2017 MESAAS Graduate Conference

(DE)STABILIZING DISCIPLINES
(RE)IMAGINING REGIONS

keynote lecture by SUSAN BUCK-MORSS

“Y E A R 1”

23 – 24 February
Knox Hall // Columbia University

Live music by: Columbia University Raaga
South Asian Fusion Organization
**REGISTRATION**

No formal registration is required. Program materials, as well as identification badges for conference presenters, may be picked up at the front area on the first floor of Knox Hall.

**SOCIAL HOUR**

*Raaga* is Columbia University’s South Asian Fusion Music Organization - a cultural performance group. *Raaga* artistically blends genres of music from India and across the world to produce a unique sound. We invite you to a social hour on Thursday, February 23, 4:30pm - 5:30pm, with music by *Raaga*. 
For the eighth consecutive year, graduate students from the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies (MESAAS) invite you to attend a two-day conference, with keynote speaker Professor Susan Buck-Morss on February 23rd and 24th, 2017.

In 2010, the conference was entitled Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference on Middle East, South Asia, and African Studies. In 2011, it was “Imaginary Geographies,” in 2012, “Sites of Modernity” and in 2013 “Paradigmatic Conflict and Crisis.” For 2014, the conference had no theme but was organized around original work that spoke to the areas of study of the department. This approach was repeated in 2016, under the broad heading “Beyond Boundaries.”

This year our conference is entitled “(De)Stabilizing Disciplines, (Re) Imagining Regions,” and seeks to problematize our modern disciplinary divisions and their epistemological underpinnings. Panelists will discuss sites of knowledge production that exist outside of disciplinary bounds, or offer new strategies for sustained interdisciplinary study. We have sought ideas and research which can challenge and change our imaginations of ‘region’ and their concomitant spatial, intellectual and political boundaries.

SPONSORED BY:
Center for Iranian Studies
Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies
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Graduate School of Arts and Science
Institute for African Studies
South Asia Institute
Institute for Comparative Literature and Society
Department of Italian
Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies
DIRECTIONS

The main campus of Columbia University is located in Morningside Heights, upper Manhattan, at 535 West 116th Street.

KNOX HALL
Knox Hall is located on 122nd street between Broadway and Claremont Avenue. Rooms 207 and 208 are on the second floor, which can be accessed by staircase or elevator.

501 SCHERMERHORN HALL
Schermerhorn Hall can be accessed by entering Columbia’s main gates at 116th Street and Broadway and proceeding up the main college steps, or by proceeding up the steps facing Earl Hall (opposite Barnard College). The building is located just northeast of the domed Low Library. After entering Schermerhorn’s main campus entrance, visitors can take the stairs immediately to their left or right, or alternately, the elevator, up one level to Room 501 on the fifth floor.
THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY

10:30 am - 12:00 pm
Legacies of Colonial Cartography
with Manan Ahmed
Unlocatable Localities
with Sudipta Kaviraj

Lunch 12:00pm - 1:15pm

1:30 pm - 3:00 pm
Legacies of Colonial Knowledge
with Durba Mitra
Epistemic Experiments, Initiations and Antagonisms
with Najam Haider

3:00 pm - 4:30 pm
Social Actors and their Pedagogies
with Laura Diamond Dixit
Dominant Disciplines: Critiquing Knowledge Objects in Economics
with Timothy Mitchell

Social Hour

4:30 pm - 5:30 pm
Live Music with Columbia University Raaga, South Asian Fusion Music Organization
### Friday, 23 February

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>New Terrains: Migrations, Circulations and Networks with Kai Kresse</td>
<td>207</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 pm</td>
<td>Lunch 12:00pm - 1:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 pm</td>
<td>Studying the Intersection I: Homologies of Form: Nineteenth Century Arabic Literature with Taoufik Ben-Amor</td>
<td>208</td>
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<td>2:00 pm</td>
<td>Studying the Intersection II: History and Aesthetics with Mana Kia</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 pm</td>
<td>Political Struggle as Study and Praxis with Andrew Eisenberg</td>
<td>208</td>
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<td>2:30 pm</td>
<td>Literary Multiplicity with Zeynep Ceylik</td>
<td>208</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 pm</td>
<td>Social Identities, Sovereign Spaces with Maria Frederika Malmström</td>
<td>207</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
<td>Keynote Lecture by Susan Buck-Morss</td>
<td>501</td>
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<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Schermerhorn Hall</td>
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</tbody>
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"We have many ways to make you leave":
The Struggle for Land rights in Old Lahore
Fatima Tassadiq, Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

