IIS Alumni Newsletter 2020 – 2021

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MESSAGE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR

Dear Alumni,

Some eight centuries ago, the erudite Persian poet and moralist Sa'di stated in a poem, now adorning the United Nations building in New York, that human beings are members of the same family and share the same fate. One cannot point to a more appropriate time than now, in the prevailing coronavirus pandemic, for reminding ourselves of this dictum. It is only by supporting one another that we shall be able to overcome this unprecedented crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly caused disruption to our personal and professional lives, not to mention the concerns that many of us will have had about our own health, or that of our loved ones. It has been the most challenging time and, despite the significant disruption, the Institute continues to deliver on its commitments while adapting to the current circumstances.

The Institute's educational programmes readily respond to the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. We managed to deliver most of our programmes via online platforms with higher attendance than usual. Our two graduate programmes are currently using a blended model of teaching, combining some face-to-face with virtual learning, and we have provided extra support to ensure that students continue to receive an interactive and intellectually rigorous experience. I am pleased to inform you that the first year of the SOAS – validated MA for GPISH and STEP concluded successfully with an effective move to online teaching for both programmes for the last term of 2019–2020. Further, three doctoral scholarships, including the Zahid Ali Fellowship, were awarded in 2020. Some of the conferences and lecture series planned had to be postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic.

The Department of Academic Research and Publications continued with its activities and published three new titles to add to the IIS's growing catalogue of some 150 publications: *People of Faith: Essays on a Historical and Contemporary Profile of the Ismailis,* by Shams Vellani; *The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message*, by Stephen Burge (World of Islam series); and my own book, *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History.* We also published a Persian translation of Shainool Jiwa's *The Fatimids.*

Finally, since 13 December 2020 the IIS is being stewarded by a newly appointed Board of Governors, who take over from a retiring Board that served the Institute with dedication and care for twenty-five years. Overseeing a period of significant development across our education, research and publication programmes, as well as the IIS's move to its permanent new premises in the Aga Khan Centre, the retiring Board of Governors has helped to position the IIS as a leader in the field of Ismaili Studies. The new appointments made by the Chairman of the Board, His Highness the Aga Khan IV, enhance the diversity among its members, who come from a mix of academic and commercial backgrounds and include, for the first time, alumni of IIS's graduate programmes.

On a more hopeful note, the disruptions caused by the coronavirus may have opened doors for which some have been waiting. Preliminary studies support that we experienced faster technological progress during the last quarter than ever before. We have also had to become more flexible, using new tools to facilitate working collaboratively in remote teams. I hope that the positive aspects of this experience and its associated learning will continue to inform and improve our approach to the way we work, even after we are able to interact physically again in the near future.

As we continue our journey in these unprecedented times, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your continuous generosity and support to the work of the Institute. I encourage your continued engagement with us on this exciting journey towards academic excellence and service to the global Ismaili community. We hope you and your loved ones are keeping well and safe.

Dr Farhad Daftary

MESSAGE FROM THE ALUMNI RELATIONS COORDINATOR

Dear IIS Alumni,

As I reflect on the past year, which can be called a year of crisis and opportunities, hope and kindness are the two words that come to my mind. To remain hopeful and kind to ourselves as well as others becomes a lifeline to our wellbeing in difficult times. So, I wish you and your loved ones a year of kindness and hope.

Despite all the challenges, the Alumni Relations Unit was able to deliver most of its programmes virtually. As part of the alumni lecture series, chapter leaders organised six lecture programmes virtually, to engage alumni and discuss key issues.

The Alumni Research Grant was awarded to Kainat Jalaluddin (GPISH 2019) to take an online Advanced Classical Arabic course at Qasid Institute, Jordan, in preparation for her doctoral studies. Seven GPISH 2020 graduates participated in the Alumni Internship Programme. Internships were set up for each of them in collaboration with the AKDN and the IIS. Two alumni have benefitted from the career development programme. I am also pleased to share that we have recently launched the Alumni Mentorship Programme.

The IIS Alumni Association is a growing community with over 697 alumni across more than thirty-seven countries. Around 80% of alumni participated in the IIS Alumni Survey 2020, and I would like to extend a big thank you to all who completed the survey.

This issue of the *Alumni Newsletter* provides a snapshot of alumni-related events and activities that have taken place in 2020 and the contributions of the alumni community to research and scholarship. I want to express my gratitude to all who have shared their reflections and contributed to this newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading it.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Hussain Daya for all the work he has undertaken in the last year as Alumni Relations Coordinator and express my hope that he remains an active member of the IIS Alumni Association.

