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*Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualizing
Community* ed. by Anthony Gorman & Sossie Kasbarian (review)

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ANTHONY GORMAN & SOSSIE KASBARIAN, Eds.,
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Anthony Gorman and Sossie Kasbarian's edited volume *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualizing Community* was published in 2015, yet, even after five years, remains a unique effort to illustrate the circumstances precipitating the complex diasporic experience of various communities in the Middle East. The book constituted a seminal volume that pushed the boundaries of the field at a time when the very meaning of "diaspora" was redefined from a Eurocentric perspective that substantially disregarded communities within the Middle East as diaspora groups. This trend in diaspora studies continues even today. Diasporas have become a contentious topic in recent decades, and many scholars and practitioners are quickly constructing a literature on their influence as non-state actors. However, this literature tends to focus solely on the Global South to Global North nexus, only recently emphasizing the utility of diaspora groups for development projects, peacebuilding efforts in conflict zones, or democratization in their homelands. The core argument revolves around what diasporas can transfer to their homelands from their Western experiences. This book challenges these perspectives, demonstrating that, in the modern Middle East, experiences of desiring a homeland, transnational memory, host state reception of diasporic identity, and exile and displacement resonate with numerous communities residing in the region. Gorman and Kasbarian's volume presents a well-written introduction followed by eleven case studies. Its approach is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, enriching the book's empirical and theoretical content and the analytical discussions each case study incorporates. This is not an ordinary edited volume that contains chapters stronger than others or ill-suited to the overall theme. Each chapter is of high quality and boasts extensive fieldwork and research, highlights the narratives of communities, and,

in doing so, engages in academic debates on diasporas. The book encapsulates salient discussions on the legacies of the Ottoman Empire, colonization, and minority issues in the Middle East from a historical perspective while concurrently holding diasporic discussions beyond the confines of non-Muslim minorities.

The introduction explains the rationale of the book by contextualizing the heterogeneity of the region. The Middle East has been fraught with conflict as well as boasted decades of peace among various communities from different religious or ethnic backgrounds. Displacement, precarious ethnic and religious statuses, persecution, and human rights violations have been integral to the region's political history. The book sought to address these issues with thorough case studies on the creation of diasporic identities, how old and new communities are "established, consolidated and maintained in a diaspora, rooted in their host states but oriented toward a transnational nation, vision or homeland" (2-3). The editors indicate that their aspiration was to "unveil and articulate a counter-history to the prevailing state narratives" in the Middle East (3). The introduction sets the scene for the subsequent chapters by first illustrating the historical background for the region from a diasporic lens and then summarizing current debates on diasporic identity. The editors explain the core themes of the book as (a) the homeland—real or imagined—from a perspective of nostalgia and return, acknowledging the fluid and variable nature of the concept of home, (b) critical analysis of the host state with a specific focus on the constant negotiation of identities in various and evolving state contexts (15), (c) the significance of citizenship and belonging, and (d) the self-perception, identity, and negotiation of communities. The book comprises four parts: "Post-Ottoman Reconfigurations;" "Exile, 'Return,' and Resistance;" "Community in Host States - Establishing New Homes;" and "New Diasporas."

The book's first part is its longest, itself containing four chapters. The first chapter, by Haris Theodorelis-Rigas, focuses on the Greek Orthodox (Rum) communities in Syria and Turkey. Broadening the discussion beyond William Safran's conceptualization of a diaspora, Theodorelis-Rigas defines the Rum communities as "accidental diasporas," a term coined by Rogers Brubaker. He discusses host country policies of secularization and their impact on three communities: the Greek-speaking Romioi of Istanbul, the Arabic-speaking Rum of Syria, and the Arabic-speaking Rum of Antakya. The merit of the chapter is its contestation of the idea of having a homeland in one fixed original location, as it demonstrates the possibility of