"Pockets of Privilege: A Historical, Spatial and Political Economy Analysis of Industrial Zones in Palestine"
Rohan Advani, Near Eastern Studies, New York University

"Dealing with the East:
‘Smart Regions’ Geopolitics, and the Uses of ‘Eurasia’"
Veronika Zablotsky, Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz; Visiting Scholar, Columbia University, The Harriman Institute

ABSTRACT: This panel discusses the politics and historical anthropology of region and urban formation. It analyzes how local and international regions are formed by spatial fragmentation, design, and construction, and are deployed by social actors within geopolitical and capitalist infrastructures. In Lahore, state-defined urban settlement clashes with the self-organizing urbanity of displaced populations; in Palestine, industrial zones converge Palestinian capitalist class power, international financial institutions (IFIs) and the Israeli Occupation; and in EAEU discourse, ‘smart regions’ of West and Central Asia are deployed in service of capitalist extraction.
PANEL 2: UNLOCATABLE LOCALITIES

Discussant: Sudipta Kaviraj, Department of MESAAS, Columbia University
Student moderator: Shaunna Rodrigues
Room: Knox 207
10:30 am - 12:00pm

“Deviance within the Household - Depictions of ‘Madness’ in Ismat Chughtai’s Longer Fiction”
Aneeqa Mazhar Wattoo, Oriental Studies, University of Oxford

“Living Textually: The Role of Two Key Texts in the Constitution of Islamic Everyday Life in a Postcolony”
Mohamed Parambil, Muslim Culture and Societies, Berlin Graduate School; Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie University Berlin

“Forgotten Societies: Islamization of Medieval Ghur in Afghanistan”
Jawan Rasikh, South Asia Studies, University of Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT: Presenting ethnographic, archival and literary evidence, these papers discuss the social processes that are not ‘locatable’ within the boundaries of area studies, modern state politics, or dominant historiographies. This panel offers new social histories of South Asia - from processes of Islamic conversion in medieval northwestern Afghanistan, to the social ‘deviance’ of Muslim women of the ashraf class represented in the literary figure of the ‘mad woman’, to the construction of pious selfhood in the postcolonial setting by Mappila Muslims in Kerala.

Lunch Break - 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm
PANEL 3: LEGACIES OF COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE

Discussant: Durba Mitra, Department of Politics, New York University

Student moderator: Prashant Iyengar
Room: Knox 207
1:30 pm - 3:00pm

“The Judicial Construction of 'Religion' in India”
Brajesh Ranjan, Jindal Global Law School

“Religion(s) and the Hindu Code Bill”
Neha Singh, Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion, Jawaharlal Nehru University

“Violent Hindu Women: Liberal Interpretations and Alternative Insights”
Leela Khanna, South Asia Institute, Columbia University

“Lahore in the Age of Colonial Exhibitions 1881-1884”
Shandana Waheed, Hagop Kevorkian Centre for Near Eastern Studies, New York University

ABSTRACT: This panel discusses the legacy of colonial knowledge production on questions of religion and culture in India. Strategies by states, academic institutions, and colonial agents of classifying, systematizing and categorizing religion and culture have left their political and epistemological legacies: religious discrimination in modern Indian courts, cultural decimation in Punjab, religious and ideological redefinition of women as legal subjects, and narrow framings of Hindu women’s right-wing nationalism.
ABSTRACT: These papers critique epistemic Eurocentrism, modern categories of science, philosophy, and law through a comparative analysis of medieval Islamicate science and philosophy. Al-Biruni’s letters to Ibn Sina in 997 are re-read for a reconstruction of the category of ‘science’, the Tabaqät Al-Shāfi’īyah Al-Kubrā for its development of legal hermeneutics, and the works of Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī for their musical terms, concepts and definitions.
PANEL 5: SOCIAL ACTORS AND THEIR PEDAGOGIES

Discussant: Laura Diamond Dixit, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University

