The Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at NYU is a Title VI National Resource Center (NRC) for modern Middle Eastern Studies as named by the United States Department of Education. NRC support is essential to the Center's graduate program (area and language studies) and bolsters outreach programs to the NYU academic community, local educators, media and culture workers as well as the general public. Title VI funding, through its Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships, also enables important opportunities for NYU graduate students to intensively study the languages of the Middle East and South Asia (including Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Persian, Turkish and Urdu).
In Europe, as I write (August 16th), commemorations of the centenary of the First World War have ended. Commentaries, television programs, dramas, readings of poetry, diaries, novels and essays, concerts, films and photographs continue. Yet more books are published. W. B. Yeats’ famous poem of 1919, “The Second Coming,” is often quoted: “The blood-dimmed tide is loosed.”

In a kind of macabre counterpoint to these commemorations, themselves punctuated by the violence and potential of confrontation in the Ukraine, events throughout the Middle East, in Iraq, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank demand even more urgent attention from us, however helpless and hopeless we students may so often feel. Gaza is yet again the theatre of vicious destruction and promiscuous killing. “Israeli security” is given a quasi-sacred status. “Palestinian security” seldom seems the equal and necessary term in any serious engagement with the conflicts. Tired, shop-soiled and hollowed-out righteous denunciations, beyond parody and without shame, still threaten to drown out voices calling for stern and unsparing re-examination of histories, conflicts, ideologies, narratives and interests.

In the Middle East, the passionate intensity that fills the worst is currently as fearful as the lack of conviction of the best. We, students of the region, have little if any effect. It is tempting to see our small and scattered efforts, personal and institutional, to pose questions, challenge assumptions, struggle to find some understandings, however unstable and weak, as doomed to failure and irrelevance. When swamped by such feelings, I recall how, over a quarter of a century ago, I told Lebanese friends who had survived the brutalities of war and were either in exile, silenced, or underground, that there was no point continuing to try to write the study of violence on which I had been unsuccessfully working (or avoiding) for so long. The Lebanese wars were too overwhelming in their brutalities, the scale of suffering too terrible, the futility of this tiny academic project too evident, the pointlessness too clear. There was no possible benefit or interest for anyone. Just abandon writing, which in so many ways I desperately wanted to do.

My friends would have none of this self-abnegation and retreat from responsibility. I had to write as if it mattered. We lost, just for now or for an age, and that makes it even more important that you write. “As if” might be all there was and is, but it has its own imperative. Write.

So a small institute such as the Kevorkian Center must be supported; student numbers must be brought to the optimum level; outreach and events of all kinds must be constantly developed; the office must have new resources; there must be a new post of Clinical Professor and the university must support students to the limit, and encourage the faculty who teach and mentor them. They will make their own judgments about their responsibilities and their capabilities. We all go on as if we can, regardless of the apparently insignificant contribution to public understanding and awareness. What heartens me and so many of my colleagues is the commitment, intensity and determination of students, administrators and teachers to fulfill our shared responsibility. It has been a privilege to be director of the Kevorkian for the past eight years and to work with such dedicated colleagues. I thank all those who have contributed to the program’s remarkable strength.

—Michael Gilsenan, Director

The Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies
Reflections on Today’s Middle East

Faculty Roundtable

Helga Taiwi-Souri
Incoming Director of the Kevorkian Center, Associate Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication

Whatever I may have wished to write about vis-à-vis events in Israel-Palestine over the past year, have been superseded by the latest violence waged over Gaza. And about Gaza, there is so much I could choose to write about: military disproportionality, international law, human and humane stories from within the Gaza Strip, an analysis of the underlying issues at the heart of this conflict, an account of day-to-day events, a solution to politicians and diplomats... I have watched the drones fly and bombs drop overhead. I have written about Gaza before. I have been in Gaza while events in Israel-Palestine over the past year have been averaging 5,000 words a day reporting coming from Israel/Palestine, and in the process, moving on – I don’t know how – to assessing the political dynamics of parts of Northern Gaza. Further moves towards the anger of what I claim is a surrender to the West Bank and Gaza, and telecommunications in Iraq, NATO bombing of Serbian broadcasting capabilities. I am trying to capture these parallels between the US and Iran, seeing its economic performance measured in terms of economic growth, social welfare, rate of unemployment, or the number of high-profile protest cases. The massive windfall of oil revenue during Ahmadinejad’s presidency (approximately half a trillion dollars), has benefitted protection of civil rights and social needs have benefitted from the US government’s (including a hostile Congress), Khamenei, various competing Iranian political factions, and the myriad demands of citizens, many of whom voted him into office last summer. This is a critical, yet overlooked point in many of Rouhani’s presidential and post-elections. While his negotiation team is in Vienna sitting across the table from the P5+1 (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany), Rouhani and his advisors see ending the international crisis as essential for economic development. The broad sanctions imposed on Iran during Ahmadinejad’s tenure combined with mistrust and structural factors to undermine Iran’s economic performance. All of these have a pressing need to be written about, published, shared when violence reaches these heights. What is most difficult however is to place aside the feeling of being overwhelmed, even only for a minute, in order to thread these arguments into something I can share. For now, it is easier to keep banging on my keyboard and stay silent.
I would be unable to conclude that the events of the year since the military coup of July 3, 2013 that removed President Muhammad Mursi from power have put an end to the great uncertainty that surrounds the new regime and its potential. Perhaps the next year will bring some sense to the scene, but the present climate of uncertainty and political flux is likely to continue for some time. The events of the year since Mursi was toppled in February 2011, for democracy, have made it much more likely that the forces that toppled Mursi will again topple him.

The role of the military in politics after Mubarak fell – intervened to support, but now turned against him. But there are many reasons for Egyptians to have reason to at least a smidgin of optimism: his narrative does not mean that all the gains of the revolution and the popular uprising that toppled Husni Mubarak have been irretrievably lost.

So it would seem that though Husni Mubarak was toppled in February 2011, for democracy, the events of the year since as a political tool over the last years, however, the AKP is not the only responsible party. Corruption, in short, in the absence of any sign of a surveillance regime. The latter is certainly true for the law enforcement and judiciary. The latter use of authority for political gain and power. The latter is certainly true for the law enforcement and judiciary who contributed to butchering of the existing laws and those who contributed to an intelligence-operated surveillance state. It is very clear justice is not indexed to law in Turkey. Not, authoritarian and the establishment of an intelligence-operated surveillance state. The latter use of authority for political gain and power. The latter is certainly true for the law enforcement and judiciary who contributed to butchering of the existing laws and those who contributed to an intelligence-operated surveillance state. The latter are a few of the issues that are comfortable with the label of terrorism. These acts are associated with the Gülen movement. Looking at the general picture, we can say that instead of investigating protest waves under the label of terrorism, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- effects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- fects of oppression, there are ef- e
Lebanon cannot be stable as long as Syria (and now Iraq) is experiencing civil war. While events in Syria have a much more direct impact on Lebanon, those in Iraq are now tied to the war in Syria and thus to Lebanon as well. Lebanon only has two land borders, one with Syria and another with Israel—a state that has invaded and occupied Lebanon three times in its short history. The border is with Syria is much longer, porous and nearly impossible to control.

The Lebanese state has actually managed to function quite well since the end of the civil war in Lebanon and across the Middle East. Lebanon’s relative stability, and the continued functioning of the state, can in part be attributed to an investment in the status quo by elites as well as powerful regional actors, and in part to the relative autonomy of particular state institutions and bureaucracies—regardless of how “well” they function. While events could still spiral out of control, the political and economic threshold for state failure and all-out war is much higher than most people would think.

