *adab* became the history of Arab culture’s offerings to civilisation and, thereby, modernity. The story of *adab* was summarised by Bustānī in his *Khuṭba* of 1859 as such; knowledge had been in the hands of ancient Arabs, then it moved to Europe, and in the nineteenth century came back to the modern Arabs. This narrative, though being apologetic at face value, once pondered further, reveals an anxiety that is not to be explained only in terms of an incomplete mode of national thinking, or faulty

²⁰¹ White, *Metahistory*, p. 9.

nationalism, a matter that Arab and non-Arab historians alike have pertained to nineteenth-century thought. The ‘history of the Arabic language as the history of Arab culture’ that is written at the time, and which I elaborate on further in the coming chapters, forms an ethical discourse, or a discourse of ethics that creates its own terms, rationale, and episteme, yet remains with no systematic nature. These factors allow for the words and neologies that took on certain meanings in the nineteenth century to continue circulating in Arab writings today. Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq were not simple inheritors of say Fairūzābādī or Ibn Manẓūr the “traditional” lexicographers, and Arabic could no longer be as it was a century or two before. How this happened is what I try and elucidate throughout this dissertation.

The limits of enlightenment: Romanticism and cultural historicism

The logic of culture or the “language of culture” has been central to thinking of the Arab nation since the inception of this notion in the nineteenth century through the institution of new language pedagogic models. Bustānī, Nāṣiff al-Yāzījī, Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī, Mīkhā’īl Mashāqa, Khalīl al-Khūrī, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and Shakīb Arslān amongst others produced speeches, treatise, essays, books, short stories, poems, prose, and lexica as they taught or lectured at the various schools that burgeoned in Bilad al- Sham, North Africa (Egypt and the Sudan), Istanbul, Malta, and Egypt. In addition, they took part in and organised science societies (Masonic lodges included) and wrote and published *maqāla* texts in Arabic journals such as *al-Jinān*, *al-Jawā’ib*, *al-Muqataṭaf*, *al-Ṭabīb*.²⁰²

²⁰² Ibid., p.9.

Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, and Buṭrus al-Bustānī are credited for having instilled this genre of “modern Arabic writing” by many. Their intellectual movement and their contemporaries’ constituted a pedagogic national project that was based on education as a model for reforming the native subject into a knowledgeable citizenry. The resounding slogan of the Nahḍa, “language is the mirror of the nation” is similar to Condillac’s well known assertion (and John Locke before him) that “every language expresses the character of the people that speak it.”²⁰³ Aarsleff in his groundbreaking work in the history of linguistics traces the links between Condillac, Herder and Humboldt. For Humboldt and German Romanticism, Condillac’s assertion became a “cornerstone not only in his linguistic analyses but in his national pedagogic project as well.”²⁰⁴ The links between French and German thought in the eighteenth century, and the Arab thought of the nineteenth century are not based on ‘influence’ (although most Enlightenment figures were well known by their Arab counterparts, as evident from the Muqtaṭaf journal and Bustānī’s Encyclopaedia), but based on the result of an “intersection between an Enlightenment philosophy of language (and human cognition) and the question of national linguistics.”²⁰⁵

Aarsleff’s reshuffling of the presumed separate phases, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, allows, for my own purpose here, for discussing the heterogeneous and mixed projects of Shidyāq and Bustānī. The urge to delineate distinct phases in intellectual history has also been present in studies of Arab intellectual history. Stephen Sheehi, for instance, insists on the separation of “Arab Renaissance thought” and “Arab Romanticist thought.” Sheehi argues:

²⁰³ Ibid., p.9.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.9.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.9.

Arab Romanticism was a rejoinder to the ideological offensive of the Arab Renaissance [Nahḍa]. In the Romantic's eyes, the Renaissance resulted in a stripping away of everything noble and holy in "Eastern" society, trumpeting "the final triumph of rational materialism." As the dilemma of the doctor in Qindil Umm Hashim illustrates, Romanticism's rejection of rationalism, materialism, and scientism was complicated in the Arab world by its own historical condition. If Arab Romanticism's obsession with "Man's" unity with nature was a reply to the indigenous bourgeois selfhood ushered in by al-Nahḍah then this selfhood's alienation was compounded further by the asymmetries of power endemic to the colonial condition. Arguably, Arab Romanticism appeared among Lebanese and Egyptian artists, intellectuals, and literati because the effects of the political, social, and economic ruptures of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries were most pronounced there.²⁰⁶

This separation of Romanticism from Nahḍa, where the former is depicted as a reaction to the latter is, perhaps, impressed by a certain reading of literary history and history in the Anglo-American world, where Romanticism has been conventionally viewed as a reaction to the Enlightenment and its crude commitment to reason and rationality. This reading has been highly contested since the 1980s in literary studies to reveal that Romanticism is inevitably a continuation of the Enlightenment project. It only replaces the Kantian moral constraints on reason, with a project of aesthetics that seems different but is not alternate to it. "The Romantic subject identifies itself as the immanent agent of creative/destructive power, so that the power of thought is manifested as art work."²⁰⁷ Both logics, whether Enlightenment or Romanticist impose a transcendental framework (whether Kant's transcendental rationalism or the Romanticist transcendental figures of genius and the sublime, for example) on the understanding of literature which is itself an expression of a social imaginary that is essentially worldly, of this world. Thus, literature, when read outside these two boundaries, can allow for the production of an imminent critique. The first premise for

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.9.

²⁰⁷ Jeffrey Sacks, "Futures of Literature", p. 33.

this critique is to realise the performative aspect inherent in literature.²⁰⁸ I choose to use this conception of literature to traverse the texts produced by Shidyāq and Bustānī with the ultimate aim of attempting an exit from the reductive readings generated by the Nahḍa and its myth-making capacity.

Buṭrus al-Bustānī was as much a romanticist as a positivist. In his works, he depicts the world through a lens of a natural history that also restitutes the position of God in nature through a natural theology. Under the definition of Civilization, *tamaddun*, Bustānī critiqued the view of eighteenth century historians “that depicted humans as having evolved gradually from a state of nature that was almost animalistic.”²⁰⁹ He argued “now we know that humans did not simply move from a state of barbarism to that of civilization and that savagery was not the first phase of human existence. Human beings have been created on this Earth by God and have never been left alone. When God created the first humans he created the first civilization and with his Word gave them language.”²¹⁰ Shidyāq and Bustānī offered different, yet supplementary, views on language and cognition. Shidyāq’s, for instance, insisted that language does not unify nations while Bustānī’s lexicographic urge to order words and their meanings, and to produce a grammar of the language, was the means to write a natural history of Arab culture. The question that incessantly haunts my study of these different approaches is: How does the national project succeed in reducing their incommensurabilities and the countless trajectories laid down in their texts into a Nahḍa-Enlightenment framework? Moreover, the question that this dissertation seeks to

²⁰⁸ Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism* (Syracuse: Syracuse Up, 1998) p. 153.

²⁰⁹ Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, p. 37 .

²¹⁰ Usama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, p. 13.

answer is: Can Nahḍa texts be formulated into the ongoing project of critique of modernity?

The metaphors of language for society and history

The project of Arab national thinking (as a strictly modern phenomenon) shapes itself not only according to its claim of reason and rationality (embodied in natural sciences), but also based on a linguistic project that ultimately emerges as a social imaginary which in turn becomes the basis or grounds for institution of the notion of ‘Arab society’. As late as 1956 Sāti ‘ al-Ḥuṣrī, in his famous *What is Nationalism*, was quoting Herder and Fichte on language and national belonging. ‘ Azmī Beshāra, in 2009, has also dedicated an entire chapter of his book *‘An takūn ‘arabiyyan fī āyāmina* (On Being an Arab in Our Present Times), on language in which he seems to re-iterate the long standing supposition that Arabic is the main constituent of an ‘Arab identity’, and that speakers of Arabic share a national identity that must not be divided. Beshāra, like many before him, sounds the need to “evolve the language” and make it suitable for science and technology.²¹¹ Like many before him also, Beshāra reproduces a metaphysical understanding of language depicting it as having been passed down through history and is now in danger of being spoiled by what he calls “non-identitary struggles such as class and social based conflict.”²¹² The idea of language being prone to corruption echoes Enlightenment philosophies of language. The link between the issue of language and the much reviewed Romanticist thought and the Nation has been brought fore in the past few decades after the so-called linguistic turn of the 1970s. It has brought back to academia the questions that had haunted European thought since

²¹¹ Usama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, p. 211.

²¹² Usama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, p. 215.

the 16th century concerning language and history. Scholars, like Edward Said and Paul de Man, have gone as far as declaring the “return of philology”. The meaning of written texts for historical inquiry is constantly being re-interrogated, whether in literary studies or the theorisations on the historical discipline as a whole (such as Reinhart Koselleck’s argument for a Conceptual History). Needless to say, the question of language has long occupied philosophical thought from Plato’s contemplations on the nature of society, and the philosophy work of Heidegger’s more contemporary occupation with being and the world.

Within the Islamic tradition, language holds a position of great significance previous to being set up by European philologists as an ancient language of ‘Semitic’ lineage, because it is the language of revelation of the Qur’an. Before the nineteenth century and since the revelation of the Qur’an the question of the language, its significance, structures and meanings, has been discussed by Muslim and non-Muslim mystics, jurists, *fuqahā*, and historians. It is, of course, not possible to summarise the genealogy or contexts of these discussions. The discussions of *adab*, *‘ilm al-lugha*, *naḥw*, *ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*, *ishtiḳāq* and *uṣūl* added to those of *fasāḥa* and *balāgha*, are abundant in the nineteenth century. But it is only in the nineteenth century that they become central to any other discussion of knowledge and society, precisely because language is being read through a national pedagogic project. These language-related categories, in fact, become, in the nineteenth century, the positions from which the ‘Arab’ encounters the world and submits to a process of self-interrogation.

The central aspect of interest for us here is social performativity of the Arabic language. Language, in general, as a synchronous body, is always open to diachrony; that is, language needs to undergo self alteration to continue functioning efficiently.

This trait is shared between language and history, both of which show us how society is constantly at work to institute itself. Language, however, is distinct from both society and history in its ability to show the inseparability of the synchronic from the diachronic, of society from history. Thus, the significance placed on language in the second half of the nineteenth century is read as a surfacing of the tension between society and history, and the formation of a vertical axis of evaluation between different nations and societies from within which the conception of locality is formulated. Instead of thinking of the relationship between the Arab and the European from within the sphere of influence, I argue that the Arab and the European can be seen as the two sides of the same subject in the same moment of historical agency.

It is not a matter of mere chance that the emergence of the modern nation in the West occurs in the period of mass migration and colonisation. However, the use of coloniality as an analytical framework, based on an assumption of a unitary hegemonic enactment of power, draws the discussion of the Arab into what, I think, are stunted analytical zones that culminate in an obsessive fixation on the “fractures” and “violence” that come to define the *Nahḍa* and the entire analysis of Arab nationalism. This does not mean that I opt for a historicist analysis that presumes a linear correlation between “a people” and “a nation” as empirical categories. On the contrary, my discussion of the Arab nation (specifically from the focus on language and literature in the *Nahḍa*) investigates it as an ambivalent narrative strategy which employs and *becomes* a metaphor, as transference of the meaning of belonging that somehow spans the imagined community of the national people.

The nation, as a measure of the liminality of cultural modernity and as a narrative strategy (best located in literature), “produces a slippage of categories of sexuality,

class affiliation, territorial paranoia, cultural difference”,²¹³ and I would like to add religious classification. These are mostly evident in Shidyāq’s *Sāq* and his *kashf al-mukhabba ‘an tamaddun urūbba a*, where his discussions of the subalterns in Europe in comparison to those “at home” (a category that I argue is constructed through the journey genre) reveal to us what Edward Said calls “the worldliness” of national belonging. This concept of worldliness, in relation to belonging, essentially calls on us to see how thoughts, ideologies, discourses, like nationalism, are made *in* the world and thereby risk being unmade. From this arises the need in theorising (for the lack of a better term) on the nation to submit to the latter’s heterogeneity, its rootedness in temporality, and not historicity.

The sources and texts studied throughout this dissertation provide us with the “emplotment” strategies – to borrow from Hayden White – that fashioned the story of the Arab nation and its history at the onset. I argue that Bustānī’s works are characterised by an Epic and Romantic plot structure through which he represents the history of the Arabs in terms of a chronicled teleology that moves through the tropes of Golden Age, Decline, and Awakening and redemption. As well, I show how Shidyāq’s writings employ the strategies of Tragedy, Satire, and Comedy. These contrasting strategies co-exist and supplement each other and all together produce one specific perception of historical consciousness. According to Hayden White, “epic plot structure would appear to be the implicit form of chronicle itself.”²¹⁴ White points out that “stories cast in the Ironic mode, of which Satire is the fictional form, gain their effects

²¹³ Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Orlando: University Press of Florida, 2004).

²¹⁴ Jeffrey Sacks, “Futures of Literature”, p. 34.

precisely by frustrating normal expectations about the kinds of resolutions provided by stories cast in other modes (Romantic, Comedy, or Tragedy, as the case may be).”²¹⁵

Romance is “fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolised by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it.”²¹⁶ Bustānī’s Protestantism and proselytising fall right into place in the Romantic drama of redemption. Now, Satire, which Characterises Shidyāq’s writing, is the precise opposite of the Romantic archetype of thinking of history. For White, Satire is actually a “drama of diremption”²¹⁷ and “dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master”, and the “recognition that human consciousness and will are always inadequate to the task of overcoming definitively the dark face of death, which is man’s unremitting enemy.”²¹⁸ Shidyāq uses Comedy and Tragedy to “suggest the possibility of at least partial liberation from the condition of the Fall and provisional release from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world.”²¹⁹ With Comedy, “hope is held out for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional reconciliations of the

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.34.

²¹⁶ I refer here to Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man’s works in specific.

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²¹⁸ Such as the ‘Karshuni’ language of the Maronite Church in Mount Lebanon that was Arabic language written in Syriac alphabet for the purpose of protection of the Church’s inner affairs from Ottoman governors. For more on this issue refer to Charbel Dagher’s recent book *al-‘arabiyya wa-al-tamuddun fī ishtibāh al-‘alāqa bayn al-nahḍa wa-al-muthaqafa wa-al-ḥadāra*, Arabic Language and Civilization, The Ambiguous Relationship Between Nahḍa, Modernity, and Cultural Exchange (Beirut; Dār al-Nahār, 2002). I will also come back to this issue when discussing Shidyāq’s harsh critiques of the Maronite Church, the clergy, and their language.

²¹⁹ Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire, Transjordan 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). And Thomas Philip, “Bilād al-Šām in the Modern Period: Integration into the Ottoman Empire and New Relations with Europe”, *Arabica*, T. 51, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 2004), pp. 401-418. He also suggests the singling out of the Napoleonic campaign on Egypt in 1798 as the moment of initiation of the Arab Nahḍa has been proposed by Arab nationalists in the attempt to escape the enduring links with the Ottoman Empire for it would not be possible to link the modernization undertaken by the Empire of its peripheries while proclaiming that the Arabs had been in decline for four hundred years beginning with the Ottoman conquests of 1516.

forces at play in the social and natural Worlds.”²²⁰ In Tragedy, there are “no festive occasions” but “intimations of states of division among men more terrible than that which incited the tragic agon at the beginning of the drama.” The “fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits” is compensated for by a “gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest”, which consists in the “epiphany of the law governing human existence which the protagonist’s exertions against the world have brought to pass.”²²¹ White’s diagnosis of forms of historical consciousness is concerned with writing a history of historical writing itself. Most importantly, this diagnosis of styles of historical writing is simultaneously a diagnosis of forms of representation of reality. Similarly this dissertation seeks to study the representations of reality in nineteenth-century works, by acknowledging the verbal and literal aspects of historical consciousness in Bustānī and Shidyāq’s writings. Thus, I interrogate their assignment to language the role of representation of social reality.

By showing how Shidyāq and Bustānī’s discourses on history and identity are prefigured by specific tropes (e.g. Tragedy, Comedy, Irony, Satire, and Romanticism), I do not aim to simply write their genealogies in the Foucauldian sense, but to argue that there occurs in their works an abstraction of hegemony through cultural terms. Shidyāq and Bustānī’s emphasis on language as an index of civilization, through the metaphor of mirroring, is to be read as a loss that they experienced in the face of modernity while trying to define the terms of their own position as historical subjects – to represent an abstract community.

²²⁰ Kemal Kafadar’s *Between Two Worlds, The Construction of the Ottoman State* (University of California Press, 1995) is a valuable book in so far as it brings into Ottoman historiography the analysis of narratives, novels, and even dreams, and in so far as it challenges the Turkish national imaginary that has incessantly posed itself as secular antithetical to so called Ottoman religious rule.

²²¹ *Naḫḫir Sūriyya*, Pamphlet Ten, February 24, 1861.

Of fractures and discontinuities: *Adab* as interruption

The formation of a distinct concept of *adab* as literature, and *Adab* as culture, produces a mode of writing and reading that persists in contemporary Arabic works on identity, and one that constantly invents the Nahḍa as a moment of origination *and* fracture of the Arabs and their history. As Jeffrey Sacks remarks, “Arabic literary studies institutes itself as a mode separation.”²²² This separation has been noted in Peter Gran’s revision of the literary salons of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gran argues that the writings of Shidyāq and others like Murtaḍa al-Zabīdī (1732–90), were driven by a “modern secular perspective”²²³ and that “religious solidarity” broke down to be replaced by “secular loyalties”.²²⁴ Usama Makdisi, in his own work on protestant missionaries, contends that the nineteenth century brought about a sense of liberal secularism. Makdisi calls Buṭrus al-Bustānī an “apostel for an ecumenical humanism”²²⁵, an embodiment of the *Tanzīmāt*²²⁶ and an “exemplary liberal product of

²²² Quoted by Usama Makdisi, in *Cultures of Sectarianism* (California: University of California Press, 2000) p. 9.

²²³ From ‘*Amal al-jam‘iyya al-Sūriyya* [Proceedings of the Syrian Society], (Beirut: American Press, 1852) edited by Buṭrus al-Bustānī. The members of the society were, Eli Smith (president), Nami Jafet, Jujris Huynin, Henri Defirst, (all three vice presidents) and then Buṭrus al-Bustānī (secretary), Nawfal Ne’me Nawfal (correspondent) and two treasurers Mikhail Shahtdha and Antonius al-Amyuni.

²²⁴ Refer to Maurice Olender’s work on the birth of modern linguistics from early modern and modern philological quests for the language of paradise.

²²⁵ Refer to my MPhil thesis and the discussion of the Darwin controversy in addition to A.L. Tibawi, “The Genesis and Early History of the Syrian Protestant College” In *American University of Beirut Festival Book*, eds. Fuad Sarrūf and Suha Tamim. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1967).

²²⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Nafīr Sūriyya* (from here on NS), Pamphlet One, September 29, 1860. American University of Beirut Archive and Special Collections (No. CA:PA:LF:956.9:B981nA). The collection is made of eleven pamphlets published between September 1860 and April 1861. They were each titled *Nafīr Sūriyya or the [first, second, third ... eleventh] nationalist pamphlet, Beirut [and date]*. All were signed “from a lover of the nation” (*min muḥib lil-waṭan*) and addressed to “the sons of the nation.”

The *Nafīr* series were re-published in 1990 after Lebanese Civil War with an article Bustānī wrote ten years later in 1870 in one of his journals, *al-Jinān*: “Love of the Nation is an act of faith.” The publisher in 1990 did as Bustānī had done: he kept his name anonymous taking on the title: “lover of the nation.”

the commingling of American and Arab histories”.²²⁷ I would like to argue that these views are problematic.

The approach that reads the secularisation of the Arab as being essentially brought about from a dialogue with the West risks two problems: 1) that the dialogue was never two-way, hence did not take place (and this is still evident today in the lack of discussion with Arab takes on modernity in the West); and 2) it sidesteps the fact that much of the works produced by Bustānī are essentially apologetic in nature and signify the closure of a field of thought at the moment of its opening – a field of thought that colonises all discussions of Arab identity to our day. Rather than focusing on how secular Bustānī’s writings are, I am interested in interrogating the very categories of religion, secularism, morality, and ethics that emerge from his and Shidyāq’s works. This is a methodological, as well as a theoretical, choice in my attempt to circumvent the question of rupture or discontinuity in the nineteenth century that others have, more than sufficiently, expanded on.²²⁸ The future is hijacked by this narrative of rupture and discontinuity as a separation, as a “secular liberal” time versus a traditional religious past. In fact, this narrative risks being simultaneously, “colonial and theological.”²²⁹ It is, thus, my contention to probe the domain of language as *adab*, morality, and ethics,

Nafīr Sūriyya, by al-mu ‘allim Buṭrus al-Bustānī (Beirut: *Dār al-fikr*, 1990). The anonymity chosen by both signifies how citizenship is always performed as an act that transcends the individual subject, as an unconscious act in the Lacanian sense because it addresses and is addressed by a force external to the self.

²²⁷ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Muqaddima*” Introduction, *al-Tuḥfa al-bustāniyya fī al-asfār al-krūziyya*.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

rather than “partake in the study of literature as the management of difference”,²³⁰ a difference constructed through separation (of the secular from the religious, of the worldly from the spiritual) and institution of Western “metaphysics of presence”, that has been repeatedly deconstructed in contemporary times.²³¹ The coming chapters reveal that the situation of presumed separation is far more complex.

What is peculiarly striking about the Arab Nahḍa is that its entire project is made possible through, and with, instituting a national language that is a language of translation. The stark difference, however, between Enlightenment thought and the Nahḍa, is that while for the former science is seen to have disrupted or constituted the modern subjective formation in the West, for the latter it is the literary subject that presumes this position. The Enlightenment model is seen to have produced a series of historical demystifications of Christianity and religion through science and philosophy. We tend to have this model in mind when thinking of Islamic and Arab history, presuming that the Arabs have somehow fallen short of this equation.²³² Yet, the nineteenth-century Nahḍa invokes a different premise of self reflection from that of the Enlightenment – the premise of language.

The institution of Arabic language in the nineteenth century as the bearer of collective identification and as the replacement for both Ottoman administrative language and local ‘sacred’ languages²³³ used by religious institutions came hand in hand with administrative and fiscal centralisation and the standardisation of the legal system.

²³⁰ Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, p. 83.

²³¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *al-Tuḥfa*, p. 74.

²³² The dispatches from Mīkhā’ ʿil Mashāqa to the American Consulate in Beirut where translated by Buṭrus al-Bustānī while he was publishing his *Naḥḍa* pamphlets. For more on these dispatches refer to Eugene Rogan’s work.

²³³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet One.

Eugene Rogan's work shows that, even at the times of great weakness in the Imperial centre, Bilād al-Shām remained deeply entrenched within the Ottoman world. Rogan and Thomas Philipp have in their own works argued for the importance of bringing the Ottoman State into the analysis not only of cultural imperialism but also of centre-periphery relations in the East Mediterranean and the Middle East. They suggest that the Ottoman political and economic system remained the frame of reference in that area up until the end of the empire.²³⁴ This analysis accounts for the increasing impact of Europe that rose exponentially in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire which witnessed a profusion of nationalistic narratives amongst its various populations, whether in the Balkans, Greece, Armenia, or Bilād al-Shām, the Ottoman social imaginary, if one can construe such a thing, began to dissolve into various burgeoning national imaginaries.²³⁵ It also makes the links established by Bustānī and Shidyāq, between law and literature, grammar and writing, speaking and *adab* more pertinent once placed within an age of great legal and administrative reform.

In 1861, Buṭrus al-Bustānī declared that his nation “will not become the Babel of languages as it is of religions.”²³⁶ Around the same time, Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador to Constantinople, claimed that “Europe is at hand with its science, its labour, and its capital. The Koran, the harem, and Babel of languages are no doubt so many obstacles to advancement in a Western sense.”²³⁷ The Arabic tongues signified to Canning, as they did to Eli Smith, an ancient civilization. In a speech for the Syrian Science Society in 1859, Eli Smith told the “natives” and missionary audience,

²³⁴ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Six.

²³⁵ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Three.

²³⁶ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Three.

²³⁷ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

Your Arab race's [*jins*] knowledge-Literature [*adab*] is a ring in the chain that connects the ancient world adorned with the sciences of the Romans and the Greeks to the modern world that is adorned with the sciences and civilization of the Europeans [Europe the righteous inheritor of the Greeks] ... although your tongue is no longer deeply related to the past, it is related in terms of language kinship to ancient languages whose lexica has survived and in which we are presently involved in with intricate research... thus your tongue may shed some light on some of the mysterious phrases of these dead languages. And if I may add, an image of a ruin, or an inscription on a rock or a prologue to a book or a sentence in your many written texts that your people have rarely thought of might add to the treasures of knowledge sought after by scholars in European countries.²³⁸

Faced with these perceptions of an “Arab race” and an “ancient Arab tongue”, Bustānī and Shidyāq engaged the question of language as an identifying mirror of those who speak it from different positions. Their lexicographic and linguistic works form an imaginary empire of Arabic language that accepts only those who comprehend the notion of *adab* as a moral project, as a realm that exists outside the jurisdiction of nation state politics.

Although, for the missionaries and Orientalists, the language held within it ancient secrets and reason²³⁹, it did not hold the potentials for producing knowledge for modern times.²⁴⁰ This sentiment was contested by Bustānī and Shidyāq and they proposed translation, neology, and lexicography as tools for reforming the Arabic language. The discussions of language produced a sphere of knowledge production that was malleable, uncontrolled by an institutionalised body of authority, and formed at the intersection of Ottoman reform politics, the *tanzīmāt*, and European colonial onset on the Arab lands of the Empire. Within this sphere of language are rich discussions of the

²³⁸ This is reflected in the oppositions of progress/regress, civilized/uncivilized, premodern/modern, which have had an overbearing presence in the analysis of Arab history and culture.

²³⁹ Rohit Goel, “War and Peace in Lebanon,” unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

meaning of politics, social organisation, religion, history and civilization. As the very meaning of *Nahḍa* transformed from the nineteenth century onward, a large number of words were crafted, re-defined, and at times obscured.

The next chapter explores how Bustānī formulated the meanings of the word *waṭan* by his use of metaphor and allegory in a series of political pamphlets he wrote in response to the 1860 wars of Mount Lebanon. For Bustānī, the urge to define the meaning of *waṭan* was compelled by an idea of public good. The next chapter demonstrates the terms by which a community becomes nationalised. In it I demonstrate how, from the onset of nationalist thought, the contradictions within society are rendered as natural ailments setting it back from the path of modernisation. The discursive unfolding of the logic of modernity is shown to be very much local, as well as contained ideologically within a social imaginary that beckons its national fantasy.

Chapter 3

The Shipwreck of the Nation

During the violent civil wars of 1860 in Mount Lebanon and Damascus, Bustānī took it upon himself to diagnose and advise his broken society from the standpoint of a spectator of the events. The idea of the nation surfaced as the unifying element for a ruptured society in Buṭrus al-Bustānī's earlier works: The *Nafīr Sūriyya* series 1860 and *al-Tuḥfa al-bustāniyya fī al-asfār al-krūziyya*, also published in the same year. The *Nafīr* series consists of eleven pamphlets that Bustānī wrote in the wake of the 1860 wars. During this time, Bustānī also translated the story of Robinson Crusoe “within a span of five months of hard work” because of his contention that the story was of “utmost importance for society”.²⁴¹

Bustānī's solitary writing and anonymous signature of every *Nafīr* pamphlet reveal what it felt like to be an ‘Arab citizen’ of the Tanẓīmāt Ottoman Empire, while also having to become a citizen of the increasingly connected capitalist world in search of a nation. For Bustānī, the nation begins to emerge from the moment of violent rupture in 1860. By consciously addressing his fellow countrymen as “the sons of the nation” in his *Nafīr Sūriyya*, the Clarion of Syria, Bustānī lays bare to his imagined readers, in terms of kinship, the truth from which he could no longer hide – that the nation bears upon the everyday lives of its subjects. It bears upon their family life, their labour, their daily sustenance, their traditions, and ultimately their religion. This nation that is yet to come, for Bustānī, bears upon the daily lives of its subjects in as far as they continuously secure its history. Bustānī weaves a national fantasy, thereby fixing the

²⁴¹ Refer to Ghassan Hage's analysis of sectarianism in his PhD dissertation “The Fetishism of Identity: class, politics, and the process of identification in Lebanon” submitted to the School of History, Philosophy and Politics at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia (1989)

past through the nation's gaze. In other words, Bustānī employs the 1860 events to weave a national imaginary that posits the violence as a rupture to a pre-existing uniform and linear history. In the previous chapters, I discussed how the nation emerges as a social imaginary coincidental with enlightenment modernity. Here, I engage with Bustānī's writings of the 1860 events as the historical telling of the events themselves. This historicisation that Bustānī proposes for the 1860 war embodies one of the central discursive shifts within the Nahḍa discourse.

Bustānī introduced his translation of Crusoe by saying:

This is the amicable tale of Robinson Crusoe and of the dangers and threats he suffered on land and sea. It tells of the many tools and ways he invented to make his life easier and his comfort more attainable... this story is preferred for the education of students to others because: one, it is based on a *true story* and *true events*. Two, the events and stories in it are rationally possible and acceptably communicable. Three, it is devoid of fowl and immoral language making it readable for the feminine gender. Four, it contains many morals and ethics that are useful for the elite and the public, and the young and elderly.²⁴²

Bustānī explained that he had completed the translation within five months of “extreme troubles, burdens, and misfortunes, but given that time is compressible made longer and shorter depending on the task one is faced with”²⁴³ he was able to complete the translation “instead of wasting time like those who spend their days in indolence and entertainment rather than doing something beneficiary for their fellow citizens.”²⁴⁴ The stanza that follows Bustānī's introduction (“every person who is of no good for another has a useless existence”) illustrates Bustānī's position as a Robinsonade of the age himself and reveals much of the true place of the metaphors that Bustānī proposes for

²⁴² I use here Mehdī 'Āmel's analysis of sectarianism in *Munāqshāt wa-aḥādīth* (1990).

²⁴³ Eugene Rogan, “Sectarianism and Social Conflict in Damascus: The 1860 Events Reconsidered”, *Arabica*, T. 51, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 2004), pp. 493-511.

²⁴⁴ Eugene Rogan, “Sectarianism and Social Conflict in Damascus: The 1860 Events Reconsidered”, p. 507.

the Arabs, society, language, and history. When read alongside the *Naf̣ir* series, Robinson Crusoe is very informative of Bustānī's cultural historicism. Robinson Crusoe is, in fact, the story of "anticipation of civil society";²⁴⁵ it depicts the social state of humans as being based on exchange of production as the ideal. Crusoe's island presents him with a state of existence for which he has tools for in another *time*, in the time of civilization or industrial society.

When Crusoe first arrived at the island it was as though he had arrived anew into the world as a whole. The state of fear and anxiety was caused by his isolation and his lack of socialisation and means of sustenance. In the *Naf̣ir*, Bustānī likens the state of individuals in his society to that of Crusoe, banished outside society, "wretched and alone." Crusoe in this state could then only think of production and labour. He spent all his time on the island in labour: moving, working, building, farming, and hunting. In fact, Crusoe describes to the reader his daily schedule by the hour and he takes down a diary. On the island alone Crusoe creates for himself a labour schedule about which he writes in his diary until his "ink runs out".²⁴⁶ Gradually, the lone Crusoe engages in a mode of living that he would have been in a producing society – in anticipation of society. By translating Robinson Crusoe and presenting it as a "true story", Bustānī translates a true story of civilization. His cure for the "evil principle" that has caused the 1860 violence is labour and productivity. It is important to keep in mind that Bustānī was translating De Foe's Crusoe around the same time he was writing the *Naf̣ir*

²⁴⁵ Kathleen Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* (UK: St. Jerome Publishing, 2001) p. 2.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

and translating the dispatches from the American consulate in Damascus with regards to the 1860 events.²⁴⁷

In other words, Crusoe's shipwreck on an island is not merely his displacement in space but in time. Similarly, Bustānī sees the shipwreck of the 1860 violence as relegation backwards in time into "barbarism and savagery".²⁴⁸ He calls the events a "*kharāb zamanī*". This translates into both a temporal catastrophe and a catastrophe in time.²⁴⁹ And time, Bustānī tells us, is not only worth life but "it is life itself".²⁵⁰ The "natural and the cultural catastrophe, *al-kharāb al-ṭabī'ī wal-adabī*"²⁵¹ that befell his nation are, in fact, "temporal catastrophes" (*kharāb zamanī*) that make time fleet like a dream. Bustānī's lifelong chasing after time, the time of civilization, in his works, is directly linked to his conversion of a political crisis into a cultural one and his diagnosis of the 1860 events as a rupture in time. "A black mark on the pages of this nation's history", ²⁵²he called it.

Bustānī's translation of the violence, in the *Nafīr* series, suggests that the violence ruptured an already existing Syro-Lebanese Nation. By painting the 1860 violence on the horizon of the nation, Bustānī had meant to suggest a discourse of advice for change

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.2.

²⁴⁸ Buṭrus al-Bustānī uses these tropes to define the time of societies in most of his works, for this chapter I refer to the *NS* pamphlets. The first instance of their use is in Pamphlet One, September 29, 1860.

²⁴⁹ Paul De Man, "The Resistance to Theory", *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 33 (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) p. 84.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p.84.

²⁵¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (UK: Penguin Classics, 2005) p. 83.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 83.

in society and community. Although the notion of reform has been used to describe the nineteenth century underlying it, however, is: economic transformation, influx of capital, the rise of a merchant class, and a post-Napoleonic world order. Thus, ‘reform’ conceals more than it reveals and it redresses the ruptures caused by the growth of global capital and colonialism on one hand, and those caused by the nation form on the other. This is why I choose not to engage with Bustānī here as a reformer, but rather as a national pedagogue whose writing is an expression of the social imaginary’s conversion into modernity and, thereby, nationalism.

The *Nafīr* pamphlets provide us with a historical telling of the making of the ideologies of sectarianism and nationalism for the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, Bustānī’s writings, along with Shidyāq’s and their many contemporaries, provide us with the discourse of the Nahḍa and help elucidate further the present position of the Arabs in the international capital and cultural market. As discussed in Chapter 1, the discourse of development for the Arab world has a history within the Arab Nahḍa. The notion of underdevelopment has been approached in academia through the lens of “civilization” – the natural capitalist mode of society’s existence.²⁵³ For the case of the Arabs, the problem of underdevelopment has been analysed through the persistence of “traditional forces” in society.

