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EDITORIAL FOREWORD



The articles in this issue of *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* reflect the work of two groups of interdisciplinary scholars in the field of Middle East Migration Studies as well as Arab American studies. Collectively, their research addresses the ways in which watershed moments of the twenty-first century—such as 11 September 2001 and the events of the “Arab Spring” that unfolded between 2010 and 2012—have impacted their field(s). In two sections, we showcase current research by members of the Arab American Studies Association, and the European Research Council’s When Authoritarianism Fails in the Arab World (WAFAW) initiative.

Mashriq & Mahjar acknowledges the tireless effort that Dr. Pauline Homsy Vinson, Dr. Louise Cainkar and Dr. Evelyn Alsultany put into shaping a main section of this issue. As co-editors of the work produced in this volume, they curated, edited, and submitted to the journal a number of strong papers from the 2014 Arab American Studies Association (AASA) conference, a selection of which appears in this issue.

SECTION 1: NEW DIRECTIONS IN ARAB AMERICAN STUDIES

Our first section, titled “New Directions in Arab American Studies,” is a selection of papers from the inaugural Arab American Studies Association (AASA) conference at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan (4–6 April 2014). At this conference, AASA members showcased research that builds upon a growing mass of scholarship in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and history focused on migratory links between the Middle East/North Africa region and the United States. Their work is part of a post-9/11/2001 generation of scholarship in the field of Arab American Studies that saw not only rapid growth within the established gravitational centers of the field—the social sciences—but also the opening of new arenas. This increased attention and breadth of methodologies has laid in place

the groundwork for new theoretical approaches to old questions – of migration, citizenship, and multiple homelands – which emanate from innovative literary, film, and cultural studies frameworks.

The articles in this issue exemplify this trend, and are united by a common focal shift toward new perspectives informed by literature and media studies. Together, they address two key facets of the representation of Arab peoples in both the Middle East and its diasporas: 1) contested and evolving academic discourses of Orientalism, and 2) boilerplate representations of the Middle East/North Africa region and its peoples beyond the academe.

Because these developments in the field of Arab American Studies are intimately linked to new directions in the field of Middle East Migration Studies (as exemplified in previous issues of this journal by authors such as Pauline Homsy Vinson, Laura Robson, Linda Jacobs, Silvia C. Ferreira, or Matthew Jaber Stiffler), we believe that readers of *Mashriq & Mahjar* will likely see here many reflections of questions and debates that have, since its inception, been central to this publication.

Michelle Baroody's article attends to this theme of contested discourses of Orientalism by guiding readers through a "montage" of encounters between literary and visual texts. In reading the "encounter" between a replica of the Sphinx of Giza and the Statue of Liberty, alongside an encounter between Ameen Rihani and a man from "al Yaman" (portrayed in Rihani's *Arabian Peak and Desert: Travels in Al-Yaman*), Baroody builds upon Melani McAllister's concept of "epic encounter." She ventures into the margins of Arab American literary and visual production in order to offer a reply to evolving discourses on Orientalism that privilege Eurocentric notions of core and periphery, and weaves in theoretical frameworks from the field of Film Studies to nuance her approach.

In his article on Hollywood's portrayal of Arab Americans and Muslims, Waleed Mahdi also accords importance to the power of visual narratives of the Orient, in this case regarding the construction of citizenship and belonging. Whereas Baroody sees "encounters" between visual narratives as "making room for the Arab American in this history," Mahdi examines the power of those who produce visual narratives, and their role in perpetuating systems of belonging or exclusion from "American" culture. By illuminating Hollywood's "moral geography," he draws attention to the ways in which the US cultural industry is part of a hegemonic tendency that repeatedly

locates Arab Americans outside the coded bounds of cultural citizenship.

While Mahdi looks at ways in which cinematic depictions of Muslims and Arab Americans reinforce cultural stereotypes, the last article of this section examines ways in which the work of poets Nathalie Handal and Naomi Shihab Nye challenges hegemonic modes of being. Sirène Harb and Hind el Hajj's work on the poetry of these two Palestinian American writers situates travel, as opposed to exile, as the interpretive framework for the politics of identity in Palestinian writing generally, and these authors in particular. Drawing on James Clifford's theorization of travel as a category of comparative analysis, they investigate intersecting narratives of personal and collective identities, as well as the themes of oppression and privilege in the work of Handal and Nye. The end result is an argument for moving beyond tropes of kinship as the defining bonds of diasporic groups, and toward the articulation of a coalitional identity in these authors' configuration of self and their kith-kin ethnic community.

SECTION 2: FROM MIGRANTS TO DUAL CITIZENS? RESEARCH FROM THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL WAWAW INITIATIVE¹

Our second section consists of research funded by the recent WAWAW initiative of the European Research Council. WAWAW (established in 2013) aims to mobilize interdisciplinary social science methodologies in order to analyze the profound changes initiated by the Arab Spring since 2010. Claire Beaugrand and Stéphanie Pouessel explore the ways in which the definition of nation has been contested, or expanded, in light of the actions of overseas nationals who have recently asserted their claim to be part of newly emerging national projects, or exile politics, in Tunisia and Bahrain. Xavier Guignard's article locates related themes in an earlier temporal context, examining the case of Palestinian returnees in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Contributions by Pouessel and Beaugrand both examine the double-edged sword of diasporic activism in recent years in Tunisia and Bahrain, respectively. On the one hand, diasporic activism, and the influence of returnee language and political platforms, has led to the rise of new discourses of "Tunisianité," or the provision of networks of international support that counter domestic attempts at political closure. On the other hand, in the case of Bahrain, Beaugrand also demonstrates attempts by the state to target, and delegitimize,

diasporic opposition by designating it as outside the parameters of the body politic. Both authors deal with the theme of generations of Tunisian or Bahraini nationals whose experiences and lives abroad make unique contributions to shifting linguistic, cultural, and political terrains in the aftermath of regime changes.

Taken together with Guignard's article, in all three case studies, we witness something akin to Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron's notion of "Long-Distance Nationalism," and are able to observe the diverse outcomes of this phenomenon coming home to roost.² Guignard rounds out this section with his article on Palestinian returnee flows that ensued after the Oslo Accords, and contributed to the state-building process. Carefully differentiating between the contingencies of distinct categories of returnees, he focuses on *mughtaribûn* who, much like actors in the previous articles, were part of global diasporic, political, and economic networks. Throughout this section, authors examine the interlocking histories of exile, power, and processes of return migration in Modern Middle Eastern contexts.

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We conclude this issue with a digital exhibit of photography from the 2011 Poetic Portraits of a Revolution project, which sent poets Kane Smego, Will McInerney, and Mohammad Moussa, alongside photographer/videographer Sameer Abdel-Khalek to Egypt and Tunisia in the midst of the Arab Spring. As our editorial board looks ahead to the future of *Mashriq & Mahjar*, we reaffirm our commitment to the unique opportunities that our digital publication platform yields us. Beyond featuring video footage, as we do in this issue with the Poetic Portraits of a Revolution project, we anticipate incorporating new work in the realm of digital humanities and public history into future issues of the journal. We believe that through this integrated approach of scholarship, creative work, and innovative digital media, we can continue to foster more holistic visions of the circulation of people, commodities, and meanings that lie at the core of Middle East Migration Studies.

NOTES

¹ Special thanks to Special Section organizers Claire Beaugrand and Vincent Geisser. Research for this section made possible by funding support from the European Research Council WFAW initiative.

² Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism & the Search for Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).