

Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures

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JEFFERSON AND THE BARBARY PIRATES: *The Many Meanings of Respect*



Commodore Stephen Decatur boarding a Tripolitan gunboat during a naval engagement, August 3, 1804

Until this century, Thomas Jefferson’s foreign policy received little respect. Jefferson’s statecraft was commonly lamented as naively idealist, even “pacifistic,” best forgotten.

Since 9/11, Jefferson’s foreign policy reputation has been reborn. President Jefferson’s war with the Barbary Pirates, once confined to footnotes of even sympathetic biographers, is now held up as a model for how America ought to fight terror and Islam. The theme runs through multiple best-selling books, including a recent page-turner by Brian Kilmeade, cohost of Fox and Friends.

Jefferson now gets “respect” for being the first American President to make war on a Muslim power. Yet there is much more to this story, beginning with a contemplation of the different meanings of “respect” in Jefferson’s thought and action.



THE MANY MEANINGS OF RESPECT
continued from page 1

First, to be sure, Jefferson was an early advocate of using force against threats from Barbary states. As Minister to France, he argued that America must build a credible navy, one that could “cut to pieces” the pirate menace to American commerce. In Jefferson’s view, such American resolve would serve a larger purpose: “It will procure us respect in Europe... and respect is a safe-guard to interest. (July 11, 1786)

As Secretary of State, Jefferson proposed an armed confederation of like-minded powers (Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, Venice, et. al) to defend against the “habitual depredations” from the “lawless pirates.” Jefferson’s novel scheme for Mediterranean collective security was ahead of its time, both in Europe and at home.

As President in 1801, Jefferson put his convictions into practice, refusing to pay new tributes and then rallying American support for what became an at times dramatic and successful four-year war with Tripoli.

Jefferson scholar Frank Cogliano (in his recent *Empire of Liberty*) explains Jefferson’s war with Tripoli as driven by a belief that the new American republic needed overseas trade to survive. That is, “the threat posed by the Barbary corsairs to American trade was a threat to American liberty.”

From this vantage point, Jefferson is not perceiving the

conflict with the Barbary powers in religious terms, even as he was aware of how some Barbary emissaries might invoke Islam to defend their actions. For Jefferson, this conflict was not over religious creed.

Jefferson could invoke respect for religion as a bridge to resolve the conflict. This is particularly manifest in how war with Tunis was averted. Amid the war with Tripoli, the US navy impounded a neutral Tunisian cruiser, and Hamuda, Bey of Tunis, demanded its return. In blunt reply, American Commodore John Rodgers on August 1, 1805 blockaded the Tunisian harbor and gave Hamuda “36 hours to declare if he wanted war or peace.”

Cooler local heads prevailed, and Tunis became the first Arab power to send an Ambassador to America, to meet with Jefferson. Among other marks of respect, Jefferson would host the first after-sunset Iftar dinner for the visiting Muslim Ambassador.

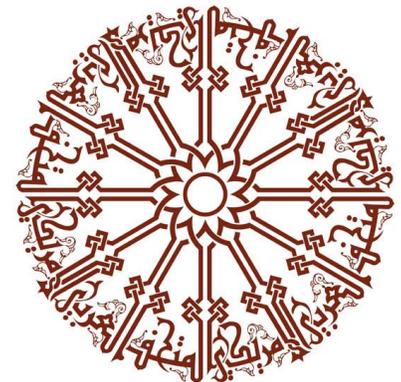
Jefferson eventually would write to Hamuda, in late June, 1806, expressing his “great concern” that Commodore Rodgers had conducted himself “in a manner not consistent with the respect due to your Excellency’s character...” While defending the disputed seizure, Jefferson offered to replace the decaying ship with one “more worthy” and sent it and other “evidences of good will” to the Bey, with “my prayers that God will have you, Great and Good Friend, in his holy keeping.”

To Denise Spellberg, (in *Thomas Jefferson’s Our’an*), this sentence “was a startling benediction for an American president, to suggest that both men were equals before a shared God.” Yet Spellberg assesses it as considered and consistent with previous exchanges between Jefferson & Hamuda since 1801.

