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EDITOR'S NOTE

Imperial War and Ground-Up Methodologies

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We have been here before. Echoes of the US invasion of Iraq reverberate in 2026 rhetoric about "regime change" and manipulated claims about the presence of weapons of mass destruction. Echoes of the US invasion of Afghanistan reappear in 2026 rhetoric about saving Muslim women from Muslim men. Israeli state and non-state actors' calls to invade, occupy, and settle south Lebanon echo a century of openly articulated Zionist expansionist aims that call for ethnic cleansing and genocide. Yet, this moment also feels different. As those in our field—and apparently only those in our field—know, Iran is a functioning state with complex infrastructure and bureaucratic systems and a well-established and well-equipped military. MESA members have taken to the airwaves and zoom screens in attempts to break through the distortions of echo chambers and the presumptions of experts as we all bear witness to clear shifts in the post–World War II hegemonic global order. One thing is clear: Imperial warfare is reshaping economic and political multilateral agreements and assumed norms in ways both predictable and not.

Meanwhile, the deafening susurration of an ongoing genocide in Gaza continues, even if missiles, bombs, and drones across West Asia have once again eclipsed the plight of Palestinians trapped in tents. They are now joined by Lebanese and Iranians facing the same extermination projects, with implications extending across the globe.

Many of our readers live in, have loved ones in, or have close research relationships with places being bombed as we write. By the time the ceasefires of 8 April and, for Lebanon, 16 April 2026 went into effect, US and Israeli attacks had killed at least 2,076 people in Iran and 2,167 people in Lebanon. The Israeli military has killed over 600 Palestinians in Gaza since the supposed ceasefire there began, and Palestinian deaths continue to escalate there and in the West Bank, where Zionist settlers, now virtually indistinguishable from Israeli police or military forces, undertake regular campaigns of ethnic cleansing. There are dozens of casualties from retaliations in Gulf states that allow the United States to use their territory for war and in Israel, as well as casualties in the US armed forces. Most in our field have been tied to the news, to WhatsApp chats with family and friends, and to social media sources, whether trying to parse information or assess the safety of loved ones.

What does this mean for us, as MESA members, as scholars in the field, and as editors? We see the toll of this long imperial war on the region in the ebbs and flows of submissions. The week after the current Israeli and US war on Iran began, we received only one submission, and that submission was a mistake and irrelevant to the journal. This is a clear departure from the norm. Since we assumed the co-editorship in July, the pace of submissions has varied from nine to eighteen per week. During this phase of war, the average has been less

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than a handful. As a record of the all-consuming nature of this moment, the collapse in professional work over these past weeks is quite stark. We also see the toll on those who continue to do the labor of peer review under circumstances of stress and exhaustion, in the apologies sent to our inbox and the delays that indicate the pain and sorrow of this moment. We feel those circumstances deeply as well. While trapped in witness mode from afar and diasporic panic about loved ones, we seek to anchor our academic labor as a response to pleas that also echo across decades of entrenched silence. As an anonymous person from Palestine narrated the agony of trauma and fear as settlers attack villages in the West Bank after every Iranian missile drops: "I write this message because we feel completely alone. . . . We ask the world, human rights organizations, journalists, and all people of conscience to see what is happening and to stand with the civilians who are living under this fear."

And so we continue, because we continue to believe that, together as writers, readers, and scholars, we are best positioned to shape narratives about the region.

To that end, this issue of *IJMES* helps shape those narratives through ground-up methodologies that exhibit the ongoing importance of scholarship produced for an interdisciplinary readership. Two articles on Iran demonstrate the significant relationship between material, political, and religio-philosophical understandings of collective identities: Zep Kalb's "Rise of the Wage Containment State: The Supreme Labor Council and Minimum Wage Politics in Iran," and Alisa Shablovskaia's "From Tyranny to Absolutism: Chrono-Spatial and Religious Concepts in Two Persian Translations of the Communist Manifesto." Both address the history of labor, the labor movement, and the policies and politics that have continually shaped and reshaped the Iranian polity. Ibrahim Gemeah's contribution to this issue, "Putting Azharis to Work: Islam, the Free Officers, and the Bid for Sudan (1952–1956)," also addresses questions of labor, religion, and territorial sovereignty and argues for the intersection between religious diplomacy and statecraft in transregional cold war politics between Egypt and the Sudan.

We then move to Omar Sayfo's "Towards an Exceptional Qurʾanic Generation: How Dar al-Wahy al-Sharif Schools Shape Islam, Identity, and Power in Northwest Syria." In a moment when Syria is poised to play a markedly different role supporting the imperial calculus, and as members of the new Syrian regime attempt to ban alcohol in Damascus and threaten to fire medical staff from regional hospitals who are not of the Sunni majority, Sayfo provides a close, on the ground reading of revolutionary educational projects that shape radical new national futures.

And finally, when ecologies of war link human and nonhuman animals and the pitched battle to survive not only this current assault but also the cascading consequences of a war machine that manufactures death and destruction and eclipses possible futures, we must not lose sight of art, beauty, and the everyday. Siobhán Shilton's "Art and Mediterranean Migration: Images of Women and Aesthetics of the Interface" argues against the binaries of "us" and "them," "here" and "there" typically reproduced in images of migrants since 2010, and focuses instead on the possibility for installation art to activate a "multilayered interface."

Book reviews extend the geographic and disciplinary scope of this issue by traversing spaces from the Gulf to southern Oman, an Azraq refugee camp, revolutionary struggle and counterinsurgency tactics that connect the streets of Istanbul with Northern Kurdistan, and secular millennial imaginaries in Israel. In combination these reviews showcase diverse disciplinary, regional, territorial, and political frameworks for peoples and places now caught up in a geopolitics of imperial warfare.

Looking ahead to the next issue, we will continue this effort to foreground historically and ethnographically rich research that works to shape narratives about the current moment. We anticipate two articles on Lebanon: Peter S. Habib's work on water truck systems that serve populations in the Beqaa Valley in the absence of state infrastructures,

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and Cynthia Kreichati's study of the temporalities of labor and crisis in relation to the Litani River's dam and power plant infrastructure, which may well have been destroyed in the interim.

These are times when it feels like our expertise does not matter and that no one with the power to shape everyday lives cares about deep histories or complex social analyses, times when many of us despair of knowledge production wielding the heft necessary to reshape global systems of power and surveillance that draw from and extend racial capitalism and the politics of colonial and imperial extraction. Yet we must persist. For it is in these same moments that we find ourselves relying on one another's knowledge, expertise, and shared commitments to centering those most at risk among us. In moments of exigency and existential crisis, we continue to seek out colleagues who can teach us, who can teach our students, and who can disrupt the discourse circulated in mainstream media and circles of professionalized policy "experts." *IJMES* remains a place for that. And we remain grateful to our editorial board and team,[1] and to our contributors, peer reviewers, and readers, for building a community dedicated to learning from and with each other.

[1] https://webauth.claremont.edu/cas/login?service=https%3A%2F%2Fwebauth.claremont.edu%2Fidp%2FAuthn%2FExternal%3Fconversation%3De1s2&entityId=https%3A%2F%2Fccl.idm.oclc.org%2Fshibboleth.

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