

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXVI Number 2, February 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, March 13, 7:30-9:00 PM. *Letter writing meeting* at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, March 18, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* This month we read a novel, "American War" by Omar El Akkad.

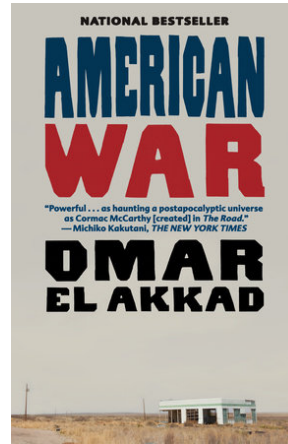
Thursday, March 22, 7:30-9:00 PM. *Monthly Meeting.* We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be putting together our calendar of events, including guest speakers and Amnesty videos, for the coming year. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello all,

This is Joyce, substituting for Kathy, who is extremely busy now with settling her father's estate. He passed away in early February. Our deepest sympathy to Kathy for her loss.

Paula invited Group 22 members to attend a strategy session at her home on the morning of Saturday, Feb. 24. Nine of us brainstormed about possible changes in our group's meetings. Book group will continue as usual; new volunteers will assume responsibilities later this year for letter writing; and we will create a calendar of events for our Thursday meetings including guest speakers and Amnesty videos. Stevi reported on the recent meeting with AIUSA Field Organizer William Butkus. We concluded with an Amnesty photo op. Thanks to Paula for initiating this productive discussion and to Vinnie for taking this photo with Stevi!



Next Rights Readers Meeting

Sunday, March 18
6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd
Pasadena

American War

by Omar El Akkad

BOOK REVIEW

A Haunting Debut Looks Ahead to a Second American Civil War

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI, MARCH 27, 2017
[www.nytimes.com/column/books-of-the-times]

AMERICAN WAR

By Omar El Akkad

Omar El Akkad's debut novel, "American War," is an unlikely mash-up of unsparing war reporting and plot elements familiar to readers of the recent young-adult dystopian series "The Hunger Games" and "Divergent." From these incongruous ingredients, El Akkad has fashioned a surprisingly powerful novel — one that creates as haunting a postapocalyptic universe as Cormac McCarthy did in "The Road" (2006), and as devastating a look at the fallout that national events have on an American family as Philip Roth did in "The Plot Against America" (2004).

El Akkad — who was born in Cairo and grew up in Doha, Qatar, before moving to Canada — worked for The Globe and Mail, and reported on the war in Afghanistan, the military tribunals at Guantánamo Bay and the Arab Spring. His familiarity with the United States' war on terror informs this novel on every level, from his shattering descriptions of the torture endured by one of his main characters to his bone-deep understanding of the costs of war on civilians, who suddenly find themselves living in combat zones or forced into refugee camps with no other future on the horizon.

There are considerable flaws in "American War" — from badly melodramatic dialogue to highly contrived and derivative plot points — but El Akkad has so deftly imagined the world his characters inhabit, and writes with such

propulsive verve, that the reader can easily overlook such lapses.

He demonstrates cool assurance at using details — many gathered, it seems, during his years as a reporter — to make his fictional future feel alarmingly real. And he writes here with boldness and audacity, using a collagelike method (involving fictional news clippings, oral history excerpts, memoirs, government documents) to help chronicle the events that led to and followed the Second American Civil War.

Those events include escalating battles over the use of fossil fuel; the assassination of the United States president by a secessionist suicide bomber in 2073; horrifying drone attacks, massacres and guerrilla violence that further embitter both sides; and, just as the war is about to conclude in 2095 with a reunification ceremony, the release of a biological agent by a Southern terrorist that results in a decade-long plague claiming 110 million lives.

The Chestnut family at the center of “American War” once led a quiet life in flood-ridden Louisiana. When the novel opens, the twin girls, Sarat and Dana, are 6; their brother, Simon, is 9. After a suicide bomber kills their father, the children and their mother, Martina, end up in Camp Patience — a “huge tent favela” for refugees near the Tennessee border. There they will remain for more than a half-dozen years.

Although “American War” is narrated, in part, by Benjamin Chestnut — Simon’s son, who miraculously survives the plague — it is Benjamin’s Aunt Sarat who stands at center stage. At first she bears more than a passing resemblance to several famous young-adult heroines. Like Katniss from “The Hunger Games” and Tris from the “Divergent” series, she’s a feisty, unconventional girl forced by the harsh conditions of the dystopian world in which she lives to prove herself as a warrior. She is defiant, resourceful and willing to sacrifice her life to protect those she loves.

