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Group at Mada'in Saleh al Ula

My “Gateway” to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

by Laura Gill

Through my participation in Model Arab League at Converse College, I was nominated by the National Council on U.S.–Arab Relations to participate in a travel opportunity to Saudi Arabia for nine days this past February. The trip was a cultural introduction to four Saudi cities sponsored by Gateway KSA, an NGO that partners with the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies to

bring international students to the Kingdom. This was the last in a series of pilot programs before Gateway KSA launches its full agenda. The ultimate purpose is to promote cultural understanding and tourism to Saudi Arabia as the country has just recently opened itself to tourist visas.

Previously the pilot students had come primarily from a limited number of prestige universities.

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Laura

As I write this, the Gateway KSA website is showing pictures from a delegation from the Harvard University Kennedy School of Public Affairs now on a similar trip to the one I experienced. On my adventure, I was one of six undergraduate U.S. students along with seven "social media influencers" selected from around the world. I was somewhat of an outlier as a sophomore interior design major when the other undergraduates

were more experienced international relations students, although the social media people were largely from cultural studies and communications.

We did not travel from the U.S. as a group, so my very first venture outside the United States was as an individual flying on my own to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I was a late addition because a more experienced Converse student originally selected for the trip could

not go at the last minute. When the opportunity opened for me, I had to scramble to get my first Passport. To say that this was all somewhat daunting would be an understatement. I arrived on February 18th with two of the other National Council students. We were met by representatives from the King Faisal Center and immediately interviewed by the Saudi television station Rotana which would follow us during the entire trip. Throughout the trip I wore an abaya, a closed robe that covers a woman's clothes and is generally black. That was also a new experience.

The first day we spent at the King Faisal Center learning about the goals and history of the Center, and we toured the beautiful Al Faisaliyah Center. We finished the day at the Al-Jenadriyah Festival, an annual two-week long Saudi fair, held in a large complex just outside of Riyadh, which highlights each region of the country. We started at the VIP building to learn a few of the customs. We learned about Saudi Arabian coffee, which is flavored by cardamom, and is completely different from American coffee. It is served in small cups with dates, and it was provided at each building at the event. We saw a sword dance and listened to a few songs, and we toured buildings for the towns of Qassim and for Mecca. The latter was informative because non-Muslims cannot visit this restricted holy city.

The second day we learned about the rise of the third Saudi state which is the current country of Saudi Arabia. We traveled to Al Masmak fortress, the first place conquered by King Abdul Aziz al-Saud, the founder of the present Kingdom, and to Diriyah the

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home village of the Al-Saud family. Diriyah is being developed as a tourist attraction. That night we had dinner at the home of Prince Turki Al-Faisal, chairman of the King Faisal Center board of directors, where we asked questions about the dramatic changes happening in Saudi Arabia.

The next day we flew to the desert at Al Ula to see the old tombs at Mada'in Saleh, including the largest one, Qasr al Faisal. We also saw an ancient library, a meeting place, and the city all carved into the enormous rocks in Al Ula. We also enjoyed a desert safari where we rode over the dunes and studied some of the interesting rock formations, including walls of mud which had dried into pillars, and a hole in a rock big enough for our car to drive through. During some free time, some of the other students and I climbed one of the rocks in the desert to watch the sunset. One night at the camp in Al Ula we met a band of young girls who perform, sing, and dance. This was a wonderful encounter and

all of the girls were very sweet.

Next we traveled to Jeddah on the west coast of the country, the most liberal city in the Kingdom. There we took a boat ride with women from a local women's running group and their families. The water of the Red Sea is a beautiful blue like one would expect in the Caribbean. Because we were far from shore and away from other people, we were allowed to wear swim suits. That evening we met with women from Effat University, a women's university. I enjoyed bonding with them about the unusual things that come from our mutual experience at a women's college. Among other things, we discussed the struggle for women to participate in government and to gain the right to drive.

