A YEAR IN REVIEW: ANNUAL REPORT
2021-2022
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The 2021-2022 academic year has been a challenging but deeply memorable year at the Center for the Humanities. The Center welcomed a larger than usual group of postdoctoral fellows — five — in addition to our three faculty fellows and two dissertation fellows. After having spent over a year unable to meet in person and with highly restricted access to the Center's physical home in the Fung House, we cautiously reassembled our community in the fall, working within university guidelines for masking and indoor meetings to bring our fellows and friends together. When the weather allowed, we made frequent use of our large outdoor patio, and sought to reestablish a sense of community in smaller and larger gatherings, both formally and informally. However, these guidelines still restricted us from being able to organize in-person events, and so we continued to organize our talks and lectures fully virtually.

Despite these restrictions, the community that assembled in the Fung House was collaborative and inspiring. The Center for the Humanities has long partnered with the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy (CSRD), and in response to a need in the new Department for Studies of Race, Colonialism and Diaspora (RCD), we embraced a proposal to relocate the department into Fung House for the immediate future. This colocation of the department and the two centers drew upon prior shared commitments and is simply the latest step the Center has taken to play a role in the incubation and establishment of the RCD. With these changes, the Fung House took on new life, and with a steady stream of individualized snacks available in our kitchen (in lieu of being able to resurrect our prior schedule of lunch events) the Center once again felt like the beating heart of a productive and supportive research community.

The public events we held this year were inspiring and deeply in tune with the challenges we face at Tufts and beyond. While the list of these events is too long to review in this setting, I will highlight a few of our programs to give a sense of the activities that we supported. In the fall, the Center collaborated with the Tisch College in cosponsoring events focusing on the history and present conditions of antisemitism. We were delighted to host Peter Beinart, a provocative moral voice on this question as well as on the question of Israel/Palestine. Beinart visited Tufts in person so as to have the opportunity to speak to students, faculty and community members in smaller settings before his lecture, which was virtual. In the spring semester, the Center organized the Phelps-Coit lecture featuring the writer Amitav Ghosh, and continued its collaboration with the Fares Center of Eastern Mediterranean Studies at the Fletcher School on an annual lecture focused on cultural currents of the Middle East and North Africa, with a special event in which the Omani International Booker Prize recipient, Jokha Alharthi was in conversation with our postdoctoral fellow, Mona Kareem.

Over the past few years, the Center has partnered with the Office of the Vice Provost (OVPR) for research on an initiative supporting innovative research into race, and is grateful for their support for the Translating Race Lab, an experimental venue for collaboration between the humanities and the sciences in exploring questions relating to teaching and researching race. Two of this year's postdocs, heidi andrea restrepo rhodes, and Jackson Davidow, were supported by the OVPR, and were central to the initiation of an experimental collective course titled Translating Race, co-organized by Professor Kris Manjapra and myself, along with several colleagues from the sciences the course presented an opportunity for participating faculty and students to engage in open cross-disciplinary discussions relating to race and other related themes.
Our other postdocs have immensely enriched our community as well. Mona Kareem organized a series of talks in conjunction with a class she taught, studying the cultures of Arab societies of the Gulf through new lenses. Our postdoctoral fellow Claire Cooley worked on her research projects exploring unstudied connections between histories of the cinemas of India, Iran and Egypt while also initiating events through the Center, and Alexis Samuels developed new research on Caribbean and Black diasporic cultures and literatures, with a focus on gendered subjectivities.

As this academic year ends, so completes my tenure as the Center’s director, a role I have held for the past four years. I am immensely grateful for the trust that was given to me, and for the many faculty and staff with whom I have had the privilege to work over this time. I am pleased that we were able to steer the Center through the worst days of the Covid-19 pandemic, while continuing to offer faculty and students at Tufts with various means to offer research support and a sense of community through the Center. Our Friday afternoon virtual presentations, which we initiated in the depths of the lockdown, have become a regular weekly highlight for many at Tufts, especially during a time in which many of us felt disconnected from our work and in need of a venue to gather with others around ideas and questions. We have offered small research grants, developed new links to the SMFA, and our book talks have given hope to many of us whose research and writing stalled under the stresses of the pandemic. It has been a challenging time, but I’m pleased to say that despite the burdens of the last few years, with the help of many colleagues and students, I’m able to leave the Center in a strong position to continue to serve our university as the hub of humanistic inquiry for all members of the Tufts community.

I have to particularly highlight my gratitude for Courtney McDermott, who joined the Center as its Program Administrator in my second year and who in many ways has been the heart and soul of our operations since her arrival. I am also excited that my friend and colleague Heather Curtis will be stepping into the director’s role and I look forward with anticipation to seeing what new initiatives and approaches will mark her leadership of the Center. Good luck, Heather!