Along the way, however, Sarat will be tempted to turn to the dark side by an erudite man, Albert Gaines, who shows up at the refugee camp and tells her that he travels around the South, where the Northerners and their drones “have caused terrible carnage,” looking for “special people — people who, if given the chance and the necessary tools, would stand up and face the enemy on behalf of those who can’t.”

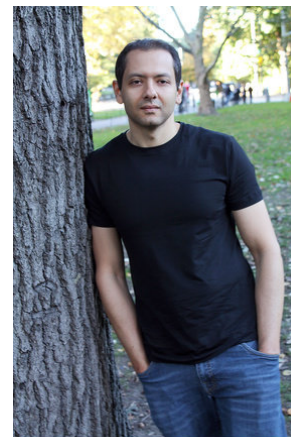
Gaines becomes Sarat’s teacher. He gives her

books to read and teaches her about the natural world, and what the world was like before climate change altered the algorithms of everyday life. He also feeds her the mythology of the South — how much was real and how much was fantasy doesn’t matter to her; “she believed every word.” He also plays to her sense of grievance and anger — rage that will build as she witnesses the calamities of war and loses one family member after another.

It becomes clear to the reader pretty early on just what Gaines is recruiting Sarat to do — in fact, El Akkad scatters a bread-crumbs trail of clues through the novel, as he tracks Sarat’s increasingly risky peregrinations after a gruesome massacre at Camp Patience. In recounting Sarat’s emotional evolution — and the dreadful choices she will be asked to make — El Akkad has written a novel that not only maps the harrowing effects of violence on one woman and her family, but also becomes a disturbing parable about the ruinous consequences of war on ordinary civilians.

www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/books/review-american-war-omar-el-akkad.html

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Omar El Akkad
PHOTO CREDIT: Michael Linnar

Omar El Akkad was born in Cairo, Egypt, and grew up in Doha, Qatar. When he was 16 years old, he moved to Canada, subsequently completing high school in Montreal and college at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. He has a computer science degree. For ten years he was a staff reporter for *The Globe and Mail*, where he covered the War in Afghanistan, military trials at Guantanamo Bay and the Arab Spring in Egypt. He was most recently a correspondent for the western United States, where he covered Black Lives Matter.

His first novel, *American War*, was published in 2017. The novel was named a shortlisted finalist for the 2017 Rogers Writers’ Trust Fiction Prize.

He lives with his wife and daughter in Portland, Oregon.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_El_Akkad

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Doyle Lee Hamm

Doyle Lee Hamm was supposed to die February 22, 2018, for the murder of Patrick Cunningham. Mr. Hamm has been on death row since 1987. The two other men who were involved in Mr. Cunningham's murder testified against Mr. Hamm and received lesser sentences. In our "Stays of execution" section we see that Mr. Hamm recently had a stay of execution. Why?

First, let's take a peek at Mr. Hamm and his formative years. Mr. Hamm was the tenth of twelve children. Among other activities, his father made his own moonshine and drank it every day. The younger Mr. Hamm experienced beatings and witnessed his brothers' and sisters' beatings, too. He saw his six older brothers go to jail, and by ninth grade, he was finished with his formal education. He moved from beer and whiskey to glue sniffing to Valium, Percocet, and Quaaludes. His sister said his father told his children, "If you don't go out and steal, then you're not a Hamm." She also said their childhood was a "constant hell all the time." Somehow Mr. Hamm managed to have his own rap sheet for arrests for burglary, assault, and grand larceny. Mr. Cunningham was murdered during a robbery.

In 2014, Mr. Hamm was diagnosed with cancer that the Alabama Attorney General's office says has gone into remission. What could this have to do with his execution? The veins in Mr. Hamm's upper extremities cannot handle lethal injection. February 22nd when he was supposed to die, the Alabama Department of Corrections Commissioner Jeff Dunn said that by 11:30 PM the medical personnel said there was not enough time to be sure the execution could be "conducted in a humane manner" before the warrant for his execution expired at midnight. Perhaps they could not find a vein into which to insert the necessary needle to kill.

Another layer to this execution is the use of midazolam, the drug used to relax the person to be executed so the other two drugs that finally kill him can be administered. There is a possibility that this drug could be given to Mr. Hamm orally, but the FDA-approved package insert is for 'dosage form for intravenous or

intramuscular injection.' Additionally, the Akorn brand of midazolam does not want its product used to kill people, will not any longer sell to Departments of Corrections for executions, and wants DOCs to send back supplies they would use for executions.

So while Mr. Hamm has had a stay, he is still likely to be executed, if only the personnel executing the execution can find veins in his lower extremities that will accept the needle that will deliver the lethal cocktail.

