



Fifth Annual *Tabayyun* Symposium

Critique and Intellectual Debates in Contemporary Iran, Türkiye, and the Arab World

Culture, Philosophy, Theology and Gender

Doha, 21-22 April 2025

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About

Little scholarly exchange has taken place between Iran, Turkey and the Arab World in the last century. Scholars, intellectuals, and artists in each of these regions remain largely unfamiliar with the works of their counterparts in the other regions. Despite their geographical proximity and the profound transformations, they have undergone over the past century, these regions have not sufficiently benefited from intellectual exchanges and comparative studies, and forums that bring their thinkers together have been extremely rare.

This is a proposal to start a series of encounters between scholars from the three regions to take place in Doha especially on topics that are of prime importance to contemporary Iranian, Turkish and Arabic speaking intellectuals and publics, namely, culture, philosophy, theology and gender. These meetings will focus on fields of particular significance to intellectuals and the wider audience of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic speakers today, namely: culture, philosophy, theology (*kalām*), and gender studies.

This symposium seeks to provide a critical survey of intellectual history in Iran, Türkiye, and the Arab world. Specialists from each region will participate to present analytical discussions and critical approaches on the history of thought in their respective countries. The symposium will explore themes related to history and memory, power and identity, theology and religious thought in comparative contexts, transformations in feminist discourse, and intellectual freedom. Discussions will highlight the evolution of intellectual historiography in the three regions, examine the key intellectual debates that have shaped discourse, and raise questions about the central themes that should be prioritized in studying the intellectual history of these regions from a comparative perspective.

Through this symposium, *Tabayyun* contributes to shaping a research agenda that enables scholars in the three regions to benefit from their shared intellectual heritage, particularly given their cultural proximity and common modernization experiences. This symposium seeks to reconfigure the relationships between these intellectual spheres, which have often engaged with one another through an external mediator rather than through direct dialogue. This re-examination of their intellectual history and interwoven connections throughout the past century – especially since the 1950s – aims to foster new avenues of shared thought that can enrich the cultural landscape of the Arab world, Türkiye, and Iran alike.

This initiative falls within broader efforts to establish an academic network for intellectual dialogue among Iran, Türkiye, and the Arab world, promoting comparative research and contributing to redrawing the intellectual map of these regions, while opening new horizons for studying their intellectual history and major transformations.

About *Tabayyun*

Tabayyun is a peer-reviewed journal specialized in Philosophical Studies and Critical Theories published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. It holds the International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSN 2305-2465 / E-ISSN 2789-3278). The first issue was published in Autumn 2012, and the journal is released quarterly. *Tabayyun* has a specialized academic editorial board, an active international advisory board, and a recognized database of expert reviewers. The journal operates based on an ethical charter that governs its publication policies and its relationships with researchers and reviewers, ensuring the integrity and objectivity of the peer-review process.

Timetable

Day 1 - Monday, 21 April 2025

9:00-9:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Registration</p>
9:30-10:00	<p style="text-align: center;">Welcoming Remarks</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Abdelwahab El-Affendi (President of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Raja Bahlul (Editor-in-Chief of <i>Tabayyun</i>)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab (Symposium coordinator)</p>
10:00-11:00	<p style="text-align: center;">Session One</p> <p style="text-align: center;">History, Memory, and Cultural Space: Transformations of Thought in Iran, Türkiye, and the Arab World</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab</p> <p>Zeynep Direk: The Hauntology of the Past in Türkiye: The Intellectual Debates over the Revolution of Letters</p> <p>Franck Mermier: Competing Definitions of the "Cultural Area" Notion of Arab World in Anthropology and the Social Sciences</p>
11:00-11:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Break</p>
11:30-13:00	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Two</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Power and Identity in Iran and Türkiye: Transformations of Colonialism, Sovereignty, and Societal Conflicts</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Bassel Salloukh</p> <p>Jihane Sfeir: What is an Archival Document in the Middle East?</p> <p>Yael Navaro*: Inter- and Intra-Racisms in Türkiye: Tracing the Field between Genocide Studies, Minoritarian Scholarship, and Migration Studies</p> <p>Fatemeh Sadeghi: Revisiting <i>Taghallub</i>: Islamism, Domination, and Political Legitimacy</p>

* Participating via Zoom.

