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## ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS

OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

### DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We knew that it would be challenging to start the academic year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as classes switched into online format, the public programs of CMEIS shifted onto the Zoom platform, which most people recognize to be inferior to personal contact. While it is undeniable that a constant stream of teleconferences can be exhausting, the need for our programs was still tangible. If anything, the number of meetings and lectures may have proliferated beyond the averages of previous years. With the prospect of returning to ordinary physical classrooms and in-person lectures next fall, we will certainly look back on this “plague year” with mixed feelings. But among the positive outcomes, we can highlight a few noteworthy examples of national and international collaboration. These virtual events include:

- a series of guest speakers, sponsored by the Carolina Seminar in Middle East Studies, in conjunction with Professor Sarah Shields’ course on the modern Middle East;
- four classes supported by the Connecting Carolina Classrooms with the World (the Dean’s initiative), with interactive video sessions with classes in the Middle East;
- Practitioners Courses, which brought in experts with NGO and comparable field experience to provide faculty complementary topics and views for their courses;
- a virtual workshop with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, featuring peace activists from the Middle East;
- Teachers Collaborating across Borders, in collaboration with the University of Arizona, which brought together 15 US teachers and 14 Middle East teachers by Zoom;
- a five-part webinar on teaching Middle East studies cosponsored with the University of Michigan, in which hundreds of educators participated;
- finally, the jewel in the crown, the nine-month Middle East and African Cultures Teacher Fellows program, which took place virtually with participants all across North Carolina.

We can all be proud of these events in the way that they keep us connected to fellow educators and scholars. Stay tuned for next year, when we hope to increase our collaborations, particularly with colleges and universities in North Carolina.

- Carl W. Ernst

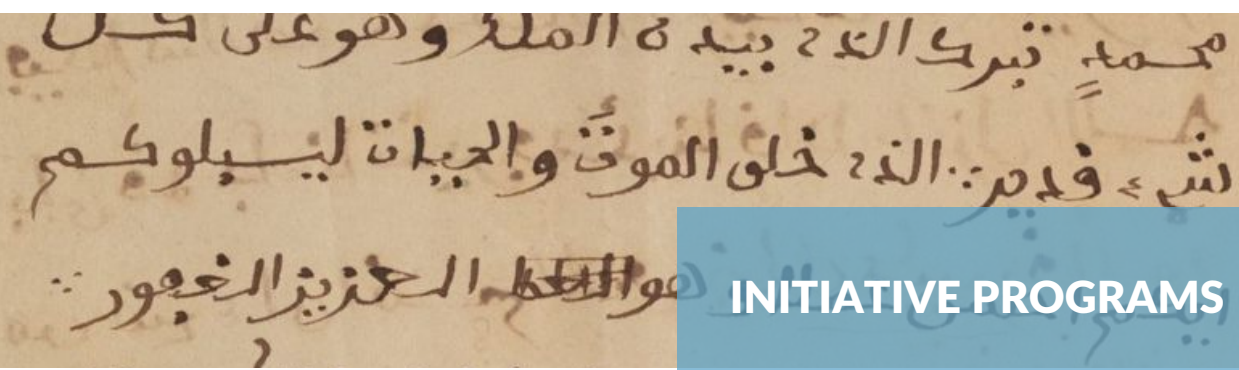


Image: Manuscript written by Omar ibn Said, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

## Omar ibn Said Initiative

As part of their commitment to investigate and overcome racism in all its forms, the Center, along with the Duke University Middle East Studies Center, the Duke Islamic Studies Center, and the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies, launched the Omar Ibn Said Initiative in June 2020 to support events and instructional activities on racism as it relates to Middle East and Islamic studies.

The initiative is named in honor of Omar Ibn Said, a Muslim scholar from West Africa who was enslaved in North Carolina. His Arabic writings are the subject of a faculty-student collaborative research project at Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill, and related to a digitization project by UNC-Chapel Hill, the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library, and the West African Research Center (WARC), to preserve endangered manuscripts by Islamic scholars in Senegal.

Activities in the initiative addressed topics ranging from Afro-Iranians, to identity in North Africa, to the racialization of Muslims in the United States. The events reached diverse audiences including K-12 teachers, community college students, university communities, and the general public.



## INITIATIVE PROGRAMS

### Panel Discussion: Black and Afro-Iranians in Iranian Cultural Imaginary

Featuring Panelists M. Shadee Malaklou, Berea College; Amirhossein Vafa, Shiraz University; Priscillia Kounkou Hoveyda, Human Rights Lawyer; Parisa Vaziri, Cornell University. Moderated by Sima Shakhsari, University of Minnesota.

October 6, 2020

### Lecture: Blackness in Malaysia and Indonesia: Stories from the Field

Timothy Daniels, Professor of Anthropology, Hofstra University

October 22, 2020

### K-12 Webinar: Understanding Racism in the Arab World and Beyond

Shreya Parikh, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Sociology, UNC-Chapel Hill and CERI-Sciences Po Paris

November 16, 2020

### Roundtable Discussion: Conceptualizations of Race, Blackness, and Identity in North Africa

Panelists Afifa Ltifi, Cornell University; Razan Idris, University of Pennsylvania; and Philip Murphy, Independent Scholar. Moderated by Omar Ali, UNC-Greensboro.

