# Beyond the Arab Disease

## New perspectives in politics and culture

Riad Nourallah

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*Beyond the Arab Disease* offers a critique of policies and diplomacies pursued by Arab and Western governments and suggests alternatives while documenting a range of political and cultural roles played by the modern Arab world.

The book deals with the general malaise impacting on inter-Arab relations and relations between Arabs and the rest of the world, with these reaching a catastrophic climax in the September 11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent War on Terrorism and the invasion of Iraq. It documents this malaise in its various manifestations and goes on to argue that the Arab world, in its desperate need for reform and all-round empowerment, must address such momentous issues as inter-Arab relations and unity, relations with the United States, and peace with Israel. The book also offers new perspectives on a range of topics covering:

- Arab and Muslim diplomacy
- Literature
- Culture
- The interaction of the Arab world with Western models and paradigms.

At a time when the world's attention is focused as never before on the Arab region, with the interest in Arab and Islamic Studies reaching unprecedented levels worldwide, this trenchant but evenhanded study opens vistas for a better understanding of the Arab world's successes and failures in its problematic relations with the West and modernity.

*Beyond the Arab Disease* offers bold insights which can be of benefit to general readers as well as policy makers and academics with special interest in Middle Eastern politics and culture.

**Riad Nourallah** is a Senior Lecturer at the Diplomatic Academy of London, University of Westminster. He has also taught at universities in Beirut, Cambridge, Salford, Al Ain, and Durham. His annotated edition of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's *The Future of Islam* was published by RoutledgeCurzon in 2002.

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**To Isaaf and Atef**

# Contents

# Preface

With an overarching theme and an *entelecheia* of its own, however unresolved in life and on paper, this book derives from a sustained engagement with issues arising from the range of roles which the Arab world has been playing, to various audiences and with various degrees of success and failure, on the modern/postmodern stage.

The diversity of these roles, not only reflecting the diversity of Arab culture, but also the diversity of its actors and audiences, is reflected in the variety of topics and points of emphasis in the book. Such variety also mirrors the expanding scope as well as interconnectedness (even interdependence) of academic disciplines and discourses, let alone nations and institutions, in today's world. Nonetheless, the predominance of political, diplomatic, and broadly cultural themes at the expense of other topics reflects the training and interests of the author rather than the many-sided Arab experience, despite the fact that, as in other areas, here too Arab performance in modern times has been far less than satisfactory, though not always lacking in perseverance or conviction. Some of its failures, however, have been no less than monumental.

Islam, often closely and singularly identified with Arabs, also finds its place here, somewhat conspicuously under one or two chapter headings, this notwithstanding the fact that the Arab population within the global community of Muslims comprises only a small percentage. Additionally, Arab civilization in classical times habitually included non-Muslim (and non-Arab) communities, who greatly enriched that civilization, while benefiting from the tolerance and inclusiveness which distinguished it in its heyday, with these communities becoming in effect an intrinsic and enriching part of that civilization's mosaic/arabesque. Islam's special relationship and common ancestry with Christianity and Judaism also receives attention, reflecting the rising (though not always salubrious) role of religion in the latter phases of the Cold War and since, while highlighting further the heterogeneous nature of Arab culture and society, which needs to invest in rather than fear that diversity. Within this more recent span of time, and despite the Arabs' numerical minority, the centrality of Arab issues and woes to such events as the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the United States and elsewhere in

addition to the conflicts in Iraq and Palestine has become obvious, though not always receiving the selfless, remedial and comprehensive attention they require.

An awareness of the varying fortunes of Arab civilization and its inability in more modern times to fulfil the dreams of its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformers is another stimulus and a recurring theme in this book. Joined to this effort is a concern (most patent in the first chapter) to identify some of the Arab nation's assortment of maladies, though with no intention of willfully inflicting further hurt or humiliation. Already, the Arabs receive a daily dose of vitriol in the world media, which have habitually deemed them the easiest and safest target for such marketable indulgence, itself aided and abetted by the mindless acts and/or discourses of a few claimants to Arab identity. Interestingly, a recent case of Arab-bashing in Britain, while further illustrating the trend, has served to provide yet another proof, if one was needed, of the impotence of Arab officialdom with its well-heeled but often hamstrung diplomatic and other bodies. At the same time, the case has highlighted the growing confidence of non-governmental organizations and the Arab expatriate community in the West, who in this instance have helped to bring about a sort of apology from the writer at the centre of the rumpus, complemented by a vigorous disciplinary action on the part of one of his employers.

As ever, the incident has illustrated the tenacity of negative stereotyping, which, when sustained by major media outlets, often reflects or affects the thinking of the political elites and their domestic and foreign policy formulations. Fortunately, the aforementioned case in a Britain proud of its cultural diversity and traditional tolerance has dramatized the steady questioning of stereotype that 'mind-forged' manacle and amber in which the 'other' is trapped for all time. Such questioning of assumptions and of the sweeping generalizations which, so un-typically for the fair-minded or scientifically inclined, continue to infest many platforms and media outlets in both 'Western' and Arab capitals, is yet another connecting thread in the book.

Naturally, tensions between politicians and their public are not exclusive to the admittedly extreme Arab situation. Rather, the issue is regularly becoming a global headline, particularly with the growing invasiveness of political 'spin' and 'consent-manufacturing', these being countered by public cynicism and frustration on the part of the electorates, who, in liberal democracies, at least have the option of voting the offending party, with the attendant spin doctors, out of office at election time or reducing its majority, while enjoying the freedom of articulating their views in the press and hoisting their placards on the streets. The absence or tightening of such spaces and outlets in the modern Arab nation-state has been responsible for much of the damage done to the Arab nations and, to some extent, their interlocutors in the West.

The relationship between the 'Arab world' and the 'West', however non-monolithic these two parties are, and with the inevitable complexity of their

relationship, is a recurrent concern here. Interestingly, this relationship, even as this Preface is being written, is impacting on political destinies and human interactions, concerns and aspirations in both of these worlds, thus testifying to a long tradition of interwoven bonds and paradoxes in 'East–West' relations. All the same, it is obvious that there is a pressing need for genuine Arab renewal and empowerment, a requirement felt and promoted for a long time by many Arab intellectuals but ignored or forestalled by a coalition of native and 'foreign' monopolies. It is also clear that the envisioned regeneration cannot be effectively translated through unquestioning and wholesale adoption of imposed or imported models or by an unthinking servicing of hegemonic and exploitative agendas. Rather, with the benefit of diplomatic lore, rich with its accumulated wisdom and caveats, one cannot but conclude that true reform and restoration must come through a consensual, instead of an overwhelmingly coercive, effort. Nonetheless, the fact remains that honest brokering or sustained interactive mediation (rather than the half-hearted 'stop-and-start' version) by powerful third parties, if not, more widely, the entire international community and with the authority of international law, can be of crucial or decisive importance. In the interim, legislations limiting civil liberties and due process in some Western democracies and the campaign to justify and prosecute the invasion of Iraq, compromising countless (and uncounted) human lives as well as legality and credulity, will have to be perceived by those Arabs, victimized by somewhat similar but more enduring abuses by their own political and economic systems, as no more than mere aberrations (or benign lumps) in the body of Western modernity and not at all representative of its general state of health and integrity.

Without a doubt, many, particularly young, Arabs are instinctively drawn to the attractive slogans of 'freedom' and 'democracy' and promises of 'peace' and 'prosperity' touted by the forces and agents of 'interventionism' around them. More often than not, however, they are (or are urged to be) wary of neocolonial implications and duplicities perceived to attend the campaign, which has seemingly cohabited, in countries like Pakistan, Libya, and Iraq, with self-seeking rehabilitation of 'coup leaders', former 'rogues', and long-derided 'medieval clerics', in a drive they suspect of fragmenting whatever is left of collective Arab action. In any event, they also need to consider whether they can summon the courage, self-confidence, and imagination to benefit from the occasion, however equivocal, by starting their own orange or olive revolution, even if some of the cheerleaders from outside the region seem to be interested in the activity only to have their own baskets filled with oranges or olives.

Once again, the fascination of Arab youths with Western culture, so intertwined, through geography and history, with Arab culture, is beyond doubt. It has coexisted with the frenzied rage of some of them who blame the 'West' for the dysfunction and dispersal of the Arab system, seen at the same time as a creation of Western colonial powers and a prisoner of a

vicious dependency cycle. This system, several decades since the formal independence of its constituent states, is still mainly composed of squabbling oligarchies, which, in many cases, can provide no viable or sustained security or dignity to their peoples. What is tragically ironic is that a minority of these youths, in their own war against their regimes, and by extension the 'imperialist' overseers, hoist a set of dubious mottos and methodologies analogous at some points to those peddled by the same 'interventionist' and 'hegemonic' powers. Indeed, the ultimate irony is that both sides seem to be subverting the fundamentals of humanity and legality which neither can survive, let alone triumph, without.

Already, Niccolo Machiavelli had counselled his prince to presuppose a natural wickedness in all men, advising him to master the roles of the fox and the lion. Lord Palmerston had also famously concluded: 'We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual.' Hence, few people with enough knowledge of the world or 'human nature' (itself an elusive and many-sided notion) would expect politicians or foreign policy makers to stick indefinitely or too stringently to consistent, let alone 'ethical', policies. Nonetheless, there is a global yearning to see such decent policies enacted, and to which only the general population, rather than a privileged elite, can give credibility and endurance. In the Arab case, and while the advice of pundits is being sought (and funded) in the 'West' to understand what makes the Arabs tick or to win their hearts and minds, it may behove everyone to know that the Arabs are essentially no different from other peoples, not only in their proneness to illness and, conversely, their desire for recovery, but also in their appreciation of honesty, truthfulness, fairness, and humaneness.

It is undeniably vital that the Arabs maintain faith in the integrity of the 'West' and the practicality of dialogue and viability of international law and institutions, especially the much maligned and scandalously underfunded, though reform-needing, United Nations. This is imperative since the growing tide of disillusionment, frustration, and despair within the Arab world, coupled with the unsustainable and indefensible nature of a status quo denying people sufficient spaces for debate and credible prospects for partnership may drive ordinary people and intellectuals away from models of beneficent (and mutually-beneficial) solidarity with Western and world bodies into a radicalism or a parochialism that is not necessarily of a religious kind but one which, given the Arabs' present state of disintegration and weakness, can only further aggravate their plight and vulnerability, with negative consequences radiating beyond the Arab region.

'Often inquisitors create heretics' while 'Oppression makes the wise man mad', we are told in, respectively, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Robert Browning's *Luria*. Dismantling structures and policies of injustice and exclusion and replacing them with fairer and saner ones in an inclusive and participatory process is a priority. The world and the powers that be can no longer afford to ignore the root causes of alienation and conflict, opting

to bury the head rather than the hatchet in the sand. In all circumstances, the Arab world needs to contend with huge conceptual, social, ethical, pedagogic, political, and economic issues if it is to participate and assist in healing itself as well as an increasingly divided and unequal global community. For the Arabs to deny themselves or be denied the necessary space for such self-generation, reflection, and membership is unfair, if not also unworkable, given the great restlessness, undying pride, and the overriding desire for change among their youths. To resign themselves to an imagined or dictated 'fate' is certainly no recourse for them. Sir Peter Marshall has reminded us somewhat recently (in his compelling *Positive Diplomacy*) of Count Axel Oxenstierna's warning to his son who was to represent his country, Sweden, in the negotiations leading to the Peace of Westphalia: 'Dost thou not know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed?' There is definitely too much un-wisdom, injustice, disparity, and misery in the wider world to merit an unqualified celebration or endorsement of its leading (and often arrogant) political and economic institutions. Yet, as George Meredith tells us in *Modern Love*, the 'wrong is mixed' and 'no villain need be', since we are more often betrayed from within rather than from without. In Kahlil Gibran's equally searching and sobering words, 'the robbed is not blameless in being robbed' and 'the guilty is oftentimes the victim of the injured'. As a consequence, the Arabs, like other nations who feel victimized or wronged by the new world order/disorder, must educate themselves to take better advantage of the unprecedented opportunities which our irreversibly interrelated and inter-reliant world offers. 'Opportunity comes to the prepared', it is often said; and one main concern of this book is to help explore, however tentatively, options and possibilities, more often in mindscapes than in landscapes, with the liberation of minds, imaginations, and empathies being treated as prerequisite to the emancipation of lands and systems. Accordingly, Arabs and others need to hone their 'preparedness' and education, knowledge being an instrument of healing and empowerment, to join hands with the forces of dynamism, diversity, inclusiveness, innovation, choice, civility, compassion, and peace which this book examines and celebrates.

R.N.
Cambridge

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I also need to note that Chapters 2 and 5 of this book are based on papers I read at the first and second Annual Conferences of the UK Association of Muslim Social Scientists, held, respectively, at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Westminster. Chapter 6 is an almost exact reproduction of a 'presentation' (hence the final word) I gave at the First International Conference on Kahlil Gibran, Poet of the Culture of Peace, held at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, and co-sponsored by the UNESCO.

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# A note on transliterations

Apart from the use of ‘ for *‘ain* and the definite article *al-* when necessary, this book adopts a brazenly simplified method for the transliteration of Arabic words into English, avoiding the use of a complex, and to the non-specialist pedantic and abstruse, system of notation. Likewise, standard spellings for common words as well as customary transliterations of proper names are used whenever possible.

# 1 The Arab disease

## Bittersweet pills to swallow?

### Preamble and symptoms

Beset by unnatural events in his country and by doubt and anguish within his soul, Hamlet famously concludes, 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark'.[1] Surveying the state of the Arab world today, one is tempted to come to the conclusion that *all* is rotten there.

Not only does the Arab Human Development report, published in the summer of 2002 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and reinforced by another in the following year,[2] depict a cheerless landscape of some of the lowest (at times *the* lowest) rates of national growth, public health, human development, literacy, women's empowerment, and civil liberties in the developing world during the mid and late 1990s, it also seems to imply, by the sheer number of hurdles in the way and the need for changed mindsets and collaborative efforts, that its brave recommendations for a recovery are not likely to be implemented in the near future.

While Arabs bask in the historical fact that an Arab city like twelfth-century Cordoba contained seventy libraries and the latest statements on medicine, public health, architecture, navigation, and fashion to the awe and envy of medieval Europe, with the caliph of Baghdad three centuries earlier paying translators the weight of a book in gold, and with translations of the Arabic works of such philosophers, physicians, mathematicians, scientists, and cartographers as Ibn Rushd (Averroes), al-Razi (Rhazes), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Zahrawi (Albucasis), Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen) al-Khwarizmi, and al-Idrisi, helping to 'stimulate Europe intellectually in the fields of science and philosophy'[3] and bring about the European Renaissance, the UNDP report cites pathetic figures on translations in the Arab world (one-fifth of the number produced by Greece alone) as well as on research funding, technological development, and use of IT. Higher education performances are way down below those in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Oceania. The combined GDP, despite irregularities caused by individual GDPs in the petroleum-exporting countries, stands less than that of a single medium-sized European country like Spain. Unemployment (the highest in the developing world) and a general paucity

of opportunities have been driving tens of thousands of Arab youths to seek legal and illegal immigration, paying with their families' life savings (and, not so infrequently, their own lives) to reach the touted shores of promise, even as the fugitive wealth of rich Arabs amounts to some US$14,000 billion on these shores.[4] At another level, and in contrast to such portrayals as those of Edward Gibbon's lean and chivalrous Arab warrior, 'his breast fortified with the austere virtues of courage, patience, and sobriety, the love of independence prompt[ing] him to exercise the habits of self-command', or Robert Browning's noble and heroic Moor, Luria,[5] modern Arab armies have become synonymous with aspiring dictators, staggering defeats, abandoned tanks, grovelling POWs, and empty army boots forlornly swallowing desert sand.

Midway into the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Arab world, to draw once more on Hamlet's disconsolate phraseology, seems like 'an unweeded garden, That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely'.[6] A peculiar assortment of largely dynastic and despotic regimes profess a broadly similar verbal commitment to pan-Arab causes and aspirations, while in reality pursuing, both within and beyond their borders, agendas which are geared to serving narrow and disparate interests. These, seemingly poles apart, converge neatly in the overriding desire to insure, through repression, exclusion, bribery, and/or foreign alliance and tutelage, the longest possible lease of life for the regime or dynasty at hand. The gulf between the rulers and the ruled seems wider and deeper than at any other measurable point in modern history; and despite the pervasive use by the region's governments of their respective (and, in many ways, formidable) media machines to polish up and aggrandize the image of the local leadership, discontent, distrust, and desperation on the Arab 'street' are quite palpable, though often muted and hushed. Almost without exception, the life style of members of every ruling family and regime is, to say the least, at odds, in its extravagance and abuse of power and influence, with the lives of the overwhelming majority of their people, with no official or credible legal system anywhere for audit and accountability – parliaments, when they exist, being, with few exceptions, mere talking shops peddling the rhetoric of the ruler of the day.

In countries like Sudan (a potential 'breadbasket' for the Arab world) and Algeria (a potential industrial base), unattended disgruntlement and long-festering inequalities boiled over into bloody civil strife, with the recent humanitarian outrage in Darfur eliciting global condemnation before a US-brokered peace in the south secured a needed hiatus in an inexorable slide to partition. In Iraq, a de facto division of the country existed for some twelve years with Arab indifference, powerlessness, or gloating before a military intervention and 'regime change' by a US-led coalition brought much relief to some and considerable consternation and misery to others, with a possible scenario of division and conflict in that country and the region looming *ad infinitum*. Old, recent, and ongoing inter-Arab conflicts and disputes

(e.g. Iraq–Kuwait, Syria–Iraq, Algeria–Morocco, Egypt–Sudan, Yemen–Saudi Arabia) have plagued the efforts of the League of Arab States to reach a reliable consensus on strategic issues or nullify the reality of deeply entrenched mutual suspicions behind the embraces and smiles of Arab leaders when they ever-so-fleetingly meet. The failure of a long-planned summit even to convene at Tunis in March 2004 furnished a relatively recent example and farce.[7] Imprudent policies have gone so far as to poison relations at popular levels between closely and organically interconnected Arab peoples, alienating the Kuwaitis from the Iraqis, the Egyptians from the Sudanese, the Moroccans from the Algerians, and, among others, the Lebanese from the Syrians. In February 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, architect of the rebirth, Phoenix-like, of his country from the pyre of a devastating civil conflict, was brutally assassinated in the heart of his reclaimed capital, depriving Lebanon and the Arab world of a refreshingly new, forward looking, internationally connected, confident, and inclusive model of political leadership and civil administration. The Taif Agreement, one of the rare successes of inter-Arab diplomacy and national rebuilding, which Hariri had helped negotiate and conclude in 1989, now lay under the combined weight of his bombed convoy and Security Council Resolution 1559, demanding withdrawals and disarmaments but overlooking and seemingly superseding the comprehensive and reformist thrust of the Taif articles. These had, in any case, been largely dodged and circumvented for some fifteen years as they clashed with clannish interests on the ground, recklessly paving the way to the threat of renewed discord and the return – in view of the combined Franco-American pressure – of the kind of 'foreign' dictation and intervention, as well as sharing of spoils, foisted on the region during the giddy days of Western colonialism.

More generally, ruling elites, whether expressing loyalty to a sovereign nation-state structure or a list of misty ideological aspirations, have marginalized, to the point of near-paralysis and insignificance, their local and wider constituencies, only to be themselves marginalized so crushingly in global debates, even when these debates concern their very countries and the destinies of their own peoples. Invariably they cut excessively deferential (and inconsequential) figures in the international forums, only to swank and swagger when back on their own outwardly tamed and trimmed turfs.

With both the Elizabethan and Arab world pictures being at one in their view of the state as a living body, people may wonder whether a disembodied 'Arab nation', like the ghost of Hamlet's father, is 'doomed for a certain term to walk the night'[8] or whether this grim 'roaming in the gloaming' is fated to last for perpetuity. Indeed, the most celebrated (and implacably insubordinate) Arab poet of the latter half of the twentieth century, Nizar Qabbani (1923–98), had already pronounced the patient dead or at least in terminal decline, however 'unofficially' – though poetry has, for well over a millennium, been designated as *the* official medium, register, and gauge of the Arab psyche. All the symptoms of rigor mortis (and disembodiment)

were there when Qabbani wrote in 1994:

> For fifty years,
> I have watched the state of the Arabs,
> As they thunder without rain,
> As they go into wars and never come out,
> As they chew the hide of rhetoric
> But never digest it…
> For fifty years,
> I have tried to draw a picture of the lands
> Metaphorically named, the lands of the Arabs,
> Using the blood of my veins for colour at times
> And at other times the hue of my rage,
> And when the drawing was over, I asked myself:
> 'If the death of the Arabs were to be announced one day,
> Where would they be buried?
> Who would shed tears for them?
> Since they have no daughters
> And no sons,
> No grief would be at hand,
> And no mourners!'
>
> I have tried, since I began to write poetry,
> To gauge the space between my Arab forebears and myself.
> I have seen armies, but there have been no armies;
> I have seen victories, but there have been no victories,
> I have followed all the wars on television:
> There have been fatalities [shown] on television,
> Wounded people on television,
> A victory from God heralded, on television…
>
> O my country! They have turned you into a serialized horror,
> Which we view in the evenings!
> So how can we ever *see* you if there was a power-cut?
> After fifty years
> Of trying to keep a record of what I have seen,
> I can say that I have seen nations who believe that men from the security services
> Are decreed by God, just like headache, or the flu
> Or leprosy, or scabies;
> I have seen Arabism on display in antique shops,
> But I have not seen the Arabs![9]

The modern 'Arab Awakening', which Cambridge graduate and Secretary General to the Arab delegation at the 1939 London Conference on the Palestine question, George Antonius (1891–1942) documented and celebrated

with a mix of passion and sobriety in 1938,[10] seems to have reverted to the comatose state which the Arabs had allowed themselves to experience for four centuries under Ottoman rule. The dream or fantasy of a free and united Arab nation envisaged by the leaders of the 'Great Arab Revolt' against the Turks ended in a rather rude form of awakening, with the Arabs jumping, they were to realize at the end of the First World War, from the frying pan into the fire – or, less severely, into an assortment of pots with varying degrees of hot fluids.

The betrayal of pledges given to the leaders of the Arab revolt by the likes of Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, and, at a lower but more flamboyant rung, T.E. Lawrence, in addition to the dispersal of the broader promises contained in the British 'Declaration to the Seven' and Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, widely celebrated at the time by Arab peoples as by other aspiring nations of the world, was personified by a yet unabashed colonialist 'Mandate' system endorsed and sanctioned by a then-nascent League of Nations – an institution envisioned by generations of philosophers, poets, and visionaries (including Kant in *Perpetual Peace* and Tennyson's narrator in *Locksley Hall*) but more practically driven by an idealistic, though far from naïve, American President. As that institution was to be snubbed by a US Senate, ever suspicious of dark European schemes and entrapments, the door was left ajar, not only to yet another deadly inter-European conflagration which was to erupt in the next twenty years – fuelled by a heinous coalition of Nazi and Fascist ideologies – but also to some of the old colonial powers of Europe, namely Britain, France, and Italy, to reconstruct the Near East and North Africa in forms and contours that suited their immediate and/or long-term 'interests', paying scant attention to the wills or preferences of the colonized peoples.

Be that as it may, and despite the 1917 'Balfour Declaration', which seemed to mortgage subsequent British policies to the alternately subtle and harsh (but ever untidy) task of implementing the Zionist project in Palestine, a mission in tandem with an earlier secret agreement to carve up the postwar 'Near East' between the British and the French, the Arabs, even as they progressively waged (in countries like Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, and South Yemen) and won the struggle for 'independence', continued to hold high hopes for progress and the restoration of old civilizational glories, including amicable (and much needed) ties with their erstwhile colonizers. After all, diplomatic, commercial, and cultural relations, even military alliances and cooperation, though rarely serenaded, had recurrently informed the history of Arab relations with the 'West', of which the Arab experience itself (in Spain and elsewhere) was, at various times, a significant, albeit often ignored or dismissed, part. This despite the fact that, over the centuries, shapers of public perceptions in both cultures had chosen to highlight conflict and confrontation in preference to a more complex and holistic account – a trend certainly entitled to receive Karl Popper's insightful disapproval of such exclusive, partial, and perilous readings of human history(-ries).[11]

It is such lopsided readings that have re-emerged to occupy centre stage and wind up large audiences since September 11, 2001. Significant of course is the fact that the young men who carried out the September atrocities all came from Arab countries, though directed by a renegade and shadowy organization sheltering in the dysfunctional state of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The irony was that the original flocks of the 'Afghan Arabs' had been fed, feathered, and feted by a US administration eager to humiliate its Cold War adversary and working for that objective both directly and through its allies and clients in the Persian/Arab Gulf and elsewhere. All the same, the September attacks were but another sign of that 'strange eruption'[12] in the Arab body politic, a 'system' that had been lurching from one failed experiment (e.g. pan-Arab unity under Jamal 'Abdul Nasser's Arab Socialism) to another (e.g. a measure of unity – or passivity – under Saudi petrodollars) to such cataclysms as Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the resultant convulsions and discords over it and over the spread of 'religious' extremism. Such trials and tribulations were to experience a new contortion in the crippling fear by Arab regimes of being placed on America's blacklist in the wake of the September terror attacks. The subsequent US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 certainly raised hopes and elicited jubilation among many within Iraq at the downfall of an exceptionally despotic and barbaric regime. However, with the unleashing of mass destruction and killing in that country and with feelings of humiliation, outrage, and uncertainty growing among the wider Arab public, whose rulers were now oscillating between more grovelling foreign policies and more repressive internal ones, a new crop of anxieties and disorders came to the fore. Outside the region, the fear among the international community, and in particular the Western powers involved in the new venture in the region, is that the assortment of Arab maladies, in their more violent and disruptive, rather than apathetic and paraplegic, forms, may progressively impact on the West with further negativity, perhaps creating a contagion or a focal point for popular vexations elsewhere whose reach might be wider than the Arab world and whose cost, in terms of eradication or cure, might be even dearer.

## Bittersweet pills?

Of course, there are people within and outside the Arab world who do not see in the ailing Arab condition a cause for alarm or an occasion for remedy, since this condition enables them to retain their advantage or hegemony. Indeed, they might dress up or extol some of these disorders, particularly the parochial self-regard and tacit renunciation of collective Arab action, as signs of a new-found pragmatism among the ruling elites, now waking up to the realities of a mono-polar world. Nonetheless, while acknowledging that self-interest, even Machiavellianism in its crudest of forms, had informed and dictated the policies of many Arab rulers in earlier eras, this essay deems itself to belong to (or reflect) a majority Arab opinion deeply dissatisfied

with the present state of affairs and united on the desperate need for a cure, however elusive or radical. It hence endeavours to explore a trilogy of options in this regard, without excluding other options and alternatives, and with the use of the word 'pill' in relation to the assumed 'disease' being obviously figurative. In this connection, other medical terms, such as 'surgery' or 'therapy' or 'rehabilitation', the latter two implying a long-term treatment at more than one level, may be equally adequate as metaphors.

### *Pill number one: an effective form of Arab unity*

In spite of the bleak symptoms and statistics presented above, the Arabs yet have a potential for survival as a recognizable and effective force within their region and on the world stage. With a landmass of over five million square miles, stretching from the Persian/Arab Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean and with a population of over 300 million, and assets like a common language, close proximity to Europe and to countries of importance in Asia and Africa, management of the Suez Canal, abundant petroleum (more than half of the identified world reserves) and other resources, the Arab world can still, ideally, summon up the power to arrest or reverse its decline and disintegration. During its post-colonial history, and in countries like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, and South Yemen, it managed, building on the work of earlier reformists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to break the mould of blind imitation of, and unquestioning subservience to, many a rigid tradition, experimenting, albeit not always successfully, with a variety of systems, legislations, and constitutions. Even from traditionally conservative quarters like al-Azhar, to choose one example, there came thinkers and academics of great boldness and musicians and singers of groundbreaking innovativeness. Despite a number of failings in areas like freedom of expression under Nasser, Egypt of the 1950s and the early 1960s saw daring schemes of agrarian reform, free mass education, secularization and industrialization, and an unprecedented flowering of new poetry, fiction, and drama, with the latter-day Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz being only one of its icons. Under Nasser, warts and all, one may add, the Arab world was in a resurgent and confident mood, perceiving its struggle for, and experimentation with, new forms and ideas as part of a global revolutionary effort, while safeguarding its own distinctiveness and integrity. By contrast, a mood of pessimism and aimlessness now dominates, fusing with a keen sense of injury, shame, and mortification.

For a general recovery, however, the Arab world needs a collective vision, supported by will and effort, in addition to the necessary educational, legal, civil, democratic, economic, scientific, and other institutions and instruments to see that recovery through. Sadly, other than the sentiments expressed from time to time in literary and other popular forms, pan-Arab and regional organizations like the League of Arab States, whose very foundation had legitimated the colonial division of the Arab world, and the Gulf Cooperation

Council, which, thanks to its financial clout, has been increasingly overshadowing and undermining the former, though more recently showing gaping cracks of its own, do not offer the practical mechanisms needed to effect such transformation. The near-paralysis of such organizations and their inability to mediate in or resolve inter-Arab crises, be they earth shattering, like the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, or moderate in intensity and reach like the Bahrain–Qatar dispute over the Hawar Islands, let alone intra-Arab conflicts like the 12-year-old Algerian situation, testifies to the inadequacy and incompetence, or at least severe limitations, of such official institutions. The inability or unwillingness of the oil-rich countries to invest their considerable funds in a credible or effective pan-Arab development plan, instead of having them invested in 'safe' banks and schemes outside the region, raises another cause of disagreement and adds to the general debility, disconnection, and resentment. Fascinating and motivational as they have been, neither the 'Asian Tigers' nor the European Union (EU) have elicited from the Arabs more than mute admiration and a pitiable inability to replicate any of the successes achieved by either of the two communities, with the democratic and other infrastructures which had helped bring about those successes (and overcome crises) receiving little attention.

There is a perception, partly self-induced, among many in the Arab world that the Arabs are *not allowed* to get their act together. The largely contrived maps drawn to confirm or perpetuate divisions to the tune of *divide et impere* are here to stay, it is believed, with the threat of map *re*-drawing ever suspended overhead like the fabulous sword of Democles. This perception was created in part by European policies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, helping to set Arabs against Turks with the purpose of fragmenting the Ottoman Empire. They were pursued through the colonial and 'mandate' periods, suppressing, not unlike policies of the chauvinistic Young Turks, nationalist Arab movements and condemning their leaders to a variety of punishments, segregation, and exile, even as the divisive cartography was in progress.

However, it may also be argued that the modern concept of Arab nationalism, and by extension Arab unity, is itself a Western construct. Though having historical (and perpetually evocative) precedence in the Arab Empire of the first Arabian caliphs and the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties, as well as in some autonomous but celebrated kingdoms and emirates in Syria, North Africa, and Spain (like that of tenth-century Aleppo under Saif al-Dawlah, patron of such luminaries as al-Mutanabbi and al-Farabi), it was European 'visionaries' and empire builders like Napoleon Bonaparte who, in pursuit of their own assorted objectives, planted the seeds of Egyptian and Arab nationalism. Ironically, those Europeans themselves were products of a relentless nationalist fervour that had been sweeping (and splintering) 'Christian' Europe since the rise of the Renaissance, the peace of Westphalia, and the steady secularization and industrialization of the continent. Even Muhammad (Mehmet) 'Ali, the wily Albanian viceroy of Egypt between 1805–48, was himself an outgrowth of that movement, though he was to

feel the searing wrath of Europe, and Britain in particular, as he attempted to build up his modern Arab-centred empire. At another level, a book by the British diplomat, traveller, and poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, namely *The Future of Islam*, in which the idea of an Arab caliphate was suggested as early as 1881–2, was to leave, like many other European publications, whose translations into Arabic had been initiated under Muhammad 'Ali's own directive, an indelible mark on the proponents of Arab 'liberation and unity' at the turn of the twentieth century.[13]

That mark was to grow, under ideologues and propagandists like Farah Antun (1874–1922), Sati' al-Husri (1880–1968), and Qustantin Zuraiq (1909–2000), into a major landmark and a defining thrust of many Arab ideological, political, educational, and literary activities in the early and mid decades of the twentieth century, reaching its most illustrious (and explosive) political embodiment in the charismatic figure and inadvertently calamitous politics of Jamal 'Abdul Nasser (1918–70). When that future President of the Republic of Egypt (1956–70) and the United Arab Republic (1958–61) was a 1-year-old toddler in Alexandria, Prince Faisal, heading the Arab delegation to the Versailles conference, was declaring in a memorandum of January 1919:

> The aim of the Arab nationalist movements is to unite the Arabs eventually into one nation. We believe that our ideal of Arab unity in Asia is justified beyond need of argument. If argument is required, we would point to the general principles accepted by the Allies when the United Sates joined them, to our splendid past, to the tenacity with which our race has for six hundred [*sic*] years resisted Turkish attempts to absorb us, and in a lesser degree to what we tried our best to do in this war as one of the Allies.[14]

However 'limited' that vision may have been at the time, pan-Arabism was to develop into a religion or an apostasy, depending on where individuals and regimes, with their loyalties and self-interests, stood. Throughout, some Arab politicians were to argue that it was futile to seek or maintain Arab unity without Western blessing. Indeed, Prince Faisal himself, aided in his drafting by T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell as well as Stephen Bonsal, an aide to the American delegation, had made it clear at Versailles that 'foreign technical advice and help' would be a 'most valuable factor in our national growth', though adding one cautionary note: 'We are willing to pay for this help in cash, but we cannot sacrifice for it any part of the freedom we have just won for ourselves by force of arms.'[15]

Faisal himself was to leave Versailles an embittered man, telling Bonsal and Lawrence in March 1919: 'Now it seems that I shall have to return to my people empty-handed, and I am at a loss to explain why';[16] but it was largely inter-Arab rivalries, fed by fanatically held suspicions and petty anxieties, the occasional foreign nudge or whack notwithstanding, which were responsible for the failure of most attempts at political unity or effective solidarity, with a distrustful United States and an apprehensive Saudi

monarchy using conservative elements and activist fundamentalist groups to undermine the secularist and 'progressive' discourse of the movement in the 1950s and 1960s. After the botched Egyptian–Syrian union of 1958–61, blueprints for unity or federation between Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Sudan (1971) or the Maghreb (since 1989) have been further instances of ill-fated or patchy ventures, the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, reasserted by force in 1994, having been, together with the formation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), an exception in terms of 'success'.

With reams of paper resolutions by the Arab League on educational, scientific, economic, industrial, and other forms of cooperation and support between member states being tidily filed but casually flouted, and in view of the particular mindset of the present political leadership in various parts of the Arab world, it was no wonder that notions (and motions) on a pan-Arab collective security were routinely frustrated by practices and preferences on the ground. Thus, to take one example, the 'Damascus Declaration' of March 1991 between the Arab Gulf states and Egypt and Syria, designed to formulate an indigenous Arab security strategy in that vital region, especially since Egypt and Syria had recently and boldly participated with some distinction in the coalition which had driven Saddam's troops out of Kuwait, petered out to be replaced by a series of military agreements between the Arab Gulf monarchies and the United States, under which earlier accords (as those between the United States and Bahrain and Oman) were solidified, and new ones saw tens of thousands of US and British troops and military personnel stationed, and provided with extraordinary facilities, in the region. All the while, these monarchies continued to shell out billions of dollars to cover the expenses of the war while coughing up other billions on costly arms systems from abroad, thus further aggravating, along with their Arab brethren elsewhere, the present culture of dependency and intellectual laziness, whilst progressively compromising the chances of unified Arab action and development. The scene might have reminded readers of *The Arabian Nights* of an episode on the fifth Sindbad voyage, during which the enterprising Sindbad acquires a fortune by throwing pebbles at monkeys, who retaliate by throwing back valuable coconuts.

The rallying of forces at the Arab League summit held in Beirut in March 2002 around Crown Prince 'Abdullah's peace initiative, though presenting to the outside world a front of solidarity and common resolve, belonged to the tradition of momentarily patching up differences to ease the woes of a dominant partner or paymaster, here the Prince's dynastic and succession worries. In addition, there was the wider necessity, felt by almost all Arab regimes, for placating American rage in the wake of the September attacks. Almost a year later, the League's meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh on the eve of the invasion of Iraq was notable, first, for the dramatic slinging match between the Saudi Crown Prince and Colonel Qaddafi, who, exasperated by Arab disunity and indifference to the woes of his own regime, had by now shifted his prime attention from pan-Arabism to pan-Africanism, and, second,

for the astute, but not adopted, proposal by the UAE's Sheikh Zayed for the League to issue a plea to a self-deluding Saddam to step down in order to spare his country and people the ravages of conflict. The final communiqué rhetorically rejecting the principles of war and regime change paled in comparison. As the Anglo-American invasion progressed, the palpable helplessness of the Arab regimes to influence events or coordinate policies drove further wedges of mistrust and contempt between these regimes and their peoples. Reigning supreme in the minds and calculations of Arab leaders, now each seeking his own salvation and that of his heir or clan, was the exemplum of Jordan and Yemen, whose reservations against foreign military intervention and declared preference for a negotiated inter-Arab solution to Saddam's occupation of Kuwait in 1990–1 had brought them much retribution and isolation until they clawed (or crawled) their way back to American and Gulf Arab good books and coffers. Later, and in addition to the much publicized troubles surrounding the convening of the Arab Summit in Tunis, the indifference to a momentous shift in US policy regarding the occupied Arab territories, to which EU, rather than Arab, foreign ministers responded with vigour and unanimity, only reconfirmed the state of ineptitude synonymous with the official pan-Arab system. In fact, the perception by many Arab rulers of a pan-Arab union, federation, or association (be it a watered-down version of the EU ever respectful of Arab diversity, specificities and sub-cultures) as the ultimate horror or absurdity (a feeling certainly not shared by Arab public opinion) and the culture of one-upmanship and pride in foreign protection have continued unabated, reminding one of Alexander Pope's couplet 'Epigram Engraved on the Collar of a Dog Which I Gave to His Royal Highness': 'I am his Highness' dog at Kew;/ Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?'[17]

In conclusion, this particular (and vital) pill, though shuffling in Arab palates (and the Arab rulers' nightmares) and dancing many a jig on Arab tongues for at least three generations, has no chance of being swallowed wholly or wholesomely in the foreseeable future. The taste of wider horizons and grander responsibilities (and a power multiplied twenty two times) it can impart will remain untried. Almost like the bickering princes in the much reduced Moorish provinces of fourteenth-century Spain, the Arab leaders in the fifth year of the twenty-first century, not too long ago cringing before the TV images of a former Arab tyrant/president in ignoble captivity, seem to perceive of the feared foreign inquisitor and conquistador a far less unwelcome consultant than a home-grown practitioner.

### *Pill number two: living with US hegemony or partnership*

Perhaps none can fill the role of that inquisitor *and* consultant, in addition to other roles, at this juncture of world and Arab history, more forcefully than the United States. The pill which the United States carries in its multipurpose

case and has proffered to its patients and partners, clients and dependents in the region has been circulating in Arab mouths for more than half a century now, its various flavours and elements subtly seeping into the Arab system, producing all kinds of calculated and unforeseen reactions. Nonetheless, until a decision by the Arab 'street' – however deemed somnambulant by some and nonexistent by others – to swallow and live with this medicine, no final word can be said about the efficacy of this treatment and the chances of its wider circulation and effectiveness in the pan-Arab body.

Already, during the latter decades of the twentieth century, the United States had served as the medical centre par excellence for the Arab world and the Mecca of Arab students and professionals, supplanting for many those of Paris and London, let alone Cairo and Beirut. Indeed, the American system of education and methods of testing or assessing candidates' abilities were always deemed to be fairer or less tortuous, across a whole range of subjects, than their European counterparts. Even at home, Arabs for much of that period were being visited in their living rooms or local cinemas and won over by Hollywood (its virulent anti-Arab stereotyping notwithstanding), as well as by American TV serials, cartoons, country music, and fast food. These went hand in hand with the alluring American slogans of freedom, democracy, and open debate, besides affable national traits identified with the American people like casualness, candour, inventiveness, and, of course, endless optimism. Even the proverbial (or assumed) American naïveté about the outside world was deemed a sign of innocence, disarmingly charming, as was the capacity for colossal violence 'on the side of good' reassuring to otherwise jittery allies and clients. To intellectuals and readers of American literature, the likes of Captain Ahab, Billy Budd, Hester Prynne, and Willy Loman, among others, were icons of considerable appeal and solemnity. Steve McQueen's dash for freedom was, for Arab audiences in the Beirut, Cairo, or Baghdad of the 1960s, also a form of 'great escape' as was Neil Armstrong's lunar step a 'giant leap' for them too – at least in imagination and empathy. An earlier generation had been equally moved, animated, and dazzled by the likes of Douglas Fairbanks, Errol Flynn, James Stewart, Shirley Temple, Claudette Colbert, Ronald Colman, Rita Hayworth, and the Marx Brothers, as they had been touched and uplifted by the daring exploits of real-life adventurers and record breakers like Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, and Jesse Owens.

Regardless of American perceptions of the Arab peoples outside the romantic or idealized portraits of Transcendentalists and Romantics like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bayard Taylor, the Arabs themselves approached America with a mixture of ingenuousness and expectation, deference and camaraderie, as the spontaneous 'lecture' by the exotic and stately King 'Abdul 'Aziz to President Franklin Roosevelt after the Yalta summit shows. Harry Hopkins, the President's formidable aide and earlier emissary to the king, already bound to the United States by an oil agreement since 1933, was to note that the President was 'overtly impressed' by what 'Abdul 'Aziz had said, with Roosevelt later remarking at a news conference and in his Address

to the Congress on 1 March 1945 that he had learnt more from Ibn Saud ['Abdul 'Aziz] about Palestine in five minutes than he had learnt 'in a lifetime' or 'could have learned in exchange of two or three dozen letters' – a mood he was to officially confirm, one week before his death, in a letter he sent to the king promising that he would take no action detrimental to Arab interests in Palestine.[18]

One crucial asset the Americans had in Arab eyes was their lack of colonial baggage, at least in relation to the Arab region. It is significant for instance that the Egyptian Free Officers of 1952 who staged their military coup against the rule of King Faruq (Farouk) first turned, almost like a beleaguered and debt-ridden Khedive Isma'il in quest of American advisers and officers more than a century earlier, to the United States as a source of inspiration, legitimization, and support.[19] Faruq himself, who was to feel let down by the Americans at the time, had, eight years earlier,[20] sought the help of the American Administration in counteracting the taunts and diktats of the British High Commissioner Sir Miles Lampson – then the latest reincarnation of the overbearing Lord Cromer, who, as British Agent and Consul General, had ruled Egypt, for Britain's (and only incidentally Egypt's) benefit, with sullen efficiency from 1883 to 1907. That very model of a modern Consul General had, nonetheless, been forced to resign his post in the aftermath of the Denshawai outrage, in which four Egyptian peasants were hanged and others were sentenced to floggings and hard labour on account of the death, by suspected sunstroke, though after a fracas with local peasants, of a British officer who was on a pigeon-shooting excursion with his comrades. The case, one needs to note, had been taken up on the pages of the Fourth Estate by writers like W.S. Blunt and George Bernard Shaw creating a universal revulsion similar to that which Zola's campaign against the perverse anti-Semitic architects of Colonel Dreyfus' tragic ordeal had generated nine years earlier.

