



# Chapter 1

## DIALECTICS OF POST/COLONIAL MODERNITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A CRITICAL, THEORETICAL AND DISCIPLINARY OVERVIEW

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### Postcolonial Studies and the Middle East

THE FIELD OF POSTCOLONIAL studies remains a primary site of radical political and cultural critique within the global anglophone academy. Like any other disciplinary formation, it has been in a process of constant evolution since its inception in English and French departments across the Atlantic in the 1980s. From its high-theory beginnings with Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak and its so-called ‘materialist turn’ with Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, Timothy Brennan, Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus, it has, in recent years, opened up to multiple developments in the contemporary world. In the last generation, postcolonial critics and scholars have turned their attention towards a range of new issues including globalisation, neoliberalism and neo-imperialism; international law and its transgressions; the global security state and unconventional warfare; terror; minority and indigeneity; religiosity, secularism and post-secularism; ‘third-wave’ gender and sexual identities; environmental crisis and the Anthropocene; children’s, disability and animal rights; global migrant and refugee crises; cultural trauma; translation; and the digital media, among others. In so doing, they have framed postcolonial studies as a site of origin for identifying, conceptualising and critically interrogating some of the most timely and pressing questions of today’s world.

*The Edinburgh Companion to the Postcolonial Middle East* seeks to advance the evolving worldly remit of postcolonial studies by foregrounding the Middle East as one such area of inquiry. Thinking genealogically, it is clear that the status of the Middle East as a critical object within the field has always been fraught and ambiguous. In its early years, postcolonial studies, as is widely acknowledged, drew much of its impetus and inspiration from scholarship on colonial history in this region, as in the foundational work of Said (Palestine, the Levant), Frantz Fanon (Algeria) and Albert Memmi (Tunisia). Indeed, it is barely an exaggeration to claim that the field was inaugurated with Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), which, among other things, involved a discourse analysis of the category of ‘the Middle East’ that exposed its constitution in Euro-American imperialism, its Orientalist epistemologies and ontologies, and its homogenising functions with respect to a vast and diverse region stretching across the Levant, the Gulf, North Africa, Iran, Turkey, and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Undergirded by a pervasive system of Orientalist knowledge production, the term ‘Middle East’ was first formulated in 1902 by the American naval strategist Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan to refer



to an area of British strategic interest in and around the Persian Gulf.<sup>2</sup> In itself, it serves as a reminder of the overt role that British and French imperialism played in the charting of the region's political geography over the course of the twentieth century. Such implications are consolidated when taking into account the formation of Middle East studies, an offshoot of area studies, during the Cold War period. As Zachary Lockman has most extensively demonstrated, this field and its governing, Orientalism-derived assumptions about the Arab-Islamic world were initially designed in order to facilitate United States geopolitical interests in the region.<sup>3</sup> Further testifying to the (neo-) imperialist implications of the term, the US administration forwarded the notion of a 'Greater Middle East' in the period following the events of 11 September 2001 so as to legitimate a univocal policy of 'democratisation' and therefore of (military) intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey in addition to the wider Arab world.<sup>4</sup> Given the origins of the field as well as the political and institutional history of the designation 'Middle East' itself, it seems self-evident that this region *should* have been a substantial and sustained object of critical scrutiny in postcolonial studies from its beginnings.

Yet as postcolonialists around the world sought to legitimate their work within the disciplinary edifices of English and French in the 1980s, and thus to consolidate their institutional standing, they tended to neglect the politics, societies and cultures of the region, and to veer away from, even repress, the Middle Eastern origins of their adopted models of colonial discourse, the coloniser/colonised interface and cultural resistance. Postcolonial studies was thereby articulated as a field whose central concern was the anglophone and francophone literatures of (former) colonies in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Oceania, and by migrants from these regions to the (former) imperial metropolis. The classic statement of the field's self-definition in these terms is Bill Ashcroft's, Gareth Griffith's and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), another foundational text. In what these authors intend as an exhaustive list of postcolonial literatures and cultures – which comprises those of 'African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, . . . Sri Lanka, [and] the USA' – those of the Middle East are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>5</sup>

A number of explanations have been put forward for what appears to be this constitutive tension in postcolonial studies. For Wail Hassan (and Rebecca Saunders), the Middle East has been considered a context too varied and anomalous in its (post) colonial status, too strained in its national and cultural politics, and too challenging in its linguistic demands to find a home within the parameters of an endemically anglophone postcolonial academy.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the neglect of Palestine in particular within the field, Anna Bernard likewise attributes this to the challenges posed by an Arabic-language literary tradition as well as to the stigmas associated with reading in translation. But she also highlights other factors specific to the case. Given the recalcitrant nationalist impulses of its politics and cultures, Palestine, she argues, has proven to be a case study antithetical to what she calls the field's prevailing, Bhabha-derived 'paradigms [of] difference, hybridity, scepticism towards grand narratives, and above all . . . anti-nationalism'.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, and as evidenced by recent controversies involving Said (Columbia), Joseph Massad (Columbia), Juan Cole (Yale), Norman Finkelstein (DePaul) and Stephen Salaita (Illinois), among others, what she calls the

more 'sinister' pressures imposed by the academic politics of studying Palestine in the anglophone world has acted as a major disincentive for postcolonialists.<sup>8</sup> As a result of these various constraints, and with the notable exception of texts like Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (1986), few avowed 'postcolonial' scholarly works of the 1980s and 1990s indeed attended to the Middle East in any substantial way.<sup>9</sup>

With this background in mind, it is understandable that scholars of the period whose work was oriented around colonialism in the Middle East should distrust what had in effect emerged as the *institution* of 'Postcolonial Studies'. In an interview for the inaugural issue of *Interventions* conducted in 1997, Said, for instance, distanced himself from the field he was instrumental in founding with a modest yet firm 'I do not think I belong to that'.<sup>10</sup> Such misgivings, though, ran deeper than the field's manifest disavowal of its progenitors and their intellectual terrain, to the term 'postcolonial' itself. Later in the same interview, Said continues that 'postcolonialism' is a 'misnomer' that, by implying 'colonialism is over', distorts or masks the prevalence of 'neo-colonialism' both in 'my part of the world' and in the activities of globalising agents such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>11</sup> Focusing on Palestine, both Ella Shohat and Massad have likewise rejected the literal 'post' of 'postcolonial' as inapplicable to that context. For Shohat, Palestine and its writers (such as Mahmoud Darwish and Sahar Khalifeh) demonstrate in their engagement with 'contemporary anti-colonial/anti-racist struggles' the 'ahistorical', 'universalizing' and 'depoliticizing' implications of the categories 'the postcolonial condition' and 'post-coloniality'.<sup>12</sup> For Massad, it is 'the synchronicity of the colonial and the postcolonial' in the contemporary space of Israel/Palestine that renders the teleology suggested by these designations incoherent.<sup>13</sup>

