

# INTERRUPTED SILENCE

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## FROM YOUR EDITORS

Another quarter's end looms around the corner, and most of us have scrolls of INT papers to write before spring break comes through on its promise of relief: a chance to breathe, if only for a moment. At *INTerrupted Silence*, we feel your pain. It's our pain, too, and we hope that this quarter's issue might relieve some of that stress.

The world spins onward, drones attack, violence runs rampant, all the meanwhile fiscal crisis soap operas find new buzzwords and the US military defends “freedom” through oppression--it's easy to let the suffering and nonsense suffocate you. But we're still here to bring such inequality to light, and shame it to no end. We're here to ask, “What's up with that?” and stay up too late talking and thinking about anything from discourse and knowledge (or should we say “knowledge”?) to intervention and exploitation. At the worst of it, when the world really comes crumbling down and lies shattered at your feet, we are empowered. We are *privileged* to be empowered. We are the answer to such inequality, and we have the power to make it or unmake it.

This newsletter is an invitation to think about our place in the world. From Becca's study abroad experience to Sam's excursion into local food, from Mishal's interview with Naveed Malik in the Foreign Service to Kevin's brief history of our own major, from Vierelina's and Gabi's interviews with INT faculty and alumni to Rich's and Naeem's review of *5 Broken Cameras*, this issue of *INTerrupted Silence* will reveal not only global disparity but our occasional roles in perpetuating it. We thought it best to leave you with our motto, “Actively engaged intellectuals, intellectually engaged activists.” Dr. McIntyre himself coined the phrase last year, and it stuck because it's what we are. And if it isn't, it's what we strive to be. As winter bids its bitter farewells, and finals incur more stress than we bargained for, we want to remind you that you are empowered by your education and uniquely equipped to leave our world a little bit better off than it was before we got here.



# WHAT IS “INTERNATIONAL STUDIES”? AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM ANYWAY?

By: Kevin Doherty

image: William J. Donovan  
Provided by National Park Service (2013)

In July of 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed William J. Donovan to the position of Coordinator of Information (COI), a position created to collect intelligence data on global affairs. While in office Donovan founded the Research and Analysis Branch (R&A) in Washington DC, a brand new organization housed under the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). “We have,” said Donovan, “scattered throughout the various departments of our government, documents and memoranda concerning military and naval and air and economic potentials of the Axis which, if gathered together and studied in detail by carefully selected trained minds, with a knowledge both of the related languages and technique, would yield to valuable and often decisive results.”[1]

The new office enjoyed a \$10 million budget and 600 staff members. His branch hired top academics from disciplines like history, economics, anthropology, politics, and geography from Ivy League schools and beyond to coordinate analyses relevant to the war effort. The creation of the office of the Coordinator of Intelligence and subsequent creation of the OSS marked the first intelligence gathering effort the United States made during peacetime (although the peace would barely last another month).

Harvard historian William L. Langer volunteered his skills in the initiative and served as OSS 117. He realized that strict academic disciplines hindered OSS ability to analyze events and regions across the world, and so Langer advocated creating a space in the office for interdisciplinary area specialist teams. These interdisciplinary teams would research, gather intelligence, and offer propaganda all under the guise of preemptively protecting United States national security.

OSS peaked in 1944, employing nearly 13,000 staff members and having spent \$135 million over four years (about \$1.1 billion today). Though the president dissolved OSS in 1945, it would be followed by the creation of the CIA two years later.

Nicholas B. Dirks reports in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that the momentous creation of interdisciplinary regional studies programs and the like have curious roots in OSS. John K. Fairbank served in China during the war on an OSS assignment. After the war ended, he returned to the United States and created the “largest postwar program in East Asian studies.”[2] Dirks elaborates

further that W. Norman Brown, formerly an India specialist for OSS, established a department of South Asian studies at University of Pennsylvania, he even hired many of his former colleagues from OSS. In another example, “Gerold T. Robinson went from his role as head of the Russia desk to become the first head of the Russian Institute at Columbia University.”[3]

Interdisciplinary programs, area studies, development studies, and the like (international studies) are the corollaries of the United States war effort in WWII. The Cold War offered similar motivations to universities and governmental institutions for constant international intelligence. In fact, it would appear that the creation of region specific programs coincides almost directly with whoever poses the largest apparent public threat to US national security.