13:00-14:30	Lunch Break
14:30-15:30	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Three</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Theology and Religious Thought in Arab, Turkish, and Iranian Contexts: Transformations and Critical Perspectives</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Raja Bahlul</p> <p>Mitri Raheb: The Development and Expansion of Palestinian Liberation Theology</p> <p>Ömer Özsoy: The Adventure of the Debate on the Quran in Türkiye: Backgrounds, Arguments, and Methodologies</p>

Day 2 - Tuesday, 22 April 2025

<p>9:30-11:00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Four</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Transformations of Thought and Culture in the Arab and Islamic Worlds: Historical and Comparative Approaches</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Hiba Ghanem</p> <p>Cemil Aydin: Re-United by the Shared Problem Space? The Transformation of Turkish, Iranian, and Arab Intellectual Exchanges and Positions Regarding "Civilization" over a Century: 1870-1970</p> <p>Muhammed Nur Kaplan: The Debate on Sufism and Politics in Türkiye between Two Eras: The Sultanate and the Republic</p> <p>Firat Oruc: Comparative National Humanisms in Türkiye, Egypt, and Iran</p>
<p>11:00-11:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Break</p>
<p>11:30-12:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Five</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gender and Feminism: Critical Readings in the Arab and Islamic Experience</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Farah Aridi</p> <p>Katajun Amirpur: Islamic Feminism? What's in a name?</p> <p>Hoda Elsadda*: What Did Women Say? A Feminist Approach to the History of Arab Thought</p>
<p>12:30-14:00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Lunch Break</p>

* Participating via Zoom.

<p>14:00-15:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Six</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Freedom and Thought in Arab and Iranian Contexts: Debates in History and Politics</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Karim Sadek</p> <p>Hossein Dabbagh: From Anti-Imperialism to "Internal Imperialism": Rethinking Secularism in Post-Revolutionary Iran</p> <p>Zeynep Direk: Contemporary Issues in Turkish Feminism</p> <p>Pamela Karimi*: Crisis and Creativity: How Art Making in Turbulent Times Reshapes the Writing of Art History</p>
<p>15:30-16:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Session Seven</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Concluding Discussion</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shared Intellectual Traditions and Diverging Trajectories: The Future of Intellectual Exchange in the Middle East</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair: Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab</p>

* Participating via Zoom.

Participants

Abstracts



Zeynep Direk

Professor at the Philosophy Department at Koç University in Istanbul, Türkiye. She obtained her PhD from the University of Memphis in 1998 and was a faculty member at Galatasaray University from 1998 till 2014. She specializes in Phenomenology, Contemporary French Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, and the History of Turkish Thought. She edited with Leonard Lawlor *Derrida: Critical Assessments*, Routledge 2002 and *A Companion to Derrida*, Blackwell, 2014. She has authored several essays in Turkish, English, and French and has published three philosophy books in Turkish on contemporary European philosophy. She also published *Ontologies of Sex: Philosophy in Sexual Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

The Hauntology of the Past in Türkiye: The Intellectual Debates over the Revolution of Letters

Jacques Derrida, during his first visit to Istanbul in 1997, inquired about the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the signature underlying its political independence, and its connection to language and writing, particularly the alphabet reform, i.e., the transition from Arabic to Latin script. His letter to Catherine Malabou refers to Mustafa Kemal, whose ghostly presence accompanies Kemalist ideology and continues to be an object of attachment for a large portion of the population, despite the ongoing blows and contestations from political Islam and its problematization of cultural identity. My essay integrates Derrida's passing observations with Turkish intellectual debates, carried out throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, on the alphabet change and language reform. I examine the arguments made by cultural Islamists in the 20th century, who argued that people were losing their identity, their ways of thinking and making sense of things, and their memories. I visit the responses of late Ottoman historians, who document the arguments for switching to a new alphabet. Lastly, I look at the arguments in defence of the language reform. The voices in defence of the reform are remarkable in an era in which the cultural identity of the people is engineered by the manufacture of resentful feelings about the legacy of modern Türkiye. The ruling power seeks to portray the revolutions as traumatic to sow feelings of anger towards Türkiye's modern institutions, which were meant to nourish the democracy, thus facilitating the destruction of these institutions. Finally, I question if Derrida's remarks on nationalism and political revolutions in his corpus fit with the position he took on this political controversy over Turkish cultural identity and could be seen as an integral part of what he meant by "democracy to come".



