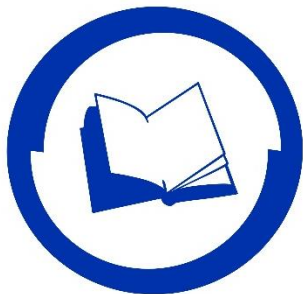


A View of the Conditions of Arabic Literature in the Nordic Region

Ahmed Al-Nawas

Multilingualism and Diversity as a Resource in the Cultural Field
Culture for All Service





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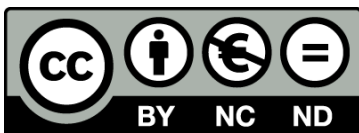
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PREFACE

The following report is conducted by the Culture for All Service as a part of the project Multilingualism and diversity as a resource in the cultural field – employment and integration through literature in the Nordic countries. The project is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture as part of a larger project initiated during Finland’s presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016.

The project is based on previous collaboration between the Culture for All Service, several organizations in the Nordic literary field and projects in which language diversity or freedom of expression have been especially present.¹ As a part of the previous work Culture for All collected information about the position of non-dominant language authors in Nordic institutions and published the results in the report *Wandering Words*. Comparisons of the position of writers who write in non-dominant languages in Nordic support structures of literature (2016).²

This report, *A View of the Conditions of Arabic Literature in the Nordic Region*, relies on the findings of the previous report and focuses on the case of Arabic-Nordic literature. The report aims to offer a view of Arabic literature written or published in the Nordic region. It also aims to offer information on the social conditions of the authors and the obstacles they face when publishing their works. In the context of this report, Arabic-Nordic literature refers to literature produced or published in Arabic by persons/organizations residing and operating in the Nordic region. The report uses the term ‘Arabic-Nordic literary scene’ to refer to a scattered network of authors, publishers, literary scholars, critics, literature platforms and associations that operate either collectively or individually in and from the Nordic region.

The emphasis of this report lays on the assembly of the Arabic-Nordic authors, publishers (in all forms) and literary networks (conventional and non-formal) that make up the Arabic-Nordic literature scene, operating in an unrecognized parallel platform of knowledge production in the Nordic countries.

¹ <http://www.cultureforall.fi/en.php?k=15369>

² Korhonen, Outi & Paqvalén, Rita 2016. *Wandering words*. Comparisons of the Position of Non-dominant Language Writers in Nordic Organizations. Publications of the Culture for All Service 1/2016.

http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/doc/monikulttuurisuus_kansio/Wandering_Words.pdf

I. INTRODUCTION

“Cairo writes, Beirut publishes, and Baghdad reads” is an old Arab saying, which has been widely used in the past to illustrate the transnational circle of knowledge production in the Arabic-speaking world. After decades of ongoing disasters, i.e. civil wars, dictatorships, economic and political inequalities and mass migration, the triangular Cairo-Beirut-Baghdad network has become outdated. Today, an Arabic book of poetry could be written in Tampere, published in Milano and translated into several languages, awarded with the PEN Prize in London, and censored in Jordan and most of the Gulf States. In their search for social and economic justice and prosperity, many Arabic speakers have found refuge in Nordic countries. It is from such circumstances that Arabic literature has been written and published in the Nordic region and crossed multiple genres for the last three decades.

The initial task for this report was to map Arabic-Nordic authors, publishers and literature platforms that operate in the Nordic region. The interest of this report in Arabic-Nordic literature lies in its transnational nature, and in the significant rise of Arabic speakers in Nordic countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland.

With over 400 million speakers, Arabic is the fifth most spoken language in the world.³ It is spoken in 60 countries, and it is the official or co-official language of 24 countries. Owing to the fact that most Nordic countries (except Finland) consider gathering official language statistics as ethnic registration⁴, there are no extensive calculations on which to base the total number of Arabic speakers in the whole region⁵. However, several studies

³ A German study in 2015 states that the number of Arabic speakers is 467 million and puts Arabic in the fourth place above Spanish. Source: Ulrich Ammon, University of Düsseldorf, quoted in Noack, R. & Gamio, L. “The world’s languages, in 7 maps and charts”, Washingtonpost.com, 23 April 2015

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2015/04/23/the-worlds-languages-in-7-maps-and-charts/>

⁴ Sweden does not gather any official language statistics, since it is associated with ethnic registration. See:

Radio Sweden (2016) “Arabic soon Sweden’s second language”. 5 April 2016

<http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6404320>

⁵ Korhonen, O. (2017) “Things we don’t know about our language diversity – revisiting non-dominant language writers’ possibilities in the Nordic Countries”, Multilingualmonth.org, 17 February 2015 https://multilingualmonth.org/2017/02/17/things-we-dont-know-about-our-language-diversity/#_ftn3

and national immigration statistics indicate that Arabic is one of the major spoken languages in many Nordic countries today.

A recent Swedish study conducted in 2016 by Mikael Parkvall, a linguist at Stockholm University, estimates that there are over 200 000 native Arabic speakers in Sweden, which makes Arabic the country's second most spoken language.⁶ Parkvall's study also suggests that Arabic is the second most spoken language in Denmark.⁷ Meanwhile, the number of Arabic speakers in Finland in 2015 was 16 713, ranking it as the sixth most spoken language after Finnish, Swedish, Russian, Estonian, Somali and English.⁸ Yet, the influx of refugees and migrants from Iraq and Syria since 2015 has raised it into the position of the fifth most spoken language.⁹ As for Norway, according to the National Statistical Institute of Norway, in January 2017 the total number of immigrants and second generation immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries was 85 696, which positions them as the second largest minority after Polish immigrants.¹⁰ Despite the low proportion of immigrants in the Icelandic population, a report published in 2015 by the Icelandic Multicultural Centre shows that there is a significant number of immigrants and second generation immigrants from Arabic speaking countries living in Iceland.¹¹

About this report

The original aim of this report was to map Arabic-Nordic literature and to create a database or a catalogue that includes all the actively engaged

⁶ Parkvall, M. (2016) Sveriges språk i siffror: Vilka språk talas och av hur många? Stockholm: Morfem & Språkrådet.

