



GMENAS



DEAR STUDENTS, FACULTY
AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS,

As we welcome the sun of spring and bid farewell to the gray skies of Michigan winters, we are excited about all the new activities and projects underway at CMENAS. After

being awarded a four-year Title VI grant (totaling 2.6 million dollars) from the US Department of Education last August, we started the 2022–2023 academic year with new plans and projects on the horizon. We have some exciting accomplishments to report!

Before turning to our center’s activities, I want to remember more pressing news from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Over the past months, people around the world have followed with sadness and sympathy the news of the tragic earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria on February 6, 2023. The staggering loss of life and widespread destruction continues to be a humanitarian crisis of heartbreaking enormity, and we at CMENAS wish to send our deepest condolences to all who have faced suffering and who continue to grieve. We also salute those who have supported the rescue efforts since the disaster struck, both on the ground and at a distance. For those who wish to help, please reach out to the Turkish

Student Association at the University of Michigan (turkishboard@umich.edu) for resources.

Our programming and outreach under the new grant are now in full swing, and we have a host of updates to report this Spring:

As part of our new initiatives, we are thrilled to welcome our new outreach coordinator, **Jennifer Lund**, who comes to CMENAS with a Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education from the School of Education at Indiana University and an MA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) from Michigan State University. She has hit the ground running this year with the first meetings of the CMENAS World History Reading Cohort, in which educators discuss thematically and globally connected academic books and materials addressing the MENA within a global context. One highlight this spring has included a teacher colloquium with Afghani-American author Tamim Ansari to discuss his book, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World through Islamic Eyes*. Jennifer has many similar outreach events on the horizon this year to disseminate resources and support instruction about the MENA region. (p. 8)



Our 2022 CMENAS fall colloquium, led by Associate Director **Muzammil Hussain**, was focused on the theme “Higher Education and Reformation across the MENA: A Geopolitical Exploration.” (p. 4)

We are pleased to announce another successful year of **Foreign Language Area Studies funding** for students across the university focusing on MENA languages. This winter, we received over 45 applications from students at all levels for full-year and summer language programs in MENA languages. We are currently working to distribute over \$400,000 in funding to the top twenty candidates among these.

CMENAS is thrilled to announce **two new funding opportunities** established by the generosity of donors and alumni for the support of students from the MENA region enrolling in our Masters in International and Regional Studies program (p. 12).

Amy Perkins, a 2019–2020 MENA-SEA Teacher Program fellow, traveled to Armenia this past summer to join a delegation of 15 teachers in a comparative study of genocide. (p. 13).

University of Michigan Law professor and CMENAS donor **Karima Bennoune** spoke with CMENAS about the legacy of her father, Mahfoud Bennoune, and her exciting plans at Michigan. (p. 6)

Happy holidays to all who celebrate across the MENA. The Jewish Passover began at sundown on Wednesday, April 5 and concluded on April 13. The Christian Easter celebration fell on Sunday, April 9 (Gregorian) and April 16 (Orthodox and Coptic). The Baha'i community's first day of Ridván is April 21. Islam's holy month of Ramadan began on the evening of Wednesday, March 22, and concludes with Eid al-Fitr starting on Saturday, April 22. Happy Holidays to all!

CMENAS at U-M is on the cutting edge of Middle Eastern/North African studies education with world-class degree programs, faculty research, and outreach to teachers and the general public. We urge you to join us and be a part of our ongoing work by donating to the center and attending our regular events. We welcome engagement with our global community, so wherever you are, please feel free to reach out to us via email, Twitter, or Facebook.

Thank you again to our generous CMENAS alumni and donors whose sustained support enables us to fulfill our educational mission. If you would like to invest in our work with moral and material support, please reach out to us. And Go Blue!

Friendly regards,

Ryan Szpiech

*CMENAS Director
Associate Professor, Romance Languages,
Middle East Studies, and Judaic Studies*

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.

Ryan Szpiech

CMENAS Director and Associate Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures, Middle East Studies, and Judaic Studies

Muzammil Hussain

CMENAS Associate Director and Assistant Professor of Communication & Media

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(Elected)

Assistant Professor, Middle East Studies

Jay Crisostomo (Elected)

Associate Professor, Middle East Studies

FRONT AND BACK COVERS: Shutterstock

EXCERPTS FROM THE FALL 2022 COLLOQUIUM SERIES

By Amber Mullins

Eric Burton Ph.D.

University of Innsbruck, Austria
The Nile Route and Other Pipelines: Decolonization, the Cold War and Africans routes to higher education overseas 1957-1965

Florian Kohstall Ph.D.

