



# CIVILITAS

## 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.

### **Samer M. Ali**

*CMENAS Director and Associate Professor of Arabic Language and Literature*

### **Ryan Szpiech**

*CMENAS Associate Director and Associate Professor of Medieval Iberian Cultures and Literatures*

### **Kristin Waterbury**

*Academic Program Specialist*

### **Mekarem Eljamal**

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FRONT COVER: Balat, Turkey by Hueseyin Bas

BACK COVER: The church of Surp Arakelots along Lake Sevan by @windogram



## DEAR CMENAS COMMUNITY,

**T**he first flickers of fall are beginning to appear, as is usual in September, but the rhythms of this new semester are anything but. The ongoing epidemics of COVID and racism (and particularly anti-Blackness) continue to buffet the country and the Detroit Metro area, and call upon our inner resources to rise to the occasion with renewed thought and purpose. In response, eighty percent of credit hours have moved online at U-M and at CMENAS, and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts has established an Anti-Racism Task Force to take stock of internal practices, both positive and negative, and look for ways to radically improve from the inside out. Meanwhile, International Institute staff have also taken the initiative in the past month to lead thoroughgoing discussions about race that will enrich our campus and programming with deeply held values.

More than ever, we need reality checks and courage to work through systemic challenges, and CMENAS has redoubled its efforts to promote respect and dignity in the ways we think and talk about our fellow humans in

the Middle East and North Africa and to enhance equal opportunity for CMENAS faculty, staff and students. The current newsletter provides updates on some of those initiatives and showcases the best of the global CMENAS community: our new students, teacher training programs, and a fresh partnership with the U-M School of Education to launch a program to meet the burgeoning demand for Arabic teachers certified to teach in Michigan public schools. This is the work we're called to do.

The road ahead is long, but we are fortunate to have the continued support of Title VI funding from the US Department of Education and the forethought of donors like Timothy Green, featured in this issue. If you have ideas about the work ahead, or would like to invest in a new generation of students and leaders, please reach out to us. And feel free to connect on social media: **Facebook**, **Twitter**, and **LinkedIn**—we LOVE to hear from our CMENAS community!

Kind regards,

**Samer M. Ali, PhD**

*CMENAS Director*

*Associate Professor of Middle East Studies*

# 60 YEARS AT CMENAS

The Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies (CMENAS) is celebrating its 60th Anniversary in 2021! To kick off our celebrations, we are looking to hear from you—whether you're an alumnus, a current student, community, faculty, or staff member (past or present). We would like to hear your favorite stories about your time with CMENAS. To share your stories or any photographs with us, you can fill out the following **CMENAS Stories form**.

In the near future, we hope to celebrate this milestone in person, and share the meaningful work that CMENAS has accomplished, so be on the lookout for special events and other programming.



"Every semester, one of the CMENAS faculty and staff would open their home for the center to come by for a Middle Eastern meal and chat. The food was excellent, and the company even better. At these events, I befriended students and faculty, who are friends that I continue to interact with to this day."  
**Christopher Pumford**, BA '19  
(pictured above)

"I felt a strong connection and sense of support with nearly every CMENAS professor in ways that did not exist in my other studies. The instructors are not only extremely knowledgeable and established experts in their fields, but they also ensured a positive and comfortable space for learning and oftentimes went the extra mile to make sure their students felt supported."  
**Farah Erzouki**, BA '14, MPH '16

"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."

**Sarah Blume**, BA '16

"Everything I do now is helped by what I learned in my degree. Being able to tailor my degree was massively helpful; it allowed me to improve my Arabic, which I use on a daily basis, and I feel as though I am able to educate non-Arabs about Arab culture and heritage with confidence."

**Devin Bathish**, BA '17

"[My CMENAS degree] has allowed me to connect with my culture in a way that I couldn't before. For example, when I recently traveled to Oman to visit my family, I could communicate much better with them and enhance the relationships we already established. This is perhaps one of the most beneficial things I've gained from the degree!"

**Tina Al-Khersan**, BA '17

(pictured below)



"I have been impressed by all the collaborative activities across departments and faculties. If we all support CMENAS, it will have a bright future."

**Dr. Lois Aroian**, PhD '78

(above with CMENAS Director Samer Ali)

"There is an embarrassment of riches at U-M and [students] should take advantage of as many opportunities as possible; be as involved as possible with CMENAS; most institutions don't have these spaces."

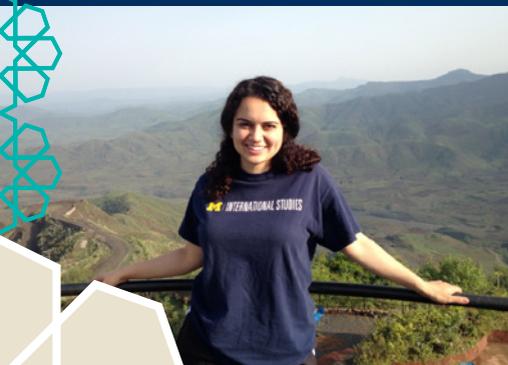
**Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar**, PhD '10

"I very much enjoyed having area studies centers as meeting points for focused dialog, I also appreciated that the 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."

**Joseph Viscomi**, PhD '16

"[CMENAS] was an exciting place to be [in the 1980s] because so much was happening...We had some wonderful students. They worked in the center and because of their activity, we could do an awful lot more. They were usually willing to help and offer ideas and they came from a lot of different places. I stay in touch with a lot of them and I read their books, I watch their presentations at [the conferences of the Middle East Studies Association], and a lot of the people in the field now were people who were our students."

**Betsy Barlow**, CMENAS Outreach Coordinator '82-'00



LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Mary Mostaghim, Rima Hassounah, and Betsy Barlow

# 2020 CMENAS GRADUATES

While we were unable to congratulate our 2020 graduates in person this year, we are so proud and happy to feature them in our Fall 2020 newsletter! Congratulations!



## **Leila Abdelrazaq, MA**

During my studies, I focused on developing my Arabic language skills in order to support my research on Arab (and especially Palestinian) art and literature. My work culminated in an MA thesis on Palestinian futurist art, and how

Palestinian futurisms reflect shifting (post)national imaginaries of liberation. I am grateful for the support I received from the department through two FLAS Fellowships and the Mahfoud Bennoune Memorial Thesis Award.



## **Ali Al Momar, MA**

The program gave me the freedom to develop a curriculum that holistically studied the Middle East.

I chose courses whose regional focus was the Middle East but whose topics included archeology, literature, history of art, history, public policy, research methods, and gender studies. The program also provided the opportunity to gain new language skills. I was awarded FLAS to study Persian in the summer between the two years I was in CMENAS. In my second year, I took additional Persian courses, including one on modern Persian poetry. Pursuing these new language skills was an exciting and rewarding endeavor. Lastly and most importantly, I continued and developed lifelong relationships. Professors provided formative mentorship that will remain invaluable for me, and fellow students became close friends whose paths I am sure will forever cross.



## **Ahmed Mitiche, MA**

My time at U-M has been both personally and academically gratifying. I developed strong,

life-long relationships and with the help of my thesis advisor, Yasmin Moll, was able to reach a decision to pursue a doctorate in cultural anthropology next year. I have also succeeded in completing my thesis, presented at various professional conferences, including MESA, and spent an amazing summer conducting preliminary research for my PhD in Algeria.



## **Asma Noray, MA**

The most memorable aspect of my experience at the CMENAS has been the friendships I've made both among

my cohort and across a variety of academic disciplines through which I have taken coursework. I feel very thankful for the ways in which my fellow classmates and professors have widened my thinking, encouraged me through the emotional and intellectual challenges of graduate school, and supported my future goals. I am also grateful for the opportunities CMENAS has provided us to bring our academic research and interests to wider audiences. The highlight of this past semester was traveling to Puerto Rico with a fellow classmate to represent CMENAS in a collaborative teaching conference and present my research on human rights abuses during the 2003 Iraq War.



