

# Middle Eastern Studies Program

Syracuse University

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Middle Eastern Studies Program

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## THE MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES PROGRAM

Located in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs' Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, the Middle Eastern Studies Program (MESP) offers both an interdisciplinary minor and major through the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as a graduate Certificate of Advanced Study through the Maxwell School. All three programs offer world class instruction and study abroad opportunities, providing unique insights into one of the world's fastest growing regions.

### MAJOR IN MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

The interdisciplinary major, which leads to a B.A. in Middle Eastern Studies (MES), provides students with the opportunity to study the languages, history, culture, religions, and politics of the Middle East. The major is open to all undergraduates who have a GPA of 2.8 or better. The major requires students to complete:

- (a) Three consecutive classes in one of the regional languages: Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish (12 credits).
- (b) Eight elective MES content courses that concentrate on the history, politics, society, and culture of the area, including Iran, Turkey, Israel, and the Arab world (24 credits). Other regions that have been influenced by Middle Eastern societies and cultures are also included. These courses must be drawn from at least three different departments. No more than six credits may be from 100/200 level courses.

### MINOR IN MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

The minor in MES was established in 2003 to offer students exposure to the diverse cultures, languages, literatures, religions, and political systems of the Middle East as it took center stage in the international geopolitical landscape. Students must complete a total of 20 credits (six courses) for the minor in MES: two consecutive language classes in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Hebrew (eight credits) and four elective MES content courses (numbered 300 and above) from at least two different departments (12 credits).

### CERTIFICATE OF ADVANCED STUDY

The Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS) in Middle Eastern Affairs is available to Syracuse University students in all graduate programs who are seeking to supplement their degree with a strong foundation in the region's culture and politics or to prepare for a career involving regional specialization. The CAS is administered and awarded by the Maxwell School. Students are required to complete at least 12 credits: a three credit required course and nine credits of approved electives selected from affiliated departments within the University and/or approved activities such as internships, language study, independent study, or capstone experiences.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE • YÜKSEL SEZGIN

On April 25, 2023, the Middle Eastern Studies Program (MESP) held its first spring reception since April 2019. Nearly 100 guests, including students, faculty, staff, and community members, joined us to celebrate the accomplishments of our students and recognize the contributions of our world-renowned faculty. After a long hiatus, meeting in person with so many friends and students was wonderful. The pandemic is not yet over, but a greater sense of normalcy and hope is in the air.

Many Middle Eastern cultures celebrate the arrival of spring. This year, Nowruz celebrations partly overlapped with Ramadan, Easter, and Passover. Spring is the time of renewals and new beginnings. It is a time of hope and inspiration.

Rumi, aka Mawlana, the 13th-century Muslim mystic and poet, wrote:

*Did you hear that winter's over?  
The basil and the carnations  
cannot control their laughter.  
The nightingale, back from his wandering,  
has been made singing master over the birds.  
The trees reach out their congratulations.  
The soul goes dancing through the king's doorway.  
Anemones blush  
because they have seen the rose naked.  
Spring, the only fair judge, walks in the courtroom,  
and several December thieves steal away.  
Last year's miracles will soon be forgotten.  
New creatures whirl in from non-existence,  
galaxies scattered around their feet.  
Have you met them?*

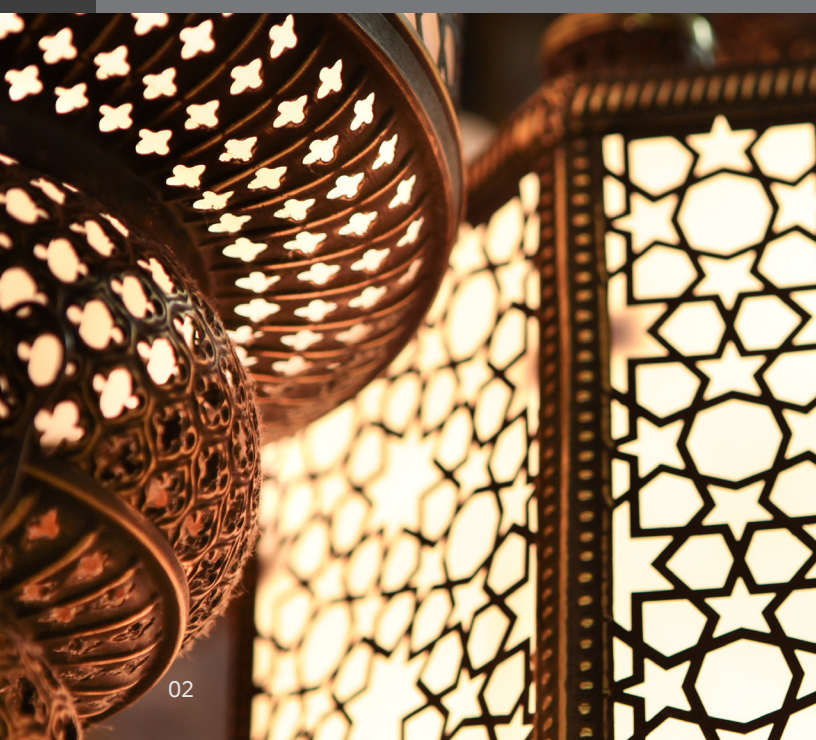
As Rumi says, spring, the only fair judge, walks in the courtroom. I am afraid the fair judge's verdict will not favor our region. We have greeted another spring with millions of refugees away from their homes, unwelcomed in their adopted countries. Earthquakes and natural disasters have claimed tens of thousands of lives. There is so much violence and bloodshed. Millions suffer under increasingly authoritarian regimes. Climate change and pandemic-induced socioeconomic problems deepen people's suffering and postpone the dreams of a better life to an uncertain future date.

In recent years, the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region seems to have lost the pivotal role that it used to play for the U.S. foreign policy establishment. However, this shift of focus does not diminish the region's political, historical, and economic importance. The region has a combined GDP of \$5 trillion, a population of 500 million, and is home to over 50% of the world's proven oil and gas reserves.

