

**A Historical Study of Saudi Theatre with Reference to the History of Theatre in
the General Presidency for Youth Welfare**

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Signature:

Dedication

Dedicated with love to my most loved wife Wafa and my daughter Sadan who was born during the last year of the third year of my PhD journey.

It is also dedicated to my mother, father, brothers and sisters who are waiting for my achievement.

Abstract

The subject of Saudi theatre has not been very well investigated by scholars and researchers, and many agree that there is a lack of resources concerning theatre in Saudi Arabia. Although there are a few studies about Saudi theatre, more studies in the history of Saudi theatre as well as in different aspects of theatre in Saudi Arabia are needed in order to help readers to further understand this subject. Unfortunately, the international community of theatre has not been able to access information about theatre in Saudi Arabia owing to the absence of studies of Saudi theatre in different languages, especially in English; this lack plays a key role in preventing readers from understanding Saudi theatre.

This thesis attempts to play a role in bridging this gap in the area of Saudi theatre. It presents, therefore, a historical study of Saudi theatre from the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a country in 1932 to the period in which the General Presidency for Youth Welfare (GPYW) was established as the first organization that was responsible for supervising and producing theatre in Saudi Arabia, 1974-2004. In particular, the main aim of this research is to study and examine the history of theatre in GPYW from its establishment in 1974 up to 2004 when the Saudi government decided to transfer the responsibility of cultural activities from different institutions, including the GPYW, to the Ministry of Culture and Information. This will offer an important picture of the history of Saudi theatre which previously has not been addressed by scholars and researchers.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Owing to the fact that Saudi Arabia is a part of the Arabic world and has some similarities with the other Arabic countries in terms of language, religion, history, and culture, the first chapter will attempt to familiarize

readers with the history of theatre in the Arabic world by providing historical background of the Arabic theatre. The second chapter will offer an outline of the historical, religious and social context of Saudi Arabia. The third chapter will present a detailed picture of the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia and the theatrical activities that took place in Saudi Arabia from its establishment until 1974, the year in which the GPYW was established. The fourth chapter will be devoted to exploring and understanding the main tendencies of theatre that emerged in Saudi theatre and dominated the history of theatre in this establishment from 1974 until 2004. In addition, a summary of a play of each tendency will be presented. It is essential for readers to be aware of the nature of these tendencies as they move to explore the history of theatre in the GPYW through the next chapters. The fifth and sixth chapters will concentrate on the history of theatre in the two main parts of the GPYW that produced regular theatre; the General Administration for Cultural Activities and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts. Finally, the thesis will conclude by summarizing its main points and ideas and will provide some recommendations that should help the readers, future researchers, and Saudi practitioners to further improve and develop the subject of theatre in Saudi Arabia.

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Introduction

Saudi Arabia has been known in the international community, for many years, as a country that stands on a territory of oil potential. It is oil potential that brought Saudi Arabia to international attention since 1973. Unfortunately, there is little information regarding other potential in terms of people, society, and other cultural aspects. The status of the arts and other aspects of culture have been neglected by scholars and researchers. Nobody seems to have knowledge of what is going on in Saudi Arabia in terms of arts and theatre in particular.

In my first year in the United Kingdom, as a student in the English Language Centre at the University of Exeter I was asked by a teacher to design a questionnaire as a part of writing training. I was interested in understanding what image British students have of my country, Saudi Arabia. Amongst the questions on my questionnaire was a question asking what comes to mind when British students hear the word *Saudi Arabia*. The majority of responses indicated that the first image is the desert, camels, oil, and a tent. Although this questionnaire was simple and immature in its nature, it revealed to me the need for and the importance of investing more effort in shedding light on the cultural aspects of my country. This was the first motivation to conduct this research. Therefore, I decided to take a step to bridge the gap between my country and the minds of other people by undertaking a study in the history of Saudi theatre; this is my way of introducing a cultural aspect of my country to the world.

Furthermore, the second motivation is that the subject of Saudi theatre has not been very well studied by scholars and researchers. One of the main resources of the history of theatre in the Arabic world, *almusrah fi alwatan alarbi* [*Theatre in the Arabic World*] (1979), written by the Egyptian scholar Ali Alrai, did not take into

account theatre in Saudi Arabia, while other scholarly works have relied upon a few historical works that were produced by Saudi researchers. Although these works are important, some critical points that should be highlighted with regard to their content will be discussed below. The most important point, therefore, that this introduction is concerned with is that there is a lack of resources on the subject of Saudi theatre, especially international theatre studies. I feel it is important to bridge this gap and decided to write this thesis in order to begin to develop resources in this area of study.

My decision was also influenced by the close relationship I had with Saudi theatre from the early stages of my education until 2005 when I left Saudi Arabia for the sake of continuing my post graduate study in the University of Exeter. I became involved in the scholastic theatre at the age of eleven where I performed the leading role in a social play called *Qaed*; the title refers to the main character, a turbulent and lazy student. In the next year I performed the leading role in a historical play about the struggle of a family who believed in the message of the Prophet Mohamed and was executed by the disbelievers in the beginning of Prophet Mohamed's time. Whilst I continued my relation with the scholastic theatre as an actor while I was at secondary school, I did not participate in theatre activities while at the higher school due to the absence of theatrical activities in the school. As I moved into the higher education in King Saud University, in Riyadh 1992, I became conscious of my passion for theatre. During the second years of my studies at in the university I enrolled in the Department of Information which has a specialization in theatrical studies, alongside other specializations such as public relations, radio and television, and the press. While in this department, I began to enhance my knowledge of theatre by studying different aspects of it including acting, directing, and theatre criticism. In addition, I performed in one to two plays each year in the University which allowed me for the

first time to work with professional directors from Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia. Having gained my first degree, I was appointed as a director in the university where I directed a great number of plays between 1998 until 2005 when I resigned in order to continue my study of theatre in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, I had worked in different theatrical establishments in Saudi Arabia both as an actor and a director. For instance, I performed in several productions that were produced by the Youth Group for Theatre in Riyadh and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts in the main office in Riyadh. Moreover, I had opportunities to direct some of the productions produced by the two establishments. In the arena of commercial theatre I performed in several productions that were produced by private establishments.

My relationships with these establishments have allowed me to experience theatre in different settings and to learn how each plays a role in enhancing theatre in Saudi Arabia. Besides, I had the opportunity of working with Saudi theatrical practitioners of different ages and from different backgrounds and was able to engage in discussions about their feelings, ideas, and attitudes toward theatre in Saudi Arabia.

My relationship to Saudi theatre as well as the people I worked with in the field of theatre in Saudi Arabia assisted me in understanding the picture of Saudi theatre. I was able to utilize this understanding in planning and organizing my research. In addition, the relationship that I have built with Saudi practitioners assisted me in gathering some primary resources that have been lost from the archives of the official establishments, such as pictures, text plays, leaflets, and some reports. It allowed me, also, to learn about the leading figures in Saudi theatre and their roles in the early stages of the history of Saudi theatre which assisted me in deciding who should be interviewed and where.

This thesis, therefore, aims to provide an up-to-date resource of Saudi theatre for readers who are interested in understanding the picture of theatre in this country. However, it seems of interest, at this stage, to familiarize readers interested in the history of Saudi theatre with the previous studies in this area; this will provide context for the thesis and a further understanding of its aims, concerns, and limitations.

Previous Studies

Some works that precede this thesis examine the history of Saudi theatre. The first study of Saudi theatre was conducted by Abdualrahman Almogren in 1979 as unpublished research. It is entitled with *bediyat almasrah alsaudi* [*The Beginnings of Saudi Theatre*]. Almogren only focuses on the period before the formal establishment of theatre in Saudi Arabia in 1973, and the years between its establishment and the conclusion of his study in 1979. Although Almogren's work is significant as the first work, it ignores a significant period of the history of Saudi Arabia, the experience of theatre in Saudi clubs. Furthermore, Almogren, without justifying the omission, fails to take into account the experience of the Art's Club in Alahsa city as the first private association for theatre before the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Art. This omission weakens Almogren's study. In addition, he focuses on the experience of theatre in one city, the capital city Riyadh, and pays no attention to the experience of theatre in Alahsa city or the branch of the Saudi Arabian Society in this city. While it could be argued that the author has the right to approach his topic in his own way, this would only be a reasonable argument if the author presented a clear methodology for his work and provided sufficient explanations of and justification for his approach. Since the author does not provide such methodology nor explain why he excludes some significant experiences of Saudi theatre, it seems that his work does not fulfil the expectations of a study of the beginning of Saudi theatre. Unfortunately,

many of the works which come after Almogren's work have relied on its content. Hence, it is needless to mention that this will influence how people understand the history of Saudi theatre.

The second study on the topic is a book by Abdualrahman Alkhoraijy that was published in 1986. It is entitled with *nashat almasrah alsudi* [*The Emergence of Saudi Theater*]. Although Alkhoraijy's work covers the period up to the mid eighties, it does not go beyond presenting general historical information about theatre in Saudi Arabia. The third book was written by Nassir Alkhateeb. It is entitled *madkhal ela almasrah alsudi* [*An Introduction to Saudi Theatre*] (1990). In the introduction to his book, Alkhateeb indicates that the essential aim of his study is to answer the following question: is there theatre in Saudi Arabia? As he mentions in the introduction, there are two fundamental reasons for conducting his study. Firstly, before publishing his study in 1990 he noticed that all the Arab scholars and researchers (including, among others, Ali Alrai, Mohammad Mandore, and Rushde Salih) who wrote about the theatre in the Arab world had ignored the theatre in Saudi Arabia (1990:14). The second reason for undertaking the study, according to Alkhateeb, is the lack of resources on the subject of Saudi theatre. His book, which consists of two parts, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion, can be seen as a precise attempt to place the Saudi theatre in the landscape of Arab theatre.

Alkhateeb's book adds some significant information on theatre in Saudi Arabia and answers the question that it poses at the start. Nevertheless, it is difficult to satisfactorily cover several different topics related to theatre in Saudi Arabia in one hundred pages. In his book, Alkhateeb tackles different topics which force him to give an overview of each topic without providing a deep discussion of any one of them. For instance, he interviews some pioneers of Saudi theatre, but this is covered in only

six pages. This limits the scope of the interviewees to inform the reader who wants to know more about them; for example, readers may want to know more about Alsubaie's situation, his ideas on the theatre, and the circumstances that forced him to abandon his attempt to build a school of acting and theatre in Saudi Arabia than the brief interview with him can provide. This lack of detail is also seen in the interviews with other pioneers. In addition, analyzing the content of Saudi plays, whether published or not, requires more space than they are given in his book if the reader is to better understand Saudi scripts and the circumstances in which Saudi playwrights work.

Furthermore, though Al Khateeb's study covers the period between 1963 and 1990, he misses a significant occurrence which had a great impact on Saudi theatre between 1984 and 1990; he does not pay attention to the theatre festivals in which Saudi theatre has been involved and the impact of such involvement. Moreover, he relies on presenting brief historical information with regard to the history of the Saudi institution that produced theatre without providing his own critical view of this history.

Far from the historical approach to studying Saudi theatre, there are some useful resources that concentrate on studying play writing in Saudi Arabia. While Nazeer Al-Azma, in his book *almasrah alsaudi: drasah naqdiyyah* [*Saudi Theatre: A Critical Study*] (1992), presents an analysis of some of the main Saudi plays that appeared up to the late eighties, Halemah Muthafar, in her book *almsrah alsudi: byn albena wa altowaijs* [*Saudi Theatre: Between Continuation And Fear*] (2009), focuses on analyzing selected Saudi plays that were published between 1980 to 2004.

Although these works about Saudi theatre are important, they are written in the Arabic language which limits their readers to those who can read in Arabic. It is important to mention that there is one article which is written in English about Saudi theatre. It is a three and a half page overview by Nazeer Al-Azma and it was published in the *World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre* [The Arab World Vol. 4] in 1999. However, the practice of theatre in Saudi Arabia had existed for more than sixty years by the time Al-Azma's article was published. Thus, the brevity of the overview imposes some limitations on the presentation of the subject and prevents him from giving a comprehensive picture of the years covered in the overview despite the subject's importance. The history of Saudi theatre since its appearance in 1928 deserves works that go beyond the scope of an overview. It requires more effort to cover the history of theatre in this part of the world, its development, and the different aspects of Saudi theatre. Saudi theatre has existed within different institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, the General Presidency for Youth Welfare, the Saudi Universities, and other private organizations. The variety of these organizations in terms of their purposes and natures has established different kinds of theatre. It appears, therefore, that doctorate research that is restricted to a specific time cannot succeed in providing a full picture of Saudi theatre. It is reasonable to claim that the history of Saudi theatre that includes all this variety requires more studies to cover the entire history of theatre in this country. This thesis attempts to be as realistic as possible in terms of its concerns and limitations.

Research Question

The main and central research question of this thesis is: What was the nature of Saudi theatre during the period that is examined by the thesis, between 1932 and 2004? Bearing in mind, as mentioned previously, the lack of resources in Saudi theatre,

which has prevented many theatrical researchers, scholars and practitioners around the world from gaining such knowledge and understanding of theatre in Saudi Arabia, answering this specific question will be essential and vital in assisting them to gain further awareness and understanding of the topic of Saudi theatre.

The term “nature”, however, is a broad term. Thus, in order to understand the nature of Saudi theatre, two important issues need to be considered. First of all, since Saudi Arabia is part of the whole Arabic world, it is important for readers to have a brief historical background of the history of Arabic theatre and its nature. Secondly, an understanding of the nature of Saudi theatre will be incomplete without an understanding of the cultural, social, political and religious context of Saudi Arabia. The thesis, therefore, attempts to address these two issues in the first two chapters.

In addition, understanding the nature of theatre in Saudi Arabia through its history requires an understanding of the circumstances that surrounded the emergence of Saudi theatre, the efforts to introduce theatre into Saudi Arabia, and the early stages of practicing theatre. Furthermore, it is important for readers to be aware of the development of Saudi theatre and the main shifts in its history. The rest of the thesis, therefore, aims to provide further understanding of the nature of Saudi theatre through examining the history and practices of theatre in the main Saudi establishment (GPYW), which supervised and managed theatre in Saudi Arabia during the period above.

Since the main concern of the thesis is to provide a comprehensive study of Saudi theatre in order to answer its central question, the thesis will attempt to cover two main areas to meet this aim. First of all, to understand the beginning of theatre in any given society is essential in order to gain an understanding of the situation of theatre

within the society; therefore, this thesis attempts to explore this area in detail and provides a view of the different practices of theatre as well as the efforts that have been made to establish theatre in Saudi Arabia. The investigation of this area is guided by some critical questions, such as: what was the historical, religious and social context of Saudi theatre prior to the establishment of a formal theatre; how did theatre begin in Saudi Arabia; what was the nature of the theatre experience in this country; what were the main efforts made to establish theatre; what were the main obstacles that faced theatre as well as the Saudi practitioners; and what factors played a role in developing theatre in this country? The answers to these questions will help readers to further understand the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia and will pave the way for further understanding of the development of theatre and its history in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, answering these sub-questions will be of importance in the search for a satisfactory answer to the main research question.

The second area is an examination and study of the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia. However, since theatre in Saudi Arabia has been produced and practiced by different establishments, which means that each establishment has its own history, it would be difficult for one thesis to cover the entire history of these establishments. There are two main factors that contribute to this difficulty. The first is that the subject cannot be covered sufficiently in a doctoral thesis with a limited number of words. The second is that due to the lack of documentation of theatre in each establishment, the time needed for studying this history is beyond the limitation of a doctoral thesis, which must be produced in no more than four years. Therefore, this thesis will concentrate on one establishment: the General Presidency of Youth Welfare in Saudi Arabia (GPYW).

There are several reasons for selecting this establishment. First of all, it is the main organization that supervises and produces theatre in Saudi Arabia. It was established by the Saudi government in 1973 in order to supervise and enhance youth activities, such as athletic, social, and cultural activities. Secondly, it has established a number of branches across the country, which ensures its influence in most Saudi cities. Thirdly, this establishment has produced different kinds of plays that address different segments of Saudi society. For instance, it has produced plays for adults, youth, and children. Therefore, its significance and importance in understanding a picture of Saudi theatre cannot be ignored. While other establishments of theatre, such as schools, universities, or private establishments, have restricted their theatre to specific segments of Saudi society (for instance schools and universities produce plays exclusively for students and their parents), the General Presidency for Youth Welfare has produced theatre for the whole of Saudi society, apart from women, who have been excluded due to the nature of Saudi society. It branches across Saudi Arabia and allows its theatre to reach as many people as possible. Hence, it is not an overstatement to assert that this establishment is the best example of Saudi theatre. With regard to this area, the thesis will be guided by the some key questions, such as the following:

- 1- How did the GPYW deal with theatre?
- 2- What was the situation of theatre in the main parts of this establishment?
- 3- How did the members of this establishment practice and produce theatre?
- 4- What were the main obstacles that faced these members?
- 5- What was the nature and type of this theatre?

The limitation of this study

The lack of documentation with regard to the history of Saudi theatre is a major problem and is expressed by some researchers. For instance, Nazeer Al-Azma asserts that the lack of resources in Saudi theatre presents an obstacle to any attempt to study theatre in Saudi Arabia in the future (1992:33). Moreover, Nader Alqannah asserts that the absence of documentation of the history of Saudi theatre and ignorance of the importance of theatre in Saudi Arabia, has led many academic scholars to experience great difficulty in studying and analyzing Saudi theatre (2008:18-19).

This lack has three major causes. The first one is the absence of recorded materials, such as theatrical sketches and texts, photos, and written descriptions of the theatrical events, especially in the early years of theatre between 1932 and the establishment of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare in 1974. The second is that most of the Saudi establishments that dealt with theatre after this time did not keep and protect their archives of the different theatre activities and information. For instance, the Ministry of Education has no archive of the theatrical activities in the schools from its inception to the time of doing this research, between 2009 and 2012. In addition, the General Presidency officers have not paid attention to recording and documenting most of the theatrical activities of the Saudi clubs that were started between the 1960s and the present. Finally, most Saudi artists and practitioners who are involved in early Saudi theatre or who have witnessed its history from the beginning have passed away. Others are getting old which makes it difficult for them to remember their own history in the theatre and the events that they have witnessed or participated in. Furthermore, there are some people who were not available for participating in this research due to different reasons. For instance, some have left theatre and do not wish to participate in

interviews or to give written statements. Also, others have health or family affairs that prevented them from participating in this research.

Essential information and data for this thesis was gathered through interviews with a number of Saudi and non-Saudi practitioners who witnessed and participated in the development of Saudi theatre. As mentioned above, the lack of resources and the absence of sufficient archives and material forced the researcher to turn to the information held by those who witnessed the development of Saudi theatre and those who have participated in enhancing the field of theatre in Saudi Arabia. The information that could be gained by speaking with people such as those interviewed for this thesis has not been given sufficient attention by other resources that addressed theatre in Saudi Arabia. Nor has this information been documented in other relevant materials such as reports or leaflets. It is not over stating the case, therefore, to say that this thesis is the first work that engages with interviews with a range of Saudi and non-Saudi practitioners who have a close relationship with the development of Saudi theatre during the period covered by the thesis.

Selecting the sample of interviewee, however, was based upon their works and how they contributed to the development of Saudi theatre. Fortunately, some of the main leading figures who witnessed and participated in early theatrical activities in different establishments such as the scholastic theatre and the Youth clubs have been recognized and identified by most of the practitioners in Saudi theatre. Moreover, some of the main figures have been highlighted by some previous studies in the field of Saudi theatre. Hence, I carefully drew up a prioritized list of the leading figures I wanted to interview. As I interviewed these figures, other names were mentioned and I added these to my list. By trying to interview more people I hoped to gain further clarification and gather more information about the development of Saudi theatre in

different establishments and locations. The final list of people I wanted to interview contained more than forty figures of Saudi and non Saudi practitioners. Unfortunately, I was only able to interview twenty-five figures. Some of the potential interviewees have passed away and some have health problems that prevented them from participating in the research for this thesis. Also, a few people found it difficult to find time to do the interview because of their engagement with life's affairs.

Since the interviewees live in different cities, the process of the interviews began with organizing the interviewees according to their cities. Following this organization, the researcher personally contacted each figure in order to identify the place and time for conducting the interview. In the case of a group interview, the researcher contacted one or two figures who then volunteered to contact the rest of the group and identify the place and time. It is important to mention that the interviewees enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity to participate in this research.

Each interview began with an explanation of the subject and the purpose of the thesis. The author intended to explain that each participant had the right to respond to the questions in his own way, including the right to reject any question. Furthermore, the participants clearly understood that they had the right to stop at any stage of the interview or withdraw from the entire interview if they wished to do so. It is important to point out that the participants expressed their support for the purpose of the thesis as an up-to-date work that will shed light on the development of the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia.

All of the interviews were recorded by voice recorder with the permission of the interviewees. The interview questions were semi-structured and were focused on the most important issues regarding the theatrical events each interviewee had

participated in or witnessed. Moreover, due to the fact that each interviewee might have additional important information or a certain point of view regarding the development of theatre, the author intended to give them space to extend the subject by allowing the interviewees to speak comfortably without interruption. The interview process ended with a transcription of the main ideas and opinions; irrelevant material was discarded.

All the interviews were recorded by voice recorder with the permission of the interviewees. Utilizing a voice recorder for the interview assisted the researcher in covering the whole interview and ensured that nothing had been missed. Indeed, it allowed the researcher to concentrate on the ideas of the interviewee and the discussion without being concerned about missing something. Furthermore, as everything is being recorded, the researcher can be free to rebuild and reorganize the interview as it moves on. For instance, as some of the interviewees may go further in speaking about an idea or topic than is strictly relevant to the question, the researcher has time to think of how to return the interviewee to the main topic or how to make the talk relevant to his\her questions in an appropriate and pleasant way instead of interrupting the interviewee. The recorder, especially a small device, is not merely easy to carry, but also cannot distract the interviewee during the talk. In interviewing the participants of this thesis, I have tried to make the interviewee feel that the interview is a friendly talk about theatre, and this could not be achieved without the assistance of a small recorder. Moreover, listening to the recording again for the purpose of transcription and taking notes is another helpful way of encountering the material of the thesis. In this, the technical abilities of the recorder – to pause and reverse for instance - allows the researcher to ensure that he follows and understands the interviewees' point of view. Sometimes, moreover, small ideas or words, which

seemed irrelevant or extra at the time of the interview, become important later, and this is an important benefit of the use of a voice recorder in interviewing the sample. In general, the voice recorder, as it was experienced during research for this thesis, is an essential tool for researchers whose research information and data are dependent upon interviews.

This thesis is the first study of the history of Saudi theatre to cover a long period of time. As the first, there are few published resources on which to draw; nevertheless, it attempts to achieve its purpose in spite of this limitation.

The importance of this study

This thesis is the first study that has presented the history of Saudi theatre in detail with reference to the main establishment that had been responsible for theatre in Saudi Arabia from 1974 until 2004, the year when the Saudi government decided to transfer the responsibility of cultural activities from different institutions, including the General Presidency for Youth Welfare, to the Ministry of Culture and Information. It is the first examination of the history of Saudi theatre at the doctorate level. In addition, it is the first thesis that introduces the history of Saudi theatre to the international theatrical community in the English language. Therefore, its significance could be recognized for being the first study to undertake the following:

- 1- Studying, in detail, the beginning of Saudi theatre from the establishment of Saudi theatre until the establishment of the main body that is responsible for theatre in the country.
- 2- Studying the history of the main establishment from 1974 to 2004 in detail and following its development and changes.

- 3- Presenting a history of the movement of theatre in a number of cities such as Alahsa and Altaif, whereas previous studies focused on the main office in Riyadh.
- 4- Highlighting and investigating different tendencies that dominated the history of Saudi theatre in this establishment.

Furthermore, this study allows people who speak English, whether as a native language or a second language, to have access to the history of Saudi theatre. This access attempts to provide readers with the history of Saudi theatre in context and follows the development of theatre in Saudi Arabia from the establishment of this country up to 2004. By doing this, the thesis is considered an up-to-date study of Saudi theatre in its context. Moreover, since this study provides an examination of the history of Saudi theatre since its beginning, it allows Saudi artists and practitioners, whether they work in the General Presidency for Youth Welfare or other establishments, to rethink this history and the main factors that influence this movement, while still playing a significant role in this theatre. It attempts to encourage people involved in Saudi theatre to look in detail at the history of theatre in order to learn lessons that will influence the future of theatre in this country.

In addition, this thesis will help young Saudi practitioners and artists to learn about the history of theatre that has not been recorded in other resources since other resources, as mentioned in the examination of the previous studies, do not go far enough in recording and examining the history of Saudi theatre. It provides them with a resource that deals with the beginning of Saudi theatre as well as the history of the main establishment that has supervised and produced theatre in Saudi society for more than thirty years. It might help the new artists and practitioners, who did not witness or live through the period studied by this thesis, to connect to the history of theatre in

their country. It is hoped that this research will add a new vision and examination of this subject to the academic field both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. Thus, it will open the eyes of researchers and scholars to more questions that should enhance the study of Saudi theatre in the future.

In order to achieve its objectives, this thesis will be divided into six chapters. The first chapter will attempt to provide the reader with an overview of the historical background of Arabic theatre. This chapter is important because it familiarizes the reader with the history of theatre in the Arabic world. The main reason for including this chapter is that Saudi Arabia is a central part of the Arabic world and it has several similarities with the other Arabic countries in terms of language, religion, history, and culture. Therefore, to further understanding of the history of theatre in one part of the Arabic world, an overview of the history of theatre in the whole area is necessary. The second chapter will offer an overview of the historical, religious and social context of Saudi Arabia. The third chapter will explore the theatrical activities that took place in Saudi Arabia from its establishment until 1974, the year in which the General Presidency for Youth Welfare was established. Since this chapter will concentrate on understanding the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia and its primary activities, it will pave the way for understanding the history of theatre in the General Presidency. Chapter Four will be devoted for exploring and understanding the main trends that emerged in Saudi theatre and theatre in the GPYW in particular. The history of theatre in the main two parts of the GPYW, the General Administration for Cultural Activities and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, will be the focus of Chapter Five and Six. Finally, the thesis will end with a conclusion that summarizes its main points and ideas and provides some recommendations that should help the

readers, fellow researchers, and Saudi practitioners to further improve and develop theatre in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter One

The Historical Background of Arabic Theatre

Introduction

Saudi Arabia is located in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula where, many years ago, the Arab nation and culture came into existence (see Figure 1 below). Since it was one of the most recent Arabic countries to experience theatre, an outline of the historical background of Arab theatre will pave the way for an understanding of the position of theatre within Saudi Arabia. It is, therefore, not an overstatement to claim that without some knowledge of the historical background of theatre in the Arabic world in general, readers of this thesis will be unable to gain a better understanding of the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, it is the aim of this chapter to provide the necessary background information because it will assist in introducing the reader to the phenomenon of the position of theatre within Arabic culture.



- Figure 1: The Arabic world (Hsu, n.d)

In order to achieve its aims this chapter will attempt to cover the debate among researchers about whether or not theatre and drama were absent in the classical Arabic culture, as this will assist in understanding the situation of theatre in the Arabic culture. Secondly, it is important to look at the beginnings of theatre in the Arabic world, especially in Lebanon and Syria which were the first Arabic countries to encounter theatre; this can help the reader to understand the attitude of Arabic culture generally towards theatre. Due to the huge influence of Egyptian theatre upon Arabic countries, an overview of the history of Arabic theatre would be incomplete without a brief examination of the beginnings and influence of theatre in Egypt. Finally, it is germane to end this background with some information about theatre in the Arabic Gulf States, of which Saudi Arabia is a significant part, because of the similarities and the close relationship among these countries.

The scholarly debate about theatre

A suitable starting point for establishing a clear picture of the relationship between theatre and the Arab culture is with an overview of the debate among scholars and researchers, especially those in the Arab world, about whether or not theatre exists in Arab culture. It is important to shed light on the various views on this matter because not only will it pave the way to a better understanding of the place of theatre within Arabic culture, but also because the scholars' attitudes and views are, as will be demonstrated, a significant part of the historical context of the Arabic theatre. The history of Arabic theatre has been narrated and discussed by historians and researchers whose personal views and attitudes have influenced their approaches to presenting this history. Consequently, this will affect the readers of the history of Arabic theatre; especially those who do not have sufficient knowledge of the debate among scholars and researchers.

Two arguments have dominated most of the scholarly work and debate on the existence, or otherwise, of theatre or drama in the Arabic culture. The first claims that theatre and drama did not exist in Arab culture prior to 1847 when Maroon Al-Naqqash, the pioneer of the Arabic theatre, staged his first play in Lebanon, imitating the European style. The other argument claims that the Arabs had known of theatre prior to Al-Naqqash, although it did not develop at the same pace or reach the same level as Greek and western drama. The latter argument, as will be shown below, says that the meaning of theatre should not be restricted to the western form that was introduced by Al-Naqqash. 1847 is a key year in the history of the scholarly debate regarding the existence of theatre prior to this year or its absence.

It is crucial for readers to be aware of these arguments in order to have a sense of the situation of theatre in the Arabic culture and how scholars consider or apply the meaning of theatre in different ways through their work. Thus, the next section will shed the light on these two arguments.

The existence of theatre

The claim of this thesis is that Arabic culture included drama or theatre for many years before the work of Maroon Al-Naqqash in 1847. Among the researchers who agree with this argument are Ali Alrai (1979), Ali Arsan (1981), Baker Al-Sheddi (1997), Jumah Qajh (2004), and Mukhled Al-Zyoud (2009).

Baker Al-Sheddi, in a PhD dissertation entitled *The Roots of Arabic Theatre*, concludes that "the suggestion of some Arab and Western scholars that medieval Islam had no theatre may no longer be accepted" (1997:197). In his book, *althoahir almasrahiyah end alarb [The Arab Phenomena of Theatre]*, Ali Arsan asserts that "... the Arab, like other nations, had theatrical phenomenon but it did not develop like the

theatrical phenomena in Greek" (1981:15-16). This argument is based on the existence of religious and social rituals practiced by the Arabs and the existence long before 1847 of some dramatic forms that have similarities with theatre in western culture. Ali Arsan (1981) supports this argument by citing the existence of religious ritual in Mecca prior to Islam and the popular entertainments afterwards. The dramatic forms that back this argument are summarized by Baker Al-Sheddi as follows:

Several types of public entertainment had been enjoyed by the Arabs for centuries. These include Hikaya (storytelling) which consists of a story which is performed before an audience, Ta'zaiya (the passion play), with its plot, characters, songs and scenery, and khayal al-zill (shadow play) which employs satirical representations in the form of mimicry. All these contain elements which are characteristic of their own and also contain elements from western drama (1997:2).

It is understandable that Al-Sheddi's main concern, in asserting that theatre existed in Arabic culture, is the similarities between the characteristics of the Arabic dramatic forms and western drama. However, other researchers use the term 'theatre' differently from that associated with the forms of theatre in Greek, or later in western culture. Ali Arsan, for instance, utilizes the term 'phenomena' to refer to the root of theatre and describe the religious and social ritual that existed in the Arabic culture before 1847. Other examples can be found, according to Al-Zyoud: "... the theatre, in its basic form, was not absent from the Arab culture before or after Islam" (2009:118). The term theatre, in its basic form from Al-Zyoud's perspective refers to "the basic roots or seeds for the art of theatre" (2009:118). The main two traditional forms that existed in the Arabic world prior to 1847 are khayal al-zill (shadow play) and

Ta'zaiya (the passion play). A brief consideration of each form will provide sufficient information about their nature.

1- khayal al-zill (shadow play)

Shadow play, in Landau's words, is "histrionics performed by the casting of shadows on a curtain, visible to the audience" (1958:9). Machut-Mendecka mentions that it is pervasive within the Islamic world and its origin seems complex. He explains that

it came from the East - according to one version from India, but according to another from China - and since in both cases its way led through Turkey, it is also associated with the Turkish theatre Karagoz, making use of animated shadows of puppets (2000:18).

Al-Khozai asserts that "the Arab shadow theatre is older than the Turkish Karagoz and was known in Egypt for three centuries prior to the Turkish conquest in 1517" (1984:21). The nature of shadow plays and examples of such plays have been examined and studied by many researchers. Hence, for the purpose of this chapter it is important to pay attention to the characteristics of shadow plays that make scholars believe that theatre did exist in the Arabic world prior to 1847. Al-Sheddi comes to an important conclusion, which is quoted in full below:

... any one of Ibn Däniyäl's shadow plays that we have examined, can be rendered easily on the stage by human actors where applicable. Meanwhile, those plays also provide an indication that certain elements of shadow plays were similar to European conventional drama. Khayäl al-Zill contains the basic dramatic elements found in European conventional drama; mimicry, dialogue, characters and plot. However, its most important attribute is that it conforms to Arabic culture and taste (1997:158-159).

Al-Sheddi, as mentioned before, is among those researchers who support this argument. It is worth noticing that Al-Sheddi's explanation takes European drama into consideration in examining traditional forms.

2- Ta'zaiya (the passion play)

Chelkowski provides a useful explanation of the meaning of Ta'ziyah; it "literally means expressions of sympathy, mourning and consolation" (1977:32). Al-Sheddi adds that "since the second half of the tenth century, the event has been commemorated and performed as a ritual drama in public places and in private homes every year during the first ten days of the Muslim month of Muharram, especially in Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon" (1997:99-100). In comparing the Ta'ziyah ritual with European theatre, Al-Sheddi explains that "it is clear that Ta'ziyah contains three basic elements of the European conventional drama: plot, mimicry and characters who are dramatized on a stage before an audience" (1997:106).

In short, the two previous forms are considered by some of the Arab researchers as evidence to support the argument that the Arab world did have drama before the late 1840s. It is important to remember that this does not mean that these forms are the only evidence that support the argument; other forms of popular entertainment existed. However, there is general agreement between the researchers mentioned above and their challengers that these dramatic forms did not develop or improve. Although the development and increase of theatre and performance studies in the late 20th century considers a range of human activities under the umbrella of theatre, the traditional form of Arabic culture and its potential remained apart from the attention of theatre scholars and researchers. Instead, the interest of Arab researchers, scholars and practitioners concentrated upon the western model of theatre. Therefore, it is useful to consider the counter-argument.

The absence of theatre

When considering the argument that theatre and drama did not exist in the Arabic world prior to 1847, it is significant to emphasize that the conception of theatre or drama held by those researchers - a key point for understanding their view - is associated with western styles; the argument is that theatre, as known in western culture, was absent from Arab culture and history until the late 1840s. Theatre, according to this argument, is explained as "... the enactment by human actors on stage of a story through action and dialogue in verse or prose..." (Al-Zyoud, 2009:109). Al-Zyoud in this definition attempts to show that he means theatre in the western sense.

Since this definition of theatre is a centre point in understanding the view of this argument, we will consider other ways of stating this meaning of the term. For instance, Al-Khozai claims that "[t]he art of theatre, or rather dramatic literature as it is *conceived today*, had been long absent, until, in 1847, the first Arab dramatist made an innovative attempt at writing and producing a play based on a *European model*" (1984:1; emphasis mine). Mohammad Al-Habsi clearly states that "Ultimately, the Arabs have not known the theatre in *its modern meaning*, or in the completeness typical of *European theatre* during all the historical Arab eras since Jahilia (pre-Islamic time) period and after the inception of Islam" (2003:22; emphasis mine).

There are, however, many scholars and researchers who favour this claim. Among the main western researchers to support this argument are H.A.R. Gibb and Jacob M. Landau. Gibb, in his preface to Landau's book, states clearly that "Drama is not a native Arab art form" (1958:1). Among the Arab researchers who support this argument there are, to name a few, Mohammad Mandur (1958:5), Ahmad Hajjaji

(1975:12), and Mohammad Najm (1999:17). These researchers express their support for this argument in their works, published in the Arabic language. There are, however, many Arab researchers who support the post-1847 view and who publish in English, such as Mohammad Al-Khozai (1984:17), Hassan Al-Hassan (1984:4), and M. M. Badawi (1988:7).

It is important to mention that the existence of dramatic forms and other popular entertainment in Arabic culture prior to 1847 are recognized by those researchers who argue that theatre was absent from Arab history prior to the 1840s. Nevertheless, from the perspective of these scholars, although these forms include some dramatic elements, they cannot be defined as theatre.

Interestingly, the absence of theatre and drama from Arabic culture prior to 1847 is a key subject in most scholarly works about Arabic theatre and is rarely neglected by researchers and scholars. Hence, Badawi seems to be right in describing the absence of drama "in the western sense" as "... an intriguing issue which has exercised the minds of many scholars and critics, orientalists and Arabs alike" (1988:3). Consequently, scholars and researchers have offered different explanations of why theatre was absent from Arab culture prior to the work of Maroon Al-Naqqash, considered as a pioneer who imported the western style of drama into the Arab culture in 1847.

The scholars' explanations

Among the scholars and researchers who offer views and explanations on this topic are Mohammad Mandur (1958), Tafeeq Alhakeem (1973), Zaki Tulaymat (1965), and Jacob Landau (1958). Other scholars such as Mohammad Al-Khozai (1984), Hassan Al-Hassan (1984), Mohammad Badawi (1988), Baker Al-Sheddi (1997), and Mekhled

Al-Zyoud (2009) have engaged with, presented, and debated these explanations. The latter scholars have produced critical discussions of the explanations of the former, and they present this issue, the explanations of the absence of theatre, in an academic and scholarly manner.

This thesis argues that the various explanations justifying the absence of theatre in the Arab culture should be re-examined in order to discern a single, reasonable answer. Most of these explanations have been presented and debated by researchers, such as Al-Khozai (1984), Badawi (1988), Al-Sheddi (1997), Al-Habsi (2003), and Al-Zyoud (2009), as valid explanations of the absence of theatre in the Arabic culture. However, since this thesis will attempt to question the validity of some of the explanations provided, it is critical to highlight important points of difference between the researchers' views of the explanations and the view of this thesis.

Researchers, such as Al-Khozai (1984), Badawi (1988), Al-Sheddi (1997), Al-Habsi (2003), and Al-Zyoud (2009), have attempted to assess whether existing explanations could finally decide the question of the presence or absence of drama prior to 1847. The view presented in this thesis, however, is that most of the explanations provided for the absence of drama have no validity and it is therefore necessary to carry out a basic reappraisal.

It is, therefore, important to return to some of the key ideas already mentioned in this debate. The first central idea is that scholars recognize that theatre, in the western form, had been absent before 1847. The second is that this idea is accepted by the two parties. Therefore, the explanations and assumptions provided by researchers relating to the absence of theatre in Arabic culture should be understood as explanations and assumptions about the absence of a western style and form of theatre. In other words,

the question concerning researchers and scholars should be rephrased to ask why theatre in the western meaning, style, or form had been absent from Arab culture before 1847. For example, Badawi asks, "but why did the Arabs themselves not develop the Art of drama (in the western sense)?" (1988:8). Al-Habsi argues that "Ultimately, the Arabs have not known theatre in its modern meaning or in the completeness typical of European theatre, during all the historical Arab eras ..." (2003:22). Al-Zyoud, in recent work, asks "Why did the Arabs not know the theatre in the western sense?" (2009:110) and moves on to test the accuracy of explanations provided by theatre scholars.

It is crucial to establish a clear understanding of the central point under discussion, that the oft-repeated explanations provided by scholars are concerned with the absence of the western form of theatre from the Arabic culture. Accordingly, it is argued that the search for explanations and justifications of the absence of this form of art from Arab culture cannot start by looking at the nature of Arabic culture or literature, or by looking back to the pre-Islamic period in order to find explanations, as some theatre researchers attempt to do. Since theatre in the western sense is the product of western culture, in the broad sense of culture, it is unreasonable to blame Arab culture for the absence of something created and developed by other cultures and nations. Johnston supports this point:

... Orientalists have also expressed the opinion that it was an error to expect an art form so closely related to the idiosyncrasies of the historical development of European culture to grow up and mature outside the western cultural ambience (Al-Khozai, 1984: v).

It is, therefore, argued that research that intends to question the Arabic culture to find reasonable justification for the absence of western theatre cannot lead to proper answers.

Mohammad Mandur, an Egyptian critic, considers that the nature of Arabic literature is one of the things that prevented the Arab culture from creating the art of drama, since it depends upon poetry as a principal method of expression. Mandur (1958) asserts that the main characteristics of Arabic poetry are the oratorical tone and the emotional, sensory descriptions, and these cannot create dramatic poetry (1958:15). This idea is shared by Al-Din who writes that drama "... is not a development of lyrical poetry in which Arabs had achieved the highest standard. Therefore lack of it, is simply due to the fact that Arab poets never had the sense of drama" (cited in Al-Zyoud, 2009:111).

Tawfeeq Alhakeem, a famous Arabic playwright, has a different view of the nature of Arabic literature from those of Mandure and Al-Din. Alhakeem (1967) agrees that poetry is not merely the heritage of Arab culture, but is a strong and deeply-rooted part of it; he does not, however, blame the Arabic culture for not creating dramatic poetry, whether before or after the advent of Islam (1967:14-15). Alhakeem implicitly takes the issue of cultural differences into account when looking at the impact of Arab literature on the absence of theatre. In this respect, Alhakeem states that poetry was the heritage of Arab literature while dramatic poetry was the heritage of western literature (1967:14).

However, this thesis argues that even if Arabic poetry and literature has a sense of drama, it cannot lead to the form of western drama. Indeed, poetry and literature in itself will not ensure the emergence of a dramatic form similar to the western drama

which developed over time. Furthermore, Arabic poetry and literature having developed within their own culture, would bring out a sort of drama that belongs to Arabic culture, and take on the characteristics and features of Arabic literature. If this did not happen, as is the case of the Arabic poetry and literature, the form and the style of drama that would emerge from the Arabic culture cannot be identified using a western definition of drama.

Another explanation of the absence of theatre from the Arabic culture goes beyond the western culture generally and into the nature of Greek culture specifically. Mohammad Mandur (1958:15) argues that the nature of Arab paganism prior to the advent of Islam, which lacked myth, did not assist the development of Arab dramatic forms. In the words of Mohammad Al-Khozai, "it would have been almost impossible for Arab drama to have established itself in an environment that lacked the full range of mythology such as was available to the Greek" drama (1984:8). The development of Greek drama, however, can neither be accounted for merely by the existence of myth, nor by the work of famous Greek playwrights. As Green mentions, the development of Greek theatre lay "in the importance given to theatre, in its reception, in the role it had in Athenian society ..." (1994:1). Hence, myth in itself cannot create drama. Drama, whether Greek or other western styles, has been developed within the whole culture in its broad sense, from "the distinctive ways of life, the shared values and meanings, common to different groups [or] nations ..." (Bocock, 1992:232). It is unreasonable, therefore, for one or two aspects of a culture, such as literature and the lack of myth, to be identified as the reason for the absence of drama without taking the entire culture into consideration.

Other researchers, such as Tawfeeq Alhakeem, mention that the art of drama requires a settled way of life; this was not available to the Arab people for many years,

especially in the Arabian Peninsula (1967:25). This explanation, however, as with literature and the lack of myth, concentrates upon one aspect of the whole culture which forms the nature of society. It ignores the huge influence that culture has on society and its power in shaping this society, even if it was unsettled. This thesis argues that this narrow explanation cannot provide a justification for the absence of drama, while drama existed and developed in other nations with the help of different aspects of their cultures.

It might be of value to look at how researchers responded to the explanation that drama could not develop in a nomadic culture. In response to this explanation Al-Hassan (1984), Al-Khozai (1984), and Badawi (1988) point out that several cities in the Arabic region were settled and civilized areas. These researchers' works provide important examples of those who take a different view from that expressed in the argument of this thesis. The current study argues that the nature of society, whether settled or not, cannot prevent the development of or cause the absence of drama. It attempts to demonstrate that this explanation, as with previous explanations, does not prove the absence of drama in its western sense.

Other explanations centre on the nature of the mind of the Arab people. For instance, Al-Khozai argues "the Arab mentality is abstract whereas the European's is concrete" (1984:3). Needless to say, this explanation is rejected by researchers on the basis that the same Arab mind has created significant abstract works such as the *Arabian Nights*; this theory cannot, therefore, answer the question of why theatre in the western sense was absent from the Arabic culture. It is strongly argued, therefore, that forms of theatre from one culture cannot transfer to another without cultural contact.

The lack of cultural contact, it seems, is the only valid explanation for the absence of drama from the Arabic culture. This explanation is proposed by Landau in his 1958 work *Studies in the Arab Theatre and Cinema*:

The fact that there was no regular Arab theatre until the nineteenth century may be explained by two main reasons:

- a. The people with whom the Arabs came into close contact had no well-developed theatre.
- b. Women, particularly if unveiled, were strictly forbidden to appear on the stage (1958:1-2).

The second seems to be an unreasonable and unconvincing explanation for the absence of theatre in Arabic culture, and has been rejected by two Arab researchers. Al-Hassan argues that the absence of women might impact upon the improvement of such an Arab theatrical movement (if it existed) but it cannot be considered a reason for the absence of theatre (1984:7). Al-Khozai strongly argues that if the lack of women impacted on the development of theatre, the western theatrical tradition would have remained undeveloped, since boys performed female roles for many years (1984:2). Both Al-Hassan and Al-Khozai, however, find Landau's (1958) first explanation convincing.

It is central, at this stage, to emphasise that while Al-Hassan, Al-Khozai, and other researchers discuss Landau's first explanation alongside other explanations provided by other researchers, this thesis maintains that Landau's theory, that it was the lack of cultural contact between Arab and other cultures that led to the absence of theatre, is the most valid and reasonable explanation proposed by any researcher on this topic. Thus, it is significant to assert that a cultural product such as theatre cannot move from one culture to another unless cultural contact has occurred. The central question

that theatre researchers should have raised and attempted to answer, therefore, is did the Arabic culture, through its history up to the 1840s, have contact with any other cultures or nations that had theatre? If the answer is yes, this will raise another critical question, which is, why did the Arabic culture fail to transfer the art of theatre when the cultural contact happened?

The earliest contact between the Arabic culture and another culture with a tradition of theatre, as many researchers agree, was in the eighth and ninth centuries when the Arabs translated Greek literature into Arabic. Badawi (1988) and Al-Khozai (1984) believe that the Arabic translators of Aristotle's works did not understand his *Poetics*. Terms like "Tragedy" and "Comedy", were translated as "Madih (panegyric) and Hija (satire or invective)" that already existed in Arabic poetry (Badawi, 1988:3-4). It seems convincing that the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the work of Aristotle prevented the Arabic culture from taking advantage of the Greek tradition at that time. As Al-Khozai emphasises, "If the *Poetics* had been fully comprehended by the mediaeval translators, and if this book had fallen into the hands of a poet of some talent, Arabic drama might have had the chance of an early inception" (1984:6). However, Badawi highlights a significant point which may explain the failure of the Arabic people to understand the Greek drama. He considers that "... the absence of a living Greek dramatic tradition at that time" was a key factor in the misunderstanding of the *Poetics* (Badawi, 1988:3). Indeed, without an existing form of Greek drama, the Arabs could not understand the subject of the *Poetics*. As a result, this can explain the failure of the Arabic culture to transfer the Greek tradition at the time of the cultural contact.

While accepting the explanation of Landau (1958), that lack of cultural contact prevented the movement of theatre, it is important to assert that cultural contact does

not lead automatically to such transformation. The aforementioned cultural contact between the Arabic and Greek cultures lacked elements that would have assisted the transfer of the art of theatre. One element was the opportunity to see examples of that tradition, which was absent during the cultural contact.

There is another significant condition that should be taken seriously in examining the transfer of a cultural product like theatre. This condition is the understanding of the value of this form of art and the willingness of individuals to transfer this art. Arabic history has, on occasion, had contact with other cultures where theatre was active, but the transmission of the art of theatre did not happen. The most important occasion was during the period from 1805 to 1849 when Egypt, under the rule of Mohammad Ali, was in close contact with western civilization for many years; this did not, however, influence or cause any transfer of the art of theatre.

The assimilation of theatre into Arabic culture, as this thesis has argued, could not and will not be achieved without close cultural contact with another culture that has a theatre tradition that can help the Arabic culture make sense of and understand the value of drama. In addition, as will be shown, the first steps towards theatre in the Arabic world also required individuals who believed in the value of theatre and its importance for their countries.

Arabic theatre: early developments

Jacob M. Landau (1958), as mentioned in the previous section, believed that the reason why the Arabic world had no theatrical art prior to the 1840s was the lack of cultural contact between the Arabic world and other cultures or nations with a developed theatrical tradition. This thesis, however, argues that cultural contact could not in itself assure the transfer of cultural achievements. It is argued that such a

transfer is also dependent on the presence of individuals who have not only been in contact with theatre, but have an enthusiasm or esteem for and understanding of the theatre, and thus the desire to work towards the adoption of this new art.

The story of how theatre began and was introduced into Arabic countries supports the argument that transferring theatre into Arabic culture required individuals who admired this art and were willing to transfer it into their culture. The first three individuals who introduced theatre into the Arabic world were Maroon Al-Naqqash in Lebanon, Abu Khaleel Al-Qubbani in Syria, and Yaqub Sanno in Egypt.

Maroon Al-Naqqash¹ (1817-1855)

Maroon Al-Naqqash is considered to be the first of the pioneers who introduced theatre into the Arabic world. Matta Moosa asserts that "He rightfully merits the title of the father of Arab drama" (1972:117). Al-Khozai makes it clear that "It is indisputable that Marun an-Naqqash was the first Arab to attempt playwriting on European models. Thus the birth certificate of drama in Arabic was issued when his play was staged at his house in Beirut in the year 1847" (1984:31).

Al-Naqqash was from a wealthy Christian family who worked in business. For this reason, he had the opportunity to travel to France and Italy on business and he came into close contact with these nations. His knowledge of different languages, including French and Italian, allowed him to fully experience theatre during his visits (Al-Khozai, 1984:33). In 1846, he decided to bring the art of theatre to his country. However, he was more enthusiastic about opera than other forms of Italian theatre,

¹ Readers may find different spellings of the name of Al-Naqqash in some of the scholarly works. In the case of quoting from these works, the name is quoted as it is written in the resource.

and he explained in a speech before his first play that he loved this form and he thought that his own people would love it as well (Najm, 1999:34).

In 1847, Al-Naqqash staged his first play, *albakhil [The Miser]*, at his own house in Beirut; it was performed by members of his family. This may demonstrate the difficulty of staging a play in a public place at that time, and also the fear that Al-Naqqash had about the public reaction to his first play. The people who attended the play were local notables and foreign consuls, which may support the idea that the prime concern of Al-Naqqash was to convince the important figures of his country of the desirability of theatre.

Controversy surrounds the text of the first play regarding whether it was an adaptation or merely a translation of Molière's original of the same name. Al-Khozai asserts that "Having examined the plot of both plays, it leads us to the conclusion that while Naqqash did not make a straightforward adaptation or direct translation of *The Miser* in Arabic ..., the influence of Molière as a source for these plays is clear" (1984:41)². Badawi adds that "... it is indeed an original although, as in the rest of al-Naqqash's work, one can detect in it an echo of Molière as well as the pervasive influence of his drama" (1988:44). Al-Naqqash started this play, according to historical sources, with a speech about the importance and value of theatre, no doubt in order to introduce this new art form to the audience (Najm, 1967:34).

In 1849, he staged a second play, *abuAlahsan almughaffal (Abu Alahsan the Fool)*, in his house. The subject of this play was a story from the *Arabian Nights*. It is not clear, however, whether he turned to an Arabic resource in response to the opinions of the first audience regarding a play with a non-Arabic subject and setting; as Al-Sheddi

² - For more details of the comparison between the two plays see Al-Khozai (1984), pp. 35-47.

points out, his main concern was to please his audience (1997:210). The third play was *alsaleet alhasud* (*The Insolent Envier*). This, however, was staged in Al-Naqqash's own theatre, after having obtained permission from the authorities.

Al-Naqqash died at the age of 38 in 1855, so his career was too short. However, one of his main achievements was that he trained and prepared actors who later led the movement of theatre into the Arabic world.

Abu Khaleel Al-Qubbani (1833-1902)

After the death of Al-Naqqash, theatre, in the sense of an imitation of western theatre, was spread across the Arabic world by many Arabic practitioners. Among the leading figures in this respect is Ahmad Abu Khaleel Al-Qubbani who had a traditional Islamic education. He is considered by theatre scholars as the second pioneer of the Arabic theatre. In addition, he is regarded as "the father of the Syrian theatre" (Badawi, 1988:57).

There is insufficient information about the roots of his interest in theatre. Sadallah Wanous and Nadim Mohammad suggest being aware of the work of Al-Naqqash and attending performances presented by visiting theatrical groups or the scholastic theatre may have captured his imagination (1999:263). Kurd Ali supports the idea that Al-Qubbani witnessed plays presented by a French group in Syria and obtained ideas about theatre, acting, and how to present a play (cited in Najm, 1999:62-63). The main point is that he continued imitating the European form of theatre and played a role in introducing this in Syria.

Al-Qubbani, like Al-Naqqash, staged his first play in a private home, at his grandfather's house. This play was *nakir aljameel* [*The Ungrateful Man*], and the

small audience included his own friends. He wrote, directed, and acted in the play. Like Al- Naqqash, he used boys to perform the female roles, showing similarities with the work of Al-Naqqash in attempting to introduce theatre; they had both encountered the art form in foreign cultures.

Al-Qubbani attained practical support and financial support from Midhat Pasha who was governor, from 1878 to 1879, of the province in which he opened his theatre and performed two plays, *Wdah* and *Haroon Alrasheed*. Unfortunately, the religious authorities forced him to close his theatre in 1884, under orders from the Sultan. Al-Sheddi is of the opinion that Al-Qubbani was condemned by the conservative people of Syria who associated theatrical activities with debauchery and alcohol (1997:212). As a result, he travelled to Egypt to continue his career. According to Al-Sheddi, most of his plays were obtained from old popular stories such as *Arabian Nights* and *Sirat Antra* (1997:213).

Yaqub Sanua (1839-1912)

Sanua is the third pioneer of Arabic theatre; he established the theatrical movement in Egypt. Al-Khozai describes him as "the pioneer who laid down the foundation of drama in Egypt" (1984:123). Badawi mentions that "the birth of modern Egyptian drama took place in 1870 at the hand of Yaqub Sanua" (1988:31) Yaqub came from a Jewish family and his interest in theatre may stem from three years spent studying in Italy from the age of thirteen. In these years he came into close contact with western culture. However, he explained in a lecture that the idea of establishing his theatre came while he was an actor in performances presented by Italian and French groups for expatriates in Cairo (Najm, 1999:80). His knowledge of different languages, such as English, Italian, and French, allowed him to participate in these performances.

Despite the encouragement, support, and funding of the Khedive Ismael (the ruler of Egypt from 1863 to 1879), the career of Sanua lasted only two years; the Khedive closed his theatre in 1872. Al-Khozai believes that the reason was related to the political activities Yaqub engaged with against the government, and the difficulties that his theatre faced financially after the Khedive's support was discontinued (1984:124). Badawi supports the idea that the main reason for closing his theatre was the "dramatist's political criticism" (1988:33).

In his lecture in Paris in 1903, Sanua mentioned that he had produced 32 plays; some were his own, while others were friends' translations of French plays (Najm, 1999:82). He was the first Arabic dramatist who insisted that females must play female roles. For this, he trained and prepared two poor girls to be the first two females on stage in the history of Arabic theatre. In addition, he used the Egyptian dialect in his theatre, instead of the formal, classical Arabic language. Al-Sheddi (1997:218) suggests that he was the first dramatist to highlight and criticise political and social problems of the day, and this cost him his career in the theatre.

It might be useful to end this brief outline of the first three pioneers with the words of Hassan Al-Hassn:

The cultivation of the European theatrical seed in Arab lands was a very difficult matter. This difficulty becomes apparent when one reads about the first three Arab theatrical pioneers, and how they were confronted with trouble and contempt, by authorities, religious fanatics and even theater-goers themselves, before they gained recognition for their efforts (1984:73).

