

# The Stunning Women at the AAUW Fund Luncheon

By Joanne Rife

**Dena Al-Adeeb**, recipient of an American Fellowship, studies at New York University but lives in the Bay Area. Her field is Middle Eastern and Islamic Art and Politics. Born in Iraq, she has lived in the US for 20 years. She said she is emotionally tied to her research, which focuses on what happened after the 2003 invasion of Iraq but starts with 19th century colonialism. She asks what it means in the short term and the long term when cultural, religious and heritage sites are destroyed or damaged, including universities, museums, places of worship and historical and pre-historical sites. Additionally, how does taking objects from an colonized or occupied area and transporting them to the colonizer and/or occupier, either by the government or by private individuals, affect the region from which the objects are taken, and also where they then reside?

How do these entities intersect, for instance, in the case of the 2003 invasion? Involved were the US government, the Iraqi government, looters, personal collectors, and public and private entities, including museums.

Her focus is on the objects, but also how Iraqi contemporary artists deal with war and the destruction of their area's past.

She cited one example, where the US military set up a base on top of one Iraqi cultural heritage site and in the process destroyed it.

**Cloe-Mai Le Gall-Scoville**, recipient of an American Fellowship, is a graduate from the UC Davis Comparative Literature Department. She studies how 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature intersects with French literature regarding the issues of race and gender.

She comes from a mixed racial background. One side of her family is French-Vietnamese, the other, American-Filipino. From that legacy she became interested in race, gender and colonialism. How the subjectivities of race and gender are manifest in such English classics as *Jane Eyre* (the Creole mixed-race mad woman in the attic) or the 1820 French classic by Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, which was the basis of John Fowles' 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. How does slavery, gender and race intersect with colonialism, resulting in mixed race children and their depiction in their cultures, often as overly sexual, base, not marriageable, and degraded.

**Connie Wun**, Mills College, received an American Fellowship. She attended San Francisco State, UC Berkeley and finally Mills College, where she is working on her post doctorate in Education, studying race, gender and violence in high schools as expressed in social media. She has a master's degree in social studies, and has taught at the high school level. She noted that in education girls of color are "over punished and under served." Social media targets young women without their consent. It affects the classroom environment and their ability to study and succeed. She noted we have no idea what to do with negative social media. Girls are also creating positive platforms using social media, so it is a mixed bag.

Born in Oakland, she is first generation Vietnamese American.

**Maria Tourtchaninova** received a Career Development Grant. Born in the Ukraine, she is presently working on two master's degrees in Public Policy and Social Welfare at UC Berkeley. She told the story of receiving an offer to attend the Goldman School of Public Policy at the same time as she was studying Social Welfare, but she did not have the financial resources to pursue both. She said she needed a “sign” as to what to do, when, that evening, she received an email informing her that she had won the AAUW grant, thus allowing her to do both. Her focus is on sex and labor trafficking. She said that survivors of trafficking are often threatened and sometimes killed if they testify. The danger is so great, she said, that she questions how she can, as a social worker, ask a survivor to go through with testifying. In San Francisco alone, in 2015, some 500 survivors faced that choice. She is also involved in the effort to provide emergency and long term shelters for survivors. Some are minors. She asked, where can society put these young children who have experienced such trauma?

She said AAUW has done so much for women and girls: this grant will continue that legacy. She plans to “pay it forward.”

**Abisola Kusimo** received a Selected Professions Fellowship. She is studying Mechanical Engineering, an under-represented field for women, at Stanford University. Raised in New Jersey, her parents came from Nigeria. A woman of many talents, she is a poet as well as an engineer. She arrived at Stanford with no funding and no idea how to pay for a graduate education in this over-priced area. After the first very difficult year financially, she lost confidence. But the AAUW fellowship allowed her to go on.

She works in the field of large scale 3D printing, focusing on applications in the underdeveloped world. She hopes to make it possible to take agricultural waste and build objects cheaply and quickly for populations that have little.

Also speaking was **Jenifer Pierre-Louis**, one of the NCCWSL (National Conference for College Women Student Leaders) students from this area. A student at Chabot College, she is pursuing three majors—Early Childhood Development, International Relations and Political Science. She is French and struggles with culture shock, her three majors, and several leadership roles. At the conference she learned how to better manage her busy life and how to make the most of college. She hopes to live up to the expectations that come with attending the conference.

**AAUW's fellowships and grants have provided more than \$100 million to more than 12,000 women and projects from 140 countries since 1888.**