⁷ Ibid. See also *The Washington Post* interview with Parkvall. Source: Taylor, A. "Worldviews: Finnish was the second language of Sweden for centuries. Now Arabic is overtaking it", 7 April 2016: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/04/07/finnish-was-the-second-language-of-sweden-for-centuries-now-arabic-is-overtaking-it/?utm_term=.31686cec83b6

⁸ *Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Väestörakenne [Nykyisessä asiakirjassa ei ole lähteitä.]*. Helsinki: Tilastokeskus [referenced: 21 March 2017]. <http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/index.html>

⁹ According to the Finnish Immigration Service statistics for 2017, the total number of Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers who are still residing in Finland since 2015 is over 20 000. Source: Maahanmuuttovirasto, statistics: <http://statistics.migri.fi>

¹⁰ This included immigrants and Norwegian-born children of immigrant parents from Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Sudan, Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Mauritania, Oman and Bahrain. Source: Statistic Norway: Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, 1 January 2017. <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvbef/aar/2017-03-02?fane=tabell&sort=nummer&tabell=297399>

¹¹ <http://www.mcc.is/media/frettir/Tolfraediskyrsla-2014-.pdf>

actors, in the hope that it could make Arabic-Nordic literature more visible at the level of cultural policy decision making. However, this task proved its difficulty already at the early stages of this investigation. It became evident that there are no specialized organizations, representative unions or centralized databases that gather information on and monitor literature in Arabic either in the Nordic countries or in the Arabic speaking world¹². Moreover, information about the Arabic literature scene in the Nordic region (such as a catalogue of authors, a publication archive or lists of associations, publishers and projects) is fragmentary and in most cases outdated. Additionally, most of the encountered Nordic academic studies that deal with Arabic-Nordic literature are centered around the more traditional aspects of literary research, such as literary analysis and linguistics.

Also, the information about Arabic-Nordic literature published in Arabic is limited. For example, this study could not find a bibliography of contemporary Arabic literature written in the diaspora, or a compiled list of authors or translators working and residing in the Nordic region. It is also important to point out that Arabic is a common language for many nations, and may function to form a community among its speakers; however, it does not automatically mean that Arabic speakers would be part of a joint collective on the mere basis of language. Many Arabic speakers unite on the basis of mutable factors, such as national or ethnic identity and political orientation.

Due to the lack of pre-existing knowledge on Arabic-Nordic literature, the geographically and linguistically¹³ scattered nature of the population and the limited period of research time, this report does not try to map the Nordic-Arabic literary field but rather aims to provide a view on the social production of Arabic-Nordic literature and its social and economic impacts, and to list obstacles faced by scene.

Methodological note

The primary goal of this study is to collect widely varied information about Arabic-Nordic literature and active actors in the field in the different Nordic countries. In this, the report employs an inductive approach that relies on information collected through three information sources: a questionnaire survey; interviews and discussions with authors, translators, critics, cultural columnists, publishers and authors associations; and a web research into

¹² Abou-Zeid, S. (2013) "A Report from Lebanon on Publishing in the Arab World". *Publishing Research Quarterly*. March 2014, Volume 30, Issue 1, pp 93–103

¹³ Information gathering requires the mastering of Arabic, English, Finnish, and Scandinavian languages.

databases, articles, reviews and discussion forums in Arabic, English, Finnish and Swedish.

The timeframe of collecting and completing the data was between June 2016 and March 2017, and it was set to investigate the following issues: the existence of Arabic-Nordic publishers, associations and promotion institutions and the scope of the transnational activities of the Arabic-Nordic literature scene.

The questionnaire design followed the structure of the questionnaire utilized in an earlier report, *Wandering words: Comparisons of the Position of Non-dominant Languages Writers in Nordic Organization*, commissioned by the Culture for All Service, which mapped the Nordic literary field in regards to the position of writers who write in non-dominant languages.¹⁴ The questions were modified to focus on Arabic-Nordic literature. The interviews and discussions were conducted at face-to-face meetings or by telephone with actors in Finland, Sweden and Denmark. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Helsinki and in Stockholm during a two-day study visit to the Association of Iraqi Writers in Sweden in Stockholm.

Study participants

To cover a geographically scattered population in such a limited period of research time, the study adapted snowball sampling¹⁵ as an appropriate tool for locating key active Arabic-Nordic authors, organizations, publishers and other literature specialists. Thanks to the support of the multilingual literature project Sivuvälo¹⁶ and the Iraqi-Finnish author Hassan Blasim, an initial snowball sampling process was carried out. As a primary data source, the Sivuvälo project provided their list of Arabic authors, translators and cultural producers. In the meantime, Blasim posted an announcement on his Facebook wall asking colleagues and literature specialists to participate in this study and to suggest other potential participants. Simultaneously, after

¹⁴ Korhonen, O. Paqvalén, R. (2016) *Wandering words: Comparisons of the Position of Non-dominant Languages Writers in Nordic Organizations*. Helsinki: Culture for All Service.

http://kulttuuriakaikille.fi/doc/monikulttuurisuus_kansio/Wandering_Words.pdf

¹⁵ Snowball sampling is a technique for finding research subjects, "where one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on". Vogt, W. P. (1999), *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences*, London: Sage.

¹⁶ Sivuvälo is a multilingual literature project that has been operating since 2013 to improve, map, and make visible the position of immigrant-language poets and writers based in Finland and the Nordic countries. <https://sivuvälo.com/>

an additional online search to locate other potential authors and literature organizations, a list of initial subjects and organizations was gathered. Part of them were approached by email and via Facebook with a request to participate in this study. Study participants were also asked to contribute to the snowball process by listing other authors, existing publishers, associations and specialized media.

