



# NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

**Faculty Committee on the Global Network  
Tuesday, November 14, 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m  
President's Conference Room, Bobst Library**

## **MEMBERS PARTICIPATING IN THE MEETING**

**Eliot Borenstein**, FAS (Russian & Slavic Studies) *Co-Chair*

**Martin Klimke**, NYU Abu Dhabi, *Co-Chair*

**Sylvain Cappell**, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences

**Una Chaudhuri**, FAS (English) and Tisch (Drama)

**Lindsay Davies**, Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee

**Chris Dickey**, College of Global Public Health

**Billie Gastic**, School of Professional Studies

**Alexander Geppert**, NYU Shanghai

**Guido Gerig**, Tandon School of Engineering

**Brendan Hogan**, Liberal Studies

**Sam Howard-Spink**, Continuing Contract Faculty Senators Council

**Dale Hudson**, NYU Abu Dhabi

**Matthew Kleban**, FAS (Physics)

**Heather Lee**, NYU Shanghai

**Peter Loomer**, College of Dentistry

**Teboho Moja**, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

**Gail Segal**, Tisch School of the Arts

**Tazuko Shibusawa**, Silver School of Social Work

**Paul Smoke**, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

**Carol Sternhell**, FAS (Journalism)

## Guests

**Mohamad Bazzi**, Associate Professor of Journalism, FAS

**Arang Keshavarzian**, Associate Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, FAS

## **MEETING NOTES**

Eliot Borenstein introduced the committee's guests, Mohamad Bazzi and Arang Keshavarzian, and thanked them for coming to talk about their experiences with the visa process and security clearance for NYU AD.

### **Arang Keshavarzian / Statement**

Keshavarzian began by saying that he is Iranian and currently has family and friends who cannot come to the United States (which has been the case for many years). He spent more than half his life with only an Iranian passport and understands that immigration systems in the US and the west are problematic for many people. Also, in the past, he has conducted field research and taught in authoritarian regimes including Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, and the UAE. He is aware that when a scholar chooses to teach and do research within these systems they must be prepared to face ethical challenges and take responsibility for their decisions and interactions with others. He therefore views his case as less about mobility than about the need to take responsibility in a profoundly uneven world.

In 2016, he spoke with Robert Young, the Dean of Arts and Humanities at NYUAD, about teaching at NYUAD and was invited to teach two courses in Abu Dhabi in spring 2018. In April 2017, he was asked to complete the forms required to receive a visa: one was from the UAE, and the other from NYU Human Resources. Both forms asked for his religion and sect. Keshavarzian asked if this information was required and was told it was. After completing and submitting the forms, he did not receive a response. In July, he emailed Young; according to Keshavarzian, Young told him he would check on the process. He emailed the Dean again in early August, and the Dean said again that he would look into it. The next day, the Dean requested to talk on the phone to Keshavarzian, and explained that Keshavarzian's security clearance (not his visa) was rejected, and that NYUAD had decided to appeal that decision (without Keshavarzian's knowledge or approval). This appeal was rejected, and Keshavarzian was told there was nothing further they could do. Keshavarzian said that the Dean mentioned that in the past they would bring faculty on tourist visas to teach seven-week courses, but in his case they decided against this. The Dean, also, mentioned that there were two other cases of security clearance being rejected this summer, but did not name the individuals. It was later discovered that Bazzi was one of the other applicants; the third individual, although known to Keshavarzian and others, cannot be named publicly.

He stated that a few days after his conversation with the Dean, Associate Vice Chancellor for Global Network Faculty Planning Zvi Ben-Dor Benite emailed Keshavarzian to invite him for coffee. As Keshavarzian was then out of town, they set up a phone call. During the six-minute call, Ben-Dor offered other opportunities within the global network. He was told that Ben-Dor would get back to him after a trip to Shanghai, but said that he heard nothing further. In the first week in September, Keshavarzian contacted Provost Katherine Fleming, in part because the University had made recent statements about the repeal of DACA and the Muslim travel bans. The Provost responded rapidly, cc'ing Vice Chancellor Linda Mills. Keshavarzian stated that he met with the Provost but Mills was not at that meeting and has never communicated with him. According to Keshavarzian, the Provost assured him that the University takes the matter seriously, but did not believe that his security clearance denial was part of a pattern of religious discrimination. Keshavarzian says that this was his only meeting with NYU administration, and that no administrator at NYUNY or NYUAD emailed Keshavarzian voluntarily. Despite the expression of concern in letters, Keshavarzian says that Hamilton has never reached out to him or Bazzi. At that point, Bazzi's piece in the *New York Times* was published and colleagues began to ask Keshavarzian about his experience. He then decided to go public with his case.

