

# MELA Social Justice Lecture Series: Season 3

October 2022-March 2023

This lecture series aims to increase awareness of social justice principles in our professional practice and to also bring attention to how libraries and archives are supporting, or failing to support, crucial research on issues related to social justice. For this season's theme, *Lives in the Margins: Ethnic and Religious Minorities in the Middle East*, we invited scholars researching minority groups to speak about the questions they are attempting to answer and the barriers they face accessing resources, and we also hosted information professionals to reflect on whose heritage is being preserved, and how, and why or why not. Recordings have been made posted on YouTube, at the speakers' discretion; titles are linked to the recordings where available.

[Click here to view the Social Justice Lecture Series on YouTube](#)

## 1- [Brahim El Guabli, Williams College](#)

### [The Amazigh Indigenous Library and the Future of Amazigh Studies](#)

October 26, 2022

Amazigh language and culture are witnessing a strong revitalization in Tamazgha or the broader North African Amazigh homeland. Although the effort to document, catalogue, and archive Amazigh cultural production had already been underway in the colonial period, the post-independence states in Tamazgha repressed all expressions of Amazigh identity and culture in the public sphere, including in institutions endowed with the authority to shape the independent nations' collective memory. This talk will contextualize the revitalization of Amazigh language and culture through the multipronged efforts of the Amazigh Cultural Movement, between 1966 and the present, focusing on the challenges the profusion of cultural production in Tamazight might create for the librarian of Tamazgha and the Middle East.

*Brahim El Guabli is an indigenous, Amazigh scholar from Morocco. He is assistant professor of Arabic Studies and Comparative Literature at Williams College. His first book is entitled Moroccan Other-Archives: History and Citizenship after State Violence (Fordham University Press). His journal articles have appeared in PMLA, Interventions, The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry, Arab Studies Journal, META, and the Journal of North African Studies, among others. He is co-editor of the two forthcoming volumes Lamalif: A Critical Anthology of Societal Debates in Morocco During the "Years of Lead" (1966-1988) (Liverpool University Press) and Refiguring Loss: Jews in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Cultural Production (Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming). He is currently completing a second book on deserts entitled Saharan Imaginations: Between Saharanism and Ecocare. El Guabli is the recipient of an Alliance to Advance Liberal Arts Colleges' grant for his project "For an Amazigh-Inclusive Curriculum on North Africa."*

## **2- Rustin Zarkar, Library of Congress Cairo Office**

**Waleed Ziad, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

**Post-custodial archives from Sufi shrines of the Afghan-Pakistan frontier**

*December 14, 2022*

“Endangered archives from Sufi shrines of the Afghan-Pakistan frontier” is a project sponsored by UCLA Library’s Modern Endangered Archives Program, with the aim of cataloguing and digitizing endangered archives of Sufi monasteries and shrines within Pakistan’s Pashtun tribal regions. Beginning in February 2022, the team consists of 14 members who have been archiving materials ranging from locally produced biographies and letters, to texts on magic, metaphysics, and poetry, anti-extremist posters, audio recordings of Sufi masters documenting their struggle against fundamentalism. In this presentation, co-investigators Waleed Ziad and Rustin Zarkar will explore the history of the Sufi networks in the region as well as how the post-custodial model empowers local stakeholders in their ability to preserve their collections and build preservation infrastructure for sustainable community-driven archiving.

*Rustin Zarkar was the Middle East & Islamic Studies Librarian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was responsible for collecting and curating vernacular language materials from the Middle East and North Africa for UNC Libraries. Along with UNC Professor Waleed Ziad, he is the co-investigator for the “Endangered archives from Sufi shrines of the Afghan-Pakistan frontier” project, funded by UCLA’s Modern Endangered Archives Program (MEAP).*

*Waleed Ziad is Assistant Professor and Ali Jarrahi Fellow in Persian Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to this, he was an Islamic Law and Civilization Research Fellow at Yale Law School. He completed his PhD in History at Yale University, where his dissertation won the university-wide Theron Rockwell Field Prize. In the last decade, Ziad has conducted fieldwork on historical and contemporary religious revivalism and Sufism in over 140 towns across Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. His recent book *Hidden Caliphate: Sufi Saints beyond the Oxus and Indus* (Harvard, 2021) won the Albert Hourani Book Award.*

## **3- Josh Mugler, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library**

**Digitization, Digital Cataloging, and the Minority Communities of the Middle East**

*January 25, 2023*

Since the 1960s, the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library has worked to preserve the manuscript heritage of communities around the world through microfilming and digitization. We try to prioritize manuscript collections that are in danger due to conflict and other threats. As a result, much of our work has been focused on the manuscript collections of communities who are religious minorities in the countries where they live. This presentation will survey the history of HMML’s work in the Middle East and beyond with an eye to the challenges of work with minority groups. This work can present

complexities and obstacles due to potential tensions with governments and majority groups. Cataloging the material can also be a challenge, as catalogers attempt to respect the narratives, geographies, and histories of minority groups. On the other hand, this work is an important way to preserve the cultural heritage of minority communities and to make their collections available, not only for international scholars, but for diaspora members of these communities. In a world where Middle Eastern religious minorities have become complex global networks, digitizing the humanities may become more important than ever before.

