

**London School of Economics and Political Science**

**Everyday Arabism: the daily reproduction of nationalism and supra-nationalism in contemporary Syria and Jordan**

**Christopher Phillips**

**A thesis submitted to the Department of International Relations of the  
London School of Economic for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
London, September 2010**

UMI Number: U613454

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U613454

Published by ProQuest LLC 2014. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

THESES  
F  
9435



1270407

## **Declaration**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without the prior written consent of the author.

I warrant that this authorization does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

## Abstract

This thesis considers how pan-Arab and state identity is reproduced in two ideologically different Arab regimes: Ba'athist Syria and Hashemite Jordan. There are three main contributions to the study of identity and the international relations of the Middle East. Firstly, the thesis re-defines Arabism as a *supra*-nationalism distinct from Nasser's Arab nationalism. This is reproduced *alongside* state identity by national governments and is now strengthened by the 'New Arabism' of transnational satellite television.

Secondly, the lack of engagement with nationalist theory by scholars of the Middle East is addressed. Modernist theory is used to demonstrate how Syria and Jordan have utilised everyday symbols and mediations to build national communities.

Thirdly Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* is established as a key mode of analysis for identity in the Arab world. It contributes to the growing literature on the everyday features of nationalism.

The thesis considers the history of nation building in Syria and Jordan before discussing three case studies of how identities are reproduced. First, public images of the leader are shown to be as unnoticed by Syrian and Jordanians as national flags in Western democracies. Alongside other mediations such as public speeches, these cults sustain an identity discourse that deliberately includes Arabism, framed to serve state interests. Second, state-run television in Syria and Jordan also uses nationalism and Arabism to frame its content, building citizens who are both Syrian or Jordanian *and* Arab.

The third case examines satellite television, which is beyond the control of the state. Rather than challenging the regimes' official identities, programming reinforces both Arabism and state identity. The final chapter expands on Billig's methods to address how citizens consume their nationalist discourse, using ethnographic interviews with 'everyday' Jordanians and Syrians. The thesis concludes by considering how international relations might be affected by the continued reproduction of Arabism.

## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	6
Note on Transliteration and Translation.....	8
Map of Syria and Jordan.....	9
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1. Arabism and the state.....</b>	<b>18</b>
1.1 Arabism Today: Contested Identity.....	21
1.2 Arabism and State Nationalism: Syria and Jordan.....	40
1.3 Everyday Arabism: Theory and Methodology.....	55
1.4 Conclusion.....	63
<b>2. Everyday Nationalism in the Arab World.....</b>	<b>64</b>
2.1 Layers of Identity.....	67
2.2 Banal Nationalism Beyond the West.....	74
2.3 Banal and ‘Hot’ Nationalism in Non-Democratic States.....	81
2.4 Expanding Billig: an Alternative Methodology.....	85
2.5 Conclusion.....	88
<b>3. Building a Nationalist Discourse in Syria and Jordan.....</b>	<b>89</b>
3.1 Building Syria and Jordan.....	91
3.2 Leadership Cults.....	100
3.3 Images and Speeches in Syria.....	104
3.4 Images and Speeches in Jordan.....	113
3.5 Conclusion.....	120
<b>4. Flagging the Discourse Daily: State Television.....</b>	<b>123</b>
4.1 Television in Syria and Jordan.....	125
4.2 A Week of Television: Methodology and News.....	132
4.3 A Week of Television: Sport, Economics, Weather and Breaks.....	139
4.4 A Week of Television: Chat Shows, <i>Musalsals</i> and Islam.....	148
4.5 Conclusion.....	156
<b>5. Challenging the Discourse? Transnational Arab television.....</b>	<b>158</b>
5.1 The Satellite TV Debate.....	161
5.2 Arabism and the News.....	166
5.3 Entertainment.....	171
5.4 Sport: A Case Study of <i>Al-Jazeera’s</i> 2008 Olympic Coverage.....	183

5.5 Conclusion.....	192
<b>6. Receiving the Discourse: Everyday Arabs.....</b>	<b>194</b>
6.1 Methodology.....	196
6.2 Arab, State and Religious Identity.....	199
6.3 Images and Speeches.....	210
6.4 State Television.....	214
6.5 Transnational Arab Television.....	219
6.6 Conclusion.....	227
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>Appendix I: Images of the leader in Syria and Jordan.....</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>Appendix II: Leaders' speeches in Syria and Jordan.....</b>	<b>252</b>

## Acknowledgements

I owe many thanks for all the financial, academic and personal support that I have received during the course of this thesis. Financially, the British Economic and Social Research Council kindly awarded me a full time studentship during the course of my research (studentship number PTA-031-2005-00219). Not only did this enable me to dedicate myself to research full time, it also provided grants for field research and, crucially, the funds for me to study Arabic in Damascus for a year. Further financial support was kindly given by the LSE international relations department to attend conferences and further my language study.

The international relations department at the London School of Economics has provided invaluable support during the course of my study, most notably the three people who have acted as my supervisor at different times: Fred Halliday, Fawaz Gerges and Kim Hutchings. They have tirelessly read through drafts, offered ideas, critiqued, inspired and given countless other forms of support, without which I doubt this thesis would have been completed. John Sidell and Katerina Delacoura provided much advice and positive criticism as advisors and panellists throughout the PhD, whilst George Lawson, Nigel Ashton and William Wallace have all offered valuable guidance. Outside of the LSE, Mai Yamani and Toby Dodge kindly read chapters and gave their thoughts, for which I am very grateful. Similarly, I must thank the many active minds at the LSE IDEAS centre and my contemporaries in the IR PhD programme for providing a sounding board for various wild theories and suggestions over countless cups of coffee.

I must also thank the many people who enabled my empirical research to be realised. In the UK I particularly owe Rob Kennedy at the SOAS media centre and those at the LSE Language Centre who patiently recorded hours of Arabic satellite television for analysis. In Syria and Jordan I am grateful to all those who agreed to be interviewed, though many cannot be named for security reasons. Many more provided me with assistance and support in finding data, locating interviewees and helping me find my way, notably Sami Moubayad, Mohammad Rayyan, Jihad Makdissi, Mazen Chibli, Sarmad Khoury, Caroline Kinj, Mohammad Lalo and Else Melkonian. Thanks also to Naji Tuleimat who helped keep my Arabic going on cold London evenings.

None of this could have been possible without the vital personal support of my friends, family and loved ones. My parents, Julie and Paul Phillips and sister Kate Godber have been there for me throughout. My close friends, especially those from Selwyn, notably Sasha and James, have offered a welcome distraction when needed. Lastly, I must thank Sayyeda who has put up with all my worries



and whinges in the past few years, made me smile at the end of long days in the library and has shared my passion to understand better the big questions in the Middle East.

Finally, I owe a huge debt to Professor Fred Halliday, my first supervisor, who sadly died in the final months of my thesis. Fred's contribution to the field was exceptional and I consider myself honoured to have worked under his guidance. He had a profound impact on my thinking, career and life. He was a fantastic teacher whose imprint can be seen throughout this work. It is a great sadness that he never got to read the final draft; I can only hope that he would be proud of what follows.

### **Note on Translation and Transliteration**

With the translation and transliteration of Arabic names I have strived to make my work both consistent and accessible. If names and terms are commonly used in English, I have followed that spelling. I have generally followed the transliteration system of the *British Journal of Middle East Studies*. For most primary data, particularly the television broadcasts and interviews displayed here, the translation was my own. I would like to thank Sarmad Khoury, Caroline Kinj, Mohammad Lalo, Else Melkonian and Naji Tuleimat for their assistance in translation, but in the end I am solely responsible for their content, and any errors contained.

Figure 1: Maps of Syria and Jordan



Map 1: Syria and its neighbours

Source: David W. Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Basher al-Assad and Modern Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. xiv.



Map 2: Jordan and its neighbours

Source: Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein: a political life* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. xiv.

## Introduction

This thesis is about the daily reproduction of Arabism and state nationalism in contemporary Syria and Jordan. It sets out to solve a puzzle: why do citizens in these states still feel Arab? Arabism was supposed to be a thing of the past. The failure of the United Arab Republic, the defeat of 1967, the death of Nasser, the consolidation of state power and the rise of Islamism were all, many predicted, supposed to mark the end of the pan-Arab dream and the consolidation of separate state identities.<sup>1</sup> However, the past decade has witnessed many expressions of ‘hot’ Arabism, when Arabs from all over the Middle East have taken to the streets to protest wars in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.<sup>2</sup> At the same time new pan-Arab satellite television channels, led by *al-Jazeera*, provide viewers from the 22 different Arab states with a shared public arena to debate, discuss and express Arab solidarity.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, many commentators and academics have started to speak of a ‘New Arabism’ emerging.<sup>4</sup> Yet where has this new Arabism come from? And what does it mean? Forty years on from 1967, this thesis seeks to explain why, how and in what forms Arabism is sustained and reproduced.

‘Arabism’ presents a problem to academics, commentators and policy-makers alike. On the one hand, the importance of Arab identity is widely regarded as diminished in recent years. On the other hand, those same analysts repeatedly speak of an ‘Arab World’, or more recently an ‘Arab Street,’ which they have come to accept as an established fact.<sup>5</sup> Few reflect on the contradiction of diminishing Arab identity one moment, whilst simultaneously acknowledging its importance. Central to this problem is a failure to locate Arabism in today’s Middle East. What does Arab identity mean to today’s Arabs and how does it interact with state nationalism and religion? How do we explain the millions of Syrians, Jordanians and Egyptians protesting wars in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, yet not such widespread popular anger at conflicts in non-Arab Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan? Similarly, how do we square these displays of Arab solidarity with bursts of state nationalism? Inter-Arab sports matches continue to arouse nationalist passion, even descending into violence at recent Egypt-Algeria football games, and the new phenomena of inter-Arab televised talent competitions, such as *Superstar*, have prompted flag waving displays of state patriotism.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ajami, Fouad, ‘The end of Pan-Arabism’ *Foreign Affairs* 57:2 (Winter 1978/9), pp. 355-373.

<sup>2</sup> Morten Valbjorn, ‘Arab nationalism(s) in Transformation: From Arab Interstate Societies to an Arab-Islamic World Society’ in Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (eds.), *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (London: Palgrave, 2009), p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Shibley Telhami, ‘Power, Legitimacy and Peace-Making in Arab Coalitions: The New Arabism,’ in Binder, L (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1999), p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Lynch, ‘Beyond the Arab Street: Iraq and the Arab Public Space,’ *Politics and Society*, 31:1, (2003), pp. 55-91.

<sup>6</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, ‘Reality television and politics in the Arab world: preliminary observations,’ *Transnational Broadcast Studies*, 15, (Fall 2005).

This thesis uses the examples of Syria and Jordan to demonstrate that, rather than being a new phenomenon, Arabism has never gone away. By analyzing the official identity discourses of these two ideologically different Arab states, it shows that a layer of Arab identity is constructed, reproduced and disseminated daily, irrespective of the ideological leanings and international alliances of state governments. The dissertation uses the theories of Michael Billig's *banal nationalism* to explain how and why Arab identity has been sustained and reproduced.<sup>7</sup> It adapts Billig's methodology to conduct a discourse analysis of several public mediations encountered by Syrians and Jordanians everyday. Not only do these include mediations controlled by the state governments, such as the contents of leadership cults and national television, but also the mediations beyond government control: the 'new Arabist' discourses of *Al-Jazeera* and its rivals. Further aided by ethnographic interviews with everyday Syrians and Jordanians, the thesis shows that the Arabism flagged daily by Arab governments and pan-Arab satellite television is in fact the same: a 'supra-nationalism' which is reproduced and disseminated daily in conjunction with and supportive of state nationalism.

### **Hypothesis and Key Questions Addressed**

The central hypothesis is that Syrians and Jordanians retain a strong sense of Arab identity because Arabism remains a central component of each state's nationalist discourse and has recently been boosted by pan-Arab satellite television. Today's Arabism should be re-defined as supra-nationalist: an imagined community in the Andersonian sense which is subordinate to state nationalism, but still politically and culturally salient. Furthermore these multi-layered discourses, whilst consciously constructed by elites, are now reproduced everyday in a largely banal and unnoticed manner, as described by Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995). Whilst new regional television has served to re-energize this identity, it has in fact long been entrenched in the nationalist discourse of the Syrian and Jordanian governments – which promote Arab identity to legitimize their rule. I term this phenomenon, 'Everyday Arabism.'

To do so the investigation focuses on three interrelated themes and sub-questions. Firstly, it asks what does Arabism mean today? To answer this it engages the contemporary debates surrounding Arabism. It considers previous arguments about the decline of Nasser's unitary Arab nationalism, which it labels 'Old Arabism', as well as the claims that a 'New Arabism' has emerged recently through pan-Arab satellite television stations led by *Al-Jazeera*. The thesis shows that the 'new Arabism' of *al-Jazeera* and its rivals is in fact a supra-nationalism that supports and entrenches state nationalism alongside Arab identity rather than undermining it. Furthermore, this supra-national Arabist discourse

---

<sup>7</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 2.

complements and supports an Arab identity deliberately maintained and reproduced by state governments such as Syria and Jordan.

However, far from being 'new', supra-national Arabism can be traced to the national discourses in Syria and Jordan established in the early 1970s. The second question asked is therefore why do these states maintain Arab identity and how does it interact with state identity? The thesis dissects the official identity discourses established by Hafez al-Assad in Syria and King Hussein in Jordan to illustrate how deliberately including supra-national Arabism within a multi-layered identity discourse in both states was closely tied to legitimizing their own rule and maintaining support for their domestic and foreign policies in the absence of a democratic mandate. The Arabist layer of discourse is shown to have continued under their sons and successors, Bashar al-Assad and King Abdullah II, who have both re-framed elements of the nationalist discourse whilst maintaining a form of supra-national Arabism.

The final question asks what are the mechanisms and processes by which Arabism and state nationalism are produced and reproduced? Here the thesis engages with a new area of nationalism theory, everyday nationalism, to demonstrate how the two complementary discourses, the supra-nationalism of Jordan and Syria's official identity and the New Arabism of pan-Arab satellite television converge to daily flag a multi-layered identity in an unnoticed, banal manner. Furthermore, identity flagging that Europeans might consider overt and propagandist, such as images of the leader displayed in public squares and buildings, have become so normalized after 40 years in these states that they too are largely unnoticed. It is demonstrated that through these unnoticed discourses both state nationalism and supra-national Arabism have become normalized.

### **Theory, methodology and sources**

The thesis grounds itself primarily in nationalism theory. Most scholars of Arabism and state nationalism in the Arab world have limited their engagement with nationalism theory.<sup>8</sup> This, no doubt, has contributed to their failure to explain Arabism in today's Middle East. The investigation aims to correct this frequent over-sight by interpreting the reproduction of identity in Syria and Jordan through the lens of nationalism theory. Whilst the views of established theorists such as Anderson, Breuilly, Smith and Ozkirimli will be discussed throughout the thesis, the purpose of this investigation is to contribute to a new and developing area of nationalist theory: that of everyday nationalism.<sup>9</sup> In particular it adapts and develops the work of Michael Billig. In his 1995 book, *Banal Nationalism*,

---

<sup>8</sup> J. Jankowski & I. Gershoni (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia, 1997), p. xiii; Fred Halliday, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp. 44-51.

<sup>9</sup> Umut Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A critical engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 32-3.

Billig suggested the reproduction of nations in the West takes two forms: the conscious, overt flag waving such as 4<sup>th</sup> July parades in the USA, and the banal, un-waved flags that hang unnoticed in petrol stations and outside houses.<sup>10</sup> This thesis argues that the everyday reproduction of nationalism Billig identifies in the West can be successfully adapted and transposed onto Syria and Jordan. It is the banal, everyday flagging of Arabism alongside state nationalism that ensures citizens maintain their multi-layered identity.

Michael Billig stretches the term 'nationalism' to cover the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced. He devises the term 'banal nationalism', "to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced," suggesting that, "daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged' in the lives of its citizenry."<sup>11</sup> He sees the institutions of the state as essential in this 'flagging' and particularly focuses on the print media: conducting a discourse and content analysis of British newspapers to show how they reproduce the nation daily. This thesis will address four aspects of his analysis. Firstly, Billig's emphasis on only national rather than other group identities being banally reproduced will be considered. Secondly, his narrow focus on what he terms the Western 'established' nations will be challenged. Thirdly, Billig's linking of banal nationalism to democratic political systems will be criticised, as will his related rejection of the role of 'hot' nationalism in reproducing the nation alongside the 'banal'.

Finally, as important as theoretically adapting and challenging Billig will be altering and moving beyond his methodology. This thesis argues that a combination of discourse analysis and ethnographic interviewing prove the most complete way to explain identity reproduction in the Arab world. In doing so, it moves beyond Billig's methodology in several ways. Firstly, it stretches Billig's focus on the institution of the media to look instead at public mediations in general. Whilst *Banal Nationalism* looked at the print media in Britain, this investigation finds that national television is more accessible in the semi-literate societies of the Arab world. Secondly, it includes a discussion of the more 'overt' or 'hot' mediation of the imagery of leaders' cults and the political speeches they make, suggesting that for the majority of Syrians and Jordanians, these symbols flag their identities in as banal and unnoticed a manner as the un-waved stars and stripes in America. Thirdly, due to the unique popularity of transnational media in the Arab world, this study widens Billig's net to include a discourse and content analysis of satellite television, a potential rival to the government controlled mediations discussed above. Finally, in a complete departure from Billig, this investigation tests the effectiveness of these mediations in flagging and reproducing identities by conducting ethnographic interviews with

---

<sup>10</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

‘everyday’ Syrians and Jordanians, challenging Billig’s assumption that what is in the media is unquestioningly absorbed by its audience.

Of course any investigation into the issue of identity in the Middle East cannot avoid and should actively seek to engage with other relevant debates that have emerged on the topic. The thesis not only engages at a theoretical level but also addresses the dominant narratives in the field, offering nuance and complex explanation. Firstly it seriously engages with literature on old and new Arabism. It challenges both anti-Arabists such as Fouad Ajami who believe Arabism has faded from view and neo-Arabists such as Khalil Rinnawi who see new Arabism as displacing and undermining state identity. The thesis also considers the various discussions of state and nation building in Syria and Jordan and the Arab world in general. It addresses and critiques Nazih Ayubi’s argument that the state in the Arab world remains weak and only sustainable through coercion. Similarly it considers the work of Lisa Wedeen and Nina Tamarkin to compare and contrast the role of leadership cults in identity building in Syria and Jordan. Lina Abu-Lughood and Christa Salamantra’s anthropological studies of how television contributes to nation building is assessed and critiqued. Finally, whilst any investigation of identity in the Arab world contributes to international relations theory in general, the specific impact of today’s Arabism upon the realist-constructivist debates of Stephen Walt and Michael K. Barnett will be explored.

### **Value Added**

The dissertation’s primary contribution is to the growing body of literature on everyday nationalism. Until now investigations into *banal nationalism* have largely been limited to Europe, with Turkey and Ghana proving the most geographically diverse countries covered.<sup>12</sup> Not only does this thesis expand the geographical scope of Billig’s work to the Arab world, it adds greater theoretical depth by demonstrating its applicability to authoritarian regimes and supra-national as well as national identities. Furthermore, by analysing television rather than newspapers and including ethnographic interviews it offers significant methodological expansions for the study of everyday nationalism.

Secondly the thesis contributes to the increased study of satellite television in the Arab world and the impact it has upon identity. Whilst much has been written on the so-called ‘*Al-Jazeera effect*’ upon Arab identity, very few have linked this with complex nationalism theory. The thesis bridges this gap: leading the way for theorists to analyse the nationalist content of television, whilst encouraging students of satellite television and identity to engage with nationalism theory.

---

<sup>12</sup> Arus Yumul & Umut Ozkirimili, ‘Reproducing the nation: ‘banal nationalism’ in the Turkish Press’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 22:6 (2000), pp. 787-804; Fuller, H.C., ‘Coinage in Ghana and symbols of Nkruma’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 14 (2008), pp. 520–541.



Thirdly, the dissertation contributes to the work of area specialists focusing on Syria and Jordan. It provides a detailed account of identity discourse-building attempts in both states and a thorough analysis of two key mediations used to disseminate them: state television and the cult of the leader. Finally, by highlighting and explaining the continued salience of Arabism in the contemporary world, the thesis contributes to the ongoing debate amongst theorists over the place of identity in international relations.

## Chapter Structure

The thesis is broken into six analytical chapters and a conclusion. The first two chapters outline the arguments of the dissertation and place it in a theoretical context. Chapter one discusses the central themes of the thesis, critiquing previous literature and explaining the methodological approach of this work. It highlights the limitations of previous approaches and explains why Arabism today should be defined as a 'supra-nationalism'. It explains further why Syria and Jordan make strong case studies to demonstrate the continued flagging of Arab identity in national discourses. By examining identity construction and reproduction in these ideologically different neighbouring states it highlights how and why the state and Arabism have been built and flagged in tandem in the region, irrespective of the ideological leanings of ruling governments. It explains why everyday nationalism and discourse analysis with ethnographic interviewing proves the best theoretical and methodological approach to demonstrate this process.

Chapter two engages with Billig's *Banal Nationalism*. It outlines Billig's theory and challenges it in various ways. It shows that Billig's theory can be extended beyond the sphere of nationalism to illustrate how religious, supra-national and state identities are also flagged daily within national discourses. It shows how the study of the everyday representation of the nation is applicable in non-democratic non-Western states. Billig's linking of banal nationalism to democratic political systems is questioned, as is his related rejection of the role of 'hot' nationalism in reproducing the nation alongside the 'banal'. Methodologically, it explains why Billig's analysis of print media is to be adapted to analyse leaders' speeches, the use of images in leadership cults, and national and transnational television whilst Billig's assumption that what is flagged in the media is unquestioningly absorbed by its audience will be addressed by ethnographic interviewing in Syria and Jordan.

Chapter three discusses the official identity discourses of Syria and Jordan. It compares and contrasts the discourses built by Hafez and Bashar al-Assad of Syria and Kings Hussein and Abdullah II of Jordan and explains why Arabism is emphasised in each. It analyses the seemingly more overt aspects

of the discourse: the imagery of leadership cults and the speeches made by the current rulers. In each case the regime's use of imagery and language is scrutinised, highlighting the tendency to emphasise state, Arab or Islamic identity in different contexts according to the relative strength or weakness of the government.

In chapter four state television in Jordan and Syria is scrutinised to assess a more banal form of identity flagging, which also has some overt components. Billig's methodology is adapted to assess a week of prime time television on Syrian and Jordanian TV stations rather than a day's newspapers as in *Banal Nationalism*. Content of news, sport, weather, advertisements, topical shows and drama serials is assessed for their nationalist and Arabist discourse and content. The experiment shows a clear attempt by both regimes to use television to culturally construct citizens of both the state and the wider Arab world using content that can be deemed both banal and overt at times.

The fifth chapter moves the analysis beyond the mediations controlled by the state to discuss the impact of transnational satellite television upon the reproduction and dissemination of identity in Jordan and Syria. It considers whether these channels and their widespread audience promote a new pan-Arab identity that undermines or complements the national discourse. It will discuss the different genres of programme that gain attention and notoriety on satellite television: news, *musalsals* (dramas), reality TV, music TV and religious programming. Finally it will focus on a case study of sport: how *Al-Jazeera* reported the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the Arab, state and religious identities it flagged. It shows that, rather than undermining state identity, pan-Arab television constructs an 'Arab arena' for its viewers. It encourages viewers to see themselves as nationals of their states but who compete, admire and interact primarily with other Arab states.

The final chapter discusses the results of various ethnographic interviews undertaken in Syria and Jordan, considering a key area that Billig left out of his analysis: reception. Interviews with 51 'everyday' Jordanians and Syrians from different ethnic, religious, economic and geographical backgrounds are analysed to suggest that the mediations analysed have been effective at constructing a sense of Arab and state identity amongst citizens. Whilst respondents show a great deal of choice and cynicism towards these mediations, most conform to the identities they flag and promote. Though this ethnographic method lacks scientific rigour, it provides another layer of detail and adds flavour to the thesis' findings.

The conclusion returns to the overall hypothesis of this thesis: that it is through the everyday, unnoticed reproduction of identity in Syria and Jordan that has sustained a strong supra-national Arab identity

despite the failure of Old Arabism. At the same time, state identity is gradually strengthening in the same manner and evolving into a nationalism that encompasses, not opposes, this supra-national Arabism.

## Chapter 1

### Arabism and the State

In Spring 2003, as American tanks were gathered in Kuwait preparing to invade Iraq, there was anger in Damascus and Amman. In Syria, where the government vehemently opposed America's invasion, 200,000 people marched on Damascus' streets in solidarity with Baghdad.<sup>13</sup> In Jordan, where the government tacitly approved of the attack in support of its allies in Washington, barely a few thousand were able to get onto the streets to protest. In spite of this difficulty, it soon became apparent that this war was wholly unpopular throughout the Arab world, whatever their leaders said. Facilitated by 24-hour reporting from the comparatively new Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera* satellite television channel, footage of anger on the Arab street was broadcast around the world.<sup>14</sup> This protest was not limited to the specific circumstances of 2003 and the Iraq war. In 2006, when Israel attacked Lebanon, Arab capitals were again awash with outraged citizens. The same was seen in 2008/9 when Israel bombarded Gaza. Though such protests were nothing new, Arab capitals had seen similar seemingly spontaneous declarations of solidarity with Iraq in 1991 and Beirut in 1982, the presence of a new and popular regional media led by *al-Jazeera* served to magnify and reproduce the sense of solidarity. In defiance of their leaders, 'the Arab street' appeared to be expressing a 'hot' Arabism.<sup>15</sup>

Yet why do Arabs feel this sense of identity? There is no single 'United States of Arabia' from which 'the Arabs' originate but rather 22 separate multi-ethnic states with different governments. Are the Arabs a nation? Are they a culture? Such questions are rarely asked by either media commentators or academics who have come to accept the 'Arab World' as an established fact, without asking how it has been established and how it is sustained. It is rarely asked, for example, *why* a Syrian who has never visited Iraq, never lived there and has no relatives in the country should care about the fate of the Iraqi people. Nor is it asked why a Jordanian who has no personal ties to Lebanon feels solidarity with the victims of Israel's 2006 attacks. Indeed, it is rarely asked why or how any 'Arab street' can exist. States in the Arab world have been independent for over 60 years, and the prospect of any realistic Arab unity was extinguished by 1967, if not before, yet still 'Arabism' seems to arouse passions. This thesis seeks to explain why, how and in what form Arabism continues to be reproduced in today's Middle East.

---

<sup>13</sup> 'Millions join global anti-war protests,' *BBC News* 17/2/2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2765215.stm> accessed 21/4/10.

<sup>14</sup> Sean Aday, Steven Livingston and Maeve Hebert, 'Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War,' *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10:1, (2005), pp. 3-21.

<sup>15</sup> John Hutchinson, 'Hot and banal nationalism: The nationalization of the masses', in G. Delanty and K. Kumar (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and nationalism* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 298.

This thesis case studies two ideologically different Arab states, Syria and Jordan, to demonstrate how Arabism is reproduced. It argues that Syrians and Jordanians retain a sense of Arabism because Arab identity is embedded in each state's nationalist discourse and has recently been further boosted by new pan-Arab satellite television stations. Today's Arabism is an imaged community in the Andersonian sense, but is subordinate to state nationalism and should therefore be re-defined as supra-nationalism. This supra-nationalism is now reproduced daily alongside state identities in a largely banal and unnoticed manner, as described by Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism*, which is then easily aroused into 'hot' Arabism at perceived times of threat, such as the 2003 Iraq War.<sup>16</sup> This daily discourse is termed 'Everyday Arabism'.

To illustrate and explain this phenomenon, this study poses three interrelated questions. Firstly, it asks what Arabism means today; secondly, why do states maintain Arab identity and how does it interact with state nationalism; and thirdly, what are the mechanisms and processes by which Arabism and state nationalism is reproduced? This first chapter explores the broad historical, theoretical and methodological origins of these themes and questions, before opening the way for a deeper examination of the principle theory upon which this investigation rests, Billig's *Banal nationalism*, in chapter two.

Firstly, to consider what Arabism means today, the many debates amongst historians and theorists surrounding Arabism need consideration. The current state of 'Arabism' in the Middle East, and even finding a definition for it, prompts huge disagreement amongst the academic. When, why and if Arabism rose and fell has divided scholars, as has the issue of a possible 'New Arabism' in the wake of the Iraq War and the emergence of pan-Arab satellite television. Similarly, the significance of Arabism within International Relations theory, and the importance of identity in determining the foreign policies of Arab states divides theorists and requires exploration. After engaging with these debates today's Arabism is located and defined as a supra-nationalism existing alongside state nationalism.

To explain why states maintain Arab identity and how it interacts with state nationalism, the chapter then discusses the debated position of state identity in the contemporary Arab world. Whilst some see the states as stronger today than they've ever been (Lewis 1999), others see them as weak entities that cannot move beyond a coercive form of government for fear of fragmentation (Ayubi 1995). A key issue addressed by this investigation is the normalisation of state identity. It will ask whether sustained nation-building alongside the simple longevity of 'Syria' and 'Jordan' has brought about the acceptance of state nationalism alongside, rather than instead of, Arab and religious ties. The reasons for case studying Syria and Jordan in particular are outlined, explaining that the ideological gulf between the

---

<sup>16</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 2.

two regimes, despite their historical and geographical closeness makes a comparison useful for similar claims on the wider Arab world. Engaging with nationalism and state building theory helps to explain why these regimes continue to promote supra-national Arabism within their national identity discourses.

To understand the processes and mechanisms by which Arabism and state nationalism are reproduced the chapter finally outlines the theoretical and methodological basis for this thesis. It discusses the views of Anderson, Breuilly and Smith along with Umut Ozkirmili's notion of nationalism as discourse, before laying the groundwork for a more detailed engagement with Michael Billig and the idea of *banal nationalism* in chapter two. This facilitates an outline of the methodology of the thesis and the reasons why certain examples, questions and case studies were chosen over others.

## 1.1 Arabism Today: Contested identity

The first theme of this thesis asks what Arabism means today. Over the years academics and commentators have used ‘Arabism’, ‘Arab nationalism’ and ‘pan-Arabism’ to describe everything from a loose cultural attachment to a movement for political unity.<sup>17</sup> The narrative of Arabism is highly debated: whether an Arab identity can stretch back to the birth of Islam or earlier, or whether it was a modern creation prompted by interaction with external actors such as France’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 or the partition of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>18</sup> Similarly Arabism’s fate is still contested, with some seeing its demise in the formation of the Arab League (Owen 1992), the failure of the UAR of 1958-61 (Dawisha 2003) or the defeat of 1967 (Ajami 1978/9). More recently a group of scholars have claimed that a ‘New Arabism’ has emerged out of the development of an Arab public sphere through popular transnational satellite television stations such as *al-Jazeera* (Telhami 1999, Lynch 2006, Rinnawi 2006, Valbjorn 2009), a fact disputed by others (Dawisha 2003, Ajami 1992). Central to these disagreements are competing definitions of Arabism. Telhami and others who see a ‘New Arabism’ emerging, see Arabism as a malleable political and cultural bond that has evolved over time. Others, like Fouad Ajami, see it as purely a political nationalism, whose time has passed. Between these stand scholars like Adeed Dawisha who wish to separate political ‘Arab nationalism’ from cultural ‘Arabism’ – the former having departed but the latter remaining.

One of the most recent scholars of Arabism, Morten Valbjorn, defines it broadly. He sees Arabism as, “the idea that some kind of special bonds exist between Arabic-speaking peoples sharing not only a common language but also history, culture and tradition.” This broad definition allows Valbjorn to link all expressions of Arab identity in the modern era together. To him, Arabism has had a malleable career.<sup>19</sup> He claims that since the Ottoman era through to the present day Arabism has at times been cultural, political, conservative, revolutionary, unitary and statist. His typology, however, is designed to account for the differing behaviour of actors in the Arab world over the past 100 years through the lens of international relations theory, and not a consideration of nationalism. Indeed, Valbjorn falls into the common trap of using ‘Arabism’ and ‘Arab nationalism’ interchangeably at times.<sup>20</sup> For example, whilst co-operation between the different Arab states in the 1970s might be seen as working towards a common Arab goal and therefore Arabist according to his original definition quoted above, they were not attempting to politically unify their communities and should not be considered Arab *nationalist*. Though the international relations theory that Valbjorn refers to warrants discussion, and will be dealt

---

<sup>17</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Arab nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Samir Amin, *The Arab Nation* (London: Zed, 1978), 7; Nazih Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State* (London: IB Tauris, 1995), p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> Valbjorn, ‘Arab nationalism(s)’, pp. 144-148.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

with in due course, the primary lens through which this thesis will frame its investigation is the study of nationalism. A key dimension of this thesis will be to distinguish *Arabism* from Arab nationalism. Arabism can be an umbrella term that incorporates a sense of political and cultural *identity*, whilst Arab nationalism was an older incarnation of Arabism which was a specific political and cultural *ideology*. In order to show how today's Arabism has reacted to the failure of unitary Arab nationalism (Old Arabism) to evolve into a supra-nationalism (New Arabism), it is first necessary to give an overview of how that failure came about and the contested debates amongst scholars.

The following discussion of Arabism's history and present will illustrate that 'Arabism' has indeed evolved over time. It will be shown that Arabism was only nationalism when it sought to align the national community with the political community during the unitary attempts of earlier figures such as Sati al-Husri, Gamal Abdul Nasser and Michel Aflaq.<sup>21</sup> This unitary Arab nationalist Arabism was effectively defeated in 1958-67. Today's Arabism is different. Whilst it must be seen as more than just a cultural bond as it still affects the political mindset, it cannot be seen as a 'nationalism' as it entrenches rather than undermines the state system and does not have the goal to create a single political unit.<sup>22</sup> Once this identity has been defined as a supra-national rather than a national ideology its impact on international relations will be briefly discussed.

### 1.1.1 The rise and fall of 'Old' Arabism

Despite a few claims of the perennial nature of the Arab nation stretching back to at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Amin 1978), most historians agree that the first seeds of nationalism were sewn in the modern era. Until this time 'Arab' referred to the Bedouin desert nomads and evoked no pride amongst the largely urban intelligentsia or elite who would go on to promote the ideology.<sup>23</sup> As with most nationalisms, Old Arabism was framed with reference to an 'other'. Whilst a few see Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 prompting a realisation of Arabness, most accept it was the Ottoman Turks who helped shape the Arab nation. The first writer to use the term 'Arabism', C. Ernest Dawn, used it in contradistinction to 'Ottomanism': an attempt by Istanbul to 'Turkify' its Arab provinces. He argued that Arab elites reacted against this in the late nineteenth century, desiring autonomy within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>24</sup> It was these elites who formed Arabist societies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Damascus, Beirut and Cairo allegedly forming tentative links with Emir Faisal before the

---

<sup>21</sup> Dawisha, *Arab nationalism*, pp. 252-297.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983 [2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2009]), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: MUP, 1993 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.]), p. 151.

<sup>24</sup> C. Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 147.



Great Arab Revolt of 1916-18 that contributed to the eventual defeat of the Ottomans and, unintentionally, the partition of the Arab world into mandates.<sup>25</sup>

Yet historians debate when and where this Arabism became nationalism. Writing long before Dawn, the first major historian of Arab nationalism, Georges Antonius, claimed the Arab nation emerged in the reign of Mohammed Ali in Egypt (1805-48) and matured during the Hashemite Arab Revolt.<sup>26</sup> Later historians in the 1950s and 60s such as Seale, Haim, Lewis and Hourani questioned Antonius' periodisation, arguing instead that Arab nationalism did not emerge until the end of the First World War and did not reach political maturity until the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> Stephen R. Humphreys notes that the Ottoman-era 'Arabists' only claimed the *Bilad as-Sham* (Greater Syria) region and the first true Arab nationalists didn't emerge until later in the mandate period when theorists such as Sati al-Husri (1882-1968) laid claim to all the Arab lands.<sup>28</sup> He and Fruma Zachs see the pre-war elites as embryonic 'proto-nationalists' as they lacked the cohesion of vision that is required of nationalists.<sup>29</sup>

As contested is why Arab nationalism emerged. Dawn maintained that foreign factors indirectly caused the growth of the movement amongst elites. He does not argue as has Maxime Rodinson, that this was a defused idea from Europe, but rather that Arabism grew out of Ottoman nationalism, itself a reaction to increased contact with the West.<sup>30</sup> Ghalyun agrees that Western contact prompted Arab nationalism, stating, "The Arab World converged with the West."<sup>31</sup> Zachs observed that though foreign contact and relations with the West may have affected a sense of inferiority fuelling nationalism at a macro level, just as important were the day-to-day contact between US missionaries that influenced the thinking of Arab intellectual elites in Lebanon at a micro level.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, Rashid Khaldidi, whilst not dismissing Dawn's proposals, maintains that domestic politics, particularly the Arab reaction to growing Turkish nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, played a key role.<sup>33</sup> In a change of focus, Mary Wilson sees Arab responses to Turkish nationalism as a reaction against centralisation as much as it was

---

<sup>25</sup> Ashton highlights that both Dawn and Albert Hourani have questioned these links. See Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein: a Political Life* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Jankowski & Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. xvi.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen R. Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Fruma Zachs, *The Making of Syrian Identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth Century Beirut* (Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 1; Humphreys, *Between*, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Referenced in James G. Mellon, 'Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism and Inter-State Relations in the Arab World', in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Winter, 2002; Dawn, *Ottomanism*, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Youssef Choueiri, *Arab nationalism: A history, nation and state in the Arab world* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Zachs, *Syrian Identity*, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> R. Khaldidi, L. Anderson, M. Muslih & R. Simon (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. xiii.

a display of Arab identity.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, James Gelvin proposes that the growth of a nationalist mob in 1920s Damascus was as much against economic reforms as it was Arab nationalist.<sup>35</sup>

The Arab nationalism of the mandate era took a dramatic twist once independence from the imperial powers had largely been achieved. The *nakhba* of 1948/9 which saw the creation of Israel and the newly-independent Arab states heavily defeated, prompted a shift in both the governments and intelligentsia's attitude to Arabism. Coups and revolutions saw the old regimes removed in Egypt, Syria and, later on Iraq and Libya, to be replaced by Arab nationalists who largely advocated physical Arab unity. Intellectuals such as Michel Aflaq and Saleh al-Bitar, founders of the Ba'ath party, and George Habash, founder of the Arab Nationalist Movement, introduced a new radicalism to intellectual Arabism.<sup>36</sup> By far the most prominent nationalist was Gamal Abdul Nasser, the president of Egypt who, whether intentionally or not, oversaw the first genuine realisation of Arab nationalism – the unity of Syria and Egypt in the United Arab Republic in 1958.<sup>37</sup> Yet this attempt to make the national and the political community contiguous soon unravelled when Syrian army officers staged a coup to reclaim Syria's independence barely three years later.<sup>38</sup>

Though historians accept that the double blow of the 1967 war and the death of Nasser in 1970 represented a major defeat for Arab nationalism, debate has emerged concerning other issues. Samir Amin amongst others disputed whether Nasserist Arabism can actually be considered Arab nationalism, claiming it was a thinly disguised 'Egypt first' foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> Al-Ansari added more revisionism, suggesting that Arab nationalism was never more than a linguistic bond, prevented from integration by the deserts.<sup>40</sup> Amongst the most contentious of issues has been whether 1967 was a final defeat or merely a 'setback', as the war came to be known in Arabic.<sup>41</sup> Fouad Ajami's 1978 article, 'The end of Pan-Arabism' was the first major critique of the Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 60s. Reacting against the idea that a single Arab nation behind the façade of several states had a 'super-legitimacy' outstripping that of individual states', Ajami claimed that the 'Waterloo' of 1967 undermined this. The subsequent war of 1973 cemented the new status quo that the Arab world would be dominated by individual states, not by a universalist Arab nationalism. This was strengthened by the subsequent wealth gap between Arabs generated by the oil boom and the legitimacy given to individual state

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>35</sup> James Gelvin in Jankowski & Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 238.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from above* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 38-41.

<sup>37</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A history* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 287-317.

<sup>38</sup> Nikolaos van Dam, *The struggle for power in Syria: sectarianism, regionalism and tribalism in politics, 1961-1980* (London: Croom Helm, 1979 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.1981]), pp. 1-10.

<sup>39</sup> Amin, *Arab Nation*, p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> Ayubi, *Overstating*, p. 148.

<sup>41</sup> Jeremy Bowen, *Six Days: How the 1967 War Shaped the Middle East* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2003), pp. 318-357.

identities as an unintended consequence of recognizing Palestinian nationalism.<sup>42</sup> Through the prism of the late 1970s and the shock of 1967 Ajami's dismissal of Pan-Arabism is stark when contrasted with the more nuanced approach of subsequent writers in the 1980s and 90s. Tawfiq Farah, for example, whose surveyed data Ajami uses to justify his article, was wary of completely writing off Arab nationalism. Whilst highlighting the growth of Islamic and state identities in the wake of 1967, he still acknowledges that Arab identity was visible, even if it was less politically prominent than in the past.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Michael Hudson maintains that though fusionist Arab nationalism did die, the impulse for a more loose confederal Pan-Arabist dream lives on.<sup>44</sup>

A second hotly contested issue is why Arab nationalism failed. There are three main schools of thought: those who believe it was doomed from the start; those who believe it was achievable but prevented by mistakes, individuals or forces; and those who argue it simply ran its course. Starting with the latter first, Al-Jabiri limits the perceived goals of Arabism to see it in a more optimistic light. By focusing on the anti-imperialistic element of the doctrine rather than the unifying aspect, he claims Arabism completed its mission of national liberation from European powers and no longer has a purpose.<sup>45</sup> A more widely subscribed-to school of thought is that Arab unity was possible but was prevented by certain events and forces. In many ways Ajami was one such scholar as he places a large emphasis on the defeat of 1967. Kazziha, similarly, cites the Arab states' recognition of Palestinian nationalism after 1967 as delegitimizing a wider Arab nationalism and legitimising states' identities as the cause of decline.<sup>46</sup> Adeed Dawisha, in contrast, claims that rather than the 1967 defeat being the key turning point, it was Iraq President Qassim's decision in 1958 to not join Egypt and Syria in the United Arab Republic that halted the momentum of nationalism.<sup>47</sup> He claims that Nasser effectively *was* Arab nationalism and, contrary to Ajami's claims, it was he, not Sadat, who began dismantling his own work in the wake of 1967. Clearly to Dawisha, individual actors were the most prominent factor determining success or failure. Roger Owen similarly maintains that actors and events blocked Arabism, yet this occurred years before the coming to power of Nasser, with the foundation of the Arab League in 1946.<sup>48</sup> Rather than being a step towards Arab integration the Arab League Charter actually defended state sovereignty and reduced the chance of any successful 'fusionist' project.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ajami, 'The end of Pan-Arabism'.

<sup>43</sup> Tawfiq Farah, 'Attitudes to the Nation and the State in Arab Public Opinion Polls', in G. Luciani and G. Salame (eds.), *The Politics of Arab Integration* (New York: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Michael C. Hudson (ed.), *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economic of Arab Integration* (New York: Columbia, 1999), p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Choueiri, *Arab nationalism*, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> Luciani and Salame, *Arab Integration*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Adeed Dawisha, 'Requiem for Arab nationalism', *Middle East Quarterly* 10:1 (Winter 2003), pp. 25-41.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992 [3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2004]), p. 5.

The final group focus on the inherent weaknesses of Arab nationalism, specifically the excessive idealism of Arab nationalists and the impracticalities of fusionist unity. Stephen R. Humphreys highlights that neither ideologues such as al-Husri nor Ba'ath founder Michel Aflaq, nor politicians like Nasser, focused on the practicalities of how a united Arab state would work.<sup>49</sup> Ideologues explained *who* an Arab was not how unity might be achieved. Similarly leaders such as Nasser used Arab nationalism as a surrogate for other impulses such as anti-imperialism and the conflict with Israel, rather than developing serious unity models. Such unpreparedness was exposed in the weak structure, and swift collapse of the UAR. Similarly Nazih Ayubi explains that Arab nationalism was always a *kulturnation* never a *staatsnation*, with little focus on the reality of what a united Arab state would look like.<sup>50</sup> He argues that the Nasserist and Ba'athist unity models of Arabism were never compatible with the socialism inherent in their ideologies. Promoting state socialism and inter-state unity, he argued, was contradictory and doomed to fail.

Old Arabism, a nationalism trying to unite Arabic speakers into a single political unit that had developed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century thus reached its zenith under Nasser. Whilst historians will continue to revise and debate at which point and why this movement failed, failed it did. Arabism in its nationalist form, described here as Old Arabism, can thus be seen as a failed nationalism.

### 1.1.2 A New Arabism?

The 1991 Gulf War marked something of a watershed for many in the debates over the fate of Arabism. For some, such as Faksh, who had clung to the hope that Nasserist unitary Arab nationalism would revive, it was the final straw.<sup>51</sup> The fact that one Arab state, Iraq, had invaded another, Kuwait, and then several more, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria, had joined a foreign power to resolve the crisis exposed the hollowness of Arabist rhetoric and the ruthless self-interest of Arab states. For others, the Gulf Crisis provided the opportunity to reassess where Arabism was.<sup>52</sup> Sirriyeh, for example, interpreted the post-1991 cooperation between Riyadh, Cairo and Damascus as an embryonic form of a new pan-Arabism that reconciled Arabism and statism, centred around realism, peace with Israel and accommodation with political Islam.<sup>53</sup> However, as the optimism of the 1990s faded into the renewed conflict of the post-9/11 world, neither Sirriyeh's new Arab order nor Faksh's post-Arab world came

---

<sup>49</sup> Humphreys, *Memory and Desire*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Ayubi, *Overstating*, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> Mahmud A. Faksh, 'Withered Arab Nationalism,' *Orbis* 37:3 (Summer 1993), pp. 425-438.

<sup>52</sup> AbuKhalil As'ad, 'A New Arab Ideology?: The Rejuvenation of Arab Nationalism,' *Middle East Journal* 46:1 (Winter 1992), pp. 22-36.

<sup>53</sup> Hussein Sirriyeh, 'A New Version of Pan-Arabism?' in *International Relations* 15:3 (December 2000), pp. 53-66.

about. Instead analysts started to observe a 'New Arabism' that centred around an unexpected product of the 1991 Gulf War: a Qatari satellite television channel called *al-Jazeera*.

The unavailability of accurate Arabic-language coverage of the 1991 Gulf War was one of the main incentives for the development of *al-Jazeera* in 1996, offering the growing number of Arab satellite television viewers western style 24-hour news coverage without the kind of censorship and control traditionally imposed by state broadcasters.<sup>54</sup> Its growing popularity prompted Shibley Telhami in 1999 to coin the phrase 'New Arabism' to describe the manner in which, "intellectual elites have found a way of asserting their political power independently of the state," using satellite television and offshore newspapers to bolster international identity as an independent transnational movement.<sup>55</sup> The western publicity given to *al-Jazeera* after 9/11, the 2001 Afghanistan invasion and, particularly, the 2003 Iraq War led to a greater academic investigation into the topic. Marc Lynch (2006) concurred that *al-Jazeera* and newly emerging rivals such as *Al-Arabiyya*, *LBC* and *Abu Dhabi*, were the primary drivers in creating a 'new Arab public' which, "should be defined not territorially but by reference to a shared identity and a common set of political arguments and concerns."<sup>56</sup> Khalil Rinnawi similarly argued that transnational satellite television stations such as *al-Jazeera* have weakened nation-state orientation and instead created a specifically Arab national public space, which he calls 'McArabism'.<sup>57</sup> The expressions of 'hot' Arabism on the Arab street in the wake of the Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza wars, described at the beginning of this chapter, are the outward expression of this 'new Arabism'.

How different is this new Arabism from Old Arabism? Its advocates are keen to distinguish it from the unionist nationalism of al-Husri, Nasser and Aflaq, and identify several features that distinguish the two. Firstly, who leads it: whilst in the 1950s and 60s Old Arabism was state led, according to Telhami and Rinnawi, New Arabism is market driven. The desire to sell a television product such as *Al-Jazeera* or *Al-Arabiyya* to the widest possible Arabic-speaking audience is determining the shape of the agenda rather than any specifically nationalist ideology experienced during Old Arabism.<sup>58</sup> Valbjorn emphasises this point by comparing the style of Nasser's *Sawt al-Arab* radio broadcasts with that of *al-Jazeera*. He sees *Sawt al-Arab*, which frustrated leaders in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq with its Arab nationalist appeals to their domestic populations, as "...an ideological tool wielded by a great regional

---

<sup>54</sup> Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Telhami, 'Power, Legitimacy,' p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> Lynch, *New Arab Public*, p. 22.

<sup>57</sup> Khalil Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism: McArabism, Al-Jazeera, and Transnational Media in the Arab World* (New York: University Press America, 2006) p. 9 and p. xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Telhami, 'Power, Legitimacy,' p. 57; Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. xv.

power.”<sup>59</sup> In contrast *al-Jazeera*, whilst also appealing to Arabs across state borders, sometimes to the consternation of regime leaders, is, “...a commercial, quasi-independent station driven by market demand and based in tiny Qatar.” Similarly, whilst *Sawt al-Arab* was a monological, one-way source of propaganda, Valbjorn sees *al-Jazeera* with its discussion shows, debates and phone-ins, as a dialogical process without one uniform view.

However, as Naomi Sakr has emphasised, the independence and commercial nature of these satellite television channels should not be exaggerated. As shall be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5, though *Al-Jazeera*, *Al-Arabiyya* and their competitors appear to be market driven, almost none operate at a profit and are dependent on wealthy owners.<sup>60</sup> Whilst the broadcast journalists and public intellectuals may appear, as Telhami claims, to be asserting their political power independently of the state, almost all channels have owners directly or indirectly linked to Arab governments. The nature of ownership thus limits how independent any content can be. *Al-Jazeera* is a case in point: it may appear ‘quasi-independent’, yet its funding and location in Doha ensures the Qatari government is rarely criticised.<sup>61</sup> The ownership of the stations further negates claims that content is entirely market driven, as it is clear that states use television channels as instruments of international relations. *Al-Jazeera* is used by the Qatari government to gain notoriety, promote its version of regional politics and criticise its rivals. Similarly *Al-Arabiyya* was launched in 2005 by Saudi Arabia primarily to counter the attacks Riyadh faced on *Al-Jazeera*.<sup>62</sup> State prestige thus appears as much of a driver of satellite television as market forces. Valbjorn and Telhami amongst others are correct to highlight its more interactive, dialogical and seemingly commercial nature that distinguishes it from the overtly political Old Arabism of the past, but to suggest that New Arabism is a development independent of the state is misleading. As shall be discussed below, this New Arabism actually serves state interests and conforms to their own identity discourses.

A second distinguishing feature of New Arabism identified by scholars is the role of Islam. Whilst Old Arabism was determinedly secular, Valbjorn sees, “an Arab-Islamic identity as the common reference point,” in today’s Arabism as seen by the regular presence of Egyptian Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi on *al-Jazeera*.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Raymond Hinnebusch claims that Arabism on the Arab ‘street’ has, “reunited with Islam, long ago acknowledged by Arab nationalist theorists to be the highest achievement of the

---

<sup>59</sup> For more on *Sawt al-Arab* see Laura M. James, ‘Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and ‘Sawt al-Arab’ Radio’, *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, 16 (2006); Valbjorn, ‘Arab nationalism(s)’, p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> Naomi Sakr, *Arab Television Today* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Sakr, *Satellite Realms*, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> Samantha M. Shapiro, ‘The War inside the Arab newsroom,’ *New York Times*, 2/02/2005

<sup>63</sup> Valbjorn, ‘Arab nationalism(s)’, p. 164.

Arabs.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover Pintak suggests that “Arab journalists are at the forefront of a cyclical convergence of interests between Arab nationalism, nation-state nationalism, and Islamism,” and that, “Arab nationalism and Islamism are two sides of the Janus-faced Arab cultural and political identity.”<sup>65</sup> The air time given to Islamists like Qaradawi, and the support for Hezbollah and Hamas, particularly by *Al-Jazeera* during their conflicts with Israel in 2006 and 2008/9, are cited as evidence of this Arabism-Islamism synthesis.

However, Pintak’s interpretation of Islamism’s role in New Arabism is too generalist. Lynch has correctly highlighted how the satellite media have linked together Arab and Muslim identity, but this link is cultural rather than political.<sup>66</sup> The, “growing Islamic dimension in today’s Arab identity,” described by Valbjorn is not *Islamist*. Tellingly Islamists like Qaradawi are given cultural space on *al-Jazeera*, with shows like ‘Sharia and life’, but not political space. The many talk shows described by Lynch as forming the ‘new Arab public’ are largely hosted by non-Islamists and, though Qaradawi is popular and well publicised, his show is the exception not the rule. Similarly, Hezbollah and Hamas are given space in relation to their nationalist conflict with Israel rather than in pursuit of their Islamist agenda. Moreover, no such space is given to Islamists who threaten the status quo, such as Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>67</sup> As Sivan has demonstrated, Islamists preaching in mosques mostly retain their opposition to Arab nationalism.<sup>68</sup> Whilst Islamists in the Arab world remain culturally Arab, and Arabists remain culturally Islamic, it is important to maintain a distinction between the two. New Arabism might have afforded a more sizeable place for Islamic culture in its discourse than the fierce secularism of Old Arabism, and is therefore somewhat different, politically it is a step too far to call it ‘converged’ with Islamism.

A third and final feature of New Arabism that distinguishes it from Old Arabism is its world view. Lawrence Pintak argues that the ‘dreamy’ political unitary Arab nationalism of Aflaq has been abandoned and in its place is a new, “multi-faceted Arab self,” that shares a broad world view though does not speak of realigning borders like early Ba’athists.<sup>69</sup> As shall be discussed below, this acceptance of state sovereignty and recognition of Arab identity alongside not instead of state identity, transforming Arabism from a national into a supra-national identity, is one of the key distinctions

---

<sup>64</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, ‘The politics of identity in Middle Eastern International Relations,’ in Louise Fawcett (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: OUP, 2005, [2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2009]), p. 154.

<sup>65</sup> Pintak, Lawrence, ‘Border guards of the “Imagined” *Watan*: Arab Journalists and the New Arab Consciousness,’ *The Middle East Journal*, 63:2 (Spring 2009), pp. 203-6.

<sup>66</sup> Lynch, *New Arab Public*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Leah Caldwell, ‘Defining the boundaries of acceptable speech in Syria,’ *Arab Media & Society*, 10 (Spring 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Arab Nationalism in the Age of Islamic Resurgence’, in Jankowski & Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Pintak, ‘Border guards,’ p. 209.

between Old and New Arabism. However, one might question whether this concept is 'new' at all. After all, the principle of state sovereignty was established by Nasser himself after defeat in 1967, agreeing at the Khartoum summit to endorse an, "interpretation of Arabism that was consistent with sovereignty."<sup>70</sup> Some have argued that this shift away from unionism happened earlier – either at the collapse of the UAR in 1961, or the failed Iraq-Syria-Egypt unification talks of 1963.<sup>71</sup>

Yet something new has occurred. As shall be demonstrated, whilst Old Arabism clearly failed, states continued to include a layer of Arab identity within their official identity discourses. It was this continued reproduction of Arab identity which allowed a sense of group identification to be sustained and made *Al-Jazeera* and other stations appealing when they were launched in the 1990s and 2000s. Whilst the nature of this Arab identity has not greatly changed since 1967 – it does not challenge the legitimacy of the states as Old Arabism once did – the means by which this layer of identity is reproduced and disseminated certainly is new. Moreover, as Lynch correctly observes, rather than Arab viewers only consuming their own states' version of Arab identity, they now consume the same content simultaneously. This effectively homogenises the type of identity discourse they are exposed to and helps reinforce, "...a shared identity and a common set of political arguments and concerns."<sup>72</sup> What has changed in the satellite era is therefore not the nature of Arab identity, it remains subordinated to state identity, but the method and scope by which it is disseminated across the entire Arab world, not just within individual states' media.

New Arabism therefore can be considered a different type of identity to Old Arabism, though many of the claims made by its advocates are exaggerated. It is less overtly state-led than Old Arabism, though states continue to hold the controlling levers of satellite media stations, ensuring they cannot be truly independent. Islam has a more prominent role, though this is merely cultural and not political Islamism as some have claimed. Finally, as shall be discussed below, New Arabism accepts and endorses the role of the state and does not seek Arab unitary whilst simultaneously strengthening the Arab community by subjecting viewers to the same media content. Whilst this is not a new conception of Arabism than that endorsed by Nasser himself after 1967, its scope and method are significantly different enough to be considered something new.

### 1.1.3 Defining Arabism

---

<sup>70</sup> Michael K. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 167; Fawaz Gerges, *The Superpowers and The Middle East: Regional and International Politics 1955-67* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> Dawisha, *Arab nationalism*, p. 243; Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: the conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989* (London: Tauris, 1990), p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> Lynch, *New Arab public*, p. 22.



So is New Arabism still Arab *nationalism*? The numerous scholars who discuss New Arabism afford little place to engage with nationalist theory. Lawrence Pintak skims over theory briefly to state that digital communication, “is fuelling the rise of a new common Arab consciousness every bit as salient as the ‘imagined communities’ that Benedict Anderson tells us are at the core of the concept of nations.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly he invokes the work of Anthony Smith to claim that Arab journalists are, “‘border guards’ who provide, ‘a new panoply of symbols myths, memories and values, that set the included national states apart.’”<sup>74</sup> Similarly Rinnawi also briefly references Anderson to suggest that, “...a new nationalism, such as McArabism is a form of imagined community.”<sup>75</sup> By and large however, nationalist theory is absent from these discussions. As a consequence, definitions of New Arabism are confused and imprecise. Telhami describes it as a ‘transnational movement,’ a sentiment echoed by Lynch who describes his New Arab Public as a, ‘transnational public sphere.’<sup>76</sup> Valbjorn describes New Arabism as ‘non-statist political Arabism’ which he categorises as the latest evolution in Arab *nationalism*.<sup>77</sup> Pintak seems cautious to actually use the term ‘nationalism’ to describe New Arabism, but does see the actions of journalists as shaping an emerging ‘imagined’ Arab *watan* (homeland).<sup>78</sup> Finally, amongst the most confused is Rinnawi, who at different times in his study refers to his McArabism as a regional identity, a regionalisation, a new pan-Arabism, a regionalism and a nationalism.<sup>79</sup> A consultation with nationalism theory suggests however that New Arabism should not be considered nationalism.

Ozkirmili highlights that no set of objective characteristics can be found which consistently prove the presence of a nation or nationalism.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, certain features of nationalism have featured consistently in the debates amongst theorists to merit discussion with reference to New Arabism. Whether nationalism needs to be a mass movement is one such topic.<sup>81</sup> By the admission of both Pintak and Rinnawi, New Arabism is not a mass nationalism. Rinnawi sees his McArabism as, “an upper middle class imagining,” whilst Pintak sees the elite journalists as ‘border guards’ who are promoting a new identity.<sup>82</sup> This is sufficient to be considered nationalism according to some scholars. Adrian Hastings claims that national identity does not need to be present amongst the majority of a population

<sup>73</sup> Pintak, ‘Border guards,’ p. 191.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>75</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Telhami, ‘The New Arabism,’ p. 57; Lynch, *New Arab public*, p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> Valbjorn, ‘Arab nationalism(s),’ p. 148.

<sup>78</sup> Pintak, ‘Border guards,’ p. 191.

<sup>79</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, see p. 148, p. xiv, Abstract, p. xiv, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 176.

<sup>82</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, xvii; Pintak, ‘Border guards,’ p. 92.

for nationalism to be present, merely a 'substantial portion' of the elite and middle classes.<sup>83</sup> This was the argument made by historians of Old Arabism such as Dawn who located the birth of Arab nationalism with the national consciousness of the elites in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, most scholars dispute Hasting's 'primordialism' supporting Ernst Gellner's assertion that, "mass popular identity," is one of the core components of nationalism.<sup>84</sup> With this in mind 19<sup>th</sup> century Arabists should be seen as 'proto-nationalists' with genuine mass nationalism not emerging until the 1920s and 30s.<sup>85</sup> Should Pintak and Rinnawi's elites also be seen, as Pintak implies, as 'proto-nationalists' of an emerging New Arabism nationalism? The Arab elites of the early 21<sup>st</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup> century have significant differences of intent. As Pintak himself declares, today's journalists are not advocating any form of political union, which was the ultimate goal of the 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals.<sup>86</sup> Complicating the issue is that, unlike in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of today's masses feel some sense of Arab identity already. It may not be their primary identity as hoped by 19<sup>th</sup> century elites but Gellner's suggestion that elites disseminate identity into mass consciousness has had a degree of success.<sup>87</sup> In this regard Rinnawi's assertion that New Arabism is an, "upper middle class imagining," deserves scrutiny: the media elite's goal is not nationalist, and yet what is imagined is felt at a mass level.

A second debate is over the political and cultural nature of nationalism. Some theorists see nationalism as a purely political phenomena. As John Breuilly states, "The term 'nationalism' is used to refer to *political* movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such actions with nationalist arguments."<sup>88</sup> This view is supported by Motyl and Hechter who argue nationalism is primarily a political ideal, aiming at independent statehood or political autonomy.<sup>89</sup> Applied to Arabism, this narrower political definition of nationalism would fit that advocated by Dawisha and Ajami: that the only Arab nationalists were the fusionist projects of al-Husri, Nasser and Aflaq. After the failure of this, what is left of Arabism today is, according to Dawisha, purely a cultural bond and not political, hence not nationalism. He states:

---

<sup>83</sup> Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave, 2000), p. 70.

<sup>84</sup> John Breuilly in Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983 [2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2009]), p. xxxiv.

<sup>85</sup> Zachs, *Syrian Identity*, p. 1; Gelvin in Jankowski & Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, pp. 231-46.

<sup>86</sup> Pintak, 'Border guards,' p. 210.

<sup>87</sup> Shibley Telhami, '2009 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,' *University of Maryland with Zogby International*, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2009/0519\\_arab\\_opinion/2009\\_arab\\_public\\_opinion\\_poll.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2009/0519_arab_opinion/2009_arab_public_opinion_poll.pdf) accessed 20/4/10; Yahya Sadowski, 'The Evolution of Political Identity in Syria,' in Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 147.

<sup>88</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates*, p. 20.

“To say one is an Arab should denote a different connotation from saying one is an Arab nationalist. The former concedes one’s cultural heritage, expressed best in the term ‘Arabism,’ whereas the latter, as we have seen, imbues this cultural oneness with the added ingredient of political recognition.”<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, Dawisha went on to claim elsewhere that New Arabism will not amount to much *because* it cannot develop into the political sphere, remaining, “ineffectual as long as it is not translated into deeds.”<sup>91</sup>

However, contrary to Dawisha, some theorists argue that a cultural definition of nationalism is more appropriate. Tamir, for example, argues the right to national self-determination is based on a cultural rather than a political claim.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the common culture and language of the Arabs is the cornerstone of the media’s promotion of New Arabism. However, as Ozkirimli states, the reality is that one cannot separate either culture or politics from nationalism. Nationalism, he says, “involves the culturalisation of politics and the politicisation of culture.”<sup>93</sup> It is therefore insufficient for Dawisha to claim Arabism is purely cultural, as no cultural identity can be completely depoliticised. New Arabism is in fact deeply political, as seen by the strong focus of the transnational Arab media on foreign policy. This is not a purely cultural tie being encouraged. As Lynch states,

“In the new Arab public, Arab and Islamic identities serve as a reference point, but no single set of policies or orientations necessarily follows from that identity. Arabs take for granted that Palestine and Iraq are Arab issues about which Arabs *should* agree, but they often disagree vehemently about what is done about them. In contrast to earlier eras of Arabism, such as the ‘Arab cold war’ of the 1950s and 1960s (Kerr 1971), the public political arguments today throw wide open fundamental questions of what it means to be Arab.”<sup>94</sup>

On the one hand today’s Arabism is more flexible than a purely cultural identity and allows Arabs to question the meaning of their identity, on the other it provides a certain fixed political lens through which viewers are expected to see their common world.

So New Arabism is both a political and a cultural movement with mass appeal, but one that does not seek political unity. Indeed, as shall be shown in this thesis, unlike Old Arabism its discourse not only accepts the existence of the Arab state system, it simultaneously reinforces state identity alongside Arab identity. Today’s Arabism cannot therefore be seen as nationalism, or even a proto-nationalism, as it does not seek to align the supposed national with the political community. The Arabs *are* an imagined

---

<sup>90</sup> Dawisha, *Arab nationalism*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> Dawisha, ‘Requiem’.

<sup>92</sup> Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates*, p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

<sup>94</sup> Lynch, *New Arab Public*, p. 4.

community in the Andersonian sense as they, “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>95</sup> Yet this imagined community is not that of a nation which, according to Anderson must be, “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>96</sup> Though the community is clearly limited to Arabic speakers within the Arab world (unlike a religious imagined community, such as the Islamic *Umma* which can be expanded and joined) it is not sovereign but rather ruled over by various state governments.

So what kind of imagined community are the Arabs as promoted by New Arabism? Several terms have been thrown around by scholars of New Arabism such as ‘transnationalism’, ‘regionalism’ and ‘supra-nationalism’. Whilst New Arabism shares characteristics with each of these, none is a completely accurate description. Transnationalism refers to activities that cross state boundaries, such as human migration, the flow of ideas and information, and movements of money and credit.<sup>97</sup> New Arabism certainly has a transnational component, for example, as the crossing of information over state boundaries, transnational satellite television broadcasts, has served to strengthen the imagined Arab community. Yet this description seems too weak to describe the political and cultural identity generated from this transnational activity. After all, the movement of money, credit and, indeed, broadcasting from the West to the Arab world has not made Arabs feel more Western, arguably the opposite. Whilst transnationalism might describe the *process* by which New Arabism is promoted, it does not sufficiently describe the *identity*.

An alternative definition, regionalism, has two meanings depending on context. Within the EU it refers to sub-state identities and polices, such as the Basque, Catalan, or Bavarian region. Whilst these regions might have national aspirations they are largely not considered nations within the bureaucratic language of the EU. The second meaning is more appropriate for its use in the case of New Arabism, and that is a supra-state regionalism such as Latin Americanism (Bolivarianism) or Australaisianism. This is sometimes, though wrongly, referred to as *Continentalism* as the region in question may not always encompass the whole of a continent. The inclusion of Portuguese-speaking Brazil within Latin Americanism, for example, is sometimes debated. With regard to Arabism being a regionalism we face the problem that it is clearly aimed at a linguistic community that does not necessarily occupy a single region. New Arabism is as much aimed and consumed by Arabs living in Europe, for example, as it is those living in the Arab world. Furthermore, not all inhabitants of the ‘Arab region’ are Arabs. Indeed, Kurds, Berbers and Armenians, who do not speak Arabic as their first language, are excluded by the

---

<sup>95</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 1991), p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Ian Mclean and Alistair McMillan, ‘Transnationalism,’ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

linguistic and cultural definition of identity assumed by the New Arabism discourse. 'Regionalism', which has a geographical rather than a political or cultural focal point, is therefore not appropriate.

A final possibility, 'supra-nationalism', describes the increased transfer of power and decision making from state authorities to international or regional bodies.<sup>98</sup> The most extensive example of this has occurred in the European Union prompting some scholars to identify a growing sense of 'European' identity. Consequently, 'supra-nationalism' has come to be used by some as the feeling of European identity as well as the formal integration of governing structures.<sup>99</sup> Parallels between Arab identity and European identity have occasionally been made, especially from the growing technocratic generation of elites in the Arab world who see the future of Arabism to be some form of 'Arab EU'.<sup>100</sup> Is New Arabism therefore a supra-nationalism like the emerging Europeanism?<sup>101</sup>

On the one hand the European parallel is not a helpful way to describe New Arabism. On a practical level, supra-nationalism describes state behaviour in pooling sovereignty, something not widely seen in the Arab world – only in regional bodies like the Gulf Cooperation Council, or the politically impotent Arab League. Moreover, in the formation of an identity-based supra-nationalist Europeanism, European states had established their own sense of nationalism *before* pooling their sovereignty and forming the EU. As Gerrard Delanty has shown, the idea of Europeanism came *after* the EU.<sup>102</sup> The Arab world saw the reverse. As described above, the era of Old Arabism saw a sense of Arab identity establish itself in most cases before a sense of state nationalism. If the discourse of European supra-nationalism is one of separate peoples coming together due to their common interests in peace and prosperity, the discourse of Arabism is of one people artificially divided. Consequently perhaps, the Europeanist supra-nationalism is institution and bureaucrat-led and has not disseminated particularly well to the European masses.<sup>103</sup> New Arabism, in contrast, is media-led but institutionally incredibly weak, yet well received at a mass level.

On the other hand, despite their different starting points, Arab and European supra-nationalism aspire to the same things. New Arabism, with its emphasis on preserving the state system whilst heightening a common Arab identity has the sense of commonality that Europeanists dream of. In contrast, many New Arabists like Bassam Tibi aspire to the kind of infrastructural supra-nationalism seen in the EU. Whilst no definition is therefore perfect, supra-nationalism seems to best describe the intent and

<sup>98</sup> Ian Mclean and Alistair McMillan, 'Supranationalism,' *Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

<sup>99</sup> Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (eds.), *European Identity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Bassam Tibi, 'From Pan-Arabism to the Community of Sovereign Arab States: redefining the Arab and Arabism in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War' in Hudson, *Middle East Dilemma*, p. 102.

<sup>101</sup> Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 1-34.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p.6

<sup>103</sup> Checkel and Katzenstein, *European Identity*, p. 1.

aspiration of New Arabism. It does not seek to make the imagined community sovereign, and hence national, but it does promote a supra-national identity which binds the Arabic-speaking peoples of the various states together. Arabism has therefore evolved. Whilst Old Arabism was a failed nationalism, New Arabism is a complex and widely felt supra-nationalism.

#### 1.1.4 Arabism in International Relations

What does this mean for international relations theory? As highlighted by Valbjorn's typology discussed earlier, the changing nature of Arabism has had a significant impact on inter-Arab relations and the identification here of New Arabism as a salient supra-nationalism distinct from Old Arabism's failed nationalism could inform the debates amongst scholars of international relations. The primary debate discusses how foreign policy is formed in the Arab world and stems from 'the cultural turn' in international relations (IR) which saw identity, previously absent from IR theory, emerge as a key determinate of actors' behaviour.<sup>104</sup> Prior to this point 'neo-realism', which asserts that states' foreign policies aim to maximise their advantages within a competitive, anarchic system, had dominated the discipline's analysis of inter-Arab relations, most notably in Stephen Walt's *The Origins of Alliances*.<sup>105</sup> After the cultural turn, 'constructivists' began to challenge the realist paradigm, with Michael N. Barnett's *Dialogues in Arab Politics* leading.

Walt argues that ideology and identity, notably Arabism, play a secondary role in determining Arab states' foreign policies, specifically the alliances they form. He believes that Arab states pursue alliances primarily to balance against *threats*, irrespective of ideological compatibility, adapting Kenneth Waltz' concept of alliances being formed to balance *power* alone.<sup>106</sup> Thus he highlights that the majority of alliances formed by Arab countries between 1955-79, such as the Baghdad Pact in 1955 or the informal Israel-Jordan alliance of 1970, were formed for reasons of balancing threats rather than power, and had little relation to ideological solidarity between the signatories.<sup>107</sup> Walt goes on to argue that, contrary to some suggestions, the Arab world is therefore not exceptional and inter-Arab relations follows the same pattern as international relations elsewhere in the world. Though leaders may pay lip-service to identity and the ideology of Arabism, in reality they use it as a tool to further state goals and protect domestic legitimacy. Walt sees Arabism as an instrument of state power primarily used by stronger states, such as Nasser's Egypt, to intimidate and harass weaker ones, such as Hussein's Jordan,

---

<sup>104</sup> Hinnebusch, 'The politics of identity,' p. 149.

<sup>105</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287-8.

hence its tendency to produce conflict, not cooperation.<sup>108</sup> Power then, not identity, determines inter-Arab relations.

Challenging this, Barnett argues that identity plays a key role in determining foreign policy as it shapes the conception of what state interests are. Inter-Arab politics, rather than a security-driven balance of threats system, was instead a competition of discourse over the norms of Arabism. Walt and other realists, he says, by focussing on the few occasions when Arab states used military means of influence, ignore how Arab states routinely used symbolic technologies to embarrass their opponents.<sup>109</sup> Nasser was able to define the inter-Arab agenda of the day and rally people on the streets of Damascus and Amman through his deployment of the symbols of Arabism, not behind the barrel of a gun.<sup>110</sup> The Arab leaders were constantly battling to define the norms of Arabism to justify their behaviour to both their own populations and to project their influence to the wider Arab world. Arabism thus acts as both a weapon in inter-Arab politics, such as Hafez Assad's ability to rally support for ejecting Egypt from the Arab League after Camp David for violating these norms, and also a constraint, such as Hussein's inability to sign a treaty with Israel in 1979 for fear of a similar fate.<sup>111</sup> Barnett highlights that regime survival was the key motivation for pursuing this Arabism. Though he acknowledges that Arab leaders could well have believed in Arabism, leaders were judged by the populations according to how well they conducted, manipulated and adhered to the norms of Arabism. The murders of Anwar Sadat, Nuri Said and Abdullah I of Jordan were indicators of the possible costs of violating these sacred norms. Barnett concludes by highlighting that since 1991 there was a noticeable shift in Arab politics, with statism overshadowing Arabism in being the key identity determining foreign policy norms. In this sense, he says, the Arab states system was both made and unmade by Arab leaders.

