Contributors

This magazine is published by the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights.

Elena Lesley (Publisher): Elena is a graduate student in the Division of Global Affairs and Publications Coordinator for CGCHR. She graduated from Brown University with a BA in Political Science and has spent several years working in Cambodia.

Rohini Chandra (Issue Editor-in-Chief): Rohini is a third-year student at Rutgers-Newark studying Political Science. She is involved with various forms of media, from film and photography to writing, and appears in the upcoming movie Sama.

Feraan Mohamed (Issue Editor-in-Chief): Feraan is a student at Rutgers-Newark majoring in English, with a minor in Accounting. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism.

Bouvier Servillas (Issue Copyeditor): Bouvier is a student associate with CGCHR. She received a BA in English Literature from Temple University.

Nela Navarro (Faculty Advisor): Professor Navarro is Associate Director/Director of Education of CGCHR and coordinates the Center’s education programs.

Jade Antoinette Adebo (Interviewer): Jade is a Political Science/Anthropology Major and works for CGCHR, specifically in the Art and Education initiatives. She hopes to pursue a life of photojournalism.

Jeff Benvenuto (Writer): Jeff is a PhD student in the Division of Global Affairs. He has graduate degrees in History and Cultural Studies from, respectively, the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and Jagiellonian University. He is concerned with the plights of indigenous peoples worldwide as well as global environmental threats.

Merve Fejzula (Writer): Merve is a recent graduate of Rutgers-Newark with a double major in English and History, and a minor in Philosophy. She is also a researcher at the Diversity Research Center in the university’s Dana Library.

Froozan Makhdoom (Writer): Froozan is a student at Rutgers-Newark and a Junior Library Assistant at the South Orange Public Library.

Claudia Petrilli (Designer): Claudia, a graphic designer in New Jersey, graduated from Rutgers-Newark with a BA in Art & Design.

Yannek Smith (Writer): Yannek is a senior Political Science student at Rutgers-Newark and student associate for CGCHR. He is interested in post-conflict development and reconciliation. Last summer he went to Cambodia to intern at the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

Javairia Zia (Interviewer): Javairia studies both Political Science and pre-medicine at Rutgers-Newark. She hopes to become a doctor serving in conflict situations.

Special thanks to Professors Alex Hinton and Nela Navarro ***

Cover photo: Scenes from Kolkata by Rohini Chandra.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PERSPECTIVES

“Afghanistan, A Different View” *(By Froozan Makhdoom)* ................................................................. 4

“Paradise Redefined: Tunisia and the ‘Jasmine Revolution’”  
*(Elena Lesley)* ................................................................................................................................. 8

“Human Rights Floor Sponsors Truly Global Discourse”  
*(Rohini Chandra)* ............................................................................................................................ 12

“Hurricane Katrina and the Spectacle of Suffering”  
*(Jeff Benvenuto)* ............................................................................................................................. 14

## ARTS & CULTURE

“Q&A with Profound Aesthetic ‘s Nabil Zaidi” *(Rohini Chandra)* .................................................. 16

“From Palestine to France, Women Rappers Redefining Genre”  
*(Rohini Chandra)* ............................................................................................................................ 18

“A Conversation with Poet Nicole Cooley”  
*(Humanist contributors)* ................................................................................................................. 22

## EXPLORATION

“A Changing City: Kolkata, India in a Globalizing Era”  
*(Rohini Chandra)* ............................................................................................................................ 26

“Searching for Justice in Cambodia” *(Yannek Smith)* ................................................................. 30

“Students Bring Medical Relief to Honduras” *(Feraan Mohamed)* ........................................... 34

## INTERVIEWS

“Seven Questions for Aldo Civico” *(Feraan Mohamed)* ................................................................. 36

“Rutgers Law Prof Fights for Global Police Force” *(Merve Fejzula)* ............................................. 38

“Revisiting the ‘Damascus Spring’ at Rutgers” *(Elena Lesley)* ................................................... 40
Afghanistan: A Different View

*Froozan Makhdoom*

As I prepared for a trip to Afghanistan last summer, I was so excited to see my grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins that I completely forgot that, in America, Afghanistan is seen as a dangerous and “backward” place. For me, it has never been a backward and corrupt place; I have always viewed the country as a home, a place of comfort and love. It is a country rich in history and culture. It is the place my family comes from and where a large portion of them still live. Hearing such negative connotations in relation to Afghanistan actually angers me, because I know that the country is more than what the media claims it to be.

After all my anticipation, I finally left for Frankfurt, Germany with my mother on July 17. From there we flew to Kabul and, after that, Herat, Afghanistan. We were advised to fly between cities in Afghanistan if an air route existed because it would take less time. For instance, if we had traveled from Kabul to Herat by land, it would have taken us a minimum of one and a half days, versus the 45-minute plane ride.

After a somewhat bumpy trip, we arrived at the Herat Airport. There, I took in the differences among the three airports I had visited: John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK) in New York, Kabul International Airport (KIA), and Herat Airport. I realized that the three airports represented, in some ways, the actual countries in which they were located. JFK is a sleek, futuristic airport compared to KIA and Herat. Similarly, New York City is much more developed than either of the two cities in Afghanistan. Furthermore, KIA is better than the Herat Airport, just as Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, is more industrialized and advanced than the city of Herat. The airports reflect the areas in which they are built and the conditions of the people who live there. The richer the area, the more advanced and luxurious the airport is, the better off the people tend to be. Similarly, the poorer the region, the more primitive the airport is and the more impoverished the people are.

In Herat, I found myself tearing up for the first time. It was hard to see in person how behind Afghanistan’s infrastructure is compared to other countries. Herat Airport’s luggage area is located outside the airport itself, surrounded by metal fences and wires. Children negotiate with travelers to carry luggage while guards try to chase
them away. As we gathered up our suitcases, I had to regroup and remind myself that this was going to be a one-month long journey. I started missing my father, brothers and sisters that I had left at home.

When I looked at my mother and saw the joy in her eyes as she talked about seeing her mother, I had to force myself to smile. I decided I could sacrifice not seeing my sisters and brothers for a month if my mom had gone eight years without seeing her brothers and sisters.

As soon as we arrived in Herat, after a brief period of joyous hugging and crying, my mother and I were asked to go to a wedding. We were completely transformed from exhausted and disheveled travelers to lively and well-groomed guests. Before we knew it we were out of the house and in a hotel filled with other Afghani women and loud Afghani music. As I listened to the Afghani music and chatted with my cousins in the hotel, my three long days of airplane rides were easily and completely forgotten. The day went by quickly and the rest of the month was just the same. We were always rushing out of the house to go to a picnic (mela); driving up hills to parks, strolling in fields of pomegranate and apple trees; visiting family members in the villages; eating delicious rice, caramelized meat, and other Afghani food; drinking lots and lots of green tea; playing in the river; going donkey-back riding; riding on motorcycles and rickshaws to go out for ice cream; shopping in bazaars and in Herat City Center.

