

OVES

TUNISIA PROGRAM
IN REVIEW, 2016–22

THE CENTER FOR
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



AS I PREPARE TO STEP DOWN AFTER EIGHT YEARS AS DIRECTOR OF CMES, I can say that my proudest achievement as Director was the opening in 2016 of the Tunisia Office of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. Through the vision and generosity of our patron, Hazem Ben-Gacem, and the diligence and skills of CMES Executive Director Lauren Montague and CMES Tunisia Administrative and Program Manager Sihem Lamine, we have built a first-rate research center that has hosted numerous conferences, workshops, and lectures, as well as summer and January-term programs and short-term research fellowships, that brought hundreds of Harvard students and faculty into contact with an equal number of Tunisian counterparts. As much as the pandemic restricted travel over the past two years, we continued to advance our academic mission and expand our network of contacts across continents.

I am happy to report that we are now back at full speed, preparing to inaugurate the second chapter of our Tunisia Office. In June 2022, we brought undergraduate and graduate students from various Harvard Schools and departments for summer Arabic language study and research. We will also resume the Hazem Ben-Gacem Postdoctoral Fellowship, the holder of which will spend this next academic year with us in Cambridge. In addition, with the participation of several of our graduate students, we have embarked on a digital humanities project to index and digitize a number of early-twentieth-century Tunisian periodicals that belong to a vast archival treasure trove for the study of Tunisian intellectual history from the colonial period. Our team will present its accomplishments in a panel that has been invited to participate in an international conference sponsored by the Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Humanities at the University of Manouba in late September.

Finally, on a personal note, my next book project is a study of Tunisia's own Arabic *Nahda* (literary renaissance), which laid the groundwork for modern Tunisian literature. I focus on the life and career of Zine El Abidine Sanousi, eminent journalist, literary scholar, and political activist, whose prodigious writings mirror the turbulent history and cultural creativity that were hallmarks of the first half of twentieth-century Tunisia. My research will take me, *in sha'allah*, on countless journeys to and from CMES Tunisia.

—WILLIAM GRANARA, CMES DIRECTOR, SUMMER 2022

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES OPENS FIELD OFFICE IN TUNISIA

On January 17, 2017, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies opened its first overseas office, in Tunisia, home to a tradition of learning and research that extends from Antiquity to the present. The office and the year-round programs run from the location are made possible by the support of Harvard College alumnus Hazem Ben-Gacem '92.

“The Middle East is a part of the world that you’ll never fully understand unless you get your feet on the ground and experience it first-hand,” said William Granara, CMES Director and Professor of Arabic. “Thanks to Hazem’s generosity, Harvard students and scholars have greater resources to pursue in-depth field research and can more substantively engage in language and cultural immersion experiences.”

“From the beginning the hope has been to establish an outpost where Harvard faculty and students would come to discover Tunisia—its history, language, culture, art, and people—and integrate this experience into their



The Harvard contingent at the inaugural celebration of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies Tunisia Office

scholarship and education,” said Ben-Gacem. “I’m very excited by this first step towards a substantial Harvard presence in Tunisia.”

Founded in 1954, CMES, through interdisciplinary teaching and research, has produced hundreds of graduates with Middle East and North Africa expertise who have gone on to directly impact students, scholars, and the public both in the United States and around the world. Its Tunisia office will provide students and scholars with a bridge to renowned Tunisian archival facilities, serve as an

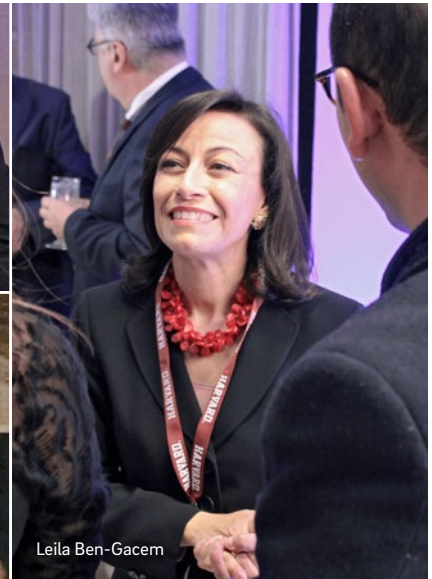
incubator for analysis of the evolving social, cultural, legal, and political movements in the region, and offer an intellectual hub for scholars of, and from, Tunisia, the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, and the wider Middle East region.

“Broadening the contexts in which teaching and learning happen at Harvard is a crucial element of our engagement with the world. We are always seeking opportunities to make the University more intentionally global, and the field office in Tunisia will bring the world to Harvard and Harvard to the world in

exciting new ways that will shape important work across fields and disciplines,” said Harvard president Drew Faust.

Programs available at the Tunis location for students and faculty from across the University include Harvard Tunisia Scholarships for Harvard graduate and undergraduate research, funding for Harvard faculty sabbatical research, an Arabic language summer program for Harvard graduate and undergraduate students, and a three-week Winter Session course for Harvard students. ▣

TUNISIA OFFICE INAUGURAL CELEBRATION





Malika Zeghal



William Granara, Margot Gill, and Hazem Ben-Gacem



Margot Gill addresses guests



Amir Ben-Gacem, Hamida Ben-Gacem, Benjamin Moeling



Blaire Byg, Shawheen Rezaei, Margeaux Fitoussi, and Brittany Landorf

NOSTALGIA, MEMORY, PLACE: MARGAUX FITOUSSI ON THE HARA OF TUNIS

In summer 2016, Margaux Fitoussi, an MTS candidate at Harvard Divinity School, curated a multimedia exhibition in Tunis about the Hara, the city's historic Jewish neighborhood, centered around a collection of photographs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In November at CMES, she assembled a smaller version of the exhibition, premiered EL HARA, a short documentary film about the Hara co-directed with her friend Mo Scarpelli and featuring an interview with the celebrated writer Albert Memmi, and gave a talk about the original exhibition in Tunis and viewers' reactions to it.

In January 2016 you were part of the first group of Harvard students to go on the CMES Winter Term trip to Tunisia. Is that when you got the idea for this project, or is it something you had been thinking about already?

Right before I arrived in Tunisia, I met with Bernard Allali, a Tunisian Jew who moved to France at the age of 13. Over the course of forty years, Bernard has amassed a remarkable collection of photographs, postcards,

newspaper clippings, pottery, artwork, envelopes, and letters related to Tunisian Jewry. It's impossible to navigate his small apartment without knocking into an artifact that pays homage to Tunisia. This was the genesis of the project that would become the exhibition. After the J-term trip, I knew I wanted to return in the summer and I began brainstorming ideas with Sihem Lamine, the Administrative Manager of the CMES Tunis office. She suggested that I curate an exhibition about Jewish life in Tunis based on Bernard's collection. I took her idea and ran with it.

How and when did you learn that the collection of old photographs from the Hara existed?

I learned about Bernard's collection of photographs, stereographs, and postcards of the Hara from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century after several conversations last spring. Initially, he was more interested in helping me with an exhibition about La Goulette—the coastal, more cosmopolitan neighborhood where many Jews moved to when they left

the Hara. Ultimately, however, I was more interested in curating an exhibition about the Hara and persuaded Bernard to share his collection with me.

The Hara represented in these photographs no longer exists, because the neighborhood underwent a long process of rehabilitation, demolition, and reconstruction beginning in the early 1930s during the French colonial period and continuing after Tunisian independence in 1956. Tunisians of my generation have only vague and fragmentary notions of this neighborhood, where a thriving Jewish community had lived since the thirteenth century. Abdessettar Amamou, the Director of the Dar Ben Achour Library, was enthusiastic about the project precisely because so few images of this neighborhood are currently in circulation. He told me there was a black hole in his memory when it came to this place and its history. He was sure there would be interest in the exhibition's topic and in these photos. It was important to me to hold the event in what was once the Hara and in an environment where current residents of the neighborhood

would feel welcome. We were both intrigued by what would happen when people were face-to-face with these images.

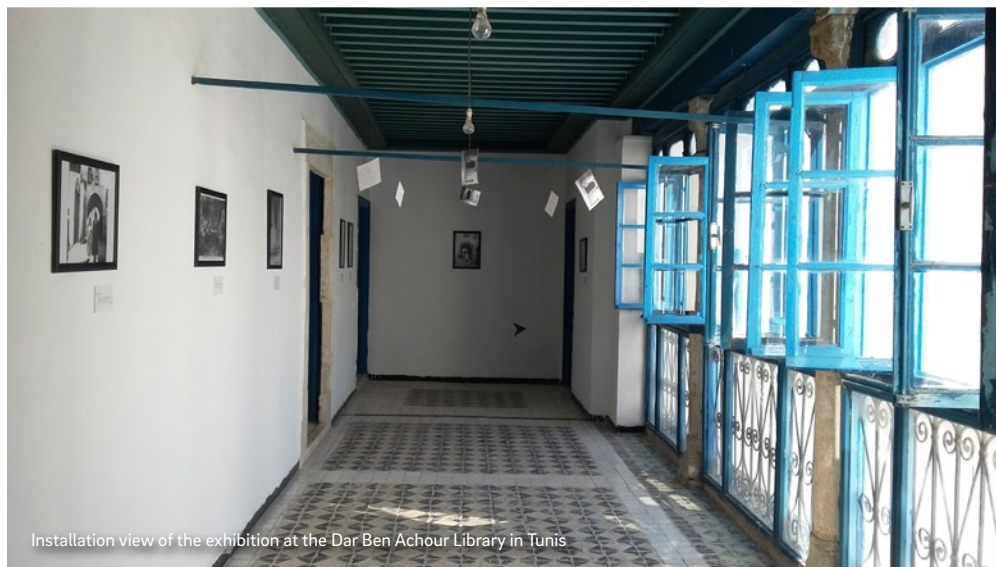
In what academic discipline do you think this project most comfortably sits? Do you intend for the work not to fit neatly into the traditional confines of any one discipline?

The exhibition is historically grounded, but not chronologically organized. Rather, it was arranged around a constellation of themes that speak to different aspects of Jewish life in the Hara. It visually traces the architectural and lifestyle changes of the Jewish neighborhood and community from the eighteenth through the nineteenth century. The forty images I selected highlighted the quotidian. I am interested in how the lives of everyday people are shaped by the political, social, and economic systems of the time. At the same time, there were also anthropological elements to this project. Basing myself in the Medina—the old city where the Hara was located—I collaborated with municipal and Tunisian state employees, photographers, architects,

graphic artists, and filmmakers to curate the exhibit. It was through these colleagues (many of whom became friends) that I learned how the Tunisian Jewish community—past and present—is viewed today.

More generally, I am interested in the way images are discursively embedded within a history of production, circulation, and consumption. How do changing political and social discourses over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries influence our interpretations of these images? I wanted to deconstruct the notion that historical images and objects can hold the secrets to our past. These images are not held in amber. Rather, they are a site of potentiality and provocation. The spectator is free to interpret the images and objects in ways that were never attached to them at the time of their creation.

What to you is the most important product of this project: the film, the photography exhibition, or the presentations you gave at CMES and in Tunis? Can these elements function independently, or do they need to be read as a whole? These three different modes



enabled me to engage with this history on a number of different levels, which was generative for me intellectually and creatively. While the film, photography exhibition, and presentations are best when experienced together, they most certainly can function on their own. The film is reaching audiences that wouldn't normally seek out this sort of story. At our screening at the Atlanta Film Festival, I had several people tell me that they were unaware that there was such a "thing" as a Tunisian Jew much less that Jews had been an important presence in Tunisia for centuries. In the United States, there's a real lacuna in popular knowledge

about Jews coming from North Africa and the Middle East.

For me, the most important product of this project was the opening night in Tunis, where we also screened a rough cut of the film and held a panel discussion. Over 250 people came. I had expected that many of the attendees would be of an older generation: the same people that would talk to me about their Jewish classmates, Jewish neighbors, or the fact that their fathers would play Habiba Msika, a famous Jewish singer, on the record player before bed every night. However, I was really excited to see a large number of people my age and younger.

Albert Memmi refers to the Hara as a ghetto in his semi-autobiographical novel *The Pillar of Salt*, and so I opened the discussion by asking the panel participants: "Writers and scholars have referred to the Hara as a ghetto: is this an adequate term to describe this neighborhood?" This question evoked an intense and fascinating conversation about the ways ethno-religious borders were delineated within the Medina and what constituted Jewish and Muslim space. Habib Kazdagli, the Dean of the University of Manouba and a professor of Jewish history, argued that the Hara was not Venice or



Margaux Fitoussi, Bernard Allali, and Marouan Zbidi preparing the exhibition in Tunis

Warsaw. The term “ghetto” was too closely aligned with that of European Jewry and could not be applied to the Tunisian context. His comment received a roar of approval from the panelists and the audience.

In place of the conversation I expected to have about how colonialism reordered social relations between Jews and Muslims, perhaps reflecting my own biases, a discussion about doorways and intermarriage emerged. Were the doors of the Hara closed at night to protect the Jews from external threats, to punish them, or as a symbol of respect, one that made it easier for the Jews to practice Shabbat? Even the Rabbi of La

Goulette, Daniel Cohen, chimed in to argue that marriage and children are notable and sometimes overlooked aspects of communitarianism. With no cars or public transport, how were they expected to meet other Jews, get married, and have children?

