

“Those Who Pronounce the *Ḍād*”: Language and Ethnicity in the Nationalist Poetry of Fuʿad al-Khatib (1880–1957)

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The *Ḍād* is a letter of the Arabic alphabet that represents a sound which Arabs claim that only they pronounce. The epithet *luḡhat al-Ḍād*, the language of the *Ḍād*, therefore singles out the Arabic language as, supposedly, distinctive and exclusive to the Arab ethnic community, or, in other words: for *al-nāṭiqūn bi-l-Ḍād*, or *those who pronounce the Ḍād*. The veracity of the notion that the *Ḍād* may be unique to the Arabic language is not what is at stake here. However, the notion of distinctiveness that it represents goes back to the times of the early Islamic conquests, when Arabs asserted their dominance, ridiculing non-Arabs' inability to pronounce the language correctly. The epithet was still used at the turn of the twentieth century to challenge Ottoman hegemony.¹ The letter *Ḍād* became a trope for the Arabic language as a whole, and, as this chapter illustrates, a marker of an ethnical boundary to speakers of other languages, illustrating the processes of vernacularization and nationalization of the classical Arabic language. As *luḡhat al-Ḍād*, classical Arabic was no longer a religious and literary idiom shared by Muslims across a range of ethnicities and a *lingua franca* in a region shared by various Arab and non-Arab religious communities, but a standardized language that members of a specific ethnicity claimed for themselves.

The poetry of Fuʿad al-Khatib (1880–1957) is exemplary for the cultural labour that went into this process of deliberate demarcation. For al-Khatib the language was not only what distinguished the true adherents to the Arab nation from others, but it was also under threat of being encroached upon by Western languages via imperialist dominance. As we shall see, for al-Khatib reciting a poem meant discharging a weapon in order to control linguistic shape and semantic heritage, and thus to preserve distinction and dignity.

1 On the letter *Ḍād*, see Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 55–60. All translations from Arabic are the author's.

Fuʿad al-Khatib moved in a nationalist universe that gained shape in the years around World War I. The late Ottoman period in general, and the war in particular, triggered a great deal of social, political and cultural changes that also affected intellectual life and literary production.² During this time, an Arab activist such as al-Khatib could still be a universalist: a politician, a teacher and intellectual, a civil servant, and an acclaimed poet at the same time – before a class of functionaries, professional demagogues, and military men started to dominate nationalist politics in the Arab lands in the 1930s and took over power after World War II.

Al-Khatib’s own recollections and a selective presentation of documents and quotes form the basis of a biography that his daughter Ihsan published in the mid-nineties of the past century.³ Anecdotes structure the biography, based on Ihsan al-Khatib’s personal memory of her father and that of relatives she talked to. In addition, the account rests on Fuʿad al-Khatib’s poetic work and its evolution over time. His poetry is available in a *Dīwān* edited by his son, and in a recent edition of the works he wrote during the time of the Arab Revolt, published in Jordan to eulogize the Hashemite dynasty.⁴ The chronological sequence of Fuʿad al-Khatib’s *qaṣīdas* establishes a quasi-autobiographical account because his poetry was rarely composed for art’s sake alone. Like many of his contemporary colleagues, he wrote his poems as commissions or in reaction to events or experiences. They are thus a remarkable monument for the rise of a radical vision of Arab national identity among ethnically Arab intellectuals confronted with the competing and alternative imperial, Islamist, and ethnocentric narratives of the contested public spheres of the late Ottoman Empire and its successor states.⁵

2 Compare Dina Rizk Khoury, “Ambiguities of the Modern: The Great War in the Memoirs and Poetry of the Iraqis,” in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al., Studies in Global Social History 5 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, n.d.), 313–40.

3 Iḥsān Fuʿād Khaṭīb, *Wamaḍāt min ʿumr al-zaman: Qabasāt min ḥayāt al-Shaykh Fuʿād al-Khaṭīb, shāʿir al-thawra al-ʿArabiyya al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 1994).

4 Fuʿād al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, ed. Riyād al-Khaṭīb ([Cairo]: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1959); Imtīnān al-Ṣamādī, *Shiʿr Fuʿād al-Khaṭīb fi-l-thawra al-ʿArabiyya al-kubrā wa-l-Hāshimīyya* (Amman: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 2010).

