

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

It is with humility that we begin our tenure as editor and managing editor of *IJMES*. Given the breadth and depth of scholarly and editorial expertise within MESA, we feel privileged to have been chosen as the team to oversee the continuing publication of the flagship journal in Middle East studies. We are also mindful of the challenge of building upon the enormous momentum achieved by our predecessors, Professors Beth Baron and Sara Pursley, over the past five years. They and their team raised the profile of *IJMES* to make it one of the top area studies journals in the United States and, indeed, the world. This accomplishment is attributable to their remarkable work ethic and coordination, keen awareness of the field, vigorous editorial work, and attention to every detail of the journal's production. Daunting though their legacy may be, we are excited about the editorial team that we have assembled and comforted by the speed with which it has developed rapport and a common purpose. We also find solace in the outstanding scholars who make up the new editorial board and in the knowledge that they are as devoted as us to making sure that *IJMES* continues to thrive. But we are most heartened by the superb scholarship that abounds in Middle East studies. With so many outstanding young and established scholars in the field, we are certain that the pages of *IJMES* will continue to be filled by intellectually engaging essays that not only enrich existing areas of research, but also push the field toward new terrains of scholarly inquiry.

In order to reflect the full range of this talent, we aim to attract scholarship in an array of fields. The interdisciplinary makeup of our editorial board is a call to increase the number of submissions in disciplines such as anthropology, art history, and sociology, even as we continue to publish outstanding articles in history, political science, and other fields. On another level, we seek article manuscript submissions that showcase not only new research and excellent expository, but also theoretical frameworks that challenge readers to think in new ways. We hope our roundtables will do the same.

This issue opens with articles by Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Toby Matthiesen exploring the role of Shi'i intellectuals—both secular and religious—in shaping the Shi'i juristic tradition and Shi'i subjectivity, respectively. Abisaab analyzes Muhammad Amin Astarabadi's (d. 1626–27) refutation of *ijtihādī* rationalism and repudiation of jurists from Jabal 'Amil and southern Iraq who applied this approach in deriving Shi'i law. Astarabadi's traditionist movement was not, she argues, “a reaction to the ‘influence’ of Sunnism on the mujtahids or to their excessive ‘borrowings’ from it,” but rather a discursive development within the Shi'i juristic tradition—itsself part of the grand Islamic tradition. As with most theological arguments, this confrontation was as much about asserting a political position as it was about the salvation of believers. In particular, Abisaab notes, Astarabadi was protesting the Safavid “monarchs’ legitimation of *uṣūlī* legal authority, the latter’s hierarchical features, and, ultimately, the sociopolitical domination of the ‘Amili mujtahids from Jabal ‘Amil.”

Toby Matthiesen's article takes us to a different temporal and geographical context—modern Saudi Arabia—where Shi'i intellectuals likewise engaged in politicized debates, though under a very different set of circumstances. Matthiesen's focus is on local Shi'i "identity entrepreneurs," or amateur activist historians who "capitalize" on identity through their production of historical narratives. Influenced by nationalist discourse, these historians have written accounts of local Shi'a and the Eastern Province aimed to counter state-sponsored histories that elide the Shi'i community. Yet in spite of this shared purpose, Saudi Shi'i historians are far from homogenous. A small minority of them has attempted to inscribe the Shi'a into the Saudi historical imagination, many have composed particularist accounts of the Shi'a, while some have gone so far as to produce nativist myths inspired by the vocabulary of Arab nationalism. Whether focusing on clerical or political leaders, struggles against foreign occupation, or episodes of violence, Shi'i identity entrepreneurs shape a common identity for the community in the context of Saudi state repression.

The articles by Amal Ghazal and Hicham Bou Nassif shift our attention from Shi'i intellectuals to North African politics from the period of anticolonial resistance to the recent past. Focusing on early 20th-century Mzabi intellectuals (Berbers from the Mzab Valley in Algeria), Ghazal traces a process of subject formation that is almost the reverse of that discussed by Matthiesen. Confronted with a complex political landscape shaped by French colonialism and a myriad of anticolonial movements—whether pan-Islamist or nationalist—Mzabis forged identifications and solidarities beyond the local and particular. Focusing on the Mzabi student missions to Tunisia that offered modern education to a generation of students, Ghazal highlights the critical role of Tunisia to the politicization and radicalization of Mzabis in the 1920s. Moreover, undermining the telos of the nation-state, she focuses on Mzabis' complex negotiation between the local and the national and regional in order to capture "the spectrum of political possibilities and alternatives envisioned by Mzabis as they participated in religious reform, anticolonial, and nationalist movements."

