

CMENAS





WE'VE UPDATED OUR TWITTER!

Along with tweets about our events, study abroad opportunities, and application deadlines, we are also highlighting important current events happening throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The region is more than just news headlines, which is why we are featuring posts about literature, arts, and culture from artists and intellectuals in the region, as well as those in the diaspora. We feel Twitter can serve as a space to further underscore the multifaceted nature of the region.

During the 2017 Middle East Studies Association Meeting, we used Twitter to connect with other scholars of the Middle East. While the room was at full capacity for Professors Angela Davis, Judith Butler, Noura Erakat, and Samera Esmeir, we brought some of what they had to say to those who could not be present. Also, two students, Ibtihal Makki and Ryan Gillcrist (see page 9), “took over” the CMENAS Twitter account while presenting at the MESA conference, giving the community a glimpse into the MESA experience from a student perspective. We hope to incorporate more live tweeting sessions to our Twitter, as well as featuring more students on the account.

If you are a student attending an interesting event on the Middle East and North Africa or presenting your work on the region at a conference and would like to “take over” our Twitter, please contact us at cmenas@umich.edu.

We hope to engage you all through our social media accounts. Be sure to stay connected and follow CMENAS:

- ii.umich.edu/cmenas**
- Facebook.com/umichCMENAS**
- Twitter.com/umcmenas**

The study of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region began at University of Michigan (UM) in 1889. Since the inception of the Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies (CMENAS) in 1961, UM 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.

Samer Ali

Director and Associate Professor of Arabic Language and Literature

Jessica Hill Riggs

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ARE YOU A MENAS GRADUATE?

Stay in touch with CMENAS by connecting with us on LinkedIn! We would love to feature you as part of our “Where Are They Now” or in the class notes sections of the newsletter

DEAR CMENAS COMMUNITY:

signs of spring around campus signal graduation season: as winter recedes, CMENAS gears up to honor the achievements of its proud graduates.

The semester has presented landmark challenges and opportunities. CMENAS staff have been immersed in planning and grant writing for Title VI-NRC, the federal program that funds us in our mission to train students in languages, internationalize the workforce, prepare K-14 teachers for the demands of international education, and reach out to the general public with quality programming that conveys the richness and complexity of the Middle East. This year, CMENAS met with units on and off campus—more than 30—to build bridges and forge collaborations to help fulfill our mission.

At one meeting, CMENAS joined forces with the UM Detroit Center to organize an MLK day event on constitutionally protected speech titled “Is There Such a Thing as a Proper Protest?” which grappled with recent protests by activists and NFL players, and reprisals against them. It featured Dr. Steven Salaita, who himself faced retaliation for academic speech. Back in Ann Arbor, Dr. Salaita also delivered a talk exploring parallels between the indigenous issues of Native Americans on this continent and Palestinians under occupation.

The talk sparked protests, furious emails, and attempts to use Canary Mission tactics to intimidate students. The II staff, with support from

UM police, ensured that the protesters were heard and respected while enabling a free exchange to unfold without disruption or intimidation. The talk, with robust Q&A, can be found

on CMENAS’s YouTube channel. It’s easy to forget that in 1966 a Gallup poll indicated that 63% of Americans had a negative perception of MLK. As I noted at the event, the civil rights movement was also controversial in the 1960s but UM’s mission embraces controversial speech. Now more than ever, CMENAS needs your support to defend academic freedom.

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 UM and CMENAS. We want to engage you, our globally minded public, in a meaningful conversation.

Sincerely,

Samer M. Ali, PhD



It’s easy to forget that in 1966 a Gallup poll indicated that 63% of Americans had a negative perception of MLK.

As I noted at the event, the civil rights movement was also controversial in the 1960s but UM’s mission embraces controversial speech.

CMENAS AT THE 2017 MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) is not only a time for critical engagement with scholarship on the region, but also a chance to meet new colleagues and reconnect with others. This year was no different, and CMENAS was honored to host the UM reception at the 2017 meeting in Washington, DC. Alumni, faculty, and friends mingled and had the chance to meet Prof. Samer Ali, the new director of our center. Attendees could review recent publications of CMENAS faculty-affiliates. We showcased Melanie Tanielian's new book, *The Charity of War: Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East* (Stanford University Press, 2017) alongside Maya Barzilai's *Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters* (New York University Press, 2016), Hussain Fancy's *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), Kathryn Babayan and Michael Pifer's edited anthology *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Worlds in Motion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and Bryan Roby's article, "Israel in Black and White" (*Frankel Institute Annual*, 2017).