Jefferson’s magnanimous letter of 1806 was well received by Hamuda. Its respectful tone helped expedite the resolution of remaining complications. By the following February, the Bey wrote to thank Jefferson for his politeness and the “reasonableness and tact” of his emissaries, then pledged that future relations would be founded on “principles of entire and perfect reciprocity.”

A fuller rendering then of Jefferson’s encounters with the Barbary powers suggests that “respect” in part could emanate from the proverbial barrel of a gun. Yet in other instances, its strength can be found in carefully chosen words, not swords.

SCOTT HARROP



Introducing GSMS

THE NEW GLOBAL STUDIES/MESALC DEGREE



Tessa Farmer

Faculty of the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (MESALC) and the Program in Global Studies (GS) began meeting early in 2015 to discuss the creation of a joint undergraduate major. GS faculty saw the value in more regional expertise for undergraduate programs; MESALC faculty wanted to explore Global Studies as one piece in a larger plan to invigorate a renewed and contextualized area studies paradigm. The new Global Studies – (M)iddle East and (S)outh Asia program received final approval in Spring 2017, and has accepted its first class of students for the 2017-2018 academic year.

The new program combines language (through a third year of study), area study (spanning the offerings in the MESALC department), and courses from across the five Global Studies Tracks. The gateway course, *The Global in Situ: Perspectives from the Middle East and South Asia*, suggests the intellectual outlook that this new major seeks to develop.

“The global,” which exists nowhere and everywhere, can and must be apprehended in its local and regional manifestations: “in situ.” With this new major, we seek to teach students, who are being invited to see themselves as “global citizens,” that one of the keys to effective citizenship both at home and abroad is deep knowledge of specific places and times beyond “home.”

The inaugural class of GSMS, selected in April of this year, will have seven students. Within the new class, two students are focused on South Asia. Maha Ghorī will continue her studies in Urdu/Hindi while in the program along with classes that will serve her in her desired career of international law. Isha Kelkar, a native speaker of Marathi, is pre-med here at UVA and interested in Global Public health. Five of the students in the inaugural class are focused on the Middle East, and have extensive language training in Arabic. Fazlah Rahaman will study Arabic in Morocco over the summer, and Sterns Swetnam and John Urbano have pursued advanced Arabic language at UVA. Grayson Rost is interested in putting her language and regional training in the Middle East to work in international law. Makeda Petri is a rising fourth year who has moved from Global Development Studies (GDS) to the new GSMS major and has developed a keen interest in the relationship between religion and politics. The GSMS program is delighted to have such a strong first class of scholars. In future years, GSMS anticipates that it will remain a small yet robust program of somewhere between 10 and 15 students entering a year.

TESSA FARMER



Michelle Sawwan

MESALC GRADUATE TO STUDY SOCIOLOGY OF THE MIDDLE EAST



Michelle Sawwan

I am very happy to report that I have been admitted to begin my doctoral studies in Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, where I will be joining a cohort of five incoming students to the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies in the fall of 2017. My journey to this point has been a long and circuitous one, though my path and training in the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (MESALC) as an undergraduate and graduate student has indeed prepared me for what I am about to undertake as a sociologist-in-training of conflict and peace studies, who will seek to study social and political phenomena in the Middle Eastern context.

My academic entrée to Middle Eastern languages and cultures was taking Arabic 101 and 102 with Prof. Mohammed Sawaie in the summer of 2008. Two semesters later I was an Arabic Language and Literature major; in 2010 I interned at the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee in Washington, D.C. on the recommendation of Prof. Hanadi Al-Samman; and by 2014 I had spent two summers in Jordan studying in and working for the UVa-Yarmouk Arabic abroad program.

I finished bachelor's and master's degrees in MESALC; worked in the UVa Office of the Dean of Students to support underrepresented students; and recently cycled back to more academic interests by working as a departmental research assistant, in addition to serving as an Arabic-English interpreter for the International Rescue Committee here in town. At the time that I began my current two jobs I had just submitted my applications to enter a doctoral studies program, and was still deliberating whether to focus on school or become a career professional. Fortunately, the door opened for me to do a PhD, and I have happily accepted this opportunity to continue my trajectory as a social scientist of the Middle East.

