



EMENAS

ABOUT THE CENTER

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

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CMENAS AT



On the cover: Noravank, a 13th century Armenian monastery, Amaghu River Valley, near the town of Yeghegnadzor, Armenia.

Above:

CMENAS's Academic Program Specialist, Jessica Riggs, took a quick break from the panels to visit the famous Alamo.

MESA

Just a short walk from the conference venue is La Villita, a historic neighborhood now a hub for community events and artistry.



CMENAS had a wonderful four days of invigorating conversations and intellectual exchanges with others committed to the field of MENA studies and K-14 outreach during the 2018 meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA).

Photos courtesy of Jessica Riggs



Above:

Director Samer Ali emceed the MESA Awards Ceremony and had the opportunity to give Professor Joel Beinin, an alum of U-M, the MESA Mentoring Award.

Left:

The CMENAS staff happily traded in Ann Arbor's grayness for San Antonio's sunshine during this year's MESA meeting in November 2018.



DESTINATION MOROCCO

By Leah Squires

I probably shouldn't confess publicly that at the first opportunity, I ignored the signature rule of school-sponsored travel: no venturing off alone. Our group of 20 masters' students and two faculty advisors from the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy had touched down in Morocco only hours ago, and we had a layover in Rabat since we were waiting to catch the Marrakech Express. (In Morocco, they just call it the train.)

We were traveling as part of the Ford School's International Economic Development Program (IEDP), which is a student-led experiential learning and international policy program composed of a seven-week course and one-week field component during the Winter 2019 semester. The country of study changes each year based on a student nomination and election process. As a prospective student, I already had a scheme to nominate and lead IEDP Morocco. Rarely do our best intentions come to fruition, yet almost two years later, I was lucky enough to find myself back in Morocco as the IEDP President. And after a year of planning with a team of student leaders, I was relieved that we

had made it as far as the Rabat train station. We were well on our way, so I took a moment for myself to visit a beloved juice bar around the corner. I had my last avocado-banana juice on the morning I left Morocco in July 2015. As a Peace Corps Youth Development Volunteer for the past three years, I lived in a small town outside of Beni Mellal near the Middle Atlas. I spent my days teaching at the youth center, supporting efforts to open a library, learning Moroccan Darija, cooking zalouk and tagine. I had the opportunity to invest in a new community and culture; Peace Corps wasn't just the toughest job I ever loved—it was my life.



Never did I imagine that my first visit back would be as part of an academic program; however, my experience with IEDP surpassed my expectations and opened a new window onto Morocco. Applying an academic lens to a favored and familiar place put my Peace Corps experience—and the lived experience of my Moroccan host family and friends—in a new perspective. Youth unemployment in Morocco has climbed to 27 percent, up from 18 percent in 2012 (the year I began my service). Many of my close co-workers—who volunteered alongside me—are still unemployed, have returned to school, or have emigrated elsewhere.

IEDP is structured around targeted policy projects, and our class reviewed policies on unemployment, water and sustainability, gender equity, and statistical capacity. In country, we set up

various stakeholder meetings with people actively involved in the policymaking process. As a member of the water group, I sat across the table from delegates from the Secretariat of Sustainable Development, the Water Department, and the National Office for Water and Electricity.

Oftentimes, professionalism and academia instill some level of expertise, yet my return to Morocco was another exercise in cultural humility. As a student, I went to learn about Morocco's plans for a water-secure future—and left with more questions than when I arrived. The chance to unite my interests in policy making and area studies in a real-world context threw into sharp relief the challenges of working as an outsider.

Taking a cab back to our hotel, though, and striking up a conversation with the driver, I was once again *kbuti* or *mellalia*. Language was still the key—a way to unlock and complicate my outsider status. I was reminded that the most valuable lesson for me is always one of cultural exchange, and in the context of our class a critical lesson: the majority of students did not have Arabic (or French), had limited exposure to North Africa, and had never visited the region. At the end of the day, the most rewarding aspect of IEDP was sharing these everyday cultural elements of Morocco with my peers—whether it was bargaining in the medina, visiting the hammam, or sharing an avocado-banana juice, *bla skaar*. (Pro-tip: order it without sugar as the banana is a natural sweetener.)

