MAY 2019

DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

LATEST NEWS FROM OUR DEPARTMENT

MDES FACULTY
Muhammad AlKhudair, Lecturer of Arabic | Laurie Brand, Robert Grandford Wright Professor of International Relations and Middle East Studies | Sarah Gualtieri, Associate Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, History, and Middle East Studies | Olivia Harrison, Associate Professor of French and Italian and Comparative Literature | Hani Khafipour, Assistant Professor (Teaching) of Iranian Studies | Peyman Nojoumian, Associate Professor (Teaching) of Persian | Suzanne Wali, Lecturer of Arabic

MDES POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLAR
Sara Salazar Hughes

MDES STAFF
Ramzi Rouighi, Chair
Renee Almassizadeh, Program Specialist

MDES STUDENT WORKERS
Paxton Lambright
Jalen Layfield
Monica Leung
Isabel Linder
Sama Shah
Muhammad Yusuf Tarr
What a year!

For a young department like ours, every little change can make a huge difference, and we had quite a few this past year. We welcomed two new colleagues, grew our course offerings, reviewed our study abroad programs, and thanks to our alumni, we created new awards and scholarship opportunities for our students. For any other unit, any one of these things would have been transformative; we did it all at once.

A first for USC, a graduating senior—who also wrote a solid honors thesis—won a prestigious fellowship to study at the Center for Arabic Study Abroad in Cairo. That means that our Arabic program is now officially competitive at the national level. Ciara Taylor also won a Fulbright scholarship, but we already knew our Middle East Studies students were first-rate. Just for the record, when it comes to prestigious awards, the batting average of our honors recipients is still 1.000 [insert appropriate incantation against evil eye here]. Bravo Ciara and kudos to all of our students who were recognized for their excellence in research and language study!

In the fall, the department welcomed Dr. Sara Salazar Hughes (Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow) who was an immediate hit with our students. As an expert on questions of sustainability and environmental justice, Sara offered exciting courses and helped guide our programming. Importantly, her work on “Cities of Globalization,” the department’s annual conference, was outstanding. It was great to see so many engaged and informed people at the conference.

Muhammad AlKhudair (Lecturer, Arabic) joined us only in January but has quickly become a valued member of our team. An experienced language teacher, Muhammad greatly expanded the department’s expertise in Levantine dialect and translation. A student of the Arabic language and its many dialects, he knows an impressive number of poems and lyrics by heart. He also knows a great number of old Levantine jokes and that, for me, makes him a great conversation partner around lunchtime. Many of you have met Sara, Muhammad, and the rest of the team at our department socials. These informal gatherings allow us to get to know one another outside of study and work, and Renee’s sweets always get the party going.

From art exhibits and lectures, to workshops and seminars, our events explored the Middle East beyond what is commonly available in the headlines. And, based on attendance, the word had obviously gotten out about the quality of our programs. That was particularly obvious at the packed lecture delivered by Prof. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi who invited us to think of modern Iranian history in a completely new way. Mujtahandis? Our Iranian Studies minors sure talked about that for days.

One last thing and thinking about what lies ahead, I want to say just how special our alumni have been to the amazing growth and success of our program. Extremely generous with their time, expertise, and resources, they have been an exceptional source of energy and strength. Your support means the world to us!

Ramzi Rouighi
Chair, Department of Middle East Studies
Associate Professor of Middle East Studies and History
On March 26, 2019 the Department of Middle East Studies hosted a conference on globalization and sustainability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The daylong event brought together experts working in various disciplines to examine how different governments, cities, and communities have been handling issues arising from high rates of urbanization and infrastructural development. By focusing on how urban development can incorporate elements of sustainability, Cities of Globalization contributed to the discussion surrounding ethical development practices and the centrality of the Middle East to these issues. Ramzi Rouighi, Chair of the Dornsife Department of Middle East Studies, welcomed everyone to the conference and was followed by MDES’ Postdoctoral Scholar, Sara Salazar Hughes, who spoke about sustainable urbanism and urban transformation in the Middle East, introduced the speakers, and made preliminary comments on the papers presented in the first panel.

"BEFORE ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE, IT DID NOT OCCUR TO ME THAT MASDAR CITY’S ARCHITECTURE WAS INFLUENCED BY THE CONCEPT OF SPACE TRAVEL AND ESCAPE FROM EARTHLY DISASTERS. IT TURNS OUT, THE CITY OF THE FUTURE IS BASED ON A PARTICULAR VISION OF THE PRESENT."