As a result, a total of 30 informants participated in this study, of whom 20 were authors, six were translators, critics and culture columnists, two were representatives of authors' associations and two were publishers. Although the participation of female informants was relatively low, they represent a sufficient variety of the Arabic-Nordic literature scene: out of the six female participants, three were authors, two were board members of a Nordic author association, one was a translator, and one was an executive director of a publishing company. The majority of the study participants were over 40 years old.

In this occasion, we would like to thank everyone who participated in this study.

Some of the study participants wished to remain anonymous. The participants who have agreed to appear in this study with their names are listed below.

Writers:

Abubaker Hamed Khaal (Eritrea, Denmark)
Aya Chalabee (Iraq, Finland)
Axîn Welat (Syria, Sweden)
Duna Ghali (Iraq, Denmark)
Hassan Blasim (Iraq, Finland)
Kareem Alsamawi (Iraq, Sweden)
Nader Alkasem (Syria, Denmark)
Saad Hadi (Iraq, Finland)
Zaid Imran (Iraq, Denmark)

Translators, critics and culture columnists:

Ashraf Atraqchi (Iraq, Sweden), critic
Jamal Al-kharsan (Iraq, Finland), columnist
Jasim Mohamed (Iraq, Sweden), poet and translator
Said Aljaffar (Iraq, Sweden), translator and literature researcher
Salim M. Ghadban (Palestine/Syria, Denmark), linguist and translator
Shaker Alnasri (Iraq, Denmark), columnist

Authors' organizations:

The Association of Iraqi Writers in Sweden

Kusay Sheikh (Iraq, Denmark, UK), author, journalist and former member of the Association of Arab Writers in Scandinavia, which was based in Copenhagen and active from the 1990s to the second half of the 2000s.

Publishers and distributors:

Mona Henning (Jordan, Sweden), publisher and translator. Founder of Dar Al-Muna publishing

Zainab Hadi Witwit, digital publishing company Hekayh.

II. THE FIELD OF ARABIC-NORDIC LITERATURE

Even though Arabic literature from the Nordic region has been operating in an unrecognized and usually parallel platform that is rarely part of the Nordic literature scene, exceptional cases have been gaining increasing interest among contemporary literature scholars, at literary festivals and through prizes, the printed press and other media. This chapter highlights different examples of this interest.

In 2011, the internationally acclaimed Arabic literary magazine *Banipal*, a magazine dedicated to the promotion of contemporary Arab literature through translations in English, issued a special feature on Arabic writers in Sweden. The issue presented works of 8 authors: Salim Barakat, Manhal Alsarraj, Faraj Bayrakdar, Jalil Haydar, Mohammad Afif al-Hussaini, Nassif al-Nassiri, Sabri Youssef and Farouq Salloum. Most of these authors have emigrated or had to flee from Syria and Iraq and eventually settled in Sweden over the last two decades.¹⁷

During the same year, a debut novel *Under the Copenhagen Sky* by a 27 years-old Iraqi-Danish female author, Hawra al-Nadawi, was longlisted for The International Prize for Arabic Fiction (often referred to as the “Arabic Booker Prize”).¹⁸ The breakthrough of al-Nadawi in one of the most prestigious literary prizes in the Arab world was considered by many as exceptional. Besides being the youngest of the authors longlisted for the 2011 prize, al-Nadawi was the first nominated author whose Arabic language and literature skills were shaped in the diaspora. At the age of six, al-Nadawi’s family fled from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein’s regime to Denmark. Al-Nadawi was homeschooled in Arabic by her parents, and she was inspired by Arabic literature by the multilingual book collection of Copenhagen’s main library.¹⁹

17 Banipal Magazine of Modern Arab Literature (2011), “Arabic Writers in Sweden”. Edit. Samuel Shimon. Vol 41. http://www.banipal.co.uk/back_issues/79/issue-41/

18 Lynx Qualey, M. (2012) “Reading the (Sole) Woman on the 2011 ‘Arabic Booker’ Longlist: Hawra al-Nadawi”. In *Arablit*, 16 June 2012. <https://arablit.org/2012/06/16/the-sole-woman-on-the-2011-arabic-booker-longlist-hawra-al-nadawi/>

19 Tarbush, S. (2011) “The Only Woman on the IPAF Longlist”. An interview with Hawra al-Nadawi. In *The Tanjara*, 26 November 2011. <http://thetanjara.blogspot.fi/2011/11/interview-with-hawra-al-nadawi-only.html>

In 2014, Iraqi-Finnish author Hassan Blasim became the first ever Arabic and Finnish writer to win the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize for his second short-story collection, *The Iraqi Christ*.²⁰ The short-story collection had previously, in 2012, received the English PEN Translation Programme Award.²¹ Blasim's work received international interest already following his first short-story collection *The Madman of Freedom Square*, which was longlisted in 2010 for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize²² and the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award²³. Meanwhile, and just recently, the Palestinian-Icelandic writer Mazen Maarouf won the inaugural Kuwait-based Al-Multaqa 2016 Prize for his short-story collection *Jokes for the Gunmen*.²⁴

This growing interest in Arabic literature from the Nordic region could be seen as part of an international phenomenon. Professor and chair of modern Arabic literature at the University of Exeter (UK), Rasheed El-Enany, argues that public interest in contemporary Arabic literature has generally heightened with the more recent events of the Arab Spring.²⁵ El-Enany adds that this interest is partly also due to the growing number of Arab authors living in Western diaspora and writing in Arabic and other European languages, who have been adopted by mainstream, high-circulation publishers, as opposed to the academic publishers of the past.²⁶ Another aspect, which El-Enany notes, is the effect of the recently established prestigious prizes, such as the mentioned International Prize for Arabic Fiction (the "Arabic Booker"), in bringing huge publicity for the shortlist and

²⁰ Flood, A. (2014) "Exiled Iraqi is first Arab winner of UK's top prize for foreign fiction". In the *Guardian*, 22 May 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/22/exiled-iraqi-first-arab-winner-uk-foreign-fiction-prize>

