



C MENAS

ABOUT THE CENTER

The study of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region began at the University of Michigan (U-M) in 1889. Since the inception of the Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies (CMENAS) in 1961, U-M has been committed to area studies and language training. In 1993, the center became a member of the university's International Institute, which seeks to stimulate research and teaching on critical areas of the world and foster cooperation among the university's departments, schools, and colleges.

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DEAR CMENAS COMMUNITY,

The leaves are changing in Tree Town, USA, and U-M has been abuzz for weeks with the spirit of football. This Fall, we are delighted to welcome six new MA students to our program (pp. 6). All of them meet DEI recruitment criteria for academic excellence and contribution to the diversity of the U-M campus. Of those, two received Rackham Merit Fellowships. Here at CMENAS, we have much to be proud of, though we continue to focus on specific challenges as a community dedicated to MENA education and scholarship.

This summer, CMENAS applied for Title VI funding from the U.S. Department of Education to fund operations as a National Resource Center (NRC) and to support students learning MENA languages with Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowships (FLAS). The competition was stiff this year: As many of you know, the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) cautioned its membership that there was a trumped-up bias against Middle East NRCs in the current political climate. But, in late August, CMENAS learned that we secured \$2.3 million, which represents a 25% increase over the previous cycle.

We will dedicate more than \$1 million of that sum solely to funding undergraduate and graduate students who wish to study any of the six languages we administer: Arabic, Armenian, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish, and Uzbek. We invite students to apply for these summer and yearlong fellowships, regardless of their degree program. This cycle, FLAS funding increased by \$400,000 enabling us to support a historic number of students. We are particularly excited by this growth, since a new language offers the most direct and intimate experience of another culture, which ultimately serves our students well as they graduate and compete for placement in the American workforce. Since 1990, CMENAS has conferred 1,120 undergraduate and 400

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graduate degrees in MENAS, and the new uptick in FLAS funding will propel us further.

Beyond FLAS, CMENAS will leverage Title VI funding to:

- Livestream MENAS-related events to minority-serving institutions, like Eastern Michigan University and Henry Ford College, and conduct companion events with those campuses for U-M recruitment in line with the DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) strategic plan
- Offer K-14 teacher training programs in MENA and international studies education, helping Michigan teachers develop curriculum that ignites the interests of their students to learn more about the Middle East
- Host outreach programs for teachers and journalists that confront the epidemic of anti-Muslim bias in America, and scapegoating more broadly
- Support the U-M library and positions in Armenian and Turkish languages

I am particularly grateful to CMENAS staff Mekarem Eljamal, Rima Hassouneh, and Jessica Hill Riggs and II staff Henrike Florusbosch and Evan Vowell for untold toil and preparation in order to bring home this vital grant. With these results and plans, we keenly position ourselves to face the challenges of our time on campus and around the nation in the form of McCarthyism surrounding MENA education and scholarship. Now more than ever, CMENAS needs your material and moral support to fulfill its mission. If you're interested, here are some ways to get involved and remain informed:

- Stay in touch with our events and activities, and view our programming at CMENAS's YouTube channel.
- We invite alumni to connect via email and on LinkedIn, so that we can grow our community. Like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter @UMCMENAS, and visit our webpage to share your thoughts and reflections on U-M and CMENAS.
- Check out Donor Spotlight with Lois Aroian (pp. 26–27) who recounts how CMENAS and her experiences in the Middle East transformed her life. And share your story with us.
- Consider making a donation to support CMENAS students as they pursue their professional and education goals. And if you wish to make your investment part of your legacy, please contact me directly about establishing a scholarship endowment: <samerali@umich.edu>. Named endowments can begin at a gift level of \$25,000.

At this moment, we are in uncharted waters for the country and for MENA education and scholarship, but we are Michigan: we have phenomenal faculty, promising students, world-class libraries and museums, and a regional catchment of 500,000 people of MENA descent around the UM campuses. I am more invigorated than ever to think through these challenges together. Join CMENAS as we chart the waters ahead and build programs that will last for generations to come. Go Blue!

Sincerely,
Samer M. Ali, PhD

CMENAS IN HISTORY

Earlier this summer, CMENAS went to the Bentley Historical Library to browse through its archival material on the center.



▲ In 1983, CMENAS, several other campus units, and community partners came together to showcase the important role of women in Middle Eastern economies, politics, history, and society.

▶ When Professor Anton Shamas, author of the award-winning Hebrew novel *Arabesques*, first came to U-M in 1987, he was a Rockefeller Writer-in-Residence. While in the U.S., Prof. Shamas gave a lecture at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at University of California-Berkeley, which was highlighted in its 1988 newsletter pictured here.



▶ This is one of the early applications CMENAS submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for the Title VI National Resource Center and Fellowships Programs. Our 1981 application was a mere 30 pages; this year, our application was over 175 pages. The Director's Message (p. 2) includes the results of this year's application.



AN UPDATE FROM THE IRANIAN STUDIES PROGRAM

By Cameron Cross

The Iranian Studies Program at the University of Michigan's Department of Middle East Studies continued many of its regular activities: we held our second annual film festival, dedicated to the cinema of the late Abbas Kiarostami, and organized Persian conversation hours for students and faculty every other week or so. The Persian Studies Workshop was especially active in bringing in guest speakers, including Professors Mana Kia, Derek Mancini-Lander, and Ali Karjoo-Ravary; along similar lines, some of our graduate students presented their work at the Great Lakes Adiban Workshop in October of 2017.

In other respects, the academic year 2017–18 was a year of long-term planning. We are in the process of reviewing and revising our Persian language curriculum from the ground up: we have restructured the program to accommodate increasing demand and offer further lines of specialization for advanced students, brought in new teaching materials, revised our pedagogical method, and are currently updating our own “in-house” textbook, the first draft of which will be given to our second-year students in the Winter of 2019. In addition, we will be hosting a symposium in the Winter entitled *The Iranian Revolution and its Disciplinary Aftereffects*, in which scholars working across a variety of disciplinary fields—history, anthropology, media studies, literature—will come together to discuss how the field of Iranian studies has evolved in the forty years that have passed since 1979. These activities, on top of the usual film festival, Persian roundtable meetings, and Iranian studies workshops, promise an exciting and busy year ahead!

FLAS

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE
AND AREA STUDIES
FELLOWSHIP AWARDEES**

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the FLAS fellowships support students studying less commonly taught languages. The 2018–2019 recipients are:

Graduate Students

Sarah Gerges (Turkish)
Master's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies

Kelly Hannavi (Arabic)
Doctoral Student, History & Women Studies

Meghan Hough (Arabic)
Dual Master's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies and Arabic Studies

Timothy Jones (Persian)
Doctoral Student, Political Science

Graham Liddell (Persian)
Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature

Bryon Maxey (Arabic)
Master's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies

Ahmed Mitiche (Arabic)
Master's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies

Undergraduate Students

Margot Libertini (Arabic)
Bachelor's Degree Student, Philosophy

Stephanie Misevich (Turkish)
Bachelor's Degree Student, International Studies & German

Zoe Pappas (Arabic)
Bachelor's Degree Student, Linguistics and Cognitive Science



On April 27, CMENAS and all the regional centers of the International Institute gathered together to celebrate the 2018 graduates from the multiple centers. Congratulations to **Ameena Yovan** (MA), **Kristen Canavan** (MA), **Shireen Smalley** (MA), **Will Hall** (MA), **Sena Duran** (BA), **Malak Ismail** (BA)!

From left to right: Samer Ali, Ameena Yovan, Kristen Canavan, and Shireen Smalley.

MASTER'S DEGREE STUDENTS

INCOMING STUDENTS

CMENAS is excited to welcome the 2018 cohort of six MA students including the five listed below. This is one of the most diverse cohorts in recent memory, and we anticipate their presence and contributions will further enrich the climate and culture of the U-M campus. Please join us in welcoming them to their new home.



Mekarem Eljamal earned her BA from the University of Michigan in 2016. Following graduation, she spent time in Haifa, where

she worked at a research institution focusing on Palestinian citizens of Israel. Mekarem works with the Arab Studies Institute as the editor for “Al-Diwan” and the Middle East Studies Pedagogy Initiative. Her research interests center on Palestinian citizens of Israel, specifically the processes and role of place-making on notions of identity, citizenship, belonging, and non-belonging.



