

An Arab Voice of Compromise

Hazem Saghie's *In Defence of Peace* (1997)

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Acknowledgments

This is now my third ‘scriptie’ (after work on Psalms and Midrash) and in all likelihood the last. If I put all three together in a book I could call it ‘challenging texts from three millennia’. No doubt my family and friends will be surprised I’m not working on one any more!

Just as the two other projects, working on Hazem Saghie’s *Difā’an ‘an al-Salām* has been an enriching experience, in spite of occasional setbacks. It has been great meeting him personally and receiving his feedback, and his text has kept growing on me throughout. It has proved a great stimulus to read up about intellectuals and the life of ideas, Israel, Lebanon, and the development of the modern Middle East. Also the support from my supervisors Martin van Bruinessen and Corné Hanssen has been excellent. Corné took me through the very complex Arabic text, and Martin provided me with clues to very valuable secondary literature. Although this project seemed less promising in the beginning than my other topics, for which I was better equipped, it is the one that I am most happy with now that it is finished. Even though always more should have been done.

Many thanks to the Department of Arabic, New Persian and Turkish, where I have spent so much time. Let us hope that at some point they may enrich the Dutch education system with their own MA programme in Middle Eastern studies. Hans Theunissen and Nico Landman helped shape the project in its infancy. Long before that Professor de Jong wrote a flamboyant letter of reference that enabled me to spend some time studying Italian in Bologna. The connection to this project shall remain inexplicit.

Without the generosity of many anonymous donors I could never have gathered the knowledge and experience to write this work. In particular I would like to mention the *Humanity in Action Program*, especially Judy Goldstein, Ed van Thijn, and Marcel Oomen; the sponsors of the CoME foundation and its executive secretary, Douwe van der Sluis; and the anonymous sponsor of my scholarship at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies as well as its staff. I also remember gratefully my late Ph.D. supervisor, Professor Dr. Sjef van Tilborg msc, who even as a New Testament scholar read my essay about Arab intellectuals with great interest and no doubt amusement.

The recent merger of the three Utrecht faculties of Humanities nicely brings me back to where I set out in 1992, in Theology. But it is better to look forward. Whatever the future might bring, this text (published or unpublished) is dedicated to Cecile. Arab intellectual culture and an interest in Yiddish may seem far apart, but Saghie for one has made a connection. I hope my finishing this will be an encouragement for you to write your book.

Introduction

The topic of my work is a small Arabic pamphlet with the title *Difā'an al-Salām*: to defend the peace, in defence of peace, written by Hazem Saghieḥ in 1997.¹ Hazem Saghieḥ is a senior columnist and editor of *Al-Ḥayāt*, a leading Arabic newspaper. A pamphlet in Arabic with such a title is likely to draw attention. It would be normal in the Arab world to find a defence of Islām, but of Salām?

I first saw this text mentioned in Professor Marcel Kurpershoek's 1998 inaugural lecture, "Wie luidt de doodsklok over de Arabieren?"² He mentioned it as an attempt to break the classic taboos that have paralysed Arab thought for decades, and to argue for a more pragmatic approach to the gigantic problems the Arab world has to deal with. In later communication he confirmed that in his opinion Saghieḥ was a trend breaker, and therefore potentially a trend setter for a new type of discourse. This was enough to get me going. From the start it was an open-ended project: I did not know what Saghieḥ was going to say or what kind of person he was. Reading the text and then trying to arrange a meeting with him in London, where his newspaper is edited, was the plan.

It became clear from the outset that Saghieḥ is a secular liberal intellectual, and very well informed about Israeli history and society. Contrary to my first expectations I found that the salām in the title referred to Israel-Palestine and the Oslo process, not so much to the social and economic situation of the Arab world. From page one it is evident that Saghieḥ deals with the Arabs' share in the responsibility for the lack of peace in the Middle East. I also quickly found that he discussed the Holocaust and the relationship between Islam and Judaism at some length, in addition to other relevant issues such as the intifada, collective memory and the problem Arabs have with the existence of Israel. So when I started reading (that is, translating) I very soon felt the need to read up on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³ This I did, on the basis of a large corpus of secondary literature: academic works, but also investigative journalism, novels, memoirs, and biographies. Then a completely unexpected turn of events enabled me to enrol in a Jewish Studies course at Oxford University. Even though my

¹ His name is often written differently: Saghiyeh, Saghiyya, Saghie. In transcription: Ṣāḡīya.

² Kurpershoek, "Wie luidt de doodsklok over de Arabieren? Arabisme, Islam en de Wereldbank", p. 19-20, 26 [Who Will Ring the Arabs' Death Knell? Arabism, Islam, and the World Bank] (1998).

³ I am not inclined to be puritanical about names. I talk about Israel where an Israeli-Jewish perspective predominates, and of Israel-Palestine where the Arab and Israeli perspectives are equally strong, more or less as it feels more natural. Regarding the terms "Arab-Israeli conflict" or "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" I usually stick to the latter because most Arabs are not involved in a tangible conflict with Israel. Although on the level of ideas there certainly is an Israeli-Arab conflict as well. It's a different dimension.

focus then was on the Greco-Roman period, my stay there was an invaluable help to understand Jewish-Israeli sensitivities relating to the conflict.

I have found Saghieh's understanding of Israeli society, to the extent that it appears from the pamphlet, to be accurate and insightful. He systematically avoids discussing facts on the ground, in Israel or beyond: no Jerusalem, no Golan Heights, no refugee problem, no roadblocks, etc. Instead he discusses assumptions and attitudes that are widespread among the Arabs and block the road to peace and a political solution: their inclination to violence, their sense of self-righteousness, their distorted image of the past, their rejection of politics as the means of choice in conflict resolution. Occasionally he will make pejorative remarks about some facet of Israel's behaviour. But in spite of these, in his pamphlet Israel is as much a potential partner for the Arabs as it is their political enemy. If we excluded Israel's militaristic, nationalist and religious characteristics, of which the Arab nations have plenty themselves, we could even call it a model. Throughout his text Israel's contribution to and part in the modern world is evident and contrasted to the Arabs. And although it is not the stated purpose of the pamphlet, Saghieh loses no opportunities to provide the Arab public with a more nuanced picture of the country and its history. This attitude is so rare among Arab shapers of public opinion that it is certainly worthwhile to look at his text even eight years later and to explore the avenues it opens.

All this meant that in my simple plan (reading the text and meeting the author) no less than four different angles had to be negotiated. Among many other things Saghieh is a secular liberal intellectual, and an important editor of a key Arab newspaper, so his work and views offer valuable insights in patterns and developments in Arab thought and media. Exploring these opportunities can be called the academic angle. Then there is the contemporary-political angle; the search for compromise and a lasting solution for the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. Most of what Saghieh wrote remains valid even with the understanding of summer 2005, and deserves to be brought to the fore. Then there is an explicitly pro-Arab angle, one that is related to progress and development, in line with Kurpershoek's argument: how can the Arab peoples move forward in the world? Lastly and perhaps most importantly, Saghieh's text offers Jews and Israelis (as well as policy makers and intellectuals) a chance to assess the feelings and aspirations of the Arabs, both as Saghieh expresses them and as they are implicit in his text. It should be clear that these four angles do not operate in isolation. Academic politics, real politics, the Arab media and Arab intellectuals, and the concerns of Israel all mutually influence each other. And to be sure, none of these technical considerations should be allowed

to overshadow the human dimension of the project. The four “angles” (for want of a better term) are all present but largely beneath the surface.

For this reason the purpose of my thesis as it finally developed is simply to present the pamphlet and the thought of its owner, bearing in mind these four angles and their interaction. Now, the academic framework I have chosen to do this can be defined as ‘the study of Arab intellectual thought, enriched and informed by cultural studies’. One of many problems is that the field of ‘the study of Arab intellectual thought’ hardly exists, except for Islamist thought: liberal and secular opinions rarely receive any attention at all, not least because they represent only a small minority of thinkers. For added support in finding a defensible academic approach I have turned to cultural studies. Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field in the Humanities that is well suited to bring together info from the various angles that are needed, and it is oriented towards action. Nevertheless it is not usually applied to the study of non-Western societies, and to make a convincing connection to Middle Eastern studies I had to develop a basic methodology of my own. The complexity of this enterprise is too great to be summarized here in a few words. So the reader will have to wait till the end of Chapter 2 to know what is really in store for him.

The structure of my thesis is as follows. For the purpose of building trust and allaying worries of those suspicious of any Arab I begin with translating and commenting on the cover, table of contents and introduction of his pamphlet in English (chapter 1). In the next chapter I move to questions of scholarly method and the history of ideas in the Middle East, and describe a recent controversy. The last section of this chapter concludes the methodology part. In chapter 3 the reader will find two significant texts that Saghieḥ published in English, again with some comments of mine and some information about his personal background, to illuminate the difficulties of intercultural understanding and to give a better idea of his outlook. Chapter 4 is a chapter with info about the Arab media landscape and the general problem of development, of which the urgency and relevance in this context will then have become clear. Chapter 5 is a summary of *Difā’an ‘an al-Salām* with my comments. In chapter 6 I try to bring out Saghieḥ’s opinions and personal background in the most undiluted form, through data from interviews (one is given in full) and fragments of a recollection he wrote about his life during the Lebanese civil war. In the conclusion I summarize my findings and draw some lines of my own.

The importance of the cultural studies connection is different with each chapter, but it is strongest in chapters 1, 2 and 5 and in the arrangement of the whole. On the academic level the biggest omission is an investigation of how the pamphlet was received in the Arab press.

The costs and effort needed to investigate that were beyond my means for this project. But of course I have asked Saghieḥ about it, and his answer suggests that it might not have been such a serious omission after all.

The transcription of Arabic names follows standard conventions; it has not always been applied to well known words. In most versions of my text the complete translation of *Difā'an al-Salām* into Dutch is given in an appendix. No doubt this will seem weird since all other texts are in English. The underlying reason is that the translation is only a tool, not what I wanted to achieve in the first place. It is not quite ready for publication, but since I have it and have put much effort in it, it seemed a pity not to offer it to readers of Dutch as an added opportunity to check what they're being told. But it did not yet seem feasible to translate the whole text again into English, even if I felt confident to do that well.

My title shows Saghieḥ's pragmatism; we decided on it together. 'Reconciliation' instead of 'compromise' was my first suggestion. I'd like to note that even though this text is done as an MA thesis, I want to continue working on it and developing it. Comments and feedback are very welcome on mkronemeijer [et] hotmail.com.

Chapter 1: An unknown Arabic pamphlet

1.1 The back cover

Difā'an 'an al-Salām is a sky blue, soft cover booklet, 11x16.5 cm (4¼ to 6½ inches) in size, 110 pages, and all in Arabic. The back cover has the following info:

The zeal of Al-Daḳāmisa (the Jordanian soldier who murdered the Israeli girls) has shown that a deep flaw affects the Arab civilization. This is a question removed from politics, no matter here who gains in politics and who loses!

The translation of the passage is not that simple – the word for “zeal” (ḥamāsa) also means enthusiasm or fanaticism, and instead of “flaw” (ḥalal) it could be e.g. weakness, damage, disorder (also psychic), or shortcoming. But in everyday English it means: ‘there is something deeply wrong with us’ (or: our culture, civilisation, society). The second sentence effectively means ‘this is a question that goes beyond day to day politics, and I’m not going to take a partisan view’. The example is rather typical for much of the pamphlet. The Arabic is complex, but begins to make sense once you try to move beyond the literal meaning of the words. The rhetorical vehemence of the text and the broad statements are also quite typical.

The words in parentheses are in a smaller type in the original. Saghih here refers to an incident of that time, when Aḥmad al-Daḳāmisa (a Jordanian border guard) killed seven Israeli girls on a visit to the border area at Naharayim. It appears that without any provocation, acting on its own initiative, he opened fire on them. The author reuses this instance of mindless violence a couple of times in the book as an example of a moral and political blind alley. The fact that the example is used in this way, without any further explanation, makes clear that the pamphlet was not written for eternity so to speak, but primarily to make an impact at its time of publication: 1997, just after Netanyahu came to power in Israel.

It is important to briefly recall the spirit of those days before the millennium. In Europe and North America, optimism ruled supreme. Economic prosperity seemed boundless, America’s political hegemony unassailable, benevolent, and generally quite convenient for Europeans. The end of (intellectual) history had been announced by Fukuyama, predicting the untroubled hegemony of liberalism exemplified by the United States. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process, however difficult, seemed to be the last missing key in a near-perfect new world order. The tragedies that had happened recently (Srebrenica, the Rwanda massacre, the

Rabin murder, the ongoing war in Bosnia) failed to shake this spirit of optimism, let alone to shatter the happy delusion, if we may call it that. Only in retrospect these events appear as warnings that should have been taken much more seriously, morally and politically.

In the Middle East there were many more events that shocked people. Apart from the Al-Daqaḡmisa murder, it was the time of some of the most vicious suicide attacks and of the massacre at Qana, a UN compound where over a hundred Lebanese refugees died in Israeli shellfire.⁴ Not least importantly, it was when Israel for the first time experimented with completely cutting off the West Bank and Gaza from Israel proper.⁵ But in retrospect, it seems a very long time ago. The election of Barak, Camp David, the Second Intifada, the Kosovo War, the accession to power of Sharon, the election of George W. Bush, 9/11, the Euro, Iraq and the appearance of China as the world leader in economic growth were all hidden in the future. Only specialists had heard of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, and even they did not care much.⁶

So much for the time frame and the description of the content of the book. The cover then tells us about the author:

‘Hazem Sagħieh, Lebanese writer and journalist, born in 1951; editor of the page ’afkār [thoughts] of Al-Ḥayāt Daily and redactor of the weekly political supplement Tayyārāt [currents]. He has published many books, including *Ta’rīb al-katā’ib al-Lubnāniyya*, [The Arabisation of the Lebanese Falangists], Dār al-Jadīd 1992, and *Al-‘Arab bayna al-ḥajar wa l-darra*, [The Arabs between the Stone and the Atom], Dār al-Saqī, 1992.⁷

⁴ About Qana I have read conflicting accounts: one saying that the shelling was very probably aimed at these people deliberately by Israeli troops, perhaps even on high authority, another maintaining that it really was an unfortunate accident. Probably the truth lies in the middle, but closer to the first theory. Reports by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International indicate that the “accident” theory cannot be ruled out, but it is not very plausible, and it is certain that IDF troops did not care enough to stop shelling when they were told they were hitting civilians. But it is also true that Hizbullah fighters operated from positions close to the UN camp in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

⁵ David Horovitz (ed.) *Jitschak Rabin: soldaat van de vrede* [Soldier of Peace], p. 203-204 in the Geuzenpocket edition. (See bibliography for more details. For users of different editions: the reference is to chapter 9).

⁶ One of my favourite textbooks on the modern Middle East, R. Stephen Humphreys’ *Between Memory and Desire* (1999) did not mention them altogether. It is sad, though, to begin mentioning this book with a criticism, however obvious it is post-9/11. Because of its structure (interlocking essays) it is really a book to learn from, to read again and again with profit. It is a book that conveys experience rather than imposing a certain analytical framework on Middle Eastern reality. It would have merited a broader readership, especially in Europe.

⁷ The full title of the first book is *The Arabisation of the Lebanese Phalanges: War, Authority, and Fear*. [al-ḥarb, al-sulṭa, al-ḥawf]. To understand this title we need to know that the Phalanges were Maronite units in the Lebanese Civil War, and as Maronites they were opposed to Arabism as an identity. See below, 3.1.

Everyone in the Arab world with a proper education knows Al-Ḥayāt and its opinion pages. Al-Ḥayāt (“Life”, just as in France one would find “La Vie”) was begun in Lebanon, suspended for a few years during the Civil War, and then resurrected in London. It is one of three major newspapers that aim at a readership across the Arab world. Its editorial boards are in London because of the greater protection and freedom, but it is printed on location in the Arab world. It is slightly smaller than Al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ, but bigger than Al-Quds al-Arabi. Even though it is owned by a Saudi prince (just as Al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ) and has to toe certain lines, the al-Ḥayāt opinion pages are considered the best and most varied of all the Arab press (see section 4.4 below). This shows that the author of this pamphlet has a very important post in the Arab media landscape as editor of the opinion pages. The fact that he is Lebanese is no surprise: most of the staff of Al-Ḥayāt, and for that matter of most pan-Arab newspapers, are Lebanese. With Egypt, Lebanon is the Arab world’s most active publishing centre. The publishing house where *Difā’an ‘an al-Salām* appeared is Dār al-Nahār; this is affiliated to Lebanon’s best and largest newspaper, which also has an appeal beyond its home country.

Concerning Lebanon there are plenty of significant issues relating to peace and progress: its relationship with Syria, its social and economic development after the Civil War, its sectarian balance (notably, the role of Hezbollah), and recently its struggle for freedom after the killing of former PM Hariri. Neighbouring Syria is of course a horrible dictatorial state, which has dominated Lebanon militarily and politically for more than a quarter century. But, we should explain that the relation of domination is not as straightforward as it might seem; Syria has always been so much poorer than Lebanon and its regime too weak to risk too much in enforcing its ideology there, for example by limiting press freedom. In any case it always had to operate behind the scenes to pretend to respect Lebanese sovereignty.

Syria itself has a press law banning anything that might damage the public’s confidence in the Revolution. The Revolution stands for the regime’s ideology of course, but it is an ideology that is nothing more than an excuse for power politics: the dominance of minority groups, mainly President al-Asad’s Alawis, over the state at the expense of the Sunni Muslim majority. It is obvious that in both Lebanon and in Syria the political situation is instable and anything might happen there in the next couple of years, if not months.

1.2 the table of contents

Opening the booklet we would see the following table of contents:

Our Attractiveness in the World	11
The Language of Strength	21
Politics, Politics	33
Results of the Intifada	41
We and the Existence of Israel	49
We and the Holocaust	61
Islam and Judaism	73
“Memory”	81
The Discourse of Memory	89
Places of Alternative Models ⁸	95

The titles of the chapters will sound strange for English readers: although the words are familiar it is difficult to make sense of them in these places, or how to see the logic of this order. But in fact the logic is clear enough, once one gets used to the theatrical quality of this kind of prose. ‘Our Attractiveness in the World’ is obviously ironic; even in 1997, it would have been clear to any Arab that they were not the most popular people in the world. ‘The Language of Strength’ (quwwa means power, strength, violence) deals with the endlessly repeated presupposition that Israel only understands force, not reason, and makes clear that the Arabs have no power worth the name. Chapters 3-7 address themes related to the Israel-Palestine conflict: the importance of politics instead of violence, the Arab rejection of Israel’s existence, memory as a social construct, and the importance of the Holocaust. Sometimes the titles fit the text only loosely, so that the argument is broader than the title suggests. The last section is dedicated (at least in part) to some places with a successful political compromise. The high intellectual register makes clear to the readers that the author wants to address issues beyond every day politics (just as the back flap indicated, of course), which means: common assumptions, stereotypes, and misconceptions that lie behind the public debate.

1.3 The introduction

Difā’an ‘an al-Salām

Since Benyamin Netanyahu came to power in Israel, peace has been stumbling and may collapse.

⁸ ‘Anāwīn namūḍaj muḍādd, a title that has baffled even native speakers of Arabic. It is a hyperbole that means ‘countries that have made a transition to democratization through compromise.’

He himself is one of the main people who are responsible for its stumbling. But nothing delights us more than pointing this out. We behave exactly like people accusing others that they are the sole cause that the aircraft with them all is on fire in the air. Not the fire itself is important but limiting it.

Netanyahu and whom he represents are legally responsible, but they are not exclusively responsible.

We are also responsible.

We share a basis in his coming to where he is. Before and after, we made life easy for the leaders of the fundamentalists: they who imposed on our societies their preferred agendas and their preferred opinions.

All of this, and the blood it has demanded, drives politics to a craze of madness in our societies, similar to the craze of madness in Israeli culture that is expressed by the growth of nationalist and religious extremism.

Here we shall speak on our share: about the madness that hits our culture, our thoughts and politics; the same madness that also filled and possessed Al-Daqamisa (the killer of the seven Israeli girls on their visit to the Jordanian border), and other murderers like him.

For Al-Daqamisa is not alone, but a signal of madness.

This is all of the introduction. It requires a bit of an effort to read it even in translation. The image of a burning plane in the air with people quarrelling inside is very powerful but hard to bring out in translation. One has to use some imagination to picture the scene in the mind, and then it works. We also note that the word “politics” is used in a broader sense than in normal English usage. One last remark in this respect: the word translated “culture” primarily means “civilisation” [ḥaḍāra, not ṭaqāfa = higher culture], but that word has associations which are not intended: the “clash of civilisations” debate.

Now what is the author saying here. It is clear that he does not like Netanyahu and holds him partially responsible for the setback in the peace process (as it appeared in 1997). Anyone in the peace camp who has lived those days will remember the feeling of shock after he won the elections, so this dislike is not altogether surprising. But Saghieḥ’s purpose is different: to talk about the responsibility of the Arabs in creating a political climate of hate and extremism in which murders like Al-Daqāmisa’s could take place. In the Dutch context it is hard not to be reminded of the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, and the climate of hatred before and after.

It seems clear the author is furious about the brutal killing of the unsuspecting girls at the border; apparently he felt that another line was crossed here, after the terrible suicide bombings. It does not take much to sympathise with that. But on the other hand we should not fail to note how cleverly he makes a non-Palestinian militant, who was not a suicide bomber, the target of his attack. In Arab eyes the suicide bomber might be called a freedom fighter, and distasteful discussions about how bad life is in the occupied territories and how this dis-

torts people's psyches are unavoidable. The same excuses do not apply to this man, al-Daqāmisa. This means that it is much harder for Saghieḥ's fundamentalist and nationalist opponents to counter his charges.

One last feature is interesting, that is his drawing an equal parallel between Arab and Jewish extremism. Apparently he was well aware of this development in Israeli society, already worrying at that time.

1.4 Read it?

Now we know what book we are looking at. What do we do? Do we want to read this book or not? There does not seem to be a plausible reason for distrusting the author or doubting the sincerity of his feelings about the terrorist murders. Nevertheless, there are several possible reasons for not wanting to.

One possible objection is a point of principle. That is the fact that many Arabs are anti-Semites. This is shown, for example, by the cartoons that can be found on the Memri website (the Washington-based Middle East Media Research Institute), some of which have appeared in *Al-Ḥayāt*. We could say: if this guy works for a newspaper that spreads anti-Semitic stereotypes and opinions, we do not want to talk to him. That would be a respectable point of view, but it has serious disadvantages, as we will see presently.

Another, quite different reason for not wanting to read the pamphlet is that we might feel despondent about yet another text about a peace that never comes and has been promised so often. So many political schemes have been crowned with high hopes and promises and ended in failure. Why invest any more time and energy in politics? Already, the plethora of opinions and points of view about the Middle East and Israel with their religious, social, economical, and political tensions are hard to deal with. Is it necessary to bother with anything new?

A third reason for not reading the pamphlet is that it may upset our cherished opinions. For example, if we believe in an inevitable clash of civilisations, the Arabs are of necessity another camp, and any attempt to communicate across this line is doomed to failure. Or, put a bit more bluntly: if this pamphlet has a message that will disrupt our convenient division of the world in good and bad, we might be at a loss and have to reconsider our position and actions, which is not an easy thing to do. Life is confusing enough as it is. But this obviously cannot count as a good reason not to read it.

The fourth, most important reason is that we do not feel sure that we want the same. Pour disputer, il faut être d'accord, as it is said. Do we have a common ground? What is this peace that is being defended here? It is a fair question: as an Arab, the author of this pamphlet could be a political enemy. But to discover that, the only solution is to read on. In the worst case we might find some useful arguments for the fight. But on the other hand, if my presentation so far has succeeded the reader may feel curious how this exposé of presuppositions of Arab public debate is going to end up as a defence of peace – since that's what the title promises. And considering the principal objection of anti-Semitism, we should realise that insisting on principle would cut us off from a very large segment of Arab public opinion and their opinion leaders (and that without knowing the details of Saghieh's work at the newspaper). After all, in the UK and the Netherlands anti-Semitism may be a marginal phenomenon, but it is generally known to be stronger in France and Germany, and beyond Western Europe (think of Poland, Bulgaria, Russia) anti-Semites and anti-Semitism cease to be at the fringes of society and public debate.⁹ They cannot be ignored, because they then keep their power over people. In Arab countries where the climate is overwhelmingly anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic, these sentiments have to be taken seriously and certainly cannot be ignored in the debate. Moreover, anti-Semitic expression in Arab countries may look quite similar to traditional European anti-Semitism, but its historical and political causes are significantly different. For these reasons I hold that refusing to read Saghieh's pamphlet because of occasional anti-Semitic utterances in Al-Hayāt would be unwise. (In fact, the difference between Arab and European anti-Semitism is one of the topics he discusses).

I have dwelt on this question (either to read the pamphlet or to put it aside) at some length because I strongly believe that a willingness in principle to listen to and consider unpopular perspectives remains crucial for Saghieh's texts to work. As Daniel Barenboim once put it, when striving for peace and reconciliation it is the *rationality behind the narrative of the other* that matters.¹⁰ To be willing to acknowledge this rationality means to go beyond trauma and feelings, however honestly felt, and beyond a politician's justified desire to assert

⁹ For the example of Poland see Georg W. Strobel, "Das andere Polen. Struktur und Selbstverständnis der rechten und rechtsextremen Kräfte in der polnischen Politik". *Osteuropa* 51 (2001) vol 3 p. 259-280, plus attached sources.

¹⁰ Barenboim used this expression in an improvised speech in the Royal Albert Hall, London, after conducting the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (founded by Edward Said and himself) in a phenomenal performance of Mahler's First Symphony (BBC Prom, 14 August 2005), with Wagner's "Liebestod" from Tristan as an encore.

his/her own preferred perception of reality.¹¹ It is an issue of political and democratic morality which I think has not been sufficiently articulated and merits further attention.

¹¹ The events leading up to the Iraq war of 2003 are the obvious of what happens when there is no such willingness. As a Dutch foreign policy expert described it: “[President Bush] was blamed for making the importance of new information on relevant developments subservient to his desire to maintain convictions valuable to him at all costs’. A. van Staden, “Afscheid van Atlantis?” *Internationale Spectator* 58 (Dec 2004) no 12, p. 585. (Original quote: “[President George W. Bush] trof het verwijt dat hij het belang van nieuwe informatie over relevante ontwikkelingen ondergeschikt maakte aan zijn behoefte om voor hem waardevolle overtuigingen hoe dan ook in stand te houden.”) The British debate about WMD was even more grotesque.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 The problem

This chapter deals with the many kinds of problems that come up when we do not only want to read Saghieh's work but to study it and reflect on it in a responsible way. There are conflicting academic and political interests that touch on it, both as an object of study and as an intellectual source. Also a basic understanding of Arab public debate and socio-economic conditions is necessary to understand its context. Through the influential role of Edward Said any discussion of Arab intellectual debates will also touch on international politics and academic method, complicating the matter further. In 2.4 below I develop a basic methodology, informed to some degree by cultural studies, to present the text of the pamphlet.

In this section I begin by explaining the academic side of the problem. In the first place, we need to know which hermeneutical principles should be followed to let the text of the pamphlet speak to us as clearly as possible. In the second place we should ask how the academic study of such a text connects to earlier work on Arab thought, debate, intellectual and political life, etc. Lastly, we need a basic awareness of controversies surrounding Middle East Studies.

The hermeneutical side of the problem about method is principally that the text of the pamphlet and its political message have to be made available and discussed in a fair and balanced way. Apart from practical factors such as its relative length and occasional wordiness this is difficult to do for various reasons. First, it is a text from a culture with low status and written in a foreign idiom; we have already seen examples of that. The way in which the text is phrased to make a point appears odd when read in a translation without explanatory comments. Second, the sensitivity of the issue – peace in Israel-Palestine – makes it hard to discuss, since many people will feel strongly about this, and my own prejudices will always play a role to some degree. Third, the text takes a point of view which is radical and far removed from the mainstream of Arab thinking, described in the pamphlet as Islamist and nationalist. But no matter how unappealing much of Arab thought might appear to Westerners, including myself, still it must be taken very seriously. Even when Arab writers hold views that one would like to disregard as anti-modern or pre-modern, they still merit careful study and consideration. In any case the nuances and varieties of Arab thought are far greater than a junior person like myself can estimate (consider also the fact that many Arabs nowadays prefer to

write in Western languages). The practical consequences of Saghieh's radical position for my study are twofold. Firstly, it is often necessary to make a careful guess who or what he is writing against (he is never specific about this, which is telling in itself). Secondly, in evaluating his argument it may be necessary to wonder whether there is not more to an Islamist or nationalist point of view than it appears in the text.

The second problem with method is the academic context of the investigation, the home base so to speak. The primary academic context is the study of Arab intellectual thought (as expressed in Arabic) of the secular liberal variety, and dealing with representation and perception of Israel. Within intellectual thought the focus is on political thought and public debate conducted in Arabic through pan-Arab media. Neat as this sounds, the problem is that this is a really narrow specialization. If we discount the study of Islamic thought and politics, which is a very different field (part of religious studies, anthropology, theology) there are very few scholarly works about Arab thought available in Western languages. Almost all are written by Arabs, and none deals with text-reading. The works that I found (a book by Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' and a handful of articles about current debates by Amr Hamzawy) have their own peculiarities.¹² Secular liberal thinkers, especially those whose ideas are close to generally shared western ones, are rarely studied. But once the topic is Israel-Palestine, there is even more tension than when we study Islamists, because with liberal thinkers we (Westerners) supposedly share common values, but for political reasons we draw quite different conclusions from them. From their point of view: they may feel they have true and valid insights about the situation but nobody wants to hear them, neither the overwhelming majority of the Arabs nor a western public.¹³

A third consideration regarding method is the broader debate about the politics of modern Middle Eastern Studies. It is a well known fact that there are different currents. In its extreme form the 'pro' current adopts Arab points of view to such an extent that it obscures or excuses almost everything that is wrong in the Arab world, while the 'anti' current regards them (Muslims and Arabs, as it suits best) as primitive, hate-filled barbarians who only understand

¹² Only at a late stage I was able to look at the works by Moroccan intellectuals Labdaoui and Laroui. But the difficulty with Morocco is its remote location and several factors that differentiate it from all other Arab countries: short and relatively benevolent colonial rule (not nearly as painful a liberation struggle as in Algeria), , no past ties to the Ottoman Empire, a stable and relatively tolerant monarchy, the importance of French and other Western languages.

force. On the political and diplomatic level these two currents reappear as pro-Arab and pro-Israeli movements.¹⁴ But one should immediately add that the extremes of these currents (represented in Munson's summary, on which I largely rely, by Georgetown's John Esposito on the 'pro' side and Martin S. Kramer and Daniel Pipes on the 'anti' side, with Bernard Lewis hovering somewhere in the background) do not represent all of Arab studies done in the US, in Europe, or Israel. Most scholars question the political and academic wisdom of these strategies. Nevertheless these two camps together create an unhealthy atmosphere in public debate, especially in the US and in the Middle East: accusations of orientalism, or Zionism, or anti-Semitism quickly stick and are hard to avoid. No one will be surprised that the radical pro-Israel side is now dominant in the US, which even poses significant and worrying constraints on academic freedom. (See the article by Doumani quoted in the last footnote).

