

Epilogue

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I am neither a philologist nor a historian of languages. Hence, the following lines do not – for I cannot – critique details of language history and politics as argued by contributors to this volume. Rather, this comment is an exercise in synthesis and contextualization. I have sorted my notes into four sets: on historical background; Arabic; speaking multiple languages; and minority communities.

To start with, a word on the late Ottoman era. As for instance Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Michiel Leezenberg have shown in their chapters, the nineteenth-century Middle East saw vernacularization trends, including increased usage of Arabic and Ottoman Turkish texts, also by Eastern churches. Vernacularization had an eminently practical purpose: to solidify and preserve the flocks of these churches, by whatever linguistic means worked best. Earlier, in the early modern period, this same purpose had been fulfilled by vernacularizing – and trying to spread the use of – “minority” languages such as Syriac. Among the reasons, then, was religious competition between Eastern churches and the Catholic Church headquartered in Rome.¹

A three-step observation may be made here. Firstly, one underlying reason why in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire minorities, too, vernacularized Arabic and Ottoman Turkish was modern state re-formation. In fits and spurts, the Ottoman state became societally more intrusive and interventionist. ‘Big’ *linguae francae* such as Arabic and Ottoman Turkish became more important for the empire’s authorities, to communicate with varied groups and to try tying these into a more connected whole. (This development in Ottoman state formation – and its linguistic implications, manifestations, and outcomes – formed an integral part of a global process, which started in the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century and, according to some, reached a decisive turning point in the 1860s–1870s.²) Secondly, another cause

1 For an example, see John-Paul Ghobrial, “The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory,” *Past and Present* 222 (2014): 51–93.

2 A classic is Charles Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 807–31.

for a rise in the use in Eastern churches of especially Arabic in the nineteenth century was another round of inter-Christian competition after that of the early modern period. But now, it was not only Catholics but also Protestants who threatened the flocks of Eastern churches, seeking to convert them. Often operating under the umbrella of Western imperialism, U.S. and European Protestant missionaries were indeed among the first in the nineteenth century to print religious texts in Arabic in order to reach larger audiences. This made it doubly important for Eastern churches to pull rank, compete, and publish more in Arabic, too. If we look at the above two points together, a series of questions may be asked, including: How did those two processes interplay? Did churches that were most directly touched by one also play a greater role in the other? And how did it matter that Arabic was spoken and printed beyond the Ottoman Empire, not least – indeed, in great volumes – in Egypt? Thirdly and finally, Western missionary work, Ottoman state re-formation, the interactions of Eastern churches with both, and the linguistic dimension of this complex: together, they may be said to have rung in the age of religious mass politics in the Middle East – one intersecting with secular mass politics. (This double Middle Eastern mass politics formed part of a global trend, too.³) Reaching out to and listening to one's flock became an ever more incumbent duty for religious authorities and confessional elites; and those flocks became ever more recognizably vocal.

This brings me to Arabic. The editors of this volume and some contributors have paid considerable attention to the fact that especially after World War I Arabic became a crucial tool and litmus test for Arab nationalism, in particular for *qawmiyya*, pan-Arab nationalism; and the question how minorities – ethnic ones, such as Kurds, as much as religious ones! – positioned themselves *vis-à-vis* that development is often asked in the pages of this book. However, contributors have also shown that Arabic served other ends and developed in other ideological, political, and cultural contexts, too. Two such contexts, i.e., a second and a third, have just been noted, and been mentioned elsewhere in this book: state formation and inter-Church competition. Two others, a fourth and a fifth, were the *nahḍa*, the Arab enlightenment, which crucially was also a project of language renewal, and changing Muslim uses of Arabic. All five date back to the nineteenth century and were interrelated. This circumstance

3 A wonderful example is David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a Nineteenth-Century German Village* (New York: Random House, 1995). See also Olaf Blaschke (ed.), *Konfessionen im Konflikt: Deutschland zwischen 1800 und 1970: ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).

has to be kept in mind when we explore the relationship between post-war Arabic, Arab nationalism, and minorities. It matters all the more because the reasons for as well as the effects of the use of Arabic could be dissimilar, even disparate. Arabic could bring people together or pull them apart, for instance, or be employed to show somebody either formed part of the larger world or was very distinct from it.

When studying the post-war interplay between Arabic and Middle Eastern religious minority languages from the point of view of Arab nationalists (and especially pan-Arab nationalists, *qawmiyyūn*), we also need to keep in mind that for them this interplay constituted only one of many fronts on which Arabic had to be buttressed and/or (re)-defined. There were at least four challenges on top of that, posed by “minority” languages current within areas populated by Arabic speakers. One was the preponderance, of Turkish and Persian the neighbouring countries of Turkey and Iran. These related languages continued to influence Arabic through loan words and because some people in Arab countries practiced those languages. Another challenge was the global spread, from the nineteenth century onward, of languages centred in European empires, such as English, French and Russian. Yet another challenge was written standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) versus spoken Arabic (*‘āmmiyya*), that is, the question of how to bring under one umbrella, or even unite, so many different dialects that in extreme cases were mutually quasi unintelligible. And lastly, there was the issue that Arabic was not simply the medium *par excellence* of *qawmiyya*, but also important to Muslims outside the Arab world, for instance to intellectually and politically significant communities in India, Indonesia, China, and the Soviet Union.