-ANGELINA GIRGIS, JUNIOR
Moderated by Dornsife's Laurie Brand, the afternoon panel focused on mobility and urban transformation. Ali Hamdan (University of California Los Angeles) presented his paper, “The Local and Global of Syria's Civil War,” examining how the civil war in Syria is not simply an internal conflict, but a global one that has created cross-border connections between peoples and cities. Ryan Dicce (Texas A&M University) then discussed his research entitled “Who flips the switch?: Human capital requirements and labor market outcomes for solar power in the United Arab Emirates.” His presentation addressed the country's clean energy sector and its heavy dependance on foreign labor, which has resulted in national and ethnic labor hierarchies. Sinan Erensü (Independent Scholar), participating from Istanbul via video, focused on activists' efforts to defend urban gardens in Istanbul from government development plans. His lecture was titled “Cultivating Tomatoes, Growing Resistance: Struggle Over the Historic Bostans of Istanbul.”

“THE CITIES OF GLOBALIZATION CONFERENCE PROVIDED INSIGHTS INTO THE WAYS THE MIDDLE EAST HAS DEALT, OR NOT, WITH FAST URBANIZATION. THE SPEAKERS HAD FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE WORKING IN THE FIELD, AT LUNCH STUDENTS COULD INTERACT WITH THE EXPERTS ASKING QUESTIONS AND FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT BOTH THE ISSUES AND THE RESEARCH.”

--AIDAN MEYER, SENIOR
ANNUAL DORNSIFE – FARHANG FOUNDATION DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

The Fifth Annual Dornsife – Farhang Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series in Iranian Studies took place February 19-20, 2019. This lecture series is part of an effort by the USC Dornsife Department of Middle East Studies and the Farhang Foundation to bring eminent scholars of Iranian Studies to USC to deliver public lectures and engage with students and faculty over several days. In February 2019, MDES hosted Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Professor of Historical Studies, History, and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto. Over the course of two days, Professor Tavakoli-Targhi delivered a public lecture, “Pathologizing Iran: The Ailing ‘Mother Nation’ and Political Diagnostics” and an informal lunch seminar entitled “Islamic Engineering in Contemporary Iran.”

HUSHIDAR MORTEZAIE

MDES hosted artist Hushidar Mortezaie for an exhibition and lecture in conjunction with the USC Roski School of Art and Design, the Farhang Foundation, and the USC LGBT Resource Center. His work was exhibited between August 20 and 30, 2018 in the Helen Lindhurst Fine Arts Gallery in Watt Hall and a lecture and evening reception took place on August 28, 2018.
Dr. A. Marie Ranjbar (The Ohio State University) presented her research on the nexus of human rights, politics, and environmental issues in Iran on September 25, 2018.

USC Postdoctoral Scholar Dr. Sara Salazar Hughes presented her research on how Israeli innovations in environmental technology--ostensibly aimed at sustainable resource management and climate change mitigation--are also aimed at land appropriation and dispossession in Israel/Palestine on November 7, 2018.

Dr. Hossein Kamaly (Columbia University) visited with two of our classes on February 14, 2019. In HIST 383 (The Modern Middle East) he discussed his book God and Man in Tehran. In MDES 313 (Modern Iran) he led a workshop on close readings of historical documents.

Dr. Joel Beinin, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University, discussed workers movements and the Arab popular uprisings of 2011, focusing on Egypt and Tunisia during a lecture on April 4, 2019.
MDES hosted 10 Arabic language tables and 10 Persian language tables this academic year. Students enjoyed refreshments while practicing their foreign language skills, gaining new vocabulary, and learning more about the MENA region. We screened *Junction 48* and *Poets of Life* in Fall 2018 with introductions by Dr. Hani Khafipour and Dr. Sara Salazar Hughes. Students also enjoyed playing Scrabble in Arabic and dining with Dr. Peyman Nojoumian at Raffi’s Place, a Persian restaurant in Glendale.
The Department of Middle East Studies consciously creates a welcoming physical and intellectual environment for all. We have a reception area with couches, tables and chairs, charging zones, snacks, and hot beverages for students during business hours. We actively strive to engage all USC students in our social events, which this year included two welcome back socials, two academic open houses with catered lunch, a winter holiday party, and weekly (fall semester) and monthly (spring semester) department socials. The big favorite this year was our February department social and its ice cream cupcakes! Come visit us anytime in THH 256 and become a part of our community of learners.
**AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

**MOHAMED EL BEIH PAPER PRIZE**

The Mohamed El Beih Paper Prize was established by USC alumnus Mohamed El Beih to recognize the best undergraduate student paper in Middle East Studies. Our inaugural recipient was Paxton Lambright; Ciara Taylor received honorable mention. Paxton's paper was titled "Investing in the Knowledge Economy: Examining the Frameworks of Motivation, Internationalization, and US Soft Power behind the American University of Cairo, The American University in Beirut, and NYU Abu Dhabi from the 19th to the 21st Century." The awardees were announced at the department's holiday party on November 28, 2018.

