



# Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures

Volume 7, Issue 1 | Spring 2018

Jefferson: Education as the Antidote to “Failed Revolutions” ..... 1

J-Term in Kerala: India in Global History ..... 3

Welcome to MESALC: New Hindi Instructor ..... 4

New Fall 2018 Courses ..... 5

New Faculty Publications ..... 6

Sajedah Hosseini: Serving as a TA at Mr. Jefferson’s School Brightened my Days..... 8

Mehr Farooqi: A Night of Ghazals and Sufi Kalam ..... 9

Janaezjah Ryder: From Pune to UVA..... 10

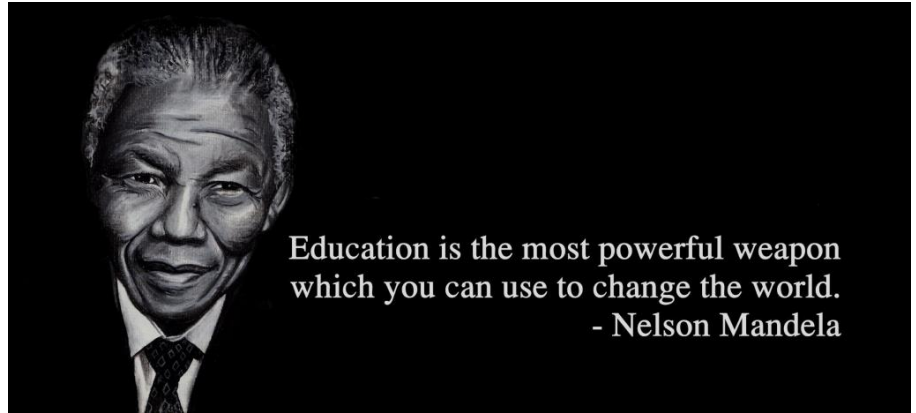
Hanadi Al-Samman: The Aesthetics of Trauma..... 11

Aenon Moose’s Speech at 2017 MESALC Graduation Ceremony .. 12

Thomas Jefferson Makes his Debut on Arabic TV ..... 13

Envisioning 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle East & South Asian Studies ..... 14

## *Jefferson: Education as the Antidote to “Failed Revolutions”*



Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.  
- Nelson Mandela

“The Arab Spring” now seems to many but a distant memory, a chimera, a false hope, one too painful to remember, revisit, or even study seriously. Mr. Jefferson would beg to differ.

Jefferson’s words on revolution did not stop with his crafting of America’s Declaration of Independence. During the half century that followed, Jefferson avidly followed and commented upon revolutionary developments around the world. While Ambassador to France, Jefferson warmly supported the emerging French Revolution, counseling moderation and advising the Marquis de Lafayette on France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man.

As France’s revolution struggled, Jefferson as US Secretary of State offered encouragement to French friends and intellectuals. To the Duchess d’Aville, on April 2, 1790, Jefferson wrote, “You have had some checks, some horrors since I left you; but the way to heaven, you know, has always been said to be strewed with thorns.” On the same day, he reasoned to Lafayette that, “We are not to expect to be translated from despotism to liberty in a feather-bed.”



EDUCATION AS ANTIDOTE  
continued from page 1

Jefferson eventually came to deplore the excesses of revolutions gone wrong, the executions of innocents and “Robespierre’s atrocities.” Yet he tended to rationalize such setbacks. To the Genevan revolutionary intellectual Francois D’Ivernois, Jefferson wrote in 1795 of how “unfortunate” it was that the “efforts of mankind to recover the freedom of which they have been so long deprived, will be accompanied with violence, with errors, and even with crimes.” Yet “while we weep over the means, we must pray for the end.”

(Of ironic note to us, D’Ivernois within that same correspondence offered to America the science faculty of the then destroyed College at Geneva. The idea fired Jefferson’s imagination, thirty years before the opening of UVA.)

Despite the brutal turns of the French revolution, Jefferson still believed that America’s example could be emulated elsewhere. Impressed by Tench Coxe’s accounts of the Dutch (Batavian) revolution, Jefferson on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1795 responded that this “proves there is a god in heaven, and that he will not slumber without end on the iniquities of tyrants.” Even more effusively, Jefferson opined that “this ball of liberty, I believe most piously, is now so well in motion that it will roll round the globe, at least the enlightened part of it, for light & liberty go together.”

Yet Jefferson saw enough revolutionary failures to prompt

extended reflection upon why some revolutions succeeded and others failed. Variables pondered include leadership quality, economics, social divisions, and the military. On the latter, Jefferson wrote to Edmund Rutledge in 1788 that a revolution’s outcome “will depend entirely on the disposition of the army whether it issue in liberty or despotism.” Were he alive today, Jefferson would recognize what went down in Egypt on the eve of July 4th, 2013.