The matter is complicated further when we consider the enigmatic and ambiguous role of Edward Said, the founder of postcolonial theory and author of *Orientalism*, as well as a great number of political columns, and the most prominent Arab intellectual in the world up until his death in 2003. Apart from his (disputed) influence on Middle Eastern studies he has also written about public intellectuals and their duties, so it will be easily understood that his role is relevant for both the academic standards and the contents of my work.¹⁵

For my purpose the polarized debate only adds complications and does not offer a way forward. But it will be obvious that my choice of topic implies that the extremes are to be rejected. Saghieh's work is extremely critical towards "the Arabs", their irredentism, their hollow rhetoric and anti-Semitism, etcetera. No matter how well these conditions can be explained by academics on cultural and historical grounds at some point an ethics of responsibility has to come in: Arab politicians and opinion leaders have to be held to account for the situation. Regarding the other extreme, reading Saghieh's text with any openness of mind, combined with some knowledge of the basics of cultural anthropology and the difficulties of intercultural communication, means that the contradictions of the 'anti', i.e. 'primitive hatred'

¹³ See e.g. two interviews with the Jordanian scholar Kemal S. Abu Jaber by Johan ten Hove, just after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. The claim was that 'You [westerners] don't want to understand us Arabs'. "Wij, die enge Arabieren" [We, those scary Arabs]. Interview with Professor Abu Jaber. *Trouw* 18-10-1990.

¹⁴ See Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand. The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America*. (2001) Kramer accuses the US institutions for modern Middle Eastern Studies of lack of patriotism, dovishness and misuse of government funding. Cf. its review in *ISIM Newsletter* 10 (2002) by Henry Munson ("Between Pipes and Esposito", p. 8), and Bishara Doumani, "Academic Freedom post-9/11", *ISIM Review* 15 (2005) 22-23. Both texts published by ISIM can be found on its website.

¹⁵ Said was a secular thinker writing about Israel, but since he rarely published in Arabic and wrote on the basis of his ideas about Orientalism and Western biases rather than anything else, he cannot be fruitfully compared to Saghieh. Said's description of the duties of public intellectuals is purely based on Western standards and directed at a Western audience; there is nothing specifically Arab about them.

paradigm can be exposed relatively easily, as it is a self-reaffirming pattern (one way to interpret a pattern is repeated again and again without considering others). It has never been my plan to step into this debate, it is only a sideline of my project, but nevertheless it seemed worth addressing.

A fourth problem with method and approach is of a very different nature: available time and resources. It would have been ideal if I could have gone to Lebanon and look at the conditions of the press and current debates there and to do a reader response investigation but lack of money and insufficient experience with Arabic prevented this. I was lucky even to be able to meet Hazem Saghieh a few times in London where he lives. I still wish I could have gone further to familiarize myself with his writings, background and opinions, but at this stage of the project there was no chance. Lastly, the library resources in the Netherlands for this kind of topic are rather disappointing. Even the Arab Human Development Reports (millions of copies sold or downloaded, *Time Magazine's* 'most influential publication of the year') have not always found their way here, let alone sources on intellectuals.

As a solution to all these constraints I have done three things. One, I have selected a few significant publications by Saghieh that have appeared in English. The first two are presented and discussed in chapter 3 to familiarize the reader with his style, outlook, and interests; others, less important for the present purpose appear in chapters 4 and 6. Two, I have gathered academic materials to place Saghieh, his work and his text in a broader context. Factors such as religious background, history of Lebanon, conditions of the Arab press and media landscape are indisputably relevant to understand his writings, even though the extent to which this is the case is debatable. My chapter 4 and the first part of chapter 3 are devoted to these topics. I thought this would not only be helpful to understand Saghieh's role but also the parameters of the secular liberal type of discourse he represents. To be sure his views should not be considered just a specimen of a broader type (and certainly not a priori), but a notion of their potential appeal and audience would certainly be valuable if a targeted reader response investigation is impossible.

Three, I have decided to look to cultural studies. Even though my work remains within the (somewhat hypothetical) context of the study of Arab thought, it seemed that cultural studies would allow me to develop criteria to structure and evaluate the pamphlet itself, to summarize it and comment on it in a responsible and balanced manner. Overall, it did, and the result can be seen in chapter 5 below. Chapter 5 is in fact the central part of my work. Chapter 6 presents the outcome of my meetings with Saghieh in London, including an interview given in

full, but unfortunately it is a bit sketchy and requires some empathy from the reader. Because the chapter contains valuable ideas and is directly linked to the original aim of my project I did not want to turn it into appendices, which was a possibility, but nevertheless the reader is asked to first direct his attention to chapters 3-5 and regard chapter 6 as optional.

The connection to cultural studies created difficulties as well as solutions. The combination of cultural studies and the history of ideas (part of what I wanted to do) is not so common and needed to be considered well. For one, a cultural studies approach required treating any interesting written text (book, pamphlet, study) as a cultural agent and an artefact in addition to its role as a source of ideas. Also cultural studies is not so often applied to non-western texts or to intercultural communication, even though this makes good sense. I will first introduce the field and then explore the connections.

2.2 Cultural studies

Cultural studies is a slightly odd field. It is perhaps the most ambitious branch of the Humanities, an interdisciplinary conglomerate centred on issues of power and its culture-bound representation in society, with strong connections to media studies, philosophy and literary theory. As a guide to this field I use Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London 2003: 2nd ed.). This is to all appearances a very good and useful introduction to cultural studies, one that approaches the discipline as a ‘language game’ and does not try to ground culture in a notion of “experience” or “practice.”¹⁶ This is an approach I find congenial.¹⁷ Most areas of cultural studies deal with modern western culture, leaving the rest of the world to the pur sang anthropologists (as Barker is well aware); this limits its applicability once we are dealing with a non-Western culture and transcultural comparisons. Nevertheless there are several points in cultural studies as he describes it that could be enriching to a study of Arab thought.

One relevant characteristic of cultural studies is its disregard for disciplinary boundaries: anything of relevance can be integrated into such an approach, no matter how the author defines himself. As a consequence, a cultural studies approach has to be multiperspectival, it cannot give preference to one sub-discipline, far less leave one (or more) out of the picture altogether. It is non-essentialist, tends to side with the marginalized, and is inclined to support

¹⁶ In this I am following Paul Willis’s foreword (who would prefer a different strategy!).

¹⁷ A possible objection to Barker’s approach is that there are patterns to culture (for one, the fact that everyone needs culture, or cultures, for life) that transcend particularities, and for this reason raise questions in the field of philosophical anthropology. If we would not like to call these patterns “universal”, at least we might call them “transdifferent”. Yes, it is a loanword from German.

social action or at least provide academic tools for it. It differs from social philosophy by staying close to human realities and by its reluctance to push normative reflection too far; its purpose remains descriptive and analytic. Its earliest inspiration was Marxist. Key themes are identity, gender roles, modernity and postmodernity, and representation of public space.

Now, what use can we make of all this. Firstly, is this the right field to look to? Saghieh's text could be relevant in other important areas of study such as international relations, conflict studies and development studies. These may seem closer in some respects. But their disadvantage for my purpose is that they are not sufficiently textual: the role of language and narrative to represent "factual" (social, economical, political) reality is so important that it requires explicit attention, which I feel it can only be given by establishing a cultural studies framework first and then adding in insights and approaches from these other disciplines.

Which facets of cultural studies are the most relevant and applicable to read *Difā'an 'an al-Salām*? The answer in part depends on the connection to history of ideas I am going to develop in the next chapter, but even so a few characteristics can be pointed out. A 'multiperspectival' approach (switching between different foci repeatedly within one study) is useful, since it allows for a perspective that applies sympathy with the Arabs in one section and with Jews/Israelis in another, and with Saghieh himself in a third, according to their different circumstances. Its demand of a consistent interdisciplinary approach should not be a problem. On the other hand, it is clear that any treatment of such a sensitive topic cannot have an ideological purpose, either for or against any party. If the analysis turned out to be biased in one direction or the other, it would immediately fail to convince. Even a notion such as 'sympathising with the marginalized' easily goes too far. Who are the marginalized, why, in which sense? Are Jews more marginalised or Arabs? Or vice versa? It depends on one's point of view.

The connection to intercultural communication is not strong in Barker's or in other introductions to the field. This is a bit surprising. The role of the Arabic language, some of its central concepts and certain culturally specific modes of expression are clearly very important; this will be obvious to Dutch readers as they compare the summary of the text to the full translation into Dutch given in the appendix. The text is lifted to a higher-status linguistic vehicle (English) and mode of expression, and the effect will be that the text makes much more of an impression on the reader, even apart from the fact that the structure or the argument is clearer. If there is any phenomenon of more relevance to issues of power, representation and culture than language communities, I would be interested to know it. Trying to reduce the dis-

tances these status barriers create is a challenge that would be worthy of any idealistic academic, as I expect my text will demonstrate.

How cultural studies has shaped criteria for my text-reading and translation will be discussed in section 2.4. To conclude this section, let us not forget that there are many other fields of theory of relevance to the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict, that are not usually connected to cultural studies, although this is certainly possible. These are collective memory, colonialism and its traumas (including related economic notions such as dependent development) and the pattern of victimization that affects both Israeli Jews and Arabs deeply.¹⁸ The next two paragraphs try to distil a connection between cultural studies, the life of ideas in history, and public debate in the Arab mass media. To do that effectively it is necessary to reflect on the role of those who shape public debate: people who may be called intellectuals, and the less articulate people whose opinions they voice or challenge. Also we need to consider their tools in shaping this debate: texts, written or audio-visual. Intellectuals, audience and texts (media) function very differently in the Arab world than they do in Western Europe. It should always be remembered that socio-economic issues and government control determine the life chances of creative ideas in society: especially in the generally poor and undemocratic societies of the Arab world.

2.3 Intellectuals and the life of ideas

In Europe the title of intellectual sounds rather presumptuous, and does not really command much respect. It is understood that intellectuals are a kind of elite, carriers of culture; but even as such they are distrusted rather than appreciated. In the Arab world this is different. In Arabic, the title *mutaqqaf* (intellectual) is more easily used and an honour to its bearer. But, contrary to Europe where an intellectual is first and foremost a critic (following the model of Zola), the Arabic points to a defender, defending the honour of the nation, tribe, or society. We might compare their role to one of European intellectuals in the 19th century, when they were also more like defenders of one national tradition than independent thinkers.¹⁹ The conception of the public intellectual as an independent countercurrent thinker developed only with Zola (the Dreyfus affair) and was carried further by the handful of people who stood up

¹⁸ Both Jews and Arabs often behave as victims of their dramatic pasts. The key to understand victimization is that the status of victim may entitle one to redress of damage, special care, immunity from prosecution for certain minor offences, getting away with irresponsible behaviour, etcetera. It can be very convenient.

for peace in the beginning of the First World War, such as Romain Rolland and Stefan Zweig. Some important theorists who helped to change this conception, Julien Benda and Antonio Gramsci, lived and wrote a little later.

By all accounts, Saghieh is a public intellectual. How can one study intellectuals? One can take a broad, sociological approach and study the creative, educated middle-upper class of a given society such as artists, scholars (academics), religious leaders and politicians, and consider them all as intellectuals since together they shape their society.²⁰ This is a perfectly possible, albeit somewhat boring strategy – boring, because it cannot be used to explain why some ideas are more powerful and influential than others, e.g. to explain why especially Charles Darwin's theory of evolution shook the Victorian world, and not those that were developed by others before him, such as his own grandfather.

Another approach may be to try exclude those people out who use their skills to support a material interest, a business interest or political power, lobbyists so to speak, and regard only those persons as intellectuals who operate from a completely disinterested position, in a way removed from society. They then come to look like a kind of priest-caste. This approach recognises the importance of biography, conduct and personal-public relationship in intellectuals, but in practice it is greatly complicated because complete disinterested-ness is a fiction that will never be a reality. Any kind of intellectual activity that will yield status or profit to its author represents a real change in his/her position. It is true that the effects of this drawback can be limited – e.g. a literature specialist writing about politics or an artist depicting religion need not necessarily compromise himself. But then still it is very difficult and in any case arbitrary to draw a line between interested and disinterested intellectuals, and they will not necessarily be removed from society at all.

Discussing the difficulties of studying intellectuals already shows the complications of the status in itself. Clearly, the balance between (narrow) specialisation and general view is important, and the relation between biography and message, the question of (financial) interests or disinterestedness, and the relation between distance from and involvement in society.²¹

¹⁹ In Michel Winock's *Le Siècle des Intellectuels* (of French intellectuals, that is) the most typical intellectual of the late 19th and early 20th century is not Zola but his opponent Maurice Barrès, the 'voice of the collective, of the people', an anti-individualist.

²⁰ A recent example of this approach is Muhammad Sabour, *The Ontology and Status of intellectuals in Arab Academia and Society*. He offers useful insights about the problems facing intellectuals (here especially people working from institutions rather than independently) and why they cannot fulfil their necessary role in society as they should.

²¹ See Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 1994.

To these observations I would add a notion that I have learned from Isaiah Berlin and his biographer Michael Ignatieff, and that is the importance of ideas in history.²² Political history, including wars and revolutions, can to some extent be seen as mirroring the life and death of ideas in society: following Kurpershoek we might call them the source code. E.g. in his renowned inaugural lecture “Two Concepts of Liberty” (Oxford, 1958) Berlin stressed the power of ideas to disrupt and change the lives of millions, and even to bring a violent end to them at times.²³ He said that it is dangerous to neglect ideas: “Dangerous, because when ideas are neglected by those who ought to attend them – that is to say, those who have been trained to think critically about ideas – they sometimes acquire an unchecked momentum and an irresistible power over multitudes of men that may grow too violent to be affected by rational criticism.”²⁴

In saying this Berlin obviously had in mind Stalinist Communism and Fascism, but that should not be a reason not to give religious or liberal ideas similar attention. In a contemporary context one might immediately think of Sayyid Qutb, of course, or of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda as followers of dangerous ideas. But one might equally well think of Western populists and politicians: the idea of a “war on terror” amply merits to be called dangerous.²⁵ I cannot tell how well this notion of describing modern history as history of ideas has been investigated or articulated, by Berlin or others. But as I have just indicated with the example of Zola and Barrès, on its basis it may be possible to develop a model to understand parallels between Arab and European intellectual history. In the following we will see another example where the analogy holds.

²² Isaiah Berlin is not too often remembered nowadays, but he was perhaps the most prominent liberal intellectual in the 1950s and influenced a number of prominent thinkers. (To name a few: Michael Ignatieff and John Gray, who both honoured him with biographies; Charles Taylor, Avishai Margalit, Stephen Toulmin). The story of Berlin’s life reads as a most original mix of fate, coincidence, luck (in getting scholarships and diplomatic postings), encounters, self-doubt, shyness, courage, perseverance, and perhaps especially eloquence, all leading him to set up his great theme in life: liberty. Also from a Jewish perspective, Berlin is remarkable. Although in many things a Zionist he refused offers to come and live in Israel, or to write his friend Chaim Weizmann’s biography. Berlin devoted a lot of time and attention to thinkers such as Herder, Vico, De Maistre, Marx and Herzen. His way of looking at ‘great thinkers’ to react to present realities might seem slightly old-fashioned, but one has to know that in following this interest, Berlin was taking an unusual direction in his own day, which worked very well for him.

²³ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, 1969, p. 118-172.

²⁴ Berlin, *Op. cit.*, p. 119.

²⁵ In a BBC documentary “The new al Qaeda”, Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA Osama bin Laden unit said that the War on Terror had been misused to interpret 9/11 as an attack on America’s freedom, values, electoral system, etc. As he put it, ‘In reality it has almost nothing to do with it. It’s our policies they don’t like’. This already illustrates the Berlin quote in the last paragraph. I especially noted the mentioning of the US electoral system, which was already beset with problems before the Bush-Gore deadlock. Jeff Greenfield’s novel *The People’s Choice* was parodied most cruelly by reality.

As said above, when considering Arab intellectuals we should remember that the conditions in which they work are fundamentally different from their Western counterparts.²⁶ One obvious factor is the high degree of illiteracy in the Arab world and the troubled state of the educational system. Other factors are the financial and social insecurity that many Arab intellectuals have to overcome, and of course the lack of freedom in many societies. As yet there is no solid intellectual stratum in Arab societies, and many professional thinkers remain attached to tribal, national and family loyalties which leads to the weirdest of contradictions.²⁷ Much of Arab intellectual life is fragmented, sometimes within one country (for example the US-oriented and France-oriented scholars in Lebanon). Many academics do not even bother to write in Arabic.

Perhaps my strong emphasis on the notion of public intellectuals is misleading in the sense that there is inevitably a gap between the knowledge, erudition, nuance and creativity of individual scholars, artists and writers and the public spheres in which they express themselves, nationally and internationally. It is similar to open discussions (a seminar, a forum, a political congress), where the debate rarely matches the capacities of the individual participants. Usually the most outspoken people push themselves forward, and more reflexive spirits keep themselves back. Of course one may say that intellectuals bear some responsibility for the quality of the debate in which they operate. But public debate also has a dynamic of its own which is very hard to challenge by expressing an unpopular or counter-current opinion. In the Netherlands the obvious example of a landmark article is 'het multiculturele drama' (2000) by Paul Scheffer. Since then the climate in society has radically changed, making it much easier for rightist views to be heard. In the following section I try to develop the notion of intertextuality to distinguish between individual writers and the ideas they may carry forward.

²⁶ This paragraph is based on Samir Khalaf, *Cultural Resistance. Global and Local Encounters in the Middle East*. London: Saqi Books, 2001, p. 70ff. Note also that in the Arab press the role of intellectuals is a recurrent topic of debate. Looking up an online library catalogue such as SOAS will easily lead to useful titles.

²⁷ In *Transit Beirut* (see 6.2), recollections of the Civil War, Saghieh tells about him coming to check on his apartment in West Beirut, which he had loaned to a Communist writer while he was himself staying in the East. He found that the guy had buried himself in the toilet, where he felt safest, and came out only very hesitantly. Then he started telling about the mistake the Communist party made to engage in the Civil War. But after the Israeli invasion he wrote a fiery piece about the steadfastness of 'real' Beirut, attacking the 'opportunists and cowards' who fled East. *Transit Beirut*, 115.

2.4 Studying Arab thought and debate

The aim of the first half of this long section is to discuss the other studies on Arab intellectual thought I have found, Hamzawy's articles and Abu-Rabi's *Contemporary Arab Thought*. By looking at these two studies the complexities of studies of Arab thought and the roads open for the present study will become clearer. On the basis of Hamzawy's work it will also be possible to give a rough idea of dominant moods and patterns in Arab public debate. After these discussions I will come back to textual method and address (a) how ideas, intellectuals, and texts may be distinguished, and (b) what criteria may be used to guide and evaluate the text-reading in chapter 5 especially.

‘Amr Ḥamzāwī is an Egyptian social scientist who has written a lot in German and English about Arab debates, general (globalization) political and Islamist: he has contributed op-ed pieces to *Die Zeit* and now works for the Carnegie Endowment.²⁸ In his academic work he often summarizes debates on the basis of a selection of representative texts. He obviously does that on the basis of his complete command of Arabic and his overview of the Arab press. To tell by his German (native or near-native) he is fully at home in Germany as well, and this puts him in an enviable position to mediate between cultures.

Hamzawy's article in *Orient* is a helpful guide to the Arab public sphere. He indicates that after the Second Intifada many Arab intellectuals reverted to ideological positions that had been developed long before, 1948-82. The division between secularists, islamists and reformists that characterized other debates in the 1990s did not appear in debates about crisis situations (the Second Intifada, 9/11).²⁹ Instead there appeared a simple divide between mainstream and marginal, usually very critical, positions. The mainstream is dominated by conspiracy theories and a sense of being victimized by base and powerful enemies, and by a permanent feeling of insecurity. Hamzawy presents the differences through the examples of the affair between Princess Diana and Dodi al-Fayed and the post-9/11 conspiracies (i.e. that the Americans and/or Israelis were themselves to blame for the attacks). In this context he also points to a series of articles in *Al-Ḥayāt* soon after the attacks which discussed Al-Qaeda in a

²⁸ Among his articles are: “Vom Primat der Verschwörung: zeitgenössische arabische Debatten”. In: *Orient* 43-3 (2002) 345-364; “Hatar Al-'Aulama: Die Arabische Globalisierungsdebatte - eine Neuauflage der Kontroverse über Moderne und Authentizität?” In: *Die Welt des Islams* 43-2 (2003) 173-213; “Warum viele Araber Demokratie wollen und Amerikas Rolle dabei nicht ablehnen” In: *Die Zeit* 58-25 (2003) 9-10; “Arabische Regime verhindern Reformen, der Westen hilft dabei”. In: *Die Zeit* 59-26 (2004) 8

²⁹ Hamzawy, “Vom Primat der Verschwörung”, p. 346. As an aside I would like to add that conspiracy theories were also a feature of the European Early Modern period, but then we are talking about the 17th century. Jonathan Israel's groundbreaking *Radical Enlightenment* will serve as a guide for this phenomenon.

remarkably factual and thorough manner, in sharp contrast to ‘mainstream’ ideologically coloured articles and their occasional undertone that it ‘served them right’.³⁰

A remarkable passage presents the important Egyptian thinker Ḥasan Ḥanafī, who is regarded as a moderate islamist.³¹ It is significant as an example of a thinker reverting to older positions, and also because it shows how Arab readers may well react to compromising texts such as Saghieḥ’s. Ḥanafī stressed the existential nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict and prophesied the Arabs’ final victory, referring to the centuries-long struggle between the Muslims and the Crusaders and equating Zionism with racism. He predicted that because of its racism, Israel would end in the same way as Nazi Germany, and referred without further explanations to conspiracies. No coexistence would be possible between “us” and the Zionists because of the Clash of Cultures (meaning, Civilizations, following Huntington). For these reasons Hanafi discredited efforts to establish an Israeli-Arab-Western dialogue as an expression of an idealistic and imperialist strategy, aiming to “Zionize” the Arab mind and culture.³² As a Western observer it is hard not to be depressed by this account. And Ḥanafī is a very prominent Arab thinker.

In 2004 Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʿ, who had previously published about Islamic revival movements, published *Contemporary Arab Thought. Studies in post-1967 Arab intellectual History*. It clearly fills a huge gap as it is the first general study to address Arab thought systematically. It describes the rise and fall of ideologies in the Arab world, focusing on the mainstream of what Arabs have thought and said rather than on the exceptions. Unfortunately it is rather useless as a reference work because of the dismal state of the index, which even omits key critical thinkers as Sadiq al-Azm, and key topics such as liberalism, Enlightenment, Human Rights, etc. On the other hand the bibliography is very thorough. In all the book undeniably offers a possible approach to study Arab thought: i.e. by describing its mainstream on its own (Arab) terms, rather than the writers and books that stand out because of their creative engagement with Western thoughts and ideas.³³

In this book, as also in his earlier study of notable Islamic thinkers, Abu-Rabiʿ gives a strong statement of what he thinks are the requirements of a serious study of Arab thought. He says that one must command a whole range of critical theories, and keep abreast of developments in a number of Western sciences, besides (obviously to him) knowing the languages.

³⁰ *Ibd.*, 353.

³¹ Hamzawy refers to an interview in *Al-Hayat*, 1 May 2002

³² Hamzawy, “Vom Primat der Verschwörung”, p. 358. Of course “Zionizing” reflects the schematic equation of Jews, Israelis and Zionists as one force.

Now it seems to me that Abu-Rabiʿ presents a somewhat closed and restricted view of the options open for the study of contemporary thought. In his first book he listed as possible angles (1) the study of systematic thought, (2) the study of informal thought, climates of opinion and literary movements, (3) social history of ideas and their diffusion, and (4) cultural history.³⁴ I am noting this because my principal interest – ideas, especially liberal ideas in their relation to Western ones – is not as such mentioned in this list. But I am looking for thoughts and ideas that stand out by their originality in the context of an international political debate, that try to connect to Western ideas and to existing political realities, and that aim to make a difference. That means moving across (1) and (3), while taking (2) and (4) into account. This is not to detract from the significance of Abu-Rabiʿs work, which on a scholarly level is certainly a great achievement. But some features give the book a decidedly unfocused outlook: the imbalance between index and bibliography, the vehement but rather randomly aimed accusations in the preface, the publisher’s carelessness with the front cover.³⁵ My hypothesis is that the book is trying to urge rebuilding Arab thought from the inside: by Arabs, for whom the many names mean something, and who can make the connections to Western intellectual thought for themselves. I think Abu-Rabiʿ wanted to contribute to an Arab and/or Muslim critical discourse against the West and globalisation. This (if it is true) is fair enough as a desire but it would be a daunting intellectual task: Arab thinkers would then need not only to engage creatively with Western thought, but understand its flaws and correct it where it legitimises injustice. Perhaps my guesses go too far, but (a) from a point of view informed by cultural studies one inevitably has to consider books as agents and artefacts as well as carriers of academic knowledge, and (b) I only set out to argue that the model of Abu-Rabiʿ is not one I could fruitfully imitate in my work on Saghieh’s pamphlet.

If Abu-Rabiʿ offers no model I can imitate, it is not easier to follow Hamzawy, since he is so obviously at home in both Arabic and German (English) and can mediate between cultures. Nevertheless I follow Hamzawy to some extent in that I present *Difāʿan ʿan al-Salām* in the form of a summary interspersed with comments. This seemed better than to try getting the full translation to convey its message by itself. In some versions my working translation is attached (in Dutch), but to read this type of text in translation requires such an effort that most

³³ ‘On its own (Arab) terms’ should not be understood too literally. Most of contemporary Arab thought came about in confrontation with western ideas, but that is not how Abu-Rabiʿ goes about describing them.

³⁴ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʿ, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, p. 4.

³⁵ The front cover shows the minarets of the Istanbul skyline – Islamic but not Arab. The accusations in the preface are aimed at Muslim intellectuals in the West (not Arab intellectuals in the Middle East) about failing to develop a theory of knowledge, rediscover Islam’s revolutionary spirit, and learn from liberation theology. No doubt these are criticisms to be taken seriously but for Western readers they raise dozens of question marks.

Western readers would get lost very soon and fail to grasp the points the text makes. The summary will offer readers a much more immediate encounter with the argument Saghiech expresses and enable him/her to enter into dialogue with it very easily.

That determines the format of my chapter 5. Now about the focus of the summary, and the criteria for the commentary. This brings us back to the questions about history of ideas and its relationship to the programme of cultural studies.

My hypothesis – building on what I have read of Berlin and Ignatieff – is that the underlying motives behind actions can be described as ideas: good, bad, ambitious, progressive, dated, whatever. Some of these ideas will arrive at the right time in history to effect changes, big or small. Even recent events such as the Kosovo war and its surrounding debates can be shown to mirror clashes of ideas: the idea of the sovereign state, of an international community, the nature of the universal consensus on Human Rights, the notion of a just war.³⁶ Read in historical succession, the writings and individual example of Western protagonists, and antagonists, of liberal ideas (relating to human dignity and rights, liberty, equality, religious freedom, and other such topics) constitute an ongoing discourse that is central to the development of (post)modernity. The notion of intertextuality (in its loose, poststructuralist sense) can then be used to identify an unbounded, multilayered corpus of fundamentally related texts that will allow all sorts of intertextual connections between them to ‘make sense’, to conflict about, defend and define modernity.

So part one of my plan with chapter 5 is based on the following logic. The fundamental insight embodied in the notion of intertextuality is that every text can be approached as a set of quotations from other texts; that applies to this pamphlet as well as any other. The extent to which *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* in its discussion of assumptions and stereotypes in Arab debate offers intertextual connections to influential western texts, and the character of these connections, is an important indicator of its attitude towards the West and towards modernity in general. If these intertextual connections show an adequate understanding of what Western authors meant and wanted to achieve, we can discern to what extent the text and its author are speaking on the same level as Western intellectuals engaged in public debate. I imagine, for example, that the interview with Hanafi just mentioned would connect to fundamentally different texts in the western path to modernity.

³⁶ Cf. Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and beyond*. London: Chatto and Windus, 2000, esp. p. 69-87. To say that historical events mirror clashes of ideas does not oblige one to deny that they mirror clashes of interests as well.

Understandably, then, looking for intertextual connections to a global discourse about modernity and ideas should be a central part of the interpretation of and comment on *Difā'an al-Salām*. In addition to this a number of criteria can be established on the basis of the description of cultural studies above. They can be classified in different levels: (1) the level of the text, (2) the level of the context (the real world outside the text), (3) the level of the reader, and (4) the academic level, which is of a different nature. This division is more or less self-evident. On the level of the text the following features should receive attention:

- Stylistic figures (irony, hidden taunts), style register (colloquial or formal), other linguistic peculiarities
- The representation of international power relations
- The structure of the argument
- The manner in which the text prescribes itself as common sense (or, in other words, claims to represent common sense)

On the level of the context, the extra-textual world, we should pay attention to:

- The central problems that the text is addressing
- The nature of the target audience
- More specifically, the role model of Arab intellectuals (and possibly also the author's self-representation as an intellectual)

The reader is in this case a reader from Western Europe, with an understanding of both Arab culture and Jewish-Israeli culture. That means that on the level of the reader the relationship between the West and the Arabs comes into view. Here the following criteria are especially important:

- The approach should be multiperspectival, sympathizing with many different parties as they are addressed (explicitly or implicitly) by the text. This includes Jews and Israelis.
- There should be an interest in the political implications and consequences of what is said, taking into account the gap of eight years since publication.
- The reading of the text should be interactive as far as possible, opening up the text for the activity of other readers

On the academic level the following criteria apply:

- There should be constant care to remember the gap in status separating Arab culture from English-speaking, dominant culture
- There should be attention to culture-bound communication
- The analysis and comments should be descriptive rather than normative
- There should be an accessible and responsible presentation of the findings

The format I have chosen to live up to these criteria is to present the pamphlet in summarized form. Every so often I add a comment in single spacing pointing out intertextual references and special features of the text. The net result is that the text is so to speak ‘interculturally upgraded’, because it is presented in English (a high-status language) and at a stylistic pitch that would be more easy to connect to for speakers and readers of English.

By doing so I think I have largely succeeded to abide by these criteria in my summary and analysis of *Difā’an ‘an al-Salām* in chapter 5. This does not yet apply to the translation. One would need a very well trained and experienced translator to bridge the communicative gap between Dutch (English) and Arabic in a satisfactory way, which I am not, so the translation is occasionally hard to follow and sparsely commented. Therefore the reader is asked to concentrate on the summary and to turn to the translation only once he or she feels prepared to make the leap to the original unsupported. Let me just point out that pamphlets and political essays are among the most context-bound that there are. Insiders know whose sacred cows are being tipped.

This is not a methodology to compete with Abu-Rabi‘ or anyone else, only to suggest (1) a way in which I think the study of Arab intellectual thought could be responsibly undertaken by Westerners when no other options are open, and (2) how, perhaps, cultural studies could try to describe global power and status realities connected to language and community. But this aspect is for others to reflect on.