I found what was left out of the conversation to be revealing. The elephant in the room was the state of Israel and how it had affected Judeo-Muslim relations. It’s almost impossible to speak about the departure of Tunisian Jews without addressing the fact that half of them went to Israel. Yet, nobody brought this up during our discussion, in what seemed

to be a tacit understanding to keep the conversation focused on Tunisia.

The impetus for this project was to spark an engaging conversation about a complicated subject, and in that we were successful.

Did your own family history inform your understanding of the larger history of the Jewish community in Tunisia?

Very much so. Understanding why my family migrated from Tunisia to France and Israel in the decade following Tunisian independence is very much tied to the history of the Jewish community in Tunisia

during the twentieth century. The migration of the Jewish community in Tunisia is yoked to the country’s experiences with colonialism, nationalism, and the broader Arab world’s relationship to Israel. In the preface to Memmi’s *The Pillar of Salt*, Albert Camus notes “the impossibility of a Jewish Tunisian of French culture to be anything precise.” I felt like I could really identify with that statement.

Knowledge of the broader history of the Jewish community in Tunisia enabled me to ask my family members more pointed questions. Why did they choose to migrate to France? What was it like during World War II when the Nazis occupied Tunis and sent my great-grandparents to work camps? I showed them photographs from the exhibition and these images jogged memories I had never heard them talk about before. These archival images carried elements of a personal scrapbook. For instance, my grandpa pointed to a photograph of the Hafsia synagogue and started telling me about the Yom Kippur services he used to attend there. He was really shocked when I showed him a film clip of the same synagogue

completely deserted and told him it was currently being transformed into a cafe. I am really interested in the construction of memory—the uncanny confluence of our inner and outer world. Our memories are under constant revision. I saw this in real time observing my grandpa react to this information, which I imagine didn't come as much of a surprise but visibly upset him.

How do you compare nostalgia among current and former Jewish residents of the Hara to that of non-Jewish Tunisians for “the Hara” as a real or idealized time and place?

There's no easy answer to that question. Most Tunisians don't think twice about the Jews (except in relation to Israel/Palestine). But for those who do, they do not mourn the Hara as a place. During the exhibition, nostalgia for the Hara, and Tunisia's Jewish past writ large, especially amongst those of my generation, seemed an obvious way to speak about the problems of the contemporary moment through the prism of the past. The figure of the Jew has become a way for those who do not identify with the values or orientations of the present to recuperate

a Tunisia that appears more heterogeneous. I'll give you two brief examples of the different forms nostalgia takes:

My friend Moche, 27, recently found hundreds of photographs of Tunisian Jews taken in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time these photos were captured, one in five people living in Tunis were Jewish and there were 110,000 Jews scattered across the country. As we leafed through photographs of weddings, family dinners, Purim parties, and selfies in the barbershop, he murmured repeatedly: “Look at them, there were so many of them.” His nostalgia is palpable. For Moche, the present is disappointing. He does not pretend that it is possible to rebuild the life in these photographs. He acknowledges that as a collective community, the Jewish population in Tunisia is nearing its end. Yet, this past remains a site of potentiality, one that opens mental maps for thinking differently about the relationship between past, present, and future.

Memmi, 96, is quite critical of his experiences in Tunisia post-independence, but his nostalgia for his natal country is humorous and often tinged with irony. It's a nostalgia that savors the details, but



with no intention of return. He described Tunisia as a country in blue, a sparkling blue. Our conversation was peppered with these details of nostalgia: those words he only remembers in Tunisian Arabic, his affinity for a fish couscous and his dislike for the French beef-steak and fries, the warm Mediterranean Sea, which he

described as his lemonade, in contrast with the glacial and uninspiring Atlantic Ocean.

Was the CMES office in Tunis a useful resource as you put this project together?

Absolutely! Even before I really started working on this project, Professor Granara took me one Sunday morning to find

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my father's apartment near the Central Market—an experience I'll never forget. He also lent me several novels by North African Jewish writers that influenced my thinking about the exhibition and the film.

Sihem's help was invaluable and invigorating. She helped me brainstorm and conceptualize the exhibition: finding a location, selecting the photos, writing my introduction and the texts that accompanied the photographs, and much more. Sihem's artist eye really brought the project together. For instance, Sihem suggested that we hang several of the exhibition postcards from the ceiling in the entryway and that we write messages on the postcards in French, English, and Arabic. It was a really beautiful addition to the exhibition.

Nour Barmada, my Arabic teacher in Tunis and in Cambridge, also helped me to select the photographs and to correct the texts in Arabic. I feel very grateful to all three of them for their support over the course of the project.

Do you hope to publish an article based on this work?

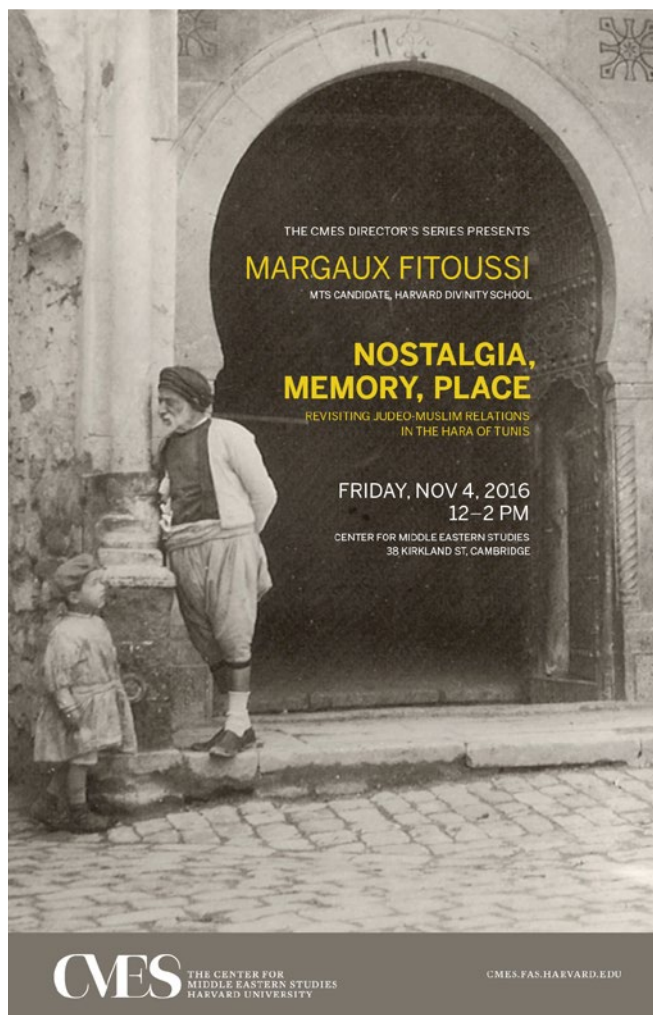
After the talk I gave at CMES, I was invited by the editors of the *Encyclopedia of Jews in*

the Islamic World to submit an entry about the Hara of Tunis. I am also working on a couple of popular pieces about the neighborhood that we will submit in conjunction with the film's online release.

Will you do more with the visual elements of the project? Will you exhibit the photographs and/or the film anywhere else?

The exhibition returned to Tunisia in the spring and was shown at the University of Manouba as part of a conference entitled "Minority Communities between Memory and Forgetting: Recent Research on the Jews of Tunisia and North Africa."

My short film, *EL HARA*, opened at the Atlanta Film Festival and is currently on the film festival circuit. *EL HARA* reflects upon the subtleties and complexities of living under colonial rule through the work of Albert Memmi—his writings and an interview with him in 2016. This film project seeks to deepen the conversation about the long legacy of French colonialism in North Africa as well as to complicate the Eurocentric opposition of Arab and Jew. Above all, it is a meditation on memory, place, and loss. We intend to release the film online this summer.



What are your plans after graduating from HDS? Will you continue to do work on/in Tunisia?

I'll be starting a PhD program in anthropology at Columbia University in the fall and have

proposed to carry out my fieldwork in Tunisia. I hope to study the shift in politics and political consciousness as reflected in visual culture in post-revolutionary Tunisia. I also plan to continue filmmaking. ▣

Q&A WITH TUNISIA POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW HOUSSEM CHACHIA

In 2017–18, Houssem Chachia was the inaugural recipient of the Hazem Ben-Gacem Postdoctoral Fellowship, part of the CMES Tunisia Office and related programming made possible by the support of Harvard College alumnus Hazem Ben-Gacem '92. The fellowship brings Tunisian scholars, especially those whose research includes Tunisia and North Africa, to Harvard for an academic year to pursue their research and teach a course in their area of specialization.

What was your doctoral dissertation about?

My research spans work on identity, cultural, historical, and minority studies. Chronologically, I focus on the sixteenth to eighteenth century. The title of my dissertation was “Sephardim and Moriscos: The Journey of the Expulsion and Installation in the Maghreb (1492–1756)—Different Stories and Itineraries.” In 2015, it was named by the Arab Center for Travel Literature: London–Abu Dhabi as the best research in the field of historical geography and travel narrative. The dissertation is in two parts: First, it examines the politics of expulsion and settlement

in the Maghreb of displaced Moriscos and Sephardim from 1492 to 1756. Second, it attempts to understand the dynamics of expulsion and the settlement to problematize the situation of the two groups. I do so by analyzing the dynamics of expulsion, or how the thought of exclusion in the Iberian Peninsula in general, and in Spain in

particular, evolved between the second half of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. Moreover, to understand the process of resettlement and the reintegration of the two minorities in Maghreb societies during this same period, I consider the religious conversion of coming and going members of the two minorities

between the three religions of the Mediterranean: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In my research, I problematize the limitations of this settlement and the possibility of talking about a solidarity between the Sephardic and Moriscos minorities during the period of expulsion and resettlement on the basis that they have the same Iberian origin, and



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on expulsion as a milestone in their journey.

What are your current research interests? What project have you been working on this year?

My research interests have recently evolved a little to include the East–West encounter. Lately, I have become interested in understanding the relationship between the West and the Arabo-Muslim world (especially the Maghreb) in the modern era. Currently, I am working on a monograph entitled “The ‘Images’ of the West through Tunisian Eyes from the 17th to Early 20th Century.” This project was inspired by the resurrection of the Tunisian identity that became prominent after the Tunisian revolution (2011), both within the Tunisian elites and in social media. To be more specific, I investigate the politics and the religious, linguistic, geographical, and cultural discourse of redefining Tunisia after Ben Ali. In understanding today’s tense relationship between the Islamic and Western worlds, one must revisit the East–West encounter discourse and the historical roots of such discourse to answer a fundamental question: Is the



Housseem Chachia with William Granara and the 2017–18 CMES Visiting Researcher cohort

Tunisian image of the West negative or is it a combination of both hostility and admiration?

What course are you teaching spring term? What does it cover?

This semester, I am teaching a seminar on the theme “The West in Tunisian Eyes: Through the Travel Literature.” This course is for students at an advanced level of Arabic and it is conducted entirely in Arabic. The goal of the course is to examine the evolution of Tunisian travel literature and the relationship between

Tunisia and the West. Thus, we are focusing on the image of the West in Tunisian eyes and the extent to which Tunisian reformers were influenced by the image of the West. We are reading selected texts of Tunisian travel writers such as Ibn Abi Diyaf, *Ithāf’ahl az-zamān* (The History of the Rulers of Tunis and the Fundamental Pact), Ali Ben Salem Al-Wardeni, *al-Riḥlah al-Andalusīyah* (The Andalusian Journey), Muḥammad al-Miqdād Wartānī, *al-Burnus fi Bārīs: riḥlāt ilā Faransā wa-Suwīsrā* (The Journey to France and Switzerland), Ali Douagi,

Jawlah bayna ḥānāt al-Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ (A Tour through the Mediterranean Taverns), and Abdelwahed Braham, *Isbāniyā ḥāḍinat al-Andalus*. In discussing these points and reading the texts, students examine different vocabularies, in various historical, geographical, cultural, political, and sociological events from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century.

How do you like working with Harvard students?

In general, I really enjoy teaching and students to me are the fruits of academia.

Harvard students, however, are special in their curiosity and inquisitiveness. Although we are studying a topic that is relatively new for most of them, I feel that they go out of their way to understand everything. I am very intrigued by the ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and academic backgrounds of students and how enriching they are for the class discussion.

What do you like best about being at Harvard?

As a research-oriented person by nature, from my first week at Harvard I fell in love with Widener Library. It is my favorite place at Harvard. And not only for me but for many researchers, it is paradise. I can always find all the books and articles I need. The system to request books is simple and fast, and you have access to many online resources. I also appreciate the wide range of lectures, conferences, symposiums, and workshops that the Harvard campus offers. I like the open educational atmosphere, and the discussions between researchers from all over the world, who form a very rich community. One, of course, cannot forget the faculty, administration, and staff members at CMES, who

are always very friendly, ready to help, and willing to accommodate. I want to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to them all. Thank you for making this cold city a very warm place and less overwhelming.