Usama Makdisi has claimed that sectarianism in Mount Lebanon and Syria is, in fact, caused by the Ottoman reforms on one hand, and European modernisation on the other. He argues that a “culture of sectarianism” was produced through the intersection of *Tanzīmāt* reforms with colonial practices as well as local challengers to traditional powers. For Makdisi, sectarianism emerged as an expression of modernity and through

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 84.

it religion was formulated as the new site of contestation of identitarian politics. Makdisi offers a descriptive analysis of sectarianism that he calls a “history of sectarianism” and while he sets out to analyze de-mystify the dynamics of sectarianism as a distinctly modern form, Makdisi offers a conclusive diagnosis of sectarianism as a transhistorical category. In other words, he makes it seem as though the sectarianism in existence in the present is a continuation of a system set in place by the Ottoman and colonial authorities. As Rohit Goel contends Makdisi “mistakes the normative project of modernity for a descriptive one.”²⁵⁴ Goel argues that “Makdisi’s work reinforces the assumption that the country’s history of communal conflict is exceptional. Lebanon may be modern like the rest of the world (the upshot of Makdisi’s analysis), but why have constructed identity categories generated violence occasionally and not always, there and not everywhere? Makdisi’s conclusion is analogous in form to the modernization thesis, which names sectarian violence not modern. He reactively returns the charge, insisting that sectarian violence is modern.”²⁵⁵ By focusing on the rebuttal of Orientalist assumptions regarding sectarianism, Makdisi’s analysis produces a rigid definition of what “Maronite” and “Druze” identities are and reifies them as essences in the process. Buṭrus al-Bustānī surfaces in Makdisi’s work as the liberal secularist during that time, having had the foresight to make a case for co-existence. By positing Bustānī as a “liberal humanist” versus the sectarian forces in society Makdisi misses precisely the dynamic and dialectical process through which sectarianism forms in that historical time specifically through liberal discourses of co-existence and tolerance. I would like to argue here that Bustānī’s “liberal” attitude was in fact most conducive to creating a discourse of sectarianism because it successfully de-politicized the conflict

²⁵⁴ Stephen Seehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, p. 57.

²⁵⁵ Luran Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, p. 21.

and transformed it into a “barbaric and primordial” struggle over religious belief. I show in this chapter how Bustānī naturalized the conflict in society into a religious one and how he actively created the terms of the discourse of sectarianism early on.

I would like to argue that sectarianism was, in fact, intrinsic to the formulation of the idea of the modern nation. The nation, for Bustānī and his contemporaries, was the necessary conclusion to the violence of 1860. Sectarianism is thus not an anti-thesis to nationalism: it is not an impediment to the formation of national thought but a founding ideology that makes nationalism possible in this case here. As a historical form in the late nineteenth-century the nation was made to conceal the story of its original disarray.

The conventional analysis of violence that argues that sectarianism is an impediment to nationalism fails to deal with the very fact that sectarianism: redresses other socio-economic and conflicts within society; and as a social ideology produced in practice, it reproduces the class and power relations which give the sectarian nation a function in the international capitalist system.²⁵⁶ I argue that we cannot deal with sectarianism as an exception or an alien phenomenon, nor can we approach it as an essence. Rather, it needs to be analysed as a site of contestation of power within the homogenising and normative project of modernity itself.²⁵⁷

The 1860 events that provoked Bustānī to write his *Nafīr* had been commonly read as a resurgence of traditional forces in a modernising society while in fact it is actually a form of politics tolerated by modernity and seems to be quite conducive to it. Eugene Rogan in his analysis reveals the underlying class conflict within the 1860 events. His reconsideration of the centrality of religion, versus that of class, to the violence is of

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p.21.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p.25

utmost importance here.²⁵⁸ Rogan agrees with Makdisi's contention that the "culture of sectarianism" was a colonial offspring and in his analysis of Mīkhā' ʾil Mashāqa's writings on the 1860 violence. Rogan notes that "in the aftermath of violence, violence must have appeared the historical norm."²⁵⁹ He suggests that it was "only natural" for a survivor of the violence like Mashāqa to project his experience on all of history. I engage here with another "survivor" of the violence, Buṭrus al-Bustānī, in order to see specifically how this "natural" stance came to become so.

The metaphor of Crusoe, the isolated man away from society proves to be central to Bustānī's proposition of the idea of the "nation", *waṭan*, on multiple levels. The very translatability of De Foe's *Robinson Crusoe* already attests to its simultaneous singularity and generality. The proper name Robinson Crusoe carries as a signifier tenacious links with other signifying elements of Bustānī's historical time; these are linguistic, social, and economic signifiers. By being deemed necessary to translate into Arabic by Bustānī the story of Crusoe repeats "recognizable structures – linguistic, familial, etc. ... – that have been encoded and preserved for centuries through repetition and tradition."²⁶⁰ As a translatable text *Robinson Crusoe* is necessarily a repetition of "already established codes or laws".²⁶¹ This reveals "the limits of translatability".²⁶² In other words, *Robinson Crusoe* would not be recognisable as a text without having an untranslatable element intrinsic to it. It is this untranslatable element or structure that

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.21.

²⁵⁹ Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, p. 48.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.48.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p.48.

²⁶² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Hub al-waṭan min al-imān*, "Love of the Nation is an act of Faith", *al-Jinān* Vol.1 (Beirut: *Matāba 'at al-ma' ārif* 1870) p. 303.

this chapter is interested in locating, in relation to the historical context of 1860 and the *Nafīr Sūriyya* texts' commentary on that. It is through a similar process of translation that the idea of the "nation" or *waṭan* begins to take shape in Bustānī's writing. His narrative of national belonging is different from the idea of belonging in the Millet System in which the sultan prefigure as the father and guardian of the nation: for Bustānī the body of the king is replaced by a body of knowledgeable and dutiful citizens. This perception of national belonging and sovereignty is promised by what Bustānī calls "*ḥuqūq al-insāniyya*" or human rights. This chapter will illustrate how national identity is created, secured, and deployed through Bustānī's discourse.

The idea of the nation is both a universal and particular notion for Bustānī. In other words, the Arab or Syro-Lebanese nation is one form of the many nations of civilizations around the world; it is a comparable subject, a translation. The nation presumes a recognisable element in all societies while instituting this similarity as a universal fact. As such, the nation is seen as an exit from a state of "savagery and barbarism" into an age of "civilization".²⁶³ This "civilization" is described by Bustānī as the natural state of society while depicting man in nature (in opposition to man in society) as being in a state of anticipating sociality and awaiting exchange with others, whether in the form of speech and language, or in the form of products and money. Robinson Crusoe spends his first days on the island in fear over his own self-preservation, as do the "sons of the nation" after the 1860 violence. This equation of a state of nature versus a state of society underlies Bustānī's political conception, it is an analogy used for analysis. Or in other words, Bustānī's analysis is not only underlined by metaphor but is explained through metaphor.

²⁶³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *al-Tuḥfa al-bustāniyya fī al-asfār al-krūziyya* [Bustānī's Masterpiece of Crusoe's Travels], Chapter 5: "Crusoe's arrival on an isolated deserted Island" Beirut: American Missionary Press, 1860) p. 53.

The translation of *Crusoe*, as any other translation into one's own language, reveals a sense of alienation. As Paul de Man argues, in translation "the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation."²⁶⁴ The translator, Buṭrus al-Bustānī, carries a task of many burdens. In order to engage with act of translation (both empirical and cognitive), from the onset Bustānī must read the original text from the perspective of a pure language – a language which carries the untranslatable meaning that is to be transmitted from the original language. It is important that this primarily occurs by discovering, during the process of translation, that the original is "always already disarticulated".²⁶⁵ Similarly, if sectarianism was a translation of modernity in local terms, as a translation it testifies to the original contradictions inherent within modernity itself.

This analysis of translation poses many challenges to the epistemology of modernity as it unfolds in the perception of language and knowledge. *Robinson Crusoe* is not only translatable; it is a translation of history and society into fiction. As a metaphor for man's need for societal belonging, *Robinson Crusoe* is as Karl Marx has called a story of "unimaginative conceit".²⁶⁶ For it posits the image of "individuals producing in society – hence socially determined individual production" as the point of departure of historical analysis while individual production is, in fact, "a culmination of a certain historical process".²⁶⁷ By claiming the metaphor of *Crusoe* as a "true story" Bustānī is able to present a reading of violence of 1860 as disruptive – as a return to a state of nature in which man has no social contract. It is as though before the 1860 events man

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p.53.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁶⁷ Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Nine, Beirut, January 14, 1861.

in Bustānī's society had already detached from the natural bonds with his own people and entered a society of free competition.

Bustānī's approach to the violence as a relegation of man into nature, which I explore below, portrays man in society contra a state when man is isolated and alone without society. This relationship, which has been proposed during the European enlightenment by Rousseau, and John Locke before him, once posited by Bustānī as the translation of violence – a telling of the events of 1860 – sets the ground for him to construct the notion of the nation. The image of an isolated individual, Crusoe, outside society producing is “as much an absurdity as is the [conception of] the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other.”²⁶⁸ This opposition that is constructed through the metaphor of Crusoe between natural man and social man is the very opposition which makes the story of political economy possible for Bustānī.

The invocation of a myth to explain the working of human society, whether it is the myth of Prometheus, that of Adam, or that of Crusoe is the stance I question here. What are the direct implications of this ideology generating posture? Furthermore, how does it essentialize the social relations that Bustānī addresses? What role does this universalising stance (of nature versus society) play in constructing Bustānī's fantasy nation? Finally, how does this link to the problem of Nahḍa as a mythistorical structure of Arab history?

Having argued in Chapter 1 that the problem of the Nation as a historical form is itself the problem of the Nahḍa as a splitting moment in history or as disjunctive rupture, in this chapter I analyse Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Nafīr Sūriyya* pamphlet series with an eye to

²⁶⁸ Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Seven, Beirut, November 19, 1860.

the language, images, and metaphors he invokes. Through his analysis of the 1860 violence, Bustānī begins to draw a perception of history as a discontinuity. From this discontinuity emerges the discourse of the nation, *al-waṭan*, as a bearer of the promise of unity and *naḥḍa* in a seemingly broken world.

The *Nafīr* series founds the epistemic premises for the discussions of sectarianism to follow, it also institutes a perception of history that allows for Bustānī's national pedagogic writings, which later on take the form of encyclopaedic work. The encyclopaedia which Bustānī produces later in his life is, in fact, a continuation of the call to alarm he puts out in the *Nafīr*. Both the encyclopaedia and the nation that Bustānī invokes in the *Nafīr* are characterised by a sense of prolepsis – the delayed attainment of knowledge and nation. As such, this chapter lays bare Bustānī's political and ethical discussions in order to link them with his language ideology, lexicography, and encyclopaedia making. As discussed in Chapter 2, the intersection between language and knowledge in Bustānī's works creates a space into which the category of nationality is engraved.

Bustānī's writings that are meant to be the voice of an anonymous "lover of the nation" (the signature underlying every pamphlet) not only invoke a national sentiment but they expose a desire for a national belonging that professes "love" as a political rhetoric, meant to empower the national subject while acknowledging the ill-fate of belonging to a nation. In Stephen Sheehi's words, the sentiment of love signifies the moment in which the "subject forms a cathexis with the nation, which in turn becomes the subjectivity's *raison d'être*." As Sheehi writes, "love bestows propriety and the rights of the nation on its subject, making him responsible for its success or failure."²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Five, Beirut, November 2, 1860

Bustānī's proposition of love as a secular act that binds a citizen to their nation posits "love" as a rational element for re-organising society. This element to which Bustānī exposes his readers is at the very core of the "national symbolic" – what Lauren Berlant, in her study of Nathaniel Hawthorne and American nationalism, calls "the common language of a common space."²⁷⁰

Like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bustānī's works provide us with the "cultural expressions of a national fantasy. This cultural expression is crucial for the political legitimacy of the nation. The culture of the nation is an expression of the nation's "utopian promise to oversee full and just integration of the people."²⁷¹ Utopia is the aspect that distinguishes modern national life from other state formations. The nation which Bustānī draws as a resolute land of safety after the breakout of violence promises a "totality that overwrites the object status of individuals and property through a transformation of micro-spaces into larger, neutral, impermeable sites."²⁷² However, the cultural expression of the nation through individuals such as Bustānī "simultaneously records the discontinuous, contradictory, ambiguous, antagonistic, and simply confusing elements of civil life."²⁷³ The symbolic work of the nation is to produce a national fantasy whose content is always open to debate and contestation. Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Nafīr Sūriyya* series provides us with a blueprint of the Syro-Lebanese nation on one hand and the Arab nation (represented by *adab* and language) on the other.

²⁷⁰ Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Nine, Beirut, December 14, 1860

²⁷¹ Ghasan Hage, "The Fetishism of Identity," p.55

²⁷² A point that Bustānī makes in Pamphlets Five, Six, and Seven of *Nafīr*

²⁷³ Al-Bustānī uses this stanza in his Translator's Introduction to *al-Tuhfa al-Bustaniya fi- al- asfar al- Kuruziya*, *Nafīr Sūriyya* Pamphlet Eleven in 1860, and in *Khuṭba fi al- hay'a al- Itjima'ia* in 1869.

Bustānī's recipe for progress of the nation has been copied almost verbatim, as Stephen Sheehi has shown²⁷⁴, in George Antonius's *The Arab Awakening*. "The *Nafīr*", says Sheehi "contains a foundational but ever present 'enunciative series' essential to the articulation of modern national identity."²⁷⁵ Sheehi draws the links between Bustānī's *Nafīr* and other nationalist ideologies that followed in the region, such as Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī's *Risāla fī al-kalām al-thamānī*. However, the "nomenclature of reform",²⁷⁶ which Bustānī proposes, draws national progress as a schematic in which civil order is based on unity and harmony albeit the sense of alienation imposed by modernity on his own society. This obfuscation of reality is characteristic in ideological writing, which Bustānī practiced, for ideology does not invert or mystify reality, rather, it reflects an inversion that already exists in the appearance of reality. The idea that says that a singular national identity is a solution to the sectarian violence in society is ideological precisely because it naturalizes the subject-object opposition between the nation and society, for it is the same society in conflict that is meant to become a harmonious nation. This logic essentializes the nation into a transhistorical form while it is in fact made and can be unmade by the very subjects it is meant to bring together. I argue that Bustānī's position which has been diagnosed as "visionary" and "liberal humanist," is in fact dangerously ideological because it is pluralist. His narrative for co-existence in the middle of civil war largely depoliticizes the conflict and alludes to a pluralist semiotic which absorbs and neutralizes the fractures of social hierarchy. Moreover, Bustānī's solution for the violence of 1860 which was largely caused by political and

²⁷⁴ Burris al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Eleven, April 22, 1861.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pamphlet Eleven.

²⁷⁶ Refer to Waḍāḥ Sharāra's analysis of the events leading to the 1860 wars in *Fī uṣūl lubnān al-ṭā'ifī: khaṭ al-yamīn al-jamāhīrī* (Beirut: *Dār al-jadāwīl*, 2011).

economic modernization is the “return to labor” and to liberal political economy making it seem as though that was the original natural state of society to begin with.

Robinson Crusoe: the Story of Political Economy

In the 1870 article *Love of the Nation as an act of Faith*, Bustānī contemplates on the repercussions of the 1860 violence and the state of his ‘nation’. He says: “if we compare our present to our past in order to observe where we ought to have been in this ‘age of civilization’ or modernity the calamity of our regress would become clear to us. Rather than protecting our position [in the age of civilization] we have regressed in to the past in the strife for civilization. It is well known to anyone with the slightest of wisdom that the extent of our delay in progress is equal to that of our regression.”²⁷⁷

Bustānī repeated this argument in his diagnosis of the history of the “*Adab* of the Arabs” as a history of the Arab nation in the *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab* (1869), which he presented in Beirut as a lecture for the Syrian Society for Science, *al-Jam‘iya al-‘ilmiya al-Sūriyya*. In the *Khuṭba*, Bustānī notes the decline of the Arabs in terms of the centuries from the end of the Abbasid Caliphate up until the nineteenth century.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the evolution of the paradigm of decline and crisis in the twentieth-century Arab writings to show how the trope of crisis is the founding episteme of every nation, while also being the main problematic aspect of Enlightenment. Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe survives his own crisis, shipwreck, only to go back to the ship and collect the tools needed for his self preservation. These tools are the tools of civilization. On day one, Crusoe realised that he had to “pursue his needs”

²⁷⁷ Ghasan Hage offers an excellent analysis of the complexities of social struggle and the rise of the Christian Maronites as a bourgeois class subject by the mid-nineteenth century in *The Fetishism of Identity: Class, Politics, and Processes of Identification in Lebanon*, Phd Dissertation submitted to the School of History, Philosophy and Politics at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia (1989).

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pamphlet Eleven.

and that that could not happen without “much pain and perseverance.”²⁷⁸ From then on, Crusoe had to behave as a dutiful subject. His duty was to survive, whatever the cost. When Crusoe first swam out to the wrecked ship he knew exactly what to collect: “I took the objects that I knew I would need.”²⁷⁹ Crusoe salvaged essential items from the sinking boat: food, clothing, cookware, rifles and gunpowder, and carpentry tools. Throughout the first thirteen days he spent on the island, Crusoe went back to the ship for objects and tools eleven times. He gradually transported anything he could carry back to the island, even coinage and money. Once Crusoe settled into his new abode he contemplated his state – “every evil brings with it some goodness.”²⁸⁰ Crusoe began to think about his own survival and what good it could bring, before he reached a moment of religious conversion three years later. One day while he read from the Bible he had salvaged from the ship the following lines, “The Lord says: I will never leave you. I will never let you down”²⁸¹ he felt a sudden rush of faith. Crusoe’s conversion only happened after he had been shipwrecked. Similarly Bustānī’s fellow citizens could only become citizens after the break out of war.

The “positive outcomes” of the events of 1860, argued Bustānī in his *Naḡīr*, is that “the sons of the nation have experienced firsthand the atrocities of civil wars and their bad effects.”²⁸² The civil war according to Bustānī induces the people of his society to convert into citizens of a nation. As in any other act of conversion, the key to its immanence is its irreversibility and its reliance on the omnipotence of God. Bustānī establishes an analogy between the convert who places all his aspirations in God and

²⁷⁸ Ibid., pamphlet Eleven.

²⁷⁹ Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, p. 86.

²⁸⁰ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four, October 25, 1860.

²⁸¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Three, October, 1860.

²⁸² Ibid.

the citizen who places all their aspirations in the nation. The return of *ilfa*, (harmony), for Bustānī is conditioned primarily by “religions that are alive, aware, and vigilant. Religions that look at those who are of different faith with tolerance and love for everyone [in the nation] are members of one family their father is the nation, their mother the Earth, and their creator God.”²⁸³ This seemingly pluralist stance however is underlined by a preference for the Christian religion above all for it is conducive to forgiveness and tolerance by the teachings of Jesus Christ. In other words, the pluralist stance is not devoid of a partisan position for Bustānī. Even his use of the motto *ḥub al-waṭan min al-imān* which is a known Hadith for the Prophet can be seen as an address distinctly to the ‘Muslims’: by building on an Islamic saying Bustānī gained access to a pluralist stance albeit from a non-Muslim position. This can be seen to have consolidated the forming binary opposition between Muslim and Christian rather than having refuted it. As early as 1860 Bustānī used the logic of pluralism to define the Lebanese and Syrian nation: “be fences for each other rather than enemies” he proclaimed.²⁸⁴ Bustānī argued that plurality is in fact the safety valve of the nation.²⁸⁵ This pluralist stance continues to exist in Lebanese society and other Arab societies today. Ghassan Hage argues that the danger of pluralist analysis is that while it aims at explaining social groupings objectively it objectivises society into a set of discernable and essentialized groups such as “Muslim,” “Druze,” and “Christian.” This is not to say that these social identifications do not exist as such in society however, rather, “the pluralist claim, however, involves more than casual observation. On a more fundamental level, it is the primacy of the empirically-defined sect, or grouping, as a social and analytical category that is asserted, and then endowed accordingly with

²⁸³ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

²⁸⁴ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Seven.

²⁸⁵ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Five, Pamphlet Seven, Pamphlet Eight.

causal and explanatory powers.”²⁸⁶ In other words, in Bustānī’s logic the problem of Lebanon and Syria is defined as religion. It is for this reason that religion needs to be separated from politics, as he argues in the *Nafīr*. In my study here of Bustānī I seek to show how he comes to believe in this ideology and I do not accept his diagnosis as a starting ground for analysis. Bustānī’s pluralist analysis of society is premised on perceiving society as a being made of different actors who carry out a set of actions, the exchange of power or consolidation of power in this process slips out of Bustānī’s analysis as well as all other similar analyses of sectarianism. Bustānī argues that the losses that have befallen various actors are in fact considered one big loss for the whole nation.²⁸⁷ Through this de-politicized logic which overlooks any notions of power Bustānī as well posits a utilitarian political economic argument with regards to the value of individuals in society.

Bustānī concluded his last *Nafīr* with the beginning statement of his translation of Crusoe: “Every man who is of no use to others has a useless existence altogether”.²⁸⁸ For Bustānī, “the human being is not created to the form of a sponge so that they may absorb all the riches and money of this world. Rather, he is created to the image of a growing fruit tree.”²⁸⁹ “He can only grow,” Bustānī wrote, “with his good deeds and

²⁸⁶ Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Six.

²⁸⁷ Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Four.

²⁸⁸ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *al-Tuḥfah*. Robinson Crusoe was translated and published by the Protestant Missionaries in Malta in 1835. There is a copy of this at the American University of Beirut’s archive. The quality of Arabic is poor in the earlier translation that Bustānī must have seen at the time. It is highly probable that this was a commissioned work for Bustānī. Regardless, his engagement with the story is evident from his addition of verses of Arabic poetry within the chapters and at the end of each one. That is, besides his invocation of the metaphor of Crusoe in the *Nafīr* series.

²⁸⁸ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī al hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya al-maqābala bayn al-‘awā’id al-‘arabiyya w-al-ifranjiya* (Beirut: Matāba ‘at al-ma’ ārif, 1869).

²⁸⁹ Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, p. 7.

not with how much he has amassed in wealth and knowledge.”²⁹⁰ Labour preceded wealth, for Bustānī. For him it represented the source of true wealth for the individual. It is important to keep in mind that this is at a time when peasants were revolting against the feudal or *muqāt`iji* system of Mount Lebanon and capitalist relations were overtaking the Levant.²⁹¹ In fact, what could have become a full on peasant revolt was transformed in the 1860s to a sectarian struggle because the Maronite church and merchants of Beirut who had originally supported the rebellion feared that they would soon be its targets. This added to the success of the onset of French industrial capital into Mount Lebanon ended the *iqṭā`* system and coupled religious identity with class politics.²⁹²

In his *Khuṭba* of 1869 Bustānī defined societal existence as a “need” for individuals, without which progress would be untenable as would not the satisfaction of individual needs. Thus he argued that, “true civilization (*al-tamaddun al-ḥaqīqī*) elevates a people by bettering them one by one.” Civilization for Bustānī was in itself “a tree on which the western accomplishments are hanging temporarily”²⁹³ but which would continue to grow and on it the Arabs would find their place as “a branch of human civilization.”²⁹⁴

The story of Crusoe, the man who was of no good to anyone but himself and thus had to be punished with solitary existence, has been rightfully analysed as the story of

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, p. 84.

²⁹² I use here Derrida’s analysis of Rousseau and Condillac in his article “The Linguistic Circle of Geneva” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 675-691. Bustānī, like his European counterparts, posits nature in opposition to society this opposition. However, this conceals a specific perception of society that claims to be one thing but is another. It is important to note that Robinson Crusoe was the only book that Rousseau accepted to be read by his *Emile* because it was a book that once read through Derrida’s discussion of Rousseau can be seen to summarize some of Rousseau’s main tenets concerning society and language.

²⁹³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

political economy.²⁹⁵ It speaks to the images of solitary figures that Bustānī had painted into the natural landscape of the nation. The isolated individual who is of no utility, of no contract of exchange with others is, in fact, outside not only the nation but outside the definition of humanity that Bustānī proposes. As he reminds us in the fourth pamphlet, “those who forfeit the love of the nation for sectarian bigotry and sacrifice the good of their nation for their personal gains do not deserve to belong to the nation. They are, in fact, its enemies.”²⁹⁶

Bustānī invoked the image of productive ants and bees to compare them with the society that stagnated after the violence.²⁹⁷ Besides reminding us of the Lockean and Hobbesian discussions of the seventeenth century, this allegory suggests that humans have a natural propensity for production and exchange. The internalisation of this capitalist tenant by Bustānī does not come without a hesitation. For him, “a man is not measured by his wealth but by his deeds.” I show in the last chapter how Shidyāq shared this perception with Bustānī as well. Thus, the individual who lived in the Levant, which in the nineteenth century was moving in its modes of production from agrarian to free market competition, appears as an ideal human to be projected into the past. Production in society or socially determined production – to which the agrarian society of the Levant was shifting in the nineteenth century – becomes an existence that Bustānī can project onto the past and the future at the same time.

Bustānī warned his readers that if society did not go back to socially necessitated production—which he presumed to have always been in existence— to the ethics of

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

²⁹⁷ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Ḥub al-waṭan min al-imān*”, *al-Jinān* (Vol.1), 1860, p. 303. This article is added to the original eleven *Nafīr* pamphlets that were re-published in 1990.

work and labour, it would collapse. “I warn you, do not prefer living on charity rather than from the labour of your hands ... I warn you from unemployment; it will only damage your body, mind, and spirit.”²⁹⁸ And it will, of course, damage the nation’s body and economy. In fact, it is the nation that, for Bustānī, will cure the damage of the social body and the economy. The nation is made contingent by the crisis. “Love of the Nation”, proclaims Bustānī, “is the only way out of the catastrophe that has befallen Syria.”²⁹⁹

The events of 1860 are seen by Bustānī to have been provoked by human “evil passions”, *al-gharaḍ al-khabīth*. Although passions can cause storm and turbulence, they are necessary to put everything in movement; after all, the cure for the evil passion, sectarianism, is “love of the nation”, according to Bustānī. Buṭrus al-Bustānī reacts to the 1860 wars by relegating the violence to a non-human realm. He names the cause of the violence “the blind drive, *al-gharaḍ al-a‘mā*”,³⁰⁰ “the evil principle, *al-mabda’ al-khabīth*”,³⁰¹ “the moment of unconsciousness, *al-ghafla*.”³⁰² He advised the “sons of the nation” to “awaken” and return to their daily livelihood and productivity.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ The Arab, like the Greek and the Indian, holds a discursive position within the history of Europe that perceives Arabs as the medium of translation and preservation of ancient knowledge. The west, however, does not recognize the untranslatability of certain things in translation. It presumes that knowledge is translatable in its totality as the nation form is translated on the geopolitical landscape of the world. The breakdown of the Ottoman world order only occurred through violence, a violence that has not ceased to occur in the nation states that have emerged from it. It is how violence forms as a discursive field through the nation form itself that is my interest here.

³⁰⁰ Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, p. 4.

³⁰¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Muḥīt al-muḥīt*, p. 607.

³⁰² Bustānī, NS, Pamphlet Two.

“Beware of the evils of unemployment”,³⁰³ Bustānī warned his readers, for a society can only attain civilization through productivity and education.

By invoking the same poetry verse (*kul insānun la khayr fī hi li-ghayrihi fa siyyānun ‘indi faqduh aw-wujūdihi*) “every person who is of no good for another has a useless existence altogether”,³⁰⁴ in the introduction to his translation of Robinson Crusoe and in his last *Nafīr* pamphlet³⁰⁵ Bustānī alluded to the state of man outside society to elucidate the need for society. This argument is at the core of Bustānī and other nineteenth-century writer’s call for the nationalisation of society. Bustānī calls upon the metaphor of Crusoe ten years later in another speech he gives in 1869 entitled “Social organization: a comparison between the culture of the Arabs and that of the *Ifranja*.” There Bustānī invokes the example of Robinson Crusoe to argue for the social need for individual production and labour.³⁰⁶ Without the division of labour Bustānī told his audience, the human being will suffer and not be able to fulfil his needs.

Read the story of Robinson Crusoe and you will see how much he suffered to find sustenance on the island on which he was destined to isolation. Then it will become clear to you that the individual necessarily needs others to aid him in fulfilling his needs and that this necessity is what made human society in the first place. One person cannot simultaneously be farmer, weaver, tailor, builder, carpenter, student, teacher, believer, king, shaykh, and priest at the same time³⁰⁷

This argument cannot but remind us of Adam Smith’s description of isolated man in comparison to productive individuals. Karl Marx’s critique of the cultural historicism

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Two.

³⁰⁵ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

³⁰⁶ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, “*Ḥub al- waṭan min al-imān: al-ghira ‘alā al- waṭan*”, (On the Love of the Nation as an act of Faith or Patriotism) in *Mukhtārat Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, ed. Yūsuf Qazma Khūrī (Beirut: al-Mu’asasa al-sharqiyya lil-nashr wa-al-ṭibā’a, 2001)) p. 214.

³⁰⁷ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, “*Ḥub al- waṭan min al -iman*”, p. 215.

of political economy proves to be very useful for the analysis of Bustānī's stance.

Bustānī, like Smith, posits the division of labour and socially necessitated labour time, which are historically specific to capitalism, as the natural conditions of social existence for individuals. This perspective is ahistorical as it evades the true analysis of the division of labour as a “historical *result*” rather than describing it as a “historical beginning”³⁰⁸ as the true nature of human sociality. In other words, the condition of alienation generated by modernity, which I argue is the main prerogative of the 1860 events, is left outside the analysis of Bustānī, who willingly engages with the discourse of “civilization” to analyze the violence he witnessed.

Defoe's Crusoe provides Bustānī with an example of man outside his social bonds. In the novel, Crusoe's isolation gradually made him resort to the same ways of civilization. He takes for himself a private property on the island, farms a plot of land, makes straw baskets, takes on a slave he names Friday, and teaches him language. By the time Crusoe leaves the island it would be ready to be turned into a colony – in other words, into a civilization. Bustānī makes a necessary connection between a natural condition of mankind and a social one. Bustānī, in both Crusoe and the *Nafīr*, refers humans back to a state of nature with which the state of civil society could be compared.

This epistemological shift begins to translate the ‘Arab’ into the tropes of modernity. What I mean by this is that the opposition created between a state of nature and state of society constructs a natural state to which society owes its existence. In other words, the existence of society (and language) is not only *natural* but also heterogeneous to the

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

usual function of the natural realm.³⁰⁹ Thus, there is a need for language, as well as a need for society, once man is in a natural state. The origin of that need is never truly interrogated except through the logic of political economy, which Bustānī proposes in his *Nafīr* series through the calculation of gains and losses of society and the need for production.

Love: The cure for the nation's shipwreck

Bustānī reminded his readers with a well known Arabic saying “*al-sirr bil sukān la bil manzil*”³¹⁰ (it's the people who make the nation and not the other way around). “The love of the nation is an act of faith”, he said, quoting a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet. Bustānī wrote, “Given that the people require their rights from the nation, the nation requires duties from its people.”³¹¹ Love for the nation is a duty that is not done to further sectarian ends. “Those who replace their love for the nation for sectarian bigotry (*al-ta'ṣab al-üḫāi'fī*) sacrifice the nation's good for personal gains.”³¹² Later on in the same essay Bustānī proclaimed that “there is no real nation in this material transient world, the only real nation is beyond the grave.”³¹³ Similarly, for a society to progress its individuals need to understand that “their personal interest is public interest.”

Bustānī argued that “each one of us needs to carry out our actions towards others while thinking that their own private interest is the interest of the public itself.”³¹⁴ The

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

³¹⁴ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet One.

problem, *al-‘aīb*, does not lie in “a certain age but in the people who live in that age.”³¹⁵

It is a cultural problem, one that has to do with the characteristic traits of a people not with the age itself. This assertion has become a tenet of Nahḍa discourse: that the consciousness of the people needs to be diagnosed. Recall, for instance, Muhammad ‘Ābed al-Jābirī’s work on the “Arab Mind”, *al-‘aql al-‘arabī*, discussed in Chapter 1; the trope of “Arab Mind” is a logical corollary to the cultural historicism that characterises Bustānī’s analysis of the 1860 events.

The problem of the Nahḍa is itself the problem of the nation for the Arabs. The tropes of decline, crisis, and awakening/renaissance/Nahḍa are not merely textual discourses; they also shape the historical development of the Arabs and the history of the discourse on Arab development.³¹⁶ They come hand in hand with the nation’s origination, within a moment of rupture, depicted by the *Nafīr*. This, of course, means that development is a problematic discourse in its presumption that the forms of certain nations are dysfunctions – the trope of decline for the case of the ‘Arabs’ illustrates this contention.

Bustānī’s pamphlets are not to be read as a secular manifestation of an Arab nationalist, but as the revelation of a solitary writer who has come to bear the birthmarks of the nation. These birthmarks are not a sign of origination or beginning but, in fact, an end to a past existence that is no longer tenable. As Lauren Berlant argues, “citizenship becomes equivalent to life itself and also looms as a kind of death penalty: both activity in and exile from the political public sphere feel like cruel and unusual punishment. It is apparently a quality of nations to claim legal and moral privilege, to inspire

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

identification and sacrifice, as well as to make citizens feel violated in public and private.”³¹⁷

I show in this dissertation how both Shidyāq and Bustānī, each from his own vantage point, bear upon themselves the birth pangs of the nation form and the citizenship it imposes – one from exile (Shidyāq) and the other from within the unfolding events in the 1860s Levant. Bustānī’s nation only emerges from the wreck of society in 1860. He called on a nation that does not exist to offer a commentary on the violent events that he witnessed. Bustānī’s word *waṭan* is conjured up by his *Nafīr*. He defines *Nafīr* in his *Muḥīt* dictionary as “a noun, when the public arises to fight the enemy... a horn, and *Nafīr Sūriyya* is a series of eleven pamphlets in which we had written our hopes and aspirations during the event of 1860.”³¹⁸ Every *Nafīr* pamphlet opens with the addressing phrase “Oh Sons of the Nation” [*yā abnā ’ al-waṭan*]. The “Oh” turns towards the past. It recalls “sons of the nation” that exit or as presumed to respond to the call that addresses them. In other words, Bustānī presumes an ‘other’ that will consent to being as such. This other (sons of the nation) is meant to respond to Bustānī’s cry, “Oh Sons of the Nation”, is used intermittently in every one of his essays.

Bustānī begins every *Nafīr* with this call to the “sons of the nation”, followed by three or four pauses in the text in which he repeats his appeal. The addressing statement, “Oh Sons of the nation!” beseeches a universal category of “*al-waṭan*”, or the nation. In the time of the nation that Bustānī records the unique is sacrificed for the common. The personal suffering induced by the 1860 events only makes sense communally by its cry

³¹⁷ Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Five, p.25

³¹⁸ Robert Meister, “Forgiving and forgetting, Lincoln and the politics of national recovery.” In C. Hesse and R.C. Post (Eds.) *Human Rights in Political Transitions*, p.140

to those who speak the same language and are in search of translation within it. The violence which had moved Bustānī to cry out for the ones he could not reach also called for a translation: replacing the other in society with the category “sons of the nation”. It is as though Bustānī wrote his pamphlets for the sake of a communal conversion. He took it upon himself as a “lover of the nation” to write “because God the almighty cannot change a people if they do not change themselves.”³¹⁹ The 1860 event for Bustānī signified “a strike by the hand of God”.³²⁰ God had sanctioned the violence in order to show Bustānī’s countrymen that they cannot exist outside a nation. He wrote on October 8, 1860:

Oh sons of the nation, if you have thought for an instance that what has befallen your country is from the work of God take that thought to be true. Do not expel it from your minds, open your hearts and welcome it. Perhaps it will be a reminder for you to always refer to Him so he may spare you. If you do the contrary I fear that his strike will be harder because God the almighty cannot change a people if they do not change themselves.³²¹

If a nation can only exist through the harmony and unity of its subjects, as Bustānī argued, *al-itihād w-al-ulfa*, then in what terms could he discuss the violence that had occurred? Bustānī’s invocation of God is parallel to his invocation of the law or a just ruler to arbiter between the warring “brothers”. In both cases Bustānī was engaging fully with the national logic as it manifests around the modern world. The nation, like the law, comes to inhabit a horizon of expectation vis-a-vis which experience does not cease to fall short.