Last, a note on Iraq. It appears that here, *qawmiyyūn* felt and waged a linguistic competition between Arabic and other languages with particular vigour. To be sure, there was *The Other Iraq*, to quote the title of Orit Bashkin’s monograph on inter-community ties and intellectual-cultural collaborations.⁴ But at the same time, to *qawmiyyūn* in Iraq at least two of the above five ‘fronts’ were particularly problematic. The country had a massive non-Arabic speaking population, mainly Kurds as well as some Christians and Jews. Moreover, it bordered on both Turkey and Iran, which posed not only a geostrategic, but to *qawmiyyūn* also an existential-political challenge. Given these multiple ‘problems,’ the question of how to ensure that their country became ‘really’ Arab,

4 Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

and what role Arabic could play in this regard, was particularly pressing for *qawmiyyūn* in Iraq.

From Arabic I move on to multiple languages. Several chapters in this volume, and other texts, can be pulled together to show how in the interwar Middle East speaking multiple languages could be a socio-political advantage. Liora Halperin argues that the first Ashkenazi colonists promoted narratives of a small number of Arabic-speaking founder figures from the late nineteenth century in order to promote their own centrist political program within the Yishuv. In a text entitled “Jews in an imperial pocket,” Orit Bashkin has shown how some Northern Iraqi Jews used their mastery of several languages – which included Arabic, and echoed the late Ottoman imperial past – to try to become a linguistic bridge between the ethnic and religious groups in Mandate Iraq. And again in this volume, Franck Salameh highlights the insistence of Lebanese (and perhaps especially Beirutis) on the worth of bi-, if not trilingualism: Arabic, French, and English.⁵ To be sure, these three groups used language skills in different contexts. Ashkenazis did so within an ideologically and socially complex ethno-religious community, the Jewish Yishuv, situated within a country, Palestine; Iraqi Jews manoeuvred within a multi-ethnic country, Iraq; and Lebanese multilingualism was not simply humanist, but also powerfully signalled and practiced, especially in Beirut’s role as a connector between the Arab World and the West. Still, what these cases have in common is the socio-political use of speaking multiple languages as a source and symbol of power – as a form of capital, one may say.

They shared another trait. Arabic was a key language for the socio-political interaction central to all three cases above. (In fact, it was the only language they had in common. The other main language that counted in the first case was Hebrew; in the second, Kurdish and to a degree Turkish and Syriac; and in the last, English and French.) That fact does not simply reflect the weight of Arabic in the Middle East in the age of nationalism or, to be more precise, of nation-state building; it also illustrates that nation-state building simply homogenizes, but in some ways simultaneously renders the world more heterogeneous – and as a result creates opportunities for some people. The

5 Liora Halperin, “Past Perfect,” this volume. See also Orit Bashkin, “Jews in an Imperial Pocket: Northern Iraqi Jews and the British Mandate,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates*, ed. Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (London: Routledge, 2015), 370–82; Frank Salameh, “Twentieth-Century ‘Young Phoenicians’ and the Quest for a Lebanese Language: Between *Lebanonism*, *Phoenicianism*, and *Arabism*,” in this volume. For Beirut, see Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017).

Yishuv was a highly specific settler colonial variant in that it willy-nilly had to spread within another national community, the Palestinian, which did not disappear, and communication with which thus mattered to the Yishuv and, since 1948, Israel. Further, new and sometimes also well-established nation-states carry complex linguistic traces of pre-national, often imperial pasts. Hence, actors such as Northern Iraqi Jews could play a role even in a country like Iraq, whose (Arab) nationalists insisted on the preponderance of their language; Iraq's past and its present reality have trumped their ideology. Last, the world comprises more than one nation-state; hence, some people and certain places, like Beirut, try to play the role of urbane transnational communicators between multiple nation-states in different world regions.

What about the minority communities themselves? Regarding this fourth and last issue, I raise follow-up questions to this volume's contributions. These can be sorted into three sets: relations within a given minority community; relations and comparisons between communities; and relations beyond communities, especially beyond their Middle Eastern spaces.

