

**Brown University
Center for Middle East Studies**

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026



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Front Cover:

29 November 2025, Doha, Qatar: Modern Zeekr showroom building located in Msheireb downtown district with contemporary urban architecture

Credit: EdNurg stock.Adobe.com

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear colleagues and friends,

This year marked the beginning of a new chapter for the Center for Middle East Studies at Brown. It became an independent center on July 1, 2025, leaving its longtime home in the Watson Institute — now the Watson School — of International and Public Affairs. It has been a year of program building and rich collaborations with other centers on campus.

Some highlights of 2025-26 include **“American-Islamic Exchanges in the Long 19th Century,”** a year-long multi-event initiative that explored the circulation of peoples, commodities, artworks and texts between the United States and the Islamic world from the American Revolutionary War to the early 20th century. Another new series, **“Vision 20XX,”** featured panel discussions about the ambitious national agendas that have emerged in the GCC states over the past decade (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030 and UAE Vision 2071), exploring topics such as “giga-projects” and Gulf foreign policy. Finally, we launched **“Shahbandar,”** a program for sponsoring self-directed reading groups for students, faculty and staff.



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

In addition to these new programs, CMES continued to host its long-running research initiatives in **Palestinian studies**, **Iranian studies** and **gender studies**. The celebrated novelist Isabella Hammad delivered the annual **Mahmoud Darwish Lecture** and CMES held several events focused on the reconstruction of Gaza, including a **virtual reality** exhibit organized by Orwa Switat, the postdoctoral research associate in Palestinian studies. The **protests in Iran** and the ensuing **U.S. and Israeli attack** on that country were the subject of two highly attended events in spring 2026. **Vivian Salama**, staff writer at The Atlantic and former White House correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, addressed our community about her experience covering the Trump administration and its Middle East policy. We sponsored a workshop titled “The Filiation and Affiliation of Jews, Muslims and Others” organized by the Program in Judaic Studies and co-organized a conversation with the renowned Syrian clarinetist and composer **Kinan Azmeh**, together with the Department of Music.

This small sample of the year's activities testifies to the extraordinary vibrancy of Brown's scholarly community. In closing, I thank our wonderful staff for their dedication to our students and faculty, and wish you all a peaceful summer.

Elias Muhanna

Director, Center for Middle East Studies

MISSION

The Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) at Brown University promotes research, teaching and public engagement about the Middle East in a historically and culturally grounded manner. Its coverage is temporally and geographically expansive, extending from antiquity to the present, and it approaches the Middle East as a region with shifting boundaries as well as a conceptual entity within global discourses. As the hub for Middle East studies at Brown, CMES supports research and programming by world-renowned faculty, houses an undergraduate concentration with an interdisciplinary curriculum and acts as an intellectual and social home for graduate students across various departments. CMES collaborates with other units on campus to further Brown's work as a global university, especially dedicated to seeking a just and prosperous future for all.

CURRENT YEAR RESEARCH INITIATIVES

NEW DIRECTIONS IN PALESTINIAN STUDIES
ISLAM AND THE HUMANITIES
IRANIAN STUDIES

RESEARCH PROJECTS

GENDER STUDIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND
VISION 20XX
AMERICAN-ISLAMIC EXCHANGES IN THE LONG 19TH CENTURY

RESEARCH INITIATIVES



NEW DIRECTIONS IN PALESTINIAN STUDIES (NDPS)

Founded in 2012 by Mahmoud Darwish Professor of Palestinian Studies Beshara Doumani, this initiative promotes knowledge production on Palestine and Palestinians. Much of NDPS's work this year focused on rebuilding, a significant theme in Palestinian history and an urgent task for the future. In his first year as postdoctoral research associate in Palestinian studies, Orwa Switat organized a number of events focusing on Gaza's reconstruction, including the VR exhibition and panel discussion **"Visualizing Gaza: Healing, Recovery and Restoration."** His course, **People and Ruins: Remapping Demolished Spaces and Narratives**, also integrated digitization and visualization with political, historical and urban planning methods to think about the recovery of Palestinian space and heritage.

Repositioning the International Discourse of Gaza Reconstruction

Mamoun Besaiso
Senior Advisor to the United Nations and European Union

Akram M. Lijja
Cultural Heritage Specialist and Researcher from Gaza

Orwa Switat
Postdoctoral Research Associate in Palestinian Studies, Brown University

Discussant
Leila Farsakh
Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science, University of Massachusetts, Boston

BROWN
Center for Middle East Studies

Wednesday April 1, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:30p.m.
Webinar | Register Online

Gaza's Reconstruction and the Question of Justice

Abdalahman Kittana
Postdoctoral Fellow, Tampere University

Alessandra Gola
Co-Founder, Yalla Project

Yosef Jabareen
Professor of Urbanism and Sustainability, Technion

Discussant
Orwa Switat
Postdoctoral Research Associate in Palestinian Studies, Brown University

