Introduction

It is often said that modern Arab theatre is a "creation *ex nihilo*,"[1] as theatre appears to have been unfamiliar to the Arab world before the nineteenth century.[2] But, of course, imitation and mimicry are an integral part of human nature, and it is inconceivable for a culture as rich as Arab culture not to have known drama.[3] There are clear dramatic dimensions in the classical Arabic canonical poetry[4] and through Arabic literature we find many references to semi-theatrical and semi-dramatic phenomena. One of these was the shadow theatre (*khayāl al-ẓill*), a type of puppet theatre in which one or more puppeteers manipulate flat figures between a strong light and a translucent screen, creating for their audience a play of shadows.[5] Shadow theatre may well have emerged alongside earlier live parallels forms, such as *hikāya* and *khayāl*, which both allude to oral genres and are thought to go back to the tenth century. That is, *khayāl al-ẓill* could have reached Arab society from the Far East sometime during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The same goes for the *maqāma* (an adventure story about a particular picaresque hero)[6] whose narrators adopted the dialogues and structures of the popular oral farce

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[1] Berque 1969 (1960), p. 221 (English translation: Berque 1964, p. 197; Arabic translation: Berque 1982, p. 273). Cf. Aḥmad al-Ḥajjājī's statement: "In 1870, the Egyptian theatre was born, one year after the opening of the Suez Canal" (quoted in Murshid 1980, p. 5).

[2] For references, see Moreh 1992, p. ix, n. 1.

[3] On the theatrical and semi-theatrical dimensions in the medieval Arab cultural heritage and the relationship between them and modern Arab theatre, see Tomiche 1969, pp. 15-16, 40-55; Murshid 1980, pp. 4-69; 'Arsān 1983; Al-Khozai 1984, pp. 1-18; al-Ṭālib 1987; Mortensen 1992, pp. 104-113; Ḥusayn 1993a; Janabi 1993, pp. 55-61; Snir 1993b, pp. 149-170; Knio 1994; Sadgrove 1996, pp. 11-26; Al-Sheddi 1997; Zeidan 1997, pp. 173-191. For other references, see Moreh 1992, p. ix, n. 1. For a survey of several aspects of entertainment in the early Islamic traditions, see Kister 1999, pp. 53-78.

[4] For example, see the dramatic monologues of Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (973-1058) (Cachia 1970, pp. 129-136).

[5] On *khayāl al-ẓill*, see Ḥamāda 1963; Wiet 1966, p. 269; Badawi 1982, pp. 83-107; Al-Khozai 1984, pp. 19-30; Moreh 1987, pp. 46-61; Ḥusayn 1993a, pp. 111-119. See also Kahle 1992 as well as the reviews in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20.2 (1993), pp. 268-270 (by Marilyn Booth); *Bulletin Critique des Annales Islamologiques* 11 (1994), pp. 15-17 (by Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa); *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 56 (1993), pp. 364-365 (by Robert G. Irwin); *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114 (1994), pp. 462-466 (by Everett K. Rowson). *Khayāl al-ẓill* is considered by some scholars to be an earlier stage of the cinema; cf. Abdel Wahab 1966, pp. 32-36; al-'Alāyli 1978, p. 142.

[6] On *maqāma* in general, see al-Hamadāni 1957, pp. 1-53 (by R. Blachère and P. Masnou); al-Ḥarīri 1969 [1867], I, pp. 1-102; al-Hariri 1971 [1850], pp. 2-22; Yāghi 1969; Beeston 1971, pp. 1-12; Abu-Haidar 1974; Nemah 1974, pp. 83-92; 'Awaḍ 1979; Mattock 1984, pp. 1-18; 'Abbās 1985; 'Abbās 1986; Ḍayf 1987; Murtāḍ 1988; Ashtiany et al. 1990, pp. 125-135 (by A.F.L. Beeston); Muṣṭafā 1991; Pellat 1991, pp. 107-115; Richards 1991, pp. 89-99. From the second half of the eleventh century, "certain *risālas*, on account of their lofty literary qualities, were considered to be *maḳāmas*" (Arazi and Ben-Shammay 1995, p. 538). On English translations of the *maqāmāt*, see Classe 2000, pp. 912-913.

tradition.[7] Significant too for the development of modern Arab theatre are the various kinds of storytellers: the *ḥakawātī* (literally "storyteller"), who used to recite popular tales, often from *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (A Thousand and One Nights); *shā'ir al-rabāba* ("singer of the rebab," a one- or two-stringed Bedouin instrument);[8] and the itinerant storyteller with his "box of wonders" or "magic box" (*ṣundūq al-dunyā* or *ṣundūq al-'ajab*). Peering through holes into this "box of wonders", one could watch a series of pictures on a roll the storyteller would rotate as he described the actions of the folk hero involved.[9] We may also count the religious festivals, such as the traditional celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid al-nabī*) or those of saints (*mawālid*), and the night-time shows presented during the fast of Ramadan. Then, of course, theatrical elements could be found in popular peasant cultures throughout the Islamic world,[10] e.g. the *dabka* folkloric line dances.