These words summarise the situation facing those who introduced theatre into the Arabic world: Maroon Al-Naqqash, Abu Khaleel Al-Qubbani, and Yaqub Sanua. Although Sanua had difficulty with political authority in Egypt, theatre in Egypt

continued and developed, in the centre of the Arabic world. For this reason it is important to shed light on Egyptian theatre and its role in influencing other Arabic countries. The next section will concentrate on this issue.

Theatre in Egypt

As mentioned in the previous section, the theatrical activities of Yaqub Sanua in 1870 played a significant role in establishing Egyptian theatre. Theatre in Egypt, unlike that in Lebanon and Syria, continually developed from 1870 onwards, and established a strong foundation as well as a distinguished tradition compared with the rest of the Arabic countries. In addition, Egyptian theatre, as will be shown later, had a great influence upon the experience of theatre in other Arabic countries. In this context, there are two critical questions which must be addressed: why did theatre succeed in Egypt? And what was the nature of the atmosphere that might have helped the development of theatre in Egypt?

Al-Khozai, speaking of Yaqub Sanua, asserts that "... with his work drama came to be established as a recognized art form and Egypt became the centre of all theatrical activities in the Arab world" (1984:123); while there is no question Sanua was the founder of Egyptian theatre, it is important to ask, was the work of Sanua the main reason for Egypt being the theatrical centre of the Arab world, as Al-Khozai claims? Machut-Mendecka claims that "... the fact that Egypt became the centre of the Arab theatre already at the end of the 19th Century, is not, however, entirely owed to the output of Yaqub Sanua" (2000:34). Machut-Mendecka seems in disagreement with Al-Khozai and highlights the role played by immigrant artists from Syria and Lebanon and their considerable work in enhancing the Egyptian theatre (2000:34). The role of these artists cannot be ignored or dismissed; indeed it will be highlighted

later. However, it is legitimate at this stage to ask why these artists immigrated to Egypt and not elsewhere. It seems that there were conditions, not pertaining in other Arabic countries that welcomed and encouraged their immigration. It is reasonable to assume that these conditions were the same as those that helped Sanua to work a few years earlier. Hence, these cultural conditions within Egypt should be explored.

In this case, both Al-Khozai and Machut-Mendecka ignore or miss, unintentionally, the atmosphere and the conditions in Egypt at that time. In addition, other Arab researchers also neglect to examine the atmosphere and conditions in Egypt. For instance, Ali Alrai (1979), whose book *almasrah fi alwatan alarabi (Theatre in the Arabic World)* is considered one of the main reference works on the history of Arabic theatre, does not indicate what the conditions in Egypt were in terms of the beginnings of Arabic theatre. Nor does he mention the significant role of these conditions in allowing Sanua and other Arab artists to launch and develop theatre in Egypt. Moreover, Professor Jomah Qajh (2004), in his book *almasrah wa alhawiah alarabiah (Theatre and the Arabic Identity)*, does not address this issue. It appears that while Ali Alrai and Professor Jomah Qajh do not deliberately dismiss the conditions that led to the foundation of theatre in Egypt, they put theatrical works and artists at the centre of their narrative. Nevertheless, it could be asserted that since theatre cannot exist in a vacuum, the task of a theatre historian should be to take the context in which theatre existed into consideration. This will help the readers to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the history of theatre in a particular area. Furthermore, a discussion of the context might help readers reach reasonable conclusions about the development of theatre and also open the debate to further questions which will enhance the academic field with regard to the situation of theatre in the Arabic world.

Saad Aldeen Dughman (1973), however, in his book *alosal altarikhiah lenshat aldrama fi aladab alarabi* (*The Historical Roots of the Emergence of Drama in Arabic Literature*), does present a detailed picture of the history of Syria and Egypt in the nineteenth century and provides a broad context for the theatrical activities that existed in this period. The problematic issue with the work of Dughman (1973) is that whilst Ali Alrai (1999) and Jomah Qajh (2004) concentrated on the theatrical works, without paying attention to their historical context, Dughman does the opposite; he devotes an entire chapter to the broad context, incorporating cultural, social, and political events, without locating the theatrical activities within this context. It seems, therefore, that Dughman does not explain how the context of the nineteenth century influenced Arabic theatre. In short, it can be strongly argued that the atmosphere and conditions, discussed in detail below, that surrounded the beginning of theatre in Egypt and which played a role in the success of Sanua and the immigrant Arab artists in making Egypt a leading country in Arabic theatre cannot be ignored.

The conditions of Egypt in the nineteenth century

The starting point for coming to an understanding of the conditions in Egypt lies before the period that witnessed the emergence of theatre in Egypt in 1870, when Sanua, the founder of modern Egyptian theatre in the sense of its western form started his theatrical works. In addition, it was prior to the period between 1863 and 1879, when Egypt was under the rule of Khedive Ismail (1830-1892), the grandson of Mohammad Ali. The starting point, in understanding the conditions that led to the establishment of Egyptian theatre and caused it to eventually become the centre of Arabic theatre goes back to the time of Mohammad Ali.

Mohammad Ali, ruler of Egypt from 1805 to 1849, is considered as "the founder of modern Egypt" (Jankowski, 2000:72). Vatikiotis asserts that "Muhammad Ali gave Egypt the organizational basis and the human cadres for the emergence of a modern state" (1980:52). Furthermore, Jankowski describes the time of Ali in the following way:

Equally in the spheres of politics, in economics, and in regard to Egypt's cultural orientation, his long reign witnessed major new initiatives which transformed the face of the country and set Egypt on the road to precocious modernization which was to distinguish it from most of its Middle Eastern neighbors through the nineteenth century (2000:72).

With this in mind, and since Egypt, under the rule of Mohammad Ali, came into contact with European modernization, it is reasonable to ask why Egyptian theatre did not develop at this time. In other words, what was the place of theatre in the modernization that Ali brought to Egypt?

In attempting to answer this critical question, it might be said that the priority and the main concern of Mohammad Ali was building a great country that was based on a great army. Many researchers agree that the main aspects of modernization during the time of Mohammad were related to military power (Ismail, 1967:26; Dughman, 1973:45; Crabbs, 1984:67; Lutfi al-Sayyid, 2007:65; Vatikiotis, 1980:56; Jankowski, 2000:72). As Vatikiotis states, "... the Pasha thought of civilization (at least, European civilization) as a set of devices to organize, arm and maintain his army which, in turn, was the best guarantee of his independence" (1980:56). Consequently, this prevented Egypt from considering theatre as one of the features of civilization.

Crabbs, however, adds a significant point that is relevant to the question above. He points out that "...Egyptian cultural movement during the first half of the nineteenth

century was determined largely by the personal wishes of her ruler, whose interest could not long be sustained in enterprises to which he could see no military applications" (1984:67). Here Crabbs identifies a crucial issue that affected the history of Egypt during the rule of Mohammad Ali: the personal wishes of the ruler.

Vatikiotis notes that "During the interval between Muhammad Ali and Ismail, there reigned three successive Pashas: Ibrahim for a mere six months, Abbas I (1848-54) and Said (1854-63)" (1980:71). Although Egypt was, to different degrees, in contact with western modernization, Egyptian theatre had not yet appeared during the time of these rulers. However, it appears that the contact with modernization alone did not help the establishment of theatre in Egypt during the time of Mohammad Ali and the three rulers who followed him, at least not up until 1863. Therefore, it might be claimed, once again, that contact with countries with a well-developed theatre tradition, as argued by Landau (1958:1-2), did not result in the development of theatre. This means that there were other conditions alongside such contact that were needed to assist in establishing theatre in Egypt.

It was not until Ismail came to power that Egyptian theatre had the opportunity to come into existence. Precisely seven years after Ismail came to power, Sanua staged a performance which is considered by theatrical researchers to represent the birth of Egyptian theatre. Barbour confirms that "... the establishment of the theatre in Egypt, like many other Western innovations, was aided by the initiative of the Khedive Ismail" (1935:173).

However, Crabbs seems to be correct in highlighting the effect of the ruler's personal wishes upon Egyptian culture (1984:67). The same can be said with respect to Vatikiotis' view of the meaning of civilization to the Egyptian ruler (1980:56).

Therefore, it is not surprising that theatre in Egypt emerged in 1870 as a result of a combination of three factors. The first was the contact with European civilizations, as in the time of Mohammad Ali. However, there were other factors in the form of the personal wishes of the ruler and his own understanding of the meaning of civilization. As Al-Khozai observes:

... it was Ismail's interest in, and fascination with, European culture which motivated him to 'transform Egypt into a part of Europe'. The lavishness that characterised the reign of this monarch made it possible for the performing arts to grow in the fertile soil of official encouragement and governmental patronage (1984:123).

This suggests that Ismail's interests, as the ruler of Egypt, in theatre and his encouragement of theatrical activities should be further investigated to help us to understand the subject of Egyptian theatre in particular and, perhaps, Arabic theatre in general, especially at the beginning of its history. This will show the importance of the acceptance of theatre by the authorities for the development of Arabic theatre. The acceptance of theatre by the authorities, one might argue, explains the nature of the relationship between Ismail, who represented authority in Egypt, and the reality of theatre at that time. Therefore, describing the relationship between Ismail and theatre as merely one of interest, encouragement, or support, as do Al-Khosai (1984) and Badawi (1988:31), appears to be inaccurate. Three examples support this claim. First of all, Ismail built two theatres in Egypt - the Opera House and the Comedy in the Ezbekia Gardens - in 1869 (Barbour, 1935:173). Building permanent theatres in Egypt illustrates in some way the relationship between Ismail and theatre. It might be said that building two theatres, even before the establishment of Egyptian theatre, could indicate how Ismail regarded the role of theatre in his country. Secondly, he allowed Sanua to perform theatrical events in his private palace on two occasions and

gave him the title of "The Egyptian Molière" (Badawi, 1988:32). Giving Sanua this title revealed Ismail education, which impacted upon his relationship with theatre. Although Ismail had a part to play in the decision to close Sanua's theatre in 1872, Badawi mentions that "... from 1876 onwards, Lebanese playwrights (who served as actors and managers, such as al-Naqqash's nephew Salim ..., and their Syrian imitators, such as Abu Khalil al-Qabbani ...) took their troupes to Egypt" (Jayyusi and Allen, 1995:1). The continuation of theatrical activities in Egypt after the close of Sanua's theatre might be considered as the third example of the relationship between Ismail and theatre. It was not, therefore, merely the interest and encouragement of Ismail that helped theatre to become established and to develop in Egypt, but rather his acceptance of theatre. The authorities' acceptance of theatre seems to be of crucial importance to the existence and the development of theatre, as demonstrated by the development of theatre under Ismail.

It is not an exaggeration to assume that the nature of the relationship between authority in a country and its theatre will determine the future of theatre in that country. In Lebanon and Syria, as mentioned before, authority - religious, political, or a combination of the two - played a remarkable role in stopping the theatre movement. The nature of the relationship between theatre and authority may be illustrated by some examples from the history of theatre. For instance, the role that the Greek government played in organizing theatrical festivals, including paying actors (Brockett, 1980:44-45; Brown, 1995:15), demonstrates that the acceptance of theatre by the Athenian government helped in establishing and developing theatre. Brockett highlights the status of Greek theatre at that time: "... the theatre was considered to be the right of everyone rather than a function for the few" (1980:44). It might be argued that without this acceptance and understanding of the importance of theatre, Greece

would not have gained its distinguished place in the history of theatre. Moreover, the negative attitude of Christianity towards theatre around A.D. 312 and the positive attitude around the 10th century (Brockett, 1980:73-71), indicated approval in terms of the relationship between authority and the theatre. Whether it was negative or positive the nature of the relationship made a great impact on the life of the theatre.

The acceptance of theatre on the part of the authorities, and its encouragement and support, played a significant role in the development of theatre in Egypt. It caught the attention of a number of Arabic artists from Lebanon and Syria, who were facing difficulties in their countries. They immigrated to Egypt to stage their theatrical performances and took advantage of the support and encouragement of the Egyptian authorities. Their works helped the development of theatre in Egypt. Mendecka mentions that Egyptian theatre benefited significantly from these artists (2000:35), so it is relevant to consider their role in Egyptian theatre.

The Lebanese and Syrian groups

While it is impossible to mention all the Arab practitioners who migrated to Egypt, the names of a few of the more important will suffice. The first figure amongst the Lebanese practitioners was Salim Al-Naqqash, the nephew of Maroon Al-Naqqash. He travelled to Egypt with his troupe in 1876, where he staged several productions in Cairo before moving to Alexandria. In 1877, Salim Al-Naqqash handed over direction of the troupe to Yousef Alkhaitt who continued staging plays until 1890. Sulaiman Alqurdahi, who was a member of the troupe, established a new troupe in 1882 and contributed to the theatre movement in Egypt for a short period (Qajh, 2001:294-295; Alria, 1999:197-198; Badawi, 1988:56-57). Ali Alrai specifically studied the migration of people interested in theatre, such as playwrights and translators of plays,

highlighting Farah Anton as the key character (1999:198). Nevertheless, while Badawi (1988:71-74) acknowledges the impact of Farah Anton on Egyptian theatre, he does not mention that he emigrated from Lebanon. Badawi, like Qajh (2001:353), includes Farah Anton in the list of Egyptian dramatists. In contrast, Machut-Mendecka (1997:31) considers Farah Anton as a Lebanese writer.

It might be of interest to mention the talented actor George Abyad who emigrated from Lebanon. He enhanced the nature of Egyptian theatre, especially in terms of the style of acting (Alrai, 1979:198; Qajh, 2004:296). Ali Alrai (1979:77) and Jomah Qajh (2004:296) mention that George Abyad studied in France from 1904 to 1910 under the supervision of Selvan, a French actor. Badawi points out that "... with Abyad we enter a new phase in the history of the Egyptian theatre. For the first time we encounter an Arab actor who received a proper professional training ..." (1988:65). However, it is not clear from the historical sources whether or not George Abyad established an acting school in Egypt, or even ran workshops to train Egyptian actors. Although Jomah Qajh (2004:296-297) mentions that there were some Egyptian actors who were trained by Abyad, he does not provide information about the process of training or how it was achieved. In terms of Syrian practitioners, Abu Khaleel Al-Qubbani seems to be the main individual who contributed to Egyptian theatre between 1884 and 1900.

It seems that the Lebanese practitioners were the most influential within Egyptian theatre, certainly more so the Syrians. Consequently, they might be considered to be a crucial initial element in shaping the nature of theatre in Egypt. However, it is vital to note the atmosphere in Lebanon and, perhaps, the attitude of the authorities which prevented Lebanon from benefiting from the contributions of those practitioners. Badawi explains that "... nineteenth-century dramatists and actor-managers migrated

to Egypt from Beirut and Damascus where they had met with opposition and hostility from the authorities and the public alike" (1988:1). Since they started to immigrate to Egypt in 1867, when Egypt was under the authority of Ismail, as Badawi mentions (1995:1), it is reasonable to deduce that the acceptance of theatre under Ismail's authority led Arabic practitioners to immigrate to Egypt.

Theatre in Egypt, based on the circumstances explained above, appeared to establish strong foundations and its influence spread not only to the cities of Egypt but also to the rest of the Arabic world. Therefore it is worthwhile mentioning some examples of this influence. Badawi provides the following explanation:

... through the various visits to the rest of the Arabic world by leading Egyptian theatrical troupes, as well as through the publication and discussion of the work of major Egyptian playwrights in newspapers and periodicals, Egyptian drama exercised a profound influence on Arabic drama outside Egypt (1988:1).

A number of Arabic countries were influenced directly by Egyptian theatrical troupes. For instance, in 1926, George Abyad visited Iraq with his troupe, and this had an influence on the establishment of Iraqi theatre. Moreover, George Abyad's troupe, Monerah Almahadaih's troupe, and Yusuf Wahbi's troupe visited Libya to stage plays which inspired Libyan artists. In 1908, Sulaiman Qurdahi's troupe visited Tunisia which influenced Tunisian theatre (Alrai, 1979). However, it seems that the influence of these visiting troupes of Egyptian artists was short term in nature.

A longer term influence by Egyptian theatre upon the Arabic world is seen in the establishment of The Higher Institute of Arabic Acting Art in Cairo in 1944, under the supervision of Zaki Tulaymat (Alrai, 1979: 80; Qajh, 2004: 358). This institute has trained many theatrical artists and actors from across the Arabic world, allowing them

to gain knowledge of theatre. Consequently, they applied this knowledge in enhancing the art of theatre in their respective countries.

As the main aim of the chapter is to provide a general background to the history of theatre in the Arabic world, in order to pave the way for this study of the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia, it may be of value to end this chapter with some information about theatre in the Arabic Gulf States.

The Arabic Gulf States

The Arabic Gulf States consist of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Because of the similarities and the close relationship among these countries, an understanding of the history of theatre in the other five countries provides a point of entry into the history of Saudi theatre. Nevertheless, the author has no intention of considering the history of the Arabic Gulf States in detail, nor of presenting a comparison between different movements of theatre in this part of the Arabic world. The main aim of the following section of this thesis is to familiarise the reader with the beginnings of theatre in countries that are close to Saudi Arabia.

The beginning of theatre in the Arabic Gulf States

The Arabic Gulf States have much in common, and the close similarities distinguish them from the rest of the Arabic world. The presence of oil is not the main aspect in common, although its importance in their history and development is unquestionable. Nor is it simply that these countries became, after the oil boom in the 1970s, the richest countries in the Arab world. In his book, *The Gulf is Not Oil*, Mohammed Alrumaihi argues that "the Gulf [meaning the Arabic Gulf States] is people and land before the appearance of oil" (1995:9). Alrumaihi's main subject in this book is the

development, social life, and challenges of these countries. He argues that they share the same past and present, and that they should also share the same future.

The Gulf State countries are close to each other in geographical terms, and it might therefore be unsurprising that they come under one umbrella. In 1980 the six countries created an international organization, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). While not attempting to ignore the political and economic factors, as well as other interests behind this step, the social life, traditions, and culture of the Gulf States played a major role in creating the GCC. For the purposes of this research it is important to highlight two of the similarities between these countries in terms of theatre. The first is that these countries were among the last Arab countries to begin practicing theatre. The second is the fact that these countries followed the same path when introducing theatre to their people. In the next section, the beginning of theatre in these countries and its nature will be briefly discussed.

The early beginning

There is no reliable evidence that the Gulf States had known theatre before the establishment of schools. It was primarily through the activities of teachers and students in schools that theatre began in the Gulf States, and these activities are considered by many researchers working in the field of Gulf theatre as the starting point for theatre in these countries. It seems that Bahrain preceded the rest of the Gulf States in the introduction of theatre in schools. According to Ali Alrai (1979:363), Alsuraia and Badeer (1993:21), and Abdualqader (1988:13), it was in 1925 that a school in Bahrain, Alhidayah Alkhalefiah in Almuhrac City, presented the Gulf's first play, entitled *alqadhy biamrallah* [*Who Rules in the Name of God*]. However, Alsuraia and Badeer (1993:21) claim that the Alahmadiaya School in Kuwait

presented a short play in 1922. Interestingly, two Kuwaiti scholars, Mohamed Abdullah (1976:35) and Mohamed Bilal (1985:5) do not mention the activities of this school in 1922; they agree that the first play in Kuwait was presented by the al-Mubarakiyya school in 1939. Furthermore, Bilal (1985:123) asserts that "it is certain that the Bahrayni school theatre had a direct and immense impact upon the Kuwaiti school theatre". While this might support the idea that Bahrain was the first of the Gulf States to introduce theatre in schools, it is not in the interests of this research to discuss the disparate opinions on who started the tradition, but rather to highlight the idea that theatre came into existence in the Gulf States through the schools.

Oman and the UAE followed the same path in introducing their people to theatre. Al-Habsi, referring to the theatrical activities in the al-Saiydia school in Muscat (the capital city of Oman) in 1940 and other schools in the 1950s, states that "in these schools theatre was created for the first time" (2003:32). Abdualqader (1988:15) traces the beginning of theatre in the UAE back to the activities of the Alqasimiay School at the beginning of 1950s.

Since these countries shared the same method of beginning theatre and introducing it to their people, it is useful to focus briefly on this issue and consider why schools were the place in which to launch theatre in the Gulf States. The Arab teachers who taught in the Gulf schools provide a possible explanation. As the Arabic countries had known of and practiced theatre for years before the Gulf States, these teachers brought a knowledge of theatre that had previously been absent from the Gulf countries. Al-Habsi, speaking about the beginning of theatre in Oman, states that "the expatriate teachers, especially those from Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon played a very important role in establishing and developing the scholastic theatre since its inception" (2003:40). In addition, Bilal mentions that the first play was directed by

Mahmud Najm, a Palestinian teacher at the school in 1939, and the second play presented by the same school in 1943 was written by Arab teacher Muhammad Labib Abu al-Saud (1985:133). The existence of Arab teachers in the Gulf's schools appears to be the reason provided by researchers such as Al-Habsi and Bilal for these schools being the places in which Gulf theatre began, whether they voice this opinion directly or indirectly.

However, since this issue has not been given sufficient attention by researchers, it seems misleading to explain the beginning of theatre in the Gulf's schools solely by the existence of Arab teachers. They might have played a significant part in establishing theatre, as Al-Habsi mentions above, but other people might have contributed or played a role, too; the Arab teachers did not work in a vacuum. Indeed, they could not present and stage theatrical activities without approval from the people who were responsible for the education system at that time; they would not have been able to achieve what they did without support and encouragement from the headmasters of their schools. It appears, therefore, that there were many people who helped the Arab teachers to establish theatre in schools; however, current historical resources give no attention to their contribution.

In addition, one might consider the status of the school, as a respected place in the Gulf States, as another explanation of why theatre was introduced through schools. Schools were a trusted place, to which Gulf people sent their children to gain knowledge in different subjects such as Islamic and Arabic studies. Therefore introducing the theatre, a new art form, into societies that were religious and conservative through this institution avoided raising doubts and suspicions about its legitimacy as well as its value to the students. Bilal makes the following comment

regarding the trend of presenting historical and Arabic plays in schools in the Arabic world:

this was due to the social and cultural nature of these societies. For example, the Arabic countries were governed by stern traditions and customs derived from religion and Arabic tradition; therefore, people would behave in a fanatically suspicious manner towards any foreign convention which was not derived from the spirit of Arabism or religion. (1985:134).

Bilal's conclusion makes sense, as it refers to Arabic countries where theatre existed first outside the walls of schools, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. Hence, presenting a play that was concerned with an Arabic or Islamic historical subject might assist theatre's entrance into schools in these countries. In the context of the Gulf States, however, schools were the proper place to establish theatre for the first time due to their status in Gulf society. The presentation of Arabic and Islamic subjects in Gulf school theatre acted as a reinforcement of the value of the theatrical form, as will be illustrated shortly.

It is vital for this research to present a picture of the nature and the chief characteristics of the theatrical activities that are considered by researchers to be the beginning of theatre in the Gulf countries. In doing so, it should be sufficient to focus specifically on the experiences of two countries, Kuwait and Oman, as examples for understanding the nature of theatrical activities in the Gulf States. The first is simple: Bilal (1985) and Al-Habsi (2003) have provided detailed pictures of the beginnings of theatre in their countries. Both have contributed to the field of theatre history by writing doctoral theses. The former is concerned with theatre in Kuwait and the latter with Omani theatre. Hence, it is reasonable to rely on their work in order to present a clear picture of this early stage of theatrical practice in the Gulf States. The second

reason is geographical and related to the location of these two countries. As shown on the previous map (Figure 1), Kuwait is located on the north of the Arab Peninsula while Oman is on the south. It is apparent that there is no direct connection between the two countries which might have allowed the communication and exchange of such experiences. It can be legitimately assumed, therefore, that the two countries did not influence each other in terms of theatre; or at least they did not influence each other in the first half of the nineteenth century before modern transformations in transport and communications. Therefore, each country, Kuwait and Oman, had its own experience of the beginning of theatre, and a brief survey of these will enhance understanding of what the beginning of theatre in the Gulf States might have looked like.

The origins of theatre in Kuwait and Oman

Despite their geographical separation, Kuwait and Oman share many characteristics in regards to the nature of theatrical activities in their schools. This leads to the tentative conclusion that the nature of the beginning of theatre was similar in all of the Gulf States.

The first similarity between the two countries was the method by which theatrical activities in schools were presented. Both Bilal (1985:130) and Al-Habsi (2003:34) explain that theatre was introduced into schools by the end of year ceremonies; Al-Habsi explains that they included "... short plays, poetic anthems and oratory" (2003:34). Bilal provides further explanations of the nature of this ceremony, which seems to be the same as in Omani schools, even if Bilal calls it a "review" (1985:130) instead of a ceremony. In the words of Bilal:

... the review usually consisted of a short recitation from the Quran, a speech delivered by the headmaster, the anthem of the school, a musical interlude

played by the musicians of the school, and then a play, which in most cases was written and directed by the Arabic language teacher (1985:130).

A play, as understood from the description above, was presented as a part of a larger ceremony or programme. In addition, it should be noted that Bilal specifies the role of Arabic teachers in introducing and establishing theatre in schools, "in most cases" writing and directing the plays. This might support the idea that Arabic teachers had knowledge and experience of writing and directing before coming to the Gulf States. However, historians such as Bilal (1985), Al-Habsi (2003), and others, spend no time examining the nature of the knowledge and experience that the Arab teachers brought to the Gulf's schools. Information about the methods they followed when directing plays, their approaches with actors, and what the texts looked like would provide a clearer picture of what kind of knowledge and experience these teachers had. As the Arab teachers planted the seed of theatre in the Gulf, it would be of interest to the reader to understand their real contribution to theatre in these countries - however, since the historians do not go into detail, this seems to be impossible.

The loss of the relevant scripts and the lack of documentation may, however, justify the gaps in the work of theatrical historians in terms of examining the nature of the plays as they were written. As Bilal (1985) and Al-Habsi (2003) interviewed a number of people who were involved in theatre in this period, it might be legitimate to ask why they did not raise the issue of the nature of the qualifications of Arab teachers to establish theatre in schools. This appears to be a central issue in investigating the theatrical activities that are considered to be the real beginning of theatre. Understanding the experience of Arab teachers, one might argue, would provide further information on the origins of theatre in the Gulf States as well as raising many other questions pertaining to it. Furthermore, the nature of this beginning, whether it

was strong or weak, would have depended on the knowledge and experience of the people who played a founding role in it. For instance, if they had little knowledge of theatre and the beginning was therefore weak, it would raise questions about this unexpected result. Consequently, this might lead researchers to discover hidden factors that would perhaps challenge currently-held ideas about the movement of theatre at that time. However, if the Arab teachers did not have sufficient knowledge and experience of theatre (for example, they might have witnessed theatre in their own countries or schools without being involved in theatre practice), it might be reasonable to expect a weak beginning.

Although Bilal (1985) and Al-Habsi (2003) provide a clear picture of the nature of school theatre, only a brief outline is appropriate in the present context. For instance, the two authors, Bilal (1985) and Al-Habsi (2003) agree that theatrical activities in schools at this time were simple in both form and content. Islamic subjects and stories from Islamic history were the common themes in scholastic theatre and all of the plays were performed either in the local dialect or in classical Arabic. In addition, because of the lack of lighting, these activities were presented during the day, which gives an indication of the state of technological development in Kuwait and Oman at that time. It is expected that a developing country will present theatrical activities in accordance with its status. Later on, theatrical activities in schools were presented in the evening due to the existence of electric lights. Female characters were performed by male actors, since women's education had not at that time been established in these countries. It is important to mention that women in Kuwait started to act on stage in 1969 (Bilal 1985:133), whereas in Oman it was not permitted until 1970 (Al-Habsi 2003:40). This demonstrates, perhaps, the attitude of the Gulf societies towards the

participation of women in theatre. Theatre in the Gulf States later moved on to be practiced in another space, which will be the focus of the next section.

Theatre in clubs

In general, clubs in the Gulf States were established as places in which people, especially young people, could take part in different activities, such as sports and social activities. Historical resources that are concerned with theatre in the Gulf States, such as Alrai (1979), Abdualqader (1988) and Al-Habsi (2003), consider theatrical activities in clubs to be the second step after theatrical activities in schools.

Alrai (1976:367) traces the earliest theatrical activities in Bahraini clubs to the early 1940s, which means that Bahrain preceded the other Gulf States in practicing theatre in clubs, as it did in schools. In addition, Alrai provides some information that may aid an understanding of the nature of these clubs and the contemporary methods of dealing with theatre:

... it [the clubs in Bahrain] was too simple, they rent one or two rooms in a building to present the activities. Once they want to present a play, they ask for a permission to stage the play on an empty space near the building. They hire wood or buy it in order to build the stage in the empty space ... the tickets were up to the appreciation of audience. The female roles were performed by boys who were about 12 and 13 years old. The members of these clubs were young people and they were interested in classical plays that considered social or historical issues. (1976:367-368)

It is notable that Alrai's description does not merely demonstrate the simplicity of these activities in early 1940s, but it also gives the impression that there were individuals who strongly believed in theatre and had a lot of enthusiasm for it whilst working in difficult conditions. Although the nature of these activities and the

struggle its advocates faced, as depicted by Alrai, might be different from those found in the rest of the Gulf States, the theatrical activities in clubs in the Gulf States also played a significant role in enhancing the movement of theatre in these countries.

Atwan (1987:65) explains that the spread of sports and social clubs in the 1940s and 50s played a significant role in introducing theatre into Qatari society. In the UAE, the sports clubs played a significant role in developing theatre during the late 1950s and 60s (Abdualqader, 1988:16). In Kuwait, as Abdullah (1976:23) mentions, the interest in theatre shifted from schools to clubs around the end of the 1940s, whereas in Oman's clubs the movement towards theatre occurred at the beginning of the 1960s (Al-Habsi, 2003:39).

To help clarify the beginning of theatre in the Gulf States it would be useful to identify whether the theatrical activities taking place in clubs were different from those in schools, and whether, therefore, these activities played a part in developing theatre in this region. Unfortunately, the answer is not clear. The lack of relevant documentation stands as a major obstacle to making sense of the nature of these activities. Nevertheless, Al-Habsi highlights that the experience of theatre in Omani clubs, for instance, was similar in its simplicity to the scholastic theatre, in terms of both form and content (2003:47). Bilal, speaking about the era of club theatre in Kuwait, states that "... this period did not add something significant to the theatre of 1950's, in a general sense of theatrical knowledge" (1985:155).

It might also be claimed that, even if there was a difference between the experiences of theatre in schools and clubs, it would go unnoticed by both practitioners and researchers. This is because most of the participants in club theatre came from scholastic theatre. Bilal (1985) and Al-Habsi (2003), for instance, indicate that

theatrical activities in clubs were often established by students and teachers who had experienced theatre in school. Accordingly, it might reasonably be argued that what happened in club theatre in the Gulf States at that time was a continuation of scholastic theatrical practice.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show the importance of the historical background of Arabic theatre by examining its development and cross-fertilisation throughout the region. This, as this thesis believes, will assist the reader in locating the main subject, Saudi theatre in its context, and will pave the way for an understanding of one part by providing a brief overview of the whole. In order to provide an introductory background of the history of the Arabic theatre, this chapter assessed the importance of the debates between theatre scholars about the Arabic theatre. This provides a significant overview regarding the relationship between theatre and the Arabic culture: whether it existed or not, and what existed and what did not. An understanding of this debate helps clarify this issue. Furthermore, by discussing the explanations that have been provided by some researchers in terms of the absence of theatre in the Arabic culture, the chapter argues that the only explanation for the absence of theatre in the Arabic culture was the lack of cultural contact and other explanations seem to be irrelevant.

Since this chapter shows that theatre, in western style and form, has influenced the Arabic world and established strong foundations, it has been important to provide the reader with a short explanation of how it began in the Arabic world and, particularly, how the first three pioneers faced difficulty in introducing this art into their societies. In addition, due to the role of Egyptian theatre in influencing the Arabic theatre, the

chapter has attempted to shed some light on theatre in Egypt. Finally, the beginning of theatre in the Gulf States, both as a part of the Arabic theatre and because of its importance for the subject of this thesis, has been considered as part of an introduction to the history of Saudi theatre

Chapter Two

Saudi Arabia: Historical, Social and Cultural Background

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the historical, religious, and social context of Saudi Arabia. This is essential because it will assist the reader in understanding the nature and the circumstances of the Saudi theatre movement in this period. In this chapter essential information regarding Saudi Arabia will be presented, along with discussions of the influence of religion on Saudi society and the social and cultural development of Saudi society.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established by King Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul-Arahman al Saud in 1932. After spending nearly thirty years fighting to unify the region under his leadership, he announced the final name of his kingdom "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" (Alothaimen, 2007:308). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was described by Lipsky as "...the creation of King Ibn Saud" (1959:8), which refers to the vital role played by King Abdul-Aziz to unify the country. Saudi Arabia is the name recognized by the international world; the word *Saudi* refers to the family name of the king, al Saud, and *Arabia* refers to the Arab world which asserts that this country is part of the Arab nation.

Saudi Arabia extends over 2,150,000 square kilometres, and covers roughly eighty per cent of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered on the north by Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait; to the east by the Arabian Gulf and Qatar; to the southeast by the United Arab Emirates and Oman; to the south by Yemen; and to the west by the Red Sea (see

Figure 2). The main language of the kingdom is Arabic. Islam is the only religion in Saudi Arabia, as the practice of other religions is prohibited. However, it is misleading to simply say that the religion in Saudi Arabia is Islam. Since Islam has different interpretations and has been practiced in different ways among those living in the Islamic world, it is important to shed light on the nature of Islam in Saudi Arabia and this deserves a separate section.



- Figure 2: The map of Saudi Arabia (Source: Saudi-US Relations Information Service, 2009)

Islam in Saudi Arabia

William Shepard provides an appropriate explanation of the word *Islam* with which to begin this discussion. He points out that

we may understand the word ‘Islam’ at three levels. At the most basic level it means submitting or committing oneself to God, essentially an inward mental action thought with outward consequence. The one who does this is termed a

Muslim. This was the early meaning of Islam and Muslim. At the second level Islam refers to a religion, that is, a system of beliefs and practices believed to be ordained by God, and Muslims are the adherents of this religion. At the third level Islam may refer to a culture and civilization, indeed several cultures and civilizations, created by Muslims over the course of time but also shared by many non-Muslims (2009:2).

The first meaning provided by Shepard is unlikely to create disagreement in the Muslim world as it presents the literal meaning of the word Islam in the Arabic language. However, the second meaning should be considered seriously as it allows for a better understanding of the nature of Islam and the differences in interpretation among those in the Islamic world. Indeed, the interpretation of the instructions of Islam and its practice has led to different views of Islam in various Islamic countries. The third definition, Islam as a culture, contains several elements including beliefs, ideas, and practices in light of the broad sense of culture.

The different practices, as Neal Robinson points out when he advises his readers visiting Islamic countries to "... expect a good deal of variety in the beliefs and practices of Muslims" (1999:13), are evident to those who travel from one Islamic country to another. I can say with great confidence, as a Muslim who was born in Saudi Arabia and has visited some Arabic countries in which the majority of people are Muslims, such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bahrain, and Oman, that the practice of Islam is different in each place. Furthermore, inside a country like Saudi Arabia, it is true that the practice of Islam is different in different regions. For instance, the beliefs and practice of Islam among the Shi'ite sect in Qateef, located in the east of Saudi Arabia, are not the same as the majority of the population in the rest of the country, who are Sunni.

The main sects of Islam are Sunni and Shiah. The majority of Muslims in the Islamic world are Sunni (Blanchard, 2011a:1, Shepard, 2009:108, Robinson, 1999:163). The Sunnis are identified in the Arabic, according to Shepard, as "... *ahl al-sunna wl-jama'a* (people of the Sunna and the main-line community)" (2009:108). Saudi Arabia follows the Sunni sect. Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to rely on this simple description, since the Sunni are divided into several sub-sects or schools (called *mathahib* in the Arabic language). Therefore, it is important to offer a brief discussion of these sub-sects.

Christopher M. Blanchard briefly summarises the main schools of Sunni as follows:

The four legal schools, which vary on certain issues from strict to broad legal interpretation, are the (1) *Hanafi*: this is the oldest school of law. It was founded in Iraq by Abu Hanifa (d. 767 AD). It is prevalent in Turkey, Central Asia, the Balkans, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh; (2) *Maliki*: this was founded in the Arabian peninsula by Malik ibn Anas (d. 795 AD). It is prevalent in North Africa, Mauritania, Kuwait, and Bahrain; (3) *Shafii*: this school was founded by Muhammad ibn Idris al Shafi'I (d. 819 AD). It is prevalent in Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, part of Yemen, Indonesia, and Malaysia; and (4) *Hanbali*: this was founded by Ahmad [ibn] Hanbal (d. 855 AD). It is prevalent in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, part of Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (2011b:5).

Saudi Arabia follows the Hanbali school, which has been described in different ways. For instance, Wayne Bowen described it as "... the most conservative of the four major schools of Islamic law..." (2008:69), though Natana Delong mentions that it was described as "... extremist, rigid, exclusivist, fanatical and intolerant..." (2004:83). Since the Hanbali school has been applied, for hundreds of years, in different Islamic societies and countries including Saudi Arabia, it appears difficult to deny or accept such descriptions without a comprehensive study of this school that meets two central

conditions. The first one is studying and investigating all of the ideas, opinions, and attitudes of Ahmad ibn Hanbal who was the founder of this school. The second is distinguishing the ideas, opinions, and attitudes that belong to those scholars who have followed ibn Hanbal and interpreted his ideas and opinions from the original teaching of ibn Hanbal.

The Hanbali school in the Arab peninsula, before the establishment of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia 1932, was reshaped and interpreted by Shaikh Mohamad ibn Abd-Alwahab in the eighteenth century. His ideas, opinions, and attitudes are the basis of the Wahabism religious movement. In his definition of the word *Wahabazim*, Habib links it to the Hanbali school. He explains that "[b]y 'Wahhabism' I mean the Hanbali school of jurisprudence as reflected in the writings and teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab" (2009:57). Interestingly, *Wahabism* refers to the name of Shaikh Mohamad ibn Abd-Alwahab. In contrast, the Wahabbis themselves, as highlighted by Shaw and Long, "reject the term as focusing more on the founder than on God and prefer the term '*Muwahhidin*,' or 'Unitarians'" (1982:87).

However, Whabbism has been given great attention in media, academia, and the public arena since the 9\11 attack. Certainly, the historical context as well as the ideas and attitudes of this movement require the attention of a comprehensive and objective study. Indeed, as was mentioned with regard to the Hanbali school, no one can be certain, more than two hundred years after the launch of this movement, whether it consists merely of Ibn Abd-Alwahab's ideas, or has been reinterpreted by his followers.

It is most important, for the purposes of this thesis, to concentrate on the nature of its beginning and its impact on Saudi society, including the strong relationship with the

ruling family and the ideas and attitudes that influenced the development of theatre in Saudi Arabia.

1744 was a remarkable date for the religious movement of Ibn Abd-Alwahab and the history of Saudi Arabia; in this year Ibn Abd-Alwahab and Mohammad Ibn Saud, the founder of first Saudi state in the centre of the Arab peninsula, agreed to a religious-political alliance that, it is fair to say, changed the face of the Arab peninsula. This alliance, to use Delong's phrase, was "sealed by a mutual oath swearing (*bayah*) of loyalty" (2004:34). Delong provides a summary of the nature of this alliance, as follows:

Ibn Abd-Alwahab was responsible for religious matters and was in charge of political and military issues. Ibn Abd-Alwahab promised not to interfere with Mohammad Ibn Saud's state consolidation and Mohammad Ibn Saud promised to uphold Ibn Abd-Alwahab's religious teachings (2004:34-35).

It seems that this agreement permitted religion, Ibn Abd-Alwahab's vision of Islam, to play a major role in the shape and future of the first Saudi state. Madawi Al-Rasheed argues that this alliance "... set the scene for the emergence of a religious emirate in the central Arabia" (2010:17). Furthermore, it is important to mention that this alliance, in its form and content, gave the ideas of Ibn Abd-Alwahab great power in the Arab peninsula, not merely because of the ideas themselves, but because of the political and military support of Mohammad Ibn Saud. Besides, in the Arab peninsula, the birthplace of Islam, no one can suspect that a political and military movement that fights for Islam, according to the vision of Ibn Abd-Alwahab of course, would not succeed. Al-Rasheed (2010:34), Bowen (2008:70), Shaw and Long (1982:87), and al-Dakhil (2009:23) agree that the religious feature of this alliance benefited Mohammad Ibn Saud by increasing his territory in the region. Most importantly, as Blanchard

points out, this alliance "... formed the basis for a close political relationship between their descendants that continues today" (2011:12). Hence, this brief discussion of the strong beginning of Ibn Abd-Alwahab's movement should clarify its influence on subsequent Saudi states.

In 1902, King Abd-Alaziz bin Abdu-Alrahman al Saud, the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, began his long journey of fighting to establish the Kingdom, as Al-Rasheed mentions, with "a new holy alliance" (*bayah*) with religious authority (followers of Ibn Abd-Alwahab) in Riyadh, which later became the capital city of the Kingdom (2010:54). She notes that this new alliance had the same significance as the old one in 1744 (Al-Rasheed 2010:54-55). It reemphasizes the vision of Mohammad ibn Abd-Alwahab as the only official view of Islam in Saudi Arabia. This vision was held by religious figures in Najd, in the middle part of Saudi Arabia, the area in which Riyadh is located. In addition, it distinguishes the religious scholars (*Ulama*) as an influential power in Saudi Arabia. Ibraheem Shehbi mentions that, in reality, the authority in Saudi Arabia has been held by two parties: the Royal family and the religious scholars (2011:18). He adds that "... each party completes the other and sometimes one party expands its influence upon the other, but neither has dominated the other. In general, the two parties have walked in parallel since the agreement in 1744" (Shehbi 2011:18). It is understood from Shehbi's words that the religious scholars participated implicitly in ruling Saudi Arabia. Hence, it is not surprising that the religious scholars' ideas have impacted Saudi Arabia. Mudawi Al-Rasheed points out that "the social values and political tradition of Najd were generalized to the whole country after 1932" (2010:6). Yahya Al-Hefdhy makes clear that "The Ulama (religious scholars) have a considerable influence on Saudi government. Their presence is felt in education, the legal life, and the social life of the Kingdom"

(1996:27). In order to understand the influence of Saudi religious scholars on the Saudi state, it is essential to provide the reader with an overview of some of the main ideas of the Saudi religious scholars that have played a major role in shaping the cultural and social life of Saudi society.

The influence of Saudi Religious Scholar on Saudi Society

The Saudi religious scholars (*Ulama*) have restrictive opinions towards the nature of Saudi society which distinguish them from other Islamic scholars. It is not an overstatement, therefore, to argue that some of the Ulama's opinions or *fatawas*³ have prevented Saudi society from accelerating the process of development in the modern world. Abdullah Alwashmy mentions some of the Ulama's ideas and opinions that played a central role in slowing down the policy of developing Saudi Arabia as compared to other Arabic or Gulf countries (2009:33). He clarifies that some of the main Ulama in Saudi Arabia described the Arab teachers who arrived in the country for the sake of teaching Saudi people in schools at the founding of Saudi Arabia as disbelievers (Alwashmy 2009: 35). Besides, the Ulama extended the description of disbelievers to include Saudi people who travelled abroad for trading or studying and people who learned the modern sciences (Alwashmy 2009). Hafith Wahbah adds that the implementation of modern sciences and foreign languages were resisted by the Saudi Ulama because of their belief that they are against the instructions of Islam (cited in Shehbi 2011:55). It can be argued, therefore, that these ideas could help to prevent Saudi people from appreciating and valuing the importance of modernity and the new sciences which, consequently, will delay the development of Saudi society. The influence of these sorts of ideas lies in the nature of Saudi society as a religious society. Mohammed Alsaif points out that religion plays a central role in the life of

³ - A Fatawa is a statement that issued by one or more one religious scholar regarding a specific issue facing people related to a religious or other field.

Saudi society and its influence extends to organizing and controlling the social, economic, and political aspects of Saudi Arabia (2003:154). In addition, Theeb Aldossery asserts that in Saudi Arabia "... economic and social developments were based mainly on Islamic law as the main source of legislation and regulation, [therefore] Sharia law applies to all aspects of life..." (2013:22). Furthermore, the influence of the religious scholars' ideas and opinions is founded on the Saudi people's belief in the religious figures as leading and authoritative figures who understand and have the capacity to interpret Islam's instructions. Moreover, the lack of education and knowledge helped to spread ignorance, especially during the establishment of Saudi Arabia; this played a significant role in blinding Saudis to other kinds of knowledge beyond the decisions and opinions of Saudi religious scholars (Ulama).

Two examples are enough to show the influence of Saudi religious scholars upon the development of Saudi society. The first example is the resistance of Saudi religious scholars to the establishment of Television in Saudi Arabia. According to Tajadeen (2012) the establishment of Saudi television was resisted by some religious people who appealed to King Faisal to intervene, but the king convinced the religious people that these inventions were important and that they would not cause problems in Saudi society. It is important to mention that religious people were concerned about Saudi television because they were did not accept new aspects of modernity that were unknown to Saudi culture. For example, as Tajadeen (2012) mentions some religious people used arms to attack the television production building, but they did not succeed. One of the king's nephews was among the attackers and he was killed in this conflict. Later, one of his brothers assassinated the king in 1975. The attitude that led to such acts of violence led the Saudi government to concentrate on Islamic television programmes during the sixties, such as recitation of the Quran, the speech of Prophet

Mohammad, and the news (Tajdeen 2012). This focus reduced other cultural and social programmes from other countries that would have enhanced the knowledge of the Saudi people and allow them to experience the lives of other societies. In late 1979, a group of religious people under the leadership of Johaiman Alotaibi invaded the holy mosque in Mecca and occupied it for more than ten days; this resulted in the deaths and injuries of a number of pilgrims. The main motivations for this invasion, as explained by Johaiman, were the existence of radio, television, and cinema in Saudi Arabia (Shehbi 2011:47). As a result, King Khalid ibn Abdulaziz, the king of Saudi Arabia from 1975 to 1982, banned the appearance of women on Saudi television (Shehbi 2011:55).

The second example of the impact of Saudi Ulama upon Saudi society is the delay of establishing women's education in Saudi Arabia. According to some historical resources the education of women was absent in Saudi Arabia, except for the traditional method of education, which was known as *Katateeb*, and a few private schools for girls (Refaiy and Younes 1978:146; Albaker 1988:24-25). Officially, women's education began in 1960, twenty-eight years after the establishment of Saudi Arabia and the spread of boy's education. The attitude of the Saudi Ulama was the main factor behind the delay in establishing women's education. In the Fatawa issued by the head Saudi Ulama, Shaikh Mohammed ibn Abdulwahab, in 1957, he declares that "... with regard to the girlss schools, we are insisting on the ban of it and we are continuing to ban it" (cited in Alwashmy 2009:176). In addition, the authorization of women's education that was issued by King Saud, the king of Saudi Arabia from 1953 to 1966, in 1960 refers to the approval of Ulama as the main reason for allowing the establishment of women's education. King Saud's announcement mentions that establishing women's education is based upon the desire of Saudi Ulama to open

schools for teaching girls the religious science and other sciences that do not conflict with religion (cited in Alwashmy 2009:27). Moreover, according to the announcement of King Saud (cited in Alwashmy 2009:27), the policy of women's education and its responsibilities were given to a committee of Saudi religious scholars under the supervision of Shaikh Mohammed ibn Ibraheem (cited in Alwashmy 2009:27). The education of Saudi women, therefore, for many years was mainly associated with teaching the science of Islam with little teaching other modern sciences.

The attitude of Saudi Ulama to women's education, however, is one example of the general attitude of Saudi Ulama to women in Saudi Arabia which played major role in preventing Saudi women from contributing to the society. This attitude, therefore, will be noticeable in the physical absence of Saudi women in the history of Saudi theatre. In the following paragraphs, it essential to present a brief view of the attitude of Saudi Ulama toward women and their roles in Saudi society, as well as the attitude of Ulama toward the art of theatre.

The Ulama's Attitude toward Women

The previous head of Saudi religious scholars, Shaikh Abdualziz ibn Baz, mentions that "the woman Muslim has respected status in Islam and a great influence upon the live of Muslims. She is the first school that plays a role in building the good society, if she behaves in the light of the instructions of Quran and the method of prophet Mohammed" (1990:348). This seems to be a general statement about the status of women in the entire Islamic world that no scholar can argue against, but in reality, the Ulama in Saudi Arabia intend to express restrictive opinions toward women in Saudi Arabia that distinguish the status of women in Saudi Arabia from women in the other Islamic countries. To begin with, the Ulama in Saudi Arabia hold two important

opinions regarding women that can shed light upon the status of women in Saudi Arabia.

The first perspective is regarding the formal address of women in society. While *hijab* is an essential aspect of women's dress in Islam, and many Islamic scholars agree that all Muslim women must wear *hijab*, the Saudi religious scholars seem to be the only ones who enforce the rule that women in Saudi Arabia must cover their bodies, including the face, with the *hijab*. Sheikh Ibn Baz (1991:355-356) and other chief scholars such as Sheikh Mohamed Ibn Othaimeen (1999:24), Shaikh Salih Alfawzan (2003: 599-601), Bakr Abo Zaid (2000:29), and Abdullah Aljaralah (n.d:47) have expressed their views regarding the importance of women covering their faces and urge Muslim women to respond to this view by wearing the Islamic *hijab*. In contrast to religious scholars in Saudi Arabia, other Islamic religious scholars have agreed that women's faces are not an obligatory part of the Islamic *hijab*, and that therefore, women are allowed to show their faces. Sheikh Mohammed Nassir Aldeen Alalbani, a famous Islamic scholar, argues that according to several speeches and instructions of Prophet Mohammad, the woman's face is not part of the Islamic *hijab* (1965:6). Among the Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia is the only country that forces women to cover their faces and this is based upon the interpretation of Saudi religious scholars that differs from the views held by other religious scholars in the Islamic world.

The second important belief held by the Ulama concerns *Alekhtelat*, or the presence of women and men, who are not close relatives, in private or public places. The religious scholars in Saudi Arabia forbid the presence of women and men in one place; the chief religious scholars in Saudi Arabia are among those to make this ruling and they include Mohamed ibn Ibraheem (cited in Im Anas 1998:17-29), Ibn Baz (1989:18), Bakr Abo Zaid (2000:97), and Alfawzan (2003:602). The prohibition of *Alekhtelat*

includes many different places such as schools, work, conferences, and public meetings (Abo Zaid 2000:97; Ibn Ibraheem, cited in Im Anas 1998:17). This, however, limits the freedom of Saudi women and their opportunities to work and contribute to society as a whole. To accommodate the Ulama's ruling regarding *Alekhtelat*, Saudi council workers have created jobs for women that allow them to work in a place that is separated from men (cited in Aljarbua and Almuhaishn 2010:83).

According to the previous two perspectives that are held by Saudi religious scholars, it seems that there is a lack of freedom for women in Saudi Arabia and that their ability to contribute to society is restricted. Furthermore, women in Saudi Arabia cannot get married or marry their son or daughter without the permission and approval of a male member of the family, such as their father, brother, or uncle (Aljarbua and Almuhaishn 2010:59). In addition, women in Saudi Arabia cannot travel without the company of a close, male family member family (Alfawzan 2003:602). Even if travelling abroad for the purpose of studying law, Saudi Arabia cannot offer a scholarship to a woman without the approval and the company of a close, male relative. The attitude of Saudi religious scholars toward the status of women extends to prohibiting women from driving cars in Saudi Arabia. In 1990, forty-seven Saudi women, including academics and famous women in the city of Riyadh, decided to demonstrate by driving cars in the streets of the city in protest. The Saudi authorities, according to Shehbi (2011:70), responded by jailing the group of women and dismissing them from their jobs for several years. This led the head of Saudi religious scholars Shiekh Ibn Baz to issue a fatwa that prohibits women from driving (Ibn Baz 1990:351) and the fatwa is still in place.

Thus, it is clear that women in Saudi Arabia have limited freedom in comparison with other women in the rest of the Islamic and Arabic world. Besides, their contribution to life and society is reduced to the marginal spaces. Therefore, it is not surprising that, as the thesis moves on to explore the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia, women are absent from the theatre landscape, whether as performers or spectators.

It is important, however, to mention that three main factors have promoted the spread of the attitude of Saudi religious scholars towards women throughout Saudi society. First of all, this attitude has been voiced by most Saudi religious scholars, especially those who are considered as leading figures; these include some of the most influential scholars in the country, such as Shaikh Mohamad ibn Ibraheem, Abdualaziz ibn Baz, and Mohamed ibn Othaimen. Secondly, this attitude has been printed several times in the form of leaflets or messages and distributed in different places to ensure it reaches as many people as possible. Besides, some of these leaflets were labelled as gifts to be freely given away, rather than sold, to ensure the easy distribution between different segments of Saudi society. Finally, some of these leaflets and messages have been gathered and edited under female names, such as Im Anas (1998), which might be interpreted as a method of reaching a female audience by using the voice of women.

Another example of the influence of Saudi religious scholars on Saudi society is apparent through their view toward arts in general, and theatre in particular. Owing to the close connection between the art of music, songs, acting, and theatre, it is important to highlight the attitude of Saudi Ulama towards these art forms.

The Attitude to Music and Singing

In general, Al-Sheddi points out that the Quran and the Hadith are totally silent on the subject (1997:35-36). However, the Hanbali school prohibits the use of musical instruments (Alqudat 1988:205), (Alghazaly 1997:166). The Saudi religious scholars, as they follow Hanbali school, reemphasize this attitude. Shaikh Abdualziz ibn Baz asserts that listening to songs is prohibited in Islam since it turns the human heart away from its duties to god (1987:24). Sheikh Ibn Othaimen also prohibits listening to music (1999:22). The attitude of Saudi religious scholars to listening to music has prevented some institutions from using music and songs in the theatrical activities. For example, in the educational systems in Riyadh and other major cities, music and songs are banned and no theatrical production can use or integrate music and songs within the production. In addition, in King Saud University, music and songs were acceptable on stage until the late eighties, at which time religious ideas were applied by many official figures in the university's administration. Their application led to a ban on music and songs in the university theatre from, approximately, the early nineties. Other theatrical establishments such as the GPYW and the SASCA have been able to continue using music and songs in their productions because they are less influenced by religious figures. The next chapters will discuss the theatrical activities of these establishment in detail.

The Attitude to Acting

On the general attitude of Islam toward theatre and acting, Baker Al-Sheddi asserts that "Both the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition are completely silent about theatre. They contain no direct mention of theatre, acting, or even imitation, either negative or positive. The absence in the two sources (Qur'an and Sunna) of any mention of theatre

means that Islamic culture does not prohibit theatre" (1997:39). According to Alghazaly, an Islamic scholar, the general attitude of religious scholars in the Islamic world consists of two points of view. The first view is that acting is acceptable if it does not involve objects or subjects that are forbidden by Islam. The second view is that acting is entirely forbidden (1997:293). Alqudat argues that acting is not absolutely forbidden nor absolutely acceptable (1988:350). In this, it seems that Alqudat can be considered among the Islamic scholars who support the first view. He explains that "the most important point is that acting is acceptable if does not include forbidden issues such as drinking alcohols, insulting the Quran" (1988:356). Furthermore, Alqudat claims that " Islam forbids the acting of the stories of myths" (1988:362). In addition, he rejects the idea that actors must believe in their roles and identify themselves with non-Muslim characters who perform actions that are unacceptable from Islam's perspective (1988:358). In contrast, Alqudat insists on believing in the characters' words and action if they represent Muslim characters who perform acceptable actions (1988:358). The forbidden issues in Islam that remove acting from the status of the acceptable and give it the status of prohibition, according to Alghazaly, include using female actors; using musical instruments; having male actors perform women's roles; performing the roles of donkey, dog, and monkey; performing the roles of disbelievers; encouraging unacceptable habits and behaviours; and representing the metaphysical world (1997:338-339). With respect to Saudi religious scholars' attitudes toward acting, it appears that there are some who agree with the first view, such as Skeikh Mohammed ibn Othaimen, Sheikh Abdualah Ibn Jebreen, and Abdualah Ibn Humaid (Alghazaly 1997:293). But there are also some who agree with the second view, such as Sheikh Abdualaziz Ibn Baz and Baker Abu Zaid (Alghazaly 1997:293). Ibn Baz, who died in 1999, was the head of Saudi

religious scholars for many years, and he was appointed as the general Moftee in Saudi Arabia in 1992. His position in the landscape of religious scholars was central to influencing many of Saudi religious scholars. Moreover, his influence extended to a great number of new Saudi religious scholars and youth religious leaders as his books and fatwas have been taught in the academic field of Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia.