Franck Mermier

Anthropologist and Senior Researcher at the CNRS (Institut de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur les Enjeux Sociaux, Campus Condorcet, Aubervilliers). He obtained his PhD in Anthropology in 1988 (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris). His research focuses on urban societies and cultural production in the Arab region. He was the Director of the French Center for Yemeni Studies in Sana'a from 1991 to 1997, and he held the post of Director for Contemporary Studies at IFPO (French Institute for the Near East, Beirut) from 2005 to 2009.

Competing Definitions of the "Cultural Area" Notion of Arab World in Anthropology and the Social Sciences

The political context and the ideological conceptions of pan-Arab inspiration contained in expressions such as "Arab nation", "Arab homeland" or "Arab society", have influenced certain orientations of research aiming to define the constituents of Arab identity. Some features considered specific to the Arab region, whether they emanate from its ethnic and religious pluralism or from its forms of social and political organization, have thus given rise to attempts at global explanation, from the "mosaic" model that appeared in the 1950s to the anthropology of "Arab-Majority societies", via "Arab marriage" and "neo-patriarchy". The expansion of research into new areas of the Arab region, whether in urban societies, in the Gulf countries or in the territories of exile, has led to a diversification and decompartmentalization of themes and theoretical approaches. Since 2011, Revolutions and wars in the Arab region have stimulated the elaboration of theoretical frameworks to grasp this new political context with the use of the Khaldounian notion of "asabiyya". My presentation focuses on the heuristic scope of the research that has developed on this region, as well as on the concomitant changes in the names and definitions of the Arab region. It also tackles the consequences of the revolutions and wars. Finally, it questions the relevance of the "Arab space" to include the space of communication that extends beyond the Arab region and includes the fluctuating geographies of exile.



Jihane Sfeir

Professor at Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and a historian of the Arab world. She teaches contemporary Arab history, the Ottoman Empire, and Euro-Mediterranean relations. Her research interests and teaching focus on Middle East history and politics generally and Palestine and Lebanon in particular. She is also the director and founder of the Observatory of the Arab and Muslim Worlds at the Maison des Sciences Humaines at the ULB. Her key publications include *Écrits politiques arabes – Une anthologie du Machrek au Maghreb au XXe siècle* (CNRS, 2022), *Archiver au Moyen-Orient. Fabriques documentaires contemporaines* (IISMM/Karthala, 2019), and *L'exil palestinien au Liban: le temps des origines 1947-1952* (IFPO/Karthala, 2008).

What is an Archival Document in the Middle East?

What is an archival document in the Middle East? How is it shaped, and how does it become effective? In this region, archives are not only tools of memory and identity, but they also reflect a renewal of historiographical practices. Thinking about archives means rethinking how memory is deconstructed, and how knowledge itself structures historical writing. What qualifies as an archive, or a "wathiqa", is at the heart of these reflections. This paper presents collective research exploring diverse archival forms across the Middle East. Examples include oral archives of the Nakba (Sfeir), photographic archives at the Arab Image Foundation (Depaule), and Ottoman administrative records on water management (Aymes). The study also addresses the disappearance of Lebanese state archives during the civil war (Raymond), the creation of fictitious archives through artistic performances (Baumann), and the National Archives building in Abu Dhabi (Camelin). This exploration examines where and how archives are created, preserved, or activated. It reveals how archives become objects of struggle, requiring the mobilization of institutions, experts, techniques, and technologies. By focusing not just on content but on archival practices themselves, the research invites us to reconsider the material forms of the past and the ways history is written and transmitted today.



Yael Navaro

Professor of Social, Political and Psychological Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Newnham College. She is the author of *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Türkiye* (Princeton University Press, 2002) and *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Duke University Press, 2012), and a co-editor of *Reverberations: Violence Across Time and Space* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021). Her work has been published in *Anthropological Theory*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *Cultural Anthropology*, and *New Perspectives on Türkiye*, among other journals. Between 2012 and 2016, she was the Principal Investigator of a European Research Council (ERC) project based on research in Türkiye.

