

Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures

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GSMS Majors and Faculty Member will Explore Charitable Water in Cairo this Summer



Tessa Farmer, GSMS Track Director

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In May and June of 2019 two UVA students, Fazlah Rahaman and Mel Throckmorton, will travel to Cairo, Egypt to undertake ethnographic research on charitable water fountains known as sabil. This project will undertake an ethnographic investigation of sabils, or charitably endowed drinking fountains, to examine the role of water sharing in the urban fabric of Cairo, Egypt. Sabils enable the gifting of water to the figure of the passersby, a local adaptation that has deep roots and can serve as an example for cities in an increasingly hot global context.

The trip is part of Throckmorton and Rahaman’s Global Studies Middle East and South Asia (GSMS) major, which is a joint project of the Global Studies Program and the Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (MESALC) Department.

CHARITABLE WATER IN CAIRO continued from page 1

Funding for the trip came from the Faculty Global Research with Undergraduates (FGRU) award from the Center for Global Inquiry and Innovation (CGII), the focus of which is to provide UVA students with unique global research opportunities in close mentorship with a faculty advisor. In this case, Rahaman and Throckmorton developed their own questions and research methodology as contributions to a long-term research project on water in Cairo by GSMS Track Director, Tessa Farmer.



Sabils have a special role to play in shaping material and ethical infrastructure in Cairo, serving to make arid urban spaces livable and traversable. They demonstrate the particularities of the moral universe in which Cairo's affective dimensions take shape—they are tied to religious conceptions about the preeminent value of sharing water, to lines of historical precedent, and to changing socioeconomic realities in post-revolutionary Egypt.

This project will include mapping sabil distribution and conducting participant observation in two suburban areas of the city. Asking questions about the intent, mechanisms, and impacts of sabil practices adds to the store of knowledge about local practices of sharing water from which a global project to mitigate the impact of urban water shortages can draw. With increasing global temperatures and continued urbanization, the distribution and sharing of water in water-stressed cities is a key global issue.

FAZLAH RAHAMAN



This zeer originally was used inside the home for drinking water, and was then transitioned into a sabil outside the house when the owner's mother passed away.

The city of Cairo was once renowned for having combination sabil- kuttab, where water provision was combined with Quranic schools. Most contemporary sabils are more everyday affairs, and range in form from simple earthenware pitchers that cool water through evaporation to mechanized water coolers. They are commonly placed on main roads, near schools, or outside mosques, and are often located near their creator's homes or businesses for ease of care. Instituting a sabil gathers merits accrued with God (hasanet) for its creator, and those merits can be shared by those who participate in maintenance or passed on to those to whom a sabil is dedicated --often the memory of a departed loved one.



Nizar Hermes

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR



Nizar F. Hermes

For all the obvious reasons, I want to express my warmest respect and extend my sincere thanks to Prof. Milani for teeming years of stellar leadership, impressive record, and exceptional achievements. MESLAC has impressively grown and thrived under her tenure and we are extremely grateful to her.

MESALC's academic year has been particularly busy this spring and last fall with plentiful scholarly talks and exciting cultural activities. With the concerted efforts of our esteemed faculty, regular and visiting, and dedicated staff, we have invited a number of distinguished scholars representing each of our great programs: Sunil Sharma (Boston University), Muhsin J. Musawi (Columbia University), Yaron Shemer (UNC Chapel Hill), Yaseen Noorani (University of Arizona), Ida Meftahi (University of Maryland), Jean Dangler (Tulane University), Valerie Stoker (Wright State University), and Nouri Gana (UCLA.) Equally exciting is the newly launched and highly successful MESALC-UVa Interdisciplinary Forum which offered MESALC faculty and students a much-needed opportunity to host colleagues and ABDs from various departments:

Jessica Andruss (Religion), Andrea Pauw (Spanish), Sherif Abdelkarim (English), Mary E. Allen (French) in addition to our own Samhita Sunya (Cinema), Tessa Farmer (Global Studies), Pardis Minuchehr (Persian), Suja Sawafta (Arabic,) and Bilal Hashmi (Urdu/Hindi.) These scholars (see their talks titles on page 5) work on interdisciplinary and comparative topics ranging from premodern/early modern linguistic symbiosis and cultural diplomacy to the more modern/contemporary literary and socio-cultural topics related to the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. The sheer talks' titles of both MESALC Lectures Series and MESALC-UVa Forum speak volumes on the fact that our department is the most interdisciplinary and culturally diverse department on grounds. Additionally, MESALC has hosted a bouquet of fascinating cultural and artistic activities such as the screening of and hosting of internationally acclaimed films and hosting of, both established and rising, writers, film directors/critics and painters such as Sarmad Sehbai (Pakistan,) Amr Gamal (Yemen,) Daisy Rockwell (USA), and Kaveh Askari (USA). This is aside from co-sponsoring numerous regionally related and culturally pertinent activities and talks across grounds. All of these rewarding activities could have never happened without the great effort and precious time of our MESALC faculty and staff.

