

Women's Quests for Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Contestations, Complexities, Contradiction

Presenter Bios

PLENARY PANELS

Karima Bennoune

Professor Bennoune is a leading feminist legal scholar and a professor of international law and human rights at the University of California, Davis, School of Law. Bennoune's writing has appeared in leading academic journals, and in the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Guardian* and on Al Jazeera. Her forthcoming book, entitled *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism*, will be published by Norton in August. Based on 286 interviews with people from 26 countries, the book details peaceful grassroots opposition to fundamentalism among people of Muslim heritage, including women's human rights defenders. A former Amnesty International legal advisor, she is also a former member of the executive council of the American Society of International Law, and currently sits on the board of the network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws. She has carried out human rights field research in many countries, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Mali, Niger, Pakistan, Palestine/Israel, southern Thailand and Tunisia.

Mino Derayeh

Dr. Mino Derayeh, a specialist on Islam, world religions and gender studies, is Associate Professor at York University. She also taught at Concordia University and at McGill University. She received her PhD in the Department of Culture and Values, the Faculty of Education at McGill University. Her research interests are related to gender and religion, modernity and tradition, and religion and social justice. Among her select publications are her *Gender Equality in Iranian History: from Pre-Islamic Times to the Present* and her articles entitled "Depiction of Women in Iranian Cinema, 1970s to Present" and "The Myths of Creation and Hijab: Iranian Women, Liberated or Oppressed?" She is presently Chair of the Department of Equity Studies at York University and teaches variety of courses including, *Islamic Thought & Politics: Human Rights in Islam*, *Women in the Quran*, *the Prophetic Tradition*, *Equity and Human Rights in Education*, and *Gender, Religion and Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspective*.

Amel Grami

Dr. Amel Grami is a professor of Gender in Islam and Arab Studies at the University of Manouba, Tunisia. She is a member of the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (AFTURD) and the Association of Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights KARAMAH (in Washington). Her paper on "Women's Solidarity in post-Revolution Tunisia" will analyze the importance of the bond among Tunisian women activists after the revolution and during the period of transition in understanding the dynamic interaction of women as agents of change in the Tunisian political landscape. Areas of her expertise include gender and Islam, as well as gender and the Mediterranean.

Nadia Habib

Nadia Habib is a cultural theorist who teaches in the Department of Human Rights and Equity Studies at York University. Her academic work examines Egyptian cultural life. Lately her work focuses on the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Egypt. Nadia is also a poet and activist and continues to be involved in creative projects.

Zeina Zaatari

Zeina Zaatari is currently a part-time lecturer at the University of California Davis, and an independent consultant working with international organizations. Previously, she worked as the Regional Director for the MENA Program at Global Fund for Women, 2004-2012. She earned her PhD in Cultural Anthropology with an emphasis on Feminist Theory from UCD. Her dissertation and fieldwork focused on women's groups and women activists in South Lebanon detailing their life histories and civil society activism. As a core member of the Arab Families Working Group, Zeina has been researching family and sexuality, including a project addressing masculinity and femininity in television series in Lebanon/Syria and an ongoing research project on Interrogating Heteronormativity in Lebanon: Family, Citizenship, and Access to Adulthood. Her recent publications include an edited book *Telling Our Stories: Women's Voices of the Middle East and North Africa* (2011), and several chapters including "Arab Feminist Awakening: Possibilities and Necessities" in *Arab Feminisms: A Critical Perspective* (Bahithat, 2012 Arabic); "In the Belly of the Beast: Struggling for Non-Violent Belonging" in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* (2011); "Women's Leadership in the MENA," in *Gender and Women's Leadership* (2010); and "Production of Knowledge: International Development Agencies" in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* (2010). She is a current Board member of the Association for Women's Rights in Development, and serves on the editorial board of the newly established Journal of Diverse Sexualities, Syracuse University Press.

Hanadi Zarka

Hanadi Zarka has a diploma in Agriculture Engineering from Tishreen University in Latakia. Among other opportunities, Hanadi has worked in Canaan House for Studies and Publishing, and as an agricultural engineer. She is also a poet, whose work has been translated into German, French, English, Danish, Dutch, and recently Spanish.