## **Leah Squires, MA, MPP**

As a dual degree student, I've benefited greatly from CMENAS' flexible curriculum. The chance to

take classes from across so many departments—History, Comparative Literature, Urban Planning, Public Policy—has meant I can tailor my education and research. A highlight for me was participating in this year's UM-UPR Curriculum Development Symposium, where I presented on the climate-migration nexus and related policy challenges in the Middle East and North Africa. Plus, Asma Noray (who also attended the conference) and I finally had a chance to go hiking together, fulfilling our Pacific Northwest destiny to explore a rainforest.



Congratulations to two additional MA graduates, **Justin Stucki** and **Dahlia Petrus**, as well as CMENAS' two BA graduates, Refael Kubersky and Selin Levi.

We would also like to recognize Leila Abdelrazaq's outstanding MA thesis, which was awarded the Mahfoud Bennoune Memorial Thesis Award. The thesis looks at Palestinian futurist art, and how Palestinian futurisms reflect shifting (post)national imaginaries of liberation. This award was established in memory of Dr. Mahfoud Bennoune, a beloved Algerian professor, author, teacher, human rights advocate, and father, who studied at the University of Michigan.

## NEW CMENAS STUDENTS



### **Maya Zreik**

Maya Zreik is pursuing a Masters in International Regional Studies (MIRS) with a specialization in Middle Eastern & North African

Studies (MENAS). She graduated from the University of Michigan in 2020 with a dual BA in International Studies and Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience. Her research interests focus on the continued effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on the Middle East and the development of identity, nationhood, and modes of resistance. She has interned with the Carnegie Endowment Center for International Peace and the Collateral Repair Project, which focuses on refugee resettlement, and served as regional editor for the Middle East of the Michigan Journal of International Affairs. She is concurrently pursuing a Master's in Public Health (MPH) in Public Health.



### **Jenna Chami**

Jenna Chami is a first-year Master's student specializing in MENAS. Jenna is pursuing a dual degree with a MPH in Health Behavior

Health Education. Her research interest includes the health impacts on the MENA region and populations, specifically Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. Jenna has worked and volunteered with several non-profit organizations catering to the MENA population in the Metro-Detroit area. In the future, Jenna hopes to create programs focusing on the health needs of refugees to improve their health outcomes.

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND AREA STUDIES (FLAS) FELLOWSHIP AWARDEES

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the FLAS fellowships support students studying less commonly taught languages. The 2020–2021 Academic Year recipients are:

### **Graduate Students**

#### **Mekarem Eljamal** Hebrew

*Dual Master's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies and Urban & Regional Planning*

#### **Nicholas Kolenda** Persian

*Master's Degree Student, International and Regional Studies*

#### **Armen Abkarian** Arabic

*Doctoral Student, History*

#### **Evgenia Kitaevich** Armenian

*Doctoral Student, Political Science*

#### **Ethan Taylor** Persian

*Master's Degree Student, International and Regional Studies*

#### **Cecilia Kuehnel** Arabic

*Master's Degree Student, Middle Eastern Studies*

#### **Daniel Lightfoot** Arabic

*Master's Degree Student, International and Regional Studies*

### **Undergraduate Students**

#### **Garrett Ashlock** Persian

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Anthropology and Middle East Studies*

#### **Simone Jaroslaw** Hebrew

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Public Policy and Middle East Studies*

#### **Drew Tarnopol** Hebrew

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Chemistry and Middle East Studies*

#### **Kaitlyn Bell** Arabic

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies, Political Science, and International Studies*

#### **Ethan Concannon** Arabic

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Political Science*

### **Summer FLAS Recipients**

#### **Armen Abkarian** Arabic

*Doctoral Student, History*

#### **James Vizthum** Hebrew

*Doctoral Student, Middle East Studies*

#### **Molly Green** Arabic

*Doctoral Student, Public Health, Health Behavior and Health Education*

#### **Richard Smith** Hebrew

*Doctoral Student, Musicology*

#### **Ethan Concannon** Arabic

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Political Science*

#### **Shon Harris** Arabic

*Bachelor's Degree Student, Middle Eastern & North African Studies and International Studies*

#### **Daniel Lightfoot** Arabic

*Master's Degree Student, International and Regional Studies*

# PICS OR IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

By Richard "Apple" Smith

**O**n January 3, 2020, I traveled to Tel Aviv, Israel, to research drag as a space that can combine queer musical performances with Arab identities. As part of my PhD program in ethnomusicology, I am required to spend extensive time working directly within the communities with which I write. Although I could never write from the perspective of someone who grew up Israeli or Palestinian, I am able to develop important insights to discuss the music that I have fallen in love with through spending time amongst its creators. Fieldwork not only allows "outsiders" to establish a basis for deeper appreciation and facility in intuiting musical creation in certain styles, it also helps to form the personal relationships needed to write *with* rather than merely *about* a community. My dissertation examines the complexities that non-binary and trans\* identities reveal within a binary society, but I could not have come to this understanding had I not reached out to a Tel Avivi drag queen to ask if I could bring my camera to her upcoming show.

For decades, ethnographers have used photography to aid their fieldwork. Moments in time can be captured and later studied, presented, or even mass produced. Technology has become such that almost everyone with a cellphone can take photos with better image quality than some entry-level cameras from the recent past. Point-and-shoot-and-post photo capture is arguably one of the very few ubiquitous practices out there in the age of social media. One of the beautiful advantages of widespread media is that newcomers have endless resources for learning and growing as artists *and* consumers. As a student, I have often loathed opening a textbook only to find dry, cold, distant images that convey a lack of empathy, published by anonymous journalists, or conversely, the sensational, high-contrast, highly textured images of a young foreign child, exploited for their visage, so a popular journalist or news

outlet rakes in top dollar. I'm reminded now of the photographs of the American Civil Rights Movement that circulate ever so often in the US. Our cultural impulse is to understand black and white images as representative of a long-gone era, causing us to feel an unnecessary distance from the subjects—nevertheless, many of these were originally published in color and only later rendered in black and white. Similarly, today we are inundated with colorful, saturated (or even overly desaturated) scenes curated by algorithms to show us the most popular influencers and styles of the day.

Therein lies a problem for the researcher. How must they... how must *we* not only take, but present photographs of the communities with which we engage? What story are we telling if we publish in black and white? What tale are we spinning if we boost the shadows or bring out the red just a bit? It's a challenge photographers have faced throughout history that I find frustrating, yet a bit humorous. Today, when consumers find out that a photo is edited, they often believe the documentary photographer is suddenly disingenuous. A long cry from "Photoshopping" a cat's head onto a human body, every camera, including those in cellphones, has some sort of technology that imposes a certain "filter" of light and color on every image. What you see from your cellphone was edited before it even loaded on your screen. Taking it a step further, the next time you're on Instagram, think about what you feel when you swipe through filters like "Cairo," "Paris," or "Tokyo." What sort of story are you telling? Or did you think it was just *your aesthetic*?

In my work with drag performers in Tel Aviv, I found an interesting compromise. I first entered the field in 2017 and have made subsequent trips over the summers, and then again starting this last January, although it was cut short due to the pandemic. I was worried initially that my presence would be disconcerting or an invasion of privacy—drag and burlesque



Mx. Force Majeure, Ann Arbor, MI

ABOVE: Christina Fox, Tel Aviv, Israel; TOP: King Shalgon, Tel Aviv, Israel

often rely on minimal to no clothing—but I was instead welcomed and asked to take photos. Performers then requested to use these photos in event adverts and on social media to garner more public interaction. Likewise, they encouraged me to post them to my own accounts and tag them as it would only boost their social media reach. Thereafter, I began honing my own style of drag photography informed by local cooperation and technical development. I soon found myself poring over famous photos and questioning not only why, but how they were created. It was as if the camera was my instrument, and I had joined a drag band. Over time, my photography networks grew both in the States and abroad, conversations ensued, and I was asked to begin performing, myself.

