Hanan Ashrawi on the Future of Palestine

Professor and Palestinian political activist Hanan Ashrawi shared her insights when she lectured on “The Future of Palestine” on December 1, 2008. The lecture was hosted by the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar (SFS-Qatar). Ashrawi is the founder and Head of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy - Miftah, and an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council for the Jerusalem District. Senior SFS-Qatar student Lina Abduljawad introduced Ashrawi to an audience of 400 people at the Diplomatic Club in Doha.

Ashrawi noted that the title of her talk, “The Future of Palestine,” was deceptively simple, but that such simplicity was not representative of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is mired in various historical, economic, political, and ideological battles that daily fracture and divide the people of the region.

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Greetings from all of us at CIRS!

This newsletter comes to you at a time when, once again, important and historically consequential developments are unfolding in the Gulf region, in the larger Middle East, and beyond. The intervening period between the publication of the last CIRS Newsletter and this issue was particularly fateful: the global financial crisis has deepened and is now beginning to creep into the economies of the oil-rich states of the Gulf; tensions between Hamas and Israel resulted in all-out war between the two and featured violence of unfathomable proportions; the tenuous political truce in Lebanon, shepherded this time by Qatar, has continued to hold for the time being; and, in the United States, a new administration has given promises of major shifts in tenor of conduct and substance of policy in relation to the Middle East and the world at large.

While at CIRS our public affairs programming and our research initiatives are generally planned months in advance, they have in many ways reflected the developments underway in the region and elsewhere. This is particularly the case with the variety of the speakers that the Center has hosted over the last few months, beginning with the Palestinian activist and academic Hanan Ashrawi and including such other figures as Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Cynthia Schneider, former US Ambassador to the Netherlands and currently Distinguished Professor at Georgetown University, and Mona Eltahawy, author and columnist, who spoke on the recruitment and mindset of female suicide bombers in Iraq.

Less topical but equally important has been the array of issues featured as part of the Center’s Monthly Dialogue Series, beginning with a lecture by SFS-Qatar’s Dean James Reardon-Anderson on the relationship between rainfall and the American Civil War, and including other in-depth discussions on the relationship between religion and political legitimization in the Islamic and Christian traditions, by Professor Jo Ann Moran Cruz and Hiafaa Khalafallah, sectarianism and political reforms in Bahrain, by CIRS Post-Doctoral Fellow Katja Niethammer, and the global economic depression and the Gulf economies, by Professor Ibrahim Oweiss. In addition, in commemoration of the life and poetry of the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, CIRS sponsored a special lecture by the Palestinian Ambassador to Qatar, H.E. Munir Ghannam, and SFS-Qatar Professor Amira El-Zein.

CIRS research initiatives, meanwhile, continue to reflect the strategic significance of the Gulf region and the larger Middle East. In January 2009, CIRS published its latest Occasional Paper, entitled Fixing the Kingdom: Political Evolution and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain, by Steven Wright of Qatar University. The Center also convened a second Working Group on the International Relations of the Gulf, made-up of leading experts on Middle East and Gulf politics, toward the completion of a volume on the same topic. Important preparatory steps were also taken toward the launch of our next major research initiative, namely the study of migrant labor in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Currently, we are in the planning stages of a major research initiative on the global economy and the Gulf, beginning some time in 2010.

As we move forward, we will continue to embark on equally relevant research projects and public affairs programming. We look forward to your participation in CIRS-sponsored events, especially our Monthly Dialogues and our Distinguished Lectures, and I personally look forward to hearing from you about our research initiatives and our academic programs.

Sincerely,

Mehran Kamrava
Director

About CIRS

The Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Qatar is guided by the principles of academic excellence, forward vision, and community engagement.

The Center’s mission revolves around five principal goals:
• To provide a forum for scholarship and research on international and regional affairs;
• To encourage in-depth examination and exchange of ideas;
• To foster thoughtful dialogue among students, scholars, and practitioners of international affairs;
• To facilitate the free flow of ideas and knowledge through publishing the products of its research, sponsoring conferences and seminars, and holding workshops designed to explore the complexities of the twenty-first century;
• To engage in outreach activities with a wide range of local, regional, and international partners.
CIRS recently published an Occasional Paper entitled Fixing the Kingdom: Political Evolution and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain. Authored by Steven Wright, Professor of Gulf Politics at Qatar University, the study outlines the challenges facing the Bahraini regime and the program of liberalization that the current King has pursued in response to these challenges and ensuing internal political turmoil. Rising youth unemployment, economic hardship and political disillusionment all contribute to the continued underground opposition in Bahrain. Wright argues that Bahrain’s political course was significantly altered when Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa succeeded his father in 1999. During this time, “Bahrain began an unexpected journey away from the political order of the past. The reforms under the King can be viewed as progressive since parliamentary and legislative restructuring, in addition to discernable changes within civil society, have taken place.”

CIRS hosted a luncheon talk for the visiting Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, on November 19, 2008. Berri has been the speaker of Lebanon’s parliament since 1992. He is effectively one of three heads of the Lebanese state along with the Prime Minister and President. Berri, an advocate of the March 8 Alliance in Lebanon, is also the head of the Shi’a Muslim AMAL Movement.

