LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The academic year is progressing so quickly it's nice to sit down and catch my breath! MESC has made some significant advances in terms of research, funding and impact. I would like to offer my congratulations to Sang Han, Salwa Salman, Janna Fahmy, Norhan Sherif, Mark Van Fleirt and Katherine Halls, who all completed their MA thesis/degrees this year (continued on page 12). We wish them well in their future endeavors.

Last October I travelled to Moscow and gave a presentation on China in the Middle East at the School of Asian Studies, National Research University Higher School of Economics. There is a strong interest in establishing an exchange program with AUC and we are working to finalize an agreement as soon as possible.

We welcomed the Minister counsellor for Political Affairs and the Press Attaché from the U.S. embassy to give a talk to our students last November. I was busy then attending MESA in Washington D.C. where we held the AUC reception in conjunction with Northeastern University and launched the new AUC Press book series on political economy and international relations of the Middle East. Whilst in D.C., I presented to students in the Middle East program at the American University and met with staff of the Middle East Institute.

It was then a quick turnaround in Cairo before heading off to Seoul where we were co-host of the Korea - Middle East Cooperation Forum. The forum was an excellent opportunity to contribute to the debate on security, economics and human development in the Middle East and hear about the wide forms of cooperation already taking place. After the conference, I was also fortunate enough to engage with students and faculty at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. I look forward to welcoming my host, Professor Seo, at my panel on the 'resistance axis' at the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies which takes place in Seville this summer.

Professor Anne-Marie Condeuse was our Visiting Scholar from Oklahoma State University. She was generous with her time and gave an impressive overview of her research project on opera in the Middle East before performing a well attended recital entitled 'International Reverberations'. We look forward to welcoming her back to MESC soon.

Ambassador Erfan and his assistant, Jessie Steinhauer, who are both based in MESC, posted an updated timeline of the struggle over Jerusalem and its holy sites. It will be required reading for many Middle East scholars and can be accessed here: https://www.thecairoreview.com/timelines/jerusalem-holy-sites/. Ambassador Erfan has also been active in speaking to the Asian Ambassadors’ Group Meeting in Cairo on the topic of the Arab League.

MESC has been fortunate to win a European Commission grant aimed at promoting dialogue between academic scholars, policy professionals and European policy makers. We start with a lecture series which kicks off in late February, so please check our website www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/mesc for details. We look forward to building on this success and securing further grant money in future.
Perspectives on The Panama Papers: Political and Economic Consequences for the Middle East
A talk with Edison Broce, currently the youngest MP in Panama, sharing his experience of becoming a politician from student activist. He discussed his efforts to effect change in Panama's education, immigration, environment and tax issues, and its implication on the Middle East. To hear more about his career, check out the interview below.

Redrawing the Map: Pipelines and Politics in the Kurdish Quest for Independence
A talk with Cameron Bell, politics and economics specialist of the Middle East, focusing on the Kurdish referendum and its impact on relationships between the KRG, Turkey and Iran. In particular, he focused on the potential future of negotiations on the construction of a pipeline to export Kurdish oil to the Persian Gulf via Iran.

Middle East Studies Center Co-Hosts 14th Korea-Middle East Cooperation Forum in Seoul
MESC co-hosted the 14th annual Korea-Middle East Cooperation Forum in Seoul where Dr. Mason attended and represented MESC. For more on his experiences, continue to page 4.

Opera in the Middle East
A talk with Anne-Marie Condacse, Opera singer and associate professor of music at Oklahoma State University, on the historical development of opera across the region that highlighted the intricate relationship between culture and politics.

American Diplomacy in Action
A talk with Samuel Werberg and Mustafa Popal, Press Attaché and Minister Counselor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy and Consulate in Egypt, on the significance of the media’s role in the relationship between the two states. The Q&A session covered wide-ranging issues from terrorism to North Korea-Egypt relations.

Mark your Calendar
Keep your eye on upcoming MESC-EU lectures:

Feb. 28. 7pm, AUC Tahrir Square
What does the EU Global Strategy means for the MENA region? with Eduard Soler

April 10. 7pm, AUC Tahrir Square
The EU and Energy Security with Marco Giuli

May 13. 7pm, AUC Tahrir Square
The EU and Palestine: Why is the EU incapable of contributing to the realization of Palestinian self-determination? with Martin Beck
A CONVERSATION WITH EDISON BROCE

Can you briefly explain your meteoric rise from student activist to become the youngest MP in Panama?

One thing I have learned in life is that when one has an aspiration, the time to start is now - not tomorrow. Politics has been in my road map, and I have always been aware of the challenges that arise when pursuing that path (huge campaign costs, limitations for the youth, public scrutiny, etc.). My first step was to gain experience by undertaking leadership positions and learning how to work well with others. Thus, during my times as a student, I served as president of Law School, president of the Students' Federation at USMA University and as president of the U.S. Embassy Youth Advisory Council (YAC), among other groups. This was practical political training for what was going to come (2014 elections).

Politics is about serving the people by action. Aside from the goals of championing youth that I acquired as a student activist, I founded an environmental NGO at 19 years old, that implemented recycling (12 stations) and community cleanups. I have the vision to help the transformation of Panama into the Singapore of the Americas, and in order to do so, we need more educated politicians. In light of this, I have always encouraged the youth to educate, invest their time wisely and work hard.

Youth activism helped me develop some skills that made it possible for me to have successfully run nine elections including student representative.

What policy changes have you proposed in your time as an MP?

I raise my voice on these main causes: education, youth/women opportunities and environmental policies. Among the bills I have presented, these are the most relevant thus far:

On youth issues, I proposed the "Youth Bill" that seeks to create opportunities for the youth and fosters their empowerment.

You are a member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB). How do you evaluate the current Rohingya crisis?

