NEWSLETTER **SPRING 2024**

CMENAS

DEAR STUDENTS, FACULTY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS,

As we follow the news of the devastation in Gaza, all of us at the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies (CMENAS) offer our deep hopes for an end to all hostilities and the safe return of all those displaced or held hostage. In the midst of the military-civilian conflicts abroad and the ideological conflicts at home, CMENAS continues to offer resources and knowledge for U-M students, faculty, and the broader community to engage in meaningful dialogue and informed critique. Now more than ever, the work of CMENAS is vital to countering the ongoing threat of Islamophobia and Antisemitism on campus and in our community.

As part of this ongoing work, CMENAS has maintained a busy schedule of events and activities in the Fall 2023 semester. Some of the highlights in this issue include:

In October 2023, CMENAS spearheaded the organization of a roundtable conversation between **Khalil Shikaki**, professor of political science and director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (Ramallah, Palestine), and **Shai Feldman**, Raymond Frankel Professor in Israeli Politics and Society and founding director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies (Brandeis University). Moderated by U-M's **Mark Tessler** (Samuel J. Eldersveld Professor, Department of Political Science), the discussion addressed the conflicting priorities of the Israel-Gaza hostilities and explored the political background of the ongoing violence.

Throughout the fall 2023, CMENAS Associate Director **Jay Crisostomo** organized a successful fall colloquium series on the theme "The MENA world after a MENA World Cup." Over the course of the semester, nine invited scholars from around the world presented research on the business and culture of sports in the MENA today.

This past fall, CMENAS was also thrilled to host doctoral student **Azar Kafaei** (Anthropology, U-M Ann Arbor) to participate in the Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellowship Program. Kafaei joined the staff and faculty at CMENAS to work on communications, outreach, and exciting new initiatives for the coming year.

CMENAS continues to partner with local colleges, including Schoolcraft College and Mid Michigan College, as well as universities across the country and region (including San Diego State University, University of Puerto Rico, Georgia State University, and Bemidji State University) to promote MENA education through speaker events, outreach, and teacher professional development.

CMENAS continues to promote discussion and knowledge of MENA resources for K–14 educators through its ongoing **MENA Reading Cohort** and **World History Learning Community** book discussion groups.

CMENAS is excited to welcome a promising new cohort of graduate students to the **Masters in Regional Studies** program in fall 2024. Look for more news on our incoming students in our fall newsletter.

Since 1961, CMENAS at U-M has promoted a more humane and global understanding of the world and given students the tools to build a better future. While the U.S. Department of Education supports some of our initiatives, our funding is threatened by shifting political and financial forces in Washington and around the globe. CMENAS relies on the critical support of allies, and alumni like you to be able to continue to realize its mission, even in the face of uncertainty. If you believe in CMENAS's educational vision, we hope you will take a moment to translate your goodwill toward CMENAS into a tangible investment in the future.

Your contribution—**whether $5 or $500**—will ensure that our mission of service and scholarship continues to be fulfilled.

Can we count on your support? Your help has never been more important.

To donate, please go to:
ii.umich.edu/cmenas/donate

Thank you! And Go Blue!

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

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CMENAS Associate Director and George G. Cameron Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Civilization and Languages and Civilizations, Middle East Studies

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Renee Ragin Randall (Elected)
Assistant Professor, Middle East Studies

CMENAS would like to recognize its student assistants for their commitment and work to the Center. We appreciate and value their effort and contributions this year!

Luna Alkassem, *Communication and Media Major*
CMENAS Newsletter Contributor

Nadeen Elkordy, *Education Major*
CMENAS Office Assistant

Azar Kafaei, *Doctoral Candidate in Anthropology*
CMENAS Outreach Assistant

Amber Mullins, *Master of Business Administration Candidate*
CMENAS Newsletter Contributor

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FALL 2023 COLLOQUIUM

THE MENA WORLD AFTER A MENA WORLD CUP

By Azar Kafaei

The CMENAS Fall Colloquium series is part of the CMENAS course "Comparative Perspectives of the Middle East and North Africa" (CMENAS 493/593). In this course and public colloquium, the center brings together a uniquely diverse cohort of specialists, opening multiple perspectives of comparative research to students, faculty, and the public. The theme of the colloquium series changes every year. In fall 2023, the CMENAS colloquium theme was "The MENA world after a MENA World Cup," organized and moderated by CMENAS Associate Director Jay Crisostomo.

The series is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education Title VI National Resource Center (NRC) grant.

Niki Akhavan
Catholic University of America
Scoring Points: Sports and Politics in Iran

Set against the complex background of geopolitical tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as the ongoing waves of protest in the wake of the death of Mahsa Amini within Iran, Akhavan explored the various ways that the Iranian national soccer team has found itself caught between the conflicting interests of the Iranian state and the diasporic and Saudi-funded media. Akhavan highlighted the ways that the national and international dynamics of the Iranian state are crystalized in the recent turbulent experience of the national team in the 2022 World Cup. While painted as agents of the regime by the foreign media, and placed under intense pressure by the Iranian authoritarian state, Akhavan stressed that the national team and individual players also had a long history of both mirroring the situation of ordinary Iranians and representing their hopes and dreams for change.

Stefan Szymanski
University of Michigan School of Kinesiology
Football Culture, Politics, and Economics in the Middle East and North Africa

How can we think about football across various scales of society and economy? In his geographically and temporally wide-spanning talk, Szymanski highlighted the local history and contexts of football in relation to freedom of association, mass politics, nation-building, and its global context of geopolitics. Citing significant literature on the minimal impact of mega events such as the World Cup on local economies, Szymanski provoked the audience to try to understand developments such as Qatar's competency to host a World Cup, or Saudi Arabia's ambition to create a globally competitive national league with concepts such as sportswashing.

Zakia Salime
Rutgers University
Beyond the World Cup: Indigeneity and Protest in Morocco

Set in the international framework of the struggle for indigenous rights and against the local backdrop of the long history of

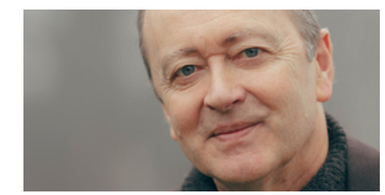
the Amazigh-speaking Moroccans living in the Atlas Mountains, this talk first explored the way Arab media reporters celebrated Morocco's outstanding performance in the Qatar World Cup as representative of an "Arab" Morocco, therefore effacing the identity of the players, most of whom did not speak Moroccan Darija. Salime then moved to consider other examples of contemporary social movements in Morocco, namely the Road-96 movement against the expropriation of natural resources in the Atlas Mountains. Through these highly engaging topics, Salime illustrated the centrality of claims of indigeneity in contemporary Morocco.

