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Between Lights and Hurricanes: Sāmī al-Kayyālī's Review *Al-Ḥadīth* as a Forum of Modern Arabic Literature and Liberal Islam

Manfred Sing (Freiburg)

In the years from 1927 to 1959, Sāmī al-Kayyālī (1898-1972) edited the independent journal of literature *Al-Ḥadīth* in the Syrian city of Aleppo and thereby participated in shaping the Pan-Arabian literary field.¹ Over the decades, the review became a junction in the communication network of liberal writers, an organ of modernising thinkers, and a platform for modern Arabic literature. Thus, *Al-Ḥadīth* represented a collective intellectual project aiming to connect Arabic literature, liberal thought, Islamic culture and Western ideas with each other and was able to shape transcultural inter-spaces as an answer to modern antinomies.² The following study analyses the editor's struggle for a foothold in the literary field and his ambivalent position in the religious and political field.³

Liberal Muslims and the Duckbill Platypus

Old and new modernization theories hold that the formation of modern society demands "Westernization" and "secularization" and that Muslim elites had to make a choice between tradition and modernity or – in other terms – between authenticity and alienation⁴ or between fundamentalism or Westernization. This binary logic binds together Westernization with modernity and alienation. Concerning liberal Muslims, it suggests that their engagement for modernization inevitably meant alienation as a conscious or an unintentional process. Alienation may be read here as alienation from the authentic culture or the authentic self, but in any case, it seems to be a code word to explain the intel-

¹ This study uses Bourdieu's insights to analyse the position of the intellectual in society, cf. Bourdieu 1992 for the terms "literary field" and "habitus".

² The term "transcultural spaces" is borrowed from Höfert/Salvatore 2000b, 17: "(T)rascultural spaces were formed as the communication arenas where the dynamics between two or more different cultures confront each other under the demarcation of a 'We' facing 'Them'. The demarcation not only works by way of polarising and mutually excluding, but it also – rather paradoxically – transgresses boundaries, producing feed-back effects and allowing for the incorporation – sometimes critical, sometimes less critical – of images of the Other into Self-images. Transcultural politics, so defined in its often contradictory complexity, cannot be mistaken for power-free 'multiculturalism'."

³ I owe thanks to Prof. Dr. Werner Ende, Martin Götz, Anja Strubel, and Heather Leahy for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

⁴ Literature on this issue is vast, see e.g. Lerner 1964, Tibi 1991a.

lectuals' failure in the post-colonial Arab states. While the word "choice" suggests, that the intellectuals acted as responsible subjects, the term "alienation" implies, that they took the wrong choice, although the opposite choice – tradition or fundamentalism – seems inadequate as well.⁵

To overcome this binary logic, I am using, as a starting point, Albert Hourani's introductory remarks to the 1983 reissue of his "Arabic thought in the liberal age". Re-thinking his own book, Hourani confessed his uneasiness with the term "liberal", "for the ideas which had influence were not only ideas about democratic institutions or individual right, but also about national strength and unity and the power of government"⁶. Thus, Western influences had complex or even contradictory consequences. As a result, Hourani referred to liberal Muslims not as westernized intellectuals but as "those who continued to accept Islam as a body of principles or at the very least of sentiments, but held that life in society should be regulated by secular norms, of individual welfare or collective strength"⁷ and whose strand of thought moved further apart from "those who stood fast on the Islamic bases of society" at the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1960s, Hourani was concerned to show the European impact on the re-interpretation of Islam, and he focused on the intellectuals' breaks with the past, but 20 years later he admitted that it would have been possible to emphasize continuity as well so as to show the "traditional" bases of a writer's thought and indicate the points where he departed from them.⁸

To re-assess liberal thought, it seems to be necessary to bring together both points of views, in Hourani's terms, the breaks and the continuities. For many Arab intellectuals, the choice was not between "Westernization" and "Islami- zation" alone, but they searched for a kind of middle path that combined the modern break with a form of cultural continuity. As with their WWI-predecessors, the new generation of *nahḍa*⁹ writers knew how "to reconcile traditional and modern areas of knowledge in a spirit of openness to the world, without

⁵ E.g. Tibi 1991b, 55, states: "One of these [i.e. two, M.S.] extremes is the over-Westernized elite, which recognizes Europe as its sole model and equates the word 'Orient' with 'backwardness'. Exponents of Egyptian liberalism and early Arab-Fabian socialism at the beginning of this century represent one example of this tendency, which is hardly encountered today."

⁶ Hourani 1983, IV. For a survey of "liberal Islam" see also Kurzman.

⁷ Cf. Hourani 1983, VI.

⁸ Cf. Hourani 1983, VII.

⁹ Like Ḥaṭīb 2001, I use the term „*nahḍa*“ to characterize a lasting process of literary and intellectual production throughout the 20th century which peaked between the two World Wars, that most likely had its roots in the 18th and 19th centuries – but that did not end around World War I, as one could think after reading Tomiche 1993, 903.

destroying the values of Islam and Arab identity”¹⁰. In their texts they tried to shape transcultural spaces that ranged between categories like modernity and tradition, Orient and Occident, religion and science. Though liberal Muslims demanded “total connection to global Western culture”¹¹, this demand was connected with a process of “Arabization” and with the formulation of Arab-Islamic self-awareness. On the one hand, these liberals were convinced that Western influence was a package of technical, social and cultural practices which were mutually interconnected, on the other hand, a distinct group of liberals was busy with reviving the Arab heritage and re-constructing cultural memory.¹² Thus, the liberals viewed, with a Janus’ head, East and West. Their criticism of European colonialism and arrogance was juxtaposed by their pleading for modernity, and their criticism of Arab backwardness was juxtaposed by their emphasis on their own cultural heritage. This attempt to build a bridge between modernity and the cultural heritage was confronted with two objections: Besides the reproach that the liberals had alienated themselves from their own society they were criticized as clinging too much to their own tradition. Asking whether liberal thought suffered from a too small or too large amount of tradition, culture, religion, or modernity,¹³ means nothing else but falling back to oppositions constructed by modernization theory or to undeniable antinomies produced by the very process of modernization. As modernization was not a homogenic vision but a continually interacting process between different groups and cultures, the liberal intellectuals were well aware of the fact that contradictions were conditions of their lives. Therefore, they at

¹⁰ Tomiche 1993, 901. In the following considerations, I use the term “liberal“ to point to this complex *nahḍa* orientation, since this somewhat simplified expression has been usually applied to the *nahḍa* writers.

¹¹ Cf. Balić 1996.