How have you enjoyed living in Cambridge?

I am from a small city in Tunisia called Beni Khalled, which is famous for its orange orchards. I grew up in my family's orange orchard, so you can imagine how much I like nature. Due to this, I found Cambridge a very beautiful place. I like how quiet and green the city is. I like its public parks. I also like how organized the public transportation is. One thing that stands out about Cambridge, the city, is how it lends itself to a multicultural diversity. This diversity is reflected in its food, music, cultures, and events. As such, the city offers a home not only for its residents but also for those passing through. And, of course, one cannot skip the various types of American hamburgers served in Cambridge.

Had you visited the United States before? Would you like to visit again in the future?

This is my first visit to the

United States. And I hope it will not be the last. The United States is not just a country; it spans a continent, and one needs many visits to say that he/she has visited the United States.

What do you miss most about Tunisia?

I miss my wife, my daughter, and my friends. And I also miss the sun, the blue sky, and the Tunisian food and air.

What advice would you offer future CMES Tunisia Postdoctoral Fellows?

I recommend that they organize their time at Harvard very well, because I can assure them that the 10 months will pass by very fast. Therefore, they should take advantage of the library's resources and the rich scholarly environment that Harvard offers them. Above all, I would like to say, be ready for the weather, and stay warm.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

In the past, the United States and Harvard were very far off places and equally impossible dreams for someone like me. I never thought that it would be possible to even visit Harvard as a tourist, let alone work at Harvard, so I feel very lucky to be here. I am grateful for

In the 2022-23 academic year, CMES will host its fourth Hazem Ben-Gacem Postdoctoral Fellow in Cambridge and will host two more in the following years. Fellows pursue independent research, engage with the scholarly community at CMES and Harvard, and make two to three public presentations, either at CMES or the CMES Tunisia Office.

this opportunity, which gave me a chance to discover how a university ranked so highly in the world works. Again, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues at CMES, especially Professor William Granara, the Director of CMES, and offer my sincere gratitude to Mr. Hazem Ben-Gacem, whose generous gift made it possible for me to be here. Also, I would like to express my eternal gratitude to my university, University of Sfax, for being accommodating and for allowing me to take leave this year. ▣

MEDITERRANEAN COUSINS: TUNISIA AND ITALY ON OPPOSITE SHORES

In October 2019, CMES Director William Granara spent part of his sabbatical year convening the first international symposium organized by the Tunisia Office of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies: *Mediterranean Cousins: Tunisia and Italy on Opposite Shores*, designed to examine kinship, exchanges, and divides between Tunisia and Italy across time.

“Much of modern scholarship has focused on Tunis and Tunisia as part of the broader Maghreb in the context of French colonial history,” says Granara. “But I and some of my colleagues in Tunisia wanted to think about ways in which Tunisia and Italy have been connected as Mediterranean neighbors without really dealing with the French colonial period. Their bilateral relations go way back and much of them don’t have anything to do with the French colonial project.”

Relations between Tunisia and the central Maghreb and Italy have been long and complicated, and much of their history—human history, mercantile history, political, military, artistic history, culinary history—has been interconnected. During Roman times, Africa Proconsularis, the Roman province roughly comprising what is today Tunisia, western Libya, and eastern Algeria (the area known as Ifriqiya in the medieval period) was the “breadbasket of the Empire,” and wheat production and import/export has played a big role in Italo-Tunisian mercantile relations. And the Italo-Tunisian connection goes back even further, to Carthaginian times. For this symposium, however, organizers made

the decision to focus on the medieval and modern periods.

The intention for the symposium was to explore Tunisian-Italian relations through creative media, such as literature, folklore, art, cinema, or music, and points of cross-cultural contact—or conflict—including food and drink, trade, diplomacy, slavery, or intermarriage. The main goal was to examine and question the many ways in which Tunisians and Italians view self and other as Mediterranean citizens across linguistic, religious, and cultural divides. “There’s been a lot of work done on political relations and economic relations between the two countries, both in Italy and in Tunisia,” says Granara. “But we wanted to bring together scholars who think about the Tunisian-Italian relationship in different ways, ways that aren’t usually done.”

In the first panel, Francesca Maria Corrao, Professor of Arabic Language and Culture, LUISS University, Rome, talked about a “wise fool” character of Mediterranean folklore who has played a major role in the folk literatures of both Tunisia (with the Arabic name Juha) and Italy (where he appears as Giufà). Alfonso Campisi, Professor of Romance Studies at Manouba University, Tunis, spoke on tensions in the relations between French and Italians in Tunisia during World War II. And Mohamed Ouerfelli, Assistant Professor in Medieval History, Aix-Marseille University, spoke on negotiations and peace treaties between Ifriqiya and the Italian maritime towns at the end of the Middle Ages.

In panel 2, Ahmed Saadaoui, Professor of Art History at Manouba University, spoke on the Italian baroque in Tunis and the Maghreb during the Ottoman period. Leila Blili, Professor of Ottoman History at Manouba University, gave a talk about a family of notable Tunisians of Genoese origin. And Youssef Ben Ismail, a PhD candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard, talked about the Italian port city of Livorno and its relationship to Tunis and Istanbul during the Ottoman period.

In panel 3, Adnan El-Ghali, a PhD student in Philosophy and Social Sciences at ULB in Brussels, explored Italian influence on Tunisian political life from the foundation of the Husseinid Dynasty to the establishment of the French Protectorate of Tunisia, in 1881. Silvia Finzi, Professor of Italian Studies at Manouba University, talked about the Italian presence in Tunisia in the nineteenth century and the tensions between colonialism and migration. And Gabriele Montalbano, of the University of Bologna, talked about the idea of citizenship, an idea that appeared in many of the talks: what does it mean to be a citizen, of what state is one a citizen, and how does free passage and legal status work between these two countries. “With Tunisia and Italy there are a lot more gray areas regarding citizenship than there would be with, say, Tunisia and France,” says Granara.

“Of course we did end up going back to some of the old narratives: we couldn’t avoid the idea that there was a colonized and a colonizer, European versus Arab. And

Italians did play a part in European colonial history, particularly in Libya and Somalia and Ethiopia. But in Tunisia that wasn't really the case. Unlike the French and Tunisian relationship the Italian and Tunisian connection doesn't fall neatly under the rubric of colonizer and colonized. I think the conference fleshed out some really interesting gray areas of the relationship. Many of the papers touched on different aspects of how Italy became a neutral or gray area between the colonizing Europe and the colonized Arab world and played a kind of intermediate role between the two.

"What we tried to show was that as much as there's a romanticized view of the relation between these two countries, there's also been a realistic one. Sometimes they contradict each other and sometimes they play off each other. Italians like to say that they're the brothers and sisters of the Tunisians—there's shared blood, there are similarities in food and dress and physical features—but there's a lot of animosity that goes on between the countries as well." The talks, Granara feels, "were all very smart in the way that they navigated between the romanticization and the realism of Italo-Tunisian relations. And thinking about the ways in which the relations have been romanticized and realized is really what the symposium was about."

Granara says that it was particularly beneficial to have this kind of conference in the CMES Tunisia Office because organizers were able to tap into a large community of scholars of central Mediterranean language, literature, history, sociology, and art history who deal specifically with the question of Tunisia's longterm historical and



William Granara and CMES Tunisia Administrative Manager Sihem Lamine with symposium participants

cultural relationship with Italy, but who may not all have easy access to the financial resources that would allow them to travel to conferences in the United States.

In March 2020, Granara was back at the Tunisia Office, to run a more practical, hands-on workshop with Tunisian graduate students. Three prominent scholars in the field of Mediterranean history, including one who works especially on North Africa, and a Harvard PhD student worked with Tunisian graduate students to help them think creatively about developing their profiles as scholars in contemporary Mediterranean social sciences and humanities beyond the confines of the Tunisian academy or the Francophone academy. Topics included how to think about English sources and how to look for primary sources in American and other Anglophone

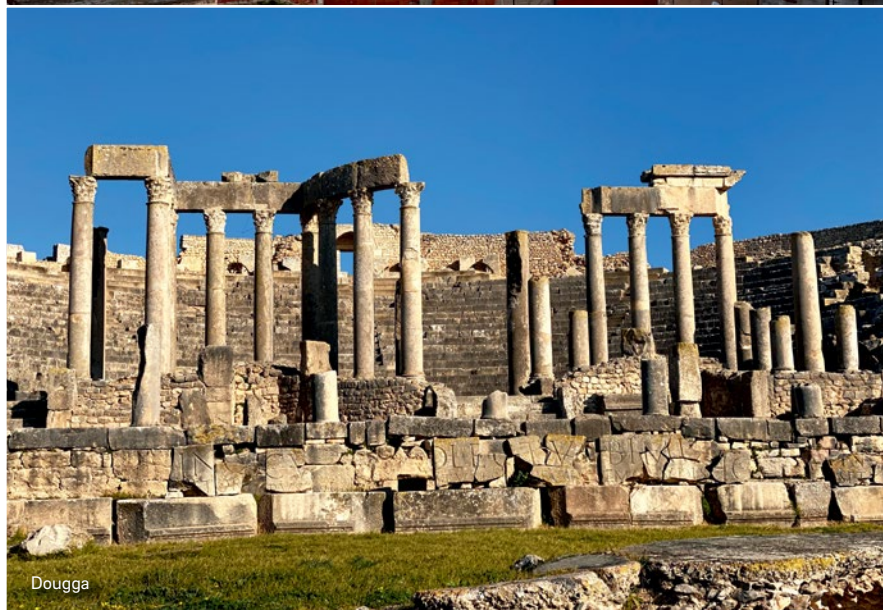
institutions, how to write proposals for conferences, how to put together CVs, and how to apply for jobs. "Our goal is to open up the CMES Tunisia Office more and more to the Tunisian academic community, to present occasions and sites in which a young generation of scholars who are less interested in French can think about how to pursue their work in English. It's one of the few places where young Tunisian scholars working on Tunisian history, and Mediterranean studies in general, have close access not only to American scholarship but to the wider world of English-language scholarship. It's a new territory for young Tunisian scholars to think of their own history, which has played a central role in Mediterranean history, beyond the confines of French, which can be limiting. It's a widening of perspective on Tunisian history." ▣

CROSSROADS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: TURKEY AND TUNISIA

Deni Hoxha is a 2021 AB/AM graduate from Adams House, earning his undergraduate degree in economics and a concurrent AM degree in Middle Eastern studies. As a speaker in the “Destination: World—Student Tales from Beyond the Comfort Zone” event in October 2020, part of Worldwide Week at Harvard, Deni gave a PechaKucha-style PowerPoint presentation about his experiences on CMES Wintersession trips to Turkey (2018) and Tunisia (2019). Here is a portion of his talk, edited for print.

Following my sophomore winter in Turkey, I spent my junior winter in Tunisia. Founded in 2016, CMES Tunisia is an overseas branch of CMES and offers several academic and research opportunities for Harvard students, including the J-Term Study Excursion. Similar to the winter term in Turkey, this trip offers a discovery of Tunisian history, literature, and culture. Although primarily intended for graduate students, undergraduate upperclassmen can also apply. I chose to apply given my interest in Arab and European encounters after having studied postcolonial and orientalist theory on a Harvard Summer School program in Aix-en-Provence, France, led by CMES Director William Granara. Moreover, as an economics concentrator, the economic history of Tunisia in the Ottoman Empire as well as its assimilation of French institutions and their impact on economic growth piqued my interest.

Previously familiar with Tunisia’s Ottoman and French history, during the





Al-Zaytuna Mosque



Virgil Mosaic, Bardo National Museum

trip I discovered Tunisia's ancient past as a Carthaginian and Roman province through our visits to archaeological sites across the country. Three historic and impressive sights were Dougga, Bulla Regia, and the El Jem Amphitheatre. Bulla Regia, a Roman archaeological site adorned by mosaics which impressively were still intact, struck me for its underground theatre and the architecture of Roman houses. Dougga, considered by UNESCO as the best-preserved Roman town in North Africa, offered a fascinating glimpse of life in antiquity. After Dougga, we also visited El Jem—the second largest Roman

amphitheatre after the Colosseum. It was interesting to hear how the usage of the amphitheatre had changed under the administration of the Romans and the Ottomans. The experience became even more unique when we visited the amphitheatre's gladiatorial underground complex, which revealed the scale and grandeur of Roman architecture.

The excursion in Tunisia differed from the one in Turkey in that the Harvard base in the country facilitated additional opportunities for students. The CMES Tunisia Office was not only an excellent resource for our trips to different sites, but

it also served as a center of exchange and research in the evenings. Throughout the excursion, we attended lectures and networking events where we met with Tunisian journalists, activists, photographers, historians, and scholars. These events enhanced my general understanding of Tunisia while also enriching my curiosity for topics like Ottoman and post-Ottoman Tunisia. The Center was also incredibly resourceful in

facilitating visits to institutions like the National Archives of Tunisia and the National Library of Tunisia. Evidently, the presence of the Center and its convenience has influenced my research interests and future possibilities.