Freie Universität of Berlin, Germany
Do We Need Another University to Reform in the Middle East, exploring the unintended consequences of international support?

Dr. Burton begins by discussing how the African Act was established and used to create new routes to higher education in different countries and how higher education, specifically Western education, was one of the few pathways to secure social upward mobility. He further discusses the colonial limits to education in East Africa during the 1950s, which could be identified as — a lack of post-secondary institutions, as well as few official scholarships available, and a colonial “colour bar” to higher education. Dr. Eric Burton concludes by discussing

the involvement of international institutions and the “Golden Age” of scholarships.

Dr. Kohstall’s research focuses on higher education reform in the 1990s and early 2000s, focused mainly on the policy processes and the role of donors. In 2011, he began exploring the link between the provision of social goods and regime continuity: how they manage reform pressure and tame resistance. He mentions the main crises of higher education within the Middle East, which include demographic growth and democratization, which both lead to overcrowding and a decrease in quality, the States’ inability to maintain the employment promises of the social contract and the promise of free education which is gradually undermined through private tutoring. Dr. Kohstall concludes by sharing forms on international invention, with specific examples of this in Egypt and Morocco, as well as the reform cycle and unintended consequences of international support.

Natalie Koch Ph.D.

Heidelberg University
Nationalism & the Geopolitics of Higher Education in the Arabian Peninsula

In her presentation, Professor Koch discusses topics that fall within her background area of study, including geography, nationalism, and authoritarianism. She shares the reasons behind the large push to domesticate elite higher education: a) proliferation of private universities, b) recruiting foreign partners and branch campuses, and c) repositioning existing & new national universities. Professor Koch also notes the double-sided face of nationalism that includes both foreign and domestic audiences. Natalie concludes her lecture by explaining the reasonings why Gulf Higher Education is geopolitical, including the fact that Nationalists scripts are bordering practices and Western ideas about high education continue to define “modernity.”



BURTON



KOHSTALL



KOCH



ORUC

Rahmi Oruc and Onder Kucukural
Argumunazara Research Center, Ibn Haldun University

Adab in Dialogue: Developing Argumentative virtues in a divided world via the Munazara engagement model (MEM)

In this presentation, Rami Oruc discusses Munazara, its place in the Madrasa curriculum, and the state of Munazara Studies in both Theory and Practice. He continues by discussing both the theoretical and practical works on Munazara. Rahmi Oruc shared insight on the Munzara Engagement Model and its practical application of a new approach to argumentation. Oruc concludes by discussing the establishment of Munazara Clubs worldwide and the need to promote the use of Munazara by the parliaments.



KUCUKURAL



COHEN

Dr. Shana Cohen

Higher Education in Morocco: Investment without adequate results

Dr. Shana Cohen’s focus lies within policy within the European Union and the relationships between economic policy, democracy, and inequality. She has spent a total of seven years living in Cairo, Egypt, and Morocco. During her time there, she developed longstanding interests, such as employment and how economic policy affects one’s sense of sense and political identity. Dr. Cohen discusses the role that higher education plays in all of this, including the social



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status and economic position of faculty, the privatization of higher education, and the importance of independent research for stimulating public debate on national and local challenges and attracting investments while stimulating national and local economies. Cohen acknowledges the main issue with unemployment is that it creates political instability and generational social issues, and a way to solve this is to accelerate structural forms, improve the quality of education and support the labor market.

Laura Mann and Muez Ali
London School of Economics and Political Science (UK) and University College London (UK)

The Long-term Consequences of the Commercialization and Politicization of Higher Education on Employment and Politics in Sudan

Laura Mann and Muez Ali explored the long-term effects of commercialization by examining higher education through different lenses. There are multiple roles within higher education and with that, inherent tensions. These roles have an economic, intellectual and social, and political role in society. Mann acknowledged the tension between both public and private sectors within higher education and the social and political challenges faced in managing development. Ali concludes by providing a few takeaways, one of them being that higher education has the potential to contribute to both economic

and social development, but similar to all aspects of development policy-making, management of science and research is heavily political, and Peter Evan’s concept of ‘embedded autonomy’ may be a useful way of thinking about strategizing around building autonomy over research and skills within higher education.

Saeid Golkar Ph.D.
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Higher Education in Authoritarian Context: Iran as a case study

Professor Golkar’s focus falls within higher education and authoritarianism within Iran, where he was a Professor before starting his teaching career in the United States. During his presentation, he explored the different regimes in Iran, including the Pahlavi Dynasty and their effects on higher education throughout the country. The Pahlavi Dynasty era is known as “University Under Monarchy” because of the state control over Universities and suppression of academic freedom throughout Iran. In 1979, student movements and the 1979 Revolution took place and from 1980 to 2021, the Islamization of universities occurred, where the country attempted to create the ideal Muslim. Dr. Golkar concluded by acknowledging several effects of the different regimes, including the secularization of students and defiance of Islamic norms and values.