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Tuesday April 7, 2026 | 1:00 - 2:30p.m.
Webinar | Register Online

Tuesday April 14, 2026 | 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. | Kim Koo Library (328)
Thursday April 16, 2026 | 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. | Joukowsky Forum (155)
Watson School of International and Public Affairs, 111 Thayer Street
Brown ID and Registration Required

PHOENIX OF GAZA: VR EXHIBIT

This powerful VR exhibit transports viewers beyond war and blockade into Gaza's vibrant life and culture

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Thursday April 16, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. | Joukowsky Forum (155)
Watson School of International and Public Affairs, 111 Thayer Street
Brown ID and Registration Required

VISUALIZING GAZA PANEL: HEALING, RECOVERY, AND RESTORATION

Ahlam Muhsen | Professor of Media Studies, California State University, San Bernardino
Mazen Iwaidi | Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Fellow 2025-56, Columbia University
Naim Abu Raddi | Data Justice Fellow, Princeton University
Orwa Switat | Postdoctoral Research Associate in Palestinian Studies, Brown University

People and Ruins: Remapping Narratives of Demolished Spaces in Haifa

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Orwa Switat: Postdoctoral Research Associate in Palestinian Studies

Discussant:
Alex Winder: Associate Director, Center for Middle East Studies

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Monday April 27 2026 | 12:00-1:30 p.m.
McKinney Conference Room (353) 111 Thayer Street

NDPS also hosted award-winning novelist Isabella Hammad to deliver the annual Mahmoud Darwish Distinguished Visiting Lecture and supported the multimedia installation **"Prisoners of Love: Until the Sun of Freedom"** by artists Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme at Brown's David Winton Bell Gallery, in addition to a number of events on topics such as poetry, education and pluralism.



MAHMOUD DARWISH DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER LECTURE

Isabella Hammad
Award-winning Novelist
Palestine Book Award Winner
"The Parisian"
Green Press, 2019
S Under 35 Honoree



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Wednesday, February 18, 2026
5:00 – 5:30 p.m. | Book signing
5:30 – 7:00 p.m. | Talk
True North Room (101)
Stephen Robert 02 Hall 1200 Brook Street
Open to the Brown community

PALESTINIAN STUDIES

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, 2025-27

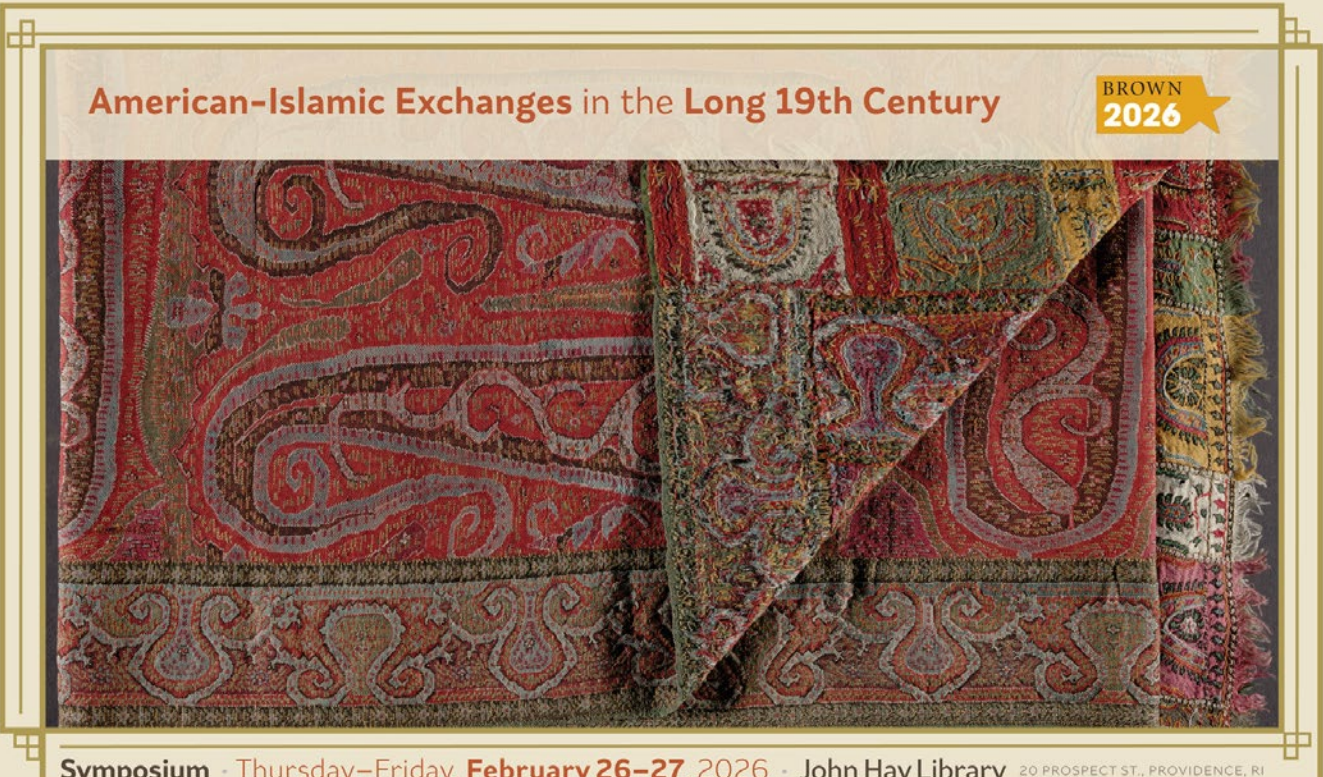
Orwa Switat is a postdoctoral research associate in Palestinian Studies at the Center for Middle East Studies at Brown University. Switat is an urban planning scholar with degrees in philosophy, political science and urban planning. He focuses on the status of groups in planning theory and practice. He has been a religion and public life fellow as part of the Religion, Conflict and Peace Initiative at Harvard Divinity School and a visiting scholar in the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University. In his research, he integrates digitization and visualization with discourse and planning analysis to uncover hidden histories, restore lost heritages, spatialize oral histories, visualize counter-hegemonic narratives and develop innovative restorative planning approaches.



