



# The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel



SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

# DIRECTOR NOTES

Fall 2023 turned out to be the most challenging semester we have ever encountered, as a program and as a community. We felt our hearts break with a triple pain. Our hearts broke on October 7th with Hamas's brutal killing of 850 Israeli civilians, and 1,200 people total, and taking 240 hostages. Many of our faculty, staff, and students have friends, colleagues, and family members murdered or taken hostage that day. Among those murdered were the daughter and son-in-law of Dr. Ilan Troen, a long-time colleague, who has spoken several times at MSU as a guest of our program; Dr. Shoshan Haran, founder of the nonprofit Fair Planet which tackles food insecurity across East Africa, and a speaker at our "Israel at 70 Conference," was among the hostages, along with her daughter Adi, son-in-law Tal Shoham, grandchildren Yahel (age 3) and Naveh (8), sister-in-law Sharon Avigdor and her daughter Noam (12). Dr. Haran's husband, sister and brother-in-law were among the murdered. Dr. Haran and most of her family members have been released, but her son-in-law remains in captivity. These are just two of many experiences of loss felt by our community. With many family and friends still at risk in the ongoing war, the fear, worry and loss continues. During this time, we have tried to come together as a community to support one another.

We have experienced a second layer of heartbreak for the thousands of Palestinian civilians who have been killed and continue to suffer.

Our hearts have broken a third time, as we witness and experience the rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia during this war.

We call on the MSU community to recognize that many Jewish, Israeli, and Palestinian students and community members are deeply affected by the war, and ask that we show our students, and one another, compassion and respect.

In the face of these tragedies, we work to play a constructive role on campus. When the war broke out, we had already planned an 8-hour, 4 session program, "Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia," facilitated by myself, Associate Director Kirsten Fermaglich, Mohammad Khalil, Morgan Shipley, Amy Simon, and Ariana Mentzel. The first session was scheduled for only 5 days after October 7th; we had so many registrants that we had to close the registration. That session, and the three that followed, provided a desperately-needed space for people to gather in thoughtful, measured and meaningful dialogue; our efforts have been publicly recognized by Interim President Woodruff on multiple occasions. We are running another such set of conversations this spring semester; we are also offering workshops on antisemitism and Islamophobia to the athletics

staff and athletes. We are urging the university to provide in-person training to all incoming staff, students, faculty, and administrators on antisemitism and Islamophobia. We – Associate Director Kirsten Fermaglich, Amy Simon, Laura Yares, Noah Kaye, Matthew Pauly, Chris Frilingos, Mary Juzwik and myself -- are also developing a 1-credit online course on antisemitism which we will inaugurate in Fall 2024.

We are also lending our expertise on Israel and the history of Israeli/Palestinian peace efforts to the campus community. In September we screened a documentary on The Parents' Circle, a group of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families who support one another and work together to fight demonization and dehumanization; we heard from two of the group's leaders about their collective efforts. On October 10th I and two Palestinian colleagues held a panel discussing the significance of Jerusalem to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and visions for the future. We also held a panel on Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian collaborations to fight climate change. To counter increasing polarization and demonization in the media and on campuses, I organized a webinar in November with my colleague Dr. Saliba Sarsar on what we call "Empathetic Complexity" and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This semester, we continue to offer much needed academic understandings of Israel through not only our courses, but our programming. We will spotlight Israeli novelist Noa Yadlin, as well as an edited book on Israeli culture and "the emergency routine" published by our visiting Israeli scholar Vered Weiss. Serling Institute alumnus Dr. Geoffrey Levin will also join us to discuss his book on Israel, American Jews, and Palestinian rights.

We have a rich array of programming addressing diverse cutting-edge research on the Holocaust (related to Ukraine, Yiddish language, and Holocaust diaries), on Jewish culture and identity, and on the influence of identity on music. Beyond the learning this programming provides, it also gives us opportunities to come together in community. Please see some of our highlights, and join us for our enriching programs and contact me if you have any questions at [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu) or 517-303-6019.

May 2024 bring peace.

*Professor Yael Aronoff*

Director of The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel.

# ACADEMIC NEWS

**Yael Aronoff** will participate this spring in several public symposia at other universities. On April 14, 2024 she will be part of a roundtable for the Pearl and Troy Feibel Lecture on Judaism and Law at Ohio State University, where she and three other scholars will discuss current events in Israel and Palestine from the perspective of international law and regional politics.

Dr. Aronoff will also participate in four roundtables at the 40th Annual Conference of the Association of Israel Studies at Charles University, Czech Republic, July 1-3, 2024. These include roundtables about the history, past, and present of the Association of Israel Studies; teaching about Israel during the war; and the books, *Americanization of the Israeli Right* (Eds. Ilan Peleg and Yoav Former) and *Netanyahu vs the Generals* (Guy Ziv).

She will also make several local presentations to Congregation Shaarey Zedek in East Lansing, Michigan. On January 21st she will discuss "Negotiating a Peace Agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority: Progress Made in the Past and Hopes for the Future;" on January 28th she will discuss "Analyzing Wars Between Israel and Hamas in the Past and Present."