Berri began by thanking Qatar for its key mediatory role between rival Lebanese political factions. Qatari efforts ultimately led to the resolution of Lebanon’s political deadlock earlier this year via the Doha Agreement 2008. Berri confirmed the successful implementation of the accord, pointing to the election of a president, the approval of the constitution by all parliamentary members and the formation of a national unity government.

He also noted Qatar’s help with the reconstruction of Lebanon following the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, in areas ranging from “healthcare to homes to houses of worship.” Berri also invited further assistance to clear the 2.4 million cluster bombs that remain scattered throughout Southern Lebanon.

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In order to know where a nation is headed, she explained, it must come to terms with its past and must go through a “historical redemption,” which is an important part of any reconciliation process. Ashrawi explained that Palestine not only needed international political recognition, but also needed its history to be affirmed and recognized as a legitimate one that has been unfairly violated.

“We have to begin debunking the myths, perhaps the most notorious myth, of a land without a people for the people without a land.”

Ashrawi noted that Palestine is in a struggle for “devolution of occupation and evolution of statehood,” but that the exact opposite is occurring, thus leading to what she terms “the deconstruction of Palestine.” This, she said, is the worst type of humanitarian crisis, as it is a deliberately crafted one. Ashrawi gave details of the daily economic, political, and physical restrictions and challenges that the average Palestinian must endure, including the inability for many children to attend schools, and for many adults to reach their lands or places of work. Physical restrictions such as checkpoints and the infamous “wall,” ironically, not only restrict the lives of Palestinians, but also prohibit Israelis from viewing their own horizon, and imprison both communities.

Ashrawi called on the international community, and especially Arab countries, to take responsibility for the state of Palestine. She welcomed new ideas and gave several possible solutions that, if honored by all parties involved, would lead to a peaceful existence in the Middle East.

During the question and answer session, Ashrawi gave recommendations for the future and how to begin to work towards a viable and long-standing peace. She called for unconventional approaches to solve the crisis, such as United Nations involvement as a caretaker and mediator or requesting the presence of international ground troops to protect Palestinian rights. Ashrawi argued that the most important aspect of any attempt at conflict resolution was to redress the asymmetrical power relations between the two communities.

“We must affirm the rights that have long been denied, especially the right to self-determination, the right to live in freedom and with dignity on our own land.”

Earlier, Ashrawi spoke at a luncheon meeting at the Georgetown SFS-Qatar campus. She took questions from faculty and discussed the nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and how it might be resolved. In answer to a question regarding how the new U.S. administration might impact the conflict, she noted that in order to break away from past failures, Barack Obama needs to surround himself with a new team of knowledgeable people and expert policy-makers. This was important to formulate a new approach and to create refreshing ideas about how to engage with the problem. It is important, she said, not to resuscitate old teams of experts who have been involved in past mediation efforts, as their energies and ideas are spent. According to Ashrawi, “this is the most important advice to give any new administration.”
Spotlight on the Faculty

Elizabeth Zelensky is a Visiting Assistant Professor at SFS-Qatar. Her expertise lies in Russian History, and she is currently teaching a class on Imperial Russia. She is also a member of the Russian Scout Organization Abroad (ORUR).

CIRS: Tell us about your research.
I am currently working on two projects; one book and one paper. I’ll start with the latter. I was asked to present a paper at an international conference “History of Childhood as a Field of Research: Philippe Aries’ Heritage in Europe and Russia” organized in honor of the centennial of French historian Arries – the founder of childhood studies as a history. My paper, “Long Ago in Pavlovsk Park”: Scouting as a Structural Element in Russian Émigré Childhood,” concerns the role of the Russian scouting movement in the preservation of Russian cultural identity among the children of the political emigration of the 1920s – the so-called “White émigrés”.

This paper continues a theme I had previously examined in “Popular Children’s Culture in Post-Perestroika Russia: Songs of Innocence and Experience Revisited,” in Consuming Russia: Popular Culture Sex, and Society since Gorbachev (Duke University Press, 1999) - the absence or presence of “childhood” in the Western sense of the word and its impact on Russian self-perception.

CIRS: What methodologies are you using?
The methodology is a combination of cultural history, anthropology, semiotics and oral history. The origin of this paper lies in serendipity, which is often the case in scholarly work. As a historian of Russia and a member of the Russian Scout Organization Abroad (ORUR), I was asked by the widow of Pantukhoff’s son to help sort through the family papers upon the death of her husband in 2000. I found a treasure-trove of original documents dealing with the early history of Russian scouting both in Russia and abroad. Diaries, personal correspondence, photographs, all reveal the inner world of the founder of Russian scouting to a much greater degree than either his autobiography, published in 1960 or his biography published in 1998. After publication of “Long Ago in Pavlovsk Park” as part of the conference proceedings, I hope to do a more lengthy study of this material.

