

## Some print-loving scholars voice outrage

## Library without books? Universities purging dusty volumes

INDIANA, Pa., Feb 8, (AP): A library without books? Not quite, but as students abandon the stacks in favor of online reference material, university libraries are unloading millions of unread volumes in a nationwide purge that has some print-loving scholars deeply unsettled.

Libraries are putting books in storage, contracting with resellers or simply recycling them. An increasing number of books exist in the cloud, and libraries are banding together to ensure print copies are retained by someone, somewhere. Still, that doesn't always sit well with academics who practically live in the library and argue that large, readily available print collections are vital to research. "It's not entirely comfortable for anyone," said Rick Lugg, executive director of OCLC Sustainable Collection Services, which helps libraries analyze their holdings. "But absent endless resources to handle this stuff, it's a situation that has to be faced."

At Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the library shelves overflow with books that get little attention. A dusty monograph on "Economic Development in Victorian Scotland," International Television Almanacs from 1978, 1985 and 1986. A book whose title, "Personal Finance," sounds relevant until you see the

publication date: 1961.

With nearly half of IUP's collection going uncirculated for 20 years or more, university administrators decided a major housecleaning was in order. Using software from Lugg's group, they came up with an initial list of 170,000 books to be considered for removal.

Faculty members who make their living in the stacks voiced outrage. "Unbelievably wrongheaded" and a "knife through the heart," Charles Cashdollar, an emeritus history professor, wrote to the president and provost. "For humanists, throwing out these books is as devastating as locking the laboratory or studio or clinic doors would be for others."

Though "weeding" has always taken place at libraries, experts say the pace is picking up. Finances are one factor. Between staffing, utility costs and other expenses, it costs an estimated \$4 to keep a book on the shelf for a year, according to one 2009 study. Space is another; libraries are simply running out of room.

And, of course, the digitization of books and other printed materials has dramatically affected the way students do research. Circulation has been going down for years.

Libraries say they needed to evolve and make better use of precious

campus real estate. Students still flock to the library; they're just using it in different ways. Bookshelves are making way for group study rooms and tutoring centers, "makerspaces" and coffee shops, as libraries seek to reinvent themselves for the digital age.

"We're kind of like the living room of the campus," said Oregon State University librarian Cheryl Middleton, president of the Association of College and Research Libraries. "We're not just a warehouse."

It's a radical shift. Until recently, a library's value was measured by the size and scope of its holdings. Some academics still see it that way.

At Syracuse University, hundreds of faculty and students objected to a plan to ship books to a warehouse four hours away. The school wound up building its own storage facility for 1.2 million books near campus.

At IUP, a state university 60 miles (96 kilometers) from Pittsburgh, faculty reacted with alarm after school officials announced a plan to discard up to a third of the books.

Cashdollar argued that circulation is a poor indicator of a book's value, since books are often consulted but not checked out. Substantially thinning a library's print collection also ignores the role of serendipity



This Jan 25, 2018 photo shows books marked with red stickers, meaning they might be removed from the shelves, at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania library in Indiana, Pa. (AP)

in research — looking for one book in the stacks and stumbling upon another, leading to some new insight or approach, Cashdollar and other critics say.

"We're going to throw away as many of them as the library can get away with, which is not a strategy," said IUP history professor Alan

Baumler. "They say they want more study areas for students, but I find it hard to believe there is no place else for students to study."

The library project is more about responsible stewardship of the state's resources than it is an effort to free up space, Provost Timothy Moerland said. But he understands his col-

leagues' passion.

"There are some who will never be comfortable with the idea of any book ever leaving this mortal coil," he said.

Libraries say the goal is to make their own collections more relevant to students while also making sure weeded materials aren't lost to history. A large digital repository called HathiTrust has commitments from 50 member libraries to retain more than 16 million printed volumes. Another 6 million have been preserved by the Eastern Academic Scholars' Trust, a consortium of 60 libraries from Maine to Florida.

