

## MELA Social Justice Lecture Series: Season 2

December 2021-June 2022

This lecture series aims to increase awareness of social justice principles in our professional practice and to also bring attention to how libraries and archives are supporting, or failing to support, crucial research on issues related to social justice. For this season's theme, 'Neutral / بی طرف / حید / tarafsız?': Heritage, Colonialism and Diversity in Middle East Libraries and Archives, we have invited librarians, archivists, curators, and cultural heritage protectors from around the world who handle materials from the nebulous region we call the Middle East, to discuss issues of neutrality, colonialism, and diversity within their institutions and experiences. Recordings have been made available on YouTube, at the speakers' discretion.

[Click here to view the Social Justice Lecture Series on YouTube](#)

### 1- [Dr. Sumayya Ahmed, Simmons University](#)

#### **From Private Archives: Using Societal Provenance to Connect Islamic Manuscripts to Local Communities in Morocco**

December 13, 2021

Scholars who use materials from North Africa do not often consider the living communities which produced the materials they study. Moroccan scholars contend that there are still more Arabic and Amazigh (Berber) manuscripts in private collections than what is found in the country's many public libraries and archives. Although the western media and cultural heritage sector tend to paint a dire picture of the condition of the archival materials in North Africa, there are actually people caring for their private collections to the best of their abilities. In this talk, we will explore how the archival concept of societal provenance might help us to develop a more complete understanding of the manuscript landscape in Morocco which may be applicable to other places in the region.

*Sumayya Ahmed recently joined the Archives faculty of Simmons University's School of Library and Information Science after teaching for several years at the Program in Library and Information Studies at University College London's global campus in Doha, Qatar. Her research focuses on documentary heritage in North Africa and the Middle East, the societal provenance of historical manuscript collections, the history of archives in North Africa and the Middle East, and the politics of cultural heritage preservation. She was the co-editor of the 2016 De Gruyter volume, Library and Information Science in the Middle East and North Africa.*



## 2- [Zhor Rehihil, Museum of Moroccan Judaism](#)

### **The Role of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in the Preservation of Morocco's Jewish Heritage**

January 19, 2022

In this lecture, Mrs. Rehihil tells the story of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism, the first and only Jewish museum in the Arab Muslim world. She highlights a record of 25 years of work to preserve and promote the Hebraic heritage of Morocco, including the restoration of synagogues, the rehabilitation of cemeteries, and the organization of pilgrimages.

*Zhor Rehihil serves as the curator of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism. She is the first Muslim curator of a Jewish Museum in the world and an expert on Moroccan Judaica. She is a member of the scientific committee in charge of the establishment of the Royal Museum on Moroccan Judaism in Fez. She has been the host of the radio show 'Nass El Mellah' on MedRadio since 2018. Besides her numerous publications and participation in national and international seminars, she compiled the first Arabic glossary of terminology on Moroccan Judaica.*



## 3- [Fatme Charafeddine, AUB Libraries](#)

### [Basma Chebani, AUB Libraries](#)

### **Challenges facing catalogers in describing and indexing Middle Eastern books and periodicals**

February 9, 2022

[Watch recording on YouTube](#)

From experience in research and publishing, librarians dealing with Middle Eastern collections are very much aware that there is a large gap in access to information from different countries, as well as some intentional or non-intentional bias in representing other cultures. This presentation will give examples of the challenges facing catalogers in describing and indexing Middle Eastern books and periodicals, as well as showing examples in the online catalog using Library of Congress subject headings. Finally, it will show some solutions elaborated at AUB Libraries.

