

# EDITOR'S NOTE

It is with great pleasure that we present this new issue of *Al-Muntaqa*, which brings together a diverse collection of research articles, two reflections, an Arab Opinion Index analysis, and two book reviews. Collectively, these contributions revisit colonial legacies in the Arab region, and shed light on current social and political transformations, digital engagement, and imagined urban futures. Palestine remains in focus, with a historical study on land governance and Israeli colonization of the country, and the interplay between the Ottoman past and the colonial present; an essay on Israel's apartheid practices in Jerusalem; another on the systematic erasure of Palestinian history in the West Bank; and a book review on the Beersheba region. The article on the impact of the war on Syrian communities and families, and the one on civil society and democratic transition in Tunisia provide some insights into the broader aftermath of the Arab uprisings. A main feature of this volume is the focus on urban development in Saudi Arabia, a topic of great interest and of utmost urgency given the rapid and drastic changes in the Kingdom.

The opening article in this issue is Munir Fakher Eldin's "*From Taxation to Dispossession: Land Governance and the Colonization of Palestine*". It traces the evolution of land governance in Palestine from the late Ottoman era through the British Mandate to Israeli colonialism. Fakher Eldin highlights how land became both a tool of colonial control and the central terrain of Palestinian resistance.

In "*Protecting the Syrian Family: Community Reconstruction and the Unseen Consequences of War*", Araa Aljaramani examines how humanitarian interventions in Syria have neglected the role of the family as a social anchor. By overlooking shifts in gender roles and child-rearing practices under conditions of protracted conflict, international organizations have often exacerbated social dislocations rather than alleviated them.

The third article, Mehdi Mabrouk's "*The Illusion of the Tunisian Exception: Civil Society and Democratic Transition*", challenges the narrative of Tunisia's democratic exceptionalism. Mabrouk shows how civil society, far from safeguarding democracy, played a role in its erosion by intensifying polarization and undermining state legitimacy.

Two contributions adapted from the 11<sup>th</sup> Gulf Studies Forum at ACRPS (30 November-1 December 2024) turn to Saudi Arabia's urban structures. In "*The Role of Urban Transformation in Saudi Arabia's Nation-building: The Case of al-Balad, Jeddah*", Rufe Li situates the transformations of Jeddah's historic district within the broader trajectory of state-building in KSA. Federico Cugurullo, Isobel Lee, and Rebecca Weir, in "*Cyberpunk Urban Fantasies in the Gulf: The Line as an Incubator of Modernization in Saudi Arabia and Beyond*", interrogate Saudi Arabia's most ambitious and bold urban project. They show how The Line draws heavily on Western cyberpunk imaginaries of hypermodern cities.

We also introduce a new section titled "Reflections", featuring "*Jerusalem: A Closed City*", which powerfully illustrates how Israeli closure policies have fragmented Palestinian life. By turning Jerusalem into a restricted and checkpoint-ridden space, these policies have denied generations of Palestinians access to a city long considered the cultural and spiritual heart of the region. Along with the article on land governance

in Palestine, and the two articles on urban transformations in KSA, these contributions make “land” in this issue a common and central theme, complemented by a cover page featuring an artistic illustration related to land. In the second reflection, “The Whitewashing of History in a Time of Genocide”, Mostafa Minawi powerfully exposes the systematic erasure of Palestinian history, memory, and identity under occupation observed through his brief teaching experience in al-Khalil.

The Arab Opinion Index’s analytical report, “*Social Media Use, Trust, and Surveillance in the Arab Region: Insights from the Arab Opinion Index (2024–2025)*”, by Laila Omar, Wajd Beshara, and Nour Chibani, highlights both widespread reliance on digital platforms and anxieties over misinformation, censorship, and surveillance.

We conclude with two book reviews. Mansour Nasasra reviews *Beersheba Region, Southern Ottoman Palestine: Land, Society, and State*, and Habib Nahdi reviews *Death Between Society and Culture*, both ACRPS book publications.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue reaffirm *Al-Muntaqa*’s mission to engage with the Arab region’s rich history and complex realities, providing rigorous and timely scholarship that enriches global conversations on the regions’ history, present and future.