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**Ambivalence and the National Imaginary: Nation
and Canon Formation in the Emergence of the Saudi
Novel**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
University of Edinburgh
2015

DECLARATION

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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DEDICATION

To Emily, without whose love and support this project could never have seen the
light of day.

ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen a surge of scholarship that foregrounds the relationship between the novel and the nation. The postcolonial condition of much of the Arab world has made the Arabic novel a compelling case. For historical reasons the focus has tended to be on the literary production of North Africa, the Levant and, to a lesser extent, Iraq. This thesis aims to redress the balance while interrogating certain assumptions about this relationship. Its main contention is that the early Saudi novel, as a unique case study, complicates traditional categorisations of the novel in Arabic, either in terms of a set of discrete, national traditions or as a monolithic, regional tradition, i.e. 'the Arabic novel'. I argue that the 'Saudi' novel and its canonisation reflect, and were shaped by, the inherent ambivalence of the nation space and Arab discourses of national identity. This ambivalence gives rise to a third or liminal space of literary production.

The thesis revolves around two axes. Firstly, it traces the emergence of the novel in Hijaz, from the 1930s through to the late 1950s. Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, for a long time Hijaz retained a sense of its own distinct identity, countering the dominant Najdi-Wahhabi narrative. The close reading of selected texts explores how they express both a strong sense of Hijazi identity and a deep ambivalence towards 'the Saudi nation'. The salience of 'the woman question' in Arab nationalist discourses makes gender a key consideration. The territorialising impulse present in much men's fiction is shown to be absent from the Saudi women's novel that emerged between the late 1950s and mid-1970s. Aside from exemplifying the genderedness of nation, this contributes to an explanation of the marginalisation of Saudi women's novels from the canon. Secondly, the issue of novel and nation is linked to the critical discourse on the Saudi novel and its canonisation. Through an analysis of the literary articles that appeared in the pages of Hijaz's early press, I trace the origins of a nationalist, ideological concept of the novel and its function that privileges the canonical realist novel for its mimetic representation of the writer's national social reality. The result of this is that histories of the Saudi novel often present a teleology that is unable to adequately explain its

construction or account for its liminality. The thesis offers a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic relationship between the novel and identity, as well as the novel's construction in the Arabic context.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I use the IJMES system of transliteration throughout.¹

Technical terms, defined as words for which there is no English equivalent, are italicised and fully transliterated with diacritics. However, words found in the Oxford English Dictionary are not treated as technical terms. A number of exceptions preserve ‘*ayn* and *hamza*.²

In order to avoid certain ambiguities I have opted to retain diacritics for personal and place names, the names of political organisations and parties, and the titles of articles and books.

Although the IJMES system follows the same capitalisation rules as English for transliterated titles, I capitalise only the first word in a title and proper nouns.

Place names are spelled according to English norms. Again there are some exceptions to this rule and the reader should consult the IJMES document cited in the footer of this page for an extensive list.³

Arabic names of important historical or cultural figures are also transliterated according to the IJMES system, for example Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, and not Gamal Abdel Nasser as the name is commonly spelled in English.

¹ Please consult the following for a detailed overview of the IJMES transliteration system: <http://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/TransChart.pdf>.

² See the IJMES word list: <http://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/WordList.pdf>.

³ Hence, throughout this document ‘Hijaz’ is used as per the IJMES wordlist, rather than the more commonplace ‘Hejaz’.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

If you like, I speak a middle dialect (*lahja wuṣṭā*). Because I have constantly moved from place to place, I have lost my original dialect and made for myself a middle one. I have not spent more than ten years in any one place. Places are alike; as for language, it is my homeland.¹

‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf (1933–2004)

The above is Munīf’s response to a question posed by the Lebanese novelist, Iliyās Khurī, who interviewed him in 1998. It is cited here because, in a sense, Munīf’s words encapsulate the essence of this thesis. In as much as his enigmatic reply reflects the realities of a writer who lived most of his life effectively stateless, it also stems from his refusal to identify himself and his work with the polity of the nation state.² It is tempting to simply assert that Munīf’s language was Arabic and that is what he cared about; indeed, this was his original response to Khurī’s question. But the interviewer’s persistence suggests this first answer was less than satisfying.

The main contention of this thesis is that the categories traditionally applied to the novel in Arabic, either as a set of local traditions bounded by the borders of the nation-state, or as a supranational literature, i.e. ‘the Arabic novel’, cannot adequately account for the type of ambivalence towards the nation that Munīf and his work exemplify. I do not intend to question the legitimacy of these categories altogether; rather, I want to argue for a more nuanced approach that identifies the liminal or ‘in-between’ spaces of novelistic production, as suggested by Munīf’s ‘middle language’. The Saudi Arabic novel offers a site through which to interrogate the production of the concept of ‘the Arabic novel’.

¹ Iliyās Khurī, ‘‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf: Taḥaddī al-muḥarram wa-dukhūl al-amākin al-khaṭīra, al-sijin bi-waṣṭihi ‘āran ‘arabiyyan’ (Challenging Taboo and Stepping into Perilous Places, Prison as an Arab Disgrace), *al-Nahār: Al-Mulḥaq al-sabī* (Supplement), 3 May 1998, 4-5. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

² For more on Munīf see Chapter 5.7

While Munīf provided the initial inspiration for this thesis, his work is not the principal subject of what follows. My main focus is on the emergence of the Saudi novel between the early 1930s and the late 1950s. Munīf belongs to a later period and deserves a monograph of his own. The Saudi novel, and this early period in particular, suggest themselves as a unique lens through which to explore the issues raised in this thesis for several reasons. Not least among these are the historical conditions within which the Saudi-state emerged. When, on 23 September 1932, Ibn Sa‘ūd announced the founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Hijaz, site of the twin holy cities of Mecca and Medina, contrasted sharply with the largely desert region of Najd, the traditional Saudi heartland. In fact, the cultural differences between the two provinces were in many ways profound.³ Hijaz’s urban centres boasted modern schools and an incipient journalistic press, while Najd was characterised by a largely nomadic and pastoral way of life. To talk about the early Saudi novel is really to talk about a Hijaz-based scene. What, then, did ‘the nation’ mean for a literary elite who looked to Cairo and Beirut for inspiration rather than the deserts of Najd? Particularly since, until the Saudi conquest, Hijaz had existed as an independent state under Hashemite rule.

Alexei Vassiliev’s observations on the formation of a national consciousness in Saudi Arabia provide valuable insight here:

A national consciousness – in other words, the sense of belonging to a Saudi nation – took time to develop. However, the emergence of new means of communication and information, the growing economic interdependence of the provinces, increased contact with foreigners and travel abroad all revealed the differences between the Saudi culture and way of life and those of other countries: this, in turn, accelerated the formation of the nation and a feeling of national affiliation. Nevertheless, the true formation of the ‘Saudi nation’, even as part of the vague concept, al-umma al-arabiyya (the Arab nation), still has a long way to go before it reaches the level of Egypt or Syria.⁴

Indeed, although the Kingdom was officially established in 1932, ‘nation building’ remained ‘in its infancy between the 1920s and 1970s. The different regions of the

³ See Chapter Two.

⁴ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), ch. 21.

Hejaz, Asir, Najd and al-Ahsa were not only culturally distinct, they also enjoyed political autonomy'.⁵

The contention that a Saudi national consciousness has taken decades to develop is supported by a study of the literature of this deeply transitional period. For some time after the Kingdom's establishment, urban Hijazis continued to see themselves as distinct from their Najdi counterparts, viewing 'their own urban culture as "sophisticated", in contrast to the "rough" and austere Najdi culture, which they associated with the Bedouin'.⁶ Men of letters writing in the early press often identified themselves and the literary tradition within which they were writing as Hijazi. References to 'the nation' itself were often qualified as 'the Hijazi nation'. Many also aligned themselves with the wider Arab revivalist movement, or *nahḍa*, centred in Egypt and the Levant, which had a formative influence on their writings.

1.2 Literature Survey and Methodology

The Novel and the National Imaginary

The ensuing discussion situates this thesis within the context of the relevant critical literature and addresses the main theoretical and methodological considerations that underpin its approach. This is followed by a brief outline of the thesis structure. Perhaps the best way to proceed is to unpack some of the key assumptions implied in the title. Foremost among these is the link between novel and nation.

Benedict Anderson's seminal book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), is one of the earliest and most widely cited works to examine this link. Although Anderson sets out primarily to describe the origins of nationalism, his observations on the rise of the novel alongside the modern nation state in Europe laid the groundwork for much subsequent scholarship.

⁵ Jörg Matthias Determann, *Historiography in Saudi Arabia: Globalization and the State in the Middle East* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris), 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

Anderson accounts for the origins of nationalism by aligning it with ‘the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being’; that is, the religious community and the dynastic realm.⁷ The rise of nationalism during the eighteenth century coincided with the demise of these cultural systems. The fall of Latin, which as the language of scripture had served to unite the sacred community, and the printing of texts in the vernacular languages, contributed to the community’s gradual pluralisation, fragmentation and territorialisation.⁸ Language is one of several factors that Anderson identifies as having fundamentally changed the way people conceived of the community and their place within it.

Another key factor is the shift in ‘the apprehension of time’ following the secularisation and industrialisation of Western societies.⁹ Medieval existence was characterised by a temporality, which – drawing on Walter Benjamin’s concept of Messianic time – Anderson describes as ‘a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present’.¹⁰ That is to say, the sacred community understood time as prophesy and fulfilment. The present is simultaneous in the sense that it has always been and always will be, and can only be understood according to a divine logic, rather than as the product of rational, linear cause-and-effect relationships.

According to Anderson, the medieval conception of temporality was superseded by – again borrowing from Benjamin – modern ‘homogenous empty time, in which simultaneity is... transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar’.¹¹

Anderson considers these developments and their importance in the birth of the imagined community in relation to the newspaper and the novel, which emerged during the eighteenth century. For early capitalists, the book – as ‘the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity’ – held the potential for great profit. Following the logic of capitalism, book printers looked to expand their market.

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Hence, there was a general move away from printing texts in Latin, which could only be read by a bilingual elite, to the printing of vernacular texts. The creation of vernacular print languages laid the foundation for national consciousness:

[It] created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars... gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation.

Anderson terms the concept of 'print capital' to explain how the widespread dissemination of the newspaper and the novel 'made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate to others in profoundly new ways'.¹²

Since the nation cannot be meaningfully experienced through face-to-face contact, Anderson argues it can only be 'imagined' by its members; as such it is 'an imagined political community'.¹³ Both the novel and the newspaper, as products of manmade clock time or 'homogenous empty time', make it possible for members of a national community to imagine the lives of other members, who they will never meet, as running parallel to their own.¹⁴ This is analogous with the so-called 'meanwhile' mode of the novel. The 'novelty of the novel', then, 'lay in its capacity to represent synchronically this bounded, intrahistorical society-with-a-future'.¹⁵

As compelling as Anderson's arguments are, *Imagined Communities* is not without its critics. In 'Whose imagined community?', Partha Chatterjee asks:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-6.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 334.

subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery.¹⁶

Chatterjee's questioning of the global applicability of *Imagined Communities* is particularly pertinent since this thesis applies Anderson's ideas outside of the context in which he originally devised them, that is, Europe and the Americas. But while Anderson's print capital seems less applicable to the Arab world – until relatively recently much of the population was illiterate and the novel in Arabic has never enjoyed a wide, mainstream readership – the primary importance of *Imagined Communities* to the present study lies largely in its identification of the relationship between novel and nation.

Although the Arabic novel emerged at a different time and in different circumstances to its European counterpart, its link with nation is no less salient. This explains why, on some level, practically all scholarship on the Arabic novel invariably engages with issues relating to nation and identity, whether or not these are of central concern. This is due in no small part to the postcolonial condition of the Arab world. As Samah Selim writes:

The rise of the novel as a modern literary genre in Egypt, as elsewhere in the colonial world, was linked to the emergence of liberal nationalist ideologies. While critics may debate the origins of the [novel] genre in the Arab context, there is a general consensus that its structural and discursive features and its representation of time and place are all located within the new historical space of the emergent nation-state... The novel's 'realistic' representation of a variety of 'national' landscapes, languages and character types offers up a literary analogue to the syncretic social and political project of nationalism.¹⁷

Selim's last point draws on Timothy Brennan's influential essay, *The National Longing for Form* (1990). Brennan emphasises how the novel's 'composite quality' described by Anderson, that is, its mirroring of society as an aggregate of individuals existing within a physically bounded space, 'cannot be understood only ethnically or

¹⁶ Partha Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community?', in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 216.

¹⁷ Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 60.

regionally'. Brennan ties the rise of the novel to a changing concept of realism, which only gained its association with the lower classes in the wake of the Enlightenment. Therefore, 'the novel brought together the "high" and the "low" within a national framework – not fortuitously, but for specific national reasons'.¹⁸

Selim's and Brennan's observations suggest how the novel genre intersects with ideology. The novel, with its mimetic reproduction of social reality and potential for large-scale ideological dissemination, readily lends itself to the propagation of the nationalist message. As such, it both shapes and is shaped by the contours of the national imaginary. This may have changed in the contemporary trajectory of the novel but it remains salient to any historical study of the form and its proliferations.

As with Anderson, Brennan's ideas have been the subject of criticism. Feminist critics have pointed out Brennan's failure to account for how gender figures in the construction of national imaginaries.¹⁹ A guiding assumption of this thesis is that, as Hoda Elsadda states, 'the nation, "an imagined community," is gendered, and by extension, the [novelistic] canon is equally gendered'.²⁰ Elsadda is by no means the first to make this connection. Anderson, perhaps unwittingly, makes the link when he states, 'in the modern world everyone can, should, and will "have" a nationality, as he or she "has" a gender'.²¹ Elsadda argues that representations of idealised femininities and masculinities 'not only define and shape the contours of national identity and national futures, but they are also cultural interventions in ideological contestations over the image of the nation'.²²

¹⁸ Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (Routledge: New York, 1990), 52.

¹⁹ For examples, see Priscilla L. Walton, 'The Janus Faces of James: Gender, Transnationality, and James's Cinematic Adaptations', in *Questioning the Master: Gender and Sexuality in Henry James's Writings*, ed. Peggy McCormack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 37-53; and Sangeeta Ray, 'Introduction from *Engendering India*', in *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 390-407.

²⁰ Hoda Elsadda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel: 1892-2008* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012), XIII.

²¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

²² Elsadda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel*, XIII.

From the late nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth, the ‘woman question’ was at the centre of Arab nationalist discourses. The call for girls’ education in Egypt, which began to gather serious momentum around the turn of the twentieth century, features as a recurrent theme in the early Arabic novel; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal’s (1888-1956) *Zaynab* (1913) is an obvious example. In such novels women are read as symbols of the nation. The eponymous heroine of *Zaynab* has been described as ‘an allegory of Egypt imprisoned in its traditional social structures’.²³

The idealisation of gender roles and their representation in the canonical Arabic novel has significant implications for imaginations and formations of male and female subjectivities, particularly at the intersection of gender imaginaries with identity politics. The canonical realist novel is characterised by an impulse to territorialise space. But, in Ouyang’s words:

The competition over space, however, is not simply a territorial contest but is rather a battle on subjectivity, the foundation of identity. Identity politics are meaningless unless subjectivity is at stake as it collides with other subjectivities in a race to territorialise the space it imagines as the home of its community.²⁴

One of the objectives of this thesis is to highlight how male and female subjectivities have been shaped by representations of idealised masculinities and femininities in constructions of national identity. It observes the absence of what might be termed ‘the territorialising impulse’ in women’s fiction and argues this as a key factor in the marginalisation of their novels from the canon.

Although some emphasis is placed on gender, this thesis assumes a concept of national identity that ultimately goes beyond unitary definitions. Identity is conceived as overdetermined – in Althusser’s sense of the term – and therefore inherently unstable and a site of ambivalence. As such, national imaginaries are themselves ambivalent and this is reflected both in the novel and in writings about

²³ Wen-chin Ouyang, *Poetics of love in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012), 250.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

the novel.

Homi Bhabha makes the argument for the ambivalence of the nation space in his influential essay, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation'. Building on and, at the same time, complicating Anderson's ideas, Bhabha argues that the nation or 'the people', as narration or narrative construct, are constituted in a 'double time' or 'double narrative movement'; they are at once 'the historical objects of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*', and the 'subjects of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity', that is, 'as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process'.²⁵

The first of these two temporalities, 'the pedagogical' can be understood as the hegemonic, essentialising discourse that tells the nation *what* it is. It derives its narrative authority from the nation's myth of self-generation, its rootedness in the immemorial past. The second, 'the performative', describes the nation as it is lived, or performed by its subjects, in the here and now. It is 'the scraps, patches and rags of daily life' which 'must be turned into the signs of a coherent national culture'.²⁶ However, 'the very act of narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects'. This excess of meaning, the people's heterogeneity, continually interrupts the pedagogical. As a result, 'the people', the national subject, are split between the double narrative movement. Ambivalence arises from the national subject's movement or 'vacillation' between the dominant pedagogical discourse and the subversive performative discourse.²⁷

Bhabha is closely associated with post-colonial studies and it is primarily within this context that his ideas need to be understood. However, while much of the Arab world can be viewed through the prism of post-colonial theory, Saudi Arabia is arguably a

²⁵ Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 208-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

fundamentally different case in that it did not experience European colonial rule, unlike much of North Africa, the Levant and Iraq. Yet, there are parallels to be drawn between the coloniser/colonised dialectic and the Hijazi/Najdi encounter. There is no need to push the comparison too far but Saudi rule in Hijaz began a process that saw the gradual suppression of Hijaz's cultural and religious specificity, and the imposition of a hegemonic Saudi-Wahhabi narrative.

But even after the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi narrative remained largely absent from Hijaz's literary and critical discourse, which evinces a strong sense of Hijazi identity and, as such, might be described as performativity. Therefore, Bhabha's idea of the nation space as ambivalent, of its liminal sites of cultural production, is a useful conceptual tool for understanding this discourse during the early decades of Saudi rule. Saudi Arabia, then, provides a unique opportunity to test the possibility for a broader application of Bhabha's theory.

Genre and Ideology

The foregoing discussion has begun to explore, or at least to assert, the connection between the novel and ideology, particularly in understanding its determining role in canon formation and shaping historiographies of the Arabic novel. If the nation is a space of ambivalence, as Bhabha argues, then perhaps in the Arab context it is doubly so. This is because discourses of national identity are often caught between the push and pull of the political exigencies of state-nationalism(s) on the one hand, and a less clearly defined cultural (trans)nationalism on the other.

Wen-Chin Ouyang has commented on this phenomenon and its implications for literary historiographies:

Two trends have come to dominate all discourses on nationalism – Arab nationalism and local nationalism – which exist side by side, though the prominence of each swing like a pendulum as we see in the histories of the Arabic novel. These histories internalise the dual discourses of Arab nationalism. To the extent that there is such an observable category as the Arabic novel, there is also a necessity, given the diversity of the Arab world and its divergent paths of development, to speak of the development of this

genre in a more particular context of a region or country.²⁸

The tension between these categories, as manifest in histories of the Arabic novel, is readily apparent in the discourse on the early Saudi novel and its canonisation. Critics often locate the Saudi novel within an overarching Arabic novelistic tradition, usually to the detriment of the former, which is viewed as ‘weak’ or ‘backwards’, particularly when judged against the Egyptian novel, which serves as a familiar point of comparison. However, simultaneously, there is the implicit assumption that in order to qualify for the Saudi canon, the novel must represent Saudi social reality, as something that is assumed to be accessible and unquestioned.

This is because critical discourses in Arabic on the novel are often influenced by a nationalist ideology that unreflectively privileges a particular mode of narration – more or less analogous to that of the European realist novel – as the highest expression of the novel form. The result is that texts that fall short of its presumed criteria are effectively consigned to oblivion, or at best, reduced to the status of mere ‘attempts’ at the novel. This has certainly been true of histories of the Saudi novel. But, as this thesis will argue over the coming chapters, early Saudi authors did not set out to write the type of novel against which critics have retrospectively judged their work. The form and themes of their novels need to be understood within the shifting cultural, social, and political parameters within which they were writing. As Mary Layoun argues in her *Travels of a Genre: The Modern Novel and Ideology* (1992), ‘neither a culture nor its constituent “texts” are seamless, internally coherent, and essentialist’. Rather, they represent ‘a complex network of relationships, themselves in dynamic exchange with political, economic, and social contexts’.²⁹

²⁸ Ouyang, *Poetics*, 8-9.

²⁹ Mary Layoun, *Travels of a Genre: The Modern Novel and Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

In order to further explore the issue of genre and ideology, the problematic of definition must first be taken into account. In his study of the Saudi novel,³⁰ Muḥammad Dīb claims that the number of novels published in Saudi Arabia between 1930 and 1988 was around one hundred, although with the caveat that both authors and critics ‘did not distinguish between the short story [*al-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra*] and the novel [*al-riwāya*] or perhaps they even confused them’.³¹ This situation is by no means unique to the Saudi novel. Roger Allen has remarked on the considerable variation in how the terms, *al-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra* and *al-riwāya*, have been used and understood across the Arab world.³²

The inconsistency in terminology is due in no small part to the ‘vagueness’ of the Arabic term, *al-riwāya*, itself.³³ Ouyang’s comments are particularly insightful here:

Al-riwāya [which] at first denoted both story and drama during the Nahḍa, has historically meant narration and narrative in the corpus of classical Arabic literature, and its definition need not be confined to the parameters set by the type of Western novel circulating in the Arab context.³⁴

Ouyang makes an important point in that definitions of the Arabic novel are all too often derived from the European tradition. The reasons for this are complicated. The Arabic novel and its history are inextricably bound up in the politics of identity in the post-colonial context, particularly in debates over its genealogy.³⁵

Selim addresses the problem of genre and ideology and, in the process, dismantles the traditional developmentalist model with which both Western and native critics have explained the Arabic novel as deriving directly from the European tradition. Because ‘realism is enshrined, in both Europe and the Arab world, as the canonical foundation of all literary modernities’, Western critics of the Arabic novel have

³⁰ Muḥammad Dīb, *Fann al-riwāya al-‘arabiyya fī al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya: Bayn al-nasha’a wa-l-tatawwur* (The Art of the Arabic Novel in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Between Genesis and Development), (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā‘a al-Maḥmadiyya, 1989).

³¹ Dīb, *Fann al-riwāya*, 21.

³² Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 5-6.

³³ Ouyang, *Poetics*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

reproduced the history of the European novel in the Arab context, with Arab critics replicating and reinforcing this model, although for different reasons.³⁶

Realism is not merely a narrative technique, mode or representation; instead it is imbued with a national, symbolic value, on which its very legitimacy hinges:

Realism is not simply understood as a technique of representation built on simply verisimilitude. Rather, realism... is constructed through a particular and very powerful discourse about social and political identity. Realism has to construct the basic elements of narrative fiction – time, place, character, plot – in a way that ‘mirrors’ the particular social, cultural and political reality (*wāqi*) of the national collectivity.³⁷

The failure of early Saudi narratives to meet these criteria has resulted in their misinterpretation as ‘attempts’ at the novel, and often poor ones at that. Critics’ privileging of the ‘artistic novel’, which was noted above, can be more or less traced back to the taxonomy of the novel devised by the Egyptian scholar ‘Abd al-Muhsin Ṭāhā Badr in his history of the Arabic novel, *al-Riwāya al-‘arabiyya al-ḥadītha fī Miṣr* (The Development of the Modern Arabic Novel in Egypt, 1963), which has become canonical in itself. Badr’s taxonomy of the novel identifies three types: ‘the didactic novel’ (*al-riwāya al-ta’līmiyya*), ‘the recreational novel’ (*riwāyat al-taslīya wa-l-tarfīh*) and ‘the artistic novel’ (*al-riwāya al-fanniyya*). For Badr, these types represent a rough chronology of the novel’s development. He views the recreational novel as essentially flawed because its ‘times, settings, characters, and narrative mode do not “reflect” the particular historical, social, and existential environment of the newly defined contemporary Egyptian subject’.³⁸ Furthermore, Badr also identifies the form and theme of novels that fall into this category with popular, oral narrative, thus making a distinction between the high culture of ‘the artistic novel’ and the low culture of ‘the recreational novel’.³⁹

³⁶ Samah Selim, ‘The Narrative Craft: Realism and Fiction in the Arabic Canon’, *Edebiyat* 14, no. 1 (2003): 120.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

Origins of the Arabic Novel

Badr's study is one of the earliest attempts to account for the Arabic novel's origins. But even today the genealogy of the Arabic novel remains the subject of much debate. There is no universally agreed upon explanation for its origins. While some trace its roots to pre-modern Arabic precursors, such as the *maqāma* genre,⁴⁰ others insist on the Arabic novel as a purely European import.⁴¹ Badr in particular identifies early translations of European novels as crucial to the emergence of the Arabic novel.⁴² According to his account of the Arabic novel's development, the novels of the twentieth century fall either into the category of the didactic novel or of the recreational novel. The canonical artistic novel does not emerge until the appearance of *Zaynab* in 1913, which until recently has been widely considered as 'the first Arabic novel'.⁴³

Some scholars have preferred to avoid debates over the first Arabic novel. Instead they have emphasised the importance of *Zaynab* as marking a critical step in the Arabic novel's production. In *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (2nd ed., 1995; 1st ed., 1982), Allen traces the Arabic novel back to the beginning of the *nahḍa* during the nineteenth century, outlining the main factors that contributed to the development of modern Arabic prose fiction, including contact with Europe and the pivotal role played by the press. Likewise, he briefly surveys several of the pioneering works of prominent literati, such as Rifā' al-Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801-73), Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1804-87), Muṣṭafā Luṭfi al-Manfalūṭī (1876-1924) and Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914). Having charted the major literary developments of the *nahḍa*, Allen moves on to that perennial subject of debate: the first Arabic novel.⁴⁴ Rather than argue for or against *Zaynab*'s contested status, Allen occupies a middle ground:

⁴⁰ An episodic picaresque narrative form pioneered and exemplified in works of the Abbasid belletrists, Badī' al-Zamān Hamadhānī (969-1007) and Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122).

⁴¹ Ouyang, *Poetics*, 3.

⁴² 'Abd al-Muḥsin Ṭāḥā Badr, *Taṭawwūr al-riwāya al-'arabiyya fī Miṣr, 1870-1938* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1963), 52.

⁴³ Badr, *Taṭawwūr*, 63.

⁴⁴ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Zaynab* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Jarīda, 1913).

As we bear in mind these examples and other categories of fiction emerging in Egypt at the time, it is perhaps more accurate and useful not to burden *Zaynab* with the designation as the first example of any particular category or quality of novel, but rather as an extremely important step in a continuing process.⁴⁵

Similarly, Paul Starkey has more recently described *Zaynab* as a ‘focal turning point, in the development of the modern Egyptian and Arabic novel’.⁴⁶

Allen’s position on *Zaynab* liberates the work from an onerous and questionable burden, and work that he and others have done since to resuscitate the nineteenth-century Arabic novel also lifts or at least questions that burden. However, the underlying issue here is in the general approach taken by critics and literary historians in their attempts to account for the Arabic novel’s origins, i.e. the tendency of critics to reproduce the European model in the Arab context, as observed by Selim. In this connection Mohamed-Salah Omri remarks: ‘Common... to the work of... critics of Arabic literatures, is the privileging of the novel form over other types of narrative. This proposition leads to the replication of the history of the novel in Europe in a Third World context’.⁴⁷ This also complicates the very origins of the Arabic novel.

Allen outlines a basic matrix for the development of the Egyptian novel, which he extrapolates to the Arabic novel in general. It represents what, until recently, was the predominant school of thought in Western scholarship:⁴⁸

In other parts of the region analogous processes were occurring; the chronology and local features were, needless to say, varied, but the basic sequence was the same: first, translation and/or arabization; second, imitation

⁴⁵ Allen, *Arabic Novel*, 33.

⁴⁶ Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 102.

⁴⁷ Mohamed-Salah Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature: Sites of Confluence in the Writings of Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

⁴⁸ Like Allen, Starkey holds that translation played the most important role in the development of modern Arabic fiction, citing various examples of the activity in this field, including the School of Languages founded in 1835 and directed by Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, whose translation of Fenelon’s didactic novel, *Les Aventures de Telemaque* was first published in 1867 and ‘set a precedent that was enthusiastically followed during the remaining years of the century’. Starkey, *Modern Arabic literature*, 27. Similarly, Pierre Cachia identifies translation as the main impetus behind the writing of new fictional narratives in Egypt. Cachia, *Arabic Literature: An Overview* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 132.

or adaptation; and then indigenous creation.⁴⁹

However, writing some years later, Allen recognises the inability of his model to account for developments elsewhere in the Arab world. In particular, he singles out the varying role of translation: ‘the availability of early writings by the pioneers of the Mashriq to the Maghrib meant that the role of translated European literature differed’.⁵⁰ Likewise, in the Saudi context, translation played a minor role, while the Mahjar poets and the literature that emerged from the Levant and Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a formative influence on the first generation of Saudi novelists. The history of the Saudi novel, then, has the potential to reorient the literary historical narrative of the Arabic novel.

A general observation made in studies of the Saudi novel is that barely a handful of examples of the genre were published during the first three decades or so following the Kingdom’s unification in 1932. Doubtless, the economic impact of the Great Depression and particularly WWII played some part in this.⁵¹ All periodicals with the exception of the state organ, *Umm al-Qurā*, were either suspended or forced to close indefinitely during the war years due to a paper shortage.⁵² In this connection, it has been suggested by some that the Algerian short story writer, Muḥammad Ḥūḥū (1910-56), who lived and worked in Medina for over a decade, chose to return to Algeria because of these same economic difficulties.⁵³ But this factor alone does not explain why, following Aḥmad al-Subā’ī’s (1905-84) *Fikra* (1947) and Muḥammad ‘Ali Maghribī’s (1914-96) *al-Ba‘th* (1948), nothing was published until the late 1950s, at least according to bibliographies of the Saudi novel.

Indeed, al-Ḥāzimī and others offer various reasons why novelistic production in Saudi Arabia failed to gather momentum, including the lack of a substantial readership, the predominance of poetry and the essay (*al-maqāla*), and the negative

⁴⁹ Allen, *Arabic novel*, 44.

⁵⁰ Roger Allen, ‘Literary History and the Arabic novel’, *World Literature Today* 75, no. 2 (2001): 210.

⁵¹ See Joel Mokyr, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1: 149-53.

⁵² See Chapter Two, 70.

⁵³ See Chapter Five, 206.

perception of imaginative fiction in general.⁵⁴ It can also be added that the situation was not helped by the deeply conservative nature of society in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in the case of Najd.

Similarly, a hiatus has also been observed in the Egyptian novel. According to Allen, following the publication of *Zaynab* in 1913, with one minor exception, no further examples of the genre appeared until the 1930s.⁵⁵ While he notes that this has often been explained by the popularity of the short story, Allen argues that a combination of social and cultural factors need to be taken into account. For one, not all authors enjoyed the same opportunities as Haykal, whose exposure to European literature during his time as a PhD candidate at Paris' Sorbonne University was formative. On a more practical level, finding a suitable publishing outlet for what was, at the time, an unconventional or un-established genre might have proved difficult. And while fiction was serialised in newspapers and journals, the ephemeral nature of this medium, as well as the skills and sheer amount of time required to produce works of long fiction, served as obstacles to the development of the novel.⁵⁶ Though largely in agreement with Allen, Starkey's account is more nuanced. He states that 'although romances and other works of popular fiction continued to be translated and composed in Egypt during the 1920s, few original works of great interest or significance appeared during this period'.⁵⁷

So while works of extended prose fiction were published in Egypt during these intervening years, it seems that none of them met the standard set by *Zaynab*. The problem with this approach is that texts which do not meet this standard are not only marginalised in histories of Arabic fiction, they are ipso facto considered inferior. This also raises the question, of course, of who sets the standards and on what basis.

The authors of *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, a critical anthology published in 1996, explore such questions by considering how the novel genre has become

⁵⁴ See Maṣūūr Ibrāhīm al-Hāzimī, *Fann al-qiṣṣa fī al-adab al-sa'ūdī al-ḥadīth* (The Art of the Story in Modern Saudi Literature), 3rd ed. (Riyadh: Dār Ibn Sīnā li-l-Nashr, 2001), 81-2.

⁵⁵ 'Isā 'Ubayd's (d. 1923) *Thurayya* (Cairo: np., 1922).

⁵⁶ Allen, *Arabic Novel*, 37-8.

⁵⁷ Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 103.

institutionalised within national cultures and how theories of the novel, as well as debates over its definition, are involved in contests over cultural identity and authority. By shifting the focus of inquiry from ‘what a novel is to what novels do’, the book’s contributors address some principal ideas about the novel: ‘their status as print commodities, their mediation of national cultures, and their role in transnational exchange’.⁵⁸

In the anthology’s final chapter, ‘The Rise of Novelism’, Clifford Siskin examines how ‘the discourse of and about novels’ – what he calls novelism – ‘produces and reproduces private, public, and professional norms’.⁵⁹ The most important effect of novelism has been the novel’s ‘naturalisation’, which Siskin connects directly to the institution of nationalism in Great Britain.⁶⁰ The problem with novelism, or the ‘habitual subordination of writing to the novel’, is that the norms it continues to reproduce in histories and theories of the novel have resulted in a teleological and reductionist history of narrative fiction that over-valorises a narrow, ‘canonical’ body of texts to the exclusion of others.⁶¹

Fundamentally, *Institutions* calls for a reorientation in critical approaches to the novel. The idea of the institution of the novel is deconstructed. Where the word, ‘institution’, is most often understood in the passive sense, that is, as an establishment existing in itself, Lynch and Warner emphasise its active sense as this ‘encourages us to study the novel as that which was once “novel”’, opening up the discursive field to a range of narrative possibilities.⁶²

Homer Brown draws attention to how, in discussions about the novel as an institution, or indeed about any institution, what is generally missed today is the word ‘institution’ does not only denote the product of its verbal derivative ‘to institute’ but also, and more significantly, the act of instituting, as something

⁵⁸ Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner, eds. *Cultural Institutions of the Novel* (Durham; London: Duke University Press), 1-3.

⁵⁹ Clifford Siskin, ‘The Rise of Novelism’, in Lynch and Warner, eds. *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, 424.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁶² Lynch and Warner, *Cultural Institutions*, 3.

deliberate and not merely arising as natural consequence. When we imagine an institution we usually picture the bricks and mortar that enshrine it. The lofty edifice that speaks of its anteriority, its continuity as something that has existed for time immemorial and will continue to do so.⁶³ In the case of the novel, the result is that ‘the history of the novel’s institution’ is confused ‘with the institution’s history of the novel’.⁶⁴

Thus, the ‘implicitly transhistorical nature’ of the novel, as an object of study in literary histories, makes it necessary to ‘historicize’ the discourse about the novel.⁶⁵ Echoing Siskin, Brown argues that ‘this is because historical accounts of the rise or origin of the novel... have as part of their effect the establishment of protocols for reading novels’.⁶⁶ This is particularly the case when it comes to ‘determining what is important to read in them and *which* novels can be read “seriously” or even be given the privilege of the curiously esteemed title “novel” instead of one of its déclassé or plebeian combination forms’.⁶⁷

In ‘Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel’, Omri applies Siskin’s concept of novelism to the Arab case where he focuses on three related issues: ‘the allure of the novel, the limitations of the novel to express the self, and the role of local literary tradition in the making of the novel’.⁶⁸

The institution of the Arabic novel was largely an expression of Arab nationalist intellectuals’ aspiration towards the achievement of modernity and nationhood. For the famous Egyptian man of letters, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1917-73), novel writing was ‘the epitome of what it meant to be modern’.⁶⁹ As a ‘major critic, editor of powerful journals, dean of the first Egyptian university, and his nation’s minister of education’, Ḥusayn ‘represents the institutional voice behind the drive to make the

⁶³ Homer Brown, ‘Prologue’, in Lynch and Warner, eds. *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, 18-20.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁸ Mohamed-Salah Omri, ‘Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* (Spring – Summer, 2008), vol. 41: 2/3, 244-63, 244.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

novel “the most important form”, as he put it’.⁷⁰

The ‘over-valorization’ of the novel by Ḥusayn and others has meant that ‘the study of modern Arabic narrative is dominated by a teleological vision of literary history, where the novel is perceived as the culmination of national aesthetic achievement’.⁷¹ This notion of the novel’s ‘victorious’ history tends to be shared by both native commentators and Western scholars of Arabic literature alike.⁷²

The privileging of the novel, or more precisely what Selim calls ‘the canonical realist novel’, has resulted in a general failure to account for ‘the specific engagements of local traditions with foreign forms. Moreover, in the Arabic context, it is frequently assumed that there is, and only could be, one Arabic narrative discourse’.⁷³ To counter this assumption, Omri cites the diversity of languages and narrative conventions across the Arab world. For example, in Algeria, which experienced a protracted period of French colonial rule, Berber and French are spoken as well as Arabic. Additionally, the nature of the colonial experience has meant that, in general, North African narrative is more closely connected to the French novel than to that of Egypt or Iraq.⁷⁴ These observations lead Omri ‘to question the limits of the novel as the adequate or indeed the sole expression of the community in the Arabic context’.⁷⁵

In making his case for the limits of the novel, i.e. that ‘the lure of the novel is not perhaps as universal as literary history makes it out to be’, Omri also cites the elitist nature of the novel in Arabic. Even the works of Najīb Maḥfūz (1911-2011), Nobel Prize laureate and perhaps the most famous Arab novelist, did not enjoy the high circulation the reputation and status of their author might imply; while narratives ‘that can hardly be seen as novels let alone Mahfuzian novels, have often gained astounding popularity’.⁷⁶ One such example is the books of the Algerian writer, Aḥlām Mustaghānimī (b. 1953). Omri proposes that the popularity of her work may

⁷⁰ Omri, ‘Local Narrative Form’, 244.

⁷¹ Ibid., 245.

⁷² Ibid., 245.

⁷³ Ibid., 245.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 245-6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 245-6.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 253.

be due ‘to their deviation from the novel form’ – again it should be noted that Omri is talking about the canonical realist novel – and that ‘their poetic language and tendency to deal with the Algerian Revolution may hold the answer’.⁷⁷ This ultimately leads him to later conclude that:

The radical difference of these narratives lies (not only) in the ratio of the libidinal to the political, as Jameson puts it. Rather, the radical formal difference of novels, like those by Mostaghanimi, lies in the ratio of the poetic to the narrative.⁷⁸

Indeed, there are a number of instances where poetry, not the novel ‘remains the most influential expression of the people’.⁷⁹ In the case of Saudi Arabia, as indeed the Gulf states in general, poetry has and continues to enjoy a far more prominent position and greater esteem than the novel, or for that matter, the short story. The limited appeal of the novel among the public contrasts sharply with the enduring popularity of poetry. Recent years have even seen a recrudescence of the traditional vernacular poetry, *al-shi‘r al-nabaṭī*, fuelled by the phenomenon of the televised *Million’s Poet* competition, which is watched by an avid audience across the Arab world.⁸⁰

It is not just the abiding popularity of poetry that suggests the novel genre has been less significant in accompanying the establishment of the nation in Saudi Arabia than elsewhere. In his semi-autobiographical book, *Ḥikāyat al-ḥadātha fī al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya* (The Tale of Modernity in Saudi Arabia), Saudi intellectual, ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad al-Ghadhdhāmī, provides a first-hand account of the fierce debate over modernity that raged in the kingdom from the mid-1980s through to the mid-1990s. Al-Ghadhdhāmī’s thesis is that modernity in Saudi Arabia has been and

⁷⁷ Omri, ‘Local Narrative Form’, 252-3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 259.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 250.

⁸⁰ Million’s Poet was first aired in 2007 on the UAE network, Abu Dhabi Television. The show has proven enormously successful across the Gulf region, enjoying higher ratings than football. See ‘Ancient Bedouin Verse, the “People’s Poetry” Has Found a New Audience’, *The National* (7 November 2013), accessed 17 June 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/the-review/ancient-bedouin-verse-the-peoples-poetry-has-found-a-new-audience>.

‘will remain a superficial modernity’.⁸¹ This is due to the ‘uniqueness’ of Saudi society ‘among other Arab and Islamic countries’.⁸² Al-Ghadhdhāmī argues that the defining feature of Saudi society is conservatism. Not only is this conservatism ‘self-willed’, it is something that is expected – even demanded – of it by Muslims and Arabs at large:

They might be able to imagine modernity in any other place except Saudi Arabia, to the extent that even the greatest Arab champions of modernity would engage in a holy jihad to prevent Saudi society from transforming into a modern society.⁸³

While al-Ghadhdhāmī’s tone is perhaps a little hyperbolic, he raises some valid points around the issue of modernity and identity. Whereas in Egypt, intellectuals have identified the novel as a ‘symbolic pinning down of entry into modernity and nationhood’,⁸⁴ the conservatism of Saudi society ‘expresses itself in various ways to speak of the necessity of the traditionalist programme, which it ties to religion, nationalism and authenticity’.⁸⁵ This is reinforced by a clear distinction between what is deemed suitable for the individual and what is deemed suitable for society:

This society is distinguished by its refusal of examples [of modernity] that are not appropriate for us, even if we are impressed by them on a personal level. But the criterion or measure is not personal, it is collective. Something might be suitable for the individual but it is precisely this individual who will suppress and prohibit it in order to protect society.⁸⁶

The situation described by al-Ghadhdhāmī would seem to explain, at least in part, why the novel in Saudi Arabia has not gained anything like the same foothold it has in other Arab countries; additionally, the connection between nationalism and

⁸¹ ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Ḥikāyat al-ḥadātha fī al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya*, 3rd ed. (Casablanca: Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 2005), 26.

⁸² Al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Ḥikāyat al-ḥadātha*, 26.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁴ Omri, ‘Local Narrative Form’, 245.

⁸⁵ Al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Ḥikāyat al-ḥadātha*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

authenticity within the ‘traditionalist programme’ offers at least a part explanation for why the novel has never managed to overthrow poetry as the most popular form of literary and communal expression.

The absence in Saudi Arabia of many of the cultural institutions associated with the novel has meant that the genre has never held the prominence or public status that it does in other countries. The novel is not taught on school curricula, there are no established national prizes for it, and its writers are not particularly well celebrated by the mainstream press. Although this might have begun to change in recent years following the appearance of the so-called ‘new Saudi novel’, which around the turn of the last century garnered considerable press attention inside and outside the Kingdom, the fact remains that the Saudi novel has not been institutionalised.⁸⁷

This situation has obvious implications for the idea of a Saudi novel canon, for if canon formation is directly implicated in the institution of novel (in the active sense), how is it possible to identify a Saudi canon in the almost total absence of those authoritative voices who, like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in the Egyptian context, represent an institutional voice? In the Saudi context, canon refers less to a corpus of nationally celebrated works and more to a small, though growing, number of novels that critics and literary scholars have debated and discussed as being representative of the genre and having artistic merit. Yet, even this definition does not always hold true, since critics have often been ambivalent about early works.

Foremost among Saudi critics of the novel is Maṣṣūr Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāzimī (b. 1935). His book, *Fann al-qisṣa fī al-adab al-Sa‘ūdi al-ḥadīth* (The Art of the Story in Modern Saudi Literature), which first appeared in 1981, is important not only because it contains the first significant study of the Saudi novel published by a Saudi critic, but because it represents the first attempt to account for the emergence of the

⁸⁷ The so-called ‘new Saudi novel’ is commonly said to have begun with Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī’s *Shaqqaṭ al-ḥurriya* (1994). The novel was banned in Saudi Arabia because of its open reference to taboos, such as extramarital sex, drugs, and alcohol consumption. The new Saudi novel is characterised by its tackling of what are considered controversial and sensitive subjects in Saudi society. For another example, see Turkī al-Ḥamad’s trilogy, *Atyāf azqa mahjūra* (Ghosts of the Abandoned Alleys, 1997-8).

novel in Saudi Arabia, and as such initiated a process of canonisation.⁸⁸ Al-Ḥāzimī has been enormously influential on subsequent scholarship, perhaps playing a role comparable to that of Badr in general histories of the Arabic/Egyptian novel. Awarded the King Fayṣal International Prize for Arabic Language and Literature in 1995 in recognition of his contribution to the field, al-Ḥāzimī also chaired the academic committee that was appointed to oversee the compilation of the monumental ten-volume work, *Mawsū‘at al-adab al-‘arabī al-sa‘ūdī al-ḥadīth* (*Encyclopaedia of Modern Saudi Arabic Literature*, 2001).⁸⁹ In terms of the Saudi novel, he is arguably the closest thing to an ‘establishment’ or ‘institutional voice’.

Al-Ḥāzimī’s role in the canonisation of key early works, most notably ‘Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī’s (1906-83) *al-Taw‘amān* (The Twins, 1930) and Ḥāmid Damanhūrī’s (1922-65) *Thaman al-taḍḥīya* (The Price of Sacrifice, 1959) is discussed in detail in Chapter Five. In *Fann al-qīṣṣa* al-Ḥāzimī states that in between *al-Taw‘amān* and *Thaman* ‘there is nothing worth considering’, with the exception of two novels that appeared in the late 1940s: al-Subā‘ī’s *Fikra* (1947) and Maghribī’s *al-Ba‘th* (1948).⁹⁰ This is reminiscent of the claims made in regards to the Egyptian novel and suggests works of extended prose fiction *were* published between *al-Taw‘amān* and *Thaman*, just not of a standard that would admit them into the canonical history of the Saudi novel. As will be seen in due course, at least one other work, Muḥammad al-Jawharī’s (b. 1905), *al-Intiqām* (1935) has come to light since al-Ḥāzimī was writing. Yet, most subsequent accounts have adopted an identical position to al-Ḥāzimī.

⁸⁸ The Syrian scholar, Bakrī Shaykh Amīn, includes a general chapter on fiction in Saudi Arabia in his, *al-Ḥaraka al-adabiyya fī al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya* (The literary Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1972). The earliest novel cited by Amīn is *Fikra*, though he does not mention *al-Ba‘th*. Amīn also discusses *Thaman al-taḍḥīya* which, like later critics, he describes as a ‘mature, artistic story’ (*qīṣṣa faniyya nāḍija*). Ibid. 475.

⁸⁹ Maṣṣūr Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāzimī et al., *Mawsū‘at al-adab al-‘arabī al-sa‘ūdī al-ḥadīth*, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Mufradāt, 2001).

⁹⁰ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 32. According to al-Ḥāzimī, the half century or so between the publication *al-Taw‘amān* in 1930 and the time he was writing, saw very little activity: ‘the sum of local, novelistic works, if the term is applied to most of them loosely, is no more than twenty or... if we suppose that some works have escaped the clutches of researchers, then in any case we cannot count more than thirty long stories’. Ibid., 31.

In *Fann al-riwāya fī al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya: Bayn al-nasha‘a wa-l-taṭawwur* (The Art of the Novel in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Between its Genesis and Development, 1989), Muḥammad Dīb, writing almost a decade on from al-Ḥāzimī, offers a lengthier and more systematic account of the Saudi novel’s development. Although Dīb is an Egyptian critic, his study of the Saudi novel has, like al-Ḥāzimī’s, been highly influential.⁹¹

Dīb covers a period of around sixty years, from the appearance of *al-Taw‘amān* in 1930 to the end of 1988, which he divides into three phases. The first begins with *al-Taw‘amān*, and includes *Fikra* and *al-Ba‘th*. Following al-Ḥāzimī, Dīb describes these didactic works as the ‘first attempts’ at the novel.⁹² The second phase begins in 1959 with *Thaman al-taḍhīya* – which Dīb identifies as ‘the real beginning of the Saudi novel’ – and extends to 1980.⁹³ This period is also marked by the appearance of the first novel by a Saudi woman writer, Samīra Khāshuqjī’s (1939–86) *Wadda ‘tu āmālī* (1958). The third and final phase extends from 1980 to the end of 1988. According to Dīb the 1980s saw a significant quantitative and qualitative increase in the Saudi novel.⁹⁴ Even so, Dīb’s decision to begin his third stage in 1980 seems somewhat arbitrary, especially since this year, unlike 1930 and 1959, is not linked to a significant moment in the Saudi novel’s historical trajectory.

In general, Dīb’s book tends to be more descriptive than analytical, being overly concerned with taxonomical distinctions. For example, in his second chapter Dīb attempts to identify the main trends of the Saudi novel, which he categorises according to several genres: the didactic novel (*al-riwāya al-ta‘līmiyya*), the social novel (*al-riwāya al-ijtimā‘iyya*), the historical novel (*al-riwāya al-tārīkhiyya*), the romantic novel (*al-riwāya al-rūmāntīkiyya*) and the political novel (*al-riwāya al-siyāsiyya*). Dīb’s typology, like al-Ḥāzimī’s, is clearly influenced by Badr’s.

⁹¹ For example see, Ali Zalah’s chronology of the Saudi novel which more or less reproduces Muḥammad Dīb’s verbatim. ‘The Progress of the Novel in Saudi Arabia’, *Banīpal* 20 (Summer 2004): 82-6.

⁹² Dīb, *Fann al-riwāya*, 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

In the opening chapter of *Fann al-riwāya al-‘arabī al-Sa‘ūdī al-mu‘āšir* (The Art of the Contemporary Saudi Arabic Novel, 1990), Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Shanṭī, like Dīb, draws heavily on al-Ḥāzimī for his discussion of the 1930-59 period. However, whereas al-Ḥāzimī and Dīb view the artistic novel as having developed out of the earlier didactic trend, al-Shanṭī divorces these narratives from the novel altogether, arguing that the former do not correspond to the contemporary concept of the novel.⁹⁵ Instead, he views them as ‘an extension of the Arabic story heritage’ on the basis that examples of didactic prose fiction can be found in the Arabic literary heritage, citing Ibn Ṭufayl’s *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqdhān* and more recent examples along the lines of Ṭaḥṭāwī’s translation of *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699).⁹⁶ Although al-Shanṭī avoids the essentialist trap of categorising these early works as attempts at the novel, his argument does not consider how texts like *al-Taw‘amān* mark a break with traditional forms of Arabic prose fiction, such as the *maqāma*, and represent a new form of narrative discourse. Neither is it clear why, in making this particular point, he chooses to cite an Arabic translation of a French work. The problem of the interaction between foreign form and local traditions is returned to below.

In his doctoral thesis, *The Novel in Saudi Arabia; Emergence and Development 1930-1989: A Historical and Critical Study* (1994), Sultan al-Qahtani reproduces Dīb’s three-phase model. Where al-Qahtani does differ from Dīb, and particularly al-Ḥāzimī, is in the importance he ascribes to the European influence. In his first chapter, ‘Fiction in Saudi Arabia’, al-Qahtani claims that prior to WWII, Saudi Arabia knew the *qiṣṣa* only.⁹⁷ With this generic term, which translates as ‘narrative’ or ‘story’, he suggests that Saudis were insufficiently aware of modern literary forms, let alone able to distinguish between them. The situation changed only after Saudi students who had been sent to study in Egypt began to return home and immigrants from more developed Arab countries like Egypt and Syria started to enter the kingdom.⁹⁸ Al-Qahtani paints pre-WWII Saudi Arabia as a cultural backwater, cut-off from what was happening in neighbouring Egypt and beyond. But this was

⁹⁵ Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Shanṭī, *Fann al-riwāya al-‘arabī al-sa‘ūdī al-mu‘āšir* (Jazan: Nādī Jāzān al-Adabī, 1990), 41.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁹⁷ Sultan S. M. al-Qahtani, ‘The Novel in Saudi Arabia; Emergence and Development, 1930-1989: An Historical and Critical Study’ (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1994), 8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

simply not the case, at least not for Hijaz.

Al-Qahtani makes the same argument in his explanation of the didactic nature of early novels like *al-Taw'amān*. He claims that the early authors wrote for didactic purposes as they 'knew nothing about "artistic" literature and would continue to know nothing until the concept was introduced from Europe and Egypt'.⁹⁹

Recognising that the 'artistic novel' 'seems to conform to no Western critical term', al-Qahtani offers the following definition: 'As used with reference to the modern novel, it may be said to describe those that incorporate to a greater or lesser degree E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the novel: Story, People, Plot, Fantasy, Prophecy, Pattern and Rhythm*'.¹⁰⁰ Al-Qahtani's citing of Forster for a definition of the novel reflects his view of the Saudi/Arabic novel as essentially a European import, albeit an indirect one:

As we have said, the novel is a new art form in Saudi Arabia; it came from Europe in the twentieth century, not directly but through Egypt and Lebanon, where many novels and collections of short stories were translated from English and French.¹⁰¹

The indirect root of the novel via Egyptian and Lebanese translations of European fiction is a slight departure from the typical developmentalist scheme for the history of the Arabic novel, although al-Qahtani is essentially proposing the same teleology as Badr.

As for the conditions that enabled this foreign tradition to take root in Saudi soil, al-Qahtani argues that, ultimately, it was education, foreign immigration and the spread of journals and newspapers that 'initiated a new literary life', superseding the classical *maqāma* and *qaṣīda* forms.¹⁰² However, he provides only the barest outlines of these developments and makes little mention of the pre-Saudi era. Following this, he turns to the 'pioneers' of the Saudi novel: al-Anṣārī, al-Subā'ī and Maghribī. Al-Qahtani's discussion of these authors' works seems little more than perfunctory since

⁹⁹ Al-Qahtani, 'Novel in Saudi Arabia', 8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰² Ibid., 14.

he offers only a brief synopsis for each. Furthermore, he relies heavily on al-Ḥāzimī's account. These novelists and their works form the subject of Chapter Three.

Likewise, Mohammed Alhasoun in his 2008 thesis, 'Social Criticism in the Saudi Novel, 1990 to Present Day', provides a general historical overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in which he goes over much the same ground as al-Qahtani, giving a brief account of developments in education and mass media, although for the most part his treatment of these factors is cursory, especially for the pre-Saudi period. Alhasoun also devotes a brief section to a survey of cultural life in Hijaz from the late nineteenth century to the Kingdom's establishment in 1932. But like al-Ḥāzimī, he dismisses the Ottoman and Hashemite contributions, claiming that their newspapers, with the exception of King Ḥusayn's state organ, *al-Qibla*, made no significant contribution to Hijaz's cultural life.¹⁰³ Neither Alhasoun nor al-Qahtani mention the influence of the early Arabic journals and newspapers from Egypt and the Levant that were read in Hijaz and had a formative influence on the first generation of Saudi writers.

In general, studies of the Saudi novel have tended to ignore or gloss over pre-Saudi developments in Hijaz in the press and education, denying or downplaying their role in the emergence of Saudi literature, preferring instead to tie this directly, either to the Kingdom's establishment or the Saudi conquest of Hijaz. This is despite the fact that the first generation of Saudi writers was mainly educated at the late Ottoman and Hashemite era private schools.

