

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

We are thrilled to present this special issue on “Queer Affects,” which explores a range of topics and analytical approaches that have rarely appeared in the pages of *IJMES* but reflect vital emerging discussions in diverse subfields of Middle East studies. That so many contributors hail from literary disciplines, which have tended to be underrepresented in the journal, also makes this a landmark issue for us. We thank guest editors Hanadi Al-Samman and Tarek El-Ariss for proposing the special issue, gathering the original collection of manuscript submissions, and introducing the final group of six articles we present here, all of which have gone through the standard *IJMES* peer review process. We also acknowledge the anonymous reviewers, some of whom read more than one article for this issue, for their perceptive evaluations. We are grateful to Huda Lufti for permitting us to use a photograph of her artwork, “Lipstick and Moustache (2010),” as this issue’s cover art.

An initial cluster of articles submitted by the guest editors on homosexuality and homoeroticism in modern Arabic literature, written by Dina Georgis, Michael Allan, Khalid Hadeed, and Tarek El-Ariss, provide innovative queer readings of contemporary novels, film, and autobiographical texts. To these we added two articles that were submitted and accepted independently, in perfect time to include in the special issue. Afsaneh Najmabadi’s contribution, which leads the collection of articles, traces the genealogy of the concept of *jins* as genus/sex in Iran from the late 19th into the 21st centuries, laying the groundwork for understanding the uses and meanings of *jins* in current Iranian debates around sex change. The article by Haytham Bahooora, which closes out the collection, explores the writings of the Iraqi poet Husayn Mardan, whose lyrics celebrating sexual licentiousness, prostitution, and filth in 1950s Baghdad landed him in court repeatedly in his own time and subsequently led to his marginalization in the Arabic canon as a “frivolous” and “bohemian” poet in “an ultimately inhospitable third world space.” The article elegantly illustrates not only how scholarly explorations of “queer affects”—in the capacious sense in which we are using the term—can go well beyond studies of “queerness” as a set of specific sexual identities or practices but also how suspending the assumption of sexual libertinism and perversity as derivative discourses can open up rich terrains for critical analyses of modern social formations.

Bahooora’s contribution is thus an apt transition to the *IJMES* roundtable presented here, on “Queer Theory and Middle East Studies.” With a sense of some of the exciting work being done at the intersection of these two scholarly traditions, we asked contributors across a range of disciplines to reflect on current directions and debates in uses of “queer theory” within “Middle East studies,” in whatever ways they chose to interpret those concepts. The responses treat queer theory not as a field with a delimited object of study (such as homosexuality or even sexuality), but as an analytic, a methodology, a critical sensibility, a conceptual strategy, or a reading practice, to cite some of the terms

they invoke. We could not have produced the roundtable without the invaluable input of our new board member Omnia El Shakry, who along with Paul Amar introduces the collection of short essays.

This issue also includes a review article by Marilyn Booth, which explores six recent groundbreaking books employing a range of methodologies to revisit the making of Egyptian nationhood, specifically through the lenses of “wayward subjects and negotiated disciplines” in relation to gender, sex, and body politics.

Many of our readers will have followed the discussions and debates that this issue of *IJMES* takes up, but for those who find them terra incognita, we hope you will peruse these diverse engagements with some of the most defining issues of our time and find the journey rewarding. For those newly drawn to our pages by the special issue, we hope you will be convinced that Middle East studies today, as Amar and El Shakry write in the roundtable introduction, offers “special insights and unique capacities for making meaning out of these queer times.”

Beth Baron and Sara Pursley