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## **Bakalářská práce**

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**Pan-Arabism in the novels of Ḥannā Mīna**  
Panarabismus v románové tvorbě Ḥannā Mīny

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I am grateful to my parents, for their continuous and never-ending support, whether from the proximity of our home, or from abroad.

## Declaration

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 23. dubna

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Lukáš Koutský

## **Thesis abstract**

This thesis examines the pan-Arab ideas present in the selected works of the Syrian author Ḥannā Mīna. This includes the author's approach on portraying the ideological, political, cultural, and socio-economic aspects of pan-Arabism. A part of this study will examine Ḥannā Mīna's relationship to this ideological concept of modern Arab history and modern Arab thought in the broad context of Arab nationalism.

**Key words:** Modern Arabic Literature, Syrian Novel, Pan-Arabism, Arab Nationalism

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem bakalářské práce je analýza obrazu panarabistických myšlenek ve vybraných románech syrského spisovatele Ḥannā Mīny. Toto zahrnuje především způsob literárního ztvárnění ideologických, politických, kulturních a socio-ekonomických aspektů panarabismu. Součástí této studie bude také vztah Ḥannā Mīny k tomuto ideologickému konceptu moderní arabské historie a moderního arabského myšlení role širším kontextu arabského nacionalismu.

**Klíčová slova:** moderní arabská literatura, syrský román, panarabismus, arabský nacionalismus

## **Preface**

The decision to examine pan-Arabism in the works of the proclaimed Syrian Ḥannā Mīna in my bachelor's thesis stems from my profound interest in the Arabic language, history, and the Levant. Syria is a country that I have deep feelings for and has a place in my heart. It is the country where I spent a significant part of my childhood in the years 2002-2006. These four years of living and growing up in this remarkable country are, among other things, what drove me to study at the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Charles University.

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# 1 Introduction

Pan-Arabism emerged along with other Middle Eastern nationalist ideologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the Ottoman Empire weakened and World War I erupted, Arab voices for independence and unity grew louder. The unstable political situation gave an opening to the ideas that were formed and discussed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily in intellectual and military circles. Those proposing Arab unity finally had the chance to act, and many did. Stately proclamations were made by during the Great Arab Revolt, but none were fully realized, as they were in direct contradiction to the Franco-British political game in the Middle East after World War I. The Middle East was instead divided into spheres of influence, and later individual nation-states were created.

The Ba‘th party created later in the 40’s in Damascus was a serious political actor in the region, but the height of pan-Arabism came with Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and the creation of the UAR (1958-1961), a state created by the unification of Egypt and Syria. The leading role assumed by Egypt in this short-lived unitary state was apparent. The 1967 Six-Day War, the death of Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and the *Infītāḥ* led to a restructure of Egyptian society and general decline of pan-Arabism.

Not long after these events, the Syrian author Ḥannā Mīna (1924-2018) wrote his two novels that were selected for this thesis: *al-Rabī‘ wa ‘l-Ḥarīf*<sup>1</sup> (Spring and Autumn) and *al-Mar‘a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*<sup>2</sup> (The Woman in the Black Robe). In both novels, Ḥannā Mīna portrays his memories of the events mentioned above. A left-leaning author, supportive of communist principles and best known for writing about poverty and social issues in Syria, he was also an author with gleaming nationalist sentiment and a supporter of Arab brotherhood. Being one of the main forces behind the Arab Writers Union (*Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arabī*) and living his early adult life during the peak of pan-Arab sentiment in Syria (which led to the formation of the UAR), this has indeed influenced his work.

Pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism are two closely related terms. This means that whenever we study pan-Arabism, a reliance on sources that discuss the overarching topic Arab nationalism is inevitable. There are many works from academics that study Arab nationalism from various perspectives, such as Adeed Dawisha, Rashid Khalidi, Martin Kramer, or Basam

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<sup>1</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī‘ wa ‘l-Ḥarīf*. Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Mar‘a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*. Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1994.

Tibi and some works that study pan-Arabism from a historical perspective. But there is a general shortage of works that focus on pan-Arabism in literary texts, although it was a serious political ideology with distinctive features throughout the Arab world in the 50's and 60's, which could be blurred when ultimately replaced by the broad term Arab nationalism in academic discourse.

Ideological concepts such as pan-Arabism may be recognised and outlined when written in political pamphlets or theoretical works, as their primary aim is to introduce the reader to a selected ideological stance. Researching ideologies in prosaic literary texts such as novels may prove a bit more interesting, as the author's approach on how to implement them in his work in a way that does not obstruct the narrative or perhaps even supports it in a manner that complements the literary text in a thought-provoking way is in my opinion worth researching. For this I have chosen to study how Hanna Mina presents the concept of pan-Arabism in his selected novels.

The novels selected for this study were chosen based on their relevance and quantity of references regarding pan-Arabism. The goal of this thesis is to outline, introduce and evaluate the different methods Ḥannā Mīna used when inserting ideas of pan-Arabism into his works. This will be supported by a study of theoretical works on modern pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism and includes an analysis of pan-Arab ideas and methods the author used when introducing ideological, political, socio-economic, and cultural aspects of pan-Arabism in his works. A section of the study will examine the role of pan-Arabism in the broad context of Arab nationalism and a brief history of pan-Arab movements and the main proponents of pan-Arab ideas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This chapter serves not only as an introduction to the history of pan-Arabism but also provides a link between historic events that the author reminisces about and the content of his novels, in other words it serves to contextualize the various issues regarding unity, independence or collective future of Arabs portrayed by Ḥannā Mīna in his novels. The metaphors used in both titles (*al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*, *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*) may be, based on the reading of these novels and the historical context preceding their publishing in 1984 and 1994, interpreted as concepts that characterize either Arab lands as a whole (Autumn), Hungary and China (Spring), or Egypt during the *Inḥitāḥ* (The Woman in the Black Robe). Selected and translated citations of his novels will be used to document Hanna Mina's artistic formulation of these ideas and interpreting will allow us to uncover Hanna Mina's views on pan-Arabism. The conclusion will consist of a reflection of the aesthetic



qualities of Hanna Mina's approach when introducing an ideological concept such as pan-Arabism into modern literary works.

## 2 The concept of pan-Arabism

Pan-Arabism, having its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, visibly emerged after the First World War in different parts of the Middle East. The question of defining pan-Arabism may prove difficult. Some people use the terms pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism interchangeably, Rashid Khalidi emphasises the differences between these two terms.<sup>3</sup> Arab nationalism seeks to consolidate the Arab people by language, history and religion. Pan-Arabism takes a step further and strives to create a single, politically united Arab state. With this in mind, pan-Arabism can be defined as an ideological concept which promotes the unity of Arabs and the implementation of a single, large Arab state in the Middle East. On the other hand, it should be noted that Arabic sources themselves do not finely differentiate between Arab nationalism (*al-qawmīya al-‘arabīya*) and pan-Arabism (presumably *al-‘urūba al-šāmīla* or *al-jāmi‘a al-‘arabīya*), as the latter is scarcely found in such texts.<sup>4</sup>

Both concepts are very much intertwined and trying to finely differentiate between them may lead us into inaccurate statements. None of the prominent scholars came to a consensus on which of these two terms should be used and while the older articles use the term pan-Arabism, the newer ones tend to stick with the perhaps more politically correct term Arab nationalism.<sup>5</sup> Even the most famous proponents of pan-Arabism such as Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir or Michel ‘Aflaq in their pan-Arab (Arab nationalist) manifests and speeches proclaimed that the Arab unified state was the ‘ultimate aim of a long and dialectical process consisting of several stages’<sup>6</sup>. One of these stages was Arab solidarity, a necessary ‘step towards unity’<sup>7</sup>. Adeed Dawisha sees this step as a pragmatic course of action, which was to be taken by Arabs whenever the political constraints (internal or external) made the aggressive pursuit of comprehensive Arab unity impractical.<sup>8</sup> Thus we can see that in reality, pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism cannot be viewed as two entirely different concepts with distinctive goals, but

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<sup>3</sup> Rashid Khalidi, “Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature.” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991), 1365.

<sup>4</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Danielson, *Nasser and Pan-Arabism: Explaining Egypt’s Rise in Power* (Monterey: Master’s thesis. Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, 2007), 17-18

<sup>6</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

rather should be viewed as two closely linked terms that have been used interchangeably in English-written literature on the topic.

This is different if we look at regional nationalism, promoted by parties such as SSNP (*al-Ḥizb al-Surī al-Qawmī al-Ijtimā'ī*, led by Anṭūn Sa'āda. His vision of Syria originated from the traditional concept of Greater Syria, which encompasses today's Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. Anṭūn Sa'āda, a Lebanese Greek Orthodox Christian, rejected Arab national unity based on the principles of language or Islam. He claimed that a nation is gradually built by people sharing the same geographical location. Building a great, sovereign Syrian nation on regional nationalist ideas was the final purpose of SSNP. They had no interest in uniting all Arab lands, Anṭūn proclaims in his speech of June 1, 1935:

*“I must declare here that the Syrian Social Nationalist Party has found a means of overcoming these difficulties by its system which breaks down both the traditions that oppose the unity of the nation and individual psychologies which opposes the psychological individuality of the nation.”*<sup>9</sup>

In his view the lands of Greater Syria embody a very different cultural region than for example the Arabian peninsula.<sup>10</sup> The addition of a culturally different region with distinctive traditions (although still Arab) would in Antun's opinion destabilize the Syrian nation and undermine the order (*niḡām*), which the SSNP promotes.

## **2.1 The roots of pan-Arabism and the Nahḡa**

After defining pan-Arabism and mentioning its close ties with Arab nationalism, the beginnings of pan-Arabism will now be introduced along with some of its earliest thinkers. As mentioned above, the roots of pan-Arabism can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when the 'Arab world' already shared a linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage. It was a time of Ottoman domination, under which the Arab nation-states of today did not yet exist. While the Ottomans shared the religious aspect of Arab identity (the relationship of Islam and pan-Arabism will be discussed later, on the case of Ḥasan al-Bannā'), the Arab language was a

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<sup>9</sup> Khater, Akram Fouad. *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*. (2nd ed. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2011), 128.

