2019-2020
CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES AT TUFTS

ANNUAL REPORT

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This has been an unprecedented year, a troubling year, a year of challenges and change. Despite this, the academic year 2019-2020 has also been a year of accomplishment, engagement and growth for the Center. So I would like to begin with a brief report on some of these points, before grappling with the implications of the pandemic that closed our campus, or the explosion of public outrage over police violence and a continuing legacy of white supremacy and structural racism that remains at the center of American political and cultural life.

This year we welcomed four faculty fellows, four postdocs and two dissertation fellows. I believe this to be the largest cohort of fellows resident at the Center in any given year. We remain grateful to the Office of the Vice-provost for Research at Tufts for the extra support that made possible our expansion of our postdoctoral fellow program from two to four fells. As an indication of the strength of this program, all four of our fellows will be moving on to visiting or tenure-track Assistant Professorships at top-ranked institutions: Hossein Ayazi will be a two-year Visiting Assistant Professor at Williams College, Anny Gaul will begin an Assistant Professorship at University of Maryland, and Olivia Gagnon will be an Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia, and Sumayya Kassamali will begin an Assistant Professorship at the University of Toronto.

The Center for the Humanities also hosted a diverse set of events, loosely tied to our theme of “Difference” this year. Details of these may be found in this booklet. These events were masterfully organized by the Center’s new Program Administrator, Courtney McDermott, who has done much to raise our profile. Beginning with a new website, the Center has, with Courtney’s oversight, updated its communication and publicity approaches, and has adopted a more integrated approach to fundraising and grantwriting which we hope will serve to fortify and expand the programs we are able to offer in the future.
Despite these accomplishments, the end of the year was difficult and troubling. The furious onset of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the dispersal of our vibrant community at the Fung House, and forced the cancellation of a number of talks and a symposium that had been long in the works. We left one another without even properly being able to bid our departing fellows farewell.

The coming year will present new challenges: austerity will demand the scaling back of our postdoctoral program, and health guidelines will require us to move events and functions almost entirely online. We will adapt, and look forward to meeting these challenges, by organizing events that speak to the urgency of our present moment, in particular the ongoing inequities that are ever more apparent with the pandemic, and the eruption of new activism in the ongoing struggle to protect and value Black lives. We are committed to serving as a place for faculty and students to find community and inspiration in seeking solutions to these and other forms of injustice.

Kamran Rastegar
Director of the Center for the Humanities at Tufts
Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature
"DIFFERENCE"

Within the framework of this theme, the Center’s activities will highlight the ways by which traditions of knowledge production — in particular, academic knowledge production — have served as foundational to the social formations and power relations that produce and inscribe forms of difference around the globe. Through this theme, the Center will explore the ways by which social and historical forms of difference remain determinative in our present political moment, and the role that re-articulations of difference in political mobilizations and cultural discourse.
Oct 22 | film screening | "Forbidden"
**Amal Ramsis**, documentary filmmaker

Oct 23 | lecture | "Rabindranath Tagore’s Šāntiniketan Essays: Religion, Spirituality and Philosophy"
**Medha Bhattacharyya**, Bengal Institute of Technology

Nov 14 | lecture | "Palestine in Black and White"
**Greg Burris**, American University in Beirut

Nov 20 | book talk | "Iran Reframed: Anxieties of Power in the Islamic Republic"
**Narges Bajoghli**, Johns Hopkins University
Jan 28 | book talk | "Empire of Friends"
Rachel Applebaum, Tufts University

Jan 30 | panel | "Grant Writing"
Barbara Brizuela, Ioannis Evrigenis, Jennifer Eyl, Donna Tyson, Tufts University

Feb 6 | lecture | "Mickalene Thomas and the Black, Queer Female Origin of the Universe"
Amber Musser, George Washington University
SELECTED CO-SPONSORED EVENTS

Oct 10 | film screening and reception | "Memory, Family, and Reflection: Palestinians in Lebanon"
Diana Allan, McGill University
Co-sponsored with the Department of Anthropology