The crisis in Rakhine state towards the Rohingya group has escalated. It is deplorable and disappointing, especially because of the expectations raised under the new government’s leadership. This situation is not only affecting a minority group, but neighboring countries who have to deal with thousands of refugees. It can destabilize the region. The whole world is watching and wants this hostile chapter to come to an end. Human rights should be respected everywhere, regardless of the cultural differences. I call on the authorities of Burma to stop the violence, and understand that democracy will not function properly if the rule of law and human dignity is not respected.

You mentioned that immigration is becoming an issue in Panama. What is your position on this?

There are tremendous gains in diversity. Immigrants contribute to the country’s development through knowledge, experiences, best practices and qualified labor in many cases. The more international, the better. Nonetheless, Panama needs to be more selective in screening immigrants and strictly enforcing current immigration policies. We should focus on importing talents and restricting people with dubious backgrounds (associated with illegal activities). I think Panama should attract talent from everywhere, especially professors who could help improve the national standard into a more international standard.

The Panama Papers illustrated that many wealthy individuals in the Middle East and internationally are taking advantage of legal, semi-legal or illegal mechanisms in the tax system. Do you believe that tax havens and law firms that support them should be abolished or do you see a more nuanced solution?

There is no easy answer to resolving this issue, and the world is already moving towards a more nuanced solution, through multilateral information sharing agreements and enhanced rules around beneficial ownership. Simultaneously, there needs to be multilateral agreements on international taxation standards, rules on permanent establishment and taxation at the source. The goals in resolving these issues should be more focused on finding common ground around reasonable and competitive taxation, protection of private property, privacy and better tax enforcement mechanism.
On November 28th, 2017, the Middle East Studies Center (MESC) of the American University in Cairo successfully co-hosted the 14th Korea-Middle East Cooperation Forum. The forum has been held in various locations in the Middle East and Korea, on alternating years, since 2003. In an effort to increase cultural and academic exchange between Asia and the Middle East, the forum brings together officials from governments, universities, non-governmental organizations and think tanks to discuss diverse issues. Although South Korea isn’t often thought of as a major player in the Middle East, interest in security and economic issues is rising.

This year, the theme of the forum was “Toward a New Vision of Korea-Middle East Cooperation” which consisted of three sessions on foreign and security affairs: “Ending Conflict, Building Peace,” “Expanding Economic Cooperation between Korea and the Middle East,” and “Human Development: Challenges and Strategies.” Dr. Robert Mason, Director of MESC, attended the forum as a representative of AUC. He moderated the session on “Human Development,” bringing in presenters from Saudi Arabia, the United States and Yemen, and also gave a special presentation on Iranian foreign policy in Syria in the Middle East and African Studies Department at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies after the conference.

According to Dr. Mason, the “New Vision,” outlined by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. CHO Hyun, emphasized the South Korean government’s efforts to generate a new start in the region and contribute to stability through building cooperation and prosperity through increased, meaningful people-to-people ties. Viewing the forum as an important platform in which to share best practices in and between regions, Dr. Mason stressed that “by building greater awareness of what the challenges are in each region, we can potentially build stronger and more sustainable linkages.” However, he believes that the South Korean government has a strong foundation upon which to build saying, “the ties are actually quite substantial in the areas of Arab students in Korea and the number of so-called health tourists.”
Eui Hyun and Woo A were also interested in attending the forum because of the reputation of AUC. "One of the main reasons I attended this forum was because it was co-hosted by AUC, one of the leading universities in Middle East Studies." Eui Hyun stressed. "Specifically, I wanted to hear the current research trends at MESC. Although Woo A already knew about AUC and had even visited the new campus in New Cairo, she revealed that many of her colleagues were not aware of it. However, she believed that "co-hosting this event would familiarize [AUC] to many Koreans." The forum also served as an opportunity for scholars and practitioners working in the Middle East to learn from others outside the region and increase awareness of the academic and research opportunities in South Korea. Saying that he was fortunate to have met scholars and students who were bright, professional and respectful during his time at the forum, Dr. Mason emphasized that "this was no great surprise as I teach and supervise Korean MA students at AUC!"

Last month AUC signed its first memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a South Korean University, the University of Seoul. Judging from the success of the Korea-Middle East Cooperation Forum and the MoU, greater communication and cooperation between AUC and Korean scholars and practitioners appears to have a promising future.
The fall of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in 2011 shattered Libyan politics into a number of disparate pieces. The country’s ensuing civil war then witnessed the arrival of extensive refugee and migrant flows from surrounding countries that significantly altered the local conflict dynamics and injected a new urgency on the part of the international community to quickly put Libya back together again. These concurrent developments, the emergence of an extensive migrant smuggling economy and decentralization of political power in Libya, have formed a nexus of concern to European countries in particular, as they view the protracted and fractionalized conflict in Libya as an impediment to stemming the flows of migrants across the Mediterranean. The need for a strong central state to effectively monitor the country’s coastal borders and disempower the increasingly entrenched smuggling networks is seen as a vital strategic goal for the EU, leading to the creation of various UN initiatives for the establishment of a central Libyan government. However, as the Libya Political Agreement of 2015 has thus far failed to produce a capable and legitimate central government, many regional powers are now looking towards Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar as a potential strongman to finally impose a monopoly of force across the territory and bring modicum of stability to the country. As European-Libyan analyst Richard Gaulston (2018) notes on Haftar, “The imminent issue is: Who is the man that can secure Libya internally and stop millions of migrants, mostly economic ones, from destroying European life as we have known it?”

“A more imminent issue is not whether international actors are supporting the right internal forces, but rather what is it about current conditions in Libya that seem particularly conducive to political decentralization, and to what extent is the migrant smuggling economy impeding a move towards centralized political power?”