For us to really recognize our roles in the globalizing world today, in which connections arise obscuring everything we once thought true and complicating our everyday lives, “We must study not just the interconnectedness of things, but the things that connect, what happens when they connect, and what connection looks like from specific places and to specific people.”[4] Without context, Dirk himself may have quoted Roosevelt speaking with Donovan in 1941. The rhetoric that compels us in international studies to understand global and local events and the inequalities that shape ourselves and others also drove Roosevelt to create OSS, further promoting and protecting the United States’ position in the world.

Even though “global studies” originated behind closed doors as an arm of US national security, and even though our own program may be a twisted manifestation of Roosevelt’s initiative over seventy years ago, we have a responsibility to understand this world and hold our institutions accountable and responsible for their actions. Dirk argues that we should learn from the time when our scholars were spies, and expose the knowledge we gain in order to ensure universal understanding and openness of the forces that guide and shape our lives and others’. I think that sounds like a good place to start.

[1] <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/oss/art02.htm>

[2] <http://chronicle.com/article/Scholars-SpiesGlobal/133459/>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Rosa is currently completing her MA in Latin American History at UIC and plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Policy Studies in Urban Education.

#### **What do you currently do?**

[Besides completing my MA in Latin American History,] I work as a Graduate Assistant at the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) at UIC with undergraduate students for the Urban Public Policy Fellowship (UPPF) program—a program focused on research, professional development, and conference participation.

#### **What did you do after graduating from DePaul?**

After graduation I worked on the things I do now, graduate school and working with undergraduate students on research, policy, and civic engagement.

#### **Why did you choose INT as your major?**

My intention for going to DePaul had been to study business, but in time, I became more interested in studying the “business” of political interests, human agency, and cultural encounters in a global perspective.

#### **Has being a former INT major helped you in any way? If so, would you mind sharing how?**

My feeling is that International Studies gives an interdisciplinary understanding of political processes, global/local change and human response, which helps us not to neglect history and its elasticity to change. I especially enjoy how the program and classes are set up to have students be opinionated and responsive to past and current events.

#### **What would your words of advice for current INT majors be?**

My word of advice to students of International Studies is to persist in your studies, remain loyal to the field of your work but not ceasing to search for truth and conveying this to the world by helping it to navigate forward.

#### **Any other general advice/thoughts?**

I am grateful for my International Studies experience, the faculty are a caring group of intellectuals actively engaged in making future scholars and professionals. I hope students continue their trajectory in making our everyday better with each passing moment.

**ALUMNI  
IN  
ACTION:**

## **ROSA MACÍAS**

By: Gabriela Polo



## **ANNOUNCING: Martin Luther King Jr. Student Essay Contest**



❖ \$500 prize for best undergraduate paper

❖ \$500 prize for best graduate paper

**DEADLINE: APRIL 15**

In "[Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence](#)" (1967), Martin Luther King calls for an anti-racist and internationalist response to oppression in its various guises. Taking King's Vietnam speech as a starting point, this essay contest asks students to consider what such a speech might look like today.

See <http://las.depaul.edu/int/Events/StudentEssayContest/index.asp> for important submission and formatting

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## INTERVENTIONS IN THE Post-COLONIAL WORLD

The International Studies Programs at DePaul & University of Illinois at Chicago invite graduate and undergraduate students to submit a one page research paper proposal for the 2013 annual student conference to be held on May 7, 2013.



The theme of this year's conference is **Interventions in the Post-Colonial World**. Proposals should address one or more of the themes in the following questions: In what ways and on what grounds do state and non-state actors carry out political, economic, social, and environmental interventions? What is the nature of the relationships between local actors, including political and economic elites, international institutions, and imperial powers? What forms of resistance appear in response to intervention? What are the root causes of these interventions and what are their legacies?

See [las.depaul.edu/int/events/StudentConference](http://las.depaul.edu/int/events/StudentConference) for additional submission guidelines. Submit abstracts to [sdirr1@depaul.edu](mailto:sdirr1@depaul.edu), by 5pm on March 11th, 2013.



# MEET INT FACULTY EXTRAORDINAIRE: JOHN T. KARAM

By: Vierelina Fernández

Sitting down for a conversation with Professor John Karam, I can barely contain my indignation as he relates to me an anecdote from when he first began his career studying Arabs in Latin America. “What did you do, talk to all three of them?” was the rhetorical question of a college official on the East Coast who interviewed Dr. Karam several years back. To this, Dr. Karam replied that estimates exceed over ten million, and that Arabs make up ten percent of Brazil’s congress. Before my INT 388 (Middle East – Latin American Relations: Migrants, Markets, and States) class with Dr. Karam this winter quarter, however, neither did I know that Arabs have had such a significant and extensive role in Latin America. Even Dr. Karam himself remembered, “I thought I would never get a job... and was writing myself into a corner.”

