

Example of essay on jurji zaydan

Philosophy, Freedom



When the great historians are mentioned, the name Jurji Zaydan does not feature as much. However, if the history of Arab has to be discussed, then the name is a common term. For many people, the history of the Arabic language and the Arabian people is synonymous with the Islamic culture. Most of the Arabic writings have a lot to do with the Islam religion and culture. However, if the history of the region is to be set apart from Islam and discussed in detail, it emerges that some names must be mentioned. One of these names is Jurji Zaydan. However, many people do not understand who he was. As such, before mentioning his relation to the Arabic history, it is important to first introduce the man.

Jurji Zaydan was born in Beirut, Lebanon on the 14th of December, 1861 (Fischer Para 3). He was born into a Greek Orthodox family. The Zaidan Foundation (Para 2) indicates that Zaydan did not receive any valuable education. His father, who was illiterate, used to run a restaurant owned by their family. He did not attach much importance to education. At the age of 11, his father forced him to drop out of school so that he could help in the running of the family restaurant. However, in as much as his father did not like the idea of education, Zaydan had a thirst for knowledge and was willing to do anything so that he could attain the level of education that he needed. Even after dropping out of school, he, with the encouragement of his mother, continued tutoring himself at home. This made him gain a lot of knowledge and insight. The more he studied, the more he liked the idea of education and the more he felt that he needed to continue pursuing his academics. He also enrolled the services of the teachers he met at the restaurant who gave him the materials, advice and instruction that he needed so as to go on with

his education. Being a hardworking young man and with the passion for education, he wasted no chance or opportunity to expand his body of knowledge.

At the age of 19, Zaydan sat for the entry exams for the Syrian Protestant College, which was later to be named the American University of Beirut (Zaydan Foundation Par 5). He enrolled in the medical school at the institution, the college did not agree with the Darwinian ideas. One of the teachers in the institution, when giving a lecture to the students, voiced his praise, amid very lightly, on the Darwinian Theory. The institution reacted by immediately firing the professor. This was met by a lot of protests by the students in the institution, most of whom left the institution to pursue their education elsewhere. Others were expelled from the institution due to their participation in the strike. This strike marked the end of Zaydan's educational life. He and his family later relocated to Egypt and that is where he started his writing career.

According to Wordpress (Para 3), Zaydan was very much interested in studying, more so the history of the Arabic people and their nation. As such, this is the reason as to why he was very influential in the writing of their history as it is today. In his career life, there were quite a number of accomplishments he made which have remained as his legacy. First of all, he was one of the founders and fore fathers of the journal Al-Hilal, which is still published to date. The journal is just a culmination of the great interests that Zaydan had in history in general and the information concerning Arabs in particular. He also published quite a number of books and novels which tell the history of the Arabian people. His publications numbered 22 historical

novels which tell the history of the Arabic people and the Islam culture. In a way, he is the first individual who wrote quite a lot on the Arabic culture without much affiliation to the Islam cultures and doctrines. His was an account based on history.

There was also an interesting manner in which he wrote his novels.

According to Wordpress (Para 4), Zaydan wrote his books in a very simple structure. Before embarking on any writing, he first read extensively on the issue that he intended to write about so as to understand the history behind. Then he would come up with fictitious characters and a romantic or love story through which he would tell the history that he intended to. Since his aim was more of historical telling rather than entertainment, Zaydan employed very simple plots in his writing. There was not much to do with character development since he introduced the character and all their traits with the first mention. The rest was all about using the characters to tell his historical account and to have his ideas understood. In other words, the characters were just a platform that he used to get into touch with the reader and then he would tell the rest of his story. He could communicate history through the characters.

There is something else that needs to be mentioned about Zaydan and his writing. He had an interest in the ideas of individualism, the laissez-faire economics as well as the social Darwinism. As such, some of his works were biased to this direction they were also the reason as to why he easily dropped from the Presbyterian college since it failed to acknowledge these aspects. His thirst for knowledge and understanding of history made him a great contributor to the Arabic history. This is as indicated in the paragraphs

below.

According to Serageldin (2), Zaydan was propelled by his individualism to believe that the Arabs should have been allowed to run their own life. Having lived in a period when the Ottoman rule was in hold of the country, Zaydan felt that this should not have been the case. The people should have been allowed to run their lives they why they wanted to and how they felt best. There was no way that keeping them under the Ottoman rule could have made life any better for them.

Based on this account, it can be seen that Zaydan was a strong believer in the rights and freedoms of the Arabs. His ideas were that the Arabian people should not be governed nor managed by other forces; they had to be respected and valued by all. If this had to be the case, then they had to be on the front-line in advocating for their rights and showing that they deserved to be respected and valued. There was only one way through which this could be realized; through the advancement of the Arabic nationalism. Zaydan understood this very clearly, and that is why he sought to make the people realize this through the educational strategies. This is the reason as to why Zaydan was famed as one of the founders of Arab nationalism. It was mainly through his principles and arguments that this assumption came about. In other words, it can be said that he was one of those who stood up and fought for the independence of the Arabian people.

