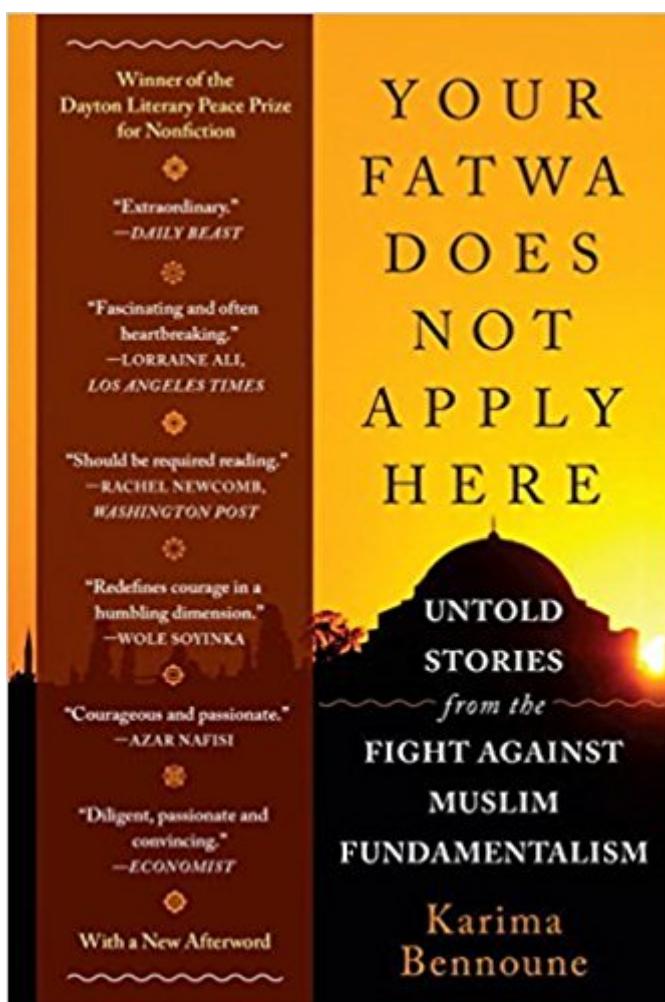


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# Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories From The Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism



## Synopsis

With a new afterword. "Compelling, meticulously researched. Should be required reading." In Lahore, Pakistan, Faizan Peerzada resisted being relegated to a "dark corner" by staging a performing arts festival despite bomb attacks. In Senegal, wheelchair-bound Aissatou Cissé produced a comic book to illustrate the injustices faced by disabled women and girls. In Algeria, publisher Omar Belhouchet and his journalists struggled to put out their paper, *El Watan* (The Nation), the same night that a 1996 jihadist bombing devastated their offices and killed eighteen of their colleagues. In Afghanistan, Young Women for Change took to the streets of Kabul to denounce sexual harassment, undeterred by threats. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, Abdirizak Bihi organized a Ramadan basketball tournament among Somali refugees to counter the influence of Al Shabaab. From Karachi to Tunis, Kabul to Tehran, across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and beyond, these trailblazers often risked death to combat the rising tide of fundamentalism within their own countries. But this global community of writers, artists, doctors, musicians, museum curators, lawyers, activists, and educators of Muslim heritage remains largely invisible, lost amid the heated coverage of Islamist terror attacks on one side and abuses perpetrated against suspected terrorists on the other. A veteran of twenty years of human rights research and activism, Karima Bennoune draws on extensive fieldwork and interviews to illuminate the inspiring stories of those who represent one of the best hopes for ending fundamentalist oppression worldwide. 20 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*Starred Review\* After a harrowing experience with her father in his Algerian home, activist and law professor Bennoune felt compelled to interview Muslims who are bravely standing up to Islamist groups. Her geographic range is vast, including France, Egypt, Senegal, Russia, Mali, and beyond. She spoke with theater owners under threat of suicide bombers in Pakistan, museum curators who risked all to save Afghani cultural treasures, and television producers from Algeria who were nearly killed for presenting a popular program. Her interviews sear with passion as her subjects deconstruct false views of Islam and inaccurate readings of the Qur'ân. Again and again, Bennoune shines a spotlight on those who battle with intelligence and creativity against guns and bloodlust. She has created a significant and compelling record of modern life in which she spares no one, from the right wing to the left. This is life on the front lines in a world that Westerners all too often willfully define with inaccurate generalities. Bennoune insists that readers see the hearts and souls of those who are fighting for their countries and hear Muslims who say, "If we bow down to the Islamists . . . then there will be nothing. We'll just be sitting in a dark corner." --Colleen Mondor --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Stirring and urgent." - Boston Globe "Extraordinary." - Daily Beast "Diligent, passionate and convincing." - Economist "Very necessary." - Times Higher Education "A must read for anyone interested in current affairs." - New York Journal of Books "Fascinating and often heartbreaking." - Lorraine Ali, Los Angeles Times "A compelling, meticulously researched account. . . . Required reading." - Rachel Newcomb, Washington Post

