

Newsletter for friends of the
**AZRIELI INSTITUTE
OF ISRAEL STUDIES**

2018–2019

CONCORDIA

SUMMER IN JERUSALEM



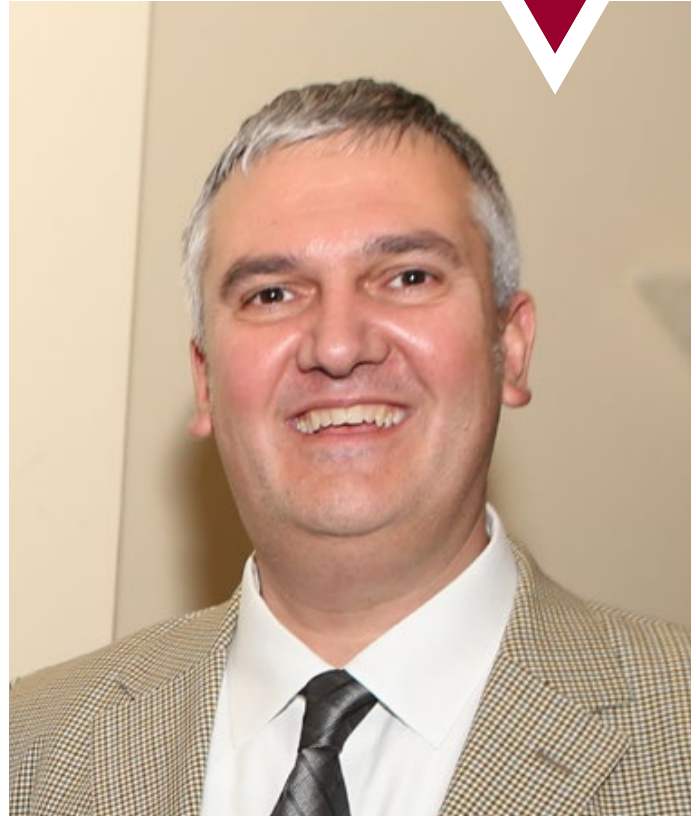
DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The past year has been filled with a number of fascinating developments and projects that I'm eager to share with you.

In July, we hosted a group of scholars, post-doctoral fellows and doctoral students from our partner institution, the Ben-Gurion Research Institute (BGRI) for the History of Israel and Zionism, for a three-day conference dedicated to the interdisciplinary exploration of Israel 70 years after the creation of the State. The papers presented at the conference covered a diverse range of views and perspectives on political, social, cultural and religious issues. During the conference, we went on a field trip to Kahnawake in order to enrich our comparative discussions around questions of Aboriginality that a number of our BGRI colleagues investigate. The conference ended with the Canadian launch of Gil Troy's new book, *Zionist Ideas*, which attracted far more people than we could possibly seat in the auditorium of the Samuel Bronfman Building. The book is a must-read and source of reference for anyone interested in the study of Zionism. I look forward to using it in my classes on Israeli politics!

The conference also provided the opportunity to open a multi-media collage on the theme of "Israel at 70 Years"—beautifully prepared and curated by one of our students in the minor program, Noa Isabel Ogilvy.

Following the conference, we packed our bags and headed to Israel for the second Azrieli Institute Summer School in Jerusalem program, in cooperation with Hebrew University's Rothberg International School and Concordia International. This year, a group of 12 undergraduate students joined us. They earned important credits towards their degrees while taking my course on Israel in the Middle East. In addition to the rigorous class seminars, we went on a number of field trips to experience first-hand the complexities of Israeli society in the 21st century. We would be grateful if you could spread the word about the summer school so we can expand the program and provide more of our students with the unforgettable experience of learning about Israel in Israel.



We have a rich and exciting few months planned and we look forward to welcoming you and your friends to all our events! These endeavours are made possible in part through your backing. If you would like to support the Institute and its initiatives, visit **concordia.ca/givenow**.

Your ideas and suggestions are very important to us. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any questions or comments you might have!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Csaba Nikolenyi".

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

ISRAEL PROGRAM GIVES STUDENTS A SUMMER TO REMEMBER



The 2018 class of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies Summer in Jerusalem program.