Two important factors contribute to these realities. The first is that Lebanese are truly war weary, and the horrifying succession of “spillovers” from Syria and now Iraq. Perhaps it is comforting to relive the popular, but false, fantasy of “other people’s wars on Lebanese lands.” Yet Lebanon was broken politically and economically, and polarized socially before 2011. Sunni-Shi’i sectarianism and violence has been on the rise in Lebanon since the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq, both by design and on account of the occupation forces’ incompe- tence. Lebanon has been in crisis, and dancing on the edge of civil war, since the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri and the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war.

For much of the 1970s, critical scholars of the modern Middle East embraced political economy—a mode of social-scientific inquiry that deployed imperialism/world system and class as central categories of analysis—in an effort to transform, with some success, a field that was still dominated by variants of modernization theory and Orientalism. After a relative decline that began in the 1980s, when culturalist approaches gained analytical prominence in the field, the last few years have witnessed a resurgence of academic interest in the study of politi- cal economy from fresh intellectual vantage points. New research has drawn on insights from environmental history, science and technology studies, network analysis, and heterodox Marxism to address questions about state and class formation, the accumulation of capital, the history and geography of ideas, and the production of geographies of power. Inspired by such new works, a group of current and former students from NYU’s Middle East and Islamic Studies Department decided to convene the workshop in the hopes of inviting critical reflections on the un- even career of political economy in Middle Eastern Studies and explor- ing new approaches and the areas of inquiry they can make possible.

The wide variety of approaches that were on display in the workshop papers gave rise to several fruitful discussions about methodology. One recurrent conversation was about the analytical possibilities and limita- tions of a method that posed, in a metaphor, to writing, sometimes quite radically, the range of possible agents/agents in a given socio-historical setting. While this approach has the valuable effect of exposing the con- straints embedded in material and symbolic hierarchies, it means that con- strue seeming to articulate social processes, several participants raised concerns about the way such a methodological rigor obscuring the structur- al hierarchies of power and the possibilities of subverting or overthrowing them that were once at the center of critical materialist scholarship.
for translating it into Persian in the future. The EWIC is an effort to de-emphasize the West as the object of knowledge production and East as the object of study to create greater intellectual exchange between, and among, scholars from different zones. Joseph also stressed the importance of making this body of knowledge available to young people in North America.

The question of personal biography arose several times throughout the conversation, whereby both scholars expressed their personal commitments to the study of women in Islam or in the Middle East. Both scholars reminded us that they were compelled to do this work, to write against the grain of tropes, and to participate in popular discourse in North America and Europe. Joseph and Abu-Lughod both grappled with the question of what citizenship entails, and several questions at the end of the night came from journalists about how to negotiate the immediate nature of field work, with the nuances of more rigorous scholarship.

Throughout the evening, Joseph, Abu-Lughod and Mikdashi all stressed the importance of feminist mentorship in the academy—recognizing that these relationships constitute a certain kind of activism. The articulation of these bonds often goes unnoticed or is sequenced to an acknowledgment page that so many of us might skip through, but these bonds are important reminders of struggles within the academy and outside of it.

The following day’s workshop at New York University’s Kavorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies was a more intimate conversation between the scholars of the Humanities Studio and graduate students. The workshop consisted of mini-seminars led by Mayaaj Farnam, Justin Dykx, Nidhi, Anjali Arondekar, and Joan Scott. The scholars of the Humanities Studio come from various disciplines, areas of study and methodological orientation, yet broadly their work complicates the dichotomy of privilege and secularity in particular ways. Studio members assigned various readings, which dealt with a range of topics, themes and sites—from recent debates over homosexuality and heteronormativity in the Iranian Penal Code to the question of transsexuality in Iran’s personal status laws in Egypt. Importantly, the participants and their research worked towards displacing “Islam” and “The Middle East” as the dominant site of inquiry for recent studies of secularism and religion by incorporating South Asia, Europe, North America and their diasporic minorities. Furthermore, participants made an effort to un-package slights, though these bonds are previously ignored by scholars of religion and secularism, and in particular the ways in which normative religious and sexual difference is produced and maintained by the secular state.

An important aim of this session was to engage graduate students and create a venue for intellectual exchange. The session closed with more participation from graduate students, where students returned to questions that remained unexplored, and also many others sought advice from the participants regarding their own projects. The workshop met once again the following day, but these sessions were limited to members of the workshop with members presenting drafts of new work. Overall, the talk and the workshop that followed represented new directions in the study of gender, sexuality and the body in the Middle East. This event was the first of Humanities Studio’s workshop series and symposia devoted to critical scholarship on the intersection of sex, religion, and secularity.

“Legacies” continued from page 11

Another set of recurring questions focused on the ways in which a new methodological of political economy could or should honor the contributions made over the last two decades by scholarship influenced by the cultural turn. One basic point of agreement among the participants was that such scholarship has tended to focus on the analysis of discursive and/or embodied forms of power and domination at the expense of the material contexts in which forms of thought and representation circulate and become possible. That is, several contributors expressed provocative reservations about the danger of ignoring the lessons of the cultural turn regarding the multiple modes and determinations of power. Of particular concern was the way in which the “new histories of capitalism” appearing both within and beyond Middle East Studies have often failed to address or incorporate the powerful insights of gender studies, many of which first emerged from a critique of the old methodology of political economy. The challenge, then, for scholars concerned to follow “new directions” in political economy lies in devising methods to engage questions of both structure and meaning together.

That even this small group of scholars encountered so many productive points of disagreement was ultimately a sign of the vibrancy of the field of scholarship. As Professor Zinovyak pointed out in the closing session of the workshop, “political economy” used to be a polite euphemism for Marxism in settings where the former was considered too radical. The latter could not be uttered. Though for many of the contributors, the Marxist tradition continues to offer insight and inspiration, the diverse approaches and political commitments on display at the workshop suggest that the future of political economy will be shaped by a broader set of trends in critical scholarship. We are therefore hopeful that this will be the first in a longer series of meetings and conversations that will attract a widening group of scholars in the field.
Spaces of Negotiation, Desire, and the State
A Review of Professing Selves

By Belle Cheves, NES '15

Chapter five and six arrive at the crux of Najmabadi's work – transcending events of historical note both before and after the Islamic Revolution. Her second through fourth chapters explore how the government sanctioned psychology of state apparatuses that intertwine with transsexuality and those considering sex change in Iran. While Najmabadi admittedly "attempts to map out a situated 'cartography of desire' in Iran that locates the contemporary discourses and practices of transsexuality in a longer historical trajectory and intersecting discursive sites, including medicine, religious doctrine, psychology, criminology, the family, trans activists, and practices of everyday life." It is not a cartography of desire in terms of expression of transsexuality and same-sex desire that ensues, but more notably a cartography of desire that "really" comes to the fore throughout her work. Through extensive interviews with trans activists, homosexuals, medical professionals, and state officials, Najmabadi establishes a far more nuanced relationship between the state, transsexuals, homosexuals, and those considering sex change in Iran.

A primary difficulty was that of translation, which in itself provides space in which to maneuver for trans and homosexual persons in Iran. First, trans activists translating terms coming from a gay international lexicon, such as gay, lesbian, and appropriating them in different manners made Najmabadi's task challenging in that terms may have very different meanings for different communities. Second, she notes that English-speaking academics in Iran may have different understandings of the non-specific pronoun subject. When Pascual Menoret arrived in Riyadh in 2001 to conduct doctoral fieldwork, the anthropologist did not intend to study the urban history and politics of the Saudi Arabian metropolis. When Menoret, currently at NYU Abu Dhabi, was interested in the politicization of Saudi youth, the researchers had hoped, has paradoxically created new social spaces. Najmabadi establishes a far more nuanced relationship between the state, transsexuals, homosexuals, and those considering sex change in Iran.