WHERE ARE THEY?

Last semester, CMENAS caught up with two of its alumni who took the academic route after leaving the center. This semester, we talked to Devin Bathish and Tina Alkhersan, who chose to work for the nonprofit sector after graduation.

After completing his CMENAS major in 2017, **Devin Bathish** returned to his hometown of Flint, Michigan, to serve as executive director of the Arab American Heritage Council.

The value CMENAS places on its community has influenced how he runs the Arab American Heritage Council.

“I loved the CMENAS community, especially the ability to connect and learn from others who are so interested in their own Arab/MENA identities,” Bathish said. A central goal of the council is to “unite the Arab American community of Flint and increase its civic engagement.” By being an active member of the CMENAS and MENA communities on campus, Bathish gained and honed his interpersonal skills that enabled him to successfully carry out the council’s mission.

Bathish expressed his gratitude for the training and support he received from CMENAS faculty, staff, and other students during his undergraduate studies. “Everything I do [now] is helped by what I learned in my degree,” Bathish continued. “Being able to tailor my degree was massively helpful. It allowed me to improve my Arabic, which I use on a daily basis, and I feel as though I am able to educate non-Arabs about Arab culture and heritage with confidence

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Devin Bathish

because the things I am addressing were directly taught to me” in the classes in Middle East and North African Studies (MENAS).

Since finishing her BA in 2017, life has taken **Tina Alkhersan** all over the world.

“First, I moved to Pittsburgh in order to take part in the Coro Fellowship for Public Affairs,” Alkhersan explained. “Then I went to Lesvos, Greece, to volunteer in the Kara Tepe refugee camp with Movement on the Ground.”

Above and beyond the area-studies knowledge that Alkhersan gained



Tina Alkhersan

throughout her undergraduate studies and later served her career, acquisition of the Arabic language was the most important and valuable skill. “I really think that

my focus on the Arabic language, which I took for eight semesters, has opened doors...for me,” Alkhersan said. “In Lesvos, I was one of the only volunteers who spoke Arabic, which was honestly so shocking.” “Language,” she added, “is essential to being able to understand an individual.”

Alkhersan also shared the personal relevance of her MENAS degree: “It has allowed me to connect to my culture in a way that I couldn’t before. For example, when I recently traveled to Oman to visit my family, I could communicate much better with the [members] and enhance relationships we had already established. This is perhaps one of the most beneficial things I’ve gained from the degree!”

To join the CMENAS Alumni Network, email us your information at cmenas@umich.edu.

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE LEGACY OF ART

Undergraduate students now have yet another option to explore Middle East history, through the lens of art. Sascha Crasnow, lecturer at the Residential College, developed the course, “Art and Conflict in the Middle East: 1900-Present,” to broaden student engagement in the social and political history of the Middle East.

“As a student, I always hated history and I was terrible at it,” she began. But art proved her point of entry. “I enjoy taking history out of this ‘we must remember the dates and this is the chronology’ structure,” she continued, “and making it more dynamic by adding the humanistic aspect, adding the cultural aspect, and showing the intersection between these broad events and how people respond to them through cultural production.”

Starting with World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, students study major regional conflicts to understand the responses of artists then and now. “I hope [students] come to understand the ‘history’ part of art history,” she said. “To see how the art [reflects] historical moments...not only the political chronology of events, [but] the actual human aspect...and how artists are engaged in the political [as well as] historical conversation.” One course goal is to appreciate the relationship of artistic production to actual human aspects, to historical moments—not merely chronology—and to artists’ engagement in political as well as historical conversations.

