

NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF THE

WINTER 2020-21

AZRIELI INSTITUTE OF ISRAEL STUDIES

A NEW CHAPTER IN ISRAEL STUDIES

Academic book series will
put Institute on the map

CONCORDIA

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear friends of the Azrieli Institute,

I am delighted to present the Institute's ninth annual newsletter. It is hard to believe how quickly the years have flown by and that next year will mark our 10th anniversary. We look forward — we hope! — to welcoming you in person to our special events to celebrate this important landmark.

The 2019-20 academic year presented plenty of challenges for our Institute, but also many new opportunities. The greatest challenge was, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic which interrupted our preparations for the fourth Azrieli Institute Summer School in Jerusalem and eventually led to its cancellation.

While our plans are under way to resume this important program as soon as global travel conditions permit, we continue to celebrate the many accomplishments of our former Summer School participants who were either inspired to continue their graduate studies in Israel, or went on to excel in their graduate and undergraduate studies elsewhere. Our students are the Institute's best ambassadors and champions, and we remain ever so proud of their progress and success, no matter where life takes them. You can find a small sample of our students' achievements in these pages (pp. 10-11).

The pandemic also forced us to retreat from the classroom and deliver our Israel Studies Minor program remotely. Thanks to the state-of-the-art technical support and solutions provided by Concordia, not only were our courses offered as planned, but we have actually seen an impressive growth in our enrolment numbers.

Special recognition is due to Lisa Komlos, BA 20, our former Israel Studies student and current social media and communications co-ordinator, whose social media strategy led to a significant increase in our student engagement. Lisa lends the Institute crucial help in her portfolio and she works together with Jennifer Solomon, BA 96, assistant to the director, who we were delighted to welcome back from maternity leave in the summer.

Our transition to the reality of a full spectrum of online programming was seamless. In addition to our tradition of scholarly and public interest seminars and lectures, we also introduced a new Israeli documentary film series.



This allowed our students, faculty and the public at large to learn about important Israeli social, historical and political issues. The presentation of each film was followed by a live conversation and question-and-answer session with the filmmakers. Attendance at our film events reached an all-time high and we remain optimistic that we can continue to develop this exciting feature of our programs in the future.

Last, but certainly not least, I am delighted to announce the launch of a new initiative that will again assert the global reputation of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies as a leader in promoting this academic field. In fall 2020, the Institute and McGill-Queen's University Press inaugurated a new dedicated academic publication series, the "McGill-Queen's / Azrieli Institute Series in Israel Studies." In my capacity as series editor, I look forward to working with editor Richard Ratzlaff and members of our international editorial board to shape the next generation of scholarly writing and discussion about Israel.

Wishing you and your loved ones a healthier and safer year ahead!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which reads "Csaba Nikolenyi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

LOREN LERNER'S DECADE

Art historian Loren Lerner knows a lot about art and art education. And she has known what has often been missing from art history courses: an understanding of and familiarity with religious art that doesn't spring from the Christian tradition.

Lerner not only signed on as a founding member of the Azrieli Institute's advisory group a decade ago, she created an art history course, titled "[The City of Jerusalem: Ideas and Images](#)," to be part of the Israel Studies Minor, the only course of its kind in Canada.

"That, I think was a major accomplishment," Lerner says. "I wanted to explore Muslim, Jewish and Christian art."

As she prepares to retire from Concordia and the advisory group, Lerner is reflective about what she most enjoyed over the course of her decade with the Institute and its students, faculty and supporters.

"What I enjoyed the most was familiarizing students with various aspects of religious art," Lerner says. "The Azrieli Institute is very inclusive, with scholars from other religious groups and scholarly interests. It brings together different interest groups to show how the past leads to the present — in political science, literature and the arts."

Lerner adds that she'll miss the contact she's had with academic colleagues and, of course, the students, "which keeps you forever young — I think I learned more from them than they did from me."



