

Academic freedom in turbulent times

2017 conference of the Scholars at Risk -- Ireland Network

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Rehahan Hall, Maynooth University

6 November 2017

Today, throughout the world, there are increasing threats to academic freedom – from authoritarian regimes and in regions at war or under occupation, but also by intolerant state and non-state actors. Academic freedom is also increasingly compromised within the academy itself by profit-maximisation models and audit cultures. How can we safeguard academic freedom and the conditions for critical thinking in these turbulent times? What measures can be taken to embed the principle of academic freedom as part of the international rights agenda? How can we defend it in practice as “managerial culture” becomes ever more prevalent within our universities and education institutions? Our speakers will draw on their first-hand experiences as well as their research to address these themes.

Speakers

Prof Aidan Mulkeen, Vice-President Academic/Registrar and Deputy President, National University of Ireland Maynooth

Aidan Mulkeen is the Vice-President Academic/Registrar and Deputy President at the National University of Ireland Maynooth. In this role he is responsible for oversight of the academic programmes of the University and for the academic supports to students. Before taking up his current role in early 2013, he was head of the Education Department at NUI Maynooth, and responsible for managing a busy academic department providing a range of programmes from initial teacher education to postgraduate research programmes in education. From 2004-2009, he was a Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank as a Senior Education Specialist based in Washington DC but working particularly on the challenges of education in sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to that he had a varied career in education, with responsibilities in teacher education, in the applications of ICT in education, in teaching and learning at higher education, and in education provision in developing countries.

Prof Homa Hoodfar, Concordia University, Montreal

Professor Hoodfar, a Canadian-Iranian anthropologist noted for her contributions to Middle Eastern studies, was detained in Tehran's infamous Evin prison for a period of 112 days from 6th June to 26th September 2016 on fabricated charges of acting against the Iranian state. Her prosecutor also accused her of "dabbling in feminism". Since she also holds an Irish passport (through marriage to her late husband), there had been significant protests and other efforts on her behalf in Ireland last year. Building on work that she began during her imprisonment, she will speak on the importance of establishing academic freedom as a transnational right, drawing on traditions of critical thinking (and respect for critical thinking) from around the world.

Dr Jamil Khader, Dean of Research, Bethlehem University

Dr Jamil Khader is Professor of English and Dean of Research at Bethlehem University, Palestine. Before arriving at Bethlehem University in 2014, Dr Khader taught at Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey and Stetson University in Deland, Florida, where he served as the Director of the Gender Studies Program and the Co-Chair of the Diversity Council. Dr Khader is the author of numerous publications which appeared in various international journals and other collections. He is also the author of *Cartographies of Transnationalism in Postcolonial Feminisms: Geography, Culture, Identity, Politics* (Lexington Books 2012). Moreover, he co-edited with Molly Rothenberg a collection of essays on the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, entitled, *Žižek Now: Current Perspectives in Žižek Studies* (Polity 2013). This book has been slated for translation in German and Korean and will be published by the end of this year. His political commentary on Palestine has been featured on MERIP, Truth-out, Aljazeera in English, Jadaliyya, The Palestine Chronicle, Center for the Secular Research and Studies in the Arab World (Al-Hewar Al-Mutamaden), News with Conscience, and other venues. He delivered scores of papers at many international conferences and gave different talks on Palestinian culture and politics at different institutions around the world. Dr Khader is the recipient of various awards including a Research Award (2006), a Community Impact Award (2011), and a year-long teaching and research Fulbright Fellowship (2014) which he completed at Bir Zeit University, Palestine. He is currently working on two book-length projects, including one on the significance of Palestine for internationalist revolutionary discourses.

Ms Sinead O’Gorman, European Director, Scholars at Risk

Sinead O’Gorman is the European Director at Scholars at Risk. Based in Ireland, Ms. O’Gorman leads SAR’s international outreach efforts, including the design and implementation of SAR’s strategy for Europe, establishing national and regional SAR sections and increasing global participation in SAR’s protection and prevention activities. Ms. O’Gorman previously served as Deputy Executive Director at Scholars at Risks’ New York office, and has over 12 years’ experience in higher education, development cooperation and human rights. Prior to joining SAR, Ms. O’Gorman served as Program Officer-Africa at the Institute of International Education (IIE) and held program and research positions at the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) in London and at the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) in Dublin. She holds an MSc in Development Studies from the London School of Economics, an MA in French from the Université de Montréal, a BA in English and French from Trinity College Dublin and was a pensionnaire étranger at the Ecole normale supérieure (ENS), rue d’Ulm.

Dr. Hassan Mody, Previously a professor in Aleppo University

Dr Mody holds a PhD in French contemporary poetry from a university in France where he wrote his thesis on the existential and poetic relationship surrounding the premonition of death. He has several years of teaching experience at high schools in Syria and France as well as two years of experience at a university in Syria where he instructed courses in French grammar, linguistics, and comprehension as well as a course on French modern and contemporary poetry.

The scholar has five articles published in academic journals, has attended numerous conferences in his field, and was invited to give a guest lecture on poetry at a university in Tunisia. In addition, this scholar is a poet and skilled oudist who regularly participates in poetry events and readings.

- 09.30 – 10.15 Registration
- 10.15 – 10.20 Introductions by **Prof Rowena Pecchenino**, Professor of Economics, Maynooth University
- 10.20 – 10.35 **Prof Aidan Mulkeen**, Vice-President Academic/Registrar and Deputy President, National University of Ireland Maynooth
- 10.35 – 10.50 **Ms Sinead O’Gorman**, European Director, Scholars at Risk
- 10.50 – 10.55 Introductions by **Dr Chandana Mathur**, Lecturer, School of Anthropology, Maynooth University
- 10.55 – 11.40 **Prof Homa Hoodfar**, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology , Concordia University, Montreal
- 11.40 – 12.10 **Refreshments**
- 12.10 - 12.15 Introductions by **Dr Paola Rivetti**, Assistant Professor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University
- 12.15 – 13.00 **Dr Jamil Khader**, Dean of Research, Bethlehem University
- 13.00 – 13.05 Introductions by **Dr Chandana Mathur**, Lecturer, School of Anthropology, Maynooth University
- 13.05 – 13.20 **Dr Hassan Mody**, Previously a Professor in Aleppo University
- 13.20 – 14.15 **Lunch**
- 14.20 – 15.20 **Roundtable discussion** (all speakers) chaired by **Prof John O’Brennan**, Senior Lecturer, Centre for European and Eurasian Studies, Maynooth University
- 15.30 – 16.30 **SAR Clinic** chaired by **Dr Noelle Higgins**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Law, Maynooth University