From Jeddah, we flew to Dammam on the east coast of Saudi Arabia. There we visited King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, a graduate level institution which attracts researchers and scholars from across the globe. The next day we met Prince Saud bin Nayef, the

governor of the Eastern Province and talked about the expanding tourist policy as well as the need for increased opportunities for jobs for the young population of the Kingdom. We toured Aramco, the first oil company in Saudi Arabia, including the King Abdul Aziz Center for World Culture, an art center developed by Saudi Aramco which includes a museum, cinema, library, and archive center. We finished the day with some last minute souvenir shopping at a store that had many items from local craftsmen as well as a gallery which I particularly enjoyed.

The last day we debriefed with a final interview with Rotana and feedback to Gateway KSA on things we enjoyed in the program and things we wanted to see expanded. It was sad to say good bye to everyone. Missing two weeks in the middle of the semester at school meant that sliding back into my academic courses had its own trauma, but it was all worth it as I will never forget this trip and all of its priceless experiences.

Banquet at Royal Military Officers Club



National Model Arab League 2018



Claudia Coffin interviews with Al Jazeera

The National Model Arab League conference was held at Georgetown University, April 6-8, 2018. Converse provided both the Secretary General (Jessica Morgan) and Assistant Secretary General (Emily Holbert). Following opening remarks by John Duke Anthony, the National Council on

U.S.-Arab Relations president and CEO, the conference set about its business for the next three days. Besides the eight councils and the Arab Court of Justice, the Joint Crisis Council held a spirited exchange over the Saudi/UAE feud with and boycott of fellow GCC member Qatar. Dr.

Outstanding Delegation at National Model



Adherraahim Foukara, Washington bureau chief of Al Jazeera, was popular as always as the closing speaker.

The conference was another successful model for Converse. With awards of outstanding or distinguished in nine of the ten venues, Converse, representing Palestine, was the overall Outstanding delegation. Northeastern University, representing Yemen, however, was named the Best delegation and the American University of Cairo, representing Mauritania, finished third as the Distinguished delegation. These three delegations were so dominant that no other school received an overall delegation citation, which was a quite unique experience at the Model. The other universities included Georgia State University, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Northwestern University, Brigham Young University, University of Utah, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Roger Williams University, John Carroll University, Adrian College, Hollins University, Texas State at San Marcos, Miami University of Ohio, Shawnee State University, University of Houston Honors College, Kennesaw State University, Mercer University, American University, and Western Kentucky University.

Converse enjoyed the unique experience that the Ambassador of the Palestine Liberation Organization to the United States, the Hon. Husam S. Zomlot, came to the conference hotel to brief the Converse delegation. Ambassador Zomlot, who also serves as the Strategic Advisor to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, was an engaging speaker who made a powerful impression on the delegates. Three Converse students

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had interviews with a Japanese television crew that was filming a documentary on the PLO Ambassador. Another student interviewed with Al Jeezera about the role of Model Arab League and her earlier trip to Qatar as preparation for her career.

At the conclusion of the awards ceremony, the Secretariat for the 2019 Model was announced. Emily Holbert will serve as Secretary and Converse received four chair appointments.

Dr. Joe P. Dunn, the Converse faculty sponsor, remarked: "It was another very special year, my 32nd in the Model Arab League program, and I hope for and anticipate many more years in this life-changing event."



Converse Delegation meets with PLO Ambassador

Economic Council at National Model



Southeast Model Charts New Territory

All successful activities must continue to evolve. The Southeast Model Arab League, held at Converse now for 17 years, expanded in a new direction this year. For the last several years, we have included a remnant of high school delegations. In Spring 2018 the number jumped to six delegations with a single student representing another local prep school as well. The Scholars Academy at USC-Upstate, a magnet school for

talented students in the county, entered two delegations (representing Tunisia and the Syrian National Coalition). They joined two private academies: Greenville's Southside Christian School (Libya) and Spartanburg Day School (Morocco) and two local public schools, Broome High School (UAE) and Byrnes High School (Yemen). Oakbrook Academy had one delegate, who competed on the Southside Christian delegation.

