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*Group and Student Guides at Al-Akhawayn*

## Kasbahs, Tagines, and Politics: On the Road in Morocco

*by Joe P. Dunn*

The first Joseph Malone Fellowship Model Arab League Advisers trip to Morocco, June 24–July 4, 2011, was a wonderful adventure for the nine participants. Despite a heat wave unusual even for Moroccan summer and a shady tour agent who disappeared

along the way, the experience provided an exceptional learning opportunity.

Morocco is unique. At once African, Arab, and European with the heritage of both Spanish and French colonialism evident; multiple tolerant manifestations

*(continued on page 2)*

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of Islam with strong Sufi overtones; the indigenous Amizah (or Berber) population that comprises a large, but ill-defined percentage of the population; and a geography as varied as its people, Morocco is a smorgasbord of sights, sounds, and adventures. We witnessed much of the diversity of the nation of 32 million people.

Moroccans claim that they are America's longest strategic partner. The connection is traced to 1777, and it continues through the present. We maintain close ties with the Moroccan military today. Moroccan military officers study in most U.S. military schools, and through the U.S. Army State National Guard Partnership program, Morocco has partnered with

Utah Army National Guard. The U.S. used Moroccan airbases as part of the Rapid Deployment Task Force during the Reagan administration; Morocco was one of first to condemn the 9/11 attack and offer support in the U.S. response; and the country's zero-tolerance against al-Qaeda, Muslim Brotherhood, and other terrorist groups has been a bond between the two countries. Well imbued with the U.S. ethic of civil-military relations, the Moroccan officer corps has been apolitical in comparison to other Arab countries.

Morocco was one of the first countries to receive U.S. Peace Corps volunteers. The original contingent in 1963 consisted of 53 American youth and

more than 4000 volunteers have served in the country. Active in Morocco since 1953, USAID over the years has spent over \$2 billion. The United States committed \$697.5 million over five years in the U.S. Millennium Challenge Compact signed in 2007. A Free Trade Agreement in 2006 eliminates duties on 95+% of goods and services; commits Morocco to transparency and protecting intellectual property rights; and provides U.S. technical assistance. Morocco is the United States' 67<sup>th</sup> largest export market (\$1.5 billion) and the U.S. imports approximately \$900 million of Moroccan products. Direct U.S. foreign direct investment in the country last year exceeded \$238 million. More than 100,000 Moroccans live in the United States, and a host of U.S.-Moroccan cultural and professional groups are active. In sum, the United States and Morocco have a solid relationship.

The primary purpose of our trip was educational, and our tour of the central portion of the country was the central component. Our first stop was the Hassan II Mosque in Rabat and we ended appropriately with a midnight drive by the magnificent Mohammad V Mosque in Casablanca eleven days later. In between, we visited the classical and medieval centers of the country at Meknes and Fez, and survived a scorching tour of the Roman ruins at Volubilis, where with no shade in sight the temperature well exceeded 100 degrees. Traveling through the picturesque Middle Atlas Mountains provided respite from the heat, and one of the highlights of the trip was a visit with the students and faculty at Al-Akhawayn University in the Swiss-Alpine-like village of Ifrane. The pine trees, the red-tiled houses like those of the Alps or the northern Italian Dolomites, the ski slopes, and stories of being snowed in for weeks in Ifrane challenged any stereotypes of Morocco



City Gate at Meknes

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as an arid desert land. The visually-stunning Al-Akhawayn University with its diverse international student body provides a grand experiment in an American-style university in North Africa.

From the mountains, we headed south to the oasis of Erfoud and the red desert dunes at Merzouga, where a two-hour night-time camel ride took us to a desert camp for the evening. The Milky Way in the clear desert sky scape was dazzling and sunrise observed from atop a high dune was an awesome display of color and grandeur. The cost of this memorable adventure, however, was more hours aboard a camel than I ever hope to repeat. The next two days provided more abundant examples of

the diverse beauty of Morocco. Amidst the stark bareness of the desert, we viewed magnificent gorges, oases, huge kasbahs, the Bollywood of Morocco at Ouarzazate, and the High Atlas Mountains ablaze with brilliant oleander.