In his fourth pamphlet and after having used the word *waṭan* repetitively Bustānī proposed a definition. Bustānī wrote on October 25 1860, “Oh sons of the Nation, we

³¹⁹ Fawaz Trabulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (UK: Pluto Press, 2007) p. 28.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Fawaz Trabulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, p. 31.

have been using often the word *waṭan* in these pamphlets because the *waṭan* is the dearest word that one who loves their nation (*waṭan*) could hear. It is the most delightful of words to ornament the ancient and originary, *muwallada*, words of the Arabic language.”³²² Bustānī’s use of the *muwalidīn* as the source of the word *waṭan* is a political move. It was common in the nineteenth century to defend the use of certain words based on their origin and genealogy. Words were claimed to have been used by the *muwalidīn*, by the ancients, the originary receivers of the language, in order to gain legitimacy. They were thus not hybrid words, nor translations, but pure original Arabic. The latter’s principles were set from the beginning and the student of Arabic had to learn them gradually.

It is important to note that Shidyāq had written an article in *al-Jawā’ib* in which he was cynical about the word *waṭan* and the “love of the nation”. Although the article does not have a definite date, there is reasonable doubt that it could have been written in retaliation to Bustānī’s *Nafīr*. From Istanbul, Shidyāq seethed with anger in an article in *al-Jawā’ib*. Critiquing the slogan of *love of the nation as an act of faith*, he wrote, “What does it mean to say Time has been corrupted? What does it mean when one ridicules his fellow countrymen and points out their faults and vices? What makes you better than they and why is it that you have not been corrupted if your time has been?”³²³ Shidyāq criticised Bustānī’s patriotism by saying that the descriptions of the natural landscapes of one’s nation and the cynicism towards fellow countrymen and one’s own neighbours are works of “those who think that by knowing grammar they know everything and think that by knowing how to say *bon jour* they know all there is to know.”

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Fawaz Trabulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, p. 37.

Shidyāq argued, “The fact is the more they think they know the less their knowledge is.” He exclaimed, “By insulting others you shall be insulted and as you condemn others you will be condemned... know thy place and thyself.”³²⁴ Shidyāq’s criticism reveals his awareness of the dangers of the critique of culture that Bustānī had proposed. He questions the lament of one’s own countrymen, probably referring to Bustānī’s use of “ignorance” and “savagery” to diagnose the violence, pointing to the class divides in society: “how are the city folk I ask? They are the first to be condemned for their gluttony and dishonesty...they are busy collecting furniture and luxuries while claiming that everyone else is savage.” Shidyāq asked, “So how is it that your nation has good attributes [that cause you to praise it and love it] while having people of such great vices? You answer that its founding fathers had tilled its lands, farmed them and built its prosperity and then Time was corrupted.” Shidyāq then added, “But how could Time become corrupt, it has never been good from the beginning and from the very creation of mankind? History is a witness to that.” Moreover, he asked, “How is it that you have survived the corruption of time?”³²⁵ Shidyāq’s criticism of Bustānī’s “love of the nation” does not contradict Bustānī’s national sentiment but comes as a supplement to it. This becomes clearer when I discuss Shidyāq and Bustānī’s notion of *adab* in the coming chapter. It suffices to say for now that Shidyāq’s critique could have provoked Bustānī to write further on the matter.

Bustānī and Shidyāq’s discussions of language within this discourse of original/corrupt allowed them to redefine through their lexicographic works the terms of *adab* and *al-*

³²⁴ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

³²⁵ Shaden Tageldin makes this distinction in her valuable book, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seduction of Translation in Egypt* (USA: University of California Press, 2011).

lugha as a nationalisation of language and thereby society. The national language serves as a link to the nation as does every citizen of the nation, “the nation is like a great connecting chain with many parts: one end is our home or place of birth with all its members, the other end is our country and all those in it. The epicentre of both ends and their core magnet is our heart, and both ends of the chain are also the centre of our heart and its magnet.”³²⁶ Bustānī places this notion of love at the core of his political rhetoric.

The nation for Bustānī was not simply a territorial entity – in fact, territory does not emerge as a central trope of his national discourse. Rather, the image of the nation Bustānī depicts is as such: “Syria that is known as the land of Sham and ‘Arabistan is our nation across its various valleys, mountains, coastlines and wild lands. The people of Syria across their sectarian, physical, racial, and differences are the sons of our nation.”³²⁷ These are the larger circles that connect the family and home to the nation, which in turn has a “strong gravitational pull towards its children fixing them with great commitment into its circle, however corrupt it is. [The nation] holds the reigns of its children’s hearts and pulls them to it with violent traction to return them to it if they had strayed away. However better their lands of exile are [the nation] has that ability to pull them towards her.”³²⁸ Bustānī invokes a common saying: “If the nation where to exist without hardship the law-less lands would prosper.”³²⁹ It is as though he is a proposing national belonging as a motto of instruction, or a motto of enlightenment. Once the citizen lovingly accepts that the nation guides him, he will be promised more progress and fortitude.

³²⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī rearticulates this point in almost everyone of his pamphlets.

³²⁷ Robert Meister, *After Evil: a politics of Human Rights* (USA: Columbia University Press, 2011).

³²⁸ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet One.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

However, for Bustānī it is the people that give a nation its culture: “For if one were to wander around the world and observe the nations and their people one would know beyond doubt that, however good the nation is in itself the evil doings of its people can destroy it and, however corrupt the nation is in itself it can be fixed by the virtues of its people.”³³⁰ By establishing this link between the nation and its people, Bustānī engaged in the production of a national fantasy that depicts the nation as natural entity – one that is corruptible by its own people.

Bustānī linked the culture of the nation to local lived lives; he connected personal and collective consciousness with the utopian dream that the nation embodies, the dream that is threatened to dissipate at the site of the violence. In fact, it is through the violence itself that Bustānī conjures the nation-dream, which, when committed to with love and faith, can promise a future that has no repetition of the violence. Needless to say, Bustānī’s nation emerges from a moment of rupture, of shame at the actions of its citizenry-to-be. On September 29, 1860 Bustānī wrote, “Oh sons of the Nation! The news of the atrocities and terrible deeds committed in such a short period of time by those warring amongst us have reached all the world, and they have affected feelings of sorrow and pity on one hand, and anger and provocation on the other throughout the civilized world.”³³¹

He then alluded to a more detailed discussion of these emotions that have been provoked in the civilized world: “The civilized world looks at these deeds that the victorious group are proud of with disgust, repulsion, and anger: it considers them to be actions of barbaric savages that are stripped from their humanity, dignity, honor, and

³³⁰ Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, p. 5.

³³¹ Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator, Paradigm for a Metaphor for Existence*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press) p. 78.

religion, actions of bandits and bootleggers.”³³² Bustānī addressed the group that considered itself victorious or that which had seen itself as defeated telling them both that the foreign troops sought not to protect one of them from the other, but to protect the “rights of humanity (*al-ḥuqūq al-insaniyya*) and observe the tenets of justice and righteousness, hence there is no fear for the innocent whichever group they belong to.”³³³ Bustānī used the notion of human rights to transcend what he saw as demands for private sectarian ends and most importantly, he used it to justify foreign aid and intervention (Napoleon III’s army). This discursive move de-politicizes the conflict by beseeching universal human rights: the social conflict that led to the 1860 events are transformed into a project of national reconciliation whence there had not been a nation to begin with in the first place.

Bustānī’s call for reconciliation based on human rights makes it impossible to understand the real context of the conflict. Thus, while the individual suffering is in fact caused by a particular social structure, Bustānī chooses to address it in terms of a universal notion which is meant to bring recovery to the individual. So the social rupture of 1860 is directly made by Bustānī into a thing from the past: a historical event whose recurrence is meant to be resisted individually as well as collectively. Rather than compelling all the Lebanese and Syrians to acknowledge the pain that civil war had inflicted on those who were perceived as others in society, Bustānī invites everyone to identify themselves as victims who survived the experience of civil war. The distinct identities of both victims and perpetrators have to be relinquished and everyone has to become a citizen of a nation that had survived civil war. “The worst of all evil wars and

³³² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Ḥub al-waṭan min al-imān*”, *al Jinan* vol.1 (1870) p. 302-303.

³³² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Ḥub al-waṭan min al-imān*”, p. 302.

³³³ *Ibid.*

all wars in this world is civil war.”³³⁴ Bustānī’s logic deems everyone as survivors and dismantles the binary logic of victim/perpetrator through the notion of social consensus and citizenship. This is reminiscent of Lincolnian logic, as Meister argues “A Lincolnian view of national recovery foregrounds national trauma as a unifying experience and seeks to replace the moral logic of victim/perpetrator with the moral logic of common survivorship and collective rebirth.”³³⁵

The violent events, besides having ruptured society’s fabric and makeup, have most importantly revealed an economic rupture: the onset of capitalism in Mount Lebanon. By 1858 the Ottomans had issued “a land code with the intention of creating a peasant led market economy that would maximise state revenues from taxes.”³³⁶ Following the Ottoman reforms, several “merchant towns”³³⁷ had revolted against the *muqāṭi* ‘ji control and, in fact, much of the events were instigated by peasant and merchant-class demands. The north of Syria witnessed large peasant revolts in 1858, bread riots in Aleppo in 1859. The Keserwan rebels in North Mount Lebanon against the Khazin clan, as Trabulsi has suggested, were “pioneers in demanding the application of the Ottoman *Tanzīmāt*”; their slogan was “full equality and complete freedom.”³³⁸ From within their demands was the issue of deriving status from society not on the basis of wealth and birth but on the basis of work and deeds. This is also one of Bustānī’s demands in his final *Nafīr* as it was the “demand of the new middle class of merchants,

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, p. 55.

³³⁸ Ibid.

usurers, and rich farmers, who wanted free trade and social recognition.”³³⁹ These demands seem to have come hand in hand with the demand for reconciliation based on human rights discourse.

The sectarian turn during the 1860 events was indeed directly affected by the Ottoman reforms and the growing class of merchants. However, the conflict was represented at the time as distinctly sectarian by figures like Bustānī who had his own stakes in society as a liberal reformer. His liberal notion of tolerance can be seen to have blocked early on the pursuit of substantive equality and freedom. In order for the conflict to be sectarian it had to appear sectarian for subjects like Bustānī who consciously and wilfully reproduced the logic of sectarianism in a specific historical moment.

Napoleon III sent General D’Hautpoul to carry out a series of “contradictory assignments: to cooperate with the Ottoman authorities, restore peace, help the Christians, contribute to the reconstruction of Mount Lebanon and get silk workers back to work as well as help create an autonomous Christian enclave in Mount Lebanon.”³⁴⁰ In addition, and as a re-enactment of Napoleon Bonaparte’s expedition in Egypt, Napoleon III sent Ernest Renan to investigate the country’s Phoenician past. With Renan, of course, came the cartographers and other topographers of empire.

Bustānī’s position from the foreign interference was not only addressed to the “sons of the nation” but to these foreign forces themselves. He reminded them that they had

³³⁹ Hans Blumenberg in *Shipwreck with Spectator* traces the metaphor of shipwreck in the works of philosophers and thinkers who belong to the early modern and modern age. Beginning with ancient Greek thinkers who were reread during the Enlightenment, Blumenberg discusses the shifting perspective from Lucretius to Goethe and Hegel. He notes a shift in the understanding of time and the position of the subject from it whereby the present is seen as always a beginning from previous shipwreck. The sea is always defined as the unknowable demon to human society.

³⁴⁰ Bustānī, *Nafīr Sūriyya*, Pamphlet One, Four, Six, Eight, and the article “Love of the Nation is an act of Faith”.

come there to aid the innocent and support the “*ahālī*” positions and opinions.³⁴¹ The position of spectator to the events, which Bustānī takes, manifests as his invocation of the trope of “human rights” or “rights of humanity”. The “lover of the nation” alludes to the “rights of humanity”, in acknowledgement of his own love as a political rhetoric – and not a political fact.³⁴² In other words, Bustānī’s “love” of his own nation allows him to place himself at the vantage position of spectator, and most importantly, allows him to become a human rights convert. He beseeches the civilized world to witness what had been done as though it had been a fact, an objective truth to be witnessed from all sides in the same way.

There is an ethical stance underlying Bustānī’s description of the violence as “barbaric and savage”. It is ethical in as far as the solution to it is political. Bustānī condemned acts of revenge in his *Nafīr* yet he did not invoke the narrative of forgiveness. The primary principle for betterment is the “love of the nation”, “the act of faith”, that Bustānī offered as a solution for violence. The love of the nation was for him the only source for “harmony and unity, *al-ulfa w-al-itiḥād*”.³⁴³ As Meister tells us “by agonising over the potential of his own guilt as a bystander, the human rights convert, the witness to human suffering tries to save his soul without necessarily relinquishing his position of advantage. The convert always asks “is it too soon or is it too late already?”³⁴⁴

Bustānī sways between saying that there is a possibility for betterment and that that the nation is doomed to its tragedy. Thus, Bustānī’s “love” is, in fact, a hatred of the ‘past’

³⁴¹ Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, p. 78.

³⁴² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Muḥīt al-muḥīt*, (Beirut: *Maktabat lubnān*, 1998) p. 626.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Three.

that had befallen his nation: “Oh sons of the nation, the calamity and destruction that have befallen our country have no equivalent in all histories. Its reasons for happening are not concealed from the majority of you. This hurts the heart of every lover of the nation and every observer of it.”³⁴⁵

Bustānī argued: “Although the calamity seems private it is, in fact, public. It affects all the sons of the nation because every loss that has happened or that will happen due to it is a loss from the reserve of the nation. Every soul that has been lost is a loss that affects each and everyone one of us.”³⁴⁶ Here Bustānī paused to interrupt himself again for he realised that his proposition of conflating private with public good is not persuasive, perhaps not even for himself. How is he going to make “the sons of the nation” –whom he had never addressed as his ‘brothers’ in the nation, reserving that phrase for when he proposed they observe each other – believe this proposition?

Bustānī retreated further into his vantage position, addressing the innocent and the beneficiaries of the violence that had passed. Bustānī claimed that he and his readers were already part of the political space of the nation, that they already inhabited it. This space is a cluster of linguistic, territorial and experiential aspects added to a space of emotion, of affect. Luran Berlant distinguishes this space, calling it the “national symbolic” and denotes it as one in which desire is regulated and affect is geared towards political life, in contrast to the space of the Law that dominates the technical definitions of rights, duties, and regulations.³⁴⁷ Bustānī’s writings do come into the discussion of duties and rights but not from the perspective of the law; rather, Bustānī

³⁴⁵ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

³⁴⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Six.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

will propose that it is the love of the nation that induces the citizens' duties and responsibilities. With this statement Bustānī ended his first *Nafīr*:

Oh sons of the nation, you drink the same water, breathe the same air. The language you speak is one, the soil you step on is one, your habits and interests are one. And if you are still drunk from drinking the blood of your brothers in the nation, distraught from the calamity of the tragedies that have befallen you the time will come when you will awaken from this, *ghafla*, momentary neglect and realize the significance of my advices and your national interest. This is what I had wanted to speak to you about and I hope to continue writing to you and I ask God to lead you to the knowledge of your own good and that of your nation, and that He may guide your heart to reconsider the texts and principles of the religion that you believe in.

Bustānī wrote his pamphlets from a spectator's position his language full of profound pity, anger, and sadness at the untold miseries of his people. His texts instil a perception of the present as always being a new beginning, an exit from the past. Bustānī, like the spectator of the present, is one "of those who possess and want to spread the courage to want to leap into the water and start all over from the beginning, possibly counting on returning to the undamaged ship as the last preserve of despised history."³⁴⁸ Bustānī is a survivor, insofar as he is in search of another relation, of another translation for his belonging – something besides the original ship; society. This search is signalled by an entry into a political life that has been severed from theology and fused with nationalism. In claiming that the 1860 events were caused by "God's will", while acknowledging the need to separate between "civil" and "religious" realms, Bustānī's writing as well as religious conversion – discussed in Chapter 1 – are signifiers of survivorship. Bustānī is a survivor insofar as he accepts his survivorship as an "other death." As he becomes a witness to the violence Bustānī enters a world which he can only see as broken and corrupted: a time in which justice is always delayed.

³⁴⁸ Refer to Faisal Devji's article, "Morality in the Shadow of Politics", *Modern Intellectual History*, 7, 2 (2010), pp. 373–390.

In 1870, ten years after he had written the *Nafīr Series*, Bustānī wrote yet another article entitled *Love of the Nation is an act of Faith*³⁴⁹, in which he declared that “the defect is not in Time but in us.”³⁵⁰ Thus, Bustānī chose to place his “hope in the future”³⁵¹, for there was nothing else in his present that he could put faith in. “Our tragic situation has moved me to hope for a future and compels me to say to the people of this beautifully positioned land – that is cursed with bad luck – that their ignorance of the love of their nation has brought them to this situation. Nothing will rescue them from disaster except the true knowledge of this principle and its diligent pursuit.”³⁵² Bustānī proposed reason, “*ḥarakat al-‘aql*”, as the source of happiness for individuals and humankind and “self-love” as the obstacle to the nation. Just as Robinson Crusoe’s selfishness and pursuit of individual happiness (contra to the dictates of his parents and society) led him to Shipwreck, the “blind drive”³⁵³ and “self-love”³⁵⁴ led Bustānī’s society to violence.

This “position of spectator”, as Hans Blumenberg calls it, “looks on history as an altar on which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals are slaughtered.”³⁵⁵ This position transforms the spatial distance between the spectator, Bustānī in our case, and others in distress into a “temporal distance of looking back at one’s own shipwreck.”³⁵⁶ While in the European Enlightenment, the metaphors of

³⁴⁹ It is a tomography because it is an image that blurs out other planes for the sake of seeing one of them. It is from the Greek root *tomos* which means a cut or a section, a part of something.

³⁵⁰ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Pamphlet Two.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, p. 109.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

shipwreck were invoked to produce a conception of reason as a distance between the philosopher of history and the world – which culminated in Hegel’s philosophy,³⁵⁷ Bustānī’s metaphor of shipwreck produced an image of the world as shipwreck.

In other words, Bustānī’s invocation of faith, “the love of the nation as an act of faith”,³⁵⁸ that is embedded within the metaphor of Robinson Crusoe promotes an understanding of the world as being always a beginning of self-preservation, a striving for survival. Blumenberg’s description of the metaphor of shipwreck for society is of utmost relevance here:

Thus to think the beginning means, in the context of the comparison [between life in isolation and life in society], to imagine the situation without the mothership of natural language and, apart from its buoyancy, to “re-perform”, in a thought experiment [Robinson Crusoe], the actions by means of which we – swimming in the middle of the sea of life – could build ourselves a raft or even a ship. The demiurgical, Robinson Crusoe longing of the modern age is also present in the handiwork of the constructivist who leaves home and heritage behind in order to found his life on the naked nothingness of the leap overboard. His artificially produced distress at sea does not come about through the frailty of the ship, which is already an end result of a lengthy process of building and rebuilding. But the sea evidently contains material other than what has already been used. Where can it come from, in order to give courage to the ones who are beginning anew? Perhaps from earlier shipwrecks?³⁵⁹

This question befits Bustānī the constructivist who calls upon Crusoe as he constructs the shipwreck of the nation in 1860. The awakening from *ghafla* to which Bustānī calls evidence of the “earlier shipwreck” that is always already there for the nation. The Nahḍa as awakening as such is a raft or a ship on the treacherous seas of modernity.

As well, the Nahḍa discourse is always haunted by the period before its occurrence, before the rupture. Although it promotes the idea of forward movement, the Nahḍa is

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Usama Makdisi, *The Artillery of Heaven*, p. 196.

³⁵⁹ Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, p. 114.

obsessed with the period before the emergence of nationalism or of awakening. The notion of an “age of decline”, and the reading of history of civilization through the problematic nature of culture, is intrinsically linked to Bustānī’s (and many others after him) diagnosis of the 1860 events as a throwback in time.

Bustānī’s Nafīr as a history of forgetting

Bustānī’s diagnosis of the violence of 1860 as a *ghafla* is very telling when read vis-à-vis the “love” narrative that he proposed. Bustānī defined *ghafl*, the root word of *ghafla*, in his *Muḥīt* dictionary as “the disappearance of something from the mind of a person, or the forgetting of something; the pursuit of the self’s desires; ignorance of everything; to neglect something without forgetting it.”³⁶⁰ The act of *ghafl* or *taghāful*, according to Bustānī, can also have the meanings of “stupidity, naïve innocence and purposefulness in acting ignorant.” The 1860 events are to be considered as a momentary regression into ignorance or as testaments to history as a process of forgetting. Those who are left behind after the violence, those who did not die and did not kill, “the innocent”, as Bustānī named them, are the beneficiaries of their present. He called on these beneficiaries to lose identification with the perpetrators of the violence, the “bandits and thieves” and to awaken them from the moment of insanity that had beset them and look towards justice and human rights as a solution. “Science, reason, faith, virtue, and vigilance to human rights are what makes one group better than the others not lineage or belonging to a religious faith.”³⁶¹

On October 5, 1860 Bustānī, in his third pamphlet, wrote, “It does not benefit us to look at the past rather we should be looking towards the future with the aim of lessening its

³⁶⁰ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Four.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

tragedies and halting the evil repercussions and destructive effects [of the violence].”³⁶²

Thus, this moment of amnesia, of *ghafla*, which has befallen the nation needs to be amended by the recognition of love as a binding force to the nation and through the condemnation of the perpetrators of the act of violence. For those “whom exchange the love of the nation for sectarian bigotry and sacrifice the good of their country for personal ambitions do not deserve to belong to the nation. Rather, they are its enemies of the nation as well as those who have not invested effort in preventing the causes of harm to the nation nor tried to lessen the damages after they had occurred.”³⁶³

In the same pamphlet Bustānī thanked “the friends from across the Atlantic”, referring to the American missionaries “who are guests in our nation and have been shaming us with their continuous generous aid.” And he condemned the Ottoman governing system from failing to protect its citizens and prevent “the causes of harm”, while addressing the Missionaries as “benefactors and guests” of the nation. Further, Bustānī calculated the aid offered by the Ottoman government and that given by the American and European nations:

The charity of the state which totals to around 50,000 bags of gold should be entered in the “revenue” and “expenditure” columns of the table simultaneously as they are from the nation to the nation. That is so because in every civilized nation the treasury of the government is formed by the riches of its rich and the poverty of its poor.³⁶⁴

As well, the aid from foreign nations, he argued, had to be returned double in amount. Thus, the Ottoman government and foreign aid were held accountable from within the topography of the nation. But as Bustānī bestowed the responsibility on the state and the “guardians of society” he simultaneously translated politics into morality. Bustānī

³⁶² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Six.

³⁶³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Seven, November 19, 1860.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

warned his fellow citizens that if they do not awaken to the moral losses in addition to the economic losses that have befallen their nation “God will increase his punishment and add to the temporal catastrophe an eternal spiritual one.”³⁶⁵

But morality cannot be identified with politics; rather, it exists in the name of the law.

In fact, morality sometimes dictates the logic of politics.³⁶⁶ Bustānī’s writings represent a moral shift to politics because, he tells us that

there is no real nation for any human in this world. His real nation is beyond the grave in the world of the spirits where he will be made to dwell until the day of judgment, *yawm al-ḥaṣhr*, and the sounding of the trumpet, *al-naḥkh fī al-sūr*. Oh and how many of our brothers, *ikhwānina*, have gone in this year to that eternal nation. The reasons may vary but death is one. Our only hope is to be ready for that nation and that day [of judgement].

This conception of the Nation as the eternal dwelling of the spirit in the afterlife reveals much about Bustānī’s nation. It is not a political nation in as far as it is an *ethos* or a moral nation that has been disjointed by the violence of 1860. The image of the nation as a natural tomography³⁶⁷ further elucidates Bustānī’s nation as one that is in mourning, as one in which its subjects identify with each other as brothers, as sons of one father and one nation. Bustānī laments:

Oh sons of the nation, why are your lands in mourning and dressed in black? Why are your mountains and hilltops desolate, your valleys and plains barren, your cities and villages devastated, your men in destitution? Why are your women wailing, your virgin girls crying, your widows and orphans in the most despicable state, victimized, humiliated, and shamed? Why is Damascus, the Queen of Syria, and one of the most well known cities of ancient heritage, sitting in the middle of the forests on a pond of water under the willows of the Barada river dressed in black and wailing in mourning over her youth and virgins, lamenting the loss of her treasures and riches, her markets and resources?

³⁶⁵ This reflects in current discourses of reconciliation as a solution for the civil war in Lebanon.

³⁶⁶ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Seven.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

Bustānī continued this rhetorical prose depicting a scene that one would see if they where to walk across the topography of the nation. In it Bustānī and other citizens can be seen as travelling spectators across the natural terrain of the nation. They are spectators watching the nature of the nation:

Why is it that you are listening to the sound of tears being shed over a missing lover, for a friend in hiding, a husband in jail, for an only son in captivation and a dear daughter that is missing? Then you hear the sighing of broken hearts, those that have drunk from the goblets of misery and destitution: they shall never heal from this sorrow. Why do you hear a deep resounding whine uttered by a heart that has bore tragedy and illness and has been inflicted with eternal pain? Why do you see a man hiding in a cave and another seeking shelter in the forests of the wilderness and companionship of wild beasts? Why do you behold yet another man lost and wandering like Cain the murderer of his brother, Abel, with no one in his pursuit?³⁶⁸ No doubt these scenes and situations are frightening and extremely saddening. What is their cause? Who collaborated with the devil to inflict this great amount of natural and moral destruction?

Although Bustānī wrote the *Nafīr* pamphlets to address the 1860 war he constantly eluded responding to questions that he himself posed:

The answers to these questions have been proposed in our previous writings and there is no time here for any further discussion of their details. It does not benefit us to look towards the past. Rather, we should be paying attention to the future with the aim of lessening the tragedies caused by the atrocious events and preventing their effects from unfolding.³⁶⁹

This imagery that Bustānī draws is written in anticipation of the solutions he proposes. He picks on the affect-generating aspects of the violence and quickly dismisses the address of the political reasons. If indeed he had outlined the reasons in the previous *Nafīr* they were not very different in their premises from the images he depicts here. In the first *Nafīr* Bustānī berated his fellow countrymen for their “savage” and

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

“uncivilized acts”. He also claimed that the violence had violated “human rights” and the tenets of “justice and equality”. He argued that the disaster of the violence was a public, not private, affair, that the “nation” thrives once its “sons love it”. In the second *Nafir*, Bustānī expanded in his diagnosis of the effects of violence and the reactions that the “sons of the nation” must take: patience, tolerance, endurance, and perseverance. Bustānī again provided an example, not from nature but from scripture: “Yes, it is indeed true that the Israelites were blinded for some time but it was for a reason. Is it not in your interest to take these people as an example to learn from rather than an example to follow?” He continued, “Because God the almighty cannot change a people if they do not change themselves.”³⁷⁰ Again Bustānī calls on God’s will to explain the 1860 violence.

Thus, Bustānī’s reasons for the violence are pertained to theological unfolding on one hand and to sudden blindness that has taken over the people on the other. As such the events were either caused by a momentary blindness or by the strike of God. Bustānī’s prediction of the impossible recovery from “this great infliction”³⁷¹ propounds that the sectarianism is an alien invader, a foreign body that has invaded the body of society, that the “blind drive”, *al-gharaḍ al-a ‘mā*, is an unrecognisable ailment that struck society at a moment of collective loss of consciousness, *ghafla*. The only thing that society can do is to awaken from the *ghafla*, to recognise the bodily pains and afflictions that have been caused and to engage in a collective conversion. This conversion would be the acknowledgement of accepting that community can no longer exist on the basis of social existence but that “the nation” has become the mediating

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Dā ‘irat al-ma ‘ārif*, volume six, p. 10.

space between the people who have now become national subjects. The moment of conversion that Bustānī beckons as a reaction to the events is best articulated by him:

Oh sons of the nation: a true religion commands the doing of good deeds and abstinence from evil ones. Every religion that does not do so is not a true religion at all. What makes the Christian religion better than others in this respect is that it commands the love of the enemies also. And although that this is one of the hardest tenets to fulfil that does not mean that it is not a commandment for all Christians at all times, places, and circumstance. However, this is not to say that the Christian religion that orders its followers to turn the left cheek and reply to evil deeds with good ones does not encourage them to demand their civil rights. Rather it gives them the license to demand their rights and protect themselves but not with the spirit of vengeance and the urge for revenge. The ones who insist on hatred and spite and who propound the spirit of revenge do not belong to the [Christian] religion in any way. In conclusion, I ask God to guide you to this realization and to strengthen your ability to act according to it.³⁷²

As we can see from Bustānī's words above, the acceptance of a secular stance, of the demand of one's rights in society, must preclude a moment of religious conversion, of acceptance of some of the central tenets of monotheistic religions (as defined from a specifically Judaeo-Christian perspective) such as the love of the enemy and neighbour, and relinquishing the urge to revenge. In all these instances it is important to note that Bustānī provides his reader, the fellow "son of the nation," with a diagnosis that does not really provide a telling of the causes of violence and war. In fact, Bustānī's diagnostic stance as a pedagogue and thinker becomes a diagnosis of culture. This recalls the narrative in his first *Naḡīr* in which he depicts the events of 1860 as his society's retreat into "savage barbaric acts" versus the rest of the "civilized world".³⁷³ As such, Bustānī reveals himself in a position of "the observer of the nature of things human. It is an anthropological reflection, since the observation of the

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Dā'irat al-ma'ārif*, volume six, p. 11.

interplay between civilization and barbarism is made possible by the translation of the logic of natural history into the logic of (national) culture.”³⁷⁴

The natural history of the nation and its crisis of morality

In the *Naḡīr* series, Bustānī used metaphors to argue that humans are reduced to a natural state by the violence: the wandering Cain after fraternal patricide, the culprit hiding in the caves are but two of the lost anguished figures that Bustānī depicts in his second *Naḡīr*. This natural state of men is seen as one of decay, of corruption, in contrast with the state of society which is the mature civilizational one versus the barbarism of nature. Bustānī provides us with yet another analogy which illustrates his transposition of tropes of natural history into the logic of national culture:

Oh sons of the nation, the colonies of ants have collected their means of sustenance for the winter and built for themselves strong fortresses to protect them from the hardships of the coming season. The bees have completed their tasks and prepared for themselves adequate shelters with enough stock for the winter and they have nested in them providing themselves with shelter and protection, while the sons of Adam and the sons of our nation are yet to fulfil their daily needs. They still do not have homes to seek shelter in, they do not have adequate clothes to protect them from the looming cold, and they have no furniture to use, no pantries and no winter stock. Observing their coming future state although necessary it leads to despair.

Thus, while the bees and the ants have fulfilled their natural roles of self preservation as respective species, the sons of the nation have failed to protect their natural body – their society and community. They have, in fact according to Bustānī, created a natural disaster. Bustānī’s position as a diagnosing observer of the 1860 war is revealed through his writing, which, in turn, acts as the nation’s *pharmakon*. His diagnosis provides the ailment of society: the blind desire, the barbaric drive; and its cure: a

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

textual space within which the Nation can trace itself continuously. *Naḡīr Sūriyya* series becomes a first account of the history of the nature of the Syro-Lebanese Arab nation.

Bustānī the therapist reveals himself as the observer of the “history of the nature” of modern Syro-Lebanese Arabs. This puts into perspective the re-publication of the *Naḡīr* Series by an anonymous writer in 1990 post the Lebanese civil war. The re-publication presumes as Bustānī did that a collective sensibility can be found at the intersection of certain historical events with a community’s presumed local character. In other words, the *Naḡīr* series is “a masterful negotiation between the history of the local and the nature of the cultural”.³⁷⁵ It is masterful in all sense of the word as it shares with the Napoleonic colonial order its need for textual order – since the invasion of Egypt in 1798 is the first embodiment of the pharmaceutical logic of the French revolution.

The fact that Bustānī shares the colonial episteme with the Europeans and the Missionaries is further elucidated by his participation in the Syrian Society for the Sciences. This society’s members were the American Missionaries Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck along with other natives alongside Bustānī. It was an organisational body that set the ground for the ‘Western’ discovery of the ‘Arabs.’ As Makdisi has noted, Bustānī’s writings mirrored the missionary drive for modernising the Arab.³⁷⁶

It is my contention to argue here that, while Bustānī proposed a textual order that precludes a shift into modernity, it is important to note that his writing also reproduced the multiple contradictions of modernity. Just as Diderot’s blind and mute ushers us into the age of enlightenment and shows us its epistemological exteriority, Bustānī’s

³⁷⁵ Reinhardt Koselleck, *Future’s Past*, p. 27.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

“blind desire”, *al-gharaḍ al-a ‘mā*, points to the same limits of enlightenment and modernity. Enlightenment is an almost “exotic matter as the actual object of epistemology is found to be grounded on the contemplation of an exteriority, which is nonetheless conceptualised as internal to Enlightenment ‘nature’”.³⁷⁷ In other words, Bustānī’s address of the 1860 violence as an exception to civilized existence and the modern world is, in fact, an attitude towards the present that he instils through his diagnostic stance and that which shapes the ideology of sectarianism early on.