There are weaknesses and strengths with both approaches which have been debated in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>112</sup> A concern of this investigation is how locating today's Arabism as a supra-nationalism will affect the dichotomy. Firstly, it highlights the need for both approaches to update their works to contemporary events. Barnett suggested Arabism's relevance declined as state sovereignty became more legitimised from the 1970s and 80s and would continue to do so as key issues, such as the Israeli-Palestine conflict, were resolved, as seemed likely when his book was published in 1998.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, as Barnett (with Telhami) stated as late on as 2002,

---

<sup>108</sup> Hinnebusch, 'The politics of identity,' p. 149.

<sup>109</sup> Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>112</sup> For example see Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005); Hinnebusch, 'The politics of identity,'; Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*.

<sup>113</sup> Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, pp. 248-256.

“The end of Arabism can be observed not only in the shift in discourse – that is, the watering down of Arabism and the growing references to Islam and the state – but also in a changing pattern in inter-Arab politics. Specifically, once Arab leaders no longer found it useful to compete over the symbols of Arabism (largely because these symbols had lost resonance with their populations), their interaction began to stabilize around sovereignty norms, and the regional state system began to resemble other regional systems.”<sup>114</sup>

However, as is hinted in Telhami and Barnett’s work, the growth of satellite media, whilst unlikely to revive suggestions of unitary schemes as state sovereignty is increasingly legitimised, has the potential to boost mutual identification and encourage renewed competition between states. Indeed, the survey of New Arabism described above suggests that this is exactly what is happening. Far from the conflict that once marked the region receding, as Barnett had predicted in 1998, war and violence have been plentiful in the past decade with the old Arab foes of Israel and the imperialist West, this time the US in Iraq, regaining their old mantle.<sup>115</sup> In the same way that 1948 and 1967 helped bind Arabs together as incidents of shared suffering, the collective anger at wars in 2003, 2006 and 2008/09, facilitated by satellite television, seemed to enhance mutual Arab identification in shared outrage. Competition over the symbols of Arabism returned, though in a different format: this time through competing state-backed television channels. The fact that Saudi Arabia felt the need to launch *Al-Arabiyya* to combat Qatar’s *Al-Jazeera* to provide a more positive view of *its* framing of Arab-wide events suggests echoes of earlier competition for the norms of Arabism. Indeed, one could make an argument that, now that states are more legitimised and talk of union passed, the age of satellite television and New Arabism invites a new competition for the norms of this supra-nationalism which are, as yet, undefined.

In a different way, this thesis also contributes to the realism debate by challenging Walt’s assertion that Arabism is a tool used by strong states against weaker ones, by demonstrating that Arab identity is deliberately reproduced in the official discourses of two comparatively weak states, Syria and Jordan. The continued reproduction of Arab identity in Jordan is a particular challenge to Walt’s thesis given that promoting Arab identity in many ways goes against its security interests. As a key ally of the US and a signatory of a treaty with Israel, the Hashemite regime might be expected to down-play its Arab identity to legitimise its alliances.<sup>116</sup> Yet this study shows that is not the case, suggesting that Barnett’s explanations of regime survival hold greater weight. Similarly, the identity discourse of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad questions aspects of Walt’s thesis. Secular Syria’s alliance with Islamist Iran, forged in 1979, seems to complement Walt’s notion of a balance of threats, offering another example of an

---

<sup>114</sup> Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 20.

<sup>115</sup> Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, p. 270.

<sup>116</sup> Lynch, Marc, ‘Jordan’s Identity and Interests,’ in Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 56.



alliance based on state interests rather than ideological compatibility.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Bashar al-Assad's strengthening of this alliance, and formation of a new friendship with non-Arab Turkey, against Arab regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt again supports the idea of state interests. However, an analysis of the Syrian identity discourse illustrates that Arabism, rather impractically, remains substantial. Indeed, these alliances with non-Arabs are framed as serving both Syrian *and* Arab interests. As shared enemies of Israel, Iran and, recently, Turkey, are portrayed as almost more Arab than those Arab regimes that support America. In reply Saudi Arabia has lamented Syria for being allied with 'Persian' Iran. As described by Barnett, the Arabist discourse is still therefore used to frame inter-Arab relations.

Any study of nationalism, and supra-nationalism, will benefit our understanding of identity in international relations and, whilst this thesis does not set out to make substantial contributions to this debate within IR theory, it can add depth and complexity to the continuing discussion.<sup>118</sup> It contributes to constructivist accounts by illustrating how everyday reproduction serves to constitute national and supra-national identity. It similarly contributes to realist accounts by illustrating how everyday nationalism is used instrumentally by elites to further their regime and state interests.

---

<sup>117</sup> Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp. 149-152.

## 1.2 Arabism and State Nationalism: Syria and Jordan

If Arabism has evolved beyond nationalism into a supra-nationalism, where does that leave state identity in the Arab world? When Old Arabism failed in the 1960s, those who highlighted its decline such as Fouad Ajami predicted that state identities, long restricted by the Arab nationalist discourse would assert themselves.<sup>119</sup> Certainly state leaders during this period made a concerted effort to construct a more distinctive identity around the modern state. However, recent surveys in the Arab world suggest that these attempts have met with only limited success. In one survey, compiled by Shibley Telhami in 2006, only 39% of respondents in 6 Arab states, including Jordan, considering the state to be their primary loyalty.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, as Hinnebusch highlights, the state does seem to have emerged as the most popular of the many potential primary loyalties in the Arab world, with the same survey suggesting only 33% saw Islamic and 28% saw Arab identity as more important. In this sense, he claims, it is quite remarkable that state identity has remained durable, “in the face of powerful supra-state identities having no parallels elsewhere.”<sup>121</sup> A second theme of this thesis will be to examine the interaction between state and Arab identity in its two case studies: Syria and Jordan. A key hypothesis will be that one of the reasons why New Arabism has widely disseminated is that it complements the national discourse of Arab states which have constructed and promoted Arab identity over a sustained period. Rather than Arab nationalism, this discourse might be termed *national Arabism* which shares New Arabism’s acceptance and entrenchment of the state system. The national discourses of both Syria and Jordan employ, to differing extents, Arab and religious identity to construct a state loyalty.

One of the greatest problems for students of nationalism in the Arab World has been disentangling people’s complex multi-layered identities. Many have struggled to apply the various theories of nationalism to the Arab case because identifying *which* nation appears more difficult than in European examples. Syrians and Jordanians each have several identities, which could potentially develop into nationalism: tribe, region or city, religion, state and ethnicity.<sup>122</sup> James Gelvin illustrated that the development of the ethnic tie, Arab identity, into nationalism in the 1920s and 30s was by no means inevitable, and took considerable effort from intellectual elites to promote.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the subsequent diminishing of Arab nationalism’s importance and its failure to unite the Arab world into a single nation-state did not guarantee the triumph of state identities. The collapse of Somalia, Lebanon and Iraq

---

<sup>119</sup> Ajami, ‘The end of Pan-Arabism’.

<sup>120</sup> Hinnebusch, ‘The politics of identity,’ p. 154.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>122</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple identities of the Middle East*, (London: Phoenix, 1998), pp. 20-22.

<sup>123</sup> James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 225-259.

at different times along tribal, sectarian, religious and ethnic lines has illustrated that the creation of a state is not sufficient alone to bind citizens together in a collective identity. Indeed, many commentators and academics maintain that Arab states such as Syria and Jordan have failed to construct sufficient loyalty to the state and hence need to maintain a coercive dictatorial government to avoid a similar fate.<sup>124</sup>

Much of the difficulty in understanding the multi-layered identities in the Arab world is the attempt to project European norms onto the Middle East. On the one hand Fred Halliday is correct to play down notions of Arab exceptionalism explaining that European citizens also have multiple layers of identity.<sup>125</sup> However, Hinnebusch is also correct to highlight that the power of supra-state identities, notably Arab and Islamic identities, is not paralleled in European cases because there are not the same powerful institutions promoting them: mosques and madrassas for Islam, external media such as Nasser's *Sawt al-Arab* in the 1950s or pan-Arab satellite television stations such as *al-Jazeera* today.<sup>126</sup> Given the strong institutions promoting these identities, it is not surprising that the 2006 poll found respondents fairly equally divided as to what was their primary identity. However, as Telhami and Barnett suggest, the very concept of a 'primary identity' is ill-suited to the Arab world. They propose a move away from the 'either-or' view of national identity accepting that such identities can be fluid and entangled in different ways.<sup>127</sup> Identity is situational.<sup>128</sup> It is perfectly feasible for someone to feel Syrian or Jordanian *and* Arab *and* Muslim at the same time and for the order of importance of these identities to change not just over the course of their lives, but on a day to day basis according to context.

A further difficulty is the word 'nation' in the Arab context. Confusingly, the Arabic word for 'nation' is debated. Arab nationalist theorist Sati al-Husri made a distinction between '*qawmiyya*', translated by westerners as meaning 'nationalism' and '*wataniyya*', translated as meaning state patriotism.<sup>129</sup> '*al-qawmiyya al-Arabiyya*' is therefore seen as Arab nationalism, or Old Arabism, whilst the scholars label the shift to more state-focused loyalty in the 1970s as the era of *wataniyya*.<sup>130</sup> However, the word '*watan*' is not a translation of 'state', which is *dawla*, or country (*balad*) but means instead 'homeland'. This distinction is crucial as it leaves the word '*wataniyya*' open to interpretation. Indeed, many Syrians and Jordanians interviewed for this thesis regarded *al-qawmiyya al-Arabiyya* and *al-wataniyya al-Arabiyya* as the same thing. This inconsistency is seen in the rhetoric of Arab leaders who speak of the

---

<sup>124</sup> Ayubi, *Overstating*, p. xi.

<sup>125</sup> Halliday, *Nation and Religion*, p. 48.

<sup>126</sup> Valbjorn, 'Arab nationalism(s)', p. 164.

<sup>127</sup> Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, 'Introduction' in Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 19.

<sup>128</sup> Drysdale in Sadowski, 'Political Identity in Syria,' in Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 138.

<sup>129</sup> Sati al-Husri, *al-wataniyya wa al-qawmiyya*, quoted in William L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati al-Husri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 92.

<sup>130</sup> Dawisha, *Arab nationalism*, p. 11.

*watan* to sometimes mean their state, and at other times to mean the whole Arab world. Indeed, as Telhami and Barnett have highlighted, the reality in most Arab states after the 1970s was a contemporary debate not on a state-identity (*wataniyya*) versus Arab nationalism (*qawmiyya*) but on the meaning of a state that has a transnational identity *and* an Arab identity.<sup>131</sup>

Yet to all intents and purposes, whatever the Arabic translation, most Arab states are now national communities. If Arabism is a supra-national imagined community then the states are national imagined communities. They are, after all, political, limited and sovereign. Whilst official discourses may contain stronger supra-national components than those of European states, these are still attempting to construct a national attachment to the specific territory and government of the state. This is certainly the case in this thesis' two case studies, as shall be discussed. In the case of Jordan, this has been a long-term project stretching back to the defeat of 1967 and receiving new impetus in 1999.<sup>132</sup> In Syria state identity-building has been a by-product of regime consolidation, though since 2000 this too has become more deliberate.<sup>133</sup> Whilst aware of the disputes amongst Arabic-speakers on the correct word, this thesis argues that, in fact, *wataniyya* essentially now translates as state nationalism, whilst *qawmiyya* is specifically the Old Arabism that failed. There are numerous components to official identity discourses being constructed in Syria and Jordan. This thesis will demonstrate how, in both Syria and Jordan, the discourse combines both state nationalism and national Arabism: a supra-national tie that accepts and promotes the continuation of the Arab state system.

Closer scrutiny of the state and nation-building processes in Syria and Jordan illustrates how these states have become normalised, even if the regimes have not yet moved beyond coercive rule. To illustrate this, a brief discussion of why Syria and Jordan have been chosen as case studies is followed by an analysis of the state and identity-building made in each.

### 1.2.1 Syria and Jordan: Contrary Siblings

Why compare Syria and Jordan? In many ways an analysis of how nationalism and supra-nationalism interact in any two Arab states could serve to illustrate how it is that Arabism is recreated in daily discourse. Unnoticed symbols of Arabism are present throughout the Arab world. The recurrence of the colours of the Arab revolt – red, white, black and green – is present in most Arab flags, for example. Similarly the word 'Arab' appears in the official name of many Arab states, such as 'the Syrian Arab

---

<sup>131</sup> Telhami and Barnett, 'Introduction' in Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 14.

<sup>132</sup> Frisch, Hillel, 'Fuzzy nationalism: The case of Jordan' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 8:4 (Winter 2002), pp. 86-103.

<sup>133</sup> Sadowski, 'Political Identity in Syria,' p. 139.

Republic' or 'the Arab Republic of Egypt'. The Eagle of Saladin, an Arabist symbol prominent in the 1940s and 50s, is the official emblem of Syria, Egypt, Libya, Palestine and Iraq. However, there are several reasons why Syria and Jordan make a particularly relevant comparison. On the one hand, there are superficial similarities to the states: their origins from the same Ottoman province; the familiar difficulties faced by ruling elites in trying to create identity and loyalty to an artificial state amongst heterogeneous peoples; and, more recently, the coming to power of young, modernising leaders. At the same time, the divergent paths these states took makes their differences equally pronounced: their systems of government, their international allies, their political ideology and their position in the international economic and political community. The similarities and differences between the two is what make the comparison relevant. On the one hand they faced the same tasks that most Arab state leaders did in having to build identity from scratch. On the other, they took very different routes and produced politically and economically very different creations on what was traditionally the same land. The fact that both ended up using similar methods to build this identity, and both found it necessary, convenient or practical to include a prominent layer of Arab identity helps to draw wider conclusions about identity building and reproductions, not just about Syria and Jordan, but the Arab world in general.

Superficially, Syria and Jordan have many similarities, firstly their close historical origins. Raymond Hinnebusch and Neil Quilliam describe Syria and Jordan as 'contrary siblings'. They are 'siblings' on account of their territories being carved out of what was historically the same region by European empires, having shared the same language, religion and culture for centuries. At the same time they are 'contrary' due to the distinct identities that ruling elites have attempted to create in each state.<sup>134</sup> Greater Syria, or *bilad as-sham* is the territory now covered by modern Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Territories that, until 1918, were all part of the Ottoman Empire. The majority of modern Syria (including the major cities Hama, Homs and Damascus) and all of modern Jordan were part of the same administrative unit within the Ottoman State: the *vilayat* of Damascus.<sup>135</sup> According to Hinnebusch, this Greater Syrian region could have supported a viable nation along the European model.<sup>136</sup> However, as has been well documented, breaking wartime promises made to Arab leaders, the British and French divided the region into four mini-states leaving two very different ruling elites in their new mandates of Jordan and Syria. On the one hand in Amman, the new Hashemite rulers benefitted from the colonial carve-up, inheriting a state with which they had no historical attachment. On the other hand in Damascus, the local rulers considered themselves the victims of imperialism,

---

<sup>134</sup> Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Quilliam, Neil, 'Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War,' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19:3 (Sept. 2006), pp. 513-528.

<sup>135</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: the History of an Ambition* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p. 17.

<sup>136</sup> Hinnebusch, 'The politics of identity,' p. 157.

being left with a rump state out of the historical *Bilad as-Sham* they sought.<sup>137</sup> Though the states therefore had similar origins, the intentions of the differing ruling elites ensured that very different states were constructed.

A second similarity between Syria and Jordan was the nature of the state and identity-building task faced by the new rulers. Like all Arab states, barring perhaps Egypt, Oman and Morocco, the territories inherited by post-independence elites were colonial creations bearing little resemblance to known boundaries.<sup>138</sup> Borders had been drawn in straight lines crossing former grazing lands and tribal regions. Consequently, the new inhabitants were a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-faith group with little attachment to the new states. Syria had a population consisting of Sunni, Shia, Druze and Alawi Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Kurds, Armenians and Assyrians.<sup>139</sup> Though Jordan was more homogeneous, with most of its population being Sunni Arab Muslims, it too inherited many Christians, Circassians and had other divisions between its urban, rural and Bedouin population.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, it soon faced a huge influx of refugees from Palestine after 1948, adding a new ethnic split between older Transjordanians and the newer refugees of Palestinian origin. The need to build a recognizable group identity amongst these disparate populations was thus a problem shared not just by Syrian and Jordanian rulers, but by those in Iraq trying to unite Shias, Sunnis and Kurds, in Lebanon trying to balance its combustible confessional mix and in North Africa trying to reconcile Arabs with Berbers.<sup>141</sup>

Despite these similarities, there are notable differences between the two states, which make them all the more relevant for comparison. Firstly, the structure and ideology of the two regimes. Whilst elites in both states struggled with political instability immediately after independence, the regimes that emerged from 1970 onwards in Damascus and Amman appeared diametrically opposed to each other. Hafez al-Assad, who seized power in Syria after a coup in November 1970, ruled for 30 years until his death in 2000. Though certainly not allowing fair elections and arranging for his son to succeed him, Assad still maintained Syria as a secular Republic. His regime was founded on the socialism, anti-imperialism and Arab nationalism of the Ba'ath party, with Assad regularly portraying himself as the heir to Nasser. In contrast the regime established by King Hussein of Jordan was quite different. Inheriting power in

---

<sup>137</sup> Hinnebusch and Quilliam, 'Contrary Siblings', p. 514.

<sup>138</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East 1914-1922* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 563-565.

<sup>139</sup> David W. Lesch, *The new lion of Damascus: Basher al-Assad and modern Syria*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. vii.

<sup>140</sup> Alan George, *Jordan: Living in the Crossfire*, (London: Zed, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>141</sup> For Iraq see Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, history and collective identity in Modern Iraq* (London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 21; For Lebanon see Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London, Tauris, 1988); For Morocco see C. R. Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830: A History* (London: Hurst & co., 2000).

1952, Hussein maintained Jordan as a monarchy, successfully passing on power to his son on his death in 1999. Though less conservative than many Gulf monarchies, Hashemite Hussein still drew legitimacy from religion, being a descendent of the Prophet Mohammad. He was a committed capitalist and anti-socialist and, though he flirted with alliances with Nasser during the 1960s, fundamentally opposed the unionist rhetoric of Old Arabism and the Ba'ath party and defended the rights of state sovereignty throughout his reign.<sup>142</sup>

These ideological differences closely relate to another major difference between the two states: their international relations and place in the political and economic international community. Though Assad enjoyed sporadic episodes of good relations with the United States in the 1970s and 1990s, for most of the Cold War Syria was a close ally of the Soviet Union.<sup>143</sup> Having lost the Golan Heights to Israel in 1967 when he was minister of defence, Assad allowed the Israel conflict to shape and dominate Syria's foreign policy between 1970 and 2000 and it continues to do so today. Indeed, Syria's continued anti-Israel rhetoric and its alliances with overtly anti-western enemies of Israel such as Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas has led to a general distrust and vilification of Damascus in the western media and policy-making community.<sup>144</sup> Though Syria is now slowly opening up its economy to Western investment after years of failed socialism, it remains economically under-developed and largely outside of the US-dominated international economy. In contrast, Jordan remains a staunch ally of the United States and is fully integrated into the world economy. Hussein relied heavily on European and especially American financial and military support to stay in power. Though he too fought wars with Israel, the conflict was less ideological or personal for him, as seen by a willingness to give up claim to the occupied West Bank in 1988 and sign a peace treaty with Tel Aviv in 1994.<sup>145</sup>

One would expect these starkly different ideological regimes to produce starkly different identity discourses. However, closer examination shows many similarities whether intentional or not. Both regimes promote Arab identity. Hafez Assad was elaborate with his use of Ba'athist mantra to promote 'Arab unity' whilst Hussein preferred a more nuanced 'Hashemite Arabism' which, whilst, "never precisely codified," proved a recurrent theme during his reign.<sup>146</sup> Both, though, were *national Arabists* as the rhetoric primarily served the priorities of the state. Similarly, both leaders oversaw the development of state identity. After the loss of 1967 and expelling the PLO in 1970 Hussein began to

---

<sup>142</sup> Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abdel Nasser and His Rivals 1958-70* (London: OUP, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1971), p. 98.

<sup>143</sup> Patrick Seale, *Assad of Syria: the struggle for the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 1988), pp. 226-250.

<sup>144</sup> Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), pp. 6-21.

<sup>145</sup> Ashton, *King Hussein*, p. 81.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

more overtly promote a specifically Jordanian identity.<sup>147</sup> Hafez, whilst still employing Arab nationalist and even pan-Syrian rhetoric, oversaw the gradual emergence of a Syrian national identity in a more nuanced fashion.<sup>148</sup> Islam also played a role in both discourses. In Jordan, Hussein's genealogy as a descendent of the Prophet was a cornerstone of his legitimacy, whilst in Syria the more secular Hafez used Muslim festivals and some Islamic symbolism to boost his religious credentials, even more so after defeating a challenge from political Islamists.<sup>149</sup> Also, the methods used by both leaders were similar: both had a cult of the leader – though Hafez's was far more pronounced – both shared space with their families, promoted ancient symbols and culture and strengthened state institutions like the media, education and the armed forces to do it. Both sought to build an identity discourse which could appeal to the majority of their disparate population whilst simultaneously inculcating loyalty to their rule.

Significantly, these discourses continued into the reigns of Hafez and Hussein's sons: Syria and Jordan's new rulers who grew up after the age of Old Arabism. Hussein died in 1999 to be succeeded by his son, King Abdullah II, whilst Hafez died the next year having arranged to be followed by his son, Bashar al-Assad. Both Abdullah and Bashar are of similar age, born in 1962 and 1965 respectively and, unlike their fathers, came of age when their states were less challenged and more established.<sup>150</sup> Though each has his own priorities and ideology, it is again remarkable how similar the new regimes prove on closer examination: both, for example, continue what Lisa Wedeen calls a 'second generation' leadership cult – surprisingly Abdullah even more than Bashar.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, both have struggled but eventually succeeded in stamping their own authority on the state. Finally, both draw heavily on the discourse established by their fathers. The succession of the sons has largely led to the continuation of the nationalist discourse and hence we see a continuation of state and identity-building efforts over a period of more than forty years. In the Arab world where coups, revolutions, civil wars and invasions have been commonplace, finding two states that have experienced prolonged stability to compare is difficult.

Syria and Jordan therefore prove a useful comparison for both their similarities and their differences. When considering how Arab identity is maintained across the Arab world it is helpful to consider two

---

<sup>147</sup> Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 339-340.

<sup>148</sup> Sadowski, 'Political Identity in Syria,' p. 139.

<sup>149</sup> Ghada Hashem Talhami, 'Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism and the Military' *Middle East Policy* 8:4 (2001), pp. 110-127; Mordechai Kedar, 'In Search of Legitimacy: Assad's Islamic Image in the Syrian Official Press,' in Moeshe Ma'oz, Joseph Ginat and Onn Winckler (eds.), *Modern Syria: From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East* (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 17-33.

<sup>150</sup> Randa Habib, *Hussein and Abdullah* (London: Saqi, 2010), p. 211.

<sup>151</sup> Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 28.



states which are ideologically and structurally diametrically opposed: one a traditionally socialist anti-western secular republic, the other a pro-West, capitalist Islamic monarchy. As this thesis proceeds to show how, despite these differing ideological views, the two states have dealt with the problem of identity construction using remarkably similar tools, methods and, ultimately, results, it proves useful to draw wider conclusions about Arab identity in the Arab world in general. Though one should be wary of drawing too broad conclusions from just two case studies, by showing a certain identity-formation process in ideologically different Syria and Jordan, it is not much of a stretch to suggest that one might find similar phenomena in other Arab states – whatever the ideology and structure of the regime.

### 1.2.2 State building in Syria and Jordan

The 1970s, when both Hussein and Hafez consolidated their rule in Jordan and Syria, coincided with a broader reinforcement of the state in the wider Arab world. Funded by increased capital from the Gulf oil boom and prompted, at least partly, by the simultaneous discrediting of Old Arabism following 1967, moves by rulers in Syria and Jordan to expand state infrastructure, bureaucracy, education and the armed forces was typical of a trend seen across the region.<sup>152</sup> Following decades of uncertainty, as early as 1988 I. William Zartman heralded this perceived stability as, “not simply an artificial vision,” but a genuine reconciliation between the Arab world and the Westphalian state system.<sup>153</sup> As discussed above, the smooth transitions of power from Hussein to Abdullah in Jordan and from Hafez to Bashar in Syria extended that stability into the present day, prompting more commentators to reflect that perhaps the state, seen for so long as artificial and uncertain, might be more entrenched than first thought.<sup>154</sup> Yet what is the significance of this durability to the development of national identity? Are we to assume, as Brian Barry has suggested, that, “the sheer survival of the state over a long period of time tends to bring a sense of common nationality among those within its territory?”<sup>155</sup> Are the Syrian and Jordanian states accepted by their populations? Are these states strong enough to survive without the coercive regimes that rule over them?

Ayubi has argued that the dictatorial nature of the Jordanian and Syrian regimes undermines any potential for the states to translate longevity into acceptance. He says,

---

<sup>152</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 355-395.

<sup>153</sup> I. William Zartman, ‘Introduction,’ in Adeed Dawisha and I. William Zartman (eds.), *Beyond coercion: the durability of the Arab state* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 5; James G. Mellon, ‘Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism and Inter-State Relations in the Arab World’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (Winter 2002), p. 11.

<sup>154</sup> Humphreys, *Memory and Desire*, p. xv.

<sup>155</sup> Brian Barry, ‘Statism and nationalism: a cosmopolitan critique,’ *Global Justice* (1999), p. 259.

“...although most Arab states are ‘hard’ states, and indeed many of them are ‘fierce’ states, few of them are really ‘strong’ states. Although they have large bureaucracies, mighty armies and harsh prisons, they are lamentably feeble when it comes to collecting taxes, winning wars and forging a really ‘hegemonic’ power block that can carry the state beyond the coercive and ‘cooperative’ level and into the moral and intellectual sphere.”<sup>156</sup>

This view is questioned by Bernard Lewis who argues the very survival of the state shows its strength.<sup>157</sup> A more balanced approach is taken by Hinnebusch who considers the state-building measures of the 1970s/80s to have partly consolidated the Arab states. Contrary to Ayubi, who emphasises the inability of governments to win wars as one of their ‘weak’ characteristics, Hinnebusch argues that the ability for regimes to survive wars, defeats and internal crises shows how entrenched they are.<sup>158</sup> Hafez Assad’s survival after defeats to Israel in 1973, in Lebanon in 1982 and the Muslim Brotherhood revolt in 1979-82, along with Hussein’s successful recovery from defeat in 1967, civil war in 1970 and civil unrest in 1988 shows a greater fortitude than their predecessors who were deposed or killed following similar crises. Yet at the same time, Hinnebusch steps back from Lewis’ certainty of the power of the state highlighting that the impact of globalisation in the late 1990s and 2000s, the information and communication revolution, could potentially undermine the coercive units established by the Arab state.<sup>159</sup>

Whilst Hinnebusch’s approach seems the more sensible, and indeed the breaking of the state’s information monopoly in the 1990s presents a challenge which will be discussed in this thesis, he shares Lewis and Ayubi’s habit of conflating the ‘state’ with the ‘regime’.<sup>160</sup> As Zartman wrote in 1988, “There is also a distinction to be made between regime and state. Governments and regimes are the groups of people who run the state at a given time.”<sup>161</sup> In fact, most social scientists would further separate ‘regime’ and ‘government’: the former being the system of government, such as the *authoritarian regimes* of Syria and Jordan, whilst the latter is the collection of individuals running the administration of the day. Whilst Abdullah and Bashar have maintained the authoritarian ‘regimes’ established by their fathers, and might be seen as a continuation of ‘government’, the Syrian and Jordanian ‘states’ have outlived all of their rulers. Though Hinnebusch and Ayubi both refer at different times to the regimes and the state, it appears that their opinions on the strength, weakness or partial consolidation of the state are essentially directed at the governments. Obviously the close relationship

---

<sup>156</sup> Ayubi, *Overstating*, p. xi.

<sup>157</sup> Lewis, *Multiple identities*, p. 104.

<sup>158</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 76.

<sup>159</sup> Hinnebusch, *International Politics*, p. 89.

<sup>160</sup> See chapters 4 and 5; also Abu-Lughod, Lila, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Salamandra, Christa, ‘Syrian Television Makers between Secularism and Islamization,’ in Kai Hafez ed., *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> Zartman, ‘Introduction,’ p. 5.

between the state and government make any kind of separation challenging, but it is still needed. This thesis concerns the reproduction of and identification with the state, rather than an attachment to the authoritarian regime or the Hashemite or Ba'athist governments. It examines how Syrians and Jordanians are asked daily to accept the *idea* of being Syrian or Jordanian even though much of this asks them simultaneously to accept the *rule* of the Assads or the Hashemites. It is possible for the regime to remain coercive and the government illegitimate in the eyes of the population whilst the existence of the state can be accepted. Therefore, our analysis of identity and state building in Syria and Jordan should not be focused on how much the authoritarian regime and its government of the day has been carried, “beyond the coercive and ‘cooperative’ level and into the moral and intellectual sphere,” but how much an acceptance of a state identity permeates everyday life.

However, as Hinnebusch comments, it is one thing to materially consolidate the state, another to construct an identity around it.<sup>162</sup> A second debate amongst scholars beyond the strength of the state is how deeply felt national identity actually is in the Arab world. Hinnebusch sees an incongruence between the relative material consolidation of the state and the shallowness of popular identification with it. He sees state identity as comparatively ‘thin’, something seemingly supported by the 35% who identified primarily with their state in the 2006 Telhami poll. Moshe Mo’az who argued that the 1982 Hama Muslim Brotherhood revolt in Syria illustrated that no cohesive national community had been built supports this notion.<sup>163</sup> However, both Hinnebusch and Mo’az seem to rely on the ‘either/or’ approach that Telhami and Barnett convincingly suggest is inappropriate for national identity in the Arab world.<sup>164</sup> The interviews conducted for this thesis, discussed in chapter six, suggest that whilst a majority of respondents may not feel loyalty to their state identity first, most do still identify with the state in some capacity.<sup>165</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood rebels may therefore have felt more Muslim than Syrian, but it is likely that they felt Syrian as well. Similarly, even if some Syrians or Jordanians have only a ‘thin’ identification with the state, it is identification nevertheless.<sup>166</sup> As Sivan has stated, the unwillingness of any Kuwaitis to cooperate with Saddam’s Iraq following invasion in 1990 shows that artificial states can still generate loyalty.<sup>167</sup> It is hard to imagine contemporary Syrians or Jordanians not taking an equally defensive and nationalist stance were one to invade the other today. Therefore just

---

<sup>162</sup> Hinnebusch, ‘The politics of identity,’ p. 156.

<sup>163</sup> Moshe Ma’oz, *Assad: Sphinx of Damascus* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988), p. 193.

<sup>164</sup> Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, 19; Fred H. Lawson, *Constructing International Relations in the Arab world* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 142-3.

<sup>165</sup> 4 Jordanians did not feel a sense of Jordanian identity. All were of Palestinian origin, itself a constructed state identity. See chapter 6.

<sup>166</sup> This is an argument made by Eric Davis about Iraq as well: “Contrary to views in the West, Iraqis are strongly committed to the Iraqi nation-state. The problem is not whether there should be an Iraqi nation-state, but rather the type of political community upon which it should rest.” See Davis, *Memories of State*, p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Arab Nationalism in the Age of Islamic Resurgence’, in Jankowski & Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 208.

because the regime that controls the state is weak and coercive, that does not mean one should dismiss the strength of state identity amongst Syrians and Jordanians. If we accept that identities in the Middle East are multi-layered, the successful dissemination of a state identity as one of these layers deserves closer investigation.

### 1.2.3 Nation building in Syria and Jordan

Having argued that Old Arabism failed, that new Arabism is a supra-nationalism rather than nationalism, and that the existence of the state has become normalised in Syria and Jordan, it would seem logical to conclude that a specific state-based Syrian and Jordanian nationalism has consequently emerged. A quick discussion of the various theories concerning nation building demonstrates that the conditions have existed for the top-down post-colonial construction of a national identity in Syria and Jordan, similar to the process seen in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, described by Eugene Weber in *Peasants into Frenchmen*.<sup>168</sup>

Theorists are divided into two paradigms on the ability of governments to construct national identity: *ethno-symbolists* and *modernists*. For *ethno-symbolists* such as Anthony Smith, the persistent importance to people of earlier myths, symbols, values and memories that pre-date the creation of the state undermine attempts to create an identity around an artificial entity like Syria or Jordan.<sup>169</sup> At first glance, the results of the 2006 Telhami survey makes Smith's hypothesis sound convincing. The survey shows supra-state ties of Islam and Arab identity were still widely felt as primary identities, suggesting older identities couldn't be displaced by state and identity-building efforts. However, as discussed by James Gelvin, Arab identity was actually not primordial but itself constructed by elites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The continued presence of Islamic and Arab identity actually partly reflects the official state discourse which promotes and reproduces those ties. Alternatively, the perceived persistence of tribal identities might also support Smith's theory. However, as Sadowski and Batatu have shown in Syria and Layne in Jordan, tribal ties are gradually eroding with the increased urbanisation of both states, and is retained only by a rural minority.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, in the case of Jordan, the official discourse actually promotes tribalism, which would counter suggestions of its resistance to integration. As with Weber's *Frenchmen*, what is seen in Jordan and Syria is an identity discourse emanating from the core of the major cities and extending its reach in the 1970s and 80s. The few instances of the identity not

---

<sup>168</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernisation of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. xi-xv.

<sup>169</sup> Anthony D. Smith, 'Opening statement: nations and their pasts', *Nations and nationalism* 2:3 (1996), pp. 358-65.

<sup>170</sup> Linda L. Layne, *Home and Homeland: the dialogics of tribal and national identities in Jordan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 10; Sadowski, 'Political Identity in Syria,' p. 144; Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the descendents of its lesser rural notables, and their politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 217.

disseminating seem to be on the periphery, such as the rural desert regions. Yet this serves to further doubt the *ethno-symbolists* as it is the absence of the state rather than the strength of older identities which is obstructing their integration.

There are, however, some instances where non-state identities remain strong, notably the Kurds in Syria and some Palestinians in Jordan. Yet these groups have rejected the discourse for reasons other than the ethnic persistence of their identity. For Kurds, there has been no attempt to absorb them into the Syrian discourse. They have been deliberately discriminated against as non-Arab and, as non-Arab speakers, excluded from the discourse. For some of Jordan's Palestinians, a powerful Palestinian discourse remains in refugee camps, schools and the media that at times counters the Jordanian.<sup>171</sup> Yet these discourses themselves are modern creations – often reactions against homogenisation attempts rather than existing beforehand. The pre-modern *ethno-symbolist* explanation of nation-building failure is therefore unconvincing in Jordan and Syria.

In contrast, *modernists* such as Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm have argued convincingly that all nations are in fact, 'imagined' or 'invented' and, whilst some may need more imagining than others, it is certainly possible for primordial ties to be outstripped by newly 'invented' ties to the nation.<sup>172</sup> The *modernist* approach is more complex than the *ethno-symbolist*. Whilst all agree that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, and most share Ernst Gellner's assertion that it is the ruling and intellectual elites who promote a proto-national identity into a fully fledged mass nationalism, theorists are divided on how this promotion takes place. The choice of ambiguous words such as 'imagined', 'invented' or 'reconstituted' is deliberate: few suggest that nations are simply 'created'.<sup>173</sup> Motyl suggests both 'invention' (Hobsbawm) and 'imagination' (Anderson) presupposes the existence of pre-existing building blocs – we cannot create *ex nihilo*.<sup>174</sup> Similarly Nairn and Miller suggest that a nation's present is constrained by its past, that things are handed down, not started from scratch. Breuilly similarly states that the ability for a state to change identity is limited by pre-existing beliefs.<sup>175</sup> In contrast Hechter argues that states actively promote new traditions such as national anthems, flags and monuments that, whilst seeming ancient, are in fact recent creations.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>172</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing traditions,' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 1.

<sup>173</sup> Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates*, p. 45.

<sup>174</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, *Revolutions, Nations, Empires: conceptual Limits and Theoretical Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 70.

<sup>175</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 277.

<sup>176</sup> Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 64.

The Syrian and Jordanian experience of identity building, certainly since 1970, in different ways support both Nairn and Hechter's assertions. They were restricted by the past which, as Ozkirimli states, they could not simply make up.<sup>177</sup> Yet at the same time, they inherited completely new states with no history as an integral unit. On the one hand, this precipitated the creation of new symbols, rituals, flags and anthems as Hechter suggests. Yet at the same time, as shall be discussed in chapter 3, many of these symbols drew on interpretations of the pre-modern past. In this sense they share with European nationalists who Tamir states cling, "even to the faintest evidence of historical continuity...in order to prove their antiquity and assert that the emergence of their nation was a matter of historical necessity."<sup>178</sup> As shall be discussed, many of these pre-modern symbols are used to promote supra-national Arabism, yet almost always in the service of the state: *national Arabism*.

This thesis will suggest that both Syria and Jordan are carving out increasingly distinctive state identities and disseminating them to their populations. In Jordan this has been a deliberate exercise, whilst in Syria it has been the by-product of state consolidation. Yet the discourse built is deliberately ambiguous and multi-faceted involving state, Arab and, at times, religious identity.

#### 1.2.4 Arabism in Syria and Jordan

If the era of Old Arabism is long gone, and the populations of various Arab countries, Syria and Jordan included, have increasingly come to expect a nationalism based around the state, a key question is why do these governments deliberately reproduce a layer of Arab identity? It would seem illogical for any state to maintain a layer of group identity, Arabism, which does not correspond to its own borders and territory. It is all very well to highlight that the Arabism now pursued serves the national interest, but why not discard Arabism altogether and pursue a solely national agenda? An ethno-symbolist might argue that Arab ethnicity has pre-modern roots and hence any national government is forced to include it in its identity discourse to maintain legitimacy. However, as previously discussed, being Arab is just as modern a creation as being Syrian, Jordanian or Palestinian.<sup>179</sup> Of course, just because it is a modern creation does not mean it can simply be 'un-imagined' when it is politically convenient. Such a process would take years of shifting the discourse a certain way and would have to contend with counter-discourses. In the era of transnational Arab satellite television channels described above, it would be difficult for any Arab leaders to 'de-Arabise' their populace. There is a pragmatic dimension to the continuance of Arabism: it is difficult to put the genie back in the bottle.

---

<sup>177</sup> Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates*, p. 45.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

<sup>179</sup> Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, pp. 225-259.

That said, it is clear from the analysis of Syria and Jordan's identity discourses that follow, there is no visible desire to change the discourse away from supra-national Arabism, even if national identity is given increasing prominence. It is reasonable to suggest that the governments themselves might genuinely feel themselves as Arab. After all, they have all grown up consuming their own national discourses and it would be too cynical to suggest that they deliberately use an identity to which they feel no attachment. However, as Michael Barnett suggests, though one should allow for the possibility that Arabism is genuinely felt, it cannot be ignored that an engagement with Arabism can serve to legitimize a regime.<sup>180</sup>

An instrumental use of Arabism to legitimize the regime is seen in both Syria and Jordan that, as autocratic governments, must seek legitimacy from places other than the ballot box.<sup>181</sup> Lisa Wedeen states that the Syrian regime established by Hafez, and continued by Bashar, bases its legitimacy on the belief that it provides both protection from Israel (and its allies in Washington), and stability from the chaos seen in Syria's neighbours and in Syria itself prior to 1970.<sup>182</sup> These two benefits are used to justify the unpopular features of the regime: the continuation of emergency rule, the harsh security services, lack of democracy, and lengthy military service.<sup>183</sup> For example, the regular crackdowns on members of the opposition are usually justified by their supposed links to either supporting the foreign enemy, or promoting instability.<sup>184</sup> As Bashar himself said in an interview for *Al-Sharq al Awsat* in 2001:

"When the consequences of an action affect the stability of the homeland, there are two possibilities. Either the perpetrator is a foreign agent acting on behalf of an outside power, or else he is a simple person acting unintentionally. But in both cases a service is being done to the country's enemies and consequently both are dealt with in a similar fashion."<sup>185</sup>

In other words, repression can be justified in the name of stability and defence. In this regard, the instability witnessed elsewhere in the region in recent years actually serves to boost the official narrative: civil wars and sectarianism in Lebanon and Iraq serve to highlight the stability of Syria, whilst Israel's invasions of the West Bank (2002), Lebanon (2006) and Gaza (2008/9) emphasize the threat from Tel Aviv. This is when Arabism is valuable to the regime. Though none of these conflicts actually occurred on Syrian soil nor cost Syrian lives, if Syrians feel an affinity to Palestinians, Lebanese and Iraqis when they are attacked by the enemy, it makes the sense of threat and fear far

---

<sup>180</sup> Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, p. 11.

<sup>181</sup> Eyal Zisser, *Assad's legacy: Syria in Transition* (London: Hurst & Co., 2001), p. 22.

<sup>182</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 7.

<sup>183</sup> Carsten Wieland, *Syria at Bay: Secularism, Islamism, and "Pax Americana"* (London: Hurst & Co., 2005), pp. 22-26.

<sup>184</sup> Alan George, *Syria: Neither bread nor freedom* (London: Zed, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

greater than if there is no sense of solidarity. The same goes for instability. The regime is keen to highlight how unstable post-Saddam Iraq and sectarian Lebanon are, both of which have similar ethnic mixes to Syria. This message clearly has more resonance if Syrians identify with Iraqis and Lebanese, and can see their own communities in the blood-lined streets of Baghdad and Beirut.

The Jordanian regime also finds it useful to promote Arab identity, though framed slightly differently from Syria. Jordan, with its peace treaty with Israel and alliance with the US clearly does not find it valuable to emphasize shared suffering between its citizens and those of Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. When it does react to such events, which it invariably has to, the emphasis is similarly on the instability factor, rather than the enemy involved, which is the Hashemite's friend. Whilst in Syria autocracy is justified by external factors, in Jordan repression is judged on a scale of comparison with other Arab states. Jordan promotes itself as less oppressive than other Arab regimes. As one human rights activists states, the regular excuse is, "...we have a heavy-handed, security-orientated political system that is both non-democratic and anti-democratic at the same time but, well, it's less bloody than Syria or Iraq."<sup>186</sup> This narrative is far easier to justify if the Jordanian population identify and compete primarily with Arab states, all of which are dictatorial or greatly unstable. Jordanians are not encouraged to look at democratic Israel or Turkey as alternative forms of government, but instead to authoritarian Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, against which their lot does not seem so bad.

However, just because there are instrumental and practical reasons why Arab regimes continue to sustain and reproduce Arab identity long after the age of Old Arabism, it should not be assumed that this is totally disingenuous. Sustaining a layer of Arab identity may serve to support authoritarian government in this case, but the two are not contingent. Many non-Arab dictatorships exist which find other means to justify and legitimise their rule. Similarly, were Syria and Jordan to transform into pluralist democracies tomorrow, it is unlikely Arab identity would suddenly ebb away. Syrian and Jordanian opposition figures regularly included Arab terminology in their statements.<sup>187</sup> When Saddam fell in Iraq there was uproar from Iraqis when the new administration attempted to change the Iraqi flag away from the traditional Arab colours of red, black, green and white.<sup>188</sup> Supra-national Arab identity seems to have been reproduced for so long that it is now embedded as a pillar of national identity. It seems sustained in a cycle that may seem illogical to the Western world, but is habitually refreshed and unquestioned in the Arab world. Sustaining Arab identity benefits the regimes too much for them to actively seek to 'de-Arabise' the discourse. At the same time, it has reached such self-sustainability that it is debatable whether any leader would be able to do so.

---

<sup>186</sup> George, *Jordan*, p. 61.

<sup>187</sup> George, *Syria*, p. 53; Assaf David, 'The revolt of Jordan's military Veterans,' *Foreign Policy*, 16 June 2010.

<sup>188</sup> 'Burning with anger: Iraqis infuriated by new flag that was designed in London,' *The Independent*, 28 April 2004.



### 1.3 Everyday Arabism: Theory and Methodology

The reproduction of identity in an everyday manner is a relatively new scholarly approach to the study of nationalism and one that has not yet been applied to the Arab world nor, specifically, Syria and Jordan. The Arab world in general has been neglected by theorists of nationalism and, in turn, many scholars of nationalism and identity in the Middle East have limited their use of theory.<sup>189</sup> As seen above, this study employs some key theories of nationalism such as the works of Smith, Hobsbawm, Anderson and Breuilly. However, the principal theoretical contribution will be specifically in the area of everyday nationalism, focussing on Michael Billig's notion of *Banal nationalism*. This thesis' will adapt and critique Billig before applying it to the case of Syria and Jordan to suggest that the resonance of Arabism alongside *wataniyya* state nationalism is the result of a daily reproduction of identity in the nationalist discourse populations interact with.

#### 1.3.1 Nationalism as discourse

What is meant by the 'discourse of nationalism'? Umut Ozkirimli provides a useful typology and definition.<sup>190</sup> He argues that nationalism can be distinguished from other political and non-nationalist discourses because of the presence of the combination of four overlapping dimensions: the spatial, the temporal, the symbolic and the everyday. The spatial dimension is the linking of territory to the nation and is what distinguishes the modern nation-state from older forms of collective social life and governance. The temporal dimension links the nation with the past and projects a collective future. The symbolic, "provides an alphabet for a collective consciousness or national subjectivity," through its use of symbols, icons and invented traditions.<sup>191</sup> The everyday dimension links everyday behaviour to an unnoticed reproduction of the nation. A difficult issue in Syria and Jordan is that populations essentially interact with three discourses that overlap, the *wataniyya* of the official state discourse, the New Arabism of satellite television, and that of their religion. Each of these has a spatial, temporal, symbolic and everyday component. Syrians and Jordanians are fully aware of both the spatial territory of their countries and the states that make up the Arab world. They similarly have a very defined temporal concept of their state and Arab identities: the former created by the colonial powers, celebrated annually on independence days, the latter promoted as primordial. As chapter three will show, the symbolism of both regimes draws on *wataniyya*, Arabism and religion at times, and even in everyday practices, such as watching television, these identities are reproduced. However, under the careful preparation of the Syrian and Jordanian regimes, these discourses do more than overlap: they are synonymous. Though the

---

<sup>189</sup> Jankowski and Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. xiii.

<sup>190</sup> Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates*, pp. 179-194.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

emphasis differs between Syria and Jordan, both official discourses contain a *wataniyya* and an Arabist discourse at the same time, and often an Islamic dimension as well.

Of particular interest to this thesis is how these identities interact and disseminate in the latter two of Ozkirmili's dimensions: the symbolic and the everyday. When considering post-colonial states such as Syria and Jordan, the temporal and spatial elements of the discourse are effectively fixed. This is not to say that the temporal and spatial are unimportant, but they will be discussed in the context of their appearance in the symbolic and everyday dimensions of the discourse rather than separately. The symbolic and the everyday dimension of a nationalist discourse is what Michael Billig has called the 'waved' and 'unwaved' national flag.<sup>192</sup> In his 1995 book, *Banal Nationalism* Billig sees the reproduction of nations in the West taking two forms: conscious, overt flag waving such as 4<sup>th</sup> July Parades in the USA, and banal, un-waved flags that hang unnoticed in petrol stations and outside houses. It is the noticed and unnoticed 'flagging' of Arab and state identity in Syria and Jordan that form the central investigation of this study.

Michael Billig stretches the term 'nationalism' to cover the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced. He devises the term 'banal nationalism', "to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced," suggesting that, "daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged' in the lives of its citizenry."<sup>193</sup> He sees the institutions of the state as essential in this 'flagging' and particularly focuses on the print media: conducting a discourse and content analysis of British newspapers to show how they reproduce the nation daily. Chapter two will give a greater theoretical explanation for the use and necessary adaptation of Billig's theory and methodology in this study, but broadly speaking this thesis will address four aspects of his analysis. Firstly, Billig's emphasis on only national rather than other group identities being banally reproduced will be considered. Secondly, his narrow focus on what he terms the Western 'established' nations will be challenged. Thirdly, Billig's linking of banal nationalism to democratic political systems will be discussed, as will his related rejection of the role of 'hot' nationalism in reproducing the nation alongside the 'banal'.

Finally, as important as theoretically adapting and challenging Billig will be altering his methodology. This thesis moves beyond Billig's subject for analysis in several ways. Firstly, it stretches Billig's focus on the institution of the media to look instead at public mediations in general. Whilst *Banal Nationalism* looked at the print media in Britain, this investigation finds that national television is more accessible in

---

<sup>192</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 40.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the semi-literate societies of the Arab world. Secondly, it includes a discussion of the more 'overt' or 'hot' mediation of the imagery of leaders' cults and the political speeches they make, suggesting that for the majority of Syrians and Jordanians, these symbols flag their identities in as banal and unnoticed a manner as the un-waved stars and stripes in America. Thirdly, due to the unique popularity of transnational media in the Arab world, this study widens Billig's net to include a discourse and content analysis of satellite television, a potential rival to the government controlled mediations discussed above. Finally, in a complete departure from Billig, this investigations tests the effectiveness of these mediations in flagging and reproducing identities by conducting ethnographic interviews with 'everyday' Syrians and Jordanians, challenging Billig's assumption that what is in the media is unquestioningly absorbed by its audience.

### 1.3.2 Methodology and Case Studies

#### *Methodology*

This thesis proposes that the variety of discourse analysis developed by Michael Billig is the most appropriate methodology for explaining the place of Arabism in contemporary Jordan and Syria. It also suggests that ethnographic interviewing can be added to this methodology to provide a fuller picture of how well identity is disseminated. 'Identity' in the Middle East is not a subject easily investigated and there have been different methodological approaches, some of which have already been mentioned. Recent studies of Arab identity have included quantitative surveys (Telhami 1999, Pintak 2009), ethnography (Raban 1979, Yamani 2000), historical (Walt 1987, Barnett 1998), anecdotal (Kassir 2006, Maalouf 1996), and content analysis (Rinnawi 2006, Lynch 2006).<sup>194</sup> All methods have their value and each investigation contributes to a valuable body of work on the issue of Arab identity. However, the combined discourse and content analysis and ethnographic approach of this thesis is the most appropriate methodology with which to assess everyday nationalism and addresses some of the issues left unanswered by previous authors on the subject.

Writers such as Lawrence Pintak and Shibley Telhami who approach Arab identity from a quantitative perspective provide valuable statistics for broad claims about identity in the Middle East.<sup>195</sup> The surveys they conduct, which ask sizeable samples in different Arab states how they feel about certain identities and issues offer an interesting over-view for investigations into Arabism. However,

---

<sup>194</sup> For titles thus far un-cited in this work see Jonathan Raban, *Arabia through the looking glass* (London: William Collins 1979); Mai Yamani, *Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000); Samir Kassir, *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2006); Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity* (New York: Arcade, 2001 [1996]).

<sup>195</sup> Shibley Telhami conducts a survey every year with Zogby International entitled 'Arab Public Opinion Poll'. For 2010 edition see ([http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805\\_arab\\_opinion\\_poll\\_telhami.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805_arab_opinion_poll_telhami.aspx) - accessed 13/8/10).

investigators of nationalism, such as this thesis, are rightly sceptical of the ability for survey data to explain the complexity of identity. Telhami's polls, for example, ask respondents each year to list their identities as 'Arab', 'Muslim' or 'State' - a question repeated in the interviews of this thesis, discussed in chapter six. However, unlike in this study, by not following up this question with qualitative interviewing Telhami is unable to convey the situational nature of identity and its ability to change according to circumstances. Not surprisingly, Telhami's surveys have shown great diversity in the past decade, with the role of 'Arab', 'Muslim' and 'State' identities varying in priority from year to year.<sup>196</sup> Without qualitative methodology it is difficult to explain why it is that a certain identity remains persistent or, conversely, diminishes in importance.

The use of qualitative research has been more broadly used when discussing identity, though few have focused on everyday discourses. Samir Kassir's discussion on *Being Arab* is an insightful investigation but seems designed to make a political case that is largely anecdotal and lacks either theoretical or methodological rigour. Those qualitative works that have discussed Arab identity in conjunction with theory, albeit limited, have tended to focus on a form of content analysis. Marc Lynch's *New Arab Public* and Khalil Rinnawi's *Instant Nationalism*, both commendably combine qualitative interviews with content analysis of *Al-Jazeera*, which they regard as the lynchpin of New Arabism. This thesis builds upon a similar methodological approach but suggests that Lynch and Rinnawi both limit the scope of the content they analyse. Lynch focuses specifically on one issue, Iraq, and the Arab media's coverage of it to illustrate his 'new Arab public'.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, Rinnawi looks at *Al-Jazeera*'s content before and after 9/11.<sup>198</sup> Both focus on occasions that are highly politically charged and, not surprisingly, suggest *Al-Jazeera* draws on Arab solidarity in these moments. Yet by failing to consider *Al-Jazeera*'s discourse at less urgent times, what Billig calls the 'in-between times', not just in terms of news stories but in non-political items such as the weather or sport, they show only that Arab identity is used at times of crisis, not how it is reproduced daily. Similarly, by looking only at news channels they fail to consider the impact of far more popular apolitical content such as drama serials and reality TV. Furthermore, by excluding the discourse of state media from their analysis they only get half of the

---

<sup>196</sup> When asked, 'which is your most important identity?' those saying 'Arab' were 14% in 2004, 20% in 2006, 20% in 2008 and 25% in 2010; those saying 'State' were 41% in 2004, 29% in 2006, 39% in 2008 and 32% in 2010; those saying 'Muslim' were 24% in 2004, 45% in 2006, 36% in 2008 and 39% in 2010. The results are shown to fluctuate considerably each year suggesting how situational and unfixed the multiple layers of identity are. Interestingly each year when asked 'What is your most important secondary identity?' 'Arab' proved most popular. For 2004 and 2006 results see Shibley Telhami, '2006 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,' *Brookings Institute* (<http://www.brookings.edu/views/speeches/telhami20070208.pdf> - accessed 13/8/10), For 2008 and 2010 results see Shibley Telhami, '2010 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,' *Brookings Institute* ([http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805\\_arab\\_opinion\\_poll\\_telhami.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805_arab_opinion_poll_telhami.aspx) - accessed 13/8/10).

<sup>197</sup> Lynch, *New Arab public*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>198</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 108.

picture.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, it is this limited methodological approach that results in authors such as Rinnawi falsely asserting that Arab media and its New Arabism is a challenge to the identity discourses of Arab states.<sup>200</sup> If they were to analyse both discourses, the states and the pan-Arab media, as this study does, it would be seen that actually the two are complementary, with Arabism deliberately reproduced but clearly a subordinate supra-nationalism to state nationalism.

Finally, this study proposes that, in addition to discourse analysis, whilst lacking in scientific rigour, ethnographic interviews help to add flavour and depth to any explanation of how identity is reproduced daily. As John Breuilly comments, it is very difficult to assess how successful attempts at nation building are.<sup>201</sup> Consequently, most theorists bypass this issue and tend to look at public displays of national sentiment, usually in extreme circumstances. The proliferation of public demonstrations such as riots, marches or protests have been employed by historians to assess national sentiment. Similarly, the collapse of states after wars, conflict or invasion is used to illustrate its absence. No such method seems appropriate to gauge nationalist sentiment in the everyday since these incidents are, by definition, abnormal. A more appropriate method, rarely employed by theorists, is to interview citizens about their everyday attitudes. Whilst quantitative surveying would provide more detailed data and produce a more verifiable sample, as discussed, much is lost in the inability for respondents to explain their answers. Ethnographic interviewing, in contrast, whilst offering a smaller sample, provides the explanation necessary. Some excellent work on identity in the Middle East has an ethnographic dimension, such as Mai Yamani's work on identity in Saudi Arabia, or Alex Klaushofer's investigation of sectarianism in Lebanon.<sup>202</sup> Sadly much ethnographic work, though detailed, lacks empirical and theoretical depth. This thesis aims to avoid this by combining ethnographic detail with nationalism theory and a thorough empirical discourse analysis.

### *Case Studies*

This investigation will use case studies to demonstrate how public mediations promote and reproduce this multi-layered identity. Choosing which sample to analyse is challenging. Why, for example, should only Arab and State identities be considered rather than the other layers discussed above: tribe, city,

---

<sup>199</sup> Rinnawi conducts an experiment in which he records 8 newscasts on three different channels, *Al-Jazeera*, *Jordan TV* and *CNN* from 15 July 2001 to 8 October 2001 - either side of 9/11. He compares the pan-Arab content of *Al-Jazeera* and *Jordan TV* demonstrating that whilst 67% of *Al-Jazeera's* content is pan-Arab, only 24% of *Jordan's* is, whilst 57% of its news items are locally focussed. From this he concludes that *Al-Jazeera* is undermining the discourse of the Jordan state by providing an alternative pan-Arab lens. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, Rinnawi mistakes content for discourse. Whilst *Al-Jazeera* may be more pan-Arab than *Jordan TV* that does not make *Jordan TV* 'un-Arab'. In fact the special section given to 'Arab news' after 'Jordan news' suggests that *al-Jazeera's* message is not so radically different. See Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, pp. 108-125.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>201</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, pp. 277.

<sup>202</sup> Yamani, *Changed Identities*; Alex Klaushofer, *Paradise Divided: A Portrait of Lebanon* (London: Signal, 2007).

family and, most obviously, religion? Similarly why choose leadership cults, leaders speeches and television as public mediations rather than newspapers, the radio or popular culture? Why choose mediations at all rather than other wide-ranging state institutions such as the education system or the army? Furthermore, why focus on the pan-Arab transnational satellite television as a challenger to the official discourse? Why not other mediations that undermine the official discourse like international Islamist cassette tapes, or Kurdish (in Syria) and Palestinian (in Jordan) newspapers?

Focussing on Arab and State identities rather than the other tribal, city, family and religious layers of identity in Syria and Jordan stems from this being a study of nationalism in the Middle East. Though tribal, city and family identities are important and strongly felt they are not even proto-national identities. Using Ozkirmili's discourse typology, whilst they might contain aspects of spatial, temporal, symbolic and everyday dimensions, none employ all four combined. Similarly, though religion is a very strongly felt identity in the Arab world, can it be considered nationalism? Whilst this is a discussion that has aroused much debate amongst scholars, notably the potential of Islam to offer a rival to the nation, religion too fails to conform to Ozkirmili's typology. The two dominant religions in the Arab world, Islam and Christianity are both proselytising faiths meaning that the spatial dimension of their discourse is theoretically continually open to fluctuation. Whilst they do contain a temporal, symbolic and everyday dimension, the ambiguity of fixed territory distinguishes these religious faiths from nations. Indeed, the fact that in Syria and Jordan, several faiths share the same territory emphasises this incongruity between religion and territory. Admittedly, in recent years Islamists have been more vocal about the concept of a core 'Islamic' territory, such as Osama Bin Laden's assertion that the Arabian peninsula should not house non-Muslims.<sup>203</sup> However, rather than this representing Islam's shift from a religion into a nationalism, it instead suggests certain groups using Islam to assert nationalist goals. The importance of territory to Islamists such as Hezbollah and Hamas suggests these groups are nationalists not religious universalists.<sup>204</sup> Whilst some Islamists have challenged both *wataniyya* and Arabism in the past, they have either been rhetorically universalists and hence not nationalists, or rhetorically state-focused and hence simply favouring religious *wataniyya*. Whilst Islam informs the discourse in Syria and Jordan it is not, therefore, nationalism. Arabism and *wataniyya* therefore represent the only two potential national discourses in Syria and Jordan and thus an analysis of nationalism in these countries should focus primarily on these two discourses.<sup>205</sup> Indeed, the analysis of these discourse will help to demonstrate that Arabism is no longer a nationalism but a supra-nationalism.

---

<sup>203</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs*, p. 448.

<sup>204</sup> Frederick Barth, 'Are Islamists nationalists or internationalists?' in Kjell Goldmann et al (eds.), *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Post-Cold War Era*, (London: Routledge, 2000); Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: the changing face of terrorism* (London: IB Tauris, 2005), pp. 48-52; Sami Zubaida, 'Islam and nationalism: continuities and contradictions', *Nations and nationalism* 10:4 (2004), pp. 407-420.

<sup>205</sup> The exception to this is rival sub-nationalisms, notably Kurdish separatism in Syria. This is discussed in Chapter 3.

The official discourse of both Syria and Jordan draws regularly on both State and Arab identity, but how best to demonstrate this? As several nationalist theorists, Billig included, have illustrated, state institutions provide ruling elites with the capacity to, “project a particular national image to most of its subjects.”<sup>206</sup> So why choose public mediations over other institutions such as the armed forces or the education system? Whilst a study of such institutions, as has been attempted by Suleiman for example, would be a worthy and valuable addition to this study, the main reasons why mediations were preferred is one of maximum accessibility.<sup>207</sup> The education process in both Syria and Jordan is designed to cater for citizens in childhood and, for the few who attend university, early adulthood. Similarly military service in each state is between 1-2 years only. It is fair to suggest that it is in these institutions that the discourse is built and promoted from an early age. However, the majority of citizens are not in either the armed forces or the education system. It is not possible to use an analysis of these institutions to explain what discourse a middle-aged man or woman is regularly exposed to as they would not have attended either for several decades. Public mediations, on the other hand, are designed for all of society and every stage of life. Whilst they may not have an impact or resonate as much as leaders would hope, they still provide the analyst with the most visible display of official discourse present.

Within those mediations, why focus on the imagery of leadership cults, leaders speeches and television rather than other mediations such as newspapers and radio? Here we need to divide the unit of analysis. The images of the leaders cults and their speeches are perhaps the most overt symbols of the official discourse in either Syria or Jordan. They prove useful in showing clear attempts at discourse and nation building at any one time yet, at the same time, have come to be viewed as banal and unnoticed. Television, on the other hand, is a more banal and unnoticed mediation. In theory this unit could have been substituted by newspapers or radio, though there are several reasons why television was the most suitable. Firstly, unlike in Billig’s analysis of Britain, print media is not widely popular in either Syria or Jordan. Circulation rates are much lower than the UK. Similarly, literacy rates are only 79% and 89% in Syria and Jordan respectively, thereby excluding many from analysis. Both television and radio are widely consumed and theoretically either could have been analysed. What made television the more favourable was that, with the advent of satellite television, citizens now have the choice of non-state run stations, whereas transnational radio stations do not operate. Assessing choice and attitudes towards television stations was therefore considered a useful way of considering the successful dissemination of the official discourse.

---

<sup>206</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 277.

<sup>207</sup> Michael Suleiman, ‘The Role of Education in Domestic and Inter-Arab Integration’ in Luciani and Salame, *The Politics of Arab Integration*, pp. 73-93.

A further question is why transnational satellite television was chosen as the non-state-run mediation to assess how much the official discourse is being challenged or supported. Admittedly there are several alternative mediations to this. Sub-state nationalist media, such as Kurdish literature in Syria or anti-Hashemite pro-Palestinian literature in Jordan, also present a challenge to the official discourse. Yet these mediations are aimed at specific minority groups and cannot be considered a threat to everyone's consumption of the discourse in the way that satellite television can. More widespread might be the affect of religious preaching that could threaten the official discourse. Patrick Gaffney's detailed investigation of *khotbas* (sermons) in Egypt in the 1970s and early 1980s demonstrated how official discourse could be undermined by such mediations.<sup>208</sup> However, in both Syria and Jordan licenses to preach are tightly controlled by the state and most *khotbas* dare not undermine the government. There might be a few on the radical fringe which escape detection but these are not a regular occurrence in mainstream society. In fact, *khotbas* are more affected by the satellite media themselves. As Dr Mohammad Rayyan, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Jordan, stated when interviewed, "The media is vital for setting the agenda in the *khotba*. Often you will find an Imam who sets his *khotba* entirely around what is in the news that day."<sup>209</sup> A more threatening mediation is cassettes or *khotbas* from abroad that advocate a more radical Islamist agenda. However, whilst an investigation of this would be interesting, they do not compete with the widespread access to satellite televisions that Syrians and Jordanians have. Moreover, it is satellite television more than any other mediation that legally and in a manner endorsed by the regimes, everyday strengthens and supports the official identity discourses of the state, and this needs to be demonstrated.

---

<sup>208</sup> Patrick Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>209</sup> Interview with author 19/10/09.



## 1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the three central themes of this thesis. Firstly, it addressed the gap in literature discussing Arabism that has limited its engagement with nationalism theory. The Old Arabism of al-Husri and Nasser with unionist goals was shown to be a failed nationalism, whilst the perceived 'New Arabism' of *al-Jazeera* and satellite media is now best defined as a 'supra-nationalism'. Whilst it is political as well as cultural, it does not seek to politically unify its imagined community. It suggested that whilst the notion of an Arabism that is subordinated to state nationalism is nothing new, the process of dissemination and homogenisation initiated by satellite television is a new phenomena. This development is also significant to the constructivist-realist debate amongst international relations theorists on Arabism as, on the one hand, the growth of satellite television stations provide new norms of supra-nationalism over which states may begin to compete, but on the other hand, Arabism remains instrumental to regimes legitimizing their power.

This issue of why governments continue to reproduce Arab identity forms part of the second theme explored which also considers how state identity interacts with this supra-national Arabism. Syria and Jordan were identified as suitable case studies due to their ideological differences despite facing similar state and nation-building challenges since independence. The fact that such different regimes both found themselves embedding Arabism within their national identity discourses suggests this trend might be replicated across the Arab World. Modernist nationalism theory was utilised to explain how these challenges facilitated the production of a multi-faceted identity discourse with supra-national Arabism a key component. Finally, the theoretical and methodological approach of this thesis was outlined. It was suggested that, given the interest in everyday nationalism that this thesis aspires to investigate, content and discourse analysis in conjunction with ethnographic interviews prove the most suitable method for investigating the public mediations of Syria and Jordan outlined. This then set the background for a more detailed engagement with Michael Billig's *banal nationalism*, the theoretical cornerstone of this thesis, in the following chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Everyday Nationalism in the Arab World

Michael Billig developed a study of the unnoticed reproduction of national identity in Western society that provides the best explanation for the daily reproduction of Arabism and state nationalism in contemporary Syria and Jordan. This chapter will outline, review and critique Billig's *Banal Nationalism* and the studies that followed, before explaining how and why the theory needs to be adapted and expanded to have relevance beyond Billig's limited Western, democratic and national parameters. Billig's 1995 work focused on the everyday reproduction of the nation in Western states. It is critical of the view that, "...in both popular and academic writing, nationalism is associated with those who struggle to create new states or with right-wing politics," rather than 'established' western nations.<sup>210</sup> He believes the Western view of nationalism as something, 'not belonging to us' leads to an overlooking of nationalism in the West. He highlights the out-pouring of national feeling during the 1982 Falklands War in Britain or the 1991 Gulf War in America to emphasise that nationalism in such established Western states is alive and well. Yet he insists that such displays are not simply a 'temporary mood' brought about by the extreme conditions of external conflict. Instead, in the 'in-between times', when these states are not required to outwardly display nationalism, a sense of national identity is sustained every day through an unnoticed banal reproduction in society.

Unlike previous theorists of nationalism, Billig insists on, "stretching the term 'nationalism' so that it covers the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced." To this end, he devises the term 'banal nationalism', "to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced," suggesting that, "daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged' in the lives of its citizenry."<sup>211</sup> According to Billig, the institutions of the state are essential in this 'flagging' and consequent reproduction of the nation. He indicates that politicians' use words such as 'us', 'we', 'they' and 'here', regularly flagging not just the nation but a 'world of nations' to their citizens in a manner that both they and their audience consider 'normal' and even 'natural'.<sup>212</sup> Also important in this reproduction is the style of reporting in the press, and the location of such unnoticed national symbols as the American flag waving on public or private buildings. As Billig states, the essence of banal nationalism is the flag waving unnoticed on the public building, not the flag waving patriot.<sup>213</sup> Importantly for this study, he distinguishes this banal nationalism from the, "overt, articulated and often

---

<sup>210</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 5.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

fiercely expressed nationalism of those who battle to form new nations,” which he later describes as ‘hot’ nationalism.<sup>214</sup>

By employing a discourse analysis of newspaper headlines in Britain on a randomly selected day, Billig illustrates the frequency of banal nationalism. He demonstrates how all newspapers, whatever their political leanings, are presented in a form to reinforce the reader’s sense of belonging to a British nation. He applies the same methodology to the reporting of sport and weather that act to reinforce the reader’s sense of national belonging in a banal, unnoticed manner.<sup>215</sup> At different times he widens his scope to include other western nations, whether the French flag being used to indicate quality on loaves of bread, or the presence of the US flag in every American classroom. Similarly, the vocabulary of the politicians of the day, whether George H Bush or John Major, he argues reinforces the presence of banal nationalism, just as the frequency of religious rhetoric from Saddam Hussein is used to indicate an absence of banal nationalism.<sup>216</sup>

Billig’s impact was substantial. Michael Skey states that, “Billig’s study led the way in marking something of a shift in focus as research began to move away from the more macro-scale theorising on nationalism to more empirical-based studies, that focused on issues of representation, contestation and localised meaning-making as well as more contextualized case studies.” Whilst theoretical debates had mostly focused on the origin of nationalism, Billig highlighted the, “tendency to treat the nation as a given both in everyday life and social theory.”<sup>217</sup> *Banal Nationalism* was intended as, “a preliminary study,” and called for others to follow with more detailed investigations, which to an extent has been seen.<sup>218</sup> The banal nationalism of modern Scotland (Law 2001 & Edensor 2002) has been investigated, as has that of Wales (Jones & Deforges 2003), Catalonia (Crameri 2000), Greece (Tzanelli 2006) and Turkey (Yumul & Ozkirmili 2000).<sup>219</sup> At the same time, Billig’s work has also promoted criticism for some of its assumptions and theoretical conclusions. The presumed homogeneity of the ‘established nations’ that Billig suggests has come under scrutiny (Rosie et al. 2004), as has his dismissal of the

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>217</sup> Skey, Michael, ‘The national in everyday life: A critical engagement with Michael Billig’s thesis of *Banal Nationalism*,’ *Sociological Review* 57:2 (2009), pp. 333-334.

<sup>218</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 9.

<sup>219</sup> A. Law, ‘Near and far: Banal national identity and the press in Scotland.’ *Media, Culture and Society* 23:3 (2001), pp. 299-317; Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); R. Jones & L. Desforges, ‘Localities and the reproduction of Welsh nationalism,’ *Political Geography* 22:3 (March 2003), pp. 271-292.; Crameri, Kathryn, ‘Banal Catalanism?’ *National Identities* 2:2 (2000), pp. 145-157; Rodanthi Tzanelli, ‘Not My Flag!’ Citizenship and nationhood in the margins of Europe (Greece, October 2000/2003),’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29:1 (January 2006), pp. 27-49; Arus Yumul & Umut Ozkirimili, ‘Reproducing the nation: ‘banal nationalism’ in the Turkish press,’ *Media, Culture and Society* 22:6 (2000), pp. 787-804.

reproductive effect of 'hot' nationalism (Hutchinson 2006) and the limited consideration of the impact of globalisation upon nationalism (Skey 2009).<sup>220</sup>

This thesis highlights a similar tendency to treat supra-national Arabism and state nationalism as a given in the everyday life of Syria and Jordan and adapts and expands on Billig's theories to explain why. As well as adding Syria and Jordan to the lists of states that have been empirically investigated for banal nationalism, the thesis aims to prove that banal, everyday identity flagging can be expanded beyond the narrow parameters Billig affords it. An analysis of how the complex multi-layered national, supra-national and religious identities of Syrians and Jordanians are reproduced daily in dictatorial political systems will serve to illustrate this point. It will show that Billig's parameters of everyday reproduction operating primarily in western, democratic and national arenas are too limited. It will continue to answer Billig's questions of 'why don't we forget our identity?', but expand his interpretation of 'we' from a narrow group of Western, democratic, national states to the rest of Billig's 'world of nations'.

The following chapter outlines Billig's arguments, engages with his critics and then offers its own critique and adaptations. Firstly it suggests Billig's emphasis on only national rather than other group identities being banally reproduced is too limited approach. Secondly, it challenges his narrow focus on what he terms the Western 'established' nations. After this Billig's linking of banal nationalism to democratic political systems will be discussed, as will his rejection of the role of 'hot' nationalism in reproducing the nation alongside the 'banal'. Finally, a new adaptation of Billig's methodology will be outlined that is more theoretically sound and pragmatic to better illustrate the role of *banal nationalism* in Syria and Jordan.

---

<sup>220</sup> Skey, 'The national in everyday life', p. 335.

## 2.1 Layers of Identity

Billig's *Banal nationalism* has been criticised for its narrow focus on national social groupings and neglect of other forms of group identity. Rosie et al. (2006) complain that Billig, "...assumes that social actors' only way of imagining spatial relations is in national terms," and underplays the local and sub-national identities regularly flagged in the United Kingdom.<sup>221</sup> Other writers have similarly accused Billig of ignoring supra-national identities, claiming examples of 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck and Willms 2003) and 'banal globalization' (Urry 1999).<sup>222</sup> To be fair to Billig, he does acknowledge other identities exist, but shares Breuilly's view of the importance of nationalism above other identities.<sup>223</sup> This thesis does not challenge this assumption but rather highlights that Billig's sole focus on the nation neglects the other forms of identity that are simultaneously banally 'flagged' alongside the nation and, indeed form a central pillar of the national discourse. In most countries, both Western and Arab, several other group identities are flagged banally in an unnoticed manner, not just the nation.

