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Empire and Arab Indology

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This article focuses on the Chouf-born poet, lawyer and translator Wadiʿ al-Bustani (1888–1954), who called himself a "Lebanese Palestinian," as he moves from Beirut, to Cairo, Hudaydah, Bombay, Transvaal, and finally Haifa. The first to translate Tagore into Arabic after a visit to his Santiniketan in 1916, Bustani spent his life annotating and translating into Arabic the Mahabharata*, the* Ramayana*, and Kalidasa's* Shakuntala *. Alongside his self-professed and self-funded philological project, Bustani was one of the most important poets and lawyers in British Mandate Palestine, inspiring protest with his verse and litigating against colonial land policies. By focusing on Bustani's relation to British imperial culture, his political commitments in Palestine, and the contours of his indological project, this article uncovers a new history of global philology and an enabling colonial frame, long hidden in the many narrations of orientalism's travel and Palestine's colonization.*

In *The Discovery of India*, Nehru wrote, "To [William] Jones and to the many other European scholars, India owes a deep debt of gratitude for the rediscovery of her past literature."[1] Some years later, upon receiving Wadiʿ al-Bustani's Arabic translation of the *Mahabharata*, Nehru is said to have remarked that it was "the greatest gift the Arabs could give India."[2] A debt owed, a gift given, a past rediscovered: how do we write the modern history of translation between India and the Arab world? And what are the idioms of this past that are occluded in our scholarship specifically and our imaginations generally? The geographical and institutional locations of modern European scholarly knowledge about the world are well known. Relatively unknown and scarcely acknowledged are the scholarly practices of non-Europeans, especially when they are not easily categorized as indigenous exegesis or caricatured as colonized mimicry. Countless volumes attest to the contours of Europe's India; what of the Arab's India?

This article focuses on one largely forgotten figure from the first half of the twentieth century, the Lebanese Palestinian poet, lawyer, and translator Wadiʿ

[1]Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi, 1987), 317.

[2]Fuad al-Bustani, "Qissat al-muʿarib" in Bustani, *al-Mahabharata: al-Malhama al-Hinduwiyya* (Beirut, 1952), 1–15, at 11. The *Mahabharata* of Wadiʿ al-Bustani contains three separately enumerated introductions, one by Wadiʿ himself, the above cited by his son Fuad, and a translation of Romesh Chandra Dutt's original English introduction.

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al-Bustani. In doing so I engage the historiography not just of modern Arab thought, but also of global intellectual history and British colonialism in the Middle East. How did one Arab intellectual present an idea of India to his Arab readers? Or rather, what India did he invent in Arabic? The "India" of colonial historiography which was bequeathed to the nation-state was an invention that displaced older geographical and political concepts in South Asia.[3] Ideas of India in Arabic emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that were distinct from those of the past. Historically characterized by the exchange of Islamic texts and the great translation project of Sanskrit science and mathematics in Abbasid Baghdad, European colonialism in the nineteenth century changed the terms of the Arab–Indian intellectual exchange.[4] Shifting sovereignties and new genres created new possibilities. The end of imperial patronage for Persian in South Asia, the subsumption of non-European texts into the categories of literature and religion, and the material and epistemic consequences of print's ascendancy, were the circumstances for Bustani's intellectual project and scene of his political engagement. New kinds of people and texts were being written, read, and translated. The emergence of a new colonial frame in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries occasioned Indian and Arab intellectual collaborations in forms distinct from the old and slow movement of the *ʿulema*.[5] In the shadow of Lords Curzon and Cromer, Arab and Indian intellectuals connected across a new world of empire. Bustani wrote his India from a Palestine under British colonial rule. Untangling the significance of those conditions, both for Bustani himself and for the challenge they pose to existing histories of colonialism, anticolonialism, and their forms of knowledge, is the task of this article.

[3]Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA, 2020). See also Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990).

[4]Carl Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages," *Iranian Studies*, 36/2 (2003), 173–95; Mario Kozah, *The Birth of Indology as an Islamic Science: Al-Bīrūnī's Treatise on Yoga Psychology* (Leiden, 2015); Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2016). Work on the long history of Middle East–South Asia connections is vast; for general overviews focusing on the premodern period see M. A. Saleem Khan, *Early Muslim Perceptions of India and Hinduism* (New Delhi, 1997); and Syed Suliman al-Nadwi, *Arab wa Hind key taʿalluqat* (Allahabad, 1935). On the early modern Persianate links see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2007). For a recent, wide-ranging study of Ottoman–Mughal relations see Maya Petrovich, "The Land of the Foreign Padishah: India in Ottoman Reality and Imagination" (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 2012).

[5]Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2010); Noor-Aiman Khan, *Egyptian–Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (New York, 2011); Hanan Hammad, "From Orientalism to Khomeinism: A Century of Persian Studies in Egypt," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 35 (May 2015), 31–52; Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual Transactions in Nineteenth-Century Arabic, English and Persian Literatures* (New York, 2007); Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA, 2017); Amal Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism Expanding the Crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s–1930s)* (London, 2010). See also the uneven and somewhat repetitive studies by Saliba which have sought to account for Arab engagements with Hinduism, especially the impact of Hindu and Buddhist ideas on the likes of Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy, and Kamal Junblatt. Luis Saliba, *Adyan al-Hind wa athuruh fi Jibran: qira'ah jadidah lil ada adab nabighat al-mahjar* (Jubayl, 2015); and Saliba, *al-Hindusiyah wa atar-uha fi al-fikr al-Lubnani: dirasa fi fikr Mikhail Nu'aymah* (Jubayl, 2018).

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Concomitantly, I engage a debate which has raged over the sites and epistemological investments of "global intellectual history," chiefly its presumed Eurocentrism. Some scholars have taken issue with the burgeoning subfield's seeming preoccupation with the reception, translation, interpretation, and critique of European ideas by non-Europeans.[6] These criticisms raise two points in particular: first, the incommensurability of non-European histories and ideas with European concepts; and second, the preponderance of rich, multilingual, south–south histories in the time before European hegemony.[7] While it is beyond the scope of the present article to weigh in on the former, I argue that a discussion of south–south intellectual histories need not be confined to the precolonial or premodern. What this article aims to show is that although south–south connections may not have been the strongest, or most prevalent, or best-documented connections in the colonial period, they nevertheless warrant serious historical attention. Indeed, narrating these very links can begin to account for the world that is missing in intellectual history's global.

Generally, the case for the global in histories of modern thought is made by making Europe one dyad in—to use a popular metaphor—an "encounter" with the rest of the world's peoples and texts. Mere mention of the world beyond Europe propels the provincial into the global. From this view, the global is inevitably imperial; it amounts to a rewriting of European intellectual history with attention to its international locations and colonial pursuits. While valuable, these are accounts of the global from above, from a privileged place in an unequal geography. The intellectual production and the social conditions of non-European thinkers, therefore, remain largely absent in this global past. Histories of India and the Middle East, however, can lay claim to the global merely on the argument that most of humanity lives there. Indeed, it would be prudent for historians to consider the note June Jordan appended to her 1985 collection of essays *On Call*. "Given that they were the first to exist on the planet and currently make up the majority," Jordan wrote, "the author will refer to that population usually termed Third World as the First World."[8] Jordan's inversion is instructive. Today, we should take seriously—think about the historiographical implications of—the "global" in global South. "Europe," Fanon famously wrote, "is literally the creation of the Third World."[9] So too the global cannot be thought without its south.

Wadiʿ al-Bustani (Fig. 1), there can be no doubt, was one of many. Scattered across the "regions" and "areas" of Western academic study, these non-European

[6]Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Global Intellectual History beyond Hegel and Marx," *History and Theory* 54/1 (2015), 126–37; Neguin Yavari, "The Political Regard in Medieval Islamic Thought," *Historical Social Research* 44/3 (2019), 52–73.

[7]This question of what constitutes "cosmopolitanism," and of whether it a sufficient or appropriate concept in the context of both early modern and modern accounts of Middle Eastern and South Asian thought, has been a point of extensive debate; for historically grounded critiques of the concept see John M. Willis, "Azad's Mecca: On the Limits of Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34/3 (2014), 574–81; and Mana Kia, "Space, Sociality, and Sources of Pleasure: A Response to Sanjay Subrahmanyam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61/1–2 (2018), 256–76.

[8]June Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays* (Boston, 1985).

[9]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1963), 102.

