



## NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

### **Parts of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the narrative portion of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and applicants are urged to prepare a proposal that reflects their unique project and aspirations.

Prospective applicants should consult the application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/neh-mellon-fellowships-digital-publication> for instructions.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Research Division staff well before a grant deadline.

This attachment only contains the narrative, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

**The application format has been changed since this application was submitted.** You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above link).

**Project Title:** *Democracy and Cultural Exchange after the Arab Spring*

**Institution:** Indiana University, Bloomington

**Project Director:** Jane E. Goodman

**Grant Program:** NEH-Mellon Fellowships for Digital Publication

**Overview:** Cultural exchange through the arts has long been popular with both governments and private institutions. From the world's fairs of the 1800s to the global festivals of today, traveling performing groups have been charged with representing their cultural heritage for foreign audiences. Yet such encounters are typically viewed as one-way exchanges: the traveling troupe comes from somewhere else to display and explain their artistic traditions to host country audiences. In this project, by contrast, I view cultural exchange as a process that is both mutual and multidimensional. I will explore problems of cultural translation, or the act of conveying one group's history and experiences in terms that another group can understand, through in-depth study of an upcoming US government-sponsored tour by the Algerian theater troupe Istijmam. I seek an NEH-Mellon Fellowship for Digital Publication to write a video-enhanced e-book that reflects on how intercultural exchange is envisioned and experienced in the wake of the Arab Spring. Titled *On Tour: Algerian Actors in the United States*, the book is under contract with Indiana University Press for delivery on January 1, 2018. As a multimedia work, *On Tour* will enable readers to experience (via video) the events analyzed in the text as well as to explore primary research materials (such as theatrical scripts) that cannot be accessed via a traditional print book.

Istijmam is an experimental theater collaborative that brings contemporary Western theatrical perspectives to bear on indigenous Algerian theatrical traditions. On this tour they will present the play *The Apples* by Algerian playwright Abdelkader Alloula, who was assassinated in 1994 by Islamist insurgents because of his commitment to secular democracy and political pluralism. Written in 1992 following a coup d'état that ended Algeria's brief experiment with democracy, the play dramatizes the hardships that permeate daily life in Algeria and much of the Arab world. While US audiences may be familiar with recent Arab Spring events, most are unaware that Algerians experienced similar developments 20 years earlier and still contend with the consequences. The play conveys the explosive frustrations that Algerians experienced in the aftermath of that country's 1988 uprising, which toppled 30 years of single-party dictatorship but led to a decade of civil war and over 250,000 deaths. Quotations from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* are woven throughout the play to comment on the dangers of political ambition, the value of freedom, and what it means to love one's country while rejecting its rulers—issues that resonate with particular poignancy in contemporary discourses surrounding the Arab region.

Istijmam was selected by Center Stage, a program created by the US State Department to bring artists from underrepresented countries to the US to promote cross-cultural dialogue. My project begins in Algeria (August 2016), where I will observe the troupe in rehearsal. I will follow Istijmam as they embark on a month-long US tour in September. The tour opens in Washington, DC on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage and moves to the Midwest, New England, and New York. By following the Algerians as they move from their own country to the US, I reverse the traditional direction of much anthropological work, which typically features Western scholars traveling abroad to study artists in their own environments. I will show that actors and audiences alike must grapple with questions of cultural translation as they confront new views of their own culture and of each other's through the performance of the play. I have been conducting research with Istijmam in Algeria since 2008. (For more on the troupe and the tour, see <http://centerstageus.org/artists/istijmam>)

**Approach:** In the humanities, intercultural exchange has been understood as a problem of translation not only between languages but also between cultures. My approach to translation develops the long-standing mandate to “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (aaanet.org). My starting premise is that the relationship between familiarity and strangeness is neither static nor polarized. As the Algerian actors move between nations and languages, and across roles of artist, tourist, consumer, and North African Arab citizen in the US, precisely what constitutes the “familiar” and the “strange” will be continuously shifting. My book, in turn, will make American culture and society strange for American readers by enabling them to see through the Algerian actors' eyes. I examine how what the

actors experience as familiar or as strange fluctuates throughout the tour. At the same time, I show how Algerians make their own culture strange to themselves in order to explain it to US audiences.

The play's title, *The Apples*, offers an example of how I will approach the relationship between familiarity and strangeness. In Algeria, the apple is an imported luxury product that only the elite can afford. An Algerian audience would know implicitly that an apple represents all that is foreign, unavailable, but strongly desired. It does not need to be stated. But how will Istijmam convey this to Americans, who can buy a cheap apple in every corner market? The actors will first need to hold up the apple reflexively – that is, make it strange to themselves by explicitly identifying what they had always taken for granted about what apples represent. Next they'll need to figure out how to make Algerian experiences of the apple come to seem familiar (or at least comprehensible) to US audiences by showing that apples in Algeria are as rare as caviar in the US. US audiences will undergo a similar process as they come to understand that their own experiences of apples are not shared in Algeria. More broadly, the apple will need to be situated in a political and cultural history that shows how authoritarian states like Algeria benefit the elites while the general population suffers. Apples come to symbolize the economic marginalization and political exclusion that have led to the recent uprisings across the Arab world. My research investigates how Istijmam reworks the script and performs the play so as to enable the layered meanings symbolized by apples to become comprehensible to their audiences in the US. I investigate the ways Algerian actors tack back and forth between the attempt to make strange to themselves aspects of their own culture in order to represent it on stage and the need to make familiar to US audiences what they might otherwise perceive as different or strange.