Student moderator: McCaulay Singer-Milnes
Room: Knox 207
3:00 pm - 4:30pm

Yara Saqfalhait, Design Studies, Harvard University

“Afghan Visual Knowledge Production and Art-Producing Spaces in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan”
Paniz Musawi Natanzi, Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies

“An Egyptian Cotton Culture: Technical Knowledge and Commodity Agriculture”
Abram Smith, Alumni of MESAAS, Columbia University

ABSTRACT: These papers draw attention to the disjuncture between social actors and their pedagogies. This panel discusses professional and technical experts, informed by a specific curricula, economic background or practical knowledge, being challenged by local environments and material contexts which are at odds with their pedagogical training. Afghan artists draw on artistic knowledges from Iran, Pakistan and the former Soviet Union, Lebanese practicing architects in the 50’s and 60’s inherit French and US modernism, and European experts in the Egyptian Khedival state must redapt a technical knowledge informed by the conditions of the Americas to a new environment.
PANEL 6: DOMINANT DISCIPLINES: CRITIQUING KNOWLEDGE OBJECTS IN ECONOMICS

Discussant: Timothy Mitchell, Department of MESAAS, Columbia University

Student moderator: Uponita Mukherjee
Room: Knox 208
3:00pm - 4:30pm

“Destabilizing a Discipline: Epistemology of Contemporary Islamic Economics”
Sami Al-Daghistani, Islamic Studies, Leiden University and Münster Universität; Visiting Scholar at MESAAS and IRCPL, Columbia University

“Partnership Bifurcated: Transformation of Credit and the Rise of Families and Corporations in Egypt”
Ibrahim El Houdaiby, MESAAS, Columbia University

ABSTRACT: This panel critiques modern thinking in economics which is rooted in Western political economy and neoliberal ideology. By charting the changes from medieval Islamic concepts of maslaha, ihsan, faqr and zuhd to 20th century economics, as well as the transformations of credit within Egyptian households in the 19th century to modern private/public divisions, these papers challenge some of the central knowledge objects constituting modern economics.

SOCIAL HOUR
4:30 pm - 5:30 pm
Live Music by Raaga
Knox 201
ABSTRACT: This session presents an analysis of the alternate geographies imagined and constructed by transnational social actors. Egyptian advertisers creatively experimented with constructing multilingual publics, and migrating Senegalese Sufi Muslims constructed a ‘delocalized religious ethos’ along European economic migratory routes.
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PANEL 2: STUDYING THE INTERSECTION I: HOMOLOGIES OF FORM: NINETEENTH CENTURY ARABIC TEXTUALITY

Discussant: Taoufik Ben-Amor, Department of MESAAS, Columbia University

Student moderator: Max Shmookler
Room: Knox 208
10:30 pm - 12:00pm

“Thou Shalt Not Translate Me: Equivalence and Contiguity in the Work of (Ahmad) Fāris al-Shidyāq”
Rama Alhabian, Near Eastern Studies, Cornell University

“The Directions of Modernity: Al-Shidyāq, Madhhab, and Literary Form”
Ziad Dallal, Comparative Literature, New York University

“A Question of Form: ‘Masā’il wa ajūbatuhā’ as a structure of knowledge production in the Nahḍa and beyond”
Hannah Scott Deuchar, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, New York University

“The Bedouin Imaginary of a Nahḍa Pioneer”
Max Shmookler, MESAAS, Columbia University

ABSTRACT: This panel presents a conceptual strategy for interdisciplinary study. Grounded in the study of Arabic texts composed in the nineteenth century, it follows the concept of ‘form’ across the disciplines of literature and history by proposing an array of homologies. In the study of modern literature, ‘form’ often refers to narrative structures, poetics, stylistics, genre theory, and abstractions useful for categorizing texts. Form, however, is also an apt term for identifying material, social, and ideology structure in society. Thinking homologically is about looking for patterns between irreducible facets of human experience, between text and world in their multiplicity.
ABSTRACT: This panel presents an empirical strategy for interdisciplinary study. By analyzing and taking seriously historical texts which juxtapose different genres of narration or modes of interpretation unrecognized by the modern discipline of history, these papers discuss the intersections of historiography and poetry, literary history and political ethics, and chronological, spiritual and mythical time.
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PANEL 4: POLITICAL STRUGGLE AS STUDY AND PRAXIS

