

ASPECT Newsletter

Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought

A Doctoral Program
at Virginia Tech

Spring 2012, Issue 3



ASPECT student Michele James-Deramo (center) enjoying a dinner with colleagues at the International Partnership for Service-Learning Symposium in Siena, Italy on November 9th. Michele presented a paper, "The Spectacle of Volunteerism: Aid, Africa, and the Western Helper."

From the Editor

By Eli C.S. Jamison, ASPECT Doctoral Student

New events, opportunities, and changes are marking this academic year for the ASPECT program and these are ushering in new possibilities that will benefit the entire ASPECT community. Therefore in this issue, we want to review and preview the many exciting events and changes of 2011/2012.

Jump starting the year were several exciting news events: the graduation and employment of our first two ASPECT graduates (Dr. Mike Butera and Dr. Juan Carlos Sanchez), the award of the SSRC doctoral fellowship to ASPECT

Doctoral Candidate, Mr. Damion Blake, and the hiring of our new ASPECT program director, Dr. Francois Debrix who brings a burst of energy to the administration of ASPECT.

Fall 2011 featured the sponsoring or co-sponsoring of several well-received events such as *We Are Egypt* and the Whiteness Conference, the continuation of the ASPECT Working Paper series, and the new ASPECT series, "ASPECT Books at Greenberry's."

The spring features four ASPECT faculty searches, the first ASPECT

mini-conference, a paper presentation by Duke University Professor, Dr. Michael Hardt, and more in the ASPECT Working Paper series.

This issue provides information on these events as well as some book recommendations and an overview of the research interests of our ASPECT student community. We hope this issue encourages you to connect and engage in our vibrant ASPECT community this semester and beyond.

Have a great semester!

In this Issue...

- Open Letter from ASPECT Director: Dr. François Debrix
- ASPECT Spotlight: Damion Blake
- In the News: *We Are Egypt* and *Whiteness Beyond the West*
- Book Recommendations
- ASPECT Student Snapshot
- Spring 2012 Events

ASPECT Ph.D Students (from left to right):
Shien-Hauh (Howard) Leu, Dana Cochran,
Jordan Hill, Komal Dhillon, Nina Salmon



Open Letter from ASPECT Director, Dr. François Debrix



Dear ASPECT Community,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to this latest issue of our ASPECT student newsletter. I have been Director of ASPECT for only a few months, and I have tried to learn as much as I could in a short amount of time. I am truly privileged to work with the talented people here at Virginia Tech: ASPECT's Stakeholders, ASPECT's core and affiliate faculty members, our talented Office Technician, Tamara Sutphin, and, last but certainly not least, our immensely creative and dynamic doctoral students, who are the lifeblood of the program. Our new 2011-2012 incoming students' class is one of the largest in ASPECT's short history. Eleven new students in total have joined ASPECT this year coming with impressive credentials from top-notch Master's programs in the United States and

About Dr. Debrix...

François Debrix, ASPECT Director and Professor of Political Science, is formerly the Associate Chair of the Department of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University, where he also directed an International Lecture series. His research concentrates on contemporary political and social theory, critical and popular geopolitics, postmodern theory and culture, and the media and international relations.

Debrix has authored three books: the recently published *Beyond Biopolitics: Theory and Violence in World Politics* (co-authored with Alexander Barder) (Routledge, 2012), *Tabloid Terror: War, Culture, and Geopolitics* (Routledge, 2008), and *Re-Envisioning Peacekeeping: The United Nations and the Mobilization of Ideology* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999). He is the editor of *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World* (M.E. Sharpe, 2003), and the co-editor of *Rituals of Mediation: International Politics and Social Meaning* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), as well as *The Geopolitics of American Insecurity: Terror, Power, and Foreign Policy* (Routledge, 2009).

(Continued: See "Debrix")

abroad. I am particularly gratified to see first year and second year ASPECT students assume leadership positions in the ASPECT Student Organization.

