

# SYMPOSIUM

CAREP Paris - Collège de France  
February 8 & 9 février 2023



Lecture Hall Maurice Halbwachs

## Thinking Arab humanities and social sciences:

contemporary production, circulation, and reception of knowledge

### Argument

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Since the end of the 18th century, if we take into account Volney's trip to Egypt and Syria, the humanities and social sciences (HSS) in the West have been interested in the Arab world. There are different approaches that can be defined either as a verification of theoretical hypotheses on the field or, on the contrary, as the formulation of theoretical hypotheses based on field research. Each of these approaches entails risks: on the one hand, the imposition of other realities on Arab societies, and on the other, the uncritical adoption of the discourse of Arab societies on themselves. These biases have been circumvented by the development of comparative approaches between several societies, including European ones.

The Arab revolutions of 2011 led to a re-evaluation of these different approaches insofar as they did not allow for a prediction of these movements and could not provide an immediate understanding of them (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2012). Moreover, few European researchers have examined the impact of these uprisings on Arab HSS (Catusse, Signoles and Siino, 2015). Seen from an actor perspective, the 2011 uprisings have brought about analyses rooted in the realities on the ground and given Arab scholars a voice in the production of narratives about their own societies (Bayat, 2021).

In this context, thinking about HSS in the Arab world means first thinking about the transfer of Western produced concepts and skills but also their reappropriation on the ground. It comes as evidence that the authoritarian context restrains the production of knowledge. At the same time, the State itself has become a producer of statistical information that is essential for its management and has needed interpretations of these data. Arab social sciences are thus caught between theoretical models largely borrowed from outside (which differed according to their place of origin) and state control seeking to limit the role of HSS to a simple technical and apolitical exploitation of statistical data.

So, can we then speak of "Arab HSS" as an entity of its own? Indeed, the production of ideas and knowledge in Arab HSS varies greatly from one country to another. While the Gulf countries are marked by an Anglo-Saxon heritage, the Maghreb region borrows more from the French conception of social sciences (El Kenz, 2006). Consequently, a fragmented research landscape emerges, which not only disconnected from societal concerns, but also from universities as the emblematic place of knowledge production. Other centers of knowledge production less linked to state authorities, such as think tanks or scholarly associations, have come to impose themselves on the Arab HSS landscape for at least two decades. Private donors play nowadays a major role in the funding of social sciences, sometimes favoring the rise of consultants over that of researchers.

This trend towards private funding has witnessed an increase following the events of 9/11. It was followed by the emergence of the idea that social sciences ought to be politically "useful". The American failure to democratize first Afghanistan and then Iraq "from the outside", translated into a greater eagerness of foreign donors and foundations (especially American ones) to fund HSS training in Arab countries, with the clear objective of forming a "knowledge society" (UNDP, 2003) able to complete the democratization process "from within". This is how the emergence in 2006 of the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS) in Beirut, funded by the Ford Foundation, the International Development Research Center of Canada, and the Swedish International Development Agency, should be understood.

In parallel, initiatives funded and led exclusively by Arab actors have also emerged, as shown by the creation of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha in 2010, paving the way for new academic networks. The latter are more and more structured around transnational "communities" of researchers. While the analysis of funding channels undermines a strictly North-South interpretation, it also highlights the reproduction of structural inequalities and the emergence of new asymmetries between local and international researchers. This redefinition of the conditions of production of HSS also implies the need for the researcher to appropriate standardized normative frameworks and "ethical" principles that hinder creativity and academic freedom.

Thinking about Arab HSS also requires reflection on the reception of concepts and notions forged in the West and transferred into an Arab/Muslim context. The example of feminism shows the extent of the appropriation-reappropriation Dynamics of gender studies at the local level. If some Arab researchers simply take up the ideas from the West; others favor a more situated use of these concepts in line with the traditions of their societies (Mahmood, 2005).