Institute director Csaba Nikolenyi says the organization will miss Lerner, and describes her as a pillar of the Institute from outside the Faculty of Arts and Science (Lerner is a member of the Faculty of Fine Arts).

Born in Montreal as the State of Israel was being founded in 1948, Lerner boasts a wide-ranging academic training in art history, with a master's degree from the University of Michigan, a Library Science

degree from McGill University and a PhD in Communication Studies from Université de Montréal. She has a lengthy list of awards and publications to her name.

One of the things Lerner is most proud of is the development of the bilingual, student-produced *Jerusalem Art History Journal* (jerusalemjournal.concordia.ca) focused on the rich, diverse history of Jerusalem. She is also proud of the role she played in the presentation of a seminar during a two-day conference in 2017 entitled "Faces of Israel at Expo 67."

"I have always wanted to show how Israel has evolved," Lerner says, while also making reference to family she has in Israel who have borne witness to the many changes that have taken place in the country.

WELCOME BACK, JENNIFER!



I am so happy to be back at the Institute after taking a year off to spend time with my new bundle of joy. While I missed communicating with our students and professors, I have spent every moment enjoying motherhood.

But now I am back, and I have dived into my work with both feet. I hope that when we can get back to our desks, I will be able to see our students and professors again.

Jennifer Solomon
Assistant to the Director, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

ISRAEL STUDIES MINOR

THE ONLY PROGRAM OF ITS KIND IN CANADA

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies coordinates a unique interdisciplinary undergraduate minor in Israel Studies, a program which remains the only one of its kind in Canada. Our students are required to take a selection of courses in three streams that respectively focus on language (Hebrew and Arabic); modern Israel; and Israel in the broader Middle Eastern context.

In addition, students can choose from a wide variety of electives, including Art History, Religion and many more.

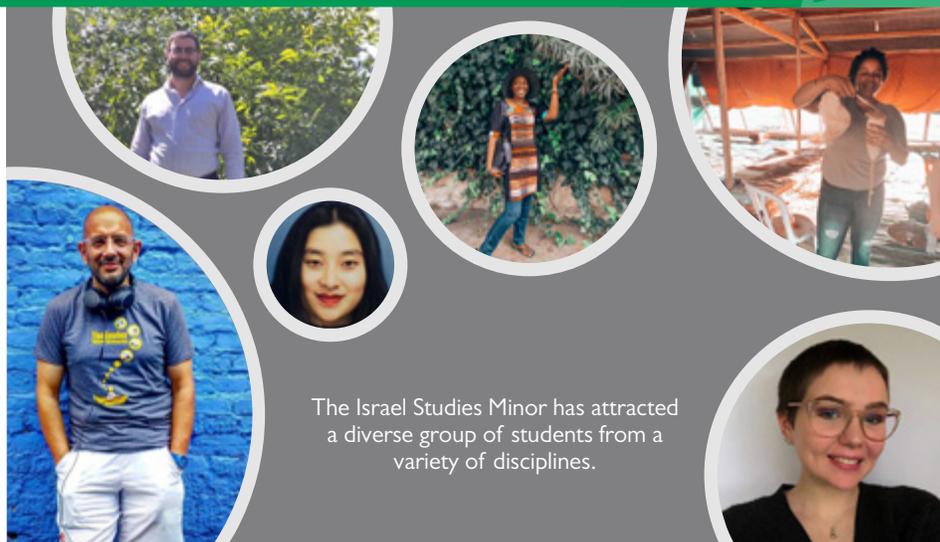
“We are especially proud of the language component of our minor, which allows our students to be immersed in learning not only the grammar of Modern Hebrew and Arabic, but also to study and appreciate the rich and beautiful literary treasures that have been written in both languages,” says Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Institute. “Our students’ language training proves especially helpful during our annual Summer School program in Jerusalem where we navigate together the hustle and bustle of the *shuk*, the traffic and all the fun that Israeli daily life has to offer.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Summer School planned for 2020 did not take place.