Inter- and Intra-Racisms in Türkiye: Tracing the Field between Genocide Studies, Minoritarian Scholarship, and Migration Studies

In this paper, I discuss Arabophobia (racism against Arabs) in Türkiye. Most studies of racism in Türkiye have focused on non-Muslim or non-Turk minorities (Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Alevis, Kurds). And work on the Turkish-Arab interface has been mostly concentrated around (historical) Ottoman borderland or (anthropological/sociological) post-2011 Syrian migration studies. In this paper, I trace the field of racism studies on and about the Ottoman Empire and Türkiye between genocide studies, minoritarian scholarship, and migration studies. While doing so, I carve out a space for the study and critique of racism against Arabs in Türkiye based on my decade long anthropological fieldwork in Antakya, near Türkiye's border with Syria.



Fatemeh Sadeghi

Political Scientist focused on decolonizing political and feminist thought in the Global South, particularly in Iran and Afghanistan. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the UCL Institute for Global Prosperity, where she examines political imagination as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by nostalgia and reinterpretations of the past. She is currently completing *The Age of Appearance: Imaginary Politics in Contemporary Iran*, exploring the future-oriented dimensions of Iranian politics.

Revisiting *Taghallub*: Islamism, Domination, and Political Legitimacy

In this paper, I examine how Islamism engages with *taghallub* (forceful domination) – whether it ignores, underestimates, or actively reinvigorates it. A pivotal moment in this trajectory was in the early 20th century, when Ali Abdurraziq challenged the revival of *taghallub* amid nostalgia for the Khilafa (Caliphate). By reminding his contemporaries of its historical legacy, he underscored the intellectual significance of critiquing domination rather than legitimizing it. However, later Islamist thinkers, such as Ruhollah Khomeini and Abul A'la Maududi, reversed this approach. By framing power as an extension of divine sovereignty, they transformed *taghallub* from a political dilemma into a religious obligation, legitimizing absolute authority and subordinating political critique to theological justification. This presentation explores how Islamist discourse reinforced *taghallub*, not merely as a byproduct of governance but as its defining principle. By sacralising power, Islamism neutralizes resistance to domination, presenting it as essential to the Islamic state. This raises a critical question: does Islamism passively accept *taghallub*, or does it actively reassert it under divine rule? By revisiting this overlooked dimension of Islamist thought, I argue that the erasure of domination as a political problem has profound consequences for contemporary debates on power and legitimacy in Muslim societies.



Mitri Raheb

Founder and President of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem. Raheb is the author and editor of over 50 books that deal with modern Middle Eastern church history, and contextual theology, including his *latest Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible* (2023). His books and numerous articles have been translated into fifteen languages. Raheb received many awards, including an Honorary Doctor of Divinity from Wartburg Theological Seminary in 2022 and Honorary Doctorate from Concordia University in Chicago in 2003. Raheb holds a Doctorate in Theology from the Philipps University in Marburg, Germany.

The Development and Expansion of Palestinian Liberation Theology

In recent decades, various forms of Palestinian contextual Theologies have emerged and spread both within Palestine and internationally. Today, this theology is taught at numerous prestigious universities around the world. This paper will examine the factors that contributed to the development of these theological movements, focusing on their evolution over the past century, with particular emphasis on the last four decades. It will place these theological developments within the broader intellectual and political developments in Palestine and the wider region. In addition, the paper will explore the contributions of key theologians in this field, before introducing my own theological perspective, which interprets scripture through a geopolitical lens within the context of settler colonialism. The ongoing genocide in Gaza and the Israeli appropriation of the Old Testament for ethnic cleansing pose a critical challenge for theologians in general and Palestinian Christian theologians in particular, urging the development of a new theological paradigm, a Theology after Gaza.



Ömer Özsoy

Professor of Quranic Exegesis at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. He obtained his PhD in 1991 from Ankara University on the semantic interpretation of the Quran. Since 2006, he has lectured as a visiting professor at the universities of Vienna, Innsbruck, and Salzburg in Austria. He has led several research projects on reconstructing the dynamics of Quranic revelation, with one of his notable achievements being the digitization of al-Tabari's exegesis. His research interests focus on the history of the Quranic text, early manuscripts, the historicity of Quranic discourse, and Quranic hermeneutics.