Marrakesh was indeed unique. The 117 degree temperature was brutal but actually less draining than the high humidity of the nearly 100 degrees in Rabat. The Marrakesh festival, replayed every evening in the central square, deservedly is world famous. For once, the usually-exaggerated tourist books got it right. Indeed one can see everything in the massive square, from snake charmers, to music and dancing of all varieties, to food beyond

imagination, and a crush of people that boggles the mind. By this point, the heat had worn me down. A free afternoon by the gigantic pool in the first-class hotel was a wonderful relief capped by a late afternoon rainstorm and a refreshing wave of cool air.

Although the character of the country remains decidedly rural, the majority of the population actually lives in urban areas. Casablanca (3.2 million population) and nearby Rabat (1.8 million) constitute the largest urban concentrations. The grimy starkness of poverty in Casablanca's large slums offered yet another perspective to our understanding of this diverse country. We spent only a brief evening in Casablanca before our late-night



Preparing to Return from the Desert Camp

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return flight. But the walk along the frenetic cornice was pleasant in the newly-arrived cool wave. Bathed in glowing lights, the Mohammad V Mosque, the second largest in the world, was spellbinding, and it was equally impressive as we drove by it in total darkness later at midnight. Admittedly totally touristy, our final meal at the replication of Rick's Café from *Casablanca* was memorable. We all knew that the real World War II location was in Tangier, but the classic movie long ago skewed reality. In any case it was a great evening of camaraderie and fun before we boarded Royal Air Maroc, on a plane that should have been retired years ago, for the long flight home.

For all the attention given here to the travel experience, my purpose for the

trip was the academic component. Circumstances compromised some of that. Advertised speakers on the schedule had not been confirmed, or in some cases even contacted, by the incompetent tour agent. But our hardworking escorts, Megan and Josh, rectified the situation as best they could and the educational experience still proved to be a powerful one. The list of useful speakers is too long to begin to cite here.

I went to Morocco with various stereotypes about the country, both positive and negative. All were revised considerably. We could not have chosen a more propitious time for our trip as the long-awaited July 1 referendum occurred during our visit. Three themes resonated for me throughout the trip—the referendum

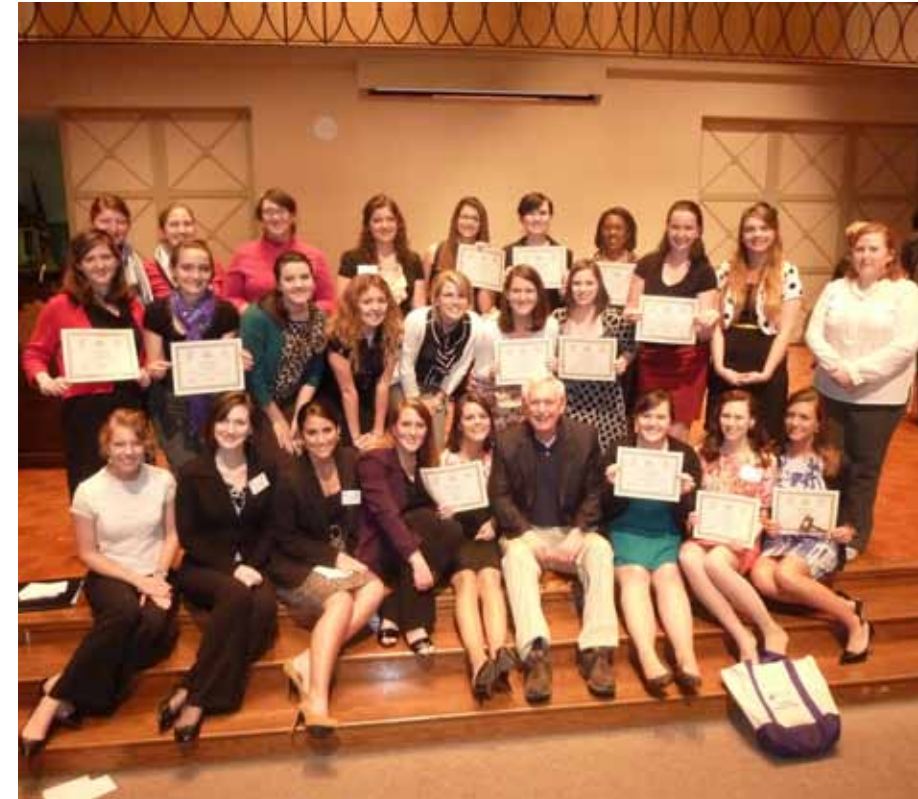
and the political future of Morocco, the Berber question, and the Western Sahara issue. Space will not allow further explication of any of these. However, suffice it to say that I returned with much deeper understanding and sophistication on all three topics. My Converse Model Arab League delegation had the pleasure to represent Morocco during this past year which allowed me to learn even more about the country.