This attitude makes the questions of twenty first-century identitarian politics seem natural, or seem as the natural conditions of Arab culture. By reducing man to the natural state of barbarism, as a perpetrator of violence, Bustānī acts as a cultural historian. He delineates a natural history of the Arabs in anticipation of a civil society. Bustānī ends the fifth *Nafīr* with another moral discussion of the events:

Oh sons of the Nation: We have in front of us the book of events that have occurred to these lands. And we turn its pages and observe what has happened in order to elucidate what will come in the future. We are sorry to say that [the book of events] is filled with disasters and wars. The desire that drives them is most known to you for being a blind one. It is a black spot on the face of every page. [This blind desire] has challenged and replaced the love of the nation. This animal drive that is inherited from the barbarians has raised its head and reeled with threats during the nation’s most fortuitous and peaceful times causing destruction and tragedy and the loss of money and children.³⁷⁸

Bustānī continued to describe the “blind drive” as an unbeatable beast. “Some people,” he said, “tried to defeat it but have failed”. Bustānī wished that they had had the foresight “to have tied a great weight to its neck and threw it in the deepest ends of the

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “Al Tārīkh: Historie, History”, *Dā ‘irat al ma ‘ārif*, Volume six, p. 12.

oceans.”³⁷⁹ Sectarianism, for Bustānī, remains unnamed but was assigned metaphorical names such as the “blind drive” and “the malignant principle”. He not only diagnoses sectarianism as one would a disease – by calling it *al-mabda’ al-khabīth*, *al-gharaḍ al-radiy’* – he also describes it as one would an evil spirit or a ghost:

It is characteristic of this evil principle to take on different colors and faces and even well-known names such as: *qaysī*, *yamānī*, *junblāṭī*, and *yazbaki*. It has, however, taken on the most horrifying forms in these days haunting old sacred names such as: Christian and Druze on one hand, and Christian and Muslim on the other. Perhaps it does this because it knows how much magical force there is underlying these labels. This magic force is what our people call the binding cause or what is known as nationality. The evil principle perhaps takes over these forms to please those who are higher in power than those who actually lead the various evil forces. In this way, its power has increased to more than double and its effects have gained super powers. One dark night while we were watching the giant chain of smoke and fire rising over the city [Beirut] making its way up over the torso of Lebanon we thought we could see the flame of the blind drive go out amidst the burning houses. If what we saw was true then rejoice! Rest assured that you will be comfortable, happy, safe, and secure again after it has passed. We give you our condolences for its death and ask you not to be sad over its loss.

It is important to notice how much emotional strain the “blind drive” has placed on Bustānī himself. He is almost delirious when discussing it. At times it is a plague, a disease, at others it is a natural disaster, or an act of divine punishment. At one time he wants to drown it in the ocean, then he wishes to put it on fire, then he wishes to see it dead and rejoice over its passing. Bustānī’s loss of words or his recognition of the limits of his language reflects his attempt to embody the causes of violence; it is almost an infection that has spread in the body of society. However, by diagnosing it as such, Bustānī portrays the violence as an interruption to the otherwise unfolding chronological history of society as a nation.

³⁷⁹ Refer to Jacques Derrida’s discussion of ethics and politics in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, *Cultural Memory in the Present*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, 2001).

From the sixth *Naḡīr* onwards, Bustānī shifted his tone to a calculation of “the material and moral gains and losses of the nation” incurred by the 1860 events. By the act of calculation alone in terms of quantity, Bustānī was reading history as a linear progression. In other words, the quantity of losses in terms of money was compared by him to the gains of other societies during the same time. Bustānī is explicit about this comparison: “Syria that we had looked upon six months ago as being unique in its wealth and growth from the rest of the Empire has fallen! And how sorry am I to say yes, it has fallen!! And a great fall it is indeed, one from which it can only rise after many years unless a miracle occurs or a supernatural feat.” The material losses that Syria has incurred could be taken as debts and then repaid, Bustānī says; however, “Syria will forever remain under moral debt to other nations for as long as she lives.”³⁸⁰ Bustānī’s moral stance towards the events returns to his assertion that “civil wars are the most evil creations under the sky!”

Thus, while Bustānī purports that “ignorance”, “barbarism”, and a moment of unconsciousness, *ghafla*, are the causes of the events, he makes no room for these in his system of morality. Moreover, one would expect Bustānī to propose a counter narrative of non-violence. Rather, after confessing that the effects of the violence are insurmountable and that the damages caused by them in terms of lives lost and human devastation are incalculable, Bustānī claims that the moral loss, *Khasā ’ir adabiyya*, of the nation incurred by the violence is the loss of “unity and affinity”, as well as morality.

Bustānī takes a classical Arabic stanza that equates the breaking of hearts with the shattering of glass – both being irreparable – and he transforms it by replacing one

³⁸⁰ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Dā ’irat al-ma ’ ārif*, volume six, p. 12.

word to make it say, “Broken hearts are not like glass once broken never to be amended.”³⁸¹ Language again emerges as the topos of intersection between national pedagogy and enlightenment logic. This reveals Bustānī’s national linguistics; after all, for him the written text is at the service of the spoken word (that of God and that of the national community). As such, sectarianism is a blind drive, as he tells us a drive that cannot be translated, that cannot see, in other words, it cannot know or cannot be based on knowledge. The blind drive is, in fact, a monstrosity, an ignorant monster that one need only banish from existence. By relegating 1860 wars to the non-human realm, Bustānī implicitly accedes to the fact that there could be an infinite possibility for the corruption of society once it is in its natural-national state. This relieves Bustānī and the inheritor of the violence from the responsibility for this non-human monstrous being.

Bustānī proposed in the seventh *Nafīr* that the “blind drive be banished and exiled such that no family pays for the mistakes of one of its members and the nation does not pay for the guilt of its sons. As such we must turn a blind eye to what has happened and remember the good deeds of the rest of the nation’s members.”³⁸² The monstrosity is not viable for Bustānī, but not necessarily ontologically transgressive. As such, the blindness is discussed from the position of sight. Bustānī addresses the blind drive from the perspective of vision. He speaks to the “sons of the nation” in the oral language and allows the spoken voice to take over the written language, as he did with the stanza above.

By asking for the banishment of blindness or the erasure of its presence Bustānī is undergoing self-deception. It is as though the absence of violence can efface its

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Reinhardt Koselleck, *Future’s Past, On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 33.

existence in society.³⁸³ Ironically Bustānī chooses to write in response to the events, to allow the written language precedence over the spoken one, over the cries of the widows and mothers and the sighs of those who lost in the war. Bustānī thus beckons the “sons of the nation” with his written language in anticipation of a civil society:

I am certain that your success depends on interrelating with each other. If you mix and engage with each other the result will be unity and harmony. I hope albeit the opposition of others and their contradictions of what I am saying that affinity will grow again as the crops grow and bear fruit. The abundance of rainfall this year predicts fertility and a bountiful season this will hopefully help us forget some of the great tragedies of this passing year.³⁸⁴

Again, Bustānī wishfully invokes an image of society productively labouring in nature. The nation is thus depicted by him as the natural state of society. And nature, like instinct, needs to be commanded for it to prosper. The nation, as such, fulfils the utmost fantasy for Bustānī – a state of perpetual progress of civilization. He is a subject who brings together incommensurate things (that constitute the core of any fantasy): the individual, the patriarchal privilege, the freedom of thought, the citizen body, and a unitary perception of religions.

Bustānī told his readers that the occurrence of violence in 1860 is similar to “a father who strikes his son with one hand to teach him a lesson and embraces him with the other in order to convince him that his strike was a demonstration of love rather than vengeance.”³⁸⁵ He explained that “the virtuous hearts in this city where only moved

³⁸³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet Ten.

³⁸⁴ Gourgouris’ *Dream Nation*, p. 90-112.

³⁸⁵ In *Futures Past* Reinhart Koselleck traces the formation of the category of world history through the formation of the concept of progress in the modern period. What is important to note is that “world history” as a concept becomes possible with the acceleration of time, conflation of space, and the novel unpredictability of the future. Koselleck observes how by the nineteenth century historical time comes to encompass ever smaller intervals of time and larger expanses of space. Thinking through “periods” or “epochs”, *al ‘asr* in the Nahḍa semiotic invokes a distinct temporalisation that is underlined by progress and which conflates all

after God the almighty had struck his blow [the 1860 wars].”³⁸⁶ He also argued that the acts of charity necessitated by the violence demonstrated that “bridges” exist between members of the same society and “between the old world and the new world.”³⁸⁷ Bustānī here was referring to the aid that had been sent from America and France in 1860 and to the aid that local “good doers and charitable persons of the city” had provided to those in need.

The works of charity, Bustānī said, “beckon people to reflect back to God’s providence and to discard of their vanity and come to Him.”³⁸⁸ As such, the 1860 events are described by Bustānī as a lesson to learn from. Although the modern age does bring a new form of violence with it, that violence is pedagogic in essence. It exists for the proper education of the sons of the nation and fulfils the pedagogic expectations of an enlightened age. These pedagogic expectations are powerful not because they are entirely new, but because they actually coincide with one of the central traditional tasks of history – being a teacher.

The notion of the iterability of history and its pedagogical value, which Bustānī proposes in the *Nafīr*, was an element of experience itself until then. This, however, did not remain to be the case over the next few years. By the time Bustānī wrote the definition of *Historie* or *Tārīkh* in his *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif* Encyclopaedia fifteen years

histories into the singularity of world history. Refer to p. 150-153 for a direct discussion of this matter.

³⁸⁶ Foucault’s work on the European Enlightenment and its taxonomic drive is of utmost relevance here, in addition to Antonio Gramsci’s work on literature and nation making and Michel de Certeau’s interrogation of language and history.

³⁸⁷ In *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford University Press, 2003: 14), Talal Asad argues that “modernity is not primarily a matter of cognizing the real but of living-in-the-world. Since this is true of every epoch, what is distinctive about modernity as a historical epoch includes modernity as a political-economic project.”

³⁸⁸ Shidyāq, *Kashf al-mukhabba*, p.332.

later, History had become “the definition of time”.³⁸⁹ Bustānī wrote: “history’s core basis is truth”³⁹⁰ and “while those in *jāhiliyya* did not know its true meaning, the moderns have now uncovered its tenets and laws.”³⁹¹ Bustānī described history as a stage from which “we can see the creation of the world and from it a series of natural evolutions that lead to the rise and decline of nations: [history] is the image of the glorious world.”³⁹² Moreover, “modern history, *al-tārīkh al-ḥadīth*,” wrote Bustānī, “has risen from Christian doctrine that linked the ancient world to the new one. From the days of Christ until the present History is abundant with great events, changes, and astounding images. These all point towards the divine providence that looks over our world.”³⁹³

³⁸⁹ Jeffrey Sacks. “Futures of Literature”, p. 37.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs ‘alā al-qāmūs* (Istanbul: al-Jawā’ib, 1881) preface.

³⁹² Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Muḥīt al-muḥīt* (Maktabat Lubnān, 1988), first published in Beirut 1870, the original print is available at the Archive Collection of the American University of Beirut; the references from here after are from the reprinted version of 1988. This dictionary is in an abridged and reordered version based on Fairūzābādī’s *Qāmūs al-muḥīt* but with an alphabetised ordering of the words, a novel method in the history of Arab lexicons, and with the addition of word meanings that are of relevance to Bustānī’s time. One can note the changes in the definition of the word *dawla* (state), *tamaddun* (civilization), and *waṭan* (nation). For example, Bustānī introduces, to the definition of *madan*, the root of *tamaddun* – the meaning of civilized; “the man *tamadana* [became civilized] by evolving from the state of barbarism and ignorance to the state of knowledge and sociability [‘uns]” (*Muḥīt al-muḥīt*, pp. 843). This definition of the word does not exist in Fairūzābādī’s lexicon where the word means anything pertaining to *madīna*, a city in general, and the specific city of the Prophet.

³⁹³ On Barak in his unpublished dissertation, *Egyptian Times: Temporality, Personhood, and the Technopolitical making of Modern Egypt, 1830-1930*, discusses the shift in the concept of time from within internal local debates on the nature of time in Egypt during the colonial mandate and through the technopolitics of rule. The “compression of time and space” were central to the homogenising force of modernity and were embodied in technologies like the steam engine and train. Barak argues that these technologies of power constitute simultaneously a homogenous and heterogeneous modernity from which the contrast between the self and the other became possible.

³⁹³ Bustānī, *Muḥīt al-muḥīt*, p. 1.

³⁹³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab* (Beirut: American Press, 1859), pp. 18.

The shift that occurs in the fifteen years between Bustānī's description of the 1860 events as cataclysmic for the history of his nation, a lesson to be learned, and the definition of history he provides in (circa) 1875 is, in fact, a shift in experiential space or experience and a semantic shift. Reinhardt Koselleck reminds us how "shifting semantic relations break up and distort the topos [of history as teacher]." ³⁹⁴ It is only through the semantic shift that the "idiom [of history as a teacher] gains its own history." ³⁹⁵ Moreover, Koselleck notes that, "At the same time, this history does away with its peculiar truth." ³⁹⁶ In other words, the relationship between the past and the future is re-articulated in new semantic terms and through a disruption of old scholarly boundaries between ethics, history, and rhetoric. What happens, however, is not the birth of an entirely novel modern episteme rather, the old formulas concerning history, time, and language, gained new forms of experience *from new linguistic use*. Modernity tolerates difference as well as old forms as long as they do not come in its way. The normative project of modernity is a dynamic one which reproduces difference.

Bustānī wrote, "Narrating a true history of events as they really happened is primarily based on thinking of the rational possibility of their occurrence", ³⁹⁷ whether they are possible or not is to be decided from the perspective of History itself. Bustānī here quotes Ibn Khaldūn at length, which further illustrates how old ideas take on new linguistic forms; in our case here, they take on the encyclopaedic taxonomic one. As such, the historical narrative was no longer just exemplary; it was expected – as evident from Bustānī's discussion of possibility – to provide a unity and a law. Needless to say,

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

the relationship imposed by the law on time always presumes the possibility of concentrating all of Time into the present.³⁹⁸

Bustānī's definition of history as a narrative of "truth, *ṣidq*"³⁹⁹ and "law, *namūs*"⁴⁰⁰ is actually reflected in his earlier commentary on the 1860 events. In describing the violence as a moment of "unconsciousness, *ghafla*", Bustānī had already begun thinking of history as being predicated on a consciousness. However, if past facts can only be translated into historical reality through their passage through consciousness, Bustānī, like his European counterparts (Voltaire in the *Encyclopedie* and Adelung in Germany), naturalised history. The lack of an entry on Natural History in the *Dā'irat* Encyclopaedia provides direct proof for that; natural history was no longer the pre-occupation.

Koselleck contends in his study of the semantic shift of in the concept of History that "the naturalistic basis [for history] vanished and progress became the prime category in which a transnatural, historically immanent definition of time first found expression."⁴⁰¹ For the case of the Arabs and, as is evident from one of the founders of modern Arab national thought, the definition of time as progress has ushered in an understanding of politics as morality.

³⁹⁸ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* p. 59.

³⁹⁹ Rather than the recourse to the linearity of time, the Arab subject always returns to the mirror. As such the flow of time goes backwards and forwards endlessly.█

⁴⁰⁰ A good example of this genre of discussion on the crisis and the fracture of modern Arab identity would be Muḥammad 'Ābed Jābirī, *Bunyat al- 'aql al- 'arabī: dirāsat taḥlīlīa naqdīa li-nuẓum al-m 'arifa fī al-thaqāfa al- 'arabiyya*. (Casablanca: al-markaz al-thaqāfī al- 'arabī, 1993) and his *Ishkālīat al-fīkr al- 'arbī al-mu 'āṣr*. (Beirut: Markaz dirāsat al-waḥda al- 'arabiyya, 1990). Also Jurj Ṭarābīshī's *al-Maraḍ bil-gharb: al-taḥlīl al-naṣī l- 'uṣāb jamā'ī 'arabī* (Petra Press, 2005).

⁴⁰¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *NS*, Pamphlet One .

Bustānī's diagnosis of the 1860 events as a testament of a nation's culture allows for culture, as *adab*, to emerge as the problematic of the nation and thereby history. The analysis of the *Nafīr* series allows us to realise that the nexus in which Bustānī works. Violence, history, language, and culture, in fact, set us up for an ideological coup. Bustānī defines the problematic nature of culture as the problem of power through his reformatory stance, while overlooking the historical events that had led to the violence. He does this through the metaphor of Crusoe, which I have shown to underline his analysis of society in the *Nafīr*.

This discourse of translation (of time into progress) is inherited by the Nahḍa discourse in the twentieth century. The Arab independence from the Ottoman Empire, however fraught it was, has always been read as a rupture in Arab history, as an awakening from a time of decline. The discontinuity at the core of the nation form, in fact, becomes the discursive vehicle of Arab national thought. This chapter has argued that the nation is born through Bustānī's perception of the violence as a disruptive event for history. This not only creates a perception of history as chronological but, in fact, institutes the discipline of history through the lens of the nation. In other words, history is re-written through the nation form for Bustānī.

The implications of Bustānī's reading of the violence as a shipwreck of society, a breakdown of order, and a relegation to a pre-modern barbaric state were explored in order to demonstrate the internally conflicted logic of national identity. When Bustānī was ready to embrace a national belonging, he realised that it would fundamentally affect religious and communal identity. So he sought a definition of selfhood in the form of Robinson Crusoe – the isolated man in a brutish state who demonstrates that no man is, in fact, an island. The cost of social existence was clearly personal sacrifice and

diligent labour. I also showed how Bustānī later theorised labour in his essay on social organisation in Smithian terms by claiming that it is the sole constituent of social relations.

When Bustānī addressed (in his *Nafīr* pamphlets) the “sons of the nation” he, in fact, was responding to the beckons of a national culture that posed itself as the only cure for society. The problem for Bustānī was that the cure was itself the ailment for society. Love and sacrifice thus became the only idioms through which he could imagine a citizenship in a nation that had already failed its promise to protect its citizens from the very moment of its creation. The crisis that Bustānī reveals in his nation, that is not yet a nation-state, is an ontological crisis: one that mars the modern Lebanese, Syrian, or Arab identity with an irredeemable fault of always lagging behind the swift wheels of progress. The problem is that this fault is read by Bustānī as a natural cultural inclination, a sickness that ails society, and can only be cured momentarily and is destined to return. In more ways than one, Bustānī’s writings are an insight into how the logic of capitalism as a recurrence of crisis that is made local in nineteenth-century Ottoman society.

The coming chapter discusses the formation of the concept of progress through the trope of *tamaddun*, or civilization. In it I discuss how the history of the nation is written through its language – through lexicography and encyclopaedia making. Bustānī and Shidyāq primarily defined the Arab nation through the category of *adab* and elaborated on the nature of the Arabic language as the nature of Arab culture. The positing of language as the only mother ship for the Arabs, as their only true nation, in the late nineteenth century instituted history for the Arabs as a state of always living with the shipwreck. Language, for Bustānī, emerges as the only survivor of modernity. In the

pamphlet before the last, Bustānī iterates that “civilization is only possible under the Arabic language” and that “education in Arabic is the only vehicle for progress”.⁴⁰² The coming chapter explores Shidyāq and Bustānī’s lexicographic and encyclopaedic works in order to further unpack the metaphor of language as the mirror of the nation.

⁴⁰² Nigel Love, “Transcending Saussure. The Language Makers: The Language myth; The Origin of Writing; The Language Machine; Reading Saussure Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein by Roy Harris.” *Poetics Today*, Vol.10, No.4 (Winter 1989), p. 814.

Chapter 4

The Co-Incidence of Lexicography and the Writing of National History

The writing of a natural history of the Arabic language by Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, and others in the second half of the nineteenth century is not symptomatic of the often presumed transcendental relationship between language and nation (folklore, *Volkgeist*, *‘āda*). Rather, this relationship between language and nation is itself the epistemology that *makes the nation historical*. In other words, the notion of a natural history of a nation’s language is the epistemic matrix that generates Bustānī and Shidyāq’s political projects of ethics, pedagogy and politics.⁴⁰³ It is these ties that I am interested in re-constructing here. In the process of discussing different language ideologies, Arab intellectuals began to think of Arab identity as distinct.

Nahḍa epistemology defines national knowledge as cumulative, exponential, and collectable into one genus, ‘Arab’. From this emerges the possibility of a historical Arab subject that is comparable to an-other. Whether with the *ifranja*, or the Westerner, the grounds for comparison are set as the Arab encyclopaedia is produced and the language lexicons begin to proliferate within the paradigm of “world history”⁴⁰⁴. The hand in hand arrival of the philosophy of language, correction, translation, and pedagogy constitutes the encyclopaedic turn of Nahḍa thinking. Traversing the underlying links between the works of Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq is, in fact, a reading of the multivalent and untotalisable Nahḍa from within the intersection of the philosophy of language and the national pedagogic project.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab*, p. 19. This is a recurring theme in Bustānī’s work and it is evident in his *Muḥīt al-muḥīt* dictionary.

Bustānī and Shidyāq are central figures in launching the project of ordering the language and fixing its meanings. The discipline that both men seek for society is one that can only be cultivated through the work of collectors like themselves. This collecting impulse that drives them both in their taxonomic activities is the Nahḍa lexicographical impulse par excellence. The bringing together of words and their meanings within the lexicon expresses the need to bring national knowledge to an order. Knowledge itself is nationalised through taxonomic activity and *culture* gains its character, its nationality, through lexicography.⁴⁰⁵

In the Nahḍa imaginary, language and society need to be reformed; they become re-formable subjects through an experience that is particular to the Nahḍa present: to the presence of steam and electric power, printing presses and telegraphs, missionaries, ambassadors, and traders. These made modernity distinct in its politico-economic project; they constructed it as the condition of “living-in-the-world”.⁴⁰⁶ Shidyāq illustrates this contention arguing that there is no other invention in the world that is as significant as print, which has “distanced humanity from savagery because of its ability to keep knowledge from being lost.”⁴⁰⁷ The accumulation and preservation of knowledge is accessed through the ordering of language into an idiomatic body particular to a group or a people – the Arabs in this case. Shidyāq’s (and Bustānī’s) focus on the benefits of inventions as a means for progress (in language and in society) prompts us to read inventions not as novelties, but as linked to the prevailing syntactical and lexicographic code. As such, these inventions are new insofar as they are repetitions.

⁴⁰⁵ Bustānī uses this definition both in the *Khuṭba* and in the introduction to the *Dā’irat* encyclopaedia.

⁴⁰⁶ Bustānī, “Introduction”, *Dā’irat al-ma’ ārif*, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁷ Bustānī, History, “*alTārīkh*”, *Dā’irat al-ma’ ārif*, Vol. 6, p. 10.

Jeffrey Sacks observes that “the new and the old require the always ruined domestication of repetition into the unity of an undivided point of origin.”⁴⁰⁸ The notion of the possibility of language to be “lost” is an invention itself that has become ‘institutionalized’ in Arab history through the Nahḍa archive. If the Arabs had indeed lost their knowledge and civilization in the past they must find a way to secure their knowledge in the future. Although this seems like a natural conclusion, it is, in fact, an ideological coup. Sacks argues that this conception sets up Arabic literary studies as an interruption and pushes the discussion of what is literary in literature to disappear. He writes, “Literature – if it is or ought to have been new, modern, and secular, and to have decisively left the past behind – lies in ruin.”⁴⁰⁹ Thus, the motivation to print, archive, and collect ultimately promotes knowledge for the purpose of ‘self preservation’ and makes it irrelevant to discuss literature as an epistemology of knowledge in itself. Buṭrus al-Bustānī tells us time and again that the study of language is in no way the means to knowledge but it is reform of the language through correction and classification that allows for the production of knowledge. This is a matter upon which Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq was reluctant to agree with Bustānī. Although Shidyāq did not write a dictionary but a critique of Arabic lexicography, as it had been practiced, his *al-Jāsūs ‘alā al-qāmūs* (The Spy on the Dictionary) attempts Bustānī’s same Odyssean feat – the preservation of the language “to the end of time”.⁴¹⁰

Bustānī compiles and publishes the *Muḥīt al-muḥīt* dictionary for the purpose of making the language “easily attainable” for students and teachers so that they use it to

⁴⁰⁸ Bustānī, “Introduction”, *Dā’irat*, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Bustānī, “Introduction”, *Dā’irat*, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Bustānī, “Ṭibā’a, Printing”, *Dā’irat*, volume 11, p. 202.

⁴¹⁰ *Dā’irat*, Vol. 1., p. 1.

achieve their aims “in the fastest way”.⁴¹¹ Time became a standard to be attained by the Arab reader, the pedagogical subject. The speeding and fine tuning or synchronisation of the quality of time accompanies Nahḍa logic.⁴¹² Bustānī writes, “I hope that this book is received by the sons of the nation [*waṭan*] and others of the teachers and students of our noble Arabic language in this age [*al-asr*] that has carried its people on the wings of steam and has exposed to them a vast ocean of arts, inventions, quests, and languages.” He continues to describe the nineteenth century as “the age, which has brought to its people an iron pen moved by lightening force, doubling the value of time.” It is a “necessity of the age”⁴¹³ that moves Bustānī to write his lexicons. This “age like no other” reveals what had already been there yet was previously unpredictable.

The scientific “spirit” of the nineteenth-century age unifies the world, in Bustānī’s narrative, by shortening distance and conflating time and space. In the introduction to the dictionary, he wrote, “Knowing the meanings of Arabic words takes you mid-way to science (*al-‘ilm*) and making use of science relies on the knowledge of the meanings of Arabic words.” Science, he argued, is the language of the age, and language must be reformed into a language of science. This does not mean to imply a ‘secular’ understanding of science or knowledge unless the secular is to be read with the recognition of its theological basis. Bustānī’s opinions remain to be embedded within a complex theological framework.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Chad Wellmon, “Touching Books: Diderot, Novalis, and the Encyclopedia of the Future”, *Representations*, Vol. 114, No.1 (Spring 2011) p. 72.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

For Bustānī and many of his contemporaries, the greatest threat to the original language is spoken language, and the biggest loss that could ever befall the Arabs is the loss of “pure Arabic”.⁴¹⁴ Bustānī states that he would claim “Arabic as the language of Adam and Eve in their earthly paradise” if he could provide evidence for it.

What is evident in the history of this language is that God has preserved it for unknown reasons in a miraculous way from the changes of days and the passing of time. And although the owners of this language have reached the lowest level of ignorance and barbarism, it has remained preserved with them through tradition and scribal work and has been protected from corruption and digression into many languages contrary to the languages of Europe.⁴¹⁵

However, for Bustānī, the state of the language in the late 1800s is bleak; its speakers, according to him, had opted for *ifranja* languages, and “the foreigners” spread the influence of their own languages, gradually “killing the mother language”⁴¹⁶ of the Arabs, by replacing their words with foreign ones. “*Ifranja* dress does not suit the Arabs, nor does *ifranja* language.”⁴¹⁷ What concerned Arabs need to do, Bustānī argued, is to numb the use of foreign words like “commission” and “excuse me” and “*afandim*” by giving them [the words] enough “opium to put them to eternal sleep”, and, on the other hand, “to awaken the Arab words using smelling salts from their deep sleep”. He concluded: “using this method, the corruption that has overtaken Arabic language and Arab taste will be eliminated.”⁴¹⁸ His suggested pharmaceutical cures for the ailments of the nation best express his taxonomic drive and the aporia that underlies it: How could the ailment and the cure (language) be the same thing?

⁴¹⁴ James Creech, “Chasing After Advances”: Diderot’s Article “Encyclopedia”, *Yale French Studies*, No. 63, *The Pedagogical Imperative: Teaching as a Literary Genre* (1982), pp. 187.

⁴¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Random House, 1970) p. 206.

⁴¹⁶ Bustānī, “Introduction”, *Dā’irat*, p. 4.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Wellmon, “Touching Books”, p. 77.

Bustānī invokes narcotic intoxication as the method of dealing with the civilizational plight of language – the mirror image of the Arab people. Doing so, he places the self in the binding moment between self-annihilation and self preservation. At the moment when self-preservation is the challenge for Arab culture – a culture always already relegated to the past – Bustānī commands the use of a metaphor that reveals more than it can conceal. There is no ready solution for the archivist; the archivist might not be able to escape his archive, as the Arab has not been able to escape his/her Nahḍa. Thus, Bustānī implicitly recognises that memory begets forgetting and that memory remains to be the only vantage point of national history, its site of preservation being in language.

The function of language, for Bustānī, is to transmit correct meaning that can only be expressed through pure original Arabic. Having stood the ‘test of time’, Arabic’s internal anachronistic elements need to be re-formed into the natural order of the language which in itself mirrors the natural history of the “Arab civilization.” The metaphor “language mirrors the nation”, *al-lugha mir ‘āt al-umma*, invoked endlessly by Bustānī, Shidyāq and others, illustrates the Nahḍa semiology. We can see the mirror as a metaphor of consumption that is characteristic of the nineteenth century – as Timothy Mitchell does – or we can push the question further; the mirror comes to constitute a binary form of vision that constantly juxtaposes one with an other, convoluting difference and sameness and rendering neat distinctions impossible. The Arab self, observing its mirror image is not at a *natural* stance with the world;⁴¹⁹ rather,

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

it is in the process of becoming a historical subject through language – what Lacan would call the “mirror stage”.⁴²⁰

The ideal Arab self is incomplete before the mirror stage, before coming into language, and simultaneously the coming into language creates a break in what was presumably whole before, a break from the past into the present as future – what Sacks has called *adab* as interruption. From this interruption on, the self is Arab; it is ordered into a linguistic signifier and must come always to terms with its subject-ness. Taking into consideration that the past, present, and future are characteristic of the subject and not time itself, the Arabs gain a historical being that is preconditioned on seeking counsel from a future that is yet to be made. The present is always being delayed and the reflection seeming transparent between the Arab and his language. It is the tain of the mirror (to borrow from Rudolph Gasche) that needs to be brought to attention in thinking of Arab historiography and Arab thought. The gritty, mutable, and conflicted surface from which the Nahḍa mirror reflects a seemingly univocal image is what I am looking at here.

The mirror metaphor articulates the fracture at the core of Nahḍa thinking. The Nahḍa’s fractured nature has been the focus of countless discussions on Arab identity.⁴²¹ This characteristic is common to enlightenment thinking elsewhere. The temporal shift embodied in the notion of progress, which underlines enlightenment thinking, is driven by an acceleration of time accompanied by a claim of overall mastery of knowledge. This mastery is best interrogated through the fractured; like Diderot’s blind and mute revealing the paradoxes of Enlightenment, the mirror and its reflection reveal the

⁴²⁰ Bustānī, “*Muqaddima*” [Introduction] *Dā’irat*, p. 4.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

paradoxes of Nahḍa, an archive that best conceals its violent gaze through its hall of mirrors.

The encyclopaedic mirror

While Bustānī wrote his *Nafīr Sūriyya* nationalistic pamphlets calling for the unity and harmony of those “who speak the same language and share the same water, air, and habits”⁴²² he also weaved a telling of history that rendered a certain cultural practice, a certain representation of the “people”, the Arabs in our case, as the historical sons of a seemingly natural civilized nation. The previous chapter described Bustānī’s cultural historicism through the metaphor of Robinson Crusoe. In it I showed how Bustānī delayed the actual discussion of the causes of social strife by relegating the events as remnants of “barbaric instincts” and obstacles to capitalist economic production, which Bustānī posited as the basis of human society. The prolepsis that characterises Bustānī’s nationalist writings in the *Nafīr* series is intrinsic to his strictly modernist – in the Saussurean sense – language philosophy that is characterised by a unique encyclopaedic turn.

The encyclopaedia that Bustānī produced was never completed and, ironically, ended at the entry Ottoman. It provides us with a map of knowledge as he perceived it on one hand, and embodies an epistemic rupture with previous encyclopaedic works in the Arabic language on the other. Not only does the encyclopaedia represent an epistemic shift, it also represents a lexical project that depicts language as a self-contained fixed system of correspondences between forms and meanings. As such, the encyclopaedia is contractual, for its role is to define words used for speech. Therefore, it necessarily

⁴²² Bustānī, “*Tāhrikh*, History, Histoire”, *Dā’irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴²² Bustānī, “*al-Zamān*, Time, Temps” *Dā’irat*, Vol.9, p. 244.

presumes that the function of written language is the representation of speech or spoken language. The writing of an Arabic encyclopaedia by Bustānī is, in fact, the transference of what has been called the “language myth” or the “language machine” into the Arabic language.

The alphabetical ordering of words in both the encyclopaedia and the dictionary presumes that language is a set of signs that combine together in larger units; each word is a combination of both form and meaning. This idea (which is essentially Saussurean) presupposes that nothing *outside* a language predetermines the connection between form and meaning and it falls short of accounting for how the supposed structural interdependence of the system of a language came about. Bustānī’s short hand answer to the source of interdependence is that the language, being Semitic in origin, was “miraculously preserved by God” and that the language carries the cultural character of its nation. By engaging in lexicographic and taxonomic activity (encyclopaedic work largely defined), in fixing meanings for words for the coming future, Bustānī creates a discourse about language, “which serves to disengage language from human motives or intentions or to disguise the extent and nature of that engagement. Through this discourse, language is presented as neutral in itself, a mere communal instrument or facility.”⁴²³

The encyclopaedic project of language initiated in Europe by the likes of Francis Bacon and John Locke is crowned by Ferdinand de Saussure’s proposition for a “science of language” and more recently in the idea of the “language machine” that cannot be grasped in lay terms, but only in terms of linguistics. The linguistic approach uses a synchronic understanding of language: “It freezes a historically evolving system at an

⁴²³ Ibid.

arbitrarily chosen point, to reveal an ahistorical *etat de langue*.”⁴²⁴ Bustānī attempts the very same feat; he has to suppress history (by reducing it to big chunks of times of decline and progress), suppress diachrony, and emphasise synchrony.

Bustānī encouraged subjective reform and personal betterment through proposing pedagogies of education and teaching that were based on lexicographic and neological reform. Language, with Bustānī, becomes a *sign* of civilization and a means for the preservation of the self (a conception that is close to say Spinoza’s proposition of self preservation as virtue, and which defines the essence of European enlightenment thinking), thus it needs to be cleansed from unclear concepts and useless terms – terms that are useless for self-preservation. Bustānī, for instance, argues for removing the endless synonyms for one meaning in Arabic – “the hundreds of names for camels and their attributes” – as well as the “inappropriate European words” (*al-kalimāt al-ajnābiyya*)⁴²⁵ because the functional meanings for utterances becomes a fixation on self preservation, communal/national self preservation in our case.

Bustānī’s lexicographic and encyclopaedic engagement with language and his specific genre of language ideology has many repercussions on thinking of history and time. My central argument here is that, through the translation of language into an alphabetical body of words with supposedly arbitrary meanings, Bustānī purifies language and the present from the burdens of the past while instituting an understanding of language as a “means for civilization”⁴²⁶ and a “tool for scientific knowledge”.⁴²⁷ This conception of

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Bustānī, “*al-Zamān*, Time, Temps” *Dā’irat*, Vol.9, p. 245.

⁴²⁵ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh*, History, Histoire”, *Dā’irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴²⁶ It is important to note that in the eighteenth century Arabic encyclopaedia by Muḥammad A’lā ibn ‘Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* first written in 1752 and republished in 1862 the definition of History as universal truth is not included under the entry history.

language as a medium comes hand in hand with Bustānī's perception of history as constant expectation of progress.

Bustānī chose Ibn Athīr from the “books of the Arabs” to push forth the idea of History as a mirror of people throughout Time. Bustānī quoted Ibn Athīr: “[H]istory mirrors the achievements of people of time past and their industriousness and pursuit of knowledge are etched in its mirrored reflection.”⁴²⁶ With Bustānī, History is made singular; it is what remains eternal as human civilisations age and pass away. In this sense History, like Language, is a mirror of human existence. Bustānī brings us back to the game of mirrors. If history is a mirror on which the image of a people is reflected, this implies that it carries the true image of those people as does their language.

However, there is a curious dissociation between an image and the mirror. In a sense the image that is in the mirror exists *in* something else. As such, history stabilises the image of things that are really in flux as does the encyclopaedia for knowledge.

