



Statement of Research

I am writing to apply for the 2017-8 Arnold Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Yavetz School for Historical Studies, in Tel Aviv University. I am currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Near East Languages and Civilizations, in the University of Pennsylvania. My PhD dissertation investigates the political and social history of coffeehouses and café culture in Cairo, circa 1880 to 1950. I expect to defend this dissertation in May 2017.

My research focuses on the social, intellectual, and cultural history of the Modern Middle East and North Africa. More specifically, I have interests in the history of class and gender dynamics; social movements; race and ethnicity; collective memory and identity politics; the history of Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa; urban history; Islamic visual, material, and aesthetic cultures (including cinema and architecture); and Arabic literature and language, from the medieval era to the present. I earned B.A. and M.A. degrees in Middle East Studies and Arabic Literature and Language from Tel Aviv University. During my PhD career at Penn, I won prestigious fellowships and international awards, and gave talks in professional conferences in the United States, France, and Canada. I wrote on such subjects as Black Identity in Egyptian Theater (with special attention to the social articulation of that marginalized “Self”); collective memory and identity politics in Egypt and Algeria; and the Jewish community in Morocco (and their self-representation between the competing pressures of the general Moroccan society, French colonialism, and early Zionism). A couple of those papers are now being peer-reviewed in prestigious academic journals, and I am preparing others for submission to other journals.

In my dissertation about Cairo's coffeehouses, I assess their role in Egyptian popular politics, society, and culture. More specifically, I am interested in how coffeehouses in Cairo turned into a public space for discussing politics, and for political campaigning and recruiting, culminating in their role during the Egyptian uprising against British colonial rule in 1919 (commonly known as the *1919 Revolution* to Egyptians). Another part of my dissertation examines the social dynamics in coffeehouses, that is, the social interactions that took place in them. I am especially attuned to the study of their gender dynamics and to their roles in the performance of masculine and feminine identities. In a third chapter, I explore how a social hierarchy of coffeehouses evolved during that period, and how it shaped the performance of class in Egyptian society. Finally, I trace the urban history of Cairo's coffeehouses to better understand what it meant to diverse Egyptians to be “modern” in a city like Cairo, whose rulers were rebuilding it as “Paris on the Nile.”

Indeed, considering the pivotal place that coffeehouses of all kinds occupied in Egyptian society and culture, the extreme meagerness of the scholarship on this subject is surprising. My dissertation will fill in some of that gap. The sources I use in my research include a large volume of Egyptian archival documents in Arabic, British archival documents, photographs, travelogues, statistical yearbooks, literature, and newspapers in Arabic, French, and Italian.

Should my application be accepted, I would use the term of the fellowship to revise my dissertation for publication as a book. As I was fortunate enough to amass a great deal of archival material during my research trips throughout Europe and the Middle East, I will not need to conduct further archival research, but may indeed incorporate some more of the material into the post-dissertation monograph that I will be producing. More specifically, I intend to strengthen and expand my research on several points, such as the articulation of class and other identities through everyday rituals; the critique of new or aberrant social identities, as they were performed in various coffeehouses; or the development of certain social networks through that pivotal urban, and public, space. I believe this fits well with the Yavetz School's postdoctoral seminar on Contextualizing the Self/Self and Society, as well as with the interests and expertise of Professor Ami Ayalon, who has agreed to serve as my adviser on this project, and with those of the Department of Middle East and African Studies in general. In the meantime, I also plan to publish at least one excerpt of this work as an article.