**ARABIC AND PERSIAN LANGUAGE AWARDS**

The Department of Middle East Studies recognizes students who have demonstrated academic excellence in the study of the Arabic and Persian languages. Nominations are made by language faculty to the MDES Awards Committee. The 2019 awardees for Arabic were Paxton Lambright and Rawan Masri. The 2019 awardees for Persian were Nastaran Far and Keon Ghodrati. All four were celebrated at the department's end-of-year social on April 24, 2019. Special thanks to the Gramian-Emrani Foundation for partially funding the Persian Language Award.

**DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES TRAVEL AND RESEARCH SUMMER SCHOLARSHIP**

Thanks to alumni support, the Department of Middle East Studies has offered a summer 2019 travel and research scholarship to Jalen Layfield. Jalen will be using the funds he received to participate in the CIEE Summer Arabic Language Program in Amman, Jordan. This new scholarship is for majors and minors in our department with a minimum GPA of 3.3 who are not graduating seniors. Applicants submitted a one-page description of their research project and the awardee was selected by the MDES Awards Committee.
STUDENT AND ALUMNUS UPDATES

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS - CIARA TAYLOR
Throughout her four years, Ciara Taylor has studied abroad in Amman, Jordan twice, first on a US government Critical Language Scholarship (CLS), and then for a semester in 2018 with the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE). Ciara is graduating in May 2019 with departmental honors. Her thesis, entitled “Relations with the Regime: Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings” was accepted in February 2019. Ciara worked with faculty mentor Dr. Laurie Brand to structure her research and complete her thesis. To be admitted to the Honors Program, students must have an overall GPA of 3.33, with a GPA of at least 3.5 in courses in the major. Students must also have a minimum grade of B+ in HIST 180 and have completed at least one upper-level MDES course requiring a seminar paper. Ciara shared her experiences writing her thesis during our Fall 2019 Academic Open House this past March.
Looking forward, Ciara was also awarded a Fulbright grant for Kuwait, but she declined this fellowship to accept a full-year fellowship from the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA), to study Arabic in Cairo. After CASA, Ciara plans to start law school.

ALUMNUS GEORGE SANAD, CLASS OF '18
I graduated from USC in May 2018 with a dual degree in Business and Middle East Studies. Upon graduation, I joined Deloitte as part of the Marketing and Communications team. In my role, I primarily support data and analytics teams and I am aligned to the tech, media, and telecom sectors. In the near future, I hope to get a second assignment somewhere in Europe or East Asia where I will be supporting the local marketing teams, helping lead a "global" voice across all member firms led by the US. In the long term, I plan to return to graduate school hoping to study law, philosophy, or sociology.
GRADUATING SENIORS

Muhammad Yusuf Tarr

According to Muhammad Yusuf Tarr, Middle East Studies has a unique atmosphere created by Renee’s big heart and sharp vision, by Suzanne’s humor and Sara’s wit, and the curiosity and ambition of all of our students. In Spring 2018, Yusuf ventured abroad to Amman, Jordan where he studied Arabic. In the future, Yusuf is setting his sights on law school.

Diana Kruzman

Diana Kruzman is a double major in Journalism and Middle East Studies, whose goal has been to develop the historical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge necessary to report on the Middle East with context and empathy. She spent Spring 2018 in Amman, Jordan and will be attending New York University in the fall on a Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship for a 2-year dual masters in Journalism and Near East Studies.

Rawan Masri

Rawan Masri feels far more capable of critically engaging with contemporary Middle Eastern issues due to her major in Middle East Studies. During a semester in Amman, Rawan was able to improve her Arabic through extensive travel. She volunteered teaching English to Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Rawan also conducted Directed Research under Dr. Laurie Brand in the fall. After graduation, she will be moving to Palestine to work with an advocacy NGO in Ramallah while further improving her Arabic skills.