¹² Boullata 1990, 3-4, distinguishes three groups of intellectuals (in reference to the last 20 years): the reform oriented group to which I would count a liberal like al-Kayyālī, a leftist group that wants to change society radically and break with the past, and a religious inspired group that takes the Islamic elements in Arab culture as the most important ones.

¹³ For example, it is consensus to call Ṭāhā Ḥusayn an “occidentalizer”, although he tried to subvert the partition between Orient and Occident, reason and spirit, Self and Other by his term of a common “Mediterranean culture”. Fakhry 1977, 106, asks whether “Mediterranean culture” was just another word for Western culture, i.e. “a purely semantic question”. The controversy on the thesis of a “crisis of orientation” (Smith 1973) shows up that the liberals’ attitude to Islam is an inexhaustible source of irritation. That Egyptian liberals took to publish a lot of Islamic works, *islāmīyyat*, in the 1930s (and, by the way, had commercial success), triggered a bulk of questions such as: Can we consider the authors leaving their liberal attitudes behind and turning away from the West (Safran 1961; Nagel 1993)? Or did they conquer religious terrain by using liberal methods (Smith 1973)? Or were Islamic texts not relevant for the liberal self-understanding that is best proved by their anti-fascist texts (Gershoni 1999)?

least implicitly practised cultural syncretism by merging different ideas and models of “old” and “new”, Western and Oriental provenance so as to find answers to their complex situation. In sum, liberal thought can be seen as a literary counterpart to the genus of the “duckbills”¹⁴ that resist to being classified in the given categories and require a new sort of classification.

Although the liberals saw themselves as enlighteners, however, they must be seen – like their opponents – as social agents striving for positions of power in society and fighting for elite positions in the fields of literature, religion, and politics. As the editor of the journal *Al-Ḥadīṭ*, Sāmī al-Kayyālī’s main challenge was the import of new ideas and the question of how to justify this import. He saw the main obstacle to progress in the existing boundaries to literary freedom, but as his will to shift and pass these boundaries was permanently confined, he was confronted with the problem of modernization in its actual form. Therefore, an adequate yardstick for his liberal project is the question whether he acquainted enough autonomy and influence to articulate new ideas in public and what kind of concessions were necessary for this. In opposition, the question why the liberals could not succeed with a wholly accepted “system of belief” in society¹⁵ does not quite take into account that there are different systems of belief in every society and that the success of ideas is neither wholly dependent on the intellectuals nor on the “truth” of their ideas but also on relations of power that are out of their range. Especially, freedom of thought is always in danger of being obstructed.

In this context, the work of Sāmī al-Kayyālī is not an exception but one of the “clear cases”.¹⁶ He was an author with liberal habitus who advocated the reform of Arab society and the re-assessment of Arabo-Islamic history and culture and who struggled for his position in society. Taking into account that he stemmed from a collateral line of one of the richest families of notables and great landowners in Aleppo, it is possible to conclude that his social position was a precondition that allowed him to edit his review, which also helped him to maintain his elite position in society. Al-Kayyālī’s editorship granted him symbolic wealth in the first respect, since the review was not able to pay its

¹⁴ Eco (2000) shows the problem of scientific classification by his example of the mammals that lay eggs and have bills.

¹⁵ Smith 1973, 384.

¹⁶ Al-Kayyālī can be called a “liberal” writer, because the notion of freedom played a central role in his thought and because he had outstanding connections to the writers of the Egyptian liberal party newspaper *As-Siyāsa* who formed the majority of writers in the first *Al-Ḥadīṭ*-edition(s), e.g. Aḥmad Luṭfi as-Sayyid, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Ismā‘īl Maẓhar, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, and Hudā Ša‘rāwī.

way, as the number of subscribers was low.¹⁷ But his social status and education¹⁸ also paved the way for him to acquire a state job in the municipal and, later on, in the regional council, the salary of which he used to finance his review. The same combination of inherited security and acquired independence allowed him to be an outspoken critic of Sufism and “worn out” religious traditions. This attitude even divided the Kayyālī family, because his father, a Hanafī *muftī*, supported him, while a part of the family, that was deeply rooted in Sufism, ran a family brotherhood and a Sufi convent, *zāwiya*. But while the family *zāwiya* was closed and pulled down in the 1950s, many Kayyālīs pursued a secular kind of professional life (jurists, writers, and politicians) in the 20th century. Thus, Sāmī al-Kayyālī’s life is an example of elite reproduction under new social circumstances. No wonder, he declared himself to the position that the Arabs should neither cling to their heritage nor throw it totally overboard, because this argument describes his social situation as well.

Though he was called a “Westernizer” by his Muslim opponents, he used the term “Westernization” seldom and never as a Self-description but as a label for hasty adoption of European lifestyle. Basically, al-Kayyālī differentiated between “modernity” as a term of the new era and “Europe” as a geographic and political entity. But he also recognized the interconnectedness of the two terms by calling modernity a “total reality” nobody can evade, because there was no resistance possible to the “inundation” by European civilization.¹⁹ The West exported its science, technique, literature, music, and politics, its inclinations and antics, while the East swallowed everything, adopted the Western lifestyle and thought its thoughts. Therefore, al-Kayyālī pleaded for a discussion on European sciences: “The East does not acquire any power if it does not take up the same method.”²⁰ Although we can look at al-Kayyālī as an admirer of Western culture in many regards, it comes to no surprise that in some respects he criticized the pretension of universality the West laid claim to:

1. Modernity: Al-Kayyālī stated that modern culture was no longer the Europeans’ possession, but it was to be found in the meeting of East and West.²¹

¹⁷ An edition had a maximum circulation of 1000 (Sayqālī 1971, 4) or 1400 copies (Ilyās 1983, 390). The ten editions of one year normally reached a size from 650 to 750 pages.

¹⁸ He was educated in the traditional *madrassa* by his father, later he visited the State school. The outbreak of World War I prevented him from studying in France, although to prepare his stay he had already learned French.

¹⁹ Cf. Kayyālī 1935, 182ff., for a grammatical essay.

²⁰ Kayyālī 1935, 187.

²¹ Kayyālī 1943, 85, contradicting Rudyard Kipling’s sentence: “East is East and West is West and ne’er the Twain shall meet.”

2. History: Al-Kayyālī thought of the Arab civilization as a melting pot. Progress meant that the Arabs should “digest” Europe’s material and intellectual values in the same way they “digested” the values of the Greek, Persian or Indian civilizations in the past.²² By using such an argument, al-Kayyālī wanted to disperse the notion that “Westernization” endangered Arab culture, because this culture’s essence was the adoption of foreign influences.

