

Generations

FRANCES S. HASSO

Karl Mannheim published an essay in 1923, “The Problem of Generations,” that would become famous for its theorization of social transformation (Mannheim 1954). He argued for the formative and sustained influence of participation in historically important moments on the consciousness of cohorts experiencing them. Rather than approach age as a biological stage, he regarded it socially as it interacted with experiences in a historical moment. He recognized nevertheless that younger people are more open to participating in and being reshaped by intense historical events. Few scholars have applied this theory to social transformation and activism outside Western contexts. In 2001 I published “Feminist Generations? The Long-Term Impact of Social Movement Involvement on Palestinian Women’s Lives,” which considered the generative impact of feminist political socialization and mobilization on the consciousness and choices of Palestinian women (Hasso 2001). This thematic issue of the *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* was inspired by generations in these senses and more. It examines biological, political, and social reproduction and change at multiple scales.

“Pieces of Us,” the lead article by sisters Munira, Yasmine, and Rola Khayyat, focuses on a Saudi family’s formation on the Aramco campus in Dhahran from the 1940s through the 1960s. There the extraction of oil to reinforce US imperialism also fed repressive forms of local government in Saudi Arabia. The authors’ account of their lives during and since the Lebanese civil war shows how imperialism manifested itself at the scales of intimacy, embodiment, and desire across multiple generations and space. These processes traversed the public/private dichotomy and fundamentally worked through intimate domains. In “Redefining Paternal Filiation through DNA Testing,” Delfina Serrano-Ruano traces how an increase in the proportion and number of children born out of wedlock in contemporary

Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia has forced secular courts and Islamic jurists to reconsider notions of legitimate family and belonging, if not the injustice informing gendered and sexual relations. Serrano-Ruano demonstrates how a body of *fiqh* knowledge, often thought to be stable, shifts as a result of public debate and social and sexual transformations. While Serrano-Ruano weighs the consequences of unauthorized forms of sex and reproduction in the Maghreb, L. L. Wynn and Angel M. Foster, in “Muftis in the Matrix,” examine English- and Arabic-language online fatwas about emergency contraception. They find that English fatwas are more likely than Arabic fatwas to be negative or uninformed in their public advice about this form of reproductive control technology. Further, Wynn and Foster note the comparative lack of controversy about emergency contraception in Muslim-majority countries, given the relative openness of Islamic jurisprudence on fertility control and family planning. All three articles illustrate how intimate and political lives and stories are imbricated.

The themes of biological reproduction, sexual health and agency, and motherhood as ideologically and socially experienced run through a number of essays in the Review and Third Space sections of this issue. These include interventions from scholars, artists, public-health specialists, and feminist activists, most of whom would refuse these categorical distinctions since they operate from multiple positionalities. Tensions and conflicts are organized around class inequality, racialized demographic concerns, anxieties about resources, heteronormativity, and sex-gender inequality. The essay “Who Carries the Water?” by the artists Fatma Belkis and İz Öztat, is unique in this issue in its attention to human and nonhuman generation and relationality. Addressing the intensified production of electricity in the valleys of Anatolia, it discusses cosmologies being reclaimed by activist women who insist on mutual and respectful relations between human and nonhuman life forms. Rather than reinforcing human sovereignty and exploitation over environment and nonhuman life, Belkis and Öztat, with their activist interlocutors, recognize rivers, plants, and nonhuman animals as generative forces also seeking to run free.

We have seen in our lifetime the destruction and the repressive forms generated by multiple wars in the region and the world, as well as the environmental and human calamities wrought by predatory capitalism, racism, colonialism, and imperialism. All extract labor and resources, concentrate wealth in the hands of a few, and have devastating consequences — what mainstream economists nevertheless call “externalities” — on human and nonhuman life and material culture. They also produce new borders, many etched with concrete, fencing, and cages and guarded by armed police, soldiers, and bureaucrats who store the documents and acquire the biometrics. Other borders, trafficking in fear of the other, racialize religious and ethnic differences and are drawn into minds, bodies, and communities.

This issue of *JMEWS* shows how these dynamics generate multiple forms of resistance and creative response. A number of essays and reviews, including those by

members of Lebanon's Feminist Bloc, founded during Beirut's 2015–16 garbage crisis, illustrate the conflicts and disagreements that often occur within activist cohorts (e.g., between men and women) and between activist cohorts whose visions and strategies are shaped by different priorities, conditions, and experiences.

This issue also engages the politics and intimate registers of reading, writing, film, and photographs. Our understanding of past and present depends on who, how, and what we remember. Together, the articles and reviews ask us to consider what we treat as an archive and how feminist scholars generate knowledge, especially given our frequent interest in nonarchival questions and subjects. Many of the topics we examine and people we care to study are not deemed important enough to document by state or other official entities. Moreover, water, wood, DNA, and biological bodies — materialities addressed by authors in this issue — are archives. They record and store environments, genealogies, the food and pollutants we produce and consume, our cultural and social practices, and historical conditions. Reading archival material is never unmediated: generations, after all, rely on erasures, burials, overdetermined inherited understandings — even demolitions.

FRANCES S. HASSO is an editor of the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* (volumes 11–14) and associate professor in gender, sexuality and feminist studies, sociology, and history at Duke University. Contact: frances.hasso@duke.edu.

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