“The study of the Hebrew language is essential for the understanding and appreciation of the historic and cultural legacy of the Jewish people,” says Menachem Rotstein, a professor who teaches Hebrew at the Institute. “From the Bible to modern Israeli literature, the knowledge and mastery of Hebrew is the key to boundless intellectual riches.”

But the Israel Studies Minor doesn’t stop at Hebrew. It also requires study in Arabic, essential to the understanding of this complex region.

“Arabic language courses are regularly offered as part of the minor by the Azrieli Institute,” says Rasha El Hawari, a senior lecturer in Arabic language and literature, and co-ordinator of Semitic languages in Concordia’s Department of Classics, Modern Languages and Linguistics.



The Israel Studies Minor has attracted a diverse group of students from a variety of disciplines.

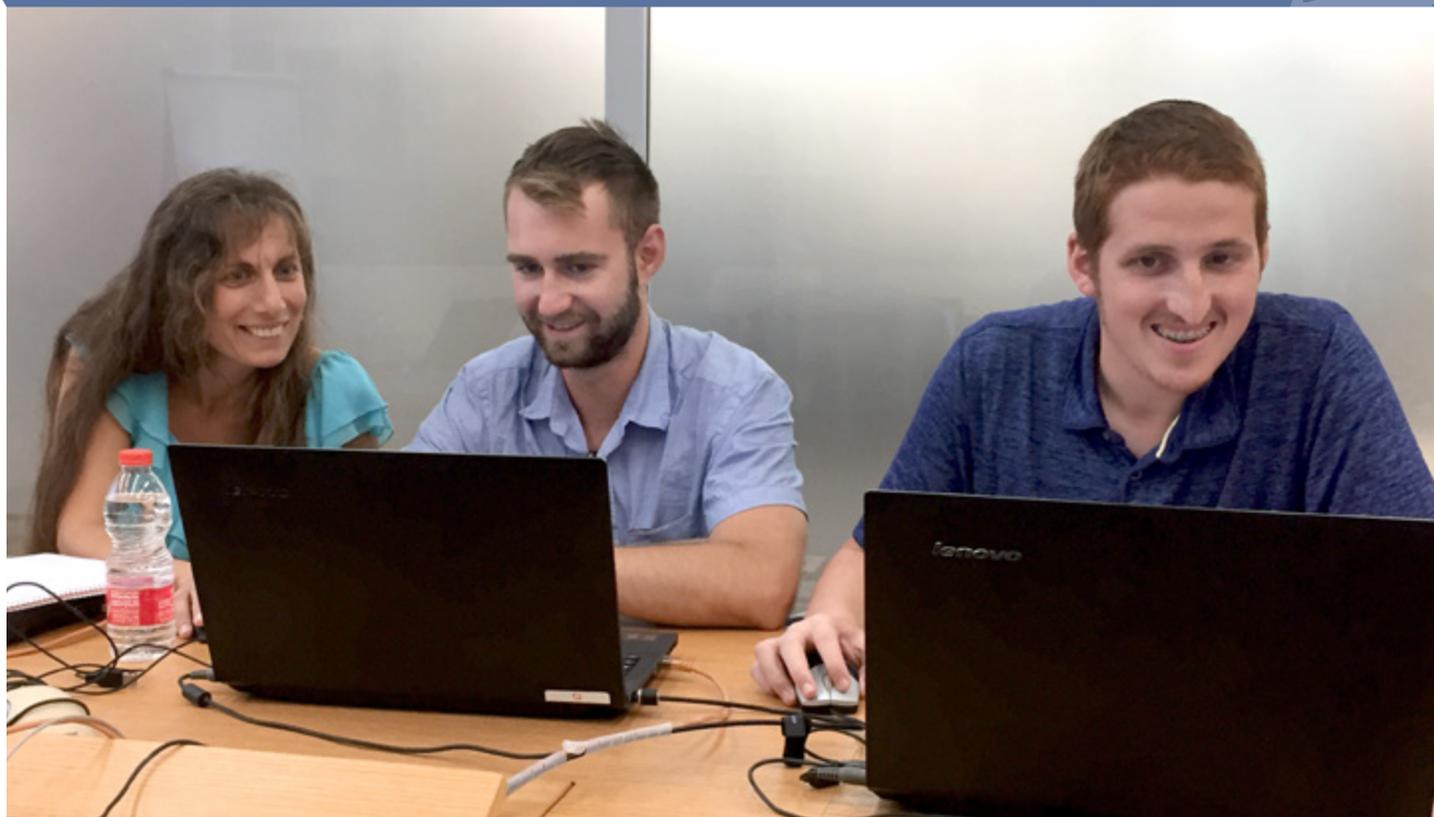
“These courses open the door to the undergraduate learner to study Semitic languages, both Arabic and Hebrew. Over the years that I have been teaching Arabic at Concordia, I have seen many students come to learn Arabic and discover more and more about the language and the culture.

