

Monday  
27 May 2013  
7:30 pm  
In English

This talk explores what ordinary people (in the Middle East) do to get around and resist the severe constraints the authoritarian polity, neo-liberal economics, and moral authorities impose on their civil and economic rights. Bayat discusses the diverse ways in which sub-altern groups – men, women, and the young – seek to affect the contours of change in their societies by refusing to exit from the social and political stage controlled by authoritarian regimes and by discovering or generating spaces within which they can assert their rights and enhance their life chances. He conceptualizes these everyday and dispersed practices as 'non-movements', and discusses how by establishing alternative norms in society they become the matrix of broader social change in society, and how they may or may not evolve into larger societal movements.

**Asef Bayat**, the Catherine and Bruce Bastian Professor of Global and Transnational Studies, teaches Sociology and Middle East studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Before joining Illinois, he taught at the American University in Cairo for 16 years, and served as the director of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) holding the Chair of Society and Culture of the Modern Middle East at Leiden University. His research areas range from social movements and social change, to religion-politics-everyday life, Islam and the modern world, and urban space and politics. His recent books include *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford University Press, 2007); (with Linda Herrera) *Being Young and Muslim: Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (Oxford University Press, 2010); and *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford University Press, 2010). The revised and extended edition of *Life as Politics* will be published in May 2013, and so will *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford University Press).

### Constituting Wholes

Wholes are said to be more than the sum of their parts. This 'more' contains both a promise and a threat. When different elements – disciplines, methods, cultures, individuals – form a whole, they not only join forces, but also generate effects of synergy and a surplus from which also the parts can benefit. Being part of a whole is a way to acquire meaning and to extend oneself beyond one's limited existence; and having a part in the whole is to have an enlarged agency. But wholes are also more powerful than the sum of their parts. Wholes constitute their parts, determining what is a part and what is apart, what has a part and what is deprived of agency. Becoming a part requires submission and although parts may not pre-exist the whole, there may still be something in the elements that exceeds being a part – even if only the possibility of being part of a different whole. While a desire for being whole or part of a whole seems all-too-natural, organic metaphors, which are often used to think part-whole relationships, have been criticized precisely for naturalizing relations of hierarchy and power. Yet, entirely abandoning the whole in favour of the part(icular) is also problematic. After the disenchantments of the postmodern post-cold-war period and in the face of global crises – be they financial, economic, political, or ecological – the critical need to include a holistic perspective is felt with renewed urgency, as is the concern that the situatedness of any such perspective and the multiple, incommensurable ways of constituting wholes may be forgotten.

An ICI Berlin Lecture in collaboration with **Assoziation A**.

The lecture is part of the **ICI Lecture Series Constituting Wholes**, which explores the double, both active and passive, aspect of "Constituting Wholes" within the framework of the multi-disciplinary ICI Research Focus **Complementarity and Wholes Which Are Not One**.

# Asef Bayat

**Non-Movements and the Power of the Ordinary**