In developing my own style of photography, I have actively sought ways to produce material in a queer manner. I see photos as a way to tell stories. In drag, the characters are larger than life and their embodied personas usher in a peculiar dynamism between stage and audience. I see it as my job to capture these moments, coupling the fluidity and organic nature of a live production with the regal elegance of studio portraiture.

In turn, my own performing has been affected. While I'm ridden with anxiety and a beginner in what feels like almost every aspect of performance, I conceive of my drag as resonating

with my photography. They are intertwined. When I perform, I step into a crafted world of gender where every bat of an eyelash or flick of the wrist becomes snapshots of the story I'm telling. These experiences then help guide me to robust questions for performers, they direct my thoughts, they orient my body, they draw me nearer to empathy, and fuel compassion. My camera then takes on new meaning. Its presence is shaped by the performers' desire, the audiences' fervor, and only limited by my own experience.

My job as a photographer is to capture a beautiful image. My job as a researcher with a camera is to better understand what beautiful means. My job as an ethnographer with photographic data is to determine how to present this queer art beautifully.

*Richard "Apple" Smith (they/them) is a PhD Candidate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Michigan. More of their photography can be found at [www.theorchardway.com](http://www.theorchardway.com).*

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Mekarem Eljamal



CMENAS had the chance to catch up with two Center-affiliated alumni: **Dana Del Vecchio**, who earned her BA from the Department of Near Eastern Studies (now the Department of Middle East Studies) in 2015 and **Rona Beresh**, who finished her BA in 2015, with concentrations in Judaic studies, Arabic and Islamic studies, and comparative literature.

As is the case for most students, **Dana Del Vecchio** did not find her perfect major immediately; rather, through exploring and enrolling in different courses she found the degree program that best fit her interests.

“My freshman year, I learned about Palestine in an Israel–Palestine history class, then immediately changed my major from Political Science to Middle Eastern Studies, and have since been immersed in Arab culture, language, and history,” Del Vecchio says. “After I changed my major, I really enjoyed my professors and classmates the most because they helped me view the world differently.”

Part of Del Vecchio’s immersion into Arab culture included a year abroad in which she split her time between Haifa and Amman. Once she completed her degree, Del Vecchio made the decision to start her post-graduate career outside of the United States, going back to a city she spent time during her undergraduate years.

“After having studied abroad in Jordan my junior year, I knew I wanted to move there as soon as I could

to gain experience in refugee education and youth development,” she said.

Del Vecchio reflects fondly on the time she spent abroad during her undergraduate studies, noting that the people she met and fieldwork she completed in Jordan while working on her thesis, which compared teaching and curricula of UNRWA and Jordan government schools, have taught her lessons that she continues to carry into her work after returning to the United States.

“I decided I needed a Masters in Education in order to advance my career.” Del Vecchio said. “Returning to the US, I studied at Harvard Graduate School of Education in the International Education Policy program and learned from advisor and refugee education experts about the ways that structures, policies, practices, and people influence the educational experience of children living in conflict, and how education might exacerbate or mitigate conflict.”

Del Vecchio has been fortunate to continue in a career that has combined her interests in the Middle East and childhood education.

“After graduate school, I started working in Program Management at World Education, specifically coordinating an early childhood research study in Jordan and technical assistance in English Language Learning and Monitoring and Evaluation for STEM schools in Egypt,” she says.

Del Vecchio’s career centers on education, and the importance of her own education cannot be understated.

“My MENA courses, combined with my junior year abroad in Haifa and Amman, were instrumental in developing my knowledge and understanding of the social, cultural, historical, and political landscape of Palestine and Jordan in particular,” she says. “Had I not changed my major to Middle Eastern Studies, I would have never ended up moving to Jordan and pursuing a career that I love.”

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Like Del Vecchio, **Rona Beresh** also chose to continue her career in Amman, putting into practice the language skills and area studies knowledge she gained while at U-M.

“[In Amman,] I had been working on economic development projects for several years. Most recently, I worked with USAID and Jordan’s private sector to pilot the first micro-franchising initiative in the country,” she said. “Prior to that role, I oversaw a project to establish micro-enterprise incubators to support Syrian refugee and Jordanian women as they became business owners.”



Despite the difficulty of learning Arabic as a foreign

language, Beresh was quick to note the importance of U-M’s strong Arabic language program when she moved abroad.

“I met students from a lot of top universities, and I consistently noticed that my Arabic was more functional and useful in real-life situations,” Beresh said. “That meant that I was better able to build relationships with my colleagues and friends, which made all the difference in my day to day life while living in the region.”

The benefits of her education in Middle East studies extended not only to the content of her courses, but also to the atmosphere within which she was taught.

“Some of my closest friends are classmates that I met via Middle East studies courses at Michigan. At a school as big as Michigan, it can be hard to find ‘your people.’ Having majors that introduced me to like-minded students was a very formative aspect of my undergrad experience,” she said. “Similarly, being part of a smaller academic community allowed me to build close relationships with professors.”

After four years outside of higher education, Beresh is now back in the United States pursuing a joint MA in Global Affairs at Yale’s Jackson Institute for Global Affairs and an MBA at the Yale School of Management with a focus on innovative ways to address under-employment in conflict-affected areas. Her decision to go to graduate school stemmed from a desire to deepen her education of the region while also exploring new ways to solve problems.

“Working in Jordan in international development taught me so much about the complexities of actually feeling like your work is contributing positively. While I learned a lot from my work in Jordan, I also noted a lot of ways in which the international development industry (and it is, indeed, an industry) is flawed,” she said. “I wanted to go to graduate school for the opportunity to step back and understand other approaches to lessening wealth inequality in the Middle East and elsewhere and to gain the skills I need to make a sustainable, ethical, and considered positive impact via my work.”

Reflecting on her undergraduate years, time working in the region, and now the early stages of her graduate school career, Beresh shares some important advice for current Middle East studies students as they prepare for their futures.

“Learning about the MENA region in depth is fascinating and important. However, when it comes to professional opportunities, having only content expertise lends itself to research roles. I wish I had spent more time thinking about the functional role I hoped to have—exploring my strengths in terms of skills as well as region and content [knowledge],” Beresh said. “I would challenge current students working in and on the MENA region to find internship or coursework opportunities to test out technical skills, too.”

## CMENAS AT THE MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ASSOCIATION

While many of the annual conferences that faculty, students, and staff present at have been cancelled or moved to a virtual format, CMENAS still wanted to take the time to honor all the work CMENAS affiliates have done to prepare their papers and contribute to knowledge production on the Middle East and North Africa.

### **Armen Abkarian**

*"Frik in the Sheets: Armenian Poetry as an Alternative Source of Studying the Mongol Empire"*

### **Sahin Acikgoz**

*"Yesilcam's Other Daughters: Armenian Women and Ungendered Ethnoreligious Alterity"*

### **Tugce Kayall**

*"Erotics of Death: Literary and Visual Representations of Martyrdom in World War I"*

### **Samer Ali**

*"Who Sits at the Banquet of Adab?: Cultural Battles in Early Arabo-Islamic Culture and Questions of Ontology"*

### **Camron Michael Amin**

*"Examining a Midwestern American Faslnameh: A Community Newsletter's Window on 20 years of Iranians Living in Michigan"*

### **Kathryn Babayan, Chair**

*Occult Landscapes and Mindscapes*

### **Golriz Farshi**

*"Opening the Gates of Paradise: Abwab al-Birr of Muzaffariyya and the Sacred Geography of Tabriz"*

### **Hani Bawardi,**

*"Locating the Arab in Arab American Studies"*

### **Juan Cole, Panel**

*Writing beyond the Academy: Commercial Publishing and the Middle East Scholar*

### **Sascha Crasnow, Chair of Panel**

*Towards an Alternative Framework: Gender, Sexuality, and Queerness in Contemporary Islamic Art*