²¹ Cleave, M. (2012) "English PEN Announces the Winners of its Writers in Translation Programme Awards 2012". In English PEN, 13 April 2012. <https://www.englishpen.org/translation/english-pen-announces-the-winners-of-its-writers-in-translation-programme-awards-2012/>

²² Tonkin (2010). "Reading all over the world: The long-list for this year's Independent Foreign Fiction Prize spans the globe". In *The Independent*, 12 March 2010. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/reading-all-over-the-world-the-long-list-for-this-years-independent-foreign-fiction-prize-spans-the-1919979.html>

²³ Munster Literature Centre (2010) "The 2010 Longlist". <http://www.munsterlit.ie/FOC%20Award%20page.html>

²⁴ Lynx Qualey, M. (2016) "Mazen Maarouf's 'Jokes for the Gunmen' Wins First-ever Al-Multaqa Prize". In *Arablit*, 6 December 2016. <https://arablit.org/2016/12/06/mazen-maaroufs-jokes-for-the-gunmen-wins-first-ever-al-multaqa-prize/>

²⁵ El-Enany, R. (2012) Series Editor's Foreword. In Syrine Hout's: *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora*. Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature. Edinburgh University Press. pp. i-iv.
Also in: El-Enany, R. (2015) Series Editor's Foreword. In Samira Aghacy's: *Writing Beirut: Mappings of the City in the Modern Arabic Novel*. Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature. Edinburgh University Press. pp. vi-viii.

²⁶ Ibid. 2012:viii.

the winner every year, as well as contracts for translation into English and other languages.²⁷

Meanwhile, literature scholars, such as Muhsin Al Musawi, professor of Arabic Literature at Columbia University, argue that the rising interest in Arabic exile and migrant literature is partly linked to the current political turmoil in the Middle East and its impact on international affairs. According to Al Musawi, the problems of migration, exile and lost homelands are now more urgent than ever, and correspondingly these questions are rising from being a subgenre in the humanities to becoming one of the main topics in academia.²⁸

A view of the role of the Arabic-Nordic literature scene in mediating Nordic literature

Although Arabic-Nordic authors have only lately gained wider international visibility, the Arabic-Nordic literature scene has been playing a significant role in mediating literature between the two worlds. Besides writing their own works, many authors have considerably contributed to setting a ground for the practice of translating Nordic literature from the original language into Arabic. Translations into Arabic were in the past only possible through an intermediary language such as English, French or German.

The first direct translation from Finnish came out in the 1970s, from Sahban Mroueh — a young Lebanese writer, poet, and scriptwriter.²⁹ Mroueh translated and co-translated several books, including the 19th century Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, which is considered as a major achievement.³⁰

While, the direct translation from Finnish into Arabic may have preceded other Nordic languages, translations from Swedish seem to have a larger flow. Since the second half of the 1990s, Arabic-Swedish authors, translators and publishers have played an extremely significant role in the inception of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See interview with Muhsin Al Musawi in: Saad, S. (2014) The Distant Imagination of the Middle East's Exiled Writers. <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/the-distant-imagination-of-the-middle-east-exiled-writers>

²⁹ Pakkala, M. (2011) *Translating from Finnish into Arabic*. In the framework of the mapping of translation in the Mediterranean, co-produced by the Anna Lindh Foundation, Paris & Transeuropéennes, Alexandria
http://www.transeuropeennes.eu/ressources/pdfs/TIM_2011_Finnish_Arabic_Maria_PAKKA_LA_107.pdf.

³⁰ Ibid: p. 8.

the translation of Swedish children's literature, poetry and fiction. Thus, this chapter focuses on the Swedish example.

According to a MA thesis by Johan Petersson (2014) on Swedish literature translated into Arabic, 284 Swedish titles have thus far been translated into Arabic.³¹ Out of these titles, 93% were released after the arrival of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Sweden during the 1990s.³² The number of translated Swedish titles is extremely high when compared to the volume of foreign literature translated into Arabic. Petersson's study does not distinguish between the titles that have been directly translated from Swedish and the ones that have been translated through an intermediary language. In a conversation on Petersson's study, the study participant, translator Jasim Mohamed, noticed that Petersson's bibliography does not include some early and important translations, such as Salam Aboud's translations of the works of Övind Jonsson and Edith Södergran. This could be due to the fact that these works cannot be found in Swedish libraries and literature archives. Despite this, Petersson's study still offers extensive and important insight into the flow of translation.

The bibliography study also shows that slightly over one half (56%) of the translated titles are children's literature and mostly published in Sweden by Dar Al-Muna, a publishing house founded in 1984 by the Jordanian-Swedish publisher and translator Mona Henning.³³ Some of Dar Al-Muna's translated titles have been directly translated from Swedish. Henning's significant contributions to distributing Swedish literature in the Arab world and elsewhere have been awarded twice: first in 2010 with the King Carl XVI Gustaf's royal medal³⁴, and in 2013 with the title of "Woman of the Year" given out by the Swedish Women's Educational Association (SWEA)³⁵.

Meanwhile, the other half of the translated titles in Peterson's bibliography from 2014 are divided between fiction and poetry.³⁶ Unlike with children's literature, these titles have been published sporadically, largely in the Arabic-speaking world, and usually as singular efforts. It was however noted that the translated Swedish adult literature may receive extensive media interest,

³¹ Petersson, J. (2014) *Svensk litteratur på arabiska – En bibliografisk studie*. Magisteruppsats, Göteborgs universitet/ Institutionen för språk och litteraturer.

https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/2077/37066/1/gupea_2077_37066_1.pdf

³² Ibid. p.38

³³ Ibid. p.41-42.

