



Women & Gender Studies Institute
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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## DOCTORAL RESEARCH SEMINAR

**Wednesday, April 12, 2017**

**3:00 - 6:00 p.m.**

**Room 2053, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Wilson Hall, New College**

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Please join us on Wednesday, April 12th for the WGSi doctoral students' seminar. Refreshment will be served! All Welcome!

PRESENTERS

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| Afiya Shehrbano Zia | “Faith and Feminism in Pakistan: Religious Agency or Secular Autonomy?” |
| Lilian Abou-Tabickh | “Reasoning ‘Aṣabiyya: On Restoring Elided Elements and Finding Political Agency in the Muqaddima of Ibn <u>Khaldūn</u> ” |
| Nicole Charles | “Sensibilities of the Flesh: HPV Vaccination and Protection in Barbados” |
| Yidan Zhu | “Learning to Become a “Good Mother” in Canada: Chinese Immigrant Mothers’ Identity, Settlement and Mothering Practice” |
| Laine Zisman Newman | “U-Hauling (or The Lesbian Rush)” |

ABSTRACTS

Afiya Shehrbano Zia: – “Faith and Feminism in Pakistan: Religious Agency or Secular Autonomy?”

Numerous post 9/11 ethnographic studies on Islamist/Muslim women have focused almost exclusively on their piety, spiritual drive, agency and subjectivities. Against this trend, the academic and political interest of *Faith and Feminism* is to recall attention to the political ideologies and routine struggles of women in Muslim majority contexts. This thesis tracks some epistemological tensions that define the growing antagonism between faith-based and secular feminist politics in Pakistan. It argues that there are serious limitations to the religious agency sometimes celebrated by scholars in Western academia as a manifestation of Muslim women’s imaginaries or subjectivities (Abu-Lughod 2013; Jamal 2013; Iqtidar 2011, Mahmood 2005).

The influence of postsecularist scholarship that discredits secular feminisms and liberal aspirations is studied with reference to Pakistan. The thesis finds that such criticism relies on a forfeiture of equality and freedoms for Muslim women and minorities *only* and offers a rationalisation of patriarchy and conservatism. At the same time, this study also recognises the limitations and ineffectual strategies of liberal resistance to Islamic conservatism; the ideological tensions amongst feminists; and the futile dependence on popular culture as a mode of resistance. The post-9/11 developmental model of “donor-driven Islam” (as a strategy of embedding progressive Islam under the guise of servicing gender empowerment while promoting a communalised ‘Muslim human rights’) is found to hinge on postsecularist arguments.

In contrast to the above trends, this thesis documents and analyses some examples of the nation-wide working women’s movements in Pakistan, which were active through the decade of the “War on Terror” (2001 – 2013). These struggles and campaigns have been secular or, free of theological underpinnings, motivations, slogans or props and have taken no recourse from faith or religious debates, yet they remain the direct targets of Islamist conservatism and militancy. The thesis argues for political investment in these movements of secular resistance for meaningful feminist progress.

Bio:

Afiya S. Zia is a feminist researcher with a Master’s degree in Women’s Studies from the University of York, UK. She is author of ‘Sex Crime in the Islamic Context’ (1994) and has edited a series of books and authored a dozen peer-reviewed essays in recent publications and scholarly journals. She is an active member of Women’s Action Forum – a secular women’s rights organisation in Pakistan and a board member of several rights-based organisations. She has designed and is teaching a course on Women, Work and Islam for a semester at Habib University, Karachi. Afiya’s research for her PhD from the Women and Gender Studies Institute (University of Toronto) is on faith and feminism in Pakistan.

Lilian Abou-Tabickh--“Reasoning ‘Aṣabiyya: On Restoring Elided Elements and Finding Political Agency in the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn”

This dissertation explores what Ibn Khaldūn (732-808 AH/1332-1406 CE) means by ‘aṣabiyya and its place in his overall political philosophy. The philosophical term of ‘aṣabiyya resulted in multiple translations, the more common among which is “group feeling” and “solidarity”, which reflect a will for defence, internal unity and faithfulness to the group -‘uṣba. The latter is commonly translated as a group of men closely connected and organized, mainly according to patrilineal kinship, to defend one another.

Dominant interpretations see ‘aṣabiyya either as a natural force prevalent among bedouin groups, or an irrational force that is devoid of legal contracts or obligations. Seeking to challenge those studies, this examination follows Ibn Khaldūn’s instructions and offers a contextualized interpretation of ‘aṣabiyya. By utilizing Ibn Khaldūn’s own methodology, I show how considering his views on historiography, logic and the language sciences unravels his conceptualization of ‘aṣabiyya (connection, unity), and how it is rationally and deliberately manufactured for the formation and maintenance of political order. Specifically, the claim can be made and substantiated, that the focus on Chapters Two to Five of the *Muqaddima* was partly responsible for the naturalistic and group-oriented analyses, whereas the inclusion of Chapters One and Six apparently introduces rationality and new agents to historical-political processes. This study challenges interpretations that reduce ‘aṣabiyya to “group feeling” and conflate the term ‘aṣabiyya with tribe. It disturbs the ascription of specific qualities to particular nations, shows that common descent is something constructed and imaginary, and that ‘aṣabiyya is neither a natural force, nor is it solely the province of men.

