



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

ARABIC

Capturing Intangible Cultural Heritage

Oral Arabic Storytelling in Hammarkullen, Sweden

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i.i. Abstract in English

The vibrant suburb of Hammarkullen in Gothenburg, Sweden, provides the field of research for this thesis on oral Arabic storytelling in an exile community. In an effort to capture and document samples of tales that constitute an intangible cultural heritage whose survival is at risk, a variety of stories have been collected through interviews with, and recordings of, local Arabic-speaking storytellers. Sweden's current Cultural Heritage Lift is discussed while bringing to the forefront UNESCO's 2003 General Conference for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is through this lens that the thesis then proceeds to take a closer look at which oral Arabic tales are told in Hammarkullen in order to find out what amuses, frightens, and fascinates their listeners who still cherish the Arabic language with its implicit cargo of cultural heritage and identity. Furthermore, the thesis allows non-Arabic-speakers to listen in on the cultural storytelling of a culture living in the midst of our own. The collected tales reveal traces of oral Arabic storytelling tradition that links them to other varieties of Arabic and nationality in the exile community, as well as to previous research on past and present Arabic folklore.

i.ii. Abstract in Swedish

Den livfulla förorten Hammarkullen i Göteborg, Sverige, utgör forskningsfältet för denna magisteruppsats om muntlig arabisk berättartradition i ett exilsamhälle. I syfte att uppfånga och dokumentera exempel på sagor som utgör ett immateriellt kulturarv vars överlevnad hotas, har ett urval av olika berättelser insamlats genom intervjuer och inspelningar av lokala arabisktalande sagoberättare. Sveriges nuvarande satsning, Kulturarvslyftet, diskuteras samtidigt som UNESCO:s Generalkonferens år 2003 "Bevarandet av det immateriella kulturarvet" lyfts fram. Det är genom denna lins som uppsatsen sedan utgår ifrån när den ser närmare på vilka muntliga arabiska berättelser som berättas i Hammarkullen för att upptäcka vad som roar, förskräcker och fascinerar dess lyssnare som fortfarande månar om det arabiska språket med dess implicita last av kulturarv och identitet. Vidare ger uppsatsen icke-arabisktalande en möjlighet att lyssna på det kulturella sagoberättandet från en kultur som lever mitt i vår egen. De samlade berättelserna uppklarar spår av muntlig arabisk berättartradition som länkar dem med andra varianter av arabiska och nationalitet i exilsamhället, samt med tidigare forskning om förfluten och nutida arabisk folklor.

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I am especially grateful for the assistance given by M.K. and M.F. in transcribing several of the story samples from audio recordings into written Arabic. Their patient efforts helped me to cross the finish line a lot sooner than if I had trudged through this marathon un-aided.

This thesis would not have been possible without the unwavering support and encouragement of my parents, family, and friends who stood by me while I was submerged in a sea of oral storytelling.

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Part 1: Background

1.1. Introduction

While my fellow students of the Multidisciplinary Field Study Course of Spring Semester 2012 at Gothenburg University boarded an airplane to Varanasi, India, I hopped onto a tram cuttingly dubbed “the Orient Express” in popular speech – a not too subtle nickname hinting at the multinational makeup of the low-income suburb of Hammarkullen¹ that nestles the tram tracks close to their final stop in the northeastern city district of Angered, toward which the tram was heading, around twenty minutes away from Gothenburg’s downtown shopping center. The passengers of varied nationalities and religions, clad in traditional or western garb, spilled onto the underground platform in the belly of Hammarkullen and headed for the steep escalators that spit us up and out of the hollow mouth of the hill and into the light of the busy Hammarkulle-square. Thus, I entered a microcosm of ethnicities, cultures, and languages that endow the immigrant-rich neighborhood on my quest for traces of oral storytelling among Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen.

1.1.1. Snapshot of a Swedish Suburb

In order to solve the housing dearth and to make life and work in the main cities more accessible to young families from smaller towns, the Swedish government mass-produced high-rise neighborhoods on the outskirts of Sweden’s larger cities in 1968-1970. This housing program was called “The Million Program”, and like many other similar suburbs around Sweden, Hammarkullen is a sample of a typical suburb that aims for efficient storage of stacked apartments, rather than aiming for visually appealing and inspired living spaces. These suburbs bear a resemblance to the so-called ‘inner city’ neighborhoods of America. Hammarkullen has almost 8000 inhabitants out of which 57% were born outside of Sweden according to statistics gathered in 2010.² The neighborhood is characterized by 84 nationalities, as well as the 115 languages that are spoken in and around its main square. Iraqis compose the largest segment with its 18% of the immigrants and speak Arabic, joined by other Arabic-speakers from a variety of Middle Eastern and North African countries. Remarkably, 33% of the inhabitants are under the age of 18 as compared to 16% for Sweden in general, and over 36% of the families have at least 3 children.

¹ “Hammer Hill” in English.

² www.scb.se/Pages/ProductTables_25795.aspx Retrieved on April 25, 2012.

1.1.2. Thesis Impetus

Being acquainted with the lack of children's books in the Arabic language after living in the Middle East for many years, I have been curious to find out in which additional or alternative ways Arabic-speaking parents stimulate their children's literacy skills from an early age in Hammarkullen. While collecting data for a field study on home literacy socialization practices it was a delight to find evidence of oral storytelling in Arabic – a hitherto undocumented phenomenon in the selected neighborhood. Before long, it became clear that this discovery constitutes valuable cultural heritage that deserves further exploration, documentation and preservation.

My delight in finding evidence of oral storytelling was only matched by my dismay in discovering that, “Very few pass on oral stories to their children in spite of having been raised with such stories themselves.”³ It is imperative that these stories are not lost along with their aging bearers of cultural tales and traditions – the storytellers themselves.

1.2. Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to explore the rich tradition of oral Arabic storytelling - whose very survival is at stake in the exile community of Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen. The thesis will examine whether traces of previous research on Arabic folklore in its countries of origin may be found in the exile-community of Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen. In so doing, the intention is that a link between place of origin and exile will be identified, and moreover, that a connection from the “world-of-the-other” to the mainstream world will be established. By opening a window to listen in on what the voices of Hammarkullen's oral storytellers are telling; empathy and understanding will, hopefully, be generated in order to appreciate the cultural and linguistic diversity in which our society finds itself. It is in such a spirit of inclusion that world citizens are created. Furthermore, the following samples of intangible cultural heritage⁴ will, thus, be documented.

1.2.1. Cultural Perspectives – *Whose intangible cultural heritage is targeted?*

In collecting and presenting the story samples contained in this thesis, the ambition is to offer a selection of indigenous stories that represent the intangible cultural heritage of a minority community in a diverse Swedish suburb – that of Arabic-speaking respondents of a field-study in

³ Cedernil 2012:29

⁴ For a definition of intangible cultural heritage see pg.20.

Hammarkullen. Although the collected material represents the interviewed respondents, and not the whole population of Arabic-speakers; the field-study, with conclusions drawn from previous research by Muhawi & Kanaana (1989), Bushnaq (1986), as well as from Jayyusi (2010), reveals that Arabic-speaking residents in Hammarkullen often tell the same or similar tales, regardless of nationality or dialect. Thus, the selection explores the themes that interest both storytellers and listeners, which affords the reader an insight into the nature of the tales and the intangible cultural heritage that is transmitted through Arabic – a language spoken by a significant number of citizens⁵, although not understood by the majority of the Swedish population. The thesis approaches the oral Arabic stories from a panoramic perspective by means of the Arabic language that serves as the glue that joins multifaceted cultures and ethnic groups together into a linguistic community of around two hundred and eighty million people in more than twenty countries⁶ - as well as Arabic-speaking immigrants in additional countries around the world. This far-reaching linguistic community uses Modern Standard Arabic as its official language⁷, as well as spoken Arabic dialects for everyday use.⁸ The similarities and joint features of this linguistic community are the ripple effects of *trans-cultural diffusion*⁹ which has spread cultural items such as religions, ethical values, languages, and storytelling between individuals, as well as between one Arabic-speaking culture to another. Yet, as citizens of different Arabic-speaking communities, cities, and countries will attest to, there are also differences and additional facets that make each ethnic group, each variety of Arabic dialect, and each indigenous culture distinct in its own right.

Nonetheless, the respondents of the study define and categorize themselves as Arabic speakers and their stories as Arabic tales¹⁰ – no matter which variety of Arabic language they speak.

⁵ Foster (2003:5) estimates that there were around 200 000 Arabic speakers in Sweden in year 2003. Retrieved on Nov.12, 2012 from www2.lingfil.uu.se/ling/semfiler/LisaD030911.pdf Parkvall (2009:91) estimates that Sweden had 93 000 Arabic speakers in year 2009 - more than one percent of the Swedish population. However, these figures are rough estimates since there are no reliable statistics for numbers of speakers of Arabic, Persian, or Kurdish in Sweden.

⁶ Parkvall 2009:91

⁷ Bassiouney (2009:4) estimates that there are around 300 million native Arabic speakers in twenty-three countries where Arabic is the sole, or joint official, or national language.

⁸ See Appendix #1 *Diglossia – A Verbal Tug-of-War* for a description of Arabic varieties.

⁹ Goldstein et al. (2009) [www.anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Diffusionism and Acculturation](http://www.anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Diffusionism%20and%20Acculturation) Retrieved on Sept.24, 2012.

¹⁰ These forms of tales, derivable directly from the Arabic and Semitic traditions in folk narrative, are related also to the Indo-European tradition, with which they share recognizable plot patterns. See Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:11.

Thus, from a *social constructionist perspective* whereby Arabic-speakers interactively form a macro-culture represented by their language (including its varieties) and customs and “act toward the representations as though they were real”¹¹, license is provided for the thesis to target Arabic intangible cultural heritage without singling out an exclusive cultural heritage of a specific nationality or ethnic group.¹²

Part 2: Previous Research

2.1. Research on Arabic Folktales

Born in Jordan, the Palestinian-Lebanese professor, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, presents a historical context from which the long tradition of oral Arabic storytelling springs in her collection of “Classical Arabic Stories – An Anthology” (2010). Aiming to offer a selection of examples extracted from Arabic classical stories to the non-Arab reader in order to show “the universality and the pertinence of human experience across cultures and through time”, Jayyusi’s work presents major genres of the art of Arabic storytelling.¹³ Her selections range from pre-Islamic and Islamic tales of love and adventure, as well as amusing anecdotes of anti-heroes, to the “more complex narratives of the *maqamat* (assemblies)”.¹⁴

Keeping in mind the great number of Arabic-speakers around the world and the long tradition of folklore that Arabic-speaking countries and communities may boast of, remarkably little research has been done on the subject of Arabic folktales. Nevertheless, a captivating and scientific contribution by two Palestinian professors has made great strides to rectify this state of affairs. Ibrahim Muhawi, Professor of English at the University of Tunis, and Sharif Kanaana, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Birzeit University, offer an outstanding collection of Palestinian Arab folktales in their book, “Speak Bird, Speak Again” (1989), along with extensive footnotes, an analytic guide, as well as an ample motif index and references to international typology.

¹¹ www.socialencyclopedia.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405124331_yr2012_chunk_g978140512433110_ss1-41
Retrieved on Sept.24, 2012.

¹² It is important to draw attention to the fact that there are circumstances in which the pinpointing of a particular Arabic dialect is pivotal – for instance, when pairing heritage language students with teachers of a specific variety of Arabic. The attention to determining the corresponding fit directly influences the students’ potential success in benefiting from heritage language lessons. Moreover, precision in determining Arabic language variety is of vital importance when it comes to selecting translators for law court proceedings, as well as for medical care – both arenas in which, not only language aspects, but culturally appropriate gender considerations and familiarity with key ethical values come into play.

¹³ Jayyusi 2010:2

¹⁴ *ibid.*

Yet another Palestinian author, Inea Bushnaq, has added significantly to the field of Arabic folktales. She is a Palestinian-American folklorist raised in Jerusalem and Syria.¹⁵ Her book on “Arab Folktales” (1986) presents a wide selection of tales gathered from an unusual number and variety of Arabic-speaking countries – which corroborates the concept that there is such a thing as Arab folklore, not only national folklore of one particular Arabic-speaking nation or another.

To my knowledge, no previous study has been done on oral storytelling in Arab exile communities.

2.2. Initial Field Report

2.2.1. Heritage Language Definition

A key-term that will be used repeatedly in this study is that of ‘heritage language’. Agnes Weiyun He defines heritage language as, “a language that is often used at or inherited from home and that is different from the language used in mainstream society.”¹⁶ She goes on to clarify that, “In the United States, Canada, and the UK, where the vast majority of relevant research is conducted, the term ‘heritage language’ has often been used synonymously with ‘community language’, ‘home language’, ‘native language’, and ‘mother tongue’ to refer to a language other than English used by immigrants and their children.”¹⁷ Currently, Sweden employs the term ‘mother tongue’ (*modersmål*) for immigrant languages other than Swedish. Nevertheless, in keeping with the ultimate theme of this essay, the term ‘heritage language’ will henceforth be applied unless quoting someone using a synonymous term.

2.2.2. Results of Initial Field Report

Several overlapping patterns have emerged out of the collected data elicited from interviews with local parents, grandparents, preschool teachers, heritage language teachers and librarians during the period of March 12, to April 12, 2012.¹⁸ In general, the interviews reveal a significant amount of unawareness of the importance of stimulating the heritage language that is further hampered by daunting obstacles to stimulating the heritage language at home and at school. These obstacles include the dilemma of choosing which kind of Arabic to employ; formal

¹⁵ <http://cosmos.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/authors.php?aid=8690> Retrieved on Nov.23, 2012.

¹⁶ Duranti et al. 2012:587

¹⁷ Duranti et al. 2012:588

¹⁸ Cedernil 2012:32

Standard Arabic or informal Colloquial Arabic – the verbal tug-of-war known as *diglossia*.¹⁹ Another, equally looming obstacle is the fear many Arabic-speaking parents have of impeding their children’s Swedish language skills and, consequently, their future academic success. Instead of deeming bilingualism to be an advantage, many parents resort to speaking broken Swedish to their children, and in some cases, avoiding passing on Arabic literacy skills at all.²⁰ As a result, many children find themselves without full mastery of either language, and with that the loss of a vital link to their cultural heritage and identity, as well as the lack of skills that would benefit their school experience. It is noteworthy that the respondents who choose to stimulate their children’s emergent literacy skills²¹ have children that are fluent in a minimum of two languages and thrive academically.

2.2.3. Haphazard Heritage Language Teaching

Further obstacles to stimulating the heritage language include the haphazard way in which unqualified heritage language teachers are paired up with students of a different dialect and nationality leading to, at best, ineffective teaching, and at worst, to students dropping out of heritage language classes altogether. Not only are obstacles to the stimulation of the Arabic heritage language found at home and at local schools, but even on a national level there exists a glaring gap where one would expect to find an official Arabic heritage language curriculum along with a standard schoolbook for heritage language lessons in Swedish schools. Instead, many heritage language teachers, often lacking a teaching degree, find themselves scrambling for an odd assortment of makeshift Arabic materials to make up for the deficit, and some, reportedly, rely on religious instruction to teach the Arabic heritage language which can be problematic as well as raising ethical questions for students adhering to a different faith.

2.2.4. Imminent Demise of Oral Storytelling in an Exile Community

Life in the exile community of Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen has led to drastic changes in patterns of socialization and childcare arrangements as compared to those left behind in the country of origin. Respondents fondly reminisce about their whole extended family living in the same house, where the grandmother would care for the youngest members of the family. At night, the grandmother would tuck all the young cousins into bed in her room where she would

¹⁹ See Appendix #1 for further discussion of the term *diglossia*.

²⁰ Cedernil 2012:35

²¹ See Appendix #2 for a description of emergent literacy skills.

tell them stories before they went to sleep.²² During the day, there would always be relatives, neighbors, or friends around to tell stories on the spur of the moment.²³ Women would share household chores with relatives or neighbors and pass the time during baking, doing laundry, or preparing meals by telling each other stories while the children would memorize and mimic the narrative and cultural traditions that were being passed on – a process that Laura Sterponi describes as “cultural apprenticeship into a community’s values, social positions, and identities”²⁴ – a vital sociocultural step on the way towards literacy.

2.2.4.1. Cultural Apprenticeship Grinds to a Halt

On arrival in Sweden, that longstanding practice of cultural apprenticeship grinds to a halt in the majority of the respondents’ new life in an exile community. “Families face new living arrangements where a once large extended family has been broken up into smaller units that no longer share meals, stories, or living space – resulting in new child care arrangements. In the process, the art of storytelling is experiencing a rapid decline.”²⁵ With no network of support from relatives, and while adjusting to language acquisition and new work schedules, parents find themselves at loss for time and inspiration to nurture their history of storytelling and make it part of their children’s lives. Instead, television and the Internet offer readily obtained entertainment and storytelling is relegated to a position of revered, yet irrelevant, remembrance, while immigrants regretfully resign themselves to the run of daily life in exile and the fact that their children are growing up without access to their rich cultural heritage.

2.2.4.2. Change in Patterns of Courtship and Marriage

The results of the field study bring to light yet another reason for the perilous position of storytelling in an exile community - that of the change in patterns of courtship and marriage on arrival in Sweden. Several respondents disclose their predicament of being unmarried – an unlikely status had they remained in their country of origin where the majority of the population marries at an early age and where singlehood is considered to be a social stigma. They, along with several of those that have married late in exile, grapple with involuntary childlessness, as well as with infertility, putting an unforeseen end to the tradition of storytelling in their family

²² Cedernil 2012:18

²³ Cedernil 2012:20

²⁴ Duranti et al. 2012:227

²⁵ Cedernil 2012:34

line.²⁶ Remarkably, these respondents, in particular, treasure the stories they have inherited and are able to remember and re-tell many more stories, songs, and rhymes than most of the respondents with children. In fact, these women constitute an unrecognized and untapped resource of cultural heritage, despite keeping their storytelling traditions in such a conscientious manner.

2.2.4.3. Silence – the Sound of Untold Stories

Arabic-speaking grandmothers living in exile share a similar status of being an untapped resource. They are no longer involved in their children's and grandchildren's lives on a daily basis – sometimes separated by a courtyard and sometimes by a continent, but more often than not, the grandchildren do not possess the Arabic language skills to be able to understand the stories of old, even if they are interested in learning about their cultural heritage and identity. The grandmothers themselves, often depending on age, academic background, and difficult cultural and lingual acclimatization, struggle to learn Swedish, some being unable to produce a single word of the new language. Thus, the link between the storytellers and the listeners is severed and the bearers of cultural heritage retreat into involuntary silence – a not uncommon response to narratives being untold and devalued.²⁷

Part 3: Theory

3.1. Language Status

3.1.1. Misrecognition and Devalued Narratives

Unlike English with its myriad of approved accents, there is considerable stigma attached to speaking less than 'perfect' Swedish – a fact which many native speakers of distinctive Swedish dialects can attest to, as well as immigrants striving to emulate specific Swedish pronunciations. Interestingly, both native speakers as well as immigrants are generally held captive by 'misrecognition'. "Misrecognition is the process through which both mainstream and minority speakers come to view those ways of speaking commanded by dominant groups as inherently more desirable."²⁸ "Socioeconomic class, gender, age, ethnic group membership, social and

²⁶ Cedernil 2012:34

²⁷ Duranti et al. 2012:198

²⁸ Duranti et al. 2012:196

geographical mobility have been shown to constrain the linguistic choices people make.”²⁹ Miller, Koven, and Lin assert that, “More recent scholarship demonstrates the disproportionate social, psychological, and educational costs of misrecognition in classrooms for nonmainstream children.”³⁰ Contemporary research on language socialization is gaining momentum towards a deeper understanding of the dynamics of language endangerment, language loss and language shift, where the dominant language usurps and eradicates the role of the minority language. Angela M. Nonaka “examines multilingual settings where negative and/or ambivalent attitudes associated with a code lessen its chances of transmission and, ultimately, survival.”³¹ It is precisely the generally negative, ambivalent and devaluating attitudes of both native Swedish-speakers as well as Arabic-speakers themselves towards spoken Arabic in Sweden that raises concerns for the ultimate survival of oral Arabic storytelling in the exile community. Thought provokingly, Paul B. Garrett comes to the conclusion that;

Bilingualism, language shift, and other contact-related phenomena, in all their social, cultural, and historical diversity, are ultimately rooted in contingent relationships of hierarchy and inequality, dominance and subordination. These contingent relationships, in turn, are ideologically mediated in ways that may not be readily discernible but are enormously consequential insofar as they guide individuals’ understandings of the social world and their actions in it, including, crucially, their everyday use of language.³²

3.1.2. Language Maintenance and Empowerment

Agnes W. He affirms that, “HL [heritage language] maintenance is profoundly connected to speakers’ attitudes and values.”³³ Further, she insists that, “language ideologies are continuously shaped by changing life circumstances and that promoting bilingualism at the societal level is a critical requirement in any language maintenance effort.”³⁴ She draws attention to the results of Tse’s studies (1997, 2000) of US-born Asian American adults which establish that;

Language acquisition is facilitated when an individual has positive attitudes toward the language and feels positively about her or his ethnic group. /.../

²⁹ Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996:12

³⁰ Duranti et al. 2012:196

³¹ Duranti et al. 2012:490

³² Duranti et al. 2012:516

³³ Duranti et al. 2012:591

³⁴ Duranti et al. 2012:592

The results suggest that, for many, the HL is closely associated with the ethnic group so that attitudes toward the ethnic group and its language speakers also extend to the narrators' own language ability and their interest (or lack of interest) in maintaining and developing their HL.³⁵

Interestingly, Garrett associates language maintenance or language revitalization efforts of various communities with attempts to preserve their cultural heritage: "In these cases the link between language and culture tends to be explicitly foregrounded; those involved in these efforts see themselves as preserving community and 'tradition', or 'heritage', as well as language."³⁶

In a Harvard study on family literacy (2003) Margaret Caspe suggests that, "The very act of asking women to reflect on the literacy practices of their daily lives can lead to empowerment and reinforcement of the strengths they already possess, in addition to inspiring them to engage in further literacy practices when they realize what an impact they can have on their children's lives."³⁷

3.1.3. Current Swedish Stance on National Linguistic Diversity

Adrian Guelke quotes John Coakley's 1992 typology of ethnic management in writing that, "In many parts of Europe there has been a powerful momentum towards the forcible assimilation of ethnic and linguistic minorities, typically by denying them access to political and cultural self-expression".³⁸ Guelke further points out that, "The imposition of one language on a society in the name of nation-building is no longer considered an acceptable approach by states to language diversity within a country's borders."³⁹ Moreover, the adoption of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 1992 indicates that a change "has taken place towards the status of local languages. Whereas the survival of Europe's lesser known languages had previously been seen as an obstacle to national cohesion in the states in which they were spoken, their preservation is now viewed in a positive light, as enriching society's cultural heritage. *However, it should be noted that the Charter does not apply to the languages spoken by immigrants.*"⁴⁰

³⁵ Duranti et al. 2012:593

³⁶ Duranti et al. 2012:512

³⁷ Caspe 2003:3

³⁸ Guelke 2012:79

³⁹ Guelke 2012:126

⁴⁰ *ibid* – Emphasis added.

