



UNC CENTER FOR  
MIDDLE EAST &  
ISLAMIC STUDIES

NEWSLETTER  
MAY 2023

## CENTER DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Wrapping up this academic year, I am asked to reflect on my first year as the center's director. Bridging cultures, departments, campus units, and disciplines is at the core of my vision for the center. In a world increasingly connected across borders by globalization, hybridity, inclusivity, and diversity are crucial concepts to grasp. Generally, communities construct identities through exclusion; they define who and what they are or are not, by drawing lines and speaking about differences. I endeavor to focus on commonalities while acknowledging differences – differences make us unique all the while they give us power. This academic year, we began on a high note with a “Welcome Back” event in September 2022 where we bridged Arab, Armenian, Persian, and Turkish cultures, music, and literature by listening to an Armenian Duduk player while our faculty read lines of poetry from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.



My top priority has also been to engage faculty and students from various disciplines and units, to listen to everyone, to build community, and to foster a rigorous intellectual space within the center. In Sept./Oct. 2022, I met one-on-one with 20 of our core faculty and a group of our graduate students. I received everyone's feedback on what they would like to see happen in the center. I implemented these insights in the center's next four-year strategic plans. One of the most important ways that I envisioned fostering participation from faculty was to launch a CMEIS Annual Lecture Series. The lecture series provided an opportunity for an equitable way to be inclusive of faculty and a great avenue to diversify our events. Another significant community-building initiative was launching a research colloquium in collaboration with Islamicate Graduate Student Association with several presentations from faculty and graduate students during a lunch session.

## ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

EVENTS

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

INVESTING IN STUDENTS

GRADUATE STUDENTS


STAFF

FACULTY

OUTREACH







This colloquium allowed space for networking amongst faculty and graduate students across campus. In addition, we provided professionalization workshops for grad students to prepare them for entering the job market and working toward publication. We also had several socializing opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff across campus through our social cafes and other receptions.

Through our collaboration with the NC Consortium for the Middle East, we expanded our reach through events like the UNC-Charlotte celebration of International Women's Day; the annual North Carolina Arabic Teacher Council (NCATC) conference; co-sponsored events with Duke; and more. Through the FLAS program, we were able to support UNC and Duke students in Arabic, Urdu, and Persian. We also supported faculty with grants in course development, research travel, and language pedagogy training.

During this academic year, I worked closely with the Arts and Sciences development office to strategize on fundraising. We held several VIP receptions, sent promotional emails to community members, alumni, and donors, and participated in the GiveUNC day. All these efforts resulted in donations that will allow us to fund graduate student research and conference travel as well as K-12 outreach. This summer, we funded four graduate students to travel to Tel Aviv, Edinburgh, Istanbul, and Raleigh to present their projects internationally and locally. We were also able to fund two graduate students to participate in the MESA conference in fall 2023. In the meantime, I have met with private donors who are interested in funding our outreach programs. And finally, I have submitted a letter of interest for a faculty line to the Roshan Institute.

The challenges have been abundant, and so have the joys of service. I am humbled to have this opportunity to serve our campus and the public community. I am even more honored to have had the steadfast support of so many of you who have shown faith in my leadership and vision.

Claudia Yaghoobi, Director

## THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

**46** Graduate students across campus

**103** Courses offered in Middle East and Islamic Studies

**6** Middle Eastern languages taught

**150** Community Events supported or promoted on our website and social media accounts

**1,876**

Students, faculty, staff and community members attended CMEIS sponsored social events, lectures, performances, and workshops





## CONSORTIUM DIRECTOR'S NOTE

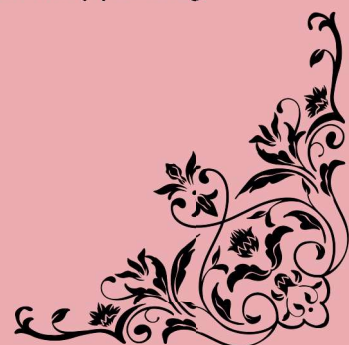
Last year at this time, our colleague Carl Ernst announced his retirement as director of the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies and welcomed his successor, Claudia Yaghoobi. This year it is my turn to announce my retirement as director of the North Carolina Consortium for Middle East Studies and welcome my successor, Claudia Yaghoobi, who is taking on the joint leadership of the Center and the Consortium.