“I learned that my family also had preconceived notions about Americans. They had a negative view of all Americans as being pro-war and unfeeling about killing people. They did not believe Americans were family-oriented or loving – a situation similar, I believe, to how many Americans view Afghans. When I showed my grandmother a picture of my boss hugging me, she was surprised to see that an American was genuinely happy to be around me.”
Perspectives

(a new shopping mall); and going to wedding upon wedding. I have to admit it was very hard for me to adjust to my Afghani family the first week I was there. Although I did not realize it at the time, I came with certain preconceived assumptions about my family. I expected them to be very conservative and close-minded. Instead I found that they were very loose with certain religious practices such as the mixing between men and women. Eventually, I adjusted to this environment and learned that religion does not permeate every aspect of Afghani life as it is portrayed in America. My trip taught me to be more open-minded about people and to accept their customs and traditions even if I do not agree with all of them. I learned that my family also had preconceived notions about Americans. They had a negative view of all Americans as being pro-war and unfeeling about killing people. They did not believe Americans were family-oriented or loving – a situation similar, I believe, to how many Americans view Afghans. When I showed my grandmother a picture of my boss hugging me, she was surprised to see that an American was genuinely happy to be around me. I know that I have probably not dispelled all of their misconceptions about Americans, but I do believe that I have somehow helped to bridge the gap between my family and America. During our stay, we were fortunate to have experienced the “120 Days of Wind,” which occurs every year during July and August. This means that the weather is very breezy all day and night and there is almost no humidity. Although the average temperature was 100 degrees every day, the weather was absolutely gorgeous and refreshing.

My month-long journey in Herat was packed with events that I knew were very precious. I had my camera around my neck at all times so that I did not miss a moment. I knew, however, that it was going to be hard to capture what I saw with the naked eye. The pictures simply did not do justice to what was actually there: the mountains running across the scenes, the trees swaying side to side, feeling the rush of the exhilarating wind.

Before I knew it I was packing and coming to Kabul again. It felt as if my month was not even ten days. It was the hardest moment of my life saying goodbye to my grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In no time, we were arriving in Kabul and flying back to the west. When I returned I prepared a presentation for my place of work, the South Orange Public Library. I was excited to show others that Afghanistan was not war, terrorists, the Taliban, riots, death, and tragedies. Afghanistan can be associated with positive words like picnics, weddings, family, togetherness, happiness, and laughter. It is truly sad that this beautiful country has been overshadowed by a dark war and as a result its rich culture and people have been forgotten.”
Afghanistan can be associated with positive words like picnics, weddings, family, togetherness, happiness, and laughter. It is truly sad that this beautiful country has been overshadowed by a dark war, and as a result its rich culture and people have been forgotten. After the presentation at the library I was asked to give a talk at University High School in Newark, and I am now preparing to present at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in Manhattan. Like my boss Ms. Kalb says, “people only believe what they hear.” I am ready to show people something that they need to hear. I am more than ready to show people another version of my home, people and culture.
Paradise Redefined: Tunisia and the “Jasmine Revolution”

Elena Lesley

Last summer, I had the chance to spend around a month in Tunisia, a small North African country known for its azure Mediterranean waters, magnificent vistas and ancient historical sites. There are many reasons Tunisia – just a few hours by plane from cities like Rome and Paris – has become a playground for European tourists. Along with its scenic beaches and convenient location, the country has followed an intensive program of secularization and modernization since its independence from France in 1956. A booming economy and complete disavowal of Islamic fundamentalism had made the country a darling to many western nations: the United States and France, among others, regularly praised former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali for his efforts to combat terrorism.

Yet this was only one side of Tunisia. As I learned during my short time there, those foreign tourists who enjoyed pitchers of sangria and late night discotheques in their enormous package hotels were largely shielded from the social turmoil brewing in the country. That long-repressed anger and discontent erupted in December, as Tunisians took to the streets demanding that their corrupt and authoritarian president vacate his office. After weeks of demonstrations, Ben Ali finally fled the country on January 14 and now a coalition government is struggling to restore order. The developments have shocked many international observers. Ben Ali ousted former president Habib Bourguiba from power during a bloodless coup in 1987, and even though he proved more repressive than his predecessor, Tunisia has long been considered a success story and one of the most stable countries in the region. The events that transpired in December and January – ultimately resulting in the defeat of an authoritarian ruler by a popular, liberal movement – were completely unexpected and unprecedented in the Arab world. While I never could have predicted this dramatic turn of events, my experiences in Tunisia did convince me that the country’s political situation would be untenable in the long term.

The fundamental problem I observed was this: a highly educated population was living in a police state. Since the country’s independence from France, a major push had been made for popular education. But job opportunities had not kept pace with the increasing number of college graduates and huge segments of the Tunisian population have been left unemployed or underemployed. Moreover, while the country’s rapid economic growth had gained international
recognition, many of the benefits had been closely guarded by the president's coterie. Recent Wikileaks cables described the life of excess enjoyed by the country's ruling elite, complete with pet tigers and ice cream flown in from St. Tropez on the French Riviera.

Meanwhile, average Tunisians were struggling. I often heard complaints about the lack of jobs and opportunities for those who weren't connected to Ben Ali's family. One former university professor I met said he had given up his profession to become a tour guide. He said he could not make enough as an educator to support his family, and he had become increasingly depressed by his disenchanted students. "They know there are no jobs when they graduate," he told me, "so why would they study hard?" Indeed, I often encountered taxi drivers with college degrees and knowledge of several languages.

Reports suggest that it was the self-immolation of a distraught produce street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, that sparked the protests in Tunisia. Although it was his only source of income, police confiscated his cart when they discovered him selling without a license, allegedly handling him harshly and slapping his face (some have contested stories of Bouazizi's mistreatment by officials). In an act of desperation, Bouazizi lit himself on fire. (He died in the hospital around two weeks later.) Demonstrations originated in his town, Sidi Bouzid, and eventually engulfed the country.

Barred from using traditional media to organize what has been dubbed the "Jasmine Revolution" (after Tunisia's national flower), Tunisians turned to new technologies like Facebook and Twitter. Under Ben Ali, the press was tightly controlled, as was television, which broadcast only a few channels, many of which recycled the same stock footage of the president and other officials. (In fact, during the ongoing anti-government demonstrations, national TV played Islamic chants along with vers-

A view from the popular tourist city, Sidi Bou Said. Photo courtesy of Joel Rozen.
Yet, even as technology progressed and Tunisians challenged the status quo bit by bit, Ben Ali’s regime seemingly became increasingly repressive. It employed an army of covert “citizen watchers” to spy on their friends, family and colleagues and report back to the government. Ahmad Chebil told the *Los Angeles Times* that he had been approached many times to be a “citizen watcher,” but refused because he had read a French translation of George Orwell’s *1984*. “I saw … the government and saw that it’s exactly like this book, with the big pictures of Ben Ali everywhere and people listening in to phone calls and informing on each other,” he told the *Times*.

During my time in Tunisia, I noticed that police were ever-present and seemed to contribute to a culture of fear in the country. On a number of occasions, while wandering through the streets of the capital city, I would take a wrong turn and end up near an official-looking building or extravagant mansion surrounded by guards with automatic weapons. They did not take kindly to my presence and ordered me out of the area with a level of force and urgency that seemed unnecessary given the circumstances. (And I assume that their response was somewhat softened by the fact that I was a woman and a foreign tourist.) It was as if everyone was always under suspicion. While visiting coastal cities, my husband and I would often venture outside the designated *Zone Touristique* in the evenings to explore local nightlife. Whenever we returned, our taxi would be stopped at the zone checkpoints, police shining their flashlights into the car and examining our faces, attitudes and dress. While they always let us through – and they explained the checkpoints were set up to prevent unsavory elements from entering tourist zones of the Quaran, according to NPR.) I was struck by the level of censorship in Tunisia. After having lived for a long time in Cambodia – a country with lax copyright and censorship laws – I was accustomed to a thriving local trade in bootlegged movies and CDs, photocopied books and pirated TV stations. In Tunisia, access to such forms of media was extremely limited. Vendors had to apply for permission from the government to bring new materials into the country, and numerous requests were denied if books, music and movies were deemed inappropriate – or worse – critical of the government. Still, cracks in the system were beginning to show, especially in relation to the Internet. While numerous websites were blocked (including the Wikipedia entry on “Tunisia”), some young and well-educated Tunisians had figured out how to use a proxy to circumvent government censorship. Moreover, when a DVD shop owner discovered that my husband and I were film buffs, he disappeared into a hidden back room and reemerged with copies of several foreign and Tunisian movies we had requested.
Perspectives

TUNISIA

zones – I felt the routine nature of the process said something about the social climate.