A more imminent issue is not whether international actors are supporting the right internal forces, but rather what is it about current conditions in Libya that seem particularly conducive to political decentralization, and to what extent is the migrant smuggling economy impeding a move towards centralized political power? This analysis picks up on an emerging line of research into the political economic impacts of migrant flows, and the degree to which local political actors, militia groups in particular, are tapping into these flows via their taxation of smuggling routes and racketeering relationships with non-armed smugglers to fund their various activities. Analysts have recognized that “these groups have an interest in further exploiting human smuggling as its revenues allow them to run and maintain the costly military units that are central to their power and influence (Narbon, 2017).” Thus, the effort of national consolidation immediately confronts the issue that a significant portion of Libya’s stakeholders have no interest in, or in the case of the militias in the southern part of the country, would see their economic livelihoods destroyed by it. Efforts at conflict resolution and national institution-building must therefore recognize that migrant smuggling, rather than an epiphenomenal by-product of the current instability, is a key component of Libya’s war economy.

Initial research into the nature of this smuggling economy suggests a set of challenges associated with conflicts that thrive on revenues derived from it. First, migrant smuggling seems particularly resistant to centralization, and carries a very low cost of entry for any local actors keen to engage in it. Control of a transit route, offer of “protection services”, or transport and guiding activities provide easy revenue for an array of local tribes and militias. In contrast to conflict zones dominated by resources and economic activities that are more amenable to monopolization, such as oil or drug cultivation, the smuggling-dominated war economy of Libya appears to produce a diffuse political landscape. The implication- in terms of conflict resolution- is the absence of the types of warlords and cohesive rebel groups that can ultimately be co-opted or at least negotiated with, which could lead to a more protracted and complex conflict. Grievances within militant groups can quickly lead to schisms and factionalism, as disgruntled rebels can branch off to form new and viable groups within the relatively open and accessible economic environment.
Such a dynamic can also be observed in the Northern Mali conflict, which is now entering its sixth year and appears to offer no sign of ending soon as the region is marked by a dizzying array of militias and armed groups, many of whom enjoy a steady income from migrant smuggling. Unlike the previous bout of conflict between the separatist north and the government based in southern Mali, the prospects of a negotiated settlement appear unlikely so long as the conflict zone remains so economically and politically decentralized.

The second challenge is that the illicit nature of the migrant smuggling activity limits the options for incorporating its beneficiaries into the regular economy. Unlike shadow economies based on normally legal products and activities, such as transborder smuggling of oil or subsidized goods, pacifying the migrant smuggling economy is not simply a matter of making their books public and entering a mutually beneficial revenue sharing agreement with the state. Thus, turning Libya from a war economy to a peace economy that is more conducive to inter-regional cooperation and stability will be an extremely thorny task, and will likely be beyond the capacities of any top down initiatives that refuse to address the core reason the industry exists in the first place; that is, the criminalization of the movement across the region.

This brings us to issues of policy. Tinkering on the edges of policy will do little to fundamentally alter the incentive structures of the migrants, militias and smugglers that animate this multi-billion dollar a year industry (with hundreds of millions of dollars flowing through Libya alone.) What cannot be ignored is the fact that the fundamental driver of this industry is the criminalization of migration in Europe that necessitates the use of smugglers in the first place. If Europe is serious about controlling migration, and convinced that a stable and effective Libyan state is essential to achieve that, it must recognize the role its own migration policies play in perpetuating conflict across North Africa via the creation of migrant-smuggling centered war economies. However, much like the drug war, it is much more likely that Europe will continue to follow the path of declaring war on an industry of its own creation, and insist on fighting it in perpetuity.

Rather than dwelling on this apparent policy paradox, one may look to the regional level for policy reforms that seem both more politically achievable and potentially effective in eroding the corrosive and destabilizing impacts of smuggling networks. It is no coincidence that the countries most affected by migrant smuggling are on the border of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) zone that ensures the free movement of people. It is at the borders of this economic zone with Libya, Algeria and Morocco that smuggling thrives. And in the cases of Libya and Mali, where rampant smuggling is playing a key role in fueling protracted civil wars. Expanding the area of free movement to include Libya will negate the need for migrants to pay for smuggling services, thus undermining an industry that emerging research shows is quite destabilizing.

While it may seem counterintuitive, regularizing movement across West and North Africa will allow states to more effectively maintain internal stability and achieve their migration priorities. Firstly, it will undermine the capacities of peripheral areas, especially those with secessionist tendencies, to resist national consolidation and take up arms against the state by extracting smuggling revenues. Secondly, despite hysterical fears of “floods of migrants,” migration has been repeatedly demonstrated to be a net economic positive for receiving states due to labor markets that are adept at controlling and limiting migrant flows as necessary.

Of course this latter macroeconomic argument has been made time and time again, only to be overtaken by political concerns over social cohesion and national sovereignty. However, the case of Libya demonstrates that one of the very few things that the criminalization of migration is effective at is the creation of a shadow smuggling economy that undermines both state capacity and its territorial integrity—hardly a recipe for maintaining stability of any sort. Indeed, current research is suggesting that instability and political decentralization are not only a mere permissive condition for migrant smuggling, but also a direct result of it.

As the head of the IOM William Lacy Swing recently put it, "migration is not an issue to be solved, it’s a human reality that has to be managed or governed (Bugge, 2017)." Libya’s current war economy cannot persist without the funds desperate migrants are forced to cough up in order to cross its borders, and eliminating this market for smuggling services is indeed within the policy purview of the governments of the region and Europe.

"What cannot be ignored is the fact that the fundamental driver of this industry is the criminalization of migration in Europe that necessitates the use of smugglers in the first place."
Putting Libya back together again will require an honest and fact based appraisal of the relationship between migration and stability, and a concerted effort by researchers and policy makers to encourage states to resist their worst institutional instincts to securitize migration. As we move forward into the much anticipated "age of migration," getting migration right is a matter of great urgency. The onus is on regional and international policy makers not to construct the conditions conducive to more problems, more instability and more war economies; but rather to seize this great human dynamism as the great civilizational asset that it has always been.

Thomas Hinkel is a Political Science MA candidate in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. His thesis is on the political economy of migrant smuggling.