Jefferson’s data base wasn’t just Europe. Amid an extraordinary exchange with the celebrated Swiss-French revolutionary woman of letters, Madame de Staël Holstein, Jefferson assessed the prospects for “liberty” in South America. For Jefferson, the “real difficulties” there were not so much keeping external powers (the Spanish) at bay, but “how to silence and disarm the schisms among themselves. [I]n all those countries, the most inveterate divisions have arisen” – among “casts” and “rival leaders” and families. (Libya anyone?)

Even as they might attain “independence” from Europe, Jefferson’s view of the “horizons” for liberty was low, given how the “whole Southern continent is sunk in the deepest ignorance and bigotry” which will “render them incapable of forming and maintaining a free government.”

Jefferson particularly despaired at the power of various clergies over the minds of illiterate citizens. As much as the heart might wish otherwise, for Jefferson, it was much as the heart might wish

otherwise, for Jefferson, it was personally “excruciating to believe that all will end in military despotisms.” (To those who still believe in the Arab Spring’s original aims, Jefferson can “feel your pain.”)

**For Jefferson, the key to improving the chances for revolutionary struggles for liberty to survive was not external armed intervention, or economic aid, but education.** To that end, that “holy cause” Jefferson turned to his last great revolutionary idea – public supported education and the founding of the University of Virginia. As TJ wrote in 1816, “Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.” To Jefferson then, the best antidote for failed revolutions for liberty is education.

*Continue reading  
on page 7.*



# J-Term in Kerala

## INDIA IN GLOBAL HISTORY



Enjoying Welcome Dinner at Hotel in Kochi.

We began this year (2018) with the first J-Term in the southern state of Kerala, India. The course lead by Mehr Farooqi and Richard Cohen is designed to whet student's interest in important, historical global networks that are generally bypassed in curricula because they are buried in history. The course taps into the economic-cultural historical elements of the spice and cotton textile trade and its profound impact on cross Indian Ocean trade with the Middle East, East Africa, Europe and East Asia. The first European to reach India was the Portuguese sailor, Vasco da Gama (1498), landing at the coastal town of Kozhikode (Calicut). Kerala is the most heterogeneous Indian state, having significant minority Muslim and Christian populations. The predominant language is Malayalam, followed by English. Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India (94%). Its dramatic dance arts, such as Kathakali, Kutiyattam and Theyyam are world famous. Readings in history and literature complemented the site visits.

The State of Kerala, India is unique not only in its geographical design, but also in the culture of its people. The cities of Kozhikode and Kochi are the two main entrepôts through which

the spice trade was initiated and prospered over centuries. Merchants from the Middle East, Swahili Coast (East Africa) and Southern Europe established settlements in Kerala. The Jewish connection with Kerala started in 573 BCE. Herodotus noted that goods brought by Arabs from Kerala were sold to the Jews at Aden. Arabs intermarried with local people, resulting in formation of the Muslim Mappila community, becoming central to the trans-Indian Ocean trade networks. Student discovery of the history of these contacts will profoundly change their understanding of the origins and implications of ethnic, cultural and religious heterogeneity, as well as the diachronic fluctuations of globalization. The first group of nine students drawn from across UVA described their experience as particularly enriching. "The course leaders didn't stop teaching whenever our day's class time was up. Instead, they made sure to talk to us about each hands-on experience we had to enrich our knowledge about it. They also were sure to tie a lot of our activities back into course material."



Map of the Silk Road. The spice trade was mainly along the water routes (blue).

MEHR FAROOQI

# Welcome to MESALC!

## NEW HINDI INSTRUCTOR



Abdul Nasir

My journey as a student and Hindi-Urdu second language instructor starts at Mussoorie, a very small and beautiful city at the foothills of Indian Himalayas. At the University of Virginia, I find myself happier than ever before. It is almost like a dream come true.

I earned my M.A. in Hindi Literature and Linguistics from Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Srinagar India in 2012. This offered me the opportunity to better understand Hindi prose, poetry, and drama as well as the history of the language itself. I completed my B.A. in Urdu Literature from Jamia Urdu Aligarh, India in 2009. I also have received a B.S. from Chaudhri Charan Singh University India in 2001. The considerable amount of time I had spent as code writer in different computer languages, helped me feel more comfortable in understanding modern day technologies.

For more than nine years from 2007 to 2016, I taught Hindi and Urdu at all levels as a second language to native and non-native English speakers from all over the world at Landour Language School Mussoorie, India.

