On May 5, the Religion Department welcomed Professor Malika Zeghal of Harvard University to campus to give the 2011 Ian G. Barbour lecture.

Zeghal addressed the recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa and the complicated role of Islam in the construction of the new political landscapes developing in Tunisia in Egypt. While secular and religious politics have often been thought of as binary opposites in the Arab world, Professor Zeghal's talk forced us to think critically about what hybrid, democratic and constitutional forms of political organization might look like which include an important role for Islam and thus can not be easily boxed-in by traditional secular/religious dichotomies.

Professor Zeghal's talk was the first event on campus regarding these earth-shaking events and we are grateful that Assistant Professor Noah Salomon was able to bring one of his former teachers to get the ball rolling on a conversation important to several departmental and disciplinary units across campus. Among the 175 students and faculty and community in attendance were Emeriti Professors Richard Crouter, Bardwell Smith, and Ian Barbour along with their families.
Lindesmith Lecture

Sudharshan Seneviratne (Chair and Professor of Archaeology at the University of Peradeniya) presented the 2011 Lindesmith Lecture in South and Southeast Asian Studies: "Opposing Inclusion, Unresolving Conflict: The Postcolonial Subversion of Knowledge in South Asia".

For more than 3 decades, Professor Seneviratne has explored Sri Lankan and Indian archaeological sites and from this exploration developed research methodologies in interpretative and theoretical archaeology. Seneviratne received the Distinguished Leadership Award from the American Bibliographic Institute for his contributions to archaeology and history in 2002. He was also inducted as a Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences in Sri Lanka that same year. Professor Seneviratne's deep interest in the use of archaeology in building national and ethnic identities led to the development of many innovative programs in conflict resolution and peace studies.

Ragamala•Carleton•ARTech

Bringing South Asian Cultural Performance to Northfield, MN

Photos courtesy of Khant Khant Kyaw ’11

MARCH

Acclaimed as one of the Diaspora’s leading Indian dance ensembles, Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance will partner with Carleton College to bring the arts and culture of South India to residents of Northfield, MN this May. The Carleton students, along with Ragamala Company members, will work at the Northfield School of Arts and Technology (ARTech) to teach an appreciation for South Asian cultural art forms. The residency will include a free public performance of Sthree, a contemporary interpretation of the 4-5th century South Indian epic Silappathikaram, by Ragamala at the Carleton College Chapel on Wednesday, May 18.

In preparation for the public performance of Ragamala's piece, Carleton students will read the classical text with ARTech high school students, discussing the themes of justice, gender, law, and religion which animate the work, and ARTech and Carleton students will study the Indian visual art of kolam (in which rice flour is used to make geometric, auspicious designs on thresholds), as well as folk and classical dance forms with Ragamala company members. In addition to the performance of Sthree on May 18th, the residency will culminate with an exhibition of kolam on the Carleton campus produced by Carleton and ARTech students together, and Professor Shana Sippy and Ragamala will also facilitate conversations with Carleton and ARTech students following the residency.
You are teaching a new class this spring titled “Performing Tradition: Art, Religion, and Globalization” and it has some amazing things planned. Can you talk a little bit about it and how you got the Ragamala Dance Troupe involved?

Professor Shana Sippy: My first term here I taught Religions of South Asia, in which we studied a host of texts, including various interpretations of the South and Southeast Asian epic, the Ramayana. Ragamala, the MN based Dance Troupe, was performing a piece based interpreting the epic, in collaboration with an Indonesian dance company, and it seemed like a wonderful way to bring the text to life for the students and so we went to see the performance. I started to develop a relationship with members of the company and helped them do research on some South Asian traditions. We partnered in applying for a grant from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, made possible through the Legacy Amendment. Intended to bring art to smaller MN communities, the grant involves Ragamala’s residence in Carleton and Northfield during April/May of 2011. Carleton students, along with Ragamala Company members, will work with students at the Northfield School of Arts and Technology (ARTech) to teach an appreciation for South Asian texts and art forms. Carleton will also open its doors to the community at large, hosting classes, lectures and a major performance. The entire Northfield community is invited to see a full production of Ragamala’s Sthree, Woman/Women, a modern interpretation of an ancient South Indian epic, called the Silappathikaram.

For my class, one of the primary questions we will ask is: what happens when you take a religious tradition or practice from one culture and reinterpret it in a modern global context, such as Northfield, MN? We will think about the ways in which rituals are performances, and how religious and cultural performances are a part of the constitutive practices of everyday life. In our explorations, we will consider performances have served to create religious communities, national identities, colonial subjects, and sacred spaces and experiences.

The class will use a range of approaches: engaged study of texts; kinesthetic learning of dance and visual art forms; and pedagogical experience of teaching ARTech students. They will learn non-South Asian art forms, with visits from a Jewish dancer/choreographer, Judith Ingber, a French-Maghrebi-Queer-Muslim Performance Artist. 2fik, and choreographer, Professor Ananya Chatterjea, who will discuss issues of justice and identity in her work. This course allows students to experience, first hand, the challenges of teaching and representing culture to students at a local middle and high school.

Ragamala Schedule of Events

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Ragamala Public Lecture and Demo

Contours of Culture: The Physical and Religious Poetics of Classical Indian Dance

April 27, 2011

6:30 pm

Great Hall

Ragamala Bharatanatyam Master Class

May 10, 2011

6:30 pm

Cowling Gym

Ragamala Performs Sthree

May 18, 2011

7:00 pm

Skinner Memorial Chapel

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Visiting Professor Shana Sippy

Senior Ainsley Land sitting next to her kolam design.
2011 Seniors Comps Talks

• Kate Athens – Translatable Traditions: Spaces for Moral Discourse in Pluralistic Societies
• Peter Berg – Examining the Knowledge of Ibn al’ Arabi
• Francesca Chubb-Confer – “A Mirror Every Moment Changing:” The Poetics of Muslim Identity in South Asia
• Marlene Edelstein – In Search of Tamar: An Investigation of Feminist Interpretations of 2 Samuel 13
• Nicole Feldman – I Sing the Body Contingent: Spaces for Moral Discourse in Pluralistic Rorty’s Liberal Utopia
• Jack Frechette – Religious Citizenship, Nativism and the Midwest- A Study of the Response to Somali Muslims in St. Cloud, Minnesota
• Eric Hitimana – Seeking Health, Seeking God: The Role of Fatwas for the Devout Muslim in New Reproductive Technologies
• Danny Hoppe – “I’ll take you there:” The Staple Singers’ Journey from the Sacred to the Secular
• Ainsley Land – “For Zion’s Sake I Will Not Keep Silent” Christians United for Israel: A Conversation between Theology and Politics in Contemporary and Scholarly Wisdom
• Terra Peterson – Illuminated Images: The Role of Stained Glass Windows in Marian Visual Culture at Chartres Cathedral
• Darian Spearman – Voices from Outside: An Appeal for a Radical Womanist Mariology
• Claire Tyree – Skillful Hermeneutics: Power, Authority and Transgression in the Guhyasamaja System