Back in 1919 (and interestingly enough for the present-day Iraq situation), Faisal, betrayed by 'old Europe', had made two anguished appeals for help to Colonel Edward M. House of the American delegation to the Versailles conference. In the first petition he had spoken about affinities with American positions and ideals in the prosecution of the war; in the second, he pleaded:

> I have come to ask you again what chance is there of America taking a mandate over our country and our people? In this way the danger of the present friction between England and France that may result in war would be avoided and my people would feel assured of ultimate independence.[21]

Colonel House, as noted by Bonsal, 'could not make any definite promise': 'The President was interested and would use his good offices toward a favorable solution, but the Arab lands were far from the American sphere

and acceptance of responsibility in Asia would be quite a departure from the American tradition.'[22]

However, both America's priorities and its image in Arab eyes were soon to undergo a sea change, with the concomitant gales and maelstroms. A perceived intrusive involvement in oil politics (sometimes against long-entrenched British and French interests in the region) and a seemingly unconditional support for Israel and unpopular Arab regimes helped to estrange the American ideal from erstwhile Arab sympathizers. Most notable of those at that phase of the story was our Nasser of Egypt, who led the 1952 coup against Faruq and looked to the United States for sympathy and friendship, even protection. However, his fiery rhetoric and diplomatic blunders were to coincide, apart from President Eisenhower's extraordinary, but understandable, opposition to the Suez campaign of 1956, with similar gaffes and misunderstandings by US officials, all in the context of the Cold War and America's anxieties about the spread of communism and its own backing of several traditionalist regimes in the region. This was an ill-fated and insidious brew, which went on to sully 'progressive' Arab views of America during much of the Cold War.

Despite the best efforts of Nasser's celebrated successor, Anwar Sadat, to bridge the emotional gap between the United States and the Arab world, the limited successes of US-mediated ententes in the region, particularly those pertaining to the core Palestinian issue, helped further nourish a growing perception by many Arabs of unmitigated American bias in favour of Israel and the compliant Arab regimes. That perception was to be further reinforced by the rise of Sunni religious militancy, borrowing some of its fuel from the fiery religio-political lexicon of post-1979 Shi'ite Iran, itself echoing some of the notes of a late-twentieth-century religio-political chorus, in which the brave invocations of such luminaries as Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, Archbishop Oscar Romero, and Pope John Paul II blended (however uncomfortably) with the dark promptings of cultist leaders like 'Reverend' Jim Jones, who, in November 1978, presided over the mass 'revolutionary' suicide-slaughter of more than 900 fellow-Americans in the jungle of Guyana. The Afghan struggle, having helped drive one final nail into the Soviet coffin, brought forth into the last two decades of the century the spectre of medieval 'holy warriors', who, in September of the first year of the twenty-first century were to turn in a most malevolent and ungrateful manner against the very images that had helped resurrect them.

The flame of narrow-minded 'jihad' ultimately met with that of small-soul 'crusade', aided and abetted by oil and other interests, to agitate a fire which gratified both the religious and secular advocates of the Last Battle, the latter group including both the intellectual prophets of the Clash of Civilizations and that sinister military-industrial coalition against whose 'disastrous rise' and 'unwarranted' 'economic, political, even spiritual' influence President Eisenhower had warned in his Farewell Address of 1961.[23] When that fire chose as a battleground, after the Afghan phase, the former seat of the 'Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, now usurped by a secular

tyrant wrapping himself up in a newfound 'Islamic' garb, it flared up with an unprecedented intensity, however briefly in the actual theatre of operations. Perhaps more importantly, it cast its dark clouds over other parts of the region while the rest of the world, having debated so heatedly the rights and wrongs of the anticipated campaign, watched the blaze and then the drifting smoke with a sense of alarm, not completely relieved by the swift end of its initial military chapter. That sense of foreboding was to be further validated by the escalating anarchy, slaughter, and cries of anguish on Iraqi streets, their echoes (and the deafening silence on the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) front) provoking more heated exchanges and intriguing inquiries at various levels in world capitals and in such forums as the United Nations and the world media.

There may well be people who will see the present American act in the Middle East as a symptom of a waning rather than growing mega-power, one that is trying to hypnotize the insecure local dynasties with inflated assumptions about its omnipotence in the world and their own need for its perpetual and exclusive guardianship even as it secretly harbours anxieties about present or emerging competitors like the EU, Japan, Russia, and China, who may be prime factors (and targets) in American calculations for dominating or safeguarding the resources of the region. All the same, for the United States to peddle (no one expects it to *donate*) successfully its yet impressive pharmaceutical products in the Arab world, who, without a doubt, have need for remedy, though, ideally, from a diversity of sources and with a crucial dose of self-help, in order to meet present and future challenges, the United States must, while carefully weighing up the chances of its long-term gains and losses (its ineffectual engagement in the Lebanon of 1958 and costly involvement in that same country in 1982–3 considered) contend boldly and intelligently with a pervasive Arab cynicism about its motives for such massive intervention and nation building in the region at this particular time and with the particular complexion (and connections) of the present game-masters in Washington.

In any case, the Arabs had heard Western champions promise to bring them liberation and freedom many a time before – Napoleon in 1798, Gladstone in 1882, McMahon in 1915, Woodrow Wilson in 1919, Anthony Eden in 1942, etc. etc. They may also argue, quoting President Calvin Coolidge's sobering remark in his 1925 speech to American newspaper editors in Washington, 'After all, the chief business of the American people is business', a pursuit with which, Coolidge asserted, Americans were 'profoundly concerned . . . producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world', these being the 'moving impulses' of 'the great majority of people'.[24] Not to be misunderstood, however, the President made it clear that 'America is a nation of idealists', and though 'we make no concealment of the fact that we want wealth', 'there are many other things that we want very much more', peace, honour, and charity being some of them.[25]

Motivated and tormented by this mix of idealism and expediency, the United States had anyway been complexly pursuing its mission and policies

in the region. These, as documented and noted before here and elsewhere ad nauseum, were not too infrequently carried out in alliance with undemocratic and despotic regimes (including, for a time, Saddam's own) who as a rule rarely felt compelled to go into the embarrassing business (to themselves and others) of consulting their peoples on matters of national importance.

Furthermore, regardless of the current confusion and doubts by the Arab street and intelligentsia about US bases (and hegemony) in the region, and the suspicion that the invasion and occupation of Iraq (with hints or bluffs about other possible campaigns in the locality) was an 'Israeli war by proxy', it may behove Arabs to remember that the current penchant in Washington, spiced by the Neo-Cons, partly emanates from only one, namely, 'interventionist', direction in US foreign policy. This is a trend, which, though now seemingly on the ascendant, having been confirmed by a clear Republican majority in the November 2004 Congressional and Senate elections, was, as a rule, regularly challenged by a vigorous 'isolationist' or non-interventionist tendency by both ordinary Americans and their representatives. The current policies themselves have been meeting some stiff and vociferous criticism from an articulate spectrum of American people and groups, including liberal writers and Hollywood celebrities, who, however, seem somewhat beleaguered by a national mood, fearful for traditional values and general security.

Nonetheless, America's apparent zeal, under the present Administration, to enforce a Pax Americana over the old possessions of the British and French Empires in the Middle East, with its own initial version of the imperial governor (a Bremer–Cromer–Kleber[26]), does not, at first sight, seem to augur well for a smooth acceptance of America's role (or medicine) by many Arabs. Such suspicions were not allayed by Negroponte's plans for a hulking Embassy in Baghdad, the appointment of acquiescent leaderships, and the same old discourse on 'rebels' and 'insurgents' along with the absence of a clearly articulated vision or long-term strategy save what Arab nationalists perceive as the further fragmentation or final subversion of pan-Arab power. There is already a great deal of resentment on the Arab street, with lingering misgivings among intellectuals, joy over the removal of Saddam's tyranny notwithstanding, about the current US Administration's motivation and the legality and selectivity of its action in Iraq. Analogies have been made to a series of cynical regime changes in the remote colonial and nearer past, with the dismissal of the Khedive 'Abbas Helmi and the appointment of his uncle Hussain Kamil to coincide with declaring Egypt a British Protectorate in December 1914 being one of the earlier instances of such arrangements. Another cause for concern was the resistance shown by the present Administration in its first term to the involvement of powers like the UN, the EU, and Russia, not to mention the token Arab League, who were continually discouraged from effective participation, if not bluntly denied effective entry, except for window dressing, rubber-stamping, or troop commitment. Such stratagems, combined with images of civilian casualties and

urban and cultural devastation in Iraq, besides the innate Arab dread of anarchy, which, in former times, had made some of their jurists condone injustice for fear of disorder, has created considerable cynicism as well as fear of further destabilization bound to inflict yet more debility on the Arabs, woefully in need of stability, invigoration, and development.

Of course, one hopes that American pressure can act as a catalyst for salubrious change. Already regimes from Arabia to Libya, caught in the grip or sweep of what might be described by International Relations (IR) savants as a version of the domino effect (Karate practitioners smashing layers of bricks might call it 'progressive collapse'), seem to be scurrying to give women long-denied platforms or dismantle, as in Qaddafi's Libya, platforms of a different kind, while promising a range of constitutional and other reforms. Such flurries, it needs to be said, were somewhat tempered by the sense of comfort, in Saudi circles, at the defeat of Senator Kerry's presidential campaign and the return of a more familiar Administration, which initially toned down some of its old rhetoric about spreading 'democracy' in the region before bouncing back with a strident pledge to proliferate 'freedom' in the region. Who, among the many millions of Arab youths famished for freedom, could resist such proliferation or not clasp the proffered hand? But would it be the hand of an Apollo or the sword of a Mars?

The governments are, as always, a different story. With Iraq being seen as a major test case, it is debatable whether the Arab regimes, when the good dividends of a post-Saddam American-sponsored regime have come to manifest themselves in the eventual establishment in that country of the promised democracy, accountability, rule of law, and economic prosperity, in addition to the vital but now seriously endangered ingredient of national unity, will have the will or desire to take the American assistance to the heights which the West Germans and the Japanese took it to after the Second World War. Of equal importance, it is also questionable whether the Americans themselves, under the present or a future Administration, will have the patience (or interest) to see these regimes or even their envisioned inheritors go through their better paces ever so slowly and reluctantly and with the least benefit to them. In the meantime, the present Administration, intermittently accused of possessing no 'exit strategy' with regard to Iraq and seeming unsure or cagey about what to do with a crescent of power from Iran to Lebanon emerging as a result of its very intervention, will have to reflect deeply on its moves in the coming era. It will not do its strategic interests much good to give the impression that it is talking down to, or over the heads of, Arabs, long struggling for 'freedom' and 'reform' (with a legislative council established in Muhammad al-Sadiq's Tunisia as early as 1861 and a model modern constitution written in 'Urabist Egypt in 1881) about its civilizing mission amongst them while seeming to pursue policies which may turn out or be perceived as injurious to their long-term interests or incommensurate with their dignity.

As a colossus straddling a battered (save for the Ministry of Oil building), impoverished and traumatized Baghdad, the United States nonetheless has a

unique opportunity to prove to the Iraqi, and, more generally, Arab, people that their memories of the 1245 Mongol sacking of the city, widely re-invoked during the war, though often ignoring or condoning the home-made Genghis in the presidential bunker, are not relevant to present events. The chaos and unacceptable loss of life (amounting to some hundred thousand dead according to *The Lancet* of 6 November 2004), with the attendant callousness of the air strikes, the shooting of civilians at checkpoints, and the tortures and humiliations at Abu Ghraib and other detention centres, matched on the other side by the insane (and escalating) brutality of the suicide bombings, hostage taking, runaway criminality, beheadings, and assassinations, have further dented the image of a humane and orderly liberation. The radicalization of young elements in the region and beyond as Iraq seems to them to have turned into an 'occupied Muslim land', a magnet and a recruitment centre for 'jihad', poses yet another challenge to American reasoning and resources, if not also to those of its allies.

Indeed, more than ever before, America will need to prove to itself that its idealism has enough true moral grit in it to fend off the temptation to act like an imperialist nation using Iraq's vast oil resources (more than 10 per cent of world reserves) and related contracts for the benefit of privileged elites, employing in the process policies of deception, suppression and exclusion, while continuing to justify and threaten more of the legally untenable and perilous practice of pre-emption. It will certainly behove the present US Administration to reflect on Woodrow Wilson's warning, in April 1917, about wars being waged in the interest of 'little groups of ambitious men who [are] accustomed to use their fellow men as pawns and tools', as well as on Isabella's wise counsel in *Measure for Measure*: 'O! it is excellent/ To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous/ To use it like a giant.'[27]

Before and during the 'Islamic' era, the Arabs, outside the Arabian interior, had lived and sometimes reasonably prospered (or had blissfully gone to sleep) as vassals or subjects of non-Arab empires like those of the Romans, the Byzantines, the Persians, the Ikhshidis, the Mamlukes, and the Ottomans. It may be argued that the four hundred years of Ottoman rule (almost equal in duration to the Roman occupation of Britain), followed by more than a hundred years of European colonialism, had left the Arabs, like the ancient Britons, with some recollections of their former independence and pride but little practical experience of self rule or self defence. The English historian Gildas records how the Britons, once fierce challengers of Roman domination, had by the early fifth century been long used to the drugging effect of Pax Romana that they appealed to the Romans, who had departed to defend Rome against the Barbarians, to return and protect them against the assorted terrors of the Scots, the Picts, the Irish, and the Saxons.[28] With the Ottomans gone for good, and the French and the British playing much reduced roles, might the Arabs, unable to unite effectively or stand up to the fragmenting forces from without and within, find it most prudent to appeal to New Rome for succour? Will they summon up the vision, the

willpower, and the shrewdness to go beyond the moment's pain and cynicism (and the abrasive sight on Baghdad streets of occupation troops, whose every young casualty is, after all, a tragedy incalculable at human and other levels) to seize the gaping window of opportunity provided by the tsunami of the American invasion? Will they, for a start, allow the outcome of the January elections, though they took place in a country without a proper census or coherent security and under foreign occupation, to chart a different course for Iraq and the region? To what extent will the success of that venture (so elementary and yet so contingent and certainly not unprecedented in an Arab country) be a new hopeful departure or a confirmation of lingering suspicions and dire predictions? Had not Japan and Germany graduated from the American occupation with untainted democratic constitutions and a culture of accountability, a culture which, in the Arab case, a coalition of self-appointed secular and religious guardians had long subverted away from public service ('A leader is his people's servant', an old Arab saying had intoned) into a personal account disclosed only on the last of days?

All the same, a modernizing, energizing, facilitating, transparent, democratic, and fair-minded America will do an excellent (and needed) job in the Arab world (though definitely not as an occupation power) to the mutual benefit and health of both Americans and Arabs. An arrogant, predatory, exclusionist, imprecise, and sullen United States in the region is 'un-American', anachronistic and self-defeating, with resultant illness and pain to be shared, in different but assured degrees, by both peoples.

### *Pill number three: a genuine and comprehensive peace and partnership with Israel*

The UNDP report mentioned in the Preamble included reference to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and its toll in terms of human suffering and decimated human development, in addition to the burdens laid on some Arab states as a result of the confrontation with Israel or claims to that effect. All the same, the long-festering 'Arab–Israeli conflict' has been, for more than a half century now, both a reflection and a source, among many, of the Arab malaise.

The successive defeats of Arab armies in the wars with Israel have most spectacularly exposed the brittleness and backwardness of the Arab system, almost completely caught on the hop by the determined and disciplined onslaught of European Zionists upon its largely antiquarian and indolent structures. This happened, initially in Palestine, whose Arab inhabitants could still respond, and at several levels, including the diplomatic one, better than some remote Arab brethren, though all the while over-trusting in the ability of those brethren to help them. But a relentless chronology of thrashings in or around Palestine managed also to reveal the chasm between the Arab peoples and their rulers, manifested in these instances by the gulf between field commanders and soldiers. The latter, though largely conscripted and insufficiently

trained, routinely showed, as Kenneth Pollack confirms, phenomenal courage in most engagements, but ultimately succumbed to or were taken out by the opposing forces, who, generally, were better trained, armed, and coordinated, as well as less rigid, centralized and politicized, and with superior access to effective intelligence, direct communication, and well-maintained equipment.[29] The feeling among Arab soldiers who lost or chose to abandon the fight was that their undoing was caused by their aloof officers and decadent rulers, who, in this sphere too, had failed to meet their followers' material and other needs, a reflection of a wider state of affairs in the nation. While such sentiments, justified or not, drove veterans of the first Arab–Israeli war to plot coups in such countries as Egypt and Syria, the defeats and reversals left the largely passive (or pacified) masses with a profound sense of shame and impotence, as they were continually frustrated from seeing an 'honourable' resolution, either through war or peace. This a state of limbo or 'hurting stalemate' in later years President Sadat was to find intolerable before the Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal and the Syrian advance on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights on 6 October 1973.

At the political level, the ineptness or near lack of 'influence' in negotiations with Western powers over the Palestine question exhibited by Arab regimes, even while conducting a thriving business with their 'allies' and 'partners' in the 'West', has always been another source of mortification and embarrassment. However, in addition to Prince Faisal's endeavours at Versailles and the brave show put up by King 'Abdul 'Aziz on *The Quincy*, bolstered by some truly impressive Arab diplomatic initiatives and reasoning by the newly founded Arab League, all to be brusquely swept aside by Harry Truman's other priorities, the successes were few. These included the period following the 1973 war and the diplomatic triumphs of Dr Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy which paved the way to troop disengagement arrangements in the Sinai and on the Golan, and more substantively (but disastrously for the concept of collective Arab diplomacy) to separate Egyptian, Jordanian, and Palestinian agreements, treaties and accords with Israel, at Camp David, Oslo, Wye, and other locations.

Paradoxically the aforementioned ineptitude has in turn made Arab rulers, who, more often than not, have represented a minority of interests deriving its authority from no real contractual basis and, with some exceptions, have been incapable of dealing with diversity or opposition, more reliant on foreign protection, knowing too well that, when the crunch came, they would not be supported to the bitter end by their peoples, who might even rejoice in or gloat over their downfall, deeming it a divine or a more earthly but overdue retribution. The case of the official Arab paralysis in the period before the invasion of Saddam's Iraq in addition to the slapdash 'London Conference' of January 2003, which was hastily convened in order to mollify popular Arab resentment, provide only two instances of the low point to which Arab self-respect and the respect of the world for Arab sensitivities had sunk. The latter case marked yet another tumble from President

George Bush's solid pledges before and during the 1991 operations. It was quite curious that, as the anti-war camp gathered strength in European capitals on a massive popular scale unprecedented since the Vietnam war and with the governments of France, Germany, and Belgium taking, for their own reasons, a distinctly assertive stance in favour of allowing the international arms inspectors more time to do their job, the Arab governments, embarrassed by France's appeal for some gesture of support from them and by the vigour of the international anti-war campaign as well as, partly, by protests from Arab intellectuals and nationalists, scrambled to convene a meeting of foreign ministers in Cairo under the banner of a jaded Arab League, eventually eking out yet another oratorical and fuzzy declaration.

During the prosecution of the war itself, statements by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Blair regarding an eventual two-state solution in Israel/Palestine were couched in general and vague terms, with the proposed 'road map' receiving a sceptical reception by both the Israelis and the Palestinians before the re-vetted Mahmoud 'Abbas (an urbane and accomplished veteran of Oslo) and an autocratic, but democratically elected, Arafat, ever reluctant to ease his grip on the unseemly degraded and emaciated Palestinian Authority, managed to put some flesh on the seemingly scrawny rabbit pulled out of the Anglo-American hat at the eleventh hour. Meanwhile, this act of wizardry (or sleight of hand) was being jeered and darted by extremists in both the Israeli and Palestinian camps.

President Bush's rather facile ability at a later stage (on 3 June 2003) to round up representatives of four 'friendly' Arab regimes, in addition to the conciliatory Mr 'Abbas, at Sharm el-Sheikh and articulate to them his vision of a new Middle East, which would include a Palestinian state by the year 2005, did add an assuredly welcome dimension and a personal commitment not seen since the Clinton era. However, the exercise, while meeting US requirements in the wake of its occupation of Iraq, exposed to the Arab public once more the receptiveness of their leaders to being herded at the drop (or tilt) of Uncle Sam's hat even as they, judging by some of their statements, boasted about being seen to rub shoulders with their all-powerful patron. This while other 'fellow-Arabs' (like Syria and more generally the deflated Arab League, never mind Arafat himself, who had a few years earlier been feted as a Nobel Peace laureate and a world statesman only to be subsequently dumped because he did not sign away East Jerusalem and the Palestinian right of return at the second Camp David talks) were denied the privilege. The exclusion paralleled that which was then being meted out to the UN, a supreme world body, long appealed to by the beleaguered Palestinians but sidelined by the penchant of the lone superpower for centre stage. Nonetheless, people waited, in the wake of the following meeting at Aqaba and a ceasefire agreement, to see to what extent Mr Bush's patience could be stretched by the radical requirements of the Sharon government, with its fourteen reservations to the plan, and a Palestinian rejection front, ever distrustful of Israeli intentions. People also wanted to see whether the American

gesture of the moment could be converted into a truly determined and balanced engagement on the ground, itself inexorably linked with the roads in and out of Baghdad and with that highway leading to a second term in the White House. The cycle of Israeli assassinations and Palestinian factions' suicide bombings later made grim statements about the fate of the road map; statements alternating between the 'death' of the map and its indefinite 'suspension' as a successor to the mild Abu Mazen, the equally hamstrung Ahmad Quray', came on the scene and the 'health' of an increasingly frail Arafat seemed to mirror the 'health' of the road map.

Meanwhile, the Great Wall of Sharon was fencing off the Barbarians, at the expense of more of their own shredded territory, and much of their shattered peace, and that of the Israelis' own. President Bush's apparent endorsement (in April 2004) of Mr Sharon's plan for an expanded Israel (as the unilateral annexation of West Bank regions seemed to imply, flouting earlier US policy fundamentals in addition to a succession of UN resolutions) was perceived by many observers at the time as the coup de grace for the road map and a knell for a foreseeable accord. It was also seen by some as another testimony to the cynicism or indifference, which, time and again, had shown crass disregard for the lives of Arabs and Israelis and for genuine peace between them. This was a shade similar to the cynicism and indifference which had denied the iconic Arafat, as he lived and led his people's national struggle for some forty years, before his death in Paris in November 2004, the chance to sell his 'peace of the brave' to his nation as no one else perhaps could at that time. However, Arafat's physical departure – itself noted for a tumultuous expression, by a captive population in Ramallah, of a grief and adulation rarely accorded by the Arab 'street' to its departed and often failed leaders – marked the beginning of a new potentially salubrious phase, in which no single leader, however iconic or overbearing, could solely make decisions that concerned the fate and destiny of his nation. Rather, such decisions, hopefully, had now to be debated, decided upon and monitored by as wide a spectrum of that nation's representatives (and electors) as could be made possible, with that process itself having to be subjected to the principles and criteria recognized as unimpeachable by a fair-minded international authority rather than a clique of self-styled wardens either within the nepotistic and corrupt Palestinian Authority or outside it in the shape of self-designated policemen of the world.

The space vacated allowed Prime Minister Blair to proceed more confidently with his scheduled trip to Washington to drive home to the re-elected US President the centrality of the Palestine issue to Middle East peace, itself seen as vital to a successful prosecution of the War on Terror and in Iraq as well as to the Prime Minister's (and perhaps the President's) own moral standing and legacy. President Bush's pledge to invest in his Administration's capital (already being depleted in Iraq) to work for an independent Palestinian state, though not by the year 2005, may have been intended to please his chief ally, who also promised to 'mobilize the international community' to help the Palestinians, provided they renounced terror. Both leaders, seeing themselves

as 'pillars of the free world' and still marketing the rather simplistic idea of Arafat as *the* obstacle to peace, refrained from paying any direct tribute to the deceased President, honoured as a head of state by Mr Chirac in France and a galaxy of world leaders and dignitaries in a crowd-fearing official Egypt.

Messrs Bush and Blair certainly did not engage in the kind of invective by the likes of Justice Minister Yosef 'Tommy' Lapid, who, some five months earlier had shocked the Israeli political establishment by his empathy with an elderly Palestinian woman, whose picture, as she crouched on all fours searching through the rubble of her demolished house, had reminded him of his grandmother, a Holocaust victim. Arafat himself, an aged prisoner groping for a relic or a prospect or a gimmick for some three years amidst the rubble of his Ramallah compound, itself a vestige of British military designs in mandated Palestine, may not have been too unlike that forsaken, though blameless, Palestinian woman. In any event, despite Arafat's contradictory legacy and the typically Arab two-tier 'state' he presided over in the largely impoverished territories doubly fleeced by his minions, he may still exercise some posthumous influence over his successors, including the newly elected President 'Abbas, a mild-mannered but astute man who has what it takes to steel himself to the task ahead. For the Israeli government the challenge was now immense (particularly after the London Conference of March 2005 adroitly called for by Mr Blair) to pick up the 'olive branch' hoisted in Arafat's own UN speech in 1974 but abandoned or not firmly or consistently grasped, either by himself or his Israeli and other foes, many of whom were fellow-Arab leaders, during the intervening thirty years. The olive tree, being enmeshed with the history, livelihood, and symbolism of the region, can still generate many a branch worthy of being lifted by many a brave or bruised hand. The transition from branch to dining table and from a peace settlement signed by a handful of politicians to true reconciliation advanced and shared by peoples is a process that is of major concern here.

At this juncture, and while it is fitting to look with cautious optimism to the future, it may also be germane to note that the 57-year-old 'confrontation' with the state of Israel, while reflecting the fragility of the Arab order and intensifying the contradiction (but also awareness of that contradiction) between the Arab rulers and their peoples, also helped bring about – particularly after the ignominious defeat in 1967 of three Arab armies and the subsequent occupation by the Hebrew state of East Jerusalem and its domination of Islamic and Christian holy sites, most notably the Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Nativity – an unprecedented resurgence of religious fervour, already a feature of a postmodern and post-Cold War world. Indeed, some Arabs were seeing in such winged or wayward orientation a last possible remedy after an assortment of revolutionary, Arab Socialist, and secularist ideologies on one hand, and shiftless conservative dogmas on the other had been tried to no avail through much of the 1950s and 1960s.

Be that as it may, and though fanned and exploited by complex 'religious' sentiments, the central issue in the crisis between 'Arabs and Jews' is,

of course, political and territorial, with the original designs and blunders of European colonial policies in the Middle East having set on it a formative seal. The colonial project, gathering sound and fury and psychosis during the nineteenth century, had reached a high pitch when the British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur Balfour issued, on 2 November 1917, just as his Arab 'allies' had done their bit to help the British-Indian troops enter Jerusalem and Damascus, the famous/infamous 'Declaration' sent by the Scottish peer in the form of a letter to Lord Rothschild promising Palestine, with its overwhelming Muslim, Christian, and Druze majority, as a 'national home for the Jewish people'.[30] The letter pledged that 'His Majesty's Government' would 'use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object', with a token reference to the 'civil and religious rights' of the majority, now demoted to the rank of 'the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine'.[31]

Nonetheless, before the emergence of militant Zionism and the creation of Israel, the meat of partnership between the two peoples had vastly surpassed the bones of contention. When the Crusaders entered Jerusalem in 1099, both Jews and Muslims, as well as Oriental Christians, were slaughtered en masse by the European knights. Centuries later, the eminent physician and scientist Amatus Lusitanus (1511–68), like many other Jews from Moorish Spain, was no longer able to tolerate the 'lie forced on him by Christian fanaticism', which had led to his conversion to Christianity under duress; he fled, also like many of his coreligionists, to the more tolerant Middle East, where he was 'free at last to proclaim himself a Jew'.[32]

It is beyond the remit of this essay to catalogue or even skim through the connections and similarities between Judaism and the two main faiths (Christianity and Islam) which Arabs ascribe to, if one does not include the Jewish faith itself as one, indeed the earliest, of that trio of Abrahamic faiths embraced by Arabs. Without either exaggerating or dismissing the religious element in a very complex and many-sided case, one may mention, among the common core principles, the basic belief in a universal and omniscient deity, together with a number of teachings and laws (be they ethical, hygienic, dietary, or sacramental) attributed in origin or inspiration to that deity through a long procession of prophets and legislators. One may cite in addition Islam's own celebration (in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and classical and popular traditions) of the great Hebrew prophets and kings as illustrious icons and heroes of one shared monotheistic experience. Right from the very beginning, the Jewish scripture and the rabbis in Arabia (particularly in Yathrib/Medina) were quoted during Muhammad's mission as a validation of that mission. No doubt, problems arose even during that time and in later periods, with fanatical and repressive regimes, whenever they were in the ascendant, casting a dark shadow over all communities of faith and over all life. However, the list of eminent Jewish philosophers, savants, scientists, doctors, Kabbalists, exegetists, poets, artisans, ministers, diplomats, civil servants, and merchants who thrived and worked from within the Arab Empire, to the mutual benefit and enrichment of both communities,

is truly formidable, and can be invested in to strike anew a common chord and inspire the present hour.

It may be sufficient in this connection to merely mention the names of such luminaries of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries as Saadia ben Joseph, Hananeel ben Hushiel, Eleazar ben Isaac, Ibn Garbriol, Bahya ibn Bakuda, Judah Ha-Levi, Nathaniel ibn al-Fayyumi, Judah ibn Tibbon, Joseph ben Meir ibn Zabara, and Judah ben Solomon al-Harizi. The case of Samuel Ha-Nagid (Samuel ha-Levi ben Joseph ibn Nagrela), eleventh-century Talmudic scholar, poet, vizier and commander of the armies of Granada, and that of Moses Ben Maimon (Maimonides) of Cordova, known as the 'Second Moses' and whose most influential books were written in Arabic, are outstanding but not exclusive instances of Arab–Jewish teamwork. Even when the 'great civilization of the Arabs faded out in the thirteenth century, and with it [Lewis Browne notes] went the tolerance that had nurtured Israel's 'Golden Age', with Jews now entering 'the horrors of life in medieval Europe', celebrities like Moses de Leon, Moses ben Nahman, Jedaiah of Béziers, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos ben Meir, and Joseph Karo, in addition to the aforementioned Amateus Lusitanus carried the Andalusian tradition of enlightenment and tolerance with them into Christian Europe or to the comparatively forbearing Ottoman empire, before a new generation of European Jews, symbolically heralded by the brilliant Baruch Spinoza, himself of Andalusian stock, emerged to help establish the European Enlightenment and modernity.[33] Cecil Roth, who, in the context of his documentation of Abbasid treatment of Jews, has asserted that 'the essential tolerance of Islam, in practice more than in theory, was to remain one of the important factors in Jewish history for many centuries to come', goes on to record, in a few horrific (and portentous) words the terrors begun in Seville on Ash Wednesday, 1391, to which the Jews were subjected as the Moorish rule in Spain crumbled:

> [F]rom the Pyrenees to the Straits of Gibraltar. In place after place, the entire community was exterminated. The synagogues, which had been the pride of Spanish Jewry, were turned into churches. . . . In the former kingdom of Valencia, not a single professing Jew was left alive. . . . Outbreaks were avoided only in Granada, the last surviving outpost of Muslim rule, and (thanks to the energetic measures taken by the sovereign) in Portugal. The total number of victims amounted, it is said, to upwards of seventy thousand souls.[34]

Such experiences, perpetually updated, were to culminate in more 'modern' nineteenth-century atrocities and disgraces like the pogroms in Tsarist Russia and the French mobs shouting death to Colonel Dreyfus and the Jews. Such ignominies were to galvanize the even-tempered Theodore Herzl into cyclonic action, though he was at pains to note, in his *Der Judenstaat*, that the new waves of anti-Semitism were not connected to the old religious

persecutions, but, rather, to the increasing emancipation of the Jews in Europe, a process which was to meet the most horrific European resistance to it in the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the earlier church-engraved memories were to travel long in the European Jewish psyche reinforced by the new horrors. A fictional ('virtual' but 'real') Pope in *Pilgermann*, a novel of the 1980s by the extraordinary Russell Hoban, builds a tower made of the clay and blood of Jews, only for the bricks to 'dissolve into a sea of Jewish blood' in which the Pontiff 'swims for thousands of years'.[35]

Not long before Herzl had an audience, in June 1896, with the Ottoman Grand Vizier, then, in May 1903, with the pan-Islamist caliph-sultan 'Abdulhamid II to negotiate the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a Palestinian Sufi master and poet, Sheikh 'Abdul Qadir al-Dajani, had composed a long *qasidah* of a thousand rhyming verses in praise of the prophet Moses. Even as the Zionist plans for Palestine were unfolding after the First World War and during the late 1940s, Faisal and 'Abdullah, sons of the former sharif of Mecca, British ally during the First World War and one-time Arab caliph in the making, were holding secret meetings with Zionist leaders. One was with Chaim Weizmann, the would-be President of the World Zionist Organization and first President of the Jewish state, having earlier been instrumental in securing the Balfour Declaration. Another, involving 'Abdullah and Weizmann, was the redoubtable Golda Meir, at the time head of the Jewish Agency's political department. Such meetings were to continue, culminating a generation later in the series of historic breakthroughs at Camp David (1978), Madrid (1991), and Oslo (1993) following President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 – itself eventually leading to the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty of 1979, which set the pace for the Jordanian–Israeli treaty of 1994.

This and the earlier traditions and experiences of civilizational cooperation (including that which existed between Muhammad 'Ali and Egyptian Jews, deemed vital to Egypt's modernizing programme, an association which continued unmolested to his last descendant, King Faruq, until it was somewhat shaken by the assassination in Cairo of Lord Moyne at the hands of two members of the Stern Gang in March 1944), provide ample material to build upon for the future even though the recent history seems to be encumbered by strife and mutual suspicion.

Before Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, Israel had, for decades, desperately sought recognition by its Arab neighbours, though not, closer to home, reconciliation with the Palestinians, dispossessed and disregarded in the very act of founding the Israeli state. However, with such momentous and confidence-building accomplishments as the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, in addition to the Madrid Conference and Oslo agreements, the latter marking the Palestinians' emergence from under the pan-Arab *'aba*, some of the statements by Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak about Palestinian suffering and the need for reconciliation and closure did manage to create an environment or at least an overture for further realignment. Subsequent setbacks, culminating in the non-success of the Camp David talks, in the last days of Bill Clinton's presidency, together with the upsurge in repressive and settlement

policies by the Sharon administration in the occupied territories, and terrorist activities inside Israel by some Palestinian groups cast their own gloomy shadow over the earlier achievements. This, however, was a shadow which diehard optimists like the authors of the complementary Geneva Accord, a brave instance of a non-governmental, though, to some, elitist, initiative in the contemporary world, did not regard as long or interminable enough to engulf all future spaces and possibilities. This was a conflict in which 'avoidance', 'conquest', 'spontaneous remission', and 'nonreconciliation' (to use terms culled and coordinated by Nusan and Taplin from Conflict Theory, sociology, law, IR, and labour negotiations) were no sane options.[36] Rather, with a conflict over-ripe for resolution, 'direct negotiation', 'mediation', 'arbitration', 'judicial decision', in addition to the all-important 'education and contact',[37] though tried in various periods and with various degrees of commitment, by official and international bodies and private groups and individuals, had now to be tackled with more perseverance and consistency. Needless to say here, a political system which allows participation at popular and civic levels has a better chance of negotiating and securing a credible (and durable) peace than one reliant on autocratic or whimsical decision making, unconvincing, if not also disastrous, in both 'peace' and 'war'.

And regardless of the prevalent perception among Arabs and others that the invasion of Iraq was prosecuted, among other US strategic reasons (or miscalculations), for the benefit of Israeli security and dominance in the region, pointing to a high profile convergence of pro-Israel and ultra-rightwing and Christian-fundamentalist ideologues in the present American Administration, Arabs need to know that they stand to gain from a partnership with Israel and the world Jewish community. This is not to be interpreted, however, as a ploy to deflect or neutralize Jewish or pro-Israel influence in America and the world, nor to kowtow to or curry favour with the wielders of such influence, which, in some imaginations, including that of the anti-Semitic authors of the *Elders of Zion*, has assumed mythical proportions. Nor should it be understood as driven by a desire to establish a 'Semitic' alliance against an imagined hostile 'West', one which both Arabs and Jews have contributed to and benefited from, and should continue to do so.

However, such a partnership would test the Western powers' sincerity in seeing a genuine peace in the region, one that they have been sermonizing about for a long time but which may see Arab petrodollars eventually invested in Arab–Israeli industry and development instead of languishing idly in Western banks or boosting multi-billion-dollar arms exports into the region.

The Israelis themselves, though, need to assess whether a shift from a seemingly inviolate alliance with powerful allies in the West to one with a weaker, unpredictable, and fragmented Arab world is in their best interest. But the Arabs, at least statistically, possess considerable and untapped resources, which, if galvanized, can be of benefit to both the Arabs and the Jews, who, incidentally, had been betrayed so many times before by Europe, even when they had assumed themselves to be unassailable or indispensable there. It may be further argued that the dominance of a harshly Hobbesian worldview

combined with a materialistic and market-driven culture and the re-emergence of ultranationalist and racist movements, slyly encouraged or cowed to by populist politicians, can be as fickle and volatile as the complex of events which led to the rise of Nazism in the 1930s. That rise, it may be germane to note, had been helped, by, among other things, the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the wealth and influence of far-right politicians and bankers. At any rate, the very concept of inordinate dependence, whether by Israel itself, which furnishes alarming statistics in this regard, or the Arab states, on powers outside the region – much as these powers are needed or are unavoidable within the interdependency of our globalized world – must be examined dispassionately in order to ascertain whether such severe dependency is to the long-term advantage of the peoples and countries of the region.

Be that as it may, and though nations, like individuals, can go through life with a combination of alliances and identities, a transformation of some considerable importance and reach needs to occur in the Israeli (and more specifically Zionist) psyche. The eighteenth-century Kabbalist Baal Shem Tov had spoken about the need to look into oneself before one could address wrongdoing in the outside world; and in the same living tradition Rabbi Yehuda Berg made the observation that 'World peace begins with personal peace'.[38] Likewise, the Midrash narrates an anecdote about the celebrated Rabbi Simon ben Shetah who instructs his disciples to return a precious pearl which the disciples found on an ass they had bought from an Arab, who had sold the animal without knowledge of the pearl. The Rabbi edifies his disciples with the words:

> Do you think that Simon ben Shetah is a barbarian? He would prefer to hear the Arab say, 'Blessed be the God of the Jews,' than possess all the riches of the world. ... It is written, 'Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbour.' Now thy neighbour is as thy brother, and thy brother is as thy neighbour. Hence you learn that to rob a Gentile is robbery.[39]

Likewise, in his analysis of Rabbi Judah Loew's commentary on the Esther story, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser notes: 'The oppression of any one people is a threat to all others. For it betrays a general loss of respect for human life, and what is to impede the extension of the tyrant's design to other human groups?'[40]

Of course, one does not wish to oversimplify national or international policies operating in a very complex, intermeshed and largely secular modern world; but involved here is an argument expressed in various Jewish (as well as Christian and Islamic) writings and which, interestingly, British and other anti-imperialists of the nineteenth century were to use. This is the notion that oppression inevitably reverts on the oppressor and his household, a concept articulated further in the Midrash as, 'If thou has habituated thy tongue to speak evil of Gentiles, thou wilt end by speaking evil of Israelites.'[41] Perhaps this is an issue that also informs peace movements and concerned

individuals in Israel, alarmed more recently (as suggested by the Israeli press) after a spate of virulent anti-Arab statements by public figures and atrocities against Palestinian schoolchildren in Gaza.

The assassins of Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin, though loading and firing their guns with seemingly opposing sets of 'visions', had one adversary haunting their minds – Peace, together with the loss of their sway over some minds, which tend to grow in number under situations of conflict, stirred up, as Conflict Theory tells us, by, among other things, a skewed 'social learning' and an 'enemy system'. Both Arabs and Israelis, who will lead the drive for peace, will have to contend with the kind of priestly or self-interested fury which, in the Biblical narrative, met Solomon's fraternization with the Canaanites of the Lebanese–Syrian coast, whose architects and cedar wood may have helped build the temple in Jerusalem but whose gods and women were frowned upon by the priests as an abomination. It is the sort of name-calling and exclusion, even murder, which has confronted some prominent peacemakers from both camps in the history of the conflict. The myth of purity and the fear of the other are two ogres to combat or tame in every society and epoch. Self-criticism, which seems to wither or cower during conflict, needs to be resuscitated and sustained, since its absence or suppression is liable to generate bigotry and self-entrapment inside a car with only an overblown vanity mirror for a windshield.

Indeed, many of the discourses, stories, and parables of ancient Israel derive their perennial charm and enduring value from those bold (and in many ways endearing) tirades and diatribes launched by their chief protagonists against their own community. This has been a legacy which successive generations of scribes and rabbis jealously preserved, not as a form of self-flagellation or self-pity in the long years of exile, but partly because there was a recognition, implicit or otherwise, that such accounts of human imperfection, frailty or proneness to temptation make for great literature as well as perennial guiding principles. The tradition has continued from stories like that of the reluctant, hence engaging, Prophet Jonah on his mission to Nineveh to, among others, the poignant and comic tales of the incomparable Isaac Bashevis Singer.

At the height of the crisis in Palestine in 1947, 'Abdul Rahman 'Azzam, then Secretary General of the Arab League, aided in his lobbying at the United Nations by two Jewish-American advisers, Joe Levy and James Batal, with the 'giant figure' of Professor Judah Magnes, Dean of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in the background lending his own support to the idea of 'binationalism', proposed the formation of a 'state in which a full proportionate representation at every level of government' would be shared by the various communities, in addition to 'an international guarantee operated by the United Nations to preserve the cultural and national identities' of those communities.[42] Despite the failure of that proposal, the idea of one democratic state for all lingered on in subsequent Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and other discourses, including Arafat's 1974 speech at the UN, until it was subsumed by the flaunted, yet hitherto elusive, 'two-state solution'.

Modern Israelis of course have the right to argue, as they do most passionately, for the maintenance of the predominantly Jewish character of their nation, which, in its modern context, entails upholding, along with the tenets and dictates of democracy and a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society, many of the lofty ideals of the Jewish faith – hence the assumed relevance of the brief references made above to some of that faith's ancient discourses on humility, charity, and universal fraternity. Athenodorus, in Robert Graves' complex account, in *Claudius the God*, of Herod Agrippa, the last Jewish king of all Judea, himself of mixed Arab–Jewish ancestry, urges us and his interlocutor, in this instance Herod himself, to 'remember that the Jewish nation is more fanatically addicted to virtue than any other nation in the world'.[43] Russell Hoban, who certainly has no illusions, despite the enticing enchantment of his tales and phrases, about the world and the suffering of 'the people of Abraham' in it, nevertheless goes on to highlight, in addition to the 'furnace' or 'consuming fire' which Jews have endured or must escape, the primacy of the 'torch' or 'onward flame' which they must carry.[44] Aristotle had defined a country chiefly in terms of the human and political virtues it highlighted and upheld, and the 'Second Moses' of Jewish lore, Maimonides, noted, in the lexicon of his day, that the thrust behind the dream of centuries for a renewed Israel was not 'for the purpose of wielding dominion over all the world, or of ruling over the heathens', but to be 'free to devote themselves to the Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress and disturb them, in order that they might merit the life of the World-to-Come'.[45]

Nonetheless, the world here and now, 'tainted' and 'perilous' as it may be, deserves our engagement, be it for the possibility of the 'onward flame' upon its paths. Towards such constructive involvement, insights and wisdom, certainly not wanting among Jews or Arabs, from other parts of the world can be of additional benefit. One example, among several, can be provided by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a mechanism that can, in a post-conflict era, investigate and recompense, however inadequate the latter term may be, injustices, atrocities, dispossessions, and other relegations of duties and obligations committed by various parties, including the Mandatory powers, in the wider region and against all communities. Meanwhile, some issues, like the Right of Return for Palestinians and the status of Arab Jerusalem, which, since June 1967 has been subjected to relentless demographic and physical changes, will, for some time to come and despite clear pronouncements on them by UN resolutions and International Law, pose a challenge to negotiators. This is indeed a challenge that must be met with boldness, imagination, and humaneness contributed to by Arab and other countries, including Lebanon, in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians enjoy no citizenship or human rights and lead wretched and obscured lives in squalid refugee camps with little prospect of employment, education, or health care, except that provided by the under-funded United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and sundry local and humanitarian groups. With the unlikelihood of the envisioned Palestinian state ever being able to

accommodate their numbers or those of similar refugees in Syria, Jordan, and other countries, the inanity, untidiness, and callousness of the original imperial enterprise, particularly as it gelled with the inefficiency and powerlessness of Arab leaderships, become more apparent, as does the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead. However, with the need for imaginative solutions and a Marshall-like plan for the region, there also must be a will to compromise and coexist, sharing mutual spaces and futures, in addition to a commitment to closure – the wisdom of looking *beyond* the past with its bitterness and scars and the present with its hopelessness and rage.