When 'postcolonial' is read strictly as a historical signifier – as it was in the wide array of scholarship on decolonisation, anti-colonial nationalism and state-formation in the 1970s – these critiques are of course accurate. But within postcolonial studies as discussed here, the term has more often been deployed in a more flexible way. Citing Bhabha for his influence in framing the field, Lazarus explains that since the 1970s, "postcolonial" has ceased to be a historical category, and has become rather 'a fighting term, a theoretical weapon, which "intervene[s]" in existing debates and "resists" certain political and philosophical constructions'.<sup>14</sup> In the last generation, a chorus of scholars have picked up on this sense of 'postcolonial' as a trans-period deconstructive praxis that traverses the discourses of colonial modernity in order to identify and critique manifestations of political, social and cultural hegemony in the contemporary world. They have sought to revitalise the field for precisely the challenges Said thought it, by definition, obscures. In their important volume *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), Ania Loomba and her co-editors insist that the field 'respond not only to the search for historical clarity about the making of modern empires but also to the continuing and bloody ambition of neo-imperialism'.<sup>15</sup> Given what they call 'the wide ideological and intellectual spectrum that has begun . . . to align itself with the global juggernaut', 'the agenda of postcolonial studies' is, they conclude, 'more pressing than ever'.<sup>16</sup> In their special issue of *new formations* on 'After Iraq: Reframing Postcolonial Studies' (2006), Lazarus and Priyamvada Gopal stress that the field must change its 'framing assumptions, organising principles and intellectual habits' for 'the contemporaneity of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism'.<sup>17</sup> And in their volume *Terror and the Postcolonial* (2010), Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton likewise underline 'the contemporary

neo-imperial hegemony of the United States' as among 'the most pressing postcolonial issues of our age'.<sup>18</sup> With the remit of postcolonial studies thus redefined for 'our age', the Middle East, the geopolitical conflicts and crises associated with it in our post-9/11 world, has now become not just legible within the field, but also a pivotal site for postcolonial critical thought.

It is perhaps hardly surprising, then, that despite the disciplinary conflicts, institutional embargos and linguistic challenges faced by those seeking to work on the Middle East through a broadly defined postcolonial framework, the current generation of postcolonialists has found itself increasingly drawn to the conceptual intrigues and political urgencies of the Middle East, as well as to the rich literary and cultural offerings of this diverse and shifting region. As such, critics and scholars variously located within the field have begun to circle towards the region and its politics, societies and cultures.

Over the last decade or so, a number of research areas, critical interventions and debates pertaining to specific Middle Eastern national and regional contexts have become especially pronounced in what might be considered the emergent subfield of 'the postcolonial Middle East'. The politics of neo-imperialism, terror and warfare represent a central concern within much of this contemporary scholarship. Urging renewed inquiry into such, numerous postcolonialists have drawn attention to both the subtle and the not-so-subtle continuities between historical and contemporary manifestations of colonialism, imperialism and Orientalism in the Middle East (Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, Juan Cole, Faisal Devji, Derek Gregory, Revathi Krishnaswamy and John Hawley, Zachary Lockman, Ania Loomba *et al.*, etc.). This sense of the Middle East as a theatre or laboratory of contemporary neo-imperial warfare has been further substantiated by those who have focused on the post-9/11 invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq in particular (Nadje al-Ali, Samir Amin, Sinan Antoon, Gregory, Neil Lazarus and Priyamvada Gopal, Ikram Masmoudi, Muhsin al-Musawi, etc.). More recently, the revolutionary upheavals of the Arab Spring and its aftermath have produced a mounting postcolonial response, often channelled through analysis of new or newly deployed cultural forms such as graffiti, popular music and the social media (Gilbert Achcar, miriam cooke, Hamid Dabashi, Dalia Mostafa, Caroline Rooney, etc.). Finally, and perhaps at the heart of any conception of 'the postcolonial Middle East', the question of Israel/Palestine and its associated politics of colonisation, occupation and resistance has throughout this period been generating a steady stream of postcolonial scholarship that is among the most urgent and innovative in the field. Indebted to, yet extending far beyond Said's foundational analysis, such scholarship has come to encompass a variety of critical approaches, including the theoretical (Joseph Massad, Ella Shohat, etc.), the sociohistorical (Salah Hassan, Saree Makdisi, Nur Masalha, Basem Ra'ad, Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, etc.) and the literary, filmic and cultural (Anna Ball, Anna Bernard, Joe Cleary, Barbara Harlow, Karim Mattar, Ihab Saloul, etc.). As an interconnected whole, the work that has thus far been accomplished by postcolonialists in these and related areas comprises a powerful testament to postcolonialism's enduring exigency as a medium for critical thinking in the face of violent political realities.

In addition to the sort of more nationally and regionally oriented scholarship outlined above, postcolonialists have in this period also pursued areas, interventions and debates of more transnational resonance. Related to many of the issues noted

above, those of the Islamic Revival and Islamic fundamentalisms have been extensively explored in contexts both regional (Sadiah Abbas, Talal Asad, Cole, Devji, Anouar Majid, Massad, etc.) and diasporic (Rehana Ahmed, Claire Chambers, Peter Morey, Amina Yaqin, etc.). Likewise, those of gender and sexuality in the Middle East have been addressed in relation to a range of socio-historical settings, including those of the (neo-)Orientalist encounter (Reina Lewis, Massad, Meyda Yegenoglu, etc.), Arab women's liberation movements (Margot Badran, Marilyn Booth, Anastasia Valassopoulos, etc.), Islamic feminisms (Abu-Lughod, Leila Ahmed, cooke, Saba Mahmood, etc.) and the politics of non-normative identification in the region (Paul Amar, Joseph Allen Boone, Jasbir Puar, etc.). And those of transnational Middle Eastern literary and cultural production have been traversed via a plethora of post-colonial routes. Key topoi to have emerged in the more literary critical approaches to 'the postcolonial Middle East' include Anglo-Arab and Arab-American literatures (Carol Fadda-Conrey, Nouri Gana, Wail Hassan, Layla al-Maleh, Lindsey Moore, Tahia Abdel Nasser, Stephen Salaita, etc.), the adoption and adaptation of transnational forms and genres in regional literatures (Tarek El-Ariss, Rasheed El-Enany, Erdağ Göknaar, Stephan Meyer, al-Musawi, Laetitia Nanquette, Wen-Chin Ouyang, Kamran Rastegar, etc.), anglophone and francophone writing there (Réda Bensmaïa, Norbert Bugeja, etc.) and literary translation from and into Middle Eastern languages (Salih Altoma, Said Faiq, etc.). Just as regionally directed postcolonial scholarship on the Middle East foregrounds the vitality of the postcolonial as a critical tool, such transnationally directed scholarship suggests the multiplicity of critical perspectives it can bring to bear on the region's worldly investments.

Far from exhaustive, this brief overview of current scholarship on 'the postcolonial Middle East' nevertheless reveals something of the scale and value of this growing subfield. In each of its areas of inquiry, it is clear that scholars have brought the unique critical resources of postcolonial studies – including its literary critical tools, theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary possibilities – to bear on analyses of the region, its literatures and cultures, that are among the most original, incisive and compelling in the contemporary academy.

Why, then, given this wide array of critical work, might it be necessary to foreground and examine afresh the role of postcolonial scholarship in relation to the Middle East? As will already be apparent to those performing such work, these themes, while individually urgent, have been pursued largely in isolation from one another in the critical discourse. Little or no dialogue has taken place among postcolonialists about their reciprocal and complementary imbrication in the wider issues of the region. Furthermore, each has maintained a largely presentist orientation. Forged in response to the demands of the present, they have tended to downplay or marginalise questions of the deep history of Orientalism, colonialism and imperialism in the Middle East, and of how this gave rise to the network of issues prevalent in the region today. And finally, little sustained effort has been put into reflexively negotiating the field of postcolonial studies itself according to the specificities of the region, or into unpacking the critical, theoretical and disciplinary questions raised by new inquiry into its literatures and cultures. As a consequence, the category of 'the Middle East' has been constructed in postcolonial studies in an ahistorical, unsystematic and fragmentary way. A coherent and comprehensive framework for addressing this region thus remains wanting in the field.