ALI



GOLKAR

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Amber Mullins

KARIMA BENNOUNE

Lewis M. Simes Professor of Law at the University of Michigan Law School

Karima Bennoune has long been connected to the University of Michigan (U-M), starting in the 1950s with her father, Mahfoud Bennoune, who arrived in Michigan to study. As an Arab-American, identifying both as half-Algerian and half-American, Karima appreciates the similarities between rural Midwesterners and rural North Africans, particularly as both cultures put forth a strong emphasis and importance on family and hospitality.

Karima's career spans many chapters and avenues. Between 2015 and 2021, Karima spent time as a UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, demonstrating that cultural rights are a crucial part of responses to many current challenges. Some of these challenges included conflicts to discrimination to the climate emergency and COVID-19. Additionally, she worked on many cases involving grave violations of artistic and scientific freedom and the right to take part in cultural life without discrimination, including those in which lives and futures were gravely affected. Throughout her work, she was able to work with civil society to achieve modest victories such as the release of those detained for exercising their cultural rights or the inclusion of rights language in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions on the protection of cultural heritage and religious sites in conflicts. Karima is proud to write the first United Nations (UN) reports on cultural rights defenders, which are human rights defenders who defend cultural rights in accordance with international standards. In addition to this topic, she also wrote reports on climate change.

Karima's work as a Special Rapporteur also allowed her to be exposed to global work and witness the inspiring human rights work that is taking place around the world. One example that stood out to her the most, and we have included an anecdote from her interview:

"For example, I will never forget meeting members of the Bicomunal Technical Committee on cultural heritage in Cyprus, which brings together Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots from all parts of the island to reconstruct and repair the cultural heritage of all and to do so together. Their approach is universal and based on finding common ground, not through pretending that the harms of the past and present are not real, but through common recognition of those harms and joint cultural healing. In Mali, I met those who had risked their lives to defend cultural sites from the jihadist groups that occupied the north of the country in 2012, and had even lost family members as a result. I also remember meeting those involved in a heroic effort in the divided city of Mitrovica in Kosovo, where civil society activists organized activities for Kosovars of Albanian, Serb, and Roma background to jointly visit each other's cultural sites. This was in an intensely polarized environment where the cultural heritage of all has been gravely attacked in both the more distant conflict past and more recent post-conflict situation."



Following her years of work, Karima had the opportunity to make a full circle and come back to the University of Michigan. She took advantage of this opportunity for several reasons including the fact that coming back to the University of Michigan Law School felt like “coming home for me” for several reasons including the fact that there is a long line of family lineage and legacy within the institution. Her great aunt studied a U-M in the 1930s and, as previously mentioned, her father received his PhD in anthropology from the university in 1976. As a child, Karima recalls, living on North Campus in the ‘married student housing’ with her parents. As a graduate student, Karima was attracted to the University of Michigan because, thanks to CMENAS, it was one of the only places in the world where she could pursue a joint degree in both law and Middle Eastern and North African studies. Following graduation, she was hired as a legal advisor at Amnesty International, where her then boss specifically referenced the importance of her dual-degree studies background as an essential complement to her specialization in international law. She is currently a visiting professor at the University of Michigan Law School.

As a current visiting professor, Karima has had the opportunity to teach many courses within the International Law and Human Rights space and is honored to lead students through these different courses. One course, in particular, she enjoys teaching the most is the United Nations Human Rights Practicum. In this course, students have an opportunity to work on real-world cases as junior Human Rights lawyers and advocates under her supervision and work on urgent cases in diverse regions. Karima believes that humanity needs the next generation of human rights advocates and is incredibly grateful for the true honor that is helping train these students. In a similar light, we asked Karima to share the most rewarding thing about working as a U-M Law School visiting professor, and she responded, “I am honored to be the Lewis M. Simes Professor of Law at the University of Michigan Law School now after three great semesters as a visitor. I was very grateful for the opportunity to get to know the school again and to work with its brilliant faculty. It is especially rewarding to be teaching International Law in the place where I studied the same subject with leading lights such as Judge Bruno Simma and Catharine MacKinnon. And I have so many excellent students...”

Karima believes that humanity needs the next generation of human rights advocates and is incredibly grateful for the true honor that is helping train these students.

