

The R-Shief Initiative: Proof of Concept

LAILA SHEREEN SAKR, MA, MFA

PROJECT DATE January 2008–July 2009

KEYWORDS Arabic, archive, diaspora, Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, mash-up, Middle East, R-Shief, transnational

ABSTRACT

*The only home
is each other
they've occupied all
the rest
colonized it; an
idea about ourselves is all
we own.*

—Paula Gunn Allen

*These...are survival strategies—maps, blueprints,
guidebooks that we need to exchange in order to feel
sane, in order to make sense of our lives.*

—Gloria Anzaldúa

*Differential consciousness is referred to as “mobile,”
“flexible,” “diasporic,” “schizophrenic,” “nomad,” but it
must be realized that these mobilities align around
a field of force drives, inspires, and focuses them.
Differential consciousness is linked to whatever is
not expressible through words. It is accessed through
poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, im-
ages, sounds, words that plummet or rise through
signification to find some void—some no-place-to
claim their due.”*

—Chela Sandoval¹

The *R-Shief Initiative* will build a working environment among scholars, librarians, policymakers, artists, and technical experts by producing a multilingual website that integrates existing open-source applications in order to archive 21st century knowledge production on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and its Diaspora.



Beta Launch Poster

It has initiated its archiving effort on Gaza, Iraq, and Lebanon. Our long-range vision is to organize (the role of the scholar) and visualize (the role of the artist) the disparate array of digital information many transnational Arab communities interface with that has yet to be integrated into one platform.

The R-Shief Initiative will convene a strategic planning session in Washington, D.C. among key stakeholders and agree on next steps. The second workshop will take place at the end of the grant-cycle in Beirut, Lebanon. This meeting will be used to evaluate, gauge quality control of the site, and determine any modifications or additions we need to make in the action plan. The workshops are part of a design to sustain ongoing research and development on the existing R-Shief platform (currently a Drupal-powered website) for public users with various disciplinary backgrounds. R-Shief will allow these users to archive their Arabic and English digital research—essays and articles, digital video, maps/images, websites, news feeds, project documentation, as well as practical information on how to do research in the Middle East. The project’s objective is to create a working group hired to research, implement, and extend new open-source software in a sustainable way. We argue for the importance to future research of large-scale, open-ended, interactive, international collaborative ventures in which policymakers, artists, technical experts, librarians, and scholars work together.

We are making a “software mashup” (to use a description like music mixing). R-Shief does not innovate technologies; but rather, employs and combines existing technologies in innovative ways. Currently, the R-Shief website is a hybrid platform that implements Drupal’s open-source software package in Arabic and English, extends it using Processing for an interactive/educational intro, Vimeo for video asset storage, Facebook and Twitter from which to

pull RSS feeds, and Basecamp and GotoMeeting for project management and collaboration. The site is also being developed using a visually compelling liquid custom design created by professional artists and calligraphers. The next phase of development includes plans for extending the platform by adding the Calais module for semantic tagging, augmenting a resource management tool, real-time video transcription software and optimizing the applications on the existing website.

A critical feature of R-Shief is that every semantically separable unit will be indexed and archived in Arabic and English. Future developments broadening the scope of the project will include adding new languages, one at a time, beginning with Hebrew, Farsi, and Turkish, to include all Middle Eastern languages. R-Shief offers an extremely sophisticated resource for libraries, universities, and electronic information banking and retrieval that is aesthetically pleasing and intuitive, and designed by an Arab public assembled along transnational networks.

A key principle in the proposed project is that disparate and discreet pieces of knowledge produced and promulgated in scholarship around the world could be (and should be) nuanced, revised, corrected, or enhanced by existing in concert with each other—that is, different forms of knowledge should be interactive and mutually engaged. Making this possible is one of the greatest values R-Shief offers. Edward Said was fond of quoting a passage from the medieval philosopher, Hugo de St. Victor. “The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land.”² The naïve view of truth, as facts validated by being printed in a book or accepted on the authority of licensed experts has been debated over the centuries. Averroes, the medieval Islamic philosopher, shows that different modes of understanding—different languages—offer different perspectives and definitions of the truth; the late French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, questions whether truth can ever exist prior to or independent of interpretation within a social context. Thus knowledge, he claims, is not there for us to find, but is constructed and produced by us. Public intellectuals such as Edward Said embodied the lived reality that there is not one correct way to view social reality and historical narratives. Different conventions may have different codes, but these are ultimately not exclusive of each other—they are present simultaneously in our minds and continually inform each other.