And yet, although there is very little scholarship in the United States on the role of the Middle East in Latin America, Dr. Karam’s award-winning book *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* has paved the way for breaking that norm. His book won both the Arab American National Museum Book Award in 2007 (non-fiction category) as well as the Brazilian Studies Association’s Roberto Reis Award in 2008 (DePaul LALS Faculty Biographies).

However, another incredible read (especially for all of the belly dancers out there!) is my own personal favorite article of Dr. Karam’s so far, titled “Belly Dancing and the (En)Gendering of Ethnic Sexuality in the ‘Mixed’ Brazilian Nation” (available in full through DePaul.) This article not only opened my eyes to the level of complexity behind the phenomenon of belly dancing and to the true origins of the dance, but it also made me realize that Latina and Arab women experience and relate to this dance in radically different ways. Whereas before I always considered belly dancing as a means through which all women embraced and reclaimed their sexuality and femininity, in his article Dr. Karam demonstrates how belly dancing in Brazil has also served to subjugate Arab women and reinforce male sexual entitlement.

Professor Karam asserts that the “seriousness” of this article was occasionally questioned. Nonetheless, he has received multiple written responses by Arab women thanking him for giving a voice to the mixed feelings that they’ve harbored for so long on the nature of this supposedly “cultural staple” of the Middle East. It is these sorts of responses which Professor Karam cites as making his writing on topics like this one all the worthwhile, despite criticisms.

Likewise, Professor Karam relates that his primary objective and motivation for the work that he does is that of helping to create a different – and much needed – conception of Latin America: one of Latin America as relating not just to the United

States, but to the world. (This is something which he puts into practice with his very vocabulary: if there has been one detail about Dr. Karam that I think worthy of noting, it is the fact that he has been the first professor I have ever heard refer to people from the United States by the proper terminology of “U.S. American.”) Dr. Karam argues that Latin America and the Middle East are so much more than simply two “peripheries” of the “center”: they have a relationship with each other. “The world is more complicated than North-South relations, or even South-South,” he states. “So what does the world look like from these ‘peripheries?’” Dr. Karam says that he also seeks to privilege Latin America as a point of reference for better understanding “Arab-ness” and the Arab world as a whole.

When asked his thoughts on what U.S. universities are lacking, Professor Karam was again refreshing in his response. He answered that U.S. universities approach internationalization as if the U.S. is still at the center of the world. Latin American universities have also begun internationalizing by connecting with other African, Arab, Asian, and European universities. Therefore, he argues that if U.S. universities really wish to internationalize, then they need to seriously consider these more horizontal and peripheral connections that do not necessarily exclude the U.S. He affirms that, “therein lies the future of Latin American studies in the U.S.”

Currently, Professor Karam is working on a book titled *Redrawing the Americas*, in which he explores the fifty-year presence of Arabs at the triple border between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, and uses that history as a lens into contemporary U.S.-South American geopolitics. Dr. Karam is also co-editor of a new peer-reviewed online journal titled *Mashriq and Mahjar* (the “place of departure: the homeland” and the “place of migration”). This journal explores Middle East migrations since the 1700’s, and is available at <http://go.ncsu.edu/Mashriq>.

Though Dr. Karam is a core professor in the Latin American and Latino Studies department here at DePaul, his courses are sometimes cross-listed with IWS (Islamic World Studies) and INT. He will be offering three courses this spring quarter: **IWS 220** (Muslim Histories in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA), **LSP 200** (Multiculturalism: Arabs in the U.S.), and **LST 300/INT 403** (Special Topics: Movements, Regimes and Ideologies).

# Q&A with Naveed Malik

By: Mishal Qureshi

Naveed Malik is a 2004 DePaul alumnus and current Foreign Service Officer in the US Department of State. At present, he is on his second tour as an FSO, stationed in Hyderabad, India as a Vice Consul for non-immigrant visas. He received a B.S. in Finance from DePaul and worked in banking for two years before receiving a Masters in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School for Public Policy in 2008.