Bio:

Lilian Abou-Tabickh is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Political Science and the collaborative program in Women and Gender Studies, University of Toronto. Her doctoral dissertation studies the political philosophy of Ibn Khaldūn and the formation of political units within the framework of his philosophy of history. Her research interests include political theory, feminist theory, decolonization theory, Arabic philosophy, Islamic theology, and philosophy of language.

Nicole Charles – “Sensibilities of the Flesh: HPV Vaccination and Protection in Barbados”

To which senses do we refer when we speak of “coming to one’s senses”? What is the connection between sensibility and protection? How does suspicion inhere in, constitute, and/or impede protection? This paper takes up these questions to analyze the multiple forms of sensibility and protection expressed by Barbadian parents and medical professionals regarding the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. Drawing upon women of colour, transnational feminist and feminist phenomenologist theories of enfleshment, embodied knowledge and futurity, this paper argues for parents’ experiences of suspicion toward vaccination as sensed in and through the body, the gut, and the flesh.

Bio:

Nicole Charles is a PhD Candidate in the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Her research engages transnational feminism, Caribbean studies and science and technology studies with an emphasis on media cultures, public health, bio- and communication technologies. Her SSHRC-funded dissertation, “Unsettling Suspicions: HPV Vaccination and the Politics of Protection and Refusal in Barbados,” examines the (post)colonial, transnational and affective politics behind refusals of vaccination in Barbados.

Yidan Zhu— “Learning to Become a “Good Mother” in Canada: Chinese Immigrant Mothers’ Identity, Settlement and Mothering Practice”

In the past decade, immigrant mothers’ learning gradually became a significant phenomenon in North America. A growing number of new immigrant mothers are enrolled in programs of settlement, language learning and parenthood education for integrating into the local society. However, few studies have been done in the exploration of immigrant mothers’ identity construction, settlement and mothering practice during their process of learning to become a “good mother” in Canada. Drawing on a critical anti-racist and feminist theoretical framework, this presentation examines how Chinese immigrant mothers’ identity has been constructed in association with the reproduction of race, gender, and class inequalities in their settlement and learning practice. It argues that taking Chinese immigrant mothers as dynamic and creative agents, their identity construction, learning practice and everyday experience could help us reflect on the unequal gender, race, and class relations in the society

Bio:

Yidan Zhu is a Ph.D. candidate in the Adult Education and Community Development Program at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the social organization of Chinese immigrant mothers’ learning in Canadian immigration settlement organizations under the changing contexts of globalization and neoliberalization. Her research interests include adult education, learning theory, immigration studies, mothering and motherhood, race, gender and class relations, and critical ethnography.

Laine Zisman Newman— “U-Hauling (or The Lesbian Rush)”

What did the lesbian bring to her first date? Flowers

What did the lesbian bring to her second date? A U-Haul.

Lesbian feminism and queer feminism can give us a rush. The excitement and urgency, the need and the determination, all work to give us a rush of emotion at the possibility for change and our involvement in it. We experience the rush of politics, the rush of the killing joy and the rush to share a bedroom with our lovers. Many of us love this rush. But the precarity of our activism and our lives and the lack of support and resources we have access to as women, often cause us to be in a rush.

Taking time, like taking up space, necessitates certain privilege not afforded to marginalized women. We are constantly trying to catch up. We are rushing to do our feminist queer lesbian work. We are expected to complete our projects with less time, resources, and money. We multi-task, activate, and mobilize as we simultaneously act as secretary and note-keeper, caregiver and mother, helper and lover. Thus, while some queer women might experience the rush of the rush, the expectation to rush illustrates how lesbian lives are devalued.

This paper presentation, exploring one of the analysis chapters of a doctoral thesis, will begin with a consideration of gendered and queer temporality as simultaneously hurried and out-of-synch. The second half of this paper will consider *The Magic Hour*, a performance piece developed and performed by Jess Dobkin. Analyzing the pacing and blurring of past, present and future, this paper argues that performance has the capacity to performatively make time for queer women. If rushing is a naturalized practice for those with less resources, than one form of resistance against this experience might just be to take our time.

Bio:

Laine Zisman Newman is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies and the collaborative programs in Sexual Diversity Studies and Women and Gender Studies. She is a Jackman Humanities Junior Fellow, chair of Toronto's Queer Theory Working Group and co-chair of the Sex Salon Lecture Series. In addition to her doctoral research, Zisman Newman is the co-founder of Equity in Theatre, a national organization working to improve equity in Canadian performance industry and one of the founding members of the Alliance of Women in Theatre (AWIT). Zisman Newman's creative and scholarly work have been published in various publications including, but not limited to: *Alt. Theatre*, *Canadian Theatre Review*; *Studies in Documentary Film*; and *Journal of Dance, Movement and Spiritualities*.