Meghan Hough is a dual master's degree student in Middle Eastern and North African Studies and

Arabic Studies. Her research interests include theoretical linguistics, pre-modern Islam, as well as post-colonialism in the Middle East and Africa. During her final years as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, she worked as the Social Media and Communications Intern for the Digital Islamic Studies Curriculum (DISC), where she helped facilitate the expansion of shared courses in Islamic Studies, offered digitally throughout the Big Ten universities.

Ahmed Zakarya Mitiche holds a BA from the University of Indianapolis in Sociology/Social Research and Philosophy/Ethics. He was awarded a Fulbright Research Grant to Morocco last year, where he conducted field work with activists from two contemporary social movements and critiqued analyses that have problematically centered



questions of security and the threat of “Violent Islamic Extremism” on an otherwise pacifist and secular social movement. As an activist and organizer, Ahmed founded a local non-profit, FOCUS Initiatives and organizes against Countering Violent Extremism funding in Indianapolis as part of the American Friends Service Committee's Communities Against Islamophobia project.

Ali Al Momar's primary area of interest is comparative politics in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in relation to electoral dynamics, democratic transitions, and identity politics. Ali previously worked at Freedom House, a DC-based democracy watchdog.



There, he assisted in managing a multi-million dollar portfolio of human rights and democracy programs focusing on issues ranging from gender equality to justice-sector reform. Ali also contributed to Freedom House's advocacy efforts; his research was utilized in analyses and various press releases published on Freedom House's website.



Asma Noray graduated from Swarthmore College in 2017 with a BA in Political Science and Arabic. Asma has studied Arabic

in Morocco, Oman, Iraq, and Jordan, and worked extensively with refugee populations from these regions. Her research interests involve understanding refugee and migration crises in the Middle East through fiction and personal narratives. Over the past year, she served as an AmeriCorps member at World Relief Seattle to expand services for refugee youth in the area. In addition to these research interests, Asma is also passionate about advocacy and civic engagement in the Muslim American community.

CONTINUING STUDENTS

In addition to our incoming students, meet our talented and accomplished cohort of continuing students, who bring to the center a diverse range of research interests, language skills, and professional experiences.



Sarah Gerges earned a BA in Linguistics with minors in French and Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Kansas in 2015. As an

undergraduate, she also began studying Turkish, and spent two summers in Izmir with a Critical Language Scholarship from the U.S. Department of State and a program administered by the University of Arizona. In 2017, Sarah received a Fulbright U.S. English Teaching Assistantship to teach English in Turkey, but the program was canceled in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt. She has recently returned from Istanbul at Bogazici University sponsored by the American Research Institute in Turkey.



Samiah Haque is a graduate of the Helen Zell Writers' Program in Poetry in 2015 at the University of Michigan. Her research interests include

the intersections of Islamic cosmology with pilgrimage studies, psychoanalysis, and architectural theory. She works at the U-M Medical School to implement a revision of the curriculum, and is at work on her first novel.

Derek Lief is pursuing a dual master's degree in Middle Eastern and North African Studies and Public Policy. After



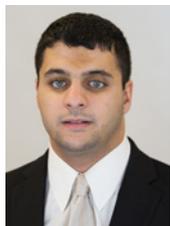
his undergraduate career, Derek worked for four years at FTI Consulting in San Francisco. At the same time, he started taking classes in math, Arabic, and Hebrew. He has lived in Israel and Jordan for the last four years, where he served the Peace Corps and worked with NGOs.

Bryon Maxey is pursuing an MA in Middle Eastern and North African Studies focusing on the history of Islamic education bridging Africa and the Americas. He completed a BA in History, African Studies and a minor in Anthropology at the University of Michigan. Bryon finds inspiration in



family and community accounts of resilience, erudition, and triumph; his professional and academic career includes multifaceted experiences as a pre-college educator, multifaith community organizer, and project facilitator of digital learning. At U-M, Bryon helped launch initiatives including: Digital Islamic Studies Curriculum; Islamic Knowledge, Histories & Languages, Arts & Sciences; Youth Civil Rights Academy; and the Teach-Out Series.

Seif Saqallah graduated from U-M with undergraduate majors in AAPTIS, Middle Eastern and North African Studies, Judaic Studies, and International Studies, as well as a minor in Religion and Law, Justice, and Social Change. Seif was born in Jordan and immigrated to the United States at two years old. Two of his favorite campus organizations are the Muslim Students' Association and MuJew (Muslims and Jews), an interfaith



intercultural group which strives to create a bridge of empathy and understanding between two communities that are commonly

misunderstood. Seif is pursuing the dual JD/MA program with the U-M Law School and CMENAS where he hopes to study law and continue his interests in Arabic and Hebrew. Combining Arabic and Hebrew: Shalom 'alaykhem, wa rahmat Allahi wa barakatuh. Peace be with you, and the mercy and blessings of God.



Leah Squires is pursuing a dual master's degree in Middle Eastern and North African Studies and Public Policy. Her years of nonprofit

experience with youth, immigrants and refugees, and linguists, as well as her Peace Corps service in Morocco, inspire her graduate coursework. A researcher-writer, her curiosity lends itself to disparate topics, linked by threads of social policy and justice, geography, and intercultural communication. Leah recently completed an internship with Direct Relief where she used data-driven storytelling to investigate the intersection between environmental hazards and humanitarian aid in the Rohingya refugee crisis. She will return to Morocco in 2019 and looks forward to upcoming intellectual explorations of the Maghrib. She is proficient in Moroccan Arabic and is studying Modern Standard Arabic and French to better inform her studies.



Justin Stucki graduated from the University of Michigan-Dearborn with a BA in International Studies and Arabic Studies.

Combined, he has spent several years studying the Arabic language and the socio-political and religious history of the Middle East and North Africa. His current research interests are broadly in the dialectology of Arabic, and in examining how different cultural, linguistic, religious, and political identities in the Middle East interact.

TURKISH

A LANGUAGE THAT BLOSSOMS

By Mekarem Eljamal

Students who enroll in Turkish language courses at U-M are provided with both a phenomenal academic environment and a welcoming and familial atmosphere. **Nilay Sevinc**, the current Turkish language coordinator, has taught Turkish for over 10 years and brings to her classrooms an excited love of teaching.

"I love teaching Turkish in general. I just really enjoy it," Sevinc said.

Prior to beginning her career at Michigan, Sevinc was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Oregon, as well as a Turkish language instructor and the language coordinator at the University of Oregon's Yamada Language Center.

"The University of Oregon was a wonderful language program," said Sevinc. "I was teaching Turkish as a self-study course, so I taught students whatever they wanted to learn. Maybe they wanted to learn about the language and culture or maybe they wanted to speak a little of the language before travelling to Turkey."

Since coming to Ann Arbor, Sevinc has had to adjust to the teaching

requirements and opportunities posed by language courses at U-M.

"At the University of Oregon, it was very student-centered and not very intense; classes were only two or three hours per week," Sevinc said. "When you teach a language as a self-study you can rely on materials, but when you meet your students five times a week, you need something more than handouts."

Overtime, and through her involvement with the American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages (AATT), Sevinc developed her own materials to use in the classroom.

"There were not any textbooks that I liked, so I decided not to use any textbooks and instead started developing my own materials," she said. "It was not easy, but I'm happy with it. I wrote a course pack for first-year Turkish and I hope to eventually turn it into a textbook sometime soon."

The AATT is a place of community for Sevinc. With other colleagues, she has developed a repository project to collect past Turkish language syllabi and course materials to pass on to new Turkish

instructors and she also is helping to revamp the language framework for Turkish, which Sevinc will be presenting on at the 2018 Middle East Studies Annual Meeting.

"Whenever you collaborate with your colleagues, you learn something new and get new ideas on how to adapt your teaching," said Sevinc. "But I also think that now that I've been teaching for years, it is time to serve others. Now I can share my own experiences and materials and mentor other Turkish instructors."

Sevinc brings this same love for community into her classrooms on campus.

"My classes are really small so I get to know students very well and we get to become like a family," she said. "I know I am teaching this language in the university and in the academic environment but we make this connection. A connection to the language, to each other, and to the class."

The learning and engagement, though, does not end after a class period or at the conclusion of the term. Sevinc hosts multiple extracurricular activities to support her students' continued Turkish education.