Sweden ratified this convention in year 2000, but only for the following minority languages: Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Romani Chib, and Yiddish.⁴¹ Remarkably, widespread Swedish minority languages such as Persian and Arabic do not enjoy similar ratification, in spite of being spoken by large numbers of the immigrant population. Foster (2003) highlights this inconsistency in comparing Sweden's Romani-speakers (around 3500) with its Arabic-speakers (around 200 000) while perceptively pointing out that there is a marked difference in status whether a language (such as Arabic) is spoken by a minority, or whether it is designated the title of *official* minority language (such as Romani Chib).⁴² Such official status is, evidently, not attained by number of speakers, but instead by length of uninterrupted existence in Sweden. According to the Language Council of Sweden⁴³, a minority language may only be considered for official status after three generations, or approximately one hundred years in Sweden. It is worth mentioning that the current Swedish population even now includes third-generation Arabic-speaking citizens. The Language Council indicates that Arabic may possibly be assessed for an eventual status change after the upcoming fifty years with regard to its use in religious practices in Sweden.⁴⁴ Foster (2003) questions whether the Arabic language will be alive after fifty years.⁴⁵ To find a way out of the quandary of *Catch-22* that minority immigrant languages are presently trapped in, Foster (2003) suggests that in order for unofficial minority languages to survive an additional fifty years in Sweden, measures such as that of official minority language status may need to be implemented as an incentive towards language maintenance. She speculates that without such measures, immigrant minority languages may have died out before they reach their centenary.⁴⁶ Parkvall (2009) identifies Arabic as the largest heritage language in Swedish schools, only outranked by the Swedish language itself.⁴⁷ In addition, he predicts that numbers of Arabic-speakers in Swedish schools will continue to increase in the foreseeable future, and, according to his own estimates, will soon supersede Finnish as the second most common heritage language in Sweden besides Swedish.⁴⁸ Parkvall (2009) may very well be right in his prognosis of the position of the Arabic language in Sweden, if the current trend of

⁴¹ <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/08/56/34/920bbf49.pdf> Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁴² Foster 2003:5 Retrieved on Nov.12, 2012 from ww2.lingfil.uu.se/ling/semfiler/LisaD030911.pdf

⁴³ Språkrådet – Institutet för språk och folkminnen

⁴⁴ www.sprakradet.se/servlet/GetDoc?meta_id=2119#item100100 Retrieved on Nov.12, 2012.

⁴⁵ Foster 2003:36 Retrieved on Nov.12, 2012 from ww2.lingfil.uu.se/ling/semfiler/LisaD030911.pdf

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Parkvall 2009:106

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

new arrivals of first language Arabic speakers continues to thrive. However, Foster's (2003) concern for Arabic language maintenance remains a relevant question for the children of such first language Arabic speakers in Sweden, as well as the following generations, in view of the present lack of an appropriate Arabic heritage language curriculum in Swedish schools. As a case in point, Baquedano-López & Figueroa (2011) refer to the report of Di Lucca et al. (2008) on a large study of Moroccan adolescents in Italian schools which shows that rapid language shift from Arabic to the new majority language may occur within the same generation.⁴⁹ Second or third generation Arabic speakers that have not received adequate training in their heritage language, if the language is not already lost, may develop a new, and local, dialectal variety of Arabic; a pidgin⁵⁰-Arabic, which may hamper their ability to partake in their worldwide cultural heritage community and their ability to communicate with other Arabic heritage language speakers.

3.2. The Swedish Cultural Heritage Lift

The official website of the Swedish Government clearly states that,⁵¹ “It is a national priority to promote a living cultural heritage that is maintained, used, and developed. The cultural heritage belongs to everyone and gives perspective on society. The citizens’ commitment and participation are important prerequisites in order for the cultural heritage to live on and develop.”⁵² Moreover, it says that, “The view and interpretation of the cultural heritage are constantly changing and from a citizen perspective it is important that there be forums for dialogue on these interpretations.”⁵³ Interestingly, the Swedish Department of Culture has launched a new effort called ‘the Cultural Heritage Lift’, or ‘*Kulturarvslyftet*’ in Swedish, in order to boost cultural heritage and support cultural activities on a national and regional level. The primary goals are to bring attention to children’s and youth’s right to culture; to improve conditions for innovative culture; and to attend to the need for building a base for knowledge about, caring for, and making the cultural heritage and cultural environment accessible to all. In fact, funds have been allocated to provide 4400 subsidized employment opportunities in the capacity of cultural heritage maintenance during the years of 2012-2014. These work

⁴⁹ Duranti et al. 2012:549

⁵⁰ A simplified mixture of two, or more, languages; whose goal is rudimentary communication without adherence to grammatical rules.

⁵¹ The following quote, as well as any further quotes from Swedish, is my own translation to English.

⁵² <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/15296> Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁵³ <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/13149> Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

opportunities are targeting people with a fragile link to the job market such as people living with disabilities or returning to work after a long term illness.⁵⁴ The main emphasis of the effort is to reinforce undertakings that renew and develop the cultural arena by using innovative ways to spread culture and make it accessible to new and broader audiences.

3.3. Tangible vs. Intangible Cultural Heritage

Sweden's Department of Culture does not detail specific types of cultural heritage to be preserved but refers in general terms to recordings needing to be digitalized, which could include samples of oral storytelling.⁵⁵ Evidently, the status and value of storytelling requires further official recognition and establishment at a Swedish national level.⁵⁶

The Council of the European Union has a similar void of information on oral storytelling with an almost exclusive focus on preserving tangible cultural heritage such as sites, buildings, and art. However, during the 2905th Education, Youth and Culture meeting in Brussels on November 20, 2008 the council adopted several conclusions including the one that, "cultural ties between Europe and the other regions of the world can be important for the development of intercultural dialogue and the setting up of common cultural projects; moreover, *the Union has to ensure the promotion of its cultural and linguistic diversity.*"⁵⁷ While listing approaches to endorse this conclusion, the document declares its support for "the protection, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, both tangible and *intangible*".⁵⁸

The term 'intangible cultural heritage' is a reference to UNESCO's⁵⁹ General Conference and 32nd session in year 2003 where a milestone in the evolution of international policies for promoting cultural diversity took place in the adoption of the 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage'. It was, "the first time the international community had recognized the need to support the kind of cultural manifestations and expressions that until then

⁵⁴ <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/1897/a/175508> Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ While concluding the writing of this thesis, a meeting with the Institute for Language and Folklore (Institutet för språk och folkminnen) revealed that Sweden ratified the UNESCO Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage on January 26, 2011. However, no funds have been provided for the promotion of this ratified convention which has caused it to pass by widely unnoticed.

⁵⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/documents/icd_external_relations_en.doc.pdf pg.2 – Emphasis added. Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁵⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/documents/icd_external_relations_en.doc.pdf pg.4 – Emphasis added. Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁵⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

had not benefited from such a large legal and programmatic framework.”⁶⁰ The main goal of this convention is, “to safeguard the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Such heritage may be manifested in domains such as oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practice about nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship.”⁶¹ Linda-May Ballard sums up the nature of Intangible Cultural Heritage to be safeguarded by the UNESCO 2003 Convention in six points:

- is transmitted from generation to generation;
- is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history;
- provides communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity;
- promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity;
- is compatible with international human rights instruments;
- complies with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, and of sustainable development.⁶²

3.3.1. Essence of Intangible Cultural Heritage

A grasp of intangible cultural heritage aids in intercultural dialogue and stimulates reciprocated respect for diverse customs and ways of life. UNESCO points out that, “The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.”⁶³ Furthermore;

There is a risk that certain elements of intangible cultural heritage could die or disappear without help, but safeguarding does not mean fixing or freezing intangible cultural heritage in some pure and primordial form. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning. /.../

Any safeguarding measure refers to strengthening and reinforcing the diverse and varied circumstances, tangible and intangible, that are necessary for the continuous evolution

⁶⁰ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00004> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Ballard 2008:74-75

⁶³ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to future generations.⁶⁴

With the Swedish Department of Culture's recent cultural heritage initiative in mind⁶⁵ it is of critical significance to be reminded that, "Safeguarding measures must always be developed and applied with the consent and involvement of the community itself."⁶⁶ As Ballard perceptively points out, "The unique factor in intangible cultural heritage is that the focus is always on people, the holders and constant recreators of the cultural artifact and practice."⁶⁷ Hence, any measures taken toward capturing intangible cultural heritage in an exile community must be applied with intrinsic respect for the culture and for the people through whom it is expressed.⁶⁸

3.4. Storytelling – Multifaceted Applications

3.4.1. Storytelling and Language as a Vehicle of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Oral expressions embrace an enormous variety of spoken forms such as, "proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dramatic performances and more. Oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive."⁶⁹

UNESCO proceeds to clarify that;

Because they are passed on by word of mouth, oral traditions and expressions often vary significantly in their telling. Stories are a combination – differing from genre to genre, from context to context and from performer to performer – of reproduction, improvisation and creation. This combination makes them a vibrant and colorful form of expression, but also fragile, as their viability depends on an uninterrupted chain passing traditions from one generation of performers to the next.⁷⁰

Emphasizing the vital role of language, UNESCO proceeds to state that;

Different languages shape how stories, poems and songs are told, as well as affecting their content. The death of a language inevitably leads to the permanent loss of oral traditions and expressions. However, it is these oral expressions themselves and their

⁶⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00012> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

⁶⁵ See pg.19.

⁶⁶ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00012> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

⁶⁷ Ballard 2008:93

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00053> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

performance in public that best help to safeguard a language rather than dictionaries, grammars and databases. Languages live in songs and stories, riddles and rhymes and so the protection of languages and the transmission of oral traditions and expressions are very closely linked.⁷¹

As the results of the field study in Hammarkullen indicate;

The most important part of safeguarding oral traditions and expressions is maintaining their every day role in society. It is also essential that opportunities for knowledge to be passed from person-to-person survive; chances for elders to interact with young people and pass on stories in homes and schools, for example.⁷²

3.4.2. Storytelling for Inter- and Cross Cultural Dialogue and Understanding

In the previously mentioned conclusion adopted by the European Union in 2008, it is established that, “intercultural dialogue can help to bring individuals and peoples closer together, and help towards conflict prevention.”⁷³ The international non-profit organization ‘Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity’, based in Australia, promotes linguistic and cultural diversity by offering language and culture classes to help raise the status of minority languages and in order to broaden public awareness of minority languages.⁷⁴ Such activities give heritage language speakers an opportunity to use their heritage language in educational settings directed at all ages.

In examining empathy and narrative competency (2012) Shaun Gallagher quotes Dan Hutto (2008) who states, “The fact that in most cultures children grow up surrounded by stories that transmit cultural meanings and values initiates them into practices of understanding reasons for actions”.⁷⁵ Gallagher argues that, “this development of communicative and narrative competency is a necessary component of empathic understanding”.⁷⁶

Interestingly, in a novel approach, Ali Al-Jafar and Cary A. Buzzelli have conducted a study (2004) to examine the use of fairytales and storytelling with young children in order to “promote cultural understanding and peace education”.⁷⁷ Children in a rural school in America listened to two versions of the Cinderella tale - a familiar version and a Kuwaiti version. They then

⁷¹ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00053> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/documents/icd_external_relations_en.doc.pdf pg.2, Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁷⁴ www.rnld.org/language_maintenance Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

⁷⁵ Foolen et al. 2012:186

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Al-Jafar & Buzzelli 2004:35

proceeded to write their own story, uniquely reflecting elements from both fairytales and, thus, creating a dialogical narrative. The researchers of the study believe that such experiences can promote children's understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Indeed, they insist that, "Fairytales promote cultural understanding because they address universal themes encountered by many cultures."⁷⁸ Additionally, they assert that, "Storytelling, especially through the genre of fairy tales, strengthens language appreciation, creativity, and self-expression"⁷⁹, elaborating that storytelling "provides an excellent means of assisting children in connecting their own world with the 'world-of-the-other'."⁸⁰ The authors cement the cross cultural angle by stating that, "fairytales can be used to tap the richness of cultural traditions outside the mainstream".⁸¹

Al-Jafar and Buzzelli convey that, "Some cultures put a great emphasis on storytelling... The Arabic culture looks at the poet and the storyteller in the past as we look now at any news station. It is an important role still played in some communities in the Middle East."⁸² The researchers quote Pellowski (1977) in saying that, "in order to generate new stories and narrate the old ones, the child needs to listen to this art".⁸³ In discussing the value of storytelling for teaching empathy and cross cultural understanding the researchers expound on the function of listening:

Many times when children just listen to stories, they learn to visualize without visual aids. Children are able to enlarge the tale to include and visualize their own interpretations. The "ability to visualize, and to fantasize, is the basis of creative imagination" (Baker & Greene, 1977). It enables children to develop empathy and insights into the motives and actions of others. /.../ This is an active process of feeling, reflecting, creating and seeing through the senses (Zobairi & Gulley, 1989).⁸⁴

In concluding the results of their study, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli suggest that:

The use of fairytales enables children to explore other cultures through direct engagement with some of the underlying values, images and stories of the cultures. These children were able to see how fairytales from their own country were similar and different in important ways from the fairytales of another culture. /.../

⁷⁸ Al-Jafar & Buzzelli 2004:37

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Al-Jafar & Buzzelli 2004:38

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Al-Jafar & Buzzelli 2004:39

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

Thus, children had the opportunity to use their own oral traditions to interpret and understand the oral traditions of another country. By connecting different versions of the same tale from different parts of the world, the tales become the starting point for a dialogue between nations and between the children in those nations... Exploring the meanings of fairytales from another country helped children better understand tales important in their own country.⁸⁵

The results of this study are relevant not only for children of different countries, but also for children of different communities and cultures within the same country or city, so as to foster empathy and understanding for diverse citizens of the society in which they live, as well as instilling an appreciation for their own cultural heritage and that of others.

3.4.3. Giving a Voice to the Voiceless

Patrick J. Lewis declares that, “Story and storytelling are simultaneously cognitive processes and products of cognition. Story is both art and quotidian. /.../ Quite possibly, it is the principal way of understanding the lived world. Story is central to human understanding – it makes life livable, because without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other.”⁸⁶ Likewise, “It is through genuine repetition, storytelling, that humans narrate ways of knowing and being.”⁸⁷ He develops this concept further by referring to narrative research through which, “Giving voice to the voiceless”⁸⁸ is seen as “providing a method for ‘telling stories’, giving voice to those traditionally marginalized and providing a less exploitative research method”.⁸⁹

Martha J. Cutter echoes this sentiment in her introduction to ethnic storytelling⁹⁰:

Ethnic storytelling does not require erudite language, sophisticated equipment, or a powerful microphone; it only requires a voice and someone willing to listen to this voice. Storytelling may be our only instrument of hope, and our most powerful instrument of change in the face of exclusion, racism, and violence, but it is crucial that we hear – and heed – new voices and new modes of telling.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Al-Jafar & Buzzelli 2004:42

⁸⁶ Lewis 2011:505

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Lewis 2011:506

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Cutter (2011) defines ethnic storytelling as “acts of linguistic creativity, acts that would defend and maintain the stories of ethnic cultures while using these stories to move forward into a different future of racial tolerance and diversity”. Retrieved on Jan.23, 2013 from <https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/melus/summary/v036/36.1.cutter.html>

⁹¹ Cutter 2011:5

For those of us with a cultural heritage and language that differs from the mainstream, Agnes W. He concludes that when parents use the heritage language out of choice, not necessity, a positive model is developed for heritage language maintenance among heritage language learners.⁹² She emphasizes the “*by-choice hypothesis*” further by adding that when motivated by a “linguistic, cognitive, and cultural enrichment” goal, the result is, “the creation of citizens of the world.”^{93,94}

Those of us, who belong to mainstream culture and language, and are similarly motivated by cognitive and cultural enrichment - as well as world citizenship - are willing to listen to the voice of ethnic storytellers in communities close-by and beyond. In order to explore and engage with some of the central values, images and stories told by Arabic-speaking women in Hammarkullen, a synopsis of their oral Arabic stories, in my own translation, will be presented.

3.5. Research Questions

During the initial field study of home literacy practices among Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen, the objective was to find emergent literacy practices offered to children; especially to children from age 0-6. Moreover, an objective of particular interest was to explore any evidence of the practice of oral storytelling. Having found such evidence, as well as the theory of intangible cultural heritage, the theory of language status and maintenance, and the theory of the value and applications of storytelling; the following research questions presented themselves, which, consequently, led to the writing of this thesis:

1. May the practice of oral storytelling be classified as intangible cultural heritage?
2. Why is this practice important, not only for heritage language learners, but also for mainstream society?
3. Which oral Arabic stories are told in Hammarkullen?
4. In which language or dialect are the stories told?
5. Which sources do ethnic storytellers turn to for inspiration; known or unknown stories handed down from previous generations or from international sources?
6. Which themes are found in the tales?

⁹² Duranti et al. 2012:596

⁹³ The term “world citizen” may be used in more than one way. Here, the intention is to describe people that celebrate diversity while promoting cross-cultural understanding and co-operation. Such people are open to experiencing and exploring languages, philosophies, arts and traditions other than those of mainstream society.

⁹⁴ Duranti et al. 2012:596

7. Is it possible, or not, to discern traces of previous research⁹⁵ on Arabic folktales in the samples of oral storytelling collected in the exile community of Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen?
8. Do these samples of oral storytelling convey obvious or implicit morals or cultural values, or not; and if so, what are they?

Part 4: Method

4.1. Data Collection

From the initial period of March 12, to April 12, 2012, and during a subsequent period of May 30, to June 7, 2012, I was temporarily based at the university offices of Center for Urban Studies in the heart of Hammarkullen from which I conducted my *area sampling*.⁹⁶ It is culturally appropriate for a female researcher to interview Middle Eastern women, and it is the cultural norm for Arabic-speaking women to be the main caregivers of children from age 0-6. Thus, the field study's target group consisted of Arabic-speaking women, mothers, and grandmothers. Appropriate venues for *multi-stage sampling*⁹⁷ were found through gatekeepers of the community such as municipal workers, volunteers and residents. These contacts were found by joining a group of researchers on a two-hour walking tour of the neighborhood on the first day of the field study period, which afforded me an excellent opportunity to be introduced to local gatekeepers of the community, as well as to find suitable venues where potential respondents might gather. Furthermore, this opportunity provided a concrete verification of the legitimacy of my entry into the community by publically demonstrating my link to the university.⁹⁸

4.1.1. Identifying Sampling Venues

My initial introduction to the gatekeepers of the community enabled me to find several venues of interest where I would be able to encounter the target group of the field study: Arabic-speaking women, grandmothers, and mothers. Sites for multi-stage sampling were as follows:⁹⁹

⁹⁵ See pg.10-11; 2.1. *Research on Arabic Folktales*.

⁹⁶ Guthrie 2010:61

⁹⁷ *ibid*.

⁹⁸ DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:41-42

⁹⁹ Cedernil 2012:9

1. **“The Meeting Place”** (*Mötesplatsen*) – located at the red cottage by the town square where local volunteers, municipality workers, and other local representatives of the community meet for lunch and networking on Tuesdays.
2. **“The Sewing Shop”** (*Syverkstaden*) – also located at the red cottage by the town square where a multinational assortment of women gather on Thursday afternoons in order to knit, sew, and talk, using donated fabrics and sewing-machines.
3. **“The Support Network”** (*Stödnätet*) – an association for women, children, and youth, run by local female residents whose goal it is to offer a multinational venue for support, education, advice in dealing with authorities, catering and much more. Courses are offered in preventive medicine, languages, as well as many other subjects that benefit immigrants in the neighborhood.
4. **“Open Preschool”** (*Öppna förskolan*) – a drop-in municipal preschool for parents and children to meet, play, sing, and do crafts under the supervision of two preschool teachers.
5. **“The Muslim Preschool”** (*Muslimska förskolan*)¹⁰⁰ – a newly opened (beginning of March 2012) preschool with a Muslim profile owned by the Islamic League (*Islamska förbundet*) located at what used to be the Church of Mary just below the town square.
6. **“The Castle”** (*Slottet*) – a municipal preschool a stone’s throw away from the Muslim Preschool, with a nationally recognized music-program and run with a *Reggio Emilia*¹⁰¹-inspired philosophy of teaching.

Moreover, I met with a group of eight Arabic-speaking women for *cluster-sampling*¹⁰², the majority of which are language-teachers at the **Caritas-charity** in the adjacent neighborhood.

The indicated venues afforded a natural setting for *participant observation*¹⁰³ and *unstructured face-to-face interviews*¹⁰⁴. All venues are run on a drop-in basis, with exception for the Muslim Preschool and the Castle. Thus, I would go to the specified sites, that gate keepers had informed me were likely for Arabic-speaking women to gather at, and simply wait for random respondents

¹⁰⁰ Subsequently named *Römossens Förskola*.

¹⁰¹ A city in Northern Italy whose name has been coined as a concept that defines the educational philosophy being developed in the city’s municipal preschools.

¹⁰² Guthrie 2010:61

¹⁰³ DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:10

¹⁰⁴ Guthrie 2010:119

to show up. Consequently, I systematically visited each site at least once during the field study, with exception for the Open Preschool which I visited every Wednesday morning – a setting which presented a natural milieu for *participant observation*¹⁰⁵ as well as the prospect of interviewing respondents on the spot.

Interaction with respondents at these venues led to increasing circles of contacts among Arabic-speakers and, thus, with local storytellers. Subsequent interviews with additional storytellers at the sewing shop of the *Caritas*-charity, as well as at the Support Network, led to the collection and recording of several samples of oral storytelling during the second interview period in June, 2012. Indeed, a network of connections was established that could benefit further research projects in the area.

4.2. Representation

During the two periods of data collection a total of thirty interviews were conducted, resulting in the collection of forty-nine stories. According to Guthrie (2010), when it comes to exploratory research, “A sample of 30 will usually give results similar to a normal distribution.”¹⁰⁶ However, it is important to point out that “it is not possible to generalize from a single case study to an entire population.”¹⁰⁷ A longer field study would have yielded not only more representative results, but also a significantly larger amount of stories, as it was discovered towards the end of the field study that there is a network of Arab authors and poets that congregate in a nearby neighborhood – possibly an excellent source of additional samples of intangible cultural heritage. Nevertheless, at the start of the data collection it was not known if any samples of oral storytelling would be found at all. Consequently, it is a great privilege to be able to present the samples that were found, and a joy to know that there are many more waiting to be explored.

4.3. Presentation

The stories were told in a variety of colloquial Arabic dialects such as Iraqi (31), Palestinian (16), Lebanese (11), Syrian (6), and Egyptian (1). Those dialects, or choice of vocabulary, differed according to if the speaker was from the north or south, from a city or a village, and according to religion; Christian, Shi’ite Muslim, or Sunni Muslim. The eleven stories that were

¹⁰⁵ DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:10

¹⁰⁶ Guthrie 2010:54

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

presented in formal Modern Standard Arabic did not give rise to the comments, vivid descriptions, nor the raucous laughter that accompanied many of the stories told in colloquial dialects. Certain storytellers got carried away with the storytelling and, thus, the adherence to grammatical forms, such as masculine or feminine forms, varied greatly. Those stories are described in the English synopsis for the reason that a faithful Arabic transcription would render them incomprehensible. In some cases, only a video recording would do the story justice in order to absorb, not only the spoken language, but the body language and presence of the speaker as well. In fact, UNESCO has inscribed a Palestinian *ḥikaye*¹⁰⁸ on its *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.¹⁰⁹ The *ḥikaye* is preserved in form of a digital video recording in order to capture, not only the words, but “the emphasis, speech rhythms and vocal inflections” that evaporate in printed form.¹¹⁰

It is not within the scope of this thesis to present all of the forty-nine stories in Arabic and in English. The stories will be grouped into certain genres or topics, and stories of particular interest will be presented in full. With the exception of five sample stories that will additionally be presented in Arabic, the chosen stories will be presented in an English synopsis to benefit non-Arabic speakers/readers. Where it pertains to the appreciation of certain stories, comments highlighting underlying features will be offered, however, the thesis will not venture in to a complete literary analysis of each sample of storytelling.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

As a female researcher with a personal experience of the cultures of the Middle East, as well as being an Arabic-speaker, in spite of being a native Swede, I enjoyed an immediate positive response from the participants and a good rapport was established that aided the data collection. All interviews and storytelling sessions were conducted on a voluntary basis. Because of the inherent positive nature of storytelling and the pleasure with which the respondents delved into their rich cultural heritage it is not necessary to conceal the identities of the storytellers. Nevertheless, the storytellers’ name will be kept confidential and will be replaced by an Arabic female name as an alias. The country of origin of the stories that are presented, as well as the

¹⁰⁸ A narrative expression practiced by Arabic-speaking women.

