

CROSSING BORDERS

INTERNATIONAL, MULTIFACETED, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY, PROFESSOR OMAR FARAHAT'S TRACK RECORD SHOWS HE WILL NOT LIMIT HIMSELF TO CONVENTIONAL BOUNDARIES. COMBINING YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN CAIRO, NEW YORK, AND PARIS WITH STERLING CREDENTIALS FROM SEVERAL OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST UNIVERSITIES, FARAHAT HAS NOW DECIDED TO STOP LOVING MONTREAL FROM AFAR, AND TO START CALLING IT HOME.



OMAR
FARAHAT

How did you decide you wanted to become a law professor?

From very early on in my legal studies, I was fond of delving into complex theoretical questions. I thought I was going to go straight to graduate studies, obtain my doctorate, and teach either in France or in Egypt. But things rarely work out exactly in the way you plan. Because of compulsory military service in Egypt and the lack of funding, I couldn't start graduate studies right away, and so I went into corporate practice. When I arrived at Harvard as an LLM student, I thought of myself as a dedicated practitioner. But my experiences that year opened my eyes to a whole new intellectual universe that I found fascinating. I became interested in American legal theory, Continental philosophy, especially ethics, Islamic philosophy, theology, and law. That was the time when I knew I was going to be an academic. I did an MA at New York University to attempt to sort out those various intellectual trajectories, and found that Islamic legal theory was the field that combined all my different interests, and that is what I focused on in my PhD at Columbia.

What excites you most about moving to Montreal?

My wife and I have been fond of Montreal for nearly a decade. When we met back in 2008, she was doing her Master's in Economics at Queen's University, and I was about to start a job at a law firm in Paris. In the year that followed, Montreal became our preferred meeting place. We experienced and loved the city as visitors, and now we are excited to make it our home. We are a multicultural family, and Montreal is as multicultural as a city can get. We have two young children who are exposed to English, Russian, and Arabic at home, and soon French will probably be their main language. We think it is a perfect place for them to grow up, and for us to settle down and grow in our respective careers.

Why did you choose McGill Law?

I feel my diverse background, which combines research and practice in French, American, Middle Eastern, and Islamic laws, fits very nicely with McGill's emphasis on the comparative study of various legal systems. To me, an important part of legal education is to learn to understand the phenomenon of law as one among many human attempts to negotiate their life in a community. This approach makes it clear that the study of law evokes a wide range of deep questions about the world we live in and the human condition. In some legal cultures, these questions are dismissed as irrelevant to the practice of law. Not at McGill. I find the divide between theory and practice to often be artificial and unhelpful, and McGill is a great place to be if you are interested in questioning and crossing those boundaries.

What is the best piece of advice you ever received regarding your career?

My doctoral adviser always reminded me that "the world is one; everything is interconnected." Everything we do and say, even the most technical question of law, is part of a larger social and economic reality that has real implications on large numbers of people, and on our planet. We are often blinded by ambition and the pressures of life, which can make us desensitized and self-centred. You should continuously assess your career choices in relation to your community and the kind of impact you would like to have.