The reward will be the creation (perhaps *recreation* is a better and, despite occasional tragic disruptions in the past, not altogether unsupported word) of a culture of cooperation and mutual recognition and respect. Deep down, Arabs look with envy at the great zeal with which the Israeli state defends its own citizens and negotiates so fiercely and tenaciously to bring about their release from capture or retrieve their bodies when they fall in battle or – in a case like that of the two young Eliahus (Eliahu bet Zuri and Eliahu Hakim) who assassinated Lord Moyne in Egypt in 1944 for the benefit of the Stern Gang – have their long-buried bodies exchanged for packs of Arab prisoners and then have the bodies re-interred in Israel with full military honours. Of course, Israeli Arabs often contend that they are not accorded the same treatment in life or death – the shooting of thirteen Israeli-Arab demonstrators almost at point-blank range in October 2000 (a revisitation of a March 1976 event), along with the subsequent accounts in the Israeli press (and courtrooms) of appalling police brutality on that occasion, provides one dramatic corroboration of such assertions. Nonetheless, and despite the contention that Israel's reported treatment of its Arab citizens, who do have rights of representation in the Knesset, provides an analogy to the two-tier system institutionalized by Arab officialdom, the ordinary citizens of many Arab countries often feel utterly defenceless and demeaned by their governments' indifference, arrogance, and incompetence, both at home and at their embassies and consulates abroad. Arabs also admire, however grudgingly, the democratic system of government, which though headed at regular intervals by former army generals, guarantees a smooth and transparent transition of power from one government to another. They also appreciate the generally simple, unpretentious lifestyle of Israeli leaders and the accountability (financial, political, and military) to which they are generally subjected, though, again, that accountability (as world opinion is increasingly contending) must likewise extend to the innumerable cases of Palestinian and Arab civilian casualties who fall and have fallen victim time and again to the devastating and often unapologetic fire of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

Arab admiration, however reluctant or qualified, is not generally reciprocated by large sections of the Israeli public, who, not well informed about moderate Arab views, often give the impression that they regard the Arabs of today with utter contempt and derision. It is indeed ironical that some of the stereotypes used by Hollywood and the Western media in defamation of the

Arab character, the only 'politically correct' object of racial abuse currently indulged in with considerable impunity, has, as Jack Shaheen has been reasoning, striking analogies with, if not also roots in, European maligning of the Jewish character. This is to be added to the other irony that the 'fundamentalist Christians' and 'Neoconservatives' in some Western capitals who seem to pursue pro-Israel policies are, with obvious variations, ideological descendants from the 'Christian' and crusading zealots who had staged and presided over Jewish pogroms in Europe – and Palestine. Arabs and Palestinians, upon whom the sins of the Nazis and other European mass murderers of Jews have been inappropriately visited, expect that a people steeped in timeless suffering would be a shining beacon and a role model of compassion and empathy.

Israel, at this juncture in its modern history, with its all too obvious invincibility in military (both conventional and nuclear) terms when compared to the numerically superior but technologically and institutionally substandard Arab nations around it, has a historic opportunity to show 'magnanimity', and, at the same time, break out of the mindset which had informed much of its earlier policies, namely that wielding the big stick is the only way of dealing with Arabs. It is definitely not in the long-term interests of Israel to be too closely identified with a 'neo-imperialist' policy in the region bent on further fragmenting and weakening the Arab world, as is now widely perceived by Arabs in the wake of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, a country destined by recent projections (the recent elections notwithstanding) to remain cripplingly impoverished (if not also ethnically and factionally divided) for years to come. Rather, it is in the best interest of Israel, being ostensibly the creation of a United Nations General Assembly resolution (no. 181), which, incidentally, also called for the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state and an international zone around Jerusalem, to show consideration for UN resolutions and international law, to which it may have recourse should some of its own territory, however unlikely in the short term, be attacked or occupied.

While the Arabs themselves need to get rid of assumptions about their own high moral ground and sense of victimhood and learn to accept compromise as a sign of maturity, graciousness, and realism, the Israelis need to respond with sympathy to an overture of such magnitude as that of Crown Prince 'Abdullah's initiative, endorsed by the Arab League Summit Declaration of 28 March 2002 in Beirut, promising an end to the 'Arab–Israeli conflict', a 'peace agreement', and 'the establishment of normal relations with Israel' within the framework of a 'comprehensive peace'. This is a somewhat unprecedented initiative (considering the equally bold Fahd Peace Plan of 1982) which needs to be accorded the seriousness it deserves regardless of the Saudi and Arab motives that had compelled it. There is perhaps a lesson to be learned from the indifference and disdain given to President Sadat's overtures and offers before the Egyptian–Syrian offensive of October 1973.

Israel should derive some other lessons from the very limited dividends (at the popular level) of its formal peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and may find it more germane to appeal to the Arab public instead of the ruling,

and often unrepresentative, elites it has engaged so far. The 'enemy system' in Conflict Theory already referred to, reinforced by 'social learning' and 'social identity', provides clues to, but also caveats about, past and current behavioural patterns and policies adopted by both Arabs and Israelis. However, the often-vilified (and self-vilifying) Arabs are not as unforgiving or congenitally pugnacious as routinely suggested, and they will doubtless respond favourably to a gesture of genuine goodwill and concession from Israel. Even when suspicions will be raised by some sceptics about ulterior motives and hidden agendas, policies, and events on the ground (like withdrawals consensually arrived at and the easing of the unacceptable suffering and humiliation of civilians under occupation, including the abolition of measures of collective punishment, such as the demolition of houses, a policy inherited from the British Mandate) are bound to discredit or severely limit the constituency and appeal of the sceptics' claims.

The Arabs may need to better understand, as many older Israeli citizens already do, the great attraction to Jews of the image of the Israeli or Jewish 'warrior' re-emerging after the suppression and slander of many hundreds of years which culminated in the slaughter of millions by the Nazis, who, in the chilling black-and-white films of the period appear like ghoulish shepherds herding Jewish women, men, and children to concentration and death camps. But 'power' has its limitations, as the ancient Jewish sages always recognized. It also has a wide spectrum of manifestations, many of which go beyond scoring points on the battlefield. To be trapped in a breathless pursuit of military supremacy at the expense of other forms of moral and civilizational empowerment can be both expensive and dangerous, if not also self-defeating. 'When a saint leaves town, gone is its beauty, its splendour, its glory', notes the narrator in one of Isaac Bashevis Singer's poignant stories.[46] Israel, having brilliantly recreated and updated the tradition of the Maccabees, the Hasmoneans and earlier heroes (and heroines) of ancient Israel, thus restoring the pride of the world Jewish community at that level, can now proceed, without of course endangering or compromising its own security requirements, to win the hearts and minds of its Arab and Palestinian neighbours. But it will have to accord them the dignity they require, and in a twisted pursuit of which, some of their youths have carried out acts of inexcusable violence.

Arabs stand to gain greatly from taking a leaf or more from the modern Jewish book on, among other matters, standing up to Jewish rights in an organized fashion, castigating defamation, and massacre. This, together with the termination of their conflict with the state of Israel, from which, incidentally, a coalition of Arab autocratic regimes and international arms exporters have benefited for decades, is bound to enhance the Arabs' security and standing in the world. It will also provide them with an opportunity to re-channel their energies and with a means to ease them into better economic and human development in a postmodern age, having largely missed out on the opportunity to participate more actively and consistently in modernity itself. For this to happen, both Arabs and Israelis have to undergo, or will themselves into, a mental transformation in which

delusions of superiority and the perpetuation of discriminatory and unjust policies should, however painfully, be laid to rest.

Again, one does not wish to overstate the religious factor in the conflict, introduced so raucously during the first decades of the twentieth century (through such texts as the Balfour Declaration and Zionist manifestos as well as responses to them by Jihadist rhetoric) into a largely nationalist, rather than religious, Arab Levant at the time. To an American aide to the US delegation at the Versailles conference, it was indeed 'Mr Balfour' who 'opened wide this Pandora box of racial and religious hatreds'.[47] The same purveyor, Stephen Bonsal, seemed to have found Prince Faisal's responses to Zionist contentions at the conference reasonable, even, at times, 'impressive'. In January 1919, Prince Faisal had noted, in a memorandum sent to Bonsal: 'The Jews are very close to the Arabs in blood, and there is no conflict of character between the two races. In principles we are absolutely at one.'[48] And again:

> I assert that we Arabs have none of the racial or religious animosity against the Jews which unfortunately prevail in many other regions of the world. I assert that with the Jews who have been seated for some generations in Palestine our relations are excellent.[49]

However, Faisal was candid enough to make a distinction between the Palestinian Jews and the 'new arrivals'. He noted, with a dash of caustic irony:

> For want of a better word I must say that new colonists almost without exception have come in an imperialistic spirit. They say that too long we have been in control of their homeland taken from them by brute force in the dark ages, but that now under the new world order we must clear out; and if we are wise we should do so peaceably without making any resistance to what is the *fiat* of the civilized world.[50]

Even after the Wailing Wall troubles of August 1929, the Arabs and the Palestinians remained puzzled as to how to classify the Zionist movement, seeming to enjoy the almost-unfettered British and Western patronage, just like, later, the state of Israel itself. Was it Jewish fundamentalist? Secular-nationalist? Reactionary? Progressive? Imperialist? Expansionist? Militant? Pacifist? An implant of the West? A spur for the East? A combination of all that and more, or less, or none? The confusion perhaps remains.

At a religious level, which certainly is only one factor among several, Judaism and Islam, despite apparent differences, have, as discussed above and as is well known, much in common. Though their nominal or ardent adherents contest over the same territory, the fact that they, together with Christians, share a complex, and not always religiously inspired, attachment to that territory, should serve as a bridge instead of being a barrier. It should, and outside the domain of idealism or speculation, ultimately inspire them

to work together on joint ventures on land, water, and resources, which are destined, if not shared fairly, to sustain a perpetual *Lord of the Flies* scenario and terrain. Middle East issues have for decades been held hostage to, among other things, American fortunes and electoral cycles; should the Arabs and Israelis join forces, this uncertainty and periodic hostage taking or foot-dragging, which admittedly have been of benefit to some, could come to an end or be radically moderated.

Although the Israelis and the Arabs can still, as noted before, hold on to other parallel alliances, it is not, one needs to reiterate, in the interest of Israel to identify too intimately (or be lured into such identification) with 'foreign' or 'hegemonic' policies in the region perceived as high-handed and damaging to Arab national interests and self-esteem. Israeli leaders and propagandists have for long advertised in the West their country's difference and distance from the Arab 'sea' (or 'desert') around it. Early on, Vladimir Jabotinsky, perhaps taking a cue from Hertzl's vision of the future state as a 'vanguard of culture against barbarism', had declared, 'We Jews [inadvertently meaning European Zionists or in Faisal's parlance the "new colonists" rather than Oriental Jews] have nothing in common with what is denoted "the East" and we thank God for that.'[51] Israel, however, may find it germane to highlight more manifestly its 'Middle-Eastern' (inadequate and Euro-centric as the term is) character and its commitment to the peace and prosperity of the region independently of outside powers or an overbearing 'Western' civilizing mission. There is a danger that should the policies of such powers in the region falter or fail, Israel (and its lobbyists) might be impacted upon negatively by their erstwhile 'allies'. Already, as noted above, the media and various political analysts around the world have drawn attention to a number of pro-Israel figures in the Bush Administration as having been influential in formulating the ethically and legally beleaguered US policies on Iraq despite the apparent re-endorsement these policies recently received in the American elections of November 2004. Such figures, however, if the truth is told about human motives, may be more interested in their own status than in the constituencies they claim to represent and from whose anxieties they derive kudos and power. Regardless of whether or not the removal of a regime like that of Saddam Hussein is in Israel's (or predominantly America's) interest, Israel may do well to avoid casting itself or being cast into the role of an instigator, conspirator, or cheerleader in the unfolding state of affairs.

Indeed, whatever influence the pro-Israel lobby has in Washington it can be utilized best and most nobly when used to serve America's real interests in finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Arab–Israeli problem, a solution that would also be of real benefit and relief to all the peoples in the region and a truly major damper on the rage (or pretexts) of 'Islamist' zealots and militants everywhere. One can only ponder what the billions of US dollars spent on the invasion and occupation of Iraq could have done to the destitute and despondent Palestinians and the insecure Israelis, let alone other disadvantaged peoples in the region and the world!

Even with an international body like the UN (the 'Parliament of Man' and the 'Federation of the world', in Tennyson's yet to be actualized words, with its pitiful budget of $2.6 billion!) playing an overarching role, the United States can certainly figure as a facilitator or a pacesetter. A figure of such stature and appeal as former President Clinton or former President Carter can assume a prominent role in the mediation, though such a choice has to be balanced by any likely wish of the American President of the day (if not also the international community) to regulate the process. Nonetheless, a colossal enterprise like this will inevitably require colossal resources, which need to be galvanized by the political and economic colossi of the world (joined by the profligate paymasters of the region) who need to push and pay for withdrawals, resettlements, compensations, and reconstruction. A whole panoply of post-conflict and peace reinforcement and confidence building strategies will also have to be devised, and, of course, implemented. These will include democratic and constitutional reform, economic empowerment and development, security coordination, and re-education (investing not only in reformed judicial and educational systems, but also in traditional reconciliation methods and religious and lay leaders and women's groups – women being, among other roles and when truly empowered, the best guardians of their menfolk's lives and the most effective thwarters, as mothers, grandmothers, sisters, or wives, of potential 'suicide bombers'), such measures to be accompanied by the prerequisite emotional, and humanitarian assistance for victims of the conflict, demobilization, and rehabilitation of former combatants and the insertion of their leaders into a participatory form of politics and nation building as has been the case in, among other communities, South Africa and Northern Ireland, with Ambassador Alistair Crooke, a veteran of peacemaking in these two and other places, recently probing and assessing such possibilities in the region.[52] Violent conflict, though providing opportunities for some individuals and groups to carry out acts of exceptional courage or philanthropy, more often than not brings out the worst in human nature, and sees the parties in the conflict using the nastiest stereotypes and depictions against each other. Hence, the establishment of official and grass-roots arts and sports exchange programmes would be crucial in order to explode alienating myths and explore the common humanity behind the stereotype. It has to be emphasized that without a wide-ranging transformative movement involving perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours from the bottom-up, no peace or reconciliation will stick. The use of repressive or coercive measures by rulers or negotiators has been proven futile time and again. People need to be convinced about the wisdom and advantages of peacemaking.

Here again, the wisdom of pushing the Palestinians, who, in 1988, agreed to live in peace on 22 per cent of their 'historical homeland', a concession they reiterated in 1991 at Madrid and in 1993 at Oslo, into yet more territorial compromises and national disempowerment will have to be reflected upon most seriously by Israeli strategists and ideologues as well as the Israeli

people at large. The lethargic pace and security obsessions of the Oslo process, which allowed time and appetite for more settlements and violence, while daily discrediting and disempowering the nascent Palestinian Authority, should be a warning rather than a model. Almost all forms of diplomacy have been tried out in the region; however, a step-by-step approach, though highly effective in other circumstances, is no longer tolerable if it continues to deny the Palestinians their own self-government *ad infinitum*, penalising and sidelining them for every stumble on the way. Elsewhere, the physical and ethical problem of Palestinian refugees surviving under dehumanizing conditions in an already troubled and scarred country like Lebanon, if not tackled, through speedy, vigorous, humane, and holistic rather than half-(or hard-)hearted and patchy measures, will always jeopardize any settlement and rock any stability or recovery in the relevant countries and the region as a whole. Giving people options and the right to choose within reasonable limits must not be denied to the Palestinians or to others. In the meantime, the Right of Return might emerge as a concept and a process relevant to both the Palestinians and the Arab Jews who had left Arab countries after the establishment of the Hebrew state. By the same token, Israel, in addition to Syria, will have to reflect on the unwisdom of not taking the 1992–6 Syrian–Israeli negotiations, so painstakingly (and tantalizingly) led, but not concluded, by President Hafez Al-Assad and Prime Minister Rabin across the occupied Golan Heights, to their logical finale – itself to be a beginning for a more profound and all-embracing process.[53]

Without a mental and moral colossus – in the shape of a commitment to coexistence and compromise, an abandonment of violence, and a genuine embracing of, and belief in, the sanctity of life (rather than land *per se*), and the wisdom of peace and cooperation – the big strides and strategies of all the other colossi would be bogged down or lost or tangled in the quagmires or mists or stockades of the rejectionist mind.

'Half a loaf is better than no bread' had been the conclusion reached by the Peel White Paper of June 1937, which also admitted that neither party would be satisfied 'at first sight' with the proposals:

> For partition means that neither will get all it wants. It means that the Arabs must acquiesce in the exclusion from their sovereignty of a piece of territory, long occupied and once ruled by them. It means that the Jews must be content with less than the Land of Israel they once ruled and have hoped to rule again.[54]

Much metaphorical water (and real blood) has passed under the bridge since the Peel days, and it is doubtful that the Palestinians will get the minimal 'half a loaf'. Nevertheless, a further assumption by Peel is still valid:

> But it seems to us possible that on reflection both parties will come to realize that the drawbacks of Partition are outweighed by its advantages.

> For, if it offers neither party all it wants, it offers each what it wants most, namely freedom and security.[55]

A tradition of Jewish ambassadors, viziers, finance ministers, and generals existed, as pointed out earlier, in Arab and Muslim states long before the advent of Benjamin Disraeli into nineteenth-century British and European politics. The formidable and multi-talented Samuel Ha Nagid of Granada and the no-less-remarkable Dona Garcia Mendez, merchant, philanthropist, and architect of Suleiman the Magnificent's European policies, provide two fine (and, for our purpose here, final) examples of such presence. This was a presence, which, incidentally, perhaps crucially, allowed the nation of Israel, for centuries 'huddled [in Lewis Browne's sympathetic words] behind its ramparts of ritual', (and in more modern times behind a partly-imposed, partly-self-induced, siege mentality) to feel that its Wall of Law 'ought to let in light as well as shut out hate; that it ought to encourage venturesomeness, and not just provide safety'.[56] However, in the interest of the medical metaphor informing this essay, one may revisit the case of Maimonides, who, besides being 'the greatest of all medieval Jewish sages' and 'the foremost rabbinic authority in the world',[57] was also the personal physician of the great and chivalrous Saladin. This was at a time when the Church in Europe had banned Jewish doctors from treating Christian patients, and when Arab physicians themselves had been acquiring a reputation for innovation and excellence which would travel to imaginative authors from Geoffrey Chaucer to Robert Browning as well as to European students of medicine well into the sixteenth century, in the latter case through such texts as al-Razi's *al-Hawi fi al-Tibb*, itself translated into Latin by the Jewish doctor Faraj ibn Salim making it one of the first medical books of its magnitude to be printed in the West. Maimonides was so skilled in his profession that an Arab poet in Saladin's court wrote in his praise:

> If the moon would submit to Abu Imran's [Maimonides'] art,
> He would heal her of her spots,
> Cure her of her periodic troubles,
> And keep her from ever waning![58]

Might such fabulous medicine, useless if not wholesomely dispensed and wholeheartedly taken, be effective in the contemporary Arab case? Might it also be of benefit to the Israeli polity as it struggles to heal itself of its own spots and troubles?

## Conclusion

The fact that an Arab malaise exists is confirmed by many witnesses and consultants, most important of whom are the patients themselves. Such self-awareness is in itself a sign of hope, though one which does not, on its own, guarantee a sure road to recovery. Doubtless, the 'pills' suggested in this essay

are only a sample of possible cures among a range that may involve other therapies and therapists. The option, if not also the necessity, of forming alliances and partnerships with other powers and facilitators in the world is always present. In fact, the practice of alliance building, itself entwined with the lives and activities of individuals, lies at the heart of IR and diplomacy and is vital to the well-being and security of any country or community. Forming or strengthening a common front with such countries and blocs as the EU, Japan, the Russian Federation, China, Latin America, or other emerging or potential powers, collectively or selectively, is certainly an alternative (or parallel) avenue open to the Arab world, should it have the confidence, courage, and the collective will to go down that road. Such a course of action might see billions, if not trillions, of petrodollars converted to euros or yens or pounds or marks as one way of improving the Arab (and the Arabs' partners') bargaining position vis-à-vis the current US Administration, should it pursue unreasonable or indifferent policies. Throughout, Arab policy makers and diplomats need to know (or need to remind themselves) that American foreign policies are not shaped solely by the penchants or preferences of the man in the White House but are propelled by the range and complexities of American life and institutions, including the shopping mall, the gas station, the classroom, the TV station, the Congress, and, among many other enduring and emerging factors, the Sunday sermon.

Exploring alternative policies (and diplomacies) is bound to bolster the overall Arab self-belief and widen their range of choice. Often, however, potential or existing allies have, been, with some exceptions, too reluctant to get involved or have been denied access by a combination of American pressure and chronic Arab disunity and vacillation. Nonetheless, such powers, already involved (through trade and other relations and joint ventures with Arab states, including the important Euro-Mediterranean Partnership)[59] have the potential (as the pre-invasion tussles at the UN Security Council showed) to compete with or moderate the perceived unilateralist and hegemonic policies by the Bush Administration as formulated and prosecuted during the first term of that Administration while galvanizing some Arab latency for multilateral action. The role of such powers as partners may, in the long run, and despite the inevitable self-interests on their part, become more noteworthy, though, at every moment, those self-interests may yet motivate selfish and inconsistent policies.

Be that as it may, what has been suggested in the three sections above, though possible, may not be desirable or affordable either by the Arabs or the interlocutors concerned. For the Arabs, the refusal to take on seriously and coherently any or all of the challenges tentatively explored above as helping with needed reform and empowerment will certainly not result in their physical demise as such. It may however indicate an unwillingness to re-invoke the original spirit of Arab pluck, pragmatism, and plurality, which had facilitated the founding of the original Arab civilization as it interacted so positively and creatively with several other cultures in the Levant, Africa,

Europe, and Asia, allowing, and indeed inviting, them to contribute to its fascinating matrix and mosaic. While the Arabs will certainly continue to exist on the ground, however shrinking that ground might be in countries like Iraq and Sudan, they will, if they persist in missing or snubbing opportunities for reform and recovery, be denied an active or participatory role in shaping their own fortunes and those of the world.

The test today, as it has been for decades, is whether the Arabs can develop that lucid vision and coherent strategy, overcoming apathy and fear, isolationism and extremism, in their dealing with the present and in planning for the future. Given the non-monolithic and diverse nature of their maps and agendas, which recall, in terms of their miscellany and varying priorities, those of the Spanish-speaking countries of South America, this seems destined to be one of their greatest challenges. Addressing that challenge also involves building the institutions to sustain any successes on the way, including the raising of the law and public interest above individual, dynastic, and cliquish gains and the celebration of their own rich religious diversity and coexistence with ethnic minorities, in addition to a more mature awareness of their global citizenship and responsibilities. Already, tens of thousands of Arab doctors, engineers, architects, teachers, musicians, writers, artists, and others are benefiting from and contributing, in so many fields and with exemplary professionalism and dedication, to their host countries outside their traditional homeland. Celebrated individuals like Michael DeBakey, Peter Medawar, Ralph Nader, Hala Salaam Maksoud, Omar Sherif, Magdi Yaqoub, Edward Said, Mona Hatoum, Zaha Hadid, Ahmed Zewail, Carlos Slim Helou, George Mitchell, John Zogby, Assia Djebar, Etel Adnan, Mostapha Akkad, Nicholas Hayek, and Carlos Ghosn, among many others, notwithstanding those within the Arab world itself, have shown that Arabs or people of Arab extraction, once their genius is acknowledged and nurtured by the environment they live in, have the potential to help enrich, enlighten, and heal the world in countless inventive ways.

Sadly, in depicting Arab characters or commenting on events in the Middle East many Western reporters and fiction writers, among others, make sweeping and hard-and-fast statements designed to capture, as though in amber, for all time the assumed traits of the group in question, thus facilitating the 'analysis' but hampering the understanding.[60] Besides the inevitable inaccuracies, half-truths, and generalizations and the facile evasion of complex and changing realities, such statements and depictions, like the 'Ancient Hatreds' argument which thwarted early attempts to stop the bloodshed in Bosnia, can also carry the danger of inciting to acts of hatred or, inversely, to inaction and apathy when action and empathy are required.

People are often shaped and reshaped by social, economic, and other circumstances of the age in which they live. Many of the great advances in legal and human rights and gender equality, among others, in Europe and North America which people there now take for granted and many other peoples elsewhere regard with a mixture of awe and envy are relatively recent

developments, and were punctuated in the twentieth century, which saw their gradual flowering, by major wars and upheavals as well as the rise (and, luckily, fall) of obnoxious ideologies like Nazism, Fascism, and McCarthyism in addition to huge economic breakdowns. The memory of Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat to a white man, as she was expected to, on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, is still fresh in the minds of many people as is the echo of the single shot that killed Martin Luther King on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis. Modern America still has to contend with, among other things at home, its gun culture, jittery race relations, and social and economic disparities. However, for younger people who were born after the events, the fact that that actual bus in Dearborn, Michigan, and King's shrine in Atlanta are now national (and indeed universal) memorials is a sign that from adversity and repression salubrious change can come about. Post-World War Japan saw the transmutation of the militant, death-seeking samurai tradition into one which laid emphasis on national reconstruction and industry, a re-channelling of the old destructive, but honour-and-glory-invoking energies, into a constructive force, even while the old spirit of bushido still found creative echoes in the stirring films of Akira Kurosawa (and the immaculate *dojos* of the world), though also sinister ones in the anarchic activities of the Red Army, with the intriguing novels of Yukio Mishima and his own tragic seppuku falling somewhat in between.

To carry out salutary transformations safely and effectively, present-day Arabs, who already are heirs to one of the world's richest traditions of generosity, hospitality, spirituality, compassion, and courage as well as business acumen, will need a visionary but also clear-sighted leadership like that provided by Yoshida Shigeru, Japanese Prime Minister between 1946–7 and 1948–54, to oversee and channel that effort. Of course, one individual, however inspired or capable, is never sufficient to create or energize a culture of rationality, meritocracy, industriousness, and peace. An enlightened, but accountable, elite (or vanguard) to lead that change is required and must be supported nationally and internationally until the new (though not alien) culture takes firm hold in people's minds and hearts and is translated into practice at all levels. Political reform, along with the requisite civil society and democratic institutions (diffusing power and decision making) and the equally mandatory 'Agenda for Development' and economic prosperity (empowering citizens to develop skills and enter the labour market) so vital for guarding and enhancing that culture, is an objective that must be pursued primarily by the Arabs themselves. To hark back to the Sindbad story alluded to earlier in the chapter, Arabs cannot afford to remain like Sindbad the Porter (Sindbad the Sailor's foil in the famous tale), land-bound and disadvantaged, carrying the freights and inventions of other seafaring or industrious people and pausing to lament their own lot or stare in envy, awe or impotence at those people's achievements and riches. Indeed, the prosperous (but humane and generous) Sindbad has the peeved porter brought into his mansion to regale (and edify) him (and us) with his own personal history of adventure and enterprise (the

great Seven Voyages) which made his hard-won fortune a lesson and an inspiration to the sluggish and the unimaginative.

Statements by the American Administration about plans to ram 'democracy' or bulldoze 'freedom', 'better education', and other virtuous commodities into the Arab world are likely to be seen by many Arabs as superior and hollow, not only in view of past imperial policies in the region but also in consideration of the post-September 11 legislation limiting human rights and civil liberties in America itself, with brutalities and blunders in Iraq posing a psychological hurdle (and an unfortunate excuse for extremists and peddlers of hate within and outside the region) – a hurdle that must be negotiated with more surefootedness.

Criticisms at several levels within the United States and Britain of the methods used by the political leaderships in both countries to justify their invasion of Iraq (Colin Powell's elaborate performance at the Security Council on 5 February 2003 being one very discomforting case) and the pressure exerted on these governments by civilian groups to hold independent and wide-ranging (rather than Hutton-like) inquiries into the decision-making process and the use (or abuse) of intelligence material in the run-up to the invasion, testify to a massive popular will in these countries, as in others, to reinstate and elevate the principles of transparency and accountability above a perceived reversion to the obscurantism and machinations of Old Diplomacy on the part of some of the 'people's representatives'. Increasingly, it is becoming obvious that both the West and the Arabs, and indeed the whole world, are involved in these issues and should be interested in debating and resolving them.

Statements about democratizing and re-educating the Arab world on the part of foreign governments, desperate to preserve their credibility at home and in the world, are better replaced by less hectoring and more sincere (and salubrious) action in these truly needed areas. Nevertheless, Arab political, civil society, educational, feminist, human rights, environmentalist, and other groups, acutely aware of the pressure being placed on their rulers from outside as well as from home-grown extremist violence, are seizing the moment to help energize their countries' political, educational, and other systems, found so deficient, derivative, and unprepared in an unprecedentedly competitive and innovation-hungry world.

John F. Kennedy, in his tragically undelivered Dallas speech, had noted that 'words alone are not enough'. He had also gone on to observe, 'If we are weak, words will be no help', a sentiment that was to be echoed by his successor in the Oval Office, Lyndon Johnson, who was also to emphasize, like many before him and since, that weakness does not bring peace.[61] Much earlier, the formidable and multi-faceted Frederick II had shrewdly observed, 'The opinion prevails that if [princes] give way it is because they are weaklings and that if they are moderate they are dupes or cowards.'[62] Nonetheless, while granting that 'weakness' is a generally undesirable and

detrimental state for all, and most assuredly for the Arabs of today, history has repeatedly shown that mere force fails to create lasting order or peace. The need for dialogue, mutual agreement, and cooperation is paramount, and if the old or existing forms of dialogue and cooperation are unable to deliver, then it must be those forms rather than the principles that are at fault. Assuming that the will to find a solution is there, the need to search for new forms (and forums) with more creativity and imagination becomes more pressing. And it is such pressures and challenges that redeem or save a nation if not also humanity. 'They have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind,' Hosea gives notice,[63] while the Midrash rather boldly rearranges the list of priorities expected of a nation of faith. 'Great is peace [it asserts], for even if the Israelites worship idols yet maintain peace, God says: 'I can do nothing to them'.[64] Islam calls itself the religion of peace, the Qur'an describing the absence of that state as the pathway of evil,[65] and has generated, through the conduct and expressions of countless men and women, a living tradition of compassion, charity, and peacefulness worthy to be included among the peacemakers blessed by Jesus on the Mount.

However, people tend to choose from texts and histories what suits their purposes. By the same token, politicians and empire builders select the most opportune and attractive labels for their schemes, and even when these flounder or fail to produce the desired outcome, they have in the toughness of their skin and the resilience of their psyches (along with a dash of amateur dramatics) what it takes to justify their action by their own good intentions, superior intellects, or lofty idealism. Marlow, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, scrutinizes the breed (and their motivation) with his usual astringency:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . .[66]

Later, he reports a journalist's assessment of the character and talents of Mr Kurtz, that chilling human (and not altogether fictive) embodiment of the imperialistic (and mercantilist) archetype:

> [H]ow that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith – don't you see? – he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything – anything.[67]

Similarly, the colonial Governor-General in Ben Okri's *Infinite Riches*, as he 'rewrites' the history of the continent and its peoples, dreams of transporting all of Africa's treasures and resources to his land:

> Some of them would be locked up in air-conditioned basements, for the benefit of Africa, because Africans did not know how to make the best

> use of them, and because his people could protect them better. He dreamt of having them in the basement of a great museum, to be studied, and to aid, in some obscure way, the progress of the human race.
>
> He dreamt of the great road on which all the fruits and riches of African lives would be directed towards sweetening the sleep of his good land. He did not dream of the hunger he would leave behind.[68]

Nonetheless, when the thread breaks, Kahlil Gibran reminds us, 'the weaver shall look into the whole cloth, and he shall examine the loom also'.[69]

The question has been posed by friends and foes, but more often by Arabs themselves, as to whether they indeed deserve to remain independent, however qualified that term should be in light of their post-colonial history, which saw most of the Arab states severely *dependent* on either the Eastern or Western bloc, despite the participation of some of them (and, in the case of Egypt of the 1950s and 1960s, joint *leadership*) in groupings like the Non-Aligned Movement. Indeed this question was raised recently by Arabs in their added sense of frustration, confusion, and self-doubt following the occupation of Iraq, whose interim 'Governing Council', which preceded the subsequent 'Interim Government', reversed the tradition of fixing the national day to commemorate, as in other Arab and developing countries, independence from foreign occupation to now signify the date foreign armies toppled a native tyranny. To be sure, some Arabs went to the extent of wondering whether they might not be better off under the kind of veiled or brazen 'protectorate' which the 'emerging Iraq' (to choose a once-popular CNN caption) might enjoy like several of its smaller Gulf neighbours who have been benefiting from such protection for many decades.

An analogy has been made to the case of Afghan (or at least Kabul) women who have been emancipated from the misogynistic (and comprehensively anachronistic) Taliban regime, though here too an irony is manifest, since it was Arab Gulf states, in compliance with US diktats, that had helped, through propaganda, funding, and volunteers (and, of course, the Pakistani military), to wreck the improvements in the status of Afghan women brought about by the previous socialist regime and the earlier reforms of Zahir Shah's Administration. Be that as it may, the loud demonstrations by ordinary Iraqis in Baghdad and other cities in the wake of the occupation against poor living conditions, power cuts, water shortage, unemployment, and large-scale detentions without trial and what they regarded as a foreign occupation and manipulation of their potentially rich country, even as they celebrated and exercised their new-found freedom to publicly articulate their views, initially painted a picture which promised to partake of some of the harsh elements in Picasso's monumental 'Guernica' (which graces and forewarns delegates walking into the UN Security Council room) rather than of his more hopeful 'Friendship' or 'Bread and Fruit Dish on a Table'. Later cataclysms, and the apparent or feared de facto division of the country into three cantons, still seemed

to point to a painting yet in the making to be put up on a wall not yet (re)built.

More widely, though Arab successes in modernity have not been many, Arabs continue to punish themselves, and be punished by others, both for their successes (the targeting of the once-applauded al-Jazeera TV channel and its reporters being one case in point) and failures, the latter outnumbering but not utterly abolishing the former. While they grapple with the limitations and challenges of working from within disparate nation states and under imaginary identities largely imposed on them by colonial powers in partnership with unrepresentative ruling elites, the ignominy of their failure to escape from, or invest more creatively in, this wardrobe of straitjackets and masks can, to some extent, be shared both by them and their imperial cartographers, who, since the Congress and Conference of Berlin of 1878 and 1884–5 respectively, had been doing similar untidy map drawing and nation building in Africa and elsewhere with imperial interests at heart but with disastrous consequences on the ground for generations of native communities.

Despite such lingering constraints, the Arabs need to look beyond that admittedly traumatic experience. They also need to jettison other unhelpful and antiquarian baggage from their remote or relatively recent past, such as that which helped military and ideological dictatorships to monopolize (and manipulate) power in the name of anti-colonialism or anti-Zionism. But, like other nations of the world, they are certainly entitled to retain ancestral memories that would help maintain their identity and pride and enhance their participation in world affairs – in a process of 'learning' rather than merely 'remembering' and in an enlivening 'odyssey' rather than (in Nanda Shrestha's words, reflecting on his sobering Nepalese experience) an 'autopsy' of how 'the imported discourse of development' can be made to function as a further tool of exploitation, alienation, and disembodiment.[70] To be denied the freedom of un-regimented expression and experimentation which might lead to holistic wellbeing and empowerment, rather than mere membership or servicing of a sprawling consumerist club, is an act harmful to them and to the larger world they live in and to which they need to contribute with confidence and pride. The previously cited UN Human Development Report of 2003 (compiled, incidentally, by an Arab team of experts, who, more recent reports suggest are being placed under pressure to produce a more 'congenial' report for 2004) highlighted the fact that the age structure of the Arab population is significantly younger than the global average, with almost 38 per cent under the age of 14. While these youths look forward to better education and enhanced job prospects, they also expect, in this increasingly globalized and better-informed world, to be treated with respect by both their governments and the world. There is something deeply demeaning and disturbing for them to see cliques of foreign statesmen converging, with a mix of motives and a diction not too un-similar to that of the imperialists and spin-masters of the nineteenth century (including the 'liberal' and church-going William Gladstone on the eve of the occupation of a reformist, people-driven

and forward-looking Egypt in 1882) to plan and pontificate on their future from thousands of miles away only to behold the consequences of such deliberations in the devastated neighbourhoods of cities and towns like Baghdad, Jenin, Gaza, Najaf, and Fallujah. Such statesmen, feeling the hand of history or God (or some other lofty or mundane power) on their shoulders, even as they are failing or struggling to meet their own people's expectations for improved health care, reasonably priced housing, affordable university education, and better public transport and pensions, have no compunctions to send their troops to die (or kill) in a far-off country self-interestedly chosen for a makeover, with no discernible 'exit strategy' or postoperative care. It may benefit these statesmen to take a leaf or two, however flawed or frayed, from T.E. Lawrence's book – in this case his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Lawrence, admitting his own duplicitous role in the betrayal of the Arabs, about which he says he is 'continually and bitterly ashamed', makes an effort to express, with his own mix of problematic contradictions, his pride in the fact that he did not cause the shedding of 'any of our own blood', since 'All our subject provinces to me were not worth one dead Englishman.'[71]

As young people, ever looking forward and longing for renewal and freedom, Arab youths will rejoice in the downfall of home-grown tyrants and in the demise of police states, even as they are made more painfully aware, in that very act, of the fragility of their national systems, which continually tempt, and give easy victories and escape-routes to powers they regard as disingenuous and exploitative, somewhat in conformity with the widely known Arabic proverb 'Unguarded money entices people to robbery' – a version of 'Opportunity makes a thief'. They will also be pained and provoked by perceived arrogance and triumphalism, particularly when this is accompanied by an astonishing manipulation of international law, and threats of further 'shock and awe' spectaculars in their region exponentially replicating the tragedy of 12-year-old 'Ali 'Abbas and his decimated family in Baghdad.

In the absence of a genuine and dignifying representation of their collective woes and aspirations, a duty which many of their governments have long relinquished despite more recent cosmetic procedures, young Arabs will increasingly see themselves as the true spokespersons of their extended Arab nation and the healthier arteries and sinews that invigorate and hold its parts together as well as the more robust bridges and authentic ambassadors to the world, the 'West' included. Increased repression or suspicion by their rulers, especially when perceived to be emanating from a desire on the part of these cliques and oligarchies to serve foreign agendas and interests while perpetuating their own survival, can only add to their sense of alienation and anguish, one certainly unrelieved by the senseless acts of backward-looking claimants to and hijackers of their identity. Such pains are undoubtedly part of every growing-up process, but statesmen and healers, native or foreign, who wish to deal with young people and empower them for a better and healthier future need to administer their skills and remedies with exceptional wisdom and extra candour, along with the requisite humility.

# 2 Islamic diplomacy

## The need for a new vision – a conceptual approach

Diplomacy is an ancient and universal practice. In its quest for peace in international relations, diplomacy is always a necessity, often a routine, *sometimes*, at the hands of a master, an *art*. It involves functions and activities like negotiation, persuasion, mediation, protection, representation, and, of course, information gathering and communication. Sir Henry Wotton defined the diplomat some three centuries ago as 'a good man sent to lie abroad for the sake of his country'.[1] That definition unfortunately stuck for some time, to the great irritation of many honest diplomats, whose brief nevertheless continued to involve varying degrees of duplicity, espionage, and coercion.

In its modern forms, diplomacy is often associated with the rise and requirements of European states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the period that saw the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which (half-)buried the horrid hatchet of religious wars and laid the groundwork for the modern state system with all the notions and hang-ups about Sovereignty, Raison d'état, and the Balance of Power. It saw the foundation of resident missions, and, later, in the twentieth century, the rise (sometimes *fall*) of international bodies like the League of Nations and the United Nations. Despite the obvious Euro-centric paraphernalia that often surrounds diplomatic ritual, diplomacy is not the preserve of any one nation or culture. It has been practised, praised, and perverted east and west, north and south, and by emperors as well as tribal chiefs who have utilized it to enhance their power, moderate their enemies' greed, or seek a genuine peace or a two-faced respite. Its forms are numerous, its benefits manifold, its failures calamitous.

Muslims, early in their history, used diplomacy to obviate conflict, aid conquest, negotiate settlements, release prisoners, obtain alliances, and sustain their livelihood and trade, among other worldly concerns.[2] It was partly missionary zeal and pride in becoming bearers of a 'divine call' which prompted many early Muslims to wear the mantle of an ambassador, either in an official or personal capacity. This was certainly a *human* endeavour, but one sanctioned (and practised) by the highest authority. Did not God, it has been argued, send His angels and messengers to mediate between Himself and humankind, to enlighten, to show the way of peace, to remove human alienation?[3]

Judging by accounts and exhortations in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the *Sirah*, sources to be later used by jurists to develop a methodology of *usul* in their untiring elaboration of an all-inclusive *shari'ah*,[4] the Prophet Muhammad, was, among other attributes, an accomplished diplomat.[5] The story of his ability, even as a young man in pagan Mecca, to resolve, almost off hand, the conflict between the fierce Arab chieftains, quarrelling – as they still do, albeit about other matters – on who should place the revered Black Stone back in the wall of the Ka'ba, is deservedly symbolic. It speaks of the role of the prophet, *and every other prophet and envoy*, as a herald of peace, a mediator between competing egos, a tamer of wild and violent forces.

Islamic accounts of Muhammad's diplomatic and negotiating skills, of his generally conciliatory and clement approach to his adversaries, even of his astounding concessions during the formulation of Al-Hodaibiya pact – concessions which some of his companions would not understand or stomach – and his diplomatic and information campaign of dispatching letters and envoys to the rulers of the surrounding lands provide a testimony to, or a construct, of the many-sidedness of Muhammad's career and his acumen as a nation builder and statesman. Besides expressing and legitimizing a desire on the part of later Muslim rulers to conduct peaceful trade and other relations with non-Muslim states and communities, these accounts also conform to and blend in with Qur'anic injunctions related to diplomatic work which can be summarized as follows:

- The appeal to peace, peace being the natural state or goal of human society, together with the appeal to reason, goodwill, and public interest.
- The repeated warnings against aggression and transgression of bounds, friendly relations being the natural order of things with all non-belligerent and neutral powers and the provocation of hostility being treated as an incitement to crime and mischief.
- The sanctity of pledges, pacts and treaties (an ancient principle found in the Egyptian–Hittite treaty of *c.*1260 BC as in the Roman *pacta sunt servanda*). Significantly, it is made to take priority, in Qur'an: 8:72, over the notion of Muslim solidarity, be it solidarity with persecuted or aggrieved Muslims in other states, especially when such states are bonded to the Muslim community by mutual recognition and agreements, thus confirming the tenet of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations; the openness and public nature of such covenants.
- The inviolability and immunity of envoys and travellers.
- The need for dialogue, mutual respect, and courtesy in dealings.
- Moderation and compromise in all exchanges.
- Practical guidelines and procedures for mediation, reconciliation, compensation, and resolution, of conflicts at interpersonal, family, and communal levels, which, in the Islamic worldview, are interrelated and go on to inform relations between the Muslim community and the wider world.[6]

These also comply with such fundamentals of the faith as:

- Tawhid (Oneness of God, His sovereignty, and the Unity of Creation, prevailing behind diversity).
- Respect for life in its various forms.
- The role of the human being as *khalifah* (custodian, keeper, trustee over natural and human resources).
- Respect for the earth as a whole – the 'environment', in the modern idiom, with repeated warnings against 'spreading mischief or corruption in the land'.
- Confirmation of earlier revelations.
- Repudiation of all discrimination based on ethnicity or material wealth.
- The principle of *shura* or mutual consultation.
- Respect for debate within perimeters of civility and courtesy.
- The ruling out of coercion in matters of faith.
- The preference for peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness.
- The denunciation of arrogance, greed, exploitation, and extremism.
- The denunciation of tyranny, scheming, and concealment.
- The right of people to well-being and prosperity and to a share in the nation's, if not also the world's, resources.
- Exhortation to learning and travel, etc.[7]

Admittedly such idealistic formulations (idealism being a spur rather than a foil to reality, since 'a man's reach must exceed his grasp,/Or what's a heaven for?')[8] had to coexist or clash with other pronouncements as well as realities on the ground and those in the minds and 'drawing boards' of ambitious princes, who, in their pursuit for power, rarely confined themselves to the strictures and disciplines of the purely defensive war allowed in the Qur'an. Nor would they, despite 'romantic' accounts in the literature of Muslim nations, readily overstretch their resources when it did not suit their interest to uphold the duty of supporting fellow Muslims (ideally all people of faith) when those fell victim to unremitting oppression or discrimination in lands not bound to them by treaty. Similarly, the truly admirable and ever-viable model of *tahkim* or arbitration, with its wide-ranging domain from the familial to the international and its anchorage in divine and human authority, notwithstanding the often contentious or inconclusive interpretation of such authority, received its own share of neglect, particularly after the battle of Siffin in 657 CE. It may have been that the initial mistrust which some of the Prophet's companions had shown to Muhammad's openness to negotiation, compromise, and concession at Al-Hodaibiya as well as the trickery practised at Siffin helped in some arcane or subconscious way to presage or colour later official attitudes to such great diplomatic and conflict-resolution resources, stunting their application in international relations (though not in other domestic and social interactions) to the detriment of diplomatic theory and practice in official Islam.