Concordia biology major Ninell Sygall has a lot of fond memories of her time as a summer student in Israel. A visit to the desalination plant in Ashkelon, 50 kilometres south of Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean coast, left a particularly strong impact. “It was impressive to see how a country with more than half its land area filled with desert can still find a way to provide the necessary water,” she said.

Sygall was one of 12 students to attend the 2018 edition of the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies Summer in Jerusalem program. It was the second time the institute ran the program. Students spent four weeks with institute director Csaba Nikolenyi touring places like the Knesset, Kibbutz Malkiya on the Israel–Lebanon border, Hezekiah’s Tunnel and Ben-Gurion’s grave, and drinking tea in a replica Bedouin tent.

They also spent time in the classroom with Nikolenyi, who used Israeli cinema, class discussions and guest lectures to teach participants about the complexities of Israeli history, politics and culture.

When at home, the Concordia students—who earned three credits for the summer program—study everything from political science and history to fine arts, biology and international business. Though some had been to Israel before and had family in the country, for others it was their first visit.

“Learning about the politics of a new country while travelling the country itself gives a much stronger appreciation of the material,” says Yana Moscovitz, a molecular biology student, who attended the 2018 summer school. “The knowledge

I acquired through the course was retained in a much more meaningful matter than a regular course.”

For Orli Lesser, an anthropology and sociology major, the fraternity she developed with her fellow group members was a personal highlight. “My favourite memory was going to the professor’s house for dinner. Everyone on the trip was super close with one another, with the professor, his wife and his assistant, Jennifer Solomon. This made the entire experience more fun.”

“The whole trip was truly amazing,” adds classmate Karla Baston. “The people that you meet, in or outside of the classroom, will definitely have an impact on you at an academic or a personal level. This is something you will carry with you forever.”

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON INDIA-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP



P. R. Kumaraswamy delivers a lecture on India-Israel relations at Montreal's Jewish Public Library in March 2018.

India's independence movement leader, the late Mahatma Gandhi, was staunchly anti-Zionist. At least, that's the commonly held belief.

"Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same way that England belongs to the English and France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs," he once famously stated. And perhaps because of this view, the relationship between India and Israel was for many years tenuous.

While the two countries formalized diplomatic relations in 1992, after a decades-long recognition-without-relations policy, it wasn't until 2017 that a sitting Indian prime minister actually visited Israel.

ON-SITE LEARNING BRINGS VALUE TO ISRAELI AND CANADIAN SCHOLARS

Academics from Israel and Canada came together to discuss Israeli philosophy, politics, art and architecture in a conference hosted by Ben-Gurion University in December 2017. Entitled Convergence or Divergence? Israel Studies "Here" and "There," the event was the first part of a joint research workshop between the two schools.

The workshop took place in southern Israel, where BGU has two campuses. Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies faculty and students including director Csaba Nikolenyi; Ira Robinson, a professor in Concordia's Department of Religions and Cultures; Meir Amor, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology; Bina Freiwald, a professor in the Department of English; PhD candidate in Art History, Tal-Or Ben-Choreen; and the Institute's Postdoctoral fellow, Sigal Barkai, attended.



"During the time I spent as a visiting scholar, I came to know scholars and students alike. I learned from them and my exchanges with them were most valuable," Robinson says.

Not only did the participants get to share with one another, but they also took part in a number of cultural activities, such as a tour of the historic city of Be'er Sheva and a visit to Project Wadi Attir, a sustainable farming initiative of the Bedouin community in the Negev desert.

"Engaging in Israel studies, while experiencing the beauty and vastness of the Negev desert added an important, if intangible, dimension to my research," Robinson adds.

Gandhi's view on Zionism, however, wasn't so cut and dried, explains P.R. Kumaraswamy, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.

"We need to demystify a number of things about Gandhi. He was one of the very few people who tried to narrow the gap between what he preached and what he practised. His opinion of Zionism was largely influenced by India's domestic situation and his ideology of non-violence, and he never truly sought to understand Judaism," Kumaraswamy told an audience at the Jewish Public Library in March 2018 during a lecture sponsored by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies. He was there to talk about his most recent book, *Squaring the Circle: Mahatma Gandhi and the Jewish National Home* (Knowledge World, 2017).

Kumaraswamy met Csaba Nikolenyi, director of the Azrieli Institute, when the latter spent a month as a guest lecturer at the Jindal Centre for Israel Studies in the fall of 2017. Nikolenyi was invited to the book launch for *Squaring the Circle* and was intrigued. "I thought, whatever it takes, whatever it costs, I want to bring this professor to Concordia and share him with our students," he said.