3. Culture: Al-Kayyālī proceeded that there was a tension between modernization and cultural identity. He stated that the call for “Self-Westernization”, *at-tağarrub*, and even the call for the adoption of “vital phenomena” from the West, “had to cease at a certain limit”²³ (without denoting it). Regarding the Turkish revolution, al-Kayyālī explained that the Kemalists had separated state and religion and put into practice freedom of belief, which made them an example for the East. But he criticized that they misrepresented the Orient and Islam and changed Turkey into a Western society by blindly following Europe.²⁴

4. Politics: Al-Kayyālī’s criticism of European modernity was mainly directed at colonialism and materialism. Believing that the goal of modernization was to overcome the division between Orient and Occident and to create a new world civilization, al-Kayyālī hoped that the Orient would be able to contribute the spiritual values. While this division of labour between East and West was a wide spread wishful thinking in the Near East of the 1930s, al-Kayyālī’s views grew more sceptical after World War II, when he wrote, that the world “was torn between materialism and spirituality”. Then, he denounced “the belief of the Orient in the West” as “a pagan belief”, thereby recycling religious vocabulary. What made him so angry about European politics was its double standard towards the Arabs, especially the denial of rights to the Arabs in Palestine: “The freedom that the Europeans enjoy in their countries in the highest degree becomes slavery in our country.”²⁵ Concerning the Palestine conflict, al-Kayyālī’s liberal habitus could also adopt racist rhetoric, as anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist and martial articles were to be found in *Al-Ḥadīth*.²⁶ However, al-

²² The metaphor of “digestion” is present in the whole booklet, Kayyālī 1943. The argument may be influenced by Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq, who belonged to the authors of *Al-Ḥadīth*. For his book *Al-Wa‘y al-qaumī* (1939) cf.: Freitag, 112ff.; Hourani 1983, 308ff.

²³ Cf. Kayyālī 1929, 141, in an appendix to an editorial written by the Turkish dissident Tefik Halid Karay who explained that the Turkish revolution was not Mustafa Kemal’s work but the achievement of many intellectuals.

²⁴ Kayyālī 1927, 2: “As the Turks have allowed themselves to be entirely carried away by the Western systems, they adopt them in spite of their mistakes without borrowing from them what fits the mentality of their groups.” Cf. also Kayyālī 1929, 141.

²⁵ Kayyālī 1946, 418.

²⁶ In Kayyālī 1948, 445ff., there was a short version of the 17th chapter of Giovanni Papini’s “Gog” (Florenz 1931), in which this sympathizer of Mussolini declared that the “double

Kayyālī printed from early times texts condemning Fascism and Nazism because of their biological racism and their suspension of civil rights.²⁷

Some Hallmarks of the Review *Al-Ḥadīṭ*

It was no accident that Sāmī al-Kayyālī edited the first number of his journal in January 1927. A main reason that moved him to take this step were the attacks directed against Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, after the latter had published his book *Fī š-šīr al-ġāhili* (“On pre-Islamic poetry”, 1926) that was considered blasphemous and sparked a religious and political scandal in Egypt. When the debate on this book reached the first peak, al-Kayyālī decided to edit his journal in Aleppo that enabled him and others – in his own words – “to give expression to the liberal tendencies and to defend freedom of thought”²⁸. With its 31 volumes, the journal was to become the independent review that was published continuously for the longest time ever in Syria. Later, al-Kayyālī claimed that he was the only one in Syria who defended Ṭāhā Ḥusayn during the eruption of the scandal and that he dared to publish Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s study consisting of several parts *Bayn al-ilm wa-d-dīn* (“Between science and religion”), when most of the Egyptian newspapers and journals did not dare to, although this study was Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s “objective and a calm answer” to all the insults directed against him.²⁹ By editing *Al-Ḥadīṭ*, al-Kayyālī did not only side with Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, but he also presented him a new platform. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn immediately replied to his request for co-operation that lasted until the end of the journal in 1959. Al-Kayyālī supported Ṭāhā Ḥusayn from the bottom of his heart, because he shared the opinion that the “literary sciences” could only be put in order, if language and literature were no longer “canonized”.³⁰ In al-Kayyālī’s opinion, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn had already in his earlier writings caused an “intellectual revolution” and created a school of thought “the foundation of which lay in the freedom of thought, the courage of criticism and the use of the Western method in

vengeance of the Jews” was that they dominated the world as capitalists and that they destroyed the fundamentals of civilization by their Marxist and Freudian teachings. Al-Kayyālī claimed that he already published the chapter in March 1933 in *Al-Ḥadīṭ* in full length (I could not check the volume). Anti-Jewish paroles (“leeches”, “tyrannical group”) are also found in Kayyālī 1959, 107ff.

²⁷ Cf. Fāris 1935. Gershoni (1999) wanted to prove the Egyptian intellectuals’ unfaltering liberalism, “whatever our definition of ‘liberalism’ is”, by showing their anti-fascist attitude in the 1930s. But without considering the relation between liberalism, Islam, and Zionism, this proof and the borderlines of liberalism remain unclear.

²⁸ Kayyālī 1963, 45.

²⁹ Kayyālī 1963, 45-46.

³⁰ Kayyālī 1951, 60.

the literary studies”³¹. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn had pushed “the doors to science” wide open, paved the way for Arab writers to “absolute freedom”, *al-ḥurriyya al-muṭlaqa*, and encouraged them to liberate themselves from all the compulsions that confined them.³²

From the very beginning, al-Kayyālī was convinced that the process of gaining and defending literary autonomy was dependent on collective effort: “We depend on the help of the great writers and thinkers who expressed their sympathy in supporting our project and the idea that we follow”, he wrote at the end of his first editorial in *Al-Ḥadīth*.³³ While he mainly composed the editorials and the literary critiques, he devoted the greater part of each volume of *Al-Ḥadīth* to studies written by other authors, amongst them such controversial figures like Salāma Mūsā, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, and Ğamīl Ṣidqī az-Zahāwī. As these writers already had the reputation of being heretics, soon al-Kayyālī also had to face accusations of unbelief and heresy brought forward by “turban wearers” and “reactionary groups” – as al-Kayyālī dubbed his opponents. 5000 signatures were collected in Aleppo for a petition demanding the closure of *Al-Ḥadīth*, the removal of its editor from his public position in the municipal council and the death penalty against him.³⁴ The petition had no success but protests accompanied the publication of the journal throughout the first decade. Once, al-Kayyālī wondered how his journal had survived nine years although similar magazines had a usual life expectancy of nine months only.³⁵ Looking back in later years, he called his starting time as an editor his “school in life”, *madhab fī l-ḥayāt*, because the protests and obstacles had taught him to take “blows however hard they may be” and not to go astray: “Because it is a human’s value – whoever he may be – to back ideas and opinions that serve his countrymen best, to work his whole life for them, and to fight for them as well as possible, even if this struggle, his pertinacious struggle, will lead him to the worst fate.”³⁶

