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Synergies: Persian, Urdu, and Hindi in MESALC

The Persian language came to India with the Turks, who established the Delhi Sultanate in the 12th century. It became the language of the court. Under the Mughals, who ruled India beginning in the early 16th century, literature in Persian flourished as more and more poets and scholars from Iran and Central Asia found their way to the Mughal court. Under Mughal rule, translations from classical languages, such as Sanskrit and Arabic, into Persian were undertaken on a massive scale. Elaborate histories of the Mughal administration, such as the Ain-e Akbari of Abul Fazl, were written in Persian. All these activities made Persian synonymous with the Mughal state.

When Persian speakers interacted with the languages of northern India (subsumed under the umbrella term Hindi) over the next couple of centuries, a mixed language that we now know as Urdu emerged. Urdu, or its early literary version, Rekhtah, was built on the Hindi/Indic grammar base with a vocabulary speckled with Persian and Sanskrit derivatives.
Three different shades of Persian were also created: *Indo-Iranian Persian*, which is the Persian written by Iranian-born writers who lived the most part of their lives in India, *Indo-Persian*, which is the Persian written by second generation Iranians whose forefathers had settled in India, and *Indian Persian*, which is Persian written by Indians, who were either Muslims or Hindus. Thus Persian, in its different registers, became the most important literary language in India. A vast quantity of literature, both in poetry and prose, was produced. To facilitate the absorption of Persian by the Indian elite, many major, influential dictionaries of Persian were produced in India from the 13th to the 19th century. Some great dictionary writers, such as Tek Chand Bahar (*Bahar-i Ajam*) and Sialkoti Mal Varasta, were Hindus.

By the latter half of the 18th century, immigration from Iran and central Asia began to wane. In the peripheral regions of the Mughal Empire, it was Rekhtah rather than Persian that represented the authority of the center. Muhammad Vali, a poet from western India, was the first to produce an entire Divan or collection of ghazals in Rekhtah. Vali’s rekhah poetry opened the flood gates to the writing of ghazals in the rekhah mode. The synergies between the Persian and Sanskritic indigenous literatures had resulted in the creation of the Sabk-i Hindi, or the Persian ghazal poetry in the “Indian style.” The themes of Sabk-i Hindi poets were complex and their metaphors very intricate and abstruse. The Urdu ghazal, too, leaned towards Sabk-i Hindi motifs. What is remarkable is that some of Urdu’s greatest poets, such as Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal, were highly regarded Persian poets too. The capability of writing in two languages with equal felicity is a remarkable accomplishment of the Indian literati.

The relationship between Persian and Urdu grew stronger as Urdu was split by the British colonizers beginning in the 19th century to create the so-called standardized form of Urdu and Hindi. A Persianized vocabulary became the benchmark for Urdu. Paradoxically, as Indian Persian declined, Persianized Urdu took its place. But Urdu and Hindi cannot be unlinked because of their common root: grammar.

The heart must have burned when the body burned;

What are you searching
digging in those ashes?
In his *History of the University of Virginia*, Philip Bruce describes Thomas Jefferson’s vision for his “academical village” as a truly international and cosmopolitan place: “His inquisitive eyes looked abroad unerringly for the best in the practical or intellectual life of every foreign land in order to employ it for the betterment of his own,” writes Mr. Bruce. From the days of its founding, foreign languages (along with philosophy, arts, science, law, and medicine) were part of the University of Virginia’s curriculum. Remarkably, of the original seven professors teaching on the first day of classes at UVa in 1825, five were foreign citizens and two were foreign-born. Mr. Jefferson would be delighted with the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures—an exemplary academical village at the institution he founded.

In its core composition and mission, MESALC rises to the challenge of educating a new wave of students who represent a surge of interest—and enrollment—in the languages, literatures, and cultures of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, an area encompassing some 30% of the world population. MESALC is not united by a common geographic area of expertise, one language, or one intellectual commitment. Yet, it has a unique identity. It focuses on the deep historical ties between the many and varied literatures, languages, cultures, politics, and religions of the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates), North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia) and South Asia (Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka). We teach six languages—Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit, and Urdu—and have an impressive array of expertise and specialization among our faculty members—Anthropology; Comparative Literature; Islamic Studies; Language Pedagogy; Literary Studies; Linguistics; History; Media Studies; Anthropology; Film Studies; Philology; and Gender Studies. We are also one of very few universities nationwide that takes a cross-regional approach, integrating studies of the Middle East and South Asia.

The institutional experience of academic disciplines suggests that the crossing of such wide-ranging linguistic, intellectual, and regional boundaries is difficult, if not impossible. We take great pride in having accomplished interdisciplinarity cross-culturally. While maintaining our strong language programs and content courses, we are designing more trans-cultural, trans-national courses in tandem with the College’s mandate for interdisciplinarity in a global context.