CIRS: What results did you find?
Paradoxically, the Russian Boy Scout and Girl Guide movement – banned by the Soviet regime in 1922 – was a pre-revolutionary attempt to expand the social boundaries of “childhood” to children outside the circles of the Westernized elite. Oleg Pantukhoff, himself a nobleman and Guards’ officer, was inspired by Britain’s Baden-Powell to create a children’s organization which would not be based on class or religious affiliation and which would provide children with the conditions for developing self-reliance and moral and physical strength through exposure to nature and the outdoors. Such an innovative movement in authoritarian Russia struck the imagination of the public and approximately ten thousand scouts and guides were on the organization’s registers in 1917, the year of revolution. The Soviet state-sponsored Pioneers who replaced the scouts were actually a step backward in terms of the liberal principles of Pantukhoff since the Pioneers had to officially espouse atheism, and their ranks were closed to children of “class enemies” – nobles, clergy, etc. After the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, Russian Scouting was once again re-organized with the help of Russian-speaking emigrants who had carried on the scouting tradition in exile all of these years; thus the interest in my paper topic among historians of Russian childhood.

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CIRS: Are you working on any other projects?
My second project is the publication of a book based on my dissertation topic, ““Sophia the Wisdom of God” as a Rhetorical Device during the Regency of Sof’ia Alekseevna:1682-1689.” This is a literary and semiotic analysis of a qualitative change in the symbolic system used to represent the monarchy in Russia on the eve of Peter the Great’s reforms. I systematically trace changes in the monarchy’s central metaphor – that of Christ-in-heaven, tsar on-earth – during the regency of Sof’ia Alekseevna, Peter the Great’s elder sister and nemesis. I believe that the shift from the more anthropomorphic figure of Christ to the abstract notion of Logos or Sophia reflected changes in the monarchy’s self-perception and self-definition, and that this is related to a new attitude towards Poland-Lithuania, i.e. “the West” for seventeenth-century Muscovy. Again, we see the same theme as in my work on Russian childhood, that of Westernization as a structural element in the imagination of the Russian elite - which both defines this elite and affects its relations with the rest of society.
Rainfall and the American Civil War

James Reardon-Anderson, Dean of the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, gave the November 3, 2008, Monthly Dialogue on “Rainfall and the American Civil War.” Dean Reardon-Anderson explained to the invited audience that the lecture was inspired by a class he regularly teaches at SFS-Qatar entitled “Map of the Modern World,” which is a graduation requirement for all students.

Reardon-Anderson explained that one way of understanding human behavior is by examining the fundamental natural forces - earth tectonics and atmospheric physics - that shape the stage on which history has been and is being performed. The lecture, which focused on the geography of North America and the implications for the outbreak of the American Civil War, was a case study of that phenomenon.

“The fundamental laws of earth tectonics and atmospheric physics ... set the conditions in which humans make their choices.”

Tectonic forces have produced a North American continent with high mountain ranges in the west and a broad flat plain in the middle, and lodged the center of this continent, which is home to the United States, between 30 and 50 degrees north latitude. Atmospheric forces produce extremely dry conditions at 30 degrees north, the locus of the American Southwest, and prevailing westerly winds across the rest of the country, which cause heavy precipitation over the western mountains, dry conditions on the central plains, and again wet conditions in the east.

The mix of weather conditions and the nature of the physical geography in the southeastern United States meant that the land was arable and conducive to the cultivation of cash crops, especially tobacco, sugar cane, and cotton. Because of the richness of the soil and the bounty of the harvest, these lands were geared towards mass-scale farming, which also meant that hundreds of people were needed to maintain these operations. This manual labor came in the form of slaves from Africa and elsewhere, shipped over to the Americas in order to toil in the fields and produce the crop.

The northern areas, by comparison, had little need for such large-scale import of slave-labor, as the temperate weather meant that farming was in the form of small-scale food-crop agriculture. Due to the progressive urbanization and industrialization of the northeast, businesses were largely run by European immigrants and their extended families and so maintaining slaves during the long winters was an expensive enterprise.

As more and more communities of people moved west across North America, the territories that applied to join as new states in the United States grew from 13 in 1789 to 34 in 1861. Until 1850, these states were roughly divided in two, between those in the southern areas and those in the northern areas, and so too between the states that maintained slavery as an important economic enterprise, and those with little or no need for it to sustain their economies.

By the late 1850s, the southern states, whose economy relied on the growth and export of cotton, had exhausted the geographic regions that supported cotton plantations and could not viably expand beyond the areas to which they were confined. As the westward expansion of the North continued and the number of “free” states increased, the South found itself in an increasingly disadvantaged position. This ultimately resulted in the South’s attempt to secede from the union, and the Civil War ensued.

“The North was, by its own natural disadvantages, forced into a social and political change that happened to be more favorable to the future of development.”

Ultimately, Reardon-Anderson concluded that the levels of rainfall and other similar climatic factors played significant roles in precipitating the American Civil War.
Research

International Relations of the Gulf: Session II

On January 8-9, 2009, CIRS convened the second International Relations of the Gulf Working Group session. This meeting is part of a year-long research initiative that began in June 2008, and which focuses on analyzing key aspects of the international relations of the Gulf region from a variety of angles.