While all of the studies mentioned here cite the pioneering works of early Hijazi writers, these are usually passed over as either 'attempts' at the novel, or 'prototypes of the genre'.¹⁰⁴ But as Omri and Selim have argued, the phenomenon of new literary genres is clearly more complicated than can be accounted for by a one-way flow of influence, i.e. from Europe to the Arab world. Even if it is pointed out that many 'translations' were extensively adapted for their Arab audience, the idea of

¹⁰³ Mohammed Alhasoun, 'Social Criticism in the Saudi Novel, 1990 to Present Day' (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2008), 59.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 60.

adaptation itself is problematic, since it implies a minor Arabic version that is ultimately ‘unfaithful’ to the original.¹⁰⁵

Recent scholarship has seen a move away from the paradigm of influence ‘based on the assumption of a one-way movement from an “original” (usually Western) text to a “copy” or minor (Arabic) version’, to intertextuality.¹⁰⁶ Intertextuality should be understood here, not in the narrow sense with which it is all too often applied, where it is used almost as a synonym for terms like citation, parody, satire etc., but rather in its broadest sense or in the sense that Julia Kristeva – who coined the term in 1969 – originally intended, i.e. the interrelatedness of all texts; the text not as a self-contained, autonomous unit but as one that only derives meaning in relation to other texts.¹⁰⁷ In his account of the emergence of what he calls Arabic ‘narrative discourse’, the term denoting the play, short story and the novel, Sabry Hafez argues for the intertextual approach over the genealogical:

The relation of modern Arabic narrative to either Western narrative discourse or classical Arabic archetypal fiction is, therefore, not one of genealogy but of dynamic intertextuality. It posits the dialogical principal with its dynamic and dialectic nature in place of the genealogical argument, which is linear and static. Thus, one does not need, as the genealogical argument dictates, to choose only one literary ancestor, or even to consider the question of ancestry a valid proposition. This is so because the dialogical process is pluralistic rather than singular, and presupposes that it takes place in a certain context, for dialogues do not take place in a void.¹⁰⁸

The move away from the importation/influence paradigm has shifted scholarly attention from identifying the elusive originary moment of the Arabic novel and the genealogical argument to focus on its construction. But while the concept of intertextuality is valuable for understanding the dialogical process underlying the genesis of new narrative discourse, it is perhaps too vague to serve as a conceptual framework.

¹⁰⁵ For example see Mattityahu Peled, *Aspects of Modern Arabic Literature*, (Paris: Peeters Louvain, 1988), 50.

¹⁰⁶ Mohamed-Salah Omri, ‘Notes on the Traffic between Theory and Arabic Literature’, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 4 (November 2011): 732.

¹⁰⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotikè: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

¹⁰⁸ Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* (London: Saqi, 1993), 27.

Expanding on Frank Moretti's theory for the development of the postcolonial novel which postulates a triangle relationship between foreign form, local form and local matter, Omri offers a more concrete approach to the novel's construction, positing local form as 'the fault line through which we can trace variation in the postcolonial novel. In doing so, he reinstates local form as an agent in narrative transformation.'¹⁰⁹ The classical *maqāma* genre, which operates as 'a nexus between poetry, orality and writing' provides a model for the construction of the Arabic novel.¹¹⁰ The *maqāma* serves as just one example, the argument being transferable to other local forms, such as the *riḥla*.¹¹¹ By shifting the focus from the novel to how local narrative forms handled the novel, an alternative history of the novel in Arabic is provided; a history not of victory but of 'resistance, compromise and transformation'.¹¹²

The study of early Hijazi/Saudi novelistic discourse and the unique conditions attending its production affords an opportunity to further interrogate 'the presumed supremacy' of the type of European novel that came to serve as a model for Arab intellectuals in the postcolonial era, as well as assumptions about the relationship between the novel and the nation.¹¹³ As such it offers a fresh perspective on the construction of the Saudi novel that has broader implications for the Arabic novel in general.

1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

Since the thesis follows two separate – albeit complementary – lines of investigation, that is, the novel and writings on the novel, it necessarily draws on a variety of sources, ranging from works of narrative fiction to extensive archival material from the Saudi periodical press. The material is organised into five chapters. Chapter Two

¹⁰⁹ Omri, 'Local Narrative Form', 254.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 246.

¹¹¹ The *riḥla* (lit. 'journey') genre of classical Arabic literature is a form of creative travelogue. The most famous example belongs to the 14th century Moroccan traveller, Ibn Baṭṭūta (1304-1369): *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī gharā'ib al-amṣār wa-'ajā'ib al-asfār* (A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling).

¹¹² Omri, 'Local Narrative Form', 246.

¹¹³ Ibid., 246.

provides a historical overview of the establishment of Saudi Arabia. It documents, in some detail, the history of state education and the periodical press, both prior to the establishment of the Kingdom and during the first decades of Saudi rule. A thorough appreciation of these developments is crucial to the arguments made in the remaining chapters and provides vital context.

Against this background, Chapter Three charts the emergence of extended prose fiction in Saudi Arabia, from early didactic narratives, through to the ‘artistic novel’. The close and comparative reading of several key texts locates them firmly within the social and cultural conditions attending their production, so as to counter the oversimplifying and erroneous perception of such works as flawed attempts at the novel. The chapter also explores the various ways in which these narratives reflect the ambivalence of the nation space.

Chapter Four continues with close reading as the main method of analysis, however, it highlights the genderedness of the nation through an exploration of female subjectivity in the novel, and the implications of this for the link between the novel and the nation. Although the works of the pioneering Saudi women novelists, Samīra Khāshuqjī and Hudā al-Rashīd (b. 1949), form the main focus, a general overview of Arab women’s novel writing is provided alongside a more specific account of Saudi women’s writing, since it is argued that these novelists and their work need to be understood within a transnational literary tradition centred in Egypt and the Levant.

The fifth and final chapter looks at the emergence of literary criticism and the discourse on the novel, beginning with articles and letters published in the early periodical press, through to later and more recent commentary from critics, most notably al-Ḥāzimī. Since the literary figures of the *nahḍa* were a major point of reference for the young writers of the emerging Hijazi scene, these developments are considered against this wider backdrop.

Chapter Five also explores sites of contestation within the canonisation process and what they reveal about the nature of literary canons and their relationship to the

nation, following Elsadda's contention that 'literary canons are invariably linked to ideas of nationhood'.¹¹⁴ It examines the process through which *al-Taw'amān* was canonised as the first Saudi novel, while Damanhūrī's *Thaman al-taḍhīya* is simultaneously held as 'the first artistic Saudi novel'. Drawing on Elliott Colla's article, 'How *Zaynab* Became the First Arabic Novel', I argue that *al-Taw'amān* has attained its status through what Colla terms 'secondary moments of literary production'.¹¹⁵ Leading on from this, I look at how the novels of Khāshuqjī, as the first Saudi woman novelist, have effectively been excluded from the canon. Finally, the chapter closes with a reflection on the ambiguous position of two Arab authors in relation to the canon, Muḥammad Ḥūḥū and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf, as compelling cases for a liminality that reveals the limitations of traditional categories of the Arabic novel.

¹¹⁴ Elsadda, *Gender*, xx.

¹¹⁵ Elliot Colla, 'How *Zaynab* Became the First Arabic Novel', *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (December 2008).

CHAPTER TWO

Hijaz and the Saudi State: Early Developments in Education and the Press

2.1 Introduction

Much has been written on the pivotal role played by the periodical press in the emergence of the Arabic novel and short story. Hafez writes:

Journalism was the first of the new discourses to develop in the Arab world and within it a host of other discourses appeared. It accelerated the cultural transition and played a significant role in the composition of both the new reading public and the narrative discourse which first emerged.¹

But the question of how the periodical press figured in the development of narrative discourse is made especially pertinent in the Saudi case by the fact that the early ‘Saudi’ literary scene and the periodical press were almost exclusively a Hijazi phenomenon, which, moreover, has its roots in the pre-Saudi era. The same can be said of education, which was vital in raising literacy and awareness of cultural developments outside the country.

Against the historical backdrop of the Saudi conquest of Hijaz and the Najdi/Hijazi cultural divide, this chapter offers an account of developments in education and the periodical press in Hijaz from the late Ottoman period through to the 1950s. In doing so, it aims to shed serious light on an otherwise neglected area, since accounts of the Saudi novel often provide only a perfunctory overview of these factors, while pre-Saudi contributions are often downplayed in order to valorise later achievements under Ibn Sa‘ūd’s rule.² This is followed by a brief overview of the introduction of television and radio in the Kingdom, which, it is argued, is likely to have been a far more significant factor in enabling the Saudi imagined community than Anderson’s print capital.

¹ Hafez, *Genesis*, 82.

² For example, see al-Qahtani, ‘Novel in Saudi Arabia’, 14.

2.2 The Saudi Conquest of Hijaz and the Founding of the Third Saudi State: 1924-32

Ibn Sa‘ūd (1876-1953) began his campaign in Hijaz on 29 August 1924, when he ordered his forces to march on Ta‘if. The city fell quickly after the commander of its five-hundred strong garrison made the disastrous decision to abandon its defences and march out to meet Ibn Sa‘ūd’s army.³ On 13 October that same year, Mecca fell without struggle, and less than two months later, on 5 December, Ibn Sa‘ūd made his triumphant entry into the city. As the birthplace of the Prophet Muḥammad and home of Islam’s holiest shrine, the Ka‘aba, Mecca’s conquest was as much a symbolic victory as it was a military one. Little over a year later, on 12 December 1925, Medina surrendered, placing Hijaz’s two most important cities under Saudi rule. The port city of Yanbu fell twelve days later and with the surrender of Jeddah on 17 December the Saudi conquest of Hijaz was complete. Over the course of the next seven years, Ibn Sa‘ūd would consolidate his rule before announcing the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 18 September 1932.⁴

Prior to the Saudi conquest, Hijaz had been under Hashemite rule since 1916, when Sharīf Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (1853-1931) led the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Even before the Saudi occupation of Hijaz, serious cracks had begun to show in Ḥusayn’s rule. Ultimately, it was a combination of internal and external factors that led to the destabilisation of the Hashemite regime and its eventual collapse. Among the most detrimental of these was Britain’s drastic reduction of its subsidies to Ḥusayn from the early 1920s onwards. Hashemite largesse was replaced by austerity. Without British finance, Ḥusayn was no longer in a position to pay local tribes the generous subventions to which they had become accustomed. The situation was made worse when Ḥusayn attempted to make up for the shortfall by raising taxes on the tribes, whose resulting unrest he met with increasingly oppressive measures.⁵ Higher taxes on trade were equally unpopular with Hijaz’s mercantile class. In 1920 a merchants’ revolt broke out and a number of high-ranking officials resigned in

³ Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia, 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 66.

⁴ This marked the beginning of the Third Saudi State. The First and Second Saudi States existed between 1745-1811 and 1843-65 respectively.

⁵ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 64.

protest.⁶ The cumulative effect of all this was the loss of internal support for Hashemite rule within Hijaz.

As Saudi power grew in Najd, tensions between Ibn Sa‘ūd and Ḥusayn increased. By 1923 Ibn Sa‘ūd had begun to seriously consider occupying Hijaz.⁷ The failure of the Kuwait Conference – held early the following year – to resolve the Najdi/Hijazi border dispute, provided him with a *casus belli*.⁸ Britain’s implementation of its earlier decision to end subventions to the Arabian chiefs in the wake of the Conference was also a critical factor in Ibn Sa‘ūd’s decision to move against Hijaz. The policy had helped keep Saudi ambitions in check, but now there was more to gain than to lose by attacking Hijaz.⁹ The Saudis were desperate for funds and the wealth brought to Hijaz by the annual pilgrimage must have been particularly enticing.¹⁰

Several ill-considered decisions by Ḥusayn served to further undermine his authority. In March 1924 he proclaimed himself Caliph. This move was poorly received in the Muslim world and was heavily criticised by Egypt and the Khalifat movement in India, with whom relations were already strained owing to the alleged mistreatment of Indian and Egyptian pilgrims.¹¹ Ḥusayn’s self-proclamation also had severe repercussions for his relations with the British, since they feared losing their influence over Hijaz.¹² His decision to prevent Najdi pilgrims from entering Hijaz gave further legitimacy to Ibn Sa‘ūd’s cause in the eyes of the wider Muslim world.¹³ The rhetoric between King Ḥusayn and Ibn Sa‘ūd became increasingly bellicose and conflict seemed inevitable. On 30 September that same year, the British informed Ḥusayn that they would not be answering his request for aid. As security in Hijaz deteriorated, a group of Meccan notables pressured Ḥusayn to abdicate in favour of

⁶ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 64.

⁷ Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 11.

⁸ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 65.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-6.

¹⁰ Al-Jabbār, ‘al-Tayyārāt al-adabiyya al-ḥadītha fī qalb al-Jazīra al-‘Arabiyya’, in *al-Majmū‘a al-kāmila li-l-mufakkir wa-l-adīb al-nāqid al-ustādh ‘Abd Allah ‘Abd al-Jabbār* (Riyadh: Dār al-Furqān, 2008), 1: 97.

¹¹ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 66.

¹² Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 12.

¹³ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 66.

his son, ‘Alī, who was proclaimed King of Hijaz on 6 October 1924.¹⁴ They hoped that by placing ‘Alī in his father’s role they would placate Ibn Sa‘ūd and avoid having to live under the notoriously puritan Najdi creed. However, King ‘Alī’s reign was short-lived. He abdicated on 19 December 1924 and fled to Iraq a few days later.¹⁵

By early 1926 Ibn Sa‘ūd had secured internal and international recognition. On 8 January the same year the notables of Hijaz pledged their allegiance to Ibn Sa‘ūd, who was proclaimed King of Hijaz and Sultan of Najd.¹⁶ Over the following months, Great Britain, the USSR, France and the Netherlands recognised Saudi rule.¹⁷

Although Hijaz was now firmly under Saudi control, major challenges remained. The Ikhwan tribesmen,¹⁸ who had proved such a fierce force in Ibn Sa‘ūd’s early campaigns and occupation of Hijaz, came to threaten his authority so that ‘by March, 1929 the Ikhwan opposition front had become a formidable challenge for Ibn Sa‘ūd’.¹⁹ The relationship between Ibn Sa‘ūd and the Ikhwan was a complex one. While their religious zeal had been a major driving force of the Wahhabi movement, their calls to ‘purify’ Hijaz caused increased tensions between Ibn Sa‘ūd and the local population and also risked damaging relations with other Muslim states and European powers. Fearing a loss of autonomy, the Ikhwan opposed Ibn Sa‘ūd’s centralising policies. When it became clear that he would not implement their more extreme demands, such as the conversion of al-Hasa’s Shi‘a minority on pain of death and the expulsion of the Christians from Hijaz, they focused their political ambitions on Najd – their traditional heartland – which they wanted to keep separate from Hijaz.²⁰

¹⁴ Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-9.

¹⁶ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 104.

¹⁷ Madawi al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44.

¹⁸ The Ikhwan were a Wahhabi militia made up of mainly nomadic tribesmen from Najd. They were renowned for their religious fervor and are generally credited with having played a decisive role in Ibn Sa‘ūd’s military campaigns, although more recently their importance in this regard has been disputed. See David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2009), 81.

¹⁹ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 134. ,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 103-34.

The tensions between Ibn Sa‘ūd and the Ikhwan were also a product of the cultural divide between Najd and Hijaz. Following its absorption into Saudi territory, Ibn Sa‘ūd devoted most of his time and efforts to Hijaz. For the Najdi Ikhwan tribesmen he became tainted by what they saw as Hijaz’s heathen, foreign influence. Ibn Sa‘ūd’s dealings with the colonial powers reinforced the Ikhwan’s concerns that he had ceased to be one of them.²¹

In December 1928 the Ikhwan rebelled against Ibn Sa‘ūd’s government. The revolt culminated in the Battle of Sibila on 29 March 1929 in which the Ikhwan were defeated by superiorly armed Saudi forces. The remaining recalcitrant Ikhwan eventually surrendered to British forces in January 1930. The British delivered three of the revolt’s leaders, Fayṣal al-Dāwīsh and Ibn Lāmī and Ibn Ḥithlayn, to Ibn Sa‘ūd on 28 January 1930. They later died in captivity in Riyadh.²²

With the last remaining internal threat to his leadership removed, Ibn Sa‘ūd could now focus his energies on state building. Although the unification of Saudi Arabia was announced in 1932, consolidation of the new state would require the creation of new institutions and the adoption of existing ones. This process was complicated by the fact that a considerable gulf existed between the country’s two biggest provinces, Hijaz and Najd. As Kostiner puts it:

Although the incorporation of the Hijaz into the Saudi realm reinforced the new central government, there was clearly no real integration between the populations of the two regions. Total unification was, in fact, impossible at this stage, given the great differences between the two provinces.²³

These differences were profound. Najd was mainly inhabited by nomadic or semi-nomadic Bedouin who depended on a mixture of trade, looting and pastoralism for their survival. Some tribesmen lived a sedentary existence in the towns and villages, usually as farmers and merchants. A smaller component of the sedentary population was made up of Arabs who were not affiliated with any of the tribes and tended to

²¹ Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*, 109.

²² *Ibid.*, 140.

²³ *Ibid.*, 109.

occupy traditional trades.²⁴ Najd's only major city was Riyadh, which before unification was relatively small, 'not more than 1 km' according to Yasser Elsheshtawy,² who also notes that the city 'remained free of any major modernization and was considered traditional and very conservative'.²⁵ On the other hand, Hijaz's pre-eminence and international importance as the site of Islam's two holy cities, Mecca and Medina; the annual pilgrimage from which it profited immensely; its proximity to the coast which favoured commerce and contact with the outside world; and finally, its history as an Ottoman province, all served to lend it a relatively cosmopolitan character with a well developed urban centre.

Even after Najdi families began to migrate to Hijaz in large numbers following the establishment of Saudi Arabia, the two groups retained their distinct identities. Hijazis referred to themselves as *ahl al-balad* (lit. 'people of the country'), while referring to the Najdi immigrants as *shurūq* ('people from the East'). This distinction was based less on geographical differences and more on the cultural differences between the urban Hijazis and the Bedouin/tribal Najdis.²⁶ This is described by Aziza al-Essa:

Unlike the other ethnic groups who settled in Hijaz, Najdis maintained a separate identity. Except for a few known families, the majority of them have led a conservative way of life and, therefore, have not assimilated into the more open Hijazi community. Most of the early immigrant families used to huddle in certain neighbourhoods and they exerted little effort to socially explore their new home. Their contact with the Hijazi locals was limited to formal encounters in the marketplace, workplace and schools. The conservative Najdi community also imposed restrictive rules of socialization on girls, thus restricting socialization outside the family boundary. Most importantly, the assimilation of Najdis into the Hijazi community is hindered by the fact that they traditionally observe strict marriage laws that disfavour intermarriage with non-Najdis including urban Hijazis. Although one may witness instances of such intermarriages, they are generally frowned upon.²⁷

²⁴Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 1.

²⁵ Y. Elsheshtawy, ed., *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity and Urban Development* (London: Routledge, 2008), 122.

²⁶ Aziza al-Essa, 'When Najd meets Hijaz: Dialect Contact in Jeddah', in Enam al-Wer and Rudolf de Jong, eds. *Arabic Dialectology* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 205.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

The social and cultural disparity between Hijaz and Najd is significant in that it partly accounts for why literary developments took some time to spread beyond Hijaz to Najd and the rest of the kingdom, and why – even some decades after unification – many writers continued to conceive of themselves as working within a Hijazi, rather than a Saudi tradition.

Histories of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have tended to gloss over the disparity and lack of integration between Najd and Hijaz. Despite this, Jörg Matthias Determann has observed the ‘narrative plurality’ that characterises early historiography in Saudi Arabia. Determann describes two currents in the literature: ‘particularistic local histories’, i.e. those histories that limit themselves to a particular province, town, or tribe, and ‘exclusivist dynastic histories’.²⁸ Crucially, both ‘had an important element in common: the relative absence of references to a Saudi nation’, and ‘the Hejaz remained the only region in which histories presented the past in the framework of an independent “nation”’.²⁹

However, from the 1960s, a time when ‘almost every segment of the nation’ began to feel the state’s presence,³⁰ ‘dynastic histories underwent a profound development of narratives... they gradually developed features of a Saudi national historiography’.³¹ According to the new paradigm, Ibn Sa‘ūd was portrayed as the founder of the modern Saudi nation and the architect of its ‘modern renaissance’ (*nahḍa*).³² This played into ‘concepts of historical development that had become dominant in the wider Middle East’.³³ In the monumental work, *Shibh al-jazīra fī ‘ahd al-mālik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz* (Arabia Under King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, 1970), Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī (1893-1976) even identifies the pre-‘Abd al-‘Azīz period with the so-called age of

²⁸ Jörg Matthias Determann, *Historiography in Saudi Arabia: Globalization and the State in the Middle East* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 99.

²⁹ See for example, Muḥammad Šālīḥ Naṣīf’s *Māḍī al-Hijāz wa-hāḍiruhu* (Past and Present of Hijaz, 1930), cited by Determann (*Historiography in Saudi Arabia*, 66). Determann also identifies al-Anṣārī’s *al-Manhal* magazine as a forum for local Hijazi history (Ibid., 99; 66-70).

³⁰ Determann, *Historiography in Saudi Arabia*, 102.

³¹ Ibid., 137.

³² Ibid., 44.

³³ Ibid., 44.

ignorance or *Jāhiliyya*.³⁴ The effects of this ‘nationalisation’ of Saudi history are not limited to dynastic or national histories, but are also apparent in literary histories too, notably in the neglect or dismissal of pre-Saudi developments in Hijaz.

A good example of how the Ibn Sa‘ūd as founder of the nation/renaissance paradigm has shaped literacy histories and cultural histories of the Kingdom can be found in al-Ghadhdhāmī’s tracing of the history of modernity in Saudi Arabia. Presumably in order to strengthen his argument for the legitimacy of modernity in the eyes of his readers, al-Ghadhdhāmī goes to some lengths in order to tie Ibn Sa‘ūd’s rule to the beginnings of modernity in the Kingdom. He describes 1924 as ‘the year of the establishment of national Saudi unity’, a claim that is clearly at odds with historical fact and the challenges of integrating the provinces into a cohesive, centrally administered state.³⁵ In fact, as Determann observes ‘the expression of Hijazi nationalism was helped by the fact that the Saudi government finally unified the dual Kingdom of the Hejaz and Najd only in 1932. Hence the Hejaz as a legal entity continued to exist for eight years after the Saudi conquest of Mecca in 1924’, even if the regime ‘gradually suppressed this form of regionalism in order to consolidate its own possessions’.³⁶

Al-Ghadhdhāmī’s highly questionable attribution of literary developments in Hijaz during the 1920s to the Saudi conquest is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Five. Suffice to remark here that, in his depiction of this transitional period, he fails to differentiate between Hijaz and the rest of the Kingdom, particularly in his portrayal of a country marked by illiteracy and cut off from developments in the wider Arab world:

Books were few because of the prevalence of illiteracy and the scarcity of schools. Those who we call writers, the first generation who received their education in traditional systems, were not exposed to other cultures and did

³⁴ Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Shibh al-Jazīra fī ‘ahd al-mālik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 3 vols (Beirut: Maṭābi‘ Dār al-Qalam, 1970), 1: 31, 108. Cited in Determann, *Historiography in Saudi Arabia*, 50.

³⁵ Al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Hikāyat al-hadātha*, 50.

³⁶ Determann, *Historiography in Saudi Arabia*, 68.

not know other languages. In fact, it was a rare and wondrous thing for them to hold Arabic books or magazines in their hands.³⁷

Had al-Ghadhdhāmī taken into account the uniqueness of the situation in Hijaz, he might have been better placed to answer his own question: ‘What happened to the early modernising, cultural consciousness?’³⁸ The following will highlight how Hijaz had already become host to a fledgling literary scene and key institutions associated with the modern state prior to the Saudi conquest.

2.3 Education in the Late Ottoman and Hashemite Periods

With the effective annexation of Mecca in 1925, Ibn Sa‘ūd extended his authority over an urban centre that was markedly more developed than the towns and cities of Najd. In stark contrast to Najd where education was extremely limited and literacy low, Hijaz boasted schools, printing presses and newspapers.³⁹ Almost immediately the new regime began efforts to build on Hijaz’s education system, creating the Directorate of Education in 1926.⁴⁰

However, the first attempts to modernise education in the Hijaz had been made during the late Ottoman era. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, education consisted mainly of private Qur’an schools (*katātīb*, sg. *kuttāb*) and theological schools (*madāris dīniyya*).⁴¹ In 1869 the Ottoman government began a programme of drastic reform. The Ottoman Law for the Regulation of Public and Private Institutions (*Ma‘arif Umumiye Nizamnamesi*), issued 1 September that year, introduced a raft of provisions aimed at instituting a system of state education closely

³⁷ Al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Hikāyat al-ḥadātha*, 64.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁹ After the collapse of the Saudi state in central Arabia towards the end of the nineteenth century, even traditional Islamic education was neglected. Negative attitudes towards formal education helped to perpetuate the situation. This only began to change with the emergence of the Ikhwan movement, which encouraged the reading of Qur’an. See Vassiliev, *History*, ch. 13.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad Abdullah Saleh, ‘Development of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia’, *Higher Education* 15 (1986), 19.

⁴¹ Muḥammad al-Shāmikh, *Al-Ta‘līm fī Makka wa-l-Madīna, ākhir ‘ahd al-‘uthmānī*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Ulūm, 1982), 27.

based on the three-tier European model.⁴² The 1869 law also made provision for the setting up of Education Councils (*majālis al-ma'ārif*) in the provinces that would oversee the schools.⁴³

Although the new law was applicable to all provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the reality was that a project of such ambitious scope would prove difficult to realise, especially given the size of the Empire and other issues. This was certainly the case in Hijaz where 'the application of the Law was... very gradual and then only partial'.⁴⁴

The earliest statistics for education in Mecca, published in the province's official almanac, *Hijaz walayati salnama si*, show that attendance of the higher primary schools was low.⁴⁵ Between 1885 and 1891, the number of pupils enrolled at Mecca's higher primary school ranged between sixty and seventy depending on the year.⁴⁶ A later article published in *Hijāz* newspaper in 1909, lists the subjects studied at the same school. The focus seems to have been mainly on traditional religious subjects and Turkish language, although students also studied history, geography, French and physical education.⁴⁷

The state of education in Hijaz at this time reflects the general malaise that had beset educational and cultural establishments throughout the Arab dominions of the Ottoman Empire. The situation changed following The Young Turk Revolution of 1908. The revolution, which represents a watershed moment in the late history of the

⁴² Primary education was to be taught at to three levels: nursery (*ṣubḡāniyya*), lower primary (*ibtidā'iyya*) and higher primary (*rushdiyya*). Secondary education comprised two grades: lower secondary (*'idādiyya*) and higher secondary (*ṣulḡāniyya*). Above this sat the so-called 'higher' (*'aliyya*) schools, which included teacher-training colleges. Higher education was provided by the *Dār al-Funūn* (The House of Arts). Al-Shāmikh, *Al-Ta'īm*, 63.

⁴³ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 74. The first Turkish state school established in Hijaz was Jeddah's Rushdiyya school, which opened its doors in 1874. Another was established in Medina, two years later in 1876. Surprisingly, given Mecca's status as the provincial capital, it was not until as late as 1885 that a higher primary school was opened there.

⁴⁵ For more on the almanac see pages 53-4.

⁴⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta'īm*, 27-9. Hijaz's first lower primary school was founded in Medina in 1908, where a teachers' training college (*Dār al-Mu'allimīn*) was also opened the following year. In Mecca, a lower primary and a technical school were opened in 1910. Over the next two years a number of lower elementary schools were opened in Jeddah and Ta'if.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

Ottoman Empire, had far-reaching consequences for all areas of life throughout the provinces. The Young Turks reversed Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II’s suspension of the 1876 Constitution and the Ottoman parliament, ushering in the Second Constitutional Era.

The effects of the Revolution were felt almost immediately in Hijaz, which saw the beginning of a new phase in its administrative life, with the Young Turks, who became officially known as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), replacing the Meccan Emir, ‘Alī ‘Abd Allah Pasha (r. 1905-8) with Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī – a decision it would later come to regret. As will be seen in due course, the revolution sowed the seeds for Hijaz’s modern press. More relevantly here, however, ‘a new burst of activity’ saw the founding of schools throughout Hijaz, in the cities of Jeddah, Mecca and Ta’if.⁴⁸

In the wake of the Young Turk Revolution, the Ministry of Education in Istanbul announced its decision to form a Council of Education in Hijaz, to be headed by Fayḍī Afandī, who had previously directed the lower secondary school in Sana’a. Shortly after this, a Director of Education, ‘Abd al-Qādir Tawfīq al-Shalabī, was appointed, and on 17 November 1910, an Inspector of Education, Khulūsī Afandī Aḥmad, was attached to Hijaz’s Council of Education.⁴⁹

Early reports in the province’s official newspaper, the eponymous *Hijaz*, which was founded in 1908, show that education had become a priority for Hijaz’s administration. Issue 14, dated 5 February 1909, reports that the governor of Hijaz had formed a commission to assess the province’s educational needs. The commission was headed by the Permanent Secretary of the Province, Maktūbī al-Walā. Its other members included Amīn Afandī, the Director of the Great Mosque, Fādī Afandī, Head of the Department of Education and a number of other notables. The same report notes that the commission had begun searching for a space large

⁴⁸ Dohaish, ‘A Critical and Comparative Study of the History of Education in the Hijaz During the Periods of Ottoman and Sharifian Rule between 1869-1925’ (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1974), 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-9.

enough to accommodate a combined lower primary, upper primary and lower secondary school in Mecca, and that it was also in discussions over the establishment of a technical school. A follow-up report in a subsequent issue mentions the formation of a Board of Education in Mecca and its decision to open four lower primary schools, which would take two students from each of the neighbouring tribes, with a projected annual intake of one hundred students. It had also decided to open a night school that would teach 'religious sciences and civil information free of charge'.⁵⁰

In spite of these developments, state provision for education remained inadequate during the late Ottoman period. A serious criticism of the Ottoman schools was that Turkish 'remained the exclusive vehicle of instruction and that Arabic text-books were not used'.⁵¹ According to the same source, even after the law of 1913,⁵² Arabic was taught imperfectly.⁵³ Additionally, it seems almost all the teachers were Turks. The local Arab population was both alienated by the Turkish schools and highly suspicious of the motivations behind them:

The general public did not attend them because they feared that the Turks' aim in establishing the schools was to Turkify the Arabs, and also because they were afraid that it was a ploy to enlist their sons in the army.⁵⁴

As a result most Arab families kept their sons out of the schools, especially since attendance was non-compulsory. In the case of Mecca's higher primary school, its pupils were mainly the sons of Turkish civil servants or families connected to the Ottoman Government.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta'īm*, 33-4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 116.

⁵² The law included a number of far-reaching reforms including the use of Arabic in schools as the language of instruction.

⁵³ Al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta'īm*, 116.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 31.

The Hashemite Period

Education in Hijaz saw ‘a limited renaissance’ during the Hashemite era.⁵⁶ More schools were built and the number of students increased, although education was more or less limited to the main towns.⁵⁷ The key development under the Hashemite rule was the substitution of Turkish for Arabic as the language of instruction.

Ḥusayn formed a Ministry of Education shortly after taking power in 1916. The Ministry was headed by his son, ‘Alī and its staff included the Syrian Muslim reformist sheikh, Kāmil Aḥmad al-Qaṣṣāb (1853-1954), who acted as Assistant Deputy Minister of Education. Ḥusayn also formed an educational committee comprising several scholars who taught at the Great Mosque.⁵⁸ Under Hashemite rule, education in Hijaz was divided into three stages: elementary (*tahḍīriyya*), intermediate (*rāqīyya*) and secondary (*‘aliyya*). Students were taught basic literacy and numeracy at the elementary schools over a period of two years, during which they were given an introduction to traditional religious subjects, such as Qur’an recitation and Islamic law.⁵⁹

There were four intermediate schools, which offered a four-year course and taught Qur’an and Qur’anic recitation, theology, Islamic law, Arabic reading, dictation, arithmetic, calligraphy, geometry and science.⁶⁰ However, there was only one state secondary school in Hijaz during the Hashemite period, which opened in Mecca in 1917. It offered a three-year course and was housed in the same building as the intermediate school.⁶¹ The syllabus was later expanded to resemble the intermediate grade followed in the private Falāḥ schools: Qur’an commentary, theology, Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, syntax and morphology, rhetoric, pre-Islamic poetry, composition, book keeping, and hadith. The traditional nature of the subjects taught at the government schools is indicative of the Arab nationalist movement’s drive to

⁵⁶ Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 13.

⁵⁷ Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 279.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 229-30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 243-4.

⁶⁰ One in Mecca, Jeddah and Ta’if, all founded in 1917, then a fourth in Medina in 1919. *Ibid.*, 248.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 249-52.

revive the Arabic language as well as its emphasis on religion.

Private Schools

Towards the end of the Ottoman period, a movement towards the establishment of private schools began.⁶² In part, this stemmed from a general belief that Hijaz needed to catch up with developments in Egypt and Syria.⁶³ But much of the momentum came as a reaction to Ottoman efforts in the field. Dohaish claims that the trend for private schools was ‘a direct result of the opening of the Turkish state schools’.⁶⁴ The Arab population held a deep distrust for the Ottoman schools and resented the use of Turkish. Additionally, a need was felt to balance new subjects and approaches with a more traditional, religiously grounded curriculum.⁶⁵ The result of this, and the largely ineffectual measures taken by Ḥusayn to reform the education system was that most children during the late Ottoman and Hashemite periods received their education from private (*ahlī*) schools, the most important of which were the Ṣawlatiyya and the Falāḥ schools.

The Ṣawlatiyya School

The Ṣawlatiyya School was founded by the Indian, Shaykh Muḥammad Raḥmat Allah al-‘Uthmānī (d. 1891/92) in 1875.⁶⁶ The school was free of charge, relying on donations mainly from Muslim Indians. The number of students enrolled during the time of its founder is said to have been around 150-200. They were taught by a staff

⁶² Mecca’s first private school, the Ṣawlatiyya (al-Madrasa al-Ṣawlatiyya), was opened in 1875. It was followed by the Fakhriyya ‘Uthmāniyya School (1879), the Islāmiyya School (1886), the Khayriyya school (1908), and the Falāḥ School (1912). By 1884, there were four private schools in Jeddah and seventeen in Medina. Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 147-8.

⁶³ ‘Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *Tarīkh madīnat Jidda* (N.p.: n.p., 1963), 152.

⁶⁴ Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 146.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁶ Al-‘Uthmānī first arrived in Mecca in 1857 and used to teach children in a corner of the Great Mosque. His classes grew larger and he eventually set up a small *Kuttāb* in an apartment in Mecca’s Shāmiyya district and enlisted several Meccan teachers. A wealthy Indian philanthropist, Sawlat al-Nisa Begum, learnt of the school while she was in Mecca for the annual pilgrimage. Impressed by Al-‘Uthmānī’s efforts, she made a generous donation for the construction of a new school. The school was completed in 1875 and named the Ṣawlatiyya after its benefactor. Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 150; Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī, *Tarīkh Makka*, 4th ed., (Mecca: Dār Makka, 1978), 2: 202.

of ten teachers.⁶⁷ Numbers increased significantly over the years. According to the school's annual report of 1913, the number of students enrolled was 518: 186 of these were native Hijazis, 108 Indians and 156 Indonesians. The remainder included Bukharis, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Yemenis and Hadramis.⁶⁸ The diversity of the school's student body is worth noting here as it underlines the diversity of Hijaz's Muslim population and Islamic practice, distinguishing it from Najd.

Over the years the Ṣawlatiyya school curriculum underwent various changes. According to a document published by the school's administration in 1962/3 and cited by al-Shāmikh, between 1901 and 1926, the school provided a fourteen-year programme which was divided into four grades.⁶⁹ Subjects taught at the Ṣawlatiyya were mostly traditional and included: Qur'an recitation, memorisation and exegesis, hadith, Islamic law, Islamic history, rhetoric, grammar, logic, literature, arithmetic, engineering, writing and dictation. In 1912/13, the school announced its intention to add modern subjects to its curriculum: 'The school's board of directors and headmaster will make every effort to increase its standing and institute reforms in its teaching system, and make it an excellent educational establishment in which all arts and sciences are studied'.⁷⁰

The Falāḥ schools

The two Falāḥ schools founded in Jeddah and Mecca, in 1905 and 1912 respectively, by the philanthropist, Muḥammad 'Alī Zaynal Riḍā, towards the end of the Ottoman era represent a turning point in the history of education in the Hijaz. Al-Shāmikh describes Zaynal's initiative as 'perhaps the most important event in the history of education in the Hijaz during the early twentieth century'.⁷¹ Although this appraisal may seem hyperbolic, it is not without some justification. Many of those who studied at the Falāḥ schools went on to figure prominently in Hijaz's cultural and

⁶⁷ Al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta'īim*, 40.

⁶⁸ These were primary (*taḥdīrī*) (4 years), intermediate (*ibtidā'ī*) (4 years), secondary (*thānawī*) (4 years), and higher (*'aliyya*) (2 years). Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 154.

⁶⁹ Al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta'īim*, 40.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

administrative life during the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, according to Hāfiẓ Wahba (1889-1967) who served as Saudi Minister of Education in the 1930s, ‘nearly all educated young Hijazis went to school there’.⁷²

The first of the two schools opened on 7th December 1905 and was originally based at the home of one of Zaynal’s cousins, before it moved to its own building.⁷³ During the school’s first ten years, between 1905 and 1916, the curriculum was taught at three grades, each over a three-year period.⁷⁴ Like the Ṣawlatiyya and other private schools in Hijaz during this time, the Falāḥ schools taught mainly traditional subjects. When the school opened in 1905 there were just twenty-five students, however, by 1916 this had reached 300.⁷⁵

Encouraged by the success of the school in Jeddah, Zaynal founded a second Falāḥ School in Mecca in 1912. The school, which followed the same curriculum as the first, proved popular and during the first year alone 247 students were in attendance.⁷⁶ The Falāḥ schools relied principally on contributions from wealthy merchants and other benefactors, however they were not free of charge and students were expected to make monthly payments according to their means.⁷⁷

The developments in education discussed so far took place in the pre-Saudi period, from the late Ottoman period through to the Hashemite era. Despite early Ottoman efforts to reform education in Hijaz, provision was poor. Because teaching at the Ottoman schools was primarily in Turkish, the already discontent Arab population was further alienated with the result that these schools were mainly attended by the children of Ottoman government administrators. More successful were the private schools that were established largely in reaction to the Ottoman efforts, and as such are evidence of an incipient nationalism among the Arab population, which had a

⁷² Ulrike Freitag, ‘The Falah School in Jeddah: Civic Engagement for Future Generations?’, *Jadaliyya* (6 May 2015), accessed 14 May 2015, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21430/the-falah-school-in-jeddah_civic-engagement-for-fun.

⁷³ Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 163.

⁷⁴ These were elementary (*taḥdīrī*) (3 years), intermediate (*ibtidā’ī*) (3 years), and secondary (*rushdiyya*) (3 years).

⁷⁵ Dohaish, *Critical and Comparative Study*, 164; al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta’līm*, 56.

⁷⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *al-Ta’līm*, 160.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, *al-Ta’līm*, 57.

significant influence on Hijaz's first generation of writers and intellectuals who came of age in the 1920s and early 1930s. The success of these private schools also counters the claim that Hijaz remained undeveloped prior Saudi rule.

2.4 Education During the Saudi Era

Early State Provision

Ibn Sa'ūd founded the Directorate of Education in 1926. It remained under the Ministry of the Interior until it was made an independent ministry in 1953. The Directorate largely adopted the Egyptian model of education, although this was modified in 1932 and again in 1935, when it was given a stronger religious focus, presumably under pressure from the Wahhabi 'ulama'. The Ministry brought in many teachers from Egypt, as well as Syria.⁷⁸

In the same year the Directorate was founded, a dozen private and state schools opened across Riyadh. During these early years, spending on schools almost quadrupled from £6,000 in 1928/29 to £23,000 in 1929/30, reflecting the kingdom's prioritisation of education as one of the modern nation-state's vital institutions. Growth continued into the 1930s, with more schools established in Riyadh, the major towns of Hijaz and farther afield.⁷⁹ However, although education was a priority for the new Saudi state, even as late as the 1950s, illiteracy remained at around ninety-five per cent.⁸⁰ The progress of education was hindered by the attitudes of the conservative 'ulama' 'who exerted a rigid control over the directorate of education', as well as the financial difficulties experienced by the kingdom during the global recession of the 1930s.⁸¹

Despite resistance from the 'ulama', subjects taught at the new schools included

⁷⁸ Saleh Abdulkareem, *Education development in Saudi Arabia*, N.p.: n.p., n.d., accessed April 2013, <http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/25384/default.aspx>.

⁷⁹ Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 13.

⁸⁰ Morderchai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Society, Government and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15.

⁸¹ Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 13.

geography, foreign languages and technical drawing. Yet the 'ulama' continued to exert considerable influence over the Directorate of Education, with religious studies constituting around seventy-nine per cent of weekly lessons in the primary schools, and twenty-five per cent in the final year of secular secondary schools.⁸² The situation does not seem to have changed during the Fayṣal era (1962-1975) which saw the introduction of girls' education and a considerable expansion of state education. By this time the 'ulama' practically controlled the Ministry of Education and mandatory Islamic classes accounted for two thirds of the Saudi school curriculum.⁸³

It is difficult to provide a clear picture of the growth of education from 1926 through to the 1950s, since there is no accurate data set for this period. Vassiliev cites al-Ziriklī, who puts the total number of pupils in Saudi Arabia in 1950 at 15,600, discounting St. John Philby's report of 1952 that there were 55,000 pupils in the Kingdom, since the latter was 'often inclined to exaggerate in his descriptions of Saudi Arabia'.⁸⁴ Abir puts the total at 33,000 in 1953, while Abdulkareem claims the number of pupils enrolled in the country's elementary schools alone was 21,409 by 1949.⁸⁵ The considerable disparity between the sources is indicative of how relatively under-researched this area is. The establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1953 provided further impetus for the development of education in the Kingdom. Under the new ministry, transport, textbooks and food were provided to students for free, and students from poorer families were given a monthly stipend.⁸⁶

The picture for secondary education is unclear. There was no secondary education in Saudi Arabia prior to 1937, when the Foreign Mission Preparatory School was founded in Mecca.⁸⁷ The school was established to prepare Saudi students for tertiary education in Egypt. The student missions were a crucial component of the early Saudi education system and are discussed in more detail below. By 1944 there were

⁸² Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 13.

⁸³ Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 16.

⁸⁴ Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 13.

⁸⁵ Abdulkareem, *Education development*, 10; Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 17.

⁸⁶ Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 13-14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

four secondary schools with 368 students between them. By 1962 this had reached eighteen and 2,770 respectively.⁸⁸ In the wake of Fayṣal's death in 1975, education in the country witnessed an unprecedented expansion so that by 1989, the total number of pupils in Saudi Arabia was around 2,650,000, of which 1,160,00 were girls.⁸⁹

Higher Education

Saudi Arabia's first institute of higher education, the College of Shari'a (Kulliyat al-Sharī'a), was established in Mecca in 1949.⁹⁰ This was followed with the opening of the Teachers' Training College in 1952. In the same year, the Grand Mufti opened a shari'a college in Riyadh in competition to the government college, which is strongly indicative of the tensions that existed between Ibn Sa'ūd and the 'ulama'. The colleges founded in Mecca later formed the nucleus of Umm al-Qurā University, established in 1980. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s higher education continued to grow at a steady rate, although much emphasis remained on religious studies. For example, the Islamic University in Medina was established in 1961 and intended to replace al-Azhar University as an international centre of Islamic learning following President Nāṣir's reorganisation of the Cairo institution in the same year. By 1982 there were seven universities in Saudi Arabia with 63,563 students and a combined teaching staff of 6,906.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Saleh, 'Development of Higher Education', 17.

⁸⁹ Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 17.

⁹⁰ The college opened with an enrollment of twenty-one students and a staff of nine. Saleh, 'Development of Higher Education', 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17. King Saud University (Riyadh University prior to 1980) was established in 1957. ARAMCO opened the Petroleum and Minerals College in 1963, and in 1975 it was made into a University. King Abdulaziz University opened in Jeddah in 1967. Originally a private institution, it was made a state institution in 1971. The Imam Muḥammad Bin Saud Islamic University was opened in Riyadh in 1974. The King Faisal University in Dammam in 1975, and Umm al-Qura University in 1981. King Saud University (Riyadh University prior to 1980) was established in 1957. ARAMCO opened the Petroleum and Minerals College in 1963, and in 1975 it was made into a University. Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 19.

Student Missions

One of the most interesting developments in education during the period in question is the early student missions. In the absence of any real provision for higher education within Saudi Arabia, the government began to fund young Saudis to study in Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Syrian, Lebanon and the US. The first educational mission was in 1929 when Ibn Sa'ūd sent fourteen students to study in Egypt. A similar number was sent in 1935 and, in 1943, a third mission of fifteen students was sent. In 1951, 169 students were sent to Egypt to train as teachers.⁹² During the 1950s, students were also sent to Lebanon, Germany and Switzerland, with nineteen students being sent to the United States in 1951.⁹³ Numbers continued to increase over the following decades so that by 1981 there were 11,921 Saudi scholarship students studying abroad.⁹⁴

The experiences of students sent abroad to study in the great cosmopolitan centre of Cairo and even farther afield were formative for the first generation and subsequent generations of Saudi writers. Damanhūrī's *Thaman al-taḍhīya*, which is discussed in Chapter Three, is certainly testament to this since it draws on the author's own experiences as a student in Cairo.

Female Education

The history of female education in Saudi Arabia is important both in understanding some of the main themes of the early Saudi novel, and in accounting for the history of Saudi women's writing. Historically, female education has been a highly controversial issue in Saudi Arabia and remains a site of contestation between conservative and progressive forces today. Resistance from the Kingdom's powerful 'ulama' and the conservative nature of Saudi society delayed the introduction of female education for decades.

⁹² Saleh, 'Development of Higher Education', 21; Abdulkareem, *Education development*, 11-12

⁹³ Abdulkareem, *Education Development*, 12; Vassiliev, *The History*, ch. 13.

⁹⁴ Saleh, 'Development of Higher Education', 21.

Before the introduction of formal state schooling, girls received a basic education in the Qur'an schools, which usually comprised Qur'anic recitation and memorisation, the sunna, hadith and prayer. Because the main emphasis was on memorisation, attendance at Qur'an school did not necessarily result in literacy, hence many illiterate men and women were able to recite the Qur'an. Girls were not usually educated beyond puberty, since this is when they were traditionally considered to have come of age and therefore were subject to strict seclusion.⁹⁵ However, some girls were taught at home by their parents or private tutors.⁹⁶ By the 1950s, a number of wealthy families had begun to send their daughters to boarding schools in Egypt and Lebanon. It is of little surprise, therefore, that the first generation of Saudi women writers was educated outside the country.⁹⁷ Indeed, both Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd received their educations in Egypt and Lebanon.⁹⁸

Ibn Sa'ūd is said to have been in favour of girls' education, though the evidence for this is a little tenuous, based solely on a conversation between Philby and Ibn Sa'ūd, in which the latter is reported to have declared 'it is permissible for women to read'.⁹⁹ In any case, given the formidable opposition Ibn Sa'ūd faced in modernising the country's education system, it would be reasonable to assume that the introduction of girls' education might have proved a step too far. Instead, it was not until the reign of Ibn Sa'ūd's successor, King Sa'ūd (r. 1964-75), that the first serious steps towards rectifying the situation were taken. This was largely the result of efforts made by Prince Fayṣal (1906-75), then prime minister, and particularly his wife, 'Iffat, who are both credited for their efforts to further the cause of girls' education in the Kingdom.¹⁰⁰ 'Iffat argued with religious scholars for girls' education

⁹⁵ Amani Hamdan, 'Women and Education in Saudi Arabia', *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 47.

⁹⁶ Al-Jawhara Bubshait, 'Saudi Women's Education: History, Reality and Challenges', in *Woman in Saudi Arabia: Cross Cultural Views*, ed. al-Jawhara Bubshait (Riyadh: Ghayna' li-l-Nashr, 2008), 20.

⁹⁷ Sadeka Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: the Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 33-4.

⁹⁸ 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā'iyya al-sa'ūdiyya wa-l-mutaghayyarāt al-thaqāfiyya: Al-Nasha'a wa-l-qadāyā wa-l-taṭawwūr* (Dāsūq: Al-'Ilm wa-l-Imān li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2010), 67.

⁹⁹ Hamdan, 'Women and Education', 47-8.

¹⁰⁰ 'Iffat is widely credited with establishing the first girls' private school, Dār al-Ḥanān (lit. 'House of Compassion'), in 1956. Hamdan, 'Women and Education', 49.

on the basis that since a child learns about religion and behaviour at home, an educated mother would be better placed to ensure the spiritual welfare of future generations.¹⁰¹ But despite these efforts to introduce girls' education, opposition from society at large remained formidable.¹⁰²

Formal state education for girls was announced in the 1959 Edict, which stipulated the opening of girls' schools throughout the Kingdom.¹⁰³ This was followed by the establishment of the Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE) in 1960.¹⁰⁴ Al-Jawhara Bubshait provides some useful statistics for understanding the growth of female education in the Kingdom. In the year of its creation, the GPGE opened fifteen government girls' schools. Even so, initial progress was slow. In 1963, there were only five intermediate schools with 235 students and only one secondary school with just twenty-one students.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, there was little specialisation among teachers. The same teachers who taught at primary level also taught at the intermediate and secondary schools.¹⁰⁶

Women's access to higher education in Saudi Arabia was even more belated. Limited access began in 1967 when the Jeddah campus of King 'Abd al-'Azīz University began to admit women to study economics.¹⁰⁷ Umm al-Qura University in Mecca opened most of its departments to women in 1971, although just eighty women enrolled compared to more than 2,000 male students.¹⁰⁸ In 1978, the Damman campus of King Fayṣal University opened a centre for women, offering courses in nursing, agriculture, nutrition, home economics and teaching. The first university to open a women's campus was King Sa'ūd University in Riyadh in 1979. Subject areas available to women included, Arabic, English, history and

¹⁰¹ Hamdan, 'Women and Education', 40.

¹⁰² For example, in September 1963, the government was forced to dispatch forces to the town of Buraydah to break up demonstrations against the introduction of Girls' education. *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰³ Bubshait, 'Saudi Women's Education', 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁶ Ruqaya al-Aloola, 'Single-Sex Education in Saudi Arabia', in *Woman in Saudi Arabia: Cross Cultural Views*, ed. al-Jawhara Bubshait (Riyadh: Ghaynā' li-l-Nashr, 2008), 31.

¹⁰⁷ Hamdan, 'Women and Education', 51.

¹⁰⁸ Nimat Hafez Barazangi et al, 'Education', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World. Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, accessed 16 Sep. 2014, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0212>>; Hamdan, 'Women and Education', 52.

geography.¹⁰⁹

Girls' education was overseen by the GPGE, which came under the Department of Religious Guidance, unlike boys' education, which has always been within the remit of the Department of Education. The situation reflected a belief in the necessity to closely monitor girls' education and prevent it deviating from its purpose, which was to raise girls to be good wives and mothers and prepare them for vocations suitable to their nature. As such, the GPGE was strongly influenced by conservative 'ulama'. This was largely the result of various concessions and compromises Fayṣal was forced to make with them.¹¹⁰

Although progress in Education for both boys and girls was slow prior to the huge increase in public expenditure of the 1970s and early 1980s, by 2013 Saudi Arabia's literacy rate for its youth population (15-24 years) had reached 99.22 per cent. Compared to the 1950s, when illiteracy was said to have been around ninety-five per cent for the general population, this represents considerable progress. Broken down into male and female, the 2013 literacy rate for young males was 99.30 and for young females 99.14, which shows that the gap in literacy between the sexes, at least among Saudi's youth population, has almost closed.¹¹¹

2.5 The Printing Press and Publishing

While education was vital to the spread of literacy, the printing press provided the means for the domestic production and distribution of books and newspapers. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, and during the early decades of the twentieth, a small number of printing presses were introduced to Hijaz's major cities. These presses were generally funded by private individuals and operated on a small scale. However, the most important press during this period was brought to Mecca in 1883 by its then governor, 'Uthmān Nūrī Pasha. The story of the Wilāya Press,

¹⁰⁹ Hamdan, 'Women and Education', 51.

¹¹⁰ Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 16.

¹¹¹ See

http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS&popupcustomise=true&lang=en#.

which eventually became known as the Government Press during Ibn Sa‘ūd’s reign, is indicative of the importance successive regimes attached to the press in the project of state building.

During the Ottoman era the Wilāya Press printed mainly religious and pedagogical materials for Mecca’s ‘ulama’ who had previously printed their works in Egypt.¹¹² The press was primitive by modern standards and was operated by a two-man staff. During its first three years, it printed forty-five works in Arabic and Malay.¹¹³

After Nūrī Pasha’s death in 1900, the Wilāya Press appears to have fallen into a state of disrepair, as bemoaned by the editor of the official newspaper, *Hijāz*, in 1910, before it was restored around a year and a half later. In 1928, the press was upgraded, and at some point between 1935 and 1936, it was refitted by the Saudi government and adapted to run on electricity.¹¹⁴ Shortly after Ibn Sa‘ūd captured Mecca in 1924, the press was renamed Umm al-Qurā Press, making it synonymous with the new official newspaper, which appeared at the same time. It continued under this name until 1940, when it was renamed again as The Government Press (Maṭba‘at al-Ḥukūma).¹¹⁵ The Wilāya Press’s output was not limited to official publications. Private individuals could commission print runs, although these were almost exclusively from among the ‘ulama’.¹¹⁶

The second printing press established in Mecca was Shams al-Ḥaḳīqa. The press was set up by the owners of the eponymous newspaper, *Shams al-Ḥaḳīqa* in 1909, though it was withdrawn later that same year.¹¹⁷ Shortly afterwards, Shaykh Muḥammad Mājid al-Kurdī (1877-1931) purchased the press and renamed it al-Taraḳī al-Mājidiyya.¹¹⁸ Al-Kurdī has been described as ‘a pioneer of the private press’ in

¹¹² Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha‘at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 15.

¹¹³ Yaḥyā Maḥmūd al-Sa‘āfi, *al-Nashr fī al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘ūdiyya* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Mālik Fahad, 1987), 10.

¹¹⁴ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha‘at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 12, 18.

¹¹⁵ Al-Sa‘āfi, *al-Nashr*, 14.

¹¹⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha‘at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 17.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19. The newspaper was originally printed on the Wilāya Press.