My final thought is that for those readers eligible for this National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations opportunity, seize the chance. For those who are not within this community, Morocco is a country that by all means you want to visit. And did I not mention tagines? But Moroccan cuisine deserves a whole other essay.

*Holly Jordan LaFountain Shows Off Her Lifetime Achievement Award*



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*Converse Delegation at SERMAL*

## Another Successful Southeast Model

The 24<sup>th</sup> Southeast Model Arab League met at Converse, March 16-18, 2012. Keynote speaker was Nora Nassri, a Converse College 2008 graduate who is now writing her Ph.D. dissertation in political science at the University of South Carolina on the topic of "Religious Reactions to Political Violence." Nora, who has extensive experience in the Arab world as well as travels in Rwanda and Bosnia, spoke about recent events in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring and reflected on her years as a four-year delegate on the Converse Model Arab League delegation.

Miles College, from Birmingham, Alabama; Tennessee State University, from Nashville; and Virginia Tech were first-time participant schools this year. Wilson Hall, a private high school, from Sumter, South Carolina, also

participated for a day in preparation for their first attendance at the National High School Model in Washington, DC. The younger students accorded themselves well in debate and other activities, and used the experience to win the Outstanding Delegation Award at the National High School Model. The faculty sponsor for the Wilson Hall delegation was Anna Owens, former head delegate for Converse College in 2010.

The highlight of debate was a complicated crises situation centered on an Iranian blocking of the Gulf in conjunction with uprisings and possible terrorist actions in Syria. Four councils addressed various components of the crisis and the Heads of State Council brought a comprehensive resolution to the Final Summit. On Saturday evening, participants at the model also

enjoyed the annual Hafla banquet in the Converse Dining Hall.

At the Awards Ceremony, held for the first time in the beautiful Daniel Auditorium, in the Petrie School of Music, Holly Jordan LeFountain, Converse '06 alumnae, received the Model Arab League Achievement Award. Holly was a four-year member of Converse's MAL delegation and was Converse's first Secretary-General of International Model NATO. During her undergraduate years, she concentrated primarily on the Arab Court of Justice, where she was Chief Justice at both the Southeast Model and the National Model. After graduation, she continued to assist with the ACJ at the Southeast and Northeast Models. While obtaining her masters at the University of Georgia, she worked with the Kennesaw State University team and helped to run the Atlanta high school MAL. She also served as a committee director with the Southern Model UN. Upon moving to Virginia Tech to pursue her Ph.D., Holly organized a MAL delegation and brought it to the 2012 Southeast Model where she won an outstanding delegate award in her council.

Outstanding Delegation awards went to Converse College (Morocco), Northeastern University (Syria), and Georgia State University (Yemen). Honorable Mention awards went to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (Palestine), Kennesaw State University (Libya), and Converse College (Kuwait). After winning the citation last year for her leadership of the Joint Defense Council, Samantha Nicholson repeated as the Outstanding Chair, this time in the Palestinian Council. Lara Cole, from Northeastern University (Social Council) and Katy Kline, from Converse (Political Council) were named as Honorable Mention.

## Converse Continues Its Performance at National Model



*SG Hilary Berry Conducts Summit*

At the National Model Arab League, held April 13-15, 2012, on the campus of Georgetown University, Converse, representing Morocco, completed another year with Outstanding Delegation Awards at all three models in which the school participates—the Northeast, Southeast, and National Models. Converse secured awards in six of the seven councils. Hilary

Berry served as Secretary-General of the model and Samantha Nicholson (Palestinian) and Shannon Bishop (Joint Defense) served as chairs. Kaylee Boalt and Ashley Blount performed as vice chairs, and Ashley received special recognition for her role in assisting the chair of her council. Samantha was named the outstanding chair for the second year in a row and as she did at the Southeast Model a couple of weeks earlier as well. At the awards ceremony, Shannon was selected to chair the Special Committee on Arab Affairs for next year's model. She will be joined by sister delegation members Ashley Blount, who will chair the Palestinian Council, and Victoria Ball, who will head the Arab Court of Justice. Becky Blanton will be assistant secretary general for communications.