It has been 20 years since Carl and I worked with colleagues across the University to establish a home for Middle East and Islamic studies at UNC-Chapel Hill, and almost as long since we joined up with colleagues at Duke University to establish a consortium for Middle East studies. During all this time, we have been honored to help support Middle East language programs at UNC, to contribute to the accumulation of Middle Eastern materials at the UNC Libraries, to leverage private and federal funds for hiring of Middle East and Islamic studies faculty, to establish a graduate certificate in Middle East studies, to fund dozens of graduate fellowships, and to work with faculty and students on hundreds of scholarly gatherings, film series, cultural events, and research projects.

Beyond UNC-Chapel Hill, we have benefitted from partnerships with colleagues at Duke University, Durham Tech, and schools across the state. Just last year, we expanded our longstanding consortium with Duke to include all of North Carolina, winning our fourth grant in a row from the U.S. Department of Education to help fund our activities, along with major financial commitments from UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke. The North Carolina Consortium for Middle East Studies has set an ambitious agenda for itself, including efforts to build Middle East studies at schools around the state where the field is not yet firmly established.

I have mixed feelings about leaving these efforts, which have been such a large part of my working life for so much of my academic career. I will miss the opportunities to work with colleagues to develop programs, and the sense of satisfaction when their plans come to fruition. I may even miss the adrenaline rush of grant deadlines and threats to academic freedom. But after 20 years of continuity, I am confident that Dr. Yaghoobi and a new generation of faculty and staff will chart their own course and figure out new ways to advance our collective enterprise in Middle East and Islamic studies. I invite you all to join in this effort, and I look forward to watching your progress (and possibly pitching in if requested!).

Charles Kurzman  
(Former) Director, North Carolina Consortium for Middle East Studies





### 20th Anniversary Stand-up Comedy & Hip-Hop Show

In March, the Center celebrated its 20th anniversary with a night full of entertainment. It started with a reception for community supporters, leadership, faculty, staff, and graduate students, where we were honored to host Dean White and Senior Associate Deans Noreen McDonald and Karla Slocum, among others. Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi (current Director), Dean White (UNC College of Arts and Sciences), Dr. Carl Ernst (former Director and co-founder), and Charlie Kurzman (consortium Director and co-founder) all offered remarks about the history of the center, its evolution, and the role it plays today.



Dean White, College of Arts & Sciences

The reception was followed by a riotous performance by stand-up comedian Tehran Ghasri. Tehran is a comedian, actor, host, television, and radio personality, and philosopher with a law degree - self-described as "part Black, part Persian, and part amazing." Next was a hip-hop show featuring Omar Offendum, a rapper/poet based in New York, known for his unique blend of Hip-Hop & Arabic poetry. Omar was accompanied by Ronnie Malley, a Palestinian-American musician, actor, producer, educator, and executive director of Intercultural Music Production in Chicago.



Tehran Ghasri  
Comedian



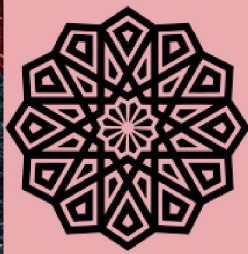
Omar Offendum  
Rapper/Poet



Ronnie Malley  
Musician



# Annual Lecture Series - Legacies Of Middle East's Global 20th Century: Moments Of Worldmaking And Worldbreaking



Throughout 2022-2023 we hosted leading scholars of modern global history. They shared their research findings on transformative moments and processes of the previous century in the Middle East and Muslim Societies across Asia to make sense of their impact on our contemporary times.



Dr. Cemil Ayden

## **Afghan Crucible: Global History and Legacy of the 1979 Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan**

Dr. Elisabeth Leake, Chair in Diplomatic History at The Fletcher School, Tufts University analyzed 1979 as a moment of crisis not just for Afghanistan or the Cold War but international relations and the postcolonial state. She drew out the stories of the political actors who tried to reshape Afghanistan in the 20th century.

## **Human Rights Guerrillas: Iran Between Global 1968 And Global 1979**

Dr Arash Davari, assistant professor of Political Science, at the University of Minnesota, reappraised debates in political theory about self-determination, revolution, and the extraordinary through the reconstruction of discursive conditions that made the 1979 revolution in Iran possible.

## **The History Of Chinese Muslims As A Link Between China And The Middle East**

Dr. Zvi Ben Dor Benite, professor of History & Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, at New York University, spoke about his work looking at late imperial Chinese Islam between history, genealogy, and memory: the state, the Muslims, and the people Around.