The art of acting has been discussed in-depth by two Saudi religious scholars; their work is worth mentioning to further our understanding of the attitude of Saudi religious scholars to this art. The first book on the subject was written by Sheikh Baker Abo Zaid and is entitled *altamtheel: haqeqtah, tarekhah wa hukmah* (The Acting: Its Truth, its History and Islam's Attitude) (1992). Abo Zaid argues that there is no doubt that Islam prohibits acting and the art of theatre (1992:57). He explains the justification of this prohibition as follows: the art of acting is a new thing that did not originate from the instruction of Islam, and what is not mentioned by Quran or the tradition of the Prophet and his close followers is unacceptable to all (1992:29). In addition, since acting was the invention of disbelievers, such as the ancient Greeks and Christians, and it is associated with their culture, Muslims must differentiate themselves from the disbelievers by not engaging with the art form (Abo Zaid 1992:30). This justification of the prohibition of acting is based upon the instruction of Prophet Mohammad that Muslims must not follow the disbelievers (Abo Zaid 1992:30). In addition, Abo Zaid mentions that the art of acting and theatre is dependent on telling lies and presenting untrue stories, and Islam prohibits lies (1992:39). Interestingly, Abo Zaid concludes that "acting as performing, profession, producing, presenting and watching is prohibited" (1992:57). It is, however, needless to say that Abo Zaid was a member of the main Saudi religious scholars and he had a reputation that influenced many Saudi religious scholars.

The second book was written by Abdulsalam ibn Barjas Al-abdualkareem; it is called *eqaf alnabeel ala hukm altamtheel* (Enlightening on the Judgment of Acting) (1992). In this book, Alabdualkareem concentrates on religious acting as a kind of acting that, as he mentions, has been a debatable subject among religious scholars (1992:15). Alabdualkareem does not pay attention to other kinds of acting such as the educational and social acting since these are obviously forbidden by Islam (1992:15). He does not even establish the terms of his argument by clarifying the term *religious acting*. It seems that Alabdualkareem does not believe in the existence of religious acting but he undertakes the subject due to the spread of the term and its usage among people in Saudi Arabia. In his introduction, Alabdualkareem explains that "representing the term religious acting does not relate to religion, nor does it mean that it is legal from Islam's perspective, but we are approaching the subject as it becomes known in the minds of people" (1992:15). However, it can be understood that the term religious acting is concerned with religious subjects that such performances are undertaken for the sake of representing the view of Islam towards the lives of the people. This is understood from the following statement:

... I have been told by a trusted person that he watched a play in the Shariah College [An Islamic college in the University of Imam Mohammed ibn Saud, in Riyadh] which performed the status of Najed [the central of Saudi Arabia] before the appearance of Mohammad ibn Abdualwahab. In a scene, a performer prostrates himself in front a tomb to imitate the behaviours of people at that time... In addition, the roles of Satan and angels are performed in several plays" (1992:7).

Alabdualkreem provides two central reasons that support his belief that acting is forbidden. The first reason is that acting is an aspect of the culture of Greek pagans and Christians; it is, therefore, imperative for Muslims to avoid following them, as

explained by Prophet Mohammad (1992:28). Secondly, since the art of acting is based on lying and untrue stories, such as pretending to be a judge, a doctor, or a salesman and presenting unrealistic stories, it is forbidden because lying is prohibited by Islam (1992:33).

It is important to mention that Alabdulkareem was not a major Saudi religious scholar, but his book and arguments have also influenced many Saudi youth religious leaders since the book was published with an introduction by Shiakh Salih Alfawzan, who is a major Saudi religious scholar and an influential figure in the field of Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia. In his introduction, Alfawzan mentions that Alabdulkareem explains the real attitude of Islam toward acting, which is that it is prohibited (cited in Alabdulkareem,1992:2). By sanctioning this argument, Alfawzan reinforces the Alabdulkareem's attitude toward acting and consequently influences many Saudi religious scholars.

The attitude of Saudi religious scholars towards acting and theatre is extended to cover some of the drama series that are presented on Saudi television. The main example is a famous Saudi comedic drama, *tash ma tash*, which has been presented on Saudi television during the holy month 'Ramadan' since 1992, and intends to criticize the behaviour of Saudi people and different aspects of Saudi society. Some of the episodes of *tash ma tash* criticize some of the bad behaviour of religious people in Saudi Arabia, which has angered many religious scholars. For instance, the persistence of religious teachers in ignoring the modern science, and discouraging students from learning the English language, were among the issues addressed in *tash ma tash*. Also, the narrow-mindedness of religious people regarding the modernity and the development of Saudi society were highlighted by this drama. However, *tash ma tash* does not criticize the Saudi religious scholars, since it is concerned with all

negative behaviour including that of the religious people, as they are part of Saudi society.

The Saudi religious scholars issued a fatwa in 2001 that prohibits this drama. According to this fatwa it is prohibited to produce, sell, distribute, and present this kind of drama (cited in Aljuraisy n.d.:186). In addition, the fatwa addresses the influence of this drama upon Saudi society, which might lead to belittling the status of Saudi religious people, as they are criticized and mocked by this drama. Therefore, the prohibition includes "watching and sitting in a place where it is presented" (cited in Aljuraisy n.d.:186).

Saudi religious scholars do not only consider the content of drama series as a reason for prohibiting them, they also consider watching such programmes on television as a waste time and Muslims should not waste their time. For instance, Sheikh Alfawzan claims that "watching drama is wasting time for Muslims, therefore, they must not waste their time. However, if the drama contains something that is prohibited by Islam such as, the appearance of women, music and song ... there is no doubt that it is prohibited by Islam" (cited in Aljuraisy n.d: 198). Ibn Othaimen argues that watching dramas on television that represent women is prohibited and even if they do not represent women it is dangerous and harmful for the Muslim community (1999:23-24).

A discussion of the influence of Saudi religious scholars upon Saudi society, however, is not complete without mentioning a significant point that plays a key role in empowering the voice of Saudi religious scholars. This point is the attitude of Saudi religious people toward those who criticise or argue against their ideas and opinions. Shehbi argues that the religious authority in Saudi Arabia is still fighting against

criticism and it considers any criticism as an aggression on Islam (2011:15). Shehbi, furthermore, adds some examples that show the attitude of Saudi religious scholars against their opponents. The first one is the attitude of the scholars towards some of the ideas of Ghazy Alqusaiby⁴, who criticizes some of the Ulama's ideas. He was described by some scholars as a deviant, bad man and an agent for a foreign agenda (Shehbi, 2011:62). In addition, Alqusaiby was asked by the head of Saudi religious scholars to announce his repentance and return to Islam because of his ideas and opinions (Shehbi, 2011:60). The second example, as mentioned previously, is the attitude of religious scholars toward the Saudi women who decided to drive in Saudi Arabia (Shehbi, 2011:70).

In light of the influence of Saudi religious scholars' ideas on the nature of Saudi society, it is important to provide readers with an overview of the social and cultural development of Saudi society during the period examined by the thesis, from 1932 to 2004, since this will assist in gaining a better understanding of the context of Saudi Arabia as well as paving the way to understanding how theatre emerged and developed within this context.

The social and cultural development of Saudi society

Mohammed Alshreef, a Saudi social researcher, presents a general classification of the five main shifts in Saudi society. The first one, named by Alshreef as the traditional period, began before the unification of Saudi Arabia in 1899 by King Abdualaziz. The second period began in 1899 and lasted until 1938; it is called the unification period. The third period launched in 1938 when oil was discovered in

⁴ - Alqusaiby is a Saudi academic and politician. He taught in King Saud University before beginning his political career. He was appointed as the minister of the Ministry of Industry and Electricity in 1975 and appointed as the minister of the Ministry of Health in 1982. He was the ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Bahrain and the United Kingdom for many years.

Saudi Arabia; it lasted until 1969. This period, according to Alshreef, is called the period of oil. The fourth period is the economic boom; it lasted from 1970 to 1990. The final period, which began in 1990 and continues to the present, is named the economic stability (cited in Alghareeb 2010:389). Although Alshreef's classification is important to understanding the general shifts in Saudi Arabia, it is more useful to concentrate on the most important periods in Saudi Arabia that show the real social, cultural, and economic changes in Saudi society.

Scholars and researchers who have studied Saudi Arabia from historical, social, or economic perspectives; these include Alshara (1984), Aljahany (1998), Alsaif (2003), Alghareeb (2010), and Theeb Aldossery (2013). Their work has drawn attention to two major periods in the history of Saudi Arabia: the periods before and after 1970. The first period began with the announcement of establishing Saudi Arabia as a new country in 1932 and lasted until the early seventies and the second period covers the early seventies to the present. Alsaif describes the period early period as one of stability, whilst he sees the later one as changeable and associated with noticeable social changes in Saudi society (2003:22). To better understand of the social, economic, and cultural development of Saudi society since 1932, therefore, readers should be aware of these two major periods in the country's history.

The first period

Since the establishment of Saudi Arabia, and during the most of this period, the state suffered from a lack of economic resources to back the process building and developing the state; the only income was from the Islamic taxes "alzakah" that were obtained from the Saudi citizens and the taxes that were obtained from the pilgrims to the holy mosque each year (Alothaimeen 2007:317). Alothaimeen asserts that "the

amount of money obtained from these resources was [too] little for the necessity and demand of building the state" (2007:317). Alahmary agrees that the Saudi economy before the discovery of oil in 1938 was dependent on the number of pilgrims who came each year (2007:58). According to Alsalman the lack of economic resources contributed to delaying the development of Saudi Arabia (1999:29). Though oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia early in 1938, it did not immediately become a major source of income and, therefore did not contribute to development at the time because at the time Saudi Arabia could only produce a small amount of oil each year. Aljahany states that from 1938 to 1950, the Saudi government benefited a little from oil because of the agreement signed between the State and the foreign company that managed the industry of discovering the oil in Saudi Arabia (1998:46). It is important to note that in 1970, with increased income from oil the rate of development increased.

Theeb Aldossery explains an important point with regards to the nature of people in Saudi Arabia:

The inhabitants of the territory that is now Saudi Arabia have been, in their majority, nomads (Bedouins), depending on camels and sheep. There has been agriculture in oases, with dates being the main product, and fishing communities along the coastline, such as al-Hofuf and al-Qassim. There are also urban centres [sic] involved in trade, such as Jeddah and Dammam, and others (2013:18).

Aldossery's brief outline of the nature of people in Saudi Arabia demonstrates that Saudi society was originally a traditional and simple society; furthermore, Alghareeb confirms that until the beginning of the sixties the slavery trade was common across Saudi Arabia (2010:400). According to Albaiary, however, the cultural contact of

Saudi society with the world was, for many years, limited to the session of Hajj and with people who came to visit the two holy mosques in Mecca and Madinah which are located in the western region of Saudi Arabia, called Hijaz (cited in Oraby and Alamry, 2001:54). Moreover, it occurred, as Albaiary mentions, through the process of trade at the seaport in Jeddah, also located in the western region (cited in Oraby and Alamry, 2001:45). This increased contact with other cultures in the western part of the country helped this area develop its education, press, and administration more quickly than other parts of the country. Alothaimen asserts that Hijaz preceded the rest of Saudi Arabia in terms of education and the movement of religious science due to the existence of the two holy mosques, which attracted religious scholars from the Islamic world, and to the educational system that was established by Othman government before the existence of Saudi Arabia (2007:324-325).

Aldossery makes the following point about the eastern region of Saudi Arabia:

The eastern province, which previously depended on fishing and pearl extraction, has become dependent on oil; and subsequently the people of this region have been socially mixing with employees of foreign companies. In addition to Al-Ahsa, the old oasis in the eastern province, developments began to grow in a number of cities during the period of oil extraction, such as Dammam and al Khobar. Saudi Aramco (the national oil company) also began building Dahrn City, which is now one of the most important cities in the eastern province, in addition to Ras Tanura city, the largest oil export terminal in the world. All of these developments began after the extraction of oil and the migration of many people who came in search of jobs. (2013:17)

While the western and eastern regions had the opportunity for cultural contact, the central part of Saudi Arabia, Najd, which includes the capital city Riyadh, had been for many years an isolated arena because it is a desert area with few economic

resources. Aldossery mentions that "this region is mainly desert and has few oases, and it used to be inhabited by many nomadic Bedouin tribes. Riyadh was a simple city until the 1960s; it had just the governor's house and some ministries for the management of the state" (2013:17). Alothaimeen notes that ignorance was common in the central part of Saudi Arabia during the beginning of King Abdulaziz's rule due to the nature of people who were not settled and were obsessed with finding food (2007:323).

It is important to mention that the western, eastern, and other regions had applied different schools of Islamic law before the establishment of Saudi Arabia when King Abdulaziz ordered that the country must apply the Hanbali school of law (Alothaimeen 2007:311-313). It is important, therefore, to remind the readers of the main characteristic of Saudi society (religious society) and the influence of religion (the Hanbali) upon it. Regarding this issue, Aldossery points out that "the *Hanbali* school of Islamic law, from which the Wahhabi movement originated, is a pillar of governance in Saudi Arabia, and the only source of legislation and the laws of social, political, and economic development" (2013: 22). Moreover, Alsaif points out that the influence of religion in Saudi Arabia is apparent in social, economic, and political fields (2003:154).

It is important to point out that the first period, regardless of the lack of resources, witnessed the interest of Saudi government in educating its people by increasing the number of schools. For instance, Abduallah Alothaimeen mentions that the number of primary schools for boys between 1947 till 1953 was increased from seventy one schools to more than two hundred, while the number of high schools was increased from five schools to twelve (2007:329). Masah Alafndy states that there were thirty-six elementary schools for boys in Saudi Arabia in 1959, but there were one hundred

and eighty six schools in 1969; furthermore, there were four secondary schools in 1959 and thirty-three secondary schools in 1969 (1983:121). Despite these notable increase, the number of schools still could not meet the needs of people in Saudi Arabia whose population was estimated by the UNESCO at 4,890,000 inhabitants in 1950 and 5,890,000 in 1960 (Al-Shuaiby 1976:65). However, girls' education did not begin until the early sixties.

Since the fifties, the Saudi government has been able to benefit from the oil industry; therefore, it started to build the country by establishing several ministries such as the Ministries of Knowledge (became Education later), Health, Agriculture, and Transport. In addition, it started to develop higher education in Saudi Arabia by announcing, in 1957, the first university in Saudi Arabia under the name of Riyadh University, which became later King Saud University.

In the mid sixties the Saudi government established its television station which played a major role in breaking the isolation of Saudi society and allowed people to experience cultural contact through the variety of broadcasts made by Arabic countries and western countries. However, in the beginning the religious authority resisted the new invention, television; their resistance influenced programming and prevented Saudi society from taking advantage of television's potential. Ahmad Tajadeen, who was amongst the Syrian specialists who came prior to 1965, to run the Saudi television station mentions that there was no sign of dramatic movements or a plan to broadcast dramatic works on television (Tajadeen, 2012). The first broadcasts on Saudi television, according Tajadeen (2012), were recitations from the Quran and readings of the news. Due to the conservative, religious nature of Saudi society, it was not surprising for a new invention like television to start in this way. Tajadeen (2012) explains that those involved with Saudi television began to take the attitudes of

religious scholars into consideration which led the development of television to move step by step from children's programmes to music. Furthermore, Tajadeen (2012) mentions that religious people expressed their concerns about music and songs in their regular visits to King Faisal, but the king did not respond to them immediately. Sometimes, as Tajadeen mentions (2012), the television producers were asked to reduce the music and songs under the instructions of King Faisal.

Although Saudi television played a significant role in allowing the Saudi people to connect with the world outside Saudi Arabia and to explore a variety of different cultures, it remained in the hands of the government. Since the Saudi government is the main provider of radio and television programs, there no doubt that the content and information that come out of the programmes must be censored in order to meet the desires and interests of the government. Aldossery argues that "the media serves the government policies" (2013:44). He goes further to explain that "there is only one channel in Arabic and another English-language channel run by the Ministry of Culture and Information. These are the main channels to pass information to the citizens" (Aldossery 2013:44-45). Since theatre is considered as another source of new experiences and information for individuals, the Saudi government attempts to maintain censorship of its content through supervising and controlling the production of theatrical activities. As the thesis moves on to examining the productions of plays that were produced by the GPYW in Chapters Five and Six, readers will gain further understanding of the process of censorship in Saudi theatre.

Over all, the first historical period had no noticeable shifts in Saudi Arabia except the natural development in building the country which any new country would face. Therefore, it seems that Alsaif is right to describe the first period as one of stability (2003:22). It is essential to mention, however, that during the first period (1932-1970)

few efforts were made by the Saudi government to enhance the status of art, including theatre. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter Three the government did not pay attention to developing the art of theatre during the first period. This period witnessed only the efforts of individuals to introduce and enhance theatre in Saudi society.

The second period

The second period, from 1970 to the present, witnessed the appearance of economic, educational, and social development that was based upon clear policies of development (Alsaif 2003:23). The Saudi government began the first five-year development plan in Saudi Arabia which aimed to meet the following targets:

- 1- Increasing the rate of growth of the GDP (gross domestic product).
- 2- Developing human resources to enable the various elements of society to increase their contribution to productivity and enable them to participate fully in the development process.
- 3- Diversifying sources of national income and reducing dependence on oil by increasing the contribution of other productive sectors in GDP (Ministry of Planning, 2002).

Commenting on this plan, Sohrab mentions that:

Saudi Arabia's five-year development plans set modernization in process and began to cause socio-economic change; this modernization involves four sub-processes, which are as follows:

- 1- Technological development: the developing society moves from simple and traditional knowledge and techniques toward the greater application of scientific knowledge borrowed from the west.
- 2- Agricultural development: the developing society moves from subsistence farming toward commercial farming.
- 3- Industrialization: the developing society progressively industrializes, placing greater emphasis on the use of inanimate forms of energy, such as oil, to power machinery and places less emphasis on human and animal power, and handicrafts.

4- Urbanization: the developing society experiences population movements from rural communities to growing urban centres (Sohrab, 2008).

Since 1970, there is no doubt that the increase in oil prices assisted the government in achieving its ambitions to develop the state. Alshara makes it clear that "the oil contributed enormously in speeding the development of Saudi Arabia. And the input of oil played a major role in improving several sectors in the country" (1984:89). In addition Theeb Aldossery makes this assertion:

Things changed dramatically with the arrival of oil wealth, making possible the first development plan in 1970, which began gradually to turn the country into a modern state, and established efficient government structures despite the weakness of the potential national income. It began the spread of education and launched a massive campaign to combat illiteracy, while paying increased attention to health care. This culminated in the State's interest in establishing the first development plan in 1970. (2013:31)

In particular, the seventies witnessed a dramatic increase of oil price in the world after the Arab war with Israel in 1973 when the Saudi government decided to stop exporting oil to countries that supported Israel, including the United States of America (Aljahany1998:104; Shalaby1988:39-40; Alshara1984:105-106). Theeb Aldoessry claims:

Oil revenue played a key role in the strategic development process and increased the state's revenue and the individual's income alike, despite fluctuations in oil prices in those years. This allowed for the investment of oil revenue, a vast financial resource, which has helped to take Saudi society from an austere life to an economy of abundance. (2013:35)

For further clarification, Abaalkhail mentions that the price of oil was \$1.21 a barrel in 1970 but it had risen to \$13.00 a barrel by the first quarter of 1974 (Abaalkhail,

2003). Furthermore, Alghareeb explains that the average income of a Saudi individual rose by 50% between 1975 and 1979 (2010:413).

Saudi society accordingly witnessed noticeable changes from the seventies as compared to the previous period. Whilst Alshara points out that the Saudi government, intended to utilize the income from oil to develop several sectors of the country, such as the education, transport, agriculture, industry, and health (1984:46), Aldossery points out that "the greatest impact of government investment was made in the health and educational systems..." (2013:35).

Aljahany indicates that as a main source of income, oil played a significant role in increasing the Saudi economy which consequently increased the wealth of the Saudi people (1998:217). It not surprising that the changes and development in Saudi Arabia since the seventies have influenced Saudi society. Oraby and Alamry emphasize that "the total modernity that occurred in Saudi Arabia since the seventies which appeared in different aspects such as economics, industry, education, administration and the infrastructure has caused rapid social changes" (2001:2).

Alsaif summarises some of the changes in Saudi society including "the increase of immigration people to the main cities for the sake of searching for jobs and educations; the raise of individuals income which impacted upon their way of life and the increase of the number of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia in different sectors" (2003:90). Furthermore, Alsaif indicates that the role of women in society has increased since the seventies, when compared with their roles in the earlier period (2003:190-191). In spite of this increase in the role of women, women have been subjected to the influence of the opinions and views of religious scholars. Alsaif pays attention to the idea that Saudi society appreciated and valued the roles of women that

do not come in contact with men or require working in the presence of men, such as teaching in girls' schools, in contrast, the society disvalues the role of women otherwise (2003:188-189).

Other phases of social and cultural shifts are highlighted by Shalaby, such as the preference for government jobs among Saudi youth after the appearance of oil because their stability (1988:217) and the advent of the consumption of unimportant things as a social value among Saudi people after the seventies (1988:221).

In addition, Oraby and Alamry (2001) discuss the social and cultural changes in Saudi society after the seventies and explain the following:

The cultural changes appeared in the decline of the relationship and traditional values, the tribal nature such as the extended family, the transformation from the feeling of group to the feeling of individuality and the dependence upon the individual instead of the group such as family and tribal, the increase of women's participation in Saudi society, the increase of marriage from outside Saudi Arabia, the shift in the role of family and its functions. In addition, the value of education, job and wealth had participated in changing the social status of Saudi people (2001:4).

Overall, as the second period changed the face of Saudi Arabia from a traditional society into a modern society, it is important to mention that the Saudi government, as Alghareeb mentions, completed seven development plans between 1970 and 2005 (2010:409). As a result, the impact of these plans, according to Alghareeb, include the considerable changes in the nature of Saudi society; the development of education, health, transport, and communication; and the growth of the financial sector (2010:410).

Since the thesis will move on to examining the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia, with a reference on the history of theatre in the GPYW, the social and cultural

development mentioned on this chapter will pave the way to understanding the context in which Saudi theatre emerged and developed.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide readers with an overview of Saudi Arabia. In particular, it aims to present historical information about Saudi Arabia since its establishment in 1932. Moreover, it presents a significant issue with regard to the application of Islam in Saudi Arabia and how the interpretation of the Hanabli school as well as the Whahabi movement influence the nature of Saudi society. Accordingly, the chapter discusses the influence of Saudi religious scholars upon Saudi society in general and on women and theatre in particular. The social and cultural development that occurred in the history of Saudi Arabia, as discussed in this chapter, will arm readers with essential information that will assist their understanding of the emergence and development of theatre.

Chapter Three

Saudi Theatrical Activities before 1974

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with a view of the primary theatrical activities that existed in Saudi Arabia before 1974, and the attempts to introduce theatre in this part of the world. These activities consist of theatrical activities in schools; the attempts of Abdualaziz Alhazaa, Ahamad Alsubaie, and the Arts club in Alahsa to introduce theatrical works into Saudi society; and the works of Saudi playwrights, which were not staged. In addition, the role of Saudi Television in introducing theatre will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

This chapter will provide the reader with a clear picture of the journey of Saudi theatre from the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 until 1974 when the Saudi government decided to organize, control and take responsibility for the development of theatrical activities in the entire country.

Scholastic Theatre

Researchers and scholars who study the history of Saudi theatre agree that theatre in Saudi Arabia began with the scholastic activities (Alsaeed,2007:2; Almogren, 1979:20; Al-Azma,1992:65; and Alkhateeb,1990:53). Interviews with theatrical practitioners who were involved with the scholastic activities in the fifties and sixties, including Abdualaziz Alhazaa (2011), Omar Alobaidi (2011), Ahamad Alhuthail (2012), and Hamad Alhuthail (2012), confirm that there were no signs of theatre outside the activities of the schools. As mentioned in Chapter One, theatre in the Gulf States also began through the scholastic theatrical activities.

The exact date of the beginning of scholastic theatre in Saudi Arabia is a controversial issue. Whilst Abualrahman Almogren (1979) and Nasser Alkhateeb (1990) trace the beginning of scholastic theatre to 1954, Ali Alsaeed (2007:3), who is a very active researcher in the field of Saudi theatre, traces it to 1928. In this year, the Alahleah School, a private school established by Salih bin Salih in Onaizah city, presented some theatrical scenes at the end of its academic year. Alsaeed (2007) bases his opinion on a testimony by Aduallah Alsalman, a student of Salih bin Salih who confirmed that the school presented such ceremonies in 1928, 1929, and 1930 (cited in Anon., 1988:67-68). As Alsalman explained, these ceremonies included *anasheed* (songs without music), comedic plays, declamations, and dialogues. It is important to mention that this testimony was unavailable to Almogren, who conducted his study in 1979, since it was published in 1988. According to this testimony, it appears that the available recorded date of the first theatrical activities in Saudi schools is in the late twenties. Hence, it is worth starting with these performances in order to understand the nature of the beginning of the scholastic theatre in Saudi Arabia.

Alsalman's testimony revealed that one of the Alahleah School's ceremonies included a short sketch entitled "*bain jahil wa motalam*" [*Between an Ignorant and an Educated Man*]. This sketch was described as '*mohawrah*', which means a conversation between two people who argue to each other. For further clarification, the synonym of *mohawrah* in the Arabic language is *montharah*, which means debate. However, the word, *mohawrah* was commonly used to describe the sketches presented by this school and most of the other sketches presented later in Saudi Arabia. A quick glimpse of this sketch between an ignorant person and an educated person can offer an explanation of its nature and characteristics.

This sketch, which was published in *moalim wa mojtamia* [*A Teacher and Society*] in 1988, shows a conversation between two characters. The first character is the Arabian, who speaks the classic Arab language *fusha* and seems to be educated. The other character is *alaami*, which means the ordinary person; *alaami* has no educational background and speaks in a colloquial accent. The sketch begins with the ordinary person (*alaami*) greeting the Arabian and telling him that he had heard that the Arabian said that life without knowledge was a life of misery. Consequently, he asks for reasons and justifications for this statement. The dialogue moves between the characters, whereby the Arabian shows disrespect to the status of the ordinary person's knowledge and calls the ordinary person ignorant. This leads the ordinary person to defend himself and to describe the Arabian as a crazy man. It seems that the point of this dialogue is that each character agrees to accept his own way of life as well as his own understanding of the purpose of it. While the ordinary person started with a rational question, the Arabian has no intention of providing him with an answer. Instead, the Arabian throughout the dialogue intends to reinforce the idea that the ordinary person is not merely ignorant, but he is on a level below that of animals. For instance, the Arabian tells the ordinary person that "... you are a man like an idiot like an animal who does not know anything "(Anon., 1988:268). Although the task of the Arabian man, as an educated person, should be focused on educating other people and transferring the knowledge that he has to others, the Arabian character in this dialogue does not pay attention to this task. He, as the dialogue shows, is focused on disrespecting the ordinary person and proving his lack of knowledge. This kind of debate or conversation could not achieve its educational purpose, nor would it encourage people, especially the audience, to attempt to move from the status of ignorance to that of being educated. The dialogue between the two characters involves

the audience in the conversation since there are some phrases that refer to them, such as "my friends" and "brothers" (Anon., 1988:268). In addition, the audience is invited to pay attention to the conversation with phrases such as "look at him" (Anon., 1988:268). After a few short lines, the sketch ends with the conclusion of the Arabian that it is pointless to argue with an ignorant person. It appears that the main point of this sketch was to address, in terms of using the classic Arabic language, the difference between the two characters. Hence, a person who uses the classic language is considered to be an educated person and the other, who lacks this language, is an ignorant person.

In addition, there is another sketch, cited in the same resource (Anon., 1988:266), which is made up of a short dialogue between an ignorant person and an educated person. In this sketch, the two characters are the big person and the small person. The available copy shows that the small person is questioning the big one about different subjects such as mathematics and reading. He uses direct questions, such as "Do you know mathematics; do you know reading?" (Anon., 1988:266). As the big person fails to provide answers to these questions, the small man announces that it is pointless to go farther with this conversation and it must be ended (Anon., 1988:266). This sketch presents the small person as an educated man who understands the important aspects of knowledge at that time such as mathematics, Arabic, and writing, while the big person has no knowledge of it. This might suggest that youth, represented in the sketch by the small person, at the time when this sketch was written had knowledge that was not available to the elderly people, represented in the sketch by the big person. Moreover, it could provide evidence that formal education in Saudi Arabia in the early thirties was in its infancy. As with the previous sketch, however, the small person makes no attempt to transfer his knowledge to the big person. Unlike the

previous sketch, there is no sign of involving the audience in the conversation between these characters.

Although the copies shed light on the nature of the dialogue, unfortunately, there is no information about other theatrical activities presented by the school. In 1935, the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdul-Aziz bin Abdulrahman Al Saud, witnessed some theatrical scenes which were presented by the same school in a ceremony containing three theatrical sketches: *wofod alarab AlaKisra* [*An Arab's Delegation Meeting with Khosrau*]; *alaama* [*The blind*]; and *alshahe wa aldarseen* [*Tea and Cinnamon*] (Alsaeed, 2000:2; Al-Azma, 1992:66). Once again, the absence of the scripts for these sketches and any information about them prevents this research from making sense of the nature of the beginning of theatrical activities in Saudi Arabia.

It is important to mention that the Alahleah School was not the only school that was established in Saudi Arabia at that time. There were some schools which preceded Alahleah, such as Alflah in Mecca in 1911, Alflah in Jeddah in 1905, and Alnajah in Alahsa in 1923 (Alsalman, 1999). However, there is no evidence that any of these schools presented theatrical activities prior to those presented in the school of Alahleah. Since Alahleah is the only available example of the beginning of scholastic theatre, it seems important to understand how the theatrical activities had been introduced to this school.

It is significant to reemphasize the importance of cultural contact in obtaining new knowledge and achievements, including theatre, and this is a reasonable method of transferring theatre into a country or society that has no knowledge of it. The scholastic theatre in Alahleah can be considered as an example of such cultural contact. The cultural contact accrued through Salih Ibn Salih, who was the founder

and the head of this school. Before establishing the school in 1928, Ibn Salih studied in Iraq and Kuwait and worked as a teacher in an Iraqi school and then in Bahrain and Dubai (Alsalman, 1999:168). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the scholastic theatre in Bahrain began in 1925 with the work of the Alkhalefiah School. Ibn Salih's biography (Anon., 1988:40) shows that he taught in this school for a year and seven months. More importantly, Ali Alsaeed, who supports the idea that Ibn Salih had obtained his knowledge of theatre while in these countries, mentioned that one of the theatrical sketches, *wofod alarab ala Kisra*, which Ibn Salih presented in his school in 1935 was presented in the Alkalifiah School in Bahrain whilst he was working as a teacher there (Alsaeed, 2011).

It is undeniable, therefore, that Ibn Salih gained knowledge of theatre while living in these countries and that he had experienced theatre before teaching in Saudi Arabia. It is worth noting that it was not merely one or two sketches that Ibn Salih brought to his school that were the same as those presented in the Gulf States' schools, but the method in which he introduced theatre into the school was the same as in the other schools. This method was through the school's ceremony which might confirm the influence upon Ibn Salih of the experience of theatrical activities in the Gulf States.

The theatrical activities in Saudi schools can be divided into two different periods. The first period began in the 1930s, where the beginning of scholastic theatre was recorded. It ends with the establishment of the Ministry of Knowledge in 1954.⁵ The second period begins with this date when most of the theatrical activities in schools came under this Ministry's supervision; this period ends in 1974 when the GPWY was established.

⁵- *Knowledge*, as a term, is the researcher's own translation because of the close similarity with *almaarif*, the term used in the Arabic language to refer to this Ministry.

Scholastic Theatre from the 1930s to 1954

The available resources that should help provide a general picture of the theatrical activities of Saudi schools in the period between the 1930s and the early 1950s are the pages of the Saudi press. The main press, at that time, was made up of *sut alhejaz*, *albilad*, and *almadinah*.

Ali Alsaeed, an active researcher of the history of Saudi theatre, lists the news that concerned theatrical activities in these publications and puts it in two volumes entitled *almasrah alsaudi fi alshafah* [*Theatre in the Saudi Press*] (1997). In doing this, Alsaeed allows researchers and scholars to find the press news about theatrical activities gathered in one book rather searching through papers published many years ago. However, the work of Alsaeed merely lists the news about the theatrical activities in Saudi Arabia without adding comments, explanations, or interpretations. This means that the task of interpreting these activities is left to the reader. This thesis, therefore, will attempt to explain and interpret the information that is provided by Alsaeed's work.

The Saudi publications mentioned above were concerned with different cultural, political, and social affairs. The news that was published in the press regarding the theatrical activities in Saudi Arabia mentioned the activities that were produced by schools. This suggests that the theatrical activities, during the period above, were not produced outside the schools. It is reasonable to assume that if there were theatrical activities outside the schools, the press would have paid attention to its existence, as they did with the scholastic activities. Most of the news concerned the schools located in the western part of the country, which includes the cities of Mecca, Almadinah, and Jeddah. This can be explained by the fact that the press were located in the western

part of the country and might have had difficulties in covering the news of other parts of it.

The theatrical activities of schools from the 1930s to 1954 were presented as a part of the schools' ceremonies, whether the ceremonies took place because of the end of the academic year or for different reasons. For instance, Alnajah's school in Almadinah presented a ceremony in 1935 celebrating the first anniversary of its establishment; in 1941, the orphanage school in Mecca presented a ceremony in honour of the king of Saudi Arabia; and in 1946, the Saudi school in Alghonfithah presented a ceremony in honour of the prince of the city (Alsaeed, 1997:2, 6-7, 8). However, being a part of a ceremony does not mean that the function of the theatrical activities is limited to providing entertainment. The news reports listed by Al-Saeed show that theatre in the schools attempted to shed light on the issues and affairs that concerned Saudi society. For instance, the issue of ignorance dominated most of the theatrical activities during the thirties. It was rare to find a school's ceremony that did not include a sketch about the importance of education. Examples which support this idea can be found in the ceremonies of the school of Alnajah in Almadinah City in 1935, the school of *Tahtheer albaath* [*Preparing for Studying Abroad*] in Mecca in 1936, the school of Alahsa in 1941, and the school of Alnajah in Jeddah 1946. The lack of education in Saudi Arabia during the period between 1930 and the 1940s has been highlighted by some researchers. Abduaalah Alothaimeen indicates that education was almost absent in the nomadic population and was little known in the population who lived in cities (2007:323). Thus, it is not surprising that many of the theatrical activities in schools across Saudi Arabia were concerned with this issue. However, this might suggest that the function of theatre during this period was that of an educational tool in the first place. The second issue that dominated the theatrical activities is the stories from

Islamic history. A few of the schools included plays from Islamic history, such as Alnajah in Mecca 1946, the school of Jazan in 1941, and the orphanage school in Mecca. In Riyadh three schools contributed to a ceremony that was held in the residence of the grown prince; the three schools presented three historical plays.

In this period it seems important to pay attention to one school that was different from the mainstream at that time. This school is *Tahtheer albaath* [*Preparing for Studying Abroad*], which was established in Mecca 1937. The school was the first modern high school in Saudi Arabia (Alsalman, 1999:162-163). The purpose of this school was to prepare Saudi students for studying abroad in different specializations. In this respect, the most important point is that the teaching staff were comprised of qualified teachers brought from Egypt. This school presented theatrical activities in its ceremonies which seemed different from other schools. In its first year, as described by Almadenah, the school presented two plays in its academic ceremony. The first play, written by Adeualmajeed Abu Hamid, a teacher in the school, was presented in English (cited in Alsaeed, 1997:4). It was unusual for a Saudi Arabian school at that time to present a play in English since Saudi education was still in its infancy and staging a play in English seems to be proceeding in the common practice of theatre, though theatre had not yet been strongly established. The second play presented by this school was in six acts and was concerned with the issue of ignorance amongst Saudi youth (cited in Alsaeed, 1997:4). It should be noted that most of the Saudi schools in the period mentioned above presented only short sketches and plays. Presenting a play in six acts, as this school did, distinguishes the practice of theatre in this school from the other Saudi schools. It reveals the importance of theatre in the school's activities. As mentioned before, two plays, one in English and the other in six acts, requires a great amount of time and practice on the part of the students before

they are ready to present them to the audience. It appears, therefore, that some of the Egyptian teachers had an influence on the nature of the theatrical activities in this school.

After the establishment of the Ministry of Knowledge

During the early 1950s, the Saudi government began to develop the country by establishing its Ministries. Each ministry managed a specific section of the government and was developed from the old administrations. For instance, the administration of health, agriculture, and transport became the Ministry of Health, Agriculture, and Transport. Consequently, the Ministry of Knowledge replaced the knowledge administration in December 1953.

The Ministry of Knowledge began by establishing several administrations. This led to the establishment of the Sports and Social Administration which, in 1954, planned, managed, and supervised Saudi Arabia's schools' activities (Anon., 1999:307). Interestingly, the priority given to sports in its name reflected, from the Ministry's perspective, the importance of sports activities and the spread of other activities such as cultural and theatrical activities. According to Saudi Arabia's *Encyclopedia of the History of Education* (1999:307), published by the Ministry of Education, this administration's main achievements, in the first few years, were holding the first conference of Sport Education in 1955 and, in 1957, appointing inspectors in the main provinces to supervise the Sports Education programmes. Since, according to the same resource, there was no indication of such achievements in other activities and given the importance placed on sports activities in schools by the Ministry, one can assume that this led to the elevation of sport in students' eyes at the expense of other

activities. Hence, this step, made by the Ministry, was likely to influence an entire generation of Saudi students.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the presentations of theatrical activities and sketches continued to be part of the ceremonies presented by a number of Saudi schools across the country. To some degree, the ceremonies were similar to the schools' ceremonies in the previous period. A report from the eastern province's educational administration, published in 1961, provides some useful information about the nature of these ceremonies. According to Aldahran news articles (cited in Asaeed, 1997:88), the eastern province's schools usually presented ceremonies at the end of each year. Each ceremony included speeches, nasheed (songs without music), and plays. The plays represented events and famous figures from the history of the Islamic nation. In addition, there were short plays concerned with social affairs. It is reasonable to assume that the ceremonies presented in this province were similar to the school ceremonies in other parts of Saudi Arabia.

With regard to plays which presented social affairs in Saudi Arabia, the issue of ignorance and the encouragement of education were the main subjects addressed by the schools in different parts of the country. In addition, it is interesting to see news articles about plays concerned with issues such as the conflict of the Palestinian people with Israel and France's occupation of Algeria. The former was mentioned in various ceremonies, and the Alahiah School in Riyadh presented a play about the latter in 1959 in the acting festival organized by the educational administration (Alsaeed, 1997:46). Interestingly, there was a theatrical festival in the late 1950s which consisted of more than five schools competing for awards and each school presented a play (Alsaeed, 1997:46).

Unfortunately, there is no information provided by the press or the available research which allows us to explore the quality of these sketches and to develop an understanding of the nature of the first attempts to introduce theatre in Saudi Arabia. The loss of these and other sketches produced by the Saudi schools afterwards is the primary reason for the lack of research on the schools' theatrical activities. Alsaeed's book that gathers the news articles about theatrical activities is the main resource for making sense of and understanding the beginning of theatre in Saudi schools. It is disappointing that there are no existing documentary works or records which shed light on the nature of these activities, or the scripts of the works produced by Saudi schools. In order to provide further information about this period of the history of scholastic theatre in Saudi Arabia, this researcher made an attempt to interview some of the Saudi artists who participated in the schools' theatrical activities during this period.

Ali Ibraheem (2011) confirms that, in the 1950s in Riyadh, theatrical activities and plays were commonplace. He explains that some of the plays were taken from the curriculum and others from outside it. Also, he mentions that in two schools there were ceremonies every two weeks; these schools were Alkhaldiah altethkariah and Mian bin Zaidah. Ahmad Alhuthail (2011) mentions that, in 1953 in Riyadh, the altethkariah schools presented theatrical activities at the beginning of each year. He remembers an historical play, presented in 1956 or 1957, in which his brother, Hamad, performed the female role. In an interview Hamad Alhuthail (2012) confirms this event and thought the name of this play was '*alabassah*' a famous female figure in Islamic history. In addition, he mentioned that the play was about this figure and, without appearing on stage, he played the main role (2012). On the stage, as Hamad Alhuthail (2012) explains, there was a covered box which referred to the female

character and his only role was speaking the dialogue of the character off stage. He comments that, at that time, it was difficult to play female characters on stage (2012). This play was adapted and directed by the Arabic teacher Mohamad Alghzoli, who is an Egyptian, as Alhuthail's brothers confirmed. Hamad Alhuthail (2012) states that Alghzoli influenced the school's students greatly with his knowledge of theatre. In terms of this play, Hamad Alhuthail (2012) explains that the students' families contributed to the production by sewing and designing the costumes. He makes it clear that "as students, we managed to give the material to our families in order to design the historical clothes for the characters" (2012). This point indicates the society's attitude towards these theatrical activities and how the families assisted the schools. Alhuthail (2012) asserts that the stage was equipped fully in terms of lighting, curtains, and design. He mentions that the ceremony was held in the evening and the audience included the school students, teachers, parents, and other members of the society (2012).

In 1959 in Riyadh, Omar Alobaidy participated in a social play presented by the Albaten School. As Alobaidy explains, the Saudi King attended this play (2011). Interestingly, he explains that it was a social play about the mother's role in the family (2011). A boy performed the female role in this play in Riyadh, which might cause confusion as this is the same city in which Hamad Alhuthail (2012) claims that it was difficult for males playing female roles. However, Alobaidy was discussing a different school, so one might assume that the difficulty was not caused by the Ministry of Knowledge's instructions and rules, but rather the attitudes of the schools themselves. Some of the artists interviewed in this study mention that in some schools there was no difficulty in males performing the female roles. Furthermore, it is crucial to mention that Alobaidy spoke about a play staged in 1959, whereas Alhuthail spoke

about a play in 1957. It is possible, therefore, that what was difficult in 1957 was unproblematic in 1959. Speaking about the play in which he participated, Alobaidy (2011) mentions that there was no script and, consequently, the play was dependent on the students' improvisation.

Othman Alseni (2011) mentions that in the early 1960s two elementary schools in Altaif, Alaziziayh and Alyamaniah, used to present ceremonies every fortnight. The most successful parts of these ceremonies were selected to be presented at the end of the year. He mentions that the ceremonies' content was the same as in other Saudi schools (2011). Alseni (2011) confirms that the Palestinian conflict was amongst the main issues presented in the scholastic theatre. In addition, there were comic sketches concerned with social issues in Saudi society.

Alseni pays attention to an important issue related to the scholastic theatre. He explains that schools' theatrical activities or presentations of plays were optional and depended upon the school's wishes (Alseni, 2011). He explains that in the mid-1970s he worked as a theatre supervisor in the Altaif educational administration for two years (2011). Importantly, he mentions that the schools that produced theatre were given subsidies for this activity (2011).

Hassan Alabdi (2011) asserts that the schools in Alahsa city were more interested in staging historical plays than social plays. In 1954, in the Alkhabaz school, he participated in an Islamic play called *Khalid bin Alwaleed* about a famous Islamic figure. Alabdi (2011) mentions that the play was in the classic Arabic language and the preparation and rehearsal for the play took about six months and the production included clothes which belonged to the period of the play. Furthermore, he explains that there was a Palestinian man who worked as a make-up assistant and confirms that

the play was the main part of the ceremony (2011). Alabdi (2011) mentions a play concerned with the Palestinian conflict called *lilail akhr* [*The End of The Dark*] and indicated that this was a poetic play written by Abdarahman almul, a Saudi teacher. In general, he says, the scholastic plays were attended by students' fathers and the public (2011). Of course, according to the social convention, women were not allowed to attend.

The scholastic theatre continued producing theatrical activities after 1974. However, the scope of this chapter ends at 1974 when the General Presidency for Youth Welfare was established. The rest of this chapter will concentrate upon other theatrical activities that existed in Saudi Arabia prior to 1974. These activities, as will be shown below, were the results of the initiative of Saudi individuals who were interested in and enthusiastic about the theatre. While the scholastic theatre had been under government supervision since 1954, there were some Saudi individuals who tried to find another way and place to practice theatre far from the supervision of the Saudi government. This movement was started by Abdualaziz Alhazaa in the early 1950s, Ahamd Alsubaie in the early 1960s, and the Arts Club in Alahsa in 1971. In addition, there were some Saudi playwrights who wrote several plays early between the 1930s and the early 1970s, but these plays have not yet been staged.

Abdualaziz Alhazaa

Alhazaa is a Saudi artist who has a special talent. As it was put by Abdualrahman Almogren, he is able to produce eighteen voices, including those of people of different ages, whether female or male, and some other sound effects (Almogren, 1979:12). The most important aspect of his talent is his ability to use his voice to create a comic story that contains different characters. Therefore, it is not surprising

that a great deal of his contribution to Saudi drama has been presented in Saudi Radio. His contribution to Saudi theatre includes performing as an actor in two plays, *akhir almushwar* [*The End of the Way*] in 1977 and *qedr alsharakah* [*The Partners*] in 1979, which were produced by The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts in Riyadh.

The starting point for Alhazaa, as he made clear (Alhazaa, 2010), was the moment when he presented his story *badawi fi altaiarah* [*A Nomad in the Plane*] in 1954, in front of King Saud, the first son of King Abdul-Aziz, who ruled the Kingdom after the death of his father. As a teacher in a primary school in Aljubail city, he was asked by the head of the school to perform the story in the ceremony that presented by the school for the visit of the king (Alhazaa, 2010). This was an indication that the head of the school knew the story of *badawi fi altaiarah*, [*A Nomad in the Plane*] before the visit of King Saud, though Alhazaa did not mention when or where he first presented it.

In this story, as explains by Alhazaa (2010), he imitated the voice of each character and produced the sounds effects of the story. In the ceremony, as Alhazaa (2010) describes, he presented the story behind the stage curtain and the story was well received by the audience. King Saud was told by one of his officials that the story had been presented by one person, but the king did not believe that. Therefore, the king, as Alhazaa (2010) mentions, went onto the stage in order to see this person. The reaction of King Saud is evidence that Alhazaa was a talented individual for his age, and that his ability to imitate different voices was remarkable at that time. His uniqueness as a performer is further supported by the fact that the King asked Alhazaa not merely to perform the same story in front of the king's family in his palace in Dammam, but to join the Royal Guard of the King as one the King's men (Alhazaa 2010). After

spending a short time with the King, Alhazaa, asked King Saud to allow him to leave the Royal Guard in order to look for work (Alhazaa,2010). Alsubial, in his biography of Alhazaa (2004), does not mention Alhazaa's reasons for leaving king's service which might have been, at that time, a better position for a young person who was struggling to settle down. Nor did Alhazaa (2010) explain his reasons in a personal interview. It is possible that Alhazaa found himself working as an entertainer for the King, and this was not what he dreamt of becoming, nor how he wanted to use his talent. The next move in his life might support this explanation. According to Alsubial (2004:33), Alhazaa travelled to Kuwait and enrolled in the Kuwaiti army as an official which would have allowed him to be close to Kuwaiti Radio where, as Alhazaa (2010) mentions, he presented some radio series such as *albadawi wa aldoctore* [Nomad and Doctor], *abo karshah fi alwarshah* [The Fat Man in the Workshop], *julat almicrophone* [The Microphone's Trip], and *allsouse wa sahib alnakhal* [Thieves and the Farmer] for Kuwaiti Radio (Anon.,. 2010:38).

Alhazaa, nevertheless, denied that any such influence of theatre on his life had brought him to this craft. He expressed the view that he observed the people whom he met during his youth, especially the nomadic people. Specifically, he confirms that "I learned from life" (Alhazaa, 2010). Alsubial, in his biography, mentions that as a child Alhazaa joined the Alahleah School for a short time (2004:23). This was approximately ten years after Salih Ibn Salih's attempt to present theatrical activities. It is not certain that Alhazaa was affected by these theatrical activities because he concentrated on imitating voices which could not have been included in the work at Ibn Salih's school which concentrated upon staging theatrical sketches in the form of conversations and arguments between two characters. During his work in Aljubial as a teacher, Alhazaa (2010) mentions that he attended the school's ceremony in which

some theatrical sketches were performed. He confirms that "theatrical activities were common in schools at that time" (Alhazaa 2010).

Most of Abdualaziz Alhazaa's work was presented on Saudi Radio after the establishment of Saudi Radio in Jeddah and Riyadh. The most famous work of Alhazaa was *Aum Hudaijan* [*Hudaijan's Mother*]. During his career, Alhazaa was very well-known as an actor in radio. Moreover, as he confirms in the interview (2010), he worked as a monologist on several occasions in the theatre and on television and radio. In this role, he created nearly twenty monologues. Surprisingly, Alhazaa did not work as an actor in a theatrical performance on stage until 1977. This was after the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Society of Culture and Arts. This, however, raises unavoidable questions about his role in Saudi theatre, such as what was his impact upon Saudi theatre before 1973, and how, more importantly, did his work as an actor who tells a story by using his talent of impersonating different voices, or as a monologist, add something to the history of Saudi theatre during the period from 1953 to 1973.

Some researchers who examine Saudi theatre, such as Almogren, Alkhateeb, Alsaeed, and Al-Azma, have their own opinions with regard to the work of Alhazaa. For instance, Alkhateeb points out that "Alhazaa is a pioneer in establishing the idea of acting in Saudi Arabia" (1990:42). This, however, might be considered as an exaggerated view after looking at Alhazaa's career. As was mentioned earlier, Ibn Salih introduced theatrical sketches in his school early in 1936, and theatre appeared in different schools across Saudi Arabia prior to 1954, when Alhazaa began his work; therefore, it is hard to accept Alkhateeb's claim. Moreover, Alhazaa (2010) confirms that theatre was common in the schools in which he worked. So, it is likely that theatre in schools established the idea of theatre in the culture more generally, which

includes, of course, acting as an art. Alsaeed asserts that Alhazaa "... brought acting outside the scholastic theatre" (2000:3-4). However, it is not clear whether shifting the acting from the scholastic theatre, as Alhazaa did, was a useful step for Saudi theatre or not. One might build an argument against Alsaeed's opinion as follows: acting in school, and later in the scholastic theatre, involved the production of a complete play which developed an idea of acting as an art that could encourage people, at that time, to accept this art. Alhazaa's acting in a one person show seems to enforce the idea of an entertainer rather than the idea of an actor.

To a greater extent, the work of Alhazaa as an actor depended largely on his ability to use his voice, which is a major tool for an actor. However, it is not the only tool for acting. Alkhateeb points out that "... through Alhazaa, the theatre of actors appeared in the Kingdom" (1990:43). In this statement, however, Alkhateeb does not distinguish between Alhazaa's talent in utilizing his voice, which made him famous in Saudi theatrical activities, and the general requirement of an actor in terms of physical and psychological aspects. In addition, he does not look at the impact Alhazaa had on subsequent developments, nor does Alsaeed. The question in examining the role of Alhazaa in the history of Saudi theatre should not be limited to his talent. It must move beyond this and consider the extent of his impact. It should, therefore, ask questions like, did the acting of Alhazaa seem to be an ideal method for the Saudi theatre at that time? This might be the most significant question that Alsaeed and Alkhateeb could have asked before admiring the talent of Alhazaa.

Almogren, however, makes a significant claim regarding Alhazaa. He says that Alhazaa was able to take advantage of his talent by trying to establish the first puppet theatre in Saudi Arabia (1979:14). However, as this was not achieved due to the lack of awareness of the experiences of theatre in other countries, it might not be

reasonable to blame Alhazaa for not enhancing the theatre movement in Saudi Arabia through this enterprise. Alhazaa (2010) confirms in the interview that "... he did not work in theatre because there was no theatre. Theatre cannot exist without women and this was the difficulty in establishing theatre". Alhazaa's belief in the importance of the appearance of women in theatre is a way of thinking that was ahead of his age, therefore, he might be excused for not working as much in theatre as he did in radio because of this belief. Interestingly, Alhazaa, as explained by him in the interview (2010), met King Faisal Ibn Abdulaziz, King of Saudi Arabia, early in the sixties in order to seek permission to establish a theatre building, but he was unsuccessful. It might be concluded that Al-Azma and Almogren have provided objective statements by insisting that the art of Alhazaa belongs to the radio rather than the theatre (Almogren,1979:13; Al-Azma, 1992:68). Nevertheless, it is also an objective statement that Alhazaa could not be criticized without recognizing the whole picture of which he was a part.

Ahamad Alsubaie

The significance of Ahamad Alsubaie in the history of Saudi theatre lies in his own idea of building a theatre as well as a school of actor training in Saudi Arabia early in the 1960s. This idea advanced not merely the status of theatre that was located in schools, but it also advanced the expectations of a conservative religious country like Saudi Arabia. In spite of the official decision made by the Saudi king to indefinitely delay the opening of Alsubaie's theatre, Alsubaie's attempt to establish theatre in Saudi Arabia cannot be dismissed in speaking about the beginning Saudi theatre.

Alsubaie was a pioneer in the area of the Saudi press. He worked in *Im Alqwra* (an old Saudi newspaper and the official newspaper now), and published his own newspaper,

Hera, a daily paper published in Mecca. He was very interested in literature and history (Almogren, 1979:17). During his life, Alsubaie wrote nearly fourteen books in addition to several articles and stories. Alsubaie, as a journalist and a novelist, was close to the arts and literature, which partly explains his interest in theatre. However, Alkhateeb mentions that the idea of establishing theatre in Saudi Arabia obsessed Ahamad Alsubaie after watching a number of plays during his trips to Cairo (1990:22). The influence of Egyptian theatre was discussed in chapter one, in which it was explained that the Egyptian theatre played an important role in enhancing the theatre movement in the Arabic world. But in the case of Saudi theatre, if it is agreed that theatre in Cairo influenced Ahamad Alsubaie somehow, the influence appeared unintentional compared with some of the other Arabic countries. Even if Alkhateeb does not pay sufficient attention to providing useful information with regard to Alsubaie's experience of Egyptian theatre, it might be reasonable to assume that Alsubaie had an opportunity of seeing a variety of theatrical performances in Cairo and we can surmise that the Egyptian theatre movement might have influenced the quality of his attempts to establish theatre in Saudi Arabia.

It is important to mention that Alkhateeb is the only researcher who had the opportunity to carry out a personal interview with Ahamad Alsubaie. However, he does not go further in providing any essential information or evidence about Alsubaie with regard to his attempt to introduce theatre in Saudi Arabia. Several questions are left unanswered in Alkhateeb's book, such as did Alsubaie travel to Egypt for the sake of the theatre? What happened during Alsubaie's trip to Egypt? Did Alsubaie meet and discuss the subject of theatre with Egyptian artists, authors, and journalists? The answers to these questions, if they had been provided by Alkhateeb, would provide a better understanding of Alsubaie's efforts.

