



Newsletter for friends of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

# CONCORDIA WELCOMES THE WORLD

## Azrieli Institute hosts the Annual Meeting of the Association for Israel Studies

Scholars from around the globe flocked to Concordia to ask: how can Israel become more sustainable? They were taking part in the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Israel Studies, the largest gathering of its kind worldwide.



Concordia President  
Alan Shepard

The association is the foremost international scholarly society devoted to the academic and professional study of modern Israel. Its membership is composed of scholars from all

disciplines in the social sciences and many in the humanities.

Concordia's Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies achieved its first international coup by hosting the major event.

The conference's theme was Sustainable Israel: A Changing Society in the 21st Century. It drew more than 300 experts to share the latest research findings across a wide range of fields.

The academics in attendance hailed from universities across the globe, including from China, the United States, Israel, Egypt, France, Germany, Romania, Japan, Russia and the United Kingdom.

"The crown jewel so far has certainly been winning the mandate from the international community to hold this conference," says Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies.

He adds that the conference was a great success, judging by the amount of positive feedback he received from attendees and speakers.

"The academic quality of the presentations was very high. To do that, as an institute that is only four years old, is a major accomplishment, and we have been noted accordingly in the academic world," Nikolenyi says.

The conference featured a keynote address from former attorney general of Canada Irwin Cotler, who was



Hon. Irwin Cotler

introduced by Concordia President Alan Shepard, and a plenary session chaired by André Roy, dean of Concordia's Faculty of Arts and Science. Yakub Halabi, a professor

in Concordia's Department of Political Science, led a successful graduate workshop on Arab-Jewish relations. Twenty-five international PhD and master's students participated in the all-day workshops, where six professors presented papers. "It made for very interesting, vibrant and illuminating discussion," says Halabi.

Other notable guests included Nora Gold and Hezi Amiur. Gold is the award-winning Canadian author and editor of the prestigious online literary journal *JewishFiction.net*.

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## SIX QUESTIONS FOR NORMA JOSEPH

### Azrieli Institute associate director talks about the institute's past, present and future



Norma Joseph

**A** full-time professor in Concordia's Department of Religion, Norma Joseph is associate director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies.

In addition to launching the university's minor in Israel studies, Joseph is director of the Women and Religion specialization and an associate of the Concordia Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies. She received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council research grant for her ongoing study of gender and identity in the Iraqi Jewish community of Montreal.

**What is your proudest achievement as associate director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies?**

**Norma Joseph:** "Helping to found the institute itself was by far my proudest moment. Before, there were very few courses on Israel at Concordia. There was no support or funding for students and researchers interested in pursuing Israel studies. I thought that it was time for the university, with its strength in Jewish studies and political sciences, to have this kind of an institute.

I worked very hard on envisioning a different kind of Israel studies institute — not just a school where classes are taught but rather a centre where faculty and graduate students are encouraged to do research, where they can come together with different specialists to network and share knowledge."

**You are also director of the Women and Religion specialization at Concordia. What draws you to the intersections between gender and religion?**

**NJ:** "I've always been fascinated by this topic, ever since I was an undergraduate. Concordia is such a great place for gender studies. When we established the Simone de Beauvoir Institute in 1978, other universities were still writing off women's studies and gender studies as a fad. Clearly, Concordia was ahead of the game.

I developed a whole series of general courses on women and religion at Concordia: women and goddesses, women and ritual, as well as courses specifically on women and Judaism. Looking at the issues of gender in Israel in particular can be a powerful tool, both for students interested in Israel and for those who want to study a kind of test case.

Israel is a new nation, raised in a western tradition, committed to democracy — so shouldn't there be egalitarianism among genders? It's an interesting question to explore."

**What kind of courses do you teach?**

**NJ:** "One of my favourite courses to teach is a graduate-level class on women in the Hebrew bible. I also teach courses on women and the practice of Judaism, women in medieval Jewish history and women in modern Jewish history."