And yet, what most distinguishes the Department is its students. We consider our students our major asset. They speak out for global justice, question canonical knowledge, revise methods of inquiry, and challenge conventional academic structures and curricula. By refusing to remain uninvolved citizens of the global village, they contribute significantly to advance the priorities of the University and its founding father.
When I told my family my plan to study abroad in Jordan that summer, they were shocked. They couldn’t believe “Play It Safe” Katharyn would choose to study Arabic 23 hours per week for two whole months… and without air-conditioning. I honestly could not believe it either. However, UVA in Jordan was essential to my college experience. Once a “Play It Safe” kind of person, I became something I had never thought I could be: bold.

Inside the classroom, my Arabic improved markedly. Once too shy to speak in Arabic, I found myself chatting with professors, language partners, and complete strangers. I still made mistakes, yet with each one, my confidence in my abilities grew. I left the United States unsure of myself, and returned a more confident student, now as chatty in Arabic as I am in English.

Outside of the classroom, I did things I never would have before. During the first week, I was overwhelmed by the newness of place. Yet by the second, I was ravenous. New foods, new experiences, new people— I could not get enough. This thirst for adventure culminated in a trip to Istanbul, a place I had only dreamt I would get to see one day. Of course, there were bouts of homesickness. But, by the end of the summer, I felt a sense of nostalgia for a place that felt so strange only two months earlier.

Since returning to the United States, I have found that when asked about one’s study abroad experience, the automatic answer is “Great!” However, my study abroad experience was not just “Great.” It was daring. It was vivacious. It was bold, and it forced me to be bold. Once “Play It Safe” Katharyn, I am now a more adventurous, open-minded, and courageous version of myself. I am bold.

KATHARYN GADIEN

My Summer with UVA in Jordan

Mahmoud Darwish

He is Quiet and So Am I

He is quiet and so am I
He sips tea with lemon,
And I drink coffee,
That is the difference between us.
He wears, like me, a loose, striped shirt
And I read, like him, the evening newspapers.
He does not see me as I glance stealthily,
And I do not see him when he glances stealthily.
He is quiet and so am I.
He asks the waiter something,
I ask the waiter something …
A black cat passes between us,
I touch its black fur
He touches its black fur …
I do not say to him: the sky is clear today
And more blue.
He does not say to me: the sky is clear today.
He is the observed and observer
I am the observed and observer.
I move my left leg
He moves his right leg.
I hum a tune,
He hums a similar tune.
I think: is he the mirror I view myself in?
Then I look toward his eyes,
But I no longer see him …
I leave the café in a hurry.
I think: perhaps he is a killer, or perhaps
He, just passing through, thought I was a killer
He is afraid, and so am I!

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), a Palestinian poet, is considered one of the most famous Arab poets in the 20th/21st centuries. The original Arabic version of this poem is selected from his anthology titled La Tā'tadhir ‘amma fa’alt (Do Not Apologize for What You Did), 2nd edition, published in Beirut in 2004.

Translated By: MOHAMMED SAWAIE
My MESALC Experience

In 2006, when I entered the graduate program at UVa’s Department of Anthropology with the hope of conducting ethnographic research in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it seemed a daunting task. I required Persian language, region-specific expertise, research visas, and faculty support, both in the U.S. and in Tehran. It helped that I aimed to study a topic that was superficially apolitical – Iranian national food culture, the family, and rural Shi’i Islam, and that I had the benefit of UVa’s excellent Department of Anthropology, yet I still needed a starting place, a beginning.

I found that place in UVa’s Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures. Having dabbled in Arabic and Persian language as an undergraduate, I took my first real Persian class with Professor Zjaleh Hajibashi at MESALC and loved every minute of it. She used Farsi language text books and encouraged the students to speak Persian to each other in class. We wrote dialogues and poetry. We learned to speak. I can honestly say that Professor Hajibashi is the best language teacher I have ever had.

As my confidence in the language grew, I made special arrangements to take more advanced Persian classes at the graduate level in MESALC. These included “Introduction to Modern Persian Literature” as well as an “Independent Study” in Persian poetry, again with Professor Hajibashi. We read amazing short stories, wrote essays, and learned vocabulary, in Farsi. In addition, I took an invaluable class with Professor Farzaneh Milani entitled “Life Narratives and Iranian Women Writers.” We read Simin Behbahani, Forough Farrokhzad, Shahrnush Parsipur, and Shirin Neshat, among others. The diversity of Iranian language, culture, and film came alive. I am tremendously thankful to Professor Milani for also being my outside dissertation committee member. Finally, I had the great fortune of auditing several fascinating classes on Persian prose and poetry with Professor Alireza Korangy, an amazing scholar and teacher.

