

Diaries of an Ottoman Spymaster?: Treason, Slander, and the Afterlife of Memoir in Empire's Long Shadow

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Puzzled, alarmed, and stirred to recall a past he faced with ambivalence, Yasin al-Jabi decided to write a letter. Two days earlier, on a Wednesday in mid-February, 1933, his friends had brought him a peculiar piece of news. During the First World War, al-Jabi had served as an Ottoman officer based at the imperial army's Jerusalem headquarters and later in Damascus, where he was still living fifteen years later. Now, his friends told him, his name had surfaced in a sensational memoir of wartime espionage. What it described, however, differed markedly from al-Jabi's own recollections. In his letter to the publisher, al-Jabi first begged pardon in case he had overlooked the author's name. (It had not been printed.) Then he assailed the mysterious memoirist as an impostor (“...*muntahalan sifat al-arif al-mutalli* ‘*ala bawatin al-umur*”).¹

The work in question was a memoir later attributed – falsely – to a Turco-Ottoman intelligence operative named ‘Aziz Bey, and which the Beirut newspaper *al-Ahrar* published in serial, then book form in 1932 and 1933.² Yasin al-Jabi was one of many Arabs – or, more accurately, Arabic-speaking Ottomans – both famous and ordinary, whose lives and loyalties were fiercely contested in the years following the war. The engagement of readers like him with ‘Aziz’s “memoir” offers a remarkable window onto the prolonged struggle over the Arab world’s Ottoman past and, consequently, its post-Ottoman future.

The fading of the old imperial order and the coming of a new one clouded an already complicated question: who was a patriot and who a traitor? The significance of this question for Arabs in the interwar period highlights the currency of buried

secrets belonging to an empire that had ceased to exist. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, the League of Nations imposed British and French mandates in the former Ottoman Arab provinces.³ That most of the region's inhabitants saw Mandate rule as a traumatic betrayal of wartime promises hardly needs elaboration; it has haunted relations between Arabs and the Western powers for the last hundred years. Yet with all the scrutiny placed on the diplomatic deceptions that cut this rift, Western scholars have too often overlooked the conflicts that wartime intrigue wrought among Arabs themselves. As the politics of loyalty shifted, the inhabitants of Mandate Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine embarked on their own critical reexamination of the final decades of Ottoman rule in the Middle East. The efforts they made to document the recent past would shape the collective memory of the region for the next century.

Memory Wars

Arab writers in the postwar years were ambivalent toward the legacy of the vanquished Ottomans. The Latakia-born scholar Yusuf al-Hakim, in his five-volume history of modern Syria and Lebanon, addresses this ambivalence by invoking his own experience as a judge and civil servant first in the Ottoman bureaucracy and then in Mandate Syria. "We" have won the war, he writes, alongside the Allies; Turkey has become "foreign to us like any foreign country." But in each of the places he worked – Jerusalem, Latakia, Jaffa, Mount Lebanon – he observed that the Ottoman government was "just and equitable to all its people, without differentiating among races and beliefs." "Do we see greater justice than that," he asks, "among the Europeans who are competing for our affections and alliances?"⁴ Wartime memories of famine and public executions were too fresh for most of Hakim's generation to mourn the end of Ottoman rule, even as resentment toward the French and British mounted. Yet in his question lingered a challenge: were elements of a better future buried in this troubled past?

The reevaluation of this history took two forms: the publication of Arab memoirs, like Hakim's, and the "translation" of Turco-Ottoman archival documents and memoirs into Arabic. Both were deeply personal. At the forefront of the latter endeavor was the Beirut newspaper *al-Ahrar* (from 1934, *Sawt al-Ahrar*). Established in 1922, *al-Ahrar* published at least five full-length memoirs in the 1930s that dealt with the First World War in the Ottoman Arab provinces.⁵ Even more ambitious was the special magazine it spawned, *al-Asrar* ("The Secrets"), of which at least twenty-five issues appeared in 1938 alone. In other words, the paper's investment in recovering Ottoman war narratives was considerable, as was – we can assume – popular demand for them.

One memoir aroused the dormant anger of Arab readers to an extraordinary degree: *Suriya wa Lubnan fi al-Harb al-'Alamiyya: al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya fi al-Dawla al-'Uthmaniyya* [Syria and Lebanon in the World War: Intelligence and Espionage in the Ottoman State], primarily an account of Ottoman counter-espionage around Damascus, Beirut, and Jerusalem, and along the Mediterranean coast from Alexandria to Haifa and Sidon.⁶ Many who feature in the book survived the war, and some became prominent

figures in the region's anti-colonial nationalist movements. The stories it told were thus very personal to *al-Ahrrar*'s readers. In fact, the paper's editors received so many letters in response that they considered publishing them together in a separate volume.⁷ These letters, sometimes furious, sometimes elegiac, underscore how important it was to those whose names figured in this chapter of shared history to right the historical record.

The focus on espionage in *Syria and Lebanon in the World War* dredged up buried demons in a way other memoirs penned by Arab and Turkish officials did not. By writing about spying, it directly invoked treason. The rival narratives that emerge from 'Aziz's "memoir" and the responses to it thus illuminate the complex negotiations of loyalty that at turns forged and undermined social trust in the former Arab provinces. At the same time, the accusation of inauthenticity leveled by Yasin al-Jabi forces us beyond the fraught content of the text to examine the circumstances of its production. By considering not only the "secrets" recounted in *Syria and Lebanon in the World War* but also where translation, fabrication, and collaboration intersect in the making of collective memory, we can begin to unravel a story about both the afterlife of empire and the afterlife of memoir.

Loyal Police, Policing Loyalty

'Aziz Bey's "memoir," as I will continue to call it for now, is set against a backdrop of dashed Arab hopes for both autonomy and Ottoman unity. Arabs had occupied an ambivalent place in the eyes of the post-Tanzimat imperial authorities. On one hand, as Ussama Makdisi has shown, the Arab lands were understood to be "proving grounds for Ottoman modernism," home to subjects who had the potential to be made modern. They were still, however, in the eyes of officials in Istanbul, stuck in the past. Arab elites, such as those who figure prominently in 'Aziz's memoir, were often partners in the *mission civilisatrice* directed at their less urban and less educated compatriots. But in the final few years before the outbreak of war, these elites surprised their non-Arab counterparts by increasingly asserting themselves as not only the foot soldiers of an Ottoman modernity dictated from Istanbul but as independent agents of it.⁸

When the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) came to power in Istanbul in 1908, many Arab officials and intellectuals cheered its rise. Most favored increased linguistic, educational, and administrative autonomy for the Arab provinces within an Ottoman framework, and believed that the CUP would advance policies to this end. The period between 1908 and 1914 thus saw the emergence of political associations such as the Decentralization Party (*Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya*), which was legally registered with Ottoman authorities and popular among the Arab intelligentsia. But the CUP fell far short of Arab aspirations, and a rift widened between Arabs and Turks within the first few years of its administration. In the 1912–13 Balkan Wars, the empire lost its last foothold in southeastern Europe, and turned its attention to its remaining territory in the Arab East. Even as Arabs came to differentiate themselves in this last hour from Turkish Ottomans, the primary fault line remained not ethnic or racial but political.⁹

Mistrust festered over the course of World War One, when the heavy-handed tactics of Cemal Pasha extinguished Arab subjects' lingering hopes for a shared future with the Turks. The decisive break in Arab-Turkish relations came in 1915–16, when Cemal carried out mass executions of dozens of local notables accused of Arab separatism in Beirut and Damascus. Many within the Ottoman bureaucracy doubted the wisdom of his approach, including much of the CUP leadership and even the head of the very court martial that imposed the death sentences.¹⁰ Regardless, compounded by the Arab Revolt in Hijaz the same year, the executions made it impossible for the leading Arab families to reconcile themselves to the possibility of continued Ottoman rule.¹¹ The extreme nature of Cemal's hanging of Arab notables ultimately eclipsed the nuances of loyalty that had existed in the Arab provinces before the war. It was easy, or perhaps necessary, to forget that one could be a committed Ottoman yet despise the methods of Cemal Pasha's administration.

