Muhammad Husayn Na’ini, Caught between Empires and Nations. The Liminal Life of an Iranian Shia Alim in Iraq.

Abstract
Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad Husayn Gharawi Na’ini was an Iranian Shia alim born in Nain, Iran, to a respected scholarly family. He completed his training in religious studies in Iran before moving to the provinces of Ottoman Iraq to study under the famous usuli scholars Mirza Muhammad Hasas Shirazi in Samara and Akhund Mullah Muhammad Kazim Khurasani in Najaf. In Ottoman Iraq, Na’ini then wrote his renowned work on Islamic constitutionalism during the regional revolutionary period in 1909. In 1911, Na’ini supported the call for Muslim unity with the Sunnis of the Ottoman Empire as Italy invaded Libya and Russia invaded Iran. By 1914, the Ottomans were involved in WWI, in which, once again, Na’ini would side with the Ottoman war effort, calling for unity against the Allied forces. Upon the collapse of the Ottomans, Na’ini rejected the new Hashemite Kingdom, which was under the tutelage of the British, and called for a boycott of the elections, which would lead to his exile back to his native Iran. This article will chart the life story of Na’ini as an Iranian alim who was very much Ottoman, whose life and experiences were integrated into the Ottoman world and its intellectual culture. It will chart how his life transitioned from straddling two Muslim Imperial empires to the new reality of the nation-state. Finally, it will show how his life was a struggle of “belonging” and “otherization” as the Ottoman world rapidly changed.

Keywords
Ottoman Iraq | Iran | Na’ini | Islamic Constitutionalism | WWI

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INTRODUCTION

In 1987 the Islamic Republic of Iran introduced a unique stamp with the image of the Iranian-born Shi'i mujtahid, Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad Husayn Gharawi Na’ini (al-Najafi),1 who was born in Nain in Iran, but spent decades, died and was buried in Najaf, in today’s modern Iraq. It was not the first time the Iranian Republic had used Na’ini’s iconography;2 in 1987, however, Na’ini was celebrated as an influential Islamic constitutionalist, with his ideas and image taking on a new meaning in the revolutionary Islamic Republic. Before this period, Na’ini’s narrative had been somewhat absent in modern Iranian historiography since the historiography of the Shiite Iranian ulema who resided in Iraq was underdeveloped during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. It wasn’t until the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that investigations of the Shia ulema class took a different turn.3

Unlike in Iran, Na’ini has not been afforded a rebirth in Iraqi historiography.4 Such has been the turbulence of modern-day Iraq that the history of the nineteenth century and its interlocutors have become victims of the various changes in national identity and governance there.5 Possible tensions between the Arab population and the Iranian ulema presence that were amplified during World War I could be a reason for this dearth. Many of the Shiite Iranian ulema who resided in Iraq were involved in the Iraqi nationalist movement, a point that still requires better treatment. Additionally, much of the history of modern Iraq can be found exclusively in British sources, as many Iraqi sources have been lost due to Western interventions, regional wars, and civil conflicts.6 That is not to say that Iraqi historiography has no mention of the Iranian Shia ulema

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1 I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Christopher K. Neumann, Prof. Dr. Benjamin C. Fortna, and the other contributors to this edition as well as the two blind reviewers for their comments, ideas, and points of reference regarding this paper. I would also like to thank Dr. Denis Herrmann for his advice.

In Turkish works, Na’ini is associated with the time he spent in Najaf, with his name being Mirza Muhammad Hüseyn Necefî Nâînî. See “Mirza Muhammad Hüseyn Necefî Nâînî,” TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/naini (accessed August 1, 2023).

2 In 1983 an image of Na’ini had appeared on a stamp with a group of other ulema. The 1987 stamp was a commemoration of him only.

3 During the reign of the Shah, many of the ulema were not celebrated in the official state narrative.


5 Sadly, many of the official archives in Iraq have been destroyed due to the years of conflict in the region. Historians are dependent on the British archives and independent accounts.

6 Pierre-Jean Luizard, “Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalisi (1890–1963) and his Political Role in Iraq and Iran in the 1910s/20s,” in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, eds., The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History (Brill, 2000), 223.
presence in Iraq, as there are references to the famous Shiite Muytahid Mullah Muhammad Kazim Khurasani, who is popularly known as Abu al-Ahrar (the father of reform). But Khurasani aside, other members of the ulema have been relegated to the status of secondary actors.

It is not only Iraqi historiography that overlooks Na’ini specifically and the Shia ulema more generally. In the field of Ottoman studies, while there has been increased interest by academics in the biographies or life stories of Ottoman nationals who transcended the boundaries of national identity or ethnicity, the likes of Na’ini appear as a simple footnote as an increasing number of Ottoman biographical works focus on actors in other provinces of the Ottoman Empire. While an Iranian national and not an Ottoman citizen, Na’ini was nonetheless heavily invested in Iraq, just like any other member of the Ottoman elite. The Shiite mujtahids established a unique status as an elite religious class with no equivalent in the Ottoman domains and became an everlasting feature of the Ottoman Iraqi provinces. The position of this liminal elite class at times created tensions with the Iraqi elites, the Ottoman government (both central and local), and the Shah and his government and allies in Iran, but by the turn of the nineteenth century, it would not be an exaggeration to say they had become a

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5 I would like to thank Denis Hermann regarding this point and his insight on this issue.

8 In comparison to Turkey and the other Arab provinces, there are still few works on Iraq. Some notable works are Gökhan Çetinsaya, The Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890–1908 (London: Routledge, 2011) and Yitzhak Nakash, The Shi’is of Iraq (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). These works are still the most detailed to date on Iraq as an Ottoman administered area. Newer works in Ph.D. form, such as works by Faruk Yasilicimen and Annie Greene, have yet to be published as monographs. See Faruk Yasilicimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shi’i Subjects: State, Society Relations in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (Ph.D. diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 2016). Annie Leah Greene, “Provincial, Not Peripheral: Ottoman-Iraqi Intellectuals and Cultural Networks, 1863–1914” (Ph.D. diss., Chicago University, 2018). For a detailed biography of Na’ini, see Abdul-Hadi Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics (Leiden: Brill, 1977). It is safe to argue that Hairi’s work is still the most comprehensive on the life and works of Na’ini in English; however, it often places Na’ini’s life within particular narratives of Westernization that have now been challenged in Ottoman studies. Nader Sohrabi, Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh, The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the Clerical Leadership of Khurasani (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

