A Change in Leadership

CMENAS kicked off its 2006 colloquium series, “Gender and Sexuality in the Middle East,” on September 8 with an introductory lecture by Nadine Naber, U-M assistant professor of women’s studies, American culture and history. Naber gave an overview of the various meanings by which academia, the international gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender movement, and the media have approached the topic of sexuality, and particularly homosexuality, in the Middle Eastern region. Highlighting such various topics as misconceptions about celibate women to the scandal of Abu Ghraib, Naber eloquently overviewed the topic, while also explaining her own research into anti-Middle East sentiment in the post-9/11 U.S. In challenging many of the ahistorical notions of culture that are often applied to the Middle East, Naber tied together colonialist views with images presented in today’s Western media and made clear many of the complexities surrounding the subject of Middle Eastern sexualities.

The second speaker in the 2006 CMENAS colloquium series was U-M professor Dr. Marcia Inhorn, whose September 22nd lecture on infertility in the Middle East was entitled “Infertility, Semen Collection, and Middle Eastern Men’s IVF Experiences.” Dr. Inhorn began by contextualizing the issue of infertility, which affects 8-14% of all reproductive-aged couples around the world. She then discussed the new assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) of in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), which have rapidly spread around the globe, being shaped and molded by the cultures into which they enter. Dr. Inhorn, using numerous examples from her personal research in Lebanon and Egypt, counted what she termed the “dated” feminist argument that it is women’s bodies, and not men’s, that are manipulated by ARTs. She explained that Middle Eastern men’s reproductive lives, particularly regarding rapidly globalizing ARTs.

On October 5, Ellen Gruenbaum, an anthropologist professor from California State University-Fresno and medical anthropolo-
gist specializing in female circumcision in the Sudan, introduced the film “Fire Eyes,” a documentary of Somalian women that has been shown at a colloquium on Middle Eastern Sexualities. “Fire Eyes” is directed by Soraya Mire, a Somalian woman who was herself circumcised and who created this documentary as a call to end female circumcision, a practice she feels is not only physically harmful to women, but also psychologically and emotionally destructive. Mire interviewed Somalian men and women who have immigrated to the US, and finds that while many of the women see the harm in female circumcision, they still plan to have their daughters circumcised (but by a milder method than the most severe form, infibulation, that is widely practiced in Somalia). Mire becomes extremely frustrated in the film as she interviews Somalian men who see no harm in the practice, and want to continue having their daughters undergo infibulation. Her film ends by citing female circumcision as just one more practice aiming to distort women’s bodies, and references the ancient Chinese practice of foot-binding and the problems of child trafficking in Vietnam as just some of the many gender inequalities women have undergone and must continuously contest.

The following day Dr. Gruenbaum presented a lecture encapsulating her research into the practice of female circumcision in Sudan. She related to the colloquium audience the way in which female circumcision is not, contrary to what many in the West believe, a practice controlled by men. In fact, it is women who perpetuate this tradition, and she cites many women whom have told her that they want their daughters circumcised so that they will not bring shame to themselves or the family. Gruenbaum told her that they want their daughters circumcised so that they can have “fire eyes” - teeth that will not bring shame to themselves or the family. Gruenbaum also noted that young girls often want to be circumcised as a result of peer pressure from classmates; in this way, even if parents do not wish their daughter to engage in what they feel is a harmful practice, the daughter herself might insist on becoming circumcised. Dr. Gruenbaum made clear that female circumcision is an aspect of Sudanese culture, and that change will not come quickly or easily. However, the current activities of migration, urbanization, and the work of various international NGOs are all giving the Sudanese an opportunity to examine the practice of female circumcision from various angles; Dr. Gruenbaum claims that this will possibly initiate change into the way Sudanese view female circumcision in the future.

Everett Rowson, NYU professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, presented a lecture on October 13, entitled, “Medieval Arabic Erotica, an area which has been the focus of his own research for a number of years. Dr. Rowson began by stating that medieval Arabic eroticism is a large genre, and that the greatest wealth of knowledge about medieval sexuality comes from Arabic texts. He explained that the early Islamic period was primarily an oral culture, and that love poems were extremely popular. The early ninth century saw the rise of a new genre of sexual poetry called mu’jam. This type of poetry, however, was not written at the end of a muj’un poem the poet would always quote the Qura’n and state that poets say what they don’t do. Rowson stated that power was a central theme to medieval Arabic eroticism, and that the works always centered on a man sexually acting upon another person. Rowson concluded by remarking that medieval Arabic eroticism is an example of the full recognition in Arabic culture of this fact and that there existed numerous variations in sexual attitudes and desires.

Molly Moran, CMENAS and MPH Graduate Student

Cancer Epidemiology for Minority and International Populations

A new program has been developed to motivate and educate Master of Public Health students to pursue careers in cancer epidemiology research in special populations. It is a new curriculum-driven program that includes elective courses, special studies, and short-term research-oriented field experiences in minority populations in the US or foreign populations in other countries, supported by our faculty and field collaborators who have great interest and capacity to provide course instruction and expert field mentorship.