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A Review of Joyriding in Riyadh
By Matt Greene, NES '14

When Pascual Menoret arrived in Riyadh in 2001 to conduct doctoral fieldwork, the anthropologist did not intend to study the urban history and politics of the Saudi Arabian metropolis. When Menoret, currently at NYU Abu Dhabi, was interested in the politicization of Saudi youth, the researchers had hoped, has paradoxically created new social spaces. Najmabadi establishes a far more nuanced relationship between the state, transsexuals, homosexuals, and those considering sex change in Iran.

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Notes
Contested Identities, Conflicted Narratives

A Review of Apples of the Golan

By Ella Wind, NES ’15

A man places four apples on the ground in a rectangle. He steps back and forth between them. “The cell was sever-
ity constricted by 1.8 meters. I was sleeping with no mattress…

twenty-four hours in darkness. I was there for seventy-three
days.” He describes his torture: he was placed, exposed, in a
tire, and lashed with a cable. He was lifted by his arms and tied
up with ropes, left to support his body weight on the tips of his
feet for hours at a time. Other prisoners had their entire bodies
covered in cigarette burns.

Since what we are seeing is set in the Israeli-occupied Golan
Heights, the viewer is led to believe the subject is describing his
time in Israeli prisons. But the documentary Apples of the Golan
undercuts the viewer’s expectations with each scene. While the
scenes in which he describes his torturers are explicitly cut out so
not to reveal to us whose prison he was in, viewers familiar with
Druze from the Golan Heights, is in fact describing his time spent
in Syrian prisons for punishment for escaping across the closed
borders in search of his beloved, who had left to Damascus. If
this is a surprise to the viewer, it was no less of a surprise to him.
“I expected to be interrogated, but the first question they asked
me was, ‘Why did Mossad send you here?’... They took me and
we went downstairs... and to my surprise they start-
ed torturing me.” In this
scene, and throughout the film, we are continually
pulled in different direc-
tions as the complexity of
a society is revealed, with each character contradicting others
in ways that are sometimes subtle, sometimes glaring.

The characters throughout the film are slowly placed into dia-
logue with each other, at first in an unclear, disjointed way. The film
uses a complex, archetypal order, which privileges di-
aologue over sequence, and very effectively highlights the com-
plexities and ambiguities of life in the Golan Heights. We revisit
the same core characters throughout the film, at different points,
with their conversations spliced and rearranged, in a way that
eventually creates a conversation between them. But within each
scene, the subject is left to present their perspective on their own
terms; most people are interviewed by themselves in their own
home or work environments. In the beginning of the film, the
viewer may not even realize that a given topic has a great deal
more controversy around it than one interlocutor articulates until
someone with a contradicting perspective readaddresses the topic
much later in the film. The interviewees are never brought into ac-
tual face-to-face conversations, but through the unfolding of the
film, the presence of a larger dialogue between them becomes
increasingly explicit as more perspectives fill in the gaps, or com-
pletely overturn previous explanations.

Throughout the film, apples form a backdrop as they are sowed,
harvested, exported, and eaten. Apples are a focal part of Golani
identity. Since 2006, the only trade between the Golan and other
Syrian communities is through the export of apples, and it is one of
the few tangible connections between the Golan and Syria. They
are also a talking point that Golani use to define themselves as a
region within Syria, distinctive from other regions whose climates
are not as favorable to the cultivation of apples. It is thus no surprise that
they are also a source of distinction from the Israeli settlers nearby.

At times, such articulation takes a much more explicitly nationalist form,
folding in the symbolism of state emblems. We meet a farmer in the Golan
who slices an apple down the middle. He counts the five seeds. He goes on to explain the significance, making a connection to the Syrian
dance, form rock bands in their cramped bedrooms, and make fun of
their parents’ outdated values. Two of the main youths in the film drive
aimlessly around the town at night, smoking cigarettes and, with a Golani
twist, eating apples while listening to Arabic rap music about Damascus.

It is interesting to note that throughout all these discussions about Arab and Syrian identities, none of the film’s Golani interviewees ever
bring up their Arab neighbors under Israeli occupation, the Palestin-
ians. Their absence from the film is striking. It’s difficult to imagine that the residents of Majdal Shams do not define their identities in
relation to Palestinians – whether in contrast or affiliation. Many of the
daily struggles articulated by the Golani in the film are the same as
those of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza: the usurp-
ing of water and other natural resources by encroaching settlements,
severe limitations on freedom of movement, and even shared prison
cells. The question of Palestine’s absence from the film frames in the
background, though it is never clear whether this is attributable to the
interlocutors or a choice on the part of the filmmakers themselves. On
a similar note, female interviewees seem to be somewhat underrepre-
sented in the film, in contrast to the diversity of perspectives otherwise.

Apples of the Golan tries to show the many contested identities and na-
rratives in the Golan; as a result, we can only catch a glimpse of each aspect.
The film makes no claims to be a deep study of any one particular issue or aspect of life in the Golan Heights. But it is worth watching, as a nuanced
and sensitive sampling of life in a deeply contested slice of land whose in-
tricacies are paradoxically unknown across both its East and West borders.
When released, Marmoulak (2004) quickly became one of the most widely-watched and oft-quoted Iranian movies in the history of post-revolution Iranian cinema. The plot follows the story of Reza Marmoulak (Reza “the Lizard”), a thief with a propensity for climbing walls, who is arrested and subjected to harsh disciplinary treatment by the prison warden, who believes in a punishment-oriented system of rehabilitation. When Reza is hurt during a scuffle, he is taken to a hospital where he makes the acquaintance of a genial and kind-hearted cleric, who leaves his clerical robe and turban for Reza. Seeing this opportunity, Reza dons the cleric’s clothes, walks out of the hospital, and begins to make his way to the Turkish border, which he intends to cross illegally. On his way he is mistaken for the imam of a local mosque in a small town and a series of funny events ensue as he is called upon to lead prayers (which he doesn’t know), give sermons, and help the poor.

After a month of appearing in theaters in Iran, the movie was slowly banned in cities across the country by local authorities who deemed it an insult to clergy, even as Iran’s Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance insisted on the legality and acceptability of its screening. Meanwhile, discussion panels were held with the film’s director, Kamal Tabrizi, film critics and members of the clergy to analyze and discuss the film. In one interview, Tabrizi claimed that he made the movie in order to bridge the gap between the cleric and ordinary people and bring the two closer in mutual understanding. The international press billed the movie as a political satire that mocks religion and challenges clerical rule in Iran, while condemning barbaric treatment of inmates by local prison wardens. When released, Marmoulak’s (2004) quickly became one of the most widely-watched and oft-quoted Iranian movies in the history of post-revolution Iranian cinema. The plot follows the story of Reza Marmoulak (Reza “the Lizard”), a criminal who is subjected to harsh disciplinary treatment by the prison warden, who believes in a punishment-oriented system of rehabilitation. When Reza is hurt during a scuffle, he is taken to a hospital where he makes the acquaintance of a genial and kind-hearted cleric, who leaves his clerical robe and turban for Reza. Seeing this opportunity, Reza dons the cleric’s clothes, walks out of the hospital, and begins to make his way to the Turkish border, which he intends to cross illegally. On his way he is mistaken for the imam of a local mosque in a small town and a series of funny events ensue as he is called upon to lead prayers (which he doesn’t know), give sermons, and help the poor.