To read more, go to

http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2018/01/midazolam_in_alabama_execution.html and http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2018/02/alabama_inmate_doyle_lee_hamm.html

Recent Exonerations

Sundhe Moses - State: NY - Date of Exoneration: 2/16/2018

In 1997, Sundhe Moses was sentenced to 24 1/3 years to life in prison for murder and assault in Brooklyn, New York. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence that police coerced his confession and manipulated witnesses' identifications.

Shawn Lawrence - State: NY - Date of Exoneration: 2/15/2018

In 2015, Shawn Lawrence was sentenced to 75 years to life in prison for murder and attempted murder in Suffolk County, New York. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence concealed by the prosecution showing he was not involved in the crime.

Michael Shannon - State: LA - Date of Exoneration: 2/7/2018

In 2011, Michael Shannon was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was exonerated in 2018 based on testimony of eyewitnesses that he was not the killer.

Edward Garry - State: NY - Date of Exoneration: 2/5/2018

In 1997, Edward Garry was sentenced to 25 years to life for the murder of a retired police officer in Bronx, New York. He was acquitted at a retrial in 2018 based on evidence pointing to another man as the real killer.

Corey Batchelor - State: IL - Date of Exoneration: 1/30/2018

In 1991, Corey Batchelor was sentenced to 30 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois. In 2018, he and his co-defendant, Kevin Bailey, were exonerated based on DNA testing and evidence that detectives beat them until they falsely confessed.

Kevin Bailey - State: IL - Date of Exoneration: 1/30/2018

In 1990, Kevin Bailey was sentenced to 80 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois. In 2018, he and his co-defendant, Corey Batchelor, were exonerated based on DNA testing and evidence that detectives beat them until they falsely confessed.

Larry McKee - State: NY - Date of Exoneration: 1/29/2018

In 1997, Larry McKee was sentenced to 24 years to life in prison for murder in Bronx, New York. McKee, who is black, was exonerated in 2018 because the prosecution concealed a witness's testimony that just before he died, the victim said the shooter was "a Spanish guy."

Zavion Johnson - State: CA - Date of Exoneration: 1/19/2018

In 2003, Zavion Johnson was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison after experts concluded that his infant daughter's death was the result of Shaken Baby Syndrome. He was exonerated in January 2018 after three experts, including two who originally testified for the prosecution, concluded that the child could have died from a fall in the bathtub as Johnson always had maintained.

Courtney Hayden - State: TX - Date of Exoneration: 1/19/2018

In 2015, Courtney Hayden was sentenced to 40 years in prison for murder in Corpus Christi, Texas. She was exonerated in 2017 after the prosecution admitted concealing evidence supporting Hayden's self-defense claim.

Stays of Execution

February

22 Thomas Whitaker TX
Commutation granted by Governor Greg Abbott on February 22, 2018 after unanimous recommendation for clemency by Texas Board of Pardons on February 20.

22 Doyle Lee Hamm AL Execution called off by Department of Corrections Commission Jeff Dunn close to midnight on

February 22, 2018, after execution team reported it would be unable to set an IV line before the death warrant expired.

23 Raghunandan Yandamuri PA Stay granted by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania on January 16, 2018, to provide Yandamuri the opportunity to pursue state and federal post-conviction challenges that are available to all criminal defendants.

March

14 Warren Henness OH
Rescheduled for February 13, 2019, by Gov. John Kasich on September 1, 2017.^

April

11 Melvin Bonnell OH
Rescheduled for February 12, 2020, by Gov. John Kasich on September 1, 2017.^

June

27 Angelo Fears OH
Rescheduled for October 17, 2019 by Gov. John Kasich on September 1, 2017.^

Executions

January

18 Anthony Shore TX
Lethal Injection 1- drug (Pentobarbital)
Years on death row: 12

30 William Rayford TX
Lethal Injection 1- drug (Pentobarbital)
Years on death row: 17

February

1 John David Battaglia TX
Lethal Injection 1- drug (Pentobarbital)
Years on death row: 16

22 Eric Scott Branch FL
Lethal Injection 3 - drug (etomidate)
Years on death row: 23

^ On September 1, 2017, Ohio's Governor Kasich [issued a statement and an updated execution schedule](#), which changed the execution dates for 19 of 26 condemned prisoners who had scheduled dates between September 2017 and September 2020. The execution schedule for these 26 prisoners now extends through April 2022.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE
Narges Mohammadi
 By Joyce Wolf

Group 22 has been writing every month to Iran's Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani, in behalf of Narges Mohammadi, our adopted prisoner of conscience. Narges herself recently marked her 1000th day of imprisonment by sending an open letter to Ayatollah Larijani:

“Your Excellency has repeatedly claimed that the Judiciary is an independent institution,” wrote Mohammadi in an open letter from Tehran’s Evin Prison. “However, such claims do not match reality. They are only deceitful words that make a mockery of justice when a judicial system detains, convicts and punishes people according to the biased and malicious opinions of security-military agencies and denies prisoners their legal rights, such as temporary leave and the use of the telephone to call their young children.”