*Fatme Charafeddine was recently appointed as the Interim Library Director at the University Libraries in the American University of Beirut. She has been working in academic libraries for more than twenty years, moving from e-resources to reference and instruction, then becoming the Associate University Librarian for Research and Academic Collaboration Services. In addition to her previous experience in cataloging, she is currently involved in several cultural heritage digitization projects. She represents the library at AMICAL, a consortium of American international universities, and works with colleagues on addressing issues connected to applying American standards outside the country.*

*Basma Chebani, Associate University Librarian for Cataloging and Metadata Services, American University of Beirut Libraries, has had long experience in implementing library systems and automating the library catalog, beginning with the MARC 21 format, introducing RDA, and adapting the Dublin core format for the libraries' digital collections. Basma is involved in most digitization projects at the University Libraries: Arabic Collections Online, from 2012; Building up the Palestinian Oral History Thesaurus (POHA), from 2014; and Al Adab Magazine Archives, 2014-2017.*



### **3- Asli Davaz, Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation**

#### **An example of alternative archiving in Turkey: The Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation**

March 16, 2022

[Watch recording on YouTube](#)

The Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation (WLICF) is the first and only women-centered library and archive in Turkey. The legal status of the Foundation was established on the 8th of March, 1990 and the Library opened to the public in İstanbul on 14 April, 1990. At that time, this project seemed an impossible dream, but the will of the five founders and their belief in the necessity of an alternative archival system centered on women in Turkey finally brought about the realization of this project. Not only in Turkey but all over the world, the last decades have been marked by the creation of many alternative archival institutions. The Official and State Archives do not have "an acquisitions policy" regarding women and the women's movement in Turkey. When defining the issues surrounding gender and archiving in the collections of the Women's Library, we must not forget that women-centered archival activities are at its beginning in Turkey. Although individual efforts to preserve the private papers of women and organizational documents started long ago, a systematic preservation movement started only thirty-one years ago with the foundation of the Women's Library in İstanbul. In this lecture we will discuss the rising awareness of the "incomplete and inadequate representation" of women in archival institutions and steps taken to overcome this deficiency, as well as what can be done to expand and develop archival centers that contain primary sources about women, and to save women's documentary heritage.

*Asli Davaz is a researcher, writer and women's history archivist and co-founder of the Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation in İstanbul (1990). She studied French language and literature at University of Paris VIII. She is one of the few researchers who specializes in women's archives in Turkey, and for many years she carried out research studies on this subject. She has spent much of the past 30 years engaging in efforts aimed toward the acquisition, preservation, and dissemination of documents related to women's history and she has been working in many projects regarding women centered archives and the memory of women's history. She has especially worked on collection building for the Periodical*

Collection, the Women's Organization Collection, and the Private Archive Collection. She has written articles on women centered libraries and archives, and participated in many workshops, conferences, and symposia related to this subject. She published three books. She currently works on women's history and women centered archives and serves as the General Board Member of the Foundation. She carried out her work as an Executive Committee Member of the Foundation in 1990-1995, 2003-2005, 2005-2007; she also served as the President of the Executive Committee in 1990, 1997, 2000, 2009-2011, 2017-2019.



## **5- Matthew Jaber Stiffler, Arab American National Museum**

## **Diana Abouali, Arab American National Museum**

### **Whose community, whose heritage? The Arab American National Museum community archive**

April 11, 2022

[Watch recording on YouTube](#)

Matthew Jaber Stiffler and Diana Abouali introduce the work of the Arab American National Museum and its archive, which is arguably the most comprehensive archive of Arab American documents, artifacts and art works in the country. Because Arabic-speaking people have been immigrating to the U.S. for 130 years and they can trace their heritage to any of the 22 Arab countries, AANM staff have the difficult task of ensuring that the archive represents the geographic, temporal, religious and other diversity of the Arab American community. Stewarding the community's heritage presents both challenges and opportunities which they will explore in their presentation.

*Matthew Jaber Stiffler is the research & content manager at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, MI. Matthew also co-founded the Center for Arab Narratives, a new national research program through ACCESS, the largest Arab American community non-profit in the country. Matthew received his Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan in 2010, where he serves as a lecturer in Arab and Muslim American Studies. He is a former board member of the Arab American Studies Association and serves on the executive board of Michigan Humanities. He writes about food and identity.*

*Diana Abouali is the director at AANM. Diana has worked in the higher education, cultural heritage and museum sectors in the United States, Palestine and Jordan. She is a graduate of Wellesley College and received her Ph.D. in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University in 2004. She has taught at Dartmouth College and held senior positions at the Palestinian Museum (Birzeit, Palestine) and the Petra National Trust (Amman, Jordan). She is a board member of ArteEast (NYC) and CultureSource (Detroit).*