I would like to encourage you to work with your chapter group leaders to bring your ideas and expertise to the organisation of alumni events so that they can be an even more significant benefit to you and as many of your fellow alumni as possible. Through these activities, the Alumni Relations Unit is committed to supporting alumni in various stages of their career and professional development, and strengthening their relationship with the IIS and other Imamat institutions. If you have any queries, comments, or suggestions, please do contact the Alumni Relations Office at alumni@iis.ac.uk.

Last but not least, please join me in welcoming our 2020 graduates to the IIS Alumni Association!

Sabeen Bashwani
Alumni Relations Coordinator

ALUMNI CHAPTER GROUP LEADERSHIP

ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP

President – Sarah Juma graduated from STEP in 2014. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher with ITREB UAE.

Secretary – Hina Amirali Mawani graduated from STEP in 2017. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher with ITREB Pakistan.

EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP

President – Nazneen Lakhani graduated from WTEP in 2004 and completed her MA in Islamic Societies and Cultures from SOAS, University of London. Her recent job involves working as a paralegal, after gaining a Level 1 qualification for the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, specialising in Immigration Law.

Secretary – Saima Khakwani graduated from GPISH in 2017 and completed her MSc in Public Health from Imperial College London in 2018. She is currently working as a senior clinical systems specialist at PRA Health Sciences.

NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP

President – Zahra Somani graduated from STEP in 2010. She completed her MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). She is currently working as a STEP teacher with ITREB USA.

Secretary – Sadiq Maredia graduated from STEP in 2010. He completed his MTeach/MA from UCL Institute of Education (IOE). He is currently working as STEP teacher with ITREB USA.

NEW IIS GRADUATES

We welcome 2020 GPISH graduates to the IIS Alumni Association

Amjad Ali (Pakistan), Imran Visram (UK), Irum Iqbal (Pakistan), Gulazor Gulmamadova (Tajikistan), Karam Alkatlabe (Pakistan), Mariam Jiwani (Uganda), Nayab Tufail (Pakistan), Noureen Shallwani (USA), Shakeel Ahmed Shah (Pakistan)

**We welcome
2019 STEP C11 –**
Yasira Yazin Charania (India)

ALUMNI INTERNSHIPS FOR 2020 GRADUATES

Each year, the Alumni Relations Unit creates internship opportunities for new GPISH graduates to facilitate their transition from student to professional life and further their career development. With the support of the IIS, AKDN HR and the Department of Jamati Institutions, the Alumni Relations Unit developed the following internship opportunities for GPISH graduates.

Amjad Ali with Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Pakistan, for nine months.

Gulazor Gulmamadova with the Office of Research and Development at the University of Central Asia, Tajikistan, for five months.

Irum Iqbal with the Department of Curriculum Studies at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK, for three and a half months.

Mariam Jiwani with the Constituency Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK, for five months.

Nayab Tufail with the South Asian Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, UK, for nine months.

Noureen Shallwani with the Communications Department at Aga Khan Academies for four months.

Shakeel Ahmed Shah with the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation at the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Pakistan, for nine months.

ALUMNI MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

As an alum of the IIS, you can share your expertise through the Alumni Mentorship Programme. This initiative has been launched recently to provide a formal platform for our students and graduates who are seeking support in the advancement of their careers or pursuing further studies to access mentoring support. In addition, this programme is envisioned to foster a sense of belonging among the IIS alumni community, with the hope that this initiative will maintain and strengthen ties with the IIS.

Potential alumni mentors and mentees (current IIS students and alumni seeking a mentor) are invited to register their interest on the IIS Alumni Community Portal. Here, you can provide information about your purpose for mentoring or seeking mentorship; this will form your profile and be important in the matching process between mentees and mentors. The mentor should form part of the mentee's network of professional relationships that can guide and support mentees with future career opportunities, internships, or placements.

If you would like to take part in the programme as a mentor or mentee, please get in touch with the Alumni Relations Office at alumni@iis.ac.uk.

ALUMNI LECTURE PROGRAMMES

TOPIC	PRESENTER
Visible Thinking	Khairunnissa Rahim Lakhani (STEP 2012) Nousheen Sadruddin (STEP 2016)
Impactful Communication with Students	Ambreen Saleh (GPISH 2008)
Moral Ambiguity and the Ambivalence of Love	Rafiq Ajani (GPISH 2006)
Age of Conflict: Marking the Trajectory of a Spanish Ismaili Family During and After La Guerra Civil Española	Noreen Sajwani (GPISH 2018)
Towards Practical Ethics and Erecting a Political Friendship in the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's and al-Tawḥīdī's Political Thought	Nuha Alshaar (GPISH 2003)
Music, Resiliency, and Leadership During COVID-19	Shumaila Hemani (GPISH 2009)
Indian Ocean Trade: Connections and Pathways of Mobility across the Global South, Past and Present	Akbar Keshodkar (GPISH 1998)
Authority and Plurality in Muslim Legal Traditions: The Case of Ismaili Law	Arif Jamal (GPISH 1997)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANNUAL ALUMNI PROFILE REPORT 2020[1]