Last but not least, in addition to the continuous national and international achievements and recognitions of our outstanding faculty through scholarly publications and talks, MESALC has been tremendously honored by Professor Mohammed Sawaie's reception of the 2019 Thomas Jefferson Foundation Award for Excellence in Teaching and Professor Shankar Nair's Alumni Board of Trustees Teaching Award.

NIZAR HERMES

MESALC Interdisciplinary

Lecture Series



The MESALC Lecture Series is a scholarly venue that invites established scholars to present their interdisciplinary research in the Literature and Cultures of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia.

September 21

Sunil Sharma, Boston University
❖ *“Travel in Reverse: Mughals in Safavid Iran”*

October 12

M.J. Musawi, Columbia University
❖ *“The City in the Medieval and Modern Arabic Narrative”*

November 30

Yaron Shemer, UNC Chapel Hill
❖ *“Rethinking Egyptian Jews’ Cosmopolitanism, Belonging, and Nostalgia in Cinema”*

January 25

Yaseen Noorani, University of Arizona
❖ *“Orientalism, Arabic, and the Threshold of World Literature”*

February 22

Ida Meftahi, University of Maryland
❖ *“(Re)Writing the Narrative of the Iranian Cabaret Dancer (1945-1979)”*

March 29

Jean Dangler, Tulane University
❖ *“The Representation of the City in Strophic Poetry (Azjāl) of Ibn Quzmān”*

April 12

Valerie Stoker, Wright State University
❖ *“Loss, Corruption, Theft: The Perilous Lives of Texts in Medieval South India”*

April 26

Nouri Gana, UCLA
❖ *“Rap and Revolt in the Maghribi City”*



MESALC Interdisciplinary

UVA Forum



The MESALC Interdisciplinary UVA Forum is a new scholarly venue that invites UVA junior scholars and doctoral students to present their interdisciplinary research in the Literature and Cultures of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia.

September 13

Jessica Andruss, Religious Studies

- ❖ *“Translation from Hebrew to Arabic: Jewish Biblical Scholarship in the Medieval Islamic World”*

September 27

Samhita Sunya, MESALC

- ❖ *“Cinematic Comedies of Terror: Strategic Offenses and Genre Tactics”*

October 25

Andrea Pauw, SIP

- ❖ *“Poetics of Prayer: Spanish Moriscos and Aljamiado Literature”*

November 8

Tessa Farmer, MESALC/Global Studies

- ❖ *“Ethnographic Knowledge Production in the Modern Middle East”*

January 31

Sherif Abdelkarim, English

- ❖ *“Of fals ymaginacioun: Poetics of Hypocrisy in Medieval Anglo-Arabic Texts”*

February 14

Bilal Hashmi, MESALC

- ❖ *“Dada à Lucknow: India and the European Avant-Garde”*

February 28

Suja Sawafta, MESALC

- ❖ *“The Dialectic of the Sea & the Desert: Exile, Commitment and Dissent in the Novels of Abdulrahman Munif”*

March 7

Pardis Minuchehr, MESALC

- ❖ *“The Aesthetics of Intermediality: Cultural Transformation in Iran”*

March 21

Mary E. Allen, French

- ❖ *“Proposing Marriage, Pursuing Peace: Diplomatic Relations and Discord between Mouley Ismaël of Morocco and Louis XIV of France”*



MESALC Professor Serves as an Associate Editor of Global Encyclopedia of LGBTQ History



Hanadi Al-Samman

Hanadi Al-Samman (Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures) co-edited the three-volume *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 2019). The encyclopedia covers current developments of LGBTQ-related topics worldwide. Al-Samman designed the Middle East section, overseeing 56 articles covering the history, literature, film, media, and current LGBTQ movements in the Middle East and its diaspora. The encyclopedia featured two articles by Al-Samman, "ISIS Gay Trials" and "Pasolini's Cinematic Adaptation of *A Thousand and One Nights*" as well as contributions by other MESALC faculty: Geeta Patel who wrote an article on the Indian film *Fire* and Samhita Sunya whose entry discussed the Israeli film *The Bubble*.

Professor Al-Samman coordinated the articles comprising the Middle East entries.

Below is a Q&A with her about the endeavor. The encyclopedia is available online as well as in hard copy, geared primarily towards purchase by universities, schools, and libraries.