My interest in the social sciences as a lens – along with language and culture – for looking at Middle Eastern politics and society was something that was growing even while I was a student in MESALC. The subjects that I chose to treat often dealt with conflict, social avenues for conflict resolution, and constructing relational pathways toward just peace – whether in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or for people torn apart by sectarianism and civil war, for instance. Studying and working with Professors Mohammed Sawaie, Hanadi Al-Samman, William Quandt, Abdulaziz Sachedina, Ahmed al-Rahim, Ahmad Obiedat, Bilal Maanaki, Suad Mohamed, Elizabeth Thompson, Robert Hueckstedt, Tessa Farmer, and others, both strengthened my language and culture knowledge, and gave me a sensibility for Middle Eastern social and political issues that will serve me well in this next chapter. I will seek to maintain and grow this set of skills while learning the discipline and methodologies of Sociology in order to study social phenomena in the Middle East as accurately and insightfully as possible. With MESALC's blessing, I will join others who are making it their life's work to foster better, more accurate understanding of, and engagement with, this region of the world.

MICHELLE SAWWAN

Adrienne Resha

“THERE AND BACK AGAIN”



Adrienne Resha

I like to joke about having a “Jeffersonian” education. My bachelor’s degree is from Florida State, a university that counts Thomas Jefferson’s grandson, Francis W. Eppes, as a founder. As an alumna of the University of Virginia, I hold a master’s degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Mr. Jefferson’s University. This coming fall I will be attending TJ’s own alma mater, the College of William & Mary, as a doctoral student in their American Studies program. Jefferson seems to have almost had a hand in this transition from one area of study, and area study, to another.

This is, in part, a result of his having recorded the most basic definition of what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America. When Jefferson declared, “... all men are created equal... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” in the Declaration of Independence, he declared that which made American citizens, those men with rights, different from citizens of the British Empire. Jefferson’s declaration also affirmed that which made American citizens different from Americans, as his definition of citizen included white, landowning men and excluded women, indigenous peoples, and slaves. Inasmuch as I take pride in having a “Jeffersonian” education,

I recognize that I am not the kind of student Jefferson would have wanted in the Academical Village, much less the kind of person that could have been a citizen of the United States in Jefferson’s time.

Among the merits of Jefferson’s writings are their durability and flexibility. The ambiguity of his words has allowed for those “men with rights” to become “men and women of almost infinite backgrounds with rights,” although they are not always inalienable. As a woman of Arab- and European-American descent, I can claim American citizenship as a right of birth and in doing so I am able to expand on what it means to be an American citizen. This idea of expanding the definition of citizen is something that has become central to my academic work.

My master’s thesis was titled, “The ‘Embiggening’: Marvel’s Muslim Ms. Marvel and American Myth.” Superficially it is a paper about superheroes; less superficially it is a paper about “embiggening” what it means to be an American citizen through the very American media of superhero comic books. Marvel’s Muslim Ms. Marvel, Kamala Khan, debuted the same year that I started at UVA. She has the honor of being the first Muslim- and Pakistani-American superheroine to be featured in a solo series. Her addition to American media, beyond comics into television and more traditional literature, is one that reflects the ever-expanding notion of what it means to be an American citizen. It is thanks to my “Jeffersonian” education thus far that I get to keep reading, writing, and talking about Muslim and Arab representation in American media, all of which I look forward to doing at that other Virginia school.



ADRIENNE RESHA

Ellie Beahm

PUTTING PERSIAN INTO PRACTICE IN TAJIKISTAN



Ellie was the Princess of Spring for American Councils' celebration of *Navruz*, or the Persian New Year, that takes place on the spring equinox.

Many things come to mind when I think of Tajikistan: instant coffee, overcrowded taxi-vans, playing Settlers of Catan with expats, cheap ice cream, Soviet-era theaters, stray dogs, bumpy roads, kids playing pickup soccer games in alleyways, beautiful mountain vistas, and freshly baked bread.