"I have immersion activities such as Turkish tea and breakfast, where I invite both my former and new students, so they get to know each other," Sevinc said. "With these events, my former students have an environment to use the language and brush up their knowledge of the language, and they can meet new people."

For Sevinc, the joys of being a language instructor is similar to that of watching a seed transform into a thriving plant.

"I see how this language changes the students," Sevinc said. "It is like a plant; you put it in their hands and it starts growing. I look forward to continue seeing this community of students grow and blossom in the future."



"My classes are really small so I get to know students very well... **[W]e make this connection. A connection to the language, to each other, and to the class.**" —Nilay Sevinc

AN INTERNSHIP, AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO BETTER UNDERSTAND A CONSTANTLY EVOLVING COUNTRY

By Derek Lief



Top: Maghar village in northern Israel
Above: As part of my job with Yahel, I organized seminars, like this one in Julis village, for the program volunteers. This lecture, held in a home converted into a museum about the Druze community in Israel, was very interesting and dealt with how Druze are expected to marry within the community. Initially, the mainly American Jewish audience was taken aback, but quickly realized that the similar expectation for the Jewish community in the United States.

This summer, I am interning at the Milken Innovation Center at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research in Jerusalem, Israel. I chose this position because I want to continue on to a PhD in public policy focusing on the Middle East and thought this organization gave me the best opportunity to merge those interests over the summer. Additionally, I am translating Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Lover* from Arabic to English with a friend based in East Jerusalem, so the location was ideal.

While I lived in Israel and Jordan for four years prior to coming back to school, and felt I had a fairly good understanding of the region, this position has really given me a better understanding of the budgetary challenges facing the city, of which I had a very limited understanding before my internship here. In fact, I was not even aware that the city was operating at a deficit! Throughout my internship at the Milken Innovation Center, I have had the chance to get a better understanding about these issues, and to start thinking about ways to try and solve them. For example, one thing that sticks in my mind this summer from my experience at Milken is meeting with someone from the municipality who had conducted surveys indicating that the majority Israeli Jewish population in West Jerusalem most desired more coffee houses; however, in Palestinian East Jerusalem, people are most desirous of gyms. I think some interesting questions (and ones I hope to consider in my PhD

program) that stem from this survey is first, what accounts for these differences and second, how can they be used to improve the budgetary problems in the city?

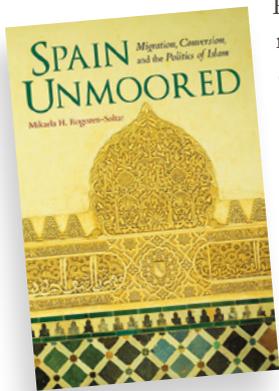
Outside of my work at the Milken Innovation Center, I also work with Yahel-Israel Service Learning, an organization that I worked before coming to U-M. With Yahel, I am responsible for leading weekend "Breakout Seminars" of international college students (including four Michigan students!) where we learn about lesser known communities in Israel. Something that has stuck with me this summer from these seminars are the Druze communities in northern Israel. The Druze are a religious group that live mainly in Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, and while they have family ties across national borders, a majority are loyal to the state where they live. In Israel, even though they are ethnically Arab, they have had an excellent relationship with the State and have served in the army since 1956. Israel passed the "Nation State Law" this summer and many Druze see the bill as relegating them to second-class citizenry. While I have worked with these communities for years, I have never heard them express anything but support for the State. After this new law, I was surprised to learn that many of them were very upset and some Druze withdrew from serving in the Israeli army.

In sum, and as always here in Israel, the summer has been filled with learning and lots of controversy—there really is never a dull moment here.

WHERE ARE THEY?

CMENAS had the chance to catch up with two CMENAS alumni who have had major career accomplishments: **Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar** finished her PhD in Anthropology in 2010 and **Joseph Viscomi**, a graduate of the joint Anthropology and History program, earned his PhD in 2016.

A two-time CMENAS Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellow for Arabic, Rogozen-Soltar recently published her first book, *Spain Unmoored: Migration, Conversion, and the Politics of Islam*. Now an assistant professor at the University of Nevada-Reno, Rogozen-Soltar took the time to talk and reflect on her entrance into Middle Eastern and North African Studies, her time as a graduate student at U-M, and upcoming projects she has in mind.



Rogozen-Soltar's interest in the emerging relationship between Islam and Spain initially came out of studying abroad in Spain during her undergraduate years. "It was post-9/11, and I was fascinated by the simultaneous celebration, consumption, and selling of the Muslim past while also fearing living and breathing Muslims."

This interest in the complexity of Muslim identity in Spain is at the heart of her new book. "At first, I went to look at migration in Spain," said Rogozen-Soltar, "but the project evolved into looking at negotiations of Islam and how the Muslim past was drawn on to make sense of the present."

While shifting the focus of one's research can be slightly nerve racking, Rogozen-Soltar emphasized that it is usually a good sign. "Changing your topic is an indicator of a good project because it means you are paying attention to your interlocutors," she said.

In addition to embracing and understanding a research shift, Rogozen-Soltar had some sound

advice to pass along to current students, especially PhD students whose research focuses on the Middle East and North Africa. "There is an embarrassment of riches at U-M and you should take advantage of as many opportunities as possible," she said. "Be as involved as possible with CMENAS; most institutions don't have these spaces."

Looking forward, Rogozen-Soltar has projects focusing on conversion to Islam, cyclical migration away from and back to Andalusia, and the impact of Moorish history on Andalusians' relationship to Spain.

In a final thanks to all that U-M provided her, Rogozen-Soltar said, "I am still so grateful to the anthropology and CMENAS programs, the funding, faculty support, and my cohort that lifted each other up in a collegial and non-competitive manner."

The centrality of movement and migration in Viscomi's research interests are reflected in his academic career. Academia was not initially a calling for him; prior to graduating from high school, Viscomi considered a carpentry apprenticeship. After deciding to apply and attend a small liberal arts college in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, Viscomi then moved to Cairo, Egypt where he earned his MA at the American University in Cairo. Following his PhD at Michigan, Viscomi held a one-year faculty fellow position at New York University, and he is now starting a permanent lectureship in modern European history at Birkbeck, University of London.

"I have been fascinated by the processes and transformations that direct and result from migration, from the historical tendency of people to move and yet for people to understand themselves—and their communities—as somehow fixed in time and place," Viscomi said. "To study these phenomena, I have had to be rather mobile, and academia has been welcoming to this mobility."





Viscomi understood the importance of mobility and flexibility as tools to continue deepening his knowledge and challenging his modes of inquiry. During his second year of the PhD, Viscomi had a FLAS Fellowship which allowed him to continue studying Arabic.

“Although my research diverged from my initial plans (this should be expected), this knowledge and regional expertise [from FLAS] helped me to read against the grain of typical approaches,” Viscomi said. “In the end, it was precisely because I had a solid foundation of regional studies in both the Middle East and Europe that I was able to see the Mediterranean as a transregional category, one that escaped the common figurations of approaches to Middle Eastern or European history and culture.”

U-M offered Viscomi many opportunities to expand his thought processes and modes of understanding.

“Above all else, I enjoyed the intense debate of graduate seminars. We brought challenging problems to the classroom and pushed one another to see our individual projects in new ways and from different perspectives,” he said. “I very much enjoyed having area studies centers as meeting points for a focused dialogue, I also appreciated that CMENAS colloquium, workshops and seminars often encompassed transregional topics and spoke to diverse audiences. These were some of the more stimulating intellectual conversations during my time at Michigan.”

In addition to the continuous evaluation of his scholarship, Viscomi has also paid attention to the transition process between graduate school and the academic job market.

“These transitions are naturally bumpy. Many tenured faculty lack the sense of the visceral toll that the academic job market takes on senior graduate students

and recent graduates,” he said. “Universities are developing strategies to better prepare students for these transitions. Within the folds of these transitions and institutional strategies are some serious questions that we should ask, within our academic communities, about both the purpose and pursuit of our role in higher education.”

Viscomi is currently working on his first book, tentatively entitled, *The Migrant Mediterranean: Imperial Afterlives between Egypt and Italy*.

“It explores how Italian residents in Egypt and the political actors around them anticipated, experienced and remembered their departures from Egypt between 1933 and 1967 in relation to contemporary historical events. The book draws together micro and geopolitical histories in studying the collapse of Italian fascism and processes of decolonization in the Mediterranean,” he said.

