



Dear Friends,

This past year—for all of us—was clearly a year like no other before, yet the responses to the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic proved heartening. I have taken up my new role as director of CMES in a context in which we were forced to improvise, rethink and reimagine our community. MES faculty and concentrators alike adapted to remote- or hybrid-learning formats, as well as Brown's three-semester schedule. Faculty reconfigured existing courses and made a number of new course offerings available. MES concentrators, meanwhile, worked with faculty to overcome frustrated plans to study language or conduct research abroad, making the most of online tools and resources to produce revised or new research projects.

I see my role as building on the excellent work and achievements of my two predecessors, Beshara Doumani and Shahzad Bashir. In addition to enabling colleagues and students to pursue their intellectual passions, I am also intending to point the Center in new directions and expand our horizons.

One of the main initiatives that I started this year revolves around women and gender as a wider lens to understanding the Middle East and its diasporas. I aim to make CMES a focal point for exploring and discussing the politics of gender not only within the Middle East and its diasporas, but also comparatively with colleagues working in and on [Africa](#), [Latin America](#), [the Caribbean](#), as well as [South Asia](#), within our institutional home, the [Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs](#) at Brown, and beyond.

In another new strand, I started to develop links to examine intersectional struggles around racism in the Middle East. We hosted a couple of interesting and well-attended events in which we explored both historical constructions of blackness and race as well as more contemporary forms of anti-Black racism in the Middle East.

Amongst the 36 events we have hosted, we had one on labor and employment in the context of COVID-19, as well as another on climate change in the Middle East in conjunction with the [Climate Solutions Lab](#). The silver lining of our mainly online existence has been our ability to easily gather speakers from around the world. Our audiences, ranging from several hundreds to 26,000 during one event in which we teamed up with the online platform [Jadaliyya](#), are based not only throughout the US, but also in the Middle East and Europe. We provided simultaneous translation into Arabic (and are planning Turkish and Persian in the future) to make our events more widely accessible.

This year, we had two major items of news linked to our New Directions in Palestinian Studies initiative. In August, Beshara Doumani was [appointed the Mahmoud Darwish Professor in Palestinian Studies](#), the first endowed professorship in Palestinian studies at any American research university. More recently, it was announced that Professor Doumani will become the new president of Birzeit University in Ramallah, Palestine, with his return to Brown in the fall of 2023. He will be continuing his outstanding work and contributions as the Mahmoud Darwish Chair in Palestinian Studies.

I extend my best wishes for a safe and healthy future, and that we will be able to reconnect in person with our students, colleagues, and members of our CMES community soon.

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