The R-Shief Initiative approaches popular digital media as well as alternative epistemologies with the same rigor and depth of critical analysis that characterizes traditional

scholarship. This project is designed to provide a scholarly working environment for those interested in exploring innovative and non-traditional platforms and methodologies in their processes of production and publication.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Initiatives to leverage and manage organizational knowledge include efforts to codify knowledge in repositories as well as efforts to link individuals using information technologies in order to overcome geographic and temporal barriers to knowledge and expertise. The sheer scale of today’s digital information production has placed emphasis on how we navigate through, and how we visualize, the information.

Walid Raad takes on this issue in his intervention, *The Atlas Group*, where the documenting and archiving processes predominate the screen and the archived data is fictitious. Another Lebanese national, Lokman Slim, problematizes the concept of “memory” and the role of archiving in a post-war society, in his online, bilingual archive on Lebanon’s civil violence and war in the project, *Memory At Work*. In an open studio held at the “Intervene! Interrupt! Conference” at UC Santa Cruz in May 2008, Art Journal’s editor Judith Rodenbeck suggested that the R-Shief Initiative consider the works of Akram Zaatar’s archiving project, the *Arab Image Foundation*, one of the first digital archives on contemporary Arab media. These production efforts, however situated, neither distinguish a collaborative community design, nor incorporate a mashup of data integration across platforms.

The R-Shief platform is a new breed of web-based data integration applications, colloquially termed ‘mashups.’ Its popularity stems from the emphasis on interactive user participation and the patch-like manner in which these types of websites aggregate and stitch together third-party data accordingly. Robust digital asset management resource platforms like Razuna and Resource Spaces do exist. However, Razuna is a for-profit enterprise with robust user profiles with granulated privacy controls. The Resource Space model is a model for software design based on computer programming abstractions, but does not articulate a methodology of visual or community design. Unlike Razuna and Resource Space, R-Shief’s innovative contribution to the humanities is its process of assembling a particular transnational public, using a participatory community design model and an ongoing process of integrating new mixes of software applications.

The R-Shief Initiative is more similar to the Cesar Project or the UC Berkeley’s Bamboo project, in that its conceptual framework is modeled on nodes of actors and specific

scholarly communities, who act as “intermediaries.”³ In the case of the Cesar Project, the platform interfaces between libraries and scholars, specifically in relation to the study of French performing arts of the 17th and 18th centuries. Comparatively, both the R-Shief Initiative and the Project Bamboo use a proof of concept that maps out the scholarly practices and common technology challenges across and among disciplines by facilitating workshops, wikis, and other collaborative platforms for dialogue about the participatory design.

During development phase two, R-Shief will integrate the open-source software developed by the Zotero Project at George Mason University’s Center for History and New Media. R-Shief Board Member Bassam Haddad, also Director of the Middle East Studies Program at George Mason University, plans to build relations with the Zotero Project internally through the university. At the University of California, Santa Cruz, the R-Shief Initiative will be able to leverage other interdisciplinary research emerging from its host institution, for example, the Center for the Study of Pacific War Memories’ multilingual website, *Eternal Flames*, recently awarded an *neh* Digital Start-up Grant.

The R-Shief Initiative is well positioned to learn from a number of similar projects. The R-Shief website does the same with the technology used. It is built using Drupal’s ubiquitous software because of its flexibility and ease with adding modules. Also, it is designed to meet the requirements of an international audience, and it provides a full framework to create a multilingual website, blog, content management system, and community applications. With a growing community of Drupal developers contributing versatile modules, we expect future upgrades to our platform will be easy.

Initial conceptual designs of the R-Shief Initiative were presented in April 2008 in a paper, “On Performing Arab New Media,” at the “Diasporic Bodies and Visual Culture Conference” at Cornell University. R-Shief received funding to exhibit its first installation at the Middle East Studies Association conference in November 2008, and received 133 guest signatures from the event. In Spring 2009, the project also received a ucsc Porter Graduate Research Grant and a Florence French Grant to initiate development of the website. In June 2009, a computer installation and video project based on the R-Shief beta platform will be in the “interactivate” exhibit at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz. It will feature the beta version of this bilingual archive using a recent collection of media that emerged in response to the war on Gaza, Palestine.

SCOPE AND DURATION

The five-year vision for the development of the R-Shief Initiative is designed in three phases.