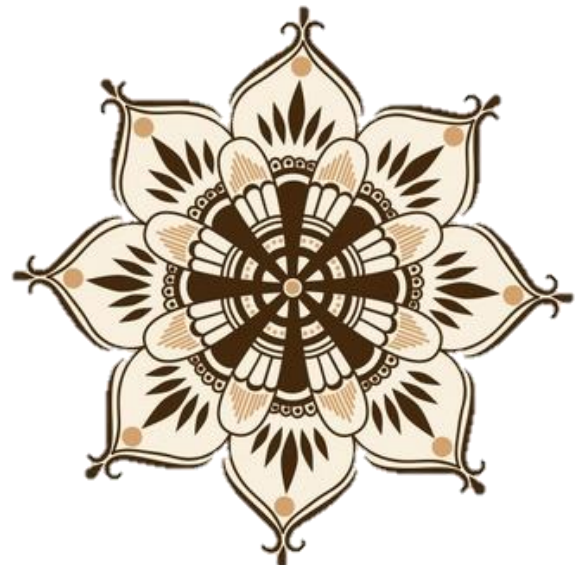
I also have taught Hindi and Urdu to graduate and undergraduate students at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill NC, for one year in 2016-17.

At Landour Language School, I worked as Urdu language coordinator for more than four years and as an integral member of the core teaching team for about eight years. The interdisciplinary and intense teaching experience at Landour Language School combined with my passion to teach languages and cultures have made me a better language teacher, who strives to be better all the time.

As an in-process project I am working on an Urdu textbook and as a future project I am really looking forward to develop an online Hindi-Urdu textbook too. As a language educator I want to work on simplification of the Hindi-Urdu grammar teaching practices. My further interests lay in the topics like – teaching Hindi and Urdu through cultural, religious, or Bollywood related texts and teaching Indian cultural practices in Hindi and Urdu, influence of the new and reinvented or revived vocabulary on contemporary Hindi and Urdu speaking community, Garhwali language and Hindi, and dying languages in India.

I hope to find myself as better educator in the coming future in the great academic atmosphere of the University of Virginia.

ABDUL NASIR



# NEW COURSES

..... 2018



## **ARTR 3559/5559**

### **Global Masterpieces from the Classical Islamicate World: A Comparative Approach**

*Instructor:* **Nizar Hermes**

This course explores the literary masterworks of some of the most celebrated authors of the classical Islamicate world (500-1500). It gives students the chance to intensely and comparatively engage notable global texts from “the medieval Islamic republic of letters,” to quote M. J. al-Musawi’s groundbreaking *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (2015). Students will cultivate an appreciation for the development of the intellectual history of the “medieval” Middle East (including North Africa and al-Andalus) alongside their engagement with such masterpieces as *Aesopica*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Confessiones*, *The Panchatantra*, *Tales of Genji*, *Tahkemoni*, *The Sundiata*, *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Othello*, *Don Quixote*, and *Robison Crusoe*. Drawing on both classical Arabic-Islamic and modern Western theories, we will further form comparative insights into the poetics and politics of the humanist topics encountered across our literary journeys into the rich corpus of Arabic-Islamic *adab* (belles-lettres).

## **MESA 1559**

### **Gateway to the Middle East & South Asia**

*Instructors:* **Tessa Farmer, Mehr Farooqi**

The earliest human civilizations developed in the Middle East (also known as the Near East and Western Asia) and South Asia. The cultures of these regions are deep and multilayered. Around 12000 BCE the Natufian culture that emerged in Palestine and southern Syria domesticated the dog and began processes that led to incipient cultivation and herding. Beginning from the Indus Valley some 5000 years ago, civilization in South Asia presented a unique linguistic and cultural diversity, much of which was owed to settlers who poured in from the rugged regions of Central Asia and beyond.

This course is an overview of the cultural dynamics as evident in the literature, arts, and cultural practices from 4000BCE to the present. Needless to say, in the course of one semester we will offer a broad sweep of the past with an endeavor to understand the complexity of Middle Eastern and South Asian civilizations. Drawing on a selection from literary works as well as writings on history, artistic production, and the history of ideas, the course will guide the students through the landmarks in the development of cultural patterns, literature and the arts within a historical-cultural backdrop.

The course will follow a chronological pattern. It will, however, focus more on the pre-modern and modern trends.

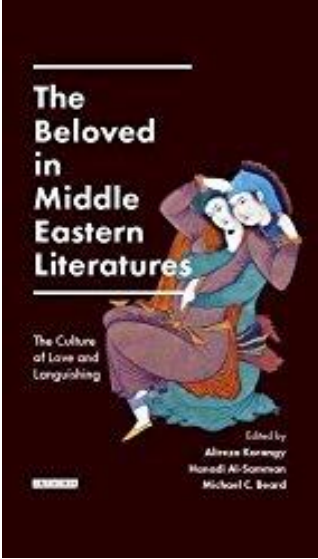
As an introductory level course, it presupposes no pre-knowledge of the subject. All undergraduates are welcome!



# NEW PUBLICATIONS

## *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures: The Culture of Love and Languishing*

- ❖ Alireza Korangy, Hanadi Al-Samman, Michael Beard
- ❖ I.B. Tauris, 2017



In the long literary history of the Middle East, the notion of 'the beloved' has been a central trope in both the poetry and prose of the region. This book explores the concept of the beloved in a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary manner, revealing how shared ideas on the subject supersede geographical and temporal boundaries, and ideas of nationhood. The book considers the beloved in its classical, modern and postmodern manifestations, taking into account the different sexual orientations and forms of desire expressed. From the pre-Islamic 'Udhri (romantic unrequited love), to the erotic same-sex love in thirteenth century poetry and prose, the divine Sufi reflections on the topic, and post-revolutionary love encounters in Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures* connects the affective and cultural with the political and the obscene. In focusing on the diverse manifestations of love and tropes of the lover/beloved binary, this book is unique in foregrounding what is often regarded as a 'taboo subject' in the region.