Alsubaie began trying to introduce theatre early in the 1960s, when he obtained permission from the Saudi authorities to establish a theatre building in Mecca (Alkhoraiqi,1986:40; Alkhateeb,1990:22; Al-Azma,1992:80). Alkhateeb provides a little information, based on a personal interview with Alsubaie in the early eighties, about this event, as follows:

After attaining the permission from the Saudi authorities, Alsubaie started making his dream of building a private theatre a reality. As Alsubaie mentions, he bought the required land to build a theatre; prepared the theatrical equipment; opened a school in Mecca to teach acting; gave each student who enrolled in this school a monthly award; sent people to Egypt in order to bring the facilities needed for the theatrical process ... he gave his theatre building the name of *Dar Quwraish for Islamic Acting*, referring to the famous Arabic tribe *Quwraish* ... he brought a theatre director from Egypt and asked two writers to write some plays ... then two plays were written, the first one was about the liberation of Mecca and the other was about *Mosailamah Alkathab* ... after the rehearsal period ... and setting the design, make up and costume ... something happened that prevented the establishment of the Saudi theatre (1999:22-23).

The decision on the part of the Saudi authorities preventing Alsubaie from opening his private theatre was that it was to be delayed until an unidentified date as Almogren (1979:18) and Alkhateeb (1990:23) explain. What had happened, between the permission being given to Alsubaie to build a theatre and the delay is clarified by Alkhateeb as a misunderstanding of the value of theatre on the part of extremely conservative people whose pressure on King Saud led to the decision. However, the term used by Alkhateeb to describe those who pressured the king, *conservative people*, does not clearly describe the nature of these people. In contrast, Natheer Al-Azma refers to the 'Ulama' (Saudi religious scholars) in describing those people, rather calling them simply conservative (1992:56). As a term, the *conservative people*

seems to cover a great part of Saudi society, which is a conservative society. Al-Azma, however, is clear in pointing to the religious people. However, it seems that theatre had been spread throughout Saudi Arabia since the establishment of scholastic theatre by Ibn Salih in 1936 without any objections from the Ulama, thus begging the question of why the Ulama rejected the attempt by Alsubaie to establish a theatre. Two main answers have been offered by researchers.

The first one is the misunderstanding of theatre and its value, as Alkhateeb mentions above. Al-Azma, in explaining that the attitude of religious people against Alsubaie expresses the attitude of this part of society (1992:56) seems to side with Alkhateeb's answer. However, as has been mentioned before, theatre was born in schools, and had spread to schools across Saudi Arabia before Alsubaie's attempt to establish a private theatre without any conflict between the Ulama and the theatre proponents. It would seem that if the Ulama did not understand theatre and believe in its value, they could not allow theatre to be present in Saudi schools. Thus, the idea that the Ulama's misunderstood the theatre and its value is not a convincing answer to the question. The second answer is offered by Almogren. He argues that placing the theatre in Mecca, a holy place not merely for the Saudi people but for the entire Islamic world, was a vital reason for delaying Alsubaie's attempt to establish a theatre there (1979:18). This seems to be a plausible answer, in this case. Building a theatre in Mecca was assumed to be an adventure on the part of Alsubaie. Almogren confirms that if Alsubaie had selected another city not far away from Mecca, the decision would not have been issued (1979:18). Thus its placement in Mecca seems to be a reasonable answer to the question about the delay Alsubaie's theatre faced, but it may not be the sole answer.

Despite the failure of Alsubaie's attempt because of the influence of religious people, the attempt seems to be an expected step in terms of the history of Saudi theatre. According to the description that was provided by Alkhateeb, which was based on a personal interview with Alsubaie, this attempt included both a method and financial support for founding a significant theatrical establishment in Saudi Arabia. It is obvious that providing a method and financial support was a great starting point for a successful project. The method in Alsubaie's attempt can be seen in terms of the establishment of theatre in an independent building which is devoted to theatrical activities. In addition, establishing a school for training actors is an aspect that supports the methodology behind this attempt. With regard to the financial support, it is out of the question that Alsubaie, as a businessman, would have been able to cover the cost of this project. In order to encourage students to enrol in his school of acting, Alsubaie gave a salary to each one who joined the school. No further information was provided by Alkhateeb from his personal interview with Alsubaie with regard to Alsubaie's ideas and views with regard to the school, the method of training, and the expected result of its courses.

The attempt by Alsubaie, once again, gives support to the idea that Saudi individuals, especially educated people such as Ibn Salih and Alsubaie, tried to take responsibility for developing theatre in Saudi Arabia. Another example in support of this idea will be illustrated in the discussion of what took place in Alahsa city in the East of Saudi Arabia under the name of the Arts club.

Arts' Club

In the middle of 1971, a group of twenty five artists met in order to discuss the idea of establishing a club for the arts in Alahsa that would include theatre, music, and

painting. Most of these artists had contributed to theatre in Alahsa, whether as part of the scholastic theatre or the clubs, and some had interest in theatre. Abdulrahman Alhamad, who was the originator of this idea, makes the following claim:

I love theatre and I was involved with theatre in school and in the Healthy Institution where I later continued my studies ... But two reasons forced me to think about establishing the Arts Club. Firstly, after completing my education, I could not find a place to practice theatre, which I love. Secondly, because I was working in Dammam city, a friend of mine advised me to visit the Aletifaq club in order to see the theatrical activities there. Unfortunately, in the Aletifaq club, sport, especially football, dominated the club's activities. So, I asked myself why there is not a club which concentrated on theatre or music. I discussed the idea with Hasan Alabdi who was well known as an actor on Dammam Television. Alabdi encouraged me and showed a great deal of support for this idea, which extended to become a club for theatre, music, and painting. But he insisted that I must move from Dammam to Alahsa to be close to the project. After I moved to Alahsa, we decided to send invitations to all people in Alahsa who had interest in theatre, music, and painting (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010).

This statement by Alhamad suggests that the difficulties he faced as an actor might also face Saudi actors across the whole country at that time, not merely those in Dammam or Alahsa. First of all, there was an absence of any establishment that allowed actors to complete their study with regard to theatre after finishing their education. Then, there was the domination of sport with regard to the activities of Saudi clubs which were under the supervision of the Saudi government. In spite of the existence of some theatrical activities in some clubs, it was less than Alhamad and other artists desired. Moreover, Alhamad, by confirming that he was looking for extending his relationship with theatre after his experience in the scholastic theatre,

provides evidence that theatre in schools had a great deal of influence on him and on other members of this club when it came to establishing their club.

However, as this might have been an unusual way of thinking on the part of Saudi actors at that time, Alhamad was asked if he had been influenced at the end of the sixties by other experiences, whether from the Gulf States or other Arabic countries.

In response to this question he offers the following explanation:

I witnessed theatre and drama series in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria through Aramco Television which was established in the west of Saudi Arabia at the end of fifties. In addition, there was cinema in Aramco that presented American movies. Therefore, I tried my best to enhance my knowledge of theatre by watching. However, there was not such influence on how to establish and organize a club. I wrote up the idea and presented a paper at the meeting (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010).

Omer Alobaidy, Hasan Alabdi, Ahmad Alnwah, and Abdullah Almejhim were among the artists who attended the meeting and showed great enthusiasm. They articulate their admiration of the idea and the importance of it at that time for theatre in Alahsa (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010).

In this meeting, Alhamad was selected as the head of the club because he was the originator of this idea, and Khalid Khair Allah was selected as vice-head. Moreover, three people were selected to be responsible for the work of the secretary, public relations, and financial affairs. The group decided to hire a small house to be the centre for the club. Abdulrahaman Alrraq (2010) mentions that "... they shared the cost of the house and the furniture".

The club, as Alhamad explains, "... was divided into five sections: music, painting, theatre, library, and folk arts" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). However, Omer Alobaidy, who was the head of the club for

approximately two years, asserts that "...despite the existence of five sections, the main focus of the arts club was theatre ... because the majority of the club's members were interested in theatre" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim,2010). As Abdul-Alrahman Alhamad, Omer Alobaidy, and Hasan Alabdi clarify, the club presented one party every month which started with music and song produced by the music section, then ended with a play by the theatre section (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). They also mention that there was great competition between the music and theatre sections (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). In order to cover the cost of each party, tickets were sold to the audience.

More importantly, the club did not have permission from the Saudi government. Alobaidy clarifies that "... it was adventure with risk to open a club and produce activities without the permission of an authority in Alahsa city" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). In this regard he comments that:

We used to create some advertisements for our plays in order to increase the size of the audience. One night, an officer from the Commission to Promote Virtue and the Prevention of Vice came to see me. Since I was the head of the club at that time, a request came from the main office to attend a meeting. The next day, I went to meet the manager of the centre [it was called *Alshaik*]. He asked me what kind of work we were doing. Simply, I answered that we were doing the same as he was doing, but in [a] different way. I explained that in theatre we call for promoting virtue among the members of society through acting. After he was persuaded by my explanation, he said that you are working for the benefit of society. Then I asked him to provide me with a letter that allowed the club to carry on its duties. The letter from the *Alshaikh* became the permission that assisted the club to continue its work without any obstacles (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010).

It is, however, essential to note that the Commission to Promote Virtue and the Prevention of Vice can be classified among the main tools of the religious sector in

Saudi society. This might, once again, bring the issue of the attitude of religious people towards theatre to the centre of the discussion of theatre in Saudi Arabia. Importantly, the permission that Alobaidy gained from *Alshaikh* supports the assumption that the religious people in Saudi Arabia, at that time, did not have an issue with theatre itself, and they could understand the value of theatre.

Alabdi indicates that "We started with the first play, *alozubiah* [*Bachelorhood*], which was written and directed by me. In this play there was no script, I wrote the main ideas and characters, then the actors improvised the dialogue" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). Omer Alobaidy and Abdul-Alrahman Alhamad confirm that this was the common process in doing theatre at this time and in the club they followed this process (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). Hasan Alabdi disagrees with Alobaidy and Alhamad in this statement. He mentions that "... the third play *alsabia* [*Hyena*] which was written and directed by him was written with a script" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). It might be worth noting that the lack of expertise in writing for the theatre was an aspect of the theatrical activities of this club at that time. Therefore, in the absence of documentary sources with regard to the plays of the Arts' Club, it is hard to come to a clear conclusion about the form of the plays that were produced by them. In terms of the duration of each play, Alhamad says that it was about nineteen minutes (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010).

There was an important aspect that shaped the plays and distinguish the experience of the Arts' Club from Saudi theatre prior to 1974. This was the beliefs of the Arts' Club members in the importance of the appearance of women on stage shaped the experience of theatre within the club. Abdu Alrhman Alhamad, Hasan Alabdi, and Omar Alobaidy confirm that "... except for *alozobia*, the first play, each play had

female roles that were played by men" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). This way of dealing with the absence of women on stage has been common in the history of theatre since Ancient Greece. So there is no difference when it comes to the productions of the Arts' Club. However, what was different was the belief among the Arts' Club members that each play must have a female role, as Alhamad, Alobaidy and Alabdi confirm (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). Alhamad clarifies that "... in the Arts' Club we concentrated on the social affairs of the Saudi society" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010), and this might explain the need for female characters on stage; women were a significant part of family life, as well as of the society more generally. The picture below (Figure 3) shows how woman's role performed by one member of the Art's club. In this scene, a boy is addressing the black cover that women addresses in Saudi Arabia in the presence of none relative of family.



- Figure 3: A scene from the play of *alsabia* [*Hyena*], 1972; Alahsa. It is reproduced with permission from Yousef Alkhomais' personal archive.

The Arts' Club had two major shifts in its history that should be mentioned. The first one was the change of its name after a year, from Arts' Club to the Society of Folk Arts as Alhamad and Alobaidy confirm (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). Alhamad adds that he changed the name after reading an advertisement in *Alfnoon* [The Arts], a Kuwaiti magazine, which was about "The Society of Artists in Kuwait" (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). The second major shift, as explained by Alhamad, is the transformation into The Saudi Society for Arts which was established by the Saudi government and was responsible for the national arts and cultural activities in Saudi Arabia (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010). Alhamad provides an account of the transformation into The Saudi Society of Arts as follows:

By chance, in 1972, I read in a newspaper that the General Presidency of Youth Welfare (GPYW) created a society for art in Riyadh which became The Saudi Society for Arts and Culture. As our club was the first private society for arts in Saudi Arabia, we decided to visit the GPYW in Riyadh in order to gain a permission to join this society or to be a branch of it in Alahsa city (Alhamad, Alobaidy, Alabdi, Alnwah, & Almejhim, 2010).

Omar Alobaidy confirms that he travelled to Riyadh to meet Prince Faisal Ibn Fahad Ibn Abdul-Aziz, who was the head of GPYW (Alobaidy, 2011). After this visit, the Arts' Club became the first branch of The Saudi Society for Arts and Culture.

The experiment of the Arts' Club, which produced fourteen plays, was a remarkable shift in the history of Saudi theatre. For the first time, a private society like the Arts' Club took responsibility for introducing theatre in Saudi Arabia.

As the attempts of Alhazaa, Alsubaie and the members of the Arts' Club in introducing theatre into Saudi society presents an aspect of the nature of Saudi theatre

that was dependent upon individuals without the help and support of the Saudi government. Significantly, some Saudi playwrights contributed to the individuals' attempts in introducing theatre in Saudi Arabia by writing and publishing plays. The section below will address the attempts of those playwrights.

The publications of Saudi playwrights

In the period that concerns this chapter a number of plays were written and published by Saudi playwrights. The first play was written in 1932 by Husain Saraj. The years that followed Saraj's play witnessed the appearance of several other plays, which are listed below:

- 1- *Althalim lenfsih* [*Self-injustice*] (1932), written by Husain Saraj.
- 2- *Jameel buthainah* [*Jameel and Buthainah*](1942), written by Husain Saraj.
- 3- *Alhijrah* [*Immigration*](1946), written by Ahmad Attar.
- 4- *Gram waladah* [*The Passion of Waladah*] (1952), written by Husain Saraj.
- 5- *Ala'am Sahtut* [*Uncle Sahtut*] (1954), written by Abdullah Abdualjabar.
- 6- *Alshyatteen alkhurs* [*The Silent Devils*] (1954), written by Abdullah Abdualjabar.
- 7- *Fi alail lama khile* [*The Mid Night*] (1970), written by Esam Khuqair.

Commenting on the existence of these plays, Nazeer Al-Azma points out that "the phenomena of theatrical texts preceded the emergence of theatre in Saudi Arabia" (1992:69). Al-Azma seems to touch a critical point in his statement. He pays attention to the existence of a tendency to write complete plays prior to the emergence of a theatre in which to produce plays that were based on written scripts, a practice that began to appear in the early seventies. Indeed, there was no comparison between the quality of these plays and the early practices of theatre in Saudi Arabia which were

very simple and rarely went beyond the theatrical sketches in schools. The emergence of plays that were written by Saudis authors indicates that there were some Saudi people who had knowledge of theatre and its nature early in the history of Saudi theatre.

However, it is hard to agree with Al-Azma in describing this phenomenon as preceding the appearance of theatre in Saudi Arabia. It should be remembered that the scholastic theatre began around the same time the first play was written. Hence, in the context of Saudi Arabia the two paths, the practice of theatre in schools and the phenomena of writing scripts, existed alongside one another with a clear difference in their conditions. Scripts were influenced by a particular context and set of conditions that played a role in their production which were different from the context and the conditions that surrounded the practices of theatre in schools. For instance, the authors who wrote the plays, such as Husain Saraj, Abdullah Abdualjabar, and Esam Khuqair had the opportunity to see examples of the nature of plays and how a play looks through their own cultural contact with other Arabic countries and Arab playwrights. Meanwhile, theatre in schools was dependent upon the experiences of teachers and students through self-searching, as explained in the section concerned with the scholastic theatre early in this chapter.

The appearance of these phenomena should confirm the information provided about the context of Saudi Arabia early in this chapter. Saudi Arabia, as explained before, unifies different parts of the Arab peninsula. These parts were different in terms of education and cultural contact. The western part, Alhijaz, which includes Jeddah, Mecca, and Madinah, preceded the other parts of the country in these aspects. Consequently, it is not surprising that the authors of the theatrical texts at that time were from Alhijaz.

Furthermore, the appearance of this phenomenon before the official establishment of theatre in Saudi Arabia carried with it the problems that Saudi theatrical authors and artists faced, and would face later, with the new country. It is understandable that while facing the task of building a new country, in Saudi Arabia the arts were of marginal interest in comparison with security, health, and education. This is clear from the fact that arts were not included in the plans and policies of the Saudi government from its establishment in 1932 to 1974 when the Saudi government decided to establish its first organization to supervise and manage the arts, including theatre. Consequently, it was the task of Saudi individuals, starting with Ibn Salih and others, including the authors of the original theatrical texts, to attempt to plant the seed of theatre in Saudi Arabia. It is significant that none of these texts have yet been staged in Saudi theatre, and this raises a critical question about why these texts have not been taken into consideration by Saudi producers and practitioners. However, a brief presentation of some of these texts should help to answer this question.

Husain Saraj was the first author who wrote for theatre in Saudi Arabia. According to a short biography listed in his play *alshouq ilaik* [*The Passion for You*] (1982), he was born in Altaif city in the west of Saudi Arabia in 1915. After finishing his education in Saudi Arabia he joined the American University in Lebanon and received a bachelor's degree in science and art in 1936. It seems that Saraj's education, especially as a student who studied art in the American University, introduced him to the field of literature and particularly to theatre. This opportunity would not be available for many Saudi people at that time and this could account for his interest in writing for theatre. Furthermore, Mohamad Taymor, a famous Egyptian author and critic, mentions in his introduction to one of Saraj's plays that Saraj loved theatre in his youth and participated in one play as an actor (1982:11). Although there is no

further information about Saraj's experience of acting, his participation in theatre and his educational background appear to play significant roles in his interest in writing for theatre.

The first play that Saraj wrote was *Althalim lenfsih* [*Self-injustice*] in 1932. It was a poetic play. His second play was about a historical love story between Jameel, who is a famous poet in Arabic history, and his beloved, Buthainah. This play was written in 1942. While the first play was a poetic play and the second concentrated on a love story, the third play, *Gram waladah* [*The Passion of Waladah*], which was written in 1952, combines the two aspects of his writing: it is poetic in style and it focuses on love, his preferred subject.

Gram waladah is based on a love story from Arabic history; it is about the relationship between the Princess Waladah and Ibn Zaidon, a famous poet. The play is written in three acts. The main reason why the Saudi producers and theatrical establishments might not have taken this play into account in their productions seems to be the topic of this play. Since this play is based upon a love story, it is assumed that this subject was not suitable for the Saudi theatre especially at the beginning when theatre was attempting to establish its legitimate place in Saudi society. In other words, a love story is not an appropriate subject for a play when practitioners are seeking to establish theatre in a religious society, like as Saudi society. Indeed, since women were marginal in Saudi society and were not allowed to appear as the object of love, such a play would face resistance from the religious people in Saudi society. It would make them doubt the function of theatre. However, there is another reason why this play and Saraj's other plays were not staged in Saudi theatre: women play key roles in his plays. The appearance of women in this play is significant because any attempt to exclude their roles in his plays will affect the meanings of the plays.

For instance, in *Gram waladah*, Waladah is a leading role, and her maid Laila also played an important role in the play. In addition, there is another female role, Suilama, which is significant in the story. Therefore, bearing in mind that women were not allowed to appear on stage and the roles of women could not be excluded from this play, Saudi producers could not consider staging it if their aim was to please a conservative society and to teach that society to accept theatre. Since Saraj's play appears not to be suitable for staging in Saudi theatre in its infancy, one might go on to ask why Saraj would write a play that could not be produced in Saudi Arabia due to the nature of Saudi society. The most reasonable explanation is that Saraj was writing a piece of work that belongs to literature more than to the stage. In other words, it is suitable for readers, but not for viewers in the Saudi context. Indeed, Saudi producers and establishments could not risk producing a play that included female roles as well as the presentation of a love story with a number of passionate scenes that were inappropriate in Saudi society. However, this is not to say that the play is not suitable for the stage, but it just could not be produced on a stage that was located in Saudi Arabia. It might be suitable for other Arabic countries.

Abdullah Abdulajabar also wrote a play at this time; it is entitled *alshaiteem alkhurs* [*The Silent Devils*] or *aljalsa althania ashur* [*The Twelfth Meeting*]. In this play, Abdulajabar presents a meeting of some people in an unknown place. This might be understood as a method of avoiding censorship by presenting an unspecific place and people. Mohamad Khfajee, in his preface to the play, describes it as a symbolic play (Abdulajabar 1954a:22). The responsibility of these people (nine people including the head and the secretary) is to look at problems that concerned their society and consider resolutions. To better explain their roles, the head describes these people as the representatives of the nation (Abdulajabar 1954a:86-87). The issues discussed in

the meeting include the complaints of some parts of society about the lack of healthy food, good schools, and good hospitals. The attitudes of the representatives of the nation are different. Some of them are enthusiastic about fulfilling the needs of the society and some are careless about such issues. The play presents clear arguments for each side which end with no clear decision. What seems of interest in this play is a discussion of a suggestion proposed to the group by a citizen for establishing a popular theatre. While some of the people encourage this proposal, others reject it. It should be understood that the issue of establishing a theatre might refer to the situation of theatre in Saudi Arabia. The dialogue of this play is built in an argumentative way that shows how each character thinks and looks at the issues discussed. It presents a clear picture of the differences between the characters in terms of their responses to the issues that are discussed in this meeting. In the differences between these characters the reader can feel a sense of humour that appears in their reactions to the discussion and the arguments between them.

It is important to highlight that the play shows the ability of the author to write for theatre in a different direction than that taken by the mainstream theatre at the time. Though most of the plays that appeared prior to the seventies swing between two main types, the historical and social play, this play took the form of a symbolic play in which the characters, place, and time which refer to other things; this indicates that Abdulajabar was moving in a different direction to the rest of Saudi theatre at that time. These differences could explain why this play did not grasp the attention of Saudi establishments that produced theatre in this period.

The final example is Osam Khoqair who wrote *fi alail lama khile* [*The Mid Night*] which was published in 1970 and consisted of several plays. While the plays of Khoqair concentrate on social and family affairs that faced the individual in Saudi

society, it is worth noting that women play significant roles in each of his plays which stands as the fundamental reason why Saudi producers to pay no attention to these plays. Despite the fact that none of the plays mentioned above was staged in Saudi Arabia it gives evidence that there were some Saudi authors who were able to write for theatre.

As this chapter, however, approaches the end of its exploration of the theatrical activities and practices of theatre prior to the establishment of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare in 1974, it is vital to consider an important event that occurred in 1965 and played a considerable role in influencing Saudi artists as well the experience of theatre in Saudi Arabia. This was the establishment of Saudi television which will be the centre of the following section.

The role of Saudi Television

The establishment of Saudi television in 1965 played an important role in the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia. However, before looking at this influence it is important to first consider the beginning of Saudi television. Since Saudi Arabia was a developing country, it needed assistance from Arabic specialists in different areas, such as directing and editing. This need led the Saudi government to turn to specialists from Syria. While Syria preceded Saudi Arabia in establishing television, they were not the first Arabic country to do so; the Saudi government turned to Syria for political reasons. Egypt preceded all of the other Arabic counties in different fields: theatre, movies, and television. The question of why Saudi Arabia did not turn to Egyptian specialists to benefit from their experience is answered by Ahmad Tajadeen, who was amongst the Syrian specialists who came prior to 1965, to run the Saudi television. He explains in an interview (2012) that conflict between Saudi

Arabia and Egypt under the regime of Jamal Abdualnassir during the sixties led the Saudi government to ignore Egyptian specialists.

With regard to the beginning of Saudi television, Tajadeen (2012) mentions that there was no sign of dramatic movements. Nor was there a plan to broadcast dramatic works on television (Tajadeen, 2012). The first broadcasts on Saudi television, according to Tajadeen (2012), were recitations from Quran and readings of the news press. Due to the conservative, religious nature of Saudi society as well as the influence of religious scholars it was not surprising for a new invention like television to start in this way. The previous chapter has highlighted the resistance of religious figures to the establishment of television and its impact upon the content of Saudi television programmes. In the late sixties, Saudi television started to show a programme called *Television Theatre*. Although the word *theatre* is in the title, the programme did not produce theatrical works. Instead it focused, according to interviews with Tajadeen (2012) and Hamad Alhuthail (2012), on presenting songs and sketches that served to link each song with the next.

In the context of Saudi theatre, the role played by Saudi television can be seen in different ways. Firstly, the broadcastings by other Arabic countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait, presented by Saudi television during the late sixties and early seventies introduced drama as produced by these countries as well as the work of Saudi artists. For instance, the Egyptian and Lebanese drama, especially series TV drama, became the standard of drama and the only form of drama that was introduced to the Saudi people, especially Saudi Artists who began to imitate this kind of drama. In addition, the Kuwaiti theatre that was presented in Saudi television which concentrated upon realistic forms and addressed the social affairs of Kuwaiti society became an available approach to Saudi artists. Hence, it is not surprising that in an

interview, Abdualrahman Alhamad (2011), a Saudi author who wrote a number of social plays, mentions that the theatrical broadcastings, especially from Egypt and Kuwait, were the only resources available to Saudi authors. Moreover, it is not surprising that Saman Alani, who was an Iraqi director and has worked in Saudi theatre since the mid seventies, mentions in an interview (2010) that the first play he directed for Saudi theatre was more suitable for television drama than for theatre. Besides, Alani faced a problem with the approach to acting that Saudi actors utilize which, as he puts it, was "... influenced by the style of acting for television" (2010). It appears that the televised productions of Kuwaiti, Egyptian, and Lebanese drama and theatre shaped the minds of Saudi artists in terms of the style of writing and acting. Consequently, the impact of this influence will appear in the works of Saudi artists in theatre and drama. Indeed, in the absence of other resources or institutions that taught Saudi artists about the nature of theatre and what it looks like, the Arabic dramatic broadcastings served as the only resource that was available for artists and practitioners.

Secondly, the arrival of Syrian specialists cannot be ignored in regards to the influences on Saudi artists. The collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Syrian specialists for running Saudi television did not end with achieving only this task. It meant that the experience and knowledge of those specialists would be transferred to Saudi people who work in the television industry. Consequently, the knowledge of these Syrian specialists would influence Saudi artists, especially in the absence of other cultural contact.

Finally, the establishment of Saudi television did not allow Saudi people who were interested in theatre and drama to work only in the production of television. It allowed them to meet with each other and discuss their interests in and hopes for the future of

theatre and dramatic works in television. Prior to the establishment of Saudi television there was no institution or establishment that aimed to allow such artists, whether authors, directors, or actors, to meet under the encouragement and support of the Saudi government. For Saudi artists, the establishment of Saudi television and the production of different dramatic works were considered as approval of and encouragement for the dramatic movement in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, this led the artists, with the assistance of Syrian specialists, to produce several dramatic works under the umbrella of television. Amongst these works, as Tajadeen (2012) and Hamad Alhuthail (2012) confirm, were a screen play entitled *arees min thahb* [*Golden Bridegroom*] and some dramatic series. The *Golden Bridegroom* was staged in the television building for a private audience when the play was recorded for television. Amongst the productions for Saudi television, with regard to theatre, was a play called *Tabeeb belmishaab* [*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*]. This play was staged in public and received a warm reception. It was the first play that was staged and produced outside of the schools and clubs in Saudi Arabia. In addition, it was produced by an official institution, Saudi Television, for the first time in the history of Saudi theatre.

***Tabeeb belmishaab* [*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*]**

Although the loss of its original script might affect the understanding of the way this play was written, the existence of a recorded tape will assist in attempting to read not merely the play and its plot, but its presentation, which includes the style of acting and directing and how people received it. Thus, it is worthwhile to look at what this tape reveals about the atmosphere of this play.

The play was an adaptation of a play that was written by the French author Molière. The information shown in the beginning of the tape explains that the idea for this play belongs to Molière. There is no extra information with regard to the name of Molière's play and no information about the play's adaptor or translator. In personal interviews with Ali Ibraheem (2011) and Ahmad Alhuthail (2011), both of whom participated in this play as actors, the two actors confirm that the entire group of actors participated in building the dialogue of the play. This might remind the reader of the improvisational aspects that dominated the experience of theatre in Saudi Arabia, especially in the clubs' theatrical productions. The actors in this play rely on understanding the ideas behind the scenes and improvise their dialogue and movements in order to deliver the ideas in their own dialect. This might cause difficulties in putting the name of a single author on the play. The tape included lists of the names of actors and the names of the contributors in different areas, such as designing, make up, music, and camera work. The play was directed by Ibraheem Alhamdan.

A comparison of a translated copy of *Le médecin malgré lui* [*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*] in the Arabic language, translated by Antwan Mashaty (1994), and the Saudi play shows that the main topics in Molière's play were addressed in *Tabeeb belmishaab*. For instance, the desire for revenge in Molière's play is the point of departure in the Saudi play. However, while in the original play the revenge comes from the wife because of her mistreatment at the hands of her husband, in the Saudi play the revenge comes from a friend, Ali, who has suffered at the hands of his friend, Hassan, with whom he shares a flat. Ali seeks revenge because Hassan does not pay attention to his duties in the flat, such as cleaning, cooking, and paying for things needed for the flat. It is recognized that the change of the female role to a male role

was forced by of the convention in Saudi society that women are not allowed to act on stage. In addition, the sort of revenge in the Saudi play was the same as that in Molière's play; the husband in the original, the friend in the translated play, is recommended as a professional doctor, but he does not accept patients unless he is being beaten. Consequently, the character agrees to play the role of doctor and goes with the two tough men to treat their patient.

Once again, the female patient in the original play is changed from a girl to a boy in the Saudi play because of societal constraints. As in the original play, the patient is forced to pretend to be sick and unable to speak. The patient is forced to get married against his will. He suffers from his father's wish to marry him to an ugly girl for personal reasons, while the son wishes to marry another girl with whom he is in love. The scene in which two characters come to ask Hassan to treat their patient, the mother, was the same as in Molière's play. The play ends with the father of the son and the father of the ugly girl agreeing to reward the doctor by marrying him to the ugly girl. He passes away as soon as he hears this news.

The play is divided into three acts. The first one takes place in Ali and Hassan's flat. As soon as the curtain rises, a living room is seen with its simple furniture. A sofa in the middle is surrounded by two chairs. There a curtain behind the sofa. The movement of the characters during the first act is centred on the sofa and the chairs whether they are sitting or standing. It is worth noticing that the main two characters, Ali and Hassan, face the audience in most of their dialogue. Furthermore, they move from time to time a few steps toward the audience. There was no audio equipment available on the stage and this affects the level of the actors' voices. Their voices were a little bit higher than usual, and the actors try to reach the audience by shouting in

different parts of the dialogue, though the nature of the dialogue does not require delivering the voice at its highest level.

It is noticed that the audience, which does not appear in the tape, is receiving the play with great pleasure. As soon as each character appears on the stage, the audience claps as an expression of greeting, even when the characters appear for a second time. Moreover, it reacts with laughter after the expected comic gestures or words performed by the actors, especially in response to words that are common in the Saudi dialect. On several occasions the audience reacts with applause as an expression of agreement with the attitudes of the characters. For instance, when the patient expresses his anger about the way his father tries to make him get married and the way he and his generation are treated by the traditional methods of their fathers.

The second and the third acts take place in the house of the patient's father. In these acts the stage is decorated as a traditional room which is known in Saudi society as the guest room in the house. Most of the actors stand in these acts. It is rare to see the actors sit on the floor as is traditional in Saudi society. In terms of the lighting, it appears that the stage does not show changes in the lighting and all the scenes are fully lighted.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to present the primary activities of Saudi theatre before the establishment of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare in 1974. Its main aim was to provide readers with a view of the activities that took place prior to this establishment. It is noticed that the role of Saudi government was absent during this period except in the schools' activities which took place under the supervision of the Ministry of Knowledge. However, this absence of the government role led Saudi

individuals who had an interest in theatre to play a role in attempting to introduce theatre into Saudi society. Amongst these individuals was Ahmad Alsubaie who attempted to establish a theatre building in the early sixties. Although Alsubaie failed to achieve his dream of theatre in Saudi Arabia, it shows that prior to the sixties Saudi government made no attempt to move toward establishing theatre. Other individuals, such as the members of the Arts Club, succeeded in producing theatre during the early seventies, but they expressed, as this chapter has shown, their difficulties in continuing to produce theatre without permission from the government.

Chapter Four

The Main Tendencies of Saudi Theatre, with Reference to Theatre in the General Presidency for Youth Welfare

Introduction

Most of the theatrical activities discussed in Chapter Three concentrated on presenting two kinds of theatre: historical and social theatre. These activities comprise the primary stage of Saudi theatre and they may will have had an impact upon the nature of theatre in the following years insofar as they sustain and develop the in the existent models of theatre within the country. As theatre in the General Presidency for Youth and Welfare (GPYW) cannot be exempt from being influenced by the nature of theatre that appeared prior to its establishment in 1974, it is essential, at this stage, to provide the readers with an outline of the main tendencies of theatre that dominated theatre in Saudi Arabia in general and, in particular, theatre in the General Presidency. This outline will assist readers in building a clear understanding of the nature of theatre produced by the General Presidency and its relation to this primary stage of Saudi theatre. This chapter, therefore, offers a framework through which readers can identify the nature of theatre and the main tendencies that dominated the history of theatre in the General Presidency from 1974 to 2004. This preparation will provide significant background for the next two chapters which explore in details the history of theatre in the GPYW.

Researcher's identification of the main tendencies of Saudi theatre

Despite the lack of resources in Saudi theatre, there are two researchers whose works have attempted to examine the nature of theatre in Saudi Arabia. These researchers are Nassir Alkhateeb (1990) and Halimah Muthafar (2009). Both examined several

plays that were written by Saudi authors, and classify the nature of these plays according to their content and style into different tendencies. The identification provided by these studies, therefore, contributes to further understanding of Saudi theatre in terms of its nature and the main tendencies that dominated its history.

Alkhateeb, in his book *madkhal ela almasrah alsudi* [*An Introduction to Saudi Theatre*] (1990), identifies several tendencies that appeared in Saudi theatre. These tendencies are as follows: the Historical, Educational, Melodrama, Entertaining, Critical, and Monodrama (1990:58). Nevertheless, he does not provide a clear picture of each tendency or describe its nature; nor does he explain when and why each appeared. In presenting his identified tendencies, Alkhateeb offers a few descriptive lines with regard to each tendency. For instance, he mentions that "the features of this tendency [with regard to the historical one] appeared through a great number of Saudi plays" (Alkhateeb, 1990:59); with regard to the educational tendency, he explains that "many Saudi plays can be listed under the educational tendency..." (Alkhateeb, 1990:59) and he points out, in terms of the entertaining tendency that "... plenty of the plays in modern Saudi theatre, especially the plays presented on stage belong to this tendency that entertainment is main concern" (Alkhateeb, 1990:66). Thus, it is clear that Alkhateeb does not offer rational and convincing explanations of the tendencies and that his general descriptions of them does not enhance the knowledge of readers. Furthermore, though he supports his identified tendencies by analysing two examples of Saudi plays that he believes belong to each one of the tendencies, Alkhateeb does not offer further explanation with respect to his selected plays. Nor does he mention the criteria he applies in selecting these plays. Two critical questions with regard to Alkhateeb's methodological approach to this subject were left unanswered. The first question was why he includes only these plays and excludes others? And the second

was whether or not the existence of two plays that share some aspects in terms of content could provide convincing evidence for the existence of a tendency in Saudi theatre. Although Alkhateeb's attempt to provide such identification of the main tendencies in Saudi theatre is important, his example should not be followed because he fails to answer significant questions.

Importantly, Alkhateeb was concerned with theatre produced in Saudi Arabia between the fifties and the late eighties and he considered published and staged plays. This is evident from the plays analysed and presented in his book. For instance, he presents *gram Waladah* [*The Passion of Waladah*], a play that was written by Hussain Saraj in 1952, as an example of the historical tendency (Alkhateeb, 1990:59-60) as well as *tahit alkarasi* [*Under the Chairs*], which was written by Ahamd Aldubaikhy and staged in 1984. Hence, the other plays included in Alkhateeb's book appeared between the fifties and the mid eighties.

Muthafar, in her book *almsrah alsudi: byn albena wa altowaijs* [*Saudi Theatre: Between Continuation and Fear*] (2009), devotes a chapter to examining the subjects discussed in Saudi theatre. Her chapter identifies four tendencies of Saudi authors: Historical, Social, Mythical, and Educational (Muthafar, 2009:155). It is important, however, to highlight that Muthafar pays specific attention to informing her reader of the approach of the chapter and its scope. For instance, she explains that that the chapter concerned with examining the content of Saudi plays considered only published works and excludes the plays that had not been published. Moreover, she limits the scope of her examination to the plays that were published between 1980 and 2004. In this, Muthafar assists readers in understanding the context as well as the period of the tendencies discussed in her chapter.

In comparison to Alkhateeb, Muthafar provides detailed and useful information with regard to each tendency. For example, she offers a clarification of the context of each tendency and its nature and gives examples of some plays that belong to each one. Furthermore, where Alkhateeb says nothing with regard to the importance of each of his identified tendencies, Muthafar concludes her study by explaining the prominence of the discussed themes in the published plays; the social themes are most prominent and they are followed by the historical and educational themes, with the mythical themes come last (Muthafar, 2009:224).

The different approaches of Alkhateeb (1990) and Muthafar (2009) in identifying the main tendencies of Saudi theatre, however, result in identifying different tendencies. Alkhateeb, as mentioned above, identifies the following tendencies: Historical, Educational, Melodrama, Entertaining, Critical, and Monodrama (1990:58). Whilst Muthafar, as mentioned above, identifies four tendencies: Historical, Social, Mythical, and Educational (Muthafar, 2009:155). As the purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with the main tendencies of theatre that was produced by the agencies of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare from 1974 to 2004, it is worth examining firstly the tendencies provided by Alkhateeb and Muthafar.

Though Alkhateeb (1990) and Muthafar (2009) identified different tendencies, both agree in identifying the Historical and Educational as among the main tendencies of Saudi theatre. This agreement reveals these two tendencies as noteworthy and indicates their influence upon Saudi theatre. These tendencies appeared with the beginning of Saudi theatre and dominated most of the Saudi plays for a considerable time. While Alkhateeb considers the historical tendency to be among the central tendencies in Saudi theatre (1990:59), Muthafar states that "the historical subjects were dominating the Saudi plays during the beginning of Saudi theatre" (2009:224).

However, since the historical tendency continued to be noticed in the plays presented by different establishments including the General Presidency, as will be illustrated in the next two chapters, it is, therefore, important to consider the nature of this tendency amongst the main tendencies that will be introduced to the readers later; since this will assist them in further understanding of the history of theatre in the General Presidency in the following chapters. The educational tendency, however, although it is important, did not go beyond the plays that were presented in the educational institutions. It is not surprising, therefore, that Muthafar points out that "the nature of this tendency is suitable to be presented by the scholastic theatre" (2009:193). The previous chapter presented an overview of the scholastic theatre which dominated, with its educational function, the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia. Having done this and since the thesis is concerned with theatre in the General Presidency, the educational tendency seems beyond the chapter's scope and will not be taken into account in the discussion of the main tendencies of theatre in this establishment.

The other tendencies identified by Alkhateeb appear to cause confusion that prevents the reader from following and understanding them. This confusion is caused by the utilisation of wide and unexplained terms in labelling these tendencies. For instance, the term *Entertaining* is a broad term and it is not explained by Alkhateeb to allow his readers to understand this tendency in Saudi theatre. He merely points out that "[its] main concern is amusement and entertainment ... while the majority of Saudi plays belong to comedy, it does not pay attention to the importance the social criticism" (1990:66). This brief description cannot aid the understanding of the Entertaining tendency. Furthermore, the two plays analyzed by Alkhateeb as examples of this tendency appear of no help in providing further explanation of the nature of the tendency. Instead, the analysis contradicts and challenges Alkhateeb's explanation of

the tendency. For example, as he analyses *thulathi al nukd* [*Three Men of Trouble*] he points out that while this play comedically presents types of characters who belong to Saudi society, it does not say anything valuable (Alkhateeb, 1990:66-67). Alkhateeb, however, contradicts himself in ending his analysis concluding that "the play presents the negative impact of sudden wealth on some of Saudi people" (1990:67). Although Alkhateeb confuses his readers by not explaining how this play could be listed under the tendency of Entertaining, *the Three Troublemakers* is examined by this thesis as one of the General Presidency productions in 1981. The play presents an important social problem that faced Saudi society in the years before 1981, which is the change in Saudi society in terms of looking at money as the central objective in people's lives. Despite the comedic nature of this play, it discussed a vital subject that concerned Saudi society at the time, therefore, it is not a play that aims only to amuse and entertain the audience.

The confusion caused by Alkhateeb's utilization of broad concepts, as this thesis argues, extends to the other tendencies identified by him. The nature of the Critical tendency, for instance, has not been explained. He mentions that:

this tendency is the most developed tendency in Saudi theatre due to three reasons. The first one is that it understands perfectly the role of comedy. The second is that it appears closes in terms of its content from Saudi society. Finally, it presents a critical sense of the negative aspect of Saudi society (1990:68).

Thus it is clear that Alkhateeb is concerned with the reasons behind the development of this tendency rather than with offering a clear answer to the critical question of what does the term *Critical tendency*, in the context of Saudi theatre mean? Nor does he explain how the Critical tendency differs from the Entertaining one, as the latter,

according to Alkhateeb, also presents negative aspects of Saudi society (1990:67). Speaking about the development of a tendency, as Alkhateeb does, without presenting a clear definition of it and the differences between its nature and that of the other tendencies appears pointless and does not assist the reader in fully understanding this tendency. In addition, he avoids offering a clear explanation of Melodrama. In his book, Alkhateeb mentions that there are a great number of plays that could be listed under the term Melodrama, which are filled up with blood and tears, and many of the events built by chance" (1990:64). In providing examples of these plays, he analyses *akhr almushar* [*The End of the Way*]. This play, as examined by this thesis, is a social play and is presented in a comic style. For example, the main character is a lazy person, his response to his father's and brother's advice in terms of looking for a job is a comic aspect of the play. It lacks signs of sorrow, blood, and tears, as Alkhateeb mentions. Hence, it contradicts Alkhateeb's opinion that this play could be considered as a Melodrama.

The final tendency identified by Alkhateeb is the Monodrama. It is obvious, however, that the term of Monodrama, a one person show, does not require further explanation since its meaning and nature are recognized from its title. The main question regarding this tendency is whether it can be named as a tendency in Saudi theatre or not. Alkhateeb presents one monodrama play, *sufah fi almrrah* [*Slap on Mirror*], which was produced by the General Presidency in 1984, as an example of this tendency in Saudi theatre. He mentions that this play was the first monodrama play in Saudi theatre (1990:71). As it was the first such play and Alkhateeb does not mention the existence of other monodrama plays in Saudi theatre up to 1990, the year of his book's publication, one can challenge Alkhateeb in identifying monodrama as a

tendency by raising the question of whether the existence of one play proves the existence of a tendency.

It is understood from the discussion of Alkhateeb's tendencies that except the Historical and Educational tendencies, the other tendencies confuse the readers due to the lack of rational explanation. Alkhateeb, however, could save his reader from such confusion if he considered one clear term and tendency such as the Social tendency instead of the Entertaining, Critical, and Melodrama tendencies. Indeed, the plays analyzed by Alkhateeb under these tendencies are concerned with the social issues in Saudi society such as the relationships among family members, marriage, and the high price of a dowry, as well as the value of work and serving the country. Moreover, these plays used comedy as the form of presenting these issues.

Muthafar, in contrast to Alkhateeb, identifies social theatre as the main tendency of Saudi theatre. Interestingly, most of the plays discussed by Alkhateeb as examples of the Critical, Entertaining, and Melodrama tendencies, such as *akhr almushar* [*The End of the Way*], *bait min leef* [*A House of Fibre*], *min ykamil althani* [*Who Completes the Other*], and *tahit alkarasy* [*Under the Chairs*], were identified by Muthafar under the umbrella of Social tendency (2009:163). This classification is reasonable because these plays shared one common interest in addressing the social issues that concern Saudi society and a considerable number of plays are concerned with social issues. Because this interest in social plays, however, continued to be prominent among the plays produced by the General Presidency, this thesis considers this tendency among the main tendencies of theatre under the General Presidency. It appears, therefore, that the main tendencies that should be taken into account by this chapter, so far, are the Historical and Social tendencies.

Importantly, Muthafar identifies another tendency that is not identified by Alkhateeb. This tendency is the Mythical, which is explained by Muthafar as the use of myths and their characters as the source of plays (2009:178). However, this tendency, in the period studied by Muthafar, only appeared in three plays, which begs the question of whether, given the existence of a small number of plays, it can be considered as a tendency? She admits that the presence of this tendency was weak and indistinguishable in Saudi theatre (Muthafar 2009:179), and asserts that "Saudi playwrights were cautious and conservative in using mythology and employing it in dramatic works" (2009:249). Muthafar provides her readers with the reason behind the lack of Saudi authors' interest in this tendency:

As the origin of myths were associated with pagan beliefs and rituals that are not suitable to a conservative religious community based on the literal assertion of God's oneness and monotheistic existence (Tawhid), authors evaded a clash with the conservative religious ideologies especially in the beginning of the Saudi dramatic movement (2009:249).

Having explained this, however, Muthafar does not provide a rational explanation for identifying this tendency in Saudi theatre even though there were merely three plays that belong to this tendency. This chapter, based upon Muthafar's conclusion that this tendency was not distinguishable, therefore, will pay no attention to this tendency as a dominant aspect of theatre in the General Presidency.

The discussion above regarding the main tendencies of Saudi theatre identified by two leading researchers in the field of Saudi theatre, Alkhateeb (1990) and Muthafar (2009), reveals that the Historical and Social tendencies that dominated theatre in Saudi Arabia. In addition to these, the thesis will consider another tendency, which was unidentified by Alkhateeb and Muthafar, that appeared as a result of examining

the nature of theatre presented by the General Presidency. This tendency, as suggested by the thesis, can be labelled as the Festival tendency. It emerged from the productions of the General Presidency under the influence of contributing to theatre festivals abroad from the mid eighties and dominated most of its productions through 2004.

1- The Historical Tendency

The historical tendency in Saudi theatre, as identified by Alkhateeb (1990) and Muthafar (2009), has been associated with theatre in the Arabic world since its appearance in 1847. Dali (1999), Muhabik (1989), and Najm (1999), are only a few of the Arab researchers in the subject of Arabic theatre who agree that the utilization of history appeared as a remarkable trend in the history of Arabic theatre. While Dali (1999), in a chapter of his book, *Aladab almasrahi almuasir* [*The Contemporary Theatrical Literature*], discusses the historical tendency in the Arabic theatre, Muhabik (1989) published a whole book, *Almasrahiyah altarikhiyah fi al masrahal arabi almuasir* [*The Historical Play in the Contemporary Arab Theatre*], concerned with examining the historical plays presented in Egypt and Syria between 1945 and 1975. In addition, Najm (1999) devotes four chapters in his book, *Almasrahiyah fi aladab alarabi alhadeth*, [*The Play in the Modern Arab Literature*] 1847-1914, to an account of some of the main historical plays that were written by Arabic dramatists from theatre's inception to the early twentieth century.

In the context of Arabic theatre, a historical play, as mentioned by Dali, "... obtains its material from history" (1999:55). While this seems to be a general meaning of the nature of historical plays, Muhabik asserts that " history as a resource for playwriting, does not mean presenting a historical play that investigates the past and introduces it

to people, it means presenting a play that utilizes the past to say something about the present" (1989:18).

Thus, Muhabik highlights one reason for the utilization of history by Arabic dramatists; the past and history, in itself, is not the focus, but is rather a device to deliver something else. This might be considered as merely one explanation of the use of history by Arabic dramatists as a resource for a theatrical text.

It is unreasonable, however, to ignore the first part of the quoted passage, that history was not used for the sake of investigating the past (Muhabik 1989:18). Indeed, one might ask why he excludes the investigation of the past as a possible reason for the tendency to produce historical plays in Arabic theatre. A reasonable answer for this question might be that the period investigated by Muhabik's book does not show such interest among Arab dramatists in criticizing the history of the Arabic world. Despite the idea that investigating and criticising the past has not been given attention by Muhabik and other researchers in Arabic theatre, it should be accounted as among the rational reasons for using history in general in theatre.

In providing another reason for the utilization of history by Arab dramatists, Muhabik discusses how it functioned in the beginning of Arabic theatre; it helped to introduce theatre into the Arabic world and gave it the ability to spread (1989:206). Maroun Al-Naqash, in presenting the second play of his works, *abualhassan almughafil* [*The idiot Abu Alhassan*], confirms that it was based on a story from the tales of *The Arabian Nights* (Najm 1999:367); this could be an example of the explanation provided by Muhabik. Moreover, Abu Khaleel Al-Qubbani, in presenting two plays from the same resource, could be considered as an example of the utilization of history for the purpose of introducing theatre as an art form in the Arabic world. In

this respect, Muhabik asserts that the use of history by Arabic dramatists was a method to give theatre an Arabic feature that would help the Arab people to accept theatre since it contains stories that come out of their own history (1989:28). Their resistance to theatre as a western invention was highlighted in Chapter One, which provides a historical background of theatre in the Arabic world. Muthafar indicates that the image of Arab communities had of theatre at its beginning was associated with theatre as an immoral art that threatened the morality of people; thus, presenting stories and themes from the Arabic history will help and encourage the Arab communities to trust this art (2009:157).

Najm (1999) provides another reason for the use of history as a resource among Arab dramatists, especially in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. He indicates that some of the Arab dramatists turned back to Arabic history in order to select stories and events that helped to arouse the feelings of Arab nations and their admiration for Arabic history. The reason for this, as Najm (1999:293) points out, is

because of national, political and social circumstances such as the increase of Othman oppression in some of the Arabic countries and the occupation of Western countries, besides, the delay of civilization among Arab people comparing with other civilized people (1999:293).

The same explanation is also provided by Dali (1999:56). This might justify one aspect of the use of history by Arabic dramatists in specific periods of time, such as the period with which Najm is concerned. It is possible, therefore, that the circumstances surrounding the Arabic dramatists, as well as the environment in which they lived, caused the increase in using Arabic history as a significant resource for theatrical texts.

As outlined previously, the use of history by Arabic dramatists is considered to be a remarkable tendency in the Arabic theatre; it is not surprising, therefore, to find that the situation in Saudi Arabia, according to Muthafar (2009:156) and Alkhateeb (1990: 59), echoes this trend. The historical tendency in Saudi theatre began within the theatrical activities in the schools that launched the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia. Ibn Salih presented a historical scene in his school in 1935 (Alsaeed, 2000:2) making the Scholastic Theatre the first institution to present historical plays in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the Scholastic Theatre continued to show interest in following this tendency. As documented by Yousf Alkhomais (2002:11), in 1947 the school of Kout in Alahsa city staged a play named after a famous king in the Arab peninsula, *Alnuaman bin Almunther*. Between 1955 and 1959 the Scholastic Theatre in Alahsa presented some historical plays, such as *yum thi Qar* [*The Day of thiqar*] and *Muan bin Zaidah*, an Arabic historical figure (Alkhomuis 2002:11). However, this does not mean that Alahsa was the first city to introduce historical theatre in schools. It only means that the Scholastic Theatre in Alahsa was documented and recorded, while other cities of the country were deprived of such documentation.

A great number of Saudi actors, such as Ahamad Alhuthail (2012), Ali Ibraheem (2011), Hassan Alabdi (2011), Mushal Alrasheed (2011), and Salih Alzayer (2012), who were interviewed for this thesis, confirm that when they were at school the historical play was a central part of the school's ceremony. Unfortunately, there is no record or copy of the historical plays that were produced by the Saudi schools. Even the actors, who acted in or witnessed such plays, expressed difficulty in remembering what the productions looked like.

Three assumptions could be made about the increase in the use of historical plays in schools. First of all, Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country and its constitution comes

primarily from The Quran and the method of the prophet Mohammed. Besides, the word *Arabia*, which included in the name of the country, refers to its association with the Arabic world. Without doubt, therefore, this could influence Saudi institutions, especially the schools, in showing a trend to stage plays based on Islamic and Arabic history. Fatmah Alwhaiby states that most of the Saudi authors utilized Islamic and Arabic history as the source of their plays more than the local history of Saudi Arabia (1995:20). The focus on Islamic and Arabic history, as opposed to local Saudi history, suggests that the nature of Saudi Arabia as an Islamic and Arabic country influenced the kind of history that Saudi authors address. Secondly, it can be assumed that the existence of Arab teachers in Saudi schools, who played significant roles in launching the theatrical activities in schools, played a considerable part in the appearance and enhancement of the historical tendency. According to the actors interviewed in this research, most of the historical plays were supervised and directed by teachers from the Arabic world. For instance, Ali Alhowareny (2010) explains that while the social plays in the Royal Institute were directed by students, due to their knowledge of the dialect and social behavior in Saudi society, the historical plays were directed by Ahamd Almajed, from Sudan, who was a supervisor in the institute. Moreover, Yousef Alkhomais (2011) mentions the role of Zaghlol Alsaifi, from Egypt, who directed some of the historical plays in Alahsa. Hamad Alhuthail (2012), in addition, mentions Mohamad Alghzoli, an Egyptian teacher, who adapted and directed some historical plays in Riyadh.

Since the teachers from the Arabic world did not have enough knowledge of the issues that interest Saudi society and its people because of the differences between the Arabic countries in terms of dialect and social affairs, they applied what they learnt from their experience of theatre before they came to Saudi Arabia and their

knowledge of Arabic history to Saudi scholastic theatre. Noting that *fusha* is the main language of the historical play might support this point. It is not surprising that the other plays, or sketches, which are concerned with social affairs, were left to the students.

The third assumption is provided by Muthafar (2009), and this is similar to the explanation of Muhabik (1989) with regard to the existence of the historical tendency in the Arabic theatre. Muthafar claims that the historical plays, in the beginning of Saudi theatre, were used to introduce theatre into a conservative religious society that had no knowledge of theatre or of what theatre looks like (2009:158). This might be acceptable at the beginning of Saudi theatre, where the Saudi society was in doubt regarding the effect of this new form of art. However, it cannot account for the existence of the historical tendency in Saudi theatre after it was established and practiced by other institutions, such as the General Presidency for Youth and Welfare.

With regard to the utilization of history by Saudi authors, Muthafar points out that it ranged between presenting the life of famous Islamic figures and events that occurred in Islamic history (2009:161). However, she asserts that the Saudi authors did not go beyond the reliable presentation of history; they made no attempt to offer an explanation of the history from their own perspective or to question what happened (2009:160). This leads Muthafar to point out that the experience of Saudi authors in utilizing history made their plays more like moral lessons than dramatic works (2009: 161). It is important to mention that Muthafar is concerned with some of the Saudi plays that were published between 1980 and 2004 and, importantly, the plays that were available to her study.

Since the thesis is concerned with the history of theatre in the General Presidency for Youth and Welfare, it is essential to highlight that theatre in this establishment, since its appearance in 1974, shows less interest in the historical tendency until the mid eighties. From the mid of eighties until 2004, theatre in the General Presidency returned to present historical plays. As the thesis moves to examining the history of theatre in the General Presidency, in Chapters Five and Six, further explanation will be given about the historical plays that were produced within the historical context of this establishment.

The following paragraphs will present a summary of a play from the historical tendency which will provide readers with a clear understanding of the nature of historical plays in Saudi theatre and how historical events have been approached and presented by Saudi playwrights.