<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/02/1000-days-in-prison-narges-mohammadi-condemns-iranian-judiciarys-subservience-to-security-agencies/>

In other news about Narges, I was very happy to discover that she is a 2018 recipient of the Andrei Sakharov Prize awarded by the American Physical Society. The prize recognizes outstanding leadership and/or achievements of scientists in upholding human rights. It is named in honor of the courageous and effective work of Andrei Sakharov on behalf of human rights. The following is from

https://www.aps.org/programs/honors/prizes/prizerecipient.cfm?last_nm=Mohammadi&first_nm=Narges&year=2018.



Narges Mohammadi
Citation:

"for her leadership in campaigning for peace, justice, and the abolition of the death penalty and for her unwavering efforts to promote the human rights and freedoms of the Iranian people, despite persecution that has forced her to

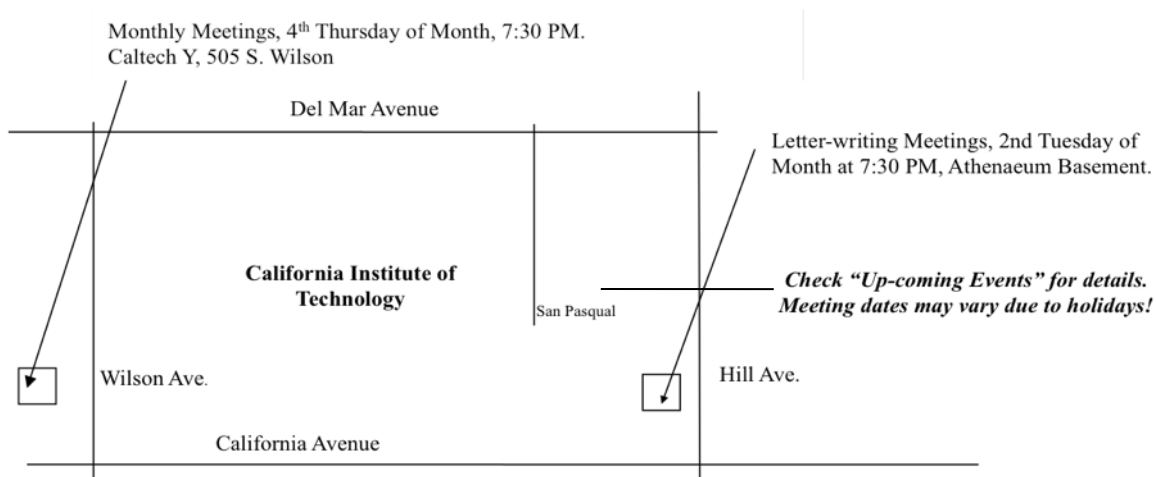
suspend her scientific pursuits and endure lengthy incarceration."

Background:

Narges Mohammadi, an Iranian physicist, engineer, and human rights defender currently serving a 16-year sentence in Evin Prison (Tehran), was born in Zanzan in 1972. She majored in physics at Imam Khomeini University in Qazvin, where she became actively involved in promoting rights and social justice by founding a political student organization and publishing on issues related to women’s and students’ rights. After graduating, she worked both as an engineer with the Iran Engineering Inspection Corporation and as a journalist, highlighting issues related to gender equality. Ms. Mohammadi’s efforts to maintain a career in the sciences while speaking out about human rights abuses were unsuccessful. In 2009 she was dismissed from her position with the Engineering Inspection Corporation. The same year, she was arrested and incarcerated.

Ms. Mohammadi is known globally for her efforts to promote and protect the rights of women, prisoners of conscience, minority communities, and other vulnerable groups. She has also been deeply involved in efforts to promote free and fair elections and abolish the death penalty in her country. As spokesperson and vice-president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC), an organization founded in 2001 by Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi and other prominent Iranian lawyers, and closed by the government in 2008, Ms. Mohammadi helped to provide pro bono legal assistance to prisoners of conscience and monitor the human rights situation in Iran. She also served as president of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Peace in Iran, an organization dedicated to opposing military conflict and violence. Together with other human rights activists, she created the Women’s Civil Center, a body that defends the rights of women, political prisoners, and minorities. Her courageous actions in support of human rights have taken many forms, from protests before parliament concerning acid attacks on women to prison vigils with the families of individuals facing execution. Ms. Mohammadi is the recipient of the 2009 international Alexander Langer Award and the 2011 Per Anger Prize for human rights.

GROUP 22 FEBRUARY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	34
POC	4
Total	38



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
 From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
 Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22
 The Caltech Y
 Mail Code C1-128
 Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.