<sup>10</sup> Přebinda, Petr. *Od velké Sýrie k malé*. (Praha: Academia, 2018), 169.

unique source of identity to the Arabs. It could be said that the Arab language was used as an instrument to differentiate Arabs from the Ottoman Empire and form a strong Arab identity. Perhaps this is why the earliest pan-Arab thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were generally secular in nature and often emphasised the role of the Arab language as a unifying element. Islam was an element shared throughout the Ottoman Empire and was effective only after its dissolution when Arabs faced the after-war European influence in the region.

This Franco-British political game, in which the Middle East was divided into spheres of influence and later resulted in the creation of several Arab nation-states has been generally criticised by pan-Arab thinkers. This will be shown on the case of Ṣāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī, one of the most famous proponents of pan-Arabism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In *The Arab Awakening* (1938), which is considered a foundational book on Arab nationalism<sup>11</sup>, George Antonius suggests the birthplace of Arab nationalism to be Lebanon around the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, formed in the minds of Christian Arab secularists.<sup>12</sup> George Antonius was a Lebanese-Egyptian Orthodox Christian who studied in Egypt and England. Martin Kramer calls him a 'cultural middleman'<sup>13</sup> (mentioning his close relationship to Europe). Such intercultural ties can be observed in many early Arab nationalist thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who are often tied to the Nahḍa. Their focus was often on reframing the modern state based on cultural and historical commonalities instead of religion. Some examples are Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī.<sup>14</sup> Both of these thinkers had close ties to Europe, promoted secular Arab nationalist ideas and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī's ode even served as the epigraph of Antonius' book: "Arise, ye Arabs, and awake!"<sup>15</sup> and is considered the first manifestation of Arab nationalism.<sup>16</sup>

A prominent Syrian Arab nationalist thinker is Ṣāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī, who unlike the others was a member of the Ottoman elite and became an ardent advocate of Arab nationalism only after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He stated that "*people who speak a unitary language have*

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<sup>11</sup> Kramer, Martin. *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East*. (New Brunswick: N.J. Transaction Publishers, 1996), 7. Martin Kramer, who is very sceptical about the historicity of the book, says it remains 'the bible of Arabism'.

<sup>12</sup> Muasher, Marwan. *The Second Arab Awakening: And the Battle for Pluralism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Kramer, Martin. *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East*. (New Brunswick: N.J. Transaction Publishers, 1996), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Muasher, Marwan. *The Second Arab Awakening: And the Battle for Pluralism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>15</sup> In the original: تنبهوا و استنفيقوا أيها العرب

<sup>16</sup> Gombár, Eduard. *Moderní dějiny islámských zemí*. (1st ed. Praha: Karolinum, 1999), 316.

*a one heart and a common soul. As such they constitute one nation, and so they have to have a unified state.*"<sup>17</sup> This emphasis on language is characteristic of many early proponents of pan-Arabism. Ṣāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī was the first to promote a German-inspired<sup>18</sup>, populist version of Arab nationalism and although his concept of nationalism was not fascist or fanatic, he laid the foundations for the nationalism embraced by Michel 'Aflaq, one of the founders of Ba'ṭhist thought.<sup>19</sup> Unlike many other Arab thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, al-Ḥuṣrī always acknowledged his debt to German, and thus European, sources.<sup>20</sup> This is quite a different attitude than the one shown by later pan-Arab movements (the Ba'ṭh party) or even Islamic reformers that fuse Islam with Arab nationalism (Ḥasan al-Bannā'). Their concepts will be discussed in the next chapter.

Another source of inspiration for Ṣāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī's theory of pan-Arabism was Ibn Khaldūn, precisely his concept of *'aṣabīya*. A hardly translatable term that refers to the feeling of solidarity or cohesion in human groups, such as tribes. It may even be interpreted as the feeling of a national bond, and that is precisely how Ṣāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī used it in his works.<sup>21</sup> Ibn Khaldūn's cyclical historical theory is based on the strength of the *'aṣabīya* between the people of these groups, in the sense that it is most prevalent in the nomadic (early) stage of the tribe and withers as time passes. This leads to the disintegrations of the group as newer, more cohesive tribes with a greater sense of *'aṣabīya* take its place. For Ibn Khaldūn, religion cannot take the place of *'aṣabīya*, although it finds its highest expression in a synthesis with religion. As such, the religion takes on the quality of a national one.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2 *Pan-Arab movements in history*

As noted above, pan-Arabism has its roots in Arab nationalism, which emerged in the Arab provinces in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is hard to say if Arabic or Turkic nationalism emerged first in the Ottoman Empire, but we can safely state that both were in some form a reaction to

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<sup>17</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 11 citing Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Ma Hiya al-Qawmiya?: Abhath wa Dirasat 'ala Dhaw'i al-Ahdath wa al-Nadhariyat* (What is nationalism?: enquiries and studies in light of events and theories) (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayeen, 1963), p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> He was most inspired by Herder and Fichte. For more information on the topic on how German romanticism inspired al-Husri I suggest: Tibi, Bassam. *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Palgrave MacMillan, 1990), 126-138.

<sup>19</sup> Tibi, Bassam. *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Palgrave MacMillan, 1990), 118.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

the European technological and military success and Ottomanism. Turks and Arabs sent to Europe “*became acutely conscious of the differences between the East and the West.*”<sup>23</sup> They admired the progress achieved by strong European nation-states and wished to implement them, often in a semi-religious or secular manner.

The outbreak of pan-Arabism began during the First World War and continued after 1918. The Arabs, who had lived under Ottoman rule for over 400 years, were given a chance to regain their independence. An important pan-Arab movement in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Arab Revolt, given the adjective ‘Great’ in Arabic sources (*al-Tawra al-‘Arabiya al-Kubrā*). It was led by the Meccan al-Hāshimī family against the Ottoman Empire. Ḥusayn al-Hāshimī, who served as *Šarīf* of Mecca under Ottoman rule from 1908, initiated a revolt in 1916 along with his sons after a series of letters exchanged with the British High Commissioner to Egypt. The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence is a representation of noteworthy British colonial diplomacy, as it was one of the three separate and conflicting territorial promises, which the British government put forward during 1915-1917.<sup>24</sup>

*Šarīf* Ḥusayn, the leader of the Arab Revolt, acclaimed the title “King of the Arab Countries” (*malik al-bilād al-‘arabiya*), signifying his vast territorial ambitions and his intention to create a united Arab state in Syria, Iraq and Arabia. This title was however in direct contradiction with British planned design of the Arab lands, and so was Ḥusayn left with a humbler and perhaps more accurate title “King of the Ḥijāz” (*malik al-Ḥijāz*).

While the Hāshimite lands of Ḥijāz were soon conquered by the House of Sa‘ūd from the Najd, Ḥusayn’s son ‘Abdullāh gained the Emirate of Transjordan in April 1921. Under a British protectorate, ‘Abdullāh tried to remain as independent as possible. Noteworthy are his pan-Arab tendencies during the early years of his reign. While boarding the train in Ma‘ān for ‘Ammān, Emir ‘Abdullāh gave a farewell speech addressed to all Arabs:

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<sup>23</sup> Dawn, C. Ernest. “From Ottomanism to Arabism: The Origin of an Ideology.” (*The Review of Politics* 23, no. 3, 1961), 382-383.

<sup>24</sup> Rogan, Eugene Lawrence. *The Arabs: A History*. (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 151. The Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour declaration are the two other promises.

*“I do not wish to see any among you identify themselves by geographical region. I wish to see everyone, rather, trace his descent to the Arabian Peninsula, from which we all originate. All the Arab countries are the country of every Arab.”*<sup>25</sup>

The composition of ‘Abdullāh’s first provisional cabinet on 11 April 1921 reflects this speech. Out of eight appointed ‘consultants’ (arabic singular *mušāwir*), three were Syrian, two were Ḥijāzi, while Palestinian and Transjordanian were one by each.<sup>26</sup> The Emir was not fond of the name ‘Transjordan’ either, at that time he inclined to use the term ‘The Arab East’ (*al-Šarq al-‘Arabī*).<sup>27</sup> However it should be noted that ‘Abdullāh’s dream of uniting the Hāshimite territories of Transjordan and Iraq was, despite the stately proclamations, not fulfilled during the inter-war period.

Focusing on the fusion of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism in the inter-war period by Ḥasan al-Bannā’ provides a good example of how connected the Arab and Islamic identities are. The Egyptian Islamic nationalism of Ḥasan al-Bannā’, later the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-iḥwān al-muslimūn*), is interesting in the sense that it combined pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. Al-Bannā’ accomplished that by underlining the role of Islam in the cultural identity of Arabs and at the same time accentuating the universal characteristics of the Islamic faith.<sup>28</sup> Islam was viewed as an undeniable and inseparable part of the Arab world and the only solution to uniting the Arabs, freeing them from the mandate system. Regionalism (*al-šu‘ūbiyya*) was viewed as anti-Islamic and ‘absolute patriotism’ (*al-waṭanīya al-mujarrada*) as a product of Western thought that had no place in the Islamic world.<sup>29</sup> But what was the ‘nationalism’ in the teaching of al-Bannā’?

Ḥasan al-Bannā’ strived to unite all Muslims under a single state, while accepting the exceptional role of Arabs. The Arabs were the nation to which God sent the Qur’an and Arabic was the language in which it was first recited. According to al-Bannā’, the decline of the Muslim community was caused by the “transfer of authority and leadership to non-Arabs... who had never absorbed genuine Islam”.<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the unity of Arabs was not

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<sup>25</sup> Salibi, Kamal Suleiman. *The Modern History of Jordan*. (New York: In the United States and Canada distributed by St. Martin’s Press, 1993), p. 93 quoting *The Complete Works of King Abdullah* (Beirut, 1985), p. 161 and *studies in light of events and theories* (Beirut: Dar al’Ilm li al-Malayeen, 1963), 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>28</sup> Gershoni, I., & Jankowski, J. *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

the ultimate goal of Ḥasan al-Bannā', it was rather a necessary and inevitable step for the revival of Islam. Compare this to Arab solidarity as a "step towards unity" as proposed by Adeed Dawisha in the first chapter. Al-Bannā' states in 1938 during the fifth congress of the Muslim Brothers:

*"The unity of the Arabs is an inevitable condition for the restoration of the glory of [Islamic] revival, the establishment of its state, and the strengthening of its power. For this reason, it is the duty of every Muslim to strive for the revival of Arab unity, to support it, and to defend it."*<sup>31</sup>

As we can see, the Muslim Brotherhood is more of a pan-Islamic movement than a pan-Arab one, even if part its rhetoric develops pan-Arab ideas. This is very different from the roots of pan-Arab movements led by Lebanese-Christian intellectuals that were discussed in the previous chapter. These thinkers were very much inspired by European ideas from the Nahḍa and were often 'cultural middlemen' that did not stand in opposition to Europe to the degree al-Bannā' did. Even so, the ideas of pan-Arabism are very much present in the works of Ḥasan al-Bannā', so including them here serves to provide an example on how the Arab and Islamic identities are very closely connected.

