SPECIAL ISSUE: IRAN – SIXTY YEARS AFTER THE COUP

- Academic sanctions
- Oil and the coup
- Mossadeq and the International Bank
- The fall of Mossadeq revisited
- Iran's literary tradition
- Politics, broadcasting and régime change
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**EVENTS IN LONDON**
As 2013 draws to a close, Iran’s tense nuclear negotiations with the group of 5+1 have been totally absorbing. But this year also marks another important stand-off between Iran and the West: that of the 60th anniversary of the US and British backed coup that removed Mohammad Mossadeq, Iran’s popular premier, from office and aborted one of the earliest brushes with democracy in our region. This event has unsurprisingly had a profound impact on Iranians’ collective memory, shaping not only the internal politics and external relations of the country but also more widely its contemporary art and literature.

The contentious issue of economic sanctions against Iran has been debated time and again but the indirect fallout of these far-reaching measures is rarely discussed. In his insight piece, Hassan Hakimian sheds light on one such aspect—their effects on academic freedom in general and international academic collaborations and exchanges in particular.

Three articles in this issue reflect the political reverberations of the 1953 coup, representing a broad spectrum of views of Iranian and non-Iranian historians and political commentators. First, Ervand Abrahamian explores the conflict between imperialism and nationalism placing the nationalisation of Iranian oil in the wider context of the struggle for control of the oil industry globally. Second, Homa Katouzian looks at the intermediation of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to end the crisis and how Mossadeq could have avoided the coup. In a somewhat sharp contrast to both these views, Oliver Bast argues that the sapling of democracy in Iran was not uprooted in August 1953 with the fall of Mossadeq but rather a decade later in 1963. And what of the position of the media, and in particular the BBC, in those turbulent summer months of 1953? Roger Hardy offers an in-depth assessment of the controversial role of the Persian language service at that time—a topic fiercely debated to this day.

Mossadeq’s forced removal also affected the outlook and dreams of several generations of Iranian poets. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak looks at some of these and examines how the coup has since shaped the poetry landscape in Iran.

Beyond the coup, the ever-increasing concerns about environmental issues in Iran are discussed by Morad Tahbaz who warns that air pollution in large cities, threats to vanishing forests and drying-up of lakes is reaching crisis point. On a happier note, Haleh Anvari and a short report on a forthcoming exhibition in the Brunei Gallery reflect on dynamic developments in post-revolutionary Iranian art, whether on walls, in the streets or on canvas. Narguess Farzad offers a look at Iran’s particular fondness for Shakespearean drama followed by a mouth-watering account of an evening in the Persian restaurant Kateh from our resident gourmet connoisseurs—Nadje Al-Ali and Mark Douglas.

Finally, it is with profound sadness that we mark the death of our former colleague, an unwavering friend of, and expert on, Iran—Keith McLachlan.

Season’s Greetings and best wishes for 2014.
Hassan Hakimian warns that sanctions against Iranian researchers and academic institutions are little understood and can be a threat to academic freedom globally

Economic sanctions: a threat to academic freedom

Much has been said recently of the unilateral EU and US economic sanctions against Iran and their debilitating impact on its economy in general and the standard of living of its population in particular. Opinion has been broadly divided between those who view economic sanctions as amounting to collective punishment, ultimately being counterproductive to international diplomacy, and those who favour them as a better 'alternative' to war. More recently, feverish speculation about the new tone and scope of discussions with Iran's new administration has raised aspirations for a potential settlement of Iran's nuclear stand-off with the West leading to an easing of economic sanctions in due course.

While the jury is still out on the outcome of these complex and potentially drawn out negotiations, an important – yet ominous – aspect of the evolving sanctions saga has been largely overlooked.

Leaked internal memos from two of the academic world's publishing giants suggest that international diplomacy may have quietly permeated the world of research and publications with adverse effects on academic freedom well beyond Iran.

Since the UN Security Council introduced multilateral and internationally enforceable sanctions against Iran's military industry in 2006, the country's economy has been battered by a raft of unilateral measures adopted by the US and EU. These have targeted Iran's strategic sectors including oil, international finance, shipping and insurance, wreaking havoc on the lives of ordinary people. Unemployment and inflation – hallmarks of economic mismanagement during Ahmadinejad's eight-year presidency – have scaled new heights. Economic contraction – estimated at 1.3 per cent last year – has deepened further this year with the Rouhani administration projecting a negative growth of 5.4 per cent for 2013. Iranian currency (the Rial) has lost more than two-thirds of its value in less than a year with widespread reports of shortages of medicine and medical supplies due to Iran's difficulties with international payments. The tough sanctions regime – described by Vice President Biden in his election trail as 'the most crippling sanctions in the history of sanctions, period, period' – is also likely to come as a serious constraint for the Obama administration vis-à-vis the Congress and Senate in the US.

If greater transparency is key to understanding Iran's nuclear intentions, why not encourage scientific publications as a way of lifting the lid of secrecy on Iran's know how?
The implications of such broad, ambiguous and ultimately contradictory directives can be drastic both for the principles they breach and with regard to the problem of interpretation by over-cautious or over-zealous editors.

First, a focus on the source of university funding is a poor guide to Iran’s nuclear intentions. In an oil-rich country where the arm of the state is long and its pocket deep, most – almost all – universities are bankrolled by the state. This is true of most public universities: since 2009, medicine and medical science have come under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME) with others covered by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT). In practice at least, it is very difficult to separate the public and private domains in Iran with genuine academics in most Iranian universities likely to become easy targets for these sanctions.

Second, where geographical and institutional obstacles to information sharing and knowledge transfer have been falling faster than the Berlin wall – and nowhere is this truer than in the academic world where multinational, collaborative projects are the norm if not a requirement for success in funding – how could one stop at the door of a given nationality on either side of the divide? Academics typically operate in international teams that draw its members from around the world. This is true of both editorial boards on which Iranian academics serve (many live and work abroad) as well as of joint authored works on which different nationals collaborate. In a world where academic reviews are conducted anonymously, it would be ill-advised to ask for, and receive, proof of citizenship to determine eligibility.

Ambiguities and contradictions aside, there is an even greater irony: if greater transparency is a key step forward to understanding Iran’s nuclear intentions, why not encourage scientific publications as a way of lifting the lid of secrecy on Iran’s know-how?

Sanctions exacerbate internal challenges many academics already grapple with. Thanks to hurdles with international payments, for some time now they have been unable to use credit cards to pay submission fees for academic journals or register at conferences. Moreover, limited means and bureaucratic interferences by the political system and a cadre of senior management selected on the basis of their ideological purity make it an impressive feat in itself that Iranian academics manage to produce any significant research. If these obstacles were not enough, since December 2012, the EU has added Sharif University – Iran’s highest ranking university for engineering and technology – to the sanctions list.

Sanctions against academics on the basis of their nationality and institutional affiliation pose a threat to academic freedom beyond Iran. Decisions about publications and knowledge dissemination are best made on the basis of academic criteria and scientific merit and not by the imposition of political directives and demands of warring diplomats or over-cautious editors who may fear the wrath of the US Treasury.

The ultimate irony is a simple one: if we uphold freedom of expression and access to knowledge and information in all countries around the globe including Iran, then we are hard pushed to justify instituting obstacles that restrict them on such an international scale.

Hassan Hakimian is a Reader in the Economics Department and Director of the London Middle East Institute at SOAS. His new book Iran and the Global Economy: Petro Populism, Islam and Economic Sanctions is co-edited with Parvin Alizadeh and published by Routledge (November 2013)
In the last sixty years much has been written on the 1953 coup. Even more has been written on the oil crisis of 1951-53 – so much so that we can now say there is an established narrative on the whole crisis. According to this narrative, as soon as Iran nationalised the oil industry, the US entered the fray as an ‘honest’ and ‘impartial broker’ accepting nationalisation and persuading its close ally, the UK, to do so also. It offered both Iran and the UK a fair ‘compromise’ which the latter readily accepted but the former, unfortunately for all, did not. This rejection led the US to reluctantly join the UK in overthrowing Mossadeq. The US, according to this interpretation, was motivated mainly by the concern that the continued crisis would eventually cause Iran to fall into the lap of the Soviet Empire.