Regarding the 'within' question, we may ask how the case studies in this volume relate to theories of nationalism, including linguistic aspects. After all, this volume is empirically very rich, and hence can significantly contribute to theorizing nationalism.⁶ Further, did Arab nationalisms – both *qawmiyya* and single-country nationalisms, *waṭaniyyas* – and the challenges and opportunities that resulted from turning the Arabic language into a nationalist tool, tend to cause specific churches and their members to close ranks? In which cases do we see opposite tendencies, and why? And how did entering the age of nation-state building affect the relationship between religious elites, i.e., clergymen high and low, and other members of a given community, some of which – think of the Palestinian Khalil Sakakini – had secular elite status?⁷ This question matters doubly because already in the nineteenth century, state re-formation and global economic integration, among other changes, deeply impacted relations within communities, sometimes empowering members of a specific community *vis-à-vis* clergymen in specific *millets*.⁸

6 Related, see Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: a Study in Ideology* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

7 For Sakakini, see Khalil Sakākīnī, *Yawmiyyāt Khalīl al-Sakākīnī* (Ramallah: Markaz Khalil al-Sakākīnī al-Thaqāfi, 2003).

8 Some historians argue that lay community leaders became stronger than religious ones already in the late eighteenth century. See e.g. Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Millets: Past and Present," in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East*, ed. Anh Nga Longva and Anne Sofie Roald (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 32, 34.

Still regarding the ‘within’ question, we may note that quite a few communities discussed in the pages of this volume were present in more than one Middle Eastern country. Thus, did the role they played in Arab nationalism and their approach to Arabic differ from country to country? Did a given community follow more than one approach? And if yes, what would that tell us about transnational dimensions of a region such as the Arab world, and more broadly the Middle East, that was characterized by multiple, parallel, inter-related nation-state projects? On a related note, what are the differences between *qawmiyya* and *waṭaniyyas* as far as minorities, including their take on language, are concerned? Could it be that minority languages posed little or no challenge to some *waṭaniyyas*, or even formed a key ideological-political ingredient for a given *waṭaniyya*, rendering it more distinct from others? After all, in *waṭaniyyas* ‘place’ is at least as central an ingredient of national belonging as ethno-linguistic identity, which is front and centre in *qawmiyya*. A last note concerns leftism. As historians such as Anna Belogurova have shown, the very internationalism of leftism triggered language questions and allowed some men and women to become translators both literally and figuratively. How did this linguistic dimension of leftism play out in the Middle East? And what role did minority members play here – especially given the fact that many were quite prominent in Middle Eastern leftist movements?⁹

Regarding relations and comparisons between communities two questions come to mind. One is: how did the changing political situation in the inter-war period affect relations between different minority communities across the Middle East? Historians have explored that question for specific countries such as Syria or Palestine. What do we see when we zoom out? Is the resulting picture ‘simply’ the sum of all parts, i.e., of all countries? Or do other or additional regional features appear? The other question is: how did the attitudes to Arabic and Arab nationalisms in one minority community influence other communities? Was a logic of competition at play here? Do we need to look sideways, to third parties, to fully understand the attitudes in a specific community?

I conclude with a short paragraph on relations beyond minority communities, especially beyond their Middle Eastern spaces. For some time now, historians of the Middle East have explored and unearthed the significance of a wide-ranging networks of diaspora communities – some more powerful,

9 Anna Belogurova, “The Chinese International of Nationalities: the Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party, 1923–1939,” *Journal of Global History* 9 (2014): 447–70. On Middle East leftisms, see e.g. Tareq Ismael, *The Communist Movement in the Arab World* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

others less so; some older, others newer – for the historical development and shape of Arab nationalism and, as importantly, of the *nahḍa*. The Americas played a role. Africa mattered, its western parts as well as eastern regions such as Zanzibar. Communities in Europe were influential, too, in west and east (and the USSR as a state certainly played a role as well). India can't be ignored, either, as historians also of Iran, for example, have shown, and as Tijmen Baarda notes in his contribution to this volume.¹⁰ How, then – to sum up and to raise one last question – would the picture that emerges from this volume shift if we incorporated those diasporas into our historical analysis?

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¹⁰ See e.g. Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: the Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Stacy Fahrenthold, "Sound Minds in Sound Bodies: Transnational Philanthropy and Patriotic Masculinity in al-Nadi al-Homsī and Syrian Brazil, 1920–1932," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 259–83 (online: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/article/div-clasitlesound-minds-in-sound-bodies-transnational-philanthropy-and-patriotic-masculinity-in-al-nadi-al-homsī-and-syrian-brazil-192032div/0F313048F18022844A44A6F62AE78315>); Christoph Schumann, "Nationalism, Diaspora and 'Civilisational Mission': The Case of Syrian Nationalism in Latin America between World War I and World War II," *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (2004): 599–617; Monica Ringer, *Pious Citizens: Reforming Zoroastrianism in India and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011). Tijmen Baarda, "Arabic and the Syriac Christians in Iraq: Three Levels of Loyalty to the Arabist Project (1920–1950)," this volume.

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