The reception of HSS paradigms in the Arab world also depends on the language used, since the language itself is an instrument of power and domination (Bourdieu, 2014). The diversity of the languages and dialects in the Arab world also require us to reflect upon the existing "linguistic quarrels" within the Arab scientific community and their subsequent conceptual divergences. The Arabization of the Arab higher education system remains therefore at the center of concerns to promote the unity of "Arab HSS", as well as their dissemination internationally. The more the Arabic language will be used for research, the more academic work produced in Arabic will be translated and spread more widely (Jacquemond, 2007).

Globalization and the development of information and communication technologies have also made the dissemination debate enter the digital scape. Consequently, the arrival of online databases is important to study since they aim to largely democratize access to knowledge. Even if new Arabic databases have been created in recent years, Arabic language productions remain poorly represented in online open sources frequently used in the West.

Yet, these technological developments should not make us lose sight of the fact that the circulation of knowledge still also requires access to libraries, archives, and places for scientific discussion and exchange, which should be developed and encouraged through the mobility of students and researchers, as well as scientific cooperation between research institutions.

Beyond these questions, this conference also seeks to underline the importance of humanities and social sciences in the construction and knowledge of the Arab world and the complex relations they maintain with the Other, in particular the West.

## Indicative bibliography

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- LAHOUARI Addi, « Sciences sociales et débat intellectuel dans le monde arabe », *Revue des Sciences Sociales*, Faculté des Sciences Sociales de l'Université Mohamed Ben Ahmed Oran2, n° 6, 2018, pp. 15-36.
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# Preliminary programme (2 days)

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## DAY 1

9:00am | Arrival of participants

9:30am | Welcome speech by Henry LAURENS

9:45am – 10:15am | Keynote by Salam Kawakibi

10:15am – 10:30am | Coffee break

10:30am – 12:30pm | PANEL 1

**Knowledge Production in Arab social sciences: emergence, places and actors**  
Moderation & discussion by **Henry Laurens**

### Speakers:

- **Sari HANAFI, American University of Beirut:** *Arab Social Sciences: Actors, trends and paradigms*
- **Mehdi GHOURGATE, University of Bordeaux III:** *The place of the colonial in the construction of Arab SHS: the case of Ibn Khaldun*
- **Elizabeth KASSAB, Doha Institute:** *The impact of social sciences on contemporary Arab thought after 2011*
- **Abdelwahab EL-AFFENDI, Doha Institute:** *The Poverty of Political Science: Reflections on the Crisis of the Discipline in and about the Arab World*

12:30pm - 2:00pm | Lunch break

2:00pm - 4:00pm | PANEL 2

**Transnational circulations of Arab social sciences: networks and funding**  
Moderation & discussion by **Eberhard Kienle, CNRS**

### Speakers:

- **Thomas BRISSON, CNRS:** *Arab intellectuals in Paris, social sciences, and orientalism: logics and strategies of a scientific debate (1950-1970)*
- **Rigas ARVANITIS, IRD:** *Impact of funding on social science research in the Arab world*
- **Agnès FAVIER, European University Institute:** *Networking researchers: opportunities and limits of transnational circulation*
- **Mohammed BAMYEH, University of Pittsburgh:** *Thinking about knowledge in Revolutionary Times: the experience of the Arab Council for Social Sciences*

### 4:00pm - 6:00pm | PANEL 3

**Receptions of knowledge: between mimicry, (re)appropriation and contestation**  
Moderation & discussion by **Leyla DAKHLI, CNRS**

#### Speakers:

- **Sonia DAYAN-HERZBRUN, University of Paris 7:** *Out of place: Arab and Muslim women, subjects of their own history*
- **Hoda ELSADDA, Cairo University:** *Women and gender studies in the Arab world: A geopolitical approach*
- **Zahra ALI, Rutgers University:** *Feminist knowledge in Iraq: Transnational and postcolonial approaches*
- **Rola EL HUSSEINI, Lund University:** *The instrumentalisation of gender by Arab authoritarian regimes*