UROP AT CMENAS



Daoud

As a recent transfer student, Nesma Daoud's return home to Ann Arbor was familiar, but her start at the university was full of new experiences. She's in the midst of her second year at college and is interested in law for the future. She hasn't declared a major yet, but is gravitating towards a double major in Political Science, and International Studies with a focus on International Security, Norms, and Cooperation. Though unsure of her discipline, Nesma knew she wanted to take advantage of the boundless number of research opportunities and resources the university has to offer. At the conclusion of her search, the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) appealed to her the most. The idea of partnering with faculty and staff to develop an invaluable mentor-mentee relationship and research skills at the same time not only interested her, but also served as the final incentive for applying to the program. Following her acceptance and thorough search of UROP's projects, the CMENAS Scapegoating project caught her eye because of its combined focus of 10th-century Arabic literature with modern-day scapegoating. Nesma has really enjoyed her time at CMENAS under the mentorship of Director Samer Ali and working with his team, especially since her experiences are twofold. Through her research and work with transcribing lectures, she learned about the connection between the themes of scapegoating in legendary *1001 Nights* stories and the instances of scapegoating today. These stories from her childhood transformed from simple entertainment to a looking glass, enhancing her understanding of modern day complexities and her place in them. Nesma also learned about policy initiatives to counteract modern day scapegoating, and the fascinating but overlooked history of Arabic in North America. Being a CMENAS team member was also critical in that it expanded her academic understanding of lectures, exposed her to the behind-the-scenes work of running an academic center, offered the unique opportunity to meet faculty and lecturers in a new environment, and allowed her to truly comprehend the vast impact of the center on the university's campus.





MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN AFFINITY BOX

Representing UM at the Association of Big Ten Students Conference earlier this year, Nadine Jawad, Central Student Government Vice-President, relayed that a Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) affinity box was unanimously supported by the Big Ten student governments.

Jawad, in partnership with Jad Elharake (BCN, '18), has worked on adding a MENA affinity box to UM forms. With Elharake focusing on garnering student support for the checkbox, such as the #WeExist campaign, Nadine turned her attention to addressing the student governments of the different colleges and schools on campus.

After meetings with each individual student governments, Jawad had sixteen letters of support or resolutions expressing approval of the affinity box, which she could bring to the provost.

“I realized the more pressure or advocacy you have from top representatives of the student body the more pressure it places on the provosts.”

“I realized the more pressure or advocacy you have from high representatives of the student body the more pressure it places on the provosts,” said Jawad, “Then we started to get more meetings and now they are moving forward with the [affinity box.]”

Jawad took all the work and progress she and Elharake made on this campus to the Association of Big Ten Students Conference. When she brought forward a resolution for the creation of a MENA affinity box for all Big Ten schools, she was met with great support by conference attendees.

“At the Big Ten conference, over half the Big Ten representatives were sponsors to the [resolution], and everyone supported it,” said Jawad, “It’s also important to keep in mind that some of these schools don’t have a large MENA population, but their adopting it is a form of allyhood.”

A similar movement to develop a MENA box has happened at the national level, but shortly after the resolution was passed at the conference, the United States Census Bureau announced that it will not be adding a Middle Eastern and North African checkbox to the 2020 census.

Despite her frustration over this new development in regards to an affinity box for the 2020 census, Jawad says that it is an opportunity for the universities.

“It allows universities to be leaders,” said Jawad, “University presidents can push Congress and the federal government to follow their lead.”

Both Elharake and Jawad are graduating this year, which could pose a problem for the future of the MENA affinity box campaign. Jawad, though, is not concerned; she has already had conversations with the Big Ten student coordinator to pass along the knowledge she and Elharake have gathered to make sure that the campaign continues across other campuses.

As for campus, “I am confident that there will be future leaders at Michigan who will do the work and take charge,” said Jawad.

While UM may be the “obvious leader” of this campaign due to its demographics, said Jawad but there is still much work to be done here before the affinity box is implemented.



Jawad





Haidar's photo won first prize in the "The World is Your Classroom" category of the International Institute's photo competition.

Between shadowing doctors and learning the ins and outs of Moroccan medicare, Fatima Haidar (junior, microbiology and writing) spent time getting lost in the mazes of stone that make up Rabat's old city. It was during one of her "let me get lost and see what I can find" sessions that she first passed this bookstore. Multiple times Haidar walked by the store, and one day she started a conversation with the bookseller. "I asked if he had any books in English. He pulled out three, one of which was a dictionary, so I couldn't really read that for pleasure," recounted Haidar. While no books piqued her interest, she was still fascinated by his store. "It is a beautiful little nook he has and built into the wall are just towers upon towers of books." With a silent, affirmative nod, Haidar and the store owner breathlessly mitigated dialectic differences, resulting in this phenomenal photograph.