The seven months I spent in Tajikistan in 2016 was a time of unparalleled personal growth and finding lifelong friendships. I am grateful to the National Security Education Program for funding my travels, and I am grateful to the Persian program at UVA for setting me up for success in this critical opportunity for linguistic and cultural immersion.

We are so lucky to have a strong Persian program at the University. Not many

schools offer the language at all, and very few to the degree that we have here. The ability to study Farsi was one of the many factors that led me to choose to come to the University. Without the strong basis in Farsi that I gained during my first three semesters at UVA, I would not have been able to get the most out of the Eurasian Regional Language Program during my time abroad. I arrived in Dushanbe with a strong grasp of grammar and a high level of analytical reading. The structure of the academic program, in which I spent four hours a day with an Iranian or Tajik professor and one other student, forced me to gain confidence and proficiency in speaking, listening, and writing.

My time in Tajikistan also offered me a glimpse into Persian and post-Soviet culture that is impossible to fully capture anywhere



One of Ellie's favorite experiences from her time abroad was the group trip to Badakhshon. Here is Ellie with some local friends she made in a small village on the border with Afghanistan.



Ellie and one of her classmates atop a fortress from the 12th century along the border with Afghanistan in the scenic Pamir Mountains.

else. Language and culture are mirrors reflecting each other, and gaining a familiarity with Tajik and Iranian culture through living in Tajikistan and getting to know local Iranians has allowed me a much fuller, greatly enriched understanding of the Persian language. Observing the Tajik way of life – their hospitality, the way they value social connections, and their slower pace of life compared to Americans – has caused me to re-asses my own values and the way I live day-to-day.

The Persian program at UVA has continued to support me in my eager pursuit of the language since my return from Tajikistan. It has been a joy to see the program grow and to be a part of that growth.

I have also found a plethora of opportunities in Charlottesville, such as volunteering with an Afghan family through the International Rescue Committee and tutoring local Iranian immigrants, to apply my knowledge of Persian language and culture to rewarding, everyday situations.

Over the last several years, with two opportunities to travel to Tajikistan for linguistic and cultural immersion as well as a strong academic base in Farsi through UVA's Middle Eastern and South Asian Language and Culture department, Persian has become an integral part of my life and future. I cannot wait to take the lessons I have learned, from Charlottesville to Dushanbe, and apply them to an enriching career that will impact the lives of many.

ELLIE BEAHM



Josh Bocher

UVA IN MOROCCO



Al-Akhawayn University

UVA in Morocco's Arabic Language program provides the unique opportunity to hone your language skills in a dynamic linguistic environment with students from around the globe.

The program is based at Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane, the aptly nicknamed "Switzerland of Morocco." In addition to its familiar college town climate, the city is nestled in the last remnants of the North African woodlands and boasts ski resorts, roaming arts festivals, and a rather exciting Ramadan nightlife with no shortage of sweets.

UVA in Morocco is facilitated by Al-Akhawayn University's Arabic Language & North African Studies *intensive* summer program—emphasis on intensive. Students will significantly improve their language skills and comprehension in the short span of eight weeks granted that they are prepared to sacrifice most of their time to do the work. Nevertheless, the university provides numerous important resources to unburden its participants. The faculty members are at the top of their class and readily accessible during downtime. Moroccan roommates are more than happy to assist you in your linguistic endeavors, and the surprisingly

spacious rooms you'll share offer much needed breathing room and stunning views of Ifrane's alpine environment. It also helps that the university system is based on the American model and requires little adaptation.

In addition to UVA familiars, the university hosts students spanning the globe, from North America to Europe to elsewhere in North Africa and the Middle East and beyond. The learning process is informed as much by the American-style format as it is by the diverse cultural exchanges and methodologies that other students bring to the table. Students will absorb new processes of acquiring and maintaining information as they dialogue with their peers inside and outside of class while building strong international solidarity. Indeed, it is very difficult to say goodbye at the end of eight weeks. Tears will be shed.

