

**Leila Fawaz**

## FROM THE EDITOR

Somewhat to my own surprise, serving as editor of *IJMES* for the past five years has been a deeply rewarding and enjoyable experience, and I have you—the readers, authors, evaluators, and reviewers of *IJMES*—to thank for contributing to that positive result.

The job of editor has entailed working closely with five other sets of people in addition to those already mentioned. These are (1) the Board of Directors and the Secretariat of the Middle East Studies Association, who have been wonderfully supportive and helpful. I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Dr. Anne H. Betteridge, MESA Executive Director, and her staff not only for their efficiency but also for the friendliness and gentle humor that turned business into pleasure. (2) The Cambridge University Press, particularly James Alexander, Anna Halasz, and the rest of the staff of the Journals Division, with whom I worked closely and harmoniously for five years over a whole range of problems involving eight sets of proofs per year, publication schedules, changes in editorial guidelines, journal exchanges, new appointments for the *IJMES* editorial board, and the *International Directory of Middle East Specialists*. (3) Tufts University, which funded and housed the Editorial Office, and not once made me feel how burdensome the effort was in these days of recession and financial cuts. For their support, I thank Melvin Bernstein, Wayne Bouchard, Sol Gittleman, Marilyn Glater, Jack Reilly, Steven P. Marrone, Thomas W. Murnane, Jeswald W. Salacuse, as well as the Department of History and the Southwest Asia Program directed by Andrew Hess at the Fletcher School. There are many other people to thank for their support at the university; they include the students and staff who worked for the Journal; Barbara Alarie, Gladys Sandman, and Nilima Bhatia, who so frequently came to my rescue, the first with regard to computers and the others with regard to staff issues. (4) The *IJMES* consultants who handled every manuscript and book review submitted, and helped standardize the Journal's style and transliteration. I am particularly grateful to Thomas M. Dolan, who continued to help us with the Journal after he moved away from Massachusetts, and to Margaret Ševčenko for the sheer excellence of the standards she set and for being so predictably prompt and efficient. (5) The *IJMES* Editorial Board and the Book Review Editors who have been simply wonderful in giving their time so generously and in contributing to editorial policies;

their support has been indispensable and I will miss having regular opportunities to work with them. As one can tell from this list of people and all the others too numerous to mention, *IJMES* is a team effort, and I have enjoyed taking part in it.

One of the rewards of my job as editor has been the opportunity to stay on top of current research in our field, and I made a concerted effort to encourage young researchers and to publish their work. While in many other parts of the world, senior scholars practically monopolize the field of Middle East studies, the number and quality of young people in the United States who now work and publish on the Middle East are sure signs of a promising future. One danger to the future balance of the research in our field is that a disproportionate number of scholars and future scholars work on the politics and history of the contemporary period to the detriment of research on earlier times. However, the quality of their research is improving in the premodern and modern periods alike.

There are two areas I wish to mention in which I might have acted differently and did not. One is that I continued the established *IJMES* policy of relying on peer review to determine what should be published, and in fact often appealed to several reviewers at a time. Some—a small number, I must add—felt that procedure, although democratic, brought with it the danger of democracy, namely mediocrity. It is true that on occasion the authors of article manuscripts were exceptional scholars who had little to learn from the evaluations they received, but in my opinion most of the time the systematic and heavy use of the peer-review system improved the articles. It also helped integrate the community of Middle East scholars by increasing their participation in the development of the field. We are becoming more and more a “small world,” but in the best sense of that expression.

The other choice I made was not to devote single issues to particular themes. When I first took on the job, I thought I would try to do so, but I found it difficult to achieve for several reasons. For one, *IJMES* publishes only a very small percentage of the manuscripts it receives as it is, and to devote entire issues to special themes would have meant accepting even fewer manuscripts because it would reduce the issues per year available for general articles. In addition, solicited articles on particular topics can end up being less carefully thought out and researched than articles voluntarily submitted and judged on their merits. Finally, an article solicited for a particular topic has to be accepted even at standards sometimes lower than those applied to other articles, and that would mean a lowering of the high standards of the Journal.

During my years as editor, I made a concerted effort to encourage publication in neglected topics and areas. I also made new appointments to the Editorial Board with a view to encouraging relatively neglected fields, such as literature and women's studies. From first to last, I made it one of my goals to improve general readability by insisting on quality of style as well as substance for articles published in *IJMES*.

In one particular area, I was unable to make much headway. Whenever I could, I sought to encourage the publication of comparative research, but that proved to be an area much talked about but rarely practiced, judging by the pool of articles sent to *IJMES*. We certainly did not turn down comparative analyses of substance, and if so few were published it is partly because those who write them turn to

more general periodicals and partly because there is still a great deal to do in that area, for any weakness in the Journal's publications reflects a more general weakness in the field. We must try to become better acquainted with research being done in other fields and to make our research available to those other scholars. To do that, we must continue to encourage analytical and comparative contributions.

My successor R. Stephen Humphreys of the University of California at Santa Barbara brings great erudition and competence to the task. As I pass the baton to the new editor, I am confident that he will continue the *IJMES* editorial tradition that blends proven excellence with innovation. For myself, I look forward to rejoining full time the community of scholars of the Middle East, a community almost coterminous with the readership of *IJMES*.