The founding of the Ba'ṯh party in the mid-40's by Michel 'Aflaq and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bīṯār is a significant moment in history for those studying pan-Arabism. Both Michel 'Aflaq and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Bīṯār studied in Sorbonne, Paris ('Aflaq studied history, al-Bīṯār mathematics) and were fully exposed to the main currents of European thought.<sup>32</sup> The idea that started as a political movement (*Ḥarakat al-'Ihyā' al-'Arabī*) by 1946 transformed into a party (*Ḥizb al-Ba'ṯh al-'Arabī*), followed by a party congress in Damascus a year later. The ideological concept of pan-Arabism took a radical political stance under Ba'ṯhist thought. The idea of a necessary and inevitable *Inqilāb* (overthrow) to implement pan-Arab ideas became the central theme of the Ba'ṯh party and a goal that separated it from many other socialist parties. The *Inqilāb* was the only way to break the *status quo*, in which other political groupings were considered to only feign nationalism while being in reality opposed to national welfare.<sup>33</sup> The execution of this *Inqilāb* would presumably lead to the Ba'ṯhist trinity – unity, freedom,

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<sup>31</sup> Gershoni, I., & Jankowski, J. *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80 quoting H. al-Bannā' '„*al-ikhwan al-muslimun fi 'ashr sanawat*“ 1938

<sup>32</sup> Kaylani, N. The Rise of the Syrian Ba'ṯh, 1940–1958: Political Success, Party Failure. (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3(1), 3-23, 1972), 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



and socialism (*waḥda, ḥurrīya, ištirākīya*). All three of these pillars are of equal importance to ‘Aflaq.

Unity (*waḥda*) refers to an all-encompassing Arab unity. As the Ba‘thists say, a united Arab nation is the bearer of an eternal message (*ummatun ‘arabīyatun wāḥida dāt risālatin ḥālida*). The aspect of freedom (*ḥurrīya*) in ‘Aflaq’s works is conceived quite generically. “Central to ‘Aflaq’s thinking is the quest for freedom, conceived not merely as emancipation from political tyranny and oppressive poverty, but the liberation of the Arab people, unified in mind and spirit, joined together in social brotherhood.”<sup>34</sup> The concept of a social brotherhood is tied with socialism (*ištirākīya*), the last pillar of Ba‘thism. It seems that socialism in ‘Aflaq’s thought replaced Islam or language as the most visible aspect that serves the unification of Arabs. Although ‘Aflaq undoubtedly acknowledges the central role Islam plays in Arab history<sup>35</sup>, the socialist factor weighs in on another level. The relaxed kind of socialism promoted by the Ba‘th party and the 70’s privatization process will be briefly discussed later. Although Arab socialism was traditionally soft in the aspects regarding private property, the idea of a social brotherhood and Arab solidarity, along with opposing traditional ruling (feudal) classes, played a central role in the forming of Arab socialist ideologies.

‘Aflaq was an intellectual, not a politician. His goal was only to open the road for new generations. Thus, the Ba‘th party remained a negligible political actor for quite a long time. This changed with the arrival of Akram al-Ḥawrānī and the merge of his Arab Socialist Party (*al-Ḥizb al-‘Arabī al-Ištirākī*) with the Ba‘th party in 1952. Akram al-Ḥawrānī was what the Ba‘th party needed to transform into a serious political actor. The days of intellectual and philosophical debates in the Ba‘th party were replaced by discussions of political strategies and action. The Ba‘th at last found a political leader. In February 1958, not even two years after Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s victory in the Suez war, the United Arab Republic (*al-Jumhūriya al-‘Arabiya al-Muttaḥida*) was formed. The newly established unitary state of Egypt and Syria was a culmination of strong pan-Arab tendencies, especially in Syria. Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir became the President and Akram al-Ḥawrānī was appointed Vice-President for the Syrian side.

Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir was hesitant for the unification with Syria at first, but after continuous pressure from the Syrian side and his concern about the rising communist presence in Syria, he

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>35</sup> As presented in one of his lectures in Damascus *In Memory of the Arab Prophet (ḍikrā ar-rasūl al-‘arabī)* at the University of Damascus in 1943. Available in French, Arabic, and English at <http://albaath.online.fr/>.

eventually agreed. The Syrian leaders went all out to force his hand, not only because of their commitment to the Arab nationalist creed, but also because unity with Egypt became the only means to preserve unity within Syria itself.<sup>36</sup>

The political situation in Syria in 1957 was tense to say the least. Three competing forces were present: the conservative feudalist and business classes, the Arab nationalists, and the Communists. This ideological division was present even in the military, which at that time was the greatest political actor in Syria. This meant that not one single actor could take power and restore order.<sup>37</sup> The calling for Arab unity was a widespread view in Syria and was reflected in the local political game between the Ba‘thists and the Communists, which began in late 1957. The Ba‘thists took the initiative to propose unity with Egypt on a federal level. The Communist reaction was simple: up the ante and demand total organic unity. They knew that Nāṣir was sceptical about the proposal of federation and assumed he would reject the idea of total unity. As Dawisha writes, in trying to outmaneuver the Ba‘th, the Communists ended up outmaneuvering themselves.<sup>38</sup>

In reaction to the recent political events, fifteen Syrian military officers led by the Communist-inclined ‘Afīf al-Bizrī took matter into their own hands. After informing the Egyptian military attaché in Syria, they boarded a military plane to Cairo on January 11, 1958. The Syrian political leaders were informed only after the plane landed in Egypt. The Syrian pressure for unity on Nāṣir began.

Dawisha mentions a few reasons for Nāṣir’s hesitance regarding total unity with Syria, the most important ones will be introduced next. His closest advisors warned about the power the Syrian military holds and their role in the political sphere. This could be documented on the arrival of a sudden “delegation” composed of fifteen Syrian military officers proposing serious political discussions, while the highest Syrian politicians including President Shukrī al-Quwatlī sat helplessly in Syria. The next reason were differences in the political and economic sphere. Political parties in Egypt were banned, while the Syrian political system spanned from the far left to the far right, characterized by the three main political actors mentioned earlier. The economic differences were striking too. Syrian economy was based primarily on freewheeling business practices and transactions, while the economy in Egypt was shifting purposefully

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<sup>36</sup> Dawisha s. 193.

<sup>37</sup> Dawisha s. 194.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

toward central planning.<sup>39</sup> Traditional Sunni business families at this time played a major role in Syria's economy and politics. This, Ba'athist Arab socialism and its role regarding Ḥannā Mīna's view of Hungary will all be discussed later. The last argument opposing total unity of Syria and Egypt was naturally the absence of a common border and the presence of Israel between the two parts of the proposed unitary state. In sum, Nāṣir had several valid reasons to be sceptical and wary of unity with Syria, given the political and economic circumstances.

If we look at Syria in the 70's, the situation is not much different. Bassam Haddad mentions in his study of business networks in Syria the zero-sum relationship of traditional Sunni businessmen and the newly formed 'alawite elite, where any progress on one side was viewed as a loss for the other. This resulted in a state of large-scale collusion, in which trust in the state-business relationship in Syria worked on an individual, but not group level. This enforces the idea of the exceptional role of political and individual profit in economic decision making in Syria and the lack of clear, collective actions and goals.

Later in his study Haddad provides an example of the ineffectiveness of Syria's economic decisions in the 1970's, a decade known for controlled liberalization<sup>40</sup> of state economies in the Middle East known as the *Inḥitāḥ*, the accumulation of oil wealth by the countries of OAPEC, and drastic political changes in the Middle East (Camp David agreement, the Iranian revolution, or the replacement of the Soviet Union by the US as the main supplier of military and political aid to most of the Arab Middle East).<sup>41</sup>

Controlled liberalization in Syria began after Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad took power, in which partial reconciliation with the Sunni businessmen began. Haddad mentions that Syria after 1970 adopted a careful soft-state option which was not politically feasible in the 1960's when the brief and unsuccessful Syrian 1961-1963 Separatist regime after the dissolution of the UAR proved how dangerous soft authoritarianism could be.<sup>42</sup> Although Syria entered OAPEC in 1972, and along with Egypt represented over 50% of OAPEC's population, these two member-states contributed to only 11.5% to OAPEC's combined GDP.<sup>43</sup> The lack of oil wealth

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<sup>39</sup> Dawisha p. 197 citing Sayed Mare'i, *Awraq Siyasiya* (Political papers) (Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Misri al-Hadith, 1978), pp. 392–393. Mare'i was the UAR's Central Minister for Agriculture.

<sup>40</sup> By this I mean liberalization aimed at stabilizing the country by inviting selected chunks of the elite into top levels of the private sector, a phenomenon which can sometimes be observed in economies in transition (from socialist to capitalist) and leads to crony capitalism.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, Roger. (1981).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47-48.

<sup>43</sup> Owen, Roger. "The Arab Economies in the 1970s" (*MERIP Reports*, 100/101. Oct-Dec, 1981.)

compared to other Arab countries and lack of long-term planning made Syria's economy ineffective, untransparent and unattractive to foreign investments, which were replaced by rents from oil rich Arab Gulf countries (the amount of these rents peaked in the late 1970 when they reached approximately 10% of the Syrian GNP<sup>44</sup>). Nonetheless, liberalization in Syria and Egypt developed two different ways: while the ASU (*al-Ittiḥād al-Ishtirākī al-‘Arabī*, Arab Socialist Union Party) in Egypt was dissolved in 1978, the political elite in Syria could not undergo such measures and leave the socialist ideological base behind, precisely because of the social dissonance between the holders of power (‘alawite elite) and capital (Sunni businessmen) mentioned above.