Given its strategic location and proximity to Europe, Morocco provides a strong backdrop for the mastery of Arabic and language skills in general. Aside from the official state languages—Arabic and Amazigh—considerable segments of the population speak English, French, and Spanish. These disparate languages interact in the form of the common tongue of the population, or Moroccan Darija, a unit of which is provided alongside Modern Standard Arabic to aid students in their everyday lives and travels.

Beyond Ifrane, the program takes its participants to some of the most important cultural, historical, and economic capitals of Morocco, such as Fez, Marrakesh, and the Sahara. Among other highlights, students will have the opportunity to tour the medieval Islamic *madāris*, explore *Jāmi' al-Fina'*, observe the souks and their traditional handicraft industries in the old cities, and ride a camel along a picturesque mountain of sand in the desert. Quiet, idyllic Ifrane is always a tranquil place to return to after a long weekend of traveling.

JOSH BOCHER

Abir Abyad

A DREAM BECOMES TRUE



Abir Abyad

I grew up in Damascus, Syria; I joined the working ranks, working for years as a manager at a small clothing manufacturer. But, even back then, I had heard so much about the University of Virginia. When my older brother (*Law '96*) gave me his graduation Jefferson Cup as a souvenir, I thought to myself that perhaps, one day, I would get my own. Well, my long-held dream has now become a reality.

In 2008, I immigrated to the United States from Syria and soon thereafter returned to school, first at my local community college, then, after earning an automatic transfer, at Mr. Jefferson's University, where I graduated in 2014 with *highest-distinction*. But I could not stay away for long. So, a year later, I returned as a graduate student in the Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures Department.

As a native speaker of Arabic, I am passionate about sharing my love of that language and culture with other university students. Now, as a teaching assistant, I have been formally teaching Arabic to undergraduates since the fall of 2015, and it has turned out to be the highlight of my graduate school experience! So much so that it is now a serious option for my professional aspirations, a long way away from the days when I thought I wanted a business degree.

I came to UVA determined to pursue an

MBA, but Prof. Hanadi Al-Samman made changing my career goals very easy. I still remember my first course with her "Introduction to Arabic Drama". She made it all seem so interesting, and something lit up in my head. I became more curious about Middle East Studies and, one Al-Samman course after another, my plans for a business degree went up in flames. Switching from degrees in math and business administration to Middle Eastern Studies now seems like it was the easiest thing to do. In fact, it was not so easy (with all that reading and writing in English!), but I'm really happy I did it.

Going back to UVA for my master's degree has opened up so many opportunities for me, not only to teach my native and beautiful language, but also to get exposure to variations in culture and ideology in a way I never thought possible. This past summer, for example, I traveled to Palestine to do some field research about Palestinian cinema (the subject of my master's thesis), and that trip gave me the chance to experience how culture and the arts evolve under the harsh conditions of military occupation. While doing my research, I volunteered at an institution called Ibdaa, which runs a community center in a Palestinian refugee camp (Dheisheh) in Bethlehem. Ibdaa was initially set up simply to provide a safe environment in which Palestinian children can learn the arts and be exposed to some cultural activities. It very quickly became the focal point of the refugee camp's community life, by providing an outlet for the peaceful and creative expression of the resident refugees' daily struggle with Israeli occupation. Ibdaa has not eliminated the military occupation for those refugees, but it has certainly eased their daily suffering and gave them a very effective means to reach the outside world.

My Virginia education has had an immense impact on my life. I owe much of that to Mr. Jefferson's vision for the University as a vehicle for sustained human development.

ABIR ABYAD

Qasim Chattha

OF POETS AND SHAGIRDS,
AN URDU MAHFIL



Every last Friday of the month, Urdu poetry enthusiasts get together for a *mahfil* led by Professor Mehr Farooqi. This *mahfil*, or gathering, provides an opportunity to explore the dazzling vistas some of the most prominent poets in Urdu have fashioned over the centuries via their pens of imagination. Of course, all of this intense analysis takes a toll on the readers, so as a remedy, piping hot chai and *garma garam* samosas are offered to all attendees—because, of course, chai and samosas possess the quintessential South Asian magical powers of inspiring the deepest understanding of poetry. In all seriousness, however, attending this *mahfil* has helped us all get familiarized with some of the most thought provoking poems in Urdu. Poetry has this ability to make us question, make us think, and in turn, help us all develop higher sensitivities about the world around us. With this purpose in mind, we gather to absorb the ink of some of the most prolific poets in Urdu on the last Friday of each month.