Syracuse University students recognize the continued significance of the MENA region. Students who want to gain an edge in the increasingly competitive job market choose to invest in their future by pursuing a major, minor, or Certificate of Advanced Study in Middle Eastern Affairs. As the director, I am happy to report that our program continues to grow. We have nearly 80 undergraduate and graduate students and 26 affiliated faculty members.

Over the last three years, the pandemic impacted our day-to-day operations. Many events, workshops, book projects, planned field trips, and study abroad courses have been derailed, canceled, or postponed. The pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions for many programs and disciplines, but its effects on area studies have been seismic. However, we remain hopeful that we will bounce back in the next few years and fully resume our pre-pandemic activities.

As we work toward that objective, I know that, as in the past, we can again count on the dedication and hard work of our students and faculty and the generosity of our friends to ensure our success. With that in mind, I personally invite you to consider supporting our programs and activities by making a tax-deductible donation at [www.maxwell.syr.edu/giving](http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/giving) (select "Middle Eastern Studies Program Fund" as the recipient). Thank you very much for your continued support and generosity.



## SUPPORT THE MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES PROGRAM AND SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Most of the endeavors and accomplishments mentioned in this newsletter are made possible by alumni and friends of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

Please consider making a tax deductible contribution at [www.maxwell.syr.edu/giving](http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/giving)

(Select "Middle Eastern Studies Program Fund" as the recipient.)



## 2022-23 MESP SPONSORED AND CO-SPONSORED EVENTS

**Panel:** Iran's Political Uprising: "Woman, Life, Freedom" Shake the Regime in Iran  
Oct. 11, 2022

**Lecture:** Does Palestine Have a Future as a State?  
Feb. 28, 2023

**Lecture:** "The Muslim Woman": Between Orientalism and Securitization  
March 8, 2023

**Panel:** Turkish Presidential Elections: Will Turkey Restore its Democracy or Further Slide Into Authoritarianism?  
April 11, 2023

**Conference:** Language Matters "Moving Forward" Conference  
April 13 14, 2023

**Reception:** Middle Eastern Studies Program Awards Reception  
April 25, 2023

**Language Table:** Arabic Culture and Conversation Table  
Oct. 17, 2022; Nov. 14, 2022

**Language Table:** Hebrew Culture and Conversation Table  
Oct. 26, 2022; Nov. 2, 2022; Nov. 11, 2022; Nov. 30, 2022; Feb. 7, 2023; Feb. 15, 2023; March 1, 2023; April 20, 2023

**Language Table:** Persian Culture and Conversation Table  
Oct. 14, 2022; Oct. 28, 2022; Nov. 11, 2022; Dec. 2, 2022; Feb. 10, 2023; March 3, 2023; April 7, 2023; April 21, 2023

**Language Table:** Turkish Culture and Conversation Table  
Oct. 6, 2022; Oct. 27, 2022; Nov. 15, 2022; Feb. 16, 2023; March 7, 2023; April 25, 2023

## CONGRATULATIONS TO STUDENTS RECEIVING A CERTIFICATE OF ADVANCED STUDY (CAS) IN MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS IN 2022 AND 2023

- AbdelHalim AbdAllah
- Sahar Mechmech
- Stephanie Saba

## GRADUATE STUDENTS CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON TOPICS RELATED TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



**MOSAB ABU TOHA**  
ENGLISH

Abu Toha is a Palestinian poet, short story writer, and essayist from Gaza. Abu Toha is the author of *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear: Poems From Gaza* (2022, City Lights), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry and winner of a 2022 Palestine Book Award. He is founder of the Edward Said Library, and from 2019-20, he was a visiting poet and librarian in residence at Harvard University. His poems have been published in *Poetry*, *The Nation*, the Academy of American Poets' *Poem a-Day*, *Poetry Daily*, *Banipal*, and elsewhere.



**HAMAD ALHUM AidAN**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

AlHumaidan's research interests include authoritarianism, trust in institutions, nationalism, and social media and misinformation. He focuses on the Middle East broadly with a specific interest in the states of the Arabian Peninsula.



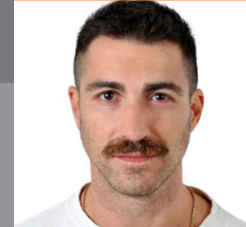
**MANSOUR ALMUAILI**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

AlMuaili is interested in political participation in nondemocracies. His research unpacks electioneering strategies in nondemocratic legislatures and assesses how gender, race, and income interact to shape individuals' political preferences in nondemocratic regimes.



**SOHROB ASLAMY**  
GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Aslamy studies the political economy of urban development in Kabul, Afghanistan, focusing on the decades long project to build a new capital for the country.



**ALTUĞ ASLANOĞLU**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Aslanoğlu is a political science Ph.D. student. He studies comparative politics with a focus on the rise of right wing populism in rural areas in Turkey, Brazil, the U.K., and Germany. Aslanoğlu has a B.S. from SUNY Binghamton, an MBA from Sabanci University, and an M.S. in international affairs from Penn State.



**MOHAMMAD EBAD ATHAR**  
HISTORY

Athar is a Ph.D. candidate in the history department. His dissertation research examines the securitization of South Asian identity in the United States and the Persian Gulf in the post 9/11 period.



**NAZ ELIF AY**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Ay's research interests include quantitative methods, money and politics, party strategies, and clientelism in Turkey and Europe.



## GRADUATE STUDENTS CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON TOPICS RELATED TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



**ALMILA BAŞAK**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Başak’s research interests include the politics of social policy, comparative welfare studies, democratic backsliding, and Turkish politics.



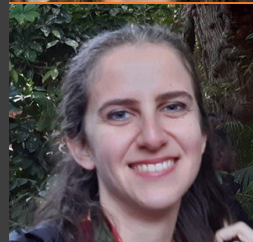
**AHMET ÇELİK**  
RELIGION

Çelik’s general research interests include comparative political thought, Islamic political and legal theory, political philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and early modern and modern political philosophy. His dissertation project, which sits at the intersection of religion, philosophy, and political theory, examines the concept of sovereignty in Islamic political thought.