2.5 Middle Eastern intellectual controversies

A key text in the intellectual history of the Middle East is a book by Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, a Syrian author with an aristocratic background, called *Al-Naqd al-Dātī ba‘da l-Hazīma* [Self-Criticism after the Defeat]. The defeat that is meant is the disastrous (for the Arabs) June war,

in 1967.³⁷ The book marks the all time low of the Arabs' political and military position.³⁸ A full discussion of the influence of Al-Azm and of this book would merit a separate study, which is of course nonexistent. But I think it is probably true to say that this book represents the first significant attempt by an Arab intellectual to leave the traditional "defender" model and turn to a self-critical stance.³⁹ It is long after Zola, of course, but perhaps one could not have expected Arab writers to adopt this attitude before; in any case, as Saghieh told me, nine out of ten Arab intellectuals still follow the 'defender' model. But Sadiq al-Azm still writes and works; he is one of the most interesting thinkers in the Middle East, an atheist philosopher, whose ideas now travel by satellite TV and tapes to remote corners of the Arab world. If they are appreciated there is another question, they might as well infuriate the local people

Another important (though controversial) intellectual landmark is Kanan Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab world*. Makiya is an Iraqi architect (later professor at Harvard) of Shi'i background, who fled Saddam Husayn's Iraq to write the chilling *Republic of Fear: the Politics of Modern Iraq*. Because the 1991 Gulf War broke out a year after the book finally appeared, it suddenly got a great deal of attention and was frequently reprinted. Then Makiya wrote its sequel, *Cruelty and Silence*, which appeared simultaneously in English, Arabic and Kurdish in 1993. Its first part deals with cruelty; the cruelty of Saddam's actions against suspected dissidents, Shi'ites and especially Kurds. The stories are mind-numbing in their directness and horrific detail. They tell of the attacks with chemical weapons on Kurdish villages, the destruction of Shi'i towns, Saddam's professional rapists (yes, rapists as civil servants), the horrors of his prisons. But then "Silence" accuses most if not all prominent Arab intellectuals of their anti-American, almost pro-Saddam attitude. Very many of them are mentioned by name; it appears that the author was convinced that no patriotism would be a valid excuse not to do everything to bring an end to Saddam's terrible rule over Iraq.

Of course, Al-Azm's book is mentioned and placed in connection to the formation of the PLO in the aftermath of the 1967 war. But according to Makiya, things have got worse

³⁷ Al-Azm has also written critiques of Palestinian thinking, and of religious thinking in general. Note that the title "critique" is borrowed from Kant; Al-Azm is a professor of Philosophy.

³⁸ A quote from Difaa'an illustrates this. 'Even if these days are evil, because of Netanyahu and Al-Daqamisa, they are a thousand times better than at the climax of the heroic period, when we were led by our most heroic hero, Jamal Abd al-Nasser, into a war that destroyed in six days three lands and three armies, and we found our land as dust in the wind and our ideas not worth a penny. Today, Golda Meir (or any one like her) cannot say: "Who are the Palestinians?" They have become a worldwide issue.' *Difa'an*, p. 59. Nothing would have prevented Israel at the time from pushing on and capturing Amman, Damascus or even Cairo.

³⁹ Cf. Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence* (to be discussed below) about the lasting relevance of Al-Azm's work. There are other influential books too that appeared in the same period, a.o. by Al-Qaradawi, Laroui, and Zurayk, but from a secular liberal perspective this was the most important.

since then: there is now even less self-criticism than at that time. Moreover, he writes that Al-Azm's book was still based on a dichotomy: what is wrong with "us" that "they" could defeat us so badly?⁴⁰ The plethora of divergent opinions that came up after 1967 in the end had only one thing in common, its anti-Zionism; all liberal and democratic elements in Arab thought that existed until then were blown away. This opened the way for forms of radical thought, Marxism, Islamism, etcetera. But these have ended up in a simple strategy for blaming the West for everything, thus leading back to the same evading of responsibility that Al-Azm tried to challenge. Still, according to Makiya.

One of the people attacked by Makiya was Edward Said. Perhaps it was this attack that prompted a fierce polemic between Said and Makiya ten years later, in the period shortly before the US led invasion of Iraq of 2003. Makiya was one of the exiled Iraqis supporting the invasion (allegedly even participating in a State Dept. think tank), while Said was vehemently against it. At times the fight got quite nasty. In my view their positions in 2003 had not changed significantly since 1990.

Their clash of opinions is worth mentioning because it illustrates the dilemma about the Iraq invasion, and the difficulties with which Arab intellectuals are faced, quite starkly. Said's accusation before the 1991 Gulf War that the behaviour of pro-US intellectuals helped the US carry out 'cynical' policies sticks, even after 2003, even though undeniably the downfall of Saddam and his imminent trial is a gain. But to be fair to Makiya, undoubtedly he was also appalled by the cultural, moral, and humanitarian destruction the US has wrought in Iraq, paving the way for terrorism and empowering it rather than making the country democratic. As the US administration did not even listen to Tony Blair, what should Arab intellectuals have tried to say or do to influence the US government?

Returning to Makiya's book: it is no doubt a truly admirable challenge to Arab thinkers. Its value lies in its compassion and honest outrage; claims by Said that he was callous and did not show real compassion sound insidious to me. Its central tenet that no consideration of political prestige can be legitimate to reject any attempt to bring an end to such cruelty, is impressive and very respectable. He is no doubt right that anyone directly or indirectly perpetuating the cruelty of these regimes (indirectly e.g. by legitimising it) faces a considerable moral burden. But nevertheless I believe Makiya's guiding principle of 'putting cruelty first' is not

⁴⁰ *Cruelty and Silence*, 313 [Dutch edition: 334]. This book and its footnotes are a very valuable source of information about controversies in the Arab press up to 1992.

as straightforward in its application as Makiya seems to think. (This is effectively what Makiya does: in his book he puts prevention of cruelty and cruel acts before anything else).⁴¹

Firstly, one cannot equate cruelty and evil; there are deeds that are terrible to do but not cruel in the specific sense of someone taking pleasure in inflicting harm or pain on someone else. These deeds can be called cruel in a metaphoric sense, from the perspective of the victim, but that is not all there is. A victim's point of view and capacity for empathy are necessarily limited; one cannot build a political or ethical order only on victims' feelings, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows all too well, because the result is chaos. In many cases 'humiliation' is a more appropriate concept than cruelty. Secondly, in my opinion Makiya has underestimated the political impact of foreign military domination on a nation, which will almost inevitably lead to a form of dependent development. This applies especially to the debate about another Gulf War. On this guideline it would have made good sense to liberate Iraq's Shia and Kurds (in addition to the Kuwaitis in 1992), but not to conquer Baghdad and the Sunni territories, Saddam's basis of support and legitimacy. A comparison will illustrate this. Even now the Third World countries that have never been colonized or for a few years only have a stronger national identity and pride than nations that have never been colonized, and often a more healthy economy. In the case of Japan the fact that it could place a condition on its surrender to the US sixty years ago, to keep the Emperor in his place, has contributed enormously to the nation's stability and modernisation chances (especially since it was an Emperor who initiated Japan's modernisation and westernisation in the first place).

This is what Said has understood much better than Makiya. In politics, identity and communal prestige matter as much as self-interest or even more, when things get tough. Makiya effectively makes all national-collective considerations subordinate to the elimination of cruelty, which makes sense from the point of view of ethical philosophy but not from that of international politics. That is why his book looks like (and can be misrepresented as) a sell-out to the US and to international political realities, even though this is not what it really is.

My excursus about the build-up to the 2003 Gulf War is a pitifully short discussion of a significant debate in Arab intellectual history, and the accusations and insults from both sides have disappeared from it. They are especially relevant because of the unique position of Said and *Orientalism* in Arab intellectual life, a position that certainly has not been studied enough. For the purpose of my argument two factors are important. One, we have witnessed the concern about humanity and compassion in Makiya's book. Two, we have now seen two fairly

⁴¹ *Cruelty and Silence*, p. 326 [Dutch edition: 348].

extreme positions: one veering towards the US and trying hard to see the good in it, the other rejecting it altogether. This last point, in combination with the examples from Hamzawy, illustrates the difficulty for Arab intellectuals such as Saghieh who do not want to fall back in older patterns (conspiracies and blaming the West for everything) but still preserve a measure of solidarity and sympathy with the Palestinians to find a defensible and morally satisfactory position, especially after the Iraq war. Especially finding a basis of values on which a discourse can be built is fraught with difficulties. A notion such as cruelty is unsatisfactory in the long run (even though it might have been the best Makiya could have done, in fact) but specifically modern values are hard to defend when the US makes them subordinate to power politics.

2.6 Economic backwardness and the life of ideas

The last element in the tangle of topics in this chapter comes from Marcel Kurpershoek's 'Wie luidt de doodsklok over de Arabieren?', where I found the hint to look up *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* in the first place. Professor Kurpershoek was Associate Professor at Leiden University for the 'Interaction between Literature and Politics in the Arab world' for a few years, but has made his main career as a diplomat in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is now our Ambassador to Turkey. Brief though his activity at Leiden may have been, his 1998 inaugural lecture remains an entertaining and well written text, with many interesting and revealing quotes.⁴² The piece begins and ends with examples of the Arab poets Kurpershoek admires: the obscure tribal poet Bukhitān, and the cosmopolitan, world wise poet Nizar al-Kabbani. Moving from poetry to hard realities, he delivers a strong judgement on the development of the Arab world in the last 30 years. He mentions how it has lost its head start vis-à-vis, e.g. Southeast Asia, how the use of pan-Arabism and Islam as political tools has turned to a fiasco, how conspiracy theories are rife, and how at long last substantial criticism begins to lift its voice, especially from Arabs living in the Diaspora. This is, understandably, where Saghieh comes in. Kurpershoek gives a series of figures about economic, demographic and ecological disaster, political atrophy (the failure of inter-Arab cooperation), and the strongly negative effect of the oil riches on development. 'Without oil, the region would not have become the

⁴² Kurpershoek, "Wie luidt de doodsklok over de Arabieren"? I am using in the article form in which it later appeared, in a volume of his collected articles and speeches under the same title.

theme park of languishing authenticity it is now, and have created for itself a better position to start working on the future'.⁴³

In Kurpershoek's view there is a link between intellectual progress, let us say progress on the level of ideas, and political and economic progress. Another quote makes this connection more explicit. 'It is not so hard to point to causes of this situation [of stagnation], although these causes in themselves do not offer an explanation. For that one probably needs to look at the mental infrastructure of the region, the source code so to speak, as it is described by Louis Auwad, Hazim Saghie, Nasr Aboe Zeid [i.e. authors he has just discussed] and other authors to which the Faculty of Arts and Humanities gives access, and not the World Bank.'⁴⁴

In view of the above I suggest we strikethrough 'probably'. Kurpershoek's suggestion that intellectual activity by poets, academics and writers is directly relevant to progress and development issues is not shared very widely, as the lack of Western scholarly attention to Arab thought and ideas indicates. By contrast, concern about the Arabs' social and economic plight is widespread, now even more so than in 1998. I strongly believe that when reading Saghieh's pamphlet we should take the political, humanitarian and socio-economic situation of the Arab countries into account, as it is the context against which the responsibility of intellectuals must be judged (in line with Makiya's book). An article of his which I present in the next chapter further demonstrates Saghieh's concern about these issues.

2.7 Conclusion

What I have tried to show in this chapter is the following. Academic politics (even including challenges to academic freedom), real politics and the fury of the debate among Arab intellectuals themselves have created a chaotic situation in which it has become very difficult to approach interesting texts such as *Difā'an al-Salām* in an open-minded and neutral fashion. As a solution to this problem I have argued that a cultural studies approach is potentially suited to surmount the problems caused by the sound and fury of politics, academic or real. Some criteria have been developed. A multiperspectival reading of a text such as *Difā'an al-Salām* might prove to be a healthy antidote to the extremes in the debate.

⁴³ Op. cit., p. 23. Original quote: 'Zonder olie was deze regio niet een reservaat van verkommerde authenticiteit geworden en had zij zich althans een betere uitgangspositie voor de toekomst kunnen scheppen'.

⁴⁴ Kurpershoek, op. cit. p. 22. Original quote: 'Het is niet zo moeilijk om oorzaken voor deze situatie aan te wijzen, hoewel die oorzaken op zichzelf geen verklaring bieden. Voor dat laatste moet men waarschijnlijk eerder zijn bij de mentale infrastructuur van de regio, de broncode om in computertermen te spreken, zoals geanalyseerd door Louis Auwad, Hazim Saghie, Nasr Aboe Zeid, en anderen tot wie de Letterenfaculteit toegang geeft, en niet de Wereldbank.'

We have seen a parallel historical development in Western and Arab intellectual roles: the changing role of public intellectuals from the ‘defender’ model to a more critical model. Lastly, we have noted the exceptionally narrow playing field for liberal Arab intellectuals who want to avoid the cheap anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism of the Arab street, but who also feel concerned about cruel and despotic acts such as Saddam’s rule and/or about the oppression and humiliation of Arab populations. As the Arabs find that the West does not care about their opinion nor about the real consequences of its own acts, it becomes very hard to find a coherent discourse that will stand a chance in the ears of public opinion. Meanwhile the economic, political and social situation in the Arab world remains dismal.

My text in some of the following chapters, especially the key chapter 5, might be compared to a three-step dance: one step in the “Arab” direction, then a step in the “Israeli” direction, and then a step in the “Western” direction, all in different orders (and excluding ‘faux pas’, of course). To some extent that implies standing on all toes equally long. Put more positively, I try to respect what is good in both opposing views, the pro-Arab (Palestinian) and the pro-Israeli, and to be conscious of the controversial role of Western policies and the biases in Western discourse.

Reading Saghieh’s text is a way to break the oppositions, because his aim is similar: as my title already promised, it is an attempt to argue a compromise. But in reading Saghieh I do not want to promote him as a kind of model Arab, a solo voice of modernity and reason against a chorus of irredentism and fanaticism so to speak. However close to reality such a picture might come it would mean falling in an old trap, the one termed by Richard W. Bulliet as ‘looking for love in all the wrong places’, because it would obfuscate that any authentic Arab discourse for peace and modern values would be significantly different from what a Western public would expect or like to hear.⁴⁵ It would overlook the culturally related differences in communication and the effort that is always needed to overcome them. And in any case ‘the chorus’ – the mainstream of Arab public opinion – also has true and valuable convictions.

The crux of notions such as international human rights, self-determination, and sovereignty is inevitably their application when Western powers do not like the political effects they bring. In a truly global debate about these issues, Arab voices have a contribution of their own to make.

⁴⁵ Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Community and Writings

3.1 Community

Many readers who are familiar with Lebanon will have been waiting for the announcement that Saghieh's background is Lebanese Christian. Well, it is: Greek Orthodox. A few explanations are in order to clarify what this means.⁴⁶ After that I will take the reader through two texts: a contribution of Saghieh's to *Time* magazine, which is quoted in full as it circulates on the internet anyway, and a prize-winning article from *Al-Ḥayāt* (written with Saleh Bashir) which I offer through long quotes and discussion.

The Greek Orthodox community is Lebanon's second most important Christian community after the Maronites; as all Lebanese Christian and Muslim denominations its character is part religious and part socio-ethnic. Lebanon's population is over 40% Arab Christian. As opposed to the Maronites, who mainly live in the mountains, the Greek Orthodox are mostly city-dwellers. The Christian communities were often singled out for protection by the European great powers in the 19th century: the French and Italians would reach out to the Maronites and other Uniate Catholics, the Russians to the Greek Orthodox community, and the Protestant powers (United States and Britain) to all communities to make converts and establish their own denominations. Also the Catholics tried to make converts; in this way the Greek and Syrian Catholic churches came into being. (Of course these efforts at making converts were deeply resented by the old communities).

Because of the advantages of the protection and the services (schools, presses) the missionaries offered the Arab Christians developed a cultural head start against the various Muslim communities in the Middle East. Generally speaking, Western ideas were accepted more quickly by them than by Muslims. This picture applies to basically all of the Arab Middle East, except the Arabian peninsula, but Lebanon was at the head of developments since it had a large Christian population and was easily accessible from the sea. As for the Greek Orthodox, their partnership with Russia was on a much more equal basis than the relationships between other Western religious communities and their protégés. They recognised each other as being of the same faith, while the other Christian communities were approached with differing degrees of arrogance and condescension. This put the Orthodox in a better position to accept the valuable elements of the offered Western protection. Politically they chose a course opposed to the Maronites. Because of their strength in numbers and their history the Ma-

ronites tried to build a sectarian Christian community, which was not based on a common Arab identity. (This is what Israel tried to make use of in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon). By contrast, the Greek Orthodox are considered the most Arab of the Christians. Citing examples such as John of Damascus (a Church father and for a long time an high official under the Umayyad Caliphs) most of them are in favour of accepting Islam as an essential part of the heritage and identity of the Middle East. The notion of an “Arab nation” was developed by a Greek Orthodox writer, 100 years ago. Intercommunal co-operation on the basis of equality was their ideal. Understandably the Maronites and Greek Orthodox go together as well as garlic and baklava, as it is said.

In the 1960s Lebanon was the cultural heart of the Arab world, thanks to the head start in relations with the West, but also because it was then the only Arab state with a liberal political and economic outlook (against the socialist, revolutionary or Islamic models of their surrounding countries). Since the 1940s there has been a division of political power between Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shi’a Muslims, which means that the President has to be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi’ite. These three officials have to cooperate to achieve anything. The influx of a large number of Palestinian refugees in 1967 and the foundation of the PLO with its armed gangs disrupted the precarious sectarian balance of the state. Especially after its expulsion from Jordan in 1970 it relocated its activities to Lebanon, and now this is seen as one of the causes for the civil war.

Most of Lebanon’s liberal culture went down in the Civil War but still its media are among the best in the Arab world, and most of the best Arab journalists are Lebanese. In this sense Saghieh’s background can be considered fairly typical, although he obviously made more of his chances than others. Saghieh himself is old enough to have experienced Lebanon both as it was before the 1975 civil war and during the war, and as a journalist he has witnessed its reconstruction (and even though he has worked in London since 1988 he still returns to Lebanon frequently). A few words about his living abroad: also this should not surprise us. London is now a big centre of Arabic thought and culture, probably bigger than any Arab capital city, mainly thanks to its status as the base of three major newspapers.

It is nice to mention that Saghieh’s wife is an intellectual just as much as he is, but with different interests. Mai Ghossoub is a sculptor, feminist and founding director of Dār al-Sāqī, a well known Arabic bookstore in London and publishing house. She is very much interested in aspects of culture (how things are written and expressed, style, emotions etc.) but

⁴⁶ The following is partly based on A. Wessels, *Arab and Christian? Christians in the Middle East*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995. (Especially Chapters III and V)

not in politics. She has edited and contributed to several significant volumes: *Imagined masculinities: male identity and culture in the modern Middle East* (2000) and *Leaving Beirut: women and the wars within* (1998). It would have been worth devoting some attention to her work but it does not seem to be feasible for me to do this.

3.2 Publications

One of the people mentioned in Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence*, discussed in the last chapter, is Hazem Saghieh. Among other things he is credited with a defence of Palestinian author Emile Habibi when he was awarded and accepted Israel's most important literary prize, when most of the Arab world heaped abuse on him. He is also mentioned as one of the first Arab journalists to write about the Kurds. Most importantly, his name appears in the acknowledgments (as does the name of Mai Ghossoub) for having read and commented on a first version of the book. This is significant insofar as it means he will be familiar with, and probably sympathetic towards, Makiya's critique of Arab intellectuals.

On the internet some more of his texts can be found. The most eye-catching discovery is a one-page contribution to the Viewpoint section of *Time* magazine, but there is also a short piece in the Observer, some speeches and especially a large number of columns for Al-Hayāt. There is also an article in the ISIM newsletter about individualism and suicide bombers, and there are several excerpts from his articles on the websites of MEMRI (the Washington-based Middle East Media Research Institute). But as it is known that MEMRI's excerpts tend to be selective it is imprudent to rely too heavily on them.⁴⁷ We also find one recent edited volume in English: *The Predicament of the Individual and the Middle East* (1999) and an article in German discussing a prize-winning article "Universalizing the Holocaust" written jointly by Saghieh and Salih Bashir.⁴⁸ Apparently they were awarded a prize for Middle East journalism by the NGO Search For Common Ground. Sadly there is no trace of a jury report. Lastly, there are some ten titles in Arabic, of which the most recent is again written together with Saleh Bashir: *The Shattering of the Arab Middle East: the bloody peace in Iraq and Palestine*, 2004. Of 2003 is *The Ba 'th of Iraq: Saddam's rule from rise till ruin*. In 2000 he published *The Nationalists of the Mashriq between Dreyfus and Garaudy*, and in 1999, *Farewell to Arabism*. Titles earlier than *Difā'an al-Salām*, apart from the few already mentioned in Chap-

⁴⁷ Its translations are useful and (as far as I know) reliable. Nevertheless MEMRI is a source of information that should be used very carefully because of the organisation's political orientation. Cf. *ISIM Review* 15 (Spring 2005), p. 5.

ter 1, discuss Umm Kulthum (the immortal Egyptian singer) and the ‘cultures of Khomeinism’. It is an impressive list by any standards. As he told me, he has been working on a study of President Woodrow Wilson’s concept of internationalism as compared to Lenin’s internationalism (almost simultaneously).⁴⁹

A remarkable feature of *The Predicament of the Individual in the Middle East*, Saghiech’s 1999 edited volume with substantial contributions by himself and his wife, is that it contains no less than three articles about Israel. One by Yaron Ezrahi (‘Individualism and collectivism in Israel’), one by Gadi Taub (‘The Shift in Israeli Ideas Concerning the Individual and the Collective’), and one by Emmanuel Sivan, (‘The Peripeteia of Commemoration’). Evidently it has been his purpose to present Israel as fully part of the Middle East. Among these three Sivan’s contribution stands out. Sivan, who is a historian of Islam at the Hebrew University, writes here about the changing ways in which Israelis have lamented their fallen soldiers. The piece has many touching literary quotes, filled by the immense power of Jewish commemorative traditions: they talk about the futility of loss of life, the complacency of the army, the loss of friends, the *yizkor* books, the few personal items and unopened letters full of anguish that family would get back. No reader would be unmoved, which was no doubt what Sivan and Saghiech intended.⁵⁰ The book has been published in Arabic in 2005.

3.3 “It’s not all America’s fault”.

On October 15, 2001 Hazem Saghiech contributed a one-page article in the Viewpoint section of *Time* magazine, reacting on the September 11th attacks. Let us try to read it over carefully; my comments should help the reader absorb its worth and avoid distractions. The first obstacle for our reading is found in the first few lines already.

IT’S NOT ALL AMERICA’S FAULT⁵¹

[1] Millions of Arabs and Muslims hold U.S. foreign policy responsible for the calamity of Sept. 11. Is it? The answer is yes, but also no.

[2] The yes has been widely articulated. Yes, there was and is a deep sense of frustration because of the bias shown by the U.S. to Israel and because of Amer-

⁴⁸ Exact transcription: Şālih al-Başīr. He is a Tunisian journalist based in Paris.

⁴⁹ As he explained in an e-mail: ‘The idea was that both nationalisms, the ‘rightist’ Wilsonian and the ‘leftist’ Leninist, are being deserted nowadays under the influence of identities and their rise. This is sad.’

⁵⁰ This very valuable collection would merit far more sustained attention than I can give it. But in its two-part structure it nicely betrays the interests of Saghiech and Ghoussoub: part I is entitled ‘Politics and Society’, part II ‘Culture and Creative Expression’. As it is said in Proverbs, “Eshet khayil mi yimtsah...” (31.10).

⁵¹ Note regarding copyright: since this piece is easily available on the internet I have felt free, for the reader’s convenience, to include it in full.

ica's cruel insistence on continued sanctions against Iraq. Plus, for historical reasons, Muslims and Arabs can always feel bitterness toward America: in the early 1950s, the CIA helped topple the elected government of Iran to reinstall the Shah. In the late 1980s, U.S. left Afghanistan very messy after using it as a battleground against the Soviets.

[3] But there is a no here as well, which hasn't been voiced much in the Arab world. Certainly the international community has a responsibility to address the political grievances of Muslim societies, especially the Palestinian question, and try to reduce the poverty and inequality endemic in most of the Middle East. But no effort at redress by the West will work unless the Muslim world as a whole rethinks its relation to modernity. Why is it that Africa, though poorer and more hurt by the West, did not create a terrorist phenomenon? Why did Latin America export its "purest" terrorist product, Carlos the Jackal, to the Middle East?

[4] The reasons lie in the fact that we in the Muslim world have not been able to overcome the trauma caused by colonialism. We could not open up to the tools that modernity suggested, for the simple reason that they were introduced by way of colonialism. Our oil wealth allowed us to import the most expensive consumer commodities, but we could not overcome our suspicions of outside political and ideological goods: democracy, secularism, the state of law, the principle of rights and, above all, the concept of the nation-state, which was seen as a conspiracy to fragment our old empire.

[5] A certain fixation on the past took hold alongside a deep uneasiness with the present. Religious reform did not take off. The Muhammad Abdu project to renew Islam the way Martin Luther reformed Christianity ended at the turn of 19th century in disarray, opening the way to more extreme versions of the religion. Efforts to modernize the Arab language and bridge the gap between the spoken vernaculars and the written classical did not materialize. Public spheres – such as a free press, trade unions, civil societies – for debating matters related to the common good were not established. And most important, Muslims and Arabs never resolved the question of political legitimacy. They failed to develop workable models, which has made every attempt at political change long and dangerous.

[6] The question of legitimacy is flagrant in Iran, where President Mohammed Khatami and his supporters won all the popular elections but could not win real power, which instead resides with Ayatullah Ali Khamenei. In Syria it seems there is no way out of Hafez Assad's authoritarian legacy. If Saddam Hussein finally falls from power in Iraq, heaven knows who might replace him, so ruthless has he been in suppressing rivals. Yasser Arafat's lack of a mandate has made him unable to make historic decisions in the peace process, so he instead alternates between directions.

[7] The weak legitimacy of local regimes leaves the most essential themes of social and political destiny hanging, creating a vacuum to be filled only populist politicians and extremist groups, by wars and civil wars. By failing to establish effective polities, we have perpetuated our impotence, making it all the harder to catch up with the West. Lebanon, the only pluralistic example in the Arab world, was destroyed by its own religious sects and its neighbors. Among the states in the area that don't work or barely do so are Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan, Algeria and Lebanon.

[8] Arab intellectuals, who ought to encourage change, have largely failed in that role. For the most part, they did not detach themselves from the tribal tradition of defending the "enemy". Their priority has not been to criticize the incredible shortcomings that they live with. They tend ceaselessly to highlight their "oneness". Thus they help stereotype themselves before being stereotyped by any enemy. It is in this particular history and this particular culture, and not in any alleged clash of civilizations, that the roots of our wretched present lie.

The beginning of this piece looks like at least half of an enormous statement. How could he talk about the U.S. being responsible for such a cruel act of terrorism, even partially? Isn't he morally legitimising terrorism here? If we had not known so much about the author before, our reaction might even have run parallel to Jay Nordlinger's, the Managing Editor of the *National Review*, a few weeks later.⁵²

'I call your attention to a remarkable piece in Time magazine by one Hazem Saghiyeh, a columnist for an Arabic newspaper in London. It is titled "It's Not All America's Fault" (don't you love that "All"?). The piece begins, "Millions of Arabs and Muslims hold U.S. foreign policy responsible for the calamity of Sept. 11 [I like that "calamity," too — just like the San Francisco earthquake was a calamity]. Is it? The answer is: yes, but also no." The piece continues in this vein, and I will not quote more. But what is noteworthy is that this must be Time's idea of a moderate Arab voice — and who can argue with them?'

The *National Review* is one of the oldest and best established periodicals of the conservative press in the US. Our knowledge of Saghih's record protects us from at least one unfortunate misunderstanding of Nordlinger's. It's not that Saghih is *Time*'s idea of a 'moderate Arab voice' (to use Nordlinger's expression), he is a moderate Arab voice, so much is certain. But why then did Saghih say this? The answer is fairly obvious. 'Responsible' [mas'ul] is a word that is ubiquitous in Arabic prose. It recurs in a similar fashion at the beginning of [3]. Just as Americans and Europeans ask who is to blame when things go wrong, Arabs ask who is responsible, but their word for it is more neutral: other and often better translations of "mas'ul" are 'liable, answerable'. It is more like asking for a cause than pointing at a moral failure. So what we are dealing with here is a misunderstanding in intercultural communication of a fairly usual kind. There is no reason to suppose that Saghih intended this statement to go beyond a summary of the anti-US clamour of the Arab world. He is just expressing partial assent to their criticism of US foreign policy for the reasons mentioned in the article. There is a subtle difference between trying to understand and explain terrorism and to legitimise it, a difference that got messed up in translation. For this reason it would be a waste to let our moral outrage run away with us and not read the piece properly, just like Nordlinger.⁵³

⁵² Jay Nordlinger, *National Review Online*, Impromptus section, "Victims and victimizers, just plain "Osama," Columbia's new prez, &c." October 12, 2001.

⁵³ Note that from a cultural studies perspective we must notice the power and status differences at work here. There is an enormous status gap between Americans and Arabs, or English speakers and non-English speakers. This means that on the transcultural level Nordlinger has a position of power which he can use to establish communication or make it impossible. But he is presumably thinking only of his American readership. I would argue that this attitude represents a moral choice that is very questionable.

In actual fact Saghieh's piece goes well beyond typical Arab discourse, by listing the miseries and failings of the Arab world and of the Muslim countries and their continuing stagnation. Notable is the stance against continued sanctions against Iraq, which he calls 'cruel'.⁵⁴ This stands out the more since he surprisingly (for an article so soon after 9/11) nowhere expresses politically correct sympathy with the victims or outrage at attacks themselves. At this point Nordlinger's picking at the word 'calamity' is understandable. (If it is not another mistranslation Saghieh might have chosen this word because of the immense political damage done to the image and strategic position of the Arabs by the attacks. He laments this damage in an article published in *Al-Ḥayāt* on 15 September 2001, found in translation on the MEMRI site.) But at this point we can only guess at his reasons for not showing more emotion.

For Western readers there is a subtle paradox in paragraph [3-4]. It is not immediately obvious why the West needs to address the grievances, the poverty and inequality of the Muslim world – except because these problems were part created, part reinforced by colonialism (second paragraph). But is this enough to warrant this claim? Why can't they do it themselves? Therefore, does not the statement in [3] sound like the same kind of emotional dependency that the text tries to challenge in [4]? Or is this another case of Saghieh using the concept of responsibility in a different way than Europeans would? Let's leave it open.

But at the same time the point Saghieh makes about the consequences of colonialism is true and important. It is a fact that the Arabs and Muslims have encountered and sometimes adopted liberal ideas all through the 19th and first half of the 20th century, only to be confronted with colonial powers and arbitrary, undemocratic interventions such as the toppling of the Mosaddeq government in Iran mentioned by Saghieh. This means they have encountered these ideas in a distorted form. The divide and rule politics mentioned before (chapter 1) practiced by the colonial powers in Syria/Lebanon are real enough in their consequences.⁵⁵

The observations in [4-5] about the effects of oil wealth and the role of the past are widely shared, we have already encountered them in Kurpershoek's inaugural lecture in 2.6 above. At this point there does not seem any particular reason any more to doubt the accuracy of the text and its diagnosis of the ills of Arab society. Many themes come up: weak legiti-

⁵⁴ In the US the debate on the Iraq deadlock was different from the one in Europe; over there, the option of a second war was closer to people's and politicians' minds than it ever was in Europe, as the former Dutch Ambassador to the UN, Mr Van Walsum, pointed out in the Dutch media.

⁵⁵ The colonial powers consciously tried to counter Arab national movements and in the case of Lebanon and Syria redrew historical borders with this purpose. Cf. P.P.T.W. van Caldenborgh, *Savage human beasts or the purest Arabs? The incorporation of the Alawi community into the Syrian state during the French mandate period (1918-1946)*. Nijmegen Ph.D. Diss., 2005.

macy of regimes, failing states, unfinished religious reform, weakness of civil society, ruthless authoritarian leaders, Islamist challenges, wars, the fate of Lebanon. It is fairly obvious that Saghiech here speaks from long and deeply sad inside experience, both as a media professional and as a Lebanese.