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00124> Retrieved on June 12, 2012.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

ethnic group or religion of the respondents, will be indicated since these factors influence themes, vocabulary, and underlying images of a number of tales.¹¹¹

4.4.1. Cultural Expressions – An Ethical Dilemma?

In their reflections on ethnology Ehn & Löfgren (1996) point out that culture is, “automatically associated with phenomena such as community, cooperation, mutuality, understanding and shared experiences, despite that its oppressive and irrational characteristics also are well known.”¹¹² The researcher, as well as the reader, needs to tread the fine line between *cultural relativism* and *ethnocentrism*. The former perspective holds that there is no universal standard of morality; that the concept of “right” or “wrong” ethics, customs, and beliefs is purely culture-specific and that, thus, no one may judge another society’s cultural practices. The latter perspective, contrariwise, uses its own cultural values and standards as a superior model by which it judges another culture’s adherence to or divergence from its own “superior” cultural and ethical practices. In an attempt to find a middle course between these opposing perspectives it is important to clarify that, while this thesis promotes diversity, it does not condone practices that are in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - nor of any other human rights. In addition, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage clearly spells out which kinds of intangible cultural heritage it safeguards, leaving the reader to infer which kinds of heritage that is *not* to be safeguarded and promoted.¹¹³

Some of the samples of oral storytelling presented in this thesis contain features of child or spousal abuse, and other instances of insupportable expressions of human existence. This component of brutality is not without precedent in Arabic tales.¹¹⁴ The Palestinian authors Muhawi & Kanaana (1989), in describing the heroines of Palestinian tales, write;

[If] the tales do present a portrait of the culture, then their treatment of women must contain a large measure of truth, as anyone familiar with Arab culture would confirm. Besides, the position of Otherness in which women are cast endows them with objectivity; they observe the society and weave plots for the folktales from the materials of their daily experience.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Bassiouney 2009:97

¹¹² Ehn & Löfgren 1996:173

¹¹³ See pg.20 for Ballard’s list of intangible cultural heritage to be preserved. (Ballard 2008:74–75)

¹¹⁴ Moberg 1927:22

¹¹⁵ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:18

Nevertheless, while telling of abusive story characters, the respondents hasten to add that such behavior is “scary”, “unacceptable”, or “not done”; yet they proceed to tell the stories as a sample of tales that have been and still are being passed down through their family to the next generation – not in order to promote such practices, but to inform of how things used to be done in the past, or simply as samples of unknown and unusual stories. In discussing true-life “family stories”, Anna Johansson’s (2005) contemplations may be applied to oral family storytelling – whether it describes actual events or whether it, by means of fictional characters, tells of practices (historical or ongoing) within a culture that are being passed on to the next generation:

Family stories are the cornerstone of family culture, but may also be regarded as a form of social control in that they legitimize the dominant forms of reality and set boundaries for other alternative interpretations. /.../

Creating new “family stories” may in some cases cause unspoken or spoken taboos, pacts and rules to be broken and well preserved secrets [to be] exposed.¹¹⁶

Although the nature of the narrators’ assurances of their personal rejection of some of the featured practices seem both spontaneous and heartfelt, the possibility remains that this demonstration of rejection may be due to Guthrie’s (2010) definition of ‘*yea*’ saying, “the tendency for interviewees to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear, especially where the interviewer has higher status”.¹¹⁷

Oral storytelling may entail commendable values and customs, as well as features of superstition, oppression, violence, abuse, and discrimination. The ethical dilemma does not necessarily lie in *what* the stories contain, but rather in *how* the stories are applied. Thus, the telling of deplorable actions does not legitimize their practice. Instead, storytellers may pass on such stories to shed light on the “structures that they are co-creators of and sometimes deviators from”.¹¹⁸ Therefore, a choice is presented to view the sample stories as enriching cultural heritage or as describing unacceptable customs which may produce understanding and empathy for the experiences and behaviors of children and adults in diverse cultural communities.¹¹⁹ Concerning the former, Muhawi & Kanaana (1989) have this to say:

¹¹⁶ Johansson 2005:100

¹¹⁷ Guthrie 2010:126

¹¹⁸ Ehn 1993:44

¹¹⁹ Ehn 1993:88

Knowledge of at least part of the culture embodied in the folktales will enrich our study of them; without it, analysis would suffer from a certain degree of abstraction. The culture and the art form are not reducible to, or deductible from, each other. The tales do not simply mirror the culture, rather, and more accurately, they present a portrait of it. It would surely be of interest to the readers of these folktales to observe how thoroughly that portion of their form which is common with other traditions has been adapted by local tellers to express indigenous realities. Then we will be better able not only to understand the tales as cultural documents but also appreciate them as works of art.¹²⁰

Part 5: Table of Compiled Tales

5.1. Aggregated Table Data

All interviews were conducted in a variety of Arabic colloquial dialects, except for one with an Iraqi Kurd who chose to speak in Swedish.¹²¹ The Dictaphone was used to record sixteen samples of oral storytelling, out of which fifteen samples were transcribed from recordings into written Arabic. Eighteen samples were told orally and then written down, either by the respondent or me. Out of those eighteen samples, seven were first presented in broken written Swedish since the respondents were not able to write in Arabic. Arrangements were then made to record four of those stories in spoken Arabic, which were then transcribed into Colloquial Arabic. During one prescheduled interview, a Palestinian woman submitted twelve stories that she claimed to be well-known to all Arabic-speakers. These stories were then presented to other respondents to poll their familiarity with them. The international stories were known to all respondents, as were stories from *Arabian Nights*. A number indicates how many of the remaining stories were known or retold by other respondents than the first contributor. An example of this is *Tale 6. An Iraqi Cinderella* told by one respondent, and known by another respondent, which is indicated by the number 2 in the column for known tales.

¹²⁰ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:12

¹²¹ For a full account of interviews see Cedernil 2012:14-29.

5.2. Table of Collected Story Samples

Title	Date	Location	Spoken	Written	Transcription	Recorded	Known	MSA ¹²²	Iraqi	Palestinian	Lebanese	Egyptian	Syrian	Swedish	Narrator Alias	Narrator rel. ¹²³
1. Snow White	2012-03-20	S.N. ¹²⁴	X				X Intl. ¹²⁵		X						Abīr + Basma	Iraqi Kurd + Iraqi Sunni
2. Layla and the Wolf ¹²⁶	2012-03-15	All	X				X Intl.		X	X			X			All
3. Sleeping Beauty	2012-03-20	S.N.	X				X Intl.		X						Basma	Iraqi Sunni
4. The Lying Boy	2012-04-11	O.P. ¹²⁷	X				X		X	X	X			X	Dunyā	Iraqi Kurd
5. Wolf & the 7 Lambs	2012-03-27	S.N.	X	X MSA	Emān		X Intl.	X	X	X					Basma + Emān ¹²⁸	Iraqi Sunni + Pal. Sunni
6. Iraqi Cinderella	2012-06-08	S.N.	X			X	2		X						Fātin	Iraqi Ass. Chr. ¹²⁹
7. Şa'alūk a	2012-06-08	S.N.	X			½			X						Ġāida [?]	Iraqi Shi'ite
8. Abū Qurūn	2012-03-20	S.N.	X				4		X						Basma + Hiba	Iraqi Sunni + Chr. ¹³⁰

¹²² Modern Standard Arabic

¹²³ Religion/Ethnic Group is only significant for dialectal identification.

¹²⁴ Support Network

¹²⁵ International

¹²⁶ "Little Red Riding Hood"

¹²⁷ Open Preschool

¹²⁸ Alternate spelling: Imān

¹²⁹ Iraqi Assyrian Christian

¹³⁰ Iraqi Muslims (Shi'ite, Sunni) + Assyrian Christian

Title	Date	Location	Spoken	Written	Transcription	Recorded	Known	MSA ¹²²	Iraqi	Palestinian	Lebanese	Egyptian	Syrian	Swedish	Narrator Alias	Narrator rel. ¹²³
9. Kid-napping Woman	2012-03-20	S.N.	X				2		X						Basma + Abīr	Iraqi Sunni + Kurd
10. al-Aswad	2012-04-11	O.P.	X						X					X	Dunyā	Iraqi Kurd
11. A Red Cat	2012-06-08	S.N.	X		V.C. ¹³¹ + Emān	X					X				Ibtisām	Leb. Shi'ite ¹³²
12. Man Turned into Ashes	2012-06-08	S.N.	X			X			X						Fātin	Iraqi Ass. Chr.
13. Duck who was Afraid to Bathe	2012-04-11	O.P.	X								X		X		Dunyā	Iraqi Kurd
14. Gift of the Red Shoes	2012-03-15	M.P. ¹³³		X MS A	Emān			X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
15. Conceited Chick	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MS A	Emān			X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
16. Egg Story	2012-06-04	Car. ¹³⁴	X	X Sw. ¹³⁵		X					X				Jumāna	Leb. Chr. ¹³⁶

¹³¹ Valentina Cedernil

¹³² Lebanese Shi'ite

¹³³ Meeting Place

¹³⁴ Caritas

¹³⁵ Written in Swedish

¹³⁶ Lebanese Christian

Title	Date	Location	Spoken	Written	Transcription	Recorded	Known	MSA ¹²²	Iraqi	Palestinian	Lebanese	Egyptian	Syrian	Swedish	Narrator Alias	Narrator rel. ¹²³
17. Ḥasan, the Thirsty Camel	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MSA	Emān			X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
18. Juḥā & the Pot	2012-04-11	Car.	X				X		X						Khulūd	Iraqi Sunni
19. Juḥā at the Hammam	2012-04-11	Car.	X				X		X						Khulūd	Iraqi Sunni
20. Nasr. Hodja & Ceiling ¹³⁷	2012-04-11	Car.	X	X Sw.								X			Lana	Turk
21. Nasr. Hodja's Baklava	2012-04-11	Car.	X	X Sw.								X			Lana	Turk
22. Ḥusni & Zayna	2012-06-04	Car.	X	X Sw.							X				Jumāna	Leb. Chr.
23. Shajaret ad-Durr	2012-03-27	S.N.	X				X		X						Māha	S. Iraqi Shi'ite ¹³⁸
24. Sinbad the Sailor	2012-03-27	S.N.	X				X		X	X	X	X			Māha	S. Iraqi Shi'ite
25. Alibaba & the 40 Thieves	2012-03-27	S.N.	X				X		X	X	X	X			Māha	S. Iraqi Shi'ite
26. Aladdin	2012-03-27	S.N.	X				X		X	X	X	X			Māha	S. Iraqi Shi'ite

¹³⁷ "Nasreddin Hodja and his Ceiling"

¹³⁸ Southern Iraqi Shi'ite

Title	Date	Location	Spoken	Written	Transcription	Recorded	Known	MSA ¹²²	Iraqi	Palestinian	Lebanese	Egyptian	Syrian	Swedish	Narrator Alias	Narrator rel. ¹²³
27. King & 4 Wives	2012-06-05	Car.	X	X Sw.		X	X		X						Khulūd	Iraqi Sunni
28. The Poor Man	2012-06-04	Car.	X	X Sw.	V.C. + Emān	X					X				Jumāna	Leb. Chr.
29. 7 Handcrafts ¹³⁹	2012-03-27	S.N	X		Najla	X			X						Māha	S. Iraqi Shi'ite
30. Power of God & Blood Tie	2012-04-19	Home	X	X MSA	V.C. + Hiba		1/2	X	X						Hiba	Iraqi Ass. Chr.
31. Magic Handkerchief	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MSA	Emān		5	X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
32. Kaḥīl Ḥenna ¹⁴⁰	2012-03-27	S.N	X		Najla	X			X						Māha	S. Iraqi Shi'ite
33. King & Janfīyya ¹⁴¹	2012-06-08	S.N	X			X	2		X						Fātin	Iraqi Ass. Chr.
34. Yūsif & his Donkey	2012-06-04	Car.	X	X Sw.		X					X				Jumāna	Leb. Chr.
35. Restrictive Husband	2012-06-05	Car.	X			X			X						Khulūd	Iraqi Sunni

¹³⁹ "Seven Handcrafts and the Luck is Lost"

¹⁴⁰ "Kaḥīl Ḥenna in the Castle of Henna Blossoms"

¹⁴¹ "The King and his wife Janfīyya"

Title	Date	Location	Spoken	Written	Transcription	Recorded	Known	MSA ¹²²	Iraqi	Palestinian	Lebanese	Egyptian	Syrian	Swedish	Narrator Alias	Narrator rel. ¹²³
36. Cheating Husband	2012-06-05	Car.	X			X			X						Khulūd	Iraqi Sunni
37. Ruling the Roost	2012-06-04	Car.	X			X					X				Jumāna	Leb. Chr.
38. Abū Nazīf	2012-06-08	S.N.	X			X					X				Ibtisām	Leb. Shi'ite
39. Cricket sponsors Bird ¹⁴²	2012-06-08	S.N.	X			X	X		X						Ġāida?	Iraqi Sunni
40. Great Chirpy Bird	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MS A	Emān			X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
41. Gift of the Tree	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MS A	Emān		3	X	X	X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
42. The Woodcutter ¹⁴³	2012-03-20	S.N.	X				2		X						Basma + Abīr	Iraqi Sunni + Kurd
43. King & the Fox	2012-06-08	S.N.	X			X	2		X						Fātin	Iraqi Ass. Chr.
44. Leila & Caged Bird	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MS A	Emān			X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
45. The Limping Camel	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MS A	Emān			X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni

¹⁴² “When the Cricket Sponsored the Bird”

¹⁴³ The following stories are not included in the synopsis.

Title	Date	Location	Spoken	Written	Transcription	Recorded	Known	MSA ¹²²	Iraqi	Palestinian	Lebanese	Egyptian	Syrian	Swedish	Narrator Alias	Narrator rel. ¹²³
46. The Sly Fox	2012-03-15	M.P.		X MSA	Emān		X	X		X					Emān	Pal. Sunni
47. The Fisherman	2012-03-20	S.N.	X				X		X						Basma + Abīr	Iraqi Sunni + Kurd
48. Drowning Boy	2012-04-11	O.P.	X				X		X					X	Dunyā	Iraqi Kurd
49. Naughty Children	2012-03-15	M.P.	X							X					Emān	Pal. Sunni

Part 6: A Synopsis of Samples of Oral Arabic Storytelling

6.1. A Word on Readability

Innocent of a glamorous Walt Disney makeover, their untouched state may cause some stories to come across as raw, stilted, or sparse in English. Therefore, it is important to remember that they come alive in the original Arabic language by the unique presentation of the storytellers themselves. In the following synopsis, nuances, such as formulaic phrases, rhymes and idiomatic expressions, are lost in translation.¹⁴⁴ The story of *The Power of God and of the Blood Tie (Tale 30)* is written in *dual* plural form which affects the grammar throughout the story. Being aware that there are more aspects to these samples of ethnic storytelling than meet the eye, it only remains to delve into the following stories.

6.2. International Stories

When asked for samples of oral storytelling, the knee-jerk response of every single respondent - whether they knew of any other stories or not - was that of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’. However, even if the actual story remains unchanged, most respondents call it *Layla and the Wolf (Tale 2)*. In addition, the stories of *Snow White (Tale 1)* and *Sleeping Beauty (Tale 3)* are also popular among Arabic-speakers in Hammarkullen. Along with the international stories, samples were discovered that bear a striking resemblance to well-known traditional tales. For example, many of the respondents tell the story of *The Lying Boy (Tale 4)*¹⁴⁵ which is almost identical to Aesop’s¹⁴⁶ story about ‘The Boy Who Cried Wolf’.¹⁴⁷ However, in the Arabic version the boy drowns when his calls for help go unheeded by passersby that are accustomed to his previous false alarms. The moral of both versions is to teach children that no one believes or helps a liar, even if the habitual liar tells the truth. In addition, it was surprising to find the story of *The Wolf and the Seven Lambs*¹⁴⁸ (*Tale 5*). The tale actually features a mother-goat and her kids, yet the children are described as lambs in spite of the existence of an Arabic word for goat kid, جدي (*jadiyy*).¹⁴⁹ This story seems to be a *halal*¹⁵⁰ version of ‘The Three Little Pigs’ with influences

¹⁴⁴ For a play on Arabic words see Bushnaq 1986:(11-)13 *The Last Camel of Emir Hamid (Saudi Arabia)*.

¹⁴⁵ Another liar is featured in Bushnaq 1986:288 *The Truth (Syria)*.

¹⁴⁶ Aesop b.620 BC, d.560 BC.

¹⁴⁷ <http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/oxford/151.htm> Retrieved on July 18, 2012.

¹⁴⁸ The full text is found in English and Arabic on pg.64.

¹⁴⁹ For an anecdote of a goat kid see Jayyusi 2010:197.

¹⁵⁰ Permissible according to Islamic standards of purity.

of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, however, one respondent assigns a German origin to this story which would explain the standing wall-clock mentioned in the tale. In fact, following the interview, an endeavor to track the tale’s origin yielded corroboration for a German source. The University of Pittsburg not only identifies Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm as the collectors of this story, but even names the storytellers from which they received it: the Hassenpflug family from Hanau, in time for its first printed version in 1812¹⁵¹.¹⁵² Yet, quite remarkably, a twin version with minor modifications stems from India, specifically from Dandakaranya¹⁵³ – a region that is featured in many Hindu spiritual tales, and whose name in Sanskrit means “the Jungle of Punishments”.¹⁵⁴ A possible link between Indian and Arabic folklore may be traced to the ‘*Abbāsīd*’ court’s admirable labors in the compilation of folktales from far and wide. Intriguingly, “Ibn al-Nadīm’s tenth-century *Fihrist*” not only catalogues different genres of medieval storytelling, but also describes the ways in which tales hailing from Babylonia, Persia, and India were incorporated into Arabic narrative collections by either culling tales from manuscripts, or, by summoning storytellers from abroad to spin their tales in the presence of the ‘*Abbāsīd*’ minister Muḥammad al-Jahshiyāri.¹⁵⁵ An almost identical version to the same tale stems from a Palestinian storyteller; however, her story features a she-goat with three kids that are eaten by a hyena.¹⁵⁶ Bushnaq (1986) offers yet another version, this time Algerian, in the story of “How the Ewe Outwitted the Jackal”.¹⁵⁷

Not to be outdone, Fātin, an old Assyrian Christian grandmother in her eighties from Iraq tells the tale of a type of Cinderella¹⁵⁸ that also brings to mind features of Pinocchio.¹⁵⁹ *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)* is a typical folktale that contains magical elements of metamorphosis when a piece of wood is transformed into a beautiful girl.¹⁶⁰ Muhawi & Kanaana’s (1989) discussion on conflict, resolution, and kinship in Palestinian society is similarly experienced in Iraqi society and may have bearing on the issues that are touched on in this story:

¹⁵¹ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen 1812, vol.1, no.5*

¹⁵² <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm005.html> Retrieved on October 5, 2012.

¹⁵³ <http://www.indolink.com/displayArticleS.php?id=021506113400> Retrieved on July 18, 2012.

¹⁵⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dandakaranya> Retrieved on July 18, 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Meisami & Starkey 1998:735

¹⁵⁶ *Tale 38. The Little She-Goat*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:281.

¹⁵⁷ Bushnaq 1986:237

¹⁵⁸ The ever-popular Cinderella-theme is also found in Bushnaq 1986:181 *The Little Red Fish and the Clog of Gold (Iraq)* and Bushnaq 1986: 193 *The Princess in the Suit of Leather (Egypt)*.

¹⁵⁹ Written by Carlo Lorenzini, under the pseudonym of Carlo Collodi b.1826, d.1890 in Italy.

¹⁶⁰ In Bushnaq 1986:306 *Four Men and One Miracle (Saudi Arabia)* a dead tree branch turns into a girl.

Folktales, like other forms of narrative, thrive on conflict and resolution, not only as a theme but for plot structure as well. As we shall see, the tellers do not have to invent situations for conflict, for they are common in the social milieu, just as the colloquial language, with all its expressive potential, is in the linguistic environment. The majority of conflicts embodied in the tales have their basis in the structure of society – and necessarily so, if the tales are to be accepted as presenting a portrait of society. The organizing or orienting principle in Palestinian life is the kinship system, which defines both social position and roles and modes of interaction. Out of this stable, conservative ground arise figures in the tales whose desires put them in conflict with the established order as represented by the dictates of the kinship system, and who in the long run must learn to harmonize their separate wills with the will of the collectivity. Much can be learned about conflict and harmony simply from contemplating the definition of the Palestinian family, which is extended, patrilineal, patrilateral, polygynous, endogamous, and patrilocal.¹⁶¹

The story goes that there was a man that had a barren wife. He wished that he had a son but his wife did not become pregnant. Before he left on a journey he informed his wife that he wanted a son. On his return, his wife became frightened because of her failure to conceive the longed-for son¹⁶², and in anguish she placed a piece of wood from the fire-place in the bed and covered it with a blanket.¹⁶³ The man asked her, ‘What did you give birth to, a boy or a girl?’ The woman did not answer, but the child – the piece of wood, came to life and said that it wished to visit its maternal aunt’s house.¹⁶⁴ The mother tried to talk the child out of the plans since the relatives lived far away, but the child insisted and left.

The child told the aunt that she was her sister’s child, but the aunt knew that her sister was barren. Nevertheless, she let the child stay with her in her house that was next to the king’s fields. One day, the child asked to enter the king’s fields. However, the aunt refused the child’s request as it was well-known that anyone who entered the fields would be killed for trespassing. Nonetheless, the child entered, had a look around the king’s fields, and then returned.

The king’s son noticed that someone had entered the field, yet had not harmed it. He decided to sleep in the field that night to find out who the secret visitor might be. He went to sleep in the field and then woke up to a marvelous sight. The child, whose outward appearance was that of a

¹⁶¹ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:13

¹⁶² Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:15:33-35

¹⁶³ For a similar motif see *Tale 24. The Seven Leavenings*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:208.

¹⁶⁴ See similar motif of child speaking at birth in *Tale 37. The Fisherman*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:275.

glowing tree, shone like a light bulb in the darkness of the night as it wandered through the field and came to a stop by the well. The king's son watched as the tree-covering was removed only to reveal a beautiful girl that had been contained inside of it.¹⁶⁵ The lovely girl entered the well to swim and did not notice that one of her earrings fell beside the well. After her swim, she dressed herself in the tree-covering and slipped out of the field.

With the earring in safe custody, the king's son went to his father and announced his intention of marrying the mysterious glowing girl that had struck him with her beauty. A search party was sent out to the village, as well as to others nearby, but without success. Then word was spread of a girl that was visiting her aunt next to the king's field. The king's son and his search party found her, recognized her matching earring, and naturally, they married and lived happily ever after.

6.3. Monster Stories

An Iraqi respondent in her early fifties reminisces about how she as a child would sleep on the flat roof top along with her relatives on hot summer nights. The overhanging palm fronds would rustle and cast long finger-like shadows across the children. The adults would tell the children that at night the palm tree turned into a monster called *Şa'lūka* (*Tale 7*) that would grab with its green fingers any child that was not fast asleep - and gobble it up. Other Iraqis, of Kurdish, Arab, or Assyrian origin, tell of stories of *Abū Qurūn* (*Tale 8*) – a tall man that purportedly had two horns. Stories about this monster were used to keep children indoors during the midday siesta in order to avoid the worst heat and sun of the day; resulting in terrified children that wholeheartedly believed in the tales they were told. Many stories of witches were also told, especially stories about a woman¹⁶⁶ who kidnaps children (*Tale 9*).¹⁶⁷ These stories were told to frighten children into correct behavior as well as to prevent children from going out at night. Reportedly, ghost stories were not told at all.¹⁶⁸ An Iraqi Kurdish woman tells of stories about *al-Aşwad* (*Tale 10*) – a black creature that supposedly kept nightmares at bay.

