UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Slick Honor

The oil industry has a tangled history with cinema — especially in Iraq. Now a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) will allow a UC Santa Barbara scholar to complete a manuscript that tells the story of this little-known relationship.

Mona Damluji, an assistant professor in the Department of Film & Media Studies, has been awarded an NEH Faculty Fellowship for academic year 2020-21. The $60,000 award will support her as she writes “Pipeline Cinema,” which she described as “a history of the social and spatial entanglements between the oil industry and cinema culture during in the mid-20th century. Iraq is at the center of this story.”

“The NEH faculty fellowship affords me the privilege of dedicating my full time and efforts towards the completion of my manuscript at a critical time,” Damluji said. “I’m honored and humbled to have received the support and recognition of this publicly funded opportunity, which upholds humanities-based scholarship as a necessary dimension of public discourse and knowledge production.”

“Pipeline Cinema,” Damluji noted, is a history of oil media based on extensive primary research and textual analysis that includes films, photographs, periodicals, trade publications, recorded interviews, correspondences, scripts and reports housed in various archives and libraries.

“My study of the movements and meanings of film production and distribution recognizes that the flows of oil media — much like oil itself — are not contained by

political boundaries," she said. "Thus, the book presents a media history of the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Co. that draws together a range of historical publications, archival records, audio-visual materials and oral histories in order to illuminate the corporation's complex global/regional entanglements from corporate headquarters in London to regional oil fields in Khuzestan, Iran."

John Majewski, the Michael Douglas Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts and a professor of history, called the fellowship a well-deserved honor that highlights the importance of Damluji's scholarly contributions.

"Mona Damluji's work on the visual culture of the modern Middle East is emblematic of the cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research of our arts and humanities faculty," Majewski said. "We are very proud that she won this prestigious grant."

Damluji, in turn, said she was grateful for the broad support she's received from across the campus.

"I want to express my gratitude to Dean Majewski, the HFA, the Department of Film and Media Studies, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center and previous NEH awardees for the support and guidance offered at each stage of the process of applying for and receiving the award," she said.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.