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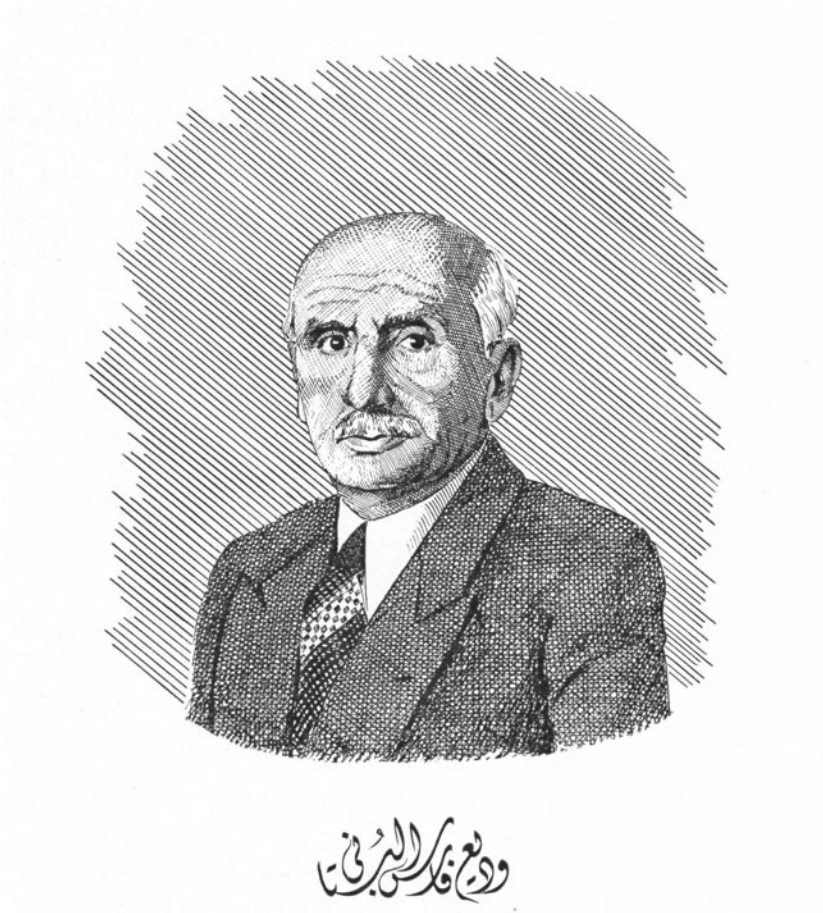


Fig. 1. Wadiʿ al-Bustani (1888–1954). Frontispiece to *Al-Mahabharata: al-Malhama al-Hinduwiyya* (Beirut, 1952).

intellectuals read with, responded to, and participated in political and intellectual movements that were global in their condition and scope. Certainly, the whole world was engrossed with the texts, histories, and languages of Europe. But either through resilient older avenues of scholarly exchange, or through newer routes of European orientalism and anticolonial solidarity, Asians and Africans connected with each other. Writing south–south intellectual history does not mean writing out Europe. European hegemony was real. It manifested itself as much in the expropriation of lands as it did in the expropriation of imaginations.[10] There is no reason

[10]Indeed, in much of the scholarly literature the ur-text of the modern intellectual history of both West and South Asia remains the travelogue to Europe, and the primary focus of most studies is the translation and reception of European texts and ideas. See, for example, Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Oxford, 1962); Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural*

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to overlook the fact that forms of commerce, cultural and otherwise, were destroyed or irrevocably altered by colonialism. The Indian historian Ashin Das Gupta described Europe's forced entrance into the Indian Ocean simply: "the fellowship upon the ocean was broken."[11] However in this period of arrogance, intolerance, and violence—the characteristics and program of colonial rule—profound relationships between the colonized were formed. Colonialism and its attendant anticolonialism created new forms of connection, communication, and comparison. New opportunities to travel for some, which were of course coupled with new restrictions on movement for others, allowed people and texts to travel in ways previously impossible. Bustani himself moved across Asia, Africa, and Europe, and his thought moved with him.

Bustani was born to a Maronite family in 1888 in the small mountain town of Dibiyye, in today's Lebanon. His intellectual inheritance is important to note at the outset. He comes from perhaps the most prominent family of the *nahda*. Butrus al-Bustani—a foundational figure in the history of Arab ideas and the founder of the first secular school in the Levant—is his most famous relative. And though Butrus died three years before Wadiʿ was born, Sulayman al-Bustani, Butrus's uncle and the translator of the *Iliad* into Arabic, had a profound personal impact on Wadiʿ.[12] Arguing that the young Wadiʿ's Arabic was weak, Sulayman once implored him to memorize the Quran, so Wadiʿ did. He went on to study English and French at Syrian Protestant College, now known as the American University of Beirut, graduating in 1907.[13] From Beirut, Bustani traveled to Cairo, Hudaydah, Bombay, Transvaal, and finally Haifa. By following him across this colonial space, this article traces the context and queries the content of the making of modern Arab indology. In Bustani's case, India and Palestine become important linkages in a larger colonial frame which stretched across Asia and Africa. It is impossible to account for Bustani's indology without attending to his political and poetical activity in Mandate Palestine. Particular ideas of religion and literature inducted Bustani into a new imperial culture at the dawn of the twentieth century. However, Bustani's experience of the British occupation of Palestine, where he initially served as an assistant to the colonial administration, chipped away at the edifice of this empire's self-presentation and its self-proclaimed principals in his mind. Bustani's responses to British imperial culture and colonial rule, in poetry, in philology, and in politics, are the primary sources of this study. The reconstruction of Bustani's life here relies on a careful reading of his own work and his traces in the British archives, the Indian archives, the Israeli archives, his family's small collection, and the unhoused archive of public utterances that constitutes the greatest source for Arab intellectual history. Below, I follow Bustani's thought from his earliest public writings in the 1910s until his death in 1954.

Encounters (Princeton, 1963); Latif al-Zaytuni, *Harakat al-tarjama fi ʿasr al-nahda* (Beirut, 1994); C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2011).

[11]Ashin Das Gupta, "India and the Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century," in *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (New Delhi, 2001), 188–224, at 219.

[12]Sulayman himself traveled to India (along with Iraq and Iran) in the 1880s on business ventures. Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge, 1991), 176.

[13]This sketch of his early life is based on al-Bustani, "Qissat al-muʿarib," 1–15; and Johnny Mansour, *Haifa, al-kalima al-lati sarit madina* (Haifa, 2015).

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Only by accounting for his work *through* his life can the particular contours of his thinking be revealed. The narrative arc of this article simulates Bustani's own journey. Beginning with his attachment to imperial routes and forms of knowledge, this article moves on to consider Bustani's disillusionment with imperial politics and ideas, chiefly as they are expressed in anticolonial poetry. I end in empire's wake, with the partitions of South Asia and Palestine which indelibly mark Bustani's life and scholarly practice. In doing so, I relate a history of global philology and an enabling colonial frame, long hidden in the many narrations of orientalism's travel and Palestine's colonization.

Imperial canons

"Oxford is my goal; a foul or a fall; a failer or a fool; I want to know more and become more. I may be hung; I may be stabbed; I may be smashed and ground to earth; but starvation can never be a cause to my death."[14] Thus wrote a twenty-three-year-old Bustani from Cairo to John Lubbock, a science popularizer and confidant of Darwin in London known officially as Lord Avebury. Bustani was in Cairo at the time, working for the British in the Public Works Department, Eastern Division. "Dear sir," Bustani wrote,

> it is a critical moment—but my beats and throbs are as regular as ever. "To be or not to be, that is the question". Whether I should stick to my present post of £10 per 1 moon's revolution, and continue to live on the figures (only Ten in shape I add and register—and die when Death knocks … or bid this routine together with colleagues, friends and relatives farewell, and entrust myself to the sear, with the sole hope of one-day anchoring on the British Isles with the twofold ambition of shaking hands with the author of "The Uses of Life" and "On Peace and Happiness" and of challenging that day's circumstances.[15]

Bustani, the young romantic poet, was unsatisfied with his bureaucratic duties in Egypt, and longed to be a part of another world. He was writing to Lord Avebury because he had nearly finished translating *On Peace and Happiness*, one of Lubbock's books, and wished to have a photograph of its author for the frontispiece. When his translations were complete, Bustani made his way to London, where he finally met his guru.[16]

Lubbock's books amounted to guides on how to become a certain kind of English gentleman: liberal, humane, and literate. He was popular globally, like his friend Darwin, and in the early twentieth century his books were being

[14]Wadih Boustany [Wadiʿ al-Bustani] to John Lubbock, 19 Nov. 1910, British Library, London (BL): Avebury Papers, MS 49676 f. 208.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, "Muqaddimah," in John Lubbock, *Misrat al-hayat*, trans. Wadiʿ al-Bustani (Cairo, 1911), 11. Bustani wrote an article from London introducing Lubbock's life and work to Arab readers, "Lord Avebury," *al-Zahra'*, 1 Sept. 1911, 387–92.

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translated across the world into a number of non-European languages, from Armenian to Gujarati.[17] Bustani would translate three of Lubbock's books into Arabic: *On Peace and Happiness*, *The Uses of Life*, and *The Pleasures of Life*. These three would be the first Bustani would translate from English in what would become a long career of translation. In the preface to *The Pleasures of Life* Lubbock writes of the importance of a particular set of oriental texts: "The *Ramayana* and the *Maha Bharata* … are not only interesting in themselves, but very important in reference to our great oriental Empire."[18] Lubbock lists the hundred books one *must* read. Besides the two aforementioned Sanskrit epics, he included three other non-European texts among his canon: the Quran (which Bustani had already memorized), Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, and the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam.[19] In the nineteenth century, Eastern texts reinvigorated European intellectual culture. Literature, high and low, was infused with a corpus of lauded non-European classics. By the early twentieth century, Lubbock's list was as predictable as it was common.

