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EDITOR'S NOTE

From the Editors

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This issue represents a formal transition for the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, as it is the first to bear our names as coeditors on its masthead. Transitions, however, are rarely quite so abrupt. The articles included in this issue were all guided through the editorial review process by the previous editorial team, led by Joel Gordon and Associate Editor Sarwar Alam. We are both honored to step in for the final stage of these works, and deeply grateful to Joel for his extraordinary dedication to ensuring that *IJMES* has published the best possible scholarship in our field for six years.

One of the first things we noticed when we stepped into the editorship on 1 July 2025 was Joel's relationship to authors. He consistently provided substantial, nuanced feedback at every stage of the review process—feedback that added significantly to the peer reviews, guided authors as they shaped their final manuscripts, and, in some cases, mentored a scholar from start to finish through the writing and publication process. As long-term Middle East Studies Association (MESA) members and scholars in the field, we acknowledge and thank him for his labor and model of ethical engagement with authors; as the new coeditors, we promise to build on his commitment to furthering Middle East studies scholarship during this time of risk and precarity.

As we develop our editorial model, we seek to sustain *IJMES* as the flagship research journal of the field and carry on the legacies of past editorial teams while simultaneously adapting to new terrains of scholarship and academic publishing. Instituting an "Editors' Note" to open each issue is a case in point. These opening notes are part of our broader vision of *IJMES* as a space to initiate conversations about the significance of our field and the role of research and publishing in today's world with the journal's readers.

Middle East studies has always been a site of contention and debate over the role of "expertise" in contexts of colonial and imperial bloodshed, but the breadth and intensity of violence these past two years has amplified a collective sense of urgency, brought new generations of scholars face to face with this cruelty, and led to new forms of pressure and exhaustion. In the face of situated, transregional, and global violence, we bear witness, grieve, and rage alongside our colleagues and students as we collectively shift among organizing, teaching, writing about the region, public-facing events, and paralysis. In this first "Editors' Note," we hold space for a necessarily incomplete list of systemic forms of brutality even as we recommit to the power of research and analysis to reframe the narrative. As we write, Palestine—and the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza accompanied by ongoing ethnic cleansing through settler and state encroachments in the West Bank—is always with us. In response to new forms of denial of the history of the Nakba, we hold up the consistency and lessons of Palestinian *sumud* (steadfastness), resistance, and

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insistence on life as a model for our continued labor within our profession. Sudan is also on our minds, joining Gaza as yet another instance in which the international legal and humanitarian system purportedly erected to intervene before genocidal conditions materialize has failed, as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commit genocide against Sudanese. The international system has sheltered not only US and Israeli complicity in support of the UAE-armed RSF, but also the US-supplied Israeli war machine that extended its devastation from Gaza to Lebanon, Iran, Syria, and Yemen, and of course, US attacks on Yemen, Iraq, and Iran, just in the past two years.

As scholars located in the US, we also have been navigating the authoritarian turn here, as are many *IJMES* authors and readers. We both came of age as academics at the turn of the 21st century (Lara received her PhD in 2003, Heather in 2009), as first the Patriot Act and then the various legal, military, economic, and political dimensions of the War on Terror reshaped civil rights in the United States and initiated a global surveillance regime. We see the eerie continuities and intensifications of these innovations in US policy in the form of ICE agents abducting and disappearing members of our community at will. These intensifications began, again, with Palestine, through the suppression of the extramural speech and academic freedom of members of Palestine solidarity movements or academics whose research and teaching dared to touch on the history that led to this moment in time. As noted in the recent MESA Task Force on Civil and Human Rights report, "Discriminating against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine," the current reality is one in which "Palestine is less an exception to academic freedom than it is a pretext for erasing the norm altogether."[1] Palestine is the crucible through which the federal government, higher education administrators, governing boards and trustees, and well-organized groups acting in defense of Israeli state and military actions have honed the tools of repression they deploy against students, faculty, and staff on college and university campuses.

Given these conditions, it is not unreasonable to wonder in what ways *IJMES*, and academic publishing in general, matter right now. We see the journal as a space where scholars shape narratives about the region, archive past and present moments so that they become part of the historical record, and insist on rigorous research attentive to the often uneven power dynamics in our broader field. Whether working in contemporary or prior eras, and whatever interdisciplinary or disciplinary tools we employ, we—*IJMES* authors and readers, MESA members, scholars of the region—are best situated to shape the narrative about the "Middle East." More pragmatically, as the academy continues to value and demand publications as a means toward tenure, promotion, postpromotion review, and even landing those ever-diminishing positions, we owe it to our colleagues and students to do the work required to bring the best scholarship into print.

We do not do this on our own. As coeditors, we rely not only on you, our peer reviewers, contributors, and readers, but also on the *IJMES* editorial board as well as our book review editorial team. Take a look at our masthead and note our commitment to multiple disciplines, to geographic and institutional diversity, and to interdiscursive research as part of our vision for publishing about the region. As scholars of anthropology (Lara) and history (Heather), we have long interrogated the meaning of interdisciplinarity in our own work and as a hallmark of area studies. Yet all too often that interdisciplinarity is understood as placing disciplinary approaches next to one another, their edges discrete and staunchly defended. As we maintain space for the strengths of scholarship firmly embedded in singular methodological or theoretical approaches, we envision IJMES also embracing work that

[1] Middle East Studies Association and American Association of University Professors, "Discriminating against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine," November 2025, https://mesana.org/pdf/Discriminating_Against_Dissent_Report.pdf.

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hovers in the borderlands between disciplines, places disciplinary approaches in conversation with one another, and adopts a deliberate focus on the territorial edges of the Middle East as traditionally defined. Our editorial board and book review editorial team embody forms of expertise that we hope will guide not only the content of *IJMES* but also possible futures for our broader field of Middle East studies. Collectively, we look forward to working with you to realize this vision.

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