With a time period spanning over 100 years, Crasnow’s task of selecting historical events and pieces of art for the course is difficult. “I never try to give the illusion of comprehensiveness because that is just impossible,” she stated. “I pick artwork and artists based on big moments in the history that might be familiar to some students.” There is a lot of material to work with because of these moments’ significance to both regional and global history.

The impossibility of entirely representing Middle East history, however, proves advantageous to students. “I like giving students a lot of free range on their final papers, so this allows them to follow up on topics that really spark and pique their interests,” Crasnow explained.

The relationship between politics and art production has always greatly interested Crasnow. In a region consistently exoticized or feared, she asserted, art can be the space to complicate tropes. “Art as a primary source gives insight, not to the players who are sitting in the room and making decisions, but [about] the

“Art as a primary source gives insight, not to the players who are sitting in the room and making decisions, but [about] the people who those decisions are impacting.”

people who those decisions are impacting,” she said. “Some students are not even aware that art is being produced in these places that are known—especially in the West—primarily through their conflicts. It is incredibly important to pay attention to art, to understand the region beyond just what we see in the news,” concluded Crasnow.



Akram Zaatar, Saida June 6, 1982, composite digital image, Lambda print, 2009.



Sascha Crasnow



PLACE AND

A CONVERSATION WITH PROFESSOR AMAL HASSAN

Frankly, I always thought I would end up in the arts and literary world,” Amal Hassan Fadlalla said. “I think the reason I chose anthropology is that it has an artful side to it. To write an ethnography means that you can use this methodology to register people’s voices and write them in a narrative style.”

Throughout the process of writing her most recent book, *Branding Humanity: Competing Narratives of Rights, Violence, and Global Citizenship*, Fadlalla never forgot the creative and human element of storytelling.

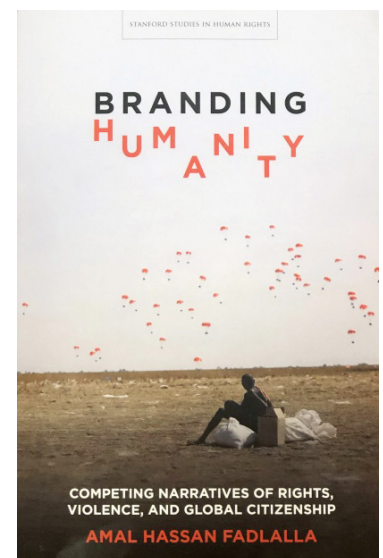
Initially, she intended the book to be about memory and home, particularly about how Sudan is still very present in the diaspora despite physical distance from the homeland.

“I wanted to write about how Sudanese remember Sudan in the diaspora and what Sudan means to them away from home,” Fadlalla explained.

The original plans for the book, however, changed as the global conversations around Sudan shifted towards the Save Darfur movement and the campaigns to solve the longest civil war between the northern and southern parts of the country.

“Sudan became a big political question on the international stage,” added Fadlalla. “So, to an extent, I had to go with the wave.”

While the broader conversation about Sudan followed a political tone, Fadlalla did not want her book to be overly political.



VOICE

FADLALLA

“I inserted my interlocutors’ narratives in every page, and even inserted myself and my creative writing,” she continued. “I open the book with a poem that I wrote when Sudan split into two nation-states. It brings in politics, but also the humanist element that I value as an ethnographer.”

By looking at a diaspora community, Professor Amal Hassan Fadlalla’s research highlights the fragmentation of time and space; throughout the process of researching for and writing the book, she crossed borders -- domestic, national, transnational, and virtual -- complicating her role as an ethnographer searching for the meanings of placemaking in her work.

“Anthropology often grounds researchers in one place, but now the

meanings of place are challenged” Fadlalla said. “Today, everyone is somewhere else even if they are right in front of you. They can be talking with you here, but also on their phone arranging some meeting with someone else overseas.”