This narrative has been repeated so often in the West that it has been accepted even by commentators highly sympathetic to Mossadeq such as Stephen Kinzer, Christopher de Bellaigue, Malcolm Byre, William Roger Louis and Mark Gasiorowski. Writing in the *Middle East Journal* this year, Gasiorowski, for example, claimed that the coup had much to do with the Cold War and not with oil because the US readily ‘embraced’ nationalisation and easily persuaded the UK to do the same.

Readers awestruck by these authors exposing the cloak-and-dagger mechanics of the coup do not realise these same authors are ultimately placing the blame on Mossadeq – i.e. they are blaming the victim. Some mitigate the blame by arguing...
that Mossadeq was misled by bad advisers, intimidated by extremists who would refuse any settlement, or perhaps immobilised by a presumed martyrdom complex inherited from his Shi’i culture. In August last year, the Washington Post, in praising Bellaigue’s laudatory biography of Mossadeq, claimed the Prime Minister never appreciated how far Britain had come to meet his demands and the tragedy of the whole story was that he could not bring himself to accept a compromise that would have saved the honour of both Iran and Britain.

The main problem with this conventional interpretation is that it readily accepts Western public declarations at face value and ignores what was being demanded of Iran behind closed doors. As soon as the crisis started in April 1951, the US developed a formula which it doggedly kept to for the next 26 months and which it managed to persuade the UK to accept without much difficulty. According to this formula, the UK and US would accept the principle of nationalisation and the right of Iran as a sovereign state to have ultimate authority over its natural resources, but actual control of the oil industry had to remain in the hands of either the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) or a consortium of Western companies. A British negotiator put it bluntly: the problem was how to pay ‘lip service to the notion of nationalisation while keeping effective power of this asset in our hands.’ His American counterpart put it equally succinctly: the term ‘nationalisation’ would not be a problem because in any future arrangement ‘control of operations’ would remain out of the hands of Iran. The UK Foreign Office recognised the real issue early on when it admitted that ‘the financial aspect is not uttermost in Persian minds but the core of the matter is the feeling that they have no control over the main source of their revenue.’ It added that ‘whatever arrangements we arrive at, they should be such that we keep effective control of the assets in our hands ... We can be flexible in profits, administration, or partnership, but not in the issue of control.’

Under no circumstances was Iran to have control over its oil industry – such a calamity would trigger waves of nationalisations in other countries. One of the Seven Sisters, the oil companies which dominated the global petroleum industry from the mid 1940s to the 1970s, declared this would be the end of Western ‘civilisation’ as they knew it. Another claimed it would be better to have Iran go communist than carry out a successful nationalisation. At times, this fear reached absurd levels. The United Fruit Company presented a brief to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee arguing that if Iran got away with nationalisation the whole of the US banana industry in Guatemala would be endangered.

Confidential papers drawn up by the State Department as well as the Foreign Office, by British as well as American negotiators, by petroleum experts in AIOC as well as in the American oil companies, show that the US and the UK were willing to accept nationalisation as a ‘cloak,’ ‘veneer,’ and ‘façade’ so long as they did not lose actual control. George McGhee, the US Under Secretary of State responsible for negotiating with Mossadeq consistently reassured not only the British government and AIOC but also the major American oil companies that under no circumstances would the US permit loss of control of the running of the oil installations to Iran. He argued that the US would never support a settlement that would ‘injure the fabric of the world oil industry.’ In his memoirs published in 1983, McGhee wrote that the obvious solution was to accept nationalisation as ‘the expressed desire of the Iranian people,’ but, at the same time, ‘retain control’ over oil production. He never explained how this could be done. Some would accuse him of Orwellian double-talk.

The American and British hope was to somehow persuade, pressure, sweet talk or hoodwink Mossadeq into accepting such a compromise. They subjected him to a torrent of details on prices, on differences between crude and refined, on rates in the Mexican versus Persian Gulf, and on the complexities of finding markets and tankers. He would cut through the thick details to the core issue: who would control the industry, its production, refining and sale? The Western negotiators claimed they were trying to educate him. He rightly suspected they were trying to take him for a ride. Once he refused to oblige, they determined to remove him through either political or military means.

Although confidential documents laid bare the negotiating strategy of both Britain and America, one did not have to wait for their long-delayed release to see through their double-talk. Very early in the oil crisis, Professor L. P. Elwell-Sutton, who had worked for AIOC and knew the company well, wrote in his classic Persian Oil: A Study in Power Politics in 1955: ‘The British attitude was that in return for their recognition of nationalisation, the Persian government should forego its insistence on that principle.’

The fact that so many writers, so many years after the crisis and so long after the declassification of documents, continue to be wedded to the notion that the West accepted nationalisation and offered Mossadeq a ‘fair compromise deal’ should provide us with serious food for thought.

Ervand Abrahamian is Distinguished Professor of Iranian and Middle Eastern History and Politics at Baruch College, CUNY, New York. His latest book The Coup: 1953, The CIA, and the Roots of Modern US-Iranian Relations was published by the New Press earlier this year

Mohammad Mossadeq - A Private Photo © Hassan Hakimian
The 1953 coup and the failure of the Popular Movement of Iran (Nehzat-e Melli-ye Iran) were not inevitable. Mosaddeq and many of his colleagues repeatedly emphasised that the primary objective of oil nationalisation was to remove the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company from Iran, thus stopping its influence on domestic politics and achieving political independence which would allow the country to progress along the path of parliamentary democracy. The economic issue of increasing Iran’s oil revenue, though highly important, was second in the minds and public declarations of Mosaddeq and his men.

The Popular Movement would have succeeded if the government had (1) enforced the law and stamped out plots against it by its right and left opposition; and (2) settled the oil dispute in the best ‘possible’ way.

The two earlier British solutions offered by Jackson and Stokes included the establishment of an international purchasing company to act on behalf of the Iranian National Oil Company, something similar to, but better, than the Consortium Oil Agreement which was made after the coup. This was not acceptable because the political aim of the oil nationalisation was to remove a foreign company’s control of Iranian oil. However, the two later solutions offered jointly by Britain and America did not envisage this condition but demanded that compensation of accepting arbitration would have been costly, but it would have fulfilled Iran’s principal aim of controlling its own oil, and becoming fully independent.
include the loss of business to the Anglo-
Iranian Oil Company as a result of the
cancellation of the remaining forty years
of the 1933 concession, to be decided by
the arbitration of the International Court
of Justice. Iran was prepared to accept the
Court’s arbitration but only if it considered
compensation for the loss of the Company’s
property, not loss of business due to the
cancellation of the concession. Accepting
arbitration on the basis of ‘loss of business’
would have been costly, but it would have
fulfilled Iran’s principal aim of controlling
its own oil, becoming fully independent,
and promoting political as well as economic
development. The second and last solution
offered by the US and Britain was presented
to the Iranian government in February-
March 1953 and, if on that basis, the
government had agreed to go to arbitration,
the coup, for which preparations were being
made, would not have happened.

Long before this, however, in winter
1952, when Mosaddeq had won the
argument in the UN Security Council;
the Populare Movement had not split; the
Shah publicly supported the Movement;
and Iranian oil had not yet been boycotted;
The International Bank for Reconstruction
and Development (later the World Bank)
came forward with a temporary solution.
They offered to act as an intermediary for
two years between the Iranian government
and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and
the British government, by taking over
oil operations at their own expense, and
dividing the net earnings into three parts:
a part to be paid to the former company, a
part to the Iranian government and a part
to be divided by the two parties after they
reached a final settlement.