Amongst the Saudi playwrights who utilize history as a resource in their plays Mohamed Alothaim seems to be the most suitable author to be presented as an example of the historical tendency in the GPYW's theatre. Alothaim is a recognizable figure in Saudi theatre. He is an active writer and has written many plays since 1985. Alothaim's plays present different subjects and some of them address social issues that face Saudi society, such as *almatareesh* [*The Travellers*], *almzad alalany* [*The Auction*], and *tahit alardh* [*Beneath the Earth*]. Also, some of his plays utilize Arabic history as their main resource; amongst these plays are *alseneen alejaf* [*The Difficult Years*], *hulum Alhamathani* [*Alhamathani's Dream*], and *Ghubar Ibn Bajah* which is named after a figure from Arabic history. Many of his plays were staged by different Saudi institutions, such as the SASCA, King Saud University, and King Fahd University. In addition to this, Alothaim worked in the Ministry of Education as a teacher from 1966 to 1969 and worked in Saudi television as a presenter and editor

for a few years from 1969 (Alothaim, 2009:219). Furthermore, he has worked in the College of Art in King Saud University as a lecturer since 1978. Specifically, he has taught playwriting in the Department of Information for many years. Later, he founded the Theatrical Training Workshop in Riyadh, which aims to train Saudi youth in different aspects of theatre, such as playwriting, acting, and directing. Moreover, as an academic, Alothaim has published several articles in the field of theatre and he delivers theatrical lectures across Saudi Arabia.

Alothaim's experience and knowledge of theatre are not the only aspects that make him suitable for consideration in this section. He is also a central Saudi playwright who uses Arabic history in his historical plays. His method of using history, as will be evident in the discussion of his play below, can be summarized as mixing historical events or figures with the present; this method allows him, as a playwright, to discuss current issues that concern the entire Arabic world. This method appears to be an attempt to avoid censorship or official questions with regard to the meaning of the plays and Alothaim asserts that most of the plays he wrote during the seventies and eighties were written in a way that avoided the questions of the censorship officers (Alothaim, 2009:7).

The play by Alothaim that will be summarised in this chapter is *alseneen alejaf* [*The Difficult Years*]. There are two reasons for selecting this play. The first is that in this play Alothaim utilizes a critical event from Arabic history, the War of *Albassus* which occurred between two of the main Arabic tribes. Alothaim mixes this event and its context with the present in order to address a significant issue that concerned the Arabic world when he wrote the play. The second reason is the significance of the issue addressed by Alothaim in this play: the increase in selling nuclear weapons to the Arabic world as a result of the continuation of conflict. In this play, Alothaim

attempts to discuss this issue and offers a critical view of the Arabic world's response to this issue. Furthermore, the play, which is Alothaim's best historical play, was presented by the main office of the SASCA in two important Arabic theatre festivals: the International Theatre Festival in Carthage in 1989 and the Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo in 1990. It was directed by Saman Alani.

Alseneen alejaf [The Difficult Years]

In this play, the author selects the *Albassus* war as the period in which the events in this play occur. *Albassus* is a name that was given to the longest war in Arabic history that occurred between two famous Arab tribes, Taglib and Baker; it lasted for forty years. Though the author utilizes this story as historical background for his play, the play does not involve the *Albassus* war, but rather it takes place during the war and he creates an imaginary tribe that is surrounded by the war. He presents real events that took place in the past as a point of departure for his own play and story. In addition, Alothaim brings Almuhlhil, as a famous figure who was involved in the *Albasuss* war, into his play and allows him to play a role in his own imaginary story.

The play is divided into three Acts. The main characters of this play are:

- 1- *Alaraf*: this name could be translated as *fortune-teller* which refers to the power of seeing the future.
- 2- *Alshaikh*: this is the title of the leader of a tribe; he is obeyed by the entire tribe.
- 3- *Subh*: a knight of the tribe.
- 4- *The stranger*: a man who is visiting the tribe for the sake of selling nuclear weapons.

The first act starts with a duel between two knights: Subh and Jahsh. It is attended by the Head of the tribe (Alshaikh) and other knights. In the middle of the duel, one of the attendants points out that the sun is going down, which means that the duel must stop. As soon as Alshaikh announces the discontinuation of the duel, the attendants express their anger. Subh goes to Alshaikh and asks him to not stop the duel because he was about to win. A dispute starts between Subh and Umairah about who is expected to win. In the argument between Subh and Umairah, and the latter says to Subh, "you are not ending the duel, you know that my brother deliberately delayed his victory for reasons unknown to us" (Alothaim, 2009:42). The scene develops into another argument between Subh and Alshaikh with regard to this duel. While Subh insists that he is the strongest knight in the tribe, Alshaikh believes that Subh is not the knight who was expected to come according to the secret paper that is held by the fortune-teller of the tribe.

This is the first time that the author represents the secret paper in the text. The secret paper does not refer to something in particular that is known through the history of the Arab nation or its culture that can be understood from the first indication, but is something that was created by the author. However, it could be interpreted as the beliefs that are held by the Arab tribe that is mentioned in the text. Furthermore, it could be interpreted as the outcome of Arab history or the ideas and explanations that are gained over the course of the history of the Arab people and their culture in a broad sense. The most significant point in relation to the secret paper is that it is held by the fortune-teller. Since the work of the fortune-teller lies in myth and legend and is his own creation and power, it could reveal the author's idea that the tribe's past merely depends upon myth and legend. The character of Subh seems to stand for the

voice of resistance to this situation and to the belief in the secret paper, as is clearly demonstrated by his argument with Alshaikh about the secret paper.

Subh shows his dissatisfaction with Alshaikh's answers with regard to the duel:

Subh: I am asking you, why you do not extend the time, so I can end this duel?

(The attendants appear interested in the argument between Subh and Alshaikh)

Alshaikh: Because the knight has not come, and we are waiting for him according to the game.

Subh: This might not be the game.

Umairah: He doubts. Did you hear?

Alshaikh: (to Subh) Do you doubt the certainty of the rules of the game? (Alothaim, 2009: 43-44).

As the attendants express their anger about Subh's attitude to the game, Alshaikh ends the argument by saying that the fortune-teller will judge Subh's doubts. It seems, however, that the whole tribe believes in the ability of the fortune-teller and relies upon his knowledge.

The first act ends with the arrival of the stranger (Hassim). The arrival of a stranger can be interpreted as an indication of the intervention of other people, cultures, or nations in Arabic affairs. As the tribe's people agree to kill the stranger as a punishment for coming near to the cave, Alshaikh asks them to wait because the fortune-teller is about to arrive.

Alaraf has great power and control over the people of the tribe. This could be understood from his way of sprinkling water over the people who react by standing

motionless. Moreover, Alaraf has power and control over Alshaikh himself. This is evident from the dialogue below:

Alshaikh: (apologising to Alaraf) We are about to kill him.

Alaraf : (kicking Alshaikh) You are disbelievers, rubbish. (To the stranger) Why did you not come to me first? (To the people) Do you want to kill my guest, who is the fortune teller of twentieth-century people? (Alothaim, 2009:45).

As Alaraf asks the people to kill some camels to serve his guest, he turns to the stranger, asking whether he has found the appropriate man or not. The stranger, who is named Hassim, says that he has not and orders the people to prepare his own place.

The scene changes in the play; the tribe disappears and an attractive modern office appears on the stage. In the middle of the office, as described by the author, there is a model of a nuclear rocket and behind the table is Hassim's secretary. This scene explains the nature of Hassim's work as a seller of nuclear weapons and his role in the war. It explains that Hassim is playing a role in the war by helping *Almuhlhil* against the other tribe. Importantly, the assistance for the war is conditional; it depends on a guarantee that *Almuhlhil* will pay the international bank. In addition, the scene shows how the author mixes the past (the tribe's location) and the present (Hassim's modern office).

The next scene shows Hassim asking Subh about the nature of the duel. Subh answers that it is a duel between the tribe's knights for honouring the name of the *Alhudag's*⁶

⁶- *Alhudag* is a private shelter that is put on the back of a camel. It is designed to cover women when they travel. The protector of *Alhudag* is a name that is given to a brave knight in the tribe as an honour and an indication that he will be married to the most beautiful girl in the tribe.

guard, which is mentioned in the secret paper with its four rules. The conversation continues between Subh and Hassim as follows:

Hassim: That is funny; you still believe that the rules of the game are four?

Subh: They are four.

Hassim: The rules of the game are five if you want to win.

Subh: But Alaraf and Asheikh say it is four.

Hassim: Where is the secret paper? (Alothaim, 2009:47).

In the rest of this conversation, Hassim tries to persuade Subh to bring the secret paper from Alaraf's cave. An example of this persuasion is given below:

Hassim: If you bring the paper, I will ask Alshaikh and Alaraf to let you fight again, and we will let you defeat your antagonist. Then we will arrange a loan from the bank and you will fight for the rest of your life like *Almuhlhil*. (Alothaim, 2009:47-48).

Subh agrees to do what Hassim is asking, and Alaraf understands that Subh has been chosen to be the hero of tribe who will lead his people in a long war that will profit Hassim. During this act, the author presents a conversation between Hassim and Alaraf that addresses the idea of investing in small nuclear bombs (as in Hassim's dream that he is making small nuclear bombs like apples) and selling them to their customers (Alothaim, 2009:48). The customers do not, as Hassim explains, need a long-range weapon; they merely need short-range weapons for their neighbourhoods (Alothaim, 2009:49). As this confirms Hassim's motivation, it reveals that amongst his plans is creating war in the region which includes the tribe and its neighbourhood. The picture below (Figure 4) shows a side of this tent.



- Figure 4: The play of *Alseneen alejaf* [*The Difficult Years*], in 1990, Cairo. It is reproduced with permission from Saman Alani.

In an attempt to maintain the presence of Arabic history in the play, the author presents *Almuhlhil* in the second act, as an example of the Arabic knights who preceded Subh in dealing with Hassim. Hassim explains to Subh how he helped *Almuhlhil* in his war for forty years either by facilitating loans from the international bank or by providing him with weapons. However, the author presents an interesting speech from Hassim in his office that contains some important information that reveals the nature of the people that this character represents in this play:

Hassim: Damn. I have been so busy with the game of Albassus that I forgot that the day here is the night there (looking at some papers). An invitation to an international meeting for peace (writes on it) agree on the tendency (reads another paper). Rescuing the earth through international effort (writes on it) we do not mind (reads the next paper). Drilling wells in the African desert to reduce drought (writes on it) to be supported financially on condition of an

investment in the uranium and phosphate found there (reads the next). Military satellite for alliance (writes on it) to be supported financially right now without any hesitation (Alothaim, 2009:61).

This monologue reveals that Hassim's character appears to be penetrating and to consider the whole world his business. In addition, it becomes clear that Hassim's concern is with financial investment across the world. However, the most important area that he is interested in is military activity.

The stage directions and the first few lines of the third act reveal that Subh is worried about the delay in celebrating the guarding of *Alhudag* and his marriage to Alia. Alshaikh enters with Alaraf carrying *Alhudag*. They explain to Subh that the disappearance of the secret paper caused the delay because it contains the method for the ceremony. It appears that the secret paper contains the conventions and the history of the tribe. The author, in mentioning that the secret paper contains the method of celebrating, makes it culturally significant to the tribe.

Hassim enters the stage and announces, "There is no need for the ceremony. Subh will become the guard of *Alhudag*, and he orders you to collect money and prepare the tribe to enter the *Albassus* war with *Almuhlhil*" (2009:63). Alshaikh interrupts Hassim's speech and explains another important idea in the play. He asserts that the tribe cannot break the alliance with Alharth who is fighting against *Almuhlhil*. Now, Hassim makes it clear that it is the time of Subh and that the alliance with Subh must be considered.

The third act ends with a scene in Hassim's office where the tribe's *araf* is acting as the secretary. Some people enter the stage including *Almuhlhil* and Subh. The stage directions mention that this scene must be distinguished by noise. The scene starts with Subh blaming Hassim for breaking his promise to name Subh as the leader of

Rabiah, which is one of the greatest and most famous tribes in the history of the Arab world. As Almuhlhil is one of Rabiah's people he starts arguing with Subh about this matter.

Hassim, speaking to all the people in the office, says that he has decided to create a new tribe which is international and differs from the other tribes. In addition, he names Alaraf as the fortune teller of this tribe. The stage directions mention that during Hassim's speech the attendants are sleeping or paying no attention to what is happening.

The Head of the tribe enters the stage and asks Alaraf for an explanation of the dream that he had early in the play and is still dreaming of each night about the tiny root that Alaraf and Hassim did not cut when they cut down a huge tree. In the conversation between Hassim and Alaraf about Alshaikh, Alaraf suggest that Alshaikh might be suited to be the Head of the new tribe. Hassim replies that he seems inappropriate for this position because he dreams too much.

Subh and Almuhlhil awake, as described by the stage directions. Almuhlhil suggests to Subh that they should leave, but Subh does not agree:

Subh: He [referring to Hassim] promised me. Are they talking about a new tribe?

Almuhlhil: He promised me too. It makes no sense (Alothaim, 2009:71).

The play ends with this speech by Hassim:

Hassim: This boy annoys me because he does not know about my new inventions. (He takes two bombs in the shape of apples from his desk and puts one in the mouth of Subh and the other in the mouth of Almuhlhil). I always told you that the rules of the game are five, not four (Alothaim, 2009:71).

Alothaim's play presents an example of the historical plays that were produced by the GPYW. In this play, Alothaim presents a new method of dealing with history as a resource for theatre. He mixes historical events with the present in a way that allows him to examine a current issue that concerns the Arabic world. The issue that is discussed in the play is a critical issue that previously had not been discussed in the GPYW's theatre. The selling of nuclear weapons and its impact on the Arabic conflict is an issue that can raise difficult questions from the censors in terms of involving a political arena that had not been opened to discussion in Saudi Arabia.

The Social Tendency

The term *social theatre* in the context of Saudi theatre has a specific meaning that differs from the meaning associated with the term in a western context. James Thompson and Richard Schechner mention that social theatre is a common term in Italian that shares many aspects of other practices of theatre such as "... applied theatre (UK and Australia), community-based theatre (USA), theatre for development (certain Asian and African countries), or popular theatre (Canada)" (2004: 12). In providing a specific description of the term, Thompson and Schechner point out that social theatre can be defined as follows:

... theatre with specific social agendas, ... [which] takes place in diverse locations from prisons, refugee camps, and hospitals to schools, orphanages, and homes for the elderly.. [and] often occurs in places and situations that are not the usual circumstances of theatre, turning "nonperformers" into performers (2004:12).

Therefore, it is crucial to assert that social theatre in Saudi Arabia has no similarities with the definition provided by Thompson and Schechner which might associated with the term social theatre in the mind of western readers.

Social theatre in Saudi Arabia is similar to the type of social theatre that dominated the beginning of theatre in the Gulf States. Speaking about the social theatre in Kuwait, for instance, Barbara Michalak-Pikulska defined the social theatre as "... plays that touch on social problems ..." (2001:163). Bearing in mind the influence of Kuwaiti theatre upon the rest of the Gulf States, Michalak-Pikulska's definition offers a clue to understanding the nature of this theatre in the Gulf States. Simply, social theatre in the context of Saudi theatre concentrates on presenting and discussing the social problems that face the society in this region.

In the history of Saudi theatre, social theatre was noticeable in the theatrical works produced by Saudi clubs during the sixties. However, although theatrical works in Saudi schools did present social problems, the educational function of theatre remained the central aim of scholastic theatre. The social tendency was preceded by the historical tendency; while historical plays concentrated on the past and on historical figures and events that were separate from the interests of Saudi people and the issues that concerned them, social plays focused on issues that were close to the society. Thus, Saudi authors found that it was worth addressing these more immediate concerns through social plays rather continuing in the presentation of historical plays. Al-Azma explains that the nature of historical plays was insufficient for Saudi theatre practitioners as well as audiences due to its concentration on the educational function and providing moral lessons (1990:133). Moreover, Al-Azma mentions that the appearance of different social issues and shifts that occurred in Saudi society forced Saudi authors to take social issues into account on stage (1990:131). As a result, the social tendency of theatre seems to be the most suitable method for Saudi authors to present and discuss the social affairs of Saudi society.

The existence of Saudi clubs, which became the most available places for practicing theatre after schools in Saudi Arabia, led to the increase in the social tendency in theatre. Indeed, as social institutions that were open to the participation of people from different backgrounds, they raised interest in considering social problems and issues as the main topics of theatre. In addition, the clubs gave people who were interested in theatre the freedom to address the issues that were of interest to the members of the clubs as well as the audience.

Furthermore, the interest in Kuwaiti theatre in social theatre during the sixties and seventies might have influenced Saudi theatre. Abdualrahman Alhamad (2011), a famous writer of social plays during the seventies and eighties, explains in an interview that the social Kuwaiti plays that were represented on Saudi television were the available vision of theatre for Saudi people and practitioners. Therefore, it is not surprising that the early social plays in Saudi Arabia were an imitation of the experience of social plays in Kuwait.

The social plays in Saudi Arabia that had begun to be produced since the establishment of the GPYW tended to follow a realistic or naturalistic convention. The authors of social plays attempt to present an exact vision of real life in which the characters imitate real people in real-life situations and settings. In terms of language, the social plays utilize colloquial speech as the main language.

Amongst the main issues that were addressed during period from 1974 to 1985 were the issues that concerned Saudi society during this period. For instance, the relationships between family members, especially between a father and his sons; the traditional method of marriage in Saudi society; the high price of dowries; unemployment; and the call for loyalty to the country, as well as the importance of

serving the country in different sectors. However, during the first decade of the history of theatre in the General Presidency the main issue that concerned Saudi authors was the negative influence of sudden wealth that appeared in Saudi Arabia after the rise of the price of oil after the war between the Arab countries and Israel in 1973. After 1973, and because of the rising oil price, people in Saudi Arabia began to enter a new area of modernity and wealth that, in consequence, led to some negative aspects which were the focus of Saudi authors in theatre. Amongst the main authors who contributed to addressing this issue were Abdualrahman Alhamad and Ibraheem Alhamdan.

Ibraheem Alhamdan wrote *qetar alhadh* [*Lucky Train*], which was produced in 1978. This play presents and discusses the increase of the price of property and the negative impact of it upon Saudi society after the increase of the price of oil in the mid seventies. The same issue was also presented by Abdualrahman Alhamad in his play *aqaqeer wa aqarat* [*Properties*] in 1981. Although the two plays are concerned with the increasing price of property in Saudi Arabia and its negative impact, both go on to discuss other issues that are related to the negative aspects of this issue. For instance, the two plays discuss the high price of dowries, the greed exhibited by people in seeking money, and the ignorance of the value of morality.

Social theatre dominated the productions of the General Presidency from its establishment in 1974 to the mid eighties. It is, therefore, of interest to end treatment of the subject of social plays with a summary of such a play that illustrates the nature of this trend.

The play that has been chosen to represent this type is *tahit alkarasy* [*Under the Chairs*]; it was written by Ahmad Aldubaikhy and staged in 1983. There are two

important reasons for selecting this play. The first is that it addresses common social affairs that faced Saudi Arabia from the 1970s to the mid 1980s; its central problem is the widespread use of bribes in the Saudi government. It was the first play in the history of Saudi theatre that presented the existence of corruption in the early eighties. For this reason, this play is the best example of the tendency of social theatre in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the play includes the main aspects of social plays in terms of style and content that dominated such plays during the period prior of the mid eighties. Hence, readers presented with this play will encounter a clear representative of the tendency of social theatre in Saudi Arabia.

Tahit alkarasy [Under the Chairs]

The play was produced by the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh and staged for nearly twelve days. According to the script, the play is divided into three acts and the main characters are as follows:

- 1- Abo Adil: an important manger who works in the government.
- 2- Abo Ali: the servant in Abo Adil's office.

In the first act the stage direction describes the beginning of the play as follows:

The curtain raises, office with good furniture which indicates the importance of the person who works in it. On the wall there is a clock that says half past eight. A group of chairs is in the office. A man is sitting on one chair and covering his face with ‘*qutra*’⁷ and is sleeping with a snore; other people are sleeping in the chairs (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:1).

It is important to mention that among the conventional aspects of social plays was the use of a curtain at the beginning as well as between the acts of the play. Regarding the

⁷ *Qutra* is the piece of cloth that covers the head. It is a traditional and formal custom that the Saudi male wears a qutra.

time shown in the scene, it should be noted that the work day in Saudi Arabia starts from half past seven in the morning and the scene indicates that an hour passes before the manager begins his work. That he does not arrive on time indicates that the manager lacks respect for his work. The scene starts with a conversation between the servant and a man who wakes up as soon as he hears the servant's voice. While the man explains that he came early because the work usually begins at half past seven, the servant explains that this is only true in private companies (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:1). This might indicate that the play is concerned with the public sector or governmental institutions. In addition, it shows the difference between the public and the private sectors in terms of restricting the workers' hours. The servant starts eating his breakfast and invites the man to eat with him; the man approaches the food without hesitation. Immediately, the servant changes his mind and says, "I am joking ... it is a kind of joke..." (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:1). This reaction from the servant is considered a comic aspect of the play. Furthermore, the servant criticizes how the man eats. The criticism reveals comic phrases such as "be careful" or "do not damage your stomach" (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:2). As another aspect of comedy in this scene, the servant discovers that the man has finished the food and responds with anger, "are you in Africa" (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:2). Also, the servant makes comic comments about the other people in the office. For instance, he says of the huge man, "I do not know what these people eat" (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:4), then he asks the thin man not to sit next to the huge man because he might be damaged by the huge man. The stage directions mention that a sound is heard and the servant announces the arrival of the manager: "the manager is arrived ... the manager is arrived ... congratulations" (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:5).



- Figure 5: A scene from *tahit alkarasy* [*Under the Chairs*], 1983, in Riyadh; the servant is standing to announce the arrival of the manager. It is reproduced with the permission of Ali Alsaeed's personal archive.

As the manager enters the stage, he comments on some of the people who seem to be having a nap in the office and says that they are not in a hotel; he then asks them to wash their faces. The manager's comment carries a sense of humour which reveals that most of the comic aspects of the play depend upon the language. In addition there an example of the use of physical comedy as a comic aspect is that as the people prepare to leave the stage, one approaches the manager in order to whisper something. The immediate response of the manager is to cover his nose because of the man's bad breath. Then, he asks the man to leave the office and clean his mouth before speaking.

As the manager sits on his chair, he receives a phone call from an unnamed person who tells the manager the news of the stock market, which seems to be happy news. Consequently, the manager expresses the desire to go on a short holiday to take advantage of the money he has gained from the stock market. Through this dialogue, the author comments on the increased wealth in Saudi society and the interest Saudi

people have in using this money to travel for pleasure. In addition, the author demonstrates that the manager's personal interests come before his duties.

The first act goes on to show different behaviour that demonstrates this aspect of the character (the manager). For instance, the manager asks the servant to give priority to those who appear to be wealthy and to deal with their issues first. Another example is shown by the manager's treatment of a poor person who comes for asking help. The dialogue between the manager and the beggar, as described by the stage directions, is a gestural conversation until the end of it when the manager expels the beggar (Aldubaikhy, n.d.: 6). Following this conversation, the manager speaks to the servant about his feeling towards the beggars:

The manager: I have no sympathy with those people. I do not like them. Do you know why?

The servant: (no comment)

The manager: Because they just take and do not give ... you know ... do not give.

The servant: Understood ... they do not give.

The manager: One time, I just greeted a poor man, just greeting. Do you know what happened? The next day, I get sick ... do you imagine that? (Aldubaikhy, n.d.: 7).

The scene of a foreign businessman who enters to resolve some issues in the manager's office shows another example of the manager's unacceptable behaviour. The scene ends with the manager asking for money in order to finish the businessman's work. As a result, the businessman takes an amount of money out, which means that he knew that the manager would ask for money, and puts it on the manager's desk. Immediately, the manager tells him that he should deposit this money

in the manager's account at the bank. Interestingly, the conversation is presented in a comic manner. It shows the difficulties that the manager faces in having a conversation with the foreigner; he cannot speak English and the businessman does not understand Arabic. The picture below (Figure 6) shows the scene between the manager and the businessman.



- Figure 6: A scene between the manager and the businessman from *tahit alkarasy* [*Under the Chairs*], 1983, in Riyadh. It is reproduced with the permission of Ali Alsaeed's personal archive.

The author, in this act, attempts to present different scenes that confirm the negative behaviour of the manager. Each scene further emphasizes the negative nature of the manager and the servant's involvement and complicity in the manager's behaviour. While one or two scenes would sufficiently show the nature of the two main characters, the author goes beyond this to further highlight the idea that the manager, with assistance from the servant, tries to use his position in a negative way. The

second act extends this aspect of the manager but it is explored it in another location: the manager's house.

In the second act we see Adil, Abo Adil's son, listening to western music and dancing in an inappropriate manner which suggests that Adil does not know how to dance to this sort of music. This refers to the impact of western culture upon Saudi youth at that time. While Adil is dancing, his uncle enters the stage and sits in a chair that Adil cannot see; he is not aware of his uncle's presence. The phone rings and Adil engages in a long conversation with a woman who is considered to be his girlfriend. As soon as Adil notices his uncle, he changes the subject and pretends that he is speaking with his father's servant Abu Ali (Aldubaikhy, n.d.: 30-31).

Adil's uncle tries to give him advice with regard to his relationship with the girl on the phone. He speaks to Adil rationally about the nature of the society they live in and attempts to persuade his nephew by saying, "suppose you were her brother, what is your feeling?" (Aldubiakhy, n.d.: 32). It is significant that the issue of love between Adil and the girl requires an in depth conversation with his uncle, who represents a wise older man. The author seems to consider this issue as marginal in comparison with the issue of bribery, which is at the centre of the play. The scene ends with Adil's uncle asking him to call his father to come in.

Before his father arrives, an Asian servant enters to present coffee to the uncle. In this scene, a typical picture of an Asian servant is reinforced by the author. He is insistently presented as a stupid person. The origin of this stereotype, which seems to be common to most of the social plays, is found in the arrival of Asian people to work in Saudi Arabia with no knowledge of the nature of Saudi society, its culture, or its language.

As the scene moves on, we see Abo Adil and his brother having an argument which reveals the main idea of the play. In the dialogue below, the brother blames Abo Adil for his illegal behaviours.

The brother: Abo Adil! Are you not stopping your behaviours?

Abo Adil: What do you mean?

The brother: You know what I mean. I am embarrassed by the number of stories I have heard about you everywhere. I become ashamed that every one speaks of you in negative way.

Abo Adil: (with laugh) What do they say?

The brother: Everything; especially the stories of bribery and corruption of which you are the hero.

Abo Adil: I heard you telling me this a hundred times. Is there thing else?

The brother: So, you know about the wrong and you insist!!

Abo Adil: This is not wrong. You know, I have family, requirements and things that I want to obtain. My salary is not sufficient and what you call bribes, I simply considered as gifts from friends that I help in my work (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:34).

The discussion between the two characters moves to the subject of Abo Adil's decision to force his young daughter to marry an old man. The attractive aspect of this old man, as Abo Adil explains, is his wealth and the money he will pay as dowry. Abo Adil rejects his brother's argument that the girl must marry a man who is her age because the youth have no money or future. In this discussion, the author tries to show another aspect of Abo Adil; he tries to increase his wealth at the expense of the happiness of his daughter. It is understood that Abo Adil's unacceptable behaviour goes beyond his work and includes the future of his family.

The third act goes back to the manager's office where the general manager enters in the company of two men; one of them is an officer. The general manager tells Abo Adil that he must be questioned by these people and that they are opening an investigation into his illegal behaviour. During the investigation two people enter the office carrying some gifts with which to bribe Abo Adil to finish their papers. This is considered as evidence of his illegal behaviour. The officer blames Abo Adil and the servant for being involved in this illegal act and highlights the attitude of Islam to this behaviour. He says this behaviour is prohibited by Islam and that because they are Muslims they must obey the instructions of Islam (Aldubaikhy, n.d.:68). The play ends with the officer announcing that the consequence of this behaviour is prison.

The play, *tahit alkarasy* [*Under the Chairs*], illustrates the nature of the social plays that dominated theatre in the GPYW in the period from 1974 to the mid eighties. It shows the common aspects of such plays. For instance, the interest in providing an exact copy of reality, the use of the Saudi dialect, and addressing the social issues that concerned Saudi society. However, the significance of this play, as mentioned earlier, is its main subject. It is the first social play that addressed the issue of bribery and corruption in Saudi institutions.

The Festival Tendency

The contributions to theatre festivals outside Saudi Arabia since 1984 have had a huge influence on the movement of theatre in Saudi Arabia as well as on theatrical practitioners. It dramatically changed the method of presenting theatre in the General Presidency for Youth and Welfare. Instead of producing plays concerned with the social affairs of Saudi society as the main topic, for instance, a wide range of topics that concerned the existence of human beings, the struggle of Arab elites with their

governments, and the role of elites in society were amongst the topics of the plays that were produced for theatre festivals. In addition, the contributions to theatre festivals, which increased considerably during the nineties, led to establishing a new understanding of theatre reflected in the works of Saudi practitioners who regularly contributed to or attended theatre festivals outside Saudi Arabia. Consequently, a new theatrical environment across Saudi Arabia developed that has none similarities with the environment of theatre that took place during the seventies and early eighties. Hence, it is significant that producing theatre for theatre festivals has been the main tendency that shaped the movement of theatre in Saudi Arabia, especially from 1984 onward, and has had a huge influence upon Saudi theatre.

The festival theatre, in the context of Saudi theatre, refers precisely to the plays that were produced and designed as contributions to theatre festivals abroad, whether international or Arabic festivals. Some Saudi practitioners and researchers, though infrequently, describe this kind of theatre as the experimental theatre. The reason for this description is that most of the Saudi plays were contributed to the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre which has been held annually in September since 1988. The Experimental Theatre is a description that refers to plays that were different in content and style from the social and historical theatre. Not all of the festival plays were experimental in style or content. The common aspect of these plays was in their presentation of modern theatre that differed from the historical and social theatre. It is significant, therefore, that the term Experimental had been applied without taking into consideration the existence of experimental aspects in the plays.

The thesis, however, prefers the name of Festival theatre rather than Experimental theatre for several reasons. First of all, it has been noticed that theatre in Saudi Arabia

had been concerned with contributing to different international and Arabic festivals, rather than merely the Experimental Festival. For instance, it contributed to the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, the Festival of Carthage Theatre Days in Tunisia, the Damascus Festival of Theatre in Syria, and the Gulf Theatre Festivals whether for Youth or Professional. Therefore, it is unlikely that the plays that were produced by Saudi producers for this number of theatre festivals can all be described as experimental theatre in terms of content or style. This is owing to the differences between the above mentioned theatre festivals in their nature and purpose. Secondly, the increased number of Saudi contributions to theatre festivals has established an image of a specific kind of theatre based on watching different plays produced by other countries in the festivals and engaging with discussion during the festivals. Finally, the limitation of contributing to theatre festivals has led to a competition between different parts in the General Presidency for Youth and Welfare to determine who deserves to represent Saudi theatre in the coming festivals. This led the theatre practitioners to demonstrate that they are able to produce plays that can meet the standards of theatre festivals. Importantly, some of the theatre practitioners aimed to have the chance of contributing to theatre festivals regardless of the existence of experimental aspects in their productions. Therefore, in the absence of theatrical institutions and academies in Saudi Arabia to enhance and develop theatre, since the mid eighties theatre festivals have become the motivation and the guide of Saudi theatre. Most importantly, they have enhanced Saudi theatre. As a result, the name of Festival theatre appears to be appropriate for this kind of theatre in Saudi Arabia.

In order to better understand this kind of theatre one must first discover the reasons behind the increased number of contributions to theatre festivals. To start with, it is crucial to mention that the idea of encouraging Saudi theatre to contribute to theatre

festivals was established early in 1974, when the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Art was established, under the supervision of the General Presidency. According to Abdualhai Ibraheem, one of the aims of establishing the SASCA is to represent Saudi Arabia in festivals outside the country (1998:12). This explains the motivation for contributing to theatre festivals, though in practice it began a decade later, in 1984. Another explanation is the Saudi government's urging of the GPYW and other governmental organizations to contribute to different activities, including cultural activities that were organized throughout the Arab world. According to the agreements and protocols between the Arabic countries in the area of culture and art, each country should contribute to any festival and occasion that is organised by a member of the Arabic world. In the Gulf States – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and UAE – contribution to the activities that were organized by a member state is compulsory. Saudi theatre, therefore, under the commitment of the Saudi government to Arabic cooperation, is forced to contribute to these festivals.

There is another reason that concerned the theatrical practitioners. Owing to a lack of methods to enhance the experience of Saudi practitioners in theatre, theatre festivals became the place where they learned new things, ideas, and techniques. Festivals were a place for teaching them and improving their knowledge of theatre. In an interview Sami Aljaman (2011) says, "for us, theatre festivals were open institutions we could learn from" and adds that "theatre festivals really allowed us to extend our theatrical culture". He insists on the importance of post show discussion in enhancing the knowledge of theatre (2011). Yousef Alkhomais (2011) asserts in an interview that theatre festivals are helpful and useful for the movement of theatre in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, He agrees with Aljaman on the importance of post show discussion. Fahd Alhoshany (2012), the founder of the Youth Group for Theatre in

Riyadh, explained in an interview that he believes in the importance of theatre festivals for Saudi theatre. He mentions that "theatre festivals are a great opportunity for the group to watch a range of different productions from different countries, backgrounds, and cultures" (2012). Consequently, as Alhoshany (2012) mentions, this will affect the experience of the group in a positive way and lead the members to gain a better understanding of different aspects of theatre such as acting, directing, setting, and lighting; he also asserts that theatre festivals allow works to be judged and criticized by expert practitioners.

Most Saudi theatre practitioners that were interviewed by this researcher express a great enthusiasm toward the importance of contributing to theatre festivals. It is significant that since the nineties several theatre festivals have been organized in Saudi Arabia which take the same direction as festivals outside the country. For instance, the main theatre festival, Aljinadrayah, is held annually in Riyadh as a part of the Aljinadrayah Festivals for Heritage and Culture. In addition, other theatre festivals are held in different cities such as Alahsa, Dammam, and Altaif. Theatre practitioners who are influenced and inspired by the phenomena of theatre festivals abroad stand behind the emergence and organization of the Saudi festivals for theatre.

Since the mid nineties there have been different claims and voices that call for rethinking the importance of the contribution of Saudi theatre to theatre festivals. For example, Ahmad Alhutheel, a Saudi theatre practitioner, claims that "there were theatre which I have never seen, it is produced merely for festivals" (Alothaim, 1996: 110). In this, Alhutheel refers to several theatre productions that were produced by the main office of SASCA in Riyadh of plays that were not for the public, but rather for the theatre festivals abroad. Although Alhutheel's statement was made in regard to a significant period of the history of theatre in SASCA, the eighties and early nineties,

most of the productions of the GPYW's theatre were staged for the public during the following years. In an interview, Ali Alhowareny (2010), a Saudi actor, describes the contributions of Saudi theatre to festivals as "the migration of Saudi theatre".

Recently, Mechal Alrasheed, in a paper presented in the first conference for Saudi Intellectuals which was held in Riyadh 2004 by the Ministry of Culture and Information, pays attention to the negative influence of the contribution to theatre festivals abroad. In this, Alrasheed asserts that the contribution to theatre festivals created a kind of theatre that has no connection with the interests and the affairs of Saudi people and society (2004:12). He implicitly blames the Saudi practitioners for their blind imitation of theatrical productions and works that are presented by other countries in theatre festivals without taking Saudi society and the nature of its people into consideration (2004:12). Furthermore, Alrasheed mentions that the Saudi public has no interest in the plays that are produced for theatre festivals because they do not express or discuss their affairs. Even if the public attend some of these plays, they leave because of a failure to understand the content (2004:13). However, in spite of Alrasheed's claims, most the Saudi practitioners are enthusiastic about the contributions to theatre festivals. The historical presentation of the plays that are produced by the GPYW's theatre, whether SASCA's branches or the Youth Groups for Theatre, shows that there is a noticeable interest in producing theatre for festivals and contributing to theatre festivals.

There are few authors whose plays were produced for theatre festivals. For instance, Mohamad Alothaim in Riyadh, Sami Aljaman in Alahsa, and Fahd Alharthy in Altaif. Aljaman (2011) said in an interview that the style of his writing for theatre was influenced by the theatre festivals he attended. He mentions (2011) that after attending the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, he began to write

his play *alqubo* [*The Cellar*] under the influence of a number of the plays he watched from different countries. Alothaim (2011), on the other hand, rejected the idea that his style of writing has been influenced by the phenomenon of festival theatre. In a personal interview, Alothaim (2011) explains that he does not write for theatre festivals, the producers of Saudi theatre choose his plays for their contributions to theatre festivals. Fahad Alharthi seems to be the only author for whom it can be said that most of his plays were produced for theatre festivals, whether international or Arabic. For instance, his play *alfanar* [*The Guidance*], presented at the Gulf Festival for Theatre in Kuwait 1997 and at the Cairo International Festival for Experiential Theatre in 1998; *albrofah alakherah* [*The Last Rehearsal*] presented at the Cairo International Festival for Experiential Theatre in 1999; *lubat alkarasy* [*The Chairs' Game*] was presented at the Cairo International Festival for Experiential Theatre in 2001 and was presented at the International Theatre Day in Bahrain in 2001; *bazaar* [*The Festival*] was presented at the Festival of Carthage Theatre Days in Tunisia 2002; *almuhtakir* [*The monopolist*] at the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre in 2003 and, finally, his play *assif* [*Brainstorm*] in the Festival of Carthage Theatre Days in Tunisia 2004.

Examining the plays that were produced for theatre festivals reveals two common aspects of these plays. The first one is concerned with the language. The authors of these plays utilize the high Arabic language *fusha* in order to be understood by the Arabic community who attended the festivals. Furthermore, using this language demonstrates appreciation of *fusha* as one of the main aspect of Arabic culture and the language of the holy book of Muslims, the *Quran*; but these are not the main reasons for using this language. It is the language of elite and educated people in the Arabic world. Therefore, utilizing this language in a play means that it can be recognized and

appreciated by critics as well as by an elite audience who usually attend the festival; their opinions affect the rest of the people. The second aspect is concerned with the subjects of these plays. The plays produced for theatre festivals concentrate on addressing issues that concern the Arabic world and human beings in general. In these plays, it becomes clear that the local issues that faced Saudi society in particular are absent.

Few Saudi playwrights have written plays that can be considered theatre festival plays. Those who have done so include Mohammad Alothaim, Sami Aljaman, and Fahad Alharthi. The following section will summarize a play that was written by Fahad Alharthi. The first reason for this choice is that Alharthi intends in his plays, from 1992 onward, to present a new form of writing that has no similarities with the other tendencies of Saudi theatre, such as historical and social plays. His main concerns in his plays are human beings who have no specific time and place. Therefore, his plays can present generic characters which allow the plays to be staged and understood in different places in the Arabic world. In addition, Alharthi utilizes a semi-poetic language in his plays that is rarely found in the historical or social theatre. Secondly, Alharthi's plays have been presented in different theatre festivals. For instance, he participated in the Cairo Festival for Experimental Theatre four times and the Carthage International theatre in Tunisia two times. This experience influenced his style of writing as he comes in contact with a range of different performance styles at these festivals. In a personal interview with Alharthi (2010) he explained the importance of theatre festivals in enhancing the knowledge of practitioners; this might be interpreted to mean that festivals have played a role in enhancing Alharthi's own knowledge. Owing to his importance in the production of festival plays, his play entitled *Assif* [*Brainstorm*] has been chosen for summarising here.

Assif [Brainstorm]

Assif is a one act play and the action takes place in one scene. The place and the time are not mentioned by the author. The play requires six male actors. In the text, the author refers to the characters as actor 1, actor 2, and so on; the characters are not named.

The stage direction at the beginning of the play provides some clues that assist in understanding the situation of the play and the nature of its characters. In the opening stage directions Alharthi offers the following explanation:

The stage is open, announcement of the beginning of the journey 'flight' are heard, the group enters the stage, each one carries his own suitcase, and the suitcases are different in form as well as in size. As the sound ends, they spread on the stage.(Alharthi, 2009:51).

As this description makes clear that no specific place or time is mentioned, neither are there specific descriptions provided for the nature, age, or background of the characters. This suggests that the author is concerned with human beings wherever they come from and whatever they are.

The clues that are available for the reader are that these people are travellers. This is based upon the suitcases they carry and the announcement that is heard about a journey that is about to begin (Alharthi, 2009:51). Their different suitcases could suggest that the characters have prepared for their journeys in different ways and have different expectations about them. Furthermore, there is another significant clue, the stage direction begins by mentioning that "the stage is open" (Alharthi, 2009: 52). This sentence means literally that there is no curtain on the stage and it is open to the spectators from the beginning. It is important to mention that it is common in the

festivals plays in Saudi Arabia no curtain is used. It can be interpreted that the text suggests the existence of one world rather than two worlds: the world on stage and that of the audience. Opening the stage from the beginning rejects the division of the theatrical space into two different places. This reinforces the importance of dealing with the space as an undivided one.

In addition, saying that "the stage is open" could establish an open relationship between the audience or reader and the text. In this, the text seems to call the reader to use an open imaginary view when reading the text. For instance, the journey that the characters are waiting for might be an abstract journey that has no similarities with other journeys that occur in the real world. In addition, the suitcases, from an open imaginary view, might refer to something beyond the real meaning of the word. For example, it could mean the selves or minds of the characters. Moreover, they could contain the secrets, worries, or hopes of the characters. Consequently, the contents of the suitcases become something else that differs from what is usually carried in normal suitcases.

Since the play presents the six characters waiting for the journey to begin and the waiting takes a long time, they start to discuss their status and share their own memories and secrets. The six characters, after having this discussion and expressing their feeling, leave the stage one by one. It ends with the last two actors leaving the stage combined with an appropriate sound effect as mentioned in the stage direction.

Interestingly, the text presents its dialogue through two different methods. The first one is the normal dialogue that takes place between the characters themselves in which they express their feelings, views, and attitudes and in which they discuss their situation. The second method involves the characters speaking as one group. In the

text, the actors function as a unified a group that appears to express a view that could not refer to one actor and must refer to the whole group. This might remind the reader of the role of the chorus that was established in Greek drama. Although the common role of the chorus concentrates on commenting on the events that are taking place in a text or providing essential information to the audience, the chorus or the group in this play seems to perform a different task. First of all, the appearance of the group in the text is not independent from the rest of the characters. Indeed, the group does not refer to anything that is given in the text. In other words, it does not represent a specific group of people. Instead, it consists of the actors themselves. It seems that the actors exchange their individual roles for another role on stage, that of speaking as a group. Secondly, the group does not appear regularly in the text and the actors speak as a group for a relatively short space of time as compared to the amount of time they spend as characters that are independent agents. This might suggest that the author believes in the importance of the existence of the group and in hearing their view or opinion, but he does not feel it should replace the individual characters. Finally, it is interesting that the group usually limits itself to asking questions rather than commenting on the events or expressing opinions. It rarely expresses ideas or gives opinions. Hence, the group seems to be different from such a group or chorus that is represented in the Greek theatre.

After a few lines between the actors that concentrate on their desires to search for themselves, the actors again become one group. The group asks

The group: Who are we? (movement)

The group: Here we are!! (movement)

The group: We are carrying our details inside our bags ... our dreams ... our pains ... we are carrying everything. (movement) (Alharthi, 2009:52-53).

It appears from the lines above that the group seems to be suffering from a loss of identity. It is in the speech from the group that the suitcases are first mentioned. In this speech it seems that they have another function, rather than the function of suitcases in the real world. These bags, as it might be understood from the last line of the group's speech, contain 'dreams', 'pains', and 'everything'. Given this information, one might suggest that the author tries to use the suitcases as symbols to refer to the selves of the characters. It is not overstating the matter to say the relationship between people and their suitcases in a journey, for example, are special as they contain private things.

The group continues to speak with one voice. It asks, "has the flight gone?? (movement)" and it replies, "have we left ourselves?!" (Alharthi, 2009:54). This is the second time in this text that the departure of the flight is linked with the departure of the group from themselves. This suggests that the journey requires the characters to leave themselves in order to find themselves again.

Following this, the actors start to express their inner feelings and tell their stories. Actor 2 says that he suffers from loneliness in spite of being surrounded by others and meeting others. Actor 3 misses his father who "left the house with half a smile and left the other half for the family" (Alharthi, 2009: 54). Actor 5 lives in emptiness and Actor 6 says he does not find time to rest and feels like a machine. Actor 1 feels he is lost and is searching for himself. Actor 4 is the only character that does not make a confession.



- Figure 7: Scene from *Assif [Brainstorm]* in 2003, Tunisia. It is reproduced by the permission of the Altaif Workshop.

In their dialogue the actors use the same semi-poetic language and there is no way to distinguish between them in terms of language. Language is a tool that expresses different aspects of people; it reveals different things about people. For instance, their personalities, educational backgrounds, jobs, and who they are. In this text, it seems a negative aspect of writing that each character speaks with the same high level of language with no difference between them. By reading the dialogue the reader can reach the conclusion that the characters are the same in terms of language. This, however, indicates that the voice of the author is dominant over the voices of the characters.

The stage directions that follow this conversation read that "the announcement is heard several times and the group reacts in moving into different directions as a queue" (Alharthi, 2009:58). As Actor 1 says that the flight has been delayed several times, Actor 2 suggests that in this case, "we might engage in opening the suitcases

and reorganizing our belongings" (Alharthi, 2009:58). This seems to be an invitation to more openness, which confirms one of the ways in which he is distinguished from the others. Actor 5 rejects this invitation and claims that his suitcase is organized. This suggests that Actor 5 is attempting to keep a distance from the group. This leads Actors 3 and 6 to ask why he rejects the invitation which indicates that these Actors, 3 and 6, agree to open their suitcases. No clear answer is provided by Actor 5 except that he will not allow anyone to open his suitcase. Also, he says that people should stop interfering with him. Actor 4 replies to the others, especially Actors 3, 6, and 5, "that we are not going to fight, and lose our inspiration, everyone is free to do what he wants" (Alharthi, 2009: 59).



- Figure 8: Image from *Assif [Brainstorm]* in 2003, Tunisia. It is reproduced by the permission of the Altaif Workshop.

The scene moves on and the group, as the stage directions explain, spreads out on the stage and each actor sits alone with his suitcase; Actor 3 opens his suitcase and takes out a photo album. Actor 3, as mentioned earlier, says he misses his father who left the house. The photo album contains his father's picture, a picture of his friend, and a picture of himself in which he is crying. While he comments on the pictures, the group surrounds him and then takes the album and moves away. Actor 3 follows the group and tries to retrieve his album. He states that he does not want them to play with his feelings.

The dialogue that follows is concerned with presenting the desire of the group to see more of the others' stuff. This is apparent in their attempt to persuade Actor 2 to show his own stuff; Actor 5 seems to still be taking the position of rejecting the idea by warning Actor 2 not to open his suitcase. After his rejection, Actor 2 agrees to show his own belongs. The first item he takes out is a tie. He explains that the tie was given to him as a present four or five years ago. The point of interest in his dialogue is that he does not know how to use the tie and he has tried several times to use it without success. He explains that the tie is a scary thing; it hangs. It seems obvious that the tie might stand as a symbol used by the author to explain something related to this character. A tie, one might assert, does not belong to the costume of Saudi people whether high, middle, or low class. It might be associated with the costume and appearance of other people such as western people or some Arab people like Egyptians or the Lebanese, who usually wear ties. The other Actors, except for Actor 5, search in Actor 2's suitcase and come up with some pieces of clothes and then run away individually to size the clothes. Meanwhile, Actor 2 tries to collect his clothes from the others.

Of this situation, Actor 5 comments that "the suitcases are secrets" (Alharthi, 2009:60). He goes further in saying that "... the clothes cover our bodies and the silence covers our voices" (Alharthi, 2009:60); it appears that he reveals something that draws the attention of the group to him. Actor 4 speaks to Actor 5: "... your voice starts to reveal your silence" (Alharthi, 2009: 61). The group moves slowly to Actor 5. As they come close to him, the dialogue starts with Actor 1:

Actor 1: Your turn now, let us search in your suitcase.

Actor 2: Your secrets, your interests and your belongs will become ours, you will not be a locked box any more (Alharthi, 2009:62).

They try to take his suitcase but he resists. Ultimately, they restrain him and open his suitcase. As they find the suitcase empty; questions start to be asked:

Actor 1: Where are your belongings?

Actor 2: It seems that his heart is his suitcase, let us search his heart (Alharthi, 2009:62).

Before they approach him, he responds as follows:

Actor 5: You will find nothing except fear, worry, and hunger (Alharthi, 2009: 62).

He ends by asking the other actors if they have experienced these things and the actors leave him and spread out on the stage. The group returns to the main two questions:

The group: Has the flight gone? (movement)

The group: Have we left ourselves? (movement) (Alharthi, 2009: 63).

The dialogue that follows the group's questions indicates that the six actors are somehow disappointed in finding hope in the search as a group. This is expressed by

the actors individually. Then, the actors leave the stage one by one expect Actors 1 and 2 who end the play with the following lines before they leave the stage.

Actor 2: Why do you not go with me, we are not looking for a place, we are looking for a space for releasing our voices. This place is not suitable for this aim, everyone has gone.

Actor 1: This place inhabits every cell in my body.

Actor 2: My friend, we are strangers.

Actor 1: I am not a stranger and I am not leaving.

Actor 2: You will stay here. Go with me, we will find a new place of revelation.

Actor 1: So, you will leave!!

Actor 2: Why not?

Actor 1: We will be two and we can release our voices. So, the others might come again.

Actor 2: They might not.

Actor 1: I hate farewell, I will close everything I have until you leave (Alharthi, 2009:65-66).

The text of *Assif* by Fahad Alharthi penetrates the interiority of the characters in order to allow the reader to discover what the characters have and what they feel and suffer. It presents the inside of the characters on two levels. The first is their feelings towards the time they live in and their desire to search for an identity that has been lost through time. The second is presenting their suitcases as containing their experiences in life which they open and allow the others to examine. However, it appears through the text that the experience of sharing the contents of their suitcases does not lead to a discussion or exchange of ideas about their contents. It might be suggested, therefore,

that the characters live miserable lives that force them to express themselves rather than engaging with or understanding their situation and the experiences they have had.

Assif attempts to enter a new territory that differs from the experience of Saudi spectators of historical or social plays. It presents a topic that is based on questions rather than answers. It calls on the readers as well as the spectators to rethink their identity and the time or place in which they live. This play is presented here in order to demonstrate the nature of the theatre that has dominated the experience of theatre in Saudi Arabia since the mid eighties; theatre that focuses on contributing to theatre festivals.

Conclusion

This chapter offered a picture of the main tendencies that dominated the nature of Saudi theatre since its appearance. It argues that this picture will assist readers in further understanding the nature of theatre presented in Saudi Arabia in general as well as of theatre that was produced by the General Presidency which will be the central concern of the next two chapters. Additionally, without this outline of the main tendencies of theatre, the readers would find it difficult to understand the different productions of the General Presidency and the main shifts that influenced the nature of theatre.

The chapter discussed the tendencies of Saudi theatre identified by two researchers, Alkhateeb (1990) and Muthafar (2009); it concludes that most of the tendencies identified by Alkhateeb were not convincing due to Alkhateeb's utilization of unexplained and broad terms such as *entertaining* and *critical*. In addition, he does not offer further explanation to allow readers to understand his identified tendencies.

In contrast, Muthafar provides a clear picture of the tendencies she identified and offers convincing explanations of the context of each tendency. The two researchers are concerned with the main tendencies of Saudi theatre in general, but this chapter is limited to the subject of the thesis, the history of theatre in the General Presidency for Youth and Welfare. Accordingly, it identified three main tendencies that were noticeable in the history of theatre in this establishment. These tendencies are the Historical, Social, and Festival tendencies. By offering an account of each tendency as well as a summary of a play that belongs to each, the chapter aims to prepare readers for the next two chapters which explore the history of theatre in the General Presidency.

Chapter Five

The History of Theatre in the GPYW

Part 1: The General Administration of Cultural Activities (GACA)

Introduction

Whilst Chapter Three provided readers with a view of the nature of theatre that existed in Saudi Arabia before the establishment of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare (GPYW) in 1974, Chapter Four tried to prepare them for an exploratory journey of the history of theatre in the GPYW by introducing a brief outline of the main tendencies of Saudi theatre as well as theatre that emerged from the GPYW. The GPYW, as will be shown shortly, supervised and produced most of the productions of Saudi theatre between 1974 and 2004. This chapter, therefore, will focus on the history of theatre in it, since this will further the ends of the thesis by aiding in the understanding of the history of Saudi theatre. However, first a brief historical context of the root of this establishment and how it became an organization is needed.

Historical context

The root of this establishment goes back to 1952. In this year, the Saudi government established the first Administration for Sport Affairs under the Ministry of the Interiority (Anon.,2012:13; Alswaad 1995:17). It was established precisely to supervise the sport activities that appeared in Saudi Arabia. Alswaad points out that "... as soon as the youth activities started to be noticed, there was a need for an official organization to supervise these activities. Therefore, the supervision was given to the Ministry of interiority" (1995:21).

A recent report published by the GPYW traces the idea of youth welfare in Saudi Arabia to 1945 when football began to increase in popularity across the country which led to the organization of the Administration of Sport Affairs in 1952 (Anon., 2012:13). As this report shows, the main reason for establishing the GPYW was the need to organize the sport activities, especially football; it is not surprising that this establishment became associated with sport even after it became an independent establishment in 1974. In addition, the report demonstrates that other youth activities, such as cultural and social activities, were absent from or beyond the thought of this administration. More importantly, the establishment of this administration as a result of the increase of sport activities shows that the Saudi government, by 1952, was reacting to new activities that appeared out of its control. In other words, the Saudi government's policy did not pay attention to the youth sector in terms of offering a clear plan or vision for their needs and future until 1952. At this point Saudi Arabia was still in the beginning stages of building the country, which was established officially in 1932; this seems to justify the ignorance of youth needs at that time. This argument appears reasonable while the country was building itself, but it would not make sense for sport activities to remain the main concern and responsibility so far as young people are concerned for many years.

The section that dealt with scholastic theatre in Chapter Three mentioned that the Ministry of Knowledge established the Sport and Social Administration in 1954; this administration planned, managed, and supervised the schools' activities in Saudi Arabia. Mahmud Sati mentions that as soon as the administration of sport affairs was transferred from the Ministry of Interiority to the Ministry of Knowledge in 1960, the latter ministry became responsible for developing the sport activities in Saudi Arabia

(1969:65). It is important to highlight that by that time there was no indication of interest in other youth activities, such as cultural and social activities.

In 1962, an administration for youth welfare was established in the Labour and Social Ministry. Accordingly, the supervision of sport activities was transferred from the Ministry of Knowledge into this ministry. Alswead, speaking about this transformation, confirms that the Administration of Youth Welfare became responsible for sport activities (1995:18). Sati points out that the main aim of this administration was to supervise sport activities in Saudi Arabia (1969:68-69). Hence, Youth Welfare in Saudi Arabia had been managed by three ministries in its history and, most importantly, all three were primarily concerned with sport. In 1974, the Administration of Youth Welfare became an independent establishment that plans, supervises, and manages youth activities in Saudi Arabia. It became known as the General Presidency for Youth Welfare (GPYW).

The vision of the GPYW is understood from a statement made by Prince Faisal bin Fahd⁸: "it is clear from the GPYW's plans since its appearance that building the body of youth should not be the main purpose... we try to walk in balance that is concerned with the aspect of sport without ignoring the cultural, social, and structural aspects..." (cited in Alswead 1995:25). The words of Prince Faisal acknowledge the domination of sport activities in the GPYW's interests and plans. He did not have to deny that "building the body of youth" is the aim of the GPYW, which cannot be achieved without sport and physical training. Although this thesis strives to translate his words as accurately as possible, the word 'concerned' was the appropriate translation for his own word *natajah* to show the status of sport. Indeed, saying that the GPYW will

⁸ - The first son of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, who was the president of the GPYW from its establishment in 1974 until his death in 1999. He was succeeded by his brother Sultan.

focus on sport "without ignoring the cultural, social, and structural aspects" of youth activities reveals the position of these activities in relation to the situation of sport.

Fahd Albani provides further explanation of the aim of this establishment. He asserts that the aim of the GPYW is to develop the mental and physical abilities of youth in cultural, scientific, and athletic aspects in order to equip them to participate in building the country (1992:18). However, by putting mental abilities before the physical suggests that Albani's explanation of the goals of the GPYW is misleading because it ignores the domination of sport over mental activities. It is also misleading to put cultural and scientific activities before the sport activities in his explanation.