Q: *What are some of the motivations and conversations that led to the publication of this volume?*

A: Earlier, Gale Group had put out a 3-volume Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America. As an expansion of such an initiative, the idea of an encyclopedia of global LGBTQ history, encompassing areas that would include the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Europe was an ambitious project. Having worked on literary histories of queer bodies in Arabic literature, I was invited to join as an associate editor, to oversee articles on LGBTQ histories in the Middle East. My earlier work in this area includes an essay titled "Out of The Closet" that was published in the Journal of Arabic Literature and a co-edited "Queer Affects" special issue of the International Journal of Middle East Studies, which examined particularities of queer expression in Arabic literature and culture. The emphasis on affect allowed us to retain a focus on the body, on the subject - to get beyond more confined designations, such as that of nationality. As a continuation of this earlier work, I joined the encyclopedia project, and the vision - shared by the editors - was that it would be something new: a project attuned to regional specificities while seeking global commonalities. We wanted to veer away from an academic-authors-wise classification of entries, instead highlighting entries by themes, texts, artworks — so that they would more readily speak to one another across the encyclopedia.

Q: *What kinds of entries, in terms of LGBTQ histories connected to the Middle East, are in the encyclopedia?*

A: There are 56 entries in total, under the Middle East section that I oversaw. They span cultural movements, classical and modern histories,

literature, art, and film, as well as certain attitudes and spaces concerning queer practices in the Middle East - e.g., notions of the closet and of coming out, or spaces that include queer online communities. All the area editors agreed on a core set of common thematic topics. So, there are entries in multiple geographic contexts on topics that include HIV, human rights issues, pornography and obscenity, and sex tourism. These entries are crucial, as bridges between the different areas. I was adamant, however, in my capacity as an associate editor, to steer clear of universal notions of queer culture that do not represent realities of the Middle East. If certain topics concerning LGBTQ histories did not seem readily applicable to Middle Eastern contexts, I insisted that a demand to produce entries about these topics not be forced onto the region.

Q: What were some of the challenges in your endeavor, as an associate editor for entries concerned with the Middle East?

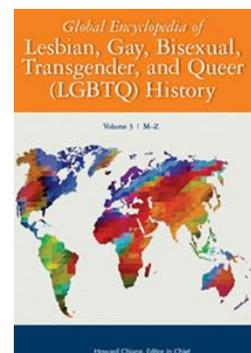
A: A major challenge remains, pertaining to the impossibility of comprehensive coverage. This encyclopedia, and the 56 entries concerned with the Middle East, are important. But among entries concerning the Arab world, for example, the Gulf is underrepresented. So while there were challenges in finding contributors to write about certain areas, there were also logistical challenges even when I did find incredibly qualified contributors. In one instance, I approached a doctoral candidate at the Middle East Studies Association, who had given a fantastic paper that would have been a wonderful addition to the encyclopedia. Unfortunately, she could not participate in the project because she was a Turkish citizen, and due to her US visa status, she would not have been able to be paid for her work. It was non-negotiable that all contributors to this encyclopedia would be paid for their work.

Q: Towards what kinds of readers is the encyclopedia geared?

A: It is geared toward a general educated public, undergrads, researchers looking for an informed start or for a bibliography... The three-volume encyclopedia allows for various kinds of engagements, from quick skimming to more in-depth reading. Each contribution did go through a rigorous editorial process, having to pass through two reviewers and the main editor, then undergo a round of revisions, before being accepted. In the end, the encyclopedia opens up new avenues and global perspectives. One can explore, for example, the idea and practice of the closet/being closeted across regions. It's truly "encyclopedic" in the sense that you can learn a lot! And this was the main goal - that you as a reader will discover many more connections, across the entries and beyond the pages. This is facilitated by design, in the arrangement of entries alphabetically rather than by region.

Q: What are some of the standout entries you might recommend, among those that comprise the Middle East contributions that you oversaw?

A: There are some fascinating, new theoretical insights concerning Middle East queer studies, contained in articles that include "Coming-Out/Coming-In Discourses in the Middle East," "Pinkwashing," "Human Rights and Queer Arab Refugees," "Masculinity in Iranian Cinema"... And also the "ISIS Gay Trials" and "Internet Queer Sites in the Middle East" articles. I could keep going!