I would also like to take this opportunity to showcase some important recent developments in the ASPECT doctoral program.

First, ASPECT now has over 70 faculty affiliates from departments, units, and institutes across the university. Expanding our list of affiliates will help in the development of new ASPECT courses and provide ASPECT students with greater variety in scholarship for building doctoral dissertation committees. Of particular note is that ASPECT is currently running four separate searches for core ASPECT faculty (joint positions with History, Philosophy, Religion and Culture, and the School of Public and International Affairs).

Second, ASPECT is organizing more on and off campus events, lectures, presentations, and mini-conferences, that will further establish ASPECT as an intellectual "hub" for theoretical and interdisciplinary research at Virginia Tech. ASPECT's Working Paper presentations continue to thrive, and ASPECT launched a Lecture Series with our first event in October 2011, *We Are Egypt*. In Spring 2012, ASPECT will host a mini-conference on the topic of "Sovereign Violence" that is an opportunity for ASPECT students to showcase their research and get valuable feedback from notable scholars in their fields of study.

Third, I am fully committed to find ways to help ASPECT students feature their work nationally and internationally. Not only will ASPECT organize an annual mini-conference geared primarily towards students' research (as mentioned above), but ASPECT will also attempt to find financial support for students to go to conferences. This leads me to my next point.

Fourth, I recently created a "Friends of ASPECT" foundation account that welcomes all sorts of gifts and donations for the ASPECT program (and, in

ASPECT

"Friends of ASPECT" Account

I would like to make a gift to ASPECT in order to assist ASPECT in program and scholarship development

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All "Friends of ASPECT" gifts and donations are tax-deductible



ASPECT students: Alfonso, Nina, Jordan, and Seth in Downtown Blacksburg, Fall 2012

Continued from "Open Letter..."

particular, for student endeavors and initiatives such as awards and conference travel). Included in this newsletter, you will find a form that you can complete and return to ASPECT to make a contribution to ASPECT's programs (contributions to ASPECT are tax deductible).

Fifth, thanks to new initiatives such as the "Friends of ASPECT" fund and other funding opportunities that I am pursuing, we have created new awards and recognition for our students. Recently, we created the new ASPECT Outstanding Dissertation Awards. These awards were announced at our Fall 2011 Kick-Off Event and Award Ceremony. ASPECT's first two Outstanding Dissertation awardees were Michael Butera (2010 Award) and Juan Carlos Sierra (2011 Award), our first two ASPECT graduates and alumni. I expect to have strong competition for the 2012 Outstanding Dissertation Award.

Finally, my task as ASPECT Director is to help students successfully complete their dissertations and graduate from Virginia Tech and to position them as best as possible in

the academic job market. To assist them in this endeavor, I have organized regular sessions on "How to Apply for Jobs" where ASPECT students can ask all sort of "jobs" questions. In this initiative, several faculty colleagues will assist me. Our initial session in November 2011 was very well received. We are off to a good start.

I am very optimistic about the future of the ASPECT program. Our students are engaged, eager to conduct innovative research, and dedicated to the program and its thriving intellectual life. As already evidenced through some of the achievements noted above, ASPECT is on a steady path of academic and programmatic excellence, one that I believe will soon make ASPECT *the* place in the United States where to conduct creative interdisciplinary and theoretical research at the intersection of the Humanities, the Social Sciences, and the Arts.

With warmest wishes,

François Debrix
ASPECT Director

Spotlight: Damion Blake

The ASPECT Ph.D program here at Virginia Tech offered me the opportunity to engage in theoretical and policy relevant courses and seminars. These course offerings helped me tremendously in selecting a topic for my dissertation research and the area that I intend to continue my post-doctoral scholarship and research. ASPECT's embrace of professional development courses is well founded; they have shaped my approach to the professorate. Building a dossier of conference presentations, a teaching portfolio and experience as well as opportunities for funded research are some of the benefits that I have gained as an ASPECT student.