### 2.1.1 Layers of identity in the West

"As far as nationality is concerned," states Billig, "one needs to look for the reasons why people in the contemporary world do not forget their nationality."<sup>224</sup> However, nationality is not the only identity that 'people in the contemporary world' do not forget. What about religious identity? In the 2001 UK census, 61% of the population defined themselves as Christian, yet those attending Church once a year or more was barely 26%.<sup>225</sup> In the absence of regular exposure to the overt religious flagging of the church, how is it that the remaining 35% of Christians in the UK did not forget their religion? Could there not be the case for banal Christianity in British society? Billig states that, "national identity is more than an inner psychological state or an individual self-definition: it is a form of life which is daily lived in the world of nation states."<sup>226</sup> This may be the case but that is not to say that those who do self define as another group do not see their identity as a 'form of life' as well. Moreover, local, sub-national and supra-national identities are similarly presented as normal and mundane as the nation itself.

---

<sup>221</sup> M. Rosie, P. Petersoo, J. MacInnes, S. Condor, and J. Kennedy, 'Mediating which nation? Citizenship and national identities in the British press', *Social Semiotics* 16:2 (2006), p. 328.

<sup>222</sup> U. Beck and J. Willms, *Conversations with Ulrich Beck*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) & J. Urry, 'Citizenship and society,' *Journals of World-Systems Research*, 5 (1999), pp. 311-324, cited in Billig, Michael, 'Reflecting on a critical engagement with banal nationalism – reply to Skey,' *Sociological Review* 57:2 (2009), p. 350.

<sup>223</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 67.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>225</sup> <http://www.vexen.co.uk/UK/religion.html#ChurchAttendance> and <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/ethnicity.asp> accessed 20/9/09.

<sup>226</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 69.

The UK's various national, or sub-national, identities are repeatedly acknowledged by Billig, yet he rarely discusses how they are being reproduced alongside the wider British nation.<sup>227</sup> At different times Billig mentions the varying English, Scottish and Welsh identities that make up the collective 'British' identity that he shows is banally flagged in society, yet explains only how the latter and not the former are reproduced. This has earned him criticism from writers who have unpicked his assumed homogeneity of the 'British' press.<sup>228</sup> Jones and Deforges and Edensor have keenly provided evidence that Welsh and Scottish identity are as reproduced locally in the press and other, "...small-scale and local contexts," as British identity is nationally. Billig similarly under-represents the reproduction of a distinctive 'English' identity. In a recent rebuttal to criticism, he admits that, "I oversimplified the complexity of nationalism in the United Kingdom...in order to show the relentless nationalist message in apparently non-nationalist England."<sup>229</sup> Yet in order to do this Billig, like so many commentators, conflates 'British' with 'English', and consequently fails to consider how a separate 'English' nation is being reproduced alongside a British identity. His day survey of sport in newspapers, for example, focuses on a rugby match between New Zealand and the British Lions.<sup>230</sup> He forgets to mention that this combined team is actually only formed every four years – the rest of the time each 'home nation' plays separately. Indeed, on most days, an analysis of the sports pages in England would show a distinct English nation being flagged.

As well as the sub-national, Billig neglects how regional identities are regularly flagged in his preferred 'western' societies. In the UK regional identities vary in their strength, but administrative political units create a 'world of regions' not dissimilar to Billig's 'word of nations' – though admittedly on a less prominent scale. Television, newspapers and local authorities regularly flag a regional identity to their audience. Just as citizens in the western world do not forget their nationality, nor do they forget their regional origins, and there is scope to explain this within an expanded framework of Billig's banal flagging. Cameri (2000) has already used this method to demonstrate how a regional Catalan identity is banally reproduced in Spain.<sup>231</sup>

More noticeably, a western state that has very prominent regional identity is the United States. Billig himself complained in 2009 that he,

---

<sup>227</sup> There is a substantial debate (see Rosie et al. 2004) about the correct term for Britain's various nations. If England, Scotland, Wales etc. are all 'nations', is Britain a supra-national identity? For the sake of simplicity the 'home nations' identity in this thesis are referred to as 'sub-national'. This is derived from Billig's own definition that Britain is a nation and therefore that its composite members must be something below this.

<sup>228</sup> M. Rosie, P. Petersoo, J. MacInnes, S. Condor, and J. Kennedy, 'Nation speaking unto nation? Newspapers and national identity in the devolved UK.' *Sociological Review* 53:4 (2004), pp. 437-458.

<sup>229</sup> Billig, 'Reflecting on a critical engagement,' *Sociological Review*, p. 350.

<sup>230</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 121.

<sup>231</sup> Kathryn Cameri, 'Banal Catalanism?' *National Identities* 2:2 (2000), pp. 145-157.

“...Hoped that others would analyse in detail the banality of the world’s most powerful nationalism – that of the United States. Instead it has been the less powerful nationalism that have attracted attention.”<sup>232</sup>

Ironically, though much of Billig’s initial analysis was on the US, he remained blinkered on the nation and did not report how regional (State) identity might be banally reproduced. Billig makes much of the role of the US flag in sustaining national identity, both in the ceremony of swearing allegiance in school, and by its presence in unnoticed places such petrol stations. However, whilst there is no equivalent on a regional level to the allegiance swearing ceremony – perhaps suggesting that the national identity remains the most prominent – state flags are abundant across the United States and one could speculate they are just as unnoticed as the Stars and Stripes. Moreover, the other great reproducer of identity cited by Billig – the media – is far more regional in the US than in the UK. There is only one newspaper that could be consider a truly ‘national’ newspaper – *USA Today* – as it does not specialise on any one region. In contrast, the other newspapers that have a nationwide readership, such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *LA Times*, remain partly region-focussed dedicating considerable space to regional stories.<sup>233</sup> Applying Billig’s own methodology to the *New York Times* on a random day, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2009, in the large section marked specifically for ‘New York / Region’ one finds stories that clearly flag a distinct regional identity. In one article labelled, ‘12,000 Teacher Reports, but What to Do?’ begins:

“As the city’s students return to school on Wednesday, thousands will enter classrooms led by a teacher that the Department of Education has deemed low performing on internal reports. But in a sign of how complicated and controversial the reports are, many teachers never received them, and there are no plans to release them to parents.”<sup>234</sup>

Like all regional media, this is appealing to the readers’ sense of localism, not nationalism. ‘The’ city is expected to be recognised to the reader as New York, *their* city, as is ‘the’ Department of Education – *their* department. The ‘parents’ in question are ‘the parents of New York’ not any parents. Billig’s methodology proves quite easily adaptable to non-national identity flagging.

Two other layers of Western identity that are flagged banally are the supra-national and the religious. Whilst Britain has shown some hostility to the idea of a supra-national European identity, that is not the case in other Western European states. Again, given the importance of the flag to Billig’s theory, it is notable that the UK is one of the few European Union members that does not fly the European flag

---

<sup>232</sup> Billig, ‘Reflecting,’ p. 351.

<sup>233</sup> <http://www.thepaperboy.com/usa-top-100-newspapers.cfm> accessed 19/9/09.

<sup>234</sup> Jennifer Medina, ‘12,000 Teacher Reports, but What to Do?’ *New York Times*, 8/9/09.

outside official buildings – and also hosts the largest number of ‘Euroscptics’.<sup>235</sup> As Laura Cram has argued, the extent to which the EU has become accepted in the mainstream suggests an unnoticed ‘banal Europeanism’, whereby supra-national identity is accepted subconsciously.<sup>236</sup>

Billig’s attitude to religion is curious. Unlike supra-national, sub-national and regional identities – whose reproduction he largely ignores or dismisses – Billig sets up religion as an example of the ‘pre-national’: sharing Anderson’s view that the national community effectively supplanted the older religious one.<sup>237</sup> He uses the example of speeches by the two leading protagonists in the 1991 Gulf War to illustrate his point. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, “...using a rhetoric which echoed pre-national times, claimed to be fighting ‘the army of atheism’.” In contrast, President George H. Bush mentions God as, “an afterthought,” at the end of his address which Billig identifies as, “..not fighting on behalf of God or a political ideology,” but instead for ‘the nation’.<sup>238</sup> However, whilst Billig overstates Saddam Hussein’s use of religious rhetoric, which will be discussed below, he also understates the use of religion in the West. Billig dismisses Bush’s request for God to bless America’s troops at the end of his speech as an ‘afterthought’, yet why does the American President include any mention of God at all? Other studies of Bush’s rhetoric during this conflict have concluded the contrary to Billig that, “President Bush freely and repeatedly made use of religious terminology.”<sup>239</sup> Nor was this an aberration brought on by conflict, with Jerry Long emphasising that George Bush, “followed the example set by his predecessor, President Reagan.”

Whilst Billig is again most probably correct in highlighting that the nation is flagged most often by politicians and in society, he is wrong to see it at the expense of religion. National symbols and rhetoric are seeped in banal religiosity – as unnoticed as Billig’s flag or newspaper headline. ‘In God we trust’ is embossed on the one dollar bill in the US and ‘God Save the Queen’ is the British national anthem, to name but two examples. In the US, it was barely noticed that George W. Bush ended his speech announcing the beginning of America’s next confrontation with Saddam in 2003, by echoing his father with, “May God bless our country.”<sup>240</sup> Before the same conflict Tony Blair’s aides persuaded the British Prime Minister to drop, “God bless you,” from his parallel speech announcing war suggesting,

---

<sup>235</sup> Only 33% of British citizens polled in 2006 believed that EU membership was a good thing – the third lowest and considerably below the 49% average. See ‘The Future of Europe’, *Eurobarometer*, May 2006, p. 27. ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_251\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_251_en.pdf) - accessed 19/9/09).

<sup>236</sup> L. Cram, ‘Imagining the union: A case of banal Europeanism?’ In Wallace, H. (ed.), *Whose Europe? Interlocking dimensions of European integration* (London: MacMillan, 2001), p. 239.

<sup>237</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 4; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12; Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 11.

<sup>238</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 3.

<sup>239</sup> Jerry M. Long, *Saddam’s war of words: Politics, religion and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>240</sup> ‘Full text: George Bush’s address on the start of war,’ *The Guardian*, 20/3/2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/mar/20/iraq.georgebush> - accessed 10/1/10.



as will be discussed below that, contrary to Billig's suggestion, there is no 'western' uniformity in how identity is flagged.<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, this debate highlights the continue presence of banal religion. If Billig is keen to highlight a world of nations that is banally flagged every day, his methodology could just as well highlight a world of religions that goes largely unnoticed in society. The ringing of a church bell or call to prayer from a mosque is considered 'normal' and largely unquestioned. Whilst in the West Billig might be right to highlight that the nation is the most flagged, he neglects to point out that other identities on a sub-national, regional, supra-national and religious level are reproduced at the same time.

### 2.1.2 Layers of identity in the Middle East

It is uncertain exactly what Billig means when he describes Saddam Hussein's use of religious rhetoric as echoing 'pre-national times'. Does he mean that Saddam is only *using* a pre-national rhetoric, or is he saying, as seems implied, that this rhetoric is necessary because the population to which he appeals in Iraq are, unlike George Bush's audience, not sufficiently nationalist? Though he simply uses Saddam as an example to illustrate his point about Western banal nationalism, the implications he makes about Saddam's Iraq are typical of the wider school of thought that questions the applicability of nationalist theory to the Middle East. Billig's simplified interpretation of Iraqi identity does not account for the different layers of identity prominent in the Middle East – the same layers that are present in the West but perhaps, as described above, less prominent. Moreover, Billig's approach suggests a degree of unintentional Euro-centrism by drawing a line between the nationalism of 'us' in the West and 'them' in the East or South.

Billig's suggests that whilst, in the Western nations of George Bush's coalition in the 1991 Gulf War, "the order of nations is not designed to serve God, but God is to serve the order," when Saddam Hussein calls on his Iraqis to be, "the faithful servants of God," this means that identity in his state is 'pre-national'.<sup>242</sup> Yet Billig gives no context for Saddam's speech. At the stage in the 1990/1 Gulf crisis that Saddam's speech was made, the Iraqi President's rhetoric was not aimed at his own civilians but at the wider Arab and Muslim population from whom he sought legitimacy against the Western coalition. As Long states, "By carefully fusing appeals to both Islam and Arab nationalism, Saddam enjoyed a joint discourse – both religious and secular – that resonated with great numbers of people on multiple levels."<sup>243</sup> Saddam was in fact a strong believer in the nation-state as a practical unit from which to build his personal strength.<sup>244</sup> Though he might have used the language of supra-national Arab

---

<sup>241</sup> Peter Stothard, *30 Days: A month at the heart of Blair's War* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), pp. 106-107.

<sup>242</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 4.

<sup>243</sup> Long, *Saddam's war*, p. 3.

<sup>244</sup> Con Coughlin, *Saddam: the Secret Life* (London: Macmillan, 2002), p. 139.

nationalism or Islamism, his primary goal was the defence of the Iraqi state and his own power within it. In fact, closer examination of the very speech used by Billig illustrates that he has been highly selective. Saddam opens the address with:

“O glorious Iraqis, O Holy warrior Iraqis, O Arabs, O believers wherever you are, we and our steadfastness is holding. Here is the great Iraqi people, your brothers and sons of your Arab nation and the great faithful part of the human family.”<sup>245</sup>

Saddam is appealing to his audience as ‘Iraqis’, ‘Arabs’ and ‘believers’. He may be using religious discourse, but this is alongside, not at the expense of a nationalist discourse, with later references to ‘the valiant Iraqi men,’ ‘we in Iraq,’ ‘the response of Iraq,’ ‘our ready missile force,’ and ‘your brothers in Iraq’. Billig’s selective interpretation focuses only on the greater presence of religious rhetoric than in Bush’s speech, ignoring both the reasons behind it – which were certainly not ‘pre-national’ – and the simultaneous nationalist and supra-nationalist (Arab) discourse alongside it.

Saddam’s ‘joint discourse’ is however, not unique the invasion of Kuwait. Throughout his reign, the Iraqi dictator at times appealed to regional (Tikriti), religious (Islamic), supra-national (Arab) and national (Iraqi) layers of identity in his rhetoric.<sup>246</sup> Yet, as most investigations into identity in the Middle East have shown, such a multi-faceted identity is not restricted to Saddam’s Iraq but is present throughout the region.<sup>247</sup> Some such studies, such as that by P. R. Kumaraswamy, argue that the presence of these multiple identities has inhibited the development of nations such as those found elsewhere. “The Middle Eastern countries,” he claims, “have been unable to build a ‘nation’. In other parts of the world, nations, both old and new, have become states; the process has been reversed in the Middle East, where states are still in search of a nation.”<sup>248</sup> Such a view conforms to the wider sense of ‘Middle Eastern’, or often more specifically ‘Arab’ exceptionalism when it comes to nationalism. This view, implicitly shared by Billig, suggest that ‘their’ nationalism is somehow different to ‘ours’ and models such as Billig’s will not be applicable.

By focussing his investigation on the reproduction of ‘our’ western nationalism, and by dismissing or ignoring the similar reproduction of identity in Iraq, the Middle East, and the wider world, Billig seems to be hinting at what Edward Said calls, ‘European superiority over Oriental backwardness’.<sup>249</sup> He is clearly drawing a line between, “Our mundane practices,” and those mundane practices of an ‘other’.

---

<sup>245</sup> Micah L. Sifry & Christopher Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (London: Times Books, 1991), p. 315.

<sup>246</sup> Said K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: the Politics of Revenge*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2001).

<sup>247</sup> Lewis, *Multiple identities*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>248</sup> P. R. Kumaraswamy, ‘Who am I?: The identity crisis in the Middle East,’ *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 10:1 (March 2006), pp. 63-73.

<sup>249</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 7.

Though he concedes in a later article that, in his 1995 publication, “it was certainly not my intention to suggest that non-Western and non-democratic nation states lack similar mundane practices by which they reproduce themselves as nation-states,” he is still speaking in the language of ‘them’ and ‘us’ whereby non-western and non-democratic’ nations and their nationalism are still somehow different.<sup>250</sup>

It is therefore false to view the Middle East as different because it has seemingly more diverse layers of identity and that therefore lacks *banal nationalism*. Fred Halliday has demonstrated how the Middle East’s layers of identity are not much different from those in Europe.<sup>251</sup> If someone can be Mancunian, English, British, European and Christian at the same time, why can someone not be Aleppan, Syrian, Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim? Moreover, as was highlighted above, Billig is wrong to limit his examples of flagging to only the national layer of identity. Closer scrutiny demonstrates a flagging of sub-national, regional, supra-national and religious identity in the various mediations of the West.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Kumaraswamy assumes that layers in the Middle East means that identity in the region is unique is that the mediations that flag them seem more pronounced to the outsider. With religious, state and pan-Arab media each flagging their various identities so overtly, the outsider is presented with what appears to be a quite exceptional case in comparison to the seemingly more ‘banal’ and ‘mundane’ West. However this analysis contains two assumptions. Firstly, that these identities are in conflict with each other, which is rarely the case. Secondly, that these mediations are too overt to be banal. However, what might appear overt and ‘hot’ to the outsider such as Billig, could be consider banal and unnoticed by the population that sees such mediations every day.

---

<sup>250</sup> Billig, ‘Reflecting,’ p. 349.

<sup>251</sup> Halliday, *Nation and Religion*, p. 48.

## 2.2 Banal Nationalism Beyond the West

Michael Billig is overly Euro-centrist and modest in his discussion of banal nationalism. Repeatedly he refers to banal nationalism being the property of ‘the established nations’ of ‘the West’, by implication dismissing it as not the property of the South or non-western world. Throughout his study, which is littered with inconsistencies on the subject, the non-Western world is barely mentioned. Despite this, and with no explanation as to why he has excluded non-Western states from his theory, Billig is confident enough to claim that it is, “in the established nations [where] there is a continual ‘flagging’ or reminding of nationhood.”<sup>252</sup> Yet Billig is also overly modest. He limits his theory to the West for no other reason, it seems, than this is where his investigation has taken place. In a 2009 defence of his 1995 work, Billig explained that he deliberately focused on the West for, “political and theoretical reasons.”<sup>253</sup> However, the following critique will explain how there is no theoretical logic in excluding the non-West from the banal nationalism thesis and how greater investigation reveals the same traits of national reproduction that Billig observed in Western society.

### 2.2.1 Demystifying the ‘established nations’

Billig claims that his theory explains the reproduction of the nation in, ‘the established nations’, which he defines as:

“...those states that have confidence in their own continuity, and that, particularly, are part of what is conventionally described as ‘the West’. The political leaders of such nations – whether France, the USA, the United Kingdom or New Zealand – are not typically termed ‘nationalists’.”<sup>254</sup>

He goes on to explain, “...the term banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced.”<sup>255</sup> Yet this definition prompts two interrelated questions: what makes a nation ‘established’, and what should we consider ‘the West’?

Billig chooses an odd definition for an ‘established nation’: “...those states that have confidence in their own continuity.” How does Billig assess this confidence? There are very few states in the world that have no confidence in their continuity as a state, and even fewer who would publically admit it. Should the unrecognised republic of Kosovo be considered a more ‘established nation’ than Israel because it proudly boasts its confidence in continuity whilst the Jewish state repeatedly plays on fears that it could

---

<sup>252</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 8.

<sup>253</sup> Billig, ‘Reflecting,’ pp. 347-352.

<sup>254</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

be driven into the sea?<sup>256</sup> Moreover, what does Billig consider as ‘continuity’? The principle of *uti possidetis juris* in the aftermath of decolonization has ensured that the vast majority of states in the world have retained the same borders since independence, and very few have had their ‘continuity’ threatened. Even when territory has been occupied or annexed by another state, as in the cases of Azerbaijan (1991), Egypt (1967) or Cambodia (1978), the existence of the state has rarely been threatened. Indeed, enemy states may intend to remove a particular regime, but even the most aggressive of neighbours rarely threatens the continuity of the state itself. They are more likely to support the continuance of the state but under a friendlier regime. Since the aggressive expansionism of Nazi Germany and the USSR, there have been few occasions when one state has actively sought to annex another completely and end its continuation such as Tibet in 1949, Western Sahara in 1975, East Timor in 1975 and Kuwait in 1990/1. Yet in these cases, the continued existence of governments in exile suggests that even when the entire state is occupied and the occupier seeks to destroy the nation, the representatives of the old state would not admit that they lack confidence in their own continuity. Undoubtedly the Dalai Lama would consider Tibet to be a legitimate and ‘established’ nation, as would all those governments that continue to recognize him as leader of occupied Tibet.<sup>257</sup>

Yet if one discounts the few states that might perceive their continuity to be under threat, even if they don’t publically admit it, Billig still does not give sufficient explanation why these confident ‘established nations’ are all presumed to be Western. Large and powerful nations such as Russia, China, India and Brazil undoubtedly have confidence in their own continuity, so why should they not be considered ‘established nations’? The nature of international law illustrates that even smaller states that boast neither economic nor military power can be confident that the international community will preserve their continuity as a state should it be threatened, as was the case with Kuwait in 1990/1 and, eventually, East Timor in 1999. One of the reasons that new states such as Kosovo seek international recognition is the assumption that such recognition will bring them under the protective umbrella of international law.

Moreover, the ‘confidence’ of Billig’s own examples of ‘established nations’ deserves some scrutiny. Michael Skey highlights the numerous works that have questioned the, “assumed homogeneity,” of the established Western nations that Billig lists.<sup>258</sup> Rosie et al. (2006) argue that Billig’s primary example of an ‘established nation’, Britain, is actually a composite of several separate nations and, against the background of devolution, “... great caution is needed when addressing potentially multi-national states

---

<sup>256</sup> Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 353.

<sup>257</sup> Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile: The autobiography of his Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), pp. 1-16.

<sup>258</sup> Skey, ‘The national in everyday life’, p. 335.

such as the United Kingdom.”<sup>259</sup> Similarly, Cramer (2000)’s discussion of Catalan banal nationalism emphasises another example of a supposed established Western nation, Spain, that faces separatist threats from both Catalans and Basques. Billig himself acknowledges that these states face threats from Scottish, Quebecois or Breton separatists, and yet does not take the further step of suggesting that such ‘established nations’ can not, in fact, be completely confident that they will continue in their present form. However, that is not to say that Billig is incorrect about how the nation is reproduced within these states, simply that he has constructed a quite arbitrary line dividing those nations that are and are not reproduced banally.

In a reply to Skey’s critique in 2009, Billig attempted to clarify his definition of ‘established nations’. He states that:

“I wanted to stress the nationalism of ‘our’ mundane practices. Most analysts have ignored the nationalism of established, Western nation-states. By ‘established’, I do not mean secure or unchanging, but simply nation-states that have been conventionally accepted in the world of nations – belonging to the United Nations, issuing internationally accepted passports, possessing their own military and so on. My argument was that analysts have defined ‘nationalism’ too narrowly, thereby excluding the mundane practices of established Western democracies.”<sup>260</sup>

Yet even this defence of his definition is contradictory. On the one hand, he opens the ‘established nations’ up to those ‘belonging to the United Nations’ – a total of 192 different states.<sup>261</sup> On the other hand he twice mentions that he is talking about the nationalism of ‘Western’ states, which would restrict this 192 to a far smaller number, depending on definition. It seems odd for Billig to simultaneously lament analysts for narrowing their definitions of nationalism to only those that struggle for independence, whilst himself keeping the definition of *banal nationalism* restricted to the mundane practices of the West.

This leads to the other consideration emerging from Billig’s definition of which nations see *banal nationalism* is what exactly Billig considers to be, “what is conventionally described as ‘the West’”. An initial concern is over, quite literally, where the line is drawn on ‘the West’? Billig is quite tight on his definition, mostly focusing on France, the US, Britain and Australasia. However, subsequent authors have cast the net wider, incorporating Spain, Greece and Turkey – countries that in an earlier age were probably not deemed ‘Western’ in the popular conscious, but are increasingly viewed as such. The case of Turkey is curious, as a state that many view is on the fault line between ‘East’ and ‘West’.<sup>262</sup> Yumul

---

<sup>259</sup> Rosie et al., ‘Mediating which nation?’, pp. 327–344.

<sup>260</sup> Billig, ‘Reflecting’, p. 349.

<sup>261</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/members/index.shtml> accessed 17/9/09.

<sup>262</sup> Samuel Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilisations?’ *Foreign Affairs*, Summer (1993), pp. 22–49.

and Ozkirimli's 2000 study is referred to in Michael Skey's 2009 article summarising the impact of Billig as, "...shifting the analysis beyond a 'Western' setting and carrying out a Day Survey of the press in Turkey."<sup>263</sup> Yet a re-reading of Yumul & Ozkirimli shows no such acknowledgement – quite the contrary. The authors admit that, "We fully admit that this study does not involve a particular theoretical contribution to the literature on nationalism."<sup>264</sup> Instead, their intention is simply to test Billig's theory to see if it applies in Turkey – a country they clearly view as no different to similar authors exploring Scotland, Greece or Spain. Despite Skey's claim, Yumul & Ozkirimli's article remains within the 'Western-only' parameters established by Billig, and makes no attempt to challenge them as this thesis does.

A more broad criticism of Billig's concept of the 'West' is that it is too generalist. Billig speaks not as a 'Brit' in particular but as a general 'Westerner' when he claims that, "...nationalism is seen as, 'not belonging to us.'"<sup>265</sup> In this view of 'western established nations' that Billig has constructed, 'banal nationalism' describes how the nation is reproduced. Yet even in his definition of Western states, he glosses over a diverse selection of states and nations that differ greatly in their national reproduction. Billig ignores the fact that many of the examples of banal nationalism that he gives for one western state, are not valid in another. He makes much of the frequent, unnoticed presence of the American flag in class rooms and petrol station forecourts in the USA.<sup>266</sup> This is a valid point for the US, but one that cannot be replicated in the United Kingdom where there is a conspicuous absence of national flags in most public places, let alone garages or classrooms. Similarly, he makes much of the British press recreating the nation in the UK, yet fails to highlight that there is no equivalent national press in the USA – where in fact only one 'national' newspaper exists. Similarly, Billig's 'established' nations are subject to change and his assumption that nationalism is ever truly 'settled' can be challenged. Western states' concepts of nationalism have recently been seriously challenged by immigration, multiculturalism and even secessionist issues in countries like Britain, Spain and Belgium.

Not only are these 'established nations' not all homogeneous, but it is wrong to speak of a wider 'western' group of states that use similar methods to reproduce the nation. The subconscious, unnoticed element might be present in each state, but the method and tools, whether press, flags or other, differ greatly. With this in mind, Billig gives next to no evidence that these various methods of banal flagging are not present in states outside of his arbitrarily created 'western cage'.

---

<sup>263</sup> Skey, 'The national in everyday life,' p. 336.

<sup>264</sup> Arus Yumul & Umut Ozkirimli, 'Reproducing the nation: 'banal nationalism' in the Turkish press,' *Media, Culture and Society* 22:6 (2000), pp. 787-804.

<sup>265</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 5.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

### 2.2.2 Locating non-Western Banal Nationalism

A careful reading of Billig exposes numerous confused and uncertain statements about nationalism beyond the West. Firstly, he seems unsure how to categorise nationalism in states that are not Western. Billig outlines 'banal nationalism' in supposed 'western established nations' as a direct contrast to the popular view of nationalism being something, "associated with those who struggle to create new states or with right-wing politics."<sup>267</sup> His thesis argues against the view that nationalism, "is typically seen as a force which creates nation-states or which threatens the stability of existing states."<sup>268</sup> The examples he gives of such 'threatening' nationalists are separatists such as the Quebecois, independence-seekers such as the PLO and right-wing politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Penn.<sup>269</sup> Yet what about the hundreds of states that do not fall into Billig's parameters of either 'western' or 'threatening'? Is Chilean nationalism western or threatening? What of Thailand or Tanzania? Billig's determination to prove a banal nationalism in the West as opposed to the aggressive nationalism of extremists leaves a huge grey space into which fall all the non-western states that are not threatening others.

Billig complains that theorists see nationalism as a development tool but find, "no further stages to describe what happens to nationalism once the nation state is established. As if nationalism suddenly disappears."<sup>270</sup> He makes a valid point, yet restricts his theories to the West. What of the many post-colonial states that, indeed, used nationalism to establish their states in the 1950s and 60s, but now do not have their right to exist questioned? Does their nationalism and national reproduction not warrant the same investigation that Billig affords the West? In a sweeping statement Billig claims that, "...in the established nations, people do not generally forget their national identity," yet by implication, having already explained that the established nations are only Western, is he claiming that those in the non-West *do* forget their national identity?<sup>271</sup> This is hard to believe and, in the case studies of Syria and Jordan investigated here, proven to be baseless.<sup>272</sup>

What makes Billig's neglect of the non-West harder to fathom is his own repeated assertions that nationalism, as an ideology has, "been diffused internationally."<sup>273</sup> He shows surprising inconsistency on this matter. He gives examples of a banal flagging of nationhood during a coup d'état in Nigeria, yet surely is not claiming sub-Saharan Africa for 'the West'?<sup>274</sup> On the one hand, he repeats throughout his study that nationalism is a highly successful 'international ideology,' which has seen the world carved

---

<sup>267</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 5.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>272</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



up into different nation states.<sup>275</sup> On the other hand, he claims that the nation is only banally reproduced in the Western states. So how does he believe the non-western states have *their* sense of nationhood reproduced in such a way that this system of nations can be maintained? Is Billig really suggesting that whilst the western states have their identity reproduced in an unnoticed manner, their non-western equivalents must be overtly indoctrinated everyday to be reminded of their sense of nationhood? Here Billig displays a subconscious Euro-centrist streak: the non-west is simply the ‘other’ in his investigation. Admittedly it is not feasible for him to make a world-wide survey of national reproduction. Yet he is willing to make generalisations about reproduction in the West that do not stand up to scrutiny. He does not offer the possibility that in the non-West national reproduction could be just as banal and unnoticed as in the UK and the US. Moreover he does not consider that even in instances in the South where reproduction might appear overt to the western observer, the local citizen may view it as banal as the American views their unnoticed flag.

Billig goes some way to explaining these contradictions and grey areas in his 2009 reply. He states that:

“If nationalism is global, then one can expect to find features of banal nationalism across the world. Skey, however, claims that I firmly locate ‘banal nationalism’ in the ‘established democratic nations of the West’. I think there has been a misunderstanding. First, it is not only in the West that one can find democratic nation states. Second, it is not difficult to find the banal reproduction of national symbols in non-Western nations.”<sup>276</sup>

However, as has been shown, this is quite a departure from *banal nationalism* (1995) and Skey cannot be blamed for ‘misunderstanding’ Billig’s vague and contradictory statements. Billig goes on to claim that, “It was certainly not my intention to suggest that non-Western and non-democratic nation-state lack similar mundane practices by which they reproduce themselves as nation states.” Yet the above analysis of Billig’s 1995 text suggests that, whilst he may genuinely have not intended to be as West-centric as he comes across, he is at the minimum woefully neglectful of any non-western cases which might suggest that he feels banal nationalism is indeed ‘global’ and not just Western. Yet even in this 2009 reply, Billig trips over himself. Despite making statements about a possible non-western or non-democratic dimension to banal nationalism, he continues to refer to ‘our’ nationalism and ‘the mundane practices of the West’. It is one thing to say that he accepts that banal nationalism could be global and that he is not West-centric, but quite another to prove it. Interestingly, the majority of his reply concerns more about western banal nationalism and not about the global dimension. Billig’s great regret is that no-one has as yet investigated US banal nationalism – despite there being a similar absence of investigation of banal nationalism in the global South.

---

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>276</sup> Billig, ‘Reflecting,’ p. 349.

Billig's neglect of non-Western nationalism is typical of theorists such as Anthony Smith who view nationalisms outside of Europe as simply mimics of those that evolved in Europe. Smith claims that the earliest nations that were composed of an 'ethnic core' provided a model for future nations, even if they didn't have a similar 'ethnic core'.<sup>277</sup> Even Benedict Anderson, who's *Imagined Communities* discusses nationalism in Latin America and Indo-China Anderson argues that extra-European nations largely 'copied' the nationalism they saw in Europe around their own circumstances.<sup>278</sup> In contrast, some writers complain of the Euro-centricity of theorists. Partha Chatterjee makes the case that nationalism changes in a colonial setting and, using the example of India, claims that colonial nationalism is manifested in a public, formal sphere which clearly does mimic European nationalisms, whilst in a private, informal sphere it is unique to the spiritual culture of India.<sup>279</sup> Similarly, Tonnesson and Antlov use the example of South-Asian nationalisms to suggest that Anderson ignores the nuanced differences between Asian and European nationalisms, particularly the role of religion, and that actually they deserve to be viewed in their own right and not as mimics.<sup>280</sup>

Some of these theorists' assumptions prove important to this study. Firstly, whilst the nature of nationalism in the Arab Middle East may have its origins locally, as claimed by Chatterjee, it is undeniable that the state system currently in place is a western mimic. When looking at the reproduction of the nation, the nature of the polity in place is essential, and both Syria and Jordan's political boundaries are western creations. As Fred Halliday states, "Middle Eastern states ... reflect the division of the Middle East in the post-1918 settlement: over a large part the British and French determined borders."<sup>281</sup> However, as Tonnesson and Antlov highlight, the prominent nature of other layers of identity – in this case Islam and Arab identity – make the reproduction of the nation not simply a mimic of the West.

---

<sup>277</sup> Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, p. 177.

<sup>278</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 109-110 & p. 140.

<sup>279</sup> P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 3-13.

<sup>280</sup> Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (eds.), *Asian Forms of the Nation* (London: Curzon, 1996), pp. 1-39.

<sup>281</sup> Halliday, *Nation and Religion*, p. 40.

### 2.3 Banal and 'Hot' Nationalism in Non-Democratic States

Having established that there is no theoretical reason not to extend Billig's methodology beyond the West and into the multi-layered identities of the Middle East, there remains a final area of incompatibility with *banal nationalism*'s original proposals: its perceived relationship between banal nationalism and democracy. Billig repeatedly claims that *banal nationalism* is a trend seen in the, "established, democratic nations," and, whilst it has been argued that 'established' is a relatively flimsy term that can be challenged, it is far more of a stretch to call either Syria, Jordan or any of the Arab states, 'democratic'.<sup>282</sup> That said, as with his choice of 'the West' to frame his theory, Billig gives no reasons as to why non-democratic states could not encounter banal nationalism. This thesis argues the contrary: that the nation is reproduced in a banal, unnoticed manner in non-democratic states with the same frequency as in democracies. Even in states where national reproduction seems obvious to the visiting foreigner, such as political slogans, banners and leadership cults they are considered banal and mundane to their citizenry. To illustrate this one first needs to reassess Billig's distinction between banal and overt or 'hot' nationalism. Following this his proposed relationship between banal nationalism and democracy shall be considered.

Billig argued that there were two types of nationalism: the 'hot' and the 'banal'. His complaint was that analysts who discussed nationalism saw only the 'hot' nationalism that was present when nations were formed, and discarded the 'banal' everyday nationalism that remained present and reproduced the nation thereafter. Billig claims that once the nation is established, this hot nationalism 'cools' to become banal and unnoticed.<sup>283</sup> However, as has been argued by Skey and Hutchinson, in emphasising the 'banal' nationalism present in these states, Billig discounts the role that 'hot' nationalism can continue to play in reproducing identity alongside the banal.<sup>284</sup> Hutchinson has argued instead that the two exist side by side:

"...there were two types of nationalism at work in national identity formation. One is the 'hot' didactic nationalism that instils the idea of the nation as sacred and transcendent object of worship and sacrifice.. This emerges in waves as a project that is self-conscious, systematic and prescriptive, providing exemplary forms of conduct in order to unify all the components (of class, region, religion and gender) of the nation....The other is the informal or 'banal' nationalism of populations who consume nationalism in a relatively unself-conscious manner as a guide to the conduct of everyday life as expressed in popular songs, political posters, stamps, banknotes, coinage and brand names on staple products."<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>282</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 93.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>284</sup> Skey, 'The national in everyday life', p. 340.

<sup>285</sup> John Hutchinson, 'Hot and banal nationalism: The nationalization of the masses', in G. Delanty and K. Kumar (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and nationalism* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 298.

He goes on to emphasize that these two nationalisms constantly interact and interrelate and, at times of crisis, the banal can easily become 'hot'.<sup>286</sup>

Billig actually goes some way to acknowledging this interaction himself. Whilst insisting that 'hot' nationalism remains something separate, restricted to, "those who battle to form new nations," he does accept that the established nations encounter an 'overt' as well as a banal nationalism. He describes this distinction in terms of a 'waved' (overt) and 'unwaved' (banal) flag, stating that, "Some [flags] are consciously waved and saluted symbols, often accompanied by a pageant of outward emotions. Others – probably the most numerous in the contemporary environment – remain unsaluted and unwaved."<sup>287</sup> This overt nationalism, visible on national days of celebration such as 4<sup>th</sup> July or Bastille Day is, "...patterned so that the national flag can be consciously waved both metaphorically and literally."<sup>288</sup> Such projects would seem to be, "self-conscious, systematic and prescriptive," such as the hot nationalism described by Hutchinson, even if Billig insists that his 'overt' nationalism is not the same thing. This, albeit, limited acknowledgement by Billig that his 'established democratic' nations also rely on overt 'waved' flags as well as banal 'unwaved' flags is an important step in expanding the theory beyond democratic states.

'Self conscious, systematic and prescriptive' flag-waving in non-democratic dictatorships actually appear no more frequently than in Billig's established west. Of Syria's fourteen annual public holidays, for example, four could be viewed as self-conscious national flag waving: Revolution Day, Independence Day, Martyrs Day and October Liberation Day.<sup>289</sup> Similarly three of Jordan's public holidays are overtly national: Army Day, Independence Day and the Anniversary of Abdullah's accession to the throne. France sees three of its thirteen public holidays take a national character – Bastille Day, VE Day and Armistice Day – and two of these are more sombre than celebratory.<sup>290</sup> The US, however, has a greater number of national days than Syria or Jordan, with seven official nation-celebrating holidays: Martin Luther King Day, Washington's birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day and Thanksgiving Day. Yet even if non-democratic states did dedicate more holiday time to overtly flagging the nation there would still remain a majority of 'in-between' times when flags remain 'unwaved'. Though flags might be waved more in the dictatorships of Syria and Jordan, this thesis will demonstrate that identity is primarily reproduced by the same unwaved, unnoticed and banal symbols that Billig highlights for democracies.

---

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 305

<sup>287</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 40.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>289</sup> [http://www.ameinfo.com/syria\\_public\\_holidays/](http://www.ameinfo.com/syria_public_holidays/) - accessed 8/4/09.

<sup>290</sup> [http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/DF\\_holidays.shtml](http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/DF_holidays.shtml) - accessed 8/4/09.

To the outsider visiting Middle Eastern, or indeed many of the non-democratic states in the world, the presence of ‘waved’ or ‘overt’ national symbols seems to present such very different polities that a comparison with western democracies is superficially difficult. The frequent images of Thailand’s king, green flags in Libya or Communist Party slogans in Cuba might appear to a visitor to be obvious examples of intentional nation-building by governments.<sup>291</sup> Because such displays are, usually, ordered by the governments themselves it might be argued that they are examples of Billig’s ‘overt’ rather than ‘banal’ nationalism. However, how is the compulsory display of Thailand’s king on every street corner any different from the compulsory display of the American flag in US petrol stations that Billig describes? Just because a state is a democracy does not mean that it does not have ‘self conscious, systematic and prescriptive’ rules about displaying national symbols. As has been described by Christel Lane, ‘civil religion’ is still very visible in Britain and, especially, the US. In the US, for example, “it becomes most ‘visible’ on such recurring occasions as Independence Day, the anniversaries of Lincoln’s and Washington’s birthdays, and in the cult of the American flag.”<sup>292</sup> Just because a visitor to these states views such symbols as overt, does not mean that its citizens do. If a Thai child has been raised in a state where he has seen his King’s face on every corner he will regard it with the same unnoticed banality as the American child that swears allegiance to the Stars and Stripes every morning. Curiously, Billig acknowledges this himself for the US stating that, “...even the saluted [flags] can seem so routinely familiar – so near to home – that they are ignored.” He highlights this by suggesting that most American children are not filled with nationalist passion as they swear to the flag each morning – the nation is celebrating and reproducing itself in a routine, unnoticed manner.<sup>293</sup> The question Billig fails to answer is why the Syrian or Jordan child singing his or her national anthem each morning will not feel the same level of routine familiarity despite not living in a democracy.

So why must we maintain an exclusive link between banal nationalism and democracy? Billig claims that, “...nationhood...frames the practice of political democracy,” but does it not also frame the practice of political dictatorship?<sup>294</sup> Since the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia there remain few dictatorships that rule over federal multi-national structures. Instead most of today’s dictatorships claim their legitimacy from ruling over what is professed to be a single nation. Billig similarly shares Renan’s view that a sense of nationhood is chosen rather than imposed, and claims that, “There is therefore an inherently popular if not formally democratic aspect of nationalism.”<sup>295</sup> It is curious that he uses this statement to justify the democracy link, given that during his study he cites D’Azeglio’s famous comment that ‘we have made Italy, now we now must make Italians’ – a clear example of a nation

<sup>291</sup> <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90785/6755657.html> - accessed 8/4/09.

<sup>292</sup> Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: ritual in industrial society: the Soviet case* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), p. 255.

<sup>293</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 50.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

being imposed upon a people.<sup>296</sup> More importantly, Billig seems to be saying that actually, democracy is not a key component of nationalism, as long as there is broad consensus that the nation does exist. One must wonder how Billig sees a consensus existing amongst the Italian peasants who were ‘nationalised’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet not amongst the citizens of non-democracies in today’s global South.

Billig states that:

“One might predict that, as a nation-state becomes established in its sovereignty, and it faces little internal challenge, then the symbols of nationhood, which might once have been consciously displayed, do not disappear from sight, but instead become absorbed into the environment of the established homeland.”<sup>297</sup>

The same could be said of dictatorial regimes. Once they feel established in their sovereignty, as in Syria and Jordan, their slogans, portraits and flags might remain – and seem overt to the outsider – yet slip into the background for the state’s citizens. Whether the regime is democratic or not is immaterial to the citizen who is having their identity flagged. Providing the state and, to an extent, the regime is accepted or, at the least, considered ‘normal’, there is no reason for the citizen to notice its symbols. It is therefore perfectly reasonable to look for banal nationalism in non-democratic states.

---

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

## 2.4 Expanding Billig: an Alternative Methodology

The above critique is not intended to discredit or undermine Billig's findings. It is designed to highlight some of the weaknesses in *banal nationalism* that need to be corrected before this thesis fulfils Billig's own request to expand his, "preliminary study," with more, "detailed empirical investigation," that, "show the operations of banal nationalism in their detail."<sup>298</sup> Previous investigations have mostly limited themselves to the Western democratic world that Billig himself outlined as the parameters of his theory. This chapter has demonstrated that these parameters do not stand up to scrutiny, hopefully opening the door for other empiricists to apply *banal nationalism* to other areas of the non-western non-democratic world. The following study will take one corner of that un-investigated world, Syria and Jordan, and apply Billig's theory in a comparative empirical study. Yet Billig's methodology needs adapting to the states in focus, both for pragmatic and theoretical reasons.

As discussed in chapter one, Syria and Jordan make a good comparison due to their common roots, their ideologically different regimes and recent, young leaders. Comparing states' banal nationalism is the first major methodological departure from Billig. Whilst *Banal Nationalism* does discuss different nations and their identity flagging, the assumption is made that their methods are similar, as part of Billig's wider 'western' bloc of nations. As has been discussed, this uniformity of flagging is false and Billig's work would have greatly benefitted by his highlighting the differences as well as the similarities in the nations he studied. Not only will a comparison between Syria and Jordan's banal nationalism provide two clear examples of the theory's applicability to the Arab world, it will also support the assumption that, even in a region that is relatively similar, methods and style of banal flagging can share as many differences as similarities.

The type of public mediations that flag identity to Syrians and Jordanians needs reassessing. Billig examined the language of politicians and the use and place of the national flag before conducting content analysis of a key public mediation, national newspapers. He did not claim that these are the only mediations that flag the nation, simply that they are appropriate samples. Turning the same methodology to Syria and Jordan only partially works. One must strike a careful balance between keeping close enough to Billig's original method to ensure a testing of his theory versus adapting to the different circumstances of the states in question. As with Billig, chapter 3 will discuss the language of politicians, sampling some speeches of the politicians who receive by far the most media coverage in dictatorships: the dictators themselves. Rather than look exclusively at the flags of Syria and Jordan, the chapter looks instead at national symbols more broadly. In particular, such is the nature of leadership

---

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

cults in these states, the images of the leaders within a wider cult of leadership comes to be seen as a representation of the nation and hence deserve analysis.

A more complex public mediation to consider in Syria and Jordan is the media. Billig chose to focus on newspapers on the premise that, “historically, Britain has the highest newspaper readership in the world.”<sup>299</sup> Not surprisingly, neither Syria nor Jordan boasts anywhere near the same newspaper circulation. Whereas Britain’s most read newspaper, *The Sun*, has a readership of one in twenty, Jordan’s, *Al-Ra’ai* reaches one in 63 whilst Syria’s most read, *al-Thawra* reaches barely one in 360.<sup>300</sup> Moreover, with average illiteracy rates at 21% in Syria and 11% in Jordan, and even higher amongst women, substantial sections of society don’t have regular access to this mediation.<sup>301</sup> Chapters four and five will therefore adapt Billig’s methodology to focus instead on television. In 2004, 90% of the citizens of both states had access to terrestrial TV and 50% of households received satellite – a figure that is probably larger due to public viewing in cafes and restaurants.<sup>302</sup> In such semi-literate societies analysing television will indicate what mass identities are flagged in the media far better than the press. This adaptation of Billig’s methodology is split into two parts. Firstly, to try to re-create Billig’s ‘day survey’ in the television world, a random selection of state-run television programmes were recorded and analysed in each country for the same week at the same time. Secondly, to allow for the relatively unique phenomena of popular transnational satellite television in these states, a further discussion is made of the role of satellite television – including a content analysis of one channel’s coverage of a major sporting event: the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Finally, in another departure from Billig’s methodology aimed at rectifying one of *banal nationalism*’s weaknesses, the last chapter of this study investigates audience response. When Billig says that, “...this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding,” he assumes that whatever is in the press or is flagged is therefore by its audience.<sup>303</sup> As Skey comments, *Banal Nationalism*, “...does not address how different constituencies might respond to the particular media texts or political speeches used as examples of the nation being flagged in a routine or taken-for-granted manner.”<sup>304</sup> In other words, Billig dedicates no space to assessing whether there is a direct correlation between attachment to a national identity and engagement with the institutions that regularly flag it.

---

<sup>299</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 110.

<sup>300</sup> Sun: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/table/2008/sep/05/abcs.pressandpublishing> - accessed 8/4/09; For Jordan see <http://www.al-bab.com/media/freedom.htm#Jordan> - accessed 8/4/09; For Syria see Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World! Media, Arts and Lifestyle*, (Oxford: ABC Cleo, 2005), p. 102.

<sup>301</sup> CIA World fact book: Jordan - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> ; Syria: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html> (accessed 26/03/09).

<sup>302</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television*, p. 1.

<sup>303</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 8.

<sup>304</sup> Skey, ‘The national in everyday life’, p. 335.



Embarking on a detailed empirical assessment of what impact public mediations have upon Syrian and Jordanian audiences is beyond the scope of this study. To gain conclusive data one would need to conduct widespread surveys and correlate viewing figures which, in these regimes, is either illegal or hard to obtain. Moreover, quantitative surveys lack the detail and complexity needed to explain identity. Therefore numerous ethno-graphic qualitative interviews were conducted in Syria and Jordan amongst a cross section of society, which will be analysed in this section. Whilst lacking in scientific rigour, these interviews offer an extra layer of detail and flavour to further build on Billig's methodology.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In *Banal Nationalism* Michael Billig asks the important question, ‘why don’t people forget their nationality in the West?’ His answer is ‘banal nationalism’ which he defined as, “the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced.” Whether Billig’s emphasis on the ‘established’ democracies of the West was intentionally Euro-centrist or simply a ‘misunderstanding’ is open to debate. Nevertheless, his thesis opens the door to further questions that, in its present form, *banal nationalism* does not answer. This thesis poses a similar theoretical query to Billig, asking why Arabs don’t forget they are Arab whilst simultaneously entrenching their attachment to their state. It argues that Billig is too modest in restricting his theory, and that the methodology and theory of *banal nationalism* can explain how identity is reproduced and sustained in societies the world over. These identities are not just national, but sub-national, supra-national and religious also. These societies are not just western democracies, but non-western dictatorships as well. Billig’s own explanation of ‘waved’ and ‘unwaved’ flags can be equally applied to the seemingly distinctive ‘hot’ and overt nationalism of dictatorships as it can the western democracies, and often what appears overt to a visitor is banal and mundane to the home citizen.

By applying an adaptation of *banal nationalism*’s methodology to public mediations in Syria and Jordan, this study will test the above hypothesis. It will illustrate how state, Arab and religious identities are flagged regularly, in both a noticed and unnoticed manner, in the different discourses and public mediations of these two similar yet distinct non-western non-democratic societies. It will discuss the images and speeches of leaders, and then analyse the role of national and transnational television. Finally, in a notable addition to Billig’s methodology, it will include interviews with these mediations’ audience to provide suggestive data on the extent of their reception. The ‘ideological habits’ of Syria and Jordan will thus be shown to enable these states’ multiple identities to be reproduced in the same way as Billig illustrated for the West.

### Chapter 3

#### Building a National Discourse in Syria and Jordan

Official identity in Syria and Jordan has never been monolithic. Since independence ruling elites in each state have constructed and reshaped different identity discourses often in reaction to political circumstances. Even once a comparative political stability was achieved in both countries after 1970 the two governments continued to promote a multi-layered and malleable identity, a feature which has continued under Syria and Jordan's new rulers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This chapter examines how and why these official identity discourses were built and the role of Arabism and state nationalism within them. This overt identity construction serves to test the applicability of Billig to Arab dictatorships. To demonstrate how such 'waved' flags are now everyday and unnoticed, there then follows an analysis of how these identities are routinely flagged daily in arguably the most overt public mediations on display: images and speeches of the leader within leadership cults.

As in many dictatorships, and indeed in some democracies, both Syria and Jordan have constructed cults around their leaders to inculcate loyalty to the state and the regime. Whilst the public mediations within these cults, the pictures of the leader displayed in a public square, or the rhetoric they use in speeches, might seem like examples of overt identity flagging to the outsider, they are very much part of the discourse that Syrians and Jordanians consume everyday. This chapter asks whether, in authoritarian regimes such as these, such obvious flagging has in fact become unnoticed. Examining how these overt symbols have become normalised and even 'banal' serves to strengthen this thesis' hypothesis that banal nationalism is as present in dictatorial Arab states as it is in the West. Billig argues that, "the symbols of nationhood (coins, bank notes, stamps) become a part of our daily lives. These small reminders turn the background space into 'national' space."<sup>305</sup> In Syria and Jordan, as shall be discussed, images of the leader come to be recognised as symbols of the nation state as much as are flags, coins or stamps. In these states, Billig's 'unnoticed flag' is replaced by the unnoticed portrait of the leader behind the desk of an official building.

Yet examining the imagery in the cults and speeches made by leaders serves another purpose as well in this investigation of nation-building in Syria and Jordan. On the one hand, previous literature on the leadership cults, such as Lisa Wedeen's work on Hafez Assad or Nina Tumarkin's study of the cult of Lenin, can be employed to assess what role these cults played in identity building in Syria and Jordan and compare them with similar cults elsewhere. Furthermore, considering the cults helps to answer

---

<sup>305</sup> Ozkirimli, *Theories of nationalism*, p. 200.

whether the identity discourses of Syria and Jordan have evolved between father and son, and how they compare with each other in their use of Arab, state and religious symbolism and rhetoric.

Before proceeding to this analysis however, it is necessary to examine the nature of Syria and Jordan's official national discourse. Both the Syrian and Jordanian government are ambiguous in the identity they disseminate. With their populations seemingly attached to multiple identities, both the Ba'ath regime of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad in Syria and the Hashemite monarchy of Hussein and Abdullah II in Jordan have promoted a layered identity in their official discourse: what Frisch calls 'fuzzy nationalism'.<sup>306</sup> A key question is why these particular discourses are promoted: whether this ambiguity is a deliberate attempt to create an identity that is easy to manipulate around the politics of the day or whether it is a result of the weakness and inability of the state to outstrip older, more deeply entrenched identities.

---

<sup>306</sup> Frisch, 'Fuzzy nationalism.'

### 3.1 Building Syria and Jordan

Both Jordan and Syria acquired artificial colonially drawn borders that had no history of territorial integrity. Understandably, both struggled with nation-building in the years immediately after independence. In Syria, political instability in the 1950s and 60s was accompanied by a debate over what Syrian identity should be.<sup>307</sup> The ruling elites were divided amongst themselves as to whether pan-Arabism or Pan-Syrianism should dominate official discourse, with any territory-based Syrian state identity pushed to the margins.<sup>308</sup> Jordan benefited from greater political stability in these years, with King Hussein ruling from 1952 until his death in 1999. However, the acquisition of a large number of Palestinians, first through conquest in 1948/9, and then as refugees due to the defeat of 1967, led to similar debates over the nature of Jordanian identity – whether it should be Pan-Jordanian or Transjordanian.<sup>309</sup>

Paul Brass argues that ethnic and national identities are convenient tools used by ruling elites to generate mass support.<sup>310</sup> Such instrumentalism was most visible in both Syria and Jordan after 1970, a period that contrasted greatly with the instability of the 1950s and 60s. In Syria, the ascent of Hafez al-Assad to the presidency led not only to political stability, but also to a sustained attempt to pursue a consistent program of nation and identity building. In Jordan, victory in the Black September civil war by Hussein's forces over Yasser Arafat's PLO sidelined Pan-Jordanian identity claims and similarly prompted a more deliberate nation-building attempt by the government. However, whilst the post-1970 stability in each country allowed the leaders the opportunity to promote an identity over a sustained period of time, both show a deliberate ambiguity in the official identity promoted. Hafez al-Assad, whilst no longer oscillating like his predecessors between Pan-Syrianism and Pan-Arabism, attempted to incorporate both into his official identity, alongside a nuanced Syrian territorial nationalism.<sup>311</sup> Similarly, Hussein's official discourse included three distinctive elements: a Bedouin culture that emphasises Jordan's uniqueness; the Great Arab revolt which stresses Arabism; and his family's connections to the Prophet Mohammad which draws in an Islamic layer of identity.<sup>312</sup>

In assessing these ambiguous discourses, this section will pose the question why such pluralism of identity was encouraged. Two alternative suggestions have emerged. The first, from both Layne and Frisch is that, as Brass suggests, these governments keep official identity deliberately vague so that

<sup>307</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* (London: OUP, 1965).

<sup>308</sup> Eyal Zisser, 'Who's afraid of Syrian nationalism? National and State Identity in Syria,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:2 (2006), pp. 179-198.

<sup>309</sup> George, Alan, *Jordan: Living in the Crossfire*, (London: Zed, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>310</sup> Smith, Anthony D., *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 153-5.

<sup>311</sup> Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 184; Barry Rubin, *The Truth about Syria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 238.

<sup>312</sup> Layne, *Home and Homeland*, p. 102.

their allegiance can be manipulated around the government's politics of the day. This is a very modernist approach, suggesting that identity is malleable and able to be manipulated. The second is that of Ayubi, that all the Arab states, including Syria and Jordan are too weak to carry the state beyond the 'coercive' and 'cooperative' sphere.<sup>313</sup> By this logic the pluralism of identity is a necessity to legitimate the ruling elite by including as many under a common umbrella of identity because, as Anthony Smith and ethno-symbolists would argue, older identities cannot be broken down or subordinated.<sup>314</sup>

### 3.1.1 Syria

When Syria gained independence in 1946 it was a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-faith state of Sunni, Shia, Druze and Alawi Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Kurds, Armenians and Assyrians.<sup>315</sup> Furthermore, against the backdrop of Nasser's Old Arabism, it was a political battleground. Patrick Seale described the 1945-58 period as 'the Struggle for Syria' in which the most powerful Arab states of the day, notably Nasser's Egypt and Nuri Said's Iraq, fought for influence by backing different political parties and military strong men.<sup>316</sup> From 1946 to 1956 there were several coups, 20 different cabinets and the constitution was redrafted four times.<sup>317</sup> Though Nasser's supporters appeared to win out when Syria was united with Egypt in 1958, the collapse of this United Arab Republic in 1961 following a further coup by the army in Damascus prompted another wave of disorder.<sup>318</sup> In 1963 the Arab nationalist socialist Ba'ath party seized power, but this only prompted two further coups: by leftist Ba'athists in 1966 and, finally, by Hafez al-Assad in 1970.<sup>319</sup>

Eyal Zisser gives a good account of the two schools of thought on identity facing Syrian rulers prior to 1970:

"Some of the ideologists might be described as 'Arab Syrianists', since they gave priority to the Arab identity and thus to the vision of Arab unity, although they did show a readiness to come to terms, for lack of choice, with the existence of a separate Syrian state on the condition that it have an Arab colouration. The rest of the ideologues, in essence the majority, could be characterised as 'Syrian Arabists', giving priority to an authentic Syrian identity and Syrian state, while enveloping it, for political convenience and perhaps because of true emotional commitment, in the cloak of Arabism."<sup>320</sup>

---

<sup>313</sup> Ayubi, *Overstating*, p. xi.

<sup>314</sup> Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 16.

<sup>315</sup> Lesch, *New Lion*, p. vii.

<sup>316</sup> Malik Mufti, *Sovereign creations: pan-Arabism and political order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 65-81.

<sup>317</sup> Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 31-53.

<sup>318</sup> Rogan, *The Arabs*, p. 320.

<sup>319</sup> Patrick Seale, *Assad of Syria: the struggle for the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 1988), pp. 154-168.

<sup>320</sup> Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 183.

Zisser explains how, in this turbulent period, the various regimes tried different formulas to entrench a national Syrian identity. Those that tried to emphasise Syria's pre-Islamic past tended to fail because most of the population already felt Islamised or, at the least, Arabised. Similarly those who played on a Greater Syrian (*bilad as-sham*) identity struggled with the reality that that historical territory had now been divided into four parts, of which modern Syria was but one.<sup>321</sup> In the immediate post-independence period, Islamists played no role in the debate over Syrian identity.<sup>322</sup> As is detailed by Hanna Batatu's account of the Syrian Peasantry, the power of the state in the post-independence period was largely limited to the towns and, with illiteracy levels as high as 42.7% in 1960, the ability for any state to disseminate an official identity must be questioned.<sup>323</sup> The pre-Assad period was therefore one in which elites could neither agree on the nature of Syrian identity nor successfully spread it.

Zisser goes on to claim that, despite this, a "distinctive, if fragile, Syrian state identity," did emerge, but one that didn't blossom until Hafez al-Assad's rule.<sup>324</sup> He states that under Hafez this identity,

"...lent considerable weight to attempts to portray modern Syria as the heir to *Bilad al-Sham*, even though certain parts of those historic lands were not under Syrian sovereignty. The regime adopted a narrative of glorification of Syria's past, moulding an Arab Islamic and an even more ancient pre-Islamic and pre-Arab past into a historical ethos for the Syrian state since it stabilised and entrenched itself. At the core of this ethos lay the claim that *Bilad al-Sham* was the cradle of world civilisation and, simultaneously, the cradle of Arabism."

In essence, Zisser argues that Assad tried to bridge the dichotomy of the post-independence years by laying claim to both Pan-Syrianism and Pan-Arabism. This discourse encompassed the cultural Arab/Islamic-orientated pan-Arab identity by highlighting Syria's role as the cradle of Arab nationalism, whilst also encompassing a territorial identity that allowed the regime to claim lineage from past civilisations that emerged in or occupied Syrian soil, particularly the pre-Islamic era. Moreover, unlike previous regimes in Syria Assad's state was large and, using the Ba'ath party machinery and the military as a mobilisation tool, went about creating, "a new generation of Syrian Arab Patriots."<sup>325</sup> Rural regions were affected this time with a conscious effort made to bring peasants into 'the nation'.<sup>326</sup>

A noticeable feature of this multi-layered official identity was both its malleability and its rigidity at different times. With regard to Islam, as shall be discussed later, the Ba'ath regime was secular and

---

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>322</sup> Talhami, 'Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism', p. 112.

<sup>323</sup> Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, p. 189.

<sup>324</sup> Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 184.

<sup>325</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, *Assad: Sphinx of Damascus* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988), p. 193.

<sup>326</sup> Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, pp. 188-90.

limited the role given to religion. Whilst they amended the constitution in 1973 to ensure that the President was always a Muslim and that 'Islamic jurisprudence' was the mainstay of legislation, the same constitution declared that Syria was a, 'democratic, popular and socialist state'.<sup>327</sup> The contradiction of being simultaneously socialist and Islamic was glossed over by the leadership. However, this caveat in the official identity allowed for the possibility of Islam's role to be more pronounced later. Inspired by the Iranian Revolution the Muslim Brotherhood launched a revolt against Assad's secular Ba'athism in 1979.<sup>328</sup> When this was eventually crushed by Assad's forces in Hama in 1982, Talhami explains how Assad subsequently sought to co-opt previous supporters of the Islamist rebellion by enhancing his own Islamic credentials.<sup>329</sup> He increased public observation of prayers, funded more mosques, and revitalised some Sharia and Quaranic studies institutes.<sup>330</sup> Whilst the shift never altered Syria's status as one of the most secular regimes in the Muslim Middle East, it demonstrates how the official identity could be moulded around political circumstances without requiring total transformation. Its broadness therefore offered a certain level of malleability.

As striking was a simultaneous rigidity about the national identity with regard to Syria's 1.5 million Kurds. Whilst Syria's other minorities – Alawis, Christians, and Druze amongst others – were afforded space within Assad's pluralist identity, the Kurds were not. Whilst Armenians were allowed to have their own language schools, the Kurds were forbidden even to speak theirs in Arabic-only schools. Various programs such as settling Arabs in Kurdish areas were attempted to deny any form of cultural autonomy for the Kurds.<sup>331</sup> The only option given was to assimilate into the Arabic-speaking mainstream, a quite different approach than that demanded of Christians, Armenians, Druze and Syrians. On the one hand, this might be viewed as evidence of Assad's deep-felt Arabism that, as suggested by Daniel Pipes, Hafez was an idealist with no time for non-Arab cultures within Syria.<sup>332</sup> This would explain how he could tolerate Arabic-speaking Christians and Druze, but fails to account for the privilege given to Syria's Armenian or Aramaic-speaking Syriac communities. More convincing is Perthes' view that he was a pragmatist.<sup>333</sup> The determining factor that led to unwillingness to find space for the Kurds was the size of threat. The Kurds are the largest minority in Syria, making them a greater threat than others. They are geographically concentrated rather than the dispersed Christians, and hence

---

<sup>327</sup> Talhami, 'Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism', p. 123.

<sup>328</sup> Nikolaos Van Dam, *The struggle for power in Syria: politics and society under Asad and the Ba'ath party* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), pp. 105-117.

<sup>329</sup> For more on the 1982 Hama revolt, see Seale, *Asad*, pp. 316-339; Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 185-6.

<sup>330</sup> Talhami, 'Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism', p. 124.

<sup>331</sup> Lowe, Robert, 'The *serhildan* and the Kurdish national story in Syria,' in Robert Lowe and Gareth Stansfield (eds.), *The Kurdish Policy Imperative* (London: Chatham House, 2010), pp.162-166.

<sup>332</sup> Pipes, *Greater Syria*, pp. 186-8.

<sup>333</sup> Volkr Perthes, *Syria Under Bashar Al-Assad: Modernisation and the Limits of Change (Adelphi Papers)* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 6.



have a legitimate case for territorial secession. Moreover, they had no economic sway nor use for Assad, being mostly of peasant stock unlike the wealthy Christian professional classes. Finally, with co-nationals in neighbouring states, Hafez had no desire to allow any concessions to Kurdish cultural autonomy for fear of igniting a wider wave of Kurdish nationalism and consequent territorial instability to his east. The discovery of oil in Syrian Kurdish territory would only have strengthened his resolve to quash all talk of Kurdish identity and secession.

Choosing to face down Kurdish nationalism through long-term oppression rather than attempted integration suggests an inconsistency to Assad's official identity discourse. Clearly political expediency dictated when the identity was fixed, and when it was malleable. Those groups that were economically powerful, but geographically dispersed and unthreatening, such as Christians, Druze and even non-Arab Armenians and Syrians, were easily included. For those who were geographically concentrated and therefore a potential threat, but economically and militarily weak, such as the Kurds, the discourse remained rigid and not inclusive. For the Islamists, who were both militarily and economically threatening because, unlike the ethnic groups, they could potentially recruit the majority Sunni population, Assad had to both repress the Muslim Brotherhood militarily to secure his regime, but then adapt his discourse to appeal to their potential supporters. In short, whilst the Kurds were containable and too insignificant to warrant a shift in the discourse, the Islamists were too great to ignore.

### 3.1.2 Jordan

Like Syria, Jordan's early years were characterised by a debate over identity. However, the two newly independent states were very different. Whilst Syria had a substantial urban population, the major trading cities of Damascus and Aleppo, a sizeable coastline and stretches of fertile land, Jordan,

“was a strip of cultivable land 270 kilometres long with a width tapering from 80 kilometres in the north to nothing in the south, and flanked by a great deal of desert; with a population of 350,000, one railway line and hardly any roads, no resources whatsoever.”<sup>334</sup>

By all accounts, basic state building rather than nation building was therefore the priority in the small desert kingdom until the 1948-9 Palestine War transformed its demographics. When Abdullah I annexed the West Bank, his new united kingdom had a population of 1.43 million, but only 476,000 were original East Bank Transjordanians. Amman's population mushroomed from 50,000 to 120,000, with many Palestinians living in refugee camps in the city.<sup>335</sup> With the East Bankers now forming a minority, the next twenty years were characterised by two camps on the direction of Jordan's identity.

---

<sup>334</sup> Avi Shlaim in George, *Jordan*, p. 14.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The dominant group were the Pan-Jordanians who, “believed in the unity of the two banks [of the Jordan] as the territorial basis of the Jordanian state, but with the centre of gravity of such a state remaining in Amman.”<sup>336</sup> In contrast there were the original East Bankers or ‘Transjordanian nationalists’ who increasingly resented the West Bank and its Palestinian population.<sup>337</sup>

It was against the backdrop of this debate that the seventeen-year-old Hussein came to power in 1952/3. This was also the era of Nasser and Old Arabism, which further complicated Jordan’s identity debate. Many in Jordan favoured Nasser’s Arabism and, though Hussein showed initial enthusiasm for Nasser’s rise in 1952, he soon found himself threatened by coups led by Nasserist officers in the Jordan army.<sup>338</sup> Though Nasser was Hussein’s enemy for long stretches his biographer, Nigel Ashton, suggests that Hussein did develop a genuine attachment for his own brand of ‘Hashemite Arabism’. It was this that conditioned some of Hussein’s actions including his disastrous entry into the 1967 war that saw the West Bank occupied by Israel.<sup>339</sup> This also ensured that a layer of Arab identity remained within the Jordanian discourse long after the Pan-Jordanian/Transjordanian debate had been resolved.

Perhaps more important than the physical loss of the West Bank in shaping Jordanian identity, was the Black September civil war of 1970-1 between Hussein’s forces and Arafat’s PLO. After expelling Arafat’s ‘state within a state’ from his borders Robins comments, “there was only one state left in Jordan.”<sup>340</sup> But was there only one identity? Though the Transjordanian nationalists would now dominate was Hussein able to construct a ‘coherent and unified’ identity alongside his state?<sup>341</sup>

Linda Layne emphasised that, like in Syria, the official identity promoted by Hussein’s regime aimed at finding a broad common identity for its pluralist population. She states, “Jordan appears to be constructing itself in a way that enables it, ‘to make links across all kinds of division.’”<sup>342</sup> As with Syria, where Hafez attempted to loosely fuse together Greater Syrian and Arab identities, Jordanian identity draws on Arabist and Islamic discourse, presumably to include Pan-Jordanians, whilst also emphasising a unique civic identity for Jordan, to co-opt Transjordanian nationalists. As Layne highlights, Jordanian nationalist rhetoric is composed of these three main elements. Firstly, the Arabist, which emphasises the role of the Hashemites in leading the Arab revolt of 1916 against the Ottomans. Secondly, the Islamic, which emphasises the genealogical links between the Hashemites and the

---

<sup>336</sup> Robins in George, *Jordan*, p. 25.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>338</sup> Ashton, *King Hussein*, p. 39.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>340</sup> Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 132.

<sup>341</sup> George, *Jordan*, p. 25.

<sup>342</sup> Martin in Layne, *Home and Homeland*, pp. 28-9.

Prophet Mohammad. Thirdly, there is the Jordanian, which highlights Jordan's unique 'tribal' character.<sup>343</sup> In each of these the monarchy is central.

As with Syria, this Jordanian identity is somewhat contradictory, not least because the Hashemites who claim to embody what it is to be Jordanian, have no historical links to the territory and are not of tribal origin – the claim to Jordanian uniqueness. However, as with the Ba'ath regime, "the Jordanian state thrives on the ambiguity and haziness of its nationalist ideologies."<sup>344</sup> Frisch coined the term, 'fuzzy nationalism' to describe this deliberate vagueness, which he states is rooted in security concerns and the need for the regime to maintain popular support for its changing foreign policies.<sup>345</sup> Useful though Hillel's term is, he essentially is modifying the nationalism theory of modernists such as Halliday who suggest that, "...nationalism as an ideology has no fixed state. It is not a matter...of a 'true' versus 'false' definition of identity, but of shifts in identity and arguments about it, corresponding to shifting social and political relations."<sup>346</sup> Hillel's angle is that, rather than evolve identities over time, the Jordanian state attempts to maintain several 'layers of identity' at the same time that it can draw upon when it wishes. One such occasion that he highlights is Hussein's dropping of Jordan's claim to the West Bank in 1988 which, surprisingly, was couched in Arabist rather than Jordanian rhetoric. Such is the extent to which these multiple layers of identity were entrenched that no one saw it as inconsistent to talk of Arab unity whilst abandoning Arab territory.<sup>347</sup>

Frisch's analysis does go some way to supporting Ayubi's assertion that Jordanian identity is flexible because of the weakness of the state. Rather like Hafez al-Assad against Islamists in 1982 and the Kurds over a more sustained period of time, the Jordanian state has at times resorted to force and coercion when challenged by those who claimed an alternative identity discourse. This was seen during Black September, when support for the PLO amongst Palestinian Jordanians still seemingly outstripped loyalty to the Hashemite state and required violent enforcement.<sup>348</sup> Similarly, the suspension of Parliament from 1970-88 suggests a lack of confidence that Jordanians would choose parties that conform to the official identity discourse should they be given the free choice. This was seemingly confirmed when free elections mostly returned tribal leaders and Islamists in the 1990s.<sup>349</sup> However, in contrast to Syria a success of Jordanian identity is that its malleability incorporated older identities rather than subsume them to a wider loyalty. Unlike Syria's Muslim Brotherhood, Jordanian Islamists tacitly support the regime and, though the Hashemites would probably prefer them to have less success

---

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>345</sup> Frisch, 'Fuzzy nationalism,' p. 86; Lynch, 'Jordan's Identity,' p. 56.

<sup>346</sup> Halliday, *Nation and Religion*, p. 41.

<sup>347</sup> Frisch, 'Fuzzy nationalism,' p. 91.

<sup>348</sup> Robins, *A history of Jordan*, pp. 129-132.

<sup>349</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (London: Boulder, 2002), pp. 39-41.

in the polls, their victory does not fundamentally challenge the official identity discourse – which has an Islamic component. Similarly, though voters stayed loyal to their tribal chiefs in elections, the tribes are loyal to the monarchy and do not challenge the discourse, which includes a tribal element. Moreover, despite the oppression of Black September, and the continued suspension of parliament, Jordan did not experience the same police state society as Syria. Hafez al-Assad relied far more on coercion than did Hussein, and the simultaneous absence of heavy policing alongside a period of relative calm suggests at least some acquiescence from the population in Jordan towards the official identity.

Can Jordan's official identity therefore be seen as more flexible and accommodating than Syria's? Perhaps the best way to assess is to compare how each regime's discourse responded to challenges. Both have faced an Islamist challenge, which both have attempted to co-opt in different ways. The Ba'athists firstly used violence by killing up to 10,000 civilians in the Muslim Brotherhood controlled city of Hama in 1982, before then altering its discourse to contain limited elements of Islam.<sup>350</sup> The Jordanians faced no such violent challenge from Islamists and were able to mould their branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the IAF, into a loyal opposition. Yet in both states there remains a layer of more militant Islamists who would overthrow the regime for a more Islam-only identity.<sup>351</sup> Both states have also faced an irredentist challenge to their official identity: the PLO-supporters in Jordan who wanted to overthrow the monarchy for a republic that would focus on liberating Palestine, and separatist Kurds in Syria. Whilst both responded with violence at times, most notably the Jordanians during Black September, it is noticeable that after this the Hashemites tried to find space for the West Bankers within their official discourse – by emphasising their Arab and Islamic identities. No such space was found for Kurds within Syrian identity.