“The language learning experience is enriching, and the students enjoy it,” adds El Hawari. “They get to learn a new script, new sounds and a new culture. After the first semester, they can understand basic Modern Standard Arabic. Having relatively small-sized, intensive introductory classes gives the students an opportunity to practice the language and make noticeable progress. It gives me great pleasure to see many of the students come back for a second course or take a study abroad — like summer in Israel — and get to practice their Arabic. They always come back and tell of how they were extremely happy to use their Arabic with native speakers.”

Moving forward, the minor is entering the digital age with the development of Nikolenyi’s course on the Israeli Political System for an online platform, in collaboration with the Department of Political Science and eConcordia.

“We are very excited by the prospect of taking our passion to teach and understand Israel to a genuinely global audience,” Nikolenyi says.

DIGITAL EFFORTS PAYING OFF AS CONNECTIONS GROW



The National Library of Israel's Galia Richler-Gerbler with Concordia students Corey Grant and Shlomo Tanny.

BY LISA KOMLOS, BA 20

After a year of “going digital” at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, we are proud of the progress we have made. Through consistent e-newsletters and social media posts, we have shared countless proud moments and achievements that we, our faculty, students and postdoctoral fellows, visiting scholars and researchers, and guest lecturers have made. We have also shared all new publications by those within and affiliated with our Institute.

There is a growing interest to broaden one’s understanding of the State of Israel and to learn about its history, cultures, religions, politics, innovations and international relations. Teaching about Israel and tackling its complexities is at the heart of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, and why we created two unique programs for undergraduate students: our Minor in Israel Studies and our Summer in Jerusalem Program. By jumping into the digital universe, we have increased the awareness of these programs and of our Institute on campus. Now more undergraduate students than ever have heard

about us, attended our events and enrolled in our programs. By having this platform in place, the transition to a fully digitized environment due to COVID-19 was a smooth one. In fact, registrants for our online events have increased twofold, reaching more than 150 attendees. Our newsletter subscribers have reached more than 700 and our number of Instagram followers has been steadily climbing as well.

Now that our online presence is active, strong and growing, we have begun a new project called Student Hub — a new section on our website dedicated to our students. The Student Hub will be a one-stop shop where students can easily learn about and engage with other students associated with our Institute. It will include what we offer to students, student awards and competitions, student achievements, projects, testimonials and a photo gallery from our Summer in Jerusalem program. We are now designing this section and hope to have it up and running by the winter 2021 term.

BOOK PROJECT WILL RAISE INSTITUTE'S

BY DOUG SWEET

Concordia University's international profile in the academic world of Israel Studies will get a boost in the coming years with an Azrieli Institute initiative, launched on the eve of its 10th anniversary, to develop a far-reaching interdisciplinary series of scholarly books to be published by McGill-Queen's University Press (MQUP).