5 The framing in this introduction is adapted from a chapter on Fuʿad al-Khatib in my book *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2017), 21–33.

1 The Convergence of Life, Culture and Politics

Fu'ad al-Khatib was born into a rural notable family of Sunni Muslim denomination in the village of Shhim in Lebanon's Shuf mountains, south of Beirut. His grandfather and father were both Ottoman judges.⁶ Fu'ad attended the Syrian Protestant College (later renamed AUB) from 1904 onwards and published his first articles and poems in the Beirut journal *al-Mufīd*.⁷ It was migration that turned him into a pan-Arab poet: due to differences with his father, who envisaged a medical career for his son and feared that his strong pro-Arab and anti-Ottoman convictions threatened his safety, Fu'ad first moved in with family members in Jaffa and then moved to Cairo around the time of the Young Turk revolution.

In 1910 he published the first part of his *Dīwān* and then spent the remaining years before World War I as a teacher at Gordon College in Khartoum in the Sudan.⁸ When war broke out he was in Lebanon for the birth of his second child, his daughter Ihsan, only to flee the Ottoman lands again to escape persecution as an Arab political activist.⁹ He then decided to join Sharif Husain and his Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire in the Hejaz. His family, too, was under threat of being deported by the Ottoman military authorities, but the poet managed to get them to join him in the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁰

Altogether, the al-Khatib family story fits perfectly into the grand narrative of the rise of Arab nationalism. Al-Khatib claimed that he was the first Arab from outside the Hejaz to join the Arab Revolt, a fact that – regardless of its veracity – provides an important legitimating element in Fu'ad al-Khatib's biography. His fame, even if largely vanished today, is based on the fact that he was once known as the "Poet of the Arab Revolution." Khatib developed a close rapport with the Sherif of Mecca and started to beat the drum of the latter's fame in prose and poetry, taking over editorship of the Sherif's newspaper *al-Qibla*. After the war, he became Husain's Foreign Minister in the government

6 Khaṭīb, *Wamaḍāt min 'umr al-zaman*, 16f, 35; Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 8f (introduction by the editor).

7 Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 9. On the Syrian Protestant College/AUB see Betty S. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 17–20 and passim.

8 Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, *Colonialisms* 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3–4, 7–11, 21, 51–55, 60–63, 104–7. Apparently, one of al-Khatib's students was the future Sudanese prime minister and president Isma'īl al-Azhari. Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 4f, 9; Khaṭīb, *Wamaḍāt min 'umr al-zaman*, 14.

9 Khaṭīb, *Wamaḍāt min 'umr al-zaman*, 14–20.

10 *Ibid.*, 24–26.

of the Hejaz. His poems were recited by school children throughout the Arab East.¹¹

Sherif Husain's rebellion is part of the founding myth of Arab nationalism, representing Arab revolutionary spirit and resilience against the Ottoman enemy, and exemplifying – in line with the mythology shaped during the *nahḍa*, the Arab literary renaissance period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the final wake-up call to the Arabs to throw off the Turkish yoke. Al-Khatib facilitated the broadcasting of Sherif Husayn's role in this awakening in the light of nationalist aspirations.¹² For this, the Sherif needed the service of a pan-Arab mind.

The Arab Revolt initiated a lasting relationship between the Hashemites and Fu'ad al-Khatib, and also between his family and Arabia. As a diplomat and senior political adviser, Fu'ad al-Khatib first served Sherif Hussein directly, and then represented the government of the Hejaz in Damascus during Prince, later King, Faysal's rule over Syria, until al-Khatib left in the wake of the battle of Maysalun that marked the beginning of French rule. He was again at the side of Sherif Hussein's oldest son 'Ali during his reign over the Kingdom of the Hejaz, and then of his younger brother, the Amir 'Abdallah of Transjordan, who would later become the first King of Jordan. He was also a friend of King Ghazi of Iraq because he had been his English teacher in the Hejaz. After he fell out with the Hashemites, King Ibn Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia remembered al-Khatib as a loyal spokesman of the Arab cause and after World War II honoured him with a post as the Kingdom's first Ambassador to Afghanistan, where Fu'ad al-Khatib died in 1957. He was buried in his home town Shhim, where weeds overgrow his tomb today.¹³

It is probably fair to say that al-Khatib's commitment to the Arab nationalist cause made him an uprooted man. He spent only limited periods of time in his home country of Lebanon – usually when he had to gather his thoughts and strength in order to embark on a new political project, or after one of his frequent breaks with a political mentor, writing a great deal of poetry along

11 Ibid., 22f; Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 10. On officers joining Faysal see Yücel Güçlü, “The Role of the Ottoman-Trained Officers in Independent Iraq,” *Oriente Moderno* 21,2 n.s. (2002): 125–27. On continuing Ottoman loyalty see Michael Provence, “Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43,2 (May 1, 2011): 215–20.