## **Losing Istanbul: Arab-Ottoman Imperialists And The End Of the Empire**

Dr. Mostafa Minawi, Professor of History at Cornell University, offered an intimate history of empire, following the rise and fall of a generation of Arab-Ottoman imperialists living in Istanbul.

## **Sisters In The Mirror: A History Of Muslim Women And The Global Politics Of Feminism**

Dr. Elora Shehabuddin, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies & Global Studies, at UC Berkeley, presented a unique and engaging history of feminism as a story of colonial and postcolonial interactions between Western and Muslim societies.



## **Legacy Of Violence: A History Of the British Empire In Palestine**

Dr. Carolina Elkins, Professor of History, at Harvard University, drew on a decade of research to implicate all sides of Britain's political divide in the creation, execution, and cover-up of imperial violence, which was the most salient factor underwriting Britain's empire and the nation's imperial identity at home.

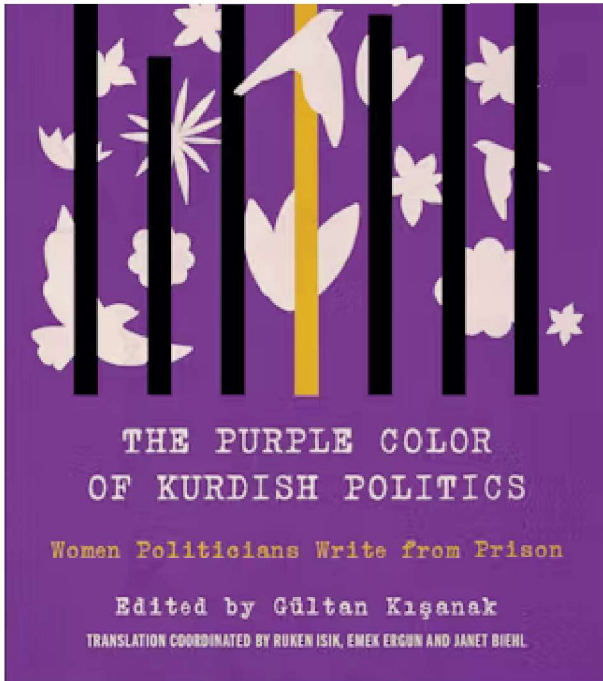
# 650

Students, faculty, staff and community members attended the lecture series events



## EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

One focus this year for the center was expanding our reach through collaboration with the NC Consortium for Middle Eastern Studies, the North Carolina Arabic Teacher Council, Duke, Durham Tech, UNC-Charlotte & more.



An example of such collaboration was our joint celebration of International Women's Day in March. We partnered with UNC-Charlotte to host a virtual Conversation with the translators of "The Purple Color Of Kurdish Politics" a collection of prison writings from 22 Kurdish women political prisoners.



Palestinians preparing akkoub, in "Foragers"

## EVENTS IN THE ARTS

We also emphasized partnerships within UNC to use the arts to promote our center's mission of providing events that increase awareness of the history and cultures of the Middle East and Muslim cultures.

CMEIS Faculty & guest musician Raffi Chilingirian



### Music & Poetry

In September, we hosted "A Night of Armenian Duduk Music & Middle Eastern Poetry." Raffi Chilingirian, an Armenian duduk musician from Beirut, played a concert of traditional folk and more contemporary music followed by a Q&A session with Dr. Mike Figueroa (Music Dept). Afterward, the CMEIS faculty shared readings of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian poetry.