The GPYW consists of different departments and organizations that supervise and manage different youth activities. Regarding theatre, it was produced regularly by two main parts of the GPYW. The first part was the General Administration for Cultural Activities, which was established as a part of the organizational system of the GPYW. The second part was the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Art which was established under the supervision of the GPYW with some degree of independence. This chapter, therefore, will concentrate upon the first part, and the second will be explored in the next chapter.

The first part: The General Administration for Cultural Activities (GACA)

The main role of the GACA is to enhance and develop the cultural aspect of the youth sector. It is limited to planning and supervising cultural activities for Saudi clubs through the GPYW's Youth Welfare offices that were established in most cities in the country. In reality, however, the GACA does not deal with the cultural activities in a direct way, but rather it leaves the GPYW's offices across the country to directly supervise and ensure the achievement of these activities by the various local clubs.

Alateeq explains that the main role of the Youth Welfare offices in Saudi Arabia is to supervise and ensure the achievement of the clubs' activities and programmes that were planned by the GPYW (n.d:43). The Youth Welfare offices, therefore, are in charge of supervising different activities in Saudi clubs such as sport, cultural, and social activities. Alswaad asserts that the GACA's programmes focus on serving the members of Saudi clubs (1995:89).

Cultural activities include theatrical activities, painting, and competitions in knowledge of the Quran and writing stories, poetry, or essays (Alateeq, n.d:271). Since these activities are designed for the clubs in Saudi Arabia, it seems that the best point of departure in order to understand the movement of theatre is to begin with theatre activities in these clubs.

Youth Clubs

It is important to offer a clear definition of the nature of the youth club in Saudi Arabia as defined by the GPYW. This will assist the readers in making sense of its nature and role that might differ from the meaning and the function of such clubs in other countries. According to a report published by the GPYW, clubs are defined as places that are equipped to allow youth to practice cultural and social activities alongside sport activities and to provide facilities for children to practice activities that are suitable to them by supplying entertainment facilities for parents and families (cited in Alateeq, n.d:44-45). It is important to mention that the words 'parents' and 'family' in the context of this definition do not refer to the precise meaning of these words in other societies. Since women are not allowed to practice such activities in the Saudi clubs, 'parents' refers to the father and 'family' refers only to the male members of the family.

The equipment of the clubs in Saudi Arabia during the period examined by this thesis varied from one club to the next in terms of their theatrical activities. For instance, some clubs had stages that allowed for the staging of theatrical works and some did not. Moreover, the subsidy provided by the GPYW was different for clubs in the main cities than for those in the suburbs. Consequently, this influenced the nature and the number of activities in the clubs.

Theatre in clubs

It is vital to point out that the presentation of theatre in Saudi clubs did not go beyond the way that theatre was presented during the years before the establishment of the GPYW, as discussed in Chapter Two. This method was subjected to the instruction issued by the GPYW that required each club to present one or two ceremonies per year that consisted of different parts, including theatre. Among the main parts of each ceremony are the performances of songs with music, the imitation of different known voices by a performer, and the production of plays. Abdalrahman Alreraq (2010), a supervisor of theatre in the cultural administration of the GPYW, said in an interview that when he joined this administration in 1982, he found that theatre existed as merely a part of the whole ceremony in the clubs. In addition, interviews with other theatrical practitioners such as Yousif Alkhomais (2011), Othman Alseni (2011), and Abdualah Almejhim (2012) confirmed this situation of theatre in clubs at that time. This situation, however, led Alreraq to present a proposal to the administration calling for establishing the Youth Groups for Theatre in the GPYW to concentrate on producing theatre as a separate activity. As this proposal was accepted by the GPYW, theatre took a new direction from 1986.

Regardless of the appearance of the Youth Groups for Theatre, which will be discussed later, the practice of theatre in Saudi clubs from the establishment of the GPYW until 2004 shows that the clubs did not develop the practice of theatre beyond using it as part of a ceremony. For instance, there was no plan for preparing actors' skills, or those of directors in the area of directing or playwriting in theatre. Besides, the time given for rehearsing the plays did not exceed a few hours before presenting the ceremonies.

However, it might be helpful to look at some of the important works produced by some of the Saudi clubs. A few examples are sufficient to provide a clear picture of the nature of theatre presented by Saudi clubs. The selection of these examples was based on three main points. The first one is that these clubs, especially in Alahsa city, preceded other Saudi clubs in presenting theatre activities. The second is that some people who were involved in the theatrical activities within these clubs have continued working in the field of Saudi theatre and participated in theatre after the clubs' activities. Finally, the people who worked in these clubs were available for interview.

Clubs in Alahsa city

From the mid seventies until the establishment of Youth Groups for Theatre in 1986, two clubs in Alahsa city continued to stage some plays in their ceremonies. The first club in Alahsa city was Hajr club. Abdullah Almejhim played a significant role in writing and directing plays in this club from 1970 to the early eighties. His role in enhancing theatre in the club is confirmed by interviews with Yousif Alkhomais (2011), Ahmad Alnowah (2011), and Abualrahman Alreraq (2010). It is important to mention that Almejhim, like many Saudi figures, had experienced theatre in schools

before joining the club. In a personal interview with him, he offers a description of his experience of theatre in the club. The main characteristic of theatre in Hajr club, as he mentions, was the absence of scripts. He explains that "there were no scripts to work with. We started with an outline that showed what the play was about, and then the actors create their characters' dialogue accordingly" (2012).

The dialogue, according to Almejhim, might be extended to unexpected length owing to the abilities of actors or the reception of the audience. The club's plays lasted for more than one hour and were presented as a main part of a larger ceremony. This ceremony was usually presented once or twice a year. Almejhim asserts that the plays presented by the club during his time were social plays that addressed different issues that concerned youth and other members of society such as parents and workers. Moreover, he mentions that male actors were not allowed to play female roles at that time. The budget given to theatre by the club was not sufficient for staging a play and the club did not profit financially from the plays; however, they paid no attention to money because of their love of theatre. This shows the enthusiasm of practitioners for staging theatre; regarding this, Almejhim asserts that "sometimes we pay for the accessories of the play from our money" (2012).

The experience of theatre in this club introduced some actors to the movement of Saudi theatre who became distinguished figures in contributed to Saudi theatre. These figures, to name few, are Abdualaziz Alsmaeel, who became an author and director; Ali Alghoainm and Rashed Alwarthan, who became directors and managers of the department of theatre in the Alahsa and Dammam branches of the SASCA; and Ahmad Alnowah who contributed to theatre as an actor (Alkhomais, 2002:19).

From the establishment of Youth Group for Theatre in 1986, the Alahsa's office became more interested in focusing upon the group and its productions, as Alkhomais mentions (2011) in an interview. This has impacted negatively on the situation of theatre in the clubs in Alahsa city. Alkhomais confirms that theatre in clubs has been left to people who have less interest in developing it. In other words, he adds, theatre returned to being a marginal activity in the clubs after the establishment of Youth Group for Theatre. Therefore, there is nothing more to say about the situation of theatre at this club. For more understanding it is appropriate to move to another club in Alahsa city, as the second example.

The second club was Aljeel. The first play presented by this club was *shabab wa alhaia* [*Youth and Shyness*] which was written by Fahad Aldukhainy and directed by Abdualrahman Almoraikhy. Although its script has been lost, it can be understood from its title that youth was its main subject. However, the interest in youth issues might be explained by the fact that most of the members of the clubs belonged to this category, and this might make their issues and concerns the focus of those discussed in theatre produced by the club.

In addition, Aljeel club presented a play written by Toufeeq Alhakeem, the famous Egyptian writer. This play was *souq alhameer* [*Donkey's Market*]. Since this play was an Egyptian play, it shows a sign of breaking the common interest in presenting social plays concerned with Saudi society. The lost of the script of this play that was staged by the club prevents further understanding of how Alhakeem's play was presented. As it was directed by Almoraikhy, his knowledge of theatre and acquaintance with Arabic plays, as a self-educated person in theatre, might have played a role in presenting this kind of play that differed from the social plays.

According to Alkhomais, Aljeel club presented several plays that were concerned with different issues (2002:18). Among these plays were *qariah ismha alsalam* [*The Peaceful Town*], *yomiat benay* [*The Dairies of Benay*], and *alhal almufqod* [*The Lost Solution*]. However, the loss of their scripts stands in the way of understanding the nature of these plays and their contents.

Sami Aljaman, in a personal interview (2011), provides some useful information with regard to his own experience of theatre in Aljeel club. He explains that Aljeel club presented a play each year. Significantly, these plays were also presented as a part of a larger ceremony. Aljaman mentions that the first play that he participated in with the club was *Ahzan* [*Grief*] which was written by Mohammad Alhamad and directed by Ibraheem Alkhomais. This play, as Aljaman mentions, was presented in a ceremony that contained different parts. The process of selecting a text in the club depended upon the club's cultural supervisor. Aljaman mentions that in 1982 he wrote a play called *Alaodah* [*The Return*] which was produced by Aljeel club in the same year. By that time, Aljaman explains that his own experience in theatre did not go beyond the several plays that he participated in with this club.

The appearance of Youth Group for Theatre in 1986 affected the theatrical activities in Aljeel clubs. Most of the actors and practitioners in this club joined the Youth Group and theatre returned to being a marginal activity in the club. In addition, as Alkhomais (2011) explains, Alahsa's office became more interested in focusing on the group and its productions.

Children's theatre in Aljeel club

The first launch children's theatre in Saudi Arabia was Abdualrahman Almoraikey in Alahsa city. He began his work within the theatrical activities in Aljeel's club in 1976.

This indicates the interest of this club in establishing theatrical works for children. This club presented several plays for children. For example, it presented *lialat anafelah* [*The 15th Night of Ramadan*] in 1976, *nassr albowakeer* [*The Early Morning*] in 1980, *altair althahbi* [*The Gold Bird*] in 1981, and *ibn adm qadm* [*A Human Being is Coming*] in 1982. Interestingly, all the plays mentioned were written and directed by Almoraikey, who is considered by researchers in Saudi theatre, such as Al-Azma (1992) and Alkhomais (2002), as the pioneer of children's theatre in Saudi Arabia. Almoraikey presented several plays between 1976 and 2005, the year of his death. Some of them were for adults, while others were for children. Importantly, he directed most of his plays.

A Human Being is Coming is a play that addresses the relationship between human beings and animals. It calls for a relationship based upon peace and love. In addition, it expresses the importance for corporation between animals in serving their forest. The arrival of a human being to the forest changes it because he attempts to educate the animals and encourage more love and corporation among them for the sake of their forest. The picture below (Figure 9) shows a scene of the play performed by actors who are dressed as animals. The scene, in addition, shows the stage decorated with forest scenery.



- Figure 9: The play of *ibn adm qadm* [*A Human Being is Coming*], staged in Alahsa in 1982. It is reproduced by permission of Alkhomais' personal archive.

This play, like most of Almoraikey's plays for children, contains some songs that are associated with expressive dancing. Some of the songs in this play are sung by the animals of the forest. For instance, the animals sing the following song as a group:

The animals: Good night our forest .. our home

Our home that existed in our hearts and eyes

Good night our forest... that its sand witnessed the appearance of us and our growth

Good night our forest... our home (Almoraikey, 1983:34).

At the end of the play the animals sing the following song that expresses their appreciation of the arrival of the human being to the forest:

The animals: Human being .. we now know the value of human being

The value of working... we now know how to live in peace...

Human Being ... because of you the light is coming to our forest

And the dark is gone (Almoraikhy, 1983:105).

Alkhomais says in general the works of Almoraikhy were received well by the audience because his plays were clear and relevant (2002:17). Moreover, Sami Aljaman worked with Almoraikhy in the first play and continued with him for a number of plays. He expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to work as a child with children's theatre and specially with Almoraikhy. The experience he had in children's theatre influenced him to love theatre and understand its value. In addition he reflects on the experience of Almoraikhy on children's theatre as follows:

Almoraikhy utilized theatre as a tool to educate and enlighten people in Saudi Arabia. He believed in the change that children can and will make in Saudi society. In addition he believed that the children he worked with and those who watch them will lead the cultural aspect in the country in the future (2011).

Aljaman notes that some of the children who worked with Almoraikhy are amongst those who led the cultural developments in Alahsa city.

The section above attempts to present an overview of the nature of theatre in two clubs of Alahsa city. For further understanding of theatre in Saudi clubs it seems important to seek other examples from another city in Saudi Arabia. The next section will explore the activities of theatre in the main city of Saudi Arabia and its capital, Riyadh.

Clubs in Riyadh city

The famous clubs in Riyadh are Alhilal and Alnassir. Despite the existence of the SASCA in Riyadh, which presented several plays from the mid seventies, the situation of theatre in these clubs did not seem to be influenced by the works of the main office of the SASCA in this city. For instance, the main office established a new

way of presenting theatre in which plays were presented without a ceremony that included other parts. But the Riyadh clubs continued to present plays only as a part of a ceremony. As confirmed by Mechal Alrasheed (2011) and Fahd Alhoshany (2011), Alhilal and Alnassir's clubs had no interest in producing theatrical productions on their own until the mid eighties. More precisely, in 1986 the club of Alnassir produced the first complete play that was separated from a larger ceremony. The most important point, in this respect, is that the proposal of producing a complete play was suggested by an individual who had interest in and was enthusiastic about theatre. This means that the idea of producing a play did not come from the club itself. Mechal Alrasheed explains that he was asked to supervise the cultural activities in club in 1986 and in that year he decided to present a play that had been approved by the club's administration. This play was *kart ahmar* [*Red Card*] and it was written and directed by Mechal Alrasheed. This play is a social play that is concerned with youth issues and was presented in a comedic form. Most of the actors who participated in this play were famous actors in Saudi theatre and had participated in the plays of the SASCA's main office. The club, as Alrasheed mentions (2011), supported this play financially. Fahad Alhoshany, who took over the responsibility of supervising the cultural and social activities in the club after Alrasheed, participated in this play as an assistant director.

Alhoshany mentions that he also produced several ceremonies that included short theatrical sketches (2011). It is significant that producing ceremonies was an important activity for the club because of the policy of the GPYW that required each club to produce ceremonies. However, producing theatre as a separate activity from the ceremony was beyond the scope of Saudi clubs. It was found, as noted by Alrasheed (2011) and Alhoshany (2011) later, that the existence of theatre for its own

sake was dependent on the existence of an individual who was enthusiastic about and interested in theatre. Two years later, Alhoshany staged two plays of which he was the author and director. The two plays were *doctore abu marzooq* [*Doctore Marzooq's Father*] in 1989 and *alhigh way* [*The High Way*] in 1990. The subjects of these plays were social affairs that faced Saudi society. Furthermore, the form of these plays was comedic.

In a personal interview, Alhoshany mentions that the support of Alnassir club for the previous plays did not include any financial aid (2011). Hence, he had to finance these plays personally. Since Alhoshany could not afford to continue to produce theatre in the clubs he preferred to continue supervising the cultural activities in this club and the work of theatre in Alnassir club returned to presenting theatre as a part of a larger ceremony. Alhoshany, as will be shown later, moved from the club to establish his own Youth Group for Theatre that emerged from the office of the GPYW in Riyadh.

Alhilal club in Riyadh, despite the increased number of its fans and its importance as a sport club, did not show interest in theatre during the seventies or eighties. Alateeq, who worked with the club from 1989 until 2002, mentioned in a personal interview (2012) that the existence of theatrical activities did not begin in the club until the early nineties. However, they did not go beyond the presentation of a play or two as parts of a larger ceremony.

The situation of theatre in Saudi clubs, according to the experience of the four clubs mentioned above, shows that despite the existence of some longer or more significant works, especially in Alnassir club, Saudi clubs remained limited in their practice of theatre to the policy of the GPYW that dealt with theatre as a part of a ceremony. It is reasonable to assume that the situation of theatre in other Saudi clubs was similar

because these clubs also followed the policies of the GPYW. Alseni, in a personal interview (2011), confirms that the two main clubs in Altaif city, in the western part of Saudi Arabia, followed the same path of the clubs mentioned in this section.

It is relevant to mention that Alateeq, in his study about the GPYW's activities, concludes that the cultural activities containing different activities in Saudi clubs prevented the Saudi clubs from considering theatre as a separate activity (n.d.:271). Alateeq's conclusion provides an answer to the question of why Saudi clubs did not develop the status of theatre. The method of the GPYW in dealing with theatre as a part of different activities rather as an activity in itself led to limiting the vision of clubs toward theatre. It did not distinguish theatre from the other activities, as noted in the activities of Aljeel, Hajr, Alnassir, and Alhilal clubs. It is assumed, accordingly, that the value and the appreciation of theatre as well as its importance to society was absent from the policy makers in the GPYW, who set the plan for Saudi clubs.

Youth Groups for Theatre

The emergence of the Youth Group for Theatre which was to replace the experience of theatre in clubs led to another new direction for Saudi theatre. The Youth Groups for Theatre were established in response to a proposal made by Abdualrahman Alreraq, a new official member of the GPYW, in the Theatre Department in 1984. Before joining the GPYW, Alreraq had spent four years as an undergraduate student of theatre in Egypt. These years had much influence upon Alreraq's knowledge and awareness of theatre which is representative of the influence of Egyptian theatre in Arabic counties. However, this influence might be considered an indirect influence upon the movement of theatre in Saudi Arabia because it influenced Alreraq first and

then he transferred the influence to theatre in the GPYW by playing a role in establishing the Youth Groups for Theatre.

Alreraq (2010) explains that he was shocked by theatre in Egypt due to the excellent works he encountered there as compared to his own experience in Saudi theatre. He described the preparations for a play in Saudi Arabia as being too simple in the approach to writing the text, acting, and directing, while theatre in Egypt appeared more professional (2010). He goes further to say that the work of Egyptian actors was astonishing in terms of presenting the characters, impersonating details of their expressions, and delivering the characters' dialogue (2010). In terms of directing, Alreraq was inspired by the presentation of plays, the way of using music, combining music with the actions and how characters moved on the stage. The Egyptian theatre, by the late seventies when Alreraq studied there, was reaching a higher status than the other Arabic countries. This greatness, as mentioned in Chapter One, was a result of the combination of different factors: the support of the authorities, the establishment of a higher institution of theatre, and the existence a number of Egyptian specialists in theatre who had graduated from universities in western countries. Therefore, it was not surprising that Alreraq felt the huge difference between the status of theatre in Egypt and that in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Alreraq saw the Egyptian theatre from another perspective:

it was the first time I felt the impact of female characters in theatre and the importance of their existence in theatre as human beings that differs from the experience I had in Saudi theatre where males play the role of females. However, nothing could be done with regard to this issue because this was subject to the nature of society and it is the society who can decide whether women participate in the art of acting or not (2010).

Alreraq, in expressing his own feelings toward the role of women on stage, supports the importance of women as participants on stage and in theatre in general. Indeed, the impact of women on stage cannot be felt and seen without their appearance on stage. The method that was common in Saudi theatre during the late sixties and seventies, in which men played the roles of female characters, could not achieve the real impact of women. In other words, a male who played the role of a woman on a stage cannot be as real as the role played by a woman who shows the physical appearance of a woman and expresses the emotion of a woman. It is important to mention that Alreraq's feelings about the importance of women on stage comes from his particular perspective. Alreraq, in his experience in Egypt where female roles were played by women, had the experience of having been a member of the audience who watched a play that included women, as well as the perspective of having been an actor who had worked alongside women on the stage which could not have occurred in Saudi theatre. However, from the expression of Alreraq it can be understood that the lack of women on the Saudi stage for many years prevented Saudi actors, practitioners, and, perhaps, spectators from feeling the importance and the need for the existence of women as participants. Alreraq seems to be being honest with himself with regard to the influence of Saudi society upon the participation of women in theatre. It is understood from Alreraq's words that the influence of Saudi society on the appearance of women on stage was huge and too rooted, therefore, Saudi practitioners could do nothing against this influence.

Alreraq, as a student in the Higher Institution for Theatre Arts in Cairo, mentions that his own knowledge of theatre was increased by the classes and training in this institute. However, the most important influence upon Alreraq's knowledge and awareness of theatre was from the theatre groups in Egypt. As he mentions, there

were a number of theatre groups across Egypt that presented theatre under the supervision of the Egyptian government. These groups were trained and prepared for theatre which seemed to Alreraq to be a method that Saudi theatre could adopt as a first stage in the development of theatre. Therefore, his first step after returning to Saudi Arabia was to establish theatre groups under the supervision of the GPYW.

The main reason behind the establishment of Theatre Group in the GPYW, as Alreraq mentions, was to develop and improve theatre in the youth sector in the GPYW:

The practice of theatre in clubs as a part of ceremony did not help in improving theatre. Nor did it attain its function by practicing theatre alongside with other cultural activities in clubs. The situation of theatre in clubs as I noticed early in the eighties did not assist in reaching the value of theatre for improving Youth (2010).

However, since the proposed Youth Group could not be established without the acceptance and support of the GPYW, it is important to assume that the GPYW as a governmental organization did not stand in the way of improving theatre as long as it did not contradict its own policy or cause conflict with the religious people in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned, in Chapter Two, King Saud suspended the project of Ahmad Alsubaie in 1962 that aimed to establish theatre because it irritated religious people. This might account for the way the Saudi government deals with theatre in the context of its policy. The interesting question in this regard is why the GPYW did not show interest in improving the status of theatre before Alreraq's proposal. The answer to this question is that the GPYW, by that time, lacked specialist figures in the field of theatre who understood the value of theatre and the need for developing its status. Alreraq was the first Saudi specialist in theatre who joined and worked for the

GPYW and this offers an explanation for the development of theatre in this organization.

It is significant that the movement of theatre in Saudi Arabia, by that time, was in need of specialists in theatre, but, unfortunately an understanding of the importance of sending students to study in Egypt was absent from the policy of the GPYW. Alreraq was the only student who had studied theatre at that time. The role that Alreraq played in establishing the Youth Group supports the idea that the development of Saudi theatre depended upon the Saudi individuals rather than upon the institutions and organizations in Saudi Arabia. As witnessed in the previous chapters, Saudi individuals' enthusiasm and passion for theatre were behind the continuation of theatre activities in the country.

Although the establishment of the Youth Group appeared to be a significant change in the practice of youth theatre in the GPYW, the method of establishing the groups did not assist in reaching a satisfactory outcome. Alreraq mentions that the cultural administration in the GPYW sent letters to the Youth Welfare offices that were responsible for clubs' activities suggesting they establish a group for theatre in each city for the youth who are interested in theatre (2010). It seems, therefore, that establishing theatre groups, as Alreraq confirms (2010), was an optional choice rather than an essential element of the clubs. Moreover, it depended upon the enthusiasm for theatre in the clubs' offices. As previously mentioned, the practice of theatre in clubs in Saudi Arabia varied in how they valued the role of theatre. Alreraq asserts that establishing a group for theatre in a city depends profoundly upon the existence of a cultural supervisor in the city who has an interest in theatre and enthusiasm for improving the status of youth theatre in the city (2010). Hence, the GPYW started with a few groups at the beginning and increased their numbers later

depending on the existence of such cultural supervisors. It appears reasonable, however, that if, as Alreraq mentions, the enthusiasm and interest of an individual such as the supervisor of cultural activities in a city played a role in establishing a Youth Group, a lack of enthusiasm in other supervisors would stand in the way of improving the status of theatre.

The Youth Groups of Theatre began with three groups in Alahsa, Almajmah, and Alqasaim during the mid eighties. Then, the number of Youth Groups began to increase in different cities in Saudi Arabia. The works of these groups have been irregular as Alreraq (2010) and Alkhomais (2011) confirm. They agree that the main two Youth Groups for Theatre that sustain the production of theatre are the Youth Groups in Alahsa and Riyadh. Therefore, it seems important to focus on exploring the history of these groups and the nature of theatre that was presented by these groups.

Alahsa Youth Group for Theatre

Yousif Alkhomais (2011), who is the manager of the Youth Group Theatre and cultural supervisor in Alahsa, explains that Alahsa Group was begun in 1986. The members of this group consisted of talented youth from different clubs in Alahsa city, mainly from the two main clubs: Aljeel and Hajr. Most of its members were actors who worked in the clubs' theatre activities. In addition, there were members who worked in different aspects of theatre productions such as stage management, music, design, lighting, and sound effects.

Since its appearance, the group has selected specialists who have knowledge and experience of theatre in Alahsa as a consultant committee responsible for deciding the appropriate texts for the group. Alkhomais (2011) mentions in an interview that the group relies on the decisions made by this committee to enhance the nature and the

quality of the group's productions. He adds that the members of this committee were volunteers who work with passion and love in theatre and there is no payment for taking part in this committee's activities (2011). However, it is important to mention that the club's supervisor was responsible for the experience of theatre in the club and the decisions made about the texts before the establishment of this group; he was also responsible for all of the other cultural activities in the club. Therefore, the existence of a committee that contributes to selecting texts and provides advice to the group seems to be a remarkable step in developing the status of youth theatre in Alahsa. Furthermore, it distinguished the work of the group from the previous experience in clubs that depended upon one person: the cultural supervisor.

Alkhomais (2011) explains that the group utilizes the Alahsa's branch stage for its productions. This, as he says, is because the stage is the best one in the city (2011). It is interesting to point out that the cooperation between the Youth Group and the SASCA branch in Alahsa was not limited to the utilization of the stage. Alkhomais (2011) and Aljaman (2011) assert in interviews that the cooperation between the two groups, the SASCA branch and the Youth Group, has existed since the beginning of the group owing to the common interest in theatre and living in one city. Besides, the nature of Alahsa city as a small city with a small population appears to play role in the cooperation between the group and the branch of the SASCA in this city. Both Alkhomais (2011) and Aljaman (2011) agree that it is not an exaggeration to claim that in reality the two groups are working together and have become one group that functions in two places: the Youth Theatre Group and Alahsa's branch of the SASCA. Although the cooperation between the two groups is beneficial, it seems that working as one unit will limit the experience of theatre to only a few people. For instance, if the same youth actors perform in the productions of the two groups, this will prevent

other talented performers in the city from finding a chance to work in the SASCA's branch.

From the beginning of the group there has been much interest in addressing social issues that concerned Saudi society, especially youth issues. This might be a result of the experience of its members in the social works that they had presented in clubs before the establishment of this group. It has been mentioned, in Chapter Three, that there was a tendency for social plays to dominate most of the theatrical works of Saudi theatre up to the mid of eighties.

The first play produced by this group was *sheqah fi aldor althalth* [*A Flat on The Third Floor*] which was written by Yousif Alkhomais and directed by Ali Alghoainm. The interest in social issues appeared in its subject matter; the play presents a group of Saudi youths who live together in one flat and face problems that affect their unity. The social interest also appears in the form of realism that was presented through this play. Realism, however, was the common form of theatre in Saudi Arabia. In the context of Saudi theatre, it meant theatre that attempted to present an imitation of reality in terms of language, costumes, and stage design. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the realistic plays, which presented a copy of life on stage, that were broadcast by Saudi television were the only available examples of theatre and this influenced the groups in Alahsa and other Saudi cities.



- Figure 10: The play of *sheqah fi aldor althalth* [*A Flat on The Third Floor*], Alahsa, 1986. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

The picture above shows the realistic way in which the play presented actors in the traditional clothes that Saudi people usually wear. The two performers standing on the left are wearing clothes that are used in the home and for sleeping, while the person sitting on the floor is wearing the formal Saudi clothes which consist of *thoub* and *Shimaq*, the red piece of cloth that covers his head. Moreover, the picture shows that the play uses real accessories and props such as the small gold prop in the floor which is usually used to serve hot drinks like tea and coffee.

The picture below (Figure 11) shows another aspect of realism in this play. It presents the shape of a local shop that is located between two houses in the city. The owner of the shop, who sits on the chair on the right, is wearing the traditional clothes of

elderly people in Alahsa's province. Interestingly, the two pictures show the kind of microphone that was used in the play. In picture one, the microphone is hanging from the ceiling while picture two shows another microphone in a lift which is standing on the floor facing the actors. Importantly, the location of these microphones plays a role in the general movement of actors, since they had to move close to the microphones in order to deliver the dialogue to the audience .



- Figure 11: a scene from The play of *sheqah fi aldor althalth* [A Flat on The Third Floor], Alahsa, 1986. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

The second play produced by the group was *nas taht alsifr* [People Beneath the Line]; it was written and directed by Abdualrahman Alhamad in 1987. The play presented a number of characters who face different problems with society. The play was presented in the Gulf Youth Festival for Theatre in the UAE; it was the first contribution of the group to a theatrical festival. It is significant that the experience of the group in this festival had a huge influence on its members and consequently affected the way they dealt with theatre later. Sami Aljaman (2011), who was among the actors who participated in this play, expresses in an interview that he and the

group were shocked by the nature of the plays that were staged in the festival.

Alkhomais mentions that

... we were surprised by the plays that were presented in this festival. The nature of these plays were new for us and our play was weak in comparison with the other plays. We were influenced by this festival and especially by the post-show discussion that criticized our play and the way it was presented, so, we decided to change the way we look at the performance and how we deal with it (2011).

In the same year, as mentioned by Alkhomais (2011), the play was performed at the Seven Arab Youth Festival in Sudan. In response to the question of why the group presented a play that had been considered weak and was criticized in the Gulf festival, Alkhomais (2011) explains that there was not enough time to produce another play for this festival. However, Alkhomais mentions that "we took the criticism into consideration and made some changes in the play" (2011). However, it is crucial to highlight that the contribution of Saudi theatre to theatre festivals, especially in the Youth Theatre Group and the main office of SASCA in Riyadh, had an influence on the development of Saudi theatre.

Nas taht alsifr was the first entry of the Youth Group to the festivals in 1987 and it led to a dramatic shift in the method of presenting theatre by this Group. This shift became noticeable in most of its productions after 1987. Hence, it is useful to examine the main productions after this year. A table of the complete list of productions is provided at the end of this thesis.

Theatre after 1987

The nature of theatre produced by the group after 1987 had one remarkable characteristic which was evident in most of the plays produced by the group. This

characteristic was that the plays that were chosen were produced specifically for entry into theatre festivals outside the country. Participating in festivals required the group to present plays that were competitive with the productions of other countries. For this reason the group became aware of the importance of presenting plays that were concerned with issues that face human beings generally, rather than plays that focus on local issues that face Saudi society in particular. Moreover, the use of light and design was now a significant aspect of this theatre.

Among the plays that were considered for entries in festivals was *nehayat almubarah* [*The End of the Game*], which was written by Sami Aljaman and directed by Ali Alghoainm in 1989. This play was presented in the Third Theatre Festival for Youth in the Gulf States in Qatar. It addresses the issue of brothers fighting for money. It tells a story of five brothers who enter a cemetery in order to bury their father who is a poor man and left nothing for them. The fighting started after discovering a box containing gold in the cemetery. It ends with the deaths of two brothers.



- Figure 12 : An image from *nehayat almubarah* [*The End of Game*], Alahsa, 1989. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

In this picture the actors are wearing clothes that are common not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in the Gulf States. The old man on the left, moreover, presents the common clothes for elderly people in the region. However, it should be noticed that the director intended to present a symbolic vision of the cemetery rather than presenting a vision of a realistic cemetery. For instance, as is evident in the picture above, the director presents an uncompleted cemetery wall which is understood as a sign of the cemetery. The play is described by Aljaman (2011) in an interview as a social symbolic play.

Alqubo [The Cellar] is another festival play, which was written and directed by Sami Aljaman. It was presented in The Arabic Theatre Assembly in Cairo 1994, and in The Fourth Theatre Festival for Youth in the Gulf States in the same year in Bahrain. This play addresses the status of writers in society and the need to play their roles in enlightening and educating their people. This play is like the other Saudi plays that were performed at theatre festivals in that it presents issues that can be described as universal issues that do not belong to a specific time or place. The play presents four characters hiding in a cellar because of the war which surrounds the play until the end. The four characters come from different backgrounds. As the play moves toward its end the reader or audience discovers that the cellar is where the writer lives with his own books and written documents. The attitude of the writer toward his society is understood from his silence during the play and his lack of desire to return to his role of enlightening his people. As soon as the war ends the four characters leave the cellar and the writer is left sleeping in his bed. The play is in Arabic, a language that is understood by people in all Arabic countries and could be presented in a theatre festival without causing a difficulty in understanding the play by people who attended the festival.

Alqafilah taseer [*The Trail is Moving*] was written and directed by Sami Aljaman. It was presented in the Cairo Scientific Gathering for Arabic Theatre in 1994. The play discusses the value of participating in society. It aims to highlight the importance of working together instead of working for the benefit of individuals. The picture below (Figure 13) shows the mode of the play which seems dissimilar to the social plays that were produced by the group. In this picture, the director tries to show the contrast between two colours, black, which cover the entire background of the stage, and white, which appears in the clothes of the performer in the middle. This is another example of the form of theatre that was produced for the theatre festivals.



- Figure 13: Image from *Alqafilah taseer* [*The Trail is Moving*], Alahsa, 1994. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

The picture below (Figure 14) shows that the contrast goes beyond the stage to include other performers who wear black clothes while only one performer is wearing white.



- Figure 14: Image from *Alqafilah taseer* [*The Trail is Moving*], Alahsa, 1994. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

The history of Youth Group in Alahsa in presenting theatre shows the domination of plays that were designed for theatre festivals. However, the tendency toward producing social plays was not absent from the history of this group. It produced several such plays, though these were not presented in theatre festivals. Among these plays was *hikait ma jara* [*Retelling What Happened*], which was written by Abdualrahman Almoraikhy and directed by Ali Alghoainm. It was staged for two nights in 1994. It is a play that reminds people of their past. The play is written as a verse play and contains a great number of songs. The author commented that his play belongs to different ages, but especially to children (Almoraikhy1990:2). The picture below (Figure 15) shows how the play is presented. It gives a sense of how the director deals with it in terms of realistically portraying the past. In addition, the costumes are traditional clothes that were common in Alahsa city in the past.



- Figure 15: Image from *hikait ma jara* [Retelling What Happened], Alahsa, 1994. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

The stage on which this play was presented was located in an open area. It belonged to the Alahsa branch of the SASCA. The picture below (Figure 16) shows the location of the audience in the open area. Most importantly, it shows the simple way in which the audience watches the play. The children in the picture are sitting on the floor, whereas the adults are sitting on chairs.



- Figure 16: The audience of *hikait ma jara* [*Retelling What Happened*], including children who watch the play, Alahsa, 1994. It is reproduced with permission from Alkhomais' personal archive.

Youth Group in Riyadh

The Youth Group in Riyadh was established in 1995. Fahd Alhoshany, the founder of this group, had worked as a supervisor for cultural activities and produced two plays in Alnassir club. The delay in establishing this group raises a critical question of why Alhoshany did not establish his group early in the eighties as with Alahsa and other Youth Groups. Indeed, working as a supervisor for cultural activities in Alnassir's clubs brought Alhoshany close to the GPYW's office in Riyadh which makes it strange that he did not think of establishing a group in Riyadh.

In response to this question, Alhoshany (2012) explains in an interview that he did not know about the GPYW's plan of establishing Youth Groups for theatre. Alhoshany's lack of knowledge of the GPYW's plan shows two important points with regard to the method of the GPYW in establishing the Youth Groups. Firstly, there was a lack of

communication between the supervisor responsible for cultural activities in the GPYW's office in Riyadh and the theatre practitioners in this city. Alhoshany and Meachal Alrasheed, for instance, had been practicing theatre in a club for several years along with the Youth Groups in other cities. In addition, it seemed, by that time, that there was not much communication between the theatre practitioners across Saudi Arabia since the existence of Youth Groups in other cities did not inspire Alhoshany to establish a group like these groups in Riyadh. Second, it seemed that the cultural supervisor in Riyadh at the time had no interest in improving theatre.

It is significant that although the idea of establishing a Youth Theatre Group in Saudi Arabia appeared a remarkable shift in the way theatre was practiced in the GACA, the method of establishing it prevented Saudi theatre from gaining the benefit of this shift. While the Youth Groups were established in 1986, they did not appear in Riyadh until 1995 under the guidance of Alhoshany. Did Alhoshany lose money, energy, and time while attempting to produce theatre in Alnassir's club for nine years that might have been saved had he known about the possibility of creating a youth group? Saudi theatre would have benefitted if Alhoshany had begun his own group earlier because it would have had as much time to develop as the Alahsa Youth Group. However, it seemed that the GACA and especially the department of theatre should have taken the responsibility for not establishing the Youth Theatre Groups throughout Saudi Arabia.

The reason for establishing the group in Riyadh, as Alhoshany mentions, was to find an appropriate atmosphere for presenting theatre that differed from the usual practices of theatre in clubs (2012). He explains that in Alnassir club, he had produced theatre on a volunteer basis and that it was expensive for him to do so, while within the Youth Group there is a subsidy for producing theatre to help offset such costs. Alhoshany (2012) explains that another reason for establishing the group was to make

up for the lack of support for providing opportunities to practice theatre from the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh.

The group's record (see appendix No.1) shows that they presented a number of plays that addressed a variety of subjects. It started with a play entitled *fursah akhra* [*Another Chance*], an adaptation of a play written by Mohamad Almaghot, a Syrian writer, and directed by Alhoshany in 1995. Most of the audience were members of the Society of Youth Houses. This group does not have its own stage or a place in which to gather its members. Most of the members were from the youth sector. The group presented two more plays that were adaptations of famous Arabic plays. The first one, *Jalsah ma alqanoon* [*In the Presence of the Law*], was performed in 1996; it was written by Fraj Foda, a famous Egyptian writer. The group also staged a play written by Molière. In addition, the group presented plays written by Saudi writers such as Abdulaziz Alsughaby, Nassir Albaz, and Fahd Alhoshany.

The nature of the plays produced by this group was influenced by the wave of theatre festivals. By 1995, the year in which the group was established, it had become common for such groups to enter theatre festivals. The nineties witnessed a great competition between practitioners to determine which ones deserved to represent Saudi theatre in festivals. Therefore, Saudi practitioners, whether in the SASCA branches or the Youth Theatre Groups, worked hard in order to be chosen to contribute to these festivals. The Riyadh group contributed to a number of different theatre festivals such as the Arab Youth Forum in Egypt and the Gulf Theatre Festival for Youth in the UAE.

Significantly, the Riyadh group aimed to contribute to theatre festivals abroad. Alhoshany (2012) explains that there are multiple reasons behind the interest in

contributing to theatre festivals such as allowing the group to encounter different theatrical experiments from different parts of the world; building relationships, connections, and friendships with other theatre groups, whether in the Gulf, Arab, or wider international theatre community; and allowing the group to examine its work through the eyes of specialists in theatre who attend and participate in these festivals.

Alhoshany (2012) asserts that the group, like other theatre groups in Saudi Arabia, contributed to the movement of Saudi theatre by introducing talented Saudi actors, directors, and writers to the Saudi people. In addition, it introduced the movement of Saudi theatre to the community theatre through its contribution to theatre festivals.

The plays presented by the Youth Theatre Group in Riyadh were varied in terms of their subjects. Alhoshany (2012) explains that there is no clear plan or vision in terms of selecting the subject of a play; it depends upon the available text and whether it suits the group and meets the group's potential. This is especially important if the expenses of producing the play are to be covered by the GPYW's subsidy. For example, in 1995 the group produced *fursah akhra* [*Another Chance*], a play that features a group of actors who suffer from the oppression of their manager who played the leading role in each play without giving a chance to any other talented member of the group. In 1996, it produced *jalsah ma alqanoon* [*In the Presence of the Law*]; this is an adaptation of a play by Faraj Fodah and was directed by Abu Baker Shelqami. It was the first historical play to be produced by the group and its main topic addresses the importance of justice. In 1997, the group presented a social play that discusses different topics concerning Saudi society such as the domination of football, the difficulty of searching for a job, and the relationship between a father and his son. This play is entitled *dunia tejnin* [*The Crazy World*]; it was written by Alhoshany and directed by Salih Alzeer. It was the first contribution of the group to a

theatre festival. It was presented in the Fifth Gulf Theatre Festival for Youth in 1997, in the UAE. In 1998, it produced *eqaa zaman waqea [Unbalanced Time]*, written by Mechal Alrasheed and directed by Naif Khalaf. The play presents a group of actors who work under the management of a leader who is the author and director of this group. It shows the conflicts between the leader and the group in regards to the value of theatre and the nature of the work that should be presented to people. Whilst the author wants to present love stories, the group of actors think that there are some essential issues that should be taken into account such as freedom, justice, and the relationships between people. This play was presented in the Youth Arab Festival in Egypt in 1999.

The main difficulty facing the Youth Group for Theatre in Riyadh, according to Alhoshany (2012), is the limitation placed on them by the subsidy of the GPWY that requires one play each year. This has limited the ambition of the group for enhancing the movement of theatre in Riyadh, whereas without this limitation they might aim to produce more plays because one performance a year is less than what we dream of. In terms of children's theatre, the group has produced some children's plays since 2000.

Conclusion

Since it is concerned with the history of theatre in the General Presidency for Youth Welfare, this chapter began by providing a historical context of the root of this establishment. The responsibility for youth welfare transformed into three ministries before it became an independent establishment under the name of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare. This shows that the youth welfare had not been given attention by the Saudi government at the beginning of its history as a country. In addition, as the sport activities were the main reason behind the attempt of Saudi

government to establish an administration to take care of Saudi youth, the sport activities remained the main interest and focus of the administrations of Youth Welfare under the three ministries. Furthermore, although the GPYW is an independent establishment for youth welfare, the sport activities, especially football, continued to be its main interest. This, however, impacted the development of other activities such as cultural activities, including theatre.

Since the main parts of the GPYW that produced regular theatre are the General Administration for Cultural Activities and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, this chapter focuses on the history of theatre in the GACA, whilst the history of theatre in the SASCA will be discussed in the next chapter.

The history of theatre in the GACA had been limited to cultural activities in Saudi clubs from 1974 until the mid eighties. By examining the history of these activities in four Saudi clubs, the chapter concludes that the activities of theatre during the period above did not exceed presenting theatre as part of the ceremonies the clubs held once or twice a year. The main focus of theatre in the clubs appeared to be on the social issues that concerned Saudi society. Importantly, there was no attempt to develop the nature of theatre except in Aljeel clubs in Alahsa city where children's' theatre began to appear because of the interest of this club. In general, it can be concluded that theatre in Saudi clubs was dependent upon the enthusiasm of some members in the clubs. The absence of enthusiastic members, therefore, led to the lack of theatrical activities.

The GPYW, in order to develop theatre, decided in the mid eighties to establish the Youth Groups for Theatre in different cities. The appearance of these groups,

especially in Alahsa and Riyadh, showed a tendency toward presenting theatre that differs from the previous period in style as well as in content.

Chapter Six

The History of Theatre in the GPYW

Part 2: The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA)

Introduction

Since the previous chapter explored the history of theatre in the first part of the GPYW, the GACA, this chapter aims to present the history of theatre in the second part of the GPYW, the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA). The SASCA was established under the name of the Saudi Arabian Society for Arts in December 1973 by the General Administration for Youth Welfare in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The decision gave this establishment preliminary permission to work and to show its potential for one year. After the General Presidency for Youth Welfare (GPYW) became an independent establishment in 1974, the Saudi Arabian Society for Arts was given ultimate permission and it was renamed the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Art in 1975 (Anon., 2012). Since the SASCA was established prior to the appearance of the GPYW, it came under the supervision of the GPYW with some degree of independency.

The aims of this establishment, as Abdualhai Ibraheem highlights, are improving the quality of Saudi arts and culture, serving Saudi artists and intelligentsia, giving Saudi talents opportunities to express themselves and contribute to the development of Saudi community, and representing Saudi Arabia in festivals outside the country (Ibraheem, 1999:20). Ibraheem points out that the SASCA consists of the cultural department, which supervises the publishing of a Saudi magazine called *Altubad*; the department of theatre; the department of painting; the department of heritage and

folklore; the department of music; the department of information; and the department of photography (Ibraheem, 1999:22). The aims identified above suggest that the SASCA was prepared by the Saudi government to take responsibility for all aspects of art, including theatre. Ibraheem points out that the SASCA has opened many branches across the country and each branch was named after the city in which it is located.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, it will focus on the history of theatre in the main office in Riyadh, as it is the centre of this organization and was the point of departure for producing theatre in Saudi Arabia. In addition, two other branches will be selected as examples in order to understand the nature of theatre produced by the SASCA. These branches are Alahsa and Al-Taif. Alahsa's branch has been selected for two reasons. The first one is that this branch has had the longest history of practicing theatre in Saudi Arabia. As will be shown later, its history goes back to the appearance of the Art's Club that was established in 1972, as the first independent club of art; it joined the SASCA in 1974. For this reason, using this branch as an example will allow the thesis to look at an important aspect of the practice of theatre in Saudi Arabia which has not appeared in any other branch. This aspect is the difference between practicing theatre within an independent establishment such as the Art's Club and practicing theatre under the control of the Saudi government. The second reason is that the branch of Alahsa preceded the other branches in producing children theatre.

The branch of Altaif has been selected as the other example; it, too, has been chosen for two reasons. The first one is that this branch produced plays that were different from the mainstream of theatre in Saudi Arabia. For example, it witnessed the emergence of monodrama in Saudi theatre. The second reason is that this branch was the first branch to establish a workshop that took a new direction in practicing theatre

in Saudi Arabia. By examining the history of these branches and that of the main office in Riyadh in the following sections, readers will be able to make sense of the differences of practicing theatre in these branches which will enhance their understanding of the nature of theatre that has been presented by the SASCA.

The main office in Riyadh

The main office of the SASCA played two significant roles in the movement of theatre in the SASCA. Firstly, it supervised and managed the productions of plays that were produced by other SASCA branches. For instance, each branch had to have approval for producing a play from the main office. To obtain this permission, each branch must send the text of plays to be censored by the main office. In addition, the budgets for producing plays came from the financial department that is located at the main office in Riyadh. This role played by the main office, however, was criticized by many Saudi practitioners who work in the SASCA's branches. For instance, Othman Alseni (2011) who worked for two years as the head of the theatre department in the Altaif branch explains that this way of supervising the branches led to some difficulties such as the delay in providing the approval for plays and the rejection of some scripts, though this did not happen often. These difficulties, as Alseni (2011) explains, affected the plan of producing plays in the branch. The two difficulties mentioned by Alseni were also highlighted by Omar Alobaidy who worked as the head of the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa. Alobaidy (2011) explains that Alahsa's branch, in trying to overcome the difficulty of rejected scripts, intended to send multiple scripts in case one of them was not approved.

The second role played by the main office in the movement of theatre in the SASCA was similar to the roles played by the other branches. This role was contributing to

Saudi theatre by producing plays. The theatrical productions of the main office benefited from being close to the administration of the SASCA. First of all, the censorship process for its scripts was easier than for other branches. It did not take more than two or three days, while other branches spent weeks in the process of censorship. Secondly, the history of productions by the main office show large budgets for its plays compared to the other branches. Some Saudi actors who participated in the plays produced by the main office, such as Ali Ibraheem (2011), Ali Alhowareny (2010), and Ahmad Alhuthail (2011) confirm that the budgets of the productions of the main office from its establishment until the mid eighties were large. Moreover, Saman Alani (2010), who directed most of these productions, agrees with these actors. In contrast, Omar Alobaidy (2011) and Yousef Alkhomais (2011) from Alahsa's branch and Fahd Alharthi (2010) and Ahmad Alahmary (2010) from Altaif's branch express their disappointment in the budgets given to the productions of their branches compared with those of the main office.

The history of theatre in the main office, as this thesis suggests, can be divided into two main periods. The first period began in 1975 when the first play was produced and ended in 1985. The second period started in 1985 and ended in 2004. The reason behind this division is that the productions from the first period were different in nature those of the second. While in the first period the main office was concerned with social plays that addressed the social affairs that concerned Saudi society, the second period showed a considerable change from producing social plays to plays that aimed to contribute to festival theatre outside Saudi Arabia. The following sections will provide further explanation as well as illustration of the nature of each period and the main productions of the main office in each one.

The period from 1975 to 1985

The first production was *Akhir almushar* [*The End of the Way*], which was staged in July 1975 in Riyadh. This play was written by Abdualrahaman Alshaer and adapted by Saad Khoder. It was directed by Mohammed Alshammiry. The play was a social comedy that highlights the value of work and the need to take a part in serving the society. The play tells a story of two brothers who have different views of the value of work. Nassir works hard on his father's land as a farmer and believes in the importance of his work in the society; meanwhile, Falih dreams of taking a respectable job that will give him an excellent position in society without going to the effort of gaining the required qualifications for such job. In searching for this job, Falih discovers that his skills and qualification cannot lead him to the job he dreams of, instead he decides to enrol in the Saudi army to serve the country. In addition, the play pays attention to the important role of parents in helping their sons find a suitable carrier. Also, the high price of a dowry is mentioned in the play as an obstacle that prevents youth from getting married, but it is marginalised by the author without further discussion of its effects on Saudi society.

The second play was also social play, which shows the prevalence of social plays among those produced by this office in this period. This play was *qetar alhadh* [*Lucky Train*], which was produced in 1978. The play was written by Ibraheem Alhamdan, the head of the theatre department in the SASCA. The picture below shows a scene from the play that presents four characters dressed in traditional costumes and shows how the stage was designed to be an imitation of reality; this demonstrates how social plays in Saudi theatre attempted to present a copy of life.



- Figure 17: A scene from *qetar alhadh* [*Lucky Train*], Riyadh, 1978. It is reproduced with permission from Saman Alani.

In the leaflet for this performance Ibraheem Alhamdan writes that the play is about the shifts in the social life that were caused by the financial boom (Almogren, 1979:51). This financial boom occurred when the price of oil went up after 1973 because of the conflict in the Middle East; this led Saudi society to enter modern life with new values that began to change Saudi people. This play was directed by Saman Alani, an Iraqi director who joined the main office of Riyadh in the same year. Alani, as a specialist in theatre, provided the office with another view of theatre that was based on his knowledge and experience of theatre gained in Iraq.

Alani's contribution to this play can be seen in two ways. The first one was reviewing and preparing the play's script. In this respect, Alani (2010) explains in an interview that the script of *qetar alhadh* was too long for a theatre production and was divided into many scenes which seemed more suitable for television than for the stage. He worked, as he mentions (2010), for a few days to adjust the script for theatre and

reduced its performance time to three hours. The work of Alani on this script reveals how writing for theatre, at that time, was influenced by the nature of writing for television. This influence can also be seen in the works of Saudi authors such as Ibraheem Alhamdan who spent time working in writing for television drama. In addition, the impact of television was noticed by Alani on the acting style of Saudi actors. Hence, Alani's second contribution to this play came from his effort in training actors for theatre. Alani makes it clear that the actors who worked with him in this play had been influenced by the style of television acting and had a little experience of acting for theatre. Although they were enthusiastic and committed to working in theatre, they had insufficient knowledge of how to approach the presentation of their characters, or how to understand the plot or the relationship between the characters in a play. Therefore, a great amount of time was devoted to explaining the basic information about the play; for example, identifying the main aim of the play and the object of each character. The picture below (Figure 18) shows Saman Alani, the director, on stage alongside with the actors and watching a rehearsal.



- Figure 18: A rehearsal of *qetar alhadh* [*Lucky Train*], Riyadh 1978. Saman Alani appears on the left; he is watching the actors. It is reproduced with Alani's permission.

With respect to the conditions on stage, Alani (2010) mentions that it was poorly equipped in terms of sound and lighting. The SASCA provided the equipment that was required for the production. This stage consisted of 750 seats and it was the same stage that the SASCA presented the first play. Saman Alani (2010), Ali Alhowareny (2010), and Ali Ibraheem (2011), all of whom acted in this play, indicate that the auditorium was full of spectators and the SASCA profited from this play. Whilst Abdualhai Ibraheem mentions that the play was staged for ten days (1999: 61), Saman Alani (2010) asserts that it was for fourteen days. In the interview with Saman Alani (2010), he mentions a short story that sheds light on the reception of this play at that time. On the opening night, as Alani (2010) explains, he was told by the chairman of the SASCA that Prince Sattam Bin Abdul-Aziz (the Deputy Governor of Riyadh) and Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz (1945 –1999) who was the president of the

GPYW would attend the performance. In addition, they would watch fifteen minutes of the play and then leave due to the schedule of Prince Sattam. During this time Arabic coffee and tea will be presented. Saman Alani was asked to open the curtain and close it after fifteen minutes to allow the special guests to leave the auditorium. In response to these instructions, Alani persuaded the chairman of the SASCA to not look at theatre performance like an official ceremony and to not interrupt the performance except for the break between the acts in which the coffee and tea can be offered to the guests. Saman Alani comments on this story: "I wanted to establish a new convention for theatre" (2010). Unexpectedly, as Alani (2010) mentions, the special guests enjoyed watching the play and stayed for the whole three hours.

The main office continued to focus on presenting social plays. Social plays, as explained previously in Chapter Three, intended to present an exact vision of real life on stage where characters imitate real people in real-life situations and settings. Furthermore, the social plays use the colloquial language used in everyday life.

Among the main social plays presented by the main office between 1975 and 1985 was *thulathi alnukd* [*the Three Troublemakers*]; it was presented in 1981, edited by Fwazi Badawi, and directed by Saman Alani. It was concerned with the changes in Saudi society in terms of looking at money as the most important objective in life. This play presents, as the main plot, three people who share one shop that sells fragrances and accessories; they do not care about their responsibilities towards their society or the people with whom they do business. They cheat their customers. A poor young person who works in the shop suffers both from their manners and from the way they deal with him in cutting his salary as punishment for any mistakes he makes. As two of them are attempting to dismiss the young man, the third one comes in to tell them that the young man has inherited millions from his uncle in Jeddah. In response

to the new situation and without telling the young about his inheritance, the three agree to make a contract with him to work for ten years for ten percent of the profits and a high monthly salary. When the young man becomes a half-partner the play comically presents the differences between his honesty in dealing with customers and their dishonesty. The play ends with the older partners coming to understand the importance of valuing honesty over money and the need to play positive roles in society.



- Figure 19: Image from *thulathi alnukd* [*the Three Troublemakers*], Riyadh, 1981. It is reproduced with permission from Ali Alsaeed's personal archive.

The main office continued to primarily produce social plays until the end of this period in 1985. In 1982, it presented a play entitled *qedir alsharakah* [*The Partners*]; it was written and directed by Abdualrahman Almoqren. In 1983, it presented *tahit alkarasy* [*Under the Chairs*], written by Ahmad Aldubaikhy and directed by Saman Alani. In 1984, it presented a play entitled *almahabeel* [*The Crazy People*], written by Ibraheem Alhamdan and directed by Saman Alani. This was the last play that this

office presented under the umbrella of social plays; it was presented at the Carthage International Theatre Festival in Tunisia in 1984 as the first contribution of SASCA to theatre festivals. Since this play was performed in Saudi dialect, which might be hard for other Arabic people to understand due to the differences between dialects, one wonders why a very local play, in terms of its language and content, was selected for this festival. Indeed, it seems that there is no clear reason for selecting this play for this international festival. Saman Alani, in a personal interview (2010), explains that he was against selecting this play due to the reasons above and because it is a long play; it takes about two hours to perform and did not match the conventions of theatre festivals. He goes further to say that it was the only available play when the invitation to the festival arrived (2010).



- Figure 20: Image from *qadir alsharakah* [*The Partners*], Riyadh, 1982. It is reproduced with permission from Ali Alsaeed's personal archive.