The point about the silence of intellectuals [8] recalls Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence*, confirming the impression that Saghiech has taken the message of this book to heart.⁵⁶ In the last line, we see how the text has gradually moved away from its opening question about 9/11. Especially the 'our' in line 60, 'our wretched present', is striking: it is as if the author forgets that he is addressing an international public. It makes best sense as a reference to the Muslims and Arabs. We have already seen him use 'us' and 'we' loosely in the introductory passages of *Difā'an*, to refer to 'us Arabs'.

To conclude: in my opinion it is fairly clear that Saghiech is speaking in this article from long and sad inside knowledge of the Arab world, and its meagre prospects for development. Also we see that he is trying to walk a middle ground between the dominant rhetoric from the US camp and the howling from the Arab world. Because of its long section about everything that's wrong the point of the argument is almost obscured, but it must be that although Arab criticism at the US and the colonial powers remains justified, the Arabs are also to blame for the desperate situation in which they find themselves, especially the intellectuals.

One last point to illustrate the precarious balance between cultures and audiences: the headline (which may or may not have been supplied by *Time*) does not quite fit the body of the article. For an Arab audience it would have been fine, but not so much for a Western audience. The key argument is that the Arabs should reconsider their relationship to modernity before anything can be done.

3.4 "Universalizing the Holocaust"

In 1999 Hazem Saghiech and Saleh Bashir won a prize for an article, written jointly, entitled "Universalizing the Holocaust" (Saleh Bashir was also the co-author of *Taşaddu' al-Mashriq al-Arabi*, Saghiech's latest publication, on Iraq and Israel). It was one of the three Common Ground Awards for Journalism in the Middle East of that year, awarded through the NGO Search for Common Ground, and sponsored by the J. Zel Lurie Fund for Investigative Journalism in memory of Father Bruno Hussar. Its news bulletin gave the following motivation:

⁵⁶ 'Defending the enemy' in the text is an unhappy expression, it should of course be 'warding off' or defending [the tribe / nation] against the enemy.

Writing in the pan-Arab *Al-Hayat*, the authors caution readers about the danger to Arab-Israeli relations if Arabs continue to minimize the significance of the Holocaust. They show insight into the role that the Holocaust plays in the psyche of the Israeli people. They also explain the significance of the Holocaust to Jews and the reasons why Arabs have resisted acknowledging the importance of the Holocaust in Israeli society.

The authors promote the start of a discourse between Arabs and Jews about the lessons of the Holocaust and the development of a "shared history." They write: "Coexistence on the land of Palestine between the two peoples is unlikely as long as each side is living its own history, alongside the other or in isolation from the other. To have coexistence, each side will have to assimilate the history of the other, even make it its own, based on what the Holocaust has entailed for both of them separately or together."⁵⁷

As a consequence of the award the article was translated into Hebrew and English for *Haaretz*, Israel's most liberal newspaper (21 February 2000).⁵⁸ It appears that there is rather more to the article – more insight as well as more controversial statements – than this statement shows.

The authors begin by noting the broad attention to the Holocaust, especially in Europe: France (the admission of French complicity), Germany (the debate about Goldhagen's controversial book), and even neutral countries such as Switzerland (the Nazi gold), Sweden and Portugal.⁵⁹ But then they ask, why is this so? The obvious Arab answer, Zionist manipulation, is simplistic: President Mitterrand was very sympathetic to the Jews and Israel but never went as far as Chirac. The authors suggest that the current represents a deepening of the values of these democratic societies.⁶⁰ 'It is as if the West, which sees itself as the creator of the highest civilizations, cannot forgive itself or each other for having programmed a crime of the magnitude of the Holocaust (...)' But then they leave this issue and move to the Arab connection:

⁵⁷ www.sfcg.org/Bulletin/Bul32/update_feature.htm. I do not know of any more extensive jury report – perhaps there wasn't one. In spite of the elaborate title it is not a very big prize. Remarkably I could not even find the exact reference to the issue of *Al-Hayat* in which it originally appeared.

⁵⁸ It can still be obtained from the *Haaretz* archive. I hope and trust it is a translation from the Arabic and not from the Hebrew, which I cannot check. www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/arch/ArchSearchEngArt.jhtml Apparently it has also been reprinted in the *Palestine Israel Journal* 3-4 (1999) p. 90-91 but I have not been able to verify this link. It is not in the online version of the journal.

⁵⁹ Saghieh and Bashir were too early to include The Netherlands in their overview, if they had wanted to. The issue about the unjust treatment of returning victims was only resolved in 2000. Cf. Ben Trachtenberg and Edgar Hütte, "With negotiations finished, what now? Efforts by Dutch Jews to gain restitution for property lost during World War II." www.humanityinaction.org/docs/programs/2000report.pdf, p. 144-154.

⁶⁰ At one level Bashir and Saghieh are certainly right, but it seems to me that they somewhat overlooked the historical dimension of the unfolding of the Holocaust memory in Europe. Ever since the Second World War new facets have come up, which had never been dealt with before as they appeared to be of lesser moral importance. It is true that this a facet that can be very easily overlooked. See Darren Teshima and Matthijs Kronemeijer, "A

The Holocaust is the most complex and intractable knot in the Middle East (...). If the Arab side has failed, with a few exceptions, to comprehend the reality of the Holocaust, and to appreciate its impact on modern human conscience, the Jewish side, specifically the Israeli one, has also failed because of its extreme involvement in its own painful experience to conceive of any other injustice - specifically its subjugation of the Palestinians. The Arabs and Palestinians have adopted the widespread belief that the admission of the Holocaust constitutes a recognition of Israel's right to exist. So they chose to doubt or question it, or even to meet with a measure of glee the denial of its existence in some Western circles.

The 'measure of glee' refers to the reception of the books of Roger Garaudy in the Arab world, where they appeared in many translations (some pirated).⁶¹ Garaudy was invited to lecture at the Cairo International Book Fair of 1998, and received financial support and backing before his trial for Holocaust denial (although not always the support his lawyer was happy with!). Many of the great and good of the Arab world spoke out in support of him, including Rafiq Hariri, Shaykh Muhammad al-Tantawi, Naguib Mahfuz, and Muhammad Hasanayn Haikal.⁶² Saghieh and Bashir explain this reaction through the pattern of victimization: 'how can the paradigmatic victim, in its turn, produce another victim?' Also they point out that it reflects the Israeli logic that connects Israel and the Holocaust. But according to them, this situation cannot last:

'The evocation and commemoration of the Holocaust will not yield unending benefits for Israel and will not help justify all its actions. (...) The dissociation between the acknowledgment of the Holocaust and what Israel is doing should be the starting point for the development of a discourse which says that the Holocaust does not free the Jewish state or the Jews of accountability. On the contrary, the Nazi crime compounds their moral responsibility and exposes them to greater answerability. (...) Modern Jewish consciousness can no longer look at the world from the exclusive perspective of the Holocaust, in spite of the magnitude of the event. (...) To be rid of the burden of this dark heritage, is above all to the advantage of the Jews themselves. In the political sense, it means that fundamentalism and extremism cannot take advantage of the collective symbols of the suffering of nations. (...) In another sense, Jews will be able to get on with their lives, relieved to a great extent from the past and its sufferings. And if the memory of the Holocaust comes between the Jews and their ability to live in and to cope with this world, in particular, their capacity to coexist with that other people at whose expense the "Jewish question" was solved, it will be a victory for Hitlerism after its defeat. (...) Bridging the gap here is the only assurance that the Holocaust will be moved from its place in European history and exclusive European centrality, to the

founding Myth for the Netherlands? The Second World War and the Victimization of Dutch Jews." www.humanityinaction.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4&Itemid=5 (In 2000 report, p.23)

⁶¹ The following is based on Goetz Nordbruch, "The Socio-historical Background of Holocaust Denial in Arab Countries: Arab reactions to Roger Garaudy's *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics*." The argument of the article is somewhat unstructured but I assume the research is reliable. <http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/17nordbruch.html>

⁶² Former Lebanese Prime Minister, Nobel Prize laureate, al-Azhar shaykh, and renowned historian, respectively. Cf. Mouna Naim, "Critiqué, jugé, sanctionné pour ses thèses en France, l'ancien théoricien du PC [parti communiste], Roger Garaudy, est décoré et louangé dans les pays arabes," *Le Monde*, 1 March 1998. I owe this reference to Nordbruch. Garaudy ended up with a fine of 120,000 French Francs, approx. 20,000 Euros.

universal dimension it deserves. (...) This bridging, however, will not be complete without a reconciliation with the non-European region that has reaped the consequence of the Nazi act. If the memory of the Holocaust remains exclusivist and indifferent to the injustices heaped upon others because of it, a moral impasse will be reached where the shrewdest and most skilled arguments and publicity will be futile.

It is a bit theatrical to describe the possibility of an ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a 'victory for Hitlerism' but that does not diminish the power of what Bashir and Saghiech are saying here. Their text constitutes a warning to Israel that one-dimensional use of the Shoah as propaganda will do themselves and the world no good.⁶³ To cap the plea for cross-community empathy with each other's tragedy, which in the authors' opinion is much more difficult than redrawing borders and cutting political deals, we find the following statement:

It is possible to go further and say that one of the most important conditions governing the worthiness of the Jews to maintain the heritage of the Holocaust is in their dealing with Palestinians. Any injustice perpetrated by Israel against them or any denial of their rights will be tantamount to an infringement of the sanctity of the Holocaust, which has become a yardstick for universalistic values.

It is a statement that I find hard to comment on, although at least its vision of universal values is sympathetic. But this aspect of the 'universalizing' is what commentators have picked on.⁶⁴ In any case, from this point some confusion and disputable statements begin to appear in the article, especially as the authors do not distinguish sharply enough between the Jewish dimension of the Holocaust (which is of course inalienable) and its Israeli dimension, I mean the way in which the suffering of part of its population and its claim to represent the victims have determined Israel's history and politics. This is a much more ambiguous story.⁶⁵ It is Israelis who deal with the Palestinians, not Jews, many of whom would like the Israelis to pursue a very different policy. (This tension will reappear later, in chapter 6).

Admirable as Bashir and Saghiech's argument is, especially when compared to the garbage the large majority of Arabs produces regarding Jews and the Holocaust, I will allow myself the comment that one must be very wary to draw parallel lines to Jewish and Arab-Palestinian suffering. I do not feel that the authors have quite succeeded in this. Certainly no deed of Israel is comparable to the industrialized and systematic killing that is called the

⁶³ The psychological connection between the Shoah and anti-Palestinian violence has been investigated by a.o. Dan Bar-On, a leftist Professor of Psychology at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

⁶⁴ E.g. Peter Rhein, "Vom Kampf zur Koexistenz. Arabischer Anti-Semitismus und die Leugnung der Katastrophe." *HaGalil online* 23-04-2000. It is still on the net and can easily be found with any good search engine.

⁶⁵ It is not very clear yet how the relationship between Zionism-Israel and the Holocaust has to be seen. Mostly this is the domain of the New Historians, who tend to emphasise the separateness of events in Israel and in Nazi Europe. To my knowledge there are no adequate defences of Zionism to complement them, but I may be wrong.

Shoah. It represents 'destruction', not 'disaster'. Whatever horrible parallel the Arabs might wish to think of, there are different categories. In this sense there certainly are aspects of the suffering (on both sides) that will remain impossible to bear. The challenges in this respect remain unequal between Israelis and Palestinians, even though each group's psycho-social requirements will have to be dealt with on an equal basis at the political level, if the vision of Saghieh and Bashir is ever to become a reality.

Chapter 4: Development and Media

4.1 States

In this chapter I will offer some background information, based on academic sources, about development issues in the Arab world and the Arab media landscape. It is not an attempt to give an up to date survey, if anyone could ever do that. The aim is to provide a rough understanding of the context in which Arab intellectuals have to work, and the practical limitations they have to face to get their message across. In the following two sections I begin with discussing development, through the Arab Human Development Reports and a few other sources, with Lebanon as the example. Then I move to the media with extra attention to publishing and newspapers. Both sections are intended to offer insights in stable patterns that affect the realities on the ground of the Middle East, and to find out which role the media and/or intellectual efforts can play in improving these realities.

The Middle East is in a state of change but nobody knows quite in which direction. In one of his policy papers for the Carnegie Endowment (March 2005) Amr Hamzawy phrased the common ignorance quite elegantly, and drew a reasonable conclusion:

Recent political changes in Arab countries reveal a heterogeneous and ambivalent overall picture. It would be misleading to reduce its complexity by referring to one grand narrative, be it that of democracy or militant Islamism. To be sure, both explain central aspects of reality; however, they fail to account for other phenomena as dominant as the emergence of ethno-religious conflicts and the rediscovery of the nation-state. Equally, the current regional scene lends no credibility to attempts geared toward identifying one of the three described trends — democratization, ethno-religious conflicts, and return of the nation-state — as the more viable future scenario. What is certain is that the Arab world of 2005 is in flux.⁶⁶

So we do not know what is going on, but we should take care with overriding narratives that maintain that the region is moving towards democracy, or to Islamic fundamentalism, or strengthening of the Arab nation-state. Two of the three mentioned currents, the rise of fundamentalism and the move towards democracy are readily visible for those interested, especially in Iraq. The strengthening of the Arab nation state and re-orientation toward domestic politics is a less common point. Hamzawy discusses Lebanon and the peace demonstration as an example (no sectarian or party flags, only Lebanese), but also mentions Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain as examples. Especially in Egypt, there is much less anti-US and anti-Israel rhetoric than before. So he concludes: ‘The nation-state is back in the Arab reality, and

with it comes a degree of political pragmatism long absent in the region.’⁶⁷ This is an observation that is useful to keep in mind. But in the case of Lebanon the situation is usually more ambiguous than it looks; in any case, there the state is the logical framework to keep the much poorer Syrians out. A friend told me that lots of people he knew had participated in both demonstrations that drew the world’s attention, the one against Syria and the one in favour of it. Why? Good question...

In this context we are reminded of Saghieh mentioning of failing states in the broader Middle East (in the *Time* article above, Chapter 3). In an address for the RSA in London (in which he promised his readers to give them some ‘happy nightmares’, as he said he is known as a pessimist), his interest in the role of the state became more explicit. In this text (February 6, 2002) he stated that in the latest war (meaning terror, Guantánamo Bay and Afghanistan) the first casualty had not just been truth but human rights.⁶⁸ The half-hearted consensus during the 80s and 90s had been worth at least something, but has now gone:

(...) the response in the Third World to 11 September. It looks as if the problem is not only the supply of democracy; there is a lack of the demand on democracy as well. Democracy and human rights are not on the agenda, and when the Americans behaved in this way, many tyrants in the Third World found the opportunity right to say, ‘Human rights and so on are mere bluff by the West to impose its control on us.’ So all of a sudden it sounded as if no one wanted to give and no one even wanted to take.

Here lies the crisis or, to put it in the context of our meeting this evening, here we witness the resignation of liberal imperialism. Liberal imperialism is an appellation, a system whose inner contradiction is more contradictory and explosive than ever before. When observing the decision-making process in the West following 11 September, especially through the dominant political discourse and ideological interpretation, I have the feeling that behind it all lies an implicit theory, a theory that separates the world into those who have established their nation-state and in particular its main function as a security provider and all the others.⁶⁹

These points are not all surprising (however urgent) except for the last: the observation that the world is increasingly separated between those who have achieved their working and secu-

⁶⁶ Hamzawy, *Understanding Arab Political reality: one lens is not enough*. Policy paper, March 2005, 6 pages. <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16751&prog=zgp&proj=zdrl,zme>

⁶⁷ Hamzawy, *Understanding Arab Political reality*, p. 5.

⁶⁸ In an otherwise excellent book on America’s conservative turn, Human Rights are remarkably short-changed.. Look at this: ‘[The US Supreme Court] ... has delivered a number of notably liberal judgements ... even agreeing to hear a case brought by the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay.’ John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation. Why America is Different*, p. 385-86. On what level are we talking if even addressing a Human Rights issue is considered ‘notably liberal’?

⁶⁹ Hazem Saghieh, “(Re-)ordering the world: dilemmas of liberal imperialism.”

www.thersa.org/acrobat/hazem_saghieh060202.pdf. The RSA is the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce. For confirmation of the observation about the role of states as security providers or nothing, one could look at the enlisting of Pakistan by the US following the 9/11 attacks. Peter Taylor, *The New al-Qaeda*. BBC documentary, July-August 2005.

rity-providing nation state and those who have not. Saghieḥ's interest in Human Rights and democracy in this passage is also interesting because in *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* they hardly play a role at all.

There is no evident conclusion to this section, there are only uncertainties. But the undecided status of former war zones such as the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Kosovo) and the Kurdish zone in Iraq show that not only the Middle East, but also the world as a whole is not of a clear mind about what to do with old and illogical borders and the notion of sovereignty. And even where nation-states are in place and working, there is usually some sort of dispute about the division of competences at state, 'federal', and supranational level. On this subject it is not only the Arabs who need to put their thinking caps on.

4.2 Stagnation and development

In his book with the beautiful title *Between Memory and Desire: the Middle East in a Troubled Age* (1999) R. Stephen Humphreys presented an accessible and illuminating picture of the modern Middle East.⁷⁰ He debunks common stereotypes, points out remarkable achievements in some areas (especially medical services, hygiene and nourishment) as well as dismal failure in others, and makes an effort to explain the logic in the region's development in terms that are recognizable for his readership. He often draws charming comparisons to the United States. In his chapter 'hard realities', the introductory chapter, Humphreys goes over the following topics:

- Rapid population growth. The high number of young people in Arab countries puts heavy pressure on the education systems and labour markets, which even for rich countries would be a challenge. Therefore unemployment remains very high. In some respects the Middle Eastern countries have become the victims of their own success in reducing mortality and improving medical services.
- Small and instable states. At the bottom line Middle Eastern governments do not trust their peoples, nor do their peoples trust them. This to a high expenditure on arms; the small size of national markets, and significant trade restrictions; and weak governments without the clout to enforce economic reform on a population unwilling to suffer 'temporary' hardships. For this reason subsidies for common goods have to remain in place,

⁷⁰ The title is borrowed from T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*. "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain... It is a sad verse to apply to the Middle East, though.

frustrating the IMF and World Bank. To avoid tackling reforms these states prefer pan-Arab or religious rhetoric and blaming Israel.

- Dependence on sales of raw commodities, of which the prices are unstable (phosphates in Morocco, cotton in Egypt). The Arab countries hardly produce any finished products for the world market, and need to import most essentials. (Of one example, printing paper, we will see the importance in the section on the media). This means they have to sell cheap and buy dear. There was never a chance for the only proven economic growth strategy, to limit imports and export high-value-added goods, like Germany or Japan did after 1945.

This is a cruelly short summary of a long, varied and detailed exposé, but it will serve to give an idea. It sounds more like Africa than like the Middle East, on the face of it, but it is the Middle East Humphreys is talking about. These factors, together with the ideological confusion that he also mentions clearly cannot be solved in isolation.⁷¹ It would take a scheme of uncommon vision and determination to achieve some real progress under these conditions.

One scheme to try to bring this about are the Arab Human Development Reports, of which by the time of writing three have appeared. One is still to follow. These reports are drafted by an exclusively Arab team under the supervision of the Egyptian political scientist Nader Fergany, and appear yearly under the aegis of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). They have had an unprecedented success. The first reports were downloaded over one million times from the UNDP website, and especially the first report was showered with prizes and recognitions. *Time* magazine named it the year's most influential publication.

The AHDR's have appeared in the format of a regional Human Development Report, a standard format developed by the UNDP. This UN branch has drafted many reports on individual Arab countries, but this is the first attempt at a regional survey. As said, the reports are written by an Arab team from the region, while the funding comes from the UNDP. So the content is Arab, but the textual form of the report is clearly international of the highest standard. The AHDR has countless charts, statistics, boxed texts, and forewords, it has key quotes highlighted on every page, an accessible overview, and the English is impeccable. It is evidently a carefully constructed text that aims at maximum effect and accessibility, it represents a massive research effort and has invaluable data. The focus is on freedom, building a knowledge society, and empowerment of women.

⁷¹ Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire*, p. 261

A striking feature of the report is its use of a so-called ‘Alternative Human Development index’. The UNDP normally uses its own Human Development Index, based on different sociological indicators.⁷² The authors of the AHDR 2002 have changed this instrument in order to exclude the gross per capita income from their new index. Their problem is that oil wealth makes some Arab countries rich, and that this leads the focus away from the areas where human development is sorely lacking, such as the three areas mentioned above. How to evaluate this? Is it a justified correction of misrepresentations or is it a simple trick to make the Arab countries look worse? It is hard to decide.

A remarkable and (in my view) very positive aspect of the report is its insistence on humans as the ‘real wealth and hope’ of Arab countries. The AHDR 2002 clearly states that the goal of development is people – not just acquiring goods or wealth. For a reader from a Western society, this sounds wise and refreshing, even as something that ‘we’ sometimes fail to see. But it is also clear that the reports also want to make a statement against the Israeli occupation. The one passage in the 2002 report that stands out most clearly is right at the beginning of the overview, under the heading ‘Occupation stifles progress’.⁷³ Then at a key point there is a long boxed text by Hanan Ashrawi, veteran of the Madrid and Oslo talks, lamenting the devastating effect of the occupation on humans and their opportunities in the West Bank. Now I do not doubt the sincerity of the authors’ feelings about Israel’s presence in the West Bank, nor that the statements represent the feelings of most Arabs, but it does appear that the report is taking a risk in this emphasis by giving the impression that once again the Arabs are hiding behind Israel. It need not be to shove away criticism – the report is very critical – but to dilute the blame at least to some extent. It is possible that this is a conscious strategy on the part of the authors to further the acceptance and implementation of the reports, but we may still doubt its wisdom on the long term.

It may also be true, as one distinguished Arab observer has remarked, that the AHDR’s have generated more debate among outside experts and international commentators than in the region itself.⁷⁴ Looking at the report in more detail does make one think that Western writers might like it more wholeheartedly than Arabs. Not only because it’s the Arabs who have to deal with its findings, but also because for Westerners the report may confirm their ideas of the backwardness of the Arab world. A little devil also said that the reports may be

⁷² Cf. Prince Hassan bin Talal, “The Arab Human Development Report 2002: Review and Reform” *ASQ* 26 (2004). As he points out, it is already problematic to discuss the Arab world as a whole because of the vast differences between them.

⁷³ AHDR 2002, p. 1.

unduly idealistic in their disregard of factors that have caused stagnation in the past, such that those mentioned above. Still, the wide interest in the reports shows at least the desire among Arabs to see reforms happen, and economic and democratic progress.

Preceding the belated publication of the 2004 AHDR, on the vital topic of freedom, there was a minor controversy. According to Thomas L. Friedman the Bush administration threatened to cancel its \$100 million annual contribution to the UNDP if some criticism of the Iraq invasion and of the occupation of Palestine was not omitted from the report.⁷⁵ Doubtful as it is, I suggest reading this news as symptomatic of a real and significant clash of strategy between the AHDR and the Bush administration that goes beyond the latter's general dislike of criticism and independent thinking. The AHDR wishes to promote a development strategy for development of the Arabs on their own terms, as 'successful reform has to come from within'. The introduction to the 2003 report made no secret of its authors' frustration that this effort is now inhibited by a US administration that wants to keep the future of Arab development in its own hands.

At present it is fairly clear which strategy is the most powerful. Even if the Arabs could follow up and carry the recommendations of the AHDR's, which is to be doubted in itself, it is still likely that for the time being the US will prevent the Arab Middle East from taking a development course that hurts its interests. The evident favouring of US-based companies regarding contracts in Iraq is a clear indication.⁷⁶ The result is a dependent development at best; a kind of development that means incurring ever new hurts and damages on the way, for which the US and its allies may rightly be blamed. But it might amount to no more than 'change without development', as is the current pattern in some Third World countries and perhaps in others as well.

I will not further discuss the message of the report regarding development, or compare it to Humphreys' account. As the report is widely available in elegant summaries the reader can look them up for himself. But for my point of view the AHDRs are as important as efforts to advocate change as through their contents

⁷⁴ Kamel S. Abu Jaber, "Introduction" *ASQ* 26 (2004). This is a special issue about the AHDRs of 2002 and 2003. Also on www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2501/is_2_26/ai_n8640608

⁷⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, "Holding up Arab reform". *New York Times*, 16 December 2004, p. 43. He does not mention his sources, and in his column of April 7, 2005 (after the report finally appeared) he does not come back to the delay.

⁷⁶ One outstanding achievement of the US' Greatest Generation, the Marshall Aid programme, was marked by great tactfulness vis-à-vis dependent populations (if not always their Governments). Cf. E.H. van der Beugel, "An Act Without Peer: The Marshall Plan in American-Dutch Relations. In: J.W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga (eds.), *A Bilateral Bicentennial. A history of Dutch-American relations (1782-1982)*, p. 66-79.

4.3 Lebanon after the war

To provide an example of the situation of Lebanon regarding development possibilities I use a 2003 study by Franck Debié and Danuta Pieter, *La paix et la crise: le Liban reconstruit?*⁷⁷ Of course there is an abundance of scientific sources on development issues in the Arab world, but this study appeared most useful to me to look beyond day to day events to structural economic, social and political issues. Apart from a thorough and careful analysis, the book also has a useful list of websites with economic data on Lebanon, for those with the time to look at them. At the time of writing (2005) the general situation in Lebanon is highly unstable, even now that Syria has withdrawn its troops.

It soon appears that the question mark in Pieter and Debié's title is not inappropriate. On the surface, the reconstruction of Lebanon is a stunning achievement, comparable to the pre-war 'Lebanese miracle'. There are not so many visible signs of war damage left, many new buildings have appeared, and life seems to have returned to a more relaxed pattern. But behind the surface, economic growth has been slow after the first post-war years; there is widespread poverty, the labour market is blocked; the state is in debt up to and beyond the limits of what is possible, families, companies and banks are struggling to meet costs and get their due.⁷⁸ The capital market does not function: banks ask important securities for loans and the stock exchange is almost blocked. The state spends most of its resources on salaries, debts payments, and some grand infrastructure projects which leaves little money for other needs, while incurring ever new debts.⁷⁹ The country hardly exports anything, imports everything and mainly survives on tourism and donations from rich expats. Prices in the tourism sector can be similar to those in Western Europe or even higher.⁸⁰

In politics too there are some real problems left. The militias have disarmed to some extent and mostly withdrawn from the public sphere, but their leaders retain some influence, such as control of important posts in the administration, of budgets and clients, and tax revenues. Not all of the territory is firmly under the control of the state. There were reportedly some 0.5 to 1.5 million Syrian guest workers in Lebanon in 2003, but their fate I do not know

⁷⁷ Franck Debié et Danuta Pieter, avec la collaboration de Eric Verdeil, *La paix et la crise: le Liban reconstruit?* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003. The authors are political geographers, which means that they are interested in the economy as well as infrastructure and theory of international relations.

⁷⁸ Debié and Pieter, *La paix et la crise*, p. 16.

⁷⁹ In a newspaper report I found the figure of a 40 billion dollar foreign debt and a 2 billion dollar deficit; on 3.5 million poor people that is enormous, even as an approximation.

⁸⁰ The country has benefited from increased tourism by Arabs who do not feel welcome in the West any longer.

about.⁸¹ As they played a crucial role in Syria's economy, it is obvious at least that the relationship with Syria will dominate Lebanon's future for some time to come. Already Syrian domestic stability is being eroded.⁸²

Debié and Pieter argue against a too strongly "realist" reading that holds Syria responsible for everything in Lebanon, from the peace at Ta'if that concluded the Civil War to the reconstruction effort. Among other things, this overstates the potential of a dictatorial and technocratic state to control a liberal economy at a distance.⁸³ The actual strength or weakness of the Lebanese state is a big question, given the economic and financial difficulties, the power of the sects and of Syria.

Any attempt to really modernise Lebanon would require firing a great number of public officials, who together consume most of the state budget and create its deficit. This however is impossible because of the understandable resistance of the Civil Service itself, and because of the client system that makes most of the employees dependent on sectarian leaders. Perhaps most importantly, the state of peace was reached on the basis of a consensus that excludes the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon from almost anything; work, travel, the right to own property outside overcrowded refugee camps.⁸⁴ They have become the worst losers of the Civil War, and the French authors do not hesitate to compare their legal situation to the South African Apartheid.

In sum, even if Lebanon could become a strong and truly sovereign state, which is to be doubted because of vital Syrian interests there, it is not clear how the country could move forward in the longer term. Some Lebanese might still prefer to remain close to Syria. Its political system remains based on sectarian inequalities and a division of the population on ethno-religious basis, that excludes the Palestinians and is dependent on pre-war realities in many places in Lebanon (areas that have been ethnically cleansed during the war). The parallel with the hopeful example of the Ukraine in 2004 is therefore misleading. Wherever the country is heading, it is unlikely to become genuinely democratic for a long time, and even reform of the civil service and the budget is going to be extremely difficult..

⁸¹ Debié and Pieter, *La paix et la crise*, p. 207. If any one of them makes one or two dollars a day, they still take away a lot of money from the country.

⁸² Syrian dissident Yasin Hajj Saleh said this in an interview. Michael Young, "Assad's Forgotten Man. A Reason Interview with Syrian intellectual Yassin al-Haj Saleh." May 5, 2005.

⁸³ Debié and Pieter, *La paix et la crise*, p. 227.

⁸⁴ Debié and Pieter, *La paix et la crise*, p. 213-23.

4.4 the Arab media

The Arab media attract a great deal of attention, not always positive. It is widely recognised however that they can work as agents for democratic change. We have already seen examples of this: the proliferation through the internet of the Arab Human Development Reports, and the TV coverage of the crisis in Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri.

One of the problems in writing on the Arab media and the modern Middle East in general is that the situation on the ground seems to change with the month, not to mention the year. There is some academic literature which is quite up to date (1998-2004), but that does not seem to mean a lot. A significant problem is just to keep abreast of developments. There is endless information, of course, there is just not the time to sift and digest it. Even in one's own country it is usually a struggle to follow current events, even without trying to make sense of them and look for underlying patterns. This applies a fortiori when one tries as a Westerner to make sense of the Middle East. It is very easy to misunderstand or overlook a new development or an important reality on the ground.

4.4.1 Survey

On the subject of Arab media there is a valuable overview by former US Ambassador William A. Rugh, *Arab Mass media* (revised for the second time in 2004). Most of the data derive from interviews with Arab media professionals. Also we have an important collection of articles edited by Kai Hafez (2000), *Mass Media, Politics and Society in the Middle East*; a 2003 congress volume in French, *Mondialisation et nouveaux médias dans l'espace arabe*, edited by Franck Mermier; a related collection, *New Media in the Muslim World: the Emerging Public Sphere* (1999) edited by Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson; an investigation done for a U.S. think tank, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, by Jon B. Alterman⁸⁵; and a special issue of the journal *Press/Politics*, 4 (1999) vol. 3. Valuable pioneering work on the mass media used by poor Muslims in Egypt has been done by the anthropologist Walter Armbrust. And of course there is the AHDR of 2003, the one on building a knowledge society.

⁸⁵ He and Rugh are of course close to the US government. I cannot say for sure if this influences the reliability of their results, but I do not think so.