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The Parastic Archive appeared in the Ettinghouse Library as a series of thick binders with labels like “Isolation in US Prisons” and “NSA: Foreign Target and Repressions,” a sign alerting us that the FBI had not (yet) been in our library, and portraits of brown faces scattered in between the library’s books. The Archive is a site-specific installation of the Index of the Disappeared, a project of artists Chiitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani that evolves into the Kimmel Windows Gallery, just two iterations of many spaces it occupies. The Archive was accompanied at NYU by the Watch This Space installations in the Kimmel Windows Gallery, just two iterations of many spaces it occupies. The Archive’s appearance was especially resonant for me as I was completing my thesis at that time. In February 2014, a federal judge ruled that the NYPD’s massive surveillance of Muslim communities in New Jersey was lawful and did not profile on the basis of religion, dismissing a lawsuit brought in 2012 by eight Muslims alleging that the NYPD’s profiling was unconstitutional. US District Judge William Martini explained that he was unconvinced that the spying program had targeted them because of their religion. “The more likely explanation for the surveillance was to locate budding terrorist conspiracies,” he wrote, adding that “the police could not have monitored New Jersey for Muslim terrorist activities without monitoring the Muslim community itself.” My thesis explored this figure of the “Muslim terrorist,” and his role in the rhetoric of the War on Terror. Who is he, and what is it that he’s supposed to be up to?

It is exactly through these fictive constructions of “the Muslim terrorist” or “Islamic terror” that the War on Terror produces a population always prone to terrorism. Brown bodies become a legitimate site of intervention, or “Islamic terror” that the War on Terror produces a population always prone to terrorism. Brown bodies become a legitimate site of intervention, legitimate targets for surveillance, deportation, torture, bombing, and on and on, because of that proximity to terror. But it is not only that they become legitimate targets, but more terrifyingly, and more insidiously, that they demand these interventions, and these interventions are therefore unremarkable. Quickly passed over, quickly forgotten, if even notable in the first place, because, after all, who would mourn a (would-be) terrorist?

It is in this reality that the archiving project becomes a radical practice, as Chitra and Ganesh insisted during an artists’ talk at the library. Where Brown lives are lives that don’t matter, the very act of chronicling these lives and foregrounding their stories is a radical act. The materials in the exhibit are diverse, pulling together personal narratives, news articles, policy making, documentaries, books, rights groups’ reports, court cases, and portraits. But they collectively archive the particular horrors of post 9/11 life.

There are slim blue folders that gather together what scant information there is on the victims of the War on Terror. A few news articles roughly sketch together stories of people imprisoned for years without trial, sent to black sites for torture, families whose loved ones have disappeared. In one folder, there is only a photo without any accompanying text. There is a larger binder on Lakhdar Bloumediene, who, as the lead plaintiff in a Supreme Court decision guaranteeing the right of Guantanamo detainees and other foreign nationals to file writs of habeas corpus, has a better-documented case. He served over a year in prison and is now on parole.

The Index juxtaposes those devastating narratives of the victims of the War’s broad sweep with materials that highlight just what a mundane bureaucratic reality this is for some. The catalog on surveillance technologies, for example, is almost comical in this context. In a scheme uncomfortably evocative of IKEA, the catalog advertises products with names like TOTEHOSTLY v.2.0 or MONKEYCALENDAR; software implants for the Windows Mobile OS or GSM SIM cards, respectively, capable of doing things like pulling your contact list from your cell phone. Or you can read the absurd and absurdly compiled report by a US military officer on “Islamic Rulings on Warfare.”

The archive is curated to draw a loose web of connections in time and space, linking American history to American present, domestic policy with foreign policy, different racisms with each other. Binders detailing “Isolation in US Prisons” and “Racial Profiling” stand alongside “Extraordinary Rendition” and “Torture Memos;” “COINTELPRO” and “Church Committee Report” and thus provide history and context to “Corporate Espionage Against Nonprofit Organizations” and “Policing Dissent.”

I could have contributed a little folder of my own to the project. When I was in high school, or maybe even earlier, there was a communism in our community over the head of our masjid, involving the FBI and all the related accusations of the War on Terror. I am not entirely sure what it was that he was supposed to have done. I had something to do with terrorism, of course, and hanged on his military service abroad, I think. No one went over the details with me, but even now and with so little detail I feel uncomfortable writing about it. It’s just not spoken about. For the most part I’ve forgotten it even happened.

Index of the Disappeared
An Archive of Dissent
By Parisa Chavoshi, NES ’14

The Parastic Archive appeared in the Ettinghouse Library as a series of thick binders with labels like “Isolation in US Prisons” and “NSA: Foreign Target and Repressions,” a sign alerting us that the FBI had not (yet) been in our library, and portraits of brown faces scattered in between the library’s books. The Archive is a site-specific installation of the Index of the Disappeared, a project of artists Chiitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani that evolves into the Kimmel Windows Gallery, just two iterations of many spaces it occupies. The Archive was accompanied at NYU by the Watch This Space installations in the Kimmel Windows Gallery, just two iterations of many spaces it occupies. The Archive’s appearance was especially resonant for me as I was completing my thesis at that time. In February 2014, a federal judge ruled that the NYPD’s massive surveillance of Muslim communities in New Jersey was lawful and did not profile on the basis of religion, dismissing a lawsuit brought in 2012 by eight Muslims alleging that the NYPD’s profiling was unconstitutional. US District Judge William Martini explained that he was unconvinced that the spying program had targeted them because of their religion. “The more likely explanation for the surveillance was to locate budding terrorist conspiracies,” he wrote, adding that “the police could not have monitored New Jersey for Muslim terrorist activities without monitoring the Muslim community itself.” My thesis explored this
ISI-NYU is collaboration between the Gallatin School of Individualized Study and the Kevorkian Center. This mission is to provide an intellectual and academic space for NYU faculty and students to study modern Iranian history, culture and society. Please see the ISI-NYU’s website for additional information at http://isi-nyu.org.

For the academic year 2013-14, ISI-NYU organized 17 lectures and other events. On September 13, we hosted Daryoush Ashoori, a prominent scholar who presented a lecture, in Persian, on “Hafez and Sufi Hermeneutics.” On September 26, we had another event entitled, “On the Occasion of the Publication of Shahnameh: The Epic of Persian Kings.” Professor Ahmad Sadri of Lake Forest College, who translated this work, gave a lecture on the importance in the early modern period. Orhan Fidan, a lecturer and Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Columbia University who specializes in the art and architecture of the Islamic world, examined geopolitics, Orientalist representations of the Ottoman Empire, and European-Ottoman cultural interactions through a discussion of a wax museum of lifelike Ottoman figures that opened in London in 1854. Established by a colorful Ottoman-Armenian diplomat, the “Ottoman and Turkish Museum” was a conscious effort to present a sympathetic version of the Ottoman Empire. Her talk addressed the power struggles surrounding medical professionals practicing in the early modern Ottoman Empire. Her talk also touched on her positionality as a European scholar examining Ottoman history.

This spring, four distinguished young scholars presented their research as part of the ongoing Ottoman Studies Lecture Series. Touching on fields of environmental, architectural, intellectual, and even medical history, they represent a new and creative generation of Ottoman historians.

An Eastern European by training, Holly Case, Associate Professor of History at Cornell University, traced the nineteenth-century emergence of the genre known as “the Postili.” Describing the phenomenon as “speculative fiction,” Professor Case discussed when and why people started thinking in questions, from “The Jewish Question” to “The Politi Question”, and what such formulations meant. Her talk also touched on her positionality as a Europeologist studying the Ottoman Empire and her efforts to broaden the geographical scope of her next book, a history of the emergence of nine-teenth-century questions, though learning Ottoman and Arabic.

On January 29, ISI hosted, in collaboration with the Department of Cinema Studies, a film screening followed by a panel discussion on Iran, Film, and Postcolonialism. Our colleague Arang Keshavarzian, Assistant Professor at Santa Clara University, gave a lecture on her new book, “Gendered Spaces and the Changing of the State in Iran.” Our colleague at NYU Arang Keshavarzian discussed the illustrations of this new book. On October 17, Professor Ahmad Karim-Haikai from the University of Maryland gave a lecture entitled “The Pioneering Spirit of Early Persian Poetry: Khosrau’s Lyics of 10th and 11th Centuries.” The discussant for this talk was our own Ph.D. student Arta Khalqap. On November 22, we hosted a special event in collaboration with Columbia University. We had a panel discussion celebrating Hamid Nafisi’s four-volume work on “A Social History of Iranian Cinema” with Hamid Dabashi as the discussant.