12 For the preceding paragraphs see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 116–205.

13 Khaṭīb, *Wamaḍāt min 'umr al-zaman*, 36–47 (the period of Faysal's rule in Damascus), 51–69 (in the Hejaz with Hussein), 75–79 (Foreign Minister under 'Ali in the Hejaz), 82–133 (with 'Abdullah in Jordan), 151–178 (in Saudi service and in Afghanistan).

the way. The periods when he pursued a political agenda were spent in countries other than his own. His life unfurled as a sort of an anti-career of Arab nationalism (unlike that of an Arab notable, a military officer, or a member of the New Effendiyya, the middle class of young professionals), in which he lived the ideals of the pan-Arab *Republic of Letters* as a nationalist poet and spent his efforts in the service of leaders who for him embodied the pan-Arab cause. He also experienced many of the crucial events in the political history of Arab nationalism either at first hand or indirectly because he was familiar or even friends with the key actors.

2 Pronouncing the *Ḍād*: Language and Identity

There are two motifs that run through Fu'ad al-Khatib's opus, from the early years prior to World War I to his death in the 1950s: the identification of Arab ethnicity with the ability to master classical Arabic ("*al-ʿarabiyya*"), and with the historical, social and geographical location of the purest state of the language as practiced by poets in the Arabian Peninsula before and during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Khatib's uprootedness and his movements throughout an Arab realm – physically between Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, the Sudan, the Arabian Peninsula and Syria as well as Jordan, and imaginatively through every place where people "pronounced the *Ḍād*" – brought him to a vision in which his true home was his language. It may also be that his perception of the Arabian Peninsula, and especially the Hejaz, of the Jahiliyya and early Islamic periods as a *chronotope* – a projection of an idealized, historically and geographically defined location intersecting with that of the author – led to his decision to join the Arab revolt, a decision based on an ethnocentric vision of nationalism (as opposed to, for instance, contemporaneous Egyptian or Syrian varieties of Arab nationalism), and conditioned by a self-image as an Arab poet. In other words, for al-Khatib the purity of one's language depended on an untainted ethnic descent and vice versa.¹⁴

This perception of an ideal state of Arabness already speaks out of Fu'ad al-Khatib's early poetry. A poem he published in the Egyptian daily *al-Ahrām* around the time of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908/9 complained about the Arabs' alienation from their roots, which al-Khatib located in the Arabian

14 For a pertinent application of the Bakhtinian *chronotope* see William Granara, "Nostalgia, Arab Nationalism, and the Andalusian Chronotope in the Evolution of the Modern Arabic Novel," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36 (2005): 59.

Peninsula where *those who pronounce the Dād* resided.¹⁵ Indeed, he took the link between language and the depth of a historically rooted identity very seriously. Stylistically, al-Khatib was a neo-classicist, but a reading of all the poetry al-Khatib wrote in his lifetime reveals that he chose particularly complex poetics in terms of structure and lexicon, with the semantics of his poetic choices subordinated to morphology and sound – at times as if he had chosen antiquated vocabulary and truncation to underline the meandering of his language. In comparison, the poetry of Ahmad Shawqi (1868–1932), the Egyptian “Prince of Poets” and the leading voice of Arabic neo-classicism, is easy to read. The predilection for rare words even influenced the prose in al-Khatib’s essays: see for example the *muqaddima* (foreword) to the second part of his *Dīwān*, published shortly after his death in 1959, in which the editor added explanatory footnotes to numerous words that, he deemed, required an explanation – a practice quite unusual for a twentieth-century prose text. Even in the first half of the twentieth century al-Khatib’s choice of style was not without alternatives. Free verse and the usage of a modernized vocabulary were used in a repertory of styles at the time. Compare and contrast, for instance, the modernism in the life and work of the Iraqi poet Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi (1863–1936). Al-Zahawi belonged to an even earlier generation of poet-intellectuals, who tried to distinguish themselves as harbingers of a new age in a period of political and social reform under Ottoman rule.¹⁶ Al-Khatib begged to differ. He even nourished a certain mistrust of print as a medium, preferring the oral presentation of his works because he was sure that anything else would lead to the corruption of his language. When he decided to bring out a second *Dīwān* shortly before his death – re-issuing the first edition of 1910, which had long been out of print, and adding a second half consisting in large parts of hitherto unpublished material – he explained that he brought a great deal of poems from obscurity to the realm of existence. He had been used to reciting his creations to a small group of friends, and then to command them to oblivion. The little that had been published had therefore been subject to corruption or had been “born out of the first passing utterance,” i.e., transcribed by others. Only recently, he had rethought this habit – maybe out of concern for his legacy, but