The global IIS alumni body comprises **697 graduates** living in **37 countries**

67 alumni were appointed to senior volunteer roles within Jamati institutions, AKDN, and external organisations

109 alumni engaged with the IIS in various capacities

27 alumni received awards and grants, including fellowships and scholarships

27 alumni were involved in organising conferences, initiating fundraising projects and artistic endeavours, as well as establishing not-for-profit organisations

58 alumni published papers in academic journals

30 alumni presented papers at international conferences

121 alumni are pursuing or have completed further studies on a part-time or full-time basis

3 alumni published books

Employment

Voluntary Contribution

Achievements

Continuing Education

A significant majority of our alumni **(588 or 84%)** reported themselves as employed, with more than half **(367 or 53%)** in professional employment with Imamat institutions

287 alumni alumni were able to contribute as volunteers to significant projects or assignments of Imamat institutions and external organisations

113 alumni provided support during the pandemic independently or in collaboration with AKDN agencies, government organisations, the United Nations, or other civil society agencies

14 alumni earned promotions in their professional roles

73 alumni conducted training sessions in a voluntary or professional capacity

61 alumni participated in non-academic conferences and workshops

2 alumni completed their doctoral studies:

Rahim Gholami (GPISH – 2002)
University of Exeter
Thesis: The Wayfarer's Sojourn at the Banquet: The Hermeneutics of Nasir-e Khusraw's Esoteric Guidance

Nazmin Halani (GPISH – 1998)
University of Warwick
Thesis: Religious Nurture of Ismaili Children in the UK

[1] 549 alumni responded to the IIS Alumni Survey 2020.

ALUMNI RESEARCH GRANT

The Alumni Research Grant (ARG) has been established to support the academic and professional development of IIS alumni who wish to present papers, publish their work, or undertake further research following their studies at the IIS. Alumni are encouraged to apply for the ARG if they are seeking funding for conducting field research studies, publishing monographs and articles, presenting research papers at academic conferences, or completing courses that directly contribute to the alumnus/na's current research and professional activities.

Apply for the Alumni Research Grant and secure support for presenting papers, publishing your work, or undertaking further research: **www.iis.ac.uk/graduate-studies/alumni/alumni-services/research-grant**

REFLECTIONS ON INTERNSHIPS PROGRAMME BY ALUMNI

Suhaib Uddin Hunzai – *Class of GPISH 2019*

At the outset, I would like to express my immense gratitude to the IIS Alumni Relations Unit for providing me with this golden opportunity to work with the Central Asian Studies Unit (CASU), in the Department of Academic Research and Publications. Indeed, I feel so privileged to be able to work on some of the key areas of Ismaili history, Tariqah and practice, stretching over several centuries in the context of Northern Areas of Pakistan and Chitral.

Ismailis of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral constitute one of the largest concentrations of Ismailis. This Jamat has been at the crossroads of key socio-political developments over many centuries. As a young researcher, I have observed that this Jamat has been understudied and there is a need for much more research on various aspects of Ismaili history, practice, and indigenous literature. I can proudly say that CASU gave me this amazing opportunity to develop an annotated bibliography of sources on the religious history of Ismailis, focusing on Ismaili *da'wa* in Northern Areas of Pakistan, documenting key historical developments as well as indigenously produced devotional literature. This initiative was the first of its kind and provided an opportunity not only to document various sources in the local languages but also to engage with various primary sources of historical significance.

I would also like to extend my special thanks to CASU for placing their trust in me and giving me the responsibility to carry out this very challenging task. I believe that the work I have produced under the guidance of CASU will be significant for future research at IIS regarding the Ismailis of Northern Areas of Pakistan and Chitral. Also, this opportunity of working for the IIS has given me a new level of hope and confidence to contribute further to the mandate of the IIS to produce new knowledge and scholarship to enable a better understanding of our Jamat within the broader context of Islam."

REFLECTION: ALUMNI RESEARCH GRANT

Kainat Jalaluddin – *Class of GPISH 2019*

To successfully pursue a PhD in Medieval Arabic Philosophy requires command of Classical Arabic. While Classical Arabic itself is very demanding, philosophical texts add further complexity. In pursuit of my ambition, the only way forward was to take advanced Classical Arabic classes to prepare myself for PhD admission. The Institute of Ismaili Studies' Alumni Relations Unit valued my passion and supported me in pursuing a Classical Arabic course through the Alumni Research Grant at one of the best institutes for Arabic tutoring, i.e., the Qasid Institute, Amman, Jordan. This intensive course was ideal for my future studies. It provided me with one-on-one tutoring and supervision to read and interpret extracts from Medieval Arabic philosophical texts ranging from Avicenna's *al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat*, al-Ghazali's *Maqasid al-Falasifa*, to Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's *Asas al-Taqdis*. Additionally, I was able to demonstrate the ability to read particular extracts from the text I am looking forward to analysing during my doctoral studies. It has, to a great extent, made me capable of reading and understanding philosophical texts independently, a skill much needed for a PhD. Expertise in language has made me confident and motivated to begin my doctoral journey."