## 6- [Randa Al Chidiac, Lebanese Library Association](#)

### **Neutrality, Achievable or Not? That is the Question**

April 20, 2022

[Watch recording on YouTube](#)

We are taught in library school about being objective in providing information and respecting our ethics in our profession. But what can a library professional do in a land that faces a lot of conflicts both nationally and regionally? Lebanon is a land rich in diversity: religious, political, and cultural. It is also in the middle of a conflict zone. Library professionals in Lebanon have always embraced the idea of neutrality, objectivity, and safe space. However, the debate is on whether or not this is achievable. The presentation will demonstrate the challenges Lebanese librarians face and the methods and solutions they have adopted.

*Randa Al Chidiac is the Vice-President & Public Relations Coordinator for the Lebanese Library Association. She is currently the President of the Blue Shield Lebanese Committee and the Executive Director, Projects and Grants Unit, International Affairs Office, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon. She was appointed as representative of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in the founding committee of the Blue Shield Lebanese Committee. Previously, she served as the Executive Director of the Library at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK), Lebanon, and as President of the Lebanese Library Association for two terms. She holds an MA degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Wales-Aberystwyth and a BA degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Balamand, Lebanon. She has a special interest in issues in management, leadership, academic integrity, preservation, and copyright, as well as raising the professional standing of librarians in the region.*



## 7- [Dr. Sholeh Arastoopoor, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad](#)

### **It is Hard to Stay Neutral and Empower Women: How Women are Depicted in Persian Literature**

May 16, 2022

Persian language literature is full of paradoxical views towards women. Some pay respect to them and some would do anything to present a tainted picture of them. This sort of depiction is rooted in women's cultural, social, economic and political status throughout history. Different studies show that even now we still encounter texts that promote toxic ideas, whether deliberately and explicitly or unintentionally and implicitly. For example gender stereotypes are still prevalent in our school books and also in recreational children's books. They are commonly found in archetypes present in novels or even in the



illustrations adorning reading materials suitable for different age categories. This leads to a multitude of texts that entail unfit content for those who are in pursuit of planning programs for women's empowerment or breaking gender stereotypes. Among them are public libraries, which sometimes experience great challenges in collection development. This presentation focuses on this problem and the challenge for public libraries to stay neutral in their collection development agenda, while developing a collection that supports programs that empower women. To this end I would also like to introduce an NGO and its success history.

*Sholeh Arastoopoor is currently an assistant professor in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (FUM). She holds a Ph.D. in library and information science and has worked at the Regional Information Center for Science and Technology as both the head of the collection development department and also as the research deputy of the center. She is currently working as a consultant for FUM's Vice President of Planning and Resource Development in the field of competitive intelligence.*



**8- [Kristine Khoury, Arab Image Foundation](#)  
Independent and Alternative Archives in the Arab World  
June 8, 2022**

For the last two decades, the Arab world has seen an emergence of alternative archival initiatives and practices that operate between and outside traditional sites of knowledge production, namely the fields of cinema, art, academia, and civil society. These endeavors have come about not only in response to the need to document recent histories, but also due to the challenges of doing historical research, particularly research on the twentieth century, as well as in response to the insufficiency of or dissatisfaction with existing official and national narratives and histories.

These initiatives, endeavors, and practices produce new narratives and alternative or imaginative histories of current and past times. Responding to and resisting dominant, state-centered histories and discourses, those behind these projects actively claim agency over histories through these independent, grassroots endeavors. At the same time, these independent initiatives are fragile and operate in precarious spaces with numerous challenges. The presentation will share a range of these independent archives/initiatives and ask about ways in which transnational and collective work can offer stability, even if momentarily.

*Kristine Khouri is a researcher whose interests span the history of art collecting, exhibiting, and infrastructure of the Middle East and North Africa as well as archival practices and related knowledge dissemination. She is a co-organizer of the Past Disquiet Project. Most recently she has been focused on critical engagement with (digital) archives, and issues that emerge from them including rights, access, and language. She serves as a board member of the Arab Image Foundation, Beirut.*