## ‘Post/Colonial Modernity’: A New Horizon for Analysis

This *Edinburgh Companion* seeks to develop just such a framework. It assembles some of the world’s foremost postcolonialists to reflexively interrogate the category of ‘the Middle East’ as it has been figured in postcolonial studies, and to collaboratively explore the core critical, theoretical and disciplinary possibilities that inquiry into this region opens for the field. In twenty-four chapters distributed across an introductory and three main sections, it aims to attune postcolonial studies to a global, dialectical understanding of the region. It thereby provides a foundational reference point for the field as scholars and students continue to research and teach in this direction. Given the new readings of the region it generates, it will also be of value to those working in adjacent fields such as Middle East studies, comparative literature, cultural studies, history, critical geography, politics and international relations, and so forth. Chapters have been provided by scholars at leading institutions from around the world on the basis of their acknowledged, field-defining work on or around these questions. The *Companion* also includes two interviews conducted by the editors with prominent writer-intellectuals – Ahdaf Soueif and Sinan Antoon – whose literary and cultural practices have to a large extent been shaped by their abiding personal as well as political investments in the region, and whose works have received significant postcolonial scholarly acclaim.

The framework this *Companion* develops for its postcolonial approach to the Middle East is derived from what the editors and contributors have homed in on as the concept of ‘post/colonial modernity’.<sup>19</sup> As a broad intellectual and historical horizon for analysis, this concept suggests both the impact of diverse colonial encounters on the modern history of the region and the forging of complex postcolonial positionalities against continued manifestations of local and global hegemony. Evoking the recent upsurge of interest in questions of modernity in the field of Middle East studies, it provides a grounding for the synthetic and historical perspective hitherto lacking in postcolonial studies.<sup>20</sup> In so doing, it allows for the comparative assessment of questions of colonialism, imperialism, statecraft, religion, ethnicity, minority, gender, sexuality, terror, war, revolution and migration within and across the Levant, the Gulf, North Africa, Iran, Turkey, and beyond. Focalised through the lens of a post/colonial modernity where multiple colonial genealogies, anti-colonial resistance movements and postcolonial formations define political, social and cultural expression across its regional and transnational geographies, the Middle East demands what Wail Hassan, one of the contributors to this *Companion*, has forwarded as a ‘tertiary model of comparison’.<sup>21</sup> Triangulating the ‘North-South’ and ‘East-West’ critical paradigms long predominant in postcolonial studies with a ‘South-South’ paradigm attentive to such exchange on a regional scale, this model responds to discourses and practices of colonialism, imperialism and global capitalism in the Middle East without sacrificing the specificity of the local. And just as this model acknowledges the essential simultaneity of the global and local within its mode of analysis, so too does it elucidate the interplay between concurrently colonial and postcolonial modernities, rendered legible through its insistence on the forward-slash in the term ‘post/colonial’: a construction that indicates the precarious interplay between states of post/coloniality in operation. Thus adopting a tertiary or triangulated model of comparison in its very design – its juxtaposition of chapters that engage distinct but mutually informative historical and geographical registers

within sections and within the whole – this *Companion* enacts as well as prescribes a new, ‘post/colonial’ framework for the Middle East.

Throughout, the focus of this *Companion* is on literary and cultural critique. Across parts (I) ‘The Colonial Encounter: Discourses of Imperialism and Anti-imperialism’, (II) ‘States of Post/Coloniality: Politics, Religion, Gender, Sexuality’ and (III) ‘The Post/Colonial Present: Crisis and Engagement in Global Context’, its chapters reveal the political, social and cultural dialectics of post/colonial modernity in the Middle East via original readings of literary and cultural texts. Spanning the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries; working flexibly across national, regional and global contexts; and covering a range of forms and genres including fiction, poetry, life-writing, film, documentary, pictorial art, performance art, popular music, graffiti, the digital media and translation, they individually and collectively trace the conflicts and contradictions of such as registered in the literatures and cultures of the Middle East. The analytical perspective afforded by this *Companion*’s broadly ‘post/colonial’ approach to Middle Eastern literary and cultural texts promises significant new insight into questions crucial not just to postcolonial studies as it continues to engage this region, but also to the entire interdisciplinary spectrum of contemporary literary studies. Oriented around this framework, the chapters of this *Companion* provide new readings of questions of comparative literary history in the Middle East; the evolution of literary and cultural forms as mediated by regional and transnational influences; linguistic interactions between Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hebrew, among other languages; diasporic Middle Eastern writing in languages both regional and global; the translational circulation and reception of Middle Eastern texts in English and other global languages; processes of Middle Eastern canonisation in the region and in the world; representations of the Middle East among ‘Western’ authors, cultural practitioners and media sources; the relationship between aesthetics, politics and resistance in global context; the digital media and fluctuating figurations of ‘the literary’; and, most broadly, the place of the Middle East in current theorisations of world literature. As such, this framework establishes a conceptual as well as a historical basis for the project of expanding both postcolonial and global literary studies for the region.

Through parts I, II and III, this *Companion* re-examines questions of colonial history, the postcolonial state and neo-imperialism from the perspective of a range of pertinent Middle Eastern texts and contexts. In so doing, it cumulatively traces how the present conflicts and crises of the region are defined by the dialectics of post/colonial modernity, emphasising along the way the persistence of imperialism and its aftermath there. By undertaking this approach, this *Companion* articulates a new, ‘post/colonial’ sense of Middle Eastern literary and cultural modernity. Individually, chapters focus on the (postcolonial) problematic of the ‘subaltern’ in the Arab world; the role of Orientalism in the formation of a modern Arab literary, cultural and educational sphere; the origins of the ‘Arab’/‘Jew’ divide in Orientalism; the roots and contemporary branches of the Israel/Palestine conflict; colonial history, state formation and cultures of resistance in Egypt, Turkey, the Maghreb, and the wider Arab world; the clash of tradition and modernity in regional and transnational expressions of (fundamentalist) Islam; the politics of gender and sexuality in the Arab world from the late nineteenth century to the present; the ongoing crises in Libya, Iraq, Iran and Syria; the Arab Spring; and the Middle Eastern refugee ‘crisis’ in Europe. The range of Middle Eastern literatures and cultures covered by this *Companion* include not only those of Egypt, Palestine,

Israel, Turkey, the Maghreb, Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Iran and Syria, but also their global correlates as manifest in anglophone and translated fiction, poetry, life-writing and film; metropolitan writings and films about Palestine; digital media art, activism and propaganda; literary blogs focused on the region; and popular forms such as graffiti and music in their transnational circulation. While developing postcolonial theories and methodologies appropriate to the Middle East, this *Companion* thus also provides unique analyses of some of the most pressing issues and compelling representations of the region through its post/colonial modernity.

In sum, this *Edinburgh Companion* contributes to the evolving worldly remit of postcolonial studies by examining and revising its inherited critical constructs according to the specificities of the Middle East. In the process, it develops a 'post/colonial' framework appropriate to the region, and a new, 'post/colonial' sense of Middle Eastern literary and cultural modernity.

## Overview of Parts and Chapters

The twenty-four chapters of this *Edinburgh Companion* are distributed across an introductory and three main parts. Each of these sections takes what might be considered more a conceptual than a historical 'moment' as its point of departure. While the moments of colonial encounter (Part I) and of state formation (Part II) in the Middle East are certainly historically and geographically localisable, their effects, logics and often even practices just as certainly reverberate into what the editors call the region's 'post/colonial present' (Part III). By positing such moments as conceptual and allocating chapters on the basis of their engagements with them, this *Companion* embodies in its structure the dialectical intertwining of past and present, local and global that might be said to define post/colonial modernity in the Middle East.