The idea did not appeal to the
Conservative government in Britain at
the time, which was reluctant to deal with
Mosaddeq. They had to consider America’s
favourable attitude towards the Bank’s
proposal, however, and they accepted it
with some reluctance. Mosaddeq was at
first highly open to the suggestion and, after
some preparatory work, the Bank sent a
high-level mission to Tehran led by Robert
L. Garner, a Vice President at the Bank. The
Bank’s representatives had hardly set foot in
Tehran when the Tudeh (communist) party
led a hysterical press campaign against it,
declaring treason and, inter alia, wrote in
its Teaching Pamphlet No 12: ‘When ... the
wheeling and dealing with the International
Bank proved our views about Mosaddeq
and his demagogic gang, then the mask of
the enemies of the people was torn apart
and his [sic] treacherous face was seen by
all’. The Tudeh’s real concern was anti-US
struggle in support of the Soviet Union
during the Cold War, which they repeated
decades later during the hostage-taking of
US diplomats in Iran.

The government nevertheless entered into
negotiations with the Bank representatives.
There were some queries about the Persian
Gulf price of $1.75, and the 58 cent
‘discount for the major buyer’ (i.e. Britain).
A more important difficulty was that Iran
was reluctant to let the Bank employ any
British technicians in its operations, but this
too was not something which would have
stopped the agreement.

The agreement did not succeed merely
because Iran suggested that in its preamble
that the Bank was acting ‘for and on behalf
of the Iranian government’, which would
contravene the Bank’s neutrality and would
never be acceptable to Britain. It was on
this petty legal wrangle that the whole
scheme collapsed and the Bank delegation
left Iran. But just before they left, Senators
Mohammad Soruri and Abolqasem Najm
al-Molk – both of them government
supporters, Soruri becoming President of
the Supreme Court a few months later –
pleaded with Mosaddeq to accept the Bank’s
intervention. Mosaddeq told them that he
was personally in favour, but if he accepted
it (without inserting the words ‘for and on
behalf of Iran’), the people of Iran would
accuse him of treason.

This was the greatest missed
opportunity in the whole of the Anglo-
Iranian oil dispute; it would have been
tantamount to a ceasefire declaration. Oil
production would have resumed and there
would have been plenty of time to resolve
the dispute in a peaceful atmosphere, which
is likely to have been more favourable to
Iran than any of the solutions later offered
by Britain and the US.

The failure of the Bank’s intervention led
to the international boycott of Iranian oil,
leaving Iran with no choice but to resort to
the policy of non-oil economics. This they
managed fairly well by taking appropriate,
if unpopular, measures. But it could only
last for a short period because the country
was poor, foreign exchange scarce, the cost
of running the oil industry with hardly any
oil income high, and no hope for economic
development. When, a year and a half
after the failure of the Bank’s intervention,
Mosaddeq decided to close the seventeenth
Majlis by referendum, at least one of his
motives was that he feared the discovery
by the Majlis that he had secretly printed
money to help relieve the economy in the
face of the oil boycott. The measure had
been sensible but would not have been
necessary had the Bank’s mission not failed.

Homa Katouzian is a member of the Faculty
of Oriental Studies at the University of
Oxford and Editor of Iranian Studies. He has
written extensively on Iranian history, society,
economics and politics, and is winner of the
SINA Award for contributions to Humanities,
and Literature – was published by Routledge
in 2013

Mosaddeq told the two senators that he was personally in favour of the intervention, but if he accepted it (without inserting ‘for and on behalf of Iran’), people would accuse him of treason

Iranian soldiers surround the Parliament building in Tehran in 1953
When, in 2012, BBC Persian TV polled its audience on the greatest Iranian of all time, only one personality of the modern era figured on the six-strong shortlist: Mohammad Mossadeq, who was twice Iran’s Prime Minister between 1951 and 1953. Six-hundred years separated Mossadeq from the person that was the second closest to the present-day on this list: the classical poet Hafez (d. 1389/90). The BBC’s shortlist did not include Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1926-1941), the authoritarian soldier who ruthlessly forged the modern Iranian nation-state with blood and iron between 1921 and 1941. There was also no sign of Shah Isma’il I (r. 1501-1524), the founder of the Safavid dynasty nor, indeed, of Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629), a later Safavid ruler. Shah Abbas I not only consolidated Isma’il’s new territorial state, he also bequeathed many of the city of Isfahan’s architectural gems to Iran and indeed to the whole world, as recognised by the UNESCO World Heritage List.

With Mossadeq not having comparable achievements to his name, one might be forgiven for asking what the reasons were for the late Iranian Prime Minister’s inclusion in such a shortlist. They lie, of course, in the perception of the circumstances of Mossadeq’s violent removal from office sixty years ago, at the height of the early Cold War. His downfall is habitually described as an event in which the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister, a beacon of self-determination and anti-imperialism, whose plucky nationalisation of Iran’s oil resources had earned him the wrath of the West, was illegally overthrown due to the meddling of Anglo-American secret agents: their boundless cash and superior intelligence expertise allowed them to orchestrate the treacherous deeds of a horde of Iranian hirelings.

Mossadeq was popular during most of his premiership. Nowhere is this better

Turning Mossadeq’s downfall as a caesura of epic proportions into a veritable hour zero for Iran’s modern history, is as ahistorical as it is wrong.
illustrated than in the huge demonstrations in his favour in July 1952 after the Prime Minister had stepped down over a constitutional disagreement with the monarch, and which compelled the latter to reappoint Mossadeq. However, at the time of his overthrow on 19 August 1953, Mossadeq’s premiership lacked constitutional legitimacy since he had chosen to disregard the Shah’s legal decree dismissing him on 15/16 August 1953.

Murkier is the question as to what degree Mossadeq’s downfall, with regard to the specific date of 19 August 1953 and more generally, can be attributed to the manifold activities of Anglo-American agents in Iran. That is the prevailing view and one that denies Iranians any meaningful agency within the episode. As for the narrower issue of the 19 August, it is clear that Mossadeq’s successful resistance to the earlier attempt to remove him from office on 16 August had left those who had been plotting against him in utter disarray. The Shah fled abroad, one of the key American agents was talking of organising his own furtive departure from Iran, while the US ambassador told Washington that they would have to continue living with Mossadeq for some time to come. Yet, just three days later, Mossadeq, who would have had time to organise his defences, fell with little resistance. The question is to which force, led by whom, did he fall on that day?

Also, if Mossadeq had been as massively popular at that moment as is the prevailing contention, where were Mossadeq’s supporters and, more importantly, why did they not take to the streets on the following day? Why did they (and the communists) not come out en masse on 20 August 1953, demanding Mossadeq’s reinstatement as they had done the previous summer?

At the more general level it is not clear whether Mossadeq’s premiership had not already hit the buffers by the summer of 1953 in any case, and as a result of a variety of reasons not necessarily related to the Anglo-American attempts directed at undermining him. Mossadeq had lost the support of many of his erstwhile political allies who had not turned against him just because the Anglo-Americans had told them to. Thus his premiership had become increasingly authoritarian with Mossadeq resorting to undemocratic measures that sat oddly with the received wisdom about him: at one point Mossadeq prevented scores of elected deputies that he suspected might oppose him from taking their seats in parliament, accusing them of being in the pay of foreign powers, nor did he shy away from ‘rigging’ a referendum. His intransigence in the nationalisation dispute yielded virtually nothing for Iran, when a more conciliatory approach might have at least secured a partial advantage from which to push for further gains. Mossadeq’s constant conjuring up the threat, vis-à-vis the Americans, of a great communist tidal wave, which he, and only he, was able to stem, may well have helped fuel the US Cold War concerns rather than alleviating them.