Salma Thani
American University of Sharjah
Kicking Goals and Reshaping Realities: Sport and Politics in the Arab Gulf States

In this talk, Thani explored the nexus between sport and politics to underscore that the Qatar World Cup 2022 has had impacts beyond the limits of the sport, with consequences and reverberations that have reshaped the sociopolitical realities of Qatar and the region. This presented the small Gulf countries with a chance to showcase their developmental capabilities on a global stage. Lively conversations in the Q&A considered the limitation of a uniformly positive perspective on the impact of the World Cup, especially as it relates to "sportswashing" and the neglect of human rights.

Philippe Auclair
Journalist, *Josimar/The Guardian*
No Such Thing as 'Soft Power' — How Gulf States are Using Sport to Gain Supremacy on the World Stage

Extending the theme of "soft power" and "sportswashing" previously presented in the colloquium, whereby football enables states to burnish or re-define their global image and mask their poor human rights record, in his talk, Auclair emphasized the limits of such discourse. Sportswashing doesn't tell the whole story of what is taking place in the Gulf countries, Auclair clarified. These states, he stated, pursue geo-political rather than reputational advantages in their investment in sports. Not just soft power, but rather power in terms of geopolitical and economic



The Fall 2023 Colloquium Cohort
PHOTO BY U-M PHOTOGRAPHY

hegemony is being negotiated on a regional and global level, through sports and especially through football. In light of the heavy hand of nation-states and the investments of intensive capital in defining the fate of a sport, Auclair warned that this moment might be the end of football as we know it.

Charlotte Lysa
University of Oslo
Women and the Contested Field of Saudi Football

Until recently, Saudi Arabia was one of few countries that had no women's team. Until 2018, women did not have access to football stadiums, and before 2020, there was no official women's league. But the story of women's football that was unfolding away from the headlines is a completely different one. In this talk, Lysa gave a portrait of how in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, a grassroots-initiated women's football league has been active since 2007. The Riyadh Women's Football League was initiated and organized by young Saudi women eager to play. The first season was played in 2008. With no official support these pioneering women have kept the league going, through challenges related to everything from renting a field to finding qualified coaches. Drawing on the story of the first Riyadh Women's Football League, Lysa charted the emergence of women's football in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s and emphasized how pioneering women built a foundation for women's football in Saudi Arabia.

Karim Zidan
Investigative Journalist
Crafting Narratives and Influence: Tracing the Evolution of Saudi Arabia's Sportswashing Strategy (2016–2023)

Set against the speaker's own biographical context of growing up in the Arab world, as well as the rise and fall of Arab protests in the past twenty years and the recent developments in Saudi Arabia's sports strategy, Karim Zidan explored the ways that the soft power of football lays the groundwork for regional diplomacy, economic diversification, global impact, and a continuous stream of entertainment for the nation's youth. Through invoking notions of brand management and public relations Zidan's lecture characterized player contracts, advertisements, and the shifts in Saudi's sport policy as ultimately interested in growing the country's global influence and reach and questioned their implications for human rights in general.

Neha Vora
American University of Sharjah
The Post-spectacle City: The Politics of Space, Nation, and Multispecies Belonging After Dubai Expo 2020 and the 2022 Qatar World Cup

Based on observations of Dubai Expo 2020 and Qatar's 2022 World, Neha Vora's most recent research has been centered on Gulf cities like Doha and Dubai as multispecies places where human and nonhuman encounter, and the talk mostly focused on the case of Dubai. Vora painted a scenario in which Gulf states' relationships with their human and nonhuman residents can inform us about large-scale urban development and shifting state policies that have impacted both human and nonhuman residents, engendering experiences of racialization, and economic precarity. The exclusionary reality of these states' policies towards precarious immigrant and nonhuman actors, Vora argued, has important implications for academics interested in questions of humanism and liberalism.

Mahfoud Amara
Qatar University
The Geopolitics of Sport in the MENA Region

In this final talk of the fall colloquium, Mahfoud Amara touched on, if not all, most of the themes that the speakers had highlighted; citizenship and migration, gender and power, youth culture, role of media, local and global dynamic, and the potent agency of sport for influencing social structures and institutions. In the Middle East and North Africa, Amara specifically highlighted, the formulation of identity within the context of sports, governmental involvement in sports and its strategic utilization for political advantages, the intersection of women and sports, the evolving power dynamics within the sports industry, and the region's emergence as a significant new player.

THE ISRAEL-GAZA WAR: THE DAY AFTER

By Luna Alkassem

On October 31, 2023, the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies organized the roundtable titled, "The Israel-Gaza War: The Day After." This event, presented in collaboration with the University of Michigan's International Institute, sought to address the complexities surrounding the conflict's aftermath and illuminate potential pathways forward.

Through this roundtable discussion moderated by Professor **Mark Tessler**, Samuel J. Eldersveld Professor, Department of Political Science (University of Michigan), CMENAS set the stage for a thought-provoking discourse, assembling prominent speakers including **Khalil Shikaki**, professor of political science and director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (Ramallah, Palestine) and **Shai Feldman**, Raymond Frankel Professor in Israeli Politics and Society and founding director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies (Brandeis University). Szpiech opened the discussion, stating, "In the face of this tragedy, then we are here to learn and understand what we can." These words encapsulated the event's primary objective—to foster understanding amid the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict. This event underscored the unwavering commitment at CMENAS to providing an open forum for discussion, where diverse opinions can be expressed, respectfully heard, and debated constructively. In Szpiech's words, "CMENAS and the University of Michigan strive always to create a truly open forum for discussion."

The conversation commenced with insights from Tessler, Feldman, and Shikaki, shedding light on the Israel-Gaza conflict. Feldman advocated for an academic approach, focusing on explanation and assessment without endorsing actions. Feldman's discussion delved into the evolving priorities in the Middle East, noting the deprioritization of the Palestinian issue by Arab countries in favor of concerns related to Iran. He highlighted the mistake in lowering the priority of the Palestinian issue, stating, "It was a major mistake to relegate the Palestinian issue to the low priority it has in recent years."