PHASE ONE: INITIAL (JAN. 2008–SEPT. 2009)

The initial team of three board members and director collectively devised a list of potential board members. The initial phase of development included research on existing technologies and projects as well as a search for a research assistant and staff programmer with appropriate technical and Arabic language skill sets, as well as the situated knowledge of Arab Diaspora. During this phase, the R-Shief team grew from three to fourteen participants.

Due to the recent conflict in Gaza, we decided to begin R-Shief’s archiving efforts with a focus on Gaza, as conflict regions tend to generate a surge of media and displace a group of people. Since December 2008, we collected hundreds of digital media assets and event documentation. By June 2009, we will have uploaded and tagged all of this content onto the R-Shief prototype.

By the end of this phase, the custom-designed graphical user interface will be powered by Drupal in both Arabic and English, extending video assets from Vimeo, incorporating RSS feeds into news aggregation, and using an interactive/educational introduction built in Processing. We have commissioned contemporary Arabic Calligrapher Nihad Dukhan to design a calligraphic logo design using aesthetic style of emptying out of the letters and creating that movement. Laila Shereen Sakr will use Dukhan’s commissioned designs to create a graphical user interface that artistically expresses the rationale and function of R-Shief, and allow for flexibility of content. The website will be designed to target all audiences and provide an easy user interface for accessing data. Associate Professor of Film and Digital Media Sharon Daniel is serving as a consultant.

PHASE TWO: DEVELOPMENT (OCT. 2009–SEPT. 2010)

With staff and advisory board in place, we plan to conduct two meetings during the development phase. The first will take place in Washington, D.C. The second will take place in Beirut, Lebanon, in June 2010. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate the preparation for a larger grant proposal aimed to seek ongoing funding and support. These meetings will also be used to gauge quality control of the site, and determine any modifications or additions we need to make.

During the development phase, we plan to research and augment an open-source resource management tool, Calais’ semantic tagging module, and real-time video tran-

scription software to the existing R-Shief mashup. We will also be prototyping an integration of Sakhr Software's Arabic Natural Language Processing tool to include diacritics in the Arabic portions of the site.

While our staff programmer is integrating new applications on the site, our staff assistant will be working to grow the user-base via consultation with the board and through a process of participation in a transnational Arab community. With the platform open for public use, anyone can sign up. The site will be monitored by the advisory board to ensure that posted content be appropriate for a public audience.

R-Shief's staff assistant will act as a primary, lead user, to collect and upload assets. She will employ focused campaigns to archive content on the following:

- Gaza: December 2009–February 2010
- Iraq: March 2010–June 2010
- Lebanon: July 2010–September 2010

**PHASE THREE: EVALUATION AND EXPANSION,
(OCT. 2010–SEPT. 2012)**

The effectiveness of the project will be formatively assessed by the number of participants and by the web analytics tool that will measure traffic on the site and information about our users' demographics and behavior on our site.

Expansion of the archive entails designing campaigns to archive the other parts of the region like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Israel, and Iran. In addition, plans for expansion include adding new languages one at a time beginning with Hebrew, Farsi, and Turkish, to include all Middle Eastern languages.

HOW IT WORKS

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DESIGN

The epistemological framework from which R-Shief was conceptualized envisions a coalition of scholars, librarians, policymakers, artists, and technical experts who share similar research interests (for example, Arab youth, Franco-Maghribi relations, or Palestinian Diaspora in Lebanon), and who advise each other, in non-hierarchical consultation online.

**ARCHIVING SITUATED CONTENT EMBEDDED
IN INDIVIDUALS**

R-Shief relies on its networked community for content to archive. The approach we have taken to find, collect, gather, and upload content on Gaza is mainly through active participation in a global transnational community engaged on the issue. Individuals who participate in this community via list serves, social networking sites, and professional networks receive hundreds of email announcements on recent developments in the field on a weekly basis.

MASHUP ARCHITECTURE

R-Shief has been offered permanent server space to be hosted by the Digital Arts/ New Media program at uc Santa Cruz. Mashup architecture enables us to extend the Drupal-powered website by incorporating Calais for semantic tagging, Processing for an interactive/ educational intro, Vimeo for video asset storage, Facebook and Twitter from which to pull rss feeds, and Basecamp and GotoMeeting for project management and collaboration.

FEATURES INCLUDE:

- **Semantic tagging:** automatically creates rich semantic metadata for the content. Using natural language processing, machine learning and other methods, the application analyzes your document and finds the entities within it. This metadata provides the ability to build maps (or graphs or networks) linking documents to people to companies to places to products to events to geographies, etc....
- **Threaded comments:** enables discussion on published content.
- **Version control:** tracks the details of content updates including the agent who changed it, what was changed, the date and time of changes made to content.