On campus, Dr. Aronoff continues to educate about antisemitism through her participation in the four-part series "Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia" with colleagues Mohammad Khalil, Kirsten Fermaglich, Amy Simon, Morgan Shipley, and Ariana Mentzel. She is contributing to the development of a 1-credit online course on antisemitism with 7 colleagues from the Serling Institute, and is working with colleagues to lead workshops on antisemitism and Islamophobia for students and staff involved in MSU Athletics, and the East Lansing police on antisemitism and Islamophobia. She is also updating the Serling Institute Guide on Antisemitism for the MSU community with Kirsten Fermaglich, Amy Simon, and Ariana Mentzel.

**Steven Gold** published "Racial and Ethnic Consciousness" in the *Wiley/Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 27 November 2023. Access to the article is currently provided through the QR code:



**Kirsten Fermaglich's** article, "'To assume another name': Race, gender, family and name changing in New York City, 1887-2012" will appear in *Gender and History* this spring. Access to the article is currently provided through the QR code: Kirsten will speak on the history of



American antisemitism in a Virtual Lecture Series at UCLA's School of Education and Information Studies and for Longmeadow Public Schools later this spring; she spoke on the same subject for Colorado College in December. Kirsten will work this semester with Amy Simon and Yael Aronoff to lead Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia at MSU. She will also work this semester with a team of Serling Institute faculty to develop a 1-credit course on antisemitism at Michigan State, to be piloted in the Fall of 2024. She will present her work on name-changing to two synagogues: Temple Beth El in Somerset, New Jersey in February, and to Valley Beth Shalom in Los Angeles in May.

**Amy Simon** will be a featured essayist in YIVO's Bruce and Francesca Czernia Slovin Online Museum's upcoming exhibition on the Vilna ghetto diary of Yitskhok Rudashevski. In May, Dr. Simon and her co-editor, Dr. Hannah Holtschneider (University of Edinburgh) will convene a workshop of Holocaust scholars working on a special issue of the journal, *Holocaust Studies: a Journal of Culture and History*, that addresses the topic of personal documents and ephemera as sources for interdisciplinary Holocaust scholarship. This meeting will take place at MSU and will include ten scholars from the United States, Europe, and Israel.

**Vered Weiss's** co-edited book *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* (Eds. Weiss, Ronen, and Dinur, Lexington, 2024) comes out this January. Weiss will present a paper at the 40th Annual Conference of the Association for Israel Studies held jointly with the 12th Annual Conference of the European Association for Israel Studies. Israel and Israel Studies: The European and International Perspective July 1-3, 2024, Charles University, Prague. The title of her paper is "Empathy and Resilience: A New Epilogue to *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* (Eds. Weiss, Ronen, and Dinur, Lexington, 2024)". Weiss will also present at The International Comparative Literature Association Conference to be held March 25-26, at San Francisco State University. The title of her paper is "Borderline Outcasts: Intellect and Marginality in 'Mishael' by Y. D. Berkowitz and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*".

**Kenneth Waltzer's** "Reflections on Contemporary Antisemitism in Europe," (2015) has been republished in *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism: the Fathom Essays*, edited by Alan Johnson, Routledge, 2024. And has a book review, "Challenging the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement: Twenty Years..." edited by Ronald and Lola Fraser. *Fathom* (Fall 2023).

# SPRING EVENTS 2024

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\* For parking information please visit: <https://maps.msu.edu/interactive/>

All our events are in person and are also livestreamed through our YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@serlinginstituteforjewishs8606/streams>



## ***The Myth of the Twelve Tribes of Israel***

**By Andrew Tobolowsky**

**Tuesday, January 16, 5:30-7:00 pm James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall (3rd floor)**

The Hebrew Bible offers the best known story of the twelve tribes of Israel - who they are, what they experienced, and what happened to them in the end. But all around the world, there are other stories - other people who identify as Israelis, or have been so identified by others, usually through stories about where one or more of the tribes went after the close of biblical history. This paper explores the fascinating phenomenon of a world full of Israelis - using the same traditions to claim the same past in different ways for different reasons.

**Andrew Tobolowsky** is the Robert and Sara Boyd Distinguished Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary, specializing in the study of the Hebrew Bible from diverse comparative perspectives. *The Myth of the Twelve Tribes of Israel*, published by Cambridge University Press, is his second book.



## **Fueling Creativity with Identity: Guest Artist Lunch Panel Discussion with Meg Okura- violinist/leader-Chamber Jazz Orchestra, Amir Farid-pianist, and Dave Eggar-cellist, composer, pianist, and producer.**

**Friday, January 19, 12:00-1:00 pm, Music Building 135**

A panel discussion with acclaimed musical artists exploring elements of faith and identity, and how this can intersect with our creative life. Lunch provided. Discussion with **Meg Okura**, violinist/leader who infuses Jewish and Japanese roots in her Pan American Chamber Jazz Orchestra, **Amir Farid**, pianist, NY based Iranian/Australian solo artist, and **Dave Eggar**, multi-Grammy nominated cellist, composer, pianist, producer.



## **Leonard Gilman Lecture on American Culture: Feeling Jewish: Nostalgia and American Jewish Religion**

**By Rachel B. Gross**

**Wednesday, January 24, 5:30-7:00 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall (3rd floor)**

American Jews tell stories about who they are and where they come from through a range of everyday objects and supposedly secular organizations. Religious studies professor Rachel B. Gross examines the ways many American Jews express longing for Eastern European heritage through artisanal delis, children's books and dolls, historic synagogues, and Jewish genealogy. These nostalgic activities can be understood as religious practices, illuminating how many American Jews are finding and making meaning today. This analysis points to the limits and possibilities of nostalgia, including challenges in embracing diversity among American Jews.