ENGAGED AND ISLAMIC STUDIES PEDAGOGY

Teaching bridges Bryon Maxey's past, present, and future. Prior to pursuing his CMENAS MA, Maxey taught K-12 students for four and a half years, exposing him to the multiple layers of education practices.

"What we hear about education is just patently true when you're in the school environment," said Maxey, "The dysfunction of the education system is at all levels."

His time as a teacher navigating the many issues that plague the modern education system brought about questions of how and why certain teaching practices have been normalized versus others. With the flexibility of the CMENAS MA degree, Maxey was able to pursue those questions through the lens of Islamic Studies.

"I knew I wanted to do something focused on Islamic Studies," said Maxey. "Even though it has a regional focus, CMENAS was one of the few places where I could still concentrate on Islamic Studies within the confines of the program."

Throughout his time at CMENAS, Maxey has been both a student and an instructor. The Engaged Pedagogy Initiative gave him the space to return to his past as a teacher, but also critically see the roles of teacher and student as inextricably connected.

HISTORIC

Earlier this year, CMENAS went to the Bentley Historical Library to browse through the archival material it has on the Center

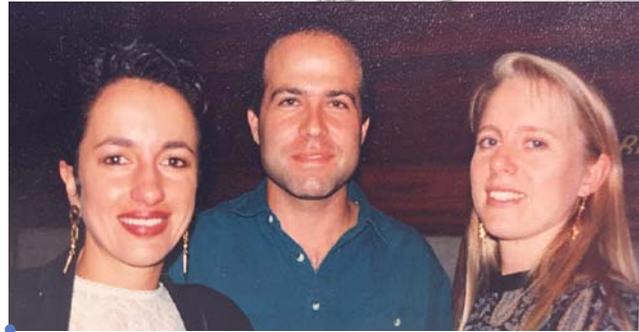


Maxey

Back in 1969, there were only 93 courses offered at UM for Middle Eastern and North African Studies. Today, students can choose from over 400! Take a look at page 14 to see a feature on one of those classes, "Iranian Cinema: Re/Presenting a Nation."

Table 1
The University of Michigan Near Eastern Language and Area Center
Number of Courses by Discipline, Level, and Credit Hours

Discipline	Courses for Under-graduate Students			Courses for Under-graduate and Graduate Students			1-3 credit
	1-3 credits	4 credits	5 credits	1-2 credits	3 credits	4-5 credits	
Language and Literature (Arabic, Berber, Hebrew, English, Persian, Turkish)	3		8	13	11	8	18
Anthropology		2			2		
Asian Course				1		1	
Economics	1					5	
Geography						3	
History				8	15	27	8
Theory of Art		2					
Social Sciences							



Here are a few CMENAS students at a social event in 1993. Rochelle Davis (on right) is now an Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Georgetown University and

Leila Hessini is (on left) the Vice President of Programs at the Global Fund for Women. If you want to learn about a couple other alumni of CMENAS, we've featured two on page 8!

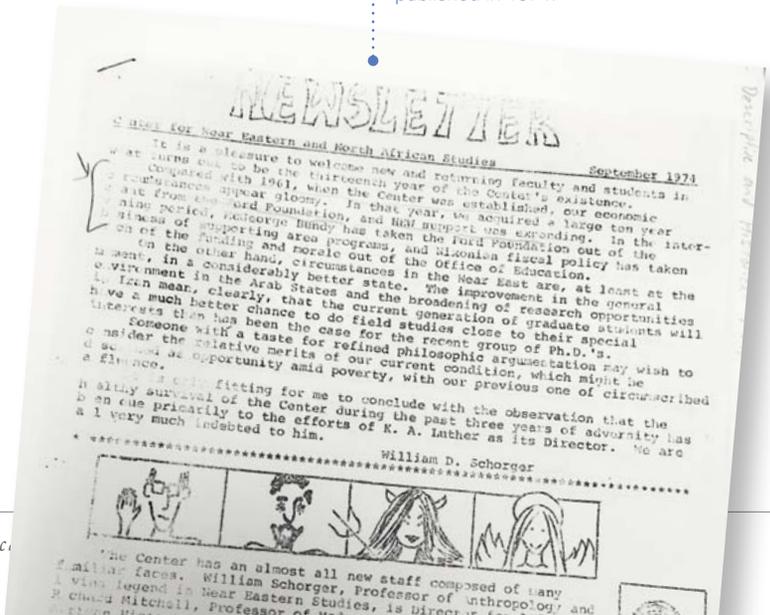
"EPI empowers you as a learner," said Maxey, "As a facilitator, it allows you to recognize if something is unclear and how a different approach might elicit what you need for progress."