Participatory Community Design Chart

- **News aggregator:** collects and caches articles directly into the MySQL database.
- **RSS:** aggregates event-based or update-driven content, such as blogs and news articles into syndication.
- **Automatically captured citations:** offer more precise control for integrating bibliographic information for scholarly writing projects
- **Granular level of privacy:** allows users to choose whether to keep data private or public. This feature is important for scholars concerned with intellectual property.
- **Rich-text notes in Arabic and English:** Easy to keep annotations, jots, and notes in one place, and all searchable. The ability to record notes about library items is essential to conducting useful research.

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DESIGN: STAFF, ADVISORY BOARD, AND USERS

The initiative brings together personnel living in Santa Cruz, California; Washington, dc; New York, New York; Cape Town, South Africa; Beirut, Lebanon; and Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine. The current R-Shief community of core stakeholders and actors—comprised of a project, a programmer, an assistant, and board members—has relied on common social and project networking sites like Facebook and Basecamp, along with the more traditional email and telephone communication internally throughout the development of this project.

STAFF

Laila Shereen Sakr, Project Director, brings considerable experience in developing and designing highly visible information platforms for projects and organizations related to the Middle East and North Africa, including The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program's Islamopedia Project at Harvard University, Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, and the Middle East Research and Information Project.

Dalia Anani, Staff Assistant, will mainly assist the project director in her duties. The main role of the intern is to upload assets to the site and add metatags. The assistant is also responsible for documenting the collaborative process involved in the development of the R-Shief Initiative.

Manal Hassan, Programming Consultant, brings a new generation of technical support to the Arabic-language programming field. She is one of six developers to have successfully installed Drupal in Arabic. While she works as an IT consultant and programmer, Hassan also brings critical training experience.

ADVISORY BOARD

The advisory board plays a key role in R-Shief network, offering advice and direction from the various disciplines and fields. Board members (historians, anthropologists, literature scholars, filmmakers, policymakers, political scientists, bibliographers, web developers and designers) incorporate their own research methods and interdisciplinary approaches to help shape the vision of the initiative.

USERS

The main audience for R-Shief is a community of various actors: students, scholars, technical experts, policy-makers, artists, librarians, and other transnational citizens concerned with the knowledge production.

FINAL PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION

The final production of this project is a forum of technical experts, artists, policymakers, librarians, and scholars who work together to build and continually modify their own mix of applications into one website that archives digital information.

Mash-up is certainly an exciting new genre of Web applications. The combination of data modeling technologies stemming from the semantic web domain and the maturation of loosely-coupled, service-oriented, platform-agnostic communication protocols is finally providing the infrastructure needed to start developing applications that can leverage and integrate the massive amount of information that is available on the Web. R-Shief is interested to see how the genre impacts social issues such as fair-use and intellectual property as well as other application domains that integrate data across boundaries.

There was a time when Westerners knew very little and cared even less about the Middle East and North Africa. But this has changed dramatically. The reasons are many, and are evident. However, getting to know and understand Middle Eastern culture is not easy for others. First, they

are locked up into an outsider's perspective, and second, that perspective is defined by negative, political media representations locally, and poor self-representation by people in the region. To put it differently, if the truth is the sun as Averroes says, our different ways of knowing it, our different languages, are creating different patterns of light and shadow. Communication is blocked; misinterpretation leads to unjust conclusions and more ignorance than light. Who is in a better position to contribute to creating a platform upon which the Middle Eastern and Western minds can meet than the transnational citizen?

BIOGRAPHIES

Advisory Board Member/Historian

Osama Abi-Mershed, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of History at Georgetown University. His research interests include colonial Algeria, colonial education, modern France, and Franco-Maghribi relations. He teaches courses on the history of North Africa and the Western Mediterranean (medieval and modern); of Muslim Spain; of the Muslim and Arab worlds; and of the modern Middle East.

Staff Assistant/Intermedia Artist

Dalia Anani is a senior undergraduate Art student at the University of California in Santa Cruz. She has focused the subject matter of her intermedia-based work on Arab-American issues. Born and raised in southern California, which has a strong Arab-American community, Anani offers unique perspective on a new diasporic youth post-9/11 generation. In the summer of 2008 she spent six weeks volunteering in a Palestinian refugee camp with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). She visits the Middle East often, and is proficient in Arabic.