Nazma Kazani – *Class of GPISH 2019*

My internship experience was a truly unique one. I was given the opportunity to embed myself within the Communications Department of the Aga Khan Academies. During the ten months I was with the Academies, I travelled to, and worked in, three different countries (Kenya, Mozambique, and the UAE).

Given my background in media and journalism, I was tasked with responsibilities pertaining to brand integrity, audio-visual coordination, public relations, and social media management. My primary responsibility was to manage the website for the Aga Khan Academy Maputo and handle the day-to-day internal as well as external communications for the Academy. Having understood the ropes at the Academy in Mombasa, I hit the ground running on my arrival in Maputo. With a great deal of support from the staff on campus, I was not only able to fit into my professional role but also ease into life in a new city.

One of my key takeaways from this opportunity was the importance of collaboration. Given that the bulk of my internship was during the pandemic, coordinating and collaborating to produce new systems of communication became essential. With the move to online learning, I was able to assist with producing the first virtual arts exhibition at the Academy and other similar endeavors where a curated and edited video took the place of an assembly or campus visit. Collaboration was key even during my short stint in Dubai, where the entire Communications team for the Academies assembled to create a coherent strategy for the coming year.

My experience of living and working in Maputo was a lesson in problem-solving, thinking on my feet and independent decision-making. My colleagues, both in Maputo and within the Academies Unit, showed faith in my skills which facilitated my overall planning and working capacity. Having worked with people around the world on a day-to-day basis to tackle issues that were posed by a global pandemic, I can say with great confidence that I have grown far beyond the initial scope of this opportunity and hope to contribute to the work of the Academies in the future."

TURNING THE PAGE ON PRINT – DIGITAL MEDIA AND LITERATURE OVER THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS

Al-Amin Kheraj – *Class of GPISH 2012*

From the Sunday morning silence Jabir erupts: "Did you know that the oldest cave painting they've found so far is in the Maltravieso cave in Cáceres, Spain?"

Jabir is my house mate, and has just saved me from drowning in my Twitter feed.

"No, I didn't," I mutter while turning to him. "How old is it?"

"Sixty four thousand years!"

He peers over his art history book gleefully at me, and then dives right back in. As my thumb lazily resumes its mechanical scroll, I wonder about the difference between Jabir's book and the stuff on my illuminated screen.

Cave paintings are no different in purpose from their later counterparts - clay tablets, paper, and smartphones. They are all mediums that help us tell stories through space and time. If literature in its broadest definition is about stories – fiction or nonfiction – then literature has existed for as long as humans have.

A lot has changed since we made cave paintings, especially in the last 20 years with the proliferation of digital media. Publishing literature used to be the occasional and expensive act of a few; now it is something I do online daily, if not multiple times a day. I do not know if what I publish today on Twitter will last 60 some millennia into the future to be uncovered by our descendants.

"Is there a photo of the painting?" I ask.

"Na'am!" Jabir responds while turning to show me the page depicting a faded cow-like animal painted in weather-worn white onto a rock. "Apparently it was a hunting story."

Jabir and I consume media differently. He can spend days honing in on a book, picking apart its story one perspective at a time. I, on the other hand, consume heaps of random facts on the Internet every day, very few of which can be strung together into a coherent story.

Some people claim the Internet is destroying literary culture. I disagree. What would Jabir do should his favourite bookstore close? He could order books to our doorstep (and incur a serious shipping bill) from an online bookstore. Why not? He may be persuaded to convert to an alternative format such as ebooks, given the seemingly limitless choices at his disposal online.

Market evidence supports the view that contemporary literary culture is healthy. Book sales are steady. Publishers are adapting their business models to only print based on their readers' orders. Audio books and Virtual Reality subscriptions are growing.