## DAY 2

9:00am | Arrival of participants

### 9:30am - 11:00am | PANEL 4

**Translating social sciences from and into Arabic**  
Moderation & discussion by **Rania SAMARA, Professor of literature and translation**

#### Speakers:

- **Lamiss AZAB, Sciences Po:** *From one language to another: translating concepts, apprehending fieldwork*
- **Richard JACQUEMOND, CNRS:** *Arab policies to support translation in the humanities and social sciences*
- **Nibras CHEHAYED, IFPO:** *Translating the untranslatable: the case of the “Vocabulaire européen des philosophies”*

### 11:00am - 12:30pm | PANEL 5

**Arab social sciences in the digital age**  
Moderation & discussion by **Mercedes VOLAIT, CNRS**

#### Speakers:

- **David WRISLEY, NYU Abu Dhabi:** *The place of digital humanities in the Arab world: stakes, actors, and implementations*
- **Mohamed BEN ROMDHANE, Université of Manouba:** *Open access to social science research in the Arab world*
- **Aze-Eddine BOUCHIKHI, Doha Institute:** *Digital technology at the service of local knowledge: the case of the historical dictionary of the Arabic language*

12:30pm - 1:00pm |

**CONCLUSION** by **Henry Laurens**

1:00pm - 2:30pm | Lunch

## Biographies of participants

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### EL-AFFANDI, Abdelwahab

President of the Doha Institute of Advanced Studies since September 2020, Abdelwahab el-Affendi previously served as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Head of the Political Science and International Relations Programme at the Institute (2015-2017). He was also a lecturer and coordinator of the Democracy and Islam programme at the University of Westminster. A former diplomat at the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1990-1997), Abdelwahab el-Affendi also worked as a journalist in London, where he was director and editor of several publications (1982-1990).

### ALI, Zahra

Zahra Ali is a sociologist and Assistant Professor at Rutgers University-Newark, her research explores dynamics of women and gender, social and political movements, in relation to Islam(s), the Middle East, and contexts of war and conflict with a focus on contemporary Iraq. She is interested in empire, (racial) capitalism, (post)coloniality, transnational feminisms as well as critical knowledge production and epistemologies. Ali is the author of *Women and Gender in Iraq* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and co-author of *Decolonial Pluriversalism* (Rowman & Littlefield, Creolizing the Canon series, forthcoming with Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun).

### ARVANITIS, Rigas

Rigas Arvanitis is a research director at IRD, sociologist, member, and director (since 2019) of Ceped (IRD-Université Paris Descartes). He has field experience in Latin America (Venezuela and Mexico), China and Arab countries. He is a founding member of the Institut Francilien Recherche Innovation et Société (IFRIS) and was its director from 2015 to 2018. He was editor-in-chief (2007-2014) of the *Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances*. He was posted in Lebanon to the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon (CNRS-L) and a visiting professor at the American University of Beirut (AUB) where he led a project on knowledge production in the Arab World with Sari Hanafi. Previously, his work focused on the technological learning of firms and the study of technology transfer, research and innovation policies and economic development. He is interested in the modes of financing research, the transformations of research systems in the South and the forms of scientific collaboration.

### AZAB, Lamiss

Politician, translator, academic advisor at the Paris School of International Affairs.

### BEN ROMDHANE, Mohamed

Mohamed Ben Romdhane graduated in Information and Communication Sciences from the University Jean-Moulin Lyon 3 in 2001. Since 2001, he has been appointed as a researcher at the Institut Supérieur de Documentation at the University of Manouba, Tunisia. His research focuses on the open access movement in general, and particularly in the Arab world. To this end, he organized an international symposium on open access ICOA in 2014 and 2016 in Tunisia and in 2018 in Morocco. His research work is also oriented towards digital reading and structuring of digital scientific and educational documents.

### BAMYEH, Mohammed

Mohammed Bamyeh is currently the chair of the Board of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS), and a professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh (USA). He is the author or editor of 12 books in such areas as the sociology of knowledge, Islamic studies, social movements, and

voluntary life. Parts of his work have appeared in Arabic, Turkish, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Korean translations.