### *Introduction*

Including the current one, the introductory section of this *Companion* is comprised of five chapters. It identifies the urgency of the Middle East as an area of inquiry within postcolonial studies and re-examines the field according to its intellectual demands. It explores questions of the institutional history of postcolonial studies; the status and remit of postcolonial scholarship in the contemporary anglophone academy; the nature and extent of its engagement with the Middle East; its present limitations in dealing with a region of vast political, social and cultural complexity; and the role of the engaged writer-intellectual in response to the representational, political, and other challenges posed by such. As explained above, this analysis rapidly reveals the need for a coherent and comprehensive framework for the Middle East in postcolonial studies. The chapters of the Introduction proceed to conceptualise and address the core issues facing a postcolonial approach to this region. By confronting these issues directly, the Introduction establishes a framework – which the editors broadly define as 'post/colonial modernity' – that structures the remainder of this *Companion* and that envisions a possible future for postcolonial scholarship on this region.

Chapter 2, 'Edward Said and the Institution of Postcolonial Studies' by Karim Mattar, sets the *Companion* in motion with a critique of the institutionalisation of



'Postcolonial Studies' in the anglophone academy. Achieved by means of its repression of the Palestinian and Middle Eastern origins of Edward Said's theory of colonial discourse (a theory it consequently *misread*, *misappropriated* for other mainly British imperial contexts, as in the work of Aijaz Ahmad, Homi Bhabha and Bill Ashcroft), such institutionalisation, Mattar argues, must be overturned in order to adapt the field to the Middle East and to revive its once radical political intent. For the author, this project necessarily begins with a reinstatement of Said's understanding of Palestine, the materiality of exile, exilic consciousness, contrapuntalism and secular humanism as a cornerstone of the postcolonial. In undertaking such a project, Mattar proposes a new genealogy of the postcolonial that locates the Middle East at its very heart.

Chapter 3, 'Postcolonialism and Modern Arabic Literature: Twenty-first-century Horizons' by Wail S. Hassan, furthers this line of inquiry by assessing the implications of postcolonial theory for the critical consideration of Middle Eastern literatures and cultures. In this chapter, Hassan traverses the intellectual histories of postcolonial studies, comparative literature and Middle Eastern (especially Arabic) literary studies with an eye towards reconfiguring the relationship between them. Identifying key limitations or failures in each as traditionally conceived (postcolonialism's 'mortuary rhetoric', comparative literature's Eurocentrism, Middle East studies' indebtedness to the categories of European modernity, etc.), he deftly moves towards a new, dialectical sense of mutual illumination and cross-fertilisation as expressed by his prescriptions of 're-comparativising' Arabic and 'triangulating' our frameworks of analysis. He details the extent and potency of such an approach by outlining a new, politically incisive and theoretically rigorous research agenda that spans the fields while at the same time suggesting alternatives to their internal shortcomings. Throughout, Hassan draws on a wide range of Arabic literary texts from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries to illustrate the critical and interpretive possibilities opened by his approach.

Chapters 4 and 5 break from the essay format of other contributions in order to present interviews conducted by the editors with Ahdaf Soueif and Sinan Antoon. The interview form presents an invaluable opportunity to explore the ways in which concepts and approaches drawn from postcolonial discourse translate into practice for those actually engaged in the production of cultural and political discourses both within the region and in transnational relation to it. In Chapter 4, Anna Ball and Soueif discuss the politics of location, form and cultural activism in relation to both the transnational landscapes of Soueif's novels and to the geographically specific locations of her political work in Egypt and Palestine. In Chapter 5, Karim Mattar and Antoon discuss the role and responsibilities of the engaged Middle Eastern writer-intellectual; the burden imposed by personal as well as political history on creative practices; the ongoing crises in Iraq and Palestine; the politics of language, translation and the academy; and the category of 'the postcolonial'. Navigating a variety of perspectives on these and other questions apposite to this *Companion*, these interviews thus make for a supple and open-ended complement to the preceding chapters of the Introduction.

With the critical, theoretical and disciplinary foundations of this *Companion* having been laid in the Introduction, Parts I, II and III proceed to illustrate the valences of its 'post/colonial' framework with reference to a range of Middle Eastern texts and contexts from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries.

## *I. The Colonial Encounter: Discourses of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*

Part I is focused on the modern colonial encounter in the Middle East, and explores the formative impact of this moment on the history of the region as well as on its literatures and cultures. The history of empire in this region is a long and complex one. From classical antiquity to the Caliphate in its various dynastic manifestations, the Crusades, the Mongol Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and so forth, the political as well as socio-cultural topography of the region was inscribed and re-inscribed according to influences both 'Eastern' and 'Western', both local and global. This *Companion*, however, takes as its critical point of departure the interface between, broadly, 'East' and 'West' as defined by modern European – primarily British, French and Zionist – imperialism there. This is because, as discussed above, the category of 'the Middle East' was itself first devised on this historical terrain as a means to facilitate such interests, rendering this method of contextualisation foundational to a postcolonial approach to the region. Furthermore, and as most influentially elaborated by Edward Said in terms of Orientalism, the discourses, practices and technologies of modern European imperialism in the Middle East were (and continue to be) specific to the region, and thus demand specialised postcolonial attention.<sup>22</sup> In itself critically compelling, analysis of the mechanisms of power and control (including statecraft, political cartography, legal and political administration, institution-building, military control, population control, ethnic and religious classification, the introduction of new languages, and new scholarly enterprises such as Oriental studies) that were in large part to shape the modern history of the Middle East also provides a grounds for comparison with other regions of the colonial world.

Along similar lines, the impact of modern European imperialism on the literatures and cultures of the Middle East was also localised and distinct. It not only spurred what is (problematically) known as the '*Nabda*' – or cultural renaissance – of the Arab world via the attendant influx and adoption of new literary forms and genres, philosophical and political world views, sciences and technologies, languages, translations, and so forth. Further, it gave rise to a multitude of local and specific forms of anti-imperial nationalism, resistance and political consciousness that were, and that continue to find expression, in the evolving literary and cultural traditions of the region. In short, the encounter with Europe – ongoing and incomplete – prompted what we are calling a 'post/colonial' modernity specific to the Middle East, one with important ramifications for our understanding of its literatures and cultures. By tracing these resonances in detail, Part I initiates a wholesale reimagining of comparative Middle Eastern literary history.

Chapter 6, 'Between the Postcolonial and the Middle East: Writing the Subaltern in the Arab World' by Juan R. I. Cole, sets the scene for this section by considering the circulation of the discourse of subalternity in the historiography of the Middle East from the 1960s to the present. Conceived by Cole as a point of intersection between postcolonial studies and Middle East studies, this discourse, he argues, has played a crucial role in expanding scholarly attention towards marginalised social groupings such as the peasantry, the working classes and the bedouin across the region. Subject to the overlapping forces of colonialism, postcolonial state formation and native elitism – to, that is, the region's post/colonial modernity – the subaltern in the Middle East thus emerges in his account as an essential locus of postcolonial engagement. Nevertheless,

he continues, subalternity there differs significantly from that of the South Asian contexts in which the subaltern studies school was originally invested. Via a thorough and wide-ranging literature review, Cole remaps the discourse of subalternity for critical approaches to ‘the postcolonial Middle East’.