I can’t begin to explain the many ways in which all of these courses contributed to the completion of my successful dissertation, Feeding Moral Relations: the Making of Kinship and Nation in Iran. The task I had set out for myself was not an easy one. But beyond providing speaking and writing skills in Persian, the MESALC’s classes provided me with the skills to do my research. Indeed, the ability to converse about Hafez or Ferdowsi, or even about Farrokhzad, became profoundly useful during fieldwork in Iran. Iran is, I found, a land of poetry experts. The verses of Hafez and Rumi abound, even in the rural town where I conducted fieldwork in the Fars Province.

Since returning from the field, I had the wonderful opportunity to contribute in my own way to MESALC. In the Spring of 2014, I taught a class, cross-listed in Anthropology, entitled “Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia,” to a group of diverse and interested students. Today, having successfully graduated from UVa, I am the Postdoctoral researcher at the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies at Princeton University. I wish to express my deepest thanks to MESALC and to its faculty and staff.

ROSE WELLMAN
Shankar Nair
MESALC’S NEWEST FACULTY MEMBER

After studying in Boston, MA for far too long (undergraduate and graduate, Harvard University), I spent a few semesters as an instructor at Brandeis University. I then had the very good fortune to teach at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for a time. Life was good – but we missed the mountains! The opportunity to work now with the fine students of UVa really is a dream come true, and the shift from the Midwestern flatlands to the hills, forests, and rivers of Charlottesville has been a welcome one. Needless to say, I am an avid nature-lover and hiker, and hope to see you on the trails sometime!

A central theme in my work is the myriad connections and interrelations between the Middle East and South Asia, and so it is a delight for me to be able to call MESALC my departmental home. I look forward to exploring these fascinating connections together in the classroom. I am also always looking for the opportunity to explore new religious texts in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, so, if you’re looking to study something, let me know!

SHANKAR NAIR
NEW COURSES

................................. 2014

MEST 3559/5559
Martyrdom in the Middle East: A Literary Evaluation

Instructor: Alireza Korangy

This course engages students both in the foregrounding and mainstream ideas and ideals that have made martyrdom into the phenomenon we see in the Middle East today. It also introduces them to the otherwise neglected notions of martyrdom as can be found in the corpora of the many writers in the history of the Middle East. The course engages rigorously the role of the literary, both in terms of the religious and exegetical tradition, but also looks at the literary influences that could have—and in some case have in fact—precedes the religious notions of martyrdom in the Middle East and or built upon those religious fervors.

PERS 3559/5559
Jami’s Haft Aurang

Instructor: Alireza Korangy

This course addresses the poetry of ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami’s masterpiece in seven parts, “the Seven Thrones, the Seven Spheres, the Seven Heavens.” Considered one of the masterpieces of Persian literature, Jami’s work touches on the themes of many other Persian poetry greats. One of these poets, Nizami, and his work, Yusuf and Zulaykha, one of the seven works constituting the Haft Aurang, will be a special focus of this course, although others will be summarily touched upon.

PETR 3559
Ghazal in Near East and South Asia

Instructor: Alireza Korangy

This class treats the influences of the poetic genre of ghazal as a focal point of divergence in linguistic and thematic development of poetry in the Middle East, Near East and South Asia. The embryonic stages of ghazal, from the ninth to the twelfth century, will be examined from the point of view of theme, rhetoric, and prosody under the rubric of historicity and cross-linguistic correlation. The subject requires an in-depth analysis and interpretation of a multitude of Arab and Persian poets in order to examine the thematic borrowings prevalent in the early and eventually later stages of ghazal development. More than fifty poets will be examined. Ghazal is the most important poetic genre in the Persian-speaking world, but is also extremely prevalent in South Asia. The inter-regional influences of the ghazal are immense, both in terms of prominence and culturally nuanced themes and rhetoric, especially when considering Indo-Persian studies. The development of this genre, in terms of both rhetoric and meaning, will be examined. This lecture and all readings will be in English.
**Border Crossings**  
**Author:** Hanadi Al-Samman  
**Publisher:** Peter Lang Publishing, 2014


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**No Tapping Around Philology**  
**Editor:** Alireza Korangy  
**Publisher:** Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014

This volume is a collection of twenty-three articles. It is dedicated to one of the most distinguished philologists and linguists in Near Eastern Studies and one of the most prolific teachers and translators of Near Eastern languages and literatures, Wheeler McIntosh Thackston, Jr. (Harvard University), on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