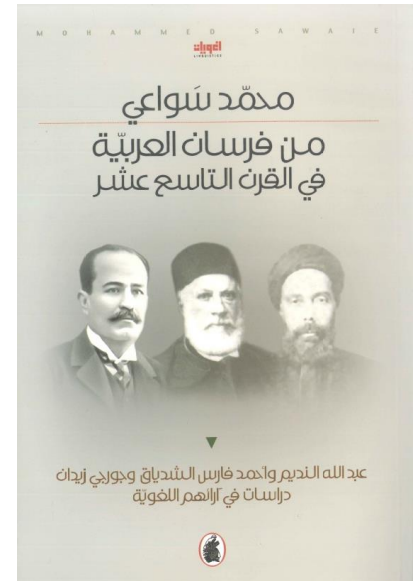
The multi-faceted outlook reveals the variety of philological, philosophical, poetic and literary forms that treat this significant motif.

## *Min Fursān al-ʿArabiyya fī al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ Ashar: Studies in Nineteenth Century Arabic*

- ❖ Mohammed Sawaie
- ❖ 2017

The nineteenth century brought the Arab countries into close contact with the West, mainly Britain and France, through colonization as well as through the establishment of educational institution modelled on Western establishments, especially in Egypt. This generated interest in language issues and calls for reform of Arabic to express then newly-introduced Western sciences and material culture. Arab scholars of the period expressed different views regarding these matters.

The book comprises five essays on three leading nineteenth century scholars of Arabic. Three essays discuss linguistic efforts by Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, author, critic, translator, editor and founder of the famous newspaper *Al-Jawāʿib* in Istanbul in 1861-1874; one essay treats the linguistic views of Jurjī Zaidān, author of several books on language issues, essayist, and founder in 1892 of the famous *al-Hilāl* journal, which continues to publish today. The fifth essay discusses the linguistic views of Abdulla Al-Nadīm, author, essayist, orator, and journalist. Such debate on linguistic matters encountered in the nineteenth century continues today.





*Captive,*  
*Forugh Farrokhzad's Poetry*

Translated By: Farzaneh Milani

Forugh Farrokhzad (1934-1967) was a consummate reader of Iranian and Western poetry, a prolific poet, an award winning cinematographer, an artist in realms as various as painting and sewing, acting and directing. The author of five poetry collections, a travel narrative, six short stories, and hundreds of letters, Farrokhzad was the most autobiographical of her contemporaries or perhaps all of Iranian literature. Her body of work reflects a complex mixture of tradition and modernity, resistance and acquiescence, protest and accommodation.

*Captive*, translated by Farzaneh Milani, is the original edition of *Asir*, Farrokhzad's first poetry collection. Few of these poems have been available in translation. *Captive* also includes the first uncensored edition in the original Persian without any of the subsequent omissions and alterations. Although the work of a youthful poet, *Captive* is intensely relevant to our time and to a better understanding of Iran and the role of women in that country.

Ultimately, Jefferson never lost faith that the "ball of liberty" will roll around the globe. In an 1823 letter to revolutionary compadre John Adams, Jefferson reflected that, "A first attempt to recover the right of self-government may fail, so may a second, a third, etc. But as a younger and more instructed race comes on, the sentiment becomes more and more intuitive, and a fourth, a fifth, or some subsequent one of the ever renewed attempts will ultimately succeed." Jefferson darkly anticipated "rivers of blood" and even "years of desolation" along the way, yet the object of self-government was deemed worth the cost.

Jefferson's last public letter, composed to Robert Weightman ten days before his death on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1826, restated his global vision for the Declaration of Independence:

"May it be to the world, what I believe it will be — to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all — the Signal of arousing men to burst the chains, under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves and to assume the blessings and security of self-government."

Yet what again today for our region of focus? Would Jefferson concur with the skeptics, the ones who did not see the Arab Spring coming, the same ones who now conclude that the region was not ready, that the recent revolutionary struggles for freedom were no more than a dream, a "false dawn?"

Jefferson and John Adams both died on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1826, 50 years to the day of the signing of the Declaration. Jefferson died first, yet Adams did not know that just before he uttered what are believed to be his last words, "Jefferson still survives."

Therein, some of us can hear a Jeffersonian echo.

"Tunisia still survives."