### BOUCHIKHI, Aze-Eddine

Aze-Eddine Bouchikhi worked as deputy dean for academic research and cooperation in Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Morocco, and served as a director of the Doctoral Studies Center, director of the Academic Center for Teaching Arabic Language and Civilization, director of the Lab for Applied and Computational Linguistics, head of the Arabic Language Department, and pedagogical coordinator for the Arabic Studies track. He is now the executive director of the ACRPS Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language project in Doha. Bouchiki received his doctorate with distinction in linguistics (on pragmatics and functional linguistics) in 1988 from Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Morocco.

### BRISSON, Thomas

Thomas Brisson is a professor of political science at the University of Paris 8 and a researcher at Cresppa-LabTop (CNRS Paris). He is the author of *Les intellectuels arabes en France. Migrations et échanges intellectuels* (2008) and *Décentrer l'Occident. Les intellectuels chinois, arabes et indiens et la critique de la modernité occidentale* (2018).

### CHEHAYED, Nibras

Nibras Chehayed is a researcher at the French Near East Institute (Ifpo) in Lebanon. He has published philosophical, aesthetic, and literary studies such as *La destructivité en œuvres. Essai sur l'art syrien contemporain* (2021, with Guillaume de Vaultx) and *Le corps aux fils de l'écriture. Nietzsche après Derrida* (2020), and has edited collections such as *Mots de chair et de sang. Écrire le corps en Syrie* (2022, with Emma Aubin-Boltanski) and *Images de chair et de sang. Penser le corps en Syrie* (2021). He is currently working on the translation of the encyclopedic dictionary of European philosophical lexicon, the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*.

### DAKHLI, Leyla

Leyla Dakhli is a historian specializing in the intellectual and social history of the contemporary Arab world. She is a research fellow at the French National Research Council, assigned to the *Centre d'Histoire sociale des mondes contemporains* (Aubervilliers). After a thesis on Syrian-Lebanese intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century, published under the title *Une Génération d'intellectuels arabes. Syrie-Liban, 1908-1940* (Karthala, 2009), she has devoted herself to work on women's mobilisations and feminism. Her analyses of intellectual worlds have also led her to take an interest in forms of belonging to nations and identities, for example by exploring the question of intellectual diasporas and writing languages through the worlds of the American Mahjar. She has published two syntheses on the contemporary Middle East (*Histoire du Proche-Orient contemporain, "Repère"* La Découverte, 2015; *Le Moyen Orient fin XIXe-XXe siècle*, éditions du Seuil, 2016). Since 2018 she has been leading a research project on revolts and revolutions in the Arab world since the 1950s (ERC-CO DREAM, [Drafting and Enacting the revolution in the Arab Mediterranean](#)). She has recently published *L'Esprit de la révolte. Archives et actualité des révolutions arabes* (Seuil, 2020) and, with Amin Allal, Layla Baamara and Giulia Fabbiano, *Cheminevements révolutionnaires. Un an de mobilisations en Algérie (2019-2020)* (CNRS éditions, 2021).

### DAYAN-HERZBRUN, Sonia

Professor emeritus in political sociology and feminist studies at the University of Paris-Cité. Author of numerous books and articles, she is the director of the French academic journal *Tumultes* and is a member of the editorial board of *En attendant Nadeau*. Amongst her latest publications, figure



*Rien qu'une vie* (Hémisphères, June 2022) and *L'impensé colonial des sciences sociales* (in collaboration with Aïssa Kadri), Tumultes/Kimé, October 2022.

## ELSADDA, Hoda

Hoda Elsadda is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cairo University, a feminist activist for women's rights. She co-founded in 1995 the [Women and Memory Forum](#). Her research interests are in the areas of gender studies, comparative literature, and oral history. She is author of *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt: 1892-2008* (Edinburgh UP and Syracuse UP, 2012); and co-editor of *Oral History in Times of Change: Gender, Documentation and the Making of Archives* (Cairo Papers, 35:1, 2018).