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On March 31, we hosted a delegation of ten poets from Iran and organized a poetry reading and discussion chaired by Sheila Dayan. On April 17, Peyton Jafari from Lebanon University presented a paper titled “The Para-doctrine of Revolution, Life and Politics of Iranian Oil Workers (1978-1982).” This discussant for this lecture was our colleague Zachary Lockman. Overall, the Iranian Studies Initiative was successful in presenting a diverse array of scholars and topics and is looking forward to another exciting year.

In Recognition of Matthieu Aikins

Matthieu Aikins, who studied in the joint M.A, program for Global Journalism and Near Eastern Studies (2009-2010) and completed his M.A. in Near Eastern Studies in 2012, was awarded the George Polk Award for Magazine Reporting for his article “The A-Team Killings.” Appearing in Rolling Stone Magazine, this article documents the war crimes committed by a 12-man U.S Army Special Forces unit and their translators in 2012. Aikins investigates the disappearance and extrajudicial killings of ten civilians in the Nerkh district of Wardak province in Afghanistan. Over the course of five months, Aikins and his team spoke not only with the US and Afghan officials and Interpreters for the Special Forces Unit, but also to the civilians who had lost friends, family, and community members to these crimes. Aikins’ piece simultaneously uncovers the horrific crimes of this Special Forces unit while also allowing these civilians to voice their own experiences of torture, abuse, and loss. Aikins’ writing demonstrates the importance of thorough investigative journalism. His article has had a tangible impact as the military, which had initially denied the charges, has opened a criminal investigation and several human rights organizations have called for an impartial investigation into these crimes. By focusing on the civilian victims of crimes perpetrated by this Special Forces Unit, Aikins forces his readers to think about the lives which are lost and destroyed in war. His journalism demonstrates courage, integrity, and a desire to tell the stories that would otherwise be forgotten.

Similarly, “America’s War Workers” explores the connections between laborers, contractors, and the dominant U.S. centres. Focusing on the situation of contract workers on US military bases, this Fault Lines episode highlights the exploitation of third world nationals who, through deception, became indebted and fill the ranks of an indentured workforce upon which the US military relies to serve American troops in war zones.

Both of these documentaries highlight the situation of workers and examine the institutional structures and misbehavior which allows these exploitative labor systems to continue. Anjali Kami’s work is an important example of journalism working to inform and influence the world in which it operates.
Wounds of Waziristan

By Maham Javaid, NES '15

Wounds of Waziristan features the unnoticed casualties of war. The documentary film does not make us feel for those lives that were cut short due to America’s drone offensive in Pakistan, but instead for those who are left behind and forced to pick up the bodies of their loved ones, those who are “haunted by loss.” Instead of focusing on the number of dead or the vague distinctions between ‘civilians’ and ‘militants,’ the creator of this project, Madiha Tahir, an independent journalist and doctoral candidate at Columbia University, attempts to capture the experience of the drone-affected people of North Waziristan without credence to military or policy experts. “What I wanted to do with Wounds of Waziristan was to allow Karim and Saddam to tell their stories without reference to the whole architecture of expertise. We ought to be able to consider them legitimate witnesses to their own lives. That is an intervention into the way war correspondence is generally done,” explains Tahir. The 26-minute-long documentary shows that the area upon which the majority of the drones fall is not directly under the ambit of Pakistan’s legal system. Apart from four major states, Pakistan is also comprised of Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (Fata): a group of seven agencies in which the jurisdiction of Pakistan’s courts does not apply. Waziristan, divided into North and South, consists of two such agencies, and has been used as a battleground by American forces and Pakistan’s security forces as well as the insurgents that they collectively created. Although Waziristan is hardly a day’s drive from the capital, Islamabad, the documentary shows how with the help of American and Pakistani media, it’s made to seem a world away.

It is a widely known fact that, due to security concerns caused both by militants and the Pakistani military themselves, it is nearly impossible for journalists to enter Waziristan. Even in July 2014 when the Pakistan Army launched an operation in North Waziristan, the only source of information available was the army’s media wing. Despite this, upon release of her film, Tahir was widely criticized by some in Pakistan for making a documentary about a region she had never visited. No part of the documentary was shot within Waziristan, simply because no journalists, barring a handful under army protection, have recently been allowed to enter the tribal area. But perhaps this makes Tahir’s documentary all the more important: she shines light on a people who do not wish to be voiceless, but have been silenced by deafening bombings. Tahir conducts interviews in Islamabad, with Karim and Saddam, two residents of Waziristan who have lost family due to drone attacks. Other interviews take place in Peshawar and Bannu, cities in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that Tahir visited to conduct formal and informal interviews.

Perhaps the only legitimate critique of the film is the fact that it never introduces the concept of tribes to the audience. Not once during the interviews does Tahir ask any of the survivors what tribe they belong to; by completely ignoring their family lineages and connections the filmmaker creates confusion for the audience as to why these regions are even called tribal and why they don’t fall under the ambit of Pakistan’s legal system. But barring this critique, Tahir’s film delivers its promise: it succinctly conveys to us that the effects of war cannot be neatly summed up in facts and figures. Even though Barack Obama describes - and Tahir quotes him - the drones as “neat surgical tactics,” the truth of the matter is that nothing about drone violence is neat or surgical. “You can’t take away the bad, and leave behind the good,” she explains. The entire idea, she says, of using physical violence to solve a political issue is senseless.

Another reason Tahir’s film stands out is because, while the standard narrative states that America is bombing Waziristan to cleanse it of the Taliban, not once during the film does she name this enemy. Instead she provides the audience with a background of the freedom fighters, comments on how Waziristan was used as a training ground for them and continuously refers to them as “insurgents.” Tahir explains that she chooses to do this because the purpose of the film was not to debate the futility of the drones, as that has been done by many others, but to convey the stories of the affected without using the already existing narratives. “Every country, every region has a slot. Pakistan’s slot is ‘fanatical Islam’ and ‘terrorism.’ Even stories about beer production or fashion or business in Pakistan must reference these tropes in order for the story to be legible to western audiences,” says Tahir. And in this she succeeds: Wounds of Waziristan is a story about drone violence outside of these clichéd tropes, and presents audiences with a fresh lens through which drones can be examined.

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What it Means to be Haunted by Loss

By Maham Javaid, NES ’15

Wounds of Waziristan journalist who has been recording deaths from drone attacks.

Still from Wounds of Waziristan

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Since the Arab Spring, organized labor has provided a significant challenge to authoritarianism, economic inequality, and the military establishment in the Middle East. I was lucky enough to witness this dynamic firsthand as a FLAS Fellow in Istanbul during the summer of 2013.

In Turkey, the labor movement has long faced serious challenges to organization. A growing, largely migrant urban workforce has bolstered Turkey's status as one of the world's fastest growing economies. Large profit margins in the construction and industrial export sectors have been maintained through the repression of labor movements seeking to raise the minimum wage, shorten long working days, and rectify abysmal work safety conditions.

Despite these conditions, the past few years have seen a rise in militant labor activism. The convergence in recent years of leftists, labor unions, and pious youth organized under the banner of an “Anti-Capitalist Muslim Youth” has signaled a break with the politics of the ruling Justice and Development Party’s “capitalism with ablations,” advocating in its place an Islamic conception of social justice rooted in a class-based understanding of Turkey’s economic development.