¹⁶⁵ A similar wooden dress can be found in *Tale 34. The Merchant's Daughter*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:260-261.

¹⁶⁶ For another female snatcher, this time of bodies, see Jayyusi 2010:233 *The Body Snatcher*.

¹⁶⁷ See motif of abducted children in *Tale 35. Pomegranate Seeds*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:264.

¹⁶⁸ Cedernil 2012:16

6.4. Revenge

The British website, *Untold Stories Reminiscence Site*, states that, “Folktales are subtle carriers of the feelings, knowledge, beliefs and traditions of the cultures from which they come”.¹⁶⁹ With that in mind, it is interesting that the unknown story of *A Red Cat (Tale 11)*¹⁷⁰ is told by a Shi’ite woman from Lebanon – a country tormented by its recent history of civil war, as well as a long history of foreign invasions. The tale features an “invasion” of sorts and the *wāsta*¹⁷¹ used to avenge it. Ibtisām heard this story from her grandmother as a young child, and her own children are still thrilled to hear it told in a sing-song voice with its initial and final nursery rhyme, as well as featuring a song in the middle.

An aged Assyrian Iraqi respondent tells the tale of *The Man that was turned into Ashes (Tale 12)*. The old story tells of a woman of such beauty that when she married her husband, her new father-in-law desired her as well. In her distress she turned to a witch for help to solve the family dilemma. The witch dipped a hat into a magic brew and handed it to the beautiful woman, instructing her to have the father-in-law place it on his head. The woman did as she was told only to watch her father-in-law turn into ashes in front of her eyes. Aghast at the fate that possibly awaited her - knowing full well how young brides might suffer at the hands of husbands and in-laws¹⁷² - she turned to her husband pleading for mercy while explaining the circumstances of his father’s disappearance. Fortunately, the husband did not mind his father’s sudden demise in view of the fact that the old man had tried to seduce his lovely bride, and they lived happily ever after.

6.5. Social Mores & Values

Middle Eastern parents go to tremendous lengths in order to instill desirable social mores and values into their children, such as obedience, cleanliness and honor. According to Mona Henning, such attempts often involve threats.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, another timeworn way to motivate children is to tell stories. Dunyā, an Iraqi Kurdish woman in her mid-twenties tells of her Egyptian landlady’s story about *The Duck Who Was Afraid to Bathe (Tale 13)*. The story tells how the naughty little duck would refuse to be cajoled into bathing, and would take off running

¹⁶⁹ Seberry 2008:4

¹⁷⁰ The full text in English and Colloquial Lebanese Arabic is found on pg.67.

¹⁷¹ *Wāsta* – the rampant practice of using mafia-like connections to get things done.

¹⁷² Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:17-18

¹⁷³ Henning 1990:2:24

at the sight of water. Eventually, having become grimy and smelly with dirt, the little duck agrees to take a bath, which, to its great surprise, it enjoys tremendously. The story ends with the duck being clean, happy, and not afraid to bathe anymore. This story is one of a number that can be found that specifically teach the values of good hygiene.

To teach the social mores of gratitude, a young Palestinian woman shares the story of *The Gift of the Red Shoes (Tale 14)*. The story goes that there once was a little girl that was raised under her grandmother's care after the death of her parents. She was extremely well-behaved, but very sad since her young aunt was about to marry and move away, in spite of the aunt being her main care-giver. The grandmother comforted her and promised that she and God would take good care of the girl, even though the grandmother was in fact sick and bedridden. At the wedding party the aunt gives the girl a gift of a pair of red shoes. The aunt goes off to thank the wedding guests for attending the party, and the girl is overwhelmed by her aunt's generosity. The story ends with a speech of thanks where the girl spells out her gratitude towards her aunt and vows to never forget her kindness and generosity. Undoubtedly, this story is designed to inspire similar feelings of gratitude in the listeners for what they are given by their family.

The same Palestinian woman also adds the story of *The Conceited Chick (Tale 15)*. Şūşū is a naughty chick and even though he is small, he bothers his older siblings. He hates to be stuck at home, but his mother warns him from going outside alone so that the animals and bigger birds will not harm him. Nevertheless, one day Şūşū sneaks out behind his mother's back and tells himself that it is true that he is small and weak, but that he intends to prove to his mother that he is brave and bold.¹⁷⁴ The chick meets a big goose on the way, stands in front of her and shouts that he is not afraid of her. Likewise, he tells off a dog and donkey. After that he meets a camel. He yells at him with his loudest voice, 'You, o camel, are bigger than a goose or a dog or a donkey, but I'm not afraid of you!' The chick goes along, very happy and pleased with his own bravery and boldness, and passes by a bee hive. He enters it with great confidence, but suddenly hears an annoying buzz. A small bee attacks him and stings his head with its stinger. He hurries home with the bee chasing after him until he slams the front door shut. The mother assumes that the larger animals have chased him, but Şūşū pants, 'I challenged all the big ones, but this little

¹⁷⁴ Another small bold bird is found in the Tunisian story, *King of Birds*, Bushnaq 1986:228.

bee caused me to know my true abilities.’ This lesson in humility is intended to cure children of unwarranted arrogance.

In teaching honesty, Jumāna, a Christian Lebanese woman with Turkish parents tells an unknown story that is passed down from her mother –*The Egg Story (Tale 16)*. The story tells of a boy and his mother whose chickens laid eggs every day. However, the boy’s friends had no eggs and they asked the boy to give them some. The boy went to steal an egg and placed it in his pocket.¹⁷⁵ As he was leaving, his mother saw him go while baffled that there were no eggs in the coop. On the third egg-less day the mother became suspicious of her son and decided to catch him stealing eggs. She stopped him on his way out while he protested wildly against her accusations.¹⁷⁶ She inspected his pockets and found an egg. She took it and beat him.

The next day, he stole an egg and hid it in his sleeve. While protesting his innocence, she searched him and found the hidden egg. Once again, she beat him. On the third day, he hid an egg in his socks. Yet, wherever he hid them, his mother would find them.

On the following day, he thought of his best place yet to hide the eggs. He placed them in his cap and was certain that his mother would not be able to find them. As he was leaving, his mother asked him where he was going. ‘I’m leaving, by God. I don’t have anything! Search me, search me; I don’t have anything today!’

She would not let him leave until she had searched him. She searched his sleeves, his pockets – nothing – his socks, and – nothing. There was nothing wherever she searched. ‘May your house be destroyed!’¹⁷⁷ May your house be destroyed! You’ve made me crazy! You’re killing me!’ She hit him on the head, and all the eggs cracked.

6.6. Humor

Interestingly, few of the funny stories are directed at children. It is considered proper for children to be serious, conscientious, and well-behaved. With those goals in mind, Middle Eastern children’s stories most often hammer home the moral lesson in such a determined fashion that all the mirth vanishes from the actual story. For this reason, the contribution of

¹⁷⁵ For another thief see Jayyusi 2010:195.

¹⁷⁶ For another forced questioning see Jayyusi 2010:122 *How a Baghdadi Chief of Police Questioned Suspects*.

¹⁷⁷ A common Arabic curse.

Ḥasan, the Thirsty Camel (Tale 17) by Emān, a Palestinian woman, is surprising as well as provoking disapproval by other respondents who consider it too flippant. In fact, the plot would seem like an unremarkable children's story to someone from a Western background, except for its cliché-like "Arabian nights" setting. The story commences when Amīr, the camel driver, loads the last of the woolen pouches of spices, essences, and precious stones onto Ḥasan the camel's saddle in the shimmering heat of the morning sky bedecked in pink, purple and orange streaks of color. When the preparation for the journey across the burning desert comes to an end, Amīr fills some water-skins and ties them to the saddle, climbs into his seat, and kicks the camel to begin the trek.

As the camel and his driver journey toward the desert of colored dust, they leave the oasis filled with palm trees behind them. At that moment, Ḥasan the camel wishes that he had drunk extra water before leaving on the trip. As his thirst grows, so does his ingenuity in tricking his driver into not noticing when Ḥasan sips the cool, refreshing water from the water-skins behind his back. The camel becomes more and more obsessed with thinking of ways to get another drink that he trips and stumbles over a stone, in front of a snake, and into a palm tree, causing poor Amīr to land on his head in the dust several times. Each time, Amīr silently shakes his head at the camel's antics, while Ḥasan smiles his broad camel's smile.

Finally, Ḥasan and Amīr arrive at the village in the midst of an oasis filled with delicious date trees, fruits, herbs, and fragrant flowers. While Amīr takes the pouches to the market to vend his wares, Ḥasan hurries to the small lake in the middle of the oasis and jumps in. He quenches his enormous thirst until there is no room left for even a drop of water. The story ends with Amīr and Ḥasan riding off into the desert once again, but this time Ḥasan is not a thirsty camel any longer.

Adult Arabic-speakers love nothing better than indulging in the recounting of comical anecdotes. Most respondents report having grown up with tales of *Juḥā* – the traditional comical figure that sometimes is identified as the Turkish imam called Nasreddin Hodja.

Turkish scholars consider Nasreddin Hodja a historical personality. There is a tomb bearing his name in Akshehir. The inscription, if read backwards (this may be a

posthumous joke), gives a date of A.D. 1284 for the death of Nasreddin. He is supposed to have been born in 1208, in the small town of Khorto near Siwri-hisar.”¹⁷⁸

Nasreddin was considered “a sort of inspired simpleton”¹⁷⁹, and may have originated in Anatolia, but was soon made an honorary citizen in whichever country his stories were adopted.¹⁸⁰ Shah (1976) asserts that tales of “Mulla Nasrudin” may be found in Greece, Sicily, Russia and France.¹⁸¹ However, “Nasreddin’s greatest popularity was reserved for Arabic-speaking lands. In Egypt he is called Goha, in the Sudan, Jawha, in Algeria, Jeha, and in Morocco, Jha.”¹⁸² Bushnaq (1986) adds that he is called Djawha in Nubia, Djahan in Malta, and Giufa’ in Sicily. Moreover, she explains that “In North Africa Djuha’s identity merges with that of Si’ Djeha.”¹⁸³

It seems likely that the name “Goha” was much earlier than the Turkish Nasreddin. In fact, Goha originally seems to have been an entirely different person, a member of a Bedouin tribe renowned for his simplicity. What seems to have happened is that Nasreddin and Goha coalesced into one person sometime in the 16th century. Today, the printed versions of his “pleasantries” sold in *suqs*¹⁸⁴ from Cairo to Marrakesh give him the imposing title of Hodja Nasr al-Din Effendi Goha.”¹⁸⁵

Interestingly,

It has been suggested that Cervantes got the idea, and perhaps even the name, for his great work *Don Quixote* (at that time pronounced “kihote”) from Goha stories. After all, Cervantes spent some years as a prisoner in Algiers, and what better way to while away the time in a dreary cell than by exchanging Goha stories with one’s jailer?¹⁸⁶

An Iraqi respondent told two stories of Juḥā, however these can also be found in *Dragomanen*, the magazine of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, where they are credited to Nasreddin Hodja.¹⁸⁷ Shah (1976)¹⁸⁸ similarly ascribes the pot story to “Mulla Nasrudin” while Bushnaq (1986)¹⁸⁹ attributes the story to Djuha.

¹⁷⁸ Lunde 1971:1

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Shah 1976:9

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ Bushnaq 1986:251

¹⁸⁴ *Markets in Arabic*

¹⁸⁵ Lunde 1971:1-2

¹⁸⁶ Lunde 1971:2

¹⁸⁷ Zamrazilová-Jakmyr 1996-1997:1:18

¹⁸⁸ Shah 1976:18 *Om en gryta kan föröka sig (If a pot may reproduce).*

6.6.1. Juḥā and the Pot (Tale 18)

Once, Juḥā asked his neighbor to lend him a pot. He returns it with a smaller pot inside, much to his neighbor's surprise. 'What is this, o Juḥā?' Juḥā says, 'The pot had a baby.' 'Good', says the neighbor and takes the two pots.

Time passes, and Juḥā borrows the neighbor's pot once again. However, this time he does not return it. After several weeks the neighbor asks to have his pot back. Juḥā says, 'May God have mercy on it, but the pot has died.'

The neighbor responds, 'But, o Juḥā how is it possible for a pot to die?' Juḥā answers, 'My precious neighbor, when I said that the pot had a child, you believed me. But you don't want to believe that it has died!'¹⁹⁰

6.6.2. Juḥā at the Ḥammām (Tale 19)

One day Juḥā and his friend go to the ḥammām.¹⁹¹ After bathing, the friend asks Juḥā, 'If I were a slave, how many dinars would you pay for me?' Juḥā answers, 'Fifty dinar.'¹⁹² His friend becomes enraged and says, 'Just the belt I'm wearing costs that much!' Juḥā answers, 'I know, I took it into account.'¹⁹³

A Turkish respondent in her early twenties tells two stories of Nasreddin Hodja that may not have been previously recorded.

6.6.3. Nasreddin Hodja and his Ceiling (Tale 20)

One day, Nasreddin Hodja invited his friend the salesman for lunch. The friend took a bite of food that immediately gave him heartburn. He looked up towards the ceiling and asked Nasreddin Hodja, 'When did you renovate the ceiling?' Nasreddin Hodja answered, 'I renovated it when I got heartburn'.

6.6.4. Nasreddin Hodja's Baqlāwa (Tale 21)

One evening as Nasreddin Hodja is on his way home, he meets a neighbor. The neighbor says, 'There is a man on his way with some baqlāwa'. Nasreddin Hodja replies, 'That's none of my business'. The neighbor says, 'But he is on his way home to you'. Nasreddin Hodja answers, 'Then it's none of your business'.

A Christian Lebanese woman tells another unknown story:

¹⁸⁹ Bushnaq 1986:254 *Djuha Borrows a Pot (Syria)*.

¹⁹⁰ Alternate version found in Lunde 1971:2.

¹⁹¹ Turkish bathhouse

¹⁹² See Bushnaq 1986:315 *Seven Cauldrons Bubbling (Lebanon)* and Jayyusi 2010:113 *A Miserly Governor* for other stingy men.

¹⁹³ Zamrazilová-Jakmyr 1996-1997:1:20

6.6.5. Ḥusni and Zayna (Tale 22)

Ḥusni is a blind man that knows a woman called Zayna. Once, Zayna was about to take a shower and undressed, but heard someone knocking very hard on her door while calling her name, 'Zayna, o Zayna'. Zayna became very enraged, 'Who is it?' 'It's me, Ḥusni, open up!' Zayna tells herself, 'It's Ḥusni. I will open since he can't see me – he's blind'. She opens the door, 'Hello, o Ḥusni, what do you want?' 'O Zayna, congratulate me, I can see you now!'

6.7. Ancient Tales

As far as historical figures go, Māha, a Southern Iraqi respondent in her late fifties tells her children the story of *Shajarat ad-Durr*¹⁹⁴ (Tale 23) – the tragic ancient Egyptian queen whom John Feeney describes thus:

One notable ghost is the unhappy Sha-jarat¹⁹⁵ al-Durr, who eventually had her husband the sultan murdered in his hammam, and then paid the ultimate price herself in the women's hammam¹⁹⁶, where she was beaten to death with bath-clogs by women slaves of her late husband's first wife.¹⁹⁷

Further ancient stories of kings and queens remain a popular theme of stories told in Hammarkullen, most of which stem from 'Thousand and One Nights' or its English name of 'Arabian Nights'. Many respondents mention the stories of *Sinbad the Sailor* (Tale 24), *Alibaba and the Forty Thieves* (Tale 25), and *Aladdin* (Tale 26). One Iraqi respondent tells a story that, supposedly, took place in the ancient city of Baghdad. It is the story of *The King and his Four Wives* (Tale 27) which Khulūd passes on as an example of wisdom to be learnt from 'Arabian Nights'. The story tells of a king that was married to four wives. As he lay on his death-bed, he wanted them to grant him his wish of not having to enter death alone.¹⁹⁸ The first wife loved him dearly, yet he did not recognize her love – instead he ignored her. The second wife would help him and advise him. The third wife was utterly beautiful. However, he did not trust her as he knew that she had eyes for a man other than himself. The fourth was the youngest and he loved her passionately.

He told the youngest that he was about to die and asked her to die with him. She said, 'I can't! I'm still young. I can't die with you'. The third wife said, 'Why would I die with you? As soon

¹⁹⁴ 'Tree of Pearls'

¹⁹⁵ sic.

¹⁹⁶ Bushnaq 1986:312 describes the *hammam* (public bathhouse) as "the ideal setting for intrigue". See *The Gown in the Bathhouse (Egypt)* Bushnaq 1986:334.

¹⁹⁷ Feeney 1993:6

¹⁹⁸ For an anecdote of Juḥā on his deathbed see Jayyusi 2010:198-199.

as you die, I will marry someone else!’ The second wife said, ‘No! I will lead you to the grave and help you, but that doesn’t mean that I will die with you’.

Suddenly, he heard a weak and sickly voice saying, ‘I will die with you’. All those years of her love for him and his rejection of her had caused his first wife to be sick.

The storyteller goes on to explain that the moral of this story is that when one dies, so does the body, which is the reason for the youngest wife’s refusal. When one dies, one’s wealth is lost, which is why the third wife would remarry immediately – for the sake of money. When one dies, friends and family disappear; this is why the second wife would not follow her husband into death. As for the first wife, the king had always ignored her good deeds, in spite of the fact that good deeds are all that remain in death and are that which God, ‘may He be praised’, records for the Day of Reckoning. Hence, that of greatest importance in life is to do good deeds, instead of taking pleasure in the trivialities of life.

Jumāna, a Christian Lebanese respondent, tells the unknown story of *The Poor Man (Tale 28)*¹⁹⁹ who, in like manner to the king with his four wives and with misplaced priorities, does not recognize the value of the opportunities presented to him, and thus loses the fulfillment of his goal – that of becoming rich.²⁰⁰ In fact, due to his foolishness, the poor man even rejects the offer of becoming king if he marries a disguised queen. Unpredictably, the reason for this disguised queen’s failure at ruling her people is the very fact that she is a woman. The storyteller matter-of-factly articulates that God, in answer to the queen, informs the man that no one listens to her since women do not have authority over men. One wonders whether the storyteller, thus, describes, or whether she perpetuates, the belief that women are powerless. It may be difficult for Middle Eastern women in, or aspiring to, positions of authority and leadership to swallow that it would be preferable to be ruled by a fool than by a woman.

6.8. Luck

Seberry (2008) writes that,

An individual folktale has its origin in a particular culture – with its own distinctive heritage: traditions, beliefs, values etc. As such the tale will preserve and reflect – to a

¹⁹⁹ The full text in English and Colloquial Lebanese Arabic is found on pg.71.

²⁰⁰ For another take on poverty see Bushnaq 1986:286 *God Disposes (Iraq)*.

greater or lesser extent – the elements of the wisdom, attitudes to life, ways of behaving and so on of a particular culture or ethnic group.²⁰¹

One such individual tale is the one told by Māha with a very distinct Southern Iraqi dialect. This unknown story was told by her grandmother's mother and is at least two hundred years old. The title is a rhyme, **سبع صنایع والبخت ضایع** (*sab^ᶜ ṣanāyi^ᶜ wa-l-bakht ḍāyi^ᶜ*), which means 'seven²⁰² handcrafts and the luck is lost' (*Tale 29*). It implies that a person may be accomplished in every skill yet has no luck. The grandmother would tell of a girl that was beautiful in looks, manners, and speech and was completely accomplished in every skill as well. On the other hand, there was another girl that was dark and not pretty, with unpleasant manners.²⁰³ A day came when they both married and settled in another place. One day a friend came to visit them both and found the beautiful girl with an ugly man who was impossible to please no matter how hard she tried. It is said "seven handcrafts and the luck is missing" – even though she was clever she had no luck.

The dark and ugly girl was married to a man who was well-mannered, kind, and handsome.²⁰⁴ He would sit and look at her and kiss her hands and feet.²⁰⁵ The storyteller attributes this to luck, which cannot be taken for granted in spite of beauty and skill. The moral of the story is that, 'Luck follows your Lord'. In other words, luck is accredited to God's will, not to our own cleverness.²⁰⁶

Although many folktales 'concern themselves with situations of courtship, marriage, and love'²⁰⁷, this story stands out with its theme of luck, as, in fact, the majority of other stories favors the possessor of greatest beauty, youth, or cleverness.

6.9. Veneration

During the Lenten fast, an old housekeeper would tell a different story every night for fifty nights leading up to the feast of Easter - much to the delight of Hiba, the Assyrian Christian Iraqi

²⁰¹ Seberry 2008:8

²⁰² A number symbolic of completeness.

²⁰³ For a similar comparison, this time between two sisters, see Bushnaq 1986:169 *One-Tooth and Two-Teeth (Syria)*.

²⁰⁴ For another ugly wife see Jayyusi 2010:219 *A Cunning Marriage Broker*.

²⁰⁵ A sign of ultimate devotion and servitude in Middle Eastern Culture.

²⁰⁶ See Bushnaq 1986:294 *We Two Against Fortune (Saudi Arabia)* for another tale of luck/fortune.

²⁰⁷ Lindahl et al. Vol.I, 2000:350

respondent, along with her siblings and cousins that would gather round the storyteller. *The Power of God and of the Blood Tie*²⁰⁸ (Tale 30) is one such story told in dual plural form that affects the language rules throughout the story – perhaps a grammatical hint of God’s double blessings²⁰⁹. This fairytale is unique in that it is redolent with Orthodox Christian imagery such as an aquatic experience similar to Moses’²¹⁰ – in addition to perhaps symbolizing a type of baptism; an angelic visitation on the verge of death followed by contrition and repentance; a monastic and platonic relationship with sisters (another name for nuns); and, most striking of all, the homage paid to a mother, whose true identity is concealed by her servant role, and who is in fact a queen – reminiscent of the humble Virgin Mary whom Orthodox Christians revere as ‘the Queen of Heaven’.²¹¹ Interestingly, Muhawi & Kanaana (1989) present a Palestinian story²¹², *Tale 10. Little Nightingale the Crier*²¹³, that has certain features in common with *The Power of God and the Blood Tie* (Tale 30). For example, both stories feature a prince overhearing three young women express what they would do if they were married to him – and as a result he marries all three.²¹⁴ Additionally, the third wife in both stories vows²¹⁵ to have children by him, which on birth are replaced by, among other things, a puppy.²¹⁶ Moreover the babies are placed in a box and sent down a river where they are found and adopted by an old couple. The story plots eventually diverge, but both come to an end with the king discovering the true identity of his children and by whom he was deceived.²¹⁷

6.10. Outsmarting Authority

In polling respondents’ familiarity with twelve stories provided by a Palestinian woman, it has been verified that the following ancient story is known in several countries according to respondents from Algeria, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, although one version is about a

²⁰⁸ The full text in English and Arabic is found on pg.75.

²⁰⁹ Isaiah 61:7 New International Version

²¹⁰ Exodus 2:3 Revised Standard Version

²¹¹ The Virgin Mary is featured in two Palestinian tales, *The Virgin Mary and the Goats* and *The Virgin Mary and the Plowmen*, Bushnaq 1986:298, 299.

²¹² Bushnaq 1986:89 features an almost identical story, *The Nightingale That Shrieked*, yet attributes it with an Egyptian origin.

²¹³ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:102

²¹⁴ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:102–103

²¹⁵ For another tale of vows see Jayyusi 2010:227 *I Shall Never Eat Elephant Flesh*.

²¹⁶ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:103

²¹⁷ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:110

handkerchief and another about a hat. Either way, great pleasure is derived from stories about outsmarting authority – in this case, a king – and at times, the pleasure turns into sheer ridicule.

6.10.1. The Magic Handkerchief (Tale 31)

Once upon a time a prosperous peasant lived in his field with his wife and his five children. That season the rain dried up and the peasant became dismayed. He planted the seeds of grain; then turned towards his thirsty field, looking at the cloud while calling out to it. The clouds passed by without responding to the cry of the peasant, so his sorrow increased. He locked himself up in his house, worried and sad.