During his time in India, Nikolenyi also witnessed first-hand a newfound warmth toward Israel. "I found no hostility, only a very great curiosity, said Nikolenyi. "It was a strong, genuine interest."

ON-SITE LEARNING BRINGS VALUE TO ISRAELI AND CANADIAN SCHOLARS

Imagine a world in which a rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox population comes to dominate Israel's parliament within a generation. To counter this, Mossad recruits the illegitimate child of a powerful rabbi in an attempt to alter the course of Israel's future. That's the plot of Rabbi Leigh Lerner's first work of fiction, *The Mossad Messiah: A Novel of Israel* (Counterflow Press, 2017).

The rabbi emeritus of Montreal's Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom and visiting rabbi at Shir Hadash Firenze in Italy called the novel a labour of love and a *cri de coeur*. "I've waited over 40 years to see the government in Israel deal with bad social policy and it hasn't happened. So I sat down and wrote this book."

A keen observer of political developments in Israel during his time as a rabbi, Lerner felt compelled to write a creative work that challenges the soul and ethic of Israel and Jewish people everywhere.



Leigh Lerner (2nd from right) introduced his first book *The Mossad Messiah: A Novel of Israel* to Montreal audiences in January 2018.

"The novel sounds the alarm on Israeli domestic issues stemming from a religious orthodoxy that threatens to ride roughshod over human rights," he says. In the end "the struggle for Israeli democracy yields stunning but workable solutions."

Lerner introduced his book to Montreal audiences at a lecture on the rise of ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel at the Azrieli Institute in January 2018.

During his talk, he asked questions such as: How did ultra-Orthodoxy arise? What are the benefits and problems associated with ultra-Orthodoxy? And can it co-exist in a modern state with liberal, secular and religious groups?

ESSAY COMPETITION CELEBRATES ISRAEL'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY

The state of Israel celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2018. To commemorate the event, the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies hosted an essay competition and invited all students enrolled in a university degree program in Montreal to submit work on the theme “Israel at 70: Past, Present and Future.”

Concordia Judaic Studies student Eden Moalem won the prize in the undergraduate category for her essay *Getting the Feminist Foot into Zionism's Door: Jewish Women's Journey in Israel*.

“I was excited to focus on women's roles, which are often muted in the recording of Israel's history. It was a chance for me to write about and summarize everything that I'd learned about my father's country and my birthright country through my own lens: female, Jewish and Israeli,” Moalem said.

“Winning was all the more exciting because it means that the content of my work is relevant and important. It



made me feel like my time and work at Concordia left a lasting mark.”

Matt Malone, a student in McGill University's Faculty of Law, won in the graduate category. His essay was titled: *Israel's Liberal Democracy and the Litmus Test for LGBT Politics*.

The essay competition gave students an opportunity to tackle issues facing Israel today, according to institute director Csaba Nikolenyi. “Israel is a fascinating laboratory for anyone who is interested

in studying complex societies through the tools of arts, humanities and social sciences,” he said. “Our advisory board decided to challenge Montreal's diverse student population to reflect on these issues of complexity on the occasion of the 70th birthday of the State of Israel.”

The essay winners were announced at the conference on Israel at 70, hosted by the Azrieli Institute in July.

BEST BOOK IN ISRAEL STUDIES

Noam Zadoff is the winner of the fourth biennial Azrieli Institute's Best Book in Israel Studies. The assistant professor at Indiana University won for *Gershom Scholem: From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back* (Brandeis University Press, 2017), which explores the life of Gershom Scholem, the preeminent scholar of Jewish mysticism. He was presented with his prize at an awards ceremony in November 2018.

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies thanks jury members Csaba Nikolenyi,

the late Linda Kay and Judith Woodsworth, who selected the winner from a pool of 27 entries.

The competition is supported by Montreal's Jewish Public Library and is organized under the auspices of its J.I. Segal Awards, which celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2018. Originally, three prizes were offered for works in four languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, English and French. The Segal awards have since grown to include 11 separate categories.

“The 50th anniversary of the prize is an accomplishment in itself. The diversity of categories that we have attests to the creativity and the work that a lot of us do,” said Robert Schwarzwald, chair of the awards committee and a professor of literature at the Université de Montréal.