In 30 years, I imagine literature will continue to thrive. Its forms are likely to keep changing in the context of evolving digital technology, but its content worries me. With so much digital media today, what guides our production and consumption of literature?
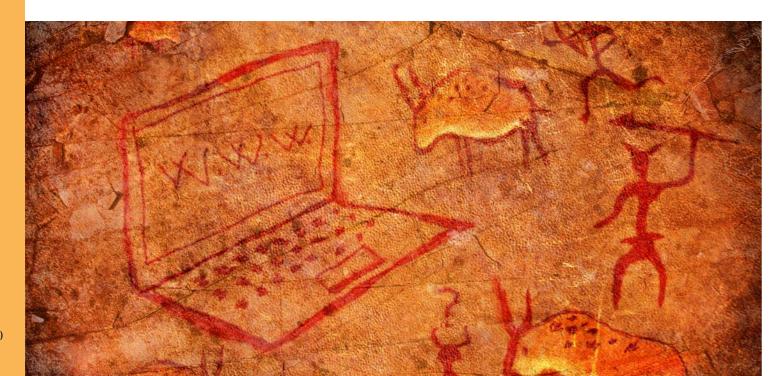
I have to ask Jabir: "Why do you think they painted a hunting story?"

He looks up and pauses. "I don't think this is a hunting story at all. I think someone was showing off their cattle as their wealth."

So far, the raison d'etre of literature has been to connect the dots of civilizations across space and time. Literature has helped one human engage with many and many with one. In this sense, literature has been necessary for societies to exchange perspectives of the past and present in order to build for the future.

Looking forward, the story is unclear. While the ease of producing and consuming literature with digital media is enabling new perspectives to emerge, we cannot be sure if these new perspectives will necessarily sustain us to 2050 and beyond.

What we can be sure about is that our consumption today influences production tomorrow, so we ought to consume literature that makes us better and not worse.

IN SEARCH OF *JUGNUS* AND *TITLIS*

Qudsia Naunehal Shah – *Class of GPISH 2006*

Did you ever chase *jugnus* (fireflies) when you were little? They are elusive tiny bugs that have flickering lights at the ends of their tails. Children run after them hoping to catch them, one moment they are within reach and the next they are gone, appearing far out in the distance – just out of their reach. Come morning, this fun and frolicking is provided by *titlis* (butterflies). The enchantment and excitement that children feel running after these little creatures and not quite ever being able to catch them is a sight to behold. When a baby is born, they go through different stages of development. One of the things that gets parents really excited is when the child is able to fix their gaze and follow movement with their eyes. When you are sitting in a garden or park and your baby follows the flight of a butterfly, even if momentarily, is a moment that can go straight into the baby book.

Many of us have had these experiences growing up. But we are fast approaching an era, of our own making, and in some places already begun, where we are losing biodiversity at an alarming rate. This includes animals, birds, insects, and plant life. Insects are a food source for birds and are also pivotal in providing pollination for plants. It is said that it is not necessary to kill an animal or a bird by holding a shotgun or slingshot; if we kill their food source, we are banishing them to extinction. If we look around us or even look down as we walk, we may notice that our feet rarely touch unpaved ground. All around us and under our feet, we have paved and cemented our surroundings; these were natural habitats of scores of wildlife. In our eagerness to build, we have destroyed plant life and animal habitats, and are posing a threat to all other creatures, and in turn, as we are witnessing through climate change, a threat to ourselves.

Small joys, like chasing a *titli* or *jugnu*, or following with our gaze the flight of a bird or the sound of crickets late into the summer nights, are becoming rarer and rarer. Through this pandemic we have seen how, in many places, due to a slowdown in human activity, the air quality has improved and there are reports of a rise in the number of wildlife sightings, including some bird species, that were rarely sighted before. This is a good sign: it shows that after this pandemic, if all of us continue to make changes in our lifestyles, we can still positively impact our environment. With the world on pause, we have had more time to appreciate how nature sustains us and rejuvenates our spirits. It should also make us realise that nature and all creatures, big and small, need humans to treat them with respect and care so that they can continue to thrive – for their own sake and ours!

TEACHING DIGITAL NATIVES ONLINE – EMPOWERING TEACHERS FOR THE NEW NORMAL

Anil Khamis – *Class of WTEP 1993*

The current COVID-19 pandemic has truly hit the world unprepared. Relative to the majority of the world, in East Africa and Pakistan, there are glimmers of hope that, despite the lack of adequate health systems and facilities, and the years of under-investment, we have dodged the proverbial bullet. There are a number of working theories as to why COVID-19 cases have not been as high as predicted and why the disease is waning in these regions. These include prior exposure to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) viruses, of which the novel coronavirus is a variant, as well as the generally youthful population of these regions. These theories and hopes give us pause for thought as virtually everything else has been either disrupted, halted, or thrown into disarray.

One of the primary considerations besides health is education. UNICEF estimates that over 1.5 billion learners have had their education interrupted, primarily in the public sector. Private schools and institutions, who invested in the development of their digital capacities, have weathered the COVID-19 storm a little better. They have managed to continue a semblance of "normal" education by transitioning what they would have done in face-to-face classes to online modalities.