*Josh Mugler is Curator of Eastern Christian and Islamic Manuscripts at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, where he and his team of catalogers manage a collection of nearly 50,000 digitized and microfilmed manuscripts from libraries around the world. He completed his PhD in Theological and Religious Studies at Georgetown University in 2019, with a dissertation focusing on interactions between Christians and Muslims along the Byzantine border in tenth- and eleventh-century Syria. He also holds a Master of Theological Studies degree from Harvard Divinity School and has published on various aspects of the history of Christian-Muslim relations. Since completing his PhD, his work with HMML has included cataloging manuscripts from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Jerusalem, Ethiopia, Yemen, and elsewhere, in a wide variety of languages and from multiple religious traditions. Originally from St. Louis, he lives in Minneapolis with his spouse and two ten-year-old cats.*

#### **4- Rıza Yıldırım, Emory University**

##### **Alevi of Turkey: A Struggle of Identity Formation Between Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Seculars**

*February 23, 2023*

Alevi constitute some 15% of modern Turkey's population. In many ways, Alevi religious tradition and identity existed in an antithetical dialectics with Sunni Islam, to which the great majority of the country subscribed. Therefore, Alevi beliefs and rituals show remarkable difference from those of the Sunni Muslims. In the meantime, although their theological stance and approach to Islamic history show close resemblance to that of the Twelver Shi'ites, Alevi religiosity conspicuously diverges from Shi'ite rituals as well. Furthermore, as the most enthusiastic recipients of the Turkish modernization, younger Alevi generations have been thoroughly secularized even though traditional Alevism had been rather shaped by religious beliefs and practices. As a result, contemporary Alevi found themselves in an ongoing identity re-formation between Sunnis, Shi'ites and modernist seculars. This talk presents an overall picture of this process, highlighting major challenges and opportunities.

*Rıza Yıldırım (Ph.D., Bilkent University) holds a Ph.D. in history and is currently completing his second Ph.D. in the Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University. His research focuses on the history and religiosity of Qizilbash- Alevi, Bektashi, and similar shari'a-inattentive, Shi'i-oriented Muslim traditions in the Middle East. He is the author of five books (in Turkish) and numerous articles. His current dissertation*

*examines the religious system of the Qizilbash, the politico- military elites of the Safavid Iran. His research combines Ottoman, Safavid, and Qizilbash-Alevi sources (both written and oral).*

## **5- Mansoureh Shojaee**

### **One Century and two Uprisings toward the Women's Liberation Movement**

*March 9, 2023*

The women's movement in Iran, starting in the Constitutional Era around 1905, began with three demands: The right to vote, the right to education, and the right to establish an association. In the past century, although women have had some successes in establishing their proper legal recognition within society, discriminatory laws have prevailed in every historical cycle, from the Constitutional Era to the Era of the Nationalization of the Oil Movement to the Reform Era under the first and second Pahlavi, to the era of the Islamic Republic. Yet, women have not only insisted on the recognition of their legal and equal rights, but also by the end of the century, they stood up to reclaim their confiscated bodies and identities from the Islamist government. From the first demonstration on March 8, 1979, to Homa Darabi's self-immolation in the mid-1980s, and with the phenomena of the girls of Revolution Street and White Wednesdays in the late 90s, the seeds were sown in women's everyday struggles for the emergence of the women's movement in a new way. These successive moments, along with the protest of women, both secular and religious, against the state ban on running screening tests during pregnancy, the ban on pregnancy prevention, and the state policy to increase the population, have all led to a physical stage of the women's liberation movement in Iran. This lecture will enumerate the characteristics of the present stage of women's liberation in Iran. I will discuss the impact of individual and collective contributions toward the women's freedom movement in Iran which led to the current ongoing movement: Woman, Life, Freedom. This lecture will be in Persian with English subtitles.

*Mansoureh Shojaee is an activist, researcher, and writer in the field of women and human rights. After being forcibly expelled from university during the Cultural Revolution, she studied for a bachelor's degree in French translation. She is retired from the National Library of Iran. Her activism includes partnership with UNICEF, and grass-roots organizations such as establishing domestic and mobile libraries for women and children in deprived areas in Iran. Amongst her singular accomplishments, Mansoureh helped with founding of the Women's Cultural Center in 2002, and the Sedigheh Dolatabadi and Evaz Women's Library (in Lar) in 2004, 2005 respectively. In 2006 she helped with the creation of the "One Million Signatures Campaign for Equal Rights." Alongside these works Mansoureh collaborated for a decade with the Children's Book Council to create comprehensive libraries for blind children for which she received the 2010 International Children's Book Award in Iran. After she left Iran, she received a three-year scholarship in January 2011 from the German Pen Association. During this scholarship Mansoureh took short training courses at women's*

*museums in Norway, Germany and Italy, in creating the Digital Museum of Iranian Women's Movement while becoming a member of the International Association of Women's Museums.*