April 19, 2021

### Conversation: Islam in America - From the First Muslims to Contemporary Debates

Hina Muneeruddin, Doctoral Candidate, Religious Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill; Yasmine Flodin-Ali, Doctoral Candidate, Religious Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill

April 27, 2021



## A Discussion of War and Covid-19 in Yemen

On September 24, 2020, the Center hosted a discussion of the military, political, ecological and public health crises in Yemen. This webinar featured Dr. Dana Moss, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, and Fadia Thabet, Yemeni peace activist and humanitarian aid worker. The discussion was moderated by Charles Kurzman, Center co-director and professor of sociology at UNC-Chapel Hill.

The speakers emphasized that the conflict in Yemen left the country particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, the Yemeni health system had been shattered by years of war. Half of its hospitals had been destroyed by the fighting and the country was already extremely under-resourced in medical supplies.

Dr. Moss provided an overview of the history of Yemen and the political crisis. She highlighted the

suffering of civilians from the conflict citing the destruction of schools, insufficient humanitarian aid, widespread famine, and displacement. Ms. Thabet, who spent years working on peacebuilding in Yemen, elaborated on the current situation in Yemen and the lack of organized global response to the crisis. "With a global pandemic, Yemen has been a forgotten country in war," she noted.

In a lively discussion, attendees posed questions on the complex political landscape of Yemen, the different groups contesting control over the territory, and the spread of COVID-19. The speakers also highlighted organizations and individuals working to make a difference in Yemen, particularly Yemeni-women-run initiatives engaged in peacebuilding work in the country. "People even under the worst possible circumstances you can imagine are always collectively mobilizing to make things better, and restore hope and dignity," offered Dr. Moss.



Image: Minoo Emami, MFA student, UNC Department of Art and Art History, "Woven for Him" (2014), mixed media painting, image courtesy of the artist

## Virtual Symposium Explores Love and Desire in Modern Iran and the Diaspora

The UNC Persian Studies Program, with Center support, organized a series of panels on "Revisiting Discourses of Love, Sex, and Desire in Modern Iran and the Diaspora," which took place between September 5 and October 3, 2020. The multi-week symposium promoted nuanced discussion around love and desire in modern Iran. The virtual format enabled attendees from around the world to participate; over 200 people registered for each panel.

This event was organized by Claudia Yaghoobi, Roshan Institute Associate Professor in Persian Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill. Selected works from the symposium will be published as part of the book series, "Sex, Marriage, and Family in the Middle East," edited by Afary and Yaghoobi. Other selected papers will appear as a special issue in the Journal of Middle East Women's Studies.

## Kitab Talk Series Highlights

### Digital Resources

A collaboration between the Center and the UNC Libraries, the 'Kitab Talk' series (*kitab* meaning 'book' in Arabic) connects students, faculty, and staff with the latest developments in the library world.

While initially held as an in-person series, the COVID-19 pandemic and the cessation of many in-person library services quickly changed the scope of the talks to a virtual format. "During the early months of the pandemic, I received a lot of queries from students and faculty about what digital resources were immediately available," reflected Rustin Zarkar, Librarian for Middle East and Islamic Studies. Lectures in the series spotlighted valuable resources to any scholar of the Middle East, such as the Arab American Newspapers Project, the Digital Library of the Middle East, Hazine, Akassah Center for Photography, and the British Library's Turkic & Turkish Collections.

Series presenters not only spoke about their respective projects, but also highlighted contemporary questions, debates, and tools available in the field. On the technical side, Akhram Khater from NC State's Khayrallah Center presented on their development of Arabic Language Optical Character Recognition Software, and Jacob Hill, Stanford Libraries, discussed the technical challenges of building an open access platform that aggregates materials from a wide variety of partnering institutions.

Furthermore, the Hazine Editorial Team and Akassah's Jasmine Soliman explored questions of ethics and social justice in library and archival practices. In addition to presenting on their resource guides, Hazine team members N.A. Mansour, Heather Hughes, Marwa Gadallah, and Shabbir Agha Abbas discussed neocolonial and unequal power dynamics throughout the research life cycle, while Jasmine Soliman introduced audiences to post-custodial approaches to collections development and subject headings as pathways—or obstacles—to data.

### The Arab American Newspapers Project

Dr. Akram Khater, Professor of History,  
Director of the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese  
Diaspora Studies, North Carolina State  
University

August 26, 2020

### Building the Digital Library of the Middle East

Jacob Hill, Data Manager and Project  
Coordinator, Stanford Libraries

September 29, 2020

### Hazine: A Guide to Researching the Middle East and Beyond

Hazine co-editors Shabbir Agha Abbas,  
Columbia University; Marwa Gadallah, graphic  
designer; Heather Hughes, University of  
Pennsylvania; N.A. Mansour, Princeton  
University

February 4, 2021

### Akkasah, NYU Abu Dhabi: Photographic Heritage of the MENA Region

Jasmine Soliman, Akkasah Photo Archivist

March 2, 2021

### Take Another Look: Revisiting the British Library's Turkish and Turkic Collections

Dr. Michael Erdman, Curator of Turkish and  
Turkic Collections, British Library

April 6, 2021



Image: Akkasah, Ozge Calafato Collection

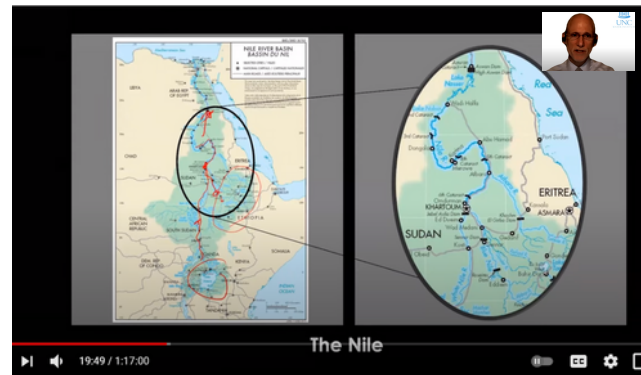


# Geopolitics of Contested Waters: The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

On October 1, 2020, the virtual discussion “Damned If You Do and Dammed If You Don’t: Troubled Waters Over the Nile,” explored the history of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and its impact on countries in the Nile basin. The discussion featured Dr. Aaron Salzberg, director of The Water Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill, and Dr. Erika Weinthal, professor of environmental policy at Duke University. Previously, Dr. Salzberg served as the first Special Coordinator on Water in the U.S. Department of State to mitigate tensions over water. For more than a decade, he worked with Nile basin countries to address the potential for conflict.