Place has such a great impact in how Sudan is discussed in *Branding Humanity*. Funded by various institutions, Professor Amal Hassan Fadlalla had the opportunity to challenge anthropological tendencies to root oneself in a singular place. With funding from U-M and a writing fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, for instance, she immersed herself in the large Sudanese diaspora community in Washington, D.C. Later, through a fellowship from the German Research Foundation, she was able to meet face-to-face in Europe with many activists whose acquaintance she had made online, adding depth and complexity to how these activists understand and construct Sudan while in the diaspora.

“In meeting on the ground, we confront the intimacy of a face-to-face rapport,” Fadlalla said. “I was sitting in a restaurant in Geneva, Switzerland, with a Sudanese activist living in France, who crossed the border to come meet me there, recalling various memories of Sudan and its people. The intimacies of these kind of conversations cannot be felt through virtual communication; something gets lost in the process.”

This nostalgia over Sudan does not necessarily come through in an online conversation. By moving from place to place, Fadlalla sees a fuller view of Sudan as simultaneously an activist site and a scattered community lived, remembered, and reimagined in the diaspora.

Fadlalla carefully and passionately weaves the voices of her interlocutors and their stories into two distinct public spheres she describes in *Branding Humanity*: the humanitarian publics and the diaspora publics.

She explained that the focus on the humanitarian publics was not on how to engage Sudan’s diversity to build a unified and inclusive nation.

“Not only do human rights and humanitarian NGOs and political elites center their discourse on Sudan as a religiously and racially fragmented society in a sensational way, but they also do so in a way that excludes diaspora voices, especially voices of secular elites,” she said.

The current uprising in Sudan returns us to Fadlalla’s discussion about the exclusion of diaspora voices. Unlike the previous human rights and humanitarian campaigns for Sudan before its separation in 2011, the current protests in Sudan give more visibility to the voices of secular and liberal youths and elites both in Sudan and in the diaspora, as she anticipated in her book.

“I mention what is happening in Sudan now because the activists who are leading the protests in the streets are the ones whose voices were excluded, you know, in previous humanitarian campaigns,” she said. During a talk in late March 2019 to launch *Branding Humanity* at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Professor Amal Hassan Fadlalla commented on the recent protest in Sudan. “[The activists] are claiming the streets and something beautiful is coming out that I had not noticed before, where they are trying to unite, not fragment.”



GPASS

Global Project in Applied Social Sciences (GPASS) is a new initiative launched in 2018-2019 by CMENAS and two other Title VI National Resource Centers at the International Institute: the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. The three centers collaborated with Washtenaw Community College (WCC) in GPASS to deliver professional development and teaching resources to WCC faculty. This initial phase culminated in two training sessions at WCC, led by Denise Galarza Sepúlveda (U-M Center for Community-Engaged Academic Learning) in designing courses in community-based learning (CBL). The second session, held on February 8th, 2019, featured a joint panel of U-M and WCC faculty members who shared lessons and best practices from their own CBL courses. GPASS' immediate purpose is to equip WCC faculty with the resources and principles for enhancing students' learning through work with local or global communities. Ultimately, GPASS aims to develop partnerships with community colleges to expand faculty's and students' knowledge related to the three NRCs' geographic regions of study.

Above: WCC faculty at the first GPASS session on January 10, 2019.



MENAS sat down with Hana Mattar, academic program specialist for Global Islamic Studies Center (GISC), to learn about her interest in the issues of higher education, religion, and area studies, and about GISC's current work.

CMENAS: *Did you always think you wanted to go into higher education or focus on religion?*

Hana Mattar (HM): In college, I started out with a psychology major, but I also took a couple of sociology and women-and gender-studies courses. Ultimately, I ended up adding a women-and gender-studies major to my undergraduate degree. Through those courses, and considering my history of growing up in countries like Egypt, Italy, and the United States, I got really interested in race relations and issues of social justice. So, after I graduated, I started working at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, which does unbiased research on American Muslims. I worked there for two years, but I realized I wanted to do more student-centered work, so I moved to University of Michigan. For two years, I worked for the Center for Entrepreneurship, which gave me a chance to really engage with students, but I did miss working in my field and on issues of race, social justice, and inclusion. Thankfully, I found this job with GISC.