This canon was indelibly imperial in its making. The European colonization of the world; the rise of the new historicist philology; the hegemony of romantic visions of human, nation, race, and world—all occasioned the emergence of two related and parallel discourses by the middle of the nineteenth century: world religions and world literature. Sanskrit texts like the *Mahabharata* (including the *Bhagavad Gita*) and the *Ramayana* sat at the confluence of these new ideas, representing both ancient Hinduism and ancient India. The celebration of these works in Europe was regularly—indeed, by requisite—accompanied by the denigration of contemporary Hinduism and India. "Decline" was the historiographical idiom of choice.

From their perch, the Orient appeared as the principal site of *Weltliteratur* for the European peninsula's philologists. And although ideologically and institutionally pan-European, the primacy of the British Empire in Asia made Great Britain a central location for the elaboration of these new ideas and English a key vehicle for their export. By 1900, centuries of philology, translation, collection, collation, and theft had produced a world canon—oriental in progeny—that was exceedingly well known and widely read. The place of empire in the constitution, proliferation, and distribution of a literary canon intelligible to British citizens (at home) and British subjects (abroad) has been thoroughly examined.[20] The colonial conditions of canonicity are impossible to deny. For example, Max Muller's Sacred Books of the East

[17]Mark Patton, *Science, Politics and Business in the Work of Sir John Lubbock: A Man of Universal Mind* (Aldershot, 2007), 223.

[18]John Lubbock, *The Pleasures of Life* (Philadelphia, 1894), x.

[19]For how these particular texts gained their currency in European culture see, among many other studies, Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York, 1984; first published 1950); and Dorothy Matilda Figueira, *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Sakuntala in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Albany, 1991).

[20]Empire's centrality in the making of modern British literary and cultural institutions and sensibilities was among the central concerns of postcolonial studies, and therefore constitutes a massive body of work produced over several decades; see, for example, Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination, 1880–1930* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993); Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Chicago, 2002). On the question of the English language and pedagogy specifically

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project—which "effectively defined the parameters of the 'major religions of the world'," according to Tomoko Masuzawa—may have been published by Oxford University Press but was funded by the India Office itself.[21] In addition to texts like Lubbock's, Bustani was reading this growing corpus of orientalism and its related projects. On his trip to London to visit Lubbock, he also traveled to Oxford to see David Margoliouth, doyen of Arabic studies in England, whom he would write about enthusiastically.[22] Aamir Mufti argues that the emergent intelligentsia of nineteenth-century India was "in a strong sense *schooled in Orientalism*, which constituted for it the very horizon of modern and Western humanistic knowledge."[23] Bustani was no different. His understanding of India was inextricable from his reading of European orientalism.

In 1912, a year after publishing his Arabic translation of *The Pleasures of Life*, Bustani published the first translation of the *Rubaiyat* in Arabic. In Bustani's Arabic rendition of Edward Fitzgerald's infamous English "translation," the *Rubaiyat* of Khayyam become *sabiʿyyat*. That is, rather than quatrains, Bustani's version is in stanzas of seven lines, a common Arabic poetic form. With his new translation, Bustani was joining the "Omarians" of late nineteenth-century Europe, or what John Yohannan called "the cult of the *Rubaiyat*."[24] Having translated the syllabi of British imperial culture, Bustani began to execute their assignments. In his introduction to the translation, he provides a biography of the elusive poet and rehearses the familiar debates about the quatrain's authenticity and Khayyam's life story. Bustani also contributes his own dubious theory about Khayyam's origins. He argues that Khayyam—the name refers in Arabic to one who sews tents—was of Arab origins and that his family must have migrated to Persia, for Persians in the eleventh century did not use tents as Arabs did.[25] This fact, Bustani argues, is but one more reason why Khayyam's verses must be read in Arabic. World literature, therefore, as Yaseen Noorani has argued in the case of Sulayman al-Bustani's translation of the *Iliad*, is presented to "the Arabic reading public as a repository of national self-discovery."[26] Bustani's Arabized Khayyam

see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 1989); and Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Durham, NC, 2007).

[21]Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005), 260; Arie L. Molendijk, *Friedrich Max Müller and the Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford, 2016), 57–8.

[22]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, "Al-ustath Margoliouth," *al-Zuhur*, 1 Oct. 1911, 413–15.

[23]Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 11, original emphasis. On Arab intellectuals' schooling in orientalism see Ronen Raz, "The Transparent Mirror: Arab Intellectuals and Orientalism, 1798–1950" (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1997); Anne-Laure Dupont, "How Should the History of the Arabs Be Written? The Impact of European Orientalism in Jurji Zaidan Work," in George C. Zaidan and Thomas Philipp, eds., *Jurji Zaidan: Contributions to Modern Arab Thought and Literature. Proceedings of a Symposium, The Library of Congress* (Bethesda, 2013), 85–122; and the relevant chapters of Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad, eds., *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze* (New York, 2019).

[24]John Yohannan, *Persian Poetry in England and America: A 200-Year History* (Delmar, NY, 1977), 199.

[25]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, "Muqaddimah," in Bustani, *Rubʿiyat ʿUmar al-Khayyam* (Cairo, 1912), 5–29, at 5.

[26]Yaseen Noorani, "Translating World Literature into Arabic and Arabic into World Literature: Sulayman al-Bustani's *al-Ilyadha* and Ruhi al-Khalidi's *Arabic Rendition of Victor Hugo*," in Marilyn Booth, ed., *Migrating Texts: Circulating Translations around the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Edinburgh, 2019), 236–65, at 243.

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was part of a larger national discourse. As enthralled as he may have been in the world literary enterprise being promoted by imperial Europe, accounting for Bustani's intellectual activity demands a consideration of the colonial frame he worked within and the currents of nationalist and anticolonial thought he encountered.

When Bustani traveled away from Mount Lebanon and its environs, he was entering a world transformed by colonialism. In 1909, Bustani would follow the ever-tighter routes of capital and empire to Yemen. A job as a translator in the British consulate there took a young Bustani out of the American missionary enterprise he had long occupied and into another—undoubtedly related—colonial initiative in the East. This was his first experience of life under the Raj, which by then covered nearly a quarter of the globe. As the historian John Willis has written, "Aden and the Aden Protectorate constituted one of the westernmost parts of India."[27] From there he went to a Cairo under British occupation, and finally, in 1912, to Bombay. Bustani recalls reading Monier Williams's translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* on a Bombay beach, Williams's verse translation inspiring him later to render his own poetic translation of the text into Arabic.[28] But in India he was not simply engaged in the entangled web of orientalism and empire he had come to know. Bustani was employed as a bookkeeper by a well-known pearl merchant from the Persian Gulf, connecting him to those older histories of trade and family that had long characterized Arab and Indian interactions. Bustani was a new edition to the scene.

While in India he traveled to Bengal to visit Rabindranath Tagore at his school Shantiniketan, or Dar-as-Salam, the Abode of Peace. Long internationalist on his own accord, the Nobel Prize in Literature thrust Tagore into world consciousness in 1913. His visits to Egypt (in 1926) and Iraq (in 1932) were major political and intellectual events.[29] By the 1930s, translations of and commentaries on his writings could be found in all the major newspapers, journals, and textbooks of the Arab world. In 1941, one prominent Egyptian journal would confidently announce that Tagore "was the most translated foreign writer into Arabic."[30] Bustani himself translated Tagore's play *The Gardener* into Arabic in 1916, giving the Arabic reading public their first taste of the Indian intellectual's writing. Bustani's translations of Tagore's poetry and drama traveled quickly across the *nahda*'s global network of journals and writers. As Ilham Khuri-Makdisi has noted, journals like *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf* "represented particularly powerful spheres that conferred legitimacy on ideas and discourses in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth in Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria, but also beyond, including within the Syrian diaspora in the Americas."[31]

[27]John M. Willis, "Making Yemen Indian: Rewriting the Boundaries of Imperial Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41/1 (2009), 23–88, at 24.

[28]al-Bustani, "Dibajat al-muʿarib," 10.

[29]On Tagore's trip to Egypt see Ahmad Muhammad Ahmad ʿAbd al-Rahman, "Rihlat Tagore ila Misr," *Thaqafatul Hind* 62/4 (2011), 85–100; on Iraq see Salma al-Youzbaki, "Tagore in Iraq: Poet and Educator," *Bulletin of the College of Arts, University of Baghdad* 20 (1977), 149–65.

[30]"Tagore fi al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya," *al-Risala*, 10 Nov. 1941, 1387.

[31]Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism*, 44.

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In May 1918, Bustani's Tagore arrived in New York City. The first Arabic literary magazine in North America, Nasib Arida's *al-Funun*, published Bustani's translations of Tagore's poetry.[32] A month later, Mikhail Naimy, one of *al-Funun*'s most frequent contributors, reflected on the task of the translator in an article about Bustani. He begins by arguing for the necessity of more Arab writers and translators. Translators, Naimy argues, connect readers with humanity by opening up new oceans of knowledge to them.[33] But translation, he admits, is a tricky task. He takes up the example of Bustani's Tagore translations. Bustani, Naimy argued, made a major contribution to Arabic by translating these poems and must be praised for doing so. But his translations failed to capture the rhyme and music of Tagore's verses, in Naimy's estimation.[34] Naimy, who spent decades in the United States, was fluent in English and therefore able to read the English versions of the Tagore poems Bustani translated. Despite this criticism, the very presence of and spirited engagement with Bustani's translations in *al-Funun* speaks to the size of the intellectual world that Bustani himself trafficked in. His own itinerary may have been determined by his location inside the British colonial frame, but Bustani's work traveled further, across the Arab *nahda*'s own world of print.