**One of your research topics is food and religion. What can food tell us about spiritual identity and religious practices?**

**NJ:** "Food and religion truly excite the imagination. Food is an area of women's ritualization and ritual expertise that is usually overlooked — namely because it has to do with women and the domestic sphere.

I teach a class on food and religion that looks at all different religious traditions and themes related to food: How do you celebrate using food? What is the symbolism of food? What kinds of spiritual issues can we explore through food? What does food bring to the fore in terms of religious practice and gender?



Tebit, a sticky, sweet chicken dish traditionally served on Shabbat, is gaining popularity.

## YOUNG MINDS, NEW IDEAS

### Current students and recent graduates on the institute's impact

Students really enjoy the course — it's inspired a number of them to pursue graduate research in food and religion."

Tell us a bit about your current research on gender and identity in the Iraqi Jewish community of Montreal.

NJ: "I have been working on recounting the narrative of the Iraqi Jews who came to Montreal and settled here. I just wrote an article on the Iraqi Jews and their Sabbath food called tebit that was recently accepted into a volume on Quebec religion.

I'm now working on an article about the silencing of the Iraqi Jews, which explores whether or not they have been encouraged to speak about their traumatic experiences and why. Next, I'll be writing an article on gender in the Iraqi Jewish community and then a fourth one on a particular food ritual that the community tried to revive."

Where would you like to see the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies in 10 years?

NJ: "First of all, I would like us to bring a visiting scholar to one of Concordia's departments and have them teach a range of courses, both undergraduate and graduate. I'd personally like someone to teach contemporary Israeli popular culture — literature, performances, music and film.

Second, I'd love to see us inundated with requests to fund graduate students.

Third, I'd like to see more undergraduate students applying for the minor in Israel studies.

Fourth, I'd like to expand our community presence in Montreal. Thanks to our director, Csaba Nikolenyi, and the success of our recent conference, our international reputation is solid. Still, it would be great if the institute could start offering courses to the general public."

**Marion Achoulias** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Religion. Her research interests include Jewish environmental and animal ethics, the Israeli vegan movement, the Frankfurt School and eco-psychological theory.

*"In 2014, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies offered me the opportunity to travel to Israel for one month to work on my Hebrew skills and immerse myself in the city's culture. It was an unforgettable experience and invaluable to me as a researcher."*



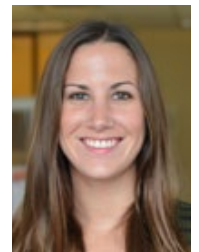
Sarah El Khaldi

**Sarah El Khaldi** graduated from Concordia in June with a BA in political science and a minor in Israel studies. Her research explores Arab-Israeli culture through film and literature, as well as feminism and dissent within Zionism.

*"Studying at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies was a very meaningful experience, as I found myself surrounded by like-minded individuals. The sense of belonging to a dedicated community of academics really nurtured my passion for*

*Middle Eastern politics and history."*

**Kristy Rogers** completed her MA in sociology in June and is spending the year travelling abroad, capping off her trip with a visit to Israel next spring. Her research interests are international development and foreign affairs, with a focus on Israeli-Palestinian relations.



Kristy Rogers

*"As a Canadian scholar who has yet to visit the Middle East, my MA thesis on the Palestinian refugee question was a very complex project to take on. I'm therefore so thankful that the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies took interest in my work. It was a pleasure to be involved as a spectator in the Azrieli Institute's many conferences over the years and to learn about the works of fellow academics in the field."*



Jessica Simon

**Jessica Simon** earned a BA in sociology from Concordia in 2014. She was the first person to earn a minor in Israel studies through the program offered by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies.