Lessons taught as part of the EPI are also formative for understanding one's positionality outside of the classroom.

"The thing that a program like EPI instills in you is that there are layers upon layers of additional self awareness," said Maxey, "It's both awareness of yourself and awareness of the whole edifice that you represent-whether you want to or not."

While Maxey finishes his CMENAS MA this spring, a future of teaching is in his sights. Maxey hopes to continue his graduate education with a PhD in History and Anthropology at UM studying the intersection of Islamic education in West Africa and the United States.

Our newsletter has changed significantly since this one published in 1974.



WHERE ARE THEY?



CMENAS had the chance to catch up with two CMENAS alumni: **Courtney Lesoon** (above, left) who earned her MA from the Center in 2015 and **Sarah Blume** (above, right) who finished her BA in 2016.

Lesoon is currently a second-year PhD student in the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT, where she is specializing in the history and theory of art and architecture.

“My dissertation is about urbanism in North African in the Medieval period (c. 10th century),” said Lesoon, “I love the program, and I’m feeling really optimistic about my timeline these days; I will be done with coursework in May and then I get to start my dissertation research this summer!”

The flexibility and versatility of the CMENAS MA were great assets for Lesoon as she transitioned into her doctoral program.

“The Center provided me with a really well-rounded education on the Middle East and North Africa,” said Lesoon, “Because of my experience at CMENAS, I often find myself in academic conversations with colleagues of other disciplines.”

The superb caliber of instruction by the Center’s affiliated faculty, noted Lesoon, has been one of the most valuable aspects of her CMENAS degree and time with the program. A great deal of gratitude goes to Professor Juan Cole, who inspired her throughout her time at CMENAS, as well as to Emeritus Professor Raji Rammuny and Behrad Aghaei, who were both so supportive in their language instruction of Arabic and Persian, which she uses on a regular basis in her research.

The opportunity to study with Professor Christiane Gruber in the Department of Art History was incredibly formative for Lesoon’s academic progression.

“Her classes and advising have shaped me into the graduate student I am today,” said Lesoon, “Professor Gruber’s wide array of interests and course offerings ensured that my background in Islamic art and architecture was well-developed even before arriving at MIT.”

After graduating, Blume knew that she wanted to use the Arabic skills that she had acquired as part of her CMENAS degree; she also wanted to determine what advocacy methods to use to promote the issues she is most passionate about. Alkarama, a human rights organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, turned out to be a great place to start with this work.

“I specifically worked on a media advocacy campaign about arbitrary detention in Saudi Arabia,” said Blume, “I was able to use my Arabic skills on a daily basis, and I also really enjoyed expanding my political understanding of many human rights related issues in the Middle East through casework, working with the regional legal officer for the Gulf region, and attending a variety of UN Human Rights Council sessions.”

Since returning to the United States, Blume has started working with the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) in New York as its communications assistant.

“At IRAP, I’ve been able to expand on my academic background by approaching many of the issues we work on with a broader understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of the region and its diverse diasporas,” said Blume. “As I have gained an intricate understanding of the refugee resettlement process, I’ve also learned to be particularly cognizant of my role in refugee advocacy work, especially in a political climate where voices from the Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian communities are most important to center.”

Her current work and her academic past have become incredibly tied together.

“My CMENAS education provided me with a strong social, political, and historical understanding of the region, which has ultimately helped me become a better informed advocate,” said Blume.

“I’m thankful for the many opportunities I found through CMENAS and I am grateful for the wonderful community I found in my classes and extracurricular activities—as I have learned, and continue to learn, so much from my CMENAS peers!”

ARE YOU A CMENAS ALUM?

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

MESA UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Each year the Middle East Studies Association holds an undergraduate research workshop as part of the annual conference. There students have the opportunity to present their own original research and connect with other scholars in the field. This past year, Ryan Gillcrist ('18, International Studies and History) and Ibtihal Makki ('21, PharmD) went to MESA to present their work on *al-Kitaab* and how such a politicized textbook impacts understandings of Arab culture.

Having been Arabic students during their undergraduate career, Gillcrist and Makki often heard the long-standing complaints about the textbook, but to their knowledge, there had never been a formal review of the textbook since its insertion into the curriculum.