The essays, written by Thackston’s students, colleagues, and friends each interact with his intellectual legacy individually and are divided into four sections: Persian Literature; Linguistics, Philology, and Religious Studies; Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and South Asian History; and History of Art and Architecture. Reflecting Thackston’s scholarly attention to the translation of primary sources, many of the essays bring to light never-before-translated texts, ranging from Persian letters from the Qing archive in Beijing to early Arabic sources on sorcery and magic to commentaries on classic works of Persian literature. The volume also devotes significant space to art historical contributions by several of Thackston’s collaborators, and it also features essays from Thackston’s colleagues in fields including Semitic Philology, Biblical Studies, and Classics. The volume is completed with a bibliography of Thackston’s publications and biographical reflections on his scholarly life.
Calendar of Events  

**Fall 2014**

**September 16**
STS Colloquium  
- Kavita Philip
3:30 PM – 5:00 PM
341 Mechanical Engineering Building

**September 24**
The Art and Craft of the Parallel Entrepreneur  
- Giles Jackson
7:30 PM – 8:30 PM
036 New Cabell Hall

**September 29**
ISIS and the Gulf States: A View from Oman  
- Reverend Doug Leonard
4:00 PM
441 Nau Hall

**October 10**
Religious Law and the Practice of Philosophy in Islam  
- Frank Griffel
3:00 PM
101 Nau Hall

**October 27**
Responding to ISIS Violence Against Women and Girls  
9:30 AM – 4:30 PM
Newcomb Hall

**October 29**
The Sorrow and the Joy: Remembering Hussein’s Martyrdom in Hyderabad, Pakistan  
- Ashok Rajput
4:30 PM – 6:30 PM
127 Ruffner Hall

**October 30**
Global Film Series – “The Lunchbox”  
- Ashok Rajput
6:30 PM
Bryan Hall Faculty Lounge

**October 31**
Standard, National, and Colloquial Varieties of Persian  
- Corey Miller
4:30 PM – 5:30 PM
G120 Claude Moore Nursing Building

**November 6**
Global Film Series – “Where Do We Go Now”  
- John Al-Haddad
6:30 PM
Bryan Hall Faculty Lounge
Rebekah McCallum
OUR ONGOING MEHFIL

When I first walked into Urdu 7300, an Urdu poetry class, I was quite unsure of myself. I took my seat and looked around as the other students were speaking in Urdu. Some were native Urdu speakers and some had studied the language for several years. I immediately felt out of my element. Based on the syllabus, I hadn’t expected to begin by speaking in the language of the poetry we would be studying and was therefore somewhat flustered by that and by the competency of my classmates. Humorously now, I can reflect on a she’r (couplet) from a ghazal of Ghalib to indicate my condition in that first class:

It is somewhat for this reason that I am quiet
Otherwise, doesn’t talk come?
–Ghalib

The class was made up of mostly undergraduates; two of us were graduate students. Verbal language capabilities varied, but we could all read the language. Despite being a few years older than most in the class and having been given permission to enroll in the class, I still felt some apprehension. I had limited (intermediate) knowledge of written Hindi, lesser ability in verbal Hindi, and not much knowledge of Urdu.

Granted, Hindi and Urdu are sister languages, twins that share the same grammar and some vocabulary, but differ in script and in the derivation of most of their vocabulary—Urdu from Persian and Arabic, Hindi from Sanskrit. I, along with one other student, would be given the readings in the Devanagari script and would have to expand my vocabulary as we progressed.

Subsequent to that first class, my trepidation was replaced by enthusiasm; the study of the poetry itself enabled that transition.

We are there, from where to us too
Does news of us not come?
–Ghalib

Poetry as a discipline transcends cultures and articulates space for the reader to enter into, enjoy its ambience, and ruminate. It even allows those less attuned to poetry’s nuances and to the intricacies of known and new languages to still partake in its content. The Urdu ghazal’s form and content, especially those of a 19th-century poet we studied in depth in this class, Ghalib, speak to richness dipped in philosophy of an era gone by. Yet, ghazals are not transient poetry. Like the she’r quoted above, contemporary readers can reap the benefits of a distant poet-philosopher’s contemplations. Ghazal poets pull from the ‘ghazal universe,’ where certain tropes, themes and metaphors are shared, intertwined, rearticulated and expanded to convey meaning.