Thus, I wonder whether Mossadeq’s downfall at that particular juncture in the history of the Cold War, regardless of how it was achieved, may not have been in Iran’s best interests, even if, at the same time, it also benefited the interests of the Western powers, whose meddling no-one denies? I realise that posing such a question amounts to an unspeakable heresy. In response, the proponents of the orthodox view will be quick to point out that the overthrow of Mossadeq forever closed the door to a democratic development in Iran, resulting in Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s authoritarian rule, which in turn led Iran to become the Islamic Republic. Moreover, they see the American interference in Iran as the root cause of the still-prevailing Iranian anti-Americanism. I beg to differ. Iran did not become entirely undemocratic immediately after 1953, and certainly not before 1963. Concerning the rise of anti-Americanism, here the underlying cause seems to be the unfortunate 1964 Status of Forces Agreement, not the events of 19 August 1953. Indeed, turning Mossadeq’s downfall as a caesura of epic proportions into a veritable hour zero for Iran’s modern history is as ahistorical as it is wrong.

Mossadeq secured his place on that BBC shortlist because of the courage with which he pursued his noble aspirations. His valiant struggle for Iran’s complete mastery of her own national resources continues to inspire present-day Iranians and non-Iranians alike. This legacy, however, must not preclude critical enquiry into Mossadeq’s political life and times. History, academic history at any rate, is served badly by erecting high pedestals.

Oliver Bast is a Senior Lecturer in Middle Eastern History at the University of Manchester and the co-convenor of the international conference on Mossadeq on 6-7 September 2013, supported by BIPS and the Iran Heritage Foundation.
It is often hazardous to posit a direct connection between political changes and shifts in literary expression. While the winds of political change may blow overnight, changes in literature almost always manifest themselves in slow, gradual progressions. It would, therefore, be difficult to see a cause and effect connection between the two spheres of politics and culture. Still, one can find events of social and political significance that have had consequences for artistic and literary production. Changes that may lead to perceptible modifications in prevailing moods may in turn bring about shifts in the works of social groups that tend to reflect or record them.

Still, we would be pressed to point to events in the political history of modern Iran that are believed widely to have rattled the nation as much as those of the years 1951-53, particularly those volatile summer days that culminated in quick succession in the humiliating departure of Shah Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi, the spectacular fall of Mohammad Mosaddeq, and the shah’s triumphal return. To this day, the political upheavals surrounding what is often referred to simply as ‘the coup’ are seen as the most significant watershed not just in the country’s political history but in its cultural history as well, including the production and dissemination of literary works and the ideas and emotions governing such texts. For many Iranians, this was not only the Pahlavi monarchy’s trial by fire, and the beginning of the end of the country’s supposed 2,500-year-long monarchical system, but the beginning of a sense of frigidity and gloom in the literature of Iran.

Chroniclers of contemporary Persian literature have seen the coup as apocalyptic to devastating, its impact on literary expression as nothing short of catastrophic.
It was not until 1970 when a guerrilla movement emerged that we see a more positive, if still idealistic, mood appearing on the left of the political spectrum.

And the poet who best illustrates the mood and most extensively exemplifies this feeling is Mehdi Akhavan Saless (1930-1990), a poet of tremendous promise whose career was defined by the coup. Reading Zemestan (Winter, 1956), his first major collection of poetry 60 years after the coup, it is hard to believe that the man was only 23 when the coup took place and 27 when that book was published. It seems as though he had aged at least 40 years in the four years that separated the two events. There is an inevitable sense in reading the title poem, for instance, that the man must have gone through bitter experiences that have made their mark on his mind and soul.

As the poem opens, the speaker, an old, utterly defeated man, stands shivering behind a closed tavern door begging to be let in to drown himself in the liquid that appears to be his only solace. And as it ends, we see an assertion of the kind of cosmic despair that, to him, as to the many poets who picked up on his mood, as never-ending:

‘Air stifling, doors closed, heads bent down, hands hidden in pockets hearts weary, pressed trees crystalline skeletons earth rotten to its core, dome of the sky low sun and moon dust-covered: it's winter.’

A similar emotion, though perhaps not as intense, prevails in Hava-ye Tazeh (Fresh Air, 1956), a collection of poems by Ahmad Shamlu. Here, poems bearing titles like Bitter Patience, Cold Arsen and Dark Symphony depict doleful idleness on one side, callous indifference on the other. More directly related to what the poet perceives to be the governing emotion, if not the spirit, of the times, in several poems here and in subsequent collections of poetry, we see a speaker lamenting the years that have been spent in a futile struggle for a less oppressive ruling class which would allow poets to express themselves and their society, rather than take on a political system which they think has little legitimacy in the eyes of the people. A decade or so later, as Forough Farrokzad was beginning to write her mature poems, the prevailing mood turns angrier and more explicitly expressive of a dark vision bordering on the apocalyptic; it also turns into an abiding feature of the emerging canon of the so-called New Poetry. In one particularly prophetic poem titled Terrestrial Verses the opening lines herald the end of the world thus: ‘Then/ the sun cooled/ and fertility left the earth’. The poem goes on to depict the horrifying impact on the intellectual community in these words:

‘Swamps of alcohol exuding dry deadly gases attracted inert masses of intellectuals to their depths while in antique cabinets pernicious rats gnawed at the golden leaves of books.’

The prose literature of the 1940s and early 50s was even more explicit in its condemnation of the ruling classes and direr in foregrounding doom and gloom, at times combining it with a desire to return to an imaginary bygone era marked by individual innocence and social purity. Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s famous novel Nefrin-e Zamin (Cursing of the Land, 1967) connects the dislocations that the Shah’s Land Reform programme gave rise to with certain Third Worldist notions of a return to village life and farming as a pathway to salvation, while his wife Simin Daneshvar’s renowned novel Savushun (1969) linked attempts at revolt for the betterment of her society with mythical and religious ideas of heroic martyrdom. Appeals to historical or legendary uprisings also became a feature of this literary tradition, as illustrated by the multi-volume novel Kelidar (1980s), the narrative of a 1940s revolt in north-east Iran.

It was not until 1970 when a real guerrilla movement registered itself on Iran’s socio-political scene that the prevailing mood began to take a more positive, if still idealistic, turn, which appeared in the wake of a series of newly formed radical political movements on the left of the political spectrum. In response, the Iranian government unleashed its security forces to crush that movement, thus further widening and deepening the already alarming chasm between state and society over the preceding two decades. For its part, the opposition forces, now comprising an energised younger and more radical left began to come together with the traditional democratic forces in the middle and sundry religious groups on the right, and seriously challenge the state’s legitimacy.

The plethora of poems, stories and other forms of literature written since the early 1950s manifests the desire to see a coming together of all these oppositional forces and when all this happened a new revolutionary movement began to take shape, eventually culminating in the Iranian Revolution of 1978-83.
The relationship between the BBC and successive British governments has never been easy, especially in times of war and crisis. The example of the Persian Service illustrates the extent to which governments have influenced, or attempted to influence, coverage of a sensitive region.

The Persian Service began broadcasting in December 1940, during some of the darkest days of the Second World War. As Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh have shown, drawing on official documents and BBC files, the Foreign Office and the British embassy in Tehran were intimately involved in the service’s birth and early life. (See their article ‘The BBC Persian Service 1941-1979’, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 2008; their book, Persian Service: The BBC and British Interests in Iran, is in the press.)

Foreign Office guidelines initially suggested that the Iranian monarch, Reza Shah, ‘should be presented as an energetic modern-minded ruler’. However, as his pro-German bias became more apparent, this attitude changed. In August 1941, with the prospect of an Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, Sir Reader Bullard, the British ambassador in Tehran, wrote confidentially, ‘To forestall the Germans and make the prospect of occupation more palatable, we might … release articles and wireless talks … referring not only to the good points, but also to the great defects of the present regime.’