### Cinema

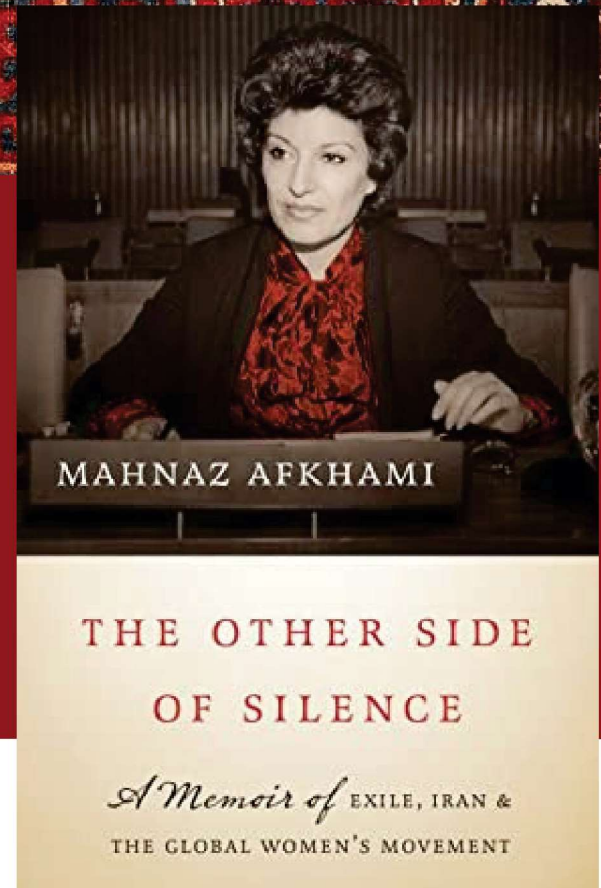
We co-sponsored multiple foreign language film screenings throughout the year with the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and the Center for European Studies, sparking critical conversations,

- Turkish films "The Water Diviner (Son Umut)" and "My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları)"
- Saudi/Chad film "Oustaz"
- French film "A Tale of Love and Desire"
- Palestinian films "Space Exodus", "Nation Estate", "In the Future" and "In Vitro", and "Foragers"
- Iranian film "Radiograph of a Family"



## Supporting Literature

In November, UNC Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, in collaboration with UNC Press and UNC Ackland Art Museum, launched Dr. Mahnaz Afkhami's new memoir: "The Other Side of Silence: a Memoir of Exile, Iran and the Global Women's Movement." Dr. Afkhami joined in conversation with center director, Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi, speaking about her life experiences as an international advocate and activist for women's rights with a full audience of 60 people. Afterwards, the Ackland Art Museum hosted a reception and book signing opportunity in honor of Dr. Afkhami.



Dr. Afkhami signing books at the Ackland

"A truly memorable night, discussing Iranian women's rights in the past and present. We talked about Iran's current women-led revolution and how it's the first and only woman-led one globally."

-Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi



Book talk audience members



Dr. Yaghoobi & Dr. Afkhami



# STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS

## Undergraduate Student Spotlight: Hadi Barakat

Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Undergraduate Student, Class of 2023

### What sparked your interest in Middle Eastern Studies?

Although I am originally from the Middle East, I was never aware of the fact that the region features vast differences when comparing place to place and time period to time period. When I arrived at UNC, I quickly came to realize that many of the other Middle Eastern students I was getting to know held a diverse array of cultural experiences that contrasted my own – as it turned out, these students came from different geographical regions, experienced different sociopolitical issues, were familiar with different historical narratives of where they came from, and were different in cultural tradition than myself. The fact that our experiences with Middle Eastern life were so dissimilar is what drove me to delve into the world of Middle Eastern studies and made me excited to explore and discover the sociocultural, political, and geographical pieces that come together to form such a highly misunderstood region of the world.

### You completed an honors thesis, what was it about?

In the summer before my senior year, I went to Jordan as part of a study abroad program to serve as an intern at the Jordan Health Aid Society, which works to provide medical services to Syrian refugees in Jordan. During my time with them, I was fortunate enough to interview a number of diabetic Syrian refugees living in Amman with a focus on how their current state as Syrian refugees in Jordan influences their perceptions of diabetes and diabetes treatment. Through my research, I discovered that there are a number of factors that go into how they perceive their diabetic condition, including their past experiences with healthcare in Syria, the rising tensions between Jordanians and Syrians as a result of the protracted nature of the refugee crisis, financial struggles, and poor health literacy. Ultimately, I hoped that in identifying these factors, a clearer path forward for refugees struggling with diabetes treatment could be revealed.



*"Studying the Middle East at UNC opened my eyes to the true state of the diverse and ever-changing social, cultural, and political dynamics of the region, all of which are impacted by centuries of local history, religion, external influence, colonialism, and even geography"*

### How has studying Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at UNC changed your perspective on the region?

Like many Americans, I had always assumed that the Middle East was more or less a cultural monolith which highly resembled a mix of my own experiences as a Middle Eastern individual and the portrayals of Middle Eastern affairs in the American media. Thus, studying the Middle East at UNC opened my eyes to the true state of the diverse and ever-changing social, cultural, and political dynamics of the region, all of which are impacted by centuries of local history, religion, external influence, colonialism, and even geography.