³⁴ The Swedish Royal Court:

http://www.kungahuset.se/royalcourt/media/pressreleases/olderpressreleases/pressreleases_earlier/medalpresentations.5.130af452128eff9afdd80002267.html

³⁵ Swedish Women's Educational Association: <http://ask.swea.org/askmottagare-genom-aren/>

³⁶ Petersson (2013) p. 42.

despite its sporadic nature. For example, among the earliest published direct translations of Swedish fiction were two novels by Niklas Rådström: *Medan tiden tänker på annat* (1997)³⁷ and *Månen vet inte* (1999)³⁸. Both novels were translated by the Syrian author and psychotherapist Yusuf Tabbakh and jointly published by Tabbakh's own small Swedish publishing company, Avanta publishing, and the Syrian publisher Centre - Essor et Civilisation.³⁹ Both novels seem to have entered extensive distribution and were reviewed by major Arabic newspapers, such as the leading pan-Arab daily paper, Al-Hayat⁴⁰. A search in the Arabic Union Catalog also reveals that the novels are available in the libraries of major universities in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.⁴¹

Another translated genre that has received widespread media attention in the Arabic-speaking world is poetry. Among the early direct translations of Swedish poetry were the works of the Swedish surrealist poet Gunnar Ekelöf. His trilogy *Sagan om Fatumeh* was published in 1994, by the Jordanian publisher Dar Al-Karmel, and was translated by Musa Alsaratawy, a Palestinian-Swedish poet. Since then, there have been several translated titles made by several translators.

However, there has been significant growth in the publishing of translated Swedish poetry after the study was made by Peterson. It is largely a result of the transnational collaboration between the Baghdad Café Swedish Association of poetry, the Italian Al Mutawassit Publishing House and the Emirati Noon Emirates publishing house. The translations produced as the outcome of this collaboration were financed by the Swedish Art Council. The collaboration kicked off in 2012 with *The Swedish Poetry Series*, which aims to introduce Nordic poetry to Arabic readers by publishing direct translations of complete titles written by major contemporary Swedish poets. This collaboration has produced 9 publications so far.⁴² During their first year of collaboration, two titles were published: *Kvad* by Ann Smith, translated by

37 Rådström, N. (1997) Baynama al-zaman yufakkiru fi umurin ukhrá. Original title: Medan tiden tänker på annat. Translated from Swedish by Yusuf Tabbakh. Spånga: Avanta publications.

38 Rådström, N. (1999) al-Qamar la yarif. Original title: Månen vet inte. Translated from Swedish by Yusuf Tabbakh. Stockholm: Avanta publications.

39 Interview with Yusuf Tabbakh in Middle East online (2010) (in Arabic) .
<http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=100926>

40 A book review by Al-Hayat Newspaper (2000) (in Arabic)

41 The Arabic Union Catalog is a Saudi-funded collaborative non-profit project which mainly aims to establish a collaborative environment for the Arab libraries and to reduce the costs of cataloging Arabic information resources by a shared cataloging system.
<http://www.aruc.org>

⁴² See some of these titles at the Neelwafurat.com online bookstore

<http://www.neelwafurat.com/locate.aspx?mode=1&search=series&entry=%C7%E1%D4%DA%D1%20%C7%E1%D3%E6%ED%CF%ED%20%C7%E1%E3%CA%D1%CC%E3>

Jasim Mohamed; and *I djuret* by Eva Runefelt, translated by Jasim Mohamed and Ibrahim Abdulmalik. This was followed in 2013 by two more titles: *Det enda nödvändiga* by Kjell Espmark, translated by Jasim Mohamed; and *Det röda* by Ingrid Arvidsson, translated by Said Aljaffar. In 2014, as part of their third year of collaboration, they published a trilogy by Bruno K. Öijer, also translated by Jasim Mohamed. On the fourth year, they published three translations by Jasim Mohamed: *Roslära* by Hanna Hallgren, *Bländare* by Hanna Nordenhök and *Den inre rymden* by Kjell Espmark. Their latest publication was in December 2016: *Ingeronetterna* by Magnus William-Olsson, translated by Ibrahim Abdulmalik.

Contrariwise, some Arabic-Swedish authors and translators have also worked towards introducing Arabic literature to Swedish readers. One of the earliest and well-known examples is Lebanese-Swedish translator, author and publisher Hesham Bahari's effort in translating and publishing contemporary and classical Arabic literature into Swedish. After studying linguistics at Lund University in the late 1970s, Bahari began, with his Swedish wife, Astrid Ericson Bahari, to translate the two Arabic works he had taken to Sweden with him – *Tharthara fawq al-Nil*⁴³, a novel by Naguib Mahfouz, and a collection of poems by Adonis entitled *Waqtun bayn al-Ramad wal-Ward*^{44,45}. Shortly after Mahfouz became the Nobel Laureate of Literature in 1988, Bahari established the Alhambra förlag publishing company, and since then has published over 200 translated titles.^{46,47} In addition to Alhambra, translators such as Mohamed Jasim have introduced the works of many emerging Arabic authors to Swedish readers. Some of these translated titles have been written by authors residing in Sweden. Despite these important efforts towards enabling this kind of cultural exchange, this study could not, unfortunately, find an extensive bibliography – one similar to that conducted by Petterson – that gathers the translations of Arabic titles into Swedish.

In Denmark, on the other hand, despite the large Arabic-speaking population of the country, the translation flow from Danish into Arabic seems relatively low when compared to Sweden. In the duration of this study, no bibliography

⁴³ Mahfouz, N. (1987) *Sori över Nilen* (översatt tillsammans med Astrid Ericson Bahari) Lund: Bakhåll.

⁴⁴ Adonis (1987) *Den förälskade stenens tid*. Lund: Bakhåll.

⁴⁵ A TV interview with Hesham Bahri by Aljazeera in 2004 (in Arabic)

<http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/a-date-in-exile/2005/1/10/%d9%87%d8%b4%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a8%d8%ad%d8%b1%d9%8a>

⁴⁶ Banipal Magazine of Modern Arab Literature (2007) INTERVIEW WITH A PUBLISHER: Hesham Bahri interviewed by Margaret Obank. Edit. Samuel Shimon. Vol 28. pp. 138-41.