An IUP faculty committee is reviewing what Moerland dryly calls the "hit list" to make sure important works stay on the shelves. The final number of books to be removed has yet to be determined, but the potential scale is readily apparent. Librarians have affixed large red stickers to the spines of hit-listed volumes.

Some students say they worry about missing deadlines if they have to wait for a book the library no longer has. Others, like 19-year-old freshman Dierra Rowland, say they're on board.

"If nobody's reading them," she said, "what's the point of having them?"

## Books

## 'Killer' ekes out suspense

## 'Mokha' recounts quest to revive Yemen coffee trade

By Rasha Madkou

**'The Monk of Mokha'** (Alfred A. Knopf), by **Dave Eggers**  
As legend has it, coffee was born in Yemen, when a Sufi brewed the beverage to fuel his late-night devotions. Roughly 700 years later, a Yemeni-American set out to revive the country's languished and forgotten role in the world's coffee trade.

Master storyteller Dave Eggers spins the story of this quest, which proves astonishing even aside from the half-dozen near-death experiences, in his latest nonfiction book, "The Monk of Mokha." Readers follow Mokhtar Alkhanshali's journey from his childhood in San Francisco's hardscrabble Tenderloin district to the verdant mountains of Yemen to the testing room for those aspiring to be expert coffee graders. Interspersed along the way are treatises on the colorful history of coffee and the extensive process involved in producing that steaming cup of joe, as well as a refreshing, insider's perspective on Yemen, a country more often associated in Americans' minds with drones and al-Qaeda.

If Alkhanshali's mission sounds ambitious, it becomes even more so with Yemen's instability following the Arab Spring and the rise of Houthi rebels. Alkhanshali uses his gift of gab to talk himself out of the many sticky situations in which he finds himself in Yemen, drawing on his hated year at a religious school to cite verses from the Quran extolling mercy and hospitality, thus persuading his jailers to let him go, as well as coaching from his former boss at a California Honda dealership ("Whoever controls the conversation controls the deal"), which propels him to tell masked men armed with AK-47s that he'll need his laptop back by the morning. "Stranger still," Eggers writes, "the (leader) agreed."

Some of these incidents, and perhaps the sheer number of them, border on the fantastical, and a reader can't help wonder if it all happened as described. Still, they're side stories to the indisputably remarkable and true tale of how Yemeni coffee got its second act on the world stage.

☐ ☐ ☐

**'Killer Choice'** (Berkley), by Tom Hunt

Gary's pregnant wife, Beth, has a brain tumor. It's going to take \$200,000 they don't have to save her. Fittingly, that's how much a drug dealer across town is willing to pay Gary for committing murder. Author Tom Hunt immediately thrusts readers into the conflict in "Killer Choice."

We meet Beth in the hospital, and when she receives what equates to a death sentence from the doctor, the scant details readers know about the unlucky woman include little more than her hair color and marital status. Her 17-year marriage to Gary is given a few paragraphs of history, and after that Beth loiters largely in the background of the story, hanging out with her friends from yoga class and updating Gary on the lackluster progress of her fundraising website. Meanwhile Gary, intent on saving his wife's life, enters an underworld and attempts to keep his excursions under wraps.

The price tag for Beth's only chance of survival originates from a clinical trial in Germany and stands at the forefront of every chapter. However, readers may be left wondering if the couple would

be better served by searching for cheaper accommodations in Europe, as the \$200,000 includes airfare and lodging (and was casually estimated by a doctor, not a travel agent). The treatment's lackluster odds — thus far it's worked on 40 percent of a 25-person sample — also dampen the mood.

## Backdrops

Hunt employs familiar backdrops. Grislier scenes take place in basements or abandoned buildings, and Gary passes much of his time plotting in his suburban home.

Despite the color-by-numbers feel of much of the book, the author delivers some surprises. As our hero burrows into a life of crime, his unfamiliarity with violence provides plenty of opportunities for failure.

With uncomplicated prose, simple setups and straightforward characters, plot drives this thriller.