*"The minor in Israel studies allowed me to pursue my interests in Israel, to learn more about Middle East politics and to expand my knowledge of the Hebrew language. As for future research, I hope to further study the relationships between Montreal Jewish communities. With that in mind, I expect to continue my involvement with the Azrieli Institute by volunteering and spreading the news of its various events on campus."*

## CONCORDIA WELCOMES THE WORLD



The 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Israel Studies, held at Concordia from June 1 to 3, recorded the highest community participation in the event's history.

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As Israel curator at the National Library of Israel, Amiur came to speak about the library's latest project: an open-access central portal for Israeli archives that puts millions of digital objects and metadata from hundreds of archives around Israel at the fingertips of researchers.

Sarah El Khaldi, BA 15, who earned a minor in Israel studies at Concordia, found volunteering at the conference an immensely rewarding experience. "What was most exciting was meeting face to face with scholars who wrote the articles I studied during my school years," she says. "It felt like meeting celebrities."

In the month leading up to the conference, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies was proud to host noted political science scholar Alan Dowty as a visiting fellow.

One of the foremost thinkers in the field of Israel studies, Dowty is considered a leading authority on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His book *Israel/Palestine* is considered an indispensable introductory text on the complex relations between the two groups.

A professor emeritus of political science at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, Dowty also has the distinction of being the first holder of the Kahanoff Chair in Israeli Studies at the University of Calgary.

"Csaba Nikolenyi, as director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies and conference chair, and Jennifer Solomon, as administrator and conference organizer, put together one of the most successful meetings in AIS history," says Dowty.

"This event has definitely put Concordia, and the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, on the international map in the academic study of modern Israel," he says. "The general program very successfully pulled in leading scholars from around the world while making creative use of the resources of the Montreal area."

## CONCORDIA'S MINOR IN ISRAEL STUDIES

The first and only such undergraduate program in Canada, the 24-credit minor in Israel studies is designed to complement students' core areas of study with courses in history, political science, religion, literature and language. The minor program is unique in its pedagogical approach. It combines three groups of compulsory courses – Hebrew and Arabic language; History and Politics of the Middle East; and Politics and Society of Israel.

The study of modern Israel is a significant focus of the program but other time periods are explored. Students gain proficiency in either Hebrew or Arabic: a student with prior Hebrew proficiency enrolls in Arabic language classes while students with Arabic proficiency take Hebrew. Students of the program may also take advantage of the option for intensive study in Israel. To learn more, visit [concordia.ca/azrieli](http://concordia.ca/azrieli).



Jerusalem, a city reflecting the fervour and piety of multiple faiths

## BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE ISRAEL STUDIES CONFERENCE

### Intern's experience leads to opportunity with the UN

By Nate Dagane

I had the exciting opportunity to intern at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies this past year, as part of the work-study program through Concordia's Institute for Co-operative Education.

My main duty as the Azrieli Institute's intern was to help prepare for the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Israel Studies.

In the busy lead-up to the conference, I worked on many important projects — there was no fetching coffee at this internship!

I compiled documentation for the conference program, liaised and corresponded with conference participants and even helped coordinate the training of student volunteers.

Still, putting together the conference program was by far my proudest achievement as an intern. To assemble the program, I had to look over 260 papers and then sort them thematically into different panel sections.

I worked so much on the program that by the end of the conference I could name (and spell) all the sessions and teachers and affiliated groups from memory alone.

Of course, this achievement could not have been possible without the help of my supervisor, Csaba Nikolenyi, who regularly provided me with the feedback that encouraged me to progress in my work with confidence.



United Nations Office at Geneva

Being an intern gave me the chance to interact with conference participants from all over the world, which yielded some entertaining discoveries and enriching encounters.

In fact, throughout the span of this internship, I often found myself pleasantly surprised by how the field of Israel studies encompasses so many different topics and disciplines!

For example, the conference's theme for this year was sustainable development.

I knew that Israel had the third highest rate of entrepreneurship in the world, but I had no idea so many of those ventures were focused towards developing sustainable technologies.