Announced in 2011, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has faced much criticism. While the dam may provide Ethiopia with a much needed agricultural boost that could serve as a reprieve for the country’s economy, downstream nations such as Egypt and

Sudan would pay the price. Focusing on opportunities for conflict resolution, Dr. Salzberg noted a need for open dialogue between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt over the dam’s construction. The discussion was enhanced through robust questions from the audience on the GERD initiative, socio-economic impacts of the dam, regional relationships, and the geopolitics of water of scarcity.



## 18th Annual Duke-UNC Middle East and Islamic Studies Graduate Student Conference

The UNC Islamicate Graduate Student Association organized the 18th Annual Duke-UNC Conference, one of the longest running graduate student Middle East and Islamic Studies conferences in the U.S. This year’s conference, “What Does Race Have to Do with Religion? Racialization and Worldwide Islam,” took place online February 20-21, 2021. The event featured a program of graduate student research, artists showcasing their work, and a keynote speech by Dr. Zareena Grewal (Yale University).

Conference panels included "Identity Formations and in Formation," "Social Conflict and Resistance" and "Histories of Racialization." Presenting graduate students engaged a range of disciplines, histories, and geographies in their analysis of race and Islam around the world. Faculty from UNC-Chapel Hill served as respondents to the presentations, and the commentary was followed by lively discussion with the audience.

Dr. Zareena Grewal, Associate Professor of American Studies; Ethnicity, Race, and Migration; and Religious Studies at Yale University and alumnus of UNC-Chapel Hill gave the keynote lecture for the conference. Her talk, "Reading Muslims: Race, Islam, and U.S. Empire," addressed the complexity and diversity of Americans’ political, cultural, and racial investments in Islam over time.

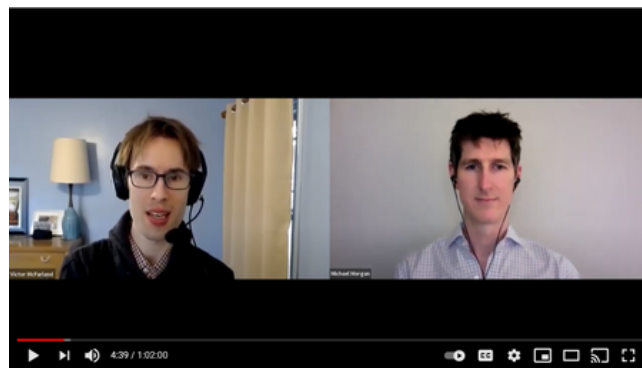
New to this year’s conference was the incorporation of artists into the program. In a special session, poets and visual artists from Chapel Hill, Atlanta, and France shared their works commenting on the African diaspora, anti-Blackness, Muslim identities, and global marginalized communities.

## Past, Present, and Beyond: A Discussion on U.S.-Saudi Relations

On March 11, 2021, the Center held a virtual discussion on relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The event featured Victor McFarland, Associate Professor of History at the University of Missouri and author of *Oil Powers: A History of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance*. It was moderated by Michael Morgan, Associate Professor of History at UNC-Chapel Hill. The discussion addressed the foundations of the U.S.-Saudi relationship and provided context to the news items that have been making headlines over the past several years.

Dr. Morgan opened the discussion by posing a question about the history of the U.S.-Saudi alliance. Dr. McFarland traced the origins of the relationship between the two countries to the 1920s and 1930s, a time period in which the relations were primarily through commerce and oil, rather than politics. The relationship became closer in the 1970s due to shared political and military goals such as support for anti-community groups and the sale of U.S. arms to Saudi Arabia.

The event then turned to a discussion of contemporary events, including the current Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed Bin Salman (often referred to as MBS) and the Biden administration's efforts to recalibrate U.S. policy toward the kingdom. Dr. McFarland elaborated on MBS' efforts



to “modernize” Saudi Arabia and its impact on the U.S.-Saudi relationship as well as international perspectives on Saudi Arabia.

The discussion of MBS and Saudi politics led to a robust question and answer period from the audience. Dr. McFarland fielded questions on the impact of 9/11 on the relationship between the two nations, the assassination of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, economic reforms in the country, and Saudi Arabia's efforts to become less reliant on oil.

The event highlighted the many factors that have impacted the political, economic, and military relationship between Saudi Arabia and the U.S., and placed current events in the context of the longstanding ties between Washington and Riyadh.

## Events Provide Insight into 2021 Israeli and Palestinian Elections

On March 16, 2021, the Center hosted a virtual discussion on the stakes of the March 2021 Israeli elections with Israeli journalist, Amir Tibon. Mr. Tibon, a journalist with Ha'aretz newspaper in Israel, has given previous talks at UNC-Chapel Hill on Israeli politics and elections. This program focused on how Israel arrived at its political crisis and the importance of the vote. In the following discussion, Mr. Tibon answered audience questions related to Israeli law, political coalitions, and issues important to Israeli voters. The discussion shed light on identity politics and Israel's political system as the country approaches a fourth election.