In addition to this book, Viscomi is developing a project that concentrates on the depopulation of towns in Calabria, Italy since the 19th century.

“Contrary to the broad scope of my early research, which follows migrants from Italy to Egypt and back again (and often elsewhere), [this] project inverts historiographical questions about migration by seeking to understand depopulation from the perspective of local, material transformations such as earthquakes, floods, and changing relations to agricultural land.”

Imparting words of wisdom to current graduate students, Viscomi reflects on the fact that he experienced many setbacks while conducting research in Egypt.

“The best advice I could give to current graduate students is to allow their research to change and develop according to the realities that shape the region—we will increasingly need to embrace new methodologies, new materials and learn new ways of addressing publics and sharing knowledge,” he said. “States (not just in the Middle East) continue to work against us and we should, as a community of scholars rather than individual competitors, engage our scholarship in understanding the realities we have lived and experienced, and continue to live and experience.”

ARE
YOU A
CMENAS
ALUM?

We would love to feature you in our next newsletter! Please reach out to us at cmenas@umich.edu

THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB NETWORK

By Mekarem Eljamal

Despite a large Arab diaspora in and around Ann Arbor, the town felt quite isolating to Miray Philips (BS 2015). Those feelings of isolation and otherness were compounded after the 2011 revolutions where change seemed to come fast and swiftly but campus lacked spaces to process and understand what was happening. Three years later, in 2014, Philips, Haya al-Farhan (BA 2015) Raya Saksouk (BPP 2015), and Branden Shafer (BA 2015) founded the Middle East and Arab Network (MEdAN) to create a space to engage in conversations about the internal and external political and social dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa.

“There were Middle Eastern cultural organizations who did fantastic work, but they weren’t necessarily engaged in political conversations,” Philips said.

Al-Farhan continued in a similar vein, saying “I wanted there to be an organization that acted as a home and community for Middle Eastern and Arab students on campus which addressed the political realities and the larger culture of the region and the diasporic communities.”

Saksouk, who was co-chair of MEdAN from 2014–2015, explained her hope of having MEdAN become a vibrant and diverse community of people with Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African identities, where “we could connect with each other over issues within our communities on the one hand, and, on the other, figure out ways to have some say in the greater cultural narrative of what it means to be Arab or MENA

identifying—to have a say in how people define and understand us.”

The intentionality the co-founders brought to the creation of MEdAN was a major drawing point for future board members in the organization. Nadia Karizat (BA 2018) joined MEdAN as a first-year student, at a time when she was struggling to find an organization that accepted her fully. “Being mixed [race] I felt like I wasn’t meeting all the checkboxes for other Arab organizations,” Karizat said. “But MEdAN was very intentional about making everyone feel welcome and I never felt like I had to put on an act about who I was.”

The importance of inclusivity that contributed to Karizat finding community, and ultimately becoming a co-chair of the organization, was a major point of conversation early in the organization’s inception. “We had a lot of conversations about defining ourselves as an “Arab” organization. This ethnic marker fails to represent the ethnic, religious and national diversity of the Middle East, which includes Yazidis, Kurds, Chaldeans, Iranians, and Turks amongst many others,” Philips said. “Despite having Arab in the title, we made an intentional decision to be mindful of not excluding communities that have historically been excluded.”

Each term, MEdAN’s board works to curate a set of events that balances having conversations that are both of interest to the MEdAN membership, but are also timely. One of their staple events is their semesterly community dinners. To build a sense of community, the community dinners are a “rich experience to come together and share a meal with friends and peers and teachers and activists who supported our vision,” said Philips. Past speakers at the community dinners have been Professors Evelyn Alsultany, Katheryn Babayan, and Hadji Bakara.

For Karizat, the most recent community dinner with Bakara epitomized that balance. Amidst conversations about xenophobia across Europe, “Bakara focused on the stories of migrants from North Africa through literature and the different impacts the ways that





From left to right: Sena Duran, Nadia Karizat, Kathryn Babayan, and Camelia Metwally

these stories are told have on people’s reception of them.” Within the MENA communities, discussions about and attention to North Africa is minimal, so the dinner served as a great opportunity to include education into a more social atmosphere.

Events like the Community Dinners and more intimate Chai Circles where conversations about topics like colorism and homophobia in MENA communities allowed Philips to leave “Michigan with a fuller heart and a new set of sustaining friendships.” Sara Dagher (BPP 2017), who served as co-chair from 2016–2017 said that these events nicely balanced the organization’s social, education, and activist goals and allowed her to participate in activism through education.

As chairs, Karizat and Dagher brought valuable conversations to the fore through event planning and intentional collaborations with other organizations on campus. The fall 2015 community dinner was in collaboration with the Armenian Students Association and had Professor Fatma Muge Gocek

speak about the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. In light of the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, MEDAN partnered with the Native American Student Association and Students Allied for Freedom and Equality to discuss the use of water as a political tool and the intentional negligence of water infrastructures across the globe.

In addition to hosting events with a variety of focuses, MEDAN’s programming also gave space to highlight the diversity of MENA in more non-traditional ways. “As hard as we tried to be inclusive, it was difficult to gather a representative group of our MENA campus community in one room,” Dagher said. “So, we tried to be inclusive in other ways—we hosted Community Dinners where we served Tunisian and Turkish cuisine from local restaurants and invited lecturers of different MENA backgrounds to speak.”

Looking towards the organization’s future, the Fall 2018 term is most likely going to be a transitional period since many of the former board members are returning to campus for graduate degrees. Karizat hopes to continue to expand the organization’s membership, building up both graduate and undergraduate numbers, and collaborate with other campus organizations.

“The goal for MEDAN is not just to bring people together,” Karizat said. “It is to bring everyone together and have conversations that challenge one another to be more critical with how we engage on and around MENA issues, both internally and externally.”

Author’s Note: Mekarem Eljamal was Co-Chair of MEDAN from 2015–2016

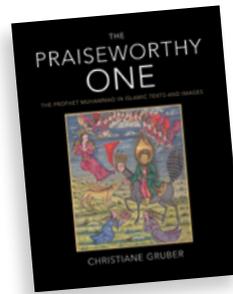
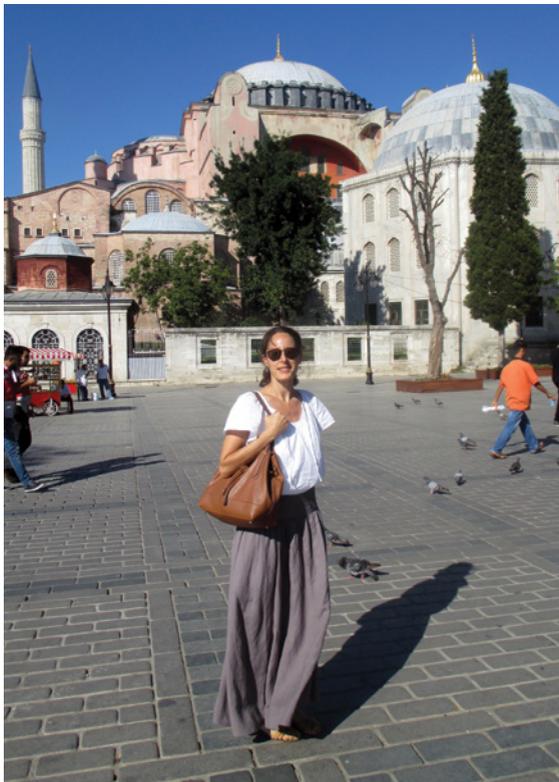
MEDAN is not just an acronym, but it is also the Arabic word for a public square, giving a nod to the 2011 revolutions that happened in the MENA and gave inspiration to Philips for this organization.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

At sixteen, **Christiane Gruber**, now, Professor of Islamic Art History, earned a fellowship that took her to Tunisia to study Arabic and the history of the Arab World. That experience set Gruber on a path to spending over 25 years living and working in countries all across the Middle East.

During her sophomore year at Princeton University, the school hired its first historian of Islamic art. Having continued learning Arabic after completing the study abroad program in Tunisia, Gruber decided that Islamic art history courses would fit nicely with her language study.