Everything from irrigation systems and solar-powered plants to biofuels and other renewable energies are being proposed as solutions to Israel's contemporary environmental challenges, which include water shortages, air pollution, species extinction and the shrinking of the Dead Sea.

I also learned that Israel is one of only two countries in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees. For me, that was astonishing.

Truly, I feel that I grew both professionally and personally since interning with the Azrieli Institute.

Organizing the conference taught me the importance of teamwork, effective communication and problem solving, as well as the ability to accept and grow from criticism.

Working in a multicultural team further emphasized to me the necessity of being open and respectful to new ideas.



Nate Dagane, former intern with the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

Even more, my experience interning with the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies paved the way for my current internship in Geneva with the UN's Ethical Fashion Initiative.

Quite literally, working with the Azrieli Institute led to opportunities that took me across the world.

If I had one piece of advice to give to any upcoming intern, it would be to never be afraid to take the initiative. Hands-on experience can teach you a lot about your work habits, just as having to make tough, direct decisions and deal with the consequences goes a long way towards improving those habits.

For that reason and more, I'm very grateful that the Azrieli Institute gave me the chance to work on such important projects. I feel much more confident in my abilities.

## A BUSY AND EXCITING YEAR

### The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies' 2014-15 events

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies played host to a full slate of events and talks over the past year.

- **November 3, 2014** — **Rabbi Yitshak Cohen**, associate professor, ONO Academic College, Israel, gave a talk on all aspects of family law in Israel. The lecture, *Family Law in Israel: The Tension between Religious and Civil Legislation*, was held at Concordia's Samuel Bronfman Building.



- **November 12, 2014** — The Azrieli Institute presented a double lecture on Arab Minorities and the IDF: Historical Perspectives. **Yakub Halabi**, a professor in Concordia's Department of Political Science and research associate at the institute, spoke on *The Origins of Druze-Jewish Co-operation in Palestine from 1938 to 1948*. **Randall Geller**, a postdoctoral teaching and research fellow in Israel studies at the University of Toronto, discussed *The Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon and the 1954 Arab Draft*.
- **November 12, 2014** — **Anita Shapira** was named winner of the second Azrieli Institute Prize for Best Book in Israel Studies in English or French at the J.I. Segal Awards, held at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal. Shapira's winning book, *Israel: A History*, chronicles the history of Israel from the origins of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century to the present day.
- **November 14, 2014** — At Concordia, **Alon Confino** delivered the lecture, *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide*. Confino is a history professor at the University of Virginia and Ben-Gurion University, Israel.
- **November 18, 2014** — **Aviva Halamish**, a professor at the Open University of Israel, gave a talk entitled *1934: A Year in the Life of the Jewish Community in Palestine (The "Yishuv")*. The lecture explored themes related to the Yishuv's character as an immigrant society, as well as issues pertaining to a minority group living under foreign rule and in a state of conflict with the neighbouring majority.

- **November 19, 2014** — **Uri Dromi**, president of the Jerusalem Press Club, spoke to faculty and students from Concordia's Department of Journalism. His talk touched on the day-to-day realities of being a journalist in Israel and depictions of Israel in foreign media.
- **November 26, 2014** — The Azrieli Institute held the first of three Israel-themed seminars aimed at giving Concordia faculty and students an interdisciplinary venue to share their research. Presenters included:
  - Contributors to the *Jerusalem Art History Journal: An Undergraduate e-Journal*, *The Process and Product*
    - **Loren Lerner**, project director, Department of Art History, Concordia
    - **Pata Macedo**, journal designer, Department of Design and Computation Arts, Concordia
    - **Amanda Charlebois**: *The Artistic Apocalypse: Three Religious Depictions of the End of Days*
    - **Valerie Gauthier**: *Symbols and Motifs: Depictions of the Heavenly Realm in Mordecai Ardon's At the Gates of Jerusalem*
    - **Stéphanie Hornstein**: *Expressing Exile as a Shared Experience: The Work of Steve Sabella*
    - **Charlotte Parent**: *Israeli Archaeology in Jerusalem: National Heritage, Identity, and Partiality*
    - **Braden Scott**: *From the Depths of the Matrixial Sea: Reviving Loss and Memory in Contemporary Israeli Art*
    - **Samantha Wexler**: *Representations of Jesus in Early Christian Art*
  - **Lorne Switzer**, Department of Finance, Concordia: *The Benefits of International Diversification: The Case of Israel in a Nexus of Market Development, Corporate Governance and Structural Change*