All best,
Kamran Rastegar
Director of the Center for the Humanities at Tufts
Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature
FALL 2021 EVENTS

Sept 14 | lecture | "The Salem Witch Trials: Hauntings from our Civic Past" (Co-sponsored by Tisch College)
Marilynne K. Roach, Salem Witch Museum; Rachel Christ, AG21

Oct 1 | lecture | "Epistemology of the Violets: Heuristics toward a Sensorium of Afro-Japanese Creativity"
Will Bridges, University of Rochester

Peter Beinart, CNN political commentator; Editor-at-large; Associate Professor

Sarah Sobieraj, Tufts University

Oct 22 | book talk | "Mixing Medicines: Ecologies of Care in Buddhist Siberia"
Tatiana Chudakova, Tufts University

Oct 29 | lecture | "Critique of Halakhic Reason: Religious Norms and Human Reasoning in Jewish Tradition"
Yonatan Brafman, Tufts University

Nov 4 | film screening | Film screening of "Asmarina" with a Q&A
Medhin Paolos, Tufts University
Feb 18 | book talk | "Remembering Winfred Rembert: Chasing Me to My Grave: An Artist's Memoir of the Jim Crow South"
Erin Kelly, Tufts University

Mar 8 | lecture | "Phelps-Coit Annual Lecture"
Amitav Ghosh, Award-winning Author

Mar 10 | lecture | "The Gulf in Kerala"
Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India

Mar 11 | lecture | "A War Neverending: How Putin Turns the Past Into the Present"
Greg Carleton, Tufts University

Apr 1 | lecture | "Wôpanâak Language Reclamation"
Jessie Little Doe Baird, Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project

Apr 5 | book talk | "Temporary People: A Conversation"
Deepak Unnikrishnan, NYU Abu Dhabi

Apr 15 | staged reading | "Under a Big Sky"
Randy Reinholz, Playwright; Courtney Elkin Mohler, Butler University

Apr 19 | lecture | "The Arabic Novel in the Gulf: Between Documentation and Fiction"
Jokha Alharthi, Writer in conversation with Mona Kareem, CHAT Fellow

Apr 25 | lecture | "Rethinking Statehood in Palestine"
Leila H. Farsakh, University of Massachusetts, Boston
Nov 12 | fellow seminar | "Picturing a Pandemic: Brian Weil's AIDS Photographs and Epidemiological Art History"
Jackson Davidow, Postdoctoral Fellow

Nov 19 | fellow seminar | "'Shaky' Essences and 'Stable' Positions in the Prose of Queer Caribbean Diaspora Writers"
Alexis Samuels, Postdoctoral Fellow

Dec 10 | fellow seminar | "Sisypha: Pushing to Tell Women's Stories"
Jennifer Burton, Faculty Fellow

Feb 12 | fellow seminar | "Black Is: Race, Reconstruction and its Aftermath 1865-1935"
Kerri Greenidge, Faculty Fellow

Mar 4 | fellow seminar | "Sonic Labor: Female Cine-Workers and the First Talkies in Cairo and Bombay"
Claire Cooley, Postdoctoral Fellow

Mar 18 | fellow seminar | "Curating a Career: A Portrait of Ethel Waters, 1925-1939"
Teri Incampo, Graduate Fellow

Apr 8 | fellow seminar | "'It's People in the Swamp': Du Bois Against the Democracy of Things"
Nathan Wolff, Faculty Fellow

Apr 15 | fellow seminar | "Shame in the Flesh: Bildung and Sentimentalism in the Novel"
Neela Cathelain, Graduate Fellow

Apr 22 | fellow seminar | "What to the Slave is the Arabic Novel?"
Mona Kareem, Postdoctoral Fellow

Apr 29 | fellow seminar | "In Light of the Future Past: Nation-Building and Settler Colonial Fantasies of a New World Geography"
heidi andrea restrepo rhodes, Postdoctoral Fellow
FACULTY FELLOWS

Jennifer Burton
Professor of the Practice
Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies; Film and Media Studies

Kerri Greenidge
Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Professorship of Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora
Track Director, American Studies
Co-Director of the African American Trail Project

Nathan Wolff
Associate Professor of English

GRADUATE FELLOWS

Neela Cathelain
PhD candidate in the Department of English
Dissertation Title: Shame, Migration and the Novel Form

Teri Incampo
PhD candidate in the Department of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies
Dissertation Title:
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

Claire Cooley
Cultural History of the Middle East Postdoc
Project: Sonic Infrastructures: National Cinema Industries and the Soundscape of al-Hind

Jackson Davidow
Translating Race Lab Postdoc
Project on global AIDS cultural activism in the 1980s and 1990s

Mona Kareem
Center for the Humanities Postdoc
Project: The Other Gulf: Against National Literatures

heidi andrea restrepo rhodes
Translating Race Lab Postdoc
Project: Infinite Latitude: Speculative Imaginaries in the Afterlife of Discovery

Alexis Samuels
Center for the Humanities Postdoc
Project: "Shaky" Positions and "Stable" Strategies in the Prose of Queer Caribbean Diaspora Writers
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
TRANSLATING RACE LAB
The Translating Race Lab is an experimental co-learning interdisciplinary space that takes the broad category of race as its central concern, and explores the meanings of race, and its implications for research and education across different disciplinary knowledge systems. Race will serve as TRL’s “boundary object,” that is, the intersectional concept that collaborators will seek to interpret and translate according to their diverse disciplinary locations. This interdisciplinary project, crossing the Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM, is geared to collaboration, trial-and-error experimentation, and adaptive learning. Unlike other classroom spaces, faculty and students together constitute a co-learning community.

In the fall of 2021, this team-taught course brought together more than 10 Tufts scholars across the Humanities, the Social Sciences, and STEM to explore what race means to different academic disciplines and across disciplines. This experimental course invited upper-level undergraduates (juniors and seniors) across all disciplines to join as collaborators in re-imagining the curriculum, and in serving as ambassadors of new knowledge and new approaches to their home departments.

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. The group is organized by Professor John Lurz (English).