9 For this argument, see Michelle U. Campos, “From the ‘Ottoman Nation’ to ‘Hyphenated Ottomans’: reflections on the Multicultural Imperial Citizenship at the End of the Empire,” Ab Imperio no. 1 (2017): 163–81. While Campos does not speak of the Iranian ulema who were not citizens, her arguments about what makes an Ottoman are worth considering here. Also, Nikos Sigalas makes the point that the meaning of millet had evolved by the nineteenth century from the meaning din and sharia, religious groups and a people shaped through belief, into a “nation” and “confession.” See Nikos Sigalas, “And Every Language that Has Been Voiced Became a Millet: A Genealogy of the late Ottoman Millet,” Die Welt des Islams 62, no. 3–4 (2022): 325–59.
permanent indigenous feature of Iraq, and they would continue to be both in the Ottoman period and during the formation of the Iraqi nation-state. This article will shed light on the life of Na’ini as a liminal actor between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, a political activist who belonged to a scholarly network, and someone whose life was closely attached to his mentors and who was a part of the world of empires as well as the new nation state of Iraq.

Much of Na’ini’s life story has been placed squarely within a narrative of him being Iranian. It is not disputed that Na’ini lived in Iraq in the literature about him, but this article will emphasize how Na’ini should be seen equally as an Iraqi and an Ottoman. Na’ini’s life and intellectual ideas were influenced by the condition of Iraq, a nexus point between the Ottoman Empire and Iran. This article will attempt to integrate Na’ini’s thoughts, actions, and positions, which did not simply address Iranian concerns but also Ottoman ones.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HAWZAT ‘ILMIYYE AND AL-‘ATABÂT AL-ALIYAT

Na’ini belonged to nineteenth-century Iraq, a nexus between the Ottoman Empire and Iran. The Hawzat ‘ilmîyye (Hawzat), which were located in al-‘Atabât al-Aliyat (‘Atabât), were a key reason for this and connected the shrine cities, bringing trade, pilgrims, students and scholars to Iraq. The ‘Atabât expressed an interconnection between the Shi’i societies that had acquired this identity before the Ottoman presence. The Hawzat permitted autonomy for scholars from the authority of the Ottoman Empire and Iran, with locally sourced finances adding to a global network of Shia Muslims also sending capital; a patronage system emerged that provided much authority to the mujtahid and the Shia ulema as a global networked group. With the advent of modern technology, such as the telegram, print media, trains, and steamships, the movement of people and ideas was able to connect the shrine cities more effectively and brought to the attention of the ulema ideas in Turkish, Arabic, and even Urdu. Language was central to networks of knowledge in the Ottoman Empire, and the Iranian ulema helped circulate Persian in Iraq, adding to the linguistic diversity of the

10 The al-‘Atabât are the shrines of six Shia Imams which are found in four cities in Iraq, Najaf, Karbala, Kadhimiya, and Samarra. Samarra and Kadhimiya were north of Baghdad with Kadhimiya being the closer city to Baghdad; today it is a quarter in Baghdad. Karbala and Najaf were further south of Baghdad in the Middle-Euphrates.

Ottoman provinces. Linguistic variety and the press also brought ideas from various ideological positions and peoples. Print modernity facilitated a form of intellectual synchronization between Shia and Sunni reformists, especially on matters of reform and constitutionalism.

The presence of the Iranian ulema in the shrine cities of Ottoman Iraq no doubt created complexities for the Sunni Ottoman government. The interaction between the Shia ulema and the Ottoman authorities was a host of negotiations, as the presence of the Shia ulema should not be seen as part of a narrative of Shiite antagonism towards hostile Sunni rule or vice-versa. Instead, the life story of someone like Na’ini can tell us of the layers that go beyond this simplistic binary. Thus, while not an Ottoman national, Na’ini belonged to the ideological and lived imagination of both Ottomanism and Ittihad-i Islam (Islamic unity); he belonged to the al-Nahda of Arabism, he was indeed Iranian, and he belonged to a moment in history where Islamic intellectualism moved fluidly and interconnected the Ottoman Empire to Qajar Iran and the wider Islamic world, which one could say facilitated an “Islamic modernity.”

THE CONDITION OF IRAQ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

After the Wahhabi forces’ defeat by the Egyptian governor Mehmet Ali Pasha in 1818, a gradually increasing number of Shia ulema from Iran returned to the holy Shia cities in Iraq—the ‘Atabât. During the Tanzimat period in 1843, the Ottomans took direct control of Karbala and Najaf but permitted Shia Imams (pîshnamâz) to continue running the mosques as long as they publicly recognized Ottoman authority. Najaf was still predominantly Arab, while many significant Shia ulema were Iranian. To restrict local Iranian influence, the Ottomans carefully implemented measures to ensure their authority in the region.

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12 Green, Provincial, Not Peripheral, 60–64. Ottoman Turkish was used to homogenize society under Ottoman authority, but in Shia scholarly circles Arabic and Persian were used to provide independence from Istanbul.

13 On Ottomanism see Campos, “From the Ottoman Nation to Hyphenated Ottomans,” 56. On Muslim Unity or Islamic Unity, which has often been described as cognate for Pan-Islamism (although this is now being challenged), see Yasliçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 104.

14 Armando Salvatore, The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 7. Salvatore makes the case that the sociology of Islam can help in raising the issue of Islamic modernity as a research question to pursue and no longer as an oxymoron.