Evidently then, both regimes promote an identity that is flexible around circumstances and politics but that still has fixed 'red lines' in places that the regime will not allow to be crossed. The Syrian regime's lines are more fixed than in Jordan, never allowing the Kurdish question to be included and only allowing a certain level of Islam. Jordan has its red lines too. In the 1980s a debate over tribalism as a symbol of Jordanian identity was ended after intervention from Hussein in favour of the tribes.<sup>352</sup> Similarly, the crushing in Black September illustrated the limited concession Hussein was willing to give to a Palestinian identity. However, Jordan's identity has a broader scope than Syria's. Perhaps this is ironically because it is a weaker government and therefore cannot rule with as much of an iron fist as Syria. Its official identity has to be flexible enough to gain broad cooperation from the population

---

<sup>350</sup> Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, pp. 185-6.

<sup>351</sup> Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, pp. 106-119.

<sup>352</sup> Layne, *Home and Homeland*, p. 104.

because it does not have the strength or resources of Syria to rule through coercion. In this regard, Ayubi's thesis seems flawed: the weaker regime, Jordan, rules through more cooperation, whilst the stronger regime, Syria, uses greater coercion. Moreover, both regimes have shown themselves able to be malleable with their identities according to political circumstance. The absence of Islamic rebellion in Syria after 1982 suggests that the combination of cooption and coercion has worked. The same could be said of militant Palestinian nationalism in Jordan since 1970. On the surface then, contrary to ethno-symbolist claims, identities do seem impressionable to official identity discourses.

## 3.2 Leadership Cults

These ambiguous, multi-faceted official discourses are disseminated through the institutions of the Syrian and Jordanian state. Educational institutions teach children a set curriculum that reproduces the official national identity.<sup>353</sup> Conscription into the armed forces ensures that young men have a few years of direct propaganda. Those who join trade unions or, in Syria, the Ba'ath party itself similarly encounter the discourse daily.<sup>354</sup> An analysis of any of these 'waved' flags would no doubt illustrate the workings of the discourse in detail. This study though will focus on the area of overt discourse flagging that is arguably the most accessible to citizens in Syria and Jordan for the longest period of their life: the images and speeches of leaders, often disseminated as part of a leadership cult.

Any visitor to either Syria or Jordan is struck by the proliferation of billboard posters, photographs and banners venerating not just Bashar and Abdullah but also Hafez and Hussein. As well as fostering loyalty to the regime, these 'cults' intersperse images of the leader with national flags and symbols, overtly promoting the multi-faceted identity discourse. Yet what seems overt for visitors is mundane for most Syrians and Jordanians: the images being as normal and everyday as advertisements for Pepsi or Nestle. Indeed, the cults and national symbols have become so interchangeable that a photograph of the leader tends to be the dominant symbol displayed in classrooms, public buildings and shops rather than a flag. Rather than being the 'waved' flag that an outsider may see, this section will suggest that the images and speeches of leaders have become so normalised that they too have become 'banal' reminders of the national discourse.

### 3.2.1 Defining Leadership cults

Deconstructing the features of Syria and Jordan's cults of leadership helps to illustrate the nature of the identity discourses outlined above. However, before analysing how the images and speeches in cults reproduce the nationalist discourses in Syria and Jordan, 'cult' needs to be defined. The advent of mass communication in the era of modernity has allowed ruling leaders to promote themselves as a symbol of their regime and, at times, the nation, in a way that pre-modern despots such as Louis XIV of France never could. The quasi-deification of 20<sup>th</sup> century dictators such as Hitler, Stalin and Mao through a cult has been well documented, and their techniques of using posters, murals, statues, media and symbols to promote both loyalty and identity have been mimicked by modern rulers such as Kim Jong Il and

---

<sup>353</sup> Suleiman, 'The Role of Education,' in Luciani and Salame, *The Politics of Arab Integration*, pp. 73-93.

<sup>354</sup> Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, p. 188.

Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi).<sup>355</sup> Distinguishing and defining cults is not straightforward. On the one hand, rulers such as Turkmenbashi who combined absolute power with such vanity that he renamed months after himself and his family might adequately be considered 'cult'. On the other hand, what about the ritual veneration of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, who has an official birthday and whose image is regularly embossed on stamps, coins, bank notes and official portraits? What about the veneration of nationalist founding fathers such as George Washington or Ataturk?

Lisa Wedeen's, *Ambiguities of Domination*, a detailed study of the cult surrounding Hafez Assad regards it as a *personality* cult. It notes several unexpected features of the cult and its relationship to power and identity. Wedeen argues that, despite its appearance, Assad's cult does not produce popularity or establish legitimacy, but instead acts as a disciplinary device, generating a politics of public dissimulation in which citizens act *as if* they revere the leader.<sup>356</sup> She highlights the link between the cult and nation-building, seeing the cult as defining and generalising a specific type of national membership and suggesting that, "national membership is expressed through people's facility to reproduce the symbolism of Assad's rule. The nation-state, in this sense, extends as far as the cult does."<sup>357</sup> Wedeen highlights the paradox of Assad's cult: that it does not persuade citizens or even the producers of the cult to believe in its absurd slogans about Assad's ability, yet its strength is in its ability to act as if they do, to, "say the ridiculous and avow the absurd."<sup>358</sup> Methodologically, Wedeen notes the difficulty in assessing how much the images and speeches of a cult impact on nation-building, given the disparity between public involvement and private reservations about slogans and symbols.<sup>359</sup> She compensates for this by conducting ethnographic interviews with Syrians – a method repeated in this study with the qualitative interviews with Jordanians and Syrians discussed in chapter six.

Wedeen's work raises several questions of relevance. Did the cult of Hussein in Jordan, for example, have similar features to those identified by Wedeen in Syria? In her conclusion, Wedeen identified Hussein's cult, alongside that of Ben Ali in Tunisia, as one that would merit further investigation – something addressed here. Similarly, what about the cults of Bashar al-Assad and Abdullah II, which Wedeen identifies as 'second generation' cults as they were inherited from the regime's previous rulers.<sup>360</sup> How has Bashar's cult changed from Hafez's? How has Abdullah's changed from Hussein's? What impact has this had on the official identity discourse they are disseminating?

---

<sup>355</sup> Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), pp. 352-3; David Lewis, *The Temptations of Tyranny in Central Asia* (London: Hurst & Co., 2008), pp. 81-3.

<sup>356</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 6.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Indeed, can Bashar, Abdullah and Hussein's reproduction of their images, which are less dramatic than Hafez's, be considered cults? Returning to the question posed earlier, how do we distinguish between the reproduction of the image of Hafez al-Assad, George Washington or Queen Elizabeth II? Both are used to promote identity and power, so are they both cults? Nina Tumarkin's study of the cult of Lenin offers some useful answers to these questions. Tumarkin asserts that what distinguishes the cult surrounding dead leaders such as Lenin or Washington, with that employed by Stalin or Mao is power. Whilst Stalin used the cult surrounding him to exercise power, Lenin's cult emerged after his death. Stalin, therefore had a *personality* cult because of its "excessive vanity and abuse of real power combined with the systematic use of political terror", whilst Lenin had a cult that was disconnected from power.<sup>361</sup> The cults of Washington and Ataturk would therefore be cults but not *personality* cults as they are deceased and, if Queen Elizabeth II can be said to have a cult, it is one of *celebrity* rather than *personality* as she holds little power.

The fault with Tumarkin's model is that it is quite an arbitrary line: when political terror and power becomes so great that the reproduction of an image becomes a *personality* rather than a *leadership* or *celebrity* cult is difficult to ascertain. This study proposes identifying cults by offering a more detailed set of criteria than just this arbitrary line between image use and power. It proposes combining the criteria of *personality* cults identified by Wedeen and Tumarkin to establish a sliding scale for the intensity of a cult. Six criteria of a *personality* cult can be chosen to consider: the actual power of the leader, the extent to which terror is systematically used, how much they demand a belief in the absurd, how much the leader personifies the state, how much they deliberately build identity, and how much space is shared with others. Using these criteria to guide us, the reproduction of images and speeches of the leader in Syria and Jordan under Hafez, Hussein, Bashar and Abdullah all display these features sufficiently to label them 'cults'. Whether we cross the line to call them 'personality' cults as has Nina Tumarkin is actually largely immaterial. With the possible exception of Hafez, none represent the level of intensity seen in the cults of Turkmenistan, Saddam's Iraq or Kim Jong-II's North Korea, yet the concentration of power in the hands of the leader being venerated and the use of some political terror ensures that each are more cult-like than the foundation cults of America and Turkey or the monarchy cult of Britain.

What remains to be discussed is how these images and speeches serve to build and reproduce identity in Syria and Jordan and how, especially under the second generation cults of Bashar and Abdullah, they

---

<sup>361</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. xx.



have become some normal and everyday that they now serve to reproduce the national discourse in a banal and unnoticed manner.

### 3.3 Images and Speeches in Syria

#### 3.3.1 The Cult of Hafez

Based on Soviet models the cult of leadership that Hafez al-Assad created in the 1970s and was maintained until, some say beyond, his death in 2000, proves a useful example of how the regime disseminated its official identity.<sup>362</sup> Through murals, slogans, pictures and statues, the cult of Assad promoted to the Syrian people the various layers of identity already discussed.

This cult was composed of various themes. Amongst the most prominent was the family, with images of Hafez alongside his mother and children widespread. Lisa Wedeen argued that it is this willingness to share public space with others that distinguishes Hafez's cult from others such as Stalin's.<sup>363</sup> These images which emphasised the importance of the family unit to Syrian society varied from early pictures of Hafez's mother, often depicted as haloed, to later promotions of Hafez' eldest sons Basil and Bashar.<sup>364</sup> Similarly, another theme played upon was that of socialism and populism. Hanna Batatu emphasises the references to Assad's own peasant background and numerous allusions to the power of 'the people', and Wedeen illustrated the paradox of Assad attempting to be both 'father of the nation' whilst simultaneously being a 'man of the people'.<sup>365</sup> A third theme was the military. Whilst Assad didn't share Saddam's cult's penchant for portraying him as all things to all people – dressed as a tourist in portraits in the Iraqi ministry of tourism, or as a chef at the Iraqi culinary association, he was nonetheless consistently depicted as a great military leader.<sup>366</sup> Having been an air force colonel, images of Assad, later joined by Bashar and Basil, dressed in uniform were amongst the most common images.<sup>367</sup> This militarisation of society was further disseminated by the regime's decision to alter school uniform to be military style.<sup>368</sup>

However, all these themes appealed to a local view of identity and primarily promoted Syrian state identity. Hafez's images of his family were clearly not intended to encourage a commonality between all families across the globe, but were a specific model for Syrian families to follow. Similarly, Assad was no socialist internationalist and his populist appeals to the masses were not aimed at identifying them with international labour. In the same way, the uniforms regularly worn by Hafez and his sons were of the Syrian military and it was within this establishment and this Syrian territory that those uniforms were valid. This might seem an obvious observation but this level of banal identification was

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., p. 27; Seale, *Asad*, pp. 339-340.

<sup>363</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>364</sup> Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), p. 63.

<sup>365</sup> Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, p. 194 and p. 205; Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 17.

<sup>366</sup> Glain, *Dreaming of Damascus*, p. 178.

<sup>367</sup> George, *Syria*, p. 8.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

not widely promoted in the pre-Assad period. The cult's widespread reproduction of such everyday institutions as the military, the peasantry and the family could therefore serve to strengthen state identity in a way not seen before. As Wedeen stated, "the nation-state, in this sense, extends as far as the cult does."<sup>369</sup>

However, the Assad cult was not that straightforward. Alongside those unnoticed images that should have strengthened a single state identity was a deliberate attempt to also manufacture the pan-Arab and pan-Syrian identities mentioned earlier. As Daniel Pipes has been at pains to highlight, Assad made loose territorial claims to Jordan and Palestine emphasising their historical Greater Syrian identity.<sup>370</sup> At the same time an attempt was made to portray Hafez as an Arab nationalist, as the heir to Gamal Abdel Nasser, with images of the deceased Egyptian President sometimes appearing alongside that of the Syrian leader.<sup>371</sup> Similarly, Zisser's analysis of Syrian public holidays shows several references to an Arabist identity. 6<sup>th</sup> May celebrates a clash between Ottoman authorities and Arab nationalists in 1916, for example, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> February is known as 'Arab Unity Day', celebrating the brief union of Syria and Egypt in 1958.<sup>372</sup> However, these holidays are celebrated alongside those that are clearly more Syrian nationalist, such as 17<sup>th</sup> April which commemorates Independence from France in 1945, 8<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> November which commemorate the two Ba'ath coups of 1963 and 1970, and 6<sup>th</sup> October which commemorates the October War with Israel.<sup>373</sup>

Syrian state nationalism was promoted in the increased celebration of ancient cultures found within Syria's modern borders. Zisser argues that, despite initial misgivings about these non-Arab cultures damaging the regime's message, "By the 1980s the Syrian regime appeared less reluctant to refer to a more distant heritage as a means of strengthening national pride in Syria, and began merging this history into the Syrian historical narrative." A quick survey of such banal nationalist objects as Syria's bank notes helps to illustrate this development. Pre-Assad, bank notes issued in 1958 had mostly Arab or Islamic cultures depicted upon them. The Umayyad mosque, Hama's medieval water wheels, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Azem Palace and the Takiyya as-Suleimaniyya mosque cover four of the five notes, with the only ancient symbol being a picture of Palmyra's ruins. By the early part of Hafez's rule in the 1970s and early 1980s, of seven bank notes four still displayed Arab/Islamic culture with the Umayyad mosque and Hama's wheels now joined by an image of Aleppo's medieval citadel and an image of Saladin. However, now three notes were dedicated to ancient cultures – Palmyra, the Roman Bosra theatre, and Palmyra's queen Zenobia. This trend continues into the present with the last notes issued

---

<sup>369</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 157.

<sup>370</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: from war to peacemaking?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 152-157.

<sup>371</sup> Ma'oz, *Assad*, p. 44.

<sup>372</sup> Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 188.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-192.

under Hafez's rule, those from 1998, portraying in total five Arab/Islamic cultural images and four ancient cultures.<sup>374</sup> The shift is such that by the end of the Hafez era ancient 'Syria-only' images are given almost as much space in the discourse as Arab/Islamic cultural images.

Despite this gradual increase in space for ancient figures and cultures, none was as central in the Assad cult as the confusing figure of Saladin. Hafez would frequently be referred to as 'the new Saladin', erected various statues to him, named a castle after him and even had a portrait of his victory over the crusaders at Hittin in 1187 behind his Presidential desk.<sup>375</sup> The fact that Saladin used Damascus as his base to drive out the crusaders from Jerusalem gave Assad an obvious parallel to draw upon during his long-standing conflict with Israel. However, quite which element of the Saladin story Hafez wished to celebrate seemed to vary. At times, Saladin was a Pan-Arabist who united the Arabs in a kingdom from Cairo to Baghdad.<sup>376</sup> However, given that he was actually of Kurdish origin, Saladin's role as ruler of an expanded *Bilad as-Sham* was also used. Finally, given that he was actually born in modern Iraq, Saladin's connection to Damascus was often emphasised for a more state nationalist. The advantage of drawing parallels between himself and Saladin was that his achievements were so wide that the regime could interpret them as they wished around which ever layer of identity they wanted to promote at the time.

Hafez al-Assad therefore constructed a cult of the leader that complemented the ambiguity of the identity he wished to disseminate. At different times he drew upon statist structures such as the military, family and the peasantry and at others more Syrian-only symbols such as its ancient cultures. At other times he used images such as Nasser to push a more pan-Arab identity and the convenient figure of Saladin to incorporate Arabism, pan-Syrianism and Syrian state identity when it suited. One symbol remained constant however: the image of Hafez himself. Many authors have commentated that Hafez himself became intrinsically linked to national identity.<sup>377</sup>

### 3.3.2 The Cult of Bashar

When Bashar succeeded Hafez in 2000, one of his first orders was the removal of portraits of his father from everywhere except official buildings.<sup>378</sup> Whilst the inefficient Syrian bureaucracy only half-heartedly carried out this request, its symbolism was still significant: things were to be done differently from now on. Yet were they really? Visitors to Syria today are struck by the volume of pictures of

---

<sup>374</sup> All notes found at <http://www.atsnotes.com/catalog/syria/syria.html> accessed 11/12/08.

<sup>375</sup> Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 187; Ma'oz, *Assad*, p. 44; For banknotes see <http://www.banknotes.com/sy.htm> accessed 11/12/08.

<sup>376</sup> Ma'oz, *Assad*, p. 45.

<sup>377</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 157; Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 179.

<sup>378</sup> Lesch, *New Lion*, p. 233.

Bashar and Hafez still scattered around the country. Some, admittedly, are relics from Hafez's days that have not been taken down. Others though, are new additions. So has Bashar just replaced Hafez in the cult, or are the changes deeper than that?

Rabil argues that things have changed dramatically, that Bashar has no leadership cult and, consequently, is in a far weaker position than his father.<sup>379</sup> Zisser argues the contrary that, though the style may be different, the substance is the same and despite Bashar's initial toning down in reality he too is the subject of a cult.<sup>380</sup> This view is shared by Ghattas, though she believes Bashar genuinely did try to move away from the cult and it was only after external factors challenged the regime's power in 2005 that a cult around Bashar re-emerged to shore up domestic support.<sup>381</sup> Finally, Carsten Wieland believes that whilst there remains a cult around Bashar, it has become popularised in a way that was never seen under Hafez, with many ordinary Syrians voluntarily placing pictures of Bashar on their cars and homes without compulsion from the state.<sup>382</sup>

Rabil is wrong to say there is no cult around Bashar. The new president's promotion of the free market may have led to advertisements lining the streets alongside government slogans, but the slogans are still there even if their impact is diluted. Even before the 2005 revival that saw the giant pictures of the President return one should not exaggerate Bashar's request to reduce the cult. Though there were to be no statues or murals like under Hafez, keeping Bashar's image on official buildings was no small caveat. The public sector in Syria employs over a quarter of the Syrian workforce and, alongside schools, universities and hospitals, not to mention Ba'ath party facilities, the President's image is still seen by most Syrians several times a day.<sup>383</sup> Though the cult became larger after 2005, and even bigger during the 2007 campaign where Bashar sought 're-election' in an unopposed referendum, it had been nowhere near removed in the intervening five years. Wieland is probably correct in emphasising how much more personally popular Bashar is compared to the feared figure of Hafez, and many may choose to display images of the President without pressure from the regime. Similarly, after 30 years of Hafez a culture of sycophancy has evolved in Syria where many businesses, unions and shops will voluntarily use images of the President to entice customers.<sup>384</sup> Syrian academic Sami Moubayad explains this by saying, "The government has never given an indication if it wants the posters there or not, so people assume that they like them. Plus there is the mimicking effect where if one shop or street puts a poster

---

<sup>379</sup> Robert G. Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 208.

<sup>380</sup> Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Assad and the First Years in Power* (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 50.

<sup>381</sup> Kim Ghattas, 'Syrian President holds on to power,' *BBC Online*, 2/2/2006  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4673186.stm> accessed 6/11/2008.

<sup>382</sup> Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, p. 34.

<sup>383</sup> <http://www.traveldocs.com/sy/economy.htm> accessed 15/12/08.

<sup>384</sup> See Appendix I, D & E.

up, the next will follow and so on.”<sup>385</sup> However, whilst it remains open to debate quite how orchestrated the cult is, it is hard to believe that there is no input from the regime. In a tightly controlled state the pictures drivers place on their car are produced, manufactured and sold on government licence, not by independent merchants spontaneously professing their love of the president.

Zisser though is inaccurate in claiming there was just a superficial change in the cults of Hafez and Bashar. Zisser states that, “a survey of Syrian newspapers...reveals no significant change in the treatment of him (Bashar) as compared to that of his father.”<sup>386</sup> However, whilst there remains a taboo around criticising the regime, the style of press is quite different. Whilst Hafez was referred to by various different grand titles from *al-mualim* (the teacher) to *Suriyya al-Assad* (Assad’s Syria), Bashar is simply *al-raïs* (The President). In other ways, Bashar is portrayed with much less deification than his father. There are no gold statues nor are there murals portraying him as the ‘father of the nation’. Whilst Hafez was at times a peasant, at others a military leader, at times an intellectual – such as the quite comical statue of him reading a book outside the Hafez al-Assad library in Damascus – Bashar’s image is more consistent. Mostly that image is of a modernising intellectual reformer.<sup>387</sup> He is also more often than not depicted as accessible: either surrounded by people, smiling or waving. One rarely sees the same solemnness associated with Hafez. Similarly, whilst there remains a certain militarism to the Bashar cult, with images of him in uniform widespread, it is nowhere near the levels seen under Hafez and there has been a demilitarisation of society with the end of military school uniforms and a reduction in the length of military service.<sup>388</sup> One area of consistency with Hafez is Bashar’s cult’s emphasis on the family. The most popular images are Bashar with his young and fashionable wife Asma and their three children, rather than those of the President with his father or brothers.

So whilst the subject of the cult has altered, has there also been a shift in the official identity it promotes? Barry Rubin argues that there has, and the Bashar regime places far greater emphasis on Islam than Hafez ever did.<sup>389</sup> He cites Syria’s public support of foreign Islamists such as Hezbollah and Hamas as evidence for this shift. Rubin however, is mistaken. Whilst there has clearly been a greater Islamisation of Syrian society during Bashar’s years in power, this is part of a regional trend that began in the 1980s. For pragmatic reasons in the conflict with Israel he backs Islamist elements abroad. In 2005 when he felt his regime under pressure, as Moubayad states, “Bashar started using religious overtones with slogans like ‘God protect Syria.’ This was strange for a secular country and a very

---

<sup>385</sup> Interview with the author 7/6/10.

<sup>386</sup> Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, p. 50.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-6.

<sup>388</sup> Lesch, *New Lion*, p. 203.

<sup>389</sup> Rubin, *The Truth about Syria*, p. 238.

secular leader but he had to shore up support from the growing Islamic street.”<sup>390</sup> However, it is noticeable that this faith-filled slogan is religion-neutral and could as well appeal to Christians as much as Muslims. Indeed, any survey of Bashar’s cult will notice a conspicuous absence of Islam, even less so than under Hafez. Whilst Hafez promoted secularism, he still allowed limited Islamic projects, such as having his name inscribed on the restored Umayyad Mosque.<sup>391</sup> Bashar, though he continues his father’s tradition of occasional public praying, particularly during Ramadan, has not embossed his names on religious buildings, nor are images of him praying amongst those widely distributed – unlike in Abdullah’s Jordan (see below). Indeed, as with Hafez, “Bashar’s speeches and interviews consistently reflect a secular perception without any Islamic religious undertones,” declining even to open his speeches with *Bismallah* (in the name of God) – seen as standard for any Arab leader.<sup>392</sup>

A closer examination of Bashar’s public speeches, both to domestic and foreign audiences, suggests consistency with Hafez in promoting a mixed Arab and Syrian identity. The author reviewed four speeches, two for a domestic audience – Bashar’s inaugural addresses of 2000 and 2007 – and two for a foreign, albeit Arab, audience – his opening of the 2008 Arab League summit in Damascus and his address to the Syrian Journalists union during the 2006 Lebanese war with Israel. As mentioned, the most obvious consistency in all of these speeches is an absolute minimal reference to religion. A second consistency is the repeated flagging of the word ‘Arab’. Bashar refers to the ‘Arab nation’, ‘Arab national interests’, ‘our present Arab world’, ‘Arab common interests’, ‘Arab values and ethics’ and ‘genuine Arab characteristics’.<sup>393</sup> This pan-Arabist rhetoric is particularly pronounced in the two foreign speeches, though it also has a substantial presence in the domestic deliveries. A specific Syrian identity is mentioned alongside the Arab in these foreign speeches with Bashar speaking of, ‘We in Syria,’ on numerous occasions. However, in the two foreign speeches the Arab identity is the most pronounced. In simple numbers, in his speech to the Arab League, Bashar mentions the word ‘Arab’ forty-two times, and ‘Syria’ only eight. When commenting on the Lebanon War, ‘Arab’ is mentioned seventy-nine times, in contrast to only twenty for ‘Syria’. In contrast, in Bashar’s 2000 inaugural address he mentions ‘Arab’ seventeen times to ‘Syria’s’ ten, and in 2007, ‘Arab’ has twenty mentions whilst ‘Syria’ has forty-nine.

Looking specifically at some passages, we see the different elements of Bashar’s discourse. Here, for example, is an excerpt from the speech given at the 4th General Conference of the Journalists Union Al-Umawyeen Conference Palace, in Damascus on August 15, 2006, just after the Lebanon war:

---

<sup>390</sup> Interview with the author 7/6/10.

<sup>391</sup> Miriam Cooke, *Dissident Syria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 13.

<sup>392</sup> Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, p. 58.

<sup>393</sup> See Appendix II, A-D.

"I would like to say to the Syrian Arab people that the word "proud" is not enough at all to express what a human being feels towards the greatness of your support to our Lebanese brothers. You were great when some persons wanted you to look small overwhelmed by malevolence. But, the great people of Syria always surprises the adversary by what is not expected. You dealt a blow to those who wanted to create a division between Syria and Lebanon. You were magnificent in your comprehending the magnitude of the conspiracy, and you were very strong in your reaction towards this conspiracy. In brief, you were the beating heart of Arabism with every sense of the word regarding the heat that will rise and the meaning which will be more powerful when we liberate the Golan by our hands, will and determination. The destiny of Syria is to be proud of Arabism and to defend and maintain it because it is the only base for a bright and honourable future we build for our children. We have to implant in our hearts and minds that there is no place in this world but for the strong. Strength starts by the power of mind, will and faith and this is the base of resistance and the only way to achieve victory."<sup>394</sup>

At once Bashar's rhetoric is Arabist and Syrian nationalist. He emphasises the commonality between Syria and Lebanon, referring to the Lebanese as 'brothers' and condemning those who, 'wanted to create a division' between them. He plays up the Arab identity of Syrians, referring to them as the 'beating heart of Arabism' and as 'the Syrian Arab people'. Yet at the same time Bashar refers directly to Syrian nationalist concerns. He speaks of liberating the Golan: a specifically Syrian rather than Arab issue. Similarly he speaks of 'the great people of Syria'. Indeed, this passage illustrates Bashar's national Arabism. He uses Arabism as something for which specifically the Syrians should be proud. By stating that it is 'the destiny of Syria to be proud of Arabism' he is in effect creating a national myth for the Syrians: that they are *more* Arabist than other Arabs. In this discourse, being the 'beating heart of Arabism' is indeed what makes Syrians special.

In a second passage, this time Bashar's speech to the Peoples Assembly following the oath-taking for a new constitutional term of office on July 18, 2007, we see a similar use of rhetoric. He says:

"Dear sisters and brothers, I address you with all respect, appreciation, and love. I want us to make every possible effort to build Arab Syria, the model in its prosperity and progress as it is the model of steadfastness. I want you to be optimistic despite all these circumstances. This nation has known many invaders throughout history. They destroyed mosques and churches, burnt libraries and killed scientists and resistance men. But they have all gone and we remained with our nation, our heritage, our identity and our language. Today, history repeats itself. They have not learnt the lesson. We did. Here is the lively spirit of this nation moving everywhere announcing its existence to the world that it is alive in the heart of every resistance man and declaring that it will triumph despite the pain. As for them, they will disappear once again. We remain the owners and lovers of this land; we live on it, hold its soil sacred and bequeath its eternal love to one generation after another. As for me, I shall remain as you have known me, one of you, I work for you, I drink with you from the spring of patriotism and pan-Arabism and breath the blessings of God and the people."<sup>395</sup>

---

<sup>394</sup> See Appendix II, D.

<sup>395</sup> See Appendix II, B.



Again Bashar strikes a balance between Arab and state identity. He speaks of a desire to build 'Arab Syria' and declares that 'pan-Arabism' is one of the crucial 'springs' from which he and the Syrian people drink. Similarly it is notable that he does add the occasional reference to religion, inviting his audience to be shocked that previous invaders, 'destroyed mosques and churches,' and breathing, 'the blessings of God'. It is striking though how state nationalist this passage is – notable as it is the final paragraph of his second inaugural speech. He is particular to link the territory of Syria to the people, speaking of past invaders to 'this nation', and declaring his audience to be 'the owners and lovers of this land'. He is not here speaking of the Arab nation or the Arab lands but specifically Syria. Again, he is promoting a mythical bond between people and territory in which the soil is 'sacred'. He similarly identifies an 'other' who threaten the nation. He speaks often of 'they' who destroyed mosques or did not learn the lessons of the past, as a counterbalance to 'we' who will triumph. The different identities whether Arab or religious are channelled into the common, Syrian, national good.

This suggests that, consistent with Hafez, Bashar balances both an Arab and a Syrian identity. Also like his father, he interchanges the 'us' group he is projecting to his people from the Arabs to the Syrians. To both domestic and foreign audiences, 'we' or 'us' is sometimes the Syrians, and sometimes the Arabs. Similarly, 'our nation', 'our people' and 'our society' varies in its meaning. Due to its specific Arabic meaning, 'Our country' (*Biladna*) however, always refers to Syria. Bashar's flagging of the nation is therefore different to Billig's examples of John Major in Britain or George H Bush in the US in that who 'we' are remains ambiguous.<sup>396</sup> This variability in which layer of identity is being banally flagged by a leader's rhetoric illustrates the need for Billig's narrow theory to be expanded.

Zisser has argued that, whilst Bashar has retained Hafez's ambiguity, the balance between Syrian and Arab identity has now shifted to be more Syrian.<sup>397</sup> An analysis of some of the posters from the 2007 election campaign, still in place in 2009, might support this view such as Statist slogans like, 'Syria: God is her protector, Assad is her shepherd'.<sup>398</sup> Similarly, with the 'return' of the cult in 2005 there was an unexpected wealth of Syrian flags on the streets and public buildings. In the past the more prominent symbol had been the pan-Arab flag of the Ba'ath – the same as Palestine. However, it is too early to see if this will be permanent or just a convenient tool for the time being. Certainly the presence of slogans such as, "Yes for the beating heart of Arabism," alongside more statist ones suggest Arabism won't be subsumed by a solely Syrian identity any time soon.<sup>399</sup> A more noticeable shift has, however, been a nuanced move away from Pan-Syrianism. Bashar dropped Syria's long standing claims to the Turkish

---

<sup>396</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp. 81-92.

<sup>397</sup> Zisser, 'Who's afraid?', p. 180.

<sup>398</sup> See Appendix I, B.

<sup>399</sup> See Appendix I, A.

province of Hatay in 2004.<sup>400</sup> Similarly, though not out of choice, Syria has recognised Lebanon's independence for the first time since decolonisation by swapping ambassadors in 2008. This is a far cry from Hafez's quasi-imperialist mantra that the two countries were, "two states, one people."<sup>401</sup>

On the other hand, the pan-Syrian Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) has been legalised under Bashar and brought into government and, whilst their power is negligible, the symbolism is still significant in forming collective identity – as seen by the growth of public posters boasting their map of historic 'greater Syria'.<sup>402</sup> Similarly, whilst Turkish sovereignty over Hatay might have officially been granted, all public maps still show the territory as part of Syria.<sup>403</sup> Whilst the Pan-Syrian layer of identity might be much further down the line of importance within Syrian official rhetoric and the cult of the leader, it still remains. Given how flexible the identity has proven to be, there is no reason to suggest the regime will not wish to draw upon it again in the future. Yet as with Arab identity, this Pan-Syrianism is likely to be framed to ultimately serve state interests.

---

<sup>400</sup> Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism* (London: Tauris, 1987), pp. 494-514; Perthes, *Syria Under Bashar Al-Assad*, p. 47.

<sup>401</sup> Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country: myths and realities of the wars in Lebanon* (New York, N.Y.: Holmes & Meier, 1996), p. 196.

<sup>402</sup> Rabil, *Syria*, p. 190.

<sup>403</sup> Perthes, *Syria Under Bashar Al-Assad*, p. 47.

### 3.4 Images and Speeches in Jordan

#### 3.4.1 The Cult of Hussein

King Hussein refrained from some of the more egotistical elements of the Hafez cult, even joking in private that the one statue dedicated to him in Jordan should be decapitated and presented to Assad as a gift to recycle.<sup>404</sup> Even so, images of Hussein were found in the usual places: public buildings, bank notes, coins and such banal representations as names of bridges, highways and schools. As discussed above, there is sufficient ritual veneration coupled with power to be deemed a 'cult'. As with Hafez, Hussein's cult built a careful image of Jordan's leader but, unlike in Syria, it was more based in reality. Whilst Assad was built up as a demi-God on absurd grounds beyond his ability, such as being Syria's 'first teacher' or 'premier pharmacist', Hussein's image was more nuanced - based on a glorification of his genuine talents.<sup>405</sup> His love of fast cars and helicopters was highlighted, as was his military history, to promote the image of an 'action man' king.<sup>406</sup> On the other hand, Jordan sees a more direct celebration of the leader himself than in Syria in its public holidays. Whilst there is no 'President's birthday' holiday in Syria, both Hussein and Abdullah's birthdays are national holidays – though Abdullah has recently ordered his to be ended. There is similarly a holiday each year to commemorate the ascension of Abdullah II to the throne.<sup>407</sup> Yet as well as the personal character of its leader, Hussein's regime built a cult around the monarchy as an institution, weaving in various themes to both legitimise itself and to promote an official identity.

Unlike in Syria, one of the most prominent themes was Islam. As Wedeen states, "King Hussein is descended from the Prophet Mohammad and his rule is officially represented as being invested with the sanctity that his genealogy implies. Regime iconography depicts the king as guardian of the Muslim holy places as well as leader of the nation-state."<sup>408</sup> This iconography is supported by state-backed projects linking Jordan's Islamic heritage to the current Hashemite dynasty, such as the new Islamic civilisation museum in Samarkland and the restoration of the Umayyad citadel in Amman.<sup>409</sup> On occasions this iconography is more overt, particularly with the construction of new mosques named after members of the royal family. There are numerous King Hussein mosques scattered around the kingdom and Jordan's two largest are the King Abdullah I Mosque and the King Hussein I Mosque. Another difference to Syria under Hafez is the role of the military. Whilst Hussein was regularly portrayed in uniform, as were other members of the royal family, this was not accompanied by a

<sup>404</sup> Randa Habib, *Hussein and Abdullah* (London: Saqi 2010), p. 78.

<sup>405</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 1.

<sup>406</sup> Ashton, *King Hussein*, p. 8.

<sup>407</sup> <http://www.jordanembassyus.org/holidays.htm> - accessed 15/12/08.

<sup>408</sup> Wedeen, *Ambiguities*, p. 158.

<sup>409</sup> Irene Maffi, 'New museographic trends in Jordan: The strengthening of the nation' in George Joffe, (ed.), *Jordan in transition 1990-2000* (London: Hurst & Co. 2002), pp. 213-9.

general militarisation of society as in Syria. A similarity though, is the role of family. Though he was married several times, images of Hussein, his wives and children were commonplace.

Alongside an Islamic layer of identity, Arab identity was another key pillar within Hussein's nationalist discourse and cult. However, the emphasis had a quiet different focus to that pursued by Hafez. Whilst Assad portrayed himself as the heir at times to Nasser's revolutionary anti-imperialist Arabism, and at others to Saladin's historic expulsion of foreign invaders, Hussein's linked his Arabism to his grandfather (Abdullah I)'s role in the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in 1916. Despite very little of this revolt taking place on Jordanian territory and the Hashemites themselves originating from far-off Hijaz, much of the cult's iconography has focused on this event. Irene Maffi has demonstrated how many of the state's 'national history' museums focus on this war of 'liberation' from the Ottomans. Similarly, each year the 10<sup>th</sup> June is celebrated as 'Great Arab Revolt Day'. However, as Ashton has observed, Hussein's, "ideology of Hashemite Arab nationalism was never precisely codified."<sup>410</sup> Glorifying the Arab revolt proved a convenient way for Hussein to stave off the challenge from Nasser and, to a point, Assad's brand of Arabism. By portraying the now historically departed Ottomans as the enemy of the Arabs, rather than the Western powers who Nasser and Assad blamed for the division of Arab lands, Hussein was politically expedient: attempting to legitimise his close contact and financial support from the former Imperial powers.<sup>411</sup> This supports Frisch's view that maintaining a broad and flexible identity was primarily for political expediency.

Whilst drawing on the ties of Islam and Arabism, an effort was also made to create a distinct Jordanian culture. The bank notes of the 1990s, for example, depicted some pre-Islamic places of worship to emphasise Jordan as a 'spiritual land'. Maffi argues that this is not depicted as contradicting the monarchy's role as guardian of Islam, with much emphasis placed on the biblical stories in the Quran amongst other things.<sup>412</sup> A very pronounced element of this Jordanian culture is tribalism.<sup>413</sup> Though they have no history as Bedouin tribesmen, the Hashemite monarchy went to great lengths to associate themselves with this supposedly unique Jordanian culture.<sup>414</sup> The red *keffiyah* headscarf has come to be associated with this tribal aspect of Jordan's national identity. Not only is it a key component of the uniform of the Jordanian army but it is also seen as the 'crown' of the monarch worn by Hussein regularly, most notably on bank notes and pictures. Yet neither Bedouin nor the red head scarf is unique to Jordan. Jordan's neighbours have far more Bedouin tribes than Jordan. Moreover, the distinct red

---

<sup>410</sup> Ashton, *King Hussein*, p. 5.

<sup>411</sup> Frisch, 'Fuzzy nationalism,' pp. 100-102; Marc Lynch, 'Jordan's Identity and Interests,' in Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy*, p. 56.

<sup>412</sup> Maffi, 'New museographic trends', pp. 217-9.

<sup>413</sup> Layne, *Home and Homeland*, p. 10.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

colour is an invented tradition that originated in the minds of British imperialists looking for an army uniform, rather than in Jordan.<sup>415</sup> Crucially though, the significance of the red head scarf is its contrast to the Palestinian black *keffiyah*: it has been used to emphasise Jordan's distinction from the Palestinians both when confronting the PLO and right-wing Israeli claims that 'Jordan is Palestine'.<sup>416</sup> Indeed much of Hussein's discourse has involved walking a tightrope between defining a distinct Jordanian identity that is separate from Palestine, whilst simultaneously integrating the Palestinian majority living in Jordan. The use of Islam and Arabism have been a key component of this, reflected in Hussein's cult.

### 3.4.2 The Cult of Abdullah II

Abdullah's cult is both more modest and more overt than Hussein's. On the one hand, more than his father he seeks to emphasise the institution of the monarchy rather than just himself. The first set of bank notes issued under Abdullah suggest a shift away from a single monarch cult. Whilst previously the reigning king (Hussein)'s head appeared on all bank notes, those issued in 2003 depicted a different Hashemite monarch on each bill: Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Hejaz, Abdullah I, Talal I, Hussein I and Abdullah II.<sup>417</sup> Similarly, much public space is given to Abdullah's glamorous wife Queen Rania, including almost daily reporting on her activities on state television news and one could argue that Rania has her own cult - though due to her lack of direct power it is more of a cult of celebrity. Unlike Bashar's also popular wife Asma, Rania occupies space in the public eye without her husband and there are some posters and postcards on sale of her alone – something one would not find in Syria.

An interesting facet of Abdullah's cult is the space within it given to his father. Wedeen identifies such cults as 'second generation'. Much public space is still dedicated to Hussein and Abdullah receives political capital from it, in the same way that Stalin used images of Lenin to legitimise his rule. On his succession, the new regime used Hussein's popularity to boost Abdullah's credibility, widely circulating images of the two together looking relaxed and familial.<sup>418</sup> Though the same can be said of Bashar's image alongside the deceased Hafez, the style is quite different. The vast majority of those images that remain of Hafez Assad were erected during his rule and haven't yet been replaced, with a stigma attached to their removal for fear of appearing to disrespect the regime. Most images that are currently produced of Bashar do not include Hafez and those that do often have the father depicted in a ghostly fashion, silhouetting his son from afar. Whilst both rulers seemingly want to take legitimacy

<sup>415</sup> Halliday, *Nation and Religion*, p. 206.

<sup>416</sup> Marc Lynch, *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 91-94.

<sup>417</sup> <http://www.onlinefx.co.uk/fx/Stores/OnlineFX/jordancurrencyguide.asp> - accessed 16/12/08.

<sup>418</sup> See Appendix I, F.

from their fathers, Bashar's cult keeps Hafez's image as a stern, respected, demi-God quite separate from his own image as an approachable, young, moderniser. In contrast, Abdullah's cult has used Hussein's approachable, action man image to absorb some of that popularity for itself. This has shifted a little as Abdullah has consolidated his power. Recently, after Abdullah named his own son Hussein Crown Prince in summer 2009, pictures of Hussein junior have started to appear either alongside his father or even alone. This suggests Abdullah may be already preparing a third generation cult for his son to inherit.

However, whilst sharing space with others, Abdullah's cult is also more overt than Hussein's because it is much larger. There are more pictures and posters of Abdullah, with or without Hussein, Rania or others, than there were of Hussein during his rule. As court insider Randa Habib notes, "his portraits were extensively displayed on the streets and in public and private offices and the number of songs glorifying him increased and were broadcast at the peak viewing time before the 8pm news."<sup>419</sup> An analysis of these portraits suggests a cult that requires a certain belief in the absurd, closer in style to Hafez Assad or even Saddam Hussein than to that of Bashar al-Assad or Hussein. Whilst Bashar's portraits in Syria show him either in military uniform or in his suit, Abdullah is dressed as a policeman outside police stations, in army uniforms by barracks, in a graduation gown at universities and even in a football shirt at the national stadium.<sup>420</sup>

Does Abdullah's cult continue the national identity fashioned by Hussein? Frisch suggests that the eclecticism of Hussein's cult was continued under Abdullah, but with differing proportions.<sup>421</sup> The three main facets of Jordanian identity, Islam, Arabism and Jordan's tribal character, certainly remain in place. Alan George suggests a shift during Abdullah's rule to strengthen a specific Jordanian national sentiment. In 2002, following popular demonstrations in support of the Palestinians' second Intifada and the threat of a US invasion of Iraq, Abdullah launched 'Jordan First'.<sup>422</sup> In what was clearly an attempt to play down the previously promoted Arab and Islamic solidarity identities around the political climate of the time – Jordan relied on financial support from the US who were supporting Israel's crushing of the Intifada and about to launch the Iraq war – Jordanian flags and pin badges were widely distributed and a 'patriotic document' was published. This was later followed by similar overtly state nationalist campaigns, 'The National Agenda' and 'We are all Jordan'.<sup>423</sup>

---

<sup>419</sup> Habib, *Hussein and Abdullah*, p. 198.

<sup>420</sup> See Appendix I, H & I.

<sup>421</sup> Frisch, 'Fuzzy nationalism,' p. 93.

<sup>422</sup> George, *Jordan*, p. 49.

<sup>423</sup> Habib, *Hussein and Abdullah*, pp. 190-1; See Appendix I, L.

Alongside the state nationalist elements of Abdullah's cult, analysis of images shows continuity with the Islamic elements of Hussein's discourse. Though less widespread than pictures of him in uniform, posters of the king praying in a mosque and some of him on the pilgrimage to Mecca can be found. Similarly tying in the promotion of the monarchy as an institution, a popular image used is Abdullah alongside the Hashemite monarchs dating back to Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Hejaz, custodian of the Holy places of Mecca and Medina.<sup>424</sup> However, though Abdullah clearly is displaying continuity with Hussein in his use of Islamic identity, and perhaps making a greater effort to promote a Jordanian state identity, it is important to highlight that an Arab layer of identity is still part of the cult and discourse. Whilst Abdullah's favoured identity is perhaps more consistent and defined than either Bashar or Hussein, Arabism still has a role in the official discourse even if it has been subordinated to state identity. Notably, Abdullah's new bank notes boast Arabist pictures even more than Hussein's did. Alongside the state symbols of the Ma'an and Raghdan palaces and the creation of Amman's first parliament, the new notes depict the 1916 Great Arab Revolt – which Abdullah still refers to like his father – and Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock. Including the latter is symbolic given that Hussein gave up his claim to the West Bank in 1988. Whether its inclusion is a nod to Pan-Jordanian, Pan-Arab or Pan-Islamic idealists is uncertain. However, the fact that a Jordanian bank note boasts a picture of a place no longer part of the country illustrates that a solely Jordanian state nationalism is not the only facet of the official discourse.

An analysis of Abdullah's public speeches illustrates the recent shift towards the primacy of Jordanian nationalism. The author considered four of Abdullah's speeches, two of a day-to-day domestic nature: addressing a military university graduation ceremony in Kerak in 2008 and opening Parliament in 1999; and two of more international significance: responding to Islamist terrorist attacks in Amman in 2005 and addressing the Arab League in Riyadh in 2007. In each, Abdullah speaks several times of, 'one Jordanian family,' 'the homeland', 'the free Jordanian will', 'the patriots of Jordan' and 'we in Jordan'.<sup>425</sup> His speeches also encompass Islamic rhetoric, much like Hussein. Unlike Bashar al-Assad but akin to most Islamic and Arab leaders, most of his speeches open with *bisimallah al rahman al raheem*. He often also cushions his words with religious references such as 'with God's help', 'thank God', 'God willing', and 'with the help of God'. In this manner, Jordanian religious identity is flagged. Such seemingly deliberate religious rhetoric should not be overstated though. Many of these phrases have evolved into colloquialisms and are not always transcribed into written documents. Whilst it is certain that Abdullah makes more of religious identity than the deliberately secular Bashar, as analysis of state television will show in the next chapter, Jordan still relegates Islam to the background.

---

<sup>424</sup> See Appendix I, G & J.

<sup>425</sup> See Appendix II, E-H.

There is also a layer of Arab identity flagged by Abdullah, though there is a noticeable difference in meaning to Bashar. Take for example this section from Abdullah's opening of parliament in 1999:

"Jordan has been and will remain, God willing, the inheritor of the message of the Great Arab Revolt and its noble aims and aspirations in freedom, unity and a better life, and it will always be Arab in its loyalty, position and message. Stemming from this clear vision, the inner Arab depth will remain for Jordan the base of all its relations. No relation will precede those of Jordan with its Arab brethren. On this basis, Jordan will continue its endeavours to purify Arab relations, transcend Arab disputes and will continue to support joint Arab institutions, work for the purpose of uniting and mobilising its efforts in a framework of cooperation and integration aimed at a better future for the coming generations. Our relations with each Arab brethren state are based upon compassion, brotherhood, respect, trust, cooperation and non-interference with others' internal affairs."<sup>426</sup>

On the one hand Abdullah emphasises Jordan's Arab identity, saying Jordan, "will always be Arab in its loyalty, position and message." He again references Jordan's founding myth of the Great Arab Revolt. Yet his emphasis is on Arab identity shaping Jordan's international relations whilst Bashar suggests Syria's Arab identity affects its national character. Abdullah talks of 'joint Arab institutions', 'each Arab brethren state' and 'Arab relations,' thereby drawing a clear line between the national and the supranational tie. In this sense Abdullah's national Arabism is even more obvious and pronounced than Bashar's.

The nature of Abdullah's rhetoric does alter depending on his audience however. Not surprisingly, he is at his most Arabist when addressing the Arab League in 2007, speaking of 'Arab rights', the 'Arab nation' and 'authentic Arab traditions' – sounding much like Bashar in places. He mentions the word 'Arab' twenty-five times, in comparison to only fifteen Islamic references and seven of 'Jordan'. In contrast, these numbers alter when addressing a domestic audience. For the university students he has three Arab references, five of Islam and two of Jordan, and in opening parliament he mentions Arabs twelve times, Islam nine times and Jordan twelve times.

Interestingly after the terrorist attacks of 2005, he makes no mentions of Arab identity, only briefly discusses religion - largely condemning killing innocents in Islam's name - but he mostly emphasises Jordanian identity: speaking of 'protecting Jordan', 'Jordan will continue' and 'Jordan does not bow to coercion'. In one section he states:

---

<sup>426</sup> See Appendix II, E.



“I appeal to every citizen - man and woman - of this country to consider himself or herself a soldier and a security officer. Each one of you has a responsibility to protect your country. Circumstances require each and every citizen to be cautious and vigilant, and to cooperate with the security services to prevent any attack on the security and stability of this country. We must be united in confronting these terrorists, who have neither a religion nor a conscience. I am confident that the patriots of Jordan - men and women - will maintain, as they always have, a watchful eye over the country and its security, and will be the first line of defence in protecting Jordan and its achievements. Jordan will continue, with the help of God and the determination of its people, to overcome evil.”<sup>427</sup>

Evidently when under physical threat, it is state nationalism Abdullah wishes to promote. He speaks specifically of the security of the country and its defence. He appeals to his audience’s state nationalism by emphasising the duties of citizenship: “to be cautious and vigilant, and to cooperate with the security services.” As with Bashar, Abdullah identifies an ‘other’ for his citizens to unite against: the ‘terrorists’ who ‘we’ (the Jordanians) must be united in confronting. This security theme is repeated when addressing a military university graduation ceremony in Kerak in 2008. He states:

“As of today, each one of you will enter the fields of honour, work and dedication, for you are the homeland's devoted soldiers. Difficulties and challenges will only enhance your determination and strength and your allegiance to the principles and goals of the Great Arab Revolt, which strove to liberate and unite the nation and defend the values of right, justice and freedom. I am confident that each and every one of you realises that the homeland's security and stability supersede all other interests and considerations. For all of us, the first priority is to protect this homeland and preserve its progress and achievements.”<sup>428</sup>

Again, his theme is security and devotion to the homeland. Again, he uses the Arab tie, the Great Arab Revolt, to promote national goals. Notably, we see here the direct flagging of his ‘Jordan First’ approach when he says, “the homeland's security and stability supersede all other interests and considerations.” As in Syria, though Jordan’s nationalism is framed differently, whether its national Arabism or national Islamism, the various components of the multi-layered discourse ultimately serve the state.

---

<sup>427</sup> See Appendix II, H.

<sup>428</sup> See Appendix II, F.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Hafez al-Assad of Syria and Hussein of Jordan constructed a flexible national identity discourse that drew on the multiple ties of their populace. Hafez gelled together Pan-Syrian, Pan-Arab and Syria-only identities that altered its focus at different times. Similarly, Hussein varied the emphasis on his three pillars of Jordanian identity – its tribal nature, the monarchy’s Islamic heritage, and the legacy of the Great Arab Revolt – according to political circumstances. A notable difference between the two discourses was the position of Islam: Hafez wished to minimise religious reference, whilst Hussein used it to legitimize his rule. In contrast, both regimes actively promoted a layer of Arab identity though through different approaches and for different motives. Hussein’s ‘Hashemite Arabism’ portrayed himself as the heir to the Arab revolt against the Ottomans which allowed him to counter the Arabist threat of Nasser whilst maintaining a pro-western outlook. Hafez claimed to be the heir to a more radical anti-western Arabism, allowing him to mobilise his population against Israel and its American ally, whilst simultaneously pursuing a largely Syria-first foreign policy. Though flexible, these identities retain ‘red lines’ that cannot be crossed, with Syria’s red lines being tighter than Jordan’s.

These cases offer a paradox for Ayubi’s theory of weak Arab states. Of the two, Jordan is the physically weaker state, and though it was able to militarily defeat the PLO in 1970, the majority of its population were still Palestinian and hence it was too weak to impose the same kind of permanent repression attempted by Syria towards its Kurds. It therefore had to find space for the West Bankers within its official identity. Of Hussein’s three pillars, whilst Jordan’s tribal heritage might exclude Palestinians, the monarchy’s link to Islam and the great Arab revolt provided them national space. In contrast, Syria’s official identity denied the Kurds space. Unlike the urban Armenians, they weren’t allowed to learn their own language in schools and were denied cultural autonomy. Though this shows the inconsistency of Hafez Assad’s official identity, rather than any staunch ideological commitment to Arabism, it also questions Ayubi’s theory. The stronger state, Syria, uses coercion to enforce its official identity because it can, whilst the weaker state, Jordan is forced to use cooption and cooperation, altering its identity around its population rather than forcing its population to accept its identity. This therefore helps to explain why Arab states promote a multi-layered flexible identity discourse: it is a substitute for strength. When a state is weaker, like Jordan, it must fashion an identity that appeals to the broadest possible group. When a state is stronger, like Syria, it can afford to exclude elements from its discourse.

To disseminate these identity discourses, both Hafez and Hussein constructed cults that have been continued by their sons and successors Bashar and Abdullah. Using Wedeen and Tumarkin's criteria, it is possible to establish certain features that appear in different cults hence allowing us to label the images and speeches of the leader in Syria and Jordan as cults. These features are: the actual power of the leader, the extent to which terror is systematically used, how much they demand a belief in the absurd, how much the leader personifies the state, how much they deliberately build identity, and how much space is shared with others. Though the cult of Hafez was more dramatic than the other three leaders', the four cults still share similarities. Though Hafez was more deified than Hussein, for example, both used similar themes such as family and military frequently. Similarly Abdullah's cult is more overt than Hussein's, with a growth in portraits and posters, yet at the same time it is more willing to share public space with past monarchs and his family – notably his predecessor whose popularity boosts Abdullah's legitimacy. Despite claims to the contrary, Bashar has retained his father's cult, though in a more humble form which portrays him as an accessible moderniser unlike his demi-god father.

The sons may both have shifted the style of leadership cult since assuming power but they have essentially retained the core flexible identities fashioned by their fathers. Public speeches and images reveal slight shifts in emphasis in the identities promoted by the younger generation, with Bashar softening the Greater Syrian identity and Abdullah promoting his 'Jordan first' campaign. These remain slight distinctions though, and there is mostly continuity, notably Bashar's avoidance of Islamic language, despite the growing religiosity of his populace. Arab identity, moreover, remains a key identity that is regularly flagged in both states' official discourse, with both leaders making effort to pronounce their 'Arab-ness' in the international arena. In each case though, the leaders seem to be promoting a supra-national Arab identity: one that serves the national interest.

It was suggested at the beginning of this chapter that the images and speeches within the cults of leadership can provide unexpected examples of banal nationalism. As will be seen in chapter six, the cults' dominance of Syrian and Jordanian public space for so long has led the portrait of the leader appearing 'normal' and 'everyday'. Though they appear to be more overt than Michael Billig's examples of flagging in Western democracies, the deliberate identity discourses described above are so frequently reproduced in these overt public mediations, they are no longer seen as overt. With a supra-national Arabism that serves state interests firmly embedded in the identity discourses of both states, it

is clear that the images and speeches of the leader so frequently seen and heard by Syrians and Jordanians reproduce Arab identity daily.

## Chapter 4

### Flagging the Discourse Daily: State Television

The complex multi-layered identity discourses of Syria and Jordan require state institutions to be disseminated into society. In contrast to the seemingly overt leadership cults discussed previously, the most institutions reproduce these discourses in a more nuanced, banal manner. In both states the military, the education system, press, trade unions, political parties, cultural institutions and the civil service vary in the extent to which they are controlled by the regime, and yet all promote or reinforce their constructed identities. Billig sees these institutions as the key to national reproduction. The following chapter aims to illustrate the applicability of his theory to non-democratic Syria and Jordan by analysing arguably the most banal and everyday state institution: television.

Television proves the most interesting institution primarily because it has greater reach than others. Political party and trade union membership remains relatively low in Jordan. In Syria, whilst membership is high on paper due to the material benefits of joining, the number of active members is much lower.<sup>429</sup> As with the military, these institutions tend to be male-dominated. The education system is perhaps the only major rival to television in terms of reach but, whilst it clearly plays a key role in establishing identity amongst the young, it lacks television's longevity in influencing citizens throughout their lives. Television has a widespread audience within society, male and female, old and young, elite and mass. In 2004, 90% of the citizens of both states had access to terrestrial TV and 50% of households received satellite – a figure that is probably larger due to public viewing in cafes and restaurants.<sup>430</sup> Given the increasing popularity of satellite television in the region, it is likely that this figure is even higher by now. Culturally, television is emerging as a focal point of society. As Hussein Amin states, “close family ties combined with often harsh weather countries, low literacy rates, and a culture of oral communication have made television the centrepiece of family life in many Arab countries.”<sup>431</sup> Even in remote areas, television is extending to regions the state previously struggled to reach, with satellite dishes replacing traditional jewellery as wedding presents amongst Bedouin tribes.<sup>432</sup>

Whilst the press was Billig's main case study to illustrate banal nationalism in Britain, this public mediation remains restricted to elites in Syria and Jordan.<sup>433</sup> Whereas Britain's most read newspaper,

---

<sup>429</sup> Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, p. 188.

<sup>430</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 1.

<sup>431</sup> Hussein Amin, 'Arab media audience research: developments and constraints' in Kai Hafez ed., *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 69.

<sup>432</sup> Hugh Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, (London: Abacus, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>433</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp. 109-127.

*The Sun*, has a readership of one in twenty, Jordan's, *Al-Ra'ai* reaches one in 63 whilst Syria's most read, *al-Thawra* reaches barely one in 360.<sup>434</sup> With average illiteracy rates at 21% in Syria and 11% in Jordan, and even higher amongst women, substantial sections of society do not have regular access to this media.<sup>435</sup> This study therefore adapts Billig's methodology, arguing that in semi-literate societies analysing television affects mass identity far better than the press – particularly the Arab world where television access is higher than in other developing countries.<sup>436</sup>

A potential difficulty in transposing Billig's methodology for the print media onto television is the range of channels available to Syrian and Jordanian viewers. Billig selected a single day to conduct a content and discourse analysis of the ten national newspapers available to Britons. Whilst Syrians have only two terrestrial channels, and Jordanians three, over half of each population have access to satellite dishes that offer over 300 free-to-air Arabic language stations.<sup>437</sup> Whilst in theory it would be possible to record all channels for 24 hours and conduct content and discourse analysis of their banal national content, such a mammoth task is beyond the scope of this thesis. It was therefore decided to focus on just one channel for each state - the single satellite channel each regime broadcasts – over a certain period of time – prime time (1900-0000) over seven days. These channels offer a broad array of programming to analyse. Unlike Billig's limited one-day sweep, by covering a full week this presents a more rounded picture of typical content. This experiment will thus help to illustrate which identities the regime wishes to 'flag daily' through its most wide-reaching institution.

This chapter will firstly outline a brief history of television in Syria and Jordan, explaining the challenges from the satellite media and considering the hypothesis of writers such as Khalil Rinnawi who argue these stations weaken nation state orientation.<sup>438</sup> It will then outline in more detail the methodology of the content and discourse analysis undertaken, before discussing the results found. These results are divided into blocks of program types to be analysed: news; sport, economics, weather and programming breaks; chat shows, *musalsals* (drama series) and Islam. In different ways, each programming type shows that, whilst state identity remains the most prominent, Arab identity is still 'flagged daily'. Moreover, not only are there as many, if not more, cases of Arab identity being flagged in Jordan in contrast to the more overtly 'Arabist' Syria, but both states deliberately minimise references to religion.

---

<sup>434</sup> Sun: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/table/2008/sep/05/abcs.pressandpublishing> - accessed 8/4/09; Jordan: <http://www.al-bab.com/media/freedom.htm#Jordan> - accessed 8/4/09; Syria: Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 102.

<sup>435</sup> CIA World fact book: Jordan - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> ; Syria: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html> (accessed 26/03/09).

<sup>436</sup> William Rugh, *Arab mass media: newspapers, radio and television in Arab politics* (New York: Praeger, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>437</sup> Amin, 'Arab media', p. 69.

<sup>438</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 9 & p. 13.

## 4.1 Television in Syria and Jordan

“To a visitor, particularly one accustomed to Western practice, the output of state media can at times appear almost comical...Criticism is rare and where it occurs it is either tame or focuses on external actors; investigating reporting and exposes of misbehaviour among the ruling elite is largely unheard of.”<sup>439</sup>

### 4.1.1 Nation-building

Like many in the developing world, the Syrian and Jordanian regimes have long appreciated the benefits of television in maintaining their rule and promoting national cohesion.<sup>440</sup> Since launching its first terrestrial channel in 1960, which then went national in 1967, Syria has operated what William Rugh describes as a ‘strict control’ television system: the primary concern being to mobilise the masses in support of the regime.<sup>441</sup> All three channels broadcast from Syria, Channels 1 & 2 (launched in 1985) on terrestrial, and ‘Syria TV’ on satellite since 1995, are run by Syrian Arab Television, a theoretically independent government authority. It is financed by the state and a little by advertising, and is operated within the General Directorate of Radio and Television, whose board is chaired by the Minister of Information.<sup>442</sup> Christa Salamandra has commented that though economic liberalisation in Syria during the mid-1990s allowed a degree of privatisation in production companies, “these emerged in the most Syrian of ways: they tended to be owned by individuals with strong links to the regime.”<sup>443</sup> She also argues that, “...although many Syrian television series are produced by private production companies, television stations remain under strict government control.”<sup>444</sup>

In contrast, Rugh classifies Jordan’s television as a ‘loyalist’ system.<sup>445</sup> Unlike in Syria, he claims, ownership is not exclusively governmental, but loyal nonetheless, and programming focuses more on entertainment than politics. Though the findings of this survey will suggest that Rugh’s claims that Jordanian TV’s content is less political than Syria’s is debatable, he does correctly highlight the difference in ownership between the two states. Though Jordanian broadcasting, like Syrian, began as an arm of the state when it was launched in 1968 as part of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, restructuring in 2001 led to part-privatisation. Terrestrial viewers now can view two state

<sup>439</sup> Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), p.61

<sup>440</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 7; Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. xv.

<sup>441</sup> N. Dajani and O. Najjar, ‘Status of media in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan’ in D. H. Johnston (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of international media and communications Vol. 4* (San Diego: San Diego Press, 2003), p. 306; Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 183.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>443</sup> Christa Salamandra, ‘Syrian Television Makers between Secularism and Islamization,’ in Hafez, *Arab Media*, p. 257.

<sup>444</sup> Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 116.

<sup>445</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 189.

channels (1 & 2) specialising in news and sport respectively, as well as a third private channel which shows movies and cartoons.<sup>446</sup> The state-run satellite station 'Jordan TV' was launched in 1993, and all four are part funded by advertisements, part by licence fee.<sup>447</sup> Though Jordan enjoys greater press freedom than the tightly controlled Syrians, this does not extent to television which, even when privately owned, remains effectively controlled by the state.<sup>448</sup>

Historically, Arab regimes such as Jordan and Syria have viewed television as pedagogical. As Marwan Kraidy states, "In the pre-satellite television era, roughly from the 1950s to 1991, Arab states launched television services with assumptions about audiences being subjects to be manipulated, citizens to be modernised or potential sinners to be kept on the virtucus path."<sup>449</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod's anthropological study of drama serials in Egypt emphasises television's historic role of 'citizen education' in the Arab world, rather than its more commercial-orientated function in the West.<sup>450</sup> Indeed, she writes that, until the economic reforms of the 1990s, the addressee of television was the citizen, not the consumer. Given how artificial borders were, argues Khalil Rinnawi, these citizens had to be created, with one of television's primary goals, "to shape a narrow national identity, orientated towards and controlled by, respective political regimes."<sup>451</sup> Televisions sets were reduced in price to promote the distribution of this nation-building tool.<sup>452</sup> In the post-satellite era, Rinnawi and others argue that state-run television continues on this pedagogical, nation-building format. Salamandra's surveys of Syrian drama, for example, concludes that, "Syrian TV makers see Arab audiences as unsophisticated and impressionable. Viewers, they believe, will absorb and conform to television's messages," and seek to take advantage of large audiences for Ramadan holiday TV serials for, "national cultural construction."<sup>453</sup>

#### 4.1.2 The Satellite Era

The remarkable proliferation of satellite dishes in Arab states after 1991 therefore represented a significant challenge to state television's ability to 'construct' national citizens. Whereas previously the regimes had a monopoly in providing the news, entertainment and culture viewed by their populations, they now faced competition from hundreds of popular foreign-owned rivals such as *Al-Jazeera*, *MBC*, *Abu Dhabi TV* and *LBC*.<sup>454</sup> Whilst capitalist Jordan initially welcomed the growth of satellite media,

---

<sup>446</sup> N. Dajani and O. Najjar, 'Status of media,' in Johnston, *Encyclopaedia of International Media*, p. 314.

<sup>447</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 208.

<sup>448</sup> George, *Jordan*, pp. 213-215.

<sup>449</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, 'From Activity to Interactivity: The Arab audience' in Hafez, *Arab Media*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>450</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>451</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 13.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>453</sup> Salamandra, 'Syrian Television,' p. 258; Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus*, p. 104.

<sup>454</sup> Hafez, 'Arab Media', p. 1.



Syria forbade receivers. This position was soon compromised when regime figures discovered there were profits to be made selling dishes, with the ban lifted in July 2000.<sup>455</sup> Even when officially illegal in 1998, at least 30% of Syrians had satellite access and, after legalisation, by 2004 that number had risen to over half the population.<sup>456</sup> Figures are similar in Jordan.<sup>457</sup> The effects of this explosion in alternative viewing, though, are difficult to gauge and analysts are divided on its true impact. On the one hand, commentators such as Rinnawi, Hammond and Tatham emphasise the revolutionary potential of the pan-Arab media, particularly focusing on *Al-Jazeera*, to claim that the end of the state information monopoly is leading to a weakening of state identity and a revived Arab nationalism. In contrast, Naomi Sakr and Christa Salamandra question this, varying their reasons from explaining how the regimes were at first threatened but then adapted to the new era, to those who argue that this new satellite media promotes the state-driven status quo as much as the old state monopolies.

One argument made by Rinnawi and Tatham is that the proliferation of alternative sources of information has led to a greater distrust in the state and hence its delegitimisation.<sup>458</sup> Rinnawi argues that audiences have become active rather than passive and now take their information from a variety of sources, rather than accepting what the state told them as before.<sup>459</sup> Moreover, he highlights that most Arabs no longer rely on state television for their information. 43% of Egyptians in 2006, for example, told a Reuters/BBC survey that they trusted news from international sources more than the state.<sup>460</sup> Similarly, Nawawy's 2002 survey suggested that 70% of Arabs surveyed relied primarily on *Al-Jazeera* rather than state television for news.<sup>461</sup> A similar survey by Telhami discovered that it was the most popular station in Jordan.<sup>462</sup> According to Alan George, the Qatar-based station is seen as more reliable than state TV which received particular criticism, as did Syria TV, for downplaying or ignoring events during the 2003 Iraq war which it found politically inconvenient, such as the fall of Baghdad.<sup>463</sup>

There are several problems with this line of argument. Firstly, Rinnawi assumes that prior to satellite, because citizens had no access to alternative television stations, they therefore did not seek alternative forms of information. In reality, as Hammond concedes, most Arabs lost faith in their government's capacity to truthfully report the news following their false reports during the 1967 war.<sup>464</sup> The widespread listenership of the BBC's Arabic radio services would support this, with two thirds of

---

<sup>455</sup> George, *Syria*, p. 135.

<sup>456</sup> Sakr, *Satellite Realms*, p. 20.

<sup>457</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 1.

<sup>458</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 94.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>460</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 13.

<sup>461</sup> Rugh, *Arab Mass Media*, p. 231.

<sup>462</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 379.

<sup>463</sup> George, *Jordan*, p. 213; Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts*, p. 138.

<sup>464</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 49.

Syrians, for example, preferring foreign to domestic radio broadcasts in the 1990s.<sup>465</sup> The second fault of this analysis is its narrow focus on news programming. Various surveys have highlighted that drama serials, not news, are the most widely watched shows in the Arab world.<sup>466</sup> Whilst it might be valid to highlight that many prefer non-state sources for news that does not mean that state television is not still viewed for other programs. Just because the populations are not passively accepting everything they see on state television, which arguably they never have, does not mean that the identities it regularly flags are deliberately ignored by viewers. A sceptical view of news authenticity does not translate into a dismissal of all the content of state television.

The second part of Rinnawi's argument is that by delegitimizing the state, pan-Arab satellite media weakens nation-state orientation in favour of a revived pan-Arab identity. He states that,

“while traditional state run media in a post colonial context has worked towards creating and solidifying national identities, transnational media undermines this in favour of a regional identity, based both upon individual beliefs in the pan-Arab nature of the Arab world and the need to appeal to a regional, Arab market.”<sup>467</sup>

He sees the pan-Arab media as creating a new ‘national’ Arab public sphere that has fostered a successful ‘re-imagination’ of Arab and Islamic communities.<sup>468</sup> In particular he emphasises the commercial drive behind these new stations, arguing that whilst state media is controlled by elites, the pan-Arab media is driven by commercial needs.<sup>469</sup> In short, he reverses Abu-Lughod's formula, suggesting that these stations address the consumer and not the citizen. In different ways, his thesis is supported by other analysts. Salamandra, whilst disputing his conclusions, agrees that many satellite broadcasters see themselves as primarily Arab nationalists, thoughts shared by Pintak and Tatham, who reminds us that historically journalists were amongst the most prominent Arab nationalists.<sup>470</sup> Similarly Hammond, whilst disputing the extent to which state identity is undermined claims, “although most Arabs identify first and foremost with their nation states, the more collective aspect of Arab identity is being indirectly strengthened by this new media.”<sup>471</sup>

However, whilst the notion that transnational Arab satellite media is reinforcing Arab identity is one that is shared by this thesis, it is not at the expense of state identity. Sakr and Salamandra offer different explanations for why state regimes and the identities they promote are not at risk from satellite

---

<sup>465</sup> George, *Syria*, p. 134.

<sup>466</sup> Amin, ‘Arab media,’ p. 73.

<sup>467</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 13.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii and p. 154.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>470</sup> Christa Salamandra, ‘London's Arab media and the construction of Arabness’ in *Transnational Broadcast Journal* 10, (Spring/Summer 2003); Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts*, p. 61; Pintak, ‘Border guards,’ p. 195.

<sup>471</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 16.

television. The first hypothesis is that the regimes were threatened by the rapid rise of *al-Jazeera* and its equivalents, but soon adapted. By breaking state television's taboos about criticising regimes, *Al-Jazeera* was considered a potential threat in its early years. Their bureau in Amman was temporarily closed after the channel criticised King Hussein in 1998, and they were not even allowed to open an office in Damascus.<sup>472</sup> However, as Sakr and Hafez both emphasise, the regimes have adapted to cope.<sup>473</sup> Sakr argues that the realisation that bullish tactics like expelling journalists and closing bureaus are less effective than wooing the new stations has led to a more TV-friendly approach from Arab governments.<sup>474</sup>

Contrary to Rinnawi's claim that these stations are primarily commercial, the fact that ownership of most pan-Arab stations is tied closely to various Gulf states has led regimes to strengthen relations with such governments in exchange for an easing of criticism. Syria's close alliance with Qatar, alongside the fact that several producers and journalists working on the station are Syrian, explains why Damascus escapes the kind of criticism from *Al-Jazeera* levelled at others.<sup>475</sup> Moreover, the famed attacks on Saudi Arabia from the station were at their height whenever Qatar-Saudi relations were strained, and criticism of Egypt was similarly related to Qatari-Egyptian relations.<sup>476</sup> Hugh Miles highlights that this, and external pressure from the United States to ease criticism of its Arab allies, has served to dilute the radical criticism of regimes that initially propelled *Al-Jazeera* to fame.<sup>477</sup> Sakr argues that in recent years there has been a levelling out of the radical potential of pan-Arab media. Whilst satellite media's emergence initially prompted a forced reassessment by the regimes of their attitude towards television, producers are now wedded to 'safe' programming that will not rattle the status quo.<sup>478</sup> This is confirmed by the very few incidents of instability or demands for the dissolution of the state during the satellite era. As Hafez points out, "paradoxically enough, the era of the new Arab media is also an era of relatively stable authoritarian government."<sup>479</sup>

An alternative theory is that the regimes were never more than irritated by the new pan-Arab stations and that their inherent structure in fact strengthens the state system rather than undermines it. The issue of ownership is paramount to this argument. As mentioned with *Al-Jazeera*, despite presenting themselves as 'above government', almost all of the major new stations are owned by elites with strong

---

<sup>472</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 232; Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 336.

<sup>473</sup> Hafez, 'Arab Media', p. 4.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>475</sup> 'How Syria came in from the cold', *Guardian online* 10/9/08,

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/sep/10/lebanon.syria>) accessed 8/4/09; Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 342.

<sup>476</sup> 'Regional rifts stymie Arab summit' *BBC News* 30/03/09

([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7971255.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7971255.stm)) accessed 30/03/09.

<sup>477</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 339.

<sup>478</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 112.