All of us, in our own unique ways, unwind the strings that the poetry casts around us, and use them to weave a complex pattern that both pulls us together, and leaves us in awe.

Over the last two months, we have read two of the most famous Urdu poets: Mirza Asadullah Khan “Ghalib,” and “Allama” Muhammad Iqbal. In the coming months, we plan to further expand our repertoire. All suggestions are welcome, and participation is encouraged. Moreover, to supplement the written texts, we often listen to musical performances (*qawwali*) of the poems. In addition to helping us enjoy the poetry via another mode, these performances help us both develop a better intuitive sense of the poetic meter(s), and experience the wonder that is Hindustāni (Indian) Classical Music. Performances add another layer to the whole picture by helping us understand how the various permutations of intonations make the poems an ocean without shore— with no true linear end or interpretation. All this is to say that this *mahfil* provides students at UVA a very unique opportunity to explore a treasure of a poetic tradition that can help us be better students of the world. An important note here is that no knowledge of the Urdu (*nastaliq*) script is necessary to attend this *mahfil*; translations of the poetry are provided. There is no dearth of samosas or chai either. So, feel free to drop-in during our next *mahfil*. All we ask of you is to bring your curiosity, and appetite.

Please feel free to contact us at mqc2vd@virginia.edu if you have any questions and/or want to have your name added to the mailing list.

MUHAMMED QASIM CHATTHA



Lilly Crown

MENAR FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT TO SUPPORT URBAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN



Lilly Crown in Wadi Rum, Jordan

Lilly Crown is a graduating fourth-year with a distinguished major in Middle Eastern Languages and Literatures and a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certification. She will move to Jordan this August as a MENAR fellow.

The MENAR Program matches fellows with partner organizations in the region. The organization that selected Lilly is called the Collateral Repair Project, a grassroots organization providing food assistance and emergency relief to recently resettled Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Amman, Jordan. Lilly will be serving as their Programs and Administrative Manager.

During the past four years at the UVA, Lilly has studied the Middle East across 10 academic disciplines, including anthropology, politics, education, literature, gender studies, sociology, history, religious studies, language and law. She has supplemented this knowledge with classes about policy, education, Non-Governmental Organization-management, human rights activism and conflict resolution. Indeed, her life's aspirations are a product of this academic background.

In addition to her in-class experiences, Lilly has also developed her research skills through the Distinguished Major's Program. During the summer of 2016, she conducted a study while abroad in Jordan that looks at the

relationship between women's agency and information and communication technology. Though the circumstances were challenging, she left after two and a half months with interview data from 27 women working in NGOs, bilateral aid organizations, media and education institutions, and governmental agencies. During her fourth-year, she analyzed her data under the supervision of her thesis advisor, Professor Geeta Patel, from the MESALC Department.

Lilly has also added the experience of working at the Hopes Women's Center in the Gaza Refugee Camp in Jerash, Jordan, to her list of academic achievements.

"My biggest accomplishment during that time was designing and launching Banaat Connect, an online language-exchange program between women in the camp learning English and American university women learning Arabic," Lilly said. "I learned there that I work at my best when seeking to mend the part of the world that is within my reach, working on the ground to form relationships and getting engaged at the project and organizational level."

The MENAR Fellowship will allow Lilly to return to Jordan. It will give her valuable experience that will help determine her future graduate studies in humanitarian issues.

"After working for different types of institutions that are serving similar problems and crises, I plan to return to school to get a master's of science in International Development and Humanitarian Aid or a Masters of Education in International Education Policy," Lilly said. "I hope to continue working abroad for intergovernmental or nongovernmental organizations, providing humanitarian relief to at-risk populations."

"I'm honored and excited to be one of this year's fellows. The work I do will be humbling and it will be the perfect start to a career in public service."



