

EDITOR'S NOTE

This final issue of *Al-Muntaqa*'s 8th volume brings together contributions that vary in their empirical fields and theoretical orientations but share the same concern, that of authority and the production of meaning under conditions of political constraint and social transformation. Tackling questions of digital activism, state theory, religious economy, and pharmaceutical practice, this issue's articles interrogate how power is exercised, contested, and reconfigured.

The first article by Mohammad Othman Mahmoud turns to political theory, engaging Azmi Bishara's democratic project through a sustained examination of the concept of the state in the Arab context. Reading Bishara alongside political-philosophical traditions, particularly Rawlsian thought, the study argues that Bishara advances a conception of the state as a "realistic political utopia", grounded in citizenship, civil society, and justice rather than abstract idealism or ideological reductionism. By tracing how questions of democracy logically begin with the state, the article situates Bishara's work as a systematic effort to rethink democratic possibility in societies marked by crises of sovereignty and political fragmentation.

The second article of Lilian Estafanous examines digital activism within the Coptic community in North America, offering a critical reassessment of the promise long attributed to Information and Communication Technologies in diasporic political mobilization. Moving beyond accounts of transnational digital engagement, the study foregrounds the growing vulnerabilities that accompany online activism, including misinformation, surveillance, censorship, and internal fragmentation. By situating the Coptic case within broader debates on "digital diaspora", the article demonstrates how technological infrastructures that once expanded political agency are increasingly entangled in regimes of control that limit advocacy effectiveness.

The third article shifts the focus to post-2003 Iraq, in which Khalid Mutlaq explores what he terms "economic theology" through the institutional expansion of the Shi'i Al-Kafeel network. The study examines how religious authority, when partially disengaged from the state, constructs a parallel economy grounded in theological legitimacy and communal trust. Rather than treating Al-Kafeel merely as an administrative or charitable apparatus, the article conceptualizes it as a symbolic formation that converts ritual authority into economic power and organizational endurance.

In the fourth article, Farouk Tahri adopts an anthropological lens to trace the "biography" of Aureomycin in Morocco, from its introduction as a modern pharmaceutical to its reinterpretation as a popular remedy embedded in local therapeutic practices. By challenging the rigid divide between "modern" medicine and "folk" healing, the study shows how pharmaceuticals acquire new meanings as they circulate through specific social and cultural contexts. The concept of "pharmaceutical heretics" captures this process of appropriation, revealing how users actively reshape medical technologies rather than merely consuming them as intended.

Complementing these research articles, the issue also includes two book reviews that critically engage recent contributions to Arab and regional scholarship. Brahim Chlahi reviews *The 2019 Legislative and*

Presidential Elections in Tunisia: Politics, Electoral Behaviors, and Elite Mobilization, and Yasmine Lahnin reviews *Chinese Strategy Toward Arab States: Goals and Implications for the Future, an Exploration*, both ACRPS book publications.

Finally, this issue features a graphic from *Jerusalem Story* documenting Israel's systematic restrictions on Muslim access to prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque. Published as the month of Ramadan approaches – a period of heightened religious presence, collective worship, and intensified Israeli control over Jerusalem – the graphic underscores the lived realities of spatial control, religious regulation, and colonial power that continue to structure everyday life in the city.

In tracing these dynamics in diverse contexts, *Al-Muntaqa* continues its commitment to fostering critical, interdisciplinary scholarship attentive to the complexities of the contemporary Arab region as well as its diasporas.