

## EDITORIAL

This issue is the last of my tenure as editor of *IJMES*. I wish my successor, Professor Leila Fawaz, Tufts University and Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, all the best for the coming five years, particularly the rich intellectual rewards that *IJMES* has given me. Next to one's own engagement in research and writing, there is nothing more exciting than to read a thought-provoking, ground-breaking manuscript and to shepherd it through the publication process. Admittedly, not all manuscripts received by the *IJMES* office during my tenure have been innovative, bold, or inspired, but those that were provided a kind of intellectual stimulation no faculty seminar, workshop, or conference could. Manuscripts on scholarly topics, which I had hitherto taken lightly, occupied my mind for weeks or months. Some manuscripts I knew almost by heart by the time they appeared in print; others piqued my intellect enough to send me to the library for some solitary research. It is this kind of scholarly awareness and enrichment that I hope Leila Fawaz will find in the coming years.

The great attractiveness of *IJMES* is its breadth: the Journal is open to any topic by any scholar in any discipline in Middle East studies. During my five years as editor, I was often asked, Why don't you publish more in medieval history, classical Arabic literature, anthropology, or sociology? Others wondered whether certain ideological approaches and scholars of certain nationalities are preferred over others. My standard answer has been that *IJMES* is the generic journal in the field, publishing manuscripts from all scholarly disciplines dealing with the area. At MESA meetings, I frequently expressed the wish to receive more submissions from scholars outside the disciplines of modern history and political science. However, given that the latter together make up more than half of our field, they quite naturally also constitute the publishing majority in *IJMES*—the Journal is and should be a mirror of the field. Nevertheless, *IJMES* also holds warmly in its embrace manuscripts by medieval historians, linguists, classical and modern literary historians or critics, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and Marxists. Some of their articles during the last five years have drawn much attention both inside and outside of our field.

If anything, it is not the overrepresentation of one or two groups in our field, but the absence of a greater methodological awareness in the study of our area that has concerned me during the past five years. For example, while the 19th- and early 20th-century Orientalists are rightfully criticized for their Eurocentrism, they nevertheless maintained a considerably more critical distance than contemporary scholars do to the corpus of Islamic self-interpretation, be it historical, literary, legal, or theological. At present, little work is being done on the historicization of this self-interpretation (perhaps because such a historicization is received with indifference or even hostility in the contemporary

Middle East?), although such discrimination is the signature of mature scholarship. Another example is the lingering presumption of Middle Eastern specificity, among humanists as well as social scientists, which somehow inhibits comparisons with the wider non-European world, such as India, China, Latin America, or Africa. A solid framework of the cultural, social, economic, and political evolution of the Middle East and North Africa which is comparative but not fixated on the European model is still sorely lacking. While we have been busy exposing the Orientalist sins of the past generations, we are leaving our present presuppositions unexamined.

By contrast, another scholarly development during the last five years is most welcome. Our colleagues in Turkey, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia are submitting more manuscripts to *IJMES* every year, contributing significant empirical research and analytical penetration. Some of their articles have already appeared and others will follow in Volume 21. I am also most pleased that an increasing number of scholars at Middle Eastern universities are willing to serve as manuscript evaluators. Manuscripts from Israel continue to be submitted in considerable numbers. Since, unfortunately, political developments in the Middle East have too often inhibited the openness of exchange among some scholars in our field, continued trust in the accessibility of *IJMES* to all our colleagues is critically important.

Article submissions from Iran have dwindled to a trickle, although the momentous events of the Iranian Revolution continue to absorb the scholarly attention of many of our colleagues outside Iran. Interpretations of this revolution are part of an academic growth industry, and *IJMES* has been deluged with manuscripts, many of which are of the highest quality. I have not imposed a moratorium on this topic, but I am afraid it has become a saturated subject for the time being.

Evaluation of manuscripts submitted to *IJMES* is to a considerable degree the work of you, the readers of the Journal. In the course of my tenure, I have asked many colleagues in the field at large to assist me, and for the most part, you have responded with extremely helpful comments and suggestions that I then passed on to the authors, together with my own evaluations. I want to thank you all once more for your anonymous labors. My deepest gratitude goes to the members of the editorial board who have consistently provided me with the most conscientious and prompt support in the reading and evaluation of manuscripts, in spite of their own heavy commitments to research, teaching, and administration. The book review editors have carried on like stalwarts, making sure that important works published in our field receive the critical attention they deserve. The great bulk of reviews now appear within two years of the publication of the books, the norm for most scholarly journals. I should also like to thank Barbara Colson, James Alexander, and Beth Roberts of Cambridge University Press for their cooperation and personal engagement in the task of maintaining the high quality of *IJMES*.

Special thanks are due to Lee Bean, Director of the Middle East Center at the University of Utah, and to Christine Elkington and Tessa Hauglid, the *IJMES* secretaries, who have provided me during the past five years with most generous

financial and loyal clerical support. Thanks to my secretaries' efficiency and dedication, it was possible to keep the evaluation process of manuscripts to an average of three months and the waiting period for publication to twelve months, including the six month production schedule required for each issue.

As the Journal passes into the competent hands of the new editor, I wish her all the intellectual satisfaction and new scholarly friendships the job offers. It is with great relief that I can lay down the burden of my editorial duties and return to my research and writing. Leila Fawaz, with her recognized intellectual authority and academic energy, is superbly qualified to carry on the high traditions of the Journal. The MESA board of directors gave her its enthusiastic support, and I know that all of us in the field are also looking forward to her inspired leadership.