Accepting Diplomas and Stamping Passports

By Kate Milliken

Austria awaits Mary Rish, new Penn State graduate and former CGS intern. Rish has recently received a Teaching Assistantship from the Austrian-American Educational Commission, the same body that manages the Fulbright Program in Austria. The program employs the US teaching assistants from May to October, during which time Rish will teach English in secondary schools in the state of Lower Austria.

Rish’s work at Penn State has certainly prepared her for the work ahead of her. At Penn State, Rish studied German, Global and International Studies, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages; it was through the German Department that she first learned of the US Teaching Assistant (USTA) program. She has also worked as a German and ESL tutor. Her internship at the Center for Global Studies in the fall of 2012 afforded her the opportunity to teach her own class—an after-school German club at the Young Scholars of Central Pennsylvania Charter School (YSCP). In fact, she is confident that all of the skills and insights that she gained during her time at CGS will help her in this new chapter of her career. She now looks forward to utilizing her degrees, and professionally representing Penn State and the United States abroad.

Looking ahead, Rish expects that practical experience and global perspectives that she will gain through the USTA position will aid her future career in education, and certainly influence her teaching style. She has never been to Austria before, but plans to immerse herself in the culture and make the most of her time abroad: “I hope to experience as much as I can; from teaching to the Austrian culture, I hope to experience as much as I can; from teaching to the Austrian culture, and the United States abroad.

By Kate Milliken

The final panel makes its statements to Dr. Elmarazy’s and Dr. McClenann’s concluding questions. The conference received high reviews, and ended with the promise of continued interdisciplinary conversation.

The entire staff at the Center for Global Studies wishes Mary all the best in her new adventure!

CIA in the Spotlight

By Katie Black

Dr. Moustafa Bayoumi gave one of the most interesting and informative speeches of the 2013 “Geographies of Power” conference. His speech was about the popular television show 24 and the recent movie Zero Dark Thirty and their portrayals of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Though it was a satirical performance that humorously poked fun at the popular media portrayals of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Dr. Bayoumi’s speech left the conference participants contemplating the sacrifices of individual citizens for the sake of the greater good.

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Dr. Bayoumi argued that, in the program 24, the CIA is shown to be constantly breaking rules and pushing limits to make sure that America is safe. This is a common theme seen during the George W. Bush administration, which argued for pushing limits of individual rights and even national sovereignty, to ensure security. Dr. Bayoumi said, “24 is a love letter to a fantasy CIA, an epic battle between good and evil.” He argued that the way in which the CIA was portrayed made it apparent to everyday Americans watching the show that we are ‘the good guys,’ and always right. Special Agent Jack Bauer breaking hands and necks in the name of freedom is not so far from the truth, as we have seen the United States accused of human rights abuses since 9/11.

Dr. Bayoumi then began to discuss the new portrayal of the CIA, as seen in Zero Dark Thirty and Argo. He argued that this was a new CIA, one focused on following strict procedure and suspicion. This is quite the contrast with the action movie genre of previous representations. The new representation is focused on following the rules instead of breaking them. Dr. Bayoumi then pointed out the extremely close link between Hollywood and the actual CIA, as the CIA website declares that the organization offers “inspiration for future storytellers.” The CIA offers to help movies and television shows by giving them information and permitting productions to use stock film of the headquarters in Langley. Dr. Bayoumi argues that this close link between the movie industry and CIA makes it extremely easy for the CIA to hide any failures that they might have. Dr. Bayoumi gave one of the most entertaining and enlightening talks of the conference and left us all with a new perspective—one of skepticism—one on popular renditions of the CIA in mainstream media.

Day two of the conference featured a panel discussion on “Cultural Representation in Times of Terror and Transition,” which was moderated by the Center for Global Studies (CGS) Director Dr. Sophia McClennen. Speaking on “Chaos and Procedure: the Late Aesthetics and Politics of the Long War on Terror,” Dr. Moustafa Bayoumi, from The City University of New York, enthralled the conference by drawing parallels from popular television series 24 and Hollywood films, Argo by Ben Affleck and Katherine Bigelow’s Zero Dark Thirty. He also argued that we are spectators of democracy rather than active participants.

Dr. Keith Feldman, traveling from the University of California, Berkeley, spoke about visualizing race and space in the age of permanent war. He discussed how the nexus between race, space and ‘visuality’ has developed into the central theme of Homeland Security. He summarized the key elements of ‘counter-visuality.’ Dr. Feldman illustrated the differences between the borders of the United States as a nation-state and the borders of the United States as a homeland. He questioned how these borders are defined, and how that definition has innovated processes of racialization. “These types of questions remain pressing, given the advancement in name of homeland security with counter insurgencies in West and Central Asia,” he concluded.

This was followed by a presentation by Dr. Peter Hitchcock from The City University of New York, whose presentation was entitled “Immolation.” He explained how self-immolation is viewed as a moralized sacrifice and how this logic guides the political and cultural imagination in understanding immolation, which can be a preliminary sketch to uprisings. His examples included the Arab uprising in North Africa and West Asia, and Cold War geopolitics (especially Kuwait). He explained how immolation marks the controversial side of conflict, struggle and violence. “Sacrifice was considered sacred in various religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, but now self-immolation is seen as political moment where it shows individual commitment to a cause, and his conviction leading to revolution,” he added. He closed the presentation with the example of a Turkish street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire, and thus acted as a catalyst for the wider Arab Spring.

The panel ended with “The Globalization of Settlers,” presented by Nikhil Singh from New York University (see photo above), he emphasized that the central theme of future U.S. policy making will be endangered by the opacity of the world beyond the borders of the United States. He quoted a former CIA Director, saying, “The oceans have shrunk and Europe and Asia share borders with the United States, just like Canada and Mexico.” He suggested that the anxiety of external borders is seamlessly transforming into the internal borders. Dr. Singh explained that, despite the African-American gains in modern America, the end of racism is not yet in sight. He pointed out how, hidden within the universalizing tones of the reform-minded liberalism at home and global democratic imperatives abroad, race radicals are still alienated and seen as dangerous and separatists.

Varada Bhat is a guest columnist for GPS. She has previously worked in India as a financial journalist covering the media and entertainment industry.