Syria and Lebanon in the World War

promises to give readers a view from within the command of Cemal Pasha's Fourth Army, at the events that shaped Ottoman fears of betrayal and at surveillance activities that ultimately led to the notorious hangings. In doing so, the author positions himself both as a mirror for Cemal Pasha's growing suspicion of Arab subjects and a dedicated critic of the internal factionalism that was rife within the Ottoman leadership.¹² He disdains Cemal Pasha's dream of his own Syrian khedivate, writing, "Each captain of the Ottoman ship had individual ambitions that were not in accordance with the public good and the service of the Ottoman nation."¹³

The zealous policing of Arab loyalties thus may have had as much to do with the competition among the CUP leadership as it did with Arab subjects themselves. Yet this hardly translated to sympathy for Arab political ambitions. "This Arab idea," Aziz writes, echoing Cemal, "which increased after Ottoman freedom [1908], has come to threaten us with dangers greater than the Armenian dangers."¹⁴ He intends to draw a parallel between Armenian and Arab nationalisms, recounting at length a diplomatic trip to Paris made by the intelligence officer Mahmud Bey and an Armenian, Aram Bey. The French minister accused Mahmud of espionage, claiming that Aram had divulged their



Figure 1. Portrait of Hüseyin 'Aziz Akyürek, the purported author of *Syria and Lebanon in the World War* (1933), from the book's frontispiece.

true intentions. “Your colleague has already told us everything and he is Turkish, too,” the Frenchman said. “No, he is Armenian,” Mahmud protested. “Because a Turk does not betray his country.”¹⁵ It is worth remembering that the memoir appeared after the empire’s collapse, at the zenith of Turkish nationalism, and that this language reflects sentiments of that time. Nevertheless, analogies with the Armenian case are significant because it was this very fear of Armenian disloyalty that CUP leaders used to justify their mass killings of Armenians in eastern Anatolia.

As Ottoman fortunes shifted, it became more and more difficult for Cemal and his associates to police loyalty from within Arab cities, encircled by possible defectors. The increasingly paranoid commander came to see everyone as a potential traitor. As his resources diminished, however, he had no choice but to rely on informants from among the local population. When former allies turned to foes, the Ottoman command sought to explain why. Its arguments appeared in a book-length report published originally in Turkish under the auspices of the Fourth Army court-martial that executed Arab notables. “First and foremost,” it reads, the issue under investigation “is not a matter of nationalism (*kavmiyet*). It is a matter of treason (*hiyanet*.)” Rather than the “inaccurate” terms “Arabism” (*Araplık*) and “Arab uprising” (*Arap ihtilali*), the report instructs, the unrest instigated by a few self-interested leaders should be referred to as “treason against the government, in general, and against the Arab people in particular.”¹⁶ ‘Aziz’s memoir endorses this characterization of Cemal’s, belittling the very notion of Arab patriotism as an ideological construct. He represents infidelity to the empire as something motivated wholly by crass opportunism – greed, professional ambition, and personal grudges.¹⁷

“I wonder,” ‘Aziz says he asked himself in 1915, “is it possible for this country to be independent?” He answers with “what the Arabs say,” quoting the tenth-century poet al-Mutanabbi:

Lofty honor does not come from suffering;
Until blood is shed on all sides.

“But have the men of this country sacrificed their blood for their country?” ‘Aziz asks, rhetorically. He delivers his own searing reply: “*Kalla*.” No. The Arabs of Greater Syria could think only of saving themselves from conscription, “preferring death from hunger to serving their country on the battlefield.”¹⁸

Though the Fourth Army’s spymasters were initially preoccupied with averting Arab betrayal, Jewish spies and counterspies come to occupy a prominent place. After the Ottoman discovery of the famous NILI spy ring at the agricultural field station of Atlit, south of Haifa, and the suicide of its leader Sarah Aaronsohn in October 1917, ‘Aziz describes, zealous officers began a frenzied sweep of Palestine to root out spies who, like the Aaronsohn siblings, might have changed allegiances.¹⁹ Ottoman authorities interrogated a string of Jews on espionage charges including, most famously, Naaman Belkind and Yosef Lishansky, who were executed in December 1917. The interrogations yielded so many names, according to ‘Aziz, that the Damascus governor Tahsin Bey complained of there being no room left in his city’s prison for Jews arrested in Palestine.

“Every train coming from Haifa [is packed] with them,” he warned his superiors.²⁰

Though Sarah Aaronsohn dominated later writing on Jewish spying – more often depicted as heroine than as traitor—another mysterious woman looms large for ‘Aziz: Natalya Davidovich. An informant in Alexandria, ‘Aziz says, first described a tall blonde woman, “full-bodied” and with amber eyes, who had surreptitiously made her way from Egypt to Palestine and was in contact with British forces.²¹ She then arrived in Beirut, where Ottoman officers fell hard for her. Was the “beautiful spy” a villain or a damsel in distress? Was she at the center of a vast conspiracy or simply a red herring?

‘Aziz claims he sensed danger from the start. Sneaking into Davidovich’s hotel room, he discovered among her papers the key to a cipher.²² Soon after, in a meeting ‘Aziz says he orchestrated in the hotel restaurant, Cemal confronted the woman. Trembling, she confessed to spying – against her will. She was an Istanbulite, she explained, a loyal subject who had traveled to Egypt only to be detained there on charges of spying for the Ottoman state. Given no alternative but to sign on with Allied intelligence, she had been sent to Beirut not to spy on Ottoman military plans, as it appeared, but in fact to make contact with the French director of the Ottoman Bank there and, with him, establish a back channel of communication between the Ottoman general and French authorities. Cemal shocked ‘Aziz by thanking Davidovich for the information, expelling the bank director from Beirut, executing two of Davidovich’s associates, and dispatching the woman to collect intelligence for him in Jerusalem in the company of his aide Fu’ad Salim.²³

Natalya Davidovich the wealthy Istanbulite Jew fades from the story, but the figure of the “beautiful spy” – the deceptive Jew who dazzles secrets out of faithful soldiers – reappears in the person of a “Miss Simone.” ‘Aziz relays a report from Cevat Rıfat Bey, head of the First Branch’s intelligence operations, noting that Miss Simone had ingratiated herself at the officers’ barracks first in Jerusalem and now in Damascus. The men had already fallen in love with her. More alarming, she knew everything, even who would be sent to the front before the privates themselves did.²⁴ ‘Aziz instructed Cevat Rıfat to find out more. When he warned the young Arab officer Yasin al-Jabi, who would many years later read ‘Aziz’s memoir, against socializing with Simone, al-Jabi reportedly retorted, “Once in our lifetime we should seize the opportunity to live a happy life – tomorrow

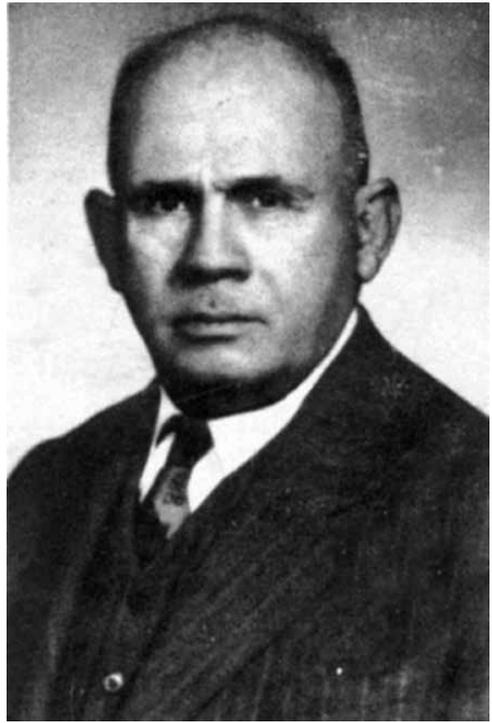


Figure 2. Cevat Rıfat (Atılhan).

we'll die."²⁵ Ultimately, Cevat Rifat decided to confront Simone directly. As he dutifully reported to 'Aziz, he came to her home in the Bab Tuma neighborhood of Damascus, and plied her with arak and love songs. Drunk on the anise liquor she began to weep. She was an orphan, she told the officer, adopted by the prominent Rabinovitch family in Jerusalem. When they decamped to Beirut, they had enlisted her to remain and spy for Britain. She was a hapless woman with little passion for politics, she claimed. Cevat questioned her further, digging for details that might incriminate his own men: how much had Yasin al-Jabi told her? How intimately did she know him? Although she should have been sent to the Divan-ı Harb, the military tribunal, 'Aziz says, Ottoman authorities determined that she could be useful to keep around.²⁶

The NILI spies exemplified Ottoman authorities' greatest fear, a fear echoed in the lesser known legends of Natalya Davidovich and Miss Simone: spies in their barracks, in their bedrooms, sharing across hundreds of miles a common bond the forces of counterintelligence were only beginning to understand. The discovery of the NILI ring was significant because it turned Cemal completely against the Jews, whom initially he had identified as potential allies. But most of the actors in 'Aziz's narrative were not, and never became, public figures. They were ordinary people, plagued by locusts and famine, who were forced to make difficult choices when faced with an increasingly uncertain future. *Al-Ahrar's* string of publications in the 1930s briefly revived many of these minor figures who had played dramatic wartime roles yet had gone on to unremarkable lives. Long after secret ties were broken and shared geographies lost to separate futures, their stories, too, became the stuff of legend, difficult to verify and prone to embellishment in the service of politics or simply entertainment.