On April 15, 2021, the Center hosted a discussion with Khaled Elgindy, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute (MEI) and director of MEI's Program on Palestine and Israeli-Palestinian Affairs. In a conversation with Mohammed Eid, Visiting Lecturer in the UNC Department of History, Elgindy discussed the Palestinian summer 2021 elections. The conversation addressed why these elections were taking place, the candidates, and the potential ramifications of the elections for Palestinians and their relationship with the international community. These elections have since been postponed.



# Carolina Seminar on Middle East Studies Supports Events on Issues in the Modern Middle East

*The Carolina Seminar on Middle East Studies, established in 2016, continues to provide forum events at UNC to engage students and the campus community with the field. This year, the seminar partnered with Professor Sarah Shields (UNC Department of History) to host a series of speakers in conjunction with her course, "HIST 276: The Modern Middle East". Each lecture featured a guest expert on contemporary events. These events supported the restructuring of the Modern Middle East course to focus on six different current issues that demonstrate how understanding the past is essential for comprehending today's crises.*

"In the past, I have begun with the end of the 18th century and followed the history of the region to the present. I had heard from many colleagues that students were often forced to step out of their courses for a few weeks as they struggled with family or medical issues. Missing two weeks in a linear trajectory course, where the next weeks build on the previous weeks, seemed to be problematic in the age of pandemic. But both my public talks and my current book project focus on specific challenges, and then trace those into the past.

"I decided then to focus this course on six current struggles in the Middle East, issues with which the students might be familiar from their other courses or the news. With help from CMEIS and the Carolina Seminars program, we were able to bring five outside experts to introduce the issues today, before the lectures and readings went back into the past to explore how we got where we are today. This format will not only allow students to continue the course if they have to step out temporarily; it will also explain why understanding history is essential to resolving current crises.

"This semester of distance learning is turning into one of the most rewarding of my career. Many thanks to the Center and the Carolina Seminars program."

-Dr. Sarah Shields, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of History

## SEMINARS

### Claiming the Hagia Sophia

Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, Professor of Political Science, San Jose State University  
January 25, 2021

### Uprising in Syria

Bassam Haddad, Director of the Middle East and Islamic Studies Program and Associate Professor, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University  
February 8, 2021

### Annexing the West Bank

Noura Erakat, human rights attorney and Assistant Professor, Department of Africana Studies and the Program in Criminal Justice, Rutgers University  
February 22, 2021

### Iran Nuclear Treaty

Pouya Alimagham, Lecturer of History, Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
March 29, 2021

### Leaving Iraq

Nabil al-Takriti, Associate Professor of History, University of Mary Washington  
April 19, 2021



## Graduate Student Spotlight: Shreya Parikh

PhD candidate in sociology at UNC-Chapel Hill and Sciences Po Paris

*Interviewed from Tunisia*

*What are your research interests?*

My dissertation project examines the social and political construction and contestation of Blackness in Tunisia and France. I am intrigued by the relationship between Arabness and Blackness as well their link to Muslimness, all three of which I study as racialized identities. My interest emerged while I was doing fieldwork for my master's thesis in the greater Paris region. Many of my Sub-Saharan origin Muslim interlocutors mentioned that the general discourse that equates Muslimness to Arabness implies that their religious authenticity and authority is questioned not only by the white French population but also by the Arab Muslims. This made me wonder if definitions of Arabness, Blackness, and Muslimness are similar in North Africa (which is the region of origin of a majority of immigrants and immigrant-origin folks in France).



**This reflection has convinced me even further the need for an intersectional approach to the study of and activism against inequalities and discrimination, as well as the importance of the study of positionality of the scholar behind all texts we study.**



*Why have you chosen to study in Tunisia?*

If you were to ask me about the 'academic' reason, I would say that Tunisia has a strong and publicly-visible movement against racism led by Black Tunisian activists. This movement is a point of entry for my greater inquiry about race and racism in the region. But academic reasons don't suffice to provide motivation to undertake a cross-continental move in the midst of a pandemic. When I travelled to Tunisia for the first time (right after the Jasmine Revolution in 2011), I remember feeling at home here. The streets, the food, the ways in which social relations work here – they all reminded me of home, of India! I also remember the sense of pride with which everyone spoke about the revolution here (the pride continues till today). Maybe I harbor similar dreams for India that is slowly becoming more and more authoritarian.

*What do you hope to gain with the experience gained through your research?*

My current fieldwork is pushing me to do a lot of self-reflection, especially about my privileges linked to my education and salary in a stable international currency. I had assumed, before coming to Tunisia, that my experience of growing up in a middle-class family in India would help me find emotional links with my interlocutors. But I am realizing that my education makes my comparative privilege clear; this privilege acts (from my perception) as a barrier to creating this emotional trust. This reflection has convinced me even further the need for an intersectional approach to the study of and activism against inequalities and discrimination, as well as the importance of the study of positionality of the scholar behind all texts we study.

*What are your plans for the future?*

I will be in France for the next academic year where I will be conducting the second part of fieldwork for my dissertation and working with researchers at Sciences Po Paris. Once I am done with my doctoral degree, I hope to continue the study of race and racism in the greater Mediterranean region and expand on my dissertation project. This is a topic that is personal in many ways; I have experienced different forms of racial discrimination in France, in the United States, in Lebanon, in India. This personal aspect keeps me motivated when I have challenges with the project. I am also interested in doing a comparative study of the caste-systems in South Asia and racial-hierarchies in North Africa; this, I believe, will shed light on the intermingling of race and religion both historically and in the present.