Its primary task as a review, i.e. to form the men of letters’ self-assessment and to discuss it from time to time, *Al-Ḥadīth* fulfilled first by systematically reviewing the latest literary arrivals and by outlining the history of literature; secondly, by initiating discussions and inquiries among literati; thirdly, by dedicating a complete special edition to the work of a classical or modern writer, a proceeding that al-Kayyālī claimed to have adopted as the first Arab editor

³¹ Kayyālī 1963, 45.

³² Cf. e.g.: Kayyālī 1951, 112; Kayyālī 1968b, 35.

³³ Kayyālī 1927, 4.

³⁴ Kayyālī 1963, 42ff.

³⁵ Quoted in I. Kayyālī 1984, 28.

³⁶ Kayyālī 1963, 4.

from Western reviews; fourthly, by proclaiming the election of “the most important writer of the era” in 1936 (!) – the fact, that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was naturally appointed the winner of the competition, led to the result of bestowing the prestige not only upon him but also upon the review for which he often wrote.

As an editor, al-Kayyālī’s function was not so much to be a creative thinker but to spread new and controversial ideas.³⁷ The journal established a Pan-Arab literary forum by publishing texts written by authors from different countries and parties. Thus, it was marked by a multitude of voices, and there was no harmony amongst the authors when they discussed issues like the future of the Orient or the role of Arab heritage. Over the decades, a bulk of liberal and leftist writers, sometimes also conservative ones, counted amongst the authors. Philosophers, historians, and social scientists from the *Mašriq* were to be found along with neo-classical, romantically inspired and avant-garde poets, since the journal also printed poems, novels, and stage-plays. As al-Kayyālī demanded women’s emancipation in an outspoken way from the first edition on, he also published contributions concerning the position of women in Arab society, for example articles written by Hudā Ša’rāwī, Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī, and Doria Šafīq, and he supported the novelist Widād Sakākīnī. There were not only studies dealing with European writers like Bergson, Tolstoj, Thomas Mann and Freud, but also some Arabic and Islamic scientists from Europe and the USA contributed to the journal. Brockelmann praised al-Kayyālī as being the meritorious editor of Syria’s leading literary journal, and al-Kayyālī was amongst those whom Brockelmann thanked in his introductory remarks to his standard work on modern Arabic literature for sending him materials.³⁸

A congeniality that eventually found its expression in the naming of *Al-Ḥadīṭ* connected al-Kayyālī with Maḥmūd Taymūr and the Egyptian school of prose writing, *al-Madrasa al-ḥadīṭa*.³⁹ Al-Kayyālī shared the school’s preference for a literary realism that was influenced by European and Russian patterns and was tied together with a detailed observation of Egyptian society. In opposition to the elder generation of authors, these young talented writers portrayed Egypt as a unique hybrid culture where modern, social and cultural

³⁷ As a writer, al-Kayyālī published 26 books most of them dealing with Arab history and Arabic literature or with his impressions collected during journeys through Europe, the USA and the Arab states.

³⁸ Cf. Brockelmann’s (1942) preface and 392.

³⁹ For the “madrasa ḥadīṭa” cf. Wielandt 1983. Until the midst of the 1930s, eleven short stories by Maḥmūd Taymūr were published in *Al-Ḥadīṭ* among them at least five as a first publication, cf. Wielandt 1983, 179ff.

factors worked together in an unprecedented way.⁴⁰ As the journal *Al-Ḥadīṭ* followed the same direction, it is understandable that Taymūr praised it in a necrology for al-Kayyālī as having been an “avant-garde” project of its time.⁴¹ With its orientation of keeping pace with the requirements of the epoch and taking a loyal position towards the Arab heritage, the journal *Al-Ḥadīṭ* can even be seen as a forerunner to the Cairine literary magazines *Ar-Risāla* and *At-Taqāfa* although it never reached their circulation.⁴²

Al-Kayyālī’s Struggle for his Position in the Literary Field

Al-Kayyālī’s understanding of literature, *adab*, covered a wide range. Already in the subtitle of *Al-Ḥadīṭ* (“it studies literature, history, and social sciences”), he revealed his intention to intervene in social, cultural and political questions. His socio-criticism was expressed in his comprehensive demand for *tağdīd*, that roughly translates as “renewal” or “modernization” and that was often spelled out as using “scientific” methods in literature, historiography, social sciences, and in the critique of “pernicious theories”. Al-Kayyālī turned to the young generation impelling them to strive for “intellectual upheaval”, *ṭaura fikrī*, because the rise, *an-nahḍa*, had not yet produced the expected results. Looking back in his later years, he claimed that the literary generation between the two World Wars was totally different from its predecessors because it had initiated rapid development in Arabic literature, understood it by the “right criteria” and animated the authors to creativity, rather than to imitation. At the same time, it had achieved literary rapprochement to Western models and closed the gap in form and contents by employing subjective, romantic, nationalist and realistic themes and sentiments.⁴³ In the first editorial of *Al-Ḥadīṭ*, al-Kayyālī also defined his task as wanting to mediate in the “war between old

⁴⁰ Cf. Wielandt 1983, 65.

⁴¹ Taymūr, 501, wrote: “It is true that the journal ‘Al-Ḥadīṭ’ possessed a special character among the Arabic journals of that time. It was the lighthouse of the avant-garde, the symbol of renewal and the tongue of realism by its call for intellectual and literary progress and for keeping pace with the spirit of the era in its trends and models and by its simultaneous high esteem for the Arab heritage and by praising its features that were covered with glory. The message of ‘Al-Ḥadīṭ’ was displayed with the most possible clearness in the fact that it knitted together the connection between the literary cheers of the day and the authentic treasure of yesterday’s Arabic literature.”

⁴² *Al-Ḥadīṭ* was founded six years earlier than *Ar-Risāla* (the circulation of which is said to be at least ten times higher) and twelve years earlier than *At-Taqāfa*. The early editing of *Al-Ḥadīṭ* questions the assertion in Gershoni/Jankowski 1995, 63-64, that *Ar-Risāla* represented a literary novelty with its program of combining tradition and modernity, science and Islamic history.