I also have language lodged in my mouth
If only you’d ask me what was wrong?
–Ghalib

The above she’r ‘speaks’ to the essential performative aspect of the ghazal and the actual voice of the poet, intrinsic features that add allure distinctive from the silent or verbal reading of words on paper. Mood and emotion is powerfully conveyed through the practiced articulation of the speaker. Rhythm is essential to its beauty. For a modern-day audience, similarity may be found in the artistic recitations of the spoken word or slam artist.
The ambience created or brought to mind when reading ghazals is that of the mushaira or the mehfil. A mushaira was/is a setting containing many poets who verbally outdo each other and also share in the richness of each other’s poetry. Each poet gets up to recite one after another, with the most distinguished performing at the end. The event can last from the evening well into the night. A smaller, more intimate gathering is called a mehfil. From the onset, our class was called “Ongoing Mehfil,” and based on the tradition, I am beginning to see what that means.

In either setting (mushaira or mehfil), the audience is inextricably involved in the recitation. The poet recites accompanied by shouts from the audience, exhibiting its pleasure, “Vah, vah, vah”. Stylishly putting his hand to his face, the poet acknowledges the praise and continues. If “mukarrar” is heard, then the poet will repeat the most recent she’r again.

The last she’r recited is called the maqta and it usually contains the poet’s takhallus (pen-name). Often humorous, it expresses a taunt directed at another poet, a tongue-in-cheek jibe at the Beloved, a self-deprecating anecdote, or an exhibition of false humility.

One such maqta is that of Ghalib, that can be translated thus:

Maybe Ghalib is not worth anything
But if you get him for free, what’s the problem?
- Ghalib

Reciting is both interpreting and conversing; we have noticed the subtleties of this in our studies. Within the class, we have had, and will continue to have, the opportunity to recite, translate, or trans-create ghazals written by Ghalib. The task has been challenging and rewarding. Pushing the limits of the form, we have produced more direct translations as well as translations that allow for contemporary creative ability to shine through. In this article, I have selected she’rs and their translations that we have examined in the class and that speak to our classroom experiences.

Each week, now, as I enter the classroom on Monday evenings, I am excited to partake in the reading of the poetry, explore the meanings and try my hand at translation. I am able to see the poet’s place within and separate from the culture which the poetry originated. Every week, we read and analyze a ghazal or examine the life of a poet to see where certain ideas are present or from where they derived. Sometimes humor is expressed, sometimes deep sadness. On these evenings, we explore the poetry into the early hours of the night. Relishing word play, we move through time to Mughal Delhi and back again, carrying the tradition with us. In this way, it is our ongoing mehfil, an intimate evening gathering—a setting created to experience poetry.

**Rebekah McCallum**
The documentary focuses on the outdoor public ceremonies rather than private gatherings at home. The documentary begins with a brief history of the events in which Imam Hussein and his family members were martyred. Through religious posters, the documentary narrates various events of the battle of Karbala. In Islam, iconography of Prophet Mohammad, his companions and other Muslim saints are forbidden. But many posters of Iranian origin depicting the Shia martyrs and the events of Karbala are widely available in Pakistan. Shias decorate these posters in their houses. After a brief history, the documentary shows the Shia ceremonies which begin every year with the erection of the standard at many neighborhood shrines all over the city. The standards, called *alam*, are beautifully decorated by Sindhi woodwork craftsmen. The *alams* are painted with various sacred insignia and symbols.

Later, the documentary shows mourning rituals called *azadari*, performed by men, women, and youth. During these rituals, head and chest beating are carried out to the beats of drumming and to the recitation of dirges. In Hyderabad, women are significantly present at various shrines and gatherings during the Muharram. They also have their separate gatherings, where they recite the dirges to remember the suffering, and recite elegies to praise the tolerance and ideals of Hussein, his family, and followers.

On the tenth day of the month of Muharram, called *Ashura*, Hussein was martyred. It’s a state holiday in Pakistan. In Hyderabad, Sindh, several small and big processions, are organized, in which thousands of people participate. During these processions self-flagellations are carried out by men. Shias believe that self-flagellation is carried out to remember the suffering of Hussein and his family. They believe that this act of self-flagellation teaches them the ideals of non-violence and peace, as suggested by Imam Hussein.
Thanks to the generosity of the Hassan, Mahvash & Farzad Milani Charitable Trust, the Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures is offering a $4,000 scholarship during the Spring semester of 2015 to a graduate or undergraduate student majoring, minoring, or taking courses in the Department. The scholarship is open to both needs-based and merit-based recipients although preference will be given to those receiving financial aid. Eligible students must be enrolled full time. Please submit a resume and an essay summarizing your educational interest to Mr. Cameron Clayton at rcc8k@eservices.virginia.edu no later than December 10. The recipient will be informed no later than January 20.