Shikaki, foreseeing a potential Israeli reoccupation of Gaza,

expressed concern about Hamas's growing popularity due to the organization's atrocities. He underscored the impact, stating, "Most Palestinians today believe that Israel understands nothing but the language of force." The scholars jointly emphasized the pressing need for diplomacy and negotiations to break the current cycle of violence in the Israel-Hamas war. Shikaki noted Arab countries' willingness to support Gaza's humanitarian needs but not impose their own rules, asserting, "The Arab countries will be very, very happy to provide support in service, delivery, humanitarian assistance, and reconstruction."

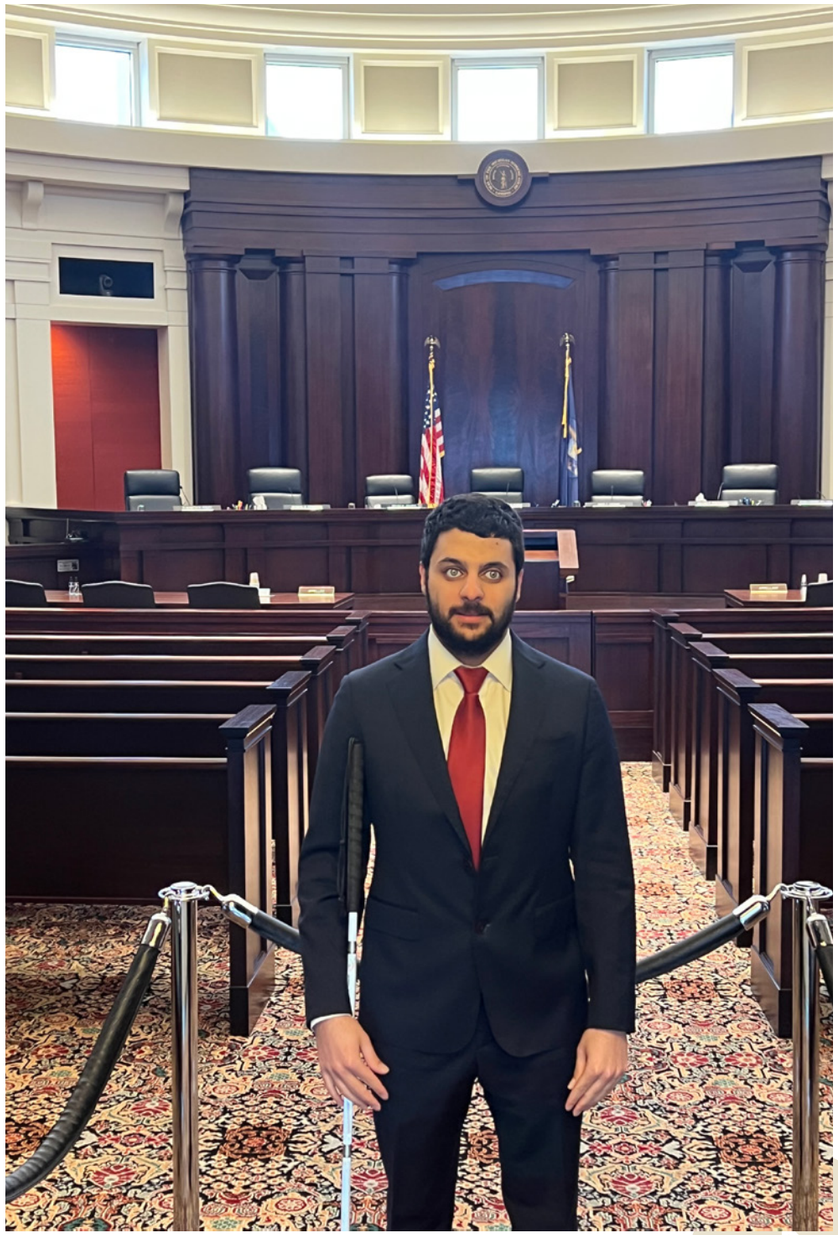
In addressing the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict, Shai Feldman and Khalil Shikaki offered contrasting perspectives on the viability of Hamas's goals and the immediate need for a ceasefire. Feldman emphasized the absence of acceptable alternatives and the lack of articulated goals by Israel, stating, "The issue is that nobody has actually come up with any acceptable proposal alternative." He highlighted the need for Israel to define its vision for Gaza. In contrast, Shikaki stressed the urgency of a ceasefire due to the immense suffering, expressing the desire of the affected people for the bloodshed to stop. The discussion highlighted the imperative of a comprehensive deal encompassing Israeli-Palestinian relations beyond Gaza. Shikaki stressed the need to enhance the perceived viability of the two-state solution among both Palestinians and Israeli Jews, stating, "If we are able to increase the viability perception among Palestinians and Israeli Jews, this seems to be the key." Feldman supported this view, emphasizing that past peace failures should not deter ongoing efforts, stating, "The failure of past peace initiatives should not discourage efforts to find a solution."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By Warsan Salah

SEIF-ELDEEN BASHEER SAQALLAH

Seif-Eldeen received JD/MA Dual Degree for Modern Middle East & North African Studies and Law '20; BA in International Studies, Arab, Armenian, Persian, Turkish, & Islamic Studies (AAPTIS), Judaic Studies, Middle Eastern and North African Studies, and completed minors in Religion and Law, Justice, & Social Change '17; all from University of Michigan. He is currently Assistant Prosecutor at Berrien County.



Since finishing your program, what have you been up to? What have you enjoyed about your experiences and positions so far?

Since I graduated in 2020, I took and passed the New York and Michigan bar exams, clerked for trial court judges at the Berrien County, Michigan courthouse (civil), and am now working as an assistant prosecuting attorney (criminal). I admire the people with whom I work and enjoy the different types of cases, though the topics can be emotionally taxing.

How did your academic background in International Studies, AAPTIS, Judaic Studies, and Middle Eastern and North African Studies influence your career path?

Majoring in these areas (including two minors, one in religion and another in law, justice, and social change) gave me perspectives I would not have otherwise had, including nuanced understanding/empathy. Having such a background motivated me to become a lawyer so I could use my cultural and linguistic competencies to serve and understand my community/clients.

Can you share any memorable experiences or lessons learned during your time at the University of Michigan that have been valuable in your professional life?