Bustānī's encyclopaedic writing attempts the pre-figuring of language as language that is yet to come. In other words, the alphabetical ordering of words and their meanings is meant to act as an overarching taxonomy and systematic description of “all the inquiries and knowledge that exists in the world.”⁴²⁹

Bustānī accompanied most words in the dictionary with their English and French counterparts in order to “tie the sciences of the Arabic language with those of European

⁴²⁶ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴²⁷ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 10.

⁴²⁷ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴²⁸ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 10.

⁴²⁸ Koselleck, *Future's Past*, p. 27.

⁴²⁹ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 11-12.

languages.”⁴³⁰ The transliterations and translations with which the *Dā'irat* is abundant signify that Arabic will be kept at bay by other languages; these will act as its regulators because knowledge is one. In other words, Arabic as a language is bound to translation in its exposition of knowledge. The entries in the encyclopaedia that are not accompanied by a translation but by a transliteration – such as proper names, linguistic categories (*tafrīgh*, *taḍmīn*), names of things Bustānī defines as no longer in use (*tīn*, clay) – are words that Bustānī predicts will no longer be used in the centuries to come.

Seeing language as a “mirror of the nation” ultimately transforms it into the mirror of progress. It is the tain of the mirror, however, that makes any reflection possible. This tain, I argue, is formed in Bustānī’s works through the alphabetical ordering of knowledge. The alphabet is itself a mirror image of language. It organises an ‘arbitrary’ allocation of signs to the signifieds. In other words, the reader of the *Da'ira* does not presume in his mind that *ṭibā'a* (Printing⁴³¹) is preceded by *ṭabātāba* (name of a Zaydi Dynasty) and *ṭabāshīr* (Chalk), but succeeded by *ṭibāq*, (a kind of *badī'*), the use of a word and its antonym in the same sentence or poem verse. Rather, the encyclopaedia is meant to organise knowledge by replacing original works such that the reader is no longer required to see things; these have been replaced by books, by the encyclopaedia itself. The *Dā'irat* is very much similar to other enlightenment encyclopaedias, such as Diderot’s and Alembert’s *Encyclopedie*. As previously quoted, Bustānī himself said that the *Dā'irat* “replaces hundreds of books”. Encyclopaedias are abstractions of original books that they aggregate into one mass of knowledge.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh*, History, Histoire”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 10.

Bustānī expressed no anxiety at this abstraction of knowledge. Rather, he believed in its necessity as an endeavour. The *Dā'irat* therefore manages knowledge, while the latter “manages the organization of society” – *rukūn li-intizām aḥwāl al-hay'a al-ijtimā'iyya*.⁴³² Thus, for Bustānī, knowledge has both a “moral” and “material” worth for every “nation”, *umma*. And every category within the encyclopaedia, every entry or definition is one part that mirrors the totality and unity of all of knowledge, upon “which [the Arabs] have found it very hard to traverse its paths.”⁴³³

This ordering was meant to offer a navigational technology to the readers allowing them to observe knowledge as though it were “something to be contained, surveyed, and thereby made manageable.”⁴³⁴ It has been suggested elsewhere in scholarship that the Enlightenment encyclopaedia “collapsed knowledge into information.”⁴³⁵ Many have agreed that prolepsis characterises the modern encyclopaedia in the sense that although the very existence of an encyclopaedia acknowledges the futility of completing a collection of knowledge, all encyclopaedic texts continue to posit the possibility of “the encyclopaedic unity of all of knowledge as a deferred ideal.”⁴³⁶

Foucault has argued that, for Diderot and the *philosophes* in Europe, the encyclopaedia was supposed to represent with confidence the world of existence. Foucault contends that “the continuum of representation and being; [is] an ontology defined negatively as an absence of nothingness [absence *deneant*], a general representability of being, and being manifested by the presence of representation—all this is a part of the overall

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 12.

⁴³³ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā'irat*, Vol.6, p. 12.

configuration of the classical episteme.”⁴³⁷ For, the case of Bustānī transferring the already problematic Foucauldian notion of a “classical episteme” into Arab history complicates things endlessly. However, the idea that the encyclopaedia is a project that presumes total representability is articulated by even Bustānī himself: “The *Dā’irat* is meant to replace hundreds of books” because it “presents the reader with all the important knowledge in the world.”⁴³⁸ By claiming that the encyclopaedia replaces hundreds of books for its readers and the “human being is prone to forgetting, *al-insān maḥall al-nisyān*”⁴³⁹ Bustānī gives the encyclopaedia the role of a storage device and a navigational tool for knowledge. The arbitrary nature of the alphabetical ordering of words in the *Dā’irat* is meant to relieve the reader’s memory and sharpen his reason. In the encyclopaedia, “memory is oriented not to a past that it simply stores but to a future that it produces.”⁴⁴⁰

The encyclopaedia is meant to act as a mirror of knowledge, and it represents a distinct perception of history and temporality. In his encyclopaedic and taxonomic work, Bustānī was ‘cleaning’ the surface of the mirror in order to look into it. In other words, he was using the mirror to look into what is reflected in it. The encyclopaedia, language, and history for Bustānī are only given attention incidentally. They are merely ideas that are means for contemplating something else – namely, identity. Thereby, as an epistemological tool the encyclopaedia carries an ontological signification of history as deferred time. In other words, the prolepsis that is inherent in the genre of

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Abdulmajid Hammoun, “Translation and the Colonial Imaginary: Ibn Khaldūn Orientalist”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 68.

⁴³⁹ Lenn Evan Goodman, “Ibn Khaldūn and Thucydides” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (Apr.–Jun., 1972), pp. 250-270.

⁴⁴⁰ Keith Watenpaugh and Jens Hansen have in their respective works pointed to the rise of an urban consumerist class at the turn of the nineteenth century.

representation, the encyclopaedia itself, reflects a prolepsis in the attainment of progress for Bustānī. And it ultimately places him in front of a demanding, if not impossible, task: to secure the language of the future such that it can continue to fulfil the Herculean task of representing knowledge as a unified whole in Arabic.

All this, of course, emanates from Bustānī's commitment to "the requirement of every nation or sovereignty, *umma*, to fulfil its needs in different times and different ways."⁴⁴¹

Bustānī's proposition in his introduction to the *Dā'irat* is as follows: the need for knowledge is ever increasing as "the lack of adequate books for the Arabic speakers" is increasing; this necessitates a unification of all books into one system of representation in order to secure memory because "the human is prone to forgetting"⁴⁴²; and because the encyclopaedia "is a book for all religions, sects, and groups"⁴⁴³ not only does it unify knowledge but it also unifies readers across political difference. Thus, for Bustānī knowledge is apolitical while being a necessary source of power for society.

This contradiction also reveals itself in Bustānī's perception of time. The encyclopaedia is meant to save time for a future that only promises to be more unfamiliar. Whilst Bustānī still mentioned the legacy of Arab encyclopaedists like al-Ḍumayrī, Ibn Khallikān, and others the *Dā'irat* in its ontological makeup as a modern encyclopaedia comes to replace all these books and claims that it does so because of their original absence in the disorder of the multiplicity of books.

⁴⁴¹ Refer to Mehdī 'Āmel's, *Fī 'ilmīyat al-fīkr al-khaldūnī*, (Beirut: *Dār al-fārābī*, 2006).

⁴⁴² Refer to Bustānī's definition of "Tamaddun, Civilization" in *Dā'irat al-ma'ārif*, Vol.6, p. 213-215.

⁴⁴³ Abdulmajid Hammoun, "Translation and the Colonial Imaginary: Ibn Khaldūn Orientalist", p. 81.

In his introduction to the encyclopaedia Bustānī perceived the multiplicity of books as a threat to progress because they depict knowledge as fragmentary. He thus chooses from the books of the past only what can solve the variety of representations of knowledge, which signifies a problem, to which writing history through the lens of an ‘Arab nation’ becomes necessary. In a coming section, I discuss how Bustānī provides a broad spanned history of the Arabs in his *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab* (1859). In the following section of the chapter, I would like to elucidate further how Bustānī re-defines History in his encyclopaedia.

History: The true story of progress

“The premodern (*qudam ā* ’ ’) conception of history has been proven wrong by the moderns (*muta ’ akhīr ūn*)”, contended Bustānī.⁴⁴⁴ Whereas he defined History as the “absolute definition of time”, Bustānī defined “time”, *al-zamān*, as an “age or a name for a small quantity of time... it is the most precious thing in existence. In it, everything exists: generations, ages, beings and their creations; the fruits of their labour; their books and their texts. Acknowledging the worth of time is the primary mover towards labour and thereby success.”⁴⁴⁵ Bustānī then added, “As the mind and money (*al-‘aql w al-māl*) are the two supporting factors for survival of mankind, so is Time (*al-zamān*) for it includes the movement of the universe and the whole world. Most of the ill fate of people is due to their disregard for Time and their failure to notice the opportunities which it carries.”⁴⁴⁶ Bustānī argued that if we were to calculate the “wasted minutes

⁴⁴⁴ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh*, History, Histoire”, *Dā ’ irat*, Vol.6, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.,

and neglected moments”⁴⁴⁷ of a civilization they should equal “the amount of time a civilization spends in decline.”⁴⁴⁸

Bustānī, like Diderot before him, adhered to the “singularisation of history”, as Reinhart Koselleck has called it. He argued that “while the ancients did know History, it is only the moderns who have uncovered its true secrets.”⁴⁴⁹ In other words, for the ancients history was a story, whereas for the moderns history had come to be the truth.⁴⁵⁰ Here we begin to see with Bustānī a shift from thinking of History as “*Historia magistra vitae*”, or History as a teacher to History, as an anticipation of a future that is yet to be made. Accompanying this shift is what Koselleck has called “the acceleration of time”. Bustānī mocked chronological historiography when he denoted a distinct shift from past understandings of history to modern ones. Modern history is a history of truth.

The notion of truth is enmeshed in Bustānī’s eschatological views. Under the same definition of history, and a page later, Bustānī states that, “Modern History begins after the fall of the ancient kingdoms under the coming of Christian tenets. From the days of Christ until now, we can observe the series of great events that point to divine intervention.”⁴⁵¹ So while “Natural History, *al-tārīkh al-ṭabī‘ī*, is concerned with living and non-living beings”, Bustānī denoted “Civil History” as that which pertains to

⁴⁴⁶ Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab* (1859), also refer to Stephen Sheehi’s discussion of this in *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*.

⁴⁴⁷ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā’irat*, Vol.6, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁸ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā’irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴⁴⁹ Bustānī, “*Tārīkh, History, Histoire*”, *Dā’irat*, Vol.6, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁰ Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, p. 18

⁴⁵⁰ Bustānī, “*Muqaddima*” (Introduction), *Dā’irat al-ma‘ārif*, Vol.1, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

human beings whether in relation to “epochs of empires” or to “the histories of kingdoms, dynasties, families, or individuals”.⁴⁵² Truth is thus derived from both types of histories.

From this we can deduce that the history of nations is like that of the natural world – fixed by laws and rules. And history is meant to bring a certain culture’s particulars to light. Since language, for Bustānī, carries the image of its people (the mirror metaphor) the study of a culture and a society can be done in the name of nature. What made the modern perception more truthful than the past ones, for Bustānī, was this anthropological perception of society.

He posited that the “moderns”, *muta ’akhir ūn*, proved the fallacy of the cyclical understanding of history. “Ancient History is no longer the mere listing of the consecutive rise and fall of various peoples and kingdoms. Rather, it is now revealed as a grand spectacle in which one nation appears after the other: the Acadian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Median, Greek, Persian, Syrian, Macedonian, Carthage, and Roman. We can see how they unfold one after the other by divine will.”⁴⁵³ Bustānī concluded, “It becomes clear then that the East, *al-mashriq*, is the main stage of history and that the first human was to be found in Asia. That is why we see many contemporaries striving to travel these lands in order to uncover the evidence and artefacts that can be used to trace back the origin of the humankind.” Bustānī continued, “This is a matter that previous historians had never given attention to. The example of India had been a controversy among historians. The idea that Indians descend from different origins besides being against the Holy Scriptures has been

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

disproven by History. After close investigation History has dissipated these illusions and traced back these nations to the one verified origin of creation.”⁴⁵⁴ History and scripture come together in Bustānī’s narrative for the purpose of naturalising Reason.

It becomes clear from Bustānī’s writing that the separation he denotes between a past form of historical knowledge and a modern one is, in fact, a redefinition of the function of History itself. History takes on a new meaning. It begins to open up a new “experiential space”⁴⁵⁵, which rearranges temporality and shifts the relationship between the past and the future. By arguing that the historians of the past had failed to realise the true potential of history, Bustānī inverted the equation from looking back at the past as a teacher to looking forward to the future for counsel.

He listed the cascade of ancient civilizations and, having given the example of the Indian Caste system, Bustānī argued that modern history was erected under the Christian doctrine. He then wrote, “Through the latter [the coming of Christ] the ancient world was connected to the modern world. Since the time of Christ History witnessed events, changes, revolutions, and marvellous images that point to the Divine Intervention in the life of the universe.”⁴⁵⁶ Bustānī claimed, “If we could calculate the date in which Abraham had lived, we could calculate all the way back to the exact time of creation.”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁴ Chad Wellmon, “Touching Books: Diderot, Novalis, and the Encyclopedia of the Future”, *Representation*, Vol.114, No.1 (Spring 2011), p. 71.

⁴⁵⁵ Bustānī, “*Muqaddima*” (Introduction), *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, , Vol.1, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Bustānī, “*Muqaddima*” (Introduction), *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, , Vol.1, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Bustānī, “*Şinā’*, Industry “, *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, Vol.11 p. 36. It is important to note that this volume was published after Bustānī’s death; however, there is no way to ascertain whether he had written these entries himself or whether they were written by his son and nephew. In all cases, I treat the encyclopaedia as one body of work.

In addition to this analysis Bustānī pointed to the fallacies of eighteenth century historians in Europe, “who had led to the corruption of this art and its decline”⁴⁵⁸; that is, “until the historical encyclopedias and annals were placed in the hands of the people. Only then”, Bustānī continued, “did History return to its true course and became re-invigorated after its stagnancy. Its true aim was corrected and its events properly investigated thus making it bloom into its true color.”⁴⁵⁹ The correction of history, Bustānī said, was undertaken by the “expurgation of rhetoric, *khaṭāba*, from it” and the “reliance on facts and accurate events” in order to make it “scientific and organized”,⁴⁶⁰ *‘ilmiyya maḍbūta*. The scientificity of History is revealed in its modern order, which proposes a certain truth or proposes to reveal certain truths that had existed in the past but were not uncovered.

To illustrate his point further, Bustānī pointed to Aristotle’s differentiation between philosophy and poetry on one hand and history on the other: “Aristotle said that poetry is far better and more philosophical than history because poetry speaks of general abstract notions while history is limited to particulars. In defence of poetry Aristotle argued that History speaks of things as they have happened while poetry describes how things out to be.”⁴⁶¹ Bustānī uses Aristotle’s argument to show how “history was never recognized as a science in the ancient days although it was recognized; its true goal remained concealed.”⁴⁶² While History for the moderns “has become an ordered

⁴⁵⁸ C. E. Bosworth, “A Pioneer Arabic Encyclopedia of the Sciences: Al Khwārizmī’s Keys of the Sciences”, *Isis*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Mar., 1963), pp. 98.

⁴⁵⁹ Bustānī, “*Jism, Body*”, *Dā’irat*, Vol.6, p. 468.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 36.

⁴⁶² Refer to the entry “*Tamaddun*” in the *Dā’irat*.

method, *ṭarīqa munaẓama*.⁴⁶³ This method “disenchants”, *tujanub al-iftitān*,⁴⁶⁴ history and makes it an orderly matter. For Bustānī, this only occurs once historical encyclopaedias and lexicons are written.

In order to buttress his arguments Bustānī specifically chose Ibn Khaldūn’s works to quote from amongst the “books of the Arabs, *kutub al- ‘ arab*.”⁴⁶⁵ I argue that this choice pertains to Bustānī’s ability to interpret a new proposition for the definition of history from old pre-existing terms on one hand, and the choice of Ibn Khaldūn, who had been depicted as the genius of the Arabs by Sylvester de Sacy and others of his time, is more than just a domestication by Bustānī of a European Orientalist proposition on the other.

The argument by scholars like Jacques Berques and de Sacy says that Ibn Khaldūn was a “genius Arab thinker” who was never recognised in his own milieu but only given his dues in Europe. This argument has been recently revisited as a translation of the Khaldunian text into a colonial one. “To discover Ibn Khaldūn means above all that the French scholar is a competent epistemic subject, able to evaluate and sanction and

⁴⁶³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba*, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, (p.18) uses the concept of heteronomy to describe the inherently contradictory logic of nationalism and enlightenment given their claims to sovereignty and autonomy within the processes of their historical formations through lexicography and pedagogy. The subject of the nation is bound to a heteronomous existence as an individual and simultaneous citizen. This brings us to Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin’s common fascination with the question of sovereignty and the state, and their dwelling on how time can come to express a sense of simultaneous normality and exception – the so called *katechon* of political time. Heteronomy emerges as a concept to articulate how normality itself becomes a state of exception for the citizen and nation, as a concept it describes how “national sovereignty” is an inherently contradictory concept.

⁴⁶⁵ The death of As’ad al-Shidyāq, Aḥmad Fāris’s brother, for his conversion from Maronite faith to Protestantism moved Aḥmad to harshly criticize the religio-political structure of his indigenous society and to insist on his own self enforced exile from “home”. His own conversion into Islam is another matter in need of study within the context of the formation of the “religious” as a categorical politico-theological concept in the nineteenth-century Levant.

intellectual activity anywhere.”⁴⁶⁶ Bustānī adopts the same position not simply out of mimesis of the Orientalist but because Ibn Khaldūn’s materialist understanding of history proves to be very relevant to the nineteenth-century socio-economic changes in the Levant.

In the different entries of the encyclopaedia, and from his encyclopaedist vantage point, Bustānī chose from the “books of the Arabs” and the “history of the Arabs” the authors that most benefited the present as it already was. Ibn Khaldūn, like Bustānī, lived in an age of crisis, in which civilization is put to a test or at least that is how they both depicted their times.⁴⁶⁷ The concern with political power, organisation of social affairs, and the structure of urban civilization are all common concerns for these two figures. The relevance of Ibn Khaldūn for Bustānī is linked to the former’s materialist analysis of the history of civilization.

In *Khuṭba fī al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya* (1869) Bustānī, in a very Khaldunian manner, proposes that society is primarily based on the fulfilment of material needs. The materialist perception of history and society, in terms of progress and fulfilment of needs, pertains to the actual social and economic changes in the nineteenth century near East; the shift from an agrarian mode of production, the increasing commoditisation of

⁴⁶⁶ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, “*Fī al-mukhayyila w-al-takhayyul*” [On Imagination and Imagining] in *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, pp. 13.

⁴⁶⁶ Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation* p. 129.

⁴⁶⁶ Bustānī’s *Khuṭab fī al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya w-al-muqārana bayn adab al-‘arab w-al-ifranja* in 1859 that was also given as a lecture at the Syrian Society juxtaposes the Arab and the *Ifranja* at a comparative stance; the co-extant self and other that emerge at a distance in time yet remain contemporaneous.

⁴⁶⁷ In his article “Language Change and the History of Events” in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol.61, No.4 (Dec., 1989) p. 650-666, Koselleck discusses how history is linguistically conditioned as language is historically conditioned; yet language and history remain different. The possibility of revising history exists because of the act of *writing* history; this is in no way specific to the European Enlightenment or the *Nahḍa* in our case. It can be seen in the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Ibn Khaldūn.

the economy, and increasing consumerism are all signs of the time.⁴⁶⁸ Bustānī's position as a member of a rising urban middle class in nineteenth-century Beirut and as a national pedagogue who established the "National School of Abey" only made him an intellectual capital in which the missionaries (who represent the onset of global capitalism) had invested. And, although his national project seems in direct opposition to any foreign power (recall his analysis in *Nafīr*), Bustānī, in fact, shared with the capitalist colonial project the same epistemic order.

Although Bustānī invoked Ibn Khaldūn, whose writings are characterised by an early historical structuralism in analysing the rise and fall of civilizations,⁴⁶⁹ he ultimately tarnishes the latter's analysis with his own politico-theological bearings. In other words, Bustānī's use of the word *umma* as a nation that exists regardless of race is linked to his belief in a unique origin for all humankind.⁴⁷⁰ Ibn Khaldūn was concerned with the process of interaction between nomadic and settled civilizations and tribal politics. His view of history "undoubtedly implies 'change' and 'transformation', but excludes the notion of 'progress' and a shared human future towards which all peoples head with different and unequal speed."⁴⁷¹ Bustānī was concerned with meaning of history for a common human future. While Ibn Khaldūn wrote of a causal relationship between historical events that is encoded in the social context and the laws of a certain

⁴⁶⁸ Koselleck, *Future's Past*, p. 22.

⁴⁶⁹ A great example of the logic of phonetical thinking can be seen in a speech given by Alexander Melville Bell at the Modern Language Association meeting in Harvard 1890 published in *PMLA*, Vol.5, No.1. (1890), pp. 23-32. In it, Bell describes how language can become universal, which is in itself profitable, because "theorizing on sounds which you cannot illustrate is profitless" (p.28). Furthermore, the function of phonetics is to remove the irregularities and anomalies in spelling, it is what Bell calls, "the national authority and umpire" in "spelling reform" (p.29).

⁴⁷⁰ Shidyāq, "*Fī al-mukhayyila wa-al-takhayyul*", *Kanz al-raghā'ib*, p. 11.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

sociality, Bustānī eluded any rigorous and critical engagement with historical events. This is most evident in his *Nafīr* series.

Ibn Khaldūn, like his Greek counterpart Thucydides, presupposes “that all histories resemble each other or are structurally similar; only on this condition it is possible to learn from them in the future.”⁴⁷² In the text he quotes, Bustānī misquotes or misreads Ibn Khaldūn in his discussion of the scribes of history (*naqala*) and the truth and falsity of what they recorded. Bustānī interprets Ibn Khaldūn as having said that “in appraising the truth of recorded events, which is the task of the historian, one must weigh the possibilities of an event’s actual happening, or the conditions of its possibility, whether it is realistic or not.”⁴⁷³ Bustānī interprets history as having been presented by Ibn Khaldūn as a telling of events that contains a hidden meaning or law to its unfolding that can only be ascertained from the conditions of the present. There is no room here for a detailed discussion of Ibn Khaldūn; suffice to say that the latter did not merely call for the correction of history but to the necessity of method and critical thought in the recording of events.

Moreover, Ibn Khaldūn had always insisted on the necessity of understanding the laws relative to every *‘umrān* (society) in order to understand any historical event. He proposed a systematic method for the verification of historical events that is based on understanding their respective social context. Bustānī, on the other hand, recognised the difference in civilizations only insofar as they were not obstacles to human civilization as a whole. In other words, the causes of the supposed “regress” of his own society are not historicised based on the specific historical context of those changes, but based on

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

the “progress” of other societies and civilizations. As the causes of the 1860 violence are said to be “blind” and “primordial” by Bustānī, so are the causes of decline of the Arabs.⁴⁷⁴ The Arabs, of whom Ibn Khaldūn spoke about as various populations (*ajyāl*), are very different from Bustānī’s Arabs. With him they transform into a genus, a culture that somehow transcends history.

Bustānī claimed that he adopted Ibn Khaldūn’s method of logical deduction in the *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*. He said that, “I think of the possible, the rationally possible as I seek to define the different entries in the encyclopaedia.”⁴⁷⁵ The encyclopaedia is thus driven by a need to collect history, to summarise the past as it has *really* happened or as it is most probable to have happened, because the “moderns have now realized the laws of history and revealed history’s nature – primarily through writing and recording of events.”⁴⁷⁶ Time had changed, for Bustānī. It took on a character of homogenisation: modern time versus premodern time. What is very striking for the case of Bustānī is

⁴⁷⁴ Shidyāq, “*Fī al-mukhayyila wa-al-takhayyul*”, *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, p. 13. This narrative lays the foundational grounds of the nation for forthcoming Arab thinkers. It brings together the conditions of the possible and sets the ground for the translation of the Iliad from Greek into Arabic by Bustānī’s own nephew, Sulaymān al-Bustānī, and the writing of a series of encyclopaedic histories of Arab literature spanning pre-Islamic times to Andalusia.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Shidyāq, “*Fī al-khilāl: fī tanzīm al-mudn wa-tartīb al-aswāq*” (On the Crisis in the Organization of Cities and Commerce Areas) *Kanz al-raghā’ib fī muntakhabāt al-jawā’ib*, vol.1, pp. 38-42.

⁴⁷⁶ Shidyāq, “*Fī al-farq ma bayn al-sharq w-al-gharb*”, (On the Difference Between the East and the West) *Kanz al-ragha’ib*, vol.1, pp. 87-101.

⁴⁷⁶ Shidyāq, “*Fī al-‘amal w-al-baṭāla*”, (On Work and Unemployment) *Kanz al-raghā’ib fī muntakhabāt al-jawā’ib*, vol.1, pp. 151-153.

⁴⁷⁶ Mohamad Alwan’s unpublished dissertation, *Ahmad Faris Ash-Shidyāq and the West* (University of Indiana, Department of Comparative Literature, 1970) is one of the earlier scholarly works on Shidyāq which contextualizes Shidyāq’s influences from Western literature by a thorough reading of his major works. The more recent book by Raḍwa ‘Ashūr, *al-Ḥadātha al-mumkina*, that explores Shidyāq’s influences offers yet another nationalistic attempt of re-instituting Shidyāq’s *al-sāq ‘alā al-sāq* as a modern novel that offers an alternative modernity for the Arabs rather than seeing it as a *memoire* of a subject seeking the desirable nation of which to make a home. ‘Ashūr works within the post-nationalistic reactionary paradigm instead of taking a more critical stance of this valuable text.

that as Time took on a homogenous character in his writings, he argued that the “truth that is revealed in history is that which is revealed in the coming of Christ.”⁴⁷⁷ As such, Bustānī, who has been considered a nineteenth-century pioneer for ‘progress’, actually falls short of Ibn Khaldūn’s more ‘scientific’ perception of history many centuries before him.

In his oration of the speech *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab* to the audience of the Syrian Society for the Sciences, Bustānī exclaimed, “I would like to claim that Arabic was the language revealed to our father Adam in his earthly paradise, but I cannot, as I will not be able to provide proof for this.” He continued, “What is evident is that this language has been miraculously preserved by God for mysterious reasons that cannot be revealed. And although the speakers of this language have reached the lowliest levels of ignorance and barbarism, the language has been preserved with them through scribal work and tradition (*taqlīd* and *naql*) and it is safeguarded from corruption and breakdown into many languages in contrast to what has happened in the case of the languages of Europe.”⁴⁷⁸

While Bustānī claims that the Arabic language has survived times past he binds the language in the future to that of Europe by supposing that the entries in the encyclopaedia can contain the knowledge of both the Arabs and the Europeans. We can see that the Arab that translates and preserves ancient knowledge is indigenously constructed through the national pedagogical encyclopaedic work of Bustānī. As such, the writing of Arab history becomes an attempt to collect the uncollectable. While the

⁴⁷⁷ “*Faslun min kitābī al- ma bi muntaha al- ‘ajab fī khaṣā’is lughat al-‘arab*”, (An Excerpt from my book that is entitled The Most Unique and Awe-Inspiring Traits of the Language of the Arabs) *Mukhtārāt min athār aḥmad fāris al-shidyāq*, p. 391.

⁴⁷⁷ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs*, (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-jawā’ib, 1881) p. 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

encyclopaedia is meant to collect all of knowledge, the Arabic language even is systematically emptied from its “books of the Arabs” and is presumed to somehow continue to prosper by Bustānī.

The homogenisation of knowledge

Bustānī’s encyclopaedia was meant to summarise “all the true facts in the world and all the important bodies of knowledge and inquiries: whereby it [the encyclopaedia] replaces hundreds of books and opens the gates of knowledge providing an easy access to it for everyone.”⁴⁷⁹ Bustānī wrote, “There isn’t a single civilized society that has not bejewelled its libraries with one.”⁴⁸⁰ Therefore, “it is a must that the sons of the Arabic language acquire one of their own in order to better the causes of: progress (*al-taqaddum*), civilization (*al-tammadun*), accumulation of wealth (*al-tharwa*), abundance (*al-rafāhiya*), sciences, and knowledge.”⁴⁸¹

Bustānī argued that the necessity of the encyclopaedia was brought about by the “increase of publications and books” in Arabic that “have only demonstrated their lack of ability [of the sons of the Arabic language] to keep up with their contemporaries” and “their inability to tread the many paths of knowledge.”⁴⁸² Then Bustānī stated

⁴⁷⁹ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs*, p. 1.

⁴⁸⁰ Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs*, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁰ Shidyāq, “*Faslun min kitābī al- Mūsama bi muntaha al- ‘ajab fī khaṣā’is lughat al- ‘arab*” p. 392.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. I argue in the coming chapter that Shidyāq, in fact, tries to critique political economy and the idea of capital through critiquing the categories of desires and needs and proposing alternative ones such as contentedness and *adab al-naḥs* or morality.

⁴⁸¹ For an the discussion of tragedy that manifests in the perception of time as past, present, and future in modernity refer to David Scott’s *Conscripts of Modernity, The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (USA: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴⁸² Shidyāq, “*Fī al-farq ma bayn al-sharq w-al-gharb*” [On the Difference between East and West], p. 87.

clearly, “We have authored this encyclopaedia in order to fulfil these multiple lacks.”⁴⁸³

The core of the encyclopaedic impulse for Bustānī as well as others like Diderot before him is the restitution of the lack in human knowledge.

For the Enlightenment *philosophes*, the encyclopaedia was meant to be an “interrelation of all of knowledge” and thereby a mirror of human cognition, rather than nature. “The encyclopaedia [as an Enlightenment project] deals with the increasing complexity and dimensions of knowledge.”⁴⁸⁴ However, while the encyclopaedia of Diderot came as a reaction to Renaissance encyclopaedias, which were based on the idea that they reflected reality because they proposed to reflect human cognition or the lack in human cognition, Bustānī’s encyclopaedia came as a mirror of the “*ifranja* encyclopedias that are main sources of the progress of their public good.”⁴⁸⁵

Giving up “hundreds of books” for Bustānī was associated with gaining speed and time in progress. The faster that one can amass knowledge, the better they are equipped for the future. As such, rather than look into the meaning of the “totality of knowledge itself”, the encyclopaedia, Bustānī preferred to pay attention to the object in the mirror. He even proposed that he liked to think of the encyclopaedia as a “book for reading rather than just reference”.⁴⁸⁶ He declared in his introduction that the book contains “everything that one can ever ask for”. And it is meant to secure future “inventions and discoveries” and be a continuous “source for power and wealth”. He wrote: “the human being is antithetical yet linked to forgetting”. Playing on the similarity of the words in

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p. 88.

⁴⁸⁴ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, introduction to *al-Tuḥfa*.

⁴⁸⁴ Shidyāq, *Sirr al-layāl fī al-qalb wa-al-ibdāl* (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-jawā’ib, 1867) p. 2.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Shidyāq, *Sirr al-layāl*, p. 3.

Arabic, Bustānī insinuated that the encyclopaedia was meant to secure the memory of past knowledge in order to guarantee knowledge to come in the future. Under Industry, *al-ṣināʿa*, Bustānī listed writing as an industry that is meant to “safeguard the human memory.”⁴⁸⁷

Besides being more optimistic about the function of the encyclopaedia and the attainability of knowledge than many before him, Bustānī’s encyclopaedia was an entirely novel classification of knowledge in the history of the Arabic language, for it classified knowledge by an alphabetical arbitrary order and bound it to a foreign language. The Arabic encyclopaedias of the eleventh and fourteenth centuries were more thematic; Khwārizmī’s encyclopaedia, *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*, for instance, was concerned with the branches of knowledge and their interrelations, and so was al-Fārābī’s before him. These encyclopaedias were tabulated and contained a systematic enumeration of the sciences and their subdivisions. These previous encyclopaedic efforts have not been adequately studied.

Von Grunebaum argues that for these Muslim scholars knowledge was not infinitely extendable. Rather, it was seen “as a finite corpus of facts which a diligent scholar should, with God’s guidance be able to encompass. This was the aim of all intellectual activity: to recover the attainable knowledge which God had set in the world.”⁴⁸⁸ On the contrary, Bustānī’s modern encyclopaedia was driven by the knowledge of the un-

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Stathis Gourgouris in Chapter 3, “The Formal Imagination, II: Natural History and National Pedagogy” of *Dream Nation* (p.100) discusses the epistemic shift in language making that accompanies the nation building process and in which language comes to be defined as the property of the nation. He convincingly argues that “the reorganization of grammar and the correction of spoken and written words or expressions, which culminate in the practice of lexicography itself, represent indeed the (re) writing of a culture’s Law. This is not merely a point of mere metaphor, as this reorganized, corrected, and ‘cleansed’ language will eventually become the actual language of the State (the constitutional and penal codes).”

attainability of total knowledge. Knowledge was forever progressing. It was like a mechanical clock; once set in motion it can count to infinity.

Under the definition of *jism*, *Corps*, *Body* Bustānī proposed a corporeal understanding of matter: “A body in the natural sciences is every matter that can be detected by the senses. It is constituted by three attributes: extension (*hajm*), form (*shakl*), and substance (*jurm*, *miqdār*, quantity of content and essences inside it).”⁴⁸⁹ He argued that bodies are made of finite particles that he calls “*daqā’iq*”, and that these are not divisible but are held by a centrifugal force. Bustānī quoted from the *Mu’tazila* and the *Mutakalimūn*, Aristotle, alchemy, various mystics, Epicurus, and physicians. He dedicated the first half of the definition to listing the views of the natural sciences, *al-‘ulūm al-ṭabī‘iyya* (the books of the Arabs), and the second half of the definition (three pages) to the discussion of “foreign bodies”, *al-aṣām al-gharība*, that infect the human body. In his attempt to amass all the knowledge on the “Body”, Bustānī leads the reader down an intrepid path of multiple definitions that do not partake in any conversation with each other except the separation between the “books of the Arabs” and those of modern sciences. In fact, he employs this method in most articles of the encyclopaedia. One can deduce that Bustānī leans towards an empiricist understanding of matter (both Cartesian and Baconian) that can be used in practice. Knowledge is recurrently displayed as a pedagogical tool for practical purposes. The second half of the definition describes how “foreign bodies” form in the human body and describes their three natures: solid, liquid, and gas.

⁴⁸⁹ Buṭrus Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya* (Beirut, 1864), p. 2.