**ELIZABETH DAVIS**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Davis’ research interests include refugee policy, migration studies, MENA politics, and pedagogy. Her dissertation focuses on the relationship between democratic transitions and refugee and migration policy, both in Tunisia and in cross-national perspective.



**AYŞE DURAKOĞLU**  
ANTHROPOLOGY

Durakoğlu’s research interests include political anthropology of space, consumption, culture, and identity; nation and state building; and modernity/modernization in Turkey. Her current research interest is the politics and experience of rising popularity of “Korean culture” in the Turkish context.



**AMR ELAFIFI**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Elafifi is a graduate student in the political science department, where his work focuses on the relationship between trauma and political participation. Most recently, he co-authored a book on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from 2013-22. In addition to his graduate studies, Elafifi is research manager at The Freedom Initiative, an organization dedicated to advocating and conducting research on behalf of political prisoners in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.



**NATALIE EL-EID**  
ENGLISH

As an English Ph.D. candidate with a CAS in women’s and gender studies, El-Eid specializes in 20th- and 21st-century U.S. multiethnic literatures and cultures with a focus on the Arab diaspora. Her research interests center on how transnationalism, war, trauma, memory, gender, and sexuality intersectionally work across representations of the diasporic identity post World War II. During the 2022-23 academic year, El-Eid received an SU Humanities Center Dissertation Fellowship for her dissertation project, “Transnational Druze and Reincarnation: Remembering, Recording, and Reconnecting.”



**İREM AYBALA GÜLEN**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Gülen’s research interests center on public opinion, polarization, and party politics in Turkey and European countries.



**OZAN KARAYIĞIT**  
GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Karayığit’s academic interests include right to the city, Islamization of built environment, and Iraqi migrant/refugee geographies.



**LAUREN MCCORMICK**  
RELIGION

McCormick’s interests include biblical studies, ancient Near Eastern studies, and material culture (specifically, discerning creativity within repetitious art forms).



**MEHDI NEJATBAKHSH**  
SOCIOLOGY

Nejatbakhsh’s research interests include globalization, cosmopolitanism, national and cultural identity, political sociology, immigration and diaspora, the Middle East, and Iran.



**ARDA ÖZ**  
ENGLISH

Öz is an English doctoral student focusing on film and screen studies. Their research lies at the intersections of transnational queer and feminist studies, critical ethnic studies, affect studies, and reception studies. Their scholarly investments primarily engage with Turkish cinema’s potential to house unregulated pleasures, transgressive desires, and other manifestations of sexual and gender dissidence as it relates to other popular cinemas such as Egyptian cinema, Iranian cinema, and Bollywood.



**IVY RAINES**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Raines is a fifth-year Ph.D. candidate in political science. Her research broadly centers on comparative legal systems in the Muslim world, with a specific focus on family law. Her dissertation investigates the relationship between religion, law, and legal practices as they pertain to women’s rights in the private sphere in Senegal, Algeria, and Tajikistan, where Raines recently returned from a six-month research trip on a Boren Fellowship.



**RAZA RAJA**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Raja’s research interests include political economy of development finance, public policy, and politics in the Middle East and South Asia.



**KATHARINE RUSSELL**  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Russell’s research focuses broadly on the decision by terrorist organizations to deploy women and children in various roles. Specifically, her dissertation explores the multiple roles, both violent and nonviolent, that terrorist organizations assign to female members.



## NEW FACULTY MEMBER



**Omar Cheta**  
Assistant Professor  
History Department

### **Tell us a little about yourself. What is your academic and professional background? How did you become interested in your field?**

I discovered history through economics. My path to economics was quite common. I grew up in Alexandria, Egypt, during the 1980s and '90s, when middle class dreams about the future revolved around an idealized capitalist society that seemed on the cusp of realization. Around the time I graduated from high school, the country was drowning in advertisements about American style suburban developments and new cellular services. When I look back, I am not surprised that my parents, both physicians, encouraged me to prepare for a career in finance or something of that sort. I followed that path for a while, majoring in economics at the American University in Cairo. Gradually, however, I realized that I was not very interested in the courses essential to the major, like microeconomics or banking. Rather, it was courses on the history of economic thought and the political economy of colonialism that I found intellectually stimulating and meaningful.

After I graduated, I joined a small team led by AbdelAziz EzzelArab - a professor of mine who had abandoned a career in banking to become an economic historian - to establish a research center focused on business history and employing oral historical methods. Soon afterward, I was accepted to the University of Chicago's M.A. program in Middle Eastern Studies. There, I became convinced that I should pursue history as a career and not just as a hobby. From there, I went to New York University, where I did my Ph.D. under the supervision of Khaled Fahmy, Zachary Lockman, and Leslie Peirce. My time at NYU coincided with the global financial crisis of 2008; as a student of history, I rediscovered economics not as a subject of technical expertise but as part of a broader scholarly interest in the "history of capitalism." After finishing graduate school, I became an assistant professor at Bard College, where I further developed this interest under the influence of Bard's strong interdisciplinary culture.

### **What is your research focus? Are you working on anything new?**

My research focuses on the intersection of capitalism (broadly defined) and the legal sphere. For a number of years now, I have been studying different aspects of this topic in relation to Egypt during the 1800s. During that time, Egypt was the site of a massive modern state building project and ambitious legal experimentation. It also became an important node in the world economy as a major exporter of cotton and the main maritime passage between imperial Europe and Asia - this is when the reputation of Egyptian cotton was made and the Suez Canal was built. I am particularly interested in two dimensions of this historical episode. The first, structural, is an attempt to reconstruct the dynamic map of institutions and rules that regulated commerce. The second, social, is an attempt to capture the experience of the individuals who navigated this legal structure in order to engage in business activities.

Right now, I am completing a book on the subject with the working title *How Commerce Became Legal: Merchants and Market Governance in Late Ottoman Egypt*. It is based on my work in several archives, most importantly the Egyptian National Archives, where I have examined the records of Cairo's merchant courts in the mid 1800s. I am also revising an article on debtor prisons during the same period, which will be published as a part of *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Egyptian History*.

