

GRADUATION DAY CEREMONY

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Master in International Relations

By Laurel Zigerelli

Friends, family, professors, administrators, and colleagues, welcome. Thank you all for being here to celebrate this moment together.

My name is Laurel Zigerelli and let me first say to my fellow ASERI students: congratulations! We did it.

I must say a special thank you to Professor Vittorio Emanuele Parsi, the director of ASERI, Professor Roberto Zoboli, the director of our Master in International Relations program, and Teresa Maria Esposito, our faithful tutor. Thank you all for your hard work and constant support to help us to achieve our academic and professional goals.

For those of you visiting us, allow me a few moments to describe our Master in International Relations program and the ASERI experience.

I can talk about our class in terms of numbers. We represented 5 continents, 11 countries... and San Francisco, California. Over the course of 6 months of lessons, we received instruction from 43 professors during more than 339 hours -- or 20,340 minutes -- of lessons in our sometimes very warm classroom. Furthermore, we completed 14 exams, 6 papers, and 3 presentations. Our combined project work totaled more than 700 pages.

But more than the numbers, the ASERI experience is different because of the people. Everyone made sacrifices - some financial, some physical, and some emotional - to spend this year here. We came from varied backgrounds as well. Some arrived at ASERI straight after completing their bachelor's degree and some had spent nearly 20 years in the working world before deciding to study again. Our class had lawyers, teachers, linguists, and world travelers. Rather than being barriers, our differences deepened our discussions.

Now I must say a few words to my colleagues. You put a human face to the topics that we discussed in class. Through your words, actions, and even food from your countries, you created learning opportunities outside of our reading material. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to see the world through your eyes.

To my fellow Americans: though we had very different perspectives, we were still able to work together and enjoy each other's company, a lesson that I hope that our politicians learn soon. I appreciated being able to celebrate and struggle over aspects our nation's reputation with you.

To my South American colleagues: you were few in number but you were great in heart. Though your region may have had a turbulent past, your positive attitude was constant.

To our representatives from Africa: thank you for your courage to stand up against the stereotypes about your continent. You were excellent ambassadors of Africa and we are excited to see what happens in Africa in the coming years.

To my classmates from the Middle East: thank you for humanizing and providing context for the stories that we hear in current events. You taught us about your region's rich history and inspired us to do more to assist those who are suffering.

And to the Europeans: you continuously showed that former enemies in war can be future partners in peace. While you speak different languages and follow different traditions, the European Union -- much like our class -- is proof that differences do not have to divide a people.

In particular, I must thank the Italians. You welcomed me into your country even though I am not as Italian in practice as my surname suggests. From your translation assistance to your energetic political discussions, you constantly entertained, informed, and helped us foreigners. We are forever grateful to you.

I came to Milan hoping to learn about history, in particular the history of where my family came from. While I did accomplish my goal, more importantly, I learned about the future. After this year spent at ASERI, I know that my classmates and I are a few steps closer to understanding the world that we all share. Through our lessons and experiences, we are better equipped to be leaders in a brighter future. Thank you.

Master in International Cooperation and Development

By Gaia Margot Verhulst

Welcome guests, family and friends, professors and the team of ASERI and Università Cattolica, I was granted the opportunity to speak in behalf of the 2015 Master Class in International Cooperation and Development and I would like to take this opportunity to express a few words of gratitude.

Thank you Professor Beretta and the entire ASERI team for offering us a great Master program. The unique feature of combining students from all over the world with professional development practitioners really was the best way to provide us with a simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic picture of the international development field. We still don't know exactly what is ahead of us, but at least we have a realistic idea.

That's why I would like to thank the ASERI and visiting professors for taking time out of their schedules to exchange their experiences with us in a very personal and animated way. Thank you for challenging our mind-sets and thank you for providing us with the necessary knowledge and tools.

Thank you Julieth and Cristina, for their ongoing support throughout the year and answering question after question after question.

Thank you to all of our parents, families, loved ones and friends that have made it possible for us to be here and that have supported us along the way.

And finally, thank you and congratulations to the entire 2015 Master Class in International Cooperation and Development. Meeting all of you was an experience that has made this past year incredibly valuable. I would not have made the same personal progress if it wasn't for exchanging perspectives and working together with all of you.

When we met a little under 12 months ago, in our beautiful class room at ASERI, most of us were uncertain about what to expect. Some of us came with questions, some of us came with ambitions, some of us came with hope and some of us came with doubts. As we leave today, we still have questions and we still have doubts. But we are leaving with one thing in common: hope. Hope to make a meaningful contribution to the world, hope to do it better than previous generations, hope to build fulfilling careers and hope to continue following our dreams. Although it wasn't always easy.