I want to thank the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Cambridge and the CMES Tunisia Office for allowing me to participate in this program and for supporting my journey at Harvard. Special thanks go to Professor William Granara, Dr. Jesse Howell, Sihem Lamine, Carol Ann Young, Akif Yerlioğlu, and Laura Thompson. ▣

CMES MARKS FIFTH WINTER TERM IN TUNISIA

In January 2020, NELC PhD candidate Hacı Osman “Ozzy” Gündüz joined a dozen other graduate and undergraduate students from across the University for CMES’s fifth annual Winter Term Study Excursion to Tunisia. Here is his account of the trip.

On Saturday, 1st of Jumādā al-’Ūlā in 997 (March 18, 1589), ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Tamgrūtī (d. 1594/5) set off on a diplomatic mission to the court of the Ottoman sultan from his native Tamegroute in Morocco. His account of the journey makes it clear that he was not fond of sea travel. Raging storms and fear of pirates prowling the North African coast added to his distaste of the sea. He was happiest when his feet were firmly on the ground. Tunis was one of the stops in this arduous journey to Constantinople. One morning he roamed the streets of the city as the “forehead of horizon peaked through the veil of dusk.” He was struck by the beautiful gardens and pleasant skyline of timeless buildings; it was the perfect coastal town. The city, in no doubt, al-Tamgrūtī notes, deserves the poems sung for it, like the following line he cites in his work *al-Nafha al-miskiyya fi al-safāra al-Turkiyya*:

Tunis is the best of abodes in the west;
A home to any stranger who settles in it.

My trip to Tunis was not as arduous. I did not have to brave any raging tempests, nor did I have to be fearful of pirates. I boarded a plane in Boston and landed in Tunis safely after a lengthy layover in

Istanbul/Constantinople. On the flight to Tunis, I reread al-Tamgrūtī’s account and wondered what he would say about the miracle of flying. I also wondered what my first impression of Tunis would be like. I have been a student of the Arabic language, culture, and literature for a long time. I had the opportunity to travel and live in the Arab Mashriq, but I had never set foot in the Maghrib. I was truly exhilarated. My knowledge of North Africa in general and Tunisia in particular was not more than cursory readings of the region’s history, a few novels and Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī’s famous lines of poetry which became the rallying cry of the Arab Spring. This trip was definitely destined to fill a void.

The Winter Term Study Excursion in Tunisia is one of the programs that CMES runs in the country. This year’s program was the fifth of its kind, and I can confidently state that the excursion was again a great success. In previous years, groups of graduate students traveled to Tunisia to partake in the program, and, this year, undergraduate students were also admitted. Our group had thirteen members hailing from diverse backgrounds. Under the supervision of CMES Director William Granara, Gordon Gray Professor of the Practice of Arabic, and Sihem Lamine, Administrative Manager of the CMES Tunisia Office, the Center organized a meticulously planned itinerary. Unfortunately, we did not enjoy the pleasure of having Professor Granara with us. Ms. Lamine and Laura Thompson, a PhD candidate in the Study of Religion at Harvard University, accom-

panied us in our trips around the country. They both were a WhatsApp message away ready to answer any questions and help with any needs. In addition to road trips and urban excursions, we were also invited to lectures and panels that the Center organized. The program lasted for three weeks, and it flew by too fast. We visited around ten cities and towns in addition to major sites in and around the city of Tunis.

The first urban excursion was in the Medina quarter of Tunis, a labyrinthine network of narrow streets flanked by beautiful white-washed houses with iconic blue doors. It was an absolute pleasure to walk through the Medina with Ms. Lamine, who is an architect. In each trip and excursion, we also had well-informed and passionate guides. It also helped that, in our group, we had fellow travelers knowledgeable of the architecture and history of the region. There was no need to resort to Wikipedia at all! My highlights of the Medina were little shops selling *shawāshi* (sing. *shāshiya*) skullcaps that dominated the headgear fashion of the Ottoman Empire for quite a while, and, of course, al-Zaytuna Mosque, the second mosque built in North Africa. The mosque is a calm oasis in the midst of a bustling Medina, a forest of splendid columns, spolia from the nearby ruins of Carthage.

I was also able to explore the city on my own. I took the train from Sidi Bou Said, where our hotel was, to the city center, and walked to the Medina quite a few times. I learned from the Urbex photographer Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed after his lecture at the Center about a street famous for its bookstores, Rue des Tanneurs (Nahj



al-Dabbāghīn). He showed us pictures of a peculiar bookstore occupying a four-story old building with piles and piles of books stacked against walls and shoved into dusty bookshelves. I had to find it, and I did. The bookstore does not have a name, it is simply known as Khālīd's bookstore. It is easy to miss as the door that opens to the chaotic assemblage of books is rather unassuming. Khālīd has been running his bookstore for decades. He gathered a formidable collection of books during his trips throughout the Arab world. He seemed to have total mastery in locating books within a minute or so. He was very welcoming and friendly. We had lengthy conversations, and he allowed me into the top floor, albeit at my own risk—I had to jump over books and squeeze myself through bookshelves.





The Medina of Tunis

I visited Khālid a few times, each time exploring a new room.

All the road trips we had to amazing sites were beautiful. We were transported in two vans, a “lecture” van and a “quiet” van. I had the pleasure of being a permanent member of the former. The lecture van had facing seats; we entertained ourselves by reciting poetry, listening to a fellow traveler’s expertise about this or that topic, or simply chatting. If I had to choose two favorite sites we visited outside

Tunis, the first would be the small town of Takrouna, tucked into the hills between Hammamet and Sousse. We visited the town in the afternoon, and we were treated to a gorgeous sunset in addition to freshly baked bread, and olive oil. The second would be the archaeological site of Dougga, some 110 kilometers southwest of Tunis. It is a gleaming crown in the midst of emerald fields. I definitely understood why the country is called Green Tunisia (Tūnis al-khadrā’).

After three unforgettable weeks, I left Tunisia with an additional suitcase full of books, three *shawāshi*, Tunisian molokhia, and many other keepsakes. This trip gave me the opportunity to explore the country in a way that I could not have done on my own. I must note here that I also finally developed a taste for couscous. A milk-soaked couscous dish topped with nuts and dates we had in El Kef did the trick! The trip was also a great opportunity to strike up pleasant friendships. I am very grateful to Professor Granara, who

spearheaded the program, and Ms. Lamine and Ms. Thompson, who ran it masterfully.

Just like al-Tamgrūtī I also went on a sunrise stroll, not in Tunis but in Sidi Bou Said. A fellow traveler and I left our hotel in the dark and by the time we climbed up a hill to a Sufi shrine, in al-Tamgrūtī’s words, “the king of the east was putting on his golden crown.” One of the poems al-Tamgrūtī cites in his travelogue declares that whoever visits Tunisia will wish to go back. I definitely wish so. ■

CMES EXTENDS COMMITMENT TO TUNISIA OFFICE FOR SIX YEARS

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies announced in January 2021 that it will continue to provide a wide range of research opportunities and programming through its Tunisia Office for a further six years, supported by a \$2 million gift from Harvard alumnus Hazem Ben-Gacem '92. The office, which opened its doors in Tunis in January 2017 with the support of an initial gift from Ben-Gacem, provides students and scholars

with a bridge to renowned Tunisian archival facilities, serves as an incubator for analysis of the evolving social, cultural, legal, and political movements in the region, and offers an intellectual hub for scholars of, and from, Tunisia, the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, and the wider Middle East region.

The Tunisia Office offers a platform for Harvard University students and faculty to learn about and engage with Tunisia

and the broader Middle East and to further their scholarly work on the Middle East and North Africa region, the Arabic language, and the many civilizations that have crossed North Africa for centuries. Since its founding, the office has hosted approximately 100 Harvard University students and faculty.

“Broadening the contexts in which teaching, learning, and research happen



Students on CMES's inaugural January term study excursion to Tunisia, January 2016

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at Harvard is a crucial element of the University's engagement around the world. I am confident that, building on the strong foundation it has put in place over the last few years, the Tunisia Office of CMES will continue to provide valuable resources for Harvard students and scholars and to furnish exciting opportunities for collaboration with local partners that will shape important work across fields and disciplines," said Harvard Vice Provost of International Affairs Mark Elliott. "We are truly grateful for the very generous support of Hazem Ben-Gacem, which makes all this possible for the Harvard community."

Programs available at the Tunisia Office include Harvard Tunisia Scholarships for Harvard graduate and undergraduate research, funding for Harvard faculty sabbatical research, an Arabic language summer program for Harvard graduate and undergraduate students, a three-week Winter session course for Harvard students, and an array of topical workshops, conferences, and lectures.

Recent special initiatives at the Tunisia Office include Rediscovering Tunisia's Interwar Literary Milieu, a digital humanities project in collaboration with the National Documentation Center, the National Archives of Tunisia, and the National Library of Tunisia; and *#After Lockdown: Very Short Stories about Enduring a Global Pandemic*, an animated film that premiered as part of Worldwide Week at Harvard 2020 and presents personal narratives collected by the Tunisia Office and the Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece during the summer of 2020. □



William Granara, Margot Gill, and Hazem Ben-Gacem at the official opening of the CMES Tunisia Office



William Granara speaks at the last in-person event at the Tunisia Office before the March 2020 lockdown

IN THE SHADOW OF HISTORY: A SUMMER IN TUNISIA

In the summer of 2022, after a two-year hiatus due to Covid-19, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies' five-week Arabic language program in Tunis made its long-awaited return. Led for a fifth time by the Gordon Gray Research Professor of Arabic and outgoing CMES Director William Granara, the program synthesized modern Tunisian history, literature, and culture through various texts dating from the early-twentieth-century pre-Independence period to the contemporary, post-Revolution setting. Nicolas Pantelick '24, a joint NELC and government concentrator pursuing a concurrent AM degree in Middle Eastern studies, detailed his summer experience in Tunisia, joining six other undergraduate and graduate classmates from across the University.

To comprehend a nation's culture, history, and traditions requires an act of submission—a supplication to journeys covered, cataloged, and yet to be conceived. Nowhere is this more evident than in Tunisia. Tunisia's is a rich and splintered history, its eras cross-pollinated by bygone civilizations—Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, and many Islamic empires. History is the setting, seat, and sequence on which modern Tunisia models and reimagines itself.

As participants in CMES' five-week Arabic summer language program, my classmates and I had the privilege of experiencing the endless wisdom, wit, and dry humor of Professor William Granara. Our class was distinctly global, with

members hailing from the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, and China, each bringing with them an inimitable character, expertise, and charm. The existence of the CMES Tunisia Office can largely be attributed to Granara's dedication and his role as a leading force within Middle Eastern studies at Harvard. In many ways, Tunis is a second home to Granara, who spent five years there as the Director of the US State Department's Arabic field school before arriving at Harvard, as well as many summers living there since.

Befitting someone of Granara's expertise, our Arabic reading selections were eclectic, historically apropos, and in tune with the tumultuous tenor of modern-day Tunisian politics. Each selected text unlocked the sprawl of Tunisian cultural, social, and political history that lay beyond the Center's walls, spanning a century from the height of French colonialism to the contemporary moment. While our textual journey through this breadth of millennia was not strictly linear, the literary thread that Professor Granara unraveled created both a coherent web to visualize the Tunisian national consciousness across time and a compelling paradigm for our summer's travels.

Our reading of early-twentieth-century Tunisian writer and intellectual Ali Du'aji's (1909–49) colloquially titled narrative “Barhopping through the Mediterranean” evoked a continuity between historical context and the contemporary, emphasizing the region's hybridity and shared culture. Du'aji's work recounted his 1933 journey

around the Mediterranean, irreverently capturing the flaws and complications of the interwar period through vivid vignettes while bucking the stringent literary parameters of the traditional *rihla* (or travel) genre that is often connected to the Hajj. Sometimes known as “the father of the modern Tunisian short story,” Du'aji was born into a wealthy merchant family of Turkish ancestry in Tunis. As a young writer, he joined the nationalist, anticolonial “Jama'at that al-sur” or “Beneath-the-Wall Group,” who met in the old Medina of Tunis near Bab Souika. Ninety years later, our class's travels seemed to fill a missing national link in Du'aji's epic, the young luminary having traversed and written about every corner of the Mediterranean but his own, though always carrying with him the Tunisian ethos. Although our summer treks across Tunisia may not have been as dramatic as the absurdities Du'aji described, we too found ourselves, strangers in a new land, piecing together abstract, refracted understandings of history and culture from fleeting moments, characters, and conversations.

My Tunisian story began on an early June evening when I arrived in Tunis, carrying on my brow the perspiration and excitement of my long journey from San Francisco. I met my classmates at our accommodations, nestled atop a panoramic perch thirty minutes north of the city center. From this vantage, we gazed down on the blue and white porticos of Sidi Bou Said to the left and the glamorous beach town expanse of La Marsa and

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Gammarth to the right. Beaches hemming the Mediterranean's expanse would be our constant companion, whether those along the translucent waters of the rocky Raf Raf and Bizerte peninsula to the northwest of Tunis or on the sweeping plains speckled with olive groves of the country's Sahel to the center east, with its port cities of Sousse, Mahdia, and Monastir.