CIRS invited a core group of Gulf studies scholars to Doha to attend the working group meetings and to contribute individual chapters towards a book entitled The International Relations of the Gulf, to be published in 2009. The book covers topics such as the history of Gulf Shaikhdoms, Gulf security strategies, and political reform in the region. Concomitantly, CIRS also invited several other experts in the field to act as discussants and to give critical consultation and enrich the topics under examination.

This research breaks new ground in the literature on the international relations of the Middle East in general and the Gulf in particular. It will be of great interest to academics and scholars specializing in the Gulf and the Middle East, as well as practitioners and policy-makers, students, and interested readers.

CIRS Publishes New Occasional Paper, continued from page 3

The Occasional Paper documents that the current King, Sheikh Hamad, pursued liberalizing reforms that resulted in discernible changes in civil society and the structure of the government. Soon after he assumed office, Sheikh Hamad demonstrated a willingness to listen to the people of Bahrain through a national dialogue campaign, gaining him widespread popularity. Although Bahrain had traditionally suffered from sectarian conflict, the King made a point of visiting with several Shia religious leaders, and opened his Majlis to previously disenfranchised groups. He also granted a number of political pardons as a step towards reform. These public gestures allowed him to build a popular base in order to gain dominance over the powerful Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, who “is the world’s longest serving Prime Minister.”

More importantly, Sheikh Hamad set up a committee to draft a National Action Charter (NAC), a proposal for the future structure of Bahraini government, which “would lead to the transformation of the country into a constitutional monarchy and would reintroduce the constitutional premise of government.” The NAC was passed by a national referendum in 2001, with a record voter turnout of 89%.

In the 2002 municipal council elections, Bahrain held its first ever elections based on universal suffrage, although no women were elected.

Despite the promise of reform, tensions continue to linger between the state and the Shi’a opposition parties, many of whom still feel alienated and excluded from the political process feelings. Although they form the majority of citizens in Bahrain, the Shi’a are barred from serving in the military. Additionally, the government of Bahrain has naturalized thousands of other Arab nationals in an attempt to bolster the Sunni population.

Wright concludes by arguing that the lack of a thriving middle class means that there is no development of a forum for civil society that could articulate demands for further rights. With the workforce doubling in the next decade, Bahrain faces further instability as a result of the increasing unemployment and continued inflation.

“The reforms under the new King can be viewed as progressive.”

According to Wright, the solutions to Bahrain’s socio-economic problems may be a mere few kilometers away. The “friendship bridge” to Qatar, set to be completed by 2012, will allow thousands of Bahrainis to enter into the Qatari labor market. With the unemployment crisis solved and the general economic status of the country improved, Bahrain’s political scene may calm down.
In honor of the memory of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, CIRS hosted a literary evening to recall his life and his legacy. The Palestinian Ambassador to Qatar, Munir Ghannam, and Georgetown University Professor, Amira El Zein, were invited to share their thoughts on different aspects of the poet’s life and work. Ambassador Ghannam recounted Darwish’s biography from birth to death, and El Zein, professor of Arabic, discussed his art, speaking of the powerful metaphorical nature of his poetry. Drawn by the culturally binding subject of poetry, the audience was an mix of students, faculty, embassy staff, and poetry-lovers. The audience was treated to rare insights into Darwish’s life as both speakers relayed anecdotes about meeting the poet, conversing with him, and relaying what he meant to them as a personal friend.

Ambassador Ghannam began by lamenting the loss of not only a great poet, but of “the voice of Palestinian resistance.” He recounted to the audience several episodes in the life of Mahmoud Darwish: how he was born in a land called Palestine that is no longer in existence; how he and his family were driven away from their homes; how he was arrested on numerous occasions because of his inflammatory writings; how he went into exile to Russia, France, the United States, and Egypt; and how he returned and became actively involved in the politics of Palestine. Ghannam spoke of the social, political, and economic struggles of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how the realities and hardships of Darwish’s life figured prominently in his work as he translated his personal experience into poetry.

Ambassador Ghannam gave a bilingual recitation of some of the verses of Darwish’s famous poem “Identity Card,” which is believed to have defined Palestinian identity through language and, which became a symbol of Palestinian resistance. Over the years, Darwish gained a reputation as a leading voice of protest and became known as the national poet of Palestine. He even lent his words to the Palestinian cause by penning the 1974 speech delivered by Yasser Arafat at the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 when he said, “Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter’s gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.” He also worded the Palestinian Declaration of Independence. Darwish’s work, Ambassador Ghannam concluded, has been translated into many languages and several of his poems have crossed artistic disciplines and have been set to music by Marcel Khalife, making them popular to a wider audience.