## FAVIER, Agnès

Agnès Favier is a Part-time Professor at the Middle East Directions Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute (EUI, Florence, Italy). She leads the Syria Initiative; she is the scientific advisor of the Syrian Trajectories project (2022-2023) and was the project director of the Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria (WPCS) project (2018-2022). Favier is a political scientist who specializes in comparative politics and conflicts in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Lebanon and Syria. She has been working on social and political transformations in Syria after 2011. Her research interests include social movements and youth mobilizations, local governance and political elites, armed conflict, and conflict resolution. Previously she has been a senior researcher at the French Near East Institute (Ifpo, Beirut), and postdoctoral researcher at College de France (Paris).

## GHOUIRGATE, Mehdi

Mehdi Ghouirgate is a lecturer at the University of Bordeaux-Montaigne. In addition to his doctorate, he holds a Habilitation to direct research obtained at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 2019. He is a specialist in the history of the Muslim West (Maghreb and al-Andalus) during the medieval and modern periods. He is committed to revisiting this history from a resolutely multidisciplinary approach that calls upon, among others, anthropology, economics, military history and demography. He is also the author of numerous books and articles published in internationally refereed journals, mainly in French but also in English and Spanish. He has also been invited to give courses and lectures at universities in the United States, China, Spain and Morocco.

## HANAFI, Sari

Sari Hanafi is Professor of Sociology, Director of the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies and Chair of the Islamic Studies Program at the American University of Beirut. He is the President of the International Sociological Association and was Vice President of the Arab Council for Social Sciences. He is also the editor-in-chief of *Idafat: The Arab Journal of Sociology*. He received his PhD from EHESS in 1994 and subsequently studied in Italy, Norway and Egypt. He is the author of numerous articles and 18 books including *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East* (with A. Salvatore and K. Obuse) and *Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The Impossible Promise* (with R. Arvanitis). In 2019, he received an honorary doctorate from the National University of San Marcos. His book in preparation, *Ethics, religion, and dialogical sociology*, offers a reflection on growing religiosity in different geographical spaces, and is situated at the intersection of political sociology and moral philosophy.

## EL-HUSSEINI, Rola

Rola El-Husseini is an associate professor in the department of political science at Lund University, that she has joined in September 2017. She holds a PhD from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France and was a postdoctoral fellow at Yale University. She has extensive work experience in the US and has held teaching and/or research positions at Texas



A&M University, CUNY-Graduate Center, and George Washington University. Her first book *Pax Syriana: Elite Politics in Post-war Lebanon* was published by Syracuse University Press in 2012. She is currently writing a book manuscript on women's political representation in eight Middle Eastern states since the Arab uprisings.

### JACQUEMOND, Richard

Richard Jacquemond is professor of modern Arabic language and literature and director (2018-23) at IREMAM (Aix-Marseille University and CNRS, Aix-en-Provence). He is a specialist of Egyptian literature (*Entre scribes et écrivains. Le champ littéraire dans l'Égypte contemporaine*, 2003 ; co-edited with Frédéric Lagrange: *Culture pop en Égypte. Entre mainstream commercial et contestation*, 2020), and has translated more than 20 books, almost all by Egyptian authors. His research also focuses on the traditional exchanges between Arabic and other languages (numerous articles published on the subject since 1992).

### KASSAB, Elizabeth Suzanne

Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab studied philosophy at the American University of Beirut and the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). She taught in Lebanon at the American University of Beirut and Balamand University and has been a Visiting Professor at several universities in Europe and the US, including Bonn, Columbia, Yale, and Brown. Her research interests center on Western and post-colonial philosophies of culture, with a particular focus on contemporary Arab thought and philosophy. She has received the 2013 Sheikh Zayed Book Award in Abu Dhabi in the category of "Contribution to the Development of Nations" for the Arabic version of her book *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (Columbia University Press, 2010). Her latest book entitled *Enlightenment on the Eve of Revolution. The Egyptian and Syrian Debates* (Columbia University Press, 2019) has also been translated into Arabic. Since 2016 she is Associate Professor of philosophy at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar.