When Karima reflects on the CMENAS community today, and what she and her father have done to help contribute to the community, she thinks about what would make him the proudest and believes that “he would be intensely proud of the students who have won the Mahfoud Bennoune Memorial Thesis Award and all the important research they have done to deepen and complexify understanding of the region. I look forward to seeing what horizons future winners will open up in their work”.

On another career note, Karima has made several media appearances, including being a guest on CNN’s Anderson Cooper 360, as well as MSNBC, and HuffPost Live. She enjoys participating in the many media opportunities as she views them as an opportunity to bring light and attention to the work of human rights defenders and activists, who otherwise would not receive sufficient attention, as well as sharing the microphone and shining the light on forgotten issues.

In addition to the media opportunities, she has obtained many accolades and awards throughout her career, which all hold a special meaning to her. When asked what award she appreciates the most, Karima shared: “They have all been very special. It is impossible to single out one. If I have to, I’d say the 2014 Dayton Literary Peace Prize for my book, *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism*. The book is based on 300 interviews with people of Muslim heritage from over 30 countries working against fundamentalism and terrorism. The award was very meaningful to some of those whose stories are presented within the book, and that is meaningful to Karima. She also notes the importance of being humble about her awards, as she acknowledges that “many of those doing the most challenging and important work on the human rights frontlines around the world do not win prizes.”

We appreciate all that Karima has done and continues to do for her community and the wider U-M community. When asked to give her younger self advice, Karima responded, “do not run a marathon as if it were a sprint.”

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

continued



MEKAREM ELJAMAL

Doctoral Candidate in Urban Planning, Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, New York

Master of Urban and Regional Planning and Masters in International and Regional Studies (Middle Eastern and North African Studies), University of Michigan '21

BA International Studies (International Security, Norms and Cooperation); BA Middle Eastern and North African Studies; Honors '16

Mekarem Eljamal is a doctoral student in urban planning at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. Her current research looks into the political economy of "mixed-cities" within Israel, looking at how the management and leveraging of the idea of "mix" in these cities is intimately tied to the same logics of division that guide and undergird settler colonialism and neoliberalism. Eljamal is currently the managing editor for the Middle East Studies Pedagogy Initiative of the Arab Studies Institute and an affiliate editor for *History@Work*, the blog for the National Council on Public History. She recently participated in the 7th Annual International Studies Alumni Panel event, which took place on March 20, 2023, co-sponsored by CMENAS.

PHOTO BY MICHIGAN PHOTOGRAPHY, 2023



A NEW FACE AT CMENAS

AN INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER LUND

In October 2022, CMENAS welcomed Jennifer Lund as the outreach coordinator. CMENAS talked with Jennifer to learn more about her past work and academic experiences, what she brings to the center, and how she hopes to see CMENAS grow.

What were you doing before coming to CMENAS?

For two years prior to CMENAS, I worked as an English Language Learner teacher in Canton, MI. My school was culturally and linguistically very diverse (over 40 languages represented), with a large population of students speaking Punjabi, Arabic, and Urdu as their home languages. In this role, I most often supported 4th-8th grade multilingual students to access core subject content in math, ELA, social studies, and science and taught a French elective to 6th-8th grade students. During this time, I also worked with adults as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at Indiana University, where I earned my PhD in the summer of 2020. There, I taught online courses to undergraduate and graduate students on bilingual and multilingual education, academic writing and research for international graduate students, and ethnographic fieldwork methods. Prior to these experiences, I was conducting field research on a primary-secondary teacher professional development initiative focused on project-based learning, 21st-century leadership skills, and the theme of sustainability in Kinshasa Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While writing up my dissertation, I spent almost two years as a graduate education outreach assistant for Indiana University's

African Studies Program, where I had the chance to work on several Title VI grant projects. In short, it has been a very busy, challenging, and rewarding last five years!

What did you enjoy most about that work?

My teaching and research experience have given me the chance to draw knowledge from colleagues and students of all ages and backgrounds. My work with multilingual children allowed me to better understand the school life of teachers and students during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I most enjoyed the challenge of adapting grade-level content or finding support materials to meet student needs and making them comprehensible in creative and fun ways. I also gained firsthand knowledge of the needs of multilingual students as they navigate their academic and social development in an English-dominant school setting. As a faculty member in the School of Education at Indiana University, my students were often practicing teacher professionals working in settings all over the world, and our meetings were full of rich discussions on teaching methodology, pedagogical materials, and critical perspectives on education. I always look forward to engaging with teachers because there are a zillion different ways to approach the same curriculum or pedagogical idea and try something new. Building on my experiences with Indiana University's African Studies Program, I am especially interested in the role of area studies centers in supporting teachers to internationalize the K-12 curriculum.