### **Mekarem Eljamal**

*Alienations and Articulations: Tracing Israeli Land Policy Through History*

### **Christiane Gruber, Panelist**

*Promoting Public Scholarship in Middle East History*

### **Xiaoyue Li**

*"From Privilege to Welfare: The Popularization of Rail Travel in Egypt, 1870-1920"*

### **Marina Mayorski**

*"Modern Crimes, Jewish Punishments: Narratives of Jewish Cultural Modernity in Popular Ladino Literature"*

### **Devi Mays**

*"How Was This War Different from All Other Wars?: World War I in Istanbul from a Jewish Lens"*

### **Lisa Reber**

*"Seeking Safe Spaces with No 'Extra Ears': Conducting Interviews in a Surveillance State"*

### **Merisa Sahin**

*"Ottoman Positivism: An Ambivalent Critique of Colonialism"*

### **Seda Saluk**

*"We act like police detectives: Changing Regimes of Care in Public Health Clinics"*

### **Nilay Sevinc, Chair**

*American Association of Teachers of Turkic Languages Roundtable: Materials, Development, and Design*

### **Mark Tessler**

*"The Evolution of Resistance: Generational Views of Palestinian Institutions"*



## NEW FACULTY

CMENAS is excited to announce that **Umayyah Cable** will be joining CMENAS as an affiliated faculty member.

Umayyah Cable is jointly appointed in the departments of American Culture and Film, Television, and Media, and is a core faculty member in the Arab and Muslim American Studies Program. They earned a PhD in American Studies and Ethnicity and a graduate certificate in Visual Studies from the University of Southern California. Before joining the University of Michigan, they held an appointment as an assistant professor of media studies at Purchase College (SUNY), as well as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in the programs of Asian American Studies and Middle East and North African Studies at Northwestern University, and a faculty fellowship at the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard University in Spring 2020. They are currently completing a book manuscript on the history of Arab American media activism in the mobilization of Palestine solidarity politics in the United States.



# BRIDGING DISTANCE THROUGH RESEARCH AND TEACHING

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR ROSE WELLMAN

By Mekarem Eljamal

### What drew you to academia and anthropology?

I couldn't have done anything else but become an anthropologist. You might say it was in my blood. My grandparents, Edie and Victor Turner, were anthropologists. That got me started, but more generally, I loved that anthropology provided possibilities for activism, learning, and collaboration around the world.

I try to bring this into my teaching. I am driven by the basic desire to raise tough questions and unravel students' assumptions about their near and distant worlds. Through topics as diverse as Iran, Islam, and food sustainability, I get my students excited about the powerful relationships between normative narratives

of modernity and political power, politics and culture, and religion. At the same time, my teaching is driven by the recognition that the best classrooms center on collaboration, exchange, and diversity of thought and experience.

### How would you describe your research interests and why were you drawn to them?

My research as a cultural anthropologist focuses on the relationship between Islam, kinship, and nation-making in the modern Middle East and its diaspora. For the most part, this research has focused on the Islamic Republic of Iran, but I am also beginning a new project in Arab Detroit among Iraqi refugees.

My aim in these projects is to increase understanding of Islam in the Middle East and its diaspora.

**Why is kinship so important to understanding the world today?**

Kinship can tell us a lot about state power. Kinship has traditionally been seen as a kind of “hybrid” between nature and culture, the biological and the social. It has been a model, not only of the family but of our ideas of ethnicity and nation—think about citizenship laws and how people get included or excluded in a nation-state. But by unpacking kinship, we can interrogate some of our most ingrained assumptions about society. We can critique processes of naturalization, whereby things like nation-states, institutions, gender, and social movements are made to seem unquestionable, natural, and legitimate. If you begin to explore kinship, just a little, you see that people’s ideas of relatedness are actually deeply entangled with state-crafting, modernity, and development.



**“In general, I seek to challenge my students’ assumptions and help them see their positionality in the world.**

**... I never use a textbook but instead, find the most interesting articles and ethnographies available.”**

—Professor Rose Wellman

**What are your upcoming projects focusing on?**

I’m just now finishing a book titled *Feeding Iran: Shi’i Families and the Making of the Islamic Republic*. The book will be available in May of 2021 and published by the University of California Press. I’m also working on several new projects that connect to my future research in Arab Detroit. With Sally Howell, for instance, I’m writing a piece on Iraqi refugees in Michigan. I’ve also become involved in research that explores barriers to health in Dearborn. My aim is to begin serious research with Iraqis after the pandemic in 2021.

**What do you hope undergraduate students will get from your “Kinship and Marriage” course?**

“Kinship and Marriage” explores diverse kinship practices around the world and gives students an understanding of how unpacking kinship can mean unpacking some of our most ingrained assumptions about our society. Specific topics include gender, adoption, LGBTQI families, spiritual kinship, and how kinship is created.

**What do you hope students gain from those introductory courses, especially since they might be some students’ first experiences with anthropology or the Middle East?**

My “Anthropology of the Middle East” course, in contrast, allows me to explore a region of the world. In the course, I address Islamophobia, Orientalism, the anthropology of Islam, among a host of other themes. I teach cultural relativism. It is a challenging course because of the breadth of diversity in the Middle East, but it is very fun to teach at Dearborn where so many students have firsthand experience of the region.

In general, I seek to challenge my students’ assumptions and help them see their positionality in the world. I also try to give them the tools to critique the state of affairs and explore, including research skills. I know these tools will be useful in their future careers. I never use a textbook but instead, find the most interesting articles and ethnographies available. I focus on collaborative knowledge building and am constantly impressed with my students’ diversity of thought and experience. I always learn a lot from my students. They’re terrific.

# FROM KIM KARDASHIAN TO MOVSES KHORENATSI: DECIPHERING THE ARMENIAN EXPERIENCE

Interview with Michael Pifer, Lecturer in Middle East Studies

By Mekarem Eljamal

## What drew you to create this course?

My idea for the course began as a light-hearted thought experiment, in the vein of “if you could throw a dinner party and invite anyone, who would it be?” After teaching various courses on Armenian cultural production, surveying works of literature and art from the dawn of Armenian writing in the fifth century CE to the present day, a curious solution suggested itself. All things being equal, why not invite the pre-modern historian Movses Khorenatsi, sometimes called “The Father of History,” to break bread with reality-TV star Kim Kardashian? The pairing would probably strike many as unlikely, but that’s part of what makes it a useful juncture to build a course around—it starts a conversation. What does it mean to say that both Khorenatsi and Kardashian are Armenian? How historically capacious is “Armenian-ness” (or “Greek-ness,” or “Turkish-ness,” or anything else)? Who gets to decide? And what voices get included in (or excluded from) those discussions?

## What do you hope students get out of the class?

The class has two basic goals—the first is that I’d like students to leave with a nuanced, albeit selective, understanding of how different figures have shaped heterogeneous senses of the “Armenian” over time. Here’s one way this works: at the start of the course, we analyze different contemporary travel accounts to Armenia. To an extent, these narratives are driven by male figures on a quest for self-discovery or self-actualization, which usually entails an attempt to understand the Armenian genocide through the lens

of family history. Often, these stories are more about the diasporan tellers (and the pasts they want to center) than about the Armenians who live in Armenia today. And so, one way to make this narrative of diasporan self-discovery more complex—and, I hope, more interesting to think about—is to bring seemingly less “serious” or neglected accounts to the table. When Conan O’Brien or Kim Kardashian go to Armenia, they make no pretension that their shows are, in a real way, about their own unique encounters with the country (if not an extension of their brands). But in that acknowledgment, in the particularity of what they want out of their journey, something a little unruly emerges—a space for telling a different kind of a story, in a different sort of way.

Of course, I’m not asking students to valorize one sort of narrative over another. Rather, I want students to think about how different forms of cultural production (the late-night talk show, reality TV, documentaries, the memoir) foreground different questions about narrative choice, affiliation, gender, and media. And this, of course, is the second and more general goal of the course: to help undergraduates become sensitive readers of cultural production across time.