**Work Plan:** The project addresses the relationship between familiarity and strangeness in three substantive areas: the rehearsal residency in Algeria prior to the tour; the play itself (as text and performance); and the US tour. I envision five chapters, the first of which will be drafted before the fellowship begins: (1) "Istijmam and Algerian Theater" introduces the troupe and the Center Stage project, and situates the troupe in a history of Algerian theater (Oct.–Dec. 2016); (2) "Apples in Algeria" uses the *Apples* script as a springboard for an account of Algeria's contemporary political history (Jan.– March 2017); (3) "In Residence" analyzes rehearsals in Algeria, foregrounding how the script and staging are reworked for US audiences and featuring how the actors envision their upcoming tour (April–June 2017); (4) "Apples in America" analyzes performances in the US and interactions with host institutions and audiences (July–Sept. 2017); (5) "On the Road" focuses on unstaged cultural encounters at tourist sites, in stores, at airports, or on city streets in the US (Oct.–Dec. 2017). The work plan for each chapter includes both writing and preparation of digital materials. For assistance with digital file preparation, I have received funding for an assistant from Indiana University's Institute for Digital Arts and Humanities.

The NEH fellowship would enable me to devote 100 percent of my time to writing the manuscript and preparing accompanying digital files. The material on which the book is based will be gathered through participant observation, fieldnotes, video recordings, and extended qualitative interviews with troupe members, US State Department and host institution staff, and spectators. Research will be completed by October 2016 and has been separately funded by Mellon and my home institution.

**Methods:** I draw together methodologies developed in cultural and linguistic anthropology, performance studies, theater studies, and translation studies, as follows: (1) I use intertextual analysis to work with the script. I focus on what is retained and what is transformed for US audiences, and I show how the actors use the text to grapple with the relationship between their own history and Anglo-American culture. In dialogue with a growing body of scholarship on Shakespeare adaptations into Arabic, I study how the Bard is invoked to address Algerian cultural politics, and I explore what US audiences make of this appropriation. (2) I use performance analysis to study how actors move among various roles both on- and offstage via shifts in vocal inflection, body language, and language use (English, French, Arabic). (3) I investigate how the troupe uses the theatrical techniques known as

“identification” and “distanciation,” and I connect these terms (developed in theater studies) to the notions of familiarity and strangeness developed within the humanities. I also extend this theatrical rubric beyond the stage, asking when, where, how, and why actors identify with or distance themselves from aspects of each culture and how they accomplish each stance. (4) I use interviews with audience members and host institution personnel to address how spectators interpret the play.

**Competencies, Skills, and Access:** I have been working with musicians and actors in Algeria since the early 1990s. My first project resulted in the book *Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video* (Indiana University Press, 2005). In 2008-9, as a Fulbright/SSRC/ACLS-NEH fellow, I conducted ten months of research with five Algerian theater troupes in the city of Oran, followed by shorter trips in 2010, 2011, and 2013 (see CV for resulting publications). Istijmam is one of the two troupes I have worked with most intensively. My previous research on Istijmam includes four months of notes and recordings of daily rehearsals, interviews, and script translations. I also compiled extensive documentation on Algerian theater history from five archives: Abdelkader Alloula Foundation; Algerian National Library; archives of the City of Oran; university libraries in Oran; and archives of the Mostaganem Festival of Amateur Theater. I will draw substantially on my previous research for Chapters 1 and 2. I received an invitation from Istijmam to observe their rehearsal residency, and from Istijmam and Center Stage to accompany the troupe on the US tour. Both organizations endorse the book project and are enthusiastic about using this tour to reflect on theater as a medium for cross-cultural exchange. The study has been approved by Indiana University’s Institutional Review Board (study #1602008672 N).

**Final Product and Dissemination:** *On Tour* will appeal to an interdisciplinary group of scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates interested in cross-cultural encounters, cultural difference, the Arab Spring, theater, or performance. Scholars of culture will be interested in how the “reverse ethnography” form (in which Algerians travel to the scholar’s home country and institution) enables a fresh approach to the long-standing relationship in the humanities between the familiar and the strange. Vivid digital material will enable undergraduate and other nonspecialist audiences to engage with Istijmam’s experiences in the US, to come to understand issues contemporary young Arabs face, and to see aspects of US culture through the actors’ eyes.

*On Tour* was solicited for the Indiana University Press series Public Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa, a leading venue for scholarship concerned with Arab popular culture. The book is contracted in both print and digital editions. The print edition will include URLs for related materials readers may access on a website: a video of the play; the script (in English and Arabic); footage of encounters on the road; and brief video interviews with actors, hosts, and spectators. The digital edition will include embedded videos and links to selected research materials, in the new “enhanced e-book” format that the Press has recently pioneered. Video recordings will also be archived at the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music and made available for classroom teaching, research, and other activities upon request. The book will significantly widen the impact of the Center Stage tour by making it available to broader audiences. Beyond the academy, I plan to use my material to develop corollary pieces of video-enhanced, accessible public scholarship for dissemination in venues such as sapiens.org, AllegraLaboratory.net, and the Huffington Post. The book contributes to the NEH’s “The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square” initiative by addressing issues of cultural and political polarization, particularly with regard to Muslims in the United States. Both the content of the play and the context of the tour exemplify the initiative’s aim of “bring[ing] the humanities into the public square and foster[ing] innovative ways to make scholarship relevant to contemporary issues.” Polarization of social groups often results from a failure of cultural translation. With its focus on intercultural exchange through the medium of theater, my project provides a timely example of how the perspective of the humanities can be used to address contemporary global challenges.