ISLAM AND THE HUMANITIES

Islam and the Humanities is a research initiative that explores topics related to Muslim societies, histories and cultures within a humanistic paradigm. In 2025–26, the initiative funded the year-long project "**American-Islamic Exchanges in the Long 19th Century.**"

With continuing support from the Carnegie Corporation, Islam and the Humanities sponsors an open access book series titled "Islamic Humanities," published by the **University of California Press.**




American-Islamic Exchanges in the Long 19th Century **BROWN 2026**

Symposium · Thursday–Friday, **February 26–27, 2026** · John Hay Library 20 PROSPECT ST., PROVIDENCE, RI

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Middle East
Studies

BROWN
University Library

omea.brown.edu/
research-areas/
american-islamic-
exchanges-long-
19th-century



“American-Islamic Exchanges in the Long 19th Century” was a year-long initiative in 2025–26 that examined the long and rich history of interactions between the United States and Islamicate societies. Spearheaded by Anne S. K. Brown Curator for Military and Society Gwendolyn Collaço in collaboration with the **John Hay Library**, the **John Carter Brown Library**, the **Brown 2026** initiative and faculty from the Departments of History and History of Art and Architecture, this truly interdisciplinary initiative explored encounters characterized by a mix of solidarity, fascination and exoticization. In addition to panels and workshops, a symposium in February 2026 brought together scholars to explore these themes through the circulation of peoples, commodities, artwork and texts and the year-long **“Fashioning Insurrection”** exhibition at the Hay Library that highlighted the mercantile intersections of imperialism, race, religion and visual culture that transformed revolutionary garb from abroad into American fashion.



RESEARCH INITIATIVES



IRANIAN STUDIES

The **Iranian Studies** research initiative connects CMES with courses and programming in Brown's Center for Language Studies and with scholars specializing in the culture, history and politics of Iran and Persianate societies. Omar Khayyam Postdoctoral Research Associate in Iranian Studies Mehrdad Babadi taught the course **Iranian Cinema: History, Aesthetics, and Politics**, hosted weekly screenings of Iranian films and led discussions on intellectual masculinity in Iranian cinema with Michelle Quay, assistant teaching professor of Persian. Quay also introduced the French-Persian film **"Universal Language"** at the Providence French and Francophone Film Festival.

In the spring, a reading group met weekly to discuss modern and classical Persian literature. The initiative also responded to pressing current events by hosting a February gathering for the Iranian community, along with two teach-ins: **"Understanding Iran Today: Protest, Violence, and the Politics of Representation"** and **"The U.S. Strikes on Iran and their Aftermath: A Community Conversation."**

UNDERSTANDING IRAN TODAY:
PROTEST, VIOLENCE, AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION


Webinar: An Online Teach-in
February 11, 2026
12:30 - 2:00 p.m. EST
Registration Required

Narges Bajoghli
Johns Hopkins University

Ahmad Mohammadpour
Bentley University

Sanam Vakil
Chatham House

Moderator:
Nadje Al-Ali
Brown University

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The U.S. Strikes on Iran and their Aftermath: A Community Conversation

Monday, March 9, 2026
5:00 - 6:30 p.m. | Registration Required
Joukowsky Forum (155), Watson School of International and Public Affairs, 111 Thayer Street, Providence RI 02912

