

**Project Title: Countering Islamophobia: Critical Feminist Interventions through Scholarship and Pedagogy**

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**Summary**

I am currently collaborating with a group of 4 scholars from different UC campuses in Southern California who work on issues of gender and sexuality, Islam and Islamophobia, and transnational Muslim communities. In Fall 2016 our group was selected for the "University of California Humanities Research Initiative (UCHRI) Multi-Campus Faculty Working Groups" award to support our proposed activities for 2017-2018. The purpose of our group is two-fold: first, to generate a scholarly dialogue among feminist scholars around the centrality of gender in epistemologies of Islamophobia; second, to develop the outlines of a Critical Feminist Pedagogy that counters epistemologies of difference which are at the core of anti-Muslim rhetoric. This multidisciplinary impetus (Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies and Anthropology), that draws on various Muslim cultures (Malaysian, Pakistani, Iranian, Sudanese, and Egyptian) from across multi-campus locations (UCLA, UCI, UCR, and CSUN) aims at producing theoretical and pragmatic interventions into Islamophobia, a public discourse that is of immediate concern in today's sociopolitical landscape.

I am applying for the Research Fellow Program at CSUN to request 12 units of reassigned time for Fall 2017 so I can succeed in meeting the objectives of our working group, and simultaneously further my individual objectives. Our group objectives include: 1) publishing a special issue of an academic journal on the topic of feminism, Islamophobia and transnational Islam, 2) creating joint pedagogical units to bring back to

each of our classrooms, and 3) disseminating our findings to our campus communities and to the general public through organizing forums and publishing in non-academic venues. In addition, my individual objectives include 1) producing/hosting a radio show on our findings, 2) designing a special topics course in GWS based on these findings, and 3) organizing a conference at CSUN in Spring 2018. While I am thrilled to be part of the UCHRI collaborative, my concern is that my heavy teaching load at CSUN will inhibit my ability to utilize this vibrant intellectual space to produce socially and politically relevant knowledge that will greatly enhance my scholarship, deepen my teaching and bring CSUN into a collaborative intellectual relationship with others at the forefront of these politically relevant dialogues that have potential impact on public policies vis-a-vis contemporary American Muslim communities.

### **Background**

As scholars and educators working on issues of gender, sexuality, and transnational Islam, we initially came together as an informal collective in early 2016 to share our concerns around the deployment of Islamophobic rhetoric in the political campaigns of the U.S. presidential elections. In the aftermath of the December 2015 San Bernardino shootings carried out by a Pakistani Muslim couple, we witnessed a heightened suspicion of Muslim Americans and a political discourse justifying the need for more stringent surveillance of Muslim communities. Our goal was to create an intellectual/political space to formulate critical responses as scholars, public intellectuals, and activists rooted in Southern California to the securitization of public discourses and policies, and their impacts on American Muslim communities. One of my current research projects focuses precisely on these issues through examining the intra-Muslim community debates about

whether Muslims in Southern California should collaborate with the US government in President Obama's "Countering Violent Extremism" (CVE) initiative – for which Los Angeles is a pilot city. While some Muslim groups see CVE as a tool for legitimizing state surveillance, others believe that Muslims communities must work with law enforcement and state agencies to help prevent home grown terrorism. A highly relevant aspect of CVE in Los Angeles is that it specifically targets women as partners in domestic counterterrorism initiatives, based on the assumption that women can offer insights into the intimate and personal realms of Muslim lives and hence a safeguard against the radicalization of youth. My co-researcher Dr. Azza Basarudin and I have carried out interviews with local non-profit organizations, such as Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Muslim Students Association West (MSA West), Islamic Shura Council, American Muslim Women's Empowerment Council (AMWEC), as well as independent individuals in Los Angeles and Orange County. While we have participated in conferences with scholars and advocates around the larger implications of these issues, no such space exists in the context of Southern California and our collective is at the early stages of combining our resources to build such a space. Indeed, the importance of this work cannot be understated, particularly in light of the racialization of Muslim as an enemy and Islamic terrorism as a rallying point for the 2016 U.S. presidential election and deepening anxieties about the security of Muslim Americans in the contemporary U.S.

### **Methodology**

In Summer 2017, we will generate a reading list of contemporary scholarship in our field, and with the support of the UCHRI grant we will organize spaces to meet and discuss

these readings. These meetings will begin in Fall 2017, and based on the dialogues/analyses that emerge, we will identify appropriate venues for publication and dissemination of our joint work, and construct teaching segments and joint syllabi that we will take back to our individual classrooms. We see this process as taking place over the course of 2017-2018, and as one that bridges our scholarship, teaching and public intellectual activism. We intend to utilize resources already available to us: our well-developed libraries in our various Centers, The Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at UC Berkeley, the various civil rights and non-profit organizations working against Islamophobia, such as CAIR (Council on Islamic-American Relations) and Alchemiya—a UK online video platform. Programs that address Middle East and Islamic Cultures and societies, specifically, at UC Riverside the Middle East and Islamic Societies and Cultures Program, and The Center for Persian Studies at UC Irvine, and at CSUN, the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program.

### **Objectives**

A broad goal of this working group is to bridge the lack of resources, intellectual and institutional isolation, and to pool our individual research projects and scholarly accomplishments to build a community of feminist scholarly activism and teaching grounded in Southern California's specific landscape. As such, in this collaborative space we aim to: (1) engage in productive intellectual dialogue and critical feminist reading of the epistemological origins, production/circulation, and deployments of Islamophobia, (2) create specific pedagogical interventions that we can share across our classrooms and campuses, and (3) disseminate our findings through publication in scholarly and non-scholarly publications and through organizing public forums.

Collective Goals: Our first goal will be to publish a special issue in an academic journal such as *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, among others. Conversely, we have discussed the possibility of publishing an edited volume with a university press. As a collaborative we will begin more concrete discussions on our plan of action in Summer 2017, and begin the work in Fall 2017. Our second goal is to create joint syllabi that will link geo-politics, the rise of political Islam and Islamophobia, and representations of gender and sexuality within the global communities of Muslims. Based on our individual expertise, each of us will develop and teach sections of this curricular program and will either guest lecture or Skype in for the specific portions of the syllabus. Our final goal is to organize a public event to disseminate our collaborative work within our campus communities and the general public at the end of Spring 2018.

My Individual Goals: In addition to participating in the goals of the larger collaborative, my individual goals include the following: 1) producing/hosting one radio show for the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) radio collective on KPKF in Fall 2017. I have been a part of SWANA for years, but have been unable to produce any shows in the last few years, 2) to create a special topics course through Gender and Women's Studies at CSUN that will be offered in Fall 2018, and 3) organize a conference at CSUN (to be hosted in Spring 2018) on the outcomes of our collaborative with support from the Middle East and Islamic Studies program at CSUN (where I am affiliated faculty).