In his essay on the Tunisian Armed Forces, Hicham Bou Nassif takes a different perspective on the same theme: the mediation between the particular and the national. He argues that military institutions in the Middle East and North Africa are far too often seen as monolithic structures that can be understood exclusively through the actions of their generals. In order to understand why Tunisia's armed forces withheld support from the collapsing regime of Zayn al-ʿAbidin bin ʿAli, Bou Nassif disaggregates the military institution into its constituent components, arguing that there was a clear and perceptible division between the politically appointed generals and the career midrange officers. These officers felt increasingly frustrated that the army was losing out to the ruling Democratic Constitutional Party and particularly the police in the competition for state resources. Ultimately, even if the chief of staff "had the will to keep Bin ʿAli in power, he lacked the capacity to do so because the officer corps was extremely alienated from the regime and happy to see it fall." The story that Bou Nassif tells is therefore one of interinstitutional rivalry and competition for resources and power. It was this dysfunctionality rather than a republican ethos that kept the army from defending the status quo.

The final two articles deal with the role of merchants and craftspeople in shaping civil society as well as national ethos and identity. Afshin Marashi examines the social

history of bookselling in early 20th-century Tehran in order to explore the relationship between the book trade and the emergence of Iranian mass culture. He focuses in part on technological changes that wrought a gradual but inexorable shift from manuscript to print and ultimately to the commercialization of texts. Yet Marashi also explores how this technology and the Iranian print entrepreneurs who used it created an Iranian mass culture characterized by “not a single national reading public acculturated to middle-class norms, but rather multiple reading publics, each increasingly defined not only by its reading tastes, but also by its distinct social, cultural, and political outlooks.” He posits that the expansion of the book trade between 1900 and 1950 created space for new forms of mass politics, the outcomes of which would only be seen in the years ahead.

Whereas the bookstore and mass print consumption were the hallmark of positivist visions of Iran’s present and future, the perceived crisis of the crafts in Fez centers on a narrative about the demise of “tradition.” Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli looks at the crisis narrative that has pervaded reflections on Fessi crafts since the onset of colonialism and modernity in Morocco. While European administrators, researchers, and travelers first introduced this narrative, Moroccans gradually adopted it as well. The “storylines” of both Europeans and Moroccans were “marked by intertextual reverberations of precolonial Islamic philosophy, colonial Orientalist discourses, modern governance, and liberal and neoliberal economic policies.” On a broad level, Ouaknine-Yekutieli’s article explores the effects of colonial modernity in Morocco, including socioeconomic changes (with global market forces buffeting a “fragile” *artisanat*), the loss of community, and the transformation of public space into impersonal commercialized arenas. She argues that over the past century and a half the narrative of artisanal decline has served rulers as a mechanism of control and the ruled as a means of resistance.

This issue’s roundtable, organized by Vickie Langohr, examines grassroots politics in the wake of the “Arab Spring,” including the organization of a largely informal anti-sexual harassment movement in Cairo; the formation of an “aesthetics of citizenship” through music in Morocco; online activism highlighting poor conditions and corruption in Egypt; new public spheres that have formed through solidarities and in the face of divisive elite politics in Yemen; and community-oriented action seeking to address urgent local needs in Egypt. Together, the essays suggest that we can only gauge the causes, pathways, and futures of the “Arab Spring” by examining the microcosmic level of politics and its interplay with macroforces.

Two review articles round out the issue. In keeping with the theme of the 2011 uprisings, Anne Sa’adah discusses a group of recently published books—four in the social sciences, one a memoir—which, in various ways, address “not ‘what went wrong’ at some past and putatively decisive moment, but rather ‘what *goes* wrong’” in states across the Middle East. Through these works, Sa’adah not only reflects on why reform efforts have consistently failed in recent years, but also inquires as to the modes of scholarly analysis best equipped to improve our understanding of social and political processes in the region. The second essay by Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicuttt examines three books on oil and state politics in the Persian Gulf. These works touch on themes such as the role of monetary policy in imperial politics, the “subaltern power” of imperial client states after World War II, and the US politics of oil. Together, they “chart the rise and

fall of Great Powers in the Middle East over the course of the late 20th century,” from British dominance, to the assertion of American power, to—arguably—the decline of US regional influence.

Akram Khater and Jeffrey Culang