15 Wahabi forces had taken Mecca and attacked Karbala in 1807. In 1818 the Egyptian governor Mehmed Ali Pasha was asked by Sultan Mahmud II to reclaim the Hijaz and secure Iraq from the Wahabis. The Wahabis would become a constant concern for Istanbul and the Shias of Iraq.
First and foremost, the Ottomans passed a law prohibiting Ottoman women from marrying Iranian nationals. The Ottoman government later attempted to restrict Sunni and Shia marriage by decreeing that marriage and divorce were only valid when conducted in the local Ottoman courts, as Shiite legal courts were abolished.\textsuperscript{16}

The Ottoman policy of emphasizing the domains as one under the Sunni Caliphate’s protection created ideological challenges in Iraq, as Shi’ism was not part of the Ottoman Imperial Islamic vision. The government’s position adjusted to encourage Islamic unity in order to win the loyalty of all Muslims in the region. By the 1850s and 1860s, the Ottomans had managed to conscript more men from the Iraqi provinces, with an increase of Shia Arabs in the Ottoman army achieved with the aid of the Iranian ulema.\textsuperscript{17} One way the Ottomans attempted to appease the Shias was to absolve Shia religious students of their obligation to join the military, an exemption usually only afforded to Sunni religious students. Permission was given to build Shia religious schools, with most, if not all, independent of direct Ottoman control.\textsuperscript{18}

During the Hamidian period (1876–1909), the government, concerned with the increasing influence of the Shia ulema on the Iraqi populations, enacted a policy of countering Shia influence by sending Sunni ulema to the region. In a new development, a telegram sent to the imperial center complained that Sunni Muslims in the Iraqi regiments were converting to Shi’ism, especially in the Ottoman Sixth Army and police force.\textsuperscript{19} The Hamidian government sought to build more Sunni schools and sent members of the Sixth Army to Anatolia to teach them Turkish and take them away from the influence of the Shia ulema.\textsuperscript{20} Despite concerns about the possibility of Sunni Muslims converting to Shiism, the government was hesitant to antagonize the Shia ulema and peoples of Iraq; the government sought to find a middle ground where Shias could be loyal to the Ottoman center, especially given the threat of foreign intervention in the Ottoman domains and Iran. Recognizing the external threat from the British and Russians, they hoped that the call for Islamic unity could momentarily control the differences between the Ottoman center and Iranian mujtahids. The Ottomans knew the Shia ulema was far more influential in Iraq than the Shah. As a result, rather than further stoking tensions, Ahmed Cevdet Pasha and Riza Pasha encouraged Sultan Abdulhamid II to gain the support of the Shia ulema.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Yasliçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 53.
\item[17] Ibid., 71.
\item[19] Litvak, \textit{Shi’i Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq}, 132.
\item[20] BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 78/20, H 18.5.1309. (December 20, 1891)
\end{footnotes}
under the pretense of Islamic unity. It was in this environment that Na’ini would arrive in Ottoman Iraq. While arriving to study, Na’ini would inadvertently become involved in the region’s local and imperial disputes.

NA’INI’S EARLY LIFE IN OTTOMAN IRAQ AND INFLUENCES

A 25-year-old Na’ini first moved from Iran to Ottoman Iraq in 1885 after the death of his mentor, Hajji Shaykh Muhammad Baqir-Isfahani. After completing his training in Iran, like most ambitious students, Na’ini made the arduous journey to continue his study with the ulema in the holy shrine cities rather than staying in Iran. First arriving in Najaf, the main center of Shia learning, Na’ini chose to move to Samarra, the shrine city north of Baghdad. Na’ini’s desire to move to Samarra was due to the presence of the famous Shia ulema Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shirazi, Sayyid Ismail Sadr, and Sayyid Muhammad Fisharaki -Isfahani. In particular, Shirazi was known as an influential figure in Shia circles, a marja’-i taqlid whose scholarly credentials were respected on both sides of the border. Some even called him the mujaddid (renewer) of the time. Shirazi was a stand-out scholar, and when he moved to Samarra from Najaf, his presence changed the social dynamic of this mainly Sunni Arab city. Shirazi’s presence was a cause for concern for the Ottoman government, who later attempted to protect the Sunni population from Shi’ism by sending the Nakshabandi Sunni Sheikh Mohammad-Sa’id to the region. As mentioned, the center’s policy was to send ulema to the Sunni areas, build Sunni madrasas, and stem the number of Sunnis converting to Shi’ism. Na’ini formed a close relationship with Shirazi, first becoming a trusted disciple and then his secretary, as he would pen petitions on behalf of the esteemed scholar.

After the Persian wars with Russia in 1813 and 1828 and then with Britain in 1856, Iran became a buffer state between the two powers, with Britain wanting to protect its interests in India and the Russians pushing their expansionist policy to counter the British. This situation forced the Shah to make political

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22 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, 109.
24 Selim Deringil, “The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda,” Die Welt des Islams 30 (1990): 49–50. Deringil states that throughout the late 1890s and the early 1900s we find repeated references in the Ottoman archival documentation to the spread of Shiism in Iraq.
25 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, 111.
and military concessions and, more significantly, economic ones. The general nature of the concessions, which were discriminatory towards Persian traders, left traders, ulema, and the intelligentsia frustrated to the point that a protest movement rose up in response to the monopolization of the production, sales, and export of tobacco in 1891.26 A fatwa, supposedly attributed to Shirazi, stated that those who purchased or used tobacco were at war with the Hidden Imam. While people in certain parts of Iran had already started boycotting tobacco, Shirazi’s intervention increased the pressure on the Iranian government. Rumors spread that Shirazi had not written the fatwa;27 this could have been a government attempt to discredit the fatwa, or Na’ini could have written it on behalf of Shirazi, leading to the confusion.28 Access to Shirazi gave direct access to forms of learning, ideas, students, scholars, and material resources. It also provided Na’ini with authority, and Na’ini was to learn that in Iraq, a Shia mujtahid could be as much a political agent as he was a religious one.

THE LOSS OF ONE MENTOR AND THE INTRODUCTION OF ANOTHER—SECOND SPELL IN NAJAF

When Shirazi died in 1895, the Ottoman government permitted a procession with a convoy of Ottoman police and soldiers to lead Shirazi’s funeral to Karbala and Najaf so that people could pay their respects.29 Na’ini would stay in Samarra for another year under Sayyid Muhammad Fisharaki-Isfahani but follow Sayyid Ismail Sadr first to Karbala and then to Najaf. Na’ini’s earlier life had been framed by staying alongside scholars until their death, first Baqir-Isfahani in Iran and then Shirazi in Samarra. While Shirazi’s presence was challenging for the Ottomans, at the same time, Shirazi was instrumental in maintaining the peace in Samarra when tensions between Sunnis and Shias broke out in 1893.30 The death of Shirazi also changed the dynamic of the Shia teaching and religious centers, with a decline in the number of students studying in Samarra.