☐ ☐ ☐

**'Mothers of Sparta: a Memoir in Pieces'** (Flatiron Books), by Dawn Davies

What's in a life? Forget celebrities and superstars, or Nobel Laureates and the like, the people who live in the realms of the extraordinary and exciting. On the contrary: What are the significant moments that make up the story of a regular person?

"Mothers of Sparta: a Memoir in Pieces" by Dawn Davies answers this question, and eloquently so. Each chapter reads like a stand-alone essay. You can read them one at a time, but, as a whole, they make sense.

"Mothers of Sparta" opens with Davies detailing her struggle with anxiety.

Davies dropped out of college at 19 and moved from her home state of Florida to Boston, where she worked various jobs and attempted to launch a business selling cheesecakes on sticks.

During this foray, her boyfriend died in a tragic accident while visiting his home country of Brazil. She is then left alone to grieve in Boston.

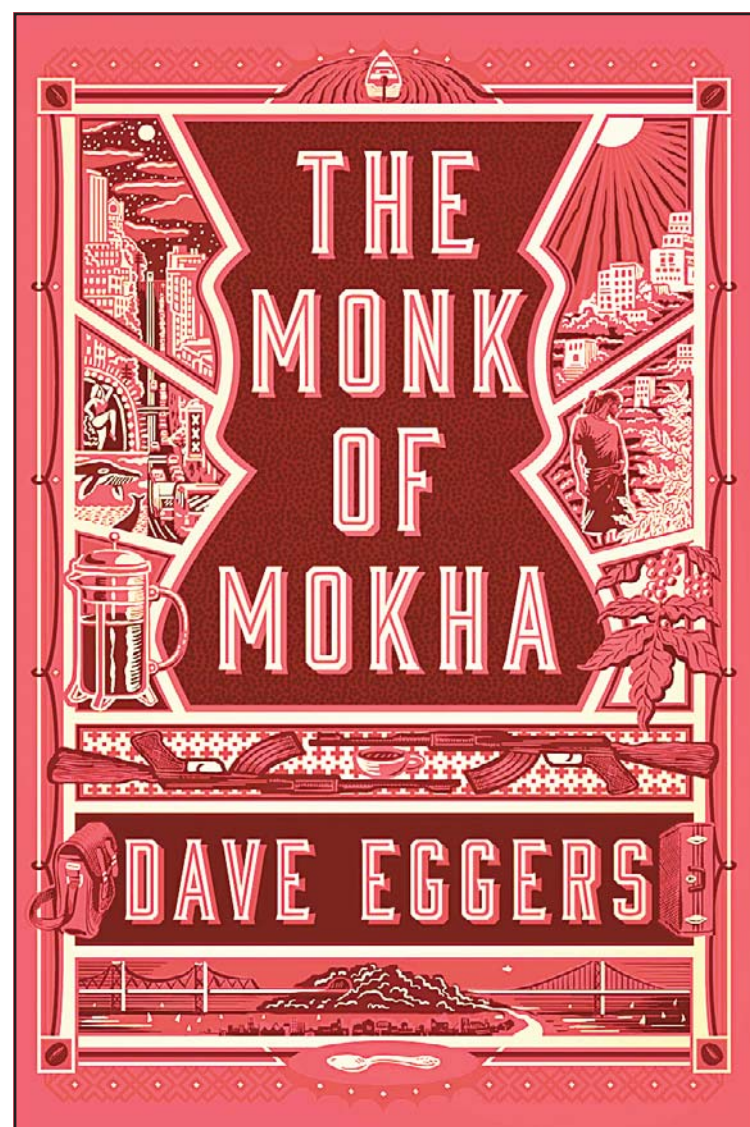
Yet, not soon after the accident, Davies has her second run in with death as she watches a Northeastern University student killed by an impaired driver on a busy thoroughfare while on a date in neighboring Cambridge. Davies held the dying girl's hand.