SCOTT HARROP

*Wm. Scott Harrop is currently a Jefferson Fellow at the Robert H. Smit International Center for Jefferson Studies, at Monticello. He taught various UVA courses on recent revolutions in the Islamic world since January 2012. Views expressed herein are his own.*

# Sajedah Hosseini

SERVING AS A TA AT MR. JEFFERSON'S  
SCHOOL BRIGHTENED MY DAYS



Sajedah (right) with her class.

I was playing alone in the backyard and as soon as my mother heard me saying, “*nazi, nazi* [cutie, cutie], she ran towards me. By the time my mother reached me, the cobra snake that I was trying to pet, fled away. According to her, my staying alive is a miracle. Meeting a cobra snake was the first major adventure of my life. I grew up in Bangalore, India; the natural habitat of numerous wild animals, and I tried to pet as many as I could. Both of my parents were students at the Bangalore University. Since then, I have been in love with animals. Growing up in the Indian subcontinent, I displayed loads of respect for the Indian culture. I also continued living my imaginary Bollywood life when my family and I returned to Iran for my schooling. This was the reason why I majored in South Asian Studies as an undergraduate student at the University of Tehran and later completed my Master’s degree in South Asian Studies at the University of Delhi.

After serving in Tehran Milad Tower for few years, I started my second Master’s in the Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures (MESLAC) at the University of Virginia, where I had the opportunity

to teach Persian to undergraduate students. I enjoyed every minute of teaching Persian. This teaching opportunity not only highlighted my graduate school experience but it also helped me to determine my professional aspiration. During a Sufi Literature class with Professor Shankar Nair, I started my research about the role of animals in the Masnavī of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī. Subsequently, my fascination towards animals and non-humans in literature grew steadily.

I am excited to report that I will start my doctoral studies at the University of Arizona in the fall of 2018, where I will work on animals and non-humans presented in the Sufi context. I have also been fortunate to receive the Roshan Fellowship for Iranian studies for the 2018-2019 academic year that will help fund my studies. I owe all of this to MESLAC because it provided me with a platform to improve my knowledge about both Iran and India during my academic journey. Studying at UVA had an immense influence in my personal life as well. I learned many life lessons that I will apply later on in my life.

SAJEDEH HOSSEINI





# Mehr Farooqi

## A NIGHT OF GHAZALS AND SUFI KALAM



Pooja Goswami Pavan (center)

*Mohabbat ne zulmat se karha hai nur  
Na hoti mohabbat na hota zahur*

(Love has drawn light from darkness;  
But for love, there would be no manifestation)

Pooja Goswami Pavan's mellifluous, hypnotic voice rendered verses from classical Urdu ghazal poets and Sufi masters, to packed audiences at the historic Old Cabell Hall on October 15, 2017. This was the first ever concert of ghazal poetry at the University of Virginia. Organized by Mehr Farooqi from MESALC in association with the Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music for Youth (SPICMACAY). The event drew students from across the university as well as music aficionados from Richmond, Washington DC, Roanoke and other places.

Pooja Goswami Pavan holds a PhD in Indian Classical Music from Delhi University. She was trained in semi-classical genres such as *ghazal*, *sufi kalam*, *thumri* and *dadra* by the eminent vocalist Vidushi Shanti Hiranand. Pavan was accompanied by Pankaj Mishra on the sarangi and Devapriya Nayak on the tabla.

Mehr Farooqi shared the stage as an interpreter cum cultural commentator for the audience that did not understand Urdu. Ghazals are poems made up of two-line verses bound within a meter with an end rhyme and refrain. This complex arrangement of words makes the poems very musical. The theme of the ghazal is mostly love, for a Divine Beloved or an earthly one. Ghazals tend to be metaphorical and abstract so that a lot of thought can be packed into two lines.

A distinctive feature of the program was Pooja's rendition of the great nineteenth century Urdu poet Ghalib. She presented a ghazal that has never been sung before as it belongs to the corpus of Ghalib's unpublished poems.

*is qadar zabt kahan hai kabhi a bhi na sakun  
Sitam itna to na kijeye keh utha bhi na sakun*

How can I restrain myself asks the poet? How much pain can I endure? If my house is on fire so be it. It is not the fire of love that cannot be extinguished. If you, my beloved, don't come to me I can die. Death is not as elusive as you. If you smile for me all past complaints are wiped away. But thoughts of you can never be erased.

At the workshop with students and guests the following day, Pavan explained how she honed her singing. She spoke at length on how she meditated on the verses she wanted to sing so that she could render the words with a deeper understanding of the meaning. For the students studying classical Urdu poetry in the Ongoing Mahfil course, it was an unforgettable experience.

MEHR FAROOQI



# Janaezjah Ryder

## FROM PUNE TO UVA



Janaezjah Ryder

I have always been interested in world cultures. When I was younger, I read a lot of nonfiction books about how people lived their lives all around the world. However, I was always intrigued by the italicized words that kept popping up throughout the books I was reading and was frustrated that I didn't know these foreign words. This led me down the path of foreign languages, where I began to study the usual European languages offered in school and then later tried to teach myself Hindi. But without the proper resources, I knew I would never really be able to learn the language.