¹¹⁸ Kurdī was famed for his personal library said to have been one of the most extensive collections of its kind in Mecca. He later worked as an administrator in the Ministry of Education during the 1940s. See Muḥammad ‘Alī Maghribī, ‘Muḥammad ‘Alī’, *A‘lām al-Ḥijāz fī al-qarn al-rābi‘ ‘ashar li-l-hijra:*

Hijaz.¹¹⁹ Even at the time, the importance of al-Taraqī al-Mājidiyya as Hijaz's first private press was not lost on Meccan literary society, and a poem was composed to mark its inauguration.¹²⁰ In its first year, the press produced a modest thirty-one titles in Arabic and Malay.¹²¹

The Iṣlāḥ Press was established in Jeddah in 1909, around the same time as al-Taraqī al-Mājidiyya press. It printed the weekly newspaper, *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī*. Although the paper lasted several months only, the press remained in operation for some time.¹²² According to the Egyptian traveller and historian, Muḥammad al-Batnūnī (d.1938), who visited Jeddah in 1909, apart from *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī*, the press had printed nothing of note.¹²³ After Tawakkul's death it was bought by the same Muḥammad 'Alī Zaynal who founded the Falāḥ schools. The press was sold again sometime in the late 1920s/early 1930s to Muḥammad Ramzī Afandī, who renamed it the Sharqiyya Press.¹²⁴

Little is known about Medina's first press, the 'Ilmiyya, except that it was set up in 1910 by the head of Medina's merchants' guild, Kāmil al-Khāja. The primitive press was run by one of the city's prominent 'ulama', the Libyan born 'Abd al-Qādir Tawfīq al-Shalabī (1878-1950) and, like most of the presses of this time, printed religious materials. Medina's second press was founded some time later, between 1927 and 1928. It was a small hand operated machine purchased by the principal of the School of Shari'a (Madrasat al-'Ulūm al-Sharī'a), where it was housed. In 1936 it was bought by the owners of *al-Madīna al-Munawwara* newspaper, which appeared the same year.¹²⁵

1301-1400 h; 1883-1980 (Jeddah: Tihāma, 1981), 2: 313.

¹¹⁹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 20.

¹²⁰ Shaykh 'Uthmān al-Rādī, a Meccan man of letters, composed a poem in its honour. Al-Sa'ātī, *al-Nashr*, 11.

¹²¹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 21.

¹²² The Iṣlāḥ Press was originally bought by a conglomerate of private individuals, including the paper's owner and director, Rāghib Muṣṭafā Tawakkul, and a group of Jeddah's merchants. *Ibid.*, 21.

¹²³ Muḥammad Labīb al-Batnūnī, *al-Riḥla al-Ḥijāziyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Amāl al-Jamāliyya, 1911), 9.

¹²⁴ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 25.

¹²⁵ Al-Qasha'amī, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Razzāq, 'Al-Ḥaraka al-adabiyya bi-l-Madīna al-Munawwara fī al-'asr al-ḥadīth', *Al-Wāḥa* (April 2011) : n. pag.

Following the Arab Revolt of 1916 and Ḥusayn's capture of Mecca, the Ottoman authorities in besieged Medina began publishing the *Hijāz* newspaper. A press was brought for the purpose from Damascus via the Hijaz railway, accompanied by the Syrian journalist, Badr al-Dīn al-Na'āsī (1881-1943), who was appointed its editor-in-chief. However, the Turkish initiative was short-lived and both the press and al-Na'āsī returned to Damascus in late 1917, after Ḥusayn's forces finally captured Medina.¹²⁶

These early presses are important because they represent the first efforts to introduce a native print culture to Hijaz. However, before the 1920s, demand for printed matter in Hijaz came from either government or the 'ulama'. The Wilāya and al-Taraqī al-Mājidīyya presses printed mainly works of a religious or pedagogical nature. Furthermore, much of the demand for printed material in Hijaz continued to be met abroad. In fact, if anything, this trend increased during the reign of Ibn Sa'ūd, who commissioned the printing of numerous books in India and Egypt.¹²⁷

Even after unification the printing and publishing industry received little investment. The global economic crisis of the 1930s and the outbreak of WWII, which saw a major paper shortage throughout the region, can hardly have helped the situation. Although by the 1940s printing presses had been established in most of the Kingdom's major cities, few books were printed in the country. It was not until the 1950s that the situation began to change, with more and more local writers commissioning the publication of their own works. It was also around this time that the first modern bookshops opened. These often provided local authors with the facilities to print and publish their books.¹²⁸

Although printing and publishing in Saudi Arabia continued to grow during the 1960s, the infrastructure remained weak. Rising costs and the low technical standards of the country's presses meant that local writers preferred to print and publish their works abroad, usually in Egypt or the Levant. Another factor that

¹²⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 29.

¹²⁷ Al-Sa'ātī, *al-Nashr*, 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

undermined publishing in Saudi Arabia was that the concept of the publisher was not well understood. Authors often bypassed the publishing houses altogether and went straight to print at their own expense. The result of this was that, being self-funded, they tended towards the most economical option, which meant their works were reproduced on poor quality paper and were often riddled with typographical errata.¹²⁹

Putting aside the difficulties of printing in Saudi Arabia, perhaps the greatest challenge that faced early Saudi writers was distribution. The lack of a reliable and extensive distribution network had the inevitable result of severely limiting a book's potential audience. Writers often gave their books to local book merchants whose activities were usually limited to an individual town or city.¹³⁰ This also meant that other Arab countries were largely unaware of developments within the emerging Saudi literary scene.

The earliest publishing houses in Saudi Arabia appeared in the mid-1960s. In 1966, Shaykh Ḥamad al-Jāsir established Dār al-Yamāma in Riyadh; and in the same year, Muḥammad Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn founded Dār al-Sa'ūdiyya in Jeddah. These publishing houses represented the emergence of something closer to a modern publishing sensibility that was reflected in the significantly higher quality of their publications as well as the relative success with which their products were distributed across the Kingdom.¹³¹ Even so distribution remained erratic and uneven. Publishing houses showed little interest in developing an integrated infrastructure and often over-relied on government concessions, with the result that many publications ended up gathering dust in ministry storerooms and never reached the reader. Critically, new publications were rarely accompanied by any form of marketing and so their potential readership was unaware of them.¹³²

The state of publishing in Saudi Arabia during the first three decades or so of unification is one reason why early examples of long fiction are so few and far

¹²⁹ 'Abbās Sāliḥ al-Tashkandī, 'Ṣinā' at al-kitāb al-sa'ūdī al-mu'āṣir', *Majlat al-iqtisād wa-l-idāra* (June 1980): 156-7.

¹³⁰ Al-Sa'āfī, *al-Nashr*, 17.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 20.

between and why, with rare exception, what little did appear was published in either Egypt or the Levant. A more fertile forum for the emergent literary discourse was Hijaz's periodical press.

2.6 The Origins and Emergence of the Saudi Periodical Press

The handful of Ottoman publications that appeared after the introduction of the printing press to Hijaz during the late nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century were mainly official in nature; the annual yearbook, *Hijaz walayati salnamah si*, is a case in point. They were typically printed in bilingual Arabic and Turkish editions and were primarily intended for the administrative class rather than the general Arab population. Yet, they mark the beginnings of the press in Hijaz and laid the ground for later developments.

The period immediately following the Young Turk Revolution saw the appearance of a modest six newspapers: *Hijāz*, *Shams al-Ḥaḳīqa*, *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Hijāzī*, *Ṣafā al-Hijāz*, *al-Raqīb* and *al-Madīna al-Munawwara*.¹³³ Only the first three, the most significant, are discussed here. The remaining titles were extremely short-lived and did not make any lasting contribution to the Hijazi press. Also treated in the following, are the Hashemite era newspapers, *al-Hijāz* (more or less a continuation of *Hijāz*), *al-Qibla* and *al-Fallāḥ*. Finally, newspapers from outside Hijaz are given some mention for their crucial influence on the first generation of Saudi writers. The early Saudi newspapers, *Umm al-Qurā*, *al-Madīna al-Munawwara* and *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, as well as *al-Manhal* magazine, are discussed at some length.

¹³³ *Al-Madīna al-Munawwara* should not be confused with the Saudi era newspaper of the same name.

Ottoman Era

Hijaz walayati salnamah si

The first periodical published in Hijaz was the Ottoman official yearbook or annual almanac, *Hijaz walayati salnamah si*, which was printed on the Wilāya Press.¹³⁴

These yearbooks were published throughout the provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In all, five issues of the Hijaz almanac were published.¹³⁵ The first issue was printed in Turkish, although it contained a few brief articles in Arabic. Subsequent editions were bi-lingual; printed in both Arabic and Turkish and bound in a single volume.¹³⁶

The contents of the almanac relate to affairs of state and Hijaz's administration. Each issue begins with an account of significant events in the Ottoman Empire before focusing on Hijaz, with statistics on its cities, inhabitants, government and private institutions. For example, the second issue provides a table listing Medina's libraries and the number of volumes held by each.¹³⁷

Ḥijāz

The history of the press in Hijaz really begins with *Ḥijāz* newspaper, published weekly by the Ottoman government from 1908-16. The paper was printed on the Wilāya Press in Arabic and Turkish. Its editor-in-chief was Abū al-Thuraya Sāmī, the Diwan's head secretary, who was assisted by Aḥmad Jamāl Afandī, clerk of the Provincial Diwan, and Aḥmad Ḥaqqī Afandī, the Diwan's secretary, as well as Maḥmūd shalhūb al-Ḥijāzī.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 33. Al-Shāmikh's study of the early press in Hijaz is by far the most comprehensive and authoritative source for this period. It comprises extensive original research, including oral history interviews. Accordingly, it is drawn on throughout the following discussion.

¹³⁵ The first issue appeared in 1883/1884, the second in 1886, the third in 1887/88, the fourth in 1888/89 and the fifth in 1891/92.

¹³⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 33-5.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-9.

¹³⁸ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 155.

In his discussion of the paper, al-Shāmikh underlines the importance of the Young Turk Revolution in the emergence of the press in Saudi Arabia, remarking that ‘journalism only appeared in the country after the announcement of the Ottoman constitution in 1326 [1908] when *Hijāz* newspaper was published in Mecca’.¹³⁹ Prior to the Revolution, the provinces of Hijaz, Palestine, Iraq and Syria had suffered under strict Ottoman censorship, which according to Ami Ayalon, had left them ‘without a press worthy of mention’.¹⁴⁰ With the constitution restored, the Arab press ‘surged forward with a burst of vigour’.¹⁴¹ The Young Turks were no doubt keenly aware of the potential of the press to affect public opinion, as observed by al-Subā‘ī: ‘After the constitutionalists revolted against the caliphate they employed *Hijāz* newspaper for their revolutionary principles’.¹⁴²

Hijāz was understaffed and had to contend with the technical limitations of the Wilāya Press, which meant it appeared irregularly and publication was sometimes delayed for up to a week. During Ramadan, the newspaper disappeared altogether.¹⁴³ Although *Hijāz* comprised just four pages, this was not unusual for Arabic newspapers of the time.¹⁴⁴ The first and fourth pages were printed in Arabic and the remaining two in Turkish. The content of *Hijāz* was predominantly made up of news relating to the Ottoman administration. There was some political analysis but this invariably expressed the Ottoman perspective. The paper also carried official announcements and ran the occasional advertisement.

Hijāz was expressive of the Young Turks’ reformist agenda, its articles often appealing for social reform and modernisation. This was important in the introduction of new ideas to its readers: ‘No doubt those articles that treated social,

¹³⁹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha’at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 39.

¹⁴⁰ Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 62.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴² Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī, ‘Nasha’at al-ṣaḥāfa wa-l-adab fī al-Ḥijāz’, *al-‘Amāl al-kāmila* (Jeddah: ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd Muḥamamd Sa’īd Khawja, 2009), np., accessed 22 November 2012, http://alithnainya.com/tocs/default.asp?toc_id=22313&toc_brother=-1.

¹⁴³ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha’at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 44.

¹⁴⁴ This was the same length of *al-Waqā’i al-Miṣriyya*. Philip Charles Sadgrove, ‘The Development of the Arabic Periodical Press and its Role in the Literary Life of Egypt (1798-1882)’, (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 52.

educational and literary issues in a new, determined spirit, played their part in awakening the citizens, and disseminating new concepts among them'.¹⁴⁵ *Hijāz* provided a forum for public discourse – even if limited – that simply had not existed in the province previously: '*Hijāz* was not merely an official newspaper; it paved the way for those newspapers that followed with its debating of the country's contemporary issues'.¹⁴⁶

There is no statistical evidence for *Hijāz*'s circulation, though some anecdotal information suggests the paper was popular. In the second issue, the editor boasts that the first quickly sold out.¹⁴⁷ Naturally, given the editor's vested interest, this cannot be taken at face value. The last known issue of *Hijāz* was published on 7 March 1915, although it is likely that the paper continued until 1916, when Sharīf Ḥusayn took control of Hijaz.

Shams al-Ḥaqīqa

Shams al-Ḥaqīqa (Sun of Truth) was the first of a number of short-lived, privately owned newspapers that appeared after *Hijāz*. Despite its non-official status, the paper was closely affiliated with the CUP. Al-Jabbār describes *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa* as the Committee's 'mouthpiece'.¹⁴⁸

Shams al-Ḥaqīqa was of a similar length to *Hijāz*, and was also published weekly, although in separate Turkish (*Shams al-Ḥaqīqat*) and Arabic editions. It began its short and troubled history on 16 February 1909. The paper does not seem to have had a wide readership and, in fact, suspended publication on at least one occasion due to poor sales.¹⁴⁹

Like *Hijāz*, *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa* tended to express the CUP's reformist agenda, although its private status enabled it to engage with subjects considered too

¹⁴⁵ Sadgrove, 'The Development of the Arabic Periodical Press', 49.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 49.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 156.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 52.

controversial for the pages of *Hijāz*. It was perhaps this independent attitude that, above any other factor led to the newspaper's downfall. *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa* was openly critical of Ḥusayn's administration of Mecca. So much so, that it is said the paper was read in secret for fear of angering Ḥusayn, who eventually made an official complaint to Istanbul and the newspaper was forced to close.¹⁵⁰ Even if the paper's criticism did reflect growing animosity between Ḥusayn and Istanbul, *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa* had gone too far. More than anything, this perhaps reveals the limitations of debate and freedom of the press in Hijaz at this time.

Al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī

Al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī (The Hijazi Reformation) appeared just a few months after *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa* on 18 May 1909. The little information available suggests it was founded by a collective comprising some inhabitants of Jeddah and local merchants who hired the Lebanese journalist, Adīb Dāwud Ḥarīrī, as its editor-in-chief. The newspaper was printed on its own private press and managed by a Syrian, Rāghib Muṣṭafā Tawakkul. Most, if not all of the articles that appeared in *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī*, were penned by Tawakkul and Ḥarīrī.¹⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, since Ḥusayn was the major sponsor and funder of *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī*, the paper took a decisively pro-Hashemite stance and its pages were full of praise for Ḥusayn's rule, countering *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa*.¹⁵² Animosity quickly flared up between the two papers with *Shams al-Ḥaqīqa* launching a personal attack on Ḥarīrī and describing *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ḥijāzī* as 'a tool of the enemies of the Committee of Union and Progress'.¹⁵³ Despite Ḥusayn's political and financial backing, the paper lasted only six months before closing as a result of poor sales and Tawakkul's death.¹⁵⁴ The competition between Ḥusayn and the Ottoman authorities continued to play out in Hijaz's press even after the 1916 Arab Revolt.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha`at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 57.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 58-62.

¹⁵² Ibid., 60.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 60-1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 62-3.

The Hashemite Era

Al-Hijāz

In 1916, Ḥusayn revolted against the Ottoman Empire, capturing Mecca and most of Hijaz. However, the Ottomans managed to hold onto Medina until after the end of WWI. The first edition of *al-Hijāz* was published in Medina on 10 October 1916. It was originally published three times weekly, but was later made a daily newspaper. Despite the efforts of the Ottoman authorities, *al-Hijāz* struggled to reach beyond Medina, which remained under siege until the Ottoman army eventually surrendered on 10 January 1919.

Al-Subā'ī claims that *al-Hijāz* was a continuation of *Hijāz*.¹⁵⁵ This seems a reasonable assumption given they effectively share the same name and were both organs of the Ottoman government.¹⁵⁶ There are, however, significant differences between the two. Even though *al-Hijāz* was little more than a propaganda sheet for the Ottoman authorities in their struggle against the Arab Revolt and the Allies, it did not describe itself as an official newspaper. Compared to its earlier incarnation, it was of a higher quality and seems to have involved a completely different directorial and editorial team.¹⁵⁷ Finally, it was only printed in Arabic. The Ottomans were now desperate to win Arab hearts and minds, competing with Ḥusayn's *al-Qibla*. Dropping Turkish and attempting to distance the newspaper from the Ottoman regime were most likely measures designed to prevent *al-Hijāz* alienating its Arab audience, whose sympathies it sought.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha`at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 117.

¹⁵⁶ *Al-Hijāz* was published in Arabic only, hence the addition of the definite article.

¹⁵⁷ Its editor was Badr al-Dīn al-Na'āsī who was commissioned by the Ottoman authorities to produce *al-Hijāz* in Medina. Ibid., 116-17.

Al-Qibla

The first issue of *al-Qibla* was published on 15 August 1916, around five weeks after Ḥusayn's forces captured Mecca (10 July 1916). As the organ of Ḥusayn's independent enclave, *al-Qibla* 'did not so much as express the editor's opinion as it did that of Sharīf Ḥusayn'.¹⁵⁸ Curiously, the paper published an announcement in 1919 denying its official status, a claim that hardly seems credible given that Ḥusayn's name appeared on the front page of the first issue as 'editor-in-charge'.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps, rather like the Ottoman authorities' reluctance to give *al-Ḥijāz* their official stamp, *al-Qibla* took this measure in an attempt to establish some sort of putative neutrality or even distance itself from Ḥusayn's British backing.

Al-Qibla was printed on the Wilāya Press in Mecca and published twice weekly. The paper's masthead described it as a 'religious, political and social newspaper published in the service of Islam and the Arabs'. The Syrian journalist and Salafi-Arabist, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (1886-1969) was appointed as *al-Qibla*'s editor-in-chief. Al-Khaṭīb was an important member of the Young Arab Society (al-Fatāt)¹⁶⁰ and has been described variously as a 'pioneer of the nationalist awakening' and 'one of the most prominent figures of modern Islamic thought and a reformer who carried the banner of the Islamic mission for more than fifty years'.¹⁶¹ As the newspaper's lead writer, al-Khaṭīb's opinions set *al-Qibla*'s tone and content, focusing largely on 'Arab rights and Islamic order'.¹⁶² Hence, the paper has been described as 'the organ of the Arab revolt government'.¹⁶³

Al-Qibla ran for over eight years, considerably longer than any of the newspapers discussed so far. As such it is the most significant periodical of the pre-Saudi period. *Al-Qibla* was less provincial in outlook than *al-Ḥijāz*, and featured the writings of

¹⁵⁸ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha`at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 106.

¹⁵⁹ Ayalon, *Press in the Arab Middle East*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ The Young Arab Society (al-Jam'iyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Fatāt) was an underground Arab nationalist organisation founded in Paris in 1911. Its main objective was the independence and liberation of Arab countries from the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁶¹ Anwār al-Jundī, *A 'lām al-qarn al-rābi' 'ashar al-hijrī*, vol. 1 of *A 'lām al-da' wa-l-fikr* (Cairo: n.p., 1981), 381.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁶³ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 156; al-Jundī, *A 'lām*, 381.

notable Arab intellectuals and political figures, including al-Khaṭīb. According to one source, it was read ‘in Egypt, Sham and the rest of the Arab, Islamic countries’.¹⁶⁴

Al-Khaṭīb’s contribution to the early Hijazi press is significant. He was one of several key figures who helped introduce the ideas of the Salafi reformist movement to Hijaz, and would later found the Salafiyya Press and the weekly journal *al-Faṭḥ* (The Conquest; 1926 to 1948). Both were influential and popular outlets for Salafi and reformist thought, along with Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā’s (1865-1935) *al-Manār* (The Lighthouse; 1898-1935) and similar publications.¹⁶⁵

Bankrolled by Ḥusayn, *al-Qibla* avoided the financial difficulties into which some of its predecessors had fallen. The newspaper shut in September 1924 as Saudi forces closed in on Mecca. It was briefly succeeded by *Barīd al-Ḥijāz* published from November in Jeddah and supported by Ḥusayn’s son ‘Alī, only to disappear a year later with the total collapse of the Hashemite regime.

Al-Fallāḥ

Al-Fallāḥ (The Peasant) actually began life in Damascus on 31 October 1919. After its owner, ‘Umar Shākir, was sentenced to death by the French mandate authorities, along with a number of other Syrians, he escaped to Mecca where he resumed publication of *al-Fallāḥ* on 8 September 1920.¹⁶⁶

The political orientation of *al-Fallāḥ* was staunchly Arab nationalist, with a masthead that read ‘an inclusive Arabic newspaper in the service of Arabs and Arabic’. Its declared goals were listed as ‘the independence of Arab countries and the

¹⁶⁴ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 111.

¹⁶⁵ For a detailed account of Riḍā’s thought and contribution see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 224-44.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha’at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 120.

defence of their rights'.¹⁶⁷ *Al-Fallāḥ* took a more modern approach to journalism than any other Hijazi newspaper, publishing readers' letters, light and humorous articles, items of general and scientific interest, and photographs – rare for the time.

In the beginning, *al-Fallāḥ* focused largely on the struggle for Syrian independence, however this gradually shifted to Hijaz, as the newspaper became more and more aligned with *al-Qibla* in tone and content. It is unclear exactly when *al-Fallāḥ* ceased publication, although this was likely at the beginning of October 1924 when the Hashemite forces withdrew from Mecca. In the absence of reliable statistics, it is difficult to gauge exactly how widely read *al-Qibla* and *al-Fallāḥ* were in Hijaz. But if the enthusiasm with which newspapers from other Arab countries were received is anything to go by, demand was likely substantial.

Newspapers from outside Hijaz

Newspapers had long been imported into Hijaz from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. Although Egyptian newspapers were banned in Ottoman governed Hijaz prior to the Young Turk Revolution, they were smuggled in, often arriving by post, perhaps once or twice a month.¹⁶⁸ Some of the newspapers read in Hijaz at this time include *al-Jawā'ib*, published by al-Shidyāq in Turkey, the two Lebanese newspapers *Beirut* and *Thamarāt al-Funūn*, and *Turkiyya al-Fatāt*, published in Paris.¹⁶⁹ In his memoirs, the Meccan notable, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf (1885-1971) recalls: '[the newspapers] reached us clandestinely, their readers would disappear out of sight. *Al-Mu'ayyid* newspaper was the most popular and widely circulated... People used to await its arrival like barren land awaits rainfall'. Naṣīf goes on to recall his astonishment as he witnessed one group of people after another come to hear the news read out from the newspaper.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ *Al-Fallāḥ* was published in broadsheet format and comprised four pages. It first appeared twice a week, but this was reduced from 17 October 1920, when it became a weekly publication. Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 120.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷⁰ Cited in al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 39-40.

Even after the appearance of *Shams Ḥaḳīqa*, *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Hijāzī* etc. newspapers from outside Hijaz remained popular; in fact, they were often preferred over the less sophisticated local offerings.¹⁷¹ With restrictions lifted, these newspapers reached their readers in Hijaz much faster, even as soon as the day after publication.¹⁷² *Al-Mu'ayyid* quickly gained 150 subscribers, and papers such as *al-Balāgh*, *al-Ahrām* and *al-Muqaṭṭam* were also imported into Hijaz. The transformative effect of these publications on Hijazi society is poignantly captured in an anecdote from another Meccan, Ṣāliḥ Shattā (d. 1949). Writing some years later in *al-Manhal*, Shattā recalls how the centuries-old literary and religious learning circles or séances that had been such a part of Meccan intellectual life plummeted in popularity with the appearance of periodicals. These séances were once bustling ‘until the Ottoman constitution came upon us. The séances dispersed, and people devoted themselves to reading the newspapers and magazines’.¹⁷³

The influence of Egypt’s press on Hijaz’s intellectual and cultural life, which is readily detectable in numerous articles published in the early Hijazi press, is also attested to by al-Jabbār:

The influence of these papers on literature and culture was significant. Educated men in Hijaz read *al-Siyāsa al-Usbū'iyya*, *al-Muqtaṭaf* and *al-Hilāl*, especially in the early days. They devoured *al-Thaqāfa* and *al-Risāla*, and followed with great interest the literary battles that flared up between al-Rāfa'ī and al-'Aqqād, or between Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and his enemies, or between Aḥmad Amīn and Zakkī Mubārak, or the followers of their schools and others. In fact, they would find themselves divided, some supporting Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and others al-'Aqqād, for example.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 41.

¹⁷² Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 184.

¹⁷³ Cited in al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 40.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 185.

Early Saudi Period

Umm al-Qurā

Umm al-Qurā, founded in 1924, is the first newspaper of the Saudi era. Alongside *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* and *al-Manhal* magazine, it was the venue for the earliest debates on literature. The paper's inaugural issue appeared on 12 December 1924, one week after Ibn Sa'ūd entered Mecca, and on the same day Medina surrendered, ending a fifteen-month siege.¹⁷⁵ The newspaper was established as the new government's official organ, supplanting *al-Fallāḥ* and, symbolically, the regime it represented. That *Umm al-Qurā* came into being so soon after Mecca's conquest suggests Ibn Sa'ūd, like Ḥusayn and the Young Turks before him, was well aware of the power of the modern press. *Umm al-Qurā* is the only newspaper to have survived this transitional period in Hijaz's history,¹⁷⁶ as well as the deprivations of WWII that brought with it a serious paper shortage causing all other publications to cease in 1941 until the end of 1945.¹⁷⁷ *Umm al-Qurā* is still in print today.

Umm al-Qurā was printed on the Wilāya Press, which was renamed Umm al-Qurā Press at the same time, or shortly after the paper began publication. For its first decade or so, it was published on a weekly basis, before becoming a daily in the mid-1930s. The paper was primitive compared to the Egyptian and Lebanese newspapers of the time. There were few regular columns and even these tended to run for a short time only, and often disappeared between one issue and the next without explanation. Its layout was inconsistent and the number of pages varied between issues.

In its first years, during the period leading up to unification in 1932, the columns of *Umm al-Qurā* were filled with official announcements, royal decrees and speeches, and news of Ibn Sa'ūd's military and political triumphs. Beyond affairs of state,

¹⁷⁵ This was on 5 December, although the city had fallen without a struggle almost two months earlier on 13 October. See Vassiliev, *History of Saudi Arabia*, ch. 11.

¹⁷⁶ *Umm al-Qurā* was also the only newspaper in Hijaz until 1932 when *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* began publication. Manṣūr al-Ḥāzimī, *Ṣaḥīfat Umm al-Qurā, 1924-45*, Vol. 1 of *Mu'ajam al-maṣādir al-ṣaḥāfiyya li-dirāsāt al-adab wa-l-fikr fī al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya al-Sa'ūdiyya*. Riyadh: Maṭba'at Saḥīr, 2003, 1: 16.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1: 16.

religious and social reform topped the paper's agenda. To some extent this was part and parcel of the new regime's drive to institute its reformist agenda, although this could equally be interpreted as reflecting broader trends within the Arab world at the time.

Umm al-Qurā regularly dedicated as much as an entire page to articles on literature, a generous allocation given the overall size of the paper. However, this is less true of earlier issues, especially preceding the country's unification. Al-Shāmikh observes how *Umm al-Qurā*'s official tone softened over the years, particularly during Muḥammad Sa'īd 'Abd al-Maqṣūd's time as editor-in-chief from 1931-36.¹⁷⁸ Under al-Maqṣūd's direction the paper was 'filled with articles of a literary, historical and social interest, penned by its editors and prominent men of letters like Muḥammad Ḥasan Kutubī and Aḥmad al-Subā'ī'.¹⁷⁹ Al-Shāmikh's appraisal is a little exaggerated, although it is true that the relative stability of the 1930s seems to have resulted in a greater emphasis on literature and culture, particularly from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s.

In his study of *Umm al-Qurā*, al-Ḥāzimī makes a distinction between what he describes as 'official literature' (*al-adab al-rasmī*) and 'personal literature' (*al-adab al-khāss*).¹⁸⁰ The literature that appeared in *Umm al-Qurā* was of the former variety and generally limited to poetry in the traditional *qaṣīda* form or ode,¹⁸¹ usually panegyric or the poetry of occasions (*shī'r al-munāsibāt*), celebrating Ibn Sa'ūd's conquests and extolling his virtues as leader, or marking a special event.¹⁸² In contrast, *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* published a much broader variety of literature, including the country's earliest short stories – what al-Ḥāzimī calls 'personal literature'. The distinction al-Ḥāzimī is making is essentially between the pre-modern and the modern, capturing a moment of profound transformation in the function and concept

¹⁷⁸ Al-Maqṣūd (1906-41) was one of the first graduates of the Falāḥ school in Mecca and went on to become a prominent figure of Saudi Arabia's literary revival of the early twentieth century. He co-edited, *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā* (1936), one of the earliest anthologies of modern Hijazi literature.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 150.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Mu'ajam*, 1: 18.

¹⁸¹ Al-Ḥāzimī notes that in general, *Umm al-Qurā* 'did not concern itself with the story (*al-qiṣṣa*) or prose fiction (*al-adab al-qiṣṣī*)'. *Ibid.*, 1: 30, 50-1.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 1: 18.

of literature within Hijazi/Saudi society.

Al-Hāzimī complains that much of the literary commentary published in *Umm al-Qurā* focussed on classical Arabic literature and therefore debated the same issues that had occupied medieval Arab scholars.¹⁸³ This judgement is unfair since it implies that writers' engagement with the pre-modern was a step backwards, when it could be argued that this actually represented a reassessment of the past and its legacy, and as such was characteristic of the *nahḍa*. Even so, the pages of *Umm al-Qurā* witnessed the emergence of a modern critical discourse in Saudi Arabia and many of its early contributors would go on to play a role in the development of the country's literary scene.¹⁸⁴

Ṣawt al-Hijāz

Ṣawt al-Hijāz (The Voice of Hijaz) was the second newspaper to appear following the Saudi conquest of Hijaz and the country's first privately owned periodical. Its inaugural issue is dated 4 May 1932, several months prior to the Declaration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The paper began as a weekly, becoming a bi-weekly in 1939. During WWII it temporarily shut down because of the paper shortage, reopening in 1946 under the new name *al-Bilād al-Sa'ūdiyya* (The Saudi Country).¹⁸⁵ It became a daily in 1953 and subsequently its title was shortened to *al-Bilād*, although its previous concern with literature was markedly absent.¹⁸⁶

More so than any of the periodicals discussed so far, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* played a vital role in the emergence of a new literary discourse in Saudi Arabia. Al-Shāmikh does not exaggerate when he writes that *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* was 'one of the most important factors in the literary movement which began at the end of the third decade of the 20th century'.¹⁸⁷ The paper was one of the Kingdom's few literary outlets throughout the

¹⁸³ Al-Hāzimī, *Mu'ajam*, 1: 33.

¹⁸⁴ Another example is 'Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī who served as its editor-in-chief from 1940-41.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 161-2.

¹⁸⁶ Writing in the early 1980s, al-Shāmikh remarks that *al-Bilād* bore barely any resemblance to *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, and that the paper's concern with literature had declined greatly over the years. *Ibid.*, 161-2.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

1930s and 1940s. A handful of texts published in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* during this period represent some of the earliest examples of Saudi prose fiction. The paper also served as the forum for intense literary debate between Hijaz's young generation of writers.

The strong literary orientation of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* is announced in the first issue, where its editor-in-chief, 'Abd al-Wahhāb Āshī, describes the paper as 'a literary connection between us, the sons of this country, that unites our ideas, interests and culture'.¹⁸⁸ This is reaffirmed in a later issue by the paper's owner and director, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Naṣīf, who wrote: '[*Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*] is the tongue of the Hijazi literary renaissance'.¹⁸⁹

Āshī's inaugural editorial of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* sets out the paper's manifesto. In it he outlines a nationalist agenda, placing a strong emphasis on cultural – and to a lesser extent, religious – revivalism. Strikingly, no reference is made to Ibn Sa'ūd or his government, instead it refers to 'our Arab Hijazi nation': 'We have been driven by our sacred national duty to raise our voices loud with this newspaper in order to inform the world about our life, the life of the Hijazi nation [*ummatunā al-ḥijāziyya*]'.¹⁹⁰

Al-Jabbār describes Naṣīf as a 'known nationalist', which he clearly means in the sense of Arab nationalism, rather than an incipient Saudi nationalism.¹⁹¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, his name had disappeared from the paper by the third issue and he was exiled to Najd along with a number of Hijazis for their 'political activities'.¹⁹²

Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz's name change to *al-Bilād al-Sa'ūdiyya* in 1946 is significant. The Saudi regime consciously sought to forge a national identity by stifling expressions of regional difference – in this case the imagery could not be any clearer: 'the voice of Hijaz' is stifled by 'the Saudi Country'. This has, to some extent, remained true to the present day and is commented upon by the Saudi anthropologist Mai Yamani:

¹⁸⁸ 'Abd al-Wahhāb Āshī, 'Ifitāḥ al-ṣaḥīfa', *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 4 April 1932, 1.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 153.

¹⁹⁰ Āshī, 'Ifitāḥ al-ṣaḥīfa', 1.

¹⁹¹ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 169-70.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 171.

There is no decree that explicitly prohibits the term ‘Hijaz’, but its use is generally interpreted as contravening the official emphasis on the social and political homogeneity of the Saudi state. This de facto prohibition is keenly felt and transgressions are greeted with a range of more or less punitive sanctions. Any new school with the name *madrasa al Hijaz* (school of the Hijaz) would soon face bureaucratic problems. A Hijazi daring to wear traditional clothes consisting of the *jubba* (overcoat) and ‘*umama* (headdress) rather than Najdi national dress would be considered eccentric at best and would be inviting trouble if employed by the government in any capacity.¹⁹³

The Hijazi ‘other’ has been a constant source of anxiety for the state since it contradicts the Saudi narrative, which it has carefully managed through a combination of suppression and co-optation.

Al-Madīna al-Munawwara

Al-Madīna al-Munawwara was founded by the two brothers ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān Ḥāfīz, and appeared on 8 April 1937 as a weekly newspaper.¹⁹⁴ In contrast to *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, the paper described itself as ‘a newspaper of the Saudi Arab people’. In its inaugural editorial, the paper declared that it would contribute to ‘reviving the distant past that shines with literary excellence and magnificent works’.¹⁹⁵ However, in practice, although it did run articles on literature and culture, this was never to anything like the extent of *al-Ḥijāz* or *Umm al-Qurā*. *Al-Madīna al-Munawwara* was discontinued during WWII but resumed publication shortly after peace was declared and is still in print today, although under the shortened title, *al-Madīna*.

Al-Manhal

Al-Manhal (The Spring) is the first and longest-running publication of its kind in Saudi Arabia. Founded by the journalist and writer, ‘Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, the magazine debuted in February 1937 and was printed on the Medina Press (Maṭba‘at al-Madīna al-Munawwara). A tagline on the front cover of early issues announced

¹⁹³ Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 14-15.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Jabbār, *al-Tayyārāt*, 172-3.

¹⁹⁵ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha‘at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 162.

al-Manhal's mission: 'A magazine to serve literature, culture and science'. As such, its remit was fairly broad; the magazine included short stories, poetry, and articles on miscellaneous cultural, historical and general interest subjects. *Al-Manhal* also published translations of European fiction and poetry.

Like many Hijazi writers of his generation, for al-Anṣārī literature was primarily a means to enlighten and instruct. He saw it as a vital force for social progress and positioned himself and *al-Manhal* at the vanguard of Hijaz's cultural revival. In his introduction to the first issue of *al-Manhal* he writes:

Al-Manhal's main objective is to usher in a new and glorious age in our youthful Hijazi literature, and the return of this sacred country of ours to its proud literary standing amongst the countries of *al-urūba* [i.e. the Arab nations]... Literature is not a means of entertainment or merely a pastime; rather it is one of the highest living arts that elevate nations and revive them. So many men of letters are dedicated to raising the social, economic, cultural and civic standards of their nation together... Truly, literature is the dynamo that injects the spirit of reform into peoples, and invests them with vitality and a sense of pride. It urges them along the path of progress.¹⁹⁶

Although in the same introduction al-Anṣārī acknowledges Ibn Sa'ūd and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like many writers of the time, he talks exclusively in terms of a 'Hijazi literature', which he locates within the broader Arab *nahḍa*. It was simply too early to conceive of a Saudi literature, especially given the country's unequal development.

Al-Manhal was a leading promoter of modern literature in Saudi Arabia and can be compared to publications such as *al-'Arabī* in Kuwait and *al-Muqtaṭaf* in Lebanon and Egypt.¹⁹⁷ As al-Sa'ātī notes: 'This magazine had a enormous influence on the Kingdom' intellectual and cultural movement. It was the only outlet for local authors, poets and scholars for a long time'.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps testament to the magazine's popularity within the Kingdom, *al-Manhal* was the only magazine to survive the

¹⁹⁶ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Manhal* 1, no. 1 (June 1937), 2-3.

¹⁹⁷ The first issue of *al-'Arabī* was published in 1958. It is still published today. *Al-Muqtaṭaf* was founded by Ya'qūb Ṣarūf and Fāris Nimr. The first issue was published in 1876. The magazine ceased publication towards the end of 1952.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Sa'ātī, *al-Nashr*, 45.

nationalising of the press with the 1963 Publishing and Printing Law, which forbade individual ownership, requiring all periodicals to be owned by conglomerates of Saudi nationals.¹⁹⁹

All of the early Saudi era publications listed here were based in Hijaz. It was not until the early 1950s that newspapers were produced in the Kingdom's other provinces, and even then progress was sporadic and uneven.

The Saudi Press Outside Hijaz

Al-Yamāma (The Dove) magazine was Najd's first Arabic language press publication. It was originally published as a monthly magazine from August 1953, but was relaunched as a weekly in September 1955. The capital did not have its first daily newspaper until 1965, with the appearance of the eponymous *al-Riyadh* in May that year. Also based in Riyadh, *al-Jazīra* (The Peninsula) newspaper began life as a monthly magazine in April 1960. It became a daily in September 1972. In the Eastern Province, Aramco launched its bi-monthly magazine, *Qāfilat al-Zayt* (Oil Caravan) in October 1953. The magazine was distributed to Aramco employees free of charge. Its articles covered a broad range of topics, with the exception of religious and political matters.

The Eastern Province's first newspaper was the bi-monthly *Akhbār al-Zahrān* (The Dhahran News) launched in 1954. However, the newspaper closed after just two years. The province did not have a daily newspaper until 1978, when the Damman-based *al-Yawm* (Today), which had begun as an eight-page weekly publication in 1965, became a daily. Unlike the earlier Hijazi press, none of these later newspapers gave much attention to literary and cultural matters.

¹⁹⁹ Maghribī, *A lām al-Hijāz*, 2: 192.

2.7 Television and Radio

The slow development of the press during the first four decades of the Kingdom's existence, not to mention the issues affecting the book and the lack of an effective publishing and distribution infrastructure, make it almost impossible to ascribe a significant role to print capital in the creation of a Saudi national consciousness. Especially since during the 1950s the overall rate of illiteracy was over ninety per cent, and, as will be seen, the combined readership of Hijaz's three dailies represented less than one per cent of the total population. Vassiliev, whose observations on the late formation of a Saudi national consciousness were cited in Chapter One, suggests modern audio-visual media fulfilled the role of print capital. Marwan Kraidy's wide-ranging study of the impact of television on Arab culture and society reinforces this point:

A comprehensive media infrastructure was essential to transform a tribally fractured and geographically dispersed population into a national community ruled by the House of al-Sa'ūd... The mass media were therefore an essential tool for building modern Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁰

The 1963 Law was one of many measures introduced during the Fayṣal era, and formed part of a drive to expand the nation's media while maintaining state control.²⁰¹ According to Kraidy, when Fayṣal was made prime minister for the second time in October 1962, there were no magazines, and only three daily newspapers and one radio station in Saudi Arabia.²⁰² This is partly inaccurate since *al-Manhal* magazine was in print at this time, although it does underline how underdeveloped the country's mass media was.²⁰³

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the state invested in developing radio and television, despite vehement resistance from the 'ulama'. The first state television

²⁰⁰ Marwan Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70-1.

²⁰¹ First as prime minister from October 1962, and then as King from 1964.

²⁰² Presumably, Kraidy is referring to *Umm al-Qurā*, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* (by then *al-Bilād al-Sa'ūdiyya*) and *al-Madīna al-Munawwara*. The country's first radio station, Radio Mecca, began broadcasting from Jeddah in 1949, although its coverage was limited to Hijaz. Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics*, 69.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 69.

station began broadcasting in 1969, although prior to this Aramco had launched the country's first Arabic language station in 1957.²⁰⁴ By the time Fayṣal's reign was brought to a bloody end in 1975 with his assassination, Saudi television reached 1.5 million of the country's seven million inhabitants. Additionally, there were now seven dailies, which had a combined distribution of 100,000 – a considerable increase from 25,000 in 1962.²⁰⁵

A driving force behind Fayṣal's expansion of the Saudi media was the need to provide citizens with an attractive alternative to foreign broadcasts. The onslaught of anti-Saudi rhetoric that came out of revolutionary Egypt during the 1960s made it imperative for the state to establish a national media infrastructure that could serve as a means to retaliate and defend against anti-Saudi propaganda.²⁰⁶

2.8 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter – roughly from the end of the nineteenth century through to the 1950s – witnessed the end of Ottoman rule, the short-lived Hashemite era and the establishment of the present Saudi state. When Ibn Sa'ūd conquered Hijaz he inherited a modern state infrastructure the like of which simply did not exist in any of the Kingdom's other provinces. This, of course, brings into serious question claims by nationalist historians that the Ottoman and Hashemite eras made no significant contributions in the realms of education and the periodical press. Even if these efforts did not always achieve their intended results they were paramount in the creation of a print culture.

Although the printing press reached Hijaz as early as 1883, the political situation in the Arabic speaking provinces of the Ottoman Empire was antithetical to the development of journalism. This was mainly due to the strict censorship imposed during the era of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. The newspapers that emerged after the

²⁰⁴ Hussein Y. Amin, 'Middle East and North Africa', in *World Broadcasting: A Comparative View*, Alan Wells, ed. (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing, 1996), 135.

²⁰⁵ Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics*, 69.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

restoration of the 1876 constitution in 1908 were generally short-lived, with the longest running, *Hijāz*, lasting eight years. Yet, they helped prepare the way for a new literary sensibility. *Hijāz* published poems by Shawqī and Ḥāfīz with critical prefaces that called on writers to follow Shawqī's example by blending elements of Western and Eastern cultures.²⁰⁷

In contrast to the situation in Hijaz, it was not until the 1950s that the Kingdom's other provinces, including the capital, Riyadh, gradually began to produce local journals and newspapers. It has been argued that the Kingdom's high level of illiteracy at this time makes it impossible that print capital could have played a meaningful role in shaping a Saudi national consciousness, especially outside Hijaz. Instead this role would be played by the newer forms of mass media, television and radio, which developed during the 1960s and 1970s under King Fayṣal. Although the political stability that Ibn Sa'ūd's rule brought to Hijaz was enabling, its writers' sense that they were writing in a specifically Hijazi or *nahḍawī* tradition, can only have been reinforced by the stark cultural differences between Hijaz and Najd, whose puritanical Wahhabi creed and even traditional dress would eventually become closely associated with the Saudi national identity. This all helps to account for the deep ambivalence demonstrated by early critical and literary discourse in Hijaz towards the Saudi state. In Chapter Three this ambivalence is explored in the imaginative fiction that emerged in Hijaz between the 1930 and late 1950s.

²⁰⁷ Al-Shāmikh, *Nasha'at al-ṣaḥāfa*, 67-8.

CHAPTER THREE

Developments in Extended Prose Fiction and the Appearance of the ‘Artistic Novel’, 1930-59

3.1 Introduction

‘Extended prose fiction’ is a calculatedly ambiguous term which aims to draw attention to what Bakhtin has described as the ‘plasticity’ of the novel – its inherent resistance to definition – as opposed to reductive histories of the genre implied by the concept of ‘the artistic novel’, the literary analogue of the European canonical realist novel.¹ As in the European and general Arab contexts, accounts of the Saudi novel’s emergence have been shaped by a developmentalist teleology that privileges the realist novel and denigrates or downgrades early narratives that do not meet its criteria.

It is these early narratives that form the subject of this chapter as it surveys the emergence of the novel in Saudi Arabia. They include: ‘Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī’s *al-Taw’ amān* (1930), Muḥammad al-Jawhārī’s *al-Intiqām al-ṭabī’ī* (1935), Aḥmad al-Subā’ī’s *Fikra* (1947), Muḥammad ‘Alī Maghribī’s *al-Ba’th* (1948). The final text discussed, Ḥāmid Damanhūrī’s *Thaman al-taḍhīya* (1959), is the notable exception.

The novels span approximately three decades; a period marked by profound social and political transformation, which saw the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 and the opening of the first girls’ schools in 1960. Given the unique transitional nature of the period in question and the practical necessity to limit the focus within a relatively narrow timeframe, *Thaman* provides an appropriate cut-off point as it marks the appearance of the ‘artistic Saudi novel’.

Against the backdrop of the Saudi state’s formation, close reading offers an appreciation of these early narratives that firmly anchors them in the social, cultural

¹ Bakhtin describes the novel as ‘plasticity itself’. See Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, 2.

and political realities attending their production. In turn, it provides a focus for one of the main assumptions underpinning this thesis; i.e. the ambivalence of the nation space. How does the early 'Saudi novel' imagine and allegorise the nation? And how is it shaped by the ambivalence inherent in discourses of national identity? What did the nation mean for these writers who, without exception, were writing within a distinctly Hijazi social and cultural milieu?

In this connection, Chapter Three also reassesses some of the paradigmatic approaches to studies of the Arabic novel and its intersection with identity politics. A salient theme in the early Saudi novel, as in Arabic fiction in general for much of the twentieth century, is what is often described as the conflict between tradition and modernity, although it might be better to conceive of this conflict, in less value laden terms, as tensions in society arising from the disruptive pattern of change or from competing visions of the nation's future. The early Saudi novel complicates readings of the Arabic novel that conflate the binary oppositions of tradition/modernity and East/West, instead it presents a more complex picture and ultimately reveals the inadequacy of this paradigm. The tradition/modernity debate finds expression in the debate over 'the woman question', which formed a major site of ideological contestation in Arab discourses on nation and identity. Girls' education and marriage are recurrent themes in the early Saudi novel and point to what has been described as the nation's genderedness, that is, the different roles and expectations allocated to men and women in the performance of the national self.

3.2 The Didactic Imperative

Al-Taw'amān (The Twins, 1930)

'Abd al-Quddūs Al-Anṣārī was born in Medina in 1906. As was customary at the time he received a traditional Islamic schooling. From an early age he attended lessons at the Prophet's Mosque (al-Masjid al-Nabawī) where he was taught Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic recitation and hadith. In 1922, at the age of sixteen, he enrolled at the newly established School of Shari'a (Madrasat al-'Ulūm al-Shar'īya)

in Mecca.² After graduating in 1927, he worked at the school as a teacher of Arabic literature before beginning a career in government administration. Al-Anṣārī occupied various positions until he left Medina in 1940 to work as editor-in-chief of the Mecca-based *Umm al-Qurā* newspaper. He published several books during his lifetime, including an important survey of Mecca's historic buildings and a collection of poetry,³ although, with the exception of the short story, 'Marham al-tanāsī' (The Oblivion Ointment, 1933), *al-Taw'amān* represents his sole foray into fiction.⁴

The first edition of *al-Taw'amān* was published in 1930 by the Damascus publishing house, al-Taraqī Press. Perhaps, had al-Anṣārī not been such a prominent figure on the early Hijazi literary scene, as owner and editor-in-chief of *al-Manhal*, his book would have met with much the same fate as al-Jawharī's *al-Intiqām al-ṭabī'ī*, which languished in almost complete obscurity until it was reprinted in 2007.⁵ *Al-Taw'amān*'s critical reception was unremarkable. In fact, both *al-Taw'amān* and 'Marham al-tanāsī' were severely criticised by the prominent Saudi man of letters and contemporary of al-Anṣārī, Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Awwād (1902-80) in a notorious article published in *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* in 1933.⁶

Al-Taw'amān is the story of twin brothers, Rashīd and Farīd, and follows their lives from childhood through to adulthood. The setting is ambiguous and there is no indication that the novel is set in Hijaz/Saudi Arabia. The story opens with a brief introduction to the twins' family, described as 'a venerable Muslim Arab family, known for its great wealth'.⁷ Salīm, the twin's father, is a model of piety and moral integrity. He patiently forbears years of childlessness until his constant prayers are finally rewarded with the birth of Rashīd and Farīd. Salīm gives them the choice between enrolling in either the state primary school or one of the foreign schools. Rashīd chooses the state school and Farīd the American school. It is from this point

² Maghribī, *A'lām*, 2: 187-8.

³ 'Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, *al-Anṣāriyyāt* (Jeddah: n.p., 1964); *Āthār al-madīna al-munawwara* (Mecca: Al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya, 1935).

⁴ 'Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, 'Marham al-tanāsī', *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 29 August 1933, 4.

⁵ Muḥammad Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām* (London: Tuwwa Media and Publishing, 2007). Originally published under the longer title, *al-Intiqām al-ṭabī'ī* (Jeddah: Al-Matba'a al-Sharqiyya, 1935).

⁶ See Chapter Five, 191-3.

⁷ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw'amān*, 7.

that their paths begin to diverge.

The deleterious effects of secular Western education on the minds and morals of its students soon become apparent. When Farīd's father asks him about his new school, he replies: 'They have relieved us of many of our religious obligations so that study time is not lost on irrelevancies'.⁸ Rashīd reflects anxiously on the changes he has observed in his brother: 'After just a few months of starting at that school, he has lost, or pretends to have, his nationalist and religious fervour'.⁹ Rashīd's concerns prove to be well-founded when Farīd develops an aversion to prayer: 'God reward that school. I only ever get a break from these tiresome exertions when I am within its walls. Maybe I should think of these movements – standing, prostrating etc. – as a sort of addition to the sports I practiced at school yesterday'.¹⁰ In contrast, Rashīd's school instils its pupils with strong Islamic and nationalist values.

The pattern is repeated at secondary school, with the brothers continuing on their divergent paths. Farīd attends the French school, which, as the omniscient narrator informs his reader, is 'run by one of the colonists'.¹¹ Given the general drift of the story so far, it is of no surprise that Rashīd remains in the state education system. His school is run by 'one of those extraordinary nationalists, a voracious consumer of knowledge with a track-record of dedication to the causes of religion and nationalism'.¹² The French school turns out to be no less insidious than the American school. During one lesson, the 'foreign, orientalist' teacher informs the class that the East is indebted to the West for its knowledge of healthcare. When a pupil dares to contradict him, arguing that he has read many history books, including those by Western writers, which say the opposite, he reacts furiously and expels the boy to the detention room. When the boy returns home he begs his father to allow him to transfer to the state school.

⁸ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw'āmān*, 20-1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

The brothers graduate from high school and enrol at university. Rashīd studies at the state university, where he proves himself to be a model student, passing his exams with flying colours and winning the love and respect of his peers. On graduating, he takes up a lecturing post at the university; but he eventually becomes frustrated by the limits of his profession and decides to pursue a career in Islamic law. Later, after having become a highly successful lawyer, renowned throughout the city for his impeccable conduct and integrity, he is elected a member of the House of Representatives and is eventually made Speaker of the House.

Farīd's life takes a very different course to Rashīd's. He enrolls at the 'foreign' university, an institution 'extremely well versed in the arts of corruption and deception'.¹³ In Farīd it finds 'fertile ground to spread its mortal poisons and deadly germs'.¹⁴ The chapter that concerns his time at the university has the ominous title, 'Farīd and the temptations of his colleague, the young French man'.¹⁵ The latter is depicted in the following terms:

A young man from a French family that had made this bountiful land its second home, seizing the opportunity to bask in its leafy shade... like many of the West's wretched and poor whose livelihoods have dried up in their own countries, causing them to swarm upon the East to satisfy their hunger in the name of civilisation and progress.¹⁶

Farīd and his new friend quickly become inseparable companions. The latter beguiles Farīd with dreams of Paris and its many worldly charms. As soon as he graduates, Farīd enrolls as a doctoral candidate at one of Paris' universities. Soon after he arrives he writes his father requesting a considerable sum of money to cover fees and living expenses. But immediately upon receipt of his allowance Farīd deliberately gets himself expelled and embarks upon a lavish lifestyle of luxury hotels, expensive cars and courting the 'starlets' of the Parisian theatre scene. The plot takes a seemingly inevitable turn when Farīd becomes involved with an actress – the proverbial 'gold digger' – who exploits his naivety and takes him for every last franc before

¹³ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw' amān*, 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

abandoning him to the ignominy of destitution. And so he begins to frequent the bars, spending the pittance he makes from his job as a shoeshine to drink himself into oblivion. One night he becomes involved in a brawl with a ‘roguish’ European. The latter pulls out a pistol and shoots him dead, before delivering the rather hammy line: ‘Take this for your gall and for mocking us on our own turf, you nasty Easterner!’¹⁷

Al-Taw’amān is as thin on plot as it is lacking in thematic subtlety. Devoid of interiority, its characters are flat and undeveloped; instead, the omniscient narrative voice dominates throughout. Furthermore, *al-Taw’amān* is short, numbering just seventy-four pages. Temporal progression is indicated by the sudden transition from one stage in the twins’ lives to the next: from kindergarten to primary school; from secondary school to university; and so on. These jumps in time, which lend the narrative an episodic or fragmented quality, are often jarring. As for the language of *al-Taw’amān*, it is notably archaic even by the standards of the day. Al-Anṣārī includes obscure items of vocabulary where he could have opted for a more common expression; hence, there is rarely a page that does not include an explanatory note. Regardless of how it is approached, *al-Taw’amān* is simply too crude in its didacticism to be enjoyed as a story in its own right. Perhaps al-Anṣārī’s focus on message to the detriment of story is what ‘Awwād meant when he criticised it for ‘a lack of imagination’.¹⁸

Yet, it is ultimately unfair to criticise *al-Taw’amān* because it lacks features usually associated with a particular type of novel, that is, the ‘artistic novel’. It was not al-Anṣārī’s intention to write an ‘artistic novel’. Although Badr’s taxonomy was problematised in Chapter One for its teleology of narrative fiction, his discussion of the didactic novel is useful for understanding the underlying motivations behind this type of narrative. Badr argues that authors of works that fall into this category ‘did not consider what they were presenting to their readers as a novel, rather their intention was to educate – an aim that related closely to the conditions of their

¹⁷ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw’amān*, 73.