I think we can all remember the slight wave of panic that came over us during our first class of economics. I am sure we all have memories of one of our professors telling us about his or her field experience that will stick with us forever. I know that we all enjoyed discovering the differences and similarities between one another. I am certain that many of us are still working on their Things-to-do-while-I-live-in-Milan list. I know we all had a moment of despair during our search for an internship and the writing of our Project Work. And finally, I believe we all have a

sense of proudness as we stand here today to receive our master diplomas in International Cooperation and Development.

So what's next for us? The future will always be uncertain but I would sum it up in one word: the world. As cliché as it may sound, our next stop is the world. We are fortunate to have already embarked on that journey as this master has been a great international experience with ourselves functioning as representatives from all over the world.

Italy, The United States, Kenya, The United Kingdom, Ghana, Colombia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Romania, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Belgium. The 25 of us came from 14 countries and collectively we have travelled to an additional 9 countries for our internships including Switzerland, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, France, Peru, Chile, Uganda and South Africa. And this is not counting the countries many of us travelled to whenever our schedule allowed us some free time.

Another 68 countries to go, if we count by the official United Nations list. There is an entire world out there for us to explore, to experience and make a meaningful contribution to. And that is what this master has prepared us for: a career in international development. What a great way to have started this journey here.

That's why I'm certain that our paths will cross again – in one way or another – sometime and somewhere. Personally, I can not wait for that day and I am looking forward to seeing what we will achieve from today on.

Until that day, I wish all of you the best of luck. And don't forget to smile!

Once again, thank you, congratulations and see you soon.

Master in Economics and International Policies

By Fulvio Dal Castello

Dear Professors. Dear Colleagues.

Dear Parents. Dear Friends.

Dear Guests.

Good Afternoon.

I'm very glad to be here today having the opportunity to speak in such an important and significant occasion, especially in a beautiful hall which has a big meaning for me, having previously obtained my bachelor in this University.

This special Master's has been set up by two important Universities: the University of Lugano – USI – and the Graduate School of Economics and International Relations of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – ASERI.

The atmosphere in both locations was quiet and proactive that was ideal to get the best from every student, moreover the international environment helped us to increase our knowledge. Surely it wasn't easy to get used to the fast pace of study especially during exams, but now I recall that moments with a great pleasure as we learnt how to work under pressure.

The reason why I chose this Master's was the will to deepen my knowledge in economics, but also to explore other academic fields such as law and political sciences and to analyze their connections.

The Master course has not disappointed my expectations. I have attended courses taught by some of the world best professors who gave us instruments to evaluate different situations from an international point of view. Thanks to this approach we gained an overall vision of this society and we could look to many other aspects with a critical perspective.

After the year spent between USI and ASERI, I decided to extend my period of study with an extra semester at Charles University of Prague, reaching 30 credits. My goal was to deepen Banking and Finance topics, enlarging my knowledge in the economic field. My success in Czech Republic was possible thanks to the academic preparation and the internalization that both these previous experiences gave me.

To liven up our store of knowledge, finally, we were able to test through internship all our knowledge learnt during the MEPIN and making us more close with the real job's world.

This experience gave us the unique opportunity to test ourselves in a very challenging way. A deep determination were required, and the efforts were widely rewarded.

Nevertheless, the friendships born during this master have become important points of reference in our life.

For all these reasons I would like to thank all the people who made this route possible: all the professors – both from USI and ASERI – who taught us interesting subjects and innovative methods of analysis; Professor Parsi and Professor Cencini, our Master's directors.

Let me say a special thanks to Vittoria Campagna. She has been the point of reference for all the MEPIN students, always kind and available. I want express her my best wishes for her motherhood. Thanks to Irene Marangoni who made possible a great dissertation day and making it a special day for all of us.

Last but not least thanks to all ASERI and USI staff and to Nadia Moscato, always ready to answer to all our questions.

Finally I had like to end saying good luck to everyone, hoping that all our dreams become true.

Grazie.

Master in Middle Eastern Studies

By Libera Chiara D'Acunto

Good afternoon to everyone.

I would like to thank each of you for being here in such a joyful day for us.

When I have been asked to give this speech I felt honoured, being this the perfect occasion for me to tell you my personal experience as a student of the Master in Middle Eastern Studies at ASERI, giving you an idea of some of the feelings that I shared with my colleagues during this journey.

After obtaining my Master's degree in International Studies at the University of Siena, following my Erasmus Placement at the Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law (CIMEL) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, I applied for this Master's course because I wanted to deepen my knowledge of the MENA region and the Arab-Muslim world, being that of the interaction between Islam and human rights and particularly women's rights in Islam a subject very close to my heart.