John Al-Haddad

MESALC GRADUATE TO STUDY OTTOMAN HISTORY AT UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



John Al-Haddad

John Al-Haddad graduated from the University in May 2016, where he double majored in Middle Eastern Studies and History. During his time at MESALC, he took a wide variety of Arabic language and Middle East-related content courses, as well as Persian language courses in his fourth year.

After graduation, John participated in the Critical Language Scholarship program in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where he continued to hone his Persian language skills. The Critical Language Scholarship is a U.S. State Department-sponsored program that funds an intensive study of ‘critical’ languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi-Urdu, Persian, Turkish, etc.

Upon his return to the States, John began the process of applying to graduate programs. After much deliberation, John has decided to attend the University of Chicago’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies. He was also fortunate to have received a sizable University scholarship that will help fund his studies.

At the University of Chicago, John will complete an M.A., continuing his study of Arabic and Persian. He will also begin a study of Turkish, in preparation for deeper studies of early modern Middle Eastern and Ottoman history. John ultimately hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in history, concentrating on Ottoman cultural and social history.

John is extremely thankful for the time spent with the MESALC family, and looks forward to bringing some of that love with him to Chicago!

JOHN AL-HADDAD



Global Currents in Place

WORKSHOP BRINGS TOGETHER SCHOLARS AND STUDENTS



Professor Farmer's students at OpenGrounds

On April 28th and 29th, MESALC and the Global Studies program jointly hosted a workshop entitled *The BioSphere in the Middle East and North Africa: Global Currents in Place*. The *Global Currents in Place Workshop* was an intensive two day exchange between scholars from Amherst College, Bard College, UC Irvine, UC Santa Cruz, The University of South Carolina, and the University of Virginia who have undertaken significant ethnographic research on the environment in the Middle East and North Africa.

In bringing together budding scholars of the environment of the MENA and their most recent written research, this exchange shed important light on how we understand environmental change in MENA, and also spoke to central questions within anthropology, geography, sociology, Science and Technology Studies (STS), and related fields.

The *Workshop* was embedded in a first-time course, "Examining Sustainability in Place: The Environment in the Middle East and South Asia," a 3000 level topics course in MESALC which attracted students from around the University. Students read foundational texts and recent scholarship in the field and engaged with a series of questions: Is there a culture out there that has the "sacred knowledge" necessary to save our planet?

What can mosquitos teach us about what it means to be human? Does the desert explain why the Middle East is so full of conflict? If the Ganga river is so sacred, why is it so polluted? Can we "manage" and "invent" our way out of global environmental catastrophe? How much of the Syrian civil war can be explained by drought?

These questions highlight the underlying project of the class, and drove the readings and activities that we engaged in over the semester. The final project of the course was a poster on an individually-selected research project that students presented during a poster session at the *Global Currents in Place Workshop*. Students had the opportunity to receive feedback from these experts in the field, as well as help shape the trajectory of this emerging scholarly conversation.

Additionally, the Workshop organized a roundtable conversation between the visiting scholars and UVA Faculty Phoebe Crisman, Mehr Farooqi, Richard Cohen, Samhita Sunya, and Sreerka Sathiamma. Round Table participants addressed questions fashioned by students in the Examining Sustainability in Place course, and students in attendance had a chance to ask follow up questions.

The BioSphere in the Middle East and North Africa: Global Currents in Place Workshop was a rich intellectual engagement that provided both scholars and students with the opportunity to ask important questions and push scholarly research forward. Thank you very much to Richard Handler and Farzaneh Milani for their guidance, enthusiasm and support for this endeavor. Melissa Slogan and Cliff Maxwell in Global Grounds and Cameron Clayton in MESALC deserve appreciation for their hard work. A special note of thanks for graduating senior Kylie Grow for her tireless efforts over the course of the spring semester to make this Workshop a success!

TESSA FARMER

BRIDGES, NOT WALLS

The Healing Power of Literature in the Middle East & South Asia



Jahan Ramazani

On April 17th, the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures hosted the Page-Barbour Conference “Bridges, Not Walls: The Healing Power of Literature in the Middle East and South Asia.” The conference was organized by our department chair, Professor Farzaneh Milani, and featured speakers from the University of Virginia as well as other prestigious universities across the country. The conference sought to facilitate an open, and timely, discussion on past and potential cross-cultural discourse among writers and literatures from the Middle East, South Asia, and Euro-America at a time when issues of barriers and cultural reductionism have become a national preoccupation.