“By the time my senior year rolled around, I had worked in the Islamic art galleries at the MET and I decided that that is truly what I wanted to do as my future career,” Gruber said. “So I applied for PhD programs; I learned Persian and I lived in Iran, and then I continued doing research and completed my dissertation while living in Turkey.”



Within the realm of Islamic art and architecture, Gruber is a specialist of illustrated manuscripts, paintings, and calligraphy in particular.

“The illustrated manuscripts that I specialize in tend to date from about 1300 to 1600 and they include paintings of Muhammad’s celestial ascension,” Gruber said. “That’s how I really got onto the subject of illustrations of the Prophet Muhammad in Islam, which is the subject of my third book coming out in a few months.”

The book, entitled *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images*, looks at how the Prophet Muhammad is imagined in the eyes of his beholders.

“There is a pretty substantial corpus of images of the Prophet in Islamic traditions and I wanted to make sure that those images, which are respectful and devotional, receive as much sustained and nuanced attention as some of the more recent images that have emerged in European cartoons in the last decade or so,” Gruber said. “I thought it was really time to let those images shine bright and tell their own story.”

Writing and publishing a book is no small feat; Gruber’s book on devotional images of the Prophet comes out of over a decade’s worth of research and travel. For her, though, having the final product in hand is not the best part of the experience.

“By the time a book is published, the intellectual challenge the book posed tends to have been met. There is a little bit of an anti-climactic feel to it because it’s done and you have perhaps resolved a major query for yourself,” she said. “I like the research and writing process because it is a labor of love. It’s like lifting a heavy stone up a hill: hopefully you make it to the top at some point without falling back too many times along the way.”

Gruber’s favorite parts of this invigorating process of research comes from her relationships with librarians and curators, relationships that she fostered over decades.

“At times items pop up from storage, some of which nobody has ever seen or studied,” she said. “Over the last two decades, curators and librarians who

oversee and protect collections of Islamic art have become dear colleagues, even friends. They know me and my research so well that suddenly objects that are uncatalogued or unpublished emerge from the collections.”

“The process of information exchange and the forging of professional friendships can lead to greater discoveries than simply searching through a catalogue or database,” Gruber continued. “That’s when you realize the gems aren’t just the objects; they are the people who serve as the custodians of these objects.”

Outside of her academic writing, Gruber also has published a series of articles about representations of the Prophet in *Newsweek*.

“I was trained to be an academic, and I really like the cavernous corners of my office. I enjoy deep, historically-grounded research, but when the issue of images of Muhammad came out in the public sphere I was called upon to issue commentary,” Gruber said. “After a few interviews, I realized that my voice (and

While she is not currently writing any further publicly engaged articles, Gruber continues to curate exhibits.

“Right now, I’m working on an exhibition on the moon in Islamic art and culture. It will open in March of 2019 at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto because 2019 celebrates the 50th anniversary of man’s first landing on the moon,” she said. “The goal is to celebrate the key role that the moon has held in man’s imagination, including within the cultures and practices of the Islamic faith.”

At the university, Gruber teaches both undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. Her graduate courses are more tightly focused and designed with the current cohort of art history doctoral students and other Middle Eastern Studies graduate students across campus in mind. In contrast, Gruber takes a broader approach to preparing and instructing her undergraduate classes. Currently, she teaches “Visual Cultures of Islam,” through which she hopes students can come to understand the depth, diversity, and rich artistic heritage of Islam.

“The process of information exchange and the forging of professional friendships can lead to greater discoveries than simply searching through a catalogue or database. That’s when you realize **the gems aren’t just the objects; they are the people who serve as the custodians of these objects.**”

information) often was reduced to soundbites, some of them lacking in factual data. For these reasons, I wrote a pedagogical piece that was just a few pages long describing more or less the development of images of the Prophet Muhammad in Islam.”

When *Newsweek* reached out to Gruber for a comment, she provided them with this brief document to help its journalists pose better, more informed questions.

“Within five minutes, the chief editor asked me if I had placed the piece,” Gruber said. “He said they wanted to publish the entire piece,” even though it was intended as a primer for journalists.

Gruber said she would agree on one condition. “*Newsweek* had to include the images because almost no other media outlet-- including those reproducing defamatory European cartoons-- was willing to illustrate beautiful devotional images of Muhammad from the Islamic tradition,” she said.

“Students become intrigued by the range of artistic creativity stemming from Islamic cultures. The arts include not just calligraphy, architecture, and geometric patterns, but also the figural arts as well,” she said. “When students emerge from my class, I hope they will understand that we cannot otherize Islam; it’s not a self-enclosed entity or phenomenon. It’s deeply imbricated with world systems and global cultures, and that holds true for artistic and architectural practices across the globe as well.”

Gruber continued to say, “I really enjoy the immense curiosity of undergraduate students. They want to understand what makes Islamic structures so beautiful, why artworks are historically important and, most of all, what creative expression means in terms of the human experience. It’s the depth of that curiosity and the willingness to stretch the mind that I find truly energizing in the classroom.”

BEHIND THE
MENA LIBRARY COLLECTION
AN INTERVIEW WITH

E V Y N K R O P F



Hatcher Graduate Library is a student favorite for those long days of studying and paper writing. Amongst the stacks of books is the office of Evyn Kropf, the Librarian for Middle East and Religious Studies and the Curator for the Islamic Manuscripts Collection. Kropf is a resource for students looking to find materials related to the region or Islamic Studies, but she is also a model for life-long learning and devotion to one's intellectual growth.

Kropf first gained an interest in the region through her time as an undergraduate and exposure to the Sufi Muslim community at her university, as well as trips abroad to Amman, Jordan, which ultimately resulted in working in Jordan for an extended period of time.

When she returned to the United States for graduate studies, Kropf knew she wanted to apply the expertise she cultivated in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies to information work, leading her to U-M's School of Information.

"I initially came to U-M with a dual acceptance to CMENAS and the SI program," Kropf said. She ultimately decided against pursuing the dual degree, but she continued her studies of the Middle East as part of her master's coursework in information and found her place as a medieval specialist.

"During my graduate training I took Arabic historiography and Classical Arabic with Professor Bonner and modern Arabic literature with Professor LeGassick to supplement the work I was doing with libraries and bibliography," she said.

From her time working in the libraries as a graduate student, Kropf gained experiences that would eventually set her on the path towards her current position.

"At the end of 2008, we secured this massive grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) to catalogue the Islamic Manuscripts Collection more completely," she said. "My supervisor suggested I apply for this position and the rest is really history because that very much set the course for my academic and scholarly research path."

Kropf's training, both in Information Science and Middle Eastern Studies, did not stop once she graduated in 2009.

"Working on the collection was a seedbed for my emergent research and gave me the opportunity to explore things I would have more traditionally explored in a master's program or thesis project, and I felt it really crucial to expand and flesh out my knowledge in manuscript studies and in particular codicology, and paleography, which were becoming greatly compelling to me," Kropf said. "I also found it crucial to expand my language expertise and studied Ottoman Turkish with Professor Hagen and a NES graduate student, but I very much had to carve out the time and press myself to do that work and research."

In her current position, Kropf assists graduate and undergraduate students, faculty, and staff from within and without the U-M community in bibliographic research, finding specific materials, and navigating the many resources available through the library. Having spent so much time with the Middle Eastern Studies collections, helping others and for her own research, Kropf had a few favorites.

"I will forever and always be excited about the Encyclopedia of Islam," she said. "The manuscripts for me will also be among the most compelling resources in the collection. We also have quite an interesting collection of lithographed books published primarily

in Iran and India during the 19th century which are rare and significant to look at in regards to their circulation and the impact of their reach.”

Exhibitions are an extension of Kropf’s role as the Curator for the Islamic Manuscripts Collection. For the 2018 Arab Heritage Month, she developed the “Handwritten Heritage: Arabic Texts in Manuscript” exhibit.

“Physical exhibits I don’t necessarily have the chance to do every year, but I aim for every other year. In the meantime, I contribute to a few other exhibits.



During Arab Heritage Month in 2018, Eryn Kropf curated an exhibition, “Handwritten Heritage: Arabic Texts in Manuscript.” Image courtesy of the Multi-Ethnic Students Association at U-M.

re-understood in all the ways that folks are inclined to do that,” Kropf said. “I see our role as making the material accessible, preserving it, and making sure that it is accessible to the furthest possible community into the future.”