⁴³ Kayyālī 1968, 35-36.

and new”.⁴⁴ But since he was involved in rivalries with his literary predecessors of the elder generation and with younger writers after World War II, the attempt to mediate between different literary currents did not remain unchallenged.

A leading representative of the elder generation was Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī (1876-1953), who influenced and formed intellectual life in Syria as an outstanding journalist, historian and as the editor of the famous Damascene journal “*Al-Muqtabas*”, and was elected President of the Arabic Academy of Damascus in 1919.⁴⁵ Certainly, his articles and books had some impact on al-Kayyālī who appreciated Kurd ‘Alī’s merits in general⁴⁶ and published some of Kurd ‘Alī’s articles in *Al-Ḥadīṭ*.⁴⁷ But he ranked Kurd ‘Alī, an opponent of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, amongst those writers who clung to the “old literature”.⁴⁸ In al-Kayyālī’s opinion, the Arabic Academy’s efforts were mainly restricted to philological reforms and were but attempts to cure the deficiencies of an “ill literature” by using “a medicine of Ibn Sīnā’s kind instead of Pasteur’s”.⁴⁹ And so he declared that the Academy was not very helpful for the literary progress of the kind *Al-Ḥadīṭ* had subscribed to.⁵⁰ In return, Ğamīl Ṣalībā, one of Kurd ‘Alī’s disciples, rebuffed al-Kayyālī’s reproach as being impertinent concerning the work of the Arabic Academy. He also declared al-Kayyālī’s criteria for con-

⁴⁴ Kayyālī 1927, 3: “When we take a look at the partisans of the old and the new, we see both sides following exaggeration or extremism, though this is a course whose damage will be probably higher than its profit and whose disadvantage will be greater than its advantage. Therefore the review ‘*Al-Ḥadīṭ*’ that we thought about editing for two years, in order to plunge into the struggles of this burning war, will steer a middle course. We reconcile the partisans of both of the schools of thought in everything we write. (...) When we support the partisans of the new and take sides with them in order to destroy corrupt thought and pernicious theories that pitted the core of this nation, then we draw lines of reform before we wield the pick-axe so that the results are warranted to a certain degree.”

⁴⁵ Cf. Hermann 1990. Kurd ‘Alī even worked for some years as censor in Syria, and he was politically isolated when the younger generation of Syrian nationalists came to power. He then suspended his presidency for some years because he was involved in constant quarrel with them.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kayyālī 1968a, 193ff.

⁴⁷ There were also articles written by disciples of the “Damascene school”, e.g. Ḥalīl Mardam Bey, Ğamīl Ṣalībā, and Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Munaḡḡid. Ṣafīq Ğabrī was even on intimate terms with al-Kayyālī, they travelled to Europe together in the 1930s.

⁴⁸ Kayyālī 1968a, 196-197.

⁴⁹ Kayyālī 1968a, 34; cf. also Malāḏī, 441-442.

⁵⁰ Al-Kayyālī supported for example ‘Umar Abū Rīṣa. Jayyusi 1977, 227-228, holds that Abū Rīṣa’s “new sensivity” was a good example for the experimental poetic tradition of Aleppo that did not fall under the direct influence of conservative classicism which dominated the “Damascene school”.

temporary literature as being badly defined⁵¹ and contrasted al-Kayyālī's thought with Kurd 'Alī's by judging the one to be a renewer, *muğaddid*, who wanted to adopt the European civilization as a whole just like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, and the other to be a moderate, *mu'tadil*, who had always striven to mix Orient and Occident, past and future⁵². This conflict shows that even among liberal intellectuals there was no unity concerning the direction of the "middle course" and the meaning of terms like tradition, Westernization and modernity.

The different notions of literature held by Kurd 'Alī and al-Kayyālī can be further exemplified by their divergent judgements on Sayf ad-Daula, the Shiite patron of Arab poets in the 10th century in Aleppo. Al-Kayyālī relied among others on al-Mutanabbī's panegyrics and depicted the Hamdani sovereign as a brave fighter who led Aleppo to a cultural heyday that was unique in the whole Arab world, declaring: "After I have examined the historians' reports painstakingly I rather incline to the view that the poets' poems are more credible in various ways than most of all the historians' accounts that are befallen by confusion and muddle."⁵³ In contrast, Kurd 'Alī branded Sayf ad-Daula as a tyrannical and megalomaniac autocrat and rebutted "the poets" as well as "some Aleppine literati's adulteration" with the words: "Poesy is lie. History is facts. What a great difference lies between both of these views!"⁵⁴

After World War II, a younger generation of progressive writers challenged the liberals' stand. Leftist intellectuals radicalized the demand for the writer's social engagement, *iltizām*,⁵⁵ thus criticizing liberals like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn whom they reproached with failing to reform society. Al-Kayyālī rebuffed the suggested choice between the ivory tower and society as being a pseudo-alternative, because, as he wrote, *iltizām* was an old concept clarified nowadays, but experienced by many writers like al-Kawākibī and al-Ma'arrī as well as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.⁵⁶ Al-Kayyālī was also sceptical about the attempts of avant-gardists who threw overboard the classical rules of Arabic poetry, although he did not reject them on principle which shows his praise of the connection between musicality and free rhythms in the poems of the Aleppine Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Badawī and the Damascene Nizār Qabbānī.⁵⁷ But he did not acquire any taste for the "chopped verses" the surrealists Urḥān Muyassar and 'Alī an-Nāṣir

⁵¹ Ṣalībā 1969, 164ff.

⁵² Ṣalībā 1958, 129ff.

⁵³ Kayyālī 1939, 96.

⁵⁴ Kurd 'Alī 1948, 607-608, quotation 608. The first attack on Sayf ad-Daula was launched in Kurd 'Alī 1925, 174ff.

⁵⁵ For the concept and the debates see Klemm 1998.

⁵⁶ Kayyālī 1960, 74, and 1957, 89.