15 The title of the poem is “Ālām al-‘Arab wa-āmāluhum” (“Pains of the Arabs and their Hopes”), Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 25; Ṣamādī, *Shī‘r Fu‘ād al-Khaṭīb*, 27. The title used in the *Dīwān* is “Āmāl wa-Ālām.” The story of the publication of the poem is in Khaṭīb, *Wamaḍāt min ‘umr al-zaman*, 10–12. See also Wien, *Arab Nationalism*, 28, with a partial translation.

16 Dina Rizk Khoury, “Looking for the Modern: A Biography of an Iraqi Modernist,” in *Auto/biography and the Construction of Identity and Community in the Middle East*, ed. Mary Ann Fay (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 109–24.

also due to the encouragement he had received in Saudi Arabia.¹⁷ The stylistic and lexical archaisms, though, and the old-fashioned practice of presenting poetry as recitation for a specific occasion rather than wide distribution via print were clearly a part of the poet's self-styling.

3 A Language of Strength

For Fu'ad al-Khatib, Arabic was "without a doubt, [...] the greatest of the Semitic languages, the widest in scope, and the wisest in usage ...," as he wrote in the aforementioned *muqaddima*, which he entitled "*Min al-ṣaḥrā' ilā al-udabā'*," "From the Desert to the Literati." The language created bonds across the lands. The confrontation with Arabic had shown that the Romans and Persians were weak. The word al-Khatib used for "to be weak" is "*ayya/ya'ayyu*," which also has the additional meaning of "to stammer and stutter." The powerlessness of the Romans and the Persians (another common term for foreigners, and especially for Persians, that al-Khatib liked to use was "*al-a'ajim*," "the non-Arabic speakers," or "those who speak bad Arabic") was therefore not only a weakness in battle, but also a weakness of language as compared to the strength and clarity of classical Arabic. However, the poet was not sure if the dissemination of the language from the Arabian Peninsula had been all that beneficial. He complained that the students of his time had turned away from "*al-arabiyya*" and had become tired of it, as if it showed sophistication in itself when people "talked in words that were not their own and blabbered in useless ways, or boasted in faulty language." Al-Khatib was clearly proud of his knowledge of the classical lexicon, and showed this off in his poetry, holding up a mirror to the frequent usage of neologisms and loanwords by younger people. He propagated that there should be a clear distinction between original rules and neologisms, as well as inventions in the language, "like between water and a mirage in midday heat." Most crucially, though, he had someone to blame for the regrettable tendencies among the youth: the narrow-minded people who had regulated the language and taken away its ability to evolve. Though he was not explicit about it, this is probably a reference to the post-conquest grammarians who had shaped Arabic in a tighter cast than the poets of the Jahiliyya with their more flexible and creative usage of the language, probably in line with al-Khatib's argument that the early grammarians were urbanites and more often than not of non-Arab ethnical background. For him, the journey of the

¹⁷ Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 107.

language “from the desert to the literati” (as in the title of the essay) therefore meant a decline.¹⁸

Variations on the theme of what the Arabs had done to their language run through the different stages of al-Khatib’s work. Already the introduction to the early, pre-World War I part of his *Dīwān* contained a complaint on this topic. Europeans, he wrote, had certainly benefited from Arab culture in the Middle Ages, but without returning the favour. On the contrary, they had even robbed Arabs of their language and “left it stuttering and in rags.” But al-Khatib was even more bitter about the way his own people had treated their heritage, to the extent that they should even be grateful for what had been preserved of it in European museums and libraries:

I wish I knew what our sons will say about us when time passes, and that inertia and disunity are not all they see in our history. Will they send down on us waves of honour or flashes of spite? Our idleness was not enough, we even let go of our literary treasures, and trivialities distracted us from the essence, and we left the books of our fathers in the treasuries of the West, and we remained at ease. It is only good that these treasures did not vanish into oblivion, but that they were taken from our hands to the libraries of Europe, until we started to marvel at our forefathers, and to revive our glory again, and until our own products will be given back to us without delay, and they will serve to elevate scholarship ... That yesterday’s finery may return ...!¹⁹

4 Ethnic Chauvinism

Before the end of the Ottoman Empire, al-Khatib did not promote a chauvinistic version of ethnocentric nationalism in the sense that he did not yet subscribe to an image that a perceived decline of the Arabs had been due to the influx of “*aʿjīm*” elements, such as the Ottoman Turks. This view became a mainstay of Arab nationalist mythology in the interwar period. In the aforementioned poem “*Ālām al-ʿArab ...*,” a commentary on the Young Turk revolution, al-Khatib stated that the Arabs had initially welcomed the rule of the House of Osman, but he regretted that the Turks no longer did justice to them: “You [Arabs]: there is no fatherland among the Turks – for you, but still they are

¹⁸ Khaṭīb, 119, 123f; Suleiman, *The Arabic Language*, 58–59.

¹⁹ Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 13f. The translation is mine.

the lords of the land ...”²⁰ In a different poem, he opposed what he perceived as the Young Turks’ Turkification policy, but called for a brotherhood between Arabs and Turks instead.²¹ In yet another poem, which had come out a little over three months before “*Ālām al-‘Arab ...*” in the Egyptian daily *al-Ahrām*, he expressed worries about frictions between ethnicities in the empire, but confirmed the strong links between them.²²

However, al-Khatib’s ethnocentric nationalism may have facilitated the adoption of a relatively unambiguous anti-Judaism that speaks out of the works addressing the Palestine conflict, which was one of the central topics of his poetry-cum-political-commentary. In the scholarly literature there are many arguments about the nature, origins and chronology of Arab anti-Judaism in the twentieth century and its descent into the lows of anti-Semitism over the past 40 years or so. There is broad agreement that the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 marked a turning point, after which politicians and intellectuals alike were increasingly willing to adopt the language and *topoi* of European anti-Semitism.²³ Take for example a poem that al-Khatib wrote on the occasion of the outbreak of hostilities between Palestinian militias and the Haganah, as well as Jewish militias in late 1947. The poem opens a chapter in the *Dīwān* called “For the Sake of Palestine,” and itself is entitled “To Those Who Pronounce the *Ḍād*,” bringing us back to al-Khatib’s vision of the ethno-linguistic community as a community of fate with a shared responsibility to protect the integrity of the nation against outside intruders. In this, the Jews, who had participated in the linguistic and cultural community of the Arab Middle East for millennia, now became a group that was essentially

20 Ibid., 25 (quote), 28.

21 See his poem “Ayyuhā al-Turk wa-l-‘Arab” in Ibid., 31–35; Ṣamādī, *Shi‘r Fu‘ūd al-Khaṭīb*, 78–82.

22 He wrote “What are the Arabs if not Turks in their honour and vigour – what are the Turks if not Arabs in their [religious] ways” in “Ilā al-‘Arab wa-Shawkat Bāshā,” *al-Ahrām*, July 1st, 1909, p. 1. The poem praised Mahmud Shawkat Pasha’s leadership, but expressed that Arabs had doubts about his affiliation. Shawkat Pasha, who played a decisive role in the second constitutional period and in the suppression of the counter-revolution in April 1909, came from an Arabized Georgian family in Baghdad. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 20.

23 See Gudrun Krämer, “Anti-Semitism in the Muslim World: A Critical Review,” *Die Welt des Islams* 46 (2006): 243–76. This special issue contains a number of critical articles on the subject. See also Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). See also Peter Wien, *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 172–97.

foreign – al-Khatib apparently making no distinction as to whether they were of European or Middle Eastern and North African origin. He wrote:

We have a dwelling that we build and live in – in its rear are fortresses in the deserts and strongholds

On top of it is the house, what a wonderful house ... – persistent forever and unchanged since ancient times

Generations walk around it in humility – they spread the ground until it is even, and he [God?] smiles

But where, you people of Israel, is your refuge – from an attack with burning ire

Woe unto you! Is the equality of the shroud your record of ownership? – Is the equality of the shroud your fortune?