Bustani aimed to introduce Arab readers to India's past and present generally. In 1916, he published a series of articles about India and Indians in *al-Hilal*. Among them was an article entitled "With Rabindranath Tagore," where he described his visit to Tagore's residence and school in Bengal in July 1914, only a few months after the announcement of the Nobel Prize. "I ate and drank and sat with Tagore."[35] "His eyes," Bustani goes on, "show his wisdom and his speech is sweet." Bustani wrote about the character of Tagore's school, where on his visit he lectured the students on the state of Egypt and Syria. But the most profound and original section of the article is Bustani's intervention into the Arabic language and Arab understandings of Hinduism. He wrote,

> He [Tagore] is "*hinduwi*," that is, an Indian who is not a Muslim. Arabs call all Indians who do not believe in *Allah* idol-worshippers. So I have decided to use "*hinduwi*" and the plural "*hinduwiyyun*" to avoid confusion or ambiguity. Most of our writers refer to them as "*Hindus*" the translation of the English and French words using the letter "*seen*" which is not how you make a plural in Arabic. The word "*hindi*" or "*hinud*" means all those living in India.[36]

[32]Rabindranath Tagore, "Ila buhayrati: min diwan al-Bustani," trans. Wadiʿ al-Bustani, *al-Funun*, May 1918, 318–19. On *al-Funun* see Richard Alan Popp, "*Al-Funun*: The Making of an Arab-American Literary Journal" (Ph.D. thesis, Georgetown University, 2000).

[33]Mikhail Naimy, "Fi ʿalam al-ta'lif: al-Bustani," *al-Funun*, June 1918, 461–4, at 462.

[34]Ibid., 463.

[35]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, "Ghand Rabindranath Tagore," *al-Hilal*, June 1916, 716–21, at 716. Earlier, in May 1916, *al-Hilal* published an article of Bustani's on Tagore which included translations of three of Tagore's poems into Arabic.

[36]Ibid., 719–20.

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While it is impossible to separate Tagore's fortunes from his entanglements with the British or English role across British imperial space, Bustani's engagement here offers insight into his larger literary and historical commitments.[37] It is clear that Bustani's intellectual investments were not simply bounded by European tastes. His dissatisfaction with the existing Arabic lexicon, and attempt to dispel misunderstanding, is a testament to his scholarly orientation toward the representation of India in Arabic. Without the civilizational condescension or imperial largesse that buttressed Europe's indologists, Bustani approached his study of India seriously.

Ecumenical Palestine

"Thus he entered the arena of battle," wrote Abd al-Rahman Yaghi of Bustani's first poem in Palestine.[38] Bustani arrived in Jaffa in the last week of November 1917. He came to Palestine to work as an assistant in the British administration, again moving along those routes made by empire. Bustani left India in 1916, and stayed in South Africa for a year thereafter, partly in the employ of the British at Transvaal. While there, in the midst of the Great War, he wrote and published a slim volume of poems, the *Quatrains of War*. Dedicated to the "South African Overseas Contingent," the martial poems ask their readers to repeatedly "Arise! March on, and Falter not! Respond!"[39] Some quatrains are explicit as to which side of the war Bustani champions: "join the Chorus of the Mighty Brave / Whose Bleeding Hearts encore 'GOD SAVE THE KING'."[40] Two years later, on his arrival in Palestine, Bustani's tune quickly changed. Writing in the immediate wake of the Balfour Declaration, his first poem from Palestine declared his concern over British intentions. Bustani's Indian career turned out to be instructive, and the germ of the disenchantment with the British which would lead to his resignation from the colonial government two years later can be discerned. In a work titled "The Infant State" ("Al-dawla al-radi'") he wrote,

> we have opened our chests to you
> outstretched our hands
> but I fear you shall betray us
> I know the Indian road.[41]

In Palestine, Bustani's fealty to the worldly culture cultivated by the British Empire was stretched to its limit. He spent the rest of his life in Palestine, mostly in the port city of Haifa, an important point on the map of war and trade that the British were

[37]See Michael Collins's well-researched study of Tagore's connections with the British and the circumstances of his being awarded the Nobel Prize. Michael Collins, "History and the Postcolonial: Rabindranath Tagore's Reception in London, 1912–1913," *International Journal of the Humanities* 4/9 (2007), 71–83.

[38]Abd al-Rahman Yaghi, *Hayat al-adab al-Filastini al-hadith min awwal al-nahda hatta al-nakba* (Beirut, 1968), 176.

[39]W.F. Boustany [Wadi' al-Bustani], *The Quatrains of War* (Transvaal, 1915), 7. My thanks to Mahmoud Elewa for helping me acquire a copy of this text.

[40]Ibid., 10.

[41]al-Bustani, *Al-Filastiniyyat,* 82.

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forging between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. While Bustani continued to work on his translations of *hinduwi* texts, his fortunes and intellectual activity were increasingly tied to the politics of the British Mandate and the European Zionist colonization of Palestine. Bustani was thrust out of the literary world he had inhabited for the first half of his life and poured himself into the service of an Arab nation and the anticolonial struggle in Palestine in particular. The imperial culture that determined the global itinerary of his youth proved illusory. Despite his political and intellectual efforts, Bustani came to realize that respect for the lives and lands of people like him were not on the British agenda. His first foray into organized political activity is emblematic of the ethos he would carry in all his efforts. Bustani was one of the founders of the Muslim–Christian Association in Haifa, an important but short-lived organization across Palestine.[42] These associations were an early organized source of opposition to the British policies in Mandate Palestine that the historian Laura Robson has rightly characterized as sectarian. The British constructed, according to Robson, "a colonial administration that assumed the political centrality of communal identifications."[43] Robson describes how Palestinian Christian intellectuals nevertheless embraced an ecumenical way of thinking, a form of knowledge that fundamentally marked the Arab *nahda*, according to Ussama Makdisi.[44] The British, keen on facilitating Zionist goals and wary of the Arab nationalist resistance that such ecumenical organizations could engender, changed the landscape of Muslim–Christian political cooperation in the Mandate by introducing new sectarian institutions like the Supreme Muslim Council.

As the Mandate dragged on, Bustani's poetry continued to pose a challenge to British activities in Palestine and to European colonialism in general. His verses evinced an ecumenical spirit and anticolonial instinct. In 1925, he published a poem entitled "We are all Muslims" ("Kulna Muslimin") in the Egyptian magazine *al-Zahra'*.[45] That same year, Syrians revolted against the French Mandate government. The French response was draconian and included the bombing of Syrian villages and cities. Regarding this violent retaliation, one French general said, "you need to terrorize people," and the then British consul in Damascus described it as "a sustained policy of frightfulness."[46] This campaign culminated in the devastating bombardment of Damascus in October 1925, which lasted for forty-eight hours, led to the death of at least a thousand people, and garnered global attention. In his poem, Bustani summons the image of the incendiary bombs destroying the Syrian city. "Oh fragrant Damascus, what will we call you," Bustani asked, "after you have been burned and destroyed / and your river has

[42]Milhim Ibrahim al-Bustani, *Al-Salsibil* (Jounieh, 1968), 191.

[43]Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin, 2011), 9. See also Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism, 1917–1948* (Edinburgh, 2013); and Nicholas E. Roberts, *Islam under the Palestine Mandate: Colonialism and the Supreme Muslim Council* (London and New York, 2017).

[44]Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Oakland, 2019).

[45]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, "Kulna Muslimin," *al-Zahra'*, 1 March 1925, 183–5.

[46]Thomas Hippler, *Governing from the Skies: A Global History of Aerial Bombing* (New York, 2017), 71.

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flowed with blood."[47] But the core of the poem's message is not Bustani's lament over Damascus, but a call for Arab unity in the face of colonial violence:

> Wake up o Arabs! Hear the sound of justice!
> There is no such thing as Druze or Christian, there is only the land of Syria and the land of Iraq
> In the doctrine of the West, we are all "Muslims".[48]

Bustani understood that for the French, being "Muslim," even if you were not, made you a killable subject. Bustani, nourished by an Arab nationalist project, flips what he recognized as an orientalist label: being Muslim, for him, only underlined the necessity of solidarity.