**Rachel B. Gross** is Associate Professor and John and Marcia Goldman Chair in American Jewish Studies in the Department of Jewish Studies at San Francisco State University. Her book, *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice*, was a 2021 National Jewish Book Award finalist in American Jewish Studies and received an Honorable Mention for the 2021 Saul Viener Book Prize, given by the American Jewish Historical Society. She is currently working on a religious biography of the twentieth-century American Jewish writer Mary Antin.

Use code GROSS30-FM for an exclusive offer: 30% discount + free shipping on *Beyond the Synagogue* from NYU Press. Scan this QR code:



## **Emotions in Yiddish Ghetto Diaries: Encountering Persecutors and Questioning Humanity (Routledge, 2023)**

**By Amy Simon**

**Wednesday, February 21, 5:30-7:00 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall (3rd floor)**

Dr. Simon will discuss her new book which uses an empathic reading of Yiddish diarists' feelings, evaluations, and assessments about persecutors in the Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna ghettos to present an emotional history of persecution in the Nazi ghettos. It re-centers the daily experiences of psychological and physical violence that made up ghetto life and that ultimately led victims to use their diaries as a place of agency to question and attempt to maintain their own beliefs in pre-war Jewish and Enlightenment ethics and morality. Essentially, this book highlights the benefits of reading with empathy and paying attention to emotions for understanding the experiences of people in the past, especially those facing tragedy and trauma.

**Dr. Amy Simon** holds the William and Audrey Farber Family Chair in Holocaust Studies and European Jewish History at MSU. She has worked as a researcher at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and she held a Leon Milman Memorial Fellowship for research there. Her work on Holocaust fiction, memoir, diaries, and pedagogy has appeared in *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*; *Jewish Historical Studies*; and the *Journal of Jewish Identities*, as well as a number of edited volumes. Her book, *Emotions in Yiddish Ghetto Diaries: Encountering Persecutors and Questioning Humanity* was published by Routledge in June. She also won a 2022 MSU university-wide Teacher-Scholar award.



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## Exploring Jewish History and the Holocaust in Ukraine through Research and Documentary Filmmaking

By Dr. Yurii Kaparulin

Thursday, February 1, 5:30pm-7:00 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall (3rd floor)

The lecture will provide an overview of the Soviet government's policy toward the Jewish population in Soviet Ukraine. In particular, attention is drawn to the process of resettling Jews to rural areas and attempts to involve them in collective farms. One of the central themes is the fate of the Jewish population after the German invasion of the USSR in the summer of 1941.

The lecture will be followed by a screening of the documentary, *Kalinindorf* and a discussion. Directors: Yurii Kaparulin and Les Kasyanov. Duration: 29 min. Year: 2020.

In the middle of the steppes of Kherson region lies a railway station called Kalinindorf. In 1927 the "all-Union elder" Mikhail Kalinin came here to establish the Jewish national district. To honor this event, the inhabitants of Velyka Seidemynukha renamed their village to Kalinindorf. In 1924 the Soviet government launched a campaign for resettlement of the Jews to the steppes of Southern Ukraine. Restoration of Yiddish language and the new proletarian philosophy were in the limelight of the Ukrainian Jewish *kolkhozes*, which got ideological names. In Southern Ukraine five Jewish national districts were created, where more than 100,000 Jews were employed. On August 27, 1941, Kalinindorf was occupied by the German army and the Nazis began executing Jews. After World War II, the Kremlin made sure that in reports about the crimes of the Nazis, any record of Jews were deleted. Only ruins of the ancient synagogue remind us of Jewish collective farms, as does as the director of the local museum, who keeps preserving the history of these lands.

**Yurii Kaparulin** is an associate professor at the Department of National, International Law, and Law Enforcement, and director of the Raphael Lemkin Center for Genocide Studies at Kherson State University (Ukraine). He studies the history and law of Eastern Europe, with particular interests in Holocaust and genocide studies, human rights, crimes against humanity, and political repression in the Soviet Union, in particular during World War II. His research has been published in *The Ideology and Politics Journal*; *Colloquia Humanistica*; *City History, Culture, Society*; *Eastern European Holocaust Studies*; *Ukraina Moderna*; and *BBC News Ukraine*. In 2018-19, he held a research fellowship at the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, participating in the Initiative on Ukrainian-Jewish Shared History and the Holocaust in Ukraine. He has also held fellowships at Yahad-In Unum in Paris, France (2019), at New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania (2021-22), and at the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History in Munich, Germany (2022). Dr. Kaparulin is an editorial board member of the *Eastern European Holocaust Studies Journal*, and is a Fellow at the Weiser Center for Europe & Eurasia (WCEE) Scholars at Risk Program and a Visiting Scholar at the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan fall semester 2023. Dr. Kaparulin is currently working on a monograph entitled *Between Soviet Modernization and the Holocaust: Jewish Agrarian Settlements in the Southern Ukraine (1924-1948)*. Together with Les Kasyanov (photographer, director, and member of the Yahad-in Unum expeditions), Kaparulin is co-director of the documentary films *Kalinindorf* (2020) and *(Un)known Holocaust* (2021).