What drew you to the field of education? How will your experiences teaching abroad and in the US guide you as you start this new role?

I began teaching violin in high school and since then have always had one foot in the classroom or in work supporting

youth and education. My first trip abroad was through a three-week Volunteers for Peace project in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, where I collaborated with other young adults from around the world to help open Caf  zoide, a caf   with a mission to support the rights of the child through activities promoting education through exploration. However, living and working abroad in Serbia is what initially drew me into the field of language teaching. I had been working in non-profit management for the Grand Rapids Youth Symphony and freelancing as an arts and entertainment reporter/reviewer for the Grand Rapids Press after graduating with a bachelor's in music, but I was not sure where that would take me long-term. Then an opportunity arose to teach English in Novi Sad, Serbia for a few months, where I had the chance to travel extensively in the region to Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, and Sremski Karlovci, home of the oldest secondary school in Serbia where students can learn up to eight different languages. This made a deep impression and led me to enroll in the MA TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program at Michigan State University. Then followed ten months as a US Department of State English Language Fellow in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand, followed by three years as a visiting English lecturer in Nancy, France. Returning to the states, I worked within the field of second language writing and taught academic writing skills to undergraduate international students while completing my doctoral coursework at Indiana University. All of these experiences have allowed me to see the world from different perspectives, especially through class discussions and the writings of my students. My experiences teaching abroad and in the U.S. have given me the chance to think about teaching and learning with a wide lens while keeping a critical perspective on what constitutes best practices because I recognize that it

is not a "one-size-fits-all" for what works in a given setting.

How has the transition been to CMENAS so far?

Last summer, I worked on the 9th floor of Weiser Hall as an intermittent lecturer for the English Language Institute, where I taught academic writing skills to international graduate students. My move to CMENAS on the 5th floor was relatively easy as I was already familiar with Weiser Hall and campus and knew there would be some familiar faces around. The transition to CMENAS has been wonderful so far, especially the welcoming atmosphere of the International Institute.

What are you looking forward to at CMENAS?

Previously, I was only peripherally engaged with the MENA region through past experiences working with Islamic schools in Southern Thailand, teaching academic English skills to North African engineering students in France, working with Saudi special ed undergraduate students during a summer English language program at Michigan State University, and teaching numerous other MENA students in educational settings in Michigan, Indiana, and Delaware. In my new role, I will have the chance to dive deeper into the history, culture, and current events of the MENA region and facilitate workshops and discussions for community members locally, regionally, and nationally to do the same. I am very excited to meet and engage with teachers and begin learning about their needs, their goals, and their ideas for translating new knowledge into the classroom. And taking into account the power of the arts and language learning to encourage cross-cultural engagement in individuals of all ages, I hope to widen the reach of CMENAS programming to more art, music, and language teachers and procure or develop additional resources for these subject areas.

CONTEMPORARY FILM

FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Once a week, we watch a movie!” said **Professor Sascha Crasnow** in a one-sentence pitch for her new course, *Contemporary Film from the Islamic World*. Sascha Crasnow is a lecturer affiliated with the Residential College, the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, the Arab and Muslim American Studies Program, and the Global Islamic Studies Center, all at the University of Michigan. Professor Crasnow’s research is focused on Islamic arts throughout the Middle East and North Africa, exploring trends of identity, nationalism, gender and sexuality, and more. Professor Sascha Crasnow’s latest course, *Contemporary Film from the Islamic World*, explores the theme of self-identity in contemporary films across the Islamic world.

Her course not only offers important lessons for students but also a unique opportunity for engagement. “One of the reasons why I want to teach this course is that film is *fun*,” Crasnow emphasized. “I would really like students to gain exposure to films they haven’t seen.” The allure of film not only provides an attractive break from traditional lectures and seminars but also incentivizes students to take a course they may not have taken the leap for, otherwise. “And for films they have seen,” Crasnow added, “to give them a new perspective.”

“I try to include as much breadth as possible — it’s impossible to cover



everything,” Professor Crasnow acknowledged. “But I try to include a diversity of regionality and genre.” From documentaries to big-budget Hollywood-style films to slower art-house movies, Professor Crasnow’s course selection offers an impressive survey of film culture across the MENA region. “Dramas, comedies, feel-good and not-so-feel-good films,” Professor Crasnow added with a laugh, “I really try to capture a range.”

Not only does Crasnow’s course defy stylistic stereotypes, where genre diversity is almost exclusively associated with the money and name power of Hollywood, but she also addresses racial stereotypes in this course, too. “One of the things I’m really excited about is something I’ve wanted to do for a while. I had a student that presented on Black African Muslim film, and that’s something that hasn’t been included in previous years.” Islam is usually associated with the Middle East, excluding other regions with large Muslim populations, like South Asia and North Africa.