CMENAS: *What do you enjoy about your work with GISC?*

HM: Honestly, I love the ability to have conversations about issues that impact the various



HIGHER EDUCATION ACROSS THE GLOBE

“In the past, conversations about Muslims, Arabs, or Arab Americans, have only really been relevant at a personal level, but now I have the chance to engage with these issues professionally as well.”

Hana Mattar

communities that I engage with. In the past, these conversations about Muslims, Arabs, or Arab Americans, have only really been relevant at a personal level, but now I have the chance to engage with these issues professionally as well.

CMENAS: *What has GISCS worked on over the past few semesters?*

HM: We hosted two conferences during the fall 2018 term. One was “Margins of the Mediterranean,” which happened in October. It was just fascinating to see the different communities. When people would be presenting their work, they would be talking about how Egypt was affected by the Mediterranean trade, but at the same time it affected the Armenian population. The entire conference complicated our thinking about the Mediterranean’s impact on surrounding areas. So many different communities are connected through those waters! It was a ton of

information I was unfamiliar with and really interested in. The second conference we did was “Destination Detroit,” in September. That one was even closer to home because I live in Dearborn. It was really cool to look at how the different Muslim, Latinx, and other minority communities grew with and around each other in the city.

CMENAS: *You also spent some time working in higher education at the American University in Cairo. What was that experience like?*

HM: Interactions with other people were so different there. When I was working in admissions, it was less about following strict professional protocol and more about making sure I was taking care of the person in front of me and creating a warm environment. I loved the chance to work bilingually. The approach to topics was also different. Sometimes, it feels like studying Islam here is about looking at something far away, which we know is not the reality. But then, in Egypt, these important institutions in Islamic history are right outside our doorstep.

CMENAS: *Reflecting on working in higher education in two countries, what do you enjoy about the nature of the work?*

HM: In both places, and generally in higher-education jobs, one thing that makes it great is that you are continually growing and learning. This opportunity to develop my own mind while at work is something that I greatly value.

CMENAS + CSEAS

COLLABORATE TO LAUNCH THE MENA-SEA TEACHER PROGRAM



CMENAS has partnered with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) to offer the MENA-SEA Teacher Program, an exciting, brand-new outreach initiative for Grade 6-12 teachers from Michigan and the region. Throughout the 2019-2020 academic calendar, the program will train a cohort of Grade 6-12 educators to deepen their understanding and appreciation of religious diversity in the two regions of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Southeast Asia (SEA).

Convening on a Saturday once a month between September 2019 and June 2020 (excluding December), the educators

will participate in scholar-led workshops; attend world-class performances and cultural events; visit houses of worship, museums, and entrepreneurial businesses; and meet with religious leaders and community representatives. The cohort will also develop teaching resources about religious diversity in the MENA and SEA freely available to fellow educators.

Upon successful completion of the MENA-SEA Teacher Program, each educator will receive a \$1,000 honorarium and be eligible for state continuing education credit hours from the Michigan Department of Education or from the departments of education in the states wherein they teach.

The MENA-SEA Teacher Program is open to Michigan and regional teachers from public, private, and charter secondary schools, as well as school leaders, librarians, and other school-based educators. For its inaugural cohort, the program received nearly 25 applications from educators both near and far, and six finalists were chosen. If interested in applying to the MENA-SEA Teacher Program for the 2020–2021 school year, please expect the release of both announcement and application on our website in January 2020.

EVENTS

CMENAS STUDENT DINNER



MENAS minor **Christopher Pumford** and master's degree students **Derek Lief** and **Sarah Gerges** at the Fall 2018 CMENAS Student Dinner on September 21, 2018.



MENAS master's degree students **Megan Hough**, **Asma Noray**, and **Mekarem Eljamal**.