Chapter 7, ‘Orientalism and World Literature: A Re-reading of Cosmopolitanism in Tāhā Ḥusayn’s Literary World’ by Wen-Chin Ouyang, explores the role of Orientalism in the formation of a modern Arab literary, cultural and educational sphere in the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. Epitomised by the pioneering Egyptian critic and reformer Taha Husayn, this sphere, Ouyang argues, was substantially inflected by the ‘East-West’ colonial encounter and the Orientalist ideas, concepts, bodies of knowledge and world views by which it was accompanied during this period. With reference to Pierre Cachia’s canonical literary biography of this figure, she seeks to draw out such hitherto underexplored cross-cultural influences on and models for Husayn and his cosmopolitan programme of cultural and educational reform. In so doing, Ouyang provides a new reading of the Arab cultural renaissance – or *Nahda* – that is attentive to its underpinnings in colonial history, and thereby of the emergence of attendant categories such as ‘nation’, ‘national identity’, ‘classical’ and ‘modern’, and ‘world literature’ in the Middle East more broadly.

Chapter 8, ‘On Orientalist Genealogies: The Split Arab/Jew Figure Revisited’ by Ella Shohat, extends this emphasis on Orientalism by tracing the roots of contemporary discourses of ethnic and religious difference in the Middle East back to such as employed during the colonial period. In her genealogy critique, Shohat argues that current political and scholarly approaches to the region, premised on identity politics and nation-thinking, cannot account for the deep-seated structural determinants of the violence that continues to be perpetrated upon minorities such as Assyrians in Iraq, Maronites in Lebanon, Berbers in Algeria and Kurds in Turkey. Rather, it is the system of ethnic and religious classification at the heart of Orientalism that instilled the violence of majority/minority identifications and divisions in and, indeed, *as* the modern Middle East. With reference to the ‘Arab-Jew’ as a figure that paradigmatically exceeds Orientalism’s classificatory logic (in this case, its inscription of ‘Jews-as-West’ and ‘Arabs-as-East’), and tracing how this figure was systematically ‘split’ or ‘bifurcated’ in Orientalist literary and visual culture, Shohat aims to destabilise the crude differentiations that continue to be fixed by such. She concludes by drawing out the implications of this critique for a renewed consideration of the Israel/Palestine conflict in particular.

Chapter 9, ‘Colonial Violence, Law and Justice in Egypt’ by Stephen Morton, focuses on the representation of the notorious Denshawai incident in British-occupied Egypt within Ahdaf Soueif’s novel *The Map of Love* (1999) and Mahmud Tahir Haqqi’s novel ‘*Adhrā’ Dinshawāi* (1906). Through comparative literary and cultural analysis of these texts, Morton exposes both contradictions and elisions in the liberal rhetoric of the British occupation that must be accounted for, while foregrounding colonialism’s resulting socioeconomic inequalities, which serve to produce discursive power imbalances even in these attempts to redress colonial histories. Ultimately, Morton’s analysis identifies a history of unlawful colonial violence that can be traced as the genealogical origins of present-day state violence in Egypt and the Arab world: a reading that sheds new light on contemporary governmental responses to protest, while also radically contesting neo-Orientalist framings of violence and terror as inherent and specific to ‘Middle Eastern’ state mentalities.

Chapter 10, 'Peripheral Visions: Translational Polemics and Feminist Arguments in Colonial Egypt' by Marilyn Booth, turns to the vibrant debate about the role and status of women in the colonial nation within the context of 1890s Egypt, and the unexpected forms of transnational exchange that surface through such debate. Focusing particularly on the 1892 exchange in print between two Arabophone women born in Lebanon, Hanna Kasbani Kurani and Zaynab Fawwāz, Booth explores the hitherto unrecognised ways in which women within the Arab world interpreted 'Western' modes of feminist activism, including the British suffrage movement, in ways that rendered them locally resonant and expedient to their own liberationist causes. Booth's chapter thus invites us to consider the conceptual and contextual as well as literal processes of translation implicit in transnational feminist exchange. In this analysis, Booth presents a radical contestation of feminist 'imagined geographies' which have sometimes positioned 'Western' and 'Middle Eastern' feminisms as antithetically opposed, and looks instead towards a model based on dialogue, exchange and coequality.

Chapter 11, 'Reimagining the Ottoman Legacy' by Erdağ Göknaç, turns to Turkey and explores how Turkish modernity was constituted during an early Republican era which saw the denigration and repression of the country's Ottoman, Islamic heritage. Such 'internalised orientalism', Göknaç argues, resulted in a far-reaching refashioning of Turkish social and cultural identity in the twentieth century, one that can be traced through an analysis of literary, especially novelistic form. In recent years, however, authors have sought to retrieve elements of the past in their literary writings and, in so doing, to expose and critique the Orientalist logic at the heart of Turkish modernity. Drawing on Orhan Pamuk's novel *My Name is Red* (1998; trans. 2001) as an extended case study, Göknaç demonstrates how the Nobel Prize-winning author appropriates the archival object of the Islamic miniature as a new model for literary form that re-inscribes the Ottoman legacy in a more positive light. He explores Pamuk's rich but critically neglected investment in the Ottoman past, including the legacies of Sufism, Islamic tradition and Istanbul. Pamuk's writings, Göknaç concludes, suggest a critical and, indeed, 'postorientalist' reimagining of the discourse of Turkish modernity.

Tracing the pathological upheavals of the modern Middle East back to a colonial encounter that has never ceased to take place, Part I also elucidates how, crystallised under the weight of such, the literatures and cultures of the region as well as their global correlates continue to imagine, negotiate and resist this conflicted heritage.

## *II. States of Post/Coloniality: Politics, Religion, Gender, Sexuality*

Part II is focused on the formation of the modern Middle Eastern state in the wake of colonialism, and examines the implications of this heritage for questions of politics, religion, gender and sexuality as well as of literary and cultural production in the region. Across the twentieth century and continuing into the present, the process of state formation in the Middle East has been diverse, multifaceted and ridden with conflict. The polities of the region, precarious, in constant flux, have by and large been constituted in what might be considered the attempted and ongoing negotiation of material, socio-cultural and ideological incommensurables. These include the European colonial heritage; the persistent imperial and neo-imperial influence of especially Britain, France and the United States after formal decolonisation; the demands of anti-colonial

nationalism on a local and a regional scale; those of innumerable sub-national social and cultural groupings, whether rooted in local tradition or newly emergent in modernity; new political alliances and economic dependencies between states in the region and with others around the world; the pressures of international politics and of global capital; and the rise of ideologies alternate to nation, most notably Islamic Revivalism as a purported unifying agent across the region. From the maelstrom of these irreconcilable forces, a number of hegemonic forms of statehood have come to predominate in the post/colonial Middle East. Among the most prevalent are (European-modelled) parliamentary republic (e.g. Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, etc.); absolute or constitutional monarchy (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, the Gulf states, etc.); military dictatorship (e.g. Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, etc.); radical theocracy (e.g. Iran, Afghanistan, the Islamic State, etc.); and what might be referred to as 'failed state' for its de facto negation of the functions of state (e.g. Lebanon, Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, etc.). This section thinks through the dynamics of the post/colonial Middle Eastern state for its impact on expressions of politics, religion, gender and sexuality in the region. Specifically, it inquires into the politics and poetics of the post/colonial Middle Eastern state; international legal discourses and solidarity practices in relation to such; the Islamic Revival and its impact on notions of statehood; and the politics of gender and sexuality under these dominant forms of statehood. In so doing, it provides for a specifically Middle Eastern contribution to key topics in postcolonial studies such as authoritarianism and dictatorship, international law, cosmopolitanism, secularism/post-secularism, third-wave feminism, gender and sexual identity, and so forth, and thus other grounds for postcolonial and global comparison with other regions.