¹⁸ Ṣāhib al-Ta’amullāt, ‘Ta’amullāt fī al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt: Fann al-riwāya, qiṣṣat marham al-tanāsī’, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 31 October 1933, 4.

society at the time'.¹⁹ Many of the pioneering writers of the *nahḍa* directed their energies into the task of public enlightenment, for which literature was often a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.²⁰

Al-Taw'amān follows in this *nahḍawī* didactic tradition. Its tone and themes echo the writings of the Egyptian journalist and poet, 'Abd Allah al-Nadīm (1845-96), specifically the dialogues he published in his own paper, *al-Ustādh* (1892-93). As a staunch nationalist, al-Nadīm's aim was to promote traditional Arab and Islamic values while simultaneously decrying what he saw as the negative influence of Western values on Egyptian society. In a four-part dialogue, al-Nadīm lectures a young boy, Ḥāfiẓ, on personal hygiene and civil and religious duties, including how to perform his ablutions and prayers. In the fourth and final part, 'Madrasat al-banīn: Kāmil wa-Ḥāfiẓ' (The Boys' School: Kāmil and Ḥāfiẓ), the dialogue is between Ḥāfiẓ, who now assumes the role of educator, and Kāmil, another young boy who attends a foreign school. Kāmil asks Ḥāfiẓ to teach him how to pray as his school teaches Christianity only. The clear parallels between *al-Taw'amān* and al-Nadīm's dialogues, particularly the juxtaposition of two characters, one who is taught at a foreign school and the other who receives an education grounded in Islamic values, strongly suggests al-Anṣārī was directly influenced by al-Nadīm.²¹

Al-Taw'amān is subtitled: 'a literary, social, scientific novel' (*Riwāya adabiyya, 'ilmiyya, ijtimā'iyya*), making the didactic intent behind the text clear from the outset. This is reinforced by additional paratextual material, including an author's note on the front cover: 'We have explained some difficult words and expressions in the margins of the novel, to enlighten and edify the thoughts of the young readers'. Al-Anṣārī is specifically targeting the young, which underlines his pedagogical focus.

¹⁹ Badr, *al-Riwāya al-'arabiyya*, 57.

²⁰ One of the earliest and most notable examples of this literature is the Egyptian renaissance intellectual, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's translation of François Fénelon's mirror-for-princes work, *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699), which he published in 1867 under the rhyming prose title *Mawāqī' al-aflāk fī waqā'i Tilimāk* (The Position of the Stars Concerning Telemachus' Adventures).

²¹ 'Abd Allah al-Nadīm, 'Madrasat al-banīn: Kāmil wa-Ḥāfiẓ', *al-Ustādh* 17 (1892): 391-5, cited in Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1983), 83-4.

As with al-Nadīm, didactic fiction often formed a critique on what was seen as the corrupting influence of Western culture on society. To an extent, this reflected nationalist politics, particularly during the early twentieth century with the rise of Arab nationalism(s). To return to Badr's observations:

Whereas before the didactic novel had sought to promote the sciences of the West, its task now was to work for the good of society by directing criticism at some aspects of western society, which had been imported into our society.²²

In *al-Taw'amān*, the main object of criticism is Western or foreign-run schools in Arab countries, which al-Anṣārī believed posed a serious threat to the region's youth. As he writes in the introduction:

The reader may find in it [*al-Taw'amān*] a true picture of the damage wrought by Western institutions... upon the future of the East, through the inculcation of its youth with westernising teachings... The novel [*al-riwāya*] also gives a true picture of the great benefits and sound edification that can be gained from the national schools, despite the issues of weakness and deficiency that plague them.²³

The setting of *al-Taw'amān* was noted for its ambiguity. But is the absence of any reference to Saudi Arabia/Hijaz significant? A novel set in England or Scotland, for example, does not necessarily state this explicitly. Texts presuppose a level of knowledge or familiarity on the part of the reader and representations of place are often implicit. *Al-Taw'amān* was published two years prior to the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, which perhaps explains why the front cover claims the book as the first Hijazi – rather than Saudi – novel. This being said, there is nothing in the story – its characters, events, descriptions of the environment – that links the text to Hijaz. On the contrary, the colonial theme, and particularly the presence of Western-run schools, makes it difficult to situate the story within a Hijazi context, since such establishments never existed in Hijaz. Even in his introduction, al-Anṣārī speaks only in general terms, such as, 'the East', and 'the Arab-Islamic world'.

²² Badr, *al-Riwāya al-'arabiyya*, 73.

²³ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw'amān*, iv.

Returning to the story itself, the few references there are to place – description is sparse in *al-Taw'amān* – are equally vague. The first page opens:

In that imposing, opulent villa in the heart of that beautiful eastern quarter of that luminous Arab city where the luminaries of the Islamic Caliphate shone during the most splendid of its bygone ages, lived an Arab Muslim family known for its nobility and great wealth.²⁴

It might be reasonable to deduce from the above that *al-Taw'amān* takes place in Baghdad, seat of the illustrious Abbasid Caliphate for over five hundred years (750-1258), the Islamic Empire's so-called 'golden age'. But the presence of French colonists and French-run schools and universities makes Damascus a more likely candidate, especially given that Syria was governed under French mandate, while Iraq was administered by the British. But to attempt to situate *al-Taw'amān* within the borders of the nation-state is perhaps to miss the point altogether. The ambiguity is deliberate. Al-Anṣārī's narrative needs to be read in the broader context of Arab nationalism and the struggle against colonial domination. He was not so much writing about a particular Arab country, rather he was writing about issues that he believed affected the whole of the Arab world, or the 'Arab-Islamic world' as he puts it himself. Author and text are oriented towards a supranational Arab entity, which is defined against the Western 'other'.

This is made more or less explicit in al-Anṣārī's introduction to *al-Taw'amān*, where he decries the insidious threat posed to the Arab world by Western cultural imperialism: 'The deadly pestilence that has been brought by the modern, Western city to the East in general, and the Arab-Islamic world in particular, is plain to see. It has almost uprooted the very fabric of our society'.²⁵ For al-Anṣārī, the novel is first and foremost a propaganda tool:

It is self-evident that this European invasion relies upon two weapons: propaganda and infernal machines. The effect of the former on consciousness and sentiment is well known. The leaders of colonialism have organised a

²⁴ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw'amān*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, i.

formidable campaign, one that utilises the most effective means. Of these, the most powerful for affecting minds is the coercive power of those novels cloaked in alluring attire to induce [in their readers] wicked acts and moral abandonment.

This propaganda has achieved widespread popularity throughout the East, especially in the Arab-Islamic world. It has crept into the hearts and minds of many young people... who have fallen victim to their readings... It is the duty of the East in general, and especially the Arab world in light of its modern renaissance, to organise a defensive campaign to combat this inundation, and stop it in its tracks... This is by fighting fire with fire!²⁶

Al-Taw'amān is al-Anṣārī's attempt to 'fight fire with fire'. It might be described as a form of counter-propaganda, which aims to 'combat the wave of corruption by the same means', as he elaborates further on:

This means adopting the very methods the corruptors use to circulate their writings and their propaganda in the world... by combining Islamic education with attractive, contemporary methods, or moulding it to be in tune with popular thinking: for example, perhaps writing in a novelistic (*riwā'ī*) or entertaining (*fukāhī*) style etc., which would increase the appeal of our Islamic writings: for their success can only be equal to their popularity.²⁷

Bearing in mind the issues surrounding literary terminology in Arabic, it is important to underline here that al-Anṣārī is not advocating the adoption of the novel per se, but rather the couching of traditional 'Islamic' content in a 'novelistic style' or 'narrative form' (*uslūb riwā'ī*). Yet, although al-Anṣārī condemns the novel, or the particular type of European influenced narrative fiction that he uses this term to denote – perhaps what Badr might have described as 'the novel of entertainment' – his efforts to encourage modern fiction in Saudi Arabia via *al-Manhal* magazine belie the impression of a hopelessly reactionary traditionalist.

This ambivalence towards the novel form is indicative of a more general ambivalence towards the West and its cultural and technological products, and is discernable in much Arabic fiction produced during the first half of the twentieth century. Rashīd El-Enany describes this phenomenon in his *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (2011): 'Their [Arab

²⁶ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw'amān*, i-ii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

intellectuals'] representations of the West evince a sense of dichotomy, of ambivalence, of simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards their object and towards modernity in so much as it is a Western thing'.²⁸ This is because:

The paradox for them was that to gain freedom from Western Domination, the Western life model had to be adopted. The tension we feel in their writings on the East-West encounter stems from their recognition of the necessity of the very *other*, against whom they are trying to assert the *self*.²⁹

It is precisely this tension that is evident in the introduction to *al-Taw'amān*, and particularly its author's emphatic rebuke of anyone who would promote:

Those arts and sciences in which Europeans have of recent much participated. No, no, no. Only a foolish and unlearned mind would go there... For they [arts and sciences] came from us and belong to us. Therefore, we must strive determinedly and doggedly to take them from the Europeans and return them to their first cradle.³⁰

However, no such ambivalence towards the novel is evident in al-Jawharī's introduction to *al-Intiqām al-ṭabī'ī*, which he published five years after *al-Taw'amān*.

Al-Intiqām al-ṭabī'ī (Natural Revenge, 1935)

Muḥammad al-Jawharī (b. 1905) is something of an obscure figure. Little is known about him except that he was born in Mecca, educated at the city's early private Fakhriyya 'Uthmāniyya School founded in 1879, and went on to teach at the first

²⁸ Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8. El-Enany traces this back to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, citing the case of the Egyptian historian, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī (1754-1825) who provided a first-hand written account of the invasion. According to Edward Said, al-Jabartī's writings 'produced a deep seated anti-Westernism that is a persistent theme of Egyptian, Arab, Islamic and Third World history'. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 39; as cited by El-Enany, *Arab Representations*, 15. However, as El-Enany argues, the opposite is equally true. Al-Jabartī may have been horrified by the French troops, particularly by their violation of the al-Azhar mosque, describing them as 'devils' and 'soldiers of Satan', but this is 'doubtless outshone by his detailed accounts of their merits in scientific achievement, and in governance and administration, where in certain parts he can barely contain his admiration'. *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ Al-Anṣārī, *al-Taw'amān*, iii-iv

Saudi government school, the Amiriyya.³¹ *Al-Intiqām* appears to be his only publication, and for decades most scholars overlooked the work until it was republished in 2007.

Like its forerunner, *al-Intiqām* is fundamentally a didactic narrative. Its protagonist, Najīb, is a wealthy young bachelor who lives a leisurely and carefree life funded by his inheritance, which he fritters away on distractions and a parasitic coterie of friends. Foremost among these is Sulaymān, Najīb's right-hand man. When Najīb's finances begin to run low, he asks Sulaymān to sell one of his valuable rugs. The rug is sold but later that same day Najīb is ambushed in his own home by a masked assailant who robs him at gunpoint. Najīb is forced to sell off more of his home furnishings. Again, he asks Sulaymān to make the necessary arrangements and they agree to meet later so that Najīb can collect the proceeds. But Sulaymān never shows up. After a few days Najīb receives a letter from Sulaymān thanking him for the money. He reveals his resentment of Najīb, informing him that, as a poor man, he was a natural enemy of Najīb's late father, who he condemns as an exploiter and oppressor of the poor. He tells Najīb that he has fled to Jeddah and from there intends to take a boat to Alexandria. Sulaymān also reveals, should the reader have not already guessed, that Najīb's assailant was none other than himself. Unable to recover his money and with no hope of finding Sulaymān and seeing justice done, Najīb becomes deeply depressed.

Between the end of the first chapter and the beginning of the second, 'Repentance', an unspecified period of time elapses. These skips in time occur throughout the narrative, giving it the same episodic quality observed in *al-Taw'amān*. The chapter begins by recounting how, as a result of Sulaymān's deceit, Najīb has learned that 'most people conceal artifice and treachery behind the guise of honesty and faithfulness in the pursuit of material things'.³² He has now severed all ties with his

³¹ Husayn Muḥammad Bāfiqīh, 'Taḥawwulāt siyāsiyya wa-l-thaqāfiyya' (Political and Cultural Transformations), *al-Riyadh*, 24 November 2005, accessed 3 March 2013, <http://www.alriyadh.com/110012>, and 'Abd Allah Bin Aḥmad al-Shabbāt, 'Lamaḥāt min al-mādī: Al-Madrasa al-amīriyya bi-l-Aḥsā' (Glimpses of the Past: al-Hasa's Amīriyya School), *al-Jazirah*, 28 August 2006, accessed 3 March 2013, <http://www.al-jazirah.com/culture/28082006/fadaat7.htm>.

³² Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām*, 31.

former associates, including ‘the thief of his heart and money’.³³ This is the first mention of any love interest and the details of this episode are left to the reader’s imagination, presumably owing to the taboo nature of extramarital amorous relationships. It seems that Najīb had fallen ‘victim’ to the feminine wiles of a ‘wicked and cunning’ woman – a familiar trope echoing Farīd’s encounter with the Parisian actress in *al-Taw’amān*. The reader encounters Najīb as he refuses to let the nameless woman back into his home, accusing her of having led him astray: ‘The weight of your sins could crush mountains. If it had not been for your immoral ways, I would never have fallen prey to such vices’.³⁴ It is not too fanciful to suggest here that this is an oblique reference to same sex relationships, since it parallels Farīd’s earlier experience with Sulaymān. This is reinforced later in the story by references to sodomy.

Najīb sells his house along with his few remaining possessions and moves to Mecca to repent his sins and earn an honest living, opening a fabric shop in the souq. As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, he begins to reminisce about the delicious meals his mother used to prepare for the family at this time of year and decides the time has come for him to marry. Najīb approaches his friend, Dr. Rushdī, one of the few acquaintances he has made in Mecca, and asks for his help in finding a ‘pious and chaste’ wife.³⁵ The doctor reminds Najīb that marriage is a ‘sacred bond’, and that for it to be successful it requires two willing partners. A man who marries a woman against her will or is unable to provide for her will be miserable.³⁶

The doctor then advises Najīb that the most important provisos for marriage are ‘good health and strength’ – of both mind and body – and that if he is not lacking on either account then he can bring him a suitable bride within the hour. However, as the doctor knows, Najīb is suffering from what might be described as a state of moral and physical dissipation. But, fortunately for Najīb, he is not beyond redemption. The doctor explains that the aches, general lassitude and other complaints Najīb has

³³ Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

been experiencing are only early symptoms, all of which are easily treatable.³⁷ But if he continues to live ‘a life of indulgence, promiscuity and other vices that corrupt mind and morals’, then he will meet with ‘natural revenge’.³⁸

Over several pages the doctor expounds on how immoral practices, particularly *al-najāsa*, the state of being unclean/impure, masturbation, fornication and sodomy, lead to chronic and even mortal afflictions, citing various Qur‘anic verses and hadith to lend weight to his arguments.³⁹ In an obvious reference to sexually transmitted disease, the Doctor tells Najīb that western scientists have discovered that microbes are the cause of many serious illnesses and that these are picked up from ‘sick and fallen women’.⁴⁰ The Doctor concludes by summarising his advice in a list of rules:

1. Do not engage in prohibited sexual acts, such as fornication and buggery etc. And likewise, avert one’s gaze from sexually arousing sights.
2. Do not consume alcoholic beverages such as beer and wine, and other intoxicants, such as opium and hashish.
3. Eat only when hungry and only dairy products, fruit, vegetables and bread baked from brown wheat flour. As for ordinary foods, most of which are unhealthy, do not eat them for at least two to three months, and then only in modest amounts.
4. Drink only when you feel thirsty, and drink either during meals or two hours after eating. Drink less tea and stop drinking coffee and smoking.
5. Live in a healthy, clean place that is light, well-aired and spacious.
6. Do not stay up late and get at least eight hours sleep a night.
7. Avoid dark thoughts and think only about those things that are of benefit to you, and pray regularly.
8. Walk two hours a day, mornings and evenings, to the mosque or where the air is clean.
9. I am sure you are not ill because if you were you would not have been able to walk here; instead you would be lying in bed. Tell yourself that you are in good health that improves everyday through the power of God who said: ‘Call upon me and I shall answer’, for He is capable of all things.

The Doctor gives Najīb some pills and instructs him to return after three days, again emphasising the importance of faith and prayer. Najīb does as the Doctor asks and experiences a remarkable restitution of his physical and mental health. It turns out

³⁷ Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām*, 41.

³⁸ Ibid., 41.

³⁹ Ibid., 39-40.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41.

the medicine was a placebo; the obvious point being that prayer and faith were the only medicine Najīb needed. Now he is ‘cured’, the Doctor invites Najīb to choose a wife from among his daughters, encouraging him to choose the eldest, since she is ‘the most mature in mind and body’.⁴¹ Once Najīb has chosen a wife all that remains to be settled is the dowry. The doctor proves to be ‘a model of humanity’ and asks for a token amount of money, which is the small change that happens to be in Najīb’s wallet.⁴² With the dowry now settled, the doctor fetches the local mufti and arrangements are made:

They sat for an hour in consultation over the marriage, the wedding party, the contract, and the wedding night. Finally they all agreed to keep things to the minimal as stipulated by Islamic law, casting aside those old and burdensome traditions that called for waste and expensive dowries, and limiting the feast [*walīma*] to friends and family only.⁴³

At the time al-Jawharī was writing marriage customs were the subject of some scrutiny. Issues such as a woman’s right to choice in marriage, the marrying of adolescent girls, and excessive expenditure on dowries and wedding celebrations were debated in the Hijazi press.⁴⁴ This was part of a more general reformist discourse that criticised and called for the abandonment of customs and traditions deemed antithetical to the nation’s progress or considered un-Islamic. Najīb’s faults are pinned on ‘his errant upbringing that was overshadowed by superstitions and customs for which God has revealed no legitimation’.⁴⁵

The positive resolution of Najīb’s crisis highlights the redemptive power of repentance and the physical and spiritual benefits of living a clean and righteous life. Conversely, Sulaymān’s death in the closing chapter, ‘In the Ajyad Hospital’, serves

⁴¹ Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām*, 55.

⁴² Ibid., 56.

⁴³ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁴ During the 1920s and 1930s numerous articles appeared in the Saudi press criticising various customs and traditions that were considered un-Islamic or innovation, *bida‘a*. For example, Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Maqsūd, in his three-part article, ‘Naḥnu wa-l-‘ādāt – baḥṭh fī al-zawāj’ (Customs and Us: A Discussion on Marriage), published under the penname, ‘al-Ghīrbāl,’ in *Sawt al-Ḥijāz*, 6 September - 3 October 1932, 6, complains about excessive dowries, even calling on the government to intervene and put an end to such ‘harmful’ practices. In *Umm al-Qurā‘ al-Subā‘ī* makes similar criticisms. See ‘Khawāṭir - al-‘ādāt’ (Reflections: Customs), *Sawt al-Ḥijāz*, 30 April 1932, 4.

⁴⁵ Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām*, 38.

as an example of what can happen if repentance is sought too late. By pure chance, Najīb comes face-to-face with his erstwhile friend during a visit to the hospital to distribute alms. Najīb expresses nothing but compassion and forgiveness for Sulaymān, who is now repentant for the life he has led, revealing that his present predicament is the result of syphilis, which he contracted from a prostitute in Cairo. He was making the pilgrimage when he became too ill to continue. Some days after his visit, Najīb learns that Sulaymān has died. Sulaymān's pitiful and ignominious end mirrors that of Farīd in *al-Taw'amān*.

Al-Taw'amān and *al-Intiqām* share a number of thematic and formal qualities that reflect the subjugation of plot and other narrative elements to the text's ideological and didactic centre of interest. Most notably, both feature two young, male characters that are each other's foil. However, there are also notable differences between the texts. Numbering just fifty pages, *al-Intiqām* is even shorter than *al-Taw'amān*. Also, its language is more accessible; there are none of the marginalia found in the latter, even if its prose is characterised by the exploitation of classical Arabic rhetorical devices and stylistic elements, such as paronomasia (*jinās*) and the emphatic verbal modifier, *lām al-juhūd*.⁴⁶

But the most significant difference between al-Jawharī and al-Anṣārī lies not so much in the form of their narratives as it does in their motivations for writing and their respective attitudes towards the novel. The politics of the Arab-nationalist, anti-colonial movement informing *al-Taw'amān* are wholly absent from *al-Intiqām*. Furthermore, al-Jawharī's whole-hearted embrace of the novel could not be further from al-Anṣārī's cynically utilitarian stance. In his introduction, al-Jawharī describes how he is utterly enamoured with the novel, stating that of all the 'literary arts' it is in the novel [*al-riwāya*] he finds most pleasure.⁴⁷ He wryly muses how he had wanted to find a guide who would take him 'step by step' towards perfecting 'this

⁴⁶ Classical Arabic prose and poetry is characterised by the liberal use of rhetorical devices. *Jinās* or paronomasia is a pun or play on words. *Lām al-juhūd* is placed at the beginning of a verb and used to intensify its action. The writers of the *nahḍa*, most notably the neoclassicists during the early period, continued to employ these devices, although their use gradually declined as efforts were made to formulate a more accessible, economic language.

⁴⁷ Al-Jawharī, *al-Intiqām*, 9.

beautiful art’, although sadly this ‘wishful thinking’ came to nothing: ‘God only knows, perhaps he was busy’.⁴⁸ At the end of his introduction, al-Jawharī tells his readers he has written ‘a little novel that meets novelistic standards as far as possible’.⁴⁹

Such self-effacing, apologetic caveats were not uncommon in the preamble of the early Arabic novel.⁵⁰ To some extent they reflect the instability of form as writers strove to shape a narrative discourse that suited the conditions of their society. Moreover, as with al-Anṣārī’s introduction to *al-Taw’ amān*, they are also telling of the morally suspect status of narrative fiction, which lacked the prestige and authenticity of established, traditional literary genres. Hence authors were often keen to justify their work on the basis of its moral and educational value.⁵¹

This is also apparent in the expository subtitle appended to al-Anṣārī’s novel. Similarly, *al-Intiqām* is subtitled: ‘a scientific, literary, moral and social novel’ (*riwāya ‘ilmiyya, adabiyya, akhlāqiyya, ijtimā’iyya*). The phenomenon of expository subtitles – also noted by Salem in the popular Egyptian novels of the 1920s – reflects an apparent need felt by writers to differentiate their work from certain types of novel – ‘the novel of adventure’ described by Badr, for example.⁵² This also confirms what Ouyang has said on the ‘vagueness’ of the term, *riwāya*.

Despite the pleasure al-Jawharī finds in the novel, which he no less embraces as an art and not – as with al-Anṣārī – as merely a means to an end, the crude didacticism of *al-Intiqām* makes it little more than a device designed to promote its author’s moral and reformist agenda, and again is reminiscent of al-Nadīm and other early writers of Arabic fiction, plays and didactic dialogues. It is this same reformist spirit that drives Maghribī’s *al-Ba’th* (1948: Resurrection).

⁴⁸ Al-Jawharī, 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰ Sassom Somekh, *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Najib Mahfuz’s Novels* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 3. See also J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 205-11.

⁵² Selim, *Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, 66.

Al-Ba‘th (Resurrection, 1948)

Muḥammad ‘Alī Maghribī was a graduate of Mecca’s Falāḥ School. In 1941, he spent a brief period as the editor-in-chief of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*. Maghribī eventually retired from literature and journalism to focus on his business interests. Like al-Jawharī, Maghribī published only one novel, although he also published several books on poetry and an important biographical compendium of famous Hijazi personalities, an example of the particularistic local historiographies described by Determann.⁵³

There are obvious similarities between al-Jawharī’s Najīb and the protagonist of *al-Ba‘th*, Asāma. Both are portrayed as dissolute young men whose family wealth has enabled them to live a carefree existence. According to the logic of such moralising tales, their immoral and indulgent lifestyles eventually catch up with them as a sort of divine retribution or ‘karma’, al-Jawharī’s ‘natural revenge’. Both characters suffer ill health – of the physical and spiritual varieties – from which they eventually recover through a process of atonement. When Asāma falls ill his family send him to India for medical treatment.

Unlike *al-Intiqām* however, *al-Ba‘th* is not without the anti-colonial polemic of al-Anṣārī. Asāma takes a British steamer from Jeddah to Bombay. On the evening of his first day at sea he attends dinner with the other first-class passengers. He immediately stands out in his ‘baggy Arab dress’ among the Europeans in their ‘tight suits’. The narrator emphasises the gulf between the two parties, describing Asama as ‘alien to them in everything’.⁵⁴ His discomfort grows as he clumsily attempts to eat with a knife and fork, being used to eating with his hands. Colonial attitudes of cultural superiority to the ‘Easterner’ are voiced in the remarks made by some of the diners: ‘These Arabs are barbarians. Look at him, he doesn’t know how to eat!’ Another interjects: ‘They’re used to eating with their hands, the food falling from their mouths and soiling their filthy clothes’. While a third exclaims: ‘An ignorant

⁵³ Muḥammad ‘Alī Maghribī, *A‘lām al-Ḥijāz fī al-qarn al-rābi‘ ‘ashar li-l-hijra: 1301–1400: 1883–1980*, 4 vols (Jeddah: Tihāma, 1981).

⁵⁴ Muḥammad ‘Alī Maghribī, ‘al-Ba‘th’, *al-Ba‘th: Majmū‘a qiṣaṣiyya* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Miṣr, 1948), 45.

barbarous nation!’⁵⁵ Although Asāma’s command of English is limited, the derogatory nature of their remarks is not lost on him and from then on he takes his meals alone in his room.

Asāma’s isolation is relieved when he meets fellow traveller, Shaykh Akbar ‘Alī, an Indian mufti who immediately impresses him with his perfect command of formal Arabic (*al-fuṣḥā*). The shaykh invites Asāma to participate in a *mawlid* celebration along with the other Muslim passengers, mainly poor Indians returning from Hajj and Yemeni servants. Asāma, who has always shunned such occasions and generally taken little interest in religion, reluctantly accepts. But contrary to his expectations he is deeply moved by the shaykh’s devotion, experiencing something akin to an epiphany.

The anti-colonial theme is picked up on again when Shaykh ‘Alī Akbar complains to Asāma about Christian missionaries in India:

The shaykh spoke at length to the youth about his country, but what he had to say was not exactly what he wanted to hear. He spoke of Islam in India, Muslims, Hindus and the pagans among whom Christian propaganda was rife, and who the Christian missionaries were converting to Christianity.⁵⁶

Despite this, *al-Ba‘th* is less a blasting of Western imperialism and the threat its proselytising missions posed to Islam, and more a call for reform at home. The shaykh complains that, while there are many people who travel from Hijaz to India and other Muslim countries each year to encourage people to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, there are far fewer who come specifically to bring people to Islam. He tells Asāma that since the Hajj is a sacred duty and crucial for Hijaz’s economy, as inheritors of:

The original land of the Islamic calling, its cradle and its source... the only Islamic country in which Islam is still healthy [and] the country that contains Muslims and Muslims only, from every race and tribe, you are the most worthy of this cause.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Maghribī, ‘al-Ba‘th’, 46.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 49-50.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 49.

Reflecting on Shaykh Akbar ‘Alī’s words, Asāma considers that while this is true, it should not be forgotten that ‘all Islamic countries, ‘ulama’, and more precisely, governments of Islam, should share in this duty, in spreading the word of God and jihad’.⁵⁸

During his time in hospital, Asāma falls in love with Kitty, an Indian nurse, after befriending her and her widowed mother. Although Kitty is Christian, Asāma promises to marry her. But after three years, Asāma is forced to abruptly return home on learning of his father’s death. Asāma and Kitty write to one another but their letters gradually become fewer and farther between until they eventually lose touch altogether. The years pass and Asāma matures into a respected and successful businessman. He falls in love with Balqīs, a young woman from Hijaz and they become engaged. However, fate intervenes and the engagement is broken off. This affords Asāma some introspection and he realises that if he had married Balqīs he would have betrayed his promise to Kitty.

A few years later, Asāma is making the Hajj when a chance encounter brings him face-to-face with Shaykh Akbar ‘Alī in Mecca. The shaykh happens to be accompanying Kitty and her mother on the pilgrimage – both converted to Islam some time after Asāma left India. One highly improbable coincidence follows another and it turns out that Kitty has taken the Arabic name, Balqīs. Now reunited, Asāma is finally able to fulfil his promise and marry her.

The marriage theme in *al-Intiqām* and *al-Ba‘th* is highly significant. Both stress a need for compatibility between husband and wife, which is indicative of changes within society at large. The introduction of modern schooling for boys and access to tertiary education abroad, resulted in anxiety over the future compatibility of Hijazi men and women. This led some to argue for girls’ education on the basis that an educated man requires an educated woman.⁵⁹ Similarly, in Egypt during the early

⁵⁸ Maghribī, ‘al-Ba‘th’, 50.

⁵⁹ For example, this argument is made by ‘Abdullah al-Jabbār in his introduction to *Thaman al-tadhīya*.

twentieth century, changes in education for men and women saw the movement away from the notion of marriage purely for procreation, as least among the middle and upper classes, to the idea of companionate marriage.⁶⁰ Hence the advocacy of monogamy implicit in *al-Ba‘th* since, as in Europe, monogamy was considered essential to companionate marriage. The argument for girls’ education is also implicit in Maghribī’s novel, where the young, uneducated Hijazi woman, Balqīs, is contrasted with her Indian counterpart, Kitty, who is not only educated but also enjoys the right to work.

The call for girl’s education in Hijaz goes back to at least the 1930s.⁶¹ However, the Wahhabi ‘ulama’ staunchly opposed its introduction in the kingdom and when the first girls’ schools finally opened in 1960, this was met with sometimes violent public resistance in Najd.⁶² These observations are important in that they highlight the specificity of Hijaz and also place developments there within the general Arab reformist movement.

Likewise, religion, another recurrent theme in these early novels, serves as a marker of Hijazi identity/difference, in that the diversity of religious practice in the province complicates the Najdi-Wahhabi national narrative. While the highly pious and puritanical character of *al-Intiqām*’s Dr. Rushdi and the emphasis on religious reform in *al-Ba‘th* might – at least superficially – suggest a reading of these novels that identifies them with the Wahhabi reformist drive, there are aspects of both novels that conflict with Wahhabism. For example, the depiction of a *mawlid* celebration in *al-Ba‘th*, which according to Wahhabi doctrine is a form of innovation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Kenneth M. Cuno, ‘Ambiguous Modernization: The Transition to Monogamy in the Khedival House of Egypt’, in *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property and Gender*, ed. Beshara Doumani (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 266.

⁶¹ For example see al-Subā‘ī’s early article, ‘Ḥājatunā ilā ta‘līm al-banāt: Shay’ yaqirruhu al-mantiq!’ (Our Need to Educate Girls: Something Dictated by Logic!), in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’* 77-80.

⁶² See al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State*, 90.

⁶³ The Wahhabi doctrine forbids the veneration of human beings. See Elie Podeh, *The Politics of National Celebrations in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 256-7. One source claims that in the late 1930s Mawlid celebrations were ‘strictly prohibited’ in Hijaz. See Mark J. R. Sedgwick, ‘Saudi Sufis: Compromise in the Hijaz, 1925-40’, *Die Welt des Islams* 37, no. 3 (1997): 366. Even as late as 2015, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Bin ‘Abd Allah, reaffirmed the Wahhabi position by announcing that the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday is innovation and superstition. See ‘Mufti al-Sa‘ūdīyya: Al-Iḥtifāl bi-mawlid al-nabawī bida‘a wa-

Additionally, the attitude of the Wahhabi ‘ulama’ towards polygamy was no more progressive than its position on girls’ education. In fact, Madawi al-Rasheed claims that they ‘spared no effort to propagate it as a natural social necessity, sanctioned by divine authority’.⁶⁴

The reality is that, although the Wahhabi movement is so closely associated with Saudi rule – the terms ‘Wahhabi’ and ‘Saudi’ often being treated as almost synonymous – the conquest of Hijaz did not result in its immediate ‘wahhabisation’, nor were initial attempts to institute the Najdi creed in Hijaz as heavy-handed as perhaps might be assumed from the perceived doctrinal intransigence of the Wahhabi ‘ulama’. The first decades of Saudi rule in Hijaz were, in fact, characterised by a certain degree of compromise and political pragmatism, helped by the defacto division of the temporal and the spiritual spheres between the Āl Sa‘ūd and the Najdi ‘ulama’.⁶⁵

Mark Sedgwick argues that Wahhabism was not monolithic and unchanging; rather, it passed through a number of identifiable stages over the course of its history. When the revivalist movement first emerged in Najd during the eighteenth century, it was defined by its revolutionary zeal, setting itself ‘uncompromisingly against the whole of the Islamic world’.⁶⁶ However, ‘this revolutionary wahhabism was extinct by the time of the reoccupation of Hijaz in 1925-6’, and was replaced by a ‘reform Wahhabism’ that ‘had come to live at peace with the wider Islamic community, and was relatively more open to doctrinal compromise with the wider community’.⁶⁷

But what explains this shift within the Wahhabi establishment? According to Sedgwick, Ibn Sa‘ūd was keen to avoid a repeat of the outcome of the first Saudi occupation of Hijaz during the early nineteenth century, when Wahhabi excesses are

khurāfa’, *al-Shuruq online*, accessed 10 May 2015, <http://www.echoroukonline.com/ara/articles/228438.html>.

⁶⁴ Madawi al-Rasheed, ‘Caught between Religion and State’, in Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic, and Religious Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 292-313; 298.

⁶⁵ Sedgwick, ‘Saudi Sufis’, 354.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 353-4.

said to have been at least partly responsible for galvanising world reaction against them. Therefore it was necessary to show restraint and treat outsiders carefully.⁶⁸ The Ta'if massacre in 1924 was another important lesson in that it showed how a lack of restraint could quickly turn the tide of public opinion against Ibn Sa'ūd, whom many Hijazis originally welcomed because of their frustrations with Hashemite rule.⁶⁹ It was also an early herald of the challenge that would later be posed by the Ikhwan who represented a continuation of revolutionary Wahhabism. Finally, the situation in Hijaz called for political compromise:

The conquest of Jeddah produced an entirely new set of problems, since instead of with beduin and a few dwellers in isolated settlements of the east of the peninsula, 'Abd al-'Aziz was now faced with a complex urban society of merchants with international connections, and with the diplomatic representatives of the Powers... Control of the holy cities had also brought with it the need to accommodate international pilgrims... because the pilgrimage was the ultimate source of wealth of the inhabitants of the Hijaz and any revenue which a ruler of the Hijaz might hope to raise.⁷⁰

Religious life in Hijaz then, even after it was absorbed into Saudi territory, enjoyed a plurality that set it apart from Najd. The theme of religion in the novels under discussion is reflective of this plurality. Furthermore, the reformist message at their core can be linked to the modernist Islamic reform movement pioneered by Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897).

David Commins observes how, during the early twentieth century, 'modernist Salafism found a foothold among the merchants and educated youth' of Hijaz.⁷¹ Among them were several leading literary and cultural figures, including the nationalist and original owner of *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Naṣīf, who 'participated in a letter writing network with Salafi 'ulama' and publicists'.⁷²

⁶⁸ Sedgwick, 'Saudi Sufis' 354.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 357.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 358-9.

⁷¹ David Commins, 'From Wahhabi to Salafi', in *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, 151-66; 159.

⁷² Ibid., 159.

Another was Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Awwād, who condemned the Meccan ‘ulama’ in his collection of essays, *Khawāṭir Muṣarraḥa* (Thoughts Clearly States, 1926).⁷³ ‘Awwād accuses the ‘ulama’ of being unable to answer simple doctrinal questions and of being ignorant of Western scientific advances. He closes by advising Muslims to ignore the ‘ulama’ of the day and instead consult the works of ‘Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Shāfi‘ī among the ancients, and Muḥammad Ibn, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and the books of Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Farīd Wajdī among the moderns’.⁷⁴

Religious journals, such as *al-Manār* and *al-Fath*, brought the ideas of the Islamic reformist movement to readers in Hijaz and, indeed, much of the Muslim world.⁷⁵ From the early twentieth century, several prominent representatives of the movement even worked to ‘normalise’ and ‘rehabilitate’ Wahhabism, which many Muslims outside Najd had viewed negatively or even with suspicion.⁷⁶ Nabil Mouline claims that the aforementioned Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, the ‘head of the reformist movement’, played ‘the leading role’ in ‘the rehabilitation of Hanbali-Wahhabism’.⁷⁷ Both Riḍā and al-Khaṭīb published articles in defence of Ibn Sa‘ūd and Wahhabism in their respective journals.

Although this is not the place for a thorough engagement with the history of the Islamic reform movement in Hijaz, two other Syrian reformists should be mentioned here for their role in promoting the movement in the province: Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bītār (1894-1976) and Sheikh Kāmil al-Qaṣṣāb. The latter, noted earlier for his position in Ḥusayn’s Ministry of Education, had studied under ‘Abduh. He was first sent to Hijaz in 1915 on behalf of the Young Arab Society and served there as Ḥusayn’s envoy until he left in 1918.⁷⁸ He returned to Hijaz in 1925 at the invitation

⁷³ For a detailed discussion of the book, see Chapter Five, 168-9.

⁷⁴ Trans. David Commins, ‘From Wahhabi to Salafi’, 159.

⁷⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Islamic Revivalism* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris), 137.

⁷⁶ Nabil Mouline, *Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, trans. Ethan S. Rundell (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), 109.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

⁷⁸ James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998), 94. For more background on al-Qaṣṣāb see Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 36; 166-68.

of Ibn Sa‘ūd who made him Minister of Education.⁷⁹ Like, al-Qaṣṣāb, al-Bīṭār, a Syrian Salafī scholar and keen defender of Wahhabism, was also ‘appointed to important positions within the Saudi education and judicial systems’.⁸⁰

Despite attempts to ‘rehabilitate’ Wahhabism, for some time after the establishment of Saudi Arabia ‘Salafism and Wahhabism remained distinct currents, the former flourishing as a cosmopolitan tendency and the latter retaining a parochial Najdi accent’.⁸¹ It was only later, during the 1950s that Wahhabism ‘rebranded’ itself as Salafism.⁸² What had previously been described in histories of the movement as ‘the Najdi call’ was amended in new editions to ‘the Salafī call in Najd’.⁸³ The motivation behind this rebranding was the government’s decision to open up the kingdom to foreign Muslims in order to develop the country’s public institutions. It was also a shrewdly tactical move in the competition with Salafī groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸⁴ However, lending weight to the case made by al-Ghadhdhāmī for the superficial nature of modernity in Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabi scholars ‘did not ascribe to Salafī the set of modernist, nationalist, and state-building’ meanings that prevailed earlier.⁸⁵

The presence of the neo-Salafī current in Hijaz is detectable in its literary narratives. Although there are aspects of *al-Taw‘amān* that can be traced to the Arabic heritage, its promotion of Islamic Arab nationalism make it essentially modernist. Similarly, the progressive outlook of both *al-Intiqām* and *al-Ba‘th* reflects the modernist, cosmopolitan tendency of Salafism, as opposed to the parochialism of Najdi Wahhabism. Doctor Rushdī’s advice to Najīb – the causal connection made between morality and good health, the preoccupation with the dangers of ‘fallen women’ or prostitution and ‘deviant’ sexual practices, and dietary and exercise advice – reads like an amalgam of traditional Islamic guidance and Victorian hygiene and purity literature. This medicalisation of sexual morality makes the doctor the voice of a

⁷⁹ Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Mawsū‘at al-a‘lām*, 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li-l-Milāyīn, 1980), 7: 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 103-4.

⁸¹ David Commins, ‘From Wahhabi to Salafī’, 161.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

rational interpretation of Islam.

However, the picture is perhaps more complicated than these necessarily brief insights might suggest. Madawi al-Rasheed has pointed out that ‘a salafi tradition existed in Hijaz before the new conquest, it was not however, the only religious tradition or even the dominant one, it co-existed with other Islamic schools and Sufi *turuq*’.⁸⁶ The mawlid celebration led by a non-Arab, Indian sheikh depicted in *al-Ba‘th*, along with Asāma’s epiphany and return to religion, are compelling evidence for a Sufi connection.

Even though, following the Saudi conquest of Hijaz ‘many (or perhaps most) *zawiyas* were destroyed, more private Sufi activities seem to have continued unmolested’.⁸⁷ The most likely explanation for this is the ‘tolerant and flexible policy’ Ibn Sa‘ūd exercised in his rule over Hijaz, which was, until the oil boom, the mainstay of the Kingdom’s economy.⁸⁸ Moreover, there was, as Sedgwick notes, the impracticality of completely prohibiting Sufism in Hijaz to which overwhelming numbers of pilgrims flocked during the Hajj.⁸⁹

No less so than the novels discussed so far, Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī *Fikra* forms a literary response to the modernist reformist discourse. But while its appeal for religious and social reform is clear enough, al-Subā‘ī’s horizons are broader than those of his contemporaries. The Muslim cosmopolitanism of Maghribī is even more apparent in *Fikra* and is combined with – for the time – a strikingly bold argument for girls’ education.

⁸⁶ Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.

⁸⁷ Sedgwick, ‘Saudi Sufis’, 360-1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 365.

3.3 The Nation and ‘The Woman Question’

Fikra (Fikra, 1947)

Writer, reformist, educator, and historian, Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī was born in Mecca in 1905. He attended one of the state schools established under King Ḥusayn’s rule, although his education was cut short by his father’s untimely passing. Al-Subā‘ī, who was just fourteen years old at the time, was forced to leave school and work to provide for his family. He took on various odd jobs until the local education authority employed him as a teacher at the Dār al-Fa’izīn school, a post he retained for ten years.⁹⁰ During this time, al-Subā‘ī published, at his own expense, a six-part Arabic language textbook, *Sullam al-qirā’a al-‘arabiyya* (A Step by Step Guide to Learning to Read in Arabic, 1933).⁹¹ Intended for primary school children, the book was quickly picked up by the Ministry of Culture and adopted as the country’s first school textbook.⁹²

Early on, al-Subā‘ī began publishing articles in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, where, like Maghribī, he would later work as an editor. He pursued these and other cultural activities in his spare time, outside his job with the Ministry of Finance as a financial investigator. This was not unusual at a time when it was virtually impossible to earn a living from writing. The situation was no different across the Arab world. In Egypt, even a writer as successful as Najīb Maḥfūz (1911-2006) was only able to dedicate himself to writing after he retired from the civil service.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibrahim ‘Awwād, ‘al-Adīb al-Sa‘ūdī, Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī’, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 5 September 2007, accessed 10 November 2012, http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?page=article&id_article=10359.

⁹¹ The first edition of *Sullam* was published in 1933 under the full title: *Sullam al-qirā’a al-‘arabiyya li-talāmīdh al-madāris al-hijāziyya* (Mecca: n.p., 1933). A later edition published in 1955, has the abbreviated title: *Sullam al-qirā’a al-‘arabiyya* (Mecca: n.p., 1955).

⁹² Ḥalīma Muẓaffar, ‘Al-Rāḥil Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī, 81 ‘āman min al-fikr wa-l-injāz’ (The Late Aḥmad al-Subā‘ī: 81 Years of Ideas and Achievements), *Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 3 September 2005, accessed 13 November 2013,

<http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=9532&article=321165#.VRgHrzSUfrF>.

⁹³ See Allen, *Arabic Novel*, 22-3. This is still largely true today, although the recent establishment of The International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2008 and The Shaykh Zayed Book Award in 2007 suggests the situation is beginning to change.

In 1951 al-Subā'ī retired from his position at the ministry and established the Ḥaram Press, later renamed the Quraysh Press. In 1958 he founded *al-Nadwa* (The Forum) newspaper of which he was editor-in-chief. He also founded the short-lived *Quraysh* magazine in 1961, which was the first Saudi periodical to feature caricatures.⁹⁴ The magazine was one of several publications that fell victim to the 1963 Publishing and Printing Law.⁹⁵ It included articles on various cultural and contemporary topics from a young and emerging generation of Saudi writers.

Al-Subā'ī's contribution to journalism earned him the epithet, 'Shaykh of the Saudi Press' among his contemporaries.⁹⁶ His bibliography includes several works, ranging from a mammoth history of Mecca to a book on local proverbs.⁹⁷ *Fikra* is al-Subā'ī's only novel, although he published his autobiography under the title, *Ayyāmī*, perhaps a nod to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's famous autobiographical work, *al-Ayyām* (My Days, 1933).⁹⁸ He also published a collection of short stories, *Khālatī khadrajān* (Aunt Khadrajān, 1968).⁹⁹ His achievements received official recognition in 1983, just a year before he died, when he was awarded the short-lived State Prize for Saudi Literature.¹⁰⁰

At around 150 pages, *Fikra* is the most substantial work of extended prose fiction published by a Saudi writer prior to *Thaman al-taḍhīya*, which appeared over a decade later in 1959. The book's full title is the rather wordy, *Fikra, badawiyat al-jabal al-tā'īha bayn widyān al-Tā'if* (Fikra, a Bedouin Woman of the Mountain Wandering between the Valleys of Tā'if). This recalls the subtitles of al-Anṣārī's and

⁹⁴ Muzaffar, 'al-Rāḥil Aḥmad al-Subā'ī'.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Muḥammad Tarāwrī, 'al-Subā'ī, shaykh al-ṣaḥāfa al-ladhī ḥājasa bi-l-tanwīr' (Al-Subā'ī, Shaykh of the Press Who Dreamed of the Enlightenment), *al-Waṭan*, 29 May 2012, accessed 9 April 2013, <http://alwatan.com.sa/Articles/Detail.aspx?ArticleID=11061>.

⁹⁷ See al-Subā'ī, *Tārīkh Makka*, and *al-Amthāl al-sha'biyya fī mudun al-Ḥijāz* [Hijazi Proverbs] (Jeddah: Tihāma, 1981).

⁹⁸ Aḥmad al-Subā'ī, *Ayyāmī* (Mecca: Matābi' Quraysh, 1970). Originally published under the title: *Abū Zāmil: Qiṣṣat al-jīl al-mādī* (Abū Zāmil: A Story of the Older Generation) (Cairo: Dār Miṣr li-l-Tibā'a, 1954).

⁹⁹ Aḥmad al-Subā'ī, *Khālatī Kadrajān wa-qiṣaṣ ukhrā* (Mecca: Dār Quraysh li-l-Tibā'a, 1968).

¹⁰⁰ Farūq Ṣāliḥ Basalāma, 'Rā'id nasīnāhu: Aḥmad al-Subā'ī' (A Forgotten Pioneer), *al-Riyadh*, 12 July 2012, accessed 14 December 2014, <http://www.alriyadh.com/751213>. From the few available references to the prize, it would seem that it ran for just two years. See Ḥasan Āl 'Amīr, 'Jā'izat al-dawla al-taqdīriyya.. taraqqub ba'd ṣamt', *al-Waṭan*, 14 February 2012, accessed 4 May 2012, http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Politics/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=86758.

al-Jawharī's novels, however, al-Subā'ī's title is also significant in other ways, particularly in how it yokes an abstract noun to a female Bedouin character, more will be said on this in due course.

Fikra is primarily set in the mountains and valleys of Ta'if, an important city located east of Mecca. Al-Subā'ī's vivid evocation of a dramatic, untamed land, couched in a highly poetic language, is strongly redolent of eighteenth and nineteenth century European Romanticism. The novel's themes of rebellion against society and its customs, its emphasis on the individual, and its call for a return to a simpler, more honest way of life are all identified by Dīb as themes of the *Mahjar* poets,¹⁰¹ who in turn were influenced by the British Romantics, including Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth.¹⁰² Al-Ḥāzimī also discusses the *Mahjar* influence on al-Subā'ī. He claims the movement was particularly influential on Saudi writers during the inter-war period, after which it gradually fell out of favour as Egyptian literature grew in popularity.¹⁰³ Indeed, in an interview, al-Subā'ī names Khalīl Jibrān as a key influence on his writing:

Jibrān enabled me to master my abilities in life and has left his mark on my work. He taught me a lot with his eschewing of customs and conventions. He made me impudent and able to trust only in the principles of intellect and reason.¹⁰⁴

Fikra revolves around two protagonists: Salīm, a young Meccan, and the eponymous heroine, Fikra, a mysterious woman who inhabits the wild mountains of Ta'if. Salīm's character is more developed than either of the protagonists of *al-Taw'amān* and *al-Intiqām*. Fikra, on the other hand, is more a symbolic figure, or what might be described as an allegorical embodiment of a rationalist discourse, something that is

¹⁰¹ The 'Mahjar poets' refers to a group of mainly Lebanese writers and poets who migrated to North America. The most notable among them include Mikhā'il Nu'ayma (1889-1988), Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān (1883-1931), Iliyā Abū Mādī (1889-1957) and Amīn al-Rayḥānī (1876-1940). They founded the Jāmi'yyat al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya in New York in 1920. The association changed its name to al-'Uṣba al-Andalūsiyya in 1932. A key member of the group, Nu'ayma published *al-Ghīrbāl* (The Sieve, 1923). The book expounds upon the group's theory of poetry, the poet and his place in society and more or less represents the group's manifesto. See Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 1: 85-138.

¹⁰² Dīb, *Fann al-Riwāya*, 37-41.

¹⁰³ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

itself supported by the unusual use of an abstract noun for her name, '*fikra*' meaning an 'idea' or 'notion'. This is not to say that Fikra is simply an expository device, a mere mouthpiece for the author's opinions – she is no Dr. Rushdī. Furthermore, there is a profound ambiguity to Fikra and her significance on the novel's ideological plain. This relates directly to tensions between the simultaneous appeal of the past and the call for reform and modernisation. For while Fikra is the valorisation of reason over blind faith and superstition, her identification with the untamed environment she inhabits suggests something more primordial:

I am neither a tent-maiden, nor a lady of the manor. Rather I am a daughter of these wild mountains within whose grim heights I grew up. I have inherited their sternness and have been seasoned by their rigours. In this wilderness I have encountered things far more intimidating than you. You will find in this person before you a strange woman who is not afraid to come out and meet her male equal. She will repay his goodness with kindness and punish his wickedness as she would a criminal! I am not suspicious of you – for I can see you are of noble character – nor do I fear your charms, even if you were the devil himself.¹⁰⁵

With her fiercely independent nature and her confident and assertive tone, Fikra is a remarkably bold image for the time, a decade or so before girls' education was introduced in the Kingdom. Surprisingly, there is no evidence to suggest the book was particularly controversial on this account. Perhaps this can be attributed to the eponymous heroine's chimerical quality. In contrast, Salīm, who is driven by instinct and emotion, is a much more human character than Fikra. But this in itself is remarkable, since al-Subā'ī reverses traditional gender roles according to which women are private, dependent, emotional beings; while men are strong and rational. The subversion of these gender stereotypes challenges attitudes at the root of gender inequality and seems to answer those who were claiming that reading was potentially harmful for impressionable young women, especially since it is later revealed that not only is Fikra literate but she is extremely well-read.

For as long as he can remember, Salīm has been drawn to wander alone in the mountains of Ta'if. During one of these solitary excursions he is caught in a sudden

¹⁰⁵ Aḥmad al-Subā'ī, *Fikra*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣāfi li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1989), ch. 2, accessed 4 May 2013, http://alithnainya.com/tocs/default.asp?toc_id=22649&toc_brother=-1.

storm. The narrator depicts a dramatic scene in which fierce winds uproot a tree.¹⁰⁶ This pathetic fallacy, a hallmark of romantic literature, is an ominous foreshadowing of the inner struggle that Salīm's encounter with Fikra will trigger. It is at this very point when Salīm, now exhausted and without food or water, first catches sight of Fikra and approaches her for help. He proceeds with a lengthy introduction:

I am a Meccan from the Banī Hāshim, from the Banī 'Abd Manāf. My forefathers lived in the shadows of these mountains. Their natural character was unblemished in the midst of this untamed land, but as the ages passed they began to look to the towns. I grew up in the villa gardens and have lived a life of plenty. I have lost the keen instincts of the Banī Hāshim and the austerity of the Banī 'Abd Manāf. But I have lost neither their nature nor their pride. Something in my blood draws me to this untamed land. From time to time, I like to wander its proud mountains and its stony valleys without aim, following my heart and compelled by an overwhelming urge.¹⁰⁷

Fikra leads Salīm to a cave where she provides him with food and shelter. They spend several days together during which she tells him her story. She was raised by the village Qur'an teacher who taught her to read and write, instilling her with a passion for learning. From an early age she would devour book after book, reading all the great works of the classical Arabic canon, even 'those books that women are usually forbidden'.¹⁰⁸ Her education was not limited to books, however. Her adoptive father took her abroad for several years, during which they travelled between Egypt, Turkey and Italy:

We spent a day at Suez, then twenty days between Alexandria and Cairo where I shed many of my garments and my habits, immersing myself in the flow of the city. I grew familiar with the ways of the city and its customs. I saw the girls' schools in Alexandria and Cairo, and later Constantinople. I debated with women teachers, and attended the soirees of the cream of al-Azhar, the great salafis, and the Sufi philosophers. Then we moved to Istanbul, and from there my road took me to Italy where I witnessed the majesty of Naples and Rome. I visited the universities, institutions and academies, and attended music and dance parties. I met with scientists in their laboratories... I returned to Istanbul where I mingled with the enlightened classes and mixed with the unlearned. I made the acquaintance of aristocrats and workers. My longing led me to the farms and the mountains, where I spent the evenings in the company of the Bedouin of

¹⁰⁶ Al-Subā'ī, *Fikra*, ch. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., ch. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., ch. 3.

the Anatolian hills and the peasants of the lowlands of Izmir.¹⁰⁹

Salīm finds himself powerfully and inexplicably drawn to Fikra, despite having a wife and children back home in Mecca. Confused by his feelings, he experiences a profound inner conflict. He leaves the mountains for home, promising Fikra he will return some weeks later to attend a wedding with her at one of the villages. During his second visit, his discussions with Fikra take on an air of confrontation as he struggles with her unwavering composure in the face of his growing confusions: ‘What is my relationship with this woman, whose errant ideas mock society? Is it beauty... or temptation?’¹¹⁰ Again, familiar romantic tropes come into play when Salīm suffers a bout of fever, during which he almost loses his mind wandering deliriously through the mountains. Salīm accuses Fikra of lacking empathy and emotion, describing her as a ‘philosopher’ who is incapable of engaging with life. However, when he eventually recovers, Fikra makes him see reason and convinces him to return to his family.

Some time after his return, a chance encounter brings Salīm and Fikra together again. Fikra has travelled to Mecca having learned the truth of her real parents. It turns out that she was found abandoned on the road between Ta’if and Mecca when she was just a baby. She was brought to the village Qur’an teacher who, having no children of his own, agreed to take her in. The old woman who told her this also happened to know of a Meccan family who lost their daughter on the road around the same time. Fikra goes in search of her parents only to discover they died several years ago, but she is given the address of her father’s sister who is able to identify her from an unusual birthmark on her leg. Her aunt then reveals that Fikra’s real name is Asia. When Salīm hears this, he realises Fikra is none other than his long lost sister and finally understands why his feelings for her were so confused.

The influence of Romanticism on al-Subā’ī is particularly evident in the novel’s descriptions of nature, and the use of tropes such as the pathetic fallacy and the gothic – a ruined palace features in the story – but there are also elements within the

¹⁰⁹ Al-Subā’ī, *Fikra*, ch. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 27.

novel that contradict some of Romanticism's basic tenets. Fikra's insistence on the primacy of the intellect and reason is in direct opposition to Coleridge's and Wordsworth's avocation of imagination as superior to reason.¹¹¹ Even more striking than this is Fikra's contempt for romantic love:

If only when we contemplated the lover, his gentleness and his sweetness – not forgetting his jealousy, hatred and unbridled selfishness – we were to open our eyes to the sham that this kind of love really is. Then we could rid ourselves of vice. But we are slaves to tradition! Love has rooted itself in our sub-consciences like a thousand other vices. We will remain slaves until we free our minds and rid them of superstition, rejecting the false traditions with which history has infected our blood... Free yourself, my friend, from foolish traditions, and return to love as it was in humankind's original state.¹¹²

However, is this apparent contradiction of particular significance given that romanticism is a notoriously ambiguous concept? Romanticism has been described as 'a word for which, in connexion with literature, there is no generally accepted definition', and after all, writers are free to mix and match generic elements.¹¹³ But rather than stemming from Romanticism's ambiguity, the apparent conflict within the nexus of ideological values that Fikra represents arises from the need to resolve certain tensions within society during a time of transformation and upheaval.