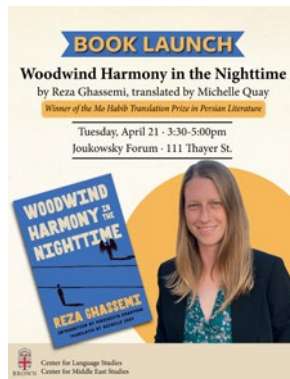
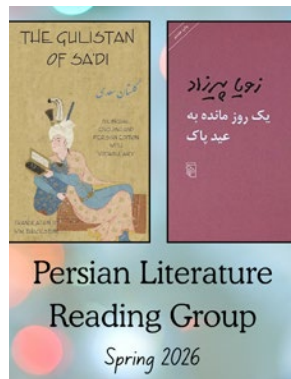
Nadje Al-Ali
Robert Family Professor of Anthropology and Middle East Studies

Stephen Kinzer
Senior Fellow in International and Public Affairs

Elias Muhanna
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and History, Director of CMES

Michelle Quay
Assistant Teaching Professor of Persian Language

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OMAR KHAYYAM POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATE IN IRANIAN STUDIES



Mehrdad Babadi is a cultural anthropologist whose work focuses on modern intimacies, love and gender, transitions to adulthood, and masculinities in Iran and the broader Middle East. In addition to his ethnographic research with youth in urban settings, he explores cinema as an anthropological lens to understand the sociocultural dynamics of contemporary Iranian life. At Brown, he teaches courses such as Intimacies in the Middle East, Iranian Cinema and Love and Gender in Modern Iran.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

GENDER STUDIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND

In collaboration with Columbia University's Middle East Institute, CMES is facilitating the initiative **"Gender and Body Politics: Arts in the Middle East and its Diasporas,"** a project dedicated to analyzing the representation and transgression of intersecting inequalities through visual and performance art. This research situates artistic production within the complex sociopolitical contexts of conflict, authoritarianism and displacement, exploring how practitioners engage with anti-racist, transnational feminist and queer praxis to challenge orientalist and Islamophobic tropes.



Body as Archive:
Gender, Borders and
Witnessing Operas

Fatma Bucak
in conversation with
Nadje Al-Ali
Brown University
Kathryn Spellman Poots
Columbia University

Wed., November 19, 2025
12:00 - 1:30 p.m.
WEBINAR

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Middle East
INSTITUTE
Columbia University

Central to this endeavor is the work of Robert Family Professor of International Studies, Anthropology and Middle East Studies Nadje Al-Ali, whose ongoing documentation of the nexus between art and activism includes recent field research among diaspora communities in Berlin and a forthcoming collaborative mission to Tunis with fellow scholar Kathryn Spellman Poots. These research commitments are further integrated into the curriculum through Al-Ali's co-taught course on transnational feminist knowledge production, which establishes a rigorous comparative framework between feminist movements in the Middle East and East Asia, as well as an event with artist Fatma Bucak titled **"Body as Archive: Gender, Borders and Witnessing Operas."**

VISION 20XX

Vision 20XX is a series of conversations hosted by CMES exploring various nation-building projects that have emerged in the Middle East and North Africa over the past decade. Articulated in the form of ambitious “vision” documents (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030, UAE Vision 2071, etc.), these national agendas reflect a diverse set of aspirations for social, economic and political change, often shaped by input from private consultancies, global NGOs and government authorities. This series brings together scholars, journalists and professionals in different fields to explore the “envisioned communities” conceived by these national programs, and to consider what effect they may have on the future of the region.



OTHER PROGRAMMING



The Trump White House and the Press

A Conversation with Vivian Salama | The Atlantic, The Wall Street Journal



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Cosponsored by:



BROWN
Center for Philosophy, Politics,
and Economics

Monday, September 22, 2025 | 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

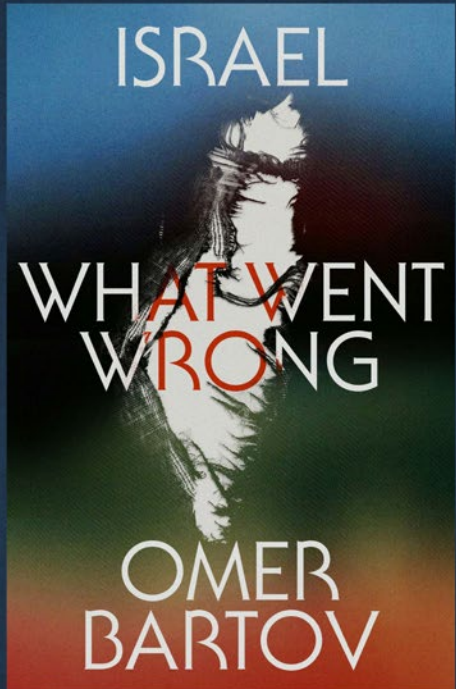
True North Classroom | Room 101

Stephen Robert '62 Hall | 280 Brook Street



OTHER PROGRAMMING

April 22, 2026 5:45 p.m. EST
Registration Required
Venue to Be Advised



Author Book Event

Israel: What Went Wrong?