The many poems that Bustani wrote over the course of his time in Palestine were collected in his *diwan*, *al-Falistiniyyat*, published in 1946. "As far was we know," Khalid Sulaiman wrote of Bustani, "he is the first Arab poet who published a collection of poems on Palestine."[49] In the introduction to *al-Falistiniyyat* Bustani called himself a Lebanese Palestinian: "I was born in Lebanon, but am Palestinian by homeland."[50] Bustani's ideas were forged under global, imperial conditions. In Palestine, Bustani was becoming increasingly aware of the unequal geography that structured the world. By the 1930s, Bustani was also writing verses—undoubtably inspired by Tagore—in celebration of the East. "The Easterner will return to the Westerner his faculties of reason," he wrote in one poem, "for the Easterner possesses more care and reason."[51] Attention to these elements in his work, and the context of their creation, challenge conventional understandings of Islam and politics in British Palestine. Take, for example, the occasion of the Indian activist Muhammad Ali Jouhar's funeral in Jerusalem on 23 January 1931, when Bustani recited a poem to the assembled (Fig. 2). His verse possessed the same ecumenical and anticolonial spirit as his other poems. Both Muslims and Christians, Bustani wrote, mourn Jouhar. And the "greedy" British, unnamed but implied, arrived in Palestine as in India, "to light a fire." His poem was originally published alongside other speeches and poems from the event a few days later in the newspaper *al-Jamiʿa al-ʿArabiyya*. In the notes he appended to the poem when collected in *al-Falistiniyyat*, Bustani claims he was the first Christian to deliver a eulogy on the grounds of al-Haram al-Sharif.[52] Though a difficult assertion to verify, it would certainly reflect the spirit of the age. It was only a decade earlier that the Coptic priest Qommus Sergius famously preached from inside Al-Azhar's mosque during the heady days of 1919. In contrast to the repeated invocations of Sergius's sermon in accounts of Egyptian national

[47]al-Bustani, "Kulna Muslimin," 185.
[48]Ibid., 184.
[49]Khalid Sulaiman, *Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry* (London, 1984), 21.
[50]al-Bustani, *Al-Falistiniyyat* (Beirut, 1946). The book is dedicated to "the friend of the Arabs" Frances Emily Newton, an English missionary expelled from Palestine by the British in 1938 for writing against British colonial practices in the Mandate. Bustani translated her memoirs into Arabic and served as her lawyer.
[51]Ibid., 202.
[52]Ibid., 205

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Fig. 2. The funeral of Mohammad Ali Jauhar in Jerusalem (23 January 1931). G. Eric and Edith Matson, Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-matpc-03052.

unity, Bustani's presence in Jerusalem that day has been eclipsed in a historiography that adopts wholesale British colonial preoccupations with pan-Islam. Jouhar's funeral in Jerusalem, therefore, has only been narrated in those terms. It was indeed Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem and head of the Supreme Muslim Council in Palestine, who arranged for the burial to take place in his city. In a series of overtures to Muslims worldwide, culminating in the World Islamic Congress convened in December of 1931, al-Husseini aimed to cement Jerusalem's place among the sites and institutions of the "Muslim world."[53]

Whatever the designs of al-Husseini, Bustani was not drawn to the Mulana because he wanted a place on the pan-Islamic stage, but rather because of a shared commitment to anticolonial nationalism. He wrote that Jauhar was in London, "with the Hindu [*hinduwi*] leader the Mahatma Gandhi, in the service of the Indian Nation [*umma*]." Bustani knew Jauhar and had met with him repeatedly years earlier when he lived in India. Confident assertions of the funeral's singularly pan-Islamic appeal ignore both Bustani's presence and the kind of politics he represented. The authors of a recent article on the event which focuses on al-Husseini's role as a "propagandist" mention only in passing that a "Christian Arab poet read a poem composed especially for the funeral," without further comment or

[53]Nicholas E. Roberts, "Making Jerusalem the Centre of the Muslim World: Pan-Islam and the World Islamic Congress of 1931," *Contemporary Levant* 4/1 (2019), 52–63.

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elaboration.[54] Moving beyond colonial rubrics and taking seriously the activities of anticolonial internationalists, whose utterances are suffused with local, ecumenical appeals, reveals connections like those forged by Bustani.

Palestinian writers have been particularly attuned to this aspect of Bustani's *oeuvre*. In a recent book on the poetry of Mandate Palestine, the Haifawi literary critic Suleiman Jubran writes that Bustani's poetry—packed as it is with references to the Islamicate past and the colonial present—"is not just Lebanese Palestinian poetry, it is Christian Muslim poetry, it is the first to address colonialism–Zionism in Palestine."[55] Here, Jubran echoes the judgment of the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, who in his well-known study of the 1936 revolt in Palestine praises Bustani the anticolonial poet: "He was the first to warn against the Balfour Declaration and its challenges, the very month it was issued." Kanafani argues that the poetry Bustani wrote in the 1920s was one of the most important influences on the multitude that moved in the 1930s. Bustani's insurgent poetics and ecumenical impulse is exemplified in a remarkable exchange with the British Mandate authorities, which Kanafani recounts:

> [On] 28 March 1920, [Bustani] had himself led a demonstration, which chanted a song that he had composed himself. He was summoned to an inquiry, and the following appears in the records of the inquiry conducted by the Public Prosecutor:
>
> Public Prosecutor: Statements have been made that you were carried shoulder-high, and that you said to the people who were following behind you: "Oh Christians, Oh Muslims."
> The Accused: Yes.
> Public Prosecutor: And you also said: "To whom have you left the country?"
> The Accused: Yes.
> Public Prosecutor: Then you said: "Kill the Jews and unbelievers."
> The Accused: No. That violates the meter and the rhyme. I could not have said that. What I said was both rhyming and metrical. It is called poetry.[56]

Bustani's political activities during his time in Haifa were not limited to what the historian A. L. Tibawi called his "distinct poetical gifts."[57] In June 1923, at the Sixth Palestine Arab Congress held in Jaffa, Bustani asked the gathering to adopt

[54]Maoz Azaryahu and Yitzhak Reiter, "The Geopolitics of Interment: An Inquiry into the Burial of Muhammad Ali in Jerusalem, 1931," *Israel Studies* 20/1 (2015), 31–56, at 49. In general, the authors construe any support or good feeling expressed in the Arab press regarding Ali's burial as evidence of al-Husseini's propaganda, never the possibility that Palestinians felt any Eastern or anticolonial solidarity despite their differences with al-Husseini.

[55]Sulayman Jubran, *Nazarah jadidah ʿala al-shiʿr al-Filastini fi ʿAhd al-Intidab* (Haifa, 2006) 50.

[56]Ghassan Kanafani, "Thawra 1936–39 fi Filastin: Khalifat wa tafasil wa tahlil," *Shuʿun Filastiniyya* 6 (1972), 45–77, at 57. Bustani himself is the source of this exchange, which is recounted in al-Bustani, *Al-Falistiniyyat*, 114.

[57]A. L. Tibawi, *Anglo-Arab Relations and the Question of Palestine, 1921–1921* (London, 1978), 270.

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a resolution stating that "taxation without representation" was not consistent with the democratic principles adopted in Great Britain itself and therefore a boycott should be called.[58] Despite regularly confronting British colonial rhetoric and practices in Palestine, Bustani nevertheless thought Arabs could reason with the British Empire. But the British simply did not uphold the principles they espoused.

In June of 1936, Bustani published in English and Arabic a salvo against the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate system as a whole, *The Palestine Mandate: Invalid and Impracticable*.[59] Bustani demonstrates, with meticulous detail, how the British Mandate in Palestine violates the principles of international law specifically and the ethos of British liberalism generally. Even within the uneven and unjust Mandate system, the situation in Palestine is an aberration, Bustani argues. "To this the Palestine Arabs revolted in 1920, in 1921, in 1924, in 1929, in 1933 and it is in the midst of the 1936 revolt that the present study is made."[60] "This study," he writes later "is merely a hurried but honestly motivated effort to expose facts and merits."[61] He quotes at length from official League of Nations documents, the Balfour Declaration, and the work of the Mandate's Attorney General Norman Bentwich, annotating and introducing their utterances to explicate his case. He criticizes British policy and rhetoric, exposing their autocratic approach to the "Palestine Problem" and their endless obfuscation of the reality on the ground, including their habit of ordering hapless commissions of inquiry. The book was submitted to the high commissioner for Palestine and the Colonial Secretary in London to little effect, like much of the diplomatic efforts Palestinians undertook in the years before 1948. But the Arabic edition was enthusiastically received by pan-Arab journals like *al-Mashriq* in Beirut and *al-Hilal* in Cairo.[62]

Bustani had more success in the courtroom. In addition to his poetry and his regular contributions to the burgeoning nationalist press, Bustani worked in the Mandate's courts in an effort to defend the lands of Palestinians. He studied law in Jerusalem, at the school established by the British for that express purpose.[63] As was the case with lawyers in much of the colonized world, many of the Arab

[58]"Summary of the Proceedings of the Sixth Palestine Arab Congress," The National Archives, Kew, CO 733/47/Appendix 6. That same year Bustani was part of the Palestinian delegation to London.

[59]W. F. Boustany [Wadiʿ al-Bustani], *The Palestine Mandate: Invalid and Impracticable. A Contribution of Arguments and Documents towards the Solution of the Palestine Problem* (Beirut, 1936).

[60]Ibid., 71

[61]Ibid., 129

[62]*Al-Hilal*, Feb. 1937, 472–3; *al-Mashriq*, Jan.–March 1937, 145–6; see also the review in *Filastin*, 3 Nov. 1936, 6.