Samhita Sunya

A YEAR IN RE-VIEW: FILMS & FESTIVALS



From a sidebar of Middle Eastern & South Asian films at the November 2018 Virginia Film Festival (VAFF), to a memorable April 2019 screening of the first-ever Yemeni-made film to be released commercially in Yemen, to speakers hosted in collaboration with the Institute of the Humanities and Global Cultures (IHGC), this year has been a special one for MESALC. I have been delighted by colleagues' and students' enthusiasm for cinema-related initiatives connected to the languages and cultures with which we are engaged, as a way of not only connecting our classrooms to on- and off-grounds programs, but also insisting upon programs that invite the participation of off-grounds members of the community for whom these very languages and places are near and dear. This year's milestones include:

“Super 8 Federations as a Social Network,” an October 2018 guest lecture by Professor Isabel Arredondo from State University of New York Plattsburgh, co-sponsored by the IHGC for students in MESA 3111: “Film Festivals & Global Media Cultures.”

Middle Eastern & South Asian Film Sidebar in November 2018 at VAFF featuring two clusters, co-sponsored by the IHGC:

“Letters of Love: From the Middle East to South Asia” cluster featuring three contemporary genre comedies in their US theatrical premieres.

“Rites of Remembrance” cluster, featuring three highly acclaimed films whose respective filmmakers, production contexts, and formal and

aesthetic modes offer poetic meditations that ensue from material experiences of displacement.

“Saadat Hasan Manto: From Story to Screen: A Special Screening & Conversation with (Screen)Writer/Poet/Dramatist Sarmad Sehbai,” a November 2018 screening of Sehbai's Pakistani telefilm *Hatak* featuring live translations by our own Bilal Hashmi, followed by Q&A with Sehbai moderated by Professor Mehr Farooqi. The standing-room-only event drew colleagues and students from across MESALC's HIND, URDU, SAST, and MESA courses!

***10 Days Until the Wedding*,** a special April 2019 screening of the first-ever Yemeni-made film to be released commercially in Yemen, in the presence of director Amr Gamal and producer Mohsen Al-Khalifi. Co-sponsored by the UVA Humanitarian Collaborative and Global Studies Middle East & South Asia Track directed by Professor Tessa Farmer, the film was introduced by our own Suad Mohamed, whose very hometown of Aden lies at the heart of the film's production and plot!

“Habits and Worlds: Malayalam Cinema's Travels with the Persian Gulf,” an April 2019 talk by Professor Ratheesh Radhakrishnan from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, hosted by the IHGC Asian Cosmopolitanisms Lab.

“Remixing Film Music: The Collage Score and Commercial Film Production in Midcentury Iran,” an April 2019 talk by Professor Kaveh Askari from Michigan State University, co-sponsored by the IHGC Global South Lab and The Americas Center/Centro de las Américas.

On the whole, MESALC's film-related events of the year have spanned offerings in Arabic, Bengali, Malayalam, Turkish, Persian, and Urdu, in collaboration with the Virginia Film Festival, Institute for the Humanities & Global Cultures, Global South Lab, Asian Cosmopolitanisms Lab, UVA Humanitarian Collaborative, Global Studies Program, and The Americas Center/Centro de las Américas. A crucial tandem effort has been that of further building up our media library's collections with films that are connected to the languages and cultural contexts of our department's teaching and learning.

Rich Cohen

MESALC FACULTY LEAD J TERM TO KERALA, INDIA



Between December 30th and January 12th, MESALC faculty members, Mehr Farooqi and Richard Cohen led a group of eleven undergraduates on a two-week J Term course to Kerala, India, titled “India in Global History: Kerala the Venice of India.” The program had three main goals: serve as an introduction to the complex and rich culture of India, raise student awareness of the important role India has played in the history of trade and globalization through the centuries, and finally, to dramatize the immensely rich flora and fauna of Kerala, claimed by Malayalis to be “God’s Own Country.”

Given the short time frame, the program planned visits to three locations: Kochi, the main seaport and historic entrepot of Kerala, Alleppey – known for its backwaters and houseboats, and Munnar, a hill station in the western part of the state, where tea estates abound at 6,000 feet, and where incredible diversity of flora and fauna are on display.

In Kochi, we spent much of our time exploring the historic “Fort” area where Christians and Jews first arrived in India around 1900 years ago. Arab sailors and traders have guided their dhows between the Arabian Peninsula, the East African Swahili coast and Kerala for millennia. While touring the Fort area we stopped for lunch at the Ginger Museum Hotel and Restaurant, where we enjoyed locally caught shrimp in a tasty, zesty curry known as “Prawn Tenga Curry.”

Though the weather was temperate and pleasant, when thirsty, we stopped for a quick drink of native coconut water right out of the nut!

While in Kochi, we explored folklore and folk art at the Kerala Folk Art Museum. The entire collection was assembled by one man, and it contains thousands of objects.