MENAS master's degree students **Bryon Maxey** and **Ali Al Momar**.



CONGRATULATIONS TO PROFESSOR ALEXANDER KNYSH

Knysh received the 2019 Iran World Award for Book of the Year in Islamic Studies, for *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*.

BDS, NONVIOLENCE, AND THE LEGACY OF MLK IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Mr. Craig Corrie, of the Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace & Justice, speaks about his daughter at the CMENAS Teach-In Town Hall, "BDS, Nonviolence, and the Legacy of MLK in the Middle East," on January 22, 2019.



Ms. Cindy and Mr. Craig Corrie, founders of the Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace & Justice, and **Professor David Palumbo-Liu** of Stanford University discuss principles of peace, nonviolence, and justice in Palestine and Israel.

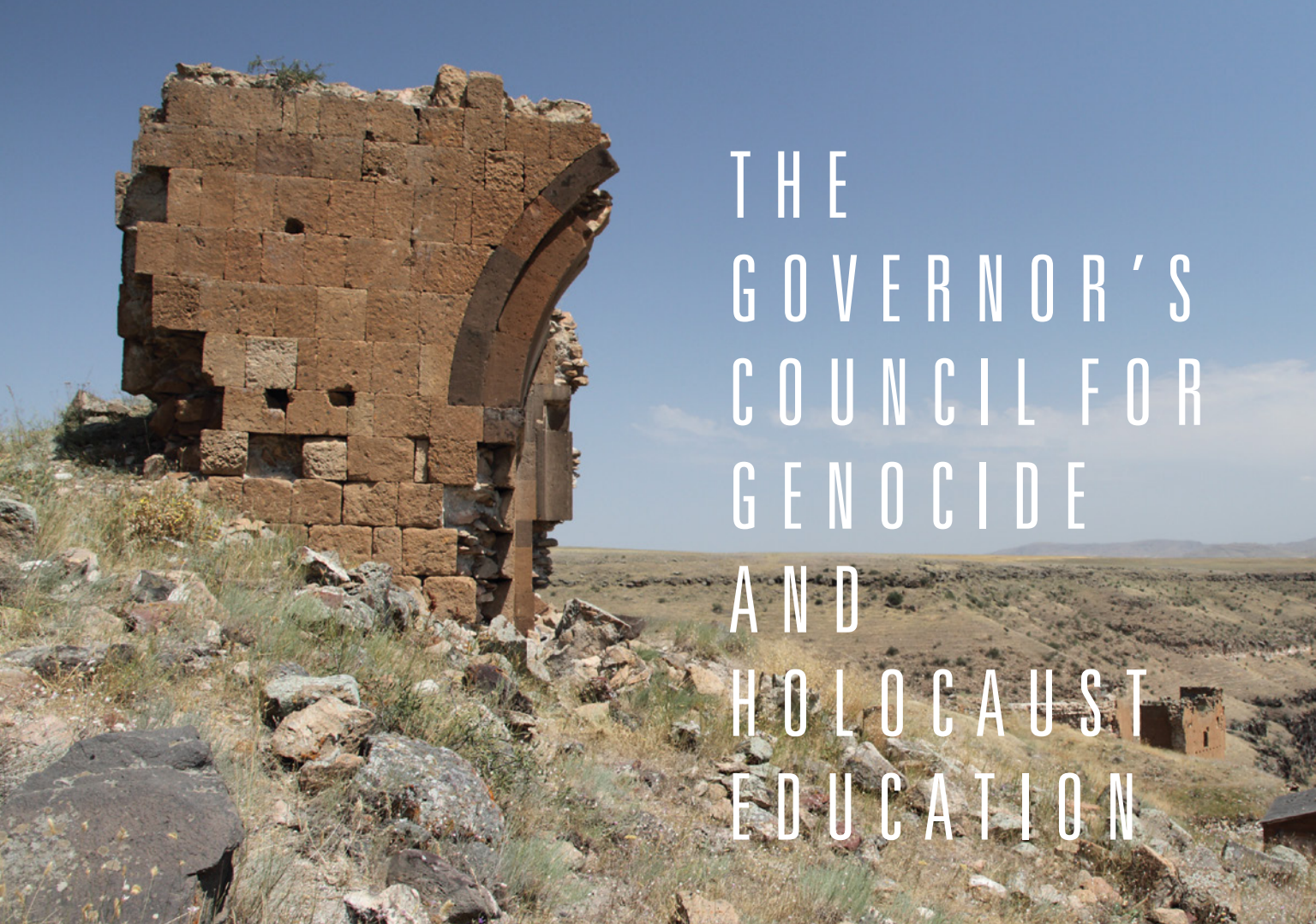


Professor Jeffrey Heath gives a presentation entitled, "Minority Languages in the Middle East and North Africa," at the International Institute's Conference, "Indigenous Languages: From Endangerment to Revitalization and Resilience," on October 25, 2018. The United Nations named 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

PRESENTATION + COLLOQUIUM



Evyn Kropf, Librarian of Middle East Studies and Religious Studies, speaks to students on library resources and research strategies, as part of the CMENAS 2019 Fall Colloquium, "The Process of Discovery: How Scholars Write Books Today," on October 22, 2018.



THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL FOR GENOCIDE AND HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

By Kevork B. Bardakjian

In response to the initiative of Armenian and Jewish individuals and organizations, on June 13, 2016 former Governor Rick Snyder signed into law HB 4493, which passed in the House and Senate of the State of Michigan, requiring schools to teach the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust, under the rubric of genocide education. On 23 September 2017, the Governor appointed a fifteen-member council, the Governor's Council for Genocide and Holocaust Education and two ex-officio members, me of the University of Michigan and Hayg Oshagan of Wayne State University. The Council's task was to identify and advise stakeholders of sources and methods to teach genocide education to Grade 8-12 students; to devise programs and identify resources

to train teachers; and to promote implementation of genocide education in both schools and the public. The Council's commission was temporary and expired on August 26, 2018.