“By and large — and this has been from the beginning of film [creation] to the present — Arabs and Muslims have been portrayed negatively,” Professor Crasnow explained. “Overwhelmingly as terrorists or oil-hungry Sheikhs.” Arab and Muslim populations, too, have often been conflated as being one and the same.

“The actors who play these roles are rarely Arab or Muslim,” Professor Crasnow acknowledged in irony.

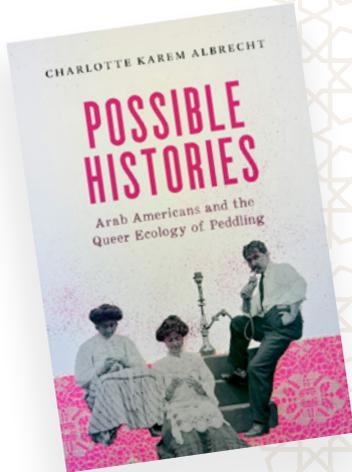
“Surprisingly, after the events of 9/11, these stereotypes changed to have positive representations,” Professor Crasnow explained. These new stereotypes fell into two main categories: “The Patriot,” about a Muslim character going *against* his Islamic identity to support America; and “The Victim of Hate Crime,” which focuses on the suffering of the Muslim character so that the American audience may sympathize with the victim without acknowledging any greater systematic prejudice at work. “It’s less about any specific movies, but rather that there have been a variety of different movies that tell a single story of Arabs and Muslims,” elaborated Crasnow.

Part of the allure of a film course, Professor Crasnow added, is the viewing experience. “There is a social pressure,” she acknowledged. “We’re not just talking about the film — all art in itself is incomplete, it needs to engage with the viewer — and so we talk a lot about our reactions to [the film].”

Language, too, can be an essential part of the viewing experience. Subtitles, which allow films to reach across cultural and language barriers, sometimes lose an element of authenticity and nuance in written translation. “There’s a film we watch where the subtitles make it appear as if the characters speak awkwardly, but really the individual who is speaking is not a native speaker, and so the subtitles reflect his use of broken Arabic,” Professor Crasnow explained. “We look at what is being done here and ask: Is this intentional?”

“Did you like it? Did you not like it? — that’s where I always start [in class],” remarked Crasnow. “I think if you’re someone who enjoys watching films, this is a class where you get to do that. And hopefully,” Professor Crasnow added, “be exposed to a bunch of movies you didn’t even know existed!”

FACULTY NEWS



Charlotte Karem Albrecht

Assistant professor, American culture and women's studies

Published *Possible Histories: Arab Americans and the Queer Ecology of Peddling* in February by the University of California Press. It is also available as an open-access e-book. Featured on the *Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness* podcast discussing her research: [How Did Syrian Peddlers Experience America?](#) Book launch of *Possible Histories: Arab Americans and the Queer Ecology of Peddling* with GISC featuring Nayan Shah as a respondent. The recording is available on the GISC youtube channel.



Kathryn Babayan

Professor, Iranian History and Culture, Middle East studies, and history

The City as Anthology: Eroticism and Urbanity in Early Modern Isfahan received a [2022 Fatema Mernissi Book Award](#) for “outstanding scholarship in studies of gender, sexuality, and women’s lived experience.”

Samer Ali

Associate professor, Middle East studies, and Residential College

Organized with Co-PIs: Su’ad Abdul Khabeer and Murad Idris, an innovative and interdisciplinary Mellon Sawyer Seminar on the Africana Muslim that convenes leading scholars from around the world in hybrid sessions that prioritize accessibility and collaboration. Leveraging the best of digital technology and close in-person collaboration, the seminar that will run for the next two years will investigate the racialized figure of the Africana Muslim. The invitees bring to bear methods from the humanities and interpretive social sciences in six sessions. Each one centered around a key site of study—theory, plantations, camps, courts, prisons, and media culture. The seminar aims to create an unprecedented intellectual community around the entangled race-based categories of Muslimness and Blackness.