*“Nasir readily agreed, for he related to Radwan a conversation he had with Salah Bitar, the Ba‘thist leader and Syria’s foreign minister, who had joined the negotiations in Cairo on January 16 and who was trying to encourage Nasir to accept the Syrian proposals. ‘Bitar told me,’ Nasir said, ‘when a person prepares to dive into a swimming pool, he has an initial fear of the water, but this fear disappears once he has jumped into the water. So I told him, Brother Salah, what scares me is that I may be jumping into an empty pool.’”<sup>45</sup>*

The pan-Arab cause Nāṣir had adopted in the earlier years and the colossal public support for unity was what drove Nāṣir into signing the agreement. On February 1, 1958, the United Arab Republic was established, and the pan-Arab dream of Arab unity seemed to have gone a step further.

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<sup>44</sup> Haddad, Bassam. (2012), p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 197-198.

### 3 Interpreting pan-Arabism in the selected works of Ḥannā Mīna

We have discussed pan-Arabism as a theoretical and political concept that emerged during the Nahḍa movement in the Ottoman Empire and explained its close ties with Arab nationalism. Then, a brief history of pan-Arab movements that emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was presented along with some of its main proponents and the forming of the UAR. In this section, pan-Arabism in literary texts will be discussed instead, on the case of two selected novels by the proclaimed Syrian author Ḥannā Mīna.

#### 3.1 *Ḥannā Mīna's personal profile*

Ḥannā Mīna was born in 1924 in the city of Latakia, the capital of the today homonymous Syrian governorate. His family moved frequently until they settled in a village in Alexandretta, which was at that time given special administrative status under French-controlled Syria, ratified by the Treaty of Ankara (1921) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The situation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta in the 20's and early 30's was complicated to say the least, but quite stable.<sup>46</sup> But the Syrian loss of the Sanjak of Alexandretta in 1939 had a profound effect on Ḥannā Mīna, his family was one of the Syrian emigrant families from Alexandretta.

He was born to a poor family. The struggles and hardships of his early life inspired some of his autobiographical novels like *Baqāyā Ṣuwar* (Fragments of Memory) or *al-Mustaḡna'u* (The Swamp). Poverty, socialism, poor living conditions and social injustice are a common theme in Ḥannā Mīna's novels. Leaning to communist ideas, he distributed the communist newspaper *Ṣawt al-Ṣa'b* (Voice of the People) and was arrested several times for his views in the 50's and 60's.

*“But I was living in an ignorant environment that could not stop looking at the ground. There were no professors who adore literature or knowledge. And in this state, there needed to be something, I would let my thoughts go into. Perhaps I'd start writing love letters, like teenagers*

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<sup>46</sup> For more information of the district of Alexandretta, the Franco-Turkish negotiations and 1939 referendum I suggest Přebinda, Petr. *Od velké Sýrie k malé* (Praha: Academia, 2018), 184-193.

*generally do. But I didn't do that. Throughout my years, I never wrote love letters. I loved stories and old tales.*"<sup>47</sup>

During his life, Ḥannā Mīna worked several jobs. He worked as a barber, bicycle repairman, a pharmacy clerk and even a sailor.<sup>48</sup> In 1945, he lived in a large apartment building with many other workers in Latakia, working as a barber. His customers were primarily low-ranking soldiers, that payed him half a lira or even less for a haircut.<sup>49</sup> During this time, he worked and finished his first work, a drama. Most of it he forgot over time.<sup>50</sup> Some of his early works include poetry, but it seems that Ḥannā Mīna's literary talent was finally discovered when he started writing novels. In 1947, he moved to Damascus, where he worked as a journalist and in 1954 his first successful novel *The Blue Lanterns (al-Maṣābīḥ al-Zurq)* was published. It was met with great acclaim and meant a new life stage for Ḥannā Mīna. His mother's hopes of him becoming a priest fell apart.

Although his enormous success, Ḥannā Mīna remained quite critical of his works. It is evident that he deeply respected literature and even admitted a certain fear when writing. He mentioned the tendency of authors of calling their works "my children", a feeling Ḥannā Mīna could not identify with.

*"Even after I finish writing a novel, I don't clap joyfully, nor do I feel any sort of satisfaction. Instead I feel bleak, because I couldn't express whatever I wanted in words as I intended. And no matter how the novel was critically received, I still kept my distance from it, the distance that was needed to cut ties with it. And from this distance, I don't like my stories or novels, and I don't care whatever happens to them after they're finished. I was once asked 'What is your relationship with the novels you finish writing?' I answered, 'Like with a divorced woman.' I am not passionate for my novels and I simply cannot consider them my children, even my own children are not fond of themselves to the point they hide their flaws from me. I'm honestly impressed by authors who, when asked about their work and which one*

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<sup>47</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā *Hawāḡis fī 'l-Taḡriba al-Riwā'īya* (Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1982), 141. In: Campbell, Robert B. *Contemporary Arab Writers. Biographies and Autobiographies*, vol. 1. Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996, 1286.

<sup>48</sup> Moubayed, Sami M. *Steel & Silk: Men and Women who shaped Syria 1900-2000*. (Seattle, Wash: Cune, 2006), 558.

<sup>49</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā *Hawāḡis fī 'l-Taḡriba al-Riwā'īya* (Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1982), 54. In: Campbell, Robert B. *Contemporary Arab Writers. Biographies and Autobiographies*, vol. 1. Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996, 1286.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

they prefer, respond: ‘My books are like my children, and I love all of them, just like parents love their children.’”<sup>51</sup>

As mentioned earlier, socialist ideas resonate throughout many of Ḥannā Mīna’s novels. Poverty, injustice, famine and filth are a commonly depicted to portray the atmosphere of the struggling Syrian folk in coastal areas. I have decided to concentrate on the pan-Arab side of Ḥannā Mīna’s work. Ḥannā Mīna was undoubtedly of nationalist, pan-Arab sentiment and one of the main forces behind the Arab Writers Union (*Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arabī*) that was established in 1969. He resigned from the Union after the Syrian author Adonis was expelled in 1995.<sup>52</sup>

“There is nothing unusual in my life that I could talk about. I am a simple man from the simple Arab people, as I am a great man from the great Arab people. Their glory is my glory, their greatness is my greatness, because of my deep affiliation with them. Thus, in whatever I wrote, I expressed the ambitions and youthful aspirations of the Arab people.”<sup>53</sup>

Ḥannā Mīna died August 21, 2018 in Damascus in the age of 94 after a long struggle with illness. In his hand-written will, he requested a simple funeral, with no publicity and no grieving.<sup>54</sup> A funeral procession two days later from the French Hospital in Damascus to his hometown Latakia was preceded by an event attended by top government officials, including the Vice President of Syria Najāḥ al-‘Aṭṭār, where she and many Syrian intellectuals and artists paid last respects to the deceased author.<sup>55</sup>

“Everything I did in my life is known, by this I mean the duty towards my nation and people. I dedicated all my words to a single purpose: to support the poor, the pitiful, the sufferers on Earth.<sup>56</sup> First I fought physically to accomplish this goal<sup>57</sup> and after that I started

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>52</sup> The expulsion in 1995 was caused by a meeting between Adonis and a Israeli intellectuals in Spain. Both Ḥannā Mīna and Sa‘dallāh Wannūs resigned from the Union shortly after as a gesture of solidarity with Adonis.

<sup>53</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā *Hawāḡis fi ‘l-Taḡriba al-Riwā‘īya* (Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1982), 1. In: Campbell, Robert B. *Contemporary Arab Writers. Biographies and Autobiographies*, vol. 1. Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996, 1286.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/culture-and-art/2018/08/21/عامة-94-عنا-مينة-عن-94-عاما-.html>

<sup>55</sup> Milhem, Rasha “Damascus pays last respects to late novelist Hanna Mina” *Syrian Arab News Agency*, 23 August 2018.

<sup>56</sup> “The sufferers on Earth” is a reference to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s novel *al-Mu‘addabūn fi ‘l-Ard*.

<sup>57</sup> Ḥannā Mīna reminds us of the hardships of his early life, where he struggled to provide for himself and his family by doing manual labour.

to write around the age of 40, by doing this I gave my pen the legitimacy to aid me in the completion of the same goal.”<sup>58</sup>

### 3.1.1 *His encounter with ideology*

Ideology and literary texts both frequently involve cognitive propositions. But unlike ideology, literary texts are not present to inform us about the real.<sup>59</sup> This does not mean that reading literary texts do not affect our views of reality in any way, as all such texts are in some sense ideological.<sup>60</sup> Terry Eagleton provides an example about the interconnectedness of ideology and realist literature:

*“When a novel tells what the capital city of France is, it is not enforcing a geographical truth; it is either obliquely signaling a fact about its character as discourse (“this is realism”) which induces us to “live” more completely that discourse’s emotive intentionality, or it is marshaling a local “support” for a particular emotive enunciation. If that local unit of discourse is falsifiable, the enunciation as a whole is not. In realist literature, the emotive level is slid under the pseudo-referential, and to this degree such literature resembles nothing quite so much as theoretical ideology.”*<sup>61</sup>

The narrator and characters play a central role in the formation of moral judgements.<sup>62</sup> They are the holders of opinions, which they directly or indirectly present. This can be done in many ways, like in the form of dialogues, character choices, emotions, or behaviour. All of these forms are used by Ḥannā Mīna in his novels. Ḥannā Mīna was a Syrian author in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, convinced about the natural unity of the Arab world. In a way he criticises Syria, especially its poor economic situation compared to other countries. But in the end, he still views it as his homeland to which he is emotionally drawn to.