The final part of the documentary focuses on Sunni Muslim processions organized by the Urdu-speaking immigrants known as the Muhajirs. In 1947, after the partition of India and the independence of Pakistan, millions of Muslim immigrants from northern India moved to Sindh province. They brought their unique traditions of tazia processions. The musical performances, particularly drumming in these processions, are markedly different from the Shia processions. The documentary shows this diversity and points to the idea of the Sunni traditions of remembering Imam Hussein and his followers’ sacrifice. In Sunni tazia processions, the atmosphere is of a festive occasion, in contrast to Shia’s mourning rituals. This is suggested in the title of the documentary “The Sorrow and the Joy.”

The documentary is fast paced and about 45 minutes long. According to Ashok Rajput, he decided to produce an ethnographic documentary in order to show the diverse traditions of Sindh, Pakistan. He said that the Muharram traditions are under threat due to the targeted killings of Shias by radical Muslim groups. The documentary will shortly be available for purchase. Ashok Rajput said that the money from the sale of this documentary will go to the manganhar musicians of Hyderabad.

ASHOK RAJPUT
In Jaghori, Afghanistan, I walked three hours to get to high school, but here in Charlottesville I only walk three minutes to get to class. I walked five miles to get to Jaghori’s only radio station where I worked as a journalist, but now I drive less than ten minutes to a part-time job on the other side of town. In Afghanistan, I interviewed young girls from different schools for my radio program, and here, in my role as a Shea House Language Assistant, I help students learn Persian.

I never expected to attend the University of Virginia, but from an early age I was determined to learn the most from wherever I could. At UVa, my understanding of the world has grown from the limitations of Jaghori, Taliban rule, and war. These two vastly different experiences have given me a unique platform from which I can once again broadcast my voice. At UVa, I double major in Women and Middle Eastern Studies to prepare for a career promoting women’s rights in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. Being here has provided me with numerous venues to contribute to a better understanding of my part in the world through sharing my unique perspective. By talking about the obstacles and challenges of my past, I have also been able to reach and positively affect others struggling with those same issues now.

While I still have far to go, looking back on my journey thus far makes me value even more the stopover at UVa. My UVa studies build and expand upon what I started in Afghanistan as a teenager when I was the only female journalist in Jaghori and one of the few in the entire country. What I’ve learned and lived at UVa will surely open new doors and encourage me to step inside each one, analyzing new ways of thinking and best practices that I can apply to make a difference in the struggles of Afghan women and in the violent struggles in the Middle East.

Accepting the offer to live at the Shea House and being a Language Assistant for the Persian cohort has allowed me to develop stronger connections with people through working with individuals who are willing to learn Persian. In addition to Shea residents, I am using my Persian skills and interest in Persian culture to support any and all students who are Persian or interested in it. I offer a Persian Lab to tutor students taking Persian classes. These activities facilitate many interesting and nourishing interactions with different cultures I had never encountered before. Among other attributes, my exposure to the culture and dynamic of Shea House definitely adds another layer to my evolving understanding of life itself.

In the end, I view my personal and academic life here at UVa, within my studies and within Shea, as beneficial too in helping map out some of my next steps after graduation. My native language Dari is very close to Persian. Teaching Persian as a Language Assistant has motivated me to continue writing poetry in Persian. My poems reflect on Afghanistan life and harsh realities, and are a catharsis for my feelings towards my country and family there.

Gaisu Yari

A Stop On My Way Back Home

Gaisu Yari

Sangi Masha, Jaghori Afghanistan
Multicultural Student Services in the Office of the Dean of Students

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures, I developed an interest in exploring the various cultural education programs developed and maintained by students in the Middle Eastern cultural community and supported by the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS). During my fourth year I interned with ODOS, which led me to a greater appreciation of the diversity within the Middle Eastern community at U.Va. and a better understanding of the domestic and international issues that affect the lives of countless Middle Eastern Americans on a daily basis. I later completed the M.A. program in Middle Eastern Studies and am now serving in ODOS as the multicultural program coordinator. One of my goals is to facilitate connections between academics and student activities, through student-faculty collaborations, in order to share the diversity and complexity within Middle Eastern cultures with the wider University community.

ODOS is committed to helping students make their academic learning practical and their student activities educational, but we also support a well-rounded and healthy student experience more generally. We offer general support for students, incident reporting and response, and multicultural student support and outreach. At a time of heightened racial and cultural bias and a misunderstanding of Middle Eastern cultures it is worth mentioning that students who experience bias incidents can attain prompt support through the “Just Report It” system. The dean on call service also provides 24-hour crisis management services, and we have resources for hazing prevention and education along with sexual violence education, mediation, and formal adjudication options. Multicultural Student Services is one piece within the wider network of support and resources available through ODOS.

