CELEBRATING A DECADE OF MIDDLE EAST GENDER STUDIES
REFLECTIONS ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
JOURNAL OF MIDDLE EAST WOMEN’S STUDIES

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This special issue celebrates the tenth anniversary of the Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies (JMEWS)—a joyful decade marked by the dramatic expansion of path-breaking new scholarship in Middle East gender studies. In this Introduction, I briefly trace the history of JMEWS and its parent organization, the Association for Middle East Women’s Studies (AMEWS), to mark some important historical milestones and to recognize those who have helped AMEWS and JMEWS to flourish.

JMEWS is the professional journal of AMEWS, one of the major affiliate organizations of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America. AMEWS was founded thirty years ago in 1984. Suad Joseph of the University of California-Davis led the way as the organization’s founder and first president. She was supported in her efforts by a dedicated group of Middle East feminist scholars from a wide variety of institutions and fields.

Early on and in the days before the Internet, AMEWS hosted a lively newsletter. The AMEWS newsletter was edited for some time by Middle East historian Eleanor Doumato and later by Middle East economist Jennifer Olmsted and was sent by mail to all AMEWS members. However, over the years, it was recognized that a newsletter alone could not meet the needs of the growing community of Middle East feminist scholars. Thus, in the early 2000s, a team of senior AMEWS members, including miriam cooke, Sondra Hale, and Suad Joseph, formed an AMEWS publication committee, headed by Hale. Together, they drafted a proposal for an AMEWS-affiliated journal, to be called the Journal of
Middle East Women’s Studies (JMEWS). Cooke pitched the idea for the journal to Janet Rabinowitch, then director of Indiana University Press (IUP). (Fortuitously, cooke and Rabinowitch happened to be seated together on an airplane while returning from a MESA conference.) This represented the beginning of JMEWS’s decade-long affiliation (2004-14) with IUP, a leading publisher of feminist journals.

At IUP, JMEWS was ably guided by a strong publications team, headed by Kathryn (Kate) Caras and Judith Caldwell. JMEWS’s editorial home was based at the University of Michigan (UM), where I was asked to serve as JMEWS’s founding editor. At that time, I was directing UM’s Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies (CMENAS), which was based in UM’s International Institute (II). The director of the II, noted Middle East political scientist Mark Tessler, provided strong support for the journal. Fortuitously, we were also able to hire Alyssa Surges as JMEWS’s managing editor, a position that she had already held at the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). Logistical support for the journal was provided by UM-CMENAS under the able administration of Marya Ayyash. In short, JMEWS was “birthed” in Ann Arbor, Michigan from 2004 to 2006, with publication of the first two volumes (three issues each) before the journal rotated to its second home in California.

After two years in Michigan, historian Nancy Gallagher at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), who was at the time president of AMEWS, expressed an interest in editing JMEWS, soon convincing Sondra Hale, anthropologist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), to co-edit. They decided the journal would have to be housed at UCLA, with subsidiary support from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Therefore, from 2006 to 2010, JMEWS thrived at UCLA under the auspices of the Women’s Studies Program (WSP, now the Department of Gender Studies), chaired by Christine Littleton, the Center for the Study of Women, directed by Kathleen McHugh, and with additional support from the G.E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies (CNES), directed by anthropologist Susan Slyomovics. Diane James was hired as JMEWS’s second managing editor, and Lara Deeb, anthropologist at the University of California, Irvine and then Scripps College, served as book review editor. As for funding support, the new director of CNES, Susan Slyomovics, had tipped
the balance of UCLA's agreement to fund the journal by insisting it be part of her hiring package. Two UCLA deans of social science, therefore, one after the other, Scott Waugh and Sandro Duranti, provided a crucial four years of financial and institutional support for JMEWS.¹