Makki (left) and Gillcrist

the two chose to use that space as an instrument to amplify student voices on the textbook.

“We drafted and passed a resolution through LSA SG calling to change the textbook,” which passed unanimously, noted Gillcrist. “It was after this that we met with the chair of the Near Eastern Studies Department.”

It was after the petition and resolution that Gillcrist and Makki heard about the opportunity to discuss their work on a broader stage at MESA.

“We wrote a petition where students could give their thoughts on the textbook if they’ve taken Arabic before and we got a lot of very colorful responses,” said Gillcrist.

Deciding to leverage their position in LSA Student Government,

“We actually learned about [the MESA Undergraduate Research Workshop] through Professors Evelyn Alsultany and Samer Ali as part of the Islamophobia Working Group,” said Makki.

The MESA Undergraduate Research Workshop comprises two parts: the first is a roundtable discussion with a faculty member and other students with similar research, and the second is a poster presentation.

During both parts of the workshop, Gillcrist and Makki received significant support from other participants.

“The workshop leader we had during the roundtable had similar feelings about the book,” said Makki. “Overall people tended to have similar problems with the textbook and agreed with what we were saying. The question they had for us, though, was how we got the UM to listen to us.”

“It was really interesting to see how widespread these opinions and thoughts are on *Al-Kitaab*,” continued Gillcrist. “Even after the event we had people wanting to connect with us on this issue; a professor from Bryn Mawr came up to us asking to see the paper and then we received emails from other students doing similar research.”

Since the presentation back in November, Gillcrist and Makki have been able to take the lessons learned from the experience and to apply them to other aspects of their lives.

“One thing that I often think back upon is one professor’s remark about the intersection between academia and advocacy,” said Makki. “Since Ryan and I are both interested in advocacy, I realized that you have to articulate your work in a way where politicians and policy makers will actually care about what you have to say.”

“Our presentation with such an education focus was very different from the others that were about politics or history,” said Gillcrist. “But it was such a great experience to see how all the issues were still in conversation with one another.”

LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

DR. ADI RAZ



Raz

Of the very few people who work at the intersection of language pedagogy and learning disabilities, UM is fortunate enough to be home to one of them. Coming from the University of Texas–Austin, Dr. Adi Raz joined the Near Eastern Studies faculty as Hebrew Language Coordinator and Lecturer in 2016.

Raz comes from a background of linguistics and literature and did not initially plan to go into pedagogy development.

“I knew that I was going to do something in language pedagogy but I had no idea it would lead me to learning disabilities,” said Raz. “One thing led to another and I became the expert in teaching Hebrew and learning disabilities.”

In more ways than one, Raz fills a gap in language pedagogy.

“There are so many people who do English pedagogy, but there are very few people who have a doctorate in Hebrew pedagogy,” said Raz. “And there are about five people in the world that deal with language pedagogy and learning disabilities.”

Between her research and time as the Special Needs Language Coordinator at the University of Texas–Austin, Raz saw that those who were thought to be unable to study a foreign language can indeed do so.

“What we found at UT–Austin was that students were not finishing their undergraduate degree, not because of math, not of science, but because of foreign language,” said Raz, “I worked with students and teachers to adapt the instructor’s teaching and the student’s studying to what would work with them in the classroom. Across 36 languages, we found out that 98% of the students can complete their language requirement.”

It is not simply about making foreign languages accessible to one student in the class; these adjustments are about making sure pedagogy is evolving to fit all the students in the room.

“What works for learning-disabled students works great for the other students as well,” said Raz. “We do things differently in the classroom and all students benefit from it.”

The Hebrew program at UM has evolved and advanced from Raz’s research background and pedagogy passion.

“We’ve changed the curriculum entirely,” said Raz. “We now use an inverted classroom, which makes the students the focus of the classroom. They come to class prepared and we use class time to activate the material.”

Together, the Hebrew, Hindi, Punjabi, Persian, and Turkish language instructors won a Whittaker and CRLT grant to further implement a flipped-classroom structure. The grant will support the creation and use of the Online Curriculum and Intensive Language Learning (OCILL) platform for these less commonly taught languages, supporting language mastery.

“What OCILL does is it allows students get their homework graded automatically,” said Raz. “It gives students the chance to get immediate feedback. Then the student can correct himself, get the maximum amount of points for the assignment, and actually learn the material.”

Beyond the pedagogical benefits that come with OCIL, it also sends an important message about collaboration.

“This idea of getting this with Turkish, Persian, Hindi, Urdu, and Hebrew is that all languages can work together,” said Raz. “I don’t speak any of these other languages, but we can still collaborate with one another.”

