EDITOR’S NOTE

The revolutionary process in the Middle East is currently in full swing affecting its societies in unprecedented ways. Since the Arab upheaval that began in Tunisia in December 2010 war has spread dramatically to engulf much of the Arab world, and those Arab states that war has not reached are sites of political crises and instability (mass protests, violence, etc.).

As part of the Middle East region, Turkey and Iran have played important roles in the region’s politics as competitors or rivals. Their roles have impacted the region significantly. Turkey has also intervened (in)directly in the Syrian conflict, often in coordination with Arab states, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and with Western states, particularly the US, France and Britain.

Colonial and imperial powers had conspired against and occupied much of the Arab world for centuries. Muhammad ‘Alī, for example, opened up to Europe to modernize Egypt and consolidate his power. He introduced cosmopolitanism to Egypt and created modern architectural projects. However, Muhammad ‘Alī’s nineteenth-century modern state did not last long against the bulwark of Western powers allied with the Ottoman Empire.

Westerners have generated Orientalist narratives about the “Other” that have been buttressed by a very limited number of Arabic novels translated into English that reinforce the stereotypes about Arabs. This fact is made even more distressing because the novels have become part of the US undergraduate curriculum that is often taught by instructors with Orientalist views that, in fact, perpetuate and increase ignorance about the Arabs.

Orientalist views about the Arab world, and the Middle East region as a whole, are currently in full swing. The state of Israel perpetuates the dehumanization of the Palestinians within it and in the West, to continue the destruction of Palestinian society through stealing more of the land of Palestine and by the practice of apartheid against the indigenous Palestinians.

The articles herein address a number of issues discussed above.

Ayman’s article takes a historical perspective in discussing a critical difference between “competition” and “rivalry,” often used interchangeably in academic writings about the topic. The article paints a clear picture about Iranian-Turkish relations regarding Iraq, Syria and the Kurdish issue in the current period.

Gomaa and Raymond’s article argues that the selective and sparse translation of Arabic novels into English perpetuates the stereotypes prevalent in undergraduate
curricula of US universities. Instructors often convey Orientalist messages to their students about the Arab world through those novels.

El Ashmouni and Bartsch’s article discusses cosmopolitanism in Muhammad ‘Ali’s Egypt. His architectural patronage was for the purpose of consolidating power. The authors use Timothy Mitchell’s “enframing modernity” and Ulrich Beck’s “unintentional cosmopolitanism” to argue that ‘Ali’s architectural projects were a “side effect” in his attempt to realize his national and imperial ambitions. The “cosmopolitan lens” provides insights into the multiple cultural and political influences throughout Egypt’s history and lends a different perspective into why imperialist forces have thwarted ‘Ali’s ambitions just as they currently attempt to thwart protests against global capitalism and imperialism.