I am now ABD and a Ph.D candidate in my 4th year in the ASPECT program. My area of research interest is Governance and organized crime in the Caribbean and Latin America. For my dissertation, I am focusing on the impact that non-state criminal actors have on the processes of

governance in the Caribbean state of Jamaica. My research takes into account issues of drug and gun trafficking, transnational organized crime and the impact of neo-liberal economic shifts and policies on organized crime, gang culture and the power of non-state actors like the mafia.

My interdisciplinary training and research topic developed through the ASPECT program impressed the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and I was awarded a 2010-2011 Doctoral Fellowship for field research in Jamaica. The SSRC program, Drugs, Security and Democracy Fellowship (DSD) is co-sponsored by the SSRC, the Open Society Foundation and the Universidad de los Andes in Columbia. The DSD offers funding to policy relevant research for dissertation students and post-doctoral scholars. In many ways I owe this award to the ASPECT program with its interdisciplinary thrust and the policy significance of

(Continued: see "Spotlight")



Damion Blake, ASPECT
PhD Candidate

ASPECT Fall Event: *We Are Egypt...Recap*

By Heba El-Shazli

The film, *We Are Egypt - Voices Leading to Revolution*, was screened at the GLC's Auditorium October 20, 2011, and 220 students, staff and faculty attended the two-hour event. A wide range of the VT community was in attendance including undergraduates from (Political Science and English); graduate students (ASPECT, Religion and Culture, Philosophy and History), and professors from a variety of departments. Plus, I met students and community leaders from the VT Egyptian community.

The film's director, Lillie Paquette, spoke for about 15 minutes to introduce the film and answered audience questions for about 35 minutes at its conclusion.

The Collegiate Times article on this event can be found at: <http://www.collegiatetimes.com/>



Photo from the Fall 2011, *We Are Egypt*, publicity flyer.

Continued from "Spotlight"

the varied subjects we investigate in our courses. The SSRC awarded 17 dissertation and post-doctoral scholars funding this year 2010-2011. ASPECT I think is well positioned to continue to attract and produced some of the best and brightest scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences both at the national and international levels.



Ms. Heba El-Shazli, First Year, ASPECT Ph.D Student. Heba also organized the Fall 2011 ASPECT event, "We Are Egypt."

From Scott Tate:

Lefebvre, Love, & Struggle: Spatial Dialectics, by Rob Shields. This is the most accessible and comprehensive overview of Henri Lefebvre's contributions to critical social theory. I recommend it because of the breadth of Lefebvre's writings that have influenced disciplines ranging from art to philosophy to urban planning. Most notably, Lefebvre's work on spatial theory and the complex dialectical nature of space, as both constructed and constructing, is of great interest.

Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation, by Jonathan Lear. This is a work of moral philosophy, exploring what it means to be confronted by the devastation of a cultural way of life, and also how a kind of "radical hope" is needed to shape a new way of life after

Book Recommendations from the ASPECT Community

From Heba El-Shazli, First Year ASPECT...

The Art of Not Being Governed by James C. Scott. Fascinating study of peoples who do not want to be governed by the state (core) and remain in the periphery. It is an interesting topic and brings various disciplines into the discussion

Civil Society - The History of an Idea by John Ehrenberg. This is an excellent history of the idea of civil society - its roots and where it is heading today. It is an often-used term/concept that is often misunderstood.

Arab Voices - What They Are Saying To Us, and Why It Matters, By James Zogby. Drawing on 40 years of experience, Zogby throws into stark relief the assumptions and biases that prevent understanding about this region. He provides an in-depth look at the myths about the Arab World, the policy blunders when we don't listen, and the all too rare successes when we do. Good and important to read to gain insight into an often misunderstood region on the front pages of the newspapers.