The broad range of subject matter under the rubric of Israel Studies will include works about political science, history, cultural studies and art, says **Richard Ratzlaff**, editor of MQUP, who works out of the publisher's Toronto office.

"There are many series in Jewish Studies, but very few in Israel Studies, and this will help provide a global context," Ratzlaff says, pointing to myriad changes in Israel over the last two to three decades that have made the country "ripe for a lot more attention from academics in North America."

Ira Robinson, a professor of Judaic studies in Concordia's Department of Religion, and a member of the project's editorial advisory board, says the book series is part of director Csaba Nikolenyi's vision to have the Institute be an important factor in the global academic study of Israel.

Israel Studies is "a worldwide phenomenon," Robinson says. "I have colleagues in Israel Studies all over the world, including in some unlikely places, like China and Indonesia."

Academics devoted to the study of Israel are united in an organization called the Association for Israel Studies and **Csaba Nikolenyi**, in his capacity as director of the Azrieli Institute, has taken a leadership role to cement Concordia as a recognized name in Israel Studies, adds Robinson.

"This is an undertaking that couldn't credibly have been accomplished 10 years ago. It needed this decade of establishing Concordia at the centre of the Israel Studies scholarly world."

From its inception, the Azrieli Institute has undertaken a multidisciplinary study of Israel, Nikolenyi notes. "This is evident in the types and range of projects we have funded as well as the breadth of programs we have organized and delivered. With the launching of the book series, we have taken our commitment to multidisciplinary to the next level, to begin creating a library of cutting-edge works on Israel Studies that will contribute to shaping the

next generation of scholarship by raising new questions, introducing innovative methodologies and drawing exciting new conclusions and perspectives about Israel."

The world of Israel Studies is becoming a global phenomenon and is spreading rapidly in the non-Western world, says **P. R. Kumaraswamy**, professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and author of *India's Israel Policy* (2010) and *Squaring the Circle: Mahatma Gandhi and the Jewish National Home* (2018).

"The growing demand requires newer multidisciplinary approaches and non-traditional avenues devoted to studying Israel and its challenges," Kumaraswamy, also a member of the advisory board, says. "The McGill-Queen's/Azrieli Institute Series seeks to offer a non-traditional contribution to Israel Studies, and I am extremely honoured to be a part of this endeavour."

Members of the editorial board will have a lot of work to do, adds Nikolenyi. "Manuscripts will have to go through the standard rigorous peer-review, which can take some time. However, given the tremendous amount of first-rate scholarship being produced in Israel Studies every year, we will have no shortage of submissions our reviewers will be eager to assess. We want to make sure the new series will be marked by academic excellence and originality of scholarship. My sense is that we may have the first titles in or close to being in print in the next 12 to 15 months, with an eye to publishing an initial two to three titles in the first five years, after which we will reassess our schedule and approach."

"This new series puts Montreal more firmly on the map of a rising global interest in all things related to Israel," says **Yael Halevi-Wise**, associate professor and chair of Jewish Studies at McGill University, and a member of the editorial board.

"Not only through lectures and international exchanges, but now also through a book series that will ensure that the best products of our research on various topics related to Israel will become disseminated and immortalized in print. As the editor responsible for advice on literary topics, I look forward to welcoming new cutting-edge avenues of research on Hebrew literature as it continues to grow into one of the most vibrant creative expressions of our time."



INTERNATIONAL PROFILE

For his part, Ratzlaff is glad to have MQUP involved in the project. “We are happy to have partnerships with universities in developing academic series. They’re good partnerships to have because they extend our reach into the scholarly community.”

Nikolenyi observes that Concordia and the Azrieli Institute have built a solid foundation for this important project. “Our work has been internationally recognized over the years, thanks to the conferences we have organized, the projects we have initiated and the speakers we have hosted. In addition, I have been an active member of the Association for Israel Studies, am currently serving on its board of directors and have chaired its committee that annually awards the prestigious Shapiro Prize to the best book in Israel Studies.