Currently, there are few cancer epidemiologists who have the skills and experience to implement studies in minority settings, including the studies of migrant populations. Unfortunately, up until now, there has been limited emphasis and opportunities for education and field research in international or ethnically diverse populations. This program will define cancer as an important educational and research discipline in minority and international settings. It will attract students from the University of Michigan and other US universities.

At present, all U-M School of Public Health Master of Public Health students are required to have summer internship projects which are the basis for their theses. Approximately 40% of these students are involved in foreign or ethnically diverse projects, but 95% of the projects are focused on infectious diseases not related to cancer. Funding for cancer has not been widely available. For example, none of our students did a summer internship on cancer last year because funding was only available for infectious disease training through other agencies. Our current curriculum program before and after the internships will equip the students to pursue careers in cancer research.

Evaluation of students, mentors, curriculum, and field experience will be reviewed continuously and annual evaluation reports will be drafted by the education committee and external advisors. Strategies developed and lessons learned through this program should have widespread applicability to other US public health and biomedical cancer education programs. We plan to disseminate the program through partnerships with other US-based epidemiology programs.

Amr S. Soliman, M.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Epidemiology
School of Public Health

My Egyptian Summer: Two Students Report on their Internships

When I first thought of Egypt, all I could think of were camels, deserts, and the pyramids. I did not know what to expect. This trip was my first work experience in another country with an unfamiliar language and culture. I was filled with mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety. Will I get along well with my physician supervisors? Will I like the food? Will be able to travel through Cairo by myself?

The two aspects of Cairo that shocked me the most were how over-populated the city was and how friendly its people were. Cairo is a city built for 5 million that holds about 19 million. Describing the city as ‘crowded’ is an understatement! However, I was received by every Egyptian that I interacted with such hospitality, warmth and support. My fondest memories of Egypt could not have been made possible without the care I received from the Egyptians.

My epidemiological research project was a very positive experience. I worked with the Gharbiah Cancer Society’s population-based cancer registry. As one of the first individuals to closely examine the data of this cancer registry, my focus is on analyzing the spatial distribution of liver cancer in the Gharbiah Province. Liver cancer is an interesting disease to study in Egypt in terms of its historical context. One of the most common causes of the increase in Egypt is the spread of hepatitis C virus (HCV) by direct blood contact. The high prevalence of HCV infection and liver cancer cases in Egypt is the use of unsterilized syringes for treatment of a common parasitic disease (schistosomiasis) over 40 years ago, which increased the spread of the already existing HCV.

My internship this summer in Egypt was more than I could have ever imagined. It taught me how to interact and work with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Most importantly, I have found that I greatly enjoy performing epidemiological investigations in the international setting.

Christiana Shoushuri, MPH Student

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do. But the opportunity to come to Egypt arose, simply, because I asked to go. A friend had told me that there was a professor who brings students to Egypt for their summer internships, and I jumped at the chance to meet with her and find out if I could take part.

I chose to work on a study involving inflammatory breast cancer (IBC), a particularly rigorous form of breast cancer that has a much higher prevalence in Egypt than in the United States. I compared IBC to non-IBC breast cancer patients, looking at clinical epidemiological data and the possible difference in expression of the Rho-C gene. I am now working with Dr. Sofia Merajver at the medical school and Dr. Soliman to examine gene expression, as well as comparing the other data I have acquired from the medical records, in order to understand more completely the details of IBC.

What I learned the most while working in Cairo is patience. Work days are over at 3, and the most common words in the workplace appear to be “baahden” (later), “bokra” (tomorrow), and “inshallah” (Allah-willing). Despite this atmosphere of relaxation, the cancer institute runs efficiently and effectively, and things are completed in a timely manner. What made the largest impact on my experience is the kindness, acceptance, and tolerance of my vastly different culture and views by all the Egyptians I have been fortunate enough to meet.

I was extremely fortunate to be able to go abroad last summer. It was a rewarding experience on many fronts—I can only advise that everyone tries to do the same. The fact that I went to a country that was so outside my comfort zone helped me realize that I am much stronger and adaptable than I previously thought. Besides, who else can say that they rode a camel through the desert to the Sphinx during their summer internship?

Angela Georgopoulos, MPH Student

CMENAS News Fall 2006
Faculty Updates


Jenifer Robertson, anthropology, received a Fulbright Research Scholar Grant for April-August 2006 at Tel Aviv University, Israel. Her work will focus on blood ideology and nation-building in Israel and Japan. She will be visiting professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Tokyo from January-March 2007.