29 BNA, FO 195/1885, No: 94/18 (February 27, 1895).
While the baton was passed to another of Shirazi’s disciples, Mirza Mohammad-Taqi Shirazi, Samarra was no longer as attractive. Rather than continuing his mentor’s project in Samarra, Na’ini chose to follow Sayyid Ismail Sadr to Najaf, where Shirazi was buried along with the first Imam of Shiism and fourth Caliph in Sunnism, Ali ibn Talib. While staying in the presence of the shrine of his first mentor in Iraq, Na’ini went on to study under a new living master. In his second period in Najaf, at 35 years old and politically more active, Na’ini would form a special relationship with the new marja-i taqlid and student of Shirazi, Akhund Mullah Muhammad Kazim Khurasani.

There were many significant Shia ulema in Najaf, none more so than Khurasani. As in his relationship with Shirazi, Na’ini quickly became a close disciple and aid to Khurasani. It is testimony to Na’ini’s abilities that he was chosen as advisor and petitioner to both Shirazi and Khurasani; in many ways, he operated as a fetva-emini did to the Ottoman Sheikh ul-Islam. In Najaf, Na’ini started teaching classes and became popular among the student body. At the same time, he was given special dispensation to miss Khurasani’s lectures as the bond between the two like-minded scholars deepened. Always careful not to upstage his mentors, Na’ini chose a life of service to the two great sages in his life in Iraq. While producing a host of fatwas in favor of constitutionalism, Khurasani abstained from writing about the subject, leaving that to his students like Ni’ani.

From the 1890s onwards, a series of arrests of ulema and activists of various ideological backgrounds who desired a return to constitutional order were made by the Hamidian government throughout the Ottoman Empire. In Iraq the Iranian ulema maintained a neutral posture towards this type of activity as Khurasani would have been sensitive to the possibility of upsetting the Ottoman Sultan as well as the Shah. However, in 1895 when Na’ini arrived in Najaf, ten-

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31 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, 112. Ha’iri argues that Na’ini was the closest consultant of Khurasani in his constitutional activities.

32 The fetva-emini was a person designated to produce the fatwa on behalf of the chief mufti, for the mufti to then sign off.


34 The ideas of constitutionalism can be found sporadically in various places in Khurasani’s works. His students Na’ini and Shaykh Muhammad Ismail Mahallati both wrote on the subject, suggesting that the life of a marja-i taqlid would have been all-consuming. For a detailed explanation of this see Mohsen Kadivar, “The Innovative Political Ideas and Influence of Mullā Muhammad Kāzīm Khurāsānī,” Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies (Ajames), 21, no. 1 (2005), 59–73. See also Denis Hermann, “Akhund Khurasani and the Iranian Constitutional Movement,” Middle Eastern Studies 49, no. 3 (2013): 430–53.

isions between Khurasani’s camp and the Shah reached a tipping point when the Iranian Shia ulema in Iraq objected to a rapprochement with the Shah, claiming that living under the Ottoman Sunni Caliph was better than the Shah. For the Shia in the Ottoman Empire, especially those from Iran, this move could have been viewed as a break from their religious traditions. During the advent of the wave of constitutional moments in the region, Khurasani wrote a letter to the Ottoman premier in Istanbul to clarify his position as a pro-constitutionalist. This was a show of adherence to the success of the Constitutional Revolution in the Ottoman Empire and his desire for Iran to be a reformed Islamic nation. Khurasani made Islam’s compatibility with constitutionalism apparent, which would have been well received by the new CUP government. Khurasani was careful in his criticism of the Shah; he wasn’t an anti-monarchist, but he would stress that to be anti-constitutional would be anti-Islamic, which was similar to ideas being promoted by pro-constitutionalists throughout the Ottoman Empire.

In this environment, Khurasani started to criticize the Shah’s regime and those who supported him in favor of a constitutional order. Na’ini’s associates claimed that Na’ini composed all the telegrams and public declarations for Khurasani, Mirza Muhammad Husayn Tihrani ibn Mirza Khalil, and ‘Abd Allah Mazandarani concerning works on the constitution. Na’ini had become part of Khurasani’s inner circle, representing the active political and social environment in Najaf. The new advances in technology not only permitted information to spread through the ‘Atabât and major cities in Iran; they equally increased the visibility of Khurasani, like Shirazi before him, in the eyes of people in Iraq and Iran.

Before being published in Tehran, Khurasani’s ideas would sometimes be published in Cairo and then make their way to Iraq and eventually to Iran. This was also the case for Na’ini’s later works, suggesting that the Ottoman Empire was more advanced in print technology in certain cities and that censor-

36 Yasliçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 107. See also Çetinsaya, The Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 122. Çetinsaya claims that the Shia ulema that included Khurasani called the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II Amir al-Muminin (Leader of the faithful), which is a term used for a Sunni Caliph. However, the context surrounding this claim is still somewhat unclear.

37 Farzaneh, The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 160. Farzaneh notes that there is no date on the letter Khurasani had penned. I am assuming this letter was penned after the success of the Constitutional Revolution in 1908 in the Ottoman Empire.

38 Ibid., 160.

39 Hairy, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, 112.


41 Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad are seen as centers of the al-Nahda (Arabic intellectual and cultural revival).
ship of Shia intellectual works in the Ottoman Empire was less stringent than in Iran.\textsuperscript{42}

No sooner had Mozaffar al-Din Shah signed a constitution on his death bed in 1906 than growing voices of discontent from Shia ulema, particularly in Iran, arose, such as from Sayyid Kazim Yazdi and Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri. After the accession to the throne of Muhammad Ali Shah, the constitution was abandoned and parliament was bombarded. Regarding the Iranian project, the ulema now differed on the best course of action. Prior to 1906, Khurasani and Nuri were positively disposed toward a constitutional system. By 1907, however, Nuri had changed his mind and believed that Islam and constitutionalism were incompatible. Khurasani, Yazdi, Nuri, and Na’ini were all students of Shirazi but had become divided on constitutionalism and their relationships with the Shah. This tension between his students might have been averted if Shirazi had still been alive. However, now esteemed scholars in their own right, their political and religious views regarding reform, the authority of the Shah, and constitutionalism created tensions within the somewhat cohesive scholarly community. On closer inspection, the pro-constitutional camp was in agreement with Nuri that the constitution of 1906 was far from desirable. But whereas Khurasani and Na’ini felt that the constitution required adjustments to make it consistent with Shia Islam in the way that they had imagined it,\textsuperscript{43} Nuri believed that the constitutionalists were attempting to instrumentalize Islam to discursively establish a secular and more liberal constitutional document, especially after his suggestions were rejected.\textsuperscript{44}

As a result, an antagonistic campaign was waged against constitutionalist supporters in Iran and Ottoman Iraq. If British sources are to be believed, in 1908 a Shia alim sent a message to the Ottoman Sultan, soliciting his help and asking him to save Iran from foreign invasion.\textsuperscript{45} In October an appeal was made

\textsuperscript{42} Cairo was beyond the remit of Ottoman censorship, but Shia books in particular were a grey area for the Ottoman center in regard to whether to censor and how works ought to be censored. Books including Quran tafsirs from Shia ulema in Iran were smuggled into the Ottoman Empire. Treaties and fatwas were easier to send to Iran. However, the Iranian state also tried to stop this. Juan R. I. Cole “Printing and Urban Islam in the Mediterranean World, 1890–1920,” in Leila Tarazi Fawaz and Christopher Alan Bayly, eds., Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 344–64.