Iraq'n'roll band Dudu Tassa and The Kuwaitis rock out to a sold-out crowd at Concordia's Oscar Peterson Concert Hall during the Montreal Jewish Music Festival on Aug. 28, 2014.

- **February 18, 2015** — The institute held the second of three Israel-themed faculty-student seminars. The seminar took place at Concordia's Department of Religion. Presenters included:

- **Linda Kay**, Department of Journalism, Concordia: Writer, Editor, Jet-Setter for Jewish Causes: The Life of Ida Siegler Bension
- **Esti Mayer**, PhD candidate, Department of Religion, Concordia: The Avodah: Two Narratives, Two Worldviews, Two Advocates
- **Annie Ross**, PhD candidate, Department of Religion, Concordia: Unreflected Glory, or: Where Were the Female *Tsadikanoyot*?



The Department of Journalism joins Jerusalem Press Club President Uri Dromi for coffee and conversation at the Samuel Bronfman Building on Nov. 19, 2014.

- **March 18, 2015** — The institute held the third and final event in its Israel-themed seminar series for Concordia faculty and students. The seminar took place at the School of Canadian Irish Studies. Presenters included:

- **Mike Rast**, PhD candidate, Department of History, Concordia: "Rebellion Was Strong Amongst Them": Irish Jews and National Politics, 1900-1922
- **Norrin Ripsman**, Department of Political Science, Concordia: Why Peacemaking Begins with States and Ends with Societies: Evidence from Arab-Israeli Peace Treaties
- **Ira Robinson**, Department of Religion, Concordia: Yehuda Kaufman (Even Shmuel): The Portrait of an Israeli Scholar, Intellectual, and Activist, 1927-1976
- **Kristy Rogers**, master's candidate, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia: A History of Conflict Between Israel and Palestine: Can the UN Ever Facilitate a Two-State Solution?



Early elections for the 20th Knesset were held in Israel on March 17, 2015

- **May 5, 2015** — The Azrieli Institute organized a roundtable on the 2015 Israel elections and their aftermath. The discussion focused on political parties, stability and the peace process. Guest speakers included:

- **Julien Bauer**, Department of Political Science, Université du Québec à Montréal
- **Yakub Halabi**, Department of Political Science, Concordia
- **Csaba Nikolenyi**, Department of Political Science, Concordia, and director, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies
- **Harold Waller**, Department of Political Science, McGill University, and co-founder, Canadian Academics for Peace in the Middle East

- **May 31 to June 3, 2015** — The 31st Annual Conference of the Association for Israel Studies was hosted by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies. More than 300 academics flocked to Montreal to attend the conference, which featured the theme Sustainable Israel: A Changing Society in the 21st Century.

The conference featured a keynote address from former attorney general of Canada the **Hon. Irwin Cotler**, a plenary session chaired by **André Roy**, dean of Concordia's Faculty of Arts and Science, and a successful graduate workshop on Arab-Jewish relations led by **Yakub Halabi**, professor in Concordia's Department of Political Science.

- **June 3, 2015** — **Efraim Inbar** and **Jonathan Rynhold** from the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) at Bar-Ilan University, Israel, led a roundtable discussion on Israel Security and Diplomatic Challenges. The event was co-sponsored by BESA, the Congregation Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem and Canadian Friends of Bar-Ilan University.

## EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR LOREN LERNER

### Concordia art history professor discusses her new online *Jerusalem Art History Journal*



Loren Lerner

**L**oren Lerner is a professor in Concordia's Department of Art History with a cross-disciplinary background in art history, library science and communication studies. She received the Joseph and Faye Tannenbaum Prize in Scholarship on a Jewish Subject at the 2004 Canadian Jewish Book Awards for her work as editor of *Afterimage: Evocations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Canadian Arts and Literature*. It was the first book of its kind to consider Holocaust studies with a Canadian focus on arts and literature, and was published by the Concordia Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies.

Lerner is also founder and editor of the *Jerusalem Art History Journal: An Undergraduate eJournal*, the first issue of which is available online and the second on the way.

#### What are your specializations?

**Loren Lerner:** "With a focus on a multidisciplinary approach to visual representations, I explore childhood imagery, portraiture, landscape drawings, travel photographs and religion.

My interest in contemporary art and religion recently led to a guest editorship of special issues for *Religion and the Arts* (2013) and the *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* (2012)."

#### What can visual art tell us about religion that text alone cannot express?

**LL:** "By looking at an artist's work, we can examine themes, motivations, desires and prejudices as expressions of religion.

Religious beliefs and practices have long been challenged by artists who use their work to ask questions about identity, belonging, spiritual practice and the tension between different interpretations of faith. Since visual manifestations of religious ideas and feelings have flourished both within and outside of religious institutions, the discussion of art and religion can provide an important forum for reacting against the campaigns of religious organizations."

You teach an undergraduate art history course specifically on the city of Jerusalem. How have students responded to the course?

**LL:** "I am pleasantly surprised by the students' enthusiasm for Jerusalem. Few have preconceived notions about Jerusalem or opinions based on biases or prejudices. I believe Montreal's multicultural character and Concordia's diverse student population have contributed to the open-minded reception of the course."

#### What motivated you to create the course and the *Jerusalem Art History Journal*?

**LL:** "I had four primary objectives in developing this art history course.

First, I wanted students to consider forms of artistic expression from a variety of cultural identities in order to encourage respect for the art and religion of different communities.

Second, I aimed to encourage an understanding of human experiences from the viewpoints of people who interpret the world in different ways.

Third, it felt important to integrate a broad historical perspective that identifies changes in the art of particular eras, as well as the continuities of religious, ethical and social values.

And fourth, I hoped the course would help students recognize artistic productions and cultural practices that construct identity, influence public discourse and act as catalysts for social and political changes."

#### Why was it important that the journal be published online and made freely accessible?

**LL:** "I am a believer in students learning from the work of fellow students. Over the years, I have seen some of the most original, exciting and perceptive writings produced by students in my classes. I am also committed to student web publishing and I have developed a number of electronic publications.



Jerusalem on the Madaba Map



The *Jerusalem Art History Journal: An Undergraduate eJournal* is my most recent initiative. To promote open access and a wide dissemination, I wanted the journal to be available online.

While there are numerous publications on Jerusalem, the majority are not by art historians but scholars in the fields of history, archaeology, religion, biblical studies, geography and urban studies. This course, in contrast, emphasizes the history of art as it relates to Jerusalem, its multifaceted narratives and the city's history."

Tell us a bit about the first issue of the *Jerusalem Art History Journal*.

LL: "The best papers from my art history course on Jerusalem are included in this first issue. The students had a choice of two assignments. The first was to write an essay about the art, architecture, archaeological sites or urban spaces of Jerusalem from a particular era.



The second option — since many of the students are artists in Concordia's studio arts programs — was to create and write about a work of art, crafting a visual response to this ancient city."

What are the benefits of taking a cross-disciplinary approach to Israel studies?

LL: "A cross-disciplinary approach to Israel studies helps students think critically about biases and preconceived notions. By exploring different perspectives, students are challenged to identify insights from a variety of disciplines, to understand multiple viewpoints and to acknowledge ethically complex issues."