Indeed, if beaches were our steadfast summer skyline, the musky ambrosia of cigarettes was our perpetual perfume. In any Tunisian *café au bord de la Mer*, whether enjoying a sugary mint tea, bitter “Turkish” coffee, or fresh fruit juice, with smoke curling up from many a patron's lips, you would soon be greeted by a jasmine flower seller bearing a woven basket adorned with a crown of a dozen or so neatly packaged white bouquets. As persistent as they are ubiquitous, the purveyors find success around Tunis' tourist-heavy beachfront towns, such as our Sidi Bou Said and La Marsa enclaves. The jasmine flowers invoke an old Andalusian tradition, wherein men place the white coronation behind an ear to allure a future lover. Wide-eyed foreigners stand out like sore thumbs amidst Tunis' urban frenzy, especially with tourism subdued by Covid-19 in recent years.

In Tunis, the humming rails of the TGM (Tunis-Goulette-Marsa) commuter tram built in 1872 bisect the city, zigzagging through the sun-soaked silhouettes of whitewashed houses and antique ruins alike. In 1912, the Tunis tram system had been the site of a boycott by Tunisian Arabs, who refused to ride all city trams for over a month after a car driven by



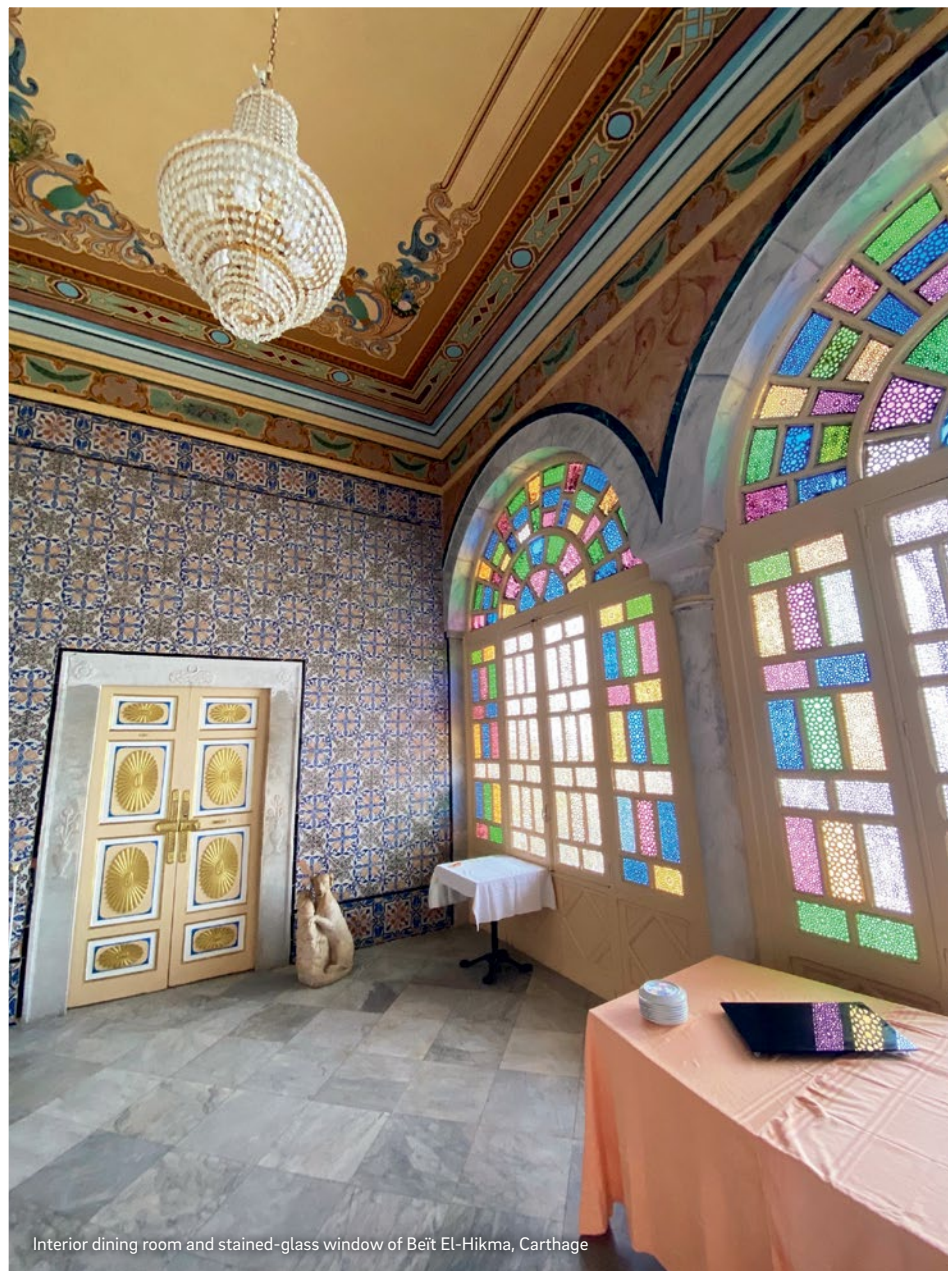
Our class (left to right: Alex Garnick, Flo Sharp, Maggie Thielens, Giulia Benvenuto, Josh Willcox, and Nicolas Pantelick; not pictured: Lavinia Zhao) at the foot of El-Zitouna Mosque in the Medina of Tunis



View from above the blue-and-white-toned village of Sidi Bou Said, a northern suburb of Tunis, where we stayed for the summer

an Italian conductor had hit and killed a child near the Medina downtown. Though ultimately unsuccessful, this experience in collective action provided a catalyst for Tunisians' political awareness, one that coalesced around the leadership of newly formed political organizations such as the "Destour (Constitutional Liberal) Party"—the principal force behind the national independence movement. Fittingly, on the first day of Granara's course, we began reading the 1920 Tunisian independence manifesto, "Tunis the Martyr," of Abdelaziz Thâalbi (1876–1944), an eminent founding Destour Party member, who wrote his nationalist commentary while exiled in France following the tram boycott.

One day in late June, with the crawl of summer towards its dog days, the weather in Tunis had grown warmer, and the sea offered a welcome respite from the sun's glare. Disembarking the TGM, I walked down the Carthage shore, cutting a path through the shallow water and the dancing drone of the beach's cacophony. The gentle thrum of Mediterranean swells against the shore was a welcome repose from the raging wedding party at our hotel the night before when the deluge of noise reached its zenith in the early hours. Eventually, I reached Beït El Hikma (also known as the Zarrouk Palace), a monumental nineteenth-century Ottoman villa constructed by the Husainid officials, towering above the antique splendor of Carthage, adjacent to the Baths of Antonius. Families swam and played in the water, splashing and jumping like minnows beneath dilapidated concrete blocks—former Carthaginian fortifications and the site of Punic War carnage. Beït



Interior dining room and stained-glass window of Beït El-Hikma, Carthage

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El Hikma holds historical significance in Tunisia as the *mise-en-scène* of the proclamation of the Republic of Tunisia in 1957, which deposed the country's last monarch, Lamine Bey, and a realized Thâalbi and other National Movement leaders' struggle. Land stretched in the distant periphery across the yawning Gulf of Tunis, an acute reminder of the distance a nation must travel to throw off colonial shackles and achieve sovereignty.

Later that week, we headed south from Sidi Bou Said. Tunis suburbs floated by the taxi's window lost in the roar of a warm summer wind. To be a passenger in Tunisia is an act of reckless abandon. Yet, you would not know it by observing drivers navigate nimbly through obstacles, straddling lanes without a turn signal or care, the brazen made tranquil and innate. With each sharp acceleration, my shirt clung to my back, as I did to my chair, the seatbelt a luxurious afterthought.

We would tour the city's Medina on one of the summer's hottest days, congregating around its imposing doorstep at Bab El Bhar (or "the sea gate")—the seat of Tunisian colonial cosmopolitanism during Du'aji's epoque. The everyday ebullience seemed as if it were plucked from a medieval *modus vivendi*; our presence was rendered alien and insignificant. Timelessness again colored our stroll through the Medina on Eid El-Adha in early July, each step tinged with the fetid smell of burnt meat as so many years and celebrations before. Every few paces, we would come across men barbecuing quartered lambs with torches, belching flames onto the blackened animal skin in a



slow whine. In the week prior, the bleating of sheep had echoed across Tunisia, the imminent stained sacrifice of flocks solemnizing a week of familial celebration and a guarantee of a nation well fed.

Within the confines of Tunisian medinas, perhaps no two buildings better epitomize the country's amalgam of history, culture, and civilization than the El-Zitouna and Great Kairouan Mosques. Both are formerly renowned Islamic university and legal centers buttressed by columns and facades salvaged from Carthaginian, Roman, and Byzantine ruins. Although El-Zitouna dates from around 700 CE, the mosque became the main national scholarly hub in the thirteenth century—when the Almohad and Hafsid rulers established

Tunis as the capital of Ifriqiya—producing scholars such as the esteemed historian Ibn Khaldun. Sihem Lamine—the CMES Tunis Office Administrative Manager and our exceptionally generous resident Tunisia expert, who deserves our endless appreciation—noted how shops in the Tunis Medina fan out from El-Zitouna, with the finest wares, perfumes, and silks in closest proximity to the holy building. Without Sihem's guidance on this history and others, ad infinitum, I do not doubt that such an observation would have been entirely lost on us, as navigating the labyrinthine Medina already constituted a captivating challenge.

The Great Mosque of Kairouan—whose name comes from the word caravan due to its strategic trade route location—predates



Interior of the Great Mosque of Kairouan. Photo by Walid Akef, PhD candidate in history of art and architecture

its northern counterpart, El-Zitouna, by several decades to claim the title of being one of the earliest Islamic city's nucleus. Piercing the arid desert ether, the mosque's singular towering minaret became the architectural paragon for all Islamic buildings to its west, across the Maghreb and Andalusia. While divinity is Kairouan's most precious and ubiquitous resource, the Great Mosque's form and function also chronicle the region's perennial water scarcity. Cisterns hide beneath the surface of its courtyard, forming an *impluvium*—or rainwater collector—furnished with horseshoe arches of white marble, able to hold nearly a thousand square meters of liquid. As we stood in the mosque's central sternum, small birds fluttered

and dove, announcing themselves with shrill invocations. Behind the courtyard's peripheral arches, women sat in cloisters swathed in shade, reciting Qur'an in forlorn and rhythmic tones, their voices blending in the lilt of prayer.

Textiles are another commodity for which Kairouan is renowned, a fact readily attested to by the bulging, tightly wrapped carpets we crammed into our luggage and caravanned back home. Forty thousand or more knots can be held within one square meter of lamb's wool or silk, the culmination of a month's work and generations of artisanry distilled into a strip of vibrant pattern and color no bigger than my torso. Just as our souvenir carpets' stitches converged together, so did the

different historical veneers on the surface of El-Zitouna and the Great Kairouan Mosques intersect with one another to produce the character of antiquity in the ephemerality of the present. Though appropriating the bones of Carthaginian, Roman, and Byzantine buildings, the mosques achieved dynamic continuity. Trade facilitated access to the diverse materials found in El-Zitouna and Kairouan's limbs; Roman capitals and columns were often reused, with their style adapted to Islamic conventions but still partial to a shared Mediterranean heritage and disposition.

From the pre-Islamic era, El Jem amphitheater stands alone as an immortal marker of Tunisia's vast history. Paid for by the olive oil trade and built in the third century CE, the colosseum wears its millennia modestly and with timeless defiance. To visit the structure today, located 2.5 hours south of Tunis, seemed an odd affair; stagnant and impetuous, it was once the focal point of macabre violence and spectacle. Today, 1,800 years later, the amphitheater's near-perfect preservation serves as a more complete reification of Roman glory than its

Since 2016, the CMES Tunisia Office has welcomed more than 100 graduate and undergraduate students from across the University for January term study excursions, summer advanced Arabic language sessions, and independent research.



Ottoman-era entrance hall of a famous carpet manufacturer in Kairouan



A few members of our class on a visit to El Jem (Thysdrus) colosseum

ancient counterpart in the Italian capital, testifying to the human impulse for permanence despite the inescapable stampede of time over lives, places, and civilizations. El Jem, in an area once known as Thysdrus, has also been a granary and marketplace throughout its history. This heritage evokes Tunisia's legacy as El Khadra, meaning green or verdant, due to its agricultural cornucopia of olives, grapes, and cereals that buoyed ancient Rome in its efforts

to sustain a far-flung empire. Tunisia's globally nonpareil mosaic collections at the Bardo in Tunis, the Sousse Archaeological Museum, and the "House of Africa" villa near El Jem—the latter two sites we had the privilege of visiting—reveal the country's enduring agricultural legacy, with countless kaleidoscopic tiles conjuring images of cultivation across the four seasons.