\textsuperscript{43} Farzaneh, The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 133. Khurasani did not support cultural Westernization, but wanted to limit unchecked monarchist power, eliminate tyranny, and establish equity among all Iranian nationals in the eyes of the law.

\textsuperscript{44} Abdul-Hadi Hairi, “Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri’s refutation of the Idea of Constitutionalism,” Middle Eastern Studies 13, no. 3 (1977), 331. Nuri’s pamphlet was titled Tadhkirah al-Ghafil wa Irshad al-Jahil (A Reminder for the negligent and Guide for the Ignorant). See also Sohrabi, Revolution and Constitutionalism, 390.

\textsuperscript{45} BNA, F.O 196/2275, No:720/76, Baghdad (August 7, 1908).
to the Shah in favor of the constitution on behalf of both Sunnis and Shias but to no avail. Critics of Na’ini and ulema of a similar mindset had fallen prey to manifests and treaties in Najaf condemning the constitution, and Khurasani and Na’ini would bear the brunt of their activities. In some cases, it was alleged that thugs and gangs were used against Khurasani and Na’ini, with Mazandarani remarking that Na’ini was the victim of idle talk and slander. Nuri and like-minded ulema expressed their views via pamphlets circulated in Iran and Iraq, with many fatwas declaring the constitution unlawful. However, Khurasani was still amiable towards the anti-constitutionalists in Najaf, as he wanted to safeguard the community from splitting. For Khurasani and then Na’ini after him, there was a need to win over people in Iraq who had become supporters of Nuri and anti-constitutional sympathizers. But Khurasani and later Na’ini would not offer Nuri that same type of courtesy, as it was felt that Nuri was disturbing the peace and that divisions in the ulema could be exploited.

By 1908 two pro-constitutionalist ulema in Tehran, Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba’i and Sayyid Abdullah Bihbahani, who had once been allies of Nuri, would request Khurasani’s opinion on the persecution of those who supported a constitutional government. Khurasani replied that such action was un-Islamic. Later, when there was a spate of attacks on Zoroastrians, Khurasani would stress the equality of all nationals in Iran, similar to how equality was being professed during the constitutional revolution in the Ottoman Empire. In 1906 when the constitutionalists succeeded in Iran, Na’ini and Khurasani must have felt a sense of unimaginable satisfaction. However, no sooner had the Iranian Revolution established the constitutional government than, with the help of the Russians, the new Shah’s regime crushed the constitutionalist movement. For Khurasani, the Iranian polity would cease to exist if the state did not support reform; for Nuri, reform was a pretext for liberalizing the state and society along more Western European lines and would lead to greater instability and outside intervention. Na’ini was profoundly shaped by this argument between Khurasani and Nuri. When Na’ini decided to pen his works on the compatibility between Islam and the constitution, it was a reflection of his life under the reform-minded ulema of Najaf, and a reiteration of his own belief that Islam

46 BNA, F.O 195/2275, No:928/103, Baghdad (October 12, 1908).
47 Muhammad Husayn Na’ini, Tanbih al-ummah wa Tanzih al-millah (1909), 77.
48 Hairi, Shi‘ism and Constitutionalism in Iran, 113.
49 Sohrabi, Revolution and Constitutionalism, 389.
50 Farzaneh, The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 126.
51 Ibid., 176. Khurasani used the term Mufsid (agitator), for whom the punishment was death.
52 Ibid., 160.
53 Ibid., 126–27.
and the ulema were not mere instruments for a “Westernized” secular project but that Islam had the mechanisms to support conditional governance.

NA’INI PUBLISHES HIS IDEAS ON CONSTITUTIONALISM

Na’ini’s thoughts on constitutionalism and Islam, particularly Shia Islam, echoed the myriad of experiences and works available to him. There was no doubt that his zeal for political activism stemmed from his time with his two mentors and his experiences during the protests against the tobacco concessions. When Na’ini published his book on Islamic constitutionalism, Tanbih al-ummah wa Tanzih al-millah (Guidance of the Public and Edification of the Nation), he addressed Nuri’s objection without mentioning Nuri or his works in person.54 After the publication of Tanbih, Na’ini’s visibility would increase due to his political activism. While attempting to address Nuri, Na’ini’s main aim was to make a forceful defense of the compatibility of Islam with constitutionalism.

Iranian thinkers had written about the need for a constitution before Na’ini’s Tanbih. Mirza Melkum Khan, an Armenian Christian from Iran, and Mirza Yousaf Khan Mostashar al-Dowell were known personalities who professed the need for conditional governance and a parliamentary system. Their ability to use traditional Islamic language while making a case for conditional governance illustrates that the Iranian ulema were latecomers to Islamic constitutional discourse, and were at times perceived as being a legitimizing tool.55 But if we place Na’ini and Khurasani within the greater Ottoman context, we can see that Muslim reformists were as active regarding constitutional theory as their more secular counterparts. The nineteenth century witnessed a constitutional effort in Tunisia in 1861. The Ottoman Empire saw something similar in 1876, with the ideas of the Young Ottomans and writers in Egypt like Husayn al-Marsafi, the Syrian Sunni alim Abdurrahman al-Kawakabi, and Khayruddin al-Tunisi’s works all being published during the first constitutional phase, all mentioning the need for constitutional governance throughout the nineteenth century.56

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55 Sohrabi, Revolution and Constitutionalism, 301–05.
56 Hermann suggests that the Circassian Bey of Tunisia, Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi’s (Hayrettin el-Tunisi) Aqwam al-Masālik fī ma’rifat ahwāl al-mamālik [The Straight Path to Reforming Governments] could have been an inspiration from Ottoman works; see Hermann, “Akhund Khurasani and the Iranian Constitutional Movement,” 436. Hairi claims that Tanbih had borrowed from the Kurdish-Arab Salafist from Aleppo, Abdul Rahman al-Kawakabi Tabā’al-istibdat wa Masari [The Nature of Despotism], especially ideas on istibdat (despotism). See Hairi, “Shi’ism and Constitutionalism,” 161–64.
Intellectuals, Muslims, non-Muslims, and ulema of all denominations had discussed the ideas of reform, conditional governance, freedom, equality, tyranny, and corruption. Na’ini’s *Tanbih* may have been a late addition, but it was by no means a piecemeal effort; it was rather an articulation similar to those of Muslim reformists in the region. The reformist ideas of the Sunni thinkers in the Ottoman Empire resonated with the *jadidi* thinkers in Najaf.