Thus we find a live theatrical tradition in Arab society and culture much before the nineteenth century which provided fertile ground for modern theatrical influences from the West. An example of how such links between traditional live theatre and modern theatre may have been established can be found in the first known printed Arabic play *Nazāhat al-Mushtāq wa-Gussat al-'Ushshāq fī Madīnat Ṭiryāq fī al-'Irāq* (The Pleasure Trip of the Enamored and the Agony of Lovers in the City of Ṭiryāq in Iraq) (1847) by the Algerian Abraham Daninos.[11] Though showing Western influence, this play at the same time reveal many similarities with *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* (The Tale [Play] of Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī) by Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī, probably composed around 1009-10 and one of the few extant textual versions of a medieval dramatic variation on the *maqāma*.[12]

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[7] See Moreh 1992; Moreh and Sadgrove 1996, pp. 13-16. Theatrical elements in *maqāma* include the make-up of the hero and posture of the narrator. *Maqāmas* written after the time of Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (969-1007), made use of dialogue in the vernacular (*'āmmiyya*) (Moreh 1992, pp. 108-110).

[8] On the *ḥakawātī*, the *shā'ir* and storytellers in the Islamic world, see Lane 1954 [1908], pp. 397-431; And 1963-64, pp. 28-31; 'Arsān 1983, pp. 353-359; al-Ṭālib 1987, pp. 106-113; Khūrshīd 1991, pp. 166-167; Slyomovics 1994, pp. 390-419; Berkey 2001. See also the first section of chapter eight in Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist* entitled "Fī Akhbār al-Musāmirīn wa-l-Mukharrifīn wa-Asmā' al-Kutub fī al-Asmār wa-l-Khurafāt" (With Accounts of Those who Converse in the Evening and Tellers of Fables with the Names of the Books which they Composed about Evening Stories and Fables) (Ibn al-Nadīm 1970, II, pp. 712-724; Ibn al-Nadīm 1985, pp. 605-613). On the role of the religious storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) in the first decades of Islamic era, see Tottoli 2002, pp. 86-96 and the references in p. 92, n. 2. For a comparative study of modern and classic style of storytelling in Arabic literature, see Mustafa 1997. On the re-emergence of the old pattern of *ḥakawāt* in contemporary Arabic theatre, see Pannewick 1999, pp. 337-348; Pannewick 2000, pp. 255-299.

[9] Cachia 1990, p. 135, n. 4; on *ṣundūq al-dunyā*, see also Ḥusayn 1993a, pp. 125-126. According to MacDonald 1999, p. 325, until the 1950s this phenomenon of peep-show could ordinarily be seen in Egypt, but after the spread of television and videos it began to disappear gradually.

[10] Cf. And 1963-64, pp. 53-61.

[11] Moreh and Sadgrove 1996, pp. 1-42 (Arabic text).

[12] Moreh and Sadgrove 1996, pp. 13-14; Moreh 1998, pp. 37-45; Moreh 2000a, pp. 409-416. On other links, see Moreh 1992, pp. 152-163; Landau 1986, pp. 120-125; Woidich and Landau 1993.

By the mid-nineteenth century we find pioneering ventures into modern live drama in Egypt, following first attempts in Syria.[13] The Syrian Christian merchant Mārūn al-Naqqāsh (1817-1855) had been impressed by Italian opera he had seen on a trip to Europe and in February 1848 produced at his own house in Beirut *Riwāyat al-Bakhīl* (The Play of the Miser), for which he drew heavily on Molière's *L'Avare*, and which involved a great deal of singing.[14] The play was written in a mixture of *fuṣḥā* and *'āmmiyya* for the speech of educated and illiterate characters respectively.[15] Following Mārūn al-Naqqāsh's death, his nephew Salīm al-Naqqāsh (1850-1884) moved to Alexandria,[16] where he became partly responsible for the rapid development of the local theatrical movement. The way theatre took off in Egypt helped give the country its leading role in the modern Arab renaissance. Egypt produced the first important figures in modern Arab theatre, among them Ya'qūb Ṣanū' (Jacob Sanua) (1839-1912), and Abū Khalīl Aḥmad al-Qabbānī (1836-1902) – after he had moved from Syria to Egypt he became the first Muslim to rise to prominence in this field. Unlike Ṣanū', al-Qabbānī resorted to rhyming in *fuṣḥā*.[17]

From the outset, Arab dramatists appear to have grappled with the question of language, that is, whether to use *fuṣḥā* or *'āmmiyya*, or a combination of the two. A play is written to be staged and performed by actors who are supposed to speak the natural language of their dramatic characters, that is, *'āmmiyya*. But the canonical language of the literary system is *fuṣḥā*.[18] Choice of language is often influenced by the type of play: in historical and translated plays, for example, preference has been for *fuṣḥā*, in farces and social comedies *'āmmiyya* has generally been used.[19] In addition, it is the presence of an active, professional theatre that has stimulated writers to immerse more and more in playwrighting,[20] thus determining their choice of the language.