The immediate and longer-term effects of the pandemic are already damaging entire education systems, including higher education. These effects are deep and profound: they will lead to loss of learning for the most vulnerable in society, and increases in mental health concerns for teachers and learners. At the same time, the meaning and purposes of education are being questioned anew, particularly when faced with disruption or in the event of catastrophic challenges.

There are two views on what may be next: in one, we will revert to schooling as normal, although with health precautions demanding physical distancing, limiting numbers in learning spaces, and limiting extracurricular activities. This seems to be the current view of many Ministries of Education in their plans to reopen schools. The other view is that we need to rethink the normal.

The dominant story of COVID-19 and its effect on education is that this could not have been predicted. We simply could not have been prepared for this crisis; it is unfortunate, but we need to accept it with the losses that affect the most marginalised in our societies. However, the evidence is quite to the contrary.

The evolving narrative of COVID-19 needs to be revisited. As far back as 2017, experts including the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned that the world was due an influenza-like pandemic. Recalling the centenary of the 1918 Spanish Flu that claimed the lives of some 20–50 million people worldwide over a course of eighteen months, they warned that we need to be better prepared. Our global overreliance on limited resources has led to damaging fragile ecosystems through practices such as overgrazing, deforestation, and carbon emissions. Meanwhile, our abuse of medications is leading to antimicrobial resistance. These behaviours and trends are creating existential vulnerabilities (UNDP).

In the light of the above, which demarcates a clear threat as well as opportunity, what can be done to rethink education and enter the new normal? The World Economic Forum (WEF), held every year in Davos, Switzerland, gives some hints. We are now in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and our learners are digital natives, although many of our teachers are digital immigrants. According to neuroscientist Marc Prensky, and founder of the WEF, Klaus Schwab, human society is on the cusp of profound changes that will be further spurred by information and communications technologies, the growth of artificial intelligence, and machine learning. These changes have been unleashing deep societal and economic transformations that have been reshaping society for the past few decades. All organs of society – governments, the private sector, and civil society – need to consider the implications of this revolution to improve coherent and holistic human development and limit the exacerbation of existing inequalities, environmental degradation, and related effects that burden today's youth and defer issues to the future.

The evidence tells us that the current socio-economic and human development models that inform our educational systems across the world are unsustainable, not fit for purpose as exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and must change.

Across East Africa, cognisance of these changes influenced policy; however, the problems to be addressed were deemed further away on the horizon and the urgency required to respond was muted. In Kenya, for instance, in 2013 – seven years ago – the government committed to providing free laptops to all pupils across the country. However, the priority soon shifted – and resources were diverted – leaving the aspiration unfulfilled. If that government pledge had been fulfilled, 90% of learners in the country would not be out of school today.

Similarly, new knowledge and what that means for children, communities, and national development, has been available to governments to mitigate crises and spur human development. The need to invest in early childhood development for all children is a clear and unambiguous illustration. Evidence going back four decades building on the work of the Nobel Laureate James Heckman, with agencies such as the World Bank advocating for it and the Aga Khan Foundation's Madrassa Early Childhood Programme (MECP) leading the way, shows that the best investment a country can make is in all its children from a young age (Heckman, 1999; Bartlett, 2004). The benefits accrue to children themselves across their life-course and to their communities, leading to national development. Countries, including developing nations, which invest in the health and education of all children, reap immense benefits including lower health care costs, more cohesive societies, and innovative and creative workers.

We have now the opportunity to re-centre our focus on teachers, who are truly engaged in the human, creative process with their learners and colleagues, and must be at the centre of reimagining the educational process. We need to build on their training, leadership development, and outcomes that have enormous societal impact, taking full advantage of the development of fast-paced digital ecosystems across the world. In so doing, we can reach more people by way of MOOCS (massive open online courses), particularly those who have been disenfranchised from opportunities due to any number of factors: tuition fees, opportunity costs, biases and restrictions (on access for girls for example), poverty, inadequate physical infrastructure, and lack of investment. A great opportunity exists to rebalance the purpose and point of education to reach the most vulnerable in society and help them become self-directed learners in the emerging global knowledge society.

Our teachers shape the learners of today and the creators of new knowledge tomorrow. New knowledge, new approaches, and new capabilities are unfolding that meet the needs of digital learners. These learners have grown up in the era of the smart phone, the Internet, and access to untold information and knowledge from all over the world – much of it easily and freely available. It is their educators, the digital immigrants, who need to be supported and encouraged to improve their teaching, to innovate, and co-create with their learners' solutions to society's issues (Khamis, Naseem, and Khamis, 2021). In doing so, we promote principles of social justice, equity, and inclusion. All learners need quality education, trained and qualified teachers, and empowered communities who can make decisions based on the best available knowledge in preparation for their members to be future-ready.