Although the tendency of this office was to produce social plays, the period from its establishment up to 1984 witnessed a new direction. This direction was toward historical plays. The office staged two historical plays: *soqut alhisab* [*The Consequence*], which was staged in 1980, and *alkarmaniah*, the title of which refers to the family name of the main character *Yousf Alkarmani*. *Alkarmaniah* was staged in 1982. The plays were written by Ahmad Abdualrhman, an Egyptian author, and directed by Saman Alani. With regard to the staging of historical plays, Saman Alani (2010), the official director of the office and the director of these plays, mentions that there was no planned production to be staged, but Ramadan (the holy month) coincided with a long holiday for students and teachers in schools and universities and this holiday was a suitable time for presenting a play. He goes further to explain the first production as follows:

I suggested that the text can be staged during the first half of Ramadan and could be a great opportunity to present a play that belonged to the spiritual days of Ramadan. The suggestion faced no encouragement from the administration of the office because the holy month is sacred to the society. I persuaded them that the production is about an Islamic story of the prophet and this would not contradict with the nature of Ramadan. Ultimately, they agreed to produce this play for three nights (2010).

Alani (2010) confirms that the play was admired by the spectators. However, Alani highlights another point that can help to clarify the attitude of Saudi society, especially of religious people at that time. He confirms that the performance was attended by some religious scholars who admired the work and the language. Some of them, as Alani asserts (2010), came up to the stage and congratulated the actors. This might be evidence that some Saudi religious scholars at the time of this performance,

and maybe up to the present, did not have a negative attitude toward theatre itself, but rather to the content that theatre sometimes offers.

It is important to end the discussion of this period by mentioning the two historical plays were written by an Egyptian author, which could reveal that this period lacked Saudi authors who were interested in writing historical plays. Furthermore, it confirms that the main interest of Saudi authors who wrote for the main office during this period was to address the social issues that concerned their society and were close to the Saudi audience; this focus led to the domination of social plays over the period from 1975 to 1985.

The period from 1985 to 2004

There are two main aspects associated with the plays produced by the main office in this period. Firstly, the Riyadh office was no longer interested in presenting social plays; in this twenty-year period the main office presented only three social plays. In 1996, it presented *sikat safer* [*Travel Way*], which was written by Ahmad Aldubaikhy and directed by Saman Alani. The main topic of this play was presenting the negative behaviour of some of Saudi tourists who travel abroad. In 1998, it presented *almishoathenn* [*The Devils*], which was written by Ibraheem Alhamdan and directed by Saman Alani. Then, it presented *loka bin loka* [*The Cheater*], which was written by Mohamed Alshidde and directed by Saman Alani in 2002. The second aspect of the plays produced by the main office in this period, and perhaps the main one, is that they were focused on contributing to different theatre festivals across the Arabic world; this aspect developed following the experience of participating in a festival in Tunisia in 1984. The plays intended for festivals focused on issues that interest Arabic people in general and elite people in particular.

In 1986, the main office produced *owais altasi ashar* [*Owais Number 19*] for its contribution to the tenth Theatre Festival in Damascus, in Syria. In 1987, it produced *Ibn Zoraiq*, a historical play named after a famous Arabic poet, Ibn Zoraiq; this play was entered in the eleventh Theatre Festival in Damascus in 1988. The two plays, *Owais Number 19* and *Ibn Zoraiq*, witnessed the appearance of Alhumod, a young Saudi director who had studied in Iraq before working with the main office for two years. In addition, they also saw the introduction of Rashed Alshamrany, a young author who contributed to the movement of theatre in the main office. Alshamrany later wrote and directed *deek albahr* [*The Sea Cock*], a play that was presented in the Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo, in Egypt in 1993.

In 1988, Alani directed two plays: *aljarad* [*The Locust*], written by Ali Alsaheed, and *alseneen alejaf* [*The Difficult Years*], written by Mohamad Alothaim. The former play was presented in two theatre festivals in the same year: the International Theatre Festival in Carthage, Tunisia and Baghdad's Third Festival for Arabic Theatre in Iraq. It presents a story of a village that was facing a threat from the creep of the locusts toward their land. As the people of the village delayed taking action against the locusts, they destroyed their land. The latter play, *The Difficult Years*, was presented in the International Theatre Festival in Carthage in 1989 and in the Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo in 1990. It is a historical play that utilizes the past in addressing modern issues such as the war and the increase of nuclear weapons. This play introduced Mohamad Alothaim as a Saudi author who contributed to most of the main office's productions for festivals. In 1991 he wrote *albateekh alazraq* [*The Blue Watermelon*], which was directed by Abdalghani bin Tarah, a Tunisian director who was working for the department of theatre in King Saud University; it was presented in the Baghdad Fourth Festival for Arabic Theatre. Alothaim wrote *alhiar* [*Falling*],

which was directed by Abu Baker Shelqami, an Egyptian director who was working with King Saud University. The play was presented by the main office in the Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo in 1995. In addition, he wrote *hulum alhamathani* [*Alhamathani's Dream*], directed by Saman Alani in 1996; it was presented in the International Theatre Festival in Carthage in 1995. In 1996, Alothaim wrote *alarsheef* [*The Archive*], which was directed by Saman Alani and presented in the Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo in 1997. In 1998, the main office produced *Almustasim*, which is named after a historical Muslim leader. This play was presented in the Gulf States Festival for Theatre in Kuwait in 1998. The two pictures below (Figure 21 & 22) show scenes from *hulum alhamathani* [*Alhamathani's Dream*] and *Almustasim*.



- Figure 21: From *hulum alhamathani* [*Alhamathani's Dream*], Riyadh 1995. It is reproduced with permission from Ali Alsaeed's personal archive.



- Figure 22: From *Almustasim*, Riyadh 1998. It is reproduced with permission from Saman Alani.

It is important to mention that the language that utilized in the plays that were produced by the main office for contributing to theatre festivals was the classic Arabic language. This allows Arabic people who have no knowledge of the Saudi dialect to follow the plays and understand their content. In addition, most of the festival plays use Arabic history as a vehicle to discuss modern issues. For instance, Alshamrany in his play *Ibn Zoraiq* discusses the occupation of Arab territories such as Palestine through the occupation of Ibn Zoraiq's house by a stranger. Moreover, Alothaim presents the atmosphere of war and the increasing utilization of nuclear weapons in the Arabic world through *alsennen alejaf* [*the Difficult Years*], which was based on Arab history.

Children's theatre

The main office of the SASCA in Riyadh was the last part of the GPYW to stage theatre for children. This office seems to have restricted its membership to adult

remembers which might explain why it did not produce children's theatre. However, this reason did not prevent other branches of the GPYW, such as those in Alahsa and Altaif, from producing theatre for this part of the society. This raises a critical question with regard to the absence of children's theatre from the plan and the productions of the main office; Mechal Alrasheed offers another explanation for the absence of this kind of theatre in the main office. He makes it clear in an interview (2011) that the main office had concentrated, from the mid eighties, on producing theatre for contributing to the Arabic and international theatre festivals. Alrasheed goes further to say (2011) that the main office has ignored the demands of theatrical artists for producing theatre that meets the needs of people inside the city; one of these needs is children's theatre. In addition, he confirms (2011) that in Riyadh, theatre is subjected to the initiative of individuals rather than to a clear policy that comes from the institutions that are responsible for theatre. It should be noted that the role played by individuals in enhancing the movement of theatre in Saudi Arabia is a noticeable characteristic of this movement. This has been noticed in the primary theatrical activities prior to 1974, as well as in most of the works that were produced after that date. For instance, Alrasheed, who became the head of children's theatre department in the main office in 2000, can be seen as an example of this aspect of Saudi theatre. Alrasheed (2011) discusses the submission of his own children's play in 1996 for approval by the main office, but his request and the play were ignored without a clear explanation for two years; it was left in a desk in the department of theatre in the main office. In 1998, as he explains (2011), the play was produced after he made a number of efforts to produce it or to have it returned to him. Alrasheed's response to the ignorance of the main office in regards to his play shows that the initiative of an individual was paramount. His insistence on producing theatre for

children led the main office to produce its first play for children in 1998. Interestingly, Alrasheed (2011) points out that the positive reception that this play received from the audience, which contained children and their parents, led the main office to ask Alrasheed to present another play for children. Consequently, the second children's play was produced the following year, 1999; it was written by Alrasheed himself. However, Alrasheed's initiative did not end with producing the second play. According to Alrasheed (2011), after the production of the second play he submitted a proposal for establishing a department of children's theatre in the main office; this department has been responsible for such theatre since 2000 and Alrasheed was appointed as the head of this department.

Alahsa's branch

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Arts' Club in Alahsa city was transferred into the SASCA in 1974 when it became the first official branch of the SASCA. The transformation came after an appeal was made by the members of the club asking Prince Faisl, the GPYW's president, to allow the Arts' Club to be part of the GPYW. The main reason for this appeal, as Alhamad (2011) and Alobaidy (2011) mention, was to legitimize the activities of the club. Alhamad and Alobaidy explain that since the club was an independent establishment, it faced problems because of the lack of government permission. It was a risk, as Alobaidy explains, for the Arts' club to carry out its activities without such permission.

Omar Alobaidy was the first head of the branch and spent nearly twenty five years in this position. The longest period of his work was between 1982 and 2002. The first two years after establishing the branch, as he explains (2011), were devoted to preparing the branch for fulfilling its purpose. Interestingly, he mentioned that the

first SASCA subsidy was used to buy a piece of land on which to erect the branch's building, which included a stage along with its facilities and the administrative offices. The theatrical productions in this branch, therefore, had to be postponed until the completion of this building process.

Significantly, while other branches of the SASCA, including the main office in Riyadh, began by using the available stages to produce their productions, the Alahsa branch's administration made building a theatre stage its first priority. This reveals the group's awareness of the importance of building a stage to suit their needs. As a group who had practiced theatre for about two years before joining the SASCA, they knew the difficulties they would face in staging their works on a stage that was not under their control. The main difficulty lay in the fact that staging a play on a stage that belonged to other organizations, such as schools or government institutions, would subject them to the conditions of these institutions. Hiring a stage that was run by another institutions limits the number of rehearsals. Moreover, the number of performances would be influenced by the timetable of these institutions. Hence, building a stage that belongs to the branch would free them from such obligations. It should be remembered that the main office of the SASCA faced problems when they tried to extend the run of a production to satisfy the desire of the audience because of the time restrictions on the stage they hired from the Ministry of Education.

The Alahsa branch's stage was built in the alsalhiyah area. In an interview Alkhomais (2011) describes it as the best stage in Alahsa city. It had a capacity of five hundred seats and was equipped with suitable lighting and audio equipment. He adds that most of the Alahsa clubs' performances were presented on this stage since the conditions of clubs' stages were lower in status compared with the branch's stage.

Since the branch, as with other branches of the SASCA, was subjected to the general plan of the SASCA, Omar Alobaidy provides some essential information about the plan of the branch for each year. He explains (2011) that each branch of the SASCA was required to present different activities, such as a musical and folk party, a painting exhibition, some lectures, and a play; the subsidy from the SASCA should cover these activities. The play's text for the annual production, as Alobaidy mentions (2011), had to be submitted to the main office in Riyadh for censorship and permission. As the branch faced some occasions in which the text was rejected for unknown reasons, Alobaidy and the administration submitted multiple texts (2011). However, Alobaidy does not mention which texts were rejected, but he confirms that the main office rejected some of the texts they sent.

At this stage, it would be helpful to briefly compare the status of the Arts' Club before and after it joined the SASCA in 1973. Before 1973 they had autonomy in selecting the text of the plays they produced the freedom to produce more than one play each year. For example, the Arts' Club produced seven plays in 1972 and six plays in 1973. After joining the SASCA, the subsidy of this organization could not allow the branch to produce more than one play a year. Thus, joining the SASCA limited the ambition of the artists in the branch in terms of practicing theatre; however, joining was indispensable for the group due to the importance of obtaining recognition by the Saudi government.

This branch, like many branches, had to follow the restricted plan of the SASCA which, as Alobaidy mentions (2011), insists that each year each branch should produce a musical performance, a fine arts exhibition, a number of lectures, a folk arts exhibition, and a play. The terms of these restrictions mean that the failure to produce one of these items will deprive the branch of part of its subsidy. Furthermore, there is

no extra subsidy for increasing the number of items, such as producing more than one play. Consequently, this will lead the branch to restrict itself to the production of only one play each year which might prevent the society from encountering a range of theatrical works as well as preventing the artists from broadening their experience. This seems to be a sufficient explanation for why each branch produced only one play each year. Later, as Alobaidy explains (2011), the branch began to add a play for children to its schedule.

The next section will examine the nature of the theatrical productions of this branch since its establishment.

The productions of Alahsa's branch

At the beginning, Alahsa's productions were similar those of the main office in terms of the interest in social plays. The first play was *aqaqeer wa aqarat* [*Properties*], which was written by Abdualrahman Alhamad and directed by Zaqlul Alsaify, an Egyptian director who was working at the Ministry of Knowledge at that time. This play was produced in 1980. It was a social play that addressed the impact of oil prices upon Saudi society. However, it was the only play that was directed by a non-Saudi director. Alhamad (2011), Alobaidy (2011), and Alkhomais(2011) assert in interviews that the cooperation with Alsaify in this experiment and his knowledge of theatre impacted some of the branch's members. The interest in social plays appeared, also, in the next two years. In 1981, the branch produced *alaitam* [*The Orphans*], which was written and directed by Abdualrahman Alhamad. This play addressed the relationship between three brothers and their struggle for money. The picture below (Figure 23) shows a scene of the play of *alaitam* [*The Orphans*].



- Figure 23: a scene of the play of *alaitam* [*The Orphans*], 1981, Alahsa. It is reproduced with permission from Yousef Alkhomais' personal archive.

In 1982, the branch produced *youmiat bnay* [*Bany's diary*], which was written and directed by Abdualrahman Almoraikey, who joined the branch after spending some time in the Aljeel club. The branch produced its first historical play in 1987, entitled *Abu Tammam*, the name of a famous Arabic poet. This play was written and directed by Abdualrahman Almoraikey. The next historical play that was produced by this

branch was entitled with the name of a historical Arabic figure *Shidad bin Antar*. It was written by Rashed Alshamrany and directed by Almoraikhy in 1995.

The period from 1996 to 2004

During period from 1996 to 2004 the branch produced several plays that witnessed a clear tendency toward presenting social issues in a new way that was different from the social plays that had dominated the Saudi theatre from the establishment of the SASCA in 1974 to the mid eighties. This new method went beyond the direct approach of presenting several social behaviours in an attempt to understand and question them. Three examples of the social plays staged during this period will clarify the nature of the new method of presenting of social theatre as practiced by some Saudi authors, particularly those who are associated with the Alahsa branch.

In 1996, the branch produced a play that was written by Abdualaziz Alsmael and directed by Ali Alghoainm. This play was *alssaram* [*The Harvest*]. For the subject of this play, the author selected an important social event that was common on the eastern area called Alssaram. It refers to the time when farmers start to gather dates from palms. Alsmael, in building a story from this event, attempts to show the relationship between the farmers and the owner of the palms. It discusses the justice of how the farmers are treated and the love between the farmers and the palms. In addition, it presents an alternative for the farmers, working for a foreign company that had started to recruit in the area. Significantly, the eastern area in Saudi Arabia witnessed the emergence of Saudi Aramco, which is responsible for oil production. Its emergence impacted on the lives of eastern people who went to work there. Although the language of this play is the dialect of the eastern people, the author intends to exceed the realistic use of this language. In one scene of the play, a character called

Owaimer describes the relationship between the hero of the play, Salman, and the palms as follows:

Owaimer : You know!! Salman did not fall down over the palm... the palm threw Salman, because he married Norah... the palm loves Salman and is jealous of Norah. (Alismaiel, n.d :7)

In another scene three children speak with Salman about the nature of the palms:

Child1: Hello Salman. Is it true that you can speak to the palms?

Child 2: Tell us, how do you listen to the palms?

Child 3: Do the palms hear us?

Child 1: What do the palms say?

Salman: The palms say good things only for people who in love with and know them very well. (Alsmael, n.d: 13)

In his second play, *mout almogny Faraj* [*The Death of the Singer Faraj*], which was staged in 1999 and directed by Ali Alghoainm, Alsmael presents the current situation of art in Saudi society and the negative attitude of the society toward arts in general and the folk arts in particular. The play presents a story of a famous singer, Faraj, who is neglected by the society and is left isolated with his memories of the past when he was the centre of attention and admiration. As a response to a rumour that Faraj has passed away, some opportunists visit his house in order to profit from his legacy as a great singer. Interestingly, they meet Faraj who is shocked to discover that nobody knows him. As the play moves on, the opportunists discuss how they could benefit financially from Faraj's legacy. The play ends with the death of Faraj. This play presents and questions the attitude of society towards art and artists. It questions the value of art and how the society should reconsider its value. In addition, it presents the feelings of an artist who is neglected by his society. This play presents an

advanced example of the kind of social theatre that presented in Saudi theatre prior to and during the eighties. Although the play relies on presenting a realistic vision, it is of vital to mention that the author added a number of dancers who appear as a chorus once the artist, Faraj, starts to sing famous old songs. In this way, this play attempts to break the common convention of social theatre that dominated the history of Saudi theatre as mentioned above. Furthermore, the text of Alsmaeel used a a third language that stands in the middle between the classic Arabic and the Saudi dialect. More importantly, the use of language goes beyond the normal usage of authors of social plays in the eighties. For instance, there is a sense of poetry in dealing with the feelings of the artist and his expressions. This sense can be seen in the dialogue between the artist and his instruments:

Faraj: (speaking to the drum) are you angry with me? Forgive me... your voice is not reaching my heart as before... we are not lovers anymore, between us is a big distance ... my friend... (he takes *aloud*⁹) I know, you are very depressed and feeling loneliness... that is the end, once you lose such feeling with the place and things... it is the journey of death... (Alsmaeel, 2008: 10).

Moreover, the language of the artist carries an aspect of philosophy, as can be sensed from the dialogue below:

Faraj: between ignorance and certainty stands a status of doubt... we must question and reason everything or we will be like clowns dancing over colours (Alsmaeel, 2008: 13).

The picture below (Figure 24) shows a scene of the play in which Faraj is dancing and singing.

⁹ - A famous Arabic musical instrument that is played with a feather,



- Figure 24: The Singer Faraj dancing and singing. A scene from *mout almogny Faraj* [*The Death of the Singer Faraj*], 1999, Alahsa. It reproduced with permission from Yousef Alkhomais' personal archive.

Altaif branch

According to Abdualhai Ibraheem (1999:137), this branch was established in 1979 in Altaif city, in the west of Saudi Arabia. Ibraheem mentions that the three people considered to be the founders of this branch were Abdullah Almurshide, the head of the branch, Talal Altaif, the assistant to the head of the branch, and Yahia Alyame, the person who was responsible for the activities and financial affairs. In 1980 the main office in Riyadh decided to restructure the administration of this branch, which

included giving several people different responsibilities, such as those in charge of the Cultural Department, the Music Department, and the Publication and Information Department. Among them, Othman Alseni was responsible for the Theatre Department (Ibraheem 1999:137). Alseni managed this department from 1979 until 1982.

The history of theatre in this branch can be divided into three main periods. Each period, as will be demonstrated below, had its own characteristics and, irrespective of its length, was different from the others. The division of the history of theatre in Altaif is a method illustrated by this thesis to help to clarify the history of this branch. In the first period, which will be called *the beginning*, no plays were produced at all. The beginning of Altaif's branch was similar to most of the SASCA's branches, such as those in Riyadh and Alahsa. In this period, which lasted from two to three years in each branch, attention was focused on organizing the branch and setting its plan. The second period in Altaif took place from 1982 to 1986. The final period started with establishing the workshop of Altaif in 1992 and continues to the present. Further explanation of each period will be given in the following sections.

The Beginning

The beginning of Altaif branch lasted from 1979 until 1982. Fahad Alharthi, who was a journalist for the *Okath* newspaper and whose work involved covering the theatrical and cultural activities in Altaif city, witnessed the early years of this branch. He explains in an interview (2010) that:

before joining the branch officially in 1982, there had not been any interest in producing a complete play in the branch but only a few sketches on some occasions such as the traffic and trees week which were common activities in the whole country (Alharthi 2010).

According to Alharthi, this branch was interested only in music and folk arts. The domination of these activities over others was evident from the record of this branch's activities in this period. Abdualhai Ibraheem mentions that in the first two years the Altaif branch produced twelve events, which consisted of music associated with songs and folk arts and there was no mention of plays or theatrical sketches (1999:138-139). However, it is important to mention that the interest in producing music and song events in ceremonies was a common aspect of the activities of the GPYW across Saudi Arabia before the establishment of the SASCA's. Abdualaziz Alsughaby (2012), who witnessed some of these ceremonies, points out in an interview that song ceremonies were popular in Altaif, and some of the main well-known Saudi singers gained recognition from these events. Therefore, this might influence the nature of activities in the early years of the branch. Moreover, presenting these events which depended upon a singer or two with some musicians to accompany them appears to be easier, in terms of organization, than presenting plays that required a group of actors, a text, and so on.

Alharthi (2010) went further in pointing out that "in 1980, Othman Alseni tried to produce some sketches similar to what existed in the Okath and Oedje clubs, but the sketches did not develop to reach the level of producing a complete play". In addition, as Alharthi clarifies (2010), Alseni attempted to establish a group of actors in the branch, which consisted of some of the actors in the Okath and Oedje clubs, to produce plays similar to what were developed subsequently by these clubs. However, Alseni, as Alharthi argues (2010), failed in this attempt. Alharthi (2010) gives the impression that neither the branch, as an institution, nor Alseni, as the person responsible for the Theatre Department, were at all interested in producing complete plays during this period. This was evident from the record of the branch which shows

the absence of plays during this period.¹⁰ As explained above, Alharthi felt that this branch merely duplicated the common practice of producing theatre, which consisted presenting a collection of sketches rather than complete plays. These sketches were short, comic in nature, and concerned with social activities in Saudi society. It is crucial to mention that Alharthi's point of view was based on his external observations of the Altaif branch's activities as opposed to an observation of a person who worked inside the branch.

In contrast, Alseni, as the person responsible for the Theatre Department during this period, provides a different view. He confirms (2011) that in its first year the Altaif branch concentrated on establishing its plan, budget, and activities. This meant that the branch spent its first year planning rather than producing activities. Ibraheem mentioned in his record of the Altaif branch's activities that there were some activities that the branch presented in its beginning period such as a music celebration, an artists' exhibition, and lectures (1999: 138). However, it seemed reasonable for Alseni to emphasize that producing a complete play could not be as simple as other activities, which were produced in either the first or second year. For instance, as Alseni explains (2011), in order to produce a play, it needed to be censored by the main office in Riyadh which meant that it took time for the script to be submitted for approval. Moreover, time was required to identify the actors, carry out auditions and to rehearse the play.

Othman Alseni (2011) explains that there was no item in the SASCA's budget which indicated that the SASCA's general plan permitted theatrical sketches. The budget had a section which permitted the production of complete plays. Therefore, as Alseni confirms (2011), the Theatre Department at that time concentrated on producing a

¹⁰ - A complete list of the productions of the branch is attached in appendix No. 2.

complete play rather than sketches. In this respect, Alseni (2011) asserts that the Theatre Department failed to produce a complete play in the early years because there were insufficient actors to do so. Instead, as he makes clear in his interview (2011), Alseni established a group of distinguished actors from the Okath and Oedje clubs so that he could prepare them to participate in the Altaif branch's production. Alharthi confirms Alseni's unsuccessful attempt to prepare actors for this purpose. It was obvious that Alharthi assumes that success depended on these actors appearing in a production of a complete play. In contrast, Alseni has a different view on this attempt. He confirms (2011) that the main purpose of preparing the actors was not to educate and train them for a specific play but for them to be available in the future. Alseni (2011) further explains, "I believe that the productions of the branch should take new direction in terms of presenting great plays and this task requires prepared, qualified actors". According to Alseni (2011), the process of preparing the actors included giving them directions, training them for a time with selective exercises from a translated edition of Constantine Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*, and then training them with selective scenes from Alejandro Casona's *Trees Die*. Alseni, himself, led this training. Furthermore, he mentions that during the process a play was chosen for the branch's first production and it was sent to the main office in Riyadh for censorship (2011). However, it was not approved and no reason was given for its rejection by the main office in Riyadh, as Alseni explains (2011).

Despite Alharthi's view of this period, it seemed clear that Alseni was interested in taking the branch's theatre in a significant direction, which appeared to be different to that taken by other branches. This was noticeable in the preparation of actors and the selection of a significant play. This period ended in 1982 with Alseni's departure from the Altaif branch to continue his postgraduate study in another city.

The period from 1982 to 1986

This period was followed by a two year break. At the beginning of this period Alharthi officially joined the branch as the person responsible for information, public relations, and publicity. This meant that Alharthi moved from being an external observer in the early years who evaluated and criticized the Altaif branch's activities, to being a member of its administration. Alharthi's testimony in this period, therefore, should be taken into account because he became an eyewitness from the inside of this branch. In addition, this period witnessed the arrival of Abdualaziz Alrasheed as the head of its Theatre Department, Alseni's replacement. The arrival of Alrasheed is described by Alharthi (2010) as a remarkable shift due to Alrasheed's interest in and enthusiasm for theatre as well as his achievements during his four years with the branch.

One relevant question with respect to Alharthi's testimony might be, however, what did Alharthi mean by *remarkable shift*? Although it is important for this branch's history, the answer to this question would help in understanding more generally how Saudi theatre practitioners saw and evaluated the history of theatre. Also, it would demonstrate how they regarded the work of their colleagues and theatre groups. In terms of a remarkable shift, it seemed clear that Alharthi did not mean that Alrasheed's arrival or even his interest in theatre was a remarkable shift. As shown previously, Alseni also had an interest in producing theatre. In fact, Alseni's training of actors using Stanislavsky's method in the early years demonstrated what kind of interest he had in theatre. It appeared, therefore, that Alharthi considered the accomplishment of producing a complete play as the remarkable shift in the second period. One might argue that producing a complete play should be the main duty of any of the SASCA's branches and, consequently, the Altaif branch should produce

theatre. Furthermore, it might be said that the training of actors using Stanislavsky's method, as Alseni did, could be considered as a remarkable shift. However, a simple explanation seems to be that Alharthi might not have known of Alseni's work with his actors because of the lack of documentation on the one hand and on the other because he was an external observer in the early period.

During this period the branch produced four plays. The first play was *Min ykamil althani* [*Who Completes the Other*] in 1983. It was written by Mohammad Rajab and directed by Mohammad Alshami, an Egyptian director who worked with the branch for a short time. This play was a comic play that was concerned with social issues. The main issue presented in this play was the interest of the main character Mahmud in finding the suitable husband for his daughter. In addition, the play addressed the increase of Asian workers in Saudi Arabia, such as drivers and servants. Interestingly, the play intended to present a copy of reality in terms of its nature. As the play takes place in the main room of a house, the living room, the author provides a detailed description of it:

the curtain raises up in a big room, the room contains luxury furniture, on the right there is a door next to a big table and television and telephone on a table. On the left there is a big door with beautiful curtains there is a big sofa, in front of the sofa a suitable table carries flowers" (Rajab1983:154).

This description confirms the tendency of the author to present the reality of décor as it appears in life. On attending this play, Alharthi (2010) and Alsughaby (2012) state that the play was received very well among the audience and the auditorium was full during the whole seven nights of its run.

The branch's second play in 1983 was *safah fi almrah* [*Slap on mirror*]; it ran for one night only. This play was written by Abdualaziz Alsughaby and directed by

Alrasheed. The play was the first experiment in producing a one-person show in Saudi Arabia and Rashid Alshamrany was the actor, who played the role in this production. He was a Saudi actor who worked in King Saud University Theatre in Riyadh and was doing a military training course in Altaif at that time. Alsughaby, as the author of this play, provides interesting information with regard to his text. He mentions in his interview (2012) that while he was studying an English course in Norwich, UK, he attended a one-person show that inspired him to write a play that belonged to this kind of theatre. In this, it is significant to highlight the importance of cultural contact in the history of Saudi theatre. The lack of cultural contact prevented Saudi theatre from taking advantage of the development of theatre in other nations and cultures. Moreover, it led Saudi theatre to restrict itself for a number of years to the social and traditional plays.

In addition, Alsughaby (2012) adds that the one-person show is similar to a monologue from the main character in a short story which is his favourite style of writing. The play, according to Alsughaby (2012) and Alharthi (2010), was a remarkable shift in the experience of theatre in Altaif city not only because it was a one-person play, but also in terms of the kind of directing, acting, and music that was utilized in the play. The play lasted for forty-five minutes and was staged for one night.

The third production, in 1985, was *ma alkhaul ya arban* [*Arabian! Follow the Horses*] for two nights. This play was written by Alshamrany and directed by Amir Alhumod, who was brought from Riyadh to direct this play. At that time Alhumod was a new graduate of the Academia of Arts in Iraq. The Altaif branch presented this play at the theatrical festival for Gulf Youth in Kuwait. Two years later, in 1987, the Altaif branch staged its fourth production, *allubah* [*The Game*]. This play was adapted and

directed by Alsughaby and it ran for five nights. This play was an adaptation of *almqha alzujaji* [*The Glassy Cafe*], written by Sadallah Wanous, a Syrian playwright. Alsughaby (2012) explains that he admired Wanous's style of writing for theatre and especially the use of an *alhakwati* [*Story Teller*], which appears in this play. This play was the final production of the branch in this period.

It seems, however, that the branch depended upon the initiative of individuals rather than on a clear plan and vision of theatre production set by the branch. As noticed above, Alrasheed, as the head of the Theatre Department, and Alsughaby, as an author, played important roles in operating the branch. Alsughaby (2012) confirms that the branch of Altaif encouraged and supported individuals in their initiative but did not show interest in setting a plan. It is not surprising, therefore, that theatre was discontinued as soon as Alrasheed and Alsughaby left the city. Alharthi (2010) insists that financial support was available for theatre productions but there was a lack of interest and enthusiasm due to the absence of an expert in theatre such as that shown by Alsughaby and Alrasheed in their works.

This break in the Altaif branch's theatre productions might have begged some questions with regards to what had been achieved before the interruption. Firstly, why, after four years of producing plays, was the branch unable to establish a clear vision and plan for the production of theatre based on a system and procedure rather than depending upon an interested individual? Secondly, despite their work during the second period, why did Alrasheed and Alsughaby fail to establish such a system? This would have meant that the Theatre Department would have a clear system which could not be influenced by an individuals' absence. Finally, were some other members of the branch resistant to the theatre? Did this lead to the interruption?

Looking at this period from another angle, Alharthi provides some personal information which might be of interest in the history of the Altaif branch and Saudi theatre generally:

During the work of Alrasheed, Alsughaby and Rashid Alshamrany in *Safah fi almrah* in 1983, I was close to the process of preparing the play, so I benefitted from their discussion about the script and the performance in the rehearsals. I start to build my understanding of theatre. This was broadened by the next two productions which were different in style and content (2010).

It is important to mention that Alharthi, as is shown later, was amongst the most influential playwrights in Saudi theatre; he became a leading figure in the Altaif branch's history a few years after his experience of the above mentioned work. Therefore, Alharthi's personal information about his own experience was valuable in three ways. First of all, it provided a clue to understanding his appreciation of Alrasheed's period, as shown in the first paragraphs of this section. This brings us back to the question of what led Alharthi to describe this period as a remarkable shift; there was a close relationship between Alharthi and the theatre practitioners who were involved in this period, which might explain his admiration. Another explanation is that information indicates he was influenced by his engagement with the productions during the second period. Consequently, it could be said that the remarkable shift happened to Alharthi himself.

The second way in which this information might be valuable is that it showed the importance of a theatre specialist in enhancing Saudi theatre. This period produced some experienced specialists, such as Alshamrany (an actor and playwright), Alsughaby (a playwright), and Alhumod (a director). These specialists influenced the quality of Altaif branch's productions.

The establishment of the Altaif Workshop

The Altaif Workshop was established by Fahd Alharthi and other members of Altaif branch in 1992. Among these members are Ahmad Alahmary, who was the director of Altaif's Workshop for many years, and the main two actors in the Workshop's productions, Musaad Alzahrani and Sami Alzahrani. Before the establishment of the workshop, the branch staged several plays. In December 1989, it produced *alluhat Althalath* [*The Three Panels*]; this was Alharthi's first play and it was directed by Othman Ahmad, a Sudanese director who was sent from Jeddah branch to Altaif branch to revive theatre productions after the interruption. In respect of this play, Alharthi (2010) explains that "the branch after bringing the Sudanese director was in need of a script and I was asked to rescue the situation". He describes the play he wrote for the occasion as dreadful because it was the first he had written (2010). However, he mentioned in his interview (2010) that the play, which was staged for one night, was important because it led to the discovery of some good actors who would work in the branch. The next play was *ya riah Alwadi* [*Going to the Valley*]; it was also written by Alharthi and directed by Othman Ahmad, and it was staged for seven nights in February 1990.

According to the branch's records (see appendix No.2), the third play was *alqap biljumlah* [*Package of Names*], directed by Alahmary and written by Abdualah Alwajieh. Interestingly, as Alharthi (2010) and Alahmary (2010) explain, this short play was performed in an open area in Altaif city, which means that it aimed to reach as many people as possible.

In 1992, the branch presented *bait aleiz* [*The House of Honour*], written by Fahad Alharthi and directed by Alahmary. This play was staged for eighteen nights in

different cities such as Riyadh, Albahah, and Altaif. The play tells a story of some people who lost their house and discusses the suitable methods for finding it. The play ends with different suggestions provided by the members of the group for getting their house back. The last lines of the play are as follows:

Actor 2: This is the solution; I have some poems which might of help.

Actor 1: Poems will not return the house.

Actor 3: I have some enthusiastic and emotional songs.

Actor 2: The house cannot be returned by songs.

Actor 4: I have an idea; let us organize conferences, meetings and lectures.

Actor 1: It is not going to work out.

Actor 5: Let us ignore the house, it will return to us when it he feels that we are careless (Alharthi, 1992:16-17).

At the end, the group agrees that the only solution for getting their house back is to work together side by side. The picture below shows a scene from the play in which the characters are discussing the situation.



- Figure 25: From *bait aleiz* [*The House of Honour*], staged in Altaif city, 1992. It is reproduced with permission from the Workshop of Altaif.

It appears that the house in this play does not refer to an actual house, but rather it is a symbol of the identity of these people in the modern world. This could be understood from the announcement at the beginning of the play that "... we have urgent and strange news, there is a house that disappeared from the western street and nobody knows where the house has gone..." (Alharthi, 1992:1). Western street in this statement could be interpreted as the modern world that is dominated by western culture and productions.

After the production of this play, Alharthi proposed establishing a theatre group under the name of Altaif Workshop. After discussing the details of this project with the members of the branch, he issued the foundation statement at the beginning of January 1992 (Alharthi, 2010:35). Since this date the Altaif Workshop theatre has

been associated with the Altaif branch's productions. The foundation statement of this workshop confirmed the main aims of this workshop as follows:

- 1- Establishing a theatrical generation who would be aware of theatre as social-cultural action.
- 2- Promoting theatre in Saudi Arabia.
- 3- Broadening the knowledge of the members in theatre.
- 4- Encouraging talented youth in different aspects such as acting, directing and design.
- 5- Creating opportunities of invention and experimentation.
- 6- Communicating with international theatre companies and Arabic theatrical experiments (Alharthi 2010: 36).

Setting aims for the workshop as well as attempting to achieve these aims give the impression that the group takes theatre seriously and beyond the scope of merely being a hobby. Although the above aims seem general, they had three main ideas that evidence the seriousness that the group is seeking in practicing theatre. Firstly, the third aim indicated the understanding of the need for artists to educate themselves in theatre. Alharthi (2010), Alahmary (2010), and Musad Alzahrani (2010) confirm that building the knowledge of theatre was a key aim for the group's members. They point out that in the absence of such knowledge, they tended to collect as many books as possible to allow the group to read about theatre. In particular, they asked their friends who travelled regularly to Egypt, Syria, and other Arabic countries to bring back materials or books about theatre. Consequently, they built a small library in the branch available for the group. This library, as Alharthi mentions (2010), consists of different books on different aspects of theatre such as, acting, directing, and the history of theatre, as well as theatre texts. Furthermore, Alharthi (2010), Alahmary

(2010), and Musad Alzahrani (2010) mention that every day they met in the branch for more than two hours to read, discuss, and exchange ideas about what they had read.

Secondly, the fifth aim indicates that the group's works intend to search for new productions of theatre. In this respect, Alharthi mentions that we usually start the new works with different ideas and open a discussion about these ideas (2010). He points out that the text is the outcome of a developed discussion among the members of the group (2010). Sami Alzahrani (2010) and Musad Alzahrani (2010), the main actors in the Workshop, confirm that there is great freedom in the discussion which allows everyone to participate and to offer his own ideas and thoughts. Ahamad Alahmary (2010), the director, confirms that the group in the workshop works as a team. For instance, the text of *albrofah alakherah* [*The Last Rehearsal*], a play produced by the group in 1999, came out of the discussion of the members of the Workshop and the exchange of their ideas. According to a leaflet about this play, the group mentions that the origin of the play a news story about a director from Chile who presented a play with the participation of mental hospital patients (Anon.,1999). This story led the group to ask some questions, such as "how did the patients behave with the play?; how the director dealt with them? and how they responded to the text and the process of directing?" (Anon.,1999). The leaflet goes on to explain that these questions were the beginning of their work which resulted in *The Last Rehearsal* (Anon.,1999). It is clear that this description provides a summary of how this play began in terms of the cooperation between the members of the group. In addition, it offers a brief picture of the nature of this group in terms of preparing for a play. However, it is important to mention that most of the SASCA's branches and the Youth Groups for Theatre in the GPYW follow the traditional method of producing a play that depends upon a written

text and the vision of a director. *The Last Rehearsal* was presented in the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre in 1999. The picture below shows a scene from this play.



- Figure 26: From *albrofah alakherah* [*The Last Rehearsal*], Altaif, in 1998. It is reproduced with permission from Altaif Workshop.

Finally, the sixth aim gave the impression that the group wanted to improve their experience through other theatrical experiences, whether in the Arabic or wider international world. As Aharthi (2010), Alahmary (2010), and Musad Alzahrani (2010) explain the appropriate way to achieve this aim was to attend several theatrical festivals. According to the Workshop"s records¹¹, when they attended a theatrical festival they usually presented a production and most of their productions were entered in several theatrical festivals. Their first contribution to a theatre festival was in 1997, when the Workshop presented *alfanar* [*The Guidance*] at the Theatrical Festival of Gulf States' Groups. In 1998, this play was also presented at the Cairo

¹¹ - A list of Altaif branch productions is attached in appendix No.2.

International Festival for Experimental Theatre. The picture below presents a scene from this play taken during its presentation at the Theatrical Festival of Gulf States' Groups in Kuwait.



- Figure 27: From *alfanar* [*The Guidance*] at the Theatrical Festival of Gulf States' Groups in Kuwait 1997. It is reproduced with permission from Altaif Workshop.

In 2000, it presented *luabat alkarasy* [*The Chairs' Game*] at the celebration of the international day of theatre in Bahrain and in 2001 at The Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo. This play utilizes a common game that is known as the Chairs' Game. The game requires that there be a number of players and a number of chairs, and that the number of players exceeds the number chairs by one. The game begins with the chairs in a circle around which the players move until the music is stopped, at which time each player tries to sit on the closest chair. The player who fails to sit on a chair considered loses and he or she must leave the game. A chair is removed and the game continues until there is one chair and two players. *The Chairs' Game* goes beyond the nature of the game to question the relationship between the chairs and the

players. In addition, it questions which controls the other, is it the chair or the player. Interestingly, the play has two scenes in which the two chairs discuss their existence in the game and how they look at the player. It presents the two chairs on stage with their voices coming from off stage. In one of these scenes the two chairs have the following discussion:

Chair 1: (speaking to chair 2) You look unfamiliar. I have not seen you before, are you new here?

Chair 2: Yes, I am new. They brought me yesterday.

Chair 1: I am the oldest chair here.

Chair 2: Nice to meet you. (Alharthi, n.d: 7)

As the dialogue continues, the two chairs discuss their existence:

Chair 2: How is the work here?

Chair 1: It is unstable. You cannot expect what is coming next. Sometimes you stay as long as many months without work and you might get bored. Suddenly, you might hear noise and movement. In this case, you will know that it is time to be brought to the attention of people and you should expect a difficult day of working. Usually, the first rows have special treatment. By the way, you did not tell me where you will be located?

Chair 2: I heard that they will put me on stage.

Chair 1: My dear, it is bad luck.

Chair 2: Why?

Chair 1: The actors and other workers in the stage will take care of you only during the time of the production. After that, you will be thrown in a storeroom. You might have a chance to come out from the storeroom or stay for the rest of your life there.

Chair 2: The problem is that I do not have another option. (Alharthi, n.d:7-8)

This scene presents the ability of the author of this play to present these chairs as having feelings and views towards the game that they are playing on the stage. The director of the play uses light as an important tool on stage to enhance the play's meaning. In addition to the light equipment on the stage the production uses other lighting that is carried by people on stage and is moved with the movement of the actors. In this, the production aimed to take advantage of the shadows of the actors that appeared on the background of the stage. According to the Workshop's record of this play, the team explains that the production attempted to use the carried lights to question the relationship between the characters and their shadows which appeared in different sizes due to the movement of the light. The picture below shows a scene from the play where the effect of lighting appears behind the two characters and the two chairs appear slightly in the dark.



- Figure 28: From *luabat alkarasy* [*The Chairs' Game*] in 2001 at The Experimental Theatre Festival in Cairo. It is reproduced with permission from the Workshop of Altaif.

In 2002, the workshop presented *bazaar* [*The Festival*] at the Carthage Theatrical Festival in Tunisia. This play was concerned with the domination of money the economy over the relationships between people, groups, and society. It highlights that money is the primary power or value in the modern world and other values such as cultural, moral and social values have disappeared. Interestingly, the author brings some of the Arabic figures out of their cultural and historical context in the past and puts them in the modern world in order to show how they react to the values of the economy. The play is presented in comedic form through the behaviour of these figures in the modern world. For instance, the main figures in the Arabic history, *Abis* and *Thubian*, appear on stage as the owners of modern cafés that provide coffee, food, Internet services, and travel services. In addition, the play presents another two Arabic figures, *Jassas* and *Almuhlhil*, who fought each other for more than forty years, as modern people who compete against each other in the market through their products. In order to link different figures that lived in different periods, the author utilizes a story teller whose job in the play is to tell the stories of these figures and to link the different scenes of the play together. The picture below presents a scene from the play that shows the historical figures fighting each other as a result of the competition in the modern world.



- Figure 29: From *bazaar* [*The Festival*] in 2002, Altaif. It is reproduced with permission from the Workshop of Altaif.

Altaif Workshop, between 1997 and 2004, was the main branch of the SASCA that contributed extensively to different theatre festivals. The main office of the SASCA in Riyadh, according to the policy of the SASCA is responsible for selecting the best play for contributing to theatre festivals. Therefore, its selection of the plays that were produced by Altaif Workshop means that these plays were the best plays produced by the SASCA's branches. In addition, most of the Workshop's plays were selected as the best plays in the Aljunadriyah Festival for Culture and Heritage, which is held yearly in Saudi Arabia and includes a competition for theatre plays.

Significantly, between its establishment and before it embraced the theatrical festivals in 1997, the workshop presented several productions. According to the workshop's unpublished records, it produced *Shadat Alqafilah* [*Departure*] and *Alnabia* [*The Spring*] in 1994, *Albabor* [*The Ship*] in 1995, and *ana massror ya qalah* [*Castle, I am*

Massror] and a short monodrama *Zabin khaleek rajal* [*Be Man Zabin*] in 1996 (see appendix No. 2). In terms of children's theatre, the Workshop produced some plays for children, such as *ajajib ajeeb* in 1996 and *arnoub and karnop* 1999, which were written by Alharthi and directed by Ahmad Alahmary.

It is important to end this section about the history of theatre in Altaif branch by raising a critical question about the great number of the plays that were produced by this branch, whether they were staged inside the country or presented at theatrical festivals abroad, that were written by Fahad Alharthi and directed by Ahmad Alahmary. It begs the question of to what extent the Workshop benefitted from dealing solely with one writer and one director. One might insist that engaging with different writers' and different directors' visions could have broadened and enhanced the Workshop's experiences. Alharthi agrees with this point (2010). However, he explains that though he was a writer and member of this Workshop, not all of his scripts were accepted by them (2010). He adds that some of his scripts were not produced by the workshop (2010). As regards directing, Alharthi (2010) points out that the group had difficulties in dealing with other directors. For instance, financial issues, such as covering the cost of living for a few weeks in Altaif city had to be taken into account. As Alharthi says (2010), its budget did not allow the Altaif branch to consider additional expenses. Musad Alzahrani (2010), who worked with the workshop in all its productions mentions that Alharthi as a writer was close to the group and knew each actor's ability. Moreover, Musad Alzahrani (2010) explains that as the group shared the play from the beginning, they started with ideas and tried to build the script with Alharthi and this would have seemed difficult with another writer.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to shed light on the history of theatre in the second part of the GPYW. This part is that governed by the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA). Since the SASCA has a number of branches, the chapter endeavoured to look at the history of theatre in the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh and two of its branches. The main office in Riyadh began by producing social plays that were concerned with problems that faced Saudi society from 1974 until the mid eighties. Since the mid eighties, and due to the increased interest in theatre festivals, theatre in the main office started to produce plays that could contribute to these festivals. This theatre intended to address issues that concerned the Arabic world more generally and those that appealed to the elite. For this reason, the classic Arabic language was the common language in this theatre, while the Saudi dialect was the common language for social theatre. The branch of Alahsa followed the main office in producing the two kinds of theatre. However, this branch did not, as the main office and Altaif branch did, abandon the social plays. Instead, it continued to produce social plays that differed from those from the period prior to the contribution to theatre festivals. Altaif branch presented another way of producing theatre in Saudi Arabia, kind of theatre that was produced by Altaif Workshop. This theatre took a different direction in terms of its content and style as well as the method of creating plays that were dependent upon the collaboration of the workshop members.

Conclusion

The thesis claims that the subject of the history of Saudi theatre that began with the theatrical activities in schools in the thirties cannot be fully addressed in a single effort such as a doctorate thesis. This is not only because of the restrictions of this kind of project, in terms of its length and time, but also because Saudi theatre has existed in and been produced by several establishments such as schools, universities, governmental sectors, and private sectors. Consequently, the landscape of theatre in Saudi Arabia over more than seventy years has consisted of different kinds of theatre and such a large number of theatrical productions that a single research project would not be able to cover all of it adequately.

In attempting to answer the question: “what was the nature of Saudi theatre during the period from 1932 to 2004”, the thesis has attempted to cover a significant part of the history of Saudi theatre. This part is the history of Saudi theatre from its appearance to the period of the GPYW (General Presidency for Youth Welfare), 1974-2004; the GPYW was established as the main organization that took responsibility for supervising and controlling the activities of theatre in Saudi Arabia. In particular, the thesis concentrates upon providing a detailed picture of the history of theatre in the GPYW.

For the sake of achieving its aims, this thesis began with an introduction in which it explained the nature of this research, its main question, its significance, and the limitations of its scope. Moreover, it offered an overview of the previous studies that examined the subject of Saudi theatre. The introduction demonstrated the lack of resources on the subject of Saudi theatre, and the importance of further studies that aim to enhance the scholarship on the subject. In particular, it highlighted the absence

of English language resources on this subject; a lack that has prevented great numbers of people who are interested in understanding the history and situation of Saudi theatre from gaining such understanding. Because of the lack of resources in other languages, especially in the English language, Saudi theatre has been an obscure area for many scholars and practitioners in the international community of theatre for many years. This thesis, with its focus on the main establishment for theatre in Saudi Arabia, the GPYW, provides readers with access, previously unavailable, to the subject of Saudi theatre. Moreover, scholars and researchers in Saudi Arabia could benefit from this up-dated resource on the history of their theatre in different ways. For instance, it could be utilized in teaching theatre in Saudi Arabia as an academic field. In addition, it could be a point of departure for more questions, research, and studies in the area of Saudi theatre.

The thesis has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter aimed to provide an overview of the history of Arabic theatre before the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia. It is imperative to mention that beginning this study with the historical background of theatre in the Arabic world was not undertaken on the whim of the researcher. The fact that Saudi Arabia is a part of the Arabic world and as such shares different cultural aspects with other Arabic countries demands a primary understanding of the history of theatre in the Arabic countries that preceded Saudi Arabia in encountering and practicing theatre. Furthermore, because Saudi Arabia is surrounded by these Arabic countries and these countries had launched theatrical activities before Saudi Arabia, it was important to begin the thesis by introducing what had taken place in some of the important countries that witnessed the appearance of theatre, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, prior to the appearance of theatre in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the thesis introduces readers to an arena that has not been

studied very well by scholars and researchers. This arena is the beginning of theatre in the Gulf States. It was significant to include a section regarding theatre in the Gulf States due to the close similarities between Saudi Arabia and the countries of the Gulf States in terms of historical, social, and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, the thesis concludes that the western model and style of theatre has dominated the landscape of theatrical practices and productions for a long period of time. Consequently, it has been the centre and focus of scholarly works and research since 1847. Researchers and scholars in the area of theatre in the Arabic world, as the thesis notices, have paid great attention to the western style that was imported into the Arabic culture by Maroon Al-Naqqash in 1847. They go further in examining and exploring the development of this kind of theatre up to the present. However, while the thesis values the work of scholars and researchers who study the history of Arabic theatre, it concludes that the traditional forms of performance that included theatrical elements which existed in the Arabic culture prior to 1847 require reconsideration by researchers and scholars as kinds of theatre that belonged to the Arabic culture. The obvious reason for this is that theatre as a term has been developed in the last three decades, especially in the hands of Schenker and other theatre theorists and anthropologists, which makes it possible for the traditional Arabic forms to be reconsidered as a form of theatre in a broad sense.

Unfortunately, scholars have made little effort to examine and explore the existence of different forms of theatre that existed in the Arabic culture prior to 1847. In this, the thesis concludes that although a few works have searched for forms of drama and theatrical activities in the Arabic culture before 1847, the main aim and interest guiding these works was merely to prove that the Arabic culture had not lacked dramatic and theatrical forms. The scholars and researchers who have studied the

traditional Arabic forms did not look deeply enough into them; the investigation of these forms should not end with confirming their existence, but should go further in raising critical questions, such as what were the circumstances and conditions that witnessed the emergence of these forms, what were the attitudes of Arab people toward these forms and whether this attitude played a role in preventing the forms from developing, and the most important question of why these forms did not develop?

Since the thesis argues for more examination of the traditional forms of theatre in the Arabic culture, it did not engage in further discussion of this issue due the restrictions of its primary aim, to present an overview of the background of theatre in the Arabic world which serves as an introduction to theatre in Saudi Arabia. Besides, the common interest of theatre producers in the Arabic world as well as in Saudi Arabia was in imitating the modern theatre that was imported from western culture, which makes the traditional form of theatre beyond the scope of this thesis.

This thesis, in addition, calls scholars and researchers in the area of Arabic theatre to rethink the validity of the general theory that theatre was absent from the Arabic culture prior to 1847 and urges a more profound examination of the nature of the traditional forms. Furthermore, it argues that any such attempt to discuss the history of Arabic theatre, its beginning in particular, would be incomplete and lacking objectivity if it did not take into account the different views of scholars and researchers with regard to the absence of theatre or otherwise. Highlighting and presenting the scholarly debate about this matter to the readers of the history of the Arabic theatre is considered to be an essential stage in providing them with a clear picture of the situation of theatre within the Arabic culture.

In relation to the explanations for the absence of theatre, in its western form and model, from the Arabic culture, the thesis has offered an examination of the main explanations that have been provided by the major scholars and researchers in the field and reached a conclusion that rejects the method of considering different explanations as valid for explaining the absence of this form of theatre from the Arabic culture prior to 1847. It concludes that many of the explanations of this matter lacked a sense of logic in providing a reasonable answer to the question of why theatre in its western form was absent from the Arabic culture before 1847, when Maroon Al-Naqqash introduced it into the Arabic world. The thesis concludes that explanation that the lack of cultural contact with other nations who had theatrical activities provided by Jacob Landau (1958) is a reasonable and convincing explanation of this matter and is the best available answer to the question.

The first chapter agrees with researchers and scholars of Arabic theatre in highlighting the importance of Egyptian theatre in the history of Arabic theatre and its role in influencing the theatre in the other Arab countries. However, the thesis goes further to highlight the importance of the conditions and circumstances in Egypt during the late nineteenth century that helped to enhance the development of theatre in Egypt. The thesis concludes that consideration of the conditions and circumstances of Egypt at that time have been absent from a number of the scholarly works that introduced the history of theatre in the Arabic world to readers and this has prevented those readers from further understanding the history of theatre in Egypt, as well as in the Arabic world in general. Moreover, the thesis determines that a history of the beginning and development of theatre in any given country would make no sense to readers if it was not located within the broad context of the country in terms of history, social structure, culture, and politics.

As the first chapter ends its discussion with a brief discussion of the beginning of theatre in the Gulf States, as having close similarities with Saudi Arabia, it concludes that the schools in these states played a significant role in introducing theatre into their societies. In addition, the thesis reaches the conclusion, also reached by other researchers and scholars in the field of Gulf theatre, that several Arab teachers who had experience of theatre assisted these states in introducing and developing theatre in the Gulf States. However, the thesis, by examining the role of the Arab teachers, goes further in assuming that these teachers could not have introduced theatre in these states without the help and facilitation from members of the educational system in the Gulf States, whether this came from other teachers or administrators. It is concluded, also, that the role of Arab teachers requires more examination as their role has not been merely to establish and introduce theatre in these states but also to influence the nature of the theatre that developed later.

The second chapter has attempted to explore the historical, religious and social context of Saudi Arabia since its establishment in 1932 until 2004. By offering an outline of the historical context of Saudi Arabia, it concluded that the face of the country was influenced by the fact that it was established with a strong alliance between the Royal family (Al Saud) and the religious scholars (Ulama). Indeed, the government could not, and cannot, break this alliance under any circumstances as this will lead its people to question its legitimacy. In addition, due to the great influence of religious scholars, it was essential to look at the nature of Islam, the religion that Saudi Arabia has been following under the supervision of the religious scholars. The thesis concludes that Saudi Arabia has been following the most restrictive Islamic school in the history of Islam, which is the Hanbali school, which later became the wahabiazm. It is concluded by the thesis that this Islamic tradition has a negative

attitude toward theatre and music. In addition it prohibited the appearance of female performers next to male performers in public works. This edict impacted upon the appearance of women and their participation in theatre. The second chapter should pave the way for further understanding of the beginning of Saudi theatre and how it was launched and developed within this context which is the focus of Chapter Three.

The Third Chapter presented and discussed the scholastic theatre and the main influential attempts that were made by Saudi individuals to introduce theatre in Saudi Arabia. These attempts took place from the thirties up to the appearance of the GPYW as the first and main governmental establishment that took responsibility for theatre in Saudi Arabia from 1974.

In terms of the beginning of theatre, the thesis concludes that the recorded data of the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia mentions that the first signs of theatre appeared early in 1928, before the unification and the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a country in 1932. Ibn Sailh was the first Saudi individual who, according to the available resources, started producing theatrical activities in his private school in Unaizah in the middle of Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, the attempt of Ibn Salih to introduce theatre to Saudi Arabia confirms the early conclusions made by this thesis that theatre could not be transferred into a country that lacked this form of art without cultural contact with other countries that have developed theatrical activities. Although, there were some Saudi schools that existed in the time of Ibn Salih, there was not any indication of the existence of theatrical activities in these schools before the mid thirties. In addition, the thesis concludes that as theatrical activities in schools were the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia, these activities were the only sign of theatre during the period from the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 up to the beginning of the sixties. According to this thesis, the available resources, whether

written or oral, did not indicate any signs of theatre during this period outside the Saudi schools.