Redolent Tunisian specialties flavored our journeys throughout the country. We

gorged ourselves on national street food staples, from the Tunisian–Jewish *fricassé* (greasy rolls stuffed with tuna, hard-boiled egg, olives, harissa, and mashed potatoes) and *brik* (triangular filo pastries packed with egg, onions, tuna, harissa, and parsley) on our first afternoon in La Marsa, to copious bambalouni (deep-fried donuts daubed in powdered sugar) enjoyed on balmy evenings scaling the cobbled passages of Sidi Bou Said. In



Octopus couscous is a dish reflecting Tunisia's dual Maghrebi and Mediterranean culinary lineage. Photo by CMES AM candidate Giulia Benvenuto



Our group resting against a wall of ceramic tiles at the Sidi Sahbi Mosque in Kairouan. Finally, a very special thank you to Sihem Lamine (far left), without whom none of our adventures would have been possible

Kairouan, we salivated over local delicacies of *keftaji* (fried vegetables married with eggs) and *makroudh* (diamond-shaped cookies infused with dates or almond paste, concocted from semolina and flour dough). The standard *complet poisson*, *couscous*, *ojja* with *merguez* (shakshuka's progenitor, often served with spicy sausage), and *salata mechouia* (or "grilled salad" of vegetables, tomatoes, peppers, onions, and garlic) were staples of any Tunisian meal.

Although the weight of antiquity is unassailable in Tunisia, the recent decades have been equally foundational in reframing the nation's illustrious history and future. In the sunny summer we spent in Tunisia, more than eleven years after the embers of Tunisian national discontent found fiery footing on the striking image of Mohamed Bouazizi's

self-immolation, the North African nation's intrepid democratic project seemed on the precipice, its horizon brooding with clouds. International democratic norms had proven hollow and inane when promises of social, economic, and political equality and justice succumbed to inertia and corruption under their lofty theoretical trappings. As the anniversary of President Kaïs Saïed's dissolution of parliament on July 25, 2021, approached at the end of my Tunisian stay, political consternation, the prospect of a new constitution, and economic malaise reached a fever pitch. To understand the raucous roots of the nation's politics over the last decade since the Revolution, I turned to Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasim al Shabbi's (1909–34) near-century-old composition "The Will to Life," chosen by Professor Granara for our class. During

the Arab Spring, couplets from al-Shabbi's poem were chanted in streets and inscribed defiantly on public spaces throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Spawned from the same anticolonial verve as the work of his contemporaries Du'aji and Thâalbi, al-Shabbi's resistance-laden verses implored citizens to oppose traditional government structures and take their lives into their own hands. The poem ends as it starts, with the resolute and eternal notion that "Should people seek or want life / Destiny will inevitably respond." In some small way, I hope my Tunisian summer embodied this ideal—not just to be a spectator of life and its conditions, however bleak or blissful, but to be an active and willing participant, wherever one's journey through the shadow of history might lead. ▣

Q&A WITH CMES TUNISIA'S SIHEM LAMINE

Siheem Lamine is the Administrative and Program Manager of the Tunisia Office of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Prior to officially joining CMES, Siheem worked as a consultant for CMES and Harvard Global Research and Support Services and played a major role in the transformation of the office space in Tunis from an empty shell to a functional and beautiful multi-purpose facility. For over six years she has been welcoming students, faculty, and visitors to the office, the city of Tunis, and the country of Tunisia, facilitating research projects, organizing public events, and generally helping visitors navigate and enjoy the resources and opportunities that Tunisia has to offer.

What is your professional background?

I studied architecture at the Ecole Speciale d'Architecture in Paris. I worked as a project architect in a ship-construction practice, Seine Design, in Paris for three years. Then, in partnership with fellow architect Jean Baptiste Barache, I co-founded Arba, a design practice specializing in sustainable residential architecture. We worked

together for more than a decade building wooden houses in the Alps, Normandie, Burgundy, and the suburbs of Paris and won several awards.

In 2013, having always been particularly drawn to the urban history of Islamic cities, I decided to go back to university and study the history of Islamic art and architecture at SOAS, London. I wrote a dissertation that explored the formation of the early medieval Zaytuna Mosque of Tunis. What I thought would be a nourishing break in my architectural path proved to be a turning point in my professional life: It drove me back to the academic and publishing worlds.

That is how, in late summer 2015, I found myself taking a job interview with Professor William Granara, CMES Director, and Lauren Montague, CMES Executive Director, in a hotel in Tunis for a position that consisted in the implementation of the first branch of Harvard CMES in Tunisia. Despite having spent most of my early professional years in construction fields dealing with artisans and construction companies, and drawing more than writing, I found an immense interest

and inspiration in the project, and in CMES programs and vision.

As a child and teenager, my family lived in campus residences, first at the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Bizerte, then in the Faculté des Lettres of Manouba. Our house was constantly filled with students and scholars of various nationalities. The gardens, amphitheatres, and libraries of these campuses were our playground. I grew up intuitively familiar with the backstage of higher education structures: how they function, how they look when they are empty and when they are filled with the flow of students. I saw and lived the 1980s tensions and protests in Tunisia's universities from the ground.

It has been more than six years since I joined CMES as the Administrative and Program Manager of the Tunisia Office. It took me some time to draw clear links between these childhood years and my CMES Tunisia experience, but university campuses are somehow a natural milieu for me, and this might explain the passion that has been driving my work at the Tunisia Office.

What attracted you to the CMES Tunisia Office position?

It is useful to keep in mind the context in which the inception of CMES Tunisia took place: Such an initiative would have never been possible in pre-2011 Tunisia, a country where individual and academic freedoms were arbitrary, not to say nonexistent. The idea of implementing a research center in the humanities and social sciences embodied a lot of what I believed in and dreamt of. I saw the project as a powerful signal proving that a substantial change was really taking place in the country.

After meeting the CMES team for the first time in Tunis, I knew that I wholeheartedly wanted/had to help the CMES Tunisia Office project to exist, succeed, and grow, with all the means and skills I had. Needless to say it was not any random Middle Eastern studies research center, it was part of Harvard University, an institution I have always admired and respected. I was thrilled to be part of a team committed to building bridges between academic communities, creating a multidisciplinary environment that values the lived experience, a team convinced that knowledge continues beyond the classroom, on the ground,

and that studying societies and communities cannot ignore their arts, literature, cinema, theater, built environment, and culture.

What have been the best parts about managing the CMES Tunisia Office and programming?

The best moments in the last six years have doubtlessly been meeting the Harvard community, students, faculty, and staff, learning about diverse research interests, and catalyzing connections with local academic communities. Programming and hosting for the successive trips, visits, and academic events has been a truly rewarding and rich experience. One of the greatest rewards is seeing students return to the country after a first visit, use the office resources as a remote place they can benefit from and where their work can thrive.

One of the highlights of the CMES Tunisia programs is the J-term Introduction to Tunisia three-week annual trip. The CMES Tunisia Office hosted five successive winter trips (2016–20). All of them were supervised by Professor Granara, and were fascinating moments of discovery and interaction for groups of students who visit



the region, sometimes for the first time. Each of these trips represented an opportunity to witness the students' tremendous curiosity and thirst to learn and understand, and rediscover my own environment through their eyes.

The Arabic Language Summer Program is also a wonderful moment of the year at the office. Groups gather for a five- to six-week period. It is an opportunity for them to learn the language while being in an Arabic-speaking environment and while enjoying Tunisia's summer atmosphere.

Spring faculty visits are also rewarding and humbling moments in the office's life. They offer, of course, the opportunity to hear from Harvard's incredible talents, and to host lectures by Harvard faculty that are open to everyone. They are also moments of rich exchange and connection. Professors Granara, Malika Zeghal, Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, Roy Mottahedeh, and Gareth Doherty all gave fascinating lectures attended by the Tunis academic community.

The CMES Tunisia Office also organized two major

academic gatherings in the field of Mediterranean studies: The first, "Mediterranean Cousins: Tunisia and Italy on Opposite Shores," was held in October 2019. A group of scholars from Tunisian, American, and European universities met in Tunis to present and discuss their work on history of the relations linking the northern and southern shores of the Central Mediterranean Sea. The second, "Mapping Tunisia in Mediterranean Studies: Approaches to Research and Professional Development in the Humanities and Social

Photo: Austin Mann

NEWS AND NOTES

Sciences,” was organized in March 2020, in collaboration with the Mediterranean Seminar. It offered a great opportunity to students in the humanities studying in Tunisian universities to hear from guest professors such as Julia Clancy-Smith, Professor of History at the University of Arizona, and Brian A. Catlos, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

In addition to these major programs, visiting scholars have contributed actively to building and maintaining a local academic community with lectures or series such as Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop, initiated by Laura Thompson, Eyalet, Discussions on Ottoman Tunisia, moderated by Youssef Ben Ismail, or the Urban in North Africa Workshop, led by Myriam Amri.

What have been some of the challenges, and in particular the challenges in the Covid era, and what kinds of programming have you been able to pursue given the ever-changing protocols regarding travel and gatherings in Tunisia, the United States, and other countries?

As an off-campus remote office, the biggest challenge we encountered was the Covid

pandemic and the travel restrictions it generated. This caused a great deal of uncertainty and successive program cancellations. However, it forced us to substantially adapt our functioning mode and programs to keep the community together, connected, and involved remotely.

In summer 2020, we launched a digital humanities program supervised by Professor Granara with a group of Harvard CMES researchers. The initiative's aim is to research a corpus of press publications from the interwar period in Tunisia, and to make the content available to the community of researchers with interest in the intellectual, social, and literary history of Tunisia and the region. The corpus was collated and digitalized in collaboration with the CDN (Archives of the Tunisian Press), the National Archives of Tunisia, and National Library of Tunisia. The program has been running for four terms, and we are hoping to see the results of the research published in collaboration with Widener Library.

Also in reaction to the first Covid lockdown, we worked in collaboration with the Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece to co-produce *#After Lockdown:*

Very Short Stories about Enduring a Global Pandemic, a 50-minute animated film presenting individual stories about living through the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic in different places in the world. The film, designed by Mr Sebs, an animation studio co-directed by CMES alumnus Mohamad Saleh AM '18, premiered at 24 Hours of Harvard 2020, the first online version of Harvard Worldwide Week. It features testimonials from students and professors, but also contributors from outside the academic community, narrating their personal experiences with lockdown, travel restrictions, switching to new forms of education, displacement, isolation, job loss, and more broadly, adapting their lives to the new circumstances imposed on them and on their communities. When we look back at the film today, it is incredibly rewarding to have this collective scrapbook documenting a moment of change for all of us.

The switch to online programming was also the opportunity to launch Tunisia Newsreel: Notes from the Ground, a webinar series on contemporary Tunisia in which selected guests discuss the country's economy,

international and regional politics, public health, crisis management, policy making, social justice, race, gender, history, heritage, and arts.

What opportunities have you had to collaborate with other Harvard departments and Schools?

The CMES Tunisia Office is committed to serve as an outreach, promotion, and recruitment platform for other Harvard Schools, departments, and programs with relation to the Ben-Gacem Fund at Harvard or with specific interest in the country.

In past years, we have organized information sessions on applying to Harvard College, held in person at the Tunisia Office and livestreamed to audiences in multiple locations around the country in collaboration with AMIDEAST and local education institutions. We have provided assistance to Harvard Kennedy School for recruitment for fully sponsored opportunities for the Master in Public Administration and Master in Public Policy programs in collaboration with Tunisia's Ecole Nationale d'Administration. The office has also served as a connection and development platform for the implementation of HMX

online courses in Medical Fundamental Sciences in four medical schools of Tunisia, a program that is developed and run by Harvard Medical School. The Tunisia Office also supported establishing connections between Harvard Business School and Tunisian companies. And we have been an active partner of the Cross-roads Program, an opportunity open to first-generation college students in South Asia, Africa, and the MENA region, initiated by the the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute.

You recently published an article in the journal *Muqarnas* (edited by Gülru Necipoğlu, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art in Harvard's Department of the History of Art and Architecture and a core CMES faculty affiliate). What was the piece about? Do you hope to publish more work in the future, in *Muqarnas* or elsewhere?

It was such a pleasure and honor for me to have my article on the minaret of Zaytuna Mosque published in *Muqarnas*, after having presented the preliminary findings of the research at the 2019 MESA Annual Conference in New Orleans. The article is

titled “Colonial Zaytuna: The Making of a Minaret in French Occupied Tunisia.” It explores the complex and fascinating context of the construction of a monumental minaret for the city’s Great Mosque, the Zaytuna, in the late nineteenth century while the country was gradually transitioning from its Ottoman past and surrendering to the newly established French colonial rule. The article questions the presence of a colonial structure where it is less expected to be found. The article is also meant to be a humble tribute to the architects, artisans, and builders who contributed to the construction of this beautiful piece of architecture.

The production and publication of this article was a team work that would never have been possible without many members of the CMES community. I am grateful to my colleagues and friends who helped me to accomplish this work by offering opportunities, connections, advice, revisions, or simply words of encouragement. I do hope I will be able to write and publish more work on Tunisia’s urban history and history of architecture. I am drawn and concerned by questions related to heritage preservation. I belong among

those who believe that our relationship to the land, the built environment, and to memory of place can be key to building creative and sustainable environments and economies. And I do believe that academic research and publication can serve as a tool for advocacy: Telling the stories of buildings is a way to protect them.