Of my many memories and resultant lessons at U-M, I learned how to prioritize work and assignments—though I am still learning and trying to perfect this skill. Importantly, I learned, when discussing difficult topics, how to slightly compartmentalize personal emotions from the facts, becoming aware of each's complementary influence and using both to achieve a goal—similar to rowing a boat down a river's current with two balanced ores or one double-bladed paddle.

What advice would you give to current students or recent graduates who are interested in pursuing a career path similar to yours?

I personally feel—given how education is structured—that undergraduate majors provide a framework to channel a professional degree, and that degree helps channel those interests. Know the different types of fields in which you might wish to practice, but also feel free to think outside the box. Do not be afraid to ask for help (including disability accommodations); especially admit when you do not know something by researching it further. Knowing the strengths, weaknesses, biases (used as a neutral term) and realities of a situation allows one to understand the issue and one's approach to that situation. Let your interests intersect with your profession to find the passion in both, though be careful not to let the negatives of one affect the other. As a mindset, be aware of the bad, but continually remain thankful.

How do you continue to stay connected with the University of Michigan community and your alma mater's programs and initiatives?

I remain in touch with current students and members I met during undergraduate and graduate clubs, but it is difficult. I also give back to my community and reach out to interested applicants or students interested in similar fields. Unfortunately, part of me still feels like I was severed from U-M because of COVID-19 in 2020, especially as I did not have either an MA or JD graduation. It is heartwarming to connect with a U-M grad, even if we have not met before.

> **"A grounding background in MENAS helped me learn to develop a service mentality and value what I do**—to serve the interests of justice, giving back to the community… while understanding that offenders and victims are both human."

How has your expertise in Middle East and North African Studies contributed to your role as an assistant prosecutor at Berrien County?

I have not yet used my purely factual MENAS knowledge or historical/linguistic skills as an APA on a case, though this has certainly influenced my outlook and how I think. Being new to the position, I still have much more to do, yet, I have already seen the glimmer of comfort when a survivor recognizes a commonality, or even when an opposing party recognizes a shared value. A grounding background in MENAS helped me learn to develop a service mentality and value what I do—to serve the interests of justice, giving back to the community (and the entirety of God-blessed creation), while understanding that offenders and victims are both human—legal leniency and lenity, with the understanding, of course, that justice should be fairness to all. It is not only about convicting offenders; doing so for the right reasons so that justice is done for victims and survivors, while being justly fair to defendants.

Are there specific intersections between your academic background and your professional responsibilities?

There are instances when, as an APA, I am seen (hopefully) as a representative of justice and a person who, as part of a community, understands that community. Given my background as a Palestinian Muslim who is blind, I strive to be an empowering representative; my MENAS knowledge, including Arabic and Hebrew, enables me to be a bridge.

Tell us about the ways that you have used knowledge and lessons learned from MENA-related coursework at U-M in your positions so far.

I honestly feel that MENA knowledge is such a part of me that it is difficult to pinpoint specific instances. From casual office conversations that seek to increase understanding, to translation in professional settings, MENA knowledge is so inherently helpful. I especially value the learned ability to combine the theoretical academic discourse with real-world practical applications/concerns—the ability to see the human behind the law (positives and shortcomings), and even the person interpreting original texts—text understood with its context.

Looking back, what aspects of your time as a Middle East studies student at U-M did you enjoy most? Why?

I thoroughly enjoyed my language classes, particularly when, as a heritage Arabic speaker, I learned Hebrew. I am thankful for my teachers who enabled me to see language's developments, like root changes and reconstructions. Linguistic and scriptural similarities fascinate me; even differences provide insight.

How has the community you built in UM helped during your time here?

For me, community is support; people of empathetic understanding with varying experiences sharing those experiences, guiding towards doing right and advising against accidentally acting wrongly. Having friends (and opponents) sharing that U-M experience is quite supportive. I am honored to be a triple Wolverine!

CMENAS

GRADUATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

By Amber Mullins

Shakeelah Hicks is from Flint, Michigan, and is pursuing her Masters in International and Regional studies with a specialization in Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS). On campus, Shakeelah is an event coordinator for Students of Color of Rackham (SCOR) and a graduate student instructor in anthropology. After graduation, Shakeelah hopes to spend time working abroad for an international business, IGOs, NGOs, or government agency.

Keena Kump is from Tobaccoville, NC, and is pursuing her Masters in International and Regional studies with a specialization in Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) and a Master of Public Policy. On campus, Kenna hopes to get involved with the English Language Institute (ELI). After graduation, Kenna plans on pursuing a Master of Public Health.

Rosa Razmi is from Rochester Hills, MI and is pursuing her Master's in International and Regional studies with a specialization in Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS). On campus, Rosa works as a Graduate Student Assistant for MIRS. After graduation, Rosa hopes to work for a few years and then pursue her PhD.

Ahmad Taylor is from Dayton, Ohio, and is pursuing his Masters in International and Regional studies with a specialization in Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS). On campus, Ahmad is a member of the Rackham Student Government. After graduation, Ahmad plans to work at NGOs.

CMENAS' Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellow Azar Kafaei writes a child's name in Arabic at the Amal Walks event at the U-M Campus last September. The event was co-sponsored by UMMA, A2 Summer Festival, and the U-M Arts Initiative.

CMENAS PARTICIPATES IN RACKHAM DOCTORAL INTERN FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

By Azar Kafaei

The Center for Middle East and North African Studies hosted University of Michigan Rackham graduate student Azar Kafaei to serve as a Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellow during the fall 2023 term. The Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellowship is a program designed to provide financial support to doctoral students to pursue professional experience, work outside their home department, expand their skills and capacities, and gain exposure to diverse careers. The fellows build relationships that expand their personal and professional networks and have the opportunity to reflect on their career aspirations in a productive and supportive environment. These fellowships support students in applying and developing their skills and professional experience by completing various projects.

So far, the program has been a win-win for both Kafaei and CMENAS. By participating in the Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellowship program, CMENAS was able to offer Kafaei a unique internship experience that combines outreach and programming in Middle East Studies with hands-on work in grant management. In turn, Kafaei brings a wealth of experience to the role. CMENAS Director Ryan Spziech couldn't agree more. "She has helped CMENAS make the most of the grant resources provided by the Department of Education Title VI program."

Kafaei is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology writing a dissertation about the history of British Petroleum in Iran. She has a BA in history from Yale and an MFA in documentary filmmaking from Stanford. Her short films have been shown at national and international festivals, and her artwork has been exhibited most recently at the Duderstadt Center.