The study of bodies, according to Bustānī, is for the chemist, the natural scientists, and the medical doctors. Thus, while he does quote from Arab sources like the Mu‘tazilites, Bustānī begins the article by defining “bodies” through classification:

Bodies are divided into two categories or great kingdoms: mechanical, *ajsām ‘āliyya*, and non-mechanical bodies, *ajsām ghayr ‘āliyya*. Mechanical bodies are studied by physiology: botany or zoology (refer to the entries: “Animal” “Plant and “Anatomy”). The non-mechanical bodies are also divided into two kinds: cosmic (*samāwiyya*) and earthly (*arḍiyya*). The cosmic includes the planets and their traits (and this is under Astronomy, *‘ilm al-hay’a*, refer to “Planet” and “Astronomy”). The earth is the subject matter of natural science that either studies the absolute traits of matter (biology) or the composition of matter and this is called Chemistry (refer to Chemistry).⁴⁹⁰

Thus, although Bustānī recognises the “Arab sources” and quotes them freely, he forces them into the present practice of the sciences either as precursors to them or as an old opinion. Bustānī presents the same line of argument in his entry “History”.

The encyclopaedia itself, as a genre of writing and collecting knowledge, reveals much about Bustānī’s perception of time. The aim of the *Dā’ira*, much like its French counterpart *l’encyclopédie*, was to “work through the past as quickly as possible so that a new future could be set free.”⁴⁹¹ The trend of placing hope in the future initiates in this *nahḍawī* text; learning from the past becomes worthless when compared to the seizing of time. The severing of ties with what comes to be called “tradition”, “the books of the Arabs”, and “pre-civilization” is an inherent trait of the onset of the nation as a historical form that pushes forth the proper use of memory and imagination for its citizenry. The guide to correct memory is to recall the “books of the Arabs” and the “writers of the Arabs” and those of times past in order to delineate the ‘modern truths’

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Buṭrus Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya*, p. 6.

⁴⁹¹ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, “*Tamaddun*” (Civilization) in *Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*, Vol.6 p. 214.

revealed by the sciences. These truths have always been there for Bustānī but it is only the moderns who have discovered them.

Bustānī went as far as saying, “if we calculated the lost opportunities in time they would equal the amount of time by which the Arabs are now delayed in progress.”⁴⁹²

This “crisis” of time lost or wasted becomes the basis of Bustānī’s narration of Arab history in his *Khuṭba* of 1859. The encyclopaedic genre that Bustānī masters in his works embodies the sense of prolepsis, or constant delay of attainment of progress, which becomes instituted through the *Nahḍa* episteme for the case of the Arabs. By merely including the entry of Encyclopaedia within the encyclopaedia itself and by introducing the encyclopaedia at length and offering reasons for its existence, Bustānī engaged in the representation of the system of representation itself (the encyclopaedia). What necessity did the definition of the encyclopaedia within itself respond to? This meta-discursive move, of defining the *Dā’irat*, is didactic because it reveals the pedagogy of the whole work of the meta-text. The entry “Encyclopaedia” is premised on the fact that language remains as it is for the future generations and it is both preserved by, and in need of preservation of, the language.

Bustānī’s encyclopaedism is not limited to the writing of the encyclopaedia itself. His taxonomic drive is also at work in his writings on literature, culture, and language. The work of Bustānī represents natural culture as emerging from the antithesis of civilization and barbarism, and aspiring to build a national pedagogy. This aspiration is

⁴⁹² Antonio Gramsci’s work on grammar and language in relation to nation making shows how the obsession with grammar and the homogenization of language occurs simultaneously with the formation of the State apparatus. He discusses language from within the construction of cultural hegemony and the consolidation of the internal geopolitical order of the nation. His *Litteratura e Vita Nazionale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950) deals with this dynamic, also *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (London and New York: Lawrence & Wishart; International Publishers, 1971).

contingent on the invocation of language, Arabic, as the intersecting trope between history and culture.

Re-writing grammar as history: Imagining national history

In the Nahḍa logos, language and society are tied to one another on a journey from decay to transcendence. In fact, this journey itself comes to be seen as the natural history of a language, a narrative that also governs the civilization which language lays claims to. Bustānī dedicates his famous lecture in 1859, *Khuṭba fī adāb al-‘arab*, before the Syrian Society for Arts and Sciences to the “causes and symptoms of national regression”⁴⁹³ approached through the discussion of the Arabic *adab* and its history. The *Khuṭba* provides a history of the *nature* of the modern Arab in as much as it is about Arabic *adab*. In it Bustānī weaves the tale of past glory, temporary regression, and then awakening for knowledge production of the Arabs. The *Khuṭba* provides the standard apologetic narrative which claims that the reasons for ‘regression’, *takhalluf*, are the burning of libraries, corrupt governors, religion and bigotry, as well as foreign invasion. The glorious age, for Bustānī, was the age of al-Ma’mūn and the Abassid dynasty. It is worth noting that by the mid-twentieth century even Islamist scholars have argued that this age was the beginning of corruption of Islam and its civilization. In the *Khuṭba*, Bustānī emphasises the role of Christian scholars in early history, stressing that the ‘Arabs’ were not only Muslims, and he argues that the appetite for knowledge and *adab* is a natural one for the Arab people. It is part of their *fiṭra*, their nature, and their mind, *al-dhihn*, has a natural propensity for it.

⁴⁹³ Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī ta’līm al-nisā’*.

The diagnostic stance that Bustānī takes is an anthropological one; it observes the intersection of barbarism with civilization, thereby calling forth a *cultural* logic. What is at stake in the encounter between the logic of the local, in which Bustānī finds himself, and the logic of culture that presents itself as universal in his work is epistemology. It manifests as the ideological coup of “heteronomy”⁴⁹⁴ that the nation introduces to the historical subject.

Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq is equally complicit in the generation of this heteronomous national stance. He engages with his Arab-ness through writing while being in exile from Mount Lebanon and Syria⁴⁹⁵. Whether in Paris, London, or Istanbul, his observations in *Kashf mukhabba ‘an tamaddun urūbba wa-al-wasita fī ma ‘rifat aḥwāl Malta* (Unveiling the Secrets of European Civilization and the Guide to knowing Malta, 1881), render the Arab self authentic through his anthropological gaze of the other. He is similar to Montesquieu’s Persian Uzbek and Rousseau’s savage, and, to an extent, De Foe’s Crusoe. Shidyāq is like the great travellers and explorers of the 18th century, who were subjugated to the experiment of culture and civilization. The promise offered by autonomous travel from one’s own culture, “ignorant Eastern mothers”, and “unreliable scribes”⁴⁹⁶, as Shidyāq represented them, is a promise of freedom of knowledge acquisition that is paradoxically simultaneous with asserting a national self-representation of one’s own Eastern-ness and Arab-ness.

In *Kashf al-mukhabba*, sections of *al-Sāq*, and in various articles of *Jawā ‘ib*, the very critique of European society becomes its exaltation. As Europe is set up against the background of civilization the Arab slips into the shadows. Shidyāq, the Arab traveller,

⁴⁹⁴ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 83.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 85.

remains Arab while the “west gains in self-knowledge”.⁴⁹⁷ What the East/Arab/Orient lacks comes to be European civilization itself. The discussions of the difference between East and West, and *ifranja* and Arab,⁴⁹⁸ become possible through the reading of space in terms of time, and the Arab becomes comparable on the stage of world civilization.⁴⁹⁹ For Shidyāq, the Arab is a phonetical condition of existence within a universe of languages as it is the condition for existence of a society within a universe of other societies. The mastery of the tongue, although cognisant of the many nuances of dialect, is the mastery of the written word and its proper ordering – a trait that Shidyāq flaunts in his own writing style. This phonetical reasoning that burgeons in Europe, and thereby ‘the world’, in the nineteenth century embarks from the claim of the unity of meanings of the *written* word and the primacy of literacy over orality; it is cotangent to the emergence of unitary concepts such as History,⁵⁰⁰ Society, and Culture.⁵⁰¹ This same process is at work in *al Nahḍa* as it is elsewhere at the time; terms like natural history (*al-tārīkh al-ṭabīʿī*), society (*al-hayʿa al-ijtimāʿiyya*), and culture (*al-adab*) crystallise into tropes through which the self can be situated in the world.

Phonetical reasoning, which Shidyāq adopts, assumes that every written word can be taught and is essentially pedagogical. This requires that the written form is regulated by a body of legislators like Shidyāq and Bustānī, and it becomes possible to think of a national phonetic – i.e., a definition of the tendencies of an individual language and a delimiting of its genuine nature. Yet, words cannot be trusted. For Shidyāq, human imagination and thought is based on a sensorial experience with nature and objects:

⁴⁹⁷ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 214.

⁴⁹⁸ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 213.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ Jeffrey Sacks, “Futures of Literature: *Inhitat, Adab, Naqd*”, p. 90.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

“You cannot picture what a triangle is if you have never touched or seen one... Abstract words like sublimity, wisdom, justice, infinity, and finiteness are not grand, they are merely sounds produced with one’s tongue if the mind (*al-‘aql*) hadn’t imagined something grand beforehand.”⁵⁰² The thought process of humans and their ability to learn rely on existing impressions in the brain, and the thinking mechanism in the brain relies on imagination (*al-takhayyul*). “Imagination is a force that exists only in rational and perceptive beings and is used for conjuring sensory objects through the power of memory, that is why the ancient Greeks considered poetry the brainchild of memory, the poet who had better memory had more imagination.”⁵⁰³ Consequently, Shidyāq perceived memory as a pedagogical field in which society must interfere through language education in order to shape it into a productive faculty.

Shidyāq wrote about two types of imagination, the “productive and the unproductive”, *al-muntija wa-al-‘aqīma*. “The former separates humans from animals and is found at rare moments as a natural trait in specific people like Archimedes and Homer.”⁵⁰⁴ The productive imagination, he continues, produces fantasy and myth like Aesop’s fables, on one hand, and it produces categorical thinking from which emanates the “magic of language”⁵⁰⁵ on the other. Language’s power lies in its ability to conjure from the mind existing impressions generated from sensual experience with the world, from the empirical existence of human beings. “Yet, like the imagination of an architect needs to be well thought of so must the poet’s. A poet has to have realistic imaginings that do

⁵⁰² Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 165.

⁵⁰³ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 83.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 84. Shidyāq levels this critique of religious figures at many points in the book.

not exceed the possible limits of parsimony and sensibility (*al-iqtisād w-al-salāma*).

S/he must not imagine what is not possible.”⁵⁰⁶ Shidyāq, like Bustānī, through his archiving project of the nation, collects the conditions of the possible through his work on the language.

This discussion of imagination fits within the array of topics that Shidyāq tackles such as “Impressions and Natural Philosophy”,⁵⁰⁷ “On Dysfunction and Disorganization of Cities and Markets”,⁵⁰⁸ “On the Difference between East and West”,⁵⁰⁹ and “On Work and Unemployment”,⁵¹⁰ and on topics like women, sex, pleasure, marriage, political rule, rulers’ virtues and vices, modesty and knowledge, and other titles. These categories proposed by Shidyāq only make sense once seen as part of a project for social reform in which society is nationalised according to categories of rule spanning language and sexual relations alike.

It is clear that Shidyāq has been impressed by British empiricism (characterised by Bacon, Locke, and Hume), on one hand, and by French Romanticism (Rousseau) on the other.⁵¹¹ Like Locke and Bacon, focusing much of their interest in purifying language to become a language of knowledge and science, and thereby a language of civilization, Shidyāq engaged with the question of language and society with the same impetus. However, the reason for the difference between the Arabs and the *ifranja* in this context, as Shidyāq puts it, is because “the *ifranja*’s languages have emanated from

⁵⁰⁶ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 165.

⁵⁰⁷ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 175.

⁵⁰⁸ Refer to Thomas Phillip, “The Autobiography in Modern Arab Literature and Culture”, in *Poetics Today* Vol.14. No.3, pp. 573-604.

⁵⁰⁹ Shidyāq, *Kashf al-mukhabba*, p. 335.

⁵¹⁰ Shidyāq, *Kashf al-mukhabba*, p. 335.

⁵¹¹ Stephen Shapiro, “The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography” in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Dec., 1968), pp. 421-454.

civilization (*tamaddun*) while our civilization has emanated from the Arabic language.”

⁵¹² It is here where Shidyāq proves to be radically different from Bustānī and other Enlightenment figures. In fact, one could argue that their works are supplementary to each other. While Bustānī saw language as a medium for knowledge, Shidyāq insisted that the study of Arabic was in itself a pursuit of universal knowledge. Although at first sight this position, which Shidyāq staunchly advocates, seems to be of an apologetic nature, it proves to be an interesting departure from the salient Nahḍa discourse that formulates during the twentieth century. I reserve the detailed discussion of Shidyāq’s language philosophy for the coming chapter. This brings us again to the crux of our discussion – how language emerges as the topos of intersection of the nation and modernity, and how it comes to be a historical telling of the *nature* of a culture. Not only does the question of language show us the making of a pedagogy of knowledge, but it also embodies a pedagogy of desire, a driving force that forms society as a nation.

In his prologue to *al-Jāsūs ‘alā al-qāmūs* (The Spy on the Dictionary), Shidyāq praised “the Arabic tongue that has stood the test of time.”⁵¹³ He propounded that, “While the tongues of other nations (*umam*) have changed from the origins of their making, and have been tainted and loathed, this dignified tongue [Arabic], remains as it was, and it shall remain so to the end of time. If there has been a change in its spoken form, its essence in writing remains untarnished.”⁵¹⁴ He continues, “The tongues of the foreigners have cramped the Arab tongue, almost concealed it from its own people, this is because the ordering of their books is easier, and accessing them is faster...as for the

⁵¹² Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and Chronotope”, p. 23 c.f. Juliet Flower MacCannell, *the Temporality of Textuality: Bakhtin and Derrida*, MLN, Vol. 100, No. 5, Comparative Literature (Dec., 1985), pp. 968-988.

⁵¹³ Shidyāq, *Kashf al-mukhabba*, p. 334.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

traders amongst us and those who carry the burden of governance, they claim that the Arabic language is unsuitable for this age and for their occupations.”⁵¹⁵ Shidyāq diagnosed this belief as a source of decline: “they have shamed themselves with their own lack of knowledge of the Arabic language.”⁵¹⁶ This furnishes an incentive for Shidyāq to perform the mastery over the language, to act as its “guardian and safe-keeper.” He even called for state censorship of books and for their unification in terms of meaning and grammar, which he likened to a discussion of the necessity of monogamy in marriage.⁵¹⁷ What is lacking in this age, for Shidyāq, is *al-qanā‘a*, or contentedness, in both sexual relations and language.⁵¹⁸ This sense of contentedness is to be deduced from Shidyāq’s own tragic engagement with the language. Elsewhere in his writing he tells us his story of engaging with Arabic, “By conquering it, it conquered me.”

With the acceleration of time and the increase of desire that are characteristic of civilized modernity, and with the growing distance between past and present, the object of desire for the “Arab”, as portrayed by the writings of Shidyāq and Bustānī, must be a unification of language and ethic, a disciplining and ordering of names, meanings, sexual desire, and pedagogical tools. Furthermore, it must entail the acceptance of the tragic element in the modern stance towards language (as a language for history), which

⁵¹⁵ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 2.

⁵¹⁶ Not a single literary critic or modern philosopher has at one point mentioned Don Quixote, for an analysis of the meanings carried through this novel refer to Jed Rasula’s “When the Exception is the Rule: Don Quixote as Incitement to Literature” in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 123-151 (Duke University Press on behalf of the University of Oregon).

⁵¹⁷ Jed Rasula, “When the Exception Is the Rule: Don Quixote as Incitement to Literature”, p. 132.

⁵¹⁸ In an article called “*Fī al-khilāl*” (On Dysfunction), in *Kanz al-raghā‘ib* vol.1 (pp. 38-42), Shidyāq argued that the role of the *jurnal* or the printed press was to report on the dysfunction and problems of society in order to call attention to it. The main aim of journalistic writing was the reform of society.

is characterized by the longing for a freedom from the past (what language carries), while it continues to anticipate the future on its own terms.⁵¹⁹ Shidyāq's claim for contentedness in language and economic activity is thereby linked to his tragedy and produces a historical narrative that takes the form of a myth. As such, Shidyāq's writings are not reactions or mimeses of a reality (of a real disjunction in time) but they *shape* reality in that manner. They are reflections on existence, articulated through the work on language.

Simultaneous to the growing distance between past and present is the growing distance between East and West. Shidyāq singles out the civilizational difference between Easterners and Westerners in social organization (of markets, roads, transport, and trade), education and rearing (language and women): "While Eastern mothers plant superstition and irrationality in their children's psyche, the Western mother instills in hers fervency for science, literature, and virtue."⁵²⁰ Shidyāq proclaims, "The only way to remove these illusions from the [Eastern] child's minds is by migrating from the homeland and through reading books."⁵²¹ Again, travel is invoked to argue that travelling across space is, in fact, time travel, to the future and the past but seldom to the present.

Bustānī's translation of Robinson Crusoe (1861), concomitant with Shidyāq's writings, reveals how the metaphor of travel becomes instituted in a disjointed perception of time. Moreover, it allows Bustānī to claim that his translation of the story was pertinent

⁵¹⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*. 1971. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 67.

⁵²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 46.

⁵²⁰ Shidyāq, *Mukhtārat min athār Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, p. 391.

⁵²⁰ Use of homonyms or words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings.

⁵²¹ A kind of *saj* ' : the use of rhyming words in both parts of a compound sentence.

for “the times” because it was a true story, “based on a true and honest telling of events”.⁵²² For Bustānī, history had come to elucidate time itself. Thus, a novel like Robinson Crusoe could be defined by Bustānī as true story, like Shidyāq’s *Sāq ‘alā al-Sāq* could claim to be a true autobiography. The synchronic elements of literature are invoked through this proposition of fiction as truth and they both reveal the epistemological aporia underlining the modern Arab engagement with the practice of history. The Nahḍa, as an archive, institutes this aporia.

In his pedagogical lexicons, *Sirr al-layāl fī al-qalb wa-al-ibdāl* and his *Jāsūs*, Shidyāq attributed the importance of his work to the simultaneous preservation of language and the unfolding of its “miraculously wise secrets”. “My greatest ambition has been to dive deep into the sea of this language, to make sense of its seemingly contradictory meanings, bring them closer to the eye, and explain them through evidence.”⁵²³ The Arabic language’s “aesthetic secrets, its wisdom, and the artistry of its making are brought out of concealment”⁵²⁴ as are the foundational traits of an Arab culture.

However, just as the sea reveals its presence and conceals its content from the spectator, the sea of language is revealed to the student of Arabic and concealed from them because of its bottomless expanse. To elucidate this point further, I suggest here that the passion for language actually resists its transformation into a pedagogical subject. Shidyāq’s passion for Arabic, “the means to all the sciences [*al-‘ulūm*] of this world and the hereafter”,⁵²⁵ signifies the turn of Arabic from a language of elsewhere,

⁵²² The use of metaphors that do not directly refer to their described subject.

⁵²³ A form of metaphor that alludes implicitly to the attribute of the described (usually praised) subject without naming it explicitly.

⁵²⁴ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 82.

⁵²⁵ Shidyāq, “*al-Dhawq*”, (On Taste), *Mukhtārat*, p. 167.

of an imagined past, to a language of the self, to a “language like no other”.⁵²⁶ Shidyāq invoked through the praise of language – of its eloquence and articulation, its *fasāḥa* and *balāgha*, and its reason and wisdom – those same aspects of language that constantly “defeated” him.

The Nahḍa’s desire to bring the subject into obedience in the private sphere and to simultaneously bring the subject into rational knowledge in the public sphere through education, science, and language forms the beginnings of the Arab national imaginary. The shift that occurs for these intellectuals from being the sovereign embodiments of language to becoming its legislators and critics⁵²⁷ occurs simultaneously with the shift in defining society. This is articulated in Bustānī’s *Khuṭba fī al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya* (1864), Treatise on Society, in which he defines it as “the natural state of human organization”⁵²⁸ that is based on fulfilling the needs and desires of its individual members. Because human needs are numerous and varied they need a collectivity to achieve them. Needs and desires increase with the level of civilization of society, from nomadic barbarism to settled civilization, wrote Bustānī.⁵²⁹ He argued that the history of society’s evolution into civilized existence, *al-tamaddun*, into a national body, is based on *natural* need for self preservation.

⁵²⁶ Shidyāq, “*al-Musīqā*”, (On Music), *Mukhtārat*, p. 182.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Shidyāq, “*al-Dhawq*”, *Mukhtārat*, p. 169.

⁵²⁸ Shidyāq, “*Fī usūl al-siyāsa*”, (On the Principles of Politics) *Mukhtārat* p. 260.

⁵²⁹ Marc Redfield, “Aesthetics, Theory, and the Profession of Literature” *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Romanticism and the Legacies of Jacques Derrida: Part 1 of 2 (Summer/Fall, 2007), pp. 228.

The story of Robinson Crusoe, as discussed in the previous chapter, illustrates the hardship of humans outside society and in nature.⁵³⁰ The very telling – because of its inherent translatability as an allegory of modernity – of Robinson’s tale (and Bustānī’s translation of it) goes to show how man cannot exist outside the city and how the city – Beirut in Bustānī’s case – is the representation of civilized society. Defining *tamaddun*, he says, “True civilization is the organization of cities and governance on the basis of justice, it guarantees for city folk (*ḥaḍar*) the pleasure of worldly bounties and with what is of the highest value for them; Republican rights. If it is in any way devoid of this condition, it would be a deceitful and lying civilization.”⁵³¹ This nationalisation of society, which is the primary engagement of the Nahḍa as an archive, is co-tangent to the re-writing of the national language and reading it as an essentially reformable subject. The reform of language and its disciplining and reordering, as practiced by Bustānī and Shidyāq, emerges simultaneously with the logic of a natural history of the nation that ultimately displaces the body of the monarch or imperial rule with the concept of the national public.

Pedagogues like Shidyāq and Bustānī institute the concept of public good whilst gate-keeping language through their endless corrections and rewritings of the language, and the culture it “mirrors”. Their privileged position as masters of the language, its grammar legislators, and etymology tracers, is in itself “an act of national-cultural politics”.⁵³² In other words, it is the moment of homogenisation of national language that the Nahḍa makes possible. They are central interlocutors of the historical moment

⁵³⁰ Shidyāq, “‘*alā al-wu‘aḍ w-al-khuṭabā’ w-al-muwaḥḥafīn wa-kuttāb al-anbā’ tablīgh al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*’” (It is the Duty of the Orators, Preachers, Employees, and Journalists to Speak the Truth and Only the Truth of Things) *Mukhtārat*, p. 226.

⁵³¹ Mārūn ‘Abūd, *Ruwwād al-nahḍa al-ḥadītha*, (The Pioneers of the Modern Nahḍa), Vol.2 (Beirut, 1946) pp. 587-606.

⁵³² al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, Vol.1, p. 260.

when society was redefined in terms of the nation, which in turn necessitated their rewriting of the national language as an essentially re-formable subject. This reforming of Arabic came hand in hand with the need to write a natural history of the Arabs, of bringing them into world history and making their national history possible.

The reform of the language presumes an immutable core that is historically transcendent, as does the writing about Arab as a distinct nationality that emerges from the space between nation and language on the stage of a “world history”. The key to defining a nation is the language that writes its history and, in that sense, the *Nahḍa* becomes the moment that binds law with language. Bustānī makes this point clear when he proclaims, “No civilized people in this world can exist if they do not have a language.” On the other hand, Shidyāq’s insistence on the “miraculous” structure of Arabic, and its wise inherent logic that transcends even its own speakers’ intellect as a divine force, carves out the terms that a culture would use to declare its own historical identity.

The Arab of past ages is made real through the archiving project of *Nahḍa*. Numerous studies proliferate towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth on the Arabs in *jāhilīyya*, the Arabs in the dawn of Islam, the Arabs in the Abassid age, and the Arabs in Andalusia. The Arabs are nationalised through *Nahḍa*; they become real simply because they had never existed as as a national imaginary. The invocation of this genus and its lexicon is more than the modern condition of living-in-the-world, as Talal Asad argues. The concept of progress, which defines *Nahḍa* temporality, becomes itself a history of decline. This idea accompanies the fracture, the in-between-ness within which the *Nahḍa* resides and makes “Arab” its mirror image.

Chapter 5

Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and the Ship of Language

Having discussed in the previous chapter the lexicographic and encyclopaedic drive of both Shidyāq and Bustānī, I want to explore here their perspectives on social habits and the nature of society. This is to elaborate on how they both – Shidyāq from exile and Bustānī from Beirut – weave supplementary discourses of the national imaginary. The former does this by using irony, criticism, and sarcasm, and the latter by using a more pedagogic logic of taxonomy and classification that presumes an individual can understand the meaning of all words and thereby all things – the mastery over all of knowledge. Their ideas are supplementary insofar as they substitute each other. As we have seen, for Bustānī, education is the substitute for nature – in his analysis of the sectarian violence he attributed it to ignorance and in his encyclopaedia he argued that knowledge is meant to further the progress of society.

For Bustānī, through his use of the metaphor of Robinson Crusoe, culture (*adab*) and cultivation supplement the deficiency of nature. This can also be seen in his treatise on the education of women, where he argues for the necessity of their progress in knowledge because they are the mothers of the nation and of the future citizenry.⁵³³

The genre of texts that Bustānī produces (the dictionary, the encyclopaedia, essays and speeches on education and society, and the *Nafīr Sūriyya* political pamphlets) all presume a truth, which language seeks to reveal. In other words, they carry a revelatory event. Whether Bustānī is revealing true knowledge, true stories (Robinson Crusoe – Pilgrim's Progress), or true lessons his writings insinuate that there is a true event to

⁵³³ al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghā'ib*, Vol.1, p. 264.

signify. Even the definition of History, for Bustānī, carries within it the meaning of Truth, as demonstrated earlier in the dissertation.

Literature and Shidyāq the tragic and solitary subject

Aḥmad Fāris, however, provides us with another testimony of his time. By writing a fictional memoir, *al-Sāq*, Shidyāq fuses his own life story with the act of writing in the very same text. Foregrounding irony and satire as tools for social criticism, Shidyāq acts like a fallen philosopher (in a literal and theological sense), whose wisdom is gained through his own tragedies. In *al-Sāq* Shidyāq takes on the name Fāryāq, a conjunction of Fāris al-Shidyāq, to signify his own split identity. Throughout the book Shidyāq alternates between a first person narrator and a third person one. He describes his own birth or that of Fāryāq as having “happened on the most cursed of days: the Scorpion’s tail was pointing to the Capricorn and the Cancer was walking along the horns of the Taurus.”⁵³⁴ *Al-Sāq* is written as a narration of Shidyāq’s embodiment of a sense of tragedy towards which he increasingly became critical. In his narration of the story of his birth Shidyāq wrote into every statement a lamenting expression, such as “Wāhin! Wāh!” and “Wīh! Wīh!”

He explained how his own parents’ “hospitality, virtue, and benevolence”,⁵³⁵ (*dhawī al-wajāha w-al-nabāha w-al-ṣalāḥ*) was greater than their means and eventually lead to their impoverishment. “Wīh! Wīh!”, Shidyāq exclaimed. He argued that this made his parents unable to furnish him with proper and costly education in Basra and Kufa, where he should have learned Arabic. They instead placed him at the local *kuttāb* in the village where Fāryāq was faced with a teacher who had only read and taught the

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

Gospels. Shidyāq again exclaims, “Oof! Oof!” He then asks, “Do you think that religion breeds a weak and corrupt tongue while *balāgha*, rhetoric, breeds atheism and blasphemy?!”⁵³⁶ As evident from such statements, Shidyāq early on in his book revealed the anxiety that underlined both his writing and his being a writer. He was attempting to straddle a language meant for the literate and the elite in society such that it may speak for an age. This language, however, was meant to carry the entire field of representation for a society that was ceasing to be similar to its past. In his writing about the Fāryāq, the two fold self, Shidyāq could only be ironic because “ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity.”⁵³⁷

Although Bustānī was more ‘encyclopaedic’ with language, Shidyāq only chose to be so when he was describing his own society and that of England and France. In *al-Sāq* and *Kashf al-mukhabba* (Unveiling the Secrets of European Civilization), Shidyāq took the position of the outsider, the observer, who was set on producing a discourse of both literary and social criticism. Shidyāq described in his writings the habits of the following: Lebanese villagers, his parents, priests and clergy men, physicians, poets, Egyptians, Turks, the English, Maltese, and the French. He described women and men, married couples, workers, English peasants, Paris, London, Cambridge, and Oxford. Shidyāq even wrote the number of prostitutes and horse drawn carriages in the streets of London.

⁵³⁶ Shidyāq, “*Fi adab al-dars w-al- naqs*”, (On the morality implicit in the self and in its pursuit of knowledge), *Mukhtārat*, pp. 183.

⁵³⁷ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 212.

His use of language and literature for the purpose of describing the world around made him commit to a series of tasks: the constant unearthing of unused archaic words, with which he named things; the crafting of neologies for things that had not previously existed within the field of representation of Arabic (thereby Arabic speaking societies) like *qīṭār*, train, *bākhira*, ship, *dabāba*, military tank, *rashāsh*, machine gun; and the defence of Arabic as the main source and signifier of civilization for the Arabs.

However, both civilization and language were a source of angst for Shidyāq. For the case of Arabic, and as previously mentioned in an earlier chapter, Shidyāq declared his sense of loss when confronted by the magnanimity of Arabic: “By conquering it, it has conquered me.”

Shidyāq expressed the double bind in which the language had brought him to “the reflective disjunction not only occurs by means of language as a privileged category, but it transfers the self out of the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language – a language that it finds in the world like one entity among others, but that remains unique in being the only entity by means of which it can differentiate itself from the world.”⁵³⁸ As such, the language divides Shidyāq into an “empirical self, immersed in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign in its attempt at differentiation, and self-definition.”⁵³⁹ In other words, language is, for Shidyāq, his tool like the hammer is to the carpenter. And it reveals to him the two-fold self, whom he calls al-Fāryāq in *al-Sāq*, and through which he realises that his empirical existence is based on the knowledge of his own mystification as a historical subject who had come into a language of times past.

⁵³⁸ Shidyāq, *Mukhtārat*, p. 224.

⁵³⁸ *Mukhtārat*, pp. 91-92.

⁵³⁹ *Mukhtārat*, pp. 104-108.

Thus, Shidyāq finds it necessary to begin *al-Sāq* by silencing the readers. Just as Bustānī begins his *Khuṭba* by an interruption and a silencing of the audience in order to signify a “repetition of another time”⁵⁴⁰ or to perform something that he has left behind Shidyāq begins his autobiography with the same gesture.⁵⁴¹ *Al-Sāq* testifies to the “ruinability of literature” in as far as it performs a separation between a time past and the present.

The autobiographical tone throughout *al-Sāq* is constantly infused with fiction. It is written in four books each composed of eleven chapters: “every chapter carries a name that signifies its content in full: like the smoke signals a fire.”⁵⁴² The reader cannot tell if Shidyāq is recounting true events or if he is creating them. Shidyāq switches between first and third person narrator positions throughout the book. In describing Fāryāq he wrote, “I have heard from many people that this thing [Fāryāq] did not exist. They say that it was either a monster or a mythical creature. And others say that it had appeared once upon a time than vanished forever from sight. One man had said that Fāryāq was transformed into a monster a few days after he was born but he did not know what form Fāryāq later on took or what happened to him. Some people claimed that he was from the *jins nasnās*, mythical creature. Others believed that he had become a *jin*”,⁵⁴³ a spectral being that lives in a world parallel to the world of humans and is nothing like it.

Shidyāq began his autobiography by a declaration of self-annihilation. He turned Fāryāq into an extinct and never-had-existed kind of ghost, a *jin*, a spectre. Fāryāq even

⁵⁴⁰ *Mukhtārat*, pp. 148-167.

⁵⁴¹ *Mukhtārat*, pp. 173-175.

⁵⁴² *Mukhtārat*, pp. 183-185.

⁵⁴³ *Mukhtārat*, pp. 187-191.

asks that God turn him into a woman, because “he had seen that the woman was much happier than the man in this world that can be called ‘the world of women.’”⁵⁴⁴ Shidyāq explained that it was due to these contradictory and multiple beliefs about the nature of Fāryāq that he had set out to explain his true nature in this book.

Al-Sāq was meant to offer a real account of the mythical Fāryāq’s life. The Fāryāq is mythical because he represented a series of tropes that were considered by Shidyāq to be critical of the existing state of things. Through the character of Fāryāq Shidyāq voiced a series of subsequent critiques of clergy men and religious figures as obstacles to knowledge and enlightenment,⁵⁴⁵ women’s behaviour and gender roles, political elites and their practices, Arabic grammarians, and popular practices. In one chapter entitled “On Snow” Shidyāq wrote:

Like snow falls during the night in order to whiten the surface of the world, my letters fall upon the paper in order to blacken it. Both the snow and its whiteness and my ink and its blackness complete each other. For the snow melts once the sun shone above it like my words disappear from the mind of the reader over time. Another commonality between the snow and my words is that after the former falls the atmosphere becomes clear and crisp and when the latter falls out of my head the mind becomes crisp and sharp as well ready to be stimulated again⁵⁴⁶

To further describe his role as a writer he said, “Like the rich elite have summer and winter homes depending on the season, the writer and ‘*alīm* takes as many homes in his own head depending on the temperament and temperature of his own words: cold, lukewarm, and hot.”⁵⁴⁷ However, Shidyāq was not always full of praise for himself.

⁵⁴⁴ *Mukhtārat*, pp. 196-198.

⁵⁴⁵ Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, Vol.1, p. 206.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Even he could not escape his own irony. Elsewhere Shidyāq exclaimed, “The pen (writing) is the worst path that a man can take for himself: it is doomed and cursed!”⁵⁴⁸

We can see that his own existence as a modern literary writer, with training as a scribe, was almost anachronistic for Shidyāq. His craft, or the only commodity that he owned, was his writing. Thus, the fictional nature of his own life narrative in *al-Sāq* is not only because of Shidyāq’s awareness of the “transitional character” of his time. This is an argument that Thomas Phillip has made in his discussion of Arabic autobiographical writing at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴⁹ Shidyāq did not find it difficult to attribute a meaning to his life for he saw it necessary to call attention to it. He does this stylistically though his interruptive exhortations in which he silences the reader.