“While all of these have been important achievements that connect us with the global research community, nothing in the academic world compares in importance, prestige and value with the weight of the printed word. With this new series, we are creating a legacy that I will always be proud to have played a role in.”

Yael Aronoff, director of the Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies at Michigan State University and president of the Association of Israel Studies, says she is also thrilled to serve on the editorial advisory board.

“There are few such publication outlets for scholars in the thriving field of Israel Studies. This new series will highlight its burgeoning scholarship and contribute to its growth.”

Ira Robinson



Yael Halevi-Wise



P. R. Kumaraswamy



Yael Aronoff



Csaba Nikolenyi

SOME RECENT EVENTS

A four-part lecture series titled “Weizmann to 21st Century: The Presidents of Israel,” delivered by Azrieli Institute director and professor of political science Csaba Nikolenyi, was presented in fall 2019. The sessions, which took place at the Adath Israel synagogue, covered the following topics: scientists, scholars and politicians in Beit HaNasi; the Knesset in action — electing the president; the uneasy relationship between presidents and prime ministers; and the legacies of Shimon Peres and Reuven Rivlin.

A book launch was held in late October 2019 to present a new work titled *My Struggle for Peace: The Diary of Moshe Sharett* by Neil Caplan and Yaacov Sharett, which offers insights into the complex workings of the young Israeli political system. Norman Ravvin, a professor in the Department of Religions and Cultures and interim director of Concordia’s Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies, was the respondent.

Two films, *King Bibi* and *Lieberman*, were screened in November 2019. The former, using archival footage, explores Benjamin Netanyahu’s rise to power. The second film chronicles the “meteoric rise of Avigdor Lieberman,” which it suggests was the first sign of a new era in the state of Israel — and with it, the fall of “the old elites,” the right-wing trend and the emergence of “the second Israel” as the dominant political force.

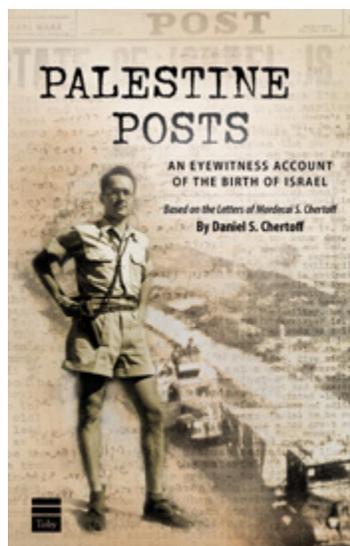
On November 11, 2019, a panel discussion about intercultural exchange and research collaboration between Israel and Asia was led by J.F. Marc des Jardins, associate professor of Religions and Cultures at Concordia, and Rohee Dasgupta, associate professor and executive director of the Centre for European Studies at the O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana, India, who is also affiliated with Carleton University in Ottawa.

On November 13, 2019, postdoctoral fellow Angy Cohen led a talk on the ambivalent positions of Jews under Spanish colonial rule in Morocco (1912-1956) during which an ethnographic study conducted in Israel and Argentina with Spanish-Moroccan Jews was presented.

On January 22, 2020, the Concordia University Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies, in association with the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, presented a public lecture by Mary Jane Ainslie (University of Nottingham Ningbo China), examining the phenomenon of philosemitism in contemporary China.

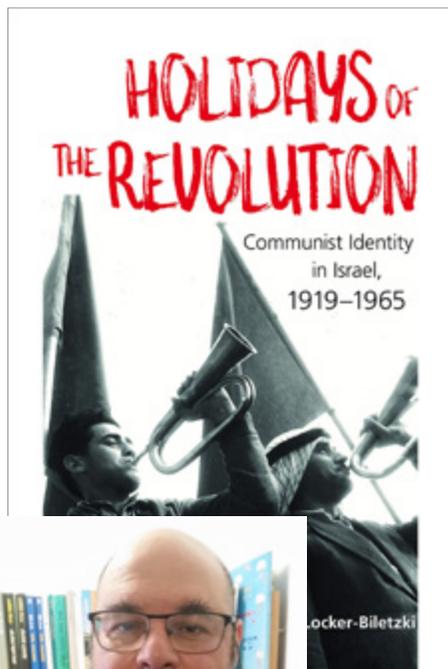
Azrieli Institute director Csaba Nikolenyi presented a lecture on April 28, 2020, on “Pluralism and Political Leadership in Israel.” In this Zoom event, which originated at Temple Emanuel, Nikolenyi discussed the complexity of the formation of government in Israel after three general elections since April 2019.