Come! Plunder them from the grave, rotten – Then wear them and declare the inheritance your inheritance.²⁴

In these lines, al-Khatib declared that the Arabs had sole ownership over the Terra Sancta, where “the house” was probably a reference to “Bayt al-Maqdis,” the Temple Mount (though the line about the people circumambulating would rather suggest that the point of reference is the Ka’ba in Mecca). He also presented the Jews as a homeless people, with no roots in the ground, no buried ancestors even, so that they had to claim the shrouds of the dead of others for themselves. He went on:

Filastin is not allowed for you as a refuge – She is not to be shared as part of the booty

She does not flow for you with honey and milk – Here are the guardians, here are volcanoes and lava.²⁵

24 Khaṭīb, *Dīwān al-Khaṭīb*, 365f.

25 *Ibid.*, 366.

Depicting the Jews as a homeless people is a European anti-Semitic stereotype, and so is the classic allegation that the Jews were the murderers of Jesus, the Christian Messiah. In a remarkable turn, al-Khatib crossed a line towards the adoption of Christian imagery in the appropriation of a European *topos* of anti-Jewish exclusion:

Oh [Jewish] nation (“*Yā qawm!*”), whichever Messiah you are going to crucify tomorrow – What is the price of betrayal for you

And how many purses count today as inheritance – when the purse of Balfour is your compensation?

God may not protect what there is in the West in terms of greed – as money is an idol there

Oh East, be a witness for history, as you have lied – people of politics; speak the truth, pen!

If the people has a soul then it saw a body – in which it lives, and the nose of death is cut off [meaning: death has been vanquished completely]²⁶

First, Jews are presented here in the role of Judas who accepts blood money in exchange for betrayal in the Balfour Declaration and afterwards. Second, the Arab people, in turn, take on the role of Jesus, whose body is Palestine, and though badly beaten conquers death.

Fu’ad al-Khatib’s favourite term for the nation as an ethnic community was “*qawm*,” which he used in his works both in its original meaning alluding to a tribal-ethnic group, and in the meaning of ‘nation.’ In the course of the interwar period, the original distinction between the patriotic “*waṭan*,” (fatherland), the ethnocentric “*qawm*” (as in “*qawmiyya*,” “nationalism”) and the Islamic “*umma*” became blurred in common usage; al-Khatib, however, liked to retain the old Arab tribal connotation of the term “*qawm*” in his predilection for old usages, probably fully aware that his audience would have understood the word as belonging to an ideological nationalist semantic field. Jews, as a “*qawm*,” were an ethnic nation for al-Khatib. He directed his ire against all of them, not only the Zionists.

26 Ibid., 367f.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the Arabic language was for al-Khatib a marker for the inseparable bonds that bound together the Arabs as an ethnic community, but it was also a monument highlighting the corruption and decline that his people had gone through since the age of purity in early and pre-Islamic times, embodied especially in the poetry of the Jahiliyya period. He therefore fashioned himself as a poet in the desert, as a bulwark against Arab decline and foreign intrusion, and as a warning that a political awakening of the Arabs would have to be accompanied by a cultivation of the soul, which for him was in the language. However, the anti-Jewish references in his poetry indicate that he was ready to adjust the borders between language, culture, and ethnicity as new lines of conflict were drawn in the interwar Middle East.

Despite his insistence on the classical form and his resistance to modernization and Westernization in the language, al-Khatib was nevertheless a modern man. Through the themes that he chose, and in the media in which he published (despite his apparent aversion to having his work printed), he participated in the formation of Arabic as a modern political vernacular and a vehicle for nationalist ideology. The pan-Arab public sphere was his playing field, even if he rejected some of its stakeholders. Thus, this chapter, presents the agenda of an intellectual to create a linguistic realm based on geography of origin, historical rootedness and religion that offers little room for ambiguity. Al-Khatib's nostalgia for the Arabs of early Islam, and his burgeoning anti-Semitism are the antithesis of the cultural labour of minority communities for whom Arabic was a language of inclusion rather than of exclusion, as other chapters in this volume show.

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