That Arab theatre has come a long way since the nineteenth century becomes clear when we look at the second half of the twentieth century when besides being a major cultural medium, theatre becomes a vehicle for political ideologies. What greatly

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[13] In his essay "al-Sha'āmiyyūn wa-Fann al-Masraḥ al-Mu'āṣir," Muḥammad Mandūr (1907-1965) emphasizes the role Syrian theatre people played in the development of Arab theatre (Mandūr 1984, pp. 3-17). See also Moosa 1972, pp. 106-117.

[14] See Landau 1958, pp. 57-58. For the text of the speech al-Naqqāsh gave before the staging of *Riwāyat al-Bakhīl*, see al-Khaṭīb 1994a, pp. 415-420.

[15] Landau 1958, pp. 57-58.

[16] Since the mid-nineteenth century Egypt welcomed Syrian Christian men of letters who were pioneering free journalism and cultural activities (Ayalon 1995, pp. 39-58, 144-145).

[17] On the development of Arabic drama and theatre, see Najm 1956; Badawi 1988; Badawi 1988a; al-Khaṭīb 1994; al-Khaṭīb 1994a.

[18] On the Arabic literary system in general, see Snir, 1998, pp. 87-121; Snir 2001.

[19] Cf. Somekh 1991, pp. 37-39. On the function of language in Arab theatre, see also Tomiche 1969, pp. 117-132; al-Khaṭīb 1994a, pp. 779-933. Some Arab troupes perform in other languages as well, particularly English and French, though to very limited audiences (e.g. in Lebanon; see Tomiche 1969, pp. 149-150). On factors determining the choice of language, especially in plays by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), see Somekh 1991, pp. 41-45.

[20] Cf. Jabrā 1961, p. 224.

encouraged the spread of dramatic art is, of course, the development of the electronic media, especially television, as shown, for example, by the satirical plays and musicals by the Syrian dramatist Durayd Laḥḥām (b. 1934) and Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ (b. 1934). Video cassettes with performances of their plays, especially of Laḥḥām in the role of Ghawwār, are so popular they are sold and rented throughout the entire Arab world. In effect, Ghawwār's popularity is similar to that of the traditional *ḥakawātī* and the shadow puppeteer of the past.[21]

Significant too, is the "Islamist theatre" (*masraḥ Islāmī*),[22] that developed in the 1980s.[23] In order to popularize Islamic ideas, authors often turn to writing plays because of the genre's "immediacy of action and capacity to give tangible form to abstract concepts [...] Social action is exemplified by characters who serve as models of behavior. Actors and audience alike experience a dramatic catharsis, mentally and emotionally, through identification with the portrayed characters."[24] The Egyptian Aḥmad Rā'if preferred theatrical drama because it enabled the Islamist cause "to take root in the minds and souls of the audience."[25] Of course, dramatic art has been popular with all sorts of cultural circles wanting to disseminate their ideas precisely because of the impact it has on the masses and the way it can be used as an alternative means of mass communication.

Palestinian culture is part of the wider Arab culture but at the same time has its own unique features. Until today, the grounding event of the collective memory of every Palestinian is the *Nakba*, the "catastrophe," of 1947-1948, when the establishment of Israel in Palestine brought the expulsion and dispossession of almost the entire indigenous population. Whereas the Jewish state extends over seventy-eight percent of historical Palestine, the Palestinian nation remains barred from creating its own state in the remaining

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[21] See Bowen and Early 1993, pp. 264-270; Kishtainy 1985, pp. 159-164. On the carnivalesque satires directed and staged by Laḥḥām (*Ḍay'at Tishrīn* [1974], *Ghurba* [1976], *Kāsak, Yā Waṭan* [1979-1982] [all three plays written jointly by Laḥḥām and al-Māghūṭ], *Shaqā'iq al-Nu'mān* [written by al-Māghūṭ] [1983], and *Ṣāni' al-Maṭar* [written by Laḥḥām] [1990-1993]), see Ḥamdān 1996; Ḥamdān 1998.

[22] For example, see Qāsim 1980 (Aḥmad); Ibn Zaydān 1987, pp. 416-417. The literary section of the May 1989 issue of *Liwā' al-Islām*, for example, includes a presentation of two "Islamist plays" staged in Saudi Arabia (pp. 56-57). See also Abū Ṣūfa 1993, p. 11. For an analysis of Aḥmad Rā'if's drama *al-Bu'd al-Khāmis* (The Fifth Dimension) (Rā'if 1987), see Szyska 1995, pp. 95-125; Szyska 1997-1998, pp. 115-142. On Aḥmad Rā'if and his works, see Szyska 1995, p. 96, n. 6. On Islamist theatre, see also al-Kaylānī 1986. For a list of Islamist plays, see Badr 1993, pp. 110-114. A distinction should be made between "Islamist theatre" as referred to above and Islamic elements in modern Arabic drama and theatre (e.g. Chelkowsky 1984, pp. 45-69).