Selim points out the ambivalence of writers towards the Egyptian peasantry or fellahin. They were the toiling multitudes, the salt of the earth upon the sweat of whose brows the nation depended. They represented a pure Egypt, unsullied by foreign influence, whose roots stretched back to time immemorial. Yet, simultaneously, they symbolised everything that was backwards or lacking in the country. Their ignorance and entrenched conservatism were the antithesis of the reformist spirit: 'Here we have the central paradox inherent in early nationalist/reformist thought regarding the peasant: the fellah was simultaneously

¹¹¹ For example see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1995), 167.

¹¹² Al-Subā'ī, *Fikra*, ch. 6.

¹¹³ Sir Paul Harvey, ed., *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 706.

conceived of a noble, authentic, industrious, primordial *and* squalid, stupid, obsequious, cunning, lazy, archaic'.¹¹⁴

A similar paradox is at work in al-Subā'ī's novel. Even though *Fikra* is dismissive of tradition, going so far as to describe marriage as a form of female slavery and arguing for a woman's choice in marriage, the story includes a wedding scene that takes place in one of Ta'if's villages. The wedding celebrations are vividly and lovingly portrayed.¹¹⁵ They include a performance of the traditional 'arḍa dance;¹¹⁶ al-Subā'ī even reproduces the lyrics of the accompanying song.¹¹⁷

This ambivalence arises from the particular challenges that faced reformists, like al-Subā'ī, who sought to reconcile the need for political and social reform with an identity politics that valorised the community's shared customs and traditions as a source of authenticity. The apparent paradox in al-Subā'ī's novel may also reflect something deeper at the heart of the Islamic reformist movement. The emphasis on reforming Islam and purifying it of false traditions makes it essentially a modernist movement. But while it claims a return to tradition – to the 'pure' Islam of the *sulafā'* or community of early Muslims – in doing so it also necessitates a rupture or break with tradition, which conflicts with the notion of continuity so essential to tradition. This paradox is another facet of nationalism's ambivalence, in that it 'links its immemoriality to its historical newness'.¹¹⁸

To reiterate what was said earlier in this chapter, the issue of women's education is particularly fraught with these tensions, since while women were the embodiment of traditional values – as homemaker, mother and symbol of the community's honour – the call for women's education made them simultaneously the measure of modernity. In this sense, *Fikra* intersects with the *nahḍa* discourse on woman and her role. Al-Subā'ī's decision to make the novel's title synonymous with its female heroine

¹¹⁴ Selim, *Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt*, 87.

¹¹⁵ Al-Subā'ī, *Fikra*, chapter 20.

¹¹⁶ The 'arḍa is a folkloric dance practiced throughout much of the Arabian Peninsula. It was originally performed before battle but is now reserved for celebrations.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

¹¹⁸ Bhabha, 'Introduction', 1.

places it within a tradition that can be traced back to the earliest Arabic novels of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹

Marilyn Booth observes how ‘a high proportion of novels bore the names of female protagonists or epithets of female sexual-social status and physical appearance, mostly referring to young, unmarried female protagonists. Such titles placed the lithe young female form centrally’.¹²⁰ Almost invariably novels of this kind feature or revolve around a love plot. For the famous Egyptian novelist, Jurjī Zaydān, this was a way of luring in the reader who might then benefit from the serious message at the heart of his novels.¹²¹ However, Booth argues that the love plot was much more than this, since it often ‘encapsulated the tensions between individual choice and patriarchal family marriage arrangements, and the question of girls’ education.’¹²² Although *Fikra*, is not a romance in the amorous sense and despite Salīm’s struggle over his feelings for Fikra, these same tensions are present.

So while *Fikra* advocates a break with custom and tradition, both in terms of her scorn for the conventional and in her unconventional upbringing, as well as her entry into the public sphere during her travels, this is compensated for by linking her to the land itself as something pure and primordial, like the fabled ‘first Muslims’, of Wahhabi and Salafi discourse, which posits a pure Islam that was later polluted by ‘errant’ practices and superstition. Hence al-Subā‘ī manages to circumvent the potential contradiction between rejecting tradition and simultaneously valorising a mythical utopic past so central to Salafi doctrine:

If we were to look to religion and reason, we would completely eradicate nine tenths of our everyday practices and conventions, and we would live by a little [of them] like the first generation of Muslims, humble like the first sentient beings to walk the earth.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Examples include: ‘Afīfa Karam’s (1883-1924) novel, *Fāṭima al-Badawiyya* (Fatima the Bedouin, n.d.), and Zaynab Fawwāz’s (1860-1914) *Ḥusn al-‘awāqib aw ghādat al-Zāhira* (Good Consequences, or the Maiden of Zahra, 1899).

¹²⁰ Marilyn Booth, ‘Women and the Emergence of the Arabic Novel’, (preprint, 2015), 9.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 9

¹²² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹²³ Al-Subā‘ī, *Fikra*, ch. 5.

Fikra's estrangement from her family, and from the urban centre, Mecca – to live on the margins, apart from society, followed by a return to her true origins – represents a resolution of the tension between tradition and modernity, past and present. Fikra, the outsider, is reintegrated into society/the family and the city, bringing with her the knowledge and wisdom that her isolation, worldly experience and objective distance from it have given her.

Fikra's experience of the world outside Hijaz/Saudi Arabia, and the relative intellectual and personal freedoms she enjoys there, throw into relief her own country's lack of progress in these fields. Yet, while the 'self' in Arabic literature of the time is so often defined against the Western 'other', in *Fikra* this is not the case. Although Fikra's travels take her to Europe, of equal, if not more, significance are the metropolitan centres of Cairo, Alexandria and Istanbul. It is becoming clear, with the notable exception of *al-Taw'amān*, that the binaries of East/West and tradition/modernity, which are so often conflated in readings of the Arabic novel, are a gross simplification of the dynamics of social transformation.

Indeed, in the final text discussed in this chapter, *Thaman al-taḍhīya*, it is Cairo, not Europe, which represents the more advanced 'other', whose temptations must be resisted, but whose progress is, at the same time, to be envied and according to the logic of progress, replicated back home.

3.4 The 'Artistic Novel': *Thaman al-taḍhīya* (The Price of Sacrifice)

Although his career was cut tragically short by his untimely death at just forty-four years of age, Ḥāmid Damanhūrī is almost universally regarded as the foremost pioneer of the Saudi novel. Damanhūrī was born in Mecca in 1921 and received his primary and secondary education at the newly opened government-run schools. He participated in one of the early student missions to Egypt and graduated from Cairo's famous Dār al-'Ulūm in 1943. After his return he worked as a teacher at the Student Mission Preparatory School (al-Madrasa al-Taḍḍīriyya), and later at the Model

School (al-Madrasa al-Namūdhajīyya) in Ta'if. In 1950 he was appointed as head of the External Ministry's cultural division, and then, when the Ministry of Information separated from the Internal Ministry in 1953, as General Secretary of the Cultural Administration.¹²⁴

Damanhūrī published two novels, *Thaman al-tadhīya* and *Wa-marrat al-ayyām* (And the Days Passed By, 1963). Although his second novel did not meet with anything like the success of his first, it was adapted for radio in 1977.¹²⁵ Damanhūrī also published several collections of poetry and various short stories. His articles featured in numerous periodicals and he kept a regular column in *Al-Yamāma* newspaper, which he co-founded. He was also editor-in-chief of *Ma'arifa* magazine from its appearance in 1959, until his death in 1965.¹²⁶

Thaman al-tadhīya is set between Mecca and Cairo during WWII and portrays the process of social and economic transformation that was beginning to impact on life in Hijaz at that time. Its plot revolves around Aḥmad who leaves his native Mecca for Cairo to study medicine, returning several years later a mature and wiser man. The novel is about Damanhūrī's own generation and as such, offers an insight into what was a transitional point in its history. Aḥmad's experiences reveal some of the conflicts and frictions in society caused by modernisation. The expansion of state education was one of the ways in which the state began to have a much greater presence in people's daily lives. His decision to join the government-sponsored student mission to Egypt presents a dilemma. Now that he has come of age, the family expects him to marry his paternal cousin, Fāṭima – they were promised to each other in marriage on the day Fāṭima was born. Moreover, as the eldest son he is expected to assume responsibility for the family business. Despite these initial

¹²⁴ Shaykh Amīn, *al-Ḥaraka*, 474.

¹²⁵ The semi-autobiographical novel, *Wa-marrat al-ayyām*, was published by the Beirut publishing house, Dār al-ʿIlm l-l-Malāyīn in 1963, two years before Damanhūrī's death. According one Saudi commentator, the novel met with acclaim both inside and outside Saudi Arabia, and was even adapted to television, although he does not provide many details of this. See ʿAbd Allah ʿUmar Khayyāt, 'Najīb Maḥfūz al-Ḥijāz: Ḥāmid Damanhūrī', pt. 2, *ʿUkāz*, 7 February 2011, accessed 9 August 2013, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20110207/Con20110207399227.htm>. See also, ʿAbd Allah al-Ḥudayrī, *Ibn al-thaqāfa wa-abū al-riwāya: Ḥāmid Damanhūrī: maqālātuḥu wa-shi'ruḥu wa-qīṣaṣuḥu* (Riyadh: Al-Nādī al-Adabī bi-l-Riyād, 2010), 211.

¹²⁶ Ḥudayrī, *Ibn al-thaqāfa*, 210.

obstacles, a compromise is reached and the *qirān* or wedding contract is concluded prior to Aḥmad's departure on the understanding that full celebrations will be held on his return from study in Cairo, seven years later.

Aḥmad leaves for Egypt, accompanied by three of his high school friends: Ḥusayn, Ibrāhīm and 'Aṣām. At medical school, he makes the acquaintance of a fellow student, Muṣṭafā, and the two quickly become close friends. On his first visit to Muṣṭafā's house Aḥmad meets Fāyiza, Muṣṭafā's sister, and is instantly struck by her close resemblance to Fāṭima. However, although Fāyiza is the spitting image of Fāṭima, this is where the similarity ends. Whereas Fāṭima has led a cloistered life and received a minimal education at the *Kuttāb*, Fāyiza is a sophisticated and cultured young woman who is well versed in the contemporary arts. She introduces Aḥmad to the great Egyptian writers of the day, such as the likes of al-'Aqqād and al-Māzinī. Fāyiza attends a French Lycée, but this does not seem to have had the negative effects feared by al-Anṣārī: 'She reads a lot: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, al-Māzinī, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm'.¹²⁷ When Muṣṭafā learns from Aḥmad that girls in Saudi Arabia are not taught beyond the *Kuttāb*, he is unable to hide his dismay: 'Woman is our other half, the half of us that builds within the house, who holds together the foundations, so that we can complete the building'.¹²⁸ Muṣṭafā quotes a line from Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm's well-known poem *al-'Ilm wa-l-akhlāq* (Knowledge and Morals): 'The mother is a school; if you prepare her, you will have prepared a nation of good stock'.¹²⁹

Like *Fikra* ten years before it, Damanhūrī's novel foregrounds the then highly controversial issue of girls' education in Saudi Arabia. It reflects an anxiety that the disparity in education between men and women threatened the nation's very future. In his introduction to *Thaman*, al-Jabbār argues for girls' education on the grounds that an educated man requires an educated wife. If the nation's women are not educated, then increasing numbers of its men will marry foreign women.¹³⁰ The issue

¹²⁷ Damanhūrī, *Thaman*, 253.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 250. The poem, 'The Girls' School in Port Said', was recited by Ibrāhīm on his visit to the school in 1910. See Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, *Diwān Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1937), 2: 282.

¹³⁰ See 'Abd Allah 'Abd al-Jabbār's introduction to *Thaman al-taḍḥiya*, 8-9.

is raised early on in relation to Aḥmad's younger sister, Zaynab. The rudimentary schooling she receives at the *Kuttāb* fails to satisfy her thirst for knowledge – every day she asks her brothers to teach her what they have learned at school. The debate over girls' education is acted out in a scene between Aḥmad and his younger brother, Yaḥyā. The latter believes that girls do not need an education, since this is not called for by their duties as wife and mother. Aḥmad scornfully rejects this argument: 'As for Yaḥyā, he was still a child and had no comprehension of the value of girls' education. Therefore, his opinions on this matter were worthless'.¹³¹ But Damanhūrī's liberalism is relative. Ultimately, he is proposing a limited freedom for women, since: 'At the end of the day, the girl belongs in the home'.¹³²

Education is not the only area in which a modern Egypt is contrasted with a traditional Hijaz/Saudi Arabia in *Thaman al-taḍhīya*. Aḥmad complains of the irrational fear and superstition that permeate his society: 'We've grown up believing in superstitions: the Night Ghoul and the Dajīra,¹³³ fear of the dark; those delusions that gain a hold over us in the family home, swimming in a sea of blind ignorance'.¹³⁴ The focus on the domestic sphere is suggestive of the arguments made for girls' education on the grounds that uneducated mothers breed ignorance, as encapsulated in the line from Ibrahim's poem cited previously.¹³⁵ This is reinforced later when Aḥmad, impressed by Fāyiza's paintings, recalls how as a child he loved to draw until his mother forbade him: 'she would tear up every picture he drew'.¹³⁶ This last point is perhaps a veiled reference to conservative Muslim elements that regard pictorial art as blasphemous. If so, this would seem to highlight the religious and cultural divide between Hijaz and Najd.

¹³¹ Damanhūrī, *Thaman*, 24.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 83.

¹³³ The legend of Dajīra, a female jinn who lures men to their deaths is a local Meccan folktale. See 'Mulīḥat al-ra'ab, Dajīra', *Makkah online* (14 April 2014), accessed 5 June 2014, <http://www.makkahnewspaper.com/makkahNews/second/37352/37352#.VVViQgZOqqko>.

¹³⁴ Damanhūrī, *Thaman*, 251.

¹³⁵ Omnia Shakry, 'Schooled Mothers, Structured Play', in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 131.

¹³⁶ Damanhūrī, *Thaman*, 247.

When Aḥmad realises he has fallen in love with Fāyiza, he makes the painful decision to end his weekly visits to Muṣṭafā's house. Aḥmad's dilemma needs to be read as allegory. He is torn 'between two equal forces – one that [draws] him towards the past and one that [draws] him towards the future', with the result that he is caught in 'a difficult inner struggle... that would need all his strength'.¹³⁷ Aḥmad's future is Fāṭima, who symbolises the nation in its undeveloped state. Fāyiza on the other hand, who is Aḥmad's intellectual equal, if not superior, represents a more advanced Egypt, against whom Fāṭima (home) is contrasted. But if the integrity of the 'self' is to be preserved and not consumed by the 'other's' subjectivity, then Aḥmad must sacrifice his personal interests to further those of the nation.

Therefore, as with *Fikra*, the self/other distinction is not made in terms of East and West. The 'other' in *Thaman al-tadhīya* is the more advanced Egyptian, not the 'modern' Westerner. A series of illustrations that adorn the first page of each chapter reinforces the contrast between Saudi and Egyptian society. Saudi characters are depicted in traditional dress; the men wearing the *ghutra* (headcloth) and the '*iqāl*' (headband), and the women the long flowing *thawb* (robe) and hijab; while the Egyptian characters are attired in modern fashions; the men beardless but with neatly trimmed moustaches and the women sporting modern hairstyles.

There are strong parallels and significant points of departure between *Thaman al-tadhīya* and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's (1905-92) famous novel, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (The Lamp of Umm Hāshim, 1944), that make the absence of the East/West encounter even more striking. Ḥaqqī's novel features a young, male protagonist, Ismā'īl who leaves his native Egypt to study medicine in England. While in England he meets and falls in love with fellow student, Mary. As with Fāyiza and Aḥmad in *Thaman al-tadhīya*, Mary, who embodies all the qualities that Ismā'īl finds wanting in his own people, teaches him to appreciate art and literature. The similarities between the two novels do not end there. At a young age Ismā'īl was promised to his cousin, Fāṭima. Like her namesake in Damanhūrī's novel – in stark contrast to her sophisticated foil – Fāṭima is depicted as a passive, naive young woman. After a

¹³⁷ Damanhūrī, *Thaman*, 275.

period of crisis, Ismā'īl decides to marry Fāṭima. But despite these similarities, particularly the two women and the marriage theme, *Thaman al-tadhīya* is not about the East/West encounter; Ismā'īl's Western 'other' is Aḥmad's Egyptian 'other'. Like *Fikra* then, *Thaman al-tadhīya* challenges the East/West binary so salient in readings of the Arabic novel.

Thaman al-tadhīya documents a changing world. Developments in education, like the early student missions to Egypt, marked the beginning of a new era for the newly founded Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The country needed doctors, engineers, economists and other professionals to meet the needs of its expanding infrastructure. The decline of Aḥmad's family business, a general store in Mecca's Suwayqa market, is symptomatic of this transformation. WWII was a testing time for Mecca's merchants. Commodities became scarce and a shortfall in supply caused rapid appreciation. Although Aḥmad's father, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, has weathered previous periods of hardship, there is a sense that this time the business will not recover. Change is afoot and destined to sweep away all that stands before it. 'Abd al-Raḥmān struggles to reconcile himself with these new realities: 'Could this history be coming to an end now, while the family begins a new life, taking it far from its past? Might he be the last page in this history?'.¹³⁸ The death of 'Abd al-Raḥmān's brother and business partner towards the end of the novel is symbolic of this painful rupture with the past and transitional moment. Aḥmad's decision to pursue medicine and, therefore, break with tradition sounds the final death knell for the family business, which has been handed down from father to son for generations:

There was no one in the family to take over the business. His sons had chosen to study subjects far-removed from commerce. Their future would be tied to their studies, which would take them away from this type of work and prevent them from following in the footsteps of the men of the family before them.¹³⁹

Thaman al-tadhīya's sympathetic and realistic treatment of this period in Hijaz's

¹³⁸ Damanhūrī, *Thaman*, 384.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 383-4.

recent history earned Damanhūrī the praise of the early Saudi critic and playwright, ‘Abdullah ‘Abd al-Jabbār (1919-2011), who penned the novel’s introduction.¹⁴⁰ There are several things worth noting about al-Jabbār’s introduction. Unlike al-Anṣārī who consistently uses the term, *al-riwāya*, throughout his introduction to *al-Taw’ amān*, al-Jabbār uses the terms *al-riwāya*, *al-qīṣṣa* (story) and *al-qīṣṣa al-ṭawīla* (long story) interchangeably.¹⁴¹ Al-Jabbār’s use of different terms to describe the novel reflects the vagueness of the Arabic terminology and its often inconsistent application. This becomes even more apparent from the notably different concepts of the novel described by al-Jabbār and al-Anṣārī in their respective introductions. Whereas for al-Anṣārī the novel is merely a means to an end, a sugar-coated pill designed to counter the toxic effects of European propaganda; al-Jabbār describes the genre as ‘a magnificent art, if not the most magnificent of all arts’.¹⁴² The novelist is equally exalted by al-Jabbār and must have ‘great talent and fertile imagination’. He compares the novelist to a blind chess player who defeats his sighted opponents by virtue of his ‘penetrating insight and keen memory’, which allow him to anticipate every possible move.¹⁴³

Al-Jabbār outlines the qualities he believes make for a ‘successful’ novel. While suspense and excitement are important ingredients, a work that ‘contains only triviality or deviancies is not destined to endure; the task of the artist – through art and not through the sermon – is to enable us to glimpse life’s eternal truths’.¹⁴⁴ Although al-Jabbār does not use the term *al-riwāya al-fanniyya*, his criteria for the ‘successful artistic work’ (*al-‘amāl al-fannī al-nājiḥ*) is very much inline with Badr’s for the artistic novel, particularly in its mimetic representation of national life:

When you read a literary or intellectual work, you find a picture of yourself, your home or a small or large part of your surroundings... In its pages you glimpse your pains, your hopes and your aspirations. When the writer transmits these things to you full of life and movement, you cannot help but

¹⁴⁰ The Meccan-born al-Jabbār was nicknamed ‘*al-Ustādh*’ (the teacher) on account of his role as supervisor to the student missions sent from Hijaz to Egypt in the 1940s, which likely made him and al-Subā’ī colleagues. Sayyidu and al-Qasha’ mī, *Mawsū‘at al-adab al-‘arabī al-Sa‘ūdī al-ḥadīth: tarājim al-kuttāb*, 95-96.

¹⁴¹ Al-Jabbār, ‘Introduction’, 6.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

keep reading until the end... The first thing the reader of *Thaman al-tadhīya* will notice is that the story is taken directly from the Hijazi environment.¹⁴⁵

Although he does not mention al-Anṣārī or *al-Taw'amān*, for al-Jabbār the didacticism of the latter is an undesirable quality in the novel. Comparing al-Subā'ī and Damanhūrī, he writes: 'Ḥāmid Damanhūrī's story, like the stories of Aḥmad al-Subā'ī, is a social document of Hijazi life in its present [stage of] development'.¹⁴⁶ However, for al-Jabbār, al-Subā'ī's stories are often let down by their didacticism: 'The teacher hiding in al-Subā'ī often spoils the atmosphere of his stories when he appears out of nowhere and beats al-Subā'ī, the artist, and the reader on the head with his big cane'.¹⁴⁷ Al-Jabbār and al-Anṣārī's opinions on the novel are almost diametrically opposed. Al-Jabbār's introduction represents a discernible shift in ideas about the novel and its function.

3.5 Conclusion

Despite the essentially didactic nature of early narratives, the formal and thematic variation between them points to the inherently unstable nature of the novel form, as it does the different motivations of their authors and their concepts of the novel. On a deeper level, this arises from the dynamic interplay of local and foreign forms, detectable in affinities with the Arabic tradition – as evident in the lack of organic unity or their episodic nature, foil characters, the citing of Qur'an and hadith, the recourse to exegetic marginalia, and other textual features.

One of the main concerns of the foregoing analysis has been to explore how these early narratives represent identity and (re)produce national space. In this respect *al-Taw'amān* is unique. Within it, the cartographic borders of the sovereign state have been erased. In their place is a supranational 'East' or 'Arab-Islamic world' defined against its 'Western' other. *Al-Taw'amān* needs to be read within the context of Arab nationalism and the anti-colonial struggle. Although Hijaz did not experience

¹⁴⁵ Al-Jabbār, 'Introduction', 8.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 12

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 12.

European colonial rule, the early Arab nationalist movement, which originally arose in opposition to Ottoman domination, was influential in the province and also helped foster a sense of Hijazi nationhood. In contrast, *al-Intiqām* is unambiguous in its Hijazi setting, naming a number of Mecca's landmarks: al-Haraj market, Shabra Square and the Naghar Gardens. The same is true of *al-Ba'ith* and *Fikra*. In all cases, the Najdi-Wahhabi national narrative is absent. Instead the presence of the Salafi current and Sufi influences reflects the plurality of religious practice in Hijaz as a marker of its identity.

Thaman al-tadhīya represents a departure from the other novels discussed in this chapter. With its portrayal of Mecca's mercantile class at a point of transition, between a centuries-old way of life and the realities of the modern age, Damanhūrī documents the rise of a new middle class whose fate and fortunes are tied to those of the modern nation-state. Aḥmad's subjectivity is directly linked to nationhood. His sacrifice, by choosing to return home and honour his promise to marry Fāṭima and forsake his love for her educated doppelganger, is ultimately a sacrifice made for the good of the nation. Even so, a degree of ambivalence toward the nation-state remains, since – as 'Awwād highlights in the introduction – *Thaman al-tadhīya* is foremostly concerned with life in Hijaz. Moreover, the argument for girls' education and implicit criticism of conservative attitudes to pictorial art identifies the novel with the modernist reform movement.

With the exception of *al-Taw'amān*, the conflation of the East/West dichotomy with the tradition/modernity binary is notably absent from these narratives. In *Thaman al-tadhīya* the 'self' is defined against the Arab 'other', and not, as in the East/West dichotomy, the Western 'other.' A modern Egypt is contrasted with a more traditional Hijaz. While in *Fikra*, the more advanced 'other' is found in the Eastern cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Istanbul. Although al-Subā'ī evokes the cultural and intellectual life of Rome and Naples, the net effect is a cosmopolitan modernity.

Finally, the theme of girls' education, at the centre of al-Subā'ī's and Damanhūrī's novels and closely intertwined with anxieties over the nation's future, demonstrates

the genderedness of national imaginaries. It is no coincidence that gender figures prominently in the self/other dichotomy. In this sense, the writers of Hijaz were participating within a wider, regional discourse on woman and her role in society. *Thaman al-tadhīya*'s reproduction of the domestic focus of Egyptian nationalism is certainly telling in this respect. In these narratives female characters figure as symbols of the nation, and as such the object of the desiring male subject, that is, the urban male intellectual elite for whom the achievement of nationhood and modernity – the former being a mark of the latter – were the priorities of the day. Chapter Four continues to explore the issues of gender and nation and their implications through the early Saudi's women novel.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nation, Space, and Subjectivity in the early Saudi Women's Novel

4.1 Introduction

The persistence of 'the woman question' and the symbolic significance attached to female characters in early narratives highlights how the genderedness of the imagined national community shapes novelistic discourse. But men's narratives can only tell – as it were – half the story. This chapter provides a crucial counterpoint by exploring the ambivalence of the nation space through the early Saudi women's novel. Such a focus is made doubly necessary since, to cite Elsadda's words again, if the nation is gendered then the 'canon is equally gendered'. That is, the author's gender is implicated in how his or her novels are read and evaluated. It will be argued here that the ambivalence of the early Saudi women's novel towards the nation is an effect of both the particular set of circumstances surrounding their production and, on a much more profound level, the different ways idealised gender identities impact on men's and women's subjectivities.

The following discussion is based on close readings of the work of the pioneering Saudi women novelists: Samīra Khāshuqjī and Hudā al-Rashīd. The selection of texts includes Khāshuqjī's *Wadda 'tu āmālī* (I Bade My Hopes Farewell, 1958) and *Ma'tam al-wurūd* (The Flowers' Funeral, 1973), and al-Rashīd's debut novel, *Ghadan sa-yakūn al-khamīs* (Tomorrow Is Another Day, 1976). These novels have been chosen because they are indicative of their authors' work as a whole and represent critical junctures in the emergence of Saudi women's writing.¹ In the case

¹ In addition to the two discussed here, Khāshuqjī's published another six novels and two short story collections: *Dhikrayāt dāmi'a* (Tearful Memories: Novel, 1961); *Barīq 'aynayka* (The Gleam of Your Eyes: Novel, 1963); *Wa-tamḍī al-ayyām* (And the Days Go By: Short stories, 1969); *Warā' al-ḍabāb* (Beyond the Fog: Novel, 1971); *Qaṭarāt min al-dumū'* (Tear Drops: Novel, 1973); *Wādī al-dumū'* (The Valley of Tears: Short stories, 1979); *Talāl fī ramāl* (Hills in the Sand: Novel, 1983). To date al-Rashīd has published a further two novels *'Abath* (Futility: 1980) and *al-Shayṭān aḥyānan imra'a: In 'itāq al-ḥamāma* (Sometimes Woman is a Devil: The Dove's Embrace: 2012), a play, *Ṭalāq*, (Divorce: 1992), and the short story collection, *Wa-min al-ḥubb* (From Love, 2013). Only one other work by a Saudi woman novelist appeared between Khāshuqjī's and al-Rashīd's first novels.

of Khāshuqjī, her pre-eminence as the first Saudi woman novelist and the trajectory followed by her writing in terms of narrative technique and thematic development mean that a more fruitful examination of her work is achieved through a broader sample.

Although Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd are described as pioneers of the Saudi Women's novel, they were not writing in a void. The nature of their novels and the horizon of expectations that they play to were determined by a transnational book market centred in Beirut and Cairo where their novels were published. It is necessary, therefore, to begin with a more general overview of Arab women's novel writing before narrowing in on the Saudi case. A more complete appreciation of the themes and narrative strategies present in Khāshuqjī's and al-Rashīd's novels is afforded by a brief consideration of the Arab feminist movement and some of their literary precursors.

4.2 Early Arab Women's Fiction

The history of Arabic literature has its roots in the oral traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia. The vast majority of this literature was never written down and only a fraction has survived to the present day. This is mainly in the form of poetry, dating from the sixth and seventh centuries. Although women's contribution to Arabic literature can be traced back to the late sixth century, to the celebrated Najdi poetess, Al-Khansā' (575-646), it was only during the modern age that women's participation began to equal men's.² The birth of the Arab feminist movement in Egypt and the Levant during the *nahḍa*, which also saw intense public debate on issues relating to women's role in society, and vitally, their right to education, eventually opened up a

This was Hind Bāghaffār's *al-Barā'a al-mafqūda* (Lost innocence, 1972), which was unattainable to the present writer. Like *Ghadan*, the novel is set in Egypt for which, along with its perceived lack of realism, it has been largely dismissed by critics. For example, see Ṣāliḥ 'Abd Allah al-Khazmarī, 'Qirā'at riwāyat al-barā'at al-mafqūda', *al-Jazira*, 5th November 2003, accessed 9 October 2013, <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2003/20031105/cu7.htm>.

² Al-Khansā' was renowned for the elegies she composed for her two brothers, Sakhr and Mu'awiya, who both died in battle against the Muslims. Despite this, she later converted to Islam and became one of Muḥammad's followers. See 'Al-Khansā'', in *E. J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*, eds. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1927; 1983), 4: 901-2.

space for women writers.³ But, as with pre-modern Arabic literature – medieval anthologists tended to ignore women’s poetry or even belittle it⁴ – ‘it is difficult to accurately assess their full contribution’.⁵ The same forces that prevented women from playing an equal role in public life, have also figured in the shaping of literary histories.

Education was vital in enabling women’s participation in public life. Female education began in Egypt during the nineteenth century, considerably earlier than in Saudi Arabia. The first girls’ school was established in 1844 by missionaries, although it was not until the 1870s that significant efforts were made by the state to provide education for girls.⁶ One of Khedive Ismā‘īl’s (r. 1863-79) final achievements was the founding of al-Siyūfiyya School, opened by his wife, Tcheshme Hanum in 1873. This was followed by the Qirabiyya School in 1874.⁷

However, opposition from traditionalists and budgetary constraints posed major obstacles.⁸ Even after education was made compulsory in 1923 for both girls and boys between the ages of six and twelve, the law proved difficult to implement due to a lack of school facilities. During President Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s rule (1954-70) secondary and university education were finally made free for both males and females, yet decades later a notable discrepancy in literacy levels between men and women remains.⁹

³ In 1923 the Egyptian Feminist Union was formed by Hudā Sha‘rāwī and a group of like-minded woman, after they split with the Wafd nationalist party over support for the women’s rights agenda. This was followed in 1928 by the formation of the Arab Women’s Union. Jennifer Struve, ‘Arab Feminism’, in *Encyclopedia of Women in Today’s World*, 1: 80.

⁴ Tahera Qutbuddin, ‘Women Poets’, in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Josef W. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2: 877. See also Marlé Hammond’s landmark study, *Beyond Elegy: Classical Arab Women’s Poetry in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Hammond looks closely at the pre- and early Islamic periods, providing a compelling account of how women’s contribution and legacy to pre-modern Arabic poetry is significantly more diverse than has previously been suggested. Albeit to a lesser extent, this is also true of the early modern period.

⁵ Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia*, 31.

⁶ Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The formative Years and Beyond* (New York: State University of New York Press), 31.

⁷ Ghada Hashem Talhami, *Historical Dictionary of Women in the Middle East and North Africa* (Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 100.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹ According to statistics provided by the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, literacy rates for male and females (15-24 years) were 92.4 and 86.1 per cent respectively. See http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/egypt_statistics.html#117, accessed 23 April 2015.

This situation is more symptomatic of poverty than conservative attitudes. Between 1965 and 1976, the percentage of women in higher education in Egypt rose from twenty-one per cent to thirty per cent. In Saudi Arabia, it rose from three per cent to twenty per cent in the same period.¹⁰ The growth of female education has generally been much faster in the oil-rich Gulf states whose high national wealth has enabled them to invest heavily in public services.

The slow progress of female education means that other factors must have figured in galvanising women's involvement in the literary field during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The women's associations and literary salons that sprang up in Syria and the Levant during the last two decades of the nineteenth century certainly provided encouragement and a vital forum for the exchange of ideas, but it was their involvement in the press that, more than any other factor, helped to establish women's presence on the literary scene.¹¹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century dedicated women's journals began to appear. Syrian born Hind Nawfal (1860-1920) established *al-Fatāt* (The Young Woman) in Egypt, the first Arabic journal to focus on women's issues. *Al-Fatāt* was founded in 1892 – the same year as Zaydān's *al-Hilāl* (The Crescent Moon) – and continued until 1894.¹² Although short-lived, the magazine was a milestone for Arab feminism.¹³ In the years leading up to WWI, a number of Arab women's journals were launched.¹⁴ However, the privations and harsh economic conditions

¹⁰ Serra Kirdar, 'The Development of Women's Education in the Arab World', in *Education in the Muslim world: Different Perspectives*, ed. Rosarri Griffin (Oxford: Symposium Books, 2006), 198.

¹¹ The first of these were Bākūrat Sūriya (Syrian Dawn), founded in Beirut in 1880 by Maryam Nimr Makariyus (1860-88), and Zahrat al-iḥsān (Flower of Charity) founded in the same year. Among the first and most famous women's literary salons were those of Maryānā Marrāsh in Aleppo, Princess Nazlī Fāḍil in Cairo and Alexandra Khūrī Averino in Alexandria. See Ashour et. al., *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999* (Cairo; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Nabila Ramdani, 'Women in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution: From Feminist Awakening to Nationalist Political Activism', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 42.

¹⁴ See Beth Baron's book, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), particularly the chapter 'Pioneers of the Women's Press', 13-37.

experienced during the war forced many to close and few new journals, if any, were founded during this time.

Things began to pick up again following the 1919 Revolution and the national movement, which gave new momentum to the development of the Egyptian national press.¹⁵ A second wave of women's journals appeared during the early 1920s, including Balsam 'Abd al-Malik's *Majjalat al-mar'a al-miṣriyya* (The Egyptian Woman's Magazine), published from 1920-39.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the women's press began to feature short stories. Labība Hāshim (1882-1952) was one of the first women to publish short stories, many of which appeared in her magazine, *Fatāt al-sharq* (The Young Woman of the East, 1906-35) and previously, in the Lebanese magazine, *al-Diyā'* (The Light).¹⁶ These stories proved popular with readers and demand grew so that short stories soon became 'standard fare' in women's journals.¹⁷ It was also around this time that the first women's novels made their way onto the cultural market. Alice Buṭrus al-Bustānī's (1870-1926) novel, *Riwāyat Ṣā'iba* (A Novel of Ṣā'iba) was published in 1891. Its eponymous heroine falls victim to the jealousy of her disreputable cousin, Farīd, after he learns she is to marry Luṭfī, a kind and honourable young officer. Farīd plots to shoot Luṭfī but misses and accidentally kills Ṣā'iba instead. Bustānī's eschewing of the happy ending of the traditional marriage plot of early *nahḍa* novels provides a form of social critique on the hardships suffered by women. It is a recurrent feature of later Arab women's novels, including those of Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd.¹⁸

Riwāyat Ṣā'iba was followed in 1899 by Zaynab Fawwāz's (1860-1914) *Ḥusn al-awāqib aw ghādat al-zāhira* (Fine Consequences or The Radiant Maiden).

¹⁵ Baron notes how the 1919 Revolution is considered a 'pivotal' moment for women, who for the first time were 'thrust onto the public stage.' Ibid., 35. Aside from its momentous importance in Egypt's national history, the revolution also represents the 'development of political and social awareness within the women's movement.' Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 33.

¹⁶ Baron, *Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 52.

¹⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸ Fruma Zachs and Sharon Halevi, *Gendering Culture in Greater Syria: Intellectuals and Ideology in the Late Ottoman Period* (New York: I.B Tauris, 2015), 126-30.

Fawwāz's historical novel also uses the theme of marriage to explore gender politics. Its heroine, Fāri'a struggles to escape a cousin who is determined to marry her, while simultaneously encouraging the advances of another cousin. The novel is set in the south of Lebanon where Fawwāz was born and grew up. Fawwāz's novel was among the first to include autobiographical elements in Arabic fiction.¹⁹

Although appearing just five years on from *Husn al-awāqib*, Labība Hāshim's *Qalb al-rajul* (The Heart of a Man, 1904), with its avoidance of ornate rhymed prose in favour of a simpler style, reflects a new literary sensibility. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Mount Lebanon Christian-Druze conflict of 1860 and features an inter-faith love story between Ḥabīb (a Christian) and Fātina (a Druze) who are forced to run away together. Juxtaposed against their story is a second romance between Ḥabīb's son, 'Azīz, and Rosa, a Lebanese woman of Syrian descent. Their relationship ends in heartbreak for Rosa when 'Azīz breaks his word and betrays her. Citing the novel's title, Elsadda suggests Hāshim 'wittingly or unwittingly, tried to deconstruct stereotypical representations of manhood and womanhood'.²⁰

During the 1930s and 1940s, the growth of women's literature that began in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt towards the end of the nineteenth century/early twentieth century, spread to Iraq and Palestine.²¹ According to Zeidan, 'the 1950s witnessed the start of a creative surge of female writers in all types of literary genres'.²² Notable examples include Amīna al-Sa'īd's (1914-95) *al-Jamīha* (The Defiant Woman, 1950) and Widād Sakanīnī's (1913-91) *Arwā bint al-khuṭūb* (Arwā, Daughter of Woe, 1949).

Whereas women writers had generally tended to deal with historical events, al-Sa'īd was the first to put her own society under the microscope. *Al-Jamīha*, which is told from perspective of its self-aware female protagonist, deals with key feminist themes that many women writers of the 1950s and 1960s would subsequently tackle.²³ As

¹⁹ Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 66.

²⁰ Elsadda, 'Egypt', in Ashour et al., *Arab Women Writers*, 108.

²¹ Ashour et al., *Arab Women Writers*, 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 94-5.

the decade came to a close one of the most influential works in the history of the Arab women's novel was published in Lebanon: Layla Ba'labakkī's *Anā aḥyā* (I Live, 1958).

Ba'labakkī was twenty-two years old when she published her debut novel. *Anā aḥyā* is narrated in the first person by its young protagonist, Līna, who rejects the constraints and expectations that society imposes on her as a woman. As such, the novel is a bold and defiant expression of rebellion against the oppressive conditions experienced by women in a conservative society. Determined to choose her own path in life, Līna empowers herself through education, avidly consuming European literature and philosophy. In defiance of her parents, she leaves home for university and finds a job. At university, she meets and falls in love with the charismatic Bahā, a member of the Communist Party. However, in the end Līna is unable to escape the social constraints that she has fought to overcome and is forced to return home, bitterly disappointed.

Discussing *Anā aḥyā*, Zeidan observes that in many Arab women's novels, female characters return to their origins.²⁴ This 'vicious circle' theme appears time and time again in Arab women's novels and is evident from the very beginnings of Arab women's fiction in the nineteenth century. The tendency is not limited to the Arabic novel. For example, Marianna Hirsch has described the truncated, or 'fragmented and discontinuous' development of female characters in European and North American women's fiction.²⁵ They are prevented from self-realisation and, like Ba'labakkī's Līna, unable to escape the social limitations imposed on them.

The legacy of Ba'labakkī and the early Arab women novelists is readily apparent in the works of Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd, whether in their protagonists' struggle for self-realisation or the marriage plot and the subversion of the traditional happy ending. The domestic feminist intellectual movement that underpins early women's novel

²⁴ Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 148.

²⁵ Marianne Hirsch, 'Spiritual Bildung: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm', in *The Voyage in: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. E. Abdel, M. Hirsh, and E. Langland (Hanover, N.H.: University of New England Press, 1985), 23-48, cited in Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 148.

writing in Egypt and the Levant, at least when Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd were writing, had no parallel in Saudi Arabia.

4.3 The Beginnings of Saudi Women's Writing

According to the brief overview of Arab women's fiction and its emergence during the *nahḍa*, women's contribution to modern Arabic literature can be traced at least as far back as the end of the nineteenth century. However, this is true only of those countries where the seeds of the *nahḍa* were first sown, i.e. Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. The situation differed in the Arabian Peninsula, and it was not until the 1950s that Saudi women began to contribute to the country's press and literary scene.

Suad al-Mana links the appearance of women's creative writing in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf to developments in education.²⁶ Education did not only equip women with the requisite skills to write at a professional level, it also legitimised them.²⁷ Without a doubt, access to education was crucial for the development of women's writing during the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, as al-Mana points out, it is paradoxical that the first published female writers in the region should hail from Saudi Arabia, one of the last countries to open state education to girls in 1960.²⁸ Perhaps this can be partly explained by the fact that 'beginning in the 1950s, and possibly earlier, some families sent their daughters to boarding schools in Egypt and Lebanon'.²⁹ Hudā al-Rashīd and Samīra Khāshuqjī, who were educated and lived much of their lives outside Saudi Arabia, exemplify this trend.³⁰

²⁶ Suad al-Mana, 'The Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf', in Ashour, Ghazoul, and Reda-Mekdashy, eds. *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide 1873–1999*, 254–75 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 254.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁸ For example, Qatar and the UAE (Trucial States prior to 1971) opened education to girls in 1954 and 1955 respectively.

²⁹ Saddeka Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 31.

³⁰ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā'iyya al-sa'ūdiyya wa-l-mutaghayyurāt al-thaqāfiyya* (The Saudi Women's Novel and Cultural Transformations), (Dusūq: Al-'Ilm wa-l-Imān li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī'), 2010, 67.

According to al-Mana, the beginnings of women's literature in the Arabian Peninsula can be traced back to the 1950s and early 1960s. She claims that the first collection of poetry published by a Saudi woman writer was Sulṭāna al-Sudayrī's diwan, *'Abīr al-ṣaḥrā'* (Fragrance of the Desert), which appeared under the pseudonym, 'Nidā', in 1956.³¹ But, as al-Sudayrī herself recounts, although the diwan was printed in Beirut in 1956, it did not appear on the market until 1975.³² The first book of poetry published by a Saudi woman is most likely Thurayā Qābil's (b. 1940) diwan, *al-Awzān al-bākīya* (The Weeping Rhythms), which she published in Beirut in 1963.³³

Nevertheless, al-Sudayrī is an important early contributor to Saudi women's literature, and one of the first to write in the Kingdom's newspapers.³⁴ She grew up in the northern city of Qurrayat, close to the border with Jordan. Her father encouraged her to read widely from his own extensive library, which included works from such *nahḍawī* luminaries as al-Manfalūṭī, Iliyā Abū Mādī (1890-1957) and Jurjī Zaydān. Al-Sudayrī is also known for the cultural soirees she used to host at her home in Riyadh, said to have been the first of their kind in the Arabian Peninsula. The soirees attracted high-ranking members of society, including princesses, ambassadors' wives and notable Saudi women academics and writers. As in Egypt and the Levant, these soirees provided a forum for cultural exchange and discussion, though it is difficult to determine to what extent they helped galvanise women's participation in literature or the wider cultural arena in the Kingdom. In 2009, al-Sudayrī became the first female literary personality to be honoured at Saudi Arabia's National Festival for Heritage and Culture.³⁵

Al-Awzān al-bākīya was followed in 1958 by Khāshuqjī's first novel, *Wadda 'tu amālī* (I Bade my Hopes Farewell), which she published under the nom-de-plume, 'Samīra Bint al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya' (Samīra, Daughter of the Arabian Peninsula).

³¹ Al-Mana, 'The Arabian Peninsula', 255.

³² Aḥmad 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Khānī, *al-Ṣālūnāt al-adabiyya fī al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya al-Sa'ūdiyya* (The Literary Salons in Saudi Arabia) (Riyadh: Maṭābi' al-Ḥumaydī, 2006), 733.

³³ Arebi, *Women and Words*, 31.

³⁴ Al-Khānī, *al-Ṣālūnāt al-adabiyya*, 733.

³⁵ 'Al-Shā'ir Sulṭāna al-Sudayrī: Al-Shakhṣiyya al-nisā'iyya al-mukarrama bi-l-Janādariyya 24' (The Poet Sulṭāna al-Sudayrī: the first female personality honoured at al-Janādariyya 24), *al-Jazīra*, 3 March 2009, accessed 1 January 2014, <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2009/20090303/ln72.htm>.

That both writers published their books in Beirut and under pseudonyms suggests access to education was only one of many obstacles faced by Saudi women writers. Yet, it should be recognised that, to some extent, publication outside of Saudi Arabia had less to do with inequality and more to do with Saudi Arabia's underdeveloped publishing and distribution infrastructure.

But the fact remains that prevailing social attitudes towards women writers were highly prejudiced. As al-Manna remarks in respect to al-Sudayrī's poetry, 'it was unacceptable in the Najd – especially at that time – for a woman to write openly about love'.³⁶ This is confirmed in an interview with al-Sudayrī, who talks about her decision to publish under a pseudonym, which she attributes to negative social attitudes towards women writers.³⁷

Arebi has also drawn attention to the conservatism of Saudi society as a major obstacle to women's participation in the cultural field. Women's status as *'awra* (private) means that their access to, and involvement in, public space and discourse have been heavily circumscribed.³⁸ Outside the home a woman must be accompanied by a *mahram* or male guardian.³⁹ Moreover, although attitudes may have softened more recently, the private status of a woman's body can also be extended to her voice, so that it is considered taboo for a man to hear a woman's voice if he is not related to her through blood or marriage. The idea that women

³⁶ Al-Mana, 'The Arabian Peninsula', 258.

³⁷ Nawḍ Sudayr, 'Ana aqall al-shā'irat baḥathan 'an al-shuhra' (I'm the Last Poetess to Go Chasing After Fame), *al-Yawm* 8, (January 2003): 3.

³⁸ The term, *'awra*, is perhaps best described as 'the modesty zone' and denotes the area of the body that should be covered in public. The word relates to both men and women, although there are significant differences in its application between the genders. While the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence differ on some details, men's *'awra* is usually restricted to the area between the navel and the knees. For women it is their whole body, with the exclusion of the hands and face. Stricter interpretations of Islamic law include the hands and face, and even the voice. See Shiu-Sian Angel Hsu, 'Modesty', in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 3, J-O, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 404-5.

³⁹ A *mahram* (pl. *mahārim*) is a close relative whom a woman (or man) cannot marry, including parents, siblings, nephews, nieces, stepparents and stepchildren, and who she can freely interact with without wearing the veil. In Saudi Arabia, a woman cannot leave her neighbourhood without a *mahram*, neither can she mix with non-*mahārim* in public without violating the rigorously enforced '*khalwa* code' – *khalwa* being understood as a private meeting with a stranger. This is because Wahhabi jurists expand the scope of *khalwa* beyond the private sphere and into public space. See David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 85.

should be concealed conflicts with the public nature of the printed word, since ‘to publish is to make public’.⁴⁰

These obstacles notwithstanding, from the 1950s women slowly began to assert their presence on the literary scene.⁴¹ Beyond the realms of poetry and prose fiction, there were increasing contributions from women to Saudi Arabia’s press, which gathered significant momentum during the 1960s. The first article by a woman in the Saudi press was published in *al-Manhal* magazine in 1956.⁴² Most newspapers began to feature a regular women’s section that included short stories, poetry and essays.⁴³ According to al-Wahhābī, Ḥamad al-Jāsir, a noted Saudi historian, established the first women’s page in *al-Yamāma* magazine towards the end of 1961.⁴⁴

The 1960s also saw the emergence of women’s short story writing, with Najat Khayyāt’s *Makhād al-ṣamt* (Labour Pains of Silence), published in 1966. Many women’s short stories were published in the press, particularly during the late 1960s and 1970s. From the 1980s, the scene flourished and more experimental forms of writing began to emerge.⁴⁵ However, Saudi women’s novel writing progressed at a considerably slower pace. Between 1960 and 1980, a total of just ten novels between four authors were published.⁴⁶ The majority of these were written by Samīra Khāshuqjī, to whom the discussion now turns.

4.4 Samīra Khāshuqjī, ‘Daughter of the Arabian Peninsula’

Although born in Mecca, Khāshuqjī spent much of her formative years in Egypt where she received her degree in economics from Alexandria University.⁴⁷

Connected to two of the wealthiest and most prominent families in the kingdom,⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia*, 10.

⁴¹ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā’iyya al-sa’ūdiyya*, 52.

⁴² Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia*, 30.

⁴³ Al-Mana, ‘The Arabian Peninsula’, 255.

⁴⁴ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā’iyya al-sa’ūdiyya*, 65.

⁴⁵ Al-Mana, ‘The Arabian Peninsula’, 267.

⁴⁶ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā’iyya al-sa’ūdiyya*, 69.

⁴⁷ Ashour et al., *Arab Women Writers*, 426.

⁴⁸ The Khāshuqjī family are renowned for their considerable wealth. Samīra’s brother, ‘Adnān Khāshuqjī (b.1935) was considered one of the richest men in the world during the 1980s: David Leigh

she enjoyed a level of personal wealth and mobility that most young Saudi women could only have envied, allowing her to hone her talents as writer, journalist and film producer.⁴⁹ As well as publishing six novels, two short story collections, and several essays,⁵⁰ Khāshuqjī also established the first Saudi women's magazine, *al-Sharqiyya*, in 1972.⁵¹ Outside these activities she founded the Young Women of the Arabian Peninsula Club, and the Women's Awakening Foundation, both of which were based in Riyadh and aimed to promote the raising of women's literacy.⁵²

Khāshuqjī published her first novel, *Wadda 'tu āmālī* (I Bade My Hopes Farewell, 1959) when she was just eighteen years old. The novel, which is set in Cairo, contains elements of both popular romantic fiction and melodrama. If read without prior knowledge of the author's nationality, the reader might justifiably assume that *Wadda 'tu* had been penned by an Egyptian writer, there being nothing in terms of theme, plot or characterisation to suggest otherwise. Contributing to this effect is the use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic in the dialogue.

Wadda 'tu is narrated in the first person by Wajdī, its teenage protagonist, whose home life typifies the emotionally fraught domesticity of melodrama. Wajdī's father, a wealthy businessman, is cold and distant and often away on business for months at

and Rob Evans, 'Biography: 'Adnan Khashoggi'', *The Guardian*, 7 June 2007, accessed 9 June 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/08/bae52>. In 1954 Khāshuqjī married Mohamed al-Fayed. Although the marriage lasted just two years, she was the mother of Dodi al-Fayed who famously died along with Dianna Princess of Wales in a car crash in 1997.

⁴⁹ Khāshuqjī produced *Uṣfūr al-sharq* (1986), which is based on Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's novel, *Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (1938). The film was directed by the famous Egyptian director, Yūsif Fransīs (1934-2001): 'Thaqāfa wa-l-fanūn: Kutub', *al-Ahram*, 28 October 1998, accessed 9 June 2014, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/Archive/1998/10/28/ARTS3.HTM#top>. It is also worth noting here that Khāshuqjī's novel *Barīq 'aynayka* (1963) was adapted to film in 1982.

⁵⁰ These include: 'Rihlat al-ḥayāt' (Life's Journey) and 'Yaqqat al-fatāh al-Sa'ūdiyya' (Alertness of the Young Saudi Woman). The present writer has been unable to locate extant copies of either of these titles. They are cited in two sources only: Ashour et al., *Arab Women Writers*, 426 and *Maṣādir al-adab al-nisā' i fī al-a'lām al-'arabī al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Al-Mua'ssasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2013), 85-86.

⁵¹ Today, *al-Sharqiyya* describes itself as a 'pan-Arab' magazine. Interestingly in this respect, the magazine's original slogan was 'a Saudi women's magazine', but this was changed in 1978 to the more inclusive, 'an Arab women's magazine'. On this basis, Khālid bin Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī, a commentator in the cultural supplement of Saudi Arabia's *al-Jazīra* newspaper, argues Khāshuqjī should be recognised as a pioneer in a much broader, pan-Arab sense. Khālid bin Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī, 'Samīra Khāshuqjī bi-waṣfihā rā'ida li-l-riwāya al-nisā'iyya al-'arabiyya', *al-Jazīra*, 5 November 2009.

⁵² Ashour et al. *Arab Women Writers*, 426.

a time. Wajdī's mother stoically endures her loneliness and her husband's lack of affection, finding solace in her son and only child. But fate delivers her another cruel blow when her health begins to deteriorate. A long period of illness follows at the end of which she dies. Barely a few months have passed since the death of Wajdī's mother when his father moves his mistress, Samiya, into the family home. While Wajdī is deeply hurt, feeling that his father is attempting to replace his mother too soon after her death, he is also troubled by the illicit nature of their arrangement and implores his father to marry Samiya, even asking his uncle to intercede, although to no avail. Typical of the melodrama's moralising tone, Wajdī's highly principled nature is set in contrast to his father's unscrupulousness.

The plot relies heavily on coincidence. Wajdī is returning home one day when he happens on the scene of a minor road accident. This is where he first encounters Amāl, who has been knocked off her bicycle by a careless driver. In the first of many coincidences, the accident happens on the day his mother dies. Greatly affected by the loss of his mother, Wajdī becomes introverted and breaks all social ties. Eventually, after some months have passed, he decides to re-ignite old friendships and arranges to lunch with a close friend, Ḥusām, at the Hilton cafeteria. Wajdī notices Amāl at the cafeteria and by yet another stroke of coincidence, Ḥusām happens to recognise one of her companions as a good friend of his sister. Wajdī and Amāl become acquainted and quickly fall in love. Wajdī plans to ask Amāl's father for her hand in marriage immediately after graduating from medical school. However, Amāl does not turn up to the graduation ceremony. This is the first sign that something is wrong and indeed, Wajdī later learns from Amāl's father that she suffers from chronic rheumatism.

The story reaches its apogee on the young couple's wedding day when Amāl suffers a sudden relapse. One of the guests, who happens to be a specialist in rheumatism, examines her and insists that she be admitted to hospital immediately. It turns out that Amāl is actually suffering from bone-marrow cancer and not rheumatism, as it was previously believed. Her condition is too advanced to benefit from medical intervention and she dies. For the second time in his life Wajdī is left heart-broken.

True love ending in tragic death is a recurrent theme in Khāshuqjī's novels. In her later work, the use of such romantic tropes is developed into an important textual strategy. However, here, it is difficult to attach any more significance to this than is immediately apparent. While *Wadda 'tu* is not without reference to women's issues, since it advocates a woman's right to choice in marriage, Samiya's character, which is depicted unsympathetically as that of a woman of loose morals, is not unlike the negative female stereotypes found in *Thaman al-taḍhīya* and *al-Intiqām*.⁵³ Yet *Wadda 'tu* is not a didactic novel, being more appropriately described as what Badr would call 'a novel of entertainment', especially with the obvious parallels between it and the popular Egyptian cinema of the day.