Spartanburg Methodist College also participated for the first time alongside returning college delegations from Spartanburg Community College, Roanoke College, Kennesaw State University, Georgia State University, GSU-Perimeter College, Jacksonville State University, Citadel, Mercer University, and Converse.

The Opening Ceremony included two student speakers who had just returned from a trip to Saudi Arabia and Professor Rashid Naim from Georgia State University who spoke about the Rabat (Morocco) International MAL from which he had just returned.

Kathleen Langbehn (Converse) served as Security General and the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations representative at the model was Sidney Jones, who was the head delegate of the Converse delegation last year. As Program Assistant for the National Council, Sidney administers and assists in running college and high school models across the country.

At the model, the Converse Palestine delegation took top honors as the Outstanding delegation and Converse's second delegation (Bahrain) tied for second place as Distinguished delegation, even though last minute illnesses meant that they were not represented on two of the eight councils. Georgia State (Somalia) was the other Distinguished delegation. Mercer (Saudi Arabia) took the last college award as Superior delegation. In the high school division, Broome High School (UAE) was named the Outstanding delegation and the two Scholars Academy delegations (Syria and Tunisia) were cited as Distinguished. Jessica Morgan (Converse) and Daniel Crum (Mercer) were named best chairs by the faculty.

Palestinian Council at SERMAL



Planting Trees and Building Orchards

by Joe P. Dunn

Johnny Appleseed went about planting apple seedlings that became orchards. In NCAA basketball circles some coaches have “trees” or families of assistant coaches and former players who follow their mentors as head coaches and even plant new seedlings for another generation in the profession. I’ve been involved in Model Arab League for 31 years and I’m proud to claim a number of “Joannie”Appleseeds, and maybe even, if not too immodest, a coaching tree.

The lead in this tree would be Dr. Holly Jordan, four-year Converse MAL delegate and 2006 Secretary General of International Model NATO. As Holly proceeded through her academic career, she planted MAL trees everywhere along the way. While a masters student at the University of Georgia, she worked with the Kennesaw State University delegation and volunteered with the Atlanta High School and the Northeast High School Models. As a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech, she started a delegation and founded the Appalachian MAL. As a three-year interim professor at Roanoke College, she organized a delegation that has continued after her departure. No question that at her next stop a MAL delegation will be the first order of business. Holly is a

believer in the power of the experience and she is a planter.

Idell Khory, a former graduate student of mine, with the help of several Converse head delegates, started a high school MAL at Greenville’s Southside Christian School. They compete annually at the Southeast Model (SERMAL) and have won the outstanding delegation award at the National High School Model. Jennifer Washburn started a MAL delegation as a masters level graduate project with me, and her Spartanburg Community College team competes annually at SERMAL.

The reigning “Appleseed” is Danny Morgan. Danny, a retired law enforcement officer, entered the Converse masters program to prepare to be a teacher in private prep schools. Danny’s teaching and organizational talents were evident early. After receiving his masters, he did some adjunct teaching for freshman-level courses at Converse. His adjunct career took off and soon he was doing adjunct teaching for a local community college’s dual enrollment courses at several local high schools. With the assistance of his daughter Jessica, a four-year member of Converse’s MAL delegation and the 2018 National University Model Secretary General, Danny started a delegation at Broome High School. After he moved on from that school, another Converse graduate picked up the responsibility, and Carson McCallum, the

2018 Converse head delegate (and Secretary-General at International Model NATO), who did her student teaching at Broome in the Spring, helped to train the team for SERMAL, where it won the outstanding high school delegation award in 2018.

Meanwhile Danny started delegations at Spartanburg Methodist College and at the Scholars Academy at the University of South Carolina—Upstate, which both competed at SERMAL. As he continues to expand his adjunct teaching assignments, Danny, we hope, will continue to plant seedlings and find individuals to maintain the orchards.