I believe these are good key texts on the Arab media that are now available in western languages. A more complete overview could easily be obtained by following the leads in the notes to the volumes mentioned. Of interest are also a few articles (originally in French, recently made available in Dutch) by Moroccan publicist Fatema Mernissi. Then of course there is a number of (sources of) primary sources, especially websites that offer texts translated from the Arabic, such as those of major newspapers. The al-Ḥayāt website has a good search engine and plenty of texts in English, even though they are not always immediately understandable in translation.

A useful distinction can be made between pan-Arab media, i.e. media that aim at an audience in many Arab countries, and national media. It is not a completely watertight distinction: Lebanese newspapers such as al-Safir and al-Nahar also aim at a readership in other countries. Every national newspaper has to deal with restrictions and sensitivities at home, although they are usually quite frank and well informed about their neighbours. The same goes for the radio. By tuning in to different national stations and/or the BBC Arabic service it is possible for Arabs to arrive at a fairly complete picture of the news.

The most important pan-Arab newspapers and magazines are edited in London; these will be discussed in the following sections. As for satellite stations, the famous Al-Jazeera is from Qatar, and Al-Arabiyya is from the Emirates. A few features are common to the Arab media. Very important are questions of independence, ownership, censorship, and ties to governments. Also common factors are scarcity of revenues and permanent deficits. Since Iraq has been eliminated as a market in 1991, the most important market by far is Saudi Arabia, and similarly the other oil rich Gulf countries, especially for advertisement revenues.

To understand the relative importance of the different media we should remember that illiteracy is widespread in the Middle East (up to 40% of the population). Illiterate people are not reached by print media, but they are reached by radio and TV. But the far majority of illiterates is poor, they do not usually own a satellite dish, and are therefore restricted to national media.⁸⁶ It is also important to note that illiterates are generally less able to deal well with complex reasoning (or even a simple syllogism) than literates, and are much more likely to dismiss difficult issues with a single truism or quotation from the Qur'an.⁸⁷ This phenomenon is an often neglected factor of the simplistic attitude towards the US, the UN, Jews, and the

⁸⁶ For statistics see AHDR 2003, p. 58-68.

⁸⁷ According to Saghieḥ there is also a disadvantage of spreading literacy, because literate people become impractical and thus useless for traditional work such as in agriculture: 'functional illiteracy'. Oral communication, 7 Sept. 2004.

world in general that is often found among Arabs.⁸⁸ This is not to say illiterates are stupid, they may be much more verbally articulate than literates.

Before I will discuss the newspapers at more length in the next section, just a few words on the newer media. The most widely known of the new media, al-Jazeera, was founded in Qatar in 1996. Qatar is an oil-rich emirate in the Gulf, with a liberal Emir who has graciously permitted some democratisation. There are no taxes (for Qataris), and there is a fairly high level of personal freedom.⁸⁹ Although there are now over 100 satellite stations in the Arab world, al-Jazeera is still the most prominent; it had its hour of glory in the 2003 Gulf War, when it could cover the US-led invasion of Iraq independently when others couldn't. It has news round the clock. To Western viewers the household style looks slightly bombastic. Al-Jazeera remains entirely funded by the government of Qatar.⁹⁰ The station is at present thoroughly disliked by the American government.

In al-Jazeera's talk shows just about anything can be discussed. This is of course the most remarkable feature of al-Jazeera. It appears from an essay by the host of the best known talk show that interference in the topics and content of the show is kept at an absolute minimum, in spite of political difficulties and even pressure on the Qatari government.⁹¹ So even in remote corners of the Arab world it is now possible that people hear iconoclastic voices that they would never have heard otherwise. That does not mean that these media always reflect views that will appeal to (or reassure) Westerners. These media will challenge but also reflect the opinions of common Arabs without prejudice. The fact that this happens more or less freely is a gain, but does not in itself lead to different opinions. To put it differently: al-Jazeera has no 'teaching strategy' or, in a term that is more applicable in the region, a 'mobilization strategy'. Such a thing would put viewers off immediately, since it would be the same that Middle Easterners have got from their state media for decades.

It is evident that many people are interested in the role and potential effects of the revolution in the mass media: mainly internet and satellite television. Already in 1999 some people were predicting that the old-style government monopoly on information would be challenged, and in the long run impossible to maintain. This process is now taking place.⁹² In

⁸⁸ E.g. as described very well by Joris Luyendijk, 'Kijk ook eens naar je eigen!' [Look at yourself for a moment!] *NRC Handelsblad* 17-8-2002. Self-evidently this does not excuse the makers of public discourse.

⁸⁹ On the Arabian Peninsula a King or Emir is supposed to hand out gifts to his supporters; this pattern goes back to the days of poverty before the oil boom, and it made good sense then.

⁹⁰ The most important work about Al-Jazeera is Mohammed el-Nawawi and Adel Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera. The story of the network that is rattling governments and re-defining modern journalism*. (2003). There is also a 2005 book by Hugh Miles but I have not been able to make sure if it is serious or not.

⁹¹ Faisal al-Kasim, "Crossfire – the Arab version". *Press/Politics* 4 (3) 93-97

⁹² Cf. AHDR 2003, p. 65. 'The official press can no longer ignore its new competitors'.

practice external media are only a challenge, not a substitute for national media. According to one source, a big part of the problem is that the new Arab media operate under severe constraints: the gap between global issues and concerns and domestic development agendas; fierce competition, lack of sufficient advertisement revenues, censorship and national sensitivities. They work on a 'globalised' technical level but have to deal with a fragmented and backward social and political reality underneath. This makes it hard for them to find a socially constructive role.⁹³

In many countries the Arab media have serious problems in getting access to information and news sources; also their research, foreign reporting, library and archive facilities are way behind the times. This applies both to satellite stations and to newspapers. Some seven big media centres are exceptions to this rule: Al-Ahram in Egypt, and the most important Lebanese, Gulf region and London-based news stations. The others are largely dependent on Western news agencies. Light entertainment is a big part of the menu; superficiality and consumerism are dominant. Celebrities and officials receive most attention, and political events are often narrated without any context that could make them understandable. According to the AHDR, this prevents Arab television from being a vibrant cultural force.⁹⁴

As for the net effects of the new media, the opinions vary; some analysts think that they may work for democratisation and more freedom, others think that it is equally likely that the Islamists would benefit most from them.⁹⁵ (It is not necessary that the two are contradictory; more democracy might just as well mean more Islam). In Morocco I got the impression that young Moroccans first of all enjoy the emancipating effects of the new media and the new info: greater knowledge, a broader world view. This helps them to be more confident about themselves and the place of the Arabs in the world. But similarly it seems that the backwardness and lack of opportunities in their own countries annoy them more and more.

4.4.2 Newspapers in the Middle East

As said, William Rugh gives a very practical overview of the different media and press systems that can be found in the region. For this end he has developed a model that has been widely accepted as valid, although it now begins to look slightly dated.⁹⁶ It applies to news-

⁹³ Muhammad I. Ayish, "The changing face of Arab communications", p. 128-130

⁹⁴ AHDR 2003, 60-61.

⁹⁵ I remember a debate on this topic in Amsterdam, 3 November 2003, where Fatema Mernissi took the first view and Joris Luyendijk the second.

⁹⁶ Cf. the discussion in Hafez, *Mass Media Politics and Society*, introduction p. 5-7.

papers in the first place, but can also be used for other media. In this model he categorises the press systems of the different Arab countries: (1) mobilized, (2) loyalist, (3) diverse.

‘Mobilized’ in this context refers to the most dictatorial regimes, which all regard themselves as revolutionary and have thus mobilized the press for their respective revolutions. This applies mostly to Egypt, Syria, Libya, of course Iraq under Saddam, Algeria. In these countries the press is just the mouthpiece of the regime and not much else. (2) ‘Loyalist’ means that the press has a measure of freedom, it is more often privately owned, but still subject to state control. The state, e.g. can harass journalists or restrict paper supplies (paper is an important cost factor that has to be imported in almost all Middle Eastern countries). There is an opposition press but even that has to toe a line that is drawn by the authorities; it still looks very much the same as the state press, and criticism of the regime has to be worded very carefully. All the oil countries of the Gulf fall in this category, with Jordan and Tunisia. In all countries, there is a state censor who can ban a particular issue of a paper or magazine. In such a case the issue is printed but cannot be distributed.

Then (3), ‘diverse’ applies in the first place to Lebanon, to a lesser extent also to Kuwait, Morocco and Yemen. This means (still according to Rugh) that there is a real diversity of viewpoints in the media. Inevitably, for the Third World, this means that there is an equally great variety in quality. Some of the newspapers and periodicals will be pro-regime, others sectarian, Muslim fundamentalist or oppositional. In Lebanon there is no pre-publication censorship for domestic press, although there is a certain pressure to self-censorship and the government retains various means to make life difficult for journalists. Of course this threefold division is not meant to be too rigid: some countries show traits of more than one system, such as Iran, and national policies may change over time. In the early 1990s the press in Kuwait and Jordan was freer than it is now.

In Lebanon, then, the media picture is slightly more favourable than anywhere else in the Arab Middle East. There are more papers, and some may be the best in the Arab world; others are just about the worst that can be imagined anywhere. Most are rather lacking in objectivity and quality of research, and tend to be sensationalist and provocative. It is possible to find about every significant current in Arab thinking represented in the Lebanese press; but still the Lebanese typically suspect newspapers of political bias, secret funding, and bribery. The fact in itself that there is such diversity in the media is due to the real plurality of political factions in the country, and to the fact that the state has traditionally exercised restraint in dealing with the media.

During the Civil War there have been some attacks on the press. In January 1976 two top editors were killed in raids on their newspapers. In December of the same year the offices of Al-Safir and al-Nahar were temporarily occupied by a Syrian force, and afterwards could continue only with some restrictions. In 1986, these two papers had a circulation of 60,000 each, and the total circulation of Lebanese dailies was then approx. 175,000. In international comparison this is still relatively low. A detail: at some late point in the Civil War, when the American, Italian and French peacekeeping forces had become hopelessly entangled in the mess of Lebanese politics and were fighting along with the different sectarian militias, al-Safir began to refer to the peacekeepers as the ‘international militia’.

At present, the media system in Lebanon is still ‘diverse’ but with the reservations that I have outlined. Criticism of Syria used to be very difficult (I do not know how this is changing) and has to be carefully worded, and the same applies to criticism of the top political officials, the President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of Parliament. Lastly, Arab newspapers are not intellectual monoliths. Jihad Khazen writes of al-Ḥayāt that some staff were against the Oslo peace process, others in favour, and Saghieh made a similar remark about Al-Safir in the period he worked there.⁹⁷

4.4.3 Al-Hayāt

Al-Ḥayāt was founded in Lebanon, but is now one of three important pan-Arab newspapers edited in London. With an estimated circulation of 40,000 copies (2003) it is second in size to Al-Sharq al-Awsat, but comes before al-Quds al-Arabi. Al-Ḥayāt is the favourite paper for Arab intellectuals, who like its variety of opinion and its careful editorials. Since 2002 it has a joint venture with the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC) to operate a news channel on TV. It is Saudi-owned, but rather more for prestige than for profit; in fact the newspaper runs a permanent deficit of around \$10 million annually. The owner, a prince, makes good use of his contacts to get access to useful information. One could argue that this compromises the independence of the paper, which is dangerous because it is one of the most liberal and Saudi Arabia is undemocratic, but one can maintain equally well that it’s about the same as Rupert Murdoch owning the *Times*, but better because the prince is willing to meet the deficit.

Al-Ḥayāt still has a Lebanese look; Al-Sharq al-Awsat, its big competitor, is clearly Saudi although not as conservative as national Saudi papers. The tone of Al-Ḥayāt is often

⁹⁷, Jihad KHAZEN, “Censorship and state control of the press in the Arab world.” *Press / politics* 4-3 (1999) 88; Saghieh, oral communication, Sept. 2004 (see 6.2 below).

critical of US policies and sometimes reflects Arab nationalist views. It has to use a certain measure of self-censorship to avoid being banned in important countries and losing direct sales and advertisement revenues (in the oil rich countries, mainly Saudi Arabia). It's a matter of survival. A former editor in chief, Jihad Khazen, described this process by stating that he had never been told what to publish, but had been told not to publish something more times than he cared to remember. In fact, he said, 'sometimes I feel I'm not so much covering the news as covering it up.'⁹⁸ Each Arab country has its own sensitive story that might lead to a ban: Polisario rebels in Morocco, border conflicts between Egypt and Sudan, Qatar and Bahrain, the opposition party in Tunisia, etcetera. Direct criticism of a president or ruling family is very difficult. So editors are trained to avoid sensitivities. Even discussing more general topics is difficult: there may always be a country that objects to them. So, in practice the paper is still fairly regularly banned in one or more countries. It's a cat and mouse game – but more an economic than a political one.

Now Hazem Saghieh is the editor of the *Tayyārāt* (currents) supplement of *Al-Hayāt*, and a senior columnist. I have met him and been able to ask some questions (September 2004) on which the following passages are based. He says *Al-Hayāt* is liberal in the Arab sense, but it has to appease a Saudi readership, its Saudi owner and the Saudi Government. Saudi Arabia is the biggest market for advertisements. So it is in fact impossible to criticise Saudi Arabia (let alone its leadership), or to talk about God, religion, sex and Islam.

Being an editor involves just about everything: reading and evaluating incoming texts, writing texts, editing them. Note that the absence of division of labour mirrors the way in which booksellers still combine functions (editor, printer, seller). The editorial policy of *Tayyārāt* is extremely pluralistic. Articles range from the very liberal to the pro-Islamist, from anti- to unquestioningly pro-American. The aim is to create a balance of ideas, names, writers.

Saghieh says he will not publish cheap polemics, name-calling and sloppy reasoning, and racist stuff. He tries to get as many women in as possible. According to him, it is important and natural that women participate in every sphere of life, and he wants to resist the 'manly' atmosphere of Arab society. But when I asked about the American policy in Iraq to require one woman candidate in every three, he says this is the wrong way to go about it: one can apply pressure but not enforce. (which was what I hoped to hear).

When asked about the vehemence and bitterness in Arab public debate, he says that there is no clear stage for public debate, and a lack of democratic tradition, so that the debate

⁹⁸ Jihad Khazen, "Censorship and state control of the press in the Arab world", *Press/Politics* 4 (3) 87. The tone of the article is quite open and (in my view) convincing.

gets drawn into scandal. It is like the behaviour of someone who has been deprived of food for a long time: he will eat greedily, sometimes over-greedily. The discussion is dominated by totalitarian ideologies, that see anything different as the enemy, an ‘objective enemy’ (Lenin) that has to be destroyed. And people are not used to public politics – it is like magic to them. It has a cloud of darkness and conspiracy. Politics are seen as immoral, which is a pre-modern view. In *Difā’an ‘an al-Salām* we will see how he spends quite a bit of time defending politics as a reasonable means of fighting.

4.4.4 Books and Publishing

The Arab Human Development Reports made some statements on the number of books and especially translations in the Arab world, that have been seized on by journalists and policy makers in Europe and the US as examples of the ‘backwardness’ of the region.⁹⁹ The report stated that all Arab countries together translate only a fifth of what Greece translates in one year, and that the total of books translated into Arabic from the 9th century onwards are about the same as the number that Spain translates annually – about 100,000 according to the report. These figures have been challenged independently by Franck Mermier and Eugene Rogan, more carefully so by the former.¹⁰⁰ In the first case the number is hard to disprove but very unlikely, in the second case the number given is simply wrong (it should be 10,000 according to the source).¹⁰¹ Another reason why these figures are unreliable is that in Arab countries piracy of books is widespread (i.e. translations or reprints that do not respect the authors’ and editors’ rights).¹⁰² It is therefore likely that there are many more translations than those recorded in these figures. Also, Spain happens to be a country that translates a lot; the US does not translate much more than the Arabs do, even according to these statistics.

In all, it is a rather comical example of the AHDR trying to emphasize the region’s need for reform, and of Western commentators seizing upon that message without using their brains. Another relevant case is the strong interest in Islamic literature that is seen as a sign of

⁹⁹ Prominently Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* (2 July 2002, 19 October 2003); in The Netherlands, Paul Scheffer in his Herzberg lecture, “Het onbehagen in de islam [Discontent in Islam].” *Trouw*, 18 september 2004

¹⁰⁰ Franck Mermier, “Les habits neufs de l’édition arabe”, in Mermier (ed.) *Mondialisation et nouveaux médias dans l’espace arabe*, p. 409-424 ; Eugene Rogan, “Arab Books and Human Development”, *ASQ* 26 (2004) 67-79. The quote from AHDR 2002 is on page 78.

¹⁰¹ Rogan, *op. cit.* p. 68; Mermier, *op. cit.*, p. 412. The AHDR’s figures are from an Arab author, who has used a UNESCO source. According to Mermier the figure does not include Lebanon, the second largest publishing country in the Arab world. The mistake 100,000 instead of 10,000 has been corrected in the 2003 report.

¹⁰² Apart from the above see Stefan Winkler, “Distribution of Ideas: Book Production and Publishing in Egypt, Lebanon and the Middle East”, in Hafez (ed.) *Mass Media, Politics and Society in the Middle East*, p. 159-173.

backwardness. Again, it is hard to prove that the statistics are incorrect, but still one may wonder if they really say anything. After all, in Europe and the US the books of Dan Brown are top of the bestseller lists. Is this a sign of modernity?¹⁰³

Nevertheless, even if the statistics are doubtful, it is true that there are significant constraints on book publishing in the Arab world. Kanan Makiya mentions an Arab magazine that already in 1989 devoted special attention to the crisis of the Arab (liberal) book.¹⁰⁴ In order to understand the chances of new and creative ideas in the Middle East it is important to know of this. One problem is, again, illiteracy, and also more generally declining levels of knowledge and education.¹⁰⁵ Another is the high price of paper, which has to be imported in most Arab countries; and related to that, high prices of books themselves in relation to the purchasing power of most of the Arab population. Finally, the publishers themselves are often not sufficiently careful or literate, and have to deal with very small margins of profit. Political constraints are censorship, which has different standards in all Arab countries, high import taxes, and the inaccessibility of important markets such as Iraq and Libya. Ordering books from one country to another is often very difficult, because of (again) censorship and the unreliability of the post, where books may get delayed, lost or stolen. There are internet bookstores but they depend on expats for their market, and are constrained to use expensive courier services such as UPC or DHL for their delivery in Arab countries, so they do not significantly improve availability of books. Markets are small, also because of the small budgets of university and public libraries. In sum, the picture is quite gloomy indeed.

Lebanon and Egypt are the largest publishing countries; Egypt largely produces books for its own market, while Lebanon exports a lot to the Gulf region. In Lebanon, most publishing companies are small and rather primitive, even without specialized departments for marketing or even editing. A publisher often simultaneously acts as publisher, printer and bookseller. Some larger companies have evolved over the last decade. There has also been an effort to establish a stronger pan-Arab union of editors, led by representatives of these companies. One of its aims is to combat piracy.¹⁰⁶ However, it may be doubted if this will actually improve access to books and information in Arab countries (at least at the short term). Piracy is a phenomenon that helps keep book prices low and therefore more affordable to poor people. Pirated books are usually 30 to 35% cheaper than legal ones.¹⁰⁷ In combating piracy, the

¹⁰³ See Rogan, *Op. cit.*, for more on this.

¹⁰⁴ The magazine's name is *Shadha*; no exact reference is given. Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence*, p. 280-81

¹⁰⁵ AHDR 2002, 47-51; 2003, 52-57.

¹⁰⁶ Mermier, *Op. cit.*, p. 417-419.

¹⁰⁷ Winkler, *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

owners of big companies and their governments are following their own interests plus those of large Western companies, promoted by the US.¹⁰⁸

Religious books have important advantages in comparison to secular books. They are less likely to suffer from censorship or bans, and a good market is assured. Some traditional works (often in many volumes) are kept as status symbols to grace bookshelves, and therefore not necessarily read. By contrast, liberal books and fiction are going through hard times. Print runs are very small: in general only 1,000-2,000. In this segment of the market the risks for publishers are much greater, and it is not self-evident that they take other considerations besides commercial interests into account when they select books for publication.

As for the chances of books as carriers of ideas, it is fairly clear that the obstacles are still enormous. I do not know how the larger (international) publishers contribute to change in this respect. Finally, there is now some support for new books from the satellite TV channels. These have programmes where new publications are discussed. One programme on al-Jazeera is presented by an expat in Cambridge, Khaled al-Hroub, who devotes 80% of its time to books published in Western languages, since many Arabs read English sufficiently well to be interested more in the original of a book than in a translation. And for seven years there has been a literature review from Cairo that has a whole range of discussions of books, with diverse political topics. Through reading this magazine and watching Al-Hroub's programme Arabs may still engage in an international debate on ideas. Perhaps, not all is bad.

At a late stage I came across an interview with Al-Hroub.¹⁰⁹ It is revealing because he quite honestly (to all appearances) explains how the taboos work. In his programme he will invite writers to talk about their books. By doing so he does aim to present the Arab audience with unfamiliar and challenging views but obviously not to the extent that this might embarrass or bring into trouble the people who come to speak, not all of whom always feel comfortable.

Regarding politics the ceiling for criticism is quite high, he says: this is his least worry. It is social and cultural issues that worry him. He observes that there is, relatively speaking, greater freedom to talk politics than to talk about social and cultural matters, particularly religion. This is the true red line. A longer quote, just earlier in the interview, brings this out:

"(...) [T]here are some total no-go areas for us. For example, we can't talk about a book discussing sexual relations outside marriage; religious freedom or any other freedom – the freedom to be an atheist, for instance. I can't discuss the books of

¹⁰⁸ Mermier, *Op. cit.*, p. 419.

¹⁰⁹ "Talking Books" in *Index on Censorship* 2 (2004) 180-84; the name of the interviewer is not given.

Ibn Waraq – he writes under a pseudonym and casts doubt upon the authenticity of the Quran.”¹¹⁰

- What do you do about the Palestine problem? If you have a book, for example, that is pro-Arab and written in the West, how do you get the other view, the Israeli view, across?

To be honest, I usually avoid such books. What is the point in simply demonstrating that the Palestinian issue is a just cause for an audience who vehemently believe in this? Further, the format of the programme is to have Arab reviewers/critics reviewing non-Arab books, so it is really difficult, next to impossible, to have somebody on the show to defend Israel.¹¹¹

The reader will have noticed the implicit point of Al-Hroub’s last comment: No Arab would be prepared to defend Israel on Al-Jazeera TV. Given that Al-Jazeera has broader margins to be critical than any of the written media, and that this is a rather low-profile and serious programme, I expect that the observations of Al-Hroub hold true as a minimum for the other Arab media as well. The range of debate is only likely to be smaller, not wider.

4.5 Evaluation: media and development

My impression from the literature is that the new media and its professionals play an enthusiastic part in the development of debate among Arabs. On the whole Arab authors, producers, etc. are excited about the new possibilities, and less gloomy than Western analysts about their possible consequences. But for the time being it mainly means that new and sometimes critical opinions are spread and that people have a chance to be challenged in their ideas. If they take up the challenge is just as doubtful as with Western TV and radio audiences (where newspaper readership is suffering too). With over 100 Arabic satellite channels, a lighter news item than whatever soul-searching topic is under discussion on a new station is never more than a click away. So if the Arabs like the new media, it need not be because they leap at the chances to finally educate themselves to modern ideas. It could just as well be a feeling of empowerment, of being part of a more modern world.

Part of an assessment of the media landscape depends on the comparison of the available formats for news and ideas; books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals. (Regarding periodicals it proved impossible to find any useful information at all, let alone pamphlets). We have seen that the pan-Arab newspapers are seriously limited in what they can do, even if the Saudi ownership does not directly affect its day to day running. The book market remains in a

¹¹⁰ Ibn Warraq (normally spelt with double r) is a notorious critic of Islam, originally from Pakistan.

¹¹¹ “Talking Books” 183

rather dismal state. The conclusion is that the formats that allow for most complexity and nuance in the argument and that traditionally carry public debate (books and pamphlets) have the least chance to getting a wide readership, because of financial and governmental constraints. Not much can be expected from television in terms of serious challenge: by and large it provides entertainment and illusions, not challenges to peoples' fixed beliefs and attitudes. For this reason a serious contribution to longer term development cannot be expected. It is hard to see where a change would come from.

Chapter 5: The Defence of Peace

5.1 background info

The introduction to *Difāʿan ʿan al-Salām* has been quoted in full in chapter 1, so it does not require discussion here. The reader will remember that Saghieḥ stressed the responsibility of the Arabs for the possible collapse of the peace process, and declared his intention to discuss this responsibility in the following, in the context of Netanyahu's accession to power and the murders committed by Al-Daqāmisa.

There are some important facts I omitted in the earlier discussion, that the reader should now be told. They derive from the interviews I had with Saghieḥ in London. First, it has to be understood that some Arab intellectuals would defend this man, Al-Daqāmisa, the Jordanian border guard. So when Saghieḥ took him as an example of mindless violence, this was not a neutral thing to do at all. There is an implicit debate here which does not enter for obvious reasons. We will see similar patterns throughout the pamphlet.

Second, the event that prompted him to write this “angry pamphlet” (his own words) was a debate at an Al-Jazeera talk show, in which he was opposed by a Muslim intellectual, Hamzi Mansuri, the head of the Islamist faction in the Jordanian parliament. He says the level of the debate, and some of the things that were said, rather upset him. Third, it has to be understood that the pamphlet would be read by intellectuals from all parts of the Arab political spectrum, not just by secularists. More about all this can be found in the interview, chapter 6.

Some of the quotations in the text are shortened to save space, the page numbers in the Arabic are added in the text. My comments are printed at a line spacing of 1 to enhance clarity and save space. The reader should remember throughout that it is a text of 1997.

One preliminary remark needs to be made about the first section. The keyword to this relatively long section is the word al-ḥaqq. It means ‘right’ (i.e. as opposed to ‘wrong’, but also in the sense ‘to be correct’), ‘justice’ and ‘truth’. It may also mean ‘law’ but there is a separate word for that too, qānūn. It can have a religious sense, because ‘the Truth’ is one of the inalienable characteristics of God in Islamic theology. The result is that the coherence of Saghieḥ's text is very hard to convey to a Western readership. This applies especially to the translation.

5.2 Summary and comments

1. *Our Attractiveness in the World*

The Arabs' problem with peace starts from their belief that they 'are right', completely and flawlessly. Because they believe they are right, they think they make a contribution to the world, and are attractive in its eyes. But the opposite is true. They do not excel in any science, art, or technology: their one Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfuz almost became the victim of an assassination attempt. They distrust everything that comes from the West, and see in everything an attack on their values and image. Even their cartoonists do not criticize them in a healthy fashion. Now, in comparison to Israel, their attractiveness is diminished by many factors: frequent military defeat (the last being the Cold War), and a hopeless backwardness in modern technology. Israel is more attractive because of its status as a parliamentary democracy, and because it can identify with Holocaust victims and the achievements of Jews all over the world. However this identification contains a measure of 'opportunism' and of 'deception'. Lastly, the Arabs are notorious for their touchiness and their gravity, bordering on depression, and their tendency to behave like cattle in a row, only reacting to events and not initiating anything.

In his first words Saghieh says that the Arabs' problem with peace is "al-ḥaqq". 'To be right' is a dimension of the text, but another possibility would be 'just' or 'justified'. In this way we are reminded of the perennial dilemma in military action and intervention: what do we prefer, peace and the persistence of some injustice, or war? What is the value of peace? Saghieh does not discuss the philosophical dimension of the problem but it seems likely he was aware of it. In any case it explains why 'peace' as a concept is never discussed in spite of the title. '

What then is this ḥaqq the Arabs are so mad about? This is going to be an unpopular point, but I am quite sure it means Israel's occupation of Palestine, and especially the ongoing and unresolved violations in international law. By modern historical standards, e.g. as applied by Tom Segev in his *One Palestine, Complete*, it becomes impossible to deny that all the international settlements (including the 1936 and 1947 partition plans) that established the Zionists-Israelis against the Arabs smack of victor's justice and colonialism: the Arabs could not reasonably be expected to get their act together quicker than they did. On a purely historical level, the Zionist legal right to the land – at least the part outside the 1947 zone – is almost nonexistent by any standard except their own. This is the truth-right-justice the Arabs know. According to Saghieh their problem is not that this is wrong in itself, but that they insist on it in an extreme way.

To far about 'truth'. The word 'attractiveness' in the title is also remarkable, but if we understand the word as 'appeal' or perhaps 'prestige' it makes more sense. In any case Saghieh treats 'attractiveness' as a political factor in a rather immediate way, as his mentioning of political factors such as defeats and the lack of democracy show. In the light of what has happened after 1997 no one will contest that the Arabs are not a very

popular people. This is what he is trying to convey to a public that does not want to hear it but sticks to old pride.

The attention to image is striking and no doubt there are culture-related behavioural patterns behind it. In this context it might be worth recalling that Egypt's initial success in the 1973 Yom Kippur war ultimately enabled it to make a peace deal without loss of face, and that spectacular gestures were an essential part of the process. This underlines the political and cultural importance of image and appearance in Arabic perception.

More importantly than all this, Saghieh says, is the Arabs' inability to put forward a coherent discourse. They ignore nuances between "the West" and "the Jews"; their anti-Semitism is arrogant and closes gates towards the world; they present themselves as a unified block, fully in the right but misunderstood by a world that continually conspires against them. These conspiracies are described only in Arabic which no one else reads. The result is that truth, al-ḥaqq, is perverted: it is not flexible and vital any more. 'Our truth is perfect and flawlessly presented, even though we know that when its application is harmful, under the pretext of the liberation of Palestine, it loses its truthfulness. Lawyers say that rights (ḥuqūq, pl. of ḥaqq) lose their validity over time. Even the law (still ḥuqūq) is harsh and merciless' (18).

This last point, quite correct from a legal point of view, must be a hard one to make on the Arabs with their incessant focus on old rights, such as the right to return for the 1948 refugees (see previous comment). It will be evident that no translation can make the same linguistic move as Saghieh makes with the word ḥaqq / ḥuqūq. There is a touch of provocation when he says that especially in a religious context al-ḥaqq is flexible and relative. This is not how most religious authorities in the Middle East deal with it.

In any case the combination of the ethical and the legal is relevant to understand the Arab way of thinking. How can something be legal if it is not ethical and true? Semantics would require the Arabs to apply the highest standards to anything described as ḥaqq. This is not to proclaim any kind of conceptual determinism, but for any proposed peace deal to make sense to Arabs it has to speak their language.

By contrast, the real service of "al-ḥaqq" renders it flexible and relative, and capable of incorporating different truths in itself: the insight that two truths can live together. The Israeli truth is also true. For instance, the Jews in France thought they were safe, until Dreyfus; in Eastern Europe, all ideologies that competed with Zionism by preaching integration and improvement of the Jews' living conditions were obliterated by the Nazis. Only thereafter Zionism emerged victorious, claiming: Look, where can we Jews live in peace, we need a national home.

Of course, Palestine became its victim. But this was not because of religious reasons, for there were other options as a national home. Above all, 'providing a place of refuge was more important than closing it off' (20) which would have meant civil war in Palestine.

Two similes borrowed from Itzhak Deutscher and Uri Avneri conclude the section, which is almost open ended. We will see this type of loose endings more frequently in what follows.

The turn to the justification of the Israeli cause (in fact the Zionist cause) is quite impressive. Note that it is not followed by normative statements: what should or should not be done. Although the text indicates that anti-Semitism is counterproductive and that the Arab and Israeli truths can be reconciled to each other, it does not call on the reader explicitly to draw the consequences, i.e. to discard anti-Semitic prejudice and to try to understand Israeli 'truth-right'. Instead Saghiech opts to give the right example.