[63]In 1921, the British administration established what were called simply the Jerusalem Law Classes. In a building that once housed Russian pilgrims to the Holy City, Arabs and Jews would spend their evenings studying the new law of the land, an orientalist amalgamation of what British administrators imagined Ottoman law to be and English legal norms. The curriculum was developed by the attorney general of Mandate Palestine, Norman Bentwich, a British Zionist who had previously been posted in Cairo. Taught at night so officials could attend, the law classes were a five-year program of instruction which provided a diploma that allowed one to practice law in the Mandate. See H. Kantrovich, "The Jerusalem Law Classes," *Journal of the Society of Public Teachers of Law*, 1937, 46–9; Donald M. Reid, *Lawyers and Politics in the Arab World, 1880–1960* (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1981), 297–8; Assaf Likhovski, *Law and Identity in Mandate Palestine* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 112–14; Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine*, 51–4.

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law graduates became heavily involved in the Mandate's politics. Bustani was no exception and quickly added the law to his repertoire of political activity after graduating from the program. His most notable legal victory was the designation of a large tract of land in the Ghor-Beisan area as public land, and therefore off-limits to the Jewish Agency. Bustani argued that this land had long been under the dominion of the Arabs who occupied it. Though this may not have been entirely accurate in light of the particular forms of property rights that reigned during the Ottoman period, it served Bustani's larger political project. In his valuable study of how land law was transformed in Palestine from the mid-nineteenth century until 1948, the historian Munir Fakher Eldin argued that "Bustani's emphasis on local autonomy … had a definite purpose to serve: to downplay the reality of Ottoman sovereignty in favor of a normative claim of an original Arab national sovereignty."[64] Bustani's activist lawyering drew the ire of the British authorities and the Zionist movement. In his autobiography, Chaim Weizmann expressed great disdain for Bustani's success in defending the Arab right to this particular tract of land.[65] Indeed, Bustani's activities in Palestine garnered him quite the reputation. He was described variously by his critics as "the worst scoundrel in the place," "an excitable, energetic young demagogue," a "notorious agitator," "a man of very excitable disposition," and "an active extremist."[66] In all the comments of his vociferous critics, Bustani's indology was unmentioned.

Liberation philology

In March 1947 a journalist from Cairo's *al-Risala*—the Arab world's premier literary weekly—met Bustani at the city's Grand Continental Hotel. Bustani was on his way back to Haifa from London, where he had just been on a political mission. The Arab Higher Committee was still trying to make its case to the British authorities. Bustani took advantage of the sojourn to do some research in that entrepôt of global knowledge, the library of the British Museum. The journalist asked Bustani about the stack of papers he carried with him, manuscripts of his translations of *hinduwi* epics. Bustani was in the midst of translating the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* into Arabic. In the interview Bustani mentions his reasons for translating these particular Sanskritic texts: "The translations of India's epics into European languages opened new doors in *fiqh al-lugah*, '*al-philologiyya*.' Today, if you look at any comprehensive English-language dictionary you will see that

[64]Munir Fakher Eldin, "Communities of Owners: Land Law, Governance, and Politics in Palestine, 1858–1948" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2008), 59. See also Eldin, "British Framing of the Frontier in Palestine, 1918–1923: Revisiting Colonial Sources on Tribal Insurrection, Land Tenure, and the Arab Intelligentsia," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 60 (2014), 42–58.

[65]Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1949), 276. Bustani went on to translate Weizmann's autobiography into Arabic.

[66]In order of appearance: Bernard Wasserstein, "'Clipping the Claws of Colonisers': Arab Officials in the Government of Palestine, 1917–48," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13/2 (May 1977), 171–94, at 191 n. 32; Philip Graves, *Palestine, the Land of Three Faiths* (London, 1923), 11; Gershon Agronsky, "Inquiry Commission to Examine Grand Mufti Monday in Own Home," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 1 Dec. 1929, 12; "Note by Herbert Samuel," 21 July 1923, The National Archives, Kew, CO 733/54/427; M. Perlmann, "Chapters of Arab Jewish Diplomacy, 1918–22," *Jewish Social Studies* 6/2 (1944), 123–54, at 131.

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many English words have their origins in Sanskrit. If we translate these texts into the Arabic language we will notice the same thing."[67] Such a philological project lays bare the sheer boldness of Bustani's undertaking. But Bustani did not labor under conditions of his own choosing. Between 23 April and 22 May of that inauspicious year of 1948, thirty-three members of Haganah occupied Bustani's house on the sea in Haifa. Despite this, Bustani—like Emile Habibi—remained in Haifa. When the soldiers left, they took him and briefly imprisoned him. Upon returning to his home, he quickly packed up his precious manuscripts.[68] They ended up with his son Fuad, who with the help of Palestinian fishermen would periodically make his way down from Beirut to check on his parents. Bustani's was a philology under colonialism, not colonial philology.

A powerful body of historical scholarship has revealed how intellectuals in the colonized world adopted the religious, racial, or sexual prejudices of the European texts they read and translated.[69] In the Arab context, this work has shown how, in their involvement with nationalist state projects, intellectuals produced knowledge of poor, mobile, or illiterate populations—first by naming them as such—that did not significantly depart from the forms of knowledge propounded by colonial officials. However, a methodological nationalism has largely precluded investigations into how this knowledge was deployed at points further removed from the nation and its frontiers, beyond the boundaries of the state and its mechanisms of coercion. What Bustani's case begins to reveal is how Arab intellectuals studied the world beyond their nation and beyond the Europe whose concepts and categories they sometimes deployed.

There has been a search, since orientalism was knocked from its summit, for noncoercive, nonhierarchical approaches to the study of the other. How does one study from within an exploitative system? Over a series of erudite essays, Sheldon Pollock has recently sought to rehabilitate philology, despite its sordid past. In what he has variously referred to as "liberation philology" and "comparison without hegemony," Pollock has argued that philology can offer "one important way out of the dead-end area-studies model of language labor as merely producing the raw data for the Lancashire mills of self-universalizing Western theory."[70]

[67]Al-Jahiz, "al-Adab w al-fan fi al-usbuʿ: saʿa maʿ al-ustath Wadiʿ al-Bustani," *al-Risala* 15 (31 March 1947), 376.

[68]Fuad al-Bustani, "Qissat al-muʿarib," 8.

[69]Partha Chatterjee, "The Disciplines in Colonial Bengal," in Chatterjee, ed., *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* (Minneapolis, 1995), 1–29; Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, 2007); Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (Princeton, 2020).

[70]Sheldon Pollock, "Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World," *Critical Inquiry* 35/4 (2009), 931–61, at 956. See also Pollock, "Towards a Political Philology: D. D. Kosambi and Sanskrit," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 July 2008, 52–9; Pollock, "Comparison without Hegemony," in Barbro Klein and Hans Joas, eds., *The Benefit of Broad Horizons: Intellectual and Institutional Preconditions for a Global Social Science*, Leiden, 2010), 185–204; Pollock, "Liberating Philology," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1/1 (2015), 16–21; Pollock, "Conundrums of Comparison," *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1/2 (2017), 273–94. See also Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York, 2004).

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Inspired by the work of Spinoza, Gramsci, D. D. Kosambi, and Edward Said, Pollock calls for a critical philology, attuned as much to political texts as to the literary. Any history of this scholarship must attend to those intellectuals from the colonized world who studied and translated old texts—however imperfectly—in the crucible of anticolonial revolt. Some accounts of comparative literature's origins begin provocatively with the German Jewish philologist Erich Auerbach's exile in Istanbul, where he wrote *Mimesis* while estranged from Europe and its libraries during the Second World War.[71] He recounts on the final page of his study a number of topics he "should have liked" to include, had circumstances been different.[72] In a striking parallel, Bustani, writing at roughly the same time in Haifa, makes a similar admission in the prologue of his *Mahabharata*. He intentionally calls his text a prologue or preamble (*dibaja*) rather than an introduction (*muqaddima*) because, according to him, an introduction would be impossible to write from his present location. But Bustani was writing from his besieged home, not from exile. "My books are as far from me now as India is, and then further." "They are in the hands of my children outside of Israel," he continued, "and I am in the grip of Israel. Between us is fire and steel and certain death."[73]

If we look at scholarship forged through a shared history of colonial rule and anticolonial revolt, rather than the scholarship produced in the process of subjugation and exclusion, a different kind of writing emerges.[74] What does the study of a region look like when it is produced under conditions of geographical proximity, cultural affiliation, and political solidarity, rather than distance, judgment, and domination? Bustani's life and work begin to reveal what the study of the not-so-distant other—who is also close, but is not a compatriot—can look like.[75] Such intellectual practices, forms of south–south knowledge, should be instructive. At the very least, they can bring into relief the methodological, disciplinary,

[71]Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 5–9; Emily Apter, "Global Translation: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933," *Critical Inquiry* 29/2 (2003), 253–81. For an important response to these accounts see Nergis Ertruk, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (Oxford and New York, 2011).

[72]Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 2003), 557.

[73]Bustani, "Dibajat al-muʿarib," 15.