Juan Cole

Richard P Mitchell Collegiate; professor, history and American culture

Began a three-year term as director of the Arab and Muslim American Studies Program in the U-M American Culture Department. Published: [“Wishing Peace on Persecutors in Islam: Classical Qur’ān Commentaries \(Sufi and Rationalist\) on Al-Furqān 25:63–64,”](#) in *Peace Education and Religion: Perspectives, Pedagogy, Policies*. Edited by Marcia Hermansen, Ednan Aslan, and Evrim Erşan Akkılıç. *Wiener Beiträge zur Islamforschung* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2022). Pp. 127–140.; “Late Roman Law and the Quranic Punishments for Adultery,” in *Muslim World*, 112, 2 (2022):207–224.; “Omani Peacemaking and Middle East Crises in the 2010s: Sultan Qaboos’ last Decade,” in *Sultan Qaboos and Modern Oman, 1970–2020*, edited by Allen James Fromherz and Abdulrahman al-Salimi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 414–436.



Juan Cole with Linda Sarsour, Arab-American activist, at AMAS showing of “Brooklyn, Inshaallah” February 20, 2023.

NEW CMENAS FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

CMENAS is excited to announce two new funding opportunities to support master's students at the University of Michigan: the **Arab Alumni Scholarship Fund** and the **Arab Alumni International Student Fellowship**. Both awards are made possible through generous donations by U-M alumni or their families to support students seeking an A.M. at the University of Michigan.

The University of Michigan Arab Alumni Scholarship Fund was **established in 2022** through a generous gift from Dr. Hamed Hamud Alajlan (BSEIO '78) to the Horace H. Rackham Graduate School. Dr. Alajlan's gift has also been a catalyst for other donors who have added to the fund and increased its impact. It will be used to support master's level students in the Rackham Graduate School who have shown perseverance in overcoming hardships, including financial circumstances, and who have earned an undergraduate degree from an educational institution located in one of many countries located throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The fund supports students in all areas of study, but candidates with a science background and scholarly interest in the social sciences and humanities will receive additional consideration.

The Arab Alumni International Student Fellowship was also established in 2022 through a generous gift from Lamees Hamdan Al-Shamsi, co-owner of Nayera UK Ltd., to the University of Michigan in honor of her father, Mohammed Al-Shamsi, who studied at the U-M School of Public Health. Like the Arab Alumni Scholarship Fund, the Arab Alumni International Student Fellowship will be used to support master's level students in the Rackham Graduate School who have shown perseverance in overcoming hardships, including financial circumstances, but it is also open to who have earned either a high school or an undergraduate degree from an educational institution located in one of many countries located throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Like the Arab Alumni Scholarship Fund, this fellowship supports students in all areas of study, with additional consideration given to candidates with a science background and scholarly interest in the social sciences and humanities.

Through the generosity of Dr. Alajlan and Ms. Al-Shamsi, master's students at the University of Michigan, including students in the CMENAS Master's in Regional Studies program, will receive much needed support and resources to continue their education. For more information on the various ways you can support students at CMENAS, please contact our center at (734) 647-4143 or visit our donation information page ii.umich.edu/cmenas/donate.

NEW OUTREACH INITIATIVES

CMENAS is dedicated to promoting a broader and deeper understanding of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) through our educational outreach programs. During past Title VI grants, CMENAS has supported the Midwest Institute for International/Intercultural Education, facilitated curriculum development workshops, and participated in the World History and Literature Initiative and the University of Michigan and the University of Puerto Rico collaboration. With this new 2022–2026 grant cycle, we are proud to continue supporting these initiatives while also developing additional programs. These include collaborations with two new minority serving institutions, Georgia State University and Tennessee State University, to fund lectures on MENA content. CMENAS will also sponsor events at Schoolcraft College's International Institute that promote greater understanding of the MENA region through the discussion of globally themed content. In addition, CMENAS is partnering with the University of Minnesota's Institute for Global Studies alongside other National Resource Centers across the country to run the World Area Book Club, an online series for K–14 educators nationwide to discuss award-winning and newly released titles from global children's literature.

In building on past outreach that has invited debate on diverse perspectives and offered virtual professional development for K–14 teachers nationwide, the World History Learning Community offers a collegial setting to study and debate academic books selected by CMENAS and other UM-NRCs. Likewise, the MENA Reading Cohort offers Michigan and regional K–16 educators the chance to discuss MENA history and related pedagogical resources in person at the U-M campus with engagement in local cultural opportunities related to the MENA region.

AMY PERKINS TO ARMENIA

By Kristin Waterbury

Amy Perkins, a 2019–2020 MENA-SEA Teacher Program fellow, traveled to Armenia this past summer to join a delegation of 15 teachers in a comparative study of genocide. Hosted by [The Genocide Education Project](#), Perkins and her cohort spent 10 days in Yerevan, attending lectures prepared by distinguished professors and traveling to sites central to Armenian history and culture.