### **What courses do you teach? Do you have a favorite?**

I have taught four undergraduate courses this year: a two-part survey of Middle Eastern history from the rise of Islam in the 7th century to the post-colonial states of the 20th century, a seminar on the history of capitalism in the Middle East, and the Practicum in the Study of History. I plan to offer new courses on the history of law and ideas in the region across different time periods. I am also developing an interest in the history of Arab communities in America and hope to add it to my future teaching plans.

It is hard for me to pick a favorite course. Part of why I enjoy teaching is that it is a dynamic activity. I am interested in everything I teach about, but my favorite teaching moments are when students demonstrate their own interest in the subject. This is what elevates the teaching - an informed comment, an insightful question, a counterintuitive connection, a well-articulated criticism. A good course design sets the stage for these moments.

### **How does the Middle East feature in your courses?**

The Middle East is a permanent feature in my courses. This is obvious for courses that are about the region. However, even in teaching on universal themes like historical methodology, or global phenomena like nationalism, I often draw on examples from the region. For example, when I taught the Practicum in the Study of History, I found it useful to include studies on Middle Eastern history because it gave my students an opportunity to think comparatively and to engage with the complex questions of the specificity of culture, universality of social science, or exceptional character of this or that nation.

## MESP FACULTY UPDATE

**Rania Habib**, associate professor of linguistics and Arabic, published articles in the *International Journal of Arabic English Studies (IJAES)*, *Journal of Universal Language*, and *Text & Talk: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse & Communication Studies*. She also published a co-authored article in the Special Issue "Teaching and Learning English During COVID 19: Impact on Pedagogy, Curriculum, Practices and Student Experiences" of the *Centre for Applied Linguistics Research (CALR) Journal*. She further published a co-authored book chapter in *Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum in Higher Education: Harnessing the Transformative Potentials of CLAC Across Disciplines*, edited by India Plough and Welore Tamboura (Routledge Research in Higher Education Series). Habib presented her work at five refereed conferences and was invited to give talks by West Chester University and Harvard University. She received the MESP Graduate Course Development Grant, in addition to CNY Humanities Corridor and SOURCE grants.

**Timur Hammond**, assistant professor of geography and the environment, wrapped up several publication projects in 2022-23, including "Making the Millet Common: Rethinking Authoritarian Politics Through Commemoration Following Turkey's July 2016 Coup Attempt," published in *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*. He also published "Conjunctions of Islam: rethinking the geographies of art and piety through the notebooks of Ahmet Süheyl Ünver" in the journal *Cultural Geographies*. Finally, he completed a monograph, *Placing Islam: Geographies of Connection in 20th Century Istanbul*, which was published open access by the University of California Press in May.

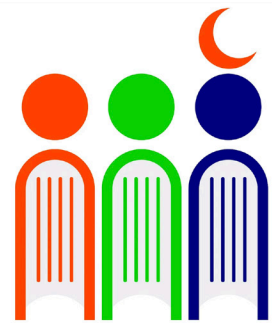
**Catherine E. Herrold**, associate professor of public administration and international affairs, published three articles that draw on data from her research in the Middle East. They are "Curating Sovereignty in Palestine: Voluntary Grassroots Organizations and Civil Society in the West Bank and East Jerusalem," published in 2022 in *Middle East Law and Governance*; "Project Think and the Fragmentation and Defragmentation of Civil Society in Egypt, Palestine, and Turkey," published with Gizem Zencirci in 2022 in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*; and "Can Service Providing NGOs Build Democracy? Five Contingent Features," published with Khaldoun AbouAssi in 2023 in *Public Administration and Development*. Her piece "Curating Sovereignty in Palestine" was featured on the POMEPS (Project on Middle East Political Science) Podcast. In 2022, Herrold served on a Council on Foreign Relations panel on "Advancing Democracy Around the World."



**Fethi Keleş**, part time instructor in the anthropology department and the International Relations Undergraduate Program, presented at the 121st Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, held in Seattle in November 2022. He published a book chapter last year in the Routledge volume *Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Loss, Transition, and Resilience in a Post 9/11 World* and is currently at work on a chapter on forced migration to be published in the peer reviewed *Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. This past spring, he served on the review committee for the MESP Graduate Student Summer Research Grants. He is the recipient of the MESP 2023 Teaching Recognition Award and a nominee for the American Anthropological Association's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology.

**Jaklin Kornfilt**, professor of linguistics, was awarded the Jean and Denis Sinor Faculty Fellowship by Indiana University in April. She visited IU to receive the award in person and deliver a lecture. Kornfilt also lectured at the University of Geneva and Arctic University in Norway. In 2022, she published a book chapter, "Prominence and Redundancy: A Wish List of Questions," in *Paths through meaning and form. Festschrift offered to Klaus von Heusinger on the occasion of his 60th birthday*. Kornfilt also co-authored the article "Partial versus full agreement in Turkish possessive and clausal DP Coordination."

**Yüksel Sezgin**, director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program, has been busy over the last six years building the Muslim Family Law Index – a quantitative tool that measures the extent to which Muslim family laws in 35 Muslim majority and 18 Muslim minority nations comply with human/women's rights standards and the rule of law. The index covers the period from 1919 to 2016. A project website hosting the index, relevant data, and legislation was launched in the spring of 2023. Scholars, policymakers, and others who are interested in project findings and want to utilize the data in their studies can access it at [www.muslimfamilylawindex.org](http://www.muslimfamilylawindex.org).



## THE MUSLIM FAMILY LAW INDEX

### WEBSITE LAUNCH: THE MFL DATABASE - MUSLIM FAMILY LAW INDEX

Spring 2023 marked the official launch of the Muslim Family Law Index (MFL-I), which enables researchers to conduct cross-national longitudinal analyses of operational Muslim Family Law (MFL) systems. MFL is inspired by the Qur'an, hadith, and *fiqh* and regulates familial relations (e.g., marriage, divorce, etc.) among Muslims. These state-enforced MFLs undermine the rule of law and impose limitations on the fundamental rights and liberties of people subject to their jurisdiction. However, there is considerable spatiotemporal variation in the degree to which they limit individual rights and the rule of law. Until now, there has been no way of measuring this spatiotemporal variation across MFL systems.