During the internship period, Kafaei assisted CMENAS with newsletter communications and outreach events, including the public-facing Amal Walks event on the U-M campus. Little Amal, the internationally celebrated 12-foot-tall puppet of a 10-year-old Syrian refugee girl, visited Ann Arbor on September 23 as part of an epic 6,000-mile journey across the United States. Kafaei's written summaries of the CMENAS colloquium series and her participation in CMENAS' session of a book club series for K-12 educators nationwide titled "Traditions and Change" hosted by various Title VI National Resource Centers. During this session, Azar presented one of her short documentary films, which was shot in a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut.

FACULTY INTERVIEW WITH

MARK TESSLER

By Luna Alkassem

In a captivating dialogue that unveiled the academic journey and profound insights of one of our esteemed colleagues, CMENAS had the privilege of interviewing Professor Mark Tessler, the Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of Political Science. With a career spanning decades and a wealth of experience in comparative politics and Middle Eastern studies, Professor Tessler shared candid reflections on his scholarly pursuits, research endeavors, and the transformative activities and events that have defined his illustrious career.

The interview commenced with an in-depth overview of Professor Tessler's academic background. "Let's start with the beginning, could you provide me with an overview of your academic background and how you became interested in comparative politics and Middle Eastern studies," asked the interviewer. Professor Tessler meticulously outlined his educational journey, from his undergraduate days at Case Western Reserve University to his doctoral studies at Northwestern University, where he specialized in political science and African studies. This trajectory also included a year of study in Hebrew at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a year taking classes on Islamic and North African sociology, in French, at the University of Tunis. His extensive research experience includes fieldwork in Tunisia, Israel, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, and Qatar.

Delving into his teaching and consulting experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa, Professor Tessler described the courses on research methods and development studies that he taught in Zaire, Rwanda, and Liberia. He also shared a number of anecdotes, such as the time his car overheated in a very remote area of Rwanda, and this just happened to be the home of one of his best students from the university. This and many other experiences left an indelible mark on his memory. "Be adventurous, take advantage of opportunities that come along, don't overthink them. Ninety-nine times out of 100, it'll be a wonderful and enriching experience," he emphasized, reflecting on the formative nature of his own early adventures. This experience underscored the resilience and resourcefulness of individuals in challenging circumstances, reaffirming his commitment to education as a catalyst for positive change.

Transitioning to Professor Tessler's scholarly publications, the interview explored seminal works, such as his 1,000-page *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Indiana, 2009), which has been widely-used and has won national awards. Among his other important books are *Religious Minorities in Non-Secular Middle Eastern and North African States* (Springer, 2019), *Islam and Politics in the Middle East: Explaining the Views of Ordinary Citizens* (Indiana, 2015), and *Public Opinion in the Middle East: Survey Research and the Political Orientations of Ordinary Citizens* (Indiana University Press, 2011).

"Science knows no borders. It's not about different statistics; it's about universal principles."

A pivotal moment in the interview was the discussion of Professor Tessler's role in co-founding the Arab Barometer Survey Project. With over 76 national surveys and roughly 135,000 personal interviews conducted across eight waves in 15 countries, the project has become a cornerstone of empirical research on public opinion in the Arab world. Professor Tessler underscored the project's impact, highlighting its recognition as the best new dataset in comparative politics by the American Political Science Association. He also detailed the challenges encountered during the project, including instances of data forgery and the complexities of conducting surveys in diverse socio-political contexts.

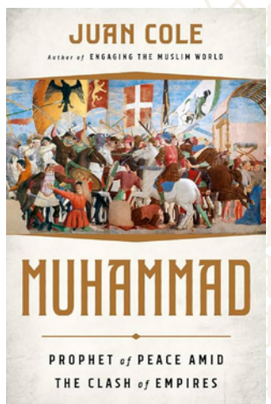
Particularly noteworthy, among others, was Professor Tessler's mention of collaboration with BBC Arabic, wherein the Arab Barometer data was utilized for insightful analysis. The resulting BBC articles garnered significant attention, with the articles in Arabic initially amassing 50,000 hits and the English version reaching an impressive one million hits. This collaboration exemplified the real-world impact of academic research and the importance of engaging with media outlets to disseminate knowledge to broader audiences.

As the interview drew to a close, Professor Tessler reflected on his contributions beyond academia, including his most recent book *Social Science Research in the Arab World and Beyond: A Guide for Students, Instructors, and Researchers* (Springer International Publishing, 2022 and Qatar University Press, 2023). Prepared for use at Arab (and other) universities, the book is available in both English and Arabic and is open access, which means it can be downloaded without charge from the publishers' websites. To date, the English version book has been downloaded over 12,000 times and the newer, Arabic version over 6,000 times. Preparation of the volume was supported by a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

In discussing this book's potential impact, Professor Tessler emphasized the importance of inclusivity and accessibility in academic research, advocating for the dissemination of knowledge across linguistic and cultural barriers. To encapsulate his ethos, Professor Tessler imparted a final thought, "Science knows no borders. It's not about different statistics; it's about universal principles."

In commemorating Professor Mark Tessler's scholarly odyssey, CMENAS celebrates not only a distinguished career but also a steadfast commitment to advancing understanding and fostering dialogue across borders. As we continue to navigate the intricacies of the Middle East and North Africa, may Professor Tessler's insights inspire us to embrace curiosity, compassion, and intellectual rigor in our scholarly pursuits.

FACULTY NEWS



Juan Cole
Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History
An Albanian translation of his book *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires* (New York: Bold Type Books (Hachette), 2018) translated by Bujar M. Hoxha was published in Tirana. Additionally, the Bosnian translation of the same book received recognition at an event hosted by the Muslim Council of Sarajevo on October 16, 2023, where he was honored to be a keynote speaker. In the past year, Professor Cole has published the following articles and chapters:

"Terraforming Yemen: Geoeconomic Imperialism, the UAE and the Southern Secessionists." *Journal of Gulf Studies* 1.1 (2024): 59-79. Print.

"Al-Niza` al-Jiyusiyasi bayn Majlis al-Ta`awun li Duwal al-Khalij al-`Arabiyya wa Iran." In *Duwal al-Khalij al-`Arabiyya wa Iran: Judhur al-Tanafus fi al-Nizam al-Iqlimi al-Khaliji wa Tajalliyatuhu*, edited by Marwan Kabalan, 72-104. Doha: al-Markaz al-'Arabi lil-Abhath wa Dirasat al-Siyasat, 2023. Print.

