

Editor's Note

Oh, the leaky boundaries of man-made states!
How many clouds float past them with impunity;
how much desert sand shifts from one land to another;
how many mountain pebbles tumble onto foreign soil
in provocative hops!
Wisława Szymborska (*Psalm*)

Arsonists attack churches in Egypt and mosques in Israel. Priests in Anatolia have been murdered, and their colleagues continue to be harassed in other parts of the region. Jewish graves are desecrated, and Muslim institutions are under attack in Europe. Meanwhile, Israel is in the midst of a fierce debate over gender segregation on public transportation and at school.

These examples are but symptoms of the region's cultural and political foundations. In many countries in the eastern Mediterranean basin, the logic of partition and practices of separation have been adopted as though natural law. Conflicts rage between social and political groups in which religion or ethnicity serves as the logic of the system that divides them. Many of the disputes are between social groups that share space in states established in the twentieth century; others occur between neighboring countries whose populations have spread "inconveniently" into each other's borders. The disputes, like many of the proposals for their resolution, are linked to the logic of partition introduced to the region by the colonial powers. The British and the French dictated much of the logic of

separation in the region under their control because of their understanding of the Ottoman millet system that granted legal autonomy to the various communities or because of the convenience of the divide-and-rule system. Of course, they were not the first or only ones to impose and legitimize partition. Ironically, Fridtjof Nansen, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, was the mastermind behind the 1923 population transfer between Turkey and Greece. One may argue that the system originated in 1492, with the expulsion of the Jews, and subsequently of the Muslims from Spain. Some see partition, both as theory and political quest, as integral to Western modernity, which produced secularism and nationalism. Moreover, even today many inhabitants of the region view the separation between various religious and ethnic communities as a law of nature and a practical necessity.

Excluding segments of the population by relegating them to the status of “other,” whether by expulsion, denial of equal rights, or additional harmful practices, often begins with immigration and, sadly, often ends in emigration. Ethnic or religious expulsions and older practices of excluding women and various minorities are common in the regions to the east, south and north of the Mediterranean. Nation-states regulated social categorization and nationalist elites turned religion and ethnic origin into political categories and tools with which to measure their citizens’ loyalty. Religion or its very absence became a central axis for distinguishing between the populations in many new states. Interestingly, these categories served simultaneously in contrasting ways. In Turkey, religion was a major component in determining individuals’ citizenship. At the same time, Turks were forced to remove religious symbols and practices from the public sphere. In the 1950s, immigrants to Israel—established by the Zionist movement as a state for the Jews—had to relinquish their religious traditions so as to be integrated into the Jewish national project.

The nationalist projects attempted to create, in top-down rather than organic fashion, a “new man,” new languages, new cultures, and civil, sometimes foreign, ceremonies. This partially explains the criticism—existent in varying degrees for over a century—of Western modernity, the Western powers, and the Westernized elites, who created citizenship contracts in their own image and succumbed to the logic of partition. This logic has turned certain groups into foreigners in their own country. As Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska wrote in “Psalm,” a poem dedicated to the unnatural condition of the nation-states’ borders: “Only what is human can truly be foreign.”

Nostalgic memories for the cosmopolitan days of the pre-nationalist era can be heard across all segments of society. Nevertheless, one should avoid the pitfall

of romanticizing the pre-nationalist era. Friction between communities existed in imperialist frameworks as well, and what we today call crimes against humanity were committed then too. The cultural symbiosis ascribed to the imperialist era was limited to specific social circles and spheres.

Most of the articles in this issue relate to the naturalness of the separations and their visual representation. There are questions of assimilation, shared spheres, and the logic of separation—between religious or ethnic communities and based on belief or lack of belief, or between those who demand dissociation from the past and those who use the past to generate cultural renewal.

The naturalness of partition has become the premise in academic literature in presenting significant historical events such as the expulsion of the Jews—a defining moment in the creation of Catholic Spain—but also in the literature on secularization. Secular and religious groups, it is often argued, like parallel lines, do not meet. Scholars, activists, intellectuals, and politicians call to eliminate the partitions and to reexamine the historical arguments that presented separation as natural and lawful; their calls are not naïve and can be seen as critique, a means of decolonization, and an analytical tool. Whether stemming from a desire for binationalism or multinationalism, or nostalgia for imperialism, these calls are political expressions of this critical approach.

In “The Assimilation of Spain’s Moriscos: Fiction or Reality?” **Trevor J. Dadson** suggests that scholars have combined fiction and fact by assuming that the Spanish public implemented, accepted, and saw as natural the logic of separation that Spain sought to implement. Dadson challenges two basic assumptions underlying the story of expulsion from Spain. Spain’s Moriscos, in contradistinction to the prevailing portrayal, underwent processes of assimilation; they were not all crypto-Muslims. Likewise, not all Christian Spaniards were fanatics. Some accepted the Moriscos as an integral part of their community. Though not all Muslims in Spain were assimilated, Dadson argues that in the beginning of the seventeenth century, despite the difficult conditions imposed by the Inquisition and the state, many found ways to overcome and coexist, and some even assimilated. Examining the case of the village Villarrubia de los Ojos, Dadson shows how economic motivation and cultural flexibility—on the part of both the old Christians and the Moriscos—created a success story of Muslim assimilation in Spain.