[23] Qāsim (Aḥmad) 1980, pp. 407-409. In addition to Islamist theatre we find also Islamist cinema (*sīnamā Islāmiyya*). The First Islamist Conference of Cinema Producers and Directors was held in Tehran (5-11 February 1994) with the participation of more than fifty producers and directors from Arab and Muslim countries. A major aim of the conference was "to face the trend of Westernization and the tendencies which have been hostile to Muslim thought, to help young Islamist cinema and to look for Muslim markets for it" (*al-Bilād*, 26 March 1994, p. 54). On the Islamist cinema in Egypt, see Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn 1998.

[24] Szyska 1995, p. 111.

[25] Szyska 1995, p. 112.

twenty-two percent. Part of the impetus for this book has been the interplay – all the more prominent after the 1967 War – that we find between the process of Palestinian nation-building and the emergence of a professional Palestinian theatre. In that sense, the story that follows may well contribute to a further assessment of how effective cultural and literary efforts have been in fostering nationalism in general, and Palestinian nationalism in particular.

There is general agreement among contemporary historians that, as a direct corollary of modernity, nationalism appeared on the historical scene only fairly recently. Accepted, too, is the notion that it has its basis in invention, construction or, in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, "social engineering":

> "[I]nvented traditions" [...] are highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the "nation," with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the state-nation, national symbols, histories and the rest. All these rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation.[26]

Elsewhere, but again stressing the "element of artifact," Hobsbawm approvingly quotes Ernest Gellner:

> Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent [...] political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that* is a reality.[27]

The history of the modern Middle East provides ample evidence of how effective this reality can be. The nation-states that arose there after the First World War clearly point to the direct influence that not only political but of course also linguistic and literary efforts exert on the fostering of nationalism.

Writing in the 1950s on developments in the West, Boyd C. Shafer already remarked that "nationalism embraces not only the political but all phases of life – men have come to work and produce and live not only for themselves but for the nation; even their truths and their Gods have become national."[28] On the subject of the national character of literature, he adds:

> By the twentieth century the student seldom studied drama, poetry, or novel as such but the English, the French, or American drama, poetry, or novel. The extreme was again to be reached in the totalitarian states of the second quarter of the twentieth century when few literary works or studies of any kind could be published unless they patriotically supported the policies of the national government. By 1955, even in a democratic country like the United States, popularly

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[26] E. Hobsbawm's "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in: Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992 [1983], p. 13.

[27] Hobsbawm 1992, p. 10; emphasis in original quote from Gellner 1983, pp. 48-49.

[28] Shafer 1955, pp. vii-viii. On developments in Western-based cultural scholarship on nationalism, see Lazarus 1997, pp. 28-48.

> elected governmental officials were examining all forms of artistic production to root out any ideas that were "un-American."[29]

This holds *a fortiori* for the nation-state in the Middle East where today one speaks of the separate Arab literatures of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, etc. But by now it is obvious that one should also study the role literature, or even the creation of a new literature, has played and still plays in the social engineering that has gone into the making of the nation-state. To return to Hobsbawm:

> Israeli and Palestinian nationalism or nations must be novel, whatever the historic continuities of Jews or Middle Eastern Muslims, since the very concept of territorial states of the currently standard type in their region was barely thought of a century ago, and hardly became a serious prospect before the end of World War I. Standard national languages, to be learned in schools and written, let alone spoken, by more than a smallish élite, are largely constructs of varying, but often brief, age.[30]

Thus, with the search for the gradual legitimization of the Arab nation-state came the invention, for each of them, of a particularist "national" past which was then disseminated through cultural campaigns in various fields and the inevitable shifts in educational and cultural policy in the service of social engineering.[31] As direct influence by the state of cultural organs and the electronic media often comes into play here, caution is required when one encounters particularist national themes in modern literature as to the conclusions one may draw from them. A case in point is Iraq, where writers and artists were

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[29] Shafer 1955, pp. 190-191. On national character in general, see Barakat 1993, pp. 182-190; Mitchell 1979, pp. 130-131. On national literatures, see the discussion published in the 1980s in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* following the publication in English translation of Ernst Elster's article "World Literature and Comparative Literature" (Elster 1986, pp. 7-13), first published in German in the beginning of the twentieth century (Elster 1901, pp. 33-47). See, especially, Clüver 1986, pp. 14-24; Steinmetz 1988, pp. 131-133; Clüver 1988, pp. 134-139; Konstantinovic 1988, pp. 140-142; Clüver 1988a, pp. 143-144. For a study that examines the legitimation of the nation-state apparatus by exploring the making of national identities in literary texts written during crucial periods of nation formation, see Carey-Webb 1998.

