



Letter from the Editor

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Perhaps it is fitting, amidst the unending slog of pandemic teaching and a year of escalating geopolitical crises across AfroEurasia, that our long-delayed issue of *RoMES* presents a plethora of voices arranged around our Special Focus topic “Spotlight on Pedagogical Perspectives and the Politics of Representation.” The idea for this topic emerged from a 2020 MESA panel attentive to volatile and contentious debates in the public sphere concerning Muslim identities and Middle Eastern geopolitical realities and social movements. Over the course of the past year, professors, students, activists, and law makers have sought to highlight patterns of misrepresentation, misattribution, and misappropriation in what amounts to a collective effort to position MENA dynamics as part of a global movement to redress inequity and establish new pedagogical, legal, and political paradigms.

While many of us may feel discouraged when scrolling through our social media feeds replete with evidence of damaged and precarious lives and territories, this issue of *RoMES* should also inspire us to stay engaged with the discursive power afforded us as members of an expanding vision of MESA. First, Corey Sherman (University of California, Hastings) opens the issue with an “ethnographically informed textual and structural analysis of public high school curricula in Washington, D.C.” and the processes by which this curriculum represents and, arguably, “produces” the Middle East in the minds of its students, teachers, and administrators. As school board meetings across the U.S. become the staging ground for defining past and present “truths” of the nation and drawing new definitions of “us” and “them,” Sherman’s essay shakes us out of the confines of higher education and reminds us of the stakes involved in public debates. We shirk these public debates at the risk of further isolating academic knowledge production and at the risk of MENA lives.

Second, Ranjit Singh (University of Mary Washington) leads us through the techniques and strategies for addressing the BDS movement in an undergraduate seminar. As MESA members, we have debated the role of the organization in analyzing and labeling historical and contemporary events in Israel/Palestine. Singh pointedly draws our attention to the classroom as a site for critical engagement with the methods and the ethics of how we as scholars, professors, and members of the global community navigate debates around one of the more significant movements of our time. Third, Mariam Alkazemi, Sameneh Oladi Ghadikolai, Marilyn Oetjens, and Edward L. Boone

(Virginia Commonwealth University) interrogate representations of gender, Muslim identity, race, religion, and immigration status in tweets, journalism, and Google searches linked to U.S. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar (D, Minnesota). I purposefully placed this essay in conversation with Sherman and Singh's to further underscore the entangled relationships between pedagogy, representation, and the production of knowledge in both the classroom and the broader public sphere.

Fourth, the essay by Courtney Dorroll, Colleen Balance, and Philip Dorroll (Wofford College) brilliantly captures how these entangled relationships can be productively and collaboratively transformed into a method for analyzing local cultural events and thereby investing in broader educational missions. In advance of a summer 2020 opera performance of *Omar* in Charleston, SC, Dorroll, Balance, and Dorroll led a student-faculty research team "to allow students agency in research on the writings and experiences of a Muslim individual of local and national historical importance." Spanning regional, religious, and performance studies, this interdisciplinary project repositioned a history of Islam, race, and slavery as a story *internal* to U.S. history. This collaborative research crossed disciplinary divides, divides between faculty and students, and between academia and public outreach. Further, their work underscores the importance of moving beyond analytic objectification toward narrative paradigms that affirm our place in global histories of racial differentiation and ethical rectification. With the humanities increasingly at risk in higher educational environments, such efforts to humanize our modes of knowledge production reinforce a necessary commitment to those fields that can also foreground our responsibilities as public intellectuals.

Even a book review can achieve these seemingly lofty goals, as Amy Singer and Chris Martin (Brandeis University) demonstrate. Their review of Jenny White's *Turkish Kaleidoscope* (co-authored by a professor and undergraduate student) represents a layered series of collaborative exercises in analysis and writing. With proofs of the novel in hand, the undergraduate seminar students met with White, provided feedback and commentary, and then contributed to the final assessment of the experience published here in the pages of *RoMES*. By analyzing this graphic novel, these Brandeis students also directly engaged with the politics of representation and evaluate White's effort to depict the political and personal volatility of events in late 1970s Turkey. Brian Mello and Mark Stein also foreground the undergraduate classroom in their reflections on the use of simulation in a course on revolution and social movements in the MENA.

But wait, there is more! The issue purposefully links both pedagogy and representational politics, and so also contains two essays that explore how diverse forms of cultural production shape perspectives on MENA lives. Sahar Razavi (California State University, Sacramento) identifies the political satire magazine, *Tawfiq* as a site of counterhegemonic resistance and uses the magazine to analyze methods of social control and reproduction, gender, and political contestation in Iran in the transformative period between 1963 and 1979. Redhwan Rashed (University of Hail & Amran University) moves our attention back into the literary genre and assesses how Leila Abouzeid's novel *Year of the*

Elephant reveals the agony and trauma of the “double colonized” in the power hierarchies of patriarchal and imperial systems.

Finally, this issue of *RoMES* shines a spotlight on what is typically just a column titled “Middle East Studies in Action.” In the past we have foregrounded important committee work in this column, but here the issue as a whole fashions an argument for what it is Middle East studies *does*. Our Special Focus section moves us in and out of secondary and higher education classrooms, broadens our sense of pedagogy as a key component of knowledge production, and tours different forums where representational dynamics are key, from high-school curricula to twitter and hashtags, to novels and satirical magazines. But we have also included a section of critical essays, one by a Evren Altinkas, a member of the inaugural group of MESA’s Global Academy Fellows that revisits methods of resistance and organization during WWI, an essay by Mohammed A. Al Tuwayjiri’s (King Saud University) on the Saudi state’s anti-communist stance, and a co-authored essay by Sooyong Kim (Koç University) and Orit Bashkin (University of Chicago). Collectively these essays remind us of the place for reflective scholarship that seeks to redefine older research paradigms via new questions and methods. For instance, Kim and Bashkin “revisit” a thorny historiographical question concerning “multilingualism” and argue against rigid linguistic dichotomies and periodization schemes to reveal a more nuanced transregional network of language hierarchies. Their essay echoes this *RoMES* issue’s dedication to foregrounding research and writing that eschews binaries and amplifies new voices. Marzia Coltri’s (Arden University) “Curator’s Column” contributes to the broader questions explored in the issue in her reflections on the significant role that philosophy and ethics curricula play in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia.

Our contributors hail from diverse institutional and geographic settings and includes small liberal arts colleges as well as public and private universities located in the U.S., Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Modelling the importance of collaborative efforts to shape knowledge production both within the classroom and beyond and the urgent need for academic publishing to diversify both content and authorship, we hope the long wait for this issue of the *Review of Middle East Studies* will be repaid by the richness of the materials and perspectives presented therein. Middle East studies thrives only as it evolves, and *RoMES* strives to both reflect and guide these evolutionary paradigms of teaching, researching, and actively engaging with the turbulent dynamics of our time.

Interested in reading the latest from RoMES? Follow us on Twitter at @RevoMES. Any questions or inquiries concerning content or potential submissions should be sent via email to Editor Heather Ferguson and Managing Editor Calista Boyd at romes@cmc.edu.