Indeed, as protestors took to the streets after Bouazizi’s self-immolation, police reportedly fired into crowds in a disturbing show of force. More than 100 Tunisians may have died during the demonstrations, but figures are unconfirmed given the unwillingness of Ben Ali’s regime to let foreign journalists or human rights monitoring groups into the country. Resistance to the government grew over the course of several weeks and on January 14, Ben Ali declared a state of emergency and fled the country.

Now the world watches to see what will happen next. Although Tunisia is a small country, its Jasmine Revolution has already influenced opinion in the region, prompting a wave of self-immolation protests and helping to inspire the uprising in Egypt. Yet Tunisia’s future is far from certain. After over two decades of repressive rule, there are no strong opposition parties with widespread popular support. The most disconcerting prospect for many western observers is the potential rise of a militant Islamist force. Yet analysts with experience in the country report that the relatively secular nature of Tunisian society would not support such a development. Demonstrators seem to be calling for more freedom, not less. And the exiled head of Tunisia’s main Islamist party says that he would champion a moderate, democratic government based on Islamic ideals. Moreover, Tunisia has long been considered as a leader in women’s rights in the region – witness the numerous photos of female protestors during the demonstrations – and many analysts say Tunisian women would resist sacrificing their privileges to an overly dogmatic religious regime.

Despite the country’s tenuous political situation, there are reasons for optimism. Opposition leaders and political prisoners have been set free throughout the country and new faces have appeared in the transitional government. Although some Tunisians have continued to protest the inclusion of any officials linked with Ben Ali’s regime in the transitional government, elections for a constitutional council will be held in late July. Meanwhile, people have been relishing their newfound freedoms. Previously banned books are available for sale, newspapers are no longer required to print at least one picture of Ben Ali on their front pages every day and people are openly enjoying the music of popular rapper El Général, who was recently released from prison, NPR reports.

Still, Tunisia’s future is far from certain and instability will no doubt reign while the country struggles to forge a government and to redefine itself. Hopefully the new Tunisia will be worthy of the revolution that inspired its transformation.
Human Rights Floor Sponsors Truly Global Discourse

Rohini Chandra

Last semester, a group of students gathered every Monday during free period to debate and discuss the numerous challenges related to human rights initiatives. We participated in truly global discourse, our sessions examining issues ranging from human trafficking to the Armenian Genocide. We even had professors and various guest speakers from abroad join our discussions via Skype.

The group – known as the “Human Rights Floor” – is currently a learning community, and will one day be a living arrangement on the Newark campus. While there were no easy answers to the questions we confronted weekly, our sessions challenged us all to think about human rights in new ways.

During the semester, we learned about human rights movements in different locations around the world and confronted the tensions that can arise between “universal” conceptions of human rights (universalism) and local cultures (cultural relativity). By trying to examine these issues logically, many of us hope to gain the preparation to influence our generation of policymakers and NGO leaders.

There is no doubt that we sometimes felt “stumped” by the difficult questions we explored in the classroom. For example, we tried to determine how foreign countries, national governments, and victims themselves can help combat human trafficking in Thailand, when the discussion of trafficking in the country is often taboo and stigmatized.

We also learned from Professor Elçin Haskollar that many Turkish citizens are unaware of the Armenian Genocide because it is not taught in their history classes. How can we possibly have a human rights discussion about the Armenian Genocide if the Turkish people, for example, are unaware of the Armenian Genocide? In our discussions we play devil’s advocate, trying to represent and understand the perspectives of others.

We examine academically the relation of globalization to human rights, all while enriching our discourse with globalizing technology. Adding another dimension to ‘global dialogue’ we video chat with one of our professors based in Southeast Asia, Natalie Jesionka. Via Skype, Professor Jesionka shares – in addition to her fieldwork done in the mountain villages of Thailand – direct observations of human trafficking and the effectiveness of NGOs. We have also held discussions with Mickey Choosetha, the founder of COSA (the Children’s Organization of Southeast Asia) and a Thailand-based *Time* and *National Geographic* photographer and journalist, who shared his knowledge of the human trafficking phenomena in Southeast Asia.

Human Rights Floor sessions can also serve as a source of inspiration. During one meeting we were able to video chat with the founder of ‘Students Helping Honduras,’ Shin Fujiyama. He helped to develop a network of 25 college campuses able to raise nearly a million dollars for the education of Honduran children, and all at the impressive age of 25 years old. During our
Elçin Haskollar, a PhD student in the Division of Global Affairs, teaches students in the Human Rights Floor about her experiences researching the Armenian Genocide. Here she is pictured conducting fieldwork in Azerbaijan. She traveled there in 2009 to conduct interviews with internally displaced persons and to gauge the implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-1994) for Azeri-Armenian relations. Photos courtesy of Elçin Haskollar.

discussion with him via Skype students asked how he successfully overcame the issue of dealing with local cultures as an outsider. His answer was that he cooperated and worked with local officials, learned and respected the local culture, and enhanced his communication with others by learning Spanish. From Shin we learned that tackling human rights issues such as lack of education is certainly possible – even at a young age. Just think. Imagine doing what Shin did. In our class, we learn that solutions to human rights problems have been successful in the past, even if they are difficult to create and implement. Our generation must therefore continue to confront these complex issues.

For more information about the CGCHR Human Rights Floor:

Please contact CGCHR:
cghr@andromeda.rutgers.edu
OR Elçin Haskollar at elcin.haskollar@gmail.com

And for CGCHR Human Rights Floor updates, please join our Facebook fanpage:

[Link to Facebook page]
Hurricane Katrina and the Spectacle of Suffering

Jeff Benvenuto

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in September 2005 some commentators referred to the victims as “refugees,” hoping the term would capture the drastic scope of this unprecedented American disaster that dislocated nearly one million people. Many of the survivors repudiated this terminology as insensitive, rightly affirming that their political rights as citizens were not washed away along with everything else. According to the United Nations Convention, the legal definition of “refugee” implies a person who has fled his or her home country, and who is unable “to avail himself of the protection of that country.” Were victims of Hurricane Katrina no longer entitled to the rights accorded all U.S. citizens? Typically, references to refugees evoke images of suffering in faraway places, of people forced into exile and stripped of their dignity – something, at any rate, that is foreign to mainstream America. Unfortunately, such a pronounced sense of social-psychological distancing was disturbingly apparent in the wake of the storm, as the rest of America blithely disregarded the root causes of the catastrophe.

The pejorative label of “refugee” also seemed to imply that the victims – the disproportionate majority of whom were poor, African American, and/or elderly – would have been left in a Hobbesian state of nature if not for the gracious humanitarianism of the rest of the country. Such a hubristic sentiment was expressed by former First Lady Barbara Bush upon her visit to the Houston Astrodome, then serving as a makeshift “refugee camp”: “What I’m hearing, which is sort of scary, is that they all want to stay in Texas. Everybody is so overwhelmed by the hospitality, and so many of the people in the arenas here, you know, were underprivileged anyway. This is working very well for them.”