SERMAL has become a mini-reunion of former Converse MAL delegates. This Spring about a dozen former head delegates and others showed up at the event to assist in various ways and to witness that the traditions continue. I have several former MAL veterans in graduate school, and I hope that when they land teaching positions at whatever levels, they will plant the seeds and the coaching “tree” will continue to grow. I don’t have that many more years left in this profession, but the greatest compliment will be that the legacy of what has been a key component of my academic life will continue to thrive.

The Benefits of Debate A Call to Support Model Arab League Participation

Christopher Latham, high school junior at Scholars Academy | March 28, 2018

History of the Program

Founded in 1983, the National Council on U.S. – Arab Relations, (NCUSAR), started the Model Arab League program, (referred to as MAL herein), to improving the knowledge and understanding of the Arab world and culture.¹

The MAL program is similar in format to the Model United Nations, but in many ways is benefited by its small size. The Arab League consists of twenty-two member states compared to the 193 member states of the United Nations.² The MAL program also holds twenty-one conferences per year and is fully backed by the National Council on U.S. – Arab Relations whereas the Model United Nations holds over 400 conferences a year.³ The small size of the MAL program holds several benefits:

Students have a much greater role to play as less member states mean that there are more opportunities to talk and develop persuasion skills.

Students are required to have deep research into the culture and policies of their nation as resolutions can be debated on fine details that are challenging to bring up in the bigger Model United Nations.

Full backing by NCUSAR ensures that students are judged and get feedback by a national cohesive standard as well as by local coordinators

The small number of council sessions allows a good team to be nationally competitive

without major financial or travel contributions.

Scholar's Academy and MAL

The performance by the Scholar's Academy at the Southeast Regional MAL conference, from March 16-18, 2018, was nothing short of incredible. Scholar's Academy represented two different governments for this conference, the Syrian National Coalition and the Republic of Tunisia. Each country had enough volunteers to send one delegate to each of eight specialized councils where they would debate to pass resolutions that would benefit their country and the rest of the Arab states.

During the three day event, judges walked throughout councils to evaluate the speaking and persuasive abilities of the delegates. Scholar's Academy students, despite their unfamiliarity with the council processes, managed to impress judges and receive marks in their favor.

Major competition for the Scholar's Academy came from the other high schools present at the MAL conference. All Scholar's Academy students competed at a high school level and tried to win one of three possible awards. In order of rank, students could win an Honorable Delegate award, a Distinguished Delegate award, and an Outstanding Delegate award.

Scholar's Academy



In total, Scholar's Academy won four Outstanding Delegate awards and two Distinguished Delegate awards, and won a Distinguished Delegation award for the representation of the Syrian National Coalition out of competition against five other teams. This is in spite of the fact that Scholar's Academy was the only high school team who had not participated in the MAL program for multiple years. The Scholar's debut was so impressive, that it was recommended by a representative of the national MAL competition that Scholar's Academy make an appearance.

Scholars enjoyed the experience as well as seen by the quotes by some of the participants:

"It gave me a lot of public speaking practice which is great for me because I have trouble with public speaking. It also gave me the opportunity to meet new people and interact with them on an academic and scholarly level. I am also thankful that I won an award as it was my first time participating in a debate like MAL." – Audrey Nguyen, Council of Arab Economic Affairs Ministers, Republic of Tunisia

"I had fun. It was interesting to see how government actually works. Getting to stand up and debate was amazing."- Anaita Thomas, Council on Political Affairs, Republic of Tunisia

"The experience was amazing. Being able to not only compete but learn through high levels of debate was something I won't easily forget"- Harrison Maguire, Joint Defense Council, Syrian National Coalition