The students were given a taste of Malayali home life and cooking with a visit to a family for an afternoon in one of the suburbs of Kochi.

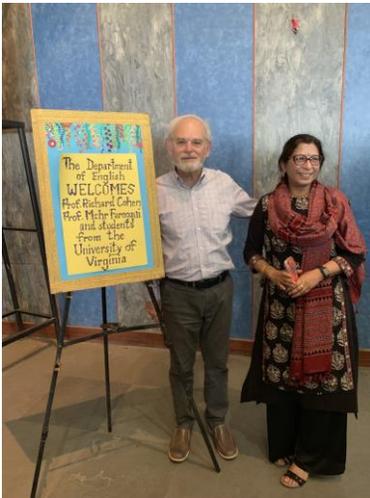
Our group spent a day travelling to the Alleppey area of central coastal Kerala, known for its inland waterways. We boarded an elaborate houseboat which had accommodations for ten people in five separate bedrooms. We were served delicious fried plantains and tea on board! After a scrumptious lunch of Malayali specialties at a Muslim restaurant, we listened to a lecture by a well-known Malayali scholar on the contemporary politics of Kerala. By the way, Kerala currently has an elected communist government, and was the first state in the world to freely elect a communist government back in 1957. Before leaving Alleppey, we cooled ourselves on the beach and got to see the Arabian Sea.



J TERM TO KERALA
continued from page 9



During the next day in Kochi, we visited St. Teresa's Women's College and met with students and faculty. The St. Teresa students presented a series of skits dramatizing gender issues in India. After the drama, we sat around and had a dialog about social and political issues in India and the United States. This was a great opportunity to learn about higher education in India, and particularly women's issues.



Rich Cohen and Mehr Farooqi

The students were introduced to one of Kerala's world-famous dance drama traditions, Kathakali, which retell the famous Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. A couple of the students were invited onto the stage to follow the moves of the dancers.



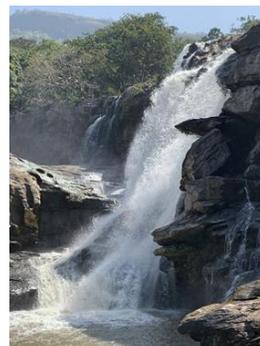
We spent the second half of the program exploring Munnar, a town tucked away high in the Western Ghats of Kerala, at 6,000 feet where the days are warm and the nights cool. Munnar is famous for its tea estates, natural wonders and animal preserves. We stayed at a lovely hotel with an equally lovely name "Fragrant Nature," which also offered us spectacular sunsets.

We held morning classes at the hotel, focusing on the folk culture of Kerala, and writing by Malayali women writers.



Of course we explored how tea was being grown and processed.

Finally, we explored what the Western Ghats had to offer in encounters with Mother Nature. On two separate occasions we went trekking, seeking out sweeping vistas and wildlife. On one of the days we went deep into the Chinnar Wildlife Preserve, where we ate lunch at a beautiful waterfall and tried our best to run into an elephant...but no luck.



RICH COHEN

Michelle Konik

2019 GRADUATION SPEECH



Michelle Konik

Dear Professors, Staff, Families and Fellow Graduates,

It is an honor standing before you today. On Behalf of the Graduating Class of 2019, I say welcome to everyone and thank you for celebrating this special day with us.

I think we should all be proud to have made it here in one piece. Today is a milestone for each of us and our families, and it is to our loved ones that we owe our deepest thanks. After today, we leave University of Virginia, the community of our friends, roommates, and professors, to find and forge our own way.

Throughout our journey, we all had to face many challenges just to be one step closer to this day. Late nights studying, submitting work on time, and trying our best in all our classes may not have been so easy. There were moments when we felt like giving up but had to stop and remind ourselves as to why we need to continue.

There has rarely been a time in which an in-depth understanding of the languages, cultures, history, and politics of the Middle East has been more important. As students, we have a responsibility to our communities, to our world, no matter our majors or aspirations. Whether we are in government, finance, or academia, we must challenge ourselves to be civically engaged. Life after college should not be about living quiet lives. (We can do that after we retire). The challenge is to take these past few years, the connections made, the unique passions, to take this degree and to do something relevant and positive with it.

As it stands today, the Middle East and its political issues seem entirely foreign to many people in our country. As a graduate student, this department taught me not to be afraid to take on any issue, research it, get to the root of the issue, and discover the truth. With this mindset, as students, we can help others identify and become better informed of current problems concerning the Middle East. Most importantly, we can help others understand that all challenges and issues are human issues.

With that being said, I wish each and every one of you much success in life.

Congratulations Class of 2019 and Thank you!

MICHELLE KONIK





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