## Grants Awarded to UNC and Duke Faculty for Research in Middle East Studies

With support from a Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Center was pleased to offer small grants to faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University through its membership in the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies. Congratulations to the following faculty for receiving grants for their projects:

### Course Development:

- Mona Hassan (Religious Studies, Duke), to develop a course on "Islam, Art, and Society," exploring the interweaving of Islamic theology, spirituality, art, architecture, mathematics, and astronomy in everyday objects and lived spaces; as well as a course on "Cross-Cultural Encounters," examining how centrally located Muslims played a critical role in connecting people of far-flung regions, cultures, and religions with one another.
- Maha Houssami (Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Duke), to restructure a 400-level Arabic course to utilize project-based learning and encourage collaboration between Duke and UNC students, as both are eligible to enroll in the course.
- Omid Safi (Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Duke), to develop a course on the life and legacy of the Prophet Muhammad.

### Language Pedagogy Training:

- Caroline Robinson (Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, UNC), to attend the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages 2020 conference.

## Connecting Carolina Classrooms with the World

The Center is participating in Connecting Carolina Classrooms with the World (CCCW), an initiative launched by the Office of the Vice Provost of Global Affairs, in collaboration with the College of Arts & Sciences. As part of this initiative, the Center supported faculty in incorporating virtual collaboration with colleagues and their classes at universities in the Middle East. Due to unprecedented constraints on international travel, these courses have been a method to continue student access to international opportunities.

Curriculum development grants were provided to the following faculty members to introduce a collaborative global module into a course:

- Claudia Yaghoobi (Asian and Middle Eastern Studies), to internationalize two courses: "Iranian Prison Literature" (ASIA/CMPL 258) and "Love in Classical Persian Poetry" (ASIA/CMPL 256). UNC-Chapel Hill students collaborated with students at Shiraz University (Shiraz, Iran) and Shahid Beheshti University (Tehran, Iran).
- Noor Ghazi (Curriculum in Peace, War, and Defense), to globalize "Conflict in Iraq" (PWAD 490) to teach about conflicts in Iraq by engaging students with peers and professors who lived under ISIS in Mosul, Iraq.
- Nadia Yaqub (Asian and Middle Eastern Studies), to enhance "Borders and Walls in the Arab World" (ARAB 337). Students connected with Gazan filmmakers (Gaza, Palestine).
- Mike Figueroa (Music), to internationalize "World Musics in Theory and Practice" (MUSC 234), collaborating with colleagues at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music at Birzeit University (West Bank, Palestine).



Image: UNC students practice Classical Persian Calligraphy

## Graduate Student Spotlight: Kylie Broderick

PhD candidate in history at UNC-Chapel Hill

*What are your research interests?*

I am broadly interested in the history of the 19th and early 20th century, with a focus on Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. My research right now is on women-oriented social movements, anti-colonial resistance, histories of the family, labor organizing, political economy, and the history of capitalism in the region. Outside of the academy, I am interested in the politics of knowledge production, think tanks, and the asymmetries of power that lurk under the surface regarding what kinds of “knowledge” about the Middle East are popularized and what kinds become marginalized.



*This year, you served as the instructor for an online course on the Modern Middle East for educators, a collaboration between the National Humanities Center (NHC) and our Center. What has been your experience teaching this course?*

Working with the NHC has been a blast! Prior to acting as the instructor for the class, I worked with Dr. Akram Khater to construct the syllabus, gather the resources, and write primers for each of the six units in the course (general history, gender, political religion, culture and music, environment, and Arab Uprisings). It's been very interesting to see the different levels of familiarity the teachers have with the subject matter, how they interpret the significance of the topics through the lens of their own training, and what needs they have as educators speaking to a much different audience than my undergrad-level one.

*You are also working on a series of videos for K-12 students on the modern Middle East. Please elaborate on the project and your interest in producing these materials.*

These videos are intended to be useful resources for beginners studying the Middle East. They are particularly geared to explaining major events, trends, and people in the Middle East in digestible, non-technical, 5-10 minute videos. Audio-visual materials are very in-demand by teachers today as they seek new and exciting ways to impart information to their students. My overall hope in making these videos is that they encourage teachers to include more content on the modern Middle East in their classes at the K-12 level.

*Why is engagement with K-12 schools important to you?*

I think that focusing more on the Middle East in ways that avoid being reductive are essential to creating more well-rounded and globally-minded critical thinkers. In Middle East studies, K-12 teachers have been overlooked as key figures shaping how young minds look at the world outside of the US. Even the best-intentioned teachers generally have neither the time nor resources to devote to these subjects —these are structural limitations placed on our public schools. My goals have therefore been to aid them in finding/creating resources that are applicable both inside and outside the classroom for teaching the Middle East that de-exceptionalizes it, historicizes it, and humanizes it in curricula.

**“ I think that focusing more on the Middle East in ways that avoid being reductive are essential to creating more well-rounded and globally-minded critical thinkers. ”**

*What are your plans for the future?*

In the fall semester, I am hoping to travel to Lebanon in order to do archival research. Post-graduation (fingers crossed), I'm hoping to work in some combination of academic and public-facing roles. My hopes to engage in alt-ac (alternative-academic) work are based in my passions that extend outside of the academy. In addition to continuing to work with nonprofits to reach out to K-12 teachers and public intellectuals, I would love to make more pedagogical resources. I have a particular interest (and training) in making podcasts, which I'm planning to do once I have any free time. If I end up staying in North Carolina, I would also love to be engaged in state curricula building.



