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## Editorial Foreword

Andrew Arsan

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## EDITORIAL FOREWORD



This issue of *Mashriq & Mahjar* brings together five articles concerned, in different ways, with the making and remaking of diasporic community, with the constant compromises and creative reconstructions and appropriations required of migrants eager to make a home for themselves in new locales. Moving between New York City, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Detroit and Dearborn – places so central to the burgeoning field of Eastern Mediterranean migration studies that some might consider them its *loci classici* – these five contributions compel us to look on these seemingly familiar sites in unfamiliar ways. While some do so by undoing master narratives and pervasive myths to reveal the complex social realities that lie beneath, others attempt to recover lives that have been forgotten, cast out of the historical record by the enormous condescension of posterity, or to reconstruct the discursive strategies and social tactics to which Middle Eastern men and women resorted. But all, despite their different emphases and approaches, prove acutely sensitive to the changing ways in which historical actors sought to embed their own individual lives in broader terrains of belonging and to craft new communities of sentiment and interest.

In the first of these articles, Salim Yaqub ably traces the evolution of African-American views on the Arab-Israeli conflict between the Six Days War of 1967 and the late 1970s. Motivated by biblical Zionism and the close ties between Jewish and black civil rights organizations, bodies such as the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Convention continued to view Israel as a haven of democracy and a model of self-affirmation through the mid- to late-1960s. Only groups like the Black Panther party and the Student National Coordination Committee dissented from the majority opinion, expressing sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians. However, this situation had begun to change by the mid-1970s, under the pressure of developments both domestic and international. The

growing willingness of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab states to contemplate diplomatic engagement with Israel, Yaqub argues, was important, opening up a space for African-American moderates to voice criticism of particular Israeli policies without having to renege entirely upon their old friend. Significant, too, was the Andrew Young affair of 1979, which saw Young, the United States' first African-American ambassador to the United Nations forced to resign for his decision to meet a PLO delegate. But equally crucial, Yaqub demonstrates, was the growth of organizations like the National Arab American Association and the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, whose members cannily drew upon the language of civil rights and shared local political concerns to forge a new sense of political community with African-American leaders like Jesse Jackson. (For another perspective on this topic see Pamela Pennock's *Third World Alliances: Arab-American Activists at American Universities, 1967-1973*).

Paulo Pinto, meanwhile, examines the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which religion, ethnicity, and nationality have become entwined and entangled categories of belonging for Middle Eastern migrants in twentieth-century Brazil. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and personal testimony as much as on historical records, Pinto highlights the central role that religious ritual, institutions and associations have played in the efforts of Lebanese-Syrian migrants and their descendants to define, and re-define, their relations to one another and their place in Brazilian society. There is no doubt, he argues, that Catholicism continues to serve as a powerful means of incorporation into the Brazilian elite, a sure source of cultural capital for those who have moved up through the ranks of the business world. However, we should not allow the dominant narrative of Christian Lebanese migration and the continuing importance of Catholicism as a cultural attribute to obscure the persistent efforts of other religious communities, whether Christian or Muslim, to define and redefine themselves. Maronite, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic, Druze, 'Alawis, Shi'a and Sunni – all have resorted to similar tactics, building churches and mosques, establishing cultural associations, schools, charitable foundations, and perpetuating ties with the Eastern Mediterranean. But religion has not always served to underscore ethnic particularity and confessional difference. At times, it has proven a useful means of building a broader sense of 'Syro-Lebanese' identity, or bringing Middle Eastern traditions into harmony

with Brazilian habits. Whatever its uses, though, religion remains a key resource of community.