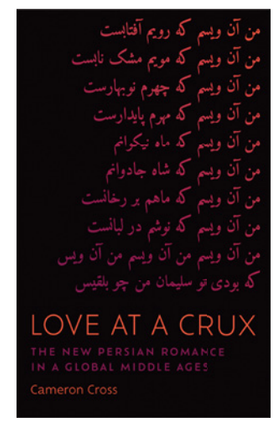
"Muslim Nonviolent Civil Resistance in Modern World History." *In The Oxford Handbook of Peace History*, edited by Charles E. Howlett, Christian Philip Peterson, Deborah D. Buffton, and David L. Hostetter, 373-392. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Print.

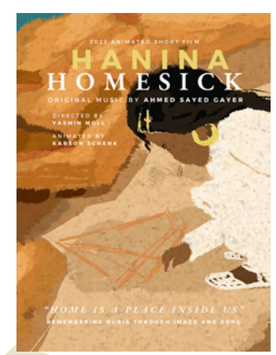
"Robāīyāt of Omar Khayyām." In *The Routledge Handbook of Post Classical and Contemporary Persian Literature*, edited by Kamran Talattof, 192-207. London: Routledge, 2023. Print.

"China and Syria as an 'Ideological Exception?'" In *The Myth of Middle East Exceptionalism: Unfinished Social Movements*, 92-110. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2023. Print.

Mark Tessler
Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of Political Science
Mark Tessler published *Social Science Research in the Arab World and Beyond: A Guide for Students, Instructors and Researchers* late in 2022. The book has been published by Springer Publishers and is open access and downloadable without charge from the publisher's website. An Arabic translation was published in spring 2023 by Qatar University Press, and it is also open access and downloadable without charge. The original, English-language text has been downloaded more than 11,000 times during the fourteen months following its publication. The Arabic version was published ten months ago and has already been downloaded more than 5,000 times. The book is designed for use in classes at Arab (and other) universities, and it has already been used at several universities.

Cameron Cross
Assistant Professor of Iranian Studies
Professor Cross's book, *Love at a Crux: The New Persian Romance in a Global Middle Ages* was published by the University of Toronto Press in December 2023. His book delves into the correlations between New Persian literature and analogous traditions found in ancient and medieval Greek, Arabic, Georgian, Old French, and Middle High German.





Yasmin Moll
Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Professor Moll recently completed *Hanina Homesick*, a short animated film on Nubian memories of displacement. Produced with the support of the Narrating Nubia project at the Humanities Collaboratory, it was illustrated by Karson Schenk with original music by Sayed Gayer. This year, she also received the 2024 Fejos Postdoctoral Fellowship in Ethnographic Film from the Wenner-Gren Foundation to support completing her documentary feature "Nubia is a Place Inside Us." The fellowship supports projects that will impact the field of anthropology and beyond through innovative work in film and other media. *Hanina* has been selected for the 2024 Annecy Festival, Perspectives Short Films in Competition–one of the most prestigious and influential film festivals dedicated to animation.

Behrad Aghaei
Lecturer in Middle East Studies
For the first time, Middle East Studies is offering a course named Seeds of Peace. Students in each of these language tracks (Armenian, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish) are exploring a common weekly theme in their own language that sheds light on life and culture in the Middle East in different ways. Some of these themes reflect critical terms for the course, such as diversity, religion, cosmopolitanism, popular culture, tourism, music, cuisine, social media, and navigating differences. Course numbers are: HEB 410, PER 410, TUR 410.

Kathryn Babayan
Professor of Iranian Culture and History
Professor Babayan has received a fellowship from the 2024-25 National Endowment for the Humanities for her project titled "The Persian Anthology: Reading Along the Margins." As part of the project, she will be conducting research and writing to develop a critical digital edition and translation of a seventeenth-century Persian law anthology.

U-M faculty/graduate students/staff join Puerto Rico teachers and UPR faculty at the University of Puerto Rico for K-12 pedagogical workshop in San Juan, Puerto Rico

CMENAS/LACS/EASC PARTNER WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO FOR PEDAGOGICAL WORKSHOP

INTERNATIONALIZING CURRICULUM IN PUERTO RICAN CLASSROOMS

By Jennifer Lund

On May 3-4, 2023, CMENAS' Title VI funding supported the University of Michigan/University of Puerto Rico (UM-UPR) pedagogical workshop for K-16 in-service and pre-service educators at the UPR, Rio Piedras campus, the only public institution of higher education on the island and a minority-serving institution. Since 2014, the U-M Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) has built a partnership with the Colleges of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences at UPR. In 2023, CMENAS, LACS, and the East Asian Studies Center (EASC) joined UPR to host a pedagogical workshop targeted for in-service K-12 teachers in the San Juan metropolitan area around the UPR Rio Piedras campus. This year's theme, "The Politics of Care in Puerto Rican Classrooms," critiqued the limited access to health services, reproductive rights, job security, and the increasing difficulty of access to housing and land as a result of extractive policies and forced displacement. Through this year's area studies curriculum development program, a breadth of issues were addressed, including such topics as female reproductive health or gender identities to practices of displacement of impoverished populations through racial or heteronormative violence. One of the essential purposes of the annual workshop is to create a collaborative space for and with Puerto Rican educators in order to integrate regional and global concepts, practices, and experiences to create area studies lesson modules that can be infused into the K-12 school curriculum on the island.

A wide range of faculty panel presentations on the politics of care opened day one of the program and featured **Victoria Langland**, associate professor of history, on a history of breastfeeding in Brazil along with four UPR faculty members: Social Work Professor **Elithet Silva Martinez** on gender violence and the ethics of care; Humanities Professor **Mabel Rodriguez Centeno** on what constitutes work in modern/colonial times; Linguistic Anthropologist Professor **Nadjah Rios Villarini** & Librarian **Dinah M. Wilson Fraites** co-presenting on archiving memory, and citizen participation; and program director of El Puente Latino Climate Action Network, **Federico Cintrón Moscoso** on approaches to addressing global warming. CMENAS funded two U-M graduate students to present on the politics of care in the Islamic world. Department of Anthropology PhD Candidate **Moniek van Rheenen** discussed re-centering care in childbirth situated in a Muslim community in Indonesia, and Department of Education PhD Student **monét cooper** shared her experience observing educational settings in Morocco and implications for female and queer students.