His bosses in London agreed. The embassy’s press attaché, Ann Lambton, drew up a fourteen-point draft detailing Reza Shah’s corruption and despotism, which formed the basis of a series of Persian Service broadcasts. (The text of the draft can be found in Bullard’s Letters from Tehran, 1991.) The Shah himself interpreted the broadcasts as proof that the British were out to get him. Under intense pressure he abdicated in September 1941 and was succeeded by his young son, Mohammed Reza.

British interests and Iranian oil

After the Second World War, a White Paper set out the gentlemen’s agreement that has governed relations between British governments and the BBC to this day. The Corporation should be independent but should broadcast in the ‘national interest’. Each side was left to interpret what this meant in practice. The agreement was put to the test in 1951-53, the period between the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil
Company by the Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadeq, and his overthrow in an Anglo-American coup two years later.

Sreberny and Torfeh quote a despatch from the British ambassador, Sir Francis Shepherd, in March 1951 suggesting it would be useful to ‘inspire’ the Persian Service to argue the case against nationalisation. This was reflected in a broadcast three days later. At the time, Iranian nationalists were convinced that the BBC took an anti-Mossadeq position, a view shared by Iranian journalists at the BBC who went on strike, forcing the BBC to bring in British Persian-speakers to read the broadcasts.

Whether, in the run-up to the coup, the Persian Service was used to transmit a coded signal to the Shah, to strengthen his faltering morale, has been the subject of some debate. The CIA’s internal history of the coup, made public by the New York Times, says that it was; so too does C. M. Woodhouse, one of the MI6 coup-planners, in his memoirs (Something Ventured, 1982). Before he died, Sir Denis Wright, who became ambassador in Tehran immediately after the coup, told me he believed some such coded message had indeed been sent. But there is no conclusive proof.

Suez and after

The BBC’s role in the Suez crisis of 1956 marked a turning-point. Brian Lapping, in his book End of Empire (1985), commented that the BBC was ‘probably the only official British institution that emerged from the Suez crisis with its reputation enhanced’. The corporation certainly stood up to the Eden government in one important respect: by insisting that, once the prime minister had made a television broadcast on the matter, the Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell must have the right of reply. This infuriated Eden, already ill disposed towards ‘those Communists at the BBC’.

But forty years after Suez, with new documentation available, the BBC’s role began to look somewhat more ambiguous. My then-BBC colleague Gerald Butt made a Radio Four programme exposing the role of Sharq al-Adna, the MI6-run Arabic radio station in Cyprus, in producing clumsy anti-Nasser propaganda. Senior BBC officials had, it appeared, ‘connived in the government’s decision to convert the station into an open propaganda weapon’ (Richard Norton-Taylor, reporting the findings of the programme in the Guardian, 16 September 1994).

It was also revealed that senior BBC officials had known that Eden lied about the true purpose of the Anglo-French intervention – which he claimed was to separate the combatants (Israel and Egypt). The head of the BBC External Services, Hugh Carleton-Greene, was a member of a secret government committee whose task was to produce propaganda against Nasser, with the explicit aim of toppling him. All this was explored in greater depth by the historian Tony Shaw in his book Eden, Suez and the Mass Media (1996).

The Iranian revolution of 1979 is beyond the scope of a short article. Suffice it to say that the Shah, haunted by the fate of his father, was convinced the BBC was hostile to him. The Persian Service, for its part, could scarcely fail to cover the swelling protest against his rule, once this had become a big international story.

Conspiracy theorists may conclude that all this proves what they had long suspected, that the BBC was (and is) merely the voice of British imperialism. But a more accurate assessment would be that the relationship between government and broadcaster changed as the world entered the post-colonial age – and as the nature of broadcasting changed. Governments have always sought to influence broadcasters – this was as true in the Iraq war of 2003 as it had been earlier – but they have found it harder to do so. As Sreberny and Torfeh remark with regard to the World Service, its ‘practice of distance from government has emerged over time and not without a struggle to claim and preserve control over the content of its broadcasts’.

Roger Hardy was a Middle East analyst with the BBC World Service from 1986 to 2010. He is currently a visiting fellow at King’s College, London, and the LSE
The Fajr International Theatre Festival in Tehran, starting in late December and continuing through January 2014, will host two Shakespeare plays: ‘Desdemona’, an adaptation of Othello by the Australian troupe Kropka Theater, and ‘Macbeth, Tehran, 1392’, written by Iranian Chista Yashrabi, whose play will look at the lives of four generations of Iranians living in Tehran between 1970 and the present day. This comes hot on the heels of Atilla Pesyani’s critically acclaimed production of Richard III at Tehran’s Iranshahr theatre where local critics compared and contrasted this production with that of the RSC’s, starring Simon Russell-Beale and directed by Sam Mendes. From this level of interest, you can conclude that Shakespeare is very much alive in Iran today.

Memorable phrases such as Budan yā nabudan, mas’ ale in ast ‘to be or not to be, that is the question’ or Mordan, khoftan; khoftan, shayad ham khābidan; مردن،خفتن،خفتن نشاید هم خوابیدن ‘to die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream’ and agar moosighi khorāk-e ‘eshq ast اگرموسیقی خوراک عشق است ‘if music be the food of love’ are quotations that Iranians know well and appear time and again in Persian blogs and the comment boxes of networking sites.

Courtly romance and passion, fatal jealousy or corruption, use and abuse of power and trials of kings and heroes, have been the mainstay of Persian epics for more than 1,000 years and they readily accept the themes and stories developed and explored in Shakespeare’s plays. Iranians appreciate the conjunction of history, mythology, religion and folktales as well as the titanic clashes between the forces of good and evil and allegories of divine or sensual and often tragic love.

Many of Shakespeare’s plays resonate at several levels in Iranian life today as they explore questions of honour and virtue, love and loyalty, justice and treachery, humour and tragedy. Moreover, where Shakespeare touches on issues like kingship and the divine right to rule, Iranians can relate to this both in terms of their ancient past and their more recent experiences.

Apart from the clear references to the Sophy, the Persian King in Twelfth Night, it is not really known whether Shakespeare had any direct knowledge of Persian stories such as those in the Shahname, although some say that both Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet were inspired by Persian heroic and romantic epics.

Iran’s first experience of the Bard was almost 200 years ago when a young Persian, Mirzā Sāleḥ Shirāzi, who was in Britain,
Where Shakespeare touches on issues like kingship and the divine right to rule, Iranians can relate to this both in terms of their ancient past and their more recent experiences.

Made references in his diaries to the playhouses of Europe and performances of Shakespearean plays.

The first full translation of a Shakespearean play, however, was completed in 1917 by Abolghāsem Qaragozlou, known as Nāser ul-Molk, an aristocrat and later high-ranking court official, who was also one of the first Iranian students to study at Oxford. Legend has it that at a dinner party in Paris someone suggested that it would be impossible to translate any of Shakespeare’s plays into Persian. This prompted Nāser ul-Molk first to translate Othello and later The Merchant of Venice. Before long other works including Romeo and Juliette and Hamlet were also translated. Today, more than 24 of the plays, as well as many of Shakespeare’s sonnets, have been translated into Persian, including among others, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra and Henry IV.

Biographies of Shakespeare are available in Persian translation and television documentaries, radio plays and review articles in magazines have also made many more people aware of the works of the man whom Iranians regard as the greatest non-Iranian poet and writer of all time.

Iranian theatre directors like to bring their own ideas to the staging of Shakespeare plays. Occasionally, they experiment in innovative ways, for example, by creating a new play entitled Maclet, a combination of, you guessed it, Macbeth and Hamlet.

Maclet was first performed as a traditional Persian passion play. The plot is a parody in which Macbeth returns from battle with the Norwegian army and joins Lady Macbeth and King Duncan to attend the wedding of Gertrude and Claudius; and so the combined story unfolds.