“I like to think of the awards as a kind of place where many people from different backgrounds come together, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. You don't have to be Jewish to win one of our prizes, you just have to be dealing with a Jewish theme.”

IN MEMORIAM: LINDA KAY

Pulitzer Prize winner, trailblazer and beloved professor: Linda Kay was all of these things and more. The former Department of Journalism chair, who spent more than 20 years at Concordia, died of cancer October 12, 2018, at the age of 66.

News of her death was met with tributes from colleagues and former students, each of whom expressed a deep respect for her talent and generosity.

“For a generation of reporters in Montreal, you didn’t learn the trade without being schooled by Linda Kay. Linda drilled us in the fundamentals, but—for many of us—she was our introduction to feminism and the idea of fair representation,” tweeted Christopher Curtis, a reporter for the *Montreal Gazette*.

During her career as a reporter, Kay broke down gender barriers as one of the first female sportswriters of her generation.

Born in Brooklyn in 1951, Linda Merry Kupferstein worked at newspapers in New Jersey, Chicago and San Diego before coming to Montreal in the 1980s. It was while in San Diego that she and her fellow reporters at the *San Diego Evening Tribune* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for their coverage of an airplane crash over a residential neighbourhood in the city.

Kay began teaching at Concordia in 1990 and became a full professor in 2014. While teaching, she continued to write for publications like *The Globe and Mail*, the *Montreal Gazette*, *Chatelaine* and *Newsweek*.



In 2007, Concordia recognized her work as a professor and awarded Kay the Dean’s Award for Excellence. The larger community also recognized her contributions and in 2013 she won a Woman of Distinction Award from the Women’s Y Foundation.

Kay wrote about what being a teacher meant to her in 2013: “We transmit a body of knowledge that we feel is precious. We serve as guides and often as mentors. And if we are fortunate, we sometimes leave a lasting impression.”

Linda Kay accomplished her mission.

“I would not be the same reporter I am today without her encouragement and influence,” said CTV News National Correspondent Michel Boyer, BA 12. “It is a true honour to have been her student.”

Q&A WITH YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

Yossi Klein Halevi is a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. His work has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. Klein Halevi will speak in Montreal on Tuesday, May 28, 2019, in a talk co-hosted by the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies and the Federation Combined Jewish Appeal.



In Yossi Klein Halevi's latest book, *Letters to my Palestinian Neighbor* (Harper Collins, 2018), the author explains the Israeli and Jewish story to a fictitious Palestinian acquaintance through a series of letters. It's the first time any Israeli writer has written directly to the Arab and Muslim worlds explaining "who we are and why we're here," Klein Halevi told *The Times of Israel*. He hopes the ensuing dialogue will help each side better understand one another. Klein Halevi's current approach to the Zionist question is a far cry from the radicalism he espoused in his youth. We spoke to the author from his home in Jerusalem about his early life in Brooklyn, his move toward and away from militant Zionism and where he sees Israel in 20 years.

You grew up in the Borough Park area of Brooklyn in the 1960s. How did that influence your worldview?

We were a Holocaust-survivor family as were most other families I knew. But unlike many others, my father was able to speak about the war with a certain amount of distance. He felt that what had happened to him wasn't personal; it was really part of Jewish history. He wanted to share his stories so we would know what to expect from the world; so that we would be prepared emotionally.

When did you first take an interest in politics?

By sixth grade I was thoroughly politicized and joined the Betar Youth Movement. Betar had a summer camp

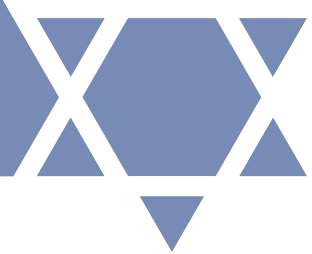
in the Catskills and I persuaded my parents to send me there. We learned how to shoot and crawl in night manoeuvres on our elbows; it was definitely preparing us for the next round of Jewish survival. And then it escalated when the Jewish Defense League and Meir Kahane came along in the late '60s.

You were part of Kahane's group, a follower. How extreme were you?

I felt there was something untrustworthy about him, but nevertheless, I was gradually drawn into this orbit. I was never part of the inner circle that was involved in terrorism. That fortunately, was not part of my experience.