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A SITE OF *SPOLIA* IN ALMOHAD SPAIN: SOME REFLECTIONS FROM MY HISTORY OF ART MASTER'S THESIS
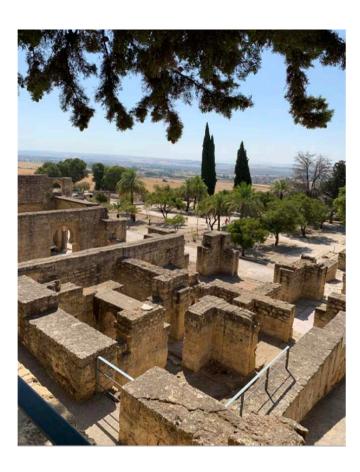
Nausheen Hoosein – *Class of STEP 2014*

In the year 1190, Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur (d. 1198), perhaps the most illustrious of the Almohad rulers, sojourned in Córdoba, which had served as the seat of Umayyad authority some two hundred years prior. At the time of al-Mansur's visit, the palatial complex was already a crumbling ruin subject to the whims of pillagers. Ibn Idhari (d. 1295), an important medieval source on the history of the Maghrib and Iberia, wrote that al-Mansur visited the palatial city of Madinat al-Zahra "with the intention of reminiscing on the monuments of past centuries and of former peoples".[1] This intention marks al-Zahra as a site of memory, particularly for the twelfth-century Almohads, Berbers of the High Atlas Mountains in modern Morocco, who sought out Umayyad visual culture as a compass in claiming caliphal legitimacy on the Iberian Peninsula.

Madinat al-Zahra had been founded by Abd al-Rahman III al-Nasir (d. 961) in 936, following the proclamation of the caliphate in al-Andalus. The city served as a clear spatial and visual expression of political power, creating a separate royal realm away from the previously held capital of Córdoba. The rectangular-plan city was composed of three terraced

platforms, and was built as a fortified, administrative, and ceremonial headquarters, visually and metaphorically challenging the hegemony of the Abbasids (r. 750–1258) and the Fatimids (r. 909–1171) in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, respectively. In this unprecedented contest for caliphal authority, art and architecture played a significant role as complex expressions of political negotiation.

In the eleventh century, following the collapse of Ummayad authority and the ensuing civil unrest, Madinat al-Zahra was sacked and burned, a mere seventy-four years after its establishment. Both well before and after al-Mansur's *ubi sunt* visit, the site was repeatedly quarried for its sumptuous materials and architectural fragments, some of which are still available on the art market today. Despite its brief tenure, Madinat al-Zahra took on an almost legendary quality. It served as a perpetual source for emulation by later courts, both in its artistic and architectural achievements and as a repository for building materials, reused in subsequent Christian and Muslim spaces. Al-Mansur's visit in 1190 was perhaps yet another lament for the ruined city, glorifying what was past, and longing for what was lost. In fact, the same al-Mansur, soon after his nostalgic visit, commissioned the construction of what is today known as La Giralda in

Seville, the monumental minaret once attached to the city's twelfth-century Friday mosque and later appropriated as the cathedral's bell tower. This journey of reminiscence, recorded in the historical chronicles of Ibn Idhari, is an early indication of the visual and symbolic link between tenth-century Madinat al-Zahra and the twelfth-century Sevillian minaret.

Scholars and tourists alike have long observed the marble-studded façade of Seville's minaret-tower, which displays spoliated columns, capitals, and bases that originated from Umayyad constructions. The marble would have likely travelled the 140-kilometre distance from Córdoba to Seville on the Guadalquivir River. The inclusion of marble from a considerably distant place was a deliberate strategy to create an immediate and physical association between the two dynasties, the tenth-century Umayyads and the twelfth-century Almohads, and their respective monumental commissions, al-Zahra and the Sevillian tower.
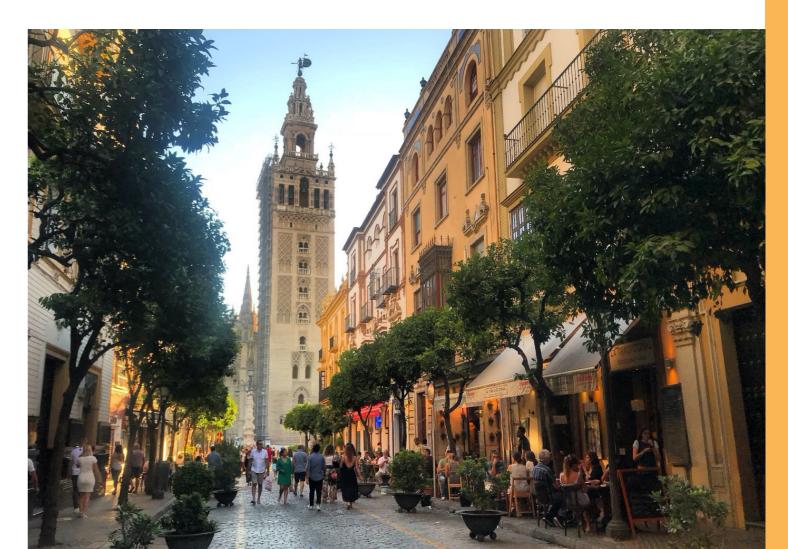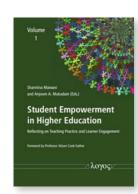
Indeed, the reuse of architectural fragments, particularly marble capitals, has historical precedence in Islamic mosque and palatial constructions. The use of *spolia* from Roman, Byzantine, and Visigoth structures was conventional in the building of medieval hypostyle mosques throughout North Africa, Spain, and the Mediterranean at large. While there is precedent for spoliation on the peninsula, including the quintessential example of the Great Mosque of Córdoba,