### What is next for you in your academic journey?

For the next couple of years, I will be getting a master's degree in public health from the Gillings School of Public Health, after which I plan to begin applying to medical school.





## Graduate Student Spotlight: Yusuf Sezgin

Department of History, Ph.D. Candidate



### How were you involved with the CMEIS lecture series this year?

My advisor Dr. Cemil Aydin, who is a professor of global history at UNC, shared with me his idea of organizing a lecture series on the Middle East's Global 20th Century, which is also my field of study. We were discussing some potential names to invite and this whole idea got me very excited. I wanted to contribute more and, with Dr. Aydin's encouragement, I got involved in organizing the talks as an assistant coordinator.

### What did you learn from this work?

It was a fascinating learning experience overall. I learned how to design fliers using online tools. I got a sense of how cooperation between different departments and finance is managed. More importantly, these kinds of academic meetings gave me an opportunity to connect with new people. I met lots of amazing people throughout the year and had very interesting conversations not only with the speakers themselves, all of whom were great intellectuals but also with the participants who enriched the series with their participation.

### What sparked your interest in Middle East Studies and History?

When I was an undergrad, I was mostly interested in modern Islamic political thought, especially how reform-minded Muslim intellectuals from the Middle East understand and interpret social justice from a religious perspective. In a course on Latin America, I came across liberation theology, and similarities between some of the Muslim intellectuals I was studying and Catholic liberation theologians really struck me. I decided to focus on this in my graduate studies. It first started as a political theory project, but then at some point, I felt the need to put the development of religious liberationist ideas in a global historical context, especially to be able to put Catholics of Latin America and Muslims of the Middle East in conversation, given the lack of direct relationships. That's summarily how I ended up with my current interdisciplinary dissertation project in which I'm in interaction with different fields including Middle East Studies.

***"I met lots of amazing people throughout the year, and had very interesting conversations not only with the speakers themselves, all of whom were great intellectuals, but also with the participants who enriched the series with their participation."***

### What is next for you in the field of Middle East Studies? How will you continue your public scholarship work?

I'm a global historian but the Middle East is part of my dissertation project, and also my alternative teaching area. I guess the first thing on my agenda is to teach a course on the modern Middle East before I graduate. I also would love to continue being part of public events and to engage further with CMEIS for future organizations. It's great to see CMEIS being more active and supportive of students. I want to thank especially Dr. Aydin, Dr. Claudia Yaghoobi, and Joanne Johnson for all their efforts, help, and support!



# INVESTING IN STUDENTS

## 22 Students

Supported with Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships

- AY 2022-2023 - 3.5 UNC + 2 Duke
- Summer 2023 - 6 UNC + 1 Duke
- AY 2023-2024 - 7 UNC + 2 Duke



6 Middle Eastern Languages Taught:  
Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Urdu, Turkish, Persian



Aykaç, Betül  
PhD candidate, Geography



Nadin Abu Khalaf  
PhD student, Medicine



Theo Kassebaum  
PhD student, Anthropology

### Graduate Student Summer Travel Grants Awarded

- Aykaç, Betül, will travel throughout Turkey to research “Autonomy as a multi-scalar solidarity network: A feminist geopolitical perspective on alternative food networks in Turkey.”
- Nadin Abu Khalaf will travel to Raleigh to present “Understanding and Preventing Islamophobia in Schools” at the World Anti-Bullying Forum.
- Yusuf Sezgin will travel to Scotland to present “Transnational Networks and the Rise of Decolonial Theologies in the Global South” at the Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion in Scotland.
- Theo Kassebaum will conduct archeological research on “Borders and Crossroads: Arameans, Phoenicians, and Israelites” in the Hula Valley in Upper Galilee, Israel.



# GRAD STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

This year a focus of many of our events was to create opportunities for building community among the center's students and faculty. Events included:



## **CMEIS Social Cafe" - September 27, 2023**

A welcoming gathering for center members including undergrad, graduate students, Ph.D. candidates, faculty, and staff. We gathered to exchange ideas and discuss research, interests, and current topics in the field.

## **"Ferdowsi Student Prize & CMEIS Social Cafe" - November 10, 2022**

Collaborated with UNC University Libraries and Persian Studies to celebrate the winner of the Ferdowsi Prize - Ph.D. student John Miller.