## New Initiative: Practitioners' Courses

In spring 2021, the Center launched a new initiative: hiring practitioners to teach and co-teach courses on the Middle East. The purpose of this initiative is to allow undergraduate students to meet, engage, and learn from individuals who have lived in the region and who have worked "in the field," including NGOs, the United Nations, or local government agencies. In addition to the academic rigor Middle East faculty already offer our students, this new initiative was designed to complement students' understating of the region by introducing them to topics and views currently not offered on campus.

In the spring semester, Noor Ghazi, a peace activist from Iraq with a Master's in Peace and Conflict Studies from UNC- Greensboro, taught a course on the conflict in Iraq under the Curriculum in Peace, War, and Defense. As someone who grew up in Baghdad during the first Gulf War and was displaced with her family in 2006, Noor is able to offer PWAD students a unique way to view the struggles Iraqis have faced and continue to face. She will teach the course again in fall 2021.

Mohammed Eid, a native of Palestine and a former Rotary Peace Fellow with a Master's in Global Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill, previously worked with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency in the Gaza Strip. In the spring semester, he assisted Professor Sarah Shields (Dept. of History) in modifying as well as co-teaching her "The Modern Middle East" course with current content. In fall 2021, Mohammed will teach his own course under the Department of Public Policy titled: "Non-Governmental Organizations, Humanitarian Aid, and Public Policy: The Case of the Middle East".

In spring 2022, Palwasha Kakar, Senior Program Officer of Religion and Inclusive Societies at the United States Institute of Peace, will teach a course under the Curriculum in Peace, War, and Defense on the topic of peace and conflict in Afghanistan. It is the hope of the Center that students who take these courses will have a direct understanding and a stronger appreciation of the complexities of the region while also building contacts with practitioners that may be useful upon graduation.

## Global Supply Chains: An Interconnected World

On February 23, 2021, the Center collaborated with the Center for European Studies at the University of Florida, the Institute for Global Studies at the University of Minnesota, and the Center for Global Studies at the University of Washington to host "Global Supply Chains: An Interconnected World," an event geared towards the business community.

Speakers in this series of lightning talks discussed supply chains and logistics as related to Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, shortages or interruptions of the supply chain affect communities around the globe, making an understanding of global supply chains and logistics even more relevant in our contemporary world.

Five guests spoke about their research and business experience, including Howard Leedham, Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, from Consilium World Consulting with extensive experience in the Middle East, who spoke about "The UAE - Its Positioning as a Financial and Logistics Hub."



## Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Kobe Spells

Undergraduate majoring in Global Studies and Arab Cultures at UNC-Chapel Hill

*How long have you been learning Arabic, and what sparked your interest in the language?*

I've been studying Arabic formally since my freshman year. With that said, I started studying the alphabet and some basic phrases independently in my senior year of high school through a book my dad gave me that Christmas. Its hard to pinpoint exactly what sparked my interest. After junior year of high school, I had studied Spanish and longed for the experience of starting a language from the beginning. I had heard friends of mine speak Arabic with their families, loved the sound and script, and was excited by the challenge of studying a language that seemed so different from English or Spanish.



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**The coolest part of learning Arabic is speaking it outside the classroom.** ”

*In your opinion, what is the most exciting aspect of learning and speaking Arabic?*

The coolest part of learning Arabic is speaking it outside the classroom. One of my close friends from high school is Syrian and has known me since before I started studying the language. We often text or chat over the phone in Arabic and I've found that speaking Arabic opens up a new realm of jokes between us and I look forward to the day when I can speak to his parents in Arabic as well (we typically speak English).

*You attended the CET Jordan Virtual Intensive Arabic Language and Culture Program in summer 2020. What was the impact of this program on your language learning?*

Ultimately, the program was very rewarding for me. I was able to come back and place a year higher in Arabic which set me up to finish my formal Arabic studies through interinstitutional registration at Duke this semester. It was also an emotional rollercoaster. I was accidentally placed in a class higher than what my proficiency interview recommended and was offered the chance to stay or leave. I chose to stay but felt really overwhelmed and a bit down as I adjusted to being the student that struggled the most in the classroom. We had class for four hours, three days a week but homework assignments consistently took me more time than the professor expected. Despite my frustration, each oral proficiency interview served as a benchmark showing me that I had progressed significantly in a relatively short period. Over time, my work paid off and I was able to meet my own expectations and look back over the eight weeks without any regrets.

*What are your future career plans? Do you plan to continue speaking Arabic?*

I want to help shape US foreign policy towards the Arab world - I hope to promote conflict prevention and reclaim some of US moral legitimacy in the international community. I'm not quite sure what the best route to do so will be, but for a long time I have been attracted to the path of becoming a Political Officer in the Foreign Service where I could inform US policymakers and build bridges through diplomacy. I hope to use Arabic to form close connections with local community leaders and foreign government officials in the country where I serve.

*What is your favorite word or phrase in Arabic, and why is it your favorite?*

That's probably the most difficult question of them all. The phrase that has the most meaning to me is *Sabah il-kheir* (صباح الخير) which just means good morning. My mentor and former Arabic professor Doria El Kerdany would always use it when someone made a silly mistake or wasn't paying attention as if to say "helloooo, wake up!" I've never heard anyone else use it that way except for her, but it brings back memories of when I first started studying the language. I'm really thankful for her, she has truly invested in me as an Arabic student.