When considering the literatures and cultures of the Middle East, it is evident that the mechanisms of modern state formation there have played and continue to play a major structural role in their thematic and formal development, their modes of socio-political engagement and their institutional locations. At once a site of anti-colonial resistance, of national canonisation and of the repression and silencing of dissident voices, the post/colonial state both incorporates the literary-cultural sphere as the expression of a hegemonic imagined community and produces its own alternatives to such from the perspective of its margins. Traversing the liminal space between the state and its marginalised political, religious, gender and sexual positionalities through close attention to the literatures and cultures produced therein, this section aims primarily to demystify the occlusions of post/colonial modernity in the Middle East. In the process, it imagines a regional or transregional canonicity oriented not around the nation, but rather around its historically and geographically recurrent others, making for another new direction in comparative Middle Eastern literary history.

Chapter 12, 'Postcolonial Nations: Political or Poetic Allegories? (On Tahar Djaout's *L'Invention du désert*)' by Réda Bensmaïa, positions itself by way of response to Fredric Jameson's claim of the 'necessarily allegorical' status of 'the third-world text', which he views as an essentialist totalisation of the literariness of the Algerian postcolonial novel, particularly in its engagement with questions of language, audience, nation and ideology. Bensmaïa puts Jameson's proposition to the test by scrutinising Tahar Djaout's *L'Invention du désert* according to its classification as an apparently 'third-world text' that presents an 'allegory of nation'. Engaging in a philosophical scrutiny of the desert as site of allegory within this novel, Bensmaïa argues that far

from presenting a legible inscription of nation, Djaout's desert instead presents a complexly deterritorialised zone of erased and rewritten histories that challenges the very possibility of producing or reading Algeria as 'text'. Bensmaïa thus finds in the desert a powerful motif for the ongoing process of 'becoming' in which the post/colonial Maghreb finds itself.

Chapter 13, 'Passing Away: Despair, Eulogies and Millennial Palestine' by Salah D. Hassan, turns to Palestine and charts what Hassan calls the 'passing away' of the once-hegemonic idea of an independent secular democratic Palestine within the 1967 borders alongside Israel (also known as the two-state solution). Coinciding with the deaths of Yasir Arafat, Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish in the first decade of the new millennium, and aggravated by more recent political events including Israel's wars on Gaza and President Donald J. Trump's decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, this demise, he argues, has prompted a widespread sense of despair in Palestinian politics even as Palestinians continue to resist the violence of the Israeli occupation. The first part of this chapter focuses on despair and hope as the affective structure that has conditioned Palestinian responses to Israeli expansionism. The second part examines how this affective structure is evident in eulogies written for Arafat, Said and Darwish. To extricate Palestinian politics from this predicament, Hassan concludes, we must retrieve these figures' messages of emancipation from the mournful teleology within which their legacies have been inscribed.

Chapter 14, "They are in the right because I love them": Literature and Palestine Solidarity in the 1980s' by Anna Bernard, brings a global perspective to bear on questions of Palestinian literary and cultural representation. Noting the emergence of a contemporary metropolitan culture of engagement and solidarity with Palestine (as in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement), Bernard aims to contextualise its predominant civil society and humanitarian discourses in relation to the positionalities of post/colonial discourse. Bernard focuses on solidarity literature of the 1980s: a critical point at which, as Bernard puts it, 'the future of the national movement appeared uncertain, and the humanitarian turn had not yet been consolidated'. She explores the distinctive constructions of solidarity assumed and incited in the work of Palestinian author Raja Shehadeh and French author Jean Genet, both of whom invoke discourses of 'love' within their work, but with the result of varying political positionalities. Palestine, Bernard concludes, thus brings to light an antagonism that continues to modulate postcolonial approaches to the Middle East, and, moreover, the field of postcolonial studies per se – that between liberationist and humanitarian modes of solidarity.

Chapter 15, 'Nikes in Nineveh: Daesh, the Ruin and the Global Logic of Eradication' by Sadia Abbas, reads Islam and the Islamic Revival that has swept across the Middle East since the late 1970s/early 1980s not as the civilisational antagonist of the regime of global capitalism, but rather as a spectacular, intensified realisation of its inner impulses. In this powerful intervention, Abbas focuses on Daesh, the Islamic State, and argues that the logic of eradication deployed by this latest manifestation of Islamic Revivalism in Nineveh, Iraq and in Palmyra, Syria is an intensified version of that of global capitalism itself as witnessed around the world. Close-reading a range of primary Daesh sources such as its online magazine, *Dabiq*, and its recruitment videos, and drawing on theorists such as Slavoj Žižek, Faisal Devji, R. A. Judy and Achille Mbembe, she demonstrates Daesh's characteristically late-capitalist fixations on the

spectacle, the ruin, the Real, the Law and the necropolitical. She elaborates further with reference to Abderrahmane Sissako's film *Timbuktu* (2014). This film, she shows, traces how the socio-political upheavals caused by (US-led) globalisation and neoliberalism in the eponymous Muslim city create the conditions for the rise of jihadism there. Abbas concludes that in its establishment of a hegemonic, homogeneous 'state', Daesh extends the logic of global capitalism to one of its horrific ends.

Chapter 16, 'There was no "Humble Task" in the Revolution: Anti-Colonial Activity and Arab Women' by Anastasia Valassopoulos, reevaluates the postcolonial feminist narrative of Arab women's involvement in the decolonisation process. While attentive to the existing literary and critical discourses surrounding women's complex positions in these moments and movements, Valassopoulos identifies untheorised forms of resistance that, she argues, have tended to remain invisible but are worthy of our attention. Working comparatively across Palestinian, Algerian, and Tunisian contexts, Valassopoulos explores the revolutionary potentials of women's intellectualism as an identifiable mode of struggle; of the category of the 'veteran' as one that offers a fresh way of conceiving of women's solidarity and revolutionary inheritance; and of varied conceptions of 'labour', which help us think differently about how it might be possible to 'work' towards revolution. Through this creative and expansive process of rereading, Valassopoulos argues that 'feminist recuperative work in the Arab world' has the potential to 'look deeper into some of the alternative stories, practices and histories, and to moments of the everyday and the uncelebrated'. She thus expands our understanding of the intersection between postcolonial and gendered liberation in the context of Arab anti-colonial struggles in vital materialist directions.

Chapter 17, 'The Queerness of Textuality and/as Translation: Ways of Reading Hoda Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter*' by Lindsey Moore, presents a considered and creative reading of Hoda Barakat's 1990 novel in order to explore the critical and pedagogic issues that surface in the act of working with Arabic texts in translation. Via this consideration, Moore approaches the complexities that emerge around the particular task of translating desire, non-normative identification, and sexuality at both linguistic and cultural levels. Drawing on pedagogical as well as textual evidence, Moore suggests that the reading and translation process presents an apt opportunity to destabilise 'homo-hegemonic' versions of national history, while simultaneously alerting us to the dangers of critical co-optation when reading sexuality within the cross-cultural arena. Moore's chapter thus offers a vital engagement with both the politics of translation and the politics of 'queer' theorisation as these have been employed within the context of Arabic literature. By engaging with a text that, she argues, 'contextualises "queer" in open-ended rather than "colonising" ways', it becomes possible to appreciate the multidimensional refractions of positionality and interpretation that must be negotiated in the task of postcolonial reading, and indeed of postcolonial 'queering'.

Moore's chapter brings Part II to a fitting close. This section embodies in its structure the value of making comparisons and establishing connections between those on the margins of both the national and the transnational imaginary of the modern Middle East. The alternative canon it models from the literatures and cultures of these margins transcribes a critical riposte to the ideologies of violent political, religious, gender and sexual disenfranchisement characteristic of the region's postcolonial modernity.