Omer Bartov

Brown University Dean's Professor of
Holocaust and Genocide Studies

Nadje Al-Ali
Orwa Switat
Erica Weiss

Laura Jockusch
Brandeis University

Brown University



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OTHER PROGRAMMING

THE MIDDLE EAST COLLOQUIUM

MIDDLE EAST COLLOQUIUM

Translating Irish Poets on Gaza

Miled Faiza
Tunisian Poet and Literary Translator
Associate Teaching Professor of Arabic
Brown University

September 25, 2025 | 12:00 p.m.
McKinney Conference Room | 353
111 Thayer Street

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REGISTRATION REQUIRED

MIDDLE EAST COLLOQUIUM

Testing and the Middle East: Nation-Building, Development, and the Enduring Importance of Standardized Examinations

Hilary Falb Kalisman
Program in Jewish Studies
University of Colorado Boulder

Friday, November 7, 2025 | 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
McKinney Conference Room 353, 3rd floor
111 Thayer Street

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REGISTRATION REQUIRED

MIDDLE EAST COLLOQUIUM

Remaking a Sovereign Landlord: Property and Dispossession Along the Basra Oil Frontier

Gabriel Young
Alomran Family
Postdoctoral Research Associate
in Middle East Studies

Thursday, November 13, 2025 | 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
McKinney Conference Room | 353
111 Thayer Street

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REGISTRATION REQUIRED

MIDDLE EAST COLLOQUIUM

In the Shadow of the State: Lived Pluralism in Ramla

Erica Weiss
Visiting Associate Professor
in Judaic Studies

Thursday, March 19, 2026 | 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
McKinney Conference Room | 353
111 Thayer Street

 **BROWN**
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REGISTRATION REQUIRED

ACADEMICS

SAMPLING OF COURSES

CMES faculty and students further the center's well-earned reputation for groundbreaking research and classroom innovation, pushing the boundaries of Middle East studies from antiquity to the present. Affiliated faculty have established Brown as a hub for research on gender and sexuality, conflict and displacement, and social and political movements. Students are drawn to Middle East studies by their interests in the region's languages, cultures and societies, as well as its connections to other parts of the world.

Brown's first-rate Middle Eastern language courses often serve as a gateway for students interested in the region. Elective courses in various departments introduce students to different disciplinary perspectives and methodologies, which they apply to their own research with the support of faculty, librarians and CMES travel funding. Students travel to the Middle East for research, language study and internships. Meanwhile, scholars, journalists, artists and practitioners visit Brown's campus for CMES events and to speak to Middle East studies classes, providing an opportunity for students to engage directly with leading voices in the field.

CMES thus continues to foster a tight-knit community of scholars — students and faculty — who bring their unique interests and perspectives together in the shared endeavor of better understanding the Middle East and the people who live there.

The Environment in Modern Arabic Literature

DIMA NASSER

With the rise of environmental concerns, the destruction of indigenous ecologies in the Arab world is a major theme of Arabic literature. This course examines representations of environmental and humanitarian crises across novels, poems, short stories, paintings, films and essays. It explores how natural resources — trees, deserts, water and oil — become sites of Indigenous struggle against erasure by settler colonialism, war and exploitative capitalist economies, featuring authors including Mahmoud Darwish, Abdelrahman Munif and others.

Demons and Drugs, Magic and Medicine: Healing in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia

JONATHAN RUSSELL

At the dawn of written history, ancient peoples of Egypt and Mesopotamia recorded methods of healing the sick. Rivers such as the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates shaped theories of sickness alongside beliefs in gods and demons. Using translated texts (including recipes, botanical treatises, incantations and rituals), archaeology and scientific research, this course compares social experiences in Thebes and Babylon, questioning modern understandings of the human body and illness.

Legal History: The Case of the Middle East

FAIZ AHMED

From early schools of Islamic jurisprudence to Ottoman, Egyptian and Iranian constitutions, and the role of lawyers and judiciaries from decolonization to the Arab Spring uprisings, this course explores the depth, diversity and transformation of legal cultures and institutions across different epochs of Middle East history. Topics include Islamic jurisprudence, imperial and national legal systems, and intersections between religion and secularism and international law.

Transnational Feminist Knowledge Productions and Practices: Perspectives from East and West Asia

LINGZHEN WANG, NADJE AL-ALI

This advanced interdisciplinary seminar challenges U.S. and Eurocentric historiographies and dominant framings of feminism. Bringing together transnational critiques, regional expressions and local historiographies, it explores feminist research spaces with a focus on East and West Asia. The course examines historical trajectories, political strategies, artistic imaginations and alternative visions articulated by feminists, while considering transnational solidarities, knowledge production, power dynamics and tensions within and between feminist groups and initiatives.

