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EDITORIAL FOREWORD



Migrant journeys across, from, and toward the Middle East reveal novel scales of analysis in area and ethnic studies. With a focus on one such mapping, this issue of *Mashriq & Mahjar* brings readers to interrogate the vicissitudes of what historian Edmundo O’Gorman called the “invention of América.” Based in Brazil, Mexico, and the US, the articles in this issue locate the Middle East in American geographies, and this hemispheric America in relation to a shifting Middle East. Read together, they bridge transnational turns from the heretofore separate fields of, on the one hand, Middle East and Arab American studies, and on the other, Latin American and Latino studies. Drawing upon anthropology, comparative literature, and history, the kind of “Arab American studies” that emerges in these works is decidedly hemispheric.

With a new approach to the magnum opus of one of Brazil’s most critically acclaimed writers, Silvia C. Ferreira focuses on the message of failed assimilation against the trope of agrarian space in Raduan Nassar’s *Lavoura arcaica*. Roughly translated as “Ancient Tillage” (and made into a film by Luiz Fernando Carvalho in 2001), the novel centers on the narrator, André, and his troubled ties with his family, of Levantine origins, in rural São Paulo. In contrast to dominant literary representations of Brazilians with Middle Eastern heritage as mobile peddlers, Ferreira finds that Nassar builds on lesser-remarked-upon themes of land and rooted dystopia in the hyphenated canon that she designates as “Levantine-Brazilian,” providing a novel point of reference for the understanding of migrant experiences and rooting processes.

Turning to an elite interface between Middle Eastern and Latin American semiperipheries, Camila Pastor de Maria Campos traces the overlap and merging of Arab and Mexican nationalist visions, against the backdrop of their homologous unequal relationship to a Euro-American center. The author looks at the Arab *nahda* as an anti-colonial

discourse whose subordinating dimension became evident among the migrant intelligentsia in Mexico. Writing in Interwar and post-World War II times, these mostly self-identified Lebanese represented themselves as partnering with the postcolonial Mexican *criollo* ideologues, including the author of *La Raza C3smica* himself, Jose Vasconcelos, in a broader civilizing mission, which would advance westernizing and modernizing attempts of indigenous peoples and backwards *criollos*.

Calling attention not to hierarchies but rather to solidarities cultivated on a transnational scale, Pamela Pennock writes US Arab Americans back into the Third World struggles of which they were historically part but were downplayed in scholarship on the global 1960s and 1970s. She focuses on one social movement, the Organization of Arab Students, in its consciousness-raising about the Question of Palestine on U.S. university campuses and she provides a case-study of its branch at Wayne State University. There, students of Arab origin (migrants and descendants) endeavored to build alliances with a broad range of liberationist movements, from the Algerian Front for National Liberation to the black radicalism of Stokely Carmichael's SNCC in the US. The Arab America that took shape at that moment was part of a rising Third World.

In addition to these three articles that position a Mashriq and a Mahjar in broader geographies of belonging, two articles take a fresh approach to U.S. Arab Americans' engagement with the politics of Orientalism. Linda Jacobs looks at how Mashriqis "played east" in theatrical performances during the nineteenth century. These performances ranged from vaudeville and circus acts to "sober" lectures about the "East." From "Arab" strong men in Buffalo Bills who killed "200 Turks," to belly dancers in the World Fair in Chicago, to Syrians who travelled the country lecturing about the "Orient" to audiences that were seemingly hungry for the "exotic" Middle East. These self-conscious acts played to pre-existing American Orientalist in attempts to profit financially, yet it was one that only fed the orientalist imagination trapping the Middle East in scenes of desert, flowing robes, and swashbuckling stories.

Decades later Arab American Christian restaurateurs made use of these latent images to sell food. Focusing on the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Matthew Jaber Stiffler serves up an original study of Arab American restaurants and food festivals in the context of a liberal marketplace where Orientalist imagery often stands in for Arab authenticity. He pays particular attention to the ways that Arab

American Christian restaurateurs and food festival organizers strategically deployed Orientalism to advance their own project in the US. Rather than portray them as the bearers of false consciousness, however, Stiffler maintains that Arab American Christians evoked Orientalist imagery in order to fundraise and support broader political struggles in the homeland. There is a decidedly double-consciousness to this Arab America.

Importantly, this issue of *Mashriq & Mahjar* features the work of Palestinian American artist, Manal Deeb. Born in Ramallah, Deeb came to the U.S. as a student of art, but even in her departure from Palestine, she continued to carry the marks of having lived under occupation for almost two decades. These questions of displacement, identity, and memory pervade her paintings and capture the productive, if dystopic, relationship between exile and Palestinian consciousness, the title of her virtual exhibit. Especially given the specific spatial framework that emerges in the five research articles, Deeb's contribution reveals that Middle Eastern movement is not limited to the far-flung networks that sojourners cultivate, but also involves what Edward Said called the "unhealeable rift" between "the self and its true home."

Whether through agricultural tropes, nationalist imaginaries, university campuses, theatrical stages, restaurant tables, or an artist's canvas, these works on Arabs across and beyond the Americas are a sign of the effervescence of Arab diasporic studies or Middle East migration studies. The vitality of this field, however, also depends on readership and, for this reason, we wish to reach out and ask that you forward a link to this new issue and enter into contact with the editors with any ideas that you might have for future issues.