## Stockholm: a screening of the TV show, *Stockholm*, adapted from the Israeli novel and a discussion with the author, Noa Yedlin

Monday, March 4, 5:30-7:00 pm, Residential College of Arts and Humanities Theater, C20 Snyder-Phillips Hall, 362 Bogue St.

*Stockholm* is a dark sitcom that follows four friends who find their friend dead in his bed 5 days before his nomination for a Nobel prize and decide to hide the fact of his death so that his nomination will not be withdrawn.

**Noa Yedlin** is a bestselling and award-winning Israeli author. She is the recipient of the Sapir Prize (the Israeli Man Booker), the Prime Minister's Literature Award and author of the bestselling *House Arrest*, *Stockholm*, *People Like Us*, and *The Wrong Book*. She will speak about her television series and bestselling novel *Stockholm*, and the differences in writing for the screen and for the page.



## The Holocaust and the Exile of Yiddish

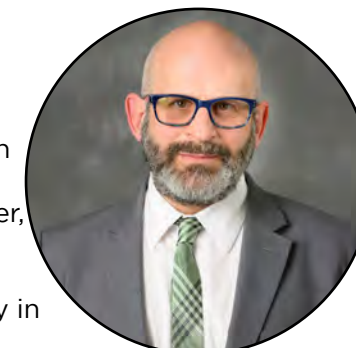
By Barry Trachtenberg

Tuesday, March 12, 5:30-7:00 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall (3rd floor)

In the early 1930s in Berlin, Germany, a group of leading Eastern European Jewish intellectuals embarked upon a project to transform the lives of millions of Yiddish-speaking Jews around the world by publishing a popular and comprehensive Yiddish language encyclopedia of general knowledge that would serve as a bridge to the modern world and as a guide to help its readers navigate their way within it. However, soon after the *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* (General Encyclopedia) was announced, Hitler's rise to power forced its editors to flee to Paris. The scope and mission of the project repeatedly changed before its final volumes were published in New York City in 1966.

"The Holocaust and the Exile of Yiddish" untangles the complicated saga of the *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* and its editors. The editors continued to publish volumes and revise the encyclopedia's mission while their primary audience, Eastern European Jews, faced persecution and genocide under Nazi rule, and the challenge of reestablishing themselves in the first decades after World War II.

**Barry Trachtenberg** is the Rubin Presidential Chair of Jewish History and Professor of History at Wake Forest University. He is the author of three books, *The Holocaust and the Exile of Yiddish: A History of the Algemeyne Entsiklopedye* (Rutgers, 2022), *The United States and the Nazi Holocaust: Race, Refuge, and Remembrance* (Bloomsbury, 2018), and *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish, 1903-1917* (Syracuse, 2008).



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## Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Personal and Academic Perspectives (a dual-session event)

These two events offer the opportunities to enter a conversation with academics from Sapir College in Israel. The recently published book, *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* (Eds., Irit Ronen, Avner Dinur, and Vered Weiss) is the product of a group of researchers from Sapir College, which is located near Sderot, a small Israeli city near the border with Gaza. As the editors note in the "Introduction" to the book:

"The constant regional stress affects many aspects of our lives and is reflected in our research and teaching. The contributors to this collection show distinct sensitivity to stress and trauma because of their cultural-geographical location. Sapir College's spatial location upon the forefront in "the Gaza envelope" leads us to rethink the forefront of our inner cultural world. The complexities of Israeli identities demand that scholars continually reconsider and reexamine their cultural and political positions. In *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine*, we explore cultural production about stress and trauma from the epicenter of "routine emergency" and a constant "state of emergency," thus offering a unique perspective upon continuous stress and ongoing trauma. The collection of articles grew out of our shared intellectual research interests as well as our shared local experience. The unique conditions at Sapir College shaped a collection of articles that brings to the forefront the "state of emergency" which is the reality of a large part of Israeli and Palestinian populations. Written by scholars who experience the state of emergency on a daily basis, the collection provides a theoretical framework for cultural attributes that are created in a climate of persistent anguish."



Twenty complimentary books will be available for MSU faculty, students, staff, and community members for those who would like to read the book before the two sessions.

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### Session 1: Voices from Sapir, a College Under Attack

**Participants: Dr. Avner Dinur, Irit Ronen and Dr. Vered Weiss**

**Monday, March 18th, 5:30-7:30 pm, Club Spartan, 332 Case Hall, room 338 (3rd floor)**

*Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* unfolds the significance of cultural memory and the effects of history on Jewish-Israeli literature and culture. The different perspectives and representations of stress and strain invite a wide readership invested in confronting personal and national narratives of anxieties and trauma. In the "Epilogue" the book pays a closer attention to the researchers themselves, including their geographical location and historical operating field.

*Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine* as a whole endeavors to shed light upon the ramifications of the constant stress of the Israeli emergency routine upon academic and cultural discourses. Israel's emergency routine might hinder and limit critical and creative scholarship, yet limitations and extreme situations might also lead to productive exploration of profound questions that require a fundamental change of certain discourses. The book suggests that we must be attentive to the effects of the physical world upon the formulation of our worldview within our social and political reality.

Irit Ronen, Dr. Avner Dinur, and Dr. Vered Weiss will share some the notes from the "Epilogue" and discuss their experiences.