Frantz Fanon: Critical Theory and Decolonizing Practices between the Caribbean and (North) Africa

MOHAMED AMER MEZIANE

Focusing on Frantz Fanon, this course explores major themes in anticolonial thought and Francophone intellectual production. It offers close readings of his work as revolutionary theory and practice, while examining influences from Césaire to Lacan and the historical context of the Algerian war. It also introduces French-language literary and philosophical traditions from the Caribbean, North Africa and West Africa, alongside key questions of colonialism, decolonization and cultural production.

ACADEMICS

SAMPLING OF COURSES

Iran and the Islamic Revolution

STEPHEN KINZER

This course examines the Iranian Revolution of 1978-80 within the broader context of modern Iranian history. It explores the anti-shah movement, the rise of religious power and the revolution's long-term effects. The course concludes in contemporary Iran, situating recent events, including political developments and evolving relations with the United States, within a century of historical change.

Contested and Ambivalent Belonging in Modern Israel: Questions of Ethnicity and Citizenship

ERICA WEISS

Belonging in Israel is shaped by ambivalence and contestation within the state and in relation to the Jewish diaspora. This course examines how ethnicity, religion, race and migration intersect to produce inclusion, exclusion and layered citizenship. Drawing on ethnographic and historical approaches, the course analyzes diverse communities and considers how nationhood, memory and identity are continuously negotiated.

Strange Powers: Energy in the Modern Middle East

GABRIEL YOUNG

This course reframes the Middle East in modern global history through the lens of energy. It examines how different energy sources — water, wood, coal, oil, gas, wind and sun — shape social, political and economic systems. Topics include capitalist development, state formation, imperialism, migration and environmental change, highlighting how energy regimes influence both historical trajectories and possible futures.

Kiarostami: What Is an Image?

JOAN COPJEC

Iranian cinema is a major site of artistic and cultural production. This course examines the work of key filmmakers alongside broader developments in Iranian film history, focusing on how cinema engages questions of reality, modernity and cultural identity. It also considers how films respond to political and social transformations, and how artistic traditions shape cinematic expression.

People & Ruins (Studio): Remapping Demolished Spaces & Narratives

ORWA SWITAT

How do Palestinian communities rebuild identities and remain resilient amid the destruction of heritage? Using a multidisciplinary approach, this course integrates digitization, mapping and visual analysis with political and historical inquiry to examine contested spaces and recover hidden histories. The course highlights cultural practices, oral histories and spatial narratives, emphasizing resilience, dispossession and possibilities for restorative and decolonial futures.

TESTIMONIALS

*“I thoroughly enjoyed **Dima Nasser’s course on the Environment in Modern Arabic Literature**. Although I am not a Middle East studies or comparative literature concentrator, the class significantly broadened the perspectives and methods I bring to my environmental studies work. It allowed me to explore my field through a new medium while engaging with a region too often overlooked in environmental discourse.”*

—ANGE YEUNG '28

*“**Gabriel Young’s class on Strange Powers: Energy in the Modern Middle East** really helped reframe energy politics in the Middle East for me beyond simply the extraction of oil abstractly. The readings, lectures and discussions highlighted the material realities of energy production throughout history and the interplay between imperialist state power, race, class and the control of energy flows.”*

—FRANK YANG '29

*“This interdisciplinary seminar, **Transnational Feminist Knowledge Productions and Practices**, brought East and West Asian feminist thought into dialogue, challenging Euro & U.S.-centric frameworks and foregrounding alternative knowledge productions. Through historical, geopolitical, ethnographic and cultural perspectives, students examined feminist politics, solidarities and tensions across regions, engaging critically with questions of power, coloniality and transnational activism in both theory and practice.”*

—PROFESSORS NADJE AL-ALI AND LINGZHEN WANG

ACADEMICS STUDENTS

DEPARTMENTAL UNDERGRADUATE GROUP (DUG)

The DUG is run by students interested in Middle East studies who wish to build a community both inside and outside of the concentration. The MES DUG aims to highlight those aspects of the center that are related to undergraduate activities. This year's DUG leaders were Layla Ahmed '27, Inari Jade Barrett '27 and Dorra Omrani '26. In their role, they acted as undergraduate student ambassadors, disseminating pertinent announcements to their peers and organizing socials and career development events.