Deborah Starr, in “Masquerade and the Performance of National Imaginaries: Levantine Ethics, Aesthetics, and Identities in Egyptian Cinema,” examines narratives of coexistence in Egyptian cinema. Coexistence is not evidence of the abolition of separation, but rather of an accepted way of life in the shadow of

separation. Starr looks at the semiotics of otherness in Egyptian films and describes how a fluid identity gave way to a more rigid national identity. She explores how minorities are represented and shows that over time the films reflect changes in relation to two minorities—the Jews and the Copts. According to Starr, one can clearly see the transition from a Levantine ethic of coexistence to one of inter-confessional tolerance.

Like Dadson, **Aline Schlaepfer** examines the willingness of religious minorities to undergo processes of inclusion and assimilation. “Between Cultural and National *Nahḍa*: Jewish Intellectuals in Baghdad and the Nation-Building Process in Iraq” places us at the historical point of transition from empire to nation-state under the auspices of the British. Schlaepfer examines the works of three Jewish intellectuals and their contribution to *Nahḍa*—the Iraqi cultural-national renaissance. By analyzing their views on the question of sectarianism and loyalty, she shows that minorities were interested in being included in the national project. Whereas Jewish-Zionist historiography has portrayed Jews as having been rejected in Iraq and, in turn, as having rejected integration, there is one historical juncture—after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and before the nationalist project was closed to minorities—when Jewish intellectuals in Iraq enlisted in the Iraqi national effort and identified with the Iraqi nation.

Dorit Gottesfeld presents the moment after separation in the sphere of Palestinian literature. In “Harbingers of Feminism: A New Look at the Works of Pioneering Palestinian Women Writers,” Gottesfeld shows how the construction of Palestinian nationalism, the trauma of the establishment of the State of Israel and the suffering following the creation of a Palestinian diaspora in 1948, generated several processes, including the abandonment of poetry in favor of prose and writing focused on national themes. Critics who have studied the development of Palestinian writing have ignored the influence of Palestinian women writers in the generation after 1948. Gottesfeld considers the writing of two authors, Samira ‘Azzam and Najwa Qa‘war Farah, and succeeds to date the harbingers of feminism earlier than is customary. She argues that women made their feminist claims noticed, both stylistically and thematically, and demonstrates that original women’s writing with its own tradition was created alongside masculine writing, which was mostly recruited for the nationalist effort.

Canan Akman-Aslan takes us to the lines of separation drawn in the Turkish Republic between the religious and the secular. The literature on the Kemalist republic is replete with assumptions regarding the nature of the modernization project and its antithesis in the form of the Islamic movements. Akman-Aslan

undermines the dichotomy that has shaped the reasoning of both scholars and the Turkish public. “Challenging Religious and Secularist Patriarchy: Islamist Women’s New Activism in Turkey” looks at middle-class urban women who are active in faith-based organizations. Against the argument that Islamic women subordinated their feminist demands and desires to those of the religious patriarchy and the religious-political struggles and hence are in a state of defeat, Akman-Aslan demonstrates that they are “engaged in resistance to both Islamist and secularist patriarchy.” The unwillingness of many of these women activists to accept the either/or politics is also expressed in the fact that they do not reject the secular state and actively negotiate with it.

Every issue of *JLS* includes an essay or chapter translated from one of the languages of the region. For the current issue, we chose to translate a chapter from Cemil Meriç’s *Bu Ülke*. Meriç, a Turkish philosopher, inspired many scholars and leaders in post-Kemalist Turkey. The chapter “Babil” is a critical discussion of Kemalist intellectuals’ cultural and political outlook and the cultural reforms that were instated. Meriç refuses to accept the divisions between East and West, religious and secular, and Right and Left. Likewise, attempts to categorize him as conservative, religious, left-wing, or right-wing are unsuccessful. He sees these divisions as straitjackets imported from Christian Europe that prevent freedom of thought. At the same time, his writing integrates a philosophy inspired by the West with one that originates in the East and creates a symbiosis between them. He challenges the premises of the Turkish modernization project and the attempt to create a new generation, new state, new language and new culture. A reformist project that disconnects from its past and adopts its principles from foreign Western culture is doomed to lack substance and to fail.

A new section, edited by Zohar Kohavi, appears in this issue under the rubric **dock-ument**. The play on words of dock-ument connects the physical and the conceptual, the theoretical research and the everyday reality, and expresses the editor’s intention of reaching a wider educated public. “Discovering My Frankist Roots,” an essay by the renowned Estonian intellectual and poet Jaan Kaplinski, inaugurates the section. Kaplinski weaves his personal story into the story of the Frankist movement, which was a world without boundaries and had a network of connections that seems impossible and even undesirable today. Kohavi’s introduction provides historical background and discusses several fascinating points in the stories of Kaplinski and Frank, which help the reader navigate between the lines.

Wael Abu-⁶Uksa and Yonatan Mendel are the new editors of the **Book Review Section** which, under their tutelage, will present studies and literature on the lines

connecting and separating different communities. The Book Review Section will offer a range of voices from and about the region and will be a platform for the discussion of fundamental arguments that were originally published in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Turkish, and other languages of the Levant.

Anat Lapidot-Firilla

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