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<sup>58</sup> A translated part of Ḥannā Mīna last will that was published at: <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/culture-and-art/2018/08/21/وفاة-الروائي-السوري-حنا-مينة-عن-94-عاماً>.html

<sup>59</sup> Eagleton, Terry. "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative." (*Social Text*, no. 2 (1979): 62-80), 65.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> Herman, Luc & Vervaeck, Bart: "Ideology and Narrative Fiction". In: Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2013. URL = <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/ideology-and-narrative-fiction>



All of this is reflected in the characters represented in the novels selected for this study. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*<sup>63</sup> (Spring and Autumn) and *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*<sup>64</sup> (The Woman in the Black Robe) both feature protagonists (Karam in the first book and 'Abd al-Jalīl in the second) that are very similar to Ḥannā Mīna and possess apparent autobiographical features, including the interest in literature, history, and cigarettes. Karam and 'Abd al-Jalīl are both of nationalist thinking, which will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapters. Although these apparent autobiographical projections, his characters are not static and unambiguously portrayed. They undergo series of changes and progression, which makes them quite believable and convincing. This will be compared with Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's novel *'Audaṭ al-Rūḥ* (Return of the Spirit) in the following chapter, a work that could be considered canonical regarding the portrayal of Europeans during the Nahḍa.<sup>65</sup> We could say that if we were not to know Ḥannā Mīna's Syrian nationality, we could easily guess it from the fate of his characters. Syria was in Ḥannā Mīna's time the ideological hub of pan-Arabism and despite all of his criticism of Syria, if Ḥannā Mīna wasn't a proud Syrian, he would never incorporate such strong pan-Arab ideas into his works.

### 3.2 Cultural aspects of pan-Arabism

In the following chapter the cultural aspects of pan-Arabism present in the two selected works of Ḥannā Mīna will be discussed. The chapter is divided into two sections, the first is focused on three capital cities, which will be explored from Ḥannā Mīna's pan-Arab view. Cairo will be analysed in the context of the novel *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*. This novel could be considered as Ḥannā Mīna's interpretation of the events around the creation a dissolution of the United Arab Republic. This issue will be examined in chapter 3.3 (Inter-Arab relations).

Ḥannā Mīna's view of Budapest and Paris will be analysed in the context of *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*, an important work if we wish to study Ḥannā Mīna's view of the relationship between the East and West, which is a question closely tied to the pan-Arabism ideology, as was outlined in the first chapter.

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<sup>63</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1984.

<sup>64</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*. Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1994.

<sup>65</sup> *an-Nahḍa* is the Arab cultural and intellectual movement in the 19th century, a period of modernization and reform. During this time we can also trace the roots of pan-Arabism.

### 3.2.1 *Cairo, Budapest, and Paris as toponyms of nationalist beliefs*

Syria was earlier mentioned as the ideological hub of pan-Arabism during the time of Ḥannā Mīna. This is true, as especially the intellectual roots of pan-Arabism are very much present in the Levant and the ruling Ba‘th Party was ideologically inclined to pan-Arabism and Arab brotherhood. But a more significant pan-Arab actor emerged in Egypt. It was Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, who left a powerful mark in the history of pan-Arabism. He did what the Syrian side could not, that is to become a leading Arab actor, respected and even feared throughout the Arab world. He was the implementor of the pan-Arab ideology, which foundations were laid in the Levant. Many later military officers tried to follow his footsteps with differing results, like Mu‘ammar al-Qaḍḍāfī in Libya, ‘Abd Allāh al-Salāl in Yemen or Ṣaddām Ḥusayn in Iraq, who was 15 when Nāṣir led the Free Officers’ Revolution in 1952, and became a hero to him and his peers.

Cairo during Nāṣir was the centre of pan-Arabism. It was where the Syrian officers promoting the unification of Egypt and Syria led by ‘Afīf al-Bizrī went to accomplish their goals. Damascus was where these ideas were born and bred, Cairo was where decisions were made. It was the Syrian side that came to Cairo to convince Nāṣir of their pan-Arab goal of unification. The question of how Ḥannā Mīna views the process of unification of UAR and its dissolving a few years later in the novel *al-Mar’a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad* will be explored in chapter 3.3 (Inter-Arab relations). In short, his interpretation of the events around the UAR suggests that Egypt, not Syria, was the country that forced itself onto the other to implement the pan-Arab goal of unification.<sup>66</sup>

In the late 50’s, Egypt was the leading Arab country with visible Arab nationalist tendencies, so where else should have supporters of pan-Arabism looked up to? Egypt, or more precisely Cairo, had the biggest political potential out of all Arab capitals. It was where agreements were signed, and decisions were made.

This changed in the 70’s, during the *Infitāḥ*. As we have mentioned earlier, this was a policy of controlled economic liberalization, which occurred after the 1973 October War during the presidency of Anwar as-Sādāt. During this time, Egypt deviated from its socialist policies

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<sup>66</sup> The terms Nāṣir laid before accepting unity with Syria were heavily in favor of Egypt and ultimately resulted in the dissolvment of the UAR, for more information on this I suggest Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 190-205.

and broke ties with its former ally, USSR, in favor of the United States. Ordinary Egyptians faced two new realities: Egypt's liberalizing economy along with consumption-oriented society and accumulation of oil-related wealth by various Arab countries. This sudden wealth explosion in the Gulf states, Libya, or Iraq led to the migration of qualified workers from Egypt to these countries. The migrants to Saudi Arabia were, during their stay, influenced by Wahhabism and upon their return to Egypt generally preserved the Islamic customs seen and practiced in the Gulf. This, along with the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 led to a restructure of Egyptian society, which adopted a more strict and literal interpretation of Islam along with growing consumerism. And under the rising influence of these two trends, Ḥannā Mīna wrote his novels, the two selected for this study were published in 1984 and 1994. To a certain extent, there is an apparent idealization of pan-Arab ideas present in these novels, accompanied with Ḥannā Mīna's passionate memories of the past. Ḥannā Mīna viewed pan-Arabism as a model, that brought along a bright perspective, something that was sought after among many Arabs.

Let us now turn to the novel *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*. The novel's plot centers around the developing relationship between 'Abd al-Jalīl and Rabīḥa, who both respectively symbolize Syria and Egypt in the 1958-1961 period of the UAR. At the end of the novel, the protagonist with autobiographical features changes his mind on marrying the Egyptian woman Rabīḥa, who at first swayed him with her life story and proposed marriage not long after their first encounter. The reasons 'Abd al-Jalīl (Syria, or Ḥannā Mīna) left Rabīḥa (Egypt) and departed on his own are as follows.

*„What remains for me is to be myself. To not allow this disease called love to grow in two opposing and compatible hearts. Therefore, for the better of both of us, I must leave her. I love her and reject her love at the same time. This is it, the turning point. Oh, how quickly we rose, from the ground to the top. And how swiftly we fall! I will not go down. I will remain, if I can, there on the top, and for this I will retreat and leave.”<sup>67</sup>*

'Abd al-Jalīl leaves Rabīḥa, the woman that he fell in love with and who led him throughout the whole story, behind. The shock and disgust 'Abd al-Jalīl feels after learning about Rabīḥa's past is too much as he ends the relationship between the two “opposing and compatible hearts”<sup>68</sup>. He comes to this conclusion as he delves into societal problems.

<sup>67</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*. (Bairūt, Dār al-Ādāb. 1994), 88.

<sup>68</sup> In the original: في قلبين متناقضين و متوافقين. Ibid., 88.

„ *And the reason for this is consumerist society, that creeps below as it devastates all our values. Poverty is the beginning, and what is there in this consumerist society, other than poverty as the beginning?*’ *‘Abd al-Jalīl finished his glass of cognac in one sip. Then, he drank some beer. Finally, in his thinking, he arrived to the final point: ‘It is impossible for things to be nationalistic in a crooked society! Abnormalities will spread, as long as consumerism spreads throughout society. All people strive for profit. Opportunism spreads. People pant around riches until richness becomes a source of pride, and poverty the opposite of pride...’*<sup>69</sup>

Ḥannā Mīna expresses his concerns related to the *Infitāḥ*. The opening of the Egyptian economy led the abandonment of *values*<sup>70</sup>. Striving for profit became the fundamental principle on which the 70’s society stood on. The author’s view on this subject is clear, consumerist society in which we live today is led by opportunists and anything they do is publicly accepted. In every society, there were people without (socialist) values, but what characterizes consumerist society is that while in earlier times the unscrupulous pursuit of profit was practiced furtively and generally frowned upon, now such behaviour is widely accepted or even encouraged. And if this disruption of balance<sup>71</sup> continues, these abnormalities will become widespread, something that Ḥannā Mīna is opposed to and that clashes with the values of solidarity and Arab brotherhood.

Ḥannā Mīna’s novel *al-Rabī‘ wa ‘l-Ḥarīf* (Spring and Autumn) is situated in Budapest, a city specifically chosen by the author to portray the life of Karam, a Syrian university lecturer and writer. It is the city in which most of the plot takes place and the only location in which we can observe Hungarian society as presented by Ḥannā Mīna. Paris on the other hand, is an ideal European city, that is mentioned only in the best of light. Karam prefers to speak with other Hungarians in French and even adopts a phrase that is repeated several times throughout the book. This French phrase will be discussed later. Paris is viewed as the city of culture and a trip to Paris is an event of great significance. Let us look at what Erjika<sup>72</sup>, one of Karam’s two Hungarian lovers, says about Paris. She is a woman of class that Karam looks up to, she says to the protagonist after she returns from her travels:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>70</sup> The undefined values Ḥannā Mīna puts into opposition with consumerist society (المجتمع الاستهلاكي) is are likely socialist values (القيم الاشتراكية)

<sup>71</sup> In the original: اختلال التوازن. Ibid., 90.

<sup>72</sup> إيرجكا

“it was very successful [the trip]. Especially in Paris. They truly savor art there. Oh, what a charming city! I participated in two music festivals and the Hungarian song was rated well. Our country really has something to compete with.”<sup>73</sup>

A charming city in which art is savored and the view of Paris as a city of culture is a description often presented in modern Arab literature. Ḥannā Mīna’s portrayal of Paris is in line with many other Arab authors. Paris was arguably the most important European city during the Nahḍa, it was the city to which many Arab students and scholars went and studied and has undoubtedly influenced in some way many Arab authors, both in the Maghrib and Mashriq.

A prime example of Arabs educated in Paris during this period is Rifā‘at aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī (d. 1873), who is known for the establishment of the School of Languages (*madrasat al-ʿAlsun*), today a faculty of ‘Ain Ṣams University in Cairo. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Fransīs Marrāš, or Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm all represent famous Arab authors that have studied or lived in Paris, which has without a doubt influenced their work. Comparing Arab cities with Paris was a common theme in the works of Arab authors during the Nahḍa. Europeans are also often represented in such novels with differing qualities, as in the renowned novel by Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm *‘Awdat ar-Rūḥ* (Return of the Spirit), where we witness the clashing views of two characters, a French archaeologist who is enthusiastic for Egyptian culture and a cynical English engineer whose disdain for Egyptians resonates throughout the book.