Most importantly, Shidyāq tried to retell the story of his life as a though it were the story of a mythical creature. This mythographic imagination that Shidyāq expresses in his writing comes as a response to an alienation from reality. It is not only a response; as a literary object, Shidyāq’s writings, in fact, institute reality as a terrifying entity. At the close of his *Kashf al-mukhabba* and after describing the hustle and bustle of the streets of London, the ongoing work and labour, and the congestion and commerce, Shidyāq said,

I have described for you the endless congestion and commerce [of London]. The truth be told: the sound of the horns of the ships in this land tests your patience. I do not think any of the inhabitants of this land can think about anything besides the labour of their hands. God has destined me to write this book in this disparate spot and not in the green pastures of Italy or in the elegant Gardens of Damascus... I can almost see clouds of smoke and a bellowing dark fog rising from the spaces between my words. Every time I left my room to go out into this horrible spot [City of London] I was wary of being inflicted some evil

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ *Kanz al-raghā'ib*, Vol.1, p. 228-229.

by the crowding of both people and beasts or by the poor quality of the food served in its restaurants. Upon my return home I felt as though I had escaped an eminent threat or survived drowning and fire.⁵⁵⁰

He then briefly differentiated between the congested busy Regent Street and central London where time was dedicated for leisure and comfort. Then he concluded, “God has only created the streets of city London for work, work, and nothing but work. The religions of these people is work, they never rest from it until the work itself leaves them... there is nothing on this road but dark morose faces, a traffic of wheel-carts and carriages, racing wheels determined on their path, black walls covered in soot, and alleyways bursting with people.”⁵⁵¹

Shidyāq’s escape to his room, as though it were a refuge for his protection from the city life, is accompanied by an escape to a language written in solitude. Fāryāq in *al-Sāq* is the fictional mirror image of Shidyāq’s own self that had experienced all this estrangement from his own surroundings. The autobiographical account is present in both Shidyāq’s fiction and travel writings. Moreover, autobiography functions as a literary object; it is literature par-excellence.⁵⁵² Shidyāq perhaps uses in all his texts the methods of ridicule, sarcasm, and irony because of the estrangement from memory that he experienced while writing.

And, as Bakhtin has argued, “one ridicules in order to forget”.⁵⁵³ Shidyāq thought it was one of the ridicules of destiny that had led him to write in the strangest of times and places. Not only was writing an activity dissociated from the speed and intensity of city life, the object of writing, literature, was used by Shidyāq as a testimony of the

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, Vol.1, p. 38.

⁵⁵² *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, Vol.1, p. 42.

⁵⁵³ *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, Vol.1, p. 265.

disjunction between literature and reality. The function of writing for Shidyāq was to report on the increasingly unfamiliar reality he was witness to while instituting a rupture, a gap, between literature as an object and life as lived reality.

Al-Sāq calls attention to his life story as an Arabic writer, journalist, and thinker who was in many ways a transnational worker. Shidyāq's travels are caused by his need to sell his writing skills in return for an income. In fact, he struggled for work throughout his life and often wrote of his writing activities as a profession needed for bare survival. Accompanying the economic need behind his intellectual production was also Shidyāq's commitment to correct rhetoric and *adab* as an ethical and moral attitude. He praised the correctness of the language of merchants in France and wondered why his own countrymen lacked it: "I am baffled by their replacement of their language with the European tongue!"⁵⁵⁴ He said, "They pompously mix Arabic with Turkish with Italian using words like *yalkan*, *barmaq*, *makina* [machine], and *primo*".⁵⁵⁵ Besides feeling like a stranger in Europe, Shidyāq felt like a foreigner in his own tongue, and amongst his own people.

I argue that, by verbalising his critique of social reality around him, Shidyāq actively made his own judgments dubious. In other words, by wording the critique in literature Shidyāq signified a rupture between morality and reality, words and actions. The transformation of his critique into a literary subject signified that the critique itself was not at work within the domain of social relations itself. Shidyāq's writing expressed ideas that did not exist in the organisation of social life itself. By noticing that the working people in the streets of London had nothing to think about except their own

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs 'alā al-qāmūs*, p. 10.

⁵⁵⁵

labour, Shidyāq not only distinguished himself through his dubious thoughts but also constructed the domain of literature as one that is separate from society – one that happens in dark solitary nights, in the mind of strange isolated individuals like Shidyāq himself, and in the privacy of loneliness.

Shidyāq began *al-Sāq* by saying,

Shush! Hush! Be silent and attentive ... lend your ear, hear and listen. Know that I have written my novella in four books during burdensome and incumbent nights that have agitated me with boredom to no avail until I silenced my thoughts by purging on the face of these papers through the nozzle of a pen. And when I saw that the pen was accommodating to my fingers and my fingers accommodating to the pen I said to myself: I must follow in the path of those who have whitened their images by their blackening of paper. If they have been considered good people then so will I be.

He then belittled any possible critiques of his writing by the reader. He pleaded that those who receive his book not condemn it nor burn it by pre-empting those critiques through challenging the readers and their most common misconceptions. In three pages Shidyāq listed over a hundred words and synonyms to describe possible vices of his imagined reader. He did this after accusing the reader of being accustomed to judging literature according to how much it is able to “list hundreds of words and synonyms”. He insisted that “the reader must not underline any of the synonyms listed in my book albeit its abundance. S/he might come across fifty synonyms for one word. If s/he chooses to underline I do not give them the license to read my book or to be recipients of this gift. It must be said that I do not intend to argue that these *mutarādifāt* [usually translated as synonyms but closer in meaning here to substitutes] have the same meaning – they would have been called equals – they are synonyms only in as far as they substitute for each other.”⁵⁵⁶ Shidyāq, although indulging incessantly in listing

⁵⁵⁶ Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs ‘alā al-qāmūs*, p. 11.

words, was concerned with a more important matter: “The depiction of beauty and the beautiful”.

Again, in a circular manner, Shidyāq – as self-defeating as always – engaged with the very same logic that he sought to critique. In many ways similar to the Romanticist writers in Europe Shidyāq sought refuge in an aestheticisation of the disjunctions that he saw in society. “Beauty, taste, and eloquent language” became the tools by which he sought to reconstitute the tragedies of social life. I argue that Shidyāq’s “value judgments” were, in fact, “social values” because they were expressed in *written* language. In other words, Shidyāq’s lament of the disjunction between the individual and reality (expressed in the character of Fāryāq, and in Shidyāq the traveller) is an expression of a social value that makes it impossible to reconstitute that separation. This means that a “collective mind” is forged through literature as a synchronic body that exists in tandem with diachronic historical time. I do not want to shoe-horn Shidyāq’s novelistic writing into one single ideology. The unique gesture that differentiates Shidyāq from Bustānī and many of his contemporaries is that he sought to argue that, through his modern novelistic works and through the methods of dialogue, irony, and stylisation, understanding is not essentially a uniform concept that can be applied at all times and in all places. Shidyāq’s writings bring together multiple forms of social registers, fusing them into one horizon – his own sense of homelessness and exile.

Quixotian dreams

Shidyāq was fascinated by Don Quixote and translated sections of the story in his *al-Jawā’ib*. Don Quixote is the story of a wandering individual seeking to establish

autonomy in a world lacking God or higher purpose.⁵⁵⁷ Quixote, the modern novel, lays claim to the idea of originality becoming the precedent for Literature as a modern discipline and presents depictions of what has been called the ‘modern psyche.’ Similar to Cervantes’ claim that Quixote was the “child of my brain”, Shidyāq claimed that Fāryāq was an idea that had come to him during a dark and solitary night. However, while having written the book in such an isolated effort, the events recounted in it are constituted through countless characters that Shidyāq introduces in every chapter. Shidyāq, in many ways similar to Cervantes, tells his reader that his book says, “Don’t read books!”⁵⁵⁸

Al-Sāq is written as a text that is autonomous from society while criticising it. While Shidyāq observed that the people of London had no time to think of anything besides their functions, he himself engaged in an almost useless act of writing literature – an act that is materially useless for society. In fact, Shidyāq’s literary writing is an extravagance and, in more ways than one, self-defeating. He had claimed that knowledge is only to be found and kept in books. Recall his belief that the printing press was the best invention for mankind because it keeps safe knowledge and protects it from being lost⁵⁵⁹. How does the literature that Shidyāq writes protect any kind of knowledge?

I argue that Shidyāq’s literary writing is, in fact, a form of “aesthetic diffidence” – borrowing Adorno’s comment on *Quixote* – an act of “functionlessness”. Shidyāq even warns his reader not to attempt to learn vocabulary from his book and not to underline any statements. His book is declared as a contestation. At the beginning of *al-Sāq*

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs ‘alā al-qāmūs*, p. 46.

Shidyāq asks the priests and the literary men of his day not to burn his novel and not to ban its circulation. It is a contestation of the established power (Shidyāq's social critique against the power of the clergy and illiterate upper classes and calls for reform). It is a "contestation of what is, a contestation of language and forms of literary language, finally a contestation of itself as a power."⁵⁶⁰ Shidyāq implicitly stated that this book was the life story of a mythical being, Fāryāq, a spectral double of himself that only exists in language.

Like *Quixote*, Shidyāq becomes a sign, a letter that has escaped the pages of a book. Foucault's description of *Quixote* is befitting for Fāryāq: "He is himself like a sign, a long, thin graphism, a letter that has just escaped from the open pages of a book. His whole being is nothing but language, text, printed pages . . . he is writing itself, wandering through the world among the resemblances of things."⁵⁶¹ Shidyāq embodied the ruptures of modernity between words and their meanings, sign and signified, and self and other. In his writings he responded to the demands of words and struggled against the very literariness of literature by making the novel a personal story of an individual life. With Shidyāq, literature is an incitement for extravagance; however, it is an extravagance that is held at bay by his other moralistic and reformist writings.

For Shidyāq, *Quixote* was a comical character, a depiction of the impossibility of a hero for injustice:

It is the best Spanish book written in the comical genre, a book of the adventures of *Don Quixote*. The meaning of *Don* in Spanish is Mr. and *Quixote* is a created name that he had taken for himself after thinking for eight days. Then he added it to the name of the province in which he was born, *La Mancha*... I think the origin of the word *Quixote* is from the

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ al-Shidyāq, *al-Jāsūs 'alā al-qāmūs*, Introduction, p. 4.

Arabic *quwwa al-sāda* [the power of the nobles]. I believe so because many have claimed that the book is originally written by the Arab Ḥāmid Bin-al-Anjalī. ... The topic of the book is that the aforementioned *Don* was a brave knight, whether real or imaginary, he combated every threat, fought against every evil, and took all the risks necessary in order to gain compliments and praise.⁵⁶²

Shidyāq, like *Quixote*, had wanted to join the legions of great Arab writers without copying them. “I say to the reader who might claim that my phrases are not eloquent i.e. not embellished with *tajnīs*⁵⁶³, *tarsī*⁵⁶⁴, *istiʿārāt*⁵⁶⁵, and *kināyat*⁵⁶⁶ that I have written this book without having in mind al-Taftāzānī, al-Sakākī, al-Āmidī, al-Wāhidī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Buṣṭī, al-Muʿtaz, Ibn al-Nabīh, and Ibn Nabāta. Rather, all my thoughts were only immersed in the description of beauty, *al-jamāl*.”⁵⁶⁷ He continued, “I hope that the description of bare beauty is favored without the embellishments as a beautiful woman is appreciated without her ornaments and jewels: that is why she is called *ghāniyya*.” This beauty that Shidyāq sought to represent is nothing other than the beauty of irony, criticism, and satire from which no one was safeguarded.

Organic decadence and subjectivity: Taste and eloquence

Shidyāq's believed that there was a decline in eloquence because of the focus on the ornamentation and embellishment of language. The *udabāʾ*, in his day and time, had preferred form to content in their language. In an article entitled *al-Dhawq* (Taste),

⁵⁶² In the introductions of *Sirr al-layāl fī al-qalb wa-al-ibdāl*, *al-Sāq*, and *al-Jāsūs ʿalā al-qāmūs* Shidyāq tells the reader that he has written his respective books in the solitude of the night.

⁵⁶³ Metathesis, *qalb*, is the transposition of sounds or letters in a word, in case, e.g., you wish to make fun or even to hide identity and substitution, *ibdāl*, is similar to *qalb* but concerns phonemes, e.g. bat=cat.

⁵⁶⁴ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 131.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 132.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 133.

Shidyāq considered taste as a measure for excellence in literary writing in both the prose and poetry genres. “Having taste in language is like having taste for food, or gustation: they are both results of habit and custom, *ulfa w-al- ‘ āda*.”⁵⁶⁸ For him, taste was a predilection and had nothing to do with knowledge. Even habit for Shidyāq was considered a fifth sense.⁵⁶⁹ Shidyāq argued that “the poet who writes what is considered to be tasteless could easily be the most knowledgeable man amongst the people of his time and of the Arabic tongue. His distasteful language is thus not a result of ignorance; it is merely a lack of taste.”⁵⁷⁰ Moreover, “taste changes in accordance to events and situations. The young and inexperienced, for instance, enjoy exaggeration, debauchery, and verbosity while the elderly despise these traits and avoid corrupt and faulty language. From this we can conclude: there is no one way to define taste because it is based on habit and custom”⁵⁷¹. However, for Shidyāq you can get closer to taste by “*salāmat al-ṭab ‘ wa-ṣafā ‘ al-sajīya*”, a good nature and clear intention. “The individual must be raised and given guidance because he is naturally inclined towards evil and vice”, said Shidyāq.⁵⁷² Shidyāq obviously believed in adaptation as a trait of both humans and their language.

Thus, taste is an attribute that lies on the fine line between nature and culture. Indeed, I argue that the notion of taste, *al-dhawq*, makes possible the dichotomy or separation of nature from culture. By arguing that taste is a force of habit and that habit is like a fifth sense Shidyāq is, in fact, arguing that there is a natural element in the individual

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ I refer here to the analysis provided in Paul de Man’s essay on Baudelaire – “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight* and Jean Starobinski’s “Ironie et melancholy: Gozzi, Hoffman, and Kierkegaard”, in *Estratto da Sensibilita e Raziobalita nel Settecento* (Florence, 1967).

⁵⁷¹ Stathis Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think*, p. 13.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

on which society is meant to work. If taste is a natural faculty then it is pre-historic, pre-linguistic, pre-societal. Shidyāq joins other Enlightenment writers – like Rousseau and Condillac – in their requirement for an ultimately natural realm with which to compare society. This romanticist move on behalf of Shidyāq is, in fact, central to his reformist politics. His critique and satire remain to be directed at an optimistic view of progress and a search for beauty propelled by the desire for “communication without signs [Shidyāq’s reference to the ancients, the ‘embellishments’ and ‘ornaments’], technological progress without technicity [his complaint about Europe as being guided by the ‘religion of work’ while praising it], and politics without mediation [his notion of a reformed citizenry].”⁵⁷³

Beauty was discussed by Shidyāq through satire; it is as though he sought to shame society into reform. In the article *On the Idea That the Human-being is the Most Perfect and Dignified of all Creatures*, Shidyāq embarked on a ruthless critique of the manners of humankind. He wrote,

It is this human who is the source of all civilization, of all art and creation, and who does what the wolves would not do to their own whelps. For he desires to drink the world dry and swallow it all to its end... he who refuses to share with his brother even a little bit of what he has! I have often thought of this false civilization [*al-tamaddun al-bāṭil*] that had not been the state of the ancients and I have found that it is the reason for: evil and animosity; for immersion in sadness and burden; for consumption and over-expenditure; for backstabbing and treason; for competition, diffidence, and wars. It burdens the self with endless expenses and imminent threats.⁵⁷⁴

Thus, Shidyāq’s interest in beauty was based in his realisation that it was always already lost, at least it was so in his own day and time. It seems that for Shidyāq the only beauty he could trust – given his remarks concerning external and internal *adab* –

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

is the well regulated body of language itself. In other words, the Arabic language (likened to a woman) is depicted in his works as an aesthetic subject because everything else was increasingly appearing to be flawed.

Shidyāq, like many of his contemporaries, found himself mastering a language of another time. The technological and scientific advancements that constituted the power of European modernity, along with the diminishing power of local social forms of representation (represented in the lively debates on reform in the nineteenth century Ottoman empire), economic regression, and ‘moral decadence’, were all issues that Shidyāq wrote and thought about. In the article “*Tamaddun*” (Civilization or Modernity), Shidyāq wrote,

There is no doubt that the word *tamaddun* is derived from *madina* (city), and *madina* is derived from *madan* (to dwell) which means to settle or to dwell – although the author of *al-Qāmūs* (Fairūzābādī) was confused, deriving it from *dan* at times and in others from *madan*. Whichever way it is, the matter remains that for the *Ifranja* (European) languages the definition of *tamaddun* is derived from the word *madina* (city). For them [the Europeans] the word pertains to the presence of all the physical and mental necessities for the city dwellers. For instance, when they speak of a civilized man they refer to what we would call a cultured (*muta’addib*), intelligent, and masterful man. Although this word is very popular amongst the Europeans and constantly appears on in all their words and out of all their pens it is still ambiguous and unclear. For, every man thinks that civilization exists because of the existence of his own craft. If, for example, a photographer visited a country where he could not find a practitioner of his craft, he would deem it as uncivilized, and so will the singer and the dancer and many others. The opposite of *tamaddun* for them is *hamajiyya* (savagery), and this is a state that is devoid of order and organization. The former condition is for them a characteristic of all the peoples of Europe. And the latter condition they impose on all other people. I find myself wondering, however: how could enforcing a certain kind of dress and food on people be considered civilized? And how is forcing people to do what is contrary to their own desire considered a civilized act? You will read in this *Jawā’ib* what has been imposed on the Muslims and Jews of Algeria and you will read about the way the people of Warsaw have been forced to dress. The French and the English would themselves judge that these as uncivilized acts... in general, I can see on the face of this age that although it has been adorned with countless sciences and inventions the expression of

savagery persists in those civilized nations given what befalls them of acts of murder, assassination, theft, abduction, wars, and deviance. What is more surprising, however, is that our lands are free from these vices and evils – although we are seen by the Europeans as devoid of any potential for civilization.

With regards to the claims that civilization is the source of these evils and that these evils are contrary to civilization: if we were as they claim uncivilized then we would have no evils amongst us; if however, we were civilized then we would have evils. Albeit, we have predators entrapping us in evil in order to say we had caused it. Yet, this blessed city, Istanbul, has embraced all kinds of mankind. However it is lamented for its vices, we are not to blame, for they have probably occurred because of bad governance and neglect.⁵⁷⁵

Shidyāq then alluded to the falsity of an event reported in the *Akḥbār* journal – an Algerian journal belonging to the government according to him – concerning the forcing of Jews to prostrate. He wondered why journals, like *al-Akḥbār* and *al-Jinān*, failed in their original mission to reform and better society. Needless to say, Shidyāq was here writing in defence of the Ottoman Porte. The practical purpose behind his criticism of the meaning of civilization was to undermine foreign contestation of the practices of the Ottoman government and secure, for his own journal, the blessings of the Porte. Shidyāq had practiced this partisan writing as a strategy to secure for himself employment and income throughout his life: in Tunis with Khayr al-Dīn Bey; in England when he wrote panegyric poems for the Queen; in the essays in which he represented the French as being a superior civilization to the English; when he wrote a poem for Siddiq Hasan Khan and the Berghum of Bhopal who were the patrons of his *Jasūs*; and at various other times in his writings. Saying this, however, does not undermine the authenticity or relevance of these ideas for Shidyāq himself. It is

⁵⁷⁵ Antūnīus Shiblī (ed.), *al-Shidyāq wa-al-Yāzījī: munāqasha ʿilmiyya abadiyya* (1871), (Maṭbaʿa al-mursaliin: Lebanon, 1950) p. 62-66. Shidyāq wrote an article on May 10, 1871 in *al-Jawāʿib* journal in which he praised and lamented the loss of Nāṣif al-Yāzījī. Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī wrote the first retaliation on July 15, 1871, in Bustānī's *al-Jinān*. The debate ensued for over a year. Shidyāq even attacked Bustānī in article written in July of the same year in *al-Jawāʿib* as well. In it, Shidyāq mocked Bustānī's language usage. This article is as well included in Shiblī's book.

important to remember that, as a writer, Shidyāq had to travel across a transnational economy in order to secure his livelihood. In *al-Sāq* he expressed time and again his strife in making ends meet. The more general thrust of Shidyāq's critique of civilization is that civilization is corruptible and corrupting.

Shidyāq's writings, I argue, are not caused by a social reality only; they also express the contradictory elements of modern civilization that had impinged on his material existence. After all, he could only secure for himself a living through his mastery of the Arabic language, a language of the past and one that he thought was prone to the danger of decay and corruption. Thus, his critique is an expression of the ideological contradictions that exist within his social reality. Shidyāq was able to transcend the conflicted and unstable reality within which he found himself because he was, in fact, located within it.

Many scholars, like 'Azīz al-'Aẓma and Fawaz Trabulsi have found Shidyāq to be uniquely different from other writers during his time and have regarded him as an *avant gardist*. I argue that this difference results specifically because Shidyāq was very much rooted in his own time. In other words, he strikes us as different in the present because he had been true to his own time in the past. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Shidyāq's future is not our present. His writings do not establish the conceptual limits of our understanding of the past; rather, they demonstrate the unfolding of strictly modernist ideologies concerning society and power. Shidyāq's romantic dreams of changing the world through writing and the printing press are characteristic of nineteenth-century conservative approaches to history.

In *The Principles of Politics*, Shidyāq mocked his own calls for political reform or what he labelled as "*ta' dīl al-siyāsa*": "If I had been an *imām* or a *za'īm* (leader) or if I

had had any voice in the senate I could have allowed myself to wish these wishes (of reform). Alas, I am a mere rhetorician in both my poetry and prose. How could I aspire to reform the people of Istanbul whilst they do not read my words?”⁵⁷⁶ Shidyāq’s depiction of the malaise of civilization was, in fact, rooted in his belief that “civilization ought to increase the happiness and comfort of the individual and better his knowledge, morality, and ethics (*akhlāq*). Yet the reality is contrary to this idea, for it has only increased his turmoil, burdens, and sadness.”⁵⁷⁷

The rising consumerism in society was one of the notions that distressed Shidyāq the most. He wondered, “Why is it that civilization ordains that one has to own merchandise from England, pottery from China, carpets from Persia, and leather from Morocco etc. ... until one’s home becomes an exhibition of all that exists in the world. Greed is rampant in the people of Istanbul.”⁵⁷⁸ Interestingly, Shidyāq attributed this greed to the lack of manufacture and industry in the Ottoman Empire itself. “We should not import all the merchandise of England. We must either: protect and develop our industries, then relish in their bounty or we should refrain from importing the products of Europe and reduce it to the utmost necessary; for it is impossible for the people of one nation – or even of a whole empire – to manufacture everything that other nations have.”⁵⁷⁹ Shidyāq argued that, for instance, it was acceptable to import metals and coal for instance, but not cheese, wax and pickles.

Shidyāq’s suggested solutions for change can be summarised in an aesthetic project of beautification. His call for contentment, refinement of taste, and parsimony (discussed

⁵⁷⁶ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 129.

⁵⁷⁷ Shidyāq, *Al-jasus*, p. 4.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

previously in Chapter 4) in sexual relations and home economics is based on a conservative view of society rather than *avant gardism*, contrary to what authors have labelled Shidyāq.⁵⁸⁰ His critique of the notion of civilization, though cognisant of the power relations between East and West, translates into a call for a return to moral principles and traditional ways. It is conservative insofar as it proposes a return to something previous to civilization. By attempting to turn the clock around, Shidyāq acted very much like a nineteenth-century clock manufacturer he imagined a world that was no longer possible.

Shidyāq observed that there was a moral decadence that accompanied modernity, whether in elite circles of *adab*, social practices, or politics.

The problem is that every one of us believes that the world has been created for their personal advantage. The basis of uprightness and rationality [*al-huda w-al-rushd*] is the knowledge of the self. For, those who do not know themselves do not know anything of this world. The current situation is that any individual who is imperfect blames his own vices on others and even on the state, *al-dawla*. The principle of civilization dictates that it ought to increase the comfort, knowledge, *adab*, and happiness of mankind. It ought to better his ethics and his social life and not increase his toil, augment his burdens, and intensify his sadness.⁵⁸¹

Adab, for Shidyāq, is the “true capital, *ra ’s māl*, of those who have no supporting means for their existence.”⁵⁸² In one of his articles in *al-Jawā ’ib*, he quoted a popular saying, “It is said that there is no value for lineage and kinship over *adab*.”⁵⁸³ He argued that the worth of a wo/man is to be found within him/her and not in the objects that s/he amasses. This inner worth for the individual is *adab*. The titles of Shidyāq’s

⁵⁸⁰ Anṭunūs Shiblī (ed.), *al-Shidyāq wa-al-Yāzījī: munāqasha ’ilmiyya abadiyya* (1871), p. 151.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Anṭunūs Shiblī (ed.), *al-Shidyāq wa-al-Yāzījī: munāqasha ’ilmiyya abadiyya* (1871), p. 149.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

social commentaries in *al-Jawā'ib* speak for his commitment to reform as a commitment to *adab*: *Fī al-Tamaddun* (On Civilization);⁵⁸⁴ *fī al-khilāl wa-fī tartīb al-mudun* (On the Lack of Urban Organization);⁵⁸⁵ *Fī uṣūl al-siyāsa* (On the Principles of Politics);⁵⁸⁶ *Fī al-ʿamal w-al-baṭāla* (On Work and Unemployment);⁵⁸⁷ *Fī adab al-dars w-l-naḥs* (On the difference of *Adab* Morality Acquired from Education and from that acquired through the cultivation of the Soul);⁵⁸⁸ *Fī mūjib al-tanzīmāt* (On the Need of and description of the *Tanzīmāt*);⁵⁸⁹ *Fī mithāl al-ʿalīm al-ladhī yaqṣidu bi-ʿilmihi nafʿa nafsahu wa-dārī ghayrihi* (On the Example of the *ʿalīm* [the intellectual or the man of letters] Who Uses His Knowledge for His Own Self Interest and Not for the Benefit of Others).⁵⁹⁰

These articles are written in an aphoristic style and are abundant with generalisations and terse statements derived from Shidyāq's own observations of society. His proposed solution of returning to good *adab* is quite obscure. By unpacking this metaphor here, I wish to expose the inherent contradictions within Shidyāq's proposition for society. I argue that by focusing on decadence of *adab*, Shidyāq transposed a natural metaphor onto human life. The immanent struggle between old ways and new ones during the nineteenth century was the pretext for cultural historicism and identitarian politics.

⁵⁸⁴ Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 583.

⁵⁸⁷ Perhaps one of the earlier instances of transliteration in the nineteenth century, Shidyāq here inserts an Arabic transliteration (not translation) of the verse.

⁵⁸⁸ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 584.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

In an article written as a rebuttal to Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī and Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Shidyāq attacked: “They have limited the definition of progress, prosperity, goodness-righteousness-excellence? *Al-faḍl* in the perfection of the language [tongue] and the mastery of knowledge and I believe that this is wrong and entirely false. Those who believe in this proposition have miscalculated and are rash.”⁵⁹¹ He then mocks their partisan writings for the nation and their claim that “the love of the nation is an act of faith.” According to Shidyāq, writers like Bustānī and Yāzījī, were not proper ‘*ulamā*’: “Not anyone who can write an article in a journal or a verse of poetry is an ‘*alīm*.”⁵⁹² He argued that those who spoke of the “love of the nation as an act of faith” and who described the lands, pastures, hills, and mountains of the nation claim that the present state of their nation is rotten because of a “corrupt age”. Shidyāq asked, “What does “a corrupt age even mean? Has not time been corrupt since the creation of humankind and are not histories a witness to that?”⁵⁹³ Shidyāq continued, “If you are deluded because you know the subject from the predicate and are conceited because you can say bonjour know that all you can know is what you know already and all you will understand is what you understand already. What are you so proud of, who do you seek to make despicable, why do you bear your teeth threateningly and who do you think you are?”⁵⁹⁴

Besides Shidyāq’s scathing tongue, the above eruption of anger reveals his true perception of society and history; both have been corrupted since time eternal.

Following these statements, Shidyāq explained that it was ironic that those who most

⁵⁹¹ Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 590.

⁵⁹² Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 81.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Bustānī, *Khuṭba fī -ta ‘līm al-nisā’* p. 1.

praised their nation were the ones to mostly list its vices and those of its people.

Shidyāq argued that it was rather their role as true partisans “to commend the good habits of their countrymen and urge them to progress and encourage them to attain perfection”.⁵⁹⁵ He contended that “any mention of the lacks or faults of one’s own countrymen should be meant as an advice and not a condemnation.”⁵⁹⁶

Shidyāq obviously felt that Bustānī and Yāzījī’s writings about society were not as well-intentioned as his own. He frequently wrote in praise of the Tanzīmāt and other reforms by the Ottoman Porte.⁵⁹⁷ He also proposed that the function of journalistic writing was the reform of society itself. Shidyāq thought that reform had to be subjective. “In Europe there are groups of people who engage in reform and the issues of people through journals, here people seem to be blind to everything, responsibility is limited to the state only, *al-dawla*. “It is as though they expect of the state to be like a mother to a newborn child. They only want to suckle at its bosom and do nothing more. What is the source of this impotence of the subjects, *al-ra‘īya*, what is the reason for this relationship of full dependence?”⁵⁹⁸

Hence, Shidyāq depicted the possibility of subjective existence outside the objective reality surrounding an individual. He could only do this because he himself inhabited a liminal space. He was a hybrid intellectual originally trained as a scribe who travelled the world and spent his years in exile from home. Although Shidyāq emphasised personal cultivation, discipline, education, correctness, and ethical uprightness, he also blamed historical errors for the backward state of the Ottoman Empire. Shidyāq even blamed the Abbasid and Umayyad Arabs for not having been as diligent and innovative

⁵⁹⁵ Al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghā’ib*, Vol.1, p. 112.

⁵⁹⁶ Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*.

⁵⁹⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 8.

as the Chinese for instance. Shidyāq asked, “Why had Ibn Baṭūṭa not informed his Arab readers of the inventions of the Chinese people such as printing and gunpowder?”⁵⁹⁹ He lamented, “If the Abbasids had imported the craft of printing earlier, we would have been protected from the digressions and mistakes of the scribes.”⁶⁰⁰

Chasing after mistakes: Language as a field of contestation

Shidyāq blamed the scribes and Arab lexicographers for the regression that had befallen the Arabic language. This is most clearly evident in Shidyāq’s description of the language as an organic lively body, “*al-lughat kā ‘inun ḥayy*”, that grows without the constant need for *iṣlāḥ*. Shidyāq’s organic analogy is similar to Bustānī’s depiction of civilization as a “tree” (in Pamphlet Eleven of the *Nafīr Sūriyya* discussed in Chapter 3). The organic metaphor, for Bustānī, was meant to denote that every civilization is a branch of the tree of human civilization. His encyclopaedia, as discussed previously, carried within it the limits of knowledge and the categories through which knowledge exists. For Shidyāq, the language itself is an encyclopaedia that grows as a living being would but it would only grow on paper. “It seems that the mistake of those who first wrote down the language was that they were only interested in collecting words, *alfāz*, whereas; collecting should have been premised on ordering, organisation, and placing every word in its place.”⁶⁰¹

Shidyāq also linked language to nature. “Language is the story of sounds, *al-lugha ḥikāyat ṣawt*.”⁶⁰² Elsewhere he argued, “The ancient lexicographers had made the mistake of advancing the metaphorical meanings of words, *al-majāzī*, over the real meanings, *al-ḥaqīqī*, pertaining to their real positing, *aṣl waḍ ‘iḥa*.”⁶⁰³ From the many examples that Shidyāq offers is the word “*kataba*” written. He argued that although the

word *kataba* had come to mean “to write”, it originally pertained to the making of a leather bind for a water skin bottle and meant an “act of bringing together and binding. Thus, the meaning of *kataba* for the Arabs comes from the water skin bottle, because the Arabs needed to make the skin bottle to drink from before they needed to write.”⁶⁰⁴

Shidyāq addressed his reader saying, “I you knew how closely related sounds or names and meanings were you would be astounded.”⁶⁰⁵ It would be interesting to compare this idea to the Saussurean notion of the arbitrariness of the sign. The examples of the fusion of meaning and sound that Shidyāq offers in his *Jāsūs* and *Sirr al-layāl* are abundant. His obsession with the origins of the definition of words straddles a fine line between considering language as determined by history, and language as determined by nature.

The conflicts and incommensurabilities he finds in the works of Arabic lexicographers and linguists are based on four reasons: 1) “The lexicographers have sharp wits that lead them to stray down many paths in their search for the meanings of words”; 2) “The competition and contestation amongst each other has turned them into parties for which each is a supporter”; 3) “They have mostly premised their evidence for the meanings of words on poetry. And it is known that poets often used words that they and their people only knew the meanings of. Maybe the lexicographers were impressed by the words that they themselves did not understand”; 4) “The absence of dots on the letters, *al-a ‘jam*, when the written Arabic language was not properly dotted, and it remains to our day prone to digressions and mistakes.”⁶⁰⁶ Shidyāq added, “The controversies that exist between the lexicographers also exist with the grammarians, *al-naḥwīyīn*, and are even more accentuated because the latter have to deal with both words and meanings!”⁶⁰⁷

In the *Spy on the Dictionary*, Shidyāq lists endless examples of incommensurability between Arabic lexicographers across the centuries to show “that the Arabic tongue, *al lisān*, has been preserved in writing although it has been corrupted in spoken language.”⁶⁰⁸ This could be why Shidyāq wrote during “the dark solitary nights.”⁶⁰⁹ Because the night is where the phonetic sign vanishes into silence and writing becomes the only language. Shidyāq’s encyclopaedic knowledge of Arabic, like Bustānī’s encyclopaedic model of knowledge, testifies to an age that is fixated on the improvement of communication channels in a world that is falling into discontinuity. The need for speed, the chasing down of advances, and the chasing down of mistakes are all symptomatic of an economy of both knowledge and material effects that was falling into place in the second half of the nineteenth century – an ‘economy of knowledge’ that bred the encyclopaedic and lexicographic works of both Bustānī and Shidyāq.

Amidst the acceleration of time and speed, signified by the journalistic writing that they both engaged in, the alphabet or the letters of the language emerged as an only constant. The alphabetical ordering of Bustānī’s *Muḥīt* and *Dā’irat* concealed internal disarray, as I argued in the previous chapter. The cross referencing, the “books of the Arabs” and other tropes, revealed that the Encyclopaedia conceals a discontinuity rather than a continuity in its content. Shidyāq’s metathesis⁶¹⁰ and substitutions, *al-qalb wa-al-ibdāl*, of letters in words, similarly reveals that the continuity of language is propelled through its discontinuities.

Shidyāq expresses a modern urge for appropriation. His use of metaphor, metathesis, and substitutions is meant to demonstrate to the reader how the Arabic language works. Similar to Bustānī, he presumes a reader that has a rational capacity to organise and

understand information. However, the more Shidyāq engaged with the written language sources, the more he noticed how far he is from an authentic Arabic, a pure language that has not truly survived the vagrancies of time. In the work of lexicographers, Shidyāq noted a form of decadence, an organic metaphor of corruption.

The decadence that Shidyāq notes in language is also one that he notes in social life. Shidyāq attributes decadence that is characteristic of natural life to culture. The trope of decadence for Shidyāq was present in his discussion of *adab*, language, gender roles, marriage, social and cultural practices, and civilization. Shidyāq's interest in the metaphor of natural history is also evident in his translation of Carl Linnaeus's animal taxonomy – with additions from Muḥammad al-Ḍumayrī. He obsesses about mistakes and digressions to the extent that he sought out, in his depiction of the state of society in Malta, in England, in Istanbul, and in Mount Lebanon, mostly what he considered vices and wrong ways. His satirical attitude is compelled by a longing for a better society in which he could find himself at home.