With JMEWS now firmly entrenched in California, David Marshall, dean of Humanities and Fine Arts at UCSB, provided funding for a new initiative, the JMEWS Distinguished Lecture Series. Beginning in 2008, JMEWS launched an annual distinguished lecturership, with anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod (Columbia University, 2008), Susan Slyomovics (UCLA, 2009), and Suad Joseph (UC-Davis, 2010) delivering the first three distinguished lectures. These lectures became the focal point of day-long conferences, in which other scholars of Middle East gender studies were encouraged to present their work. Furthermore, a JMEWS Graduate Student Paper Prize was launched in 2008, with the first prizewinning essay by Sophie Richter Devroe (University of Exeter) being published in JMEWS Volume 4, Number 2. (Publication of each year's prizewinner would be one of the benefits of the award).²

At the end of the University of California period (2006-10), JMEWS moved to Yale University, where I had taken a new position as professor of anthropology and international affairs and chair of the Council on Middle East Studies (CMES) in 2008. As part of my hiring package, I had asked for the future right to bring JMEWS to Yale. Ian Shapiro, the director of The Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, was extremely supportive in this regard, providing a generous financial and institutional commitment. Thus, in 2010, JMEWS moved from California to Connecticut for the next four-year period.

During these past four years, JMEWS has been beautifully housed in Yale's CMES and supported by a wonderful managing editor, Bonnie Rose Schulman, as well as CMES staff members Lora LeMosy and Amaar Al-Hayder. Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, a former Yale postdoctoral fellow (Anthropology and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies) and now an assistant professor at the University of Nevada-Reno, has served as JMEWS's book review editor. In addition, several Yale faculty members, including Narges Erami (Anthropology), Zareena Grewal (American Studies), and Jonathan Wyrtzen (Sociology), have served on the JMEWS editorial advisory board and helped with the annual conference at Yale.

At Yale, we launched a JMEWS web site (www.jmews.org) to allow
for easy online manuscript submission. (The web site was beautifully constructed by Touraj Rahimi of Olibro Design.) In 2011, we also initiated an annual JMEWS Book Award to recognize the most outstanding, solo-authored volume in Middle East gender studies published during the previous year. The 2011 winner was Marlé Hammond (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) for Beyond Elegy: Classical Arabic Women’s Poetry in Context. The 2012 winner was Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet (University of Pennsylvania) for Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran. And the most recent 2013 award goes to Fida J. Adely (Georgetown University) for Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress.

Yale also continued the JMEWS Distinguished Lecture Series, with lectures presented by political scientist Diane Singerman (American University, 2011), historian Judith E. Tucker (Georgetown University, 2012), anthropologist Nadje Al-Ali (SOAS, University of London, 2013), and anthropologist Sondra Hale (UCLA, 2014). Each distinguished lecture has been part of a day-long conference, featuring the research of other Middle East gender scholars. While our first JMEWS conference at Yale in 2011 included only one panel of four presenters, the final JMEWS Distinguished Lecture and Tenth Anniversary Celebration, held on April 3, 2014, in Yale’s MacMillan Center and Department of Anthropology, included four panels of eighteen scholars, including several who had traveled to Connecticut from the Middle East.

After four years at Yale and ten years as an Indiana University Press journal, JMEWS is transitioning to a new editorial home in North Carolina. Volume 11 will be published by Duke University Press, under the co-editorship of miriam cooke and Frances Hasso of Duke University, and Banu Gökarıksel of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Amy Aisen Kallander (Syracuse University) will serve as JMEWS’s new book review editor and Tamar Shirinian (Duke University) its managing editor.

In this final issue of JMEWS, Volume 10, Number 3—the last to be published under my editorship at Yale—I want to thank those colleagues who have contributed to the success of JMEWS over its first ten years. This includes several stellar casts of Associate Editors and Editorial Advisory Board Members, who have served as willing peer reviewers, prize committee members, and generous feminist “sisters.” This also includes
the many scholars who have submitted their work to JMEWS over the past ten years.