To fully understand how Paris was viewed during the Nahḍa and how Ḥannā Mīna’s perspective of this European capital is no different, we should look at how the authors wrote about this city. The authors of Arabic travel literature (*Adab al-Riḥla*) of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fully admire Paris and admit that it reminds them of a rich, oriental city.<sup>74</sup> It is a clean, developed metropolis, full of cafés, fountains and theatres. Even the way Parisians live is quite similar to the way people in the Orient do.<sup>75</sup> It is a city of gold and luxury that every man who travels between Europe and the East should visit.<sup>76</sup> London on the other hand, although a great city, is characterized as an austere city. A strict, rainy city in which the policemen cannot even smoke on duty or hide from rain or snow.<sup>77</sup> This is very different from what is commonly seen in Arab

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<sup>73</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī‘ wa ‘l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al- Ādāb. 1984), 301.

<sup>74</sup> Ondraš, František. 2017. *Arabský román: Vznik a vývoj uměleckého žánru (1830–1930)*. Praha: Charles University in Praha, Faculty of Arts Press, 79.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

cities or Paris. Compare this to the characters in Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's novel, where the French archaeologist understands Egypt and the struggles it underwent and admires its deep culture. On the other hand, the sceptical Englishman does not succumb to such emotional outcries and views the world through cynical and practical lenses. This is how the European characters of Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm reflect the descriptions English and French capitals by various Arab authors.

This is different in Ḥannā Mīna's *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. The characters there are not so clearly depicted. Ḥannā Mīna, who is ideologically inclined to pan-Arabism, does not present his ideas one-sidedly as the authors of the Nahḍa tend to. Instead of static, one-dimensional characters that serve as archetypes of their countries respectively, Ḥannā Mīna tries a more personal approach. The narratives of both selected novels guide us through the lives of the protagonists with apparent autobiographical features. It should be noted that some of these "Nahḍist stereotypes" are still present in the selected works. For example, in the beginning of *al-Mar'a dāt al-Tawb al-Aswad*. In the train's restaurant wagon, we witness an intoxicated, rowdy Englishman who disturbs people around. Once again, such a scene would definitely not work as well if we replace the loud and unruly Mr. Smith with a Monsieur Dubois.

But these depictions are not what gives Ḥannā Mīna's novels the biggest value within the scope of nationalist and pan-Arab sentiment. It is the narrative in which his main characters transform. When we start reading the novel *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*, we do not know that the protagonist Karam, a Syrian living in Budapest will change from a quite successful middle-aged man to a defeated, melancholic and depressed stranger in a foreign country who wishes to return to his homeland. It should be said that in Ḥannā Mīna's view, there is no other European city like Paris. It is a city with which even cities like London or Rome cannot compete, a perspective very similar to the authors of travel literature during the Nahḍa.

Budapest is a city very similar to Paris. The architecture and a large river that flows through the historical centre are only some of the many ways Budapest resembles an ideal picture of the French capital, a resemblance many Arab capitals cannot challenge. There is one difference between these two cities that perhaps placed Budapest a bit closer to Ḥannā Mīna's heart. The Hungarian capital lies to the East, in one of the socialist countries of the Eastern bloc. This made Budapest a much more accessible city for Arabs than Paris. The hosting of a number of Arab students in tertiary education by Hungary and other Eastern Bloc countries during the 60's, 70's and 80's is well known. Although its socialist regime, Hungary in the 60's and 70's adopted a relaxed form of socialism, quite different from the other Bloc countries.

It was similar to the economically soft Arab socialism promoted by the Ba‘th party in Syria. By this I mean the emphasis on social justice and brotherhood along with leniency regarding private property and small businesses.

The emphasis on solidarity, social justice and brotherhood is present in the root of the Arabic term for socialism (*al-ištirākīya*). The Arabic root Š-R-K in its many used forms overwhelmingly has the meaning of participation, partnership, sharing, or cooperation. All of these meanings have a generally positive connotation in Arab society. On the other hand, communism (*al-šuyū‘īya*) is an abstract noun from the root Š-‘-Y, traditionally in the meaning of ‘to spread’, ‘to become known or public’, or even ‘take side’ and ‘dominate something’<sup>78</sup>. These meanings have undoubtedly more neutral or even negative connotations. Within the general public, communism could have been perceived as something foreign, that spreads and has very close to totalitarianism. Compare this to the positive meanings of *al-ištirākīya*, in which brotherhood, sharing, partnership and cooperation is instead emphasized.

Although Budapest is a city in an allied socialist state with an opening economy and solid standard of living, it still isn’t enough for Ḥannā Mīna. Karam’s transition from a fresh, optimistic and full of life Syrian living in Budapest, who thoroughly enjoys its cafés and nightlife to a miserable, melancholic and nostalgic middle-aged man who yearns for the return to his homeland will be discussed later. Now we will introduce and analyse some apparent manifestations of Ḥannā Mīna’s nationalist sentiment in his work in the frame of these two cities.

The novel *Spring and Autumn* presents many layers of Hungarian society which the protagonist Karam continuously unravels by simply living in Budapest, observing and interacting with local people. Focusing on the portrayal of Hungary and Hungarian society in Ḥannā Mīna’s novel, we can notice some nationalist ideas and beliefs. As the somewhat lonely protagonist strolls on a long summer night through the streets of Budapest, he passes by the Heroes’ Square, a majestic depiction of Hungarian national leaders. And before these statues of national heroes he sees “...young people embracing and lovers kissing each other. Or even resting their heads on the chests of their beloved with their fingers interlocked.”<sup>79</sup> The depicted Hungarians are well aware of their past as they gather around the monumental square with their

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<sup>78</sup> Wehr, Hans, J. Milton Cowan. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. (4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 581.

<sup>79</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī‘ wa ‘l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al- Ādāb. 1984), 20.

lovers during the night. After witnessing this, Karam says to himself “*Wonderful*”<sup>80</sup>. *This truly is Little Paris*”.

Comparing Budapest to the French capital is a sign of respect, through which the author acknowledges the deep historical roots and unique architecture of Budapest.<sup>81</sup> He also refers to the frequency of bars and cafés, which the protagonist often visits to meet new people. The novel itself begins as Karam sits alone in a café in Budapest and observes people passing through the then called Lenin Boulevard<sup>82</sup>, not far from the Danube. Budapest is a city built on a river, just like Paris. The scene mentioned above, in which public displays of affection under historical national landmarks are depicted, are also signs easily associated with the life of Parisians. Such scenes are generally uncommon in Damascus and many other cities in the Middle East.

The protagonist’s Hungarian friend with whom he spent years in China before arriving to Hungary appears only twice in the novel, but is important to understand Mina’s portrayal of Hungarian men: “...*the pride of his Hungarian nationality, which began and never ends, as if he wanted to persuade the world that Hungary is paradise on Earth and that he is its representative whose national duty is uncompromising, whatever the circumstances.*”<sup>83</sup>

This grey-haired Hungarian man with strong nationalist sentiment living in China is the author of the phrase “*chez nous, par exemple*”<sup>84</sup>, which Karam repeats many times throughout the book, only changing the meaning of “*chez nous*” from Hungary to his Arab homeland.

“*He says it in French ‘chez nous par exemple’ and keeps repeating his phrase ‘At our home, for example’. He never says, ‘At our home, in Hungary’. Instead, he lets his listeners deduce what he means... because there is only one place in the world, and it is Hungary. And this place, according to Haidiji, is what he means by ‘At our home’, and that is all.*”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Arabic *hanī’an* in the original. The author’s usage of this expression accentuates the joy the character felt upon observing the scene.

<sup>81</sup> The widely known description of Beirut as “Paris of the Middle East” also has many positive connotations.

<sup>82</sup> The author’s decision for the protagonist to live on Lenin Boulevard corresponds with his communist past.

<sup>83</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī wa ‘l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al- Ādāb. 1984), 9.

<sup>84</sup> Arabic ‘*indanā maṭalan*’.

<sup>85</sup> In the original هيدجي. This name could be pronounced either [Haidijī] or [Hīdijī]. The issue of foreign names in Arabic texts is known and we can assume that Arab readers generally do not search for the vocalization of such names and simply acknowledge that the name is of foreign origin. Using foreign names in novels gives them a shade of originality and may appear even exotic. Ḥannā Mīna was a well-travelled man and may have heard this name somewhere during his stay in foreign countries.



The role of France and the colonial traces it left in the Middle East and North Africa is indeed impressive. The French did what the British could not, in the sense of penetrating the cultural life of Arabs. The French language today is widely spoken in the Maghrib and the its cultural presence still vividly appears in many, mostly urban parts of the Levant. This phenomenon corresponds with the Arab views of Paris and London I have provided earlier.

The motive of an Arab homeland to which Karam seeks to return resonates throughout the book. At the beginning, the protagonist is a stranger in a country. His life seems almost idealistic, as he lives in a nice apartment in the historical center of Budapest and spends his days sitting at cafés and bars, chatting with the locals. He even meets two Hungarian women with which he spends intimate encounters. Budapest is a place in which Karam feels great. At least for some time.

The protagonist's stay in Budapest is interwoven with short outcries of nostalgia and lamentation. From time to time, Karam either reflects on his homeland, or mentions his inability to write. What a strange situation. The apparently ideal life of an Arab writer who lives in Europe, enjoys its culture and people is constantly stricken by the cry for the return to the Arab homeland, even if the standard of living there is much worse, as will be explored in the following chapter. Never in the book was Karam hurt by the locals or felt excluded from Hungarian society. His ability to assimilate into society, make acquaintances, friends and even develop intimate relationships with locals (something which he did not succeed in when living in China!) is apparent throughout the book. All this and he still feels empty. As he answers Berushka, his lover and a university student, when she says that his lifestyle<sup>86</sup> is quite bohemian:

*"This is just an outer shell. In the inside, I am in pain. I live in the reality of deepest alienation. I live in pain, alone... and silent."*<sup>87</sup>

This confession happens at the end of the book, just two chapters away from the events of the 1967 war, which will have devastating psychological effects on the Arab community in Budapest, including Karam. It will also be a force that rallies all Arabs together, a very clear motive of pan-Arabism. This will be discussed later in chapter 3.3 (Inter-Arab relations). With this in mind, we can see that although Budapest is considered a fine city to live in, it is still a

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 250.

source of *ghurba*<sup>88</sup>, a word which frequency gradually rises and we progress through the book and witness the protagonist's yearning for his homeland.