Fortunately, when I was a junior in high school, I was granted the National Security Language Initiative Scholarship for Youth, which allowed me to spend a summer in Pune, Maharashtra, India. The program's goal is to allow students interested in critical languages the opportunity to learn them in a native setting. This was the first time I had ever left the country and the fact that I was going to be studying Hindi in a formal setting was almost as exciting as getting to be in India.

I was assigned a host family and spent all day in an international school learning Hindi, cooking Indian food, acting out historical scenes, Bollywood dancing and singing traditional songs; while also receiving Hindi tutoring from local students and teaching

younger children English. On the weekends, we would go on excursions around the city. One of the most notable trips we took were to the different places of worship, which were a Sikh gurudwara, a Christian church, a Hindu temple and a Jewish synagogue. This was especially interesting because I had read so much about India and its diversity but had never gotten to experience it up close. While in Pune, every day was a new experience in which I learned more about the culture in India and Maharashtra. Being able to combine my interest in the Hindi language while experiencing the culture truly helped solidify my choice to study this region formally.

When I began applying to colleges, I knew I needed to find a school that offered Hindi, and when I came to UVA, I knew I wanted to learn more than just the language. Often I'm asked if I have had any experience or connection with South Asia before choosing my major. Other than the National Security Language Initiative Scholarship for Youth and the fact that I am from a black military family, I respond that I had little to no interaction with South Asian culture. However, the supportive staff really helped guide me on my path.

Although I had come to UVA knowing that South Asian Studies was the right major for me, one of the classes that made me feel confident in my choice was Modern Hindi and Urdu Literature. This class essentially helped combine culture, history and literary traditions that I was beginning to become familiar with. However, for me, this class tested my cultural knowledge because I was able to use what I knew from my experience in India coupled with the knowledge from my previous classes to connect with the texts we were reading. I have been so fortunate to have such a comprehensive education and am grateful that I have been able to study with passionate professors and dedicated students.

JANA EZJAH RYDER

# Hanadi Al-Samman

## THE AESTHETICS OF TRAUMA



This spring, MESALC associate professor and college fellow, Hanadi Al-Samman taught two sessions of a new College Engagement course entitled, “EGMT 1510: The Aesthetics of Trauma.” The course sought to teach students trauma theory and the ways in which aspects of traumatic recall, postmemory, intergenerational and transnational trauma can be expressed creatively and affectively in works of art. The course took the ongoing Syrian revolution and subsequent civil war as a case study and as a portal to connect to other local and global tragic events such as: the Charlottesville August 2017 Hate rallies, the Holocaust, the Palestinian Catastrophe (Nakba), the African-American Middle Passage (Maafa), school shootings in the US, and the MeToo Movement.

Enrollment from both sections totaled more than 70 students, many of whom were first years who felt like their class had been marked by the tragic events of August 11th, 2017, when a group of white supremacists bearing torches invaded UVA grounds chanting, “you will not replace us,” and “Jews will not replace us.” The conflict escalated the following day when a counter-protester at an alt-right rally in downtown Charlottesville, Heather Heyer, was killed when a white supremacist slammed his car into the crowd.

The incident took place just two weeks before the start of the fall semester, and many incoming students felt that their class inherited the weight of this traumatic event. Even though most had not moved in yet, their ties to the community left students feeling the impact of this senseless

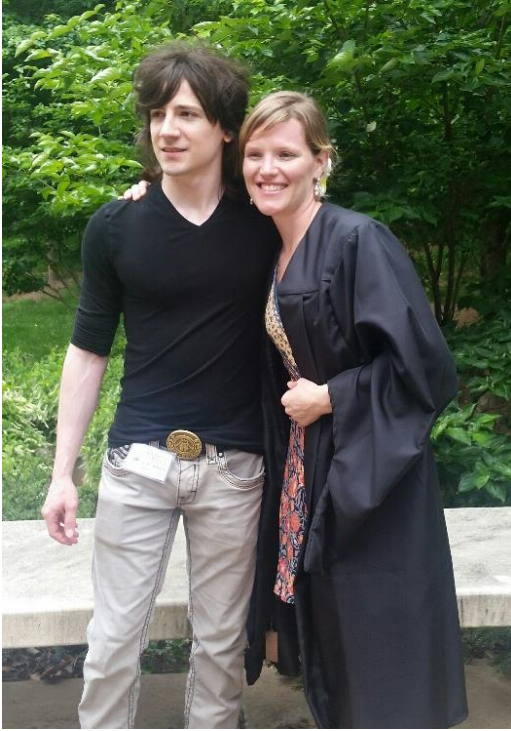
violence. “We all carry the postmemory of this event because many of us only witnessed this tragedy on our television screens,” said Emily Elmore, one of Hanadi’s students. “We are all affected by what happened in August because our school has been forever marked by this event. Together, as a community, we must rise up against the hate in order to cope with what happened.”