In terms of multicultural enrichment we provide funding for a variety of student activities, particularly those that are outreach-based in scope and collaborative in nature. We coordinate the Middle Eastern Mentoring Program, and we also provide support to the Middle Eastern Leadership Council (MELC). MELC serves as the umbrella organization for several student groups that have a cultural focus. MELC has been instrumental in organizing programs and events to bring in speakers, screen films, and offer service opportunities to help educate the wider community about Middle Eastern cultures. Funding for such activities comes through ODOS, the Cultural Programming Board, the Office of the Vice President & Chief Student Affairs Officer, Student Council, the Parents Fund, and Alumni Hall, among other sources. In our work with and support for student groups we at ODOS are eager to continue in a proud tradition of collaborations between our office, MESALC, and the vibrant student groups on Grounds.

MICHELLE SAWWAN

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1 http://www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/programsandservices/
Innovative Collaborations: 
Synaesthesia and Inter-institutional Classrooms

Institutional climates in the United States are currently awash in buzz phrases, raining down like manna from some imaginary heaven: global studies, interdisciplinary studies, new area studies, digital humanities, online courses, and virtual classrooms. In many of these phrases, the university is portrayed as being at the edge of innovation. Though newness is the value being heralded through them, I am not suggesting that the terms in question are so au courant they have no history. To the contrary, many of the mandates that are incipient in these tag-lines have longish lineages that have sometimes shown up at other times under various auspices. The problem at stake here then is not that words are and have been bandied about to fill out a department portfolio or a university strategic plan.

I begin with this list of expressions because when Kavita Philip, an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of California, and I, in MESALC at UVa, were talking about new pedagogies that would bring students from our institutions together in productive ways, while attending to the research questions and periods that were central to our academic lives, we found ourselves designing projects in which all of the so called new mandates found a home. Both Philip’s research and my own bring disciplines into difficult tensile conversations. Science, history, finance, and aesthetics come together in shapes, shades and plot-lines that challenge old stories about the proper objects of study.

This essay is a short think piece, written around the innovative practices in which Philip and I were engaged. We decided to co-teach units across University of California, Irvine and UVa that incorporated her research on digital piracy with mine on historical piracy and forms of governance and finance. Piracy is also a concept with which students are familiar—it informs their everyday lives in myriad ways that include piracy on the seas as well as digital piracy, pirated film, pirated books. So we felt that piracy could be a particularly generative and exciting unit for students from both our institutions.

We wanted to think about bringing classes together in several different ways over at least three years, piloting several kinds of collaboration to see what might work best—including online collaboration, the equivalent of face-to-face meetings, and collective virtual classrooms. Since I was teaching business and banking in historical South Asia and Philip was teaching courses in South Asian history, we designed a unit on Indian Ocean piracy.

In the Spring of 2013, the classes at both institutions focused on historiography and the conventions that mandate certain representations of piracy and the aesthetics embedded in practices of historical representations. What pirates did, the comportment of pirates, littoral and oceanic trade networks, the ways in which the various forms of labor that incorporated piracy as a trade were integrated into local ecologies and environmental patterns; ship building and the complexes that included governance, port cities and states that were remade into pirate ones, and the shifting imaging of regional, geographic and area boundaries.

This collaboration was built around digital materials in the humanities that included written and visual materials from art and critical geography, such as photographs and maps from various periods that demarcated geopolitical domains as well as
topographies, sea routes and eco-systems. Our students conversed with each other in various ways on-line, so that their understanding of an online classroom was one that expanded the classroom itself across space and time. Since what they were learning also traversed disciplines, the combination could be thought of as a form of synaesthetic learning.

Synaesthesia is usually taken to depict gathering different senses together in various confluences: the waft of a scent mutes into color, sound acquires a color palette, or flavor on the tongue is experienced as color, which one might encounter in wine tasting notes. In recent years, neuroscience researchers have been pressing synaesthesia into the service of new strategies to augment learning. Blending the somatic into epistemologies, pushing at the geo-political boundaries that have been established at particular historical junctures, bringing epistemic trajectories and materials from different disciplines into conversation with each other in the spaces of conjoined classrooms, made us call our venture ‘synaesthetic innovation’.

In 2013, students exchanged notes, commented on separate classroom discussions, and responded to each other’s blog entries that discussed salient historiographical and historical issues. The exchanges were rich and, varied and some of the insights on the political economies and assumptions that determine historical accounts, such as Eurocentrism and the influence of Atlantic trade networks, were extraordinarily valuable in inculcating critical thinking as well as introducing students to interdisciplinary engagements with geographic areas and histories outside their usual purview (most of our students had had few courses on regions outside the US).

