Editor's Note

The significance of "space" as an analytical category has been well established in the social sciences and humanities for many years. As a result of the "spatial turn" in the late 1970s and 1980s, "space" began to be treated both as a symbolic form of meaning and as playing a much greater role in historical processes. Indeed, as David Harvey taught us in his seminal work *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, space is not simply a neutral, abstract, and uniform category; rather, it is embedded with certain historical realities and processes. Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau, among others, introduced and developed the idea of space as fundamental in the exercise of power, whether imaginary or real, and as directly linked to the formation of social identities. Indeed, the connection between space and power is strongly related to the construction, ownership, and conflict over boundaries and the inclusion and exclusion from certain spaces in different contexts: national, urban, legal, social, and cultural.

This issue of *Journal of Levantine Studies* focuses on the concept of space and its different uses and functions, as well as the practices of exclusion from it, mainly within the geographical context of late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine and contemporary Israel. Each of the articles in this volume considers a different type of space and examines its functions, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and different uses and functions within a particular reality—usually within the context of a certain matrix of power relations.

The urban space is discussed in **Dotan Halevy**'s article, "The Rear Side of the Front: Gaza and Its People in World War I." The city of Gaza is, sadly, often discussed in relation to the ongoing conflict and violence between Israel and the Palestinians. Discussions about the reconstruction efforts in Gaza are not new, as

Halevy demonstrates in his article, which offers a fresh and exciting contribution to the study of everyday life and the social history of World War I in Palestine. The article also attempts to bring the somewhat neglected and forgotten history of the city of Gaza, an important city in Ottoman Palestine (the third largest, after Jerusalem and Jaffa), to the fore. Halevy follows the story of the forced evacuation of Gaza's inhabitants and the destruction of the city during the war. He examines the fate of the citizens who were exiled and then follows some of their stories as they returned to the city after the war had ended. The story of Gaza during this period can be interestingly compared to other cases of evacuation of important cities during wartime and contrasted to the more ordered evacuation of the younger town of Tel Aviv during the same period. Halevy's focus on one locale, while considering the transformation of an urban space and its civil population, offers new research directions for the study of World War I in the Middle East.

Yair Lipshitz's article, "The City Square in the Performance of *Taanit*: From Rabbinic Space to Contemporary Jerusalem," also looks at the urban locale but from a very different context and perspective. Lipshitz provides an intertextual analysis of the performance action *Taanit* (Civil Fast) by the Israeli group Tnua Tsiburit (Public Movement), which first took place at Davidka Square in Jerusalem in December 2012. The performance, lasting for twenty-four hours, was initially established to commemorate Mohamed Bouazizi's setting himself on fire in Tunisia and was designed to explore the potential role of the body, and of bodily self-affliction, in social and political protest. This paper examines the potential embedded in using religion-based rituals that bring the self-affliction of individuals out to the public sphere for political purposes. Lipshitz thus offers an interplay between the analysis of an urban site and its public uses, on the one hand, and the way religious texts are being read and interpreted in the public space, on the other. In addition the paper follows the transition that occurs when turning a rabbinic text into an urban performance taking place in the city square and looks at the way the performance of *Taanit* reinterprets and transforms *textual* as much as *physical* spaces.

Ido Shahar's article, "Islamic Law as Indigenous Law: The Shari'a Courts in Israel from a Postcolonial Perspective," demonstrates how, when viewed from a postcolonial prism, the legal and institutional space and function of the shari'a courts in Israel are double faced and paradoxical: they constitute a site of state intervention and control, as well as a site of agency, autonomy, and opposition for the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Shahar discusses the formation of an inner space of a minority or subordinated population's religious law, within the larger framework of the general law of a state having a colonial or quasi-colonial character.