The Media Relations Department of Hizballah Wishes You a Happy Birthday: Unexpected Encounters in the Changing Middle East, By Neil MacFarquhar. A wonderfully written book that tells us about "normal people" like us who live in the Middle East and the challenges they face daily. He is trying to give us a glimpse behind all the war, conflict and suffering that we tend to hear/read about in the media. A delightful book that is difficult to put down until you finish reading it.

such devastation. The work explores this problem through the life of Chief Plenty Coup, the last leader of the Crow Nation. It is very readable, and bears much relevance for all kinds of places and peoples confronting devastating cultural change.

Belfast: Segregation, Violence, and the City, by Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh. This work draws from rich theoretical base to explore critically the impacts and meanings of segregation and difference, in a variety of forms, and how segregation and division is created, maintained, affected, and also at the same time creates, maintains, and affects experiences and understandings of the city.



Mr. Scott Tate, ABD ASPECT

SNAPSHOT: ASPECT Student Research Interests (Fall 2012)

Full Name	Year	Research Interest/Area	Major	Minor
Damion Keith Blake	4th	The State, Governance and Organized Crime: Studies from Latin America and the Caribbean	Political	Cultural
Jeremy Young Carter	4th	The intersection of Language and Mind as revealed in a large body of disciplines. Cultural, Neural, and Psycho linguistics, Literary theory and semiotics, as well as Phenomenological approaches within Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language.	Cultural	Ethical
Dana Stoker Cochran	4th	Appalachian studies; American labor/unionization; women's and gender studies; American history post-Civil War; social justice issues	Cultural	Social
Barbara Okker Hassell	4th	The social-religious roles of resistance by women during the Nazi Germany.	Cultural	Social
Robert Kirsch	4th	Political Responses to Financial Instability	Political	Cultural
Roque Martin Saavedra	4th	Political Economy; legal theory, gender and minority studies, urban theory	Political	Cultural
Reed W. Taylor	4th	Women and gender in Islam: Muslim feminisms, agency, and political activism. Feminist theory: postcolonial, queer, and religious feminisms. Sexuality and religious ethics. Feminist pedagogy: interdisciplinary methodologies, Indigenous knowledge, and civic engagement	Political	Social
Xiaochen Zhang	4th	Climate Change Governance and Global Economic Transformation	Political	Social
Seth James Bartee	3rd	American intellectual history; historiography/historical methodology; the history of philosophy	Social	Political
Jordan Hill	3rd	The relationship between violence, memory and identity in the modern (post-1900) United States	Cultural	Social
Michele James-Deramo	3rd	Intersectionalities, ethnographic methodologies; third space subjectivities; forced migration and women	Cultural	Social
Lyusyena Kirakosyan	3rd	NGOs, social justice, disability	Ethical	Political
Shien-Hauh Leu	3rd	The meaning of pedophilia in a broad sense arguing the prohibition against pedophilia is not to protect minors from exploitation, but rather authorizes exploitation of adults. My project does not seek to promote pedophilia in any way, but rather to underscore its co-optation as a technology of class warfare.	Cultural	Political
Pamela Ann Mullins-Baker	3rd	Colonial-Post Colonial Sub-Saharan Africa, Atlantic Triangular trade, Race and representation	Culture	Political
Nina Vest Salmon	3rd	Race, power, oppress, and the unintended consequences of integration using the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia as a case study.	Cultural	Social
Aaron Stoller	3rd	Post-secondary education, particularly the relationship between teaching, learning and knowing, and the aims of education	Social	Cultural
Scott Tate	3rd	Concerns of place identity, spatial theory, and urban development and change. Particularly with the inclusion or exclusion of marginal groups and perspectives in community change and development efforts. Related research interests include arts and culture-based development; civic engagement; community-based entrepreneurship; inclusion and diversity; participatory practice; democratic governance; cultural policy; and community resiliency and capacity.	Cultural	Political