In her subsequent novels, Khāshuqjī employs similar themes and tropes to those established in *Wadda 'tu*, although she does so to fulfil a very different function. A useful way to qualify this difference is to consider Elaine Showalter's well-known framework for tracing the history of women's literature, which Hafez has applied to the history of the Arab women's novel.⁵⁴ Showalter outlines three phases: the Feminine, the Feminist, and the Female.⁵⁵ During the first, women sought to 'equal the intellectual achievement of the male culture and internalized its assumptions about female nature'.⁵⁶ During the Feminist phase, women's writing criticised patriarchal values and the social values and structures that perpetuate female oppression, calling for women's rights and personal freedoms. In the final phase, 'women reject imitation and protest – two forms of dependency – and turn instead to

⁵³ Samīra Khāshuqjī (pseud. Samīra Bint al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya), *Wadda 'tu Āmālī* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Suhayl Ba'lbakkī, 1958), 87..

⁵⁴ See Hafez, 'Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: A Typology', in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), 154-74. Hafez identifies the first phase with the literature produced between 1880-1930 by upper class women of Egypt and the Levant. The second phase extends from the 1930s through to the 1970s and coincides with the era of Arab nationalism and decolonisation. This period saw the rise of a new, educated urban middle-class. For an example of the final phase, Hafez cites Salwā Bakr's novel *Maqām 'Aṭīyya* ('Aṭīyya's Shrine, 1986).

⁵⁵ Elaine Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 137.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature'.⁵⁷

Showalter's framework provides a useful tool with which to approach Khāshuqjī's work. In *Wadda 'tu* the critiquing of female oppression is not a priority. Even though there is an element of this in the relationship between Wajdī's mother and father, Amāl's death is the result of illness and is in no way allegorical of the particular hardships suffered by women through inequality. As such, the novel sits most comfortably in Showalter's first category, the Feminine. However, Khāshuqjī's later novels demonstrate a marked development in the author's thematic concerns and are much more engaged with women's issues. Her 1973 novel, *Ma'tam al-wurūd* (The Flowers' Funeral), is consonant with Showalter's Feminist phase.

Although the main theme of *Ma'tam* is ostensibly romantic, it is more meaningfully described as a feminist critique of patriarchal society, or more specifically, male hypocrisy and the curtailment of women's personal freedoms and their right to self-realisation. *Ma'tam* is the story of a fraught and difficult relationship and its eventual acrimonious dissolution. The protagonists, Ghālī and Ḥabība, are childhood sweethearts, but because Ḥabība's mother breastfed Ghālī, society considers them brother and sister.⁵⁸ As a result, Ghālī and Ḥabība are prevented from being together and are forced to go their separate ways, both eventually finding themselves in unhappy marriages. Soon after giving birth to her son, Ḥabība's heart is broken again when her husband suddenly divorces her and takes custody of their child, preventing her from seeing him. There is an element of the autobiographical here, where Ḥabība's divorce and separation from her infant son parallel Khāshuqjī's brief marriage to Muḥammad al-Fāyid during which she gave birth to their son, Dūdī. The sense that Khāshuqjī was, to some extent, writing from experience is reinforced by the self-reflexive aspect of *Ma'tam*.

⁵⁷ Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', 139.

⁵⁸ According to Islamic law breastfeeding creates kinship. Children breastfed by the same woman – regardless whether or not they are blood related – are considered siblings and, therefore, cannot marry.

With the exception of a brief author's introduction and epilogue, the novel is composed in the epistolary mode. The correspondence between Ḥabība and Ghālī reveals a turbulent relationship, marked by doubt, distrust and jealousy. The text is striking in how it represents their correspondence. There are thirty-four letters set in regular text, all but one of which is from Ghālī to Ḥabība. They average around four pages in length, with two at just short of eight pages. Ḥabība's letters, on the other hand, appear almost in the form of brief excerpts and occupy the left side of the page only, leaving the right side blank; the font is also visibly smaller. They range in length from one or two lines to a page and a half. The resulting effect is that Ḥabība's words appear almost parenthetical, limited to the margins of discourse, which perhaps serves as a device to reflect the inequalities between men and women where the latter struggle to make their voices heard. However, her letters manage to convey the sense of a strong woman who, in spite of her initial naivety which eventually gives way to disillusionment, refuses to accept the limitations imposed on her as a woman:

‘I am not a slave to submit to servitude. I am an ambitious woman. I have goals. I cannot be a prisoner to customs imposed on me by other human beings no better than I... I am a human being (*insāna*) who has to have her intellectual and moral independence’.⁵⁹

Ghālī's first letters to Ḥabība date from shortly before their marriage. They reveal that Ḥabība is already divorced from her first husband and Ghālī is in the process of divorcing his wife. Eventually Ghālī and Ḥabība marry and the rest of Ghālī's letters are sent during his frequent trips abroad. During the twelve years Ghālī and Ḥabība are married, Ghālī's work means he spends much of his time away on business. Ghālī is plagued by insecurity and paranoia over Ḥabība's fidelity when she is out of his sight and control. Perversely, while abroad on business Ghālī has a string of affairs as he tries to ‘forget his first love’.⁶⁰ Having learned of her husband's infidelities, Ḥabība takes revenge by having her own affairs. It hardly needs to be said that the portrayal of female infidelity was a daring move on Khāshuqjī's part. For Ḥabība, it clearly represents an act of resistance.

⁵⁹ Khāshuqjī, *Ma'tam*, 163.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

Ghālī's paranoia is at the heart of the couple's marital difficulties. The romantic sentiment expressed by Ghālī in his early letters, hyperbolic to the point of absurdity, is ultimately devoid of substance. As their relationship deteriorates, Ghālī begins to idealise the past, fixating on the childhood memories he and Ḥabība share. He fails to appreciate or understand the woman she has since become. But Ghālī's jealousy is not merely sexual; he is threatened by Ḥabība's intelligence. Her strong and assertive character is also a source of discomfort for him. His failed attempt to prevent Ḥabība from pursuing a career as a novelist emphasises this point:

Given all the sacrifices I have made, you need to let go of your strong personality and your ambitions. You need to stop writing your stories. You must stop writing. Have you forgotten that we are Easterners? As your husband I forbid you to continue in this field. You should know that by doing this, I am protecting you and saving your life.⁶¹

Here Khāshuqjī reproduces the familiar patriarchal excuse of 'protection' used to assert control over women.

Ḥabība's literary aspirations introduce an element of the self-reflexive. As with later women novelists like Ḥanān al-Shaykh in *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra, 1980), writing, in the Shahrazadian tradition, becomes not only a means of rebellion but of survival itself: 'At that time she was writing one story after another, depicting the same mood despite herself: tears and fear of oblivion'.⁶² Writing is perhaps the only means by which Ḥabība can circumvent the restrictions placed on her by society: 'For a time, the only way I could free myself was through writing'.⁶³ Words are Ḥabība's resistance and even a form of activism:

I want the story of our love to serve as an example for anyone who gives love all his strength, all his heart, without using his mind. I shall write it so that it lives on in legend for years to come, for future generations.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Khāshuqjī, *Ma`tam*, 158-9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

Although Ḥabība's words are effectively marginalised, it is through their juxtaposition with Ghālī's that the latter's hypocrisy and cruel and unreasonable behaviour is exposed.

Ghālī's preoccupation with the past at the expense of the present and the future is an oblique criticism of social convention and customs that prevent society, and women in particular, from progressing:

How can I come back to you... when you are a fossilised lover, clinging to tradition and outmoded customs? Why don't you try to free yourself from that damned rigidity? I have, and so have thousands of other educated people in this world.⁶⁵

Al-Wahhābī argues that in Khāshuqjī's novels 'romantic language is the metaphor which underpins her structure and the device by which she attempts to tackle the issue of the position of Arab woman and Saudi society'.⁶⁶ Ouyang's observation of how the influence of classical Arabic poetics continues to bear upon the modern Arabic novel can provide further insight into Khāshuqjī's use of 'romantic language'. According to Ouyang, 'Arabic poetics of love... partake in discourses on political authority, modernity, and more importantly, artistry, but now within the epistemological and ontological framework given shape by the nation-state'.⁶⁷ However, in *Ma'tam*, Khāshuqjī parodies these same traditions, mirroring the overblown language of *ghazal*.⁶⁸ Combined with the epistolary mode in which the beloved's voice is practically absent – in much the same way as it is in classical Arabic poetry – Khāshuqjī criticises the hypocrisy of patriarchal society in which women are mere objects of desire rather than equal partners.

⁶⁵ Khāshuqjī, *Ma'tam*, 163.

⁶⁶ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā'iyya al-sa'ūdiyya*, 90.

⁶⁷ Wen-Chin Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 145.

⁶⁸ *Ghazal* is a verse form that has its origins in the sixth century Arabic *qasīda* or ode. Its principle themes are loss and romantic love. By the early eleventh century *ghazal* had entered Persian poetry where it took on a mystical dimension. Among its most notable exponents are Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207-73) and Ḥāfiz (1325/6-1380/90). In the following century it spread to South Asia where today it is composed in Urdu and many other languages. The *ghazal* was introduced to Europe during the nineteenth century, most notably through the efforts of Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). See F. D. Lewis, 'Ghazal', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., eds. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), 570-2.

This criticism of the idealisation of love and longing for the female beloved – typical of classical Arabic poetry – as a male conceit is reinforced towards the end of the book in a brief epilogue in which the omniscient narrator provides a somewhat unnecessary synopsis of the story, warning her readers of the dangers of unrealistic notions of love.⁶⁹ The narrator signs off as ‘Samīra’, a self-reflexive stroke that reinforces the association of Ḥabība’s subjectivity with the author’s, since it gives a sense that Khāshuqjī is writing from personal experience.

The intertextual presence of classical Arabic poetics or more specifically, *ghazal*, in *Ma`tam* does not function in the same way as described above by Ouyang, who is more interested in the novel as national allegory. Moreover, in *Ma`tam*, the nation-state is almost absent, despite the occasional reference to several European capitals, America, and Beirut. When Ghālī mentions the ‘mother country’ or ‘the homeland’, it is never clear exactly where home is.⁷⁰ Perhaps this apparent lack of engagement with space reflects Zeidan’s observation on how, in women’s novels, freedom of movement for female characters is limited; Ḥabība’s immobility contrasts starkly with Ghālī’s jet-setting lifestyle, his work taking him ‘from country to country’.⁷¹ Yet this explanation is far from satisfying. The issue is not with the representation of place, even if this is often vague or of secondary importance in Khāshuqjī’s novels, rather, it is the absence of national space. This important distinction points to a major difference between Arab women’s and men’s novels. At this juncture, Ouyang’s insights on nationalist discourse and the Arabic novel are of particular relevance:

The nation-state is more often than not feminised. She is Ishtar, simultaneously the mother, sister and lover of Tammuz, the masculinised agent of imagination and national hero... Modernity as experienced in the nation-state, is an alluring female object of desire to the decolonising and nationalising male desiring subject.⁷²

In the above, Ouyang makes some important points on the gendering of Arab nationalist discourse. Modernity and the decolonised nation-state are feminised; as

⁶⁹ This perhaps points to the instability of the novel form.

⁷⁰ Khāshuqjī, *Ma`tam*, 101.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷² Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia*, 80.

such they are the twin objects of desire for the masculinised national hero. Hence, in many novels written by men, male selfhood or subjectivity is closely tied to nationhood. This is particularly so with the realist novel, its mimetic qualities providing – to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term – the ideal chronotope for the ‘decolonising and nationalising’ project.⁷³ It stands to reason then, that women’s novels relate differently to nation than men’s, since nationalist discourse impinges differently on male and female subjectivities. The territorialising impulse is absent from women’s novels. As Ouyang remarks, ‘I have yet to read a national allegory written by an Arab woman writer’.⁷⁴

The absence of national allegory does not necessarily mean that *Ma’tam* has nothing to say about Saudi society; it is more a case of pointing out that self and society in the novel are not defined or bounded by the author’s national identity. Al-Wahhābī and others have suggested Khāshuqjī did not set her novels in Saudi Arabia because she feared a backlash from Saudi society.⁷⁵ Perhaps this is supported by the fact that Khāshuqjī wrote under the nom-de-plume, ‘Samīra, Daughter of the Arabian Peninsula’, which strengthens the association between writer and Saudi Arabia and, at the same time, seems to support the notion that Khāshuqjī was self-censoring. But it is too far-fetched to suggest that the glamorous international locations that feature in most of her other novels are, in fact, merely a form of displacement; that Khāshuqjī was really writing about Saudi society. For one, Khāshuqjī largely grew up outside Saudi Arabia. Her formative years were spent between Egypt and Lebanon. It was in these places that she began writing and publishing in a cultural milieu that is reflected in her novels, both in terms of their themes and settings, but also as cultural production. Furthermore, the social critique in her novels is just as applicable to Egypt, Lebanon and beyond, as it is to Saudi Arabia.

⁷³ ‘Chronotope’ is a term coined by Bakhtin (1895-1975) to refer to the configuration of time and space in language and discourse. For an elaboration of the concept see Bakhtin’s 1937 essay, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 85-258.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷⁵ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-nisā’iyya al-sa’ūdiyya*, 78.

Khāshuqjī is just one example of what was a general tendency in the early Saudi novel, since it was by no means uncommon for early Saudi women novelists to set their stories outside Saudi Arabia.⁷⁶ Al-Rashīd's *Ghadan sayakūn al-khamīs*, the final text examined in this chapter, is another example, although some scenes towards the end of the book do in fact, take place in the Kingdom. Like *Ma'tam*, there is a certain ambiguity to the novel's setting, though a number of references and other clues make it almost certain that *Ghadan* is, for the most part, set in Cairo.

4.5 Hudā al-Rashīd's *Ghadan sayakūn al-khamīs* (Tomorrow Is Another Day)

Like Samīra Khāshuqjī, Hudā al-Rashīd has lived most of her life outside Saudi Arabia. Although born in Ta'if, al-Rashīd completed her secondary school education in Beirut and later gained her Bachelors and Masters degrees in London.⁷⁷ As the first Saudi woman to work for BBC Arabic, al-Rashīd is better known as a journalist than as a writer. She began her career in journalism working as an assistant reporter for Jeddah radio. After three years she moved to Riyadh TV where she worked as a news presenter and was 'the first Saudi woman to appear on screen'.⁷⁸ During a visit to London, al-Rashīd was invited to apply for a position as an anchorwoman at BBC Arabic radio. She moved to London in 1974 where she worked for the BBC until 1998.⁷⁹

Ghadan was published in 1976 by the Egyptian publishing group, Rūz al-Yūsuf.⁸⁰ Arguably ahead of its time, the novel is a penetrating, feminist critique of a conflicted society, caught between the seemingly ineluctable process of rapid modernisation and the powerful hold of tradition. This being said, in terms of al-

⁷⁶ See Bāghaffār's *al-Barā'a al-mafqūda*.

⁷⁷ Hudā al-Rashīd, interview by Muḥammad Qawwās, *Alāmāt istifhām*, ANB TV, 21 March 2012.

⁷⁸ 'Huda Al-Rasheed: First Saudi anchorwoman to work for BBC Arabic', *The Saudi Gazette*, 11 June 2014, accessed, 20 July 2014, <http://www.sauress.com/en/saudigazette/208065>.

⁷⁹ Al-Rashīd, interview, *Alāmāt*.

⁸⁰ It is worth noting here that Rūz al-Yūsuf, also written Rose El Youssef (1898-1958) was an important Egyptian Actress and Journalist who founded the eponymous *Rūz al-Yūsuf* magazine in 1925. The Cairo-based publication was billed as a political magazine, although it also covered entertainment news. It was nationalized by Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir in 1960 and has been noted for its 'leftist leaning' during Anwar al-Sādāt's presidency (1970-81). Richard Butsch and Sonia Livingstone, *The Meanings of Audiences: Comparative Discourses* (London: Routledge), 125.

Rashīd's approach to the novel form, *Ghadan* is unremarkable. While it demonstrates a more skilful handling of character and plot than many of Khāshuqjī's works, *Ghadan* is a fairly straightforward example of the social-realist fiction popular at the time.⁸¹ Although there are elements of the self-reflexive, these tend to be somewhat heavy-handed, serving to express the author's opinion on the function of art and literature, and as such they are not far removed from the didactic interjections of al-Anṣārī and al-Jawharī.

As noted earlier, *Ghadan* is mostly set in Cairo. Like *Ma'tam*, the story centres on the life of a young female protagonist – in this case Nawāl – whose progressive outlook and independent nature conflict with social expectations and result in the breakdown of her romantic relationship. Nawāl lives at home with her aging mother, her father having died when she was very young. An ambitious young, single woman, her life is focussed on her work as a political analyst for a newspaper. The kinds of difficulties faced by women like Nawāl who choose to pursue a career are voiced by her colleague, Nabīla, who resigns from the paper ahead of her impending marriage:

My articles are either deleted or cut short. All my work just goes to waste... And you believe in the value of hard work? I'm not indifferent, Nawāl. But how do you expect us to work, to build and to contribute in this environment? In their view, our qualifications are just for show, for marriage – a marriage commensurate with our diplomas, naturally. As for recognising us as independent beings, impossible – an unforgivable sin, the consequences of which are disastrous for a young woman living in a closed society... and you know the weapons they will brandish in our faces.⁸²

Whereas al-Subā'ī and Damanhūrī attempted to further the cause of women's education, writing prior to the opening of the first girls' schools in 1960, Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd represent a generation of elite young women who were foreign-educated. Their focus is less on education and more on the social norms that perpetuate inequality. If anything, the above suggests that access to education fell far short of the kind of changes needed to readdress the role and status of women. Al-

⁸¹ In a television interview al-Rashīd talks about how her use of the stream of consciousness technique was directly influenced by the novels of Virginia Woolf. Al-Rashīd, interview, *Alāmāt*.

⁸² Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 19.

Rashīd seems to be saying that rather than empowering women, education had become a kind of social capital or currency, adding to women's value as prospective wives. This is perhaps an indirect criticism of the popular argument, made in *Thaman al-tadhīya* for example, that women's education was necessary in so far as it would make them better mothers and more intellectually compatible partners for their husbands.⁸³

As a woman in her mid-twenties, society expects Nawāl to assume the traditional roles of wife and mother. Her single status has now become a talking point for those close to her, particularly her friends, Lamyā and Maḥmūd, who are constantly attempting to match Nawāl with an eligible suitor. Although there is the suggestion that Nawāl has sacrificed her youth to care for her mother, her reasons for remaining single actually run much deeper. When Maḥmūd warns her that she will eventually be forced out of desperation to accept any man, she argues that there is no shame in living as a single woman and that this is preferable to living with 'someone you do not love, or who does not understand you'.⁸⁴ Nawāl is angry and frustrated at how women continue to be treated as commodities. She has no desire to kowtow to society's expectations of her; she wants a partner, an equal:

I'm not looking for perfection. It's about feeling at ease, about having a sense of one's own humanity, which sadly isn't valued in our society. At least you're not made to feel like you're on display, like something for sale... I'm not interested in just any young man. Maturity, honest intentions, morals and conscientiousness are the most important traits in any person.⁸⁵

Maḥmūd on the other hand, belittles Nawāl's ideals as unrealistic, though his opinions reflect a deeply cynical rather than a conservative outlook:

You're dreaming or you're in another world... far from our reality. Young women at your mature age get married and that's the end of it. They become mothers at the age of sixteen or seventeen. That's the average, and it's not so bad if you compare it to the past when they married at nine, eleven, twelve or thirteen years old.⁸⁶

⁸³ For example, see 'Abd Allah 'Abd al-Jabbār's introduction to *Thaman al-tadhīya*, 2-12.

⁸⁴ Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 28.

⁸⁵ Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Again, al-Rashīd seems to be saying that the reformist drive had lost its momentum or simply not gone far enough.

Nawāl seems destined to remain single until events conspire otherwise. Her mother falls seriously ill and is admitted to hospital, where she remains for several months. Around the same time, Lamya and Maḥmūd introduce Nawāl to Aḥmad b. ‘Ammā. Aḥmad is newly arrived from America, having recently obtained his doctorate in public relations. Despite Nawāl’s initial misgivings, they find common ground and begin to meet regularly at Lamya’s and Maḥmūd’s home, where they engage in lengthy political and philosophical discussions.

One day, in an obvious allusion to marriage, Aḥmad asks Nawāl what, at the age of twenty-five, she intends to do with her life besides work. The following exchange makes a strong comment on society’s double standards, evoking the issue of extramarital relationships and the much heavier price potentially paid by women in such situations. But perhaps most interestingly, it offers a perspective on some of the issues then facing young Arabs in the post-colonial era:

‘First you tell me why you’re not married’.

‘Arab girls scare me, they’re complicated and don’t really know what they want. You can’t really get to know them because they’re vapid and superficial and... treacherous’.

‘And doesn’t the Arab man bear any responsibility for the situation as you describe it, since he completely disregards those qualities he finds in the Arab woman?’

‘That’s the crux of the disaster. The Arab man is very simple, simpler than you’d imagine. The Arab woman attracts him because of their similar upbringing. But he only feels at ease with the Western woman, because of her understanding and straightforwardness’.

‘Perhaps the Arab woman is complicated, but the reason for this lies in the hypocrisy of you men. For her the man is protection, it’s instinctive. But look at how things really are. He’s confused. He doesn’t know what he wants. He wants understanding, attentiveness, absolute honesty. But does he help her, does he accept her playing a full role in life and her sincerity - especially

where it concerns the romantic – or does this automatically cheapen her in his eyes, making her loose-moraled...? He mouths off about his needs and his conditions without being prepared to pay the price of sharing the responsibility. Never mind comparing the Arab woman to the Western woman - what about the opposite? Does the Western man get together with a woman only because he hasn't bedded her yet, or is it more a deep appreciation of the other party, of all their strengths and weaknesses'.⁸⁷

This is an overt critique of the double standards governing relationships between men and women; but more profoundly, it raises some of the complex issues that Arab society faced in the post-colonial era. Nawāl's criticisms of Arab men can be read as a critique of Arab society's inability to fully reconcile itself to the process of social reform, particularly where this concerns women's rights. Aḥmad can only 'feel at ease' with the 'Western woman' because as the 'other' against which the 'self' is defined, she does not have the same potential as the 'Arab woman' to threaten or undermine Aḥmad's perception of self or selfhood. The reason for this relates to what has previously been said on women as symbols in Arab nationalist discourse, i.e. how 'the woman question' came to embody the conflict between conservative and liberal forces and woman herself figured as a highly contested symbol of nationhood. The Arab woman's apparent complexity is a projection of Aḥmad's/society's own ambivalence towards the new cultural experiences to which Arab society was exposed with the onset of the modern era. Nawāl's self-assertion, her demand for equality and refusal of tradition, result in a kind of cognitive dissonance for Aḥmad, leading eventually to a full-blown existential crisis.

Aḥmad and Nawāl's relationship continues to develop and eventually, Aḥmad proposes. Nawāl accepts, Aḥmad promising to ask her mother's permission and make it official as soon as she is out of hospital. However, the arrival of his younger sisters, Salmā and Şafā, triggers a profound crisis for Aḥmad who begins to have serious doubts about his relationship and impending marriage. The sisters have come to spend some time with him in the run-up to Salmā's wedding. Early into their visit, Aḥmad arrives home from work one evening and is puzzled to learn that both Salma and Şafā have remained inside the entire day, not even venturing out to shop for the

⁸⁷ Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 39-40.

evening meal. When he asks them why, his sisters are surprised that he would expect them to leave the house without the company of a male escort or *maḥram*.⁸⁸

Although at first bemused by the situation, Aḥmad quickly discovers he derives a certain pleasure and self-validation from his sisters' dependence on him. This leads him to compare them to Nawāl and her very different, independent nature. It is at this point that Aḥmad begins to question himself and his relationship with Nawāl:

Aḥmad was gripped by a sudden refusal of his self, and then Nawāl. He felt lost when he looked at Salmā and Ṣafā. They had brought his childhood back to him. In them, he saw his mother. They had been all that mattered to her. Six brothers and sisters... He remembered his father's *dīwān*, always ready for receiving male guests – there was never a woman in sight. He saw his mother as she stood behind the door clapping her hands to get the attention of his father so that her voice would not be heard.⁸⁹ Only there could you find the value of manliness, true manliness, not in this tribulation and partnership. Confused, he wondered: what had brought him here? This life and this false city, which he now completely rejected. His previous convictions came back to him... In Salma's weakness he had found the road to return to his past and his childhood, which he imagined unchanged. One generation following the next, living exactly alike. He pictured Nawāl and saw her as a contradiction and felt sickened by it all. He was living in two contradictory states, within and without. He lived with his two sisters, which brought back to him the way he had been raised; with Nawāl, he was drawn to her by love but repulsed by her at the same time. His perspective had become clouded and confused. Sometimes he rebelled and at others he went with his new feelings. This split tortured him. In this struggle there was no winner and no loser, because both hands of the scale were equal. To emerge from this crisis he went cold. He knew he was letting Nawāl down, but it was as if he were paralysed.⁹⁰

Aḥmad's deep nostalgia for his childhood recalls Ghālī's attachment to an idealised past. In both cases, this represents a more general attachment to the past, a fear or reticence towards change. The impossibility of returning to life as it was (real or reimagined), and society's unwillingness to embrace the need for social reform, particularly concerning the role and status of women, results in paralysis and a profoundly conflicted state. There is a powerful correlation between past and self,

⁸⁸ This one of several clues that point to Aḥmad being Saudi since, as noted above, women in Saudi Arabia are generally prohibited from going into public without a *maḥram*.

⁸⁹ The idea here is that even the woman's voice is *'awra*, and as such should not be heard by non-*maḥārim*. This and the tradition of the *dīwān*, also known as the *majlis*, are common throughout the Arab Gulf region and provide further clues to Aḥmad's Saudi identity.

⁹⁰ Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 71-72.

which is reinforced by the evocation of Aḥmad's mother fulfilling her traditional role as child-bearer and obedient wife. *Ghadan* serves to highlight the objectification of woman as national self, how in male discourses of nationhood 'woman, as mother, sister and lover, comes to symbolise the nation'.⁹¹ Past and present, here and there, are conflated into two incompatible selves – a dichotomy: Aḥmad rejects the 'here and now' and what this represents in terms of change, valorising the 'there and past'. For Aḥmad, 'there' is home, Saudi Arabia, whose traditions and values conflict with 'here', Cairo, 'the false city'. Cairo plays the role of the 'other', in the same way that Europe or the United States – the West – functions as the other, against which the self is defined, in much Arabic literature of the time and earlier.⁹²

Nawāl and Aḥmad's relationship becomes increasingly strained as the latter's inner conflict intensifies and they begin to see each other less and less. Aḥmad breaks his promise to ask Nawāl's mother for her blessing, even after the latter is finally discharged from hospital. He decides to leave the country and spend some time with his family, hoping to find some sort of resolution. Aḥmad's continued absence becomes a source of deep anxiety for Nawāl and the emotional strain, coupled with the death of her mother, eventually causes her to suffer a nervous breakdown. When news of her mother's death reaches him, Aḥmad's response is almost callous. Instead of returning to comfort her in her hour of need, he sends only a telegram, dryly expressing his condolences. With this final disappointment, Nawāl decides she no longer wants Aḥmad in her life. She applies herself to her work with renewed enthusiasm and tries to forget him.

In an ironic twist, Salmā and her husband visit Aḥmad and the rest of the family a few months after their wedding. Aḥmad is astonished by how much his sister has changed since he last saw her in Egypt. He learns that she now goes out alone, and even visits the cinema. When she notices his reaction, she tells him that she and her husband had agreed on certain things before the marriage, and, most significantly, that they were already in love. Aḥmad realises he has made a mistake. The next day

⁹¹ Ouyang, *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel*, 106.

⁹² There are countless examples of this trend. *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* was mentioned in Chapter Three. See also Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *al-Adīb* (The Intellectual) (Cairo: n.p., 1935).

he rushes back to Nawāl, telling his parents of his intention to marry her. Nawāl's cool reception comes as a shock for Aḥmad:

Don't you have any self-respect? And me? Should I pretend I don't have any – sell it for the sake of appearances? What could ever entice me to give it up? You? 'The seductive eyes of love,' as you used to say? They'd be painted with pretence and self-delusion... Perhaps you'd be happy like that Aḥmad, because that's how you are. But how could I, when I'd know what I'd lost and the crime I'd be committing against myself?⁹³

Despite the enormous social pressure to marry and, not least, her feelings for Aḥmad, by refusing him Nawāl stays true to her principles and retains her self-respect. For a readership accustomed to traditional tragic tales of star-crossed lovers, as in *Wadda 'tu* or the happy-ever-after endings of the pulp romance, the resolution of *Ghadan* might well have proved unsettling. This must remain purely conjecture, since, as was the case with Khāshuqjī's early novels, al-Rashīd's literary debut seems to have gone unnoticed by the press at the time, making it difficult to gauge its initial reception.

It is tempting to describe the narrative arc of *Ghadan* in terms of Zeidan's vicious circle concept. Yet, although by the novel's end Nawāl is in an arguably worse position than before – her mother having died – it is her decision to terminate the relationship. Through this act of empowerment, even if at a price, Nawāl maintains her integrity and self-respect. Likewise, *Ma'tam* does not quite complete the vicious circle. When Ghālī ends their relationship for good, Ḥabība presumably finds herself back where she started at the end of her first divorce. But she remains defiant like Nawāl, and continues to pursue her writing. Perhaps the problem with the vicious circle concept is that it assumes a complete lack of agency on the part of women to decide their destiny and ignores the various and subtle forms resistance can take.

Another noteworthy parallel between *Ma'tam* and *Ghadan* is their inclusion of self-reflexive elements. In the former this has the effect of blurring the lines between protagonist and author, or fiction and reality; whereas, in the latter, al-Rashīd uses

⁹³ Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 94-95.

the device to voice her views on literature. Discussing art with Aḥmad, Nawāl argues:

‘It’s life itself, and with the exception of religion, the most divine thing there is. It weaves together truth and the imaginary. It is the fusing of the self with what is and what should be. I’m talking about art or literature that is worthy and carries a message and has a goal, not what you find today’.

‘You mean Arabic literature?’

‘I mean the kind of literature that contains nothing but over-the-top romance or cheap titillation, or is totally removed from reality. Where is reality in our literature? Life, struggle, our day-to-day existence... Young people read what’s easy and cheap. They get lost in its ideas, which are completely unrealistic. Ideas that are anaesthetising their minds like a drug’.⁹⁴

Although using very different strategies, both Khāshuqjī’s and al-Rashīd’s novels criticise idealised notions of love and romance. In doing so, they expose the inequalities in male/female relationships. Khāshuqjī achieves this largely through her parodying of classical Arabic poetics. Al-Rashīd’s narrative, on the other hand, might be described as an ‘anti-romance’ since it essentially rejects romanticised notions of love. In this respect its ending is telling; it conforms to neither the happy, nor the tragic endings that characterise popular romantic fiction. Nawāl’s disdain for ‘over-the-top romance’, reinforces *Ghadan*’s anti-romantic outlook; while her call for a literature that engages directly with reality, with ‘the day-to-day’ struggle for existence is a prime example of the privileging by Arab critics and writers of the realist novel over other novel genres, recalling al-Jabbār’s introduction to *Thaman al-taḍhīya*. These ideas about the form and function of novelistic discourse foreshadow later criticism of Khāshuqjī’s novels and have important implications for which works have been included or excluded from the canon.

4.6 Conclusion

Although the history of Saudi women’s novel writing begins with Khāshuqjī’s *Wadda ‘tu āmālī* in 1958, only a handful of novels were produced over the following

⁹⁴ Al-Rashīd, *Ghadan*, 43.

three decades. These were all published in either Beirut or Cairo. Perhaps this can be explained by Saudi Arabia's weak publishing and distribution infrastructure, which made publishing outside the Kingdom a practical necessity. But coupled with its low literacy rate – particularly among the female population – and consequently, what must have been a very small potential readership, it is unlikely that Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd were writing specifically for the Saudi market, if at all. Instead, their novels were produced for and consumed by a cultural market centred in Egypt and Lebanon, then at the vanguard of contemporary Arabic literature.

Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd exemplify how porous and equivocal local literary traditions in the Arab world are. Both writers are described as Saudi women novelists yet they wrote primarily for a foreign audience. Furthermore, their literary roots can be traced to the pioneering achievements of Egyptian and Lebanese women writers such as Ba'labakkī, whose feminist narratives almost certainly influenced them and their work. After all, Khāshuqjī and al-Rashīd were educated and spent many of their formative years in the relatively liberal environments of Egypt and Lebanon. It is impossible, therefore, to discuss their work solely within the context of a Saudi literary tradition.

Adding a further dimension to the relationship between Khāshuqjī's and al-Rashīd's work on the one hand, and concepts of nation and national canon on the other, is the ambiguity of place in their novels and the absence of national space, salient in many – although by no means all – Arab men's novels. This, it has been argued, relates to the gendering of Arab nationalist discourse and important differences between male and female subjectivities. In *Ghadan*, it is almost as though the male gaze in being turned back on itself or a mirror is being held to the male desiring subject, Aḥmad. Society's conflicted relationship with modernity is acted out in Aḥmad's relationship with Nawāl, whose progressive attitude and determination to chart her own course in life makes her a symbol of modernity. Aḥmad is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by Nawāl, reflecting society's ambivalence towards transformation in women's roles.

CHAPTER FIVE

Critical Discourse and Canon Formation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter moves the focus of analysis from the novel to the discourse on the novel. Commencing with an overview of the origins of modern Arabic literary criticism within the *nahḍa* movement, it provides vital context for analogous developments in Hijaz, which are explored in some depth. Of particular interest is how notions about the role and function of both literature and the critic developed over time, especially as a response to the ideological concept of ‘national literature’ promoted by Haykal.

Linking to this is a critical examination of the canonisation of the early Saudi novel, which offers some answers to the following questions: ‘Which novels are canonized and why, and which are marginalized, ignored and then rediscovered?’¹ And how does the canon itself ‘both reflect and construct the ideas of nation and national identity’.² Hence, the debate over the first Saudi novel and its canonisation are discussed in some detail, as are the marginalisation and exclusion of Khāshuqjī’s novels for their detachment from Saudi social reality. Building on the argument made in Chapter Four, it is contended that the debate over why she chose the particular settings of her novels is a mute point and that, as someone who eludes the traditional classifications that demarcate cultural space, it is more insightful to view Khāshuqjī and her work in terms of liminality. Finally, the liminality of the novel is argued for from a slightly different angle with a reflection on two authors who also defy easy categorisation, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf and Muḥammad Ḥūḥū, concluding the chapter.

¹ Elsadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel*, xvi.

² *Ibid.*, xiii.

5.2 Precedents: Early Developments in Egypt and the Levant

The development of the journalistic press and new literary forms in Hijaz during the early twentieth century needs to be understood within the context of the *nahḍa*; that is, the Arab cultural and political movement that began in Egypt and the Levant during the nineteenth century.³ Accompanying developments in literature and the arts was a new critical discourse whose urgent tone questioned every facet of Arab culture and society: from religion to education, the role and social position of women, literature and beyond. It was from within this general critical discourse that the first efforts arose to redefine literature and its role in the modern period. As Arab nationalism gathered momentum, greater emphasis was placed on the Arabic language and its revival after centuries of Ottoman rule, during which it had been supplanted by Ottoman Turkish as the language of administration. Many Arab and Western historians have referred to this period as ‘the age of decline’ (*‘asr al-inḥiṭāṭ*: 1516-1789), during which, it is alleged, Arabic language and literature stagnated.⁴

Although the *nahḍa* is usually spoken of in the singular, it was not so much a coordinated movement as a general trend, which swept the Arab region during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, although developments in Hijaz are described here as an extension of the *nahḍa*, this is more in recognition of the Egyptian cultural influence, and to a lesser extent that of Syria and the Mahjar writers, and the formative role they played in shaping these developments. The

³ The word *nahḍa* is often translated as ‘renaissance’, although its actual meaning is ‘awakening’ or ‘arising’. There is a growing body of scholarship on this period. For example, see Hourani’s *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* and, more recently, Abdulrazzaq Patel, *The Arab Nahdah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

⁴ This period is usually said to date from the Ottoman conquest of Syria and Egypt (1516-17), to the French occupation of Egypt in 1798. For example, see Ḥanā al-Fākhūrī, *Tarīkh al-adab al-‘arabī*, 2nd ed. (Jounieh: Al-Maṭba‘a al-Būlīsiyya, 1953), 859. Jurjī Zaydān describes the Ottoman period in his four-volume history of Arabic literature, *Tarīkh adab al-lughā al-‘arabiyya*, 4 vols (Cairo: n.p, 1910-13), as one of general decline in almost every aspect of life, from the arts and sciences to morality, even claiming the era failed to produce any ‘poet worthy of mention outside the Arab world’ (3: 289-92). Recent scholarship has seriously problematised this paradigm. Patel, for example, describes its ‘disastrous’ effect on the study of Arabic thought and culture during this period. Patel, *Arab Nahdah*, 3.

nahḍa meant different things in different countries and at different times, but perhaps its most notable achievement was the reform of the Arabic language. Layoun sums this up neatly: ‘The nahda or Arab literary renaissance of the 19th and early 20th centuries was not a coherent programme of social reform. However, its most important outcome was the revival of the key instrument of Arab unity, i.e. the [formal] Arabic language or al-fusha’.⁵

As the Arab peoples sought to gain their independence from the Ottoman Empire and the European colonial powers, *nahḍawī* discourse was closely related to issues of identity and nation. Language and literature became the vehicle to assert an Arab identity distinct from its erstwhile foreign occupiers. As Jeff Shalan asserts, ‘a self-consciously modern and distinctly nationalist literature emerged first in Egypt in the 1920s’.⁶ This literature would have a significant influence throughout much of the Arab world.⁷

The project of restoring the Arabic language to its former glory, arguably the root of modern Arabic literary criticism, can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. During the early period of the *nahḍa*, critics tended to focus their attention on issues of correct language usage and grammar. This was very much in the classical Arabic belles-lettres tradition, as Fayṣal Darrāj observes,⁸ however, their efforts were not simply a continuation of tradition; rather they reflected the agenda of the modern reformist movement, which sought to revive Arabic language and culture.

Indeed, the neoclassical movement that emerged during the mid-nineteenth century marks ‘the first stage in the modern literary revival’.⁹ Poets, such as the Egyptian Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Barūdī (d. 1904), took the medieval Arabic ode form, the *qaṣīda*, as epitomised in the poetry of the great Abbasid poet, al-Mutanabbī (915-64), as their

⁵ Layoun, *Travels of a Genre*, 58.

⁶ Jeff Shalan, ‘Writing the Nation: The Emergence of Egypt in the Modern Arabic Novel’, in *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, eds. Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 131.

⁷ Elsadda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel*, xxxiv.

⁸ Fayṣal Darrāj, ‘La Critique littéraire’, in *Histoire de la littérature arabe moderne: 1800-1945*, eds. Hallaq and Toelle (Arles: Actes Sud, 2007), 1: 620

⁹ M. M. Badawi, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 15.

model. To some extent these developments were paralleled in prose. A number of writers attempted to resurrect the classical *maqāma* genre pioneered during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The most famous exponent of this trend was Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858-1930) with his *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā ibn Hishām* (‘Īsā Ibn Hishām’s Tale, 1907).¹⁰

These attempts to revive classical literary forms were ultimately unsuccessful, though the classical belles-lettres tradition and its rich heritage remains a source of inspiration for writers. One of the earliest criticisms of the neo-classicists was made by al-Shidyāq who wrote of the need for poets to free themselves from the strictures of classical Arabic poetry.¹¹ In the first volume of his monumental work, *al-Sāq ‘alā al-sāq* (1855),¹² al-Shidyāq describes the erotic prelude (*naṣīb*) of the *qaṣīda* as an unnecessary convention imposed on the poet by tradition.¹³

The neoclassical trend of the early *nahḍa* period eventually fell out of favour. It was superseded by a more radical attitude towards language and literature that saw the need to reform Arabic as a vehicle of expression capable of meeting the needs of contemporary society. Much of the modernising drive focussed on style. The reformers called for a simplified, accessible style of writing that eschewed the overwrought rhetorical devices and frequent recourse to recondite vocabulary that characterised much of the literature produced by the neoclassicists. One such voice was that of Adīb Ishāq (1856-85), a Syrian pioneer of Arabic journalism and one of

¹⁰ The work was first serialised in *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq* newspaper between 1898 and 1900. Although couched in traditional rhyming prose, the language of *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā* is less obscure than its medieval precedents. El-Enany has described it as ‘a ground breaking critique of the turn-of-the-century Egyptian society with a high sense of realistic representation, nonetheless striking with its immediacy and insight into human nature for its overelaborate garb’. El-Enany, *Arab Representations*, 35.

¹¹ Scholar, writer and journalist, the Lebanese born Al-Shidyāq is considered a key figure of the early *nahḍa* and the emergence of modern Arabic literature.

¹² Full title: *Al-Sāq ‘alā al-sāq fī mā huwa al-fāriyāq* (‘One Leg over the Other’ or ‘The Pigeon on the Tree Branch’). The semi-autobiographical work records al-Shidyāq’s observations on, and comparisons between, Arab and European culture and society. The book was recently translated by Humphrey Davies as *Leg Over Leg Or The Turtle in the Tree: Concerning the Fāriyāq, What Manner of Creature Might He Be*, 2 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

¹³ Abdelfattah Killito, *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*, trans. Wail S. Hassan (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 75-6.

the earliest promoters of Arab nationalism. He argued for the need to rid language of ornamentation and rhyming prose.¹⁴

The advent of literary journalism around the mid-nineteenth century was a pivotal step for literary criticism. Literary journalism played ‘a key role in the propagation of new poetic ideas’.¹⁵ *Al-Muqataṭaf*, one of the earliest and most influential Arabic literary journals, was founded in Beirut in 1876 by two Syrian Christians, Ya‘qūb Ṣarrūf (1852-1927) and Fāris Nimr (1856-1951). According to Faysal al-Darrāj, *al-Muqataṭaf* saw criticism as vital to the achievement of modernity. It was ‘at the origin of all progress, whether in the sciences, technology, or the arts’.¹⁶ However, this was less true during the journal’s early years when ‘literary criticism barely featured in *al-Muqataṭaf* and ‘criticism was defined as pointing out the merits and defects in an author’s work’.¹⁷

Al-Muqataṭaf was followed by *al-Hilāl*, founded in 1892 by the renowned writer and journalist Jurjī Zaydān. From the outset *al-Hilāl* provided a vital venue for fiction. It inspired a new generation of writers and was influential in the propagation of new literary forms. *Al-Hilāl* also served as an outlet for Zaydān’s own novels as well as his interest in Arabic literary history. His landmark four-volume work, *Tarīkh adab al-luḡha al-‘arabiyya* (The History of Arabic Literature, 1910-13) first appeared in *al-Hilāl* as a series of articles.¹⁸ The journal also helped introduce European literary theory to an Arab readership with a series of anonymous articles, titled ‘Bāḥith fī al-naqd’ (A Researcher in Criticism), published in 1916-17.¹⁹ These journals were one of the principal channels through which new ideas were introduced to Hijaz, especially after the Ottoman Constitution, which ushered in an age of greater freedom of the press and the end to the prohibition of Egyptian publications.

¹⁴ Darrāj, ‘La Critique litteraire’, 621-2.

¹⁵ Elisabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 30.

¹⁶ Darrāj, ‘La Critique litteraire’, 621.

¹⁷ Kendall, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde*, 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24

¹⁹ Brugman, *Introduction*, 322.

One of the obstacles to the establishment of a modern critical discourse was the negative connotation the term ‘criticism’ (*al-naqd* or sometimes *al-intiqād*) had come to imply among writers during the early *nahḍa*, being perceived as something closer to ‘slander’ or ‘insult’.²⁰ The situation was deplored by the famous lexicographer, Najīb Ḥaddād in *al-Muqṭaṭaf*, who writes: ‘Criticism is something the East knows only as a kind of manure mingled with slander and invective, and which the ears of Easterners are not accustomed to hearing, since it has nothing to do with the flattery and eloquent speech of which they are so fond’.²¹ It seems the situation persisted, since even as late as 1923, Mikhā’il Nu‘ayma in his famous book, *al-Ghirbāl* (The Sieve), is at pains to distinguish literary criticism from personal invective: ‘I would not have taken the trouble to explain this simple truth, if it were not for the fact that many Arab writers and their readers continue to see criticism as a form of warfare waged between critic and the critiqued’.²²

Other landmarks in modern Arabic literary criticism include Rūḥī al-Khālīdī’s (1864-1913), *Tārīkh ‘ilm al-adab ‘ind al-ifrānj wa-l-‘arab wa-Victor Hugo* (The History of the Discipline of Literature among Westerners and Arabs and Victor Hugo, 1904). Al-Khālīdī, who served as a consul in Bordeaux, contends that the spirit of criticism and social progress are inseparable.²³ The book focuses on the life and work of Victor Hugo, although there are some sections on Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*) and an attempt to draw connections between French, English and Arabic literatures. According to Brugman, despite being reprinted in 1912, al-Khālīdī’s book did not have ‘any great influence’.²⁴ However, the fact that it was reprinted relatively soon after its publication and also serialised in *al-Hilāl*, suggests the work was popular and enjoyed broad appeal among the general educated readership.²⁵ Ferial Ghazoul

²⁰ Darrāğ, ‘La Critique litteraire’, 621.

²¹ Cited in Darrāğ, ‘La Critique litteraire’, 622. Unfortunately Darrāğ does not provide details of his source for this citation.

²² Mikhā’il Nu‘ayma, *al-Ghirbāl*, 15th ed. (Beirut: Nawfal, 1991), 14.

²³ Darrāğ, ‘La Critique litteraire’, 625.

²⁴ Brugman, *An Introduction to Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, 331.

²⁵ Ferial J. Ghazoul, ‘Comparative Literature in the Arab World’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, 3, nos. 1-2 (2006): 113.

argues that al-Khālidī's comparison between the poetry of Hugo and that of al-Ma'arrī make his work a precursor of comparative literature.²⁶

Writing around the same time as al-Khālidī, Farah Anṭūn's (1861-1922) article, 'Inshā' al-riwāya al-'arabiyya' (Writing of the Arabic Novel, 1906), is also worth noting here. Anṭūn's article is among the earliest attempts to establish a set of criteria for the Arabic novel.²⁷ In the article, which was published in his own *al-Jāmi'a* magazine,²⁸ he lists five qualifying criteria for the novel: creative power or force, dynamism, unity of context and thematic variation, detailed psychological and sociological description, as well as aesthetic emotion – i.e. the coming together of thought and emotion to create a meaningful response to art.²⁹ Anṭūn was drawing from his knowledge of European – notably French – literature and philosophy, which he attempted to introduce into Arabic literature.

The first major and influential work that applied a modern methodological approach to Arabic literary criticism was arguably Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's controversial study of pre-Islamic poetry, *Fī al-shi'r al-jāhilī* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry, 1926).³⁰ Ḥusayn (1889-1973) contended that the celebrated corpus of pre-Islamic poetry is, in fact, a latter-day forgery, fabricated by the early Muslim 'ulama' to justify their interpretation of scripture. The book's iconoclasm provoked a violent reaction in conservative religious circles and calls were made for the author's trial and imprisonment.³¹ Ḥusayn's approach draws heavily on the French historians Langlois and Seignobos and their famous textbook, *Introduction aux études historiques* (1887), in which they applied new scientific principles to the study of history.³² Although Ḥusayn's

²⁶ Ghazoul, 'Comparative Literature', 113.

²⁷ Darrāğ, 'La Critique litteraire', 631.

²⁸ The magazine began life under the longer title, *al-Jāmi'a al-Uthmāniyya*, and was published in Alexandria from 1889-1904. It was later moved to New York where it was published as *al-Jāmi'a* from 1906-09.

²⁹ Darrāğ, 'La Critique litteraire', 631-2.

³⁰ The backlash to *Fī al-shi'r* was so violent that Husayn was forced to withdraw the book. He republished it in 1927 under the title, *Fī al-adab al-jāhilī* with the most controversial passages omitted, although he maintained his argument that the celebrated body of pre-Islamic poetry was forged.

³¹ Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 21.

³² Abdelrashid Mahmudi, *Taha Husain's Education: From the Azhar to the Sorbonne* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 200.

argument in its most extreme form, which casts serious doubt on the authenticity of all pre-Islamic literature, has been convincingly refuted,³³ the value of *Fī al-sh‘ir* remains in that it represents one of the first attempts to apply a modern, methodological approach to Arabic literary criticism.³⁴

During the first decades of the twentieth century, poetry remained at the forefront of literary debate. The 1920s saw the rise to prominence of the Diwān Group, which launched a fierce critique against the neoclassical poets. The group was founded by the celebrated poets, ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād (1889-1964), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Shukrī (1886-1958), and Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī (1890-1949), and took its name from their book, *al-Diwān, kitāb fī al-adab wa-l-naqd* (The Diwan, a Book on Literature and Criticism). Published in Cairo in 1921, the book was more or less a manifesto for the group’s literary principles, and drew strongly on the ideas of the English romantics. The most celebrated of the neoclassical poets, Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932), nicknamed ‘Amīr al-Shu‘arā’, ‘the Prince of Poets’, was subjected to particular criticism from al-‘Aqqād. Among his many criticisms of Shawqī’s poetry was its lack of ‘organic unity of meaning’.³⁵ This was actually a salient feature of the traditional *qaṣīda* form practiced by Shawqī, where each of a poem’s individual lines or *abyāt* (sing. *bayt*) represents an independent unit of meaning.

It is almost impossible to discuss the Diwan Group without mentioning al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya (The Pen League). The league was formed in the United States by the Lebanese émigré poets (or the Mahjar poets as they were known), whose key members included Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān (1883-1931), Mikhā’il Nu‘ayma (1889-1998), Naṣīb ‘Arīḍa (1887-1946) and Rashīd Ayyūb (1871-1941). Perhaps even more so than the Diwān Group, al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya was inspired by English

³³ For example, see A. J. Arberry’s *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), 228-54.

³⁴ *Fī al-sh‘ir* was just one of Ḥusayn’s many contributions to Arabic letters. Novelist, short-story writer, journalist, translator, critic, and dubbed ‘the dean of Arabic literature’ in his day, he is one of the major Egyptian literary figures of the first half of the 20th century. See Hugh Kennedy, ‘Taha Husayn’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1: 297. *Al-Ayyām*, his fictionalized autobiography, a three-volume work published in 1933, was the first modern work of Arabic literature to gain substantial recognition.

³⁵ ‘Abbās Maḥmūd Al-‘Aqqād and Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī, *al-Diwān: Kitāb fī al-naqd wa-l-adab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sa‘āda, 1921), 2: 47.

Romanticism. Arguably its most prominent member after Jibrān, al-Nu‘ayma, published *al-Ghirbāl* in Cairo in 1923.³⁶ Nu‘ayma calls for a literature that is ‘profoundly and authentically anchored in life’.³⁷ He argues that metre and rhyme are dispensable, and that literature must come directly from the writer’s heart. Ultimately, ‘language and prosody are systems which must serve the individual creative writer and not inhibit his artistic ability’.³⁸

Both the Diwān School and al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya had a far-reaching influence on the young generation of Hijazi men of letters who were writing during the first half of the twentieth century. While this was particularly true of poetry, al-Subā‘ī’s *Fikra* is one example of the Romantic trend in prose fiction.³⁹ In the realm of literary criticism, Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Awwād (1902-80), whose work is discussed here, was known for his admiration of al-‘Aqqād; and his book, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa* (Thoughts Stated, 1926) has been compared to *al-Ghirbāl*, particularly for its derisive tone towards traditional modes of criticism.

A crucial development in modern Arabic literary criticism was the concept of ‘national literature’ (*al-adab al-qawmī*). While Haykal is known primarily for his novel *Zaynab*, he also did much to advance the concept, which finds its most significant elaboration in *Thawrat al-adab* (The Literary Revolution), a collection of his essays published in 1933.⁴⁰ Central to Haykal’s concept of national literature was his notion of ‘objective criticism’, directly influenced by the social determinism of the French literary historian, Hippolyte Taine (1828-93). According to this concept, the critic’s personal taste is irrelevant to the evaluation of a literary work’s aesthetic and historical value, rather its specific social and historical milieu must be

³⁶ Indicative of the similarities between the poetical orientations of the Pen League and the Diwān Group, *al-Ghirbāl* included an introduction penned by al-‘Aqqād.

³⁷ Darrāḡ, ‘La Critique litteraire’, 637.

³⁸ R. C. Ostle, ‘The Romantic Poets,’ in *Modern Arabic literature*, ed. Muhammad Mustafa Badawi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 100.

³⁹ Many prominent Hijazi poets of the 1920s were influenced by the romantic trend, including, Husayn Sarḥan (1914-93), Hamza Shaḥāta (1910-72) and Muḥammad Ḥasan Fiqī (1914-2004).

⁴⁰ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Thawrat al-adab*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1978).

considered as a whole – Taine’s ‘race, milieu et moment’⁴¹ – since ‘the individual human being has no separate existence’.⁴²

Building on this concept Haykal asserts that the Egyptian writer has a duty ‘to speak of his country and its history and beauty’.⁴³ This notion that literature should represent the national social reality has and continues to inform literary criticism and canon formation in the Arab world, as observed by Selim in the Egyptian context:

The new critical concept of ‘national literature’ was a pivotal element in the later development and canonization of the novel genre in Egypt. Its three main distinguishing features are setting, character and time: Egyptian landscapes and Egyptian characters, urban and rural, and an overarching sense of national history were identified as the necessary ingredients for a genuinely national literature.⁴⁴

The purpose of the foregoing has been to provide a historical outline of Arabic literary criticism, between the late nineteenth century through to the first half of the twentieth century, in order to contextualise developments in Hijaz. Between the mid-nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, it is possible to observe a shift in ideas about literature and criticism and their respective roles; from the revivalism of the neoclassicists who tended to focus on formal issues, to a politicised, socially engaged concept of criticism that made it indispensable, not only to literature, but to all areas of national life.

5.3 Developments in Hijaz

By the early 1920s this reassessment of literature and its role had extended to Hijaz. Its young writers closely followed the new intellectual trends and debates of the *nahḍa* through the Arabic newspapers and periodicals that were imported into Hijaz. The result of this was that the early literary output of Hijaz is heavily indebted to the

⁴¹ According to Taine’s concept, *race*, *milieu* and *moment* would be more accurately translated as ‘nation’, ‘environment’ and ‘time’. See Jean Terrier, *Visions of the Social: Society as a Political Project in France: 1750-1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 25-6.

⁴² Selim, *Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, 80.

⁴³ See his essay, ‘al-Adab al-qawmī’, included in *Thawrat al-adab* (105-20). Cited in Selim, *Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, 82.

⁴⁴ Selim, *Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, 62.