The Adventure of the Debate on the Quran in Türkiye: Backgrounds, Arguments, and Methodologies

With the Kemalist revolution, the modern Turkish nation-state abandoned any application of Islamic law, provoking an intellectual shock that shaped the psychological context of religious thought in Türkiye and influenced major Quranic debates. Consequently, Sharia became the central focus of religious discussions in the early republican period, while *ijtihad* served as the conceptual framework governing these debates. The first discussions on the Quran emerged from the state's project to Turkify the language of worship and translate the Quran into Turkish, giving these debates a political rather than a purely scholarly or theological character. The second wave of Quranic debates appeared in the 1980s, influenced by the translations of works by Arab Islamic thinkers and Western Orientalists specializing in Islamic studies. Initially, various Quranic approaches were introduced within the broader discourse on Islam and modernity, but after 2000, the discussions shifted towards Quranic hermeneutics. Undoubtedly, the historicity of the Quran became the most heated topic in these debates. When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) pursued liberal policies, reformist interpretations of the Quran and historical approaches gained significant depth. However, over the past decade, as authoritarian and religious policies have taken hold, these approaches have been forced to retreat in favour of traditional interpretations. This study analyses current trends in Quranic understanding in Türkiye by examining their historical and political backgrounds, key arguments, and prominent figures, and offers an outlook for the trajectory of these debates.



Cemil Aydin

Professor of Global History at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's Department of History. He received his PhD from Harvard University in 2002 and his recent publications include *the Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2007); *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Harvard University Press, Spring 2017); and the chapter "Regions and Empires in the Political History of the World, 1750-1924" in *An Emerging Modern World, 1750-1870* (Harvard University Press, May 2018).

Re-United by the Shared Problem Space? The Transformation of Turkish, Iranian, and Arab Intellectual Exchanges and Positions Regarding "Civilization" over a Century: 1870-1970

Modern Arabic, Turkish and Iranian thought addressed a shared problem space defined by Eurocentric imperial hegemony legitimated by anti-Muslim Orientalist discourses from the 1870s to the 1950s. By looking at a long durée transformation of the civilizational ideas that united, separated and re-linked Turkish, Persian and Arab intellectuals of the 20th century, this paper aims to answer the following questions: How did civilizational ideals of humanism and world order become transformed from early 20th century globalist Muslim modernist goals to reform humanity afflicted with colonialism and racism, into its post-colonial versions? What opportunities and limitations did civilizationism provide in contemporary intellectual exchanges across Arabic, Turkish and Persian intellectual spheres? While highlighting the importance of problem space of Western hegemony during and after decolonization, I examine the changing political meanings of the civilizational notion of revival and authenticity of each national and religious community in from the 1970s onwards, contesting the association of civilizationism with Islamism. I also examine the impact of the enduring exclusionary sense of Western civilizational superiority that characterizes both the European Union project and transatlantic alliance on non-European polities in general, and with regard to Arab and Muslim societies in particular. Last but not least, I discuss the missed opportunities for conversation, historical amnesia, and blind spots in contemporary Arab, Turkish and Persian intellectual exchanges, to clarify the emancipatory critique and content of current intellectuals in making justice claims from an unequal world order.



Muhammed Nur Kaplan

Professor of Sufi Sociology and Trends in Anatolia and a faculty member at Karabük University, Türkiye. He obtained his PhD in 2021 and previously worked at several Turkish public universities and research centres. He has authored numerous books, including *Deconstructing the Foundations of Western Thought – A Critical Approach to Nietzsche's Reading of Greek Philosophy* (2020), *Citizenship in Syrian Curricula – An Evaluative Study of the Social Studies Textbook in Basic Education* (2017), *What is Being?* (2022), and *Abu al-Fath al-Awfi: His Life and Sufi Thought* (in Turkish, 2024). He has also published numerous research papers and articles in Arabic, Turkish, and English in peer-reviewed academic journals.