On July 6, 2020, the Azrieli Institute hosted a roundtable discussion on parliaments in the age of COVID-19, moderated by director Csaba Nikolenyi, during which views were presented from Israel, Canada, Germany and the U.K. Discussants included Brooke Jeffrey (Concordia University), Ronan Cormacain (Bingham Center for Rule of Law), Ittai Bar-Siman-Tov (Bar-Ilan University) and Sven T. Siefken (Martin-Luther Universitat Halle Wittenberg).

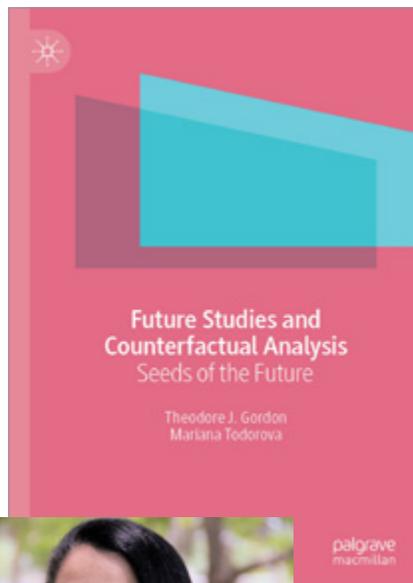


On August 27, 2020, a virtual discussion was held with Daniel Chertoff about his recently published book *Palestine Posts: An Eyewitness Account of the Birth of Israel*.

SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS



Amir Locker-Biletzki was the Institute's postdoctoral fellow in the 2016-2017 academic year during which he completed the writing and editing of his manuscript. This year, he published the book, *Holidays of the Revolution: Community Identity in Israel, 1919-1965* with State University of New York (SUNY) Press. The book shows how Israeli Communists developed a distinctive national identity outside the boundaries of Zionism. Locker-Biletzki has continued to be affiliated with the Institute since he completed his fellowship.



First introduced at the Institute as a visiting researcher in the fall of 2018, **Lihi Lahat** was also holding a post as a senior lecturer at Sapir Academic College. During her time at the Institute, she worked on public policy research papers. She has continued to be affiliated with the Institute while publishing articles and crediting the Institute with helping her research. Her latest publication was co-editing the book *Collaborative Governance: Theory and Lessons from Israel*. This book presents examples derived from local and central government levels and from policy areas such as education and regulation.



Sigal Barkai is currently the Chief Supervisor of Art Education for the Ministry of Education in Israel, but only a few years ago was the postdoctoral fellow at the Institute (2017-18). She has published many articles and put up numerous art installations. In late 2019, Barkai published her latest book, *A Stage for Masculinities, Representations of Israeli Soldiers in the Theatre* (in Hebrew). Since leaving the Institute, she has kept in touch to let us know what great things she has been able to accomplish with the help of her time at Concordia. Early in 2020, she curated an art exhibition called "Trespassing" for the Jerusalem Museum for Islamic Art. The exhibit delved into a new phenomenon in Jewish and Palestinian society in Israel in which women from conservative, religious and patriarchal backgrounds create bold art that confronts the conventions of their societies.