## How do you think this course adds to and supplements the other courses on Armenia offered at U-M (such as Hakem al-Rustom’s course on memory)?

As the title hopefully suggests, the course’s historical range is quite broad. I’m a medievalist, and so I often try to bring many case studies from the pre-modern world into conversation with



contemporary issues. One useful example comes from a fascinating medieval poem that depicts a conversation between an Armenian and a Turk. In the poem, not only do Armenian and Turk fall in love, but both urge the other to convert to a different religion. They also share much in common—a similar sense of the poetic, the same cultural references, and the same languages—even though their differences never entirely disappear, either. As poems like this one suggest, cultural production can help to theorize where such differences lie, what they might do, and how they shift in unexpected ways.

## Anything else you would like to share about the course?

Simply that there’s no single Armenian story, and there shouldn’t be a monolithic or exclusionary way of telling it. Hopefully, the spirit of this course will help to bring some of the strange, lesser-told stories to life.

# LIBRARY UPDATE

By Eryn Kropf, MENAS Librarian

HOping everyone is hanging in and keeping well enough in this surreal time. Research, teaching and coursework are looking quite different in the **midst of the pandemic**, but you can still rely on your University Library partners. Physical collections and spaces are less accessible, but we are taking careful measures to continue to acquire and preserve print materials and to provide access to a vast array of material online.

Loads of ebooks, online journals, digital archives and online reference works relevant for the study of the peoples, languages, and cultures of the Middle East (Southwest Asia) and North Africa are already listed in our **Library Search platform** and **MENAS (SWANAS)** and **Religious Studies** research guides, and as a library we are actively expanding digital access through additional scanning and ebook purchases.

We've also been able to take advantage of an **emergency service from HathiTrust** which opens temporary digital access to hundreds of thousands of copyright-protected books, magazines and journals already scanned while our collections are out of reach, including many important studies, government publications, and periodicals published in Egypt, Lebanon, Iran and Turkey. Current U-M affiliates can “check out” these volumes for **online browsing** (*see sidebar*). Full text search across the HathiTrust corpus is also supported, even for Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hebrew. This is particularly valuable for navigating historical monographs and magazine archives.

A number of rich resources remains accessible open access, including **almost all volumes** of the Library's **Islamic Manuscripts Collection**. Other notable open access resources include **MENAdoc Digital Collections**, **Arabic Collections Online**, **Qatar Digital Library**, **SALT Research Digital Archives**, **Global Press Archive Middle Eastern & North African Newspapers**, and the recently launched **Digital Library of the Middle East**. These and many others are listed on the **MENAS (SWANAS)** and **Religious Studies** research guides. The **Access to Mideast and Islamic Resources (AMIR) guide** lists even more open access resources, including journal and newspaper archives.

If you need access to a book or article not already available electronically through the Library (or elsewhere open access), please feel free to contact me via email or send a request directly to **Document Delivery (ILL/7FAST)**. We will try to track down an electronic copy or prepare a scan.

And for specific guidance related to your ongoing projects, coursework or teaching—including reconceptualizing intended research trips—please feel free to be in touch with me. We can discuss over email or set up a virtual chat by video call.

For more details on navigating our Library's resources during the pandemic, see our **Access During COVID-19** page.

And take good care.

## ONLINE BROWSING

To access these volumes, navigate to the HathiTrust catalogue platform and log in (upper righthand corner) selecting University of Michigan under “partner institution” and entering your username and password. You can then search or browse for titles, click on the “Temporary access” link, and finally “check out” to view the full text.

# THE “ASSASSINS OF MEMORY” AND THE ARMENIANS WHO “REFUSE TO DISAPPEAR”

By Rima Hassouneh

The only weapon against bad history deployed for political or personal vindication,” argued **Ronald Grigor Suny** on the morning of Saturday, February 22nd, 2020, “is a scrupulous investigation that results in evidence-based narration and analysis of what it is possible to know.” He was explaining the Armenian Genocide to a learning community of six Grade 6–12 teachers from Michigan. Ronald Grigor Suny is the William H. Sewell Jr. Distinguished University Professor of History at U-M, and the founder and first director of its Armenian Studies Program, now the Center for Armenian Studies (CAS). He was speaking at “Genocide and Collective Historical Memory in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia,” the fifth session of the 2019-2020 MENA-SEA Teacher Program. The program is a Title VI collaboration between the Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. CAS had provided financial support for the program and his talk, whose title,—also of his book published by Princeton University Press—“They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else,” is the verbatim and ignominious statement pronounced by Talaat Pasha (1874–1921) about the Armenian survivors of the Genocide.

The **2019–2020 cohort** of the MENA-SEA Teacher Program included: **Greg Dykhous** (History, Black River Public School), **Kiersten Gawronski** (English, Saline High School), **Colleen Kalisieski** (English, All Saints Catholic School), **Amy Perkins** (AP World and AP US History, Lakeshore High School), **Gabrielle Popp** (Special



Ronald Grigor Suny

Education English, Beacon Day Treatment), and **Alison Sullivan** (World Geography and World History, Traverse City East Middle School).

To prepare for Professor Suny’s presentation—later described as “such a privilege to hear” and “one of the most thought-provoking” of the entire program—the teachers had read his article, “Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians.” “I employ the word ‘genocide,’” began Professor Suny, “to designate what in German is called *Völkermord*, the murder of a people, and in Turkish *soykırım* or Armenian *tseghaspanutium* (killing of an ethnicity or, in an older understanding, ‘race’).” Drawing on his book, he demonstrated that the purpose of the Genocide was to eliminate the perceived threat of the Armenians within the Ottoman Empire by reducing their numbers and scattering them in isolated, distant places. “The destruction of

Professor Suny narrated how the Genocide resulted from a strategic vision **“colored by the passions of the Ottoman leaders, their propensity for violence, and the affective disposition of hostility—anger, fear, resentment, and hatred—that they felt toward Armenians in particular.”**

the *Ermeni millet* was carried out in three different but related ways: dispersion, massacre, and assimilation by conversion into Islam.”

Using an array of material evidence, including official documents and papers, photographs, maps, paintings, and portraits, Professor Suny narrated how the Genocide resulted from a strategic vision “colored by the passions of the Ottoman leaders, their propensity for violence, and the affective disposition of hostility—anger, fear, resentment, and hatred—that they felt toward Armenians in particular.” His scholarship, he explained, was dedicated to reconstructing new national imaginings in the Tanzimat, Hamidian, and Young Turk periods. The Young Turks, “however Ottomanist they were in their inception, became over time national imperialists prepared to take the most desperate and drastic measures to homogenize their state while promoting some peoples over others and annihilating still others.”

Beginning in 1915, first the “muscle” of Ottoman Armenians—the demobilized soldiers—and then the “brain”—“the intellectual and political leadership, and the connective tissue that linked separate communities together”—were removed. Women, children, and old men in town after town were marched through the valleys and mountains of eastern Anatolia. Those who reached the inhospitable deserts of Syria languished in concentration camps or starved to death. By the end of the war ninety percent of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire had vanished, a culture and civilization wiped out, “never to return.”

The MENA-SEA teachers had traveled from all over the state—some from as far as Holland, Traverse City, and Stevensville—to assemble in Weiser Hall for this history lesson by Professor Suny. They had reflected too beforehand on the definitions of genocide laid out by the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, and by Human Rights Watch; they had explored the educational, historical, and moral exigence of truth-telling and its denial with respect to

the Genocide. Kalisieski observed that, “as soon as the word genocide gets used, it becomes a direct threat to a political structure.” Sullivan’s middle-schoolers “want all things to be fair. And genocide... well, it’s the opposite of fair. It would drive them mad to know they couldn’t do anything about it. But that’s what’s key in this - they must become aware of it in order to never be a part of it happening again.” Professor Suny’s rigorous and scholarly recovery of the difficult past, the teachers could appreciate, challenged—to quote him—the “assassins of memory,” those who “through distorting sophistries deny or minimize the enormity of [the] human tragedy.” This disinterment and raising of memory from the dead were also quite personal: Professor Suny’s great grandparents had been the first victims in his family of the Genocide.

