



**Centre d'études et de documentation  
économiques, juridiques et sociales**

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On Tuesday November 26, 2024 at 11am at CEDEJ **Alaa Badr** will be presenting her research project: **The Remaking of the Arab Intellectual - Informal Intellectual Collectives in Egypt.**

This research project is a careful examination of the new modes of knowledge production and intellectual currents in Egypt. The Post-2011 Arab world witnessed a profound disillusionment with public intellectuals, whose response to the uprisings was either silence or, worse, opposition, thereby betraying their social role. However, this void was quickly filled by a younger generation of knowledge producers who did not fit the traditional 'category' of the public intellectual and therefore were dismissed as a result. This was due to their departure from their elders' *modus operandi* and their adoption of novel mechanisms for engaging with their audiences, particularly an emphasis on the collective co-creation of knowledge and its dissemination through public pedagogy. It was clear that the questions required a methodological lens that was no longer relevant in reading Egypt's current intellectual milieu. As a result, this research project asked a different question: If the figure of the Arab Enlightenment (*Nahḍāwī*) intellectual is dead, then where is the debate taking place, who are the agents of these debates? What does this new and emerging, intellectual look like? The answers to this question were found in three instances of intellectual production: parallel educational initiatives, novels, and satirical shows. The agents of intellectual critique are turning to the cultural field, and moving away from politics proper, as an outlet for their intellectual production. The project details the characteristics of these new intellectuals as (1) belonging to a separate generation, (2) distancing themselves from publicness, and (3) engaging in self-critique. The research then complimented these characteristics with their new social role through (1) carrying out public pedagogy, (2) breaking the fourth wall between audience and the theatre of politics, and (3) maintaining collective critical spirit through structures of abeyance. All three instances of cultural production through public pedagogy exemplify a dialectical relationship between sociology and society, where both continually influence one another. For example, the uprisings changed Arab societies' social makeup, leading to a shift in the definition of the public intellectual, which, in turn, prompted further alterations in social structures. One aspect of

this transformation is the blurring of boundaries between social roles: the boundary between educators and activists has brought together theory and praxis, while the boundary between the public and private spheres helped evade censorship. Furthermore, the blurred line between teacher and student has emphasized a liberating pedagogy, granting greater agency.

**Alaa Badr** is a visiting researcher at the Robert Schuman Center at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy and a teaching fellow of political theory at SciencesPo Paris. She holds a PhD from the Social and Political Sciences (SPS) department at the EUI. Her thesis, entitled “Contributions towards the Remaking of the Arab Intellectual Scene” explores Informal Intellectual Collectives in Egypt and the changing landscape of cultural and intellectual production in the MENA region. The thesis contributed with a new theory of the post-modern intellectual operating in inhospitable political environments, and the new centrality of popular culture as space of intellectual interventions. She received her master’s degree in political theory from SciencesPo Paris where she researched Self-Criticism in Arab Political Thought and received her B.A. in Political Science with a regional focus on the Middle East from SciencesPo Paris, Menton Campus. She spent a year at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) studying Medieval Islamic philosophy and Ethnomusicology. Throughout her studies, she has carried out different research projects including immigration in Berlin, Post-Communist space in Prague, as well as the theatre scene in Athens.