Are you currently working on any other projects connected to Israel studies?

LL: "Yes! Travel art during the 19th and early 20th centuries relating to Jerusalem is a recent field of exploration of mine. I am particularly interested in how Canadian travellers to Jerusalem in the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw Jerusalem and recorded their thoughts, feelings, impressions and ideas in words and images.

I intend to demonstrate that the fusion of a real and imagined Jerusalem continues into present-day Israel."



## YOU'RE INVITED!

Do you want to sit in on exclusive lectures delivered by world-renowned scholars in the field of Israel studies?

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies invites you to join in its pursuit of knowledge by coming to one of its many public events.

The institute hosts a variety of free events year-round — everything from thought-provoking speaker series and roundtable discussions to film screenings and musical performances.

Stay informed about upcoming events through our website, [concordia.ca/azrieli](http://concordia.ca/azrieli), or "like" our Facebook page.

## MONTEFIORE FELLOW

### PhD student documents oral histories



Sabah Haider

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies' Montefiore Fellow this year is **Sabah Haider**, a joint PhD student at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture at Concordia and in the Department of Social Anthropology and Ethnology at École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris.

Haider's interdisciplinary doctoral project weaves together anthropology, film and history. Her research explores transnational historical narratives of the Palestinian

Liberation Organization's armed fighters between 1967 and 1985 by documenting oral histories of surviving fighters around the world.

Haider is also a research affiliate at Concordia's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling.

### Aidan Joseph Beatty draws links between Irish and Israeli history

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast to the rainy grey skies of Dublin than the balmy Mediterranean weather of Jerusalem.

With over 6,000 km — and two very different climates — separating them, what could Israel and Ireland possibly have in common?

It's a question that educator and historian **Aidan Joseph Beatty**, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies' new postdoctoral fellow, is eager to answer.

Originally from Ireland, Beatty completed his BA at Trinity College Dublin, which included a year of study at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, before moving to the United States to earn his MA and PhD at the University of Chicago.

His doctoral dissertation was an analysis of Zionism and Irish nationalism that highlighted how both movements share similar rationales about race and gender. Once completed, Beatty was surprised to learn that comparative history was a rather underused research method in Israel studies and Jewish studies.

"I think there is a very deep-seated idea in Jewish studies — and perhaps in all Western thought — that Jews are somehow a people apart, whose history follows a pattern different to other nations," says Beatty. "I'm interested in comparative work that challenges that idea."

When it comes to the stories of Irish and Jewish peoples, he thinks that the two historiographies can learn a lot from each other.

"Both the Irish and the Jews are deeply affected by their status on the fringes of Europe," says Beatty. Zionism and Irish nationalism, he explains, are both fuelled by the belief that a glorious national past can be rebuilt in the future as means to escape a degraded present.



Aidan Joseph Beatty, postdoctoral fellow

The two groups also share some common issues, including diaspora, partition and a tortuous relationship with the British Empire.

"I hoped that I would find parallels between Zionism and Irish nationalism, but I have been pleasantly surprised at how strong the comparisons turned out to be," Beatty says.

The similarities only go so far, of course. The Jewish people, Beatty explains, have been on the fringes of European culture far longer than the Irish, and the idea that Jews are inherently different is a much more deep-seated notion in European culture than anti-Irish attitudes. Another major difference he identified is that Irish nationalism has no equivalent to Zionism's relationship with the Palestinians.

Still, one area in which some surprising resemblances can be found between Zionism and Irish nationalism is gender.

As a "historian of power," Beatty often uses gender as a lens that allows him to identify the perceptions and ideas of power that were at play during major historical events and political movements.

"Nationalism in general, with its focus on fraternity, violence and state power, is always underpinned by gendered assumptions, so the study of nationalism can only benefit from using masculinity as an analytical lens," he explains.