The Enigma of 'Aziz Bey

'Aziz Bey's memoir is one of the most commonly cited sources on Ottoman intelligence operations in the Levant during the First World War. But a comparison of the biography of the supposed author with the contents of his books reveals inconsistencies so puzzling as to strongly suggest that the author was not the man he claimed to be.²⁷ Who was he?

Inside the cover of *Syria and Lebanon in the World War* is a single photograph of a mustachioed 'Aziz, no fez, in a checkered Western suit with silk tie and handkerchief. This photo did not originally appear with the work when it was serialized in *al-Ahrar*. Readers had pressed the editors to reveal the author's identity, however, and eventually they complied.

Fu'ad Maydani, who was billed as the translator of the work from Turkish to Arabic, provides only one biographical detail about its author in his brief introduction – that he assumed the head of the Ottoman General Security Directorate in late 1917.²⁸ This information, paired with the photo, establishes the memoirist as a man who would come to be known, after the passage of Turkey's Surname Law in 1934, as Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek.

According to his Interior Ministry personnel file, Hüseyin Aziz was born in 1881 in Trabzon, where his father was a mid-level bureaucrat.²⁹ He entered the Ottoman civil service in January 1903 at the age of 21 and by summer 1914 had been appointed to the General Security Directorate.³⁰ He served first as deputy director and then was promoted, in 1916 (not 1917, as Maydani says) to the post of director.³¹ Polat Safi and others have placed Hüseyin Aziz simultaneously in the upper echelons of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (“Special Organization”), a secretive, officially sanctioned but often rogue department that emerged from the Italo-Turkish War in Libya (1911–12) and the Balkan Wars (1912–13), and which specialized in guerrilla operations on the imperial frontier as well as in espionage.³²

After the 1918 Mudros Armistice, Hüseyin Aziz was rounded up with other operatives of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa and its successor from 1915, the Department of Eastern Affairs, and tried by Ottoman authorities, under heavy pressure from the Allies, for the departments’ involvement in the Armenian genocide. Hüseyin Aziz, as director of the General Security Directorate, was convicted of destroying a stash of incriminating documents from the Ministry of Interior.³³ But hampered by both CUP stalwarts and the ascendant Kemalists, the tribunal’s damning verdicts were not enforced.³⁴ Hüseyin Aziz, now Akyürek, went on to serve in civil posts in Manisa and Izmir before launching a long career as a member of parliament from Erzurum, and died in 1951.

The beginning of the memoir is roughly compatible with the known details of Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek’s life. The narrative opens on 15 April 1909, when Nazım Bey, then a senior officer in the newly established government of the Committee of Union and Progress, supposedly dispatched him to Abdülhamid II’s Yıldız Palace to sniff out the details of a counter coup underway against the newly empowered CUP.³⁵ This Nazım would later be involved in the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. The author does not name the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, but rather suggests that he arrived in Damascus as an aide-de-camp to Cemal Pasha’s Fourth Army in November 1914, when the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War.³⁶

While certain chapters are strikingly impersonal, others suggest detailed knowledge of the Ottoman spy apparatus in the Arab provinces. For instance, ‘Aziz the author reels off the numbers, locations, and salaries of paid informants throughout the Levant: eighteen in Beirut, five in Acre and Haifa, three in Nablus, twenty-two in Mount Lebanon, sixty-two in Damascus, eighteen in Aleppo, and so on, he says, each receiving between 150 and 500 Ottoman lira a month.³⁷ Jerusalem was a special case. There, he asserts, Cemal employed twenty-two Arab spies and ten Jews, but paid the Jews twice as much because he distrusted them more.³⁸ This mention of the commander’s special preoccupation with the loyalties of non-Muslim populations leads to what ‘Aziz claims was his primary responsibility. By his account, Cemal installed him as chief of a special Beirut-based intelligence branch charged with monitoring religious orders. Of twenty-eight men under his supervision, ‘Aziz maintains, a full ten spied day and night on the Maronite Patriarchate and its flock. The agents’ identities were kept secret from each other, and so ‘Aziz spent his time collecting and synthesizing a steady stream of intelligence. Cemal, he notes, prized his work and demanded daily reports. “He was

always saying to me,” writes ‘Aziz, “I want to know every move these guys make, even in their bedrooms.”³⁹

But not everyone who read the memoir was persuaded by the author’s claim that he had had a front seat to the intrigue. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Nusuli, who in the early 1930s was a prominent Beirut businessman, wrote a lengthy letter to the editors of *al-Ahrrar*, before the author’s name was released, questioning his legitimacy. “The author of these memoirs was not for a day director of intelligence in the headquarters of the Fourth Army,” he insisted. How was he so sure? He was himself, he said, employed in the intelligence bureau of the Eighth Corps, active in Syria and Palestine under the direction of an Ahmet Durmuş, then in a similar position in the Fourth Army under a certain Şemsi Bey, whom he identified as the head of the War College in Istanbul at the time of writing.⁴⁰ We have already seen that Yasin al-Jabi shared al-Nusuli’s incredulity. He was another young officer of whom the memoir’s author claimed intimate knowledge. But al-Jabi, like al-Nusuli, could not remember any official with the title of head of intelligence for the Fourth Army. If the memoirist was not an impostor, al-Jabi concluded, his deceit and dishonesty (*al-khadda‘ wa al-tadlil*) were intentional.⁴¹ This struck Yasin al-Jabi, as it might well strike readers today, as bizarre, since there was no shortage of men still living who could contest basic elements of the narrative.

Ottoman Interior Ministry records from the period, though incomplete, give credence to al-Nusuli and al-Jabi’s doubts. There is no evidence that the man whose portrait sits behind the book’s title page was in Syria at all, much less in 1914 or 1915. In November 1914, when Cemal Pasha was bound for Damascus, Hüseyin Aziz was shuttling back and forth between Istanbul and Edirne, near the present-day border between Greece and Turkey.⁴² And in December of that year, he traveled to Vienna with another security official.⁴³ By July 1915, foreign diplomats reported that Hüseyin Aziz was comfortably ensconced in a security role in Istanbul.⁴⁴

Casting further doubt on the provenance of Aziz’s memoir is the fact that the “original” Turkish version is not extant; scholars have always cited its Arabic translation. The authenticity of another book in the series published by Fu’ad Maydani is also questionable: There is no trace in Turkish of the memoir of the Mersinli Mehmed (“Küçük”) Cemal Pasha, which appeared in Arabic in 1932.⁴⁵ Since Mersinli Cemal was among the top commanders in the Ottoman army at the end of the war, it is unlikely that he would have written a hitherto undiscovered book. Perhaps most damning of all, the postwar writings of several officers with whom the author of ‘Aziz’s work claims to have had regular interaction omit any mention of someone by his name. Even Cemal Pasha, in a self-exculpatory memoir penned on the eve of his 1922 assassination in Tblisi, fails to make note of his supposed right-hand man.⁴⁶

Another figure who is prominent in ‘Aziz’s memoir but did not return the favor is Cevat Rifat, the officer who became entangled with the beguiling Jerusalemite “Simi Simone.” This encounter apparently scarred Cevat Rifat for the rest of his life: He went on to become a prolific anti-Semitic author, penning more than seventy books about Jewish and Masonic conspiracies well into the 1960s. His account of Jewish spying on

the Palestine front, and particularly of the “Syrian Matahari” whose story also appeared in ‘Aziz’s memoir, had an afterlife of its own. First appearing in Turkish around 1933, Cevat Rıfat (now Cevat Rıfat Atilhan)’s work was immediately translated and released in Germany, where anti-Semitic circles devoured it with enthusiasm.⁴⁷ Cevat Rıfat’s melodramatic retelling differs in certain details from ‘Aziz’s version but is, in substance, the same.⁴⁸ The former’s work appeared in Turkish markets in 1933, making it contemporaneous with the later serial installments of *Suriya wa-Lubnan fi al-Harb al-‘Alamiyya* in *al-Ahrar*. ‘Aziz’s “memoir” appears to have drawn heavily from it.⁴⁹