⁵⁷ Kayyālī 1957, 231ff., and Kayyālī 1968a, 438ff.

composed, judging: “If we read these pieces we do not understand anything.”⁵⁸ So he concluded in reference to the free-verse-movement: “It is of paramount importance that we grant these modernizing poets their freedom but we demand two things from them. First, that their Arabic has to be correct. Secondly, that they should have to say something in their poems.”⁵⁹ By quoting this “article of faith”, *‘aqīda*, he referred to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn as the “doyen of Arabic literature”, *‘amīd al-adab al-‘arabi*, who had “issued it”, *aftāhā*. In this formulation, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn appears to be a juror guarding the correct form of poetry by issuing a *fatwā*. We may conclude, that al-Kayyālī voted for freedom but in the frame of law. In 1964, he even wrote that all contemporary literary currents were imported from the West and were applied but by a few men of letters with success, while at the same time he pointed out that all modern currents basically were to be found in classical Arabic poetry as well.⁶⁰

This judgement shows how wide al-Kayyālī’s idea of mediation between “old” and “new” was, because it allowed him sometimes to approve and sometimes to criticize innovation. It also shows how fond he was of juxtaposing different currents in literature which he declared, was one of his main tasks by editing *Al-Ḥadīṭ*. This self-inflicted mission also led him to compose his collections of Aleppine and Syrian biographies.⁶¹ In his *Al-Adab al-‘arabi al-mu‘āṣir fī Sūriyā* (“The contemporary Arabic literature in Syria”), he refined his art to judge the 58 most important Syrian authors of the past 100 years as impartially as possible⁶² and to sketch the literary progress⁶³. On the one hand, this task demanded a good “feeling for doing the right thing” from him, on the other he was reputed to be an independent critic whose words carried weight. His reputation for being a literary authority also opened the gates for him to acquire honorary positions in the Aleppine, Syrian and Arabic literary service.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Kayyālī 1968a, 292. For another judgement see Jayyusi 1977, 513ff.

⁵⁹ Kayyālī 1968a, 440.

⁶⁰ Kayyālī 1964, 431.

⁶¹ Kayyālī 1957 and Kayyālī 1968a.

⁶² Ḡabrī 1968, 8, underlined in his foreword that al-Kayyālī had succeeded with this, i.e. from the first pages of his own book, al-Kayyālī’s claim and mastership were publicly approved.

⁶³ In spite of his partial criticism of avant-garde poetry Kayyālī 1968a, 39, stroke a positive balance, resuming: “A new generation is born in an epoch that we can call the beginning of the era of the prime of Arabic literature.”

⁶⁴ He became the director of the public library and of the culture centre in Aleppo. In 1950, he was appointed to Egypt’s “His Majesty’s society for historical studies”. In 1954, he was advisor of the Syrian delegation that visited the UNESCO Conference in New York. At the Arab League in Cairo he held lectures and was elected five times to the committee for cul-

Politics and Censorship

The conflict between literature and politics was present from the first day when al-Kayyālī started editing his review and castigated the political encroachment on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's literary freedom. It was no accident that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn pointed out in his first contribution for *Al-Ḥadīth* that the struggle between science and religion assumed ruinous proportions whenever policy intervened.⁶⁵ In Syria, restrictions on literary freedom were a normality as well, since regulations of censorship prevailed during the whole period in which *Al-Ḥadīth* was edited.⁶⁶ Therefore, or in spite of it, al-Kayyālī often let his authors write about freedom of thought. He published a programmatical essay on the theme in the context of the debate on the new Syrian constitution under the title: "All that we want from the new constitution is freedom of thought."⁶⁷ He renounced applying for a new license for *Al-Ḥadīth* when the press laws were altered after the unification of Syria and Egypt in 1959 and he later explained: "The review had reached a stage where it could no longer fulfill its mission the way it should have, especially because we could not edit it, the way we wanted, i.e. in a free climate."⁶⁸

Al-Kayyālī's relationship with politics was not only marked by conflict but also by interests he shared with nationalist and Pan-Arab Syrian politicians. As a writer, he took part in the process of nation building, in making Arab culture a political combat concept, and in reconstructing Arab-Islamic history. He participated in a discourse that dominated and legitimated political culture.⁶⁹ This kind of relationship went back to the very beginning of al-Kayyālī's editorship. *Al-Ḥadīth* was founded in the same year the Syrian nationalists held their "Beirut Conference" which resulted in the formation of the most important political force in the 1930s and 1940s, the "National Bloc", *al-kutla al-waṭaniyya*. Al-Kayyālī started editing his review together with the Great Syrian nationalist Edmond Rabbāṭ who abandoned the review after a short time because he went to France to study law. In 1936, Rabbāṭ belonged to the Syrian

ture. In 1966 he was appointed a member of the jury in the State competition for young talented novelists. In 1970, he was appointed a corresponding member to the Academy of Arabic Language in Cairo by the then president Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.

⁶⁵ Cf. also Kayyālī 1968b, 10ff.

⁶⁶ Under the French mandate, censorship touched all political subjects. After independence, press freedom was banned under the military regimes from 1949 to 1954 and again abolished in 1959 when the press was put under government control.

⁶⁷ Kayyālī 1950.

⁶⁸ Sayqalī 1971, 6.

⁶⁹ For the use of Pan-Arabic rhetoric as a strategy to legitimize political power struggle see Mufti 1996.

delegation that negotiated the independence treaty that al-Kayyālī sanctioned in his review.⁷⁰ One of the founding fathers of the “National Bloc” was ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kayyālī, one of Sāmī al-Kayyālī’s relatives from Aleppo, who was elected a member of Parliament in the mid 1930s and became minister. Directly after the formation of the “National Bloc”, both Kayyālīs advocated in public meetings social and political reforms, especially the women’s unveiling. In the prelude to the elections, a fierce debate arose with the liberal newspapers and *Al-Ḥadīth* on the one side and religious circles, conservative politicians and newspapers on the other. In course of time, the two Kayyālīs managed to take key positions in the local and national elite: the journalist as a producer of sense, the politician as a decision-maker.

In 1947, al-Kayyālī even tried to enter active politics, when he ran for a seat in Parliament as an independent candidate, but was not elected. After that, he took the parties and the voters severely to task condemning corruption and fraud at the polls and stating that the voters understood but one language: “Fanatism, submissiveness to power, and adoration of money.”⁷¹ Further, he criticized that there was equality at the polls between literati and uneducated, so that an illiterate who had but the brain of a “cave-dweller” had the same rights as somebody holding “the best certificates of the highest universities in the world”, while even educated women were excluded from the polls. Since quantity had won a victory over quality and the intellectuals were represented just as a “illustrious minority” in Parliament, al-Kayyālī conceived “a setback by decades”. The bitterness in al-Kayyālī’s comment was due to his conviction that education was the absolute precondition for modernization and democratization and that it was the most important symbolic capital to be spread amongst people. But by then he had realized that education had but little effect in the political field compared to more tangible forms of capital like vote-getting, vote-buying, nepotism, and clientele systems. Al-Kayyālī who may have felt personally mortified assumed the ambivalent attitude of an “incorruptible” intellectual towards politics: Though he first wished to influence politics more directly, he now showed his disgust for the dirty business. And hardly had the candidate deplored his defeat, when he moved back to his lofty intellectual standpoint to give a sulky piece of advice to the winners whom he had just chided for corruption and fraud. He recommended to them that they should necessarily fight “the greedy opportunists who had but the one sign that they suck the people’s blood, enhance their own wealth even if they lead the country to the abyss”.