Celebrated cellist Yo-Yo Ma ’76 was in Tunis recently, and CMES Tunisia hosted a panel conversation with him. Can you tell us more about it?

Sunday, March 27, was an unforgettable day, indeed! The Harvard CMES Tunisia Office took part in the North Africa edition of Yo-Yo Ma’s Bach Project, organized in Tunis on March 26 and 27, 2022. On the first day, Ma gave an exceptional concert at the Cité de la Culture of Tunis. Then the second day was dedicated to action and dialogue on how culture connects people and how hope can be (re)built through creative heritage. In the panel discussion entitled “Finding Beauty in What We Call Home,” Yo-Yo Ma conversed with two Tunisian artists: painter and sculpturist Sonia Kallel and urbex photographer Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed. The three of them talked about their work

and projects; they spoke on themes as diverse as beauty, memory, heritage, war, and the role of artists in society and in the world. It was an immense pleasure for me to moderate this discussion.

What is fantastic is that the very first connection with the Bach Project’s team happened thanks to two Harvard CMES Tunisia alumni, Dustin Klinger, NELC PhD ’21, and CMES PhD candidate Salmaan Mirza, in early 2020. I remember responding to the introduction email saying that Yo-Yo Ma’s visit to Tunisia would be a “dream come true.” Then, after two years of Covid, the dream became reality! And all of us at CMES are most grateful to Yo-Yo Ma and everyone who contributed to putting Tunis and the CMES Tunisia Office on the Bach Project’s map.

What are you up to at the office for the coming spring and summer?

I am thrilled to be relaunching in-person programming with such a celebration, and in music! And we are very much looking forward to resuming the in-person Summer Program after two years of interruption. The return of students to the CMES Tunisia Office will be a delightful moment! ▣

YO-YO MA COMES TO TUNISIA, WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM CMES

When world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma '76 and his Bach Project visited Tunisia in March 2022, it was the realization of plans set in motion over two years earlier with help from members of the CMES Tunisia community.

The Bach Project (bach.yo-yoma.com) began in 2018 with the goal to perform

Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for solo cello in 36 locations around the world.

In addition to celebrating the power of music to connect people, the project also seeks to explore and celebrate all the ways that culture makes people stronger as individuals, as communities, as societies, and as a planet. Thus, in conjunction with

each Bach Project concert, Ma and his team partner with artists and culture makers, cultural and community organizations, and local leaders from across sectors to design conversations, collaborations, and performances on a smaller scale for a "Day of Action" in the communities they visit.



All photos: Austin Mann

Yo-Yo Ma performing at the Théâtre de l'Opéra de la Cité de la Culture Tunis

Originally scheduled for April 2020 but, like so many other events, performances, and gatherings around the world, delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bach Project's visit to Tunisia finally took place this March. On March 26, Ma performed the cello suites at the Théâtre de l'Opéra de la Cité de la Culture Tunis for an audience of over 1,500.

"The concert was an encounter with beauty," says CMES Tunisia Administrative and Program Manager Sihem Lamine, who worked closely with the Bach Project team on preparations for the visit. "It was an experience comparable to seeing a Van Gogh masterpiece or the Hagia Sophia, or a great city or landscape, for the first time. You leave the room as a different person. Yo-Yo Ma invents a musical language of his own. It was mind-blowing to listen to the Bach suites—which are among the least approachable pieces of classical music—performed in a way that transforms them into something more accessible, that speaks to the deepest human emotions, beyond the cultural background of the listener. The concert was a gift to the city. I am certain many people in the audience, like myself, will keep the memory of this performance with them for the rest of their lives."

Ma dedicated the second day of his visit to action and dialogue on how culture connects people and how hope can be (re)built through creative heritage. On Sunday morning, Ma met with a group of creative peacemakers from Libya who convened in Tunis to explore reconciliation through artistic and creative ventures. Ma joined a discussion about cultural reunification through the stories of Libyan



In conversation with a group of Tunisian students



In the workshop of silk weaver Abdennebi Chentouri



Touring the historic Medina of Tunis with local students

artists, arranged in partnership with the delegation of the European Union in Tunisia, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, and the Libyan Peacemakers Network. Videos of the group's workshops will be used to promote ongoing peace initiatives in Libya.

The second part of the Day of Action took place in the Medina (old city) of Tunis and was coordinated in partnership with Blue Fish, a social enterprise dedicated to heritage preservation, urban revival, and community empowerment, led by Leila Ben-Gacem. Ma met for a conversation with a group of local students, with whom he then toured the historic Medina. As craft is an essential part of Tunisia's culture, history, and future, they visited the studios and shops of artisans, including silk weaver Abdennebi Chentouri, shoemaker Souhail Fitouri, and bookbinder Mohamed Ben Sassi. Following the visits, fourth-generation calligraphy artist Mohamed Saber Akili joined Ma for a calligraphy workshop at Dar Ben-Gacem, a beautifully restored guesthouse and event space and sister company to Blue Fish, owned and operated by Leila Ben-Gacem, who helped facilitate several of the activities during Ma's visit.

Later in the afternoon, the CMES Tunisia Office hosted a panel discussion at Dar Ben-Gacem with Ma and two Tunisian artists, painter and sculpturist Sonia Kallel and urbex photographer Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed, moderated by Lamine. The three artists talked about their work and projects, touching on themes as diverse as beauty, memory, heritage, the sense of belonging to a land or a culture, the work of construction craft workers, who are



In the workshop of bookbinder Mohamed Ben Sassi



Calligraphy workshop with Saber Akili



In the workshop of shoemaker Souhail Fitouri



Panel discussion with artists Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed and Sonia Kallel



vital to the preservation and restoration of Tunisia's architectural history, and the role of artists in society and the world, specifically in times of war and crisis.

The day concluded on the Dar Ben-Gacem rooftop, overlooking the city and the domes of Mohamed Bey Mosque. As the sun set, second-generation Tunisian musician Sabry Mosbah and his group featuring guitar, lute, and piano performed

for the afternoon's participants, including a collaboration with Ma. Poet Zina Ben Ammar presented reflections on Tunisia's cultural future and the socio-economics of Tunisia today. And finally, Ma performed a rendition of "Amazing Grace," which was followed by a symphony of calls for prayer emanating from the Medina's minarets.

"I believe stars had to align for Yo-Yo Ma's visit to Tunis to be possible," says

Lamine. "When it finally happened, it was beyond all expectations and preparation efforts." CMES might not have been involved with the project at all, however, were it not for the intervention of CMES PhD candidate Salmaan Mirza and Harvard NELC alumnus Dustin Klinger, PhD '21. After they had spent time with CMES in Tunis, they suggested to mutual friend Sophie Shackleton, a senior producer

in Ma's office who scouts projects and locations, that the CMES Tunisia Office would be a valuable partner especially in planning the Day of Action activities in Tunis, and they introduced her to Lamine.

CMES began hosting student and faculty travel and research to Tunisia in 2016, and in 2017 officially opened an office in Tunis, with work and event spaces. Over 120 students, faculty, and administrative officials from across Harvard have visited for research and language study, and the office has hosted dozens of public and private lectures, conferences, and workshops, including a full slate of virtual events during the Covid period. Funding for the office and programming was provided by a gift from Harvard College alumnus Hazem Ben-Gacem '92. A second gift from Ben-Gacem, in 2021, will fund the office, student and faculty travel, and related programming through 2026.

"Although music is not what the CMES Tunisia Office is usually programmed for," says Lamine, "contributing to the Bach Project Tunis 2022 lies at the core of our mission to build bridges between scholarly communities and institutions, and seek impact through academic and cultural exchange. It was a great satisfaction to see members of CMES Tunisia's alumni community extend these goals beyond the strictly academic milieu, and actively contribute to making a beautiful event like this one possible. And I am proud to see that the CMES Tunisia Office has now built the capacity and community to support, host, or originate impactful projects and embrace initiatives greater than its original sphere of activity." ■



Playing "Amazing Grace"



With Sihem Lamine and Leila Ben-Gacem

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY 2016

Mapping Out Muslim Intellectual Networks in the Mediterranean in the Interwar Period. A lecture by Malika Zeghal, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor in Contemporary Islamic Thought and Life in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, Harvard University.

JULY 2016

El Hara: Photography Exhibition, Film Screening, and Round Table. A presentation by Margaux Fitoussi, MTS candidate at Harvard Divinity School, in conjunction with a photography exhibition, film screening, and roundtable discussion on the historical Hara of Tunis.

JANUARY 2017

Zinelabidine Senoussi and the Creation of a Modern Arabic Mediterranean Literature. A talk by CMES Director William Granara, Gordon Gray Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University.

JULY 2017

Lost and Found: A Panel

Discussion on Heritage Revival in the Medina of Tunis. With Leila Ben-Gacem, Ashoka Fellow, cultural entrepreneur; Anas Ghrab, Assistant Professor in Musicology, University of Sousse, former Director of the Center of Arab and Mediterranean Music; Zeineb Madiyouni, Co-founder of *Journal de la Medina*; and Emna Mizouni, Co-Founder of Association Carthagina. Opening remarks by CMES Director William Granara; moderated by CMES Tunisia Administrative Manager Sihem Lamine.

Intercolonial Connections: The Italian Community of French Tunisia. A lecture by Gabriele Montalbano, PhD candidate, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris.

I Love You, Hedi. A film screening and discussion with director Mohamed Ben Atiyya and producer Dorra Bouchoucha.

I Was in Raqqa. A book discussion with Hedi Yahmed. Moderated by Sihem Lamine.



Malika Zeghal



Leila Ben-Gacem



Gabriele Montalbano



Gülru Necipoğlu



Cemal Kafadar

NOVEMBER 2017

Who Speaks for the Sacred?

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Laura Thompson, PhD candidate in anthropology and the study of religion, Harvard University.

DECEMBER 2017

Governing through

Expectations. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Lana Salman.

JANUARY 2018

Ulemas of the Zaytuna

and al-Azhar. A workshop with Malika Zeghal, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor in Contemporary Islamic Thought and Life in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, Harvard University.

Seven Lives.

A film screening and discussion with directors Lilia Blaise and Amine Boufaied.

Looking Back on Abdelaziz Thaalbi, His Life, His Works, and His Trial.

A discussion with Kmar Bendana, Professor of History, University of Manouba. Moderated by Laura Thompson, PhD candidate in anthropology and the study of religion, Harvard University.

Patrimonialisation Process in Tunisia: The Case of Berber Heritage.

A talk by Neila Saadi, Assistant Professor, Centre de Recherches, d'Études, de Documentation et d'Information Sur La Femme, Tunis.

Competing Spectacles.

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with CEMAT Director Laryssa Chomiak.

FEBRUARY 2018

Tunisian Developmental

Thought in World-Historical Context. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Max Ajl.

MARCH 2018

Artistic Cosmopolitanism

from Istanbul to North Africa: The Royal Images of Sultan Süleyman and Hayreddin Barbarossa. A lecture by Gülru Necipoğlu, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art, Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, and Editor of *Muqarnas*, an Annual on the

Visual Cultures of the Islamic World, Harvard University.

The Adventures of Coffee, from Yemen to Istanbul to London, With a Stopover in North Africa: Where Does the Story of Modernity Begin?

A lecture by Cemal Kafadar, Vehbi Koç Professor of Turkish Studies, Harvard University.

Teaching the Arab Conquest at School in the Maghreb.

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Aroua Labidi, PhD candidate in history, University of Tunis.

APRIL 2018

Presentation of the Second Annual Crossroads Emerging Leaders Program to Tunisian First-Generation College

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



Crossroads Emerging Leaders Program session



Maxwell Dikkers, Hazem Ben-Gacem

Students. With Meena Hewett, Executive Director, Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University; and Lauren Montague, Executive Director, CMES, Harvard University.

Tunis Bourgeois Subjectivity and Civil Activism in Dalila ben Mbarek Msaddek's Testimony. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Rania Said.

MAY 2018
The Creeds of Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Sanusi (d. 1490): Toward an Understanding of Post-Classical Philosophy and Theology in the Maghrib. A lecture by Caitlyn Olson, PhD candidate in Near Eastern languages and civilizations, Harvard University.

Tunisia's Next Generation of Politicians? A lecture by Aytuğ Şaşmaz, PhD candidate in political science, Harvard University.

Harvard College Open House in Tunis. A program for Tunisian students, parents, and counselors about undergraduate education at Harvard University, covering academic programs, the admissions process, preparing to study in the United States, campus life, costs, and financial aid. Presented by Maxwell Dikkers, Senior Admissions Officer, Harvard College.

The Fellaga Seeking Independence and Harvesting Autonomy. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Max Ajl.

JUNE 2018
Turning a City Inside-Out. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Joachim Ben Yaacoub.

JULY 2018
Understanding Violent Extremism in the Context of Tunisia. A lecture by clinical psychologist Rim Ben Ismail, Project Director of the Life after Guantanamo Program in Tunisia, consultant for the World Organization against Torture, President of Psychologues du Monde, Tunisia.