**What is a typical day like for someone in your position?**

I am in the most regimented job you can have in the Foreign Service: Consular. From 8:30 to 12:30, I interview applicants for visas, deciding whether or not to issue them visas. I then have lunch and return to do a couple hours' worth of administrative work, which brings us to about 3:30. The remaining two hours I'll spend on my portfolio, which includes training new officers, as well as managing a team of "Locally Engaged Staff". I enjoy the structure, which admittedly can get to be monotonous after a while. But again this is just one two-year assignment. As an Economic Affairs Officer [in Kuwait], I would get in at varied times, read the news headlines and internal reporting, and take meetings on a wide range of issues. I worked on projects, and I served as control officer for high- and low-level visitors from America. Over the course of a career, an FSO will have all sorts of interesting (and some not-so-interesting) jobs.

**What advice do you have to those who are interested in international relations and public policy?**

It's a broad field, and you should take jobs that will expand your future opportunities and make you more marketable as you continue to hone in on what exactly you want to do in the long run. You may ultimately want to be a program officer for an NGO repatriating child soldiers working in Africa, but start out as an intern for a DC-based think tank working on NATO relations. The point is, take what you can get, and soak up knowledge and keep all the business cards you get, and keep your eye out for whatever is more interesting. Getting your foot in the door is often the hardest part, as this is a competitive field. An advanced degree doesn't hurt. For college grads, positions like researchers, volunteers on political campaigns, and NGO staff are all low-hanging fruit to get started. Finally, follow your heart. That's why you are here, isn't it? Otherwise, like the college version of me, you would get a bachelor's in Finance and get a corporate banking gig traveling the country and living the high life. You have answered to a higher calling. So even if you start out doing something you don't love, make sure you are working towards whatever it is that excites you, and trust me, there are jobs out there for your career path.

**Who, in your opinion, is best suited for a job in foreign service?**

There is no typical profile of a diplomat. The one who is best-suited is the one who has a strong work ethic, is flexible, is motivated by the greatness of the cause, not by their own ego. In

time, the President may appoint you to be his/her Ambassador to a nation, but early on, you may be the 'luggage officer' on a large Congressional delegation visit, literally keeping watch over the Senator's spouse's carry-on luggage. If you're willing to do whatever it takes, wherever it is needed, you'll be just fine.

**How did your experience as an undergraduate at DePaul help in you arriving where you are today? What aspects of DePaul should students take advantage of to help them get their foot in the door?**

Let me start by saying that DePaul's political science faculty is fantastic, and underrated, in my opinion. I developed relationships with my professors, which helped me during and after my collegiate career (especially when it came time to apply to grad schools).

As for advice, I would say take the courses that interest you personally and foster relationships with your professors and seek their counsel when it comes to careers. Professors Larry Bennett and Azza Layton were some of my favorites. Professors, as well as staff, and the Career Center, can all aid in your academic and professional development. DePaul is well-situated, and has connections with NGOs, city government, alumni, etc. who can all give an eager student guidance or even an opportunity.

**What first sparked your interest in foreign service?**

At its root I would say it's a fascination with people. I have been traveling internationally since I was a little boy, and I have always found new cultures and places intriguing. So if thought of being able to live among various societies was a root motivational factor, then the desire to make the world a better place for all people was a more immediate one. By that I mean that I thought this career path may enable me to help people most in need in the world, wherever they may be. So I would rename my career field as 'international public service.'

**What was the process you used to pursue this career track?**

Without knowing I wanted a career in international public service at the time, I avidly studied (and enjoyed) the American political system in college. Though I was a Finance major, I took courses in both U.S. and international politics, to get a feel for political history, systems of governance and policies. I found both American and international politics equally compelling, and intertwined. After working in banking for a couple of years, I went off to graduate school, earning my Master in Public Policy from Harvard Kennedy School.



## IS LOCAL FOOD RESPONSIBLE FOOD?

By Sam Masi

A few months ago, I took part in Dr. Sharma's class on forced migration. I recommend the class to anyone interested in studying migrant identities, international agreements, displaced peoples and institutionalized racism.

When I took the class last quarter, I started to rethink food.

Five years ago, I realized I had an awful cyclical habit of binge-eating and dieting, and ever since then I began trying to just enjoy food. I wanted to find a balance between pleasure (for myself and those who dine with me) and discipline, hoping to maintain personal and environmental well-being. I considered myself a disciple of Slow Food (which I still think is worth some credit) after Barbara Kingsolver and her family seduced me to local eating in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.

