



Fall 2021

Dear students, colleagues and friends,

As the new academic year begins, I would like to welcome you back, whether you are on campus or still remote. We all have big hopes for the coming year but also know that we live in uncertain and unpredictable times. In addition to the question marks in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, I assume that many of you have been shaken and concerned by recent developments in Afghanistan. Some of us have colleagues, friends, or even family who are directly affected. We are thinking through different ways of raising awareness and supporting them starting with a panel via webinar titled "[Afghanistan Lives: Then and Now](#)" on September 14.

Looking back to last academic year, we invite you to read our [2020-2021 annual report](#) now available online. Projecting ahead, we have planned a wide range of [programming](#) that hopefully brings our CMES community back together, both virtually and in person. In addition, CMES is resuming its [research travel funding](#) for graduate and undergraduate students; and the incoming CMES associated graduate group leader is PhD student in history, [Joseph Leidy](#).

Looking forward, I am excited to introduce our 2021/2022 Herbert H. Goldberger lectureship series on "[Queering the Middle East and its diasporas](#)". The series will use non-normative gender and sexuality as a lens to discuss war and conflict, forced displacement, political transformations, authoritarianism, protest and resistance, identity contestation and every-day lives. The series will also highlight LGBTQ experiences and activism in the region and its diasporas, showing both the multiple challenges faced as well as coping strategies, forms of mobilization and transformations. Speakers will include [Evren Savci](#), [Walaa Alqaisiya](#), [Fadi Saleh](#), [Sa'ed Atshan](#) and [Sima Shakhari](#) in the fall, and Khalid Abdel Hadi, and Asli Zengin in the spring semester.

Related to many of the topics raised in the lecture series, we will co-host, jointly with Humboldt University in Berlin, [a two-day conference](#) on September 24-25 that aims to bring together researchers, activists, and community organizers to discuss how discourses on gender and sexuality have evolved in the Middle East and Europe amid the rise of far-right and authoritarian movements.

Just as anti-gender discourses are at the heart of the so-called culture wars we are currently witnessing, so are allegations of "[Islamism](#)" which is the subject of a panel discussion on September 23. In recent years, a group of French intellectuals have questioned the benefit of academic research that explores questions of ethnicity, race, gender, intersectionality, post-colonialism, and Islamophobia. Often lumped together and defined as "identity politics," these same critics blame American society and academia for influencing French left-wing scholars and activists. Here we are pursuing our wider goal to make connections between anti-Black racism and Middle East studies.

I am also delighted to announce that with funding from the [Mahmoud Darwish Chair in Palestinian Studies](#), CMES will be hosting three female Palestinian scholars (Ruba Salih, Rema Hamami and Noura Erakat) for brief [fellowships](#) that will include public talks, workshops and visits to classes as well as meetings with graduate students.

We will also have a chance to watch the film "[The Present](#)" prior to a conversation with its director [Farah Nabulsi](#) on September 28.

I am hoping to see many of you in person over the coming year but also cherish the virtual community we have created in the past year that we hope to nourish as well.

Best wishes,

Nadje Al-Ali  
Director, Center for Middle East Studies