CELEBRATING AWARD-WINNING

Undergraduate award winners

Sarna-Weigensberg Award 2020

Congratulations to **Lisa Komlos**, recipient of the Sarna-Weigensberg Award for 2020. This award recognizes academic accomplishments and dedication to Israel Studies at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, and is in honour of Lazar Sarna and Jewel Sarna-Weigensberg in recognition not only of their dedication to Jewish and Israel education, but in memory of their parents, Libby and Israel Sarna, and Jean and Harvey Leslie Weigensberg.



“I am honoured to be the 2020 recipient of the Sarna-Weigensberg Award from the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies,” says Komlos. “Adding the Israel Studies Minor to my bachelor’s degree was the best and most rewarding academic decision I’ve ever made. This award has further inspired me to dive deeper into learning about Judaism and Israel.”

The Sarah Morris Scholarship 2020

Corey Newman has been named the recipient of the 2020 Sarah Morris Scholarship. This award is available to students who participate in the Institute’s programs such as the Israel Studies Minor or the Summer School in Jerusalem.

The Sarah Morris Scholarship was established in loving memory of a special woman who left her mark on the world and everyone whose life she touched. Sarah Morris was a woman with a thirst for knowledge and a deep love for Israel and Judaic studies, who strived for excellence in everything she did.



“I am honoured to be the recipient of the Sarah Morris Scholarship. My love and admiration for the Jewish people, our collective history, religion and connection to the Land of Israel has always been paramount in my quest to strengthen my identity,” says Newman. “I will never forget my time spent in Israel studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I thank the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies for such a unique and memorable experience that I will cherish forever.”



Graduate award winners

Montefiore Graduate Award Winners



Elliot Mason



Sara Sharpe



Lucas Cober

Congratulations to **Elliot Mason**, **Sara Sharpe**, BA 19, and **Lucas Cober** for winning the 2020 Montefiore Graduate Fellowship Award given by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies.

Corber's research, which is supervised by Carly Daniel-Hughes and Naftali Cohn, titled "Without Blemish or Defect," focuses on disability and Biblical interpretation.

Mason's research — supervised by Lorenzo DiTommaso — is focused on monsters and the monstrous, and particularly the ways in which monsters have been used to represent marginalized groups and peoples.

Meanwhile, Sharpe — supervised by Norma Joseph, DPhil 95 — is focused on "Friendship, Gender, and Jewishness: Interpersonal Connections Between Jewish Women in Montreal."

The Montefiore Graduate Fellowship is presented to top graduate students in any Concordia degree program working on an Israel-related thesis or dissertation project.

AZRIELI AT 10: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2021!

To mark this milestone, we are preparing a range of exciting events and activities throughout the 2021-22 academic year, including an international conference, a celebration of our students and their professional achievements, online virtual exhibitions, book launches and much more.

This important moment will also give us an opportunity to reflect on where we want to go in the future. However, as the old story goes, if you want to find the road ahead you need to know where you set out from.

In this spirit, we will use our 10th anniversary theme not only to look ahead and chart new paths for our growth and the future directions of Israel Studies, but also to look back and take stock of the different ways in which we have shaped and contributed to the development of knowledge about Israel in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and the world.

I hope many of you will be able to join us for our anniversary-themed events — be they virtual or actual — as we look back so that we can look ahead.

— *Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute*

AZRIELI INSTITUTE OF ISRAEL STUDIES



NEW BOOK SERIES!

McGILL-QUEEN'S - AZRIELI INSTITUTE SERIES IN ISRAEL STUDIES

Series Editor: Csaba Nikolenyi, Director, Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies

Press Editor: Richard Ratzlaff, Editor, McGill-Queen's University Press

Proposals welcome from all areas of scholarly inquiry related to the study of modern Israel.

PROGRAMS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

ISRAEL STUDIES MINOR

A unique interdisciplinary program with an emphasis on the politics, religions, cultures and languages of Israel.

SUMMER IN JERUSALEM

Our Summer School is offered in collaboration with the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

Our competitive Montefiore Awards are available for incoming and in-program students in any area of research dealing with Israel.



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