

FALL / WINTER 2019

THE MGRUBLIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH HARD WORK



MGRUBLIAN OPEN HOUSE

On September 13, 2019, the Mgrublian Center (in partnership with the Keck and Salvatori Centers) welcomed staff, faculty, and students interested in learning more about the Center's programming, research, and curricular offerings. The Open House also welcomed new and returning students looking to participate as human rights task force volunteers and/or apply for employment and fellowship opportunities.

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MEET THE MGRUBLIAN CENTER STAFF

In the fall of 2019, the Mgrublian Center selected sixteen student employees dedicated to bettering the world. Hired for the 2019-20 academic year, these students take on various tasks, such as assisting professors with human rights related research, managing task forces, identifying grants, hosting career panels, securing key speakers and much more. Some of our other students, the "Justice League", also work as legal research assistants in conjunction with a local human rights lawyer in Los Angeles.

STUDENT ASSISTANTS



(From L to R): Jenny Gurev '20, Maya Shah '22, Isabela Overturf '22, Caroline Phillips '22, Sydney Heath '22, Lucie Kapner '22
(Not pictured: Jennifer Collao '21, ErisJames Elliott '23, Yvonne Macias '22, Sophia Ramirez-Brown '22, Hailey Wilson '22)

Jennifer Collao '21 – Programming
ErisJames Elliott '23 – Research Assistant to Professor Heather Ferguson
Jenny Gurev '20 – Student Manager
Sydney Heath '22 – Programming
Lucie Kapner '22 – Research Assistant to Professor Wendy Lower
Yvonne Macias '22 – Task force liaison, Unchained task force leadership
Isabela Overturf '22 – Programming
Caroline Phillips '22 – Immigration Task Force Leadership, Newsletter contributor
Sophia Ramirez-Brown '22 – Programming, Immigration Task Force Leadership,
Maya Shah '22 – Newsletter editor
Hailey Wilson '22 – Research Assistant to Professor Heather Ferguson

THE JUSTICE LEAGUE

This year five CMC students (aka "The Justice League") are working closely with a Los Angeles-based attorney on his current domestic and international human rights cases. In conjunction with CMC alumna Larissa Peltola '18 (who is currently employed by the firm), the Justice League is providing case-specific legal research, creating searchable databases, reviewing prior litigation, and presenting their work on a monthly basis back to the firm. This program has given our students the opportunity to work directly with a human rights lawyer, learn the process of researching and presenting a case in the courts, and provided hands-on exposure to the challenges and triumphs of litigating and shining light on human rights abuses around the world.



(From L to R): Jacob Boles '22, Flor Canales-Morones '22, Shreya Chatterjee '22, Torben Deese '22
(Not pictured: Jaelin Kinney '21)

2019-20 RESEARCH FELLOWS

Through the research fellowship program, students design and conduct research of their own choosing under the guidance of a faculty advisor. Research fellows spend the academic year diving deep into a human rights, Holocaust, or genocide studies project while benefiting from the resources and office space the Center has to offer. Fellows also receive a modest stipend to offset research expenses. This year, the Mgrublian Center is proud to sponsor 6 fellows.



(From L to R): Simon Gilbert '22, Renee Perper '21, Laleh Ahmad '20, Anita Sheno '20, (Not pictured: Anna Choi PO '23, Nandeeni Patel '21)

Anna Choi '23: I am investigating the motivations of the Hong Kong protesters who use force and exploring whether tactics of force have been successful. I have conducted field research on the front lines of the Hong Kong protests and interviewed people involved in and impacted by the protests.

Renee Perper '21: I dedicate most of my time to researching the Yazidi genocide of 2014. The Mgrublian Center is sponsoring my research on how sexual violence was used as a genocidal tactic by ISIS in this region. Moreover, I am focusing on how UN legal policies inadequately address sexual violence as a weapon of war and also working to find strategic alternatives for Yazidi survivors to reach some sense of justice.

Simon Gilbert '22: One of the few European countries with a sizable post-Holocaust Jewish population, Romania's treatment of Jews in the second half of the twentieth century is best categorized as hostage-taking rather than elimination. I am researching how the political, economic, and social realities of Romania during the Cold War dictated the emigration of its Jews.

Laleh Ahmad '20: My fellowship (also my senior thesis) is exploring different types of collective violence, and I'm drawing comparisons and examining factors that facilitate cases of mass violence. To do this, I'm exploring a variety of case studies that fall under different categories of violence such as race-based, religious, ethnic, gendered or those having to do with decolonization and civil war.

Anita Sheno '20: My project analyzes the influence of sociocultural factors and access to mental health care on the psychological well-being of people displaced and affected by the Syrian civil war and the role of the media, politics, and cultural relativism in the current refugee crisis.

Nandeeni Patel '21: I am studying the nature of sexual and gender-based violence against women in India from the lens of social norms and political practices. My research will conclude with a list of narrative-supported and evidence-based recommendations for the Indian government on methods to increase the effectiveness of current policies targeted towards women.