Too often, however, the story of Muslim expansion is told in exclusively military and conflictual terms. Both Muslim and non-Muslim writers have contributed to this one version of the truth. This may in part be the result of the astonishing distension of Muslim territory, from the Arabian Peninsula to Syria and Anatolia in the north, and from Samarqand in the east to Cordoba in the west, in the span of a few generations. Later Muslim writers seemed dazzled by the speed of the military campaigns and tended to dwell on them, as on the genius and pluck of the young generals who masterminded them, to the exclusion of the less pugilistic envoys of the faith like traders, travellers, scholars, and Sufi fraternities. This unbalanced view, perpetrated and glamorized by chroniclers and sanctioned by jurists, justified further conquests, while boosting morale and unity at times of insecurity caused by foreign invasion or internal division and decline. All the while, the vitality, intellectual curiosity, and cultural diversity in such places as Omayyad Damascus, which had imbibed much of Byzantine diplomacy, and 'Abbasid Baghdad, a beneficiary and a benefactor of, a range of Western and Eastern traditions, were giving way to the general intellectual torpor and the tyranny of the pedantic and legalistic mind associated with the 'age of decadence', whose beginning is conveniently dated as subsequent to the cataclysmic fall of Baghdad to the Mongol armies in 1245 CE.

Relevant in this context is the medieval 'Islamic' paradigm of classifying the world into an abode of peace (*dar al-Islam*) and an abode of war (*dar al-harb*). This was sometimes explained or defended as emanating from an assumption that the provinces outside the Islamic 'green' were unsympathetic or hostile to that vision and had actively stood in the way of its peaceful dissemination, thus *initiating* that rift and discord in 'God's global manor'.[9] Whether or not such argumentation is tenable, the concept brings to modern sensibilities some unpalatably bigoted and adversarial baggage, which puts it on a par with the ideologies that governed, among other periods of world history, the defunct Cold War, which divided the world into two clear-cut camps, with pretensions to right and accusations of wrong (or 'evil' ) by each contender – a state of affairs which resurfaced more recently in the 'Clash of Civilisations' discourse and the 'You Are Either With Us Or Against Us' assertions in the wake of the September atrocities in the United States. In the background to these recent resurrections, the very concept of International Relations remains largely underpinned by the unsettling notion of 'anarchy', the presumed state of affairs prevailing in the absence of a central global authority such as a world government or an effective United Nations and an enforceable International Law that could convincingly moderate Thomas Hobbes' (and more subtly the dominant Realist School's) notion of war as a law of nature and of humanity as governed by 'natural passions' leading to 'partiality, pride, revenge, and the like', with 'covenants' being but words' 'without the swords'.[10]

Be that as it may, the adversative medieval paradigm, though preponderant in the legalistic and imperial mind of the age, was challenged, in theory, by such alternative (and invigorating) worldviews as that articulated by

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210), who saw the world as composed of a dynamic relationship between *dar al-ijabah* (the realm of acceptance of Islam and its values) and *dar al-da'wah* (the realm of invitation to the faith).[11] The static binary vision also diverged from realities on the ground, which saw formulations like *dar al 'ahd* and *dar al sulh* (territories involved in peace pledges or treaty or truce agreements with a Muslim state), along with concepts and practices like *mithaq* (covenant/pact), *hilf* (alliance), *aman* (safe conduct/pledge of security), and *dhimmah* (agreement to provide protection for non-Muslim subjects).[12] These were regularly practised or concluded as was the exchange of ambassadors, which was an ongoing process. Even at times of bitter conflict, such as during the Crusades, diplomatic exchanges were taking place, being deemed indispensable, with scrupulous criteria for the selection of ambassadors being formulated, elaborate ceremonials held, and meticulous documentation and accounts kept.[13] For the Sufis, the world was never but indivisible, bound together by a universal fraternity (and sanctity) as well as a yearning for the true peace.

One story which primary school children in the Arab world habitually learn concerns the exchange of envoys and gifts, in *c.*798, between Haroun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad, and Charlemagne, king of the Franks and 'Roman' Emperor. What is often not told to the schoolchildren, in the course of drawing favourable distinctions between an illiterate and wild Charlemagne and a cultured and urbane Haroun, is that the two monarchs were forming a pact against a common enemy – namely the Muslim rulers in Omayyad Spain. The diplomatic gesture was an expression of that will, of that mutual interest.

This was but part of a pattern, which punctuated Muslim political and diplomatic history, and saw Muslim caliphs, princes, rulers, and warlords, in various parts of the Muslim world, forming, when the need arose, alliances with non-Muslims against other Muslims. The same is of course true of the other side(s). Christian, Hindu, and other princes and emperors also made agreements and coalitions with Muslim rulers against their own co-religionists, when this was in their interest. After all, politics is classically defined as the 'art of the possible', and the Law of Survival often takes precedence over other laws and pledges. This took place in ancient times, as it does in the present.

The present is difficult. It always has been. In 1881–2, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, British diplomat, writer, traveller, and champion of Muslim, Arab, Indian, and African causes, captured, poignantly and prophetically, the macrocosm of challenges besetting the Muslim world at the outset of a new age as well as the microcosm of a brave intellectual and moral choice that had to be made:

> Islam, if she relies only on the sword, must in the end perish by it, for her forces, vast as they are, are without physical cohesion, being scattered widely over the surface of three continents and divided by insuperable accidents of seas and deserts; and the enemy she would

> have to face is intelligent as well as strong, and would not let her rest. Already what is called the 'Progress of the World' envelopes her with its ships and its commerce, and, above all, with its printed thought, which she is beginning to read. Nor is it likely in the future to affect her less. Every year as it goes by carries her farther from the possibility of isolation, and forces on her new acquaintances, not only her old foes, the Frank and Muscovite, but the German, the Chinaman, and the American, with all of whom she may have in turn to count. If she would not be strangled by these influences she must use other arms than those of the flesh, and meet the intellectual invasion of her frontiers with a corresponding intelligence.[14]

'AbdulHamid AbuSulayman has already described and critiqued, in his important *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations*, the major policies progressively adopted by a declining Ottoman state and later independent Muslim nations. Though the 'abandonment of war as the basis of foreign relations with non-Muslims' was certainly a welcome decision, albeit one driven by expediency and an acute sense of vulnerability, the Ottoman and later Muslim and Arab policies of 'alliances with non-Muslim states' (by no means an innovation) and in the absence of genuine or consistent institutional and intellectual reform, resulted in these countries being sucked into disastrous European conflicts, thus further weakening their (and the larger) Islamic solidarity and security.[15] Even the 'third major policy' of 'positive neutrality', though laudable in its purpose and understandable in its historical context, was similarly handicapped and is no longer a 'working' policy, AbuSulayman observes, in the context of the New World Order, whose 'opportunities and dangers' require a most profound and comprehensive intellectual and systemic reappraisal.[16]

All the same, if the kind of cosmoses and challenges mapped out by Blunt and AbuSulayman are not explored, complexities addressed, failures critiqued, and historical periods differentiated and independently assessed, a unilateral version of the past is bound to take over, transforming itself into a 'golden' and effortless age, an age of undiluted 'innocence' and 'purity', or, alternatively, unending 'heroism', with mistakes recycled, intellectual laziness sustained, and opportunities wasted. Nonetheless, Muslims, like other peoples of our increasingly, but not seamlessly, globalized world, are bombarded by images of power – alluring images, images many of them find alien, threatening, tempting, tantalizing, revolting. As noted by Blunt, the Muslim world, though now largely 'independent' from the colonial powers of the nineteenth century, remains fragmented into many territorial or nation-states, members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (now totalling some fifty-six member states), but also of the UN and many international and regional organizations. Each state pursues national policies perceived to be conducive to its security and prosperity – or the security and prosperity of its governing elites, who, more often than not, are

in fact dependent on or in partnership with foreign backers, whose interests they also serve, or are made to prioritize. Each has diplomatic representations in many of the world's capitals. Increasingly, Muslim women are becoming part of that corps – a most refreshing development, one, though, continually resisted by champions of patriarchy and exclusion.

At this level of diplomacy, that is representation, we may note in passing that all modern Muslim-majority states have jettisoned with alacrity the medieval caveat about the strictly temporary nature of the envoy's mission in a foreign country. This had been a stern stipulation shared by other cultures until dislodged by the proliferation of permanent missions in the post-Westphalia Europe, a process that had begun in the fifteenth century but reached its culmination, though not perfection, in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Privileges, Intercourse, and Immunities and the Convention on Consular Relations of the same year. Indeed, one may further observe that by the early sixteenth century, the Ottomans had established a form of resident representation with Venice; and under Selim III (r. 1789–1807) a crop of brilliant ambassadors became articulate advocates and promoters of reform and rapprochement with Europe.[17] Later, in the nineteenth century Ottoman diplomats and officials were trained at an academy in Paris founded and funded by a Sublime Porte increasingly aware, since the reforms of Selim III and Mahmud II (r. 1808–39), of the desperate need for modernization and cooperation with Europe, the Ottoman Empire itself 'officially' becoming a 'European' player, and victim, at the Congresses of Paris and Berlin in 1856 and 1878, respectively.

Again at the level of diplomatic representation, and at a time in the post-modern world when the power of the media and Information Technology is at unprecedented heights and media (and own) misrepresentation of Islamic values almost unbridled, many Muslim representatives are not properly equipped, trained, or qualified to carry out their functions optimally. Many of them do not even speak the language of the country to which they are posted, while many are too closely associated with the often authoritarian regimes that pay them their salaries and which they are so anxious to please to the extent that they become of no real value to them, since they can provide little in the way of unbiased advice or objective assessment. It is often said that a good diplomat should not only stand *for* his or her country, but must also stand *up to* it in professionally and fearlessly recommending to their ministry the right course of action as judged by them at the time. However, the prevailing culture, as at home, is one in which independence of thought and initiative are generally discouraged, if not also resented and sometimes punished, and where accountability is absent or practised against the weak and the 'unconnected'.

Of course, many of these failings are also known to infest services of other nations. In fact, many career diplomats from Muslim countries perform their duties with exemplary, at times unequalled, dedication, and professionalism, utilizing the limited parameters and resources at their disposal with great

intelligence and resilience. But they, like the nations they represent, are caught up in and are subservient to a paradigm of power and exaggerated national sovereignty, which in turn is paradoxically subservient to the might and will of other dominant powers with their own national or hegemonic priorities. Almost each Muslim nation represented in the world's major capitals is bedevilled by security concerns and anxieties, often about fellow Muslim neighbours and internal dissension – anxieties which are constantly played upon by outside parties interested in maintaining hegemony, cheap oil supplies, or, among other objectives, unfettered exports of arms and industrial products. Rarely is there, beyond verbal expressions and ornate communiqués, effective coordination or genuine pooling of resources. Also absent is a rational and dynamic definition of foreign policy objectives along with the requisite reassessment of them as well as of the feasible options and systems of rewards and punishment, in light of changing circumstances. This has been the case not only in issues like those of Palestine, Somalia, or Chechnya, but also in humanitarian and relief aid, which, as the case of Kosovo illustrated in 1999, even when the will is there, the way is often lost under many feet rushing about with no discernible strategy or coordination.

Interestingly enough, the deep-seated anxieties about security, which Muslim nations and regimes suffer from, often rub off on their representatives abroad, as these rarely enjoy job security and live in fear of being recalled by their governments for the most arbitrary of reasons. And, of course, seldom do Muslim diplomatic missions co-ordinate with other Muslim missions abroad, missions that saw an upsurge in numbers as new Muslim-majority nations emerged from the rubble of the Soviet Union.

The OIC, with its Principal Bodies, Subsidiary Organs, Specialized and Affiliated Institutions, has been trying, since its foundation, in 1969, in response to an attempt to burn down al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, to pool the considerable but disparate resources of Muslim countries. Despite the great significance of its very existence as a forum for meetings and discussions, its achievements have been, to say the least, modest. These include the odd success in mediation (as between Pakistan and Bangladesh for mutual diplomatic recognition at the 1974 Lahore Summit), the moral support given to the Palestinian cause over the years, and the commendable, but little known, work of the Islamic Development Bank (economic cooperation being enshrined in Article II A 2 of the OIC Charter), in addition to the cultural and informational efforts of its UNESCO-styled Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the shrewd use of its presidency (between 1997 and 2000) by the Khatami reformist regime to garner prestige for a re-emerging Iran and guarantee it a more respectable re-entry into the pan-Islamic and international clubs. More substantial, however, has been the OIC's failure to stop or effectively mediate in inter-Muslim conflicts, let alone make a tangible impact on other conflicts, or galvanize the negotiating power of the Muslim world and develop a workable form of collective security. This combined has created

a popular impression of the Organization as an ineffectual and elitist institution, a mere talking shop, an expensive lounge for kings, presidents and ministers, and an occasion for pomp and circumstance, hiding deep divisions and hierarchies of interest, in short an organization divorced from, or, less harshly, not in tune with, the lives, concerns, and aspirations of Muslim masses, and of negligible weight and a diminutive stature in international circles.[18]

Already, in the popular Muslim perception, there is a widespread suspicion of officialdom, even on the part of the 'silent majority' that is not actively in opposition, but exists, or survives, *despite* their governments, in a two-tier system dictated and demarcated by a minority, whose monopoly over power and wealth is being increasingly scrutinized and challenged by educated youths. Certainly, suspicion of officialdom or scepticism about its machinations is not a bad thing. Nor is it exclusive to Muslim youths. Muslims, like others, live in an age of satellite TV, mobile phones, email messages, and other trappings of an era where the very borders of the territorial states are becoming nebulous, and where the power and agendas of the transnational corporations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and entities are expanding by leaps and bounds. The secrecy, elitism, and state-centred features of the 'old diplomacy', theoretically made redundant by Woodrow Wilson in his celebrated 'Fourteen-Point' statement on 8 January 1918 (delivered in response to the Bolshevik Revolution of the previous October), have been gradually, though never completely, giving way to a 'new diplomacy' of 'open covenants, openly arrived at' to evolve with more freedom.[19] Notwithstanding the betrayal at Versailles and later under Article 22 of the League of Nations of some key 'Points' relevant to the promised resolution or adjustment of 'colonial issues' like the 'self-determination' and 'independence' of colonized peoples, and in breach of the grand principles on which the League had been formed, the 'new diplomacy' continued to make some progress, enlivened and enhanced by the defeat of the pernicious Nazi and Fascist regimes in Europe.

The establishment of the UN was another boost to the emerging system and a great leap for humanity, despite the perversely undemocratic format of the Security Council and the tussle which surfaced and gathered pace, seemingly without end, between the two superpowers and their respective blocs at and outside UN forums. But the new diplomacy was to receive a salubrious shot in the arm with the demise of the Cold War discourse and the seeming triumph of globalization popularized and facilitated by the homilies of democratization, accountability, and good governance. In the wake of September 11 and the subsequent War on Terrorism the resort to public and media diplomacy by the US and other countries became frantic, initiating a spate of publications on the subject as well as debates and accusations regarding such issues as the wisdom or otherwise of dismantling (in 1999) the United States Information Agency (USIA) as an independent foreign affairs agency, one that could have arguably played a more effective role in helping to communicate a more principled and sensitive US message (and image) to the Muslim world.

Increasingly, and in view of perceptions about an open-ended nature of the current conflicts and the unfeasibility of conclusive victories even by a mega-power like the United States, the accent is being placed on 'persuasion' and 'attraction' rather than 'coercion', 'soft' rather than 'hard' power, and on track-two and multi-track diplomacy, with spaces and roles being sought for mediation and reconciliation by religious envoys and inter-faith groups. This became particularly relevant as a wave of religious revivalism and cultism, with all its perils and promises, had swept, in various degrees of intensity and diffusion, through such diverse countries as the Russian Federation, the United States, Japan, China, and Uganda, impacting on the mainly secular international system and affecting national and international policies. 'Winning the minds and hearts', along with combating extremism and stereotypes (and the ignorance that breeds them), educating public, creating understanding and inspiring trust, has become far more than a mere cliché, embedded as it is now in the policies of nations and groups, great and small. Interestingly, the role of 'private action' and 'private citizens', traditionally part of state-directed 'public diplomacy' with its panoply of state-funded programmes, is increasingly assuming a centrality and a prominence never seen before.

This provides an opportunity for a *new Islamic diplomacy* to emerge. A.A. AbuSulayman has already excoriated Ottoman and later Muslim failures to create 'the freedom and ability to cooperate, bargain, and manoeuvre in relation to the influential and covetous foreign powers', with the result that Muslim foreign policies became 'further entrenched in the camp of one foreign power or another'.[20] One may argue nevertheless that Muslim choices of 'Western' allies were often severely delimited or dictated by the Western powers themselves, engaged in a balance of power game, as was the case, for instance, in the Ottoman drift towards an alliance with Germany, a drift determined by anti-Ottoman policies which had been initiated in the early 1880s by William Gladstone. Still, the disadvantages of a one-track policy, let alone a policy that is haphazard or made on the hoof, are too obvious; and while some Muslim countries or regimes had benefited from the bipolarism of the Cold War period, those that had prospered or scraped through under Soviet protection or sponsorship felt suddenly exposed after the implosion of the 'evil empire', and they had to modify their policies almost overnight. Even long-standing allies or clients of the United States have of late, particularly in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the escalating, but poorly structured and enunciated, pressure on them by the Bush Administration, had to exert extraordinary efforts and go into unlikely contortions in order to please the now-dissatisfied patron and lone superpower.

Nonetheless, and despite some tactical success or *léger de main*, like that achieved by General Musharraf of Pakistan during the Afghanistan campaign (his own army and intelligence services having played a salient role in the rise and entrenchment of the Taliban) or Colonel Qaddafi of Libya in the wake of the Iraq invasion, Dr AbuSulayman's insight is amply

justified and should be taken note of, though not only by Muslim officials, but more creatively, given the self-constraints under which Muslim governments work, by non-governmental bodies working in Muslim countries or with Muslim issues. Indeed, in view of the universalist idealism and orientation which distinguishes Islam as a transnational faith, the thrust of this policy may well serve its purpose by, next to enhancing pan-Islamic solidarity, supporting a multilateralist, cooperative, inclusive, and holistic approach in international relations. Such diplomacy should have the potential to escape the narrow confines and rigid diktats of official state diplomacy, implacably and hopelessly caught up in parochial concerns and hamstrung by the culture of mistrust that exists between the rulers and the ruled, with no prospect of a major recovery or an effective coordination in the foreseeable future.

Muslims live in an age where the powers that be, be they states, multinational companies, media barons, or others, contend for global domination through economic and other means. Cutting-edge technologies like intranets, video conferencing, firewalls, spying satellites, and advanced encryption techniques have been placed at the service of diplomats. However, in the decade following the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the diplomats' role seemed to have been almost confined to the domain of enhancing the trading power of their countries. But the singular failure of nearly everyone, including erudite academics, seasoned diplomats, and astute businessmen, to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union or the cataclysmic eruption of the Iranian Revolution, illustrates the limitations and dangers of an overemphasis on economic and trade issues, however important and relevant these will continue to be to diplomatic priorities and functions as well as people's well being. Additionally, the growing ease and accessibility of Summit Diplomacy has taken further territory (but, thankfully, some drudgery as well) away from the daily work of diplomats.

All the same, the age, which has recently seen, together with the phenomenal expansion of the diplomatic agenda and the emergence of non-traditional players and global and vocal constituencies, the inclusion of the private sector and non-state actors in state diplomacy (an art honed to near perfection by Norway), provides many windows of opportunities. In fact, a committed, enlightened, culturally-sensitive, and IT-skilled individual or group can reach where no ambassador or attaché dares to tread. Accordingly, one may briefly list, in bullet point format, some of the *challenges* which the envisioned new Islamic diplomacy should address and some of the *tasks* it might undertake:

- To creatively recall lessons, insights, and practical guidelines from the Islamic diplomatic heritage, with a view to making them relevant and better known to Muslim audiences and educational systems, if not also to diplomatic academies. This should help in creating a culture of diplomacy, as well as of conflict prevention and conflict resolution, at several levels, while legitimizing that culture on the basis of historical and creedal precedence. Some of the time-honoured hallmarks, skills and tools of general

diplomacy, such as mutuality, courtesy, debate, negotiation, persuasion, compromise, conciliation, arbitration, toleration, communication, articulation, interpretation of information, planning, reasoning, and management, can be of momentous value in the cultivation of standards and models of good citizenship and good governance, if not also good education, at interpersonal, communal, and national levels. The cross-fertilization of Muslim diplomatic experiences with the well-established and emerging norms and variants of diplomacy elsewhere should be a complementary priority, which should further empower and broaden the home-grown models. The rarely-serenaded chapters of, and untapped material on, diplomatic relations and forms of peaceful (and profitable) cooperation between Muslims and others through the ages should also be brought to bear in the effort to inculcate the new ethos and culture.

- To commence or participate in a discourse endeavouring to apply broadly moral and ethical values to international relations, as well as to national policies within Muslim and non-Muslim countries, this to be achieved through debate and persuasion rather than strong-arm tactics or claims of superiority. Here, a role for religious or faith-based institutions can be defended. Too often, religion has been put in the service of individuals, groups, and governments to legitimize violence, aggression, dictatorship, and exploitation. Nonetheless, at this juncture in human history when the lineaments of a global economic apartheid seem to be emerging, moral restraints ought to play a role in global affairs. In this regard, the emphasis on the traditional Islamic notions of the Unity of Life and the Unity of Human Responsibility, which Islam shares with other faiths, is of value. The Qur'an stipulates that a murder committed against one person is a murder committed against all human beings, while the Hadith gives notice that if a man commits murder in one country and another man in a distant country makes allowances for the act, the two become entwined in guilt.
- To initiate, and participate in, inter-faith dialogue as an Islamic and human prerequisite and as part of a many-sided programme of cultural-interaction and coalition building, based on the fundamental belief in a common parenthood and destiny as well as in the belief that the often-bewildering diversity of creation, is but a sign of the infinite richness of the creation and, as the Qur'an implies, the grandeur, omnipotence, and equal love of the creator. The Qur'an also enjoins Muslims to dwell on the great unifying issues (as those common to the three monotheistic faiths, without excluding others) rather than on minor ceremonial and divisive details, that is, the destination rather than the means of transportation and the routes. In this regard, one may note with some relief that the often highhanded preaching in which the standard Friday preacher, to take one example, harangues or talks down to the congregation as though they were juvenile delinquents or a consignment awaiting

shipment to *Jahannam*, is mercifully on the way out along with, hopefully, sermons of hate and exclusion by semi-illiterate 'imams'. Dialogue, with Muslims and others, which, incidentally, may have had a hand in the above development, must be conducted with sensitiveness and courtesy. Meetings in mosques, synagogues, churches, temples, and community centres should be encouraged to enhance knowledge and develop hands-on and shared experiences. Unshared experiences, like unshared or un-communicated knowledge, itself an act of 'hoarding' or 'concealment' which Islamic texts designate as selfish and unworthy of a person of faith, are of little value to humanity at large.

- To defend minority rights, as part of an endeavour which should address a given society in its totality, particularly as new evolving concepts about citizenship and civil society are being debated worldwide. This should be seen as being in tandem with and an extension of the religious-cultural pluralism which distinguished Muslim civilization at its most inclusive. As the late Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi has observed, the *millah* system, as a fundamental identity framework, was historically pluralistic, composed of Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Sabaean, Hindu, and Buddhist communities, humanity and the Will to Peace being the criteria for membership.[21] And yet there is always a need to expand on and liberate both the text and the human intellect examining it. The immense folly and barefaced criminality of targeting or agitating against non-Muslim minorities or travellers in Muslim-majority countries has been made manifest over and over again. Besides its desecration of life and its innate treachery as well as breach of common citizenship, neighbourliness or hospitality, it has often played, particularly during the nineteenth century, into the hands of imperialistic and hegemonic powers, long adept at the policy of *divide et impere*, creating opportunities and pretexts for direct intervention. Rather, Muslims should renew or build on the classical Muslim tradition, which, thanks to its inclusiveness and tolerance when it genuinely practised them, had maximized its resources by employing non-Muslims or nominal 'converts' as envoys and mediators. The talents and skills of such individuals were often amply rewarded, but the services they rendered to the Islamic state were far more valuable than any material remuneration they received. Their very employment, one may argue, was of benefit to the culture of meritocracy, whose chequered history in later periods was symptomatic of a larger malaise. In this connection, the employment of citizens of the Islamic faith in Western diplomatic services, traditionally monopolized by adherents of the state religion or ideology, can, if practised with good intentions, generate considerable goodwill and practical benefits to the countries concerned. Relevant here also is the need to invite or consider seriously the membership of countries like those of India and the Russian Federation, where hundreds of millions of Muslims live, to the OIC. Not only would this be

to the benefit and security of those sizeable minorities, but also to the Organization itself, enhancing its communication lines with such states and communities and its negotiating power, net-working, conflict pre-emption, and prestige in the global arena. At a time when the European Union, an admittedly different organization, is accused by many Muslims, aided and abetted by statements like those of Monsieur Giscard D'estaing and others, of prejudice against Turkey's membership, a decision in favour of India's (and Russia's) admission to the OIC should be right and opportune.

- To invest in *ijtihad* as a dynamic and expansive intellectual force and in the concept of reality as evolving and many-sided. Part of the job or training of a diplomat has traditionally been to develop and hone the ability to discern patterns and clues where an untrained eye sees none. Listening, at individual, communal, and global levels, is also an immensely valuable skill and an indispensable bridge to understanding and reconciliation. The proverbial rule is 'There's no misunderstanding, but a failure to communicate.'
- To work to reclaim and revitalize such institutions as *hisba, furusiyyah*, and *waqf*, decimated by the monopolistic modern state, and to recreate and broaden interest in concepts like *falah*, *hayat tayyibah*, *huquq al-'ibad*, *'adalah*, *qist*, *tarahum*, *takaful*, and *amana*. The institution of *ilaf* (*eelaaf*), which, Hisham al-Ghazzi cogently argues, is at the heart of Islam's spiritual, social, economic, and political endeavour, also works at family, community, and global levels to spare human beings the dire effects of alienation by providing, at various stages of their life, agents and institutions of human companionship and support from childhood to old age, thereby working for harmony between people and between them and the natural and divine orders.[22] Inevitably, there is a need to insist on justice and fairness, without pointing a finger at a 'single' guilty party. Already there exists an emerging awareness today that religion cannot only focus on the spiritual aspects of life without looking at the 'material milieu in which the spirit lives'. Mediators who are conscious of the cultural baggage and the human frailties which they unavoidably carry make potentially receptive and successful public diplomats and negotiators. Those who are guided by the injunction to tell the truth even when it runs counter to their own interests or the interests of their relations, associates, or the powers of domination or terror in the world, are also well qualified to be true servants and envoys of fairness in the world.
- To present Islam not as a threat, but as an agent for peace and civility in the world. The codes of Chivalry, which the medieval Crusaders encountered, and (despite their own appalling brutality to the various communities in the Levant) sought to identify with, helped formulate some of the codes and protocols of diplomacy in subsequent ages. This in spite of the fact that the building blocks of the subsequent 'law of the nations' were to be put in place by jurists who, their many merits

notwithstanding, sometimes acted as agents or apologists for colonial expansion and exploitation. Nonetheless, the task of tempering mutual suspicions inherited from a subsequent colonial age in which the very diplomatic institutions and missions were used to undermine the popular will and aspirations of colonized nations remains a challenge that needs to be addressed with resolve but also goodwill. The spate of sweeping sallies against the core beliefs of the Islamic faith and Islamic culture by officials, evangelists, statesmen, and media outlets in the Western world in the wake of the September 11 attacks by a spectral terror group exploiting Islam and Muslim grievances has created an environment of animosity which can only be corrected by unofficial, hence more ingenuous and bona fide, diplomacy using balanced and truthful argumentation (and re-education), with no frantic desire to 'win' over an 'adversary's' contention or subvert their will or power of choice. While the 'word of an honest man' (or woman) remains central to traditional diplomacy, notwithstanding the traditional diplomats' stereotypical evasiveness or prudence with the truth, truthfulness remains crucial in public and, by extension, interpersonal and inter-organizational diplomacy. For information – already recognized worldwide as a vital 'power resource' – to be effectively utilized, it needs to be used and shared with candour and trust. Abraham Lincoln's often quoted caveat about the limitations of a politician's or any person's ability to fool people is relevant here, and is applicable to individuals as well as nations. Exposing such deception, particularly when used to prepare for or justify conflict, becomes another challenge to the Muslim diplomat.

- To invoke (and practise) the qualities of mercy, tolerance, and forgiveness, notably forgiveness of wrongs committed in ignorance. Such amnesty may include, among other forms, forgiveness of debts, a good practice explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an but rarely endorsed by financial or government institutions – recently being pressurized by popular campaigns to do so. One relevant activity here is Muslim participation in the legal and diplomatic campaigns on the part of communities and countries which suffered loss of life and ancestral land and property as a result of genocide (e.g. Jews under the Nazi regime) or breach of international obligations (e.g. Palestinian Arabs under the League of Nations Mandate), the campaigns to be seeking apologies and reparations, but also closure. The case of millions of landmines buried in Egypt's Western Desert by participants in the Second World War with their terrible legacy of daily deaths and injuries to children and others is, like the case of civilian victims of reckless bombings and shootings in Afghanistan and Iraq, an issue that needs to be placed more assertively on the international legal and moral agendas. The scant attention paid by the world media, let alone statesmen and politicians, to Muslim casualties in such places is likewise a human, ethical, and professional issue that should be of concern to all. Among such

concerned people should be the redoubtable gatekeepers who control the doses of information dispensed by such media outlets. Concerned parties should also include occupation authorities, who, when not caught on camera, rarely eke out an apology or inch towards reparation. Casualties often include women, children, bystanders, journalists, cameramen, peaceful activists, and aid workers, even, at times, whole families, whose humanity or personal histories are rarely allowed to filter through to the public in contrast with those of other victims. Similarly, abuses and atrocities (and they are numerous) committed by 'Muslim' governments (let alone 'Muslim' terror groups) against their own people should be closely monitored and redress vigorously sought at national and international levels. In these and other cases the spirit guiding the effort should not be that of vendetta but an awareness of the value of human life and of the necessity of linking that awareness to universal efforts and standards endeavouring to expand on the principle of accountability of all and the equal value of all victims. The code of selective humanism practised for long, though not exclusively, against people of colour must be exposed by citizen diplomats and human rights groups of all nations and creeds on account of the licence it gives to murder and discrimination. The bazaar of 'blood money' and hierarchy of lives recently endorsed by Libya in concert with her American and French interlocutors jars with the above principle. While the post-Lockerbie deal has adroitly helped to start that country's rehabilitation into the community of nations and justly, though never truly, 'compensated' the families of victims for their loss, it sharply contrasted with the failure of Western governments (or their occupying forces) to offer such compensation packages to Muslim victims of deliberate or accidental killing, a failure compounded by that of 'Muslim' governments to ever think of pursuing such claims on behalf of their citizens. Elsewhere, the campaigns conducted by countries like Greece and India for the return (or sharing) of national treasures expropriated during the colonial period should also be of interest to Muslim diplomacy. Relevant here is the awareness that must be generated, together with the required funding, to utilize the enormous and varied artistic talents (in such fields as music, dance, film, and representational art) of Muslims all over the world so that they may act as ambassadors of their nations and cultures. The rewards of their success or mere participation, as in the recent, splendidly staged, Olympics in Athens, often outweigh any political gain they may hope to achieve. In view of the astonishing ignorance reflected or perpetrated by world media outlets about the wide spectrum of Muslim realities and diversity, Muslims around the world, and particularly in Western countries, can do a great service to the cause of peaceful coexistence and human and cultural interchange by trying to produce or initiate, in addition to the 'weighty' political and polemical programmes they seem so hung up about,

'lighter' programmes, including situation comedies or sitcoms of the kind the late comedian and humanist of Lebanese descent Danny Thomas excelled in during the 1950s, investing so brilliantly and endearingly, along with his team, in the passions, humour, frailties, uniqueness, and common humanity of his parents' immigrant background within a rich multi-ethnic American context. At a time when Muslims in Western societies are leaving, or are made to leave, behind them (with few regrets) the stereotype of the docile outsider but take exception to being foisted with the new, more pernicious stereotype of the terrorist and the traitor, they need to engage with their Western societies at every human, civil, and diplomatic level. Such engagement will help ensure that their faith (and any other) will not be hijacked by a minority to whom the media seems predictably attracted, to the apparent exclusion of the much wider spectrum. Importantly, such engagement will help broaden and further enrich the discussion in present-day societies on such re-emerging issues as civil liberties, tolerance, freedom, loyalty, and identity, providing these societies, including those in the 'West', with challenging but humanizing perspectives.

- To propagate – at a time when the 'fat cats' of the corporate and financial worlds in collusion with political establishments are exploiting the present phase of globalization to pursue policies and transactions causing widespread injury, disparities, and resentment – the principle of sharing. This is to embrace the concept of sharing the planet, its wealth and resources, with others, developing mutuality, consensus, networks, and authentic multilateralism. In the pan-Islamic domain, which must not be detached from the global one, the pitifully small amount of inter-Muslim trade and investment currently taking place should, to say the least, be increased – not merely for the sake of trade itself. The participation in wider debates about the international commons and the environment, for instance, should be pursued with vigour – and not merely for the sake of participation.
- To continue to strengthen the links of such endeavours to a broadly universal and human one, inviting contributions from every individual and institution. For example, the experiences of organizations like the Moral Re-armament Movement (MRA), the Ecumenical Commission on European Co-operation (ECEC), and Pax Christi, which contributed to the Franco-German reconciliation after the Second World War, can be studied for useful lessons and insights,[23] as can be the experiences of religiously or humanistically motivated individuals like Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, Uri Aveneri, Archbishop Tutu, and Mary Robinson. The useful role of religious mediators of all faiths in local and international conflicts around the world has been amply documented. Muslims, throughout much of their history, have sought and benefited from experiences of other nations. In this they were *partly*

acting on Qur'anic and Hadith exhortations to people to seek wisdom and learning wherever these might be found; but they were also driven by need and necessity – mothers of most, if not all, inventions! Questions are raised from time to time by Muslim regimes about the 'real objectives' and 'hidden agendas' of some international NGOs, particularly those that monitor human rights abuses. While such regimes, fearful of losing their sway, have been in the habit of crying wolf at every shadow that seems to threaten the docility of their flocks, an enlightened public opinion will increasingly find it unacceptable to compromise on the expanding margin of civil liberties, even when these liberties are being constricted in some Western democracies in the wake of September 11 and other outrages, though not without challenge from many civil groups. Nonetheless, the process of exchanging views and experiences with the 'outside world' (already a dated term) cannot but be advantageous, despite the challenges implicit in any such activity. Despite huge imbalances (and injustices) in today's world, what may be described as a 'global consciousness' seems to be burgeoning and gravitating towards collaborative norms and action in resistance to policies perceived as designed to maintaining dependency in the 'third world'. Coercion, inimical to all faiths, including Islam, which textually forbids it,[24] will not sustain a diplomatic campaign or a peace formula, let alone a society or a civilization. 'A man [in the words of Dean William Inge, popularized by Boris Yeltsin at the time of the failed military coup in Moscow] may build himself a throne of bayonets, but he cannot sit on it.' Politics, however, being the art of the possible, some Muslim states have already been using international arbitration and mediation in disputes amongst themselves. This can be taken as a further sign of the absence of trust between such countries as well as the lack of faith in agreements reached between them without the presence of international (or third-party) mediation or guarantee. Even so, Muslim states, as well as Muslim groups and individuals, are an indivisible part of the international community (the larger human family) and should make use of the instruments and institutions of international legality and peacemaking, while the Muslim world struggles, at times seemingly in vain, to put together or activate its own 'official' mechanisms for resolving or mediating in inter-Muslim conflicts. In whatever case, the concept of moderation and compromise, which lies at the heart of any such endeavour and is native to Islamic teachings, needs to be explored in greater depth and with more maturity and vigour. Increasingly, ordinary people around the world, more aware than ever before of the disparities and possibilities of their world, are voicing objections to economic and other monopolies, preferring to see more participation and representation in various fields of human endeavour impacting on their lives. In the same way, claims to a monopoly over the truth, the whole truth, and none other than the awesome truth, is progressively being treated with

cynicism and aversion, though such claims seem to have of late typified discourses on both sides of the war on terror. The rhetoric of 'You are with us or against us' and of open-ended conflict seems to create an unwitting 'partnership' or jousting of convenience between extremists on both sides. Fortunately, for many people, the attractiveness (and doubted 'diversity') of a fiercely polarized real world is very suspect. 'The threat', Mervyn Frost has already warned and challenged us in his pioneering study of ethics in international relations, 'resides in the way that communism, anti-communism, nationalism, and fundamentalism all profess to understand the world in zero-sum terms – that is, as a battle between an insider group in mortal combat with a hostile external foe. Against crusades, ethical discourse appears tame – if not irrelevant'.[25] Nonetheless, the principle of sharing, of being an active part, of human realities and dreams, needs to be upheld with conviction and humility.

- To combat fatalistic and defeatist attitudes: 'Nothing can be done!' 'They have been killing each other for centuries!' 'They hate us for our way of life!' etc. Instead, unrelenting and *proactive* rather than *re-active* pursuits of diplomatic and human objectives should be the norm. Emperor-cum-General-cum-Musician Frederick II of Austria has shrewdly noted that 'diplomacy without power is like an orchestra without a score'.[26] Muslims of today, despite their vast numerical (and other) latent strengths, have been incapable of converting their strength (or even their weaknesses, as shrewd diplomats or adept Judokans can do) into a positive or affirmative force. The statement of a former Pakistan Prime Minister, H.S. Suhrawardy, on the hopelessness and inefficacy of any pan-Islamic move for unity or solidarity ('Zero plus zero plus zero plus zero is after all equal to zero')[27] may have been intended as a painfully truthful reading of Muslim realities; but the need is paramount to move beyond its scepticism and unintended fatalism. Much of the weakness of Muslim countries derives from the gulf that exists between the 'rulers' and the 'ruled' with the concomitant culture of mistrust and paralysis, which in turn tempts hegemonic powers to further bend and fracture the Muslim will, rarely unified in any case at the official level. With no effective machinery to bridge the gap between the regimes and their supposed constituencies or resolve rampant inter-Muslim disputes, on which the bulk of Muslim military expenditure is spent, and with no coherent system to reward or penalize powers that are supportive of or hostile to legitimate Muslim aspirations, the state of fragmentation of Muslim power, and its subservience or vulnerability to outside interests, seems destined to continue. However, while contemporary Muslims, at the popular level and among communities living in the West, may benefit from a study of, emulation, and collaboration with, Anti-Defamation and Anti-Discrimination organizations, they also need to explore (like their ancestors) the various aspects and facets of power, instead of being mesmerized (or intimidated) by its military and material manifestations

alone. As noted above, a wide variety of legal instruments and institutions can be used and appealed to, and an ample range of lawful options should be pursued, with confidence and imagination. The recent cases in the United States and Europe of successful or half-successful challenges (by such civil groups as the Council on American–Islamic Relations, the Muslim Council of Britain, the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, or the Council for the Advancement of Arab–British Understanding) to defamatory, erroneous, or racist public statements, programmes, and publications, testify to the growing effectiveness of such highly motivated but financially disadvantaged groups. In truth, the very fact of their financial want enhances both their credibility and independence. At the same time, it sharply illustrates the almost utter spinelessness of the well-heeled Muslim embassies, ever inclined in these situations to play the proverbial ostrich, which, incidentally, bears no resemblance to the *real* and ever-alert, and purposeful creature.

- To focus on people, but also lobby political, parliamentary, congressional, civil, non-governmental, legal, cultural, and other institutions as well as the press and TV and radio stations with determination, know-how, and courtesy. A signal failure of Arab diplomacy with the USA, to take one obvious example, is the preference shown by Arab leaders to deal with the resident of the day in the White House rather than with the complexities of American political life, to which the White House itself is a client. Likewise, the US political and military profile in the Arab world, unlike other aspects of American culture to which millions of Arabs are drawn, has been traditionally negative, partly because of a perceived superiority and double standards with a supposed preference by the American Administration to deal, directly and less cumbersomely, with autocratic and unpopular leaders over the heads of their own peoples. Such scepticism still lingers on despite the apparent change of tack by a Bush Administration anxious to insure better reception for its agenda in the region. In any event, both humility and vigour should inform diplomatic activism at grass roots and other levels. Richard Blystone, CNN Senior Correspondent in Europe, observed in an international diplomatic symposium at the University of Westminster:

  > And if you don't like this, you're all subscribers to television. Write to the management and tell them you don't like it. Because if you don't, the people who put together programming are going to think that you do like it.[28]

Of course no one should expect quick or instant results, famished though the Muslim masses have been for such transformation. As in public diplomacy, results here are often slow, but, more often than not, cumulative and enduring – an object lesson for all concerned.

Muslims, rightly (though somewhat belatedly) concerned with improving their image and diplomacy in the wake of the September

atrocities and the savage onslaught on the core values of their faith and civilization by some Western propagandists, politicians, and evangelists, may wonder about the usefulness of their endeavours in view of the ferocity of negative stereotyping available to Western audiences (including children) in various forms and genres of popular literature and the media decades before the September madness. Of course there will always be the contention, 'We told you so!', suggesting that the negative stories or films in the pre-September 11 era were able to *predict* such events and environments, ignoring the fact that adverse stereotyping and wild storylines are often self-fulfilling, being in some cases partly an incitement to rather than a result of violence.

Muslims, however, need to know that they too are responsible for the negativities and misconceptions that lay siege to their image and activities in the 'West' and the world at large. Their inability or reluctance to offer spaces for open dialogue and peaceful difference of opinion in their own lands and within their own political, economic, educational, and religious systems has allowed discontented and disenfranchised groups to confront them and the world with skewed and militant interpretations of their faith and culture. Such interpretations, whether by pamphlet or feat, have invariably hijacked and stripped to thinness such complex and spiritually opulent concepts as *jihad* and *shahadah*. Also, the inability or reluctance – in part caused, but not justified, by a bitter colonial experience and perceived bias and arrogance on the part of Western political elites – to condemn acts of violence perpetrated by extremist groups in a more direct and unambiguous fashion has contributed to the propagation and endurance of militant and negative images of Islam. It may be argued, however, that even when such condemnations and 'counter-fatwas' are declared, many 'gate keepers' in the Western media do not show a readiness to convey them to their public. In any event, self-motivated Muslim denunciations of atrocities perpetrated in the name of their defence must persist, even when atrocities against blameless Muslims are not always publicized or condemned in the West. The very concept of the 'West' (as of 'Islam') needs to be liberated from the dark dungeons of fixed and narrow notions, such liberation being essential, not only for mutual respect and cooperation, but also for the understanding of reality and the diverse and interdependent world we live in.