The first versions of *Tanbih* were published in Baghdad and translated into Arabic by Salih Kashif al-Ghita, who later published it in Cairo. In Egypt it was met with enthusiasm by the Salafist alim and the editor of the famous Carine Islamic journal *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse), Sheikh Rashid Rida. A lithographed edited edition was published in Iran in 1910 by Hajji Sayyid Mahmud Taliqani. By the time *Tanbih* was written, a host of works had been written around the Ottoman Empire and Iraq in 1908 and 1909, with the Ottoman periodicals full of pieces, especially from the ulema, on *istibdat* and constitutionalism. There were also several articles in the Ottoman journals such as *Beyan ul-Hak* and *Sirat ul-Mustakim*. The Arabic pamphlet from Abdullah al-Alami from Gaza titled *Azam Tidhkar lil-Uthmaniyyin al-Ahrar aw al-Hurriyya wal-Musawa wal Mabuthan min Ta’alim al-Quran* was also published. It discusses ideas similar to Na’ini’s and merits a more detailed comparison with Na’ini’s *Tanbih*, as Na’ini’s book, like Alami’s and those of other Ottoman ulema, used evidence from the Quran and hadith and had similar ideas on equality, tyranny, and injustice. Na’ini was not imitating Ottoman works; rather, the ideas found throughout all these works reflect a larger corpus on Islam and constitutionalism which was part of a formative expression of state formation and modern Islamic thought for both Sunnis and Shias, with Iraq being a node for both the Ottoman and Iranian worlds.

Na’ini’s contemporary and another student of Khurasani, Shaykh Muhammad Ismail Mahallati, published *Al-la’ali al-Marbuta fi wujub al-Mashruta* around the same time; however, unlike *Tanbih*, this book was less critical of the ulema in Iran, and it didn’t use the Quran and hadith in the same way as Na’ini’s work. In particular, Na’ini criticized the ulema who were supporters of the Shah as being equal to the tyrant in the act of tyranny, suggesting they were the *shu’ba-yi*

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57 Hairi, “*Shi‘ism and Constitutionalism,*” 157. A third edition in 1955 would be reprinted in Iran as Na’ini was now considered a distinguished alim.

58 For Ottoman works see Ahmed, “*The Role of the Ottoman Ulema,*” 128–81. For Iraqi works by the Iranian ulema and thinkers see Ha’iri, *Shi‘ism and Constitutionalism*, 161–64.


istibdad-i dīni (religious branch of tyranny). While Khurasani and Mazandarani were hesitant to criticize the ulema in print in the way Na’ini had in Tanbih, which probably reflected his sentiments toward Nuri, Khurasani still praised the overall contribution of Na’ini’s Tanbih and the leading ulema signaled their approval of his book. Khurasani and Na’ini’s contribution would provide the legitimacy the Iranian parliament needed to hold Nuri to account.

Since his book was written in Persian, it is easy to assume that Na’ini’s target group were people in Iran; however, there was a sizeable Persian-speaking population in Iraq and the borderland areas of the Southern Caucasus. Na’ini is clear about welcoming the Ottoman success of the new constitutional order and claims that the victories of the constitutionalists in Istanbul and Iran were due to the importance of the ulema in Najaf for Iran and the elder statesmen (politicians) and ulema of the Ottoman Empire. The book was written in March and April 1909, when the Ottomans had crushed the counter-revolution and before the Iranian constitution was restored in July 1909. The success of the Ottoman constitutionalists had provided Na’ini with an environment to criticize his detractors. In the opening section of Tanbih he states: “With Allah’s benevolent support, the retrogressive trajectory of the Islamic world has been halted and slavery under the imperious passions of dictatorial rulers has been terminated. [He meant both the Iranian revolutionaries in 1909/1324 and the Young Turks in 1908/1326].” He further continues that “The Muslim community (both Sunni and Shia) has, thanks to the superb guidance and reasoning of its ulema, became aware of the true requirements of its religion and its God-given freedoms.” He finally states that

...the momentous edicts of the Ja’fari religion [Shi’i Islam] in the city of Najaf and the subsequent edicts of the elders (ulema and senior statesmen) of Istanbul who unanimously declared the struggle for these holy and legitimate goals [constitutionalism] as a necessity of religion, exonerated Islam from acquiescing to such tyrannical and irrational rules. These were clear historical documents concerning the position of the Islamic leadership on the issue, thus silencing critical tongues.

From this passage one should assume that Na’ini was aware that an Ottoman audience was reading his ideas and that he continued to support the idea of

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62 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism, 222.
63 Charles Kurzman, Modernist Islam, 117.
Muslim unity, and in return works by ulema in Istanbul made similar claims of Shia and Sunni cooperation.\(^{64}\)

While Hairi claims *Tanbih* was aimed at the layperson but needed to be easier for them, it seems clear that *Tanbih* was written in a scholarly style for students of knowledge, primarily for those who resided in Najaf and also perhaps for those in Iran.\(^{65}\) The book was published after the 3rd Action Army in Istanbul had suppressed the counter-revolution in the Ottoman Empire and four months before the Iranian constitutional restoration in July 1909. Na’ini’s contribution was aimed at an audience that had inclinations toward change in politics in Iran, but for those who also lived within the Ottoman world, primarily Iraq, the Najafi Iranian ulema reflected a like-mindedness with the Sunni ulema in the Ottoman world regarding Islam and political change, as a general synthesis in thought was observable in the works published at the time.