What was so “scary” about the influx of Katrina victims? Was it because the storm washed away the wall that hid the systemic inequalities that have historically shaped American social geography? It is doubtful that Barbara Bush or much of the rest of gentrified America dwelled on this implication for too long, if at all. Perhaps more “scary” was the apparent unleashing of a domestic “Third World”: of “welfare queens” selfishly draining hard-earned tax dollars from those supposedly more productive elements of society and ex-convicts who, if given the chance, would kill and rape with impunity. Indeed, gross sensationalization of the disaster by the twenty-four-hour cable network news undoubtedly stirred this trepidation, recalling racial stigmas deeply ingrained in America’s collective subconscious. For instance, images from New Orleans of African Americans “looting” with opportunistic ruthlessness were in stark contrast with the far more limited coverage of white people “finding” what they could for survival.

Such a sensationalized mischaracterization is surely an unfortunate consequence of contemporary mass media. The advent of twenty-four-hour, for-profit cable networks has transformed the “news” into a packaged commodity, the primary purpose of which is not necessarily to responsibly inform viewers but rather, first and foremost, to attract more “customers” – hence their endless quests for ever higher ratings. Accordingly, televi-
Perspectives

KATRINA

sion news has devolved into a form of entertainment, a spectacle where superficiality has outweighed substance.

But mass media sensationalization has long been a crucial component of humanitarianism. For better or worse, the appeal of grotesque imagery has been used to foster the critical mass of compassionate sentimentality necessary to motivate relief efforts. Such an approach, apparently necessary to engage the public, is problematically myopic, unable or unwilling to look into the deep structural causes of social vulnerability that underlay any humanitarian disaster. In the public discourse surrounding Katrina, the profound inequities at stake were generally neglected and truncated out of view. Without any frame of reference, many upper-and middle-class spectators of the storm, taking their social safety nets for granted, simply could not understand why the victims did not take it upon themselves to evacuate. “Why didn’t they just load up their SUVs,” they asked incredulously, “and use their credit cards to pay for a hotel room?”

Such obtuse disbelief speaks to the shortsightedness of humanitarian narratives. In this case, however, it was not only the social geography of race and poverty that were ignored as root causes. Also underemphasized have been the implications of global climate change. After all, it was no coincidence that 2005, which saw the most active and destructive Atlantic hurricane season in recorded history, also had the highest annual average of global surface temperatures. It is likely, then, as global warming grows worse, hurricanes may become more frequent and deadly. As sea levels rise with the possibility of melting polar ice caps, storm surges will reach greater heights and stretch further inland. And as coastal regions continue to overdevelop, particularly with the increased exploitation of offshore energy resources, wetlands will further diminish, making the effects of storm surges all the more destructive. More and more people may thus be similarly afflicted with the trials of environmentally-induced dispersals. Indeed, a new term is entering the humanitarian lexicon – “environmental refugee” – to signify this increasingly relevant phenomenon.

Humanitarian narratives surrounding Hurricane Katrina have thus displayed an unfortunate myopia that remains ignorant of the catastrophe’s ultimate causes. Historically complex legacies of racism and class warfare, together with the portent of contemporary climate change, have been cast aside. Instead, sensationalized superficialities have dominated the discourse. In the process, the victims have been blamed for an apparent lack of individual responsibility, despite not having the privileged social safety nets presumed by many Americans. If humanitarianism has any hope of addressing the welfare of our fellow humans, then the structural root causes of this catastrophe and others must be acknowledged and addressed.

For more on Hurricane Katrina, and the CGCHR event “Art and Disaster: Hurricane Katrina Five Years Later” held this Fall 2010 semester:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPElx2WeIWA
Q&A with Profound Aesthetic’s
Nabil Zaidi

Rohini Chandra

Profound Aesthetic is a clothing line with a positive message based in Manalapan, New Jersey. Marketing Director Nabil Zaidi participated in a Q&A with CGCHR student associate Rohini Chandra.

1. How did “Profound Aesthetic” develop?

“The idea of starting a clothing company had been floating around our heads for some time, but it wasn’t until a trip back from Chicago in 2008 that we decided to become serious about it. Profound Aesthetic team members, Faraz, Iram, as well as myself, had noticed a lack of substance in t-shirt brands and wanted to introduce our perception of graphic art, fashion and style.”

2. What do you think makes the Profound Aesthetic brand different from other fashion lines and attractive to youth?

“Profound Aesthetic is just so thought provoking. Each tee is designed to have a deeper meaning behind the art, along with appeal. We call our t-shirts ‘concept tees.’ If you look at our collection, you will recognize that each tee has a concept, a purpose, a story.”

3. You emphasize also that this fashion line is universal. What message do you have to the older generations about your new art form?

“Our generation’s minds are getting polluted with ignorance and simply lack of thinking. When I went shopping, all I saw on the shelves were t-shirts of pictures of naked women, bunch of nonsense cluttering graphics, or ignorant statements. Through fashion, we want to promote peace, teach history, and encourage people to ‘dream big.’ We want to change pop culture.”

4. In your blog, you mention the difference between “fashion” and “style.” While adhering to fashion norms, how do you promote individuality as one of your goals?

“Profound Aesthetic is more than just a t-shirt line. It is a trend, a way of life, a culture. We are unique because we also market a ‘look’ to pop culture. You can visit our look book page on our website to find our taste of fashion. Yes, I consider our-
selves an urban brand but we are not limited to just the urban culture. You will find people from various different groups, races, and styles wearing Profound Aesthetic.”

5. Does a “fashion designer’s block” exist? What inspires you and your fellow artists to create?

“We get inspired from almost anything. Personal daily life experiences, a lyric, a picture, or a thought. If I try to sit there and think of a design, I wouldn’t be able to. If you tell me to go take a walk in the city and get in contact with so many visuals, people, and then go sit at a computer and design, I would come up with something that would blow your mind away based on my reflection of that experience.”

For more information about this clothing line, please visit:

www.profoundaesthetic.com

Have a look at Profound Aesthetic’s lookbooks:

www.profoundaesthetic.com/lookbook.html
Rap is no longer primarily the musical domain of Americans – or of men. With the rise of female rappers like Hard Kaur, who spits rhymes in English and Hindi, and Shadia Mansour, the “first lady” of Arabic hip hop, women rappers throughout the world have started to express themselves through different languages, instrumentation and rhythms.

Of course rap always had international roots. The musical form was influenced by the griots (or bards) of West Africa who rhythmically delivered stories over percussion. Modern rap took shape in 1970s New York and quickly spread through the country, but the scene was largely dominated by men.

To get respect in the hardcore, male-dominated rap world, some women MCs “stashed” their femininity and showcased their gangster bravado, Joy Bennett Kinnon wrote in a 1999 article for *Ebony*. Later, the emergence of sexually provocative artists such as Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim pressured other female rappers to follow their lead.

“You look at people like Da Brat and how their images changed and you really see the conundrum these women were in, now that this sexual thing took precedent,” Ava DuVernay, a documentary filmmaker, told Reuters in 2010.