“Each morning, we engaged in academic discussions of historical evidence and theories associated with the Armenian Genocide,” Perkins

recounts. As the teachers examined the stages of genocide implemented by the Ottoman Empire amidst the backdrop of a world war, they also investigated the motives behind Turkey’s persistent denial of the Armenian Genocide. Their intensive study revealed as much about the historical context of the early 20th century as it did about the geopolitical landscape of the present.

Forging a connection between Turkey’s ongoing denial of the Armenian Genocide and recent opposition to the teaching of Critical Race Theory within the United States, Perkins

concludes, “A nation’s unwillingness to confront its brutal past—be it genocide, slavery, or the like—causes these historical wounds to fester. No nation can effectively extricate itself from the shackles of past wrongs if it is unwilling to confront those wrongs thoughtfully, critically, and honestly.” Perkins and her colleagues spent their afternoons touring churches, battle sites, museums, local markets, and memorials. Each location reflected the resilience of Armenian culture and identity. Impromptu meetings with Rwanda’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Academy Award-winning director Terry George further enriched participants’ understanding of genocide. Perkins explains, “The perpetrators of genocide are not madmen. Rather, they are ordinary citizens who, through the process of cultural and social indoctrination, rationalization, and dehumanization of the ‘other,’ devolve into mass murderers. This disturbing reality underscores the importance of examining the contexts in which genocides occur. If we can identify clear patterns, we are better positioned to prevent future genocides through education.” Perkins plans to share her insights and research with fellow Social Studies educators at the National Council for the Social Studies annual conference in Philadelphia this December. She remains grateful to The Genocide Education Project for the opportunity to study in Armenia and to the University of Michigan for enriching her understanding of the Middle East through the MENA-SEA Teacher Program.

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ARABIC DEBATE TEAM

By Amber Mullins

Karam Alrawi, a student here at the University of Michigan, has led the Arabic Debate team to victory. The Arabic debate team is a newly formed group that travels to different universities across the nation to compete in parliamentary debates.

Born and raised in Iraq, Karam has always been intrigued by the art of language and speaking. Growing up in Iraq, Karam spoke Arabic and later started using Fusha, which is the classical form of the Arabic dialect used in Iraq. During his early years of life, he spent a good amount of time reading classical literature and learning more about poetry and Arabic philosophy, both of which fostered and nurtured his love of languages.

Karam's interest in debating developed through exposure to philosophy; he believes philosophy can help to depict the power of the human brain and how to tackle differences in a logical manner. His interest in hearing arguments and listening to people's views on different issues aided his realization on just how significant debating can be. This realization eventually became one of the main reasons Karam started the Arabic Debate Team.

The field of debating is attractive to Karam for the simple

fact that it attracts individuals who are open-minded and capable of understanding different viewpoints. His interest in the field also stems from his love for speaking and he considers debating to be a "peaceful and fruitful war." Karam often finds himself contemplating how many world issues could be solved and conflicts could be avoided if people applied the teachings of debating.

The Arabic Debate team at the University of Michigan has put in countless time, energy and consistency and their practice, discipline and dedication have led them to another win. Most recently, the Arabic Debate team traveled to Stanford University for the U.S. Arabic Debating Championship. This competition in particular is rigorous and team members are put under significant pressure to perform. Each team is given a declared motion and the debate teams have twenty minutes each to come up with a completed argument to present.

During this championship, Karam was ranked among the Top 10 Best Debaters in the championship, which attests to his hard work, dedication and genuine enjoyment of the field. In order to make it into this ranking, a speaker must demonstrate strong speaking skills, solid argumentation as well

as add value to the debate.

Karam offered two great points of advice on how an aspiring debater can prepare themselves to win this award or an award of similar nature. His advice is to speak with confidence, as if you have lived your whole life to debate the current topic. All debaters will eventually get topics that they are not comfortable with or don't know enough about and Karam urges to not let that discourage you. The only thing that matters is that you confidently convince the audience and judges why your stance on the motion is correct. The next piece of advice is to be open-minded and make an effort to understand the other side, as this will increase your chances of predicting the opposition and further increase your chances of winning the debate.

Aside from debating, Karam enjoys a number of hobbies such as reading, playing chess and playing video games. Karam also enjoys writing and believes that it is one of the best ways to increase your learning. Because of this, Karam holds himself accountable to writing a large summary of a different nation's history every year. In addition to writing about history, he also enjoys writing about philosophy, science and education.



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Donations are sought in the CMENAS Support Fund (798809), the Lois A. Aroian Middle Eastern and North African Studies Scholarship Fund (700745), the Mahfoud Bennoune Memorial Thesis Award (570802), and the Richard P. Mitchell Memorial Prize (794815).

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