- To give due attention to women's issues and participation – the very notion of the *ummah* (the universal nation of Islam) resonates with the feminine qualities of motherhood, nurturing, caring, enfolding, comforting, civilizing, and loving, the latter word rarely mentioned in the political lexicon of nations. What dedicated and articulate women diplomats can accomplish at international forums and in the media, despite the admittedly male-dominated international and economic arenas they operate in, can in many cases outdistance and outshine what

their male counterparts can achieve. However, taking the worldwide power (and guile) of patriarchy into consideration, one needs to discriminate between genuine improvements in this field, which came about as a result of a long and hard struggle by women for a share of public participation and decision making, and those disingenuous and cosmetic moves by various systems and regimes to use women (for instance as military spokespersons) to garner sympathy or acceptance and in pretence of sensitivity or progress.

- To invest, as mentioned earlier in the context of media stereotyping, in the expatriate community of Muslims, many of whom have been participating with great distinction and integrity in the life and programmes of their adopted societies. Arnold Toynbee had suggested, almost in response to Oswald Spengler's argument about a terminal stage in the decline of Western European civilization, that this process could be reversed by the creation of a synthesis with other faiths and cultures such as Islam. True, the postulate of the Clash of Civilizations and the rhetoric of new crusades and *kulturkampf*, before and in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, have created for the Muslim communities in the West an environment somewhat similar to that which confronted German Catholics for some ten years under Bismarck or Japanese Americans during the Second World War. However, Western democracies still provide generous spaces for peaceful debate and remonstration which Muslims must use with the confidence (and humility) that they too have been a source of cultural enrichment and material and moral well-being to these democracies. Throughout, Muslim communities need to guard against being drawn into pointless confrontations over minor issues with their host societies; and, while exercising their civil rights with all the vitality (and wisdom) they can muster, they must not harbour a siege or ghetto mentality, which would inhibit their mental and other abilities to contribute to and benefit from their respective societies. At the same time, and despite the deep and enduring scars left by the occupation and traumatization of Muslim countries and communities during the colonial period, Muslims need to make a genuine and sustained effort to free their Western interlocutors from the memories and labels many Muslims insist on indiscriminately foisting on them. A failure to relate with sympathy, fellow feeling, and generosity to the massive shows of solidarity with legitimate Muslim and humanitarian causes shown by ordinary Western peoples would be a terrible letdown for all concerned. It would certainly be a mark of inability on the part of Muslims to liberate themselves from their own 'mind-forged manacles' enough to explore new beginnings and possibilities.
- To keep pace with information technology and the borderless world of cyberspace. Nabil Ayad, Director for more than twenty years of the Diplomatic Academy of London, has predicted that the diplomacy of

the future will be increasingly electronic, technology-driven, networked, and interactive, necessitating the training of diplomats in communication knowledge and skills.[29] But Muslims, like others, must also endeavour to reach the modem-less, even *phone-less*, millions of people in the world through more traditional means. Obviously, to many on our planet, the priority of getting clean running water is a more pressing need than surfing the Net!

- To compensate for the official Muslim failure (or reluctance) to use the annual Hajj as a great diplomatic convention, by investing in what the Sufis call the Ka'bah of the heart, creating parallel 'pilgrimages' within and without and at personal and group levels (the entire earth having been described in a famous hadith as a holy sanctum and forum). Here too linkages and networks, which cyberspace and other media and spaces may accommodate, are vital.
- To have the breadth of vision and magnanimity to support the diplomacy of Muslim countries and organizations in fairness and truthfulness and without being sucked into the machinery of official priorities or being compromised by them. Nation-states and their representatives remain major movers in the international arena despite the expansion in the scope of the global diplomatic agenda and the membership of players on the world stage. Nonetheless, and though recent cases have demonstrated the shortcomings of some NGOs to protect civilians in times of armed conflict, governments will be wise to try to partake of some of the dynamism, if not also the idealism and broad-mindedness, of NGO and citizen diplomats. Governments, some of whom have been using foreign public relations companies to enhance their image abroad, should also wake up to the fact noted earlier that a free and un-coerced (and certainly un-sycophantic) participation by private individuals and organizations in their country's diplomatic effort lends more legitimacy, urgency, credence, and attractiveness to that endeavour, particularly in view of the poor achievement records of governments in terms of persuasive skills. Public opinion, almost everywhere, tends to be suspicious of governments and politicians. However, by conducting campaigns and staging demonstrations at a global level 'people power' has impacted positively or, at the very least, focused attention on such diverse matters as anti-personnel landmines, unfair trade and investment deals, poverty, environmental degradation, and wars of aggression, which governments and corporations, despite their high-sounding claims, would have preferred to decide upon with little interference from the public. Ironically, globalization, against some of whose imbalances, insensitivities, and hegemonic practices, the demonstrators have been protesting in cities like Seattle, Genoa, and Doha, has provided the bridge and interface which has enabled these activists to come together and put their voices and placards before a global audience.

- To support and invest in the United Nations and the institutions of international law, since these, despite their dire need for reform and activation, are a global resource of inestimable value and of great untapped potential. Indeed, a global popular movement should be launched to wrest the UN and its bodies as well as the courts and corridors of international law and arbitration from the overbearing grip of states, making them available to ordinary people anywhere as adjudicators and sanctuaries. At any rate, what is often wrong with international law is the failure to apply it evenly and consistently. The door of the International Court of Justice, for instance, is one door worth knocking on again and again, even if the response is sluggish, merely symbolic, or unfavourable. A claim on international legality is a claim on universal citizenship. For this and other endeavours, a pool of lawyers and legal experts in international law and related legislations should be formed and continually enlarged and empowered at every level. The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), to take two chief UN texts, evolved from a long and universal struggle for the security and dignity of human beings, a struggle in which all the faiths of the world, including Islam, and certainly Muslim diplomats in the 1940s, contributed. To exaggerate or linger on, as some Muslim states and group have done, differences between the UDHR and Islamic laws, which also had evolved over a long period of time and are open to further evolution, is to attempt to take the Muslim world, or segments of it, away from the march of history and the league of human aspirations.
- To acknowledge that tensions and competing loyalties (as between the territorial state and the *ummah* or, at a personal level, between one's own family's immediate needs and those of faraway communities bonded to one, somewhat loosely, by faith) will in many cases remain unresolved as part of the human condition. And though no ideal solution can be found, such tensions and contending priorities need to be understood and addressed. Another tension (and a major irony) that needs to be acknowledged is that those Muslims who speak about unbridgeable gaps and irreconcilable rifts between them and the 'West' or non-Muslims are unable or unwilling to moderate, let alone resolve, long-festering feuds amongst themselves, as in the case of the 'great divide' between the 'Sunnis' and the 'Shiites' with its roots in the politics of the Prophet's succession and endless litany of bickering (and internecine killing) over peripheral rather than truly core issues.
- To come to the conclusion that a *living* model of Islamic ethics and conduct, especially when based on the principles of *tawhid* and *ilaf*, is still worth much more than mere rhetoric – let alone the rhetoric of confrontation.

Diplomacy, which comes from the word *diploma*, or folded document, which an ambassador carried as an authorization and passport, can nowadays be *un-folded* and carried by ordinary people who have the passion, compassion, conviction, rationality, imagination, dedication, tact, courtesy, adaptability, gender harmony, expertise, *and* VISION to work with others for more concord and fairness in a world whose problems, anxieties, and aspirations require participation by the broadest spectrum of parties.

# 3 Modern Arabic literature

## The West as a bridge to freedom – a bird's eye view

### A preamble and an overview

In D.J. Enright's *Academic Year* (1955), Mr Bacon, a long-serving university teacher of English in Egypt, makes the point that his situation is comparable to someone holding a 'sick child in front of a pharmaceutical counter and inviting it to choose a bottle for itself'. The old, affable and often-inebriate cynic expects the child of his metaphor to go for the 'biggest and brightest' – labels like 'Sartre or Monsieur Despair – Lawrence or Mr Sex – Kafka or Herr Too-good-for-this-world'. 'Trouble is that there's no literary tradition in this country,' Bacon adds.[1]

Despite an eye for the grotesque and the farcical in Bacon's, and two other expatriates' experience of a simmering and untidy Egypt of the late 1940s, Enright's semi-autobiographical novel, which at times seems like a unique blend of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lucky Jim*, and *Alice in Wonderland*, offers, besides its superb literary and narrative qualities, some telling insights into historical and cross-cultural, let alone human, situations. Of course, Bacon's pre-assumed knowledge of the local literary tradition sounds in this instance rather wanting as shown by his facetious remark about it (we are told by Enright's 'mouthpiece' in the novel that Bacon is '*the* authority' on things Egyptian). Nonetheless, the observation goes to record something of the contemporary Arab learners' avidity for European literature even at the expense of their seeming to turn away from their own indigenous tradition or exhibit symptoms of cultural schizophrenia. 'Milton is the greatest epic poet in *our* literature',...'We are proud of *our* world-famous dramatist, Shakespeare', Bacon's students would routinely write. Even with the rise of anti-British sentiment in the wake of the first Arab–Israeli war, which Enright witnessed from his vantage point in Egypt as a lecturer in English, the doting students would always warn their English teacher of an impending strike: 'Down with Britain – but not you, sir, you are our father. And there will not be any work for three days, sir.'[2]

The above students' adulation of, and identification with, Western literature resonates in various modern Arab works, one of which is Taha Husayn's account(s) of his student days before the First War. It was the European

(or European-educated) lecturers at the then newly founded Egyptian University, we are told, who provided the greatest attraction and instilled the most beneficial influence.[3] Such influence, backed by the reach and allure of a pervasive imperial presence, was to inspire Husayn to try to forge a new cultural identity (and destiny) for his country, one linked to Europe rather than the East. The sentiment found echoes (however ephemeral at times) among widely placed writers from the Maghrib to Iraq. From Hafiz Ibrahim to Nizar Qabbani, poets expressed a longing for the breeze from the 'North'. Panegyrics and dedications to Western writers were penned by such different poets as Ahmad Shauqi ('Sheksbir'), Salah Labaki ('Lamartine'), and 'Abdul Wahhab al-Bayati ('Ila Rafael Alberti'). These names and many others were to reappear over and over again in much of the literary and critical discourses of modern Arab writers, providing models of excellence and setting parameters of good writing, social and political commitment, and critical analysis.

Such developments were of course the outgrowth of a process whose starting point is conveniently and dramatically placed near the pyramids of Gizah on 21 July 1798. Of course, there had been a whole and wholesome legacy of contacts with and borrowing from ancient Greek philosophy and 'Western' culture during the golden age of the 'Abbasids in the eighth and ninth centuries. Even through the subsequent 'age of decadence', which the 1258 Mongol sacking and devastation (under Hulegu) of Baghdad had 'officially' ushered in, writers like Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), al-Qazwini (d. 1283), and Ibn Battuta (1303–77), among others, were proving that the spark of creativity and interest in the outside world was not completely snuffed out, neither by the foreign invaders nor the native conservatives fearful of the loss or 'corruption' of their heritage and content to live on a diet of stale imitations, though expending phenomenal energy on the compilation of huge lexicographic and encyclopaedic works. By the same token, an almost entirely indigenous, though excessively zealous and puritanical, reform movement, that is 'Wahhabism', sprang up in the mid-eighteenth century and stormed its way through a semi-idolatrous Arabia, while a circle of enlightened amateurs were reading Voltaire and Montesquieu in Damietta decades before Napoleon landed at Alexandria and Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–71) disembarked (in 1826) at Marseilles as head of Egypt's first educational mission to France.[4]

It was the colossal modernization project carried out by Muhammad 'Ali (1769–1849), beneficiary par-excellence of Napoleon's near-decimation of Mamluke power and Egypt's forward looking viceroy and al-Tahtawi's patron, which placed Egyptian, and subsequently other Arab, intellectuals of the day face to face with the dynamic and ever-innovative stream of cultural life in European cities. It was left mainly to such intellectuals (alongside some shrewd entrepreneurs and a steady flow of European experts, educators, governors, and missionaries) to sow the seeds of salubrious literary and linguistic innovation as part of the mixed imperial baggage. Gone

now were the days when the Turk could sit 'unmoved' (as Byron saw him in 'Childe Harold') in his assumptions of superiority while the 'light Greek' carolled by. Indeed, it was significant that Mahmud al-'Aqqad, a giant of the Egyptian and Arab literary scene for several decades of the twentieth century, called, in 1921, for the litmus test of translation (presumably into a European language) to be applied to the neoclassicist poetry of the much-acclaimed and hitherto-unassailable Ahmad Shauqi (1868–1932) with a view to ascertaining its inherent poetic qualities and ultimate worth.[5] Al-Jahiz (*c.*775–868), though living within the great mosaic (or arabesque) of 'Abbasid culture, had asserted that Arabic poetry was above and beyond translation. Now, however, a radically different social and cultural topography was emerging, being helped into the new birth by colonial midwifery.

The first impact of the imported genres and styles on the Arab scene may be partly compared to the rapt reception of the *Thousand and One Nights*, with its attendant Oriental vogue, in Europe of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, statements by translators and writers like Sir William Jones and Goethe about the benefits to Western literature of adopting Oriental models share with expressions by Marun al-Naqqash (1817–55) and As'ad Dagher (1888–1958), among others, the messianic zeal to place before their respective nations a formula supposed to save the native culture from sterility and effeteness – in Europe's case the long, outdated subsistence on classical Greek and Latin themes and imagery. However, in the Arab instance, the literary influence from the West was mediated and indeed enforced by a powerful, though versatile and alluring, imperial power. Perhaps Paul Alvarus' awareness of the pervasive (and, to him, alarming) influence of an Arab-Islamic culture in mid-ninth-century Cordoba[6] can serve as another analogy to this state of affairs, while partly explaining the sense of threat which conservative Arab quarters felt at the galloping spread of Western fashions, at times not recognizing that these were truly global events, appropriating almost every culture and country as a theatre and a marketplace.

While any comprehensive treatment of Western influences on modern Arabic literature is inconceivable in this brief space, one may still try to offer glimpses of some of the main issues involved and the ways in which Arab writers have made use of Western models to suit personal and wider national requirements at some crucial moments in modern Arab history. Some relevant analogies will be made along the way. But, it will be essential to note at the outset that this process was propelled (as perhaps in other parts of the world) by a quest for freedom, however challenging or unfulfilled at times, yet one which has persisted with great energy and boldness, often branching out into and interlocking with other quests – like the search for identity, communication, and recognition. Present throughout will be the paradox or irony of the colonized world seeking freedom and recognition by the use of the models and instruments of the very colonizing powers which denied or undermined its quest for those prerogatives.

## Poetry

### *A Romantic connection*

Much of the early twentieth-century Arab writers' fascination with the European and American Romantics – following an earlier generation's attraction to the more 'rational' and Enlightenment icons of Western culture – seems to have stemmed from Arab perceptions of those writers as champions of political, artistic, and intellectual freedom. The dominant view of the West by the educated Arab elite had already been substantially shaped by the reported ideals, rather than horrors, of such Western models of liberation as the French Revolution. The Arab empathy with that filtered model, at a time when the quest for political and other forms of freedom within the Arab world was intense, was indeed compelling. An early example of this is provided by Ahmad 'Urabi, the peasant officer who led the 1881–2 nationalist and reformist movement against the corrupt rule of Khedive Taufiq, and was particularly appreciative of one British sympathiser's family connection to the English Romantic Lord Byron, whom 'Urabi 'held in high esteem for his work for liberty in Greece'.[7] In this particular case, the termination – by a Britain anxious about an assumed threat to its financial and strategic interests in the Suez Canal – of that astonishingly enlightened and popular movement, which had drafted a national constitution of a most remarkable progressive and inclusive nature for its time, was to set a pattern to Western responses to such tendencies in the region.

Nonetheless, and despite the fact that generations of nationalist leaders like 'Urabi were to be met with extreme harshness by the colonial powers, who had given themselves the right to occupy other peoples' lands on a variety of pretexts and dictate the destinies of these peoples for generations to come, with incarceration or exile to remote islands being a customary punishment for dissension ('Urabi was exiled to Ceylon), Arab writers persisted in generally viewing the West as a paladin of civil rights and liberties. Such was the yearning for such desiderata! Al-Tahtawi, while in Paris, had accorded his sympathy to the 1830 Paris uprising, and even critics of Western imperialism like Shauqi and Hafiz Ibrahim (*c*.1872–1932) had a tendency to refer to colonial atrocities (such as the French bombardment of Damascus in 1925) as, in part, violations of Western principles and slogans. Arguably much of the pre-Islamic and early classical Arabic poetry (even without counting the literature of Sufism, with its own brilliant release of the imagination and bold yoking of religious and sensual imagery) possessed 'Romantic' features like the singing of freedom and uninhibited love, as well as the common man, at a time when church-dominated Europe could permit no such profanities. Nonetheless, early modern Arab writers like Khalil Mutran (1872–1949), Jubran Khalil Jubran (Kahlil Gibran) (1883–1931), Ameen al-Rihani (1876–1940), Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi (1892–1955), Ilyas Abu Shabaka (1903–47), 'Ali Mahmud Taha (1902–49),

'Abd al-Rahman Shukri (1886–1958), Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini (1890–1949), Ibrahim Naji (1898–1953), and 'Umar Abu Risha (1910–90), consciously (or otherwise) echoed sentiments and expressions (even rhythms) used by the likes of Blake, Goethe, Shelley, Keats, Byron, de Vigny, de Musset, Baudelaire, and Emerson, such writers increasingly becoming available in translation as well as (to those educated in the steadily secularized school system) in the original languages. The Arab writers (representing a progressively growing elite) were seeking, from the dominant, at times hostile or indifferent, culture, a verification of their yearning for freedom in its manifold forms.

But the encounter with the Romantic model, some of whose additionally attractive features were its lyrical, transcendental, vatic, and universalist preoccupations, enabled Arab writers to direct criticism at the materialism associated with the new culture while embracing the Romantic slogans of universal love and brotherhood, bringing their experiences and output closer to the Western experience and canon (Remember '*our*' Shakespeare?). Some indeed sought to synthesize Western Romanticism with the Arab equivalent, not realizing what a dangerous concoction Western political Romanticism, mixed with late nineteenth-century Social Darwinism and jingoistic and commercial enterprises, was doing to the independence (and assumed or envisioned unity) of the Arab world. Still, many an Arab Romantic manifesto (as by Mutran, al-'Aqqad, or al-Mazini) was fired with the zeal of a true Arab patriot, the sentiment itself, along with ideas about modernization, political institutions, and nationhood, having stemmed from a fascination with Western models. And many were convinced that they were part of a world-wide movement and a universal fraternity – a conviction that was to persist among many modern Arab writers of various artistic and ideological persuasions. Like Sa'id 'Aql's Qadmus setting sail for Europe (the continent named after the hero's own kidnapped sister), the Arab Romantic writer saw the world as his or her oyster; but, like the Western Romantics, he or she had to explore and experience some of the horrors and nightmares of the journey through it.

### *The shapes of things to come*

Arab modernist poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century (like Mahmud Sami al-Barudi), spurred by the encounter with the West (in Barudi's case, also by some seventeen years of exile in Ceylon for his role in the nationalist movement of 1881–2) and the increasingly felt need for the revival of an Arab, rather than Ottomanic, culture, attempted to recapture the vigour and majesty of early and mid 'Abbasid poetry. The resultant neoclassical school was to include some of the most celebrated and sonorous voices of subsequent decades. Poetry, like no other literary genre, has traditionally been regarded as the most perfect and cherished genre in the tradition and intimately entwined with and reflective of the Arab psyche; and

seeing it revitalized after centuries of decadence and derivativeness, the Arabs hailed its revival as both a national and cultural, rather than merely artistic, renaissance. However, in their zeal to relate to modern concerns as well as attain further liberation from some of the confining rules of classical prosody, successive generations of Arab poets (even those among the august group of neoclassicists) were to increasingly subject their verses (and readers) to the growing pains of modernity. But instead of merely mirroring the scenes or echoing the noises of the brave new world, the poets sought to assimilate the changes taking place around them in a more visceral and total way, one reminiscent of F.R. Leavis' shrewd comments (in 1932) on J.C. Squire's poetic anthology.[8] Interestingly, the astute al-'Aqqad had made a strikingly similar distinction between a superficial and a deep commitment to change a decade before Leavis' own.[9]

Thus instead of citing or celebrating through mono-rhyme (as is the case of traditional *qasidah* forms by Shauqi, Ma'ruf al-Rusafi, or Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi) the advent of modern inventions like air travel, electricity, or the railway, Arab poets were seeking greater freedom from formalistic and other constraints by further and bolder experimentation. Tamer al-Mallat's early poem on a speeding train – though it may still be favourably compared, in the sense of wonder it imparts (de Vigny and Jubran both had condemned trains), with the famous poem on the same subject by W.H. Auden – had treated the machine partly like an updated fleet-camel. Soon, however, Fawzi al-Ma'luf's ''Ala bisat al-rih' (1929) was making use of a dynamic flow of fourteen innovative cantos to depict the mechanical achievements of modern science (in the shape of a flying machine he was a passenger in) while insisting on the spiritual values of the East. Luwis 'Awad's train journey some two decades later ('al-Hubb fi Saint Lazar', published in 1947) intimately embodied, with its irregular form and conflicting emotions, the physical and cultural experience of a young Arab Prufrock in Europe. Later poets went their various ways in search of freedom (and identity), employing blank and free verse (Ameen al-Rihani, from his vantage point in the *Mahjar*, had noted its use by Walt Whitman and initiated its adoption in Arabic), with subsequent poets (like Unsi al-Hajj, Kamal Abu Dib and Yasin Taha Hafiz) using 'prose', 'visual', or 'kinetic' poetry to embody or discharge their new visions and questionings.

### *The case for Symbolism*

A friend of the Lebanese poet Adib Mazhar (1898–1928) often heard him recite to himself Albert Samain's line, 'Le Seraphin des soirs passe le long des brises', which influenced the composition of what may have been the first Symbolist poem in modern Arabic literature – Mazhar's own 'Al-Nasim al-aswad'.[10] Had the poets of the Arab *nahdah* (modern revival) re-invoked highly innovative and complex figures from classical Arabic poetry and literary theory (like Abu Tammam (d. *c*.845), al-Jurjani (d. 1166), and the Sufi

poets), Adunis ('Ali Ahmad Sa'id) would later contend, they would have obtained a richer fund of symbols (as well as a more pertinent model for Arab modernity) than found elsewhere.[11] Be that as it may, a later generation of modern poets, like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926–64), Khalil Hawi (1919–82), and Salah 'Abd al-Sabur (1931–81), were discovering, as Adunis himself was, through their reading of European and American literature evocative images which the Western writers had been employing to address and comment on a prosaic, increasingly mechanical and spiritually disembodied world. Thus was ushered into modern Arabic verse (at a rate unknown during the Romantic phase) a flood of images borrowed from classical Greek and Roman mythology and the Bible – and of course Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, or at least the chapter translated by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. William Jones, who, in the late eighteenth century had wanted to invigorate Western poetry and literature with an infusion of Eastern poetry, would have been bemused by all this.

The figure of T.S. Eliot towered like a colossus over this period. His particular attraction stemmed from a variety of reasons. Prominent among these was his ability to combine a deep-seated spirituality and a phenomenal knowledge (and use) of tradition with a razor-sharp awareness of the material allure and spiritual failings of modernity – all expressed with a studied blend of lyrical exuberance and ironic detachment as well as a keen sense of an overall epic design. But, despite the obvious echoes from such works as *The Waste Land*, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' recurring in the works of al-Sayyab and al-Sabur, among others, the Symbolist poets were able to forge composite symbols which they felt were pertinent to both their own creative needs and the requirements of the historical period through which the Arab world was passing. Through myths and symbols, such as those of Prometheus, Orpheus, and Icarus, combined with those of Tammuz, Ishtar, Adonis, Baal, Osiris, Gilgamesh, the Phoenix, and the crucified Christ, as well as those of al-Khidr, al-Mahdi, al-Hallaj, Sindbad, 'Abdul Rahman al-Dakhil (founder of the Omayyad dynasty in al-Andalus), and others, they were forging an all-embracing (though often strife-ridden) metaphor of rebirth and renewal, not exclusively in a predominantly spiritual sense – as in Eliot – but one with a marked political and social resonance.

Even with the relative retreat of the Symbolist wave in Arabic literature and in the heat (or immediate aftermath) of the 1982 Israeli onslaught on Beirut (and the massacre at Sabra and Shatilla), the Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish (b. 1941) was able to restrain his oratorical proclivity enough to produce, in flowing 'free verse' and with a complex interplay of a variety of tones, a poem of epic proportions (*Madih al-dhil al-'ali*) not too remote from the tradition of Eliot. The poem interweaves, both passionately and ironically, the image of Ulysses (first introduced into modern Arabic literature through al-Tahtawi's translation of Fenelon's *Les Aventures de Telemaque*) with that of the medieval Arab concept (and

grass-root institution) of *al-futuwwah* (a fraternity of brave and chivalrous youths championing the weak and the undefended). The new Ulysses-cum-*al-fata*, now de-romanticized and battered, nevertheless emerges (together with the generic, and oracular, bard) as a messenger of hope and of a triumphant, albeit scarred, maturity. He succeeds – aided by a cavalcade of ancient and modern urban symbols (and a refrain of Hamlet's 'To be or not to be') – in prevailing over the immediate calamity, asserting an identity that transcends nationalism itself, while indicting (besides the effete Arabic political discourse) both Arab and Western realpolitik, which has allowed the continual victimization and suffering of the Palestinian people.[12] Ulysses reappears, however elusively, with his faithful Penelope, and with a contribution from the immortal Scheherazade, in Mahdi 'Isa al-Saqr's recent novel, *Imraat al-gha'ib*, to comment on the drawn out tragedies of the Iraqi people faced with the traumatizing effects of successive conflicts and the unsettling devastation of their society.[13] The fate of Iraq, so central to contemporary Arab fears and aspirations, has also prompted Darwish's lifelong friend and fellow 'resistance' poet Samih al-Qassim (b. 1939) to depart from his beloved free verse and return to the *qasidah*, indeed *mu'allaqah*, form in his epic elegy (and eulogy) of occupied Baghdad. In the poem, the Arab city stands bleeding but tall over the rubble and carnage of the moment to remind the world of its glorious past, which saw the metropolis, under al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun, as one of the greatest synthesizers and humanizers of cultures and creeds in human history. But it is not the city of the past that al-Qasim wishes to see revived, but a new city and a reinvigorated symbol of rebirth, recovered from a new Mongol invasion and a pan-Arab malaise, to embrace the future with confidence, humaneness, and dignity. The indomitable Scheherazade also appears as a tamer of tyrants while the figure of the 'Abbasid anthologist, critic, and chess master Abu Bakr al-Suli (d. *c.*946) reinforces the role of writers, intellectuals, and artists in forging a new destiny (and nobility) for the Arab nation and humanity at large.

Symbolism, like Romanticism before and Surrealism after, offered the Arab writer a vehicle with which to explore further recesses (and potentials) of the Arab psyche, as well as the capabilities of the Arabic language itself. It also provided, when needed, a relatively safe method of self-expression. In 1944, Muhammad Mandur (graduate student of Linguistics in France between 1930–9) had pleaded for a whispery 'à-mi-voix' rather than sonorously public verse.[14] And poets like 'Umar Abu Risha, himself having spent some time in England, where he fell under the influence of Browning and Tennyson, were being exposed to the hushed but subtly revealing tones of the dramatic monologue, their experimentation further displacing the traditionally (though not exclusively) stentorian tone. Surrealists like Unsi al-Hajj were now creating a private, riddling language, which, while expressing the increasingly complex and unsettling political and social realities around them (even providing in part a form of retreat from these realities),

incited the reading public to actively participate in the 'ontological life' of a poem. Consequently, the intellectual demand on the reader shot up by leaps and bounds. The celebrated standard-bearer (and interpreter) of modernity, Adunis, equally at home with the French Nobel Laureate St John Perse as with the tenth-century mystic al-Niffari, was to marry the language of Surrealism to that of Sufism, creating narratives and images of great beauty and originality, though not divorced from historical and socio-political realities, with the aim of reconstructing a new idiom, perhaps a new Arab psyche and a new world. In him, as in some others, the use of symbols has been undergirt by the desire on the part of the poet to elicit maximum intellectual awareness from his readers and galvanize them to tap a rich ancestral resource that deserves to be visited afresh and salvaged from centuries of neglect or repression.

Freeing the tradition from a self-appointed priesthood, then harnessing it to the 'infinite variety' of countless 'individual talents', has been a remarkable achievement, one entwined with a considerable measure of success in infusing the old, perceived as sacred and static, with an evolutionary and dynamic impetus, thus opening up the language (and minds) to the limitless possibilities Arabic is inherently capable of. This accomplishment has in turn been confirmed and consolidated by the poets' ability to create a wide, sympathetic audience for their new language and styles. Such success is a testimony to the entrenchment, within the collective psyche, of the need for both imaginative literature and national self-renewal.

## Drama

Returning from France, where he had spent three idyllic years imbibing (like the earlier Shauqi and Muhammad Taymur) influences from the French literary scene (and particularly Parisian theatre) instead of pursuing legal study, Taufiq al-Hakim (1898–1987) gave a forceful and pertinent expression (through *Ahl al-kahf*) to Egypt's state of affairs in 1933. Welding the classical and experimental theatre of the contemporary West to the Qur'anic (and Christian) story of the Seven Sleepers, he commented cerebrally and imaginatively on an Egypt at the threshold of a new and challenging chapter in its modern history. Refraining from making direct statements or offering easy solutions, al-Hakim persisted in a series of experimentations with a genre completely new to Arabic literature, save for forms like the medieval Shadow Play and the annual cycle of pageants by the Shi'ite community commemorating the martyrdom of Imam al-Hussein, taking the early 'modern' experiments of Ya'qub Sannou' (1839–1912) and the neoclassical but ever-versatile Shauqi to new heights embracing a multiplicity of forms and styles, which would be further developed by a younger generation of dramatists like Nu'man 'Ashur, Yusuf Idris, Alfred Faraj, Mikhail Ruman, Mahmud Diab, Muhammad al-Maghut, al-Tayyeb al-Siddiqi, 'Abdul Rahman Wild Kaki, Sa'dalllah Wannus, 'Abdul Karim

Barshid, Najib Srur, and 'Abdul Haq al-Zirwali. In the process, the Arab dramatists were inviting some handy influences from Sartre, Brecht, Pirandello, Wilder, Ionesco, Beckett, Weiss, Grotowski, and others, linking them, whenever relevant, to a tireless attempt to forge a national theatrical style. This achieved some notable successes, the Lebanese al-Hakawati trope (directed by Rogé 'Assaf) and the Tunisian Masrah al-Ardh being among these at popular and elite levels, although such successes have of late been contested by inferior types of comedy and slapstick at a time when the theatre worldwide is facing tough competition from other forms of entertainment and the inexorable march of cyber technology and satellite TV. However, more recent years have seen the rise (or re-emergence) of the Palestinian theatre, using a blend of folkloric and conventional theatrical elements to propagandize national traumas and aspirations, with some ingenious borrowings and adaptations, which the Lebanese have always been adept at as exemplified by, among others, Michel Jabr's 1985 Lebanization of Ionesco's *Delire à Deux* in a trenchant commentary on the Lebanese state of affairs at the time and, more recently, in January 2004, Rif'at Tarabay's adaptation, at Théâtre Monnot, of Ludwig Tiek's *Le Chat* as an expression of the passing of old Lebanon, with its problematic dreams and delusions, and the birth, however troubled, of a new, perhaps saner one.

## Fiction

Two Arabic medieval narrative forms, the didactic fables (of Sanskrit origin) *Kalilah wa Dimnah* and *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*, had (under such titles as 'The Fables of Bidpai' and *The Thousand and One Nights*, respectively) made their way into Europe, where they exerted, through numerous translations, an influence on a variety of literary genres, the latter (*The Nights*) continuing to this day to fascinate and fire the imagination of Western writers, artists, and film makers. The debate as to whether *Risalat al-Ghufran* by Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri (973–1058) had exerted a similar influence on Dante's *Divina Commedia* still waxes and wanes in academic circles.[15] However, another medieval genre of fictional narrative, namely the *Maqamat* of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (*c.*968–1008) and al-Hariri (1054–1122), which introduced witty *picaros* charming and tricking their way through largely urban and secular settings, may have exercised, through their Hebrew translations and other cultural contacts in Spain, some influence on the rise of the European picaresque novel, itself seeing its first major flowering in Cervantes' masterpiece *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605, 1615). More confidently, the *Maqamah* genre was to attract the notice of early Arab modernists (like Nasif al-Yaziji and Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq) as they were exploring indigenous but once-innovative and subtly subversive forms (the *maqamah* certainly fitting those attributes) in which to express their thoughts and feelings in a new age. Skilled and resourceful in their use of the genre, they, nonetheless, came to discover that

their need for further freedom and innovativeness went beyond the limitations and strictures of that form as well as of the folk sagas and popular romances exemplified in such fascinating but little studied works as the *siyar* of *'Antara*, *al-Malik Sayf*, and *Dhat al-Himmah*.

The first Arabic novel, M.H. Haikal's *Zaynab* (1910–11), written in Europe and serialized, like the earlier European novels, in the new press, benefited from a host of nineteenth-century European (mainly French) novels and novelistic experiments of Arab writers like Zaynab Fawwaz (*c.*1850–1914), Muhammad al-Muwaylhi (*c.*1858–1930), and Jubran, in addition to the liberal and early 'feminist' views of Qasim Amin (1863–1908), to offer, among other perspectives, a new portrait of Arab women in a new genre. This exercise was to be carried to greater complexities and conclusions in later generations by women writers born in the early and mid decades of the twentieth century (like Nazira Zayniddin, Latifah al-Zayyat, Durriyah Shafiq, Suhayr al-Qalamawi, Ulfat al-Idlibi, Emily Nasrallah, Samira 'Azzam, Daisy al-Amir, Colette Khuri, Layla al-Ba'albaki, Ghada al-Samman, Layla 'Usayran, Alifah Rif'at, Nawal al-Sa'dawi, Layla al-'Uthman, Fatmah al-'Ali, Hanan al-Shaykh, Layla Abu Zayd, Houda Barakat, Sahar Khalifah, Liana Badr, and Ahlam Mosteghanemi) as well as by women like Assia Djebar, Fadia Faqir, Ahdaf Soueif, Kathryn Abdul-Baki, and Soheir Khashoggi, who chose a medium other than Arabic to send truly distinctive and vibrant messages to a different, perhaps dimly informed, but wider audience. The pains and joys, defeats and triumphs, of their heroines have become a mirror to and a register of the fluctuating fortunes of their societies, and an impulse for change. But as the stories of Alifah Rif'at and others have shown, a strong link with tradition (reflecting the writers' own daily lives) is zealously maintained, to the enrichment and intriguing complexity of the works.

The pioneering *Zaynab* itself was to come in for criticism (on account of its very Romanticism) in al-Sharqawi's *Al-Ardh* (1954). The accent now was on socialist realism and *engagement*, Romanticism itself having been discredited by the Imagists and the New Critics – not to mention two World Wars, in addition to the Palestinian *nakbah* of 1948. Thus, al-Sharqawi's novel was part of an imposing tradition which included Gogol, Ignazio Silone, Erskin Caldwell, and Pearl Buck. Mahmud Taymur (1894–1973) had already made his painful transition from Romanticism, helped by his reading of such masters of the short story as Maupassant and Chekhov, as well as, more pressingly, by the violent changes coursing through Egypt as it confronted an obdurate British occupation and sought a forum and an identity for itself among the free nations of the world – a quest poignantly (but not un-humorously) portrayed in Najib (Naguib) Mahfouz's *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (1956), the first part of his celebrated trilogy, itself modelled after the great European tradition of the *roman fleuve*. An alert and discerning Taha Husayn immediately spotted the importance of Mahfouz's achievement: 'I have no doubt that this novel will hold its own when

compared with any of those written by novelists of international stature, in any language of the world,' he declared.[16]

Later Arab novelists and short story writers, including Mahfouz himself, were to experiment with diverse forms of realism, continuing to benefit from the wide range of imported models available to them as well as from the still wider range of national trials and tribulations which lent them to artistic expression. Still others, like Imil (Emile) Habibi (1921–96) and Jamal al-Ghitani (b. 1945), also gaining and suffering from the same assortment of imported models and native crises, have opted to revisit various Arab classical forms, like the *maqamat* genre and historical and Sufi narrative forms, to reflect with great inventiveness and poignancy on acute contemporary political and social issues and events.

Interestingly, just as some Arab critics in the mid 1970s were commenting on the sluggishness and/or derivativeness of the contemporary Arab novel, a new crop of writers, spurred on by national needs as well as by the successes of the genre in Latin America and elsewhere, soon instilled a new vitality and hope. Of further interest to our argument, the suggestion that many an Arab novelist and short story writer is further impelled to creativity (and controversy) by the allure of having his (and especially *her*) work translated into Western languages offers additional food for thought. Be that as it may, the rise and relentless progress of the Arabic novel is an indication of great significance. It signals a fierce determination on the part of the Arab practitioners and their publics to use and approve a now-universal art form, endowing it with their unique perspectives and requirements. It also signifies an endorsement of a modern and dynamic form of literary Arabic, which, though accommodating so many local dialects and colours, is common (and comprehensible) to all readers in the twenty-two countries that form the League of Arab States, inadvertently bypassing that dilapidated official organization and hinting at the role which literature can play in forming a new Arab world. That world, for centuries entrenched in a predominantly *poetic* literary tradition, now has an ample, and, thanks to the new educational opportunities, expanding range of literary expression, which can benefit from a tradition of innovativeness and resistance to injustice and tyranny in classical and modern Arabic poetry, while taking prose, the medium and genre of modernity par excellence, to new encounters with the colossal problems and challenges that confront Arab societies.

## The Nobel Prize for Literature, and conclusion

When Najib Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, many in the Arab world felt that this was a much belated recognition by the 'West' of Mahfouz's own undoubted genius. The 'great novel trilogy', which may have formed the basis of the Nobel nomination on the strength of its 'broad campus depicting contemporary life' and its bold address of 'the crucial questions of existence', characterizing an output 'rich in nuance – now

clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous', and forming 'an Arabian [*sic*] narrative art that applies to all mankind',[17] had been published way back in the 1950s. For decades, names like Taha Husayn and Taufiq al-Hakim, in addition to Mahfouz, had been mentioned by Arabs as fit candidates for the prize. In the process, a conspiracy theory had crystallized to explain the exclusion of modern Arab talent from that honour. Perhaps in compensation, Professor Sture Allén, of the Swedish Academy, in his presentation speech, made a point of also honouring the laureate as a 'spokesman for Arabic prose', through whom, 'in the cultural sphere to which he belongs, the art of the novel and the short story has attained international standards of excellence'.[18] Mahfouz himself, in the passionate and poised, poignant and polished Nobel Lecture he wrote for the ceremony and which was translated and read for him, first in Arabic then in English, by Mohammed Salmawy, representing the cultural office of Egypt's Foreign Ministry, made it clear that, though Arabic was a language 'unknown to many' in the Academy's hall, it was in fact 'the real winner of the prize'.[19] He added:

> It is, therefore, meant that its melodies should float for the first time into your oasis of culture and civilization. I have great hopes that this will not be the last time either, and that literary writers of my nation will have the pleasure to sit with full merit amongst your international writers who have spread the fragrance of joy and wisdom in this grief-ridden world of ours.[20]

Still, even after the startling announcement and the grand ceremony, with the inevitable ripple of curiosity worldwide, there were those in the Arab world who explained the award in cynical terms, namely as being a reward to Egypt in her pro-Western policy re-orientation and peace with Israel. But there is no denying the fact that from the very beginning – even as al-Tahtawi submitted the manuscript of his *Takhlis* to his French examiners and Marun al-Naqqash stood up to introduce his musical imitation of Moliere's *L'Avare* to a select Beirut audience, and even later, as Sa'id 'Aql's Qadmus set sail for Europe or Adunis' persona for New York – there had always been a deep personal (and wider) desire on the part of the Arab writer to get his or her voice across to the rest of the world. The Arabs, a 'median' nation and, since ancient times, with some exceptions, in close touch with various civilizations and continents through trade, empire and faith, were rarely happy to be isolated from the rest of humankind. The great cultural synthesis under Islam (and the earlier and enduring monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity) had sowed into the collective mind (already imbued with memories – however distant – of yet more ancient imperial and civilizational glories) an international dimension which, though dormant and unnourished for a time, would spring back to life at the first downpour. Sture Allén was not at all off the mark when he judged Mahfouz's yield as 'the result of a synthesis of classical Arabic tradition, European inspiration and personal

artistry', while Mahfouz himself, having extolled so lyrically, sensibly, and humanely to his Western audience the higher virtues of the two civilizations whose parentage he proudly acknowledged, the Ancient Egyptian and the Islamic, stated with confidence and humility:

> It was my fate, ladies and gentlemen, to be born in the lap of these two civilizations, and to absorb their milk, to feed on their literature and art. Then I drank the nectar of your rich and fascinating culture. From the inspiration of all this – as well as my own anxieties – words bedewed from me.[21]

All the same, the pace and diffusiveness of modern (and postmodern) culture continue to be increasingly awesome as is the pressure (from within and without) to conform to it. There is a certain inevitability about this act of deference to a dominant culture, which demands (for its own self-affirmation and interest) that act even as it mocks its servility and imitativeness. The supplicant on whom the honour is conferred experiences a sense of euphoria reminiscent of Yasin's reaction (in Mahfouz's *Bayn al-Qasrayn*) to a friendly chat he has had with one of the British soldiers patrolling Cairo streets. A succession of writers – from Taha Husayn, who, for all his loyalty to and identification with Western culture, would yet rap the innovative Iliyya Abu Madi over the knuckles on account of some grammatical and metrical lapses in the Lebanese poet's verse, to Salah Labaki, to Adunis – have warned against slavish imitation, deeming it a recipe for artistic (and cultural) disaster. At the same time, Arab literary historians (often benefiting from the tools and resources of Western scholarship) are fond of citing various cases of Western 'indebtedness' to early Arab literary and cultural models. By this they are perhaps indirectly asserting that, as heirs to a people who had made a contribution to world culture, even to the very beginnings of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, they have a right to the benefits and challenges of contemporary culture, even with its negative by-products and in the face of denigrations by anti-Arabs and exhortations to isolationism by some Arabs.

As shown by, among many examples, al-Ma'mun's Baghdad and Queen Elizabeth I's London, contact with other cultures, however challenging or unsettling at times, often pays salubrious dividends in cultural and literary terms, other benefits notwithstanding. As the translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* into European languages also shows, one spark can, other conditions permitting, set countless imaginations ablaze. But the case of *The Nights* can additionally serve as a warning, since few *creative* writers in the West have been able to go beyond the entrenched fantasies or spectres and view the evolving and struggling Arab world with the clear sight, sympathy and respect it deserves.

Modern Arab writers, unlike the 'sick child' of Bacon's avuncular simile (in Enright's novel), have, on the whole, managed to handle the merchandise

across the 'counter' with some skill and prudence, if not also with shrewd self-interest. This despite the fact that some (indeed many) appeared at times to duplicate too closely the models from across the sea or attempt to compress in too short a time a whole age of fermentation and development, while others brazenly flaunted shameless plagiarisms – like al-Mazini's youthful poems, which he recanted in later life. Others, like the formidable Khalil Hawi in 'Al-Bahhar wa al-darwish' (1967), were dissatisfied with both East and West and would not be hemmed in by either, let alone wear any 'borrowed robes'. Interestingly, many, even while drawing on the well-spring of modern Western culture, have sought to save it from its perceived materialism and insularity – a messianic streak not peculiar to them and probably expressive of a desire to be partners in, rather than victims of, modernity and globalization.