Of course, not all of the current productions of Shakespeare plays in Iran meet with the approval of the state-run cultural establishment. Last year, a physical performance of Othello raised the eyebrows amongst the more conservative critics who found the production, to quote, ‘trivial and scandalous.’

Both Shakespearean drama and classical Persian stories have flourished in countries where kings and rulers were deemed to be divinely anointed by God, and religious aspects of kingship continue to play a role in shaping the ruling institutions of both Iran and the UK. One of the shared preoccupations of both Shakespearian and Persian epics is the notion of honour - whether at court, on the battlefield or in the tavern: honour in all its manifestations, its possession, its defence and its loss.

Ferdowsi could have equally spoken for Shakespeare when he summed up his own writing as ‘stories full of love and trickery, whose heroes lived for honour and chivalry.’

For some societies or individuals, honour is only determined in battle and for others it equates to stoic virtue when faced by temptation and evil. But one thing that both classical Persian and Elizabethan traditions agreed upon was that death is always superior to loss of honour.

In the poignant Shahname story of Rostam and Esfandiyar, Ferdowsi explores the conflict between blind obedience on the one hand, with upholding honour on the other. Rostam, the hero of the epic, is faced with a demand that goes against every grain of his being. He laments:

‘The world is but deceit and toil,
One man is rich, another poor; this man
Is honoured, that despised, but all must go,
Still, men at least shall quote
Good words from me when I have passed away,
A wise man will not turn from truth:

The theatre in Iran where Richard III was performed with a poster advertising the play in the left corner.
The writing’s on the wall: street art in Iran

Despite state control of this mode of cultural production, the motivation to write on walls has proved mutable.
of Tehran’s Beautification Office made its first foray into the world of billboard advertising. To pave the way for this break from revolutionary sensibilities, the first billboards carried a carefully chosen, self-referencing sentence from the Quran in Persian: ‘God is beautiful and likes beauty.’ These new billboards dominating the city’s highways and byways added to the noise generated by the already chattering walls, compounding the dizzying juxtaposition of the spiritual, the political and the commercial.

Experiments with decoration began during the latter part of Mohammad Khatami’s presidency (1997-2005) as a departure from the austerity of revolution and war. Trompe l’oeil techniques, using realistic imagery to create the illusion of depicted objects in three dimensions, were introduced. From a painted housewife casually shaking her carpet outside an imaginary window over Vanak Square or men securing giant screws on the facade of a high-rise to a child being lifted to the sky with giant balloons, the deceptive realism of the genre escalated into the fantastical. Iran’s mural culture was transformed into something much more complex in which the political was inscribed in apparently trivial as well as commercial concerns.

In the wake of post-election unrest in 2009, the municipality under Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, seemingly on a mission to soothe the nerves of a city nostalgic for a lost past, turned the walls of the city into a collection of surreal scenes and kitsch renditions of the Persian rural idyll. Billboards at major crossroads dispensed advice on how to appreciate your spouse or achieve inner calm. One, ‘Record the sound of your parents’s laughter’, set against a psychedelic background, was positively hallucinatory.

But in the back streets, away from prying eyes, the walls were being reclaimed by citizens who wished to express dissent. A spray can war raged between the supporters of the Green Movement and their detractors. What was not whitewashed by municipality workers during the day would be defaced by an unseen hand. Overnight the V of the Green Movement painted on a wall would be turned into cartoon mice, or faces, or ice cream cones. Reducing a serious political signifier to a childish squiggle was a deft way of denigrating and demoting dissent. This process of action and reaction established a conversation on the walls.

Meanwhile, an effort was made to renovate neglected and weather-beaten revolutionary murals. But conservation, intended to add new lustre to old revolutionary icons, seemed instead to drain them of their aesthetic appeal and their authority.

A famous mural of a teen martyr in Abbasabad became brighter in colour at the cost of the young martyr’s serene smile. Elsewhere, the minimal style of the original Abshenasan mural was transformed into kitsch. Abshenasan appears to have aged visibly, looking more like a general in his seventies as opposed to a man who died at 49. The intention may have been to prompt meanings suggesting that martyrs are forever alive, or that the moral authority of the revolution lies in the hands of older men. The new generation of muralists are seemingly emotionally detached from the spirit of the revolution and the war.

Occasionally, you can still find faded slogans from the early days of the revolution in unexpected corners of Tehran. Sometimes they are obscured by material realities like a new gas pipe, sometimes they are changed not by weather but by a hand from another time, like the unexpected addendum to an old favourite: ‘Say Death to Shah’ is augmented with the words ‘who left’, transforming a revolutionary absolute into a bitter lament. The walls of Iran chatter in many tongues.

Haleh Anvari is a writer and photographer

(Above) An old slogan on a wall- original Death to the Shah is amended with the words ‘who left’

(Below) This Mural uses trompe l’oeil techniques to depict a man securing giant screws on the facade of a building
Recalling the future: post-revolutionary Iranian art

From January to March 2014, the Brunei Gallery at SOAS will host a major exhibition of Iranian contemporary art. Recalling The Future focuses on the post-revolutionary period of the 1990s and 2000s, and aims to show how a group of Iranian artists have set out to illustrate what it means for them, or their art, to be Iranian.

The art of Iran, as of the whole Middle East, is increasingly under the spotlight of the international market. The global art crowd expects certain exotic signifiers of ‘Iranianness’. Furthermore, with well-intentioned but misplaced liberal sentiments, it also encourages certain kinds of political and social commentary. Divorced from any proper analysis of the complicated Iranian situation, this can only serve to reinforce unhelpful stereotypes.

However, while it is easy (and no doubt important) to criticise this international desire for a fantasised ‘Iran’, it is also possible to overstate its importance, and to ignore what is really at stake inside the country.

Recalling The Future is an exhibition of artists who produce art in Iran today. The premise of the exhibition is the claim that these artists deconstruct received ideas of Iranian national identity, and probe links with problematic socio-political situations.

There is no real tradition of art history in Iran. The fact that we lack any historical framework for understanding the practice of these artists is a significant problem because the history of Iranian art is arguably the crucial terrain upon which their critical battles have been fought. In particular, this exhibition argues that their work can best be understood when it is properly contrasted with the ‘Iranian modernists’ of the 1960s and 70s; the core of the modern Iranian canon. While earlier artists aimed to produce art which could embrace ‘modern’ styles while remaining distinctly Iranian, the artists in Recalling The Future have questioned the idea of ‘Iranianness’ as a fixed, timeless entity. They have considered how ideologies which seek authenticity (either nationalist, religious or nativist) have contributed to repressive politics and opened up avenues for the construction of new identities, thereby re-routing themselves and society towards a different future. While much of their work is focused on working through historical tropes, and on identifying the mechanisms which reproduce them in the present, what makes them so important is that their work focuses on present constructions and leads towards a newly politicised conception of the future. No longer romantics, viewing themselves in the light of a fixed and unaltering past, we can perhaps call these artists constructivists, who seek to combine the fractured parts of their history into new assemblages, and to produce variants of their own.

Alongside the exhibition, there will be several public events including film screenings, artist talks and a major symposium at the Brunei Gallery on 1 February 2014.

Iran faces a number of major environmental challenges. Together, they could lead to a possible humanitarian disaster: there is serious concern over the future availability of potable water and agriculturally useful land, not to mention the loss of biodiversity.

Water limitation and pollution are significant challenges that warrant people’s attention. Currently, Iran’s aquifers are declining at 7 per cent on balance annually. While the water shortage issue in Iran is urgent, mismanagement is magnifying the problem. In agriculture, which uses about 90 per cent of the country’s water resources, the efficiency rate of water usage is only 30 per cent. To compound the problem, domestic use of water is 70 per cent above what other people use around the world. Large inland bodies of water have been drying up as a result of drought, excessive water use, depletion of the aquifers through drilling deep wells, and diverting rivers and streams for agricultural use. Add to that significant pollution of wetlands, ground water and rivers, and the pattern of the impending disaster begins to take shape. To compound all of the above, the recent droughts will multiply the negative effects dramatically. The drying-up of Lake Urmia, and the subsequent fallout as a result of the exposed salt beds to the elements, and the additional impact on air quality, should be considered one of the great ecological disasters of our time.