[74]It should be noted that Asian intellectuals made European orientalist scholarship possible, in their work as historians, translators, compilers, and assistants, what Tavakoli-Targhi has called "Orientalism's genesis amnesia." Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 18–34. Moreover, European insights into Asian languages were not particularly novel as they were entering a space with its own established philological practice. See Rajeev Kinra, "This Noble Science: Indo-Persian Comparative Philology, *c.*1000–1800 CE," in Yigal Bronner, Lawrence McCrea, and Whitney Cox, eds., *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock* (Ann Arbor, 2011), 359–85. See also Phillip B. Wagoner, "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45/4 (2003), 783–814; Rama Mantena, *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India: Antiquarianism and Philology, 1780–1880* (New York, 2012); Manan Ahmed Asif, "Quarantined Histories: Sindh and the Question of Historiography in Colonial India—Part II," *History Compass* 15/8 (2017), 1–7.

[75]Geographic proximity and historical affinity obviously do not necessarily produce empathetic observations; often they did not. Bustani's exemplary case, therefore, is instructive. For another perspective see Juan R. I. Cole, "Mirror of the World: Iranian 'Orientalism' and Early 19th-Century India," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 5/8 (1996), 41–60.

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geographical, and political presuppositions that the social sciences and humanities in the West inherited from colonialism. Bustani himself brings the same commitment to careful reading—and the same investment in liberation—to his excoriation of British rhetorics of rule as he does to his elucidation of those texts he believes to be irreducibly Indian. In both cases, having jettisoned from his reading practice any conscious devotion to British imperial precepts, he seeks to project a vision for an egalitarian future, free of domination and communal discord.

Bustani's *Mahabharata*, the only one of his Arabic translations that he prepared for publication before his death, was published in 1952, a collaboration between the Alumni Association of the American University of Beirut and the publisher Dar al-Ahad. Albert Hourani described Sulayman al-Bustani's Arabic *Iliad* as "a book of a kind which had never appeared in Arabic before: a handsome, well-produced volume of 1,260 pages, with an introduction, a running commentary, indexes and illustrations."[76] The *Mahabharata* translated by Wadiʿ al-Bustani was similarly monumental in form. The cover spells out the title in an Arabic script that mimics the Devanagari of Sanskrit and the book is full of color illustrations borrowed from Indian editions of the epic text (Fig. 3). Bustani subtitled the book *al-malhama al-Hinduwiyya, kubra' al-malahim al-ʿalamiyya*—"The Hindu epic, among the greatest epics in the world."

Bustani had studied Sanskrit during his time in India, but not to the extent needed to translate the epics he was interested in. His translation, or Arabization, comes from the Indian civil servant and historian Romesh Dutt's 1898 English verse translation of the *Mahabharata*. Bustani is explicit as to his role in the endeavor; the title page reads that the translation (*tarjama*) of the text from Sanskrit is Dutt's, and he is the one who has put it into Arabic poetic form (*ʿarabiha shʿariyyan*). However, Bustani does do more than simply render the text into Arabic. Unlike Dutt, who aimed to produce a modern, literary *Mahabharata* for modern Indian readers like himself, Bustani's project was more than just one of belles-lettres.[77] Introducing a new text to Arab readers, he sought to produce both an aesthetically beautiful piece of poetry and a scholarly edition. Therefore, in addition to Dutt's poetic version, Bustani drew on a number of other editions of the *Mahabharata* in English and French—hence his trips to London. Bustani's nearly one hundred pages of original endnotes—Dutt's edition

[76]Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 178.

[77]For an analysis of the form of and motivations behind Dutt's *Mahabharata* and other texts see Sheshalatha Reddy, "Romesh Chunder Dutt's Indian–English Epics and Epochs," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 47/2 (2012), 245–63. The transformation of Brahminical texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* into "epics" and their role in the history of modern Indian literature and political thought have been the subject of important work. In a 1904 essay Tagore himself succinctly registered this shift in literary conceptualizations: "Before the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* came to be classified with the great poetical works of the world, they used to be designated as history. Now, having adjusted them against the literary treasures of foreign lands, we call them *epics*." Rabindranath Tagore, "The *Ramayana*," in Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi, 2001), 252–64, at 252. See also Simona Sawhney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit* (Minneapolis, 2009); and the essays collected in a forum edited by Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji, "Bhagavad Gita and Modern Thought: Introduction," *Modern Intellectual History* 7/2 (2010), 269–73. For a classic study of the role of Hindu texts and concepts in the articulation of Indian nationalist thought see Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization Of Hinduism," *Social Research* 59/1 (1992), 111–49.

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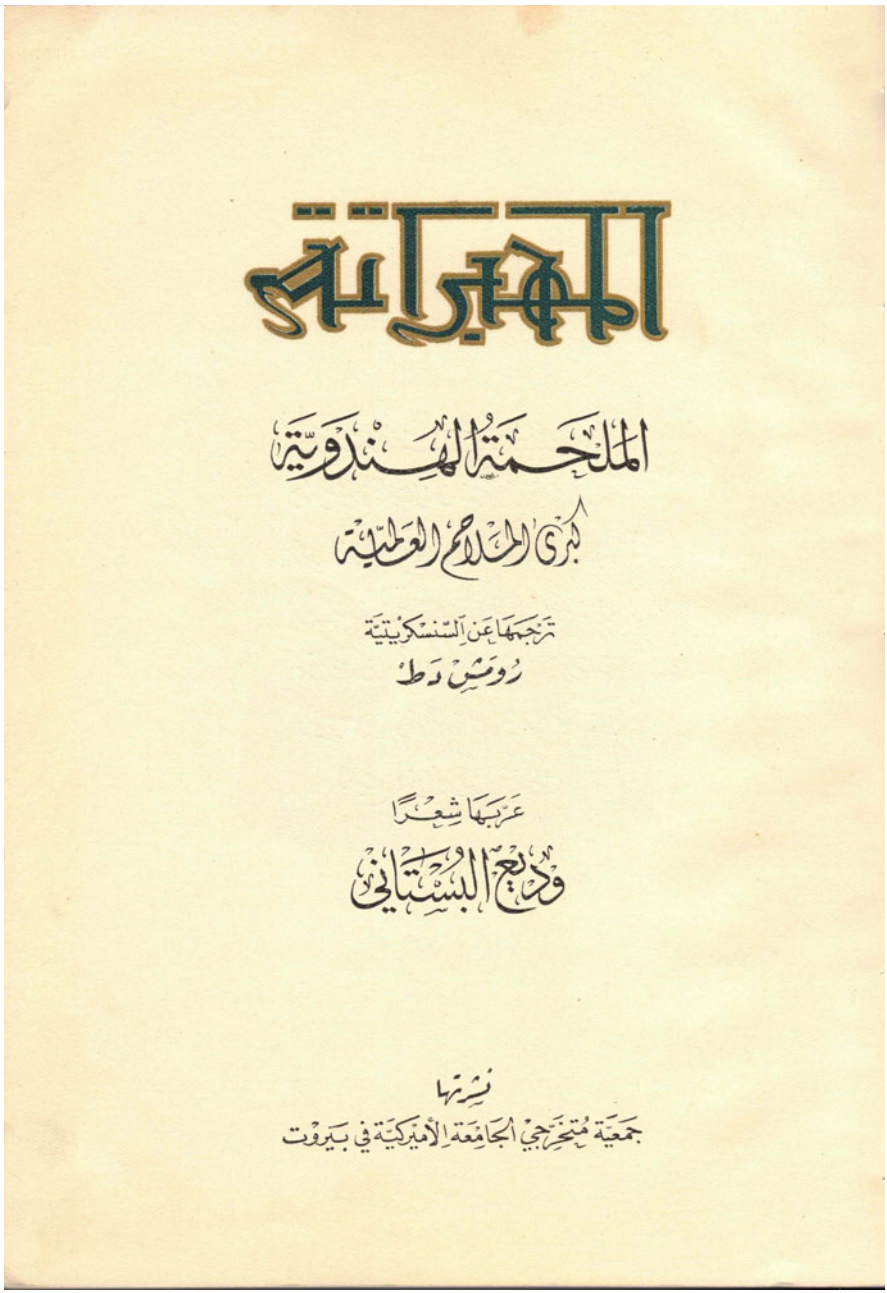


Fig. 3. The cover page of Wadiʿ al-Bustani's *Mahabharata*.

contains no notes—are evidence of this larger project. Some of the notes refer readers to different episodes and characters within the epic, while others provide context, offer alternative translations, or explain specific concepts.

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Bustani writes that while he was translating the *Mahabharata* from Dutt's English translation, he heard the Lebanese poet Shibli Faris utter on the radio that there "is no sectarianism in culture."[78] After hearing this, Bustani said *ameen*—like the English "amen"—which he compared to the Sanskrit *om*. Bustani wrote, "we took from the Jews so there is nothing wrong with taking from the Indians." "The Prophet," he continues, "took from the Torah, so there is no problem taking from India," and he cites that famous *hadith* that implores believers "to seek knowledge even unto China."[79] Bustani then makes an explicit comparison, arguing that the ethos found in a Quranic verse which says that God is with the weak and the patient is shared with the *Mahabharata*. Bustani simultaneously argues that the *Mahabharata* both is an instructive text for his contemporary political context on the one hand and parallels Arabo-Islamic principles on the other. Beyond the discussion of his own circumstances, his introduction is suffused with the political. Gandhi gets repeated mention, as freedom fighter and inheritor of the Buddha's teachings. Bustani notes that he completed his translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* the day after Gandhi was assassinated. He sent a copy to G. D. Birla, the Indian businessman who had been hosting Gandhi in his home at the time of his murder. Bustani dedicated the translation to the "soul of the Mahatma, in the name the Arabs of Palestine."[80] Bustani goes on to write that Dutt, who died in 1909, could never have imagined India's independence.[81] Dutt's introduction to his *Mahabharata*, which Bustani translates, is devoid of any political discussion.