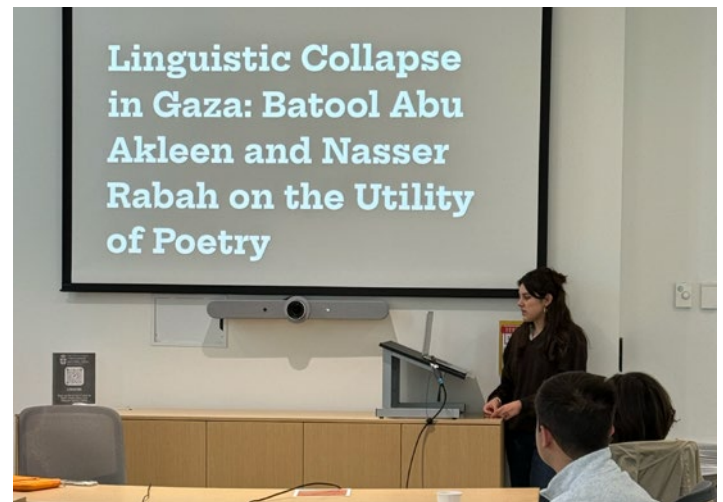
(from left): Layla Ahmed '27, Inari Jade Barrett '27, Dorra Omrani '26

ACADEMICS STUDENTS



"My past four years studying MES have been very impactful and exciting. I've come across such lovely staff, faculty and students. They have all truly shaped the way I think and approach academia."

—DORRA OMRANI '26

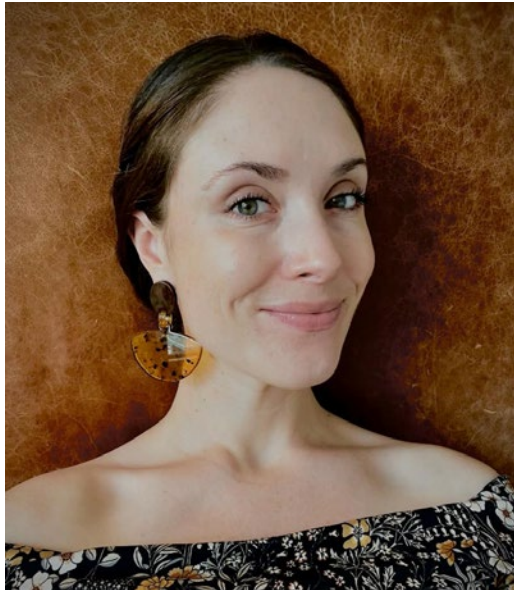


ACADEMICS STUDENTS

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION (MESGSA)

The Middle East Studies Graduate Student Association (MESGSA) is an interdisciplinary group united by a shared scholarly interest in the Middle East and North Africa. Combining diverse humanities and social sciences backgrounds with regional expertise, the association aims to foster conversations among graduate students that are theoretically diverse and regionally focused.

The association offers opportunities for funding of paper workshops, reading groups, research travel and panels on fieldwork in the Middle East and North Africa led by graduate students with hands-on experience. These gatherings serve to support and foster critical and engaged Brown student scholarship in the Middle East at the graduate level.



Mairéad Smith

2025-26 MESGSA leader **Mairéad Smith** is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at Brown University. She holds a B.A. in sociology and philosophy from Trinity College Dublin and an M.A. in Middle East studies from Lund University. Her research examines responses to violence categorized as “conflict-related sexual violence,” focusing on how language, translation and semiotics shape its aftermath. Centered in post-conflict Nineveh, Iraq, her work interrogates how the category of “rape” is translated and universalized — especially where no direct linguistic equivalent exists — and how language ideologies influence women’s ability to speak about sexual violence in state, humanitarian and legal encounters.

ACADEMICS STUDENTS

SAMS FAMILY RESEARCH TRAVEL AWARDS

“Thanks to the CMES RTA, I was able to fund a research trip to Lisbon, Portugal, where I looked at the National Archives at the Torre do Tombo. I was able to consult 15th and 16th century manuscript records relating to the Portuguese colonization of cities on the Moroccan Atlantic coast.”

—IMEN BOUSSAYOUD, PH.D. CANDIDATE IN HISTORY

2025-2026 AWARDS

GRADUATE STUDENTS

IMEN BOUSSAYOUD

KATE CREASEY

FRANK FAVERZANI

PATRYK IMIELSKI

MOHAMMAD GELDI GELDI NEJAD (WINTER)

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

GENEVIEVE SYCHTERZ

“My dissertation project looks at the 1980 military coup d’etat in Turkey. I was able to use my RTA to go to Berlin, Germany, in May 2025 where many people from Turkey were in exile in the aftermath of the coup. In Berlin, I conducted a series of oral history interviews, and I attended a play at the Maxim Gorki theater about the afterlives of the 1980 coup d’etat.”