TASK FORCES: UPDATES

Student-led human rights task force groups address current national and global human rights problems and are a great way for students to be involved with the Center on a volunteer-basis and to focus on a campaign of their choosing. Below are the leaders of our task forces as well as some of the events they held last semester.

Amnesty International (AI-CMC) – Mila Piacsek

Curis – Global Poverty and Public Health – Ameer Nabi, Stella Streufert, Genevieve Collins

Immigration and Refugee Rights – Caroline Phillips, Sophia Ramirez-Brown

Power of Women (POW, women and gender rights)

– Jamie Bitz, Zoe Carlson, Gayle Lee

Social Enterprise Initiative (SEI, microfinance) – Elena Castellanos

Education – Anika Kimme, Emily Ortiz

Unchained (anti-human trafficking and slavery) – Yvonne Macias, Neyda Cujcuj Xoyon



Amnesty International's (AI-CMC) first event of the semester was an "I care about ____" wall. The wall was an opportunity for students to write down a human rights issue(s) they are most passionate about. Also, AI-CMC hosted a screening of *Lifeboat*, a documentary about the Syrian Refugee Crisis, for Human Rights Day, December 10th, 2019.



Image from the documentary film, *Lifeboat*, directed by Skye Fitzgerald.
For more info: <https://www.lifeboatdocumentary.com/>

TASK FORCE UPDATES

Unchained aims to bring awareness to human trafficking. This semester, Unchained hosted a documentary screening series of the T.V. show: *The Traffickers*. The first part of the series featured an episode called *Dark Side of Adoption*. After the screening, board members led a discussion on what was covered in the episode. Unchained will continue the series during Spring 2020 by screening two more episodes, one about tourism and human trafficking and the other about organ trafficking.



MGRUBLIAN TASK FORCE UNCHAINED
PRESENTS:

THE TRAFFICKERS SERIES: DARK SIDE OF ADOPTION



Curis aims to talk about global health issues. This semester, Curis held a documentary screening of *Period. End of Sentence*. This documentary investigates how women in India are trying to fight the stigma surrounding menstruation and start to manufacture sanitary pads.

Power of Women works to raise awareness about the severity of domestic violence and sexual assault against women. One event they held this semester was a tabling during sex week to talk about period sex. Later in the semester, Power of Women held an event at the CARE center on the diva cup.

MICHELINE ISHAY

By Hailey Wilson '22

On November 19th, the Center had the pleasure of welcoming Athenaeum speaker Micheline Ishay, acclaimed author and professor of International Studies and Human Rights at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. Ishay is well-renowned in the human rights field; highlights of her career include publishing *The History of Human Rights* and *The Human Rights Reader*, and serving as a visiting professor at the Khalifi University in Abu Dhabi.

Faculty and students had the opportunity to hear her discuss her new book, *The Levant Express*, in a talk titled, "Hope Amidst Despair: The Future of Human Rights in the Middle East." Throughout her Athenaeum talk, Ishay used the metaphor of a train to describe human rights progress in the Middle East. In the beginning of the Arab Spring, she compared the dissemination of human rights throughout the world to a high speed train. Ishay argued the train, or "Levant Express," has since been rerouted on a track towards counter enlightenment. She attributed the new direction to the disengagement of the Western community and the political vacuum left after the Arab Spring. As promised in the talk title, Ishay provided hope for the progress of human rights in the Middle East. Her advice for the international community centered around engaging the Western world to promote human rights within the Middle East.

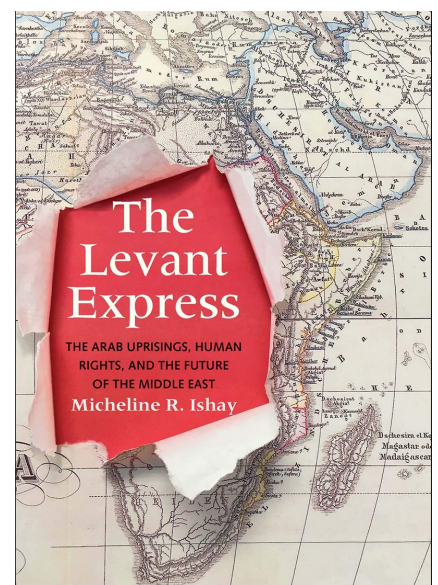
After the Arab Spring, Ishay noted Western disengagement enabled the region to reverse the progress made during the Arab Spring and Ishay urged the Western world to return their attention to the Middle East to help redirect the region to a path of enlightenment. Additionally, she argued that FDR's four freedoms (freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of speech, and freedom of worship) should serve as a guideline for the rehabilitation of human rights in the Middle East. Ishay, however, added her own freedom to the list: freedom from sexual discrimination



At left: Micheline Ishay, author and professor of International Studies and Human Rights

Below: Book cover for *The Levant Express: The Arab Uprisings, Human Rights, and the Future of the Middle East*

. Once institutionalized throughout the region, Ishay argued that hope can be restored to the Middle East. In her concluding remarks, Ishay emphasized the need for the international community to prepare a plan for the aftermath of the conflicts, such as the Yemen and Syrian Civil Wars plaguing the Middle East today. Without a vision for the future, Ishay warned that the Levant Express will continue to hurtle down the track of counter enlightenment.