The MFL-I, covering 43 countries that have formally integrated MFLs into their domestic legal systems from the 1920s through 2016, aims to fill this gap. The index measures the extent to which MFLs are reformed or rendered compliant with the specific rule of law and human/women's rights standards.

The MFL-I consists of three sub-indices that were constructed utilizing longitudinal data that cover the following kinds of interventions that governments across the globe have undertaken to address the adverse effects of MFLs on basic human/women's rights and the rule of law:

1 • **Substantive interventions** are aimed at reforming the material rules of MFL to improve women's and children's status and rights. The Substantive Reform Index (SR-I) measures the extent to which MFLs have been reformed concerning polygyny, *talaq*, and underage marriage (the three most-common substantive MFL concerns). An MFL system where polygyny, underage marriage, and extrajudicial divorce are limited will rank higher on the SR-I than an MFL system where such practices are not regulated.

2 • **Procedural interventions** are aimed at increasing accessibility, accountability, and predictability of institutions and processes through which MFLs are implemented. The Procedural Reform Index (PR-I) measures the degree to which specific rule of law and due process rights are integrated into the institutions and processes through which MFL rules are applied. The index assigns higher scores to systems where applicable MFL rules are codified or ascertained; individuals have the right to legal counsel at MFL courts; proceedings are conducted in writing; judges are appointed on gender-equal grounds; and decisions of the courts are published regularly and are subject to constitutional review.

3 • **Exit rights interventions** recognize concurrent jurisdiction of religious and civil laws/courts that allow individual Muslims to exit the jurisdiction of Muslim family law and courts and opt for alternative civil (nonreligious) rules for domestic matters. The Exit Rights Index (ER-I) measures the degree to which individual Muslims are allowed to exit the religious jurisdiction and opt for civil laws that uniformly apply to all citizens regardless of religion in six issue areas (marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, testate, and intestate succession). For instance, an MFL system where a marrying (or divorcing) Muslim couple can freely choose between civil law and the MFL will rank higher on the index than a system where the MFL mandatorily applies to all Muslims.

In addition to the cumulative MFL-I reform score, researchers can access data from these three sub-indices to observe spatio-temporal variations in MFLs while accounting for categories of reform across time and space. Both the MFL-I and its sub-indices assign country-year scores ranging from 0 to 100. The higher the score, the more reformed the national MFL system in question. Eighteen reform measures included in the construction of the index closely align with the specific rule of law and human and women's rights standards. As a result, higher index scores can also be interpreted as a sign of greater compliance with the rule of law and basic human rights. All indices are intended to capture the *de jure* state of affairs in the field of MFL rather than the *de facto* application of the law.

In addition to the indices, the MFL project provides a database of relevant legislation from countries that formally apply MFLs within their national legal systems, including state constitutions, legal codes, ordinances, and acts. The indices and database are free to use and available for download at [www.muslimfamilylawindex.com](http://www.muslimfamilylawindex.com). For questions about the MFL project, please contact the MFL-I team at [info@muslimfamilylawindex.com](mailto:info@muslimfamilylawindex.com).



## BOOKS IN FOCUS

Several of our faculty members have recently published new books. We interviewed two of them to learn about their publications.



Timur Hammond's book, *Placing Islam: Geographies of Connection in Twentieth Century Istanbul*, was published by the University of California Press.

### Tell us about your academic and professional background, your activities, and your research interests.

I joined Syracuse University in the fall of 2017. I would describe myself as a cultural and urban geographer who focuses primarily on the politics and practices of Islam in 20th century Turkey. I did my Ph.D. in geography at UCLA from 2007-16. While I was at UCLA, I overlapped a lot with other programs in Middle East area studies broadly, especially art history, architectural history, and Middle East history. My path to geography was a little winding. As an undergraduate, I started out as an English major and creative writing minor. When I was imagining what I wanted to do for graduate school, somebody recommended I look into geography, and I found myself in the discipline. My master's thesis was about the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk. During the course of that thesis, I developed this idea for a dissertation project that is now at the core of the book: how people develop a sense of what Islam is, in terms of where it is. The basic argument that geographers make is that rather than begin by defining what things are, we should begin with this question of "where?" ... How is it that people come to make the world around them?

### What is the focus of *Placing Islam: Geographies of Connection in Twentieth Century Istanbul*?

The book grew out of my dissertation work, when I spent two years (2011-13) living and working in Istanbul. It focuses on a neighborhood of that city, Eyüp (or Eyüp Sultan, depending on whom you talk to), which is significant in part because it is Istanbul's most important Muslim shrine center. At the center of the neighborhood is a mosque. At the center of the mosque is a tomb, and in the tomb is buried a companion of the Prophet Muhammad. The story goes that in 1453, when the Ottomans captured Istanbul, they miraculously rediscovered the grave of this companion and built the tomb there. Ever since, it has functioned as a site of pilgrimage and a site establishing Muslim claim to the city of Istanbul.

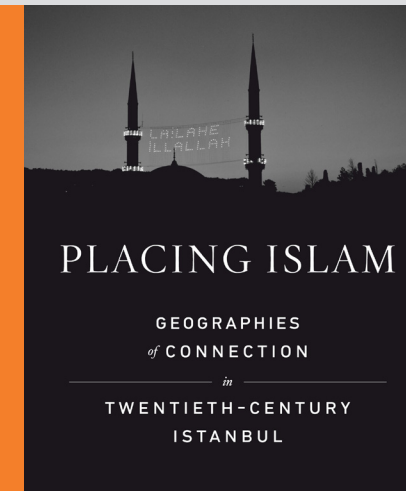
I was interested in two seemingly contradictory dynamics in this neighborhood of Islam, or place of Islam as I developed it in the book. On the one hand, the meaning and religious importance of Eyüp has stayed remarkably stable over five to six centuries. On the other hand, the neighborhood has changed in radical ways as part of 20th century Istanbul's broader urbanization, industrialization, and, to a lesser extent, secularization. The book explores this productive tension and makes a number of contributions. To start, 20th century Istanbul is often talked about in relation to Turkey's broader 20th century transformation ... particularly the secularization and modernization of the country following 1923, the declaration of the Turkish Republic. What's interesting about the neighborhood is that its trajectory parallels that story of modernization and secularization, but not exactly. So, it becomes an opportunity to rethink and reconsider some of the broad narratives that we have about Turkey and the ways that its politics and culture have changed over the past 100 years.