The situation on the ground is certainly one of continuing change, along with the excitements and anxieties attending a cultural scene in a state of flux. School and university curricula in various parts of the Arab world carry required readings from Western (mainly British and French) literature which, despite what is commonly asserted by the Western media, generally portray the West in a favourable light. This is, incidentally, quite disproportionate with whatever there is about real, rounded Arabs or their literature in Western textbooks for children and young people. In this context it may be interesting to note that certain Western perceptions of the Arabs, with their 'camel countries', are so jealously maintained and frozen in time and space that choices of what is translated from Arabic, particularly feminist, literature are often governed by whether these texts, Amal Amireh has argued recently, conform or not to the perceived stereotype.[22] Nonetheless, and despite a general condemnation by Arab writers of US policies in the region, and a sensational rejection (in October 2003) by the renowned and multitalented Egyptian writer Sun'allalh Ibrahim (b. 1937) of a prestigious government literary award in protest against US and official Arab policies, there is a widespread belief among Arab intellectuals, writers, artists, and educationalists, that links and collaboration with their counterparts in the West are much to their own individual benefits as well as to the benefit of pan-Arab causes and aspirations. In the run-up to the large-scale Arab participation in the Frankfurt International Book Fair for 2004, the Goethe Institute organized, on the sidelines of the 36th International Cairo Book Fair and under the evocative Goetheian title of 'West-Östlicher Divan' and in collaboration with a number of German and Egyptian institutes, what turned out to be a valuable seminar of lectures, workshops, and literary readings by Egyptian and German writers, publishers, educationalists, and academics. At the Frankfurt Fair, which hosted the Arab World as its Guest of Honour, the Arab participation, supported by the Arab League, was, as 'viewed on all sides', a 'huge success'.[23] 'With hundreds of readings, discussions, exhibitions, and concerts, the Guest of Honour had succeeded in providing a wide-ranging glimpse of the heterogeneous cultures of the

19 countries that took part.' The Fair President, Volker Neumann, noted, 'This has achieved an important beginning for comprehensive inter-cultural dialogue.' Incidentally, one of the last plays to have been written by the hard-hitting Syrian dramatist Sa'dallah Wannus (1941–97), *Tuqus al-isharat wa al-tahawwulat*, which criticizes the dominant political, religious, and social institutions in the Arab world, while prophesying and celebrating a coming age of liberation, was to be released from censorship and performed on Syrian and German theatres, thanks to a joint venture by the two countries in pursuance of a programme of cultural and art exchange between Europe and the Arab world.

In 1999, the distinguished Palestinian academic (and pianist) Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim, celebrated director of the Berlin State Opera, had founded the Arab–Israeli Youth Orchestra in Weimer. This was a daring feat of cultural diplomacy and a spur to dialogue which reached a new height and a wider circle when Claude Chalhoub, who had participated in the 1999 venture, launched in late December 2003, the 'Orient Meets Occident' project, in which ninety young musicians from ten Arab and European countries met and performed classical Western and Arab music in Beirut. Some eighteen years earlier, in 1985, the young members of the all-Omani Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra were busy rehearsing, however demurely, for their inaugural performance in front of a select and hand-picked audience. By the time of its tenth anniversary, the Orchestra was self-assured enough – having been trained and led by world-renowned conductors, supplemented (in 1996) by the phenomenal Yehudi Menuhin – to have been performing standard works from the international repertoire and attracting capacity audiences to its public concerts in Oman. More recently the older members of the Iraqi Symphony Orchestra, which had been founded in 1959, were recovering from twelve years of sanctions imposed on their country and reassembling in a post-Saddam Baghdad for their own grand re-launch before they flew (or were flown) to perform at the Kennedy Center in Washington to an audience that included the American President and his Secretary of State, eager to showcase the success of their costly venture in Iraq. From Rabat to Muscat, the music shops vibrate to the booming rhythms of a postmodernist, pop and rap-soused Arab music jostling but not elbowing out the quieter, though no less revolutionary and iconoclastic (for their time) compositions (themselves beneficiaries of liberating contacts with Western rhythms) from the 1950s and 1960s. Also in Baghdad, its well-known theatre, Masrah al-Rashid, having been damaged by the 'Shock and Awe' of allied bombing and the subsequent looting and vandalism, has of late been witnessing a resurgence of dramatic activity, with adaptations from Beckett and Pirandello as well as Gilgamesh and Iraqi folklore treading the boards of the more fortunate Al-Masrah al-Watani.

Arab films, sometimes with Arab TV channels, have, to the best of their ability, drawn on, and helped popularize, works by the likes of Mahfouz,

Ihsan ʻAbd al-Quddus (1919–90), ʻAbd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, and Muhammad al-Maghut (b. 1934). The Arab Film Programme at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Programme itself having been organized by the Arab League and the Arab World Institute in Paris in cooperation with the Friedrich–Ebert–Stiftung, saw works of great sensitivity, innovation, and boldness by Merzak Allouche, Atif al-Tayyib, Mufida Tlatli, Ziad Duwairi, Abderrahmane Sissako, Jillali Farhati, and Danielle ʻArbid. With the exception of al-Tayyib's 'Layla Sakhinah', all these films were joint productions, namely with French film companies, affording their directors the much-coveted funding and international exposure, as well as fame (or notoriety) at home.

In the Arab homeland itself, poetry readings by such virtuosos as Mahmud Darwish, Muzaffar al-Nawwab, and Adunis as well as by such outstanding and truly astonishing poets of colloquial Arabic as Ahmad Fu'ad Najm and ʻAbd al-Rahman al-Abnudi, continue to draw and enthuse large crowds. And while Arab children are flocking to watch Hollywood's latest adaptations of Tolkien and Sindbad (the racist anti-Arab slur in the *Aladdin* of 1993 having been edited out and forgotten), the long-running Arabic-speaking magazine *Mickey*, based on Walt Disney's characters, is bowing out under financial pressure from the parent company, leaving the Egyptian *Bulbul* and the UAE-based *Majid*, among a handful of other children's magazines in Arabic, to attempt to capture a vital space, still contested by legions of imported video and computer games. In this domain, 'Omar Faruq's recent novella for children, 'Rasha fi Baris', while reflecting, in its deceptively simple way, on a long and complex tradition of novels and short stories set in the West,[24] portrays a 15-year-old Egyptian girl visiting the great capital on a UNESCO-sponsored exchange programme and holding her own in conversations with her French peer group on topics like the contributions of the Arabs to world civilization and the suffering of the Palestinian people, but also on the splendours of Western, more specifically Parisian, culture, the ideals of the French Revolution, and the necessity of reconciliation, peace and partnership between the peoples of the world.

Rasha's sense of pride in her native culture and the ease of her one-month journey into the pleasure parks, museums, and affections of her host country are, however, not shared by Ghalia Qabbani's female protagonist in a short story (part of a recent collection entitled *Finjan shay maʻ missiz Robinson*)[25] when she, a refugee from political oppression and religious extremism in her home country, is traumatized by an act of bigotry on a London street, though she is equally pained by her own husband's opaque indifference, only to find solace in the soothing company of Mrs Robinson, who is herself transformed by the encounter from an exteriorly cold professional to a caring and compassionate sharer and ally. The Arab city, though, offers no such comfort to Ahmad al-ʻAydi's principal and minor characters of his newly published novel, *An Takuna ʻAbbas al-ʻAbd*,[26] as these, mainly young, characters blindly roam and desperately try to communicate, through their mobile phones, in an overwhelmingly alienating

and schizophrenic environment. The breathless and disjointed language of text messaging used in the novel seems to unconsciously gravitate towards fulfilling F.R. Leavis' (and al-'Aqqad's) prescription for a thoroughgoing engagement with and assimilation of a new age, however perplexing, trying or traumatic.

A city such as this, denuded of human warmth and real communication, the old order having broken down with no new coherent or humane structure to replace it, was one which the Algerian poet and novelist Mohammed Dib (1920–2003), one of the finest Maghrib writers in the French language, did not wish to return to (from his exile in France) even in death. Not long afterwards, however, the young King of Morocco, Muhammad VI, took the unprecedented step of nationally elegizing an often marginalized novelist, the maverick, self-taught and talented Muhammad Shukri (1935–2003), celebrated and scandalized for his vivid and uncompromising portrayals of street life in Tangiers. Similar wayward and overlooked but fascinating characters, this time in the fiction of the Egyptian novelist Khayri Shalabi, were to receive the Naguib Mahfouz literary award for the year 2003, the award itself having been instituted by the American University in Cairo in 1996, though not without generating yet another conspiracy theory about its 'agenda'. In this connection, the hot topic of the tension between political authority and dissidence, repression and terrorism, as manifested in contemporary Arabic literature, but with roots in earlier traditions, received an exacting treatment in Jabir 'Asfur's important new study *Muwajahat al-irhab: qira'at fi al-adab al-mu'asir*, 'Asfur himself representing a new generation of literary critics who have been creatively applying Western critical approaches to the study and elucidation of Arabic literature with great vigour, erudition, and readability.[27] The more recent death of the Saudi novelist 'Abdul Rahman Munif (1933–2004) has deprived the Arabic novel of a prodigious talent that had produced a stream of epic novels benefiting from Western techniques to expose with unprecedented detail and astringency both the repression of Arab political regimes and the guile of Western imperialism, a candour and conviction which caused his Saudi citizenship to be revoked and for him to endure life and death in exile. Amazingly, Naguib Mahfouz, in his ninety-third year, is still writing and publishing books, while the most prominent Arab Nobel-hopeful, 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id (Adunis), is still waiting, despite the recent disappointment, for a letter from Drammensveien.

Citizens of – or exiles from – countries whose very borders are a Western creation and a serrated compartmentalization of wider Arab aspirations and collective action, the modern Arab writers, forming an articulate, creative, and messianic vanguard for reform and empowerment, have managed, while using old and reinvented genres as well as new ones imported from the very authors (more realistically, *co*-authors) of their division and powerlessness, to transcend manifold restrictions and forces of fragmentation and infirmity in order to send their diverse messages to regional and international

readerships. Their quest for an elusive freedom has fulfilled itself, not in a smug sense of arrival, impossible to achieve or to be sustained, nor in an indefinite stopover on a bridge that will grant them no real recognition, but, rather, in a journey (repeated elsewhere, the 'West' included) for a more profound and ever-challenging understanding of the self and others as well as of the world in which they all live and need to enrich and protect.

# 4 George Bernard Shaw on Muhammad, Egypt, and Palestine

George Bernard Shaw is often invoked in the Arab world. More than 54 years after his death, he is still looked upon as a sage and a wit, whose insights and epigrams are regularly quoted by the Arab press and media. Though references to him are sometimes made via inadequate translations and are of a fragmentary nature, which seems to lose sight of his status as a playwright, he is remembered – however nebulously – by the Arabs as a friend and ally. His Irish background, anti-imperialism and favourable references to the Prophet Muhammad, together with his fierce independence of mind, asceticism, wit, even longevity, have all been points in his favour. In a general way and to the non-specialist, Shaw's is a discerning and often amusing, but relevant, sympathetic, and curiously authoritative voice from a fading epoch.

The relative haziness which attends Shaw's image in the contemporary Arab world is understandable. Among other things, Shaw belonged to a generation which still maintained the Victorian fascination with great men, and occasionally great women – lonely and towering geniuses, who, it was believed, were able, through deeds or words, to change the world for the better. Shaw's own sparkling intellectual and physical presence, his phenomenal 'gift of the gab', and ever-ready and trenchant topical commentary are in substance somewhat distant from present-day Arabs, save through the sort of quotations by the press and media alluded to above or the requisite play (most likely *Pygmalion*) on the curricula of English Departments at Arab universities. It needs to be said, however, that even in Britain, and despite the work of devoted and indefatigable biographers and scholars like Stanley Weintraub and Dan H. Laurence and some brilliant performances and productions of his plays, Shaw has suffered a relative neglect or perhaps a natural waning of reputation after his death in 1950. Nevertheless, one should note that the affection, cherished by a generation of parents and grandparents who were closer to the age of Shaw, still endures – however fragmentally – in the young Arabs of today.

The affection is not without cause. Shaw, a pioneer of the movement against the militarism and jingoism which afflicted Victorian sentiment and drama, in addition to politics, had helped (through plays like *Arms and*

*the Man* (1894) and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1899)) to strike a new, at the time controversial, but enduringly healthy and salubrious note. Such bold and innovative departures from conventions, explained and rationalized by extensive prefaces to the plays, tireless public speeches, and innumerable pamphlets and letters to friends and associates as well as to a predominantly flag-waving and sensationalist press, did much to help shape and extend the political consciousness of his contemporaries, as well as elevate the general standard of the drama of the period, endowing it with an intellectual and inquiring, though humane and compassionate, dimension. His anti-imperialism, bravely weathering the fury and hysteria of several colonial conflicts and two world wars, helped inspire wider liberal, humanistic, and pacifist movements, while pressing for a more direct, truthful, and profitable relationship between literature and reality.

Shaw's attempted rehabilitation of the Arab image in English literature was an extension of his wider sympathies and humanism as well as dissatisfaction with the hypocritical and racialist aspects of contemporary British institutions, which, Shaw believed, provided political, economic, 'scientific', religious, and 'literary' backing for the oppression, not only of peoples like those of India and Africa, but also of Ireland – 'John Bull's Other Island' in Shaw's phraseology – and, of course, women. Thus, while military melodramas like J.T. Haine's *The French Spy* (1837), Dion Boucicault's *Jessie Brown*, or *The Relief of Lucknow* (1858), and G.F. Rowe's *Captain Brassbound in Freedom* (1833) portrayed Arabs and Orientals as evil, villainous, and barbarous, Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* flew in the face of the tradition by introducing, against a Moroccan background, characters and situations designed to prick the bubble of the imperialist argument.[1]

Similarly, playing against pseudo-Romantic expectations, Shaw did not use the Egyptian setting in his *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898) for an outlandish or titillating treatment of the famous story: 'Are you impatient with me? Do ye crave for a story of an unchaste woman? Hath the name of Cleopatra tempted ye hither? Ye foolish ones…'[2] Although his Egyptian queen is a very young and spoilt, albeit imposing, child facing the older, shrewd and regal Caesar, it is the Egyptian god Ra, an 'august personage with a hawk's head', who surveys the modern audience with 'great contempt' and reminds them (against a nineteenth-century practice of making approving comparisons between imperial Rome and Victorian London) of the glory that was Egypt, in comparison with which modern England is, as perceived by the god, puny and insignificant:

> Peace! Be silent and hearken unto me, ye quaint little Islanders. …Look upon my hawk's head; and know that I am Ra, who was once in Egypt a mighty god. Ye cannot kneel nor prostrate yourselves; for ye are packed in rows without freedom to move, obstructing one another's vision…[3]

Ra then launches into a diatribe against the arrogance and presumptions of the moderns with a fervour anticipating that of Pound's famous 'Pull down thy vanity' lines in *Canto 81*:

> Ye poor posterity, think not that ye are the first. Other fools before ye have seen the sun rise and set, and the moon change her shape and her hour. As they were so ye are; and ye are not so great; for the pyramids my people built stand to this day; whilst the dustheaps on which ye slave, and which ye call empires, scatter in the wind even as ye pile your dead sons' bodies on them to make yet more dust.[4]

The political and anti-imperialist strain is pursued along the Rome–London parallel, with which his audience are all too familiar:

> [T]hen the old Rome, like the beggar on horseback, presumed on the favour of the gods, and said 'Lo! there is neither riches nor greatness in our littleness: the road to riches and greatness is through robbery of the poor and slaughter of the weak.' So they robbed their own poor until they became great masters of that art, and knew by what laws it could be made to appear seemly and honest. And when they had squeezed their own poor dry, they robbed the poor of other lands, and added those lands to Rome until there came a new Rome, rich and huge. And I, Ra, laughed; for the minds of the Romans remained the same size whilst their dominion spread over the earth.[5]

Anxious lest the modern audience miss the point, Shaw (through Ra) hammers again at the imperial theme. And with the First World War – a conflict partly sparked off by jealousies and rivalries among Western colonial powers – somewhat waiting in the wings, the inevitable (and violent) end of all empires is re-invoked:

> And now, would ye know the end of Pompey, or will ye sleep while a god speaks? Heed my words well; for Pompey went where ye have gone, even to Egypt, where there was a Roman occupation even as there is but now a British one. And Caesar pursued Pompey to Egypt: a Roman fleeing, and a Roman pursuing: dog eating dog.[6]

Caesar himself, a lonely genius honed by age and experience, acknowledges that Rome is 'a madman's dream'; Egypt, represented by the Sphinx – an 'eternal sentinel' and an image of the 'constant and immortal part of life' – possesses a 'Reality' that surpasses men's understanding.[7] Though somewhat reminiscent of Shelley's 'Ozymandias' and in small part indicative of Western views of the East as passive and static, Caesar's address to the Sphinx in Act I seems on the whole to reinforce Ra's claim for the superiority of his own Eastern philosophy and view of history.

Another Egyptian of remarkable qualities but unambiguously modern credentials appears in Shaw's *The Millionairess* (1935–6). In the play, later made into a film starring Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers,[8] the Egyptian Doctor is an intelligent, resourceful, and philanthropic man, to whom Epifania, the Millionairess, is attracted and whom she eventually marries, thus breaking a taboo of representations of such inter-ethnic marriages in early modern British drama if not also predicting such developments in what will be an increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-faith British society. Interestingly, the Doctor lives in London, works at a local hospital, and keeps a clinic for 'penniless Mahometan refugees'.[9] In a fit of anger over the exploitation of the poor by the unscrupulous rich, he declares himself to be a resolute 'guardian of life' and a 'servant of Allah' – for 'only in the service of Allah is there justice, righteousness, and happiness'.[10]

With his pronouncements and acts of selfless humanitarianism, the good Doctor joins the Shavian (and Fabian?) gallery of heroes and heroines who conscientiously and altruistically fulfil the plans of the 'Life Force', defined by Shaw as the impulse 'often called the Will of God' and the power 'behind Man' and to whom 'intellect', together with 'prudence, careful selection, virtue, honour, chastity' is a 'necessity'.[11]

In this context, the numerous references to the Prophet Muhammad (invariably spelt as 'Mahomet') in Shaw's writings are motivated by the conviction that the Prophet, described by Shaw as 'one of the greatest of the Prophets of God', a 'truly wise man', and 'conspicuously humane and conscientious', is an outstanding exponent of the relationship between man and the 'sacred and holy' Life Force.[12] The Prophet emerges as an outstanding example of the human intellect, a 'princely genius', consciously harnessing the creative energy of the cosmos for the improvement and enhancement of both the human race and the quality of life itself, even at the expense of the hostility and misunderstanding of the institutions and people of his time.[13] Ever concerned with political philosophy and the problems of governance and leadership, Shaw, himself an heir in this to Edward Gibbon and Thomas Carlyle, invariably saw Muhammad as one of those inspired individuals who, imbibed with the energy and passion of the Life Force, strove for a better humanity, and 'far from being an anti-Christ', as he was often made to be in Christian Europe, 'must be called the Saviour of Humanity', one capable of 'solving' the 'problems' of the modern world and bringing it 'the much needed peace and happiness', with a role for it in Europe of the future.[14] In Shaw's eyes, Muhammad wisely founded 'a religion without a church', a religion which Shaw (through the Elderly Gentleman in *Back to Methuselah*) saw as 'the only established religion in the world in whose articles of faith any intelligent and educated person could believe', one which the playwright ranked (through the character of Napoleon) as 'perhaps the best popular religion for modern political use'.[15]

Shaw's near-obsession with the theme made him contemplate writing a play on Muhammad, described by Hesketh Pearson as 'in all history the one

person who exactly answered [Shaw's] requirements, who would have made the perfect Shavian hero'.[16] The projected play could also serve as a counterblast to Voltaire's, which Shaw thought had been an 'outrage'.[17] It was only because of stage censorship and anxieties about his personal safety that he had to give up the idea and direct his energies instead to the writing of *Saint Joan*, described by Stanley Weintraub as Shaw's 'greatest play', which 'sealed [his] renown' and provided the occasion for awarding Shaw the Nobel Prize.[18] The play, in addition to the clear references made in it to Muhammad and the parallels drawn between the Prophet and the saint, contained many of the themes and arguments intended for the play on Muhammad.[19] The Prophet, however, appears in *Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1932) as one who 'founded Islam and made a colossal stride ahead from stock-and-stone idolatry to a very enlightened Unitarianism' – a man, who 'now needs to be rediscovered'.[20]

At any rate, Shaw, who believed that he too was an instrument of the Life Force, or 'the will of Allah', in whose hands one was 'only a pen', continued to identify himself with Muhammad's message and show interest in Islam and the Arabs.[21] In March 1909, he reported that he was 'reading the Koran daily', having managed to get John M. Rodwell's translation, published in Everyman's Library.[22] Some three years earlier, he had rendered a valuable political and humanitarian service in the context of his Arab-Islamic interests.

On 13 June 1906, four British officers went to the little Egyptian village of Denshawai to shoot pigeons. The villagers protested and a fracas ensued in which a woman and three men from the village received gunshot wounds and a British officer died of a suspected sunstroke. The punishment meted out by the tribunal set up by Lord Cromer's government in Egypt was detailed by Shaw with grim sarcasm:

> Abd-el-Nebi, in consideration of the injury to his wife, was only sentenced to penal servitude for life. And our clemency did not stop there. His wife was not punished at all – not even charged with stealing the shot which was found in her person. And lest Abd-el-Nebi should feel lonely at 25 in beginning penal servitude for the rest of his days, another young man, of 20, was sent to penal servitude for life with him.
>
> No such sentimentality was shewn to Hassan Mahfouz. An Egyptian pigeon farmer who objects to British sport; threatens British officers and gentlemen when they shoot his pigeons; and actually hits those officers with a substantial stick, is clearly a ruffian to be made an example of. Penal servitude was not enough for a man of 60 who looked 70, and might not have lived to suffer five years of it. So Hassan was hanged; but as a special mark of consideration for his family, he was hanged in full view of his own house, with his wives and children and grandchildren enjoying the spectacle from the roof. And lest this privilege should excite jealousy in other households, three other Denshavians were hanged with him.

> Hanging, however, is the least sensational form of public execution: it lacks those elements of blood and torture for which the military and bureaucratic imagination lusts. So, as they had room for only one man on the gallows, and had to leave him hanging for an hour to make sure work and give his family plenty of time to watch him swinging ('slowly turning round and round on himself', as the local papers described it), thus having two hours to kill as well as four men, they kept the entertainment going by flogging eight men with fifty lashes each. ...
>
> In any case there was not time to flog everybody, nor to flog three of the floggees enough; so these three had a year's hard labour apiece in addition to their floggings. Six others were not flogged at all, but were sent to penal servitude for seven years each. One man got fifteen years. Total for the morning's work: four hanged, two to penal servitude for life, one to fifteen years penal servitude, six to seven years penal servitude, three to imprisonment for a year with hard labour and fifty lashes, and five to fifty lashes.[23]

Having earlier vindicated the villagers' action in the face of the officers' 'provocation', Shaw went on to describe the 'dignity' with which the condemned men faced death, the tortures, 'mentionable and unmentionable', they had been subjected to during interrogation, and the fallacy of the official argument, which he traced back to the events surrounding the British naval bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 and the pretexts used then for military intervention.[24] In much of this, Shaw may have been influenced by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, poet, diplomat, traveller, and champion of various Arab and Muslim causes.[25] Blunt, who, almost alone in England of 1882 onwards, had unreservedly espoused and defended the cause of Ahmad 'Urabi (Arabi) and his fellow revolutionaries,[26] had also rallied to the defence of the Denshawai victims, describing the vindictive punishments as a serious miscarriage of justice and a gruesome prophecy of his warnings about the damaging effects of British military occupation and administrative and economic control of Egypt.[27] Blunt's *Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt* (1906), in addition to other pamphlets, letters to the press, and appeals for funds for the creation of a 'Denshawai Memorial School', may have further inspired or added to Shaw's own sense of outrage as expressed in the 'Preface' to *John Bull's Other Island* which Blunt revised for Shaw.[28] The combined efforts of Blunt and Shaw – in the course of which Shaw drafted a petition, later published with the signatures of fifty-three prominent people – helped start enquiries into the atrocity, eventually leading to the commuting of the prison sentences and the downfall of Lord Cromer.[29]

Shaw never forgot the 'abominable' and 'infernal business at Denshawai'.[30] Besides such later reproachful references as those to the British intellectuals' willingness to 'swallow Denshawai', 'the avenging angel of Denshawai' and 'the Egyptian horror',[31] Shaw remembered Denshawai twenty-four years after the event, deeming it a watershed and

a turning point in Anglo-Egyptian relations. Amazingly, and to the credit of his astute political analysis and power of prophecy, he treated the Egyptian episode as a case-study in a world that was steadily becoming resentful of an essentially antiquated imperialist (and militaristic) mentality, which, on account of the seeds of further conflict it had foolishly planted in many regions, seemed destined to drive the world into a major conflagration:

> In Egypt the British domination died of Denshawai; but at its deathbed the British Sirdar [Sir Lee Stack, British Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Army and Governor General of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan] was assassinated [shot at by Egyptian nationalists on 10 November 1924 and died the following day], whereupon the British Government [under the premiership of the Conservative Stanley Baldwin], just then rather drunk after a sweeping election victory secured by anti-Russian scare, announced to an amazed world that it was going to cut off the Nile at its source and destroy Egypt by stopping its water supply [Among British demands following the killing was an ultimatum for the payment of half a million pounds to be delivered by Egyptian officials post haste to the British residency in Cairo]. Of course nothing happened but an ignominious climb down; but the incident illustrates my contention that our authority, when it is too far flung (as our patriotic rhapsodists put it) goes stark mad at the periphery if a pin drops. As to what further panics and atrocities will ensue before India is left to govern itself as much as Ireland and Egypt now are I am in the dark until the event enlightens me. But on the folly of allowing military counsels to prevail in political settlements I may point to the frontiers established by the victors after the war of 1914–18. Almost every one of these frontiers has a new war implicit in it, because the soldier recognizes no ethnographical, linguistic, or moral boundaries: he demands a line that he can defend, or rather than Napoleon or Wellington could have defended; for he was not yet learnt to think of offence and defence in terms of airplanes which ignore his Waterloo ridges. And the inevitable nationalist rebellions against these military frontiers, and the atrocities by which they are countered, are in full swing as I write.[32]

In 1938, one year before the outbreak of the Second World War, Shaw again re-invoked 'the Denshawai atrocity', stressing its historical role in exposing official 'connivance…, folly and callousness in dealing with Egypt', a policy for which the First World War had been the 'price that England paid'.[33]

Earlier, in September 1921, Shaw had rendered a service to the nationalist cause in Egypt by chairing a public meeting (at the Mortimer Halls in London) of the 'Egypt Parliamentary Committee'. His opening remarks – published at the time by *The Muslim Standard* and reprinted by *The New York Call* – emphasized the need for Britain to fulfil its 'solemn pledge to evacuate

Egypt'.[34] The remarks, while ridiculing 'this "empire business" ', berated both the sensationalism of the popular press and the bias of the 'official sources' which had made it difficult for the British public to be adequately informed about the reality of the situation in Egypt – a deficiency which a group of distinguished and well-informed 'Egyptian friends' (a parliamentary delegation from an Egypt simmering with unrest and patriotic fervour) was trying to remedy in an exercise of public diplomacy.[35]

Shaw's Arab and Muslim sympathies were wide-ranging and unmistakable. For instance, despite his willingness to publicly defend the much-maligned Russians on several occasions, he did not hesitate to point out their brutality against the Turks, whom he accused the British government of betraying.[36] Likewise, in spite of his awareness that 'the day has gone by for refusing freedom to a nation or race on the ground that they will abuse it', he, again prophetically, voiced serious doubts about the ability of the Slavs ('infernal cutthroats') to deal fairly with the Muslims of Bosnia.[37] Much earlier, in 1885, he had joined forces with Wilfrid Blunt in railing against the British military intervention in the Sudan describing it as 'indefensible', 'atrocious', and 'a lower form of villainy than commercial exploitation'.[38] In the process, he accused the British Socialist League of justifying the 'wickedness' of that war.[39] In 1898, he concurred with Blunt's almost lonely condemnation of Kitchener's Sudanese campaign, the slaughter of more than ten thousand dervishes on the battlefield (the recently invented Maxim automatic machinegun having been used to a devastating effect), and the desecration of the Mahdi's tomb prior to the setting up of a British protectorate or 'condominium' over the Sudan (to last until 1956), as well as, years later (in 1912), Blunt's sally against the Italian massacres in Libya.[40] In addition to the 'Egyptian friends', Shaw's personal contacts and correspondence with people like Blunt, R.B. Cunninghame Graham, T.E. Lawrence, and Mahmoud 'Abdul 'Aziz, president of the All-India Muslim League, helped keep him informed of independence and reform movements in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Shaw's 1909 North African and 1931 Mediterranean tours, which saw him sojourning in such Arab cities as Constantine (with a copy of the Qur'an), Cairo (with its 'stupendous treasures'), Jerusalem (in the Mosque of Omar 'I found the charm and sanctity of Jerusalem'), Damascus, and Beirut, brought the Irish celebrity closer to the region, about which he could now speak with first-hand knowledge.[41]

In a 1923 letter to the British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, Shaw, pleading the case of T.E. Lawrence, argues for more recognition of the Arab role in the 1917 triumphant entry of the Allies into Jerusalem.[42] Shaw's view of Palestine as an Arab province perhaps precluded any real sympathy on his part for the schemes of European Zionism, already derided in *The Millionairess* (*Plays*, 1268), to take over that country. Though he was, needless to say, utterly contemptuous of anti-Semitism, he refused to endorse Zionist aims or accord them backing or sympathy. He wrote, rather

politely, but firmly, to J.E. Spingarn, a Zionist propagandist who had petitioned him in April 1923 for a literary statement of support:

> [I]t would be a very big job, and a difficult one, as a criticism of the Zionist experiment in Palestine (which is very open to criticism) would have to come into it – also a criticism of Nationalism generally, which might appeal to [H.G.] Wells.
>
> I daren't even think of it at present. I am old; and all my bolts are shot. [Shaw continued to write until shortly before his death in 1950]. Perhaps if I wrote a play about a Jew, it might be published with a preface; but I have no intention of doing so. Many thanks for the proposal.[43]

The pattern was repeated with some variation in 1939, when a socialist group in Britain, encouraged by a lull in the hostilities in Palestine and driven by hopes of a Jewish–Arab alliance on the basis of a 'Socialist Federation in the Middle East', established a 'Committee for Jewish–Arab Socialist Unity' and asked Shaw to join. Fenner Brockway later recollected the event: 'He returned the letter with the sketch of a hand pointing to his handwritten reply: No. Too old. And I won't be a deadhead.'[44]

Apart from his usual criticisms as a secularist, however untypical, of the Judaeo-Christian legacy, Shaw, a thorough humanist and one who had several Jewish friends, would have found it totally repugnant and demeaning to be identified with any form of anti-Semitism. So, he was deeply offended when, in 1925, he became the butt of a smear campaign by the French Zionist press, spearheaded by Henri Bernstein, editor of *Le Temps*.[45] Mortified and outraged by accusations from someone 'blind and mad with rage, who evidently took me for a vulgar anti-semite', he wrote to his French translator, Augustin Hamon:

> The truth is that there is no anti-semitism in England, though there is a literary clique headed by [G.K.] Chesterton and [Hilaire] Belloc who profess it as a sort of Catholic literary affection. But England is politically and officially Zionist.[46]

Be that as it may, Shaw's antagonism to the colonial and militant aspect of the Zionist movement remained unshaken. And, instead of writing a play in support of Zionism, as Spingarn and others would have liked, Shaw managed to write a play *against* Zionism. This, Shaw's boldest and most original statement on the Palestinian and, conversely, the Zionist questions, came in the form of a reply to a request for an opinion on a policy statement on Palestine which Fenner Brockway had written to the Independent Labour Party. In the wake of the 1917 Balfour Declaration which promised the Zionists a national home in Palestine, the socialist Brockway had cited 'in support of the Zionist argument' the 'historical' claim – one which Shaw summarily and censoriously brushed aside: 'This is all nonsense, the historical part.'[47] Shaw, in

agreement with the likes of Lord Beaverbrook and Mahatma Gandhi on the imbalance of the Zionist claim on that front,[48] was incensed (or inspired) enough to write a short three-act play, which is yet to find its place among his collected works.

The 'lost play', published by Brockway in his personal recollections of Shaw, *Outside the Right*, is set in the Foreign Secretary's room at the Foreign Office. The time is 1917, and Arthur Balfour is scrutinizing with dismay a document handed to him by a young attaché. The Foreign Secretary is upset on account of the great financial cost of the War. He harangues the attaché:

> Young man, do you realize – but no. Only a Scot can feel as I feel about it. Look at this one item only. £5,038 15s 97/8d for cordite enough to kill a single German. How can any country stand such a strain?[49]

The gibe at the proverbial (but untrue) Scottish thriftiness (Balfour being a Scot) is certainly not the best of Shavian humour, but the 'humour' takes on a grim tinge as Balfour is increasingly shown to be extremely callous about human life. When the attaché explains that it is the acetone that is so expensive and that cordite (a powder used for explosives) cannot be made without acetone, Balfour replies: 'I don't know what aceton [*sic*] is; and I don't care. All I know is that if we go on like this we shall have to give an order to cease killing Germans. Dead Germans cost too much.'[50]

Elsewhere, 'clutching his temples as he again pores over the sheet of figures', Balfour agonizes: 'Five thousand and thirty-eight golden pounds to put one Boche [an abusive slang term for a German] out of action! And we have to exterminate the lot of them!'[51]

These are clearly facets of a portrait, which, at least fictionally, can put Shaw's Balfour on a par with the emotionally and morally numb generals and officials depicted by Wilfred Owen and other war poets, with one or two attributes of the later Dr Strangelove!

In any event, it transpires that a way to make acetone for next to nothing from a certain 'microbe' has been discovered by a chemist in Manchester – the city itself being associated with Balfour since 1885, which saw his re-election as a member of parliament for East Manchester. However, and in the course of the dialogue between Balfour and the young attaché, with the two men expressing contempt for both 'provincial' scholars and representatives of minorities, Shaw hints at the upper-class attitudes and racial prejudice which had dominated and compromised the Foreign Office since Victorian times. The condescending and grudging references made to the chemist and then to the Jewish minister Herbert Samuel (later British High Commissioner for Palestine) illustrate the unpleasant tendency further. At any rate, the attaché is dispatched to fetch the Manchester chemist, who shows up three hours later and is none other than Dr Chaim Weizmann.

As is well known, Weizmann, originally a lecturer in chemistry at the University of Geneva, and later at Manchester, was a prime mover behind the Balfour Declaration. More recently, a top-secret Colonial Office file from 1943, released in September 2004, revealed that Weizmann, at the time head of the Jewish Agency, suggested to Winston Churchill, who had supported the Balfour Declaration and was an ardent advocate of the Zionist project in Palestine, a plan to try to bribe King 'Abdul 'Aziz with £20 million and the leadership of the Arab League in exchange for the Saudi monarch's help in handing over Palestine to the Zionists. During the First World War, Weizmann was appointed as Director of the British Admiralty laboratories and achieved unprecedented fame when he developed a synthetic acetone to be used in the manufacture of explosives. In due course, he would be President of the Zionist Organization and of the Jewish Agency, and, in 1948, the first President of the state of Israel. The fictional conversation, in Act II, between the Foreign Minister and the Zionist propagandist goes to some seemingly absurd lengths in hinting at the kind of political and financial bargaining that occurred at the highest levels. One illustration of this was to occur years later at the United Nations General Assembly, when the Truman Administration utilized a whole range of pressures and inducements to secure (on 29 November 1947) Resolution 181, partitioning Palestine into two states and giving the Palestinian Arabs, who even after waves of European Jewish immigration were in a majority of 70 per cent of the population and owned or were settled upon more than 90 per cent of the land, only 48 per cent of the territory. The Gilbertian (after W.S. Gilbert, Arthur Sullivan's illustrious partner) touch of *reductio ad absurdum* hides behind it a deep-seated suspicion of officialdom as well as of the imperialist frame of mind, which regards far-flung parts of the world as God-given possessions to give away or haggle over in Machiavellian tête-à-têtes:

ARTHUR: Doctor Weizmann, we must have that microbe at your own price. Name it. We shall not hesitate at six figures.

DR WEIZMANN: I do not ask for money. …

ARTHUR: A title, perhaps? Baron? Viscount? Do not hesitate.

WEIZMANN: Nothing would induce me to accept a title. I should have to pay more for everything.

ARTHUR: Then may I ask, without offence, since you want none of the things that everybody wants, what the devil do you want?

WEIZMANN: I want Jerusalem.

ARTHUR: It's yours. I only regret that we cannot throw in Madagascar as well. Unfortunately it belongs to the French Government. The Holy Land belongs naturally to the Church of England; and to it you are most welcome. And now will you be so good as to hand over the microbe.[52]

Interestingly enough, the play ends, in an epigrammatic Act III, with Shaw himself exasperated enough to make a personal appearance invoking some affinities with Pirandello and Brecht. The playwright, seated in his study 'reading the announcement of the Balfour Declaration', makes a personal statement, which, in its undisguised disapproval and directness, links the Palestinian question to the North Ireland problem, both, it is argued, products (or bungles) of unscrupulous (and largely incompetent and short-sighted) politicians – problems that were sadly destined to endure:

MR B.S.: Another Ulster! As if one were not enough.[53]

The prophetic ring to Shaw's terse but astute final statement is somewhat appropriate. An heir to the Romantics and the Victorians (despite his anti-Romanticism and anti-Victorianism) and an original and innovative playwright, Shaw never tired of expressing an innermost longing to be more than a mere writer in his age. His fascination (almost obsession) with prophets, saints, martyrs, and visionaries, and with the spiritual power they wield or can generate, pervades his writings. A freethinker and iconoclast, he would, nonetheless, preach from a church pulpit that 'all art is didactic', that 'the man who believes in art for art's sake is a fool in the Scriptural sense – a genuine, hopeless fool, a man in a state of damnation'.[54] Though, at times, and largely because of his own dramatics and the absence of a comprehensive political programme, Shaw was not always taken seriously in his role as a 'politician' or 'reformer'. 'Clever and futile' is how the much-travelled Cunninghame Graham described Shaw's Fabianism.[55] Many of his public speeches were punctuated by audience laughter – something he doubtlessly worked for and savoured with relish. Nevertheless, the man's political undeceivedness and farsightedness, in the face of political spin and chicanery, coupled with courage, aversion to tyranny, and the ability to express unconventional opinions, showed in many encounters with the Establishment at the risk of official hostility, public suspicion, and ostracism. His stances and pronouncements on the Middle East, a region still suffering the consequences of ill-conceived imperialist and mercantilist policies (with updated versions of those policies being currently applied, as perceived by many within and outside the region, in a somewhat similar high-handed, cold-hearted, and short-sighted manner), as well as his brave exploration and lateral reassessment of Islam and its political and cultural role in relation to Europe (another issue of topical interest and anxiety), may be counted among his many endeavours on behalf of the victims of injustice, and misrepresentation and in which he showed both human compassion and political foresight. To be remembered in this context, and for his prophecies and caveats to be vindicated by history, would have pleased a man, who, not un-proud of his playwrighting, still desired – in his own words – 'to be known as a prophet rather than as a playwright, much as Mahomet fought all his life against the taunt that he was only . . . a poet'.[56]

# 5 The one and the many

## The Sufi path to social responsibility – from anecdote to action?

### Preamble

In their eager but often faltering endeavours to embrace Western models of power and progress, Muslim intelligentsias and, at times, some ruling elites have, since the encroachment of European modernity on their territories and consciousnesses, felt the need to cast off some traditional institutions and patterns of thinking deemed effete, unwieldy or unaccommodating. On the list of casualties, which have included such venerable, though in some cases not fully or consistently utilized, institutions as *al-hisba*, *bayt al-mal*, *al-waqf*, and *al-futuwwah*, Sufism (*al-tasawwuf*) has figured in modernist writings as yet another relic incompatible with the trappings of a forward looking, rational, and all-dominant nation-state system. Even with the 'Islamic Revival' of the past twenty years or so, *al-tasawwuf* has had to face fierce criticism from an assortment of critics condemning it as heretical, intransigent or escapist.

This chapter attempts to briefly explore some aspects of the Sufi lore, chiefly to ascertain its potential to help enhance Muslim social awareness as well as individual and collective sense of responsibility and ability to participate in global (and inter-Muslim) affairs and governance in the present diverse and complex, if not also frenzied, international environment. The material for this work relies in the main on popular, largely medieval, biographies of the lives and marvellous deeds of Sufi masters.[1] This corpus is read as part of a larger narrative, anecdotal and didactic in part, visionary and mythical, but expressive of the historical Sufi engagement with (at times disengagement from and apparent subversion of) social, political, and other institutions, even accepted notions of reality. Although this material comes from traditional accounts, it is often recycled in modern circles, repeated at times with some variations in the tales of the lives of modern 'saints', the word being used in its general sense.

### Definitions and an overview

Sufism is generally described as the inner, mystical dimension of Islam, a 'science of the heart' and 'the ultimate science', in al-Ghazali's lexicon,[2]

a journey of inward discovery and transcendence, counterbalancing a predominantly outward and legalistic emphasis in the Muslim polity but also complementing the basic Islamic preference for harmony between the One (Allah/God) and the many (al-khalq/the creation), *din* (religion) and *dunya* (the world), as well as between *al-zahir* (the Manifested) and *al-batin* (the Hidden), which, interestingly, are also names or attributes of the Divine.

Even when some departure or dissension from orthodox Islam is perceived (or perhaps secretly intended), a grounding in the early, formative experiences and fundamental texts of the faith is habitually invoked or claimed by Sufis. Such texts commonly include the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the *sirah* (biography of the Prophet Muhammad), exemplars from the lives of *al-sahabah* (Muhammad's companions), *ahl-al-suffah* (ascetics or indigents who lived at the time of the Prophet), *al-a'immah* (especially the imams of the Shi'ahs), and *awliya' ulllah* (friends of God or saints). Also included are concepts such as *fitra* (the state of purity and innocence in which human beings are held to be born, hence requiring no redeemer or priest), *tawhid* (belief in the oneness of God), and, by extension, particularly under the influence of Ibn al-'Arabi, *wihdat al-wujud* (unity of being). The Islamic standpoint of general endorsement and confirmation of other monotheistic faiths is also crucial, along with practices like *zuhd* (asceticism), *faqr* (poverty and privation), *zikr* (remembrance and recitation of God's name), *nawafil* (voluntary prayers other than the prescribed five daily prayers), *tafsir* (elucidation of the Qur'anic text) leading to *ta'wil* (interpretation leading to understanding), the pursuit of *ihsan* (charity, altruism, compassion, perfection of one's work), *ikhlas* (devotion and sincerity), *ma'rifa* (knowledge, gnosis, wisdom), and a general invitation (interspersed in the Qur'an) to freely 'read' from or into the book of the universe and develop the self on a personal and collective *mi'raj* (ascension) parodying that of the Prophet. These have functioned as authorities, concepts, models, and precedents which have always been called upon by successive generations of Sufis to bolster and legitimize their calling, however subversive or unconventional that calling may have been.

In early twentieth-century modernist Muslim discourses, Sufism was perceived, and indeed condemned, as an outdated and nationally debilitating and unbecoming form of otherworldliness unsuited to progressiveness and modernity, with historians and academics seeing its emergence in the early Muslim epochs as a reaction to the materialism and cupidity, but also inequalities and upheavals, of Umayyad and 'Abbasid societies, with the subsequent turbulence and fragmentation of later ones continuing to fan its embers. This, it was argued, had made Sufism a system of flight, avoidance, and withdrawal from the harsher realities of political tyranny or economic deprivation, national defeat or foreign occupation, a mode that was no longer compatible with the new and increasingly secularizing Arab and Muslim nation-states.