Shahar focuses on the differences in status and function of the shariʿa courts in the Ottoman and British Mandate eras and on the way the courts changed following the establishment of the State of Israel. He shows how, despite the different restrictions on the courts, they have in fact become spaces of autonomous action for an indigenous minority experiencing discrimination and sites of resistance of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

Henriette Dahan Kalev and **Maya Maor**'s article, "Skin Color Stratification in Israel Revisited," offers a critical analysis of the state of research regarding "colorism" within the Israeli context. The researchers compare the Israeli case to other national and cultural contexts, showing how colorism, while prevailing in Israel, is almost totally excluded from Israeli research. For them this is in fact an exclusion within an exclusion because the preservation of "color categories" has a clear stratifying function that should not be overlooked by scholars. For this reason they point to the need for a deeper and more systematic understanding of skin color stratification within the very sensitive Israeli context, and they look into the social implications of the ethnic/racial categories of colorism as a practice of exclusion. Last, they make suggestions for future studies that can shed light on the connection between skin color and ethnoracial relations, as well as on the conceptualization of the skin color hierarchy and the intersection of skin color and gendered stratification, all within the Israeli context.

Another fascinating example of exclusion and inclusion mechanisms in the context of the Jewish community in late Ottoman Palestine, and specifically in the context of Sephardi/Mizrahi women of this period, is offered in the Essay section. Here we are introduced to part of the story "Flora Saporto," which was written by Nehama Puhachevsky (1869–1934) and originally published in the Jerusalem newspaper *Haherut* in 1914. While analyzing the story and its writer's identity, **Moshe Behar** argues in his article, "The Foundational Antinativism of Mizrahi Literature," that it should be understood as the first protofeminist Mizrahi story written in Hebrew in the Middle East, despite the fact that it was written by an Ashkenazi Zionist writer. In addition to providing a literary analysis, Behar discusses the important concept of "nativism" in relation to the period and the various categories (Jews and Muslims, men and women, Mizrahim and Ashkenazim) that this text introduces and confronts.

Behar's analysis is joined by **Margalit Shilo**'s essay, "'Flora Saporto' as a Window into Changes in the Lives of Sephardi Women in Palestine at the End of the Ottoman Era." Here another dimension is added to the original story by placing the figure of Flora Saporto within the context of the changing lives and realities of

Sephardi women in late Ottoman Palestine. Shilo analyzes the position, roles, and, to a degree, the agency of Sephardi women during this time, demonstrating some common misperceptions while using the case of Flora Saporto as an example.

The *document* section goes beyond the Israeli and Palestinian confines, focusing on one of the greatest, most heartbreaking human tragedies to take place in the Levant in recent years. It is dedicated to poems written by Ezidi (Yezidi) poets, translated from Arabic by **Idan Barir** and edited by **Michael Dekel**. The poems were all written following the horrific events of August 2014, when the systematic destruction of the Ezidi community took place. The translated poems reflect and represent different facets of the Ezidis' collective trauma. As Idan Barir explains in his preface to these beautifully translated and touching poems, "'I Own Nothing Save My Dreams': Ezidis Recount Their Tragedy," poetry became an outlet for the surviving Ezidis, one that enables them to reflect upon their past, present, and future, to face their present realities, and to exchange ideas, thoughts, and fears. The translated poems presented here expose readers to the disastrous and concrete dynamics caused by the interchange between power, space, and mechanisms of exclusion and destruction, as demonstrated by the Ezidi tragedy. The *Journal of Levantine Studies* publishes these poems both out of great concern regarding the fate of the Ezidi community and in the hope that they will expose our readers not only to the Ezidi collective trauma and tragedy but also to their rich, and little-known, culture and poetry.

This volume also includes a short eulogy written by **Birgit Schäbler**, "In Memory of Thomas Philipp," dedicated to a renowned scholar, teacher, and mentor whose scholarly work on the intellectual, political, and social history of the Levant enriched and influenced the field. Prof. Philipp passed away in Germany in June 2014.

This is the first volume of the *Journal of Levantine Studies* for which I have served as editor. I would like to take this opportunity to thank especially Edo Litmanovitch, the associate editor, and Medi Nahmiyaz-Baruh, the editorial coordinator, as well as Yonatan Mendel, the book review editor, for wonderful, fruitful teamwork, and the advisory board of the journal, for their ongoing support.

Abigail Jacobson
November 2015