Too little of the work being done on the front lines of Muslim fundamentalism has gone unsung and unsupported, especially given the media focus around this important issue. Bennoune catalogs the stories of the women and men who have stood up in their countries and communities to make their voices heard and to stand for the human rights that form the backbone of secular government. I read this book on a series of long-haul flights, keeping my reading light on at all hours, unable to put it down. The emotion and sheer courage which those activists and human rights defenders, artists and journalists, defend their rights and the rights of all made me swell with emotion. And then, the obvious question: why aren't we doing all we can to support them? I could not recommend this book more highly, for those seeking to understand the context of Muslim fundamentalism and for those wondering what can be done about it. Bennoune offers us a glimpse over the last few decades of a

struggle that has gone unnoticed for too long. Simply ground-breaking stuff.

Too often the media in America asks the question, "Where are the local people standing up to fundamentalist Islam?" Professor Bennoune answers this question with a resounding "Right in front of you!" This book, for the first time, collects the stories of those who use culture and education to fight terrorism in their communities. It offers a counter-narrative to the traditional anti-terror rhetoric which prefers drone strikes over community development. It also shows how those that Americans typically think of "victims" are actually on the front lines of this fight and are thriving. Additionally, Professor Bennoune provides historical background that shapes the individual stories and places them within the greater narrative of history. Well worth the read for anyone who is interested in the complex subject that is terrorism.

This book is a compendium of vignettes of the struggle within the Moslem world against Islamism. They sample the globe from Mali to Afghanistan. The breadth and depth of this struggle is under recognized in the West. The author's intention is to correct this condition. The author, of Moslem heritage, is credible having a family that went through the butchery of Islamism in Algeria in 1990's and having professional experience with NGOs focused on human rights. What is astounding is the bravery of the unarmed members, particularly the women. They make up the many Moslem heritage organizations battling, in the face of extreme danger, with only words and civil disobedience, the atrocities of Islamism. Those who are hung up about US religious fundamentalism, civil rights and male chauvinism need to read this book to see what real extremism is all about.

I greatly appreciated both the geographic breadth and the detailed descriptions of the resistance by individual Muslims to radical Muslim intimidation and terror. I found Ms. Bennoune's description of her own family's struggles particularly poignant. To struggle long and hard for Algerian independence only to face an ongoing struggle against an inept government and now religious extremism is truly sad.

A rather depressing account of atrocities committed by Muslims against other Muslims, but at least it is out there on public record. Since the book's publication, the Arab Spring has turned into an Arab winter and the Islamic State is being established in Iraq, two events which will put a dent in the author's cautious optimism that Islam is heading in a moderate direction. Also, while not overly critical of Israel, compared to other Middle Eastern writers, the author accepts Hamas narrative vis a

vis Israel and offers nary a criticism of the organisations stated lethal aims and of their mistreatment of the population of Gaza by brainwashing and using the civilians as a human shield

This book should be required reading in every school. It is a moving account of the struggle for equal rights and freedom in the face of extremism. It is a culturally sensitive and unbiased view of the internal struggle within majority Muslim societies between extremism and humanism, which teaches lessons in bravery and intellectual honesty to all of us. It puts a human face on those who struggle tirelessly against oppression and allows all of us to realize that there are good and bad people everywhere. It strikes just the right balance, exposing hypocrisy and inaccuracy on both sides of the debate. Well done, professor Bennoune!

Absorbing though brutal at times, I learned a lot about how anti fundamentalists are fighting "behind the scenes" unknown to most of us in America. It is a call for help which must be answered.

It is part of my current reading theme of Islamic extremism.

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