

Harmony in Diversity: Exploring Azerbaijan's Jewish Heritage

Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 5:45- 7:30 PM
303 International Center, 427 N. Shaw Lane.

Azerbaijan, located in the South Caucasus region at the intersection of Southwest Asia and Southeastern Europe, was established in 1918, and was the first democratic state in the Muslim world. Throughout its history, Muslims and Jews, as well as Shiites and Sunnis, have lived together with mutual respect. The Jews of Azerbaijan are a deep-rooted Jewish community and are accepted as an integral part of the local Shi'ite Azerbaijani society. Azerbaijan's Jews were divided into two main communities: a native Jewish community that lived hundreds of years in the Caucasus, and Russian-speaking Jews who migrated to the region since the end of the 19th century. In addition, there were small communities of Modern-Aramaic speaking Jews from Iranian Kurdistan and Georgian Jews.

Join us for an engaging evening featuring a panel discussion and a documentary film dedicated to the rich Jewish heritage of Azerbaijan and Georgia. This is a collaboration between the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, the Center for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies, the Humphrey Fellowship (a Fulbright Exchange Program), the Muslim Studies Program, the Asian Studies Center, Templeton Religious Trust, James Madison College, International Studies and Programs, and the College of Arts and Letters.

We will watch the documentary film "Remembering Jewish Heritage in Azerbaijan and Georgia." This captivating documentary delves into the rich history and enduring legacy of Jewish communities in these two neighboring countries. It highlights their cultural, religious, and social contributions while showcasing a harmonious coexistence with other ethnic and religious groups over centuries. Through personal stories, historical narratives, and breathtaking visuals of synagogues and cultural landmarks, the film preserves the memory of these vibrant communities and their unique traditions, beautifully woven into the broader heritage of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Co-Sponsors: College of Arts and Letters, College of Social Science, James Madison College, Residential College of Arts and Humanities, International Studies and Programs,

Following the film screening, our distinguished panelists will delve into the peaceful coexistence of Jewish and Muslim communities in Azerbaijan, highlighting their shared history and cultural collaboration. Panelists include:



Chen Bram is an anthropologist, educator and organizational psychologist who is a senior lecturer in Hadassah Academic College, and a research fellow at the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Bram conducted field work in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Israel, and among post-Soviet immigrants in NYC, has worked as an engaged anthropologist on multicultural policy, and has served as a Visiting Professor at UPenn; Clark University; MSU, and the University of Florida.

Gulnara Ismailova is Fulbright Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow at MSU and an accomplished program management and human resources expert with over two decades of experience spanning Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Germany, and the UK. She holds advanced degrees in Political Science and International Economic Relations and is the Founder and CEO of Resource HUB, leading sustainable development projects and empowering youth and women through education and skill-building.



Matthew Zierler is an associate professor of international relations at James Madison College who focuses on foreign policy, international security, and international law, and is currently researching the foreign policy of Azerbaijan. He has taught on four

separate occasions at ADA University, in Baku, Azerbaijan. He also served as Associate Dean and Interim Dean of the Honors College. Dr. Zierler will be moderating the panel.

Complimentary refreshments provided



The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute
for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Center for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Muslim Studies Program
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Humphrey Fellowship
A Fulbright Exchange Program



RESOURCE HUB

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



TEMPLETON RELIGION TRUST

Asian Studies Center
International Studies & Programs