Still, "Mothers of Sparta" isn't just a grim recounting of all the suffering that Davies has experienced. There are laugh-out-loud funny moments — such as the time she rescued a dog with her second husband and young children. Or the story about trying to save money on her 19-year-old daughter's wedding by ordering a designer dress from China. The dress was a dud, but the daughter called off the marriage anyway, choosing to keep pursuing her education at a top-tier school.

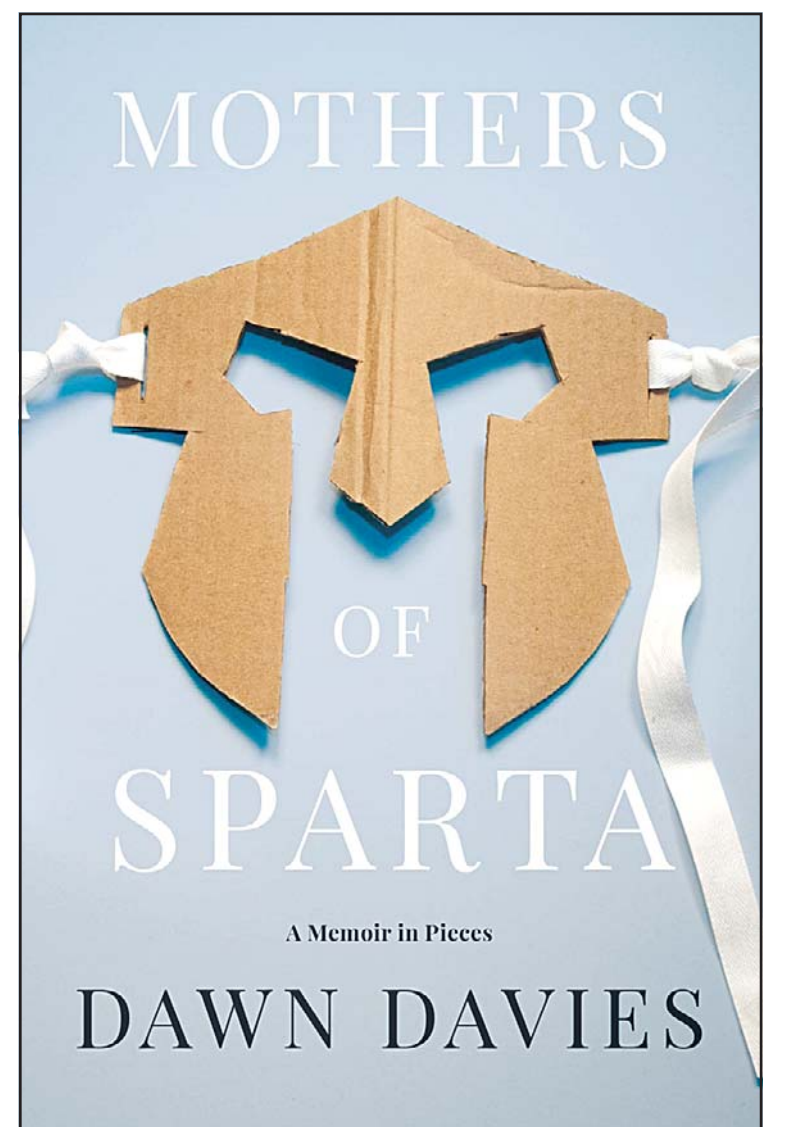
Some of the most compelling writing is on the subject of parenting. Davies' ruminations about being a mom are all over the place — happy and sad, funny and serious — but they're sure to resonate with readers who have kids.

"Children can hold hope for a long time without it burning their hand, far longer than adults can, which is what allows them to complete the act of growing up in a world full of people who lie, where people let you down all the time," Davies writes.

"Mothers of Sparta" offers exquisite writing and storytelling craft. Davies, it seems, can bring to life just about anything with her writing. (RTRS)



This image released by Alfred A. Knopf shows 'The Monk of Mokha', by Dave Eggers. (AP)



This cover image released by Flatiron Books shows 'Mothers of Sparta: A Memoir in Pieces', by Dawn Davies. (AP)

## Lifestyle

## 'Everyone should be able to decide for themselves what to wear'

## Iran's hijab protests cap years of evolution

TEHRAN, Feb 8, (AFP): A spate of unprecedented protests against Iran's mandatory headscarves for women have been tiny in number, but have still reignited a debate that has preoccupied the Islamic republic since its founding.