Five of the top six award-winning

*Converse Delegation at NMAL*

delegations were participants at the Southeast Model, including Northeastern University (Syria), Georgia State (UAE), Kennesaw State (Libya), and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (Palestine). The U.S. Military Academy at West Point (Saudi Arabia) was the only non-Southeast Model school to be cited.

Besides the awards above at the Final Ceremony, two special Lifetime Commitment Awards were presented at the Opening Ceremony. Ambassador Andrew Kilgore, career foreign service officer who served tours throughout the Arab world with his last assignment as Ambassador to Qatar, was a founder of The Educational Trust, which published *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, and Richard Curtiss, present Executive Editor of the respected publication, were both honored.



*Moroccan Delegates Lobby in Environmental Council*

*Dr. Dunn & Moroccan Ambassador*



## Converse Joins in Partnership for the Mubadara Model in Dubai

When Beyond Discovery program coordinator Moneer Moukaddem contacted me about sending students from our Model Arab League program to assist in training secondary school students and faculty members in Amman and Dubai to participate in the Mubadara Model (MMAL) to be held in late November, I jumped at the invitation. It was not our first involvement with this company that specializes in a variety of educational programs and extra-curricular activities and organizes, designs, and executes programs to meet requested needs. MMAL is the central program under its Creativity component. Converse students had helped to administer the first MMAL last year in Aqaba, Jordan.

This was a bit different role for us and we knew that it would be a wonderful opportunity, but we had no idea

just how powerful the experience would be for us and we believe for the students and faculty with whom we were privileged to interact.

The significant work in which Beyond Discovery is involved cannot be overstated. Amidst dramatic political and social changes in progress in the region, the engagement of youth as active participants in preparation for their future roles and responsibilities in society is important. Model Arab League affords a unique vehicle for gaining knowledge about the issues that will shape their lives and for developing student skills and talents. My twenty-five years of participating in Model Arab League has been the best learning opportunity that I have afforded my students in a forty-year career. Seeing this program develop and expand for youth in the Arab world is exciting.

I knew that my student partners in this venture would be worthy mentors and role models. Hilary Berry, the 2012 Secretary-General of the National University Model Arab League; Sarah Warrick, Secretary-General of the Southeast Region University Model; and Converse alumna and former student body president, Megan Madison, a Fulbright Fellow in Jordan who assisted us in Amman and later helped to administer the MMAL in Dubai, did their jobs well. But none of us anticipated the depth of investment in the students and the MMAL that we all developed. The experience was as life-changing for us as we hope that it was for the young students with whom we engaged. My experience with the faculty in both locations and my observation of the growth of the students in such a short time ranks as one of the true joys of my career.

Space allows me only to remark that the situations in Jordan and Dubai were quite different. In Amman we worked with students, albeit quite young, who had some experience in this type of activity. It was beautiful to see them grow in competence and confidence in two short days. In Dubai the culture provided a different challenge. It was particularly rewarding to see young girls and boys participating in cross-gender dialogue on matters of great relevance. Words can barely capture how excited the three of us were to have played our small roles in this activity, and we longed to witness the actual MMAL that we later heard was a great success.

The hospitality of Beyond Discovery was unsurpassed. Better hosts would not have been possible. We praise the organization and its devoted and energetic program director Moneer

for the vision, the commitment, and the creativity exhibited. As a significant region of the world is undergoing monumental changes, Beyond Discovery and MMAL are making a difference for future generations. The three of us at Converse are committed to our role in telling this story. Already we have had several speaking engagements and we are spreading the word about MMAL's role in the larger Model Arab League community. This activity is great work and we anticipate continued success.

Although the training process absorbed most of our time during our brief two days in each city, we were able to tour both Amman and Dubai. Megan was a wonderful host in Amman and made her personal taxi driver available to us as we toured the city. In Dubai we saw the seven-star Burj Al-Arab Hotel, visited the Burj Khalifa (the world's tallest building), shopped in the Dubai Mall (the world's largest) and the famous Gold Souk, and made a trip to the neighboring emirate, Sharjah.