If a label on a grocery shelf announced an apple's nationality, I'd pick the one that was US born and raised. I had community with the apple; it might have grown on land I've touched, or felt the same autumn breeze. On the rare nights I chose to eat out, I was quick to praise restaurants with local, seasonal menus. Everything tastes so much better when it's from the farmer down the road, right?

I was in a strange mental limbo. As a global citizen I knew better than to be fooled by US corn subsidies, but in the kitchen I favored what I understood as local (read: US crops). My personal eating habits did not reflect my understanding of power relations.

In the US, the focus on 'local' caught on in the 1980s and 1990s in California, and is now popular on both coasts and in large cities throughout the country. You can see shows like *Portlandia* poke fun at high-maintenance locavores while food magazines praise restaurants with a seasonal menu.

So what's wrong the locavore diet? In a place like Chicago it's secretly, perhaps accidentally, a racial and economic separation of people: only some can indulge in local, pricey, organic-or-not produce from farmer's markets or Whole Foods. And how do people define local? Are beans from southern Mexico any less local than apples from Washington? Some measure by miles, others by borders and still others by what is mentally local. Can people represent a locality in themselves, embodying the places from where they come? If so, we can't assume that bibimbap or chilaquiles are out of place on a 'traditional American' menu.

I saw that maybe it would be best to welcome the 'immigrant crops' and make sure they do not represent a marginalization of people.

I began to learn that my concern with personal and environmental longevity was oblivious to the health of those who pick my food. Conventional and organic producers rely on immigrants and minority populations to cultivate their crops. Conventional farm workers face frequent exposure to pesticides, and find a greater risk of personal illness and reproductive issues (including birth defects and decreased fertility). But laborers in both systems don't stand to benefit too much from my dollars or my 'healthy' decisions.

We have to overcome the sexy thought of taking care of our bodies and feeling connected to the earth (which really mean judging bodies who can't afford the 'healthy' and being disconnected from the earth's issues). Over the past few years, tomato workers in Florida organized to form the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to uplift themselves from poor living conditions, health risks at work and low wages. By advocating to fast food and grocery conglomerates for one extra penny per pound of tomatoes, these workers can now earn minimum wage. Until recently, producers had not offered a pay raise since the 1980s, and workers had to pick up to 2.5 tons of tomatoes to earn minimum wage in one day.

The CIW's success is great, but I am curious to see how scholars, activists and those in power will approach global food justice. As they continue to talk about food, I hope they consider not just individual but translocal communities.

Keep up the discussion and watch out for these upcoming classes in the spring:

**GEO 351: Geography, Food and Justice**

Howard Rosing  
TTh 1-2:30pm

**PSC 319: Politics and Food**

Catherine May  
TTh 1-2:30pm

# 5 BROKEN CAMERAS

## GIVING AUDIENCES A GLIMPSE INTO PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE AT THE EDGE OF SETTLER COLONIALISM

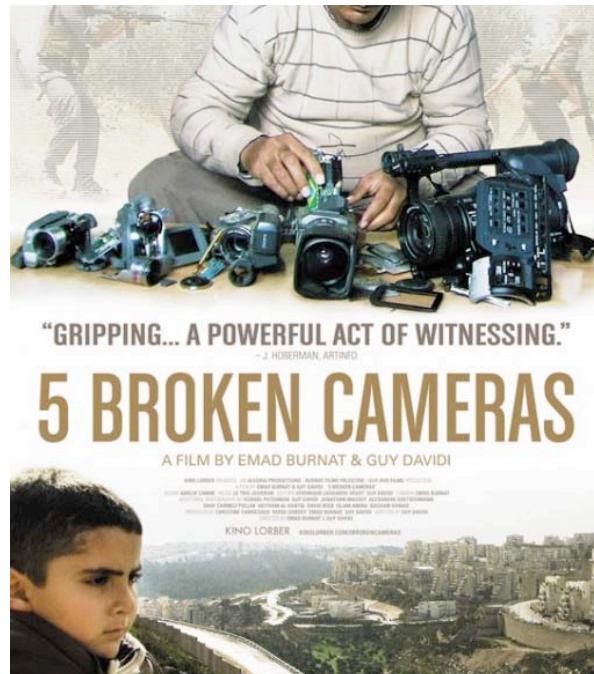
By Richard Hoffman Reinhardt  
& Naeem Vahora

Last weekend, millions of people around the globe tuned in to watch the annual Academy Awards ceremony to see which films would take home the golden statue and the honor of being one of the year's best cinematic pieces. While audiences took to social media to celebrate (or vilify) category winners, there was an excited buildup to see if a little known documentary from a Palestinian village would be granted the prize. *5 Broken Cameras* did not win, but the filmmakers expressed their gratitude on Twitter, stating that being nominated was a victory in itself and a great opportunity for the world to see courageous acts of non-violent resistance movements in Palestine.