In January of 2007, CMENAS will launch the “Changing Face of Iranian Society” series that will run through December 2007. This series will include presentations on women’s and women’s rights; oil and the nuclear program, literature and other cultural arts, architecture and urban planning; and films. Two of the major focal points of the series will be a winter 2007 residency by Iranian film director Mohammad Ghaffari who will work with U-M students to produce a Shakespeare play in the ta’zieh style, and an exhibit of contemporary Iranian photo-

tographers at the University of Michigan Museum of Art in fall 2007. The joint CMENAS-NES colloquium for the winter term, “Middle East Minorities,” will feature U-M faculty and graduate students as well as external speakers. The series will touch on ethnic and religious minorities, diaspora communities in Europe and the US, human rights, democracy, and legal issues. Alexander Knysh will teach the course "Modern Islamic Movements in Comparative Perspective." A number of the external speakers for this class will be asked to give public lectures included in the LS&A Citizenship Series in the spring semester.

In March, CMENAS will again partner with the University Musical Society during the residency of Rahim Alhaj and Souhail Kashyap whose public performance will be in Hill Auditorium on March 23. In addition to the public performance, they will be working with various local schools and give a youth performance.

In 2006 Andrew Shryock, anthropology, received a Guggenheim Fellowship to support his work on hospitality in Jordan. He was awarded a fellowship at the U-M Institute for the Humanities, where he is writing on Jordanian and Arab American topics. Shryock also received the University Undergraduate Teaching Award, and began his tenure as the new editor of Comparative Studies in Society and History.

What’s Coming for Winter 2007

In 2006 Thomas Abyob, professor of anthropology at Wayne State University, was appointed by the President of the American Anthropological Association to the Elected Office of the Executive Board, representing the Southeastern Section. Abyob is the author of “Beyond the Top Line: A Tale of Three Textiles” (Cornell University Press, 2006) and forthcoming in the Journal of Cultural Dynamics. He gave the keynote address at a conference convened by South Africa’s Institute for Global Dialogue. Tessler’s work on political attitudes in the Arab world is supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of State; and in collaboration with local scholars he has designed and implemented two representative national surveys in Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq and Kuwait. Recent publications have appeared in Journal of Democracy: Perspectives on Politics, and PS: Political Science & Politics. He gave the keynote address at a recent international conference held in Abu Dhabi, on “Opinion Polls in the Arab World: Opportunities and Challenges.”

Mark Tessler, political science, is Vice Provost for International Affairs at the University of Michigan. His work includes a recent chapter in International Studies Quarterly. His book, “Modern Islamic Movements in Comparative Perspective” (Indiana University Press, 2006); he is writing on hospitality in Jordan. He gave the keynote address at a recent international conference held in Abu Dhabi, on “Opinion Polls in the Arab World: Opportunities and Challenges.”

Alumni Updates

Thomas Abyob (MA, 1993) is professor of anthropology at Wayne State University. He has published three books on Jordanian and Arab American topics. Shryock also received the University Undergraduate Teaching Award, and began his tenure as the new editor of Comparative Studies in Society and History.

Jaco Arback (MA, 1983) is co-founder and head of The Channel, a 24/7 all-English entertainment television network featuring African music, films, travel shows, art, news & information, reality and more: www.theculturechannel.com.

John J. Brgoman (MA, 1984) is Vice President for Student Development at Northwestern College. He has been involved in development, administration, and the arts.

Mahoney Calder (MA, 1994) worked at the New York office of the American University of Beirut from 1999 to 2005, as director of communications for North America and co-editor of the alumni magazine MainGate. She is now working as assistant director of Foundation Relations at Winterthur Museum & Country Estate, which features one of the largest collections of early American decorative arts. She and her husband Peter are expecting their first child in April 2007. She fondly remembers her days at the Center and although not in the field anymore, she still tries to keep up with all things Middle East.

Clinton E. Cameron (MA and JD, 1991) is a partner with Ross, Ross & Ball, LLP in Chicago.

Diane Charipar (MA, 1989) works in the corporate finance group of a investment management firm in Boston. She also serves on the Collections Committee for the Department of Islamic and Later Indian Art at the Harvard University Art Museums.

David Schenker (MA, 1992) is a senior fellow in Arab politics at The Washington Institute. Previously he served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as Levant country director, the Pentagon’s top policy aide on the Arab countries of the Levant.

Elyse Semerdjian (MA, 1994) finished her Ph.D. in history from Georgetown University in 2003. She teaches Middle Eastern history at Whittier College and is in the process of publishing her first book, Off the Straight Path: Sex and Crime in Ottoman Syria.

Azezeh N. Shahshahani (MA, 2003) is an attorney and works for the ACLU of North Carolina Foundation as Muslim/Middle Eastern Community Outreach Coordinator. Laura A. Weinberger (MA, 1988) has moved on to a new career as an attorney with Dykema Gossett PLLC, in Detroit. She works as an associate in their real estate practice group.

If you are a Center alumn and have news you would like to share in the next issue of our newsletter, email us at cmenas@umich.edu.
CMENAS Mugs and T-Shirts for Sale

CMENAS is pleased to now offer T-shirts and mugs for sale. If you would like to place an order, you can fax us at 734.764.8523, send an e-mail to cmenas@umich.edu or mail this form to CMENAS, 1080 S. University, Ste. 4640, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1106.

We accept cash, check or credit card. T-shirts are $12 each and mugs are $10 each.

Size and Quantity:

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- Adult M
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