## **"Professionalization Workshop" - April 14, 2023**

Dr. Julianne Hammer led a 3-hour session for MA & Ph.D. students to prepare them for entering the job market and publication.

## **"CMEIS Year End Celebration" - April 28, 2023**

We recognized the accomplishments of our graduating students, faculty promotions and awards, staff anniversaries, and the center's co-founder Charlie Kurzman.

**“It [the job market workshop] was immensely helpful to have so many of the logistics of the job search systematically spelled out all in one setting. I have a lot of invaluable information that is now fresh in my mind”**

**- John Miller, Ph.D. Student, Religious Studies**





# GRAD STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



In February 2023, the Center for Middle East Studies and Islamicate Graduate Student Association collaborated on a research colloquium where graduate students and faculty specializing in Middle East and Islamic Studies workshopped their in-progress research, building bridges across various disciplines and departments across campus. Twenty-five people attended, representing various specialties and interests, who shared insight and cross-connections during thoughtful question-and-answer periods.

"It was incredibly rewarding to have the opportunity to host and moderate the CMEIS and Islamicate Graduate Student Association (IGSA) Research Colloquium this February. We heard illuminating talks from a disciplinarily diverse collection of professors and graduate students on topics that captured the scope and vibrancy of UNC's research community in the domains of Middle East and Islamicate studies. Participants presented papers ranging from historical-musicological analyses of Egyptian nationalist recordings (Melissa Camp) to the development of women's pulp fiction in Urdu (Dr. Afroz Taj), to a transatlantic network of African-American and West-African Sufis who, as Dr. Youssef Carter describes, 'deploy West African spiritual training to navigate historical-political contexts in the U.S. South and beyond' — to highlight but a few of the contributions. Each presenter fielded questions and comments from an audience comprising undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty from across UNC's departmental landscape. Taken together, the presentations and their warm reception spoke to the enduring importance and relevance of critical scholarship on Middle East and Islamicate studies to UNC's student body and to the broader public discourse to which UNC's scholars contribute".

-John Miller, Ph.D. Student & Colloquium Facilitator



Graduating student: Samir Sefiane,  
MA, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies



Graduating Student: Caroline Williams,  
MA, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies



## STAFF HIGHLIGHTS



"I've been with the Center for a little over a year. They have welcomed me with open arms, given me a place that I'm proud to be a part of, and I've learned that the work we do, truly makes a difference. The Center has opened my eyes to topics that I'm fascinated to learn more about. One way they are pouring into my professional development is by sending me to Morocco, this summer. Not only will I have a better understanding of the region I serve, but it will also allow me to see, firsthand, the outreach work conducted by the center. The culture, the history, and the sheer beauty of this country is something I am absolutely ecstatic to see and learn more about."

-Courtney Phillippe, Business Coordinator

"Working with such supportive staff, faculty, and students at the Center was really a fun experience. In just a year with the Center, I learned so much about Middle Eastern Identity, culture, history, and communities here in the Triangle Area. I was also able to hone skills in writing, graphic design, event planning, reporting, and more, especially while helping create our new website! Moreover, I experienced a culture of support, friendship, and advocacy that makes coming to work every day fun"

-Joanne Johnson, Graduate Assistant

In May we welcomed the new Outreach Manager, Alaa Hammouda. Alaa has a breadth of experience in management, journalism, development, and working to advance human rights in the Gaza Strip. We are thrilled to welcome her to the UNC Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies. As the Outreach Manager, Alaa will provide programs and resources for K-12 and Community College educators in professional development, classroom tools, partnerships, and student engagement. She will also build partnerships with the Middle Eastern community in North Carolina.





# FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

## Faculty Research & Travel Grants

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 Travel:

- Bud Kauffman (Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill)
- Hugo Mendez (Religious Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill)
- Eren Tasar (History, UNC-Chapel Hill)
- Afroz Taj (Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill)

### Research Travel:

- Benjamin Arbuckle (Anthropology, UNC-Chapel Hill)
- Knapczyk (Wake Forest University)
- Sandy Marshall (Geography, Elon University)
- Yaron Shemer (Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, UNC)

### Language Pedagogy Training:

- Farida Badr (University of Wyoming at Fort Bragg)
- Didem Havlioglu (Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Duke)



"Receiving support from the CMEIS to attend the Annual Conference of the Middle Eastern Studies Association was highly beneficial to me and the Arabic Program. It allowed me to evaluate the textbook market, meet with publishers, and gain a broader understanding of the trends in Arabic course materials."