According to Serageldin (8), Zaydan's activities in the Nahda or the Arab renaissance was based on his ideas for freedom. The freedom that he was after was the liberation of his people from the rule of the Ottoman Empire and any other Western influence. However, his ideas of freedom were quite

different from the normal understanding of freedom. First of all, he was for the idea that absolute freedom destroys freedom absolutely. That is, he argued that the excessive freedom was used wrongly, and that is why the people needed to understand what freedom was before they put it into practice. There were some things that he agreed that the Arabs should have borrowed from the western nations as an aspect of freedom. The first one was the recognition of duty. That is, the people did not have to be reminded of what their roles and responsibilities in the society were. They should have an understanding of who they were in the society and what they were supposed to do. This is the reason as to why he went into the trouble of looking at the history of the people and bringing it out to the people. He wanted them to understand who they were and the roles they had to play in the advancement of their society, this could even help them in utilizing their freedom more effectively.

He also argued that one aspect that they had to borrow and incorporate into their freedom is the issue of punctuality and efficiency in time utilization. There was no reason as to why the people should have to be forced to be at a particular place at a particular time. It was all about responsibility. He also placed quite a great emphasis on the issue of education and the empowerment of women as one way of civilization and advancement towards independence. It is well known that education is power and he who possesses education has the power. Through this understanding, Zaydan sought to educate the people on broad categories of issues (Zaidan Foundation Par 5). He well understood that through this, the people would be enlightened. They would know more about their rights and self governance.

They would also learn how to manage their resources in such a manner that they got the necessary returns. In other words, they could utilize their understanding to govern themselves more effectively. They could practice their independence without having to rely on other people. Last of all, there was the need for hard work if the people had to have their freedom. Being self-governing implies that the people have to use their resources wisely and sparingly.

Based on the above understanding, it can be argued that Zaidan's ideas of freedom were based on the understanding of a people and their cultures. They needed to understand themselves as that was the only way through which they could effectively utilize their freedom and independence.

In line with the issue of freedom, the Arabs had to have a self-governing system. This is where they could continue running their lives without being governed by a kind of godfather; the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman rule was there so as to help them run their resources and manage them effectively. However, it did not allow them to govern their lives as they wanted to. They were subject to manipulation, mistreatment and being misinterpreted. Any attempts at gaining freedom would be foiled by the fact that they did not have the knowledge or understanding of how to manage the different systems of administration. This is where the issue of education came in. According to Fischer (Para 5), Zaidan was for the idea that the people did not just need their freedom. Rather, they also needed a transformation. They needed to understand who they were and to have the confidence that they could effectively manage their country and their affairs. This was the reason as to why the education aspect was very important. If they had to be self-

managing, they had to have the skills, knowledge and understanding on how to effectively manage themselves.

With reference to this, there were quite a number of tactics that he employed to tray and educate the people. First of all, he started the Al Hilal magazine. The information that was contained in the magazine had a lot to do with the Arab people understanding themselves and who they were. The accounts included in the journal entries included history of the people, biographies of major Arab figures and their beliefs as well as critical entries on some of the issues that he did not agree with. With the help of some of his colleagues, he managed to keep the journal alive, and this is the reason as to why it is running to date.

Another effort that cannot be denied is that he tried to influence the people using Samuel Smile's book entitled " Self-Help" after it was translated into Arabic. He wanted to do this because he closely associated with the book. As indicated above, he came from a family that do not have much. His father was a restaurant operator and they did not have much to themselves.

Smile's book was very relevant to him as it talked about moving from rags to riches. This is actually what he had done since he had transformed himself from a pauper to a writer, educator and philosopher. This had changed his place in the society. As such, he believed that the same could be the case with the rest of the Arabs. They could acknowledge that they had the potential and the ability to propel themselves from rags to riches as well. In other words, they could move from the lower position to the higher position in the society; from the position of servitude to a position of self-governance. For this to happen, the people had to have a strong belief in themselves.

It is not only this that mattered. But if the people had to attain the level of self governance needed, they had to have a deeper understanding of how the systems of governance work. The only way through which they could learn this was through education. This is the reason as to why education was such a central figure in his arguments. If any transformation and success of the Nahda had to be realized, the people had to have a certain level of education. This is what Zaidan so much was after. He fully understood that the people needed to understand themselves so that they can manage themselves better. He sought out to bring this enlightenment.

In conclusion, this essay has looked at the life and works of Jurji Zaydan. It has emerged that he was an Arab transformational leader who believed that the Arab people had the ability to run their own lives. They did not need the guidance or instruction of the Ottoman rule to show them the way. However, he also appreciated that for this to be realized, there was the need for education to be improved in the population. He sought out to make sure that this was achieved. To achieve this, he collaborated with other Arab elites to start a publication that would help the people understand themselves better and the issues that surrounded them. He also tried in his own individual ways and tried to get the people to know their history by bringing out through his publications. By the time Zaidan dies in 1914 (Fischer Para 8), he had started a revolution in the Arab world. The effects of this revolution can be seen to date where they can be related to the Arab Spring.

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