THE BREWING STORM—WARS AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Na’ini’s life, however, did not see the upward turn he may have hoped for. The Ottoman Revolution was a zenith of optimism for many, but no sooner had the Ottomans established their constitutional order than the new order faced uncontrollable challenges. The constitutions were designed to bring stability to both imperial states to curb further foreign encroachment. The constitutions did indeed offer the likes of Na’ini an increased political authority in Iraq. The new Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government provided further bureaucratic flexibility to Shias in Iraq, who were never part of the state program as a Sunni Caliphate and could become part of the state machinery under the guise of the revolutionary ideal of equality. After the restoration of the Iranian constitution, Nuri was hanged by the Iranian state in 1909, much to the surprise of the ulema (even those who had opposed him). After this, the anti-constitutionalist camp in Iraq stopped its activities against Khurasani and Na’ini.\(^{66}\) However, in Iran tensions remained, as Sayyid Abdullah Bihbahaini was assassinated in 1910.\(^{67}\) Khurasani would then telegram Nasir al-Mulk, the Regent, to say that the ulema in Najaf was dissatisfied with the new constitu-

\(^{64}\) For the Ottoman response calling for Shia and Sunni unity during the revolution, see “Alem-i Islam: Iran,” *Beyan’ül Hak* 1, no. 12, 265 (27 Zilkade 1326 –December 20 1908) [The World of Islam: Iran].

\(^{65}\) Hairi, *Shī’ism and Constitutionalism*, 155.


\(^{67}\) Hairi, *Shī’ism and Constitutionalism*, 115.
tional order. But while factions of pro-constitutional and anti-constitutional activists no longer existed, tensions between Sunni Arabs and Iranians emerged. When conflict arose in Iraq in 1911, the office of the Sheik ul-Islam announced that hatred and factionalism conflicted with the constitutional order and the Islamic law and that the Muslim community should come together. The new constitutional order attempted to provide the Shia of Iraq with better conditions, and the appeal for Islamic unity became more vocal than ever before. Na’ini had little time to rest, as in 1911 the Russians invaded the north of Iran, and Italy invaded Ottoman Libya. These activities created greater urgency for Muslim unity. The increasing Russian and British threat to Iran led to territorial losses that created an uncertain atmosphere following the turmoil of the revolutionary period. It was understandable that the Russian invasion of Iran would stir emotions in Iraq for Na’ini and the Shia ulema, but the Italian invasion of Tripoli was equally impactful for the Arab province. As in the case of the Tobacco Concessions, Khurasani would first move to the city of Kazimayn in Iraq and then call for a boycott of Russian goods but also went further by saying the Muslims needed to fight the invaders and both learn and teach the new military techniques. Khurasani would add that a jihad against the infidels was obligatory according to the consensus among Muslims, that it was a religious necessity, and that Muslims needed to be united. A telegram was then sent to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed Reşad V, addressing him as Caliph and assuring him that he had their full support. Na’ini, like many, took an oath of loyalty to the ulema’s case against the foreign campaign and called for Sunni-Shia unity. Even Yazdi, antagonistic towards Na’ini and his supporters, came on board by independently arguing that the Italian invasion of Libya, and the Russian and British occupation of Northern and Southern Iran meant that it was a duty of all Muslims to protect the Iranian and Ottoman domains against the invading crusaders. In response to these events, the British suggested that the CUP had encouraged the Iranian ulema in Iraq to be anti-Russian. In October 1911, most of the prominent Shia ulema issued fatwas against Italy.

68 Ibid., 116.
69 “Müslümanları İttihâd ve İttifâka Dâvet,” Strât-ı Mustakîm 7, no. 182, 11 Raceb 1330 (February 27, 1912).
71 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism, 117.
72 Ibid., 121.
73 Ibid.
74 BNA, FO 195/2309, No: 748/82, Baghdad (July 12, 1909).
75 Yaslıçimen, The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects, 140.
Later that year, in December 1911, Khurasani died, leaving a vacuum in Najaf and Iraq, with some citing foul play; however, Na‘ini stressed that it was a natural death. The death of Khurasani would have come as a blow to Na‘ini as not only had he lost a mentor and friend, but Shia Muslims had also lost a significant representative. Due to Khurasani’s death, Na‘ini would now become a key figure for the Shiite ulema in Iraq. In 1913 the Ottoman Empire witnessed further shocks as the Balkan wars facilitated a host of independence activities in the Balkans, and these events had a catastrophic impact on the Iraqi ulema, who developed a great fear of the emergence of Balkan “Christian” states against Muslims. The wars involving Iran, Libya, and the Balkans had left Ottoman-Muslim public opinion fragile as loss after loss had been reported, impacting Sunnis and Shias alike. No sooner had the Ottomans made gains in recovering lost territory in the Balkans than, on June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, sparking a series of events that led to World War I.

On November 13, 1914, the Ottoman Sheikh ul-Islam Hayri Effendi issued the jihad fatwa that was read out by the fetva-emini to an emotionally charged Muslim audience who had gathered in and around Fatih mosque in Istanbul. The Ottomans sought assistance from the Iranian Shiite ulema in Iraq. There were multiple versions of the Ottoman jihad fatwa, with the version sent to the Shiite regions omitting the war on behalf of the Ottoman Caliphate. Many of the Shiite ulema produced their own fatwas, stating that it was a religious obligation to defend Iraq in the war. While the Ottoman jihad fatwa had many layers, including a global Muslim jihad against the Allied forces, in Iraq, the fatwas, which were more passionate in style, were written as a result of more local concerns about Muslim unity. The Ottoman Ministry of Internal Affairs asked the province of Baghdad to transmit the fatwas of the Iranian Shia mujtahids to the Iranian state. As a way of appeasing the Shia Muslims in Iraq, in April 1914, Süleyman Şefik, the Ottoman governor of Basra, suggested that Shiite teachers be permitted to work in Ottoman courts as the new CUP government made attempts to have Shi’ism officially accepted as a legitimate branch of Islam. The hope was that Sunni and Shia dif-

76 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism, 117.
77 Yasliçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 101.
78 Ibid., 97.
79 Hanioğlu, “Ottoman Jihad or Jihads,” 120.
80 Hairi, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism, 236. In his Ph.D. thesis Hairi alludes to the fact that Na‘ini was involved in the writing of the fatwas; however, this point is omitted from the book, where Hairi states that Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, Sayyid Ismail Sadr, Sahriat Isfahani, and Shaykh Abdallah Mazandarani were the main writers. In the documents in the Ottoman archives, Na‘ini’s name seems to be missing. DH.EUM.6. Şb, 2/25, 25 Muharrem 1333 (December 12, 1914).
81 Yasliçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 126.
ferences would be put aside to stabilize the region. Surprisingly the Ottomans had a more challenging time convincing some of the Sunni tribes and leaders in the Hijaz than the Shiite ulema in Najaf, who already believed in the concept of Muslim unity, with Na’ini becoming a significant figure.