As part of their final project for the class, the students had to create a visual display in which they interpret a traumatic experience in a way that elicit affective resonance in the audience. Submissions ranged from a suitcase filled with items that a Holocaust survivor or a Syrian refugee might have carried to a diorama of empty desks which represented the lives lost during school shootings. Collectively the projects highlight the value of empathic art that seeks to engage the audience in an interactive, redemptive engagement, rather than the old-fashioned commemorative art function.

I was blown away by the creativity of my student’s collective projects, by the various ways in which they used individual traumas to connect to collective ones locally and globally. From school shootings, to the Charlottesville hate rally, to Hungarian wars, Holocaust refugee suitcase, sexual violence, an excellent recording of Syrian refugee stories, and a 3-D model of the intricate workings of trauma inside a human’s head, they proved the pervasiveness of trauma and the need to combat it with our shared humanity. I challenged them to remain engaged in transforming traumas into perpetual moments of triumph.

HANADI AL-SAMMAN

# Aenon Moose's Speech at 2017 MESALC Graduation Ceremony



Aenon Moose (right)

First, I would like to thank the MESALC faculty and staff for all that they do to guide, educate, and support us, as well as the generosity of the Hassan, Mahvash, and Farzad Milani Charitable Trust which provided me and other students with scholarship funds. I would also like to thank the MESALC faculty for allowing me the honor of speaking to all of you today. To be honest, I'm terrified of public speaking. But I'm also thrilled by the opportunity to challenge that fear as well as to share my personal triumphs with all of you today. No doubt we have all had to overcome countless, seemingly impossible obstacles on our way to this moment of celebration.

For me, this entire experience has been a process of re-discovery, of personal and intellectual growth. I was so nervous about returning to school after a five year interval following my undergraduate degree. Towards the end of those five years I gave birth to my son, and shortly afterwards found myself escaping an

emotionally abusive and dangerous marriage. In the process of coming to terms with my imminent divorce, I decided to finally achieve a postponed goal—going to graduate school. Formerly I had been accused of not being able to follow through with my goals, and that my interest in the humanities was a useless waste of time. All lies.

The last two years in this program have taught me more than I ever could have imagined, not only about my field of interest—gender, caste and class in South Asian society—but also about myself. Each semester, as I answered to calls of “Mommie! Mommie!” while sporadically reading dozens upon dozens of pages, translating Sanskrit, and contemplating a viable thesis, I thought to myself that what I was doing was crazy, not only that, but impossible—that I simply couldn't go on anymore. But each time I made it to the end of a semester, I realized that I could, and it wasn't impossible.

With the unending support of my wonderful fiancé, the kindness of my supervisors and colleagues, the tenacious encouragement of my mother, and the limited but noble patience of my four year old, I was able to cross the biggest finish line I have ever faced. I can now proudly say that I am the first woman in my family to earn a Master's degree, and for that I am incredibly proud and grateful. I know that I am not alone in claiming that my own unique experiences, struggles, and triumphs are what drive my pursuits of more inclusive understanding, discourse, and action.

Now, more than ever, the work that we, our mentors, and our colleagues have done as scholars of other, often misunderstood cultures is of the utmost importance. The current global geopolitical atmosphere dramatically highlights both the value and necessity of interdisciplinary education and transcultural understanding. Our scholarship has the potential not only to change our own understandings and opinions, but also to change the world around us.

Without recognizing and honoring the richness of our differences and experiences, there is no hope for meaningful progress in academics or world affairs.



From left: Lilly Crown, Aenon Moose, Jeanne Hucek, Cameron Clayton

From my studies at the University of Virginia I have come to realize that the contemporary issues that we collectively face are not reducible to a singular disciplinary perspective—they cannot be understood fully from one methodology alone—they require an intersectional approach that scrutinizes from all directions. It is crucial to synthesize the historical and theoretical with the personal in order to imbed our own experiences, fears, and compromises within locally diverse processes while simultaneously and continuously re-contextualizing these in relation to world around us. Today we celebrate our monumental achievements, our strengths, and our diversity. My academic career in the humanities has changed my life and how I perceive the world. And I hope to project these changes into the world around me.

I congratulate each and every one of you today that is also celebrating your own changes, triumphs and firsts. May we all strive to be powerful engines of change in these uncertain times. Thank you so much and congratulations!

AENON MOOSE

## Thomas Jefferson Makes his Debut on Arabic TV



Students in the “Introduction to Arabic Drama” class are interviewed for Arabic TV

In Fall 2017, associate professor Hanadi Al-Samman and her students in “Introduction to Arabic Drama” class were interviewed on **al-Hurra TV** in Arabic on the life and legacy of the university’s founder, Mr. Jefferson. The interview tackled various aspects of Mr. Jefferson’s educational vision upon founding the University of Virginia, his role in drafting the US constitution, views on freedom and their contested implementation in light of his slave ownership.