His one-sentence characterization of the political diversity among Eastern European Jewry before the Shoah is accurate, as far as it goes. Zionism was only one of many competing ideologies, and not the strongest. I would suggest that by building on these other Jewish traditions and reviving them, if necessary at the expense of nationalist Zionism, it might be possible to strengthen support for and understanding of Israel, even in the Middle East. They are a rich and immensely valuable part of Jewish (and World) heritage.

2. The Language of Strength

'Israel only understands the language of strength', the Arabs say. [Strength, quwwa, is another ambiguous word: it can also mean might, force, or military power]. The problem is precisely that Israel possesses and uses strength, while Arab power is pathetic in comparison. Consider the global power realities: the end of ideological struggles and of the Cold War, the Arab dependency on oil sales, and the new mode of Western world dominance without actual presence in poorer areas. No help will come to the Arabs from a divided Europe, or from China, or Yeltsin's Russia. And only Israel possesses nuclear weapons, while to use them would be the limit of madness. The most important Arab countries, and also Iran, are listed one by one and ruled out as strong supporters of the Arab-Islamic cause. Again, the Arabs' rhetoric of strength is shown to be based on nothing.

Saghiech does not point out that in Israel the same is said: 'The Arabs understand only the language of strength', although he must be well aware of the parallel. Of course Israel has an enormous military might at its disposal so it makes much better political sense in that context.

Looking at his list from hindsight it is striking that the new protagonists of the Arab-Islamic cause have appeared from Afghanistan (not in the list but when he talks about the west leaving zones as 'deserts of death' one might think of it, see 3.2). The rise of Al-Qaeda-related fundamentalism owes a lot to the confidence the Arab fighters gained by beating the USSR (still a superpower) on that battlefield.

The section continues with the call to mass mobilization, which the author said is illusory as well. The Arabs have many cares in the world: education, political progress, women's rights,

illiteracy, child labour... Palestine is only one of them, and not the most important: for some remote countries it is not relevant at all. It is time to stop to lie to the Palestinians. Not to reject Islamic and Arab solidarity, but now the Arab nations have to do without elementary necessities. Moreover, the Arabs are a much greater (ʿafḍal) people than that they should reduce themselves in the world's eye to 'the enemies of the Jews'. Nor can they fight against America's cultural dominance.

A strong country requires more than just a strong military; this is a totalitarian model. Such a country is like a body with strong arms but with weak legs, brain, chest. In the end this overall weakness will defeat it. In comparison Israel is comparatively healthy, with its parliamentary system and its modern, individualized society. Even the militant Arabs do not fight a modern war, which requires a different kind of bravery than martyrdom or placing bombs on the market. This is no confrontation with the modern world.

The theme of modernity (ḥadāṭa) and its rejection runs strongly through this passage, even more than my summary shows, but it is never explicit. Critical Arabs could suspect that Saghieh wants to sacrifice the Palestinian cause to utilitarian arguments but from the following section I derive that this is not the case, although he does favour a realist, political solution. In the *Time* article he deplored Arafat's rejection of the Barak offer at Camp David in 2000, even though most Palestinians turned out to support Arafat's decision.

As an idealist I have to say that I retain strong doubts about Barak's offer and approach, courageous as it was. But this is not a matter to be discussed here. The description of society as a body is reminiscent of Christian political models based on harmony; also the Biblical allegory of Daniel 2 (the statue with clay feet) comes to mind. One would not expect the same from a Western secular intellectual. Finally: following the allegory, Israel can probably be said to have become less healthy over the last eight years. Especially liberal and secular Jews find the atmosphere increasingly hard to bear and in some cases 'go down', i.e. emigrate.

In sum, the Arab 'strength' means the strategy of Al-Daḡāmisa. This is rejected by the heart as well as by the mind, for many reasons: humane, legal, moral and political. The consequence of violence is lawlessness and reckless decisions, which do not take into account costs and effectiveness. Most importantly: 'The strategy of the Intifada, which aimed to alienate the Israelis from Netanyahu is diametrically opposed to the strategy of Al-Daḡāmisa' (30). They make the horrific acts committed by Israelis such as the murders in Hebron in 1994 by Goldstein appear as defensive measures, because Israel is small in comparison to the Arab countries who are seen as the initiators of the violence. 'We cannot allow Netanyahu or any Israeli monster to let us lose our reason and our humane feelings and turn us into opposite monsters. We cannot allow ourselves to blame every failure or defeat on Netanyahu. When a worm eats

into an apple, the apple will remain worm-eaten; denouncing the deeds of the worm cannot be a consolation to the apple, nor a justification. We cannot allow Netanyahu to force on us the strategy of terror' (31).

Again the implicit common humanity-argument is a bit stronger than it appears in my summary. The quote about the apple and the worm is unflattering but interesting because it subtly assumes the Palestinians' perspective (the apple of course stands for Palestine). It is clear that Netanyahu is presented by Saghieh rather schematically as a kind of embodiment of all that is wrong in Israeli and especially Likud politics. On the basis of the interview (quoted later) I believe that the invectives are mainly brought in to convince an overwhelmingly antagonistic audience, and are not rooted in personal rancour or resentment. (See also Chapter 6)

Personally I tend to disagree with Saghieh's categorical rejection of Likud: it represents intellectual currents in Israeli history that have to be engaged in dialogue, however difficult. But it is understandable that for Saghieh this would be a bridge too far and an impossible position to defend.

The point here is clearly that Arabs have to be smart, understand the hopelessness of their position and relinquish violence as a strategy. I believe there has been a growing realisation among some Palestinian groups after the repression of the Second Intifada that suicide bombs are counterproductive, but on the other hand radicals have only become more radical since 1997. (In 1998 Bin Laden's fatwa appeared that considers all US citizens as combatants, since they support their Government's actions through their taxes.)

3. Politics, politics

Politics is the indispensable way for the Palestinians to get their rights (ḥuqūq), compensation for their losses, and to benefit from peace. It is essential that the course proposed by Netanyahu and his supporters is abandoned. Therefore our "ḥaqq" has to be made relative, reduced to normal size, and reconciled to the possible. The Palestinian problem has to be put in a framework that is big but not too big. It is not of cosmic or eschatological dimensions, as if the Arabs were close to extinction and the Islamic civilization not the most cosmopolitan in the world. In modern times different peoples can intermingle, but large-scale migration cannot be made undone. And there have been other, much bigger dramas in the world than the foundation of Israel. Reliable senses are needed to enter into politics.

Now, politics is the art to see fine distinctions and nuances, which normally the Arabs do not see. They equate Zionists and Jews, Rabin and Peres, Rabin and Netanyahu etc. Take the difference between Likud and Labour. Labour initially attempted to compromise with the Arabs: it means that part of its ideology does not support the 'violations', while all of Likud's ideology does support them, since it is 'fundamentally nationalist and discriminating' (38).

Also Labour is more sensitive to the international and regional context, to pressure from businessmen and intellectuals, from the political left. Even in the worst case, as Arabs say it is as bad as Likud but smarter, this is still a reason to try to make a deal with it rather than with Likud.

Part of what Saghieh is doing here is to present 'politics' as the means of choice for a way forward in the conflict: as he said earlier, many Arabs do not understand political debate and see it as a weak option. (This is not to say that non-Arabs generally do understand it, but their ignorance is better hidden).

He clearly holds the two leading Israeli political parties responsible for the wrongs that have been done to the Palestinians, and regards reparation payments as fully legitimate. No doubt this last element is a message that is unwelcome to Israeli ears, but after the sums paid by Germany to Israel and Israelis after the war, and by Governments and companies from the late 1990s onwards, it can hardly be said to be an unreasonable demand from an Arab point of view, the more so since many of the affected have been on the international dole ever since 1948. Nevertheless, a fair assessment of the damage done would require great nuance and ethical sophistication, and no doubt consider Jewish and Israeli losses as well. I believe that there is no fixed recipe in international and Human Rights law to deal with this issue. Parallels to make the matter more complicated are the 'Heimatvertriebene' in Germany, Jewish property in Poland, and the Cyprus dilemma in which the wronged party is now the economically stronger and unwilling to compromise. I would suggest focusing on the guideline of 'making participation in the modern world possible', which would fit the spirit of socio-economic Human Rights laws, but this is outside my field of expertise.

The Arabs' inability to perceive the fine distinctions of politics, and their presentation of themselves as a perfectly united mass only achieves three results: the arbitrariness of the people's wishes, a conflict in which only one side's disappearance will bring a solution, and ultimately a racist division: übermenschen against untermenschen. The racist obscenities that are common in both Israeli and Arab fundamentalism are the price of this image making. An added consequence is that the world is placed outside the conflict – exactly the opposite of what Mandela did in South Africa. "We do not matter to the world because we do not get two metres away from our coasts. Nothing that matters in the world, if it be a cure for cancer, the collapse of the Soviet Union or a looming nuclear war, means anything to us except through its connection to The Problem, our problem. This is one of its sick aspects (39-40)."

The similarity of Israeli and Arab fanatics has been noted by others, Cf. Marcel Kurpershoek, *Onzalig Jeruzalem*, (1996), so it should not surprise anyone that Saghieh does this too. At the end of the section the perspective is broadened to return to the global issues mentioned in the beginning of this chapter and of the pamphlet as a whole. There is no reason whatsoever to dispute the appropriateness of Saghieh's fury at the insular mentality of the Arabs, in spite of its polemical vehemence.

4. Results of the Intifada

Now, the situation is such that a political way forward is still possible. When the Arabs succeed to isolate Netanyahu and appeal to the Israeli public opinion, they can achieve what military action cannot. Businessmen, intellectuals and citizens (especially the secular Israelis) can be made to understand that Netanyahu's governance is harmful to their positions and interests. It may alienate the secular American Jews from Israel, the richest and most powerful Jews in the world. It is possible even to isolate Netanyahu from the Americans. The televised images of the intifada are a precedent in this respect, as they split the ruling Likud and opened a dialogue between America and the Palestinians in Madrid and Oslo. Since then the Jews in the world are divided between Netanyahu's supporters and the supporters of peace, as the worried and torn Israeli literature shows. The old precedent of the Suez war of 1956 shows clearly that an Arab-American alliance against Israel is not impossible. Also in Camp David (1979) Carter was closer to Sadat than to Begin. And there are more examples.

'This peace of Oslo is a farce', we have said from the beginning, and we say it now with greater vehemence. It is true that peace has not come falling from heaven just like that. But in actual fact the unjust peace has made the Palestinian rights a bit better with regard to the existing power balances on earth. If realizing peace had been left to these power balances, Oslo would have been far worse. The truth has to be recovered: we never realised that in Oslo we got more than the power balances allowed for, and we can get more through security, reassurance, the building of trust and good examples. Treaties change over time; Netanyahu changes them for the worse, while it would have been possible to change them for the better. Who could have imagined that Germany and France would be reconciled so soon after the Second World War, with a history so much more bloody than ours?

The section is straightforward enough: this is what the Arabs should have done in the name of a political solution. The example of Germany and France in the 1950s is valid, just as the examples of strategic American-Arab alliances. (This shows clearly, once more, that the text is directed at readers who have reached a high level of general knowledge: even the average European does not know the particulars of this reconciliation process, in my estimation). But the success of the European Community for Coal and Steel (based on the principle of removing vital raw materials suited for war from national control) is fully worthy of remembrance.

My background readings have cast substantial doubts on the Oslo process, which are not quite taken away by this section. Among other things, from the very beginnings of limited Palestinian autonomy a rift appeared between the Tunis-based old revolutionaries headed by Arafat and the leaders from within occupied Palestine. None of the PLO

leaders who concluded the agreement had ever lived under the occupation himself; according to Hanan Ashrawi, main spokeswoman of the other group, this was apparent in the document from the beginning. She describes this in her memoirs, *This side of peace*.¹¹² (The PLO, including Arafat, had its original power base outside Palestine: in the refugee camps of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan). Her fears that Israel would continue creating facts on the ground regarding Jerusalem, settlements and human rights restrictions have proven all too true. Even though Ashrawi in her book makes a good effort to retreat with grace and not to display an open conflict with the PLO leadership, it is still clear enough that there was a serious conflict in which all the Palestinian leaders from the Territories were rebuffed. To me it seems plausible that this split was a decisive cause in the failure of the peace process at Camp David 2000.

This is not to say that Saghieh's arguments were wrong at the time of writing, and it is doubtful in any case if he really believed this wise course would be adopted. Note that he addresses terrorism only indirectly where he talks about 'security and setting the right example', which is of course the exact opposite of what terrorists do. This is because terrorism was (and is) considered by some Arabs as a legitimate means of resistance, following lines of thought similar to the Bin Laden fatwa mentioned earlier. One might have wished for a stronger stance but we should remember that he is relying partly on a sense of 'common humanity' which makes terrorism distasteful; to open a debate about its possible legitimacy would have undermined this strategy. The more so since common Western arguments for rejecting it (a human rights discourse) would be dismissed as biased and not sound convincing.

The most we understand in politics is the question of the state, since we understand that the politicians do not care about the state, but avoid it by talking about the Arab nation and the Arab or Islamic community. But the Palestinian authority can be the preparation of a state, which would be a big gain; and most Israeli Jews support the demand, as a recent poll has shown. The whole world can understand the demand for a Palestinian state, especially under some pressure: human rights and freedoms, tolerance, a vision of a new policy. And creating new states is still possible; it would be the basis for articulating further-reaching demands for peace and compensation for the losses of 1948. Consider the fate of the Gypsies, who never managed to reclaim their rights or any compensation for their suffering under the Nazis. We should be afraid that our fundamentalists and the Israeli fundamentalists will co-operate to turn us into modern Gypsies.

It is true that only towards the end of the 1990s the fate of the Roma and Sinti got real attention, and the parallel is convincing. Even though the PLO has made some feeble efforts to document the damages done to Palestinians and give them a voice, a full-fledged state could have gone much further to do this well. It has to be added that Israel has consistently tried to obliterate Palestinian national memory and hide its connection to the land. Cf. Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt* (1995). It is evident that a fair assess-

¹¹² Hanan Ashrawi, *This Side of Peace. A Personal Account*, esp. 260-61 [Dutch edition: 278-79]

ment and memorialisation of the losses on their side too is a prerequisite for them to move forward.

This is the only place in the pamphlet where Human Rights come up, and only as a potential argument to address a Western public. It is clear that although he is certainly interested in them, Saghieh is not going to stand up for them here. Instead, the parallel between Arabs and Israelis is strong again. The notion of a state as its people's advocate is clearly derived from Israel. The comparison with the Gypsies is more poignant in the Arab context because the Arabs generally feel that the Jews capitalized on the experience of the Holocaust and benefited from it. As Saghieh says later, the Arabs envy the Jews their "lucrative" tragedy and try to promote their own. So now they risk to suffer similarly but to be left penniless.

5. We and the existence of Israel

"What do we really wish to achieve? We want freedom from the occupation, to arrive at a Palestinian state, to turn the region into a coast of peace, compensation for the Palestinians, etc. etc." (51). To do this we need to discard the fundamentalist agenda that now controls us. This agenda is at bottom the rejection of Israel's existence. We need to address this issue honestly, the sooner the better.

Israel has become part of the reality of the region, and one that can turn it altogether in a sea of blood, while we fantasize about its elimination! For one thing, Israel would not hesitate to use its nuclear power under serious military threat, which we will never achieve anyway. (Note that the world is less worried about her nuclear weapons than about our chemical ones.) We can read its behaviour as the fear of a small minority for whom the Middle East as a whole remains a demographic time bomb without democracy. Even though Israel was built on the Palestinian tragedy (and there were many things wrong with the place in which it had no part) and it might have been possible to abort her as a foetus, we cannot now kill it after its birth, to borrow the image used by Bernard Lewis.

The text is clear enough: the dominant Arab discourse, which is determined by the fundamentalists, rejects Israel and wants to eliminate it. Saghieh attempts to force a debate about its acceptance as part of the Middle East. I do not know if it was a first, but it might have been.

The distinction minority / majority and their respective fears and behaviour will appear more frequently in the text from now on. The imbalance between fears about Israel's nuclear weapons and Iraq's chemical weapons (I think these are meant here) has only been accentuated since. The reference to Bernard Lewis is not specified in the text, which throughout does not contain footnotes and references. The abortion example is followed by a digression against anti-abortion movements: 'Isn't the distinction between the foetus and the baby a fundamental proof for the defenders of abortion? Sadly, we follow the reactionary philosophy which equates them...'. This appeared to me the one

spot in the pamphlet where a secular-liberal viewpoint predominates over a humanist one, which should take the ethical dilemma more seriously. But, as I said, it certainly is a digression: now comes the most important suggestion of the whole pamphlet.

It is true that the people who founded Israel in 1948 were migrants. But now the great majority of Israelis was born there. They are not responsible for the misdeeds of their parents, even though they are asked for compensation for what their parents and grandparents did, and to be mindful of it in their approach of us. Israel is older than most Arab countries. Is it not possible to think about another approach? Could we not consider trying to benefit from Israel's modern economy, its ties with the West, its technology, its parliamentary experiment? In one of its sick moments the region chased over half a million Arab Jews that did not have ties to Zionism. Couldn't we renew this bond, and add this new Jewish colour to our multicoloured region, which is formed anyway by migrations? Most likely this idea sounds heretical at a time of rising intolerance and absence of pluralism throughout the region: Kurds and Shia in Iraq, Christians in Lebanon and Syria, Orthodox Jews in Israel. But after all there are 250 million Arabs, if they were all sane and democratic it shouldn't be difficult. Couldn't we trade something better than poison?

Saghieh offers a new vision of Arab-Israeli relations: one of economic co-operation and cultural exchange. It is remarkable that he does not hesitate to mention the expulsion of oriental Jews from their homelands in the Middle East, a deed the region cannot possibly be proud of. No doubt the re-evaluation of this many-layered process would be important for a new phase in Arab-Israeli relations.

The value of the Jewish-Israeli development model is very clear in the text, for example in the words "parliamentary experiment". From a European perspective Israel's cut-throat style of coalition- and policy-making is hardly a likely model to appeal to other countries, but surprisingly it still does. Apparently Saghieh recognises its dilemmas, hence "experiment", but still retains his interest. It is also true, incidentally, that the most interesting Arab experiments with democracy (and its family- and clan-related complications) can be found among Israeli Arabs and in Palestine.

The mentioning of pluralism and tolerance are significant and again show Saghieh's liberal paradigm. In this light it is remarkable that throughout the pamphlet the Arabs appear as a collective: the pronoun is always "we". An antagonistic reading of the pamphlet would probably reduce this to a convention typical for a Greek Orthodox writer who wants to accommodate all Arabs and Muslims. But it would be a weak excuse not to take the message seriously.

The consensus about the fight against Israel is only a sham; it is the only item we can talk about against dozens of suppressed disagreements. Therefore we speak about it with so many exaggerations and artificial rhetoric. Examples of this are the 1991 Gulf War and the Lebanese and Jordanian wars, the ceaseless debates about the seriousness of our leaders towards

Palestine, and most specially the fact that we ignore the conditions of the Palestinians in our own countries: none of our leaders is prepared to pay one penny for them. Through the fears of a minority, the absence of a middle class and the weakness of democracy most people go along with this consensus in its most extreme shape, as determined by the radicals. In the future, none of our countries will be able to live and prosper without peace. International bodies will take over the tasks of the state. Only peace will deliver us from the continuous crisis of identity, from which we and the Israelis suffer. On the other hand, what might happen if the Gulf region re-orientates towards Asia, the Maghreb towards Europe? What Arab Middle East will remain, and what will be left of Egypt's central role? What if the American-Israeli alliance will gain in strength in our part of the world?

So far we have always found excuses for political, cultural or economic normalization. Murderers were proclaimed heroes. Through terrorist deeds we have voted for Netanyahu, to such an extent that he is our means and our product as much as the product of historical Jewish extremism. It is this foolishness that made us acclaim a reckless person such as Saddam Husayn – the cause for the destruction of two Arab countries.

But even so, if these days are bad, they are far better than when we were led to defeat by our greatest hero, Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Nowadays no one can say any more that the Palestinians do not matter.

This passage calls to mind the old Arab vision of pan-Arabism, embodied by Nasser; the passage about the looming disintegration of the Arab world presents the exact opposite of this ideal. (The new media have since changed the picture somewhat.) Saghieh's text reads as a deconstruction of pan-Arabism. I have a suspicion though that underlying his text there is a vision for a future with similar ideals, but this time with genuine communication and solidarity, and in the context of a globalized world to be sure.

The accusation that Netanyahu is the Arabs' product and means as well as Israel's must have infuriated any nationalist or Islamist. But it is undeniable that the violent actions on both sides reinforce and support each other to a large degree.

6. We and the Holocaust

In order to help the Palestinian cause, and to become citizens of the world, we need to understand the source of its sympathy for Israel.

Each side needs to understand the tragedy of the other. At present we do not understand the Jewish situation in Europe, nor are the Jews sensitive to the Palestinian suffering. So we need a radical strategy towards tragedies. The Israeli intellectuals have a duty to speak about the Palestinian tragedy, as the New Historians admirably do; the Arab intellectuals have a

duty to speak about the Holocaust and make it better known. Which also helps our prestige in the world, without any damage.

The dominant view is that we paid the price for something that we had nothing to do with. But once we have become its victims, how can we maintain it had nothing to do with us? A victim of a natural disaster cannot say the same. And Nazism in its effects was closer to being a natural disaster than an act of a society. But also: those who say ‘it means nothing to us’ betray a third-worldly insensitivity to Europe and its history. The effects of colonialism do not excuse this; even our own independence movements are unintelligible without the Second World War, which is closely connected to the Holocaust.

Saghieh simply steps over views that dismiss the Holocaust as a Jewish invention or diminish its numbers; again, he does not wish to conduct a debate on that level. The comparison of the Holocaust to a natural disaster calls to mind his use of “calamity” to describe 9/11, as we have seen in Chapter 3. It is not very fortunate. One could say that precisely the fact that the destruction was man-made is central to its significance. Also, the negation of individual identity and self-determination is one of its most threatening aspects in Western perception of the Holocaust. But as we will see, the conviction that people should have control of their destinies (as individuals) and choices, of which the Holocaust was the ultimate denial does not appear strongly even in his more personal writings. Perhaps it is the luxury of living in the West that makes it possible.

The point about the significance of the Holocaust to the Arabs is quite clever. The rejection of colonialism as an excuse serves a similar purpose: to move beyond tragedy. A ‘radical strategy towards tragedies’ echoes the old Arab mobilization rhetoric. But that does not diminish the validity of his point. The challenge (both collectively and individually) is to move beyond the first-person perspective taken by the victim to accept also a third-person perspective, similarly to what he would argue later in the article discussed in Chapter 3.

Most likely this insensitivity towards the Jewish tragedy in Europe is not just an Arab thinking error, parallel to the Jewish political error to establish Israel. There is an element in it of opportunism and lack of good will; as if only useful Western events mean anything to us. More worryingly, most of those who say ‘it means nothing to us’ share opinions and manners of thought that were common among the perpetrators of the Holocaust: Islamists and nationalists like Sayyid Qutb and others. Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and Rashid al-Keilani even tried the co-operation that Yitzhak Shamir and the Stern gang tried. This difference puts us in direct opposition to modernity, of which the Holocaust was one of the most prominent negative consequences. Of modernity we now accept only the collective and military sides, not the humanitarian and legal sides.

Both the Stern Gang (a well known Jewish terrorist organisation) and Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, tried to co-operate with Nazi Germany: the first against the British, the second against the Jews. See Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 464, but apparently Saghieh presumes we know this. In popular Israeli imagination a huge deal has been made on the Mufti's attempts to make a deal with Hitler. An example is the length of the entry on him in the Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust: it is almost as long as the entry on Hitler, longer than the entry on Eichmann, and twice as long as the entries on Heydrich and Himmler. Although the Mufti visited Nazi Germany during the Second World War, his position was marginal at the time and he did not have a role in the Holocaust at all.¹¹³ (

Why was the establishment of the State of Israel a political mistake according to Saghieh? The obvious explanation is that it was based on inequality between citizens (what an Arab would call racism), and that the Jews never had a plan to deal with the Arabs at all. In their talks the Arabs have usually argued for a secular Palestine with equality for its citizens, also in 1947 but of course the idea had no chance with the Zionists. Saghieh does not specify why the thoughts of Arab extremists and the Nazis are similar, but I suppose he means their murderous plans and anti-Semitism.

The notion that the Holocaust is intimately connected to modernity and not a relapse in the Middle Ages has been demonstrated by Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989).

If the Palestinians feel like this, they are excused: their toes are in the fire. But intellectuals cannot be excused if they stick to their nationalist and fundamentalist opinions. The tragedy that inspired them is only the signal of a crisis, not of a possible solution. A victim will attempt to arrive at a solution through pain and revenge, which do not provide a cure. One can try to understand him but he should not be idealized.

If intellectuals are led by the masses, this is a disaster. Instead of Lenin's ideal to let the intelligentsia lead the masses we reverse the order, which alienates us further from the world, from sympathy, relations, and fair criticism. We envy the Jews their "lucrative" tragedy, and at the same time we talk down the number of victims and translate every Western author who denies the Holocaust. Garbage such as the *Protocols* insult the Jews with whom we want to build peace, just as it insults the Arabs' good sense, and shows our lack of intellectual talent. Our arrogance and stupidity in prolonging the tragedy are as big as the Zionists'.

Our relationship to the Holocaust is complicated by our similarity. Our political fantasies mirror theirs, witness the 'diaspora', 'slaughter' and 'memory'; even the liberation organisation is an imitation of theirs. This similarity and the clashing attempts to monopolize victimhood show all the more that recognition of the other's tragedy is essential for a more peaceful relation between ourselves and a world in which we must now be willing to live.

¹¹³ I owe this information to a lecture by Dr Idith Zertal, Utrecht, 12 January 2005; see her *Nation und Tod: der Holocaust in der israelischen Öffentlichkeit*, 2003, p. 168.

The passage is clear enough. Note how it targets intellectuals specifically, not surprisingly since the pattern of conflicting victimizations requires some theoretical background. More and more Saghieh's text makes one wonder how important the conflict with the Zionists has been in the Arabs' encounter with modernity. The point about Arab-Israeli similarities is true also; the 'liberation organisation' that is meant is the PLO, but also Hamas has Jewish parallels in its combination of militant and social groups. These similarities would merit a lot more attention.

7. Islam and Judaism

The fundamentalists project a struggle between Muslims and Jews on all phases of history, but they rarely offer any proofs for this. This projection damages our understanding of the past as well as the present.

In reality Islam at its coming had set its mind on greater things than fighting Jews. There are numerous similarities in the stories, doctrine, social organisation and legal system; early Muslims fasted on Yom Kippur and directed their prayer to Jerusalem. In Medina there was a breach after Muhammad's "Constitution", which is only natural when a new religion wants to change social conditions that are the basis of an old one. Moreover, Muhammad had expected Jewish support to his mission that did not come. After the Jews had been conquered militarily, they did not remain a danger to Islam. Even in the period of the fight at Khaybar the Prophet had Jewish allies; he concluded treaties with Jewish tribes and even married a Jewish woman, Safiya bint Huyyay.

In actual fact Muhammad expelled two Jewish tribes from Medina and exterminated the male members of the third, seizing their possessions for booty. From a 'lachrymose' view of Jewish history under Islam he could be criticized for this omission, but this fact is sufficiently well known among Arabs so that it does not have to be repeated. And Saghieh's point is accurate: the religions were very close, especially in the beginning, and after Islam established its superiority by military means, Judaism was no longer a threat.

The statements in the following paragraph about the origins of Arab anti-Semitism are accurate to my knowledge, but they are difficult to verify. The rise and nature of Arab anti-Semitism is a topic that is well-nigh impossible to study in a fair and balanced way – especially the cartoons are notorious. It is obviously of huge political significance. The point about the role of the Catholic missions in spreading anti-Semitism is especially original, and is certainly worth more investigation. The Orthodox Christian communities had a repository of anti-Semitism in their religious traditions, such as texts by John Chrysostom which might have fostered anti-Semitism but the explanation that it is basically an imported article from the West sounds more plausible to me.

In later days too, Judaism was no threat to Islam. The Jews did not engage in mission, nor did they have powerful allies as the Christians did. In fact Jews and Muslims were often allies, as under the Crusades and the expulsion from Spain. Early modern Arabic literature witnesses to ongoing connections. Even Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was not an anti-Semite: his first target was the Christian missions. It was the Catholic missions, who were against the French revolution and had taken the side against Dreyfus, who spread Western anti-Semitism among the Arabs. Only under influence of the wars of 1948 and 1956 anti-Semitism became more common.

The conflict between Judaism and Islam is a modern conflict, and one connected to Palestine. The fact that it is connected to a real issue differentiates it from European anti-Semitism, which was an anti-Semitism without Jews based on fantasy. In anti-Semitism the Jew is simultaneously a greedy capitalist and a communist, a fanatical nationalist and part of an international conspiracy, the spider in the web of society and unable to be integrated in it. But in our context anti-Semitism is connected to a political problem, so we should reflect on the political problem with the same realism we apply to its causes. We have to break the circle of self-perpetuating stereotypes that shape the thoughts and policies of Al-Daqaḥīsa and of Netanyahu.

This is as far as Saghih goes in his critique of anti-Semitism and attempts to turn hostility to the Jews into a supra-historical phenomenon: he points out the blatant contradictions of anti-Semitism, and enumerates some historical facts that are not commonly known. He refrains from discussing the Qur'anic verses that could be used to support anti-Semitism. Apparently he didn't trust his chances to challenge the Arab intellectual scene more directly, and it is not very clear how he (as a non-Muslim) could best have done that. One might have wished for a stronger statement that signs of anti-Semitism are the means of choice to let Western societies and commentators lose their sense of reason and proportion – but he has already said something to that effect before.

We have to remember that if illiterate Arabs have any notion at all of the powers that be in the world, then Israeli and American dominance will play a central role in it: a measure of anti-Semitism fits perfectly into such a picture. My experience of the racism in a Dutch Christian community in a multi-ethnic (largely Moroccan) suburb is that no talking would have made any difference whatsoever against the realities of dirt, danger, noise, headscarves, battered BMWs and Mercedes, etcetera. From what he said in the last section we understand that in the Arab context the Holocaust would not impress anyone as an argument.

8. "Memory"

Memory is a common word among our intellectuals, but most of them do not know that the concept of memory is a Jewish invention, and the reason for it was the Holocaust. Now it is said that memory urges us to war and hatred. Is this true?

We should know that memory is selective; part of it is suppressed, another part is artificially constructed. This is the domain of time, of ideological systems, theologians, school-books, etc. Most of what all these factors do is to weaken the individuality of memory in favour of the collective and national. There is always an element of coercion in creating memory, but among us this is strong, because of the weakness of personal formation and the absence of documentation centres and archives. All our old states except the Ottoman Empire ended in disintegration with the loss of documents, and what is left of the Ottomans is no great help: cultural changes were gradual and did not leave the centre, and led to a lazy memory without the necessary strength of imagination and flexibility. Also its study has been one-sided, focusing on Muslims rather than others, Sunni rather than Shia Islam, etc.

What's more, within the framework of national and collective memory, there is a certain measure of tension: memory from before the nation state or after, local memory, ethnic memory versus state memory. Sometimes a part of Palestinian memory (such as the fight with Israel) conflicts with another memory, said to be the beginning of national consciousness: the revolt of 1834 against Muhammad Ali. So any attempt to enforce a homogeneous national memory is always repressive, and its mendacity grows proportionally to (1) its fragmentation and (2) the decrease of historical knowledge, which are widespread among us.

