**Project: Narrating the Parallel Histories of Western Europe and the Middle East, 400-1000**

At the 2010 NEH Summer Institute in Barcelona, I launched the research project that I had proposed in the application essay. This project, envisioned as a monograph, will tell the parallel origins and developments of the West and Islam from 400 to 1000. Taking advantage of bibliographic resources available at Barcelona institutions including the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, the Universitat de Barcelona, and the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas Institut Milà i Fontanels, I read intensively on the historiography of the Germanic invasion and settlement in the Western Roman Empire. One particular topic that caught my eye was the question of Germanic ethnogenesis. I studied the debate internal to the field between Herwig Wolfram, Walter Pohl, and Walter Goffart on Germanic identity and migration. This dispute centers on the question of whether a distinct and coherent Germanic identity existed, if cohesive tribes migrated from place to place in search of a homeland, and whether the extant sources would really be able to shed light on these issues. I explored the works of Patrick Geary, Julia Smith, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Chris Wickham for the latest take on these issues. Though I found limited resources on Middle Eastern history in the Barcelona libraries, I was able to use my findings from research on the West and apply them to my thinking on the origins of the Arab peoples and the Arab conquests in interesting ways.

In addition to historiographic research, lectures, seminars, and informal conversations with visiting faculty as well as Institute participants also helped advance my project. Peregrine Horden’s lecture and seminar invigorated me to think of a human-experiential equivalent to the macro-geographic/ecological conceptualization and study of the Mediterranean basin. Engagement with the questions he asked about the Mediterranean as a cohesive geographic field helped me realize that my project, conceived originally and specifically as a juxtaposition of Western and Islamic history, could contribute to the reformation of Mediterranean history on the macro-level, rather than focusing on local places interconnected through travel and transmission. Readings assigned by Steven Epstein on the concept of race in the western Mediterranean forced my mind to focus and ask questions of the idea of ethnogenesis. Judith Cohen, Dan Selden, and Cynthia Tucker’s lectures and seminars both made clear to me that music, literature, art, and architecture were media and the means to define, preserve, and reproduce cultural forms, memories, values, and norms. As such, I need to explore how Germanic peoples and Arabs engaged with Roman cultural production and the role that
such forms played in helping establish and perpetuate some of the ideological notions of new societies.

Perhaps the most unexpected, invigorating, and rewarding aspect of my work at the Institute was the interactions I had with other participants. I shared ideas with experts in the field and took advantage of their knowledge of the Middle Ages. Likewise, I tested out a preliminary, but global, vision of my project with a broad, expert, and supportive audience of Europeanists and Middle Easternists. As an early modernist who is moving back in time to late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the Institute represented the an opportunity to form a new community. In particular, I met a group of scholars interested in thinking about the interconnections between Iberia and North Africa in the Middle Ages and early modern period. An unexpected but exciting outcome of the Institute was the formation of a new scholarly organization called the Spain-North Africa Project (SNAP), founded by eleven members.