

Editor's Note

This year marks one hundred years since the birth of Egyptian Jewish essayist and novelist Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff. Probably more than any other intellectual, Kahanoff greatly contributed to both the conceptualization of the Levant as an analytical framework and to rethinking its cultural and historical heritage and roots. Since the publication of her personal essay “Reflections of a Levantine Jew” in 1958, the term Levantinism has been widely debated by many scholars, among them David Ohana, Gil Hochberg, Deborah Starr, and Sasson Somekh.¹

The current volume of the *Journal of Levantine Studies* pays tribute to Kahanoff by dedicating a thematic discussion to the concept of the Arab-Jew, which is strongly connected to the idea of Levantinism. In her writing Kahanoff considers the dilemmas of Mediterranean Jews and opens the possibilities of imagining a new geographical, political, cultural, and historical space: the Levant. Similarly, the idea of the Arab-Jew reflects the possibilities or impossibilities of the Levant and Levantine belonging. It offers possibilities of thinking beyond the politicized categories of ethnic identity and of considering the Mediterranean as a combination of local and regional histories.² The three articles and essay presented in this thematic discussion attempt to highlight the Arab-Jew and propose new directions of research on the topic in light of the last decade's rich scholarship regarding this important part of a Levantine world and identity.

David Tal's article considers the term “political Arab Jew,” criticizing what he sees as a false separation of ethnic identity from national identity, a separation sought by the proponents of the Arab Jew. By looking into many of the past and current debates on this question, Tal argues that the ethnic and national aspects of this identity are strongly connected and cannot be separated. Lital Levy, one

of the main scholars engaged with these questions, analyzes the Arab Jew debates. By examining the different discursive spheres in which the idea of the Arab Jew appears—including the political, cultural, and historical—this article offers an overview of the main directions and controversies that developed over the years regarding the Arab Jew as an idea and a concrete identity. **Aviv Ben Or**'s article brings us to a different, though closely linked, realm—that of the early Arabic writings of the much-acclaimed Iraqi-born Israeli author Sami Michael. Presenting a selection of Michael's Arabic stories, Ben Or discusses what he views as the ambivalences and possibilities of Michael's Arab-Jewish identity and writing.

The Essay section offers a personal reflection by **Almog Behar** on the different appearances of the Arab-Jew and the Jewish Arab option as he experiences them from the perspective of a poet and writer. In an essay replete with poetry written by Behar and others, he argues that in 2017 the only place left for the Arab-Jew to live or relive a full life is in the space of literary imagination.

The first two articles in this volume address, each in its own way, the sensitivities and tensions of an ethnically mixed space. In her article **Yali Hashash** focuses on one institution, the Mission Hospital in Jerusalem (est. 1844), arguing that through the encounter between Jewish women and missionaries, the hospital served as a unique liminal space for women that was neither religious nor secular, neither Jewish nor Christian. Moving to a different period and locale, **Joel Gordon**'s article introduces us to the Egyptian comedy *Hasan and Marika* (1959) and analyzes, through a cinematic lens, the vanishing world of Egypt's minority populations, such as the Greek community, and examines Egypt's sense of nostalgia for its lost multiculturalism.

The *document* section features an essay by Egyptian novelist **Miral al-Tahawy**, "Writing the Body and the Rhetoric of Protest in Arab Women's Literature." In her introduction to the essay, **Nathalie Alyon** discusses the recurring theme in al-Tahawy's writing of the physical and literary metaphorical covering and uncovering of the female body.

This is the last volume of *JLS* that Sophie Schor, our outstanding editorial coordinator, will be involved with. I would like to take the opportunity to thank her for her superb and thoughtful work and for playing such an important role in our editorial team. Edo Litmanovich's contribution and input as the associate editor are, as always, invaluable and very much appreciated.

Abigail Jacobson

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Notes

- 1 The inaugural volume of the *Journal of Levantine Studies* was dedicated in part to Jacqueline Kahanoff. See *Journal of Levantine Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011).
- 2 See more on these issues, and on the comparison between Kahanoff and Albert Memmi regarding the question of Arab-Jews, in Daniel Monterescu, “Beyond the Sea of Formlessness: Jacqueline Kahanoff and the Levantine Generation,” *ibid.*, 23–40.