‘Pray to the prophet, o man! Things will ease up for you. What is wrong with you? You are making a dome out of a grain!’ ‘Leave me be, o mother of my children! God will be pleased with you. Don’t increase my burden! Take note, do you not see that the earth is cracked because of the great thirst and that the seeds that I planted in it have been eaten by the birds?’

The man was persuaded by the words of his wife so he picked up his provision and bid his family farewell and went on his way. This journey was his first. Therefore, he struggled with difficulties and circumstances, and at times a monster would appear before him.

*

No sooner had the peasant gotten close to the palace gate when the guard shouted at him, ‘Hello, you! Where to?’ ‘I want to meet the owner of the palace.’ ‘Why do you want to meet the Sulṭān?’ The sulṭān overheard the discussion as he sat on his balcony, so he signaled to the guard that he should allow the man to enter.

As soon as he stood in front of him he said, ‘As a peasant I know planting...’ Then he told him his story.

‘What? Well, listen to what I will say: As far as the work of planting is concerned, that is something I do not have need of – I have planters. However, if you would like to break stones, then there is no hindrance. The ground is full of stones and I am thinking of picking them up and benefitting from their space.’

‘I have a suggestion: What do you think if you would weigh this handkerchief for me at the end of the week and give me its weight in gold?’ Then the peasant took a small handkerchief embroidered with green thread out of his pocket.

As soon as the sulṭān saw the handkerchief he began to laugh until he nearly fell from the top of his luxurious throne, then said, ‘Han... handkerchief, o stupid man?! And how much will the weight of this rag be? It is for sure that its weight will not exceed that of the weight of a penny of silver. Ha, ha, ha! Fool! Surely you are a fool!’

The peasant swallowed his spit²¹⁸ and said, ‘It turns into a small stone.’ And as long as the sweat of effort and tiredness was pouring from his brow, he pulled out his little handkerchief and wiped it off.

*

The peasant worked with earnestness and diligence until he, at the end of the week, reached the last stone. It is true that the sweat poured from his brow like drops of rain, but that did not thwart him from the grit and the toil.

The week of labor came to an end and the time for accounting arrived.

‘May God grant you health, o peasant; you have worked with diligence! Hand me your handkerchief that I may weigh it for you.’

He became vexed. He shoved away the silver coins and lay down a gold dinar, yet the result remained as it was. He was confused. He asked his chamberlain for a handkerchief, plunged it into the water and placed it in place of the peasant’s handkerchief. It outweighed the scale of the dinar.²¹⁹

The peasant smiled and the sultān began to weigh the handkerchief all over again. He then placed two golden dinars, then three, then four, until it reached ten dinars at which time the scales became balanced. The sultān went mad, ‘What is happening? Is it possible that this is ten, TEN dinar?’

‘May God restore, your majesty the Sultān! The story is not one of magic. I do not believe in it. The story, in short, is that when a man exerts an honest toil, he is driven towards a blameless bite of food. His brow pours with sweat. This sweat is heavy – much heavier than water.’

Māha, the Southern Iraqi grandmother that contributed a story about luck similarly told a story about a despotic king which she heard from her grandmother – thus it is more than one hundred years old.²²⁰ *Kaḥīl*²²¹ *Ḥenna in the Castle of Henna Blossoms (Tale 32)* is a story about a king, a dictator, which lived in his castle of henna blossoms. The king would seize any pretty girl and rape her. This king had no manners, as well as being ugly and fat. The grandmother would tell that the king had a voracious appetite which would have him devour both food and women.

There was a beautiful girl called ‘Kaḥīl Ḥenna’ who loved a beautiful man. They suited each other perfectly and lived in complete happiness until the king got word of them. He said, ‘That

²¹⁸ An idiom for restraining one’s displeasure or disgust.

²¹⁹ Scales are also featured in Jayyusi 2010:270 *A Strange Vow*.

²²⁰ For another royal marriage involving conspiracy, see *A Ruse of Mu’awiya* (Jayyusi 2010:103).

²²¹ Derived from the word ‘*kohl*’. The heroine’s name means ‘Blackness of Henna’.

one, she has to come to me to live and I will marry her'. So, he sent his guards and they kidnapped her and took her to the Castle of Henna Blossoms.

The beautiful girl's beloved sat down with her family and they decided to search for her. One day, as he was passing by a place he heard a voice, but none of them recognized the voice that was speaking. So she said, 'I am Kaḥīl Ḥenna, my heart has been broken'. She continued to say, 'Kaḥīl Ḥenna is here and her heart is broken by the Castle of Henna Blossoms'. The sweetheart heard her voice and brought friends that loved Kaḥīl Ḥenna. Together, they entered the castle and killed the king and restored Kaḥīl Ḥenna back to her beloved.

From a linguistic perspective it is interesting that the word used for heart, normally **قلب** (*qalb*), has been replaced with the synonym **فؤاد** (*fu'ād*) – which, reportedly, immediately identifies the storyteller as a Shi'ite Muslim.

An old Assyrian Christian grandmother, Fātin, tells a different story about a king whose command was circumvented by those under his authority. This ancient story, with echoes of Mowgli and the Jungle Book²²², is known to another, unrelated, Assyrian Iraqi respondent. *The King and his Wife Janfīyya (Tale 33)* tells of a king that went to war for seven years and did not return home during that time. When he went to war, his wife was pregnant, and the king put a supervisor in charge of the house during his absence in order to protect his wife.²²³ However, the wife did not accept to have this man in charge of her. Slighted, the supervisor sent letters to her husband at war falsely claiming that she was unfaithful.²²⁴ As a result, the king sent a message that she should be executed for her unfaithfulness.²²⁵

The supervisor ordered one of the guards to take her outside and to kill her. However, the guard told himself, 'She is a good woman and she is pregnant. Why should I kill her?' Instead, the guard took the woman far away to the mountains inhabited by wolves and left her there. He returned to the castle and told the supervisor that he had killed her.

²²² Written by Rudyard Kipling, b.1865, d.1936.

²²³ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:17

²²⁴ See same motif of inculpatory letter on pg.363 in *The Girl Outwits Three Men (Palestine)*, Bushnaq 1986:361.

²²⁵ See similar motif of innocent woman made to appear guilty and escaping death in *Tale 42. The Woman Who Fell into the Well*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:298.

The woman stayed in the mountains and gave birth to a boy.²²⁶ She could not find food for him so she prayed to God for sustenance. Then she saw a gazelle that had milk and she fed the child. She kept the boy in the wolves' den while she would go searching for food.

After seven years, the woman became sick and lay down on her cot. The boy, who had torn clothes and looked like an animal, had never met people. However, she instructed him to find people on his search for food as an angel had told her that her death was imminent.

One day, the war ended and the king set off to return home, all the while believing that his wife was dead. While hunting on horse-back, he saw a scraggly boy dart in front of the horse and run away. He followed the boy and entered the wolves' den and saw the woman lying on a cot. When he removed the turban-wrapping from his face, the woman recognized her husband. He asked for her story and she proceeded to tell him.

When he heard the story he realized that she was indeed his wife. He also realized who had manipulated him into condemning her to death. The story ends with the king deeply regretting that his son had been raised in the wild when he was in fact the son of a king.

6.11. Husbands & Wives

Just as tales of kings and rulers tend to mock the holder of authority on a kingdom-wide scale, in a similar fashion, husbands - rulers of many Middle Eastern homes, are often the unwitting butt of numerous jokes and stories. Such tales juxtapose husbands on the one extreme of foolishness, and wives on the other extreme of cleverness, insight, or virtue. A Lebanese woman of Turkish roots spins the tale that her mother used to tell:

6.11.1. Yūsif and his Donkey (Tale 34)

Once upon a time there was an old man called Yūsif who owned ten donkeys.²²⁷ Yūsif was on his way to the market in the village. It was a long way so he soon tired. He sat down under a tree and fell asleep. While Yūsif slept, a donkey ate up his lunch.

A little while later Yūsif opened his eyes and was hungry. He fetched his lunch sack and discovered that it was empty. Yūsif became very angry and looked suspiciously at the donkeys. He fetched hay and a bucket full of water in order to discover who had eaten his food. Nine of

²²⁶ A similar motif of a birth in a cave may be found in *Tale 28. Chick Eggs*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:232.

²²⁷ For an anecdote of an additional owner of ten donkeys see Jarryusi 2010:204.

the ten donkeys ate hay, but one donkey only drank water. Then Yūsif understood that the donkey already was satisfied. It must be this donkey that had eaten his food!

As punishment, Yūsif rode on the donkey all the way to the village. When they arrived at the market, a man approached and said that he wanted to buy a donkey. ‘You can buy this one’, said Yūsif and pointed at the donkey that had eaten the food. ‘How much does it cost?’ ‘You may buy the donkey if you pay with food.’

The man who bought the donkey went home and painted the old donkey black and white in order to sell it for a good price.²²⁸ On the following market day, Yūsif arrived in order to buy a new donkey. He saw the black and white donkey, ‘Oh, what a beautiful donkey! How much does it cost?’ ‘It costs seventy-five gold liras.’ ‘I have no gold liras, I only have silver.’ ‘Then you may pay one hundred silver liras.’ Without realizing it, Yūsif bought his old donkey back.²²⁹

When he returned home he said, ‘Look at the beautiful donkey I bought!’ His wife looked at the donkey with its obvious splotches of paint, ‘But it’s our old donkey!’ she cried. Yūsif looked at the donkey and recognized it, ‘Yee, by God, what a donkey I am! I’ve been fooled!’ From that day forward, Yūsif let his wife do all buying and selling. In other words, from then on she was responsible for the money and Yūsif never made business again.

Bushnaq (1986:312) explains the context of the following story by stating that:

The dictates of custom rather than religion, and a convention in which the honor of the family rests on the moral conduct of its women, has resulted in the severe seclusion of Moslem women in most parts of the Arab world./.../

Social activities outside the house are strictly segregated and freedom of movement is inhibited. Even within the home, women are required to withdraw demurely from sight at the entrance of male visitors.

The Iraqi respondent tells the story with an underlying moral lesson against hypocrisy, in order to illustrate how God himself protects the honor of wives:

6.11.2. The Restrictive Husband and his Wife (Tale 35)

There was a man that was very restrictive at home and did not allow his wife to leave the house in order to safe-guard her honor. She was wise. God, may He be praised, says, ‘Don’t look at someone else’s honor.’²³⁰ When you look at someone else’s honor, God will bring someone to interfere with your [own] honor.’

²²⁸ See Bushnaq 1986:260 *Si’ Djeha Cheats the Robbers (Algeria)* for another “enhanced” donkey. For yet another “enhanced” sale see Jayyusi 2010:202.

²²⁹ A further fool at the marketplace is found in Jayyusi 2010:200-201.

²³⁰ ‘Don’t concern yourself with someone else’s honor.’

The husband was immoral outside of his home; he associated with prostitutes. He did bad things away from home, but controlled his family²³¹ at home.

There was a water-seller that sold water. One day he gave the wife a dirty look so that she became distraught. Consequently, when her husband returned from work she said, 'Today the water-seller gave me a dirty look!'

So, even though the man protected and controlled his house²³², God allowed a bad man to intrude.

The same Iraqi respondent describes the nature of men by telling this story:

6.11.3. The Cheating Husband (Tale 36)

One day a man married a woman that was utterly beautiful. She had no fault – she was perfect. In spite of this, he would cheat on her with a prostitute and pay her money. So, the wife made an agreement with the prostitute. She said, 'I will sleep in your place this night. I want to see what you have that I don't'.

Her husband came as usual and thought that she was the prostitute. It was dark, and he slept with her and gave her the money. Then he switched the light on to look at her – the one that he had slept with and taken pleasure in. So, he looked at her and what did he say? He said, 'How sweet you are when forbidden and how repulsive you are when permitted!'²³³

(Mā aḥlāki fī-l-ḥarām wa-mā awḥashaki fī-l-ḥalāl.) 'ما احلاك في الحرام وما اوحشك في الحلال'

In other words, men always prefer what is forbidden even if they have the same, or better, at home!

Lindahl et al. (2000) state that,

Every folktale follows some sort of generic conventions, but those conventions vary widely from group to group, place to place, time to time. Moreover, every folktale possesses a cultural style adapted to the values of the audience that enjoys it.²³⁴

The following unknown, unconventional and, perhaps, unsavory folktale stems from a Christian Lebanese respondent and illustrates the power struggle between a husband and wife:

²³¹ In conservative Muslim societies, the word 'family' may imply the word 'wife'.

²³² The words 'house', 'home', 'family', and 'wife' are often used interchangeably.

²³³ An equivalent English proverb says, 'Forbidden fruit tastes sweeter'.

²³⁴ Lindahl et al. 2000:353

6.11.4. Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)

*You know how it is disgraceful to fart?*²³⁵ *Well, a man farted and his wife rebuked him for it. ‘Why, o wife, didn’t you cook today?’ ‘Hush, don’t speak! I will tell the neighbors that you farted. Shame!’ The poor man kept quiet and she did not cook; that day there was no food. [The] second day – the wife came home late. At ten, at eleven, the wife came home. ‘Where were you?’ ‘Hush, don’t say a thing! You farted; I will tell the neighbors. I will tell people; people will laugh at you.’ He kept quiet – poor man.*

*Day after day, day after day, she did things; she did not come home; she did not cook; she did not wash; she did not clean; did not care; she let the children stay at home.*²³⁶ *Every day it was the same situation – she would threaten him, threaten this and threaten that. ‘What should I do about this woman? What should I do about her?’*

*One day it was hot and the man sat in the courtyard. As he sat there, there were about ten hens and one rooster pecking next to him. This rooster would say, ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’, and chase after the hens. He would chase after them until they ran into the chicken coop. The man watched the rooster and the hens.*²³⁷ *‘What a donkey I am! One rooster rules over ten hens, and I can’t even rule over one woman! This rooster is better than I, he’s smarter than me! By God, as soon as I get home she will see what I will do to her!’*

She arrived home and opened the door. He asked her, ‘Where have you been? Why are you late?’ ‘Hush, don’t speak! You farted! People will talk about you.’ ‘I farted? Ha, I will show you that I farted.’ He left and went up the stairs and out on the roof. He began to shout, ‘O people! O neighbors; I farted!’ Then he went downstairs.

*He grabbed his wife by her hair and slapped her, this way and that. He hit her. The neighbors said, ‘What? Has he gone crazy? He went up on the roof and shouted that he had farted and then went down and beat his wife. Did this man go crazy?’ They went and knocked and knocked on the door; he opened.*²³⁸ *‘Why did you do like this? Why did you scream?’*²³⁹

‘She wore me out! She killed me! For months she has been threatening me. Once I farted and she has been threatening me [ever since], ‘You farted this; you farted that.’ She wouldn’t cook, she wouldn’t clean, she didn’t take care of the children - she didn’t take care of anything! I said to myself, ‘By God, the rooster is better than I! The rooster rules over ten hens – won’t I be able to rule over only one?!’ And then I hit her.’

‘By God, you have done well. Kill her! Kill her!’

²³⁵ See similar motif in *Tale 43. The Rich Man and the Poor Man*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:303-304.

²³⁶ For another contrary wife see Bushnaq 1986:332 *When Twice as Many Is Half the Trouble (Palestine)*.

²³⁷ For a similar motif see Bushnaq 1986:276 *Abu Nuwas and the Hundred Eggs (Syria)* – with its almost identical version attributed to Juhā in Khalil: 16 *Bayḍ ad-dīk (The Rooster’s Eggs)*.

²³⁸ For a different domestic anecdote involving neighbors see Jayyusi 2010:202.

²³⁹ An abusive husband is similarly questioned in *Tale 24. The Seven Leavenings*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:211.

Yet another unusual story hails from Lebanon – this time from Ibtisām, a Shi’ite woman who heard it from her grandmother.²⁴⁰ *Abū Naẓīf and his Wife (Tale 38)* is a story about an old Lebanese villager and the misfortunes he creates for those related to him, as well as for himself. The story mentions several typical Lebanese foods, customs, and sayings while recounting the calamitous tale. Additionally, the story blatantly show-cases the diligence and industry of village women, while ridiculing useless men, in this case Abū Naẓīf, that, intentionally or not, ruin and waste the hard-earned labor of productive women.

The storyteller introduces Abū Naẓīf and his wife that lived in a village. All their daughters were married and lived close by, while Abū Naẓīf and his wife lived by themselves. Early one morning, they woke up trying to decide what to eat for breakfast; ‘*manāqīsh*’²⁴¹, or ‘*fūl*’²⁴². Since they did not have any at home, Um Naẓīf sent her husband off to get some from the market.²⁴³ Because of his notorious forgetfulness, she instructed him to keep on saying, ‘*fūl, fūl, fūl*’ to himself all the way to the market.

Along the way, he saw a gathering of people and found two men fighting in their midst. He intervened and tried to broker peace between the two men. He forgot to say ‘*fūl*’ to himself and turned to one of the men and asked, ‘What was I supposed to buy?’ ‘How would I know?’ ‘But what was I supposed to say?’ The man said, ‘May God give us reconciliation among the Muslims!’²⁴⁴

Abū Naẓīf still could not remember the word, and once again returned to his wife. Once more, he was sent on his way, and this time he bumped into some people while mumbling ‘*fūl, fūl, fūl*’. One of them turned angrily toward him and said, ‘*عم تفاعل على العالم؟ شو؟*’²⁴⁵ (*Shū?* ‘*Am tifāwil ‘ala-l-‘ālam?*’) ‘What? Are you insulting people?’ The man told him to go on his way, but Abū Naẓīf had already forgotten the word and was too afraid to return to his wife empty-handed. He

²⁴⁰ A story with mutual motifs is found in *Tale 27. Im ‘Eshe*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:224-227.

²⁴¹ Lebanese “pizza” – a typical breakfast food, most often served with a topping of *za ‘tar* (a blend of thyme, sumac and salt) and olive oil.

²⁴² Inexpensive as well as filling, mashed broad beans is a popular, yet ridiculed, dish eaten in Lebanon, and especially in Egypt.

²⁴³ For an anecdote of another person sent on an errand see Jayyusi 2010:200.

²⁴⁴ A common, pious saying referring to the history of wars and civil wars between different Arab nations and between different ethnic groups.

²⁴⁵ A play on words, using the word ‘insult’ (*tifāwil*) whose root letters are the same as broad beans - ‘*fūl*’.

decided to go to his daughter that lived close by to ask her what his wife liked to have for breakfast.

‘What does your mother like to eat for breakfast?’ She said, ‘*Manāqīsh?*’ ‘No, no.’ ‘Cheese? Olives?’ ‘No.’ She said, ‘*Ḥummuṣ?*’ ‘No.’ ‘The brother of *ḥummuṣ; fūl?*’ ‘That’s it! Bravo!’ In his enthusiasm, Abū Naẓīf slapped her and she fell so badly that the neighbors carried her off to the hospital.

In the meantime, Abū Naẓīf bought the *fūl* and returned home. However, when his wife had prepared it and called him to sit down and eat, pangs of guilt caused him to lose his appetite. On being prompted, he confessed what had happened, to which the wife responded by cursing him and hurrying to the hospital to check on her daughter. In her absence, Abū Naẓīf became bored and went down into the food cellar to see what it contained. He saw his own reflection in the glass jars of preserves on the two shelves and said to himself, ‘Ohhh, Ummu Naẓīf has hidden a man behind the glass jars!’ And he broke the jar in front of him.²⁴⁶ ‘Oh, now the man has hidden himself behind the next jar.’ He crashed it, and broke each jar as he went along the shelf. - The storyteller exclaims, ‘Poor Ummu Naẓīf!’²⁴⁷

Still bored, and now tired, Abū Naẓīf went to the ‘*yūk*’-closet²⁴⁸. He declared both the linen, as well as Um Naẓīf as dirty and resolutely piled quilts, pillows, and mattresses onto his donkey’s back and took them down to the sea for a wash. On her return, Um Naẓīf demanded to be let in through the door behind which Abū Naẓīf was hiding guiltily.²⁴⁹ She further demanded to know what he expected them to eat and where to sleep now that the contents of the house were either broken or soaking wet. She then told him that they would go to stay with their daughter that lived at the far end of the village. On arrival, they found her baking and Um Naẓīf sat down by the ‘*tannūr*’²⁵⁰ to help her daughter bake the bread.

Upstairs, the daughter’s two-month old son was fussing and would not be quiet. Abū Naẓīf said, ‘Someone, shut this child up!’ The child still cried. When upstairs, Abū Naẓīf asked, ‘What’s

²⁴⁶ For another tale including broken glass bottles on a shelf see Jarry 2010:209 *Abu ‘I-Qasim’s Slippers*.

²⁴⁷ Lebanese women work hard preserving all kinds of fruits, vegetables, olives, and cheeses to store food for the cold and barren winter.

²⁴⁸ A typical Lebanese closet which contains all the linen and bedding of the house.

²⁴⁹ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:226

²⁵⁰ A dome-shaped clay oven used to bake flat bread.

that pimple sticking out of his head?’²⁵¹ He took a pin-cushion and poked the infant’s head so that it died. ‘May your finery be destroyed, o my daughter, at least the boy is at peace!’ He pulled it out and told himself, ‘I’ll pretend that he is sleeping.’ He went downstairs and they asked him, ‘What have you done with the child?’ ‘He is sleeping.’ They went up to look and found him dead.²⁵²

The daughter said, ‘Hurry, go before my husband arrives! When my husband arrives, what will I say? That my parents killed the boy?! Go before he comes.’²⁵³ As they were leaving, the daughter sent along some jars of molasses and some blankets should they freeze on the way home. Being cold, they stopped under a tree where they ate and warmed up a bit. Um Nazīf walked off for a little while and Abū Nazīf stood up and noticed how the tree danced and shook from the wind and the cold. He said, ‘What a shame! The tree is freezing.’ He poured the jars of molasses that his daughter had given them on the tree and wrapped it with blankets, ‘Now it’s warm!’²⁵⁴

When his wife returned she turned furious at the sight. ‘What have you done?! May God leave you! Go, get going on the way!’ As they were walking, a buzzing fly surrounded them and Abū Nazīf waved it off. A drop of molasses from his hands landed on Um Nazīf’s nose and the fly got stuck on it. Abū Nazīf tried to wave it off to no avail. Then Abū Nazīf picked up his bird rifle and shot the fly on Um Nazīf’s nose. The storyteller continues, ‘Um Nazīf died, leaving him all alone, poor thing. He kept walking along the way. His belly began to hurt and he began farting. ‘Enough, o behind, won’t you stop?!’ He shot his buttocks and the story ended’.

6.12. Politics

An Iraqi respondent tells a short story to illustrate the Iraqi proverb that, ‘A cricket sponsored a bird since they are both airborne’; ‘زرزور كفل عصفور واثنين طيارة’.²⁵⁵ The equivalent proverb in English says that, ‘Birds of a feather stick together’ – and an Iraqi audience would immediately associate the saying with the nature of presidents and their vice-presidents.

²⁵¹ A hemangioma which is a knot of vascular birth marks.

²⁵² Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:226

²⁵³ *ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:225

²⁵⁵ For another tale of insects see Jayyusi 2010:352.

The story of *When the Cricket Sponsored the Bird (Tale 39)* says that a cricket came to a hotel and wanted to rent a room. The hotel clerk asked him for the intended length of his stay and for his name. ‘Don’t forget to pay tomorrow, o father!’²⁵⁶ ‘Of course.’ The room was nice and the cricket went to sleep.

The next morning as he left, the hotel clerk asked him to pay, ‘Where is the money, o father? You didn’t pay, o man!’ He quickly left; flew away like a bird, and he was gone.²⁵⁷

The second day, a bird came to the hotel and asked for a room for two nights. ‘The hotel is comfortable, o father. Here’s the key!’ The bird rested in the hotel and when he was about to leave and return the key, he flew away instead. The hotel clerk went to the police to complain.