Dr. Bud Kauffman (Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, UNC)



"I am using [the grant] to travel to Türkiye in July and participate in archaeological research in the Black Sea region... My role is to reconstruct the diet and economy of the prehistoric inhabitants of the Pontic region of Türkiye (c. 4000-1000 BC) about which we know very little and to help understand how their farming, herding, and hunting strategies adapted to changing environmental conditions."

Dr. Benjamin Arbuckle (Anthropology, UNC)



# Persian "Bazm o Razm" Conference

On March 10, 2023, the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies co-sponsored the UNC Persian Studies Program symposium "Bazm O Razm In The Persianate World: Continuities And Convergences." Throughout the day, 2 dozen participants and guests discussed the nuances around discourses of feasting and fighting in the Persianate world, focusing on the cultures of Pre-Islamic and Pre-Modern Persia. Enjoying tea, coffee, and Persian sweets in between.

UNC & Duke faculty Dr. Jennifer Gates-Foster, Dr. Bruce Lawrence, Dr. Waleed Ziad, Dr. Eren Tasar, and graduate student Ehsan Sheikhalharam, acted as discussants after each presentation. They Engaged speakers and audiences in conversations about cultural capital, the consumption of artifacts, cosmopolitanism, conflicting narratives of war, and the political power of the poet and the slave.



Conference organizers, presenters & discussants

## Topics included:

- "The wife and property-sharing, wine-imbibing, Mazdakites, and later Khurramdīns: Accusations & Realities, Bazm o Razm misunderstood?" (Dr. Parvaneh Pourshariati, CUNY)
- "Dining in Eranshahr: politics of dining in late antique Iran." (Layah Bigdeli, Ph.D. Candidate, UC Irvine)
- (Keynote) "Nān Xwardan Bazm: On the Etiquette of Feasting in Iranshahr" (Dr. Touraj Daryaei, UC Irvine)
- "Epic Brutality and Long-Distance Romance: Amity and Violence in Persianate Depictions of East Asia and the Iberian Peninsula." (Dr. Kaveh Hemmat, Benedictine University)
- "The Hunt as Erotic and Martial Training in Early New Persian Poetry." (Dr. Domenico Ingenito, UCLA)





# Annual NC Consortium Conference

Faculty, staff, students, and communities across the state came together on April 14-15 for the NC Consortium for Middle Eastern Studies 2023 conference centered on “Border Politics: Bodies, Community and Ecology.” The 2-day event (also co-sponsored by the UNC Institute for Arts and Humanities and Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies) featured film screenings and discourses on Global Futurism, and the power of borders as zones that both separate and connect different bodies, communities, and ecologies.

Palestinian director Larissa Sansour’s films offered one artist’s reimagining of Palestinian border ecologies through futuristic science fiction. Followed by a panel discussion, where Dr. Priscilla Layne and Dr. Robin Visser (UNC-CH) drew parallels between ideas and motifs from the films with themes in Afro-futurism and Chinese literature. The 45 Students and faculty in the audience added further insights and examples of transnational connections including contemporary YA fiction, cinema, and more.

Following the screening of her film “Foragers”, Palestinian director Jumana Manna virtually joined Dr. Yaron Shemer (UNC-CH) for a Q&A discussion about local ecologies, and her processes and methodologies when making the film. Members of the audience brought up themes of gender roles, the symbolism of language, the relationships between land; memory, tradition, and identity, and connections to similar examples across indigenous cultures worldwide.



Center director, Claudia Yaghoobi with conference organizers Drs. Banu Gökariksel, Jennifer Gates-Foster (and Not pictured: Nadia Yaqub)



Film screening of Larissa Sansour's "Nation Estate"

## Panel topics covered included:

- “Bordering Sacred Space: (Re)Storying Fractured Sacredscapes in Palestine” (Sandy Marshall, Elon University)
- “The temple at Khirbet et-Tannur: interpreting arrival within the epiphanic landscape” (Jim Frakes, UNC Charlotte)
- “Crossing Borders in Translation: Feminist Solidarity in the Making” (Emek Ergun, UNC Charlotte)
- “Temporal Borders and Permanent Liminalities: Viewing the first century of the Islamic-Byzantine Frontier as a chronological inflection point” (Asa Eger, UNC Greensboro)
- “Visualizing violence: masculinity and politics of race and death in Afghan/istani visual arts under military occupation” (Paniz Musawi Natanzi, Duke University)



# OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS

## 2nd Annual NCATC Conference

After being formed in 2021, the CMEIS hosted the second annual North Carolina Arabic Teacher Council (NCATC) conference "FIKRA," to Support Arabic Language Programs across the State. It brought together 30 K-16 educators working to expand Arabic as a language offering to North Carolina students gathered recently at UNC-Chapel Hill to explore diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the language and cultures classroom. "Conferences like this FIKRA are important because they provide a space for people with very specific interests to interact in a way that is meaningful and transformative," said Dr. Bentley Brown, a filmmaker and professor of critical media practices.



Emma Trentman, an associate professor of Arabic at the University of New Mexico who is renowned in the Arabic-linguistics community for her research on multilingualism and trans-language, engaged attendees in a virtual keynote presentation focused on the languages of instruction and learning that make Arabic language acquisition more accessible for students. In concurrent sessions, educators explored ways to expand the DEIA scope of their instruction from curricula to classroom teaching practices. They also spent time discussing potential programs for involvement: Qatar Debates, an international debate competition in Arabic held at the high school and university levels; and Arabic as an offering on the UNC Online Course Exchange, which would grant students across the state access to quality virtual Arabic language instruction.

Awad Awad, a high school Arabic teacher and representative of the Arabic Teacher Council of the South, remarked "the vision, synergy, avant-garde work, and potential of the NCATC is a K-20 pipeline model worthy of emulation." He concluded that "the FIKRA conference ought to take its show on the road for it pushes TAFL from its artificial classroom realm into intercultural, multi-dialect, and multilingual reality framed in an inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible world we all wish to live in."

Noor Ghazi, an Arabic professor at UNCG and Durham Technical Community College, reflected - "I have learned that coming together with other Arabic educators can add a lot to our knowledge by sharing different resources and teaching methods," Ghazi noted. "The highlight for me was seeing the tremendous efforts of all educators to make a difference and be as creative as possible in delivering the beauty of Arabic and its cultures, from music to films, documentaries, media, and more."

Conference organizer Caroline Sibley concluded, "this past year alone, four new Arabic language programs emerged in our state, one at an HBCU, two at Montessori elementary schools, and one at the North Carolina School of Science and Math in Morganton. The community of both Arabic language teachers and students learning Arabic continues to grow, and NCATC wants to be an integral part of supporting them."



### Sessions topics covered included:

- Representing Western Arabic Language and Culture in the Classroom
- Exploring Inclusive Teaching Methodologies: Lessons from Yallah al-Quds
- Critical Intercultural Communicative Arabic: A Call for a Paradigm Shift in 21st Century TAFL
- A panel with the authors of "Jusuur, a groundbreaking program for beginning Arabic"



# OUTREACH HIGHLIGHTS



## CMEIS Will Lead Trip for K-14 Educators to Morocco

In June 2023, CMEIS will collaborate with GCEO (Global Exploration for Educators Organization – a non-profit organization that helps and encourages teachers to travel abroad) to lead an educational tour across Morocco. Caroline Sibley, Teaching Assistant Professor in Arabic, will facilitate the learning experience. Ustaaza Caroline (professor Caroline, in Arabic) shares her thoughts about the upcoming adventure

“This summer, I am excited to explore Morocco with a group of K-14 educators across nearly all parts of the country. For two full weeks, we will travel from vibrant spice markets and ancient cities to the tops of the Atlas mountains, to stretches of nothing but Sahara. Teachers will experience all the cultural richness, geographic, linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity Morocco has to offer. All our adventures will inspire lessons and curricula designed to bring Morocco inside the classroom! Civil rights for indigenous populations, linguistic and economic exchange with France, Italy, and Spain, water scarcity in the Atlas Mountains, Jewish and Moorish refugee history in Chefchaouen- the Blue City, Islamic tile art, and a visit to one of the oldest Universities in the Middle East, al-Qarawiyyin, the list goes on...”



Teachers will walk away with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Moroccan history, geography, politics, customs, cultures, and, of course, a crash course in how to make Moroccan mint tea, eager and inspired to share their journeys and their impact with their very own students.



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