[30] E. Hobsbawm's "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in: Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992 [1983], pp. 13-14; he continues: "As a French historian of Flemish language observed, quite correctly, the Flemish taught in Belgium today is not the language which the mothers and grandmothers of Flanders spoke to their children: in short, it is only metaphorically but not literally a 'mother tongue'" (p. 14). In Hobsbawm 1992, p. 54 he has written: "National languages are therefore always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented. They are the *opposite* of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind" (emphasis added – R.S.).

[31] For the regional school or theory (*madhāhib* or *naẓariyyāt al-iqlīmiyya*) in Egypt since the 1930s, whose main proponents were Aḥmad Ḍayf (1880-1945) and Amīn al-Khūlī (1895-1966), see al-Ḥuṣrī 1985, pp. 11-20. This tendency even took on excessive aspiration, such as the desire of the Lebanese poet Sa'īd 'Aql (b. 1912) for the "Lebanonization of the world" (*Lubnanat al-'ālam*) ('Aql 1947 [1944], p. 22). On the Phoenician tendency in literature, see 'Awwād 1983, especially the introduction (pp. 7-11); Bawārdī 1998, pp. 48-179.

"encouraged to derive their inspiration from the civilization and cultures that flourished in Mesopotamia-Iraq from remote antiquity to the modern age."[32] But then to argue that poets as Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964) and 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī (1926-1999) rely heavily on Mesopotamian themes because of their own strong sense of territorial *waṭaniyya* (patriotism),[33] misses the point. Besides, Mesopotamian mythology[34] has by no means been used by Iraqi poets alone.

Arab poets clearly seem to be dismissive of the territorial tendency in literature. For al-Bayyātī, for example, one of the signs of "cultural deterioration" was the appearance of "territorial chauvinism so that we can see that each Arab state has begun to establish foundations of imaginary style and history for the literary movement in the framework of this or that state."[35] The same distinction between political territorialism, which he sees as positive, and cultural territorialism, which is a threat to "Arabic cultural sensitivity," is made by Ibrāhīm al-'Arīs, the literary editor of the Palestinian magazine *al-Yawm al-Sābi'*, published in Paris in the 1970s and 1980s.[36] In other words, we find that in the contemporary Arab world the idea of "national culture" fluctuates between two poles: *thaqāfa qawmiyya* ([general] national [Arab] culture) and *thaqāfa waṭaniyya* ([particular territorial] national culture).[37] Though often paying lip-service to "strengthening overall Arab unity," *thaqāfa waṭaniyya* is seldom outside of a particular nation-state. At the same time, *thaqāfa qawmiyya* enjoys wide circulation. For example, during 6-11 May 1972, the Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Sciences of the Arab League held a conference in Cairo which came out strongly against the national territorial cultural activities in the Arab world. In the proceedings, published as "al-Waḥda wa-l-Tanawwu' fī al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya al-Mu'āṣira" (Unity and Diversity in Contemporary Arab Culture) published in *al-Ādāb*,[38] the *maḥaliyya* and *iqlīmiyya* versus *qawmiyya* and *waḥda* dichotomy in Arabic culture stands out sharply, as illustrated in the introduction:

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[32] Baram 1990, p. 425. See also Baram 1994, pp. 279-319.

[33] Baram 1983, pp. 282-287. The relationship between lingual and literary expression based on the educational and cultural environment as well as on the psychological structure of the writer may be clarified by the similar relationship that we encounter in the expressions of the mystical experience in various religious traditions. Although such experiences are essentially the same, each mystic draws upon the specific symbols he or she is familiar with from their own culture. History shows us, again and again, "the great mystics as faithful sons of the great religions" (Underhill 1961, pp. 95-96).

[34] In Arabic it has been called *al-mīthūlūjyā al-tamūziyya* or *al-rāfidayniyya* (e.g. Jabrā 1992, pp. 220-221).

[35] *Al-Majalla* (London), 27 March-2 April 1982, p. 64.

[36] *Al-Yawm al-Sābi'*, 4 September 1989, p. 31. On the opposition to the territorial tendency in Arabic literature, see 'Ammār 1979, pp. 18-23; on other aspects, especially with regard to modernism in poetry, see Dāghir 1995, p. 17.

[37] On the terms *waṭan* and *qawm*, see Lewis 1968, pp. 75-78, 88. On *waṭaniyya* and *qawmiyya*, see Bengio 1998, pp. 87-97. On them in the framework of the reconstruction of Palestinian nationalism, see Schulz 1999, pp. 32, 44, 79.

[38] *Al-Ādāb*, June 1972, pp. 81-114.

