

**Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe
Beirut Summer Academy, October 2 – 13, 2006**

Travelling Traditions: Comparative Perspectives in Near Eastern Literatures

For the first two weeks in October, twenty-four participants, representing twenty-two different universities and fourteen countries, convened at a Summer Academy at the American University in Beirut. The Academy, entitled “Travelling Traditions: Comparative Perspectives in Near Eastern Literatures,” was directed by Samah Selim (IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence) and Friederike Pannewick (Oslo University). It was organized by the research program “Europe in the Middle East/The Middle East in Europe” of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in collaboration with the Anis Makdisi Program in Literature, the Heinrich Böll Foundation Middle East Office, and the German Orient Institute in Beirut.

On the opening evening at the AUB, Angelika Neuwirth (Freie Universität Berlin) welcomed the participants and described the presence of the Summer Academy as an affirmation of Lebanon’s vibrant intellectual climate. This past summer it was unclear whether or not the Academy would be able to convene as planned. As the war dragged on, the participants were notified that a contingency plan might be put in place to transfer it elsewhere. When August came to an end and as a cease-fire was finally implemented, the organizers decided to proceed with the initial proposal. Neuwirth’s remarks, set against the backdrop of the summer’s events, encouraged thinking about the Middle East and Europe not solely through the lens of history and politics, but also through the arts, which, she suggested, provide a “playful creativity and hybridity” often overlooked by social scientists. The stage was set for a series of conversations that would take place in the coming two weeks.

Each morning the participants gathered for sessions dedicated to topics ranging from secularism in world literature to classical poetic forms in modern Arabic writing. In some of these sessions, the participants met as part of smaller working groups to discuss each others’ individual projects; at other points, the group was divided into thematic discussions of pre-assigned readings; and twice, the group convened in a plenary session to develop strategies for implementing these discussions in research and teaching. Many of the discussions returned to key methodological questions underpinning the study of Near Eastern literatures: What is the difference between literary history, which finds differences across time within a tradition, and literary space, which finds difference across geographically-delineated traditions? Is the study of literature the place of writing, with an emphasis on the national location of an author, or the place of reading, with a focus on the appropriation of texts through criticism, translation and adaptation? When comparing texts drawn from separate contexts and often separate audiences, what categories ground the comparison? What is the location of these categories? Is a tradition an embodied practice or a set of texts and beliefs? Does the translation of tradition

decontextualize it or sustain its relevance over time? The responses to these questions emphasized some key reversals in literary method, namely, to think locally and act globally. Rather than apply a global theory to a local context, many of the participants analyzed local instances in order to complicate presumptions of universalized literary methods.

At a time when Europe and the Middle East are frequently cast in terms of civilizational binarisms, the participants' individual projects demonstrated alternate models of comparative work: less a matter of positing one civilization against another than of exploring the entanglement of comparative perspectives. Individually and collectively, the projects suggested interactions across area studies, history and literature, and included topics ranging from the Iraqi prose poem, Persian writers in the Mughal empire, gender in the North African novel and Turkish literary history, to Russian translations of Frantz Fanon, nineteenth-century Indian travelogues, Egyptian film adaptations and medieval accounts of the Mongol court. The proceedings of the two-week session both exemplify many promising trajectories for this next generation of scholars and ultimately chart different ways of thinking about interactions within and between cultures.

Beyond the individual projects, the participants also met to discuss articles relevant to the overarching topic of the Summer Academy. These thematic discussions were moderated by participants and drew together a range of topics resonant with problems in world literature, literary theory and literary history. One thematic discussion, for example, focused on an article by Latin American scholar Walter Mignolo questioning the status of colonial difference in literary studies; another discussion focused on problems raised by the anthropologist Talal Asad regarding exclusionary practices of secular politics and multiculturalism. Still other discussions addressed the field of Qur'anic Studies, Samia Mehrez on modern Egyptian literature, Franco Moretti on 'distant reading' and Stephan Guth on global dimensions of Middle Eastern literature, to name just a few. These readings helped to invigorate analysis of individual projects and to frame the intellectual scope of the Academy, providing possible sources for participants to incorporate into their own teaching.

The collaborative format of the Academy benefited from the insights of invited speakers and moderators, many of whom offered lectures in conversation with the participants' projects. The Lebanese writers Rachid al-Daif and Abbas Beydoun both reflected on the role of tradition in their work. For Abbas Beydoun, poetry relies on the revolt against tradition, and for Rachid al-Daif, tradition serves as the writer's historical unconscious. In a talk on Shidyaq's satirical narrative *The Adventures of al-Faryaq*, Radwa Ashour (Ain Shams University) discussed the question of narrative influences from both the classical Arabic tradition and contemporary European sources: the *maqamah* form and the writings of Lawrence Sterne. The Palestinian poet, Mourid Barghouti, read from his memoir, *I Saw Ramallah*, and responded to questions about his writing. Elias Khoury, the Lebanese novelist, discussed literature, war and modern Arab politics, and at a later session, he joined Samir Khalaf, Jean Said Makdisi and Fawwaz

Taraboulsi for a panel discussion dedicated to cosmopolitanism in Beirut. Other lectures included Tarif Khalidi (AUB) on ‘Anbara Salam’s travels to England,, Samah Selim on translation and canonicity in the Nahdah, Fawwaz Taraboulsi on the music of the Rahbani brothers, Sabry Hafez on Naguib Mahfuz’s legacy and Angelika Neuwirth on visual and textual tropes of martyrdom in Islamic culture.