Afiya Zia

Afiya Zia is a feminist scholar and activist based in Karachi, Pakistan. She is also a lecturer in sociology and has written extensively on the topic of gender and Islam in Pakistan. She is author of 'Sex Crime in the Islamic Context' (1994) and is currently researching the engagement between 'Faith and Feminism in Pakistan'.

PANELS 1, 2 & 3

Shirin Abdmolaei

Shirin Abdmolaei is an MA student in Social and Cultural Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec. Abdmolaei has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Anthropology from York University. Her interests include dress, resistance, the body, women's rights, and Iran.

Hulya Arik

Hulya Arik is a Ph.D. candidate in Human Geography at York University, Toronto, since 2008. She received her B.A. in English Language and Literature at Bogazici University (Istanbul, Turkey) in 2003 her M.A. in Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) in 2006. Arik's MA thesis is titled "Being a man in the Coffeehouse: Explorations of Hegemonic Masculinity in Public Space in Turkey." Her current research interests include geographies of militarism, secularism and the construction of the female body. Her Ph.D. research focuses on 'Islamist identities' inside the Turkish military and within the context of the discussions over national security, political Islam and secularism in Turkey.

Bahar Hashemi

Bahar Hashemi finished her Bachelor's Degree in the field of Social Sciences in Tehran, Iran prior to her migration. She has recently finished her Master's in Sociology at York University, focusing on the political and cultural activities of Iranian immigrants through a transnational perspective. She will be starting a PhD program in Sociology at the University of Toronto in September 2013.

Farshid Farzin

Farshid Farzin has a LLM in Public Law, Tehran University and a BA in Law, Azad University, Iran. He has work experience as an Assistant Legal Officer in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Tehran, Iran, a position that provides legal assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants. He has been working on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) cases. Farshid also worked as a Consultant with Atieh Bahar Consulting, Tehran, Iran.

Safinaz Jadali

Dr. Jadali is an Assistant Professor at Azad University of Tehran, an Associate member at l'Observatoire sur les missions de paix et les opérations humanitaires, UQAM, and a former member of the board of examiners of National Competitive Examination, Iran. Her work experience includes United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Montreal; Senior Protection Assistant, UNHCR, Tehran; International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, and International Criminal Court.

Jessica Jones

Jessica completed an honours degree in Political Science at Concordia University in Montreal. She is now an MA student at Carleton University in Political Philosophy. Jessica's interests are predominantly ancient and classical political thought as well as continental philosophy and its applicability to greater political problems of today.

alma khasawnih

alma khasawnih is a PhD student in the Gender, Women, & Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Washington-Seattle. She has a Master's degree from Rhode Island School of Design and a Bachelor's in Environmental Policy and Behavior from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She is the recipient of the Graduate Opportunity Program (GO-MAP) Fellowship - University of Washington. Alma is a columnist for the *Seattle Globalist* and an artist with several exhibitions to her name. She taught adult fiction writing at the Bloomsbury-Qatar Foundation in Qatar. Her interests include understanding and documenting the role of art and artists in inciting conversation and action of social change and political movements, transnational feminist theory, and Arab feminism. Her current focus is Arab women artists' process and work within the context of the Arab Spring.

Fidaa Shehada

Dr. Shehada worked as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Department of Public Administration, the State University of New York at Binghamton, NY; as an Adjunct Faculty & Researcher in the Political Science Department & The School of Public Affairs and Administration, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Newark, and in several NGOs in the Middle East in field of development and human rights. Her research interests include international development and women's rights.

Gunmeen Singh

Gunmeen Singh recently submitted a PhD thesis on the "Status of Women in the GCC States: A Comparative Study of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia" at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Singh has an MA in International Relations from the University of Warwick, England, and a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy (Hons.) from Lady Sri Ram College, New Delhi. Singh has experience as a Guest Lecturer at the 'Indian School of Business and Finance' (ISBF), New Delhi, and as a Project Coordinator for Amnesty International India. She also worked at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, whereby her research area involved the Middle Eastern region resulting in the publication of her book *Lifting the Veil: Position of women in the Gulf Cooperation Council States*.