<sup>479</sup> Hafez, 'Arab Media' in Hafez, *Arab Media*, p. 4.

connections to ruling regimes. *MBC* and its news network *Al-Arabiyya*, *Al-Jazeera*'s main rival, are owned by a member of the Saudi royal family. *Al-Jazeera* itself, though claiming to be independent, is so closely tied to the Qatar regime that following Jordan's closure of its bureau in 1998 it was not until the Qatar government, not the station, issued an apology that the journalists were readmitted.<sup>480</sup> As Salamandra states, "Satellite television has worked to strengthen rather than undermine existing regimes as new television media has been harnessed by Gulf ruling elites to support and enhance their non-democratic power structures."<sup>481</sup> Even beyond the Gulf elites which tend to own the channels, the production companies of Syria and Egypt that sell dramas to them are unable to work without licences from their regimes. Not surprisingly these are mostly given to trusted associates.<sup>482</sup> In such a market ruling elites are the only ones with the resources to compete and, by keeping a monopoly on the industry, they ensure its ability to undermine their regimes is contained.<sup>483</sup> Alongside ownership, Salamandra and Abu-Lughod illustrate that the opening up of the Arab market for state cultural products such as drama serials, films or music can promote national pride.<sup>484</sup> Whilst on the one hand it does strengthen a regional identity by presenting the viewer with a certain geographical/cultural area within which their state's culture should be competing, as will be discussed in the next chapter, this is in tandem to not in opposition with state identity. Similarly, the analysis of state television in this chapter will also challenge Rinnawi's hypothesis, illustrating that the regimes themselves, not just the Pan-Arab media, promote Arab identity in tandem with state identity.

### 4.1.3 Islam

A brief word needs also to be said about the relationship between Islam and television. As a key identity that is flagged often in the official discourse of Jordan and, to a lesser extent Syria, one would expect any analysis of state television to include an assessment of its role on state television. Similarly, Islam's interaction with Pan-Arab media needs to be discussed. Opinions seem divided on this issue. On the one hand, Hafez sees pan-Arab media as a balance of secularism against the other main rival mass medium: the political Islam preached at the local mosque.<sup>485</sup> Amin supports this notion by highlighting Islamists' such as the Muslim Brotherhood's unwillingness to use television, believing it to be a negative force.<sup>486</sup> Yet rather than being a force to dilute an increased religiosity in Muslim society, others argue television embeds and strengthens Islam. Rinnawi highlights that state television remains structured around the Islamic day, with the call to prayer broadcast five times a day in the middle of

<sup>480</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 232; Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 232.

<sup>481</sup> Salamandra, 'London's Arab media'.

<sup>482</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, pp. 22-32; Salamandra, 'Syrian Television,' p. 257.

<sup>483</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 15 and pp. 199-202.

<sup>484</sup> Salamandra, *New Old Damascus*, p. 103; Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*, p. 6.

<sup>485</sup> Hafez, 'Arab Media' in Hafez, *Arab Media*, p. 2.

<sup>486</sup> Amin, 'Arab media' in Hafez, *Arab Media*, p. 74.

programming.<sup>487</sup> Similarly he sees the regional identity promoted by the new pan-Arab media as much Islamic as it is Arab. Salamandra takes a more indirect approach to make the same point. She proposes that whilst state television used to be a bastion of secularism, the conservative tastes of Gulf stations are forcing the previously secular producers of drama serials in Syria to make increasingly religious-orientated programming. This is then disseminating a more Islamic identity in Syria than was present in the past.<sup>488</sup> As well as assessing the extent of Arab and state identity present in state television broadcasts, this section will therefore also consider the extent to which Islam is being 'flagged daily'.

---

<sup>487</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 138.

<sup>488</sup> Salamandra, 'Syrian Television', p. 253.

## 4.2 A Week of Television: Methodology and News

### 4.2.1 Methodology

Despite a greater interest in the media of the Arab world since 9/11, complains Kai Hafez, the majority of empirical work conducted recently is neither methodologically nor theoretically sound.<sup>489</sup> Work by authors such as Hugh Miles and Steve Tatham on *al-Jazeera*, for example, are largely essayist and not based on detailed scientific research. To avoid similar criticism, having previously considered the theoretical context of this study, its methodology will now be explained.

The purpose of this survey was to investigate what identities were being flagged by state television in the 'everyday' lives of Syrians and Jordanians. Syrians have two state-run terrestrial and one satellite channel run by the state (although at the time of writing a new 'education' satellite channel had just been launched, and a 'drama' channel was on the way). Jordanians have three terrestrial and one satellite channel. One of the major advantages for the researcher investigating these state stations is that, given all channels are governed by the same authority; it is a safe assumption that the identity discourse flagged is similar on each station. Therefore the two satellite channels were selected for analysis. An advantage of this is that both are 'conglomerate' channels which tend to show a variety of programming from news, to entertainment, to discussion shows, whilst the terrestrial channels tend to wholly specialise on just one subject matter such as sport. The researcher therefore avoids the trap of many analysts such as Rinnawi who focus only on news programming. A third reason for selecting the satellite stations is that, whilst officially only 50% of households in each state have access to viewing, this does not account for public viewing. The author's own experiences living in both states suggests that in almost every area, even the poorest, cafes chose to show satellite television over terrestrial and attract larger crowds as a consequence.<sup>490</sup>

Of course, here one encounters an obvious limitation of this research – such evidence of audience response is anecdotal, not empirical. The difficulty is that, unlike in the West, there is little data gathered on audiences in the Arab world. There are no viewing figures carried out either by state governments nor by private channels at anything more than a sample level. Furthermore, the few empirical surveys that have been conducted by academic or commercial researchers have been impeded by governments. As Hussein Amin states, "Government restrictions make the procedures for obtaining official permission to conduct research – particularly research like opinion polls and surveys for

---

<sup>489</sup> Hafez, 'Arab Media', p. 9.

<sup>490</sup> This is further confirmed by ethnographic interviews in chapter 6.

audience studies – problematic if not impossible.”<sup>491</sup> Whilst the few surveys that have been conducted are utilised in this chapter, it is with the acknowledgement that much of this work can be criticised for its limited scope. Further questions come when considering the engagement of the audience as much as actual viewing. Whilst one might be able to prove that a certain café in Amman that screens state satellite television receives over 500 customers each night, it is far more difficult to ascertain how many of them actually watched the television and, of those, how many responded to the identities or messages it flagged. The issue of audience engagement and reception is to be dealt with later in this thesis and for now the focus is on what the regimes aim to flag to their citizens, irrespective of their success.

Having selected the unit to analyse – the Syrian and Jordanian state satellite channels – the issue of when to gather data emerged. The model for this experiment came from Michael Billig’s ‘newspaper sweep’ of the British press, in which he analysed the 10 national British newspapers for banal nationalist content in one random day.<sup>492</sup> However, to do the same with Syrian and Jordanian TV would be problematic. Firstly, though viewing figures are unavailable, it is safe to assume that in the middle of the day when people are at work or school, programming would not prove as valuable to assess as later in the day. Indeed, a commercial survey by a private Arab channel, *Showtime*, in 2005 suggested that by far the most popular television viewing time in the Arab Middle East, like in the Western world, was ‘primetime’ between 1800-0000.<sup>493</sup> For technical reasons, recording a full six hours each day was not possible, so a five hour broadcast between 1900-0000 was decided upon as the sample from each channel. Secondly, a single day of either state would prove an insufficient sample. If on that one day a key event occurred – such as the outbreak of a war or a terrorist attack – that could not be considered ‘typical’. Indeed, one could argue that it was only practical considerations that discouraged Billig from attempting more than one day in his sweep. Having decided to take a sample of the day rather than a full day’s broadcast, there was no such practical restriction on this experiment and so a greater number of samples was decided upon. In the end it was decided to record a full week’s (seven days’) worth of five hour samples.

The recordings were conducted in February 2009: Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup>, Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>, Friday 20<sup>th</sup>, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>, Monday 23<sup>rd</sup>, Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup>. Technical difficulties prevented recording on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> so Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> was selected as a replacement to complete the week. Rather like Billig’s experiment, the intention was to capture a ‘typical’ set of days, rather than a period of any particular national, Arab or Islamic celebration. February is free from public holidays in both states, and there were no religious festivals celebrated at the time. In the region it is difficult to ever select a time

---

<sup>491</sup> Amin, ‘Arab media’, p. 72.

<sup>492</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 109.

<sup>493</sup> Amin, ‘Arab media’, p. 73.

when potential 'Arab' issues will not be present and, perhaps inevitably, the period covered was just after a major conflict: the Israeli war in Gaza of 27<sup>th</sup> December 2008-17<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Yet skirmishes and violence between the Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the ongoing Iraq conflict, are an integral part of the region and any study of the media must acknowledge the considerable coverage these conflicts are given.

Unlike Rinnawi and others, by taking a time-period sample rather than a program-type sample, the following results display more than just news programming. Whilst news is an important tool for disseminating identity discourse, and is consequently discussed first, it is not the only manner. As prominent, though completely ignored by the likes of Rinnawi, are the other types of news reported upon beyond politics. How the sport, weather and economic news are reported is a key way by which these state channels banally flag both state and Arab identity daily. Similarly, the symbols and images found in programming breaks are some of the best examples of both overt and banal identity reproduction. Discussion and interview shows in contrast, with their audience participation promote state nationalism perhaps more than Arab supra-nationalism due to their emphasis on tackling 'the state's' problems and culture, though even they nod towards a wider Arab identity. Finally, the role of drama serials as the most popular program type in the region deserves far greater analysis than that given by Rinnawi, who ignores it, in aiding both nation building and supporting Arab supra-nationalism. Throughout this analysis and in a section at the end, there will also be a discussion of the presence of Islam in programming. Though Islam has an acknowledged place on both stations, most notably Jordan, it is marginal and in terms of symbols and flagging, it is utterly subordinated to State and Arab identities.

#### **4.2.2 News**

News programming in both Jordan and Syria is frequent. In the sample slot (1900-0000) each day, except for Fridays, *Jordan TV* shows four news programs: a brief bulletin at 1900, its main, in-depth hour-long program at 2000, a half hour slot of English language news at 2200, and another brief bulletin at 11pm. In the same time slot, *Syria TV* affords less time to news programming, showing three shorter shows. Its main in-depth program which includes sport and economic news (shown separately in Jordan) lasts for approximately 45 minutes from 2030; a brief bulletin at 2230; and a longer show for approximately 40 minutes beginning at 2340. To maintain a fair comparison, this experiment chose to analyse the two shows of similar length from each channel each day: the main in-depth shows at 2000 in Jordan and 2030 in Syria, and the brief bulletins shown at 1900 in Jordan and 2230 in Syria. In reality, the content of the other news shows varied very little and results would have looked similar had



they been included in this analysis. The survey looked at the four news programs (two Syrian and two Jordanian) over seven days and assessed the stories each reported. In particular what was noted was, firstly, the subject of the story – whether about the state, the Arab world, the wider non-Arab Islamic world, or international news that was unrelated to the Arab or Islamic world; and secondly, the order of the news – what was prioritised for the viewer and what made headline news. In looking at content, Arab news was divided into sub-sections: separating the Israel-Palestine and Iraq conflicts from other Arab news. The results can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Subjects of News bulletins**

	Jordan TV		Syria TV	
	Headlines	Stories	Headlines	Stories
<b>State news</b>	9 41%	60 38%	14 50%	70 44%
<b>Arab news: Israel-Palestine</b>	8 36%	54 35%	10 36%	43 27%
<b>Arab news: Iraq</b>	3 14%	17 11%	0 0%	6 4%
<b>Arab news: Other</b>	1 5%	12.5 8 %	0 0%	11.5 7%
<b>Arab news: TOTAL</b>	12 55%	83.5 54%	10 36%	60.5 38%
<b>News about non-Arab Islamic States (Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc.)</b>	1 5%	9.5 6%	3 11%	15 9%
<b>International news not related to the Middle East or Islamic states</b>	0 0%	3 2%	1 4%	13.5 8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>159</b>

News coverage in both counties primarily emphasises domestic ‘state’ news. Whilst the table in Figure 2 highlights that Jordan had more headlines and stories about Arab issues than about state issues, it does not illustrate the order in which those items were given nor the amount of time afforded them. Though state news only made 40% of the headlines, compared to 55% about pan-Arab news, the first headline – that which producers wished to inform audiences was the most important issue of the day – was about Jordan on six out of seven days. Of those headlines, four were about the King – reinforcing his cult –

and two were about the Prime Minister. The one day (20<sup>th</sup> Feb) when non-Jordanian issues made the first headline, it was news about Israel-Palestine: that Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu had been asked to form a government following Israeli elections. This trend of prioritising domestic news was even more pronounced in Syria. 50% of headlines concerned Syrian news, compared to 36% about Arab issues. Six out of seven first headlines also concerned domestic news and all were about President Assad. The one day when Syrian news did not feature in the first headline was also the news about Netanyahu on 20<sup>th</sup> February – though it was presented more in terms of the Palestinian reaction than *Jordan TV*'s more apolitical description of events.

Rather like Billig's observations that British newspapers help flag the nation by putting domestic news first, followed by foreign, both Syrian and Jordanian TV tend to fill the first half of their news shows with state-centred stories. The first 25-30 minutes of Jordan's hour-long show almost always focussed on domestic news. Items tended to be longer and in more depth than the Arab and foreign news that followed in the second half of the program, hence the smaller number of state stories shown in figure 2 is somewhat deceptive: more *time* is allotted to state news. Standard practice was to open the show with 3-4 headlines. Some of these would be domestic and some foreign. They then proceeded to tell all domestic stories first – even those not included in the headline bulletin – before focusing on the non-domestic headlines and other foreign news in the second half of the show. These domestic stories, that focussed on various topics such royal diplomatic visits, government activities and the Queen's social projects, were all presented under the caption of '*al-mamlaka*' (The Kingdom) written at the foot of the screen. When news about non-Jordanian places was reported on, the practice was to replace 'the Kingdom' with the place name such as 'Ramallah' or 'Washington'. Here we see a key example of Billig's banal flagging. By writing 'the Kingdom' rather than 'the kingdom of Jordan' or just 'Jordan', the viewers are informed that they should already know that 'the kingdom' is therefore 'their' kingdom and does not required a label. The same is seen in their references to 'the' Prime Minister and occasionally 'the' King – though protocol usually required Abdullah's full title. Jordanian state nationalism is therefore flagged banally in the news.

*Syria TV* shows similar traits, generally dedicating the first 20 minutes of its 40-45 minute news shows to domestic items. Like with Jordan, after it has reported domestic and foreign news in its headlines, it then proceeds to tell all domestic stories before moving to non-Syrian items. Though unlike Jordan its bulletins are not labelled by country or place, references to 'the' President or 'the' parliament similarly flag that viewers should regard Syria's parliament or president as 'their' parliament or president. One noticeable exception though was on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February when, bizarrely, the news programs reported no domestic news whatsoever. Most news was about Israel-Palestine, but there were also stories about

Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Sudan, NATO and Hillary Clinton, yet nothing on Syria. Whilst this does not take away from the fact that news programming does tend to promote Syrian identity first, it also says a lot about the political system in Syria compared to Jordan. Such is the limited mandate for what can be reported upon in Syria, it was possible for there to be a day when no 'appropriate' domestic news was found.

Alongside state news, much space is dedicated to news about the Arab world on both channels. 86% of non-domestic stories in Jordan and 62% in Syria was dedicated to news about the Arab world. Rinnawi tried to emphasise that state television shows far less news items about the pan-Arab world than *al-Jazeera*. In his sample of the channel's reporting in 2001 he showed that the Qatar-based station covered Arab news with 57% of its stories. In contrast, in his sample, Jordanian TV dedicated only 24% of its stories to Arab news, yet 57% of its stories on domestic news and 19% of stories international news.<sup>494</sup> However, Rinnawi is determined to show the mutual exclusivity of Arab and state identity and hence focused on how little pan-Arab news Jordan TV showed in contrast to *al-Jazeera*. What he failed to note was that, even in his experiment, of the non-domestic news shown in Jordan, 56% was about the Arab world. Moreover, he ignored the order of news in his experiment. In each broadcast covered by my experiment in 2009, and one can assume that the format of Jordanian news has not changed dramatically since 2001, Arab news was always placed directly after domestic news but before 'international' news. It highlights to the viewer that this is more important than news about the 'rest of the world' but less important than news about Jordan. In essence it was giving the viewers a ranking of their identities: Jordanian first, but then Arab.

Yet the findings of Rinnawi's experiment themselves can be questioned. Rinnawi deliberately chooses the dates he analyses (8 days in July and August 2001), to include a 'before and after' scenario for the events surrounding 9/11 and the Afghanistan war.<sup>495</sup> Yet in doing so, he chooses dates in which non-Arab international news - reaction to 9/11 and the outbreak of war in Afghanistan - is likely to dominate headlines. In terms of an 'international' to 'pan-Arab' news balance then, Rinnawi's dates are far from typical. A similar criticism could be levelled at the dates chosen for this study: with the aftermath of the Gaza war and the Israeli elections likely to result in more stories about the Arab world than perhaps would be usual. I would contend though that it was 9/11 and Afghanistan that were the freak occasions that took the usually region-centric focus of the news temporarily away from the Arab world. The Gaza war and Israel's elections, in contrast, are more 'typical' of the Palestine-centric Arab news cycle. Yet even if we were to average the findings of this survey with those of Rinnawi's to balance out the two

---

<sup>494</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 108.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-119.

perceived biases, it shows that, of the non-domestic news shown by Jordanian TV, the majority of it is about the Arab world. Rinnawi's findings showed 56%, this survey showed 86%, which would average at 71% - a clear majority of coverage.

Of this Arab content, in both states, most is about Israel-Palestine: 65% in Jordan and 71% in Syria. The reasons for this might vary. Syria, whose news tends to focus on Israel's atrocities, is still at war with the Jewish state and has long used this as an excuse to justify dictatorship. Keeping news about this war in the public eye is in its interest. Jordan, though at peace with Israel still has an enormous population of Palestinian origin who care about the situation. Though its items are more apolitical, ensuring that this community is informed of events from the Jordanian governments' perspective might explain the volume of reports. Beyond Palestine, pan-Arab news about Iraq is more prominent in Jordan (20%) than Syria (10%). There are more historic and tribal links between Jordan and Iraq which might explain the Hashemite state's greater promotion of these events.<sup>496</sup> In contrast, Syria has a recent history of animosity towards Iraq and the regime has no interest in the new post-Saddam democratic state succeeding as it might prove a model to end its own dictatorship. Whilst it may celebrate reporting of bombs and destruction, news on democratic developments could be muted. Finally, very little Arab news in either state focuses on other regions. Only 15% of Jordanian and 19% of Syrian pan-Arab news focused away from Palestine or Iraq. Much of this concerned a bomb in a tourist area in Cairo and the death of a Sudanese poet.

Of non-Arab news, neither state put much emphasis on stories from the wider Muslim world: only 9% of Syria's stories, and 6% of Jordan's. This slightly higher figure in Syria is in line with another feature of Syrian news compared to Jordanian, that of showing more non-Arab international news. The 8% of non-Islamic, non-Middle Eastern news shown by Syria was greater than the paltry 2% shown by Jordan. This, combined with their coverage of the wider Muslim world presents an interesting figure. Of all the stories shown on Jordanian news, only 8% was *not* about the Arab world, whereas Syria allocated 18% of its stories. Given that it is Syria that is regarded as the more politically 'Arabist' of the two states, and Jordan the more western-facing, 'liberal' state, this figure is intriguing. What it illustrates is that both states, whilst focusing on domestic news primarily, inform their audiences that when they look outside of their state, they should find news from the Arab world, particularly Israel-Palestine, far more important than news from beyond it. Moreover, this is banally emphasised even more in the news broadcasts Hashemite Jordan than in Ba'athist Syria.

---

<sup>496</sup> Laurie A. Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 196-7; David Schenker, *Dancing with Saddam: The Strategic Tango of Jordanian-Iraqi Relations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), pp. 5-7.

### 4.3 A Week of Television: Sport, Economics, Weather and Breaks

#### 4.3.1 Sport, Economics and Weather

Whereas most literature on pan-Arab satellite television has focused on news coverage, little attention has been paid to less politicised topics reproducing identity to viewers. The following analysis of sport, economics and weather coverage illustrates how state and, to a lesser extent, Arab identity is regularly flagged on Syrian and Jordanian TV. For sport, both stations had regular bulletins: in a separate 15 minute show at 1930 in Jordan, and as a 10 minute slot as part of the 2030 news program in Syria. Whilst each channel also had a separate sports feature program on one day a week, this survey focused on the content of the regular daily bulletins only. Neither state gave a sports bulletin on Friday 20<sup>th</sup>, so only six bulletins are discussed. The results can be seen in figure 3.

Figure 3: Subjects of Sports Bulletins

	Jordan TV		Syria TV	
	Headline / 1st story	No. of Items	Headline / 1st story	No. of Items
<b>State: Football</b>	3 50%	3 6%	4 57%	6 21%
<b>State: Other Sports</b>	0 0%	2 4%	1 14%	1 4%
<b>Total State Sports:</b>	3 50%	5 10%	5 71%	7 25%
<b>Arab: Football</b>	1 17%	8 16%	0 0%	0 0%
<b>Arab: Other Sports</b>	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 4%
<b>Total Arab Sports</b>	1 17%	8 16%	0 0%	1 4%
<b>Foreign (non-Arab): Football</b>	2 33%	22 43%	2 29%	11 39%
<b>Foreign: Other Sports</b>	0 0%	16 31%	0 0%	9 32%
<b>Total Foreign sports</b>	2 33%	38 75%	2 29%	20 71%

<b>Total Football</b>	6 100%	33 65%	6 86%	17 61%
<b>TOTAL</b>	6	51	7	28

Unlike with political news coverage, figure 3 illustrates that international stories – from outside of the domestic and Arab world – dominate both stations’ sport broadcasts. 75% of Jordanian sports stories and 71% of Syrian sports concerned news from foreign countries. Moreover, this is contrasted by very few stories concerning domestic sporting events – only 10% of Jordanian and 25% Syrian stories. The likely explanation for this is not that there is a deliberate attempt by producers to under-report domestic sport but more that, as small countries with limited resources for professional sport, there is simply less sport to report on. Similarly, the popularity of commercial international brands of sport such as the English football Premier League and the American Basketball NBA within these states means that there is substantial demand for sporting news from outside of Syria, Jordan and the Arab world. Nevertheless, the use of sports reports to flag national identity is still noticeable given how much attention each bulletin gives to such a small pool of state sports. In Jordan, 50% of headlines were about state sports, with producers making the most of the paltry 10% of stories. Similarly, 71% of Syrian headlines concerned state sport, despite barely a quarter of stories covering this topic.

The relative absence of sport news from within the Arab world is surprising. Jordan reported 16% of its stories on Arab sport, whilst Syria managed only 3%. Syria similarly declined to report any headlines on Arab sport, whilst Jordan managed one. Again, as with the news, the surprising result here is that supposedly Arab nationalist Syria shows more domestic and less Arab sport than Jordan. One could speculate a few reasons for this. As can be seen, football dominates most sports reports. Most state sports reported on in both countries were domestic football and most foreign sports reports were about foreign football. Unlike Syria, Jordan also reported on the football leagues in Saudi, the Gulf and Egypt. Syria’s reason for not reporting these leagues might be political – unlike Amman, Damascus was not enjoying strong relations with these states at the time of investigation. They might also be due to domestic demand, with Jordan being geographically closer to the states whose leagues they showed and having a greater number of their migrants. Yet even these numbers are slim – barely 1.7% of the Jordanian population, for example, is of Egyptian origin, hardly a significant lobby.<sup>497</sup> For whatever reason, it is interesting how in sport, whilst domestic states sport is inflated to dominate headlines, Arab sport enjoys less focus, especially in Syria. Given how Arab identity is flagged elsewhere in Syrian

<sup>497</sup> Arouri, Fathi A., ‘Non-Jordanians working in Jordan’ in *Cooperation Project on the social integration of immigrants, migration, and the movement of persons* (European Commission, 2007) ([http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/e-texts/CARIM-AS\\_2007\\_05.pdf](http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/e-texts/CARIM-AS_2007_05.pdf)) accessed 8/4/09.

television, this is more likely to be due to an absence of interest in other Arab leagues, or a political decision to not endorse the commercial leagues of Syria's Arab foes.

Economics news is reported in a similar fashion to sport in both states. In Jordan a separate 15 minute show is aired daily at 1945, just before the news and after the sports bulletin. In Syria, the 10 minute economic bulletin is part of the 2030 evening news, just before sport. This survey focused on these daily broadcasts, the results of which can be seen in figure 4.

**Figure 4: Subjects of Economics News Bulletins**

	Jordan TV		Syria TV	
	Headline / 1st story	No. of Items	Headline / 1st story	No. of Items
<b>State Economic news</b>	7 100%	43 77%	7 100%	17 53%
<b>Pan-Arab Economic news</b>	0 0%	2 3%	0 0%	0 0%
<b>International Economic News</b>	0 0%	11 20%	0 0%	15 47%
<b>TOTAL</b>	7	56	7	32

In a reversal of the results seen for sport, yet in line with news reporting, the majority of news stories focused on domestic economic news. 77% of Jordanian stories and 53% of stories from *Syria TV* concerned the state economy. Moreover, as was seen with sport, there was a clear effort to flag to the viewer that this news was of the greatest importance to them, with the first story / headline on each day on each station concerning domestic economics. More surprising was how little economic news from the Arab world was reported: 3% of Jordanian stories and none of Syria's. This was in contrast with the quite detailed international economic news being reported, especially in Syria which dedicated 47% of its stories to this area, with Jordan only 20%. The reasons for this lack of focus on the Arab world, yet wider coverage of the international scene – the reverse of what was seen with news coverage – could have numerous explanations. Firstly, the context of the experiment: February 2009 was a time of world wide economic uncertainty and the state of the world stock market would have a considerable enough impact on local economies, justifying interest. Similarly, Syria's detailed focus on the international economy might be explained by the regime's attempts to blame its own weak economy on the global downturn, keeping viewers aware of the global problems to lighten their own troubles. Another explanation might be that neither economy, but particularly Syria, is that open and hence there is not much domestic economic news to fill the 10 minute slot. To show economic news from other Arab

states could prove politically difficult: to show successes might lead the domestic audience to question why fellow Arab economies are better, yet to show failures could damage relations with other Arab states. International economic news is suitably unfamiliar to Syrian or Jordanian viewers that they would not be as controversial. Having said that, even in Syria Arab economies are not totally ignored, and the connection with the Arab world is flagged briefly with the currency markets shown at the end of each bulletin. The value of the Syrian pound is shown first next to the US Dollar, then Euro, Swiss Franc and Yen. Then its value is given to the Iranian Rial, followed by that of Egypt, Emirates, Saudi and Kuwait.

A far more visible flagging of both state and Arab identity can be seen in the weather forecasts of both states. Jordan shows two main weather forecasts in the evening. The first, starts with a map of the Eastern Mediterranean which then zooms in to a map of Jordan. 'Jordan' is never labelled as it is assumed that the viewers know 'their' country, something that Billig highlights is a key to banally flagging national identity.<sup>498</sup> The camera on this computer generated map then pans across the cities of Jordan forecasting the day's weather. This in itself is a clear case of nation-building through television: daily flagging to the viewer that this is 'their' state. The second weather bulletin of the day, just after the 2000 news, is more intriguing. It too repeats the map of Jordan, but then proceeds to show a similar computer generated map of the Arab world. Starting at Mecca and Medina, the camera pans around the Arabian peninsular, across to the Levant and finishes in North Africa at Rabat in Morocco. As the camera moves, the capital of every Arab state is labelled and the weather over it depicted by a symbol. Crucially, none of the non-Arab states that the map passes by are labelled. We do not see a label for 'Tehran', 'Ankara', 'Tel Aviv' or 'Madrid', all of which are within view of the map. The existence of this map supports the idea that Jordanian state television helps to promote an Arab identity alongside state identity. The broadcast clearly prioritises Jordan first, but then flags to its viewers that, after Jordan, they should care about the weather in the Arab world. This was not just regional, as there would be no need to give the forecast as far west as Morocco, and clearly had an Arab-only focus, illustrated by the unlabeled Iranian, Israeli and Turkish capitals.

Syria shows only one weather map in the evening, but it too flags both state and Arab identity. Starting with a map of the world that then zooms in to just Syria, it emphasises to the viewer that they should care about 'their' state's weather first. After this, unlike in Jordan, it shows a map of the regional area only at first. This includes the Arabian peninsular and Levant, but also Turkey. Though no cities are labelled and only weather symbols shown over broad areas, this map does not include the whole Arab world. A second map is then shown which does show the remaining Arab states in North Africa, but

---

<sup>498</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 108.



this is part of a larger map that includes Western Europe. Unlike in Jordan, this map makes no distinction to the viewer that they should care more about the Arab regions than the non-Arab regions. The end of show summary does flag Arab identity though. After the maps, the broadcast lists Syria's principle cities and the weather they will experience in the next 24 hours, continuing the state flagging seen before. However, after this it proceeds to list the weather in all the Arab capitals: Damascus, Beirut, Jerusalem, Amman, Cairo, Riyadh, Sana'a, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Manama, Doha, Muscat, Baghdad, Khartoum, Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers and Rabat. After this follows a long list of European cities followed at the end by 'Moscow', 'Istanbul' and, finally 'Tehran'. By listing all the Arab cities first before the Europeans, and making a key distinction between them and regional cities such as Istanbul and Tehran, the show clearly flags that these Arab cities should be of greater interest to the Syrian viewer than either European, Russian, Turkish or Iranian cities. Curiously, the list of Arab cities includes only 18, not the full 22 members of the Arab League. The capitals of Comoros, Mauritania, Somalia and Djibouti are excluded. These states though are included on the map of the Arab world that is seen across Syria as the symbol of the ruling Ba'ath party. The absence from the weather bulletins suggests that, to an extent, the Syrian producers consider the Arab world to be slightly different from the party line and that the party are not so wedded to the principle that they have intervened in what remains a tightly controlled television station.

#### **4.3.2 Programming Breaks**

When assessing how identities are banally flagged by Syrian and Jordanian television, it is as important to take note of what fills the spaces between shows as much as the shows themselves. These 'breaks' are the very background space which, as Billig claims, becomes 'national space'. Their content was quite unlike that found on western television and varied a great deal from day to day, and a sense of schedule was sometimes hard to obtain. Commercial advertisements did take place on both stations, though more so in Jordan than Syria, but there were far more adverts for forthcoming shows, and brief government information films than one would find on western television. As well as this there were short music videos shown, some with a very patriotic theme especially in Jordan, and 'links' that showed a montage of national images with the station logo. Whilst it would be difficult in this brief summary to list the content of every break encountered in this experiment, the following section will discuss the most noticeable features of what was found. In particular, it will note the occasions when breaks overtly flagged state, Arab or religious identity, and those occasions when it was more banal.

Of the two channels, breaks on Jordanian television tended to show more items that overtly flagged state identity. On five occasions (18<sup>th</sup>, twice on 19<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> February) patriotic music videos were

played in five-minute slots. These all were of a similar nature. They all had very patriotic titles: *likateb imak ya baladee* (to write your name my country); *hethe baladna* (this is our country); *watane al helu* (my beautiful homeland); *balad ordon* (country Jordan); *ya baladee* (oh my country). The exact content for each video varied, but the themes were essentially the same. All showed images of Jordan: ancient sites, the cities and areas of natural beauty. They also showed symbols of the regime: the flag, the army, and the royal family, especially the King. Jordanian people were also focused upon, with many images of children in schools, students at university, factory workers and farmers in fields. Notably, in terms of religious identity, there were also several images of famous Jordanian mosques. Such music videos support Kraidy and Abu-Lughod's assertions about regimes using television to quite deliberately 'create citizens'. These images are so frequent and 'normal' to Jordanians though that, whilst the western viewer might see them as overt nation building, the local viewer might let them pass in a banal unnoticed manner.<sup>499</sup>

In contrast, Syrian television showed far fewer examples of overt nation-building. For one thing, *Syria TV* was less consistent. Whilst *Jordan TV* seemingly had a semi-regular place for patriotic videos – just after the 8pm news show, presumably when producers thought most were watching – Syria saw no such regularity. Whilst it had no patriotic music videos, Syrian TV did show two different slogans 'from the speeches of President, Bashar al-Assad'. One stated: *la hawieh wa la watan min doun lugha* (no identity and no homeland without language), and the other, *al timsak bil lugha al arabi anwan liltimsak bi wajoudana a qawmi* (holding the Arabic language is the key to holding the soul of nationalism) – both being displayed for a few seconds on a blank screen, without the fanfare afforded in Jordan. Similarly, on another occasion in between shows, the slogan '*Suriyya biwasal al arab*' (Syria the Arab compass) was shown. Unlike in Jordan, these slogans were strongly Arabist and made a conscious effort to link nationalism (*qawmi*) and Syrian identity (*hawieh*) to the Arab language and Arab identity. In the latter case, they simultaneously promoted state pride by suggesting that Syria is the 'compass' of the Arabs: the first state where others look for guidance. Curiously though, these slogans were shown over two days only: one on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> and four repeats of the same slogans on Friday 20<sup>th</sup>. No similar slogans were repeated on any other day of the experiment. The author could not find any particular significance attached to these dates and therefore concludes that being evening on a Thursday and Friday – the weekend in Syria – producers believe this will be viewed by the largest audience. Curiously, on Syria's very few overt instances of nation flagging, there is a considerable effort in all three to link in with Arab identity or the Arab language.

---

<sup>499</sup> See Chapter 6.

More exclusively state-orientated flagging was also visible in Syrian breaks, though more nuanced than Jordan's patriotic music videos or its own Arab nationalist slogans. This was particularly visible on network 'links'. These links were short montages that would end with the logo of the *Syria TV* network, rather like those seen on the *BBC* or *CNN*. These links were shown 21 times during the time period recorded, averaging at once every two hours. There were five types of link, each showing a short film that flagged state identity. The most frequent showed a young boy making a paper boat with his grandfather, attaching a small Syrian flag to it and then floating it on a pond. This then cut to him building a ship in the Arwad boat yard on the Syrian coast, and then to a display of large tankers in the Syrian merchant fleet. This was clearly designed to give viewers pride in the industriousness and modernity of the country. The same is seen in other 'modern' links. One shows a businessman in a modern shopping mall and another shows a female architect drawing plans in the ancient Bosra Roman theatre, before cutting to a very modern building being constructed in Damascus. The links again try to instill a sense of pride in the nation in the viewer by seeing its ancient and modern successes. The two others do the same, but emphasize Syrian cultural pride. One shows a boy playing football in the Ottoman Azem Palace in Damascus, whilst the other shows a teenage girl ballet dancing in the newly constructed national opera house. Each link points to state identity.

Other examples of less overt identity flagging were seen on both stations in the advertisement breaks for products, future shows or events. Figure 5 shows the subjects of all the advertisement breaks during the week's experiment.

**Figure 5: Subjects of advertisement breaks**

	Jordan TV	Syria TV
<b>Commercials for transnational companies</b>	18 19%	4 4%
<b>Commercials for local (Jor/Syr) companies*</b>	27 29%	12 13%
<b>Government advertisements &amp; advice</b>	27 29%	13 14%
<b>Ad for Al Quds Arab capital of culture</b>	1 1%	16 17%
<b>Ads for upcoming shows</b>	21 22%	48 52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>93</b>

\* In Syria almost all companies advertised are state owned

The first notable feature of figure 5 is the different place given to commercial advertisements on each station. Jordan, perhaps due to its longer history of capitalism compared to more socialist Syria, has more commercial advertisements.<sup>500</sup> Whilst nearly half of Jordan's advertisements (48%) are for commercial companies, only 17% of Syrian advertisements are – and most of those products advertised, such as the new 'Syria Drama' channel, or *finoon* entertainment magazine, are government owned. Of these commercial advertisements, Syria finds very little space for non-domestic transnational companies such as *Pepsi* (4%) compared to Jordan (19%). However, both states give the majority of their commercial advertising space to local products – 60% in Jordan and 75% in Syria – which in itself banally flags state identity to viewers: showing that producers believe local products should be of more interest than transnational ones. Whilst *Syria TV* proved to be less commercially orientated than *Jordan TV*, which is no great surprise given how little the former relies on advertising revenue to survive, it tended to promote itself more than any other product or business. 52% of its advertising slots covered upcoming shows on the network, compared to only 22% on Jordan TV. Indirectly this could be seen as a form of state identity flagging: by promoting the national station so often, producers continued to remind Syrians that this was *their* station from *their* country.

Also flagging state identity were adverts offering advice from the government, which are seen more in Jordan's breaks (29%) than Syria (14%). In Jordan these are varied in nature. Some portray a cartoon of a Jordanian man – wearing a red *keffiyeh* and flagging to the viewer this national symbol – wasting electricity, and then warning citizens against doing the same. Others warn against speeding on the roads by showing photographs of 'model citizens' – families, a son graduating from university – in a glass frame which is then smashed to the sound of screeching tires. One of the more bizarre government adverts has no dialogue or writing, but shows a group of young men (*Shebab*) joking around on a street corner, and yet rise to their feet in respect when an older man walks past them. The message, like the others, shows a more banal, unnoticed attempt to create 'good citizens'.<sup>501</sup> Syrian government advice is similarly aimed at creating 'better' citizens, though they almost all tended to focus on health. Short adverts showed families visiting their local clinic – naturally with a picture of the President hanging unnoticed over the entrance – and proclaiming how good the government-run service was, and how others should do likewise.

Whilst state national identity seems to dominate both stations' advertisements Arab identity is not totally ignored. In particular, adverts for the cultural festival held in Jerusalem: 'Al Quds capital of

---

<sup>500</sup> Eberhard Kienle, *Contemporary Syria: liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace* (London: British Academic Press, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>501</sup> Kraidy, 'From Activity to Interactivity', pp. 94-5.

Arab culture' was shown on both stations. However, the fact that Jordan showed it only once in the week, compared to 16 times in Syria is curious. Whilst analysis of news and sport suggested that Jordan was more inclined than Syria to report banal unnoticed flagging of Arab identity, it seems to minimize the advertisement of a far more overt item as the Arab capital of culture. The reasons for this though, may well be political. The advert shows Palestinians celebrating the festival in spite of occupation, with colorful kites being flown over the West Bank separation wall. As mentioned before, whilst it is in Syria's interests to keep its population reminded of the Israeli occupation, Jordan finds the topic uncomfortable due to its unpopular peace with Israel. Moreover, Jordan's agreement with Israel gave the Hashemites a nominal influence over Jerusalem's Islamic holy places, which Tel Aviv has since largely ignored. This commercial, which draws attention to the suffering of Jerusalem, only serves to further humiliate Amman's impotence. Jordan's limited display of the advertisement may therefore be more a sign of its dismay at the advert itself rather than a conscious effort not to flag Arab identity. This is in line with other trends in its programming breaks though, which are generally far less Arab-focused than Syria. Unlike its other shows, Jordan tends to reserve programming breaks almost exclusively for nation-building by banally and, more often than not, overtly, flagging state identity.

#### 4.4 A Week of Television: Chat Shows, *Musalsals* and Islam

##### 4.4.1 Chat Shows

Discussion shows are a good way of flagging state identity and forging a national community. Whether by having a live studio audience, or using phone-ins, the audience is exposed to ‘ordinary’ citizens from around ‘their’ country being involved in the program, and hence strengthens the ‘imagined community’. This was seen in discussion shows in both Syria and Jordan. As figures 6 and 7 demonstrate, several of these shows had expert guests questioned by viewers via the telephone. On each show on each station, the caller’s name and city were listed on screen. Yet in listing simply ‘Aleppo’ or ‘Aqaba’, rather than ‘Aleppo, Syria’ or ‘Aqaba, Jordan’, the viewer was being told that they should already know that these cities are part of *their* country and hence don’t need the state name to be labeled.

**Figure 6: Jordanian discussion shows**

Show name	Date	Discussion topic	Audience / Phone in?	Principle focus: Domestic, Islamic or International?
<i>That al qabuh</i> (Under the dome)	Wed 18th	Regional Politics, esp. Is-Pal	Phone-in	Arab
<i>Fikr wa hedara</i> (Thinking and civilisation)	Thurs 19th	Arts and Culture	Phone-in	Arab
<i>That al daw</i> (Under the light)	Fri 20 <sup>th</sup>	Moral Issues: how young to marry?	Phone-in	Domestic / Islamic
<i>Lihakeealna</i> (The talk is ours)	Fri 20 <sup>th</sup>	TV dramas	Audience	Domestic
<i>Mura al a'lam</i> (Mirror of the world)	Sun 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Regional Politics: Discuss regional and world media’s view of Gaza	None	Arab
<i>Fusalu ihal althakr</i> (Ask the people who know)	Mon 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Religion	Phone-in	Islamic
<i>Ifaf Islamiyeh</i> (Islamic piety)	Tues 24 <sup>th</sup>	Religion	Phone-in	Islamic
<i>That al qabuh</i> (Under the dome)	Wed 25 <sup>th</sup>	Regional Politics, esp. Is-Pal	Phone-in	Arab

**Figure 7: Syrian discussion shows**

Show name	Date	Discussion topic	Audience / Phone in?	Principle focus: Domestic, Arab, Islamic or International?
<i>Khat al ahmar</i> (The red line)	Wed 18 <sup>th</sup>	Topical Issues: Prison	Audience & Phone-in	Domestic
<i>Masa al kheer ya Arab</i> (Good evening Arabs)	Thurs 19 <sup>th</sup>	Culture: pop music, Arabic language.	Phone-in	Arab
<i>Songs and wishes</i> (English title only)	Sun 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Pop music	Phone-in	Domestic / Arab
<i>Nadee television</i> (Television club)	Sun 22 <sup>nd</sup>	TV dramas	None	Domestic
<i>Mula'ab al ghud</i> (Stadium of tomorrow)	Mon 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Sport	None	Domestic / International
<i>Al shabab rae</i> (The youth's opinion)	Tues 24 <sup>th</sup>	Youth issues	Audience	Domestic
<i>Khibree ya teer</i> (Tell me little bird)	Tues 24 <sup>th</sup>	Family: Syrians living abroad	Phone-in	Domestic
<i>Madaraat</i> (Orbits)	Tues 24 <sup>th</sup>	Science: new agricultural methods	Phone-in	Domestic
<i>Khat al ahmar</i> (The red line)	Wed 25 <sup>th</sup>	Topical issues: education	Audience & Phone-in	Domestic
<i>Al jithur</i> (The roots)	Wed 25 <sup>th</sup>	Topical issues: international crime, Is-Pal.	None	Arab / International

The topics of the discussion shows suggest which identities producers hoped to flag. Both channels had discussion shows on a variety of topics such as politics, culture, family, religion and sport, yet Jordan's discussion shows tended to focus on Arab issues more, whilst Syria focused on the domestic. Possible reasons for this could vary. The Syrian regime tends to discourage political discussion in public more than Jordan, even the much celebrated Israel-Palestine issue, which might explain why the one show that did concern this topic in Syria was a show with panelists that was not open to public phone calls. Moreover, it would be logical that Syria wants a very strict control over *its* message on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which can be controlled far more easily by showing news items rather than discussion shows. The number of discussion shows on each side, moreover, is yet another area where Jordan surprisingly shows more Arab content than Syria, with Damascus offering more nation-building

domestic shows. Similarly, it questions Rugh's notion that, as a 'loyalist' system, Jordan's television is less political than Syria's.<sup>502</sup>

Having said that figure 8 shows that in more controlled interview shows Syria does promote Arab content. In its choice of interview guests in six shows, none were Syrian and only one concerned domestic rather than Arab issues. Jordan seemed to prefer to involve interview guests in discussion shows, having only one 'interview only' program in the week, which had a domestic focus. Syria dealt with both regional politics and Arab culture in its interviews. By having cultural guests from Algeria, Egypt and Sudan, producers were clearly flagging that they are culturally relevant to Syrian viewers. Significantly, in these cultural interviews and on discussion shows the presenter and, often, the guest, referred to *al watan al arabi* (the Arab homeland). During *Dee al canadeel* on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February, the host asked the guest, an Egyptian writer and dissident, about her experiences in the 'Arab homeland'. The guest responded, also talking about the 'Arab homeland'. A similar exchange took place during the *Masa khal kheer ya Arab* (Good evening Arabs) discussion show on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> February, when the host and guest talked about the 'Arab homeland's' interaction with western culture. In each case, guests and hosts spoke of the 'Arab homeland' not as a question but as an established fact. This flags not only the existence of an Arab nation, but Syria's desires to *lead* it. Whether the Syrian viewers believe that there is an Arab homeland or nation is disputable, but that is clearly the message banally flagged by such shows.

**Figure 8: Jordanian and Syrian interview shows**

	Show name	Date	Guest	Topic	Principle focus: Domestic, Arab, Islamic or International?
Jordan	<i>Wajha li waja</i> (Face to face)	Mon 23rd	Head of Jordan Valley civil engineering authority	The 'national strategy' for development in Jordan	Domestic
Syria	<i>Al akbar al masura</i> (The pictured news)	Wed 18 <sup>th</sup>	Amr Moussa – Head of the Arab League	Regional politics	Arab
	'Special show' for Rashid Bujadra	Fri 20 <sup>th</sup>	Rashid Bujadra	Discuss Algerian poet / writer's work	Arab
	<i>Dee al canadeel</i>	Fri	Dr Nawal al Salawee	Discuss Egyptian writer and	Arab

<sup>502</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 189.



	(These are the lamps)	20 <sup>th</sup>		dissident's work	
	'Special show' for the late Dr Mohammad Saleh Ahmed	Fri 20 <sup>th</sup>	Dr Mohammad Saleh Ahmed	Archive interview with Sudanese writer who died this week	Arab
	'Special show' on American peace	Fri 20 <sup>th</sup>	Anna Baltzar	Discuss American student / author's experiences living in the West Bank	Arab
	<i>Al balad baladak</i> (the country is yours)	Mon 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Spanish academic	Discuss Syrian ancient sights, tourist attractions – all featured in guest's new book	Domestic

In contrast, most Jordanian shows that mention the topic refer to *al alam al arabi* (the Arab World) rather than *al watan al arabi* (the Arab homeland). One such example is *Fikr wa hedara* (Ideas and civilisation) on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> February when the host and guests speak of culture 'from the Arab world'. On the one hand this suggests that Jordan TV promotes a lesser Arab identity than its Syrian equivalent – seeing it as a more disparate 'world' rather than a specific 'homeland'. However, even this throwaway comment suggests to the viewer that they are bound more to the Arabs than other states. In *Mura al a'lam* (Mirror of the world) on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, the host says he and his guests will be analysing 'Arab newspapers and newspapers from the world'. In doing so he flags to the audience that the Arabs should somehow, collectively, be distinguished from the 'outside' world: that they are more important to Jordanians than citizens of other, non-Arab states. The discourse is, in this case, perhaps less overt than in Syria, yet in both their content and language, Jordanian discussion shows also flag Arab identity alongside that of the state.

#### 4.4.2 *Musalsals* (Drama serials)

The final type of programme discussed here is also the most popular: the *musalsal* (drama serial). Though it is hard to assess exact numbers, numerous surveys and research confirm that more than news, sport or entertainment shows, nightly screenings of dramas attract the largest audiences in the Arab world.<sup>503</sup> With the advent of satellite television in recent years, the *musalsal* industry has boomed, with Egyptian and Syrian productions in particular dominating the field.<sup>504</sup> For all television producers in the Arab world, the most important time of the year is Ramadan, when new dramas are screened each night,

<sup>503</sup> Amin, 'Arab media,' p. 73; Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*, p. 21.

<sup>504</sup> Salamandra, *New Old Damascus*, p. 103.

attracting at times near-obsessive followings.<sup>505</sup> For the rest of the year these series that were made for the holiday peak season are shown again in runs of different length. During this experiment, Jordan TV was screening two different series each night, one at 2100, the other at 2330, whilst Syria TV screened one at 2230, as well as two separate 'feature-length' films.

The connection between *musalsal* and identity has only begun to be studied recently, such as Abu-Lughod's analysis of Egypt and Salamandra's investigations of Syria. Both argue that these serials 'help to form a national imagining'.<sup>506</sup> This pedagogical approach was certainly seen in the two feature films shown on Syria TV during the period analysed. The first, shown on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> was called *film jawlan* (Golan film) and was fairly naked national propaganda. It centred on a family who lived on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, close to the Israeli border, who communicated with other family members on the occupied side via carrier pigeon and other methods. The lead character, the father in the family, had fought in the 1973 war, and flashbacks showed him fighting bravely against the Israelis. The pedagogical message was clear: Syria is still occupied by the enemy and Syrians should not forget the bravery of families split by the conflict. Just as pedagogical, in another way, was the second film: *Yemeni al rahan al khaser* (The lost Yemeni bet). This told the tale of Islamist fighters in Yemen who attempted an insurgency but eventually were either killed or saw the error of their ways. This continues the anti-Islamist theme of the Syrian regime and, whilst perhaps less obviously nation-building, had a clear pedagogical message against the dangers of Islamism.

Most *Musalsals* are more nuanced than this, and are good examples of identity being banally flagged. The main Syrian drama shown during the week, *Yawm momatar akhr* (another rainy day), is more typical. It is set in modern Damascus around a middle class family and their friends. On the one hand this can be seen as directly pedagogical in the manner described by Abu-Lughod. The characters presented are of a wealthier background than most Syrians, and yet presented as 'normal', suggesting role models for citizens. The various problems the family face are dealt with in a manner that viewers can relate to. In a more banal way, this series flags state identity by presenting a national perspective: the problems faced by the characters are those facing all Syrians, not just those in Damascus or the middle classes.

However, Salamandra contends that the recent success in the Syrian drama industry has actually led to a weakening of the nation-building potential of its *musalsals*.<sup>507</sup> Whilst in the 1990s, Syrian dramas were largely made for a domestic audience they are now made for export to the wider Arab world. According

---

<sup>505</sup> Salamandra, 'Syrian Television,' p. 253.

<sup>506</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*, p. 229.

<sup>507</sup> Salamandra, 'Syrian Television,' p. 257.

to Salamandra this has not only lead to their broadening in subject to appeal to the widest audience, but also to their inclusion of a more Islamic tone to please conservative Gulf buyers. She cites the growth in period pieces about the 'glorious' Islamic era in Andalucía as evidence of this.<sup>508</sup> However, whilst there might be a broader trend in this direction, it is far from comprehensive. As Salamandra states, over 100 new serials are aired each Ramadan, which leaves much room for diversity.<sup>509</sup> During the week of this experiment, the broadcast of two clearly state-focused pedagogical films suggests that there is still plenty of state identity flagging content on *Syria TV*. Moreover, as shall be discussed in chapter six, the success of Syrian dramas within the Arab world has offered Syrians a focus for national pride. Syrian production companies might be edging towards more conservative and religious content for export, but the week covered in this experiment suggests that Syrian state TV itself still prefers pedagogical, secular, nation-building dramas.

More curious is Jordan which, unlike Syria, has a very weak drama industry. Both dramas shown during the week were imported: *abbas al abyad fi yawm al aswad* (the white Abbas in black days) from Egypt and *Al mawt al qadim ila alsharq* (The next death to the east) from Syria. *Abbas al abyad fi yawm al aswad* (the white Abbas in black days) is set in modern Cairo about a man, Abbas, who spent years in prison in Iraq, only to return to Egypt to find his wife has married his best friend and his children don't know him. He spends the series slowly building a relationship with his unassuming children and rebuilding his life. *Al mawt al qadim ila alsharq* (The next death to the east) is a fantasy series set in a fictional past whose costumes resemble the early days of Islam. It is set in a safe city on the frontier which is seized by a gang of bandits. Throughout the series the main characters attempt to liberate the city. Neither of these shows can really be said to be promoting Jordanian state identity.

Both series can though be seen to promote Arab identity. *Al mawt al qadim ila alsharq* (The next death to the east) is a Syrian series which is said to have direct parallels with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The evil bandits who illegally seize the peaceful city are clearly supposed to represent the Israelis. This series is typical of many Egyptian and Syrian serials that thinly veil criticism of Israel.<sup>510</sup> More banally, *abbas al abyad fi yawm al aswad* (the white Abbas in black days) can also be seen to flag Arab identity. Though it is set in Egypt, the series was popular across the Arab world. Like many popular *musalsals*, it prompted discussion shows on pan-Arab satellite television stations and, though in this case it was shown on a domestic channel, can be seen as part of a wider trend that links Arabs in an 'imagined community' who all watch the same TV series and, crucially, conduct transnational public discourse

---

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>510</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, pp. 68-69.

about it. Contrary to Rinnawi though, this is not in opposition to the state system. The series makes no attempt to disguise the fact that it is set in Egypt, yet attracts non-Egyptian viewing nonetheless.

The presence of a thriving drama industry therefore allows Syria to be more pedagogical and nation-building in the dramas it screens than Jordan. The existence of more Arab-leaning Syrian shows, such as *Al mawt al qadim ila alsharq* (The next death to the east) does suggest though that, at another time, this experiment might have found a more pan-Arab flagging drama than the state-focused series discussed. This would be in line with the general trend on *Syria TV* of flagging both state and Arab identity. Jordan, in contrast, seems not to flag state identity so readily in the dramas it shows. This though is more due to financial constraint than a conscious choice. Nonetheless, it is yet another example of Jordanian viewers being exposed to more Arab flagging.

#### 4.4.3 Islam

Finally, a word should be said about the notable absence of Islamic identity flagged on both Jordanian and Syrian television. Whilst state identity is clearly dominant, the analysis described above indicates that in different ways and at different times, both *Syria TV* and *Jordan TV* find considerable space to flag Arab identity as well, sometimes overtly, sometimes banally. However, as noticeable is the limited exposure given to Islam. Unlike most state television stations, *Syria TV*, does not interrupt its programming for the Islamic call to prayer five times a day.<sup>511</sup> This is in line with the secular values of the ruling Ba'ath party and, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the personal characteristics of the cults of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad. These calls are shown in Jordan, but they are framed by state identity. Rather than showing the Ka'ba in Mecca as some stations choose to do, Jordanian mosques – notably the King Abdullah mosque in Amman – are filmed. Again, this is consistent with the leadership cults of the Hashemite kings that derive legitimacy from their lineage from Prophet Mohammad. This is reflected in the previously mentioned Jordanian mosques that sporadically feature in patriotic music videos, though it is notable that the number of religious images is far fewer than those of the army, the King and other more secular national symbols.

A more visible sign that secular rather than Islamic identity is promoted on both stations is the portrayal of women. Despite the regional stereotype of male-dominated societies, both Syrian and Jordanian TV have more female than male presenters on their shows. On all the shows viewed during the week, *Syria TV* had 41 female presenters, and only 24 male, whilst *Jordan TV* had 40 female to 31 male. Naomi Sakr has highlighted that the widespread presence of women presenting on television is deceptive

---

<sup>511</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 138.

because it hides the reality that women in the Arab Middle East are largely disempowered.<sup>512</sup> However, irrespective of this reality, the image that the two regimes wish to promote regarding women is one of equality and a visible presence. Importantly, not one of the female presenters in either Jordan or Syria wears the veil. The picture of women presented to viewers is decidedly un-Islamic: highlighted hair, business suits and make-up. This image is supported in the *musalsal* dramas where lead female characters are almost always unveiled. The standard practice, and certainly in the case of the four modern series discussed above, is for only older women to wear headscarves, usually as a sign of respect and maturity rather than any visible religiosity. These *musalsal* stars and presenters are, as Abu-Lughod explains, intended as role-models by the regime.<sup>513</sup> The absence of Islam from their appearance and practice says a lot about the identity they wish, or don't wish, to flag.

Islam is not completely ignored however, and there are some shows dedicated to religion. Figure 6, for example shows that two of Jordan's eight discussion shows concerned an Islamic topic. Similarly, each Wednesday, Syria TV shows *Darasat Quaranieh* (Quaranic lessons) in which an elderly Imam reads parts of the Qur'an. More banal examples of Islamic flagging can be seen in Jordan's weather reports of the Arab world which notably begin at Mecca and Medina. This could be related to the Hashemite's historical ties to the holy cities and be regarded as regime strengthening as much as Islamic focused. Syria's list of Arab cities, in contrast, excludes the Islamic holy sites, only displaying capitals – in line with their secular ideology. As well as this, though presenters and *musalsal* stars are unveiled, a small number of female guests on discussion shows, and a sizeable number of the women in studio audiences are shown wearing the veil. The producers clearly are not so rigid as to only select their guests and audience from those citizens who chose to be unveiled. However, in both states anywhere from a third to half of the women are veiled, yet this is not reflected in its portrayal of women. Evidently there is a conscious effort to discourage taking the veil by the regime by pedagogically flagging secular identity through its leading female stars. Moreover, though a few shows may have an Islamic focus, their number is tiny compared to the vast majority that focus on secular domestic issues and the sizeable number flagging Arab identity. Even news broadcasts show less than 10% of their stories on non-Arab Islamic states. Islam is therefore deliberately marginalised by both regimes in its television programming, especially in Syria.

---

<sup>512</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 105.

<sup>513</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*, p. 233.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This survey of Syrian and Jordanian state television illustrates several features of identity reproduction in each state. Firstly, many of the banal traits that Billig identified that reproduce the Western nations are visible. In news coverage in Britain, Billig highlighted that "...all the broadsheets, whatever their politics, maintain a principle of news *apartheid*, keeping 'home' news and foreign news paginally separate." The same can be seen in Syrian and Jordanian television news coverage. Moreover, there are the same unnoticed indicators that link the viewer to the nation through unnoticed linguistic assumptions. Jordan, for example, is referred to as 'the Kingdom' in news reports, indicating to viewers that they should regard it as 'their' kingdom. Similarly Bashar al-Assad is always referred to as 'the' President. Many other banal indicators of nationhood can be found nightly on Syrian and Jordanian television, such as the unlabelled map of the state during the weather broadcast which assumes both recognition and attachment from the audience. Elsewhere, this experiment has highlighted several instances of programming designed to quietly inculcate a sense of nationhood on viewers. This was seen in the pedagogical nature of Syrian drama series, for example, or in Jordanian commercials that instinctively took a national focus. In each instance the experiment shows how successfully Billig's theory and methodology can be transplanted both on to the mediation of television, and into the non-western non-democratic states of Syria and Jordan.

At the same time, the experiment revealed how a supranational Arab identity is flagged alongside state nationalism on both Syrian and Jordanian television in a banal and unnoticed manner. On the news, stories from the Arab world automatically followed those from each state and preceded news from either the Muslim or the non-Arab world. These news stories were mostly about Israel-Palestine and Iraq though it should be noted that considerably more news about the Arab world was found in Jordan than Ba'athist Syria. Rather like the weather forecasts on each channel which showed the weather in the Arab world after the state but before Europe or other parts of the world, the order of news stories gives viewers a clear list of identity priorities. Elsewhere on the television schedule there were further examples of this supranational identity being highlighted. In Jordan, chat shows talked about the Israel-Palestine conflict and Arab culture, whilst in Syria interview shows were with largely non-Syrian Arab cultural and political figures.

Finally, religious identity was banally flagged on each channel. In Jordan, shows were regularly interrupted for the call to prayer five times a day, which focused on national religious symbols such as the King Abdullah I mosque in Amman, illustrating how this everyday event is fed into the national discourse. Syria was much less religious, not playing the call to prayer and only having one religious

programme a week in primetime. However, it should be noted that in both states a broadly secular image was encouraged – even in Jordan. Female presenters were always unveiled and modelled on European secular women. Though Islam was given a slightly more prominent role in Jordan, which fits into its place in the national discourse, it was noticeable that Islam and religion were flagged far less frequently on each channel than either state or supra-national Arabism.

It was noticeable, however, that not all identity flagging seen on television could be considered ‘banal’. At different times and for different reasons each channel showed signs of overt identity building that might be deemed national propaganda. This was surprisingly most noticeable in Jordan, considered to be less authoritarian than Syria.<sup>514</sup> The regular music videos that showed images of Jordan, the King, and national symbols played after the news each night to a patriotic tune, whilst in line with Abdullah’s increased leadership cult and ‘Jordan First’ campaign, cannot really be considered banal. Syria too had more overt identity flagging, such as its programming breaks that portrayed Syrians in famous Syrian places, usually undertaking a constructive activity such as building a boat or dancing. Whilst these may have been more nuanced than in Jordan, they still betrayed a concerted nation-building intent. Moreover, in Syria, unlike in Jordan, there were overt attempts at building Arab identity, with slogans such as ‘Syria the Arab compass’ displayed. This though again shows how the Syrian national discourse uses Arab identity to serve national goals, emphasising its ultimately supranational nature. However, as with the images and speeches of the leadership cult, just because Billig might consider these instances of national propaganda to be overt, does not mean that viewers have not become used to them and see them with the same unnoticed indifference as they do billboard posters, as Chapter six will suggest.

All of this seems to conform to Christa Salamandra’s view that television is a pedagogical means of ‘national cultural construction,’ as both Syria and Jordan use television to banally and overtly disseminate their national discourses. Two things should be noted however. Firstly, in contrast to Rugh’s argument that Syria has a more political and mobilising media to Jordan’s loyal passive media, this experiment has suggested that, if we look beyond the content of news programming, both television stations show roughly the same level of propaganda, deliberate and undeliberate identity construction and political content. If anything, Jordan is more propagandist at times. Secondly, in contrast to Rinnawi’s claims that satellite television is undermining state identity by promoting Arabism, it is clear that Arab identity is already a key component for framing the content of Syrian and Jordanian television.

---

<sup>514</sup> Volker Perthes, *The political economy of Syria under Asad* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 180-190.

## Chapter 5

### Challenging the discourse? Transnational Arab Television

In January 1991, a Syrian or Jordanian wanting to watch news coverage of the Gulf War on television had few options. They could watch the limited coverage their governments allowed on state television or, for the privileged few who had satellite dishes and understood English, they could watch the American coverage of the war on *CNN*. In contrast, when Israel launched a similarly intense military campaign against Hamas in Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, Syrians and Jordanians had a plethora of choice. With over half their populations owning satellite dishes, and even more having access to this new media, viewers in each state could now watch over 300 different channels in their native Arabic language, originating from beyond their borders. Though the state-run channels are adapting to the new climate, increasingly viewers prefer pan-Arab focussed channels such as *Al-Jazeera*, *Al-Arabiyya*, *MBC* and *LBC*. Not only do these channels offer different images and reporting of key events such as the Gaza War, they often offer different opinions than the official line promoted by state regimes. Having previously established that both Jordanian and Syrian regimes use state-controlled television to reproduce state nationalism and supra-national Arabism together, the following chapter discusses whether that discourse is challenged or complemented by the growing popularity of transnational Arab satellite television beyond their control.

Analysing the impact of transnational television upon Syrian and Jordanian identity represents a departure from the methodology of Michael Billig so far employed by this study, as it considers a public mediation originating outside of the 'nations' under consideration. However, having established that television provides a better gauge of *banal nationalism* than Billig's preferred print media in semi-literate Syria and Jordan, to dismiss the most frequently watched stations because they are transnational would undermine this study. Indeed, the following analysis complements chapter 4's discussion of state television and helps explain the two identity discourses encountered by Syrian and Jordanian viewers. As well as this, the popularity of transnational satellite television in Syria and Jordan, and the Arab world in general, can be used to challenge and expand upon Billig's theory. As was discussed in chapter two, with Billig's study on the reproduction of British and American nationalism, it is not surprising that he placed little focus on the banal reproduction of supra-national identities. British and American citizens are not regular consumers of transnational media and, perhaps as a consequence, supra-national identity – such as Britain's sense of European-ness – is relatively weak. However, in the Arab World we encounter the reverse: supranational Arabism is strong and consumption of transnational Arab media, notably satellite television, is widespread. An analysis of Arab satellite television can therefore



show how Billig's theory can be applied beyond the limited national arena: do we see the 'daily flagging' of Arab identity? Is this the reproduction of the Arab nation or a supra-nationalism? What role is given to state identity and Islam?

Whilst satellite television is not the only form of transnational public mediation available to Syrians and Jordanians, it is by far the most accessible. International Arab-language newspapers are available in Syria and Jordan, but the three most popular *Al-Hayat*, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Al-Quds al Arabi* have a readership of fewer than 300,000 globally, and the majority of these readers are Saudi Arabian rather than Syrian or Jordanian.<sup>515</sup> Internet access has increased in both states in recent years but access remains far lower than access to television. In 2008, Syria had 3.565 million internet users, or 18% of the population, and Jordan had 1.5 million users, or 24% of the population.<sup>516</sup> Both of these mediations tend to be limited to the literate and urban sectors of society. Whilst more modern mediations like text message news services are increasing in popularity, their usage is similarly limited to a largely young and urban demographic.<sup>517</sup> In contrast to the urban-focused access for internet, any journey into rural Syria or Jordan will reveal rusty satellite dishes on the roof of almost every home, no matter how modest. The author even encountered satellite dishes beside nomadic farmers' tents in rural Jordan.

However, analysing the banal and overt nationalist content of satellite television is a challenging task. Over 300 channels broadcast for twenty-four hours a day. Consequently, the kind of content and discourse analysis employed by Billig for newspapers and replicated for state television in chapter four cannot realistically be repeated here. As well as the amount of content is the challenge of variety. The different channels are not uniform. A great number are state-focused channels from other Arab countries, broadcasting like *Syria TV* and *Jordan TV* for their satellite-using domestic audiences as well as projecting a positive image onto wider international audiences. Several stations are religious, both Christian and Muslim, broadcasting sermons and prayers. However, the stations that receive the widest audiences across the Arab world, and consequently the most attention from scholars and journalists, are those that seem to deliberately target an Arab-wide rather than a domestic audience. As Andrew Hammond states, "...their audience is not so much Egyptian, Saudi or Jordanian as 'Arab'" - Marc Lynch's 'Arab public sphere'.<sup>518</sup>

---

<sup>515</sup> 'The Press in Saudi Arabia,' *BBC News*, 13/12/06 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6176791.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6176791.stm) accessed 18/11/09; 'The Palestinian Press', *BBC News* 13/13/06 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6176691.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6176691.stm) accessed 18/11/09.

<sup>516</sup> 'Jordan,' *CIA World Fact Book* <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> accessed 18/11/09; 'Syria,' *CIA World Fact Book* <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html> accessed 18/11/09.

<sup>517</sup> Kraidy, 'From Activity to Interactivity', p. 92.

<sup>518</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 16; Lynch, *New Arab public*, p. 22.

Scholars debate the impact of satellite television upon Arab identity. Lawrence Pintak claims that it creates an, “emerging ‘imagined’ *watan*,” whilst Marwan Kraidy contends that, “regionalisation is skin deep.” However, it is a notable weakness of many of these studies that most focus on only one type of channel, the news, and *Al-Jazeera* in particular.<sup>519</sup> Though studying news sources is important, and will be discussed below, it is worth noting that by far the most popular type of shows within the Arab world, Syria and Jordan included, are entertainment.<sup>520</sup> Any analysis of the unnoticed identities flagged on television would surely gain as much, if not more, from entertainment shows than from news channels which are, by their nature, more overt in the identities they promote.

Rather than conduct a broad content analysis of satellite television channels, this chapter will therefore lead a discussion of the different identities flagged in different types of shows found on the most popular Arab satellite channels. Firstly, there follows an analysis of the ongoing debate amongst scholars on the impact of transnational television upon Arab, state and Islamic identity in the Arab world. Following this, the well-versed role of news channels including *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiyya* in promoting Arab identity will briefly be considered. There then follows analysis of four different types of the under-studied area of entertainment television. Firstly the three most popular program types are discussed: reality TV, music television and soap opera dramas (*musalsals*). There then follows a consideration of the often ignored impact of Islamic television. Finally, there is a case study of a final programming type, sport. An empirical study was made of *Al-Jazeera*'s coverage of the 2008 Olympics and the results displayed highlight the broad themes explored in the rest of the chapter.

In conducting this analysis of the identities flagged to Syrians and Jordanians through satellite television, this chapter illustrates four points. Firstly, that when considering the impact of transnational television on identity in the Arab world, the role of entertainment is as important to study as the widely-covered subject of news. Secondly, that whilst the vast majority of entertainment is largely apolitical, a layer of Arab identity is clearly promoted. Thirdly, contrary to the views of scholars like Rinnawi, this Arab layer of identity is not being promoted at the expense of state identity which is in fact further entrenched by transnational satellite broadcasting.<sup>521</sup> However, entertainment and news shows create a clear ‘arena’ of Arab states in which viewers are encouraged to see other Arab states as more important than other non-Arab states, both as friends and rivals. Finally, whilst Islamic culture is clearly flagged in both news and entertainment, political Islam is not.

---

<sup>519</sup> Pintak, ‘Border Guards,’ pp. 191-211; Marwan M. Kraidy, ‘Reality television and politics in the Arab world: preliminary observations,’ *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (Fall 2005).

<sup>520</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 327; Amin, ‘Arab media,’ p. 73.

<sup>521</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 9.

## 5.1 The Satellite Television Debate

As discussed in chapter four, the emergence of satellite television and its impact upon mass identity in the Arab world has divided scholars. For a region that has historically attracted little interest from theorists of nationalism the widespread popularity of stations such as *Al-Jazeera*, *MBC* and *Al-Arabiyya* has prompted some authors to cite Anderson and Smith to prove or disprove the emergence of new 'imagined communities' created by satellite television.<sup>522</sup> Unlike many of these studies the purpose of this chapter is to highlight the identities *promoted* on transnational television rather than make any claims about their successful dissemination, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter six. However, no analysis of this topic can ignore these issues and there follows a discussion of the key three debates emerging from this recent literature.

### 5.1.1 Tandem identities: Arab supra-nationalism and state nationalism

As part of the New Arabism debate discussed in chapter one, some scholars claim that satellite television is reviving, enhancing or even creating Arab nationalism. Media analyst Lawrence Pintak, for example, states, "In the Arab world, a media revolution is contributing to the emergence of a reawakened regional Arab consciousness," whilst veteran Egyptian Arab nationalist Saad Eddin Ibrahim states, "...in many ways Arab satellites *de facto* or by default are creating the infrastructure for the dream of Arab unity."<sup>523</sup> Lynch emphasises the growth of a new politicised and united 'Arab street', whilst Khalil Rinnawi sees a 'new regionalisation'.<sup>524</sup> At the same time critics have claimed these scholars are too selective in their analysis. Christa Salamandra argues that sentiment on the ground does not reflect the Arab unitary message of Arab satellite television stating, "In an argument extending Benedict Anderson...new pan-Arab and pan-Islamic communities are said to be emerging through internet usage and satellite TV watching, although ethnographic evidence supporting such claims is scant."<sup>525</sup> Similarly, Marwan Kraidy argues that the inter-Arab rivalries evident during popular reality TV shows such as *Superstar* question any claims that satellite TV is diminishing state identity.<sup>526</sup> Rather, he claims, it is the new Arab identity that is superficial, stating that, "...regionalisation is skin deep."

The impact that transnational television has had upon state identity has prompted similar divisions. Rinnawi believes that his new regional identity causes state de-legitimisation and undermines state

<sup>522</sup> Salamandra, 'London's Arab media,'; Pintak, 'Border Guards,' p. 193.

<sup>523</sup> Pintak, 'Border Guards', p. 191; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Thoughts on Arab Satellite Television, Pan-Arabism and Freedom of Expression,' *Transnational Broadcast Journal* 13 (Fall 2004).

<sup>524</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 154; Marc Lynch, 'Beyond the Arab Street: Iraq and the Arab Public Space,' *Politics and Society* 31:1 (2003), pp. 55-91.

<sup>525</sup> Salamandra, 'London's Arab media,'.

<sup>526</sup> Kraidy, 'Reality television.'

identities.<sup>527</sup> In contrast, several commentators such as Kai Hafez and Naomi Sakr highlight the structural bias of the satellite system ensuring that state interests remain prominent.<sup>528</sup> No matter what Arab nationalist gloss is given to the rhetoric on satellite TV, states William Rugh, "...existing national political systems are still a dominant variable affecting the structure and behaviour of Arab media."<sup>529</sup>

Yet many scholars in this debate tend to lurch to the extreme, and view state and Arab identities as mutually exclusive. In Rinnawi's case any increase in a sense of Arab community must be accompanied by state de-legitimation and an undermining of state identity. For Kraidy, expressions of state pride during a talent contest therefore indicate the absence of Arab solidarity. Yet neither allows for multiple layers of identity that overlap and inter-relate. Rinnawi does not consider that Arab audiences might increase their Arab identity the more transnational satellite television they consume, without discarding their original state attachment. Similarly Kraidy does not account for the intra-state format of his talent competition. Surely a better gauge of Arab solidarity would be a contest in which Arab states took on non-Arab states, as in the Olympics discussed below. Similarly on the matter of ownership, it is unquestionable that the majority of owners of Arab satellite channels have a vested interest in maintaining the state system from which they derive their power. However, that does not mean that they oppose any attempts at promoting Arab solidarity or supra-nationalism, only the variant of Nasserist Old Arabism that would call for the destruction of the state system and, consequently, their power base. It is perfectly feasible that, whether for genuine idealistic reasons or more commercial interests, producers, editors and, most importantly, owners, favour the promotion of both state and Arab identities as long as those identities don't seriously challenge the status quo or power of the states' rulers.

This chapter will demonstrate how satellite television promotes both state and Arab identity in tandem. At the most obvious level, the discourse, rhetoric and content of certain programmes quite overtly flag Arab identity. In a more banal and unnoticed manner, the structure of shows and ownership promotes the imagining of a supra-national arena of Arab states to which viewers should attach more interest than elsewhere. Within this arena, however, viewers are discouraged from forgetting their state identity. The state system is flagged in almost all forms of programming and, contrary to Rinnawi's assertions, it is given increased legitimacy and further entrenched as a consequence of satellite television.

