Stanford



Kabir Tambar

Associate Professor of Anthropology

Bio

BIO

Kabir Tambar has been conducting ethnographic and historical research in Turkey since 2003, primarily focused on the critical study of secularism and semiotic approaches in anthropology. His work centers on questions of temporality in political modernity, or the narrative threads that bind our sense of the present to both an inherited past and an anticipated future.

Tambar's first book, The Reckoning of Pluralism (Stanford, 2014), explored how Alevis in central Anatolia encounter and interrogate the promises of secular modernity. The book offered a critical study of how state authorities (along with academics, journalists, and intellectuals) seek to define and discipline the parameters of religious difference, such that ostensibly epistemological questions about the writing of history have come to shape governing imperatives to regiment public enactments of Alevi religion. The book is also especially interested to reveal how Alevi engagements with Islamic tradition, including in practices of ritual mourning, enable alternative ways of narrating the religious past and its inheritance in the present.

After completing this research project, Tambar began to study inter-communal expressions of solidarity. Initially, the work developed in response to the massive, country-wide Gezi Park protests, with particular attention to the tensions and misunderstandings that accompany the emergence of new political friendships. From this starting point, Tambar began a decade-long inquiry into the history of irresolute and foiled friendships that have unsteadied the politics of the nation-state for over a century. He is now completing a new book manuscript, tentatively titled After Friendship: An Ottoman History of Loss, that examines the erosion of friendship as a credible discourse of late Ottoman and Turkish republican politics in the past century. Rather than redeem friendship as a normative ground for understanding political possibilities today, the book excavates the failing of friendship as a historical problem, asking how social actors — especially Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds — have grappled with the attenuation of solidarity and the estrangement of political identification.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Associate Professor, Anthropology

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Hellman Faculty Fellowship, Hellman Fellows Fund (2014)
- Member, School of Social Sciences, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ (2011)
- Sakip Sabanci International Research Award, First Prize, Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey (2009)

PROGRAM AFFILIATIONS

- Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE)

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- Ph.D., University of Chicago , Anthropology (2009)
- M.A., University of Chicago , Anthropology (2003)
- B.A., State University of New York at Buffalo

LINKS

- Kabir Tambar - Anthropology: https://anthropology.stanford.edu/people/kabir-tambar

Teaching

COURSES

2026-27

- End Times: ANTHRO 18N (Spr)
- Foundations of Social Theory: ANTHRO 301A (Win)
- Language and Semiotics: ANTHRO 342 (Aut)
- Theory of Cultural and Social Anthropology: ANTHRO 90B (Win)

2025-26

- Anthropology of Islam: ANTHRO 132, ANTHRO 232 (Spr)
- Foundations of Social Theory: ANTHRO 301A (Win)
- Language and Semiotics: ANTHRO 342 (Spr)
- Theory of Cultural and Social Anthropology: ANTHRO 90B (Win)

2024-25

- Anthropology of the Middle East: ANTHRO 133A, CSRE 133A (Spr)
- Foundations of Social Theory: ANTHRO 301A (Spr)
- Political Anthropology: ANTHRO 324 (Win)
- Theory of Cultural and Social Anthropology: ANTHRO 90B (Win)

STANFORD ADVISEES

Doctoral Dissertation Reader (AC)

Deniz Demir, Emilia Groupp, Bilal Nadeem, Shikha Nehra

Doctoral Dissertation Advisor (AC)

Noor Amr, Miray Cakiroglu

Doctoral (Program)

Noor Amr, Miray Cakiroglu, Shikha Nehra

Publications

PUBLICATIONS

- **The Populist Slipper** *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*
  Samet, R., Tambar, K., Mazzarella, W.
  2026; 67

- **The Wager of Popular Address** *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY*

Tambar, K.
2026; 67

- **A History of Clamor: Historical Time and the Late Ottoman Surreal** *COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN SOCIETY AND HISTORY*
  Tambar, K.
  2026
- **Professions of Friendship Revisiting the Concept of the Political in the Middle East** *COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF SOUTH ASIA AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST*
  Tambar, K.
  2019; 39 (2): 249–63
- **The Uncanny Medium: Semiotic Opacity in the Wake of Genocide** *Current Anthropology*
  Tambar, K.
  2017; 58 (6): 762-784
- **Brotherhood in Dispossession: State Violence and the Ethics of Expectation in Turkey** *Cultural Anthropology*
  Tambar, K.
  2016; 31 (1): 30-55
- **The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey**
  Tambar, K.
  Stanford University Press.2014
- **Historical Critique and Political Voice after the Ottoman Empire** *HISTORY OF THE PRESENT*
  Tambar, K.
  2013; 3 (2): 119-139
- **Islamic reflexivity and the uncritical subject** *JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE*
  Tambar, K.
  2012; 18 (3): 652-672
- **Iterations of lament: Anachronism and affect in a Shi'i Islamic revival in Turkey** *AMERICAN ETHNOLOGIST*
  Tambar, K.
  2011; 38 (3): 484-500
- **The Aesthetics of Public Visibility: Alevi Semah and the Paradoxes of Pluralism in Turkey** *COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN SOCIETY AND HISTORY*
  Tambar, K.
  2010; 52 (3): 652-679
- **Secular Populism and the Semiotics of the Crowd in Turkey** *PUBLIC CULTURE*
  Tambar, K.
  2009; 21 (3): 517-538