Keshavarzian concluded by saying that his case is over; he will probably never go to NYUAD now, and will have trouble traveling to the GCC countries in the future, further compromising or even ending his research activities. No one at NYU has apologized or acknowledged the University's role in the situation. These sorts of run-ins with the UAE's opaque legal system will happen again to other faculty members, students, or graduate students, and based on his experience it appears there is no NYU protocol or procedure for such cases; rather, there is an active attempt by the administration to avoid discussing them. He asked about the nature of NYU's relationship with the UAE government. What agreements were made? What does tenure mean in the UAE when tenure is tied to visa renewal? What will the University do when tenured faculty don't have their visas renewed? These issues have not been adequately thought through. He's been at NYU for nine years, and none of this has ever been discussed publicly by the leadership.

### **Mohamad Bazzi / Statement**

Bazzi noted that his case bears a lot of similarities to Keshavarzian's. He was supposed to go to NYUAD this semester, but instead wants to describe an earlier experience with NYUAD. In 2011, he and his wife, a journalist, were approached to teach a J-term class in January 2012 in Abu Dhabi. Both were US citizens at the time. This course would not require a work visa (since it was less than a month long), but did require security clearance. He filled out the required forms in May 2011, and in June received an email from Ron Robin, then Senior Vice Provost for Global Faculty Development, who said in a subsequent phone conversation he was concerned that Bazzi's application would be rejected because Bazzi listed his religion and sect as Shia Muslim. According to Bazzi, Robin said he would attempt to use "backchannel" means of getting the security clearance approved. They had a series of conversations, and Bazzi assumed Robin knew officials in Abu Dhabi who would help. In summer of 2011, NYUAD leadership met and told Bazzi that they would not be able to pursue these backchannels at that time.

According to Bazzi, Hilary Ballon, former Deputy Vice Chancellor of NYUAD, was also involved. NYUAD administration suggested that Bazzi travel as a consultant on the course and his name was removed from the course listing. As a Lebanese citizen and a US citizen, Bazzi knew that obtaining the security clearance/visa approval process could take a long time.

He was approached again to teach during J-term in January of 2013. By spring of 2012, NYUAD asked if he would go as a consultant again and he agreed, hoping they would be able to obtain his security clearance in the future. He didn't deal with NYUAD again until summer of 2016. In initial conversations, he described his past experience to Robert Young, who was helpful in the initial stages and thought they could resolve the issue by using a new immigration/visa consultant. When Bazzi found out about Keshavarzian's experience, he decided to go public. When Bazzi was eventually rejected, he was not informed until August 2017 (a few weeks before he was due to leave). At the time, he had been receiving emails with questions because his course was listed (without his knowledge) as a seven-week course; some NYUAD officials suggested he could do a "visa run" to get around the formal security clearance/work visa (stay for four weeks on a tourist visa, leave Abu Dhabi for a few days, and then return for four more weeks).

Bazzi said that the underlying point is that there is a pattern of NYUAD trying to get around difficult visa restrictions. The NYUAD administration has an interest in keeping the numbers of rejections down, and keeping some of this information away from administration in New York. He wondered about the frequency with which these workarounds are used and what they mean for any faculty and students who have an association with NYUAD and other parts of the global network.

### **Discussion**

Borenstein thanked Keshavarzian and Bazzi for sharing their experiences and opened the meeting for questions and discussion. A committee member asked Keshavarzian whether he had conducted research in the UAE before he joined NYU. Keshavarzian confirmed that he went to Dubai before he came to NYU. Bazzi noted that both he and Keshavarzian might now be blacklisted in the UAE, and possibly barred from entry to other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Another committee member asked what action Bazzi and Keshavarzian would pursue if they were in positions of authority. Bazzi answered that he would advocate for more transparency and clear protocols for these situations. He noted that President Hamilton's first response said that both Bazzi and Keshavarzian were offered other opportunities to travel within the network, but no one offered this to him. According to Bazzi, the only people who reached out to him were Robert Young and Josh Taylor of the Office of Global Services; he has not been contacted by anyone within the Provost's Office. He would also appreciate a public statement of apology, rather than a statement intended to "cover" the University. A committee member pointed out that there has been a public declaration on their behalf from the Tisch School of the Arts. She said that any reluctance on the part of Tisch faculty to reach out to Bazzi and Keshavarzian is probably out of fear of disrupting any ongoing negotiation between them and the administration. Bazzi noted that faculty support has been great overall. He is not sure whether the "backchannels" that were mentioned in 2011 were deployed this time, but as far as he knows they were not. He suspects that it was decided at some point that this issue was not worth the political capital it would take to get him admitted to the UAE, and that any such capital would be spent instead on budgets and other issues which affect more people.