⁷⁰ France never ratified this treaty.

⁷¹ Kayyālī 1963, 224ff.

Islam and Faith in Freedom

The strongest opposition that al-Kayyālī and his fellow literati had to face arose from religious circles whether of traditional or Islamist orientation. The religious men's furious attacks on the liberals resulted from the fact that both sides struggled for hegemony over the cultural orbit in direct competition to each other, trying to make the best out of different kinds of symbolic capital. In his first editorial, al-Kayyālī frankly expressed the literati's claims and implicitly disputed the religious ones: "Modernization does not only treat literature, as every man of letters knows. By no means! It treats the sciences and arts, the customs and traditions, and all spheres of life."⁷²

Speaking to the Arab public in his early editorials, he did not call it an "Islamic community", *umma*, but he used the much wider geographic term "Orient", *šarq*. The change of the terms was connected with a change of focus and image: The first front page of *Al-Ḥadīṭ* showed a man wearing an impressive long beard, yet he was not a religious scholar but Rabindranath Tagore who had been the first Non-European to be decorated with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Tagore had made it his business to tie together Asian and European culture, and he combined his Bengali heritage with modernity without intending to return to its ideal origin.⁷³ Al-Kayyālī followed a comparable concept of culture, aspired to improve the insight in the "old" and claimed to revive it by studying it in a scientific manner. However, his religious opponents viewed his claims to be nothing else but "the alienation from the old", which was the same as "the alienation from the holiness of religion", an attack on holy principles, and therefore "heresy and unbelief", *ilhād wa-kufr*, as he soon realized.⁷⁴ For example, Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā in his journal *Al-Manār* took detailed notice of the publication of *Al-Ḥadīṭ* and counted al-Kayyālī among the modernizers, "the Westernizers", "the enemies of Islam", and "the propagandists of cultural revival that extinguishes all preceding things".⁷⁵ Riḍā remarked that the so called literati did not comprehend renewal and culture, *taḡdīd* and *taqāfa*, in a genuine manner, and therefore he gave al-Kayyālī the advice of clarifying the definitions of these words first.⁷⁶

In the context of the Syrian constitution debate in 1949 and 1950, al-Kayyālī opposed to the brothers' demand, that Islam had to be embodied as the religion

⁷² Kayyālī 1927a, 2.

⁷³ Cf. Henn 1985, XVff., and Kämpchen 1992, 77ff. passim.

⁷⁴ Kayyālī 1963, 3.

⁷⁵ Riḍā 1927, and 1928, 115ff., especially 118.

⁷⁶ Riḍā 1927, 716.

of the state in the constitution.⁷⁷ He held that such a demand would undermine “the national spirit”, *al-rūḥ al-qaumī*,⁷⁸ and denounced it as a kind of “sectarianism” by calling it *madḥabiyya*, i.e. clinging to one of the schools of law or the confessions within Islam. He characterized the writers’ and philosophers’ far-reaching concerns by calling them “the avant-garde of the revolutionaries” that rouses peoples and unleashes one revolution after the other. During the centuries, hundreds of bloody revolutions had broken out among different peoples in order to spread freedom. He expressed his thorough conviction that these revolutions would go on until all people enjoyed absolute freedom or at least enough freedom enabling them to live in prosperity. However, the term “freedom” had been unclear to many men until that time, though without freedom and unity the nation had no power at all and was doomed to a creeping sentence of death. Therefore, as a man of letters, he declared that freedom of thought and freedom of speech were of paramount importance to him.

His religious opponents’ annoyance stemmed not only from his use of such terms that did not bear any religious meaning, but also from his adoption of religious code words he put in a new context, thus changing their connotations and subverting their original meanings. First of all, he claimed to practise renewal, *taḡdīd*, – a traditional concept saying that every one hundred years there would be another *muḡaddid* who would put an end to stagnation and lead the *umma* to a new and better understanding of Islam.⁷⁹ Al-Kayyālī maintained that whoever criticized *taḡdīd* had no idea about Islam, although he wanted to defend it. “The *muḡaddid* is the only one who can understand and appreciate the heritage”, he wrote in 1927. “Verily, the righteous forefathers were not stalled as their followers of today may think, but they were renewers.”⁸⁰ Even the name of *Al-Ḥadīṭ* can be seen as a struggle for the meaning of the term. In an Islamic context the word is used to designate the “accounts” on the prophet Muḥammad’s deeds and sayings. But the same word can also mean “new” or “modern”, and in this sense it was used by al-Kayyālī four times in his first editorial. He also planted the terms *rusul*, God’s envoys, and *ḡihād*, the struggle on/for God’s way, in a new context by combining them with science, so that “envoys of science” supported the nation in its “scientific struggle”. He re-interpreted holiness by designating freedom as “the highest sanctuary”, *al-quds al-aʿlā*,⁸¹ and called upon Syria’s youth to embrace “the religion of free-

⁷⁷ Cf. Kayyālī 1950.

⁷⁸ Both sides used the term “rūḥ”, since they claimed to represent spiritual values.

⁷⁹ Cf. Jansen 2000, 61.

⁸⁰ Quoted by I. Kayyālī 1984, 37-38.