In addition to the Whittaker and CRLT grants, Raz also earned a Carnegie Mellon Grant with Hebrew faculty at the University of Maryland and the University of Minnesota.

“We are going to develop a new curriculum called “Start-Up Nation,” which focuses on start-ups and business in Israel,” said Raz. “The curriculum will be for the Big Ten initially, but eventually it will be open source.”

With all the changes to the Hebrew program, Raz hopes to see the program reach new heights and bring in new faces.

“I want our curriculum to be authentic, to be innovative, to be interesting, to make students excited to come and study Hebrew,” said Raz, “I want people who are not necessarily heritage learners, and students should know that, by the end of the four semesters, you will speak Hebrew.”

SHACHAR PINSKER

By Mekarem Eljamal

Associate Professor of Hebrew literature Shachar Pinsker's most recent book was somewhat out of his comfort zone. *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture* (NYU Press), looks at how the institution of the coffee house moved from one place to another, the tensions that existed within the cafés on local, national, and transnational levels, and the writers that migrated between these coffee houses and created networks as they moved.

"If you asked me years ago if I would write about coffee houses, I would have told you no, it's not my area," said Pinsker. "During my previous book, I came again and again to the coffee houses as a place. At the

beginning I thought this is because I love these spaces and I was attracted to them. But it took me awhile to understand that there is more to them."

Pinsker considered the topic not within his academic wheelhouse, and so the project initially started as a few articles published in Haaretz, an Israeli newspaper. After publishing a few articles, Pinsker received responses that made him reconsider limiting this research to newspaper publications.

"People volunteered to give me all kinds of information from the family members, grandparents. They sent me photographs and asked me questions. Some people even told me they had nostalgia reading these pieces; they had nostalgia for a place they had never been to," said Pinsker. "I came to understand that is a great topic and something that touches many different people in different ways."

These responses reaffirmed the centrality of people in coffee houses and café culture as Pinsker explored cafés in Eastern Europe, New York, and Tel Aviv. Leaning on cultural geographers and sociologists such as Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre, Pinsker focused on the Jewish experiential element of cafés.

"There is nothing Jewish about coffee or the coffee house; it is not a Jewish space in any traditional way," said Pinsker. "But when you look at some of the figures that received traditional Jewish educations, they experienced the coffee house as the modern secular substitute to the house of study of synagogue, and they talk about the coffee house in these terms."

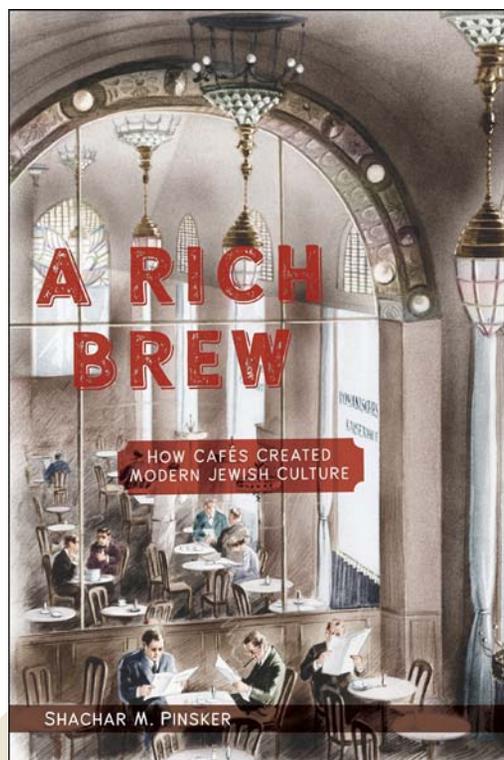
Interpersonal connections that moved coffee from Ethiopia to the Ottoman Empire, where Jews first encountered cafés, also impacted Jewish practices.

"In all the cities that I'm looking at, coffee houses were always brought by people in the Ottoman Empire, by Armenians, Greeks, and sometimes Sephardic Jews," said Pinsker. "Jews were also influenced by Sufis, doing religious practices at midnight and then we start to see something in Muslim societies, where you have debates amongst religious rabbis, asking, 'Is coffee okay to drink? Yes. Is it okay to go to a coffee house? Maybe yes, maybe no.'"

Accompanying the transnational movement of coffee and its houses came an air of otherness or "orientalness." Coffee houses were always understood as coming from elsewhere, and according to Pinsker, that explains a lot of the attraction to these spaces by Jews.

