



Letter from the Editor

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Academic publishing in the midst of war is always a fraught endeavor. Academic publishing in the midst of the Israeli government's genocidal war waged against a Palestinian population risks adopting the deeply unethical practice of "business as usual." As a publication of the Middle East Studies Association and as Editor and Managing Editor of the *Review of Middle East Studies*, we therefore first pause to acknowledge that the Israeli and Palestinian lives lost on and since October 7, 2023, has led to an epistemic rupture and a global failure to embrace humanity in the midst of tragedy. Members of the Middle East Studies Association have long criticized the vapid claims of the "liberal" order and traced the illiberality that instead animates it. They have also provided deeply engaged scholarly methods for assessing the historical, economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental consequences of dehumanizing discursive projects and their realization in systems of governance and methods of surveillance and warfare. Still and yet, the horrific unspooling of events in Gaza and in the Israeli occupied Palestinian territories magnify a broader failure: to transform privilege into a platform for action and solidarity. While academia is, of course, a profession, the privilege that accrues from our status in various disciplinary fields also demands that we stand up and with those victimized by the systems we study – and thus build our careers on – or we become deserving of the varied criticisms lobbied with increasing fervor against educators. While the Middle East Studies Association has long recognized that academic freedom and free speech is not just a professional commitment but also a commitment to global equity, we should still learn from this moment to check our epistemological biases, the assumptions behind our research priorities, and our own complicity in erecting scholarly models detached from the exigencies and existential crises of our colleagues around the globe. In a moment of heightened politicization and escalating attacks on critical scholarly commentary in EuroAmerican contexts, all taking place as we bear witness to the extermination of life and the possibility of future lives in Gaza, our best defense is to embrace an ethical praxis that supplants willful ignorance with a global right to speech and to endurance. This entails reaffirming our disciplinary commitments which, each via their own methods, interrogate events "over there" as always already shaped by past and present actions "here." And, most urgently, we should stand against



powerful state and extra-state projects that silence, and, in that silence, murder.

In honor of this broader effort to amplify silenced voices so as to disrupt past and present projects of dehumanization, we are honored to showcase the rich array of scholarship included in this issue's Special Focus, "Amazigh Literature: Critical and Close Reading Approaches," edited by Brahim El Guabli (Williams College) and Aomar Boum (University of California, Los Angeles). Our readers may be aware of the fact that Middle Eastern Studies departments overwhelmingly focus on the linguistic and literary traditions of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. At many institutions, even the latter two struggle against the predominance of Arabic. However overlooked these traditions might be, their representative scholarship in the EuroAmerican academy is certainly robust. This is not the case, however, for Amazigh languages and literatures, whose struggle for scholarly attention against Arabic very much mirrors the colonial politics of French and Arabic in North Africa. This Special Focus, however, provides a truly comprehensive exploration of the literary traditions of Amazigh culture and signals a key intervention in both the cultural production and the regional designation of "North Africa." El Guabli and Boum have gathered fourteen unique contributions that treat Amazigh texts and their histories *as literature*. Further still, as RoMES is particularly open to showcasing the scholarship of academics based in the region, of the fourteen contributors, all but four are faculty members of universities in North Africa.

What these articles do so well is sidestep strawman arguments that solely lament the absence of serious scholarship into Amazigh literature. They do this, as their subtitle informs us, by advancing critical and close readings of individual texts and key authors. While the substantial number of its contributions precludes any attempt at full summarization, we should like to highlight the range of genres this Special Focus addresses. From the expected poetic and narrative genres to lesser stressed literary modes such as the proverb and the *tullist* (short story) and approaches such as titular analyses and onomastics, these articles provide some of the first English-language scholarship on the Amazigh literary tradition. Moreover, readers may discern our idiosyncratic approach to representing the Amazigh language in Latin script across the Special Focus articles. Given the marginal status of Amazigh Studies within Middle Eastern Studies there is little in the way of a standardized transliteration scheme for Amazigh languages. We therefore left transliteration choices up to our authors who then demonstrated the wide variety of possible representations of Amazigh linguistic horizons in English. This variation is direct testimony to Amazigh's marginality within western academic institutions, its designated illegibility. RoMES is proud to contribute, in our modest way, to the growing attention paid to Amazigh in Middle Eastern Studies. We encourage readers to follow further scholarship on the topic at the newly founded *Tamazgha Studies Journal*, which promises to reinforce the interventions showcased in the following pages.

In addition to this Special Focus section, we also present two illuminating interviews that embody our goal to shape scholarly itineraries with and

through the voices and creative actors in diverse global contexts. Nevine Abraham (Carnegie Mellon University) interrogates the role hip hop plays in shaping Casablanca landscapes and horizons with documentary film director Nabil Ayouch. In 2021, *Casablanca Beats* was “the first Moroccan film to compete for the Palme d’Or since 1962, and the Moroccan entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 94th Academy Awards.” And, Nuha Askar (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University) interviews the Kurdish Syrian writer Jan Dost as part of her dissertation research “on internal dissent in modern Middle Eastern narratives that negotiate[s] the failure of ‘nationalism’ in building modern states.” Dost and Askar together reflect on categories such as “third world intellectual” and on the politics of Anglophonic translation regimes that enact their own editorial politics that selectively silence and amplify global voices.

In closing, we would first like to draw attention to the co-authorship of this “Letter from the Editor.” Ghayde Ghraawi (Ph.D. Candidate/Yale University) joined the RoMES team as Managing Editor in August, 2023, just in time to draw on his expertise in comparative literature as we finalized our Special Focus on Amazigh critical and close readings. And, finally, we underscore that the last Letter from the Editor (issue 56.1) ended with a warning and a call for action repeated again here, along with its original footnote: “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 This footnote also appeared in issue 56.1: 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/>.

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