⁴⁷ Alhambra förlag's publications also include other translations of foreign literature into Swedish. For more about Alhambra's publications see <http://www.alhambra.se/>

studies were found that would offer a list of translated titles. The study participants mentioned however the individual translation efforts of several authors. For instance, the Iraqi-Danish author Jamal Jumáho has translated several works by Danish poets and authors into Arabic, among them Jens Fink-Jensen, Bo Green Jensen, Johannes V. Jensen, Janus Kodal and Niels Lyngsø.⁴⁸ Also, there have been a few translations of Danish poetry anthologies, one made by the Iraqi-Danish author Zuhair Shleiba⁴⁹, and another by the Iraqi-Danish poet Muniam Alfaker in collaboration with Mai Jalabi⁵⁰. Meanwhile, in 2005, the Copenhagen Library undertook the project H.C. Andersen på arabisk. Funded by the 2005 Anderson Fund, the project commissioned the translations of 75 stories and fairy tales written by H.C. Andersen. The collection was published by Dar Almada, and translated by the Iraqi-Danish author Duna Ghali in collaboration with Stig T. Rasmussen.⁵¹

A view of the publishing of Arabic-Nordic literature

If they wish to publish their work, Arabic-Nordic authors have the choice between publishing in the Nordic region or approaching an Arabic publisher in the Middle East, central Europe or the UK. Since the nineties, works by Arabic-Nordic authors have been infrequently published by Swedish independent one-person Arabic publishing companies or by different Nordic temporarily funded multilingual projects. One of the earliest small publishers was the Malmö-based Arabic-Swedish Dar Al-Manfa. Founded by an Iraqi-Swedish author, Ibrahim Ahmed, Al-Manfa (meaning exile) published several poetry anthologies, including the works of Adnan al-Sayegh, a celebrated Iraqi contemporary poet and scriptwriter who went into exile in Sweden during the late 1990s.⁵² The publisher has also released a number of fiction and nonfiction titles written by exiled Iraqi intellectuals.⁵³ A web search in Arabic on Dar Al-Manfa shows a large number of reviews, literature studies

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamal_Jumá

⁴⁹ A TV interview with Zuhair Shleiba broadcast by Aljazeera (in Arabic)

<http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/a-date-in-exile/2007/1/9/زهير-شليبية>

⁵⁰ Cordes, S. (2010) A book review (in Arabic) <http://ar.kvinfo.org/node/610>

⁵¹ Stig T. Rasmussen. H.C. Andersen på arabisk. Published in Det Kongelige Bibliotek:

<http://www.kb.dk/da/nb/samling/os/naeroest/hcapaaarabisk.html>

⁵² An article on the history of Iraqi diaspora literature platforms (in Arabic)

<http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=89601>

⁵³ A list of some of Al-Manfa's publications can be found on ALMAKTABAH.COM, an Internet bookstore for books in Arabic

<http://www.almaktabah.com/catalog.php?publisher=MANFA>

and bibliographies of Arabic and Iraqi literature that contain titles published by the company in Sweden during the 1990s.⁵⁴ The importance of Al-Manfa during the period came as no surprise. Since 1990 and until 2003, Iraq was under an international economic embargo and in cultural isolation. To prevent Iraqi citizens from any revolt attempts against the dictatorship government, the state imposed strict control and censorship of all forms of communications, including access to the Internet. Many authors seeking more freedom of expression were forced to either silence, exile or face persecution otherwise. Thus, the role of publishers like the Malmö-based Dar Al-Manfa was important in the history of Iraqi literature.

Another example of a one-person publishing company is the Swedish Visionmedia Syd, founded by Iraqi-Swedish writer Sahar al-Amri in 2003. The small Växjö-based company offers a possibility for Arabic-Nordic authors to publish their works in Sweden.⁵⁵ The company has published around 13 titles, including both fiction and nonfiction works.⁵⁶ The operation model of Visionmedia is, however, more like that of a printing company, offering authors possibilities to apply for literature funding both in Sweden and elsewhere: the company charges for printing and distribution costs, and in return it promises authors to send their books to Swedish literature funders in hopes of receiving a publishing or writing grant.⁵⁷ Companies like Visionmedia provide emerging authors a low-threshold opportunity to publish and produce also countercultural works. However, the operating model contains many disadvantages, such as poor visibility, absence of editorial support and therefore lack of professional credibility.

Due to the lack of such publishers in the Nordic countries that would be able to offer sufficient editorial support and professional credibility, many Nordic-Arabic authors prefer publishers that operate within the Middle Eastern market. This preference is evident in the answers of the authors who participated in this study. When the authors were asked about their publishers during their residency in the Nordic region, they listed mainly

⁵⁴ A recent study published by The New York University in 2016 which discusses the silencing of Iraqi literature during Saddam's regime lists the works of the Iraqi-Swedish author Janan Jassim Hillawy.

Khakpour, A. Khorrami, M. M. & Vatanabadi, S. (2016) Moments of Silence: Authenticity in the Cultural Expressions of the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988. New York University Press.

⁵⁵ An article written by Sahar Al-Amri on Visionmedia (in Arabic)
<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=73231>

⁵⁶ Visionmedia Syd promotes its publication on their blog <http://gelgamesh.blogspot.fi/>

⁵⁷ An article written by Sahar Al-Amri on Visionmedia
<http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=73231>

publishers in the Arabic-speaking world. For instance, the Iraqi-Danish author Duna Ghali listed three Arabic publishers: Dar Al-Mada (Damascus/Baghdad), Dar Altamweer (Cairo/Lebanon/Tunisia) and Dar Sanabul (Cairo); the Kurdish-Swedish poet Axîn Welat listed two publishers that have published her Arabic anthologies: Dar Ababil (Damascus) and Dar Aladham (Cairo); the Iraqi-Finnish author Saad Hadi has two novels published by Moment publishing (London/Tunisia); the Iraqi-Finnish author Aya Chalabee listed Layan publishing (Cairo); whereas the Eritrean Danish author Abubaker Hamed listed Al Saqi (London/Beirut).