The contours of Turkey’s rapidly expanding economy and the push back against the exploitation and dispossession it causes were readily apparent upon my arrival in Istanbul. With construction cranes scraping the skyline everywhere I turned, the city seemed to be in the process of reinventing itself. Hip boutiques and cafes lined streets that were once home to the city’s working classes, demonstrating the effects of displacement and gentrification.

A week into my stay a popular movement rose up against the abuses of this so-called “urban renewal.” Mass demonstrations, marches, and clashes between police and youth in the streets became a daily occurrence. I became a frequent visitor to Gezi Park, the center of the protests and an incredible experiment in participatory democracy. At its height, the revolutionary community in the Park ran free libraries, a radio station, day-care centers, and community gardens. Striking workers joined university students in political conversations lasting through the night. Istanbul’s streets and parks became my most effective classroom, and I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to learn through this incredible experiment in participatory democracy.

Egypt is home to four million Sudanese refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented residents, in a country of 80 million. Refugees from Egypt do not have access to free education, housing, employment, citizenship or health care. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the main governing body over refugees in Egypt, as the state rescinded its responsibility in 1992. The UNHCR provides a negligible service to refugees, especially from Sudan. Racial discrimination, at a state and societal level, leads to arbitrary arrests and harassment on the streets. In the midst of this, refugees such as Matar and Badr have engaged in resistance to the UNHCR and Egypt’s state apparatus through demonstrations, video production, and publishing stories.

During my research in Cairo, I discovered that testimonial narratives are forced upon refugees by neoliberal entities such as the United Nations. Sudanese refugees not only resist this control but also struggle for their refugee rights in a state undergoing a political transition.
This year, two Falak Sufi scholars are enrolled in our program. Maham Javaid, who joined the Kevorkian Center in Fall 2013, will return in September to finish her degree. A graduate of Lahore University of Management Sciences, Javaid is studying patriarchal norms and gender-based violence in societies where the War on Terror is being waged. She spent her summer in Pakistan working in the Opinion/Editorial section of DAWN newspaper in Karachi. Additionally, she spent time in Bannu in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where she filmed a documentary about the displacement of people from North Waziristan. She has also been freelancing for Pakistani as well as international publications. After completing her M.A., Javaid envisions embarking on a career in journalism in Pakistan.

Aqsa Khalid will join the Kevorkian Center in Fall 2014. Aqsa obtained a Bachelor of Science in Economics, with honors, from Lahore University of Management Sciences in Pakistan. Her research explores the juxtaposition of past and present socio-cultural norms in the Middle East and South Asia, especially pertaining to the role and position of women. Her interests have led her to probe further into women’s narratives as depicted in Near Eastern history, literature, film, and folklore.

Kevorkian also awarded the sixth annual Falak Sufi Memorial Essay Prize that recognizes originality and promise in M.A. scholarship in April 2014 to Sarah Yozzo ‘14. An honorable mention went to Nate Christensen ‘14.

In her Falak Sufi winning research paper “Producing Intifada: Security Narratives and Imagined Social Identities,” Sarah examines the controversy surrounding the Khalil Gebran Academy in Brooklyn and, perhaps most famously, its principal Debbi Montassar. Sarah used her own research in the school and among its students and other Arab American children in the NY public education system to illustrate the ways that the controversy operated within the context of the “War on Terror” and its production of “good” and “dangerous” US citizens. She thought through this fieldwork using literature on the state, on surveillance, and on power, and succeeded in writing a tight and well-written article on the ideological spaces of the “War on Terror” and the subjects that it produces.

In his research paper, “Tribalism, the War on Terror, and the State in Yemen,” Nate studied the ways in which tribalism has been researched, (re)constructed and circulated in studies and policies related to Yemen. Nate related the academic development of “tribalism” as a trope, to its circulation in policy and war-making worlds. In doing so, Nate provided a fresh and innovative perspective to a field of inquiry that has preoccupied researchers of the Arabian Peninsula for decades.

Applications for next year’s scholarship will arrive in Fall 2014, and the essay prize competition will take place in April 2015. The Hagop Kevorkian Center remains indebted to the family of Falak Sufi for supporting this recognition of outstanding M.A. candidates and their writings.
MA Student News: Class of 2014

Sara Afzal Sab: This summer, I will be involved in a research project for the LEAP program in Bouj In El Shannah refugee camp in Tunisia. I have been conducting interviews for my thesis, speaking to members of the community and learning about their concerns in order to gain a better understanding of their past experiences and their political affiliations.

Yasmine Al-Sayyad: I am currently working as a Junior Researcher at the UNDP Bureau of Arab States helping with the review process for the Arab Human Development Report. I am interested in the political and social implications of various development projects on women participation in the public sphere. I will be traveling to Egypt in August to start reporting for my thesis.

Thalita Beatty: I will be studying Arabic in Tunis this summer on a FLAS and conducting interviews for my thesis. I plan to write about the continuing problem of unemployment in the region after its political revolution. I will be in touch in the near room at WNYC for New York Radio and I hope to continue working in radio.

Belle Cheves: My first year at Kav was a FLAS fellowship. I am looking forward to working abroad sometime soon or continuing my studies in another city in the U.S. and abroad. I hope to be able to find a position in either the non-profit or academic fields, particularly pertaining to the social sciences and the study of the Middle East.

Margaretha Blignaut: This summer, I will be traveling to Egypt and beginning my studies in Arabic at the Lebanese American University in Cairo. In Egypt I will focus on conducting interviews with the bars and restaurants in the city even better.

Brooke Fisher: This summer I will be working as a teacher’s aide in a junior school located in Pas- tos, a village in the South of Tunisia. I will be exploring the topic of education, policy and reform in North Africa. In my free time I will be traveling to Cairo, Egypt in order to contin- ue my research.

Shima Houshyar: Having fin- ished an amazing first year at the Kevorkian Center, I am looking forward to spending my summer in Iran where I will be visiting friends and doing field work. I hope to continue some field- work and archival research, while also exploring the Persian and Arthurian art and cultural scene in Tehran.

Majd Mahjabin: After complet- ing my first year at the Kevorkian Center, I am seeking out new opportunities this summer. I am working in the Editorial section of the Iranian Center in Karachi and I will continue to freelance for Pakistani as well as international publications over the summer.

Hannah Lawrence: This sum- mer I will be working as an intern at the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) in Brooklyn. I am hoping to pursue another in- ternship this fall, and use both experiences as a basis for my M.A. work. Thanks to the guidance of the FLAS program and the Kevorkian Center, I am grateful and excited to continue my second year as a fellow in Arabic.

Adnan Moussa: This summer I am studying Persian at Arizona State University and conducting preliminary research for my thesis topic, which tentatively addresses the relation between Lebanon and Lavan movements in the Middle East. This summer, I am working with Persian added to my research skills, I will gain access to more material, thus helping to shed more light on my specific direction.

Anna Reunert: Happy to join you all! This summer, I am for- tunately remaining in the United States and will be working as a Research Assistant at the University of Virginia’s summer Arabic program in Irbid Jordan. I plan to do some traveling in the re- gion and return to New York to find full time employment.

Serin Gerami: During my second year at the Kav, I will be working on my thesis. I will be traveling to Turkey for a length of time. I plan to attend academic events and continue my research in Roma communities across Europe and the Middle East. This summer, I will continue to work on my language skills as I prepare to enter the Anthropology PhD pro- gram at Harvard in the fall. I plan to continue my work on both Turkey and the Roma in the years to come.

Ella Wind: I was a FLAS fellow in Turkish and began my studies in Istanbul during my second summer at Bogazici University in Istanbul. Towards the end of the year, I will be starting my research at the Center for the Social Sciences and the Middle East, and the Roma in the years to come.