### III. *The Post/Colonial Present: Crisis and Engagement in Global Context*

Part III is focused on the contemporary moment in the Middle East, a critical juncture at which questions of terror, war, revolution, neo-imperialism and transnationalism have come to dominate regional politics, scholarship and literary and cultural production alike. Given its colonial heritage and processes of state formation, it seems legitimate to claim that the Middle East today is defined by the dialectics of post/colonial modernity. This account is further substantiated by the renewal of especially Anglo-American policies of diplomatic, economic and military intervention there in recent decades. Read in light of its modernity, the contemporary landscape of crisis in the region – most dramatically embodied by the Islamic Revival, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Arab Spring, the rise of the Islamic State and the Middle Eastern refugee ‘crisis’ in Europe – manifests in terms of an eruption of antagonisms and contradictions inherent to a centennial and as yet incomplete historical unfolding. Yet recent generations have also witnessed an unprecedented surge in the visibility of issues of Middle Eastern politics, societies and cultures as well as of the rights and representations of immigrant Arab and Muslim communities on the global stage. Such developments are discernable in the resurgence of anti-Arabism and Islamophobia in Europe and the United States; in the rise of the global security state and its associated discourses and technologies; and in the mobilisation of a contestatory politics of dialogue, inclusion and multiculturalism oriented around the figure of the (immigrant) Arab/Muslim. Bringing the *Companion* to its methodological crux, this section addresses the regional and the transnational issues currently gravitating around ‘the Middle East’ – now conceived as a nexus of global entanglement in multiple layers and dimensions – alongside one another, as interrelated and, indeed, inseparable. Having – as per the preceding sections – in effect rendered the category of ‘the Middle East’ a point of intersection between those of ‘East’ and ‘West’, ‘North’ and ‘South’, it thereby frames the topic of crisis as central not just to the critical consideration of this region at the present moment, but also to the practices of postcolonial and global comparatism writ large.

Such a globalised conception of the region is borne out by this section’s approach to contemporary Middle Eastern literary and cultural production. On the one hand, it inquires into the impact of the contemporary landscape of crisis on the region’s literatures and cultures. Specifically, it assesses how novels, literary blogs, graffiti, popular music, political poetry, pictorial and conceptual artworks, documentaries and digital media sources from Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria have thematically and formally registered such over the last decade, making for a new, transmedial and transregional archive of the present. On the other, it examines how transnational forms and genres – including anglophone novels and autobiographies by Arab immigrants in Britain and the United States and European fictional, filmic and media treatments of Middle Eastern refugees – respond to cross-cultural discourses and representations of the region and provide counter-narratives of its multiple current conflicts. Typically read as distinct and incompatible, this section places these regional and transnational canons in dialogue for their overlapping and complementary engagements with, in a word, contemporary Middle Eastern globality. By adopting this approach, it posits what might be called a worlded Middle Eastern literary and cultural sphere as a critical counterpoint to such.



Chapter 18, ‘Anglophone Arab Autobiography and the Postcolonial Middle East: Najla Said and Hisham Matar’ by Tahia Abdel Nasser, assesses the rise of anglophone Arab writing, specifically life-writing, in light of the regional conflicts of recent decades. Situating this field in relation to wider trends in global writing and publishing, Abdel Nasser starts with a survey of prominent anglophone Arab autobiographies by Palestinian, Egyptian, Moroccan, Lebanese and Libyan writers from the last twenty-five years. She argues that in their nuanced meditations on issues of exile, diaspora, dispossession, occupation and war, such narratives play a crucial role for international audiences in that they disrupt common assumptions and stereotypes about the politics of the Middle East. She then turns in more detail to two recent texts focused respectively on Palestine and Libya, *Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused in an Arab-American Family* (2013) by the US-based Palestinian-American writer and actor Najla Said and *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land In Between* (2016) by the London-based Libyan novelist Hisham Matar. In her readings, she demonstrates that it is precisely through the intimacy and affective qualities of life-writing as form that such writers are able to successfully humanise the otherwise alien conflicts of the region for their audiences. Abdel Nasser concludes that when read alongside one another, such examples of anglophone Arab autobiography cumulatively suggest a new, post/colonial understanding of the Middle East.

Chapter 19, ‘Bare Life in the “New Iraq”’ by Ikram Masmoudi, draws on Giorgio Agamben’s paradigmatic concept to address the fate of the Iraqi subject in the years following the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. In this chapter, Masmoudi demonstrates through close readings of literary texts produced in this period – including the novels *The Green Zone* (2009) by Shākir Nūrī and *Baghdad Marlboro* (2012) by Najm Wālī – how Iraqis have been reduced to a condition of ‘bare life’ where they are drawn to target both the occupier and their fellow citizens in suicide bombings. Focusing on the liminal figure of the Iraqi US Army translator – a figure who inhabits both sides of the (neo-)imperial divide, yet does not fully belong to either – she traces through these texts the occupier/occupied dialectic in the context of the ‘War on Terror’. Such texts, Masmoudi concludes, powerfully embody in both their thematic context and their form the violence, fragmentation and outright destruction brought about in Iraq and on Iraqis since 2003.

Chapter 20, ‘Towards a Globalisation of Contemporary Iranian Literature?: Iranian Literary Blogs and the Evolution of the Literary Field’ by Laetitia Nanquette, turns to the twenty-first century phenomenon of the ‘literary blogosphere’ as an innovative medium through which it becomes possible to assess the impact of transnational technologies and formats on Iranian literature, and consequently, on the production of socio-political and cultural hegemonies. Through a contextual survey as well as case-studies of specific literary blogs, Nanquette presents a vital ‘counter-reading’ of the Iranian blogosphere that contests its arguably neo-Orientalist critical framing as an inherently ‘revolutionary’ realm of ‘Cyberutopia’. Instead, Nanquette produces a subtly contextualised reading of the literary blog as a realm in which formal and thematic innovation has occurred – though according to a process that must be understood as evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and which thus demands a reconfiguration of postcolonial assumptions about online discourse in the Middle East.

Chapter 21, ‘Popular Culture and the Arab Spring’ by Caroline Rooney, proposes literature and culture as active, participating agents in liberatory and/or revolutionary

movements, as well as sites of critical reflection and/or colonial appropriation. Tracing a trajectory between the importance attached to popularist national culture in the work of African liberation theorists such as Aimé Césaire, Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon and the central role of popular cultures and grass-roots creativity in the development and articulation of revolutionary discourse during the Arab Spring, Rooney explores a range of forms including graffiti, film and popular music as they have surfaced within and between the Egyptian and Syrian revolutionary struggles. Through her analyses, Rooney pushes towards a renewed and reinvigorated postcolonial understanding of revolution that places the creativity of the people at its heart, while alerting us to the dangers of appropriation that may occur when the Arab Spring is mistranslated within Western intellectual frameworks. Her chapter thus powerfully resituates the Arab Spring within a narrative of post/coloniality.

Chapter 22, 'The Syrian Revolution, Art and the End of Ideology' by miriam cooke, comprises an inspiring meditation on the Syrian Revolution of 2011. The locus of perhaps one of the most devastating humanitarian catastrophes of modern times, the Revolution, though continuing to this day, is often dismissed as having descended into crisis and failure. cooke rejects the finality of such accounts. In the creative works of Syria's writers, artists, filmmakers, digital media practitioners, and others, both at home and abroad, she sees not only an enduring revolutionary momentum, but also the expansion of such into a new transnational terrain of engaged cultural praxis. In this chapter, cooke surveys this terrain. She covers local and emigrant/exiled writers, artists and documentarians, as well as the gallery and the website as transnational physical/digital spaces. She argues that having created the circumstances for the global dissemination of its cultures, the Revolution has also laid the groundwork for a global mobilisation through which it might be addressed, and identifies the work of artist-activists as central to the production of a new style of revolutionary 'organic intellectual'. A resounding expression of faith in this project and of hope in the future of the country, cooke's archive of the Syrian Revolution and its transnational imaginary provides an apt riposte to pessimism.