When the hotel clerk returned from the police station a bird came to the front desk to return his key. When asked to pay for the room, the bird turned to the cricket standing next to him, ‘Please pay for me because I don’t want to bring a stranger²⁵⁸ in to pay for me.’ The cricket answered, ‘I will sponsor you.’

However, with the saying about birds of a feather sticking together in mind, neither of the feathered friends could be trusted. The hotel clerk knew that bill would never be paid; that the money would vanish as surely as the feathered cronies would. Thus, this story is an inferred dig at politicians, ‘If I don’t trust you, how will I trust someone that you recommend?!’

6.13. Cycle of Life

The synopsis comes to an end in the following two stories, contributed by a Palestinian respondent, that in different ways describe the cycle of life. *The Great Chirpy Bird (Tale 40)* features the interchange between a set of young green watermelons and the ripe mother melon that is ready to burst and, thus, to offer her seeds to a swooping bird. The young watermelons are busy imagining their imminent fate; will they end up in the hands of a thirsty traveler; or be transported to faraway countries; or will they be picked by efficient farmer women and distributed to poor families of the village?

²⁵⁶ This paternal term of respectful affection is one for which dictators are prone to nurse a particular affinity.

²⁵⁷ See another bird that flies away from paying the bill in *Tale 11. The Little Bird*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:115-116.

²⁵⁸ May also imply that he does not want a foreigner to foot the bill.

The plumpest melon of them all is serene in the face of her own expected future; her seed is big and strong and she knows that she has been planted for a different purpose than the other watermelons. With unbridled curiosity, the young watermelons ask the mother melon to tell them what the purpose of her life is. When she explains that her purpose is to stay in the field until she bursts and her seeds come out of her, the youngest watermelon screams with shock, 'For what? Are you not coming with us to be useful for people? That's it? Or for what were we created?' The mother melon laughs and explains that she is waiting for her friend, the chirpy bird, which will carry as many of her seeds as his beak can hold to drop them in an unknown land. 'So I will grow again, there, and I will be happy with people's happiness in me.'

The young watermelons, begging to be spared, find it difficult to believe that life can begin or end in seed-form, and that instead of being a fearful thing, it is a useful and happy adventure. The mother melon, on the other hand, longs for it to happen to her and speculates about the possibility of more birds coming to help to spread her seeds, 'They will take me and use my seeds so that I will return and grow with each seed all over again.'

The story ends with the young watermelons consulting each other to see who will dare to join the mother melon in her fate, while the nameless bird, 'whose secret no one knows', flies over the watermelon field, chirping with delight and searching for seeds in the soil.

Similarly, *The Gift of the Tree (Tale 41)*²⁵⁹ presents the cycle of life, while teaching the value of pleasing others and finding happiness in someone else's joy. The tree is 'happy for his happiness', and the mother melon will be 'happy with people's happiness' in her offerings. The story employs a nurturing maternal figure, in this case a tree instead of a melon, to illustrate self-sacrifice and devotion to someone else's good, rather than attending to individual interests. Such sentiments of consideration for collective good, rather than for individual needs, reflect the values of Middle Eastern society.

Interestingly, the tree in the story is animated, emotional and nurturing, while the human being appears wooden and unfeeling. This role-switch of opposites echoes other pairs of opposites that appear in the story such as; generosity/selfishness, nurture/neglect, compassion/indifference, heartbreak/happiness, age/youth, permanence/change, and birth/death.

²⁵⁹ The full text in English and Arabic is found on pg.78.

According to an Iraqi respondent, the story of ‘The Gift of the Tree’ dates back to the time before the Ottoman Empire. What is certain is that this story touches the listeners with its lingering effect of ethos and beauty, offering sentiments that can be recognized by all – regardless of cultural or national background.

Part 7: English Translation with Original Arabic Sample Stories

7.1. The Story of the Wolf and the Seven Lambs²⁶⁰ (Tale 5)

The following didactic animal tale, teaching children not to talk to strangers, was first collected on March 27, 2012 at the Support Network. It was told by two Iraqis; Basma, a Sunni mid-forties woman, and Abīr, a Kurdish late-thirties woman. At a later date, it was also told by Hiba, an Iraqi Assyrian Christian woman in her late fifties, as well as by Emān, a Palestinian Sunni in her mid-twenties. They all agree that this story is well-known in Arabic-speaking countries and they all told it the same way – including replacing the word ‘kid’ with ‘lamb’. The story was initially presented in *wuṣṭa* – a semi-standard Arabic with colloquial features.²⁶¹ Later on, it was presented in written form by Emān using Modern Standard Arabic which then was edited for punctuation and spelling, as well as translated, by the researcher.

The story tells that there was a [mother] goat that had seven small children. They were very charming and clever and they lived in happiness and bliss. The most intelligent of them was the youngest. The youngest would not fall asleep until after his mother would sing a beautiful song to him.

One day, the little ones were playing. The weather was very beautiful and the mother goat wanted to go to the market to buy some things. Before she left she warned her children and told them, ‘Listen very [carefully] to me, o my children. You need to stay at home until I return from the market. Do you understand what I’m saying? Don’t open the door to anyone because the wild wolf might pounce on you.’

The children answered, ‘[Yes, Ma’am]!’²⁶² One of them asked, ‘How will we recognize the wolf, o mother?’ The mother said, ‘Listen to me, the wolf has an ugly voice like the sound of thunder – don’t forget that!’ One of the children said, ‘Likewise, the wolf has black feet, isn’t it so?’ The mother said, ‘Yes, because of that, don’t open the door to anyone with black feet. Do you understand? The children said, ‘Yes, Ma’am!’ Thus, the mother left convinced that everything would be all right when she returned.

²⁶⁰ It should read ‘kids’ instead of ‘lambs’.

²⁶¹ Cedernil 2012:19

²⁶² The actual Arabic text says ‘ready’, but in English one would say ‘yes, ma’am’.

However, who was watching the mother as she was leaving the house? It was the wolf. The wolf said, 'Great! She has left for the market and now I will pounce on the seven little ones and they will be an easy prey.'

The children were already busy skipping and playing and did not notice the wolf as he was watching them. The wolf knocked on the door and said, 'This is Mommy, o little ones, come on and open the door; I've returned to you already!' The children said, 'Yes, Mommy is back again! Mommy's back, Mommy's back!' One of the children said, 'No, this is not Mommy!' Then she carried her brother far from the door. The children shouted, 'You're the wolf, you're the wolf!'

The wolf became furious and walked around thinking of a trick [with which] to fool the children. The wolf believed that the ugly voice might get tidied up if he ate a little [bit] of chalk! But this is not true and it is wrong since chalk hurts bellies – so don't you do it! The wolf returned to the children with a new trick and began to sing a little, 'I am your mother that has returned to you, returned, returned, returned!' The children screamed, 'Mommy, Mommy!' Yet, they went and looked under the door before opening [it] and saw the black feet. They said, 'No, it's not Mommy! You're the wolf, you're the wolf!' The wolf became furious again and went to the store nearby and stole flour. He smeared his whole body with flour to make his color appear white. He knocked on the door and said, 'Come on, o my children! Open the door! I'm your mother and I've already returned to you!' The children rejoiced and said, 'Mommy!'

They looked under the door then saw the white feet and said, 'It's Mommy!' They rejoiced and ran towards the door. They opened the door and were surprised by the wolf. So, they were afraid and ran all over the place. The little ones tried to hide but they were too big and it was difficult for them. The wolf ate them, one after another, until the wild wolf was satisfied.

The youngest goat continued to be hidden in the [standing] wall clock because he was of small size and able to hide and be saved from the wolf. The mother returned looking for her children [while] crying and saying, 'My little ones, where are you? O my God, where are you?' She asked her youngest one and said, 'My darling, where are your siblings?' So the little goat told her the whole story. His mother said to him, 'Prepare a [pair of] scissors and a needle for me, immediately!' And during the wolf's sleep, the mother opened the wicked wolf's belly and took out her children. In their place she put heavy stones and sewed up the wolf's belly again with the needle and closed it.

When the wolf woke up in the morning he felt thirsty and went to the well [in order] to drink. And since the stones were heavy, he fell into the well and drowned and died. This way, the children felt safe and they began to play and be merry, happy amongst the grass and flowers.

قصة الذئب والخراف السبعة

تحكى القصة أنه كانت هناك ماعز (معزة) لها سبعة أبناء صغار ظرفاء جدا واذكيااء وكانوا يعيشون فى سعادة وهناك. وكان أكثرهم ذكاء اصغرهم سنا. وكان الصغير لا ينام إلا بعد ان تغنى له أمه أغنية جميلة. وفى يوم من الأيام كان الصغار يلعبون وكان الجو جميلا جدا وأرادت الماعز الأم أن تذهب إلى السوق لشراء بعض الأشياء. وقبل أن تذهب حذرت أبناءها وقالت لهم, "إستمعوا إلى جيد, يا أولادى. عليكم أن تبقوا فى البيت لحين عودتى من السوق. هل فهمتم ما أقول؟ لا تفتحوا الباب لأحد لأن الذئب المتوحش ممكن ان يهاجمكم."

رد الأبناء, "حاضر!" وسأل أحدهم, "كيف نعرف الذئب, يا أمى؟" قالت الأم, "إستمعوا إلى, للذئب صوت أبح كصوت الرعد, لا تنسوا ذلك!" قال أحد الأبناء, "وكذلك للذئب أرجل سوداء, اليس كذلك؟" قالت الأم, "نعم, لذا لا تفتحوا الباب لمن أرجله سوداء. هل فهمتم؟" قال الأبناء, "نعم, حاضر!" وهكذا ذهبت الأم معتقدة ان كل شئ على ما يرام لحين عودتها.

ولكن من الذى شاهد الأم وهى تغادر البيت؟ أنه الذئب. قال الذئب, "رائع! لقد خرجت للسوق والآن سوف التهم الصغار السبع وسيكونوا فريسة سهلة."

لقد كان الصغار منشغلين بالقفز واللعب ولم يلاحظوا الذئب وهو يراقبهم. دق الذئب الباب وقال, "هذه ماما, يا صغار, هيا إفتحوا الباب لقد عدت إليكم!" قال الأبناء, "آه عادت ماما ثانية! عادت ماما, عادت ماما!" قالت إحدى من الأبناء, "لا, ليست ماما هذه!" وحملت اخوها بعيدا عن الباب. وصاح الأبناء, "أنت الذئب, أنت الذئب!"

غضب الذئب ومشى يفكر فى حيلة يضحك بها على الابناء. وإعتقد الذئب ان الصوت الأبح يمكن تنظيفه لو أكل قليلا من الطباشير! ولكن هذه ليست حقيقة وخطأ فالطباشير يوجع البطون فلا تفعلوا انتم ذلك! وعاد الذئب إلى الأطفال بحيلة جديدة وأخذ يغنى قائلا, "أنا أمكم عدت إليكم عدت عدت عدت!" صاح الأطفال, "ماما, ماما!" ولكنهم عادوا ونظروا من تحت الباب قبل أن يفتحوا ورأوا الأرجل السوداء. وقالوا, "لا, ليست ماما! أنت الذئب, أنت الذئب!" وغضب الذئب ثانية وذهب إلى مخزن قريب وسرق طحينا وطحج جسمه كله بالطين ليصبح لونه أبيض. ودق الباب وقال لهم, "هيا, يا أطفالى! إفتحوا الباب! انا امكم ولقد عدت إليكم." فرحوا الأطفال وقالوا, "ماما!"

ونظروا من تحت الباب فرأوا الأقدام بيضاء وقالوا، "هذه ماما!" وفرحوا وجروا نحو الباب. وفتحوا الباب وفوجئوا بالذئب. فخافوا وجروا كل في مكان. ولقد حاول الصغار ان يختبئوا ولكنهم كانوا كبارا وكان يصعب عليهم ذلك. وأكلهم الذئب واحد تلو الآخر حتى شبع الذئب المتوحش.

وكان الماعز الصغير ما زال مختبئا في ساعة الحائط لانه صغير الحجم ويستطيع ان يختبئ وينجو من الذئب. وعادت الأم تبحث عن أبنائها وتبكي وتقول، "صغاري أين أنتم؟ يا إلهي، أين أنتم؟" وسألت صغيرها وقالت، "حبيبي أين إخوتك؟" فحكى لها الماعز الصغير الحكاية كلها. قالت له أمه، "احضر لي مقصا وإبرة حالا!" وأثناء نوم الذئب فتحت الأم بطن الذئب الشرير وأخرجت أبناءها. ووضعت مكانهم أحجارا ثقيلة وخاطت بطن الذئب بالإبرة مرة أخرى وأغلقتة.

وعندما إستيقظ الذئب في الصباح شعر بالعطش فذهب للبئر ليشرب. ولان الأحجار كانت ثقيلة فسقط في البئر وغرق ومات. وهكذا شعر الأطفال بالأمان وأخذوا يلعبون ويمرحون سعداء بين الحشائش والزهور.

7.2. A Red Cat (Tale 11)

This unknown story is told by Ibtisām, a late-thirties Lebanese Shi'ite woman from Şabrā and Shātīlā - the Palestinian refugee camp in the Ḥizbullah district of Beirut where an infamous massacre took place in 1982 after an invasion during the Lebanese civil war. With that raw piece of recent history in mind, it is possible that this tale hints of political allegory with an edge of revenge. However, the respondent tells the tale as an example of a story that her grandmother used to tell her, and that the respondent herself continues to tell her own children in Hammarkullen – much to their unbridled amusement.

The story was recorded in its sing-song telling on Dictaphone at the Support Network on June 8, 2012, after which it was written down in collaboration with Emān in the Colloquial Lebanese Arabic in which it was presented. It was then punctuated, typed, and translated by the researcher.

Once upon a time there was a red cat,

She put henna on her feet²⁶³ and hands

She lifted her hands to her Lord²⁶⁴

²⁶³ A Saudi-Arabian tale, *Who Lied?* (Bushnaq 1986:218) features a pigeon with henna-dyed feet and a partridge with kohl-rimmed eyes.

Her Lord colored her eyes with kohl^{265, 266}.

The cat was hungry and went to the butcher.²⁶⁷ She said, ‘O butcher, o butcher, give me a piece of meat!’ He said, ‘Go away! Go to your mother. Do you have money?’

She said, ‘I don’t have any money. She said, ‘May God keep you, I don’t have anyone. I don’t have food, I’m hungry.’

He did not give her [anything]. She stood to the side. The butcher felt sorry for her and gave her a piece of meat. She was very, very happy. She took it and went home.

When she was about to eat it she said, ‘Nooo. Let me take a bath and get clean and nice – after that I will eat it’. She got up and took the meat and put it on a windowsill. As she was bathing, the big [tom-] cat came and took the meat. He pulled it out from the window and took it.

She came out and did not find the meat. She began to cry and cry and cry and was hungry and wanted to eat. ‘What should I do? I want to go to my uncle the judge’. She went to her uncle the judge.²⁶⁸ She said [singing]:

‘O my uncle the judge, the judge

Ha ha, your clogs are high and low²⁶⁹

Your wife is faithful²⁷⁰, ha ha

Pregnant and fat, ha ha

She gave you a son

She called him ‘Abd an-Nabbi’²⁷¹

She gave you a daughter...

Anyhow, he said, ‘What’s with you, o red cat?’ She said, ‘I’m very upset’. He said, ‘What happened to you?’ She said, ‘This and that happened to me and the big cat took the piece of meat from me’. He said to her, ‘Don’t worry! Now I will send people to bring the big cat and you will see what I will do to him for you’. He went and sent off his soldiers and they brought the big cat.

²⁶⁴ Two devout cats are featured in Bushnaq 1986:216 *The Cat Who Went to Mecca (Syria)* and in Bushnaq 1986:222 *The Pious Cat (Oman)*.

²⁶⁵ Arab brides are traditionally prepared for the wedding party with henna and kohl.

²⁶⁶ An almost identical nursery rhyme is found about a bird in *Tale 11. The Little Bird*, Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:115.

²⁶⁷ For a butcher anecdote see Jayyusi 2010:205.

²⁶⁸ For another judge see Bushnaq 1986:322 *The Judgment of the Qadi (Egypt)* and Jayyusi 2010:197. An alternative judge is found in Jayyusi 2010:205.

²⁶⁹ Implies that the judge suffers from a limp, most likely caused by polio. Accordingly, one heel is high and the other one low, in order to balance out his gait.

²⁷⁰ ‘Faithful’ may also be read as ‘Amīna’ – the name of the mother of Muhammad.

²⁷¹ ‘Slave of the Prophet’

He said to her, 'What do you want us to do to him?' She said, 'I want you to kill him for me; I want you to butcher him!'

Afterwards, they brought her lots of meat to eat. Then they said, 'What do you want us to do with the bones?' She said to them, 'Make me a ladder and make me high-heeled shoes'. They said, 'Why?' She said, 'Just make them and you'll know why'. Then they made them. She wore the shoes and went out on the steps saying:

'Tick tack tom

Tick tack tom

Tick tack tom

I lived and you died!'

قطة حمورة²⁷²

كان في مرة قطة حمورة،

حنيت ديها ورجليها

ورفعت ديها لربها

ربها كحلها عينيها.

كانت جعانة راحت لعند اللحم. قالتله، "يا لحام يا لحام اعطيني شقفة لحمة!" قالها، "روحي لعند امك. معاكي مصاري؟" قالت، "ما عندي مصاري." قالتله، "الله يخليك، ما عندي حدا ما عندي اكل وانا جعانة." ما اعطاها. بعدين وقفت على جنب. شفق عليها اللحم واعطاها شقفة لحمة. انبسطت كتير كتير. اخذتها وراحت على البيت.

اجت لتاكلها قالت، "لا، خليني اتحمم وصير نظيفة بعدين باكلها." قامت اخذت اللحمه وحطتها على الرفة. وهي عم تتحمم اجا البس الكبير واخذ اللحمه. سحبها من الشباك واخذها.

طلعت هي، ما لقت اللحمه. وصارت تبكي تبكي تبكي وجعانة وبدها تاكل. قالت، "انا جعانة. شو بدي اعمل؟" قالت، "بدي روح لعند عمي القاضي." راحت عند عمها القاضي وقالتله،

يا عمي القاضي القاضي

ها ها قبقابك عالي وواطي

²⁷² The color red in diminutive form.

مرتك امينة ها ها

حبلى وسمينة ها ها

جابتلك صبي

سميته عبد النبي

جابتلك بنت ...

المهم, قالها, "شو بكي يا قطة حمورة؟" قالتله, "انا كتير زعلانة." قال, "شو صار معي؟" قالتله, "هيك هيك صار معي والبس الكبير اخذلي اللحمة." قالها, "خلص ولا يهملك! هلاء انا بدي ابعت ناس يجيبوا البس الكبير وشوفي انا شو راح سويلك فيه." راح بعت جنوده يجيبوا البس الكبير. وقالها القاضي, "شو بدك نعمل فيه؟" "بدي اياكم اتموتولي اياه. بدي تدبحوه!"

جابولها لحمة كتيرللها تاكلهن. بعدين قألولها, "شو بدك نعملك بعظامه؟" قالت, "بدي تعملولي سلوم وتعملولي جزم كعبهم عالي." وقألولها, "ليش؟" قالت, "بس تعملوهم بتعرفوا ليش." عملولها اياهم. لبست الجزم وطلعت على الدرج وصارت تقول,

تك تك توم

تك تك توم

تك تك توم

انا عشت وانت مت!

7.3. The Poor Man (Tale 28)

During a previous visit to the Caritas charity, a bundle of painstakingly handwritten stories in broken Swedish were handed over as a contribution to the data collection. A swift perusal revealed an assemblage of original, unknown stories and an arrangement was made to meet the storyteller on June 4, 2012. This mid-forty Christian Lebanese woman of Turkish ancestry has a wealth of stories passed down by her mother, and she herself tells them with evident pleasure and skill. Regrettably, she has no children of her own to pass them on to but she shares them with nephews and nieces. Having fled Lebanon as a young teenager, she speaks Colloquial Lebanese Arabic with a sprinkling of Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi words, but does not read or write any version of the Arabic language.

Her stories were recorded on Dictaphone; transcribed into Colloquial Lebanese Arabic in collaboration with Emān; punctuated, typed, and translated by the researcher. It is the story of a foolish man told as a cumulative tale with supernatural features as well as containing a talking animal.

*Once upon an ancient age and time, there was a man that worked very, very much and [yet] had no money. One day, he decided to go out to search for God in order to see where He was and to ask Him why he worked very, very much yet was not becoming rich.*²⁷³

As he was walking on the road [for] a day or two, he saw a wolf. The wolf asked him, 'Where do you want to go?' The man told him, 'I want to go to search for God [in order] to ask Him why I don't get rich. I'm poor, I work a lot, and tire [myself] out a lot, but I [still] don't have any money.' Then the wolf said, 'OK. Just [as soon as] you see God, ask Him why I'm blind; why I can't see?'

That day he stayed with the wolf and [on] the second day he continued on his way. He left, left; went, went, went, went. He saw farmers that were working on the land. They asked him, 'Where are you going?' He said to them, 'I want to go searching for God.' They said, 'Why are you searching for God?' He answered, 'Because I work a lot and tire [myself] out a lot, but I'm not getting any money – I'm poor. I always want to ask Him why I'm poor.' They said, 'OK. If you see the Lord of the Two Worlds²⁷⁴, ask Him why regardless of how much we plant and plow – no fruit/harvest grows. Why doesn't our land yield [anything]?' He said, 'OK.'

He left [and] continued on his way; went, went, went. He saw a king. The king asked him, 'Where do you want to go?' He said, 'I want to go see the Lord of the Two Worlds [in order] to ask Him why I'm not getting rich. I work a lot and tire [myself] out a lot and don't get rich.' He [the king] said, 'OK. Can you, if you see God, ask Him why I'm a king and no one obeys me and no one listens to my words – why [is that]?' He said, 'OK. Just as soon as I see Him, I'll ask Him.' That day, he stayed with the king; he ate and he drank and the next day he continued on his way. He left; continued to go, go, go.

And old man appeared right in front of him. The old man asked him, 'Where do you want to go?' He said, 'I'm going to search for the Lord of the Two Worlds [in order] to see Him. I want to ask Him a question, which is that I work a lot and tire [myself] a lot but I don't get any money – why [is that]?' The man told him, 'Stay here! I'm the Lord of the Two Worlds; I am God.' He said, 'OK. If you are God why am I not becoming rich?' He said, 'Return to your home and dig in the ground that you have. You'll see a pot. This pot, there is gold in it. Take it and you will become rich.'

²⁷³ For another story of a poor man on a quest for fortune see Bushnaq 1986:285 *Don't Count Your Chickens (Egypt)*.

²⁷⁴ A Muslim title of God declaring Him Lord of the heavenly and earthly worlds.

He said, 'OK, fine, and the wolf? What should I answer him?' He said, 'The wolf; if he eats eyes of a lunatic, his eyes will open and he will be able to see.' He said, 'Good, and the farmers?' He said, 'The farmers; no vegetation, in other words, no crop, grows out of their land because there is a pot in the middle of the land. If they take out that pot, [which] has money in it, then the crop will grow.' He said, 'OK.' Then he asked Him, 'Good, and the king? Why is no one obeying the king and no one listening to his words?' He said, 'The king; no one obeys him or listens to his words because he is not a man – it's a woman. Women don't have power with [or authority over] men, so because of this no one listens to her.' He said, 'Aha!' He said, 'OK.' He said, 'Return to your home in order to become rich.' He said, 'OK.'

He returned to his home. As he was returning, whom did he see on the way? He saw the king first of all. The king asked him, 'Huh, what did you do? Did you see the Lord of the Two Worlds?' 'I spoke with Him', he said, 'yes, I saw Him.' He said, 'What did the Lord of the Two Worlds say? Why doesn't anyone obey me and listen to my words – why?' He said, 'No one listens to you because you are not a man but a woman, so because of this no one listens to your words and no one obeys you.' The king told him, 'And you, what did He tell you?' He said, 'I need to return to my home; I will become rich. There is a pot at home in the ground. I will take it and become rich.'²⁷⁵ He said, 'What's your opinion [about] you marrying me and you will become rich – you will become king?' He said, 'No, I don't want to! I am going to return home and become rich.' He said, 'OK.'