A History of Apostasy Accusations in Tunisia. Part 1 of a book talk with Chokri Mabkhout, Professor of Arabic Literature, University of

Manouba. Moderated by Laura Thompson, PhD candidate in anthropology and the study of religion, Harvard University.

SEPTEMBER 2018
Technology and Blasphemy. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Laura Thompson, PhD candidate in anthropology and the study of religion, Harvard University.

OCTOBER 2018
Princess Aziza Othmana: The Birth of a Myth. Eyalet Discussion on Ottoman Tunisia with Leila Temime Blili, Professor of Ottoman History, University of Tunis. Moderated by Youssef Ben Ismail, PhD candidate in Near Eastern languages and civilizations, Harvard University.

NOVEMBER 2018

Papa Hedi, a Film Review.

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Rania Said and film director Claire Benhassine.

DECEMBER 2018

Ottoman Carthage. An Eyalet Discussion on Ottoman Tunisia with Ridha Mounni, curator and art historian. Moderated by Youssef Ben Ismail, PhD candidate in Near Eastern languages and civilizations, Harvard University.

Tunus Meselesi. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Youssef Ben Ismail, PhD candidate in Near Eastern languages and civilizations, Harvard University.

JANUARY 2019

Reflections on the Sacred and Secular Dimensions of Classical Islamic Thought.

A lecture by Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, Gurney Professor of History, Emeritus, Gurney Research Professor of History, Harvard University.

Archipelagos of Dissent: Protest and Politics in Tunisia.

A talk with Laryssa Chomiak, political scientist, Director of Center d'Etudes Maghrebines à Tunis.

The Ahmadi Collection.

A lecture by Mahdi Abdeljaouad, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Tunis.

FEBRUARY 2019

For the Love of a Country. A reading performance by political analyst and public policy consultant Chaima Bouhlel.

APRIL 2019

Translating Human Rights: The Example of Legal Training Workshops in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia.

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Ola Galal.

MAY 2019

Explaining the Electoral Weakness of Secular Modernist Parties in the Middle East.

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Aytuğ Şaşmaz, PhD candidate in political science, Harvard University.

JUNE 2019

Nouba, a TV Serial Drama Featuring the Mezwed Folk Music Milieu in 1990s Tunis.

A talk with film director Abdelhamid Bouchnak. Moderated by Myriam Amri, PhD candidate in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies, Harvard University.



Roy Parviz Mottahedeh



Myriam Amri, Sophie Bessis

A Citizen Indeed. A film screening and discussion with filmmaker Youssef Aswad.

A History of Criminalization of Homosexuality in Tunisia.

Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Daniel Levine Spound and Ramy Khouili.

JULY 2019

A History of Tunisia from Antiquity to Modern Times.

A book discussion with author and journalist Sophie Bessis. Moderated by Myriam Amri, PhD candidate in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies, Harvard University.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

The Day They Came to Arrest Me. A book discussion with author Hedi Yahmed. Moderated by Sihem Lamine, CMES Tunisia Administrative and Program Manager.

Bourguiba's Sons: A History of Apostasy Accusations in Tunisia. Part 2 of a book talk with Chokri Mabkhout, Professor of Arabic Literature, University of Manouba. Moderated by Laura Thompson, PhD candidate in anthropology and the study of religion, Harvard University.

Unrest and Discontent in Tunisia: Post-Colonial Legacies of Betrayal Past and Present. Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop with Margaux Fitoussi, PhD candidate in anthropology, Columbia University.

OCTOBER 2019
Mediterranean Cousins: Tunisia and Italy on Opposite Shores. A symposium examining kinship, exchanges, and divides between Tunisia and Italy across time and questioning the many ways in which Tunisians and Italians view self and other as Mediterranean citizens across linguistic, religious, and cultural divides. With CMES Director

William Granara, Symposium Chair, Gordon Gray Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University; Leila Blili, Professor of Ottoman History, Manouba University, Tunis; Alfonso Campisi, Professor of Romance Studies, Manouba University, Tunis; Francesca Maria Corrao, Professor of Arabic Language and Culture, LUISS University, Rome; Silvia Finzi, Professor of Italian Studies, Manouba University, Tunis; Mohamed Ouerfelli, Assistant Professor in Medieval History, Aix-Marseille University; Ahmed Saadaoui, Professor of Art History, Manouba University, Tunis; Youssef Ben Ismail, PhD candidate in Near Eastern languages and civilizations, Harvard University; Adnan El-Ghali, MPhil, MD, ULB, Brussels; and Gabriele Montalbano, PhD in late modern history, EPHE Sorbonne, Paris.

The Master in Public Administration Program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. An information session on the Master in Public Administration Program at Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) and the newly created fellowship open to Tunisian applicants: The

Hamida Ben-Gacem Fellowship Fund at HKS. With Christy Jackowitz, Senior Associate Dean of Development, HKS; Cathleen Coyle, Assistant Dean, HKS; Asma Sehiri Labidi, Director, Ecole Nationale d'Administration de Tunis; and Hazem Ben-Gacem, Harvard AB '92, initiator of the fund.

Harvard College Open House in Tunis. A program for Tunisian students, parents, and counselors about undergraduate education at Harvard University, covering academic programs, the admissions process, preparing to study in the United States, campus life, costs, and financial aid. With Janet Irons, Senior Admissions Officer, Harvard College; Hazem Ben-Gacem, Harvard AB '92; and Nadia Ali, Harvard AB '17.

Paradoxes of Green: Color, Space, and Environmental Movement. A lecture by Gareth Doherty, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture and Director of the Master in Landscape Architecture Program, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

JANUARY 2020
#EnaZeda: The Birth of a Movement against Sexual

Harassment in Tunisia. A panel discussion with Nawrez Ellafi, Campaign Officer of #Enazeda and Aswat Nissa; Rania Said, PhD candidate in comparative literature and moderator at #Enazeda; and guest discussant Kmar Bendana, Professor of Intellectual History, University of Tunis. Moderated by Laura Thompson, PhD candidate in anthropology and the study of religion, Harvard University.

Documenting the Beauty in a City's Decay: Lost in Tunis (UrbEx Photography). A presentation by urban explorer and photographer Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed.

Royal Portraits and Embedded Stories: Court Paintings and State Narratives in Nineteenth-Century Tunisia (1837–1881). A lecture by curator, art historian, and CMES Hazem Ben-Gacem Postdoctoral Fellow Ridha Moumni.

What It Takes to Build a Professional Tunisia News Website: The Example of Creating Meshkal. A discussion with journalist Fadil Aliriza, co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of Mesh-Kal.com.



William Granara, Sihem Lamine, and Gareth Doherty



Kmar Bendana, Laura Thompson, Nawrez Ellafi, Rania Said



Ridha Moumni



Mapping Tunisia in Mediterranean Studies workshop

MARCH 2020

Spring Equinox in Tunisia: Wrecks, People, and Things in the Sea, Or How Do We Do Mediterranean Studies?

A lecture by Julia Clancy-Smith, Professor of History, University of Arizona.

Mapping Tunisia in Mediterranean Studies: Approaches to Research and Professional Development in the Humanities and Social Sciences. A workshop on the field of Mediterranean studies, with a specific focus on Tunisia. With Julia Clancy-

Smith, Professor of History, University of Arizona; Brian A. Catlos, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder; and CMES Director William Granara, Gordon Gray Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University.

SEPTEMBER 2020

Applying to the Harvard Kennedy School's Mid-Career Master in Public Administration.

An online information session with Suzanne Shende, Associate Director of MPA Programs, Director of Edward S.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Mason Program, Harvard Kennedy School.

OCTOBER 2020

Sustaining Democracy in Time of Pandemic. A Tunisia Newsreel Q&A with economist Hedi Larbi, Tunisia's former Minister of Economic Infrastructure, Regional Planning, and Sustainable Development, and former Regional Director and Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa Vice President at the World Bank. Discussant: Aytuğ Şaşmaz, PhD candidate in political science, Harvard University.

#After Lockdown: Very Short Stories about Enduring a Global Pandemic. Premiere showing of a short film designed by Mr Sebs and co-produced by the CMES Tunisia Office and the Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece, Harvard University. Part of the 24 Hours at Harvard event during Worldwide Week at Harvard 2020.

NOVEMBER 2020

Human Trafficking, Migration, and Severe Exploitation: Modern-Day Slaves of Tunisia. A Tunisia Newsreel Q&A with Judge Raoudha Laabidi, President of



Tunisia's National Authority against Human Trafficking.

A City's Shadows: Urban Marginalization in Tunis.

A conversation with Jihed Hajsalem, social researcher and development adviser, FHI 360, Tunisia, and Myriam Amri, PhD candidate in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies, Harvard University.

DECEMBER 2020

What Is in a Clock? Tunis and Its Politics of Monumentality in a Post-Political Age.

A conversation with Iheb Guermazi, architect, urban historian, and PhD candidate in history, theory, and criticism

of architecture and art, MIT, and Myriam Amri, PhD candidate in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies, Harvard University.

FEBRUARY 2021

Applying to the Crossroads Program 2021. An information session cohosted by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute at Harvard University for first-generation college students in Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and the United States. Online session presented by Tiara Bhattacharya, Program Manager of the Crossroads

Emerging Leaders Program, and program alumni of 2020 Crossroads Program. Introductions by Lauren Montague, CMES Executive Director, and Sihem Lamine, CMES Tunisia Administrative and Program Manager.

MARCH 2021

In Search of Other Maps of Egypt. A conversation with Nermin Elsherif, PhD candidate in cultural studies, Amsterdam School of Heritage, Memory, and Material Culture, University of Amsterdam, and Myriam Amri, PhD candidate, anthropology and Middle Eastern studies, Harvard University.

Since 2016, nearly twenty Harvard University faculty members and officers have traveled to the CMES Tunisia Office to lecture, teach, conduct research, participate in workshops, and engage with the Tunisian academic community and interested public.

APRIL 2021

Food Sovereignty, Land Policies, and Social Marginalization in Tunisia.

A Tunisia Newsreel talk by geographer and documentary filmmaker Habib Ayeb, co-founder of the Tunisian Observatory for Food and Environmental Sovereignty (OSAE).

Tunisian–Libyan Relations in the Time of Libya’s Rebuilding and National Reconciliation. A Tunisia Newsreel conversation with Khemaies Jhinaoui, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, and CMES Director William Granara, Gordon

Gray Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University.

JUNE 2021

Overview of HMX Fundamentals Courses.

Information session with Dr. Michael Parker, Associate Dean for Online Learning, Harvard Medical School, and Sophia Snyder, Director of Operations, HMX, Office of Online Learning, Harvard Medical School.

OCTOBER 2021

The July 25th Experience in Tunisia: Transition, Performance, or Sentiment?

A Tunisia Newsreel talk with public policy specialist Ouïem Chettaoui.

What Exactly Is Undermining Tunisia’s Economy? A Tunisia Newsreel talk with economic and political analyst Anis Marrakchi.

Form, ForEx, Family: Black Market Economies and the Architecture of Social Credit in Libya. A conversation with independent researcher and artist Moad Musbahi and Myriam Amri, PhD candidate in anthropology and Middle Eastern studies, Harvard University.

NOVEMBER 2021

Tunisia’s Fight against Corruption: Actualities and Political Uses.

A Tunisia Newsreel talk with Mouheeb Garoui, transparency and public policy activist and co-founder of I Watch Organization.

DECEMBER 2021

Tunisia’s Long Wait for a Roadmap to Recovery.

A Tunisia Newsreel talk with Chaima Bouhlel, political analyst and independent consultant to civil society organizations in the fields of decentralization and governance.

JUNE 2022

Tunisia in the Global Middle Ages: Gold Routes and Silver Supply in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods.

A panel discussion with Alex Metcalfe, Senior Lecturer in History at Lancaster University; Hervin Fernández-Aceves, historian and AHRC Research Associate at Lancaster University; and Marco Muresu, archaeologist and AHRC Research Associate at Lancaster University. Respondent: CMES Director William Granara, Gordon Gray Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University. Presented in collaboration with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK).

60 Years after Independence: What Has Algeria Become?

A conversation with Hugh Roberts, Edward Keller Professor of North African and Middle Eastern History, Tufts University; Slim Othmani, President of CARE Algeria and President of MEF Tunisia; and Zahia Smail Salhi, Professor of Modern Arabic Studies, University of Manchester. Moderator: Adel Hamaizia, Visiting Fellow, CMES, Harvard University. Presented in collaboration with CMES at Harvard University.

JULY 2022

Reflections on the July 25 Referendum on a New Tunisian Constitution.

A Tunisia Newsreel discussion with economist Hedi Larbi, Tunisia’s former Minister of Economic Infrastructure, Regional Planning and Sustainable Development, and former Regional Director and Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa Vice President at the World Bank. Discussant: CMES Director William Granara, Gordon Gray Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University. Presented in collaboration with CMES at Harvard University.



Early days in the CMES Tunisia Office



Gülu Necipoğlu and Cemal Kafadar



Sihem Lamine and Lauren Montague

TUNISIA OFFICE
THE CENTER FOR
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