> There is no doubt that the essence of diversity and unity in Arab culture is not a product of the contemporary period. Arab culture in its previous periods knew various kinds of diversity, which can fundamentally be explained by two causes: first, Arab culture spread to and included very wide territories, where the ways of life were of various kinds and the levels of civilization different. And second, Arab culture was open to preceding and contemporary cultures and was influenced by many intellectual trends from East and West, in addition to the interaction of this new culture with the wide range of ancient heritage embedded in the same Arab environment. Nevertheless, Arab culture retained its special nature in various domains of creativity and it is this which gives it its own identity, if we compare it with other cultures in ancient and medieval times [...] it enables the masses from each Arab state to understand and benefit from the cultural creation of peoples from other Arab states and in the face of the vast cultural systems in Arab states to emphasize their role in this domain so that that diversity continues to be a source of and a cause for enriching Arab culture and completing its unity.[39]

Even in the 1990s Aziz al-Azmeh ('Azīz al-'Aẓma) discerns an Arab culture that transcends boundaries:

> Arab nationality has thus in the course of many decades become an accomplished and cultural fact, not only because a high-cultural, "modular" cohesion has been accomplished, but also because the mass-cultural field has been to a large extent homogenized, and in the same breath, commodified.

Relevant for our purpose is also the linkage, or even the collapse, al-Azmeh sees between high and low culture, when he goes on to say:

> One would cite here, for example, the circulation of a largely but by no means exclusively Egyptian output of television serials, films, songs, and school teachers: a mixed blessing, as it should really more aptly be described as low, rather than popular, culture. Much like the crassness of the gutter press in Britain and the United States, it has the effect of obliterating entire regions of lived culture and substituting for them a cultural surface which might be read as a text no less canonical for being, or rather for becoming, popular.[40]

Yet, here too we find that the attempt to bring particularist cultural activities under one general Arab umbrella stems from the realization that the long-cherished dream of pan-Arabism, of a united Arab state or even a coherent Arab political bloc, had to be abandoned.[41] A similar phenomenon occurs in the field of literature, especially when we

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[39] *Al-Ādāb*, June 1972, p. 81. For a similar collection of articles, see *Waḥdat al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya: Abḥāth Nadwat 'Ammān (10-12 Kānūn al-Awwal 1993)* ('Ammān: Manshūrāt al-Ittiḥād al-'Āmm li-l-Udabā' wa-l-Kuttāb al-'Arab, 1995).

[40] Al-Azmeh 1995, pp. 11-12. Cf. Al-Azmeh 2000, p. 75. See also Al-Azmeh's observations in al-Khūlī 1998, pp. 355-356. Cf. Ṣāghiyya 1999, pp. 78-103.

[41] In 1992, Bernard Lewis would already argue that pan-Arabism no longer counts as a political force: "It survives among diminishing groups of intellectuals, mainly outside the Arab lands; it is still cherished by

accept that literature is never an isolated activity whose laws are inherently different from all other human activities, but always an integral, often central and powerful, factor.[42] Nowadays in the Arab world one will seldom find a reference to "Arabic literature" as such, but instead to "Egyptian literature," "Palestinian literature," "Syrian literature," and even "Kuwaiti literature," "Bahraini literature," and "Omani literature."[43] Scholars in the West have followed suit. For example, in the *Encyclopedia of World Literature in 20th Century* the entry "Arabic Literature" includes references to the following entries: Algerian, Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Moroccan, Nigerian, Palestinian, Somali, Sudanese, Syrian and Tunisian literatures.[44] At the same time there is what one may call a neutral critical outlook, as exemplified by Salma Khadra Jayyusi (b. 1926):

> The forties, however, were the last decade in which poetry in the Arab world was first recognized by its country of origin. The modern poetic movement which flourished in the fifties was to be a unifying movement which was to unite the energy of poets all over the Arab world. In the fifties Arab poets were usually recognized not as Egyptians, Syrians, Iraqis, Lebanese, etc., but as followers of the new movement or as conventional poets.[45]

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a variety of special interests, often for reasons unrelated to the concerns or well-being of the Arabs themselves. But it is not a factor in international or inter-Arab or even domestic politics [...] What is much more likely, however, is that the position of the Arab world will more closely resemble that of Latin America – a group of countries linked by a common language and culture, a common religion, a common history, a common sense, even, of destiny, but not united in a common polity" (Lewis 1992, p. 101. Cf. Landau 1995, p. 247; Sāghiyya 1999, especially pp. 9-19). On Arab nationalism in general and the Palestinians as well as further bibliography, see Jawani 1996; Jankowski and Gershoni 1997; Ayyad 1999; Choueiri 2000.

[42] Cf. Even-Zohar 1990, p. 2; Sāghiyya 1999, pp. 73-86..

