The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual is one of those rare works that manages to describe an aesthetic formation—in this case, a generation of contemporary Arab writers—in order to reflect generatively on the intersections of history, politics and culture. In the opening pages through to the conclusion of the book, the author analyzes Arabic poetry, film, novels and essays against a shifting historical and political backdrop from the Cold War to the Oslo Accords to the Arab Spring. Each chapter adeptly navigates a robust literary dialogue between past, present and future, on the one hand, and between shifting conceptions of politics, critique and dissent, on the other. Whether pairing Oraik Toukan and Mahmoud Darwish or Rabee Jaber and Elias Khoury, Halabi positions contemporary writers alongside political imaginaries of previous generations—and in doing so, helps to reimagine the place and role of the Arab intellectual. The constellation of writers and filmmakers assembled here provides unto itself a unique contribution, combining a rich archive of critical work with insightful and attentive readings. Enriched by recent scholarship in the field, The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual offers a critical intervention that sheds light on a new generation of Arab writers and allows us to see the literary past anew. For both its literary insights and historical contributions, I enthusiastically recommend the book for publication with full confidence in the strong impact it will have in our field.

As for the question of audience, the book is in direct dialogue with scholarship that Edinburgh’s series has been critical in helping to cultivate. There are explicit references to a number of recent monographs in modern Arabic literature, and The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual is one of the first books I have seen to engage so thoughtfully with a generation of younger Arab writers. It thus builds upon debates in our field and extends them to consider more recent work—much of which is now available in translation. As is likely obvious to anyone picking up the book, the writing style is accessible and eloquent, and the introduction and conclusion help to structure the work as readable from beginning to end. I could easily see the book being excerpted to suit the needs of a classroom focused on specific texts addressed in individual chapters. It is impressive that the book mostly adheres to a common structure across the various chapters by pairing contemporary writers with the generation prior—that is, by reading the present in its engagement with the past.

The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual is at its best in the insightful close readings that stage most explicitly an encounter between generations and the stakes of political reflection in the Arab world. That the author engages the figure of the intellectual as the site through which to consider these questions adds an important dimension to the inquiry. It is clear that the book has much to offer anyone interested in Arabic literature, politics and culture. I would go so far as to say that The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual provides one of the most imaginative engagements with contemporary Arabic fiction I have read. It will make a perfect addition to a series renowned for publishing work from cutting-edge scholars in our field.

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