The Debate on Sufism and Politics in Türkiye between Two Eras: The Sultanate and the Republic

At the beginning of the 20th century, modern Türkiye underwent a major political transformation with the advent of its republican era. This shift not only ended a nine-century-long alliance between Sufism and political authority, removing Sufis from the public sphere and denying their historical roles in the country's past, but also regarded them as an obstacle to the realization of the new modern Turkish state. However, Turkish Sufi movements did not remain confined by this historical and political legacy. Instead, they adapted to the new republican reality by developing their intellectual and political strategies. After their failed implicit alliance with the Democratic Party and its leader Adnan Menderes (1950–1960), alternative Sufi groups (replacing traditional orders) sought to establish their own political parties by encouraging their followers to actively participate in politics. This involvement took two primary forms: First, the conservative Islamic movement, spearheaded by Necmettin Erbakan, who introduced Sufi-affiliated figures into parliament. Second, the liberal movement, led by Turgut Özal, who governed Türkiye from 1983 to 1993 and was a disciple of Mehmet Zahid Kotku, the leader of the Iskender Pasha Sufi order. Following the failure of the postmodern coup of 1997, orchestrated by the military against the legitimate government, and with changing global dynamics, Sufi groups found renewed influence. Since 2002, with the conservative movement in power, these groups have continued to shape the political landscape in Türkiye, albeit in a discreet and indirect manner.



Firat Oruc

Associate Professor at Georgetown University in Qatar. He holds a PhD in Literature from Duke University. His publications include "Rewriting the Legacy of the Turkish Exile of Comparative Literature: Nationalism and Philology in Türkiye, 1933-1946" (*Journal of World Literature*) and "Translated Humanism and the Making of Modern Türkiye" (*The Routledge Handbook on Turkish Literature*). He also contributed to *Global Histories and Practices of Islamophobia* with a chapter titled "Islam as Founding Fear: Turkish National Humanism and 'the Muslim Orient'." His current work examines how national humanism has been articulated through literary and intellectual discourses to shape national imaginaries in the region.

Comparative National Humanisms in Türkiye, Egypt, and Iran

The concept of national humanism encapsulates a commensurable translatability of national particularity and human universality into one another. Yet the onto-theology of national humanism, as Derrida reminds us, is always aporetic. Can there be a nation before humanism? By the same token, can there be a humanism before the nation? Which one precedes the other? In translational terms, which one is the source and which one the target text? This paper focuses on key national humanists from Türkiye, Egypt, and Iran to explore these questions through a framework of comparative intellectual history. I discuss the work of the major ideologues of this discourse who envisioned a new paradigm of self-discovery and cultural renaissance that would place the homeland in a unique position in the presumed historical progress of world civilization. The discourse of humanism, I argue, was embraced to affirm a new national ontology in the idioms of vitalism.



Katajun Amirpur

Scholar of Islamic Studies. Since 2018, she has been Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Cologne. Previously, she held positions at the University of Hamburg and the University of Zurich. She completed her PhD in 2000 at the University of Bamberg and her habilitation in 2010 at the University of Bonn. Amirpur has received several awards, including the 2021 Reuchlin Prize and the 2018 Tolerance Prize of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. She is a prolific author, with numerous publications on Islamic theology, Iranian politics, and gender issues in Islam.

Islamic Feminism? What's in a name?

Islamic feminism initially sounds like a contradictory idea. How can one be simultaneously feminist and live according to what the Islamic faith supposedly prescribes for women? This question likely arose nowhere more urgently than in Iran, given that it is a self-proclaimed Islamic Republic. While women had donned headscarves in 1978/79 to protest the former regime, as a symbol of resistance against an oppressive system, these women were betrayed as the Islamic Republic brought unfreedom in the name of Islam. Thus, feminism had to fight for feminist ideals using the Quran, and Islamic feminism emerged in Iran. However, women writing outside Iran, such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, had been making stronger arguments for decades. Important for the Iranian context is that the struggle for women's rights is no longer perceived as just a fight by women for particular interests. Women's problems not only concern women; it's about the bigger picture. Islamic feminism has managed to create this connectivity, according to the author's thesis, in a traditionally patriarchal society. While Islam is not fundamentally necessary to justify equality, it can help underpin the endeavour. Through it, many who were previously opposed to women's rights have been convinced over the past decades. They no longer see women's rights as something that must be discussed someday when the great utopia of democracy is achieved. Instead, they view them as the first step, after which everything else can develop.