Unrealized Education: South Sudanese Refugees Access to Education in Egypt

VIVIAN FAYEZ

Today, there are an estimated 21.3 million refugees worldwide, over half of which are under the age of 18 (UNHCR). There are over five million refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt alone originating from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

 Generally speaking, refugees in Egypt face similar challenges as in their countries of refuge: seeking shelter, generating livelihoods, integrating into a community, as well as general health, security and education issues. Education is an especially significant issue within the refugee community because it is estimated that refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than their peers (UNHCR).

The situation of South Sudanese refugees in Egypt reflects these challenges, particularly the struggle to gain an education for the children of the community. Sudanese refugees comprise the largest group of refugees currently living in Egypt. The Carnegie Foundation, the American University in Cairo, the Canadian government and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) have estimated that two to five million Sudanese refugees arrived in Egypt between the years of 1999 and 2011 (Karapapan, 2016). The first waves of Sudanese refugees arrived in Egypt following the outbreak of the second civil war in Sudan in 1983, the longest civil war in Africa (Coker, 2004, p. 15).

South Sudanese refugees in Cairo often live in a state of limbo; many lack legal status in Egypt but are unable or unwilling to return to Sudan. The majority of Sudanese refugees view Egypt as a transit state and wait for an opportunity to be resettled in a more developed country through one of the resettlement programs offered by the United States of America, Canada and Australia – a process that can take several years to materialize.

Additionally, the majority of the South Sudanese community are marginalized due to poverty and racial discrimination (Ghazaleh, p. 7). Many lost their property and belongings when fleeing their homes while those who are educated and skilled professionals can only work in menial jobs in the informal economy or the black market due to the inability to obtain work permits. Adding to their economic struggles, many South Sudanese face racial discrimination, due to biased perceptions that they are “black of skin, Christian and culturally African as opposed to Arab.” (Coker, 2004, p. 402).

Nothing can better describe the predicament of the South Sudanese community in Egypt than their own words:

“Life was difficult and harsh due to discrimination, and we felt no sense of belonging, or security. My children were full of anger and fear. They felt discrimination from Egyptian children on the street” (Melissa in El-Tahawy, p. 60).

“Our children are lost here. Society rejects them because of their colour, their clothes; they are chased away from shops. They can only relax here, among those of their race” (one woman from Arba’a wa Nuss in Ghazaleh, pp. 3.4).
These factors combine to create a significant impediment to the integration of the South Sudanese community into Egyptian society, specifically in the area of education. South Sudanese refugees have lived in Egypt since the 1980s yet, second generation and even third generation refugee children are still restricted in their right to state-funded education (Grabska, 2006, p.292).

**Accessing Education in the South Sudanese Community**

These challenges combine to impact the ability of South Sudanese refugee children to receive an adequate education. While children of officially recognized refugees have a legal right to attend government schools, this right is often unmet due to discrimination, poverty, a lack of space in Egypt’s over-crowded schools and strict bureaucratic standards. For example, refugees in Egypt receive educational grants from UNHCR through the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). However, this provision is contingent upon their status as an official refugee under Egyptian law. Yet, South Sudanese applicants for official refugee status constitute the highest percentage of rejected refugees in Egypt (Grabska 2006, pg 296). This rejected status means that many South Sudanese children simply cannot afford to attend a government-run school.

How then do these refugees and their children receive an education? The South Sudanese community resorts to church and charity-run schools. However, these schools are mostly limited to primary education that is not accredited by the state in Egypt. Thus, these children obtain only a primary education with no prospects of completing a secondary school education, let alone achieving higher education. Moreover, some parents cannot afford to pay the education fees as well as the expenses of books, uniforms and transportation and subsequently, their children are deprived of even a basic education (Grabska, 2006, p. 299).

There are many existing church and charity-run schools in Egypt that are working to rectify these obstacles to education for South Sudanese children. St. Andrew’s Refugee Services (STARS) in Downtown Cairo, All Saints’ Cathedral in Zamalek and the Good Shepherd’s School in Abbasiya are just a few examples. STARS states that it began “offering a structured and professional education to refugee children in 1999.”

At present, the program “adopt[s] the Sudanese curriculum taught in English, offering successful students the possibility of obtaining the Sudanese Certificate of Graduation and later attending public universities in Cairo.” This organization also “prepares outstanding students for the American or Canadian GED exam, which is the equivalent of high school level and enables students to apply to universities in the US and Canada, as well as the American University in Cairo.” In 2014, the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa of the Worldwide Anglican Communion stated that it was planning to open a new school for refugee children in 2015 in the area of Kilo Arba w Nuss where more than 500 Sudanese children cannot attend schools. The diocese was planning to teach the Sudanese curriculum in Arabic to ten classes of twenty children from the ages of five to nine. The school was planning to employ ten trained Sudanese teachers, the majority of whom were working as domestic workers at the time (Diocese of Egypt).

Yet, these measures from NGOs and charities must be combined with greater government protections and support for the refugee population’s right to education in Egypt. The government has failed and continues to fail the marginalized South Sudanese refugee community through outdated policies and bureaucratic obstacles. However, there are examples of the local government listening to the needs of the refugee community. In 2003 in Alexandria, the South Sudanese community attempted to assert their rights by mobilizing and directly addressing the local Egyptian government. This collective action resulted in all South Sudanese children in Alexandria, whatever their legal status, having access to state-funded education (Grabska, 2006, p.300). Thus, meaningful change to the education status of South Sudanese refugees is possible if the government and the South Sudanese refugee community work together to identify the barriers to education and implement appropriate solutions.

**References:**


Vician Fayez is a Middle East Studies MA candidate in the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. Her thesis is on "Balsam al-Malik: A Forgotten Coptic Feminist and Nationalist Voice during the Interwar Years."
Hend Eltaweel, MA graduate 2016, first developed an interest in studying the Middle East region from an interdisciplinary perspective while pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration and Political Science at the American University in Cairo. Her research focus is on gender, civil society and Islamic studies. Hend realized her dream of affecting positive change on critical humanitarian issues when she accepted her current position as Regional Program Assistant for the Middle East and North Africa at the UN Migration Agency - IOM.