“This poet was most famous as the ‘Voice of Palestinian resistance.’” – Ambassador Ghannam

Professor El Zein concentrated on the metaphorical nature of Darwish’s work. In most of his poems Darwish acknowledged the native American use of the “name” and the metaphor of home to give identity to, and keep alive, a home long gone. She argued that everything exists in language and so to keep the idea of home alive in language is to also keep the idea of returning to that home alive. El Zein quoted Darwish as saying “because I couldn’t find my home in the land, I found it in history.”

Language, El Zein said, does not mirror the world, but rather, Darwish created Palestine through poetry and that is why his use of language is such a powerful socio-political tool. The foundation of Israel not only appropriates the land, but perhaps more importantly, the histories, mythologies, and identities of the Palestinian people. All these elements of existential strife are interwoven through the poetic devices of Darwish’s work. El Zein concluded by telling the audience that she is in the process of translating a book of interviews with Darwish, which she had hoped to share with him.
Monthly Dialogue Series

Religion and Legitimization of Political Rule in the Islamic and Christian Worlds: Preliminary Findings


The presentation was part of a larger study entitled Religion and the State in the Christian and Islamic Worlds, in which both professors conducted research into coinciding Islamic and Christian historical experiences by juxtaposing a variety of primary sources.

Moran Cruz began the lecture by debating the prevailing current discourse on the “Clash of Civilizations.” She noted that the task of their study was to get beyond modern and ahistorical ideas, an example of which is “secular humanism,” which, she said, “is a problem in western scholarship. It is a term that does not stand up to scrutiny.” Moran also suggested that prevailing ideas on the role that religious hegemony has played in the West understate its influence on representative institutions. Khalafallah, in turn, argued that the bulk of historical evidence shows that the current narratives for the study of Islam blur and do not clarify our understanding of its historical experiences. She emphasized the importance of the memory of Medina and the role of consultative rule and legal methodologies in Islam.

Moran Cruz and Khalafallah further argued that both religions, although different from one another, shared a common historical concern with notions of “legitimacy.” Legitimacy, in this historical sense, is an “established, recognized, and accepted framework (legal, cultural, moral, social, procedural) that is paramount for the survival of political authority.” Both Muslim and Christian histories have been concerned with legitimacy and this concern has shaped social and legal infrastructures. Both Moran Cruz and Khalafallah explained particular convergences between Muslim and Christian historical discourses and noted similarities between the two religions and how they informed the means of governance around the Mediterranean in each religious tradition.

Beginning with an examination of their formative years and foundational texts, the speakers noted that in both religions, there are scriptural indications, even if implicit, regarding what makes good governance. For example, Khalafallah noted that in the Qur’an, there are instructions to “respect persons in authority…a general endorsement of the notion of collective decision-making, including an explicit directive to consult,” as well as an emphasis on notions of “egalitarianism and equality.”

In their formative years, there was the Pauline model of governance in the Christian context and the Medina model in the Muslim one, both of which are marked by persuasion, connections, negotiated settlement of disputes, as well as extreme fluidity. Using religion to legitimate political authority, the professors argued, became high on the agenda after the triumph of authoritarian states that were, for the most part, illegitimate. Moran Cruz noted that, subsequently, in the struggle for legitimacy, “both cultures have struck varying balances between theocratic and civil governments and between religious and political authorities.” The narratives in both religious traditions are similar with regard to these dynamics, although differing in other fundamental ways.

“We are looking at both cultures as they vary between theoretic and civil governments as they go through the generations.” – Jo Ann Moran Cruz

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“The Muslim Holy Book does not explicitly champion a monarchy, a republic, or even a caliphate.” – Haifaa Khalafallah

In conclusion, both Moran-Cruz and Khalafallah argued for situating current narratives on Islam and Christianity and their relations to each other in their historical contexts in order to better understand their common experiences and differences vis-à-vis political authority as well as to be able to locate their current ones, rather than focusing on “otherness.”
Focused Discussion

American Public Diplomacy after the Bush Administration

CIRS hosted a luncheon discussion on October 19, 2008, featuring Cynthia Schneider, Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy at Georgetown University, nonresident Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and former U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands. Professor Schneider discussed ways in which the next U.S. administration should use culture as part of its diplomatic efforts. The lunch was attended by a number of locally-based ambassadors, policy-makers, and educational experts from Qatar Foundation and the Brookings Institution.

Schneider began her talk by quoting the author Fareed Zakaria, who argues that “America remains the universal nation, a country that people across the world believe should speak for universal values”. This, she said, summed up the current situation in which the U.S. has seriously squandered its world-wide reputation as a country that stands for universal values. The U.S. does, however, have the potential to fix its image abroad through the healing and generative aspects of its art and culture.

“Military power has limited value and cannot solve all, or many, problems.”

Throughout her career as both an art historian and a diplomat, Schneider said that she attempted to successfully combine public diplomacy with cross-cultural understanding. Her aim, she said, was to promote U.S. culture as a major component of foreign policy; not in the sense of “selling” U.S. culture to the rest of the world, but by offering it as a friendly gesture in order to enhance “mutual understanding and respect” with other nations. Schneider reported that one of the most striking results of John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed’s Gallup poll research was that the issue of “lack of respect and understanding on the part of the U.S.” rated higher on the agenda in the Arab world than the Israel-Palestine conflict or the war in Iraq. This shows how important it is for the next U.S. administration to conduct culturally sensitive diplomatic missions that try to understand the realities of the Arab world in order to not misrepresent the problems it faces in these regions.