Paxton Lambright

Paxton Lambright is a double major in Middle East Studies and Global Studies with a minor in Arabic. Paxton spent a semester at the Rothberg International School at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem through the D.O.M.E. (Dynamics of the Middle East) Program where she studied both Hebrew and Arabic. Her honor’s thesis entitled “Women of Palestine: Women’s Activism’s Two-Fold Pursuit of Liberation in Palestinian Civil Society” benefited from advisement from faculty in both Global Studies and Middle East Studies. Following graduation, she hopes to attend graduate school and ultimately work on developing women-centered policies in conflict and post conflict settings.
WELCOME TO OUR NEW LECTURER OF ARABIC, MUHAMMAD ALKHUDAIR

We are pleased to have Muhammad AlKhudair join us as our new Lecturer of Arabic. AlKhudair has a Master's Degree in Middle Eastern Studies and a B.A. in English/Arabic Translation. Previously, he has taught at the University of Arizona as a Fulbright and as an instructor of Arabic from 2010 to 2018. Prior to that, he worked as an English language lecturer for Kalamoon University in Syria from 2006 to 2008 and as a language teacher for the Syrian Ministry of Education from 2002-2005. Additionally, AlKhudair has been certified as a translator by the Syrian Ministry of Justice and has a very strong background in language teaching and pedagogy.

WELCOME TO OUR POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLAR SARA SALAZAR HUGHES

Since joining our department, Dr. Salazar Hughes has played an active role in our department, delivering a lecture on “Sustainability and Environmental Justice in Israel/Palestine” and organizing our Spring Conference, Cities of Globalization.

She has also been involved in activities beyond the USC campus. In October, she participated in the Association of Pacific Coast Geographer's Annual Meeting in Reno, presenting a paper entitled "Environmental Racism in the Occupied West Bank." She also has an article that was recently accepted and is forthcoming in the journal Settler Colonial Studies, entitled "Unbounded Territoriality: Territorial control, settler colonialism, and Israel/Palestine."

Together, they organized two paper sessions at the April 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers, entitled "Settler colonial fabrications/Fabricating settler colonialism," and she and Stepha presented a co-authored paper, entitled "Greenwashing Palestine: Zionist green ideologies and the making of settler expertise." Dr. Salazar Hughes also presented two other papers at the conference, "The Ecological Impacts of Israel's Conflict Infrastructure," and another paper for the American Geographical Society on the "Legacy of the American Inquiry and Paris Peace Conference 100 Years Later."

She and two colleagues, Rhys Machold and Stepha Velednitsky, have also been invited to submit an article to the journal Geography Compass, provisionally entitled "Political geographical perspectives on settler colonialism."
HANI KHAFIGOUR

Dr. Khafipour is excited to announce the imminent publication of his edited volume *The Empires of the Near East and India: Source Studies of the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal Literate Communities* (Columbia University Press, May 2019). His current research project is his forthcoming book, *The Mantle of the Sufi Kings*, which investigates the sources of social power in early modern Iran and focuses on examining structures of power in Sufi thought and practice, Perso-Islamic ethical discourses, and notions of religio-political authority as a way to re-conceptualize the longevity of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722). Dr. Khafipour's field of research encompasses Islamic political thought and state formation and draws on theoretical perspectives from the fields of sociology and political science. In particular, Dr. Khafipour examines the relationship between language and political power to analyze group cohesion and the ideologies that enable cohesion to endure in the early modern Persianate world.

SUZANNE WALI

Dr. Wali invested much of her time this year on developing new curricula for three courses: Advanced Arabic I, Advanced Arabic II, and Introduction to Translation. The three courses offer students the chance to develop their language skills to the advanced low/mid-level using authentic Arabic sources that cover current political, environmental, and economic issues in the contemporary Arab world. The course materials include multi-disciplinary selections from different textbooks, newspaper articles, documentaries, and research papers. Dr. Wali is also working on developing a faculty professional development workshop about aligning learning objectives with curriculum selection and students' outcomes.

PEYMAN NOJOUMIAN

Dr. Nojoumian had a busy year inside and outside of the classroom. He trained world language teachers at two different American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages-sponsored workshops in Illinois (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign) and Washington, DC (American Councils for International Education) in March 2019. Dr. Nojoumian also submitted a chapter for review on teaching Persian using technology to a book series published by Routledge. Finally, he attended the 2018 Association for Iranian Studies Conference at the University of California Irvine (UCI) and presented a paper entitled “Creative Strategies for Language Instruction, Tools from Instructional Technology.”
INVEST IN EXCELLENCE

The department relies on institutional and external support to fund academic growth and development. Please consider donating to MDES at this link: https://bit.ly/2rnFduO.

WRITE TO US

The alumni newsletter is published by the Department of Middle East Studies. We encourage alumni to contribute news regarding their educational and career progress, published articles, books, and op-ed pieces for future editions. Please send you updates to mdes@usc.edu.

STAY CONNECTED

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