The investigation of history and historiography is all the more relevant and exigent, since Michigan law requires schoolchildren to learn about the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. Upon learning about state atrocities against civilian populations, Perkins’ students, “gifted with hindsight,” wonder aloud, “Why didn’t we do more? Why didn’t we intervene sooner?” She aims to trouble their bewilderment at the devastating decisions of political and historical actors. She wants to teach them, as Suny put it, to “[investigate]” those moments of choice when political actors might have acted differently but decided instead to embark on a course that led to devastation and destruction. “Why do particular people understand topics in a certain way?” her colleague Dykhouse challenged. “By having young learners practicing responses to [this] question,” he continued, “they are strengthening skills of analysis or understandings of various points-of-view. Historians work with such analysis often, so young learners become more adept at considering various perspectives as explanations of historical events.”

From John D. Ciorciari, associate professor of public policy, director of the Ford School’s International Policy Center, and senior legal advisor to the

MEET THE FELLOWS OF THE

2020 / 2021

MENA-SEA  
TEACHER  
PROGRAM

Documentation Center of Cambodia, the teacher cohort on that day also learned about the Cambodian Genocide perpetrated by the regime of the Khmer Rouge, expanding their understanding of the definition of genocide beyond the restriction to an ethnic or racial group, to encompass a political collective target. And PhD candidate in linguistic anthropology Cheryl Yin followed with a talk about Cambodian diasporic communities in the US in the aftermath of the Genocide.

The MENA-SEA Teacher Program provided year-long professional development in religious and cultural diversity in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Intending to bring into their classrooms what they have learned during 2019-2020, the teachers each designed two lesson plans about the regions. At the close of the program in June, one wrote: “Being part of this cohort has been the most inspiring thing I’ve ever been involved in as a teacher. Thank you so much for the development and work that goes into supporting us with such skill and thoughtfulness.” “The impact it has had,” declared another, “will be life-long for me and the impact it will have on my students is immeasurable. It is a pebble dropped in the waters of humanity that will ripple out for many lifetimes to come.”

Introducing himself to the teachers, the septuagenarian historian lightheartedly had described himself as “antique,” but Professor Suny’s setting straight of the record has far-reaching and contemporaneous ramifications, as by no means are the actions and decisions of the Turkish republic exceptional or obsolete in the world arena. “Like many other states, including Australia, Israel, and the United States, the emergence of the Republic of Turkey involved the removal and subordination of native peoples who had lived on its territory prior to its founding,” Professor Suny concluded. “Coming to terms with that history, on the other hand,” he continued in an imperative tone, “can have the salutary effect of questioning continued policies of ethnic homogenization and refusal to recognize the claims and rights of those peoples, minorities or diasporas—Aborigines, Native Americans, Kurds, Palestinians, Assyrians, or Armenians—who refuse to disappear.”

The MENA-SEA Teacher Program thanks CAS for its delivery of Genocide-related education to Michigan teachers, and looks forward to future collaboration in the imperative of telling and teaching the truth to Michigan’s schoolchildren.



**Susan Bertoni**  
North Farmington High School,  
Farmington Hills, MI

I am excited about this program because it will broaden my perspectives on the cultures and religions of the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. Specifically, I would like to know [how] various cultural groups within the regions self-identify and advocate

for themselves and one another in different arenas—within family, community, and religious structures. In 2000, I taught at the American Language Center in Amman, Jordan. Most of my students were professional young adults taking English improvement courses. In August of that year, I jumped at the opportunity to work at the new Arab American University in Jenin, Palestine/West Bank. For about four years I was also affiliated with a local alternative organization, Al Muntada, to bring young students together to teach them more critical and creative methods of learning. From the seminars and the people whom I will encounter, I will incorporate materials, historical and cultural knowledge, and most of all personal stories [into my teaching]. Naturally, if I am able to embark on [an international GEEEO] trip, it will only further enrich classroom materials and perspectives. I hope that this [program] will impact not only our school staff, but the entire student body and their families as we continue to work on increasing acceptance of cultural and religious diversity.

*continued >*



**Amy Frontier**  
Pioneer High School, Ann Arbor, MI

I am so excited to join the MENA-SEA Teacher Program. I look forward to learning about other cultures, understanding different perspectives, and hearing stories from other parts of the world. I believe that this program will give voice to these stories. I plan to share what I learn

with my students in the hopes that I can dispel myths, generate excitement, and learn about the rich cultures of the Middle East and Southeast Asia. I first experienced international education when I studied Spanish in Costa Rica and stayed with a family. While this stay lasted only two short weeks, I was hooked. The immersive nature of the experience helped me realize how much we can learn from spending time with people, hearing about their experiences, and listening to their stories. Most recently, I traveled to Palestine with a delegation of educators, religious leaders, and community leaders. We learned about the richness of the Palestinian culture and the power of the people who work in schools, community centers, economic centers, government, and refugee camps. It was an extraordinary glimpse into the Middle East that has and will shape my ability to understand and teach about this part of the world for many years to come. I look forward to participating in the MENA-SEA Teacher Program and believe that the more I can learn about a different part of the world, the more I can offer my students a window into another world. Even more important, I believe this program will offer me ways to help my students see how other cultures often mirror their own, since the more we learn, the more we realize that we are not so different from one another.



**Barbara Gazda**  
Hartland High School, Hartland, MI

I am so very excited to be a part of the MENA-SEA Teacher Program and meet other teachers to share information and ideas. I want to learn more about modern Islam [in countries such as] Iran, about which I teach. The best thing about teacher opportunities like this one is that we

get to create a “hive mind” where I always get so much great information. Another great bonus is that we get permission to steal from each other. I had the great luck to study abroad both in high school and in college. These experiences changed how I see the world. They broadened my thought process, opened my mind and eyes to the world around me and played a significant part in how I teach today. I would like to present about what I learn in this program at future staff/department meetings in my school.



**David Hales**  
Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, Wayne, MI

I am so excited to be a part of the MENA-SEA Teacher Program! Wayne County is home to 33 school districts and 108 public charters. As the K-12 social studies consultant, I interface with teachers, students,

communities, and cultural institutions to support classroom instruction, curriculum, and assessment efforts. I am looking forward to better understanding the students and communities of Wayne County and being better equipped to serve them. I have already attended numerous professional-development trainings at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn. Thanks to the MENA-SEA Teacher Program, I will increase my own personal content knowledge and deepen my connections to culturally relevant pedagogy.

I have always been interested in international education. For instance, I have been an area representative for Youth for Understanding for some time, volunteering to support exchange students that are placed in Farmington/Farmington Hills schools. I also volunteer for the U.S. State Department-sponsored Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange & Study (YES) Program, which provides scholarships for secondary school students from countries with significant Muslim populations. I have also attended the German Transatlantic Outreach Program (TOP) with educators from around the U.S. for two weeks, focusing on curriculum and intercultural dialogue.



**Karen Leland Libby**  
Interlochen Arts Academy, Interlochen, MI

I teach general language arts to ninth-graders and semester electives to seniors at a fine arts boarding school in a very small Northern Michigan town. I’m discovering some interesting connections between my two electives of

“Shakespeare” and “Middle Eastern Literature”! Before 2016, I was a novice in Middle East studies, so I’m really looking forward to experiencing the resources and community of the MENA-SEA Teacher Program. I hope to learn more about the peoples and cultures of our local Arab-American community. I was fortunate in 2017 to have spent a month in East Jerusalem, traveling around Israel and throughout Palestine. I’m interested in learning more about the Arabic language, Islam, ancient and contemporary writers of Arabic, and Arab Anglophone writers. I’ve spent many summers teaching in an international summer program in

southern Switzerland, where my classes often include students from several Middle Eastern countries. These small classroom communities have left me feeling that the world is closer to the Northern Michigan woods than often seems! I hope that, through experiencing religious spaces, fine art, and shared readings, I'll be able to share this feeling of connection with my students, whose main goal each semester is to create Middle East-inspired art and writing that they share with our wider school community.