In order to fully integrate cultural promotion with foreign policy, Schneider quoted the basic principles of public diplomacy, which are to communicate some aspect of U.S. values such as diversity, opportunity, or freedom of expression; to cater to the needs of other countries and to recognize that the same formula does not work for everyone; and to enter into a long-term relationship with other countries. She explained that “military power has limited value and cannot solve all, or many, problems” and that we have witnessed the damage that the excessive use of force has done. This is why it is necessary for the next U.S. administration to find alternative means of engaging with the rest of the world. Listening, she said, was an integral part of reciprocal public diplomacy and one that, in its simplicity, generates a great deal of respect for the other.

The media, both commercial and state-owned, is a powerful tool for promoting values internationally and should be used to enhance positive cross-cultural relationships. Popular culture is an important means of promoting values, history and heritage. Specifically, more positive representations of Arabs in U.S. media and entertainment programs can go a long way to bettering relationships between the U.S. and the Arab world.

In conclusion, Schneider made a few recommendations to improve the next U.S. administration’s efforts in the Arab world. They included aligning values and actions; engaging and not instructing; and taking other nation’s cultures as seriously as they do.
Spotlight on the Faculty

Patrick Meadows is a Visiting Associate Professor at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. His research focuses on poetry in comparative literature.

My research lies in the domain of literary analysis and interpretation; more particularly, it concerns the symbolic structures of modern poetry, including French and Francophone poetry as well as European and American poetry in other languages such as English and Spanish. The analysis has interdisciplinary ties with the fields of semiotics and semantics, and it is situated within the branch of literary studies known as “Comparative Literature”.

Through the examination of the poetic use of images, allusions, and etymologies, my work involves philosophical, religious, and spiritual perspectives expressed in the writings that I choose to explore. I am interested mostly in poets whose works either express such a perspective, or evoke the search for a more spiritually centered mode of being. In a recent article entitled “The Inner Compass of Modern Poets,” which I was invited to deliver at the annual conference of the Comparative Literature Association of India in January 2009, I examine several representative examples of the principal tendencies that are expressed in the modern symbolic structure of the cardinal directions. Without going into great detail, I will provide a thumbnail sketch of my recent work; since my writing deals with poetry, I feel that something evocative and also open-ended is in order—a kind of “abstract,” if you will.

One general point that I feel is important to bear in mind, since it expresses the point of departure for my interpretations: Of all the literary genres, poetry remains the one that most clearly claims the prophetic status of speech. Inheritors of the romantic magicians, the European and American poets of the twentieth century paint a “mythic geography” of the world, in order to take up the challenge of what one may call, parodying Alexandre Koyré’s formula, the passage from a world harmoniously closed, thanks to meaning, to the infinitely open and exploded universe of a century born on the ruins of metaphysics. At the dawn of the twentieth century, those poets who no longer possess a resolute faith in progress and the future—Verhaeren, Apollinaire, and other disciples of Whitman and Marinetti—perceive the world as a very paradoxical space. Whereas the surface of the earth is almost entirely circumscribed and the terrae incognitae have become rare on the maps of the world, it is in vain that they search a compass with which to orient themselves. Given its immensity, terrestrial space is no longer for them a place. As Hugo Friedrich postulates in his The Structure of Modern Poetry, during the era of Nietzsche and Mallarmé, the priests of language lack this supreme “place” from which their predecessors could define the major directions and thereby find their way. Not that the cardinal points, guarantors of a symbolic structure of space, have disappeared from the poetry of the twentieth century, but in it they acquire connotations that express confusion and disorientation.

In brief, one conclusion that imposed itself on me as I was carrying out this study is the following: During the modern era of earth’s conquest, in the immense emptiness of the divine absence, an opposing and labyrinthine “non-place” fills the poetic imagination.

CIRS Welcomes its First Intern

Assma Al-Adawi has joined the CIRS team as an intern for the Spring 2008-2009 semester. She is currently a Senior in SFS-Qatar, majors in International Politics, and will graduate this May as part of the first graduating class. Assma has been active in several clubs such as the Student Government, HELP (Hoya English Language Program) and Hoya Green. Her other interests include arts, business and writing. After graduation, she plans to continue working in Qatar’s private sector.

Assma has been working at CIRS in the capacity of Publications Assistant, where she helps in the compilation and layout of CIRS publications.

Niethammer’s lecture is part of a larger study undertaken in her PhD research and analyzes the differences in goals, strategies and behavior between Shi‘ite and Sunni Islamist political organizations in Bahrain. As such, she “shed light on the relationship between Islamist actors and political reform.” Niethammer conducted extensive fieldwork in Bahrain, during which time she conducted interviews with political and religious activists from both Shi‘ite and Sunni communities and also spent time within the Bahraini parliament. During these visits, she witnessed parliamentarians “engage in serious confessionalist agitation and occasionally scuffles between MPs erupted sparked by discussions on events in Iraq.”