Curating these exhibitions and adding to the collections, though, does bring up difficult questions that Kropf must contend with.

“As I am developing the collection, I am trying to be very careful about what is acquired as far as provenance is concerned. It is really important for me ethically, professionally to be as transparent as possible, about whatever provenance information we have,” Kropf said. “Also, in making the ultimate decision whether or not to acquire the materials, it is important to consider what the situation is, especially given the turmoil in Syria.”

After purchasing the different materials, the language over ownership comes to the fore.

“We are always very careful, and I think I am in particular, about not claiming ownership of the material and acknowledging our role as stewards or caretakers of the materials,” Kropf said. “My favorite language in referring to the collection is that it is preserved here; it is not ours.”

Kropf continued to say, “I’ve been wrestling lately with ideas of repatriation and claims around a shared heritage or particular ownership. It becomes so complicated around the Middle East or any situation of colonialism and where state boundaries have been imposed from the outside. These communities transcend present-day political boundaries.”

To promote this type of deep engagement with the collection, Kropf writes for the library blog. “I wrote a couple posts on provenance and transparency in how these objects were acquired and allow folks to approach that critically,” she said. Kropf hopes that a new “After Hours” program in the Special Collections Research Center at the library will provide a space for further engagement with the rare materials and manuscripts.

If you have questions about the Middle Eastern and North African Studies collections or the Islamic manuscripts, feel free to contact Eryn Kropf at ekropf@umich.edu.

“I will forever and always be excited about the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. **The manuscripts for me will also be among the most compelling resources in the collection.**”

For example, on an annual basis I select and prepare labels for manuscripts to be sent to the DIA,” she said. “Regardless of what I do physically on campus, there tends to be, somewhere, manuscripts on display.”

The galleries are tools for promoting the collection and also making the collection more accessible and more present for the university community and the larger community, particularly the folks who consider it a heritage for them.

“I’m just trying to put the material in a space where it can be accessed, interpreted, re-interpreted, and

IN THE NEWS

“The real difference today is that Yemenis are representing Yemen to the public, not just having ethnic Yemeni restaurants in tightly knight Yemeni enclaves.”

Sally Howell *on Yemeni immigrants planting stronger roots in the U.S. (Gulf News, 6 March 2018)*

“The Trump presidency has been a catalyst of sorts for Muslims—and other communities—to be more politically active.”

Evelyn Alsultany
(CNN, 25 April 2018)

“They [ISIS] believe Sufi shrines are the most egregious expression of that [polytheism]”

Alexander Knysz *on terrorist attack against Sufi Muslims in Egypt (Vox, 28 Nov 2017)*

“There is this history in which Black Muslims have really shaped the ways in which people work and move the world, have really inspired—like Malcom X for example—people to be very much committed to questions of social justice.”

Su’ad Abdul Khabeer
(CNN, May 2018)



Sascha Crasnow (PhD, University of California-San Diego) is a Lecturer with the Residential College as of fall 2018. Crasnow’s art history doctorate has a focus on contemporary art from the Middle East and North Africa. Her dissertation looked at Palestinian art since the second Intifada. With the Critical Language Scholarship, Crasnow has studied Arabic in Morocco and Jordan; she has also spent time in Palestine doing fieldwork.



Nancy Khalil (PhD, Harvard University) came to U-M as an LSA Collegiate Fellow in American Culture and Arab and Muslim American Studies after completing a postdoctoral fellowship with Yale’s Center on Race, Indigeneity and Transnational Migration. Her research has spanned looking at the profession of the Imam in America to Muslim students and Muslim student group engagement on college campuses. Khalil also served as a Muslim Chaplain at Wellesley College prior to her doctoral studies.

NEW FACULTY



Su’ad Abdul Khabeer (PhD, Princeton University) started as an Associate Professor in American Culture and Arab and Muslim Studies in fall 2017. She is a scholar-artist-activist who uses anthropology and performance to explore the intersections of race and popular culture. Her latest work, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States*, is an ethnography on Islam and hip hop that examines how intersecting ideas of Muslimness and Blackness challenge and reproduce meanings of race in the U.S.

THE WORLD HISTORY AND LITERATURE INITIATIVE

By Evan Vowell and Mekarem Eljamal

The World History and Literature Initiative (WHaLI) is a unique collaboration between area studies Centers in the International Institute and the U-M School of Education, funded in part by Title VI grants from the U.S. Department of Education, with additional funding from the International Institute and the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies.

Since 2009, WHaLI has provided over 500 K-12 teachers in the fields of History, Social Studies, and English Language Arts with area studies curriculum content and professional development.

Held each year in June, WHaLI is a three-day workshop designed to improve teachers' capacity to teach world history and literature by providing them with area studies resources and content. New initiatives to broaden the reach of WHaLI include opportunities for early career or beginning teachers to work with experienced teachers and scholars, and the use of livestream webcasting technology and on-site facilitators to reach teachers outside the Ann Arbor area.

More than 30 participants took part in the 2018 workshops, which brought together teachers with varying levels of experience to network with each other and share best practices. Each of the presentations are coupled with materials designed to assist teachers in producing lesson plans on migration. This year, CMENAS supported two speakers to present at the institute. CMENAS Director Samer Ali, presented on "The *1001 Nights* and the Globalism of Arabic Islamic Middle Ages" on the first day. The participants also were gifted *1001 Nights*, along with a couple more books, to share with their classrooms. Christopher

Sheklian, a Postdoctoral Fellow in anthropology, gave a presentation entitled, "Remnants of the Sword," which discussed Armenian genocide survivors in Turkey and the diaspora on the final day of WHaLI.

Migration has been a constant in human history, shaping our world in every place and time. From our earliest ancestors' movements out of Africa to the present, people have migrated across continents, oceans, seas, mountains and deserts. Pushed, pulled or coerced, humans have moved in large and small numbers, with or without families and friends, to or from rural or urban areas. And each migration has had significant consequences on the people and places they moved to or from.

The 2018 World History and Literature Initiative addressed the themes of migration in human history and literature by exploring case studies encompassing various parts of the globe, as well as pedagogical lessons from faculty director Bob Bain (Associate Professor of Educational Studies and History) on how to incorporate these themes into teachers' lesson plans.



Samer Ali



Christopher Sheklian

BETWEEN WHITE PINES AND OLIVE TREES

CMENAS AT INTERLOCHEN ACADEMY FOR THE ARTS

By Rima Hassouneh

One beautiful day in May, I drove from Ann Arbor to Interlochen State Park, nestled between Wahbekaness and Wahbekanetta (now named Duck Lake and Green Lake respectively), in Michigan's northwest Lower Peninsula. I camped there for the night. In the clear morning, I explored the trails and shoreline along the lakes sparkling in the sun. Then I walked "next door" to meet Karen Leland Libby, an English teacher for 12 years at Interlochen Academy for the Arts (IAA). The academy offers arts training and comprehensive college-preparatory academics to youth

from around the world. Leland Libby had graciously invited me, the community outreach coordinator at CMENAS, to visit her 12th-grade class in Middle Eastern literature. She had developed a keen interest in teaching the literature after attending a related session at the 2014 Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English. In 2017, she participated in a six-week seminar on the arts of the Abrahamic traditions at Saint George's College in Jerusalem.