**Ross Newman**  
Monroe High School, Monroe, MI

Underneath my rugged exterior beats the heart of a history teacher, a realization almost forty years in the making. Transforming my life's passion into my life's work brought me to the University of Michigan. As a curious scholar, athlete, and amateur adventurer my hobbies and

interests tend to be academic in nature. Recently I took part in a study abroad program in Italy, focusing on power, place, and image in Rome and Florence during the late Middle Ages through the Renaissance. Aside from the incredible academic experience, it provided an opportunity to explore the cities and satisfy my need for adventure.

The cultures of the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia have always intrigued me. Exploring the connections between Southeast Asia and the Middle East was a topic I first explored while teaching World History. So much of what we think of as "Western Culture" has its roots in the Middle East and North Africa. Diving deeper into these connections is certainly something that I am eagerly looking forward to. In the case of Southeast Asian cultures, my curiosity is equally peaked. Taking part in such programs enhances my teaching practice by integrating my experiences into my lessons. Immersing myself in different cultures—[through] the MENA-SEA program—broadens my horizon of what it means to be human. My students in turn, benefit from my experiences given that opportunities of this nature do not yet exist for them (something I intend to change).



**Susan Syme**  
Troy Athens High School, Troy, MI

I am excited to join the MENA-SEA teacher cohort for the 2020-21 school year and to learn more about regions of the world that do not always get the most emphasis in history and geography texts. Specifically, I am interested in learning more about their cultures and about how

migration has changed the cultural landscape in the U.S., especially in the Detroit Metro area.

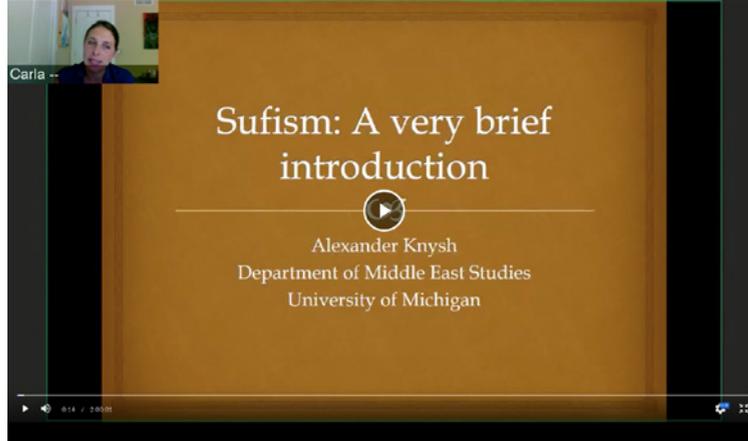
Since 2014, I have been leading students on educational trips abroad. As any of my students could confirm, I am extremely passionate about the educational value of travel. Pictures and stories from my travels are frequently part of my lessons. Through the MENA-SEA Teacher Program, I am excited to gain more knowledge and ideas to add to my lessons. Even though I have been teaching for many years, I have much more to learn. I am thrilled to bring my experiences from this program to my students and colleagues.



**Kimberli A. Wregglesworth**  
Onaway Secondary School,  
Onaway, MI

I am very excited to network and learn with like-minded, dedicated educators and experts in two fast-growing and very important regions of the world. As an undergraduate student, I traveled to southern India for a year to teach in a small,

English-medium school. In addition to learning with students in Grades 4-7, I traveled to a variety of locations in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, attended local and regional festivals, and visited the homes of many of my students' families. I also traveled with the Gerstacker Education Fellowship to Finland and Germany to study their education systems. Our group visited elementary and secondary schools, as well as a technical college and two universities. Both of these experiences changed how I view not only education, but also myself and the world. I have a much broader understanding that, although we have a number of differences in culture, belief, and language, we have even more similarities in our values and priorities. I am the only teacher who teaches my topics at a very small school. I look forward to gaining a better understanding of the cultures and religions of Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian communities. I also look forward to the opportunity to travel to one of these regions with my cohort group to experience first-hand all aspects of the culture.



# SUFISM EXPERT DELIVERS “ONE OF A KIND LECTURE”

AT WASHTENAW COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By Rima Hassouneh

## **Professor Alexander (Sasha)**

**Knysh** is a world-renowned scholar of Sufism and Islamic mysticism at U-M's Department of Middle East Studies. As part of CMENAS' Title VI outreach to Washtenaw Community College (WCC), Professor Knysh was invited to give a lecture on June 24th, 2020, delivered over Zoom, to students and faculty of anthropology, comparative religion, philosophy, and language, about the origins, teachings, and practices of Sufism. He introduced the topic in Professor Carla Cribari-Assali's course on the anthropology of religion, to an audience of 33.

The WCC students had plenty of questions for Professor Knysh. How do Sufis know they have experienced God? What is Sufism's view on hajj or other externally visible pillars of Islam? Is Sufism “counter culture”? Why are music and dance prohibited? And a question unprecedented for the professor prior to

this occasion: How are children viewed and treated in the Sufi tradition? Besides a general introduction to the topic and the differences between Sufism and Wahhabism/Salafism, Professor Knysh talked about some of the most remarkable protagonists of Sufism.

Born the fourth daughter to a family of the 'Adawiyya tribe, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya celebrated a pure, disinterested love of God in beautiful poetry and sermons. This most famous mystic from Basra believed that the faithful should love Allah for His own sake, and not for the paradisiacal rewards promised to those who obeyed His commands. Her self-annihilation and devotion to the Beloved were especially extreme on the Sufi path towards divine love. She even went so far as to espouse loving God to the exclusion of everyone else, including the Prophet. More than a thousand years after her death in 752 CE, Rabi'a remains alive in the popular imagination:

a square in Cairo reflects her name, her tomb in Jerusalem receives daily visitors, and artists and fans recite her poetry at concerts.

And then there was the Persian-born preacher Mansour Hallaj, best known for declaring “I am the Truth” (Ana’l-Ḥaqq), a blasphemous claim to divinity according to his numerous political opponents. Al-Hallaj gained a wide following before getting entangled in political intrigues and crossing the Abbasid Court of Baghdad. In 922 CE he was condemned to death, on the charge of wishing to destroy the Kaaba (he had said that pilgrims could circumambulate “the Kaaba of one’s heart”). A second charge was recommending local replicas of the Kaaba for pilgrims unable to reach Mecca. Although most Sufi contemporaries disapproved of his transgressions, Hallaj later became a major figure in the tradition. Contemporary Egyptian cinema, Professor Knysh said, has analogously depicted his passion as the fight of the laboring masses against oppression and tyranny. The professor also told the students that many esoteric books about Sufism could be found right here and locally, in a number of Ann Arbor bookshops.

In his decades-long “deep dive” into this “Muslim version of ascetic-mystical piety,” Professor Knysh has been personally inspired to practice its most distinctive features: taking things in stride, practicing humility, and eschewing judgment based on appearance (*zahir*) in favor of the interior (*batin*).

His in-depth insight into Islam’s mystical traditions showed Professor Carla Cribari-Assali’s students “how diverse and complex [it was].” They had only just begun “scratching the surface,” it dawned on them. One student exclaimed: “Definitely one of a kind lecture for the semester!”



## CMENAS COLLABORATES WITH THE DUKE-UNC CONSORTIUM IN TEACHER OUTREACH

By Rima Hassouneh

I virtually presented about Palestinian personal narratives at Freesia Stein’s 9th-grade World-History classes of 40 students at Davidson Community School in NC on May 5.