The keynote speech delivered by Professor Ramazani kicked off the conference with a thought provoking presentation, “A Bridge Taken for a Wall, a Wall Taken for a Bridge,” which analyzed and discussed Persian art, poetry, and literary translation in the context of global discourse and cross-cultural exchange. Professor Ramazani provided insights in to both the challenges and the rich opportunities in the dialectics of translation and transcultural discourse, beginning with the historical intercultural interactions, influences, and interchanges between Persian and European artists and writers.

Former discourses have painted these cultures as diametrically opposed, when in fact there existed a widespread cosmopolitanism which has resulted in a rich literary and artistic record which spans the distances, both literal and conceptual, between these cultural milieus. Ramazani particularly focused on the Irish poet W. B. Yates’s poem “Byzantium” in the context of recognizing and appreciating the originality of Eastern arts and ideas and their influence on Western forms. In Yates’s poem we can identify a translation and appropriation of foreign forms in which cultural dialectics are bridged together in complementary modalities.

The second half of Professor Ramazani’s presentation transitioned to provide an important counterbalance to his assertions of cross-cultural bridges by illustrating the limitations of literary translation. By using the example of the popularity of the works of the Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, Professor Ramazani indicated what is literally lost in literary translation. The richness of metaphors, alliteration, meter, and the cultural subjectivity of thematic properties are among the literary devises and content that are often incapable of being transferred from the source language to the target language in their full richness. By illustrating this point, Professor Ramazani sought to convey that, despite the importance of cross-cultural translation and discourse, there exist important limitations. Literary translation can result in lost meanings and misapprehensions of the author’s intent, thus eliminating the culturally specific socio-religious contexts and purposes of the original text. Often, Rumi’s sacred poetry is transformed for Western audiences into popularized secular translations, thus eliminating the devotional elements that form the core of the writer’s work. This is not to say that translation is ultimately impossible, but rather to recognize and appreciate the important limitations that exist along the boundaries of language while still striving for ongoing discourse and understanding.



Professor Ramazani’s engaging discussion set the tone for a day of cross-cultural discourse that highlighted the immediacy of intersectional dialogue. Each of the accomplished scholars that presented at the conference offered an important contribution to this end, and illustrated both the power and the capacity for nourishment that the literary arts embody. The conference also featured a welcome and brief introduction from the panel chair MESALC’s Associate Professor Hanadi Al-Samman, followed by the opening remarks from Dean Francesca Fiorani. The morning session began with the keynote speech delivered by Professor Jahan

Ramazani of the University of Virginia’s Department of English, followed by a presentation by Duke University’s Braxton Craven Professor of Arab Cultures Miriam Cooke: “Arab Writer Re-member Trauma,” and concluded with a presentation by Professor Michael Hillman of the University of Texas at Austin entitled “Healing and Resistance in Persian Poetry from Ferdowsi (d. 1020) to Forugh Farrokhzâd (d. 1967).” The afternoon session began with an introduction by the panel chair, MESALC’s Assistant Professor Samhita Sunya, followed by presentations by MESALC’s Associate Professor Mehr Farooqi: “Globalization, Culture Wars and the Modalities of Resistance: Thoughts on the Proliferation of Literature Festivals in South Asia,” Assistant Professor Blake Atwood from the University of Texas at Austin: “Old Movies, New Frames: The Geopolitics of World Cinema and a New National Order for Iranian Film,” Marie Ostby a visiting Assistant Professor of English at Connecticut College: “The Red Pen: Cultivating an Online Home for Intellectual Work,” and Norma Moruzzi Associate Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago: “Finding a Critical Lens into the Politics of Daily Life: Iranian Cinema and Society.” All of the students and faculty who attended the conference had the privilege of participating in a day of dynamic and enlightening discourse which emphasized building bridges while simultaneously celebrating the richness of diversity.



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