



Letter from the Editor

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Every issue of the *Review of Middle East Studies* (RoMES) seeks to embody evolution: the evolution of the field, of the membership of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), and, consequently, the evolution of our scholarly horizons. Yet, there are also moments when our collective energies move ever so slightly from evolution to revolution. This issue will, I hope, testify to the importance of embracing revolution in our approaches to the infrastructure of knowledge production.

It is hard not to ignore the global attack on intellectual critique as a method to slow, if not forestall, contemporary forms of authoritarianism, settler colonialism, and ethnonationalism. Academic freedom and free speech are under assault in every geographic locale represented by MESA's membership and the financialization of higher education keeps pace to further undermine traditions of critique, much less criticism. Many of us have personally experienced this assault, even as we bear witness to the exigent circumstances faced by the inhabitants of the regions we study, live, and work in. It is therefore all the more urgent for us to reckon with our own histories of silencing within disciplines, institutions, and, of course, within the mechanisms of academic publishing.

RoMES has always been nimble, shape shifting as it has through its history from a bulletin to a compendium of book reviews and, slowly, to snapshots of the field of Middle East Studies in action. This nimble quality is advantageous, as it also enables our team to be responsive to emergent disciplinary and global shifts in the practices and the ethics of publishing. But RoMES can be *more* than responsive by also modeling an approach to academic publishing that pushes back on at least three forms of institutionalized gatekeeping, and, thus, of silencing. First, the tendency for academic journals to reinforce the power and authority of legacy institutions by drawing the contributors, reviewers, and editorial team members that shape their content from a rather small pool. Second, the concomitant penchant to foreground EuroAmerican geographies, and only particular institutions within those geographies, as the generative “sites” of expertise. And, finally, the Anglophone-centric content that results. Institutional, geographic, and linguistic uniformity impoverishes our scholarly horizons and, worse, reinforces neocolonial and neoliberal narratives. If the Middle East Studies Association has increasingly embraced



the “global” in its definition of the field, then so too should its journals of record.

In April, the Associate Publisher of Cambridge University Press informed us that an article from this current *RoMES* issue, released early on “First View,” was the most downloaded article in *Middle East Studies* from Cambridge for the month of March. Titled “Collective Memory in Post-Genocide Societies: Rethinking Enduring Trauma and Resilience in Halabja,” the article is co-authored by Hawraman Fariq Karim (University of Sulaimani) and Bahar Baser (Durham University). Eight other contributors showcased in the “Special Focus” section of this issue dedicate their intellectual labor to “Revisiting Legacies of Anfal and Reconsidering Genocide in the Middle East Today: Collective Memory, Victimhood, Resilience, and Enduring Trauma.” The “Special Focus” is guest edited by Ibrahim Sadiq (Soran University), Bahar Baser (Durham University) and Stephen McLoughlin (Coventry University) and emerges from a conference co-hosted by the editors in June 2021. Their aim was to adopt an interdisciplinary perspective to intervene in problematic debates concerning Anfal, genocide, and ongoing campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the region. The contributors address the politics of genocide as both a legal designation and a method of analysis, the erasure of histories of ethnic cleansing, shifts in gendered dynamics in the aftermath of genocidal campaigns, and the ongoing persecution of the Kurds and other stateless peoples such as the Yazidis. Each article represents an extraordinary collaborative effort to ensure that once suppressed stories and voices can find their way into an English-language academic journal. As such, this “Special Focus” section embodies the principles outlined above as it includes: several authors publishing for the first time in English; a majority of contributors representing institutions in Iraq; and intellectual horizons shaped by the affective histories of which the authors write. As we commemorate the anniversary of genocide and bear witness to genocidal acts occurring across the globe today, it is our hope that this “Special Focus” serves as an invitation to adopt a collaborative and multi-sited approach to academic publishing that destabilizes systems of silencing rather than bolstering them.

In addition to the “Special Focus” section, this issue showcases our “Curator’s Corner” with two reflective commentaries on the politics of representation and misrepresentation. Katarzyna Puzon (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) focuses on “Connections and Disconnections on Berlin’s “Museum Island” and Rita Elizabeth Risser (United Arab Emirates University) on “The Arabasque of Script and Metaphor in Islamic Art.” Our “Middle East Studies in Action” section highlights the efforts of the Committee for Undergraduate Middle East Studies (CUMES) to bridge the worlds of pedagogy and research. We are honored to publish the research posters of Mary Rudolph (graduate of Colorado College) and Eric Workman (University of Pittsburgh). Both sections underscore *RoMES*’s willingness to critically assess narratives once held sacred and to support emerging scholarship.

As we plan for the academic year ahead, may this issue of the *Review of Middle East Studies* remind us that the politics of silence puts us all at risk and that moments of “generalized catastrophe” demand revolutionary strategies.¹

¹ Sherene Seikaly reflects on catastrophe as the “generalized condition of our time: an eternal, interminable present” in “Nakba in the Age of Catastrophe,” *Jadaliyya*, May 15, 2023: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45037>. Seikaly purposefully interrogates the concept and reality of an “ongoing catastrophe” on the 75th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba in parallel with the “trouble without end” of the climate catastrophe. Here, I am also purposefully disinterring the vocabulary of catastrophe from this ground of Palestinian struggle to embrace Julia Elyachar’s call “to confront and remake colonial infrastructures of knowledge-making in our own times” issued in “For Anthropology, Decolonizing Knowledge Means Supporting the Academic Boycott of Israel,” *Mondoweiss*, June 26, 2023: <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/06/for-anthropology-decolonizing-knowledge-means-supporting-the-academic-boycott-of-israel/>.

Cite this article: Ferguson H (2023). Letter from the Editor. *Review of Middle East Studies* 56, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2023.7>