### What inspired you to write the book?

Firstly - and this is not unique to me at all - a love of and fascination with Istanbul. Istanbul is just a remarkable city. From the very beginning, it was a place I wanted to write about. So, there's a sense of personal connection, affection, and curiosity about this place and desire to write a book that added one small part to that broader tapestry of stories that define the place. Beyond that personal interest, there's a conceptual and disciplinary interest. Oftentimes, books about Istanbul have been written by political scientists, urban historians, architects, and anthropologists - and these are great. One of the things I try to acknowledge in the book is the richness of scholarship about Istanbul. However, when we work from smaller disciplines - and I think in the broad spectrum of things, geography is relatively small - it provides a way to rethink some of the assumptions we have about how, in this case, Islam, works and functions and is experienced in the city. The third is a broad public ethical commitment to writing about Istanbul and Islam in ways that captures their diversity. The book tries to give a fine-grained account of the many competing and complicated ways that people define and understand being Muslim in Istanbul.

### How is geography important to the understanding of the changing cultures of Islam in contemporary Turkey? What other methodologies do you employ in this book?

One argument that I make in the book, and that other people have made as well, is that oftentimes studies of Islam are defined by a sort of methodological nationalism ... scholars get locked into this framework of asking either, "What is the Turkish version of Islam?" or "What does Islam tell us about Turkey?" What emerges as a result is an assumption that geography is just a container and everything else happens inside of it. In the book, I develop an alternative way of thinking about geography and place. This involves shifting the metaphor we use to think about geography from the idea that space is a container to instead thinking about "places of connection." That shift is valuable because it helps us start to parse out the fact that you and I could be standing in the same physical location and yet have totally different understandings of what kind of place we are in. That different understanding of place emerges because of how we understand the connection between where we are and elsewhere ... how we understand the connection between the time and moment where we are and other, different kinds of histories. These understandings might coincide in small bits, but they might also diverge in interesting ways.



In the case of contemporary Turkey, rather than assuming that there is a single narrative of Islam or a single set of references that define a geography of Islam, the book opens up the possibility for thinking of multiple kinds of geography. Sometimes those multiple versions sit neatly on top of one another without really interacting. Sometimes they coincide really clearly, and sometimes they clash and rub up against each other. So, I think geography helps us get out and step beyond the assumptions we have about how the world is organized.

One of the things that I think the book does well is draw on methods that would be familiar to other disciplines. For instance, anthropologists often draw on things like ethnography and participant observation, and historians might draw on popular culture and reading newspapers, and art historians or architectural historians might look at buildings in urban context. My book draws on and brings together these different kinds of methods all within the same text. I draw on methods like landscape analysis, and I spend a lot of time observing, living with, and interacting with people in the neighborhood. I draw on semi-structured interviews, on reading manuscripts and newspapers, and on popular culture. These difference approaches would be familiar to different disciplines, but in bringing them together, I add something new.





Natalie Koch's book, *Arid Empire: The Entangled Fates of Arizona and Arabia*, was published by Verso Books.

**Tell us about your academic and professional background, your activities, and your research interests.**

I am a professor in SU's Department of Geography and the Environment, where I started in 2012 the same year I finished my Ph.D. in geography at the University of Colorado, Boulder. I identify primarily as a political geographer, which means that my research focuses on key concepts like the state, geopolitics, citizenship, and borders. More specifically, I study authoritarian state power in the Arabian Peninsula but through "positive" channels of power like science and higher education, spectacle, sport, environmental policy, and urban planning, which are essential avenues for regimes in the Gulf to demonstrate their supposed benevolence. My new book, *Arid Empire*, grew out of this work in multiple ways, but it also reflects my broader interest in tracing the global connectedness of the Arabian Peninsula beyond the standard focus on war and oil.

**Can you expand upon the concept of "arid empire" and how it links the deserts of Arizona to the Arabian Peninsula?**

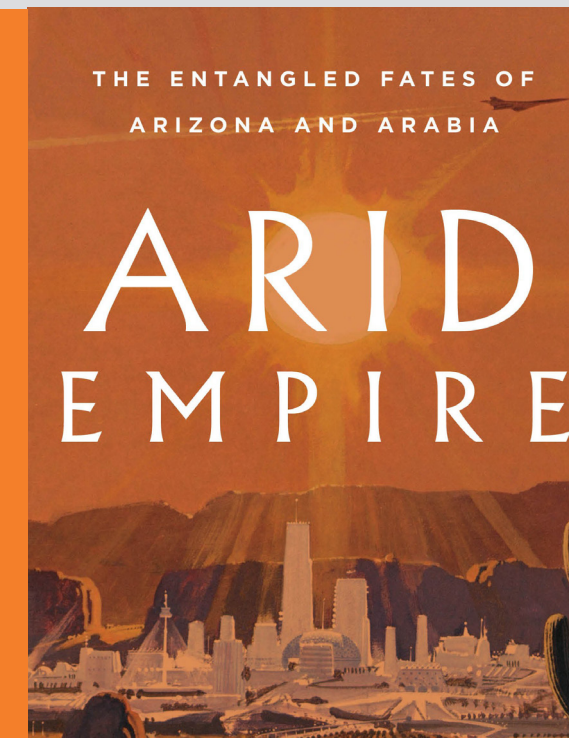
*Arid Empire* charts the long history of connections between Arizona and the Arabian Peninsula, which most people see as counterintuitive at first. But when American settlers and the U.S. military first started to colonize the Southwest after the Mexican American War added these territories to the United States in 1848, they really didn't know how to deal with the desert environment. Deserts demanded a rethinking of the colonial systems that had prevailed in other non-desert climates that had already been subjected to U.S. domestic empire building. As a result, advocates of U.S. expansionism—settlers in government, agriculture, education, and private industry—all looked to the Middle East to import ideas, approaches, plants, animals, and more. They believed that the "Old World" deserts that were romanticized in biblical narratives could help settlers conquer the American "New World" deserts.