Indeed, the ever-widening array of submissions from scholars working in numerous countries, disciplines, languages, and subjects and at different stages of their career is a stunning testament to the growth and dynamism of the field of Middle East gender studies. For example, in our final JMEWS Annual Report (2012-13), we were able to track fifty-two manuscripts submitted by sixty-four authors, forty-two of whom were women from sixteen different countries in Euro-America and the Middle East (as well as one scholar from Singapore). Research conducted in sixteen different Middle Eastern nations was highlighted by these scholars, working in five Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hebrew, and Armenian). Indeed, scholars who speak Arabic as their first language now exceed native English speakers in their scholarly submissions to JMEWS, demonstrating how gender scholarship within the Middle Eastern region itself continues to grow. Finally, it is important to note the wide range of academic fields now represented in JMEWS. During the past year, scholars working in twenty different academic disciplines submitted their manuscripts to JMEWS—not only from the primary disciplines of gender/women’s/sexuality studies, Middle Eastern/Near Eastern studies, sociology, and anthropology, but also from international relations/global studies/political science, comparative literature, history, religious/Islamic studies, education, theater studies, law, public health, and a variety of other disciplines. Many of these manuscripts were interdisciplinary in nature, and many of them were written by a younger generation of feminist scholars.3

It is the "new generation" who will take the lead in both JMEWS and AMEWS in the future. Already, an exciting new AMEWS e-Bulletin has been launched in conjunction with the Women and Memory Forum and the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSA) at Lebanese American University. Now in its third issue and edited by a group of young, dynamic feminists, the AMEWS e-Bulletin is full of news, editorials, feminist histories, and scholarly reports, and is intended "for activists and academics—and everyone in between."

In short, we have much to celebrate as a Middle East feminist-scholarly community at the end of JMEWS’s first decade. Thus, this tenth anniversary special issue is intended as a celebration of our JMEWS
From left to right: JMEWS Book Review Editor Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, Managing Editor Bonnie Rose Schulman, Editor Marcia C. Inhorn, and Editorial Advisory Board Members Ellen Gruenbaum, Nancy Gallagher, Sondra Hale, and Diane E. King gather around the cake, a replication of the journal’s first issue, at the tenth anniversary celebration. Nancy Gallagher and Sondra Hale are also former JMEWS Co-Editors.

achievements. To that end, the issue includes three distinguished lectures—two by JMEWS Distinguished Lecturers Judith Tucker and Sondra Hale, as well as my own Middle East Distinguished Lecture delivered at the 2013 American Anthropological Association annual conference in recognition of my Middle East gender scholarship and service to JMEWS. In addition, this special issue includes the 2013 JMEWS graduate prize-winning essay by sociologist Nazanin Shahrookni (Harvard University; Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley). It also features a recognition and review of Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress by anthropologist Fida J. Adely (Georgetown University), recipient of the 2013 JMEWS Book Award.

In conclusion, this tenth anniversary special issue—filled with exceptional theoretical insights, rich empirical research findings, and provocative suggestions for the future of Middle East gender studies—is proof not only of the spectacular achievements of this field, but of the
many ways in which JMEWS has served to shape, nurture, and expand Middle East gender studies during a crucial period of modern Middle East history. It is my hope that the next ten years will bring JMEWS to new heights, building upon its first decade of success as the leading journal in Middle East women’s and gender studies.

NOTES

1. Thanks go to Sondra Hale for helping me reconstruct the journal’s history, especially during its tenure at UCLA and UCSB. In general, Sondra’s editorial advice and guidance has been invaluable.

2. JMEWS Graduate Student Paper Prize Winners include: Sarah A. Kaiksow (published in Volume 4, Number 2), Sunny Daly (Volume 6, Number 2), Rania Kassab Sweis (Volume 8, Number 2), Marie Duboc (Volume 9, Number 3), and Nazanin Shahrokni (this issue).

3. Thanks go to Bonnie Rose Schulman for writing these annual reports and tracking all of these crucial statistics. She has been an extraordinary managing editor of JMEWS during the past four years.