dispersal as a corollary of national borders changing over time. Ehud R. Toledano penned the second chapter, in which he delves into the Egyptian-Ottoman Diaspora through the biography of Muhammad Farid, a member of a distinguished Ottoman-Egyptian elite family. Complementing the arguments of the previous chapter, Toledano demonstrates how the Egyptian-Ottoman experience linked the old homeland, the Ottoman capital of Istanbul, to a new one. Georgy Chochiev's chapter then shifts the focus toward the evolution of a North Caucasian community in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Turkey. As in the previous chapters, the author maintains a historical perspective to explain the construction of a diasporic homeland for the Ossetians. The photos in the chapter originate from different archives and enrich the text with visual dimensions. The fourth chapter focuses on the Italians of Egypt. Anthony Gorman's extensive research reveals the experiences of the Italian diaspora with the introduction of personal narratives as quotes in the chapter. Personal accounts and photos help readers understand diasporic trajectories in colonial and postcolonial eras.

The second part begins with Zeynep Turan and Anny Bakalian whose chapter unpacks the link between diaspora tourism and identity through visits by the Armenian diaspora to Eastern Turkey. The authors argue that these visits allow Armenians to reclaim their past and, in line with book's core aim, to challenge state narratives by reframing their own story. In doing so, Armenian travelers "find consolidation in the tragedy that befell their people" (174). The chapter embodies an example for understanding the complexity of diasporic memory and the hereditary transmission of traumatic experiences between exiled groups. Chapter six, written by Maria Holt, focuses on the experiences of Palestinian women and emphasizes stories of identity and resistance. The author conducted extensive field research in Lebanon in 2006-2007 and 2011, and adapted a methodology that considers women's oral history as "feminist encounter" (215). Her research indicated that women utilize memories to counter politics of denial and, by employing acts of resistance, amplify their own stories.

Sossie Kasbarian's chapter in part three pertains to the Armenian community in Cyprus and examines their diasporic condition from a position of being "others within" (244). The chapter links the Armenian experiences of transnationalism and exile with their circumstances under Greek Cypriot nationalism, which counters Turkish Cypriot nationalism in times of conflict and contestation. May Farah's contribution highlights the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, focusing specifically on their imaginations of the

homeland. Farah's chapter comprises third-generation Palestinian young adult refugees living in and outside refugee camps in Lebanon. The text evinces the ways in which exiled Palestinians preserve their identity and unity in refugee camps and form transnational connections to their homeland, no longer "bounded, singular or stable" (290). The final part, "New Diasporas," includes three chapters by M.H. Ilias, Elisa Pascucci, and Jumana Bayeh. Ilias writes about Malayalee migrants in the Gulf and their translocal politics. The chapter scrutinizes the concepts of translocality and political space by using the Malayalee experience as a case study. The author shows that the Malayalee diaspora mobilizes however their concerns are not necessarily global. Also, their political mobilization is not free from political constraints despite the fact that these diaspora politics are performed transnationally. Pascucci's chapter discusses young Iraqi refugees in Cairo which is a topic that has been understudied as most of the research on Iraqi refugees focus on Europe. The author sets a theoretical framework by using Jean-Francois Bayart's concept of "social production of waiting" and analyses the everyday experiences of Iraqi youth from a variety of perspectives including education, spaces of consumption and solidarity. Bayeh's chapter details the meaning of "home" in Lebanese diaspora literature. After examining Lebanese diaspora writers' literary texts, the author finds that "home" is represented in a diverse number of ways. The author's findings challenge the conformist understandings of "home" in diaspora literature and makes a call for readers to think about more creative and fluid ways of imagining what actually "home" means for the diaspora. Each chapter discretely establishes how diasporas find new venues to articulate their identities, shaped by time and space.

Overall, the book is both a welcome addition to diaspora and Middle Eastern studies and a great benefit for scholars and students in these fields. The book's explications of fluidity in the notion of diaspora re-contextualizes common concepts such as home, exile, and memory from an alternative perspective and correlates old and new diaspora communities within theoretical discussions. It succeeds in offering the field contributions that are innovative and original and the chapters are both theoretically and empirically valuable. Considering the persistence of displacement and exile in the Middle East as a consequence of proxy wars, inter- and intrastate conflicts, and genocides, the concept of diaspora will remain a germane tool to analyze the experiences of emergent internally displaced persons and migrants.