"There is this really interesting interplay between the local, national, and transnational because coffee houses are travelling, and it was very similar to how people understood the place of Jews in Europe," said Pinsker. "On the one hand, they very much belong in the place. In eastern and central Europe, Jews lived there for centuries, yet they were never understood to be from the place—they were always othered."

With regards to Jewish migration to Palestine, a level of irony emerges through Jewish expectations of what a café house and coffee culture are.





Pinsker

“People move from one city to another and from one place to another, and the café itself becomes a Silk Road of modern Jewish creativity, but it dies when people become very rooted in a place.”

“In Jaffa and Jerusalem, obviously, there was a more traditional Arab café culture, but what I find so fascinating is you have these east European immigrants coming to Palestine and they go to Jaffa and they don’t recognize these places; they find them strange,” said Pinsker. “They are not aware themselves that the coffee houses are not a European institution, and that in a way they are coming to the origin of coffee houses.”

Pinsker was able to return to his literary roots in analyzing how writers addressed this irony when explaining and describing coffee houses of Palestine.

“Agnon, one of the famous Hebrew writers, used the word in Hebrew *beit kahawa*, which is like the Arabic word for coffee, *qahwa*. Most Hebrew writers actually used ‘café,’ as the Europeans,” said Pinsker. “Some people say he is using it to make coffee houses sound more archaic, but I think he is using it to show the irony that many of these European immigrants thought they are bringing this European café culture to the Middle East, but in fact it started there.”

The linguistic subversion that Agnon brings forth in his writing continued within the coffee houses of Jaffa and Tel Aviv.

“Coffee houses were always multilingual spaces. In cities like Warsaw and Udesa, you could have a table speaking in German, Polish, Russian, and Yiddish,” said Pinsker. “When it comes to cafés

in Jaffa and Tel Aviv, there was a lot of pressure to move to monolingual culture and to revive Hebrew, but coffee houses always undermined it.”

Coffee houses also found their way into various narratives of Jewishness, as people added meaning to cafés existence.

“The fathers of Zionism used coffee houses as part of the whole discourse on the negation of the diaspora and tried to keep them out of Tel Aviv. People constructed the ‘coffee-house Jew’ as the Jew who is not productive and in opposition to the New Jew,” said Pinsker. “In this sense it is kind of the ultimate irony that Tel Aviv was established as the epitome of the Zionist dream and became famous for its coffee houses.”

While coffee houses created tension between narratives of the New Jew and Old Jew, Pinsker found writers who brought together the traditional religious culture and secular modern Jewish culture through the idea of the coffee house.

“I came across a Polish Jew who wrote, ‘I did not believe in the future of this Jewish Palestine, then when I came to Tel Aviv and saw these coffee houses, I knew it is here to stay,’” said Pinsker. “He said that every city needs to have a group of idlers, people who sit in cafés and create culture, and when you read it you think it is making fun of Tel Aviv, which he is, but at the same time he goes back to traditional Jewish culture. In the Talmud there is a

question about what constitutes a city, how do you know the difference between a small town or village and a city. The answer that the Talmud gives is that you need at least 10 idlers. Why? Because you need 10 people to make a quorum to pray. So this is another example for me of how, for many Jews, the coffee house was a modern secular idea of the synagogue.”

The question of belonging, which in eastern Europe made cafés attractive to the Jewish community, also comes forward again when looking at the state of cafés in today’s modern Jewish culture.

“I find that the golden age of coffee houses was at the time when you have migration,” said Pinsker. “People move from one city to another and from one place to another, and the café itself becomes a Silk Road of modern Jewish creativity, but it dies when people become very rooted in a place.”

Pinsker’s research has broken through the confines of this book; he has created an undergraduate course that uses cafés as a lens through which to introduce modern Jewish culture. Pinsker is also working on a digital mapping project that will house photographs, writings, and caricatures that he came across during the research process.

Pinsker always believed that this knowledge should not be solely bound in a book. It should be free and accessible to everyone: students, scholars, and the people with memories of these cafés.

EVENTS



POLITICS THROUGH NARRATIVE WITH HUSAM JUBRAN AND YUVAL BEN AMI

In November 2017, CMENAS hosted Husam Jubran and Yuval Ben Ami. Tracing their divergent upbringings, Jubran and Ben Ami shared their personal narratives, political transformations, and friendship with the audience. Together, they used a multi-narrative approach to highlight the nuances in the political landscape of Israel and Palestine.