On AUC:

What did you study as an undergraduate, and how did it prepare you for pursuing a graduate degree and your future career?

I obtained my bachelor’s in Business Administration/Marketing with a minor degree in Political Science/International Relations from AUC in 2008. Throughout my bachelor’s years, I realized my passion for the study of humanities and social sciences as I always aced my history, sociology and politics courses. Therefore, I developed the idea of pursuing my master’s degree in one of those areas.

AUC helped me start my career as I did two internships at multinationals during my undergraduate years. From these experiences, I recognized that I can give my best in a job that serves a humanitarian cause and the path of my future career began to crystallize.

What influenced your decision to pursue a Masters’ degree in Middle East Studies at AUC?

I have always had this thirst for studying politics, history, sociology and legal studies. Studying and working in multicultural environments has also made me enthusiastic about societies and the means of building bridges between nations. I believed I could only play this role after learning about my very own region and history of this complex and rich part of the world. I felt an immense curiosity to enroll in the Middle East Studies Center at AUC because it offered an interdisciplinary degree under the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, allowing me to pursue a study of the region from various subjects including, anthropology, gender studies, forced migration, etc. Even though it is of a pivotal importance to have an area of specialization, the multidisciplinary nature of this program equips the student with a broad knowledge of the region which can be utilized in a large array of jobs in and outside the humanitarian field.

Do you have any favorite memories from your time at AUC?

I can confidently say that my Master’s years at AUC were the best of all times. It was not only an astounding learning experience, but also an opportunity to meet and make some of the best friendships, with people from different backgrounds who share this passion for learning and connecting with others, that I cherish and maintain until today.

Does any particular experience or relationship you formed during your time at MESC stand out as challenging or altering your worldview?

The challenging trick of being an Arab studying the Middle East, with the innocence of a fresh graduate, is that sometimes you are inclined to see things in black and white. Therefore, you feel a sense of stubbornness and resilience to believe certain realities that come against the ideal version of history that you tend to imagine. I recall questioning my professor Sherene Seikaly about everything in the “Introduction to Middle East History” course, yet she always warmly welcomed and accepted my curiosity with impressive openness. This was a moment when I finally gave up on seeing the world in black and white, and started to understand the nuances in various historic accounts and in all aspects of life.

What influenced your decision to pursue a career in migration and refugee affairs, and have you always wanted to work with an organization like the United Nations?

I never imagined myself working with the United Nations per se, however, since my early career years, I realized that I will only put my whole heart into a job if it serves a humanitarian cause that improves people’s lives. In 2016, when I got a job offer at the UN Migration Agency (IOM), it was around the time when the migration crisis dominated news’ headlines. The coverage of the crisis showed flows of vulnerable migrants escaping wars, droughts and disasters on one hand, and on the other hand, statesmen and politicians using an anti-migration rhetoric to make political wins. Additionally, the migration crisis was exacerbated by the ongoing turbulence in Arab countries experiencing their very own grievances and struggles for survival under rough economic conditions. Working with the United Nations looked like an opportunity channel to give back to the community and best utilize the good education and professional skills I had previously gained.

What was your job in Dean Nabil Fahmy’s office, and how did the experience prepare you for your current career?

During my work at the Dean’s office between 2010 and 2015, I was responsible for various student-related tasks including graduate applications, reviewing case by case student petitions, fellowship applications and academic advising. I have also assisted Dean Nabil Fahmy in editing and translating his writings including op-eds and frequently published works related to Middle East Politics and International Relations. Working with a career diplomat has been an exceptionally rewarding experience. Besides learning about political protocols and attaining skills of thoroughness and timeliness, I learned, specifically from working with Dean Fahmy, the importance of taking initiative. He is not only a man with a vision, but also someone who endeavors to make this vision a reality through tireless commitment and hard work.
Do you think it is important for people from the Middle East region to study Middle East studies?

I certainly believe that understanding one’s own region enables them to better serve the region, especially when you speak the mother tongue and have access to different accounts of its rich and complex history. In my job today, if we are to implement a project serving a certain migrant community in Egypt, how can we do that if we don’t have information on this community and understand their needs? It is the same thing when it comes to being a Middle Eastern aiming to serve the region, or any other region. World issues are extremely intertwined and simply being born in a place is not enough to understand its multifaceted realities.

On Middle East Studies:

What are some areas of research within the field of Middle East Studies or migration issues, more specifically, that deserve more attention and exploration?

Middle East Studies is a very broad field with limitless potential topics for research. I recall the struggle that I faced during my years of study in order to decide on a research topic for my thesis. With the fast changing dynamics of today’s world, new topics are constantly emerging, especially as migration flows become more complex and becomes more and more of a reality as international migrants form over 3.3% of the global population. Henceforth, there is a wide array of research areas that are yet to be explored.

How should students approach the study of the Middle East, and what are the main skills and experience students should obtain in order to succeed in careers in the field of MES?

First of all, train yourself to study a topic from different perspectives. We usually have a tendency to read accounts that support our arguments and convictions. However, in humanities and social sciences, it is crucial for us as academics to explore the topic from different angles in order to have a clear and objective understanding. Secondly, diversify your learning tools. Sometimes the textbooks and reading materials absorb all our time and make the learning process very dull. Halfway through my studies, I came to rely more on creative learning tools such as watching documentaries, historical films and educational videos. This not only made the learning process more appealing, but also helped me comprehend events in a more holistic manner. Last but not least, for any student who would like to understand the Middle East, I encourage them to travel as much as possible in the region. There is often a misconception that the region is homogenous with similar social and historical characteristics but this risks overlooking the peculiarities of each society and the nuances of its complex fabric.

On Refugee and Migration Issues:

What is the scope of the refugee crisis in the Middle East, and what makes this particular wave of mass forced displacement different from previous waves?