She and her students had spent the semester reading and discussing literature from/about the Middle East, including Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (Palestine), Sarah Glidden's *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less* (U.S.A.), and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Afghanistan). A curious, outgoing, and talented group of about 16, the students were eager to encounter a real-life—rather than literary—Palestinian. I told anecdotes from my childhood, spent in Kuwait, Dubai, and Jordan. I shared pictures of my students from U-M Global Intercultural Experience for Undergraduates trips to Palestine and Israel. There they were at Al-Aqsa



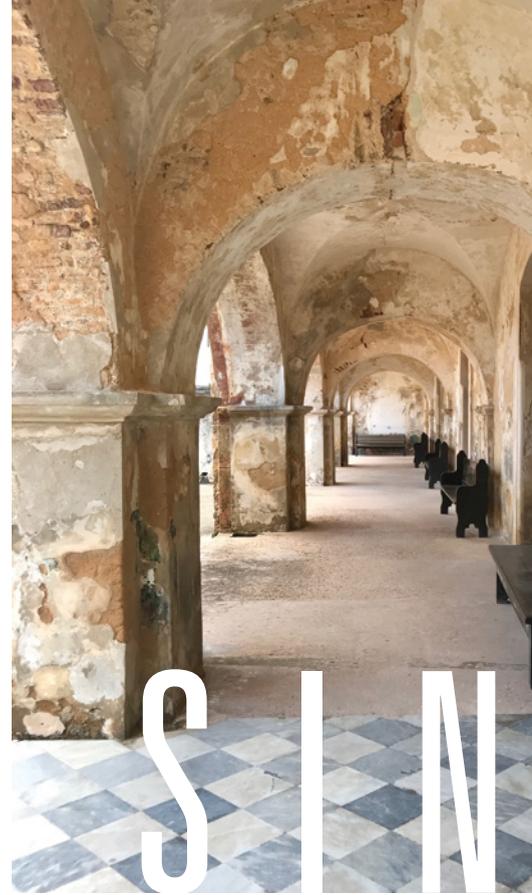
Mosque in Jerusalem, the Sanctuary of Abraham and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and the old port of Yaffa on the Mediterranean Sea. In Nablus, they grinned over plates of hot, syrupy kenafeh, the city's deservedly famous sweet.

Leland Libby's students also sought my opinions about the current state of affairs. One student asked about my response to the Trump administration's move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Another wanted to hear my thoughts about the violent Israeli military response to the civilian demonstrations in Gaza against the siege and for the right to return. They were particularly intrigued by my testimony about Hebron, where the military occupation is especially severe. Leland Libby had encouraged sincerity and candor from me. "My students appreciate honesty and nuance," she had assured. True to IAA's focus, for their final assignments the students had expressed their interpretations of and reflections about the literature through their art. Olivia Michael (U.S.) had drawn a collage of visages, words, and motifs (see picture). Weaving in elements of



A LITERARY JOURNEY THROUGH IRAN, PUERTO RICO, AND THE U.S. CURRICULUM

By Shireen Smalley



“ I , T O O , S I N

On May 2, 2018 I traveled with a dozen other University of Michigan graduate students to San Juan, Puerto Rico, en route to the fourth annual University of Michigan–University of Puerto Rico Symposium.

For those who don’t know, the annual U-M-UPR Symposium is a joint effort between University of Michigan National Resource Centers (NRCs) that are awarded Title VI funding from the U.S. Department of Education. As part of this funding, NRCs like CMENAS and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies engage local stakeholders and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to give their international expertise back to the community, a process known as “internationalization.” This year, I was one of several NRC graduate students chosen to present my research, to take part in this internationalization and to explain how our international study could be adapted for use in classrooms in Puerto Rico.

The opportunity to present was a special one for me. Just four days before the Symposium, I had graduated from U-M with a Master of Public Policy and a Master of Arts in Middle Eastern and North African Studies. A few days before that, I had officially submitted my master’s thesis for the MA in MENAS. My thesis proposed a new method of reading global poetry in American K–12 classrooms, using two of my favorite poets as examples—Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish and

Iranian Forough Farrokhzad. My thesis was also a rebellion against my American public-school education, which left me surprisingly uninformed about my place as an Iranian-American in the national literary landscape. Presenting my research to a bilingual audience at the University of Puerto Rico—alongside other speakers presenting on the caste system in India and on Chinese-Taiwanese relations—was a humbling experience.

My time in Puerto Rico was also significant as a newcomer to the island in increasingly dire times. Hurricane Maria had hit the island in September of 2017, killing over 1,427 people, in contrast to the earlier official death toll of 64.¹ On the day we arrived, hundreds of Puerto Ricans were demonstrating just blocks away from our hotel, protesting harsh austerity measures made worse by the hurricane’s destruction. One of those austerity measures was a proposed tuition increase at the University of Puerto Rico, our host university, from \$57 to \$157 per credit, a 175% increase. Elsewhere on the island, primary and secondary school teachers—the intended audience of the Symposium—were protesting the forced closures of hundreds of public schools.²

The impact of the proposed austerity measures was immediately visible when we arrived at the University of Puerto Rico. On the first day of the Symposium, our van rolled up to a deserted campus. Students had boycotted classes for the day,



A hallway at the Castillo San Cristóbal, a Spanish fort built in 1783 to repel maritime attacks on the city of San Juan. The arch in this photo is reminiscent of the horseshoe arch style in Islamic architecture, and often replicated in Moorish-influenced designs in Spanish architecture.

history, Professor Juan Hernandez said firmly, “Puerto Rico is not a part of the United States. Puerto Rico belongs to the United States.” His message was that, as an unincorporated territory, the relationship between the mainland and the island is one of oppressive ownership and colonization, not one of democratic representation and statehood. He was right. And most Americans are sadly uninformed about this reality. In fact, only 54% of U.S. citizens are aware that Puerto Ricans are fellow Americans, not “foreigners.”⁴

I understood this discrepancy keenly, because I had discovered a similar lack of knowledge in the American curriculum, especially with regards to non-white subjects. While researching global literature in U.S. classrooms, I was shocked to learn that Common Core reading guides overwhelmingly recommended

G A M E R I C A “

and instead were deliberating how to respond to the possibility of massive tuition increases that would force many students to withdraw. At the same time in Washington, D.C., the Department of Education was only granting disaster relief to UPR sparingly, giving more generously to mainland universities that were not nearly as affected by natural disasters.⁷³ I slowly reflected on all this as we walked through campus, taking in the majestic palm trees shading the silent, vacant grounds below.

At that moment, the prospect of “internationalizing” the Puerto Rican curriculum seemed disingenuous. Surely, I thought, the bigger issue was that the world was not paying enough attention to Puerto Rico, and not the other way around? So I began contemplating what I, as a student and diasporic subject of the Middle East, could possibly offer this symposium, and what I could learn from the people and history of Puerto Rico in return. What similarities between Puerto Rico and Iran could I learn from?

There were many learning points for me in the two days of the conference, but perhaps the most powerful take-away came from one of the faculty members at the University of Puerto Rico. In a conversation about how to teach Puerto Rican

“I often have difficulty justifying my love for literature in an age of political corruption, crises, and natural disasters... But then, I remember that **poetry is often a light illuminating dark times, and, when done well, connects people in solidarity around the world.**”

Anglo-American authors for inclusion in the curriculum, with very little mentions of international authors, indigenous authors or American authors of color.⁵ Where were the Puerto Rican poets like Julia de Burgos, who moved to New York and helped establish Nuyorican poetry? Where was the poetry of Iranian Ahmed Shamlu, who “first learned about poetry from... the American Langston Hughes; and only later, with this education, turned to the poets of my mother tongue?”⁶

Facing these glaring gaps in knowledge, I wondered if the most effective strategy to increase global understanding is not to internationalize the curriculum, but actually to *domesticize* it. What if students in American K-12 classrooms were taught about their country’s role in the occupation and continuing colonization of Puerto Rico? What if, as part of their history classes, American students were taught about the 1953

"I, TOO"

Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

continued from page 23

CIA coup that overthrew Iran's first democratically elected prime minister, an act that was the forerunner for many more politically devastating interventions in Latin America?

I often have difficulty justifying my love for literature in an age of political corruption, crises, and natural disasters, an era with a long and dark history such as this. But then, I remember that poetry is often a light illuminating dark times, and, when done well, connects people in solidarity around the world. During my short time in Puerto Rico, I was reminded again of Ahmed Shamlu, and his appreciation for the poet Langston Hughes. In 1945, Hughes, an African-American, deliberately sat in a dining car reserved for whites while traveling on a segregated train to the American South. The white steward first ignored Hughes and his brown skin, then demanded to know if he was "Puerto Rican" or an "American Negro." To this, Hughes replied loudly, "I'm just hungry."

My experience in Puerto Rico gave me a better understanding of this hunger, and of all those who are tired of being sent to "eat in the kitchen / when company comes," as Hughes' most famous poem goes. And yet, both in his personal life and in his poetry, Hughes demanded a seat "at the table." My hope is this—that through our curricula and our policy, the American table will find more seats, and more people will be able to "laugh / and eat well / and grow strong." For we, too, "sing America."

