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Putting It Together: Muslimness, Queerness, and Joy



On September 12, 2022, Founding Co-Executive Artistic Director, Jamil Khoury, moderated an extensive conversation with panelists Imam Daayiee Abdullah, Dr. Manal Hamzeh, Imam Trina Jackson, Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala, and playwright Omer Abbas Salem on the topic of Muslimness, Queerness, and Joy.

This panel was inspired by our partnership with About Face Theatre in anticipation of their World Premiere production of Omer Abbas Salem's play *Mosque4Mosque* (November 17 - December 17, 2022) being performed at Chicago's Den Theatre.

Featured panelists below.



Featured Panelists

Imam Daayiee Abdullah

Dr. Manal Hamzeh

Imam Trina Jackson

Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala

Omer Abbas Salem, Playwright

Jamil Khoury, Moderator

Don't Miss Mosque4Mosque!



MOSQUE 4MOSQUE
A family comedy about love and expectations
Written by **OMER ABBAS SALEM**
Directed by **SOPHIYAA NAYAR**

NOV 17-DEC 17
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The Polyculturalist
Journeys in Cultural Interchange

Polycultural Institute

Our second offering of Polycultural Institute's soon-to-be-launched online publication, *The Polyculturalist*, features Turkish scholar, artist, and activist Hülya Adak. We are thrilled to be introducing Hülya to our Silk Road Rising community.

Stay tuned for expanded interview transcripts when *The Polyculturalist* officially debuts on Substack.

Introducing Hülya Adak

This interview was conducted on August 25, 2022 by Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala, Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council Coordinator.

Tasneem: As someone whose

places--including Turkey, Armenia, Germany, and the US--what role do you think polyculturalism could play in promoting engagements and connections between populations that may otherwise hold static or stereotypical views of one another?



Hülya: Polyculturalism is meaning in motion. It defies any concept that's connected to a static definition, so it defies any understanding of Armenianness, whether that be defined in a racist sense in Turkey or a statement of nationalism in Armenia. It also reacts against any definition of Americanness, any definition of Turkishness. I do not fit into the mold in Turkey,

it resists this idea of essentialism. The work I do is something that opens up spaces between these geographic grounds, but also peoples—and contemporary peoples. Peoples who are there today and now, rather than groups that want to assert some kind of essentialist identity or remember the past as a constant that doesn't change. Polyculturalism also emphasizes dialogue, interaction, intersectionality, openness and open-endedness.



Ecofeminist artist Agnes Denes' "Living Pyramid" that I recently visited at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul. The pyramid is evocative of most of the issues relevant to polyculturalism: motion, growth, a state of becoming, always changing and evolving. The Living Pyramid is a significant intervention that moves us to think about new conceptual questions brought about by ecological art (September 2022).

Tasneem: You run what was one of the first university-level gender studies program in Turkey. How do you see polyculturalism speaking to this endeavor?

international center for gender and women's studies, I think our research foci have increased in the past few years, and this is really important because it was during the time of a global pandemic when it was extremely difficult to actually expand research horizons and human labor. I'm proud that I was part of the leadership, and there were others who were amazing in their roles, working in full capacity to expand the center. But this is exactly where we stand in terms of our intersectional approach: It's not just about gender, but it's the crossroads of gender with class, race, age, health, disability. Just looking at gender doesn't help us understand multiple dimensions, axes of power, and how these power dynamics oppress certain groups or individuals.



Book Launch *Mapping Gender* (editors Hülya Adak & Richard Wittmann) at the German Consulate in Istanbul. The book highlights the way Ottoman and Turkish Studies have taken new turns in their interaction with Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and includes articles from 25 international universities, including MIT, Yale, Oxford, Free University of Berlin, University of Athens among others (April 2022).

in advancing the cause of acknowledging the Armenian genocide within Turkish society?

Hülya: I see my role as one where I try to do research on the topic to the best of my capabilities. I work on Armenian texts in translation and the history of human rights; part of my work also involves looking at the pre-Holocaust moment as a moment of important progress of human rights. Pre-Holocaust, the Armenian genocide wasn't called "genocide," but it's important to take a look at how these issues were discussed before WWII, and how the discussions and human rights declarations of the time got lost; that prepared the stage for another set of horrors. What happened post-WWII is that scholars tried defining "genocide" as post-WWII, completely dismissing what was happening after WWI. I try to write back this history. I also try to mainstream Armenian literature and history in my courses.

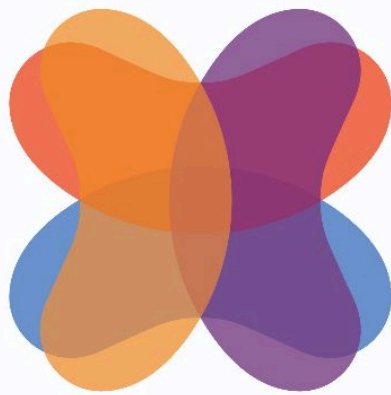


Alternative Pride in Istanbul with SU Gender Team and LGBTI+ activists. Pure Joy!
(July 2022)

Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.

Hülya: Some years ago, the Vatican created a new and very high

Armenians. A friend of mine became the archbishop, and he invited me to the coronation in Istanbul; it was one of the most amazing ceremonies I have ever seen. Because my friend is a friend, I was expecting friendly treatment from him, but I was not expecting the same from the community because a church is such a sacred space. It's very closed. To be a part of all of that, as someone not just who's Turkish but who's not very related to religion at all, I was not expecting the group to be amenable to my presence. But I was just hugged and welcomed, and I don't know if I've ever felt more at home anywhere. I was one of the very, very few outsiders in every sense: religious, national, ethnic. It was a privilege to be welcomed like that. And some of them tried to talk to me in Turkish, and that was just icing on the cake. They probably wanted to speak Armenian there! It's their world, and they talked to me in Turkish. It was truly unforgettable; a breathtaking experience.



**Polycultural
Institute**

Connecting People, Cultures, and Communities

A Historic Gathering in Dearborn, Michigan!



Join the Middle Eastern and North African Theater Makers Alliance (MENATMA) for our fall convening at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, MI on **November 10-12, 2022**. There will be networking opportunities, panel discussions, a showcase for MENA playwrights, opportunities to share your own work, and more!

The convening is being co-sponsored by Art2Action, Golden Thread Productions, New Arab American Theatre Works, Noor Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Silk Road Rising.

[Register Here For MENATMA's Fall Convening](#)

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