He left [and] continued; went, went, went. He saw the farmers. The farmers asked him, 'Did you see the Lord of the Two Worlds? What did He say to you?' He said to them, 'The Lord of the Two Worlds said to me, '[When] you go home you will become rich'.' They said, 'Fine, and [what about] us?' He said to them, 'Do you know why no crop grows in the land that you own? Because there is a pot in the middle of the land. Take it out! It has a lot of money in it and as soon as you remove the pot you will have a lot of money.' They said, 'OK. Thanks a lot!'

He left [and] continued; went, went, went. He reached the wolf. The wolf asked him, 'What did you do? Did you see the Lord of the Two Worlds?' He said, 'Yes, the Lord of the Two Worlds told me that if I return home I will become rich.' He said, 'OK, and [what about] me?' He said, 'You, if you eat eyes of a lunatic your eyes will open.' The wolf said to him, 'There is no one as crazy as you! You could have become rich if you would marry the queen! You would have become rich and [become] king. And you could have taken the pot from that land of the farmers and you would have become rich. You didn't accept, so you are a lunatic! I will eat your eyes [so that] my eyes will open.' And he ate him up!

²⁷⁵ For another buried treasure see Jarry 2010:203.

الرجل الفقير

كان يا ما كان في قديم العصر والزمان في واحد رجال كان يشتغل كثير كثير وما معه مصاري. في يوم من²⁷⁶ الايام قرر يطلع يدور على الله عشان يشوف وينه ويسأله ليش هو بيشتغل كثير كثير وما بصير زنجين

وهو ماشي بالطريق يوم يومين شاف ذئب. الذئب سأله, "لوين بك تروح؟" قاله الرجال, "انا بدي اروح ادور على الله اسأله ليش انا ما بزنجينيش. انا فقير بشتغل كثير وبتعب كثير بس ما بصير عندي مصاري." فالذئب قاله, "اوكي, بس تشوف الله اسأله ليش انا اعمى ليش ما بشوف؟"

وظل هداك اليوم عند الذئب وتاني يوم كمل طريقه. وراح راح مشي مشي مشي. شاف فلاحين عم بشتغلوا في الارض. سألوه, "لوين رايح؟" قالهم, "انا بدي اروح ادور على الله." قالوله, "ليش اتدور على الله؟" جاوب, "لانه انا عم اشتغل كثير واتعب كثير وما عم يصير عندي مصاري - انا فقير. دائما بدي اسأله ليش انا فقير." قالوله, "اوكي. اذا شفت رب العالمين اسأله ليش احنا قد ما بنزرع وقد ما بنفلاح الارض تبعا - ما بتطلع اثمار. ليش ما بتطلع الارض تبعا؟" قالهم, "اوكي."

راح كمل طريقه مشي مشي مشي شاف ملك. الملك سأله, "لوين بك تروح؟" قاله, "بدي اروح اشوف رب العالمين اسأله ليش انا ما بصير زنجين. بشتغل كثير وبتعب كثير وما بصير زنجين." قاله, "اوكي, فيك اذا بتشوف الله تسأله ليش انا ملك وما حدا عم يطيعني وما حدا عم يسمع كلامي ليش؟ فيك تسأله هذا السؤال؟" قاله, "اوكي, بس اشوفه بسأله." ظله هداك اليوم عند الملك اكل وشرب وتاني يوم كمل طريقه. وراح ظل ماشي ماشي ماشي.

طلع واحد ختيار بوجهه. سأله الختيار, "لوين بك تروح؟" قاله, "انا رايح ادور على رب العالمين اشوفه. بدي اسأله سؤال انه انا بشتغل كثير وبتعب كثير وما بصير عندي فلوس ليش؟" قاله الرجال, "خليك هون! انا رب العالمين انا الله." قاله, "اوكي, اذا انت الله ليش انا ما بصير زنجين؟" قاله, "ارجع على بيتك واحفر في الارض عندك. بتشوف جرة. هاي الجرة فيها ذهب. خذها وراح- تصير زنجين."

قاله, "اوكي, طيب والذئب؛ شو بدي اجاوبه انا؟" قاله, "الذئب اذا بياكل عيون واحد مجنون عينيه بيفتحوا وبصير يشوف." قاله, "طيب, والفلاحين؟" قاله, "الفلاحين ما بيطلع نبات, يعني زرع, من

²⁷⁶ According to other Arabic speakers this word is pronounced incorrectly by the storyteller – instead of زنجين (*zanjīn*) it ought to be spelled زنقين (*zanqīn*) – a Turkish borrowed term, meaning “rich” or “wealthy”, which is commonly pronounced with a “g” instead of “q”: *zangīn*. However, the storyteller consistently uses the “j” pronunciation and the transcription is faithful to her own rendering.

ارضهم لانه في جرة بنص الارض. لو هاي الجرة يطلعوها, فيها فلوس²⁷⁷, بصير يطلع الزرع." قاله,
"اوكي." وبعدين سأله, "طيب, والملك؟ ليش ما حدا بطيع الملك وما حدا بيسمع كلامه؟" قاله, "الملك
ما حدا بطيعه وبسمع كلامه لانه مو²⁷⁸ رجال- هذا مرة. فالمرة ما عندها هذي القدرة مع الرجال, فمشان
هيك ما حدا بيسمعها." قاله, "اها!" قاله, "اوكي." قاله, "ارجع على بيتك عشان تصير زنجين."
قاله, "اوكي."

رجع على بيته. وهو راجع بالطريق شاف منو؟ شاف الملك اول شي. الملك سأله, "ها, شو سويت؟
شفت رب العالمين؟" "حكيت معه," قاله, "اي, شفته." قال, "شو حكى رب العالمين؟ ليش انا ما حدا
مرة,²⁷⁹ بطيعني وما حدا بيسمع كلامي- ليش؟" قاله, "انت ما حدا بيسمع كلامك لانه انت مو رجال اما
فمشان هيك ما حدا بيسمع كلامك وما حدا بطيعك." حكا له الملك, "وانت, شو حكاك؟" قاله, "انا بدي
ارجع على بيتي راح اصير زنجين. في جرة ببيتي بالارض. راح اخذها واصير زنجين." قاله, "اش
رايك تتزوجني انت وتصير زنجين - صير الملك؟" قاله, "لا, انا ما بدي! انا راح ارجع على البيت واصير
زنجين." قاله, "اوكي."

راح كمل مشي مشي مشي. شاف الفلاحين. الفلاحين سألوه, "شفت رب العالمين؟ شو قالك؟" قالهم,
"رب العالمين قالي, 'انت بترجع على البيت راح تصير زنجين.' " قالوله, "طب, واحنا؟" قالهم, "انتوا
تعرفون ليش ما يطلع زرع عندكم في الارض مالتكم؟ لانه في جرة بنص الارض. اطلعوها! فيها فلوس
كثير وبس تشيلون الجرة راح يصير عندكم فلوس كثير." قالوله, "اوكي, شكرا كتير!"

راح كمل مشي مشي مشي. وصل للذنب. الذنب سأله, "شنو سويت؟ شفت رب العالمين؟" قاله, "اه,
قالي رب العالمين اني ارجع على البيت راح صير زنجين." قاله, "اوكي, وانا؟" قاله, "انت لو تاكل
عيون واحد مجنون راح يفتحوا عيونك." قاله الذنب, "ما في مجنون مثلك! انت كان فيك تصير زنجين
بانك تتزوج الملكة! كنت راح تصير زنجين هم ملك. وكان فيك تاخذ الجرة من هدوك مال الفلاحين من
الارض وهم²⁸⁰ تصير زنجين. ما قبلت, فأنت واحد مجنون! اكل عيونك يفتحون عيوني." وكله!

²⁷⁷ Colloquial Egyptian term for "money".

²⁷⁸ Colloquial Syrian particle indicating negation: not [a man].

²⁷⁹ [sic]

²⁸⁰ A prefixed particle, most often found in Colloquial Iraqi Arabic and Colloquial Gulf Arabic, to indicate a present tense indicative verb - in this case "would have become rich [in the future]". The storyteller has borrowed a particle that is not otherwise found in Colloquial Lebanese Arabic.

7.4. The Power of God and of the Blood Tie (Tale 30)

The ensuing fairytale with its echoes of religious imagery was enthusiastically told in Colloquial Iraqi Arabic by Hiba, an Iraqi Assyrian Christian lady in her late fifties, at her kitchen table on April 19, 2012. When she realized that it would be used in the thesis, she wrote it down in proper, yet slightly lackluster, Modern Standard Arabic – the grammar and spelling is, thus, her own. The handwritten account was then deciphered, typed, punctuated, and translated by the researcher. Lastly, it was presented to the respondent for proofreading and approval.

Typically, the fairytale contains formulaic phrases and numbers, as well as instances of supernatural events. Unlike the other sample stories, this fairytale is written in dual plural form. It is one of many bedtime stories that Hiba's old housekeeper used to tell the children of the extended family during the Lenten fast in Baghdad.²⁸¹

There was a king and he had a son. The son was a commander of his army. One day, the king's son was passing by the s̄āqiyya²⁸² and had his retinue with him. At the water wheel there were three girls sitting by the water. The eldest one said, "If the king's son will marry me I will cook food for him in a small pot, but it will be sufficient for his whole army."

The middle one said, "If the king's son will marry me I will make him a carpet that all his army will cross, and he will fold it up and put it in his pocket."

The third one said – and she was the youngest, "If the king's son will marry me, by God's power I will give birth to two children for him – twins; one endowed with a head of gold, and the other endowed with a head of silver."

The king's son overheard the talk²⁸³ and married the three of them. Then he said to the first one, on the second day of his marriage, "Today the army is coming to eat from the pot that you said." She answered him, "Did you believe it? It was just talk!" So, he punished her in that she would work her whole life as a servant in the castle.

He asked the second one, "Where is the carpet?" She answered, "I am able to make a big carpet, but it is not possible for you to put it in your pocket – so, this was just [mere] talk." Then he said to her, "Your punishment is that you will become a chambermaid and a helper to the third wife."

²⁸¹ For a different tradition of piety see Jayyusi 2010:182 *Virtue and Divine Reward*.

²⁸² A kind of water wheel used (especially in Egypt) for raising water, from wells or pits, in buckets attached to its periphery or to an endless rope.

²⁸³ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:103

He said to the third one, “But as for you, I will wait for nine months and when you will give birth, that is when the judgment will be.”

After nine months she gave birth and they were two beautiful boys – one endowed with a head of gold, and the other endowed with a head of silver, because it was the power of God. When the first wife beheld [this], she took them and placed them in a chest and threw the chest in the watering place.²⁸⁴ She took two small pups²⁸⁵ and placed them by the third wife²⁸⁶. When the king’s son came and asked, “What did you give birth to?” he saw the two pups. So, he beat her and said to her, “Your punishment is that you will polish the shoes²⁸⁷ of people that enter the castle so that they will not sully it.”

But the chest travelled in the water of the irrigation canal until it arrived at the town’s mill. The owner of the mill and his wife had no children and were of old age and poor. Hence, the wife said, “We cannot take care of them.” And the husband answered, “God will help us.” So, they took the two boys and took care of them.²⁸⁸

They slept at night and in the morning the two cried and the wife got up to take care of the two of them. Then she found two pouches by their both heads. When she opened the two pouches she found one bag filled with gold and the other with silver. She told her husband and every day was like that – they became some of the richest in the land.

The boys grew and became young men and their mother (the wife of the mill owner) said, “I have aged and you both ought to get married. There is a king that has beautiful daughters – go and choose from them.” Thus, they both went to the king’s castle and they found a poor woman that polished the shoes before the visitors entered the castle. However, they did not accept that she would polish their shoes; instead they both kissed her hands.²⁸⁹ They did not recognize her, nevertheless, it was the blood tie and God’s power that made them bow down to her.

Afterwards, they both entered the castle and got to know the family of the castle and the daughters. They treated the daughters like sisters and assisted the king since he was going through a financial crisis. At that time, the first and eldest wife of the king became sick and the angels surrounded her²⁹⁰, hence she decided to reveal the secret that had been hidden for years, and she told the story. The king apologized to the third and youngest wife and searched for his sons.²⁹¹ He found them and they lived a happy life.²⁹²

²⁸⁴ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:104

²⁸⁵ Dogs are considered physically and morally unclean in the Middle East, and it is thus a great insult.

²⁸⁶ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:103

²⁸⁷ Yet another insult, as shoes are considered inherently filthy.

²⁸⁸ Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:104

²⁸⁹ A sign of veneration.

²⁹⁰ An idiom for being on one’s deathbed.

²⁹¹ For another repentant king see Bushnaq 1986:297 *The King Who Changed His Ways (Syria)*.

²⁹² Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:110

قدرة الله ورابطة الدم

كان هناك ملك وله ولد. والولد كان قائد لجيشه. في يوم كان ابن الملك يمر عند الساقية ومعه حاشيته. وكان عند الساقية ثلاث بنات جالسات عند الماء. وقالت الكبيرة, "لو تزوجني ابن الملك سوف أطبخ له طعام في جدر²⁹³ صغير ولكنه يكفي لجيشه كله."

وقالت الوسطى, "أنا لو تزوجني ابن الملك سوف أعمل له سجادة يمر عليها كل جيشه ويطويها ويضعها في جيبه."

وقالت الثالثة وهي الصغيرة, "لو تزوجني ابن الملك بقدرة الله سوف ألد له ولدان توأم – واحد ذو رأس ذهب والآخر ذو رأس فضة."

فسمع ابن الملك الكلام وتزوج الثالثة. فقال للأولى في ثاني يوم زواجه, "اليوم ياتي الجيش ويأكل من الجدر الذي قلت." فأجابته, "هل انت صدقت؟ فقد كان هذا كلام!"

فعاقبها وان تعمل كل عمرها خادمة في القصر.

وسأل الثانية, "وأين السجادة؟" فأجبت, "أنا أقدر أعمل سجادة كبيرة ولكن لا يمكن وضعها في جيبك – فهذا كان كلام."

فقال لها, "عقوبتك ان تصبني وصيفة ومساعدة للزوجة الثالثة."

وقال للثالثة, "أما أنت فسوف أنتظر تسعة أشهر وعندما تلدين سوف يكون الحكم."

وبعد تسعة أشهر ولدت وكانا ولدان جميلان – واحد ذو رأس ذهب والآخر ذو رأس فضة لأنها قدرة الله. ولما رأتهما الزوجة الأولى أخذتهما ووضعتهما في صندوق ورمت الصندوق في الساقية. وأخذت جروان صغيران ووضعتهما عند الزوجة الثالثة. ولما جاء ابن الملك وسأل, "ماذا ولدت؟" فرأى الجروان. فضربها وقال لها, "عقوبتك هي ان تمسحي احذية الناس الذين يدخلون القصر لكي لا يوسخوا القصر."

وأما الصندوق ذهب في ماء الساقية إلى ان وصل إلى طاحونة البلد. وكان صاحب الطاحونة وزوجته ليس عندهما اولاد وكانا كبار في السن وفقراء. فقالت الزوجة, "نحن لا نقدر ان نرعاهم." وأجاب الزوج, "الله يساعدنا." فأخذوا الولدان ورعاهما.

²⁹³ Written in Colloquial Iraqi Arabic by exchanging the MSA- ق (q) for ج (g).

وناما في الليل وفي الصباح بكا. فقامت الزوجة لترعاها فوجدت عند رأسيهما كيسان. عندما فتحت الكيسان وجدت كيس مملؤ بالذهب والاخر بالفضة. وأخبرت زوجها وكان كل يوم كذلك – واصبحوا من اغنياء البلد.

وكبرا الولدان واصبحا شابان فقالت امهما (زوجة صاحب الطاحونة), "أنا كبرت ويجب ان تتزوجا. وهناك ملك عنده بنات جميلات – اذهبا وإختارا منهن." فذهبا إلى قصر الملك فوجدا امرأة فقيرة كانت تمسح الاحذية قبل ان يدخلوا الزوار القصر. ولكن لم يقبلا ان تمسح احذيتهما؛ ولكن قبلا يديها. ولم يعرفاها ولكن رابطة الدم وقدرة الله التي عملت انهما ينحنيا إليها. وبعد ذلك دخلا إلى القصر وتعرفا على اهل القصر والبنات. وعاملا البنات مثل اخواتهما وساعدا الملك لانه كان يمر بضايقة مالية. في ذلك الحين تمرضت زوجة الملك الكبيرة الأولى وأن الملاءكة تحوم حولها, فقررت ان تبوح بالسر المخفي منذ سنين وحكت الحكاية. وقام الملك بالإعتذار من زوجته الثالثة الصغيرة وفتشى عن أولاده. وجدهما وعاشوا عيشة سعيدة.

6.5. The Gift of the Tree (Tale 41)

Three of the respondents, from Iraq, Algeria, and Palestine, recognize this folktale that was contributed in written Modern Standard Arabic by Emān, a mid-twenties Palestinian Sunni respondent, on March 15, 2012, at the Meeting Place. The story was punctuated, typed, and translated by the researcher. The Iraqi respondent claims that the tale precedes the Ottoman Empire, although that statement cannot be ascertained. Interestingly, this formulaic folktale notably affects its listeners, leaving them touched and pondering life, sacrificial love and devotion. The respondents unanimously attribute this esteemed tale with exceptional beauty, possessing a distinct class of its own, perhaps being stirred more by the unspoken values of this tale rather than the actual words that are heard in the telling of this story.

A long time ago there was an apple tree that was extremely large – and there was a child. Furthermore, he would doze off to sleep a little in its shadow and eat from its fruit. He loved the tree and the tree loved his playing with it.

Time passed and the child grew up. He did not play around this tree after that. Then the tree said, "Come, play with me!"

So, the boy answered it, "I'm not small anymore to play around you. I want some toys and I need some money to buy them."

Then the tree answered him, "I do not have any money."

The boy was very happy. Then he climbed up the tree and collected all the apples that were on it. He climbed down happily from it. The boy did not return afterwards.

*

The tree was exceedingly happy at his return and said, "Come, play with me!"

But he answered it and said, "I will not return to be a child in order to play around you again. I have become a man responsible for a family."

"Sorry", said the tree. "I do not have a house for you; however, you may take all my branches to build a house for yourself with them."

And the tree was happy for his happiness and to see him like this. But he did not return to it.

*

The man returned another time and the tree was exceedingly happy. So, the tree said, "Come, play with me!"

It went on to answer him, "You may take my trunk to build your boat and afterwards you may sail with it wherever you want - and you will be happy."

So, the man cut the tree trunk and made his boat. Then he travelled sailing and he did not return for a very long time.

*

Finally, the man returned after a long absence and many long years. But the tree answered and said to him, "I am sorry, my beloved son, but I do not have anything left to give to you."

And it said to him, "There are no apples."

Then it told him, "I really do not have anything to give to you. Everything I have now is dead roots." It answered him crying: "The roots of the old tree are the most suitable place for you to rest." Hence, it answered him and said: "Come, come and sit with me here below and rest here with me!"

Then the man came down to it and the tree was happy with him and tears filled its smile.

عطاء الشجرة

منذ زمن بعيد كانت هناك شجرة تفاح في غاية الضخامة - وكان هناك طفل.

وبعدها يغفو قليلاً لينام في ظلها ويأكل من ثمرها.

كان يحب الشجرة وكانت الشجرة تحب لعبه معها.

مر الزمن وكبر هذا الطفل. وأصبح لا يلعب حول هذه الشجرة بعد ذلك.

فقالت له الشجرة, "تعال ولعب معي!"

فأجابها الولد, "لم أعد صغيراً لألعب حولك. أنا أريد بعض اللعب وأحتاج بعض النقود لشرائها!"

فأجابته الشجرة, "أنا لا يوجد معي أية نقود."

الولد كان سعيداً للغاية. فتسلق الشجرة وجمع جميع ثمر التفاح التي عليها. ونزل من عليها سعيداً. لم يعد الولد بعدها.

*

وكانت الشجرة في منتهى السعادة لعودته وقالت له, "تعال ولعب معي!"

ولكنه أجابها وقال لها, "أنا لم أعد طفلاً لألعب حولك مرة أخرى. فقد أصبحت رجلاً مسئولاً عن عائلتي."

"أسفة", قالت الشجرة. "فأنا ليس عندي لك بيت؛ ولكن يمكنك أن تأخذ جميع أفرعي لتبني بها لك بيتاً."

وكانت الشجرة سعيدة لسعادته ورويته هكذا. ولكن لم يعد إليها.

*

عاد الرجل مرة أخرى وكانت الشجرة في منتهى السعادة.

فقالت له الشجرة, "تعال ولعب معي!"

فأجابته, "يمكنك أخذ جزعي لبناء مركبك وبعدها يمكنك أن تبحر به أينما تشاء - وتكون سعيداً."

فقطع الرجل جزع الشجرة وصنع مركبه. فسافر مبحراً ولم يعد لمدة طويلة جداً.

*

أخيراً عاد الرجل بعد غياب طويل وسنوات طويلة جداً. ولكن الشجرة أجابت وقالت له, "أسفة, يا بني

الحبيب, ولكن لم يعد عندي أي شئ لأعطيه لك."

وقالت له, "لا يوجد تفاح."

فأخبرته, "أنا فعلاً لا يوجد لدي ما أعطيه لك. كل ما لدي الآن هو جذور ميتة."

أجابته وهي تبكي, "جذور الشجرة العجوز هي أنسب مكان لك للراحة."

فأجابته وقالت له, "تعال, تعال, وإجلس معي هنا تحت وإسترح معي!"

فنزل الرجل إليها وكانت الشجرة سعيدة به والدموع تملأ إبتسامتها.

Part 8: Conclusions

8.1. Storytelling - An Integral Component of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The practice of oral storytelling is one of a wide variety of oral expressions, including nursery rhymes, tales, proverbs, and humorous anecdotes; as well as an extensive list of further oral practices. As such, the practice of oral storytelling comprises a significant segment of what the UNESCO 2003 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage' targets, safeguards, and promotes.

Storytelling has multifaceted applications which provide its tellers and listeners with a sense of identity, continuity, and community, as well as reinforcing language, creativity, and self-expression. Storytelling fosters understanding and appreciation for one's own culture and that of others, which makes it particularly suitable for connecting a child's world with the world-of-the-other in that it inspires empathy and cross-cultural understanding. Storytelling gives a voice to ethnic minorities, thus promoting respect and understanding for cultural diversity, which leads to the fostering of world citizens.

According to the UNESCO 2003 Convention, it is relevant and beneficial to both minority and mainstream society that intangible cultural capital, in the form of knowledge and skills, is passed on to the next generation, resulting in social and economic value for all.

8.2. Language Wields Key Role

Language is the vehicle of oral storytelling, and thus, a central carrier of intangible cultural heritage. Without language, a significant link between generations is severed and intangible cultural heritage is irrevocably lost. Research has showcased the lopsided social, psychological,

and educational costs of *misrecognition*²⁹⁴ in academic settings for minority children. I would venture to add that there is also a considerable cultural heritage cost due to misrecognition. Regrettably, it is the ambivalent and devaluating attitudes of both mainstream society, as well as Arabic-speakers themselves, towards spoken Arabic in Sweden that raises concerns for the survival of oral Arabic storytelling and its inherent cargo of cultural capital in the exile community. This negative trend could be reversed if the status of immigrant languages received official recognition in like manner to the main minority languages of Sweden.