Inserting Europe and "his homeland" into opposition is an occurring theme throughout the novel, which title itself is a contrasting metaphor. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf* (Spring and Autumn) may indicate the difference between Karam and Berushka.<sup>89</sup> Karam, an Arab middle-aged university professor who teaches the Arab language at university and Berushka, a young, Hungarian female student have an intimate and strange relationship in the novel. The young, admirable but naive character of Berushka is often contrasted with the old, but charming personality of Karam. He repeatedly mentions his "inability to love" to Berushka when she expresses her emotions to him and neglects her studies just to spend time with him. He sees her more as a student than as an equal partner to himself. Although accompanying her to the countryside to visit her family (where they spend free time swimming and relaxing next to the Danube river), he feels embarrassed when she publicly holds his hand in front of other students. Karam says to George, a Syrian student and head of the Arab Students Club:

*"I told her what I felt inside. First, that I do not love her, by this I mean 'love her' in the sense of irresistible feelings, that bind a person and control him. Then there's the age difference. Her sun is rising, while mine is setting. Think about it, my friend. Spring and Autumn never meet."*<sup>90</sup>

Spring and Autumn never meeting may seem even more dim than unfulfilled love of a young student when interpreting Spring as China, a blossoming state with a strong, growing economy and Autumn as the Arab states that are withered, stagnating and without a clear future. While the portrayal of China in contemporary literature has indeed changed (with the rising number of Chinese imported products at the expense of local production), I argue that Ḥannā Mīna in his novels presents China as the ideal nation-state from which the Arabs should take inspiration from to fulfil their goals and become a strong, independent nation capable of promoting its interests. This is an idea which would be hardly accomplished without close cooperation or even unification of Arab states, which is without a doubt a pan-Arab thought. In the next section I will analyse some socio-economic aspects and problems Ḥannā Mīna presents in his novels regarding Arabs, Hungary, and China.

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<sup>88</sup> A widely used Arabic word, meaning "alienation", or "separation from one's homeland/native country".

<sup>89</sup> بيروتشكا

<sup>90</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al- Ādāb. 1984), 184.

### 3.2.2 *Socio-economic aspects of pan-Arabism*

Economic nationalism is traditionally in political debates placed into opposition to economic liberalism and globalisation.<sup>91</sup> The various problems of categorizing and defining economic nationalism will not be discussed here<sup>92</sup>, I will attempt only to introduce and analyse the economic aspects of Arab nationalism Ḥannā Mīna presents in his novels *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf* and *al-Mar'a dāt al-Tawb al-Aswad*. Here we return to the problem of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism, two very closely related terms. If we were to attempt to distinguish 'economic aspects of Arab nationalism' and 'economic aspects of pan-Arabism', we would descend into an unclear field of terminologies and end up with very similar answers for both sides. Whenever talk about nationalism, we must acknowledge its many aspects and how intertwined they are. The economic aspects that will be presented below are just one side of the nationalist concept that overlaps with politics, culture, language, or even religion. The goal of this chapter is to contextualise the ideas and analyse the methods Ḥannā Mīna used when introducing socio-economic aspects of pan-Arabism into his works.

Beginning with the first novel, *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*, the question of why people often prefer imported goods in favour of local ones is brought up when the protagonist Karam sits at a bar in central Budapest and converses with a local bartender. He criticizes how Hungarians prefer imported liquor from various countries instead of their own and order champagne, cognac or whiskey whenever out with their lovers, most likely just to impress. It is evident that the author presents this behaviour as characteristic of people who lack nationalist sentiment. Higher-class foreigners in Beijing<sup>93</sup> who he met when living in China are also mentioned. He argues that they boast about their non-Chinese products from all over the world, especially liquor. Karam on the other hand, during his stay in China thoroughly enjoyed local Chinese products and perhaps even preferred them, not having the need to buy imported goods.<sup>94</sup> Another example of such lack of nationalist sentiment and distrust in local production was presented when the protagonist came to Hungary, wore Hungarian shoes and his neighbour

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<sup>91</sup> Pickel, Andreas. *Explaining, and explaining with, economic nationalism*. 2003, 13.

<sup>92</sup> For more information on this topic I suggest: Pickel, Andreas. (2003). *Explaining (with) Economic Nationalism*. Nations and Nationalism.

<sup>93</sup> In the original „foreign experts“ (*al-ḥubarā' al-ajānib*)

<sup>94</sup> Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al- Ādāb. 1984), 25.

wouldn't believe that the shoes he was wearing were made in Hungary, insisting that they were Italian.<sup>95</sup>

It may be that this truly is Ḥannā Mīna's personal view, as he points out the nature of people who disregard and unfavourably view products of their own country while they unreasonably praise imports, especially from Western countries. His frustration can be observed when Karam in his thought process returns to his homeland.

*"...and with that he remembered an old saying in Syria, his homeland. 'Whatever is foreign is great.'"*<sup>96</sup>

Hungarians and Syrians are both criticized by the author for their lack of respect for locally produced goods and their blind adherence to foreign products. Chinese on the other hand, are not, as he mentions only *foreign experts* who lived in China. Perhaps this again is a manifestation of Ḥannā Mīna's personal beliefs and his admiration of the Chinese national economy. The ordinary Chinese are not ashamed to use local products and have no tendency to view imported goods as inherently superior. This makes China seem as having an ideal approach to national interests.

And where would Ḥannā Mīna place Syria among these countries in terms of shoes production? Most likely on the bottom. We could say that regarding quality, Italian are considered the best, followed by Hungary and perhaps China, with Syria being the last. This is no surprise if we return to observe the economic situation in Syria in the 1970's, not that long before the novel *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf* was published. Bassam Haddad provides an example in his work on the business networks in Syria, that was mentioned in chapter 2.2 (Pan-Arab movements in history):

*"For instance, four shoe factories were created in the same general area during this period; not only did they quickly fail, but they also caused the shutting down of authentic Syrian-made factories that had been producing high-quality products."*<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>96</sup> In Arabic *mā huwa faranġī baranġī*.

<sup>97</sup> Haddad, Bassam. (2012), p. 94

### 3.3 *Inter-Arab relations*

Now we shall focus on the topic of inter-Arab relations present in the selected works of Ḥannā Mīna. We can view the relationships between Arab either on a state, or individual level. In the novel *al-Mar'a dāt al-Tawb al-Aswad*, the developing relationship between the two characters, 'Abd al-Jalīl and Rabīḥa, in many ways reflects the 1958-1961 period of the United Arab Republic, the brief pan-Arab unitary state of Egypt and Syria. The individual level of inter-Arab relations can be seen several ways. Arabs that live abroad might be seen cooperating, bonding, or even just gathering around, perhaps even helping each other. Often it is the cultural and language differences and barriers of a European country that bond the Arabs together. At other times it may be a significant event, as is seen at the end of the novel *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*.

It is July 1967 in Budapest. Erjika has returned from her travels across Europe and meets Karam. As she is on her way out, she nonchalantly asks him if he's heard the news. Karam, who cannot read Hungarian newspaper, is astounded by her report, a war between the Arabs and Israel is expected anytime soon.<sup>98</sup> The author's decision to use the expression "Arabs", a term encompassing all Arab people from all Arab states in opposition to Israel is worth noticing.

Here is where we see Ḥannā Mīna's pan-Arab sentiment at its highest. All Arab students living in Budapest are at first invited to a sitting at the Egyptian Cultural Centre. Karam says stately to the students around him:

*"Every Arab in Hungary must go to the embassy of his country and put himself at its disposal, as long as the Arab embassies in Budapest are able to organize their transport and participation in the battles that will break out."*<sup>99</sup>

An Egyptian student brings a map of the Arab world<sup>100</sup> and envisions a great Arab victory, which he enthusiastically presents to those gathered around him. He ends his speech on a high note:

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<sup>98</sup> In the original: الحرب متوقعة بين العرب و إسرائيل. Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al- Ādāb. 1984), 306.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>100</sup> In the original خريطة الوطن العربي. Ibid., 308. Notice the use of the more expressive word *waṭan* instead of 'ālam.

*“There are 105 million Arabs. The destruction of Israel is certain this time.”*<sup>101</sup>

The students and other listeners cluster around the radio and await the broadcasts. Their optimism eventually fades away as the news about the Six-Day War start arriving. First, they stand in disbelief, denying the reports from foreign, Western media and consider them a part of a *“psychological war in favour of Israel”*<sup>102</sup>. As the days go and more news arrive, denial is succeeded by shock, sadness and pain. Then, the devastated protagonist decides to return to his homeland. 105 million Arabs have been defeated. *“What happened to the Arab nation?”*<sup>103</sup> one of Karam’s friends asks before he says farewell to his friends as he announces his return to Syria. The protagonist’s return home is justified by his inability to write, which was mentioned earlier. After the war, he feels guilt. He spent the time during which others were preparing for war and fighting Israel in Hungary, enjoying his bohemian life. This is the curse of the *ghurba* for Karam, it is a peculiar state in which he finds himself in, one in which he cannot write when living in a foreign country. He considers writing to be a service for his country and the community, which he cannot fulfil in Hungary.

After a month, he leaves for the airport without notice, with only a suitcase in his hand. He says to himself as he leaves his apartment for the last time:

*“My studies have ended. It is true I’m not returning with a degree, but with experience. There [in Syria] I might struggle, face some difficulties, but nothing is harsher than alienation... I was content here. I was happy living with you, but despite all of this, I will be happier in my homeland. There is my land, my home and my people. There I will write...”*<sup>104</sup>

Upon returning to Syria, the protagonist is shot under unexplained circumstances. The tragic story of a fortunate Arab university lecturer living in the centre Budapest, ‘the Little Paris’ of Europe, who thoroughly enjoys life ends as a nostalgic man yearns for the return to Syria ends as he is shot soon after his return. Perhaps these are the emotions Ḥannā Mīna feels when he thinks about his homeland. Despite all the suffering, stagnation, utter disappointment after 1967 and the withering economy, he still loves the Arab nation and his Syrian homeland. It is the only place into which he yearns to return, no matter the conditions in Hungary, or China. For Ḥannā Mīna, these countries are the ideal to which Arabs should look up to, but in

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 327.

no way they can replace their true home. But perhaps the Autumn that befell the Arabs is transitory and will recede after time, and perhaps one day they will become a strong and independent nation. At least in the hopes of Ḥannā Mīna.