The first meeting of the Council occurred on 5 April 2017. A number of work groups were set up to plan and devise the program: Education/Resources Workgroup; Teacher Training Workgroup; Community/Public Education Workgroup; and Funding/Finance Workgroup. I oversaw the Curriculum/Education/Resources Workgroup and collaborated with the other groups to complement and contribute to the ultimate task of designing a website for teaching genocide. The website is in place and will be published soon.

I eagerly agreed to work with the Council because I believe in the importance of preventing future crimes of genocide through education; although the emphasis in this case is on the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust, there are extensive materials on the website for the study of other instances of genocide (e.g. Rwanda, the Ukrainian Holodomor, etc.). Throughout my teaching career, both at Harvard and here at Michigan, documenting and teaching the Armenian Genocide has been one of my principal goals. I have been particularly attracted to the study of Ottoman Turkish documents, most of which, especially Ottoman government records, are still under lock and key, and memoirs of certain contemporaneous Ottoman officials. I am also interested in German complicity in the Armenian Genocide.



I see certain comparable patterns between the Armenian Genocide and German atrocities in Belgium at the beginning of WW I, as well as German responsibility documented in new material coming out since my book, *Hitler and the Armenian Genocide* (1986). In December 2018, I participated in the Third Global Forum held in Yerevan, Armenia, dedicated to preventing the crime through education.

Denial of genocidal crimes in general and the Armenian Genocide in particular has also motivated me to include the Armenian Genocide in my courses. Establishing facts and factors that lead to genocide provides fundamental support and guidance for anticipating and preventing such crimes in the future.

Above: Ruins of churches in Turkey taken in August 2016. Photography by David Low.



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

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

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

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At left:
Photo of High Atlas Mountains in Morocco taken in March 2019 by students attending the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy's International Economic and Development Program.

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