The description of memory as a multi-layered phenomenon is plausible even though it is of course unclear on which it is based. Underlying the text is the awareness that Arab writers were influenced by Jewish writers about memory. Saghieh himself is certainly an example of an Arab writer interested in Israel (as is illustrated by a.o. his discussion of Hannah Arendt's book on Eichmann below) but it is hard to estimate how common it is for Arab intellectuals to have such an interest.

Nor did Israel escape them. It wished for a collective Hebrew memory to replace the Yiddish memory, plus all painful memories that preceded the state, and presented this collective memory as the preparation for the state. A western journalist who visited Israel and noted the reactionary energy that enforces this tendency towards unity described how the newness of Jewish cities and houses betrays their strangeness to the country and the weakness to their bond with

the place, because Jewish memory in connection to Palestine is so recent. The insistence on history and faith is increased to fill this gap.

Hannah Arendt addressed this issue when she criticized Israel for mounting a theatre trial and for emphasizing crimes against the Jewish people instead of crimes against humanity. Arendt wanted to liberate memory from its national character, but Ben Gurion preferred small politics and use the trial for strengthening the fragile basis of the state.

Israeli national consciousness first refused and suppressed the debate about the Holocaust. Zionist nationalism, as all nationalism, wanted to create a heroic consciousness of which the Jewish state was to be the culmination. But memory of the Holocaust and construed national memory are different. The first is the rejection of the evil of the Nazis, while the second is the renewal of war with a rising state with which whole peoples identify. And the memory of the Holocaust starts with its individuality (Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah", Schindler's List, Primo Levi, etc.).

Again the text shows that Saghieh has studied Israel well; especially the suppression of Yiddish memories is important. A huge amount of valuable material about Yiddish culture before the Shoah is still gathering dust in archives (which, by the way, shows that having archives is not enough in itself if they are underfunded).¹¹⁴ Also the influence of Zionism in classical Jewish historiography is still paramount and hard to challenge.

The systematic study of Holocaust memory in Israel is a quite recent phenomenon, about which the last word has not yet been said by any means. It belongs in the sphere of activity of the 'New Historians' (Tom Segev, Idith Zertal). The fact that Saghieh brings all this up for an Arab audience is remarkable in itself. Unfortunately the name of the journalist quoted (at some length in fact) is not given, nor is the source specified. Could it again be Hannah Arendt? Her, or his, remarks are acute enough. The aim of the section is undoubtedly to increase understanding for Israel's situation and behaviour among Arabs, as a follow-up of what he has said about the duty of intellectuals beforehand. In this case Saghieh is quoting this anonymous source to say what he as an Arab cannot very well say not to be accused of being too pro-Israeli.

9. *The Discourse of Memory*

Both Zionist and Arab nationalists begin memory with their discourse about it. It is a simplistic, totalitarian memory that does not consider nuances or details. We only call to mind what we already know, the defeat of 1948! What we remember is then easily turned into a slogan. But memory, even the memory of the Holocaust, is a danger to tolerance when she is not used according to Arendt's advice, with a concentration on its human aspects and not on its Jewish

¹¹⁴ Cf. Cecile E. Kuznitz, *Where the treasure of our people lies. A history of the YIVO institute for Jewish research*. (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 2000).

aspect alone. In present-day Germany the Jews' persistent appealing to the Nazi past results as Jews, not as Germans, results in grievances among democratic Germans and is seen as counterproductive. An example is Henryk M. Broder who remarked: 'The Germans will never forgive the Jews about Auschwitz'.

Memory is functional. How should we then understand its narrowing down to pure hatred? In this single dimension, half true and half artificial construct, theories of memory do not change us but lead to endless open warfare, just as it does in Northern Ireland. As the Catholic memory is based on exclusion, and the Protestant memory on fear, there is no room to work together on a new future. "Is it not possible that the future enters into the construction of the past to the same extent as the past enters into the construction of the future?" (93).

This is not a call to forget the past, or to proclaim forgetting a virtue. But as long as memory is governed by artificial constructs of ideological passion, we need a notion of the future in it in order not to leave it as a call to revenge alone. We should have a more complex memory, more independent of its acknowledged shapers, and one that includes the wars, incompetence, autocracy, social disintegration, and human suffering. We will remember all this soundly, conscious of our responsibilities, knowing that we can do better than our memories and that we will not be imprisoned in them.

The key to this passage is the accusation that nationalists and fundamentalists would throw at liberals such as Saghieh: to make a peace deal is to forget the past. An example is the right of return issue. In response he says that insisting on the past leads to a deadlock, and that the Arabs need a future as well as a past. This makes sense, but nevertheless this section shows the importance of a balanced and comprehensive approach to the past in order to win the Arabs' minds for peace. I mean deeds, not words.

Henryk M. Broder is a well known and very controversial German publicist; the book meant is *Der Ewige Antisemit*. His homepage at www.henryk-broder.de will give the reader an impression of his style, and most likely confirm Saghieh's point to some degree. Another intertextual reference can be discerned in the passage about the functionality of memory: this is a central idea in Maurice Halbwachs' ground-breaking work on memory (posthumously published after 1945). Sadly the rising violence will have replenished the store of violent memories with new ones since 1997. Nevertheless the call for a realistic vision of the future, not dictated by one-sided memories, is still valid for both sides in the conflict. The power of memory as a political instrument is evident.

10. Places of Alternative Models

"Netanyahu is no mediocre opponent, whom we could fight with our usual strategies to fight and to fail.(...) More than any time in the past we need to rise above the traumas, to avoid new ones; and speak to the Israelis and Americans. We must do this to win, not to die" (97).

The title sounds a bit strange, but what is meant are countries that embody a different model, one of compromise. A whole enumeration is given in the middle of this relatively long paragraph. The opening sentence means that even when the Arabs fight mediocre opponents they fail, so now more than ever they need to rise above their normal fighting strategies.

It is justified that we are afraid of Israel, the occupier with its superior weaponry, whose soldiers and inhabitants behave with a criminal arrogance. But in the end we will not succeed to take away its weapons except by assuaging its fear, which is rooted in the Holocaust, a history of repression and the deeply felt sentiments of a minority. As a minority, it can be reassured by a modern and democratic mentality among the majority and its intellectuals. But the situation of minorities in Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, make it more difficult to tempt Israel to peace. They help Netanyahu's cause, just as our writings doubting the Holocaust and our articles do. In spite of its military power, Israel does not feel safe because of these things. Our example should persuade them to relinquish Netanyahu, give the Palestinian people rest, and support its protests... To arrive at the granting of a state. Rancour has to be replaced with calm.

This passage is clearer than any other about Saghieh's feelings about Palestine and the situation on the ground. The characterization of Israel as an arrogant occupier is no doubt based on his perception of the daily humiliations faced by Palestinians, e.g. the bullying and arbitrary decisions by fearful 18-year-old conscripts at checkpoints. It seems to me that he well understands the fear at the Israeli side too. The expression 'tempt Israel to peace' should not raise doubts, as the following will show. It is just his description of the process of persuasion that is needed.

It is worrying that the wooden rhetoric dwelling on defeats going back to 1936 remains victorious and blocks everything, even though it has never achieved anything good. We know that noble peoples can degenerate, just as Germany, the cradle of modern philosophy and one of the cradles of literature and classical music, degenerated under Nazism. We may never have advanced that far, but neither did our intellectuals behave in a similar way to the German intellectuals who went into exile, committed suicide or were killed. Our intellectuals side with al-Daqa'misa; they are moved by nationalists and religious fanatics, not by cultivated democrats.

"Some say that this is how the vanquished behave. Perhaps, but if the vanquished can achieve one single victory in this state of mind, he will certainly commit a massacre" (100). Such a victory is a great danger, it would damage not only politics but reason and life; it may

be more dangerous than the enemy. But chances are that the vanquished will never achieve this victory in this state of mind.

We should remember that Israel has gained in prestige by the collapse of Communism, and that all democratic countries are worried about it. And we might as well remember that we called the dissidents in Eastern Europe spies and Jews, they who are the new sages of this part of the world. We should be open for harsh criticism in order to win this battle.

Implicitly Saghiech is telling the Arab intellectuals that the Arab mental condition is dismal, comparable to Nazi Germany's, and that their behaviour does not meet the demands of the day, nationalists and fundamentalists as they are. There are no excuses for persisting in this frame of mind, not the glorious past, not the mentality of the defeated. Here I am strongly reminded of Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence*, but there the criticism was more direct. And his stories about Saddam's regime prevent me from dismissing the comparison to Nazi Germany out of hand.

Our voice betrays that we reject compromise. This weakens the sensible politicians, and shows our inability to come up with a coherent discourse and strategy. Insisting again and again on Arab unity leads to the opposite. More than that, our uncompromising self-presentation is an insult to the cause we want to win. Witness: China, Chile, Germany and Japan with their plea to be banned from re-arming, South Africa...

China and Chili are discussed with some examples of the painful compromises they had to make to develop. Saghiech is implicitly making the point that all the world develops and the Arabs risk being left behind. He shows his awareness of globalisation, which it seems was pretty early for an Arab writer.

America: we disagree about politics, but we cannot contest its model. It's the first empire with this model, and for this reason it will not collapse through military expenditure. We cannot contest it because it is the proud image to which our children are drawn: from hamburgers and Pepsi to songs and PC's. If we do not give them what they want, the fighting will start again! The bond with America creates ties between the world's tribes for the first time. We certainly shall not let North Korea or Iran determine our values?

The conflict about Palestine should not paralyse our minds. The way we avoid contact (we do not eat with them, we do not sit with them, ...) is almost pagan. Individuals should meet and discuss their interests, literature, cinema, cooking, architecture... Individuals mirror their governments and states, but we prolong the conflict to all aspects of life. Instead we could protest against the racism common in many countries that cannot decide which, Jew or Arab, is most hated.

I wonder if the Arab avoidance of everything Jewish could not be seen as a mirror of Jewish avoidance of everything German, which was strong especially after the war.

Even now 35,000 Arabs work in Israel, apart from the Palestinians whose desire for work and income we should respect. We should be sensitive to life, in showing a human face: to relate the deaths of civilians and children to their conditions and be wary about the language of murder and martyrdom. We should not let ourselves be manipulated by any country in trouble under the delusion that we follow a ‘collective national and Islamic strategy’.

But most especially we should not appear as heathens who cannot bear to allow any criticism without a criticism of Israel that precedes it. We all know about Israel, our abusing it does not change matters. We must lift ourselves to a strategy to defeat it politically, and not fight a “Big Brother” with incantations. This is a matter of common sense. “For if we did win in this mentality, then to lose would be better” (110).

The theory that like all empires the US would collapse sooner or later under military expenditure is Paul Kennedy’s: *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, which was influential in the late 1980s. Saghieh’s belief in the unshakeable position of the US as cultural focus and political power is understandable in the world of the mid-1990s. The references to paganism and to North Korea are subtle taunts to fundamentalists and Islamists, while the example of modern children is quite charming in this highly political context. More about that later.

The commonplace of criticism of Israel (even if honestly believed in) we have seen even in the Arab Human Development Reports, which for me somewhat weakened their persuasive power, so he seems to be ahead of them by almost a decade. His repeated statement that a carnage would follow should the Arabs ever win a war against Israel in their current mentality, which would be disastrous for themselves as well, can only be affirmed.

In fact, when he states that losing would be better, the implications are far-reaching. If we apply the same reasoning to 1967, then he suggests that for the larger Arab world (not the Palestinians of course) even the defeat of 1967 was better than what might have happened otherwise. What if they had been more successful, with all their violent rhetoric?¹¹⁵ Any second mass killing of Jews (hypothetical of course, but likely) would have been the ultimate moral defeat of humanity in the twentieth century, as well as the death blow to the Arab course towards modernity and a sound relationship with the West. But as it is, there is still a chance.

¹¹⁵ Cf. André Chouraqui, *L’Amour fort comme la mort*, p. 352 and 358-9. He quotes Radio Amman: ‘O Arabs, wherever you are, shoot! Shoot until the last bullet! Forward, to write new pages of glory! Revenge! Crush the aggressor! You have the end of Israel in your hands! Forward to victory! Fly, o eagles, o heroic pilots!’ (My translation). The comparison to Radio “Mille Collines” in Rwanda 1994 is appropriate.

5.3 Conclusion

1. Characteristics

In his 2002 article, to which I have already referred a couple of times, Amr Hamzawy wrote the following about the marginal voices in Arab debate:

Auf der anderen Seite neigen kritische Denker angesichts der tragenden rückwärts-gewandten Ausrichtung der Mehrheitsauffassung dazu, in ihrer Bereitschaft, die jener Auffassung zugrunde liegenden normativen Grundannahmen zu hinterfragen, couragierter zu werden und sich nahezu ausschließlich um einen zeitgemäßen Character ihrer Argumentation zu bemühen.¹¹⁶

This observation fits Saghieḥ's *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* remarkably well. The courage of the author in writing the pamphlet is evident; also, the text clearly attempts to question the underlying assumptions of the mainstream of Arab debate, and the 'topicality' (an awkward translation of 'zeitgemäß') of the argument is shown by the many intertextual connections that have appeared in the comments above. Saghieḥ has studied Israel and Judaism quite thoroughly. As far as I am able to assess the text, its discussion is always erudite, on a par with Western intellectual texts. There is no evidence of prejudices, half-truths or far-fetched theories such as conspiracies; in fact I would say that in courage and erudition the pamphlet compares favourably to the recent Dutch political essays I have read. It is not rare for Arab thinkers to engage with Western ideas, but that Saghieḥ understands them and knows their worth makes his text stand out.

Occasionally there is a display of learning that may appear a little overdone to Western readers (most examples have disappeared from the summary, but the translation will show them). The examples of al-Daḡāmisa and Netanyahu are time-bound but nevertheless I would recommend this text warmly to any Arab (or Dutch) reader, if perhaps with the caution that the high rhetorical style might be hard to get through.

In contrast to the dominant Arab discourse we see that Saghieḥ, and no doubt some others, have achieved a position of intellectual independence against the Arab mainstream they criticise, a position that also offers them insights in currents and developments in the Arab world that are crucial for the Western world to know of. These people can function as reality checks for Western policy makers and opinion leaders. No doubt the communication with

¹¹⁶ Hamzawy, "Vom Primat der Verschwörung", p. 346. In English, roughly: 'But because of this backward orientation of the majority, critical thinkers are inclined to be more courageous in their readiness to challenge the normative assumptions that underly it, and to be concerned almost exclusively about the topicality of their argument.'

them could be facilitated better – cultural differences and miscommunications, in Arabic or English, remain likely – but the opportunity is certainly there.

Apart from its effort to be ‘topical’ the pamphlet stands out through its pragmatism. Saghieh presents the conflict in Israel-Palestine as a purely political struggle; the Arabs have no credible military option, and cannot count on any international support. Instead he argued for a political line of action involving more persuasion, exchange, and setting the right example. There is no reason at all to doubt his sincerity, he does not regret the fact that the Arabs have no chance on the battlefield at all, as his last statement shows. My belief is that he hoped (and perhaps still hopes) for a political deal and for normalisation of the relationship. As a modern and advanced country, Israel could be an incredibly useful partner on the road to progress in the Arab world. It certainly is a tempting idea, and as we have seen earlier, the Arabs have preciously few alternatives. But it is also clear that Saghieh’s hopes would require a significant change in Israel’s attitude towards Arabs and Palestinians: equal treatment, respect, financial compensation for losses, opportunities to benefit economically from its international connections. These are the essential conditions that would have to be met. As in the article “Universalising the Holocaust”, he considers hot issues such as the status of Jerusalem, water rights, and all the other contested items as of secondary importance, perhaps even technicalities. In any case he cannot be bothered to discuss them. By contrast, overcoming mutual victimization is of paramount importance.

2. Target Audience

The target audience of the pamphlet must be intellectuals, or at least people with a high level of education. The text presumes extensive historical and intellectual background knowledge, also anyone less educated would never be able to understand the more complex theoretical parts. In a few cases intellectuals are addressed relatively directly, but never ever by name. This is one of the most remarkable features of the pamphlet: it is vehemently critical but not directed at individual people. Saghieh uses more common-sense logic and less factual arguments and statistics than most Western intellectuals would do. The common sense arguments are meant to stick: Saghieh seems to prefer the arguments that can be dismissed least easily, even if they are not necessarily the most cogent ones. A good example is constituted by the contradictions in the anti-Semitic fantasies mentioned in section 7: Jews as capitalists, communists and whatnot at the same time.

It seems clear that the text is not written to expect a sympathetic audience: that means that not secular liberals but primarily intellectuals of a different outlook, nationalists and Islamists, would read it.¹¹⁷ I regrettably have not had time to investigate the reactions to the pamphlet. It would have been interesting to see how the communication lines run. Some criticism of other positions has to be read between the lines of the text, indicating further that its target audience would include people with very different convictions. In the Netherlands it is sort of understood that religious and secular authors (leftist or rightist) politely ignore each other and their disagreements but not in the Arab world, apparently. The price of the communication across party lines seems to be that much of it takes place below the surface, so to speak. This would preclude any challenge to good name and position, and allow people to change or modify their positions without shame. Unlike Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence*, this is a text to persuade, not to accuse.

It is remarkable how the text targets Arabs in general but does not address the Palestinians directly ever. At one point it says that 'if they feel so-and-so, they are excused: their toes are in the fire'. There is another occasion where suicide bombers and putting a bomb in the marked are condemned, but it is a bit of a sideline (suicide bombers are referred to as just suicides, 'even though they are called martyr's deaths'). Not coincidentally Al-Daqāmisa is not a Palestinian but a Jordanian. Bringing in an assessment of the legitimate rights to self-defence of the Palestinians would have compelled Saghih to qualify some of his argument, and it is understandable that he did not want that. What's more, the responsibility of the non-Palestinian Arabs is an excellent topic as it is.

Quite frequently there are negative references to Israel ('criminal arrogance', Netanyahu as an 'Israeli monster', Israeli extremism, excesses and fundamentalism) but they play a marginal role for the whole of the text, this is why I did not bring them out. Whatever the feelings of the author are (or were), they also serve to appease a hostile audience to some degree.

3. *Time frame*

It makes sense to read the pamphlet as an attempt to rescue the Oslo peace process from imminent collapse – or at least to do the maximum on the Arab side to rescue it. This is just about the stated purpose (see introduction, Chapter 1). But in spite of the threatening opening, to some extent the pamphlet reflects the optimistic vision of the 1990: the economic boom,

¹¹⁷ I never fully understood this until Saghih told me in an interview; see below, chapter 6.

the prospects of peace and the hegemony of liberal capitalism. The examples of compromise in the last chapter bear this out. Also the connection to the Al-Jazeera debate that prompted Saghieh to write fits this pattern; apparently it was an open debate, one of a sort that should have moved the Arabs to a more modern thinking, but did not.

In the discussions of the effects of the intifada I thought I could feel some doubt seeping in if this optimistic vision was ever going to work. And it evidently hasn't for now: Israelis and Palestinians have moved towards further separation and estrangement. Nevertheless there remain significant attempts at dialogue and communication, often organised by NGOs, in which total and permanent separation is certainly not taken for granted. (In my own experience of these encounters the gap between Israelis and Palestinians seemed narrower than the gap between them and 'us' Europeans; their ways of talking and behaving seemed related). Of course the Middle East conflict has gained other dimensions: Iraq and the War on Terror, the hunt for Al-Qaeda. But their connection to Israel-Palestine is limited, and I do not feel Saghieh's text has lost any of its urgency, even if some passages are time-bound. And as the interview in 6.4 shows, he has certainly not given up on Israel.

4. Israel and Arab modernity

Modernity and Israel appear very closely related in the pamphlet, so much so that I wonder to what extent Israel's presence and activities have influenced the Arab encounter with modernity. It would surprise me indeed to find balanced discussions of this pattern in the academic literature. Not only memory, also anti-Semitism is relevant for modernity, just as (as he says) the Holocaust was an essential part of it in the West. A little devil – perhaps not so little – says that 'being modern' is becoming less and less of a requirement for daily life, even in developed countries.

On the basis of what we have seen above, in section 2.4, it seems a likely working hypothesis to understand the dominant discourse in the Arab public sphere (media) as a cocktail of contemporary, early modern and occasionally pre-modern ideas in which defeat plays a role, as do conspiracy theories, references to Islam and the Arabs' glorious past, the lack of stability and economic opportunities, and lamentations of the negative impact of American and Israeli policies. I will develop this observation in the conclusion.

The crooked set of thoughts and beliefs that the mainstream discourse represents might easily have led to excesses in the many Israeli-Arab wars, and might still, although thank God the question remains hypothetical. On the other hand there are certain elements in it that are

true and incontestable, such as the legal and moral predicaments of Israel and of the international community in Iraq (especially since 2003). As the notions of sovereignty, the role of religion in society and democratic rights remain issues of global debate, the contribution of Arab thinkers cannot be missed. We have seen that real fears – for Israel’s enormous conventional and substantial nuclear arsenal – play a role on the Arab side too. We have to say that the fears from both sides appear justified, both in the past and in the present.

The many passages about Jewish-Israeli history in the pamphlet add up to tell a story of their own. They tell about Israel’s troubled and partly traumatic arrival in a Middle East where it hardly feels at home: the role of Zionism and its changing nature after the Holocaust, the necessity to find a refuge, the wars, the forced migrations from other Middle Eastern countries, its selective revision of Jewish history and use of the Holocaust memory, the internal political struggle between Likud and Labour (and religious and secular), its roughness and newness on its territory, the fears of a minority. The excesses and ‘arrogance’ are condemned and sometimes negative terms are used, but they do not dominate the narrative. In short: it features through the text as a human story, told with understanding and dedication, with a hint of admiration and sympathy; if not for Israel itself then certainly for Jewish culture in a broader sense. Israel’s presence in the region is seen as what it has always also been for the Arabs: a chance for the Arabs to catch up with the modern world.

Chapter 6: Encounter

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I leave the strictly academic, it can be considered as an appendix. In it I offer some additional information about Saghieḥ's background and opinions and a chance to encounter his style and manner of speaking on a more personal level.

The first section is based on what he told me about his intellectual career when I first met him, in London, September 2004. In the second section I present some fragments of a recent autobiographical essay that he wrote about his life in Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War. Together these sections will give some idea of his development as an independent thinker, even though it does not go very far. For example his work at a Lebanese newspaper (1974-88) and the threats and attacks it experienced do not figure in the story, not to mention the other books he wrote. At that stage of our acquaintance I thought it improper to ask too much about it. After all, intellectual activity in the Arab public sphere brings some real risk to personal safety that should never be overlooked. My interest in *Difā'an al Salām* would inevitably emphasise his attempts to argue for an understanding with Israel and great care was needed. By the time we met he couldn't possibly know (and neither did I know it myself) how I was going to represent him and his viewpoints.

The third section of the chapter is an interview written in full. It does not always go very far, I am sorry to say. But the reason to retain it (and the whole chapter) in the body of the thesis is that it brings into relief the need for empathy and sensitivity to culturally influenced attitudes in dealing with Arab historical experiences and Arab points of view in the context of a global debate about peace and reconciliation. In any case that is what I wanted it to achieve. I was hoping for a chance to do a follow-up interview but our different time schedules did not allow that.

6.2 Hazem Saghieḥ

Hazem Saghieḥ received his education in England (Cambridge) in an unspecified technical subject, but he did not finish this as he got more and more involved in politics. He set out as a Marxist, but at the beginning of the Iranian revolution he admired Khomeini, who succeeded in mobilizing the masses and toppling a pro-imperialist regime, something Marxists aspired to do but could not. This sparked his interest in religion as a more efficient revolutionary tool

than Marxism. But he soon saw that Khomeinism meant building a theological regime from the Middle Ages that would not accept external elements (i.e. ideas not derived from Shia Islam only).

For this reason he changed to liberalism in about 1982-83. Because he saw Lebanon crumble in the Civil War, he wanted to depart from all totalitarian ideologies. This was because of the Lebanese war more than through books and discussions. But besides his own observations, he was also influenced by some books: among others, Hannah Arendt *On Revolution*, and J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. About Talmon I cannot tell much, but Arendt as a critical Zionist is not an unlikely thinker to appeal to Arabs. Among Arab thinkers he mentions the Lebanese ex-Marxist Waddāḥ Šarārah. He was the author of an article “Self-criticism before the Defeat”, published according to Makiya on 25-08-1991 in Al-Hayat (but it might have been 1990, before the Gulf War).

He has worked at Al-Safir, an important Lebanese newspaper that was started and financed by Libya, but it employed many Marxists. He started work there as a commentator in 1974, when he was 24 years old, and stayed until 1988 when he moved to London. It was fairly normal then for a paper to employ a commentator who was not a reporter. In the period 1981-88 he says he was a dissident within Al-Safir, because he thought the essential thing was to stop the war and give the State a chance without first making idealistic plans what it should look like. Then afterwards one could oppose it. People at the newspaper were tolerant about this opinion, even though they did not share it.

Freedom is required for a healthy intellectual life, and there is no freedom for Arab thinkers, even in the West. At the moment you can't doubt. As long as kinship relations are strong, thinkers want to be accepted by families and tribes. Courage is just about nonexistent – it cannot exist until intellectuals break away from their primordial environment, which they do not do. There is a widespread feeling of being besieged and victimized that is half true and half fantasy. And things change in an awkward way. Some people (Iraqis and Kuwaitis) now defend America uncritically because they believe that America serves their interests. So in the background is interest, not an assessment of the situation. The main issues for Arabs is not America but how to be able to participate in the modern world.

At some point in the early 1980s he became interested in liberation theology, though he never was religious. His mindset is more rational-scientific, and in any case he is a secularist. According to him Christianity is more irrational than Islam in certain aspects, for example its ‘virgin birth’ dogma, but in practice Christians are more advanced and modern than Muslims. For the Arabs to participate in the modern world a modern, less literalistic interpretation of

religion is needed. Communism, as an offshoot of the Enlightenment, is certainly better than political Islam.

6.3 *Transit Beirut*

The fragments that follow (smaller cuts in a passage are not always indicated) have been taken from Saghieh's contribution to the volume *Transit Beirut*, edited by Malu Halasa and Roseanne Saad Khalaf.¹¹⁸ This is a book with literary and documentary reminiscences of Beirut war-torn Beirut. Saghieh's piece does not have a title.

I will not add a conclusion to this section (or the next) but would like to alert the reader beforehand to what I think is the most interesting feature of the text. Given that we know that Saghieh is a *mutaqqaf*, public intellectual, and has been so since 1974 when he began writing commentaries, it is striking how little effort he made to create an intellectual posture that shows his opinions as a rational and coherent whole or presents himself as in control of his life and emotions. It's very different from what I would expect a Western opinion maker to say or write. As a result it is rather hard to guess what ultimately motivates him to write and speak out in the way he does. .

We should know that Israel and Lebanon may appear closely related or even similar from a European or American vantage point, but in the region they see each other as different planets, almost. For people from one country to visit the other peacefully would be like a voyage to outer space – unimaginable.

At one point Saghieh mentions 'multinationals' but I think he means the peacekeeping forces, not companies.

* * *

When the Israelis advanced towards Beirut, I felt puzzled. Is this normal, when the Israelis are in Khalde by the airport, only a few kilometres from where I'm living in al-Mousaitba? 'Israel' is a word familiar to me since I was a kid. I learned it as a swear-word in the same way foreigners learn a new language through its expletives. So how could I not feel ambivalent when Israel had come as an invader to my country?

...

But there was another feeling, stronger than fear, which was behind our cold neutrality, our black neutrality that could appear yellow to others. For years Beirutis

¹¹⁸ Malu Halasa and Roseanne Saad Khalaf, *Transit Beirut: new writing and images* (2004), 111-121

had felt that they were insignificant – that no one consulted them about their lives and the total anarchy that pervaded the city. Their existence was taken for granted.

...

My colleague Abdullah told Arafat [who visited al-Safir] that 'If the Palestinian fighters really loved Palestine they should leave it to the Jews.' He had a whole theory to back it up. The lover, if truly in love with the other person, should sacrifice everything for the other person's happiness. If another lover comes along who can provide a better life, the lover should release his loved one. So Abdullah concluded that if the Palestinian revolution didn't want Palestine to end up like war-torn Beirut, it was better to leave it to the Israelis.

...

At that time I was extremely disturbed by how angry we were at the Israelis but not with our own 'brothers'.

...

I was a bundle of anger, a calculator which counted other peoples' stupidities. I confronted their fanaticism with a fanaticism of my own. Mine was not violent and it accumulated inside me, while my enemies found relief for theirs in the street clashes. So they were much happier than me.

...

In the meantime I fell in love with the multinationals who had come to Beirut. The multinationals came from somewhere above and beyond the religious sects. They – the Americans, the French, the British and the Italians – came from countries I loved to identify with. They didn't only convince us that the checkpoints were temporary, they also provided a picture of a world in which there were no checkpoints at all. They came from unimaginable distances. But the multinationals quickly discovered that we were warring sects and then they left us as well.

...

For two nights [we] heard a voice coming from the other side of the wall in the next building where one of the political parties had an office. A man was shouting that he was neither a spy nor a traitor, then he would surrender to cries that made it seem like we were living on the edge of an inferno.

...

Beirut then was very dark. Even today, when I think of Beirut in the 1980s, I only recall darkness. (...) There was also the roar of the electrical generators, and the wires hanging in dangerous and complicated ways between the buildings, the houses and every place else in the street, while the garbage was mounting everywhere, spreading its putrid smell day after day after day.

...

But the real war killed my friend Ali Salama, a taxi driver who drove south to visit his ageing parents. Ali's face stayed with me for a whole month.

...

And yet it was still unacceptable and unfamiliar to be self-critical. We kept refusing to ourselves that the harm we inflicted on ourselves was equal to the harm inflicted on us by Israel.

...

Everything was degenerating – the mental structure, the institutions and civil ethics. A friend of mine who taught at the Lebanese university showed me some papers written by his students. One of them called Freud a ‘filthy degenerate’. Another saw Max Weber as an agent of imperialism conspiring against Muslims.

...

We waited a long time for the end of the war and we counted the days like people sitting on chairs without changing their shirts or washing their faces. Old age started to attack us while stupidity, which consumed the city, provoked us to the point that we lost the distinction between the provoked and the provoker. They merged to a point after which I could only see things from a specific angle and in a particular position. Instead of considering stupidity as a reason for empathy I went too far in political dogma and judgmentalism.

...

Then someone phoned me, telling me to come to London where there was work waiting for me. So, to London then.

6.4 Interview (London, 2005)

The following is a slightly edited version of an interview I had with Saghieh in London, near the Al-Hayat building, on August 15, 2005. The goal of the interview as I prepared for it was on the one hand to gather some more information about the context in which *Difā'an 'an al Salām* appeared and its role in the debate, and on the other to hear about Saghieh's views on current developments in the Arab world and international power realities. Unfortunately a few factors inhibited me from pursuing those goals as effectively as I would have wished, such as my own limited experience as an interviewer and the fact that I am a little hard of hearing.

*Can you tell me something about what prompted you to write *Difā'an 'an al Salām*?*

I remember that this pamphlet was written after a debate I had in al Jazeera in Qatar. I was really shocked by the questions that had been raised, and the level of the debate there. There was an Islamist, a Jordanian. He was the head of the parliamentarian block of Islamists in Jordan. I was amazed how such things could be said, could be thought, be believed, and so I was disturbed.

