International Journal of Middle East Studies (2026), **58**, 1–3
doi:10.1017/S0020743826101731

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

EDITORS' NOTE

On Collective Burnout and Perseverance

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We drafted this Editors' Note at the end of yet another brutal academic year of genocide, war, and repression, and anticipate that it will be published before the next academic year begins. During this season when the cycle of teaching and administrative labor slows down or pauses for many of us, we take stock of our shared state of exhaustion, depletion, and burnout.

This collective burnout appears across multiple registers: Fewer people are showing up at webinars or replying to text and email chains. We see this slowdown from our editorial perspective too: Fewer manuscripts submitted; authors struggling to complete revisions in a timely manner; and peer reviewers ignoring our emails or apologizing again and again for months-late responses. And, frankly, we get it. Many are struggling to get out of bed in the morning, whether due to grappling with grief and despair, trying to keep track of day-to-day shifts in politics and violence in places they call home, or fighting administrative and governmental efforts to suppress their speech. We are living these layered realities alongside *IJMES* authors, reviewers, and readers.

At the same time, we hold fast to the belief (yes, we have said this before) that, as experts on the region, it is our duty to continue producing knowledge in our field, supporting that knowledge production, and sharing that expertise more broadly. As the flagship journal of our field, *IJMES* shoulders some of that responsibility, and while we serve as its coeditors *IJMES* remains an endeavor that relies on our collective expertise, time, and labor. In fact, the impact of burnout on the journal reminds us that this project is a collective one.

Contributing to the editorial process also serves as an act of solidarity with scholars in our field, especially, but not only, those who work under conditions of genocide and colonial and imperial war in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iran, conditions of state violence in the region as well as here in North America, and conditions of academic precarity across the globe. We stand in awe of our colleagues who have continued to do their academic and editorial work under bombardment. We stand in awe of those who do so while mourning family members and loved ones. We take a lesson from those who insist that continuing to do this work is a strategy of persistence and survival under conditions of erasure. We are grateful for the authors and reviewers who have continued to labor under a variety of degrees of exhaustion, and, as always, give thanks to the persistent support of our editorial board and book review editors.

And so we call on ourselves, and on our readers, to each assess our own capacities, positionalities, and degrees of precarity and to step up accordingly to take part in our collective project. As we do so, we look to the Palestinian concept of *sumud*, which Palestinian scholars and practitioners explain as the idea of coming together as a collective

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743826101731 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to resist both conditions of violence and repression and the powers that are producing those conditions.[1] Although the conditions differ, the struggles are interconnected. For example, efforts to silence academics in the United States are part and parcel of the Israeli settler-colonial state's efforts to control the narrative about itself. Under conditions of genocide, occupation, and war, the tactic deployed is scholasticide and the targeted assassinations—murder—of scholars. Under the legal and institutional conditions of higher education in the United States, those tactics are legal and administrative.

In this entangled context, we hold that editorial work and knowledge production are means of countering erasure and practicing academic freedom. Now is the time to step up and do what we each can do—including submitting manuscripts and serving as peer reviewers—from wherever we each are located, geographically and structurally. Research, writing, and teaching about the region are more important than ever.

For example, two of the articles in this issue of the journal address aspects of infrastructure, labor, and precarity in Lebanon in ways that shed light on our understanding of some of the stakes and impacts of the Israeli wars on Lebanon. The pieces by Cyntia Kreichati and Peter Habib are both ethnographies of labor related to water infrastructures in the Beqaa Valley, infrastructures that were already in perpetual crisis at the time of their research, some of which have been damaged or destroyed by Israeli bombs since, including the Litani Dam, pumping stations, and irrigation canals. Kreichati provides a thoughtful analysis of workers' navigations of temporality in the context of uncertainty and state power at a Litani River hydroelectric plant, arguing that we must understand workers' relationship to time as one of ambivalence and endurance. Habib's rich social analysis of water trucks, a temporary and contingent water provision mechanism, and the men who run them insists on taking both trucks and labor seriously as infrastructural agents impacting life for Lebanese and Syrians living on the precarious margins of society. These research articles are joined in this issue by a review of Yasemin Ipek's book on crisis and activism in Lebanon.

Salma Shash and Sarah Nagaty turn the issue's readers toward complex layers of 19th- and 20th-century Egyptian history. Shash introduces a microhistory of bedouin and tribes, deftly analyzed as malleable categories, from the 1830s to the 1930s. Shash's archive-based research demonstrates how one family of tribal shaykhs first act as administrators negotiating with newly interventionist state and colonial powers and then position themselves as representatives of a distinct group within the nascent politics of a nation–state and its citizenry. Nagaty inserts gender politics within traditional histories of the Egyptian Left. She illuminates the life story of silenced militant student activist and Egyptian Communist Workers' Party member Arwa Salih and analyzes the failed effort to reconcile liberatory politics with struggles for gender equality. She contends that a deliberate erasure of Salih's role in the movement indicates internal tensions within Marxist-oriented groups that either intentionally or unintentionally depoliticized the private sphere.

Readers are then invited to turn to articles on literature and the arts from the premodern to the modern, with Asmaa Essakouti's analysis of scatology in medieval Arabic literature and Alma Itzhaky's arguments concerning biblical orientalism and the "rewilding" of occupied Palestinian territory through state violence. Essakouti focuses on how litterateurs managed "self-disgust" and adds a new dimension to academic scholarship on human effluvia that more typically focuses on proximate distance with others or, rather, the "other." When the self is the object excreting abhorrent waste, both sensory and moral, what strategies, Essakouti asks, do poets and treatise writers deploy to manage this perpetual state of discomfort? Itzhaky analyzes film and material art exhibitions to address

[1] Lena Meari, "Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (2014): 547–78; Samah Jabr, *Radiance in Pain and Resilience: The Global Reverberation of Palestinian Historical Trauma* (Wakefield Press, 2025).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743826101731 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the transformation, via state violence, of biblical orientalism into a colonial ecology of enclosure and dispossession. This colonial ecology depends on cultural and religious myths of the "Holy Land" to mask violent Israeli state and military projects that expand military zones and purposefully contribute to desertification. These processes in conjunction ensure the present "unlivability" of occupied Palestine.

The book reviews included here further demonstrate the diverse range of lives, regions, histories, and disciplines contained in this issue. We look forward to readers following the circulation of Hindi films to Beirut, Cairo, and Dubai; reflecting on activist and revolutionary life histories and afterlives in Lebanon and Oman; and assessing the burgeoning academic scholarship on varied Kurdish political, territorial, and cultural formations both past and present.

We hope you find this issue as engaging as we have, and look forward to continuing the dedication of *IJMES* to multiple disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical perspectives. Always, we are grateful to our editorial board and team (https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/about-this-journal/editorial-board), our contributors, our peer reviewers, and our readers for building a community dedicated to learning from and with each other.

Cite this article: Lara Deeb and Heather Ferguson, "On Collective Burnout and Perseverance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2026) **58**, 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743826101731

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