[In]Tolerance & [Mis]Understanding: Holocaust Commemoration in Poland

By Tallan Donine '21

2019 Mgrublian Center summer intern, POLIN museum, Warsaw, Poland



Above: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which was built on land that was once within the Jewish Quarter and the territory of the Warsaw Ghetto. In front is the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes built in 1948 by Natan Rapoport to commemorate the 1943 Jewish Ghetto Uprising.

Navigating Warsaw is both a literal and figurative confrontation with history and the present. The entire city was decimated in World War II. Monuments are everywhere, surrounded by residential areas and busy streets. These monuments, although solemn in nature, command an isolating force making them both stand out from the normalities of everyday life all around and largely invisible at the same time. In the absence of historical sites as physical structures, it is up to those remaining to determine how to commemorate, restore, and draw attention to the atrocities that occurred and the shared responsibility to progress without forgetting. In Poland, politically contentious times are attempting to challenge history and jeopardize the preservation of critical testimonies. Eighty-nine percent of respondents in a recent survey conducted by the Center for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw stated that in the last year they heard from non-Jewish people that “Jews have too much power,” while 47% reported they had heard anti-Semitic comments in political discussions, and 50% believed that Jews use the Holocaust to achieve their goals.

These widely shared thought-patterns display the extent of inter-group hostility that remains in Poland today at the hands of a historical claim to martyrdom. Since the war's end, many Polish people have continued to believe that their story has been neglected and misunderstood by the world. Capitalizing on these grievances, the Law and Justice (PIS)-led Polish government is actively working to highlight the favorable perspective of war-time Poles, and thus, appears to be the group strategically using the events of World War II to reach their own, nationalistic goals. It is this political climate that led to the passage of the controversial 2018 Holocaust Law. The Polish government fell under international scrutiny for the law which originally intended for criminal prosecution of anyone who claimed the Polish state was complicit in Nazi crimes during World War II. Although the government left exceptions for artistic and scientific purposes and ultimately reversed the criminality of such an offense, the law remains in effect.

The impacts of this heavy-handed approach to monitoring freedom of speech and criticism have already reached Poland's cultural institutions, particularly the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The current government has not approved its former director for reappointment despite his selection by the election committee.

The concern is that the PIS-led government is withholding approval of the former director because he was vocal in his opposition to the 2018 law among other reasons, and will ultimately appoint a director themselves. With a new PIS-backed director, the core exhibition, especially the galleries focused on the twentieth century and World War II, could see the incorporation of changes made to highlight instances of Polish righteousness and limit the negative stories of Polish people harming Jews. Although such changes would be expensive to implement and would reverse the progress the museum has made since its opening in 2014, fear is already rising among its global base of donors amid worries staff will leave the institution in opposition. For the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews to continue to serve as a symbol for progress and tolerance in the years to come, major changes in the government, such as a non-PIS party win in the next election, would be needed. The international community, notably the European Union, has the ability to pressure the Polish government to reevaluate its stance and push for freedom of its institutions to be honest in their approach to transmitting history. The jeopardized freedom of cultural institutions around the world serves as a reminder that a comprehensive engagement with history based on facts is crucial for understanding, reflecting, and implementing lessons learned through times of war and genocide.

References:

- 1 Michał Bilewicz, "Antisemitic discourses in Poland: The forms of hatred," lecture at the 2019 Polish-Israeli Youth Exchange based on research conducted at the Center for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw, slides 5, 7, and 8 of PowerPoint presentation.
- 2 "Poland Holocaust law: Government U-turn on jail threat," BBC News, June 27, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44627129>.
3. Ibid.
- 4 Monika Scisłowska, "Fearing for its future, donors suspend funds for Poland's Jewish museum," The Times of Israel, July 16, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/fearing-for-its-future-donors-suspend-funds-for-polands-jewish-museum/>.

2020 SPRING PREVIEW

March 2nd - Deadline for 2020 Elbaz Post-Graduate Fellowship Applications.

March 6th - Atrocity Prevention Simulation: Zimbabwe. Sponsored in partnership with the Keck and Salvatori Centers. Students will navigate a humanitarian, environmental, and political conflict alongside their peers and expert practitioners in a one-day simulation event. Kravis Center, Lower Court.

March 9th - Deadline for 2020 Human Rights Partnered Internship Applications.

March 30th - Annual Human Rights Career Panel & Dinner. CMC Athenaeum, Parents Dining Room.

April 30th - *Surviving the Forgotten Genocide: An Armenian Memoir*; book presentation and lunch. CMC Athenaeum, Parents Dining Room.

April 30th - *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924*. Benny Morris presents his latest book at the annual Mgrublian dinner and lecture on Armenian studies. CMC Athenaeum.

May 8th - Human Rights Research Fellowships Presentations. Roberts North 15.



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For more information, please visit <https://human-rights.cmc.edu/>

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