## Making Positive Change: Using the Stories of Yesterday to Shape a Better Tomorrow

On December 5, 2020, the Center, in association with the Institute of World Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, hosted a virtual workshop for educators entitled "Making Positive Change: Stories of Activism from the Middle East and North Africa." This workshop featured four speakers from the MENA region who shared their diverse stories of peacebuilding work and community engagement, emphasizing work on the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The speakers ranged from a doctor in Syria to an Iraqi graduate student who uses "peace carnivals" to build a foundation of peace among youth. Another speaker shared her experience growing up in Iraq when the country was under heavy sanctions and reflected on the changing landscape of activism there. After the four very engaging and informative

accounts by the panelists, attending teachers were able to ask them questions to gain a more nuanced understanding of the efforts that go into activism.

Drawing inspiration from the panelists' experiences, the workshop also provided strategies to lead students in taking informed action on issues in their own communities. Using the framework of the SDGs, workshop facilitators discussed strategies for engaging students in service-learning pedagogy. In small groups at the end of the program, teachers discussed how they would share the knowledge gained from the webinar with their students, and what activities could be done in class to do so. The webinar successfully highlighted peacebuilding in the MENA region and provided strategies to activate student global citizenship.

## Exploring the Contributions of Arab-Americans: Celebrating History and Culture

On April 14, 2021, the Center, in association with the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies at North Carolina State University, hosted a webinar for educators in recognition of Arab-American Heritage Month. During the program, Dr. Akram Khater, Professor of History and Director of the Khayrallah Center at North Carolina State University, presented an overview of Arab-American history with an emphasis on cultural history.

Dr. Khater highlighted the importance of Arab-American Heritage Month in countering negative stereotypes about the Arab community in the United States. He then guided the audience through major Arab-American contributions in media, literature, and art in the late 19th and early 20th century.

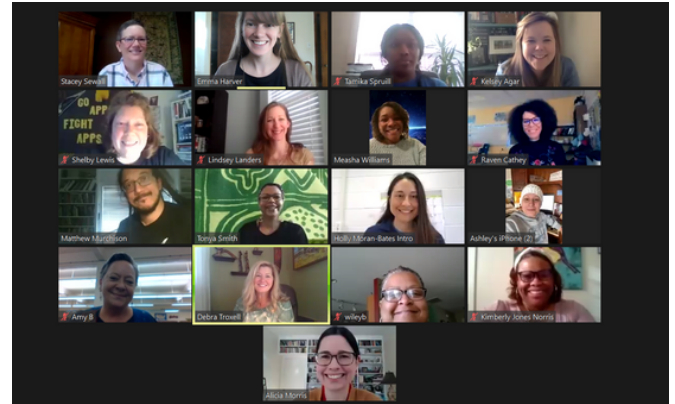
Dr. Khater presented educators with a guide on how to explore materials from Turath, a path-breaking virtual exhibit that highlights the early cultural innovations and accomplishments of Arab-American musicians, writers, poets, artists, performers and journalists. This virtual exhibit offers not only a detailed history on the Arab-Americans who immigrated to the United States, but also a variety of interactive resources to incorporate into the classroom. "The website will be an excellent resource to use in our history department," shared an attending educator.

The teachers in attendance asked a variety of questions about the exhibit and how to incorporate the information presented into their courses. Dr. Khater offered valuable feedback on how to make curricula more inclusive of the cultural heritage and history of Arab-Americans. "I didn't realize the extent of early immigration of Arab-Americans," reflected an attendee. "Now I have new resources to use for teaching about Arab-Americans and culture."



# K-12 Teachers Participate in Fellowship on the Middle East and North Africa

In December 2020, 15 teachers completed the intensive nine-month Middle East and African Cultures Teacher Fellows Program (MEAC) offered by the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies and the African Studies Center. The 2020 MEAC program was held virtually, connecting teachers with presenters and communities across North Carolina.



The fellowship aims to increase teachers' knowledge of Middle Eastern and African history, culture and diaspora by introducing educators to places and communities across North Carolina that have connections to these regions. Fellows participated in a series of virtual site visits with partners around the state, including workshops with the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies, the North Carolina African Services Coalition, Masjid Omar Ibn Sayyid, and the Triangle-based Arab Heritage Learning. At the end of the program, the fellows developed a classroom project with content on the Middle East or Africa.

## Reflections on the MEAC Program: Tonya Smith

*Instructor of Spanish and Humanities, North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, Durham, NC*

*Describe your experience in the MEAC Program.*

The MEAC Program really opened up a whole new world of academic, professional, and personal opportunities for me. Not only did I broaden my worldview, and acquire a deeper, personally more meaningful understanding of the Middle East and Africa, the program provided a plethora of free and high-quality materials designed for educators' easy implementation in their classrooms and access to leading scholars in the field. I also really enjoyed interacting with and learning from educators from across the state; it was really inspirational to make these types of connections, especially during the pandemic when so many were feeling socially isolated.

*What was your favorite workshop during the program?*

I truly relished the sensory experience provided by the workshop on the tastes and smells of the Middle East and Africa. I love commodity histories, and tracing the different types of spices was a lot of fun. The sessions definitely made me curious to learn more about the Middle East.