The Shia ulema held a major meeting in Najaf, at which an audience of approximately 40,000 people was told to participate in the jihad against the foreign powers. While the Shia Iranian ulema was calling on Shias to fight for the Ottoman cause, the Wahabis refused to support the Ottomans; Sherif Hussein of Mecca revolted and in Iran, the preference was to maintain neutrality. Soon a fatwa had been co-signed by 23 ulema, including those who were critical of the Iranian constitutionalists. Fatwas written by the Shia ulema of Iraq were sent around Iraq and Iran. However, the Iranian state, careful to maintain its neutrality, prevented the Iraqi fatwas from being distributed in Iran. Many of the ulema were active participants in the military campaigns against the Allied powers during the war effort. Sunnis and Shias fought together on the same front, and Na’ini would also be active in the war effort. However, Baghdad soon fell as the war dragged on, and the conditions in the region changed with the Sharifian revolt against the Ottoman center.

By 1915 Sharif Husayn had made a pact with the British to secure Arab independence, and by 1918 the Ottomans had lost the Arab provinces. The British assumed that the Shias would be happy with the fall of Ottoman authority in Iraq. However, the Shia ulema became agitated when they discovered that Britain wanted to place a British governor in charge of Iraq. Mirza Taqi Muhammad Shirazi declared that no non-Muslim should be accepted as ruler over the Iraqi people. The Shia ulema, led by Shirazi, continued to support the resistance to the British, inviting all peoples in Iraq to resist the British occupation. It was not simply the fall of the Ottomans or the British threat that concerned the likes of Na’ini. When Wahabbi forces attacked Southern Iraq, Naini and Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Khalisi sent a joint telegram inviting their followers to offer their opinions on the best course of action. While the Iranian Shia ulema

82 Ibid., 125–26.
84 Ibid., 100.
85 DH.EUM.6. Şb, 2/25, 25 Muharrem 1333 (December 12, 1914). Na’ini’s name is absent in these fatwas. He probably simply followed the leading ulema at the time, such as Mirza Taqi Muhammad Shirazi, as was the custom.
86 Hanioğlu, “Ottoman Jihad or Jihads,” 98.
87 Haire, Shi’ism and Constitutionalism, 126.
88 Yasliçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 140.
89 Ibid., 127.
90 Ibid., 129.
was moving towards resistance, Faysal was nominated King and signed a treaty with the British to replace the British mandate and become King in 1921. At this moment, a joint *fatwa* that included Na’ini suggested Muslims abstain from voting in the elections. 91 The *mujtahids* declared another *fatwa* forbidding the Shiite Muslims from helping the new Iraqi government.92 While the Sunnis and Shias were still collaborating, the British were confident this would not last. To consolidate his rule, Faysal separated education along the lines of ethnicity. Arab *mujtahids* were encouraged to increase their influence over the Shiite people challenging the Iranian ulema’s authority and presence.93 The modern states of Iraq and Iran established sharper ethnic divisions.

In 1919, leading ulema of the war effort, Sayyid Kazim and Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, died, as did Na’ini’s critic Sayyid Kazim Yazdi, and by 1920 another key *alim*, Shariat Isfahani, had also passed away. While these ulema had been alive Na’ini had adopted a more reserved position, but after their deaths, his position would become more overt, especially once King Faysal came to power in 1921. Moving away from his views of 10 years earlier, Na’ini gradually abandoned his political support for a constitutional government. As in the Sunni ulema, the empire’s collapse led to despondency, and many ulema had given up on speaking about Islamic constitutionalism, choosing instead to focus on more immediate concerns of survival. The British used more draconian measures than the Ottomans to deal with them. The Iranian Shia ulema were exiled either to the Hijaz or to Iran, with Na’ini choosing to migrate back to Iran rather than waiting to be pushed.94 This was a significant blow for Na’ini, as the exodus hurt him personally and impacted the Shiite ulema of Iran’s position in Iraq.

Na’ini would stay in Iran until the Shiite ulema were again permitted to enter Iraq, so long as they stayed away from political activity. Na’ini faced much criticism in Iran during his time there. The supporters of Nuri still had not forgiven him, perhaps, but now older, Na’ini accepted the British conditions and returned to Najaf. Na’ini did not agitate the Shah in Iran as he no longer criticized the Iranian regime, instead choosing a more cordial approach to authority. Upon his return to Iraq, he abstained from political activity or criticism of the Iranian and Iraqi governments. He lived out his days in Najaf, teaching *ilm* and attempting to consolidate a Shia ulema presence in Iraq once again.

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91 BNA, F.O 371/7772, Intelligence Report by Secretariat of the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad (November 1, 1922).
92 Yaslıçimen, “The Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Subjects,” 143.
93 Ibid., 150.
In 1936, Na’ini died in Najaf. He was buried alongside his mentors Shirazi and Khurasani. The region had changed considerably since the young Na’ini had arrived in Iraq in the 1880s. The Ottoman Empire had collapsed, and many of his mentors had died, with a new generation of Muslims forced to come to terms with the seismic change in the region. In Najaf, his death was commemorated with a host of services, and Kashif al-Ghita provided a eulogy for his services to Islam. In Iran, however, services were more muted. There, Riza Shah was overseeing a more secular Iranian program, and Na’ini’s death only made it into one of the Iranian journals. Na’ini had spent his whole life straddling his native Iran and his place of abode in Iraq. In the end, while he could not influence the conditions in the new nation-state, he was afforded the right to be buried in his beloved Najaf. At times Na’ini’s political positions made him a divisive figure, but by the end of his religious life he had abandoned politics for a simple life of learning. His life was never a straightforward one, and while he has been remembered in Iran, Na’ini was as much an Ottoman and an Iraqi as he was an Iranian. His life is testimony to that.

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