Walking through central Tehran with a loose scarf tossed lightly over her head, Samar, a dentist, is typical of the relaxed approach to headgear many Iranian women have adopted since the 1990s.

"Everyone should be able to decide for themselves what to wear. I don't think a few loose hairs can provoke anyone to anything," she said.

She was referring to the conservative claim that men are unable to stop themselves assaulting women if they can see their hair.

A typical sign — at a hammam in Kashan, south of Tehran — compares the veil to a pearl's oyster: "The oyster keeps the pearl safe from the hazards."

Many agree. "In our country, men are raised with the idea that women must be seen with a headscarf. I will never remove my headscarf in my country for as long as I live," said Hanieh, a journalist, wearing a much tighter scarf around her head.

The issue has returned to the fore in recent weeks after several women took the unprecedented step of protesting in public without their headscarves. Police say 29 people have been arrested.

Iran is the only country in the world to impose a mandatory headscarf on both Muslim and non-Muslim women as part of its ill-defined "hijab" rules that require modest clothing, including a ban on shorts for men.

In practice the rules have been steadily eroding for years.

Particularly in wealthier areas, the all-body black "chador" robes have been increasingly replaced by jeans, make-up and loose, colourful scarves which many let drop around their shoulders entirely.

To see how much Iranian society has evolved, one need only listen to the president, Hassan Rouhani.

He once boasted of personally imposing the compulsory headscarf on women in the years after the 1979 revolution, starting with military centres.

"The women employees... started moaning and making an uproar but I stood firm," he wrote in his memoirs.

But since he became president in 2013, the morality police that enforce clothing rules have largely disappeared from the streets.

And just days after police announced the 29 arrests, his administration released a report showing that half of Tehranis opposed enforced hijab.



Iranian women wearing hijab walk down a street in the capital on Feb 7. (AFP)

The timing of the release, four years after the study was conducted, was seen as a shot against Rouhani's conservative critics.

"Rouhani has evolved a lot," said Hamid Reza Jalaipour, a sociology professor at the University of Tehran.

"In a way, everyone has changed and we must forget the positions and statements of 20 or 30 years ago," he said.

The report said a substantial number — 40 percent — still support mandatory hijab but that figure has dropped from 55.5 percent in 2006.

"In a society where at least 40 to 50 percent believe hijab is a personal and optional matter, it is very difficult to demand enforcement," it concluded.

That is not a point that conservative clerics and officials are likely to concede easily.

On Sunday, judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei said the arrested protesters had either

been duped, drugged or were working for foreign enemies.

"If it is proved that they have had links with a particular (foreign) organisation, a heavy file will be opened against them and they and their families will be in trouble," he told reporters.

The forced hijab did not come immediately after the revolution.

First it came to schools and government buildings and within a few years, shops were putting up signs telling women they were not welcome without a headscarf.

The revolution's founders were keen to break with Western influences, and the policies of the deposed monarchy which had sought to suppress outward symbols of religion.

Supporters said the hijab allowed religious families to send their girls to school and work for the first time.

But activists say that masks a deep-seated patriarchy, seen as anachronistic to many of the girls that benefited from that education.

"Some say that wearing the headscarf allowed women to come out of the house, but we should not forget this was always conditioned on the permission of the husband or father," said rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, who is representing one of the women arrested in the recent protests.

Powerful parts of the establishment still see the headscarf as a crucial symbol of their revolutionary identity, up there with supporting Palestinians and opposing the United States.

"But even in this part, things are changing. A new level of tolerance and acceptance is emerging," said Jalaipour.

"Social phenomenon are not like teeth that can just be ripped out. There has to be a gradual evolution, and that's what is happening."