*5 Broken Cameras* debuted at DePaul's campus a few weeks ago. Students for Justice in Palestine at DePaul (SJP DePaul) organized the screening, and the American Friends Service Committee co-sponsored the event, along with the Jewish Voice for Peace-Chicago. Students, alumni, and local activists packed Cortelyou Commons on February 25 to watch the movie.

Emad Burnat's deeply personal first-hand account portrays some of the daily intimacies, violations, and anxieties experienced by those who live on the edges of Israeli settler colonial expansion in a town called Bil'in. The filmmakers weave together disparate and disjointed scenes: images of land and nature pitted against settler development and construction; of children at work and play, who grow up in midst of Israeli occupation; of the burning of olive trees, rending the earth, and the resistant act of planting new saplings under the gaze of Israeli soldiers; of protest and its suppression by force are all linked together by Burnat's reflective voice-over narration. The scenes unfold over several years, giving the audience a sense—not merely of escalating tensions between the town's people and those who police, surveil, and encroach upon them—but of the difficulty or impossibility of healing amidst ongoing incursions and ever-present anxieties.

Even as the cameras are inevitably broken by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) during moments of communal protest and confrontation, Burnat picks up new ones again and again as an act through which he futilely attempts to find healing and protect himself, his friends, and his family: "I feel like the camera protects me, but it's an illusion," the narrator says. Though Burnat tries to be resistant to Israeli encroachments, the audience is forced to ask an important set of questions: Can he really resist? What might be lost or gained from this



attempt? Yet the audience is left, in the end, with Burnat's unwillingness to squeeze his narrative into an immediately intelligible or 'easy' frame of redemptive resistance. Anthropologist and queer theorist Elizabeth Povinelli, posits in her discussion of redemptive narratives, "[T]he options presented to those persons who choose, or must, live at the end of liberalism's tolerance and capitalism's trickle, are often not great options. To pretend they are is to ignore the actual harms that liberal forms of social tolerance and capital forms of life- and wealth-extraction produce." The exceptionalism of *5 Broken Cameras*' narrative might be precisely the portrayal of this unwillingness to fetishize and celebrate resistance, instead emphasizing the raw and daily violations, intimacies, and anxieties experienced by Palestinian residents of Bil'in.

If Burnat's film offers its audience a set of disparate and disjointed images linked together in the everyday realities of the filmmaker's experience, and if it refuses the temptation to provide a narrative that renders people and events immediately intelligible, then some of its value might rest in the portrayal of life's disjointedness. The audience might read the film's ongoing and permanent struggle as an invitation to take seriously such forms of complex and irreconcilable violence, resistance, and struggle as a matter of both study and action.

From March 4-8, SJP DePaul will sponsor a number of events as part of Israeli Apartheid Week, "an international series of events held in cities and campuses across the globe" intended to raise communities' awareness and participation in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and help confront the ongoing encroachment and violations faced by Palestinians ([www.apartheidweek.org](http://www.apartheidweek.org)). Students interested in reflecting, working, and acting with others on issues related to Palestine might consider getting involved and look for updates on events. Find "SJP DePaul" on Facebook for more info.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

### ROMINA HENDRZAK

“I have been involved with Moldova AID, a non-profit organization that primarily supports informational and educational programs to Republic of Moldova. Moldova AID launched a new project called *A Book to Share*. The objective of the project is to expand access to academic books to encourage research and development in various fields of science and technology in the Republic of Moldova and to promote English as a universal platform for accessing information. Thus, Moldova AID is looking for donations of textbooks, academic journals, CDs, and DVDs in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, information technology, sociology, political science, philosophy, linguistics, economics and other fields.”



For more information on Moldova AID, visit [www.moldovaaid.wordpress.com](http://www.moldovaaid.wordpress.com).

### *The Paradox of Neo-Colonial India: Auroville*

By: Becca Son

I was asked to give a presentation about my study abroad experience in Auroville as a student representative for the International Institute of Education a few months ago, which I respectfully declined because my honest critique of Auroville derails from the expected optimism that an audience expects from these types of study abroad presentations. So instead, I thought the INT's newsletter would be a more conductive platform, and appreciative audience, to critically discuss an international township—otherwise known as Auroville.