Advisory Board Member/ Asset Management Expert and Bibliographer

Brenda E. Bickett is the Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies Bibliographer at Georgetown University Library. Educated at the University of Texas-Austin and the University of Michigan, where she earned master's degrees in Middle Eastern Studies and Library/Information Science, her languages include Arabic, French, Italian, Persian and Turkish and she has traveled /studied/worked in Egypt, France, Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Her research interests are all over the maps of the region, by discipline and geography. She is active in the Middle East Librarians and the Middle East Studies associations where she has worked on digital initiatives for preservation and creation of new media.

Advisory Board Member/Lawyer and Musician

Shahid Buttar is a civil rights lawyer, hip-hop MC, independent columnist, grassroots community organizer, singer and poet. Professionally, he will in May 2009 assume leadership of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee as Executive Director. He also resistance at the 2005 Counter-Inaugural and the 2004 Republican National Convention—where Democracy Now! named one of his public addresses among “The Best of 2004.” Shahid graduated in 2003 from Stanford Law School. As a musician, Buttar has performed around the world for audiences as large as 50,000. His debut CD, *Get Outta Your Chair*, was released in 2008 and features music from the funk, blues, hip-hop, house, drum ‘n bass, and South Asian fusion traditions. He also writes a column on politics and constitutional law for *Huffington Post*.

Advisory Board Member/Literature Scholar

Carol N. Fadda-Conrey is an assistant professor of English at Syracuse University. Her research and teaching interests include the study of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, war, trauma, and transnational identities in Arab and Arab-American literary texts. Her essays on Middle Eastern and Arab American literature have appeared in *Studies in the Humanities*, *MELUS*, and *Al Raida*, as well as in the edited collections *Arabs in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora* (2006) and *Arab Women’s Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing* (2007).

**Advisory Board Member/
Researcher and NGO Director**

Kathryn M. Coughlin is President of the Global Research Group, a non-profit organization that produces scholarly research on and engages in public diplomacy in the wider Islamic world. She completed her doctoral exams (with distinction) in Islamic History at Georgetown University specializing in Islamic law, but abandoned her dissertation for active public service. Ms. Coughlin has taught, lectured and/or delivered papers in the Middle East, North America, Europe and Asia on a wide range of subjects including religion and gender; Islamic law; religion and modernity; and U.S. foreign policy and the Middle East. Ms. Coughlin’s research has been supported by a number of American and international foundations including the U.S. Social Science Research Council and the Arbeitskreis Moderne Und Islam (Germany). Her publications include a reference work on Muslim cultures in sixteen countries,⁴ a biographical dictionary on post-Saddam Iraq (forthcoming late 2009). On sabbatical

from GRG in 2008–2009, Ms. Coughlin is a Research Fellow with the Islam in the West Program at Harvard University’s Center for Middle East Studies.

Film and Digital Media Consultant

Sharon Daniel is Chair of the Digital Arts and New Media Program, and Associate Professor of Film and Digital Media at the University of California, Santa Cruz where she teaches classes in digital media theory and practice. Her research involves collaborations with communities that focus on the use and development of information and communications technologies for social inclusion. Daniel’s work has been exhibited internationally at museums, festivals including the Corcoran Biennial 2001, the University of Paris I, the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival, Ars Electronica and the Lincoln Center Festival as well as on the Internet. Her essays have been published in books and professional journals and she has presented at a variety of international venues including the conference “contested commons” in New Delhi, India. More recently, Daniel’s net.art work *Public Secrets* was launched in 2007 in the fourth issue of *Vectors Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*. It was named a Webby “honoree” in the 2007 Webby Awards, the so-called “academy awards of the internet”.

**Advisory Board Member/
Political Scientist and Filmmaker**

Bassam Haddad is Director of the Middle East Studies Program at George Mason University and Visiting Professor at Georgetown University. He serves as founding editor of the Arab Studies Journal, a peer-reviewed research publication, co-producer/director of the award-winning documentary film, *About Baghdad*, and director of a film series on “Arabs and Terrorism.” He is currently working on his book on Syria’s political economy, provisionally titled *The Political Economy of Regime Security: State-Business Networks in Syria*. Bassam recently directed a new film series on Arab/Muslim immigrants in Europe, titled *The “Other” Threat*. He also serves on the Editorial Committee of Middle East Report.