Sara Afzal: As a Global Journal- ism student, I am looking forward to con- tinue working for the Kav. This summer, I hope to be spending a great deal of time in the Middle East, both in Turkey and in the Gulf, while still working on my thesis at the Kevorkian Center. I am working on publishing my thesis. I will be teaching on the History of the Middle East at Behdad High School in Iran, as my first year at the Kav. I will be working on my thesis at the Kevorkian Center this summer. I will be working on my thesis at the Kevorkian Center this summer.

Matthew Coogan: This summer I will be working on my thesis. I will be working on my thesis at the Kevorkian Center this summer. I will be working on my thesis at the Kevorkian Center this summer.
pora tourism to Israel under the guidance of Maya Mikdashi. I am currently working as a development associate and grant writer at the World Centers at New York City, an organization that helps train professionals in low-income communities, thus foisting resilience on NGOs and government agencies. I plan to apply to doctoral programs in anthropology this fall.

Eva Schreiner: While studying Arabic at AUB in Lebanon last summer I became interested in Beirut’s urban layout and what it has to do with the ongoing violence in the city. I then spent the summer of 2014 researching the evolution of Downtown Beirut in terms of its neoliberal goals and establishing the area as a security zone. I want to continue pursuing questions around urban space and politics in the Middle East. In addition, I am currently working on my master’s thesis, titled “Planting the State: the FAO forestry division in the Modern Language Association.” As for the summer of 2014, NYU awarded me a predoctoral fellowship to continue my research in support of my dissertation project, which focuses on the extensive commercial militarization surrounding medieval literary texts, particularly the Maqam al-Antari. I also received a summer FLAS Fellowship to pursue additional Arabic study, and travel to Jordan to present a paper titled: “The Emergence of the Modern Middle East” course during Summer. I am currently working on my MA thesis on Sudanese resistance in Egypt, focusing on the iconic figures and national identity of the United Nations (UN). I am now working as a researcher for the labor union UNITE HERE in New York City, which fights for low-wage workers’ rights in the hotel, gaming, and food service industries.

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A Journey on the Great Silk Road
A Study Tour of Uzbekistan

In July 2014 the Kevorkian Center teamed up with the Global Exploration for Educators Organization (GEO) to host an outreach trip for K-12 teachers to Uzbekistan. Masha Kirasirova (MEIS, ’13) and Maurice Pomerantz, faculty members at NYU Abu Dhabi, served as Academic Directors. The trip focused on the history of the Silk Road, highlighting the importance of Central Asia as a crossroads of empires, trade and religion. Professor Pomerantz’s scholarship on pre-modern Arabic Literature and Islamicate Literary cultures as well as Professor Kirasirova’s work on the history of exchanges between Soviet Eurasia and the Middle East added context and additional knowledge to the tour as the group traveled from Tashkent to the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva.

“I learned so much about a part of the world that had been a gap in my students’ study of the Silk Road. The fabled cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva are truly wonderful. A trip to Central Asia was incredibly exciting and enlightening. Our guide, Lazig, was great, and the two NYU professors who accompanied us really added a lot to the whole experience.”
Barbara Moore, Grade 6, English and History

“I’m amazed by the incredible diversity and the different wares of the people who have moved through this region. This diversity will allow me to incorporate the culture and history of Uzbekistan in multiple units in my World History course ranging from the Silk Road to Tamerlane and the Mongols.”
Chi-Ann Lin, Grades 9-12, Global and East Asian Studies

“Participation on this trip has enabled me to better prepare my students with an understanding of how Uzbekistan was indeed the “cradle of civilization” and a crossroads of Khans, cultures, and cuisines. A must do for any teacher of ancient history of literature!”
Elizabeth Graf, Grades 10-12, Literature

“Traveling on the Heart of the Silk Road trip with GEO allowed me to experience Central Asian history and culture in a way that brings to life the knowledge that I’ve gained from books. This allows my lessons in World History about this region of the world to become more meaningful. My students will benefit tremendously from the information provided by my guide, images I took and mementos I brought home to share.”
Cassie Elliot, Grades 9-12, History, Government and Economics

“This opportunity to travel the same path as previous travelers will allow me to present facts about cultures, and customs to my students that will enhance their knowledge of differences from the past to the future.”
Carol McCormick, Special Education Diagnostician

“Being in Uzbekistan was a unique experience. One can see the ancient, medieval, and modern histories side by side, and all three have combined to form modern Uzbek identity. There is much I will take back to my classes from this trip, particularly ancient and medieval globalization via the Silk Road as well as better understanding of Islam in Central Asia. These are just two of the many new ideas that I might include in my future courses. This was an enlightening trip and I have become richer for it.”
Nandini Sinha, Grades 9-12, Global History

“The Great Silk Road was not one continuous route from China to Rome from a set time in history but rather a nexus of encounters driven by commerce, empire, exploration, science, and religion, in short every human activity between and among a myriad of cultural centers both proximate and far-flung lasting variously for generations, reigns, centuries, and in some cases millennia.”
Philip Scharper, Grades 6-8, Assistant Principal

“It was fascinating to travel along some of the exact routes that were traversed by caravans hundreds of years ago. The monuments were truly beautiful and relayed the power that various rulers held over the centuries. It is amazing that the ancient trading centers of Khiva, Samarkand, and Bukhara continue to flourish as centers that capture many of the elements of the Silk Road. I enjoyed the sights, food, landscape, and meeting many friendly and warm Uzbeks. The homestay with the Uzbek family and the yurt stay in Kyzyl Kum desert allowed me to experience the Silk Road as many traders along the Silk Road experienced it. The extreme heat helped to de-romanticize many aspects of the Silk Road. I have gathered an immense amount of information and images which I will utilize to enrich my unit on the Silk Road.”
Fazeela Scharper, Grades 9-12, History and Government
In addition to my regular courses, I have had the opportunity to present my analysis of spatial politics to explore the multiple effects of the Gezi Park protests. I did manage to get to Washington D.C. in April 2014 with generous funding from both the Kevorkian Center and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Last but not least, I continued to serve as chair of the Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Last but not least, I continued to serve as chair of the Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Last but not least, I continued to serve as chair of the Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Last but not least, I continued to serve as chair of the Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Last but not least, I continued to serve as chair of the Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Last but not least, I continued to serve as chair of the Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. 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impasses between Middle East Studies and Feminist studies and, in particular, this year I also worked closely with Greta Schirmbrger, our associate director, to host a three-day work- shop in partnership with Ilona Humanities Research Institute on Reli- gion, Socialism, and Gender. In the Spring I received the news that I had been awarded a two-year Mellon postdoctoral grant to the Institute for Research on Women at Rutgers University, an opportunity that made the difficult decision to leave NYU in the Fall of 2014. I will miss working with the staff, faculty, and most importantly the students, at the Kevorkian Center.

Ali Mirresai: I was on leave for the 2013-2014 academic year. I spent the fall semes- ter as a visiting professor of sociology at NYU in the Fall of 2014. I will miss working with the staff, faculty, and most importantly the students, at the Kevorkian Center.

Everett Rowson: A highlight of the 2013-14 academic year for me was the opportunity to participate in February in a panel at the Uni- versity of Louisville on “History and Hom-osexuality in the Middle East,” which had an engaged audience with lots of questions and discussion. The talk was streamed on the Internet. My mon- graph on homosexuality in medieval Islamic societies is nearing completion (finally!), and was pleased to gain access in Krakow to a manuscript of a seventeenth-century Arabic work concerning sodomy, one more piece of a complicated and multifaceted voice. Aside from my teaching obligations, I also contin- ued to serve as one of five executive editors of the third edition of the Encyclopedia of Is- lam, as well as one of four editors of the En- cylopedia of the works of the rikh-vaqif author al-Ya‘qubi, a collaborative effort which will be delivered to the press this fall, after a decade of work.