— KATE CREASEY, PH.D. CANDIDATE IN HISTORY

ACADEMICS CLASS OF 2026



CAPSTONE

From Verse to Image:
The Afterlives of Abu
al-Qasim al-Shabbi's
Iradat al Hayat

DORRA OMRANI '26

is a double concentrator in Middle East Studies and Biology. She has served as a DUG representative for the Middle East Studies concentration and as editor-in-chief of the Brown Undergraduate Journal of Middle East Studies. She has also been heavily involved in the leadership of the Brown Arab Society during her time at Brown. Dorra's capstone project examines the poetry of Tunisian writer Aboul Qacem El-Chebbi and the visual art it has inspired in its cultural afterlife. Beyond her engagement with CMES, Dorra is involved in biotechnology and global mental health research projects at Brown. After graduation, she plans to apply to medical school.

SABINE JIMENEZ-WILLIAMS '26

is a double concentrator in Middle East studies and comparative literature. She has worked for the College Hill Independent as a managing editor and section editor and is currently working with Bidoun Productions on a monograph of the late Lebanese artist Nicolas Moufarrege. Her capstone focuses on Gazan poets Batool Abu Akleen and Nasser Rabah and their respective explorations of the limits of metaphor, translation and language during genocide. She is also invested in language justice and immigrant rights in the United States, previously working as a Spanish translator, interpreter and project manager for Caritas of Austin and Respond Crisis Translation. After graduation, she is excited to continue working on projects that mobilize art and literature against imperialism.



CAPSTONE

The Death of Language
in the Collections of
Batool Abu Akleen
and Nasser Rabah

STUDENT ASSISTANTS



INARI JADE BARRETT '27



SALMA ELDEEB '26



TYLER FISCHMAN '27



HESHMA HUSSAIN '29



SABINE JIMENEZ-WILLIAMS '26



MUSTAPHA KHARBOUCH '27



VERA KOONTZ '29



DORRA OMRANI '26



PROTTOY ROY '28

PEOPLE



ELIAS MUHANNA

CENTER DIRECTOR
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND HISTORY



ALEX WINDER

CENTER ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR



BARBARA OBERKOETTER

CENTER MANAGER



THERESA PAIVA

EVENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR
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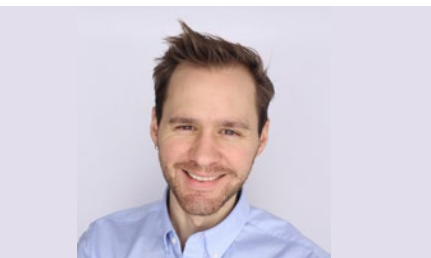
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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND HISTORY; DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

Muhanna is a scholar of medieval and early-modern Islamic history and classical Arabic literature. His research has focused on encyclopedic practices in the medieval Arabic-Islamic world, the history of the Arabic language and the problem of the vernacular in various literary traditions. His essays and criticism appear regularly in *The New Yorker*, the *London Review of Books*, *The New York Times* and other periodicals.

NADJE AL-ALI

ROBERT FAMILY PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES;
PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

Al-Ali's main research interests revolve around feminist activism and gendered mobilization, mainly with reference to Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and the Kurdish political movement. Her publications include "What kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq," co-authored with Nicola Pratt; "Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present" and "Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East."





MARGARET GRAVES

ADRIENNE MINASSIAN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN HONOR OF MARILYN JENKINS-MADINA

Graves is a specialist in the art of the Islamic world, with a particular research focus on museum objects, the plastic arts (ceramics, metalwork, stone carving) and the acts and contexts of making in the medieval and modern eras.



JAE HAN

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES; ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF JUDAIC STUDIES

Han is broadly interested in the literature of the peoples who lived in ancient Syria and Mesopotamia. His current project focuses on concepts of prophethood and revelatory knowledge among late antique Syro-Mesopotamian communities, especially "Jewish Christians," Manichaeans, Neoplatonists and early Jewish "mystics."



PAUL NAHME

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES; DIRECTOR OF JUDAIC STUDIES

Nahme is a scholar of modern Jewish thought and intellectual history. His work engages political theory, psychoanalysis and critical theory to examine religion, race and nationalism. He is the author of "Hermann Cohen and the Crisis of Liberalism and Ghost People" and co-editor of the essay collection "Covenantal Thinking: Essays on the Philosophy and Theology of David Novak."

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ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Pabón teaches courses on comparative poetics, Arabic literature and anticolonial thought. Her current manuscript examines efforts to construct the “voice of the people” across Palestinian, Cuban and Algerian poetry throughout the long 1960s. She is the co-editor of the volume “Art and Politics Between the Arab World and Latin America.” Her academic writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Middle Eastern Literatures* and *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*.



MICHELLE QUAY

ASSISTANT TEACHING PROFESSOR OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

Quay’s research focuses on premodern Persian literature, particularly in the writings of Farid al-Din ‘Attar Nishapuri and other early Sufi mystics. Through her teaching, she enjoys helping students acquire the basics of Persian language and guiding them through the program to advanced Persian language, literature and culture courses.



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Box 1970
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