Reflecting on the experience, Hilary remarked that "after four years of studying the region, I had some ideas about to expect. I was wrong about almost everything." Sarah concluded, "It was powerful to feel that we were playing a role in changing the future."

*Most of the above article appeared in Beyond Discovery's **BD Magazine** (December 2011).*

### **Addendum:**

In February, Beyond Discovery invited Hilary and Sarah to return to the UAE to conduct another training session in Abu Dhabi. The experienced facilitators enjoyed this trip as much as the first one, and they were pleased to work with some of the same youth whom they had met in Dubai.

Hilary remarked that "These opportunities were simply remarkable and renewing friendships and witnessing



*Hilary and Sarah on the beach in Dubai*

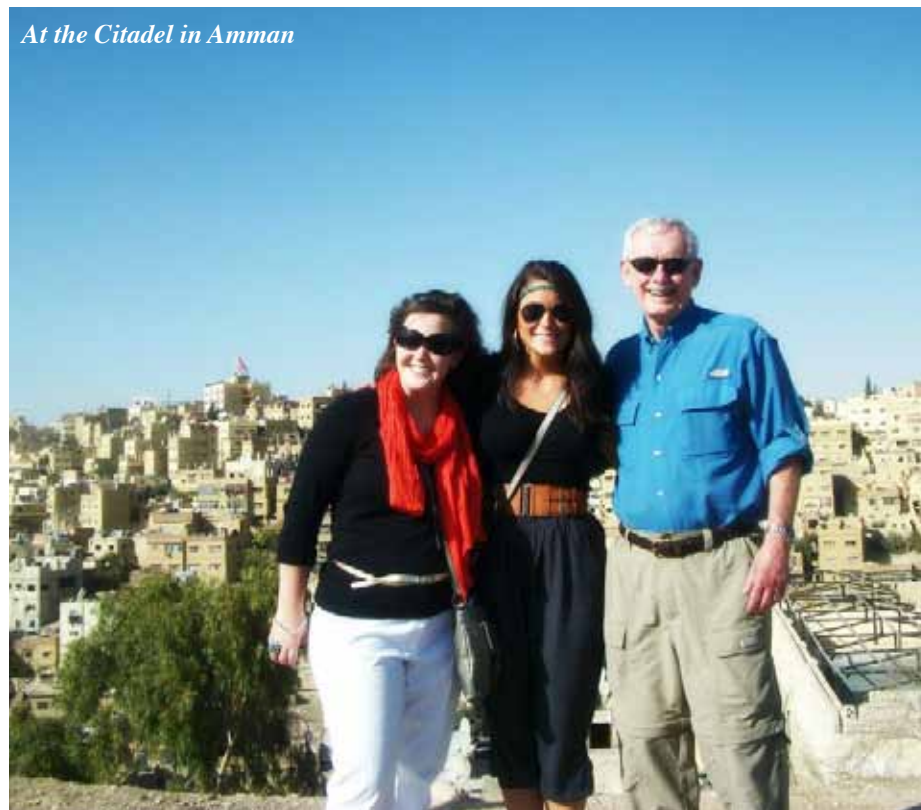


*Hilary, Sarah, & Joe in Dubai*

the growth in the students with whom we worked was so empowering." Sarah, who recently was selected as a delegate to attend the 2012 NATO Chicago Summit, concluded, "My

primary interest has always been American politics, but I am beginning to think that foreign affairs may be a new career area for me. I am becoming quite at home in the UAE."

*At the Citadel in Amman*



## Saudi Doctor Speaks at Converse Women's Leadership Forum

Dr. Selwa Al-Hazaa, a pioneer of women's rights in Saudi Arabia, head of the NGO, "Friends of Saudi Arabia," and one of the most influential women in the Arab world served as featured speaker at the November 9, 2011 Converse College Probe Symposium entitled "Increasing Women's Participation and Involvement in Politics and Public Policy."

Dr. Al-Hazaa, a medical school graduate of King Saud University and Johns Hopkins University, is currently the head of the ophthalmologist department at

King Faisal Specialist Hospital, the first female department head in the Saudi hospital system. In 1998, she was selected as Woman of the Year by the American Biographical Institute, and in 2004 King Abdullah named her as the leader of the Saudi delegation to restore Saudi Arabia's international reputation in the wake of 9/11.