Furthermore, the thesis concludes that the Ministry of Knowledge in Saudi Arabia played a role in supervising, enhancing, and increasing the theatrical activities in the country from 1954 onward. However, the nature of the theatrical activities during the supervision of this ministry did not go beyond their educational function. This was evident from the number of historical plays and other social sketches that focus on issues that interest students and their parents. Next, the thesis concludes that the lack of interest in education among Saudi people before the late 1950s is reflected in the content of the sketches in schools that highlighted this issue and addressed the importance of education. Moreover, the early theatrical activities in schools were short plays and sketches which were presented during the annual celebrations and ceremonies of the schools. It is important to mention that as the thesis believes that the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia witnessed the help and assistance of Arab teachers, it concludes that there were people who participated alongside the Arab teachers in launching the beginning of theatre in Saudi Arabia though they are not mentioned by the available resources on the subject of Saudi theatre. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Knowledge, the thesis concludes that the activities of sport had dominated the policy which impacted upon the development of the situation of theatre in schools. For instance, the theatrical activities did not go beyond their presentation in the schools' ceremonies which were held once or twice a year.

Furthermore, the thesis concludes that the awareness of some Saudi individuals of the importance of theatre and its value preceded such awareness in the government. This was made evident by the fact that there were some individuals who attempted to establish a new territory for theatre that exceeded the common practice of it in

schools. For instance, the attempt of Ahamad Alsubaie in building a theatre as well as a school of acting; this is an example of the individual initiative that paved the way for dealing with theatre in the Saudi government. In addition, Alahsa's club aimed to improve the practice of Saudi theatre in the early seventies; this is another example of the initiatives that were taken by Saudi individuals. It is concluded by the thesis, moreover, that the appearance of Saudi television played a role in allowing Saudi society, including people who were interested in theatre, to encounter other experiences of theatre; these experiences had a huge influence upon the minds of Saudi people in terms of the nature of theatre and the style of writing and acting.

In Chapter Four, the thesis introduced the main tendencies that dominated most of theatre activities in Saudi Arabia, and in particular, the theatrical productions of the GPYW. These tendencies are the historical, social, and festival trends. By providing an explanation of each trend as well as an example of a play that belong to each one, the thesis allows readers to further understand the nature of theatre in the GPYW.

Chapters Five and Six concentrated on examining the history of theatre in the GPYW which lasted for thirty years from 1974 until 2004, the year in which the Saudi government decided to hand over the responsibility for cultural activities, including theatre, to the Ministry of Culture and Information. These two chapters explored the development of theatre as well as the significant shifts that had been noticed in terms of content and form in the two main parts: the General Administration for Cultural Activities (the GACA) and the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (the SASCA).

By looking at the historical context of the establishment of the GPYW, the thesis concludes that the root of the Youth Welfare sector in the government of Saudi Arabia

was associated with the appearance and the increase of sport activities in the forties and fifties. This is highlighted by the publications of the General Presidency for Youth Welfare itself and other resources concerned with the youth activities in Saudi Arabia. The thesis goes further in concluding that this early interest in sport had dominated the plan, vision, and policy of the GPYW during its history up to 2004. Consequently, it had influenced the practice of theatre in this establishment, especially in the GACA, as theatre was not given the same attention as sport.

The history of theatre in the main parts of the GPYW, the GACA and the SASCA shows that the latter, although it was responsible for different cultural activities as well as the arts, showed a clear vision and it concentrated on the theatre to the same degree as other cultural activities. In addition, the GACA dealt with the cultural activities in general through the clubs that served to accomplish these activities. The thesis concludes that while the SASCA had dealt with theatre in a direct way by producing and supervising theatrical productions, the GACA left the achievement of the cultural activities to the Saudi clubs. This, however, left the production of theatre to the enthusiasm and interest of the members without obliging them to produce theatre. Therefore, in examining the history of theatre in Saudi clubs, the thesis concludes that the result of the way the GACA dealt with clubs is that the practice of theatre in clubs did not develop under its supervision beyond the presentation of theatre as a part of an annual ceremony. In terms of theatre in clubs, the thesis believes that theatre did not show development in their productions as a result of the treatment of theatre as an activity by the GACA, as mentioned above. Besides, there was a lack of knowledge of theatre and of experts in theatre who could work on enhancing the knowledge of Saudi practitioners and help them to better understand it. In addition, the GACA did not try to fill this gap by offering theatrical workshops or

training courses in different aspects of theatre such as writing, acting, and directing. It was mentioned by the thesis that most of the practice of theatre in clubs was merely a continuation of the practice of theatre that existed in Saudi schools. The common method of presenting theatre in Saudi clubs, as this thesis confirms, was through the celebrations and ceremonies that were held by clubs once or twice every year. Theatre in clubs was not produced as an independent activity. However, the thesis concludes that the examination of some Saudi clubs from the seventies to the mid eighties confirms the existence of some efforts by individual Saudis who sought to develop theatre despite the lack of knowledge of theatre; these individuals had an interest in theatre and great enthusiasm for making a difference in the landscape of theatre in some Saudi clubs.

The best example of developing theatre, as the thesis concludes, was the establishment of the Youth Groups for Theatre which was a step forward for developing theatre in the GACA, in general, and in Saudi clubs in particular. The thesis, by examining the history of two main Youth Groups for Theatre, concludes that these groups worked, within their limitations, to present different productions in terms of their nature and form that enhanced the quality of theatre in Saudi Arabia. However, despite the importance of this step and the different kinds of theatre produced by the Youth Groups for Theatre, the Youth Groups for Theatre negatively affected the development of theatre in Saudi Arabia. By this, the thesis concludes that the GACA, by giving attention to the Youth Groups for Theatre, did, in fact, ignore efforts for further development of theatre in clubs and failed to take advantage of the capability of clubs to participate in enhancing theatre in Saudi Arabia alongside with the efforts made by the Youth Groups for Theatre.

Children's theatre had been presented differently by the two parts of the GPYW, the GACA and the SASCA. The GACA paid attention to the Aljeel club in the late seventies and later to the Youth Groups for Theatre in the mid eighties. In contrast, the SASCA started early in one branch, Alahsa, to develop the children's theatre that was presented by the GACA in this city. The other branches of the SASCA did not present children's theatre before the mid nineties. Children's theatre in the GPYW, as this thesis concludes, was not given the attention that it deserves. Although there were several productions of children's plays, the GPYW did not go forward with developing this kind of theatre. However, theatre for children requires knowledge of its nature and the methods that should be utilized for presenting and producing it. The GPYW did not offer courses and workshops for training the Saudi practitioners in this kind of theatre or to enhance their knowledge of its nature.

There was a lack of Saudi expertise; few practitioners studied theatre abroad and had experience of approaching theatre scientifically, academically. Although the Saudi government had enhanced the quality of its members by sending them abroad for further development, the GPYW did not engage in such development by sending some of its members to obtain the knowledge of theatre.

The sixth chapter focused on exploring the history of theatre in the second part of the GPYW, the SASCA. It offered a detailed picture of the history of theatre in three branches of the SASCA: the main office in Riyadh, the branch of Alahsa, and the branch of Altaif. It also discussed the main theatre productions in these branches. With respect to the nature of theatre in the productions of the SASCA, the thesis concludes that these productions began by focusing on social theatre that addresses social affairs in Saudi society in a realistic form. The social theatre, as this thesis concludes, dominated the history of the SASCA theatre from its establishment until

the mid eighties. It is noticed, also, that the social theatre during this period tended to present the social plays in a comic style rather than a dramatic or serious style. None of the topics that were discussed by the social theatre from 1974 until 2004 intended to discuss issues related to religious and political aspects of Saudi society. The interest of the SASCA in social theatre as described above is explained by the difficulty of addressing religious and political issues in Saudi Arabia due to the powerful influence of religious people and to the strong relation between the Saudi ruler and religious scholars. In addition, it was difficult for political issues to be addressed in the absence of a democratic atmosphere in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the lack of cultural contact with other countries that had developed various kinds of theatre prevented Saudi theatre from broadening its horizons.

The mid eighties witnessed the beginning of cultural contact between Saudi practitioners and those from other countries; they were able to experience theatre through different theatre festivals. As a result of the many contributions of the GPYW to theatre festivals, Saudi theatre took a new direction. It was clearly noticed, as this thesis concludes, in the productions of the SASCA rather in the GACA. As the main office in Riyadh contributed to different theatre festivals across the Arabic world, the subjects of its productions shifted from the concentration upon social theatre to subjects that concerned the Arabic world more generally, such as the role of elite people, the conflict in the Middle East, and freedom. In the branch of Alahsa, although it contributed to different theatre festivals, social issues were not absent from its productions. Instead, the social theatre in this branch had shown improvement in terms of its content and form, as well as in the language utilised in the plays. The branch of Altaif, however, had shown a different method of presenting theatre from the other two branches, the main office and the branch of Alahsa. Since the branch of

Altaif established Theatre Workshop, theatre produced by this workshop took a different direction in terms of its content and style as well as the method of creating plays that were dependent upon the collaboration of the workshop members.

Finally, the thesis concludes that the history of theatre in the two parts of the GPYW did not show any participation of women in the activities of theatre. This is explained and justified by the nature of Saudi society as a conservative religious society. More importantly, it is explained by the religious attitude toward the participation of women alongside men in different aspects of life. However, there were a few attempts by women to participate in the GPYW's theatre through writing for theatre. It is concluded by the thesis that the participation of women was marginal to theatre in the GPYW.

The thesis' recommendations

The thesis believes in the importance of ending this research with providing some recommendations related to the future of theatre in Saudi Arabia and further development in the field of theatre. Thus, the thesis, after examining the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia with particular reference to the history of theatre in the GPYW, proposes that because of the lack of resources in the field of the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia, the GPYW and other establishments that work in theatre should take advantage of the existence of some materials related to the theatre productions that have been produced, and begin to build its history and publish it to provide a resource for its activities. Moreover, it is essential in doing this to pay attention to gathering the information that exists only in the memories of people who participated in these activities. It is noticed by this thesis that most of the information that is worth preserving about the theatre productions in the past is held in the

memories of these individuals. As some of these individuals are getting old it is essential for the benefit of the history of Saudi theatre that this information should be documented and recorded.

Owing to the importance of recording the productions of theatre in Saudi Arabia in general and the GPYW in particular, the thesis recommends that the GPYW, as well as other establishments in Saudi Arabia that produce or supervise theatrical activities, should understand the importance of documenting their activities and pay attention to the process of recording these activities in different ways. The methods of recording available to them include keeping copies of the texts and information about the events at which these activities take place, as well as digitally recording the shows. This will allow future researchers to further their studies and research by using existing, well-made resources. In addition, it will enlarge the history of theatre in Saudi Arabia.

In terms of further studies and research in Saudi theatre, the thesis recommends that researchers who aim to conduct such studies should take advantage of the general and current development of the historical studies and the field of history. It is mentioned by the thesis that the role of the GPYW in theatre concentrated on producing plays. Although this is an important role, the thesis recommends that the GPYW as well as other establishments for theatre in Saudi Arabia should extend their role to include enhancing the ground of Saudi theatre. This can be achieved by running theatrical workshops on different aspects of Saudi theatre for enhancing the knowledge of Saudi artists. Moreover, it can be achieved by arranging lectures, seminars, and actor training courses.

Since the thesis notices that the GPYW did not pay attention to sending as many Saudi students and artists as possible to carry out further theatre studies in countries

that have developed theatre in practical as well as theoretical terms, it urges the GPYW to rethink the importance and value of sending some Saudi practitioners to enhance their knowledge in different aspects of theatre. Once they are sent on such courses of study, they will play a significant role in developing theatre in Saudi Arabia by returning and applying their knowledge of theatre in their home country.

Appendices

Appendix No. 1

Chronicle of the plays produced by the Youth Group for Theatre in Alahsa and Riyadh

1- The productions of the Alahsa Youth Group for Theatre

No	Name of Play	Author	Director	Years of production
1	<i>Sheqah fi aldour althalth</i> [A Flat on the Third Floor]	Yousif Alkhomais	Ali Alghoainm	1986
2	<i>Nas taht alsifr</i> [People Beneath Zero]	Abdualrhman Alhamad	Abdualrhman Alhamad	1987
3	<i>Saq alqasab</i> [Stem]	Abdualrhman Almorikhy	Ali Alghoainm	1989
4	<i>Sabir ibn alsyad</i> [The Master's Son]	Esa Alhlal	Sami Aljaman	1989
5	<i>Ethhak</i> [Laugh]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1989
6	<i>Nehayat almubarah</i> [The End of the Game]	Sami Aljaman	Ali Alghoainm	1989
7	<i>Alqadm min almareekh</i> [The Comer from Mars]	Sami Aljaman	Ali Alghoainm	1991
8	<i>Alam alrsom almutahrikah</i> [The World of Cartoons]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1992
9	<i>Hikayt ma jara</i> [Retiling What Happened]	Abdualrhman Almorikhy	Ali Alghoainm	1994
10	<i>Alqafrah taseer</i> [The Trail is Moving]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1995
11	<i>Safee</i> [Pure]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1995
12	<i>Jakm slaisl</i> [Slaisl is Coming]	Mushal Alrasheed	Ali Alghoainm	1996
13	<i>Hadiqat alensan</i> [The Garden of the Human]	Ibraheem Alkhomais	Noh Aljaman	1997
14	<i>Alqubo</i> [The Cellar]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1997
15	<i>Sahee wlahee</i> [Unmindful]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1998
16	<i>Kees alnohas</i> [The Cooper's Bag]	Abdualrhman Alhamad	Abdualrhman Alhamad	1998
17	<i>Shaeen wa quoi eyeen</i> [Unashamed Person]	Sami Aljaman	Sami Aljaman	1999
18	<i>Alnimr alwardy</i> [The Rose Tiger]	Ibraheem Alkhomais	Ibraheem Alkhomais	1999
19	<i>Kashtah</i> [Trip]	Sami Aljaman	Noh Aljaman	1999

20	<i>Hamil wa shamil</i> [Names of Two Funny People]	Abeer Albaz	Ahmad Aleyed	2001
21	<i>Shabab fi albay bay</i> [Youth Getting Lost]	Eaad Albasrawy	Mohammad Albadr	2001
22	<i>Aljowhrah althahbiyh</i> [The Golden Jewel]	Sami Aljaman	Ahmad Aleyed	2002
23	<i>Lo noces</i>	Abdualrhman Almorikhy	Yousif Alkhomais	2003
24	<i>Alghabh alsagheerh</i> [The Small Forest]	Abdualkareem Almosa	Abdualkareem Almosa	2003
25	<i>Naeem majaneen</i> [The Paradise of Madmen]	Majed Alnowys	Majed Alnowys	2004
26	<i>Alnaqeeth</i> [The Opposite]	Abdualrhman Almorikhy	Yousif Alkhomais	2004
27	<i>Abaa lelbaiy ao lelejar</i> [Fathers for Sale or Rent]	Qasim Muhamad Adapted by Abdualaziz Alsumaeel	Ali Alghoainm	2004

The source: A leaflet for the play *Abaa lelbaiy ao lelejar*

[*Fathers for Sale or Rent*], The Youth Group for Theatre in Alahsa 2004.

2- The productions of the Youth Group for Theatre in Riyadh

No	Play Name	Author	Director	Year of Production
1	<i>Fursah akhra</i> [Another Chance]	Adabted by Fahad Alhowshany	Fahad Alhowshany	1995
2	<i>Jalsah ma alqanoon</i> [In the Presence of The Law]	Adabted by Moshal Alrasheed	Abu Bakr Shilqamy	1996
3	<i>Dunia tejnin</i> [The Crazy World]	Fahad Alhowshany	Salih Alzeer	1997
4	<i>eqaa zaman waqea</i> [Unbalanced Time]	Adabted by Moshal Alrasheed	Naif Khalaf	1998
5	<i>Awraq shahr sabaah</i> [Papers of Seventh Month]	Moshal Alrasheed	Awadh Aseery	1999
6	<i>Lubat alhyah</i> [Life's Game]	Fahad Alhowshany	Nasser Albaz	2000
7	<i>Alrehlah</i> [The Journey]	Abeer Albaz	Nasser Albaz	2000
8	<i>Wahd ethnan thalathah</i> [One, Two, Three]	Abdualziz Alsughaby	Naif Khalaf	2001
9	<i>Qariat almarah</i> [The Village of the Joyful]	Mohammad Droby	Awadh Aseery	2002
10	<i>Almuqlab</i> [The Trick]	Adabted by Nasser Albaz	Salih Aleylany	2002

The Source: A leaflet for the play *Almuqlab*

[*The Trick*], The Youth Group for Theatre in Riyadh 2002,

Appendix No. 2

Chronicle of the productions of the branches of the SASCA

1- The productions of the main office in Riyadh

No.	Name of Play	Author	Director	Year of Production
1	<i>Akhir al mushar</i> [The End of The Way]	Abdualrahman Alshaer	Mohammed Alshammiry	1975
2	<i>Qetar alhadh</i> [The Lucky Train]	Ibraheem Alhamdan	Saman Alani	1979
3	<i>Soqut alhisab</i> [The Consequence]	Ahamad Abdualrahman	Saman Alani	1980
4	<i>Tholathy Al nakd</i> [The Three Troublemakers]	Adabted by Foazy badway	Saman Alani	1981
5	<i>Alkarmaniah</i> [Name of a historical family]	Ahamad Abdualrahman	Saman Alani	1982
6	<i>Qedir alsharakah</i> [The Partners]	Abdualrahman Almogren	Abdualrahman Almogren	1982
7	<i>Tahit alkarasi</i> [Under the Chairs]	Ahamad Aldubaikhe	Saman Alani	1983
8	<i>Qubat Rasheed</i> [Rasheed's Roof]	Mohamad Alothaim	Saman Alani	1983
9	<i>Almahabeel</i> [The Crazyies]	Ibraheem Alhamdan	Saman Alani	1984
10	<i>Wahid sefr</i> [One- nil] A one person show	Abualziz Alsughaby	Saman Alani	1985
11	Watny [My Country]	Ahamad Husain Almouj	Saman Alani	1985
12	<i>Oais altasia ashar</i> [Oais No. 19]	Rashed Ashamrany	Amer Alhomod	1986
13	<i>Ibn Zoaraiq</i> [Name of a historical figure]	Rashed Ashamrany	Amer Alhomod	1987
14	<i>Aljarad</i> [The Locust]	Ali Alsaeed	Saman Alani	1988
15	<i>Alseneen alejaf</i> [The Difficult Years]	Mohamad Alothaim	Saman Alani	1988
16	<i>Albatekh alazraq</i> [The Blue Watermelon]	Mohamad Alothaim	Abdualghani bin Tarah	1991
17	<i>Deak albahar</i> [The Sea Cock]	Rashed Ashamrany	Rashed Ashamrany	1993
18	<i>Alhiar</i> [Falling]	Mohamad Alothaim	Abu baker Shelqame	1995
19	<i>Hulum Alhamathani</i>	Mohamad Alothaim	Saman Alani	1996

	[<i>Alhamathani's Dream</i>]			
20	<i>Sekat safar</i> [<i>The Journey</i>]	Ahamad Aldubaikhe	Saman Alani	1996
21	<i>Alarsheef</i> [<i>The Archive</i>]	Mohamad Alothaim	Saman Alani	1997
22	Almushawtheen [<i>The Magicians</i>]	Ibraheem Alhamdan	Saman Alani	1998
23	<i>Almustasem</i> [Name of a historical figure]	Ahamad Aldubaikhe	Saman Alani	1998
24	<i>Shraikh alsharkh</i> [Name of a traditional game for children]	Moshal Alrasheed	Saman Alani	1999
25	<i>Luka ibn Luka</i> [<i>Double Dealing</i>]	Mohamad Alsheddi	Saman Alani	2002

The source: unpublished report from the main office in the SASCA, Riyadh.

1- The productions of the branch of Alahsa

No	Name play	Author	Director	Year of production
1	<i>Aqaqer wa aqarat</i> [<i>The Property</i>]	Abduarhaman Alhamad	Zaghlol Alseeghi	1979
2	<i>Alaitam</i> [<i>The Orphans</i>]	Abduarhaman Alhamad	Nassir Almobark	1980
3	<i>Alhal Almafqod</i> [<i>The Lost Solution</i>]	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	1982
4	<i>Yomiyat Benai</i> [<i>The Dairy of Benai</i>]	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	1982
5	<i>Ihtifalet Abi Tamam</i> [<i>The Ceremony of Abi Tamam</i>]	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	1987
6	<i>Zafrat Kokab</i> [<i>The Breath of a Planet</i>]	Abdualbaqi Albakheet	Ibraheem Alkhomais	1995
7	<i>Shidad bin Entar</i> [Name of a historical figure]	Rashid Ashamrani	Abdurahman Almoraikhi	1996
8	<i>Alsaram</i> [<i>The Harvest</i>]	Abdulaziz Alsumail	Ali Alghoainm	1996
9	<i>Nahar Malih</i> [<i>A Salted River</i>]	Abdualbaqi Albakheet	Rashid Alwarthan	1998
10	<i>Albear almaskon</i> [<i>The Inhabitant Well</i>]	Abduarhaman Alhamad	Noh Aljaman	1998
11	<i>Mout almugny</i> [<i>The Death of the Singer</i>]	Abdulaziz Alsumail	Ali Alghoainm	1999
12	<i>Aain bo Aain</i> [<i>The Eyes</i>]	Ibraheem Alkhomais	Noh Aljaman	2000
13	<i>Halom wa alkanz</i> [<i>Halom and The Treasure</i>]	Yousef Almuhaimeed	Abduarhaman Alhamad	2000
14	<i>Azraq Alymamh</i> [<i>The Blue of Ymamh</i>]	Abduarhaman Alhamad	Ali Alghoainm	2001
15	<i>Wahsh almasrahiyah</i> [<i>The Play's Monster</i>]	Saad Aldosary	Yousef Alkhomais	2001
16	<i>Alabwab alarbah</i> [<i>The Four Doors</i>]	Abduarhaman Alhamad	Abduallah Alturky	2002
17	<i>Sanat alrahmah</i> [<i>The Year of Mercy</i>]	Mohamad Alsheddi	Zakria Almomany	2002
18	<i>Daq aljaras</i> [<i>The Bell Rings</i>]	Sami Aljaman	Zakria Almomany	2003
19	<i>Tah ma tah</i> [<i>The Imponderable</i>]	Mushal Alrasheed	Abduallah Alturky	2003
20	<i>Jerah ibn Saty</i> [<i>Ibn Saty's Sawbones</i>]	Sami Aljaman	Zakria Almomany	2003
21	<i>Ahl alarth</i> [<i>People of Earth</i>]	Saad Aldosary	Zakria Almomany	2004

22	<i>Nusos [Scripts]</i>	Zakria Almomany	Zakria Almomany	2004
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The source: A leaflet from *Rsail Alsharqy* [*Alsharqy's Letters*], 2007. The branch of Alahsa, Alahsa.

2- The productions of the branch of Altaif

No	Name of play	Author	Director	Year of production
1	<i>Mien ykamil althani</i> [Who Completes the Other]	Mohamad Rajab	Mohamad Alshamy	1983
2	<i>Safah fi Almraah</i> [Slap on Mirror]	Abdualziz Alsaqabi	Abdualziz Alrasheed	1983
3	<i>Ma alkhaul ya arban</i> [Follow the Arabian Horses]	Rashed Alshamrany	Amer Alhomud	1985
4	<i>Allubah</i> [The Game]	Abdualaziz Alsaqabi	Abdualaziz Alsughaby	1987
5	<i>Alluhat althalath</i> [The Three Panels]	No author	Othman Ahamad	1990
6	<i>Ya riah alwadi</i> [Going to the Vale]	Fahd Alharthy	Othman Ahamad	1990
7	<i>Alqab jamelah</i> [Package of Names]	Abdulah Alwageh	Ahamad Alahmary	1991
8	<i>Bait aleaz</i> [The House of Honour]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1992
9	<i>Shadat alqafila</i> [The Journey]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1994
10	<i>Alnabia</i> [The Spring]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1995
11	<i>Hikaiat saghera</i> [Small Stories]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1995
12	<i>Albabor</i> [The Train]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1995
13	<i>Ana masrur ya qalah</i> [I Am Happy! Castle]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1996
14	<i>Ajaib ajeeb</i> [Strange Things]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1996
15	<i>Zabin khleek rajal</i> [Be Man! Zabin]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1996
16	<i>Alfanar</i> [The Guidance]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1997
17	<i>Albrofah alakherah</i> [The Last Rehearsal]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1998
18	<i>Arnob wa karnob</i> [Arnob and Karnob]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1999
19	<i>Rehlat ma kabl almeah</i> [The Journey before a Hundred]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	1999
20	<i>Lubat alkarasy</i> [The Chairs' Game]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	2000
21	<i>Bazar</i> [The Festival]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	2001

22	<i>Almuhtaker</i> [<i>The Monopolist</i>]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	2003
23	<i>Assif</i> [<i>Brainstorm</i>]	Fahd Alharthy	Ahamad Alahmary	2004

The source: An unpublished record of Altaif's Workshop

Appendix No.3

Examples of interviews

Interview No. 1: with Omar Alobaiby, conducted on 6\8\2011, in Alahsa.

Naif: How would you like to introduce yourself?

Alobaidy: My name is Omar salim Alobaidy; I was born in Alahsa in 1945. I began my early studies within alkatateeb, the traditional schools, in Alahsa.

Naif: Would you please explain the nature of this school.

Alobaidy: Alkhatateeb was a group of students taught by a religious person who was called *almutaw*. He taught us the alphabet and how to read the Quran, starting with the short sura's. We usually studied in his house. As soon as the students read all of the sura's in the Quran the teacher gained a small amount of money from their parents. The period of studying in Alkatateeb took between two to three years maximum. The time of studying was divided into two lessons: one in the morning and one in afternoon.

Naif : When and how did you experience theatre for the first time?

Alobaidy: In 1958 or 1959 we moved to Riyadh with my father who worked there. In Riyadh, I joined the school of Albaten. In this school there was a group of students from the scouts who were involved in different activities, including theatre. Theatre, by that time, was presented as short sketches at the end of each year. The sketches were dependent upon improvisation rather than written texts and it was very simple in content and style. In preparation for a ceremony in honour of a visit to the school by King Saud, I remember that the group was in need of a child my age. Because I was

so active in the scouts I was selected for the role of a child. The sketch was about a mother who did not take care of her house and family. I remember a boy performed the role of my mother. We did the rehearsal in two hours before the ceremony. The ceremony was in the evening and we did the rehearsal before the sun set. There was no plan for the actors, no text, and no design on the stage. As I come to the group, they said that I would be sitting on the floor and my father would enter and ask about my mother. Then, I should just answer that I did not know where she was. This was my role in the play. I remember that the ceremony began with some citation from the Quran, and some speeches to welcome the king. That was my early experience of theatre in school. As soon as the curtain opened, there were two students who were responsible for opening the curtain by hand; I saw the king and a great number of people around him, including his guards. I was scared of the scene so I did not say a word in the play. I remember that the boy who played my father asked me many times about my mother, but he did not get any answers from me. He lashed me with a stick in his hand. As I felt the stick, I jumped to the audience crying: I do not want to act. Then I went out of the hall. The audience was laughing at my reaction. I remember that the king asked one of his guards to call me. I came and greeted the king who was happy and pleased by my performance. From this experience I started to love theatre and began get to involved in theatrical activities in school. Then, I returned with my family to Alahsa.

Naif: Before leaving Riyadh, did you experience theatre in other places?

Alobaidy: Theatre was only in schools. There were no places where we could produce theatre.

Naif : In your school in Riyadh, who directed the plays?

Alobaidy: There was not director in the current sense of the word. I remember one student who was older than us called Alshyep. He was responsible for the sketches and theatrical activities. But, in terms of doing the work, we as students shared the preparation and it was really simple.

Naif : So, your experience was associated with the school in Riyadh only.

Alobaidy: Yes. But when I returned to Alahsa I continued working in theatrical activities in school.

Naif: Ok.

Alobaidy: In Alahsa, there was only one elementary school and its name was the first elementary school. I joined this school around 1965. We usually presented one or two ceremonies each year. One in the middle and the other was at the end of the academic year. I remember some of teachers from Egypt who were responsible for the theatrical activities as well as for the preparation of the ceremony.

Naif: Do remember specific names?

Alobaidy: It hard to remember names. It has been ages since that time. But I remember that the advanced students assisted the teachers in the social sketches because of their knowledge of Saudi society and the language. Theatre in the schools by that time was concentrating upon the social issues, and it was presented in the form of comedy. The nature of these plays was dependent upon improvisation as I mentioned. For instance, one student can come with an idea and the other students work together in building the dialogue of the play. There was no directing, in the current sense of the word. The lighting was simple. The female roles were played by

boys. In addition, there were some historical plays from Islamic and Arabic history which were produced under the supervision of the Egyptian teachers.

Naif: With regard to the female roles, how did you present them?

Alobaidy: The female roles were performed by boys, and the performers wore female clothes. In addition, the performer used female make up and he wore a hijab over his head in order to mask his lack of long hair. However, I think that boys playing the female roles ended by the early seventies due to a change in Saudi nature, especially with the rise of religious influence upon the educational system.

Naif: As the number of schools increased do think that the nature of theatre was different from one school to another?

Alobaidy: During my experience as a student and teacher, I think that the nature of theatre in school was the same in all Saudi schools. However, as I worked in the educational system as a teacher, I stopped my work as an actor in school.

Naif: Did you supervise theatrical activities in schools when you became a teacher?

Alobaidy: Yes, but the nature of theatre in schools by the beginning of the seventies was not the same as now. For instance, the support of the Ministry of Education was poor compared with our time. The theatrical activities were left to the enthusiasm of the heads of schools. Besides, the sport activities were increased in schools and encouraged by the ministry more than theatrical activities.

Naif: As a teacher in the school, how did you evaluate theatre?

Alobaidy: Well, it was simple and did not improve because theatrical activities were optional and there was no plan for encouraging schools to do theatre.

Interview No.2: with Sami Aljaman; conducted on 5\8\2011 in Alahsa.

Naif : Let us start with your writing for theatre. When did you start?

Sami: I started in 1980. The first play was *Hamad*, which was a simple social story. Honestly, my style of writing in this play was too weak, but I still have this play in my record.

Naif: You mean it has not yet been staged?

Sami: Yes, and I do not think that I will allow this play to be staged because in it was I was only starting to explore how to write a play. In fact, if I had not tried to write a play, even if was a weak play like this, I would have waited ages trying to write a good play. So, it was the beginning and I had to do it.

Naif: Did you have primary knowledge of writing for theatre before this play?

Sami: Never. My knowledge came from my participation in theatre as an actor.

Naif : Where was that?

Sami: It was in Aljeel Club in Alahsa and I was participating as an actor before starting to write for theatre. Working as an actor motivated me to write plays. So, my knowledge was based on practical aspects and I did not have knowledge that was based on reading. The next play, however, was *alaoudah* [*The Return*] and this play was staged in the club around 1982. I could not say that his play was a good play but I can say that it was better than the first one.

Naif: With regard to the first play, did you consult a member of the club or friend about the quality of the play?

Sami: The first play was not been read by anyone because I was too scared. I did not have enough courage to ask people to read it. But, two years after writing the first play, I was encouraged to present a play to the club. I thought my experience helped me grow a little bit.

Naif: What do you mean by your experience?

Sami: As an actor in the club. In two years the club produced about three plays and working in these play helped me not merely by enhancing my skills in acting but also assisted me in understanding how the plays were written. As a result, I presented the play to the club.

Naif: Would you please tell me to whom you presented the play?

Sami: I presented the play to Yousef Alkhomais who was the first one to read the play and was the head of the Theatre Department in the club. He felt that the play worth producing. I was very happy that my play was going to be staged.

Naif: Who directed the play?

Sami: The director was Ibraheem Alduhaln who was the main director in Aljeel club.

Naif: What was the next play?

Sami: The next play was *idhuk* [*Laugh*] and was for children. It was staged in 1989, five years after the second play [*The Return*].

Naif: What motivated you to write for children?

Sami: In Aljeel Club we were interested in children's theatre. In fact, Alahsa city was involved in children's theatre because of the works of Abdualrahman Almoraikhy who is the pioneer of children's theatre in Saudi theatre. The tendency of Almoraikhy

toward children's theatre was amongst the things that motivated me to write for this kind of theatre. Almoraikhy's work could be distinguished from other works for children's theatre because of his understanding and awareness of the importance of this theatre in enlightening and educating children. He had a vision for the future when he was working for children's theatre; he utilizes theatre as a tool in order to educate and enlighten people in Saudi Arabia. He believed in the change that children can and will make in Saudi society. In addition he believed that the children he worked with and those who watch them will lead the country's culture in the future. Accordingly, most of the children who worked with Almoraikhy contribute to the culture of Saudi Arabia.

Naif: Ok.

Sami: The next play was *alqafelah tasser* [*The Trail is Moving*]; it was a poetic play which was staged in 1989 and produced in 1993 at the Gulf Festival for Youth Theatre in Bahrain. I received the award of the best script in this festival and the second best director.

Naif: The contribution to theatre festivals leads me to ask you about the influence of theatre festivals on your theatrical career, whether as a writer, director, or actor.

Sami: Theatre festivals were open institutes to us in Saudi Arabia; we learn from these festivals. For instance, we were shocked by the first contribution in 1987 because of the quality of plays that were presented in the festival. We had not met plays like these in Saudi Arabia. In the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre I had the opportunity to see different plays from all over the world. So, theatre festivals, especially the post show discussion, can be a main source of knowledge of theatre for me.

Naif: Would it be possible, please, to go back to your early experience with Aljeel club, as it seems an important period for my project?

Sami: Ok, go ahead.

Naif: When did you start with the club? What was your experience there?

Sami: I started with Aljeel in 1980. In this year, I participated as an actor in the play of *ahzan* [*Grief*] which was written by Mohammad Alhamad and directed by Ibraheem Alkhomais.

Naif: How old were you by that time.

Sami: I was born in 1968, so I was about twelve years old.

Naif: How were your early notices about the play, the stage, etc.?

Sami: The play was presented in a ceremony that was held at the end of the year. The play was usually presented at the end of a ceremony that included several parts such as songs and sketches. The stage was prepared for theatre ... there was lighting ... and so on. I can say that the plays presented by Aljeel and Hajr club were good plays when compared to other clubs. We committed as a group to theatre ... sometimes we spent three months rehearsing. The play of *ahzan* was presented at a local festival that was held in the city of Dammam in the Eastern Province in 1980. This festival was open for the clubs in the Eastern Province.

Naif: What did think of your experience in Aljeel club?

Sami: Aljeel club, honestly, introduced me to theatre. It motivated me later to be involved with theatre as a writer and director.

Naif: What were the main shifts in the experience of theatre in Aljeel club?

Sami: Well, I think the main shift was the appearance of the Youth Group for Theatre in Alahsa. The idea of the Youth Groups was created by Abualrhaman Alreraq who worked in the GPYW. I actually witnessed the early ideas since Alreraq discussed this with some of the theatrical practitioners in Alahsa. The first Youth Group was established in Alahsa city. This group took us, the people interested in theatre, from Aljeel club and we began a new direction of practicing theatre within this group.

Naif: Sorry, do you know why he started the discussion with the theatrical practitioners in Alahsa?

Sami: I have no idea really, but it might be because Alreraq was close to people from Alahsa and, as you know, he started his carrier in Alahsa as an actor.

Interview No.3 : with Saman Alani, conducted on 21\9\2010, in Riyadh

Naif: I would like to start the interview by asking how you joined the SASCA?

Saman: After coming from Iraq to Saudi Arabia in 1978, I was sent to work at the Ministry of Information. As I met the person who was in charge of employees, he told me that they did not have a job in Riyadh, but did have one as a television director in the city of Aldammam. I thanked him for that but explained that I did not know Saudi Arabia very well and was still new, so it would be difficult to work there. Importantly, I told him that I specialized in theatre not television. I went to another person who was in a high position in the ministry who told me that there was a job in Gulf television, but that I must wait six months before starting. I explained to him that I had been here in Saudi Arabia for eight months, and it would be difficult if I waited for another six months. He asked me to wait because he would have a meeting in his office, and he would discuss my situation after he meeting. While I was waiting in the secretary's office, I met Abdulrahman Alkhateeb, the Saudi actor, who told me about the SASCA and the availability of a position as a director there. As soon as the person who wanted to discuss my position finished his meeting, I told him about the SASCA. Immediately, he transferred my application to the SASCA where I started as a director and two days later I began to work on the play of *qetar alhath* [*The Luck Train*] which was written by Ibraheem Alhamdan.

Naif: So, the first play with the SASCA was *qetar alhath* [*The Luck Train*]; what was your experience of preparing for this play?

Saman: Well, I did not face big problems with selecting the actors because of the assistance of Ibraheem Alhamdan who was the head of the Theatre Department. He recommended most of the characters. Then, we rehearsed daily for two months.

Naif: Do you remember the stage where you did the rehearsals?

Saman: Yes, it was on the stage of the Ministry of Education, in Riyadh. The original text was around one hundred and twenty five pages, which meant that the play should be about five hours. I decided, therefore, to reduce the time of the play to three hours. The play discussed the negative impacts of the increased wealth in Saudi Arabia. The play was closer to the style of writing for television than for theatre. For instance, there were a great number of scenes.

Naif: How did you see the Saudi actors in terms of their knowledge and acting skills?

Saman: The experience of the Saudi actors I worked with by that time was based on participation in Saudi television. By this, I mean that this experience was attained by working in front of television cameras rather than on stage. For instance, Ali Ibraheem and Ali Alhowaireny were actors who came from television productions. I discovered that the actors needed more reading rehearsal around a table. Therefore, I intended to spent time on reading the play with the actors. In this reading, I tried to explain the nature of play, its plot, the nature of the characters, and the relation between the characters. In fact, it was a rehearsal as well as a lecture on theatre.

Naif: How did they respond to this?

Saman: Actually, they received my words and instruction with great love. Besides they were enthusiastic and committed to the time of rehearsal. In this, I would like to mention Ali Ibraheem who was the best example of an actor who works hard in receiving the instructions and following the comments of the director. The group who worked with me in *qetar alhudh* and later in *tahit alkharasy* [*Under the Chairs*] were different in their commitment and love of theatre to those who worked in the late nineties.

Naif: How many times did you perform the play of *qetar alhuth*?

Saman: It ran for about two weeks, which means fourteen nights. The play was stopped because one of the key actors had to travel abroad to continue his study. The auditorium was full of spectators every night. Moreover, it was received with great pleasure. Interestingly, I was informed by the head of the SASCA that two important figures from the Saudi government would attend the opening night: Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz, who was the Deputy Governor of Riyadh, and Prince Faisal bin Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz, the president of the GPYW. In addition, he told me that they would watch fifteen minutes of the play and then leave due to the schedule of Prince Sattam. As this was such a formal visit, Arabic coffee and tea would be presented to the guests. I was asked, by the head of the SASCA, to open the curtain and close it after fifteen minutes to allow the special guests to leave the auditorium. In fact, I tried to persuade the head of the SASCA that theatre is not like a formal visit, it should be considered as theatre. Therefore, I asserted that the play would not be interrupted during the show in any circumstances except for the time between the chapters. In this time the coffee and tea can be offered to the guests. I wanted to establish a new convention for theatre. I want people to know that theatre is theatre and make a distinction between the theatre and other formal visits and occasions. Interestingly, the two princes enjoyed watching the play and stayed to watch the whole play, which lasted for about three hours.

Naif: How about the equipment on the stage and its condition by that time?

Saman: Well, the stage was not equipped well in terms of lighting and audio devices. So, the SASCA supplied the stage with equipment and with people to run the lighting and audio devices. This play utilized some of the traditional Saudi songs through a

singer who played the role of storyteller. With regard to the design of the stage, there was a professional designer who designed the stage with the appropriate shape for the events of the play. It is fair to say that the SASCA spent a lot of money on the play and it profited a lot as well by selling the play to the public and to Saudi television.

Naif: Well, would you like to move to the next play?

Saman: The next play was *suqot alhesab*, and this play was produced according to the plan of the main office of the SASCA. By that time we were approaching Ramadan and there were no activities in this month, due to the respect of this month as you know. I suggested to the Department of Theatre that during Ramadan the department could produce a historical Islamic play that presented something about the history of Islam as this could not cause a problem to the spiritual nature of the holy month. The department had received a play that was written by an Egyptian writer and it was a good historical play about the war of *alkhandaq* which occurred during the time of Prophet Mohammad. I suggested that the text could be staged during the first half of Ramadan and could be a great opportunity to present a play that belonged to the spiritual days of Ramadan. The suggestion faced no encouragement from the administration of the office because the holy month is sacred to the society. I persuaded them that the production is about an Islamic story of the prophet and this would not contradict the nature of Ramadan. Ultimately, they agreed to produce this play for three nights.

Naif: How did the audience receive the play?

Saman: It was received with great pleasure and admiration. To be honest, among the spectators was a number of religious people who expressed their admiration.

Interestingly, some of the religious people came up to the stage congratulated the actors.

Interview No.4 : with Fahad Alharthy conducted on 12\7\2010, in Riyadh.

Naif: Well, Fahad, how would you like to be introduced? I mean, in terms of your relation to theatre, as an author? As the founder of Altaif Workshop? Or as a poet?

Fahad: I do not know really. My early experience with theatre came from the press. I started to have an interest in theatre through the work of Rashed Alshamarany and Abdualaziz Alsughaby. In 1987, I became responsible for a section on theatre in the Bilad Newspaper, a daily newspaper. It was the first such section in the Saudi Press. Through this section, I began to educate myself in theatre and read plays. Later, in 1989, I started write plays. This led me to think about Altaif Workshop which was established in 1993.

Naif: What was your relation with the SASACA before 1987?

Fahad: The relation began through my work as a journalist. I was responsible for covering the news of the cultural activities in Altaif city including, of course, the cultural activities in the branch of the SASACA in Altaif. In addition, I covered most of the cultural activities in the main two clubs in Altaif: Wedg and Okath. From this I think my relation started with theatre.

Naif: Did you witness the establishment of the branch of the SASACA in Altiaf?

Fahad: No, I came after the establishment of the branch?

Naif: Would you please be specific? When?

Fahad: About one and half years after the establishment of the branch. The branch was established around 1980, and I began my work within the branch about 1982; I was responsible for the Department of Information and Public Relations in the branch.

Othman Alseni was the Head of Theatre in the branch from its establishment until 1982. But he did not succeed in producing theatre during his time. In 1980, Othman Alseni tried to produce some sketches similar to what existed in the Okath and Oedje clubs, but the sketches did not develop to reach the level of constituting a complete play. I think he merely produced some sketches in the branch.

Naif: Do you remember anything about the theatrical activities in Altaif before joining the branch?

Fahad: There was no sign of theatre in the branch during the first two years. As I mentioned, I covered the news and the activities of the branch before becoming a member and becoming responsible for the Department of Information. There were two clubs in the city: Wedg and Okath. These clubs presented plays and there was a competition between them over which would contribute to the competition held by the GPYW which consisted of the main clubs in Saudi Arabia.

Naif: You mean before the first play, *meen ykamil althany* [*Who Completes the Other*]?

Fahad: Yes, before this play.

Naif: Well, when you joined the branch in 1982, what was your impression of it?

Fahad: The building was rented and it had a space in the front which was transformed into something similar to a stage that had poor lighting. The interest of the branch was merely in producing music and folk ceremonies. Indeed, before joining the branch officially in 1982, there was no interest in producing a complete play in the branch, but only a few sketches on some occasions such as the traffic and trees week which was a common activity for the whole country.

Naif: Do you remember the first play in the branch?

Fahad: In 1982, Abdualziz Alrasheed became the head of the Theatre Department. He started searching for a script for the first play. I remember that he brought a text that was written by Ghazi Awadh but it was rejected by the main office in Riyadh.

Naif: Do you remember anything about the reasons for this rejection?

Fahad: I have no idea really. But he continued to search for another script until he got a play that was written by Mohammad Rajab entitled *min ykamil althany* [*Who Completes the Other*] which was produced in 1982 as the first complete play.

Naif: Who was the director?

Fahad: The director was an Egyptian man I think his name is Mohammad Alshamy. But the success of this play led the branch to think of continuing producing plays. There were three figures who helped produce theatre in the branch. Abdualziz Alsughaby, as an author, Rashed Alshamarany, who worked as an actor in Riyadh and was on a visit to Altaif for military training, and Alrasheed, who was enthusiastic about theatre and the head of this department. The three figures were behind the production of the next play which was *Safah fi almrah* [*Slip on Mirror*] in 1983. During the work of Alrasheed, Alsaghaby, and Rashid Alshamrani, I was close to the process of preparing the play, so I benefitted from their discussion about the script and the performance in the rehearsals. They studied the play in depth.

Naif: What do mean by in depth?

Fahad: I mean they studied the details of the script. For instance, they studied its dialogue, the movement and the relationship between the actors and the characters. Furthermore, they spent much time in rehearsal. Actually, with this experience, I

started to build my understanding of theatre. In addition, it was broadened by the next two productions which were different in style and content.

Naif: What was the role of Alsaghaby in the branch?

Fahad: He was a member and the head of the Story Department.

Naif: During the two plays, did the branch stop producing sketches?

Fahad: No, I think that the branch continued to produce sketches that were presented in ceremonies.

Appendix No. 4

List of the Interviewees

- 1- **Abdualaziz Alhaza:** A Saudi actor and monologist. He participated in presenting radio drama where he performed different characters using his voice. He performed in two plays produced by the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh. He worked in the General Presidency for Youth Welfare. **(He was interviewed by the author on 25\8\2011 in Riyadh)**
- 2- **Abdualaziz Alsughabi:** A Saudi playwright and novelist. He participated in supervising and producing some of the productions of the branch of the SASCA in Altaif from 1982 to 1987. Some of his plays were produced by the branch of the SASCA in Altaif, while others were produced by the Youth Group for Theatre in Riyadh. **(He was interviewed by the author on 13\4\2012 in Riyadh)**
- 3- **Abduallah Almejhim:** A Saudi actor and director. He participated in most of the productions of the Arts' Club and the productions of the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa. He also participated in and supervised most of the productions of the Hajr Club in Alahsa. **(He was interviewed by the author personally on 16\6\2012 in Alahsa and in a group interview on 8/8/2010 in Alahsa)**
- 4- **Abdualrahman Alateeq:** A Saudi activist in theatre. He worked as a cultural supervisor in Alhilal Club. He participated in supervising the theatrical activities in the club for more than fifteen years. **(He was interviewed by the author on 20\1\2012 in Riyadh)**
- 5- **Abdualrahman Alhamad:** A Saudi playwright and director. He participated in the theatrical activities in schools in Dammam and Alahsa cities in the

sixties. It was his idea to establish the Arts Club in Alahsa in the early 1970s and he participated in the productions of this club. He continued working as an author and director in the productions of the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa from the mid of 1970s. **(He was interviewed by the author personally on 6/8/2011 in Alahsa and in a group interview on 8/8/2010 in Alahsa)**

6- Abdualrahman Alreraq: A Saudi actor and director. He attained his Bachelor's Degree in Acting and Directing from the Higher Institute of Theatre in Egypt in 1983. He worked for many years as a theatre supervisor in the General Administration for Cultural Activities. **(He was interviewed by the author on 15/9/2010 in Riyadh)**

7- Ahamad Alahmary: A Saudi director and actor. He participated in the establishment of Altaif Workshop in 1993, where he became the main director of its productions. He attained several awards in the local and international festivals as a director and actor. His primary employment is with the Saudi Agriculture Bank. **(He was interviewed by the author on 25/9/2010 in Altaif)**

8- Ahamad Alhuthail: A Saudi actor. He attained his bachelor's degree from Florida University in the USA in 1980. He participated in some of the productions of the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh. He worked for many years in different departments of Saudi television before his retirement. **(He was interviewed by the author on 7/6/2012 in Riyadh)**

9- Ahamad Alnwah: A Saudi actor. He participated in some of the productions of the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa and the Hajar Club in Alahsa. He worked in the educational system in Saudi Arabia. **(He was interviewed by the author personally on 6/8/2011 in Alahsa and in a group interview on 8/8/2010 in Alahsa)**

- 10- Ahamad Tajadeen:** A Syrian actor and director. He arrived in Riyadh in 1966, when he began to participate in acting, writing, and directing most of the early drama productions in Saudi television in the sixties and seventies. **(He was interviewed by the author on 27\9\2012 in Riyadh)**
- 11- Ali Alhowareny:** A Saudi actor and director. He participated in most of the productions of the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh. He worked in the Ministry of Culture and Information. **(He was interviewed by the author on 26\8\2010 in Riyadh)**
- 12- Ali Ibraheem:** A Saudi actor and producer. He participated in most of the productions of the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh since its establishment in 1974. He worked for twenty-eight years as a teacher of Art Education before his retirement. **(He was interviewed by the author on 7\9\2011 in Riyadh)**
- 13- Fahad Alharthi :** A Saudi playwright. He began as a journalist in the branch of the SASCA in Altaif. He was among the main founders of Altaif's Workshop in 1993 and was the main playwright of the Workshop's productions. He works as a teacher of Arabic language in Saudi Education. **(He was interviewed by the author on 12\07\2010 in Riyadh and on 25\9\2010 in Altaif)**
- 14- Fahad Alhoshany:** a Saudi playwright and director. He supervised the cultural activities and the productions of theatre in Alnassir Club. He established the Youth Group for Theatre in 1995 in Riyadh. He works in the Administrative Department of Education. **(He was interviewed by the Author on 10\5\2012 in Riyadh)**

- 15- Hamad Alhuthail:** A Saudi actor. He participated in some of the precautions of the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh early in the seventies. He participated, also, in the drama productions of Saudi television in the sixties and the seventies. He discontinued his career in theatre and drama in the late seventies. **(He was interviewed by the author on 27\3\2012 in Riyadh)**
- 16- Hassan Alabdi:** A Saudi actor and playwright. He worked with the Arts' Club early in the seventies as an actor and playwright. He discontinued his career in theatre in the late seventies in order to be more engaged with his business. **(He was interviewed by the author personally on 6\8\2011 and in a group interview on 8/8/2010 in Alahsa)**
- 17- Musad Alzahrani:** A Saudi actor; he participated in the establishment of Altaif Workshop in 1993. He is considered one of the main actors in most of the Workshop's productions. He attained several awards in the Saudi local festivals as an actor. He works as a teacher of sport in the Saudi education system. **(He was interviewed by the author on 25\9\2010 in Altaif)**
- 18- Mushal Alrasheed:** A Saudi playwright and director. He was the head of the Children's Theatre Department for more than four years in the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh. His main plays were produced by the Department of Children's Theatre. He works as a student supervisor in Saudi Education. **(He was interviewed by the author on 15\9\2011 in Riyadh)**
- 19- Omar Alobaidy:** A Saudi actor. He participated in most of the productions of the Arts' Club in Alahsa and the early productions of the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa. He worked as the head of the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa for more than twenty years from its establishment. **(He was interviewed by the**

author personally on 6/8/2011 in Alahsa and in a group interview on 8/8/2010 in Alahsa)

20- Othman Alseni: A Saudi enthusiast in theatre. He supervised some of the theatrical activities in the youth club in Altaif. He worked as theatre supervisor in the Ministry of Education. He was the head of Theatre Department in the branch of the SASCA in Altaif from 1980 to 1982. **(He was interviewed by the author on 10\1\2011 in Riyadh)**

21- Salih Alzayer: A Saudi actor. He participated mainly in the theatre productions of King Saudi University. He works as an Associate Professor in Art Education in King Saudi University in Riyadh. **(He was interviewed by the author on 28\10\2012 in Riyadh)**

22- Saman Alani: An Iraqi director. He worked for many years as a director in the main office of the SASCA in Riyadh from 1977, where he directed most of its productions. He works, now, as a theatre supervisor in the Ministry of Culture and Information in Saudi Arabia. **(He was interviewed by the author on 21\9\2010 in Riyadh)**

23- Sami Aljaman: A Saudi actor, playwright, and director. He participated in most of the productions of Aljeel Club, the Youth Group for Theatre, and the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa. He works as an Assistant Professor in the King Faisal University in Alahsa. **(He was interviewed by the author on 5\8\2011 in Alahsa)**

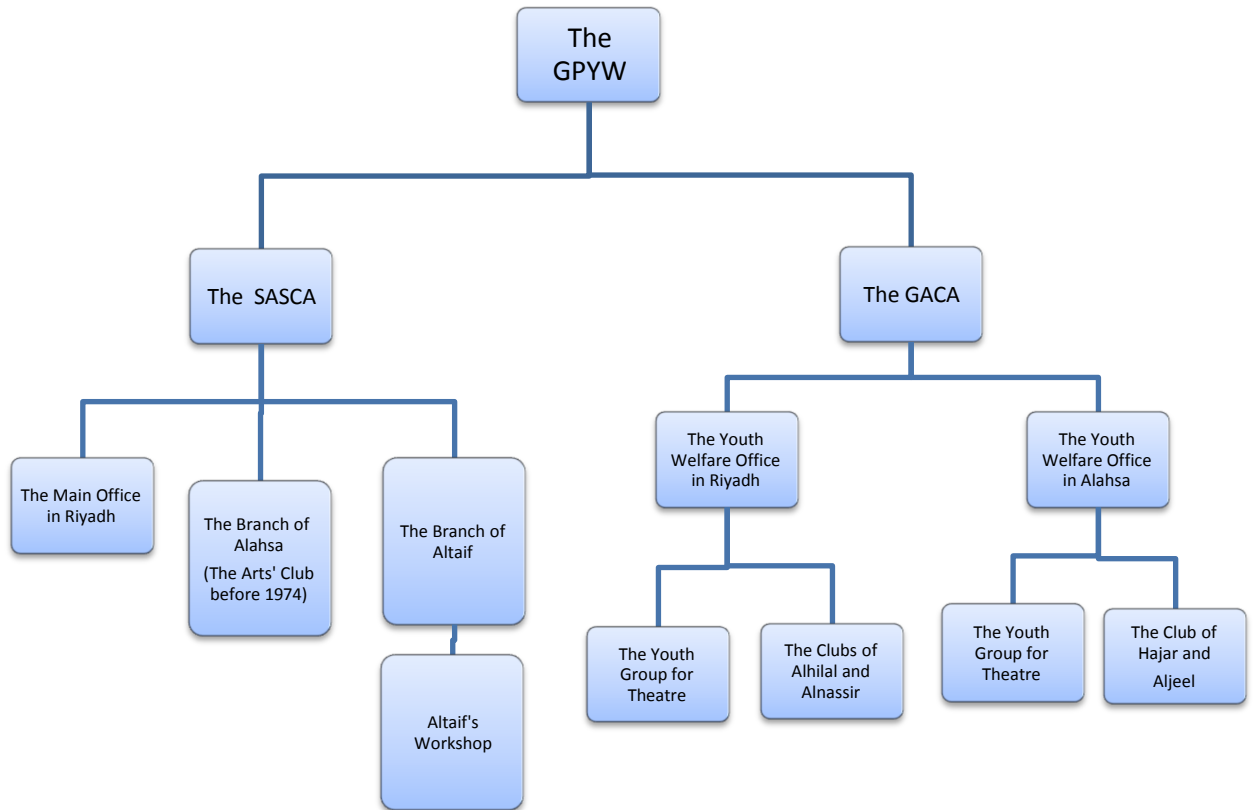
24- Sami Alzahrani: A Saudi actor; he participated in the establishment of Altaif workshop in 1993. He is considered one of the main actors in most of the Workshop's productions. He attained several awards in the Saudi local

festivals as an actor. **(He was interviewed by the author on 25\9\2010 in Altaif)**

25- Yousef Alkhomais: A Saudi playwright and director. He is a supervisor of theatrical activities in the General Administration for Cultural Activities in the GPYW. He is the head of Youth and Children's Groups in the branch of the SASCA in Alahsa. **(He was interviewed by the author on 6\8\2011 in Alahsa)**

Appendix No.5

The Structure of the GPYW



- The Source: this diagram is constructed by the thesis and based on the information attained from:
 - Anon., (2012) *Youth and Sports: Structures Facts and Features*, Riyadh: The GPYW.
 - Alswaad, M., (1995) *Ilwatan: reaiah wa shabab [Saudi Arabia: Welfare and Youth]*, Riyadh: The GPYW.

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