al-Mansur's reuse was distinct. The Almohad penchant for Andalusian marble and their strategic deployment of capitals was neither a reuse for practical purposes, nor a triumphalist one. Considering the laborious journey to bring the immensely heavy marble across the river and up the tall minaret, it is clear that the movement of marble was not practical, especially considering that the capitals do not serve a structural function in the tower. Nor can we consider al-Mansur's reuse as a triumphant gesture, since the Almohads succeeded the Umayyads by almost two centuries and did not defeat or overcome them. Rather, the Almohad appropriation of marble in their most architecturally complex minaret is a selective spoliation, one that seeks to associate Almohad rule on the peninsula with that of the splendours of the Córdoban court. The Sevillian tower, constructed at the height of Almohad rule, becomes a symbol of success in the Islamic West. As the tallest, most monumental structure in the medieval city, the tower was the ideal space for the spectacle of *spolia*. Al-Mansur's journey of reminiscence to the marble-saturated Madinat al-Zahra serves as the pivotal moment in the transformation of the Sevillian minaret into a site of *spolia*. His nostalgia for the former rulers of al-Andalus and their prominent place in politics, art, and architecture fuelled the now eternal relation, both material and metaphorical, between the two monuments.

[1] Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-Mughrib fi Akhbar al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib*, ed. Abd Allah Muhammad Ali, based on the edition of E. Levi-Provencal and G.S. Colin, 4 vols (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2009), Vol. 4, p. 268.
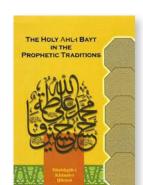
ALUMNI PUBLICATIONS

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: REFLECTING ON TEACHING PRACTICE AND LEARNER ENGAGEMENT (2 VOLS)

Edited by Sharmina Mawani (GPISH 2002) and Anjoom A. Mukadam

Student Empowerment in Higher Education brings together the accumulated knowledge and experience of many accomplished teachers and students from higher education institutions around the world, and has much to offer those who are engaged in higher education, as students, teachers or support staff. The authors offer personal reflections in teaching, learning, mentoring, assessment, hands-on activities, course design, and student identities in higher education across the globe, supported by academic research and scholarship.

Readers are provided with a window into tried and tested empowering practices in varying contexts, enabling them to see what works and what does not, alongside the challenges and possibilities. A distinctive feature of this book, and its paramount strength, is that it explores best practices in student empowerment, whilst reflecting on matters of teaching and learning that are familiar to students and teachers alike, and also explores practices in a variety of disciplines. The intention of these volumes, therefore, is not only to inform readers about the diverse learning and teaching approaches of the authors, but, most importantly, to facilitate processes of student empowerment and promote reflection on teaching and learning practices.

THE HOLY AHL-I BAYT IN THE PROPHETIC TRADITIONS

Compiled and translated by Faquir Muhammad & Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai (IoE Class of 1982)

The sayings or traditions *(ahadith)* of the Prophet Muhammad are considered second only to the holy Qur'an as a source of teachings in Islam. The authors have selected traditions from Sunni sources that relate to the close family of the holy Prophet, in order to alert the community of believers to its shared beliefs and common roots. This is a bridge-building book, which makes available in English those sayings of the holy Prophet that relate to his son-in-law and cousin, 'Ali, his daughter Fatimah and his grandsons, Hasan and Husayn. It will be especially of interest to the younger generation of Muslims as well as the English-reading public. The book is bilingual and contains the traditions in the original Arabic. Every saying is referenced with a number or a volume and page number for easy access.

We would like to invite you to take part in the user research survey we are currently running to support the upcoming IIS website redesign project.

Please fill in the online **IIS 2021 Website Discovery survey.**

The survey will be open for four weeks until **17 May 2021.**

It also asks for voluntary participation in one of the upcoming focus group meetings/interviews which will help us to gather further insight and inform the changes needed on the site.

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