Helga Tawil-Souri: As part of a Steinhardt Dean’s Global Honors program, my “Borders, Barriers, and Buffers” class met regularly throughout the Fall 2013 semester and cul- minated in a ten-day trip to Israel/Palestine in January 2014. The experience of seeing in “real life” what we had analyzed in class, of translating what we read onto the compli- cated landscape in front of us, and spending twenty-four days with a group of freshmen and sophomores, many of whom had never been to the region. Promotes cross-regional and interdisciplinary engagement of analytical issues in Middle Eastern Studies and beyond.

Research Workshops

T he program’s academic cornerstone features new and established work by established and up-and-coming scholars of the region. Promotes cross-regional and interdisciplinary engagement of analytical issues in Middle Eastern Studies and beyond.

New Books

A series featuring new, groundbreaking publications with relevance to the field of Middle Eastern Studies.

Research Workshops

From Yarkand to Sindh via Kabul Weald.Zied, History, Yale University; Lahore; Can, History, City College of New York

Professing Sexes: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran (Duke University Press, 2013) by Afshin Najmabadi, History, NYU

Beyond the Two State Solution: A Jewish Political Essay (Polity Press, 2012) by Yehuda Shenhav, Sociology, Tel Aviv University

Joyriding in Ryadhi (Cambridge University Press, 2014) by Pascal Moncret, Arab Crossroads, NYU Abu Dhabi

The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Civil Religion in the British Sphere of Influence (University of Hawai’i Press, 2013) by Kavita Davta, Mount Holyoke College

Events Archive

2013-2014 Events Archive

Yellow Peril: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012) by Jack Tchen, History, City College of New York

Narrating Gender Violence: Arab Assyrian Applicants in the United States (Brill, 2013) by Lila Abu-Lughod, Anthropology, Columbia University

Settler Colonialism: Then and Now (University of California Press, 2013) by Eve Krakowski, Judaic Studies, Yale University

A n interdisciplinary series of lectures and presentations pertaining to the field of Middle Eastern Studies.

Settler Colonialism: Then and Now (University of California Press, 2013) by Eve Krakowski, Judaic Studies, Yale University

Muslin Elite in the Neo-Liberl Sphere: Shaping Sharia in the West: Research Case Studies (New York, London and Sydney) by Joshua Rooney, Religion and Society Research Centre, University of Western Sydney

Private Space and Female Honor: Negotiating Jewish Households in Fatimid Egypt (University of California Press, 2013) by Eve Krakowski, Judaic Studies, Yale University

New Books


Reflections on the Academic Study of Women and Islam: a panel discussion featuring Afsaneh Najmabadi, History, NYU

Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran (University of California Press, 2014) by Sadiq Joseph, Anthropology and Women’s and Gender Studies, Columbia University

Beyond the Two State Solution: A Jewish Political Essay (Polity Press, 2012) by Yehuda Shenhav, Sociology, Tel Aviv University

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Classified Memories: Trying To Tell Terror Suspects Who Were Tortured by the CIA
Lisa Hagé, Sociology, University of California Santa Barbara

The Revolution As Music: Authenticity and Performance in the Modern Middle East
John Chalcraft, Government, London School of Economics

Visual Culture Series

A series of films, presentations, performances, and exhibitions centered on visual art and media from and about the modern Middle East.

Gaza Strip (2002)
Hamid Naficy, Department of Radio/Television/Film, Northwestern University; Marwan Rechmaoui, Artist-in-Resident, Alwan for the Arts

Visual Art: The Case for Syria
Abbe Bothwell, Music, Columbia University

Iraq: Pedagogies of the Unconscious
Dina Khoury, History and International Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Iranian Studies Initiative

S cholarly presentations of Iran, Past and Present, curated by Professor Ali Mesripasay with a steering committee drawn from MEIS and other faculty and students with support from the Gallatin School and Hagop Kevorkian Center.

Hafza and Sufi Hermeneutics
Dayo Y. Afolabi, independent Scholar, France and Ali Mesripasay, moderator: NYU Gallatin

Shahnameh: The Epic of Persian Kings/Succession and Charisma
Hamid Rahmanian, illustrator and designer; Ahmad Sadi, Lake Forest College; Shaida Dayani MEIS, NYU

The Pioneering Spirit of Early Persian Poetry: Khorasani Lyricos of the 10th and 11th Centuries
Mary Elaine Hegland, Anthropology, Santa Clara University; Ali Mirsepassi, NYU Gallatin

Iraq: Authorship in Studying the Arab Uprisings
Eve Troutt Powell, History and Africana Historical Records (and how to see them)
K-16 Teacher Training

As mandated by our Title VI grant, K-16 workshops are hosted by the Hopp Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies in collaboration with the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University as well as NYU’s Faculty Resource Network. Middle and High School teachers as well as Community College faculty from the tri-state area regularly attend alongside teachers-in-training from Steinhardt. The programs increase the quality of Middle East-related content in our region’s K-16 curriculum.

Understanding Sharia, Then and Now
Intisar Rabb, MEIS and Law, NYU; Marion Katz, MEIS, NYU; Joshua Roose, Religion and Society Research Centre, University of Western Sydney

Music, Art and Resistance: Teaching the Culture of Social Movements
Mark LeVine, History, UC Irvine

Central Asian Connections: Crossroads of Empire, Trade, and Culture
Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, MEIS, NYU; Masha Kirasirova, MEIS, NYU; Lale Can, History, City College of New York

Unpacking “Terrorism”
Jack Shaheen, Visiting Distinguished Scholar, NYU; Malcolm Clarke, filmmaker; Remi Brulin, Journalism, NYU

On Humanitarian Intervention
Asli Bial, Law, UCLA

Islam and U.S. Slavery: Cultures and Historians in Connection
Ashra Khan, Anthropology, NYU; Ali Alyas, Affiliated Scholar, Queens College; Barbara Petzan, President, Middle East Outreach Council

Heart of The Silk Road: A Study Tour for Educators in Uzbekistan
Masha Kirasirova, MEIS, NYU; Maurice Pomerantz, Literature, NYUAD

Faculty Resource Network: The Middle East After the Arab Spring
Ali Banuazizi, Political Science, Boston College

NEH Summer Institute: A Reverence for Words: Understanding Muslim Cultures Through Poetry & Song
Jawed Mojaddidi, Religion, Rutgers; Sylvia Diouf, NY Public Library; Bruce Lawrence, Religion, Duke University

Jack G. Shaheen Archive

NYU holds the archive of media scholar Jack Shaheen, which includes over 3,000 TV shows, feature and documentary films, movie posters, comic books, editorial cartoons, and personal papers focused on stereotypes and images of Arabs and Muslims in American popular culture. This year we hosted Dr. Shaheen on campus for two events featuring materials from the collection:

Archiving Stereotypes: Documenting and Remaking the Images of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. Popular Culture
Jack Shaheen, Visiting Distinguished Scholar, NYU; Hazem Jamjoum, MEIS, NYU

Terror in the Promised Land (1978)
Malcolm Clarke, filmmaker; Jack Shaheen, Visiting Distinguished Scholar; NYU; Adam Shatz, NES, NYU

A is for Arab Traveling Exhibition

Powerful, accessible and compelling, A is for Arab, which features images from the Jack G. Shaheen Archive, reveals and critiques the stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. popular culture. Providing historical context about these images, which range from film stills to comic books to editorial cartoons, this traveling exhibition aims to educate and stimulate discussion about the impact of stereotypes on both individual perceptions and national policy. This year, the exhibit was featured at several universities, organizations, and conferences.

Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

Arab Center of Washington, Seattle, Washington

Pope John XXIII High School, Sparta, New Jersey

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia

Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois

University of Maryland College Park, Maryland

Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis, Indiana

Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio

Colby College, Waterville, Maine

Bettendorf Public Library, Bettendorf, Iowa