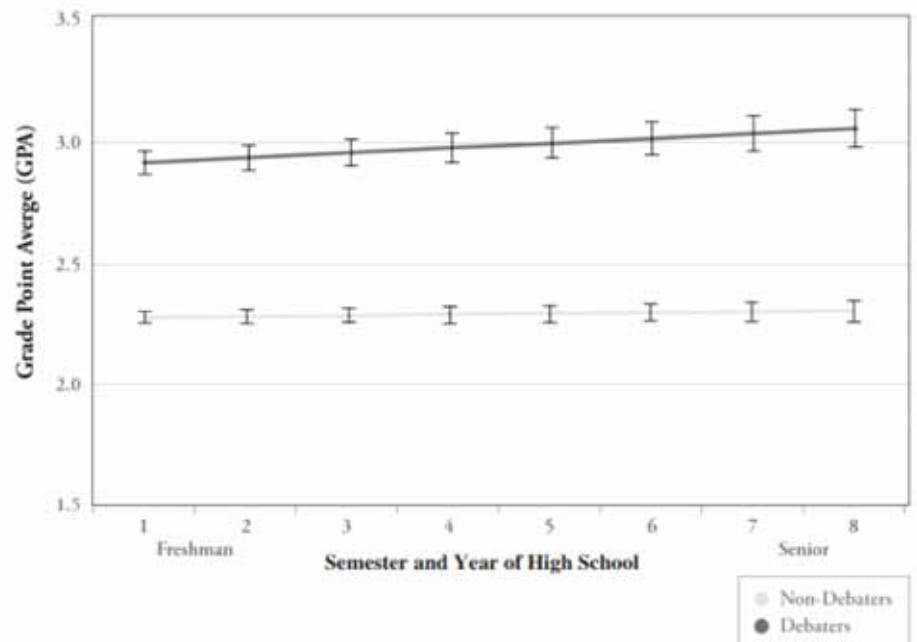


Figure 2. Expected cumulative GPA by debater status over the course of high school. Propensity score weighted mean cumulative GPA over the course of high school by debater status. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Chicago Public Schools 1997 – 2006. N = 9145.

Long Term Benefits

The benefits of debate, especially among peers of equal academic level, have long been revealed, but for the sake of a reminder some benefits include: an increase in confidence, an increase in comprehension of documents, and an increase in logical analysis skills.⁴

The MAL program goes a step further however in helping Scholar's Academy students as it provides several opportunities that MAL alums can take advantage of. A student only needs to participate

in the program once to be considered an alum, and some of the opportunities presented are once in a life time for some students, like expense paid study trips to Saudi Arabia and Morocco.⁵

Finally, debate participation has been shown to help increase the GPA and graduation rate for at risk youth. While the designation of "at risk youth" may not apply to many Scholars, the noticeable difference in GPA levels may also have an effect on Scholars grades (see Figure 1).⁶ Note: The graph does not take into consideration attitudes towards school or the level of parent's education.

¹ MAL Frequently Asked Questions. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/about-model-arab-league/faq/#alum>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Benefits of Debate. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <http://www.americandebateleague.org/benefits-of-debate.html>

⁵ MAL Frequently Asked Questions. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/about-model-arab-league/faq/#alum>