It is no exaggeration to say that the current refugee crisis is the largest in magnitude and complexity since WWII. Throughout the 20th century, the Middle East witnessed waves of migration and displacement; from the 1948 Palestinian refugee crisis to the Lebanese Civil War to the Gulf War. Yet, by all historical standards today’s refugee crisis represents a new phenomenon. With roughly six million Syrian refugees escaping the war and almost ten million internally displaced, the situation is more challenging than ever. The situation is complicated by the dire internal conditions many of the neighboring Arab nations face even as they become host countries to the shattered masses. Today, the Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi refugee communities in Lebanon and Jordan comprise over a third of their populations. Additionally, many host countries lack the policies and resources that facilitate good governance of these communities and provide them with the necessary livelihoods.

The Syrian crisis has dominated the discourse around the issues of migration in the Middle East. What are some of the other major issues we should be focusing on?

The problem with protracted crises like the ongoing war in Syria is that we cannot predict a timeline for safe return of the internally and externally displaced masses. In addition to meeting the immediate needs of Syrian refugees, it is essential to start looking at preparing them for a safe return as soon as the war ends and political stability is achieved. This entails encouraging various factions of the society to have an open dialogue to pave the way for reconciliation and state rebuilding. This applies also in Libya, Yemen and Iraq where social cohesion and community stabilization are pivotal prerequisites to bringing life back to normal in these war-torn countries.

What are the ethical implications of treating traumatized, displaced populations primarily as objects of research?

What expectations of aid or concern are raised by the simple act of asking questions?

Working with beneficiaries brings a whole host of sensitivities and ethical concerns, one of which is gender sensitivity. The UN system deals with gender sensitivity as part and parcel of each and every project among other results-based indicators. There is also an important role for Psychosocial support units to set and identify ethical standards of working with persons of concern, whether as beneficiaries or in taking part in research projects. We have to always bear in mind that vulnerable communities such as traumatized and displaced persons come from all sorts of racial/ethnic/religious backgrounds and therefore all these variables have to be respected and taken into consideration.

What does regional cooperation or a regional framework on migration protection and cooperation look like? Is a regional framework more appropriate than a national or global one?

We cannot really say one form of cooperation is more appropriate than the other. The need for partnerships and responsibility-sharing is emerging now more than ever when
it comes to dealing with migration and refugee issues. On one hand, global and regional cooperation is needed to
guarantee policy cohesion, border security, sharing the
burden and maintaining solidarity among states, while
national frameworks help protect sovereign national
interests in light of the context and extent of its internal
crisis. These frameworks can be binding or non-binding, but
most importantly, they set the benchmark for regulating
migration affairs and act as the guiding manuals for states
to better govern migration in a safe, orderly and humane
fashion.

Disclaimer: All opinions expressed here represent
personal opinions of the interviewee and not any official
stances of an organization.

What has been the impact of social media on
the understanding of the refugee crisis?

In today’s world of technological advancement and digital
revolution, the power of picture is stronger than ever. Each photo
shared on social media conveys a story and tells an experience of
those we don’t hear or see in our day to day lives. Hence, social
media has played a pivotal role in raising awareness on the
gravity of the refugee crisis, whether in the size of refugee
communities or the brutal circumstances that they encounter
during their journeys in search for a safe refuge. That said, social
media is, and has always been, a double-edged sword. Many
politicians have taken advantage of media platforms to exploit
the migration crisis and frame the flows of refugees as a
potential national threat and to make political gains. Thus, there
is a responsibility on social media users to verify and question
the authenticity and credibility of stories that filter across their
social media feeds.

AROUND THE CENTER

Congratulations to our Graduates!

In the fall of 2017, four MESC students successfully defended
their thesis. We are proud to introduce the new graduates:

Sang Yong Han, journalist at South Korean News Agency,
Yonhap News, presented on Islamophobia in South Korea with a
focus on Muslim Migrants.

Sang became interested in the topic because of how
under-studied the phenomenon was in East Asia, specifically, in
South Korea, in comparison to how much coverage
Islamophobia received in Western countries. Although he
struggled to find compelling research, his advisor, Dr. Robert
Mason, helped him build a theoretical framework to analyze the
topic. After graduation, he hopes to specialize in reporting on
Middle East issues while working as a journalist in Korea.

Salwa Salman presented on Egypt’s Desert Paradoxes, Promises, and Possibilities: A Study of Land
Reclamation Policies along Cairo-Alexandria Desert Road.

Salwa became interested in the topic after President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi ordered former Prime
Minister Ibrahim Mehleb to establish a committee for retrieving looted state lands along the
Cairo-Alexandria desert road which possessed a significant squatter community. Her own residence
was threatened after the committee started to execute demolition orders along the road. This made her
deide to take her own case and connect it to the broader academic question of customary land
acquisition and development policies in the global South. She notes that there is an absence of academic
scholarship and theoretical foundations on the topic of property rights and desert development in Egypt.
Subsequently, she conducted fieldwork and examined the history of desert reclamation as part of the
national development discourse. When she first began the MESC program, she did not know how her
research interests would be shaped. Yet, she believes that MESC allowed her to explore different subjects
and tailor her studies as her research interests developed. She also argues that her training as a Master’s
student provided her with the tools needed to explore and theorize development in land politics, despite
the dearth of literature on the topic, and plans to continue her research as she pursues a PhD in
legal-sociology.
A Winter Break in Beirut

Mohamed Gameel, MA student, MESC

After a long semester and many other professional projects, I finally got the time to plan a short vacation in Beirut, Lebanon. Although it was not a pure holiday as I had to do some work there, I had enough time to visit new places and hang out with friends. Before traveling, a lot of friends and family members in Egypt advised me not to go to Beirut due to many security reasons. I believe they were more affected by media than the situation on the ground. As usual, I didn’t listen to their advice and started to plan my trip. Besides having a vacation in Beirut, I wanted to assess the feasibility of conducting my MA thesis project on Lebanese cinema and the war memory. Therefore, I scheduled several meetings with professors, students and librarians in the American University at Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU). The outcome of these meetings was promising, and encouraged me to go further with my project.