These publishers offer a stronger probability of getting wider exposure to readership, wider distribution, the possibility of nomination for Arabic literature prizes, and access to Arabic literature discourse. However, there are also some essential disadvantages. First, the authors will be detached from the Nordic literature context, and lose their touch with national support institutions and readers. Secondly, they will face problematics that are associated with the nature of the Arabic literature market, such as censorship, piracy and inefficient publishing structures. In her report from 2013 on the conditions of publishing in the Arab world, researcher Samar Abou-Zeid argues that these problematics have been the same for decades, despite some occasional progress.⁵⁸

One of the problems that Arabic-Nordic authors are faced with when their books are published by publishers operating in the Arabic-speaking world is the issue of censorship. According to Abou-Zeid, governments censor written material for political, religious and moral reasons. However, the level of censorship differs from country to country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia being the strictest, and Lebanon the most liberal.⁵⁹ Publishers are required, in many Arabic countries, to submit their books to the censorship authority before printing. The permission to print can often be conditioned by changes in the contents.⁶⁰

In an interview with the study participant, Iraqi-Finnish author Hassan Blasim, recounted how in 2012 his first short-story collection, *The Madman of Freedom Square*, was censored by his publisher, the Arab Institute for Research and Publishing (Beirut), in over 140 occasions. All direct critical comments against holy figures or direct reference to the sex organs and sexual activities were toned down by the editor. Such censorship is widely practiced by publishers to overcome different sets of criteria for introducing

⁵⁸ Abou-Zeid, S. (2013) "A Report from Lebanon on Publishing in the Arab World". *Publishing Research Quarterly*. March 2014, Volume 30, Issue 1, pp 93–103

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

their books in the different Arabic speaking countries.⁶¹ Despite the heavy censorship, Blasim's books were immediately confiscated and banned by the Jordanian and Kuwaiti censorship authorities. In some occasions, a book may get the approval of authorities but will end up self-censored. After receiving death threats from several conservative and political parties, Blasim's publisher Al Mutawassit (Milano) decided to withdraw Blasim's latest poetry collection, *The Shia's Poisoned Child*, from Lebanese, Iraqi⁶² and other Arabic book fairs.

The effect of such institutionalized censorship is regarded as a serious setback for the creativity of literature. A good example is the effect of the Saudi Arabian censorship policy on all Arabic-language children's literature publications. As Abou-Zeid writes:

With a population of over 28 million people, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is one of the important markets in the Middle East. Out of obvious commercial reasons, most Arab publishers of children's literature will exclude from their books any themes, images, or references that could ban their entry to KSA, even if these contents are allowed – or even relevant – in their own countries.⁶³

In a conversation with Mona Henning, owner and founder of the Swedish Dar Al-Muna publishing house specialized in introducing Nordic children's literature to the Arabic reader, the publisher recounted the first difficulties she encountered when entering Saudi book fairs. The liberal and gender equality standards reflected in the depictions of Nordic children's picture books could be, as Henning explains, a key cause of censorship. Despite the strict and conservative control of public life, Henning has successfully managed to enter the Saudi market as one of the first and few female publishers, and as the first picture book publisher. This success, according to Henning, is due to Dar Al-Muna readers, including Saudi readers, who have found an interest in the books that she has published.

Book piracy is another major problem faced by authors and publishers in the Arabic-speaking region. According to General Manager of Arab Scientific Publishers and secretary general of the Arab Publishers Association in 2009, Bachar Chebaro, there exists a network for pirating bestselling books and academic texts that brings these titles to parts of the Arab World.⁶⁴ Abou-

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Iraq does not have censorship authorities any longer since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. However, self-censorship is widely practiced since many authors have met with threats, persecution and assassination carried out by different paramilitary groups.

⁶³ Abou-Zeid (2013) p. 97.

⁶⁴ Cited in: Abou-Zeid, S. (2013) *The Arab Book Market. General Presentation with a Focus on Qatar*. Frankfurt Fellowship Programme 2013. Frankfurter Buchmesse.

Zeid adds that pirate editions of printed books can also often be found on the original market where the book was published, as is frequently the case in Egypt, for example.⁶⁵ Furthermore, texts and books might be distributed by the publisher free of charge with an issue of a cultural magazine or sold separately, in both cases without the permission of the rights holders. Additionally, with the popularization of smart technology, online piracy has become a nightmare for many publishers. The problem of online piracy was addressed by an Arab publishers association in 2013 as no less threatening than the piracy of print books.⁶⁶ In her report on the Arab publishing market, Abou-Zeid lists several Arabic websites that offer a free download of books that are still in print and not free of rights.⁶⁷ There have been a few successful strategies in fighting online piracy. A relevant example is the Malmö-based emerging digital publishing service company, Hekayh.⁶⁸ Founded in 2016, the company aims to offer piracy-safe digital solutions to Arabic publishing houses and individual authors, and help with reserving the copyrights of the authors and publishers. The company also offers Nordic libraries and its Arabic readers an accessible channel to Arabic literature.

A third problem faced by Arabic-Nordic authors who publish in the Arabic-speaking world is the absence of efficient publishing structures. Given the problems mentioned earlier on, besides other obstacles set by the national market regulations of different Arab states, the Arabic publishing industry faces difficulties in developing sustainable and fair publishing structures. Due to the low purchasing power and the concurrence of pirated books, publishers are pushed to reduce production costs, while keeping the selling prices of books relatively low.⁶⁹ In the end, it is the author and the quality of literature who suffer the most since the constraint of keeping the production costs very low in turn results in a reduction of editorial costs. As Abou-Zeid explains, Arab publishing houses in general lack good editors, and often function merely as mediators between authors and printers. Moreover, non-bestselling writers are expected to finance the production of their books themselves. Three of the study participants, who wished to remain anonymous, said during interviews that it is rare for authors to obtain book selling revenues, and if they do, the sums only barely cover what they have paid in printing costs.

http://www.buchmesse.de/images/fbm/dokumente-ua-pdfs/2014/buchmarkt_arabische_welt_engl_2014_43687.pdf

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Cited in Abou-Zeid (2013)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ www.hekayh.com

⁶⁹ Abou-Zeid (2013)

III. CONCLUSIONS

Arabic-Nordic literature has been gaining increasing international interest among contemporary literature scholars and literary festivals, and through prizes, the printed press and other media. Additionally, Arabic-Nordic authors and translators have considerably contributed to setting a ground for the practice of translating Nordic literature from the original language into Arabic. Thus, they have been playing a significant role in mediating literature between the two worlds, and functioning as organic agents who promote both Nordic and Arabic literature to new readers.