Discussant: Andrew Eisenberg, Department of Music, New York University

Student moderator: Jared Sacks
Room: 208
1:00 pm - 2:30pm

“#RhodesMustFall: Decolonization, Praxis and Disruption”
Kayum Ahmed, International and Comparative Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

“Imagining a Nation, Performing an Uprising: Kenyan Theatre and the End of Empire 1952-1960”
Elizabeth Burns Dyer, History, University of Pennsylvania

“Sheikh Imam: Oppositional Music and Identity in Egypt”
Sophia Frankford, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford

“The Struggle is Incomplete”
Khubu Khubu Meth Zulu, Alumni of Wits University

ABSTRACT: This panel analyzes leftist politics, highlighting their frameworks, motivations and strategies. #RhodesMustFall seeks to decolonize education through tactics of disruption, employing frameworks of decolonization, black consciousness and intersectionality, “Anti-Mau Mau” Maasai comedians leverage power against British colonials in their performance of ‘hybrid’ political identities, and leftist Egyptian students and intellectuals mobilize the music of Sheikh Imam to negotiate increasing marginality.
PANEL 5: LITERARY MULTIPLICITY

Discussant: Zeynep Celik, Department of History, Columbia University

Student moderator: Roni Henig
Room: Knox 208
2:30 - 4:00pm

“Imperial Mimesis and Textual Transactions in Ottoman Literary Modernity”
Mehtap Ozdemir, Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

“Comparative Postcolonial Poetics: A Parallel Reading of Intiza Husain and Naguib Mahfouz”
Maryam Fatima, Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

“Paratext to the Poetry of Salim Barakat”
Esraa Al-Shammari, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania

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PANEL 6: SOCIAL IDENTITIES, SOVEREIGN SPACES

Discussant: Maria Frederika Malmström, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University

Student Moderator: Nadia Sariahmed
Room: Knox 207
3:30 - 5:00pm

“The Writer’s Impasse: Overcoming Lebanon’s Sectarian Deadlock”
Sabiha Allouche, Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies University

“The Other Side: The Embodied Experience of The Self”
Somayeh Noori Shirazi, History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture, University of Alberta

“Deconstructing the Objectification: Dalit Women as the Agents of Emancipatory Knowledge”
Pradnya Jadhav, Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University

“Challenging Fanon: A Black Radical Feminist Perspective on Violence in the Fees Must Fall Movement”
Wanelisa Xaba, Social Development, University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT: This panel offers political, methodological and conceptual strategies to redefine social identity within and against the nation-state. Through an anthropology of everyday practices, “Lebanese-ness” becomes a category of contestation, women artists in Iran, through visual self-reflection, challenge the Orientalist gaze, black womxn and queers in South Africa’s student movement assert themselves against militarism, and Dalit women use music, writing and poetry to confront their multi-layered objectification.
Friday, 24 February, 2017

Keynote Lecture

5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Susan Buck-Morss

“Year 1”

Location: 501 Schermerhorn Hall
Special thanks to:

**Keynote Speaker**
Susan Buck-Morss

**Conference Organizers**
Yayra Sumah and Basma Radwan

**Faculty and Departmental Support:**
Sudipta Kaviraj, Manan Ahmed, Zeynep Celik, Timothy Mitchell, Kai Kresse, Najam Haider, Taoufik Ben-Amor, Jessica Rechtschaffer, Michael E. Fishman, Kerri O’Connell, Laura Diamond Dixit, Mana Kia, Abdul Nanji, Andrew Eisenberg, Maria Frederika Malmström, Durba Mitra, Rachel Brulé, Mamadou Diouf, Charles Jester

**Conference Volunteers:**

**Performers:** Raaga South Asian Fusion Music Organization

**Staff:** Knox Hall Facilities & Security Staff, IAS Work-Study Staff

**Sponsors:**
Center for Iranian Studies, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, Office of the Dean of Social Science in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School of Arts and Science, Institute for African Studies, Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, South Asia Institute, Department of Italian, Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies

**(De)stabilizing Disciplines, (Re)Imagining Regions:**
The 2017 MESAAS Graduate Student Conference

Organized by Basma Radwan and Yayra Sumah. Poster by Kekeli Sumah.

Program Art by Nile Davies.