“Islamist groups are currently – and not only in Bahrain – the most important actors besides the ruling elites.”

The study of Islamist groups in general is extremely important in the current political climate of the Gulf states as “Islamist groups are currently – and not only in Bahrain – the most important actors besides the ruling elites.” This is because “they have a wide social base and have extensive religious networks at their disposal.” Niethammer noted that the groups portrayed in her research are legal organizations and promote their goals through non-violent means.

During her lecture, Niethammer proceeded to debunk the two major assumptions currently holding sway over Islamic studies scholarship. The first assumption is that Islamist parties form a natural partnership with ideas of reform and justice and the second revolves around the hypothesis that Islamist parties will lose any extremist edge and become more democratic if involved in serious parliamentary participation.

These assumptions have been proven valid in some Middle Eastern countries, but Niethammer proposed that the situation in Bahrain was far more complex. Because those parties that rejected electoral participation – the Shi‘ite Islamist parties – called out for more democratic reform, and those that fully contributed to parliamentary elections – the Sunni Islamist parties – were more concerned about supporting authoritarian rule, other factors must be useful in explaining moderation and reform-mindedness.

“When Islamists represent a dominant confessionalist group, they reject meaningful reforms that enhance political representation and participation.”

Niethammer proposes that one reason why Bahrain does not fit comfortably within the framework of these hypotheses is Bahrain’s prevalent sectarian and ethnic fragmentation, which has created dominant and marginalized groups. Hence, the social and economic positions of the Islamists vis-à-vis the ruling elite determine their political goals and strategies to a larger extent than their ideological orientation. She suggests that this might also be the case in other fragmented societies in the Middle East.

In conclusion, Niethammer argued that such experiences from Bahrain suggest that “when Islamists represent a dominant confessionalist group, they reject meaningful reforms that enhance political representation and participation. When Islamists represent politically marginalized groups, they endorse such reforms.” In other words, Niethammer maintained that Islamist political actors do not exhibit behavior that is different from their secular counterparts.

Niethammer joins CIRS for the 2008-2009 academic year. During her Fellowship, she has been involved in three major CIRS projects and research initiatives.
Berri’s address provided a theoretical overview of the basis and key characteristics of a “congruent democracy” as distinct from other forms of democracy, as well as a practical account of its realization in Lebanon.

The “congruent democracy”, he explained, emanates and develops in situations of weak national unification and a divided, heterogeneous population. In particular, he stated that the most important characteristic of a congruent democracy is the element of ruling through a large coalition such as a national unity government.

In talking about Lebanon’s experience, Berri confirmed the country’s early adoption of this system of governance on May 23, 1926, with the establishment of its first constitution. He highlighted the constitutional provisions which are central to the concept of congruent democracy, namely, ensuring that all sects are equally represented in the cabinet and among public services functions, and that freedom of religion is absolute (Articles 95 and 9 of the Lebanese Constitution respectively).

Citing its independence in 1943 and a host of domestic, regional and international influences that led to constitutional amendments of 1990, Berri reinforced the fact that Lebanon’s democracy is not static.

A number of key changes were highlighted under the rubric of Lebanon’s evolving congruent democracy. The Chamber of Deputies’ Muslim to Christian seat distribution ratio was changed from 5:6 to an equal 6:6, to accommodate a growing Muslim majority. He also discussed Article 69 of the amended constitution, which deems the government as resigned if more than 1/3 of the members withdraw. Other points discussed included the veto right extended to the Council of Ministers to create a system of unanimous decision-making and a revision in the balance of executive power extended to the prime minister and president.

On the question of whether or not congruent democracy proved to be a successful political system for Lebanon, Berri confirmed its positive outcome. “Lebanon is unlike any other country in the world, in the light of its steadfast commitment and continuous recourse to dialogue meetings held both locally and internationally,” he said. He pointed to talks held in Lausanne, Saint-Cloud, Taif and Doha, as key examples of the operations of a congruent democracy.

Berri explained that the “congruence culture,” while evolving to better reflect the socio-political changes of its time, “has always been rooted in the minds of the Lebanese nationals.” As distinct from an inevitably unsuccessful export product, he stressed the importance of a “home-made and national democracy which must be consistent with the nature and hopes of its people.”

Berri concluded that his country’s culture of congruence, regardless of its results, constitutes the “security and safety valve of Lebanon’s political system.” As such, the lacking ingredient in Lebanon is not the recognition of congruent democracy per se, but the need to observe and respect the principle.

“Home-made and national democracy ... must be consistent with the nature and hopes of its people.”