Located along the southeastern coast of India, Auroville came into existence in the early 1970s as an experimental and supposedly “universal” city that was founded by “The Mother”—yes, we literally had to reference “The Mother”—collaborator Sri Aurobindo. The city has a strong adherence to Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual teachings, which emphasize a great respect for nature in relation to unity of human kind. The mission of this intentional community is “to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize

“human unity” (Auroville website). Although Auroville does not advertise their township on CTA el trains, thousands of tourists visit every year for prolonged stays or decide to make the investment and become Aurovillians.

However, many people have criticized the disproportionate number of western people in decision-making positions of authority. This has raised interesting challenges in terms of the relationship between indigenous Tamil populations and Aurovillians (consisting of 40% foreigners from predominately western countries and 60% Indian nationals predominately from outside Tamil Nadu and urban elite cities).

Aurovillians have made efforts to reach out to villages located on the fringes of Auroville’s permeable borders, but there seems to be a sharp divergence between Aurovillians and the local Tamil population. An inescapable lingering of neo-colonial hierarchies manifested in the way in which “integration” plays out. Instead of working toward this idea of “human unity,” efforts of towards integration, paradoxically, creates pronounced borders defined by socio-economic and cultural difference among of “Aurovillians” and “Villagers.” For instance, Aurovillian teachers/volunteers assisting in village schools introduce themselves within the authority of township, and then explain their role is to educate village children on Sri Aurobindo’s teachings.

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Does INT 202 sound familiar at all? This is the paradox of Auroville. Sri Aurobindo's teachings are foundational upon the ideals of human unity (the reason for Auroville's existence), yet the stark lack of cohesion among Aurovillians and Tamil village community has me questioning whether this is a universal township or a new-agey version of colonialism.

Auroville is a perfect case study to understand how the idealistic utopia translates into social practices. Or in other words, how colonial practices are hidden beneath the rhetoric of postcolonial equity and blindness. The number of young western- hippie backpackers that have come to work on their "spiritual enlightenment," whatever that means, raises some interesting question about how people recognize, or deny,

their privilege when coming to a place that strives for the unity of humankind.

I may come off as a person dissatisfied from my study abroad experience, but Auroville is an interesting intentional community that propels constant analysis and critical thought about one's surroundings. From an INT perspective, the purpose of studying abroad may not be to receive a perfectly gift wrapped experience; rather a submersion into any environment that challenges one's thoughts about society, social boundaries, and the role power plays within the context of forming relationships. So, INT students who have the lovely privilege to study abroad, I ask that you consider not only the best tour packages, but also an experience that exercises your critical thoughts—even if it kind gets you a bit disgruntled.

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## 2013 Spring Quarter Class List

**INT 150 Global Connections: Palestinian- Israeli Conflict** — Kamin, Daniel — TuTh 11:20 - 12:50

**INT 150 Global Connections: Global Violence & Power** — Warner, Mallory — MW 1:00 - 2:30

**INT 362/INT 490 Language & the Politics of Terror** — Michael McIntyre — TuTh 11:20 - 12:50

**INT 364/INT 502 Topics in International Political Economy: Europe's Economic Crisis and the Future of the EU** — Antonio Morales-Pita — TuTh 2:40 - 4:10

**INT 366/INT 504 Topics in International Law: Human Rights** — Gil Gott — MW 1:00 - 2:30

**INT 330 East Asian Area Studies I: China** — Philip Stalley MW 11:20-12:50

**INT 331 East Asian Area Studies II: Japan** — Kathryn Ibata-Arens — Wednesday 6:00 - 9:15

**INT 340 European Area Studies I : Spain and Portugal** — Kara Dempsey — TuTh 9:40 - 11:10

**INT 360 Development/Anti-Development: International Development & Regional Inequities** — Carolyn Breitbach — Fri 9:00 - 12:15

**INT 368/INT 500 Topics in Global Culture: Black Freedom & Modernity in the Atlantic World** — Daniel McNeil — MW 4:20 - 5:50

**INT 374 Topics in International Organizations: European Union** — Erik Tillman — MW 1:00 - 2:30

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~ *The Newsletter Committee* ~

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12 Get involved with *Interrupted Silence* next quarter! Look for an announcement via intstuds in the *Spring*.