Marc Thomas	3rd	Democracy, specifically direct and participatory forms. Past projects have utilized race theory to explore political systems in the Caribbean and Africa. Also, a broad interest in issues of power, identity and ethnicity.	Political	Social
Alfonso Vergaray	3rd	History of political philosophy, liberalism and its critics, American political thought, religion and politics, and the capabilities approach	Political	Social
Dana C. Volk	3rd	Racial and Social Passing	Cultural	Social
Joseph A. Forte	2nd	The interrelation of popular culture, consumption, identity, and citizenship--specifically the degree to which popular media depictions of "cool" have strengthened an American tendency to seek political agency, define social problems, and formulate perceived solutions within an individualized mode	Cultural	Social
Komal K. Dhillon	2nd	Pigmentocracy, whiteness studies and skin bleaching in India examined through the feminist lenses of postcolonial and intersectionality theories.	Cultural	Social
Jennifer Lawrence	2nd	Environment, Social Justice, Critical Theory	Political	Cultural
Robert Andrew (Drew) Wallace	2nd	Exploring the new paradigm in marketing through social media technologies.	Social	Cultural
Ryan E. Artrip	1st	Primarily, 19th and 20th century continental philosophy, modern political and social theory, critical theory, and ethical theory. Additionally, the intersections of existentialism and Marxist thought; the study of existential experience within modernity and capitalism via alienation, isolation and anxiety; what it means to exist as a subject tethered to capital through its technologies within hyper-consumptive but bureaucratically controlled technological society.	Ethical	Political
Richard Garry Lazell Curtis	1st	Engagement outside of the deemed regular space of participation (i.e. the voting booth). Specifically, in the relationship between democratic engagement, public space, and sovereign power.	Political	Social
Heba F. El-Shazli	1st	"Allah at the Ballot Box" ~ the future of governance, secularism and Islam (comparative study: Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey)	Political	Cultural
Elizabeth Jamison	1st	Organizational cultures governing influence on corporate social responsibility behaviors. Additional broad research interests in migration, power, identity, leadership, and gender.	Social	Political
Holly Jordan	1st	The effects of political conflict on religious practice, most specifically in Israel and Palestine.	Political	Cultural
Mohsen Manteghi	1st		Political	Cultural
Christian Matheis	1st	Ethics, political philosophy, epistemology, philosophies of community, philosophies of liberation in Latin American thought, feminist critical social theory, narrative theory, community organizing, activism and pedagogy.	Ethical	Political
Edwin Kent Morris	1st	Sovereignty, power, and domination in the US.	Political	Social
Julie Walters Steele	1st	Women in the Labor Force; American Indian Governance	Ethical	Cultural
Tyler Edward Suggs	1st	The political and social applications of virtue ethics in a contemporary setting.	Political	Ethical

Continued from "Debrix"

Debrix has published more than 20 peer-reviewed journal articles in interdisciplinary theory journals across the social sciences and humanities such as *Millennium*, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Alternatives*, *Geopolitics*, *New Political Science*, *Peace and Change*, *Études Internationales*, *Telos*, *Postmodern Culture*, and *International Political Sociology*, among others. Over the past 15 years, Debrix has translated (from French into English) many of French critical social theorist Jean Baudrillard's essays for the journal *C-Theory*, a Web-based international journal of theory, technology, and culture. He has also published close to 20 book chapters and written several critical essays on current international events for philosophical reviews in Japan such as "Jokyo (Situation)" and "Associé."

Debrix received his Ph.D. and a Master's degree from Purdue University, and he holds two bachelor's degrees: one in English and Spanish literatures from the University of Haute Normandie, France; the other in International Relations, International Law, and Diplomatic History from the Institute of Political Science (Sciences Po.) in Strasbourg, France.