Keshavarzian noted that a Ph.D. student from Egypt won a fellowship to travel to NYUAD but was blocked from entering. He would appreciate a public statement from the University and from all provosts that NYU's administration supports all students and faculty and does not consider them security threats, and that calls upon the UAE government to support free movement for scholars and researchers. He is a US citizen with tenure; he should be able to travel without restriction to teach at an NYU campus. If NYUAD is collecting data on the religion and sect of everyone who travels, what is this information being used for?

A committee member asked Bazzi and Keshavarzian what they see as the role of their faculty colleagues at NYUAD, and of this committee, in a situation such as this one? Since its inception, this committee has tried to create a space where faculty can have agency and control over aspects of the educational program in NYUAD. Have colleagues from the NYUAD Faculty Council Steering Committee been

approached? From what she can see, many faculty members in Abu Dhabi are upset and concerned about this situation. When Andrew Ross was barred, he came and talked to the committee, administrators were invited, and the committee asked them for information. What can a committee like this one do, and was there a reason Bazzi did not reach out to this committee in 2012? They might have been able to use his experience as ammunition for specifying what the administration could do to protect academic freedom. Another committee member asked if they did not approach the committee because they were not aware of it or its function at NYU.

Bazzi pointed out that in 2012, this committee did not exist for him to contact. He became aware of the committee's advocacy role around the time of the Andrew Ross case. Bazzi's reason for going public at this time was that he was flabbergasted by his earlier experience in 2011 and 2012, but was asked not to discuss it publicly and expected that it would be resolved through backchannel methods. He only recently discussed it with a faculty colleague on the committee, who reported it during the October meeting. In retrospect, he thinks he should have gone public from the start.

Keshavarzian asked when the committee found out about this situation. (Most members did not learn of it until Bazzi's *New York Times* article was published in late September.) He asked why this committee wasn't informed of this situation during the summer, and why it should fall to him or Bazzi to alert the committee about their visa problems. A committee member responded that in the past, the committee has asked the administration for information and they have responded; in the past, the administration has not offered information unless and until the committee has asked for it.

A committee member said that she is sure Shanghai faculty will have comparable visa experiences in the future and must learn from these situations. One issue in play is that of public acknowledgement by the University administration, which would help with social healing. The practical issue in play is the lack of protocol and transparency; there is no reserve or "braintrust" at NYU for these issues. Perhaps this function was formerly fulfilled by Ron Robin. What are these backchannel methods, and how do we (and should we) access them?

Another committee member followed up on the issue of transparency. It seems that very little information was relayed to Bazzi and Keshavarzian about their cases throughout the process. NYU's Office of Global Services (OGS) should keep faculty updated on progress in the visa process. Keshavarzian noted that the attempt to create workarounds is not ideal; this puts people in vulnerable positions and displaces responsibility from institutions to individuals. He is very uncomfortable with the idea of workarounds or backchannels, especially when these methods are undertaken without the knowledge of faculty. He sees this as legally problematic. Borenstein noted that in Russia, scholars used to conduct archival work on tourist visas, but faculty no longer want to do this now that the authorities have been deporting scholars doing research on the "wrong" visas. The committee clearly must urge greater transparency; a statement from NYU condemning the denial and supporting faculty; more comprehensive protocols; and fuller discussion of workarounds and whether they should be used. Bazzi added that faculty should have a guarantee that NYU will support them. Another member added that administration should obtain faculty consent before appealing cases.

Keshavarzian finds it problematic that this committee is not notified when a security clearance is denied. Several undergraduate student visas were not approved recently. One committee member mentioned that it was covered in the NYUAD student paper, *The Gazelle*. Borenstein pointed out that, while the lack of information is a problem, the committee's official purview is more in matters of curriculum rather than mobility.