Nov 12 | lecture | "On my way to Emancipation, I found black-space"
Erna Brodber, writer and activist
Co-sponsored with the Department of Studies in Race, Colonialism and Diaspora

Nov 19 | poetry and nonfiction reading
Joan Naviyuk Kane, Harvard University
Co-sponsored with the Department of English and the Department of Studies in Race, Colonialism and Diaspora

Feb 5 | book talk | "Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home"
Richard Bell, University of Maryland
Co-sponsored with the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy
FACULTY FELLOWS

Freeden Blume Oeur
Associate Professor of Sociology and Education
Project Title: The Sociological Dream: W. E. B. Du Bois, C. Wright Mills, and the Promise of Radical Sociology

Jennifer Eyl
Assistant Professor of Religion
Project Title: Paul's Use of Fidelity Among the Gentiles

Lily Mengesha
Fletcher Foundation Assistant Professor of Dramatic Literature
Project Title: Critical Dreaming: Indigenous Temporalities in Contemporary Performance

Man Xu
Associate Professor of History
Project Title: A Local Deviation: the Transformation of Luzhou Elites in Medieval China
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

Hossein Ayazi
Project Title: *Verdant Empire: Racial Capitalism, Containment, and the Settler-Imperial Politics of U.S. Agricultural Development*

Olivia Michiko Gagnon
Project Title: *Feeling Close: Performing Archival Intimacies and the Politics of Historiography*

Anny Gaul
Project Title: *Affecting Tastes: A Kitchen History of Modern North Africa*

Sumayya Kassamli
Project Title: *Black Beirut*
GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOWS

Asha Tall
PhD Candidate in the Department of English

Hesam Sharifian
PhD Candidate in the Department of Drama and Dance
Project Title: Americanizing Shakespeare in Print: Nineteenth Century American Illustrated Editions of Shakespeare’s Works as Representations of National Identity
Oct 08 | "Teaching Happiness: Colonial Education, Gender, and Transnational Currents in Modern Morocco"
**Anny Gaul, Postdoctoral Fellow**

Nov 19 | "Banking on Liberty: Debt and Diplomacy in Firestone’s Liberia"
**Hossein Ayazi, Postdoctoral Fellow**

Dec 09 | "China’s Local Elites in Transition: Seventh- to Twelfth-Century Epitaphs Excavated in Luzhou"
**Man Xu, Faculty Fellow**

Feb 03 | "Closeness and Historical Work in Krista Belle Stewart’s Potato Gardens Band"
**Olivia Michiko Gagnon, Postdoctoral Fellow**

Mar 05 | "The Scholar Desired: Racial Trauma in DuBois's *Black Flame* Trilogy"
**Freeden Blume Oeur, Faculty Fellow**

Mar 09 | "Fidelity or Faith? The Virtue of Loyalty in Christian Origins"
**Jennifer Eyl, Faculty Fellow**
FACULTY BOARD

Alessandra Campana, Music
Eulogio Guzmán, Visual and Material Studies, SMFA
Peter Levine, Philosophy
Pedro Ángel Palou, Romance Languages
Alisha Rankin, History
Kamran Rastegar, International Literary and Cultural Studies

STAFF

Kamran Rastegar, Director
Courtney McDermott, Program Administrator
INITIATIVES

CULTURE, HISTORY AND TRANSLATION GROUP

The goal of this group is to continue to create a model of global intellectual collaboration that will renew humanities research, innovate curricula, and ultimately, generate a model of academic study that can shape a new era for Tufts and for the next generation of humanists. Building on the ongoing work of the Center for the Humanities at Tufts, and the newly-established Department of Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora, our work encompasses both academic interdisciplinary research projects such as the Comparative Global Humanities initiative, as well as outwardly-focused conversations, such as the Boston African American Freedom Trail project. Our programming has encouraged those conversations around new research that offer group members a context that stimulates new research approaches and methodologies towards enriching both their individual research aims, and the global conversation.

HUMANITIES READING GROUP

The Humanities Reading Group, involving faculty from across the arts and humanities departments, meets several times a semester to discuss readings on the role of the humanities in public life.