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Article

# Pluralism and Tolerance in Arab and Mediterranean Societies

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## **A set of international symposia and schools on religious pluralism, education and political liberties**

What would be the appropriate response to the rise of rigorist strands of Islamic thought in recent years? In 2018, the international association Reset Dialogues on Civilizations aimed to answer this question by launching the Reset Seminars on Pluralism in North Africa. These were part of a yearly international program on cultural and religious pluralism and political liberties. The purpose was to train forty emerging opinion leaders on the relationships between religion, history and power. The objective was twofold: to promote a local intellectual response to rising intolerance and to contribute to the reawakening of pluralistic traditions in Muslim contexts.

The critical tools provided by a wide range of social sciences were envisioned as the best means of addressing this complex agenda. From political philosophy to sociology and domestic law to theology, the organizers sought a variety of sociocultural perspectives. These included the diverse historical processes characterizing the contemporary world; institutions in Europe, North America and Muslim countries; juridical and constitutional law

and related political theories; the differences and shared traits that pluralist positions arise from; the variety of positions in the Islamic cadre; and the historicity of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and other religious denominations.

The Reset Seminars ran for four years and maintained a strong focus on impacts throughout this period. The academic teachings were complemented by project management tools to facilitate the embedment of learnings into the participants' daily work. The latter were also taught how to plan and apply new concepts and tools gained from the seminars in dedicated tutoring sessions. The impact of the project came from its pursuit of a unique combination of techniques that allowed the propagation of its teachings to students and the broader public in the region.

Recent speakers, faculty, and participants: Asma Afsaruddin, Massimo Campanini, Jocelyne Cesari, Khalid Hajji, Aziz Mechouat, and Abdulaziz Sachedina.

## The Casablanca Seminars of 2018: Sources of Pluralism in Islamic Thought



*Source: Hans Jurgen Weinhardt via Unsplash*

Held from July 9 to 11 in both 2018 and 2019, the Casablanca Seminars International Conference and Summer School brought an illustrious group of scholars together to contemplate the different approaches to pluralism within Islamic thought, from classical scholarship to the Quran and the Prophetic tradition to Sufism and modern political philosophy.

While several different topics were discussed, a central problematic anchored many of the discussions:

***While doctrinal or philosophical exclusivism rejects “the other” in theory — and frequently in practice, too — inclusivism connotes the accommodation and toleration of difference. But if that means the reluctant acceptance of difference within a hierarchy of world views, inclusion may not be enough to create more egalitarianism within modern multicultural societies. Modern pluralism might come to mean, instead, a robust appreciation of human diversity and values.***

Note: This international symposium was made possible via Reset DOC’s partnership with the King Abdul-Aziz Foundation and the Granada Institute for Higher Education and Research as well as support of the Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion in International Affairs, Nomis Foundation, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[Read more here](#)

## The Carthage Seminars on Cultural Pluralism and Political Liberties

From June 30 to July 3, 2020, the Reset Dialogue Seminars returned to create a forum for in-depth and critical analysis of the relations between religion, history and political dynamics in European and Mediterranean societies. Participants engaged in a thorough review of legal and constitutional perspectives on cultural and political pluralism within both established and developing democracies. The debate about critical issues, ranging from electoral pluralism to the role of religion in public life, traversed the Mediterranean

and will continue beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The Reset Dialogues assembled a broad range of scholars and researchers in the virtual home of Beit al-Hikma in Carthage, Tunisia. The Tunisian experience illustrated the complexity of the compromise between tradition and modernity, confessional rigor and openness to religious and political pluralism. Taking advantage of the serious economic stagnation across the region, the forces of authoritarianism, radicalism and militancy stand poised to fill any power vacuums that occur.

The program brought together academics from the Middle East and North Africa, the United States, and Europe, alongside young scholars and an international pool of young professionals and opinion leaders from the fields of education, journalism, and social media. The working languages of the seminars were Arabic and English, with simultaneous translation.

**Note:** This international symposium was made possible via Reset's partnership with the Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts (Beit al-Hikma), and through the support of the Henry Luce Foundation and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

## Arts, Culture and Media Under Duress

After previous successful editions held in Casablanca (2018 and 2019) and Carthage (2020, online), Reset Dialogues held a forum from June 28 to July 2, 2021, for in-depth and critical analysis of "Current Trends in the Arts, Culture and Media under Duress". This occurred in two parts.

The summer school's courses and workshops explored the status of pluralism in the Arab

and Muslim world and global communities — from Beirut to Santiago to Detroit and beyond — as it is lived and experienced in the arts and humanities.

The seminars explored the theme of cultural pluralism in the media, both traditional and digital, with particular attention paid to information technologies and how news spreads:

***What are the principal sources of information in the Arab and Muslim World? Who finances them, who owns them, who controls them culturally? Who is in the position to guarantee or impede freedom of speech and the plurality of public discourse?***

The following subthemes emerged during the summer school and the international conference: the growing hegemony of the Turkish cultural and political model in the Middle East and North Africa region; the influence of the Gulf countries on cultural trends in North Africa and the Arab diasporas in both hemispheres; contemporary Islam and its reflections in contemporary Arab culture (television, music, storytelling and cinema); artistic-literary production in Arab /Muslim communities; and the impact of living in democratic, pluralist societies vis-à-vis environments with fewer freedoms on creative production among the Arab diasporas.

## Student Papers

This is a selection of the papers submitted after the 2021 summer school held in the context

of the Reset Seminars on Pluralism in Arab and Muslim Societies:

**[The 2011 Radical Imagination Through the Panopticon of Hip-Hop: The Promise of a Better Democracy in Tunisia](#)** by Amina Karoui

**[Building Bridges, Not Walls: Arab Anglophone Diasporic Writers as Cultural Mediators](#)** by  
Nouah Anajjar

**[“La révolte féminine sur les lois patriarcales dans le roman de Bahaa Trabelsi, “Une Femme Tout Simplement”](#)** by Saida el-Khales