### 5.1.2 'Arab Street' or elite?

---

<sup>527</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 9.

<sup>528</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 15; Hafez, 'Arab Media,' p. 4.

<sup>529</sup> William Rugh, 'Do national political systems still influence Arab media?' in *Arab Media and Society* 2, Summer (2007).

A second debate emerging from the impact of satellite television upon identity concerns its elite nature. For those, like this study, who accept that Arab identity is promoted through transnational television, a central question is, who is doing this promoting? Is this a case of television simply reflecting the widely-felt Arabist feelings of the masses, or are the journalists, producers and owners themselves leading a new trend in the hope of influencing their audience to think likewise?

Several analysts regard the television producers as leading New Arabism. Zayani believes that it is the Arab media who are 'creating' a pan-Arab public opinion that is becoming known as the 'Arab street'.<sup>530</sup> Khalil Rinnawi similarly believes that his new regional Arab nationalism is directed by elites, calling it an, "...upper middle class imagining."<sup>531</sup> This top-down conclusion is elaborated upon by Lawrence Pintak who uses Anthony Smith's nationalist theories to explain why. Pintak expresses Smith's belief that nationalist ideologies create 'border guards' who provide, "a new panoply of symbols and myths, memories and values, that set the included national states apart' from those surrounding them." For Pintak, "Arab journalists are the border guards – if not the architects – of this new imagined *watan*."<sup>532</sup> In contrast, many scholars subscribe to what Alderman has called, "Arabism from the ground up," which sees the growth in Arabist television reflecting a genuine grass roots sense of national identity rather than leading it.<sup>533</sup> As the *Washington Post* claimed about *Al-Jazeera* they, "are being led by the masses, they don't lead the masses."<sup>534</sup> Jeremy Tatham supports this point highlighting that such was popular feeling against the Iraq War of 2003 that any news station such as *al-Jazeera* would be committing commercial suicide were it to report in an impartial manner that did not reflect the audience's outrage.<sup>535</sup> This was seen by the relative failure and unpopularity of the American-sponsored Arabic news station, *al-Hurra*.<sup>536</sup>

The difficulty in entering this debate is that it is hard to assess whether a television station is leading or reflecting popular opinion. How do we assess from where public opinion originates? Tatham's point that the Iraq war was so unpopular that *Al-Jazeera* had to portray it negatively is undoubtedly true, but why was the war unpopular in the first place? How much did *Al-Jazeera*'s own coverage of the run-up to war, and the decade of sanctions on Iraq before this inform public opinion to make a dislike for the war inevitable?<sup>537</sup> Similarly, given the level of Arab identity seen on state television and in the speeches and images of leadership cults, how much do domestic mediations still inform opinion?

---

<sup>530</sup> Amin, 'Arab media,' p. 82.

<sup>531</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. xvii.

<sup>532</sup> Pintak, 'Border Guards,' p. 193.

<sup>533</sup> Amin, 'Arab media,' p. 81.

<sup>534</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 235.

<sup>535</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts*, p. 191.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>537</sup> Lynch, *New Arab public*, p. 27.

To avoid this self-sustaining debate, one must therefore accept the interactive nature of agenda setting and popular opinion on Arab satellite television. Whilst elites clearly have the power to broadly set out agendas and programming, they would not be as popular as they are if they did not at least broadly reflect mass notions of identity. As William Rugh states, television media *reinforces* existing Arab values rather than promoting a particular agenda.<sup>538</sup> It must be remembered, however, that many of these 'Arab values' have been reproduced and sustained in state discourses for decades.

### 5.1.3 Islam and satellite television

As with state television, the role of Islam on satellite TV has prompted considerable discussion. On the one hand some scholars see satellite television as continuing the traditional secular role played by state-led TV and on the other are those who see channels such as *Al-Jazeera* promoting Islam. Interestingly two of the leading advocates of a New Arabism being forged by satellite TV, Rinnawi and Pintak both see a convergence between Arabism and Islamism.<sup>539</sup> Similarly, several US-based critics of *al-Jazeera* claim it is promoting an Islamic identity, with its willingness to grant a platform to political Islamists such as *al-Qaeda* and Hamas. However, a distinction needs to be made between highlighting and even promoting Islamic identity and encouraging Islamism. Outside of Neo-Conservative circles, few analysts believe that *al-Jazeera's* willingness to broadcast footage from *al-Qaeda* or to interview Hamas or Hezbollah spokespeople is actively promoting Islamism. Rather this is interpreted both in the context of their attempting to present a balanced picture of the news, and their desire to gain viewing figures with exclusives and controversy.<sup>540</sup> Their willingness to interview Israeli government officials or British diplomats does not lead to charges of the station trying to promote pro-Western views, for example. However, that is not to say that Pintak and Rinnawi's claims should be discounted, rather that a distinction between flagging Islamic and Islamist identity should be made. Later analysis will show that there are numerous instances of both banal and overt flagging of Islamic culture and identity within news broadcasting on Arab satellite television, but this is largely within the aforementioned Arab supra-national arena and not any deliberate endorsement of Islamism.

Curiously the same level of debate and analysis has not been afforded the potentially Islamic or Islamist content of non-news satellite channels. Pintak and Rinnawi all but discount responses to new religious stations such as *Irqa*, *al-Risalah* and *al-Majd* whose content is deliberately Islamic. Though they rush to highlight the Islamic content of *al-Jazeera*, the fact that Islamic programming receives less than 1% of

---

<sup>538</sup> Rugh, *Arab mass media*, p. 18.

<sup>539</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 22; Pintak, 'Border Guards,' p. 209

<sup>540</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 326.

viewer ratings in the Arab world is conveniently ignored.<sup>541</sup> Could this not suggest that some, if not all viewers, of *al-Jazeera* watch it in spite of, not because of, its supposed Islamic orientation? Similarly under-analysed, yet potentially of far greater impact than these rarely-watched Islamic channels is the popularity of entertainment shows, particularly *musalsal* drama covering Islamic history. Marlon Dick and John Shoup have both written about the glorification of Islam's past in drama series, yet such analysis has not yet been included by Pintak and Rinnawi. Yet, as with the news, closer analysis of this genre will show that it is Islamic cultural identity rather than a political *Islamism* that is regularly highlighted.

---

<sup>541</sup> Amin, 'Arab media,' p. 73.

## 5.2 Arabism and the News

News programming on satellite television and its relationship to Arab identity has already received a great deal of attention from scholars of the Arab world. This thesis will therefore not dwell long on the subject before moving on to the less well studied area of entertainment television. However, before this two key questions need to be addressed: is Arab identity actually being promoted by news channels on Arab satellite television, and are they simultaneously discouraging state identity?

A key difficulty when answering these questions, however, is what do we mean by ‘news programming’ on satellite television? The majority of literature has focused on one channel: *al-Jazeera* (Tatham, Miles, Rinnawi). The Doha-based station is primarily funded by the Emir of Qatar and widely regarded as the most popular in the region, though most surveys declaring this are usually denounced by its rivals.<sup>542</sup> However, it is easy to forget that *al-Jazeera* is not the only player. Whilst the Qatari station has always faced rivals from state news shows and fellow Arab-world focused networks like *ANN* or *Abu Dhabi*, the world-wide publicity it achieved after the 2003 Iraq war led to a new wave of challengers. Marwan Kraidy describes this as a, “...global struggle for Arab hearts and minds,” which has seen the establishment of American, British, German, Russian, French and Iranian-funded Arabic-language news channels, as well as numerous new Arab channels, to challenge the dominance of *al-Jazeera*.<sup>543</sup> However, as confirmed by surveys and interviews in Jordan in Syria, discussed in chapter six, these international stations have made little headway primarily because they are viewed as foreign propaganda. Arab stations such as *LBC*, *Abu Dhabi*, Hezbollah’s *al-Manar* and *Future TV* have achieved modest success, but the main rival to *al-Jazeera* is undoubtedly the Saudi-based *al-Arabiyya* channel that was launched in 2005.<sup>544</sup> *Al-Arabiyya* is the news arm of Sheikh Walid al-Ibrahim’s *Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC)* satellite network and comes second, albeit by quite a long way, to *al-Jazeera* in most Arab-wide polls.<sup>545</sup> Al-Ibrahim is the brother-in-law of Saudi Arabia’s late King Fahd who sees MBC’s, and *al-Arabiyya*’s, main goal to, “promote Arabs and Arabic, and Saudi Arabia in particular.”<sup>546</sup>

### 5.2.1 Arabism

Though set up as a rival to *al-Jazeera* analysts are torn over *al-Arabiyya*’s role in promoting or discouraging Arab identity in its broadcasts. On the one hand, Paul Cochrane highlights the threat Arabism has to Saudi national interests and suggests that producers deliberately employ an anti-Arabist

<sup>542</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 13.

<sup>543</sup> Kraidy, ‘From Activity to Interactivity,’ p. 95.

<sup>544</sup> Samantha M. Shapiro, ‘The War inside the Arab newsroom,’ *New York Times* 2/02/2005

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Salamandra, ‘London’s Arab media.’



tone.<sup>547</sup> Moreover, he states that far from being a promoter of Arabism, *al-Jazeera* itself is simply using Arabist rhetoric to promote Qatari interests.<sup>548</sup> In contrast, others suggest the background of many *al-Arabiyya* journalists as former employees of *al-Jazeera* means that despite their employer's preference, they still push an Arabist agenda whenever they can.<sup>549</sup> This supports the hypothesis of Lawrence Pintak that the majority of Arab journalists are, "...shaping an emerging 'imagined' *watan*," through news television.

Several authors agree with Pintak's assertion that all the pan-Arab news stations, whether *Jazeera* or *Arabiyya* broadly promote Arab identity because of the Arabist sentiments of journalists.<sup>550</sup> Interviews with journalists and news-makers support this assertion. Yousi Fouda, *al-Jazeera*'s station chief in 2003 stated, "...you adopt a pan-Arab mentality, this is the number one criterion that will help you decide whether this news item someone in Mauritania would be interested to know about, someone in Somalia or Iraq or Morocco."<sup>551</sup>

The argument that Arab identity is promoted by satellite news programs is further supported by analyses of its discourse and content. The use of a single vernacular, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), on news broadcasts has, according to Hugh Miles, "...accustomed Arabs to a standard form of Arabic speech and led to a growing sense of regionalisation."<sup>552</sup> This has had a knock-on effect on the news presentation of state satellite channels as well who, as far as Morocco and Algeria, have reversed recent trends of localisation to demand all state news is read in MSA rather than local dialect.<sup>553</sup> Similarly, the content of the news channels, which places disproportionate focus on uniting issues like Palestine and the Iraq or Lebanon wars is considered by many as a key factor in raising Arab consciousness.<sup>554</sup> One Jordanian politician stated, "Before we had been ignorant about how Arabs lived in other countries; now Jordanians care about events on the other side of the world."<sup>555</sup> Similarly, *al-Jazeera*'s chief in the West Bank stated, "I think we can say that *al-Jazeera* is broadening Arab perspective; before us no-one was saying anything about Arab leaders or Arab corruption or about the Arab situation even."<sup>556</sup> Both

---

<sup>547</sup> Paul Cochrane, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Influence,' *Arab Media and Society*, Issue 3 (Fall 2007); Andrew Hammond, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Empire: keeping the masses at home,' *Arab Media and Society*, Issue 3 (Fall 2007).

<sup>548</sup> Cochrane, 'Media Influence,'.

<sup>549</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 56.

<sup>550</sup> Pintak, 'Border Guards', p. 196.

<sup>551</sup> Salamandra, 'London's Arab media,'.

<sup>552</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 335.

<sup>553</sup> Rugh, *Arab Mass Media*, p. 21.

<sup>554</sup> Ibrahim, 'Thoughts,'.

<sup>555</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 327.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

Pintak and Rinnawi suggest that news producers choose this content deliberately because they have, "...a financial/professional stake in fostering a pan-Arab perspective."<sup>557</sup>

### 5.2.2 Islamism

Yet there is debate over the extent to which New Arabism is linked to Islam. Several commentators see a distinction between the specifically Arab Islamist agenda of *al-Jazeera* in comparison to other stations. Lisa Shapiro makes the case that *al-Jazeera* is viewed by Arab journalists as too Islamist for their taste.<sup>558</sup> She further states that there is nothing on other stations like *al-Arabiyya* that has the same Islamic message as signature shows on *al-Jazeera* such as, 'Islamic Law and Life' which, "...offers advice to viewers on how to apply Sharia to their lives."<sup>559</sup> However, this view is challenged by Hugh Miles who argues the Qatar based station's un-Islamic stance is reflected by the fact it relies entirely on only one religious scholar, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for all its religious shows and opinions.<sup>560</sup> In fact, argues Paul Cochrane, it is *al-Arabiyya* that is the more Islamist in outlook, as it deliberately stirs up *fitna* (discord) between Sunnis and Shia in its reporting of events in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran.<sup>561</sup>

This reflects a simultaneous debate amongst Arab viewers as to which station represents the interests of the Islamists and which those of Arabism.<sup>562</sup> These debates, states Pintak, "...obscure the reality that in the newsrooms from Casablanca to Sana'a the agendas of the two are blurring, producing a synergy of interests reflected on television screens across the region every day."<sup>563</sup> However, Pintak exaggerates this 'synergy of interests' between Islamism and Arabism on the news. The varying degrees of favourable treatment that different Islamist groups receive on the news illustrate this. Islamists that are fighting for goals that coincide with broader Arabist aims are presented in a favourable way. Hamas and Hezbollah's conflicts with Israel are largely reported positively on both *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiyya*, and until recently, suicide bombers in Palestine and Iraq were referred to as martyrs on the former.<sup>564</sup> However, the same degree of support is not shown to domestic Islamists operating away from these Arab nationalist conflicts, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood or Morocco's Justice and Development party being cases in point. Similarly, *al-Qaeda* style attacks on Arab targets, such as in Jordan or Syria are more swiftly condemned than similar attacks on American or Western targets in places such as Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>565</sup> The political agenda of these news channels can therefore be seen to be more

---

<sup>557</sup> Pintak, 'Border Guards', p. 208.

<sup>558</sup> Shapiro, 'The War.'

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 338.

<sup>561</sup> Cochrane, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Influence.'

<sup>562</sup> Pintak, 'Border Guards', p. 193.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>564</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 357.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

consistently Arabist than Islamist. Shapiro's use of religious programming like 'Islamic Law and Life' is similarly tenuous. As seen by analysis of Jordanian and Syrian TV, religious programming is seen across the Arab world even in secular regimes like Syria. Whilst this can, and does, flag a cultural Islamic identity, it is more difficult to link this to a political Islamist agenda.

### 5.2.3 State Nationalism

Whilst Pintak, Miles and Rinnawi correctly highlight that the content of news shows is deliberately promoting a pan-Arab perspective, the reasons behind this are more complex and help explain the limitations that any New Arabism via television can have. Rinnawi sees the motivation as primarily financial.<sup>566</sup> In the hunt for viewing figures and profits, news stations want to appeal to as wide an audience as possible and hence attempt to create a pan-Arab discourse. Pintak agrees with this but also highlights the nationalist ideology of the journalists reporting themselves. Whilst their employers at the stations might be pushing Arabism for commercial reasons, Pintak sees the reporters as genuinely believing in promoting Arab unity.<sup>567</sup> However, there is a further explanation: the desire by owners to use their channels to promote their home state's interest.

It is highly possible, as Pintak asserts, that the journalists on *al-Jazeera* genuinely hope to promote a stronger sense of Arab identity, and even that the Qatari owners see the commercial importance of fostering that sense of Arab collectivism to maintain its high viewing figures. However, it should not be forgotten for what reason the Qatari owners want high viewing figures: to promote the interests and profile of Qatar. Naomi Sakr highlights how the Emir of Qatar uses *al-Jazeera* to gain notoriety for his state rather than for any 'globalised' vision.<sup>568</sup> At a simple level, the station rarely criticises the Doha government, but on a wider scale it acts as an instrument of Qatar's international relations. When it has reported negatively about certain Arab governments in the past, for example, they lodged their complaints by withdrawing their Ambassadors from Qatar, addressing the state rather than the station.<sup>569</sup> Similarly, past content analyses of *al-Jazeera* have shown that until 2008 it took a particularly aggressive line against the government of Saudi Arabia. Yet this was not for any Arab nationalist reasons but rather the product of an ongoing feud between Riyadh and Doha, fuelled by personal grudges from many of *al-Jazeera*'s employees who lost their jobs after Saudi Arabia cancelled a proposed BBC Arabic television service in their territory.<sup>570</sup> Moreover, it was the diplomatic reconciliation of the two *state* governments in 2008 that ended this feud on the airwaves, which then was reflected on the station's content. Whilst the content and shape of *al-Jazeera*'s broadcasts may

---

<sup>566</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. xvi.

<sup>567</sup> Pintak, 'Border Guards' *Middle East Journal*, p. 196.

<sup>568</sup> Sakr, *Satellite Realms*, p. 207.

<sup>569</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 100; Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*, p. 69.

<sup>570</sup> Salamandra, 'London's Arab media.'

therefore take an Arabist tone to increase its audience figures, the motives behind this are as much linked to inter-state and intra-Arab rivalries as any perceived Arabist vision.

The same can be said of *al-Arabiyya*. Tatham, amongst others, notes that *al-Arabiyya's* *raison d'être* was to counter the wave of anti-Saudi news produced by *al-Jazeera*, highlighting how state rather than pan-Arab interests have defined its agenda from the beginning.<sup>571</sup> As with *al-Jazeera* the Dubai-based station must adopt a more pan-Arab content to appeal to the widest possible audience but again, the ultimate goal of attracting this audience is to promote a positive view of a state, Saudi Arabia. This appears to be a modern echo of the inter-Arab propaganda between Nasser and Saudi Arabia in the 1950s. Once again states are competing to frame Arab-wide events to a favourable way, hinting at a return to a competition over the norms of Arabism.<sup>572</sup>

Rinnawi's claim that state identity is gradually being eroded by the growth of satellite television news is therefore questionable as the stations and their ownership structure actually further entrenches rather than erodes the state system. In recent years the creation of 'media free zones' in Arab cities like Dubai, Cairo and Doha have brought many transnational news stations back from outside the Arab world and forced them to operate within the boundaries set by the states.<sup>573</sup> As Naomi Sakr highlights, it was the existing Arab elites who had the initial capital to establish and purchase most channels.<sup>574</sup> These elites, who profit from the continuation of the state system, were able to ensure that any radical Arab nationalist potential of news programming was contained. That is not to say that there is no Arabist agenda on the content on the news, this certainly does exist, in an attempt to draw as many viewers to the station as possible. However, the stations are there to ultimately serve state interests and so fall short of promoting a true unitary Arab nationalism that might question state legitimacy. As with Syria and Jordan's official discourses, these stations ultimately pursue *national Arabism*. As William Rugh states,

"*Al-Jazeera* is on the one hand an example of pushing the boundaries of what is possible on Arab television, yet at the same time, its behaviour tends to reinforce the basic thesis that domestic political concerns are very important to the media."<sup>575</sup>

In other words, whatever the channel, satellite television news promotes Arab supra-nationalism, that instils a sense of interest amongst the widest possible audience within the Arab world, but does not question the legitimacy of the state system.

---

<sup>571</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts*, p. 74.

<sup>572</sup> Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, p. 4.

<sup>573</sup> Sakr, *Satellite Realms*, p. 208.

<sup>574</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 15.

<sup>575</sup> Rugh, 'National Political Systems.' in

### 5.3 Entertainment

“With so much talk of *al-Jazeera*, it is easy to forget that the most popular shows on Arab television are Egyptian and Lebanese soap operas and films, as well as imported western game shows.”<sup>576</sup>

Whilst most literature discussing the impact of satellite television upon identity in the Arab world covers news programming, it is only the fourth most popular amongst viewers.<sup>577</sup> As in Western societies, television audiences spend more time watching entertainment shows than news. It therefore proves advantageous to consider what is seen on the most popular shows rather than just those that have attracted the most attention. Interviews in Syria and Jordan, discussed in chapter six, highlight that viewers of news are mostly men, older, and people who are already interested in politics. The viewing preferences of more apathetic or politically disinterested audiences, women and younger viewers are therefore not considered if we analyse only the identities flagged on the news.

This section will consider four different genres of popular programming. Two of these, reality TV and *musalsals* (drama serials), are consistently the most watched type of programmes in the region. The third, music television, whilst not statistically as popular as other genres, warrants analysis for its amount of public display. Indeed, fieldwork in Jordan and Syria revealed that, after news stations, music television is the most likely type of programme to be displayed in public places like cafes and restaurants. This is just the kind of ‘background’ space that Billig claims becomes ‘national space’. Finally, Islamic television, whilst not that popular, warrants analysis within the wider debate over how much Islamic identity is highlighted on satellite television.

#### 5.3.1 Reality TV

Reality TV has provided both the most popular and the most controversial television shows in modern Arab history.<sup>578</sup> Televised talent shows like *Star Academy* and *Superstar* regularly attract the largest Arab-wide audiences when they are shown. Syria and Jordan are no exception: when a Syrian and a Jordanian reached the final of the 2003 edition of *Superstar* citizens in both states were glued to their TV screens, with the governments openly encouraging them to publically display their ‘hot’ nationalism.<sup>579</sup> At the same time, such shows court controversy. In 2004, an Arab version of the show *Big Brother*, known as *Al-Ra'is* (The President), which involves numerous contestants of mixed gender living together in a house full of cameras, was closed down after a week on air after considerable

---

<sup>576</sup> Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 327.

<sup>577</sup> Amin, ‘Arab media’, p. 73.

<sup>578</sup> Kraidy, ‘Reality television.’

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

pressure from religious conservatives in Bahrain where the show was filmed.<sup>580</sup> *Star Academy* and *Superstar* attract similar protests for 'promoting un-Islamic values', despite their widespread popularity.

These reality TV shows overtly flag national state identity, which might question the assertions of this thesis. The format of *Superstar* and *Star Academy* encourages national rivalry amongst viewers. Usually each Arab state has a representative in the singing tournament and one by one they are voted off by texts and phone calls from the viewing public. Marwan Kraidy suggests that viewers are encouraged to be nationalistic and vote for the representative from their state. He says that, "contestants become embroiled in a 'battle of nations' in which their compatriots appropriated them as national symbols."<sup>581</sup> This is embodied in the visual presentation of shows like *Superstar* where studio audiences wave the different national flags of the contestants. Far from this being unintended behaviour, it is actively encouraged by producers who deliberately select contestants from different countries and parade the various flags of the nationalities competing in the show's opening credits.<sup>582</sup> This appears a clear example of Billig's 'waved' flag, but it is state identity that is being encouraged by reality TV, not Arab supra-national identity.

Kraidy gives a case study of the 2003 *Superstar* final to illustrate this point. The final two contestants were from Jordan and Syria, prompting widespread expressions of nationalism rather than Rinnawi or Pintak's New Arabism. In Syria, telephone companies placed billboards urging citizens to perform their 'national duty' and vote for the Syrian contestant. When interviewed by Western press, "...Syrians on the street were unequivocal: they were voting for him [the contestant] because he was Syrian. The fact that he was a good performer was just fine, but his national identity was the primary motivation for their participation in the show."<sup>583</sup> A similar response was seen in Jordan where, "...rumours spread of a fully-fledged national mobilization. King Abdullah himself was reported to have instructed officers in the Jordanian armed forces to issue orders to the soldiers under their command to vote."<sup>584</sup> Some Amman restaurants and cafes even offered free deserts for customers who voted for the Jordanian candidate, who eventually triumphed. This kind of passionate patriotism leads Kraidy to conclude that, "While there are burning issues with transnational appeal, such as the plight of the Palestinians and Iraqis under occupation, they appear to cede the way, even if temporarily, to more provincial

---

<sup>580</sup> Marc Lynch, 'Reality is Not Enough': The Politics of Arab Reality TV,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (2005), p. 11.

<sup>581</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, 'Popular Culture as a Political Barometer: Lebanese-Syrian Relations and *Superstar*,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 16 (2006).

<sup>582</sup> Kraidy, 'Reality television.'

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

affirmations of patriotism,” for reality TV shows like *Superstar*.<sup>585</sup> This, he suggests, shows that any regionalisation as a product of satellite television, is only ‘skin deep’.

A further feature of reality TV is its apparently secular nature. The regular portrayal of ‘un-Islamic’ behaviour has prompted a backlash from religious conservatives, such as the protests in Bahrain against *al-Ra’is* encouraging unmarried women to co-habit with men.<sup>586</sup> Similarly, many have complained that such shows distract youth from their religious duties with foreign culture. *Al-Jazeera*’s Yusuf al-Qaradawi stated, “reality TV and *Star Academy* especially are instruments of cultural and intellectual invasion of the Ummah.”<sup>587</sup> Such protests further question the assertions of Rinnawi amongst others who see satellite television as promoting a new Arab-Islamic identity. However, as Marc Lynch has highlighted, such protests should be placed in context. Whilst there has been a religious backlash against reality TV, it has largely been in places such as Jordan, Bahrain and Kuwait where pro-western governments see reality TV as, “...a “safe” area of cultural critique which allows Islamist politicians to hold marches, demand parliamentary inquiries, and flex their muscles without violating any of the real “red lines” governing politics.”<sup>588</sup> Moreover, just because reality TV might offend certain conservative Islamic streams does not make it rigidly secular. Many of the female contestants in several editions of *Star Academy* and *Superstar* have worn headscarves and often contestants sing songs that have a religious component. The fact that religious authorities do not notice these pro-Islam elements when they protest perhaps illustrates just how normal and everyday aspects of Islamic culture are to the Arab world. Whilst religious conservatives might object, there is still at least some level of banal flagging of Islamic identity in reality TV.

Similarly, whilst Kraidy rushes to interpret the overt state nationalism on display in reality TV shows, he fails to notice the banal supra-national Arabism being promoted. Shows like *Superstar* simultaneously promote two identities. On the one hand, they encourage state rivalry by encouraging flag waving and patriotic competition. This is almost certainly a commercial decision to maximise viewers who will initially tune in to cheer on the representative of their state. However, just as important to the producers is to promote the very regionalisation that Kraidy believes is only skin deep. When the Jordanian contestant won in 2003 she was not just crowned ‘Superstar’, but instead handed the title ‘Superstar of the Arabs.’<sup>589</sup> Whilst only a Jordanian and a Syrian were left in the competition, the majority of the viewers, and voters, were from other Arab states who continued to watch long after the contestant from their state had been eliminated. By parading the different flags of the competitors at

---

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Lynch, ‘Reality is Not Enough.’

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>589</sup> Kraidy, ‘Reality television.’

the beginning of the show the producers of *Superstar* were sending viewers two messages. Firstly, that they should support their state, but secondly that *these* were the states with which they should be competing: the Arab states. Non-Arab states were not involved in the competition and viewers were effectively being told that these states should not matter to them as much. A Tunisian viewer is told they should compete more with far-off Iraq than neighbouring Italy. In doing so, reality TV is promoting an 'Arab arena' for its viewers. Both solidarity and competition should be limited to the Arab states, irrespective of distance and geography. Whilst state identity is being overtly flagged and reproduced, in a more banal manner Arab supra-nationalism is also sustained and encouraged.

### 5.3.2 Music TV

Music television, alongside the news, is the most visibly popular genre of satellite program in both Jordan and Syria as it occupies much public space. Most restaurants, cafes and bars that have televisions, which is the overwhelming majority, show either news or music television and those that have a clientele of mixed age and gender tend to prefer music TV. There are now over fifty different music TV stations broadcast over Arab satellites, though by far the most popular is the Saudi-owned but Lebanese-based *Rotana*, followed by the Egypt's *Melody*, *Muzzika* and the US-owned *MTV Arabia*, all of which broadcast multiple channels.<sup>590</sup> Ownership of these channels reflects the regional trend, with most owners closely linked to state governments. The owner of *Rotana*, for example, is a Saudi prince, Al-Walid Bin Talal, who has been described as, "the Rupert Murdoch of media ownership in the Middle East," whose empire extends to newspapers, record labels and even the religious channel *al-Risalah*.<sup>591</sup> With owners so closely tied to state governments, one might expect an analysis of the content and style of music television to show banal and overt flagging of state identity to dominate. However, as with news, reality TV and drama series, we instead see a mixture of identities flagged. On the one hand, songs and videos are largely apolitical but, when it does stray into political territory, we see a relatively even mix of songs highlighting Arab, state and Islamic identity. At the same time, the visual format of music TV continues the trend of banally flagging to the viewer a world composed of Arab states and flags.

Most pop songs and videos found on music TV are apolitical.<sup>592</sup> Observing a few hours of *Rotana*, for example, the author found most songs and videos share the same themes as their western counterparts: love, relationships, betrayal, friendship and, perhaps more than in the West, family. One video, saw Lebanese singer Haifa Wehbe sing a song for her son dressed in pyjamas waiting for his father to come home. Another song observed by female artist Shereen portrayed the Egyptian singer in a beach house

<sup>590</sup> Dana El Baltaji, 'I want my MTV,' *Arab Media and Society* 5 (Spring 2008).

<sup>591</sup> Cochrane, 'Saudi Arabia,' *Arab Media and Society*; Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 10.

<sup>592</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 142.



wearing a variety of dresses and revealing clothing awaiting her man. These romantic ballads typify the majority of the content, without any overt flagging of identities.

However, songs about identity, nationalism and religion are also popular in the Arab world. Interestingly, *Rotana* frequently shows songs referencing Islam. This is most obvious during Ramadan when religious songs and videos appear, often recorded by mainstream artists who would usually be singing about love and relationships but now wear pious clothing to sing about religion. Even outside of Ramadan, there are videos that are either overtly religious, featuring an artist in white robes, or more subtle 'moral' tales involving a reckless youth reforming his decadent ways to find religion. Such videos might suggest the channel is used by Saudi authorities to pedagogically promote religion. However, whilst it has been suggested by many writers that the huge stake in transnational media tied to Riyadh plays a role in promoting a positive view of the Kingdom, the frequency of distinctly un-Islamic material on *Rotana* must question how much it can be seen as a pro-religion vehicle.<sup>593</sup> Most videos of female artists portray them in 'racy' clothing, prompting widespread criticism from Islamic authorities.<sup>594</sup> The fact that the station bases itself in Beirut rather than Saudi Arabia illustrates that religious promotion is not its main function. Instead, the presence of these religious videos alongside songs about love and relationships reflects the pluralist content of music television. It is considered normal when a love song is immediately followed by one about religion, perhaps indicating that an Islamic identity is flagged quite banally.

As with religious videos, state nationalism-focused songs are also often seen in-between scantily-clad divas warbling about lost love. The love for one's '*balad*' or country has long been a feature of Arabic popular music, and its continuation into the satellite age is not surprising. What is noticeable is the predominance of songs about certain states. The vast majority of performing artists come from either Lebanon or Egypt and so it is not surprising that songs about these states are more frequent than those about either Syria or Jordan. These songs can vary from nuanced ballads about the beauty of Beirut, to more crude songs such as the 2008 hit, 'Egypt, Egypt, Egypt!', whose lyrics didn't evolve far beyond those of the title. Because few artists from beyond these two states make it into the mainstream, very few songs flag other state identities so overtly. Syria's greatest contemporary pop star, George Wassouf, for example, prefers singing about poetry and romance than his state.<sup>595</sup> The two notable exceptions are Iraq and Palestine. Though Iraqi singers are not that well known due to their isolation from the wider Arab world during Saddam's rule, Kathem al Saher has recently made a name for

---

<sup>593</sup> Cochrane, 'Saudi Arabia.'

<sup>594</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 151.

<sup>595</sup> Motti Regev, 'Present Absentee: Arab music in Israeli culture' in *Public Culture* 7:2 (1995), pp. 433-445.

himself singing tragic ballads of the destruction of Iraq under occupation and war.<sup>596</sup> His success might indicate a certain level of Arab solidarity, with viewers opting to show their support for Iraq through the purchase of songs depicting their misfortune. A far greater focus for songs about specific countries is Palestine. Whilst several Palestinian figures have risen to prominence singing about their occupied lands, it remains the only state where Arab singers from other countries will repeatedly refer to. Lebanese artists Marcel Khalife and Fairouz are famous for their songs of Palestine, notable the latter's *Zahrat al-Mada'in* (flower of cities) about Jerusalem.<sup>597</sup>

An extension of this country-focused genre are the numerous songs that have a more specifically Arabist bent. The outbreak of the second Intifada in the West Bank in 2000 prompted a wave of new pro-Arab pop songs. In 2001 Egyptian singer Shaaban Abdel Rahim produced the blunt but highly popular, 'I hate Israel' and Lebanese artists Yuri Mrakadi sang *Arabiyyun Ana* (I am an Arab) to widespread applause.<sup>598</sup> Similarly, a collection of mainstream singers from across the Arab world recorded *al-Quds hatirga lina* (Jerusalem will return to us), the video for which featured images of Israel attacking Palestinians.<sup>599</sup> However, whilst contemporary events might surge the popularity of Arab nationalist songs, they remain present on music television throughout the year. One particular video that repeatedly appears is the 1998 *al-Hilm al-Arabi* (the Arab dream). This was recorded by a cooperation of singers before the second Intifada, at a time of peace negotiations, yet has many images of Arabism that proved popular, such as videos of Nasser or of Palestinians throwing stones.<sup>600</sup> Interestingly, this video was initially banned in Egypt, but popularity on other channels eventually forced authorities to make a *volte face*.

Content on music television can therefore best be described as pluralist. Though the vast majority of songs and videos are apolitical pop about love and relationships, there are also regular songs about Islam, state nationalism and Arabism. External events, such as Ramadan or an escalation in Palestine or Iraq, seem to effect the frequency with which these differing types of song are shown. However, they retain a presence even in 'colder' periods of interest, banally flagging all three identities in between love songs. This further supports the thesis that producers have no qualms about promoting Arab and Islamic identity, as long as it is alongside, not in opposition to, state identity and interests.

---

<sup>596</sup> 'Veteran Ferrer scoops music award', *BBC News Online*, 1/2/04  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/3444611.stm> - accessed 4/5/10.

<sup>597</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 1.

<sup>598</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 154.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>600</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, pp. 17-18.

This hypothesis is confirmed when one examines the presentation of most music TV in the Arab world. All of the mainstream channels present viewers not only with music videos, but at the same time a 'newsfeed' bar scrolls over the bottom or top of the screen with SMS text messages from viewers sending their opinions on songs and messages to their friends. In order to coordinate the receiving of these messages, which earns the channel a tidy profit, numbers to call are listed which differ according to which national state telephone network they are on. Consequently, the names of almost all of the Arab states are frequently flashed to viewers throughout the broadcasts as songs are playing, 24 hours a day. On some stations, the flags of these states are similarly shown. Such images are largely unnoticed by viewers and considered normal. However, as with the opening credits to *Superstar* these symbols and names are encouraging viewers to see themselves as members of separate countries, whilst simultaneously encouraging them to think of themselves as part of a wider network or arena of Arab states. Again, no non-Arab state's name or flag is mentioned. All viewers are expected and encouraged to be part of the Arab supra-nation.

### 5.3.3 Drama series

By far the most popular shows in the Arab world are drama serials, or *musalsals*. As discussed in chapter four, though state television regularly shows these widely-watched series – a tradition that began in the 1950s and 60s with popular Egyptian dramas rebroadcast on various state networks - it is now on the transnational satellite channels that they are most often viewed. In recent years a ritual has emerged during Ramadan whereby, after the fast-breaking *Iftar* meal in the evening, most families sit down to watch several hours of *musalsals* on television.<sup>601</sup> As a consequence, the different entertainment satellite networks – *MBC*, *LBC*, *Dubai* and *Future* being the most prominent – spend huge sums producing dramas to win over this vast audience. 80% of Egyptians are estimated to watch *musalsals* during *Iftar* and, though figures are not available, discussions with Syrians and Jordanians suggest that a comparable number in those states do likewise.<sup>602</sup> In the early years of satellite TV dramas from Egypt, the home of the Arab movie industry, dominated the airwaves. However, in recent years dramas from Syria and, more recently, Turkish shows that have been dubbed by Syrian producers with the Damascene dialect, have, “quickly become a staple in the Arab world.”<sup>603</sup> Lila Abu-Lughood argued that, in the 1990s, such *musalsals* in Egypt were pedagogical vehicles used by the state to bind the nation together. Can the same be seen of an Arab nation in the *musalsals* of the satellite era?

---

<sup>601</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 67.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>603</sup> Marlin Dick, 'The state of the *musalsal*: Arab television drama, and comedy and the politics of the satellite era,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (Fall 2005).

Marlon Dick highlights that an increasing number of *musalsals*, in their attempt to appeal to a wider audience, draw on pan-Arab and Islamic themes. He notes that, as previously discussed with music TV, external events had a bearing on the frequency of Arabist and Islamic content in dramas.<sup>604</sup> He states that, “when the regional situation heated up with the Al Aqsa Intifada, the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the US-led invasion of Iraq, *musalsals* have reflected the Arab world’s tensions, albeit in different ways.”<sup>605</sup> Some of these *musalsals* seems to fuse both Islamic and Arab identity, which would support Rinnawi and Pintak’s assertions that the two are synchronising, especially those that focus on Islamic history. One popular trend in this period has been to set dramas in *al-Andalus* (Andalusia) during Omayyad rule.<sup>606</sup> Many of these series, such as 2005’s *Muluk al-Tawa’if* (War Lords) positively portray an era of religious and political tolerance when Arabs and Muslims were united together, drawing obvious analogies with the divisions in the contemporary Arab world.<sup>607</sup>

However, despite some assertions that *musalsals* glorify Islamic history, the sheer volume of different series produced each Ramadan suggests space for pluralistic content and, in reality, Islam is not the most prominent subject.<sup>608</sup> As Dick explains, “while most producers respect the Islamic conventions required for selling their shows, writers and directors usually qualify as secularists, reformists, conservatives, Arab nationalists, leftists or some combination of the above.”<sup>609</sup> In fact, whilst most historical dramas about Islam tend to have a parallel message of Arab solidarity, there are also many shows about Arab nationalist history that lack any similar religious meaning, perhaps suggesting flagging Arab identity is generally more prominent. Shows celebrating past Arab nationalists such as *Nasser 56*, *Gemal Abdul Nasser* and *Umm Kalthoum* take a distinctly secularist bent, for example.<sup>610</sup> Similarly, even some comedies touch on Arabist themes, whilst avoiding religion. The Syrian comedy *Spotlight*, for example, features a Damascene character who emphasises that it is an Arab’s duty to fight occupation in Iraq – that is until he is offered the chance to fight himself at which point he fearfully asks, “Y-y-you mean, where the b-b-bombing is?”<sup>611</sup>

As with music TV, pluralism dominates when one analyses the content of *musalsals*. Whilst shows appealing to Arab and Islamic identity may be prominent, most deal with small-scale subjects. “Purely domestic concerns, though, are the standard fare of *musalsals*,” reassures Dick.<sup>612</sup> There appears to be a

---

<sup>604</sup> Dick, ‘The state of the musalsal.’

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> John Shoup, ‘As it was and as it should be now: Al Andalus in contemporary Arab television dramas,’ *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (2005).

<sup>607</sup> Dick, ‘The state of the musalsal.’

<sup>608</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 67.

<sup>609</sup> Dick, ‘The state of the musalsal.’

<sup>610</sup> Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!*, p. 18.

<sup>611</sup> Dick, ‘The state of the musalsal.’

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

dichotomy of content. On the one hand, many shows could be considered ‘mindless’ domestic entertainment based in Syria, Turkey or Egypt, following characters with ‘everyday’ lives that their audience can relate to, which primarily flag domestic and state identity, continuing the pedagogical themes discussed in chapter four. On the other hand, there are also a large number of high-profile shows, particularly historical dramas that emphasise the audience’s wider Arab and Islamic identities. However, unlike in the pre-satellite era, studios and channels must fight for their audiences, suggesting that the volume of one type of *musalsal* on television appeal to the wider Arab audience. The continued presence of shows that emphasise Arab and Islamic identities, alongside domestic-focussed shows suggests that, as with music TV, producers do not see these identities as threats to their interests.

This dichotomy between apolitical domestic dramas and more politicised historical *musalsals* can be seen by the two most popular *musalsals* in Syria and Jordan, and the wider Arab world, over the past few Ramadans: *Bab al-Hara* and *Nour*. *Bab al-Hara* (The Neighbourhood Gate) typifies the political historical drama. Now into its fourth Ramadan, with a fifth series already commissioned, the *musalsal* is Gulf funded but Syrian produced and aired on the Saudi-owned *MBC* network. Set in a neighbourhood in old Damascus under French occupation during the 1920s and 30s, the show follows numerous characters and their families over several years. Whilst many of the storylines follow relatively mundane events of local gossip and intrigue, there is a distinct emphasis on both culture and politics. Culturally, it has a pedagogical edge in its emphasis on older ‘Arab’ value of honour, which many audience members harked for in today’s society.<sup>613</sup> Politically, the decision by many of the characters to fight either the French in Syria or to travel to fight in the Palestinian revolt of the 1930s, is a clear nod to Arabism. The widespread popularity of this show – enough to commission five series and, reportedly, clear streets and force restaurants to broadcast it on big screens to retain their customers each night – perhaps illustrates the popularity of shows that overtly flag Arab identity.<sup>614</sup>

Yet at the same time, the popularity of *Nour* might indicate that escapism and entertainment are as much motives for watching *musalsals* as any political views. Shown on *MBC* in Ramadan 2007 and 2008, this dubbed Turkish show is an apolitical soap opera. It sparked controversy from religious figures for its distinctly un-Islamic style – showing young Muslims drinking, having premarital sex and, in the case of one of the protagonists, an abortion.<sup>615</sup> Nevertheless, it was enormously popular, prompting *MBC* to launch a separate pay-per-view channel that showed the series twenty-four hours a day, and leading to a dramatic rise in the number of babies in the Arab world named *Nour* and

---

<sup>613</sup> Yaov Stern, ‘Arab tradition makes a comeback on TV,’ *Haaretz* 9/10/07.

<sup>614</sup> Dalia Nammari, ‘Syrian Soap Opera Captivates Arab World,’ *Associated Press* 14/10/07.

<sup>615</sup> Robert F. Worth, ‘Arab TV tests societies limits with depictions of sex and equality,’ *New York Times* 26/0/08.

Muhannad – the show’s lead protagonists.<sup>616</sup> Being from a Muslim country like Turkey made its controversial topics more accessible than similar shows from America. As Nadia Bilbassy-Charters writes, “Coming from a Muslim country like Turkey (even one imbued with a strong secular identity) made it easy to penetrate the thick walls of conservatism in the Arab world where bigotry and misogyny often masquerade as "moral" or "ethical" issues.”<sup>617</sup>

The contrast in values and identities flagged in *Nour* and *Bab al-Hara* illustrates the pluralism of choice available to viewers of *musalsals* in the Arab world, yet their equal popularity suggests that a show’s values or political persuasion does not effect audience choice as much as storyline and entertainment. Indeed, the presences of such Arabist fare as *Bab al-Hara* in the schedule alongside ‘mindless’ entertainment like *Nour* supports the claim of this thesis, that programming that promotes a wider Arab identity is considered ‘normal’ and ‘banal’ by viewers.

#### 5.3.4 Islamic television

Aside from the various forms of banally flagged Islamic identity in mainstream entertainment shows described above, there exists a sizeable number of shows and channels specifically dedicated to Islamic programming. Whilst they are not as popular as the other genres assessed, with one estimate putting Islamic programming’s share of transnational audiences at less than 1%, this relatively unique phenomena merits discussion.<sup>618</sup>

It is notable that most political Islamists disapprove of the their members using television. Organisations such as Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood openly condemn television as a corrupting, immoral influence, and regularly release statements of outrage at shows such as *Superstar* and *Nour*.<sup>619</sup> The content of Islamic television is therefore largely set by comparatively moderate Muslims who see the role of their channel or show as primarily cultural rather than political. Moreover, self-styled Islamic channels such as *al-Risalah*, *al-majd* and *Irqa* are owned by the same (mostly Saudi) Gulf elite who own other stations and hence have a vested interest in promoting a discourse which does not challenge the state system as a universalist political Islam possibly could do. Indeed, the first line of the statement of intent of *Irqa*, one of the first Islamic channels, was to, “promote the moderate and tolerant line of Islam.”<sup>620</sup>

---

<sup>616</sup> Ali Jafar, ‘Arab net plans film of Turkish Soap,’ *Variety* 11/2/09; Karin Laub and Dalia Nammari, ‘Soap Opera Shakes customs of Arab married life,’ *Associated Press* 28/7/08.

<sup>617</sup> Nadia Bilbassy-Charters, ‘Leave it to Turkish soap operas to conquer hearts and minds,’ *Foreign Policy* 15/4/10.

<sup>618</sup> Amin, ‘Arab media,’ p. 73.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>620</sup> Abdul Qadar Tash, ‘Islamic satellite channels and their impact on Arab societies: *Irqa* channel – a case study,’ *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 13 (2004).

However, whilst promoting a political Islam that would challenge the state system is against the owners' interests, it is notable how much Arab identity is flagged in their content. The founding statement of *Irqa*, for example, mentions 'Arabs' almost as much as it does 'Islam'. They state amongst their goals: "reinforcing the significance of the Arabic language;" "highlight the notable features of Arab and Islamic culture;" "tackle the present and future problems and issues facing Arabs and Muslims;" and, "to present recreational programs for all members of the Arab family."<sup>621</sup> Indeed, whilst 34% of *Irqa*'s programming was specifically religious, a further 22% was drama serials (mostly historical) which, as has already discussed, often have an Arab nationalist element to them.<sup>622</sup> However, this does not support Pintak's views that Arabist and Islamist views are synchronising as the Islam promoted on these channels supports the status quo. Instead this illustrates the cultural element of Islam which is promoted across Arab satellite TV shows, rather than a specifically political Islamism which is largely absent. Whilst not widely watched, these Islamic channels seem to therefore support attempts to promote an Arab-wide audience through its use of Arab rhetoric and choice of programming. However, as with other shows, this is alongside Islamic and state identities, not in opposition.

A notable exception to this rule would be Hezbollah's increasingly popular *al-Manar* (The Beacon) channel. Unlike the largely unwatched *al-Risalah*, *al-Majd* and *Irqa*, *al-Manar* enjoys a relatively popular following, particularly in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. The channel, which focuses on the conflict with Israel, includes news, sports, entertainment and children's shows, and is one of the few in the Arab satellite world, along with *al-Jazeera*, which does not fall into the 'Saudi space' Riyadh-funded orbit of influence.<sup>623</sup> Unlike the other Islamic channels, *al-Manar* does seem to support Pintak's hypothesis of synchronisation as it is both overtly and banally Islamist and Arabist, regularly showing images of suffering at the hands of the Israelis. It states as its aim to, "preserve the Islamic values and to enhance the civilising role of the Arab and Islamic community," as well as to be, "...the first Arab establishment to stage an effective psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy."<sup>624</sup> More banally, it portrays all its female presenters in headscarves, promoting Islamic identity, and has quiz shows such as 'The Mission' where contestants must answer questions which will get them 'to Jerusalem.' 25% of the winnings are sent to 'support the Palestinian people' and often the questions include asking the name of recent suicide bombing 'martyrs'.

However, the impact of this Islamist channel should not be over-exaggerated. Despite the rhetoric, Hezbollah remains a state-based Islamic political group, unlike universalists like *al-Qaeda*. As a

---

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

<sup>623</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts*, p. 76; Hammond, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Empire.'

<sup>624</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts*, pp. 76-7.

consequence it frames its content within the state system: speaking of ‘liberating’ Lebanon or Palestine more than creating a single Islamic state. Even domestically the party has moderated its language, no longer calling for the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon.<sup>625</sup> Similarly, Katharina’s Notzold’s research demonstrated that, even within the different channels available in Lebanon, *al-Manar* did not have the most religious rhetoric or content.<sup>626</sup> *Al-Manar* therefore flags Islamic, Arab and state identities at different times. Whilst it might oppose the status quo more than its mostly Saudi-owned rivals, it does not actively undermine the state system – just calls on the existing states to act differently. This perhaps shows the limits of satellite television to undermine existing identities and structures. Despite all its rhetoric, Hezbollah is a Lebanese organisation which depends primarily on Lebanese support for its existence, and this is reflected in its *al-Manar* channel. As with other shows and stations, it might promote Arab or Islamic identities *alongside* this state identity, but not in opposition to it.

---

<sup>625</sup> ‘Hezbollah cuts Islamist rhetoric in new manifesto,’ *Reuters*, 30/11/09 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5AT3VK20091130>) accessed 6/12/09.

<sup>626</sup> Katharina Notzold, ‘The political elites dominance over the visual space: a qualitative and quantitative content study of Lebanese Television,’ in Hafez, *Arab Media: Power and Weakness*, pp. 139-140.



## 5.4 Sport: A Case Study of *al-Jazeera's* 2008 Olympic Coverage

The final section of this chapter considers sport on satellite television, using an empirical case study of how *al-Jazeera* reported the 2008 Beijing Olympic games. Whilst there are several stations dedicated specifically to sport, the most popular news channel's sports bulletins seemed an appropriate sample of sporting broadcasts at this time.

### 5.4.1 Methodology

The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics saw over 360 athletes from Arab states competing and each of the 22 members of the Arab League, as well as the Palestinians, had some representation. This two week sporting event seemed a suitable occasion to analyse whether *al-Jazeera's* sports coverage was flagging Arabism, state nationalism or even Islamism, as some would suggest. Whilst there is a separate *al-Jazeera Sport* channel that covered each event in detail, this experiment was more concerned with the short five minute sports news bulletins displayed every few hours as part of the regular *al-Jazeera* 24 hour news channel. These were the reports that the majority of Syrians and Jordanians in the audience would be watching, whilst the sports channel only caters for specific sports fans and not the whole of society.

To assess the extent to which content and discourse flagged Arab, state or Islamic identity an experiment was set to record these bulletins each day throughout the Olympics. As with the experiment in chapter four it was decided to record the prime time slot of six hours between 1800 and 0000 Mecca time (KSA), or 1700-2300 in Syria and Jordan, when most viewers watch their daily news.<sup>627</sup> This time period incorporated the two main evening news hours: 'This evening' at 1900 KSA and *Hasad al-yawm* ('Harvest of the Day') at 2300 KSA, each of which usually had a 5-10 minute sports bulletin of the day's events from Beijing. Occasionally, a third sports bulletin would be shown at the earlier time of 1800 KSA, and on a few occasions the news hour shows were reporting live from a crisis event and cancelled the sports bulletin. The data gathered proved sufficient to draw various conclusions about the Arab, Islamic and state nationalist nature of sports reporting on *al-Jazeera*.

### 5.4.2 Discourse: flagging 'the Arabs'

The use of the word 'Arab' in *al-Jazeera's* Olympic coverage is perhaps the clearest example of a banal Arab identity being flagged. When reporting on the performances of athletes from the Arab world, the reporters repeatedly describe 'Arabs' or use some reference to 'the Arabs'. Whilst the competitors' state

---

<sup>627</sup> Amin, 'Arab media,' p. 73.

of origin was also mentioned, by emphasising the commonality between the athletes and the wider Arab-speaking audience from different states, we see a clear sense of Billig's banal flagging.

On 13<sup>th</sup> August, for example, after an Algerian boxer won silver and an Egyptian Boxer won bronze, the sports bulletin headline was, "New medals for Arabs in Beijing," and not 'New medals for Algeria and Egypt in Beijing.'<sup>628</sup> The item did go on to say the athletes' country of origin, and so was not undermining state identity as Rinnawi claims, but it was the athletes' Arab character that producers thought would attract maximum audience attention. Such flagging sends the message that the viewers, like the athletes, are 'Arab', and should take pride in the achievements of 'their' competitors, even if from a different state.

This discourse was repeated throughout *al-Jazeera's* Olympic coverage, particularly when discussing several athletes from Arab states. On 20<sup>th</sup> August, following the success of two Algerian, two Sudani, two Bahrainis, a Saudi and a Kuwaiti athlete in the qualifiers for the 800m mens' semi final, the headline announced, '8 Arabs have qualified for the 800m men's' semi final'.<sup>629</sup> Similarly, the success the next day of four of these was presented as '4 Arab competitors' reach the final'.<sup>630</sup> In the same bulletin, on 21<sup>st</sup> August, the qualification of a Bahraini and two Moroccan women for the women's 1500m final was headlined as, '3 Arab competitors also,' qualify. Again, though the athletes' names and states of origin were subsequently listed, the priority headline was that it was 'Arabs' who had succeeded.

The use of the word 'Arab' was not simply a tool to save time. Whilst it did allow the sports newscaster to deliver a snappier headline, the use of the word 'Arab' elsewhere suggests that choice of vocabulary is more attuned to keep the broad-based audience engaged. This was illustrated in the recurrence of the word 'Arab' in the reportage of individual success. The gold medal taken by Tunisian swimmer Oussama Mellouli on 17<sup>th</sup> August was reported as 'the Arabs' first gold' of the games and, in a summary of the games on 24<sup>th</sup> August, a report hailed the event as a, 'first gold for Arabs in swimming', in Olympic history.<sup>631</sup> Though each bulletin mentioned that the swimmer was Tunisian, their priority was not to state the equally true, 'Tunisia's first gold' or the 'first gold for Tunisia in swimming'. As with Oussama Mellouli's gold, the sports bulletins took the individual successes of athletes representing Arab states and presented them in a manner as if all the athletes were representing a single 'Arab' team. On 19<sup>th</sup> August, after a Bahraini athlete took gold in the 800m, they announced,

---

<sup>628</sup> 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 13/8/08.

<sup>629</sup> 'This evening', *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 20/8/08.

<sup>630</sup> 'This evening', *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 21/8/08.

<sup>631</sup> 'This evening', *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 24/8/08.

‘The Bahraini Rashid Ramzi won Arab countries another Gold’.<sup>632</sup> Similarly, on the 24<sup>th</sup> August a Moroccan silver was presented as, ‘the Moroccan Jaouad Gharib has won a new Olympic medal, the eighth for the Arabs by finishing in second place in the Marathon’.<sup>633</sup> Again, the athletes’ state is pronounced, whilst simultaneously implying a common Arab goal in the competition.

Presenting athletes as a combined ‘Arab team’ was also highlighted in the medal tables displayed at the end of most sports bulletins. Whilst usually only the top five countries in the medal table were displayed in these bulletins – mostly highlighting the growing rivalry between the USA and China – on days in which Arab states won medals, a second table was displayed illustrating where these individual states were in the overall rankings. Figure 11 replicates this ‘top five’ table, labelled ‘*bilad Arab*’ (Arab countries) that kept a running tally on the total number of medals for ‘the Arabs’.

**Figure 11: Example of medal table from 24th August 2008**

State	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Overall place
Bahrain	1			52nd
Tunisia	1			55th
Algeria		2		65th
Morocco		1	1	69th
Sudan		1		77th

The table also encouraged competition between the different Arab states. This helps illustrate how Arab identity is being flagged in tandem with, not against, state nationalism. They encourage state pride and rivalry between the states, but also ‘flag’ that it is these states with which the Arab audiences should feel competition. Sudanese viewers should feel a greater sense of competition with Morocco than with neighbouring Ethiopia. Moroccans should compete more with Kuwait than neighbouring Spain. The discourse allows viewers a state identity, but within a wider Arab arena around which they should orientate themselves.

### 5.4.3 Content: proud winners

The discourse and direct use of the word ‘Arab’ is not the only way in which *al-Jazeera*’s coverage of the Olympics seemed to flag Arab identity. As crucial is content: what is shown and the order in which it is presented. Michael Billig emphasised how important it was in the flagging of British identity that domestic news was placed first in newspapers, with foreign news a lesser priority later on in the

<sup>632</sup> ‘*Hasad al-yawm*’ *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 19/8/08.

<sup>633</sup> ‘This evening’, *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 24/8/08.

edition.<sup>634</sup> The same can be seen in the presentation of the Olympic sports bulletins. Arab successes, particularly medals, are given greater priority than comparative successes or news about competitors from non-Arab countries.

Examples of this can be seen most obviously on the occasions when Arabs won medals. Though the 360 athletes from Arab states managed to acquire a fairly paltry tally of only eight medals, each one was given major priority by *al-Jazeera*. On average, the sports bulletins displayed from five to ten stories each bulletin. On the days when Arab athletes won gold, the Tunisian swimmer Oussama Mellouli on 17<sup>th</sup> August and the Bahraini 800m runner Rashid Ramzi on 19<sup>th</sup> August, their achievement was the first headline on each sports bulletin.<sup>635</sup> These were deemed more important news than the other golds won by non-Arab athletes. Similarly, though *Al-Jazeera* tended to pack its bulletins with stories about the various gold medals that had been won in Beijing that day, on days when one of the remaining six Arab silver or bronze medals was won, this was always either the first, or, occasionally, the second headline. Figure 12 shows the example of 13<sup>th</sup> August when the success of two Arab boxing medallists was given the first headline spot ahead of the news that the American swimmer Michael Phelps had broken the world record for the number of gold medals achieved by a single athlete. The audience were being informed that the achievement of two ‘Arab’ medals in one day, neither of which were gold, was of more importance to them – in both the 1900 and the 2300 report – than the remarkable individual achievement of one American swimmer. There might be an argument to say that, with its audience’s perceived anti-American feeling the *al-Jazeera* producers chose to relegate the news of American success. However, the numerous reports on Michael Phelps that were featured in subsequent sports bulletins, on days when there were no Arab successes, would question this.

This trend of putting Arab achievements on a higher pedestal than non-Arab achievements was extended to non-medal successes, such as qualification. The qualification of the Moroccan Hasna Banhassi for the final of the women’s 800m on 16<sup>th</sup> August was given the second headline at 1800 and 1900 that day, behind only the world record-breaking Jamaican Sprinter Usain Bolt’s gold in the 100m.<sup>636</sup> It was considered a greater priority to viewers than gold medals for an Ethiopian 10,000m runner, a Russian walker, a Ukrainian shooter and a Chinese badminton player. Similarly, on 21<sup>st</sup> August, when the four previously mentioned Arab 800m runners reached the men’s’ final this was the headline news at 1900.<sup>637</sup> The second headline was about the three Arab women qualifying for the

<sup>634</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 126.

<sup>635</sup> ‘*Hasad al-yawm*’ *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 17/8/08; ‘*Hasad al-yawm*’ *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 19/8/08.

<sup>636</sup> ‘This evening’, *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 16/8/08.

<sup>637</sup> ‘This evening’, *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 21/8/08.

1500m women's final. It wasn't until the third story that of the 4x100m Jamaican men's relay team, that a gold medal was reported.

**Figure 12: Sports stories on 13th August 2008**

6pm 'Riyada' (Sport):

1. **Silver for Algerian and Bronze for Egyptian in Judo.**
2. Michael Phelps gold medal record
3. Gold for Chinese female weightlifter
4. Injured Hungarian weightlifter
5. Gold for US Cyclist
6. Gold for Chinese shooter

7pm 'This Evening':

1. **Silver for Algerian and Bronze for Egyptian in Judo.**
2. Michael Phelps gold medal record
3. Gold for Australian female swimmer
4. Gold for Italian female swimmer
5. Gold for Chinese female weightlifter
6. Gold for US Cyclist
7. Gold for Chinese shooter
8. Olympic football fixtures
9. Volleyball results.

11pm 'Hasad al-yawm':

1. **Silver for Algerian and Bronze for Egyptian in Judo.**
2. **Victory for Moroccan Boxer in round of 16, defeat for Algerian boxer in round of 16.**
3. Phelps gold medal record
4. Gold for Australian female swimmer
5. Gold for Italian female swimmer
6. Gold Chinese female weightlifter
7. Olympic football fixtures

In an Olympic games that could be considered a poor one for the Arab states collectively, even comparatively obscure victories received some coverage. On the 15<sup>th</sup> August, the Algerian Abdelkader Chadi was given the fifth headline for reaching the quarterfinals of the 57kg men's boxing.<sup>638</sup> Similarly, the next day another boxer, the Tunisian Walid Cherif received a mention for reaching the same stage in the 51kg category.<sup>639</sup> Again, these stories were not surrounded by stories of non-Arab athletes reaching quarterfinals or qualifying for finals. Instead, they were sandwiched between stories of gold-winning by athletes from non-Arab countries. The message of this content choice is quite clear: minor successes by Arab athletes should be as important to the viewer as major successes by non-Arab athletes.

#### 5.4.4 Content: Quiet Losers

A noticeable feature when considering *al-Jazeera's* content is what was not reported. Unlike many national television channels, such as the *BBC*, which show empathy and support not only for its nationals' winners but also for its losers, *al-Jazeera* did not have the same attitude towards defeat as it

<sup>638</sup> 'This evening', *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 15/8/08.

<sup>639</sup> 'Riyada (Sport)', *al-Jazeera*, 1800 KSA, 16/8/08.

did victory. Whilst the successes of Arab athletes, even the most minor ones, were given priority over seemingly greater non-Arab triumphs at the games, the defeats were rarely mentioned. Though there were a large number of Arab athletes competing each day in the Olympics, only their successes were reported. On a few days, such as the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, there were no stories of Arab athletes in either sports bulletins. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Egyptian handball and volleyball teams were defeated, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Egyptian Aya Mendany finished 8<sup>th</sup> in the women's modern pentathlon, Egypt finished last in a round of the synchronised swimming, a Qatari man was defeated in the round of 16 in 80kg Taekwondo, and an Emeriti woman was defeated at 67kg Taekwondo preliminaries. Yet none of these defeats were deemed reportable, even though there were no other Arab victories to report in their place. Instead, non-Arab successes were the only topics covered in these bulletins.

Though the station did tend to report qualification to semi finals and finals for Arab athletes, if they failed to perform in those events, their fate was left largely unmentioned. Hussein Taher al Saba, the Saudi long jumper who finished 11<sup>th</sup> in the men's long jump final on 18<sup>th</sup> August was, for example, ignored. The same fate met the Qatari Rashid Shafi al-Dosari when he finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the men's discus final, despite representing *al-Jazeera's* parent state. Throughout the games, the hundreds of Arab athletes who failed to get beyond qualifying rounds, and even those who made it quite far but without achieving a medal, went unreported.

There were a few exceptions. For some reason the defeat of Tunisia's Walid Cherif at the 51kg boxing quarterfinal was deemed worth reporting in a way that the Saudi long jumper and Qatari discus thrower's arguably more impressive achievements were not.<sup>640</sup> There are some suggestions that the presence of North African producers in *Al-Jazeera* might explain this Maghreb bias. A more interesting case is that of the Bahraini Rogaya Al-Gassra, who attracted international attention for being the first female athlete to compete in a hijab. On 20<sup>th</sup> August Al-Gassra finished six in the women's 200m semi-final, failing to reach the final. Given precedent, *al-Jazeera* should not have considered this worth reporting. However, it was the second headline on both the 1900 and the 2300 bulletins, second only to the Jamaican Usain Bolt's gold-winning second world record in the men's 200m.<sup>641</sup> It cannot be explained for certain why this athlete in particular was singled out as the one figure with whom *Al-Jazeera's* audience was asked to give sympathy, when so many more were not. It is possible that, due to the hijab, she was the Arab world's most high-profile athlete and hence public interest was high irrespective of her performance on the track. Whatever the reasons it is clear that the al-Gassra case was the exception to *al-Jazeera's* general denial of defeat, rather than the rule.

---

<sup>640</sup> 'Riyada (Sport)', *al-Jazeera*, 1800 KSA, 20/8/08.

<sup>641</sup> 'This evening', *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 20/8/08; 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 20/8/08.

This unwillingness to report the many defeats of athletes from Arab states might question the extent of the banal Arab nationalism that *al-Jazeera*'s Olympic coverage displays. It certainly suggests a kind of 'hot' and 'cold' Arab identity: one that only wants to identify its audience with their fellow Arab athletes when they achieve success, and downplay it when they fail. However, all this demonstrates is that the five minute sports bulletins do not necessarily have the same level of blind patriotic loyalty that might be encountered on a nation-state television channel like the *BBC*. This might be an issue of limited time, or it might be an issue of consumer choice, with the perception that its audience does not want to hear of failure, whether Arab or other.

However, the idea that Arab identity is somehow 'cold' at times of defeat is questioned by an extended edition of the sports bulletin broadcast on 18<sup>th</sup> August entitled: 'The Arabs at the Beijing Olympics: the Gold and the features of weakness'.<sup>642</sup> In this section the regular sports host asked why it was that 'the Arabs' had only managed one gold medal – at that time the solitary gold won by Tunisia in swimming – and yet so much failure. He interviewed Kamal Darwish, a representative from the Sports Education College in Cairo, to explain why Arab athletes had performed so badly. He probed about a lack of state funding, inadequate facilities and government schemes. Though Darwish was a representative from Egypt, the debate was conducted to encompass the problems facing athletes in all of the Arab world. The presenter maintained the Arab-wide tone with questions such as, "Could we see an Arab Michael Phelps in 10-20 years?" The existence of such a debate serves to support the idea that *al-Jazeera* maintains a banal flagging of Arab identity. Even when it comes to defeat, something they don't like to display, the questions raised aren't, 'why has Egypt performed so badly?' or 'Why has Algeria underperformed', but instead a general questions about why are 'the Arabs' weak.

#### **5.4.5 Content: Region and Islam**

Though addressing a largely Arabic-speaking audience, *al-Jazeera*'s news coverage is generally that of a regional broadcaster. Its articles on 'Greater West Asia' such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Israel are almost as numerous as its coverage of the Arab-speaking areas of North Africa, the Levant and the Arabian peninsular.<sup>643</sup> As such, it is possible that analysts of the channel might view the identity that its discourse and content is banally flagging to be Middle Eastern or Islamic, rather than 'Arab'. To an extent this can be viewed as true. Though this experiment did not focus upon news headlines, it stands to reason that, if repeatedly exposed to news about Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, *al-Jazeera*'s audience might eventually come to view them as contiguous with the more distinctly 'Arab' local

<sup>642</sup> 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 18/8/08.

<sup>643</sup> Fred Halliday, 'Lebanon, Israel and the 'Greater West Asia Crisis',' *Open Democracy*, 17/8/06, ([http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/westasia\\_crisis\\_3833.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/westasia_crisis_3833.jsp)) accessed 6/12/09.

conflicts in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. However, in scrutinising their coverage of the Olympics, it is quite clear that *Al-Jazeera's* prime interest is in the competitors from Arab states, and not in athletes from neighbouring non-Arab countries nor in the triumphs of Muslims from distant states.

The three non-Arab states closest to Doha and neighbouring the Arab world – Turkey, Iran and Israel – had more success than their Arab contemporaries at Beijing. Turkey in particular did well, collecting 1 gold, 4 silvers and 3 bronze. *Al-Jazeera's* viewers, however, were not made aware of this fact as all but two of their medals were unreported in the evenings' sports bulletins. The silver won on 15<sup>th</sup> August by a Turk in the women's 10,000m was briefly mentioned in an aside within the main news item about the Ethiopian who had won gold.<sup>644</sup> It was not judged to be an event worth reporting in its own right. The gold won by Turkey in the 66kg men's wrestling on 20<sup>th</sup> August was featured, but only as the seventh item in only one of the day's two sports bulletins.<sup>645</sup> Turkey was given no special treatment on account of it being either Muslim or local to the Arab world, and its triumphs certainly received nowhere near the same coverage given to the Arab medallists. A similar story is seen with Iran, who won one gold and one bronze. The bronze passed unreported whilst the gold, achieved in men's taekwondo on 22<sup>nd</sup> August was featured only as the seventh story that day.<sup>646</sup> Israel's solitary bronze medal was, not unsurprisingly, unreported.

Unlike region, the role of Islam as a unifying factor between audience and athlete was not totally marginal in *al-Jazeera's* Olympic coverage. On several occasions, in reports about Arab athletes' successes, amongst the few images displayed were shots of the victors praying. This was seen, for example, after the victories of the Algerian and Egyptian boxers on 13<sup>th</sup> August, the qualification of Walid Cherif on 16<sup>th</sup> August and the gold medal won by Rachid Ramzi on 19<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>647</sup> This might be an example of *al-Jazeera's* producers trying to appeal to the religious sentiment of its viewers, using Islam in the same way as they use Arab identity to draw in their audience and encourage viewers to identify with the athletes. However, as the case of Iran and Turkey showed, there is no similar attempt to draw lines of identification and solidarity with other Muslim athletes from outside of the Arab world. The unreported successes of Muslim states such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan support this. None of the Muslim athletes who won Kazakhstan 2 golds, 4 silvers and 7 bronze medals were reported.<sup>648</sup> The same goes for the Muslims who won one gold, two silvers and four bronzes for

---

<sup>644</sup> 'This evening', *al-Jazeera*, 1900 KSA, 15/8/08.

<sup>645</sup> 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 20/8/08.

<sup>646</sup> 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 22/8/08.

<sup>647</sup> 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 13/8/08; 'Riyada (Sport)', *Al-Jazeera*, 1800 KSA, 16/8/08; 'Hasad al-yawm' *al-Jazeera*, 2300 KSA, 19/8/08.

<sup>648</sup> Of the two Kazakhs who won gold, at least one has a Muslim name: The winner of the 69kg Men's Boxing, Bakhyt Sarsekbayev. The other winner, of Men's 94kg Weightlifting, Ilya Ilin could possibly be of Russian and therefore of Christian or Jewish origin.



Azerbaijan and one gold, two silvers and three bronzes for Uzbekistan. The lack of interest in these athletes is because religion is not the marker of identity used by *al-Jazeera* to bind its audience together: they are not Arab and therefore not deemed of sufficient interest to report upon.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Khalil Rinnawi and others who contend that the rise of *al-Jazeera* and other transnational Arab satellite television channels has led to a weakening of state identity are mistaken, as are those who support Marwan Kraidy's belief that any growth in supranational Arabism is 'skin deep'. Both assessments view identities as mutually exclusive and fail to accommodate that both Arab and state identities might be strengthened by the growth of transnational television.

This survey of shows available to viewers in Jordan and Syria has illustrated several points about the potential impact of satellite television upon identity. Firstly it highlighted the weakness of a news-only approach as adopted by the majority of scholars such as Rinnawi and Pintak who use *al-Jazeera* as the main point of analysis to show Arab identity being strengthened. It firstly questioned their findings, by illustrating that though journalists may well, as Pintak suggests, be committed ideologically to a New Arabism, the owners of the stations are equally committed to preserving the state-system status quo and hence use Arab rhetoric to promote their own interests. This suggests the owners of satellite channels are as instrumental as the Syrian and Jordanian governments in their use of Arab identity. Similarly, whilst Islamic culture might be central to some news stories, Pintak is wrong to claim New Arabism is aligned with Islamism as the only Islamist voices given are those that serve either state nationalist or status quo-focused goals. News channels may indeed strengthen Arab identity, but this identity is supranational: specifically designed to maintain and even entrench further the state identities and system from which the owners' power largely derives.

Yet most viewers of satellite television prefer to watch entertainment rather than news and the analysis of scholars such as Miles and Rinnawi is greatly limited by their unwillingness to assess this genre. A consideration of five types of entertainment television – reality TV, music television, dramas, Islamic programming and sport – offers a far better cross section of the identities flagged to viewers than just news. Whilst most entertainment is apolitical, different identities are still highlighted. Reality TV shows such as *Superstar* overtly encourage state nationalism to enhance their viewing figures. Similarly some songs found on music television are designed to appeal to consumers' state nationalism. In a more nuanced and banal way, these same shows reproduce Arab identity at the same time. *Superstar*, for example, only encourages competition within the Arab world and creates an 'Arab arena' in which both competition and solidarity is expected. Similarly, music television channels continuously broadcast the flags and names of Arab states to advertise text messaging fees, banally highlighting to viewers which states are fellow viewers and part of a wider supranational audience.

Arabism is more overtly flagged in other forms of entertainment, such as some *musalsal* drama series as *Bab al-Hara* that emphasise both state nationalism and Arabism by recreating the anti-imperialist struggles of the 1920s and 30s. However, many popular series are apolitical such as *Nour*, though these do have the impact of indirectly encouraging a stronger affinity between Arab viewers who are bound by the same displays of enthusiasm, such as naming children after the main characters. *Al-Jazeera's* coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics shows attempts at creating an 'Arab' audience. In this instance, despite taking a clear preference to only report on winners and not losers, successful athletes from the different states were labelled 'Arab' successes primarily before their country of origin was listed. The athlete's Arab origin was shown to be more important than either their religion or regional origin, as seen by the marginal coverage of other competitors from non-Arab Muslim or Middle Eastern states. At the same time, state identity was emphasised and certainly not undermined as Rinnawi would suggest. The regular display of a league table of Arab states' medals served the same purpose of *Superstar*: encouraging competition between the states whilst simultaneously delineating the countries with which they should be competing - the Arabs.