In a conversation in *al-Sāq* between Fāryāq and his Arabic teacher and grammarian, *naḥwī*, the teacher explains to the confused Fāryāq how the science and art of *naḥw* had evolved across the ages. “Many spent their lives in perfecting this art but have died to no avail, each leaving to their successor unfinished knowledge open to critique. ... Thus, the gates of criticism have been kept open.”⁶¹¹ The teacher then lists the many different kinds of metaphors in the Arabic language; the listing evolves into a series of rhyming words that he creates from roots that have meanings attached to eating, or tasting, herbs, foods, and plants. He then says, “Every book has to include these entire antitheses [*aṭbāq*].”⁶¹² Diligent in his eloquence as ever, Shidyāq uses *ṭabaq* through his use of the word *aṭbāq*, which simultaneously means plates and antitheses. Shidyāq

continues to play on words when the teacher tells Fāryāq how the various Arab *nuḥāt* had died: “al-Fara ‘ ” died with a burden on his heart concerning the word *ḥattā*. Sibaway died without uncovering the secrets of the accentuations of *hamza*. Al-Kasā ‘ ī died without revealing all there is from the *fā ‘ ...*”, and here Shidyāq again lists ten different functions for the article *fā ‘* in Arabic, ending with another word, switching where he calls the “connecting *fā ‘*”, *al-fā ‘ al-rābiʿa*, a zipper, *ḥazāzāt*.⁶¹³

The teacher likens every proposition or article to a sickness that attacks the body of the *naḥwī* (Sībawayh, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Asmaʿiy) in specific organs: the heart, the liver, the head, and the neck. Shidyāq, speaking in the first person, concludes, “If a student pursued one of these articles he would have to give up all other pursuits and dedicate all his life to collecting all that has been written and said about them.”⁶¹⁴ Shidyāq presented the discussion between the student and teacher to deduce at the end of the story that the fixation on *naḥw*, correctness, and rhetoric is

the reason for the lack of publications and original works in our age. By simply writing a book one places himself amidst sheer criticism and refutation of his language with disregard to the content and meaning in it. He can only escape this if he embellishes and ornaments his text with all the beautifying techniques and pays intricate attention to the minutest details. It is similar to when a wise man enters a *majils* dressed in rags: no one pays attention to his intrinsic *adab*. People only pay attention to outer appearances.⁶¹⁵

The teacher sarcastically concludes, “Thank the lord for the lack of authors in this day and time, if they had been many, conflict and hatred would profuse amongst them. Thus, people have given up writing and taken up reciting simple short stanzas. As for poetry in this age: it is only written for the sake of petty praise and the description of women.”⁶¹⁶

The student then challenged the teacher with regards to the accents of the subject and predicate, *al-fa 'il w-al-maf ' ūl*, alluding to the act of defecation to illustrate an argument. Then the teacher reprimands him, “You ought to be disciplined and well-mannered in the *majlis* of learning contrary to being in the *majlis* of rule and politics.”⁶¹⁷ Shidyāq often makes comparisons between the world of literature and morality-eloquence, *adab*, and the world of politics. Using irony and metaphor he recreated the terms of the mastery of language as he tried to resist it. The conversation between the teacher and student, which Shidyāq stages, depicts the arenas of contestation within the fields of language and juxtaposes them with political contestation.

The distinction that the teacher made between the realm of *adab* and the realm of politics represents a formal relationship that Shidyāq constructs in his works between eloquence and morality. As a man of letters himself, Shidyāq spent much of his time writing for various patrons: the Bey of Tunis, the Berghum of Bhopal, the Ottoman Sultan, the missionaries, and the upper class for whom he originally worked as a scribe. He warns of the threat of Arabic language suffering the fate of Latin, yet in his writings he denotes a space for language that is largely socio-political in nature. What is at stake in making mistakes and lacking eloquence is the future of the Arabic-speaking nations and their unique language.

Shidyāq's hyperbolic tricks with language are employed by him to reveal a sense of “*folie lucide*”, as though they are a cure for his sense of self alienation and melancholy.⁶¹⁸ By chasing down “mistakes” in language in his *Jasūs*, and constantly using a multiplicity of synonyms at every turn in his text, Shidyāq was, in more ways than one, beingI “ironical”. This irony that manifests in *al-Sāq* and in most of his other

writings is an irony that attempts to speak of human matters as though they were historical, while recognising that it has become impossible for things to be historical as such.

Literature, for Shidyāq, was a performative space in which he interrogated the social imaginary. “The particularity of the literary text embodies its theoretical work as it grips the sense of different readers in time and space, producing an indefinite plurality of responses while retaining its own social-imaginary intact.”⁶¹⁹ By claiming that the literary text weaves its own social imaginary, Gourgouris argues that even the fictional aspects of literature reside at the core of the real social imaginary of society. “Thus what produces for the subject [in society] the sense that s/he is real (a real person in the real world) is an imaginary that is as “fictional” – in the sense of being constructed by irreducible social-historical parameters – and thus as real as the world of the literary text.”⁶²⁰ Thus, Fāryāq – a composite name from Fāris and Shidyāq – speaks to this “radical reality of social-imaginary significations”.⁶²¹ Literature, or the work of language, becomes a passage, a traversal, between the subject’s constituted self and the world. “This transversal produces a tentative and ephemeral opening that allows a sort of ‘cognitive appropriation’ of the social imaginary dimension... it simultaneously creates a new self-recognition and self-alteration.”⁶²² From here we can see Shidyāq’s sense of irony, as emanating from his conception of history as an organic unfolding. Shidyāq wrote fiction using metaphor, irony, ethnography, and autobiography because he realised that history itself was not fiction and that books were the only primary source of knowledge to be trusted. In an increasingly changing world during the nineteenth century, Shidyāq sought in literature “a refuge in the darkest of nights” and a companion in his quest for *ta’ dīb al-naḥs* in the face of increasing abjection.

In attempting to escape the lexicographic and encyclopaedic pedagogic genre of fixing and ordering, in which Bustānī invested his life, Shidyāq engaged in the chasing down of mistakes in Arabic lexicons and journalistic writing. He engaged in a long journalistic feud with Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī and Buṭrus al-Bustānī over what he saw as the wrong use of certain words. In the year 1871 all the *al-Jawā'ib* and *al-Jinān* editions had articles written by Shidyāq and Yāzījī in retaliation to one another. The debate was initiated by Shidyāq's inflammatory tone in his eulogy of Ibrāhīm's father, Nāṣif al-Yāzījī.⁶²³ In the eulogy, Shidyāq levelled a series of criticisms of Nāṣif's wrong use of Arabic words and grammar before he proceeded to write a touching panegyric poem for the deceased. Shidyāq mentioned a couple of short poems that he and Nāṣif had exchanged by mail while he was in Malta and Istanbul. One poem was, according to Shidyāq, a "bad use of *jinās*". He wondered, in the eulogy, why it is that Nāṣif had not mentioned his name in relation to the poems when they were first published. He then listed a couple of mistakes in the use of certain words, such as *fiḥtal* (an age before the creation of human beings), *marābiḍ* (goat houses), and *marābiṭ* (stables). Shidyāq includes in his article a poem that Nāṣif had written in praise of *al-Jawā'ib* journal. In conclusion, he wrote a poem for Nāṣif, finally praising him after all the criticism.

If one carefully reads the last stanza in Nāṣif's poem of praise to Shidyāq ("He [Shidyāq] is today content in the King's palace while his departure has left a sorrowful longing in the land of Lebanon", we notice an embedded lament that might have provoked Shidyāq's anger. In the exchange with Ibrāhīm, who rushed to defend his father's language skills and reputation, a tension is noticed between the local, where Yāzījī and Bustānī lived (*bilād al-shām*), and the centre (Istanbul), where Aḥmad Fāris lived. What is striking, besides the fact that the linguistic debate represents a political

difference between the local intellectual and the one in exile, is that, for both parties of the debate, language figured as being above all considerations. Shidyāq had placed forefront the need for correctness of the language with disregard for the memory of the deceased Nāṣif, and Ibrāhīm engaged with the debate from the perspective of language as well, while seemingly responding in defence of his father. To further denote this issue, it is worth mentioning that Shidyāq elsewhere in his *Sāq* wrote that “*al-naḥw khālīdun k-al-naḥs*”,⁶²⁴ the Arabic language and its *naḥw* are eternal like the soul.

In the introduction to *Jasūs*, Shidyāq argued that no written text had survived mistakes, *al-taṣḥīf*. “For instance it was said that the Prophet was washing the testicles of his donkey (*yaghṣul khuṣya himārihi*) while the true statement was: he was washing his coal embers (*yaghṣul hasa jamrihi*).”⁶²⁵ Shidyāq argued that

no one has survived the mistakes and deviations in meanings not even the *imams* and ‘*ulamā*’ of language like the Imams of Basra such as al-Khalīl bin Aḥmad, Abī ‘Amru bin al-‘Alā’, or those of Kufa. ... That is because the Arabic language is like a sea of endless dimensions and with no horizon, and because the vowels are similar in their positing. They are like the etchings meant for ornamentation: like the engravings on a coin. That is why I thought of not writing this book for long: because its topic is that of language. A topic from which one: can attain no treasures and riches; on whose paths one will limp and beg to reach their goal. ... nothing has encouraged me to write this book except my urge to promote the people of Arabic, *ahl al-‘arabiyya*, to love their divine language and languish in its bright courts. And my wish to encourage the people of wisdom to write a book in this language that will be devoid of any mistake and on which the pupil may rely without hesitation. So I saw that all the books on the language are generally disorganized especially the most consulted one these days: *al-Qāmūs*. Its author [Fairūzābādī] relied on summarization to the extent that his book became a collection of mysteries and puzzles.⁶²⁶

Shidyāq took on the responsibility of restituting the puzzles and incoherencies in the language lexicon with the same impulse that he had for proposing reforms for society. In humorous, as well as deeply serious, moments Shidyāq depicted a national fantasy as

fundamental to the everyday life of people and their Arabic language. The need to regulate language is like the unconscious need to regulate social practices. Although he criticised Bustānī and Yāzījī's patriotism, he was no less a patriot himself for he believed that those who spoke the same language were bound together and inhabited the symbolic space of the nation. We can imagine Shidyāq frantically looking through dictionaries and lexicons of Arabic – all the ones he could get his hands on – in order to salvage what had remained untouched by the “hurricane of mistakes and deviations.”⁶²⁷ Language prefigures, for Shidyāq, as a space for the contestation of political and moral power. It also prefigures as central to his discussion of women. Moreover, Shidyāq's depiction of women through the character of Fāryāqa, Fāryāq's wife, shows how the “national symbolic” implicates gender, political identity, and added to language itself. Needless to say, the implications of the nation on Shidyāq the exiled citizen-subject has been demonstrated above.

The crisis of manhood and the national symbolic

The close reading of Shidyāq's texts and life story as a journalist, translator, and editor demonstrated the tenacious relationship between the personal private life and the collective one within the “national symbolic”. The way that Shidyāq muddled reality and fiction through the character of Fāryāq demonstrates how the nation presides over memory (recall Shidyāq's discussion of memory and imagination in Chapter 3) and personal experience. The fictional autobiography that he writes acts very much like a memoir in which we can see the intersection of the various axes of personal identity. Most importantly, Shidyāq's *al-Sāq* and his linguistic debates testify to the incoherent narrative of Arab manhood.

In the debates between him, Yāzījī, and Bustānī, the three men challenge each other for the position of “*Shaykh al-lugha al- ‘arabiyya*”. At one moment, Shidyāq accused Yāzījī of having a “feminine language, *lugha unthawiyya*”,⁶²⁸ a “*language of the market, lugha sūqiyya*”.⁶²⁹ He accused both Bustānī and Yāzījī to be men lacking of *adab* who wrote in an “incorrect, fowl, and anti-national” manner.⁶³⁰ Shidyāq argued that “although *al-Jinān* has claimed that it was established for the disciplining and refinement of people and to satisfy refined women, it has proven to be written in a broken and incoherent language. As those who read them would know, the only purpose of *al-Jinān* and *al-Janna* is incitement and seduction. It is the *Jawā ‘ib* journal that was truly established for the service of the nation, *li-khidmat al-waṭan*, the call for progress and civilization, and the refinement of morals!”⁶³¹

What is at stake in the linguistic debates of the nineteenth century is far more than language itself; it is the very meaning of the nation and complex factors that citizenship involves. The debates show that the citizen is at once “an inclusive and an exclusionary noun naming by negation contested identities.”⁶³² The demarcation of boundaries through the discussion of meanings of words and their proper usage between Shidyāq and Bustānī and the tenacity of the exchanged insults and blame testifies to the incoherence in the origin of the formation of the national symbolic. Language pre-figured as the central contested space for defining womanhood, manhood, citizenship, race, class, and identity altogether. Rather than simply reading the debates as a sign of lively intellectual activity or renaissance, as many scholars have done (e.g. Anwar Chejne and Adrian Gully), they can be put to a much more productive end – the elucidation of the underlying stakes of language debates. The dialogic nature of the discussions turns them into a background onto which new works are to be measured.

These debates have been seen as an index or sign of the Nahḍa and its intellectual project.

Here I propose that they testify to a crisis in historical consciousness. The representation of *al-‘āmmīya* by either Shidyāq or Bustānī as an unfit language for scholarly use, Shidyāq’s chasing down of mistakes and derivations, and his critique of all dictionaries including Bustānī’s *Muḥīt al-muḥīt* are amongst the central signs of the practice of nationhood in the nineteenth century on individuals and collective social life. They reveal to us how the contradictory logic of nationalism and liberalism are reproduced by the citizen-subject. While Bustānī sought to historicise the Arabs, Shidyāq was as historically conscious of a brewing crisis.

Shidyāq’s depiction of women, for instance, is eerily similar in manner to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s women in 19th century America. Shidyāq’s women “emerge as uncanny, paradoxical, politically unintelligible: as fantasy projections of Patriarchal fear about the imminent end of male hegemony within the political public sphere, as occasions for serious critique of the same patriarchal culture, and as eroticised subjects who speculate that other forms of collective life might be imaginable.”⁶³³ Whether in his fictitious dialogues (in *al-Sāq*) between Fāryāqa and Fāryāq, the teacher and the student, the priest and the traveller, or in his journalistic essays on manners and mannerisms, morals and ethics, politics and society, Shidyāq relied heavily on elaborating on an idea through question-answer dialogues or the dialogical model. In this narrative form, the question is always posed as an interruption of a common idea, such as when Fāryāqa asks her husband about learning the English language. Fāryāq tells his wife that he has advice for her concerning her embarking on studying a foreign language. Shidyāq wrote,

Fāryāq says: “I tell you that it is common for those who want to learn a foreign language to begin with the names of the parts of the human body: the veins, muscles, and flesh surrounding them. She asked: I am confused: what do you mean by this advice? He said and I said praise the lord how inclined the human being is to haste! What I mean to tell you is that when one sets out to learn this language one first begins with the names of the things that are heavenly and not earthly. Yet people here merely fain virtue and piety. She said: now I am worried: are there prostitutes in this village? I said: no the folk of small villages in this land habitually marry and are prohibited from committing adultery like everyone else. What I mean is that they merely display abstinence, so what use is it for you to inquire about the veins, muscles, and flesh?”⁶³⁴

Fāryāqa is not convinced by her husband’s words and she mocks the use of his advice.

Fāryāq gets angry and tells her to think and do as she pleases but the price of overlooking his advice will be high. Shidyāq wrote,

A few days go by and the Fāryāqa came to speak to me: “how wonderful is this language, it caresses the hearing and the thoughts and is rolls smoothly off the tongue [make note of the eroticisation of language here]. Today I have memorised a verse of poetry which I kindly ask you to explain to me. Would you please aid me?” I said: “of course I would, your requests are my command. She said: “to what do you insinuate all I mean to ask for is the meaning.” I said: “What is the meaning that you intend? I know very well that you have no other intentions. Now, orate what you have memorised.” She said: “Up up up thou art wanted, she is weary and tormented, Do her justice she is hunted. By her husband, she has fainted.”⁶³⁵

Once Shidyāq translates the verse, his wife becomes angry at him and accuses him of fabricating the meaning at his own will.

She said: that is not true. People here do not write obscenities and immoralities in their poems as the Arabs do! Words here are about words and not bodies! [*al-kalām hunnā ‘alā al-kalām la ‘alā al-ajsām*] and Fāryāq responded: “but where does obscenity come from if not from the body? Where there is a body there is an action, and when there is an action words will be said of it. Look at Dean Swift: although he was almost a cardinal he wrote a grand treatise on ether. And what about Stern: he was a priest who wrote about sexual indulgence. And John Cleland: he wrote a book about a prostitute called Fanny. Do you think he was more obscene than Ibn Ḥajjāj or Ibn ‘Attīq or Ibn Sarī ‘ or than the author of a Thousand and One Nights? ... One of the first to

follow the path of indulgence is Rabelais I think, and he was one of the sons of the Church as well. She asked me: “did you not say yesterday that these were pious and virtuous people?” I said: “yes indeed I did. But this trait is simply a deception caused by habit, ‘*aada*, or convention. The one who is deceived knows what the deceiver conceals. I said: they are concealed as though painted with another color. Yes, this type of people grows abundantly in these lands.”⁶³⁶

The conversation goes on as Shidyāq advises his wife to watch her words in public and always smile and be entertaining in conversation. Fāryāqa becomes confused. She asks her husband how it is that he is requesting that she acts deceitful while he was complaining of the deception of others. Shidyāq here lists around 30 analogous traits pertaining to behaviour every synonym with its antonym. Fāryāqa exclaims: “Ye! Ye! Have you brought me to these lands to mold from me another woman?” Shidyāq then lists a series of expected behaviours from Fāryāqa in public and in private using evident satire: conversation manners such as “encourage the speaker, never contradict them, praise them, and abstain from cooking on Sundays and working on Sabbaths.” Here Fāryāqa questioned him further and he explains that these are Jewish traditions, “because Moses stoned a man who was caught collecting wood on Saturday you should not make any effort on Sunday.” Fāryāq continued listing prohibited actions: “opening the curtains of your windows” and mocking the sanctity of Saturdays. He explained to Fāryāqa that she must always be agreeable, and never critical of their habits or ways.

Then, as expected of the ever-ironical Shidyāq, he spent a few paragraphs listing the habits and ways of the English. Of the “commendable traits” he enumerated their long nails, sideburns, and uncombed hair: “When you enter their homes you must always say: ‘oh how beautiful, oh how nice... how beautiful are your toilets, and how aromatic your sewages!’”⁶³⁷ Shidyāq spent another two pages mocking English table manners. Then with an even more ironic twist of tone, and after his wife proclaimed that she had

decided from then on to be weary of all that is English, Shidyāq listed their positive attributes. “Their general posterity with words; their organisation and politics... all the people to them are equal in their human rights.” He concluded: “In general their positive attributes balance their vices. No one is perfect but God almighty.”⁶³⁸

Then his wife began to express boredom with his narrative and asked him to go back and explain the two verses she had originally asked about. Here Shidyāq finally translated the verses into Arabic and she concluded: “while you had said that the poet was complaining about the woman it seems as though he is simply bored with himself. In that case the woman is not to blame for her own boredom.”⁶³⁹ Shidyāq ended the chapter by commending his wife for her excellent ability for interpretation and understanding.

The main reason for the dialogue was Fāryāqa’s request of a proper translation of an English verse from her husband. Fāryāq took this as a chance to display his ingenious language abilities, jumping from one meaning to another like a trapeze artist. He also engaged with issues pertaining to morality, social conformism, and gender roles. Although Fāryāqa is given a chance to voice her opinions, Fāryāq commands the conversation. In the introduction of *al-Sāq* Shidyāq had stated that he sought to depict beauty as well as “a description of women”.⁶⁴⁰ He said: “because I fear the wrath of women I have refrained from speaking of their treachery and antics and I have instead decided to gain their appreciation in this book. I also feel very sorry for them because their lack of reading knowledge and its high rhetoric will prevent them from understanding it. They find anything other than love poetry and passionate talk [*al-waṣl*, *al-ḥub*, *al-gharām*] very hard to understand.”⁶⁴¹

While Shidyāq eroticised the feminine subject in his writings, Bustānī depicted a pious well-educated and well-mannered mother and wife in his own works. Both approaches, although different, demonstrate that the typical citizen subject in Arab thought is the masculine subject. The feminine, like all other aspects of society, needs to be reformed. While there were women at the time who were demanding political participation through journalism and writing, men like Bustānī and Shidyāq sought to defend the impingement of women in this separate sphere, whether through the eroticisation of the feminine subject or the call for her education. In his *Khuṭba fī -ta 'līm al-nisā'* (Speech on the Education of Woman, 1849), Bustānī argued that the education of women was necessary. He said to a predominantly, if not totally, male audience at the Syrian Science Society in Beirut, “Molding them in the molds of education and civilization, and dying them into the necessary colors deemed necessary by the society makes our world more beautiful and successful and adorns it with the jewels of comfort, safety, and happiness.”⁶⁴²

The similarity cannot be missed between Shidyāq’s discussion of women above and Bustānī’s. For both, the educated female subject is a model for an Enlightened and civilized society. For Bustānī, she must be taught religion, the proper science of language, reading, writing, history, geography, house economics, and mathematics in order for her to properly educate the future citizenry of the nation. Shidyāq had also made a distinction between “ignorant eastern mothers” and Western cultured ones – discussed in the previous chapter.

While conventional scholarship has celebrated intellectuals like Bustānī and Shidyāq for their pioneering view on woman’s rights, I seek here to approach these views from the perspective of them as projects for nation building. Their perspective on women, in

fact, testifies to the rhetorical and practical practices and struggles implicit in the formation of discourses of nationhood. Shidyāq and Bustānī's calls for subjective reform are, in fact, a commentary on what forms the cultural laws of national identity. The question they were answering is: "What does it mean to be a citizen in the nineteenth century?"

The discussions that I have presented in this chapter provide a view into the mirror of the nation, the making of its language and culture, in order to elucidate the "anatomy of national fantasy" – to borrow from Berlant – and to reveal how the seemingly 'natural' identity of the nation, in fact, operates within an ideological realm constructed by men like Shidyāq and Bustānī, both, in many ways, strangers to their own society. Shidyāq wrote, "They say that the most advanced and civilized nations are those that have a unity of race, language, and religion. ... I think that kingdoms and states are like bodies and I have rarely seen a healthy body without defects."⁶⁴³ The anatomy of the nation has always been, and will always be, full of defects, for Shidyāq and Bustānī, for time itself had been corrupted since creation. This was precisely the romanticist perception that instituted a crisis of historical consciousness in Arab thought.

Conclusion

In the Hall of Mirrors has aimed at writing a history of Arab historical consciousness in the nineteenth century for the purpose of contributing to a critique of modernity. To do so, I have sought throughout to provide an answer to Hayden White's question: "What does it mean to think historically?"⁶⁴⁴ This study has aimed at revealing the status of the Nahḍa paradigm in Arab historical thought in order to point to its ideological implications, as well as the kind of historical emplotment that it reproduces for thinking

of Arab history. Thus, I have called attention to a series of nineteenth-century metaphors and literary tropes that regulate Arab historical thought, the foremost of which has been the metaphor of language as a mirror of the nation. *In the Hall of Mirrors* has been concerned with the emplotment strategies of Nahḍa thinkers and Nahḍa logic. It has discussed the nation as historical form underlined by Nahḍa logic for the Arabs in order to critique the conditions of heteronomy imposed by the former on society and community.

I have argued that the nation imposes an abstract temporality on modern society in which conditions of domination and injustice are naturalized. For the case of the Arabs, this occurred primarily in literary terms. The Arabic language became a refuge in the face of modern civilization. And it was presented as an independent realm in which the ‘Arabs’ could see themselves as a nation. This evasive logic dominated foundational works on Arab culture and continues to have an enduring influence in contemporary discourses on Arab identity and society.

Shidyāq and Bustānī regarded the internal conflict of their societies in the nineteenth century as being induced by an external other. Be it sectarianism or the corruption of time, the plight of *tamaddun* was seen by them as external to it. This exteriority was presented by Shidyāq and Bustānī as being the nature of a people, their morality, and culture. Language, as well, was seen by them to be prone to corruption by an external force: namely, its speakers. The corruptibility of both language and nation was a central preoccupation for Shidyāq and Bustānī as they chased down ‘mistakes’ and fretted about correct usages and eloquence. I have shown in the previous chapter how the notion of taste, *dhawq*, for instance, was developed by Shidyāq as the natural faculty on which society had to work.

The most salient method of representation or literary trope that they used in their language was metaphor. Through it they escaped, as well as complicated, a historically grounded analysis of their society. Shidyāq and Bustānī alike held up the mirror of language in the face of their present and in it they tried to immortalise the image of Arabic as a language for civilization.

Metaphors, as discursive uses of language, tend to be a source of confusion for historiographical and philosophical thought. History writing would find it more suitable to forget about language all together. However, the attitude towards language, in fact, shapes the real experience of Arab belonging. The use of rhetoric and eloquence, *balāgha* and *khaṭāba*, was acceptable for Bustānī and Shidyāq as long as it was a ‘proper’ use. Proper use of language meant that it was clear and true to its origin, one which was never really named by them.

The regulation of language was undertaken under the ruse of metaphor. Language for them was significant because it mirrored the nation and the nature of those who spoke it. Hence, the syntagmatic nature of the language (its rules of syntax) is an essential part of its paradigmatic nature (the paradigms embedded in the text). As such, metaphor is not simply a literary trope, it is foremost a cognitive apparatus. It functions as the clothing of certain concepts, like the onion peel to its bulb. Although the content of the metaphor of language as a mirror seems to be descriptive and figural, it is, in fact, tropological in nature.

The metaphorical nature of Nahḍa logic perceives history as a stage on which is acted out the successive rise and fall of civilizations. The main motivation of this study was to show that not only does the Nahḍa create specific understanding of subjectivity and objectivity as opposing entities, it institutes an ideology of history that constantly

reproduces this opposition as though it is a natural one. The *Nahḍa* dictates that language, as well as culture, *adab*, is a metaphorical representation of the nation. The metaphor of language as the mirror of the nation proposes that somehow language is the nation, or that one can substitute the other. The power of this metaphor is precisely its ability to make an arbitrary sign, language, a signifier of the nation.

I have shown that this metaphorical thinking is implicit in Bustānī's interpretation of the 1860 violence, and that it is implicit in Shidyāq's Quixotian understanding of injustice and society. Shidyāq's perception of the function of the literary text as a representation of beauty and Bustānī's perception of language as a conveyor of truth both institute a communicative mode that is premised more on communication rather than information. I have shown how their lexicographic and encyclopaedic works instituted a mythical perception of history, one that was premised on cultural historicism and on the priority of the present over the past. The *Nahḍa* narrative that they proposed was based on their divorcing of the past from the present and its relegation to the realm of natural history. Through this reasoning the idea of a *nation* formed and so did a distinct perception of time.

Shidyāq and Bustānī told us again and again in their writings that time was out of joint. Although their present was the source of their anxieties towards *tamaddun* and *waṭan*, civilization and nation, they could only reproduce the idea of the present as a representation of the juncture in time itself. I showed in the previous chapters how both Shidyāq and Bustānī viewed time as "eternally corrupt" and how they believed in the imperfectability of humankind.

In addition, I argued that this analysis reified the source of their angst, real material relations in society into 'natural' ailments from which there is no escape. Historical

temporality was conceived by Shidyāq and Bustānī as a successive linking of identical presents. Civilization was the end of history and so was the idea of the nation. I have tried to argue that Bustānī and Shidyāq's works were embedded in a specific historical dynamic of modernisation as a distinct political and economic project. Thus, they projected an understanding of history as a fundamental transformation of the past into an increasingly different present. Their concern with the then present state of affairs in their societies, evident in their liberal projects of social reform, managed to be transformed through the Nahḍa paradigm, from a historically specific dynamic in which they found themselves into a transhistorical prescription for Arab culture.

Shidyāq and Bustānī projected the conditions of their own present onto the whole of Arab history. Theirs was a romantic critique that yearned for community in the face of modernity. From this yearning emerged the notion of *waṭan* as a guardian of the present from the perceived threats of the future. This ideology has had an enduring force on Arab thought since. By being a myth of origin, the Nahḍa allows for the invocation of nineteenth-century questions outside their contexts. I have argued that by re-posing the same questions of the nineteenth century such as, "What is civilization?" and, "Why have we regressed?" – questions that were once asked in circumstances of the breakdown of social order – Arab intellectuals in the twentieth century have engaged in an ideologically locked-down logic.

In Chapter 2 I argued that the 1860 wars of Mount Lebanon carried the first emblems of the nation as being born from crisis. The memorial for these events was erected by Bustānī: a monument of words, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias. In these he drew internal boundaries within the social imaginary of the nation. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that nineteenth-century 'Arab thought' drew these internal

boundaries between spoken and written language and between a word and its meanings. These boundaries are like the contours of a mirror reflection for they cannot be located in reality, yet they dictate how we perceive it.

Although the nation is predicated on collective memory, it is also predicated on collective forgetting. As Benedict Anderson has forcefully argued, nations are predicated on the forgetting of historical difference. The 1860 violence became catastrophic for Bustānī once he called for its forgetting through a reconciliation that would be predicated on a shared nation, a *waṭan* for all. The past, according to Bustānī, had to be sacrificed for the sake of the future. For Shidyāq, the fear of forgetting words drove him to a frantic collecting and sculpting of them in his own works. Bustānī and Shidyāq felt an urgent need to “be one with the people”, and to claim a place for themselves in the only resolute reflection of the nation they could find – its language.

What we see in Shidyāq and Bustānī’s works is an embodiment of the idea of national belonging and citizenship as tenets of modernity. In their works there is a tension between a utopia, a perfect homogenous world in which citizens and nations live in unison and harmony, and the nation whose birth pangs and livelihood are largely premised on injustice and in which all kinds of violence is perpetuated (exemplified in the 1860 wars). The foremost and simplest aim of noting this kind of tension throughout the previous chapters was to critique the ideologies of reification within the *Nahḍa*, the most important of which is that history cannot be overcome. The past decline of society (its pre-modern times) is always already there in any contemplation of its future. In this *Nahḍa* logic, the mirror of the past carries the image of the present, as well as the future. My claim is that once this discursive and ideological position is

critiqued we could possibly begin to think of real ways of overcoming historical structures of injustice and alienation.

By positing that the *Nahḍa* is yet another myth of modernity I have argued that myth and ideology are implicitly linked. The concept of modernity carries a set of mystifying and mythifying processes in which the projects of reason, rationality, positivism and science, as well as the homogenisation of the world through knowledge are undertaken. What is most dangerous about modernity is that it is able to recognise itself in past myths and to simultaneously cease to recognise the myths that it creates itself.

Besides being directly embedded within bourgeois politics, with the aim of capital accumulation in any form of value, the Enlightenment functions like a myth in which “everything that happens must atone for the fact of having happened.”⁶⁴⁵ Within the *Nahḍa*, the central tenets of Enlightenment are fulfilled; knowledge was recognised as a value to be accumulated and work was re-defined as socially necessitated labour. Moreover, contradictory forms of social practices and structures existing in nineteenth-century society were categorically classified through the *Nahḍa* paradigm in terms of tradition and culture. The importation of natural metaphors into the social realm by Bustānī and Shidyāq instituted the logic of cultural historicism as the driving paradigm in thinking of history for the Arabs. Difference and contestation were thereby reduced into a necessarily diverse liberal society.

The lexicographic and taxonomic turn, which is evident in Bustānī’s encyclopaedia, dictionary, and his stated aim of making Arabic a language of science and progressive civilization, is supplemented by Shidyāq’s conception of language as an organic body prone to natural growth and decay. While Bustānī constructed a natural history of the

nation, Shidyāq created a natural history of language. As such, the dissertation demonstrates how an improper naturalism is imported into the cultural realm. I have argued that this formulates a metaphorical discourse that is based on the logic of cultural historicism and political economy, both of which continue to dominate contemporary Arab intellectual thought.

The study demonstrates that the Nahḍa is inherently conflicted and composed of incommensurable projects that testify to the imposition of national fantasy on personal and individual realms. It shows how the tension between the discourses of Bustānī and Shidyāq is co-incidental and conducive to the institution of the central epistemological tools that produce the nation as a historical form in Arabic speaking societies.

I have tried to show how the a-synchronic narrative of national history is produced through translation of both society and language into national symbols. This occurs through the institution of the notions of crisis and corruption, as characteristics of history itself for the Arabs. Ultimately I have sought to de-naturalise national identity by revealing, through its main interlocutors, how an identity of an elsewhere, of citizenry before the existence of a state, becomes the norm of structural experience in the Arab world.

In the Hall of Mirrors thus seeks out the implications of Nahḍa discourse on historical narratives, reform projects, identitarian politics, and literature as *adab* for the case of the ‘Arabs’. It explores the complex factors in which nationalism is inscribed. In it I have tried to re-construe Arabness and Arabism through discussing rhetorical and literary practices from the nineteenth century and juxtaposing them with twentieth-century Arab thought. My aim was to show that the discourse of nationalism over-

determines individual and collective experience and foreshadows the constant reproduction of a crisis in Arab historical consciousness.

This dissertation recommends the re-theorisation of the Arab Nahḍa and the discourses that it produces such as progress/regression, crisis/awakening, decay/growth, and culture/history. It argues that there is an urgency for re-thinking the question of nationalist politics through a rigorous and critical elucidation of twentieth-century and contemporary 'Arab' understandings of time and temporality, nation and history, labour and value, and society and thought.

The dissertation recognises the space that the notion of Nahḍa has come to occupy in the "Arab imaginary", as a mythical point of origin of an Arab upheaval, transformation, and change on one hand, and as a failed attempt at modernisation on the other. I have thus been interested in the possibilities of critiquing the Nahḍa and its ideological traps that have lured many to endless discussions of modernity and tradition as opposing categories, and to the rhetorical questions of why the Arabs have failed, and when the Arabs will restore their righteous position in history. By exposing the inherent and contradictory logic of nationalist discourses in foundational nineteenth-century texts I have sought to demonstrate that foundations are foundational precisely because they are on unstable grounds. In other words, the Nahḍa is foundational because it is constantly reinstituted as such. Foundations are, in fact, principles of derived conclusions. Rather than safeguarding the continuity of the Nahḍa transcendence over any discussion of society, time, justice, and history, I have sought to reveal the contradictions through which this continuity is actually perpetuated.

Needless to say, the contemporary uprisings in the Arab world testify to the urgency of overcoming nationalist paradigms in thinking of history, time, and value and are not to

be read through the paradigm of *Nahḍa* as an awakening from crisis. In more ways than one, they represent the social imaginary's need for ridding itself from the shackles of the past and the ghosts of the dead.

In the late nineteenth century, Bustānī and Shidyāq felt a different kind of need, one which made them imagine the future as a reflection of an imagined past. Their future, however, is not our present. For we now know that what comes after shipwreck and crisis is only another shipwreck, and yet another. The task today is to re-imagine a political organisation in forms other than nation-states, one that ceases to reproduce crisis as the driving force of history.

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