As his citations and ideas reveal, the precise sources of Bustani's readings of Hinduism and India were often the voluminous works of European orientalists. Bustani's imagined readers, however, were not the same, so his points of emphasis, sources of comparison, and method of address differ markedly from the likes of Muller or even of Dutt. One of his unpublished manuscripts, *Akhbar al-Ahala* (Divine Chronicles), is a collection of quotations and commentaries testifying to the monotheistic origins of Hinduism.[82] The manuscript contains passages from Hindu texts, quotations from secondary sources, and Bustani's own interpretations and explanations. The book also serves as a general introduction for Arab readers to a series of Hindu concepts and characters: Vishnu, Brahma, Agni, Lakshmi, *karma*, *ananda*, and many others. He also explains the chronology of Hindu mythology. Bustani's specific form of address through comparison continues throughout the text. "Brahma," he writes, for example, "is to Hinduism, what '*allah*' is to Arabs."[83] Certain ideas present in Bustani's works can be found both in the many centuries-old Arabo-Islamic corpus and in the writing of modern European orientalists. The notion of Hinduism as monotheism which captured Bustani so strongly is shared between these two bodies of knowledge. In his famous

[78]al-Bustani, "Dibajat al-muʿarib," 16.
[79]Ibid., 17.
[80]Ibid., 5–6
[81]Ibid., 15.
[82]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, *Akhbar al-Ahala*, Indian Council for Cultural Relations Library (ICCR), New Delhi, 294.592 AKH/M-119.
[83]Ibid., 16.

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book, Al-Biruni himself repeatedly notes the monotheistic roots of Hinduism.[84] Bustani goes on to write that readers will be skeptical of his claim that Hinduism is monotheistic, but nevertheless it is the truth.[85] It is clear, then, that Bustani is writing into an already established sense of what India and Hinduism are thought to represent in Arab thinking. His writing was nothing short of an attempt to transform the terms and attitudes of Arabs' India. And although he did so in the spirit of solidarity and in the interest of dispelling myths, Bustani's India was an invention which did not reflect the reality of difference or diversity in the land of Hindustan itself. Like Max Muller's India or Jawaharlal Nehru's, Bustani's India was his own, tied inexorably to his particular place in an unequal colonial geography.

In the end, Bustani's neologism *hinduwi* never caught on and the impact of his indology is difficult to account for. In 1966, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) published an edition of his *Shakuntala* based on the manuscripts Bustani's family donated to the Indian government.[86] In 2012, the ICCR and Abu Dhabi's Kalima Project finally published an edition of his *Ramayana*, unveiling the book at the Jaipur Literary Festival in January 2013 (although mention of the text has now been scrubbed from Kalima's website).[87] The rest of his unpublished manuscripts, including a translation of *Kalila wa Dimna*, remain in the library of the ICCR. Copies of Bustani's 1952 *Mahabharata* are, unfortunately, quite rare. The only citation of the text I have tracked down is quite notable, however: an article by the great Bahraini poet Ibrahim al-ʿArayyed for *al-Abhath*, the journal of Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the American University of Beirut.[88] Al-ʿArayyed himself was an important link between modern Arabic literature and India. Born in 1908 in Bombay, he studied Urdu at Aligarh and translated Persian and Urdu poetry into Arabic. He merely quotes from the translation, but its presence in his hands reveals at least some of the text's capacity to travel. In 1947, *al-Risala* had enthusiastically reported on Bustani's efforts in the months prior to their aforementioned interview with him in Cairo. They lamented that what they know today of India comes to them from orientalists (*al-mustashriqin*), despite the long, well-documented history of Arab and Indian knowledge production from at least the Abbasid period.[89] Bustani, they argued, should be praised for repeating that older tradition of shared knowledge and translation across West and South Asia in modern Arabic form. Bustani represents, then, the very possibility of producing knowledge of the other outside the confines of colonial formations.

[84]Franz Rosenthal, "On Some Epistemological and Methodological Presuppositions of Al-Biruni," in *The Commemoration Volume of Biruni International Congress* (Tehran, 1973), 535–56.

[85]al-Bustani, "Dibajat al-muʿarib," 23.

[86]Kalidasa, *al-Shakuntala*, trans. Wadiʿ al-Bustani (New Delhi, 1966).

[87]Wadiʿ al-Bustani, trans., *Al-Ramayana* (Abu Dhabi, 2012).

[88]Ibrahim al-ʿArayyed, "Al-shiʿr wa qadiyatu fi al-adab al-Arabi al-hadith," *Al-Abhath* 7/2 (1954), 139–88. The only other scholarly mention of Bustani's indology after his death is from a publication by the ICCR itself, and even then exceedingly brief. M. S. Ashraf, "India in Arabic Literature," in Ashraf, *India and World Literature* (New Delhi, 1990), 211–18.

[89]"Al-Falsifa al-Hindiyya al-qadima," *al-Risala*, 17 Feb. 1947, 209.

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Conclusion: Partition

After 1948, despite remaining in Haifa, Bustani resigned from the political activities he had been a part of in the preceding years. In one Israeli intelligence report from 9 February 1949, Moshe Yitah, the director of the short-lived Ministry of Minorities in Haifa, wrote that Wadiʿ

> remained living in his home, even though most of the Arabs in Haifa moved in accordance with the decree of the military authority to Wadi Nisnas, and in his home there was for a long time a base of the Haganah. He is not engaged in public or political activity and is involved, as his acquaintances say, only with issues of rich literature.[90]

Bustani's position, like that of all Arab inhabitants of the new Israeli state, was precarious. Obviously weary of his fate, he wrote to thank the Ministry of Minority Affairs for not expelling him or confiscating his property: "This has all become possible thanks to my presence here, with all my books and manuscripts for which the authorities in Israel have been thanked and will always be thanked in contrast to the memory of our friend Azra Haddad retains of the Iraqi authorities who robbed him of his Hebrew translation of Omar Khayyam."[91] While his manuscripts would later be smuggled out of the country, the mention of Azra Haddad is telling. Haddad, one of Baghdad's most prominent Arab nationalist intellectuals, had just reluctantly arrived in the new state of Israel, along with more than 100,000 other Iraqi Jews. Bustani must have felt a certain kinship with Haddad, not only because they had both cut their teeth in the pan-Arabist press of the early twentieth century, but because he himself had translated Khayyam into Arabic. In 1953, the tragic fortunes of the Arab world's Jews were becoming increasingly clear. The world of translation and intellectual exchange that Bustani had tried to foster was collapsing around him.

But Bustani was not entirely without hope. As his health waned Bustani finally left Haifa and spent the last months of his life in the young state of Lebanon. In one of his final poems published shortly before his death, India served as a negative example. The poem praises Camille Chamoun, the second president of independent Lebanon. In it, Bustani juxtaposes the case of South Asia where Partition occurred—while also celebrating the role of Gandhi, who opposed Partition and upheld the ethics of the great Hindu epics—with the case of Lebanon, a model of ecumenism in the Arab East. He writes of the new, multi-sectarian state:

> Of those devout among us, there are those who read the Bible and those who read the Quran
> My homeland is my heaven on earth until God takes me to his heaven in the sky
> Lebanon is the homeland of thought and culture, if our East surveyed its nations

[90]Moseh Yitah to Mr. T. Eshbal, 9 Feb. 1949, Israel State Archives (ISA), 1329/19-C. The Ministry of Minority Affairs, the only Israeli ministry not based on a department within the Yishuv, would close in July 1949, scarcely a year after its founding.

[91]Wadiʿ al-Bustani to Moshe Yitah, 15 June 1953. I thank Nora Boustany for sharing this document with me from her personal archive.

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> The East would want Lebanon to be a lighthouse filling humankind with light, so it has become so.[92]

Despite the political passion of his life, Palestine, being gone, and his intellectual passion, India, being dismembered, Bustani remained committed to a vision of Eastern unity and pluralism. Global transformations birthed in Bustani a worldly imagination. The itinerary of his life and the content of his writing were inseparable. Each of his narrations of the Indian past was indelibly marked by the conditions and ideas of his Arab present. Bustani, it can be said, was a product of empire. His life and work reflect a history of imperial connections beyond those of administration and exploitation: an intellectual history of philology and solidarity. After 1948, Bustani's thinking was certainly guided by the language and conditions of the postcolonial nation-state. Lebanon, the land of his birth, became his final refuge, but his dreams of another, unpartitioned, world were not foreclosed.

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[92] Wadiʿ al-Bustani, "'Irfan," *al-Adib* 7 (July 1953), 6.

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