Finally, this investigation questioned Pintak's claim that Islamism and Arabism have converged on satellite television. It was suggested that Islamic culture is banally flagged on certain shows. This can be seen by the undue attention given to a mediocre Bahraini runner during *al-Jazeera's* Olympic coverage simply because she wore a hijab. It should be noted though that there was no less coverage of unveiled athletes from Arab states. Some music videos and drama also banally flag Islamic identity, though again, they are seen alongside videos and series which are deliberately secular. A great indicator of how successfully Islamic identities are disseminating is a consideration of specifically Islamic television stations. Two things stand out. Firstly, that these stations are not widely popular suggesting viewers prefer less overtly religious shows, and secondly, that these are owned by the same elites as other stations and so promote a form of Islam which entrenches rather than challenges the state system. Even the one outlier, Hezbollah's *al-Manar* channel works within the state system and channels its energies at Israel not the various state governments. Whatever Islamism is allowed on satellite television is therefore highly sanitised to not challenge the status quo. Any Islamic rhetoric, rather like the Arab rhetoric, is designed to entrench the state system not disrupt it.

The satellite media revolution of the 1990s has therefore not challenged the nationalist discourses of Syria and Jordan but rather fed into the supranational Arab identity that they have long constructed and reproduced. Syrians and Jordanians are exposed everyday to various public mediations originating from both within his state and from the outside which flag to them their state, Arab and, to a lesser extent, religious identities.

## Chapter 6

### Receiving the Discourse: Everyday Arabs

“In relation to the Banal Nationalism thesis, it might be unfairly assumed, given the limits of his empirical data, that Billig believes nationalism is banal for everyone who happens to live in Britain at the current time. Given the complexity of a population of 60 million individuals containing four ‘national’ groups, first, second and third generation migrant ‘communities’, distinct regional and class identities and so on, making such an assumption closes down our analysis where it should begin.”<sup>649</sup>

Michael Skey’s above observations of Billig’s *Banal Nationalism* study of Britain could, until now, also be applied to this investigation. In applying Billig’s theory to Syria and Jordan, this thesis has expanded on his methodology in two ways. Firstly, it has covered a wider range of public mediations than Billig, including not only the images and speeches within leaders’ cults, but also state and transnational television. Secondly, whilst Billig focused his attention solely on the reproduction of national identities, the preceding chapters have focused on state, supranational and, to a lesser extent, religious identities flagged daily in Syria and Jordan. This chapter addresses a third expansion, the reaction of citizens to these identity discourses.

Billig’s assumptions about the response of his audience are a major weakness of his study. In stating that, “...this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding,” he implies that whatever is flagged is therefore absorbed by its audience.<sup>650</sup> As Skey comments, *Banal Nationalism*, “...does not address how different constituencies might respond to the particular media texts or political speeches used as examples of the nation being flagged in a routine or taken-for-granted manner.”<sup>651</sup> In other words, Billig dedicates no space to assessing whether there actually is a direct correlation between attachment to an identity discourse and engagement with the mediations that regularly flag it.

Unlike Billig, this study aims to add depth and flavour to its observations by engaging with a section of the audience and considering their perceptions of identity. Skey’s comments about Britain apply equally to Syria and Jordan. Of the 20 million Syrians and 8 million Jordanians, one observes complex populations composed of different ethnicities, sects and religions. Syria is the more heterogeneous with Sunni Muslims, Christians, Druze, Alawis, Kurds and Armenians amongst many others. Jordan is more homogenous with 92% Sunni Muslim and 8% Christians, yet is divided amongst those of Palestinian or

---

<sup>649</sup> Skey, ‘The national in everyday life,’ p. 337.

<sup>650</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 8.

<sup>651</sup> Skey, ‘The national in everyday life,’ p. 337.

Jordanian origin.<sup>652</sup> Alongside these different ethnic and religious groupings, one encounters the same distinct regional and class identities as Skey noted of Britain, as well as divisions of age and gender. The following chapter discusses numerous ethnographic interviews conducted in Syria and Jordan that consider respondents' attitudes towards identity and the public mediations shown to flag them.

It is beyond the scope of this study to establish conclusively how each of these segments of Syrian and Jordanian society might respond. To gain conclusive data one would need to conduct widespread surveys and correlate viewing figures that, in these regimes, are difficult to obtain. Though lacking scientific rigour, the 29 interviews conducted in Syria and 22 in Jordan, serve to examine further some of the observations drawn from earlier chapters. Whilst none of the data obtained could be considered conclusive, an exploration of the topic expands Billig's model further and adds colour to this investigation.

The following chapter first discusses the methodology used for these qualitative interviews, explaining that the nature of the society and government ensured that an ethnographic approach proved the most advantageous. It then discusses the various findings focusing on five themes. The first is a broad discussion of identity in Syria and Jordan, whether respondents feel Arab, Syrian/Jordanian and/or Muslim as is flagged to them daily, and in particular how they feel about their layer of Arab identity. The next three themes discussed correspond to the public mediations investigated in chapters 3-5. Firstly the images and speeches of leaders in cults, followed by their viewing habits and opinions of state and transnational television. In each case, whilst respondents show a great deal of individuality, most seem to conform to the broad identity discourses flagged to them daily.

---

<sup>652</sup> CIA World Fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> - accessed 22/1/10.

## 6.1 Methodology

The purpose of this research was to assess the interaction with and opinions of ‘everyday’ Syrians and Jordanians towards the public mediations sampled in this thesis. Various methods were considered to obtain this data. One possibility was quantitative surveying but this would have caused numerous problems. Firstly, the scale was too great. For conclusive data to be obtained from surveys a minimal sample of 100 in each country is required which would mean 200 respondents in total. To distribute, collect and correlate such a large quantity of data was beyond the scope of this study. Additionally surveys discriminate against the illiterate, of which there are many in Syria and Jordan.<sup>653</sup> Moreover, the Syrian government often object to surveying being conducted within its borders. Even had permission been granted, there is no guarantee against official interference, or that respondents would have felt comfortable answering questions in writing.

Qualitative interviewing was therefore more practical but also more suitable than quantitative analysis.<sup>654</sup> Whilst quantitative data is able to provide larger samples, it fails to offer explanations as to *why* identities are felt or *how* they are manifested. A more ethnographic and anthropological approach that allows respondents to give detailed answers about their identities better serves this thesis’ goal of explaining why and how identity is reproduced and disseminated. Societal and political conditions in Syria and Jordan discourage the conduct of formal, structured interviews however. Whilst they may prove useful to interview regime officials, the climate of fear and paranoia amongst the everyday population brought on by both Syria and Jordan’s *Mukhabarat* intelligence services ensure that most feel uncomfortable being tape-recorded or having notes taken during interviews. With such circumstances, the best method to obtain data from everyday people therefore proved to be semi-structured ethnographic interviews.<sup>655</sup> Being semi-structured, the same topics were discussed with all respondents amongst other loosely unrelated questions. Whilst not recorded or noted at the time, the interviewer was able to type up the salient points and quotes from interviews immediately after they were conducted, using the five key themes as a memory aid.

The data was obtained in two separate research trips, one to Syria in June-July 2009, and the second to Jordan in October-November 2009. Interviews were conducted, as much as possible, during ‘normal’ time periods that did not hold any particular national or religious significance in case the resulting atmosphere swayed the answers of respondents. It should be noted that throughout 2009 Jordan saw an

---

<sup>653</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>654</sup> Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*, p. 40.

<sup>655</sup> See, for example, Raban, *Arabia*.

extra burst of state-sponsored overt national flagging due to ongoing celebrations marking a decade on the throne for King Abdullah II.

Choosing respondents to interview was challenging. On the one hand, the author was aware of the diverse backgrounds, economic status, ethnicities and religions found in Syria and Jordan, and wanted to accommodate this within the results. On the other hand, the author was also aware of the limited scope of this sample and how inconclusive any variations according to background would be. As much as possible, therefore, respondents of different backgrounds, gender, age, ethnicity, religion and sect were sought, that loosely reflected the national demographics. However, these results are presented in the full knowledge that any conclusions drawn must only be suggestive as the sample size is small.

In total 51 respondents were interviewed, 29 in Syria and 22 in Jordan. Interviews were conducted in blocs around certain areas to increase the geographical spread. In Syria, 11 interviews were conducted in and around Damascus, the capital and largest city (pop. 5 million), 13 in Aleppo, the second largest city (pop. 4 million) and 6 in Lattakia and its surrounding countryside, the fourth largest city (pop. 400,000) and a rich agricultural area. In Jordan, the majority of interviews, 13, were held in Amman, the capital and largest city (pop. 1.9 million). The next largest cities, Irbid (pop. 290,000) and Zarqa (pop. 400,000) hosted 5 and 2 interviews respectively. Finally the small Christian-dominated town of Madaba (pop. 65,000) produced 2 interviews.

Though both Syria and Jordan have a roughly equal gender balance the author, as a western male, struggled to find women from certain ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds to interview. Each sample is slightly skewed towards men with 18 men to 11 women in Syria and 16 men to 6 women in Jordan. Both countries have young populations. Syria has an average age of 21.7 and Jordan an average of 24.3.<sup>656</sup> The author therefore attempted to balance the age of those interviewed. In Syria 14 of those interviewed were under-30, and 15 over-30, with 8 of those over-50. In Jordan, 13 interviewed were under-30 and 9 over-30, with 2 of those over-50. Most interviewees in each state were from urban areas, as most of the population in each state is urban, 78% in Jordan and 54% in Syria.<sup>657</sup> In Syria 24 respondents were urban and 5 rural. In Jordan 18 were urban and 4 were rural.

Defining economic group in the Middle East is less straightforward than in western societies as standards of living are quite different. Both Jordan and Syria have large, bloated bureaucracies that,

---

<sup>656</sup> CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>;  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html> - accessed 22/1/10.

<sup>657</sup> CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>;  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html> - accessed 22/1/10.

whilst not returning a substantial salary, carry with them a sense of respect and economic stability comparable to western middle classes. Such employment could affect a person's sense of identity. This study therefore attributed economic background based on the standards of Syrian and Jordanian societies rather than those of the West. In Syria, 5 respondents would be considered 'rich', 16 'middle class' and 8 'poor'. In Jordan, 2 were 'rich', 10 'middle class' and 10 'poor'.

Matching up proportions of ethnic and religious groups around their national average was the most challenging element of this study. Ethnicity in Syria is 90% Arab, 10% Kurds, Armenians and others. Religious groups in Syria are 74% Sunni (66% Sunni Arab, 7% Sunni Kurd), 13% Shia, including the Alawis (the largest Shia sect), 10% Christians and 3% Druze.<sup>658</sup> This study interviewed 13 Sunni Arab Muslims, 6 Christians, 5 Druze, 3 Alawis and 2 Kurds. In Jordan, the ethnic and sectarian gap is less pronounced. 98% of the population is Arab, 92% Sunni, 6% Christian and 2% other (including a small Druze and Armenian community).<sup>659</sup> 19 Sunni Arab Muslims were interviewed and 3 Christians. However, there is a significant divide amongst those of Palestinian or Transjordanian origin. 10 respondents originated from Transjordan, and 12 from Palestine.

A mention should be made before the results are presented of the numerous limitations encountered in obtaining this data. Firstly, certain segments of the population proved difficult to access, often due to the suspicion afforded a western white male. Women, the poor and certain rural communities in particular proved hard to approach. A second difficulty was one of language. Though the author speaks proficient Arabic, to ensure an exact translation, a translator was sometimes employed which creates a slight barrier and filter between interviewer and respondent. Thirdly, there was the difficulty of the author's origin. Being western was a double-edged sword: some would confide facts they would rarely tell their peers, whilst others were reluctant to share anything. Equally, sometimes one feared respondents would say what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. Fourthly, the location of interview greatly affected responses. Those held in private homes and offices proved far more open and enlightening than those held in public cafes. Finally, the semi-structured interview, though mostly useful, often gave respondents the opportunity to wander off-topic and sometimes respondents would refuse to discuss certain issues. Nevertheless, the interviews produced a wide range of responses and issues that enrich and deepen this study and its conclusions.

---

<sup>658</sup> 'Syria: International Religious Freedom Report 2006', *US State Department*  
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71432.htm> - accessed 22/1/10.

<sup>659</sup> CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> - accessed 22/1/10.



## 6.2 Arab, State and Religious identity

“I don’t agree with idea of an Arab Union, but I do feel Arab. I don’t want to be in the same country with the Maghreb or Saudi Arabia.” *Bassel, Dentist, Greek Orthodox Christian, 29, Aleppo, Syria*

“The Arabic nation is not like you in Europe. In Europe you are British, Spanish, French whatever. We are Palestinian Arabs, Jordanian Arabs, Libyan Arabs etc.” *Suleiman, Shopkeeper, Sunni Muslim of Palestinian origin, 45, Amman, Jordan*

### 6.2.1 Syria

A common trait held by the vast majority of Syrians interviewed was that they defined themselves in some regard as ‘Arab’. Of the 29 interviewed, only three said they were not Arab, and two of these were ethnically not so: one Kurd and one Armenian. The only ethnic Arab interviewed who did not feel a sense of Arab identity, Maha, a 55 year old wealthy religious Sunni Woman from Damascus stated that being Arab was, “not so important to her.” Indeed, national identity of any sort seemed irrelevant. “I do not feel very nationalistic about Syria,” she said, “Why should we celebrate? What do we have to celebrate? If a sportsman wins something? Who cares?” This attitude was quite exceptional and the remaining 26 interviewees all felt a sense of Arab-ness. When asked to list their identities, with a template of the interviewer feeling British first, European second and Christian third, Syrian respondents seemed fairly divided between those who considered their national (Syrian), supra-national (Arab) and religious identities the most important. Curiously, of the three identities more people thought themselves Arab first or joint-first, than anything else. 14 of the 29 thought themselves Arab first or joint first, whilst 9 saw their religion as most important, and 11 being Syrian. This suggests that, Arab identity remains an important, if not the most important, layer of identity within contemporary Syrian society.

However, what that layer of Arab identity actually meant to respondents varied greatly. For some, such as Reem, a wealthy secular Sunni woman from Lattakia, being Arab meant a belief in unitary Old Arabism. “Yes, I still feel an Arab nationalism,” she said, “If we could, we would all be united. We are the same people, with the same interests and same geographical region.” These feelings were shared by several others, unaffected by economic or geographical background.<sup>660</sup> In contrast, several respondents expressed their scepticism of Arab unity, whilst still expressing a wider supra-national Arab identity.<sup>661</sup> Amal, a 45 year-old female Druze shop worker from Suweida, south of Damascus, for example stated,

---

<sup>660</sup> Interviews with Umm Ghadeer (19/7/09), Ibrahim (20/7/09) and Hajj Khaled (16/7/09).

<sup>661</sup> Interviews with Bassel (30/6/09), Karim (9/7/09) and Wissam (16/7/09).

“It’s a nice idea, Arab unity, but everyone has gone their separate ways. Everyone thinks it is a different thing. Even so, I still feel a closeness to the Arab world so I would say I am an Arab first. Yes, the Maghreb is a long way away and they are not like us, but they are still Arab. In the end this is what we all are. We are all one.”

Similarly, Ghazlan, a 31 year old student from Aleppo philosophically explained, “I do feel Arab, but don’t believe in Arab unity. If you run a race, you will be much slower if you have to carry someone with only one leg. So why would UAE ever want to be dragged down by carrying Sudan? It is not realistic.”

Quite who ‘the Arabs’ were, however, was not clearly defined. Whilst most expressed some sense of common identity with other Arab states, the boundaries of solidarity were often blurred. Whilst the Arab world promoted by the Syrian discourse includes North Africa and the Gulf several respondents dismissed these countries as un-Arab or ‘different’. Khalil, a 70 year-old Christian from Damascus claimed, “I don’t feel close to Saudi, the Gulf or North Africa – they are African. They have a different culture and a different way of thinking to us.”<sup>662</sup> More common, however, was an acknowledgement of the distance between Syria and North Africa, and consequent cultural differences, rather than an outright rejection of their Arab-ness. Bassel, a 29 year-old Aleppan Christian stated, “Whilst we have a long common history with *Bilad as-sham* (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan), with North Africa we were only united for maybe 200 years a very long time ago.” This was supported by Ahmed, a middle aged Sunni shop keeper in Damascus who said, “The Maghreb are Arabs but they are much more Western than us. They are close to France in Morocco and Algeria and think they are different. They are still Arabs though.”

Most interviewees did broadly accept the government’s template of the Arab world, but showed a more varied interpretation of which Arab states were more important to them. Alongside a general belief that North Africans are some how ‘different Arabs’, Palestine and the other *Bilad as-sham* countries received more solidarity than other Arab states.<sup>663</sup> In contrast, the Gulf states and specifically Saudi Arabia were notable for arousing hostility. “We don’t really like the Gulf,” said Ahmed, “they have too much money and think they are better than us. They are stupid though, they are not cultured and are narrow minded.” More common was specific hostility to Saudi Arabia. Zein, a wealthy secular Sunni 25 year-old from Aleppo typified this secular-fuelled disapproval when she said, “I don’t like Saudi Arabia. It is too conservative and makes women cover up.” Bassel, a Christian, extended these

---

<sup>662</sup> A common trait amongst Syrians and Jordanians was to often refer to ‘the Gulf’ and Saudi Arabia separately, ignoring the fact that Saudi Arabia is a Gulf country and member of the GCC. In some interviews ‘the Gulf’ seems to refer to the GCC countries except for Saudi, yet in others the term includes all such states, Saudi included.

<sup>663</sup> Interviews with Maen (28/6/09), Bassel (30/6/09), Hassana (2/7/09), Mazer (4/7/09), Hisham (5/7/09), Reem (18/7/09) and Khalil (11/7/09).

sentiments citing what he perceived as Riyadh's influence on Syrian society: "People from Saudi Arabia pay Syrians to be more conservative. It makes me sad and angry – they are changing my country." Interestingly, some of the more religious Muslim respondents felt the opposite, and saw Saudi Arabia as the Arab country with which they most identified. Sana, a veiled 33 year-old Sunni said she, "...felt so comfortable and at home," when in Saudi because, "the religion is the same and the system is more religious." Of those encountered not all religious Muslims liked Saudi Arabia, yet almost all secular interviewees disliked it.<sup>664</sup> That said, none denied that Saudi Arabia were real Arabs as some had North Africans. As Mazen, a 45 year old wealthy businessman from Aleppo stated, the Saudis are seen as Arab rivals to Syria rather than a completely different people. "All Arabs, including me, think that their country is the best in the Arab World, but there are only three who could lead it: Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, so they are our main rivals."<sup>665</sup>

A specifically Syrian national identity existed amongst all respondents. Of the three identities discussed – Arab, religion and Syrian – feeling 'Syrian' was the only one felt by all 29 respondents. This suggests that the modern Syrian state is now accepted or, at least, regarded as normal. Curiously though, only 11 of the 29 respondents considered themselves Syrian first.

The weighting that respondents gave to their identities seemed to be affected by the ethnic, religious or sectarian group. The 5 Christians interviewed, whose community makes up 10% of the population, tended to feel Syrian ahead of Arab or Christian, but still identified with both.<sup>666</sup> Indeed, for some Christians such as Marleine, a 53 year old Catholic teacher from Aleppo, it was Syria's religious pluralism that gave her national pride.<sup>667</sup> "I am very proud to be Syrian," she said, "It is the best country in the world for inter-faith relations. Muslims and Christians give each other respect." Yet this Syrian nationalism comes alongside, not in opposition to, Arab identity, and all but one Christian interviewed identified themselves as Arab. For Marlene, her Christianity and Arab identity were closely related. She stated, "I get annoyed when people in the West think that all Arabs are Muslims. We (the Christians) were here first; this is our culture too. The Muslims came later."

Syria's other minorities' sense of identity provides an interesting contrast to the Christians. The Druze and the Alawis are similar in several ways. Though concentrated in opposite corners of Syria, the former largely south of Damascus, the latter in the hills and countryside near Lattakia, both are traditionally unreligious despite being nominally Muslim. Consequently, religion was the least

---

<sup>664</sup> Interview with Hajj Khaled (16/7/09).

<sup>665</sup> Interview with Mazen (26/6/09).

<sup>666</sup> Interviews with Suzanne (25/6/09), Marlene (27/6/09), Bassel (30/6/09) and Khalil (11/7/09).

<sup>667</sup> Thoughts also shared by Bassel, interviewed 30/6/09.

important identity amongst the 5 Druze and 3 Alawis interviewed.<sup>668</sup> Some, such as Roba, a 25 year-old Suweidan Druze even stated, “I definitely don’t feel Muslim.” Another Druze, Jabir, a 37 year-old government employee said his sense of Islamic identity was affected by context. “We Druze are a type of Muslim, like the Alawis, but we are definitely Muslim. Of course, when I am with other Druze, we are Druze together, but if I were abroad, I would say I was Muslim.” Such remarks support Drysdale’s observation that identity is situational.<sup>669</sup> Curiously neither Druze nor Alawis felt a particularly strong minority identity. “I don’t really have any kind of Alawi nationalism,” said Wissam, a 25 year old Lattakian farmer, “none of us do. We don’t like to separate ourselves.” This was reflected when all but one of the 8 Alawi and Druze interviewees saw themselves as either Syrian or Arab first. Of the different groups in Syria, the few Druze and Alawis appeared to most consistently emphasise Arab identity. 6 of the 8 identified as Arab first or joint first. As explained by Umm Ghadeer, a 50 year old rural Alawi farmer’s wife in Lattakia, “It means everything to me to be an Arab. I like Arab nationalism very much. I wish we were all united.”

The 2 Kurds interviewed, in contrast, showed no such Arab identity, and had a stronger ethnic identity. Kurds are not afforded space in Syria’s national discourse and, unlike Armenian and Syriac minorities, are not permitted to speak in their own language in government schools. Neither defined themselves as Arab when asked to list their identities, though Akrash, a 37 year old shop worker in Aleppo later said he saw himself as ‘Kurdish Arab’. When pressed, he muttered that his answers were tempered by the fact that, “everyone else in this shop is Arab.” This is typical of the sense of second class citizenship felt by many Kurds in Syria.

More frank answers came from Abu Jamil, a 70 year old doorman, from Aleppo’s agricultural hinterland, who stated:

“I don’t like the Arabs. We don’t mix well. The Christians, they are ok, and I like the Europeans very much – they freed Iraq. But no, I don’t like the other Arab countries. They are bad to the Kurds. Turkey, Iraq, Iran, all of them. We want Kurdish independence. We are Kurdistan.”

Interestingly Abu Jamil makes no distinction between Arab Syria and Iraq with non-Arab Turkey and Iran. To him, ‘Arab countries’ are defined by their behaviour to the Kurds, not their ethnic make up. Similarly, to him, ‘the Christians’ were not Arab, even though ethnically most are. Curiously though, we see in Abu Jamil a superficial level of integration with Arabs: having adopted an Arabic not a

---

<sup>668</sup> Interviews with Maen (28/6/09), Jabir (9/7/09), Karim (9/7/09), Roba (9/7/09), Amal (9/7/09), Wissam (16/7/09), Umm Ghadeer (19/7/09) and Ibrahim (20/7/09).

<sup>669</sup> Sadowski, ‘Political Identity in Syria,’ p. 138.

Kurdish title. 'Abu Jamil' means 'Father of Jamil', the title of 'Abu' being given to most Arabs on the birth of their first son. Whether he actually has a son with an Arabic name, which would show an interesting attempt at integration despite his private Kurdish nationalism, or whether he feels the need to adopt an Arabic name himself to avoid discrimination is uncertain. Curiously Akrash, who seemed more resigned to Arab dominance of the Kurds than Abu Jamil, had chosen to retain his Kurdish name. It should be noted that both respondents still considered themselves Syrian: Akrash as Syrian first, then Kurdish, and Abu Jamil the reverse. Both saw Islam as of tertiary importance – typical of the predominantly secular Kurds.

Most Syrians are Arab Sunni Muslims and this group proved the most religious of respondents. Unlike Christians, Druze, Alawis and Kurds, a roughly equal number of Arab Sunnis saw themselves as Muslim first as considered themselves Syrian or Arab first – a far higher proportion than the other sectarian groups. Several of these seemed to subscribe to a Muslim universalism ahead of either Arab or Syrian nationalism. "Being Arab matters less than being Muslim," stated Hisham, a 24 year old market stall vendor from Damascus. His thoughts were shared by Mahmoud, a 21 year-old Aleppan Student who stated, "For Muslims there is no nationality, race or colour. It does not matter if they are Arab or not." Yet both of these also claimed that they felt both Arab and Syrian as well, even if being Muslim was their most important identity. This multi-layered feeling was illustrated by Sana from Aleppo who claimed, "Nationality does not matter to Muslims, but I am still proud to be Arab. We have so much culture, society and history." Indeed, for several Sunnis, their Arab and Islamic identities were closely related. For Hajj Khaled, a 70 year old from Lattakia, being Arab and Muslim was, "the same thing," and what made the Arabs special was that they spoke, "the language of the Quran." A slightly more surreal way of making the same point was attempted by Mohammad, a 26 year-old Lattakian student, who said:

"I like the idea of Arab nationalism, but as a step to Islamic unity. Arab nationalism is like a car with no doors. It still works but it would be better if we have doors. We need the doors of Islamic unity to make it work better."

Loosely breaking down other categories suggests a few other trends. More men felt a sense of Arab or Syrian identity first over women who were more balanced in the spread of their identities. No significant differences in identity priority were noticed between different economic groups or between rural and urban groups. The only further difference was noted in age group. Under 30s showed a greater tendency to prioritise Arab identity than over 30s. 9 out of 14 Under 30 year-olds saw themselves as Arab first, whilst only 5 out of 15 over 30 year-olds did. This might suggest that the resurgence of Arab identity during the satellite era has had an impact on the younger generation.

In essence, what was clearly suggested was that most Syrians feel some sense of Arab, religious and Syrian identity and nationalism, but there is no uniformity as to which is the priority. In many ways, this reflects the deliberate ambiguity of the official discourse discussed in chapter three. However, these interviews do suggest there remains a difference between ethnic and sectarian groups as to how strongly these identities are felt. The interviews suggest that Sunnis are more likely to be the most religious of respondents, and Alawis and Druze the least so. Kurds feel the least Arab, not surprising as they are ethnically and linguistically separate and excluded from the national discourse. Alawis, Druze and Christians, those groups that arguable benefit most from the status quo and the regime's discourse, feel the most Arab. These disparities suggest the limitations of how the discourse is successfully disseminated. Whilst most conform to the identities in some capacity, with the notable exception of the Kurds who are deliberately excluded, we do not see a uniformity of strength of identity.

All respondents did feel Syrian in some sense, and no-one openly rejected the idea of Syrian nationality, which suggests the broad goals of the discourse, to build a sense of commonality, had succeeded. Most also felt Arab, though quite what 'being Arab' actually means varies. Some see it as nationalism, echoing the Old Arabism discourse, whilst others see it as a supra-nationalism, reflecting the New Arabism discourse. Some still hope for physical unity, others recognize the differences between states. Likewise, the strength of solidarity with other Arab states varies, with Palestine and the *bilad as-Sham* countries seen as most important, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries viewed frequently as Arabs, but financial and political rivals, and North Africa sometimes considered 'un-Arab' and often as 'different'. This also reflects the ambiguous attitude of the ruling Ba'ath regime towards the Arab world: using Arab nationalist rhetoric yet actually pursuing policies that ensure Arabism serves state interests.

### **6.2.2 Jordan**

As with the Syrian respondents, the majority of Jordanians interviewed felt a sense of Arab identity. Of the 22 interviewed, only one didn't consider herself to be Arab. Soussa, a Sunni Pharmacist from Irbid took a universalist approach stating, "I am not going to say I only like this group and don't like that group. I am a human being. That's it. It does not matter if someone is European or Arab, all are the same to me." This was the one exception though, and all other respondents felt a layer of Arab-ness. However, in contrast to Syrian respondents, who tended to rank their Arab identity as highly or higher than their religion or state nationality, most Jordanians relegated being Arab to a secondary or tertiary level of importance. Of the 22 interviewed, only 3 considered themselves to be Arab first or equal first. In contrast, 11 considered themselves Jordanian first, 5 Palestinian, and 5 their religion. This suggests

that Jordanians do all feel a strong sense of Arab identity, but it is of lesser prominence than to their Syrian equivalents, again reflecting Jordan's official discourse that overtly ranks 'Jordan First'.

As in Syria, Jordanian respondents differed in what they felt that layer of Arab identity meant. A small number, fewer than in Syria, maintained an Old Arabism.<sup>670</sup> One respondent, Moussa Haddad, a 70 year-old Christian shopkeeper from Madaba, still spoke the language of rejecting the artificial boundaries of the modern Arab states:

"I am Arab. That is it. Some will say they are Jordanian or Saudi or Egyptian or Syrian or Lebanese. These borders, they were made by the British. If you go to America, you can travel 3000 miles and they will still tell you there are American. Here, the Arab world is 2000 miles long and you hear 'Saudi' or 'Syrian' but we are all Arab. The distance from Syria to Lebanon is barely 100 miles. It is the same people."

The majority, however, used the language of supra-nationalism: seeing Jordan as an Arab state in a system of others. Many lamented the failure of Arab unitary, but seemed to accept that this would not happen. Abu Mohammad, for example, a 50 year-old hotel worker from Amman stated, "The Arabs are a system of states right? Now they are in two camps: one with America, one with Iran. I wish we were only one camp. We should be together and united." A more negative reflection of the same feelings were displayed by Mohammad Hussein, a 21 year old fast food worker in Amman's Wahdat Palestinian camp:

"How can there be an Arab nation whilst the Israelis are in Palestine and the Americans are in Iraq? Would I like an Arab nation? Sure, of course, all of us would but it isn't here. In the future, maybe, but we are not an Arab nation now. They made sure it couldn't happen – King Hussein and the other leaders. They didn't want a real Arab nation. How would it work anyway? Who would lead? Each country has their own leader – Mubarak in Egypt, Assad in Syria. They won't give up power will they?"

As with the Syrians, Jordanian respondents' views of who were 'the Arabs' differed. As with Syria, the *bilad as-Sham* countries were most frequently referred to positively. However, whilst in Syria Palestine was most frequently mentioned as a state that people identified with, curiously amongst Jordanians it was Syria that appeared most liked.<sup>671</sup> This might be explained by the extent of interaction – be it positive or negative – with Palestine in Jordanian society that it is not necessarily seen as a different Arab state, discussed below. Interestingly, the popularity of Syria seemed to come from a perceived sense of cultural closeness – possibly related to the success of Syrian *musalsals* on satellite television.

---

<sup>670</sup> Interviews with Abu Mohammad (27/10/09) and Suleiman (14/10/09).

<sup>671</sup> Interviews with Bassam (11/10/09), Raca (11/10/09), Ruwan (12/10/09), Sandi (17/10/09), Ayman, Khaled and Hussein (together 15/10/09).

Sandi, a 24 year-old Christian tourist worker in Madaba who said, "I am closest to Syria, as they are like us and have the same culture", typified this attitude. Curiously, more so than in Syria, Iraq and, in particular, Egypt, were added to the *bilad as-Sham* countries as Arab states with which Jordanians identified. As Shereen, a 21 year-old veiled student in Irbid stated, "Egypt is the *Umm-dunya* - 'mother' to all Arabs." This extra closeness to Egypt and Iraq might be the consequence of geography – being closer to Jordan would mean more frequent interaction between the peoples – or politics: Jordan has had better relations with both Iraq and Egypt than Syria in the past few decades.<sup>672</sup>

Ambivalence towards North Africa's Arab-ness and hostility towards the Gulf and especially Saudi Arabia was found in Jordan as well as Syria. As with Syria, there was a sense that North Africans were somehow different or un-Arab.<sup>673</sup> "I don't like the North African countries – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya – as they are not real Arabs," said Shereen, "their culture is different, their language is different and their religion is different. They are Muslim but they don't understand what the true meaning is." These thoughts were echoed by Mohammad Zarqawi, a 45 year-old bookshop owner in Zarqa who said, "I most dislike Tunisia and Morocco. These are Arab and Muslim countries but they do not practice Islam well. They try too hard to copy the West but this is just empty." Curiously both of these respondents used religion as the justification for the lack of Arab solidarity they felt towards the Maghreb, rather than, perhaps, the ethnic distinction that many in these states are Berber, or the geographical distinction that these countries are African not Asian.

A more frequent occurrence was hostility to the Gulf and particularly Saudi Arabia. Two of the most vicious criticisms came from Christians who both attacked Riyadh's religious conservatism – rather like the Syrian Christian Bassel. Sandi explained that, "I don't like Saudi Arabia at all. They are very different. Look how they treat women!" Yet it was not just Christians who resented the Gulf. Three youths from Wahdat Palestinian camp in Amman shared this hostility, yet their anger was fuelled by politics and economics rather than religion and culture. "I really dislike the Gulf and Saudi, we all do," said one of them, Khaled, "They take so much money from America and Israel and give none to us." Interestingly there were few who had positive things to say about Saudi Arabia, and those who did, as in Syria, gave religious reasons. Ahmed, a student in Irbid, stated, "I would say that of the other Arab states I most like is Saudi Arabia. Not because of the government or our relations with them, but because this is the home of Mecca." There is some irony here for this attachment given that it was Jordan's ruling Hashemites that ruled the holy cities for over 1000 years – the Saud's being

---

<sup>672</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, pp. 437-9.

<sup>673</sup> Thoughts also shared by Raca, interviewed 11/10/09.



newcomers.<sup>674</sup> That said, as with Syria, the Saudi's Arab-ness was not questioned in the same way as was North Africa's, suggesting a general consensus on who was Arab, even if some were less well liked than others.

Respondents' attitude to Jordanian identity, in contrast to Syria, was somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand a far greater proportion of interviewees felt their state identity was most important, 50% of interviewees in Jordan, compared to 38% of Syrians. Yet there were more respondents in Jordan who rejected Jordanian identity. Four stated that they did not consider themselves Jordanian, for different reasons. Moussa Haddad rejected state identity for Old Arabist reasons. Fawzi, a 37 year-old policeman working in Amman, in contrast, rejected state nationality for Universalist reasons, declaring, "I don't feel Jordanian really. I don't think we should be divided into different countries. Not Arabs, not people, not humanity." The final two rejectionists of Jordanian identity were of Palestinian origin, who felt proudly Palestinian. This defiance was typified by Abdullah from Zarqa, who said, "I am Muslim. Just Muslim. Not Jordanian, definitely not. I'm Palestinian, thanks be to God, and Arab. But not Jordanian."

Whilst Jordan does not have the same sectarian and ethnic mix seen in Syria, its major fault-line divides those of Palestinian and Jordanian origin and responses seemed to vary accordingly. Whilst respondents from each background all considered themselves Arab, all 3 of those who considered themselves Arab first were of Jordanian not Palestinian origin.<sup>675</sup> Of those Palestinians interviewed, about half – 5 out of 12 – saw themselves as Palestinian first rather than Jordanian.<sup>676</sup> Interestingly, all 5 were from poorer backgrounds: from the slums of Wahdat and Zarqa, doing menial jobs such as hotel porters and fast food servers. This suggests that a lack of tangible benefit from the Jordanian state might discourage these poorer Palestinians from feeling attached to it. As Abu Mohammad, an aging hotel porter stated, "I don't feel Jordanian as I am forbidden from doing things as a Palestinian. I have to pay taxes, but I cannot vote for the parliament. I am barred from working at 5, 4 and 3 star hotels, I can only work at cheap hotels, because I am Palestinian." In contrast, the 7 Palestinians who regarded themselves as Jordanian ahead of Palestinian tended to have middle class or wealthier backgrounds.<sup>677</sup> Two of these, Rowa and Ruwan, 21 year-old medical students explained that they can feel both identities simultaneously:

Rowa: "I feel both Jordanian and Palestinian. I mean I was brought up in Jordan and I love my country but when my Dad tells me of the old times in Jaffa it makes me feel so close to Palestine. I feel both Jordanian and Palestinian together."

---

<sup>674</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans* (London: Saqi, 1974 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2002]), pp. 48-9.

<sup>675</sup> Interviews with Moussa Haddad (17/10/09), Fawzi (13/10/09) and Mohammad Zarqawi (10/11/09).

<sup>676</sup> Interviews with Wedad (1/11/09), Ayman, Khaled and Hussein (together 15/10/09), Abu Mohammad (27/10/09) and Suleiman (14/10/09).

<sup>677</sup> Interviews with Rowa and Ruwan (together 12/10/09), Mohammad (2/11/09) and Soussa (25/10/09).

Ruwan: “Its different for me, all our family stayed in the West bank, we were the only ones to leave. We often see our relatives from there and know how bad it is day to day, so sometimes I feel more Palestinian. But I would say I was both.”

Integration and assimilation of Palestinians into a Jordanian sense of identity tended to rest not only on wealth and prosperity, but also on age. It appeared that the younger generation was more likely to feel Jordanian than the older migrants from Palestine. Along with wealthy Rowa and Ruwan, the three fast food workers in Wahdat Palestinian camp all felt Jordanian first, then Palestinian, whilst the aging hotel porter and shopkeeper felt Palestinian. That said this proved a grey area. Some of the younger generation of Palestinians did still feel Palestinian first, then Jordanian, such as Abdullah in Zarqa and Wedad in Amman.

Interestingly those who felt Jordanian had differing attitudes to the Palestinians within Jordan. Some, such as Bassam, a 50 year-old hotel owner saw Jordanians and Palestinians as, “the same.” This sentiment was shared by Housam, a taxi driver from Amman, who stated, “. . .there is no divide between Palestinians and Jordanians. We are all Jordanians no? Most Palestinians love the king even more than the Jordanians. We loved King Hussein even more.” In contrast some Jordanians are still hostile to the Palestinians in their society.<sup>678</sup> “It is hard to describe,” says Shereen in Irbid, “but there is a problem between us and the Palestinian Jordanians.”

Jordanians have a greater level of religious homogeneity than Syria, with 92% being Sunni Arabs, compared to 66% in Syria.<sup>679</sup> The pattern identified in Syria, that Sunni Arabs tended to be the most religious might explain why Jordanians tended to place a greater priority on religion on average. Whilst roughly the same proportion of interviewees in each state listed their religion as their most important identity, all Jordanians listed a religion whilst several Syrians did not – generally non-Sunnis. This seems to reflect the Jordanian official discourse which emphasizes religion more than the Syrian. As in Syria, for some Sunni Muslims, an Islamic identity outstripped any nationality or supra-nationalism. As Rowa states, “We are culturally Arab but religiously Muslim. The religion should be first but culture is strong too.” Several respondents tied their Arab identity to being Muslim. Bassam, the elderly hotel owner saw being Arab and Muslim as, “the same,” – a sentiment shared by several other interviewees.<sup>680</sup> As Shereen says, “My Arab identity is closely tied to my Muslim identity. I am Muslim, therefore I am Arab before I am Jordanian.” Yet at the same time this was by no means universal, and several religious Muslims felt a stronger sense of Arab supra-nationalism than religion. Mohammad Suker, an 18-year-old student from the Irbid countryside said, “Being Arab is important to

---

<sup>678</sup> Interview with Raca (11/10/09).

<sup>679</sup> CIA World Fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> - accessed 22/1/10.

<sup>680</sup> Interviews with Mohammad (2/11/09) and Shereen (25/10/09).

us. There are some people who would put their religion ahead of their Arab identity. That is their choice, but for me my Arab-ness transcends religion. You can be Christian or Muslim and still be Arab. I prefer it this way.”

As in Syria, little distinction could be drawn between the attitudes of respondents from urban or rural areas, nor, this time, between men or women. A noticeable trend was seen in class, in that all three of those claiming to feel Arab first were from Middle Class or wealthy rather than poor backgrounds. The most significant distinction from these results though was the distinction of age. Under 30s in Jordan felt less Arab, more religious and more Jordanian than over 30s. Even younger Palestinians tended to feel more Jordanian than older Palestinians. Curiously, this is the reverse of a trend seen in Syria where younger respondents felt more Arab than older respondents.

The results suggest then that Jordanians do feel Arab but more as a secondary identity, unlike in Syria where it is a primary identity in many cases. Moreover, an age distinction is emerging whereby young Jordanians are less likely to feel Arab first, unlike Syrians. This might reflect the Jordanian discourse and Abdullah’s recent efforts to emphasise ‘Jordan First’, with those who were exposed to these slogans for most of their adult life more likely to respond. As with the Syrians, they feel closest to local Arab states – including Egypt and Iraq to the *bilad as-sham* countries noted in Syria – and are hostile to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, with a few religious exceptions, whilst acknowledging the ‘differentness’ of North Africa. Again, this reflects the clear Arab supra-nationalism of Hussein and Abdullah. Interestingly state nationalism as a primary identity seems stronger in Jordan than Syria based on these responses, yet paradoxically, at the same time, more Jordanians questioned the existence of the Jordanian state than did Syrians. Even more so than in Syria, this suggests the possible limitation of the Jordanian discourse to disseminate to all its population. Though most feel Jordanian, in the face of the powerful Palestinian nationalist discourse, it seems the Hashemites still struggle in some quarters to overcome other identities.

## 6.3 Images and Speeches

“These posters are normal. I don’t really read them as they are always there. Even if I do read them, I don’t store them in my brain.” *Roba, Druze Shop Assistant, 25, Suweida, Syria*

“Its not as if I look everyday at these pictures of the King and think of Jordan. I am accustomed to them. In many restaurants you will see pictures of the king, but most people like me, won’t even notice.” *Sandi, Christian tourist worker, 22, Madaba, Jordan*

### 6.3.1 Syria

One of the central hypotheses of chapter three was that the local population view seemingly overt images of their rulers with the same level of banality and indifference as an American views the ‘unwaved’ Stars and Stripes. Discussions with everyday Syrians suggested that this claim was largely true. Most respondents regarded the many pictures of President Bashar al-Assad as ‘normal’ and rarely noticed them.<sup>681</sup> Indeed, further travel in the region suggests that this is something found in most Arab states, adding to the sense of normalization. Syrian respondents said they noticed the posters, “very very little,” or that they, “don’t concentrate on them.” As Ibrahim, an Alawi shopkeeper from Lattakia stated, “Its not that we don’t notice the pictures, its just that they are normal. It is our national symbol that is displayed with pride.” In this case, as discussed in chapter three, the image of the President is revered with the same national pride as the flag in the USA. Some respondents suggested that when the posters are new, they are noticed yet, as Karim from Suweida states, “...most people will read the posters when they first appear, but will not look again until there is a new one.”

The extent to which the population views the pictures and posters as ‘normal’ was displayed when interviewees were asked about specific places. In Lattakia, for example, several respondents were asked to guess how many pictures of the president there were on a major thoroughfare, *Baghdad Avenue*. All estimates were way below the 54 posters that were present. Mohammad, a 25 year-old law student said, “I would say we don’t have many in Lattakia. Only when there is a celebration or an election. There are none around now. *(Pause)* Or maybe there are some but I don’t notice them because they are so normal.” A second curious facet of the cult in today’s Syria is that the majority of respondents accepted the view that, unlike Hafez al-Assad, Bashar Assad does not have a cult around him. As Louay, a student from Damascus stated, “Seriously, there aren’t so many posters anymore. Before they were everywhere – even on the tables. Now there are fewer.” Moreover, even those who have noticed that,

---

<sup>681</sup> Interviews with Zein (25/6/09), Suzanne (25/6/09), Louay (3/7/09), Karim (9/7/09), Amal (9/7/09), Roba (9/7/09), Mohammad (15/7/09), Wissam (16/7/09), Reem (18/7/09), Ibrahim (20/7/09) and Abu Jamil (22/7/09).

indeed, there *are* many pictures of the new president in place, they maintain this is not from the President himself. As elderly Khalil states:

“There are about the same number of posters under Bashar as under Hafez. The difference is that these posters are not from Bashar himself, they are from those around him. The Ba’ath party likes to do this sort of thing. He (Bashar) will change it. I think in 2 or 3 years it will come to an end. These things happen very slowly in Syria.”

Yet Syrians are far from brainwashed and, despite regarding the posters as normal, respondents were not passive. There were several examples of cynicism and dislike of the leadership cult and the posters of the President. Bassel, the dentist from Aleppo says, “I don’t need to read the posters to know what they say: ‘we are here forever’.” Even those who supported the regime expressed some disapproval. Wissam, the Alawi farming student from Lattakia said, “I don’t like the idea of so many posters of the president in the street, but I agree with what the slogans on them say.” All of those showing cynicism and doubt towards the cult and posters were of a middle class and educated background.

There were several respondents, however, who actively engaged with the posters and their content, seeing them as normal, but also claiming to regularly read their slogans and messages. Mostly, this was out of a professed ‘love’ of the president himself.<sup>682</sup> As Hisham, a poor 24 year Sunni Damascene stated, “Every Syrian you will speak to loves this President. He tells the truth.” Indeed, this largely positive attitude towards Bashar was observed in most respondents, even if they disliked the government in general. This suggests that whilst the majority of respondents see, or do not see, the cult and the posters as an unwaved, unnoticed, ‘normal’ reminder of their nationality, there remains a minority for whom it is an active, overt, waved reminder with which they regularly interact.

### 6.3.2 Jordan

Jordan tended to have more national flags on display in public than in Syria and marginally fewer pictures of the leader. Nevertheless, as in Syria the vast majority of Jordanians interviewed regarded them as completely ‘normal’.<sup>683</sup> As Mohammad Suker, a teenager from Irbid stated, “Maybe we don’t notice the pictures because there are so many. It is normal to have them.” These sentiments were echoed by Raca, a Christian from Amman who told the interviewer, “For you as a tourist you arrive and see all the flags and pictures and think, ‘Ok, I am in Jordan now. Hello Mr. King.’ But to us it is there everyday and so we don’t notice it.” The extent to which these images and flags were considered normal was expressed by the fact that several Jordanians, perhaps more worldly in outlook than their

---

<sup>682</sup> Interviews with Suzanne (25/6/09), Maen (28/6/09), Sana (29/6/09), Hisham (5/7/09) and Ibrahim (20/7/09).

<sup>683</sup> Interviews with Bassam (11/10/09), Raca (11/10/09), Rowa and Ruwan (together 12/10/09), Suleiman (14/10/09), Mohammad Suker (25/10/09), Soussa (25/10/09) and Shereen (25/10/09).

Syrian counterparts, believed that such things were found in all countries. As Rowa the medical student stated, “Well yes there are pictures of the King but there are everywhere in the world – we are just like everyone else.” Suleiman, the Palestinian shopkeeper similarly said,

“If you go to any country it is like this. I have relatives in Egypt who say there are pictures of the president and flags in the street. I’m sure it is the same in Syria. This is just the system, seen everywhere, whether Arab or foreign. In Britain don’t you have many flags and pictures of your Queen everywhere?”

Such was the level of banality of the cult that even fewer respondents in Jordan than in Syria said they actively paid attention to the posters. The only noticeable interaction came from Fawzi the policeman who said:

“There is a huge photograph of him (the King) outside the police academy that I see everyday and I often look at as if he is watching me. It is like he is expressing different things at different time: sometimes approving, sometimes being strong to me.”

Yet as with Syria, many respondents were unaware of the sheer volume of pictures and flags on show. At Yarmouk University in Irbid, students were asked to guess how many pictures they thought were on campus. Shereen said, “There really aren’t so many pictures, only one or two around the university.” The interviewer was able to find 14 free standing images of the king around the campus during a 10 minute walk as well as a separate portrait at the entrance of every faculty building. There was even a giant picture of the royal family in the campus McDonalds, silently ignored by patrons.

Perhaps because the images are even less noticed in Jordan than in Syria, there also appeared to be less negativity towards them from respondents. Yet unlike in Syria, opposition to the images seemed to focus on opposition to the King himself. The three Palestinian youths in Wahdat camp in Amman, for example, said that you wouldn’t find many pictures up in the camp. “We don’t dislike him,” they said, “but we’re not going to celebrate him.” Indeed, all the opposition to the cult came from Palestinians rather than Jordanians. Another Palestinian, Abu Mohammad said:

“Why do we have these pictures of the king everywhere? They are not necessary. They are designed for outsiders so they think that we like this guy, but its not reality. Not at all.”

As with Syria, those who supported the regime were insistent that the images were put in place by active patriots. “We put the pictures up,” said Soussa, a pharmacist from Irbid, “not because there is a law or something, we just love him.” The more cynical critiques of the regime however, such as

Mohammad Zarqawi, disagree though. “The pictures in the street,” he said, “are put up by the government and the *Mukharbarat*.” However, from the interviews conducted the vast majority of respondents, as in Syria, seemed favorable towards the King and favorable to his image, which, again, seemed to adopt a national symbolism. As Fazwi states, “There are many flags and pictures of the king because people are patriotic. They want to show how much they love the king.” In Jordan, as in Syria, the consumption of these mediations was largely banal though occasionally engaged. They were rarely completely rejected, even amongst those who had their doubts. In almost all cases the images were regarded as ‘normal’ and the banal consumption of them by citizens might help to explain the largely successful dissemination of the identities they flag discussed earlier.

## 6.4 State television

“Syrians watch so much TV, maybe 30 hours a week. Most women don’t work, maybe only 10%, so they watch TV all day instead. I have friends who know the TV schedule by heart – I call them up if I want to know what time something is on. If you walk down any poor street in Syria you will see satellite dishes everywhere. They care more about watching TV than paying for food!” *Sana, Sunni Arab School teacher, 33, Aleppo, Syria*

To complement Chapter four, which analysed the identities flagged daily on Syrian and Jordanian state television, a segment of each interview discussed respondents’ television preferences. The most obvious, but necessary, conclusion one can draw from the interviews is that Syrians and Jordanians watch a lot of television. As Sana, the veiled Syrian Sunni school teacher states above, the rate of television consumption is staggeringly high. Though rates vary, all respondents said they watch television and even those who said they were too busy admitted to watching during Ramadan. This suggests that the decision to use television rather than Billig’s preferred print newspaper to investigate banal nationalism is justified.

### 6.4.1 Syria

Khalil Rinnawi argued that consumption of state television has declined irrecoverably since the advent of satellite TV.<sup>684</sup> Rinnawi’s focus is news channels such as *al-Jazeera* and the interviews did reveal that many Syrians are skeptical about the validity of the news available on state TV. Of the 26 respondents who were willing to talk about television an equal number, 13 each, said they did regularly watch *Syria TV* news as said they definitely did not. As implied by Rinnawi, those who did not watch state news complained of bias, censorship and it being out of date. As the Alawi Ibrahim in Lattakia said, “I don’t watch *Syria TV* News as it is too censored. They do not show live stories, just pre-prepared items.” As Bassel, the Aleppan dentist summarizes, “I don’t like it, because I already know today what it is going to say tomorrow.”

However, those who did consume state news did so whilst being aware of its limitations. Marlene, the Aleppan school teacher said, “I know that *Syria TV* is not free, but I like to watch it alongside other news channels to get a different opinion.” Similarly Amal, the Druze shopkeeper, said she, “...liked to watch *Syria TV*, “but admitted, “...it is not as comprehensive as *al-Jazeera*.” A few, such as Umm Ghadeer the elderly Alawi from Lattakia, maintained unconditional support for everything on the channel, news included: “*Syria TV* is my favourite channel, I watch it most of the time. I watch everything on it – news, *musalsals*. It is brilliant!” However, the majority of viewers admitted they watched *Syria TV* news in conjunction with others. Mazen, a 45 year old Sunni businessman typified

---

<sup>684</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. xviii.



this view when he stated, “I watch the Syrian government channel for local news, but if I want international stories there are better channels elsewhere.” This suggests that Syrian viewers are far from passive consumers and do use the availability of other channels to question the government message which they mostly know is one-sided. However, it is false to say that the majority do not watch state-run news. Many still watch it, whilst knowing its limitations.

Despite roughly an equal number admitting to watching news on *Syria TV* as those that did not most respondents said they would watch the channel for something. The new tradition of watching television with the family after *Iftar* during Ramadan seemed to have a substantial impact. Even those who had a generally negative view of the channel, claimed they would still watch it during Ramadan to catch the new *musalsals*.<sup>685</sup> As Mohammad, the Sunni Law student from Lattakia stated, “I don’t really watch *Syria TV*. Sometimes I watch *musalsals* in Ramadan, but only if the schedule is good. Last year they showed *Bab al-Hara* first. I really like this show so I watched it then.” Whilst only a few such as Umm Ghadeer claimed to watch the station ‘a lot’, the majority claimed to watch it ‘sometimes’. The *musalsals* in particular seemed to attract interest. Similarly, only *Syria TV* showed the popular domestic football league.<sup>686</sup> No-one made any comments about the banal nationalist symbols and shorts that linked programs, which would suggest that even in their occasional consumption of the channel viewers were not actively objecting to the identities being flagged.

Only a few respondents said they actively did not watch the channel and they tended to criticize the style and accessibility of the station rather than any political message. Bassel the dentist states that, “...everything is repeated over and over, so there is no need to watch it.” The two exceptions were Abu Jamil the elderly Kurd and Ghazlan an angry Aleppan Sunni who opposed the government. Abu Jamil stated, “I never watch *Syria TV*, it is rubbish! Never anything about the Kurds!” Ghazlan, was more comprehensive in his political and stylistic opposition;

“I never watch *Syria TV*, it is like watching something from the 1960s. The news is just like watching *al-Manar* (Hezbollah’s satellite channel). It only represents the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah-Hamas axis. In general, the channel is very bad. I used to watch it more, but now why would I when there are much better channels like *al-Arabiyya* and *Abu Dhabi*?”

Broadly however, these kinds of criticisms were rare. Whilst the news attracted the most criticism, the channel in general was received with mixed feelings. Five respondents were avid fans, who variously described the station as, “beautiful,” “wonderful,” “brilliant,” and, rather nationalistically, “*our*

---

<sup>685</sup> Interviews with Moussa, Louay and Mamdouh (all 3/7/09).

<sup>686</sup> Interview with Maen (28/6/09).

channel.”<sup>687</sup> Curiously, all five of these respondents came from poor backgrounds. In contrast, the six who disliked the channel were all middle class except for the Kurdish doorman. The majority of respondents had mixed feelings. They accepted that the station had limitations, but also drew positives, such as stating that it had improved recently. As Sana stated, “*Syria TV* used to be a load of crap, but now it is much better.”

The interviews therefore suggest that Syrian viewers are neither brainwashed by their state channel, nor do they outright reject it. The majority watches it with enough regularity to consume some of the content and identities flagged, but very few uncritically accept everything it says. Transnational stations have provided competition, but have not totally reduced the importance of the state channel. Of all the shows, news is most doubted by viewers, with even those who regularly watch state news using other stations to make comparisons. Yet even some of the most cynical viewers still admit to watching *musalsals* during Ramadan, giving the opportunity to have their identities ‘re-flagged’.

#### 6.4.2 Jordan

It is curious that several authors writing about the impact of *al-Jazeera* and other transnational channels in the Arab world, Rinnawi and Hugh Miles included, often chose *Jordan TV* as their example of Arab state television to case study.<sup>688</sup> The relative unpopularity of *Jordan TV* is used to justify the inevitable rise of satellite TV. However, whilst the results of these interviews seem to confirm Rinnawi and Miles’ findings, that most Jordanians do not watch their own state TV much, it is important to compare these results with those found in Syria. Indeed, the comparative popularity of state television in Syria, suggests that Jordan could be the exception not the rule and that Rinnawi and Miles should have investigated more than one state television channel before drawing conclusions.

Fewer people watched state news in Jordan than in Syria, but there was less criticism too. Fewer than half of those interviewed watched *Jordan TV* news. As in Syria, those who did saw its value for local news, yet watched it in conjunction with other channels. As Moussa Haddad, the elderly Christian from Madaba states:

“The news is good, but limited. If I want to know about what the King is doing, or the Prime Minister, or what new buildings have opened and hospitals and schools, I will watch *Jordan TV* news. If I want to know the whole story, or what is going on outside Jordan, I will watch *al-Jazeera*.”

---

<sup>687</sup> Interviews with Amal (9/7/09), Hassana (2/7/09), Umm Ghadeer (19/7/09), and Hajj Khaled (16/7/09).

<sup>688</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p. 112; Miles, *Al-Jazeera*, p. 339.

As in Syria, a few respondents complained about bias. Abu Mohammad, the Palestinian Hotel porter in Amman, for example described it as, “all lies.” In fact, only 4 respondents actively complained about the news’ bias, and all were of Palestinian origin and generally against the government. The content of state TV news generally bothered Jordanians less than their Syrian counterparts. Fewer watched it, and fewer complained about it.

The channel in general attracted fewer viewers than the Syrian equivalent, and far more people than in Syria actively did not watch it. Almost all of those who did said they only did so ‘sometimes’ and there was not the sizeable minority found in Syria who mainly watched state TV. Only one respondent, Fawzi the policeman, said he, “probably watches *Jordan TV* more than other channels.” Most respondents who did watch it felt like Soussa who said, “I only watch Jordan TV now and again, if there is a *musalsal* I like.”<sup>689</sup> Those who did not like the channel tended to criticize it for being ‘boring’ rather than for political reasons. Ayman in Wahdat Palestinian camp laughed on being asked about the channel stating, “No-one watches *Jordan TV*. Why would we? There is nothing on it!” Curiously the majority of the vocal critics of the station were under 30.

Despite *Jordan TV* being largely unpopular, the overt nationalist symbols it displayed, particularly the music videos about Jordan and the King played at the end of the evening news, aroused much support in certain quarters. Unlike the posters of the king, these music videos seemed to be noticed by viewers and prompted an opinion whether positive or negative. They were aware, in effect, that this was overt identity flagging. Amongst some respondents, all of which were East Bank Jordanians, the videos were received warmly. Similarly Shereen said, “I feel very proud when I see the videos of Jordan on *Jordan TV* – it makes me feel more patriotic and happy.” Mohammad Suker even confidently predicted that, “I think everyone loves Jordan and so they like that they play these songs. It makes us see our country and be proud of it.”

Yet, in contrast several respondents voiced their opposition. Most were Palestinian, such as Abu Mohammad, who stated:

“The films and songs after the news are not designed for Jordanians, but for foreigners. They want you to see that we all love our country and think that Jordan is great...but we all know that is not true and it is a lie.”

The ‘foreigners’ he refers to seem to be the westerners from states allied to the regime. Similarly, Mohammad Zarqawi, who was not Palestinian but was politically opposed to the government said:

---

<sup>689</sup> Thoughts also shared by Ruwan, interviewed 12/10/09.

“Yes I see those songs after the news each night. You know, there are many problems in this country: social problems and economic problems. These songs are meant to make us feel together, but they don’t.”

In general, there were fewer positive remarks made in interviews about state TV in comparison to in Syria. Some negative comments were political such as Abu Mohammad who stated, “*Jordan TV* is not very good. All you hear about is the government’s message. If you read a state-owned newspaper and then watch Jordan TV, its exactly the same thing.” However, the majority of criticism was on style, with younger viewers in particular seeing it as boring and outdated.<sup>690</sup> There were some mixed opinions, but generally the viewpoint was negative.<sup>691</sup>

Interestingly in both Syria and Jordan it is clear that State television has a large number of critics. Whilst a section of the population do like the channels and watch regularly, the majority only watch occasionally for certain shows. This largely negative view of the state channels might support Rinnawi’s claims that the transnational media is threatening traditional dominance. Moreover, regular criticism or at least awareness of certain overt identity flagging such as Jordan’s patriotic songs, might question whether state television is able to banally reproduce identity. However, the results are more nuanced than that. On the one hand, neither Syria nor Jordan have been able to produce a passive population that uncritically consume everything they watch. Their skepticism of the news illustrates this. On the other hand, the willingness to watch state television for popular shows like *musalsals* and an unawareness of the banal identities they and the linking segments between them flag suggests that state television can have a limited impact on reproducing identity. Interestingly, and unexpectedly, respondents were more critical of the obvious identity building aspects of state television than they were of the, presumably, more overt speeches and images of the leadership cults.

---

<sup>690</sup> Interviews with Raca (11/10/09), Rowa and Ruwan (together 12/10/09).

<sup>691</sup> Interviews with Mohammad (2/11/09) and Bassam (11/10/09).

## 6.5 Transnational Arab Television

“Everyone in Syria has a dish.” *Hassana, Sunni Cleaner, Aleppo, Syria*

“It has become like a tradition in the last few years. The whole family sits down every night during Ramadan to watch the latest shows.” *Ruwan, Sunni Medical Student, Amman, Jordan*

As anticipated, interviews in both Syria and Jordan revealed a high proliferation of satellite dishes and the consumption of transnational television. Whilst statistics suggest that there is a sizeable minority in both states that do not have access to these channels, it was notable that not a single respondent, no matter their economic background, admitted this to the interviewer.<sup>692</sup> On the one hand this might suggest that ownership of this technology is a status symbol and poorer interviewees were too proud to admit that they could not afford it. On the other hand, the author witnessed rusty satellite dishes screwed onto homes in the most humble of neighborhoods, refugee camps and rural villages. Moreover almost all cafes, coffee shops and public places displayed satellite TV, providing viewers with more opportunities. As the above quote from Hasana suggests, along with the earlier quote from Sana, the impression in both Syria and Jordan is that very few are unable to view transnational television if and when they wish.

### 6.5.1 Transnational Television in Syria

#### *News*

Whilst only half of respondents in Syria said that they regularly watched news on state television, the vast majority, 22 out of 26, listed news as something they watched on satellite. Only 4 claimed not to watch the news. As anticipated, *al-Jazeera* was by far the most popular channel for news with half the respondents, 14, specifically identifying it as their preferred channel. Abu Jamil, the elderly Kurd, explained this general preference when he said, “*al-Jazeera* shows everything: Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Iran, everything. And they tell the truth.” The Qatar-based channel seemed to attract vocal and passionate fans in Syria. Quite often a preference for *al-Jazeera* would be followed by a criticism of its Saudi-owned rival *al-Arabiyya*. The issue of ‘truth’ in particular seemed to dominate preferences, with *al-Jazeera* widely considered the more reliable and unbiased. Mohammad from Lattakia stated, “I always watch *al-Jazeera*. *al-Arabiyya* is full of lies. It is just what the Saudi Arabians want us to hear... They don’t tell the truth like *al-Jazeera* does.” These sentiments were shared by many, including Hisham the young shopkeeper from Damascus who said, “*al-Jazeera* tells the truth always. Some of the other channels like *al-Arabiyya* are too focused on a certain area or biased.” This, interestingly,

---

<sup>692</sup> Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, p. 1.

reflected Syrian government policy at the time of research which was hostile to Saudi Arabia. This perhaps suggests the successful dissemination of Damascus' political message.

Preference for *Al-Jazeera* was not universal, and it did attract some criticism. Ibrahim, the Alawi from Lattakia, for example, said that he preferred *al-Arabiyya's* less confrontational style to *al-Jazeera's* more direct approach. Ghazlan, the exacerbated Sunni from Aleppo, had a more political attitude:

"I am not like most people you will talk to in Syria. I do not like this axis of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. So I do not like *al-Jazeera* as they seem to represent this viewpoint only. I know that *al-Arabiyya* has the agenda of Saudi Arabia, but I agree with this so I watch it."

More cynically, Khalil, the elderly Damascene Christian dismissed both channels saying, "I don't watch either *al-Jazeera* or *al-Arabiyya* as they are controlled by Qatar and Saudi and so they tell you only what their governments want you to hear." Alongside those who actively liked or disliked *al-Jazeera* were a sizeable number (8), who actively consumed several news outlets at once, and had no preference. Mazen, the businessman from Aleppo said he, "followed the story, not the channel," and would switch channels regularly. Similarly Mazer, the student from Damascus said he, "Likes to jump between channels: *al-Jazeera*, *al-Arabiyya*, *al-Hurra*, *BBC* – I have no preferred channel." Like many interviewed, Mazer only considered Arabic language channels for his news, despite the availability of English, French and German language alternatives – illustrating the significant grip on discourse that these major networks have.

What becomes evident is that Syrian viewers are well aware of the different biases present in the news that they consume. For the same reason that many choose not to watch state TV, viewers make a conscious decision to follow a satellite news channel that follows their political opinions or what they regard as 'the truth'. The interviews suggest that *al-Jazeera* is indeed the most popular news outlet and warrants a greater level of analysis. However, they also suggest that viewers are far from fixed on a single channel and obtain their news from several sources. This warns against the attitude of authors such as Miles and Rinnawi who focus solely on the Qatar-based channel as clearly the body of opinion making up 'the Arab street' is informed from other sources as well.

### *Musalsals*

As the emerging centre of the Arab world's drama (*musalsal*) industry it was perhaps unsurprising that most Syrians expressed enthusiasm for this genre. Many interviewees used the phrase 'of course' when

asked if they watched *musalsals*, particularly women who proved the most avid fans.<sup>693</sup> The extent to which watching drama is considered banal, normal or even expected in Syrian society was demonstrated when several respondents explained that though they were not regular viewers, even they would tune in for the new series aired during Ramadan.<sup>694</sup> The popularity of the genre was considerable but not universal. Several respondents considered the dramas to be silly and pointless.<sup>695</sup> Mahmoud, the student from Aleppo, for example, said, “I don’t ever watch *musalsals* as I don’t want to waste my time.” Notably, whilst men and women showed enthusiasm for *musalsals* all the critics were male.

Respondents who did watch drama series tended to prefer Syrian series to rivals from Egypt or Turkey, whose shows are translated into Arabic. The reasons given were normally about their quality or the degree of sympathy interviewees felt for the stories. Several claimed that familiarity was the key to success.<sup>696</sup> Hassana, the Sunni cleaner from Aleppo said, “I prefer Syrian to Egyptian dramas as they are closer to our real life.” Other respondents said it was the quality of storylines and acting.<sup>697</sup> The interviews only produced one case of outright hostility to Syrian *musalsals*, again from Ghazlan, who tied his opposition to the government to his opposition to drama series:

“The *musalsals* present a view of Syria that is the ideal and not a true reflection of our society. Syrians are cheap and competitive with each other, yet this is not shown. The Egyptian shows are much better – they are realistic of what society is like.”

Yet this was a minority opinion, and the overwhelming majority of respondents not only preferred the Syrian dramas, but also took national pride at their success. Even those who did not watch them were nationalistic about their fame. One notable feature of interviews was the frequent competition with Egypt.<sup>698</sup> As Wissam, an Alawi farming student from Lattakia states, “I take much pride of course that Syria has the best *musalsals*. We like to stick it to Egypt!”

Curiously, there was not the same level of competitiveness with Turkish *musalsals* as with Egyptian ones, despite the former’s recent encroachment on the Syrian market.<sup>699</sup> This seems to support the hypothesis voiced in Chapter five that it is to the Arab arena, not the regional that Syrians look to for competition. There was, however, less of a sense amongst respondents that *musalsals* were bringing

---

<sup>693</sup> Interviews with Hassana (2/7/09), Roba (9/7/09) and Marlene (27/6/09).

<sup>694</sup> Interviews with Reem (18/7/09) and Ibrahim (20/7/09).

<sup>695</sup> Interviews with Mahmoud (1/7/09), Mazer (4/7/09), Abu Jamil (22/1/09), Ghazlan (20/7/09).

<sup>696</sup> Interviews with Hassana (2/7/09), Reem (18/7/09), Umm Ghadeer (19/7/09), Ibrahim (20/7/09), Sana (29/6/09).

<sup>697</sup> Interviews with Roba (9/7/09) and Mohammad (15/7/09).

<sup>698</sup> Interviews with Maen (28/6/09), Karim (9/7/09), Amal (9/7/09), Mohammad (15/7/09), Wissam (16/7/09) and Hajj Khaled (16/7/09).

<sup>699</sup> Interviews with Marlene (27/6/09) and Hajj Khaled (16/7/09).

Arabs any closer together than before, although one interviewee, Mohammad from Lattakia, did raise this possibility:

“I take much pride that Syria has the most popular *musalsals*. Last year some friends of my uncle came to visit from Morocco. We found it hard to communicate because their Arabic is so different. But then the wives started to talk about how much they loved Syrian *musalsals* and we talked about that. I was very proud that they watch Syrian shows.”

It must be said that a few respondents did voice their indifference about the origin of the *musalsals*, stating they took no great national pride from the Syrian successes in the field.<sup>700</sup> Hisham, the Damascene shopkeeper, for example stated, “The message of the *musalsal* is more important than where it was made...I would like this wherever it was from, Syria or not.” Such an opinion seems to be the minority though.

One of the Syrian *musalsals* discussed in Chapter five provoked interesting responses amongst interviewees. *Bab al-Hara*, which was one of the most popular shows in the Arab world at the time of research did indeed prove to be watched often by Syrian interviewees. Young men in particular were avid fans, with the reasons given for its popularity centered on nostalgia.<sup>701</sup> Young men like Karim in Suweida beamed about how the series, “...is about a better time. A time when we were strong and society was closer together. Not so individualistic like now.” Yet just as unexpected were the few opponents of the show, who complained that it set a bad, reactionary role model for society. As Bassel, the Aleppan dentist complained, “We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but people are obsessed by a show stuck in the past. Some people watch the show and want to recreate the old way of life. Its stupid.”

In general, the interviews suggested that *musalsals* are widely watched in Syrian society, but views about them are far from uniform. Whilst the majority enjoyed their stories and recreations of older societies, taking national pride in Syria’s success, several others view them as silly or even reactionary and counter-productive. Avid fans tended more to be women, whilst critics were largely men. Generally though, Syria’s *musalsals* did boost national pride, though specifically within the Arab arena.

#### *Other entertainment*

Whilst news and *musalsals* proved the most popular forms of television amongst Syrians interviewed, an unexpected discovery was that western entertainment shows were more popular than other Arabic entertainment. Western movies and dramas broadcast on transnational channels like MBC and Dubai One drew much praise from several respondents. Some, such as Reem from Lattakia, even said they

---

<sup>700</sup> Interviews with Hisham (5/7/09), Reem (18/7/09) and Amal (9/7/09).

<sup>701</sup> Interviews with Mohammad (15/7/09), Karim (9/7/09), Hisham (5/7/09).



preferred western shows. “I do sometimes watch Arabic shows,” she said, “but I prefer to watch relaxing shows, like the western shows on MBC4 and MBC2, like Opera and Dr. Phil.” Similarly, Western movies proved more popular to viewers than Arabic movies. This was surprisingly even amongst poorer, non-English speaking viewers, who presumably watch the subtitled American movies. It should be noted that these American movies and dramas are presented by the Gulf owners of channels such as *MBC* as ‘the acceptable face of the West’. They are heavily edited to remove references to sex or pre-marital relationships, though ironically retain many violent themes. One such poorer interviewee was Hisham from Damascus who said, “Western movies have action and are well made, whilst Arabic movies are cheap and comedic.” In general it seemed with movies Syrians exercised the reverse of their views of *musalsals*: Western productions were considered superior to Arab.

That said, alongside popular western entertainment shows, Arab shows remained popular. Several respondents commented how they regularly watched sport, reality TV and music TV.<sup>702</sup> Interestingly, no respondents said that they watched religious TV.

### 6.5.2 Transnational Television in Jordan

#### *News*

As in Syria, the vast majority of Jordanian respondents listed news as something they watched on TV, though marginally fewer said it was something they mostly watched.<sup>703</sup> Jordanians’ news-watching habits are very close to Syria’s. *Al-Jazeera* actually proved more popular in Jordan than in Syria with over half the respondents specifically identifying it as their preferred channel. As in Syria these viewers saw *al-Jazeera* as, ‘more truthful,’ than its rivals.<sup>704</sup> As in Syria, these viewers specifically criticized *al-Arabiyya* as part of their praise for the Qatar-based channel. As Ruwan, the Palestinian-originated medical student from Amman states:

“*Al-Jazeera* is up to date and tells the truth without restrictions. All Jordanians feel like this and prefer *al-Jazeera*. *Al-Arabiyya* will tell you the news 10 hours after something has happened – and it will be wrong!”

Again, the issue of perceived ‘truthfulness’ and the level of bias on each station is a major issue in Jordan. Viewers are aware of Qatar’s control, but seem to see it as more benign than Saudi Arabia’s

---

<sup>702</sup> Interviews with Hajj Khaled (16/7/09), Ibrahim (20/7/09), Mohammad (15/7/09), Wissam (16/7/09), Karim (9/7/09), Amal (9/7/09), Bassel (30/6/09), Sana (29/6/09) and Maen (28/6/09).

<sup>703</sup> 15 out of 22 Jordanian respondents said they watched news on TV; 10 out of 22 said they mostly watched news on TV, whilst 16 out of 29 in Syria said they mostly watched news.

<sup>704</sup> Interviews with Sandi (17/10/09), Abu Mohammad (27/10/09), Ruwan (12/10/09) and Suleiman (14/10/09).

similar influence over *al-Arabiyya*. Moussa Haddad, Madaba's aging Christian shopkeeper explains this attitude:

"I prefer *al-Jazeera*. It is owned by the Prince of Qatar and he gives them the freedom to say whatever they like. There is freedom on *al-Arabiyya* as well, but not so much. I would say *al-Arabiyya* is 90% free but *al-Jazeera* is 100%."

Whilst support for *al-Jazeera* is not universal, for a society that generally accepts free speech and criticism more, the Jordanians interviewed were less critical of the channel than the Syrians. Criticism was less cutting and more nuanced, such as Bassam, the Amman-based hotelier who said, "I don't watch *al-Jazeera* or *al-Arabiyya*. It is not that they are bad but they always talk too much. Too much talking for so little is not good for you." Only two others expressed any real criticism of the channel and it was similarly restrained.<sup>705</sup> Moreover, though there were a few respondents who watched several news channels rather than specifying one, the number was fewer than in Syria.<sup>706</sup>

In general Jordanian respondents had less complex news viewing habits than Syrians. Most watched the news though a minority, larger than in Syria and curiously mostly under-30, proved more apathetic to current events. Those who did watch the news showed an overwhelming preference for *al-Jazeera*, an even larger proportion than in Syria, and any criticism of it was more subtle. This is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the high popularity of *al-Jazeera* in Jordan seems to support the findings of both Rinnawi and Miles who used the state as their sample when commenting on the impact of the channel on the Arab world. However, the slightly varied results in Syria perhaps suggest their conclusions should be tested elsewhere before making generalizations. Secondly, the fact that Jordanians prefer the channel even more than Syrians, and reject *al-Arabiyya* even more asks questions about the success with which a 'government line' of politics is disseminated in Jordan.