While the Summer Academy took place mostly on the campus of the American University in Beirut, certain sessions and activities brought the participants to locations throughout the city. One evening all of the participants met at an art space and historical archive overseen by Monika Borgmann and Luqman Slim in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Although part of the archive was destroyed by the bombing of the past summer, the art space continues to host filmmakers, visual artists and interested audiences from Beirut and the surrounding areas. Other outings included a lecture by Friederike Pannewick at the German Orient Institute, a guided tour of the historical area, Zuqaq al-Blat, as well as a visit to Harat Hreik in the southern suburbs. Whether in discussions or in actual locations of sessions, the site of the Academy in Beirut was always a crucial vantage point from which the participants considered Europe and the Middle East.

Two days before the Summer Academy came to an end, the New York Times ran a cover story entitled “Across Europe Worries on Islam Spread.” Far from emphasizing worry, the twenty-four participants at the Summer Academy charted hopeful avenues for rethinking the conventional opposition of Europe and the Middle East. Whether considering how and when Islam is written out of a supposedly Judeo-Christian Europe or examining the intricacies of a shared Mediterranean region, the two weeks of discussion offered a critical forum for better understanding the complexities of entangled traditions.

Michael Allan, October 2006

Participants:

REFQA ABU REMAILEH (Oxford), *The Representation of the Anti-Hero in Modern Arabic Literature and Film*

MICHAEL ALLAN (Berkeley), *The Limits of Secular Criticism: On Critical Reading in Colonial Egypt*

SINAN ANTOON (Baghdad/New York), *The Sub-Version of a Genre: The Iraqi Prose Poem*

RADWA ASHOUR (Cairo), *The Road Not Taken: A Reassessment of Chidiac's Adventures of Fariac*

MOURID BARGHOUTI (Palestine), *I Saw Ramallah*

ABBAS BEYDOUN (Beirut)

ELIZABETH BISHOP (Wilmington) *Fanon in Furs: Theorist for North Africa’s National Liberation in Russian Translation*

SADIAH BOONSTRA (Amsterdam), *Remix: The Story of Layla and Majnun in the National Cultures of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Iran*

ATEF BOTROS (Cairo/Leipzig), *A Critique of Tradition: Taha Hussein's Reading of Franz Kafka*

RASHID DAIF (Beirut)

KIRILL DMITRIEV (St. Petersburg/Berlin) *Cross-cultural dynamics in Late Antiquity. New approaches towards the study of the early Arabic literary traditions*

NINO DOLIDZE (Tbilisi), *Maqama in the 20th Century Arabic Literature*

ZALFA FEGHALI (Beirut), *Personal and Political Space in Mehdi Charef's Tea in the Harem*

SABRY HAFEZ (London) *Translation and Popular Traditions in Arabic Narrative: The Case of Mahfouz*

HANY HANAFY (Tanta), *Reconstructing the Past: History in the Modern Arabic Novel*

PETER HEATH (Beirut), *Foundations and Meta-Practice: Genealogy, Metonymy, and Analogy as Principles for Organizing Literary Study*

DINA HESHMAT (Cairo), *"Cosmopolitan" Alexandria in Literary Illustrations and its Assessments at the Literary Criticism Level: A North-South Comparison Between Egyptian and Non-Egyptian Writers*

ASLI IGSIZ (Istanbul/Michigan), *Poetics and Practice of "Minor" Literature in the Western Institutions: A Contemporary Case Study*

SAMIR KHALAF (Beirut)

TARIF KHALIDI (Beirut), *Anbara Salam in England, 1924-1926*

ELIAS KHOURY (Beirut), *Words and War. Press, Media, Literature and Representations of Violence*

RAJEEV KINRA (Chicago), *Secretary-Poets in Mughal India and the Ethos of Persian: The Case of Chandar Bhan 'Brahman'*

EROL KOROGLU (Istanbul), *Perpetual Struggle of the Nation in Turkish Narratives of the Independence War: Literary Cultural History of a Thematic Genre*

MICHAEL MARX (Berlin), *Deciphering Giovanni Di Plano Carpini's Travel Account to the Mongol Court (1245-1247)*

StEFAN MILICH (Freiburg), *Travelling Spectres – Palestinian and Iraqi Poetry of Exile*

MARIAM NANOBASHVILI (Tbilisi), *The Prose Romance of Barlaam and Ioasaph*

ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH (Berlin), *Ink vs. Blood: Biblical and Qur'anic Mnemonics in the Martyr Discourse reflected in Near Eastern Literature and Art*

FRIEDERIKE PANNEWICK (Oslo), *The Performative Potential of Tradition*

FRANCESCA PREVEDELLO (Venice), *From the Novel to the Screen: The Adaptation of Western and Egyptian Novels in Egypt Between the Thirties and the Sixties*

AMINUR RAHMAN (Dhaka/Manchester), *The Gaze Returned: The Empire in Indian Travelogues*

STUART REIGELUTH (Toledo), *Detaching from Europe and Connecting the Mediterranean Basin*

JEAN SAID MAKDISI (Beirut)

FRODE SAUGESTAD (London), *Individuation and the Shaping of Personal Identity*

CHRISTIANE SCHLOTE (Bern), *Beyond Literary Hegemony: Anglophone Arab Literatures and the Postcolonial Canon*

SAMAH SELIM (Marseilles), Pharaoh's Revenge: Translation, Literary History and 'The Colonial Difference'

IVO SPIRA (Oslo), Languages Rewritten: Isms as a Force of Change. The Impact of Isms on Chinese, Russian and Arabic: A Comparative Study on Language Modernisation

FAWWAZ TARABOULSI (Beirut), The Representation of Social Problems in the Musical Theatre of the Rahbani Brothers and Fairuz

BARBARA WINCKLER (Berlin), Gender Transgressions or How is Gender Reflected in Modern Arabic Literature?