Soil erosion and land degradation is another significant issue. Currently the grazing areas (rangelands) in Iran are being used at three times their carrying capacity. In other words, the land can only support a third of the herds of sheep that are grazing and still be able to regenerate the following year. The result is that much of the rangeland loses its ability to regenerate and slowly allows the process of desertification to take hold. In many areas, traditional rangeland has been converted to agricultural use on a massive scale. This is particularly visible on the foothills of mountains where rangeland is consistently ploughed for dry farming and left as wasteland after one or two seasons of crop production as the topsoil is easily washed away by rain. As a consequence, livestock owners turn to more remote areas with fragile ecosystems and the negative cycle continues. With human developments and agricultural activities come excessive water use and pollution.

Another of these challenges is the threat to Iran’s natural ecosystems and biodiversity. According to a survey by the World Health Organisation, four of the top ten most air polluted cities in the world are in Iran.
biodiversity. These are characterised by the current loss of biodiversity (loss of species) and fragmentation, caused by human intervention and/or natural causes. Iran has a total of 1,144 species of fauna, of which 194 are mammals. Seventeen of these are threatened, according to the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Some of the better-known critically endangered species are: the Asiatic cheetah, of which there is an estimated population of less than 70; the Iranian wild ass, also known as the onager, of which there are less than 1000; and the Persian leopard, whose numbers are estimated at less than 800. Overgrazing by domestic sheep, poaching and human encroachment have contributed to these population declines. Successive years of drought and mismanagement of resources have also contributed to the situation these endangered species face today. Birds, fish and reptiles all face similar threats and various species in each category are endangered.

Iran's limited forests are cause for grave concern. They have been in decline since the 1960s, partly due to climate change but also largely as a result of human population expansion and subsequent development activities. The forests of Iran have decreased by 30 per cent in the last fifty years. Once again, lack of management and insufficient planning have played a major role. Many trees in forested areas have been felled to provide firewood and to make way for agricultural activities. Deforestation has major long-term negative impacts. First and foremost, forests are important providers of oxygen conversion. Multiple species of fauna and flora are dependent on this form of habitat and, given the minimal water resources available to the country, regenerating forestlands will be a challenging task. The biodiversity loss is tremendous and much of the time, irreplaceable.

Air pollution in Iran's large cities is also at a critical stage. According to a survey by the World Health Organisation (reported in Time Magazine, 27 September 2011), four of the top ten most air polluted cities in the world are in Iran, with Ahvaz ranking number one. Lack of refining capacity, modern fuel additives, catalytic converters and the prevalent use of antiquated fleets of buses, trucks and cars continually belching out terrifying amounts of toxic fumes contribute to Iran's air pollution issues. Add to this dust and sand storms, riz gard and other forms of airborne particulate pollution, and the level of harmful air intake reaches dangerous levels.

Iran also faces the impacts of climate change. Average annual precipitation has decreased by 9 per cent and overall temperatures have increased by 0.5 per cent degrees Celsius. As a result, there is less available water and a reduction of agricultural productivity. The results of these impacts have already begun to show and can be seen in high rates of soil erosion, decrease in topsoil fertility and reduced crop production. Migration from rural to urban areas has been happening at a steady rate over the last 50 years, but has increased dramatically in the last 30. The ratio of rural to urban has gone from 70/30 to 30/70 during this period.

Most of the issues and challenges stated above are not unique to Iran and are seen throughout the region. How these challenges are met is what will make the difference. The government is engaged in resolving these issues but is limited by budgetary constraints and a lack of sufficient management talent and know-how. The United Nations has been an active partner in helping resolve some of these problems too, but is also limited in what it can do. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also involved in this struggle,
The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East

By Charles Tripp

Cambridge University Press

Reviewed by Atef Alshaer

Professor Charles Tripp’s latest book, The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East, draws a clear picture of the various forms and patterns of power and resistance in the Middle East. Tripp writes with compelling lucidity that sometimes borders on poetic virtuosity. His understanding of power and resistance is informed by historical facts and narratives, economic facets and behaviours, political discourses and activities, and artistic productions and effects. The book does not dwell on the philosophical origins and entailments of power and resistance. Instead, it opts for an empirically grounded narrative that shows them at work in several contexts in the Middle East. The virtue of this method is that it demonstrates that there is hardly any example of power that does not give rise to examples of resistance, whether violent, subversive or peaceful. One of the arguments Tripp advances is that ‘... a politics of resistance follows power in that it too is capillary in nature, branching out in many different ways’.

Two predominant patterns of power and resistance can be discerned from the book. First, there is the power and violence of colonialism and the nationalist resistance to it. This can be seen during the colonial era in Algeria and Iraq and in the context of the continuing Palestinian resistance to Israel. Secondly, there are internal patterns of resistance, which are directed against dictatorships and various forms of repressive authorities in the Middle East. Violence was inbuilt into the very system of colonialism, giving rise to resistance that defeated or undermined it. In the case of Algeria, the colossal violence of French colonialism abetted native Algerian resistance, which succeeded in liberating Algeria after 130 years of occupation. Here, eight years of violence led to independence from an intransigent colonial power. The Palestinian case is another where violence gave the Palestinians a sense of reclamation and recognition: ‘The Palestinians had established themselves through armed resistance, however gruesome some of its methods, and however many Palestinians died in the Israeli reprisals’. In addition, a number of armed groups have taken up arms for various reasons in the recent history of the Middle East. These tended to undermine the central authority of the state and to propagate their own ideologies – Islamist in the majority.

Within the nation-state itself, Tripp shows that there are recurrent patterns of power and resistance. This is the case of Syria in 1982, when the Syrian president Hafiz al-Assad, the father of the current incumbent Bashar al-Assad, emitted harsh reprisals against the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama. This flattened parts of the city and killed thousands of people. The violence of the father was continued by his son in 2011. Thus, violence has been contagious in the formation of the state in the Middle East. As it grew in scope, people found ways to revolt and fight against it. As Tripp writes, ‘the perceived moral bankruptcy of established power, the resonance of violent narratives and experiences among the population ... all these can influence the fateful decision to fight against generally overwhelming odds’. Besides the physical violence, there are various forms of coercive authorities, which are challenged by acts of resistance, whether at the economic, cultural, gender or memory levels. Women from Morocco, Palestine and Iran have found ways to challenge the patriarchal and religious authorities which limit or typify their roles. In Israel, acts of resistance took place at the level of memory whereby the manipulatively heroic Israeli state narratives were undermined, allowing a Palestinian narrative to emerge. Artistic works in Palestine and Turkey also challenged the incumbent authorities and revealed the limits of power, and in a way, the inevitability of resistance.

Overall, the book, though descriptive rather than analytical at times, is enriched with examples that depict the dynamics of power and resistance in a region that continues to see so much of these aspects.

Atef Alshaer is a Senior Teaching Fellow in the Near and Middle Eastern Department at SOAS. He has several publications, including his forthcoming book Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab World.

Edited by Parvin Alizadeh and Hassan Hakimian

The recent mass uprisings against autocratic rulers in the Arab world have highlighted the potency of Islamist forces in post-revolutionary societies, a force arguably unlocked first by Iran’s version of the ‘spring’ three decades ago. This book is concerned with the economic aspects and consequences of the Iranian Revolution in general and its interaction with the international economy in particular. The contributions in this volume by experts in the field address ways in which, in the span of three decades, Iran’s economy has evolved from a strong aspiration to develop an ‘independent economy’ to grappling with debilitating international economic sanctions.