### *Musalsals*

"Here we don't have time to watch TV, we have to work. This is a camp, they are simple people. They care about money, food and sleep, not what is on TV. You should talk to women: they sit around all day just watching TV." *Hussein, Wahdat Palestinian camp, Amman, Jordan*

The attitudes to *musalsals* in Jordan also reflect what was seen in Syria, perhaps suggesting that this pattern is common in the wider Arab world. Again, the majority of viewers expressed enthusiasm about

---

<sup>705</sup> Interviews with Mohammad (2/11/09) and Suleiman (14/10/09).

<sup>706</sup> Interviews with Bassam (11/10/09), Moussa Haddad (17/10/09) and Mohammad (2/11/09).

*musalsals*, particularly women, but also young men.<sup>707</sup> The habitual watching of *musalsals* in Ramadan was widespread, even amongst Christians. As Sandi the Christian shop worker in Madaba states,

“Christian families all like the new *musalsals* during Ramadan. It makes no difference that it’s a Muslim holiday, we still gather as a family each night at home to watch them.”

As in Syria, those who criticized the drama series tended to be men. One, Raca, echoed the critics in Syria, by saying. “The dramas are silly, the comedy is stupid. Some fat guy falls over. It’s all just physical. You cannot compare it to the quality American dramas.” Interestingly two respondents criticised the *musalsals* on religious grounds. One said he felt Ramadan should be spent praying and reading the Quran rather than watching TV.<sup>708</sup> Another, Fawzi, said he worried about some content:

“I don’t like some of the modern *musalsals* that go against religion. That’s not to say I only like religious shows, I just don’t like those that promote a lifestyle that is against Islam.”

Jordan has a comparatively weak drama industry, so respondents’ choice of drama series, unaffected by a sense of nationalism, proved interesting. As in Syria, most preferred Syrian shows, though a large group also liked the Turkish shows. Reasons given for the popularity of Syrian shows were akin to those found north of the border: the familiarity of the subject, the quality of writing and humour and, interestingly, the similarity between Syrian and Jordanian life. As Ruwan the medical student stated;

“I really like the modern shows, not the history shows. I especially like Syrian shows. Egyptian dramas are too dramatic, whereas Syrian shows make you feel like they are showing your life. It is so real.”

*Bab al-Hara* proved particularly popular, as found in Syria, with even cynics who generally didn’t like *musalsals* saying they liked the show.<sup>709</sup> As Suleiman, the Palestinian shopkeeper stated, “I don’t really like *musalsals*, except for *Bab al-Harra* which is great.” Unlike in Syria there was no criticism of the series’ reactionary nature. This might suggest an even more nostalgic society in Jordan or, more likely, less ownership of the programme – as it was made abroad – and hence less shame that it was made.

Jordanians interviewed conformed with Syrian preferences when it came to *musalsals*. They too were largely avid viewers, with women and young men again most enthusiastic, and all the critics being male. Though more Jordanians said they enjoyed Turkish shows than Syrian interviewees, the most popular shows were again the Syrian *musalsals*. Moreover, the fact that many said they identified with

---

<sup>707</sup> Interviews with Mohammad Suker (25/10/09), Ruwan (12/10/09), Soussa (25/10/09) and Shereen (25/10/09).

<sup>708</sup> Interview with Suleiman (14/10/09).

<sup>709</sup> Interviews with Raca (11/10/09) and Suleiman (14/10/09).

the familiarity of the Syrian life seems to support the claim that, at least in some regard, the proliferation of transnational satellite television is able to bring viewers in Arab states closer.

### *Other Entertainment*

Again, in other forms of entertainment, trends identified in Syria were repeated in Jordan. Firstly, the popularity of western programming which, after news and *musalsals*, proved the third most popular programme genre. The preference for American movies to Arabic ones was repeated amongst Jordanians. As Sandi, the Madaban Christian stated, “I mostly watch American movies on MBC. I watch some Arabic movies too, but the American ones are better.” This preference was particularly seen amongst younger viewers, who perhaps have been brought up in a more western-dominated environment than their parents. That said, there were a few respondents who like Arabic movies. One, Abdullah from Zarqa, even said he ‘only’ watched Arabic movies on TV, plus some *musalsals*. It should be noted that respondents who said they preferred Arabic movies to western tended to be poorer, and non-English speaking.

Curiously, interviews in Jordan did reveal one fan of religious television. Mohammad Zaraqawi from Zarqa said, “I really like Islamic programming. I regularly watch *al-Risalla* and *Irqa*.” However, he was the only respondent in either Syria or Jordan, out of 51 in total, who even mentioned the Islamic channels. This supports the idea proposed in chapter five that, as a genre, it remains widely unpopular. Of other genres, sport proved particularly popular, especially among young men.<sup>710</sup> Reality TV, music and documentaries were also watched, though with less frequency than American movies and sport. The general impression was that Jordanians had slightly more western preferences in entertainment than Syria.

---

<sup>710</sup> Interviews with Mohammad Zaraqawi (10/11/09), Tarek (25/10/09), Mohammad Suker (25/10/09), Moussa Haddad (17/10/09), Ayman, Khaled and Hussein (together 15/10/09).

## 6.6 Conclusion

The ethnographic interviews conducted in Syria and Jordan seem to suggest a broad agreement with the overall hypothesis of this study that public mediations successfully reproduce identities in these states in both a banal and overt manner. That said, it is notable that several surprising results were also observed.

With regards to identity in general, Jordanians interviewed tended to feel Arab, but more as a solidly secondary identity, whilst more Syrians saw it as their primary identity. This reflected the position given to Arab identity in both official discourses – more obviously a secondary identity in Jordan and more ambiguous in Syria. In both states what ‘being Arab’ meant was open to interpretation: for some it remained the nationalism of Old Arabism, for others it was clearly supra-nationalism. This suggested some engagement with the official discourse: most accepted the aspect of the discourse which said they were Arab, but had differing opinions on what that meant.

Attachment to state identity was found in all Syrian respondents and all but four Jordanian respondents. The Jordanian case presented a paradox: more people saw themselves as ‘Jordanian first’ than in Syria, reflecting the desired identity discourse, yet more in Jordan totally rejected the discourse than in Syria. This might illustrate the limitations of such overt nation-building in the face of other powerful discourses, such as Palestinian nationalism. Interestingly Jordanian identity seemed strongest amongst younger respondents, perhaps indicating a degree of success with Abdullah’s ‘Jordan First’ approach with those too young to remember otherwise. Conversely, Syria’s broader discourse that seemingly does not demand citizens choose any primary identity, seemed more successful and perhaps reflected better the multi-layered nature of identity in the Middle East. That said, the different attitudes to identity from Syria’s different ethnic and sectarian groups also illustrate the limitations of its ability to nation-build. Druze, Christians and Alawis felt most Arab whilst Sunnis felt most religious. The noticeable difference between these groups shows the limited success in creating a uniform national community who feel the same level of identity irrespective of ethnic or sectarian origin.

With regard to the images and speeches within leadership cults, both sets of respondents confirmed the hypothesis that the majority regard such overt displays of identity reproduction as everyday and normal. In Syria, whilst the majority of respondents see, or do not see, the cult and the posters as an unwaved, unnoticed, ‘normal’ reminder of their nationality, there remained a sizeable minority for whom it is an active, overt, waved reminder with which they regularly interact. There was some cynicism, all from the middle classes, but it was aimed at the notion of a cult not the president himself. In Jordan there was

even more banality than in Syria and only one respondent actively interacted. What opposition there was, however, was focused on the king himself unlike in Syria. In both cases, the level of normalization of the images of the cult suggests that the identity discourse regularly flagged is consumed unknowingly by most citizens.

Syrians are neither brainwashed by state TV nor do they outright reject it. News is widely questioned, yet entertainment like *musalsals* watched avidly. Jordanians do not watch state TV as much as Syrians, especially not amongst the younger generation. On the one hand, neither Syria nor Jordan have been able to produce a passive population that uncritically consume everything they watch. On the other hand, the willingness to watch state television for popular shows like *musalsals* and an unawareness of the banal identities they and the linking segments between them flag suggests that state television can have a limited impact on reproducing identity.

Finally, in the area of satellite television, the popularity of *al-Jazeera* in both states justifies its widespread analysis, but the desire to look at several news sources questions Rinnawi and Miles' tendency to only look at the Qatar-based channel to understand the 'Arab street'. In Syria, viewers consciously chose which news channel to watch around their political views. For most this is *al-Jazeera*, but many seek alternative news sources. *Musalsals* were widely watched but reception is varied. In general they boost national pride, though the glorifications of the past tend to irk some as reactionary. Surprisingly, despite a more Arabist mentality, western shows are highly popular. Whilst this shows a diversity of choice, it must be remembered that these shows are the sanitized, censored versions allowed by Gulf producers. Moreover, the popularity of western shows does not question a viewer's engagement with the national or supra-national discourses: the popularity of American shows in UK does not make people feel less British, for example.

In Jordan, the popularity of *al-Jazeera* seems even higher than in Syria, perhaps suggesting that a majority disapprove of their government's pro-western line on foreign policy. In this sense they might be seen to challenge a *part* of the official discourse – though it must be said that Jordanian official identity, whilst perhaps fitted around its choice to ally with the west, does not indicate that *being* Jordanian requires a pro-western sympathy. As in Syria, *musalsals* were highly popular and the sense of familiarity with Syria felt by viewers after watching them suggests their popularity enhances the supranational Arab discourse.

All these results seem to support this thesis' central hypothesis. It is through the everyday, unnoticed reproduction of identity in Syria and Jordan, through both the public mediations officially and the new

supranational New Arabism discourse promoted by transnational satellite television that has sustained a strong supranational Arab identity despite the failure of Old Arabism. At the same time, state identity is gradually strengthened in the same manner and has evolved into a nationalism, subscribed to by the majority, though not all, which encompasses, not opposes, Arab supra-national identity.

## Conclusion

The thesis posed three critical questions why it was that Arabs in Syria and Jordan maintain a sense of Arab identity. It firstly asked what Arabism means in the contemporary Middle East. Chapter 1 unpicked the various debates and engaged with nationalist theory to illustrate that today's Arabism differs considerably from the fusionist Arab nationalism of Nasser and al-Husri. Unlike this earlier 'Old Arabism', which can be seen as a failed nationalism, today's 'New Arabism' is a supra-nationalism that operates alongside and in support of individual Arab state nationalism. Chapter four's analysis of Jordanian and Syrian television demonstrated the subordinate position given to Arab identity within the daily discourses experienced by viewers in these two case study states. Simple mechanisms, such as the organisation of news items or the countries displayed on weather bulletin maps clearly flagged to citizens that their priorities should be firstly to the state, but that they should pay greater interest to the Arab world than to either the wider Muslim or non-Arab world. This confirmed what had been explored in chapter three that this supra-national Arabism was not a 'new' phenomenon but had formed a key pillar of the identity discourses of Syria and Jordan since the 1970s.

Chapter five revealed that the satellite television stations that many commentators claim are reviving an Arabism that challenges state nationalism actually further entrench the state system and an Arabism that is supra-national. Satellite television owners are almost all linked to state governments and, given the unprofitability of these supposedly commercial enterprises, stations such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiyya* primarily function to promote their backers' interests rather than any political Arab nationalism. Promoting an Arab supra-national identity that does not harm the status quo is in owners' interests though, as it boosts viewing figures and their ability to project influence. This status-quo orientated Arabism is seen in the promotion of Islam on satellite television. Contrary to commentators such as Pintak who see Islamism and Arabism converging on satellite TV, Islam is largely given cultural rather than political space and the Islamists allowed usually do not threaten the status quo. Content of satellite television analysed in chapter five was shown simultaneously to promote state and Arab identities, even seemingly apolitical entertainment shows. Shows like *Superstar* and *Al-Jazeera's* coverage of the 2008 Olympics showed this duality: viewers were addressed as a common Arab audience whilst at the same time encouraged to be nationalistic towards their state within a given 'Arab arena' of states with whom they should primarily compete. The Arabism found today in both official state discourses and satellite television was thus shown to be a supra-nationalism not nationalism.

The second question asked why the Syrian and Jordanian governments continued to promote Arab identity and how it interacted with state nationalism. Chapter three illustrated how both Hafez al-Assad



in Syria and King Hussein in Jordan deliberately built an ambiguous identity discourse. In Syria the layer of supra-national Arabism was seemingly given an equal footing with Greater Syrian and Syrian state nationalism, with Islam only occasionally drawn upon and often deliberately sidelined. Under Hafez's son and heir, Bashar, the identity discourse has shifted slightly, with Greater Syrian identity lessened, but Arabism remaining prominent. Though foreign policy concerns have prompted a stronger emphasis on Syrian state nationalism, manifested in the growth of Syrian flags and images of Bashar displayed after 2005, an analysis of Bashar's speeches and Syrian television discussed in chapter four shows that Arabism remains a prominent pillar of Syria's identity discourse. In Jordan Hussein built a specific form of 'Hashemite Arabism' which presented him as the heir to the Arab revolt rather than Assad's more Nasserist anti-imperialist Arabism. This allowed Hussein to maintain strong ties with the 'imperialist' West without contradicting his Arabist discourse. Like Hafez, Hussein promoted a multi-layered or 'fuzzy' nationalism that included a religious and a Jordanian element. Under his son Abdullah, this multi-layered discourse has continued though the new King has more clearly promoted Jordanian state nationalism above the other identities through his 'Jordan first' campaign.

As suggested in chapter one, the continuation of Arab identity in the discourses of Syria and Jordan is both instrumental and habitual. Whilst ethno-symbolist theories of the pre-modern roots of Arab identity were shown to be spurious, the habitual nature of identity reproduction is an important factor to be considered. Having spent several decades successfully promoting Arab identity it would be difficult to consciously 'de-Arabise' a population. Not only do many of the elites themselves, who have been exposed to this discourse, feel Arab and would not be inclined to do so, the recent growth of satellite television, outlined in chapter five, now offers a highly popular second source of supra-national Arabist discourse making it even harder to discard. That said the instrumental reasons for maintaining a layer of Arab identity in Jordan and Syria make any departure unlikely. Affinity between its population and Palestinians, Lebanese and Iraqis allows the Syrian government to use Arabism to legitimise its dictatorial rule, offering safety from Israel and a stability not seen in neighbouring states. A similar affinity allows Jordan's government to present itself as 'the best of a bad bunch' and justify its own more benign dictatorship through Arabism. The Syrian and Jordanian regimes thus maintain an Arab identity that is subordinate to state nationalism but that remains a key aspect of their official discourse for reasons that are both habitual and instrumental.

The final question asked about the processes and mechanisms by which Arabism and state nationalism are produced and reproduced. Chapter two developed Michael Billig's idea of *Banal Nationalism* beyond the limited western democratic national societies outlined in his 1995 book to illustrate how it can also explain the reproduction of supra-national Arabism in the dictatorships of Syria and Jordan. It

was suggested that not only were Billig's 'unwaved' flags present in Syria and Jordan, but also that the 'waved', overt forms of identity building such as leadership cults that seem blatant propaganda to outsiders are now as normal and banal to locals as an unwaved stars and stripes in the USA. Chapters three and four then examined public mediations regularly experienced in Syria and Jordan in which the multi-layered identities described in chapter three were both banally and overtly flagged. The use of television in particular to build what Salamantra calls, 'national cultural construction' was notable, as was the fact that it was Jordan, perceived as less authoritarian than Syria, which had the most overt attempts at nation-building propaganda. Moreover, the discourse of new satellite television stations was shown to flag an Arabism that was supra-national and subordinate to state nationalism.

The interviews conducted in chapter six suggested that most viewers did indeed consider these often-overt attempts at identity building 'normal' and 'everyday'. Whilst lacking the scientific rigour of quantitative surveys, these ethnographic interviews added a new layer to Billig's methodology: offering depth and flavour of what public reaction might be to the identities flagged to them in daily discourse. What was evident was that most interviewed were sceptical about many of the mediations they consumed, but simultaneously seemed to accept the identities they flagged. Many Syrians accepted that Syrian television was propaganda, for example, yet most conformed to the identity discourse it flagged. Jordanians too were not positive about the propaganda shown on Jordan TV, yet saw nothing wrong with the large cult around King Abdullah II which most regarded as 'normal'. Interestingly most Syrians and Jordanians were huge fans of satellite television and though a few recognised the way some channels framed their coverage around a political message, most accepted the discourse more unquestioningly than those on state television. Not unrelated to this, as suspected, almost all respondents felt a layer of Arab identity. Curiously though, respondents' understanding of the meaning of their Arab identity tended to reflect the place of Arab identity in their *state's* official discourse rather than that of their preferred satellite station: firmly a secondary identity in Jordan, more ambiguous in Syria. An adaptation of Michael Billig's notion of *Banal nationalism*, that identity is reproduced and sustained through the unnoticed daily habits of public mediations, thus serves to explain the processes of identity reproduction in contemporary Syria and Jordan.

These three conclusions seem to confirm this thesis' original hypothesis that Syrians and Jordanians retain a strong sense of Arab identity because supra-nationalist Arabism remains a central component of each state's nationalist discourse. That layer of identity is now strengthened *alongside* state nationalism by the daily Arabist discourse of transnational satellite television. This thesis has shown that an 'Everyday Arabism' is at work in Syria and Jordan normalising state nationalism and sustaining Arab identity in both a banal and overt manner.

## Further Research

Locating Arabism today as a supra-nationalism embedded in the daily habits and structures of two Arab states and transnational satellite television stations is important both to the study of nationalism and international relations in the Middle East, and for the further questions it raises about identity and Arab politics. Illustrating how Billig's theories and methodology can be adapted and expanded in order to explain today's Arabism contributes to the growing academic study of everyday nationalism. Aside from the content of this thesis, which offers material for the growing body of literature on everyday nationalism, this dissertation offers new methodological and theoretical avenues to explore. Methodologically, the successful analysis of television content in the experiments of chapters four and five opens new doors for the study of the banal nationalist content of media in developing countries. Billig's model of investigating only newspapers was replicated by subsequent investigators of Turkish, Catalan, Scottish and British everyday nationalism. Hopefully this thesis' model for surveying the banal nationalist content of television, which is far more accessible than newspapers in semi-literate societies, can be replicated in areas previously considered unsuitable. Similarly, adding ethnographic interviews to gain a sample of how a society might actually engage with nationalist discourses, whilst not scientifically rigorous, adds greater depth and another layer to this investigation which one hopes will be replicated by nationalist scholars elsewhere.

Theoretically, by demonstrating that Billig's theories can be liberated from the western, democratic and national box that he placed them in opens the way for further investigation. Having shown that a supra-national identity can be flagged and sustained banally one would expect investigations into further non-national ties to provide similar results. Cram's work on 'banal Europeanism' has already led the way on this, and a similar study of 'Latin Americanism' or 'Banal Africanism' would prove interesting.<sup>711</sup> A more relevant further study to this investigation would be to investigate the banal reproduction of religious identity, particularly Islam in the Middle East given its political potency. The position given to Islam in the official discourses of Syria and Jordan, discussed in chapters three and four, and the controlled cultural space given to Islam on satellite television, mentioned in chapter five, surely plays a role in sustaining and reproducing Islamic identity. A public mediation awaiting investigation are the speeches made at mosques every Friday, the *khotbas*.<sup>712</sup> Such an investigation would offer a further dimension to the study of Arab and state identity, by assessing how much nationalist and supra-nationalist content was found, but might also shed some light on to how Islamic identity is reproduced.

---

<sup>711</sup> Cram, 'Imagining the union' in Wallace, *Whose Europe?*

<sup>712</sup> Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit*.

The thesis, I hope, contributes to the study of politics and society in Syria and Jordan, two countries in the Middle East that receive limited academic attention. Whilst previous authors on Syria and Jordan have examined Hafez al-Assad and King Hussein's role in building identity discourses in Syria and Jordan, this is one of the few works to discuss how these discourses have been adapted and continued under Bashar and Abdullah. Two contributions in particular are worth noting. Firstly, the thesis engaged Bashar's Syria and Abdullah's Jordan with nationalist theory, which until now has been done minimally. Secondly, the detailed television experiment of chapter four offers unique depth into the nation building content of Syria and Jordan's media, analysis of which has largely been restricted in the past to newspapers and literature.

These contributions lead the way for further investigations into identity in Syria and Jordan. As well as the study of religion discussed above, many questions arise about sub-state identities. It was suggested in chapter six, for example, that ethnicity and sect had a substantial impact on respondents' engagement with national and supra-national identity discourses. In Syria, whether someone was Druze, Kurdish, Christian, Sunni or Alawi seemed to affect how they felt about their Syrian and Arab identities. In Jordan, whether someone was of Palestinian or Transjordanian origin, or was Muslim or Christian, similarly seemed to affect how they conceived of their Jordanian and Arab identities. A further examination of how these sub-state identities are constructed and reproduced, sometimes in opposition to the official discourse, warrants further study. Further questions also emerge concerning the political structure of Syria and Jordan. As discussed in chapter three, both the Syrian and Jordanian governments strive to place the leaders – Hafez, Hussein, Bashar and Abdullah – at the very centre of the nationalist discourses. The obvious question then is, what happens to the discourse if these leaders fall from power? Casting an eye around the Arab world it seems there are two models. In states where strong man replaced strong man, as in Egypt in 1981 and Tunisia in 1987, the new dictator appeared able to adapt the nationalist discourse of old, simply replacing their predecessor at the centre of a similar discourse. However, in cases where a strong man was replaced by pluralist politics, as in post-Saddam Iraq or civil war Algeria, the fall of the dictator and his discourse prompted an often violent debate about the very meaning of national identity in these states. Popular rejection of a change to Iraq's flag after 2003, away from the 'Arab' colours, is one clear example of this. More investigation is therefore needed into the link between authoritarian government and the building of national identity. Indeed, the survival of Algeria and Iraq, just, as complete political units might suggest a limited success of identity building under dictatorship.

With regard to the study of Arabism, this study has added to the growing debate on the impact of satellite television on Arab identity. It has suggested that, far from undermining state identity, the

discourse of *al-Jazeera* and its rivals largely serves the supra-nationalist position given to Arab identity within official state nationalism. The obvious question to pose is, having shown this is the case in Syria and Jordan, would we see a similar result in other Arab states? On the one hand, Syria and Jordan prove useful case studies to make wider generalisations about other Arab states because they are so ideologically different. The Arabism seen in Syria's anti-western republic might be replicated in Gaddafi's Libya, Saleh's Yemen, Saddam's Iraq and Algeria. Similarly, the softer Arabism seen in Jordan's pro-Western monarchy might be repeated in Morocco, Oman, Kuwait, and the Gulf monarchies. What would be interesting would be to assess how Arabism is used differently by different regimes and for what reasons. Hussein's Hashemite Arabism was quite different to Hafez's more Ba'athist Arabism in order to fit around the specific circumstances of their international alliances and domestic constituency, and the same differences continue under their sons. Would we expect a similar uniqueness to the Arabism of Sadat, Mubarak or Saddam? This expected variation might highlight another aspect of Arabism in today's Middle Eastern states: its ideological vacuousness. When politics in the Arab world now seems to centre entirely on leaders and individuals rather than parties and ideology, it is not surprising that Arabism is instrumental to power rather than a consistent principle.

Certainly there is space to extend the experiments of this thesis into other Arab states to test if the same results are seen. Of particular interest would be Morocco, Egypt and Oman, which can claim far older roots as states and might see a different state/Arab balance within their national identity discourses. Equally interesting would be regimes that place Islam at the centre of their national discourse, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies. Might Arab identity be less important when a state's population is more religiously homogeneous? How would this feed into the ethno-symbolist/modernist debate amongst nationalist scholars? Further questions arise about the relationship between geography and Arabism. Do states at the centre of the Arab world, such as Syria and Jordan, appear more Arabist than those on the periphery such as Sudan and Morocco? Another question would be about the relationship between Arabism and stability. Both Iraq and Lebanon have experienced questions about their Arab identity whilst undergoing civil wars and periods of domestic instability. The results of chapter six would suggest that no similar doubts would emerge in Syria and Jordan were they to suffer a similar fate, but circumstances can change. Can the place of Arabism in a discourse thus be seen as a sign of stability or merely a reflection of authoritarian politics?

Finally, this study offers something to the ongoing debate amongst international relations theorists. The thesis adds to realist accounts of international relations by illustrating how everyday nationalism is used instrumentally by elites to further their regime and state interests. At the same time it contributes to constructivist accounts by illustrating how everyday reproduction serves to constitute national and

supra-national identity. It further continues some of Barnett's themes by suggesting that the growth of satellite media has the potential to encourage renewed competition between states. This is currently being seen with states launching their own satellite channels to counter seemingly negative press. The fact that Saudi Arabian elites felt the need to launch *al-Arabiyya* to combat Qatar's *al-Jazeera* echoes earlier competition between Nasser's Egypt and other states over the norms of Arabism. This thesis' account of 'Everyday Arabism' thus opens the door to question whether the age of satellite television invites a new competition for the norms of a supra-nationalism that are still being formed.

### **Final Thoughts**

Commentators such as Fouad Ajami once argued that the defeat of Nasser's Arab nationalism would mean that Arabism would fade away as separate Arab state identities rose in prominence and legitimacy. This thesis has demonstrated the contrary: that it is the states themselves who have embedded Arab identity within their own national discourses. Far from fading away Arabism has evolved into a supra-nationalism that is habitually reproduced daily alongside and subordinate to state nationalisms. Moreover, the recent growth of pan-Arab satellite television is now boosting that Arab supra-nationalism, perhaps meaning that national governments would struggle to 'de-Arabise' their discourses even if they wanted to. Therefore, just as Arabs are unlikely to forget that they are Arab anytime soon, we should not forget that they are Arab either. Whilst other identities in the multi-layered Middle East have correctly been identified as important, notably state and religious ties, Arabism is often neglected as a hangover from the past. This thesis has shown that in Syria and Jordan and, one would expect, the wider Arab world, Arabism remains salient. Whilst it would impossible for policy makers to deal with the Arab world as a single actor, governments must understand that their actions in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt will affect their perception in Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon. I do hope that this thesis has contributed to our understanding of why this is.

**98,781 words**

## Bibliography

### Interviews

Most interviews were ethnographic and respondents did not give their surnames. Some requested that their names be changed.

#### *Syria*

- Abu Jamil, Aleppo, 22/7/09.  
Akrash, Aleppo, 12/7/09.  
Amal, Suweida, 9/7/09.  
Bassel, Aleppo, 30/6/09.  
Ghazlan, Aleppo, 20/7/09.  
Hajj Khaled, Lattakia, 16/7/09.  
Hassana, Aleppo, 2/7/09.  
Hisham, Damascus, 5/7/09.  
Ibrahim, Lattakia, 20/7/09.  
Jabir, Suweida, 9/7/09.  
Karim. Suweida, 9/7/09.  
Khalil, Damascus, 11/7/09.  
Louay, Damascus, 3/7/09.  
Maen, Aleppo, 28/6/09.  
Maha, Damascus, 12/7/09.  
Mahmoud, Aleppo, 1/7/09.  
Mamdouah, Damascus, 3/7/09.  
Marlene, Aleppo, 27/6/09.  
Mazen, Aleppo, 26/6/09.  
Mazer, Damascus, 4/7/09.  
Mohammad, Lattakia, 15/7/09.  
Moussa, Damascus, 3/7/09.  
Reem, Lattakia, 18/7/09.  
Roba, Suweida, 9/7/09.  
Dr. Sami Moubayad (Editor, Forward Magazine), Damascus, 7/6/10.  
Sana, Aleppo, 29/6/09.  
Suzanne, Aleppo, 25/6/09.  
Umm Ghadeer, Lattakia, 19/7/09.  
Wissam, Lattakia, 16/7/09.  
Zein, Aleppo, 25/6/09.

#### *Jordan*

- Abdullah, Zarqa, 10/11/09.  
Abu Mohammad, Amman, 27/10/09.  
Ahmed, Irbid, 25/10/09.  
Ayman, Amman, 15/10/09.  
Bassam, Amman, 11/10/09.  
Fawzi, Amman, 13/10/09.  
Housam, Amman, 28/10/09.  
Hussein, Amman, 15/10/09.  
Khaled, Amman, 15/10/09.  
Mohammad, Amman, 2/11/09.  
Dr. Mohammad Rayyan, (Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Jordan), Amman, 19/10/2009  
Mohammad Suker, Irbid, 25/10/09.  
Mohammad Zarqawi, Zarqa, 10/11/09.

Moussa Haddad, Madaba, 17/10/09.  
Raca, Amman, 11/10/09.  
Rowa, Amman, 12/10/09.  
Ruwan, Amman, 12/10/09.  
Sandi, Madaba, 17/10/09.  
Shereen, Irbid, 25/10/09.  
Soussa, Irbid, 25/10/09.  
Suleiman, Amman, 14/10/09.  
Tarek, Irbid, 25/10/09.  
Wedad, Amman, 1/11/09.

### **Television sources**

*Al-Jazeera*  
*Jordan TV*  
*Syria TV*

### **Newspapers and media sources**

*Al-bab.com*  
*Associated Press*  
*BBC News*  
*CIA World Factbook*  
*Eurobarometer*  
*Foreign Policy*  
*Haaretz*  
*Open Democracy*  
*Reuters*  
*Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)*  
*The Guardian*  
*The Independent*  
*The New York Times*  
*USA Today*  
*US State Department*  
*Variety*

### **Academic articles**

Aday, Sean, Livingston, Steven and Hebert, Maeve, 'Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War,' *International Journal of Press/Politics* 10:1 (2005), pp. 3-21.

Ajami, Fouad, 'The end of Pan-Arabism' *Foreign Affairs* 57:2 (Winter 1978/9), pp. 355-373.

As'ad AbuKhalil, 'A New Arab Ideology?: The Rejuvenation of Arab Nationalism,' *Middle East Journal* 46:1 (Winter 1992), pp. 22-36.

Barry, Brian, 'Statism and nationalism: a cosmopolitan critique,' *Global Justice* (1999).

Billig, Michael, 'Reflecting on a critical engagement with banal nationalism – reply to Skey,' *Sociological Review* 57:2 (2009), pp. 347-352.

Caldwell, Leah, 'Defining the boundaries of acceptable speech in Syria,' *Arab Media & Society* 10 (Spring 2010), pp. 1-4.



- Cochrane, Paul, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Influence,' *Arab Media and Society* 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 1-11.
- Cramer, Kathryn, 'Banal Catalanism?' *National Identities* 2:2 (2000), 145-157.
- Dawisha, Adeed 'Requiem for Arab nationalism,' *Middle East Quarterly* 10:1 (Winter 2003), pp. 25-41.
- Dick, Marlin, 'The state of the musalsal: Arab television drama and comedy and the politics of the satellite era,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (Fall 2005).
- El Baltaji, Dana, 'I want my MTV,' *Arab Media and Society* 5 (Spring 2008).
- Faksh, Mahmud A., 'Withered Arab Nationalism,' *Orbis* 37:3 (Summer 1993), pp. 425-438.
- Frisch, Hillel, 'Fuzzy nationalism: The case of Jordan' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 8:4 (Winter 2002), pp. 86-103.
- Fuller, H.C., 'Coinage in Ghana and symbols of Nkruma,' *Nations and Nationalism* 14 (2008), pp. 520-541.
- Hammond, Andrew, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Empire: keeping the masses at home,' *Arab Media and Society* 3 (Fall 2007).
- Huntingdon, Samuel P., 'The Clash of Civilisations?' *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond, and Quilliam, Neil, 'Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19:3 (Sept. 2006), pp. 513-528.
- Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, 'Thoughts on Arab Satellite Television' *Transnational Broadcast Journal* 13 (Fall 2004).
- James, Laura M., 'Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and 'Sawt al-Arab' Radio', *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 16 (June-Dec 2006).
- Jones, R. & Desforges, L., 'Localities and the reproduction of Welsh nationalism,' *Political Geography* 22:3 (March 2003), pp. 271-292.
- Kraidy, Marwan M., 'Popular Culture as a Political Barometer: Lebanese-Syrian Relations and Superstar,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 16 (June-Dec 2006).
- Kraidy, Marwan M., 'Reality television and politics in the Arab world: preliminary observations,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (Fall 2005).
- Kumaraswamy, P. R., 'Who am I?: The identity crisis in the Middle East,' *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 10:1 (March 2006), pp. 63-73.
- Law, A., 'Near and far: Banal national identity and the press in Scotland.' *Media, Culture and Society* 23:3 (2001), pp. 299-317.
- Lynch, Marc 'Beyond the Arab Street: Iraq and the Arab Public Space,' *Politics and Society* 31:1 (2003), pp. 55-91.

- Lynch, Marc, 'Reality is Not Enough': The Politics of Arab Reality TV' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (Fall 2005).
- Mellon, James G., 'Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism and Inter-State Relations in the Arab World,' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 8:4 (Winter 2002), pp.1-15.
- Pintak, Lawrence, 'Border guards of the "Imagined" *Watan*: Arab Journalists and the New Arab Consciousness,' *The Middle East Journal* 63:2 (Spring 2009), pp. 191-212.
- Qadar Tash, Abdul, 'Islamic satellite channels and their impact on Arab societies: *Iraqa* channel – a case study,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 13 (Fall 2004).
- Regev, Motti, 'Present Absentee: Arab music in Israeli culture,' *Public Culture* 7:2 (1995), pp. 433-445.
- Rosie, M., Petersoo, P., MacInnes, J., Condor, S. and Kennedy, J., 'Mediating which nation? Citizenship and national identities in the British press,' *Social Semiotics* 16:2 (2006), pp. 327–344.
- Rosie, M., Petersoo, P., MacInnes, J., Condor, S. and Kennedy, J., 'Nation speaking unto nation? Newspapers and national identity in the devolved UK.' *Sociological Review* 53:4 (2004), pp. 437-458.
- Rugh, William, 'Do national political systems still influence Arab media?' *Arab Media and Society* 2 (Summer 2007).
- Salamandra, Christa, 'London's Arab media and the construction of Arabness' *Transnational Broadcast Journal* 10 (Spring/Summer 2003).
- Shoup, John, 'As it was and as it should be now: Al Andalus in contemporary Arab television dramas,' *Transnational Broadcast Studies* 15 (Jan-June 2006).
- Sirriyeh, Hussein, 'A New Version of Pan-Arabism?' in *International Relations* 15:3 (December 2000), pp. 53-66.
- Skey, Michael, 'The national in everyday life: A critical engagement with Michael Billig's thesis of *Banal Nationalism*,' *Sociological Review* 57:2 (2009), pp. 331-346.
- Smith, Anthony D., 'Opening statement: nations and their pasts', *Nations and nationalism* 2:3 (1996), pp. 358-65.
- Talhami, Ghada Hashem, 'Syria: Islam, Arab Nationalism and the Military' *Middle East Policy* 8:4 (2001), pp. 110-127.
- Tzanelli, Rodanthi, "'Not My Flag!' Citizenship and nationhood in the margins of Europe (Greece, October 2000/2003),' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29:1 (January 2006), pp. 27-49.
- Telhami, Shibley, '2006 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,' *Brookings Institute* (2006).
- Telhami, Shibley, '2009 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,' *Brookings Institute* (2009).
- Telhami, Shibley, '2010 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey,' *Brookings Institute* (2010).

Urry, J., 'Citizenship and society,' *Journals of World-Systems Research*, 5 (1999), pp. 311-324.

Yumul, Arus & Ozkirimili, Umut, 'Reproducing the nation: 'banal nationalism' in the Turkish press', *Media, Culture and Society* 22:6 (2000), pp. 787-804.

Zisser, Eyal, 'Who's afraid of Syrian nationalism? National and State Identity in Syria,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:2 (2006), pp. 179-198.

Zubaida, Sami, 'Islam and nationalism: continuities and contradictions', *Nations and Nationalism* 10:4 (2004), pp. 407-420.

### Chapters in books

Amin, Hussein, 'Arab media audience research: developments and constraints' in Hafez, Kai (ed.), *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

Arouri, Fathi A., 'Non-Jordanians working in Jordan' in *Cooperation Project on the social integration of immigrants, migration, and the movement of persons* (Brussels: European Commission, 2007).

Barth, Frederick, 'Are Islamists nationalists or internationalists?' in Goldmann, Kjell (ed.), *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Cram, L., 'Imagining the union: A case of banal Europeanism?' in Wallace, H. (ed.), *Whose Europe? Interlocking dimensions of European integration* (London: MacMillan, 2001).

Dajani, N & Najjar, O., 'Status of media in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan,' in Johnston, D. H. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of international media and communications*, Vol. 4, (San Diego: San Diego Press, 2003).

Hobsbawm, Eric, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions,' in Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

Hutchinson, John, 'Hot and banal nationalism: The nationalization of the masses', in Delanty, G. and Kumar, K. (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and nationalism*, (London: Sage, 2006).

Hinnebusch, Raymond 'The politics of identity in Middle Eastern International Relations,' in Fawcett, Louise (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: OUP, 2005 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2009]).

Farah, Tawfic, 'Attitudes to the Nation and the State in Arab Public Opinion Polls', in Luciani, G. and Salame, G. (eds.), *The Politics of Arab Integration* (Croom Helm, New York 1988).

Lowe, Robert, 'The *serhildan* and the Kurdish national story in Syria,' in Robert Lowe and Gareth Stansfield (eds.), *The Kurdish Policy Imperative* (London: Chatham House, 2010).

Lynch, Marc, 'Jordan's Identity and Interests,' in Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Kedar, Mordechai, 'In Search of Legitimacy: Assad's Islamic Image in the Syrian Official Press,' in Ma'oz, Moeshe, Ginat, Joseph, and Winckler, Onn, (eds.), *Modern Syria: From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East* (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).

Kraidy, Marwan M., 'From Activity to Interactivity: The Arab audience' in Hafez, Kai, (ed.), *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

Maffi, Irene, 'New museographic trends in Jordan: The strengthening of the nation' in Joffe, George, (ed.), *Jordan in transition 1990-2000* (London: Hurst & Co., 2002).

Notzold, Katharina, 'The political elites dominance over the visual space: a qualitative and quantitative content study of Lebanese Television,' in Hafez, Kai, (ed.), *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

Sadowski, Yahya, 'The Evolution of Political Identity in Syria,' Telhami, Shibley and Barnett, Michael, (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Salamandra, Christa, 'Syrian Television Makers between Secularism and Islamization,' in Hafez, Kai, (ed.), *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

Sivan, Emmanuel, 'Arab Nationalism in the Age of Islamic Resurgence', in Jankowski, J & Gershoni, I (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Suleiman, Michael, 'The Role of Education in Domestic and Inter-Arab Integration' in Luciani, G and Salame, G (eds.), *The Politics of Arab Integration* (New York: Croom Helm, 1988).

Telhami, Shibley, "Power, Legitimacy and Peace-Making in Arab Coalitions: The New Arabism," in Binder, L. (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1999).

Tibi, Bassam, 'From Pan-Arabism to the Community of Sovereign Arab States: redefining the Arab and Arabism in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War' in Hudson, Michael C. (ed.), *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economic of Arab Integration* (New York: Columbia, 1999).

Valbjorn, Morten 'Arab nationalism(s) in Transformation: From Arab Interstate Societies to an Arab-Islamic World Society,' in Buzan, Barry and Gonzalez-Pelaez, Ana (eds.), *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (London: Palgrave, 2009).

### **Books**

Abu-Lughod, Lila, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Aburish, Said K., *Saddam Hussein: the Politics of Revenge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001).

Amin, Samir, *The Arab Nation* (London: Zed, 1978).

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1991).

Ashton, Nigel, *King Hussein: a political life* (London: Yale University Press, 2008).

- Ayubi, Nazih, *Overstating the Arab State*, (London: IB Tauris, 1995).
- Barnett, Michael K., *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998).
- Batatu, Hanna, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables, and their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- Bauer, Martin W., & Gaskell, George, *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a Practical Handbook* (London: Sage, 2000).
- Beck, U. and Willms, J., *Conversations with Ulrich Beck*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
- Billig, Michael, *Banal Nationalism*, (London: Sage, 1995).
- Binder, L (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1999).
- Bowen, Jeremy, *Six Days: How the 1967 War Shaped the Middle East* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2003).
- Brand, Laurie A., *Jordan's Inter-Arab relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)
- Breuilly, John, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: MUP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1993).
- Buzan, Barry and Gonzalez-Pelaez, Ana (eds.), *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (London: Palgrave, 2009).
- Chatterjee, P., *The Nation and Its Fragments*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. and Katzenstein, Peter J., (eds.), *European Identity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).
- Choueiri, Youssef, *Arab nationalism: A history, nation and state in the Arab world*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
- Cleveland, William L., *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati al-Husri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- Cooke, Miriam, *Dissident Syria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- Coughlin, Con, *Saddam: the Secret Life* (London: Macmillan, 2002).
- Davis, Eric, *Memories of State: Politics, history and collective identity in Modern Iraq* (London: University of California Press, 2005).
- Dawisha, Adeed, *Arab nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
- Dawisha, Adeed and Zartman, I. William (eds.), *Beyond coercion: the Durability of the Arab state* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

- Dawn, C. Ernest, *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1973).
- Delanty, Gerard, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995).
- Delanty, G. and Kumar, K. (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and nationalism*, (London: Sage, 2006).
- Edensor, Tim, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
- Fawcett, Louise (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: OUP, 2005 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2009]).
- Fisk, Robert. *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- Fromkin, David, *A Peace to End all Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East 1914-1922* (London: Penguin, 1991).
- Gabanyi, Anneli Ute, *The Ceausescu Cult: Propaganda and Power Policy in Communist Romania* (Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 2000).
- Gaffney, Patrick, *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
- Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983 [2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2009]).
- Gelvin, James L., *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).
- George, Alan, *Jordan: Living in the Crossfire*, (London: Zed, 2005).
- George, Alan, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (London: Zed, 2003).
- Gerges, Fawaz, *The Superpowers and The Middle East: Regional and International Politics 1955-67* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994)
- Glain, Stephen, *Dreaming of Damascus: Arab voices from a region in turmoil* (London: John Murray, 2004).
- Goldmann, Kjell et al. (eds.), *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Post-Cold War Era*, (London: Routledge, 2000).
- Goodarzi, Jubin M., *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2006),
- Habib, Randa, *Hussein and Abdullah* (London: Saqi, 2010).
- Hafez, Kai (ed.), *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (New York: Continuum, 2008).
- Halliday, Fred, *Arabia without Sultans* (London: Saqi, 1974 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2002]).
- Halliday, Fred, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

- Halliday, Fred, *The Middle East in International Relations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).
- Hammond, Andrew, *Pop Culture Arab World! Media, Arts and Lifestyle*, (Oxford: ABC Cleo, 2005)
- Handley, PM, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New York: Yale University Press, 2006).
- Harik, Judith Palmer, *Hezbollah: the changing face of terrorism* (London: IB Tauris, 2005).
- Hechter, Michael *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).
- Hinnebusch, Raymond, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
- Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Syria: Revolution from above* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).
- Hopwood, Derek, *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).
- Hudson, Michael C., (ed.), *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economic of Arab Integration* (New York: Columbia, 1999).
- Humphreys, Stephen R., *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- Jankowski, J & Gershoni, I (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia, 1997).
- Johnston, D. H. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of international media and communications Vol. 4* (San Diego: San Diego press, 2003).
- Joffe, George, (ed.), *Jordan in transition 1990-2000* (London: Hurst & Co., 2002).
- Kassir, Samir, *Being Arab* (London: Verso, 2006).
- Kerr, Malcolm H., *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abdel Nasser and His Rivals 1958-70* (London: OUP, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1971).
- Khaldidi, R, Anderson, L, Muslih, M & Simon R, (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
- Khoury, Philip S., *Syria and the French mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism* (London: Tauris, 1987).
- Kienle, Eberhard, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: the conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989* (London: Tauris, 1990)
- Kienle, Eberhard (ed.), *Contemporary Syria: liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace* (London: British Academic Press, 1994).

- Klaushofer, Alex, *Paradise Divided: A Portrait of Lebanon* (London: Signal, 2007).
- Lama, Dalai, *Freedom in Exile: The autobiography of his Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).
- Lane, Christel, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: the Soviet Case* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981).
- Lawson, Fred H., *Constructing International Relations in the Arab world* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- Layne, Linda L., *Home and Homeland: the Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- Lesch, David W., *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Assad and Modern Syria*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
- Leverett, Flynt, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).
- Lewis, Bernard, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*, (London: Phoenix, 1998).
- Lewis, David, *The Temptations of Tyranny in Central Asia* (London: Hurst & Co., 2008).
- Long, Jerry M., *Saddam's War of Words: Politics, Religion and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).
- Lowe, Robert and Stansfield, Gareth (eds.), *The Kurdish Policy Imperative* (London: Chatham House, 2010).
- Luciani, G and Salame, G (eds.), *The Politics of Arab Integration* (New York: Croom Helm, 1988).
- Lynch, Marc, *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- Lynch, Marc, *Voices of the New Arab public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
- Maalouf, Amin, *In the Name of Identity* (New York: Arcade, 2001 [1996]).
- Ma'oz, Moshe, *Assad: Sphinx of Damascus* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988).
- Ma'oz, Moshe, Ginat Joseph, and Winckler, Onn, (eds.), *Modern Syria: From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East* (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).
- Ma'oz, Moshe, *Syria and Israel: from war to peacemaking?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)
- Martin, Bradley K., *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004).
- Mayall, James, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).



- McClean, Ian and McMillan, Alistair, *Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).
- Miles, Hugh, *Al-Jazeera*, (London: Abacus, 2005).
- Motyl, Alexander J., *Revolutions, Nations, Empires: conceptual Limits and Theoretical Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- Mufti, Malik, *Sovereign creations: pan-Arabism and political order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996).
- Owen, Roger, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992 [3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2004]).
- Ozkirimli, Umut, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- Ozkirimli, Umut, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave, 2000).
- Pennell, C. R., *Morocco since 1830: A History* (London: Hurst & Co., 2000).
- Perthes, Volker, *Syria Under Bashar Al-Assad: Modernisation and the Limits of Change (Adelphi Papers)* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).
- Perthes, Volker. *The political economy of Syria under Asad* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 1997).
- Picard, Elizabeth, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country: Myths and Realities of the Wars in Lebanon* (New York: Holmes & Meier; 1996).
- Pipes, Daniel, *Greater Syria: the History of an Ambition* (Oxford: OUP, 1990).
- Raban, Jonathan, *Arabia Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 1979).
- Rabil, Robert G., *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2006).
- Rinnawi, Khalil, *Instant Nationalism: McArabism, Al-Jazeera, and Transnational Media in the Arab World* (New York: University Press America, 2006).
- Robins, Philip, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).
- Rogan, Eugene, *The Arabs: A History* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).
- Rubin, Barry, *The Truth about Syria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- Rugh, William, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio and Television in Arab Politics* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).
- Ryan, Curtis R., *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah* (London: Boulder, 2002).
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).
- Sakr, Naomi, *Arab Television Today*, (London: IB Tauris, 2007).

- Sakr, Naomi, *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2001).
- Salamandra, Christa, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).
- Salibi, Kamal, *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: Tauris, 1988).
- Schenker, David, *Dancing with Saddam: The Strategic Tango of Jordanian-Iraqi Relations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003)
- Shlaim, Avi, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Penguin, 2007).
- Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, (London: Penguin, 2001).
- Seale, Patrick, *Assad of Syria: the Struggle for the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 1988).
- Seale, Patrick, *The Struggle for Syria* (London: OUP, 1965).
- Sifry, Micah L., & Cerf, Christopher, *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (London: Times Books, 1991).
- Smith, Anthony D., *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Smith, Anthony D., *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
- Stothard, Peter, *30 Days: A Month at the Heart of Blair's War* (London: Harper Collins, 2003).
- Tatham, Steve, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006).
- Telhami, Shibley and Barnett, Michael, (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- Tonnesson, Stein and Antlov, Hans (eds.), *Asian Forms of the Nation* (London: Curzon, 1996).
- Tumarkin, Nina, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- Van Dam, Nikolaos, *The struggle for power in Syria: politics and society under Asad and the Ba'th party* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995)
- Van Dam, Nikolaos, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics, 1961-1980* (London: Croom Helm, 1979 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.1981]).
- Wallace, H (ed.), *Who's Europe? Interlocking Dimensions of European Integration* (London: MacMillan, 2001).
- Walt, Stephen M., *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1987).
- Weber, Eugen, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernisation of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

Wedeen, Lisa, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Wedeen, Lisa, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Wieland, Carsten, *Syria at Bay: Secularism, Islamism, and "Pax Americana"* (London: Hurst & Co., 2005).

Yamani, Mai, *Changed Identities: The Challenge if the New Generation in Saudi Arabia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000).

Yildiz, Kerim, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

Zachs, Fruma, *The Making of Syrian Identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth Century Beirut* (Boston: Brill, 2005).

Zisser, Eyal, *Assad's legacy: Syria in Transition* (London: Hurst & Co., 2001)

Zisser, Eyal, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Assad and the First Years in Power* (London: IB Tauris, 2007).

**Appendix I: Images of the leader in Syria and Jordan**



A. 'Yes for the beating heart of Arabism', Damascus 2009;  
 B. 'Syria: God is her protector, Assad is her Shepherd', Damascus 2009



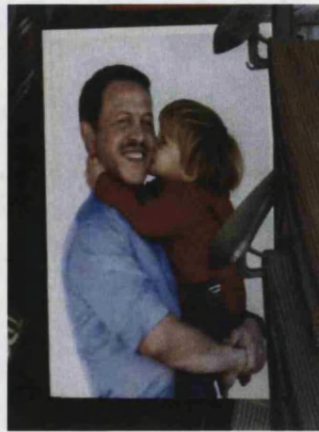
C. 'The eye doctor in the eyes,' Aleppo 2009; D. Guild of Trade and Industry of Lattakia, Lattakia 2009



E. Pharmacy sign, Lattakia 2009; F. Amman airport, Amman 2009



G. Hashemite dynasty, Zarqa 2009; H. Abdullah in Football shirt, Amman 2009



I. Abdullah, Zarqa 2009; J. Abdullah 'Municipality of Greater Irbid', Irbid 2009; K. Abdullah and son, Amman 2009



L. 'We are all Jordan; Municipality of Greater Irbid,' Irbid 2009

All photographs taken by Christopher J. O. Phillips

## Appendix II: Leaders' speeches in Syria and Jordan

### **A. Speech delivered by Bashar al-Assad on his inauguration as President of Syria, Syrian Parliament, July 2000. (Abridged)**

(Source: [www.al-bab.com](http://www.al-bab.com); <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/countries/syria/bashar00a.htm> accessed 13/11/08)

“As I stand today in this gracious Parliament all I can do is to start my address by thanking the Almighty God for granting us the strength in this resolute country and for providing us with the appropriate means that helped us bear the painful tragedy that has befallen all of us. I would also like to thank you all for the precious trust you have put in me and which you have expressed through your endorsement of what was contained in the letter from the Regional Leadership of the Baath Arab Socialist Party that included nominating me to the post of President of the Republic. I truly appreciate all the efforts you have exerted in your deliberations relating to the contents of this letter, these deliberations that revealed your high sense of responsibility and your abundant feeling of love for your country.

From behind this podium I would like to express a very special thank to all our people, men and women, old and young, inside and outside Syria who bestowed upon me their trust through voting in the referendum and through their active participation in this national duty. I would also like to thank them for all the love and loyalty they expressed to me which had a great effect on me and granted me strength and optimism in the future.

The result of the referendum is an expression of the will of the people and there is nothing I can do except to respond to the will of the people and to willingly accept to carry the mission I am asked to carry and shoulder the burdens and tasks related to fulfilling my duty during these very delicate and sensitive circumstances which our country, our nation and the world at large are going through at the moment. I shall try my very best to lead our country towards a future that fulfils the hopes and legitimate ambitions of our people.

These tasks are both very difficult and very easy.

These tasks are very easy because the great leader, Hafez al-Assad has prepared for us a firm ground, solid basis and a great heritage of values and principles which he defended and adhered to till he parted with us and moved to the after life. Added to this the infrastructure and the great achievements in all fields and throughout the country that will enable us to launch our work strongly and confidently towards a future we all desire. Yet, these tasks are difficult because the approach of the great leader, Hafez al-Assad, was a very special and unique approach and therefore it is not easy to emulate it especially as we remember that we are required not just to maintain it but to develop it as well. This undoubtedly requires great efforts and work at all levels with the aim of building on the basis of what has been achieved in the glorious period of Assad to continue with what has been achieved and to multiply the steps determined to overcome the difficulties and cope with the challenges without giving up our national principles ordained in our hearts and minds. In all this we have to imitate his wisdom by transforming sorrow to a creative energy and the painful event to continuous work and achievement...

Brothers and Sisters.

As we are talking about every thing that concerns our people at the domestic as well as external fronts we should not forget that there are the unknown soldiers who do not exert efforts only but who pay with their souls without any price. They are the sons of our military forces, the guardians of our country, the source of our pride and the symbol of bravery and heroism who were and will remain to be ready to defend our country and support our brothers. Our military forces shall remain an example of honour, and perfect national and responsible behaviour and shall always remain the focus of our great attention in order to remain able to carry out their duties whenever they are called upon. All our love and appreciation to the members of our glorious army and our high respect and loyalty to the innocent martyrs who fell in battles of honour and duty. I shall not forget to mention our brave people on the Golan who cling tenaciously to their country and their Arab nationality rejecting Zionist existence in all its forms and we say to them we are with you and our steadfastness together is the guarantee that our land will be liberated.

In Lebanon, the brave national resistance wrote the best anthem of heroism and martyrdom and shall always remain in its path and achievement and example that will live long with future generations.

Our dear people, my trust in you is infinite and so is my love to you. I hope you will allow me to emphasize to you a fact I feel that the man you have known and loved some of his merits and exchanged trust and love with him will not change at all once he assumes his post. He came out of the people and lived with them and shall remain one of them.

You may expect to see him every where whether in the work place or on the streets or in your picnics in order to learn from you and sharpen his determination by his contact with you and shall work for you as he has always done. The man who has become a president is the same man who was a doctor and an officer and first and foremost is the citizen.

May God bless you all.”

**B. Speech delivered by Bashar al-Assad on his second inauguration as President of Syria, Syrian Parliament, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007. (Abridged)**

(Source: Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA); <http://www.sana.org/eng/21/2007/07/18/129596.htm> accessed 13/11/08)

“Mr Speaker of the People’s Assembly,

Ladies and gentlemen members of the Assembly,

Sisters and brothers,

Speaking to you on this national day while embarking on a new phase of our national process, I am overwhelmed by different feelings which have been growing inside me since the people has chosen, seven years ago, to make me its leader. These feelings have become my most valued resource which inspires my every action, responsibility or decision. I feel love, appreciation, pride, and gratitude towards a great country and a proud people, towards my larger Syrian family who have engulfed me with a flood of noble emotions and provided me with power and will in difficult times...

Sisters and brothers,

We are before a new phase based on the achievements of the past in as much as it avoids its pitfalls and weaknesses. It will be enriched by experiences of the past in as much as it addresses difficulties and stumbles. I am all hope that I will achieve with you all our national ambitions the foundations of which we shall lay with our own hands and insure with our will the conditions for their achievement.

I look forward to the near future from the reality of the past which we lived together with its difficulties and successes, and today with its challenges and hopes, and I see Syria safe and assured enjoying stability, growth and prosperity. I see it strong with its people and their determination, self confident and confident in the steps she is taking and confident in its liberation project. At the heart of our Syria is the steadfast Golan which I can see returning to its mother country. I am fully confident of that. I salute our steadfast people in the Golan and our freedom fighters in prison sacrificing themselves for its sake. I salute them for their patriotic stances.

Here I must salute, with you, members of our armed forces the symbol of our steadfastness and pride, those who keep abreast with the march of our people, work silently and determinedly to maintain the honour of their country and their nation and stay fully alert so that the Syrian people continues to enjoy safety and dignity.

Dear sisters and brothers, I address you with all respect, appreciation, and love. I want us to make every possible effort to build Arab Syria, the model in its prosperity and progress as it is the model of steadfastness

I want you to be optimistic despite all these circumstances. This nation has known many invaders throughout history. They destroyed mosques and churches, burnt libraries and killed scientists and resistance men. But they have all gone and we remained with our nation, our heritage, our identity and our language.

Today, history repeats itself. They have not learnt the lesson. We did. Here is the lively spirit of this nation moving everywhere announcing its existence to the world that it is alive in the heart of every resistance man and declaring that it will triumph despite the pain. As for them, they will disappear once again.

We remain the owners and lovers of this land; we live on it, hold its soil sacred and bequeath its eternal love to one generation after another.”

As for me, I shall remain as you have known me, one of you, I work for you, I drink with you from the spring of patriotism and pan-Arabism and breath the blessings of God and the people.”

**C. President Bashar al-Assad addresses the Arab League, Damascus, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008. (Abridged)**

(Source: Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA); [www.sana.org/eng](http://www.sana.org/eng), accessed 13/11/08)

“Your Excellencies and Highnesses Dear brothers and sisters,

On my behalf and on behalf of the Syrian Arab people, I extend to you a very warm welcome in your country, Syria, which receives you today with love, respect and sincere hope that this meeting among brothers is going to be a beneficial meeting for the Arab nation whose sons and daughters are looking forward to the achievement of solidarity, dignity and prosperity for this nation at a critical juncture of its modern history.

The convening of this Arab summit in Syria at this critical stage is a great honour and responsibility which we appreciate due to our strong belief in the importance of joint Arab work and its significance to our Arab nation that aspires to take its esteemed place in today's world.

We tried our utmost to prepare the right conditions to make this summit a success, and we tried to overcome many of the obstacles which stood in its way. Especially as we all recognize the difficult stage and the sensitive developments evinced by our nation, to the extent that it is not an exaggeration to say that we are no longer on the brink of danger but in its midst and we could feel its direct effects on our countries and people.

Every day passing without making a decisive decision that serves our Arab national interests makes the possibility of evading catastrophic results more remote and far reaching. However different our opinions may be about the nature of these dangers, their causes and the best ways to face them (and it is only normal that members of the same family may entertain different opinions about the same issue), what is beyond doubt is that we are all in the same boat, facing turbulent currents, and there is no doubt that we have no alternative to consulting, coordinating and working with each other to unify our stands, regain our rights and achieve growth and development for our countries.

We live in a world that is passing through extremely important changes which are basically initiated and mapped by great international powers. This has incited many countries in the world to formulate their own regional blocs which consolidate their powers and enhance their interests, sometimes without initially having any thing in common among them. How natural and logical it is, then, for us, the Arabs, who constitute a natural national gathering that possesses all factors of success, that by far exceeds the factors enjoyed by any other regional bloc, to group and coordinate our efforts together? This becomes even more pressing in view of the challenges which are threatening our inner strength, making some of our Arab countries open fields for conflicts among others, though assuming the shape of a conflict among our people, or making us a target for aggression, killing and violence exercised by our enemies....

Your Excellencies and Highnesses It is true that the time of the summit is calculated in days and hours, but it is an important juncture during which we add few blocs to the building we aspire to construct. It is true that what is important is not what we say at the summits, but rather, what we do in between the summits, but the summit remains essential to decide the right direction and the necessary speed of what we intend to do later. It is true that, in both words and deeds, we are open to cooperation with the others in the world, but what is truer is that this cooperation will bear fruit, only, when we rely on ourselves.

The common denominators that combine us as Arabs are many and fundamental; as for points of difference, if they fall under the framework of concern for our nation, there is no doubt, then, that the solid building, that we aspire to achieve for our Arab project, will be completed. I welcome you once again, my gracious brothers wishing you the best of times in your country and among your people. Wassalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatu Allahi Wa Barakatuhu."

**D. President Bashar al-Assad addresses the 4th General Conference of the Journalists Union, Al-Umawyeen Conference Palace, Damascus 15<sup>th</sup> August 2006. (Abridged)**  
(Source: Syrian Arab News Agency; [www.sana.org/eng](http://www.sana.org/eng), accessed 13/11/08)

"Ladies and gentlemen,

The heroic Lebanese national resistance has written with its blood and its people's sacrifice an eternal epic in the history of the nation, destroyed the legend of the invincible army, buried under its feet the policy of surrender and humiliation and proved that the power of faith in land and homeland can defeat the power of armaments.

I express my appreciation and admiration to the men of resistance; I salute with great reverence our noble martyrs and I salute the brotherly Lebanese people whose steadfastness was the incubator of this resistance.

We say to those who accuse Syria that it stands by the resistance, and this accusation is not a new one at all. We say to those who accuse Syria that if standing by the resistance is a mortifying sin, then it is an honour and a source of pride for the Syrian people. This resistance is a badge of honour on the chest of each Arab citizen not only in Syria. By each drop of sweat, each drop of blood, each rocket that destroys a tank and by each Israeli soldier defeated in Lebanon, we consider that there is a badge of honour to be worn on the chest of Arab citizens.



I would like to say to the Syrian Arab people that the word "proud" is not enough at all to express what a human being feels towards the greatness of your support to our Lebanese brothers. You were great when some persons wanted you to look small overwhelmed by malevolence. But, the great people of Syria always surprises the adversary by what is not expected. You dealt a blow to those who wanted to create a division between Syria and Lebanon. You were magnificent in your comprehending the magnitude of the conspiracy, and you were very strong in your reaction towards this conspiracy. In brief, you were the beating heart of Arabism with every sense of the word regarding the heat that will rise and the meaning which will be more powerful when we liberate the Golan by our hands, will and determination.

The destiny of Syria is to be proud of Arabism and to defend and maintain it because it is the only base for a bright and honourable future we build for our children. We have to implant in our hearts and minds that there is no place in this world but for the strong. Strength starts by the power of mind, will and faith and this is the base of resistance and the only way to achieve victory.

However, waiting for others to solve our problems, keeping faith in the international community as an alternative to the faith in our abilities, and yielding our mentality to fear and our will to others, is not only the adverse of wisdom but absolute ignorance.

I would like to repeat my salutations to the journalists and I wish your conference all success.

Thank you."

**E. King Abdullah II, Opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary Session of Jordan's 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament, Speech from the Throne, Amman, Jordan, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1999. (Abridged)**

(Source: Jordanian Embassy to the United States;

<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/HMKASpeech110199.htm> accessed 13/11/08)

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate  
Prayers and Salutations on the Noblest and the Most Honourable Faithful Arab and Hashemite Prophet Mohammad.

Honourable Senators  
Honourable Deputies  
Peace, God's Mercy and Blessings be upon you

In the name of Allah and with His blessings, we inaugurate the third session of the Thirteenth Parliament, being the first ordinary session in our reign; a reign of will and tenacity for the prosperity and advancement of Jordan, defending the causes of its nation and the future of its generations, in redemption of the great message that our forefathers left us to which they sacrificed immensely and in fulfilment of the noble aims His Majesty the late King Hussein endeavoured to establish, thus creating this lofty existence that we inherited and the great respect we see wherever we go that nestled in our conscience and hearts.

Since the first moment God honoured me to bear the first responsibility in Jordan, I have pledged myself to serve the loyal Jordanians who are Arabs in their presence, conscience and message, whom I cherish belonging to, and I am proud of their genuineness, their ability to face challenges and difficulties, their struggle to fulfil their duties, defend their nation's causes and participate in shaping its future which matches up to its history and its great human and civilised message.

My esteem for your Honourable Council is unlimited. Your council is the symbol of the free Jordanian will and it is the stronghold of our democratic path and its fortress. It is the beacon of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. In recognition of this council's sacred message and the great national responsibilities it shoulders, my government will cooperate and consult with your Honourable Council over all national issues and causes, incarnation with the Constitution and within the framework of the detachment of the three authorities, creating a balance among them, specifying the responsibilities and duties that each of them holds...

Jordan has been and will remain, God willing, the inheritor of the message of the Great Arab Revolt and its noble aims and aspirations in freedom, unity and a better life, and it will always be Arab in its loyalty, position and message. Stemming from this clear vision, the inner Arab depth will remain for Jordan the base of all its relations. No relation will precede those of Jordan with its Arab brethren.

On this basis, Jordan will continue its endeavours to purify Arab relations, transcend Arab disputes and will continue to support joint Arab institutions, work for the purpose of uniting and mobilising its efforts in a framework of cooperation and

integration aimed at a better future for the coming generations. Our relations with each Arab brethren state are based upon compassion, brotherhood, respect, trust, cooperation and non-interference with others' internal affairs.

My government will continue its efforts in advancing the peace process and allowing it to achieve the sought advancement on all tracks. It will continue to support our Palestinian brethren until they regain their rights and establish their independent state on their national soil with Jerusalem as its capital. Since we believe that the Palestinian cause is the core of conflict in this region, no aspired peace will be achieved without a fair settlement to this conflict.

As for our brethren in Syria and Lebanon, we will not fail to support them regain their rights and occupied land until a comprehensive, lasting and just peace is achieved as aspired by the region's peoples.

As for our brethren in Iraq and Sudan, we share their suffering under the blockade enforced on them, and we invite the international community to fulfil its human and moral duty in lifting the blockade on these two peoples and putting an end to this suffering which has exceeded all limits. In this regard, we confirm our firm position concerning safeguarding the unity and integrity of Iraq.

I steadfastly believe, in light of what I know, of your true appreciation of the hefty responsibility you bear, that you are able to enlist all capabilities to work, build, produce and establish fruitful cooperation between the executive and legislative authorities. The nation needs the efforts of all its sons and national institutions. Let us work together to build Jordan the model and to serve our Arab Nation.

I salute you and salute each brother and sister in this dear nation.

May Allah be with us.

*"I wanted nothing but reform so far as I am able, and with none but Allah is the direction of my affair to the right issue; on Him do I rely and to Him do I return."*

Peace, God's Mercy and Blessings be upon you."

#### **F. Speech of His Majesty King Abdullah II to Muta University Graduates, Muta University, Kerak, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2008. (Full text)**

(Source: King Abdullah's website;

[http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main\\_page=0&lang\\_hmka1=1](http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main_page=0&lang_hmka1=1) accessed 13/11/08)

"In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate,

Dear Brothers the Graduates,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May God grant you good health.

On this blessed day, we celebrate the graduation of this group of the homeland's chivalrous knights who today become officers in the Arab Army and security institutions and who will have the honour of practical service in work, sacrifice and giving. They will work side by side with their brothers and comrades in arms - officers and soldiers - who have dedicated their souls to the defence of this country, its security and stability.

On this day and on this occasion, I extend to the graduates of the twenty-first class, the Khalid Bin Al Walid Battalion, my greetings, along with my feelings of pride, and my sincere congratulations on their success and achievement in acquiring the knowledge, preparation and training that will enable them to perform their duties and responsibilities in the future. I would like also to extend my greetings and express my appreciation to the Muta University family, its professors, trainers and administrators, for their distinguished efforts and ceaseless giving in preparing this group of graduates and previous ones.

Dear Brothers, Graduates,

As of today, each one of you will enter the fields of honour, work and dedication, for you are the homeland's devoted soldiers. Difficulties and challenges will only enhance your determination and strength and your allegiance to the principles and goals of the Great Arab Revolt, which strove to liberate and unite the nation and defend the values of right, justice and freedom. I am confident that each and every one of you realises that the homeland's security and

stability supersede all other interests and considerations. For all of us, the first priority is to protect this homeland and preserve its progress and achievements.

The armed forces is a major partner in comprehensive development, especially as it concerns training human resources, establishing productive enterprise and providing basic services of education and healthcare.

I want you and every member of the armed forces and security institutions to be assured of our keenness to support these institutions through modernisation and development, preparation and training and the provision of the latest weaponry and equipment. We are also keen to continually improve their living conditions and provide decent housing to the families of servicemen. We also owe the retirees and families of martyrs and injured military personnel their due care, attention and appreciation for their service and the sacrifices they have made for the homeland.

With the determination of the sons and daughters of the one Jordanian family, Jordan will remain an oasis of security and stability and a model of progress and prosperity. It will be able to face challenges and realise the greatest achievements.

Once again, we extend our greetings and appreciation to each officer and soldier in the Arab Army and security institutions and offer our congratulations to the graduating officers...with God's help, spirits will be high and the flag will wave high.

Peace, God's mercy and blessings be upon you.”

### **G. His Majesty King Abdullah II Speech to the 19th Arab League Summit, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2007. (Abridged)**

(Source: King Abdullah's website;

[http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main\\_page=0&lang\\_hmka1=1](http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main_page=0&lang_hmka1=1) accessed 13/11/08)

*“In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate*

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz,  
Your Majesties, Your Excellencies, and Your Highnesses,  
Kings, Presidents and Emirs of Arab States,

Peace, God's mercy and blessings be upon you,

Allow me first to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, to the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its government, for hosting the 19th Arab Summit. We value the tremendous efforts exerted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to enhance Arab solidarity and unify the Arab and Islamic Nation's stance. Thanks are also due to His Excellency the Sudanese President Field Marshall Omar Al-Bashir for his presidency of the 18th summit. We also renew our thanks to our Arab League and its Secretary General Amr Moussa on efforts exerted to convene this summit and ensure its success, God willing.

This summit convenes at a time when our Arab Nation is passing through the most dangerous stages of its contemporary history. The challenges and dangers facing our nation and endangering its security, identity, and future may be greater and more serious than any other test that the nation has faced in modern times. The Palestinian issue, which is the Arabs' core concern and the main cause of conflict in this region, has reached a stalemate, and the Palestinian people continue to suffer under occupation. The Iraqi people too are exposed to the worst forms of violence, killing and sedition....

Your Majesties, Excellencies and Highnesses,

The world around us is changing and moving forward. We also look to move forward. Hence our countries are in dire need of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, to enable us to build societies and update and modernize our fields of science, industry, agriculture and health. Hence we call for the establishment of an Arab centre for the peaceful use of atomic energy. We will continue to demand that Israel become a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation agreement, and that its atomic reactors be subjected to international inspection, just as those of other states in the world are. This will realize security for all the countries in the region, and guarantee that the region is free from weapons of mass destruction, which threaten the future of all humanity.

Finally, we reaffirm the need for this summit to suggest practical steps to lay the cornerstone for institutionalized and effective Arab action that will restore confidence in the Arab order, assert its credibility and enhance solidarity as a basis for cooperation, complementarily and consensus. And again we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for hosting and sponsoring this summit, and for His Majesty's continued efforts to unite Arab ranks and strengthen the Islamic stance through the major role assumed by the Kingdom in the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organization of Islamic Conference.

May God grant us all success in all that is good for our nation.

Peace, God's mercy and blessings be upon you.”

#### **H. His Majesty King Abdullah's address to the nation, Amman, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2005. (Full Text)**

(Source: King Abdullah's website;

[http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main\\_page=0&lang\\_hmka1=1](http://www.kingabdullah.jo/main.php?main_page=0&lang_hmka1=1) accessed 13/11/08)

“I would like to begin by extending my profound condolences to the families of all the innocent victims who were killed, and we are praying for a swift recovery for all of those who were injured.

This is not the first time that Jordan has been a target of terrorism. It is also not the only country that has been a victim of terrorism; there have been many countries in the region and throughout the world which have been similarly terrorized by attacks of greater scope and intensity.

We know, however, that Jordan has been targeted more than any other country for several reasons, among them, its role and its message defending the essence of Islam -- the religion of moderation and tolerance that abhors the terrorists who kill innocents in Islam's name, even as Islam is innocent of such crimes.

Let it be clear to everyone that we will pursue these terrorists and those who aide them; we will reach them wherever they are, pull them from their lairs and submit them to justice.

Jordan does not bow to coercion. We will not be intimidated into altering our position, nor will we abandon our convictions or forfeit our role in the fight against terrorism in all its forms. To the contrary, every act of terrorism strengthens our resolve to adhere to our convictions, and to confront, with all means at our disposal, those who seek to undermine the security and stability of this country.

Our confidence in the security services and their ability to protect the security of this country and its stability remains unwavering. We have succeeded in preventing many planned attacks on this country. For every infrequent success terrorists have had in carrying out one of their crimes, we have had many more successes in foiling their plots.

I appeal to every citizen - man and woman - of this country to consider himself or herself a soldier and a security officer. Each one of you has a responsibility to protect your country. Circumstances require each and every citizen to be cautious and vigilant, and to cooperate with the security services to prevent any attack on the security and stability of this country. We must be united in confronting these terrorists, who have neither a religion nor a conscience.

I am confident that the patriots of Jordan - men and women - will maintain, as they always have, a watchful eye over the country and its security, and will be the first line of defence in protecting Jordan and its achievements. Jordan will continue, with the help of God and the determination of its people, to overcome evil.

Finally, all my thanks and appreciation go to our security, military and civil institutions, as well as to the citizens of Jordan who have acted as one in confronting the attacks on our precious capital, Amman.”