1. Frances Robles, "Puerto Rico Government Acknowledges Hurricane Death Toll of 1,427," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/09/us/puerto-rico-death-toll-maria.html>

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LOIS AROIAN

By Nesma Daoud



After beginning her education at Occidental College in 1963, Lois Aroian studied abroad at the American University of Beirut where, through her stay and travels to other Middle Eastern countries, her passion for the region was cemented. This life changing year ultimately inspired her to teach, enter the foreign service, and become a full-time minister for the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

“Going to Lebanon in 1965 and travelling through the Middle East changed my life.

I discovered relatives in Syria whom I had not even known existed and keep in touch with their relatives to the present day,” Aroian said.

Upon completing her degree in Diplomacy and World Affairs at Occidental College, Aroian earned the National Defense Foreign Language (now known as Foreign Language and Area Studies) fellowship and was accepted into the University of Michigan’s Department of History to begin her graduate studies in Arab history.

“June 1967 was a terrible time to start graduate studies in Arab history, since all the Arab countries had broken relations with the U.S. after the war. So even

though I was highly-motivated, it wasn’t at all clear where I’d be able to do research,” Aroian recalled.

Although her journey through graduate school was uncertain due to the strained political relations between the West and the Middle East, Aroian obtained a fellowship from the American Research Center in Egypt and was able to conduct research in Egypt through the Center for Arabic Study Abroad program.

“Egypt became like home during my research years; that’s why I never sought a diplomatic posting there,” Aroian said.

Spending a great deal of her life in the Middle East allowed Aroian to gain a deeper understanding of the region, and wishes more people would dismiss the common misconceptions and accept a more positive and accurate view.

“I have lived much of my 24 years abroad as a devout Christian in Muslim-majority countries. I wish that people understood that, regardless of religious affiliation (or none), we’re all the same homo sapiens who want to live with dignity, human rights, and peace. Had I never studied in Lebanon, I would have ended up in the ministry out of college. It was the one female

professor (in my seven years of college and graduate school) and my female classmates at AUB who gave me the confidence that I could go on for my PhD as they were planning to do,” Aroian said. “I want people to understand that there are plenty of dynamic women in the Middle East. I was taken a lot more seriously as a young female researcher in Egypt than I was in the U.S. It’s a region with a rich history and culture.”

Aroian returned to the United States and began her post as a teaching fellow in Studies in Religion at U-M after completing her research. However, as a PhD student in Modern Middle Eastern history and as a woman, finding a job proved to be challenging. Aroian eventually found a position at the University of Ilorin in Nigeria for two years.

“I was looking for a position at a time when Michigan’s History Department had almost no female faculty among 70 professors. We women were bucking a trend, and we had to work a lot harder to be taken seriously,” she said.

In 1983–1984, Aroian was awarded the Rockefeller Congressional Fellowship by the American Historical Association and moved on from teaching full time to working a member of the House of Representatives prior to entering the U.S. Foreign Service.

“That time enabled me to understand why our Middle East policy was as it was and that my ability to change any of it in the Foreign Service would be negligible. However, I still thought it would be possible to make a difference,” Aroian stated.

Aroian began her career in the U.S. Foreign Service in Sudan as the Consular Section Chief and subsequently ended up dividing her time between the Near East Bureau and the Africa Bureau. Through her time at the foreign service, she served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. embassies in Mauritania and Botswana and as Principal Officer of the U.S. Consulate-General in Quebec City, Canada.

“I spent five years in the Foreign Service dealing with labor issues. Most of my career as a political officer focused on democracy and human rights. I feel as though my 23 ½ years in the Foreign Service won friends for the U.S. and helped people in need,” Aroian said.

During her time in Quebec, Aroian occasionally preached and led worship at two English-speaking

“What I am doing now with **this bequest is just a continuation of my commitment to Middle Eastern studies at Michigan**, to give back to the center, to strengthen it, and to make it possible for students of the future to benefit from its outstanding faculty and programs.”

churches and transitioned from working for the Foreign Service into the ministry.

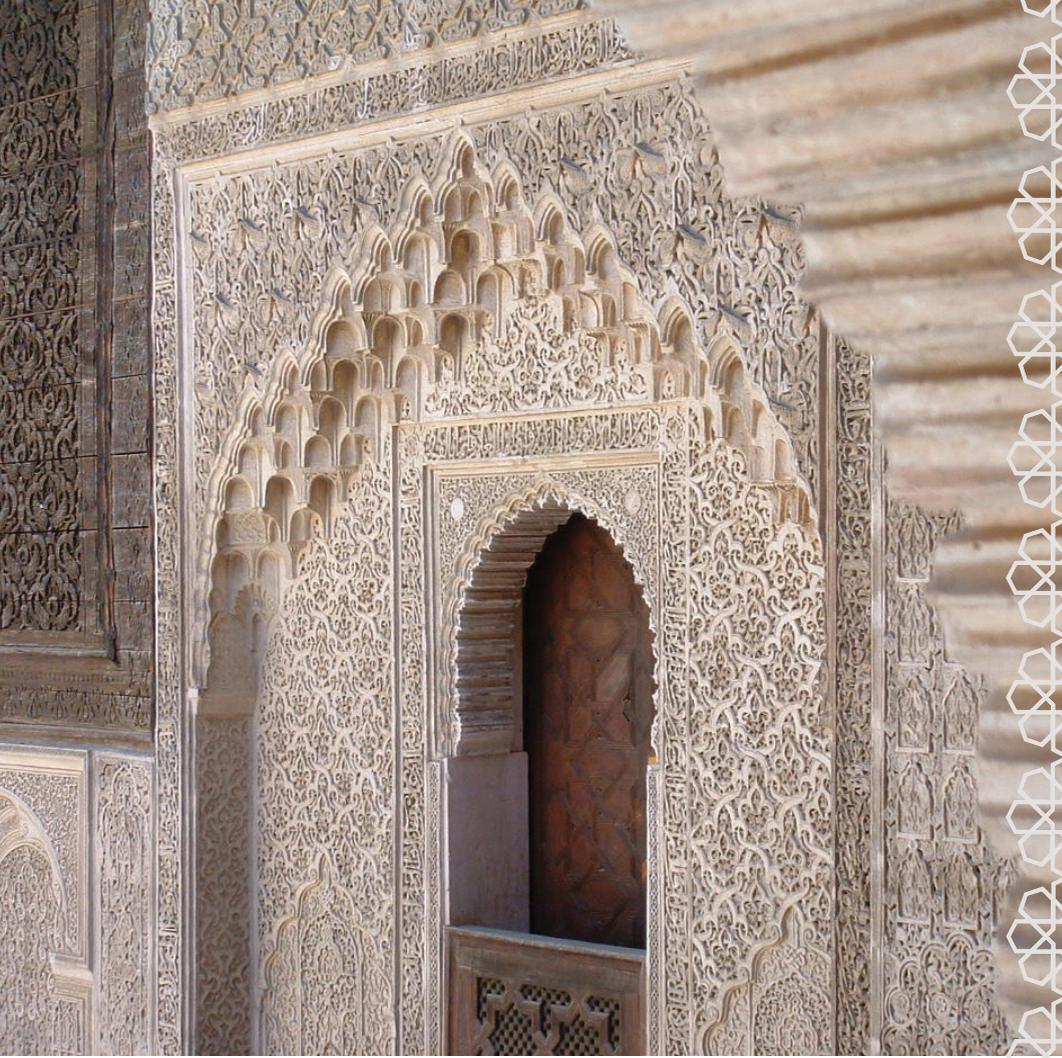
“I could no longer ignore my call to ministry and started Wesley Theological Seminary one course at a time toward a Master of Divinity degree. It took me six years to finish while I worked full time at State. That made my transition from retirement in 2007 very easy. I was already well on my way to my next career,” she said.

Throughout her her career shifts, Aroian always remembered her time at CMENAS fondly.

“At U-M, it was my home base. I am very grateful for the NDFL Fellowships from the Center that enabled me to stay at Michigan and finish my PhD,” she said.

Recently, Aroian gifted CMENAS with a generous donation so students can pursue their interests in the Middle East and North Africa and be presented with the same opportunities she has.

“I have been supporting the center for years. What I am doing now with this bequest is just a continuation of my commitment to Middle Eastern studies at Michigan, to give back to the center, to strengthen it, and to make it possible for students of the future to benefit from its outstanding faculty and programs. More recently, I have been impressed by all the collaborative activities across departments and faculties. If we all support CMENAS, it will have a bright future.”



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