⁸¹ Quoted by I. Kayyālī 1984, 14.

dom”, *ad-dīn al-ḥurriyya*.⁸² As Islam had preached justice and equality among the people, he labelled it “the most splendid human (!) message ever in the history of humanity”, *aḥẓam risāla insāniyya fī tariḥ al-baṣariyya*.⁸³

His proceeding was a “change of code”⁸⁴ on the level of signs, an “ideological change” on the theoretical level, and on the social level, it was the expression of an on-going struggle for the hegemony to define terms and conceptions in the cultural orbit.⁸⁵ By re-coding what had to be considered as holy, al-Kayyālī repudiated his opponents’ binary mode of thought that separated traditional/pious/holy from modern/infidel/atheist. He called this mode of thinking old-fashioned and reactionary, subverted his religious opponents’ claim to be singly competent for the holy side of life, distributed what was holy and unholy in a new way, and reclaimed for himself renewal as well as the middle course which is an Islamic ideal itself. Thus, al-Kayyālī challenged the religious discourse, yet he did not attack it frontally but referred to its own values. And in the review *Al-Ḥadīṯ*, the authors modulated this new kind of connections between modern, religious, and cultural ideas and thereby shaped transcultural inter-spaces between systems of thought that stemmed from European, Arab, and Islamic provenance and that al-Kayyālī’s opponents conceived and constructed as mental universes excluding one another.⁸⁶

Very illuminating for al-Kayyālī’s notion of reality was his collection entitled *Anwā’ wa-aḍwā’* (“Hurricanes and Lights”, 1948) which was the sum of narrative experiments over 20 years. The 13 chapters include not only romantic and realistic novels, but also one fable, three stage-plays, and three translations from Turkish. Therefore they can be subsumed neither formally nor in their contents or stylistically under a single category. In the preface, al-Kayyālī admitted that he had entered the “castle yard” belonging to “the realm of novel” but with “a great deal of timidity and humility”, because he had not aimed at climbing to the top of narrative genius but at dressing “pictures taken from the centre of society” and “stories taken from the midst of life” in a narrative garment that was, like life itself, sometimes vast and sometimes tight:

⁸² Kayyālī 1927b, 67.

⁸³ Kayyālī 1968b, 76.

⁸⁴ Cf. Eco 1991, 385ff.

⁸⁵ Al-Kayyālī was certainly not the first one to practise this kind of code-switching. He was influenced by the Egyptian liberals and the elder Syrian generation of writers like Muḥammad Kurd ‘Alī and Rafīq al-‘Aẓm who tried to find a synthesis of Islamic modernism and secular nationalism, cf. Hermann 1990, 11ff. and 63ff.

⁸⁶ For the proceeding of trans-coding between different milieus by adopting “the other” and shaping “inter-spaces” as well as for the repetitive character of marking his own territory see e.g. Deleuze/Guattari 1992, 423ff.

“It is literature that truly portrays these contradictions whether they are taken from the roaring cyclones or hurricanes or from the abundance of rays and lights. Because life is a mixture of good and bad, truth and deceit, darkness and light, bliss and misery. These contradictions are the great pillar that the truth of life is based on. And as I said: The narrator is he who can truly record these colours without deviating from reality.”⁸⁷

These words reveal the structural homology between the reality al-Kayyālī conceived and the world he tried to sketch in his texts. It was a world full of contradictions that could only be welded together by literary text. Thus, the succession of different ways of depicting reality was not a literary deficiency, as al-Kayyālī primarily seemed to suggest, but the adequate articulation of a reality perceived as contradictory. The consistent lack of coherence concerning form, style, and contents was devoted to a truth exceeding the written word, i.e. portraying a world that evaded a consistent form of expression.

Conclusion

By editing the journal of literature *Al-Ḥadīṭ*, al-Kayyālī aimed to concentrate and proliferate ideas and intellectual creativity and he participated in the collective freethinking search for answers to the post-colonial Arab situation. He followed the conception that these answers could neither be completely adopted from the West nor wholly taken from one’s own heritage. Treating different ideas and influences, combining them and switching between them, al-Kayyālī produced in his texts and his journal transcultural spaces. The goal was to form a modern Arabic literature that borrowed from Western, Arab and Islamic examples. Western models had some impact on his liberal as well as nationalist views, and he even quoted from Western anti-Jewish rhetoric. He adopted some aspects of the Islamic discourse, dressed them in a liberal way, justified his proceeding as revival and thereby tried to repudiate the accusations that he had turned away from the straight road of Islam. In confrontation with the Muslim brothers and the colonialists, he pleaded for Arab nationalism as an act of cultural resistance. This proceeding can be interpreted as a strategy that played Arabo-Islamic culture off against Western impact and vice versa so as to “decentre” the discourses of Islamic and Western authorities and to produce liberal and nationalist counter-discourses. Since al-Kayyālī saw himself as a writer who was rooted in Arab culture, lived in a new epoch, and was part of a movement that strove for social and literary progress as well as for trans-

⁸⁷ Cf. Muṣṭafā 1957/58, 260.

gression of geographic and mental boundaries, his mode of thought circulated around three axioms:

1. Arab modernity in literature and society was to be reached by Western methods.
2. A combination between Arabo-Islamic culture and modern ideas, between “old” and “new”, was not only possible, but also necessary.
3. The writers’ freedom was a inalienable precondition for reform and progress, because the writers were those who triggered change (“intellectual upheaval”).

Al-Kayyālī can be said to be a representative of the generation of authors who started writing between the two World Wars and who wanted to anticipate the political partnership between Europe and Orient for the time to come after independence. When the political hopes were shattered after independence, he sharpened his Pan-Arab nationalism, especially when he was confronted with a younger generation of writers who revolted against the prevailing status, the rules of poetry, and the (liberal) establishment. Then, al-Kayyālī found himself trapped in an conflict between personal freedom and national strength, since the Pan-Arab policy, he seems to have legitimated in general, led to the union of Egypt and Syria and to the closure of *Al-Ḥadīth*.

As the intellectual’s claim to modernize society was also connected with personal and group interests, the journal *Al-Ḥadīth* was situated in a web of power struggles. For al-Kayyālī, journalism provided an opportunity to take and prevail an elite position in society. His status was a mixture of inherited possibilities and acquired qualifications, as he was a loyal state official and an independent journalist, a representative of Aleppo’s elite and a critic of the system. In this context, he certainly overestimated his own and the literati’s general potential for “intellectual upheaval”. This over-estimation may have been a “necessary illusion” that impelled him to dare his project of editorship and to hold out for more than 30 years in spite of severe restrictions. But his self-understanding of belonging to “the avant-garde of revolutionaries” was also part of the intellectuals’ struggle to define and justify their role in society as a group that claimed the right to identify the essential problems in literature and society and to analyse and discuss them in a “scientific manner”. Although their notion of modernity was contested and restricted by other social groups, the review *Al-Ḥadīth* had a modernizing effect, as it was part of an emerging transnational network of intellectual communication. Therefore, it set an example for Arabo-Muslim modernity, though, like any other form of modernity, it was a tessellated and sometimes contradictory undertaking. However, this example may illustrate the thesis that the liberals’ crisis or the alleged failure of their “system of belief” was neither due to their inability nor to their “alien-

ation”, but to the very fact, that all modern ways of life and practical acts of liberation touch the verge of failure.

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