Let's consider Makiya's Cruelty and Silence. One big difference between your pamphlet and his book is that he criticises a lot of people by name, which you do not do at all. Why is that?

When this Difaa'an al-Salam... Makiya was writing a book, this was just a pamphlet. Sometimes in my commentaries in Al Hayat I name names but I do not think the problem has to do with naming names or not; the problem is mainly the concepts and the emotions which are being dealt with ... So mentioning names might be important sometimes but sometimes it might sound scandalous. It is not always the right thing to do.

What kind of people would be reached by a pamphlet like this, at the time of its original appearance?

It would reach all segments of those groups who read. But mind you, those who read in the Arab world are a very tiny minority. And then political leaders or those who read politics are mostly very entrenched in their ideological positions. I do not think neither this pamphlet nor any ideological work would change them by itself. It might push some of them to ask some questions, to review or test their convictions, but the main change will come from elsewhere. I mean from political, economical, cultural changes.

We are talking about a whole process of things. On the one hand we have to make some changes as far as Arab ideology, if I can say this, is concerned. We have to push on the level of reforming the religious thinking of the Muslim majority. At the same time something should happen on the political-regional level, by which I mean: more pressure from America on Israel to be more forthcoming. And still I don't believe that peace will come in the area while Likud is in power in Israel. The rise of the Israeli left is a must.

Each of these changes would help the other. If the Arab situation became more relaxed politically, ideologically, religiously, this should affect Israel positively. On the other hand, if the Israelis started to pursue some open-minded policies, a sort of relaxed policy concerning the Palestinian question, this would affect Palestinians and Arabs in a positive way. So you can't isolate the elements of this agenda, neither the Arabs alone nor the Israelis nor Americans can act alone. All of them should move in the same direction.

Do you see any role for Europe in this process?

Oh yes of course. Europe proved always to be wiser than the United States, although less active. Mind you Europe is paying the money for peace in the Middle East, so its say should be bigger, much bigger than it is now. But here again, this right-wing agenda in America now is very anti-European. Although the second term of Bush is a bit better than the first one.

Have there been explicit reactions to the pamphlet? For example, people writing reviews?

Yes, some writers attacked it, some writers supported it, like anything else. Such things are still very sensitive to tackle in a free and open-minded way. It has been reviewed in some Lebanese newspapers and in al-Hayat. The funny thing is, certain attitudes are still not being appreciated and understood by fanatical religious or nationalistic writers. And unfortunately this applies to both Arabs and Israelis. Some commentaries and articles written by Israeli right-wingers foment on things written by left-wingers in Israel, saying: ‘Oh my God, it’s like what Islamists, pan-Arabists, write about us in the Arab world.’ It’s very similar. When the fundamentalists or nationalists attack whoever is liberal or left wing, it’s almost the same. The same drive, the same terminology, you find it all over.

Is Israel becoming more Middle Eastern, you’d say?

Not only Middle Eastern, it’s an international way of thinking, a global way of thinking. I mean those who give the priority to the protection of their religion, or their nation or their various ideological fears, this is characteristic of the right wing thinking all over.

That means you’re saying that there are even similarities between the US and the Arabs in their way of thinking.

Yes; this administration sort of culminated many regional tendencies here and there and gave them primacy, international legitimacy. It is the Kremlin of the Komintern of the right-wingers.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ I suppose the first sentence means: ‘Is the culmination of many regional tendencies...’ Note also that the parallel to the Soviet empire is a rare instance where Saghieh jumps to metaphorical language. I’m not sure a joke was intended – I think not. The phrase escaped me at the time of the interview.

Amr Hamzawy said that after the 9/11 attacks and the second Intifada many writers returned to positions they had before the peace process. Do you see the same?

Yes, this happened, some of them. I'll tell you what I really think. With the second Intifada and Sharon's coming back to power, and before all the election of George Bush the president of the US, and afterwards the 11th of September and the Iraq war, these events made me feel that things are much more complicated than I used to think. That peace would not come just like that; that democracy as the Americans say is not going to come just like that to Iraq. And there is the societal dimension, by which I mean the specific nature of Arab and Islamic history. Unfortunately our peoples developed the concept of politics as an in-between of fighting the west, so they entered politics as a means to fight imperialism. In this process they developed a certain animosity towards modernity.

In order to overcome this you have to pursue an agenda which is different from waging wars and imposing Israeli peace. We have to pursue a strategy which is on the one hand economically promising and politically based on compromises. A sort of Clintonian strategy. I was very optimistic in the years of Clinton, especially in his last year. I thought, this guy is really moving in the right direction toward an Arab-Israeli peace. To which Arafat very foolishly did not respond to in a positive way.

But on the other hand the Bush-Sharon way of doing things – the war in Iraq, etcetera, made me think that things are much more complicated. You can't have a positive change in the Arab world without having a different way of thinking in the West, as far as the Governments are concerned.

A change in which direction?

In order to influence changes in a positive direction we have to present a better face in the White House – and the same applies vice versa. In order that the West will be ready to listen to the Arab and Muslim grievances Arabs and Muslims should change many things themselves. So it's sort of a dialectical thing. No change will occur in one place while things are getting rotten in the other place. Things should move simultaneously in more than one front.

How do you feel about self-critical discourse in the Arab debates?

There isn't enough I'm afraid. If you bear in mind the shortcomings and the mistakes and measure the amount of criticism, then criticism is minimal still compared to the huge shortcomings we are faced with. The rise of fundamentalism, now, it's become like inquisition. Lately an Egyptian, Sayyid al-Qumni, was threatened by some Islamist-terrorist fundamentalist gang in Egypt and he relinquished his writing. He stopped writing because they already killed more than two people before him... So there is an atmosphere which is already quite dangerous.

Are you worried about the stability of regimes in the Middle East? I read a piece by a Syrian dissident, Yasin Hajj Saleh. He said the regime was getting weaker and wouldn't survive.

The problem is, it's different from the European or Western way of thinking. It's not only that you have the duality between regime and society: the moment the regime falls apart, society rises and replaces it with the opposition, and so forth. The problematic in our part of the world is that societies themselves might be as bad as the regimes. So the falling apart of the regime might lead to anarchy or disintegration or civil strife, which are as bad as the tyranny of the previous regime. Iraq is an example. So we are having a sort of catch-22 between tyranny on the one hand, and anarchy and civil wars on the other. The choice is between despotism and tyranny on the one hand, and civil war, anarchy, and fundamentalist movements on the other. This is the reason why I told you that things are more complicated than before, than the way we thought they were.

What do you think about the US media policy. They now have this TV station I believe...

It doesn't produce anything tangible I'm afraid. Because I mean it's not the fault of the media itself but the media can't create magic when things get wrong – in Iraq, Palestine, all over. The way politics is conceived by the USA is very simplistic and naïve, sometimes vicious. When things like Guantánamo or Abu Ghraib take place no media can present a positive image about these things. Media can't be magic. The media do reflect reality: if reality is good, media can make it better. If reality is very bad, the media cannot make it good. The late Robin Cook, the ex-Foreign Minister who died lately said a very important sentence. He said once: we would have been in a better place towards terrorism if we had taken peace to Palestine instead of taking war to Iraq.

What do you expect that will happen after the Ghaza pullout? Let's assume it is successful...

It depends on many factors. How will the Palestinians deal with normal politics, would they behave in a responsible way? On the other hand, what is Sharon going to do with the West Bank settlements? He and his cabinet ministers are conveying the message that the West Bank or most of it will never be left by the Israelis. And this is quite dangerous. Ghaza is not the end of the story, Ghaza by itself is a place which is less than a mini-state, it's not viable. Still the questions of Palestine, the Palestinian State are very real, very actual. So what about creating a Palestinian State? This question the Israelis should answer. Of course if the Palestinians behave in a responsible way, it would help the Israelis to reach a better answer.

About the Arab press. What patterns are there in the articles you get for Al-Hayat?

Well now there is a multifaceted polarization among Arab writers. On the one hand you have the ideological split which makes the vast majority very much against America and Israel, and a very tiny minority which is pro-American and Israel, let's put it this way. While the reasonable voices are very few.

The reasonable voices, are they in the middle, so to speak?

I don't say the middle voices, the above voices. Still you can have other polarizations which are based on sectarian and ethnic lines, for instance take Iraq. The Kurds and Shia among writers and media people are to some extent pro-American, while the Sunni are against America. So you find all sorts of things.

But the atmosphere is not healthy. It is the 'asabiyya more than a reasonable way of conceiving things.¹²⁰ The 'asabiyya is driving most of the Arab writers to where they are.

What I couldn't find info about are Arab periodicals. Are there periodicals that are essential to understanding the Arab debate?

Nowadays I'm afraid you have fewer and fewer periodicals because they lack the money which is needed. Apart from the few periodicals which are subsidized by the Governments or

¹²⁰ Edginess, fanaticism, intolerance, nationalism

some ministries here and there, you have almost no periodicals. The last 10 years three or four important magazines stopped, ceased to exist. And the readership of these magazines is very small. So you don't have the constituency to keep these magazines running, and the corporations, the companies etc. do not give them advertisements. No way they can live.

You paid some attention to al-Dhakira, memory. You were saying that this concept was borrowed by the Arabs from Israel. Can you say something very roughly how this process developed?

The Israeli and Jewish writers, because of the experience of the Holocaust, wrote more than any other about memory. Then the same theme was taken by Central European writers, whose work, which goes back to pre-communism, almost disappeared by communism. The thing in the Arab world is that Arab writers took this memory thing but it created a certain memory which is not real: because we don't have archives, and because the memory was used by nationalistic regimes. So they created almost a totalitarian memory in which you only remember the struggle against imperialism, the struggle against Israel... While memory supposedly is something much richer and wider than that. You might remember this, but you remember many other things as well. So I said that this militant situation impoverished the memory instead of enriching the memory. And when you don't have archives, you don't have accurate history. When history is being employed by the regimes to keep rewriting history, then the memory issue becomes very artificial, a sort of alleged memory. You have an alleged memory instead of having a real one.

Is this situation changing in any way?

Not to my knowledge, because the reasons behind creating memory are still there. For instance in Syria the Syrians are supposed to remember only how they fought in order to make Syria vast, which is not the case at all.

Do you think international institutions such as the EU and the UNESCO could play a role in restoring memory?

Of course they can play a role. But the main thing should come from within, from the Arabs, especially its intellectuals who would try to change the agenda, change the priorities, change the way through which things are seen. If this does not happen no one can help.

Is there going to be a group of intellectuals to create a stronger middle ground between a blind anti-US and a blind pro-US attitude?

This could take place when political society rises. But unfortunately political societies themselves are captives now. Because, one, polarization in the region, two; the rise of identity things; three, poverty and volcanic demographic changes. All these factors are helping obliterate the rise of political society, the middle ground, the middle class! We need a middle class in order to do that thing.

Demography, that's the high birth rate and so on?

Yes, and the wave of migration from countryside to cities.

And polarization?

Israel-Palestine, America-Iraq, the ideological fanaticism concerning identity, Islam, and the rest of it. All of these prevent de-politicising the issues we live in. Instead of talking about what's bad, what's good, what's better for the people, what's this, what's that, everything is being diverted in a fake way: nations, religions... So there isn't a room for political society, political discourse. You might say: OK, here in this country the interest of the people is to make peace with Israel. In that country the interest of the people is not to make peace with Israel. Here it's better to be on a good relation with America, there it's better not to be pro... etcetera. This is a political issue. But when you give your priority to ideological things, you are either pro-American or anti-American. But not according to the way you see your interests, but according to some identity theory.

Hamzawy is saying that moderate Islamic classes will become more important as a middle ground. I think he mentioned the al-Wasat party in Egypt.¹²¹ Do you think that's likely?

¹²¹ An offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, combining Islamist and liberal democratic ideas in a manner similar to the AK-Party in Turkey.

No, I don't think so, unfortunately not because things are not moving into that direction at all. Things are moving in a very polarizing direction where the middle ground is being squeezed day by day. So I sound a bit more pessimistic but I'm afraid that is the case. Unless, unless some real things could change. Such as an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, a big change. If the situation in Iraq would come to a pause, if Lebanon as a new experience would succeed. But I cannot see anything promising on the horizon.

What if the EU would get its act together and mount a more pro-active Middle East policy? Especially towards Lebanon and Syria?

That would be a very welcome thing to happen. If they pressurize Syria to stop interfering in Lebanon, and pressurize the Lebanese themselves to give their priority to building allegiances instead of following their sectarian instincts, if the EU could do this it'd be a great job. And at the same time the Europeans are the only power who can sort of rationalize the United States because it's short of experience. The American policy lacks wisdom and experience, they need someone who knows better.

But especially with this fragmentation in the European attitude, the European stance... and on a different level, this rise of terrorist and fundamentalist activity in the name of extremism in Iraq and elsewhere, these I'm afraid might push the Europeans more and more towards adopting an American attitude instead of vice versa. I mean the kidnapping, killing and murdering in Iraq, acts of terrorism such as happened in Spain, in London, these could give some strength to the American argument, not to a wise and sophisticated European thinking. In a sense the fundamentalist terrorists are really helping the right-wing extremism in the West. Fundamentalist-terrorist actions are strengthening racism and Islamophobia among some Europeans. Take Holland, your country, for instance. Holland, which was the most tolerant country, said at a certain point: We can't tolerate any more, there are things which are unbearable. In this sense we can speak about Americanising the Dutch public opinion rather than Europeanising the American public opinion.

In Difa'an you wrote about the Holocaust. Has there been more attention now to the Holocaust in the Arab press, say over the last ten years?

Yes, to a certain extent, yes, but a very minimal, a very minimal change. And I still believe that in order to internationalise the Holocaust as a human experience two things should happen. One of them is that the non-Europeans should want to know more about the experience and absorb it in their consciousness. Second, the breaking of the Jewish monopoly on the Holocaust. The Jews should help to internationalise it and not to highlight its Jewishness. It is not an experience for the Jews, it is an experience for the human ...

But this is what Jews will find very hard to accept.

Exactly. So the internationalisation of the Holocaust, the globalisation of the Holocaust should be demanded by non-Jews and supplied by Jews.

I am not sure to how far I agree with this. But I agree that Jews should let the Holocaust be a universal experience and not claim it for themselves only.¹²²

The Jews should give this experience to the others, and the others should be ready to take it.

* * *

¹²² I am unhappy with my expression here, but the nuance is hard to catch in a few words. The reader is referred back to Chapter 3 where a similar discussion came up. At this point I do not trust myself enough to carry the debate further.

Conclusion

1. Hazem Saghieḥ, *Israel and Arab modernity*

As I wrote in the introduction, this research project was open-ended from the beginning: the contents of the pamphlet to be read would have to determine the course of action. A problem all the way through was how I could try to connect to Saghieḥ's opinions from a Western perspective without being judgmental towards them, given that he knows the Arab intellectual scene and the Arabs' feelings and desires so well from within. I hope I have succeeded. Now follows a summary and elaboration of what the reader has already been able to see for him/herself. Only for specifics about the pamphlet I refer the reader to 5.3.

Saghieḥ's *Difā'an 'an al Salām* fits the time of its writings. It shows an awareness of global developments (the end of ideologies, the difficulties of military intervention) and the beginning of a new and different era after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. It shows a thematic connection to Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence* when it addresses the role of intellectuals and endeavours to set the right example. But it differs from that book insofar that at bottom it tries to persuade as much as accuse; it does not try to shame individual writers. One aspect is that it tries to instil into the Arabs some awareness of their dismal bargaining position and modes of communication, as well as their rigidity, lack of political sense of reality, and tendency to disregard nuances.

The different topics in *Difā'an 'an al Salām* constitute a coherent whole. The unifying factor is the Arab-Israeli relationship and its influence on the Arabs encounter with modernity and the modern world. This is the red thread that the pamphlet never leaves: the extreme sensitivity about culture, addressed in its opening section, fits this pattern because it is the most tangible expression of the Arab public's ambiguous attitude towards the Western world. The Arabs' political position regarding Palestine (the topic of the first five paragraphs) is no more than the most recent and urgent aspect of this encounter, although the pamphlet certainly also represents an attempt to rescue "Oslo" from imminent collapse as far as possible and to warn against escalation across international borders (since Al-Daqamisa is Jordanian). But its main purpose lies deeper, as is borne out by the fact that political hot issues are not discussed. Throughout the text we find attempts to increase understanding of Israel's unique position, beginning with Zionism (and Israel's economic and political achievements), its large Orthodox-fundamentalist population and its political system (Likud and Labour), its alliances with America, its demonstrations against Sabra and Shatila, the fact that it is now established in the

Middle East for a relatively long time with the generation that fought the War of Independence dying out. In the second half the comparisons get sharper: parallel (but conflicting) victimizations, anti-Semitic propaganda and envy, and the relationship of the Jews and Muslims in the past. Israel's manipulation of Jewish memory is brought up, and the way the Holocaust is used as a political tool, but also Hannah Arendt's protest against this. In passing even references to Yiddish culture and to the newness of Israeli presence in Palestine can be found. The sincerity of his efforts to further understanding is beyond any doubt, as the reader can easily verify by reading Sivan's article in *The Predicament of the Individual in the Middle East*.

Saghieh's opinion that in the end not America but participation in modernity is crucial for the Arabs (in *Time* he said this explicitly) is worth taking very seriously, whatever terminological questions one might wish to ask. It is quite likely that this represents the most pressing concern not only of himself but of most countercurrent Arab writers (see above, 5.3). The *Time* article stated that the initiative for improvement should come from the Arabs themselves. But in the West it should be better understood – this is vitally important – that the Arabs have a problem with modernity not because they never tried to be modern at all (this may be true for much of Africa but not for the Middle East). The reason is that they tried and could not do it. Challenges such as the knowledge gap, culture (treatment of women), and the lack of unity in society were too big to overcome, and in the process they were deeply frustrated, wronged and thrown into confusion by western powers, including Israel.¹²³ To single out just one factor: artificial borders from the colonial period seem to have had an enormous impact in creating instability in Arab countries. Most taboos mentioned by Jihad Khazen (former Chief Editor of *Al-Ḥayāt*) refer to border disputes, and no war has been without them (Lebanon-Syria, Kuwait-Iraq, Iran-Iraq, Kurdistan, Bahrain-Qatar, Egypt-Sudan, Morocco-Southern Sahara).¹²⁴

Different elements can be distinguished in the Arab public sphere: perfectly natural reactions to loss, catastrophe, and injustice similar to those in the West after World War II, but also patterns of behaviour reminiscent of 19th-century developments in Western Europe. Among these are anti-Semitism, nationalism, stronger political manifestations of religion, the 'defender' pattern in the role of public intellectuals, and perhaps most importantly: the general

¹²³ As (c) I would like to add, following Abu-Rabi', that the intellectual stagnation of Western (Christian) socio-religious thinking after liberation theology left Islam without a productive model to compete with. Instead Islam is now confronted with a Christian discourse, mainly from the United States, that is markedly unscientific, dogmatic and metaphysical. Witness the strength of creationism and literal readings of the Bible; Catholic moral absolutism plays a similarly unconstructive role. I would venture the proposition that Christianity has not proved its ability to contribute to the contemporary world (other than by maintaining the status quo, and by condoning and sometimes legitimising its excesses) any more than Islam has.

inability to be critical towards one's own nation.¹²⁵ Adding up all these factors, I believe it makes good sense to say that Arab debate in the media and public consciousness reflect the crooked path of the Arab peoples towards modernity. If we understand modernity as the sum of a long, varied and by no means straightforward historical process (see above, chapter 2) then we can say that the Arab public sphere retains characteristics reminiscent of phases that Europe and the US went through 80 to 100 years ago; we may consider calling some aspects pre-modern.¹²⁶ These characteristics are a force that prevents Arab nations and individuals from participating creatively in the modern world (e.g. by acting on a practical understanding of its fundamental values, and by contributing to debates of universal concern). Also they lead to a general feeling of uncertainty and unease, especially on the cultural level.¹²⁷ As another element of this 'struggle about modernity' one may think of the blind eye that most Arab intellectuals turned to the excesses committed by Saddam and other tyrants, as pointed out by Makiya. After all, the insight that humans are capable of mind-boggling atrocities towards one another is vital to modernity as it evolved after the Holocaust.

In his way of arguing Saghih sometimes appears rather close to common-humanity arguments and a harmony model, such as one would find in Christian-democratic political thought. This is another parallel I have not explored. At one point in our interview he jumped to symbolic language, describing the Bush administration as the 'Kremlin of the Komintern of the right-wingers'. Also at other times his reactions would surprise me; the best example is the text from *Transit Beirut* where he does not make any effort at all to represent himself as in control of his own destiny, as one could expect an intellectual to do. Arab-bashers might want to argue, insultingly, that these two are vestiges of a pre-modern pattern of behaviour. But his characterization of the Bush administration as a culmination (or conglomerate, perhaps) of many regional tendencies is accurate; if anything it represents the dominance of rural and southern America over the liberal Northeast and West Coast. And the Kremlin metaphor is

¹²⁴ Jihad Khazen, "Censorship and state control of the press in the Arab world", *Press / Politics* 4-3 (1999) p. 88

¹²⁵ The religious parallel appears for example from the strength of Catholic and Protestant networks around 1900, the reason for the so-called Kulturkampf. From approx. 1900 to 1960 all Catholic clergy had to take an oath to abstain from "modernism".

¹²⁶ The Egyptian thinker Husayn Ahmad Amin decried (according to Hamzawy) Arab political culture as based on mendacious, fatalistic and authoritarian premises, favouring the continuation of two pre-modern patterns of thought: conspiracy and personality cult. Hamzawy, "Zeitgenössische arabische Debatten", p. 361 As indicated earlier, conspiracies were also a feature of Western societies in the Early Modern era.

¹²⁷ Hamzawy: '(...) eine solche reduzierende Eigen- und Fremdzuschreibung (...) [i.e. 'we against them', MK], vor allem aber ihre diskursive Allgegenwärtigkeit, zeugen von der stets wiederkehrenden existentiellen Unsicherheit, die sich in weiten Teilen des arabischen Intellektuellentum ausdehnt, sobald es um als bedrohlich eingestufte Ereignisse oder Phänomene geht.' Hamzawy, "Zeitgenössische arabische Debatten", p. 345

not such a bad metaphor indeed. Similarly, the text from *Transit Beirut* gains its power exactly from this unpretentious rhetorical strategy.

Saghieh has repeatedly stated that the impetus for change has to come from below, from the Arabs themselves, and that he is not impressed by foreign attempts to force some kind of democratisation and emancipation on the Arabs. As the combination of the interview and survey of Arab media suggest, a major change is not going to come from intellectual efforts or from the media, but from changes on the socio-economic and political scene. I think the examples of culture-bound communication in the course of my text (especially Chapter 3, on which this section is largely based) show that humans from different linguistic cultures are conditioned to talk past each other unless they make an effort, and that it is the attitude of the most powerful and prestigious party that decides if communication can take place or not.

2. Evaluation

This last section is meant to look back on the writing project and suggest ways to take it further.

In the preceding chapters I have worked to overcome the gap between dominant Western discourses (pro-Arab and pro-Israeli) and Saghieh's Arabic message in *Difā'an 'an al-Salām*, but as I do not fully share either I cannot say to what extent this has worked. In one place I have 'smuggled' (to use a Dutch expression) because in 6.4 I have smartened up my own questions grammar-wise and argument-wise rather more drastically than Saghieh's answers, but I do not think the misrepresentation is serious, and there did not seem to be any reason to foreground my own culture and language-related difficulties.

My analysis in chapter 5 has moved between a pro-Arab (Palestinian) and a pro-Israeli (Jewish) perspective, hopefully in a convincing way. I do believe that I have been able to follow the reading strategy informed by cultural studies in a consistent manner, for what it is worth. I have addressed power relations, the cultural and status gap between Arabs and westerners and the effects on their communication, and the target audience (intellectuals). The interactive and multiperspectival character of the presentation should be clear to anyone. I have also indicated numerous intertextual connections between Saghieh's text and influential studies by western scholars: connections that to me seemed helpful to understand why he might be saying what he says. These show the text to be influenced by contemporary thought as much as anyone could expect. I know that this is not a lot in terms of scholarly method, but it is the best I could make out of the tangle I discussed in Chapter 2.

Some interesting aspects of the pamphlet I had to let go. What I would have liked to do if more time had been available would be to go over the responses to *Difā'an 'an al-Salām*. It would also be worth investigating how many secular-liberal essays would come out of Beirut in the 1990, to provide more of a context. And I would have liked to pay more attention to Saghieh's other works: in particular his book in Arabic *The Shattering of the Arab Mashriq* and his English collection *The Predicament of the Individual in the Middle East*. Perhaps there will still be a chance. And it remains a great pity that the occasion to refine and deepen the interview in 6.4 did not come.

The reading of *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* leads to a lot of new questions for research. One is methodological: how can and how should the study of Arab thought be undertaken, especially secular liberal thought, in such a way as to avoid the pitfall of prejudice to either side? Is the connection with cultural studies one that can be explored and developed to this end? On the basis of my own experience I would certainly say yes to this, but it would depend on experienced scholars from both disciplines (of Arab culture and of cultural studies) to figure out a fruitful connection that would respect the status gap and the linguistic conventions of Arabic. Another topic would be to further explore the role of intellectuals in Arab society and the historical development of liberal ideas. There are patterns in the history of ideas that can be described in sociological and sometimes psychological terms, but why this is so and how a developing culture such as the Arabic culture connects to them remains completely obscure.

From the viewpoint of the study of anti-Semitism in the Arab world, its possible origin in the Catholic missions has been noted. It would be worthwhile to explore this further, but it is not my expertise. My suggestion to combat Arab anti-Semitism I will offer below. But there is also this other question of paramount importance: to what extent has the Arab encounter with modernity been shaped by its confrontation with Israel, even if it is only through antagonism against it? My reading of *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* suggests that its impact goes quite far indeed, and not only in a negative sense, also in a positive sense. Israel as a modern country is a model the Arabs look to imitate and compete with, economically and socially. But it also means that when Arabs intent on making a compromise look for redress of wrongs done to the Palestinians, they will look first at the example of the Jews after the Holocaust to estimate what is fair and just. And what does this imply for the future of Arab-Israeli relations? In fact the question is about how Israel has shaped the Middle East and been influenced by it, and vice versa. Understanding this process better would help enormously to reconcile Arabs and Israelis, as the memory of it is still alive in their societies.

In spite of its time-bound features it does not seem to me that *Difā'an 'an al-Salām* has lost any of its relevance for Arab debates. It tried to challenge assumptions which are still commonly held. As Saghieḥ said, a secular-modernist discourse is still not being appreciated and understood by the large majority of writers. To me this sounds plausible, and it is an enormous problem.

Saghieḥ's biography is interesting to understand how he developed his independence, but within the framework of this MA thesis it has not been possible to get very far in this, and in the end I have chosen to leave out some personal details as were mentioned in our talks and in *Transit Beirut*. He has come a long way from war-torn Beirut. Nevertheless he managed not to get caught in lasting bitterness towards Israel, but see its deeds in proportion to what the Arabs do to themselves. And in spite of the many disappointments, Saghieḥ's pragmatist and conciliatory attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has certainly survived the events that have taken place since. His view that Arafat should have taken Barak's deal illustrates that. As his pamphlet has not lost its relevance, perhaps the implicit vision of a solution can also be considered as relevant. I will add one or two more pages to develop this point.

The methodological fights that I discussed in Chapter 2 show the deadlock between a rightist and a leftist discourse on the political and the academic level, in America in particular. The extreme 'pro-Israeli' discourse (as expressed in academia and intellectual life) is now entangled within a broader rightist discourse whose fate is intimately tied up with that of the Bush administration and American global hegemony. To the extent that the Holocaust memory is used as an instrument to keep this pro-Israeli discourse in its dominant position, it risks becoming narrowed down to not much more than an effective policy instrument. The Arabs now perceive the Holocaust memory as exactly that: an instrument in Israeli power politics, and they hail people like Garaudy simply because they challenge Israel's most useful story. They do not have any understanding at all of the real horrors that it commemorates. But there are two serious risk factors that threaten this seemingly stable state of things.

The first is the likelihood that the Bush administration will discredit itself by mishandling more difficult issues, in Iraq or at home, and finally cross the limits of what spin can do. As Saghieḥ put it, when reality is very bad the media cannot make it good. If the Bush administration is considered after its years to be a failure, the rightist discourse it is associated with might end up deeply discredited (at least in the eyes of the rest of the world); and with it the memory of the Holocaust as a factor to ward off criticism of Israel. America may be the most powerful country in the world, it is very far away from Israel indeed. 'Imperial overstretch' cannot be ruled out. How much can US foreign policy achieve in Iran and Syria? In

addition to this, with Saghiech and Saleh Bashir, one may question the wisdom of maintaining the Holocaust memory in place as a political factor. It hardly seems to do justice to the daily lives, hopes and ideals of the people who were killed, and might further compromise it as a warning for future generations. As the New Historians are putting question marks to the direct connection between the Holocaust as it took place and the emerging state of Israel, it seems time that Israelis consider a more independent definition of Zionism, preferably one that will help Israel feel at home in the Middle East, that would help to distinguish it from colonialism.

Secondly, I believe that the wave of debate in the late 1990s about the Holocaust was probably the last of its kind: the last issues that were buried in the European collective memory were brought to the fore. The investigations done by myself and my colleagues in the Humanity in Action Programme 2000 seem to me to support this opinion.¹²⁸ Dutch integration and minority policy used to be closely connected to the bad conscience about the Second World War, but not any more. More effort is now needed to keep the debate alive and functioning. Simultaneously the integration of Muslim communities in Europe progresses, and their attitude towards Israel is not very positive. Their political importance might grow.

Saghieh's pamphlet offers an alternative route, should Israel and Jews-Israelis lose international support. There are Arabs – not so many perhaps, but here is one at least – who are ready to accept Israel as part of the reality of the Middle East. What's more, his text shows that the Israeli political and social model, in spite of its military, religious and nationalistic excesses has maintained its significance for the Arabs, and that in any case most of the Arab encounter with modernity is intimately tied up with Israel. What Saghiech tried is to use Israel to help the Arabs develop a more modern way of thinking, and to open some prospects for economic and cultural development. The political requirements from the Israeli side are fairly simple: a form of financial compensation for the Palestinians, recognition of a Palestinian state, and most importantly, a new and equal way of dealing with each other. To do this would match quite neatly the principles laid out in Israel's Declaration of Independence, as a matter of fact. By lack of a Constitution, they might consider living up to it.

I fully agree with Saghiech that the essential requirement for peace is to break the mutually exclusive claims to victim status, on the Arab side and on the Israeli side. These claims are fundamentally unequal but have to meet on an equal basis at the political level. It is hard to see how the Arab media could produce a change in this respect by themselves, or how Israel is going to do that. If I can add one practical suggestion, it would be for an additional

¹²⁸ See notes 58 and 59 to paragraph 3.4

Arab Human Development Report devoted to stereotypes and preconceptions relating to modernity and the modern world, and inevitably to Israel. Even if it only tried to refute the manifest misconceptions and falsehoods it would be a big gain, and the AHDR format is sufficiently well-established to make a significant impact. The example of Saghieh suggests that Arab intellectuals should by now be capable of defining some form of challenge to the crooked notions of modernity that are now dominant, and point to new directions. To try this would mean that all the partners in AHDR would have to jump over their shadows, and it would be a huge challenge on the level of organisation. But, as Saghieh also said, without a change on the level of political mentality no attempt at reform will have any chance of success.

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