True enough, Sufism had seen much growth under adverse national circumstances of the types mentioned above, but it also had traditionally been an active, if not additionally *proactive*, agent for positive action, with a *jihadist* branch having been, in times of perceived national threat, one among many of its public and political manifestations and engagements.[3]

Structured into *maqamat* (stages) and *mujahadat* (self-endeavours, labours, exertions), culminating in *fana'* (annihilation, extinction, or total immersion of the human ego-self into the divine object of love), the Sufi project entails to the serious adherent a truly arduous and sustained mental and physical effort, one that requires an exceptional degree of self-discipline and positive renunciation, in the process of which inner resources are tapped and galvanized (the polishing of the mirror of the self, in Ibn al-'Arabi's phraseology), usually under the guidance of a Sufi master and within a fraternity or a circle of fellow-seekers/travellers (*saliks*) or devotees (*murids*).

The movement has historically carried the Islamic faith and culture to various parts of the world in a process of diffusion and on the strength of personal and moral leadership–fellowship; and though emphasizing the Prophet's concept of *al-jihad al-akbar* (the Greater Jihad or the striving within to forge beyond a narrow concept of the ego) – a notion to be utilized for national revival by, among others, Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938), a self-proclaimed disciple of Jalaluddin al-Rumi (1207–73), but one who was to sow the intellectual and religious seeds for the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947. This notion was to serve also as a foil to the dominant reading of Muslim (and universal) history that put the accent on the dualistic, military, and the officially sanctioned versions of that history, though, one may need to mention in passing that traditional Muslim biographies, anthologies, and encyclopaedic compilations have given, perhaps more than their counterparts in the classical Western tradition, some considerable attention to the lives of 'ordinary' people like scholars, poets, lovers, and saints, rather than exclusively or predominantly kings and generals. The Sufi paradigm has also helped to question – as al-Suhrawardi (1154–91) and Mulla Sadra (1571–1640), among others, did – prevailing philosophical assumptions of the time like the stringent espousal of Aristotelian logic and categories to the exclusion of other avenues to the truth, a critique that is likely to be more appreciated in our postmodernist world than in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century.

In its *jihadist* manifestation, Sufism has also helped mobilize the masses to fend off attacks against Muslim territories, even though, for a thoroughgoing Sufi, the whole earth was, as stipulated in a famous hadith, a sacred sanctuary or terra sancta (*al-ardh* as *masjid*), transcending the jurists' harsh 'division of the world' into *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*. Be that as it may, classical and modern times have repeatedly witnessed a sudden transition from quietist Sufism to political activism, as evidenced by movements like those led by the Emir 'Abd al-Qadir (1808–83) in Algeria, Shaykh Shamil (d. 1871) in

Daghestan, and Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi (1843–85) in the Sudan, as the Muslim world was being subjected to European colonialism.

## Sufi literature

The affinities between Sufism and poetry need no elaboration here. The works of eminent Sufi poets like Fariddudin al-'Attar (d. 1230), Ibn al-Faridh (d. 1235), Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), Rumi, and Yunus Emre (d. 1321), articulating complex mystical concepts and experiences in daring and redolent verses, have captured the imagination of generations, who committed them to memory and recited them in scholarly seminaries and transcendental assemblies. One may note, however, that Sufis and poets have somewhat similar dispositions and aspirations, though the former proclaim their desiderata as primarily spiritual. Many Sufis have been poets or have shown deep appreciation for poetry, using it, rather intrepidly, in their spiritual exercises, be it in their individual retreats or communal rituals. Both (Sufis and poets) are keenly aware of the tension (or the harmony to be regained) between the individual and the world of men or nature. Both use the imaginative faculty to go beyond the conventional and the institutional, but are confronted now and again by misunderstanding, marginalization, and hostility; particularly, but not exclusively, in the case of poets, they are visited at times by anxieties about the effectiveness or value of words in the midst of the world's turmoil and strife. In the case of the mystical poets, these anxieties are most intense when the ecstatic state (*jazb* or *wajd*) is denied or delayed.

Besides the attractive genre of poetry, the Sufi canon includes the very sophisticated and elaborate metaphysical and intellectual formulations offered by the likes of al-Ghazali, al-Suhrawardi, al-Qushayri (d. 1072), Ibn al-'Arabi, and Mulla Sadra. These have benefited from the rich cultural and intellectual matrix provided by the Islamic contact and cross-fertilization with other cultures, faiths, and philosophies, a diversity that went into the very growth and later development of Sufism as it interacted with (and attempted, as in Sadra, to synthesize) Greek, Hermetic, Kabbalist, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and other traditions. Indeed, the richness and many-sidedness of that environment has latterly captured the interest of the celebrated historian and author Theodore Zeldin, who chose to showcase the exciting diversity of that age by, among other things, quoting a famous statement by the tenth-century group of intellectuals in Baghdad *Ikhwan al-Safa* (Brethren of purity and accord) advertising their supreme model of humanity:

> The ideal and perfect man should be of East Persian origin, Arabic in faith, of Iraqi i.e. Babylonian education, Hebrew in astuteness, a disciple of Christ in conduct, as pious as a Syrian monk, a Greek in individual sciences, an Indian in the interpretation of all mysteries, but lastly and especially a Sufi in his whole spiritual life.[4]

## Anecdotes of the saints

As in the mystical traditions of other nations, the role of the master, shaykh, or saint as a motivator and guide as well as an embodiment of the spiritual aspirations, experiences, and achievements whom the learner hopes to emulate is of pivotal importance. Such a man is described by Ibn al-'Arabi as a mirror of the divine attributes and a perfect human being, *insan kamil*. And like other religious and spiritual writings, Sufi biographical literature makes frequent use of 'authoritative' logia and literary topoi which aim at promoting or providing evidence of a saint's power, one derived from the degree of the saint's nearness to God, unsurprisingly perceived as the source of all power and magnificence, some of which He chooses to impart to His human 'friends' or *walis* (*awliya'ullah*). Inevitably, the element of story telling makes this body of writing (which can also be part of, or a variation on, an older or parallel oral tradition) quite entertaining as well as inspirational to many people, a feature which enhances its general appeal and diffuses its universal and timeless exemplar across a wide area of diverse individual and cultural experiences. This without taking away from the challenge which a thoughtful reading of, or participation in, this kind of transcendental but, arguably, socially concerned, entertainment creates.

From the galaxy of such stories, one, familiar to the author from an oral tradition, may be chosen to preface the discussion. A version of the anecdote is cited in 'Abdullah b. As'ad al-Yafi'i's *Rawd al-rayahin fi manaqib al-salihin*, a compilation of the fourteenth century, incorporated into Yusuf al-Nabhani's larger collection.[5] It tells the story of a Sufi Shaykh, who is approached by a young disciple anxious to learn the Ineffable Name of God, *al-Ism al-A'zam* or the Supreme Name. This, in popular Muslim culture and legend, figures as a paramount grace and an ultimate power-tool, hidden or inaccessible to all but to a select few, upon whom God, for His own reasons and perhaps on account of those individuals' own exceptional merits and intensity of selfless devotion, compassion, or spiritual striving, bestows that superlative gift. In some accounts, this incomparable grant can be transmitted by one *wali* to another. Knowledge of the Name, the one hundredth beyond the other ninety-nine divine names or attributes traditionally enumerated in the orthodox canon, can unlock every secret and effect any action in the universe. The Shaykh, who the narrator tells us *knows* the Ineffable Name, having been given to him by a great *wali*, asks the young disciple whether he considers himself qualified to possess such momentous knowledge. The youth assures him that he does. So, the Shaykh asks him to go and sit at the city gate and report to him at the end of the day on what he has seen there. The young man goes and sits at the city gate, thus becoming a witness to a procession of daily life moving in and out of the city. In the course of the day, an old man, who sells firewood, passes by with the firewood he has gathered stacked on the back of his donkey. A brutish soldier challenges the old man, gives him a good beating, and walks

away with the donkey and the stack of firewood. The disciple is incensed by what he has seen, and when he recounts the incident to his mentor, the Shaykh asks him about what he would have done had he possessed knowledge of *al-Ism al-A'zam*. The youth says he would have used it to exact a terrible punishment on the clearly culpable soldier, who deserves to be unceremoniously whisked to oblivion. So enraged has been the youth by the act of injustice and brutality perpetrated against an old and defenceless firewood seller. The Shaykh, however, tells his well-intentioned but impetuous disciple that it was that same old and seemingly helpless man who had *taught* the Shaykh the Supreme Name. Evidently, in the confrontation with the soldier, the old *wali*, who could, by the logic of the tale, have restrained or annihilated the soldier, had chosen the way of self-control, toleration, and forgiveness. Personal injury or humiliation was obviously of no consequence to him, utterly filled as he was with compassion and meekness. Moreover, with the kind of esoteric knowledge the old man possessed he was able to discern the ultimate ends of actions, including that of the soldier, and could not use his prized gift in a way that might have upset the scheme of things and the harmony of the divine plan.

To the opposition, the story lends itself very neatly to the standard accusations of passivity and quietism, in the sense that the Sufi way, in choosing to dwell, rather indulgently, on the inner struggle, the greater Jihad or the greater *Hijra*, in quest of enlightenment and a personal ecstatic communion with the divine, inevitably helps to preserve (or even endorse) the status quo on the ground, however unjust or malevolent that status quo might be. The French word *collaboration* has been often used to describe, not only the well-known act of betraying one's community and aiding its enemy, but also that of closing the eyes to social and political inequities and cultivating the inner cosmos while one's country lay under a foreign occupation, one invariably assisted by some tacit acceptance or collusion on the part of some local leaderships. This was a charge levelled against some Sufi orders in French-occupied Algeria and, among other places, Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union.

The evidence which critics present in support of the above charge is considerable. But, aside from the *jihadist* manifestations in the Muslim 'homeland', so is the body of evidence linking the Sufi orders with the formidable (and peaceful) expansion of Islam in both the 'old' and 'new' worlds. Francis Robinson's description of the Sufis as 'first bearers of the faith' and builders of 'bridges' between Islam and other traditions[6] is amply dramatized in the Sufi anecdotes and biographies. In the narratives under discussion, such bridges, a speciality and a goal of public (and certainly citizen and multi-track) diplomacy, are often built through a meeting of hearts, an emphasis on a common spirituality, and a civil competition between Muslims and non-Muslims (mainly Christians and Jews) to win God's pleasure.[7] Though Islam as *din al-fitra* often occupies a central place, considerable tolerance and courtesy is accorded the fellow competitor

and 'traveller' – a sentiment that permeates al-'Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* (particularly in the story of Shaykh San'an) and informs the 'religion of love' by such giants of Sufi literary expression as Ibn al-'Arabi, Rumi, and Emre.[8] Interestingly, in one anecdote, the Crusaders (identified in the contemporary Arab chronicles as Franks, *al-Ifranj* or *al-Faranja*, rather than soldiers of the cross) also show respect for the shrine of one of the Sufi saints of Palestine, 'Ali bin 'Alil,[9] almost duplicating the kind of tradition seen in, among other places, multi-faith India, where the shrine of a saint is visited and venerated by people of all faiths.

The respect and consideration accorded to women, several of whom are actual heroines of these tales and anecdotes,[10] is typical of the Sufi approach generally, which has seen women assuming roles of spiritual and communal leadership in Sufi *tariqas* in what may be regarded as one corrective to unbalanced practices by the religious orthodoxy in partnership with the political and economic patriarchy. Of equal interest is the fact that Sufis, in their innovative use of the classical love poetry of Arabia, Persia, and other cultures, have routinely employed feminine attributes and images to describe the divine. Such 'redress of imbalances' in the gender equation is certainly relevant (and inspirational) to social issues and programmes in a postmodern world, where Muslim women, besides making inroads (as elsewhere in the face of fierce opposition) into education, literature, art, politics, diplomacy, science, business, the media, protest movements, and other activities, have also chosen to lead Sufi fraternities.

Also relevant to the theme of social responsibility is the pervasiveness, in the anecdotes and biographies under study, of accounts of *tariqah* masters standing up to unjust rulers and corrupt officials – the *walī* versus the *wāli* syndrome. The frequency of such accounts suggests that these stories, in which mighty sultans, emirs, viziers, judges, and generals are humiliated, restrained, or transformed in the presence of a greater spiritual authority,[11] reflect (or perhaps partly relieve) a collective yearning in Muslim societies at various times of their social and political evolution for justice, equity, and fairness, which, though pivotal to Islamic teachings, were rarely addressed by political authority. This resulted in the creation of two systems, one official and the other popular, running parallel to each other, though occasionally intersecting, with Sufi masters sometimes acting as agents of 'bridge-building' and institutors, in the words of Abu Yazid al-Bistami, of a 'hidden caliphate' (*khilfah batiniyyah*).[12]

In many stories, Sufi diplomacy or mediation helps to release imprisoned or condemned individuals who are victims of injustice or corruption, while Sufi sanctuaries and shrines provide havens of protection and refuge to the oppressed, the wronged, and the dispossessed.[13] Food, education, comradeship, healing, and a new point of reference are routinely offered not only to disciples but also to many other people, especially the needy and the misfits. In some cases, old prostitutes are given shelter, food, and protection.[14] Fortunately, data on the orders' social role and charitable work, particularly

at their *khanqas*, or hospices, as well as on contributions to national reform, is becoming more available, however insufficiently. The relatively recent work of Valerie Hoffman and Julian Johansen, albeit dealing specifically with the Egyptian experience, sheds interesting light on such social involvement.[15]

A spiritual *hisba* (a supervisory and regulatory body or watchdog), parallel to or as a compensation for the one usurped by the political leadership, seems to be well in place in these narratives, providing a possible and subversive model for activist movements. Bahauddin Naqshband (d. 1389) explains the essence of that authority in the words: 'The *walīs* derive their jurisdiction from Allah, hence the Sultans put their cheeks on their doorsills.'[16] At the heart of this relationship is the occasional congruence of interest between the two parties, the need for mutual legitimization; but there is also the inevitable conflict and tension. This may stem from the attempt to re-define political and social responsibility, even the very concept of 'power', prioritizing a moral and spiritual dimension, actualized in communal service. As in the story of the Supreme Name cited above, people of power are enjoined not to abuse their gifts or possessions. Even when they have strength or knowledge greater than that given to (or attained by) others, they should realize that, by virtue of their greater power, their responsibilities must be the greater. Reform or growth must begin from within, just as a seed has to break up in the earth and struggle towards the light. Neither coercion nor quick-fix solutions are relevant here. A more subtle, 'soft', and incremental approach should be the norm. Only people who are graced with the qualities of patience and forbearance, and have compassion for all humanity, al-Yafi'i himself asserts, are fit to belong to the company of the enlightened, the true friends of God.

Nor is such compassion and sense of responsibility and accountability confined to human society. It also extends, as in the fundamental Islamic teachings, to *all* created beings. There are stories of astonishing empathy and fellowship with such creatures as wild birds, insects, and the fish in the sea, for whose welfare Makhluf al-Qaba'ili prays and by whose distress he is moved to tears.[17] Even after death, a Sufi woman saint ('Aisha bint 'Abdallah al-Bakriyyah) can provide healing to injured birds that perch on her tomb, as does Abu al-Hassan 'Ali bin 'Abdallah (nicknamed the 'animal-healer') for the animals visiting his grave.[18] A poignant anecdote tells of the inexorable link between releasing a trapped insect and the restoration to health of an ailing human being.[19] As such, the anecdote places itself within a humanistic tradition establishing accountability and connection between the human and natural worlds, as manifested in such gems of world literature as Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner', itself inspired initially by a tale from the Arabian Nights. Other relevant stories in the Sufi corpus reflect a most remarkable care for the environment, including trees (as in the anecdote involving 'Ali al-Khawas and the palm tree)[20] and seem to foresee such concerns which occupy us today at local and global levels.

In one tale, a Sufi master of a middle rank, called Shaykh Muhammad, is gifted with some truly amazing powers.[21] In his endeavours to exhort villagers to piety as well as provide food for them, he miraculously commands wild birds to fly to his *zawiyah*, where he slaughters these birds and hands out their flesh to the villagers and his disciples. The people are naturally mesmerized by this version of the Pied Piper of Hamlin. However, when a master of a superior rank and greater knowledge, a Shaykh 'Ali, appears on the scene, the scales of judgement are turned. Shaykh 'Ali is horrified by what he sees, and bids the birds congregating outside the *zawiyah* to disperse and fly back to their nests and roosts. He then turns to the miracle-worker and admonishes him with the words: 'Do you not know that among these fowl are birds that nurse eggs which will fail if neglected and others that tend chicks which will perish if abandoned? What you have been doing is nothing short of a vast cruelty!' The lesser Shaykh is abashed. His intentions were good, but he promises to mend his ways. He spreads a lavish banquet for Shaykh 'Ali and the villagers; but the Shaykh will not eat at a table that has a history of brutality to any of God's creatures.

Such sentiments and preoccupations are of course present in Qur'anic and Hadith narratives, leaving an imprint on early Islamic literature and helping to inspire and sustain social and economic institutions like *bayt al-mal* (the public treasury), *al-zakat* (obligatory tax for the benefit of the needy), *waqf* (religious endowments), and *'ushr* (a percentage of 10 per cent of the agricultural produce payable to the poor) as well as concepts like *rahmah* (mercy and compassion), *'adl* (justice and fairness), *falah* (human well-being), *amana* (the trust nature of resources), and *huquq al-'ibad* (obligations towards other human beings). In this context, one must note that the principle of sharing and fraternization which informs the structure and philosophy of the *tariqas* has been instrumental in nourishing the solidarity of a Sufi group and its cohesiveness. Throughout, the Sufi masters appear so thoroughly attuned to what Mulla Sadra so pithily called *da'irat al-wujud* (cycle of being) and to their human role within it on the basis of *sarayan al-wujud* (penetration of being), a process of infiltration and immersion so total and overpowering that it can result, or culminate, in the Ka'bah, in Abu al 'Abbas al-Basir's audacious words, doing homage to and circumambulating the friend of God.[22]

Another feature of the Sufi narratives is the general exuberance and not infrequent sense of humour which inform them. This occurs as the narratives interweave so intimately and refreshingly with a search for happiness in the world and beyond, moderating (even undermining at times) the generally dour decorum of the 'ulema and the jurists. That decorum is generally scoffed at or casually left behind by the often-less convention-bound Sufi leadership and population, drawn in the main, though by no means exclusively, from the common people. Here too, Sufism has played a curative-corrective if not also seditious role in the sense that it has defied the forces perceived to have turned Islamic worship and some associated social relations into a generally regimented, cheerless, and ritualistic affair,

legitimating a coercive and severe side of the faith and an 'Old Testament' image of the deity.

In this manner, Sufi orders (and narratives) have represented, be it through charismatic leadership, legend, bold story telling, dance, music, and, of course, the supreme ecstatic goal of the disciple's trek, a more spontaneous, joyful, and *youthful* dimension of Islam, expanding on its potential for social service both imaginatively and through personal conduct, celebrating, healing, and changing lives. The gospel of love which the Sufi masters have taught for centuries is unconditional and sweeping, involving all faiths and temples (as in Ibn al-'Arabi) but going beyond them all (as in Rumi) since God dwells, as one *hadith* suggests, in the human heart. The fabulous stories, in some of these biographies, of Sufi Shaykhs practising what is called *tahammul* or the taking upon themselves of a disease afflicting an individual or a community and falling seriously ill or dying in the process[23] represent an extreme form of social engagement, with roots in shamanism and such prototypes as the hanged god of Frazer and the crucified Christ. At the same time, the stories epitomize the uncompromisingly holistic and inclusive approach of these 'people's saints' to the ills, anxieties, and aspirations of their societies, whose various ethnicities and sects habitually hold the memories of these saints with considerable devotion. Accounts such as by the historian Ibn Iyas or Sultan Walad of the public funerals of Sufi masters in which members of all social classes and religious communities walk with genuine grief and a keen sense of bereavement (to the Sufi in question it is of course an *'urs*, a wedding) testify to the unifying, cohesive, and inclusive power of the masters.[24]

All this, however, came with an occasionally high price tag, involving conflict between Sufi orders and the forces of orthodoxy. This was inevitable since the movement was perceived as a challenge, subtle or blatant, to the legalitarianism of officialdom, with the 'doctors of the law' often seen as hopelessly in collusion with political authority in an unending monopoly of power. Naturally, such opposition could hardly be tolerated anywhere else, especially in contemporary 'Christendom'. Mystics like Marguerite Porete, Luis de Leon, and even the great John of the Cross, were burnt alive or severely persecuted in Europe of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, somewhat coinciding with the burning of 'witches' on the continent. The (fabled) confrontation between Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1226) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210), like the more historically attested debate between the Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) and master of the Shadhli order Ibn 'Ataillah (d. 1309) and the disputation in 'Asir in 1832 between Ahmad ibn Idris (d. 1837) and Wahhabi scholars[25] – a tradition kept alive in more recent times by such public debates as that which took place in the United States before the September 2001 events between the Naqshbandi Shaykh Hisham Kabbani and Muslim traditionalists in the United States – is typical of the mistrust as well as the competing, though often invigorating, discourses between the two institutions, which,

however, have at times collaborated in the 'service of the faith'. The conflict between Husseyn al-Hallaj (d. 922) and the judges of Basra and Baghdad had in an earlier era been a high point of antagonism and high tragedy, though its stirring and evocative spark was to travel in time to enthuse many generations of writers and reformers. These included, among others, some Arab writers of the latter half of the twentieth century in their challenge of the existing political order. Nonetheless, mutual suspicions have been more typical. The Sufi Shakyh Dahmal in a poignant anecdote walks up to the *minbar* (pulpit) in a mosque, strikes it with his hand, and calls it the 'mount of cheaters',[26] another echo of the original criticism against the growing rigidity and formalism of some major Muslim schools and a yearning to revive the perceived spontaneity, vitality, *fitra*, and forbearance, of a youthful and self-confident Islam.

Despite the polarization, in more recent years, of the debate (and confrontation) between political authority and militant 'fundamentalists' in several Muslim and Arab countries, Sufism, like other non-militant religious groups, has managed to occupy a place in the middle or a safer one on the margin. A case like that of al-Ahbash, a semi-political, semi-militant, Sufi group in Lebanon, has been an exception rather than the rule, and one which has generated considerable controversy in that country. But Muslim nations and communities are increasingly (and most painfully) aware, as in Chechnya, of the devastating effects of exported or home-grown intolerance and militancy. The attractiveness and potential of 'traditional' Sufism in embodying a gentle, though by no means passive, form of Islam continue to be explored by many people within and outside Muslim-majority countries. Writers and artists have continued to draw inspiration from the life histories and works of Sufi exponents. One case in point has been that of the Iraqi poet 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati, a lifelong advocate of leftwing and pan-Arabist ideologies, but who, in his later years drifted towards the Sufi discourse, ultimately asking to be buried, shortly before his death in 1999, in the sanctuary of Ibn al-'Arabi's shrine in Damascus.

## Concluding thoughts

What Sufi narratives (including the very substantial and valuable body of *creative literature*) can help bring into the larger Muslim and Arab picture is a needed liberation of the imagination and a freeing of the ego, along with the inspiration they provide for social and global conduct that is responsible, ethical, peaceful, and animated, Sufism itself having been an engine of spiritual, moral, and cultural globalization for centuries. The potential of such material for selective use in educational programmes is considerable; its openness to and bonding with diverse cultural experiences of innumerable nations can also be beneficial and liberating.

In an environment that is increasingly globalized, diversified, and open-ended, but also in other ways hegemonic, materialistic, and ruthless, despite

the claims of its merchandisers and militaries to the contrary, the Sufi approach can be a tool and a path for self-fulfilment, spiritual advancement, transcendence, and renewal. Its compassionate discourse and generally non-coercive and participatory methodology can serve as a foil to an excessive obsession with purely political and dogmatic concerns, though without shunning, perhaps aiding, the pressing need for political and ideological reform. The spiritual and societal activism of the Sufi path, together with its ascetic, selfless tendencies, reverence for all life, interest in emotional release and happiness, psychological subtlety and fresh approach to the multiple layers of reality, as well as its 'soft' (but bold and revolutionary) flattening of barriers, resistance to monopolies, and reversal and merger of roles and genders, can inspire or guide many people yearning for spirituality coupled with social engagement in a postmodern and turbulent world, particularly, though not exclusively, in multi-ethnic and democratic (or democratizing) societies. One human being can fill the entire cosmos, asserts Tajudddin bin 'Ata'illah.[27] But as Shaykh 'Abdallah al-Turkumani reminds the lecher, in a story narrated by Kamal al-Din al-Sarraj (in *Tuffah al-Arwah*), no human law can truly restrain a wrongdoer except that of his own conscience.[28] Reform, we are continually reminded, must begin with an inner conviction/conversion and a deep awareness of individual and collective responsibility. Perhaps it is for that reason that Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, after a life-long struggle with, and a pioneership of, juristic, political, and national reform in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Egypt, intimated to his disciple Shaykh Rashid Ridha that reformers of the future should be educated along Sufi lines,[29] unconsciously reaching a conclusion somewhat similar to that of Ikhwan al-Safa.

Of course, the Sufi orders themselves have not been without blame or blemish. They too have been tarnished from time to time by such corrupting and compromising factors as royal patronage and participation in cabal-type palace and national intrigues.[30] Also, to outsiders they seem to cultivate an oppressive hierarchy, an awkwardly quietist philosophy, an inordinate veneration of 'saints', an exaggerated licence with the interpretation of the sacred texts, and an obsession with esoteric meanings. Some of their own ritualism and cultism can be perceived at times to contradict their emancipatory and iconoclastic claims. But, on the whole, they remain part of a composite and dynamic Islamic experience, which needs its male and female, its transmitted text and direct experience, its communalism and individualism, its traditionalists and iconoclasts, affirmation and negation, reason and imagination, *logos* and *muthos, nomos* and *eros*, technology and spirituality, prose and poetry, *khirqah* (the rags of the mystic aflame in his own *harqah*) and business suit.

# 6 Literature and peacemaking
## A role explored

Peacemaking is a somewhat nebulous but evolving concept which embraces elements of mediation, reconciliation, and peacekeeping, among others. It shares with kindred fields of study like diplomacy and conflict-resolution an interest in the practicality of ending disputes, but goes beyond them, *and* beyond peace*keeping*, in dealing more with long-term rather than short-term solutions and with *mindscapes* (and *soulscapes*?) rather than mere landscapes. Be that as it may, the concept is not the preserve of either Harold Nicolson, Butros Ghali, or any other. In its more general sense, it is an ancient and ongoing activity known to various cultures and communities – and extolled by them: 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God!'[1]

I shall not put *another* metaphorical bullet through my head by attempting a second definition – that of literature. I only wish to point out that the 'literature' intended here is *imaginative* literature, encompassing the well-known genres and forms, but also including *religious* and devotional texts, though these are treated here only cursorily.[2] At any rate, in the present confines I can only offer few, fleeting glimpses into a truly vast subject.

I remember vividly, chillingly, how, at the beginning of the 'troubles' in Lebanon, in the summer of 1975, a stray bullet fired from a street near what later became known as the Green Line in Beirut whizzed an inch past my father's head as he was standing at the window, and lodged itself into the wall of our living room jolting in the process a few tomes in a bookcase. That bookcase, which, incidentally, housed some works by Kahlil Gibran, was but part of a family collection of thousands of books, a few of which had been inherited from at least two earlier generations; most were to be lost or plundered a few years down the road.

What can a *book* do in the steely face of a *bullet* or under the blazing eyes of a *torch*? Moreover, books, even noble and sacred ones, have been regularly used to stir up hatred and launch pogroms. Not long before his death ('he died younger than he was born', noted James Stephens) the Anglo-Irish poet W.B. Yeats fretted over whether a play he had written in his greener years had helped send some men to their deaths.[3]

On the surface, good imaginative literature is, in a manner of speaking, hamstrung by its own rules and paradigms. It will *not* be drawn into open polemics about good and evil, thus sliding into monochromatic portraiture, moralism, sensationalism, propaganda, or utopia. A mature and self-respecting novelist or playwright possesses the skill and the self-restraint to back away from a hundred opportunities to make a direct statement. And though Hamlet is at pains to tell his actors to 'hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature', he is likely, in his intellectual dilemma, to agree with W.H. Auden's notion that 'poetry makes nothing happen: . . . it survives, A way of happening, a mouth'. Archibald MacLeish would go as far as to demand of poetry to be 'silent' 'wordless', 'motionless' – 'A poem should not mean/But be'.[4]

And this is exactly what good literature can do to help with peacemaking and reconciliation – simply by being there, as:

1 A bridge, a need fulfilled (or in the process of being fulfilled) for telling and talking, for dialogue and communication, which is a vital prelude to (and a crucial component in) any peacemaking process: 'I was angry with my friend,/I told my wrath, my wrath did end;/I was angry with my foe,/I told it not, my wrath did grow. . . .'[5]
2 A model of creativity, which, though demanding great mental effort and, at times, fraught with heartache in the process of its creation, is, at the end of the day, a testament to peaceful activity, and a reward to its own author, as well as to his or her community and the world at large, perhaps for all time. And as an innovative, meaningful, and essentially participatory alternative to simple-minded, facile, and one-track indoctrination, bullying or terrorization, it can induce an appreciation – possibly an inclination – for *persuasive* rather than *coercive* methods, and for work that needs *imagination* and *patience* and yields slow, but *cumulative* and *enduring* results, while requiring (and encouraging) communal interaction. Of course, as noted by Aristotle, rhetoric is *intentionally* persuasive, while great literature ('the quarrel with ourselves') only inadvertently and subtly so.[6]
3 A model transcending, not reality, 'where all the ladders start',[7] but ephemeral distinctions, flimsy masks, and the temptation to surrender one's voice and integrity to a partisan, inhumane, or demeaning cause, reality itself to be viewed *not* in terms of opposites or platitudes but as a fascinating, ever changing, ever challenging, kaleidoscope, a sea of galaxies too vast to be captured in one mortal lens or frame.

   Indeed, one of the major causes of conflict in the world is the reluctance or inability to acknowledge or respect difference and diversity. The readiness to do so is germane not just for moral or idealistic reasons, but also for functional and artistic ones. Oxford historian Theodore Zeldin has pointed out the significance of El Greco's

decision, at the age of thirty-five, to settle in Toledo, where

> Christians, Muslims, and Jews had once lived in it side by side; [where] one of its kings had been proud to call himself Emperor of the Three Religions and another to have his epitaph inscribed on his tombstone in Castilian, Arabic and Hebrew.

Zeldin has argued most trenchantly that, without that move to that intellectually exciting and stimulating city, where even the harsh Inquisition could not totally snuff out the earlier, lingering aura of latitude and pluralism ('reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable'), El Greco 'would doubtless have remained an obscure artist of no significance, repetitively painting conventional icons, imprisoned by formalities and habits'.[8] Writers like Gibran and Ameen Rihani, who worked for synthesis at various levels, were – without taking away any merit from the liberal platform which America gave them – part of a Lebanese–Syrian, Arab–Islamic–Christian tradition that celebrated diversity, which in Qur'anic, Hadith, and Sufi discourses, to dwell on one tradition, itself a part and an extension of the monotheistic (Abrahamic) tradition of the Levant, is regarded as a sign of God's grandeur. It is true that Gibran drew on Nietzsche's Zarathustra, but in no way similar in method or intention to the way the later propagandists of violence and racial superiority in Nazi Germany distorted and abused Nietsche's ideas, through no fault of the philosopher's own. Gibran approached the Ubermensch with the Jewish–Christian–Muslim synthesis he knew so intimately and to which he contributed. One aspect of that synthesis was the man of spiritual power, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Universal Man, as expressed in the words of Ibn al-'Arabi:

> My heart is capable of every form:
> A cloister for the monk, a temple for idols,
> A pasture for gazelles, the votary's Ka'ba,
> The tables of the Torah, the Koran,
> Love is the faith I hold; wherever turn
> His camels, still the one true faith is mine.[9]

Truly, at the heart of all great literature, whether secular or religious, both inevitably tapping into some universal reservoir of images and memories (be it the Spiritus Mundi, the Collective Unconscious, or the 'Mind of God') is a moment of epiphany (or discovery) that involves a union between one person (or character) and another or with a larger, perhaps transcendent, being or truth. That moment is an instant of eternity transcending man's fleeting and squabbling hours, one subliminally expressed by Blake ('To see a world in a grain of sand', etc.), just like a true Sufi, just like Fariduddin al-'Attar depicting the journey of the diverse, often doubting, despairing, egotistical, birds to the Simurgh,

who is the sum-total of all their souls in supreme splendour and strength of will: 'Come you lost Atoms to your Centre draw,/And *be* the Eternal Mirror that you saw:/Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide/Return, and back into your Sun subside.'[10]

By reflecting the complexity of human nature and the indivisibility of responsibility, literature can alert the reader to the difficulty (and absurdity) of oversimplifying, of pointing a stern finger, of casting a real or a figurative stone, of being trapped in – or perhaps drugged by – an endless cycle of accusation and counter-accusation, a cycle which diplomats and negotiators call a 'lose-lose' situation. The principle is that 'a single leaf turns not yellow but with the silent knowledge of the whole tree.' After all, it is from the knowledge of the self that wider knowledge makes a start, peace *within* being the first step to the larger peace. Likewise, the expansion of individual consciousness which great literature is able to generate can further extend to enhance universal consciousness. Thus in his elucidation of the Kabbalist saying 'In Kether [the Crown or the creative principle] is Malcut [the physical world and Man], and Malcut is in Kether', Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi employs the analogy of a seed. 'Within the tough dense kernel of a chestnut', writes Halevi, 'resides not just one possible new tree, but a whole forest of generations' – hence the hope, in the 'human kingdom', of ever-new beginnings and new mindsets. Therefore the parable in the Qur'an of a gracious and beneficent word (*kalimah tayyibah*) embracing, like a cosmic tree whose roots are entrenched in the earth and branches tap the heavens, the whole of creation and an infinitude of cornucopias. Of course, Aristotle's argument about the social and civic role of *catharsis* in tragedy is relevant here. Even to the casual observer, the element of struggle or conflict in its technical sense seems to be invariably interwoven into the very texture of almost all literature in its 'imitation' of life and of the complexities and contradictions of the human psyche. Imagine *Romeo and Juliet* without the Capulet–Montague feud, *The Scarlet Letter* without Puritan Boston, *Laila and Majnun* without the tribal taboos of the desert, *The Broken Wings* without the feudal and clerical tyranny of feudal Lebanon, or, for that matter, *Oedipus Rex* without Apollo's curse, *Paradise Lost* without its Lucifer, *Wuthering Heights* without its Heathcliff, *War and Peace* without Napoleon's campaign, even 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' without the awesome wife – the list can go on and on! Nonetheless, the goal or benefit (however obliquely sought or achieved) of great literature is the 'expurgation' of violent or negative emotions or exhaling the rage and the bringing together and uplifting of individual souls and whole communities, underscoring throughout the preciousness and endurance of life even when it is most painful or frail.

Not only thematically, but also by its very structure and the composite, seemingly contradictory, world it portrays, a literary work, perhaps like

a painting or a sculpture, *embodies* (rather than merely 'represents') the diversity which is to be preserved in society or the world at large within an overarching or ultimate (in some cases elusive) harmony. Furthermore, the self-identification with a fictional character (or a group) in crisis allows us, readers or audiences, to explore other psyches as well as our own, and to revisit our own problems with new and fresh insights. Sir Brian Urquart, for many years a UN under-secretary in charge of peacekeeping, concludes his impressive autobiography, *A Life in Peace and War*, with an insight that may explain something of the difference between tawdry and great literature. He says: 'Struggle is the essence of life. The problem is to draw a line between *struggle*, which is stimulating – and conflict, which is often lethal.' This is an assertion one may quote without submitting totally to the 'Realist' contention (in IR studies) about the inevitability and/or perpetuity of conflict in human and international society.[11]

4 Associated with the above notions is the fact that literature can develop a sympathy and understanding for characters or people often condemned (or excluded) for being different, nonconformist or disadvantaged, thus broadening the human capacity for compassion and generosity, even while 'agitating', in its own way and with its own tools, for justice and reform – the two being another province and an abiding interest of literature. The realm of such empathy can be broadened further to include the whole Earth (seen in religious and mystical literature as one sentient and dynamic, alternatively bruised, *being*) and mitigate – sometimes by way of mocking and ridiculing – human and institutional arrogance (Ezra Pound's 'Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down', and al-Ma'arri's 'Tread lightly, softly; the earth you tread upon is but the dust of these, our bodies!'). In fact, the capacity of literature to make people laugh at pomposity, self-importance, and stubbornness may go some way towards reducing in them the likelihood or desirability of indulging in such attitudes, and may help unmask war as an absurd, irrational, and wasteful exercise, a demonic force unleashed: 'Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.' And while literature can recall the 'tears of things' in the midst of the loud triumphal march, it can in the process educate people in the art of stepping back enough to see the 'drama' of life (the 'poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage') with a sense of detachment: 'And who could play it well enough/If deaf and dumb and blind with love?'

Indeed, while literature, like religion, can propel the human soul to great heights of empathy and achievement ('Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?'), it can also inject a sobering or calming dose of realism (particularly helpful in situations of public agitation) and awareness of irony: 'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone'.[12]

5 With its uncanny ability to *liberate* (but also *focus*) the imagination, highlighting *essences* with an intense epigrammatic force or at a more

leisurely pace, literature can enhance in the reader the aptitude to discern hitherto unnoticed or indecipherable patterns and details within and without (the 'Hidden Man' of P.B. Porter and the road 'less travelled by' of Robert Frost) – a talent shared by well-trained or sensitive diplomats, artists, scientists, etc., while acting as a model allowing one to participate in the joy of *exploration* and *discovery*, which even when not flattering or exhilarating, is enlightening and emancipating. The capacity of literature for *prophecy*, for reading *between* and *beyond* the immediate events is almost legendary, and can be harnessed to a process of peacemaking or reconciliation, even one of predicting and preventing conflict. We all know cases in modern and recent history where a legion of diplomatic missions and envoys in a country could not foresee a revolution round the corner, a pogrom brewing, a civil war in the offing, an economic meltdown! Jura Soyfer's play *Vineta* ended, in 1937, with the words:

> Sure, there really is no city in the world that's like Vineta [a fictional city of nightmare], but if one day a tidal wave should come, some big barbaric outbreak, I wonder if the whole world might not turn into a Vineta. . . . [T]here might not be much time left.[13]

Some works of fiction published before the 'civil war' in Lebanon, as Evelyne Accad has poignantly demonstrated, had in them a vision of Beirut engulfed by such a tidal wave. And again, as Accad has argued, women novelists who wrote about the war highlighted, so perceptively and predictively, certain disparities, particularly gender inequalities, as a consequential factor in starting and perpetuating the conflict.[14] Such knowledge is of some value in rebuilding and healing shattered communities – restoring, as it were, the lute's broken string in Hans Holbein's opulent (but cautionary) painting 'The Ambassadors', the Diplomatic Academy of London's perennial logo.

Of course, not all prophecies are grim or apocalyptic. The vision of universal government ('the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world' – which the UN is yet to fulfil) was expressed, outside religious literature and Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, in Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* (1886), a poem, incidentally, based in structure, approximate metre, and themes (love, time, change, etc.) on the *mu'allaqah* of Imru'ul-Qais, a pre-Islamic Arabian poet. Also in passing, one may mention the curious but valid contention elusively conveyed by Spencer Holst in his short story 'The Zebra Storyteller', namely that the reading or writing of literature (in this instance fiction) prepares us for the unexpected and the extraordinary, without, however, minimizing its ability to make us ready for more mundane events in our everyday lives. Still, even when dealing with tragedy and high tension, great literature is inherently hopeful and reassuring – be it by way of its own endurance and unrelenting creativity.[15]

6 Literature can serve as a fund for indirectly educating (while *entertaining*, an all-important aspect and asset of all art) the public into values like selflessness, magnanimity, charity, spirituality, and compromise,

even, and especially, as aggressive market and consumerist 'values' seem to be sweeping and moulding the globe, including international political and diplomatic agendas. In this context, and in passing, one may note the conspicuous absence of references to 'love' (perhaps the greatest and most enduring and unifying theme in world literature) in international politics and documents, but also its gross trivialization in commercials and other manipulative and exploitative forms. The alternative or, in Ben Okri's (building on Christopher Marlowe's) words, 'infinite', 'riches' which literature explores and reveals *beyond* material possessions are, without serving as an 'opiate for the people', both comforting and transforming. The substitute or complementary perspectives, resources, and articulations offer themselves as tools of discovery, making us sometimes, as the Wedding Guest at the end of the Ancient Mariner's tale, 'sadder and wiser', though they can also turn us into children seeing the world with new eyes and fresh appetites.

Great literature has always highlighted the *totality* of the human being and the human experience, and this endeavour should continue, particularly as this totality is being compromised and compartmentalized by market forces and an often snappy and fickle media. The danger of stereotyping people, for instance, is that they are denied the complexity and many-sidedness, as well as the dignity (a pivotal concern of literature) hence legitimacy and rights, of other human beings. They are reduced and diminished, caricatured, and cast out. Their faults and shortcomings are held up to be their defining feature and identity, in a sinister 'comedy of humours'. In great literature, however, even a blameworthy Macbeth or a culpable Phèdre can still excite our pity and fear, finding in them, with all their faults and frailties, aspects of our selves and the 'saving graces' of common humanity. Even the murky political and social issues of the emerging nations of the modern era can be transformed by the luminous and invigorating power of a pen like that of Ben Okri into an occasion for a universal statement and vision, one stirringly emphasizing the oneness of human origin and aspiration, since 'spirits are essentially the same the world over'. The old mythical woman in the forest whom the African spirit child Azaro observes weaving the 'true', rather than colonial, history of her nation is yet another icon of the writer and artist, encoding fragments of the 'great jigsaw that the creator spread all over the diverse peoples of the earth, hinting that no one race or people can have the complete picture or monopoly of the ultimate possibilities of the human genius alone'.[16]

Fundamental here also is the role of children's literature in inculcating values of sharing and forbearance at various levels, with a view to lifting these children, and their own children to come, out of and beyond the dark holes and petty enmities of the fathers. The incorporation of such material into educational books, which, as part of 'national curricula', often dwell on exclusive and exclusionary issues, is vital.