Featured ASPECT Events for Spring 2012

ASPECT will host a mini-conference on March 12-13. The theme of the conference this year will be 'Sovereign Violence: Rethinking Ethics, Politics, History, and Culture in the Wake of Terror.' On day 1 of the conference, we will have a plenary session with three guest-speakers: Dr. Kennan Ferguson (a political theorist from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee); Dr. Alison Mountz (a human geographer/social theorist from Syracuse University); and Dr. Richard Boothby (a philosopher/psychoanalytic theorist from Loyola-Maryland University). Each of them will speak for 20-30 minutes, in turn, on a topic related to the theme of the conference. On day 2 of this conference, we will have a full day of panel sessions with ASPECT students' presentations. We will feature our students' current research, and they will get feedback from the guest-speakers and the ASPECT community. A

few PGG doctoral students will present their work too, along with two doctoral students from outside Virginia Tech (one from Johns Hopkins University; and another from Florida International University). We are hoping that this year's ASPECT mini-conference can be repeated next year and becomes an annual ritual at Virginia Tech."

As for the Michael Hardt event, his lecture will be on Thursday February 23rd at 7 pm in the GLC auditorium. The title is "What To Do in a Crisis." Michael Hardt is the co-author with Antonio Negri of the famous thought-provoking trilogy of books *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*.

You can find more information about Michael Hardt and his prolific publication record here:

<http://romancestudies.duke.edu/people?Gurl=%2Ffaas%2FRomance&Uil=hardt&subpage=profile>

Pictured at Right: Virginia Tech faculty, conference guest speakers, and the students who were enrolled in the "Whiteness Beyond the West" course and helped organized the November 2011 conference. Five students were ASPECT Ph.D students, and the course instructors were Dr. Brett Shadle (History) and Dr. Paulo Polanah (Africana Studies).

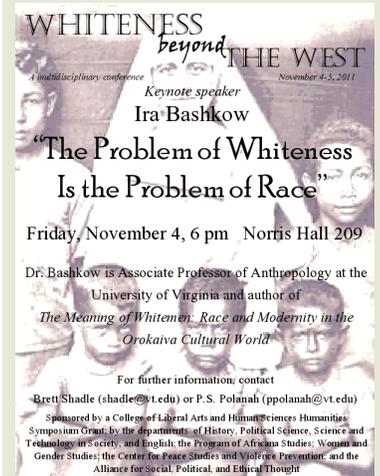
(More information of the "Whiteness Beyond the West" conference on the following page.)



Fall Conference: *Whiteness Beyond the West*

In November 2011, ASPECT co-sponsored the *Whiteness Beyond the West* conference, which proved to be an overwhelming success. The conference signified the increasing scholarly and popular attention directed to whiteness studies and provided a much needed forum for examining a wide array of topics. The attendees included prominent whiteness scholars from a variety of disciplinary background. Ira Bashkow, an anthropologist from the University of Virginia gave a memorable keynote lecture that explored whiteness as a cloak of invisibility that is problematically excluded in race categorizations. Amongst the presenters were ASPECT students Marc Thomas (“Apartheid in Jamaica: An Examination of White Supremacy and its Limits from Slavery to 1970”), Komal Dhillon, (“Illuminating the Dark Side of Whiteness: Pigmentocracy and Gender”), and Christian Matheis (“The Legend of the White-ness Monster: Getting ‘the West’ Beyond Whiteness”), as well as core ASPECT faculty Dr. Brett Shadle (“Poor Whites, Jewganda, and Raving Dutchmen: Civilization and Whiteness in Early Colonial Kenya”).

Other conference topics spanned global issues from indentured Chinese labor in early 20th century South Africa and colonial whiteness in Liberia to the feminization of Jewish men in Kenya and the mimicry of whiteness, just to name a few. The breadth of these conference topics illustrate the far reaching and diverse impacts of the area of whiteness studies, while providing further elucidation to a small but growing field and one that is crucial to understanding of global, cultural and socioeconomic issues.



Flyer used to advertise the Fall 2011 Conference: “Whiteness Beyond the West.” Co-sponsored by ASPECT.

ASPECT Student Association 2011/2012 Officers: Holly Jordan, President; Kent Morris, Vice President; Komal Dhillon, Treasurer; and Eli Jamison, Newsletter Editor.

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