### KAWAKIBI, Salam

Political science and international relations researcher. Director, Paris office, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies (CAREP Paris). Deputy Director and Research Director in Arab Reform Initiative – ARI, France (2007 – 2017). Salam Kawakibi is the co-founder of The Day After: Supporting a Democratic Transition in Syria organisation, senior fellow at Syrian Studies Centre in Saint Andrews University, co-founder and member of the advisory board of the Mediterranean Citizens' Assembly Foundation (MCAF), member of the board of the Institute for Arab World and Mediterranean Research and Studies in Paris, and a member of the scientific committee of Confluences, the Paris magazine focusing on the Mediterranean region. In 2009 – 2011, Mr. Kawakibi was the senior researcher in the Department of Political Science in the University of Amsterdam. Before that, in 2000-2006, he served as the director of the French Near East Institute (Ifpo) in Aleppo.

### KIENLE, Eberhard

Eberhard Kienle is *Directeur de recherche* (Research Professor) at the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS)* in Paris teaches politics at SciencesPo Paris. He previously managed the governance portfolio at the Ford Foundation Cairo officer and served as director of the *Institut français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo, French Near East Institute)* in Beirut. Thematically his interests include economic and social policies, the transformation of political regimes, as well as the erosion and disintegration of contemporary states. Geographically he has focused on Egypt and the Fertile Crescent. His publications include *Ba'th versus Ba'th: The conflict between Syria and Iraq, 1968-1989* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1990), *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2001), and *Egypt: A Fragile Power* (London, Routledge, 2022).

## LAURENS, Henry

Henry Laurens holds a doctorate in history and is recognised as one of the leading specialists on the Middle East. Henry Laurens is a professor at the Collège de France (head of the chair of Contemporary History of the Arab World) and at Inalco (the French National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations). He was also director of the Centre for Studies and Research on the Contemporary Middle East (CERMOC) in Beirut and then scientific director of the French Near East Institute (Ifpo). Henry Laurens is particularly interested in the study of relations between Israel and the Arab world. In 2004, he received the Joseph du Theil Prize from the Académie des Sciences morales et politiques, as well as the Franco-Arab Friendship Prize from the Association de solidarité franco-arabe. Henry Laurens is the author of numerous books.

## SAMARA, Rania

Rania Samara is professor of literature and translation at the University of Damascus and founder of the Centre for Applied French Language. Associate professor at the Sorbonne nouvelle in translation and Arabic literature and co-director of the Arabic literature seminar at the IISMM/EHESS. She is also advisor to the IOF for the translation prize and to the Geneva Book Fair for Arabic literature, and had translated into French some thirty novels, collections of short stories and poetry and plays.

## VOLAIT, Mercedes

Mercedes Volait is an art historian, specialist in contemporary Egypt, research director at the CNRS and co-pilot of the Huma-Num consortium DISTAM (Digital studies Africa Asia Middle East) hosted by the Ariel Studies unit of the Campus Condorcet.

## WRISLEY, David

David Joseph WRISLEY is a tenured Professor of Digital Humanities at New York University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Graduated in Romance Languages and Literature with a specialization in Medieval Literature, Wrisley is an expert in the application of digital humanities tools and methods in multilingual and non-English speaking contexts. His current research interests include the development of handwriting recognition models and applications of machine learning to the study of archival sources. He is also interested in the acquisition of data from historical corpora, especially proper names. For over 20 years he has been actively engaged in interdisciplinarity and collaboration in the Arab world. He was a professor at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon) between 2002-2016. He has collaborated with different research teams in Canada, Germany, Latin America, and Arab countries, where he has created and presented numerous courses related to the field of digital humanities. He also co-leads the [OpenGulf](#) research team.