Before visiting El-Dahyaa, I had never thought of changing my perceptions of the city or where they came from. After my visit, I became more cognizant of the importance in not judging a place before experiencing it in person. It is a small city where I could find all what I need: significant diversity, cultural events, heritage, beautiful and varied architecture, astonishing beaches, breathtaking mountain views, amazing food, warm nightlife and of course sweet people all around. While it was not my first time in Beirut, for many reasons, I felt deeply relaxed and secure during this visit.

First, before starting my thesis proposal, I was concerned that people in Beirut might have concerns regarding my topic. However, to my delight, I felt my topic was welcomed. That feeling helped me relax during the rest of my vacation.

Second, this time, I had a unique experience that encouraged me to reevaluate all the prejudices I had. I received a call from a friend, Lubna, telling me that a mutual friend, had invited us to visit the Southern District of Beirut, known as El-Dahyaa. For a moment, I remained silent. Then, I asked Lubna if it was safe to go there. She laughed and asked, “Are you serious?” “No, I’m not. Ok. I will go with you,” I replied. For my family and me in Egypt and Beirut, El-Dahyaa was a forbidden place. It was a district that Hezbollah and Hassan Nasrallah, the Security General of Hezbollah, used as a base. A voice from my childhood kept repeating in my head: “It is dangerous to be there if you are not a Shia.”

On the morning of the next day, I prepared myself. I met Lubna in Ras Beirut, and we caught the minivan number four. I have never imagined myself in this minivan. After about 30 minutes, the minivan arrived, and I was surprised. “Lubna, it is a very normal place. It is even similar to Maadi or Zamalek in Cairo.” She smiled and said, “You are naive.” After spending half a day in El-Dahyaa with my friends, I admit that I had been naive.
The Southern District of Beirut has a diverse population; it was not only Shia as I had imagined. There were significant minority of Christian Maronite and Sunni populations living in El-Dahyaa. Furthermore, El-Dahyaa has become a shopping destination for a lot of Beiruties because the prices there are much cheaper than those in Beirut. Before visiting El-Dahyaa, I had never thought of changing my perceptions of the city or where they came from. After my visit, I became more cognizant of the importance of not judging a place before experiencing it in person.

Falling in Love with the Country of Color and Art

Yieun Kim, MA student, MESC

It was one of my goals to travel around the region while studying in Egypt. Morocco was always on my list as I felt like it was an exotic place compared to other Middle East and North African countries. I have previously traveled to Jordan, Palestine, Algeria and Egypt (obviously). Although I still need to explore more in the region, living in Egypt for one and a half years helped to provide some insights and observations on Morocco in comparison to Egypt. Although they are two distinct countries, with my ignorance and prejudice, I expected a lot of similarities. Before my trip to Morocco, I had a chance to travel around Egypt to Siwa, Luxor, the White Desert and the Red Sea with visitors from home. I would describe Egypt as a country with history while Morocco as country of colors and art. Before I traveled to Morocco, I had thought that every individual should visit Egypt since it is such a dynamic country with beautiful history and people. After my recent travels, this is how I now feel about Morocco!

As I traveled with my friend who had no relation to or experience in the MENA region before, I realized a lot of things that I considered normal in Egypt were not the same in Morocco. Coming from Egypt, having a separated pedestrian street in Morocco was such a surprise and everywhere seemed to be clean! I was surprised to always see nice public bathrooms on the bus stops during road trips. It was also very interesting to see the mix between Europe, the Middle East and Africa in one country. Another difference in comparison to Egypt was the amount of pictures of the king and his family that were everywhere in Morocco. While my friend thought everything was yellow or sand-colored, to me, Morocco’s buildings, clothing and decorations were full of vibrant colors!
My journey started with an unexpectedly long five and a half hour flight. I had to look up the map again as it was way longer than I expected. I was, in fact, crossing one of the biggest continents in the world! Ironically, this was the most difficult time travelling for me in terms of language. Due to my background studying modern standard Arabic, I did not think that the trip would be particularly challenging. Normally I can always communicate in English in tourist areas in most places in the world. However, in Morocco, if you do not speak Moroccan Darija, you need to speak French, a language in which I had no background.

Although we experienced some aggressive sales tactics in the city of Fes, the storied history and diverse beauty of the oldest city in Morocco more than made up for this. With more than 9000 small alleyways, the medina, the city center, is one of UNESCO’s world cultural heritage sites. The medina is also home to the first university in the world: the University of Al Quaraouiyine! I enjoyed the aesthetic Islamic architecture everywhere in the city. Although I could not go into the university as I was not a Muslim, I tried to gain the spirit of scholars as I prepare to write my thesis this semester.

My whole trip around Egypt and Morocco made me think more about ‘identity.’ As a Korean who has a strong national identity, it was a very interesting experience to meet many people who did not consider themselves to be Egyptian or Moroccan. When I traveled to Siwa in Egypt, I met many people in Siwa who had stronger Siwa or Berber identities than Egyptian and were claiming that they follow Sheik’s voice rather than the national police. I also met many people in Casablanca who had a very strong European identity rather than an African one while some Berbers in the desert were happily calling themselves African but not Moroccan.

Last but not least, the food was also AMAZING in Morocco! Tagine and Couscous are the best invention!

*P.S. Camels in Morocco are black!

Reviewed by Mohamed Gamal-Eldin, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark, New Jersey.