[43] I have been collecting hundreds of studies published in recent years in periodicals, magazines and book form, about particular national literatures in the Arab world, even such as *al-adab al-Imārātī* (the literature of the United Arab Emirates) (Muḥammad 1993, p. 22. On the building of a new nation in UAE, see Alqassime 1996); *al-adab al-Mūrītānī* (Mauretanian literature) (al-Naḥawī 1979); *al-adab al-Qaṭarī* (Qatarian literature) (*al-Akhbār*, 20 December 1989, p. 11), and Omani literature (al-Shārūnī 1990; see also the special issue on the short story published in *al-'Alam al-Thaqafī* [Rabat], 29 October 1994. In his introduction the editor, Najīb Khadārī speaks about the "effective and propagated presence" [*hudūr fā'il wa-mutawālid*] of modernism in Omani literary creation [p. 1]). More recently, the territorial tendency in Arab literature has also brought about the publication of special bibliographical lists and books of local national literatures, e.g. Tunisian literature; Fontaine 1997. Fontaine also wrote extensively about modern Tunisian literature. For a list of his studies on the topic, see Fontaine 1997, p. 4. For earlier bibliographical lists of Tunisian literature published by Fontaine, see *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982), pp. 151-153; 17 (1986), pp. 151-154; 19 (1988), pp. 84-87; 20 (1989), pp. 213-215. The same journal published similar lists on Moroccan Arabic literature by L.K. De Voogd (13 [1982], pp. 149-150) and Syrian literature by B. Seekamp (22 [1991], pp. 176-181).

[44] Klein 1982, I, p. 104. Cf. also Gibb and Landau 1968, p. 193 ("Die Aufteilung erfolgt deshalb geographisch, weil es ungeachtet der thematischen Gleichförmigkeiten und der Ähnlichkeit, die sich auf die Art des Dargebotenen bezieht, dennoch offenkundige Unterschiede nach dem Entwicklungsstand der Literatur gibt und lokal bedingte Nuancen zumindest in einem Teil der arabischen Länder"); see also Gibb and Landau 1968, p. 288 and cf. the method of presentation in Tomiche 1993, chapters 2-4.

[45] Jayyusi 1977, p. 242.

Still, there remains in each Arab state a strong tendency to emphasize, more than ever,[46] the particularist characteristics of their own territorial national literature, including the folk heritage.[47] In the 1960s Charles Pellat could still write that "some modern Arabic authors are trying hesitantly to revive the ancient themes in order to make of them truly literary works, but it is quite certain that, on the whole, folklore hardly inspires contemporary writers, who are more interested in imitating the West, neglecting this traditional material."[48] But, of course, that writers and poets have been paying so much attention in recent years to folk heritage is not just because of the cultural-literary motives that inspire them, but also – and perhaps primarily – because of the nationalist visions they cherish.[49] In other words, the thematic allusions we find in modern Arabic fiction to well-known popular narratives of ancient times are frequently introduced first of all to highlight national causes and only then to satisfy literary or aesthetic reasons.[50] A close relationship between the literary system and the political, territorial, and national systems remains clearly visible.[51] The Syrian critic Khaldūn al-Sham'a (b. 1941) has lambasted this particularist cultural phenomenon as a "baseless territorial narcissism which is devoid of a minimum of required reliability" (*narjasiyya quṭriyya majjāniyya tafiaqiru ilā al-ḥadd al-adnā min al-miṣdāqiyya al-maṭlūba*), adding that with the entry of other states into the Arab League, "we might soon expect to hear about a Djiboutian

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[46] It is instructive to compare the territorial cultural tendencies in the Arab world since the 1980s with the findings that came out of a special project initiated by the Egyptian magazine *al-Risāla* in 1936. Writers from all over the Arab world were asked to report on the state of the "literary life" (*al-ḥayāt al-adabiyya*) in their region which was then published in successive issues: Baghdad (al-Amīn 1936, pp. 381-381); Damascus (al-Ṭanṭāwī 1936, pp. 214-216); Lebanon (al-Shaqīfī 1936, pp. 540-541); Palestine (Ṭūqān 1936, pp. 2047-2048); East Jordan (al-Qassūs 1936, pp. 865-867); Tunisia (al-Ḥaliwī 1936, pp. 1062-1064); Ḥijāz (Shabkashī 1936, pp. 586-587) and Morocco (Ibn Jallūn 1936, pp. 743-744; K. 1936, pp. 984-986). Significantly enough, all reports, directly or indirectly, were in favor of a united Arab culture. For some of the writers, the project of the magazine in itself illustrated a response to the "narrow territorial idea" (*al-fikra al-iqlīmiyya al-ḍayyiqa*), i.e. they saw *al-Risāla* not only as an Egyptian magazine but an Arab one as well (al-Ṭanṭāwī 1936, p. 214). Most of the reports mentioned the central status of Egypt in Arab culture and the marginality of other regions. The report on Lebanon briefly mentions local poetry in *'āmmiyya*, however without pointing out any territorial cultural tendency (al-Shaqīfī 1936, p. 541).