Within the past decade, a new generation of women rappers has continued to redefine the genre. Explaining her image in *Interview Magazine*, Nicki Minaj said “I made a conscious decision to try to tone down the sexiness, I want people—especially young girls—to know that in life, nothing is going to be based on sex appeal. You’ve got to have something else to go with that.”
Beyond America, however, international female rappers are both brandishing their sexuality and earning respect with their social messages. Still keeping their roots in the streets, they are transcending borders. Here are a few who have something to say:

**Keny Arkana:**
*French*

Keny Arkana is a French rap artist involved in the “alter-globalization” movement with “La Rage Du People,” a music collective, which started in the neighborhood of Noailles in Marseilles. The movement advocates democracy, economic justice, environmental protection, and human rights over material gain. Of Argentine heritage and the product of an impoverished family, she began rapping at the age of 12 and made a name for herself mostly in the underground scene of rap. Her first single, *La rage*, released in 2006, was inspired by the 2005 civil unrest in France. She may not be mainstream, but she is certainly catching worldwide attention.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8txhtB2e5M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8txhtB2e5M)
Hard Kaur:  
**English, Punjabi**

Hard Kaur is known as the first female rapper and hip-hop artist of India. Switching between British English and Punjabi Hindi, she breaks the stereotype of the Indian girl donning a *salwar-kameez* (traditional dress). With her firsthand experience living the “Indian way” overseas and its double stan-

dards, she describes the differences between the “Little Indias” abroad and the real India. She also emphasizes her love for the “rude boy culture,” which originated in Jamaica and describes the Indian gangster youth in England. Having experienced the death of her father in India’s 1984 Anti-Sikh riots, she encourages young people to remember their tough roots. While sampling Bollywood songs, you’ll realize her lyrics are juxtaposed with the *Desi* (South Asian) flavor of *Dhol* (Indian percussion instrument) rhythm.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4w05yL3p74

“An advocate of rap as nonviolent resistance, Mansour often draws on images of Middle Eastern conflict in her videos. She also freely expresses her view of Israel’s forty-three-year control of the West Bank. To distinguish herself from other British rappers, she sings in Arabic, which she believes to be a classical language of poetry. While giving concerts in Bethlehem, Hebron, and Ramallah, she works with young rappers and hopes to promote her identity and culture to the regional Diaspora.”

Ana Tijoux:  
**Spanish**

Born to a French mother and a Chilean father in political exile during Pinochet’s dictatorship, Ana Tijoux, a politically charged hip-hop singer, has set groundbreaking expectations in the rap worlds...
Shadia Mansour: Arabic

Known as the “first and only lady” of Arabic hip-hop, Shadia Mansour is a British-born Palestinian singer and MC. Mansour finds inspiration in her family’s involvement in politics. An advocate of rap as nonviolent resistance, Mansour often draws on images of Middle Eastern conflict in her videos. She also freely expresses her view of Israel’s forty-three-year control of the West Bank. To distinguish herself from other British rappers, she sings in Arabic, which she believes to be a classical language of poetry. While giving concerts in Bethlehem, Hebron, and Ramallah, she works with young rappers and hopes to promote her identity and culture to the regional Diaspora.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eNYXkQT5J4
New Orleans native Nicole Cooley shared her collection of poems about Hurricane Katrina this fall at Rutgers-Newark, during the CGCHR events “Breach” and “Art and Disaster: Hurricane Katrina Five Years Later.” Cooley is a Professor of English and Creative Writing at Queens College-City University of New York.

An interview with Cooley was conducted by CGCHR student associates Jade Antoinette, Javairia Zia and Rohini Chandra.

Q: What prompted you to write this book, Breach?

“What made me want to write this book was being from New Orleans and watching my beloved city be destroyed with my parents in it because they had made the decision not to evacuate. So watching New Orleans, my city, being destroyed on TV and knowing my parents were there led me to want to do something. All I could think to do was to write everything down, which is my way of coping as a poet and person of the world. I began to write everything down, not thinking that I want to write a poem about this, but to simply record. I threw everything into a basket, all the pieces of text, newspaper articles, emails, and photographs. I threw it all into a basket thinking I don’t know what it will become, but I need to somehow save this. After many revisions and many drafts of poems later, it ended up becoming this book.”

Q: What is your writing process like?

“Writing poetry is the arena of life where I allow myself to be messy and pretty neat. I tell my students, at my job, if the worst thing you do all day is write a bad poem, you’re having a good day. Writing a bad poem does not hurt anyone. If I have writer’s block, I write a bad poem and that poem takes me somewhere else. I write a bad poem, a messy poem, a poem on a scrap of paper, a poem on a matchbox, a poem on a receipt, a poem on my hand with a pen. It’s all a big mess mess mess. I generate as many ideas as I can. Then that’s the basket of stuff for this book.”
Then I go back and try to make it into something good, which is much harder. The fun is collecting all this weird stuff. Scribbling all these lines seeing what will happen. And then you fine tune it into something far less messy.”

**Q: What would you like readers to walk away with?**

“If people would think about Hurricane Katrina for five minutes, then I did my job with this book. If people would think, ‘Oh Yeah, August 29th, 2010, was the fifth anniversary of Katrina!’ If they were reminded of that, if they got a sense of the images that circulated Katrina, I would feel great. I do believe there are connections between poetry and social justice and social action. I have to believe that to keep writing, but I go back to my favorite poet, my heroine, Muriel Rukeyser, twentieth century poet-activist. My favorite quote from her book, *The Book of the Dead*: ‘What Three Things Can Never Be Done? Forget, keep silent, stand alone.’ To me, I’m like, how do we keep from forgetting, how do we stop keeping silent, how do we not stand alone? We can write a poem that someone else will read that takes us out of that silence, that connects us to another human being, that keeps us from forgetting.”

**Q: All of your poems evoke personal emotions, so I imagine writing them must be an effort in itself. Are all those personal reflections, are they only of you and your family, or are they of people you know, close friends?**

“I think it would be wrong to say that I was there and experienced Katrina. I can say that I saw Katrina from afar and wished I was there to do something. I think for me it was friends, family, and all of it. I think for me, I want to be careful to situate myself as the outsider I truly am. When I returned to New Orleans, it’s not where I live. I live in New Jersey. It’d be wrong to pretend that I am still from there.
Q: What improved preventative measures can be taken?

“Right after the storm, people were talking using Holland as an example because of their dikes and levees, which are built in a different way to withstand tons of water pressure. Now, that seems to have dissipated. Now, it’s like, ‘Oh, let’s just patch it up!’ What they’ve done now, they’ve also rerouted the levees so that different parts of the city would flood if there were a big storm again. I just don’t think it’s better.

I think 2 years ago, Hurricane Gustavo hit. Everyone evacuated and the storm didn’t hit. So people were like, ‘I’m not evacuating again.’ I evacuated, it cost me tons of money. I went all the way, nothing happened, I came back, and you forced me out. People want to know what they’re supposed to do.”

Q: Having seen the disaster and its consequences, would you consider Hurricane Katrina as a self-created or a natural disaster?

“I would say it’s primarily a human-made disaster, but we can’t discount the part of it that is a natural disaster, the part of it that destroyed Mississippi, and the winds, water, or the storm surge basically that came over the flood walls. A lot of it is human-made and that’s what I’ve come to realize more and more as time goes on. Now I’m watching the Army Corps of Engineers rebuild the levees, but they’re not rebuilding it back up to where it should be, and everybody knows it. It just makes you want to scream because it can happen again. Except now, we have the added oil on top of it. You can’t bear to repeat the past, but we can see the past in 2005. Can we please learn a lesson? Can this please not happen again? Can someone please do something? It’s very alarming. Hurricane season is quite stressful. I’m always checking the weather now and thinking about what hurricanes could be heading for New Orleans.”

Q: You made a reference to the 9/11 sky in your poem. Any reason for that?

“If you remember the day of 9/11, it was this beautiful blue sky. I always think of that. Katrina was 13 days before 9/11. The day Hurricane Katrina hit here was similarly a beautiful blue cloudless day. I was thinking how could it be so blue here when I know that’s happening down there.”