Arabic-language Programming Consultant

Manal Hassan is an IT Consultant, experienced web developer and designer and a FOSS enthusiast, currently in South Africa. Her main interest is adapting and delivering technology to non-technical experts, and training them in making it their own. She co-founded the Egyptian GNU/Linux Users Group (EGLUG) in 2004, and has extensive experience in working with ngos, human rights activists,

and children on web technologies and new media. She won the Best of Blogs (BOBs) and Reporters without Borders award together with her husband in 2005. Hassan's specialties include Drupal, HTML, PHP, CSS, training, Linux, foss, websites, portals, multilingual websites, RTL designs, mentoring, Drupal theming.

Advisory Board Member/NGO Director

Steven Keller has served since January 2006 as country director in the West Bank and Gaza for America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST), a private, nonprofit organization that strengthens mutual understanding and cooperation between Americans and the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa. Prior to his current post, Steven worked at amideast's headquarters for more than three years heading up the organization's new business and program development. His interest in and focus on education and development in the Arab World began in Tunisia, where he served during the early nineties as a volunteer in the United States Peace Corps. His experience also includes working as an independent contractor for usaid in Washington, dc as well as a year-long graduate internship at the Galilee Society—The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services—which strives to achieve equitable health, environmental and socio-economic conditions for Palestinian Arabs in Israel. Mr. Keller holds a Master's degree from the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, part of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, as well as a Bachelor's degree from the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech. He currently lives in the West Bank in Ramallah, Palestine.

Advisory Board Member/Anthropologist and Editor

Laurie King holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies from Indiana University-Bloomington. She has done anthropological field research among Palestinian citizens of Isarel, and in post-war Beirut. King is currently managing editor of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, the quarterly journal of the Institute of Palestine Studies (published by the University of California Press), and was editor in chief of *Middle East Report* (MERIP) from 1998–2000. Laurie King is co-founder of the online news sources, *Electronic Intifada*, *Electronic Iraq*, and *Electronic Lebanon*. King is also currently an adjunct faculty member in the Master of Arts in Arab Studies Program at Georgetown University.

Advisory Board Member/Journalist and Film Writer

Lynn Maalouf manages the Lebanon program of the International Center for Transitional Justice (www.ictj.org), a New-York based human rights ngo, focusing on such issues as the missing and enforced disappearances, political initiatives dealing with post-war reconciliation, and archiving. She is the Beirut correspondent for the English-language service of *Radio France Internationale* and was formerly a correspondent for *The Washington Post*. She is a board member and contributor to the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World's publication *Al Raida*, affiliated with the Lebanese American University. Prior to that, she was editor of the English-language website of the pan-Arab publication *Al Hayat* between 2002 and 2004, and then became correspondent of *Radio France Internationale*, covering the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and the ensuing political developments until 2006. She has written a script for a short film that is currently in production, and co-written a script for a feature film, selected at the Sundance Screenwriters' Lab in November 2006.

Advisory Board Member/Literature Scholar

Marcy Newman joined the faculty of Al Najeh University in Nablus, Palestine in the fall of 2008. She has taught at Boise State University, American University of Beirut, the University of Jordan, and Al Quds University. She is a scholar, teacher and activist invested in human rights. She teaches comparative American/Middle East literature courses. She is the editor of Jessie Redmon Fauset's *The Chinaberry Tree & Selected Writings*, *The Sleeper Wakes: Harlem Surge Stories by Women* and the author of *Beyond Slash, Burn, and Poison: Transforming Breast Cancer Stories into Action*.

Project Director

Laila Shereen Sakr is an Egyptian-American poet, graphic designer, editor, community organizer, and digital artist, having spent twelve years in Washington, D.C. working in the fields of publishing and design on issues related to the Middle East for Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, *Al Hayat* newspaper, and Quilting Point Productions. Currently in the San Francisco Bay area, she has lived and worked in the U.S., in Egypt, and served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Morocco (RPCV 1993–1995). Her most recent work includes a video and co-designed website for "Conversation Map", an exhibit in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's show *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (November 2008 – February 2009). Shereen Sakr was recently commissioned to build a social networking site by the

graduate division at UCSC and to design a graphical user interface for The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program's Islamopedia project at Harvard University. She experiments with live and recorded video remixing as part of a conceptual art project, vj Um Amel. With an MA in Arab Studies from Georgetown University (1998), she will receive an MFA in Digital Arts/New Media from UC Santa Cruz in June 2009. See <http://www.lailashereen.com>.

NOTES

- 1 Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
- 2 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House Publishers, 1978), 259.
- 3 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 4 Kathryn M. Coughlin, *Muslim Cultures Today: A Reference Guide* (Greenwood Press, 2006).