**Dr. Avner Dinur** is a secular theologian who lives in Sderot, by the border with Gaza. He is a lecturer of Jewish Studies at Sapir College and Bar Ilan University, where he teaches courses on Jewish identity, secularism in Israel, radical theology, Zionism, medieval Jewish theology, and more. His research in the last few years focuses on the topic of "secular theology" through the works of Hans Jonas, Emanuel Levinas and Martin Buber. His recent book is *Something To Believe In: Secular Theology* (Idra, 2023; Hebrew).



**Irit Ronen** is a Ph.D. candidate at Ben Gurion University of the Negev and was a teaching fellow at the Department of Multidisciplinary Studies at Sapir Academic College. Her Ph.D. dissertation deals with the poetry of the prominent Israeli poet Aharon Shabtai as a unique meeting point between the classical Greek world, Judaic ancient texts, and modern poetry. Ronen participated as a fellow in the Human Rights and Judaism Program at the Israeli Democracy Institute.



**Dr. Vered Weiss** is the Serling Israeli Visiting Scholar and The Israel Institute Teaching Fellow at The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel at Michigan State University. Weiss is a faculty member in the Center for Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities, and teaches courses on Israeli culture, Israeli cinema and television, Hebrew literature, as well as world literature. Weiss is co-editor of *Tracing Topographies: Revisiting the Concentration Camps Seventy Years after the Liberation of Auschwitz* (Routledge, 2017), and *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* (Lexington, 2024). Her current research project explores the interplay between the location of marginalized characters and the ways in which narrative empathy is formulated in literature, and she is also collaborating on a co-edited book with Elana Gomel about Israeli speculative fiction (Liverpool University Press).

### Session 2: Trauma, Stress, and Israeli Society: a conversation with the editors and contributors of *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress*

**Participants: Dr. Avner Dinur, Irit Ronen, and Dr. Vered Weiss in person; and virtual guests Professor Nurith Gertz and Professor Omri Herzog**

**Tuesday, March 19th, 10:30 am-12:00 pm Club Spartan, 332 Case Hall, room 338 (3rd floor)**

*Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* exposes the ways Israeli "emergency routine" leads to perpetual stress and trauma and explores how these conditions are overwhelmingly present in the cultural production of Israeli art and literature. The nine chapters engage with a variety of Israeli cultural artifacts, including poetry, prose, film, and graphic novels, and cast a wide temporal net, reaching from as early as the 1960s to 2019. In doing so, this collection sheds light upon the ramifications of the constant stress of the Israeli emergency routine on academic and cultural discourses and alerts readers to the effects of the physical world on the formulation of world views within social and political realities.

Professors Nurith Gertz, Omri Herzog, Irit Ronen, Avner Dinur, and Vered Weiss will discuss the book, focusing on the chapters they contributed.

In "Facing the Chaos: Contemporary Israeli Literature (Re) Acting to Uncertain Times" Omri Herzog and Nurith Gertz offer an overview of a few Israeli novels of the last decade that respond to the challenges Israeli society is facing in these times. Herzog and Gertz suggest that when key civil concepts such as solidarity, personal and national security, governance, and truth confront powerful challenges, Hebrew Israeli literature naturally responds to the state of affairs in which it is written and situated. This chapter focuses on pivotal trends emerging from contemporary Hebrew Israeli literature (2017-2019) that reacts to a precarious social, political, and security climate.

Irit Ronen's chapter, "The State of Emergency and the Ethos: The Poetry of Aharon Shabtai" explores Israeli author Aharon Shabtai in terms of the "ethos" against the occasional declaration of a "state of emergency."

Dr. Avner Dinur's chapter "A Stressful Identity: Jews, Other Nations and Other Religions" considers the tensions between religion and nationality in the context of the unique history of Jews in general and in modern Jewry within the context of the state of Israel.

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Working comparatively with Jorge Luis Borges' "Funes el Memorioso" (Argentina, 1942) and David Grossman's *To the End of the Land* (Israel, 2008), in "Monstrous Memory" Vered Weiss considers questions of memory, trauma and marginalization that are explored through spatial metaphors and the setting.

**Nurith Gertz** is a Professor Emerita of Hebrew Literature and Film at The Open University of Israel and a full professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at Sapir Academic College. At Tel Aviv University, she headed the Cinema Studies program of the Department of Film and Television as well as the M.A. program of Cinema Studies. She founded and headed the Department of Cultural Studies at Sapir Academic College, as well as the M.A. program of Cultural Studies at The Open University of Israel. Currently she serves as the head of Sapir Academic College's M.A. program of Cultural Studies. As a visiting professor, she has taught at U.C. Berkeley, Yale University, University of Paris 8, and Brandeis University.



Gertz won the Dov Sadan Award for outstanding research in Hebrew and Yiddish literature; the Brenner Prize for Literature in 2009 for her book *Unrepentant* which was also shortlisted for the Sapir Prize for Literature; and the Levy Eshkol Hebrew Writers' Prize in 2021 for her book *What Was Lost to Time*. Among her recent books are: *An Ocean Between Us* (Or Yehuda: Kinneret Zmora-Bitan, 2015); *Traces of Days to Come: Trauma and Ethics in Contemporary Israeli Cinema* (Tel Aviv University: Am Oved, 2017); *What Was Lost to Time* (Ma Sheavod Bazman), (Or Yehuda: Kinnert Zmora-Dvir, 2020).