Egyptian and Mahjar pioneers. This was also the case farther afield in North Africa, Syria and the Sudan, particularly in the arena of poetry.⁴⁵

In an article that appeared in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* in 1937, al-Subā'ī makes clear the extent to which his generation took their lead from the Egyptian scene:

On the subject of culture, I have to admit that Egypt, with its newspapers, magazines, books, radio stations, and its intellectual leaders in general, are our teachers from whose well we drink and by whose light we walk.⁴⁶

As in Egypt during the early *nahḍa*, the literary criticism that emerged in Hijaz during the 1920s and 1930s was primarily concerned with issues of language and style. Furthermore, critics tended to focus on poetry, while fiction received comparatively little interest. This situation was partly due to the longstanding preponderance of poetry over prose in Arab culture. But more significant is the low esteem in which fiction was generally held. Even a writer as celebrated as Najīb Maḥfūz published some of his early short stories anonymously fearing the ridicule of his friends.⁴⁷

The earliest works to address contemporary literature in Hijaz were two books published by Muḥammad b. Surūr al-Ṣabbān (1898-1971), a pioneer of Hijaz's modern literary movement.⁴⁸ The first, *Adab al-Ḥijāz* (1926), is an anthology of poetry and essays that brings together the work of fifteen young Hijazi writers. Al-Ṣabbān intended the book to provide 'an insight into the emerging Hijazi literature'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 61-72.

⁴⁶ Aḥmad al-Subā'ī, 'al-Ḥijāz yamurru ilā al-yawm fī sitta adwār tarīkhiyya', *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 14 (January 1937), 1.

⁴⁷ Matti Moosa, *The Early Novels of Naguib Mahfouz: Images of Modern Egypt* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994), 8.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṣabbān is known for establishing the Hijaz Library (al-Maktaba al-Ḥijāziyya) and his own printing press, the Arab Press (al-Matba'a al-'Arabiyya). Both were established sometime in the early 1920s in Mecca where al-Ṣabbān was based for much of his life. See Maghribī, *A'lām al-Ḥijāz*, 1: 323-32.

⁴⁹ Muḥammad Surūr al-Ṣabbān, *Adab al-Ḥijāz* (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-'arabiyya bi-Miṣr, 1344 AH; 1925-6 CE), cited in al-Shāmikh, *al-Nathr al-adabī*, p. 20.

Adab al-Hijāz champions the modernist school, expressing the same youthful impatience with the traditionalists as the Arab Romantics. The poet, Muḥammad Jamīl Ḥasan, for example, exhorts Hijazis to ‘awake and forsake the age of your forefathers,’⁵⁰ while al-Ṣabbān deplores the tradition of orally transmitting poetry as ‘an improper and disdainful occupation’.⁵¹

Al-Ṣabbān’s second book, *al-Ma‘raḍ*, appeared in the same year as *Adab al-Hijāz*.⁵² The concept behind *al-Ma‘raḍ* aligns it firmly with the popular debate over the use of formal Arabic (*al-fuṣṣḥā*) versus colloquial Arabic (*al-‘āmiyya*).⁵³ Al-Ṣabbān asked ten writers to respond to the following question:

Is it in the interest of the Arab nation [*al-umma al-‘arabiyya*] for its writers and speakers to retain the styles of classical Arabic [*al-fuṣṣḥā*], or should they embrace modern developments, adopting the opinions of the modernists [*al-‘aṣrīyīn*] and smashing the constraints of language to embark upon the road of pure colloquial?⁵⁴

Al-Ma‘raḍ was inspired by *al-Ghirbāl*, particularly the essay, ‘Naqīq al-ḍafādi’ (Frogs Croaking), which al-Ṣabbān quotes at length in his introduction. In the essay, Nu‘ayma attacks the traditionalists and their pre-occupation with form, arguing, ‘the aim of language is to serve literature’, and not vice versa.⁵⁵ From this, al-Ṣabbān identifies two opposing camps: ‘one believes in upholding the forms of classical Arabic and its constraints; while the other believes in breaking these constraints and following the new, extremist path that obeys no rules and submits to no order’.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Muḥammad Jamīl Ḥasan, ‘al-Munājāt’, *Adab al-Hijāz*, 83 – cited in al-Shāmikh, *al-Nathr al-adabī*, 3rd ed. (Dār al-‘Ulūm, 1983), 105.

⁵¹ Muḥammad Surūr al-Ṣabbān, *Adab al-Hijāz*, 6, cited in al-Shāmikh, *al-Nathr al-adabī*, 104-5.

⁵² In his introduction, al-Ṣabbān states he had prepared the book as early as 1924, but was forced to delay its publication. The main reason for this, he claims, was ‘the eccentricity (*al-shudhūdh*) gripping the thoughts of our leaders and their standing in the way of our progress’. See al-Ṣabbān, *al-Ma‘raḍ* (Mecca: Al-Maktaba Ḥijāziyya, 1926), 3.

⁵³ This question was debated frequently in Egypt from the late nineteenth century. It has also been the subject of contention across the Arab world. See Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 128-30.

⁵⁴ Al-Ṣabbān, *al-Ma‘raḍ*, 7-8.

⁵⁵ Mikhā’il Nu‘ayma, ‘Naqīq al-ḍafādi’, *al-Ghirbāl*, 15th ed. (Beirut: Nawfal, 1991), 14. Cited in al-Ṣabbān, *al-Ma‘raḍ*, 5.

⁵⁶ Nu‘ayma, ‘Naqīq al-ḍafādi’, 7.

None of the writers polled in *al-Ma'raḍ* argue for the use of colloquial, in fact most emphasise the need to revive the Arabic language and restore it to its former glory. Others like the critic and poet, Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Awwād (1902-80), express what might be described as a more 'progressive' outlook. In his response to al-Ṣabbān's question, 'Awwād makes a distinction between language and style. Although he is against the incorporation of loanwords from English and French, since this is indicative of 'deficiency' and undermines the 'dignity' of the Arabic language, he advocates a 'contemporary, eloquent' style, citing journalistic writing as a model.⁵⁷

'Awwād is perhaps best known for *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa* (Thoughts Clearly Stated, 1926). Al-Ṣabbān, an acquaintance of 'Awwād, financed the book's printing and wrote the introduction. *Khawāṭir* is a bold and outspoken call for reform and tackles a broad sweep of topics, from poetry to women's education and religion. Its publication caused a stir in Hijazi circles, mainly due to the author's attack on the 'ulama' of Mecca and Medina.⁵⁸ Some prominent members of society even called for 'Awwād to be put on trial for apostasy.⁵⁹

In *Khawāṭir*, 'Awwād insists on the abandonment of 'backwards' or outmoded traditions as an essential precondition for the country's development and future prosperity: 'Progress is shedding the skin of the past'.⁶⁰ Echoing Nu'ayma, he champions a literature that is relevant to contemporary life, describing the themes of classical Arabic poetry as 'dead ideas' that belong to the age of Abū Nuwās.⁶¹

'Awwād was sometimes called 'the 'Aqqād of Hijaz', in recognition of the formative effect al-'Aqqād's writings are said to have had on 'Awwād's ideas.⁶² Al-'Aqqād's appeal for freedom of expression is echoed in *Khawāṭir* where 'Awwād repeatedly

⁵⁷ 'Awwād, 'Jawāb Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Awwād', in al-Ṣabbān, *al-Ma'raḍ*, 33-6.

⁵⁸ Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Awwād, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Jadāwal, 2012), 65-9.

⁵⁹ 'Abd Allah 'Umar Khayyat, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa wa-l-'Awwād* (Thoughts Clearly Stated and 'Awwād), *Ukāz*, 6 August 2012, accessed 9 September 2013, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20120806/Con20120806522883.htm>.

⁶⁰ 'Awwād, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa*, 115.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶² Aḥmad Muḥammad Bādīb, 'al-'Amm Muḥmūd 'Ārif: Madinatī Jidda, innahā haqqan 'ā'ila muḥtarama', *al-Bilād*, 31 January 2013, accessed 9 September 2013, <http://badeebjeddah.net/wp/?p=870>.

underlines the critic's need for intellectual independence and honesty.⁶³ Typically for the time, the concept of criticism had a much broader application than it does today and, as such, was not limited to literature. In a separate article published in the 1930s, 'Awwād states: 'Criticism is a necessity of public life in general... Any aspect of life that remains uncriticised – be it social, scientific, literary, economic or other... becomes stagnant and should be consigned to oblivion'.⁶⁴

In this sense, 'Awwād views criticism as integral to the reform and progress of society. In *nahḍawī* discourse, the idea of social enlightenment was central to the rationalisation of both criticism and literature. Fiction was often conceived as a means to an end, particularly in the case of the story or novel; al-Anṣārī's description of *al-Taw'amān* as a form of 'counter-propaganda' is a good example of this. However, citing the Egyptian socialist and intellectual, Salāma Mūsā (1887-1958) in the preface to *Khawāṭir*, 'Awwād expresses a loftier view of literature:

The task of literature is not limited to criticising life, rather the greatest of its tasks and the axis upon which it revolves is life itself; since the final and most worthy subject that humankind should study is humankind.⁶⁵

Although Mūsā was known as a socialist rather than a romantic, the connection between art and life is emphasised by al-Nu'ayma in *al-Ghirbāl*: 'Everything humankind originates revolves around a single axis – humankind. Around this axis revolves its sciences, philosophy, industry, commerce and art. Around this axis revolves its literature'.⁶⁶

The following decade saw little development in the field of literature outside the emerging press, which was the arena for several notorious spats between Hijaz's literati. The first work of literary criticism published after the Kingdom's unification was a slim volume entitled *al-Adab al-fannī* (1934) by Muḥammad Ḥasan Kutubī

⁶³ For example see 'Awwād, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa*, 63.

⁶⁴ Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Awwād, 'Ta'ammulāt fī al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt', in *Amāl al-'Awwād al-kāmila* (Cairo: Dār al-Jīl li-l-Ṭibā'a, 1981), 368-83.

⁶⁵ 'Awwād, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa*, 61.

⁶⁶ Nu'ayma, *al-Ghirbāl*, 25.

(1911-2012).⁶⁷ *Al-Adab al-fannī* differs considerably from *Khawāṭir*. As well as lacking the youthful, revolutionary zeal that fires ‘Awwād’s writing, Kutubī’s book is much shorter and focuses almost exclusively on language and style.

Kutubī’s title is unusual and difficult to translate. His introduction is expansive and, again, draws on the concepts of the Arab Romantics in its portrayal of the writer as possessing a unique and acute sensitivity to the world and his surroundings – the writer’s ‘sense of life’ is the ‘germ of literature’.⁶⁸ However, the rest of the book is less given to introspection, dealing mainly with issues of style. Perhaps the title is best rendered ‘cultivated prose’ or ‘correct literary expression’. Kutubī’s main concern is to promote economy of style and clear expression. In the chapter, ‘Loathsome Affectation’, he asserts:

The purpose of writing is to convey the trust (*amāna*) of thought to the greatest number of those it concerns, those who are worthy of it and are capable of understanding and benefiting from it. Ideas are amenable [to language] as long as they avoid wordiness, farfetched allusions, absurd metaphors, rhymed prose, puns and stuffing, and as long as words produce clear meaning without making the reader struggle.⁶⁹

Al-Adab al-fannī received mixed reviews. Its most notable commentator was ‘Azīz Ḍayā’ (1914-97), who wrote about the book in what must be one of the earliest reviews of a Hijazi/Saudi publication to appear in the local press. Published in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* in early 1935, Ḍayā’’s article dismisses *al-Adab al-fannī* as nothing more than a school textbook:

I say to people, *al-Adab al-fannī* is not what you imagined; rather it is merely a school textbook, nothing more and nothing less. Despite this, you might think otherwise [addressing Kutubī]. Perhaps you believe this book of yours to be a valuable work of literature, and it may be the case that you intended it for men of letters and the elite. It is possible that you wrote it thinking you were opening up the way for a new literature. If you really do think this and this is why you produced the book, then I have to express my regret at wasted efforts.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Kutubī was the first editor-in-chief of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* and later served in the Ministry of Hajj.

⁶⁸ Kutubī, *al-Adab al-fannī*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2013), 61.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁰ Cited in, ‘Introduction’, *al-Adab al-fannī*, 7.

In the same issue of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, a second article on *al-Adab al-fannī* appears alongside Ḍayā's. The tone of the article, penned by Aḥmad 'Aṭṭār (b.1918) is completely at odds with the first. 'Aṭṭār heaps praise on *al-Adab al-fannī*, which, in rather highfalutin terms, he hails as an unprecedented accomplishment in Hijazi literature:

It is one of a kind. No other writer of Hijaz has written a book like it. I believe it would be better for our cultured youth – who are eager for success and progress, and who devote themselves to reading and re-reading books from which they cannot possibly hope to benefit – to read this book and books like it carefully, so that they may truly behold Hijazi culture, with which men of letters [like al-Kutubī] are so well-acquainted.⁷¹

Ḍayā's criticism of *al-Adab al-fannī* is not entirely unfounded. The book is somewhat narrow in scope and certainly less sophisticated than the works of some of Kutubī's contemporaries, 'Awwād's *Khawāṭir*, for example. Furthermore, Kutubī's call for a contemporary style of writing free from rhetorical clutter was hardly new. However, it is the first Hijazi/Saudi publication to tackle issues of language and style exclusively, *al-Ma'raḍ* and *Khawāṭir* advocating a generalised programme of social and cultural reform. No further reviews of 'Aṭṭār's book appeared in either *Umm al-Qurā* or *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* suggesting that the debate quickly faded.

In a similar vein to *Adab al-Ḥijāz*, the anthology, *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā': Ṣafḥat al-adab al-‘aṣrī fī al-Ḥijāz* (Inspiration of the Desert: A Page from the Contemporary Literature of Hijaz, 1937) featured various contributions from several young Hijazi writers, many of whom are counted among the pioneers of Hijaz's modern literary movement, including, al-Anṣārī, al-Subā'ī and al-Ṣabbān. The book is prefaced by a brief overview of Hijazi literature from pre-Islamic times to the mid-1930s. Penned by one of the book's two editors, Muḥammad Sa'īd 'Abd al-Maqṣūd, it is the earliest example of a historiography of Hijazi literature, which, despite its brevity, surveys the late Ottoman, Hashemite and Early Saudi periods.⁷²

⁷¹ Cited in, 'Introduction', *al-Adab al-fannī*, 12.

⁷² Muḥammad Sa'īd 'Abd al-Maqṣūd, 'al-Adab Ḥijāzī wa-l-tarīkh' (Hijazi Literature and History), in *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā': Ṣafḥat min al-adab al-‘aṣrī fī al-Ḥijāz*, eds., Muḥammad Sa'īd 'Abd al-Maqṣūd and 'Abd Allah 'Umar Balkhayr, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2001), 21-48.

Perhaps to be expected given the general consensus among Arab critics, al-Maḡṣūd describes the Ottoman period as one of decline for Arabic letters and culture in general. He argues that, of all the Arab lands that fell under the dominion of the Ottoman Empire, Hijaz was most affected by the Ottoman policy of Turkification, especially in the fields of cultural production and education. Although al-Maḡṣūd criticises Ḥusayn for practicing what he describes as ‘a policy of suppression on education and life in general’, he is generally positive about developments during this period, describing ‘the current intellectual renaissance’ as ‘the fruit of political and educational efforts made during Ḥusayn’s era’.⁷³

The introduction to *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’* is provided by Haykal. It situates the emergence of modern literature in Hijaz within the *nahḍa*, describing its young writers as the ‘sons of this Christian twentieth century’:

When I say they are the sons of this Christian twentieth century, I mean they are the children of the modern renaissance in Arabic literature... that began in Egypt and Syria... over more than half a century ago... Reading this collection you will see the clear influence of the renaissance (*nahḍa*) on everything it contains, and rarely will you come across anything that resembles the old Arabic literature. The style, images, modes of thought and expression, reflect what you read in the literature of Egypt, Syria, Iraq etc. in this present era.⁷⁴

Neither Haykal nor al-Maḡṣūd make any reference to Saudi Arabia or Ibn Sa‘ūd and both trace the beginning of the *nahḍa* to the Arab revolt. Instead, they view themselves as writing in a Hijazi literary tradition, which is highly indicative of the extent to which Hijaz retained its own distinct cultural identity, and is also symptomatic of the divide that existed between it and Najd. In contrast, later histories tend to denigrate the Hashemite era. In *Fann al-qiṣṣa*, for example, al-Ḥāzimī describes the Hashemite contribution to Hijazi literature as equally unremarkable as that of the late Ottoman era: ‘It was a false awakening. The country was not yet prepared, neither socially nor intellectually, to achieve its political aspirations’.⁷⁵

⁷³ Al-Maḡṣūd, ‘al-Adab al-Ḥijazī wa-l-tarīkh’, in al-Maḡṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’*, 47.

⁷⁴ Haykal, ‘Introduction’, in al-Maḡṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’*, 13-14.

⁷⁵ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qiṣṣa*, 11.

Al-Ghadhdhāmī ties the *nahḍa* in Hijaz directly to Ibn Sa‘ūd’s rule. He refers to *Adab al-Ḥijāz* as ‘the first Saudi book published by Saudi writers’, claiming that its ‘symbolic significance’ corresponds to ‘a bringing together of parts into a unity, just as the nation that year [1924] brought together Najd, Hijaz, ‘Asir and Qatif in one nation. This [represents] a symbolic, rhetorical correspondence between the cultural and the national’.⁷⁶

Al-Ghadhdhāmī’s claim that these early publications were ‘cultural responses’ associated with the establishment of Saudi Arabia is not convincing.⁷⁷ Even if it were possible to describe 1924 as ‘the year of the establishment of national Saudi unity’,⁷⁸ *al-Ma‘raḍ*, which al-Ghadhdhāmī cites alongside *Adab al-Ḥijāz*, was originally prepared for printing as early as summer 1342 hijri,⁷⁹ which corresponds to the period, 14 August 1923 to 4 July 1924, predating Ibn Sa‘ūd’s campaign on Hijaz which began on 29 August 1924 and was not concluded until late the following year with the surrender of Mecca.

‘Awwād’s *al-Ma‘raḍ*, which al-Ghadhdhāmī incorrectly dates to 1924, ‘the [same] year as the establishment of the kingdom’,⁸⁰ is even more problematic when viewed within the Saudi paradigm of development. ‘Awwād’s foremost concern is a Hijazi literature, itself reflective of a ‘Hijazi nation’:

The Hijazi nation, or Hijazis, is one nation united by many strong ties: it is untied by ideas, by religion, by the homeland, and by politics. Therefore, it should be, as it truly is, one nation in every respect.⁸¹

The main problem with al-Ghadhdhāmī’s account of these early developments is that in his haste to establish the history of modernity within the kingdom with the

⁷⁶ Al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Ḥikāyat al-ḥadātha*, 51.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁹ Al-Ṣabbān, *al-Ma‘raḍ*, 3..

⁸⁰ Al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Ḥikāyat al-ḥadātha*, 52.

⁸¹ ‘Awwād, *Khawāṭir muṣarraḥa*, 82.

commencement of Saudi rule and therefore legitimise the modernist movement, he glosses over the profound differences that existed between Hijaz and the rest of the kingdom and, in doing so, misses or ignores the influence of Arab/Hijazi nationalism and their manifestations in literature.

Essentially a collection of poetry and articles, *Waḥī* embodies the outward-looking, reformist spirit of its young generation of writers. The influence of their Egyptian contemporaries is plain to see, particularly in articles like al-Subā'ī's on the need for girls' education.⁸² Several of the articles found in *Waḥī* address the role of literature in the *nahḍa*.⁸³ But of particular interest here is how these writers situate – both nationally and historically – Hijazi literature. Al-Anṣārī's contribution, 'Zāhirat majīda: Fī nahḍat al-adab al-'arabī: Mādhā yajib an yakūn mawqīfunā tujāhahā?' (An Admirable Phenomenon: On the Arab Literary Renaissance: What Position Should We Take?), is typically grandiloquent as it proclaims the achievements of the *nahḍa*, which is finally in the process of escaping the shadow of the West as it revives the heritage of its glorious Islamic past. Al-Anṣārī closes his article exhorting Hijazi writers to play their part in the *nahḍa* and help restore Hijaz's 'lost literary pre-eminence' as 'the well-spring of Islamic, Arabic civilisation'.⁸⁴

Like Haykal, Aḥmad al-'Arabī's 'al-Adab al-ḥadīth fī al-Ḥijāz' (Modern Literature in Hijaz) ties the dawn of modern Hijazi literature to the Arab revolt.⁸⁵ In his brief article, he condemns the literature produced in Ottoman Hijaz, contending that only a fraction of it – a few scattered examples here and there – is of any value. After ridiculing the use of the traditional *qaṣīda* form and its tropes by some contemporary poets to describe modern phenomena, he argues that emotion and consciousness are the 'strength of poetry and its vital element'.⁸⁶

⁸² Aḥmad al-Subā'ī, 'Ḥājatuna ilā ta'līm al-banāt: Shay' yaqirruhu al-mantiq!', in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā'*, 77-80.

⁸³ The one exception is a very brief article by Muḥammad Ḥasan Fiqī (1914-2004), 'Ḥawla riwāyat Raphael li-l-kātib al-faransī al-kabīr Lamartine', on Alphonse de Lamartine's semiautobiographical novel, *Raphaël* (1849), which was translated into Arabic by Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayāt (1885-1968).

⁸⁴ Al-Anṣārī, 'Zāhirat majīda: Fī nahḍat al-adab al-'arabī: Mādhā yajib an yakūn mawqīfunā tujāhahā?', in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā'*, 239.

⁸⁵ Aḥmad al-'Arabī, 'al-Adab al-ḥadīth fī al-Ḥijāz' in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā'*, 104-5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

Al-Ṣabbān's contribution to *Waḥī*, 'al-Tatawwur fī al-adab' (The Development of Literature), is an amalgamation of romanticism and the kind of socially engaged realism advocated by the nationalists. Al-Ṣabbān transposes the Romantics' conception 'of the mutually embedded relationship between art and life'⁸⁷ to that of literature and the nation:

Literature does not only resemble life in its subjection to the laws of transformation, it resembles life in that it is subject to it, and that its developments are subject to life's developments, and everything that is inseparable from the life of the nation.⁸⁸

He then evokes the Arab struggle against colonialism, describing literature in 'the Arab nations' (*al-umam al-'arabiyya*) as being in a state of 'rebellion' (*al-tamarrud*). He claims this that has lent contemporary Arabic literature its urgency and emotive power.⁸⁹ Al-Ṣabbān is talking about literature in general, although the connection between it and nation perhaps prefigures the later insistence that the novel should embody an ontology defined by nation, as dictated by the concept of 'national literature'.

Finally, a nationalist, anti-colonial sentiment is also evident in 'Abd al-Salām 'Umar's (b. 1909) contribution to *Waḥī*, 'Muhimat al-adab fī al-ḥayāt' (The Function of Literature in Life). 'Umar describes literature as the translation of emotions – of individuals and entire communities.⁹⁰ It is a source of both delight and moral edification. Furthermore it serves as a unifying force for nations that have been 'toyed with by the hand of division and scattered by the four winds; in which the flame of nationalism has been extinguished and the spirit of unity and solidarity has been repressed'.⁹¹ Typifying the ambivalence of Arab nationalist discourse(s), it is not entirely clear whether by 'our nation' (*ummatunā*), 'Umar is referring to Hijaz,

⁸⁷ Michael Andermatt, 'Artificial Life and Romantic Brides', in *Romantic Prose fiction*, eds., Gillespie et al (Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2006), 205.

⁸⁸ Muḥammad Surūr al-Ṣabbān, 'al-Tatawwur fī al-adab', in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā*, 391-93.

⁸⁹ Al-Ṣabbān, 'al-Tatawwur fī al-adab', 392.

⁹⁰ 'Abd al-Salām 'Umar, 'Muhimat al-adab fī al-ḥayāt,' in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā*, 321.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

Saudi Arabia or the whole of the Arab world. ‘Umar’s example of literature as a unifying force in Germany, which he describes as having been ‘fragmented and divergent in language’, noting that some of its territories were occupied by Napoleon, may be an allusion to the need to revive the Arabic language or *al-fuṣḥā* as a common tongue between Arabs. Additionally, his reference to Napoleon might well allude to the latter’s invasion of Egypt and, by extension, European colonial ambitions – particularly French – in the region. Together, this would suggest that ‘Umar is talking about the greater Arab nation rather than the fledgling Saudi state.

The same tensions and ambiguities characterising notions of nation and identity are evident in the poetry of *Waḥī*, which accounts for around half the book’s contents. While Ahmad Ibrāhīm al-Ghazāwī’s poetry is focused on celebrating Saudi rule and the kingdom’s 1934 truce with Yemen,⁹² poems from various writers laud the Hijazi renaissance and its achievements and make no mention of the Saudi government. When they do, it is usually in the form a perfunctory line of praise or acknowledgement.⁹³

Despite the appearance of anthologies like *al-Ma‘raḍ* and *Waḥī* during the 1930s, the real forum for early literary criticism and debate in Saudi Arabia was its nascent press, particularly *Umm al-Qurā* and *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* newspapers and *al-Manhal* magazine. Several articles appeared in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* in response to the publication of *Waḥī*. These include a letter reprinted from the Egyptian newspaper, *al-Siyāsa al-Uṣbū‘iyya*, and signed by ‘H, a resident of Cairo’.⁹⁴ The writer praises *Waḥī* as an example of modern Arabic literature, arguing against Ḥusayn’s assertion that the contemporary literature of Hijaz has yet to develop its own distinct character.⁹⁵ The

⁹² For example, see Ahmad Ibrāhīm al-Ghazāwī, ‘Hum al-jīra al-adnūn’ (They Are the Closest Neighbourhoods), in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’*, 36-41.

⁹³ For example, see Ahmad al-‘Arabī’s poem, ‘La-qad bada’ nā al-yawm nash‘ur bi-l-ḥayāt wa-l-nushūr’ (Today We Feel Alive and Rejuvenated), in al-Maqṣūd and Balkhayr (eds.) *Waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’*, 403-6.

⁹⁴ ‘Ḥawla waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’’, *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 18 August 1937, 3.

⁹⁵ In his short book on literature in the Arabian Peninsula, which also covers Yemen and Iraq, Ḥusayn writes: ‘The Hijazi modernists have begun to produce modern poetry and prose, but they have not yet succeeded in giving Hijaz its own literary character; rather they are still students of the Syrians, particularly the Syrians who migrated to America. They find their highest literary ideal in al-Riḥānī and Khalīl Jibrān Khalīl’. *Al-Ḥayāt al-adabiyya fī Jazīrat al-‘Arab* [Literary Life in the Arabian Peninsula] (Damascus: Maktab al-Nashr al-‘Arabī, 1935), 45.

letter provides some evidence that early publications like *Waḥī* were being read outside Hijaz.

The most substantial response to *Waḥī* was a series of three articles, signed ‘Sahrān’.⁹⁶ In the second article, the writer criticises Haykal’s introduction to the book, accusing him of flattery in his praise of Hijazi literature. He also takes issue with Haykal’s assertion that the poetry in *Waḥī* is influenced by the natural environment: ‘We believe that urban literature (*al-adab al-ḥaḍārī*) has not yet been influenced by the desert’.⁹⁷ Continuing, he complains that, with some minor exceptions, the book’s contents are:

Nothing more than subjective writings that have absolutely nothing to do with the communities of Hijaz. If we want the honest truth, the prevailing spirit in *Waḥī al-Ṣaḥrā*, in terms of style and ideas, is that of the books and literature produced by the contemporary writers of Egypt, the Levant, and the Mahjar.⁹⁸

Throughout the 1930s, Saudi writers continued to describe their literature almost exclusively in terms of a Hijazi tradition. Numerous articles appeared in the country’s press interrogating the history and nature of Hijazi literature. In an article that appeared in *Umm al-Qurā* newspaper in 1938 entitled, ‘Ḥarakatunā fī al-adab’ (Our Literary Movement), ‘Abd al-Salām Ṭāhir al-Sāsī (1916-81) makes a very negative assessment of the literature produced in Hijaz.⁹⁹ He describes this literature as a recent phenomenon that was introduced with foreign Arabic periodicals, writing, ‘most of what is printed in Hijaz’s newspapers and magazines is weak and imitative. Good [Hijazi] writers can be counted on one hand’.¹⁰⁰ However, perhaps somewhat ironically since his complaints are practically the same as those made by ‘Sahrān’,

⁹⁶ One source claims ‘Sahrān’ was the penname of a Dr. Ḥusnī al-Ṭāhir. See *‘Arabiyya*, issue 324 (March 2004), n.p. However, I have been unable to find any reference to al-Ṭāhir or any corroborating evidence in the sources to substantiate this.

⁹⁷ Sahrān, ‘Ḥawla waḥī al-ṣaḥrā’, pt. 2, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 30 March 1937, 1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁹ Al-Sāsī was born in Medina where he studied at the Falāḥ school. He published a number of works on contemporary Hijazi literature, including *Fī zilāl al-ṣirāḥa: Abḥāth wa-arā’ wa-maqālāt fī al-adab wa-l-naqd* (Mecca: n.p., 1953), and *al-Mawsū’a al-adabiyya: Dā’irat ma’ārif li-abraz al-udabā’ al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa’ūdiyya* (Mecca: Dār Quraysh, 1977).

¹⁰⁰ ‘Abd al-Salām Ṭāhir al-Sāsī, ‘Ḥarakatunā fī al-adab’, *Umm al-Qurā*, 19 August 1938, 2.

unlike the latter, al-Sāsī ranks *Wahī* as one of the few Hijazi publications that are worthy of merit.¹⁰¹

An article published in *al-Manhal* early the following year and signed Abū ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd,¹⁰² observes the influence of the Egyptian and Mahjar writers in more positive terms:

Egyptian newspapers and magazines invaded Hijaz and filled the libraries of its young people. The Egyptian influence overcame the Mahjar influence, which slowly declined until it vanished completely. Young people devoured Egyptian culture and everything it produced. They were enamoured by its writers, imitating their style and even their ideas... It was upon these foundations that modern Hijazi culture was established.¹⁰³

Al-Maqṣūd is not the only commentator to suggest that the main orientation of Hijazi literature gradually shifted during the 1930s from the Mahjar to Egypt.¹⁰⁴ Several reasons might explain this shift. The romanticism of the Mahjar poets, particularly their attitudes to religion, may have proved too controversial for the generally conservative Hijazi/Saudi society. It is also true that the literary output of Egypt came to eclipse that of the Mahjar poets with the decline of the Romantic influence in Arabic literature during the 1940s.

As the comments of ‘Sahrān’ and al-Sāsī might suggest, the prevalence of the Egyptian influence was often a matter of some concern among Hijazi writers. In another *al-Manhal* article published the same year, ‘Adabunā bayn al-iḥtilāl wa-l-istiqlāl’ (Our Literature between Occupation and Independence), al-Anṣārī complains that the Hijazi literary scene is effectively ‘occupied’ by Egyptian literature, to the point where Hijazi writers are even taking sides in debates between Egyptian writers.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Al-Sāsī, ‘Ḥarakatunā fī al-adab’, 2.

¹⁰² An obvious penname for Muḥammad Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd.

¹⁰³ Abū ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd, ‘Ma huwa al-athar al-lathī awjadahu al-adab al-ḥadīth fī al-Ḥijāz?’ (What Has Been the Effect of Modern Literature in Hijaz?), *al-Manhal* 3, no. 2 (February 1939): 48.

¹⁰⁴ See al-Ḥāzīmī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Abd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī, ‘Adabunā bayn al-iḥtilāl wa-l-istiqlāl’, *al-Manhal* 3, no. 7 (July 1939): 241-46.

It seems the situation continued for some time, as almost a decade on, Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Ghafūr ‘Aṭṭār makes the same complaint, where he condemns Hijazi literature for what he describes as its immaturity compared to the modern literature of Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Like al-Anṣārī, he identifies its lack of independence as a major weakness, describing it as completely overshadowed by Egyptian letters: ‘As for the style of this literature, admittedly it is not without brilliance, beauty, subtlety and wit, but it lacks independence. Everywhere the spirits of Egypt’s literati peer out from its pages’.¹⁰⁶

This early commentary on Hijazi literature was accompanied by a more general debate on the nature and function of literature and criticism. Signalling the paper’s literary priorities, the first issue of *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* includes a short article entitled, ‘Kayfa yajib an naktub?’ (How Should We Write?). Despite, the article’s title, its subject matter is more relevant to criticism than to writing. The author, Muḥammad Ḥasan Fiqī, condemns what he sees as the damage being done to Hijazi literature by its young ‘pretenders’ (*mutaṭaffilūn*).¹⁰⁷ According to Fiqī, the ‘unconsidered and harsh criticism’ of these ‘pretenders’ in the country’s press ‘gives the false impression to those who are unaccustomed to criticism that it is all vilification and vituperation’. This hinders the progress of literary criticism and ‘herein lies the disaster’.¹⁰⁸

In the following month, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* published an article from Maghribī in response to Fiqī.¹⁰⁹ Maghribī scorns Fiqī’s call for a staid and polite criticism:

He calls upon us to be gentle in our critique, but criticism knows neither mercy nor leniency, for it is a tyrant. Indeed, Sir, it is hard on those hearts when they are confronted by something they dislike. But what kind of hearts are these? Are they strong hearts that see in the free writer a guide and in honest criticism a light? Or, are they weak hearts that spurn the truth and hide behind a thick curtain of toxic flattery?¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ The article, ‘Adabunā al-mu‘āṣir’ (Our Contemporary Literature) was published in *al-Manhal* 11, no. 8 (September 1948): 501-4.

¹⁰⁷ Muḥammad Ḥasan Fiqī, ‘Kayfa yajib an naktub?’, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 4 April 1932, 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad ‘Alī Maghribī, ‘Ḥawla maqāl “kayfa yajib an naktub?” radd wa-tanfīd’ (On the Article, ‘How Should We Write?’ A Response and Refutation), *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 3 May 1932, 7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

Maghribī's notion of criticism ties in with the *nahḍawī* reformist discourse where criticism and literature are assigned determining roles in the nation's revival: 'No nation can rise from its knees without the revolution of the pen and the might of honest and open criticism'.¹¹¹

A second response to Fiqī's article appeared in issue eight of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*.¹¹² That the article's anonymous author agrees with Fiqī in principle does not stop him from chastising the latter for self-aggrandisement and condescension towards Hijazi writers. The remainder of the article elaborates on the author's own concept of criticism, which has very little to do with the judgement of literature. He positions the critic almost as censor, or as someone whose primary responsibility is to uphold public morality: 'The usefulness of criticism does not extend beyond correction and refinement, although it includes the combatting of vice and the promotion of virtue'.¹¹³

In late 1932, a further contribution to the debate on criticism appeared in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*. In his article, 'al-Naqd wa-ma'nāhu' (Criticism and its meaning), Ibn Rashīq lambasts those would-be-critics who resort to insults and personal attacks. Rashīq opens his article with a definition of criticism, which is less bound-up in the idea of social reform and public morality than that expressed by Fiqī's respondents, and more focussed on the idea of critical evaluation:

Criticism is not insulting or mocking others. Nor is it attacking and treating people unjustly... Rather, at its core, criticism is observation, reflection, study and analysis. It is the shifting, weighing up, and debating of things... expressed in a logical manner befitting decent literature and good taste.¹¹⁴

The debate over criticism and its role continued throughout the decade. In 1939, 'Sahrān' published a short article in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, entitled 'al-Naqd wa-l-nāqidūn' (Criticism and the Critics). In it he compares the critic to the doctor. The critic is 'the

¹¹¹ Maghribī, 'Ḥawla maqāl "kayfa yajib an naktub?"', 7.

¹¹² Ṭufaylī, 'Ḥawla maqāl kayfa Yajib an naktub (naqd wa-naqd)' (On the Article 'How We Should Write', Critique upon Critique), *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, May 1932, 7.

¹¹³ Ṭufaylī, 'Ḥawla maqāl kayfa yajib an naktub', 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Rashīq, 'al-Naqd wa-Ma'nāhu', *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 14 November 1932, 6.

doctor of thought who diagnoses its ailments and diseases'.¹¹⁵ The comparison suggests a narrow view of the critic as someone who merely points out the flaws or errors in the author's work, reflective of the earlier neoclassical focus on language and style. However, while this might be true, for 'Sahrān' the metaphor is twofold, in the sense that the critic, as a man of letters, like the doctor, requires formal training. Furthermore, he argues that the man of letters belongs to an elite, since only a few such men – 'the possessors of genius and wisdom' – are born to each generation.¹¹⁶ The idea of criticism as a serious professional vocation is an important development, although here it is still tied-up in the wider sense of cultural and social criticism.

In the same year, Maghribī published the first of a series of three articles under the general heading, 'Fī al-naqd' (On Criticism). The series reveals how Maghribī's ideas had developed since his earlier riposte to Fiqī. Here Maghribī's definition of the critic is not too dissimilar to that of 'Sahrān'. Where the latter compares the critic to the doctor, Maghribī argues that the critic should be no less qualified for his vocation than the engineer is for his. However, for Maghribī, the critic's call is much loftier than that of the engineer. He describes the man of letters (*adīb*), who becomes synonymous with the critic (*al-nāqid*), as someone who is gifted with a poetic sensibility or what he describes as 'the sense of life' (*al-ihsās bi-l-ḥayāt*), which he expresses through his pen:

Understanding is not the same as being able to judge. You may read a piece of literature and comprehend its beauty, but this does not mean you can discern the secret of its beauty. The man who does not understand the philosophy of painting stands before a splendid canvas but does not understand the secret of its splendour. Understanding is not beyond the capabilities of any thinking, reasoning person, but comprehending the secret [of beauty] is the domain of the man of letters and the specialist critic.¹¹⁷

In the second article, Maghribī continues to expound on his concept of criticism and the critic. Criticism is not only a necessity for literature, but for life itself. It is 'a guide to [what is] good' and leads us upon 'the path of perfection'.¹¹⁸ As with the

¹¹⁵ Sahrān, 'al-Naqd wa-l-nāqidūn', *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 8 June 1939, 1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁷ Muḥammad 'Alī Maghribī, 'Fī al-naqd', pt. 1, *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 16 July 1939, 1.

¹¹⁸ Maghribī, 'Fī al-naqd', pt. 2, *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 19 July 1939, 1.

Romantics, art and life are conceived of as inseparable from one another: ‘If literature is an expression of life, then criticism is the study of life’.¹¹⁹ Just as life is characterised by the binaries of good and bad, beauty and ugliness, so too is literature, and while the man of letters might be able to discern the good from the bad, ‘the rose from the thorn’, not all people possess this same level of understanding and discernment.¹²⁰ Therefore, argues Maghribī, it was inevitable that criticism would emerge and take its place at the forefront of literature. The critic becomes vital to the success of a literary work: ‘A book that is not spoken about by the critics or the literary journals will not enjoy demand or circulation’.¹²¹ The critic is curator and judge, ‘who weighs literary issues on the true scales of art, good taste, and a capable mind’.¹²² Ultimately, criticism is ‘a means of assessing literature and directing it towards the highest ideal and loftiest goals. The critics are the custodians (*umanā*’: sing. *amīn*) of this high and beautiful art’.¹²³

In the third and final instalment of the series, Maghribī discusses the importance of psychology (*ilm al-nafs*) in modern literary studies. He understands this less in the scientific sense and more as the study of the author’s personality, which he defines as being the things that have influenced the author and his work. Responding to the negative perception criticism had garnered in some quarters, Maghribī stresses that the study of personality does not mean ‘curses and insults’ (*al-sibāb wa-l-shatam*).¹²⁴ Despite his enthusiasm, Maghribī laments that this approach is difficult to follow owing to the conservative nature of society.¹²⁵

As already noted, a recurrent theme in the early critical discourse was the nature and role of literature. This was often accompanied by a deep anxiety at the slow pace at which Hijazi literature was progressing, and what was usually described as its ‘backwardness’ in comparison to Egypt. In a 1937 article, ‘Ghāyat al-adab ‘indanā’

¹¹⁹ Maghribī, ‘Fī al-naqd’, pt. 2, 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 1

¹²¹ Ibid., 4.

¹²² Ibid., 4.

¹²³ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁴ Maghribī, ‘Fī al-naqd’, pt. 3, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 23 July 1939, 1.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1.

(The Purpose of Our Literature),¹²⁶ Ḍayā' complains that nothing published in either *Umm al-Qurā* or *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* represents 'a strong literature'.¹²⁷ The now familiar theme of anxiety over the identity of Hijazi literature is also present in Ḍayā''s article where he derides its writers for their slavish imitation of Egyptian literature, concluding that they have yet to boast a Māzinī or a Haykal, their writings wholly lacking in spirit and purpose.¹²⁸

Ḍayā''s article is typically bombastic in tone and it is not unreasonable to suggest such an un-nuanced and blanket assessment of his countrymen's literary efforts was to some extent intended for rhetorical effect. Most articles in this vein tend to emphasise the role they believed literature should play, particularly in the context of Hijaz's *nahḍa*. This is almost invariably in the realm of social reform and public enlightenment. Fiction barely featured in definitions of literature, in fact imaginative writing was openly disparaged. In an early issue of *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, an article entitled 'al-Udabā' fī bilādinā wa-mā 'alayhim' (The Literati in Our Country and What They Must Do) signed Muta'llim, bemoans the state of Hijazi literature, citing the lack of newspapers and freedom of speech in 'days past' – presumably referring to the Ottoman and Hashemite eras – as reasons for its backwardness, since it meant Hijaz was effectively isolated from the outside world and its developments. The author charges Hijazi writers with failing to engage with society: 'some of our men of letters are used to floating on the horizons of their imaginations, far removed from the reality in front of them. They devote themselves to imagination and delight in dreams and fancies'.¹²⁹

Far from the frivolity of imaginative writing, the man of letters has, above all, a social responsibility to expose the grievances of the people and remind those in power of their duties. As a political exigency, literature should be concerned with the 'real', i.e. observable, concrete reality experienced by the nation, as opposed to the

¹²⁶ 'Aziz Ḍayā', 'Ghāyat al-adab 'indanā', *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 22 January 1937, 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 4

¹²⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁹ Muta'allim, 'al-Udabā' fī bilādinā wa-mā 'alayhim', *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 23 May 1932, 7.

subjective or imaginary: ‘At the present time, we, the people of Hijaz, need truth, and this need is far greater than our need for imagination’.¹³⁰

In an unaccredited piece, ‘Muhimat al-adab fī bilādīnā’¹³¹ (The Task of Literature in Our Country), which appeared in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* later the same year, the imaginary is rejected altogether. According to the utilitarian concept of literature presented here, its purpose ‘is not to provide spiritual comfort or innocent entertainment for the individual, or what this involves in terms of verbal affectation, the play on hackneyed images, and acrobatic fantasies’. Rather, as a ‘powerful tool for guidance and counselling’, the role of literature is in ‘forming and directing public thought towards noble ends and the ideals to which its true masters aspire’.¹³²

In contrast, the anonymous author of ‘al-Adab ḥayāt wa-l-ḥayāt adab’ (Literature is Life and Life is Literature) celebrates the imaginary and the writer’s ability to affect the emotional state of his reader. Here literature is conceived as a fine art (*fann jamīl*):

The person surrenders himself to the writer... and swims with him to the farthest reaches of the imagination... The writer’s evocative words move him deeply, pulling on the strings of his heart.

Literature that can arouse the heart to the awe of beauty, the soul to the artistry of depiction, and the ear to the delight of a sweet and delicate song, is true literature. This art is fine art. And the writer who takes his inspiration from nature and depicts life’s events – its pains and its hopes – such a writer is a true writer. His art is an immortal art.¹³³

Yet even here, where art is discussed in such idealistic terms, the author concludes his article by stressing literature’s more worldly function, reflecting on how it often serves politics, since it has the power to affect public opinion: ‘in calming agitations and in checking the flames of [civil] strife’.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Muta’ allim, ‘al-Udabā’, 7.

¹³¹ ‘Muhimat al-adab fī bilādīnā’, *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 8 July 1937, 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³³ ‘Al-Adab ḥayat wa-l-ḥayat adab’, *Umm al-Qurā*, 31 January 1936, 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

5.4 The Argument for the Story

Although short stories and other hybrid forms of prose fiction began appearing in the Saudi press from the 1920s onwards, the discourse on literature (*adab*) rarely included narrative fiction, unless it was under the rubric of ‘imagination’, where it was typically cast in a negative light. However, from the late 1930s articles began to appear which promoted the story, allocating fiction a pre-eminent role in the country’s *nahḍa*. Published in *Umm al-Qurā* in 1938, ‘Ḥājatunā ilā adab al-qaṣaṣī’ (Our Need for Narrative Fiction), declares that ‘literature in itself is the delight of souls and the joy of life’.¹³⁵ This is in stark contrast to the idea of literature as purely informative. The writer, who signs himself ‘al-Sayyid’, places narrative fiction at the forefront of the revivalist movement: ‘Anyone who peruses the history of nations will find the foundation of their renaissance is correct literature (*al-adab al-saḥīḥ*), especially narrative literature (*al-adab al-qaṣaṣī*)’.¹³⁶

Despite the author’s celebration of literature’s ability to delight, there is nothing here to suggest the Romantics’ ‘art for art’s sake’ position. Narrative fiction is primarily a means to deliver a moral message, its objective being the advancement of the individual and, ultimately, the nation:

No doubt anyone who acquaints himself with the fiction of any nation will find that it would not have been able to change its ways or reform its morals had its men of letters not concerned themselves with this form of literature.¹³⁷

The argument for the story is made more forcibly by Muḥammad Amīn Yaḥyā in ‘Adab al-qīṣṣa’ (The Art of the Story). In this 1940 article, Yaḥyā describes story writing as a highly skilled undertaking that requires a considerable degree of effort. Not only must the writer be widely read and able to draw on ample material, he must also be able to express himself in a precise and eloquent style. The story itself is ‘food for the soul’ and ‘a record of historical events’.¹³⁸ Yaḥyā advises young people to read copiously ‘literary and beneficial stories and novels’, listing several examples

¹³⁵ Al-Sayyid, ‘Ḥājatunā ilā adab al-qaṣaṣī’, *Umm al-Qurā*, 16 September 1938, 3.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁸ Muḥammad Amīn Yaḥyā, ‘Adab al-qīṣṣa’, *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 11 March 1940, 1.

including Haykal's *Zaynab*, al-Ḥakīm's *Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (1938) and al-'Aqqād's *Sāra* (1938). Apart from demonstrating Yaḥyā's awareness of contemporary developments in Egypt, the above suggests he was familiar with the novel and short story as separate and distinct forms, even if he does tend to use 'story' (*qiṣṣa*) in a more general sense to denote prose fiction.¹³⁹

Yaḥyā expresses his frustration that Hijaz has yet to claim a sophisticated story tradition, criticising its literature as imitative and disconnected from Hijazi reality:

I have read some stories whose atmosphere does not correspond to Hijaz, and that do not bear the mark of the national character. Their authors have borrowed their events from another life, and not that of our country, and this is undesirable in story writing.¹⁴⁰

Two things are worth noting here. Firstly, when Yaḥyā talks about the nation he does so in terms of the 'Hijazi nation'; and secondly, the idea that the story should reflect the unique 'national character' of its writer implies the influence of Haykal's 'national literature'.

The Algerian, Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū, draws on his knowledge of French and European literary history to make the case for the story (*al-qiṣṣa*), referring to prose fiction as superior to the article or essay (*al-maqāla*). Ḥūḥū describes the story as a centuries-old tradition that, in the West, facilitated the dissemination of moral principles among the public. He points out that during the age of the Roman Empire, the 'dramatic story' (*al-qiṣṣa al-masraḥiyya*), by which he means the play, enjoyed far greater popularity than the written story (*al-qiṣṣa al-'ādiyya*: lit. ordinary story). This is because theatre was more democratic in nature owing to the fact that education was limited to the elite, which made the written word inaccessible for much of the population. Additionally, the thrilling and spectacular nature of theatre added to its appeal. The performance of a tragedy was usually preceded by a comedy, which grew in popularity until it eclipsed the former. The comedy provided a form of social critique; Ḥūḥū cites Moliere's *L'avare* as an example. The story developed in

¹³⁹ Yaḥyā, 'Adab al-qiṣṣa', 1.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

parallel to the comedy and its primary function was reformist, since its goal was the righting of social ills. Ḥūḥū concludes that the story is more important than the article and even poetry, since:

The story... is more widely read, of greater benefit, more influential and offers a greater degree of representation... With the story we can treat our moral and social ills. We can find no shortage of readers for the story, which is easily accessible, and even the simple reader can benefit from the vitality and magnificence of its art. We are mistaken if we imagine that your average reader can benefit from our articles or is even interested in reading them!¹⁴¹

The democratic nature of the story and its didactic potential were the main grounds upon which its proponents argued its legitimacy. In 'Fann al-qīṣṣa' published in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* in 1941, Muḥammad 'Umar Tawfīq argues along similar lines to Ḥūḥū, pointing out the limited appeal of the article, which is aimed at an elite, educated audience.¹⁴² While Tawfīq believes the Arabic story in general has yet to reach maturity, he is outright dismissive of the efforts of Hijaz's writers, which he claims have resulted in mere 'fairy tales' (*ḥikāyāt*) and lack many of the elements vital to the story form.¹⁴³

The ambiguous use of literary terminology in Arabic has already been discussed at some length. Most writers in the Saudi press and *al-Manhal* magazine tended to use the generic term *qīṣṣa*, which, in its broadest sense, denotes narrative fiction. However, some writers understood the *qīṣṣa* as roughly approximating the short story, distinguishing it from extended narratives or the novel, using the terms *riwāya* and *qīṣṣa ṭawīla* (lit. long story).

¹⁴¹ Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū, 'al-Adab al-ḥayy: Bayn adab al-qīṣṣa wa-adab al-maqāla', *al-Manhal* 5, no. 4 (March 1941): 73.

¹⁴² Muḥammad 'Umar Tawfīq, 'Fann al-qīṣṣa', *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 9 July 1941, 1.

¹⁴³ Curiously, despite the long tradition of the saga and folktale in Arabic, Tawfīq, Ḥūḥū and others made no attempt to situate the modern story as an extension or continuation of these traditions, which would presumably have lent it greater legitimacy. This is perhaps because these genres were primarily an oral mode of expression and as such, were delivered in the vernacular. The tension between classical Arabic, *al-fuṣḥā*, and the vernaculars is well documented, being rooted to a large extent in the primacy afforded the latter as the language of the Qur'an. During the *nahḍa*, a new political imperative saw the reinforcement of this position, with serious emphasis placed on reviving the Arabic language and purifying it of the influence of the vernacular and other languages, particularly Turkish. This is perhaps why, when attempts were made to find a precedent for the short story and novel in the Arabic canon, the claim was usually made for the *maqāma* genre.

A piece by Muḥammad ‘Ālim al-Afghānī also published in *al-Manhal* is close in tone to Ḥūḥū’s in that it argues a need for the story based on its capacity to enlighten and shape public opinion.¹⁴⁴ However, as suggested by its title, ‘al-Riwāya al-adabiyya wa-ḥājatunā ilayhā’ (The Literary Novel and Our Need for It), its focus is the novel. Al-Afghānī defines the novel, employing both the terms, *al-qīṣṣa al-muṭawwala* and *riwāya*, in contradistinction to the [short] story (*al-qīṣṣa*):

The novel is distinct from the story in that it unites hearts and delights the reader so that he cannot put it down half or a quarter of the way through, not being content until he has finished the whole thing. It follows that the novel is the truest means for a writer to highlight an idea with the most impact on the reader. It is easy to plant an idea in the mind of the reader while he is engrossed in the novel by means of psychological suggestion (*īḥā’ nafsī*), which the writer complements with the repetition of scenes and images that suggest the thought he would like to convey.¹⁴⁵

It has been argued that the term, *riwāya*, should not be taken at face value in early Hijaz/Saudi literature; or at least, the term should not be interpreted to signify a conception of the novel harmonious with that which would later come to dominate Arabic literature, i.e. the realist novel. While al-Afghānī understands the novel form allows for a more detailed exposition of a particular idea or concept than the story, owing to its extended length, he defines the novel against the short story principally in terms of its power to influence readers’ thoughts and opinions, i.e. its powers of suggestion.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, he views the novel’s role as primarily didactic, the role of the writer or novelist being to ‘combat vice and vileness’.¹⁴⁷ The title of his article, then, might be more appropriately rendered as the more general, ‘Literary Narrative and Our Need for It’.

Like their Egyptian counterparts, Hijazi writers and critics were more often than not ambivalent in their opinions on narrative fiction. This will become clearer in due course, particularly in relation to some of the early texts discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Afghānī acknowledges Ḥūḥū’s article in his opening lines. Muḥammad ‘Ālim al-Afghānī, ‘al-Riwāya al-adabiyya wa-ḥājatunā ilayhā’, *al-Manhal* 5, no. 6 (May 1941): 5.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Afghānī, ‘al-Riwāya al-adabiyya’, 5.

¹⁴⁶ According to al-Afghānī, while a story has the potential to be expanded into a novel, the reverse is not true and any attempt to reduce a novel to a story will result in something shallow and mechanical. *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

Even those writers who openly championed the story tended to espouse a narrow notion of what might constitute a ‘worthy’ story. Writing in *Şawt al-Hijāz* in 1939,¹⁴⁸ Ḥūḥū is deeply concerned about what he calls ‘police stories’ (*al-qīṣaṣ al-būlīsiyya*) and their negative influence on young people:

I do not think that it would be an exaggeration to say that every day the printing presses produce thousands of these stories that have no value, except to wage war on virtue, corrupt morals and place wicked and criminal thoughts in the minds of young people. Most of these stories, if not all of them, make the corrupt and wicked criminal out to be a hero worthy of the world’s plaudits and admiration.¹⁴⁹

Again, such concerns bring to mind criticisms of the story and novel voiced in Egypt, as epitomised in Badr’s typology, where the so-called ‘novel of entertainment and leisure’ is unfavourably compared to the ‘artistic novel’.

The force of Ḥūḥū’s attack, echoing al-Anṣārī’s sentiments in his introduction to *al-Taw’ amān*, suggests writers felt a need to publically distance themselves from this type of fiction. If the short story and novel genres were already contested as a ‘western import’ – al-Afghānī goes to some pains in his article, previously cited, to argue against this as grounds for rejecting them – then the work of a writer in Hijaz/Saudi Arabia was further complicated by the low level of literacy, particularly outside of Hijaz’s major cities; and the highly conservative nature of society. It is likely that writers such as Ḥūḥū were almost obliged to proclaim a strong moral position on the narrative innovations they were promoting. Hence al-Anṣārī describes his novel as a form of positive propaganda to counter the insidious influence of Western novels.

¹⁴⁸ Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū, ‘al-Qīṣaṣ al-būlīsiyya wa-athruhā al-say’i fī al-akhlāq’, *Şawt al-Hijāz*, 11 June 1939, 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

5.5 The beginnings of a National Canon: *Al-Taw`amān* (The Twins)

So far, this chapter has surveyed some of the key developments in early Arabic literary criticism, including the concept of ‘national literature’, which would later prove enormously influential. Following on from this, the Hijazi critical discourse and its salient features were charted as largely an extension of the *nahḍa*. In the pages of its early press – notably *Umm al-Qurā* and *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* newspapers, and from 1937, *al-Manhal* magazine – young Hijazi writers debated the nature and function of both literature and criticism chiefly within a *nahḍawī* context. It is against this background that canon and canon formation are now discussed.

The importance critics have since conferred on the work notwithstanding, when *al-Taw`amān* was first published in 1930 its reception was, at best, unremarkable. ‘Awwād is the only critic to have commented on the book at the time, although this was two years after its publication. ‘Awwād’s stinging critique of *al-Taw`amān* provoked a vitriolic exchange between him and al-Anṣārī, which played out in the pages of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* and is still remembered today as one of Hijaz’s most notorious literary spats.

