

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

This issue is focused on the politics of belonging/exclusion at the level of rhetoric and everyday practice. We open with two articles—Jonathan Shannon’s “There and Back Again: Rhetorics of al-Andalus in Modern Syrian” and Ellen McLarney’s “Freedom, Justice, and the Power of *Adab*”—both exploring linkages between culture and political ideas. In his article, Shannon analyzes the interweaving of a mythologized al-Andalus (the Arab-Muslim Iberian Peninsula) into Syrian popular culture, particularly music, in order to show how it was critical to the formation of Syrian memory cultures and, by extension, nation building. Yet within past- and future-oriented nationalist discourse, this rhetoric of nostalgia—whose genesis dates to the Pan-Arab halcyon days of the 1960s—posits “not only a lost paradise of past glory, but also a (utopian) vision of a future state of glory in the Arab world itself, a sort of *neo-Andalusia*.” Financed by petrodollars and fostered by Arab migration to and investment in Spain, literary, cinematic, and musical productions evoking al-Andalus and linking it intimately to Syria continued in the subsequent era of what one of Shannon’s interlocutors describes as “political, economic, and cultural decline,” in part as a source of solace. With today’s Syria tragically fractured, Shannon concludes by suggesting that “the rhetoric of al-Andalus, so closely tied not only to Arabism but also to a broad understanding of community, may yet again offer a way to reimagine the Syria of tomorrow as a ‘first rate place.’”

Whereas sonic evocations of al-Andalus in contemporary Syrian *muwashshaḥāt* (a poetic-musical genre often traced to al-Andalus) were integral to constructing a Syrian past and pining for a utopian Syrian future, Ellen McLarney contends that *nahḍa* intellectual Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi’s mobilization of the Arabic and Islamic discursive tradition of *adab* created for Egypt a new political imaginary of freedom and justice. Previous scholarship emphasized al-Tahtawi’s three-year sojourn in Paris—where he learned French and was exposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment—as the source for his subsequent modernizing projects, central to which was the introduction of a new political lexicon and ideas centered on the rights of the individual and the nation. However, McLarney argues that these were neither imported ideas nor wholly new. Rather, al-Tahtawi drew on and innovated upon existing notions of governance to relocate sovereignty in the people and to propose a new polis where “the ethical self becomes the very embodiment of freedom, in its capacity for self-government, cultivated through the discipline of education (*tarbiya*).”

Similar to McLarney, Julian Weideman challenges the artifice of a rupture between secular and Islamic political thought. His article, “Tahar Haddad after Bourguiba and Bin ‘Ali: A Reformist between Secularists and Islamists,” rereads the work and life of the Tunisian reformer Tahar Haddad. Largely ignored in the English-speaking world, Haddad is widely known—and celebrated—within his country of birth for being a “pioneer” in the early 20th-century struggle for women’s rights. Indeed, Weideman

notes that it was the mobilization of his memory first by Bourguiba and then by Bin 'Ali (both, to varying degrees, self-styled champions of secularism) that obscured the meaning of Haddad's work underneath the patina of state narratives of modernity. Peeling away these layers, Weideman presents a Tahar Haddad who never sought to break from his formative Islamic education or Islamic tradition, but rather presented reformist ideas very much anchored in both. Moreover, Weideman argues that Bourguiba's policies on women's rights—and civil rights in general—had little if anything to do with Haddad. As he puts it, "Haddad's most enduring impact has therefore been not as a 'precursor' for policy—much of which has actually contradicted his ideals—but as a malleable symbol to celebrate, commemorate, or vandalize for the sake of myriad identities in the postindependence period."

The second section of this issue moves from the realm of ideas to the realm of the everyday. Anja Kublitz's article, "From Revolutionaries to Muslims: Liminal Becomings across Palestinian Generations in Denmark," examines generational shifts among Palestinian families in Denmark. Kublitz addresses the question of "why the children of the *fidā'īn* (fighters) and many of the *fidā'īn* themselves have turned their backs on secular politics and embraced Islam." In line with the two previous articles contesting this dichotomy, Kublitz argues there is greater continuity than divergence across these generations, particularly in the way they adopt identities. She contends that becoming revolutionary in Lebanon and affirming a Muslim identity in Denmark were driven not only by differing historical contexts (i.e., the spread of leftist politics in the 1970s and Islamist effervescence in the 1990s), but also by structural continuities: "an extraordinarily prolonged liminal position in a nationally ordered world." In Lebanon and in Denmark, Palestinians were marginalized, and in response they adopted current political ideas to change their predicament.

From generational mobilization, Sarah Ababneh shifts our attention to the mobilization of women day-waged workers in Jordan. She asks why, in the absence of any women's rights groups in Jordan's Popular Movement (Hirak) in 2010, so many women were attracted to one of its central activist organs, the Day-Waged Labor Movement (DWLM). Upending a tendency to devalue struggles for economic justice, she argues that one reason was the movement's prioritization of economic rights over political rights, which spoke to women's practical needs for a living wage, healthcare, and job security. Another reason was the DWLM's discourse and decentralized and flexible structure, which, in its sensitivity to the social and economic constraints faced by women, enabled them to be active participants. Challenging the distinction between the political and the personal, Ababneh argues that "it is on the personal level that the political is lived most acutely. The work of the DWLM is therefore a practical example of what grounded, political work, which starts not with abstract ideology but with the lived reality of its members, looks like, and how such work is able to include women and men in egalitarian, nonpatriarchal structures."

This issue's roundtable is a call for "Bringing Sound into Middle East Studies." The eight authors argue collectively that until recently the field has been either mute or deaf to the cacophony of sounds that defined and continue to define people's daily lives in the region. From Qur'anic recitations to the calls of Cairo hawkers, from Jazz performances in Istanbul to the water wheel in front of Umm Kulthum's Zamalek villa, from music in an Iranian home to an Iranian *muṭrib* performance, from Sufi liturgies in France to radio

programming in Mandate Palestine, sensory experiences and the memories of them, these authors suggest, have critically shaped the region. The roundtable asks us to open our ears to new questions, methods, and perspectives on the field. We thank Andrea L. Stanton and G. Carole Woodall for leading it.

In her review article, “Reflections on the Limits of Law,” Saba Mahmood reviews three recent works whose common thread is their understanding of law “not as the arbiter of justice, freedom, and equality but as a form of bondage to statist power.” In delineating the operation of law, its violence and coercive tactics, they also provide a trenchant critique of the nation-state and its assault on the very political openness and civil freedoms that it claims to protect. Out of this critique, Mahmood suggests, emerges the possibility for different conceptions of ethics, politics, and freedom: “In reading these authors, one gets a sense that they are painfully aware of the novelty and urgency of our current political situation, the sense that the political strategies on which we had classically depended are no longer useful, and that a new way of thinking about our present and past needs to be forged in order to reimagine the future.”

Akram Khater and Jeffrey Culang