In the positive light of minority languages' vital role in enriching society's cultural heritage, as well as in the spirit of UNESCO's framework for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, I would argue that Sweden would benefit from reevaluating its interpretation and stance on the status of minority languages, oral expressions, and their undeniable function in expressing and maintaining cultural heritage and identity, not only for the sake of the minority groups in question, but also for its relevant value to mainstream society according to the 2003 Convention. This could be facilitated by the government's laudable proposal for "forums for dialogue on these interpretations" that, according to the government's own website, are important from a citizen perspective. Considering the increasingly multinational makeup of Swedish citizens, the actual implementation of such forums for dialogue would cement the cornerstones for a progressive, tolerant, and inclusive society – the quintessence of what Sweden aspires to be.

8.3. Empowerment

8.3.1. Effect of Field Study and Thesis Interviews

Caspe's study (2003) suggests that women are empowered, and that their innate skills and knowledge are strengthened, when they are asked to reflect on the literary practices of their daily lives. Spurred on by the impact they can have on their children's lives, they are inspired to engage in further literacy practices – which includes the transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

The truth of Caspe's (2003) findings is confirmed by the reaction of the respondents in Hammarkullen when asked for samples of oral storytelling. Once the storytellers realized that there is interest in their stories and cultural heritage they responded by being deeply moved, as

²⁹⁴ See 3.1.1. Misrecognition and devalued narratives.

well as with a strong sense of validation and encouragement to keep on telling stories. Similarly, the respondents that have chosen to not pass on stories for various reasons were taken aback by a mixture of delighted surprise and pondering regret, in addition to a fresh resolve to begin telling stories when realizing that they have the power to impact their children's academic success, along with their cultural heritage and identity. Undoubtedly, there are valuable insights and unique contributions to be gained by approaching immigrant women, not as representing a disadvantaged segment of society, but rather as proprietors of knowledge and skills that are beneficial to themselves, their families, as well as to surrounding society. Through conversations with further members of the Arabic-speaking community in Hammarkullen, it has become clear that when given license to value a heritage that is sometimes subjected to scorn and neglect, there is a significant collective wish to cultivate that cultural heritage for fears that the stories and traditions will be irrevocably lost through assimilation into the host culture. Nevertheless, although there is an undisputed wish to maintain storytelling traditions and, thus, a substantial cultural heritage, there does not seem to be an apparent plan of action for how to ensure the realization of that wish on a community level – perhaps further hampered by a lack of interest or legitimization from mainstream Swedish society. Hence, the cultivation of an exile community's cultural heritage calls for participation on a community level, as well as on a national level, beginning with a change in attitudes and values both in minority and mainstream society.

8.3.2. Cultural Heritage Lift

The Cultural Heritage Lift is designed to support cultural activities on a national and regional level. Listed among its primary goals is the ambition to build a base for knowledge about, and maintenance of, cultural heritage; thus making the cultural environment accessible to all. In view of the fact that funds have been allocated to provide 4400 subsidized employment opportunities for cultural heritage maintenance during the years of 2012-2014, and that these work opportunities target people with a fragile link to the job market²⁹⁵, it would seem pertinent to view minority citizens possessing cultural keys, such as language and cultural proficiency, as a resource in order to achieve the goals of the Cultural Heritage Lift. Arabic-speaking immigrants, especially older immigrant women, encounter tremendous challenges in finding employment in Sweden, regardless of academic background, and may certainly be included in the group of people with a fragile link to the job market. It would seem that this is an opportunity to be seized

²⁹⁵ <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/1897/a/175508> Retrieved on June 13, 2012.

for Arabic-speaking immigrants who could contribute to the increasingly diverse cultural heritage arena in Sweden by comprehending, encouraging, tapping, inventorying, and digitalizing the stories and traditions of Arabic-speaking storytellers in exile communities such as Hammarkullen.

8.4. Oral Arabic Storytelling in Hammarkullen

8.4.1. Storytelling Synopsis Features

A closer look at the collected samples of oral Arabic tales in Hammarkullen, told in Palestinian, Lebanese, Iraqi, Syrian, and Egyptian Arabic, as well as in formal Modern Standard Arabic and dialectal varieties ranging from urban to rural; brings to light the themes that amuse, frighten, and fascinate the audience of local storytellers. These themes include international stories in original form such as *Little Red Riding Hood/Layla and the Wolf (Tale 2)*, as well as those that have been adapted, such as *The Story of the Wolf and the Seven Lambs (Tale 5)* or *The Lying Boy (Tale 4)*. Whether, or not, the Grimm brothers have located the original storytellers of the first two tales, it is without question that these, and other international stories such as Aesop's tales, hold a significant position in the cultural heritage of Arabic-speakers, no matter which nationality they hail from, nor which Arabic dialect they speak. In like manner to their peers in varied cultures on different continents, Arabic-speaking parents still employ these tales to teach their children not to talk to strangers, nor to lie, as well as for sheer entertainment.

While children of a Swedish heritage language background generally grow up with tales of witches and trolls, children from an Arabic heritage language background in Hammarkullen are told of monsters in various apparitions. These monsters can be conjured up by the fingerlike shadows of swaying palm fronds in the country of origin, or may, for instance, be referred to in the form of an old female kidnapper. Such tales are almost exclusively told with the child's health or safety in mind, in order to avoid apparent or imagined dangers, or to inspire desirable habits such as staying put indoors for a midday nap.

The motif²⁹⁶ of fear may appear in alternative contours such as in the tale of *The Man that was turned into Ashes (Tale 12)*, in which the new bride fears the ramifications of her father-in-law's

²⁹⁶ A motif is a recurring element that helps to produce a narrative aspect such as theme.

bewitched disappearance. Her dread, which more than a few listeners are able to relate to, is that she may be punished or ostracized by her new husband or mother-in-law.

The collected story recordings reveal the relish with which several generations of a Lebanese Shi'ite family pass on the vengeful story of *A Red Cat (Tale 11)*. While possibly posing as a nursery rhyme and tale, this unusual story may be a veiled political allegory. The motif of revenge reappears in, perhaps, less flamboyant forms where foolish kings or husbands get what they deserve, for instance in the story of *Kaḥīl Henna and the Castle of Henna Blossoms (Tale 32)*. At times, queens and wives are the recipients of revenge which is told in the historical recounting of the fate of *Shajarat ad-Durr (Tale 23)*, as well as that of the wife in the tale of *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)*.

Social mores, such as obedience, modesty, honor, honesty, and hygiene, dominate the themes of stories told to young children. On the other hand, tales of infidelity and intrigue such as in *The King and his Four Wives (Tale 27)* or *The King and his Wife Janfīyya (Tale 33)*, along with tales of husbands and wives such as *Abū Nazīf and his Wife (Tale 38)*, titillate the senses of adult listeners and permits them to deride authority figures in a manner that is not otherwise commonly acceptable in their cultural community.

Humor is a much appreciated theme, just as elsewhere, although opinions on what constitutes appropriate humor for different age groups may vary. For example, upon hearing the story of *Ḥasan, the Thirsty Camel (Tale 17)*, notwithstanding that the story explains that Ḥasan is not like other camels; respondents disapprove of his uncharacteristic behavior and doubt that children would see the humor in a camel that behaves so strangely. However, it is often such unpredictability and element of surprise that tickles children, no matter what their cultural background is, which the popularity of cartoons can attest to.

The antics of the renowned character of *Juḥā (Tale 18, 19)* and/or *Nasreddin Hodja (Tale 20, 21)* provoke hilarity from Turkey to Sudan, and perhaps further beyond. Another type of humor - that of wordplay; is an admired skill in which Arabic-speakers gleefully display their wit, swiftness of repartee, and deft linguistic mastery. Glimpses of this time-honored practice may be found in the tale of *Abū Nazīf and his Wife (Tale 38)*.

Ancient tales such as those of *Arabian Nights* are stapleware in Arabic-speaking homes in Hammarkullen. Several respondents tell different stories that have been passed down for many generations within the same family such as *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, *Kaḥīl Henna and the Castle of Henna Blossoms (Tale 32)*, *Seven Handcrafts and the Luck is Lost (Tale 29)*, *A Red Cat (Tale 11)*, *Abū Naẓīf and his Wife (Tale 38)*, *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)*, *The Poor Man (Tale 28)*, *Yūsif and his Donkey (Tale 34)*, and *The Egg Story (Tale 16)*.

Although several of the respondents are devout followers of religion, only one story, *The Poor Man (Tale 28)*, explicitly features God as a character in the plot. Conversely, *The Power of God and the Blood Tie (Tale 30)* alludes to religious motifs without specifically naming deities in the narrative.

Politics is only metaphorically featured in one story, *When the Cricket Sponsored the Bird (Tale 39)*, and possibly indicated in *A Red Cat (Tale 11)*. Politics is a recurring theme in ordinary daily discussions and perhaps that is why storytelling generally features alternative subjects. Besides the international stories and tales from *Arabian Nights*, a number of tales are familiar to, and appreciated by, several respondents; *The Magic Handkerchief (Tale 31)*, *The Gift of the Tree (Tale 41)*, *Juḥā*, *Nasreddin Hodja* and several of the monster stories such as *Ṣaʿlūka (Tale 7)*.

The magical folktale of *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)* thought-provokingly presents the heroine, dressed in a covering of wood, as she takes charge of her own life and makes decisions contrary to her mother's wishes, and later, against her aunt's veto as well. She chooses where she wants to live, she goes on an exploratory adventure at night time, and she disrobes outdoors in the open where a possible stranger may, and does, see her. Furthermore, she ends up marrying someone that, although most likely welcomed, is not of her family's own choosing. All these events are quite unthinkable measures of independence for a young girl living in a conservative culture – in some more than others. Perhaps the wood-covering is a metaphor for how a young woman would have to harden herself against the, at best, disapproval she would encounter from her surroundings if she attempted to make such independent choices. Instead, this story may express the wishes of a young woman for such independence from typical social and cultural conventions, even if only in the form of a fairytale, that has then been passed on from generation to generation.

The Cheating Husband (Tale 36) similarly presents a female protagonist that resorts to unconventional and culturally inappropriate measures in order to satisfy her curiosity – this time to lay bare the cause of her husband’s philandering. In so doing, the answer to her question is revealed, as is the irrational logic of her husband.

More, or less, prevailing cultural customs of segregation and seclusion are exposed in *The Restrictive Husband and his Wife (Tale 35)* for their underlying double standards by juxtaposing a sanctimonious husband and his demure wife. Interestingly, the storyteller uses this story to demonstrate that God himself, in favor of virtuous wives, teaches hypocritical husbands a lesson; leaving the listener to infer that husbands need not go to such extreme lengths²⁹⁷, as is culturally common, in order to safeguard their own and/or their wife’s honor. In fact, such husbands would do better to keep their own morality in rein. On the other hand, a less favorable characterization of women is found in *The Poor Man (Tale 28)* where the God-character clarifies that a queen, disguised as a king, has no authority over her people for the reason that she is female – explicitly underscoring the ostensible cultural consensus that no one listens to a woman.

The husband in *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)* does in fact listen to his wife - until he can bear it no longer. At that point he resorts to spousal abuse in order to intimidate his wife into submission and to regain control over her and the household. In *The Egg Story (Tale 16)* the mother similarly resorts to violence in order to vent her exasperation over her son’s deceitful mischief. Both stories are recounted by the same respondent as unremarkable strategies of frustrated spouses or parents. A different respondent tells *Abū Nazīf and his Wife (Tale 38)* which includes violence against family members. However, the story is presented as a caricature with echoes of exaggerated reality. While the two first stories implicitly sanction traditional structures and forceful aspects of hierarchy, the last story lampoons the very same structures and aspects.

8.4.2. Traces of Borderless Arab Folklore

A perusal of Muhawi & Kanaana’s (1989) collection of Palestinian folktales, as well as Bushnaq’s (1986) assemblage of Arab folklore reveals a definite link between their stories and the samples of storytelling found in the exile community of Hammarkullen. In fact, the

²⁹⁷ For the latest technological development in tracking women under guardianship see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/23/saudi-arabia-text-alerts-women> Retrieved on Nov.25, 2012.

following list of common motifs and themes confirm that Arabic folktales know no dialectal or national borders – instead they share indelible traces of the same subjects of interest.

Wordplay as is found in the Lebanese *Abū Nazīf and his Wife (Tale 3)* is also found in the Saudi Arabian tale *The Last Camel of Emir Hamid* (Bushnaq 1986:(11-)13).

Liars are dealt with in the Iraqi *The Lying Boy (Tale 4)*, and the Lebanese *The Egg Story (Tale 16)*, as well as in the Syrian *The Truth* (Bushnaq 1986:288). For an alternative approach to lying see *All Lies* (Jayyusi 2010:114).

Forced questionings are accounted for in the Lebanese *The Egg Story (Tale 16)* and in *How a Baghdadi Chief of Police Questioned Suspects* (Jayyusi 2010:122).

Grimm's *The Wolf and the Seven Lambs (Tale 5)*, told by Iraqis and Palestinians in Hammarkullen may also be found in alternate versions in Palestine, *Tale 38. The Little She-Goat* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:281). It is also found in the Algerian story of *How the Ewe Outwitted the Jackal* (Bushnaq 1986:237).

Cinderella is an ever-popular theme that is used in a Kuwaiti version by Al-Jafar & Buzzelli (2004:35). An Iraqi version is told in *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, and other versions may be found in Iraq, *The Little Red Fish and the Clog of Gold* (Bushnaq 1986:181), and in Egypt, *The Princess in the Suit of Leather* (Bushnaq 1986:193).

Pinocchio, or the motif of a piece of wood turning into a child, appears in *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, and also in Saudi Arabia, *Four Men and One Miracle* (Bushnaq 1986:306).

Failure to conceive and a wife's frightened solution is found in *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, and mentioned in Muhawi & Kanaana (1989:15).

Placing an effigy in a crib is part of the plot of *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, and is likewise portrayed in the Palestinian *Tale 24. The Seven Leavenings* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:208).

Child speaking at birth is a common feature of *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, and the Palestinian *Tale 37. The Fisherman* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:275).

A tree-covering/wooden dress is found in *An Iraqi Cinderella (Tale 6)*, as well as in the Palestinian *Tale 34. The Merchant's Daughter* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:260-261).

Abducted children are featured in the Iraqi *Tale 9. The Kidnapping Woman*, and also in the Palestinian *Tale 35. Pomegranate Seeds* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:264).

A bold little bird with its hint of *David & Goliath* is told in the Palestinian *The Conceited Chick (Tale 15)*, which has a kindred theme in the Tunisian *King of Birds* (Bushnaq 1986:228).

Juḥā/Nasreddin Hodja/Si' Djeha is a familiar figure, as previously mentioned, in Turkey, Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Nubia, Malta, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, in addition to Greece, Sicily, France, and Russia – and possibly further afield as well. Tales of **Arabian Nights** are similarly told across continents.

Stinginess is the basis of the Iraqi anecdote of *Juḥā at the Ḥammām (Tale 19)* and reappears in the Lebanese *Seven Cauldrons Bubbling* (Bushnaq 1986:315) as well as in *A Miserly Governor* (Jayyusi 2010:113).

A tragic queen is recounted in *Shajarat ad-Durr (Tale 23)* which is told in Egypt and Iraq according to interviews with respondents. Another tale in the setting of an Egyptian *Ḥammām* is told in *The Gown in the Bathhouse* (Bushnaq 1986:334).

A repentant king is featured in the Iraqi *The Power of God and the Blood Tie (Tale 30)*, with a reappearing motif in the Syrian *The King Who Changed His Ways* (Bushnaq 1986:297).

Poverty and riches are treated in the Lebanese *The Poor Man (Tale 28)*, as well as in the Iraqi *God Disposes* (Bushnaq 1986:286), while a **quest for riches** is featured in the Egyptian *Don't Count Your Chickens* (Bushnaq 1986:285).

Comparison of sisters is found in the Iraqi *Seven Handcrafts and the Luck is Lost (Tale 29)*, and also featured in the Syrian *One-Tooth and Two-Tooth* (Bushnaq 1986:169).

Luck/Fortune is treated in the Iraqi *Seven Handcrafts and the Luck is Lost (Tale 29)*, as well as in the Saudi Arabian *We Two Against Fortune* (Bushnaq 1986:294).

Ugly wives are featured in *Seven Handcrafts and the Luck is Lost (Tale 29)* as well as in *A Cunning Marriage Broker* (Jayyusi 2010:219).

The Iraqi *The Power of God and the Blood Tie (Tale 30)* shares the following almost identical features with the Palestinian *Tale 10. Little Nightingale Crier* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:102) and the Egyptian *The Nightingale That Shrieked* (Bushnaq 1986:89):

1. Prince marries three women when overhearing their pledges.
2. Children of third wife replaced by, among other things, puppies.
3. Babies placed in a box and sent down a canal.
4. King discovers the true identity of the children and of the deceiver.

Vows are uttered in the Iraqi *The Power of God and the Blood Tie (Tale 30)* as well as in *I Shall Never Eat Elephant Flesh* (Jayyusi 2010:227).

The Virgin Mary is possibly alluded to in the Iraqi *The Power of God and the Blood Tie (Tale 30)*, and is the subject of the Palestinian tales *The Virgin Mary and the Goats*, and *The Virgin Mary and the Plowmen* (Bushnaq 1986:298, 299)

Inculpatory letters are found in the Iraqi *The King and his Wife Janfīyya (Tale 33)* and in the Palestinian *The Girl Outwits Three Men* (Bushnaq 1986:363).

Innocent women are made to appear guilty and escape death in the Iraqi *The King and his Wife Janfīyya (Tale 33)* and in the Palestinian *Tale 42. The Woman Who Fell into the Well* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:298).

Birth in a cave is a motif found in the Iraqi *The King and his Wife Janfīyya (Tale 33)* as well as in the Palestinian *Tale 28. Chick Eggs* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:232).

Foolish husbands and virtuous or clever wives are found in the Lebanese stories of *Yūsif and his Donkey (Tale 34)* and *Abū Nazīf and his Wife (Tale 38)*, as well as in the Iraqi stories of *The Restrictive Husband and his Wife (Tale 35)*, and *The Cheating Husband (Tale 36)*.

Enhanced donkeys are presented in the Lebanese *Yūsif and his Donkey (Tale 34)* and in the Algerian story *Si' Djeha Cheats the Robbers* (Bushnaq 1986:260). Another “enhanced” sale is presented in Jayyusi 2010:202.

Flatulence is the source of trouble in the Lebanese *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)* and in the Palestinian *Tale 43. The Rich Man and the Poor Man* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:303-304).

Contrary wives are introduced in the Lebanese *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)* and the Palestinian *When Twice as Many Is Half the Trouble* (Bushnaq 1986:332).

Rooster and eggs are featured in the Lebanese *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)* and also in the Syrian *Abu Nuwas and the Hundred Eggs* (Bushnaq 1986:276).

Questioning of an abusive husband takes place in the Lebanese *Ruling the Roost (Tale 37)* and the Palestinian *Tale 24. The Seven Leavenings* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:211). For an alternative questioning of a husband and an abusive wife see Jayyusi 2010:202.

Cumulative features are found in the Lebanese *Abū Nazīf and his Wife (Tale 38)* and, once again, in the Palestinian *Tale 27. Im 'Eshe* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:224). Both of the stories have the following motifs in common:

1. Husband hiding guiltily behind a locked door.
2. Inadvertently killing a baby.
3. Dead baby presumed to be sleeping.
4. Wife protecting parents against husband's expected anger.
5. Warming up a shivering tree with blankets/cloth.

Animals (cat, pigeon, and partridge) bedecked in wedding make-up (henna and kohl) are presented in the Lebanese *A Red Cat (Tale 11)* and the Saudi Arabian *Who Lied?* (Bushnaq 1986:216).

Devout cats appear in Lebanon, *A Red Cat (Tale 11)*; Syria, *The Cat Who Went to Mecca* (Bushnaq 1986:216); and Oman, *The Pious Cat* (Bushnaq 1986:222).

Nursery rhymes make up a core component of the Lebanese *A Red Cat (Tale 11)* and the Palestinian *Tale 11. The Little Bird* (Muhawi & Kanaana 1989:115).

Judges are approached in the Lebanese *A Red Cat (Tale 11)* and in the Egyptian *The Judgment of the Qadi* (Bushnaq 1986:322) as well as in Jayyusi 2010:197.

Part 9: Recommendations

1. Opportunities for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage from person to person may be facilitated by offering oral storytelling events in schools, libraries, museums, and community centers. This will provide elders and other carriers of cultural knowledge forums from which they may interact with a younger generation. It may also inspire parents to revive old family tales in order to carry on a generational practice and stimulate literacy skills in their children.
2. Oral storytelling events may be recorded, filmed, and archived by the Language Council in order to conserve minority intangible cultural heritage in Sweden.
3. Immigrants, particularly women, may be employed in order to search for, collect, and record samples of oral storytelling by capitalizing on their inherent skills and providing empowerment for those that are often marginalized by mainstream society, both socially and professionally.
4. Future research may be allotted to study the effect of the use of intangible cultural heritage in preschool settings in exile communities such as Hammarkullen. By means of oral storytelling for pedagogic purposes, based on emergent literacy theories, research may find ways to incorporate intangible cultural heritage into teaching strategies, as well as into teaching materials for Swedish schools and preschools.
5. Samples of oral storytelling may be harvested for developing a relevant heritage language curriculum for heritage language students in Swedish schools.
6. Oral storytelling may be used to tell stories in Arabic, along with a Swedish translation, on Sweden's national children's television channel, *Barnkanalen*, in order to promote cultural understanding and peace education according to Al-Jafar and Buzzelli's (2004) findings.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Al-Jafar & Buzzelli 2004:35

Part 10: Appendixes

10.1. *Diglossia* – A Verbal Tug-of-War²⁹⁹

It is important to point out that there are several kinds of Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic is the formal language that is used for writing, news broadcasts, and academic discourse. The degree to which a person masters this type of Arabic reveals how educated, or not, he or she is and it is consequently a language of high prestige.

At the other end of the spectrum one finds the colloquial languages of different Arab countries and regions, as well as varied dialects within those regions. It is the dialect that is the spoken language among family and friends; however, it is looked down upon. Depending on one's academic history and on the conversational partner, Arabic speakers are able to glide between the two extremes of the formal Standard Arabic and the informal colloquial dialect, hence the term *diglossia*.³⁰⁰ Because of the class distinction between the prestige language and the spoken language, the few children's books that are produced are written in Modern Standard Arabic in the hope that children will acquire the prestige language from early years, even if it is not the language they speak or hear at home.

10.2. Emergent Literacy³⁰¹

The time period from birth to kindergarten is often referred to as the “emergent literacy stage.” Much Western research has been done on family literacy, the benefits of reading storybooks to children, as well as reading skills of at-risk children. Emergent literacy has its origins well before a child actually attempts to decipher a text or form letters with a pencil. Emergent literacy develops as a product of a stimulating and responsive environment and is not only concerned with alphabet recognition, but rather with phonemic awareness and concepts of the function of literacy – the way in which people make sense of the world around them, in other words, literacy as a social and cultural practice.³⁰² Emergent literacy can be fostered through storytelling, pictures, song, dance, rhyme, and various types of word games – all of which are literacy behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy skills. A wealth of research has shown that a good foundation of emergent literacy skills boosts a child's academic success. As

²⁹⁹ Cedernil 2012:3-4

³⁰⁰ Versteegh 2001:190

³⁰¹ Cedernil 2012:4

³⁰² Caspe 2003:2

Svensson points out in her dissertation, “Literacy generates power primarily on an individual level and turns into something that the individual owns and is able to use”.³⁰³

10.3. System of Transliteration

Consonants:

ء	ʾ	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	ʿ
ج	j, or -g (Egyptian dialect)	غ	ġ, like the Parisian [r] in renaissance
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ي	y

Short vowels: َ - a, ِ - i, ُ - u

Long vowels: َ - ā, ِ - ī, ُ - ū

“Tā marbūṭa” is written as “-a” in pausa form and as “-at” in “’iḍāfa”.

Names are kept according to the source’s own spelling in quotes.

³⁰³ Svensson 2011:23

Part 11: List of References

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³⁰⁴ Illustrated by the author.