The May 2023 program benefited three teachers-in-training in UPR's College of Education and five teachers in nearby K-12 schools. The two-day program featured interactive pedagogical workshops and curriculum design studios led by Darin Stockdill of the Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research (CEDER) at Marsal Family School of Education alongside Ileana Quintero Rivera, a professor of curriculum and instruction in UPR's College of Education. During the curriculum design studios, the eight participating middle school and high school Puerto Rican teachers were divided into four different groups that included at least one U-M graduate student and one UPR faculty member. In all but one group, the medium language of discussion was Spanish. Each group worked on a curriculum development project centered around the sub-themes of health and gender equity, environmental care, and education as civic care. Edras Rodriguez-Torres, U-M librarian for Latin American and Caribbean studies, also contributed a session on text selection and analysis and provided resources for further research. The groups continued their cross-cultural collaboration with virtual meetings to complete the themed lesson modules with a final meeting with all participants to present the curriculum modules via Zoom on June 7. Rodriquez-Torres noted, "One of the interesting things that has come out of this collaboration has been that there is a lot of co-learning happening where our (U-M) graduate students learn from Puerto Rican teachers and Puerto Rican teachers learn from our area studies experts."

The U-M facilitators and presenters also had the opportunity to make site visits to two area schools of the participating teachers: *Escuela del Deporte de San Juan and Escuela Especializada en Matemáticas, Ciencias y Tecnología.* The former school, known for producing Olympic athletes, was heavily damaged during Hurricane Maria, and the state-of-the-art gymnasium has been completely rebuilt since 2017. The latter school, specializing in STEM subjects, featured a rooftop garden that was designed and created for and by the school's students.

Overall, the collaboration strengthened the partnership between U-M and UPR, and plans have already been put into motion to broaden the scope of the program to reach more teachers on the island and increase its relevance for Puerto Rican K-16 educators. José Alberto Marquez Gomila, a participating seventh-grade history teacher at Cupeyville School, reflected, "I believe creating lesson plans as a community is better for the exchange of ideas. It has been an important contribution to my training as an educator." He added, "Education is a human right; however, not all countries in the region have the same resources to meet all their educational needs. I believe this type of project should continue."

Interior spread of *Drawn Across Borders*, by George Butler, published February 2021 by Walker Books

TRADITIONS AND CHANGE

A BOOK CLUB FOR K-12 EDUCATORS

CMENAS Explores Human Migration with George Butler's "Drawn Across Borders"

By Azar Kafaei

As a part of the book club series titled, "Traditions and Change: Book Club for Educators," **Jennifer Lund**, CMENAS outreach coordinator, and **Azar Kafaei**, CMENAS-Rackham Doctoral Intern Fellow, PhD candidate in anthropology at U-M, and filmmaker, led a discussion on November 27 for K-12 teachers covering the book's themes of migration and displacement in the Middle East and other world regions. The session was held virtually and the participating educators included middle school and high school English language arts, humanities, and social studies teachers from across the nation. In advance of the discussion of the book, Kafaei shared her short documentary film shot in 2015 in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. This prompted a lively conversation about refugees' experiences of displacement and discrimination in their host countries. Several teachers expressed surprise about the contrast in living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as opposed to Syria as they listened to an interview with a Palestinian refugee. Another teacher noted that the permanent and urban built environment of the camp in Lebanon contrasted sharply with their previous assumption of refugee camps as temporary emergency solutions.

Writings and illustrations from the book *Drawn Across Borders: True Stories of Human Migration* by George Butler served to deepen educators' understanding of the conditions leading to migration, the experiences of refugees along the way, and the narratives within which they are often placed. In the second half of the workshop Lund presented a curriculum development component where she modeled a learning activity to aid teachers in developing age-appropriate interactions with the illustrations from *Drawn Across Borders* appropriate for curriculum related to human migration. Using a close-looking activity focused on Butler's reportage illustration depicting scenes of war zones, refugee camps, and conflict situations, the activity aimed at foregrounding the emotions and experiences of migrants and refugees while allowing students to ask questions, find common themes, and relate the illustrations to larger questions about human migration. Butler won Best Illustrated Story in 2023 at the American Society of Magazine Editors Awards, and *Drawn Across Borders* was shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Award in 2022. In addition, it won the 2021 Middle East Outreach Council book award for non-fiction. More information on the book can be found at **georgebutler.org**.

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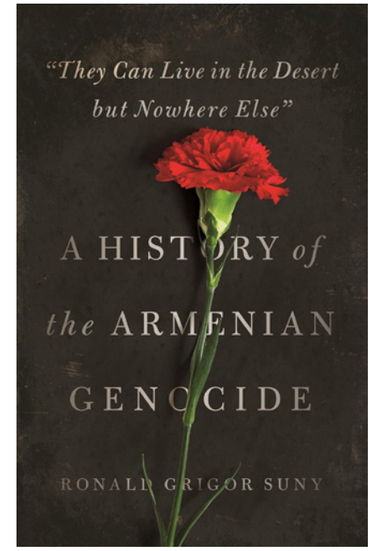

CMENAS PARTNERS WITH UM-NRCs FOR

WORLD HISTORY LEARNING COMMUNITY

U-M Professor Ronald Grigor Suny Connects with History Educators

By Jennifer Lund

In 2023-2024, CMENAS partnered with fellow UM-NRCs to host a virtual learning community focused on the discussion of books in the field of world history. The World History Learning Community is open to K-14 in-service teachers and community college faculty across the United States and meets in four two-hour sessions between November 2023 and April 2024. The purpose of this initiative is to build a collegial and intellectually invigorating learning community between fellow K-14 educators and esteemed scholars. By enabling this outreach in a virtual format, the impact of this initiative has expanded to include a cohort of 30+ teachers attending the sessions. To aid the globalization of curriculum, teachers are given a complimentary copy of the book and resources and lesson plans to accompany each discussion. One history teacher commented: "As we are working on developing Ethnic Studies for our district, I am making these lesson plans available to other teachers so that we can work them into our curriculum."

CMENAS, in partnership with the Center for Armenian Studies, hosted the first meeting on November 14 with Ronald Grigor Suny's book, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton University Press, 2015). Professor Suny, a distinguished emeritus professor of history at the University of Michigan, joined the cohort to speak about his motivations for writing the book, which has become known as the definitive narrative history of the Armenian genocide. He shared a brief synopsis of why, when, and how the Armenian genocide happened and discussed the psychological origins that paved the way for this genocide and others.