So, one way to understand "arid empire" is as a political, scientific, military, and cultural system that was needed for American settlers to take over the desert Southwest. But as U.S. empire started to expand beyond North America, Euro-American settlers and their descendants learned that they could sell this desert expertise abroad and started to build new colonial networks in the Middle East around the stories of their common arid lands experiences. So, in this sense, "arid empire" is not just about domestic empire building but is also about U.S. empire building in the Middle East since the mid 1900s. My book toggles between these places' pasts and presents a set of cases that link Arizona, Oman, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, showing how the "desert" became a narrative resource that was used to bring them together across time and space.



**What inspired you to write the book?**

I have been a U.S. political geography professor for over 10 years, and nearly all of my research has focused on international contexts. First, I was studying Central Asian countries that were once part of the Soviet Union; then, the Gulf countries of the Arabian Peninsula. The places I spent so many years traveling to—like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—were all deserts. I grew up in Tucson, Arizona—the heart of the Sonoran Desert—so I was always filtering those experiences through my understanding of the desert. I saw so many similarities between these three different arid regions and how people related to and understood desert landscapes. But I never reflected on the direct links between the places until I heard about the Saudi dairy company Almarai acquiring an alfalfa farm in Arizona. I was shocked by the news itself, but at the same time, I realized that deserts aren't just cultural and natural landscapes to compare—that they actually have rich histories of direct political connection and exchange. For example, this Saudi dairy company is actually headquartered in a farming district that the U.S. government paid a team of Arizona farmers to help set up in the 1940s, and this effort also included several royal family visits to tour Arizona agriculture in 1943 and 1947. This curious circularity was something I saw over and over again with this project—a seemingly modern point of connection having much deeper roots. So, pulling at these threads had me tumbling through dozens of stories, past and present, about how the two deserts I know best—Arizona's Sonoran Desert and the Arabian desert—are directly linked.



**What challenges did you face in writing this book? How did publishing this book change your writing process?**

I wrote this book with the hope that the general public would read it, as well as the scholarly audiences that I am more accustomed to reaching. So, I tried to keep the book as free of jargon and academic gesturing as possible, such that it would appeal to readers with a critical eye to history and politics, but who are not formally part of the academy. I think the general public in the U.S. is much more tuned into critical discussions about what it means to live in a settler colonial state built on violence—directed not just at Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies, but also the land. This was probably the biggest challenge for me in writing the book: How should I, as a descendent and inheritor of white settler colonialism in the U.S., use my voice in a way that contributes to these ongoing discussions? So besides reaching people in Arizona and the U.S., I wanted to challenge other descendants of settler colonial projects about how we should think about "complicity" and "responsibility" today. In opening the book with my own reflections on these dilemmas, I tried to position myself not as an authority with answers, but rather as a provocateur with questions. In this sense, I hope *Arid Empire* will push readers to examine and excavate the everyday landscapes they personally inhabit and, often, unthinkingly reproduce. Learning how to effectively raise these questions for broader audiences beyond academia was indeed a challenge, but the way I had to adapt my writing is something I will take with me in my future work.



## STUDENT AWARDS

### Recipients of the 2023 Goekjian/Middle Eastern Studies Program Graduate Student Research Grant:

**Mansour AIMuaili** for his research, “Navigating the System: The Appeal of Constituent Service in High Income Authoritarian Elections.”



**Altuğ Aslanoğlu** for his research, “The Socioeconomic Determinants of Islamist Versus Secular Voting Patterns in Turkey.”

**Ahmet Çelik** for his research, “Traces of Sovereignty: Multiple Layers of Islamic Political Discourse in al Farabi, al Mawardi, and al Juwayni.”

### Recipient of the Young Scholar Prize in Middle Eastern Studies for Outstanding Scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies at the Undergraduate Level:

**Brinn MacRae** for her paper, “Israel Palestine and South African Apartheid: A Comparison of Characteristics and Conflict Resolution in a Divided State.”

### Recipient of the Young Scholar Prize in Middle Eastern Studies for Outstanding Scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies at the Graduate Level:

**Almila Başak** for her research paper, “Understanding the Gender Gap in Party Preferences: The Case of the AKP Era in Turkey.”



## FACULTY AWARDS

### Recipients of the Middle Eastern Studies Program (MESP) Faculty Research Grant:

**Rania Habib** (Spring 2023)

**Timur Hammond** (Spring 2023)

### The Middle Eastern Studies Program (MESP) Teaching Recognition Award:

The Teaching Recognition Award was established in 2016 to recognize excellence in teaching and to appreciate our faculty’s indispensable contributions to enhancing knowledge of the MENA region. Faculty are nominated by their students and colleagues and recipients are selected by an awards committee.

This year, the Teaching Recognition Award was given to **Fethi Keleş**, instructor of anthropology.



## OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARDS

At our annual Spring Reception, the Middle Eastern Studies Program was proud to honor Professor Margaret Hermann, director of the Moynihan Institute from 2005 until her retirement in December 2022, and Havva Karakas-Keleş, regional programs coordinator at the Moynihan Institute from 2017-22, for their outstanding service to the program and the University.





## INTERVIEW WITH FETHI KELEŞ, RECIPIENT OF THE TEACHING RECOGNITION AWARD



### **Tell us a little about yourself. What is your academic and professional background? How did you become interested in your field?**

I am a cultural anthropologist specializing in the study of forced migration and refugees with a focus on the experiences of resettled refugees of diverse origins in the United States. I earned a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology at Syracuse University in 2014. With support from Germany based *Die Zeit Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius*, I conducted ethnographic research among refugee immigrants from Bosnia in urban areas of the United States and studied their resettlement and integration experiences, the effects of dislocation on attitudes toward cultural and political citizenship, and the relationship between collective memory and diasporic consciousness.