Imagined Empires starts with the statement, “Empire is almighty,” (pg.1) which the author, Zeinab Abul-Magd, quickly does away with later in the same opening paragraph when she says the idea of a hegemonic empire is nothing more than a “myth.” Through a five-hundred-year microhistory of the Qina Province in Upper Egypt, Abul-Magd traces the ebb and flow of five empires and their failure to consolidate power in the province. Beginning with the Ottoman attempt to assert control in Qina and the Red Sea trade, all the way through to the contemporary period of neoliberal intrusion, the book traces the various political and economic mechanisms of empire. Additionally, Abul-Magd’s intervention highlights the non-nationalist elite and subaltern actors who were integral in combating the onslaught of empire. One of Abul-Magd’s major successes is to disrupt the view of a break between the “pre-modern” and “modern” in Egyptian historiography.

Napoleon’s entrance into Egypt, the establishment of the Mehmet ‘Ali dynasty and the erection of informal and then finally formal British colonial order are overshadowed by a streak of continual southern independence and rebellion.

Each of the five chapters focuses on a separate empire and details the rebellion in Upper Egypt and the inability of imperial power to assert itself on both the elites and subalterns alike. Looking at the long view of history in Qina, as Abul-Magd does, allows the historian to trace the persistent imbalance in investment towards developing infrastructure, agriculture and industry in the Delta as compared to Upper Egypt that occurred in every period.

Additionally, at various periods in Upper Egyptian history independent local rulers and tribal leaders etched out their own share of power in the south. This strong sense of independence, imbalance of investment and recurring rebellion demonstrates the failure of empire for Abul-Magd. Imagined Empires throws into confusion the false view of imperial continuity and success in creating a unified state and market in Egypt (p. 146).

This text is essential for students of Egyptian history as it provides a unique methodology and counters long perceived views of the eternal unity of the Egyptian nation; an idea that persists into the contemporary. Abul-Magd uses archival sources to illustrate the ways in which the subaltern population of Qina a province used every legal and political institution possible to petition for a solution to poverty, environmental disaster, and oppression. The sources give voice to the underrepresented non-elites who tend to be overlooked in most histories. Imagined Empires meshes both official and elite sources in contrast to the peasants of the province who suffered at the hands of empire. In contradistinction to Benedict Anderson’s theory of the importance of the print media in forming national identities Abul-Magd demonstrates the way “living memory” (pg. 140) of revolt, banditry, rebellion and southern independence played an important role in passing on the methods and stories of anti-imperial action.

Abul-Magd’s Imagined Empires is required reading for all students of Egyptian, Middle Eastern and World History. It forces historians to challenge previously long held ideas about the strength of empire. Empires are complex and because the hegemony they exert is usually uneven no imperial formation is “all-powerful.” Examining case studies on the periphery of the empire demonstrates, as Abul-Magd asserts, “the stumbling existence of world history’s imagined empires” (p. 146).
ROBERT MASON’S TOP 10 PICKS FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES STUDENTS:

1. Roger Owen
   State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East
   A leader in the field, with a remarkable career spanning six decades. Hear more about that here. For me, this book is incredibly useful in understanding the demise of empire, emergence of states and the modern Middle East political system(s).

2. Beverly Milton Edwards
   Contemporary Politics in the Middle East
   This textbook from a notable scholar covers all the key aspects of Middle East politics, with special attention on women, minorities, foreign actors and emerging trends. It should be one of the first ports of call for any scholar engaging with the field without prior experience.

3. Fawaz Gerges
   Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East
   A new book from the renowned scholar, this time looking at the lives of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Sayyid Qutb. It tells one much about the state, political Islam and power.

4. Raymond Hinnebusch
   The Foreign Policies of Middle East States
   I am an IR scholar at heart and one of the first books I looked at during my PhD was The Foreign Policies of Middle East States. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami remain pillars of the Middle East politics and the international relations community for good reason, partly to be found in this insightful volume.

5. Trita Parsi
   Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy
   Trita Parsi is the founding director of the National Iranian American Council, based in Washington D.C. Parisi’s proximity to policymakers makes this book and A Single Roll of the Dice useful primers on U.S. diplomacy towards and concerning Iran.

6. Madawi Al Rashid
   Muted Modernists: The Struggle over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia
   Al-Rashid is a well-respected Saudi scholar and professor. Her recent book Muted Modernists gives you an insiders perspective on some of the dynamics that perhaps account for the rapid shift in policy direction taken by the current Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman.

7. Sherry Gadelrab
   Medicine and Morality in Egypt: Gender and Sexuality in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
   In my view, Sherry was one of the best emerging talents in Ottoman history (especially Egyptian history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and I’m not just saying that because she was my wife. She was respected by peers and eminent professors alike.

8. Yvonne Haddad
   Islamic Law and the Challenges of Modernity
   These professors from Georgetown University in Washington D.C. present a readable volume on a vital aspect of Middle Eastern Studies, that of the relationship between shari’a law and Western legal systems in particular, as well as the often divergent interpretations of shari’a by Western, traditionalist and Islamist scholars.

9. John Waterbury et al
   A Political Economy of the Middle East
   If you want to know why the Middle East is the way it is and what the future may hold, there is no better volume to explain it.

10. Augustus Richard Norton
    Hezbollah: A Short History
    Hezbollah was and remains an important non-state actor not only in the politics of Lebanon, but increasingly in other states such as Syria, and further afield still through funding, cooperation and collaboration with the Iranian Quds Force. This book details its history and possible future.
CALL FOR MESC WORKING PAPER SERIES

The Middle East Studies Center Working Paper Series is a platform for individual scholars and contributes to international social science and humanities scholarship on the Middle East and the wider Islamic world, from the seventh century to the present. It allows for publication, dissemination, and discussion of new research on a relatively fast track. It is quicker than the usual timelines for publication of articles in journals or books.

Visiting scholars are generally expected to submit a working paper during, or shortly after, their Middle East Studies Center residency. Other scholars are welcome to submit papers at any time. The general editor of the Working Paper series is Middle East Studies Center Director Robert Mason, associate professor at The American University in Cairo.

For more information on submission guidelines, click here.

Disclaimer: All opinions expressed here represent personal opinions and not any official stances of MESC.