Like Pinto, Sally Howell points to the growing salience of religious discourse as a marker of ethnic identity in the late twentieth century. Howell does so through a close examination of the political and social conflicts over space that broke out in the Southend of Dearborn from the 1960s onwards. Leading us through the changing organizational landscape of this locality, she shows that the multi-ethnic militancy of the 1960s, embodied in the Southend Dearborn Community Council, increasingly gave way to distinctive 'Arab-American' concerns as organizations like the AAUG came to the fore, and then to a novel sense of Islamic belonging, as Yemeni migrants arrived, taking over key religious institutions. But Howell's is not simply a story set in Dearborn, but one about the making of Dearborn—about the emergence of a particular idea of this township as an intrinsically Muslim locality, the heart of American Islam, but also about the lingering presence of an older narrative of the Southend as an Arab neighborhood, if one defined not by ethnic or religious particularity but by diversity and comity. Rather than taking place for granted, and treating Dearborn as a mere inert backdrop, Howell proves alive to the ways in which community and place are bound together in a mutually constitutive relationship, showing the way in which the narratives that began to swirl around these contests shaped the sometimes discordant way in which locals and outsiders alike have come to understand Dearborn.

In similar fashion, Linda Jacobs seeks to unsettle familiar narratives of Eastern Mediterranean migration. Moving away from the traditional focus on the economic activities of the 'Syrians' of New York City—and, in particular, on peddling—she retraces the trajectories of the entrepreneurs who cared for them in birth and life. In particular, she homes in on the lives of female midwives and male doctors. The former, she shows, were looked upon warily by health reformers who saw their foreign origins, lack of formal training, and willingness to perform 'criminal' operations—in other words, backroom abortions—as worthy only of condemnation. In time, these women, whose activities provided them with a valuable source of independent income, gradually gave way to male doctors, as birth and pregnancy came to be seen as medical conditions, to be treated only by those with the requisite expertise. But this broader shift away from female care towards male expertise, Jacobs demonstrates, was compounded by the particular circumstances and predilections of Eastern Mediterranean

migrants, who came to prefer the ministrations of men who seemed the very embodiment of successful assimilation. Anglophone and trained in American missionary establishments to a man, these physicians were as much brokers of community as providers of care, and their bourgeois lifestyles and prominent participation in the associational and political life of the city provided an influential blueprint for others to follow.

This process of bourgeois self-affirmation and political claim-making is also central to Anne Monsour's piece. Moving from the Americas to early twentieth-century Australia, Monsour examines the varying responses of local administrators and lawmakers to the arrival of Eastern Mediterranean migrants, the halting evolution of a juridical model that classified these men and women as Asiatic aliens, and the discursive repertoire on which they drew to contest this definition. Using arrival statistics and data on residential distribution and occupation profiles, Monsour is able to show the way in which the elaboration of the regime of migration controls known as the 'White Australia' policy shaped the choices of new arrivals. For this set of checks not only put many off travelling to Australia, compounding the discouraging effects of distance; it also led those who made it to New South Wales and Queensland to adopt an unspoken convention that they would not cluster together, avoiding direct competition with one another. This was a small community, then, but one whose very exiguity meant it was policed by strict prescriptions. And its thin ranks led it, too, to define itself in particular terms. Far from challenging the legal regime the Australian state built up, Eastern Mediterranean migrants queried its decision to regard them as 'Asiatic.' Christian, commercially successful, solvent, civilized and settled, they were intrinsically different from the floating population of Chinese or Indian migrant laborers who flooded the goldfields of Australia in the same period. To exclude Syrians because they were not white, the community's champions argued, was to fundamentally misapprehend their cultural make-up.

These are all quite distinctive pieces, which move between time periods, places and disciplinary approaches. But, despite their differences, these five articles all remind us that community cannot be treated with scholarly complacency, as a natural by-product of shared origin, or ethnic, linguistic or religious affinity. On the contrary, communities must be made and remade, projects in social infrastructure that require the elaboration and revision of everyday practices, the careful crafting of discursive strategies and claims and

the investment of hard-won social, political, economic and political capital. All things considered, then, the making of community is hard work that leaves rough calluses on the fragile surface of individual lives.