As children and young people are often beneficiaries and 'victims' of 'fantasy' and other genres of popular literature and films depicting scenes of violence and conflict, invariably directed against 'foreign' or 'different' characters, one may mention in passing the excellent (and cautionary) study by Christa Kamenetsky of the roots, manifestations, and impact of the German 'heroic' and 'epic' literature on German children and youths, as well as, among others, British writers, artists, and intellectuals, from at least the late eighteenth century to the eve of the Second World War. Such caveats are necessary at a time when educators, diplomats, and religious authorities, among others, are urged to revise their discourses, educational curricula, and strategies in a genuinely needed effort to build a culture of peace and foster a 'dialogue' rather than a 'clash' of civilizations. Such a process, needless to say, must not be set up or be supervised by a censorial 'Big Brother' or a Goebbels Ministry. No Commissar, Torquemada or a Mullah's 'fatwa' must ever impinge on the freedom and imagination of a creative writer or artist. Nor should 'sales' and 'market demands' solely decide the issue, as they often do in the real world. Nonetheless, since we do live in the real world and need to negotiate our way through it by concessions and compromises, it is still helpful not to lose sight of the warning by the inspired Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'Auschwitz was not built with stones, but was built with words.'[17]

7 Literature can further serve as a magnet and an incentive for *translation*, that magical bridge across linguistic and cultural barriers, with the consequent universal benefits. Language is often an identity tag. Conflicts can start or be fuelled by people's anxieties about the possible loss of their identity. Toleration, indeed *respect* and *celebration*, of variant and minority expressions in literary and linguistic forms can take a great deal of anxiety, frustration, and embitterment away from the national or even global scene, the former having been long constrained if not stifled by notions of 'sovereignty' and the latter dominated and waylaid by monolithic and adversarial paradigms. In fact, there is a need to encourage and reward (through awards, sponsorships and other programmes) local and indigenous forms of literature, like folk drama and traditional storytelling, along with all genuine local talent in all fields, to be heard and seen and read, in several languages – thus enriching and completing the 'great jigsaw'. A somewhat redeeming role for the UNESCO, an organization that is often perceived as remote and elitist, can be sought in this regard. Globalization itself (initially eulogized then increasingly maligned), together with Information Technology (the many-headed 'Modern Hydra') and NGOs, can be an *asset* and a *vehicle* to the sharing of individual and cultural experiences (and forms of *wisdom*) in cyberspace, without ignoring other immense, modem-less, spaces.[18]

8 Karl Popper has rightly railed against the elevation of the 'history of political power' into a dominant 'history of the world', to the exclusion

> of 'an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.' By reaffirming its enormous role in the development of the human psyche (and human civilization), literature can provide, along with its Janus-faced and protean tradition of respecting the past and embracing the new, an alternative to one exclusive reading (or hijacking) of the history of humanity by the 'history of power politics . . ., the history [in Popper's words] of international crime and mass murder.' It can continue to enrich (and restore balance to) human life and civilization, and enhance their amazing diversity and totality, even when some literary and religious masterpieces (not to mention the plethora of inferior material, fuse and fodder to the culture of hate) have been used throughout history to legitimatize (or generate) war and xenophobia. Aristotle has already argued that poetry is 'more philosophical and higher in the scale' than history because it 'tends to represent ethical universals based on probability'. Perhaps the Arabs should not be too shy or apologetic about their traditional saying, '*al-shi'r diwan al-'arab*,' roughly translated as 'the true register and history [perhaps the very essence] of the Arabs is found in their poetry'.[19]

The well-known British diplomat and historian of diplomacy Harold Nicolson, writing on peacemaking in 1933, expressed scepticism about the effectiveness and value of 'high-mindedness' acting alone in international politics. Later in 1945, with the added bitter harvest of horrific conflict and shoddy peace, he was warning against reliance 'upon the wattle of improvisation and a few hastily gathered sods of compromise . . . quickly overrun by the flood'. Gibran himself speaks of the need to relate values to issues of fairness and equity, to specific socio-economic realities: 'It is in exchanging the gifts of the earth that you shall find abundance and be satisfied. Yet unless the exchange be in love and kindly justice, it will but lead some to greed and others to hunger.'[20]

Hence the necessity for a well-thought-out programme to advocate, without Big Brother tactics, the literature of peace and fairness at regional and global levels, particularly in territories of conflict or potential conflict. 'A stitch in time saves nine', advises the adage, and a *proactive* move in time saves *nine* peacekeeping battalions – and many human lives! The UN *Agenda for Peace* speaks of the need for 'concrete cooperative projects which link two or more countries [one may add, "communities"] in a mutually beneficial undertaking . . . [to] enhance the confidence that is so fundamental to peace'.[21] Some of the literary, educational, and translation projects alluded to above can easily take the form of such collective undertakings and workshop, though care has to be expended to coax such activities away from elitist circles and bring them closer to people's needs and participation.

The gains achieved, so painstakingly (and belatedly), at, for example, Taif or Dayton or with the Good Friday Agreement, are truly momentous. But

much remains to be done, much that involves genuine, rather than superficial or cosmetic, inter-communal harmonization and all manner of institutional and systemic reforms, without which deep-seated divisions and long-running grievances and suspicions will remain and might multiply. The role of religious literature and truly dedicated religious mediators is certainly relevant, particularly as these possess the expert knowledge, authority, and diction to confound the priests of animosity and war. Attention to details and specific requirements is vital. Setting a good example is crucial on account of its vivid and inspirational power, which is not a small thing since inspiration knows no borders and rises above individual faiths. Living examples are hard to come by among world leaders these days. One can think of past and present individuals like Gandhi, the Pope, and Nelson Mandela; organizations and institutions like Moral Armament, the World Conference on Religions and Peace, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Hariri Foundation, Greenpeace, Médecins Sans Frontières, the United Nations itself, etc. Literature, like religious faith and other beliefs, commitments, and activities deeply held or passionately pursued, has often helped its practitioners and recipients to overcome personal problems and somehow triumph over tragedy. At a communal and even global level (and in a peacemaking process which needs all the help and resources it can galvanize) literature can certainly continue to highlight afresh the priority, beauty, diversity, fragility, and mystery of life, along with the qualities and values which humanity may aspire to identify with as well as the perils and infamies it wishes to avoid. The quest is so decisively important and meaningful since it is intertwined with the very definition and destiny (even survival) of humankind. Writers themselves who work so hard on their compositions sometimes feel that such work, however significant and demanding, is not enough, and wish to travel away from the paper and the artefact to reach out in other ways. This may not be always necessary. Tolstoy didn't have to set up (then *give* up) his progressive commune on his ancestral estate, surrounded as it was by a sea of serfdom. But the appealing, perhaps apocryphal, anecdote about Gibran declining to take two women to court over a financial matter since such litigation would have jarred with the principles of spirituality and forgiveness so passionately advocated in *The Prophet* is perhaps indicative of the need Gibran felt as a writer and a human being to join literature more directly to life, and at more than one point.[22]

Indicative also was the plan he contemplated with Ameen Rihani (himself a pioneering writer and a forerunner of the 'global diplomat') to construct an opera house, a Taj Mahal of life and creativity, with the aim of emphasizing, *on the ground, and in Lebanon*, the two men's vision of religious and cultural synthesis and harmony. Rihani's own amazing will, which was not even read out at his funeral, was another effort to reach out, beyond the paper, beyond the grave.[23]

However, Rihani still lives on. And Gibran *has* survived! He has survived my family's shattered shelf and plundered library in Beirut, and may even survive my presentation!

# Notes

## 1 The Arab disease: bittersweet pills to swallow?

1 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, iv, 90.
2 Arab Human Development Report, United Nations Development Programme, at www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/, accessed March–April 2003. Also cf. the 2003 AHDR at http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/englishpresskit2003.html, accessed January 2004.
3 See W. Montgomery Watt, *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* (Edinburgh: the University Press, 1972), p. 84. Also consider individual topics and figures in John R. Hayes, ed., *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance, New Edition* (London: Eurabia Publishing, 1983).
4 See report at Inter-Arab Investment Guarantee Corporation, http://www.iaigc.org/index_e.html, accessed 29 November 2004.
5 Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, n.d. [1787]), vol. iii, p. 66, and *Luria* in Roma A. King Jr and Jack W. Herring, eds, *The Complete Works of Robert Browning* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1973), vol. iv, pp. 281–349.
6 *Hamlet*, I, ii, 135–7.
7 The summit eventually convened in May of the same year, with a number of heads of state staying away and Libya's Colonel Qaddafi walking out in a row over the agenda and in protest against criticisms by the League's Secretary-General, 'Amr Musa, of Arabs acting unilaterally. Musa's remark was an apparent reference to the Libyan leader's decision to scrap his country's WMD programme without coordination with other Arab states who wished to link the issue to an ongoing diplomatic campaign to remove all weapons of mass destruction, including Israel's own, from the region.
8 Ibid. I, v, 10.
9 Nizar Qabbani, 'Mata yu'linuna wafata al 'Arab', at Arabic Literature, Middle East and Islamic Studies Collection, Cornell University, www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/nzmat.htm
10 George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).
11 Karl Popper, 'Has history any meaning?' in Karl Popper, ed., *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 500.
12 *Hamlet*, I, i, 68.
13 No Arabic translation of Blunt's book as such seems to have existed at the time, but Blunt himself was very close to the circle of Arab reformers and nationalists starting with Muhammad 'Abduh and ending, for the ageing Blunt, with Sa'd Zaghloul. See Sylvia G. Haim, 'Blunt and al-Kawakibi', *Oriente Moderno*, 35 (1955), 132–43. Also see Haim's 'Alfieri and al-Kawakibi', *Oriente Moderno*,

34 (1954), 321–34. For further treatment of the theme, see, among others, Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Ra'if Khuri, *Modern Arab Thought: Channels of the French Revolution to the Arab East*, trans. by Ihsan 'Abbas, rev. and ed. by Charles Issawi (Princeton, NJ: The Kingston Press, 1983).

14 As cited in Stephen Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants: The Little Nations at Versailles* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1946, reissued 1969), pp. 32–3.

15 Ibid. p. 39.

16 Ibid. p. 48.

17 Pat Rogers, ed., *Alexander Pope* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 408.

18 Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Universal Library, rev. ed. 1950), p. 872. Also see B.D. Zevin, ed., *Nothing to Fear: The Selected Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt 1932–1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947), p. 452.

19 On the extent and many-sidedness of US–Egyptian cooperation during the first crucial years of the Egyptian revolution, see M.A.W. Sayed-Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy* (London: LAAM, 1989), pp. 50–70 and *passim*. On relations between the CIA and the Free Officers before the coup, see ibid. pp. 42–50.

20 See, for instance, the readily available 'Urgent from Landis [US Ambassador to Egypt] for the President and the Secretary of State, Confidential and Personal', Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box36/t331g02.html, accessed June 2003. Interestingly enough, the meeting Roosevelt had with Farouq and Haile Selassie on *The Quincy* in the wake of the Yalta Conference was an occasion, Frank Fieldel asserts, for the US President to 'expound his schemes to raise the living standards of the Ethiopian and Egyptian peoples', a discourse still being articulated in our time with varying degrees of determination to stay the course. See Friedel's *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1990), p. 592. On some aspects of the Egyptian king's turbulent relations with the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Miles Lampson, later Lord Killearn, see Barrie St Clair McBride, *Farouk of Egypt: A Bibliography* (London: Robert Hale, 1967), pp. 144–7 and *passim*. Also see William Stadiem, *Too Rich: The High Life and Tragic Death of King Farouk* (London: Robson Books, 1991), pp. 240, 281, 383.

21 As cited in Bonsal, pp. 35–8, 48.

22 Ibid. p. 49.

23 Dwight D., Eisenhower, 'Farewell address', in Dean Albertson, ed., *Eisenhower as President* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 162.

24 As cited in Robert Sobel, *Coolidge, an American Enigma* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1998), p. 313.

25 Ibid. p. 314.

26 Jean-Baptiste Kleber (1753–1800), French General and Napoleon's brave but ill-fated Deputy in Egypt.

27 As cited in Louis Filler, ed., *The President Speaks: From William McKinley to Lyndon B. Johnson* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), p. 125 and William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, II, ii, 107–9.

28 Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Essays* (De Excidio Britanniae), ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom (London and Chichester: Philimore, 1978), pp. 21–4.

29 See the monumental study by Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness 1948–1991* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

30 See the well-known text in Bernard Reich, ed., *Arab–Israeli Conflict and Conflict Resolution* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 29.

31 Ibid.
32 Lewis Browne, ed., *The Wisdom of Israel* (London: Michael Joseph, 1949), pp. 404–5.
33 Ibid. p. 379 and *passim*. Also see David Goldstein, trans., *Hebrew Poems from Spain* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), and chapter 3 in Marion Woolfson, *Prophets in Babylon: Jews in the Arab World* (London and Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 60–72.
34 Cecil Roth, *A Short History of the Jewish People* (London: East and West Library, 1953), pp. 150, 238, as cited in Woolfson, op. cit., pp. 44, 68.
35 See Russell Hoban, *Pilgermann* (London: Pan Books, 1983), pp. 54–5.
36 See Jack Nusan Porter and Ruth Taplin, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution: A Sociological Introduction with Updated Bibliography and Theory Section* (Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, 1987), pp. 19–23.
37 Ibid. pp. 22–35.
38 Yehuda Berg, *The Power of Kabbalah* (San Diego, CA: Jodere Group, 2001), pp. 211, 222, and *passim*.
39 Browne, p. 225.
40 See Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, *From the World of the Cabbalah: The Philosophy of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague* (London: Peter Owen and Vision Press, 1957), p. 86.
41 Ibid.
42 Adel M. Sabit, *A King Betrayed: The Ill-Fated Reign of Farouk of Egypt* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1989), pp. 159–60.
43 Robert Graves, *Claudius the God and his Wife Messalina* (London: Penguin Books, 1934, 1976), p. 14.
44 See Hoban, here p. 12.
45 Maimonides, 'Yad, Melachim' in A. Cohen, ed., *The Teachings of Maimonides* (London: Shapiro, Vallentine and Co., 1927) as cited in Browne, op. cit., p. 358.
46 'The Destruction of Kreshev' in Isaac Bashevis Singer, ed., *The Spinoza of Market Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 190.
47 Bonsal, p. 60.
48 Ibid. p. 39.
49 Ibid. p. 56.
50 Ibid. Also see the text of and commentary on the Faisal–Weizmann agreement of January 1919 in Reich, pp. 29–31.
51 See Jabotinsky in Avi Shlaim's well-documented, highly perceptive and important study, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p. 12 and *passim*.
52 See relevant studies by Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990), Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham, and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1999), Luc Reychler and Tania Paffenholz, eds, *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), and Nigel D. White and Dirk Klaasen, eds, *The UN, Human Rights, and Post-Conflict Situations* (Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 2004).
53 On the fascinating complexities of those negotiations, fascinatingly narrated and critiqued, see Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli–Syrian Negotiations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
54 Reich, p. 51.
55 Ibid.
56 Browne, p. 267.
57 Ibid. pp. 347–8.
58 Ibid. p. 347.

59 See George Joffe, ed., *Perspectives on Development: Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* (London: Frank Cass, 1999) and Alvaro Vasconcelos and George Joffe, eds, *The Barcelona Process: Building a Euro-Mediterranean Regional Community* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).
60 Instances of the above are of course legion, occurring in Medieval as well as in later and more modern sources. One may, however, choose a statement from the 1970s, since it is articulated in a commendable book on diplomacy and purports to explain, albeit in a cast-iron, sweeping and utterly dismissive manner an assumed Arab trait: 'Their [the Arabs'] beliefs and attitudes are so deeply embedded in the personality structure that change by any rational argument, no matter how skilfully presented, is precluded. The perceptions involved are not just political or economic in nature, or simply matters of national pride. They . . . involve a holy war.' Glen H. Fisher, *Public Diplomacy and the Behavioural Sciences* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 134.
61 Filler, p. 403.
62 As cited in George Peabody Gooch, 'Old Age', in Peter Paret, ed., *Frederick the Great: A Profile* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972), p. 42.
63 Hosea 8:7.
64 *Beershit Rabbah*, 6, 5, cited in Browne, p. 223.
65 *Qur'an*, II, 208.
66 Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness and Typhoon* (London: Pan Books, 1979), p. 13.
67 Ibid. p. 91.
68 Ben Okri, *Infinite Riches* (London: Phoenix, 1999), p. 237.
69 Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, with introduction and annotations by Suheil Bushrui (Oxford: OneWorld, 1995), p. 105.
70 Nanda Shrestha, 'Becoming a development category' in Jonathan Crush, ed., *Power of Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 266.
71 T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927, 1973), pp. 23–4.

**2 Islamic diplomacy: the need for a new vision – a conceptual approach**

1 Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 61.
2 Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, *Kitab rusul al-muluk wa man yasluh li al-risalah wa al-sifarah, ta'lif Abi 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-ma'ruf bi Ibn al-Farra'* and Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, *Fusul fi al-diblumasiyyah: al-rusul wa al-sufar'a fi bilad al-gharb wa bilad al-'Arab* (Cairo: Matba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1947), 2 vols. Also see Yasin Istanbuli, *Diplomacy and Diplomatic Practices in the Early Islamic Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
3 James Der Derian, *On diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 44–5 and *passim*.
4 See 'AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1993), especially here pp. 17–26, 63–75.
5 See Chaiwat Satha-Anand's perceptive and valuable assessment 'The Prophet's practice as paradigm', in Elise Boulding, ed., *Building Peace in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), pp. 295–302.
6 For a compact and itemized general reference, see T.B. Irving, K. Ahmad, and M.M. Ahsan, *The Qur'an: Basic Teachings* (Leicester: the Islamic Foundation, 1979), particularly the section on 'Principles of Foreign Policy', pp. 241–4.

7 Ibid.
8 Robert Browning, 'Andrea del Sarto', ll. 97–8.
9 See 'Basic definitions' in AbuSulayman, pp. 18–26.
10 Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, ed. by John Plamenatz (London: Fontana Library, 1962), p. 173 and *passim*.
11 As cited in Taha Jabir al-'Alwani, 'Editorial: globalization: centralization not globalism,' in *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 15, Fall 1998, no. 3, i–iii.
12 See 'Ali Husayn al-Shami, *Al-Diblumasiyyah: nash'atuha wa tatawwuruha wa qawa'iduha wa nizam al-hasanat wa al-imitiyazat al-diblumasiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1990), pp. 76–83. Also see Nadia Mahmud Mustapha, *Al-Usul al-'ammah li al-'ilaqat al-duwaliyyah fi al-Islam: Waqt al-silm* (Cairo: al-Ma'had al-'Alami li al-Fikr al-Islami, 1996), especially in this regard pp. 111–73.
13 For a fine selection of diplomatic and political documents and correspondences between Muslim and Crusader, Mongol and other princes between the late eleventh and fifteenth centuries, see M.M. Hamadah, *Watha'iq al-hurub al-salibiyyah wa al-ghazw al-maghuli li al-'alam al-Islami* (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risalah, 2nd imp. 1982). Also see a treatise of the eleventh century on 'the etiquette, protocol, and diplomacy of the Abbasid caliphate', *Rusum dar al-khilafah* by Hilal al-Sabi', ed. by Mikhail 'Awwad (Baghdad: Matba'at al-'Ani, 1964).
14 Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Future of Islam*, ed. by Riad Nourallah (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 132.
15 AbuSulayman, pp. 147–54.
16 Ibid. pp. 154–61.
17 See the excellent study of the age by Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III, 1789–1807* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
18 See Abdullah Al Ahsan's pioneering and in its time wide-ranging study of the organization, *OIC, The Organisation of the Islamic Conference: An Introduction to an Islamic Political Institution* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1988).
19 See text in Louis Filler, ed., *The President Speaks: From William McKinley to Lyndon B. Johnson* (New York: Putnam, 1964), pp. 126–9.
20 See AbuSulayman, p. 158.
21 See, for instance, I.R. al Faruqi, 'Introduction', to AbuSulayman, pp. xxxvii–xlii.
22 See Hisham al-Ghazzi, *Buna al-Islam* (Damascus: Matba'at al-'Ajluni, 1992), p. 162 and *passim*.
23 See case studies in the pioneering work by D. Johnston and C. Sampson, eds, *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
24 *Qur'an* 2:256.
25 Mervyn Frost, *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 7–8.
26 See Adam Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1982), p. 53.
27 As cited in Al Ahsan, p. 16.
28 See Richard Blystone's contribution in Peter Marshall and Nabil Ayad, eds, *The Information Explosion: A Challenge for Diplomacy: Proceedings of the Third International Symposium held at the University of Westminster, April 1997* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1999), p. 50.
29 Nabil Ayad, 'Diplomacy and Information Technology: The Hydra in a Mutating Environment', in Peter Marshall and Nabil Ayad, eds, *Are Diplomats Necessary? Proceedings of the International Symposium held at the University of Westminster, April 1996* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1999), pp. 72–84.

**3 Modern Arabic literature: the West as a bridge to freedom – a bird's eye view**

1 D.J. Enright, *Academic Year* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 36.
2 Ibid. pp. 15, 18, 233. Also see the moving tribute to, and reminiscences of, Enright (on the first anniversary of his death, which occurred on 31 December 2002) by Azza Kararah, one of Enright's outstanding young Egyptian students during the late 1940s. Kararah, who, after her undergraduate days in Alexandria, obtained a PhD from Cambridge and became one of the foremost Professors of English Literature and Heads of Department in Egypt and the Arab world, throws very interesting light on the creative and academic life of the English poet and novelist in Alexandria, where Enright spent three years after his arrival in the Autumn of 1947 'fresh from Downing College, Cambridge, to take up his first job as a "mendicant professor" of English literature at the then Farouk I University at the age of 27'. Aspects of the politically volatile but culturally complex life of Alexandria and Egypt in general at that time are also intimately brought to light in Kararah's tribute. The depth (and longevity) of the affection with which Enright's Egyptian students held him is also revealed in the memoir, as well as in Kararah's own efforts with former fellow students of Enright to commemorate his association with the city by suggesting at the time a series of lectures to be organized by the university's Faculty of Arts with an inaugural session on the English author. See Azza Kararah, 'Memorabilia: D J Enright', *Al Ahram Weekly* (18–24 December 2003), no. 669, posted at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/669/bo31.htm, accessed March–April 2004.
3 See Taha Husayn, 'Al-Ayyam', in *Al-Majmu'ah al-kamilah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1973), pp. 389–92, 453; also see *Tajdid dhikra Abil'Ala'*, in ibid. vol. 10, pp. 11–14.
4 See 'Atiyyah 'Amir, *Dirasat fi al-adab al-'Arabi al-hadith* (Tunis: Dar al-Maghrib al-'Arabi, 1970), pp. 36–49; also Ahmad Simaylovitch, *Falsafat al-istishraq wa atharuha fi al-adab al-'Arabi al-mu'asir* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1980), p. 446.
5 'A.M. al-'Aqqad, *Al-Diwan fi al-naqd wa al-adab*, in *Al-Majmu'ah al-kamilah*, vol. 24 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1983), pp. 525, 530, 549–53.
6 See quote in R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 21.
7 A reference to Lady Anne Blunt, Byron's grand daughter and wife of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 'Urabi's redoubtable ally and propagandist in the West. See Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p. 169.
8 See F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), p. 24.
9 See M.'A. al-'Aqqad, 'Al-'Asriyyah fi al-shi'r', in *Al-Fusul*, in *Al-Majmu'ah al-kamilah*, op. cit., vol. 24, pp. 487–8.
10 Ilyas Abu Shabaka as quoted in Salah Labaki, *Lubnan al-sha'ir* in his *Al-A'mal al-kamilah: Al-Majmu'ah al-nathriyyah* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-Jami'iyyah, 1982), pp. 265–9.
11 See Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. by Catherine Cobban (London: Saqi Books, 1990), pp. 79–80.
12 M. Darwish, *Madih al-dhil al-'ali* (Beirut: Dar al-'Awdah, 1983).
13 Mahdi 'Isa al-Saqr, *Imraat al-gha'ib* (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 2004).
14 See M. Mandur, *Fi al-Mizan al-jadid* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1944), pp. 48–87.
15 For a handy summary of these views, see Maria Rosa Menocal, 'Italy, Dante, and the Anxieties of Influence', in her *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), pp. 115–35.

16 Taha Husayn, 'Bayn al-Qasrayn: Qissah rai'ah li al-ustaz Najib Mahfuz', in *Al-Majmu'ah al-kamilah*, op. cit., vol. 12, p. 281.
17 Presentation Speech by Professor Sture Allén, of the Swedish Academy (Translation from the Swedish text) in *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1981–1990* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co.), posted at www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/1988/presentation-speech.html, accessed February 2004.
18 Ibid.
19 Naguib Mahfouz, 'Nobel Lecture' (translated into English by Mohammed Salmawy), in ibid. posted at www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/1988/mahfouz-lecture.html, accessed February 2003.
20 Ibid.
21 Sture Allén, op. cit.; Mahfouz, 'Nobel Lecture', op. cit.
22 See Amal Amireh's brilliant discussion of the translations of works by Nawal al-Sa'dawi in chapter 2 of Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba, eds, *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002).
23 'Frankfurt Book Fair 2004 – Good Business and Optimistic Mood', Press and PR, Frankfurter Buch Messe, http://www.frankfurt-book-fair.com/en/index.php?content=/en/presse_pr/pressemitteilungen/details/09781/content.html, accessed October 2004.
24 See the well-sourced and well-paced study by Mohammed Ali Shwabkeh, *Arabs and the West: A Study in the Modern Arabic Novel (1935–1985)* (Al-Karak: Mu'tah University, 1992).
25 Ghalia Qabbani, *Finjan shay ma' missiz Robinson* (Cairo: Merit, 2003).
26 Ahmad al-'Aydi, *An Takuna 'Abbas al-'Abd* (Cairo: Merit, 2003).
27 See Jabir 'Asfur, *Muwajahat al-irhab: qira'at fi al-adab al-mu'asir* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Usrah, 2003).

**4 George Bernard Shaw on Muhammad, Egypt, and Palestine**

1 See Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater* (Princeton, NJ and London: Princeton University Press and Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 186–215. Also see Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The Pursuit of Power* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), pp. 20–2.
2 *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965), p. 252. Henceforth cited as *Plays*.
3 Ibid. p. 250.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid. pp. 250–1.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid. p. 257.
8 The film version (released in 1960) was directed by Anthony Asquith (1902–68), son of the Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith (1852–1928). See Dan H. Laurence, *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters*, 4 vols (London: Max Reinhardt, 1965–88), vol. 4, pp. 133–4. Series henceforth cited as *Letters*.
9 *Plays*, p. 1268.
10 Ibid. p. 1282.
11 *The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965), p. 50 (henceforth cited as *Prefaces*); *Plays*, pp. 379, 381.
12 *Prefaces*, pp. 290, 636; *Plays*, pp. 384, 932.
13 *Letters*, vol. 4, p. 305. In Shaw's accounts, Muhammad stands head and shoulders above his own people, whom he finds necessary to discipline by warnings of hellfire. See *The Future of Religion: Mr Bernard Shaw at Cambridge*, rep. from *Cambridge Daily News* (30 May 1911), p. 3. Also see Shaw, *Imprisonment*,

(Madeira: Prison Medical Reform Council, 1925), pp. 12–13; *Prefaces*, pp. 290, 555, 636, 903; *Letters*, vol. 4, p. 790.

14 Shaw, *The Genuine Islam* (1, 8, 1936).

15 *Plays*, p. 932; *Prefaces*, p. 602.

16 *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 837 and Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality* (London: Collins, 1942, rep. 1950), pp. 282, 375.

17 *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 874–5.

18 See Stanley Weintraub, *The Unexpected Shaw* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982), p. 191; also Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist: A Study of the Intellectual Background of the Major Plays* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969, rep. 1971), p. 203.

19 The analogies between Joan and Muhammad are made in the play through Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, who, as a 'dry, hard man', in effect exalts the two personages as he fulminates against them. Warwick's own retort is meant to call attention to Cauchon's 'bigotry'. See *Plays*, pp. 982–3. Also see *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 875; *Shaw: An Exhibit. A Catalog by Dan H. Laurence* (Austin Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, 1977), p. 584. Andrew Lang had, in 1908, drawn parallels between Joan and Muhammad. See his *The Maid of France: Being the Story of the Life and Death of Jeanne D'arc* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), p. 8. On the genesis of *Saint Joan* see Weintraub, *The Unexpected Shaw*, pp. 181–93. On the play's importance and its connection with T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and the literary tradition, as well as with T.E. Lawrence, see Weintraub, ed., *Saint Joan: Fifty Years After* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1973). Also see the excellent chapter on the play in Crompton, pp. 193–260.

20 *Prefaces*, p. 653.

21 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 804. See instances of empathy with Muhammad's mission in *The Future of Religion*, p. 3; Dan H. Laurence and James Rambeau, eds, *Bernard Shaw: Agitations: Letters to the Press 1875–1950* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), p. 117; *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 319, 800; Meisel, p. 11; Pearson, *Life & Personality*, p. 395. It may be relevant to mention in this context that Shaw generally shared the Muslim view of Jesus as a messenger and prophet, one in a long succession of such human agents. See, for example, Dan H. Laurence, ed., *Platform and Pulpit* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 130.

22 *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 837.

23 *Prefaces*, pp. 464–5.

24 Ibid. pp. 462–70.

25 See Elizabeth Longford, *A Pilgrimage of Passion: The Life of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979). Also see Blunt, *The Future of Islam*, ed. by Riad Nourallah (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

26 See Longford, pp. 171–8, 180–91, and *passim*. Also see Blunt, *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907).

27 In addition to Blunt's *Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt* (pamphlet, 1906), see Blunt, 'The dictator of Egypt', *Daily News* (21 May 1902), p. 5; 'The situation in Egypt', *The Times* (15 September 1906), p. 11; 'Mr. Wilfrid Blunt and Egypt', *The Times* (24 September 1906), p. 9; 'Lord Cromer's report: a criticism', *The Manchester Guardian* (5 May 1906), p. 9; 'The shooting affray in Egypt', ibid. (21 June 1906), p. 6, etc. Also cf. Longford, pp. 359–61, 373–4.

28 See Blunt, *Denshawai Memorial School: Appeal for Funds* (pamphlet, 1907–8?). For reference to Blunt's help in revising the Preface to *John Bull's Other Island*, see the Fitzwilliam Museum: Blunt Papers, MS/Lytton 23 January 1907. Among Shaw's tributes to Blunt, see Shaw, *Prefaces*, pp. 465–6, 470 and *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 111, 114, 713.

29 See *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 698–9, 712–13, 722–3, and Longford, pp. 359–61, 373.
30 *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 722–3.
31 Ibid. vol. 3, pp. 247, 301.
32 *Prefaces*, p. 473.
33 *Letters*, vol. 4, p. 491.
34 Laurence, ed., *Platform and Pulpit*, pp. 164–5.
35 Ibid. pp. 165–8.
36 *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 267, 420.
37 Ibid. pp. 280–1.
38 Ibid. vol. 1, pp. 130–2.
39 Ibid. p. 132.
40 For sample views of the two men on the Sudan case, see Shaw, 'The Mahdi's skull', in *Agitations*, pp. 49–51. Also see Blunt, 'The Sudan advance', *The Times* (2 April 1896), p. 10; 'The fighting in the Sudan', ibid. (10 September 1898), p. 3; 'A Condemnation of Lord Kitchener', *Daily News* (5 June 1899), p. 5; and *Gordon at Khartoum* (London, 1912). For views on the Italian expedition against Tripoli, see Shaw, *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 66–9; and Blunt, 'The crime of Italy', *Egypt*, 1 (October 1911), pp. 79–80; 'Tripoli', ibid. (December 1911), pp. 103–4, and *The Italian Horror and How To End It* (pamphlet, 1911).
41 See Holroyd, pp. 206–7 and *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 228–35; also vol. 2, pp. 837–41.
42 *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 828–32, 908.
43 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 714.
44 Fenner Brockway, *Outside the Right* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963), p. 217.
45 *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 921–4. In the period after the First World War, Lord Beaverbrook observed:

> To be a friend of the Jews is not equivalent to believing in the Zionist movement. It is certainly not equivalent to favouring the establishment of the British protectorate in Palestine whereby the great Arab majority in that country is held down by the British bayonet, and placed in an inferior position to the Jewish minority, all at the risk and expense to the British taxpayer. In fact, a dislike of the Zionist programme is by no means confined to Christians. Many of the best and wisest Jews objected to the adventure . . . At one time these anti-Zionist Jews, may of whom were to be found especially in England, used to express their opinions freely enough. Lately, they have been terrorized by violent abuse of the Zionist Press and the accusations of treachery to their race, into an enforced silence. They think exactly as they did before, only they dare not speak . . . I am amazed at the ferocity – for I can use no other terms – with which the Zionists criticized the anti-Zionists in their press [and] the extraordinary susceptibility to such criticism displayed by the victims, even when they were men of established position, wealth or even eminence.

Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the Press* (London: Hutchinson, n.d. [1928]), pp. 99–103, as quoted in Marion Woolfson, *Prophets in Babylon: Jews in the Arab World* (London and Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 20–1.
46 *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 923. Accusations of anti-Semitism were repeated in 1938 subsequent to a performance of Shaw's *Geneva*. Lawrence Langner, expressing quite legitimate concerns, inveighed against Shaw for making the character of The Jew in the play 'a pitifully inferior mouthpiece to express his case, thus playing into the hands of the breeders of racial hatred by ranging yourself unconsciously on their side'. Shaw replied:

> I have dared to introduce a Jew without holding him up to the admiring worship of the audience as the inheritor of all the virtues and none of the

> vices of Abraham and Moses, David and Isaiah. And instantly you, Lawrence, raise a wail of lamentation and complaint and accuse me of being a modern Torquemada. …

Despite his own protestations, Shaw eventually, and so rightly, as the vile spectre of Nazism was looming, revised the part. See *Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 510–12.

47 Brockway, p. 81.

48 Cf., for instance, Lord Beaverbrook's conclusion:

> [I]n the spring of 1923 I went to Palestine to form my own conclusions on the spot. I returned home more than ever convinced that the setting up of a Zionist state by force of arms is unjust to the Arab majority who have, after all, lived there in history quite as long as the Jews.
>
> (Beaverbrook, as cited in Woolfson, p. 21)

In 1938, Gandhi wrote:

> My sympathies are all with the Jews. …But my sympathy does not blind me to the requirements of justice. The cry for the national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me. …Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code or conduct. …The Palestine of the Biblical conception is not a geographical tract. It is in their hearts. But if they must look to the Palestine of geography as their national home, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of the British gun. …They can settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs.
>
> (M.K. Gandhi, 'The Jews in Palestine 1938', from M.K. Gandhi, *My Non-Violence*, comp. and ed. by Sailesh Kumar Bandopadhaya (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1960), as cited in Woolfson, p. 21)

49 Brockway, p. 97.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid. p. 98.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid. p. 99.

54 British Library: MS. 45296.

55 C. Watts and L. Davies, *Cunninghame Graham: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 127.

56 British Library: MS 45296; also *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 447.

## 5 The one and the many: the Sufi path to social responsibility – from anecdote to action?

1 For practical purposes, an excellent compendium of medieval collections of Sufi anecdotes and biographies is used here. The work, compiled and edited by a notable scholar and judge of the late Ottoman period, also incorporates the text of the distinguished fourteenth-century shaykh 'Abdullah al-Yafi'i *Nashr al-mahasin al-ghaliyah fi fadl mashayikh al-sufiyyah as'hab al-maqamat al-'aliyah*. See Yusuf al-Nabhani, *Jami' karamat al-awliya'* (Beirut: Dar Sader, facsimile edition, n.d.) 2 vols.

2 A.H.M. al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1346 AH), 4 vols, vol. 1, pp. 18 and *passim*.

3 For a relatively recent, relevant, and concise but informed and sensitive study, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1999).

4 Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p. 456.
5 See al-Nabhani, vol. 2, pp. 327–8.
6 See the excellent chapter by Francis Robinson, 'Knowledge, its transmission and the making of muslim societies', in F. Robinson, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 208–49, more specifically the section 'The Sufi transmission of spiritual knowledge', pp. 231–41.
7 See for instance al-Nabhani, vol. 1, pp. 101–2 and vol. 2, pp. 8, 9, 267.
8 See the handy, now classic, anthology by Margaret Smith, *The Sufi Path of Love* (London: Luzac, 1954).
9 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 158.
10 See for instance biographies and anecdotes of women in al-Nabhani, vol. 1, pp. 96, 231, 363, 395–6 and vol. 2, pp. 10, 14, 17, 21, 39, 50, 232, 234, 251, 273, 276, 278, 315. Also see Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women*, trans. by Leonard Lewisohn (New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 1983); Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic and her Fellow-Saints in Islam: Being the Life and Teachings of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya of Basra together with some Account of the Place of the Women Saints in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: the University Press, 1928); Kevin Shephered, *A Sufi Matriarch: Mazrat Babajan* (Cambridge, MA: Anthropographia, 1986); Irina Tweedie, *The Chasm of Fire: A Woman's Experience of Liberation through the Teachings of a Sufi Master* (Shaftsbury: Element, 1979, 1988).
11 See representative accounts in al-Nabhani, vol. 1, pp. 47, 114, 158, 364, 366, 397 and vol. 2, pp. 8, 51, 71–2, 110, 111–12. Also, see an interesting perspective on links and tensions between Sufis and Sultans in K.M. Jamil, *Sufis in the Mongol Era* (Lahore: Alpha Bravo, 1986), pp. 37–41.
12 Al-Nabhani, vol. 2, p. 49.
13 See for instance ibid. vol. 2, pp. 116, 146, 193, 198–9, 233, 245, 282.
14 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 51.
15 See Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) and Julian Johansen, *Sufism and the Islamic Reform in Egypt: The Battle for Islamic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
16 Al-Nabhani, vol. 1, p. 147.
17 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 248.
18 Ibid. vol. 1, p. 173 and vol. 2, p. 50.
19 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 136.
20 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 194.
21 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 197.
22 See Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's appraisal, 'Mulla Sadra: his teachings', in S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman, eds, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 643–64. Also, see al-Nabhani, vol. 1, p. 390.
23 See, for instance, al-Nabhani, vol. 1, p. 399 and vol. 2, pp. 193, 263.
24 See for instance Sultan Walad's account of the funeral of his illustrious father, Jalaluddin al-Rumi, in Annemarie Schimmel, *I am Wind You are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston, MA and London: Shambhala, 1992), p. 31. The esteem shown to Sufi masters, with accounts of their deaths, and sometimes public funerals, is conspicuous in the fifteenth/sixteenth-century history of Shihab al-Din Muhammad Ibn Iyas's *Badai' al-zuhur fi waqai' al-duhur*. See the edition by Muhammad Mustafa *et al*. (Wiesbaden: Frz Steiner, 1945–72), 5 vols.

25 See B. Radtke, J. O'Kane, K.S. Vikor, and R.S. O'Fahey, *The Exoteric Ahmad Ibn Idris: A Sufi's Critique of the Madhabib and the Wahhabis, Four Arabic Texts with Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
26 Al-Nabhani, vol. 2, p. 8.
27 Ibid. vol. 1, p. 394.
28 Ibid. vol. 2, p. 116.
29 Muhammad 'Amarah, ed., *Al-A'mal al-kamilah li al-Imam Muhammad 'Abdu* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1972) vol. 3, *al-Islah al-Fikri wa al-tarbawi wa al-Ilahiyyat*, pp. 530–2.
30 In addition to the long involvement of the Piktashi order, through the Janissaries, in Ottoman politics and intrigues up to the bloody day in June 1826, when the once-mighty corps were massacred at Sultan Murad II's orders, an act which, on the other side of the sectarian divide, Shah Abbas I had anticipated in his own destruction of the politically-intrusive Nimati order, one may cite, among numerous examples, 'Abdul Hamid II's use of the Sufi orders in his pan-Islamic campaigns and schemes.

**6 Literature and peacemaking: a role explored**

1 For some views of the concept, see B. Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1992) at www.fundforpeace.org/ffp/d-agenda.htm, accessed January 2003; Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (London: Constable, 1945 edn); and David Bloomfield, *Peacemaking Strategies in Northern Ireland* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1997). The biblical reference is of course to St Matthew v.3.
2 For reasons of space, the present chapter does not dwell at more length on the considerable potential which religion and religious texts have for peacemaking, nor on their capacity, in the wrong hands, to incite to violence, division and hatred. For an indispensable work on the generally positive impact of religion (and religious envoys and organizations) on peacemaking and international relations, see Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds, *Religion, the Missing Dimension in Statecraft* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
3 The reference (in Yeats' 'The man and the echo') is to his *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). See *The Collected Poems* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979 edn), pp. 393–5. Also see James Stephens, 'He died younger than he was born', *The Listener* (17 June 1943) as cited in David Pierce, *Yeats's World* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 259.
4 See *Hamlet*, III, ii, 24; Auden, 'In memory of W.B. Yeats', in Edward Mendelson, ed., *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1991), p. 248; MacLeish, 'Ars Poetica', in Archibald MacLeish, *Collected Poems* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), pp. 40–1.
5 Blake, 'A poison tree', in W.H. Stevenson, ed., *The Poems of William Blake* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 212.
6 See James Hutton, trans., *Aristotle's Poetics* (New York and London: Norton, 1982), p. 21; the allusion in the brackets is to Yeats' 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry' in Anima Hominis' (1917). See A. Norman Jeffares, ed., *Yeats, Selected Criticism and Prose* (London: Pan Classics, 1980 edn), p. 170. Compare Yeats' insight to the Hadith and Sufi concept of the 'Greater Jihad', the struggle within, on the path to enlightenment and harmony with the universe and the Godhead.
7 See Yeats, 'The circus animals' desertion', in *The Collected Poems*, pp. 393–5.
8 See Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (London: Minerva, 1995), pp. 11–12.

9 R.A. Nicholson's translation as cited in Suheil Bushrui, *Kahlil Gibran of Lebanon* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987).
10 Edward FitzGerald's translation, in A.J. Arberry, ed., *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and Other Persian Poems* (London: Dent, 1972), pp. 160–70. For a complete and well-annotated (Arabic) translation, see Badi' M. Jum'a, *Mantiq al-tayr* [Conference of Birds] (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 3rd edn 1984).
11 Kahlil Gibran, 'On crime and punishment', in Suheil Bushrui, ed., *The Prophet: An Annotated Edition* (Oxford: OneWorld, 1995), p. 104; Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, *Tree of Life: An Introduction to the Cabala* (London: Rider and Company, 1972), p. 49; Brian Urquart, *A Life in Peace and War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 378.
12 See Ezra Pound, Canto LXXXI, in *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 521. For the allusion to al-Ma'arri's verse, see Ameen Rihani's free rendering (à la FitzGerald): Tread lightly, for the mighty that have been/Might now be breathing in the dust unseen;/Lightly, the violets beneath thy feet/Spring from the mole of some Arabian queen. In *The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala* (New York: James T. White, 2nd edn 1920), p. 41. For subsequent quotes see: *Julius Caesar*, III, iii, 34; *Macbeth*, V, iii, 21; Yeats, 'Never give all the heart', in *Collected Poems*, p. 87; Robert Browning, 'Andrea del Sarto', in Ian Jack, ed., *Browning: Poetical Works 1833–1864* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 675; Yeats, 'Parnell', in *Collected Works*, p. 359.
13 See Kenneth Segar and John Warren, eds, *Austria in the Thirties* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1991), p. 175.
14 See Evelyne Accad, *Sexuality and War* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990).
15 See 'Locksley Hall', in Christopher Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1987 edn), 1: 118–30. Read Holst's intriguing short story and the insightful commentary in Jeromy Beaty, ed., *The Norton Introduction to Fiction* (New York and London: Norton, 1973 edn), pp. 3–6.
16 Ben Okri, *Infinite Riches* (London: Phoenix, 1999), p. 54.
17 See Christa Kamenetsky, *Children's Literature in Hitler's Germany* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984). On the prominent Jewish Rabbi, academic, and activist Abraham Joshua Heschel, author of such works as *Man is not Alone, God in Search of Man, Who is Man?, A Passion for Truth,* and *The Insecurity of Freedom*, see Or N. Rose, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Man of Spirit, Man of Action* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 2003) and Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
18 For an enlightened and entertaining study of the transmigration of literary genres (mainly narrative) across cultural and linguistic 'barriers' (here from East to West) see E.L. Ranelagh, *The Past we Share* (London: Quartet, 1979). For an equally valuable study of influences travelling the other way, see Ihsan 'Abbas, *Malamih Yunaniyyah fi al-Adab al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1977). The primacy of addressing communal needs and anxieties about identity in a conflict resolution process is represented by the pioneering and influential works of Edward E. Azar and John W. Burton. See, for example, their (as eds) *International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1986), and Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990). On the use of the Hydra metaphor and the challenges Information Technology is posing for but also offering to modern life and diplomacy see Nabil Ayad, 'To tame the modern hydra', in Peter Marshall and Nabil Ayad, eds, *Diplomacy beyond 2000* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996), pp. 76–91.

19 See Karl Popper, 'Has history any meaning?' in his *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 500; Hutton, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 20. Also see Yeats' 'A poet . . . is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast. He has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete' – in 'A General Introduction for my Work' (1937), Jeffares, *Yeats, Selected Criticism and Prose*, p. 255.
20 See Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, p. 113 and 'Introduction', p. vii; Gibran, 'On Buying and Selling', *The Prophet*, p. 100.
21 Ghali, *Agenda*.
22 See Barbara Young, *This Man from Lebanon* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1956), pp. 13–14.
23 For an instructive summary of Rihani's will see Jamil Jabr, *Amin al-Rihani, al-Rajul wa al-Adib* (Beirut: 1947), pp. 124–5.

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