**Omri Herzog** is a professor of Cultural Studies. His recent articles deal with corporal politics, emotional utopias, and the study of contemporary Israeli culture. His latest book, *Compliance and Resistance within Neoliberal Academia*, was published at Palgrave in 2021. He is a literary critic for *Haaretz* newspaper, for which he won the Bernstein Prize.

## Annual Rabin/Brill Lecture: Holocaust Diaries, Holocaust Histories by Alexandra Garbarini Tuesday, April 16, 7:00-8:30 pm, Kellogg Center, Lincoln Room

In cities, towns, and villages across eastern, central, and western Europe, in ghettos, hiding places, concentration and transit camps -- even in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Jews kept diaries. Some wrote for the first time, while others who had written before made the experiences of Jews under German occupation the subject of their literary production. More accessible as a literary form, popular among people of different ages and cultural-linguistic backgrounds, diaries reflected the perspective of the diarist on the occurrences happening to them and around them.

In her lecture, Alexandra Garbarini will consider a phenomenon which, under particular and varying conditions, developed among Jewish adults, youth, and children across Europe during the Holocaust. Rather than analyze a small number of texts which can be interpreted and reinterpreted, the focus here is an overview of diary writing for what it reveals about the perspectives of their writers, the victims. Her talk will connect the phenomenon of diary writing to the cultural, social, and even political history of the Holocaust. New readings of Jewish diaries along with the publication of new editions of diaries in multiple languages have contributed to the writing of new histories of the Holocaust.



**Alexandra Garbarini** is a historian of twentieth-century Europe and European Jewish history. Garbarini is the author of *Numbered Days: Diary Writing and the Holocaust* (2006; National Jewish Book Award finalist), and co-author of *Jewish Responses to Persecution*, volume 2, 1939-1940 (2011). She has also co-edited two volumes on violence and testimony. Her work has been supported by grants from the Fulbright Program, the DAAD, the Mellon Foundation, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Philosophical Society, and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. Her most recent publication is the English edition of the Holocaust diary of Lucien Dreyfus *'A Terrible and Terribly Interesting Epoch': The Holocaust Diary of Lucien Dreyfus* (2021). She is currently writing a new book about victim testimony to mass violence and genocide from the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust, tentatively titled, *Atrocities' Truth Tellers: Testimony before the Holocaust*. Garbarini teaches at Williams College in Massachusetts, and serves on the Academic Council of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

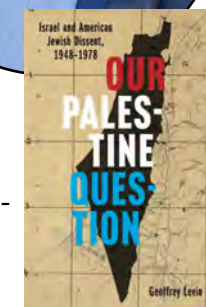
## Israel, American Jews, and Palestinian Rights: A History 1948-1978 By Geoffrey Levin Thursday, April 11, 5:30-7:00 pm, James Madison College Library, 332 Case Hall, room 338 (3rd floor)

Join us for a talk about a new book on the American Jewish relationship with Israel focused on its most urgent and sensitive issue: the question of Palestinian rights.

Author and MSU alum Geoffrey Levin will discuss the many ways that American Jews have grappled with challenging ethical and political questions stemming from the early decades of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His talk will also reveal the secret ways that Israeli, Arab, and American government actors shaped the limits of American Jewish discourse during Israel's first thirty years.



**Dr. Geoffrey Levin** is assistant professor of Middle Eastern and Jewish Studies at Emory University in Atlanta and Director of Undergraduate Engagement at Emory's Tam Institute for Jewish Studies. His first book, *Our Palestine Question: Israel and American Jewish Dissent, 1948-1978*, was released by Yale University Press in Fall 2023.



Dr. Levin was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard's Center for Jewish Studies in 2019-20. He holds a PhD in Jewish history from New York University and also studied at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Haifa. Most importantly, Geoff is a 2011 graduate of MSU's James Madison College, where he earned a major in International Relations and minors in Political Economy and a specialization in Jewish Studies.

## Serling Undergraduate Research Conference Friday, April 12, 9:00 am-5:00 pm, James Madison College Library, Club Spartan, 332 Case Hall, room 338 (3rd floor)

During this annual conference, undergraduate students will present their research papers written for Jewish Studies courses under the guidance of Jewish Studies faculty. The conference includes a keynote address at noon, by an alumnus of the Serling Institute, **Dr. Geoffrey Levin**:

### Coming Full Circle: From Jewish Studies Student to Jewish Studies Professor

Eleven years after taking Professor Yael Aronoff's "Israeli Politics and Society" course as an undergraduate at MSU, Geoffrey Levin headed back to the "Israeli Politics" classroom - but as an Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern and Jewish Studies at Emory University in Atlanta.

Dr. Levin will discuss his time as a student in Jewish Studies courses and activities in Jewish life at MSU and how they led to his subsequent work and studies in Israel, Australia, Italy, and Morocco. He'll also tell students how what he learned at MSU helped him during his years as a graduate student and how his time at MSU continues to shape his approach to being an author, professor, and mentor to students at a major research university.

# FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



**Vered Weiss's** co-edited book *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* (Eds. Weiss, Ronen, and Dinur, Lexington, 2024) comes out this January. Weiss will present a paper at the 40th Annual Conference of the Association for Israel Studies held jointly with the 12th Annual Conference of the European Association for Israel and Israel Studies. July 1-3, 2024, Charles University, Prague. The title of her paper is "Empathy and Resilience: A New Epilogue to *Israeli Culture and Emergency Routine: Normalizing Stress* (Eds. Weiss, Ronen, and Dinur, Lexington, 2024)". Weiss will also present at The International Comparative Literature Association Conference to be held March 25-26, at San Francisco State University. The title of her paper is "Borderline Outcasts: Intellect and Marginality in "Mishael" by Y. D. Berkowitz and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*".