Q: What can young people, like us, and your readers do? You mention a lot about what the government can do, such as building levees and a better infrastructure in the state. What can our generation do?

“What a fantastic question that no one has ever asked before. I think everyone should go to New
Nicole Cooley

Arts & Culture

Orleans like almost like a civic duty — not only to the headquarters. Everyone should go down there and see it. I know there is a lot of wonderful work by AmeriCorps and Habitat for Humanity. I wish these things were done by the government and not by volunteer organizations.

There’s a burgeoning of social service in New Orleans, not necessarily by the government, but by individual people. Tulane University now has public service as a part of its BA, like if you come to this school, you will help this city. There is a new tradition developing of young people in their early 20s, giving back to the city. New Orleans is in desperate need of public school teachers because schools are being revamped. It’s a hard place to live at the moment. Unfortunately, it’s expensive as a place to move to. Rents are still up because of the scarcity of housing. If you can go down and volunteer for a few days, helping with rebuilding, that is crucial. If you can’t do that because it’s hard to do, also being aware and going out and searching for the real story behind New Orleans. There are wonderful books that have been written about the storm, everything from Douglas Brinkley’s, ‘the Great Deluge,’ which was the first book to come out about the storm and really tell the story of it, to Patricia Smith’s ‘Blood Dazzler.’ Really going to different sources and trying to understand the storm is crucial. Then bringing those poems, stories, and photographs back to others in your life. I think too often we get caught up in the ‘official’ story, and we don’t see the stories of the actual individuals and their suffering and what it’s like.”

Watch Nicole Cooley read from Breach:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnLMHtkEMIo

www.nicolecooley.com
A Changing City: Kolkata, India in a Globalizing Era

Rohini Chandra

During my childhood visits to India, when the electricity — or “current,” as they call it there — went out in the neighborhood, my cousins and I would roam through the labyrinth of back alleyways, chasing kites. Unfortunately, the same kite we chased after would sometimes get tangled in the bundle of electric cords that had failed to produce electricity in the first place. Today, the situation has changed. In keeping with Kolkata’s rapid modernization, the electricity rarely goes out. And people nowadays are more likely to be on their blackberries and computers surfing Facebook, than partaking in the more traditional pastime of flying kites. Although I am only 20 years old, in my lifetime alone I have seen the city transform.

This past summer, I was able to wander the streets of Kolkata as a backpacker. If you were to join me for a ride on an auto rickshaw through the city, you would be surprised at how many malls and tall apartment buildings have cropped up in between the decaying bazaars and little shanties. Consumerism has taken over the city. Passing by, you would feel like you were in America, as gangs of spiky-haired teenagers chatting on their mobiles carry shopping bags emblazoned with Timberland and Armani labels. As luxury condominiums increase in places like Highland Park and Silver Spring, aunties and uncles buy Lysol and vegetables at a “Big Bazaar,” the biggest grocery chain. It seems clear that the standard of living has become more Western — people are saving less and spending more.

Redefining lifestyle for the Kolkatan middle class, city projects like the South City Projects (Kolkata) Ltd. are creating new real estate landmarks and improving infrastructure. Bringing great advancement to the city, this corporation has developed shopping complexes, townships, residential buildings, and corporate spaces. Not only are middle class Kolkatans shopping more, they are also living in better-built homes, schools, and offices. Recently, a 900,000-square-foot mall was opened in the southern part of the city. Among one of the largest in India, it houses 40 new retail centers. In addition, 20 new multiplex cinemas were built as the city expands to the east. Contributing to the increase in per capita income, these projects provide employment and harness the best skills in the sectors of engineering, design, architecture, and business. The new urban landscape is attracting the educated middle class, wealthier citizens, and NRIs (non-resident Indians) or migrants from abroad to the new Kolkata.
Despite the drastic change in middle class lifestyles, the issue of poverty continues to exist. Not everyone has acquired a better standard of living. Although slums may be worse in Mumbai (which shelters four times as many people), the slums of Kolkata are spread throughout the city. During the sweltering Monsoon season, I saw the same miserable reality of people living near me who had no access to air-conditioning. In addition to the slums, I still see old men pulling rickshaws, symbols of exploitation, barefoot in Shealdah bazaar although the law has abolished it. I continue to see homeless kids not attending school. I still see the expanding epidemics of AIDS in the red light district of Sonagachi and malaria during the Monsoon season.

Observing these ongoing social issues, some may claim that India’s globalization has only increased the gap between the rich and poor. There is no doubt that urban balkanization or class stratification demands attention.

This evidence of poverty coincides with the Communist Party’s disappearing ideology. As the paint of Marxist propaganda on Kolkata’s walls fade, politics simultaneously drifts from communism toward the Congress
more jobs such as altering clothes, barbering, washing clothes and fixing appliances. Learning the capitalist concepts of thrift and professionalism, a tailor now saves money, travels with a mobile phone from his slum every day, and sets up his sewing machine on the sidewalk to garner profit. Moreover, food stands and vendors testify to the rise of the lower middle class from abject poverty. The increase in family cars shows the rise in affordability of goods. These daily images of Kolkata exemplify the irony of globalization. With Kolkata’s high level of secondary education, it may also become a service hub in the information technology sector. More than 200 IT companies have developed in West Bengal. Moreover,
As globalization helps foster economic development in the region, Kolkata is gradually becoming the Bengali entrepôt for eastern India, Bangladesh, and Burma. This city could become the new global gateway to the Southeast. With trade often trumping national borders in today’s globalized world, traveling armies of “professionals,” which include all classes of workers, are transforming the city into a diverse industrial hub.

It is exhilarating to see the drastic changes occurring in Kolkata today. Although the word “Kolkata” has often evoked images of street poverty, AIDS, malaria, and prostitution, the growing diversification of this city is forging a new global village in the worldwide network of globalization.

the government intends on Kolkata becoming a competitor to the service cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad. It is no wonder that a recent article in The Atlantic proclaimed, “Forget Mother Teresa, think IT and young people with disposable income.”
Searching for Justice in Cambodia

Yannek Smith

Nothing could have mentally prepared me for Cambodia. Stepping out of the Phnom Penh airport last May, into 100 degree weather, I was surrounded by stunning Buddhist pagodas, mopeds and motorized rickshaws, street vendors (many of them small children), markets, fruits and vegetables I had never seen before, new social customs and norms, and a unique energy that I cannot put into words.

This was the country I had read about for so long as a student – the one that had experienced the genocidal brutality of the Khmer Rouge, the heaviest bombing suffered by any country ever in history, a landscape riddled with landmines, and protracted war and political conflict that left the large majority of its citizens in extreme poverty. For most Americans, Cambodia is known mainly for the tragic things that happened there. During my two months in the country however, I saw a brighter picture of Cambodia – one evoking feelings of hope and tremendous admiration.

I was part of a delegation of CGCHR student associates who had come to intern with the Documentation Center of Cambodia. Staff members at DC-Cam, many of whom have or will soon study at Rutgers, were wonderfully hospitable, taking time to show us their culture, their food, and including us in their important work. I had the privilege of joining eight members of DC-Cam’s Victim Participation Team on their trip north to small rural villages in the provinces of Kampong Thom and Siem Reap. These areas are well known for their dams, constructed under the forced labor of the Khmer Rouge regime. Kampong Thom is also the home province of Kaing Guek Eav (also known as “Duch”), the infamous leader of Toul Sleng prison and the first top Khmer Rouge leader to be con-
vicited by the UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal on July 26, 2010.