Throughout his book, Atilhan footnotes appearances of individuals who were still alive and active in the public sphere at the time of writing; he even gives the positions they then held. Given that Aziz Akyürek had been a high-ranking security official and worked his way back into officialdom after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, his omission is striking. But while Cevat Rıfat was certainly where and who he said he was he, too, was accused of blatant fabrication of parts of his story. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Nusuli, the same Arab intelligence officer who disputed ‘Aziz’s very existence, explained that while he had found Cevat Rıfat “bright, enthusiastic, and cultured” when they worked together during the war, he had to conclude that most of his reports now seemed to be “derived from his fertile imagination.” It was true, he agreed, that Simone – or Simi Basmach, as she was known to “all the families of Jerusalem” – had ingratiated herself with the top officers in Jerusalem, and that she was consequently sent to Damascus, where she could be kept under closer watch. She was no foundling child, however: vain and boastful of her Spanish origins, she had lived with her mother and sister on Mahane Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. After the war, she married a British officer and moved with him to Cairo. There was nothing she loved but money, al-Nusuli claimed, and while still at home in Jerusalem Simi was a renowned *simsara*, or broker, wringing local families for money in exchange for securing extra rations or cushy posts for their conscripted sons.⁵⁰

Even more important to al-Nusuli than Simi’s story was correcting Yasin al-Jabi’s part in it. Contrary to ‘Aziz’s description, he insisted, al-Jabi was hardly a guileless slave to passion: as the man who held the key to the army’s numeric telegraph cipher, he was carefully watched, and eschewed altogether the hard-drinking culture of his fellow officers. As a testament to his steely disposition, he noted, Yasin once rode his horse from Jerusalem to the army camp at Bir Sab‘a (Beersheba) in the Negev while fasting, demonstrating a piety that drew guffaws from his comrades and admonishment from his commander. Had the young officer’s lips been as loose as they were portrayed, al-Nusuli reminds us, he would hardly have been kept in a position of authority; instead he was promoted.⁵¹

Digging for “truth” in the incongruous details of al-Nusuli, Cevat Rıfat, and ‘Aziz’s narratives may well be a futile exercise. More important is that the inconsistencies inspired a debate among readers nearly two decades later – a debate that undertook to establish what had actually taken place, yes, but also wrestled with the broader problem of authenticating voices that by their very nature traded in secrets.

The discrepancies demand an explanation from the translator, Fu'ad Maydani – about whom, unfortunately, almost nothing is known. Did Hüseyin Aziz make a secret sojourn in Syria, so brief that colleagues failed to take note, and covertly dispatch an account of it to a Lebanese journalist many years later? This seems improbable. Or did someone less prominent than Hüseyin Aziz or Mersinli Cemal Pasha author their books and pass them off to *al-Ahrar* as the work of leading officers? This seems risky given that both men were alive and, in Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek's case, still active in the public sphere in Turkey in the 1930s. Or could parts of the book, perhaps those that describe prewar intelligence operations, genuinely belong to Hüseyin Aziz, while others were appended to them to create a (mostly) coherent story? Most likely, Fu'ad Maydani constructed the narrative based on officials' memoirs and, perhaps, documentary sources abandoned by the retreating Ottoman army.

As noted, certain parts of 'Aziz's account resemble other officials' published works – notably that of Cevat Rifat Atilhan. Five years later, when Fu'ad Maydani published the substantively very different but similarly titled *al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya fi Lubnan wa Filastin wa Suriya khilal al-Harb al-'Alamiyya* [Intelligence and Espionage in Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria during the World War], with which the work attributed to 'Aziz is often conflated, he was both more and less opaque about its source material. On one hand, no single author's name was attached to it, though Maydani still christened himself its translator (*mu'arrif*). On the other hand, the work explicitly mentions both published memoirs and unpublished archival material on which it drew. One long passage, for example, explicitly reprises Falih Rifki Atay's *Zeytindağı* [Mount of Olives] (1932). It is even noted, in an aside from the *mu'arrif*, that Atay, once top aide to Cemal Pasha in Palestine, was at the time of publication a renowned member of the Turkish Parliament in Ankara.⁵² Other source notes are even more intriguing. "In the documents that were found in the warehouses of the Ottoman Interior Ministry," one chapter begins, "are important reports" related to the secret surveillance of Arab political parties on the eve of the war.⁵³ Another section claims to quote verbatim a series of secret communiqués of which a zincograph copy – a notably specific detail – remained with the "Ottoman intelligence service" (*da'irat al-istikhbarat al-'uthmaniyya*).⁵⁴ It is not always evident where a cited passage or document ends or begins, or how these disparate sources were assembled. Further complicating the question of authorship in the case of this later text is the fact that it is laced with commentary describing the oppression of Arab populations, something that almost certainly does not derive from a Turkish Ottoman source.⁵⁵ What is clear, however, is that Maydani was well aware of the reservoir of Turkish sources available at the time and had a certain aptitude for weaving them together.

Whether Maydani himself employed broad artistic license in constructing the "memoir" of 'Aziz Bey or was fed a forgery by another party, hints in other works in the series suggest that Maydani and *al-Ahrar*'s editors knew the material they were publishing would be incendiary. Beyond entertaining readers, it seems, they wanted to provoke a public dialogue. They realized that kindling the archival vestiges of a collapsed state with human voices would stir their audience to action – and sell papers. Indeed, criticism of 'Aziz's memoir did not stop Maydani from churning out similar copy throughout the 1930s.

More clues as to the authorship of this work may be hidden in the corpus of espionage narratives whose publication Maydani oversaw in the 1930s, including the short-lived journal *al-Asrar*. But we must first pose a basic question: Why does it matter who wrote *Syria and Lebanon in the World War: Intelligence and Espionage in the Ottoman State*? And to whom?

The Afterlives of Traitors and Saviors

By the time *al-Ahrar* began publishing war memoirs in the early 1930s, Syria and Lebanon had been under French Mandate for a decade and Palestine under British Mandate for slightly longer. Several of the key actors who figure in ‘Aziz’s account had turned to fight against the latest occupying power. Overshadowed by this new reality, the war receded into a space filled with both moral gray zones and sharp passions.

The newspaper’s publication of the ‘Aziz Bey memoir revived accusations of treachery buried fifteen years in the past. It marked, like the memoir itself, an effort to police the loyalties of fellow citizens. The editors certainly did not set out to promote ‘Aziz’s characterization of Arab defectors as traitors, but neither did they set out to invert ‘Aziz’s narrative by making heroes of the men whose reputations the writer had impugned. Instead they repurposed the narrative in order to call attention to – and indirectly condemn – fellow Arabs who had collaborated with the Ottomans during the war.

The introduction to the purported memoir of Mersinli Mehmed Cemal Pasha, published just before that of ‘Aziz, gives us an idea of what the editors had in mind for the series of Ottoman war stories. It appears in the form of a letter from a friend and colleague of Fu’ad Maydani, Butrus Mu‘awwad, who marvels bitterly at how quickly readers have forgotten the dark days when Ahmed Cemal marched Arab leaders to the gallows.⁵⁶ Many of his countrymen, he exclaims, were “still walking about in elegant robes by virtue of the bodies hidden inside them, [and] still [wore] on their faces the look of innocence.”⁵⁷ Those who cooperated with Cemal’s forces, he suggests, betrayed their own people and deserved a different, grimmer fate: they should have been publicly shamed, not appointed to high office.

There was also another motive behind the publication of the memoirs: the desire to construct an authoritative narrative of the war from an Arab perspective. For Mu‘awwad, and presumably Maydani as well, it was to posterity if not necessarily to the law that collaborators should be held accountable. Many readers, he admitted, would “look askance at these books . . . because they contain things that hurt them, that bring a painful sting to their numb consciences.” But their descendants would surely rely on *al-Ahrar*’s publications to pass fair judgment on the events of the war.⁵⁸ In this light, the memoir series appears not only as an exercise in finger-pointing, but also an attempt at writing self-critical history.

Yet this history was subject to revision in keeping with current events. When Fu’ad Maydani published *Intelligence and Espionage in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine during*

the World War in 1937, he included an introduction to the work whose politics were far more explicit than Mu‘awwad’s. Maydani prefaces the 1937 work by heaping praise on contemporary politicians: Lebanese President Émile Eddé and Prime Minister Khayreddin al-Ahdab, Syrian President Hashim al-Atasi and Prime Minister Jamil Mardam, as well as various ministers. He saw fit, he explains, to publish the series of Ottoman spy memoirs at this moment, the “end” of the Mandate period (though in fact it would last another decade) because it was then that the people of Lebanon and Syria, under the inspired leadership of Eddé and the others, were finally reclaiming their own destiny after many long years of subjugation. Maydani goes on to claim a direct, if imprecise, link between these new national heroes and the martyrs of the First World War – the victims of Cemal’s tyranny. It is by recording those past sacrifices made in the face of oppression, he says, that society will come to evaluate the present era of liberty and constitutionalism “with the justice and righteousness it deserves.”⁵⁹

Looking beyond the loud, if banal, rhetoric of the 1937 introduction, it is clear that what was taking place was the fine-tuning of a narrative, nascent at the end of the war and still under construction in the early 1930s. Shaped by local political developments under the Mandate governments, it involved the search for and incorporation of new documents to tell a more complete story of how the Arab states were born of a dissolving empire.