Please consider the Serling Institute in your charitable giving this year, to support our mission to educate students and future leaders about Jewish Studies and Modern Israel.

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and click on the Give Now button. If you wish to make a gift via check, please make your check payable to Michigan State University and in the memo section include Serling Institute. Please mail it to: University Advancement, Spartan Way, 535 Chestnut Road Room 300, East Lansing, MI 48824. If you have questions about giving, please contact: Christine Radtke, CFRE, Sr. Director of Development, College of Arts & Letters at 517.353.4725 or email at [radtkech@msu.edu](mailto:radtkech@msu.edu)



SCAN ME

# PAST EVENTS FALL 2023



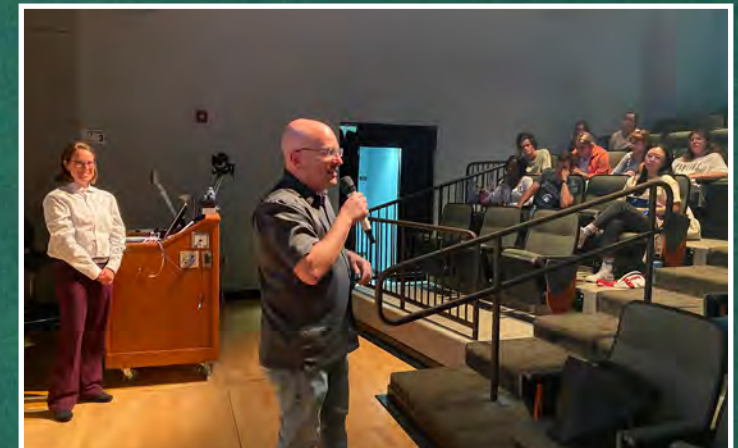
Laura Yares, Lauren Harris, Elaine Serling, Michael Serling, Yael Aronoff, and Amy Simon 08-27-2023



Yore Kedem, Guy Yehudah, and Tasha Warren 08-27-2023



Michael and Elaine Serling with JS minor Maya Weisberger 08-27-2023



Screening of *Here We Are* with Dr. Yore Kedem 09-10-2023



Film Festival Dinner 09-10-2023



"The Lost Rhapsody: A World War II Survival Story and Musical Legacy." Professor Thomas O'Halloran, Michael Serling, Interim President Teresa Woodruff, Elaine Serling, Dean Jim Forger, and Director Yael Aronoff 10-15-2023

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM GRADUATING SENIORS

*Sydnie Burnstein (Social Relations and Policy, James Madison College)*

Completing a Jewish Studies minor at MSU has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of my undergraduate experience. Through the Serling Institute, I was able to study abroad in Israel at Hebrew University, learn how to speak and read Hebrew, and study numerous other subjects including, antisemitism, Israeli politics and culture, Holocaust memory, and ancient history. I was honored to be the Jewish Studies Student Representative for the past two years. Holding this position allowed me to connect with other minors, with whom I have found community and common interest. Over the past four years, I have attended many lectures and educational events hosted by the institute. These events have enhanced my learning, influencing the way I engage in my classes and think about the world around me. I have also formed incredible relationships with Serling Institute faculty, who have supported me and all of my interests and cared deeply about my learning experience. After I graduate, I will be pursuing a Masters in Community Sustainability, specializing in community and identity-based agricultural resilience. Sydnie was awarded the Finifter Hebrew scholarship in 2021 and in 2022, the Levy Hebrew scholarship in 2022, and the Levy study abroad scholarship for study In Israel in 2021.



*Sarah Goldman (Human Biology, Lyman Briggs College and Honors College)*

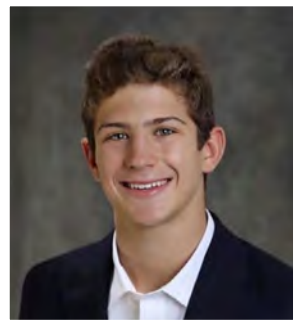
I have had such a positive experience being a Jewish Studies minor. The highlight for me has been taking three semesters of Hebrew with Yore Kedem. He taught Hebrew in a way that was fun, interesting, and informative. Additionally, Jewish Mysticism with Morgan Shipley really changed my outlook on Judaism and Kabbalah. After graduation, I am planning on attending Physician Assistant (PA) school. In my future as a healthcare provider, I will carry with me everything that I have learned throughout my Jewish Studies classes, as they have all made such a big impact on my educational journey here at MSU.



Sarah was awarded the Levy Hebrew scholarship in 2022 and in 2023.

*Ben Perry (Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy, James Madison College)*

Taking the Jewish Studies minor was one of my best decisions academically. It allowed me to explore many different perspectives and learn from others. I am very appreciative that I was able to go in depth not only on the basis of religion, but language and history. One event that stuck out to me was the Serling Institute hosting Dani Menkin, director of the documentary "Aulcie," about an American who went to Israel to play basketball for Maccabi Tel-Aviv. Menkin showcases the vast differences between life in Israel and America, while also illustrating the similarities people have beyond borders. I also took Hebrew with Professor Yore Kedem, which gave me a good knowledge base to travel within and around Israel. Another experience of mine was learning about Judaism with Professor Morgan Shipley, hearing from backgrounds that were guided by different belief systems than mine, while we all analyzed the same text, made me incredibly grateful to be a part of such a great academic community.