The objective of the team’s trip was to deliver notification letters from the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (Cambodia’s hybrid tribunal, known as the “ECCC”). The letters were given out to complainants who had experienced or witnessed massive human rights abuses under Democratic Kampuchea (the name of Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge). They confirm that the court has received their applications and inform them about the progress the court has made as a result of their contribution. The complainants were usually groups of five to 20 people, mainly elderly women since so many of the men of that generation were killed. We generally assembled at the house of the village chief or at a pagoda.

It was an important task that the Victim Participation Team was undertaking, given the clear disconnect between the complainants and the ECCC, which is tasked with granting victims a voice and role in the justice process. Many villagers in Kampong Thom and Siem Reap provinces barely remembered that they had filled out the complaints. Given the harsh and demanding conditions of their lives and the failure of previous attempts at justice in the past, it is not surprising that many have not been keeping up with the progress of the international court. In this context, the Victim Participation Team strengthens the bond between the people and the court, putting the trial back into the consciousness of those most affected by the horrors of the Khmer Rouge.
The most interesting part of the process for me was the interviews. With the help of some of the English-speaking team members I was able to conduct about 15 interviews with complainants from different villages. Throughout my interviews what I found fascinating, and certainly indicative of Khmer culture, was the role that “justice” was playing for the victims. With a few exceptions, most interviewees did not say that the importance of the court was that it would punish bad people. In fact many did not seem to equate the justice system with punishment or vengeance.

I was frequently told by interviewees that they had forgiven the perpetrators, even ones who had murdered their own family members and friends. Forgiveness is a very important value in Cambodia’s predominately Buddhist culture, and anger and hatred are seen as highly undesirable energies. Many of the complainants found comfort in their belief that the Khmer Rouge cadres would pay for their acts in the next life. For most, the trials of the top Khmer Rouge leaders were important because they would prevent atrocities from happening in the future. They believed that impunity would set a dangerous precedent. They believed that the trials would send a strong message to future generations. On a spiritual level, many said that convictions would help put the souls of the dead to rest.

When I asked whether they would like to see more former Khmer Rouge leaders on trial, most said no.

The Cambodia trip gave me a lot to consider. What does “justice” encompass? Can delayed justice be justice delivered? What are the other processes of social reconciliation? Which of these processes is most important? What have been the social effects of perpetrators living with impunity alongside their victims? What role does truth have in reconciliation? These are classic questions of transitional justice, ones that need culturally salient answers and must be examined on a case-by-case basis. Obviously, two months is not nearly enough time to properly answer any of them, nor is it enough time to fully understand Khmer culture and its nuances. And on a realistic note, 15 interviews with

[Image: Exploration]

Reenactments of the brutality committed by the Khmer Rouge on the “Day of Anger” at the Choeung Ek Killing Fields, where thousands were killed and buried in mass graves. Photo courtesy of Gassia Assadourian.
victims do not provide adequate information for extrapolation and generalizations about Cambodian society.

There are, however, many important things that I learned from my time in Cambodia. What I gained in Cambodia is a fresh perspective on these issues, a better appreciation of the complexities of justice, truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation. I learned a great deal about Khmer culture, worked with a remarkable NGO under the leadership of director Youk Chhang (a personal hero of mine),

made new friends and saw spectacular sites. While this trip granted me a better understanding of people and myself, it also instilled me with a renewed sense of mystery and wonder.

1 For a more comprehensive description of my trip with the Victim Participation Team, see my article at:

www.genocidewatch.org/cambodia.html

2 See our Rutgers Student Cambodia blog, created by Gassia Assadourian, Raphael Smith, Douglas Irvin and me:

www.motodupdispatch.tumblr.com/
Students Bring Medical Relief to Honduras

By Feraan Mohamed

Seniors Jaydev Mistry and Nirmal Shah gave up the comforts of life in the United States last summer to work as medical assistants in Honduras. Forsaking TV, internet, cell phones – and sometimes even hot water and electricity – they worked in clinics that sometimes ran out of supplies, and had to turn patients away due to overcrowding.

“It’s definitely a reality check for everyone on this trip,” said Mistry, a biology major at Rutgers-Newark who plans to become a doctor. Shah said the experience made him realize “how much we take for granted … simple things like water, paved roads, electricity.”

The pair went to Honduras for a week in August as medical assistants for the student-based program Global Medical Brigades, a branch of the not-for-profit organization Global Brigades. Created in 2007, Global Brigades describes itself as “the largest student-led international development movement on the planet,” according to the organization’s website.

Mistry and Shah joined a group of around 30 volunteers who stayed at El Rapaco ranch, located two hours away from the capital city, Tegucigalpa. Although they described the living conditions as cramped, with around 15 guys sharing one room, bunk beds, and a bathroom, they felt it enhanced and promoted bonding among the volunteers.

“We became like family,” Mistry said. Four out of the seven days in Honduras were spent doing clinic duty. During the other three days, volunteers visited an orphanage and toured the country.

Clinics were set up in schools in different villages and broken into four stations: “intake” (where the patient’s background information such as name and age was taken), “triage” (where vital signs, blood pressure, weight, etc. were checked), “doctor” (where the patient consulted with a doctor and got a diagnosis), and “pharmacy” (where medicine was given). The clinic treated over 1500 people while Shah and Mistry were working there.

Mistry and Shah rotated through triage and the pharmacy. They had to obtain their own supplies and take them down to Honduras.

Demonstrating the immense need for medical services in Honduras, Mistry said that the clinic had to turn people away because it had reached capacity, and that they ran out of medical
supplies at times and had to buy them from other local clinics.

They said that the most prominent problem among their patients was malnutrition. “Most of the people needed vitamins and anti-parasitic medications,” Shah said.

The students traveled by bus to the remote villages and always returned before nightfall, around 4pm. Mistry said he never felt unsafe and that they “were always escorted by the military.” They describe their surroundings as very “green” and Mistry described his appreciation of the country’s mountainous landscape: “We were up in the mountains and there were certain moments when we were at the level of the clouds. We were pretty high up.”

“You learn a lot about yourself and other people,” Mistry said. “It helped me to understand what it meant to serve people. It helped me to realize my love for service.”
Seven Questions for Aldo Civico

Aldo Civico came to Rutgers-Newark this fall and has served as the Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights. He is also an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Born in Trento, Italy, and raised by an Austrian mother and an Italian father, Civico describes his upbringing as “culturally diverse.” From 2005 to 2008 he facilitated negotiations between the Colombian government and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerillas. His research is mainly concerned with issues related to armed conflict, conflict resolution, peace building, insurgency movements and human rights. Civico sat down to talk with CGCHR staff writer Feraan Mohamed.

Q: What sparked your interest in Anthropology?

“I was always interested in topics of political violence, terrorism, and so on. I talked to a professor. I found that anthropology is a very holistic science that looks at the totality of the human experience.”

Q: What was your role in the dialogue between the Colombian government and the ELN?

“My role was as a facilitator operating as an academic from civil society. (My role was) to help the parties have a better understanding of what a ceasefire is, help the dialogue where at moments it seemed to be falling apart, and to place strategies so that talks would continue.”

Q: What was the most difficult part of your job?

“Building the necessary confidence with the Colombian government because governments are generally suspicious and skeptical of outsiders coming in and playing a role in negotiations. Governments want to have total control over the negotiation process. The challenge is to become credible to the two parties. The challenge is to have a balanced approach.”
Q: How were you able to create that “necessary confidence?”