[47] The interest in folklore has generally much to do with nation-building, as exemplified by the Palestinian case (e.g. Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, especially p. 12 [Arabic version: Muhawwī and Kanā'ina 2001, especially pp. 5-6]; MacDonald 1999, pp. 344-347). On this topic, see also Ṣāghiyya 1999, pp. 87-103). Al-'Antīl 1987, on the other hand, concentrates on the general issue of folklore.

[48] Pellat 1960, p. 371.

[49] On the role of popular songs in the consolidation of national identity, see e.g. al-Barghūthī 1986, pp. 8-9. Cf. Armbrust 1992, pp. 525-542; Bamia 2001, pp. 11-22.

[50] See, for example, the allusion to the popular story of 'Antara in *al-Arḍ* (The Earth) (1953) by the Egyptian 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqawī (1920-1987): Shaykh Yūsuf's national enthusiasm grows when he is reading the story of this black slave hero who defeated the oppressors (al-Sharqawī 1968 [1953], pp. 200-202. For a partial English translation of these pages by D. Stewart, see al-Sharqawī 1990 [1962], pp. 147-148). Aida Adib Bamia used a passage from these pages as a motto for the chapter "The Power of Folk Poetry," in her book on Algerian folk poetry (Bamia 2001, p. 11).

[51] For example: "the history of modern Omani literature is the history of Omani renaissance which began in 1970 when the Sultan Qābūs came into power" (al-Shārūnī 1990, p. 9; see also al-Shārūnī 1990a).

or Mauretanian novel."[52] Actually, his "prophecy" had already come true. This particularist cultural phenomenon is strengthening as a result of what Kamal Abu-Deeb calls "the collapse of totalizing discourses and the rise of marginalized/minority discourses." If, in the previous decades, "no serious intellectual would have defended the notion of a Jordanian national identity or a Saudi national literature,"[63] the term "Arabic literature" is now sometimes even considered as essentially parallel to the term "European literature." Moreover, some seem to expect the Arabic language today to take up the same role as Latin used to have in the past in Europe.[54] For the Lebanese writer Yūsuf Ḥabashī al-Ashqar (1929-1992) there is no such thing as "Arabic novel" but only "Syrian novels," "Lebanese novels," etc., written in Arabic.[55] Likewise, in a discussion with the Syrian 'Alī 'Uqla 'Arsān (b. 1940), an advocate of one shared Arabic culture, the literary critic Jihād Fāḍil argued that traditional Arabic general culture was nothing but a day-dream.[56] In fact, Fāḍil is one of the literary critics inveighing against what he describes as *al-naz'a al-shu'ūbiyya*[57] in modern Arabic literature, especially as expressed in the works of such poets as Adūnīs (b. 1930) and Nizār Qabbānī (1923-1998).[58]

The development of independent national literatures sharpens the conflict in the general Arabic literary system between distinctiveness and unity, that is, between Arabic identity and local territorial specific identities.[59] It is too early to discern whether or not the unity Arabic literature still shows today will in the future be replaced by distinct particularist local literatures. However, one can no longer be as apodictic as Sāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī (1880-1968) – usually seen as one of the defenders of the unity of Arabic literature[60] – was in the late 1950s: "There is not and there will never be Egyptian literature, Iraqi literature, or Syrian and Tunisian. But there are and there will be Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian and Tunisian writers."[61]

A prominent factor in any future development will certainly be whether religion and the language of the Qur'ān will be able to maintain their role as unifying cultural

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[52] Al-Sham'a 1989, p. 78.

[53] Abu-Deeb 2000, p. 348. On the Saudi nation-building, see Kostiner 1985, pp. 219-244.

[54] On this issue, see al-Ḥuṣrī 1985, pp. 33-50; Kazziha 1981, pp. 154-164.

[55] Al-Sham'a 1989, p. 78.

[56] *Al-Ḥawādith*, 17 September 1993, p. 45.

[57] An allusion to the movement within the early Islamic commonwealth of nations which refused to recognize the privileged position of the Arabs (Goldziher 1889, I, pp. 177-207; Goldziher 1967, I, pp. 164-190).

[58] See, for example, Fāḍil 1989, specifically pp. 16-19, 69-75, 135-149.

[59] On this issue see, for example, the case of Syria (Snir 1992b, pp. 61-64; Snir 1996a, pp. 165-182). The same conflict also exists in other arts, such as cinema; e.g. al-Nahhās 1986; Armbrust 1994-5, pp. 6-20.

[60] For example, al-Ḥuṣrī 1985, pp. 11-20, 143-158. Cf. Ṣāghiyya 1999, pp. 55-71.

[61] Al-Ḥuṣrī 1985, p. 19. In 1937 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973), than the rector of Egyptian University, suggested that a special chair for Islamic Egyptian literature be founded. Commenting on this suggestion, Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh 'Anān wrote in *al-Risāla* that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's call was engendered not only by national motives but scientific, cultural and historical ones ('Anān 1937, p. 249).