*How are you inspired to incorporate information on the Middle East and North Africa learned through the program?*

Due to my participation in this program, I will offer a course on North Africa and the Middle East at my school next year. It was a course that had been in our course catalog but it had not been offered - until now. We also started a Middle Eastern Cultures Club on our campus. We hope to eventually add Arabic to our language program, too. In the meantime, the students who organize the Middle Eastern Cultures Club are considering offering Arabic lessons for interested students as a part of their cultural outreach programming.

*How has the MEAC program impacted the way you see and teach about the MENA region?*

Frankly, it has set me on a course that I had never really envisioned for myself. Now I'm studying Arabic, preparing to teach the new course, and I'm even planning to pursue additional graduate coursework in the future that will combine my interests in African history, languages, and the Middle East. I feel like it's started a new chapter in my intellectual life and I consider it one of the best educator professional development programs in which I've ever participated; it was really a game changer for me- transformative even!



Image: Nighttime in a Palace, , Mir Sayyid Ali, Harvard Art Museums

## WEBINARS

### Islam through Art

Christiane Gruber, Professor of Islamic Art and Chair of the History of Art Department, University of Michigan  
January 28, 2021

### Teaching Middle East History in World History

Allen Fromherz, Professor of History, Director, Middle East Studies Center, Georgia State University  
February 25, 2021

### Experiential Learning about the Middle East through the Senses

Barbara Petzen, Director of Training Initiatives, the Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy at the Center for Strategic & International Studies  
March 18, 2021

### Teaching about the Middle East through Underreported Stories

Fareed Mostoufi, Associate Director of Education, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting; Alia Ibrahim, Journalist, co-founder and CEO of Daraj.com  
April 22, 2021

### Hip Hop and Women's Voices in the Middle East and North Africa

Angela Williams, Associate Director, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
May 20, 2021

## Spring Series: How to Teach about the Middle East - and Get it Right!

Teaching about the Middle East and doing it well may seem like a daunting order to any educator. The MENA region is so large and broad in scope, it can be difficult to determine where to start or how to approach certain topics, especially when teaching children or young adults.

In spring 2021, the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies partnered with the Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies at the University of Michigan to provide a five-part spring webinar series, equipping educators to teach about the region through a variety of topics from history, art, hip hop, and gender, to sensory experiences and journalism in the region. The virtual series also provided content and pedagogical resources, accommodating for both in-person and virtual teaching environments. "I found the blending of content and pedagogy especially helpful," reflected one educator.

The sessions were highly interactive, with all presenters making use of activities such as break-out room discussions, real-time polls, visual analysis of art and photos, and collaborative Google documents. These activities emphasized the multitude of possibilities that can be used to engage students of all ages in a study of the Middle East.

The series reached hundreds of educators across the U.S. and beyond. Attendees noted that the sessions provided "practical strategies" and "useful information." One attending educator reflected; "Thank you for coordinating wonderfully engaging, nuanced approaches to teaching (and learning about) the Middle East."

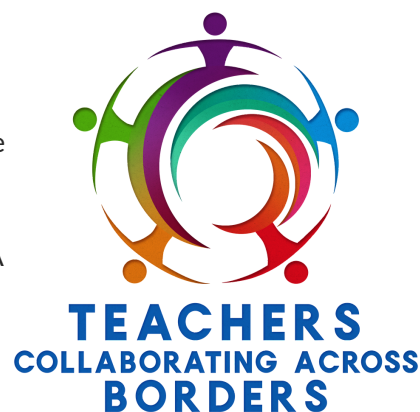


Image: Google Map indicating locations of participating teachers

## Virtual Exchange Program Encourages Teachers in the United States and the Middle East to Collaborate Across Borders

Together, the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies and the University of Arizona Center for Middle Eastern Studies established the Teachers Collaborating Across Borders Program (TCAB), a virtual exchange program for educators from the United States and the Middle East and North Africa.

15 teachers from 11 U.S. states and 14 teachers from 10 countries across the MENA region met throughout the fall for structured discussions on educational topics. Through both synchronous sessions on Zoom and an active asynchronous forum, the educators explored different school structures, student demographics, and immigration and migration, among other subjects. In the spring, their students participated in shared activities on topics ranging from recycling to food traditions.



Participating teachers increased understanding of different cultures, engaged in shared conversations about topics of mutual interest, and globalized their classrooms.

### Reflections on the TCAB Program: Freesia Stein

*9th grade World History teacher, Community School of Davidson, Davidson, North Carolina*

*What did you gain from your participation in the TCAB program?*

This program helped me to feel more connected to teachers from around the world. I gained more exposure to countries I knew very little about previously and I saw that we face both similar and different issues as educators based on where we live. I also saw how different countries/schools were doing to deal with COVID.

*What was the impact of your students' interactions with MENA students abroad?*

My students realized how much they had in common with students from other countries. They realized that they shared many of the same interests, hobbies and challenges. Several commented that it is very different to communicate with other teenagers from a country than to just learn about the politics or current events in their country. These interactions humanized people who live far away and helped my students to feel more connected to the greater world.

*What new things did you learn about the Middle East and North Africa through the program?*

I learned about how immigration impacts countries in different ways, despite that fact that immigration is a relevant and controversial issue in most countries. I also found it interesting to see the similarities and differences in how schools operate and the experiences of teachers in different places. I specifically found it interesting to hear about the different options for students who want to pursue a trade or craft and the different ways of supporting students with special needs.



## Support the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies

Thank you for your engagement with all that we do at the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies. We are grateful for the financial support of our alumni and friends. Private gifts help sustain our programs. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to help further understanding of the Middle East throughout the university and community. Your gift to the center will directly support the many events we host and sponsor, our K-12 outreach initiatives, and help support student fellowships.

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