Supported by personal accounts as well as Ottoman archival sources, a narrative of espionage, collaboration, and martyrdom coalesced between the early 1930s and the end of the decade. For Fu‘ad Maydani, Butrus Mu‘awwad, and the editors of *al-Ahrar*, writing history entailed coming to terms with its darker dimensions. In shedding light on the injustices inflicted by those in power, they saw it as inevitable that they would implicate some of their own. Some readers, however, thought it was too soon. *Al-Ahrar* was attuned, it seems, to the sensitivity of the subject it had taken on. When they released ‘Aziz’s memoir in 1932, editors invited the paper’s readers to weigh in with their own version of events, either to corroborate ‘Aziz’s story or to contest it. Six of the letters they received in response, including those of ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Nusuli and Yasin al-Jabi, were printed in the published book. And, though the project apparently proved too expensive, the editors even floated the idea of issuing a separate volume to accommodate the rest.⁶⁰

In their letters several readers, as well as Maydani, turned to other memoirs, especially that of Cemal Pasha, to cross-reference their disputes with ‘Aziz. Paradoxically, they found themselves both employing and arguing against a historical record that was dictated largely by the losers of the war – by an empire that no longer existed. These letters give us a vivid, if incomplete, view of the fault lines that animated the politics of loyalty in the early 1930s. Mu‘awwad’s explicit reference to the hangings of 1915–16 makes clear that his animus was directed first and foremost at those who collaborated with Cemal Pasha, “the Butcher.”⁶¹ But not everyone who survived the war and followed Maydani’s series in *al-Ahrar* rushed to deny involvement with Cemal. There were many shades of treachery. Which was worse: collaboration with Cemal, the brutal but

dead symbol of a collapsed empire? Or collaboration with France and Britain, empires still very much alive?

To the authorial ‘Aziz, the worst traitor was one who turned to the French or British for help in undermining the Ottoman war effort. During the Balkan Wars, he says, he was deployed to lurk outside the French embassy in Istanbul, taking down the names of visitors. A handful of prominent Arabs, he explains, were using the embassy’s mailbox to send seditious correspondence abroad, beyond the purview of Ottoman censors. Intercepting one of the posted letters, he uncovered the activities of a secret Arabist society.⁶² Thereafter he worked zealously to uncover Western attempts to infiltrate the empire through personal contacts,

educational institutions, the press, and cloak-and-dagger espionage. One target was the prominent Lebanese newspaper *Lisan al-Hal*, whom he accused of a Christian, anti-Muslim bias.⁶³ What is explicit in ‘Aziz’s attacks on *Lisan* and several other presses, but only implicit in the paper’s angry response, is that this meant French patronage.

The stain of collaboration with the French looms silently behind the controversy between ‘Aziz and his critics. ‘Aziz excoriates the Arabs for looking to Europe for salvation. And while Mandate-era readers were hesitant to broach this subject directly, it is very likely that Maydani was gingerly using ‘Aziz’s voice to treat a subject that was even more delicate in the postwar era than it had been during the war itself. He hoped to remind readers of the perils of collaboration with occupying powers whether they came from near or far.

The sharpest critic of the ‘Aziz Bey memoir was Amir Shakib Arslan (1869–1946), a prominent Druze politician and intellectual who served as the unofficial representative of Lebanon and Syria at the League of Nations in Geneva in the 1920s.⁶⁴ Arslan feuded with Maydani over the publication of the book because it portrayed him as a collaborator with Ottoman authorities at the expense of the Lebanese population. This was a profound accusation at a time when the statesman was traveling the world as a champion of his people against colonial oppression.

Arslan enters ‘Aziz’s narrative even before Cemal Pasha’s arrival in Damascus. Ahead of Cemal’s deployment, Ottoman officials assembled Syrian advisors to ensure a smooth transition for the new commander: Arslan, As‘ad al-Shuqayri of Acre, and ‘Abd al-Rahman Pasha Yusuf of Damascus.⁶⁵ Cemal feared their lingering allegiance to his rival Enver Pasha, perhaps justifiably so. ‘Aziz writes:



Figure 3. Amir Shakib Arslan.

Amir Shakib Arslan was at the forefront of individuals upon whom Enver Pasha relied to bring the Druze and some of the Arab tribes into the Ottoman fold. . . . After his encounter with Enver Pasha in Istanbul, Shakib Arslan announced his complete readiness to do whatever else he ordered, and he is the one who made clear to Enver the necessity of seizing the opportunity to destroy Lebanon's independence and adjoin her to the Ottoman state.⁶⁶

(He was referring to Mount Lebanon's special administrative status.) The lingering accusation is thus not that Arslan, in contrast to al-Shuqayri, was a direct accessory to the hanging of his compatriots, but that he was obsequious, willing to compromise Arab interests if it was politically expedient.

'Aziz underscores this point in the final pages of the memoir, pointedly denouncing Arslan as an apologist for German imperialism. For at just the moment that Cemal Pasha decorated the Druze leader for his bravery and leadership of a volunteer brigade in the 1915 Suez Campaign, the German government awarded him its own Iron Cross. The states were allies, yes, but not friends. How, then, 'Aziz asks, could Arslan's crusade against foreign imperial powers possibly be sincere? Having berated his countrymen for fighting alongside the enemy, Arslan proceeded to write a series of articles beginning in 1915 absolving Germany of responsibility for the war. This was, in 'Aziz's view, blatant hypocrisy; the Germans coveted the Middle East even more hungrily than the French and British.⁶⁷

Unfortunately, as Arslan's outraged letter to the editor was not appended to the book, we have only the portions of it that Maydani reprinted in order to counter them. However, in his own autobiography, published in 1936, he attempted to underscore his principal loyalty to the people of Syria by depicting himself in a heroic confrontation with Cemal Pasha at the Damascus Hotel Victoria.⁶⁸

The conflict between Maydani and Arslan hinged on five points. First, Arslan sought to discredit 'Aziz's facts, calling the work an unreviewed "mess" (*khalat*), while Maydani defended the scrupulousness of the author. 'Aziz, he said, had supplied scores of names and dates and offered a balanced perspective, praising good deeds and maligning bad ones on all sides of the conflict. Moreover, he said, Arslan's cooperation with Ottoman authorities was corroborated by the memoirs of Mersinli Mehmed Cemal Pasha and 'Ali Fu'ad (a leading Ottoman general on the Sinai-Palestine front), and by Ahmed Cemal Pasha's own.⁶⁹ Finally, Maydani extolled his own neutrality: he was too young to have participated in the war, he said, and therefore had no stake in incriminating Arslan or anyone else.⁷⁰

Maydani then dared Arslan to reconcile his account with that of 'Aziz and of Cemal Pasha himself. Echoing 'Aziz, he accused the amir of "working to consolidate the influence of Ahmed Cemal Pasha, helping him to abolish Lebanon's privileges." Arslan wielded influence over Cemal Pasha, he continued, only because his brother was a postal employee in Beirut and had agreed to read and report on the mail of his countrymen. "So what," he challenged, "does the amir think about that?"⁷¹

Whether Arslan replied we do not know. But the different shades of meaning attributed to the amir's dealings with the Ottoman regime in Syria point to a larger problem. Because so many Arabs served in the Ottoman bureaucracy, and especially in the army, what constituted collaboration was an ambiguous matter. The letter writers walked a careful line, unwilling to condemn themselves or their compatriots simply for doing their job. Yasin al-Jabi, for instance, acknowledged the "malice" (*naqma*) of Turkish Ottoman officers toward their Arab underlings while simultaneously underscoring how faithfully and with what dignity Arab soldiers performed throughout the war.⁷²

If it was difficult in the postwar years for those who survived the conflict to construct perfectly coherent narratives about their role in the final hours of the Ottoman occupation and the first hours of the Mandate period, it was, of course, even harder for those who were dead. Dr. 'Izzat

al-Jundi of Homs was one such casualty. The controversy over the nature of his death that played out on the pages of *al-Ahrar* illustrates the frustrations of family members who could fight memories only with other memories.

In April 1915, a woman named Farida wrote to Ottoman authorities pleading for information about the whereabouts of 'Izzat, her husband, who had disappeared after being summoned to meet with Cemal Pasha in Damascus.⁷³ Recounting the episode in his memoirs, the commander wrote that he arrived in Damascus in December 1914 with documents in hand proving that al-Jundi was a dangerous and immoral character ("*meşhur ahlaksızlardan*") who had used British and Italian funds to foment provincial rebellions against the Ottoman state.⁷⁴ To get 'Izzat out of the way, Cemal says, he called him to Damascus and, without letting on that he knew he was a double agent, dispatched him to the restive Arabian emirate of Asir with a stipend and a letter for the rebellious local leader Sayyid Muhammad al-Idrisi.