My scholarly writings have discussed refugee resettlement in the U.S., ethnic/forced migration and refugees in recent times, the relevance of critical anthropology to global phenomena, and conflict analysis. With colleagues around the U.S., I co-edited two volumes in back to back years (2017 and 2018), *Maintaining Refuge: Anthropological Reflections in Uncertain Times and Porous Borders, Invisible Boundaries? Ethnographic Perspectives on the Vicissitudes of Contemporary Migration*. Both volumes were published by the American Anthropological Association.

My interest in the field of forced migration and refugee studies was sparked several years ago while I was a graduate student at Syracuse University. Upon becoming aware of refugee communities of Bosnian origin in the Central New York region, I conducted some preliminary inquiries about their experiences in the U.S., and these inquiries later grew to a dissertation length study. My courses on the Middle East build upon the doctoral coursework I completed to earn the Certificate of Advanced Study in Middle Eastern Affairs while in graduate school.

### **What courses do you teach? Do you have a favorite?**

I have taught anthropological and interdisciplinary courses at all levels of the undergraduate curriculum at five private and three public universities and colleges in the U.S., including, over the past four years, my alma mater Syracuse University. At these institutions, I contributed to liberal arts and general education programs while interacting with diverse learners, including underrepresented and first generation college students. In addition to regular offerings of introductory courses and several small, seminar style courses, I have taught multiple specialized courses covering transnational experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the U.S. and globally; the Middle East in anthropological perspective; problems and prospects of racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other forms of diversity; peoples and cultures of the world; urban anthropology; the anthropology of Islam/Muslims; and peace and conflict, among others. It is teaching that I love as a profession and vocation and, honestly, as a moral calling of sorts, not any specific course per se. This is a roundabout way of saying I don't have a favorite and I love all of the courses I teach!

### **What is your approach to teaching? How would you describe your teaching methodology?**

My nearly 25 years of hands-on instruction at a very wide variety of institutions in two different countries has taught me this: Teaching is more art than science. To borrow from the writings of performance theorist Richard Schechner, I have increasingly come to see teaching as a type of performance art. Schechner suggests that all performance has four functions: *ritual, healing, entertainment, education*. So, in my own formulation, good teachers keep implementing high-impact pedagogies over and over again (ritual); they go out of their way to improve the intellectual, moral, academic, and cognitive well-being of their students (healing); they are downright fun and funny (first meaning of entertainment) and they find ways to help their students critically consider alternatives and possibilities (second meaning of entertainment); and they are adept at creating inclusive structures conducive to the acquisition of knowledge and skills (education).

To accomplish these functions in any and all of my classes, I make frequent use of the six levels of cognitive learning emphasized in Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Learning. These levels go by the following names: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. The varied assessment tools I design and implement are generally inspired by this vocabulary. I am a great fan of the Teaching column of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and recommend it to anyone interested in the practical and theoretical aspects of teaching. But I also turn to uncommon sources to become a better teacher: to learn a lesson or two in stage management; audience interaction; effective use of pauses, pitches, and pacing; storytelling; narrative construction; boundary-pushing, and so much more, I draw inspiration from the world of stand-up comedy. I think of the likes of Dave Chappelle, George Carlin, Gabriel Iglesias, Russell Peters, and other stand-up greats as wonderful sources all teachers can learn from.

### **How did your own experience of being a student influence your teaching methodology?**

Over the course of my graduate study in anthropology at Syracuse University, I was fortunate to benefit from the instruction of a number of wonderful teachers. The late Michael Freedman, for instance, was a fantastic instructor. Every class meeting with him was something of a master class in time management, lesson planning, organization of material, and so much more. The late John Burdick showed me, with deeds more than with words, what it means to be passionately dedicated to your discipline, your specialties, and to the sheer pursuit of knowledge. And, of course, there is no aspect of my graduate training and subsequent professional life as an anthropologist that has not been profoundly shaped by the countless interactions I have had with Robert Rubinstein in the multiple graduate courses I took with him back in the day, as well as on numerous other occasions beyond the classroom over the past 20 years. As my graduate advisor and mentor, Robert helped me keep my research and writing focused and to the point, encouraged me to dive into the world of publishing early on, tirelessly edited my cover letters and grant applications, and gave me fair and sound criticism when I needed it. He did all of this while never ceasing to accompany me on my intellectual trajectory with compassion and care. I am grateful to all of my former teachers and mentors, and I am honored to carry all of their best practices with me in my own instructional journey.

### **Do you have any advice or suggestions for those planning to teach courses in MES and enhance knowledge about the region?**

I have had the good fortune to teach Middle East-focused courses at five U.S. colleges and universities, including our own Syracuse University. The greatest asset we have as instructors of MES courses is the amazing curiosity our students bring with them. My one and only suggestion is this: Let us nourish that curiosity to the best of our abilities and let us help our students leave our courses with better, sharper, and more critical questions than the ones they may have had about the region on the first day of class!

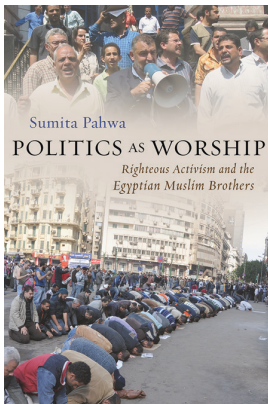


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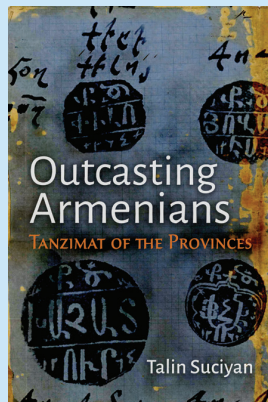
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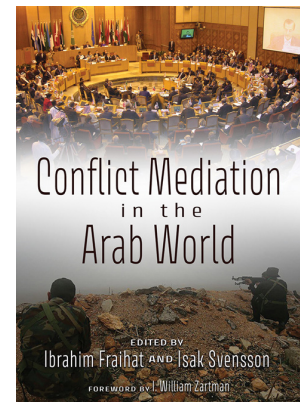
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