In the novel *al-Mar'a dāt al-Tawb al-Aswad*, the two characters of 'Abd al-Jalīl and Rabīḥa embody Syria and Egypt. Their relationship develops on a train in Egypt and starts when Rabīḥa, a charming, middle-aged woman clothed in black catches 'Abd al-Jalīl's eye. In the following events, the reader witnesses how Rabīḥa almost leads 'Abd al-Jalīl by the hand as she starts telling him her life story. Her engaging storytelling abilities invoke 'Abd al-Jalīl's deepest curiosity as he notices her in the train. She leads him from the coupé to the train's bar, from there to the restaurant, and finally to a hotel room. It is as if 'Abd al-Jalīl was suddenly infatuated by Rabīḥa's storytelling and getting to know her was the only thing that mattered. The woman in the black robe leads him like a mother leads his child. Wherever she suggests, 'Abd al-Jalīl follows.

She proceeds to tell him her life story. Of how a poor, young woman married two older men and inherited their fortune. As she insists on that the marriages she underwent were solely because of love or attraction, her sudden description of intimate practices with her second husband bewilders 'Abd al-Jalīl. Her confession of how her second husband hit her while she fully enjoyed it is incomprehensible for 'Abd al-Jalīl. In the end, we are left with an interesting picture of Rabīḥa. She is a woman that married two old men, that have both already died. The first she married of genuine love (at least she says) and inherited an enormous amount of wealth. Even with this wealth, with which she could spend her whole life not working and living peacefully, she decided once again to marry an older man, even when men much younger and attractive confessed love to her. Her second husband was the one mentioned above, the one who regularly beat her, while Rabīḥa fancied it.<sup>105</sup>

As her story finishes, 'Abd al-Jalīl is still very much baffled by what Rabīḥa experienced. While they feel attraction for another, 'Abd al-Jalīl starts to doubt what he heard and questions their relationship. On the other hand, Rabīḥa, who led 'Abd al-Jalīl by the hand

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<sup>105</sup> These two marriages could be interpreted as follows: the first marriage symbolizes the Kingdom of Egypt under severe British influence and the second as Egypt after the 23 July Revolution under the rule of Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir, when Egypt was reformed and "beaten" (perhaps in the meaning of the communist opposition), while Nāṣir enjoyed popularity of the masses.

throughout the novel suddenly proposes that they marry. In the end of the novel, the hesitant ‘Abd al-Jalīl decides to leave Rabīḥa behind.

The novel’s plot builds on an important event of the Arab history from a pan-Arab view, the United Arab Republic (*al-Jumhūriya al-‘Arabiya al-Muttaḥida*) period in 1958-1961. The UAR was, as mentioned in chapter 2.2, a brief unitary state between Egypt and Syria, that was pushed by the Syrian Ba‘th Party as a reaction to the rising influence of the Syrian Communist Party and widespread public support for Arab unity. The interpretation of ‘Abd al-Jalīl’s character as the embodiment of Syria and Rabīḥa’s as Egypt<sup>106</sup> enables us to uncover various pan-Arab thoughts and even Ḥannā Mīna’s interpretation of this event in history.

If we return to chapter 2.2 (Pan-Arab movements in history), where historical circumstances surrounding the creation of the UAR were discussed and set them beside what Ḥannā Mīna presents in the novel *al-Mar’a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*, we begin to notice a striking dissimilarity. While in 1958, significant pressure from the Syrian side led to Nāṣir accepting the unification of Syria and Egypt, in Ḥannā Mīna’s novel, the roles are switched. It is the Egyptian Rabīḥa, who leads ‘Abd al-Jalīl throughout the plot and finally proposes to him. With the marriage proposal symbolizing their unification (or more precisely, the unification of Egypt and Syria), Ḥannā Mīna’s interpretation of the events emits a visibly pro-Syrian vibe, as if Syria was ‘fooled’ by Egypt into unification. Here we see that Ḥannā Mīna, although a visible supporter of pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism still views the events from a Syrian point of view. Pan-Arabism in Ḥannā Mīna’s views was a great idea and opportunity for a better future with a united Arab nation, although he still belonged to a country, in which he grew up with and which he refers to as his home. The use of *al-waṭan* (homeland) in the novel *al-Rabī’ wa l-Ḥarīf* is partially wreathed in fog, in the sense whether the author refers to his Arab, or Syrian homeland. Perhaps it is not even important, and the answer lies somewhere in between, as for Ḥannā Mīna, one could not be without the other.

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<sup>106</sup> Egypt is very often viewed as a feminine subject in Arab culture. Even the expression ‘*Umm al-Dunyā*’ (Mother of the World) traditionally refers to Egypt.



## 4 Conclusion

This thesis examines how the Syrian author Ḥannā Mīna presents the concept of pan-Arabism in his selected novels and outlines the different methods the author used when introducing ideological concepts in his two novels *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf* (Spring and Autumn) and *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad* (The Woman in the Black Robe). This includes the analysis of political, economic, and cultural aspects of pan-Arabism in the selected works.

Instead of apparent but depthless manifestations of pan-Arabism in Ḥannā Mīna's novels, such as the repeated greeting by Karam's Persian friend Ḍiyā' "Greetings to the Arab nation!"<sup>107</sup>, let us now summarize what was discussed in the previous chapters and attempt to analyse and uncover Ḥannā Mīna's stance on pan-Arabism in the selected novels.

As was discussed in chapter 3.2.1 (Cairo, Budapest and Paris as toponyms of nationalist beliefs), Ḥannā Mīna acknowledges Egypt's prominent role in the 50's and 60's as a strong Arab country and the leading actor of pan-Arab ideas, that led Syria into unification (even if the provided historical accounts tell us otherwise). This changed in the 70's, when Ḥannā Mīna noticed the changing Egyptian society, rising consumerism and the decline of socialist values, that were one of the pillars of pan-Arabism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (let us not forget the Ba' thist trinity *waḥda, ḥurrīya, ištirākīya*).

Ḥannā Mīna was a Syrian author, and this should not be overlooked. For him, the Arab world is his home, but Syria is undoubtedly in the centre. This of course is nothing strange and is not in conflict with pan-Arabism. His Syrian nationality undeniably forms his view of certain historical events, as we have seen on his recollection of the events around the forming of the UAR in the novel *al-Mar'a dāt al-Ṭawb al-Aswad*.

Next, the author's view of China and Hungary should be mentioned. He places both of these countries to the top and gives them an idealistic feel. China is praised as a strong, independent global actor, with a rising economy and prevailing national sentiment among its citizens. Hungary, or Budapest, could be viewed as a fusion of the East and the West, borrowing the best from both sides. Its resemblance to Paris is glaringly obvious and underlined by the phrase "this truly is Little Paris" in the novel *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. Although China is an ideal

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<sup>107</sup> In the original *as-salām 'alaykum yā Ummat al-'Arab*. Mīna, Ḥannā. *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*. (Bairūt: Dār al-Ādāb. 1984), 85, 111.

Ḥannā Mīna looks up, to, we could say that Hungary is an attainable goal, given the similar laid-back form socialism in the 60's and its proximity to the Arab world. France and China on the other hand, are just too far and different for Ḥannā Mīna to imagine Syria or other Arab countries attaining their level.

This is why Karam's<sup>108</sup> yearning for the return to his homeland, the feeling of *ghurba* that he felt throughout his stay in Hungary, may be viewed as incomprehensible or even baffling. The protagonist lives comfortably in a socialist country, with a relaxed form of socialism very close to what is present in his homeland. During his stay in Hungary, he develops many friendships with people from all over the world, two intimate relationships and seems quite content living in Budapest. But he still decides to return to his homeland, as he simply cannot write. This is where pan-Arab ideas are apparent and underlined by Ḥannā Mīna.

Regarding the methods Ḥannā Mīna when presenting his pan-Arab sentiment, we can see that in both novels the author accomplishes this throughout the progression of the main characters. Both protagonists (Karam and 'Abd al-Jalīl) possess apparent autobiographical features and are far from being static or unambiguously portrayed. They undergo series of changes and progression, which makes them quite believable and convincing.

'Abd al-Jalīl leaves Rabīḥa behind, just like Karam left Hungary. In both novels, the relationships both protagonists built over a short ('Abd al-Jalīl and Rabīḥa) or long (Karam in Hungary) period of time were cut short and abandoned by each one of them respectively. Although both times spent in these relationships were pleasant and fulfilling, promising a bright future, both experiences led to failure and disappointment thus and were left behind. The decision to stop differentiating between the characters of 'Abd al-Jalīl and Karam, acknowledge the apparent autobiographical features both characters undoubtedly possess and instead place Ḥannā Mīna into the centre of these two novels helped us uncover the pan-Arab ideas Ḥannā Mīna promotes in his novels.

With all this in mind, Ḥannā Mīna reminisces about pan-Arabism as an idea, that offered a bright and foreseeable future for the Arabs but was not fulfilled. If we look at *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf* (Spring and Autumn) and *al-Mar'a dāt al-Tawb al-Aswad* (The Woman in the Black Robe), we see that both titles do not portray much optimism. The Spring that could have once been accomplished by the Arab countries during the pan-Arab "golden age" of the

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<sup>108</sup> Karam is the protagonist of Ḥannā Mīna's novel *al-Rabī' wa 'l-Ḥarīf*.

50's and 60's but visible in Hungary or China, was succeeded by the gloomy, foggy and colder Autumn, just as the *al-Rabī' al-'Arabī* (Arab Spring in 2011) has been sometimes renamed as the *al-Ḥarīf al-'Arabī* (Arab Autumn). Or Rabīḥa, the woman in the black robe, that at first intrigued 'Abd al-Jalīl as he listened carefully while she told him her life story, turned out to be completely different to what he imagined, perverse and strange. Once again, a black robe or Autumn covered the Arab lands, and all that Ḥannā Mīna has left is to recollect bright memories from the past, the time when the Arabs felt that there is a goal. A clear objective, that could be achieved and that bound them together.

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