Al-Jundi was never heard from again. Cemal claimed no knowledge of his disappearance, while the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa operative Eşref Kuşçubaşı proposed, improbably, that he had been carried off by Bedouins.⁷⁵ 'Aziz largely corroborated Cemal's account, but added himself to the story. He met 'Izzat at his hotel when he arrived in Damascus, he says, and 'Izzat (perhaps expecting an interrogation) assured him that he was loyal to the Ottoman state. The next day, Cemal asked 'Aziz to stay



Figure 4. 'Izzat al-Jundi, pictured in Fuad Maydani's later project *al-Asrar* (9 December 1938).

in the room during their meeting, wanting a witness. The day after the meeting, he says, ‘Izzat went to Beirut, where immediately he boarded a Spanish or Italian ship and steamed off toward Suez, then on to Arabia.⁷⁶

‘Aziz also claimed not to know whether or not Izzat executed his mission.⁷⁷ But to Muhammad Munib al-Jundi, ‘Izzat’s son, there was no doubt that Aziz’s account was full of holes. Al-Jundi was one of the readers who wrote to *al-Ahrar*’s editors to contest the authenticity of the memoir. Seeking information about his missing father, Muhammad explained, he had personally met with ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, a prominent Damascus notable, to discuss his father’s death. Shahbandar, by then a Syrian nationalist activist, told him that Cemal had ‘Izzat killed in the Damascus Palace Hotel; any story of a Spanish steamer was nonsense.

Did ‘Aziz leave out these truths because he was ashamed of their barbarity (*hamajiyya*)? Muhammad wondered. Accusing Aziz Bey of “false propaganda” (*al-da‘aya al-batila*) and “distorted truth” (*al-haqiqa al-mushawwasha*), Muhammad begged the reader to decide for himself which story to believe.⁷⁸ ‘Izzat’s death was only a footnote to the mass deaths of the war years, but his son’s determination to correct the record reflects a broader concern with who would have the right to narrate history.

The challenge that Muhammad Munib al-Jundi, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Nusuli, and Yasin al-Jabi launched against ‘Aziz’s depiction of historical fact was nested within the doubt these men harbored as to the legitimate identity of the author. Even as they insisted that he could not be the man he claimed, they declined to dismiss his narrative out of hand. Perhaps there remained a crumb of uncertainty as to whether such a person had existed, holding secrets to which they were not privy. More important, though, was that the facts *still mattered* – regardless of who had written the memoir. That it mattered then is why it matters today, even if we are never certain how the works in the prolific Fu’ad Maydani’s series were produced. *Al-Ahrar*’s readers were aware implicitly of a gap between authenticity and truth: They might well tear down an inauthentic document without supplanting the narrative it advanced with a truer one. Consequently they undertook the dual task of contesting the authorship of ‘Aziz’s memoir, which had the potential to cast suspicion on its overarching narrative, while still working toward the more definite and concrete task of correcting individual fragments of his story.

Conclusion

Arab writers who reflected on their own actions at the twilight of Ottoman control found themselves navigating profound moral ambiguities. While it might have been patriotic to decry the Ottoman as well as the British and French occupations, resentment was tempered with the reality that most Arabs who were in a position to publish memoirs in the interwar period had worked under both the Ottoman and Mandate regimes. When confined to the limited choices that historical circumstance allowed, what then did it mean to take a moral position? This question underlay the vigorous debates surrounding ‘Izzat al-Jundi and Shakib Arslan that animated the pages of *al-Ahrar* in

the mid-1930s and, more broadly, the retrospective efforts to narrate and interpret the transformative period of the First World War as it was experienced in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The fraught matter of treason around which their disputes revolved was further complicated by the dubious authenticity of ‘Aziz’s memoir. Yet real or not, true or not, it brings to light the old schisms festering beneath the surface of a society preoccupied with a new struggle against European colonialism.

Such “memoirs” also serve another function, that of exposing the dilemmas inherent in the democratization of historical writing following World War One. In this, the work attributed to ‘Aziz is not an isolated case. In 2012, a rancorous public debate broke out in Turkey around Sarkis Torossian, an Armenian who claimed to have fought heroically with Ottoman forces at Gallipoli and to have received a letter of commendation directly from Enver Pasha. In 1947, in Boston, where he then was living, Torossian published a book recounting his wartime exploits. A Turkish translation sixty-five years later inflamed the already explosive discourse on Armenian (dis)loyalty and the CUP-engineered genocide of 1915, inspiring dozens of newspaper columns, television debates, and academic journal articles.⁷⁹ In addition to discrepancies in the text itself, new documents surfaced during the controversy that were shown to be forgeries.⁸⁰ But in the absence of proof of when, where, and by whom they were forged, Torossian’s defendants continued to argue that the fake papers did not fundamentally disprove his story. They insisted that the memoir poked an irreparable hole in the prevalent Turkish nationalist narrative depicting Armenians as a treacherous fifth column; the rival camp, meanwhile, categorically rejected Torossian’s viability as a credible historical source. A third group worried that championing the Torossian memoir would harm the very cause it sought to bolster: “The genocide of the Armenians is a historical fact that does not need to be supported by Torossian’s dubious account,” wrote historian Edhem Eldem.⁸¹ Those who downplayed the genocide, he warned, would use the credulity of Torossian partisans to cast suspicion on other, legitimate sources that exposed injustices inflicted on the Ottoman Armenian population.

Torossian’s work belonged to a refugee population decimated by the war, while the memoir of the Ottoman spymaster claimed to offer readers a peek into the annals of power. One wrote from within the state; the other wrote envisioning memoir as a counterbalance to the archives of the state. Despite this asymmetry, both reveal how the fracturing of empire fractured historical narrative. Torossian’s memoir, despite its resonance in the Armenian-American community, was unknown in Turkey until 2012; ‘Aziz’s memoir is only now, in 2019, appearing in Turkish.⁸² Confusion surrounding the authors’ legitimacy was possible only because the texts remained sequestered for a surprisingly long time within Armenian and Arab communities, respectively. As the shared histories these memoirs recount are slowly knit back together after one hundred years, we must reconsider how to read them. If we persist in thinking of the work attributed to ‘Aziz as a memoir – *mudhakkirat*, as Fu’ad Maydani says – we should adjust our expectations. Instead of attempting to prove or disprove authenticity, we should read as Arab readers of the 1930s did: not expecting forgery, and certainly not accepting of it, but hungry for new voices to narrate history and willing to engage, at least, with works that promise this.

In his introduction to ‘Aziz Bey’s memoir, Fu’ad Maydani remarks on how eagerly his countrymen had devoured the preceding volumes in the series – as well as on how many of them had published their own accounts of the First World War.⁸³ In doing so, he points to the crucial role that memoir would play in constructing an authoritative narrative of an era in which the world as his readers knew it was wholly reconfigured. In the years after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, archival documents were not available to the inhabitants of the former Arab provinces in a systematic way. Cemal Pasha and his associates had left Damascus in a rush of defeat, burning documents as they ran. And under Turkey’s new republican government, the Ottoman State Archives in Istanbul were undergoing reorganization. The consequent turn to memoir blurred the lines between the actors in the drama and those who sought to document it. Yet it was a process that would be repeated throughout the twentieth century as post-independence Arab states closed off their own archives. In staking a claim to memoir as a valid, if contestable form of truth-telling, interwar Arabs thus set the stage to circumvent the state’s monopoly on history.