The three other sessions featured the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies with Ada Ferrer's *Cuba (Winner of the Pulitzer Prize): An American History* (Scribner, 2021), the Center for South Asian Studies with William Dalrymple's *The Anarchy* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), and the Center for African Studies with *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Pan Macmillan UK, 2019) by Adam Hochschild with Hochschild as guest speaker.

These events are funded in part by a Title VI National Resource Center grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

TACKLING POLARIZATION THROUGH BETTER CONVERSATIONS, SYSTEMS THINKING, AND MAJLIS-STYLE DEBATE

Two Workshops benefit faculty/staff/students at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, MI

By Jennifer Lund

CMENAS Title VI funding supported two interactive workshops in 2023 at Schoolcraft College focused on tackling polarization. The workshops, targeted for faculty, staff, and students, were held in a two-part series taking place on April 11, 2023 and September 20, 2023 as part of the college's Focus Series lectures. Both events were spearheaded by Helen Ditouras, English professor and co-chair of the International Institute at Schoolcraft College, and welcomed guest presenter Jennifer Geist, a global education specialist. Geist develops curricula and trainings for Doha Debates to help facilitators of all kinds guide participants in the dialogue skills needed to use systems thinking to address community problems. She is the co-author of the Deep Dive Guide which introduces the Middle Eastern Majlis-style of debate, a different form of public reasoning aimed towards consensus building and collective solutions to complex issues. On April 11, Geist led productive dialogue activities based on the Deep Dive Guide's modules for 22 faculty, staff, and students from Schoolcraft College on Zoom. With Dr. Glenn Cerny, president of Schoolcraft College, in attendance along with several other key faculty who work on DEI issues, there was overwhelming support for the minority-serving institution to continue the conversation with a Deep Dive Part II in September.

> "As political discourse continues to be the subject of contentious debate, **it was refreshing and necessary to screen a film that included thoughtful and meaningful dialogue with the purpose of uniting,** rather than dividing, people."
>
> HELEN DITOURAS

For the September 20 Deep Dive II event, CMENAS sponsored Geist to return along with two Doha Debates youth ambassadors to lead a group of 30 students through Deep Dive exercises to avoid polarization in response to a short film titled **(Un)divided**. The film engages with the concept of polarization through the true story of Amina, an Iraqi-American Muslim, and Joe, a Trump supporter, who make the effort to hear each other's stories. Ditouras commented, "As political discourse continues to be the subject of contentious debate, it was refreshing and necessary to screen a film that included thoughtful and meaningful dialogue with the purpose of uniting, rather than dividing, people."

The two youth ambassadors who led the event were Divya Rath, a second-year medical student at Howard University, and Dana Smiley, a senior at Emory University with a double major in Public Health and International Studies. The **Doha Debates Ambassador Program** is a 12-week training program that brings together several hundred young people from across the globe to share their different worldviews and learn to facilitate dialogue that cultivates empathy and understanding, as well as addressing real problems. Ambassadors Rath and Smiley guided Schoolcraft students to think about how people with different worldviews can be collaborators, to practice listening and dialoguing skills, and to practice identifying positions vs. interests to find common ground. In addition to reflecting on the film, the attendees did a series of personal reflection exercises that focused on what makes a good listener and how to ask questions that promote dialogue to find common ground. Geist concludes, "To have opportunities like this for ambassadors to facilitate large groups is the best part of my work. They take what they learned in the program and make it their own, guiding their peers to a better way of communicating—it's magic!"

MENA Reading Cohort K-14 educators at the Arab American National Museum

MENA READING COHORT EXPLORES PERSPECTIVES OF ARAB AMERICANS IN METRO DETROIT

A discussion of Arab American creative non-fiction at the Arab American National Museum

By Jennifer Lund

The 2023 Middle East North Africa (MENA) Reading Cohort held its first book discussion session in person on Saturday, October 28 at the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn, Michigan. The goal for the MENA Reading Cohort is to build a collegial and intellectually invigorating learning community open to all Michigan and regional K-16 educators to gain knowledge and skills in teaching MENA cultures and histories. Twelve educators, including two faculty members from a mid-Michigan college, convened in the AANM library to discuss the 2023 Arab American Book Award winner *Hadha Baladuna: Arab American Narratives of Boundary and Belonging* (2022). Also recognized as a Michigan Notable Book for 2023, *Hadha Baladuna* (meaning "this is our country" in Arabic) is the first work of creative nonfiction in the field of Arab American literature that focuses entirely on the Arab diaspora in Metro Detroit. Book editors (and contributors) Ghassan Zeineddine, Nabeel Abraham, and Sally Howell compiled the talent of emerging and established writers from Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Yemen to forefront Arab American individuals as they tell their personal stories based in Arab Detroit.

The participating educators included middle school and high school English language arts, humanities, and social studies teachers from West Michigan, Southeast Michigan, and Wisconsin as well as two faculty members from **Mid Michigan College in Mt. Pleasant** who teach English, humanities, and history. The session also included three of the book's contributors: Yousef Alquamoussi, English language arts teacher at Henry Ford Early College in Dearborn; Jeff Karoub, senior public relations executive at the University of Michigan and singer/songwriter; and Sally Howell, associate professor of history at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and director of the Center for Arab American Studies.

On commenting on the book after the event, one educator reflected on the issue of representation in the story titled "Thinking Detroit" when considering the past and history: "I would ask students if history is objective; does history rely on one untainted truth; or is history composed of multiple understandings?"

Further consideration of diverse perspectives emerged organically via the personal stories highlighted in the book with roots in the MENA region that caused several educators to grapple with the current events unfolding from the Israel-Hamas conflict that had recently erupted. An educator shared: "The discussion opened me to seeing the Palestinian side of the conflict. I have been speaking with several colleagues about how to teach the conflict fairly from both sides, including the issue of apartheid, something I had not looked at before the discussion."

Following the book discussion, cohort members had the opportunity to view many of the interactive exhibits of the Arab American National Museum (AANM), a Smithsonian affiliate. As the first and only museum of its kind in the United States devoted to recording the Arab American experience, the museum has one of the most extensive archives of Arab American historical documents, oral histories, and artifacts. It is the only museum in the country that actively collects Arab American art. For more information on the museum, visit: **arabamericanmuseum.org**.

This event was funded in part by a Title VI National Resource Center grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

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