What was the context for your activism at the time?

We were always mobilized—demonstrating for Jews in the Soviet Union, Iraq and Syria; wherever there was persecution, we would demonstrate. In that sense, I wasn't that different from lots of other American kids in the '60s and early '70s. That was the time where adolescence and the process of growing up merged with history. The violence, especially ethnic violence, really had a wider American context. It made sense somehow to see ourselves as the Jewish equivalent of the Black Panthers.



When did you become disillusioned with Kahane?

Kahane's American phase was really about defending diaspora Jews. When he moved to Israel in 1971, his goals shifted and he became part of the farthest right. The worst acts of Jewish terrorism in Israel were outgrowths of what was known as Kahanism. One was the 1994 Baruch Goldstein massacre in Hebron (Goldstein was one of Kahane's closest followers). Yigal Amir, who assassinated Yitzhak Rabin, was very much influenced by Goldstein and to some extent Kahane. When I first moved to Israel in 1973–74, during the Yom Kippur War to attend Hebrew University, my first inclination was to get involved with Kahane, but when I looked him up, I discovered a very different Kahane than I had known in the States.

You moved permanently to Israel in 1982. You were part of the Israel Defense Forces during the first intifada (Palestinian uprising against the occupation). How did your time in the army influence your current attitude toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict?

My time in Gaza refugee camps became my education of the conflict. We were glorified policemen rather than soldiers and engaged in riot control. I remember going into people's homes at 2 in the morning to make arrests. Until then, Israelis had flattered themselves — we were benign occupiers, and maybe until the first intifada we were, but there is no such thing in the end. Especially once an occupied people start to revolt.

At what point did you start thinking about the term reconciliation?

The experience of the first intifada led me to two places. One was that we have to try to find a way out of this because it isn't good for Israel. The second was more personal. I was curious about who these people were. I wanted to know how the conflict looked through their eyes and how they experienced our shared reality.

That question is largely at the centre of your second book, *Garden of Eden*...

In the late 1990s, I spent a year immersing myself in Palestinian society, specifically religious Palestinian society. I was interested in how Muslim and Christian Palestinians experience their devotional lives. I didn't talk a lot. I spoke about myself if I was asked, but I wasn't asked much. There wasn't a whole lot of curiosity over who I was and what I was doing, but I was not just there as an observer. On a number of occasions, I was invited to participate in the prayer line and I learned how to pray as a Muslim. We were supposed to launch that book in New York on 9/11 and because of the events, the book really faded away, which is why we decided to re-release it earlier this year.

You talk a lot about the Zionism of longing. What does that mean?

Zionism is the meeting between need and longing; the need for a safe refuge along with the longing for the lost land we believed we would one day return to. As a people, we have tended to emphasize the Zionism of need.

This became the more compelling narrative but as a result of that, we have displaced an important part of the story, which is that we returned to the land not only because we had to, but because we wanted to. The more we tell a Euro-centric, holocaust account of Zionism, the more we leave ourselves vulnerable to the accusation that Zionism is a European colonialist movement.

When you are talking about reconciliation, what do you tell young people on the other side of the divide who have same certainty you once did as a youth?

I was giving a talk at the University of Chicago not too long ago and a student asked me: "How do I become a peacemaker?" My response was: "by avoiding absolute certainty". Take a position but leave a corner of your being open to doubt. Politics is dealing with the world as it is; with a flawed reality. To apply a kind of blind religious faith to politics is to profoundly misuse faith. What's happened in the modern West, is that people are agnostic about their religion, but absolutely certain about their politics.

Where do you see Israel in 20 years?

Impossible to say. It's a North American question. Israelis never ask that question because we can't imagine what life here will be like in a year from now. We can have a war on almost any of our borders at any time. And what will Israel be like after the war?

STUDENT BODY



1

Alan Bariman

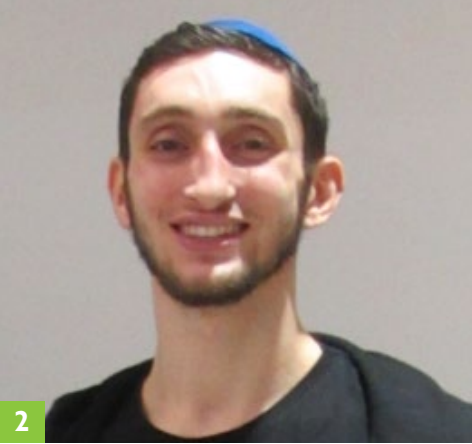
Alan Bariman, BA 18, is pursuing his master's in literature at McGill. His graduate research explores the influence of Israel on the works of Canadian modernist writers such as Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton and A.M. Klein.