Members of the Converse Model Arab League delegation praised Dr. Al-Hazaa's presentation. Converse senior, Krystal Jackson, remarked, "This is the kind of woman that we need to highlight

before the Converse student body." Amy Peele, who had heard Dr. Al-Hazaa speak previously and was instrumental in recruiting her for the event, exclaimed, "I was so pleased to bring this outstanding woman to the Converse community. She breaks stereotypes and helps the wider student body to understand a culture quite foreign to most of us." Dr. Joe Dunn, who was out of the country on sabbatical during the forum, expressed that he was proud that the Model Arab League delegation had helped to organize this event which had a significant impact on the college.

## Converse Dominates at Northeast Model Arab League

With outstanding delegate awards in six of the seven councils, the Converse Morocco delegation took first-place honors at the Northeast Model Arab League, held November 4-6, at Northeastern University in Boston. Northeastern University's Syria delegation finished second and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, representing Saudi Arabia, finished third as the other cited outstanding delegation. Converse's first-year delegates, representing Kuwait, won an honorable mention award.

Other participating schools included the University of Massachusetts--Lowell, University of Massachusetts-Boston, University of Pittsburgh, MIT, Bard College, Drake University, Roger Williams University, Colby College, Fitchburg State University, Simmons College, Endicott College, and Emmanuel College.

In other Converse citations, Samantha Nicholson was recognized as the honorable mention outstanding chair for her leadership of the Palestinian council. Victoria Ball won her case in the Arab Court of Justice.



### Book Review

Dr. Joe P. Dunn  
Charles A. Dana Professor of History  
and Politics, Converse College

Isobel Coleman, *Paradise Beneath Her Feet: How Women are Transforming the Middle East*

Women are changing the world, and the patriarchal-driven Middle East is no exception. Isobel Coleman, *New York Times* correspondent and senior fellow and director of the Women and Foreign Policy Program at the Council on Foreign Relations has travelled the region for the last decade writing extensively about women's changing role. In this fascinating collection of vignettes, she focuses on five critical Muslim countries—Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, where the new role of women is a particularly important component of the future of these societies.

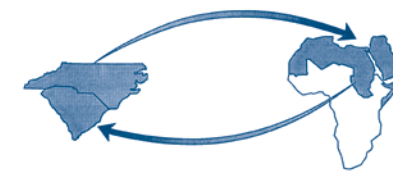
Students have responded quite positively in the two courses where I have employed the book—Islamic and Middle East Politics and in Women's Lives in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. They find the work enlightening, insightful, and inspiring, simultaneously both depressing and

## Isobel Coleman, Paradise Beneath Her Feet: How Women are Transforming the Middle East

Coleman's essays on a cadre of Islamic feminists, primarily female but she does include some men, provide vivid insight into cultural and political change and a forecast of the future. These brave women are not attempting to undermine Islam. Indeed for the most part, they are staunch adherents who believe that the faith has been kidnapped and perverted by elements whose cultural and/or personal blinders distort Islam from its original intent. They wish to make the faith relevant to the modern world and unlock the tremendous potential of women for the betterment of their societies. The great strength of the book is Coleman's ability to put this story in context of recent history and political dynamics in each country. She mixes solid research, statistical data, and good reporting with her own personal accounts of meeting with significant women in all these countries and others in the Muslim world.

encouraging. And they stress how the accounts give life and context to lectures and discussions on political change in the individual countries and the wider region. More novice students with less familiarity with the diversity of Islam as faith and basis of political and social praxis stress how the work challenges stereotypes and introduces them to the great breadth and multiplicity of religious expressions. More advanced students particularly appreciate how the same issues manifest themselves in various quite different cultural contexts. Students in the course on Women's Lives draw interesting comparisons to the global confrontation of modern challenges to traditionalism in other areas of the world in non-Muslim contexts.

Several of my students have suggested the book to friends and families, but the study isn't for neophytes. The countries involved have unusually complicated political agendas and the issues, including the role of women, require a degree of background and sophistication to understand. However, the topic is a critical one, and I highly recommend this outstanding contribution to those interested in the Middle East and political change.



Dr. Joe P. Dunn, Director  
Jenny Dunn, Associate Director and co-editor of *Newslines*  
Carolinas Committee on U.S.–Arab Relations  
Converse College • 580 East Main Street • Spartanburg, SC 29302