Ben was awarded the Finifter Hebrew scholarship in 2021 and in 2022.

*Andrew Schulman (Social Relations and Policy, James Madison College)*

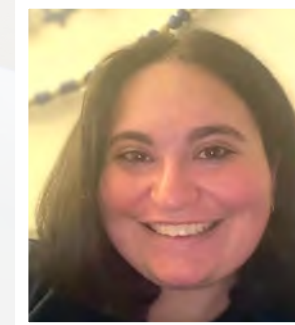
The Serling Institute and the Jewish Studies minor have supported and created some of the most valuable experiences for my growth throughout college here at MSU. As a minor, I learned Hebrew in a specialized class for my level and interests with Professor Vered Weiss. I also enjoyed learning about the cultural diversity of Israel from Professor Yore Kedem while studying abroad at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, with the help of the Levy Scholarship. Back home, I have especially enjoyed interning for the institute under Professor Aronoff, and attending engaging events such as fascinating speakers, the annual Israeli Film Festival, and the faculty bake-off. Not to mention, the Jewish Studies community has been extremely



supportive of students during times of uncertainty on campus, providing resources, hosting informative events, and just checking in. After graduation, I plan to take a gap year and ultimately apply to law school. Andrew was awarded the Finifter Hebrew scholarship in 2021, the Levy Hebrew scholarship in 2022, the James and Anna Hersh Scholarship in 2022, the Levy study abroad scholarship for study In Israel in 2022 and the Eric and Deborah Abramson Scholarship for Holocaust Studies in 2023.

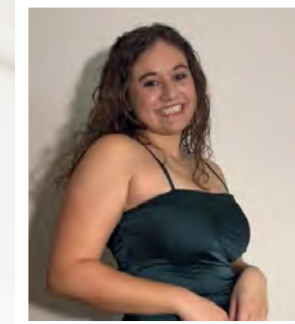
*Lela Weintraub (Residential College in the Arts & Humanities)*

I have loved being a Jewish Studies minor. Through the minor I had the incredible opportunity to study abroad in Israel, a life-changing experience that deepened my understanding of the country, both in the modern and historical sense. Further, being in the Jewish Studies program has allowed me to be part of the amazing Jewish Studies community. While I am sad to leave the program upon my graduation, I am excited to see what lies ahead. After graduation I am planning on taking a gap year before applying to law school. Lela was awarded the Finifter Hebrew scholarship in 2021 and in 2022, and the Levy Hebrew scholarship in 2022.



*Courtney Yaldao (Criminal Justice, College of Social Science)*

Becoming a Jewish studies minor, never crossed my mind before having the chance to study in Israel. I am a criminal justice major with another minor in human behavior and social services. I never thought about studying abroad until I learned about the opportunity to participate in the faculty-led Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel program to the Hebrew University over the summer. I had already taken a great course on Jerusalem at MSU with Professor Vered Weiss. When traveling in Israel, I learned so much about Jewish culture and how much it related to me and my own culture. I made lifelong friends who taught me so much and helped me realize how amazing it is when communities come together. This trip was the reason I wanted to continue the Jewish Studies minor. After the trip, I saw how I can interpret my own studies and experience to Jewish studies.

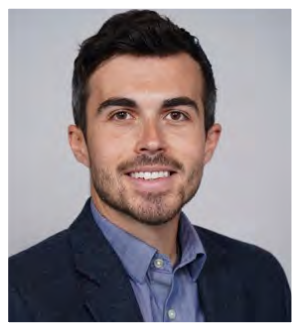


Studying this has been an amazing eye opener. Courtney was awarded the Levy study abroad scholarship for study In Israel in 2023, and the Slade scholarship in 2023.

# ALUMNUS HIGHLIGHTS

*Shaun Spivak (Religious Studies, College of Arts and Letters, College of Communication Arts & Sciences '11)*

Embarking on a Religious Studies undergraduate program and Jewish Studies specialization opened the world to me and allowed me to think critically about other viewpoints and opinions while being empathetic and considerate of different backgrounds and approaches. The catalyst of this was my experience studying abroad in Israel through the Jewish Studies Program at Hebrew University of Jerusalem with Professor Yael Aronoff and studying with Professor Eric Aronoff in the "Nature, Culture and Environmental Sustainability in a Green Israel" study abroad program, which exposed me to the intricacies of the complex political, cultural and socio-economic challenges that not only plagued the Middle East, but places all over the world. This considerably shaped the way that I see the world and approached my personal and professional life moving forward, and has allowed me to navigate situations with individuals, teams and organizations globally. After graduating and spending some time working in the technology sector, I moved to a software startup company and relocated to London, UK where I spent over 8 years leading their Customer Support and Project Management teams for the company's EMEA business. This involved traveling to and collaborating heavily with individuals in countries all over Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Currently I reside back in the US in Denver, CO where I work remotely for a different software startup in a global capacity, partnering with individuals all over the world. My experience at Michigan State empowered me to seek these types of challenges out, embrace the differences in people and places, and enjoy the work that I do.





The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute  
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