“You create trust. You have to be very professional. Professional in conflict resolution means that you are very patient. You don’t take attacks as personal. You develop great skills in listening and you develop empathy so that you understand their feelings and values. So you are very reserved.”

Q: What is your role here at the Center?

“My specific task is to develop a conflict resolution program. I will focus on some of the new programs we are developing: the intersection between environment and peace building as well as the intersection between urban security and peace building.”

Q: How do you plan on creating such a program?

“At the center I want to have the same conversations on how do you create conflict resolution.

We live in a world where you have armed conflict that is broken into small groups like the Taliban in Afghanistan that are linked to larger networks. So how do you do conflict resolution in this environment? How do you mediate conflict resolution in this environment? These are the questions and there are no easy answers. I am also recruiting experts and friends with whom I have had the privilege to work. In this sense, I am very happy and proud to announce that former child soldier and best-seller/writer Ishmael Beah will join our Center and work with us on issues related to youth violence, reintegration of former combatants and reconciliation.”

Q: What has been your experience working at Rutgers-Newark so far?

“I have enjoyed every minute. I feel I’ve won the lottery. I have the great fortune of working with excellent colleagues who have been big markers of anthropology.”
Rutgers Law Prof Fights for Global Police Force

**By Merve Fejzula**

Nations have long used state sovereignty as a means of preventing outside interference in their internal affairs. This has often proved tragic for those living under a brutal sovereign power, particularly in the case of genocide.

But in recent years, advocates of human rights have reinterpreted sovereignty as a “responsibility to protect” civilian populations. When nations fail to perform this duty and diplomatic efforts fail, they argue, international forces can claim a right to intervene.

Professor Saul Mendlovitz is at the forefront of an effort to create a system that would carry out such humanitarian interventions – the United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS). He and other scholars and policymakers gave a public presentation, “UNEPS in Context: Third Pillar Capacities and First Pillar Responses,” at the UN Plaza in early December, in what Mendlovitz described as the “launch of a UN lobbying campaign.”

UNEPS is a complementary, service-integrated capacity that would be comprised of individually recruited women and men from different countries stationed throughout the world, who could be dispatched to stop crimes against humanity and genocide.

“It occurred to me that instead of starting out demanding a full force, if you start with genocide, people would be more willing to listen,” said Mendlovitz, who is the Dag Hammarskjöld Law Professor Emeritus at Rutgers-Newark and a CGCHR associate.

Conflicts such as civil wars or wars of aggression would not be included under the UNEPS mandate. “We’re trying to make clear that it is a humanitarian effort,” Mendlovitz continued.

R-N Law students and West Point graduates Captain Stephen J. Bishop and Captain Edward L. Westfall participated in creating the draft UNEPS statute.

Mendlovitz said it was an enormous boon to have military personnel contribute, since it helped make the service more feasible in military terms.

UNEPS would consist of 12,000 to 15,000 service people who would be stationed in three strategic areas throughout the globe. It would be a “first in, first out” service, to be deployed within 48 hours of being invoked and remaining no longer than six months in any country.

“We’re now looking for two or four countries to introduce it to the political community,” Mendlovitz
said. He is hoping that Brazil, Japan, India and South Africa will eventually sponsor the bill in the UN, “so that it doesn’t come from the ‘developed’ world,” he added.

The Security Council can invoke the UNEPS, but if the council cannot reach a vote then the Secretary-General can invoke the service under guidelines previously determined by the General Assembly and Security Council.

The idea of a UNEPS-style service has a long history within the UN and has involved the efforts of scholars, military experts and others in Canada and worldwide. This particular iteration emerged in part from an interdisciplinary seminar that Mendlovitz taught with then Center for Global Change and Governance Director, John Fousek. They began teaching the course in 1994, after witnessing the events in Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

Fousek noted how difficult it was to deal with human rights conflicts in abstract terms when such horrific real-world examples were being played out in the news. Faced with the stark reality of genocide, “No matter what your moral or political commitments are, you feel sort of helpless,” Fousek said.

Fousek and Mendlovitz also worked on an article for the journal Alternatives entitled “Enforcing the Law on Genocide.” In it they proposed the idea of a “global constabulary force” to stop genocide.

A “common refrain in the course was that all human beings are capable of evil,” Fousek said. “These people who commit genocide are us. The monster is inside you.”

Mendlovitz also partnered extensively with Robert Johansen, a senior fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame and many other scholars and policymakers on developing the proposal.

Global Action to Prevent War is leading a growing group of international organizations that are helping to integrate the idea of UNEPS into the mainstream of the UN’s security interests. Mendlovitz compared their current lobbying efforts to the beginnings of the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Mendlovitz admits that “ratification here is going to be more difficult” but insists that all one needs is the momentum from “appropriate civil society groups” to affect change.

For an interview with Professor Mendlovitz, please see the following link:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=borxWXzX2Ps
Revisiting the “Damascus Spring” at Rutgers

By Elena Lesley

The death of authoritarian president Hafiz al-Asad in 2000 ushered in a period of vibrant political and social dialogue within Syria that became known as the “Damascus Spring.” Having lived under a repressive regime for decades, Syrian intellectuals, artists and opposition leaders gathered for regular muntadat (or salons); debate flourished.

“People really thought this could lead to a new era in Syria,” said Mohamed Alsiadi, coordinator of the Arabic Language and Cultural Studies Program at Rutgers-Newark and the Director of the U.S.-Mideast Program for CGCHR.

Unfortunately, the Damascus Spring was short-lived. A government crackdown began in 2001, closing salons and imprisoning outspoken critics of the regime. Numerous intellectuals and professors fled the country.

Alsiadi, a native of Syria, was already in the United States when the Damascus Spring – and subsequent backlash – occurred.

“I felt very guilty I couldn’t be there,” he said. But now Alsiadi is launching an effort at Rutgers-Newark to study the Damascus Spring and to make materials related to the period more widely available.
Interviews | DAMASCUS SPRING

Professor Edward Ziter, an expert on Arab theater in Syria; Hunter College professor Jonathan Shannon, who has studied musical aesthetics and cultural politics in the Arab world; Rutgers professor Said Samatar, a scholar of African literature and history; and hopefully, Alsiadi said, Syrian scholar and actor Naela Al-Atrash.

Alsiadi said he has also collected piles of materials related to the Damascus Spring that he and students are translating so they can be posted to the internet.

“Our goal is to use cyberspace,” he said. “We have all the elements at Rutgers to make this work; I believe we can accomplish a great deal.”

Those interested in working with the Damascus Spring Project should contact Professor Alsiadi at alsiadi@andromeda.rutgers.edu.

“I thought, why don’t we do an assessment at the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights? What went wrong? How can we get people to mobilize again?” he asked.

The effort, which will be named for the Syrian movement, will involve translation of Arabic language materials, creation of an online repository for documents related to the Damascus Spring, and events that will bring speakers to campus to discuss change in the Arab world. This coming fall, Rutgers-Newark will host New York University Professor Mohamed Alsiadi.

CGCHR held an event devoted to the Damascus Spring last year.
The Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights

Facing tomorrow’s challenges today

The Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights seeks to enhance our understanding of and find solutions to the most pressing challenges of the 21st Century.

To this end, the Center promotes cutting-edge research and scholarship on related issues such as genocide, violence, conflict resolution, environmental change, sustainable development, transitional justice, and human rights.

Contact Info:

Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
360 Martin Luther King Blvd.
703 Hill Hall
Newark, NJ 07102
USA
Tel: 973-353-1260
fax: 973-353-1259
e-mail: cghr@andromeda.rutgers.edu
website: http://cghr.newark.rutgers.edu