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Endnotes

- The author would like to thank Salim Tamari, Polat Safi, and the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful reading, and Tom Suarez for assistance in the UK National Archives.
- 1 “Radd Yasin Bek al-Jabi,” Damascus, 17 February 1933, in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan fi al-Harb al-‘Alamiyya: al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya fi al-Dawla al-‘Uthmaniyya* [Syria and Lebanon in the World War: Intelligence and Espionage in the Ottoman State] (Beirut: al-Ahrar, 1933), 373.
 - 2 I use modified modern Turkish orthography for the names of primarily Turkish-speaking individuals and transliterated Arabic orthography for those who were primarily Arabic-speaking. Hence Fourth Army Commander *Cemal Pasha*, not *Jamal Basha*. I use ‘Aziz Bey for the author of *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, but *Hüseyin Aziz (Akyürek)* for the official he claimed to be.
 - 3 On how Ottoman-era relationships and social structures continued to shape the politics of the former Arab provinces well into the 1940s, see Michael Provence’s *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
 - 4 Yusuf al-Hakim, *Bayrut wa-Lubnan fi ‘ahd Al-‘Uthman* [Beirut and Lebanon in the Ottoman Period] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar lil-Nashr, 1980), 304.
 - 5 Ahmad Ra’uf, *Kayfa dakhlat Turkiya al-Harb al-‘Alamiyya* (Beirut: al-Ahrar, 1932); Muhammad Jamal, *Kayfa Jalat al-Quwat al-‘Uthmaniyya ‘an Bilad al-‘Arab* (Beirut: al-Ahrar, 1932); ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan; al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya fi Lubnan wa Filastin wa Suriya khilal al-Harb al-‘Alamiyya* (Beirut: Matba’at Sadir, 1937); “Hizb al-Ittihad wa al-Taraqqi: Kayfa wulida? Kayfa ‘asha? Kayfa mata?” *Sawt al-Ahrar*, 28 September 1933, 2, from “Miscellaneous Syrian Newspapers,” *Sawt al-Ahrar* v. 1:23, Harvard Microfilm Services. Fu’ad Maydani is listed as translator for all the works.
 - 6 *Al-Ahrar* was a daily established in Beirut in 1922 by Jibril Tawini, Khalil Kasib, and Musa Nimur. In 1934 it changed its name to *Sawt al-Ahrar*. Yusuf As’ad Daghir, *Qamus al-sihafa al-Lubnaniyya, 1858-1974:*

- wa-huwa mu 'jam yu 'arrif wa-yu 'arrikh lil-suhuf wa-al-dawriyyat allati asdaraha al-Lubnaniyyun fi Lubnan wa-al-kharij (Beirut: al-Jami'a al-Lubnaniyya, 1978).
- 7 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, n.p. [frontmatter].
 - 8 Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–96, online at doi.org/10.1086/532495 (accessed 27 March 2019).
 - 9 Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
 - 10 M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's Governorate during World War I, 1914–1917* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2014), 49; Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 193–95.
 - 11 For the collective social and psychological effects of the executions, which began with eleven hangings in Beirut in August 1915, see Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 243–48.
 - 12 Talha Çiçek argues that even the term "Triumvirate," commonly used for Talaat, Enver, and Cemal Pasha, is misleading. Not only were the leaders often working at cross-purposes, but there were other, conflicting factions that at times wielded significant power. See Çiçek, "Myth of the Unionist Triumvirate: The Formation of the CUP Factions and Their Impact in Syria during the Great War," in *Syria in World War I: Politics, Economy, and Society*, ed. M. Talha Çiçek (London: Routledge, 2015), 10.
 - 13 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 63, 71–72, 78.
 - 14 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 25. He applies various terms to Arab aspirations throughout the book, most often "the Arab idea" (*al-fikra al-'Arabiyya*), but occasionally "Arab independence" (*al-istiqlal al-'Arabi*).
 - 15 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 162.
 - 16 Fourth Imperial Army, *Aliye Divan-ı Harb-i Örfisinde Tedkik Ohunan Mesele-yi Siyasiye Hakkında İzahat* [Explanations Regarding the Political Case Examined by the High Military Tribunal] (Istanbul: Tanın Matbaası, 1332 [1916]), 6.
 - 17 One prominent example is the case of 'Aziz 'Ali al-Misri (also al-Masri), whose arrest in Istanbul in 1914 'Aziz Bey (the author) claims he orchestrated ('Aziz Bek, 28–29). Al-Misri had served alongside Enver Pasha and Mustafa Kemal in Libya, but shifted loyalties. Cemal Pasha intervened on al-Misri's behalf in the dispute that precipitated his trial and near execution in 1914, recording the incident in *Hatrat: 1913–1922* (Istanbul, 1922), 48–53.
 - 18 "*La yaslamu al-sharafu al-rafi'u min al-adha/Hata yuraqa 'ala jawanibihi al-dammu.*" 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 181. This could be Maydani ventriloquizing 'Aziz in the hope that such an insult would stir Arab readers' patriotism in the struggle against Mandate rule.
 - 19 The name NILI is a Hebrew acronym for Netzach Yisrael Lo Yeshaker, or "The eternity of Israel will not deceive." The spy ring's story has been retold many times, including in Fu'ad Maydani's 1937 *Intelligence and Espionage*, which gives an account more extensive and less garbled than that of the 1932 work. Hired by Cemal Pasha to assist with locust eradication, the Zionist agronomist Aaron Aaronsohn shifted loyalties in mid-1915 and used the detailed knowledge of the Syro-Palestinian landscape that his position afforded him to construct a network of spies who would go on to feed intelligence to British agents. On dynamics between Cemal Pasha and the Zionists, see Hilmar Kaiser, "The Ottoman Government and the Zionist Movement during the First Months of World War I," in *Syria in World War I*, ed. M. Talha Çiçek (London: Routledge, 2015): 107–129.
 - 20 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 346.
 - 21 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 166.
 - 22 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 169.
 - 23 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 174–80.
 - 24 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 321.
 - 25 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 322.
 - 26 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 347–53. In Atilhan's version, there is no attempt to intimate disloyalty on the part of al-Jabi. To the contrary, Atilhan throughout the book deploys Arabs' positive relations with Turks as a foil to the treachery of Jews. (Cevat Rifat Atilhan, *Filistin Cephesinde Yahudi Casuslar: Suriye'nin Mataharisi Simi Simon*

- [Jewish Spies on the Palestine Front: The Syrian Matahari Simi Simone], 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Üstün Eserler Neşriyatı, 1947.)
- 27 In “From Young Turks to Modern Turkey: The Story of Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek (Aziz Bey), the Last Director of the Ottoman General Security Service,” which appeared as this was going to press, Eliezer Tauber acknowledges in passing that Fu’ad Maydani may have ghostwritten the work, though he does not probe further into the implications of such a challenge to the work’s authorship, nor does he doubt that the text reflects the experience of the man who was to become chief of the Directorate of General Security; *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 1 (2019): 33–43, online at tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263206.2018.1493994 (accessed 27 March 2019). Yet the acknowledgment of doubt marks an important departure from Tauber’s “Some New Facts on Ottoman Counterespionage in the Levant during World War I,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 35 (1994): 193–208, on which the 2018 piece draws heavily. I wish to thank Tom Suarez for working to track down the British archival sources cited in these two articles.
- 28 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, ii.
- 29 “Hüseyin Aziz Bey; 1298 Trabzon doğumlu, Edirne Defterdarı Mehmed Midhad Efendi’nin oğlu,” [Hüseyin Aziz Bey; born Trabzon, 1298, son of Edirne Treasurer Mehmed Midhad Efendi] 29 Zi’l-hicce 1298 [22 November 1881], Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) DH.SAİDd 113/385.
- 30 “Hüseyin Aziz Bey,” BOA, DH.SAİDd 113/385. See also Nejdet Bilgi, “Saruhan Sancağı’nın Son Mutasarrıfı: Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek,” [Saruhan Sancak’s Last Governor: Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek] *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 20 (1), July 2005, 3; Vartkes Yeghiayan and Julide Değirmenciler, *Malta Belgeleri: İngiltere Dışişleri Bakanlığı “Türk Savaş Suçluları” Dosyası* [The Malta Documents: The British Foreign Ministry’s ‘Turkish War Criminals’ File] (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2007), 453–56.
- 31 “Tayin; Aziz Bey (Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdürü)” [Appointment; Aziz Bey (Director of General Security)], 21 Cemaziye’l-ahir 1334 [25 April 1916], BOA I.DUIT 39/54.
- 32 Polat Safi, “The Ottoman Special Organization: *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: A Historical Assessment with Particular Reference to Its Operations Against British-Occupied Egypt (1914–1916)*,” MA thesis, Bilkent University, 2006. Safi identifies Hüseyin Aziz (Akyürek) as one of the four original leaders of the Istanbul-based organization in 1913, along with Süleyman Askeri, Atif Bey (Kamçıl), and Dr. Nazım Bey (123). An overview of the vast Turkish-language historiography on the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* is in Safi, “History in the Trench: The Ottoman Special Organization – *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Literature*,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012): 89–106, online at doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2011.553898 (accessed 9 May 2019). In Turkish, see Ahmet Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Umur-ı Şarkiye Dairesi) Tarihi* [History of the Special Organization (Department of Eastern Affairs)], 2 vols. (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014, 2018).
- 33 “The Key Indictment,” *Takvim-i Vekayi* #3540, s. 4–14, in Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 274.
- 34 Dadrian and Akçam, *Judgment at Istanbul*, 1–8.
- 35 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 3. This is April 2 in our text because of a discrepancy between the Rumi and Gregorian calendars. The event, known as the 31 March Incident, began on April 13 according to the Gregorian calendar.
- 36 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 79.
- 37 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 102–3.
- 38 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 103. Such information does not appear in Cemal Pasha’s memoirs.
- 39 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 102–3.
- 40 “Radd ‘Abd al-Rahman Bek al-Nusuli,” 9 March 1933, in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 371.
- 41 “Radd Yasin Bek al-Jabi,” Damascus, 17 February 1933, in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 373.
- 42 “Edirne’ye gidip gelen Müdür Muavini Aziz Bey’in harcırahını itası” [Per diem for Assistant Director Aziz Bey’s round-trip to Edirne], 10 Muharrem 1333 [28 November 1914], BOA DH.EUM.MH 93/63.
- 43 “. . . Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdür Muavini Aziz Bey’le Birinci Şube Müdürü Mahmud