A committee member noted that when he was younger, he used tourist visas to travel to the USSR to give seminars, both legal and illegal. The issue of restrictions on work visas to NYUAD for those of Shiite origin has come up in other settings, and he always got the impression that there would be difficulty obtaining visas for candidates of Persian descent. Many excellent mathematicians are of Persian backgrounds, and faculty in his department eventually decided to pass on their hiring recommendations for these candidates and leave it to the University to process their travel. The NYU Faculty Senators Council (FSC) has a parallel committee to this one, and most of what they know is from Bazzi's *New York*

*Times* article. Hypothetically, that committee would take this to the administration and urge them to resolve it, and then consider further action. According to this committee member, the situation, while unpleasant, is not unanticipated; it came up when NYUAD was first proposed. At that time, the FSC committee helped organize a faculty forum on academic rights, and President Emeritus John Sexton spoke expansively but vaguely about the commitments to academic freedom NYU had received from the UAE government. Cheryl Mills, former legal counsel, was explicit about what NYU did *not* receive from the UAE; it was in both parties' interests for this project to succeed, but NYU had no binding, specific commitment with the UAE government. NYU decided to go ahead with the portal anyway. He noted that Bazzi and Keshavarzian are welcome to come speak to the FSC committee as well.

A committee member said that in the future, the committee could demand or request to be informed when there is a visa denial, but it is important to keep in mind that the committee does not and should not "work for" OGS – the committee aims to serve faculty members who want the global network to thrive. The Committee is trying to speak from the faculty point of view and to articulate principles they feel are ethical and right. The committee can invite administrators to come and address specific issues, as it has in the past.

Another committee member cautioned against visa workarounds, as he knows someone who traveled to Abu Dhabi on just such a workaround and was fined several thousand dollars at the border due to a recently changed visa rule. While NYU paid the fine, this is an example of how workarounds can go wrong. Keshavarzian noted that not everyone denied fits the profile of religious discrimination – some Shiites are denied, but some Sunni Muslims have been denied security clearances as well. The committee member suggested that the committee request information on past cases to see if there are patterns. Borenstein added that the committee will get a mobility report, but the report will not fully reflect people who did not follow through with the visa application process. Confidentiality will also prohibit the administration from sharing some specifics. Bazzi noted that this information is already being collected by NYU HR. Borenstein said that he wants to find out why HR collects information on religion and sect. Bazzi suggested the committee ask also to see portions of NYU's initial agreement with the UAE government that pertain to academic freedom and related issues. Administration will not give them fiduciary details, but might share other portions.

Klimke thanked Bazzi and Keshavarzian for coming and agreed that their experiences are troubling. NYUAD faculty are saddened and frustrated with the situation and ensuing debate. A commonality between both of their stories was the need for a central person in New York to manage the flow between New York, Abu Dhabi, and Shanghai. In the past, this committee asked for a "Dean of Connectivity" position. Keshavarzian asked whether this was not Linda Mills' role, and a committee member answered that Mills has a broad set of responsibilities that probably includes connectivity. Klimke said that there seems to be a gap there within administration, which should be central to the discussion at the University Senate. Also, this needs to be a global discussion, because there are visa challenges in different degrees at all the portals and sites, including the US. The university must be clear about the limits and opportunities of the global network. This committee has done great work, but it would also be helpful to have a forum about the current and future state of the global network and the challenges it faces. Successes and failures can be used as leverage for greater transparency. A committee member noted that she is not surprised Bazzi and Keshavarzian did not come to this committee first with their stories. Frequently at NYU, there are multiple parallel groups addressing similar issues and no one knows where to turn. When she brought this issue up at the last meeting, she felt all the committee members were appalled, but none wanted to take action. Another member said it is clear that NYU needs to hire someone with legal expertise on immigration visas – currently, there is legal counsel, but no expertise.

Keshavarzian raised the issue of equity among departments and disciplines. In initial discussions of establishing NYUAD, the purported benefits were that NYU would help bring liberal education to other corners of world, and that the portal would be an economic and financial boon to New York. However, if academics of certain races and religions cannot travel freely within the network, some faculty and departments will be precluded from these financial benefits and others will benefit disproportionately.

A committee member noted that at the last meeting, the committee did resolve to write a statement. She has been struck by how faculty in Abu Dhabi feel like their colleagues in New York forget and dismiss them. She agrees with Klimke that they need someone in charge of connectivity to be a resource for all faculty.

Borenstein thanked both Bazzi and Keshavarzian for coming, and for raising issues that will be addressed in the committee's forthcoming statement. The committee will push for greater transparency. He asked that they be patient, as the committee process is slow. The committee regrets what happened and feels faculty should be supported by the administration. They will emphasize that these issues should be dealt with in a more transparent, effective, and timely manner. Keshavarzian noted that he is willing to talk to any university body about his experience.

Borenstein noted that faculty should feel free to come to this committee with any similar situations in the future.

The meeting concluded at 10 am.