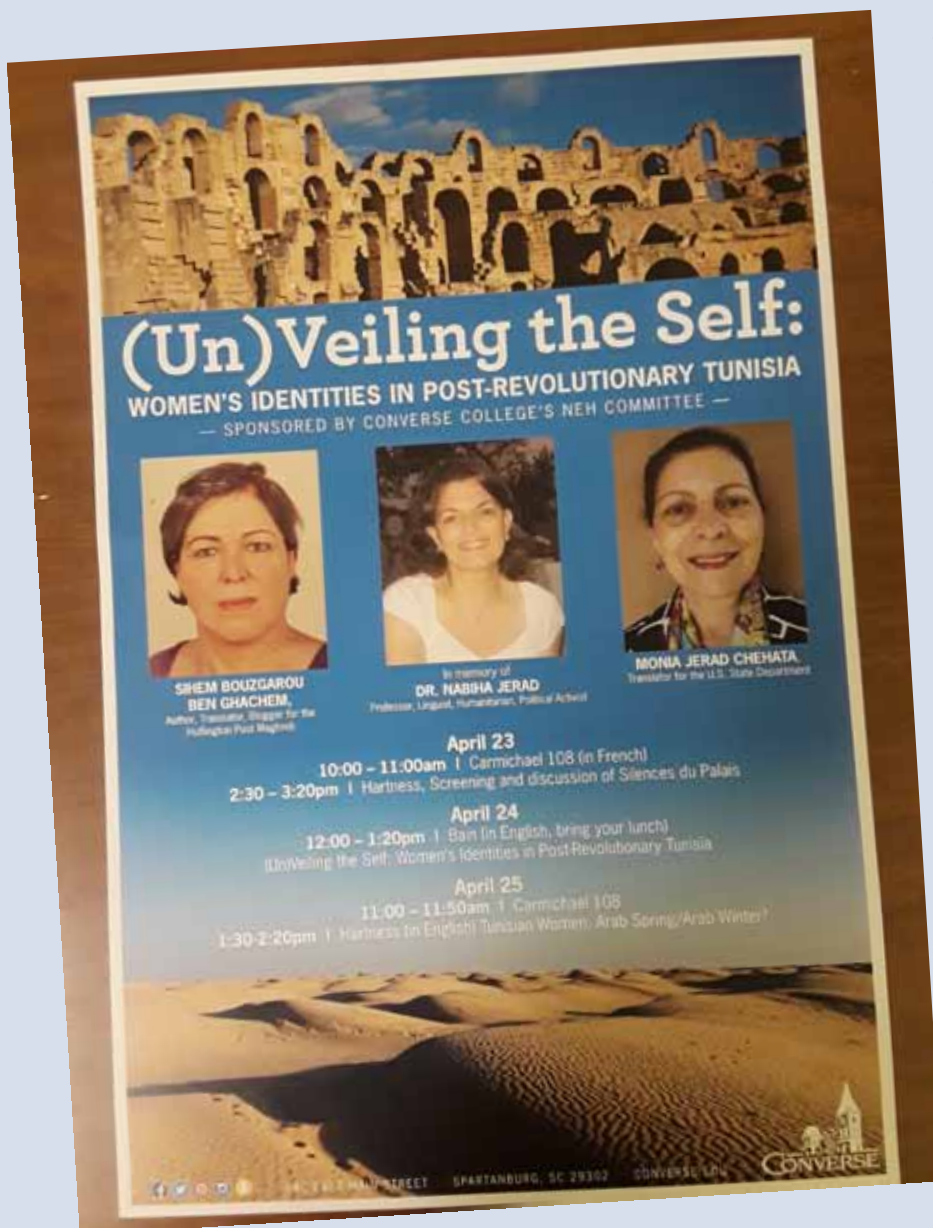
⁶ Mezuk, B., Bondarenko, I., Smith, S., & Tucker, E. (2011, September 5). *Impact of participating in a policy debate program on academic achievement: Evidence from the Chicago Urban Debate League* [PDF]. Educational Research and Reviews.

Tunisia Symposium

Dr. Cathy Jones, Converse associate professor of French and women's studies, sponsored a symposium on the Converse campus, April 23-25, 2018, entitled "(Un) Veiling the Self: Women's Identities in

Post-Revolutionary Tunisia," held in the memory and honor of Dr. Nabihah Jerad, a deceased linguist, humanitarian and political activist. The three presentations consisted of the screening and discussion of the film "Silences

du Palais, and speeches by Sihem Bouzgarou Ben Ghachem, an author, translator and blogger for the Huffington Post Maghreb, and by Monia Jerad Chehata, a translator for the U.S. State Department. The titles of the two speeches were the symposium title and "Tunisian Women: Arab Spring/ Arab Winter?" In connection with the symposium, on Saturday, April 21, Dr. Jones hosted a social event at her home in Hendersonville, NC. The symposium was sponsored by the Nabihah Jerad Foundation and a Converse College National Endowment for the Humanities Award.