Chapter 23, 'Biopolitical Landscapes of the "Small Human": Figuring the Child in the Contemporary Middle Eastern Refugee Crisis in Europe' by Anna Ball, rounds off this section by examining one of the outcomes of the conflicts addressed in previous chapters: namely, the Middle Eastern refugee 'crisis' in Europe. Focusing on the overdetermined but frequently silenced figure of the child within contemporary media and literary discourses, Ball presents a fresh reading of the European response to the 'crisis' as underpinned by neo-Orientalist imagined geographies, which, she argues, have been reconstructed in biopolitical and necropolitical terms rendered particularly visible through the discourse of ethical exceptionalism attached to 'the refugee child'. Drawing on postcolonial and human rights discourses, Ball seeks to read against the discursive construction of the child in these hierarchical and dehumanising terms by turning to the resistant voice of Syrian 'child refugee' Nujeen Mustafa. In Mustafa's waywardly childish, childishly wise and critically playful voice, Ball finds an alternative representational mode that radically contests the neo-Orientalist biopolitical hierarchisation of human life, and thus transcends the residual coloniality rendered visible within the mobile landscape of the post/colonial present.

In the 'Afterword: Critical Companionships, Urgent Affiliations', the editors Anna Ball and Karim Mattar bring the volume to a close by articulating its urgency

against the backdrop of present-day events. They identify future areas of postcolonial inquiry into the Middle East (such as globalisation, human rights, environment, digital humanities, pedagogy, etc.), and reflect on the volume's wider implications for the future of postcolonial studies per se. They suggest that the model of a 'post/colonial Middle East' developed throughout the volume opens exciting new possibilities for the field as it continues to expand its attention to other hitherto overlooked historical and geographical contexts, political issues and debates, and literary and cultural canons. Forward-looking, the 'Afterword' thus makes for a provocative concluding note.

It is perhaps in its as yet unfolding history of global entanglement that the Middle East – its conflicts and crises, its all-too-human devastations, its very idea – might most effectively be addressed. This *Companion* delineates a strand of this history through the literatures and cultures of post/colonial modernity in the Middle East, and, in so doing, makes for an important contribution to the humanistic understanding of a region under duress. Along the way, it crafts what the editors and contributors hope will be a powerful, flexible and influential framework for postcolonial critical inquiry into this region as scholars and students across the academic disciplines continue to engage the predicaments of globality.

## Notes

1. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
2. See Alfred Mahan, 'The Persian Gulf and International Relations', *The National Review*, XL, (1902), pp. 27–45.
3. See Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Zachary Lockman, *Field Notes: The Making of Middle East Studies in the United States* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016).
4. The term 'Greater Middle East' was first used in a working paper the George W. Bush administration submitted to the G-8 Summit in 2004. A leaked draft of the paper was acquired and published by the newspaper *Al Hayat*. See 'President Bush's "Greater Middle East Partnership Initiative": U.S. Working Paper For G-8', *Al Hayat*, 15 March 2004, <http://english.daralhayat.com> (last accessed 1 June 2016), n.p.
5. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 2. Also absent from this list as a synecdoche of the remit of early postcolonial studies, and likewise subject to complex colonial and imperial histories, are East Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. As with the Middle East, postcolonialists have started to direct the field towards these regions and their diverse linguistic and literary traditions in recent years.
6. See Wail S. Hassan, 'Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 33:1 (2002), pp. 45–64 and Wail S. Hassan and Rebecca Saunders, 'Introduction', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23:1&2 (2003), pp. 18–31.
7. Anna Bernard, 'Palestine and Postcolonial Studies'. Talk delivered at the 'London Debates 2010: How does Europe in the 21st century address the legacy of colonialism?', School of Advanced Study, University of London, 13–15 May 2010, [http://events.sas.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/postgraduate/Papers\\_London\\_Debates\\_2010/Bernard\\_\\_Palestine\\_and\\_postcolonial\\_studies.pdf](http://events.sas.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/postgraduate/Papers_London_Debates_2010/Bernard__Palestine_and_postcolonial_studies.pdf) (last accessed 1 June 2016), n.p.

8. Bernard, 'Palestine and Postcolonial Studies', n.p. For the first book-length study of controversies involving Palestinian or pro-Palestinian scholars in especially the US academy, see Matthew Abraham, *Out of Bounds: Academic Freedom and the Question of Palestine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
9. See Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1986). In this monograph, Harlow reads the lauded Palestinian novelist and critic Ghassan Kanafani for his contributions to this genre alongside comparable African and Latin American authors. She is one of the first scholars to introduce (and later translate) Kanafani and Palestinian literature more generally to the English-speaking world.
10. Edward W. Said, 'In Conversation with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul, and Ania Loomba, New Delhi, 16 December 1997', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1:1 (1998), pp. 81–96; p. 82.
11. Said, 'In Conversation', p. 82.
12. Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), pp. 99–113; pp. 104, 99, 104.
13. Joseph Massad, 'The "Post-Colonial" Colony: Time, Space, and Bodies in Palestine/Israel', in Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (eds), *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 311–46; p. 312. Elsewhere, specifically in his work on Jordan, Massad has applied the colonial model to national contexts within the Middle East. See Joseph Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
14. Neil Lazarus, 'Introducing Postcolonial Studies', in Neil Lazarus (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1–16; p. 4.
15. Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty, 'Beyond What? An Introduction', in Loomba *et al.* (eds), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1–40; p. 13.
16. Loomba *et al.*, 'Beyond What?', pp. 13, 1.
17. Neil Lazarus and Priyamvada Gopal, 'Editorial', *new formations*, 59 (2006), pp. 7–9; p. 7.
18. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, 'Introduction: Terror and the Postcolonial', in Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (eds), *Terror and the Postcolonial* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 1–24; p. 7.
19. A number of the volume's contributors participated in a seminar organised by the editors on 'The Postcolonial Middle East: Theory, Politics, Culture' at the American Comparative Literature Association Annual Convention at Harvard University in 2016, at which discussion of this and many other issues took place.
20. In Middle East studies, scholars such as Jaafar Aksikas, Michael Allan, Tarek El-Ariss, miriam cooke, Hamid Dabashi, Nergis Ertürk, Erdağ Göknar, Homa Katouzian, Stephan Meyer, Timothy Mitchell, Muhsin al-Musawi, Wen-Chin Ouyang, Kamran Rastegar, Jeffrey Sacks and Stephen Sheehi, among many others, have in recent years all started to reexamine the history, practices and implications of (literary and cultural) modernity/modernisation in the region. Indeed, the question of modernity might well be considered a key critical nexus for the field moving forwards. In developing the concept of 'post/colonial modernity', this volume takes its cue from such scholarship, while also hoping to contribute productively to it via its unique 'post/colonial' emphasis.
21. See Wail S. Hassan, 'Which Languages?', *Comparative Literature*, 65:1 (2013), pp. 5–14 and Wail S. Hassan, 'Arabic and the Paradigms of Comparison', in Ursula Heise *et al.* (eds), *ACLA Report on the State of the Discipline 2014–2015*, <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/arabic-and-paradigms-comparison-1> (last accessed 1 June 2016), n.p.
22. See Said, *Orientalism*.