In line with my expectations, this Master provided me with specific competencies on the region, through a multidisciplinary lens, allowing me to study academically topics that before I had only addressed through personal researches and gave me the chance to put all this into practice, through a three-month internship with Musawah, the Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family, based at Sisters in Islam in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This last year at ASERI was a very intensive journey.

During the first six months, we were fully immersed in classes and exams going at a very fast pace, with many challenging moments. We were privileged to receive the teachings of a distinguished international faculty, with scholars and professionals coming from all over the world, and to catch the perspective of each of them.

Every class was an occasion for us to learn, to think, to ask, to wonder, to discuss, to question. All the subjects that we studied were like pieces of an harmonious puzzle: we were asked to put all of them together, in a way that at the end of the day it could finally make sense.

What I appreciated most is the approach of this Master: we have been taught the importance of having a critical attitude and always being curious, challenging stereotypes, refusing simplistic views, looking beyond the end of one's nose to understand such a complex and diverse reality like the Middle East. The MIMES guided us through all the nuances of this universe. This is exactly what we were looking for. We all shared a voracious curiosity and commitment to explore, with a view to broadening our horizons. With different backgrounds and nationalities and with a specific reason for being here, each of us gave something to the others, adding value to this experience.

In the second part of the Master, from July on, our paths separated for a while: Morocco, Germany, Netherlands, Iran, Italy. My path was to Malaysia, to join the team of Musawah and Sisters in Islam, the most courageous women I have ever met, who are telling to the whole world that Muslim women can see their rights inside the family recognised without abandoning their faith, fighting against the use and abuse of Islam to justify discriminations against women, claiming that reform of discriminatory family laws, that are men made laws and not divine, is both necessary and possible, to finally overcome the existing disconnect between law and reality.

The work of Musawah and SIS proves that Muslim women do not need to be saved!

Thanks to this Master I found the courage to go to the other side of the world, using the knowledge acquired to get an hands-on experience, giving a concrete contribution to the cause I am passionately devoted to, and writing my research project on that experience.

Today we are living a very sad period in human history, in which prejudices and easy associations on Islam are stronger than ever. I think the burden of spreading the knowledge we have acquired and are acquiring is on us, having chosen this field.

This Master taught us the importance of overcoming the dichotomy 'we/the others', challenging Islamophobic and orientalist views, and of promoting a mutual comprehension and recognition, without assuming the superiority or inferiority of one or the other.

We started this Master by reading Edward Said's book "Orientalism", and I believe it could make sense to close it by quoting Said's words, when he questioned: «Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?».

This Master and my internship in Malaysia enriched me, made me a stronger person, improved my critical thinking, further opening my mind.

When I have been asked to give this speech I also thought that this could be the occasion to finally say thank you to those who made all this possible.

I would like to thank ASERI, and particularly Professor Riccardo Redaelli, Director of the MIMES, Professor Vittorio Emanuele Parsi, Director of ASERI, Ms. Nadia Moscato and Ms. Elisa Creperio. Special thanks go to Dr. Anna Lisa Pinchetti, Program Assistant of the MIMES, for her continuous support during all this year.

I am grateful to each of the professors we have met for inspiring and enriching us, and in particular to Professor Massimo Papa, our professor of Islamic law and supervisor of my research project, who encouraged me to leave for Malaysia and guided me during this journey.

Allow me to personally say thank you to my family and my boyfriend Giuseppe who are here today, without whose support I could not have made it, for being patient during my stay in Malaysia and giving me the necessary strength to carry on. And thanks to Latifah and Kwok Yew and to little McG for being a family to me in Malaysia.

Thanks to the amazing team of Musawah and Sisters in Islam, for allowing me to be part of them during this incredible summer and for making me feel at home even if I was thousands of kilometres far away from home. I will continue to support them forever.

I would like to show my gratitude to INPS, for funding my Master with a scholarship.

Thank you to all my colleagues. It was a delight to share this journey with you. Kant said that since the earth is round our destiny is to meet sooner or later. I hope we will share other experiences in the future. I wish all the best to all of them, also to those who could not join us today, and particularly to Taha, who is facing a difficult period and to whom we want to show our support.

We should congratulate ourselves for being the students of the first edition of this Master and I wish good luck to the future students of the MIMES.

At the end of this memorable journey, I am confident that the MIMES will help us to realise the dream of a career that could reflect our passions and emphasise the competencies we have acquired during a period of our life that has deeply transformed us.

Thank you for your attention.