"In terms of their view of history, their attitudes to race and their attitudes toward masculinity, there are very strong similarities between Zionists and Irish nationalists," Beatty says. "Both saw language revival as a kind of masculine revival or as something that would recuperate a sickly nation."

Beatty chose Concordia to pursue his innovative research because he was impressed by the potential for interdisciplinary work offered by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies. Another key factor in his decision is the fact that Concordia houses both an Israel studies centre and the renowned School of Canadian Irish Studies.

As a postdoctoral fellow at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Beatty's first task is to adapt his PhD thesis into a book. He also hopes to write some shorter academic articles while at Concordia: an investigation into "the ways in which Jewishness and sovereignty intersect in Irish nationalist thought" and a "comparative paper on settler colonialism in Ireland and Israel-Palestine" are both in the works, he says.

"So much of my work touches on the research interests of other scholars at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, so the chance to do all this whilst getting their thoughts on my work is something I'm very much looking forward to," Beatty says.



### Message from Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

I am delighted to report that the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies has closed another extremely successful year! Our most important achievement in the past year was our successful hosting of the 31st Annual Meeting of the Association for Israel Studies.

This was truly a landmark event for the institute, drawing well over 300 scholars to Concordia from all over the world — from Egypt, Hungary, China and beyond!

In addition to showcasing the Azrieli Institute on a global stage, hosting this unique event also allowed us to deepen our ties with the local community, who contributed to its success through financial contributions and in their overwhelming interest in the lectures, talks and special events that marked the three-day conference.

The Azrieli Foundation played a leading role in helping our fundraising efforts for the conference. We were especially delighted to have Stephanie and Naomi Azrieli join us for many of the sessions and discussions.

Working alongside Concordia, major institutional supporters of the event included the Israel Institute, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Jewish Community Foundation of Montreal, in addition to numerous individual donors from the community at large, whose dedication and enthusiasm we are so thankful for.

As a fledgling research centre, being chosen to host such a prestigious conference indicates a major vote of confidence from the broader Israel studies community.

The year ahead will be critical in capitalizing on the international reputation we have gained and in positioning the Azrieli Institute as Canada's leading research centre in the field of Israel Studies.

There is much to be excited about in the upcoming academic year.

For one, we welcome Aidan Beatty as our new postdoctoral fellow with a freshly completed PhD from the University of Chicago, as well as Ziv Rubinovitz, research fellow at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Israel, and Shawn Aster, professor at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, as our visiting faculty members.

Our regular faculty-graduate seminars will continue to provide a wonderful venue to showcase ongoing work in our research community.

With the presence of our three international visitors, we look forward to an even richer program of seminars and talks throughout the coming year.

I hope this newsletter offers a glimpse of the exciting and vibrant intellectual environment that the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies has created at Concordia.

You are invited to join us at one — or more! — of our many interdisciplinary events in the upcoming year.

Csaba Nikolenyi  
Professor, Department of Political Science  
Director, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

## ABOUT US

The **Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies** unites students and scholars across disciplines in drawing a bigger picture of Israel, its languages, religions, rich history and evolving culture. Its researchers aim to advance how society understands the multifaceted Middle Eastern state by sharing knowledge that benefits Montreal, Quebec, Canada and the world.

Founded in 2011, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies was born thanks to a visionary gift from the Azrieli Foundation to Concordia University. Today, the Institute serves as fertile and neutral ground for stimulating discovery and discussion. For more information, please visit [concordia.ca/azrieli](http://concordia.ca/azrieli).

1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. W., SB-435  
Montreal, Quebec H3G 1M8  
Phone: 514-848-2424, ext. 8721

## SECURING A BRIGHT FUTURE

A contribution to the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies is a gift towards education and research. Help us advance knowledge on the State of Israel by giving to Concordia.

To support the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, please contact our development staff:

Faculty of Arts and Science  
Advancement and Alumni Relations  
Phone: 514-848-2424, ext. 4379



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