Due to its exclusion from the Nordic literature scene and its structures, Arabic-Nordic literature faces essential challenges especially when it comes to publishing. Consequently, many authors favor publishers that operate in the Arabic-speaking world, in hope of a better opportunity of gaining greater exposure to readership, wider distribution, the possibility of competing for Arabic literature prizes, and access to Arabic literature discourse. However, the practice leads to some essential disadvantages. First, authors and their works will be detached from the Nordic literature context, become invisible within the Nordic literature field, and the authors are detached from national support structures and Nordic readers (both in Arabic language and in Nordic languages). Secondly, they will face problematics that are associated with the nature of the Arabic literature market, such as censorship, piracy and inefficient publishing structures. In the end, it is the author and the quality and creativity of literature that suffer the most. Authors often end up paying for the printing costs, employing an additional editor and suffering from the measures applied by the several censorship authorities operating in all the Arabic-speaking countries.

Therefore, it is important that future policy actions should focus on enabling support structures and facilities that would allow the publishing and translation of Arabic literature within the Nordic region. Also, it is of urgent importance to adopt strategies for including Arabic-Nordic literature as part of the Nordic literature structure and in the collections of Nordic public libraries.

Appendix 1

Questions for the Arabic-Nordic Authors

Organizations, networks

1. Are the writers who write in different languages accepted as members of the most important writers' associations in your country of residence?
2. Are there organizations that support writers who write in Arabic?

Publishing

3. Where did you publish your books and texts during your residence in the Nordic region? What is the name of the publisher and in which country is it located?
4. Is there an Arabic publisher in the Nordic country of your residence? What is the name of the publisher? Is there a media in the Nordic country of your residence that is specialized in Arabic literature? Could you name it?

Grants and awards

5. Have you applied for grants dedicated to full time writing? How many times? How many times did you get it? What is the duration and the value of the grant and which is the foundation?
6. How difficult is it for the writers who write in Arabic to receive a full-time scholarship?

Possibility to translations

7. What is the position of the writers who write in other languages in the translation support systems? Is the translation support available also for translations for works of writers who write in Arabic?

Thank you very much for your help. We will be delighted to cooperate in these questions.

Appendix 2.

The questionnaire sent to the study participants

مرحبا

اسمي احمد النواس و اعمل كباحث و استشاري في مؤسسه فنلنديه اسمها Culture for All . عمل المؤسسه ينحصر في اعداد بحوث وتقديم المعلومات عن الاقليات الى المؤسسات الثقافيه و الفنيه العامه و الحكوميه. تهدف المؤسسه الى اتاحه المساواه الاجتماعيه للجمهور الثقافي و للعاملين في هذا المجال.

اكتب لكم بخصوص بحث ننوي البدء به و هو بحث يخص الادباء الذين يعيشون في الدول الاسكندنافيه ويكتبون بلغات اخرى غير معتمده في الدوله. جزء من البحث يختص بكتاب الادب العربي ووضع تقرير اولي عن الكتاب الذين يعيشون في المنطقه و نسبة تكافؤ فرصهم في العمل و النشر و الترجمه. هذا البحث هو جزء من خطه مجلس وزراء دول الشمال Nordic Council التي تهدف الى تحسين مستوى الرفاهيه و المساواه الاجتماعيه لسكان هذه الدول بشكل عام و للعاملين في مجالات الابداع بشكل خاص.

العمل في هذا البحث سوف يحقق حلم شخصي لانشاء ارشيف للتاريخ يتضمن مقابلات مسجله مع الكتاب العرب المقيمين في اسكندنافيه. دور هذا الارشيف هو توثيق السيره الشخصيه لهاؤلاء الكتاب و اعمالهم.

في البدايه اود ان ادعوكم لتشارك في الاجابه على بعض الاسأله الخاصه في البحث بارسال هذه الاسئله على بريدك الالكتروني. واجراء المقابلات الشخصيه للراغبين بالمشاركه في الارشيف.

اشكركم مقدما على الاهتمام

- هل يحق للكتاب الذين يكتبون باللغة العربيه الانضمام كاعضاء في النقابات و الجمعيات الرئيسيه للكتاب في الدوله الاسكندنافيه المقيم بها؟
- هل هناك في الدوله الاسكندنافيه المقيم بها مؤسسات او منظمات تدعم الكتاب الذين يكتبون بلغه العربيه؟
- اين نشرت كتبك و نصوصك خلال فتره اقامتك في اسكندنافيا؟ اسم الناشر و البلد؟
- هل هناك في الدوله الاسكندنافيه المقيم بها دور نشر باللغه العربيه؟ ما هو اسم دار النشر؟
- هل يوجد في الدوله الاسكندنافيه المقيم بها وسائل اعلام متخصصه بالأدب تركز على كتاب اللغه العربيه ؟ اسمها؟
- هل قدمت طلب للحصول على منحه مخصصه للتفرغ الى الكتابه ؟ كم مره؟ و كم مره حصلت عليها؟ ما مده و قيمه المنحه ومن هي الجهه المانحه؟
- ما مدى صعوبه حصول الكتاب اللذين يكتبون بالعربيه على منحة مخصصه للتفرغ الى الكتابه؟
- ما هو الموقف من الكتاب الذين يكتبون بلغات اخرى في نظم دعم الترجمة؟ هل دعم الترجمة متاح أيضا لترجمة اعمال الكتاب اللذين يكتبون بلعربيه؟



Multilingualism and diversity as a resource in the cultural field
– employment and integration through literature in the Nordic Countries

www.multilingualit.org