And the Duke-UNC K-12 Summer Seminar went virtual this year, of course. “Diversities of the Middle East” was held by the Middle East Studies Center at Duke and the Middle East & Islamic Studies Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Over several days, the seminar challenged monolithic narratives about the Middle East by highlighting the plurality of the region. I was honored to moderate



“Diverse Voices from the Region” on Friday, August 7th, 2020, a panel of five guests, who were: **Mohammed Eid** (Palestine), **Noor Ghazi** (Iraq), **Sepideh Saeedi** (Iran), **Shai Tamari** (Israel), and **Fadia Thabet** (Yemen). The panel drew an audience of 71 teachers from across the US and abroad.

R. Hassouneh moderated the conversation amongst the five panelists representing the diverse Middle East



Leah Squires (MA, MPP) presents to an audience of educators and students about the intertwined relations between climate and migration in the Middle East and North Africa.

# CMENAS PARTICIPATES IN THE U-M AND UPR PEDAGOGICAL WORKSHOP

By **Alana Rodriguez**, Program Manager, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies

**O**n March 5-6, 2020, CMENAS' Title VI funding supported the U-M/UPR Pedagogical Workshop (previously the U-M/UPR Outreach Collaboration Symposium) for K-16 in-service and pre-service educators at the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico, the only public institution of higher education on the island and a minority-serving-institution. This year's theme, "Integrating the Concept of Vulnerability into the Classroom," saw some 14 cross-disciplinary presentations from scholars at U-M and UPR, as well as a series of interactive pedagogical workshops and curriculum design studios led by Darin Stockdill of the Center for Education Design, Evaluation and Research at U-M's School of Education. One of these

panels—"Vulnerability and World History"—featured Puerto Rican teachers who had participated in the NRC-funded U-M World History and Literature Initiative in December 2019.

CMENAS funded two of our MA students to present at UPR. Asma Noray discussed the US human rights abuses during the 2003 Iraq War. Leah Squires, who was pursuing a dual degree with Public Policy, presented on the "Climate-Migration Nexus in the Middle East and North Africa." CMENAS also contributed funding for U-M Latin American and Caribbean Studies Librarian Edras Rodriguez-Torres to provide access to archival materials to teachers and graduate students throughout the symposium as they tuned curriculum modules and brainstormed new ideas. Rodriguez-Torres' expertise in digital and



## A NEW CMENAS AND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION INITIATIVE

open-access primary and secondary source materials served the workshop participants in real-time and helped maintain the workshop's momentum.

This workshop built on previous iterations to expand its interactive and collaborative components, increasing our relevance and reach among Puerto Rican K-16 educators. We were delighted by the results. Though it is extremely difficult for Puerto Rican teachers to take off two consecutive school days to attend this workshop in full, we counted the highest attendance of K-12 teachers in the history of this collaboration. The in-person audience boasted more than 40 educators, scholars, students, and educational administrators, not counting live-stream attendees. One attendee wrote, "The participation of local teachers discussing current challenges and ideas was perfect." Sheykirisabel Cucuta Gonzalez, Director of the Social Studies Program in the Puerto Rican Department of Education, expressed to our staff her deep support for this event and its restructured mission. Gonzalez is looking forward to future collaborations with even more Puerto Rican educators. CMENAS also saw increased interest in Middle Eastern and North African education too with interviewed attendees expressing a high likelihood of incorporating Middle Eastern and North African content into their future teaching. About 71% reported a strong likelihood of using the curriculum toolkits specifically designed in this workshop. 86% of those interviewed made new professional contacts.

In summation, the symposium was hugely successful, and we look forward to strengthening the ties between U-M and UPR, and the larger community of Puerto Rican educators.

CMENAS has embarked on a new partnership with the World Languages Teacher Program at the School of Education (SoE). Funded by CMENAS' Title VI grant from the US Department of Education, the multi-year partnership plans to increase the number of certified teachers of Arabic in the state of Michigan by increasing the number of University of Michigan students enrolled in the Arabic certification track at the World Languages Teacher Program.

The need for certified teachers of Arabic is fast-growing in schools throughout the United States, with schools hiring an increasing number of Arabic teachers to teach students of all ages and levels. Many communities demand Arabic classes in their schools to maintain ties to their children's heritage language and to create future work opportunities for students. Thus, there is an ever-increasing number of professional opportunities for certified Arabic teachers throughout Michigan and the rest of the country. Being an Arabic teacher can be an exciting, rewarding, and lucrative career, and teaching Arabic presents an opportunity to share language and culture and make a positive impact on the lives of young people. CMENAS is excited about this collaboration with SoE and we are looking forward to enrolling our first students in the 2020–2021 academic year.

# THE PULL OF EDUCATION

## A DONOR SPOTLIGHT

By Mekarem Eljamal



CMENAS is grateful for the support of its donors. To show our appreciation, we feature a donor in each of our newsletters. In this newsletter, we talked with **Tim Green (BA '68)**.

Tim Green's interest in area studies did not begin with the Middle East. Instead, it was Chinese studies that first got his attention while attending the University of Michigan from 1964 to 1968.

"I came to college without having a very clear direction, so I just followed my own interests and became fascinated with the field of Asian studies and Chinese," Green says. "I was such a unique language, and it was an experience with language that I didn't have with English."

With all his interest in Asian studies, Green ultimately graduated a term early from U-M in 1968 with a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature. After graduation, Green returned to his hometown, a small city in northern Alabama.

While his time in higher education may have ended, for the time being, Green's involvement in supporting learning continued.

"In Alabama, I ended up teaching in a Johnson administration program," Green says. "I worked with first graders who needed additional support to prepare them for moving into second grade."

Having gathered experience teaching, Green made the decision to return to higher education.

"I left Alabama and enrolled in Union Theological Seminary in Virginia to get my MA in Education and Theology," Green says.

As was the case after finishing his BA, the value of education and his interest in continuous learning only increased once Green completed his MA degree, eventually leading to his finding of Middle East studies.

Once Green relocated to the DC Metro area, he took advantage of the many different avenues through which one can be a life-long learner. One of the most significant ways that Green continued to

expand his knowledge base was through a Georgetown University program wherein senior citizens could audit undergraduate courses for a small fee.

"I took a course called 'The Problem of God' that looked at the phenomenology of belief structures and the sense of awe seen in and across religions," Green excitedly says. "Even with my theology background, we had never talked about religion in this way."

Building on his interests in theology and religion, Green enrolled in an "Introduction to Islam" course.

"I started to think about what these religions share and the impact of colonialism," Green says. "Which brought me to thinking about the epistemology of the Middle East."

From this course and others like it, Green gained more than knowledge about a region he previously had not explored, but he also gained friends.

In 2013, along with new friends he met while auditing Georgetown courses, Green traveled to Turkey. While there during the Gezi Park protests, Green was able to explore a new country, bringing to

life many of the conversations that he had back in a DC classroom.

Green now owns a small antique store, wherein he continues to carry out his interest in the Middle East. With the store, Green often has the opportunity to engage his customers with his passionate, expansive interests. The iconic nature of objects makes for a fertile context for discussion, and even a sale or two!

As Green described, while at U-M his international interests centered around China, not the Middle East and North Africa. His introduction to CMENAS came through the annual Giving Blue Day.

“I saw the annual card about donating to U-M and CMENAS was listed,” Green says. “I decided to give to CMENAS because I wanted to support a program that is more underfunded than others.”

Being a Title VI National Resource Center, CMENAS’ initiatives align closely with Green’s value of education and knowledge building at all levels.

“Education shouldn’t always seek closure,” Green says. “It should posture towards discovery and expand people’s minds.”

# C

MENAS is dedicated to promoting a broader and deeper understanding of the region—its histories, cultures, languages, and people—through research, education, and outreach programs.

**The center is committed to creating a supportive environment where scholars, educators, students, and the community have the opportunity to engage in dialogue and to study current and historical events related to the Middle East and North Africa.**

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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Thanks to the generous donations from those listed below.

Dr. Lois A. Aroian

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We hope to engage you all through our website and social media accounts.

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