- Bey'in Viyana'ya gönderildiği" [General Security Directorate Assistant Director Aziz Bey and First Branch Director Mahmud Bey's dispatch to Vienna], 28 December 1914, BOA HR.SYS 2109/2. The arrival of Hüseyin Aziz and Mahmud Bey by train to Vienna was reported back to Foreign Ministry headquarters by telegram on December 22.
- 44 Tauber, who maintains that Hüseyin Aziz was in Syria with Cemal's forces, acknowledges that he could not have remained longer than seven months. Cemal Pasha arrived in Syria in November 1914, and by July 1915, this Aziz had a significant portfolio as a political officer in the Emniyet-i Umumiye headquarters in Istanbul. (W. Gust, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2014), 250, 310, 360, cited in Eliezer Tauber, "From Young Turks to Modern Turkey, 4.)
- 45 No mention is made of this text, for instance, in the heavily footnoted biography of Mersinli Cemal Pasha produced by the Turkish government-affiliated Atatürk Research Center. See Dursun Gök, "Mersinli Cemal Paşa," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı*, online at www.atam.gov.tr/dergi/sayi-34/mersinli-cemal-pasa (accessed 11 September 2018).
- 46 Cemal Pasha, *Hatırat: 1913–1922* (Istanbul, 1922). The memoir was first published following the commander's death. It was translated immediately into English as *Memoirs of a Turkish Statesman, 1913–1919* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922).
- 47 Cevat Rifat Atilhan, *Filistin Cephesinde Yahudi Casuslar*. The German translation appeared as *Die Schöne Simi Simon – die Mata Hari der Syrischen Front*, trans. M.M (Erfurt: U. Bodung, 1934). The history of this translation is related in Tilman Lüdke, "Loyalty, Indifference, Treason: The Ottoman-German Experience in Palestine in World War I," in *Palestine and World War I: Grand Strategy, Military Tactics, and Culture in War*, eds. Haim Goren, Eren Dolev, Yigal Sheffy (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 99.
- 48 Atilhan, *Filistin Cephesinde Yahudi Casuslar*, 22–49; 62–63.
- 49 As this article was going to press, Polat Safi identified several passages of 'Aziz's text which were drawn directly from Cevat Rifat's writings.
- 50 "Radd 'Abd al-Rahman Bek al-Nusuli," 9 March 1933, in 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 369–71.
- 51 Radd 'Abd al-Rahman Bek al-Nusuli, 369–71.
- 52 *Al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya*, 243–47. Incidentally, Atay does not mention an 'Aziz Bey in *Zeytindağı*.
- 53 *Al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya*, 13.
- 54 *Al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya*, 291.
- 55 One salient example is an unbracketed discussion of the civil strife that broke out when the police of Beirut went after their brothers (*insarafu ila mutaradat ikhwanihim*), resulting not only in imprisonment, but also beatings (*darb*), torture (*ta'dhib*), and displacement (*tashrid*) – and ultimately in the sentencing of many by the Divan-ı Harb on charges "of which they were innocent" (*tuhum hum bari' minha*) (*al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya*, 203).
- 56 Mu'awwad (1890–1955) was a poet of Lebanese origin who served as an aide to the Mandate-era Syrian president Subhi Barakat. He later returned to Lebanon and wrote for both *Lisan al-Hal* and *al-Ahrar*. "Butrus Mu'awwad." *al-Mu'ajam*, online at almoajam.org/poet_details.php?id=1471 (accessed 15 April 2018).
- 57 Butrus Mu'awwad, "Muqaddima lil-Kitab," in Muhammad Jamal, *Kayfa Jalat al-Quwat al-'Uthmaniyya 'an Bilad al-'Arab*, trans. Fu'ad Maydani (Beirut, 1932), 4.
- 58 Mu'awwad, "Muqaddima lil-Kitab."
- 59 *Al-Istikhbarat wa al-Jasusiyya*, 2, 6.
- 60 'Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa Lubnan*, n.p. [frontmatter].
- 61 Though Mu'awwad does not name names, he could well have meant individuals such as the Syrian literary scholar Muhammad Kurd 'Ali or As'ad al-Shuqayri of Acre. Shuqayri led a delegation of thirty-three scholars and journalists from Syria and Palestine to Istanbul in the immediate aftermath of Cemal's executions to assure the Ottoman leadership that all was well in the Arab provinces. M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's Governorate during World War I, 1914–17* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2014), 48.

- 62 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 19–20.
- 63 “Radd jaridat Lisan al-Hal,” in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 322.
- 64 Shakib Arslan, *Sira Dhatiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali’a, 1969), 7–13.
- 65 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 63.
- 66 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 63.
- 67 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 355–56.
- 68 Shakib Arslan, *Sira Dhatiyya*, 179–83.
- 69 “Maqalun li-l-mu‘arrib fi al-Ahrar,” in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 376.
- 70 “Maqalun li-l-mu‘arrib fi al-Ahrar,” in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 377.
- 71 “Maqalun li-l-mu‘arrib fi al-Ahrar,” in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 379.
- 72 “Radd Yasin Bek al-Jabi,” Damascus, 17 February 1933, in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa-Lubnan*, 375. The loyalty of Ottoman Arab officers is treated in Mesut Uyar, “Ottoman Arab Officers between Nationalism and Loyalty during the First World War,” *War in History* 20, no. 4 (2013): 526–44.
- 73 “Humuslu Dr. İzzet el-Cüнди’nin 4. Ordu Kumandanlığının talebi üzerine Şam’a gittiğinden beri hakkında bir haber alamayan ve hayatından endişe eden eşi Feride Hanım’ın bu konuda kendisine malumat verilmesi talebi” [Request for information from Mrs. Farida, the wife of Dr. Izzat al-Jundi of Homs, who has received no word from him since he traveled to Damascus at the order of the Fourth Army Command and is worried for his life], 23 Cemaziye’l-Ahir 1333 [8 May 1915], BOA DH.EUM.4.Şb 1/51.
- 74 Cemal Pasha, *Hatırat*, 165–71.
- 75 Eşref Sencer Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber’de Türk Cengi: Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Arabistan, Sina ve Kuzey Afrika Müdürü Eşref Bey’in Hayber Anıları* [The Turkish Battle in Khaybar: The Khaybar Memoirs of Eşref Bey, the Chief of Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa in Arabia, Sinai, and North Africa], ed. Philip Stoddard and Basri Danişman (Istanbul: Arba, 1997); Cemal Pasha, *Hatırat*, 171.
- 76 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa Lubnan*, 110.
- 77 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa Lubnan*.
- 78 “Kalimat Najal al-Shahid al-Jundi,” in ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa Lubnan*, 357.
- 79 For the original, English-language memoir of Torossian, see: Sarkis Torossian, *From Dardanelles to Palestine : A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance* (Boston: Meador, 1947). For the Turkish translation, see: Sarkis Torosyan, *Çanakkale’den Filistin Cephesine* [From Çanakkale to the Palestine Front], trans. Gizem Şakar (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012). The first phase of the controversy in Turkey is summarized in Taner Akçam, “A Short History of the Torossian Debate,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 345–62, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2015.1062287. The debate continued in English between Taner Akçam, Ayhan Aktar, and Edhem Eldem in *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (2017): 258–97.
- 80 Edhem Eldem, “Torosyan Belgeleri ve Sonrası,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 230 (2013): 38–44.
- 81 Edhem Eldem, “A Shameful Debate? A Critical Reassessment of the ‘Torossian Debate’,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (2017), 265.
- 82 The first Turkish translation of *Suriya wa-Lubnan fi al-Harb al-‘Alamiyya* is set to appear in the summer of 2019 as *Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek, İstihbarat Savaşları: Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Suriye ve Lübnan’da Casusluk Faaliyetleri*, ed. Polat Safi (Istanbul: Kronik Kitap, 2019). Safi corroborates the falsified origins of the text and has identified a number of works from which Fu’ad Maydani apparently borrowed extensively.
- 83 ‘Aziz Bek, *Suriya wa Lubnan*, n.p. [frontmatter].