During the concluding Question and Answer session, Berri recalled the great show of national unity during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, drawing upon examples of supported internal migration and united Lebanese resistance. Berri highlighted nationalist ideologies, refusing the claim of a Lebanese “positive-neutral” political approach and endorsing Lebanon’s Arab identity and commitment to the Palestinian crisis. Finally, in countering the claim that the Taif Agreement of 1989 runs parallel to a congruent democratic Lebanon, Berri ended by retracing Lebanon’s history from the days of Fakhreddine, who celebrated the unique demographics of the country where reconciliation and harmony should prevail.
The Season in Events

Some highlights of the semester’s events

Audience member asks a question at Hanan Ashrawi’s lecture

From left to right: the Palestinian Ambassador Ghannam, Mrs. Ghannam, and professor Amira El-Zein

Mrs. Berri and Ibrahim Oweiss

Nabih Berri with Georgetown SFS-Qatar students and staff

Guests converse at a CIRS event

Georgetown SFS-Qatar faculty, staff and guests at a Monthly Dialogue
Opportunities 2009 - 2010

Call for Occasional Papers

The Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar is pleased to announce a call for contributions to its Occasional Paper series. CIRS publishes original research in a broad range of issues related to the Gulf region in the areas of international relations, political science, economics, and Islamic studies. Other topics of current significance will also be considered.

Papers should be a maximum of 10,000 words and cannot have been previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere. Citations must appear at the end of the paper using the format of the International Journal of Middle East Studies. All submissions are subject to a double-blind review process. Any copyright concerns are the full responsibility of the author.

Please send electronic submissions only to cirresearch@georgetown.edu. Inquiries about the CIRS Occasional Paper Series or other related questions may be directed to Suzi Mirgani, CIRS Publications Coordinator, at sm623@georgetown.edu.

Post-Doctoral Fellowship

Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar’s Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) announces an opening for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship. The fellowship will support a recent PhD recipient in any discipline working on the area of the Middle East with priority to those working on the Gulf. The Fellowship is for a period of one academic year starting in the Fall 2010 semester. The Fellow is expected to devote this time to turning his/her dissertation into a book manuscript for publication.

Applicants must have completed a PhD between August 1, 2007 and August 31, 2010. The fellowship requires residence at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. The Fellow will be given library privileges at Georgetown University and office space at CIRS, and is expected to participate fully in the academic and intellectual life of the Center, including delivering occasional lectures at CIRS and taking part in the Center’s academic seminars and conferences. Depending on needs and interests, the Fellow may be invited to teach one course as well.

SFS-Qatar, which is located in Education City in Doha, Qatar, is a branch of the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in Qatar. The Fellow will be given library privileges at Georgetown University and office space at CIRS, and is expected to participate fully in the academic and intellectual life of the Center, including delivering occasional lectures at CIRS and taking part in the Center’s academic seminars and conferences. Depending on needs and interests, the Fellow may be invited to teach one course as well.

SFS-Qatar, which is located in Education City in Doha, Qatar, is a branch of the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in Qatar. Each year, the SFS-Qatar admits a class of approximately 50 students, primarily from the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, who take courses on and will graduate from the Doha campus. The students and facilities of the SFS-Qatar are outstanding. SFS-Qatar employees join a community of scholars in Education City who teach in the other branch campuses of Carnegie-Mellon University, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Northwestern University.

Compensation, benefits and other terms of employment are highly competitive. Review of applications begins December 15, 2009 and will continue until the position is filled.

Interested candidates should submit a cover letter, a current curriculum vitae, three letters of recommendation, and a synopsis of their PhD dissertation. Candidates should provide a statement outlining the precise nature of their intended work during the period of the fellowship, the final product’s significance in terms of the discipline and the body of knowledge, and when the completion of the project for publication may be expected. Please submit application materials electronically to cirpositions@georgetown.edu. Applications may also be sent to CIRS, 3300 Whitehaven Street, NW, Suite 2100, Washington, DC 20007-2401.

CIRS Work-Studies Spring 2008-2009

For the 2008-2009 Spring semester, CIRS welcomed two new student work-studies to its team: Nicholas Nassar and Haya Al-Noami.

Nicholas is an International Politics major. He has acted as treasurer of the International Relations Club, president of the Doha Lecture Fund, the vice president of the Debate Club, and a writer in the Dohoya. He was also active as Chair of the African Union in the 2007 SFS-Qatar MUN, and co-chair of the Security Council in the 2009 SFS-Qatar MUN. He also recently participated as an award-winning delegate of Sierra Leone in the 2008 Oxford International MUN.

Haya Al-Noami is an International Politics major. She is on the board of the Senior Class Committee and is also part of the Theatre Group.

Nermana Babi, joined CIRS for the Fall 2008-2009 semester and continues to work as a research assistant.
Upcoming 2009 CIRS Events

April 7, 2009  Monthly Dialogue: Mark Farha
Lebanon as the Mirror of Arab Politics

April 29, 2009  Distinguished Lecture: Nabil Fahmy
U.S.-Arab Relations in a Changing
World: Opportunities and Challenges

May 3-4, 2009  Working Group: PRIO and CIRS
The Ethics of War

May 4, 2009  Monthly Dialogue: James Onley
Agents of Empire: Britain’s
Local Representatives in the Gulf,
1750s-1950s

For event inquiries: cirsevents@georgetown.edu
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