Hoda Elsadda

Feminist activist and Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cairo University, as well as a co-founder of the Women and Memory Forum. She previously served as Professor of Contemporary Arab World Studies at the University of Manchester (2005–2011), Co-Director of the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World in the UK, and a Visiting Scholar at Georgetown University (2014–2015). Her publications include: *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt 1892–2008* (2020). Co-editor of *Oral History in Times of Change: Gender, Documentation, and the Making of Archives* (2018). Author of *The Humanities in the Arab World in Times of Conflict and Change*, published by the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (2023).

What Did Women Say? A Feminist Approach to the History of Arab Thought

Discussions on the major issues that have faced Arab societies in modern times have always been closely linked to the question of women, their status, and their role in post-independence states. The question emerged alongside the question of modernization, then the struggle for liberation from colonialism. Over the course of more than a century, debates about women's rights in Arab societies have consistently been entangled with the region's complex relationship with the West, the need to preserve cultural identity, and opposition to Western intellectual dominance, among other issues. Women were never absent from the cultural scene; they actively engaged with the dominant ideas presented by Arab intellectuals who played a major role in shaping modern Arab thought. However, their dissenting or critical views were often ignored or sidelined. For example, Malak Hifni Nasif (1886–1918) disagreed with Qasim Amin and criticized the binary opposition between authenticity and modernity in Nahda thought. Similarly, Doria Shafik (1908–1975) rejected the framing of women's issues within the discourse of identity and insisted on addressing freedom and democracy, thus adopting a political approach to the woman question. This ultimately led to her exclusion from the political sphere. In short, the exclusion of women's contributions in shaping alternative discourses in Arab intellectual history has been one of the key factors hindering the process of critical self-reflection, which is essential for the evolution of Arab thought. In this presentation, I trace the contributions of women to Arab thought in the 20th century, with a particular focus on the work of contemporary female scholars in the 21st century, who are critically re-examining Arab cultural history from a feminist and emancipatory perspective.



Hossein Dabbagh

Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Northeastern University London and a Philosophy Tutor at the University of Oxford. His research spans moral philosophy, practical ethics (biomedical and AI ethics), political philosophy, and public policy. Among his current projects is an examination of Islamic political theology, focusing on how theological frameworks evolve in response to sociopolitical challenges. He critically engages with questions of secularism, theocratic governance, and the impact of technology on democracy and human rights. His work addresses the philosophical tensions between religious traditions and modern governance, especially in post-revolutionary Iran.

From Anti-Imperialism to "Internal Imperialism": Rethinking Secularism in Post-Revolutionary Iran

How did Iranian intellectual debates shift from anti-imperialism to critiques of "internal imperialism"? This paper explores the evolving tension between secularism and theocratic governance in post-revolutionary Iran, particularly in light of the Women, Life, Freedom movement. After the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic institutionalized Twelver Shi'ism within its legal and political framework, embedding theocracy at the heart of governance. However, recent protests reveal growing opposition to religious rule, especially among women and younger generations, who increasingly advocate for a clearer separation between religion and state. By engaging in historical, philosophical, and sociopolitical analysis, I ask: Is a secular Iran possible and desirable? I will examine the complex relationship between secularism and imperialism, as well as the intellectual and political origins of scepticism toward secularism within Iranian society. While anti-imperialist rhetoric (Gharbzadegi) once dominated Iranian intellectual circles, its prominence waned after the Iran-Iraq War, as critiques of authoritarianism turned inward. For example, in the 1990s, the Kiyān circle moved beyond resisting Western hegemony to questioning theocratic despotism – what might be described as "internal imperialism". This intellectual shift recognised that oppression is not solely external but also embedded within religious governance itself. I argue that secularism in Iran is not merely a foreign imposition but an indigenous response to the systematic exclusion of religious and non-religious minorities from the public sphere. By reframing secularism as a tool for inclusion rather than a relic of colonialism, this paper contributes to broader discussions on democracy, pluralism, and the future of governance in Iran.



Pamela Karimi

Associate Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Cornell University. Her expertise lies primarily in the art, architecture and visual culture of the modern and contemporary Middle East. She is the author of *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (2013) and *Alternative Iran: Contemporary Art and Critical Spatial Practice* (2022).