In 2014, Philip and I will be lecturing in each other’s classes, and these lectures will be incorporated into relevant units at each university. Thanks to help from the School of Engineering (Science, Technology and Society), the Asia Institute, MESALC and the Dean’s office in Arts and Sciences, Philip came to Charlottesville to talk on her work on big data and censuses.

A third of my students in “Business and Banking in South Asia” class are majoring in the sciences, so the lecture empowered them to re-envision the spaces for productive intellectual exchanges in a way that brought together areas that they had imagined as separate. I will deliver a talk via Skype to a class at Irvine in the upcoming months.

In 2015, we plan to combine classes, co-teaching them through one of the virtual classroom formats that will allow us to combine on-line teaching with multiple uses of digital materials in virtual space.

As we continue to explore our classroom collaborations, Philip and I have begun to document the kinds of innovation that have been built into the work on which we have embarked. We are combining classrooms across institutions organized along two different time-lines, the semester and the quarter. Instead of staying with a single set-up for inter-institutional interdisciplinary classrooms, we opted to work at the level of a teaching unit. Using piracy set in the oceans between Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the South Asian peninsula and South East Asia, we textured the global by undoing the ways in which areas had been sedimented into epistemic-political units. Neither the nation as the unit of analysis, nor Cold War-funded political geographies that separated Africa and the Middle East from Asia, nor the more familiar histories of piracy as practice which are settled into the Atlantic sufficed. More than one extant version of area studies had to be revised to suit the material at hand. From shipping, trade, boats, environments, and labor that shapes itself around shifts in weather, fishing, farming, pillage, security, cargo and finance—piracy commands different lineages of knowledge production. The reading and the exercises allowed students to grapple with and critique the failsafe intellectual trajectories that scholars who study different areas are now also challenging. Our students shared the intellectual excitement of these new avenues for research by entering them through the interdisciplinary classroom as a site for synaesthetic learning.

GEETA PATEL
On Leopards, Cheetahs, and Persian Literature:

An Interview with David Laylin

David Laylin (center) participates in a stick dance in Iran

Q: What are you doing at UVA?
A: It is my great pleasure to be taking a course in Persian Literature with Professor Mahshad Mohit this semester.

Q: Why did you decide to audit this class?
A: This class is of special interest to me because I have been associated with Iran and Iranians for most of my life. I consider myself bi-cultural. I lived in Iran for 15 years as an Iranian, rather than as a foreigner. I had Iranian family, business partners, mostly spoke Persian and spent much of my time in the mountains, deserts, wetlands and villages of that beautiful country.

Q: How did you begin travelling and living in Iran?
A: My father did important legal work for Iran's pre-revolution government. Cases included the Azerbaijan case against Russia at the UN Security Council in 1946 and the Hirmand River treaty of 1973 with Afghanistan. My sister married Narcy Firouz, brother of Eskandar Firouz, who directed the Sazeman Hefazat Mohit Zist for some 15 years until the time of the Revolution.

Iran is at the confluence of the European, Indian and African continents. Its biological diversity is extraordinary! I co-founded the first hunting company in Iran in 1965. At that time, the quantities of game in the comprehensive network of protected areas were amazing. Unfortunately, after the Revolution, the new government was focused on other issues and the work of the Iranian Department of Environment was allowed to deteriorate. Some major species, like the leopard and cheetahs, are now threatened with extinction. Others are not far behind.
Now, I am associated with an Islamic NGO and an American non-governmental organization by the name of the Persian Wildlife Foundation. The latter works with another NGO in Tehran to improve the wildlife conservation and management situation in Iran. We are trusted by, and work closely with, the Department of Environment and the United Nations Development Program to help educate people at all levels in Iran.

Q: What are you studying with Mashad?
A: We are currently reading excerpts from a book by one of Iran’s foremost novelists, Simin Daneshvar. Her prose is full of interesting Persian expressions and slang. I especially enjoy this, as it makes me feel as if I were back in Iran, inside a family home. Persian is an extremely rich language.

Q: What, if any, other classes have you taken? Which has been your favorite?
A: This is the first college-level course that I have taken since 1961. At that time, I was studying Civil Engineering at George Washington University. I did not study languages in college, but spoke French as a child in Switzerland. Also my mother was from Argentina, my first wife from Uruguay and my first job was with the Inter-American Development Bank.

Q: How do these classes compare to your experience as an undergrad?
A: Compared to the language teaching philosophy of the 1960s, Mashad’s approach is very refreshing and productive.

Q: What do your classmates seem to think of you?
A: Thankfully, they do not seem to mind that there is an age difference of more than fifty years!

Q: What is next for you? Do you think you will audit any other classes?
A: I avidly look forward to the rest of this course and hope to also study Persian poetry.

DAVID LAYLIN

Mahshad Mohit

Photographer: Claude Levet
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