Similar to Mr. Jefferson who cultivated diplomatic ties with Morocco and owned a copy of the Qur’an, students highlighted the need to study Arabic and to pursue diplomatic ties with the Middle East at this critical political juncture. Subsequently, the TV crew proceeded to interview Professor Al-Samman at the Rotunda, and to visit Monticello. The interview will air in its entirety on September 2018.

HANADI AL-SAMMAN

# ENVISIONING 21ST CENTURY MIDDLE EAST & SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

Co-Sponsored by the Center for Global Inquiry & Innovation, the College & Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, and the Institute of the Humanities & Global Cultures.



Zachary Lockman and Tessa Farmer

On April 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures hosted a symposium on *Envisioning 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle East & South Asian Studies*. The Symposium was held in the Rotunda and organized by Department Chair, Farzaneh Milani as well as Professors Mehr Farooqi, Hanadi Al-Samman, and Tessa Farmer. The aim of the conference was to define the contours of possibility for area studies of the Middle East and South Asia. Scholars arrived on grounds to dialogue and discourse on the future of area studies in the Middle East and South Asia. The conference could not have come at a better time, never has there been a greater need to address the role of scholars and institutions of higher learning in knowledge production of the connections and continuities between the two regions and the world. Throughout the two days of panels and dialogues, the symposium highlighted the collaborations and regional knowledge produced in the region.



The first panel opened up the conference by addressing the topic “Why Area Studies are Indispensable,” featuring dialogue from Professors Zachary Lockman of NYU, Jo-Anne Hart of Brown, and Fahad Bishara of UVA. Zachary Lockman opened the panel by speaking on the “Paradoxes of Area Studies,” where he spoke on how we can decentralize area studies away from a Western lens and move toward a more intellectually diverse alternative. Professor Hart discussed the impact of US military and foreign policy on area studies, and the importance of co-production of knowledge in area studies. Our very own Fahad Bishara brought our attention to the importance of the role of the bazaar in shaping global economy, emphasizing the importance of the local and transregional in order to understand the global. The panel as a whole illustrated the importance of a holistic view of area studies in order to better understand our interconnectedness.



The second panel continued the conversation after a lunch recess with “The Global South Reconfigured” with panelists Vinay Lal from UCLA, Mubbashir Rizvi of Georgetown, and Neha Vora of Lafayette. Professor Lal brought an analysis of the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955, in which formerly colonized peoples gathered in solidarity. He complicated the definition of the “Global South,” and discussed ways in which South Asian Studies can breathe new life into a term he sees as being an American academic way to quell academic dissent. Professor Rizvi discussed sectarian politics in Pakistan and the role of nationalism and authoritarianism in creating and fueling sectarian politics. Professor Vora discussed South Asian migration to the United States and the problems of H1B, a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ and exploit South Asian laborers.



(From left) Griff Chaussée, Abdul Nasir, Tessa Farmer, Jo-Anne Hart (foreground)



Guest Speakers, (From left) Vinay Lal, Mubbashir Rizvi, Neha Vora

The next day, the third panel, “The South Before Global South,” wrapped up the symposium with talks from Bassam Haddad of GMU, Raza Rumi of Cornell, Culture Writer and UVA alum Bilal Qureshi, and Anne Garland Mahler from UVA. Professor Haddad discussed his pioneering new website, the “Knowledge Production Project.” When it goes live, the website will contain all data and knowledge produced on the Middle East in English since the 1970s. Professor Rumi highlighted geographies of power on the Asian continent, focusing on the growing influence of Iran as a global and regional power. Bilal Qureshi walked us through the ‘Padmavati Problem,’ and the dynamics of Islam and Hinduism in the face of present-day Hindu nationalism. Professor Mahler discussed her forthcoming book and traced the genealogy of the conception of Global South from the Cold War until now. The symposium concluded with a field trip to Monticello.

Envisioning 21<sup>st</sup> Century Middle East & South Asian Studies symposium was a big success. Please be on the lookout for the edited volume of its proceedings.



MESALC Faculty, (From left) Griff Chaussée, Abdul Nasir, Bilal Maanaki, Bilal Humeidan, Mohammed Sawaie, Suad Mohamed, Farzaneh Milani

---

STEARNS SWETNAM



Department of Middle Eastern &  
South Asian Languages & Cultures



142 New Cabell Hall, P.O. Box 400781  
Charlottesville, VA 22904-4781  
Phone: (434) 243-8076 Fax: (434) 243-1528  
Email: [mesa@virginia.edu](mailto:mesa@virginia.edu)

The MESALC Newsletter  
Contact: Cameron Clayton  
Phone: (434) 243-8076  
Email: [rcc8k@virginia.edu](mailto:rcc8k@virginia.edu)



**Support Us!**

Please consider supporting the Department of Middle  
Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures.

Log on to our website at:  
[www.mesalc.virginia.edu](http://www.mesalc.virginia.edu)  
and click on "Donate"