Tal-Or Ben-Choreen

1 Tal-Or Ben-Choreen is an artist and PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at Concordia, specializing in photography. A Fulbright Scholar, Ben-Choreen is focusing on the institutionalization of photography education in Canadian and American universities in the 1970s and 1980s. She has a master's from Ryerson University in photographic preservation and collections management and has done research for the New York Public Library and the National Gallery of Canada. Her work was recently featured in Afterimage Online and Canadian Jewish Studies.

Dvir Cahana

A former member of the Concordia Stingers basketball team, **2** Dvir Cahana, BA 18, is completing a master's in Jewish studies with a focus on biblical exegesis and hermeneutic rabbinical techniques. Last summer, he joined the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies for additional courses in Tel Aviv and Tel Meggido. He hopes to further his studies at the Yeshivat Chovevi Torah rabbinical school in the Bronx and at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan.



2



3

Chloe Collier

A religious studies graduate of Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, **3** Chloe Collier, MA 18, is pursuing a master's in Israel studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research explores disputes around multi-faith sacred spaces and how this produces competing political narratives, such as at Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif complex. After her MA she hopes to do a PhD in religious studies at the University of Toronto.

Lauren Luz

Lauren Luz, BA 15, studied religion at Concordia with a minor in Israel studies. She completed a Master of Diplomacy and Conflict Studies at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya with a focus on Middle Eastern politics. Her thesis examines fundamentalism in Jewish women in Israel. She has worked at the United Nations as an advisor in international law and terrorism and in the private sector. Originally from Montreal, she now lives in Tel Aviv.

Alex McCrae

Montefiore Graduate Fellowship recipient **4** Alex McCrae is completing a master's degree in religions and cultures at Concordia, with a focus on the Druze community. Before undertaking graduate work, he spent time in the Middle East. His travels inspired him to focus on the region in his academic work. His research interests include Middle Eastern/Israeli politics, minority politics and the politics of religion. He has a BA in political science from Leeds University and upon completion of his master's, hopes to do a PhD in the same field.



Eden Moalem

5 Eden Moalem, BA 18, graduated on the Dean's List and was president of her student association while pursuing her degree in Judaic studies at Concordia. She participated in a Hasbara Fellowship to better understand Judaism and Israel in the context of Middle Eastern politics. Her studies focused on women's roles in Israel and Judaism and how these roles have affected Israeli legislation.

Noa Isabel Ogilvy

5 Noa Isabel Ogilvy is completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Concordia, with minors in Israel studies and Chinese language and culture. She hopes to pursue a master's in security and defence, with a focus on counter-terrorism. She recently produced a series of eight large oil and collage-based pieces of art for the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies offices in Montreal, each depicting a period in the history of Israeli statehood.



Tahmina Tariq

A recipient of the Montefiore Graduate Fellowship, Tahmina Tariq is a second-year doctoral student in the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia. Tariq's research focuses on othering discourse in the works of religious leaders Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and Abu Ala Mawdudi, and how this relates to settler movements such as the Gush Emunim in Israel. A speaker of Hebrew, Arabic and Urdu, she is working on a literary analysis of her source texts in their original languages.



FACES OF ISRAEL AT EXPO '67

The 2018 edition of *Canadian Jewish Studies* features a series of papers from the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies' spring 2017 conference Faces of Israel at Expo '67. They include: *The Israel Pavilion for the 1967 International and Universal Exposition in Montreal*,

by Eran Neuman; *Photographic Boxes – Art Installations: A Study of the Role of Photography in the Israel Pavilion at Expo '67*, by Tal-Or Ben-Choreen; and *A Tale of Two Pavilions: Jewish Participation in Expo '67*, by Harold Troper.

The Faces of Israel conference examined Israel's contributions to Expo '67 in Montreal at Concordia's Samuel Bronfman Building.

The Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies would like to thank the authors for their contributions.

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**.

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