LEARNING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*

Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn

I teach a course entitled "Women's Lives in Africa and Asia," which treats women in various geographical areas and cultures in different historical periods in the non-Western world. We read and discuss 14 books during term. From the hundreds, possibly thousands, of potential books, I select a diverse sampling and I change out many of the books each course offering. I am constantly seeking possible new selections. On the New Books Shelf at the public library, I noticed Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State* (2017), the experience of a young Yazidi women; and I introduced the book into my course this semester.

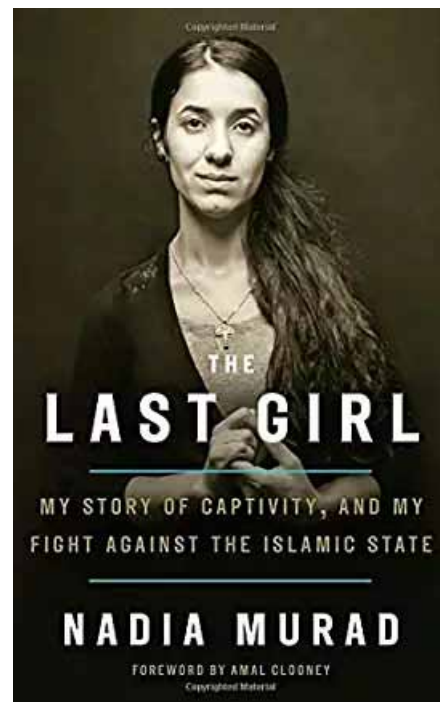
The Yazidi were not an unheard of people for me. When I visited Kurdistan in 2012, I met several Yazidi within the Kurdish communities. Subsequently, I published an article on the interplay of the mosaic of ethnicities and religious expressions in northern Iraq at the time of the founding of the new state in the 1920s. But none of my students knew anything about this tiny and exotic faith even though the group received brief international attention during the Islamic State's genocidal assault on them in 2014 and the horrors of entrapment on Sinjar Mountain.

Murad begins by telling about the Yazidi faith, life her tiny, poor, insular Yazidi village in northern Iraq, and the com-

plex interrelations of her people among the Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds before the coming of the Islamic State. She was 21 when ISIS overran her village in the Sinjar region. They killed the men and older women and took the boys to become ISIS fighters. Her mother and six of her brothers were murdered. Nadia and hundreds of Yazidi girls became sex slaves passed around among ISIS fighters and literally sold on the Internet. The bulk of the book details the extremely depressing account of Nadia's horrid captivity, torture, and rape until she escaped after three months.

Beyond another example of the course theme of the place and role of women in the myriad cultures, the book affords a window to discuss the manifold evil of ISIS's religious and ethnic zealotry. By this point in the course, the students were well inundated with violence toward women. The previous week, for example, they watched *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, as gruesome a depiction as anyone should experience. But the demonic nature of ISIS struck a particular cord.

However, the political scientist in me also wished to address the difficulty of forging national identity and political development in fractured environments. The issues and questions are not unique to this region. They are global as already established in the course. But the effort to make Iraq work as a nation state was present at its found-



ing, and it continues today. The Yazidi were only one group in this ethnic and religious tapestry that included Assyrians, Turkmen, Shabaks, Armenians, both Arab and Kurd Sunnis and Shias, and the several different rival Kurdish political entities.

A literature on the Yazidi genocide is emerging. A small sample include Farida Khalaf's *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS* [who was from the same village of Nadia]; Cathy Otten's *With Ash on Their Faces: Yazidi Women and the Islamic State*; Gharbi M. Mustafa's novel *What Comes with the Dust*; and a burgeoning scholarly literature as well.

Personal stories are an effective tool for addressing large political issues, and the passion generated by these accounts spurs many students to a more sustained and deeper study of larger questions. The plight of the Yazidis is well worthy serious academic attention.