In issue eighty of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, an article appeared with the cumbersome title, ‘Ta`ammulāt fī al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt: Fann al-riwāya, qiṣṣat marham al-tanāsī’ (Reflections on Literature and Life: Narrative Art [and] the Story ‘The Amnesia Ointment’). The article is signed, ‘Ṣāhib al-Ta`ammulāt’, although it soon became common knowledge that this was in fact a pseudonym for ‘Awwād. The article savages al-Anṣārī’s short story, ‘Marham al-tanāsī’, before giving equally short shrift to *al-Taw`amān*. ‘Awwād’s criticism of al-Anṣārī’s work takes on a personal note when he attacks the latter’s artistic abilities, accusing him of having ‘intruded’ on an art for which he has no aptitude, before advising him to stick to what he knows best, this being the more academic pursuits of language and grammar. Commenting on ‘Marham’, ‘Awwād opines, ‘there is no art... no spirit, no taste and no imagination

in this story'.¹⁵⁰ He then compares the story to 'the tales of Juḥā or the yarns of old housewives... [which are] intended to deliver a simple moral message... and are characteristically inane. This is something that art and literature refuse'.¹⁵¹ In almost the same breath, 'Awwād takes the opportunity to deliver his verdict on *al-*

Taw'amān:

This reminds us of the novel *al-Anṣārī* published not too long ago, and which failed to achieve popularity among the distinguished literary classes or the cultivated youth, being devoid of all the key ingredients of narrative art (*al-fann al-riwā'ī*), which attracts the soul and enriches the mind. This was due to its clumsiness, weak conception, triviality, absence of serious inquiry, lack of unity, and imprecise and superfluous use of language. We had intended to critique it when it appeared, but we left it to die by itself... and indeed, this is what happened.¹⁵²

Despite 'Awwād's caustic tone, which is perhaps intended more for rhetorical effect, his criticisms of 'Marham' and *al-Taw'amān* are not entirely without grounds. Charges such as 'the absence of serious enquiry' and 'triviality' are difficult to quantify, but the fragmentary quality of *al-Taw'amān* and its reliance on coincidence could be described as 'clumsy'. Furthermore, *al-Anṣārī*'s use of recondite vocabulary, despite having a pedagogical aim, might be construed as 'imprecise and superfluous use of language'.

'Awwād's article evidently hit a nerve among the readership of *Ṣawt al-Hijāz* with a number of individuals registering their indignation and support for *al-Anṣārī* in several brief, anonymous ripostes that appeared over subsequent issues.¹⁵³ In response, 'Awwād published a follow-up article in issue eighty-five, 'Ta'ammulāt fī al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt: Al-Radd 'alā zawba'a muḍḥika' (Reflections on Literature and

¹⁵⁰ Ṣaḥīb al-Ta'amullāt, 'Ta'ammulāt fī al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt: Fann al-riwāya, qiṣṣat marham al-tanāsī', *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 31 October 1933, 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵² Ibid., 4.

¹⁵³ For example, an article entitled, 'al-Intiqād wa-kayfa yajib an yakūn' (Criticism and how It Ought to Be), *Ṣawt al-Hijāz*, 21 November 1933, 4. The author, who signs himself, 'Kuwaytib', takes 'Awwād to task for his criticism of 'Marham', arguing that the critic should 'encourage and not destroy'. The writer praises *al-Anṣārī* and *al-Taw'amān*, considering it the first 'Hijazi story'.

Life: A Response to a Storm in a Teacup).¹⁵⁴ As might be expected from the dismissiveness of his title, ‘Awwād’s tone is far from apologetic:

We kept silent for long enough on that class of beginners in the pursuit of literature. [Even] I was in danger of mistaking our silence for some sort of tacit appreciation for the output of their feeble pens. Some of them were so self-deluded they imagined we had not spoken out in fear of those pens that know only deficient literature. That is, until we turned a critical eye on two stories concocted by a resident of Medina. One was printed as a book under the title, *al-Taw’amān*, and the other was printed in an issue of this newspaper as, ‘Marham al-tanāsī’. Both stories are examples of juvenile literature.¹⁵⁵

In issue eighty-six of *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, al-Anṣārī finally responds to ‘Awwād.¹⁵⁶

Turning the tables on his critic, al-Anṣārī enumerates his criticisms of ‘Awwād in six separate points. With headings like ‘a joke who claims he is a critic’ and ‘a joke face-to-face with the novel, *al-Taw’amān*’, and ‘a joke in a camel saddle’, al-Anṣārī’s riposte is arguably even less constructive than ‘Awwād’s original article.¹⁵⁷ This is not helped when he concludes with his own, rather conceited, evaluation of ‘Marham’: ‘It is a realistic and true story. I have moulded it in a refined Arabic style, and over it I have flung the finely embellished robe of imagination. It is on an excellent subject... [and] reveals the great mysteries of human emotion’.¹⁵⁸

While al-Anṣārī’s response is not without a sense of irony – if indeed this was the intended effect – he fails to fully engage with ‘Awwād’s actual criticisms of ‘Marham’ and *al-Taw’amān*. That ‘Awwād delivered these with such force and so unsympathetically cannot have encouraged a constructive response from al-Anṣārī. What this exchange demonstrates is that literary criticism had yet to find legitimacy or an accepted approach. As was the case during the early *nahḍa*, criticism was often poorly received and usually resulted in the kind of vitriolic exchanges witnessed between ‘Awwād and al-Anṣārī.

¹⁵⁴ Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Awwād, ‘Ta’ammulāt fī al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt: Al-Radd ‘alā zawba‘a muḍḥika’, *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 28 November 1933, 4.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Awwād, ‘Ta’ammulāt fī al-adab, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Anṣārī, ‘Ta’ammula jawfā’ wa-naqd mutahāfīt: Hawla naqd ṣāhib al-ta’ammulāt li-qīṣṣat marham al-tanāsī’ (Empty Reflection and Ropey Criticism: On Ṣāhib al-Ta’ammulāt’s Critique of the Story, the Amnesia Ointment), *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz*, 5 December 1933, 4.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Although having gone almost unnoticed when it first published in 1930, critics both inside and outside the Kingdom generally consider *al-Taw'amān* the first Saudi novel, despite their reservations. It would seem, then, that al-Anṣārī's text has been conferred its prestigious status solely on the grounds that it represents the first published example of extended prose fiction to have emerged from Saudi Arabia. Yet, the book was published in 1930 by the Damascus-based Taraqī Press, two years before the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established. This may well explain why the front cover of the first edition bills it as 'the first Hijazi novel' rather than the first Saudi novel. Perhaps this last point becomes less significant when it is recalled that Ibn Sa'ūd had effectively conquered Hijaz by 1924. Hence, many Saudi historians trace the beginning of the Saudi era to 1924 and not 1932.

Interestingly, Amīn makes no mention of *al-Taw'amān* in what is the first study to address the Saudi novel, published in 1972. However, in 1984, al-Ḥāzimī, arguably the pre-eminent critic of the Saudi novel, appears to make the first substantial claim for *al-Taw'amān* as the first Saudi novel, stating that al-Anṣārī may as well have added 'the first novel published in Najd and its dependencies' as the country was known when the book was originally published, almost half a century earlier.¹⁵⁹ But curiously, as he discusses the novel he takes a more ambivalent attitude towards it, describing *al-Taw'amān* as 'the first attempt in the field'.¹⁶⁰ While subsequent scholarship on the Saudi novel has, with some minor modifications, adopted al-Ḥāzimī's account of its development, most commentators have shown less reticence.¹⁶¹ The result is that the status of *al-Taw'amān* as the first Saudi novel has rarely been challenged.

This begs the question: Why did al-Ḥāzimī, and particularly later critics – having none of the former's reservations – establish *al-Taw'amān* as the first Saudi novel, only to denigrate it for failing to meet the necessary standards? The answer to this

¹⁵⁹ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 31.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶¹ For example, see al-Shantī, *Fann al-riwāya*, 5-7. See also Dīb, who describes it as the first attempt at narrative prose fiction, *Fann al-riwāya*, 34.

question brings the discussion round to the issue of canonisation and the establishment of the novel. The national canon by definition is intimately tied to the nation and national identity. Literary canons do not evolve organically but rather are, as Terry Eagleton, has remarked, ‘a *construct*, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time’.¹⁶² The literary historian necessarily plays a pivotal role in canon formation, since he or she effectively decides what is included or excluded. As with any tradition, the further back in time it can be traced, the greater its legitimacy.¹⁶³ But as Hobsbawm has remarked, ‘the peculiarity of “invented” traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious’.¹⁶⁴ In the context of a young state still in the process of consolidating its national identity, on the one hand; and on the other, a literary form viewed by many as an import of morally dubious origin and influence; the tendency of critics like al-Ḥāzimī to date the canon – one of the modern nation’s cultural institutions – as early as possible is understandable, even if this predates the Kingdom’s founding, and even if the critic is clearly reticent to confer this dubious honour.

Further insight into the issue at hand can be gained by exploring the parallels between *al-Taw’ amān* as the first Saudi novel, and *Zaynab* in the debate over the first Arabic novel. In a now much discussed 2009 article, Eliot Colla re-examines the ‘long-standing critical consensus’¹⁶⁵ that *Zaynab* is the first Arabic novel.¹⁶⁶ He argues that when *Zaynab* was first published anonymously in 1913, there was nothing remarkable about its reception, nor was it unique compared to other works available on the cultural market at the time.¹⁶⁷ As such, its status is due less to literary merit or historical precedence, and more to the convergence of a number of other factors.

¹⁶² Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 10.

¹⁶³ The Latin root of tradition, *traditionem* (nominative *traditio*), signifies a ‘handing down’.

¹⁶⁴ Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁶⁵ Elsadda notes how the consensus over *Zaynab* only began to shift during the last decade of the twentieth century (XVII).

¹⁶⁶ Colla, ‘How *Zaynab* Became the First Arabic Novel’, 216.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

Colla makes a distinction between what he terms ‘primary and secondary moments of literary production’.¹⁶⁸ While primary moments relate to the novel’s initial production and publication, secondary moments are usually extrinsic to the novel and may be non-literary in nature. Colla makes the case that it is the latter that have conferred on *Zaynab* its privileged status. For example, the claim for *Zaynab* as a breakthrough in modern Arabic literature was made as late as 1929, when it was republished under Haykal’s name.¹⁶⁹ Haykal claimed the novel was the first to depict rural Egypt and its peasantry. However, as Colla argues, the historical record simply does not support this. Incidentally, 1929 also saw the first screen adaptation of *Zaynab*.¹⁷⁰

The historian and Arabist, H. A. R. Gibb (1895-1971), added further momentum to the canonisation of *Zaynab* with an article published in the 1930s, in which he proclaimed it the first Arabic novel.¹⁷¹ Haykal subsequently translated the article into Arabic and had it published. Later, Badr described *Zaynab* as the first ‘artistic Arabic novel’ and subsequent historiographies of the Egyptian novel have tended to fall in line with this.¹⁷² Colla views Badr’s work as an attempt to establish a national canon, itself part of an effort to ‘remake Egyptian universities in the face of Nasser’.¹⁷³ Similarly, the novel’s reproduction, i.e. its screen adaptation and reappearance fifteen years after it was first published, needs to be understood within the context of Egypt’s shift to representational party politics following the 1919 Revolution and the growth of a new nationalist discourse culminating under the rule of President Nāṣir. This discourse, which sought in the peasantry a source of cultural legitimacy in opposition to the Europeanised urban effendi, found its ideal in *Zaynab*. The remake of the screen version coincided with the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. It was highly successful and thrust the novel into the popular imagination. Thus:

¹⁶⁸ Colla, ‘How *Zaynab* Became the First Arabic Novel’, 218.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁷² Badr, *al-Riwāya al-‘arabiyya*, 323.

¹⁷³ Colla, ‘How *Zaynab* Became the First Arabic Novel’, 219-20.

The formation of the Egyptian canon, of which *Zaynab* is the cornerstone, has more to do with the needs of national institutions, such as cinema, the parliament, or Cairo University, at moments of formation or reformation than it does with the texts themselves, or more precisely, with the texts themselves at the moment of their initial appearance within the literary field. Simply put, *Zaynab* became recognized as part of the national literary tradition not at the moment of its initial production, but repeatedly, in subsequent circumstances of reception and reproduction, each of which was tied to other non-literary significances.¹⁷⁴

Like *Zaynab*, *al-Taw'amān* achieved its status through secondary moments of production, beginning with its republishing as 'the first Saudi novel' in 1986,¹⁷⁵ over fifty years after it first appeared on the cultural market; and also through the efforts of al-Ḥāzimī and other critics to define a Saudi national canon. The need to provide legitimacy for the novel as national institution in the form of a traceable lineage that could be roughly identified with the nation's creation in 1932, appears to have outweighed any hesitancy critics might have had in admitting *al-Taw'amān* into the canon.

Yet, 'canons as products of cultural processes implicated in sociopolitical transformations are necessarily subject to contestation and reformulation'.¹⁷⁶ During the early 2000s, a few voices rose to challenge the primacy afforded *al-Taw'amān*. This period saw a general increase of interest in the Saudi novel, both within and outside the Kingdom, largely as a result of phenomenon of the so-called 'new Saudi novel'. Perhaps due to this increased interest in Saudi literature, several earlier novels were reissued. In 2007, a work long overlooked by scholars and thought lost by some, was republished by the London based Tuwa Media & Publishing Limited. *Al-Intiqām* (Revenge) or to give its longer and original title, *al-Intiqām al-ṭabīṭ* (Natural Revenge) was originally published in 1935 by the Sharqiyya Press in Jeddah.

¹⁷⁴ Colla, 'How Zaynab Became the First Arabic Novel', 221.

¹⁷⁵ The book was republished by al-Ansari's publishing house, Iṣḍārāt Dārat al-Manhal. See Dīb, *Fann al-riwāya*, 24.

¹⁷⁶ Elsadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel*, xvii.

The novel has already been discussed at length in Chapter Three; suffice to reiterate here that it is primarily a didactic work that shares much in common with *al-Taw'amān*. Like the latter, *al-Intiqām*, does not conform to the concept of 'the artistic novel', even if a subtitle on the cover of the original edition describes it as 'a scientific, literary, moral and social novel'. Even so, inside the 2007 edition, the publisher has added a new tagline: 'The First Saudi Novel (1935)'. This is followed by a brief introduction to the second edition in which *al-Taw'amān* is not only discounted as the first Saudi novel in favour of *al-Intiqām*, but as a novel altogether:

What al-Anṣārī did in his novel, which promotes fear of the other... excludes the book from the art of the novel, just as its title presents an obvious issue, since it suggests there are four protagonists, when there are only two!¹⁷⁷
Whose glasses was al-Anṣārī looking through?¹⁷⁸

Besides the grammatical error in the book's title, which is hardly cause enough to dismiss the work, the argument here is that the polemical and crudely didactic nature of *al-Taw'amān* disqualifies it as a novel, since 'the issue is one of marking a distinction between the novel as an art and the novel as an ideological tool'.¹⁷⁹ To strengthen the case for *al-Intiqām*, the introduction argues that since *al-Taw'amān* was published in 1930, two years before the establishment of Saudi Arabia, it cannot be considered the first Saudi novel.

Though previously rare and difficult to obtain, the 2007 republishing of *al-Intiqām* was not quite the great moment of rediscovery billed by Tuwa in their introduction.¹⁸⁰ As early as 2001, al-Ḥāzīmī includes it in *Mawsū'at al-adab al-'arabī al-Sa'ūdī al-ḥadīth*, in his introduction to the volume on the novel, despite having made no mention of the work in *Fann al-qiṣṣa*.¹⁸¹ Writing in *Majjalat al-thaqāfa* (Culture Magazine) in 2003, the critic 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Sabīl argues forcefully against *al-Taw'amān*'s inclusion within the canon on similar grounds to

¹⁷⁷ This is an allusion to the much commented on grammatical error made by al-Anṣārī in the title of his book, where he uses the dual form of *al-taw'am* (twins), therefore implying there are two sets of twins.

¹⁷⁸ 'Introduction', *al-Intiqām*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸¹ Maṣṣūr al-Ḥāzīmī, *al-Riwāya* (The Novel), vol. 5, *Mawsū'at al-adab al-'arabī al-sa'ūdī al-ḥadīth* (*Encyclopedia of Modern Arabic Saudi Literature*) (Riyadh: Dār al-Mufradāt, 2001), 9-10.

those cited in the introduction to the Tuwa edition of *al-Intiqām*. He proposes the latter as ‘the real beginning of the Saudi novel’, seeing in it ‘a novel of some maturity’.¹⁸² This he explains is based on its ‘integrity of plot’, ‘character development’ and level of *realism* in its portrayal of events.¹⁸³

According to al-Ḥāzimī, ‘nothing worthy of note’ was published after *al-Taw’amān* until the late 1940s, when Maghribī’s *al-Ba’th* and al-Subā’ī’s *Fikra* appeared in 1947 and 1948 respectively. Although in 2001 al-Ḥāzimī includes *al-Intiqām* in his introduction to the encyclopaedia, his earlier account in *Fann al-qīṣṣa* continues to be reproduced in subsequent historiographies of the Saudi novel.¹⁸⁴

The Artistic Novel

Unlike *al-Taw’amān*, whose status and relative merits continue to be debated, *Thaman al-tadhīya* is generally recognised as ‘the first artistic Saudi novel’. In this respect, al-Ḥāzimī has even compared its author to Haykal: ‘Ḥāmid Damanhūrī remains the true pioneer of the novel in our country in the same way Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal is a pioneer of the novel in Egypt’.¹⁸⁵

Before exploring some of the implications of this, it is useful to pause and consider more closely the term, ‘artistic novel’ (*al-riwāya al-fanniyya*). The adjective, *fannī*, is usually rendered ‘artistic’, although it also denotes the idea of competence in a specialised field. The artistic novel therefore is a work that is both technically and artistically accomplished. Perhaps the best way to think of the ‘artistic novel’ might be, to borrow John McRae’s term, as ‘literature with a capital L’, as opposed to what is often critically regarded as inferior, popular fiction in the vein of detective novels and romances – so-called ‘pulp fiction’.¹⁸⁶ But, as has already been made clear, the

¹⁸² ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Sabīl, ‘Bad’ al-riwāya al-maḥaliyya bayn al-Taw’amān wa-l-Intiqām al-tabī‘ī’, *al-Jazīra: Majallat al-thaqāfa*, 7 July 2003, accessed 11 November 2011, <http://www.al-jazirah.com/culture/07072003/fadaat21.htm>.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ See for example, Ali Zalah, ‘The Progress of the Novel in Saudi Arabia’, *Banipal* (Summer 2004): 82-6.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 45.

¹⁸⁶ John McRae, *Literature with a small ‘l’* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), vii.

artistic novel is defined by more than its level of technical and aesthetic accomplishment.

Badr distinguishes the artistic novel from other types of novel in terms of its realistic depiction of the writer's environment:

If the principal aim of the romance is entertainment, for which it relies on fantasy to create an unrealistic world filled with magic and the supernatural, then the aim of the artistic novel is to express the writer's sense of the world around him'.¹⁸⁷

Badr develops his concept of the artistic novel in his discussion of *Zaynab* where the writer's environment, or 'the world around him', becomes synonymous with the nation. He lauds Haykal's loving depiction of Egypt and his valorisation of its peasantry: 'In his devotion to this reality he reveals his great love for everything Egyptian'.¹⁸⁸ It is perhaps on these grounds, more than any other, that Badr describes *Zaynab* as representing 'the authentic beginning of the artistic novel'.¹⁸⁹

Al-Ḥāzimī's definition of the artistic novel corresponds closely with Badr's. He begins by outlining its formal elements: 'The most important elements of the artistic novel are structural cohesion, the presence of some form of conflict, its conformance to the law of cause and effect, [and] character development'.¹⁹⁰ He continues, emphasising that the artistic novel is deeply rooted in social reality, with its 'concern with a particular segment of society or a specific human issue'.¹⁹¹

Until recently, the general consensus has been that *Zaynab* represents the first Arabic novel because it attained what was a previously unprecedented level of technical and artistic accomplishment. Critics of the Saudi novel, however, usually cite *al-Taw'amān* as either 'the first attempt at the novel' in Saudi Arabia, or more often than not, as 'the first Saudi novel', while simultaneously heralding *Thaman al-*

¹⁸⁷ Badr, *Taṭawwur al-riwāya*, 198.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 323.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

tadhīya as ‘the first artistic Saudi novel’. The reasons for this peculiar distinction have already been suggested. Such an approach is highly reductive, since to view *al-Taw`amān*, and the works of al-Jawharī, Maghribī and al-Subā`ī etc., as ‘attempts’ at the novel, implies that extended prose fiction necessarily follows a trajectory of development towards ‘the artistic novel’.

The danger of this teleological perspective is that works which do not fulfil defining criteria of the ‘artistic novel’, crucially its representation of social reality, and therefore cannot be interpreted under the rubric of nation-state, are either undermined or misinterpreted. It is precisely for this reason that the novels of the first Saudi woman novelist, Samīra Khāshuqjī have been largely dismissed in histories of the Saudi novel.

5.6 Khāshuqjī and the Canon

In spite of its significance as the first novel by a Saudi woman author, at the time of its publication in 1958, *Wadda`tu āmālī* did not receive any attention in the Saudi press. Yet, Khāshuqjī would go on to publish a further seven novels and two short story collections, indicating that she was not without a readership, even if it was largely or wholly outside Saudi Arabia. The publisher’s blurb on the back cover of Khāshuqjī’s 1973 novel, *Qaṭarāt min al-dumū`* (Teardrops), suggests her previous novels had been popular. It claims they had ‘caused a stir in the literary and publishing worlds’ and were ‘well received’. Such testimonial, of course, should be greeted with a healthy degree of scepticism given the publisher’s vested interest in promoting the book; however, the fact that another of her novels, *Barīq` aynayka* (The Sparkle in your Eyes, 1963) was adapted into a film, implies her work was better known than its marginal status would otherwise suggest.

Amīn offers perhaps the first serious critical engagement with Khāshuqjī’s work in his *al-Ḥaraka al-adabiyya fī al-Mamlaka al-`Arabiyya* (The literary Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). Discussing her novel, *Dhikrayāt dāmi`a* (Tearful

Memories, 1961), Amīn takes Khāshuqjī to task for the absence of Saudi settings and characters:

It is reprehensible of the writer, who calls herself ‘Daughter of the Peninsula’, that there is not a trace of the Peninsula in her story, save the name of its author... [Instead] the events unfold in Cairo, Alexandria, Sidi Beshr, and Switzerland.¹⁹²

Amīn’s issue with *Dhikrayāt*, which could be applied to most of Khāshuqjī’s novels since only one is set in Saudi Arabia,¹⁹³ stems from the same notion that underpins the concept of the artistic novel; i.e. that the author’s national identity should determine the settings, characters and themes of her works.

Writing a decade later, al-Ḥāzimī disagrees with Amīn’s evaluation of *Dhikrayāt*, calling it a ‘gross error’.¹⁹⁴ According to al-Ḥāzimī’s argument, Khāshuqjī’s novels fall into the category of the ‘adventure novel’, in which ‘the environment loses its distinctive features’.¹⁹⁵ The citing of place names in the adventure novel is ‘inconsequential’, since ‘the environment is not established simply by referring to it, but through a deep interaction between it, events and characters’.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, it is ‘unjust to demand of the adventure novel what is not in its nature’.¹⁹⁷ It is difficult to construe al-Ḥāzimī’s argument as a defence of Khāshuqjī, since by relegating her novels to the category of adventure novel he not only trivializes her work but also effectively excludes it from the canon.

Later, in *Mawsū‘at al-adab al-‘arabī al-Sa‘ūdī al-ḥadīth*, al-Ḥāzimī revisits Khāshuqjī’s novels. But here his tone has shifted and is more in line with Amīn’s:

As for Samīra Khāshuqjī – Samīra Bint al-Jazīra – despite having written many novels, she has not been able to present a single work of artistic value. All her prose works are very much alike. This is because the writer is enamoured with depicting liberal ‘aristocratic’ airs, usually Arab and

¹⁹² Amīn, *al-Haraka al-adabiyya*, 508.

¹⁹³ See *Qaḥarāt min al-dumū‘* cited previously.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 41.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

European liberal places – such as Alexandria, Beirut and Geneva – to rid the characters of obstacles and allow them to act freely.¹⁹⁸

Putting aside the various other criticisms al-Ḥāzimī makes of Khāshuqjī's novels, such as their overreliance on coincidence and grammatical errors etc., one of his two main points of contention is essentially the same as Amin's, i.e. that the settings and characters of her novels are not Saudi. His second point rests on refuting Khāshuqjī's claim that her novels aim to defend 'the educated young woman' and her right to choose in marriage:

The author says she wants to defend the educated young woman who desires the freedom to choose who she wants to marry. However, we really do not see exactly what problems Khāshuqjī's heroines face. They go out with their girlfriends to the clubs and places of amusement; they live in a Western atmosphere, which bears no relation to conservative Arab environments, so what defence does Samīra Bint al-Jazīra mean exactly?!¹⁹⁹

More recently, al-Wahhābī has challenged the mainly unfounded criticism levelled at Khāshuqjī. In his study of Saudi women novelists, al-Wahhābī argues for a rereading and re-evaluation of Khāshuqjī's novels, in an attempt to pull her work back from the margins. He places Khāshuqjī's writings within the context of the liberal movement, which was at its peak in the Arab world during the 1960s and 1970s. Where others have considered her novels as no more than frivolous romances, or 'adventure novels', al-Wahhābī claims that Khāshuqjī 'employed a romantic style and language, combined with a liberal perspective, to demand women's rights'.²⁰⁰

Al-Wahhābī believes the tendency of critics to form a negative focus on the morality of Khāshuqjī's characters²⁰¹ – al-Ḥāzimī's comments are certainly indicative of this – has caused them to neglect the thematic significance or the 'message' of her novels.²⁰² Ultimately, he contends that the largely negative reception of Khāshuqjī's novels has been due to the fact they challenge the prejudiced notion that women cannot write good novels, and most significantly, they break the taboo of women

¹⁹⁸ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qīṣṣa*, 39.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁰⁰ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-sa'ūdiyya al-nisā'iyya*, 77.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 87.

writing on romantic subjects, all of which is ‘shocking from a traditional masculine viewpoint’.²⁰³ Al-Wahhābī also addresses the often-made criticism that all but one of Khāshuqjī’s novels is set outside Saudi Arabia. He argues that this was a necessary strategy adopted in ‘most Saudi novels’ to confer a sense of realism on the events they depicted, which could not have taken place within Saudi Arabia given its underdeveloped and highly conservative nature. It was only from as late as 1991 that the setting of novels inside the Kingdom became an ‘increasingly common phenomenon... owing to the development of society, especially in terms of individual freedom’.²⁰⁴

Although al-Wahhābī provides a timely and vital re-reading of Khāshuqjī, the debate over where she chose to set her novels is a moot point. If, as al-Wahhābī admits, Khāshuqjī spent very little of her life in Saudi Arabia, why would she necessarily choose to set her novels in Saudi Arabia? Again, the underlying assumption is that a novelist’s national identity should determine the setting of her novels. Al-Wahhābī’s apology for this apparent anomaly is as unnecessary as such criticisms are unfounded. The reasons writers chose to set their novels outside Saudi Arabia are many and varied. Censorship – whether of the official variety or in terms of the limitations imposed on individuals by society at large – was no doubt an important factor. However, the novelist Abduh Khal offers a compelling counter-argument to the claim that Saudi reality was simply too poor for it to function as a setting for the novel:

The argument about the poverty of [Saudi] reality is unfair. Any society, however stagnant, however hidebound, has in that very trait an aesthetic matrix in which novels can originate and develop, novels that will, of course, be different in their aesthetic elements from novels written in vibrant societies.²⁰⁵

A more likely reason behind Khāshuqjī’s decision to set her novels outside Saudi Arabia is that she was more at home in, and more familiar with, Lebanon and Egypt, and indeed, this was the cultural market at which she aimed her novels. Furthermore,

²⁰³ Al-Wahhābī, *al-Riwāya al-sa‘ūdiyya al-nisā’iyya*, 87.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁰⁵ Abdu Khal, *The Novel in Saudi Arabia: Establishing an Aesthetic*, *Banipal* 20 (Summer 2004): 80.

the absence of national space from her novels, or the territorialising impulse, has been linked to the nation's genderedness.

While none of the particulars of Khāshuqjī's life and her novels outlined in the foregoing discussion should necessarily preclude her inclusion within the Saudi novelistic tradition, they do bring into question the usefulness of categorising her work within such a narrow context. A more insightful approach to Khāshuqjī is to consider her in terms of liminality, as someone who 'elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space'.²⁰⁶ Khāshuqjī is not unique in this respect and the remainder of the present chapter offers a consideration of two further examples, Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū (1910-56) and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf (1933-2004), both of whom, along with Khāshuqjī, problematise the notion of the Saudi canon – and for that matter national canons in general – as a discrete and stable category.

5.7 Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf

The Tunisian born Ḥūḥū is included in the Encyclopaedia of Modern Saudi Arabic Literature for his contribution both in the areas of literary criticism – through his articles published in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* and *al-Manhal* magazine – and prose fiction, most notably his story *Ghādat Umm al-Qurā* (The Maiden of Medina, 1947).²⁰⁷ Al-Ḥāzimī includes the latter as one of the pioneering texts that preceded the appearance of the novel proper, or artistic novel.²⁰⁸ A lengthy excerpt is reproduced in the Encyclopaedia alongside excerpts from other key texts, including *al-Taw'amān*, *Fikra* and *al-Ba'ith*.

What initially makes al-Ḥāzimī's decision to include *Ghādat Umm al-Qurā* interesting is that Ḥūḥū was actually an Algerian and only left his native land for Medina as a young man in 1934. He enrolled at the city's famous Shari'a College to

²⁰⁶ Victor Turner, 'Liminality and Community', in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, ed. Jeffery C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 147.

²⁰⁷ Al-Ḥāzimī, *al-Riwāya*, vol. 5 of *Mawsū'at al-adab al-'arabī al-sa'ūdī*, 61-71.

²⁰⁸ Al-Ḥāzimī, *Fann al-qisṣa*, 10.

complete his studies and taught there following his graduation in 1938.²⁰⁹ In the same year, he was employed by al-Anṣārī as the editorial secretary of *al-Manhal* magazine. Ḥūḥū later moved to Mecca where he worked for the National Telegraph and Telephone Company until 1946, when he returned to Algeria. While Ḥūḥū is recognised by al-Ḥāzimī for his contribution to Saudi literature, having lived and worked in the country for just over a decade, in Algeria he is also considered a pioneer of the novel, as well as the short story.²¹⁰

The setting of *Ghādat* and its main themes are familiar. Writing in *al-Riyadh* newspaper, the Saudi scholar and journalist, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-‘Awayn, compares the novel to *Fikra* for its depiction of the plight of women in Hijazi society and their lack of access to education, as well as its condemnation of popular beliefs and superstitions.²¹¹ The story is set in Mecca and revolves around Zakiya, its protagonist, and Salīm, who are deeply in love with each other. However, the ruthless and avaricious ‘Abd al-Ru’ūf, a wealthy Meccan businessman, wants Zakiya for his own son. When ‘Abd al-Ru’ūf learns of her and Salīm’s engagement he frames Salīm for drunk and disorderly behaviour. The news of Salīm’s arrest causes Zakiya to lose her mind. Her condition continues to deteriorate, resisting the charms and potions of the charlatan folk-healers, and she dies. Salīm continues to languish in prison and eventually starves himself to death.

Ghādat has earned Ḥūḥū recognition as a pioneer of the Saudi novel, yet it is simultaneously held as the first Algerian novel.²¹² Even so, Ḥūḥū remains at the periphery of histories of the Saudi novel. He is only referred to by al-Ḥāzimī in the encyclopaedia and al-Qahtani in his doctoral thesis, while Dīb, Amīn and Hasoun make no mention of him at all.²¹³ Presumably this is because Ḥūḥū was not a Saudi citizen. But it is not only the novel’s Hijazi setting that has caused al-Ḥāzimī and al-

²⁰⁹ Wail S. Hassan, ‘Muhammad Reda Huhu’, in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, ed. Simon Gikandi (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), 318.

²¹⁰ Huhu was also a journalist, playwright and translator. His plays were written performed in Algerian Arabic. The politically subversive nature of his plays provoked the French authorities who assassinated him in 1956. *Ibid.*, 318.

²¹¹ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-‘Awayn, ‘al-Mar’a ‘ind Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥūḥū: Ghādat Umm al-Qurā namūdhajan’, *al-Riyadh* (13 December 2007), ??.

²¹² Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, 49.

²¹³ Al-Qahtani, ‘The Novel in Saudi Arabia’, 6.

Qahtani to identify its author as a pioneer of the Saudi novel; *Ghādat* clearly belongs within the Hijazi literary, reformist discourse, to which Ḥūḥū also contributed through the articles he published in its press.

But what of *Ghādat*'s place within the Algerian canon? Again, there is no real consensus. Some accounts claim *Ghādat* as the first Algerian novel, while others do not even mention it.²¹⁴ A similar situation characterises the critical reception of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf. Dīb and Hasoun both cite Munīf's works, whereas he is absent from al-Ḥāzimī – including the encyclopedia, Amīn and al-Qahtani.

Munīf was born in Amman in 1933 to an Iraqi mother and a Saudi father. Although one of the most celebrated Arab novelists of the twentieth century, he began his literary career fairly late in life, publishing his first novel, *al-Shajar wa-ightiyāl Marzūq* (The Trees and the Assassination of Marzūq), in 1973 at the age of forty. He went on to publish a further ten novels, several volumes of collected essays and two posthumously published short-story collections. A number of Munīf's works have been translated into English, including the first three parts of his magnum opus, the quintet, *Mudun al-milḥ* (Cities of Salt, 1984-9).²¹⁵

Rashid El-Enany has described the quintet as ‘an interpretation of history through the medium of fiction’.²¹⁶ In brief, *Mudun al-milḥ* describes the profoundly transformative impact of the discovery of oil on life in the Arabian Peninsula. Munīf's long career in the oil industry arguably put him in a unique position to tell this particular story. However, the terms in which the impact of oil is described in the quintet are less than positive and reflect the author's own profound sense of disappointment with the political and social realities of the Arab world. In an interview, Munīf comments: ‘I believe that the second biggest convulsion in the

²¹⁴ For an example of the latter see Hamdi Sakkut, *The Arabic Novel: Bibliography and Critical Introduction 1865-1995*, vol. 1, trans. Roger Monroe (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2000), 122. Allen, however, cites *Ghādat* as the first Algerian novel. Roger Allen, *Introduction to Arabic literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 184.

²¹⁵ *Mudun al-milḥ*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1986-89).

²¹⁶ Rasheed El-Enany, ‘*Cities of Salt: A Literary view of the Theme of Oil and Change in the Gulf*’, in *Arabia and Gulf: From Traditional Society to Modern States*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Totawa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1986), 215.

Arabian Peninsula after Islam was oil. If Islam brought with it a message that led to profound changes in society, and represented something of an Arab awakening, then I believe that oil, which could have played a similar role, has had a more negative than positive effect'.²¹⁷

The quintet is usually read as a satirical commentary on the House of Sa'ūd and its rise to power with the creation of the Third Saudi State. In his analysis of the first two volumes, El-Enany identifies clear parallels between the quintet and actual historical events. He observes that together, they cover a period of around thirty years, from 1933 to 1964, the year in which Ibn Sa'ūd (1953-64) – Khaza'al in the novel – was deposed by his brother, Fayṣal (1964-75), represented by the character, Finīr.²¹⁸ Similar parallels can be identified in the remaining parts of the quintet. For example, the third volume, *Taqāsīm al-layl wa-l-nahār* (Variations on Night and Day, 1989), takes the narrative back to the early Saudi conquests, paralleling Ibn Sa'ūd's defeat – 'Sultan Khuraybiṭ' in the novel – of Sharīf Ḥusayn – 'Ibn Mādī' and the annexation of Hijaz in 1925.

Given that Munīf was born to a Saudi father and that his most famous work, *Mudun al-milḥ*, is read primarily as an indirect comment on Saudi history, many understandably regard him as a Saudi novelist. Yet, if this is the case, why do both al-Ḥāzimī and al-Shanṭī fail to make any mention of Munīf and his work? An obvious answer might be that the controversy surrounding *Mudun al-milḥ*, which is banned in Saudi Arabia, was such that Saudi critics have effectively boycotted Munīf's work or considered it too sensitive to critically engage with. This, however, has not prevented them from discussing other banned and controversial Saudi novelists, and it seems unlikely that censorship alone would prevent them from making even a passing reference to Munīf. A closer look at Munīf's background and a consideration of some of the common thematic issues found in both his fiction and non-fiction reveals that the issue is much more complex and cannot be explained away by censorship.

²¹⁷ Abdelrahman Munif: Clashing with Society at Gut Level, *Banipal* 10 (Spring 2001), 8-14.

²¹⁸ El-Enany, 'Cities of Salt', 217.

As already noted, Munīf was born in Jordan, and although his father was a Saudi citizen, Munīf rarely visited the Kingdom with the exception of a few summer holidays when he would stay with relatives. Munīf left Amman in 1952 to study law in Baghdad, where he continued to play an active role in the Ba‘th Party, which he had joined while still at secondary school. In 1955, he and a number of other students were expelled from Baghdad as a result of their protest against the Baghdad Pact. He was forced to complete his studies at the University of Cairo where he joined the Egyptian arm of the Ba‘th. A party scholarship took him to Belgrade where he completed a doctorate in oil economics. A growing unease with Baathist policies eventually led Munīf to quit the party during its Fifth National Congress held in Homs in May 1962. The following year Munīf was stripped of his Saudi citizenship, as a result of his earlier involvement with the Ba‘th party. From then on until his death in 2004, he lived in a state of exile.²¹⁹ Following his death, the Saudi government offered to reinstate Munīf’s citizenship, but his wife refused, believing this would go against her husband’s wishes.²²⁰ If Munīf’s personal history alone is not sufficient to seriously problematise his categorisation as a Saudi novelist, then his own views on the subject and how this translates in his work reinforce the sense of a writer who eludes such distinctions.

Of Munīf’s many novels, *Mudun al-milḥ* is the only work that relates specifically to Saudi Arabia; in fact it is one of few that can be located within any specific place in the Arab world, his trilogy, *Arḍ al-sawād* (The Fertile Earth, 1999) being a further example.²²¹ A notable characteristic of Munīf’s novels is the near total absence of real place names. In Munīf’s own words, this is because he felt that ‘the Arab calamity is the same everywhere’.²²² Munīf believed that in his novels he was dealing with issues that affected the whole Arab world. The title of his novel, *Sharq al-mutawassiṭ* (East of the Mediterranean, 1975) is telling in this respect as it

²¹⁹ See Māhir Jarrār, *‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf wa-l-‘Irāq: Sīra wa-dhikrayāt* (‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf and Iraq: Biography and Memories), (Beirut: Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 2005), 13–30. Jarrār’s book, which is based largely on interviews with Munīf, is one of the most extensive accounts of the latter’s early life, particularly his involvement in the Ba‘th Party and his eventually disillusionment with its politics.

²²⁰ This was widely reported on by the Arab press at the time.

²²¹ The trilogy is a historical novel set in Iraq during the Mamluk period. *Arḍ al-sawād*, 3 vols (Beirut: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1999).

²²² ‘Abdelrahman Munif: Clashing with Society at Gut Level’, 9.

potentially encompasses a swathe of territory, stretching from Lebanon to the Arabian Peninsula. Given his history with the Ba‘ath Party, it is not surprising to find that Munīf’s extensive corpus of essays strongly reflects a pan-Arab or Arab nationalist outlook. While Munīf recognised the opportunity for effective political union of the Arab states had passed, he nevertheless deplored what he saw as their fragmentation and division, believing that the strength of the Arabs lay in their unity. He did, however, continue to champion Arab cultural unity in the face of Westernisation and globalising forces.²²³

Munīf’s own feelings about his identity are captured in a fascinating interview conducted by the Lebanese author Iliyās Khurī, a quote from which opens Chapter One. When Khurī asks Munīf if he feels himself to be Saudi, the ambivalence of his response reveals the complexity of the matter: ‘I feel that I am from the Arabian Peninsula. I was stripped of my Saudi passport in 1963 and since then I have been nationless. [During this time] I have held several passports: Algerian, Iraqi, Yemeni and Syrian’.²²⁴

To categorise Munīf as a Saudi novelist seems meaningless, as it would be to place him within any other national literary canon. More than any of the authors discussed here, Munīf occupies a liminal position that effectively places him beyond national divisions. If Munīf’s homeland is language, the ‘middle language’ that transcends these borders, then it is through writing that he sought identity: ‘I search for identity and belonging, which are part and parcel of my work’.²²⁵ Ultimately, it is perhaps more appropriate to view Munīf as ‘an Arab Cosmopolitan’ to borrow Meyer’s term, ‘in the sense that, while his cosmopolitanism is sophisticated, it is not Western-centred’.²²⁶

²²³ See his essay, ‘al-Thaqāfa al-waṭaniyya: Wāqi‘ wa-taḥadiyyāt’ (National Culture: Reality and Challenges), in ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf, *Bayn al-thaqāfa wa-l-siyāsa* (Beirut: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1998), 21-46.

²²⁴ Khurī, ‘‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf’’, 4.

²²⁵ ‘Abdelrahman Munif: Clashing with Society at Gut Level’, 9.

²²⁶ Stefen G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 72.

5.8 Conclusion

The new literature and critical discourse that emerged in Hijaz during the 1920s was part of a wider cultural trend that began with the Arab *nahḍa* movement in the nineteenth century. The writers and thinkers of Egypt, the Levant, and the North American Arab émigré community were a formative influence on the Hijazi pioneers. Such was the extent of this influence that some even complained that Hijazi literature lacked its own identity.

What clearly emerges from this discourse is that the early generation of Hijazi writers, who had been educated mainly at the private Arab schools during the late Ottoman and Hashemite periods, rarely identified with the Saudi state. Instead, a sense of Hijaz as an independent nation lingered in their writings for years after the Saudi conquest. In fact, they were perhaps more likely to identify with the greater ‘Arab nation’, since they often saw themselves and their work as part of the greater Arab revivalist/reformist movement.

A general trend observed in the Egyptian and the Saudi/Hijazi context is a gradual move away from the idea of literature as instruction or moral edification, which associated fiction or the imaginary with low culture, to an acceptance of the story, even if this was rationalised on the basis of the story’s didactic potential. The uncomfortable exchange between al-Anṣārī and ‘Awwād in *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* stems from two irreconcilable perspectives on the nature of literature and its role, confirming the instability of the novel form, and the broad field of possibilities the term *riwāya* denoted.

Al-Taw’ amān’s subsequent canonisation as the ‘first Saudi novel’, through secondary moments of production, despite the ambivalence that critics have expressed towards it, reveals the contradictory forces that impinge on the processes of canonisation. While there is a desire, or impulse, to legitimise the Saudi novel tradition by tracing it back to around the time of the Kingdom’s establishment, its failure to meet the nationalist criteria has resulted in its demotion by some critics to a mere ‘attempt’ at

the novel. Curiously then, while al-Anṣārī's novel might be described variously as either 'the first Saudi novel' or the 'first attempt' at the novel, *Thaman al-taḍhīya*, published three decades after *al-Taw'amān*, holds the honour of being the first Saudi 'artistic' novel.

Khāshuqjī's novels, on the other hand, have fared much worse than *al-Taw'amān*, having been practically excluded from the canon altogether. The main reason for this lies in the nature of the cultural market for which she was writing and her own cosmopolitan lifestyle, which is reflected in her narratives. Moreover, Khāshuqjī was primarily concerned with depicting the inequality between men and women, a phenomenon that does not recognise national borders.

The issue of marginalisation, of what is included in or excluded from literary canons brings the discussion round to a consideration of Ḥūḥū and Munīf, and their ambiguous position vis-à-vis the Saudi canon. Ḥūḥū's dual status as a pioneer of the Saudi novel, and as a pioneer of the Algerian novel for precisely the same work is a compelling example of the liminality that is argued for in this thesis. Even more so perhaps than the case of Ḥūḥū, is that of Munīf who was argued as an Arab cosmopolitan par excellence.

CONCLUSION

The early Saudi novel challenges paradigmatic assumptions about the novel's origins in the Arab context and its role as the expression of the national community.

Readings of the novel in Arabic, particularly under the rubric of area studies, often situate it either within the territorial borders of the nation-state, or as part of a nebulous, undifferentiated supranational tradition that, as Omri has remarked, erroneously assumes a single Arabic literary discourse. This thesis has argued that while 'the nation' is a valid frame of reference, to read and interpret texts within this frame, without questioning its limitations, obfuscates the complex ways in which both the novel and the discourse on the novel intersect with identity and identity politics.

For Hijaz, the first half of the twentieth century was a turbulent, transitional period marked by the end of the Ottoman Empire, Hashemite rule – under which it had existed as an independent state, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, its absorption into Saudi territory was not, as nationalist pedagogies suggest, a genesis moment that witnessed the birth of 'the Saudi nation'. Political authority over a territory is not the same as the creation of an imagined community among its citizenry, which must be understood as a gradual, gestative process that is forever destined to remain – if identity is ultimately fluid and a site of ambivalence – incomplete, split between the double narrative movement of the pedagogical and the performative.

Even so, Hijaz retained a strong sense of its own unique identity for decades after the Saudi conquest. This is evident in its cultural production, from narrative fiction to critical discourse. The first generation of Saudi writers were based in Hijaz where they were educated at the private schools established in some measure as a reaction to the Ottoman reform of education policy in its Arab territories. Their sense of nationhood was influenced, if not shaped, by the defining political and social developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; namely, the rise of

Arab nationalism and Hijaz's status as an independent state under King Ḥusayn's rule from 1916 to 1924.

Even for some time after the Saudi conquest the sense of Hijaz as a nation continued to exercise a strong pull on its inhabitants. In this respect, the influence of the Hashemite era newspapers, and perhaps even more importantly, the role of the Arab newspapers and journals that came from outside Hijaz should not be underestimated in the fostering of a nationalist sentiment among Hijazi men of letters.

As the state pursued efforts to forge a national Saudi identity, suppressing or erasing difference through the introduction of national dress, the enforcement of state-sponsored Wahhabi orthopraxy and other measures, it seems reasonable to assume that there was less and less space for Hijazis to imagine a Hijazi nation or to talk in terms of a specifically Hijazi literary tradition, even if the distinction between Hijaz and Najd and the cultural stereotypes that adhere to them are still very much alive in the present day.

Al-Ghadhdhāmī's struggle to trace a lineage between the pioneering developments of 1920s/1930s Hijaz and the subsequent period is telling in a number of respects. Without wishing to labour a point that has been well established over the course of the preceding chapters, Hijaz was unique from the rest of the Kingdom and remained so for a long time. Al-Ghadhdhāmī's insistence on including these developments within a Saudi national narrative is part of a wider trend in Saudi historiography, according to which Ibn Sa'ūd is identified simultaneously as founder of the nation and founder of its cultural and social renaissance.

The victory narrative of monarchical historiography where the history of the Āl Sa'ūd is made synonymous with the history of Saudi Arabia parallels literary histories, since the confusing of monarchical history with the history of the nation is not unlike the confusing of 'the history of the novel's institution with the institution's history of the novel'. Both are reductionist, victory narratives that seem to confirm

the famous dictum that history – or at least that of the ‘official’ variety – is written by the victors.

The nature of the emergence of the novel in Saudi Arabia challenges assumptions about the link between novel and nation based on their dialectical relationship. Collectively, the texts surveyed in Chapters Three and Four are deeply ambivalent to the nation-state, making it – at the very least – difficult to meaningfully read them as ‘Saudi novels’. From al-Anṣārī’s anonymous ‘East’ or ‘Arab Islamic East’, to the urban Hijaz of al-Jawharī, and the urban/rural dichotomy of al-Subā’ī, there is nowhere anything that might be described as constitutive of a Saudi national imaginary or consciousness, which – in any case – simply could not have existed at that time.

This calls into question the appropriateness of locating these works within a putative early Saudi literary tradition. Indeed, several factors, not least Hijaz’s distinct cultural identity, which resisted absorption within the homogenising thrust of Saudi state practice for some time after unification, and the absence of a modernist literary movement in the Kingdom’s other provinces, make this designation inadequate, if not misleading.

Moreover, while the religious reformism of al-Jawharī, Maghribī and al-Subā’ī might resonate with the Wahhabi movement that underpinned Ibn Sa‘ūd’s temporal legitimacy, various aspects of these novels were shown to fundamentally conflict with the Wahhabi-Najdi narrative. For example, al-Subā’ī’s championing of girls’ education through his bold and redoubtable protagonist more than puts him at odds with the Wahhabi religious scholars who fiercely opposed the opening of girls’ schools in the kingdom. The Salafi, and even Sufi, influences evident in these novels reflect the diversity of religious practice in Hijaz, constitutive of a uniquely Hijazi identity.

Of the novels surveyed in Chapters Three and Four, *Thaman al-taḍhīya*, ‘the first Saudi novel’, is the only one to have achieved unequivocal canonical status.

Although the novel is set during WWII, it was written in 1959, by which time the Saudi state and its institutions had gained substantial presence throughout the kingdom and in all areas of life. *Thaman al-tadhīya* is primarily a novel about Hijaz and the changes that began to impact on life in the province by the late 1930s/early 1940s. Still, it is difficult to separate the novel from an overarching national narrative since these changes were part and parcel of the Saudi state building enterprise, particularly the student missions to Egypt. The anxieties expressed in *Thaman al-tadhīya* over the nation's future, and its realistic representation of Hijaz, make it an ideal embodiment of that entry into the modern world and moment of national realisation that the canonical realist novel came to represent for Arab intellectuals.

Meanwhile, the aloofness of the Saudi national community from early literary narratives has proven difficult for nationalist histories of the novel to account for. The privileging of the realist novel or what is usually described as 'the artistic novel' stems from a deeply embedded ideological notion that the novel should realistically portray the writer's national social reality, itself closely tied to Haykal's 'national literature' concept.

Hence, a recurrent criticism made of Khāshqijī's novels, and Saudi women's novels in general, has been that their themes and settings are too far removed or disconnected from Saudi reality. The ambiguous status of the early Saudi women's novel is revealing of critics' inability to account for its liminality. As wealthy, foreign-educated women, Khāshqijī's and al-Rashīd's cosmopolitan lifestyles did indeed remove them from the day-to-day life and concerns of the nation. Not only this, in the absence of a domestic market, their novels were written for and consumed by a transnational readership. But more profoundly, the novels of Khāshqijī and al-Rashīd and their reception point to the ways in which the genderedness of the nation shapes both novel and its institution.

Even though, formally and thematically – with the exception of *Thaman al-tadhīya* – none of the novels featured in this thesis meet the criteria of the artistic novel, *al-Taw'amān* is widely cited as the first Saudi novel, with some critics making a

distinction between it and the significantly later work, *Thaman al-tadhīya*, heralded as ‘the first artistic Saudi novel’. This situation is largely the product of two interrelated factors that have impinged on canon formation.

The first relates closely to do the victory narrative of monarchical historiography or the overarching narrative of official/hegemonic historiography in the Kingdom that identifies the Saudi conquest of Hijaz as the inaugural moment of its modern cultural renaissance, attributing all significant developments in the country’s social and cultural spheres to the heroicised figure of Ibn Sa‘ūd. Secondly, there has also been the need of critics and historians to retrospectively institutionalise and, in doing so, legitimise the novel. This has had the added advantage, at least from the point of view of reductionist, nationalist histories, of subsuming early developments in Hijaz within a greater narrative of Saudi endeavour and, thus, mitigating the disparity that existed between Najd and Hijaz.

Even so, the equivocal status of *al-Taw‘amān* and a general sense of dissatisfaction among scholars and critics in their encounter with the early ‘Saudi’ novel supports Omri’s contention that the novel is not necessarily always the most appropriate expression of the national community. The ambivalence of the nation space in the early novels notwithstanding, the idea of the novel as an expression of the national community is deeply problematic in the Saudi case. Everything that can be said of the Arabic novel in general – its limited readership and its absence from school curricula, for example – is even more true of the Saudi novel, whose institution within the literary establishment and field of cultural production has been far less successful. It will be recalled that even as late as 1989, Dīb estimates the total number of Saudi novels produced at around just one hundred.

The denigration of narratives that do not meet the criteria of the artistic novel also points to the problematic of the construction of the novel in Arabic. Teleological histories that over-valorise the realist novel simply cannot account for the plurality and hybridity of the novel form. It is necessary, therefore, to draw attention to the interactions between foreign form and local traditions, Omri’s example of the fault

line between foreign and local forms is the *maqāma*. The analysis of the early Hijazi/Saudi novel revealed the intertextual presence of various genres of the classical Arabic tradition. Khāshuqjī's drawing on the *ghazal*, for instance, supports an approach to the Arabic novel in terms of 'the ratio of the poetic to the narrative'. Indeed, the prominence of poetry, often addressed to (or in celebration of) 'the nation', and the near absence of prose fiction in the early Hijazi literary anthologies suggest poetry as the more effective expression of the community.

The ambivalence of the early Hijazi/Saudi novel towards the nation-state is further complicated by the tension between state-nationalism and regionalism. In al-Rashīd's *Ghadan sayakūn al-khamīs* and Damanhurī's *Thaman al-tadhīya* the self/other binary of identity is not necessarily formulated according to the East/West paradigm. Instead, the presence of an (Egyptian) Arab other complicates the picture. In *Thaman al-tadhīya*, Egypt functions as the self's defining 'other', while in *Ghadan*, Aḥmad's comparison between Western and Arab women on the one hand, and between Nawāl and his sisters on the other, suggest an even more complex picture. This tension is manifest not only in literary narratives and poetry but also finds expression in critical discourse, where different, and sometimes conflicting, concepts of nation and identity attach to the terms, 'nation' (*al-waṭan*) and its synonym, 'the homeland' (*al-umma*).

According to the logic of the artistic novel concept, there is, in fact, an inherent contradiction between the idea of 'the Arabic novel' and discrete, local traditions, such as 'the Egyptian novel'. If novels are excluded or downgraded because of a perceived lack of felicity to the author's national social reality, how, with the borders between national traditions of the novel being so sharply defined by critics, is it possible to simultaneously postulate a novelistic tradition that transcends the nation-state? The ambivalence between categories opens up what Homi Bhabha describes as a 'third space'. The novel's ambivalence towards the nation and its plethora of articulations, arising from the interactions between local and foreign form, points to its performative hybridity as the literary genre that is 'plasticity itself'.

If by highlighting the liminal spaces of novelistic production this thesis has revealed new possibilities or ways for thinking about the Arabic novel and identity, it has also offered a fresh take on the novel, building on recent efforts in the field of Arabic literature studies to liberate the genre from the teleological developmentalist insistence on the canonical realist novel, as it has sought to resituate texts long consigned to the marginalia of literary history as proto-novels or mere literary curiosities.

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