INTER/NATIONALISM: DECOLONIZING NATIVE AMERICA AND PALESTINE

Dr. Steven Salaita, a former professor, now political writer, came to campus over Martin Luther King Jr. Day for a two-day event series. On MLK Day, he spoke with Sam Riddle, Rep. Jewell Jones, Cecily McClellan, and James Eberheart Jr., at the UM Detroit Center on their panel, “Is There Such a Thing as a Proper Protest?” The next morning, Salaita met with students for “Coffee and Conversation.” This is a new event format for CMENAS, where students and guest speakers can interact in a cozy environment. Later that afternoon, Salaita spoke to 120 attendees about the relationship between Native American and Indigenous studies and Palestinian studies through concepts of settler colonialism, indigeneity, and state violence.



SALTS OF THE EARTH WITH ZAMZAM AND HONEY

SPOKEN WORD PERFORMANCES WITH MOHJA KAHF

With the support of over 20 different departments and student organizations across campus, CMENAS hosted Professor Mohja Kahf for a two-day event series entitled, “Salts of the Earth with Zamzam and Honey,” on March 23 and 24.

On Friday morning, Kahf met with students for “Coffee and Conversation” to discuss her career path, writing practice, and activism. Kahf closed out Friday with her performance of “Syrian Dreams—Siren Blasts,” in the Rackham Amphitheatre.

On Saturday, at the Arab American National Museum, Kahf read from her most recent book, *Hagar Poems*.



UM offers a wide array of coursework on the Middle East and North Africa, and CMENAS faculty affiliates are constantly creating new classes, exposing students to different ways of thinking about and understanding the region. CMENAS spoke with Assistant Professor Cameron Cross of the Near Eastern Studies Department about his course, “Iranian Cinema: Re/Presenting a Nation.”

IRANIAN CINEMA

RE/PRESENTING A NATION

Mekarem Eljamal: *What drew you to create this course?*

Prof. Cameron Cross: One of my main aspirations as a teacher is to make Iranian history, art, and culture accessible and interesting for students who might otherwise have no cause or opportunity to learn about the country; cinema is one of the best ways to do this. We all watch movies; there is something in this medium deeply familiar and resonant to us, even as we encounter films from unfamiliar settings. As a bonus, Iranian cinema is consistently regarded as one of the best in the world (and has been for the last two or three decades), so we get to watch some really special films that challenge us to broaden our understanding of what cinema can do and why it matters.

ME: *How did you choose the films to include in the syllabus?*

CC: It’s a challenging process—imagine trying to teach a history of American popular music in 14 albums—and every year I swap out old films for new ones to see what kind of alchemy they produce. I generally aim for a selection that showcases a representative spectrum of genres, filmmakers, themes, and historical moments; I also strive to find films that reward multiple

viewings, that directly address the central issues of the class, and that have some critical analysis on them available in English. This is all to facilitate the work of learning to watch, think, and write about films critically.

ME: *What do you hope students get out of the class?*

CC: In light of my teaching goals I described above, I would want students to finish the course with a richer and more complicated understanding of the history and peoples of the region we now know as Iran (Persia before 1935). For us in the States, most images of Iran are filtered through the lens of politics and the national news, producing a rather shadowy and ominous figure without much of a human face. I hope that students, after taking this class, could give a face—indeed, many faces—to Iran after this course. In addition, I hope that students will gain a new enjoyment and appreciation for the art form of cinema itself. Every film or video we see is an amazingly complex artifact, joining technical skill, narrative device, visual composition, performance, synesthesia, philosophy, music, and time itself together in a unique package; learning to identify and analyze

these various components transforms us from passive to active consumers of the medium, and with that shift in agency we develop a richer and more meaningful relationship with a craft that most of us encounter on a daily basis.

ME: *What is unique about film as a medium of presenting nationalisms, histories, and cultures?*

CC: Cinema is one of the best sites to explore these topics, because it does not merely “reflect” these identities, but indeed is instrumental in their very formation. One of the things I strive to impress on my students—something I didn’t fully realize until I started doing the research for the course—is that cinema is part and parcel of modernity; cinema engenders new ways of representation, new modes of experience, and above all a new kind of society; it is difficult to talk of modernity at all without cinema. And nationalism, history, and culture, in their modern incarnations, are articulated most vividly and disseminated most widely on the silver screen; it was to invoke this struggle for the power to create and (re)present “Iran” to its people and the world at large that I came up with the course’s sub-title.

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CMENAS gifts help support internships, student groups, faculty and student travel, workshops and lectures, visiting scholars, artists and performers, and special courses related to the Middle East and North Africa.

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The audience at the Arab American National Museum gathered to hear Mohja Kahf read from her most recent book, *Hagar Poems*, on March 24, 2018.



LSA

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