Rolf C. Hemke's *Theatre in the Arab World* : Struggling Against Insurmountable Odds

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A Book Review by Michael Malek Najjar
Theatre in the Arab World/Theater im arabischen Sprachraum
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In the preface to his edited volume *Theatre in the Arab World*, Rolf C. Hemke writes, "This book was written with the context of…upheavals in mind, and with the awareness that theatre is often the most political and the most spontaneous of all forms of art. Hence, theatre can function as a seismograph of societal conditions." Hemke's volume, written in both German and English, explores how the political,

social, and conflictual situations facing contemporary Arab nations both positively and negatively affect theatrical output. Hemke is clear that this book is neither an encyclopedia nor a representative compendium of theatre in the Arab world; instead, he states, “this book is the result of a very subjective research and curating activity that I have had the privilege of carrying out for several years now for my employer, the *Theater an der Ruhr*…”

The volume contains brief essays by various theatre critics including six by Hemke himself. The nations encompassed in this study include Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia. Essays like Moumen’s “Dreaming of Chaos—The Theatre of Fadhel Jaibi” and Sharghi, Al Hadi, and Hemke’s “The Theatre of Everyday Events: Muhaned Al Hadi’s Theatre” provide biographies and overviews of the works of individual Arab theatre artists. Other essays, such as Hemke’s “Ramallah, Amman, Haifa—The Palestinian Theatre Scene in the West Bank and Diaspora” and Mrabet’s “Tunisian Theatre: From Opposition to Revolution” attempt to provide an overview of decades of theatre history in several brief pages. Still other essays such as Peter Sellars’ “Diversity and Democracy—A Tribute to Zoukak” are directed toward extolling the virtues of specific theatre companies.

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