Crisis and Creativity: How Art Making in Turbulent Times Reshapes the Writing of Art History

In recent decades, the Middle East has faced a multitude of crises, ranging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to the Green Revolution, the Arab Spring, the rise of ISIS, and, more recently, the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising in Iran and the ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon. Despite the turmoil, many artists have continued to create, using their art not only as a form of expression but also as a tool for activism. For many, art has become intertwined with political action, serving as both a personal and public response to oppression and violence. As art historians, we are tasked with documenting these practices, but this raises important questions: How should we narrate the stories of these artists working amid crises? What ethical and critical dimensions must we consider when turning these contemporary events into historical narratives? How do these urgent, real-time responses to conflict shape the evolving field of contemporary art history? This presentation draws from my recent research on artistic responses to crises in Iran, addressing these pressing questions. I outline the challenges of documenting such work, the methodologies used, and the ethical considerations involved. Additionally, I discuss the importance of swift responses and writing in times of crisis, and how art history can amplify messages of care, solidarity, and humanity in moments of war, injustice, and conflict. This exploration underscores the vital role that art history plays not just in reflection, but in action, during the most turbulent of times.

Session Chairs

Bassel Salloukh

Associate Dean and Professor of Political Science at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He obtained his PhD and MA in Political Science from McGill University in Canada. His areas of specialization and research interests include comparative politics (the Global South and the Middle East), political philosophy, and international relations. His current research focuses on critiquing forms of power-sharing in postcolonial and post-conflict states, as well as the political economy of postwar Lebanon. He has co-authored and co-edited several books, including *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, *Beyond the Arab Spring*, and *Mapping the Political Landscape: An Introduction to Political Science*.

Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab

Associate Professor in the Philosophy Program since September 2016 and its Chair from February 2017 to August 2018. She has taught modern and contemporary Arabic philosophy, contemporary Arab political philosophy, gender in the Middle East, and the history of liberation thought. She also coordinated the college course on issues in social sciences and humanities. She is a member of the editorial boards of *Tabayyun* and *Qalamoun* journals, a founding member of the Brill book series "Currents of Modern Thought", and an elected member of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences. She holds degrees from the American University of Beirut and the University of Fribourg and has taught philosophy in Lebanon. She has also been a visiting professor and researcher at Yale, Columbia, Berlin, and other universities. Her publications include *Enlightenment on the Eve of Revolution* (2019) and *Contemporary Arab Thought* (2010), with a new edition set to be released in April 2025.

Farah Aridi

Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research interests include spatial literary studies, city literature, the processes of (re-)production and appropriation of space in literature, as well as the quotidian, the practice of everyday life, issues of spatial justice, and the right to the city. She is currently working on issues and theories in textuality, specifically textuality of space and the spatiality of the text. She is interested in alternative and transgressive readings of city spaces in cultural and literary production, with emphasis on positionality and subjectivity in acts of reading and theorising.

Hiba Ghanem

Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. Her academic career spans multiple institutions, including the Lebanese American University, where she is a faculty member in the Department of English, and the Lebanese University, where she teaches English Language and Literature. She is also affiliated with Lancaster University, as a member of the Department of Politics, Philosophy, and Religion

(PPR). Her research interests lie at the intersection of comparative literature, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary approaches to literature and philosophy.

Karim Sadek

Assistant Professor in the Philosophy Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. His research interests bridge critical social theory, Islamic political thought, democratic theory, and the ethics of argumentation. After earning his PhD in Philosophy from Georgetown University, Karim held research and teaching positions at various institutions, including the American University of Beirut, the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Boğaziçi University, Ibn Haldun University, Freie Universität Berlin, University College Dublin, and Marmara University.

Raja Bahlul

Professor and Head of the Philosophy Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of *Tabayyun*, published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. His work engages with questions of identity, scepticism, and the philosophical underpinnings of human rights and political sovereignty. He earned his PhD in Philosophy from Indiana University in 1983 and has held academic positions at various institutions, including Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Yarmouk University, Birzeit University – where he co-founded the MA Program in Democracy and Human Rights – and Qatar University. His forthcoming publications include *Scepticism about Other Minds*, *Wittgenstein and Logical Behaviourism*, *Modest Universalism about Human Rights*, *al-Razi's Cognitive Therapy*, and *Democracy and Popular Sovereignty*. His works have been published in both Arabic and English, with some translated into Italian.