Oct 2013, Routledge, £87.62

Contemporary Iranian Art
New Perspectives

By Hamid Keshmirshekan

This book explores the history of modern and contemporary Iranian art by reconsideration of the relationship with the cultural past, modernism and the issue of contemporaneity vis-à-vis cultural specificity. In this new, comprehensive study, featuring 379 colour images, Hamid Keshmirshekan considers the dynamics at play for Iranian artists as they confront their cultural past as well as issues of contemporaneity and cultural specificity. He contends that the twentieth century in particular proved a crucial period in the art and culture of Iran; it was then that the legacies of tradition and modernism came under critical review, and artistic concerns revealed themselves as indivisible from ideological ones.

Oct 2013, Saqi Books, £45

The Renaissance and the Ottoman World

By Anna Contadini and Claire Norton

The fourteen articles in this volume contribute to an exciting cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scholarly dialogue that explores elements of continuity and exchange between the two areas and positions of the Ottoman Empire as an integral element of the geopolitical and cultural continuum within which the Renaissance evolved. The aim of this volume is to refine current understandings of the diverse artistic, intellectual and political interactions in the early modern Mediterranean world and, in doing so, to contribute further to the discussion of the scope and nature of the Renaissance.

Oct 2013, Ashgate, £65
Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906

By Vanessa Martin

The events of the Constitutional Revolution in Tehran have been much discussed, but the provinces, despite their crucial role in the revolution, have received less attention. Here, Vanessa Martin seeks to redress this imbalance. She analyses the role of the Islamic debate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and its relationship with secular ideas, and examines the ramifications of this debate in the main cities of Tabriz, Shiraz, Isfahan and Bushehr. By exploring the interaction between Islam and secularism during this tumultuous time, Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism concludes that in each province, the Constitutional Revolution took on a character of its own.

Sept 2013, IB Tauris, £42.15

Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East

Edited by Hugh Kennedy

The Middle East has a poetic record stretching back five millennia. In this book, leading scholars draw upon this legacy to explore the ways in which poets, from the third millennium BC to the present day, have responded to the effects of war. They deal with material in a wide variety of languages including Sumerian, Hittite, Akkadian, biblical and modern Hebrew, and classical and contemporary Arabic, and range from the destruction of Ur in 1940 BC to the poetry of Hamas and Hezbollah. Some poems are heroic in tone, celebrating victory and the prowess of warriors, others reflect keenly on the suffering that war causes.

Oct 2013, IB Tauris, £59.50

Cultural Revolution in Iran
Contemporary Popular Culture in the Islamic Republic

Edited by Annabelle Sreberny, Massoumeh Torfeh

The Islamic Republic of Iran has entered its fourth decade, and the values and legacy of the Revolution it was founded upon continue to have profound and contradictory consequences for Iranian life. This book draws on the expertise and experience of Iranian and international academics and activists to address diverse areas of social and cultural innovation that are driving change and progress. While religious conservatism remains the creed of the establishment, this volume uncovers an underground world of new technology, media and entertainment that speaks to women seeking a greater public role and a restless younger generation that organises and engages with global trends online.

Aug 2013, IB Tauris, £56.50
Leaves fall, the air cools, and the clocks change this weekend. British Summer Time is over. We visit Kateh, near the canal at Little Venice, accompanied by two friends familiar with Iranian cuisine. It’s an early Friday supper for us – the only booking available at this popular place being 6.30pm – but at least it’s suitably dark. The restaurant’s windows glow invitingly. As we enter, Alhena, our design conscious daughter, likes the simple but stylish décor, particularly the colourful lamps. We’re first to arrive, but the place is soon buzzing. The restaurant speaks to a cosmopolitan London clientele, as does the Italian waiter with fluent French, eager to entertain.

We've visited the menu in cyberspace and recognise the language of 21st century foodies. Organic offerings abound, along with the free range, the pan fried, the fresh; lamb is sourced from Rhug farm in Wales; they proudly blend pomegranate and walnut with Ligurian ‘Tagliasche’ olive. When plates arrive they are fashionably large and white - square for the starters, oval for the mains – food centred beautifully by a Paul Klee in the kitchen. The question on all of our minds as we begin is: What might be lost in this translation; and what gained?

Eating with friends is fun, especially because you can sample more food! Kateh’s menu is fairly extensive; we ask for ten dishes – five small and five large. As the waiters manoeuvre plates, all appurtenances are banished: napkins, phones, spectacles; even the sultry bottle of Sicilian Nero d’Avola must sit far away.

Of the starters, koofteh berenji makes all eyes close. These tender Persian meat balls are leavened with plum, rice and split peas; neither sweet nor tart, just delicious. Oktapoos is popular and Mark’s favourite: pan-fried squid served with artfully scattered strands of beetroot is a salt-sweet triumph. Not on the website, it’s presumably one of the daily/seasonal variations promised by the owner, Narges Pourkhomami. Salad Dezfooli is a delicate cucumber and pomegranate salad sparkling with indigenous angelica powder, lemon and mint. Smoky grilled baby aubergine creamed with yoghurt, then given an edge with mint and walnut is kashke bademjan. Only yoghurty borani spinach fails to excite.

Now arrives a kaleidoscope of rices. Saffron rice – glistening white rice arranged around a golden bed of saffron steeped grains; aromatic herbed rice is moist and comes in variegated greens; zereshk polow is, our friend says, a menu understatement: really it’s the legendary javaher polow (jewelled rice), resplendent with barberries, pistachios and almonds. The rices have company. Alhena enjoys chargrilled baby chicken (joojeh), marinated and tender. Fesenjan is firm duck revelling in dark pomegranate and walnut sauce. Nadje is a particular fan. A venison special is rather dense and dry. It shares this quality with the kookoo sabzi herb cake accompanying the sea bass special, though the fish is silky and fresh flavoured. (The specials aren't priced on the menu so you may want to check before ordering.) Mark is hypnotised by succulent minced veal kebab, but our Iranian friend is less impressed. She laughs graciously and says Iranians argue over koobideh because it’s so close to the heart.

Three servings of faloodeh end the meal, a distinctive rice noodle and rosewater sorbet with saffron ice cream. Alhena enjoys homemade frozen blueberry yoghurt. Mark likes simple cheesecake.

People relax. Many tables, we notice, have Iranians with non-Iranian friends. The website speaks of ‘combining traditional and contemporary Iranian hospitality’. They succeed; though, at £40 per head, it is with a crowd not fazed by austerity. We’ll return one day. For now we drink tea.

Nadje Al-Ali is on the Editorial Board of Middle East in London and Mark Douglas is her eating partner.
OBITUARY

Professor Keith Stanley McLachlan

19 February 1937 – 12 October 2013

Member of the academic staff of SOAS 1962-1996

Keith was born in Warrington, now in Cheshire. A busy family bakery was his home where the virtues of early rising and coping with customer quirks were key concerns. He had a lifelong and very nuanced faith in the private sector, entrepreneurs and competition. At the same time other ideas and values came his way at Boteler Grammar School where inspired teachers introduced him to the ‘enlightenment’ and the virtues of cooperation and equity so evident in the industrial history of his native Lancashire. He was much better read than any of us who joined the Department of Geography at Durham in 1955.

In the 1950s the Durham Geography Department established itself as a major national research centre on Middle Eastern and North African studies. On graduating Keith gained funding to complete a PhD at Durham. He worked with a Durham team in the newly independent [1951] Libya. He analysed agrarian change in the coastal district of Al Khums. The theme of agrarian change remained one of his main research interests throughout his life in the academy.

From Durham he joined the newly established Economics Department at SOAS with a Research Fellowship in Contemporary Iranian Studies in 1961. He significantly expanded his Middle Eastern expertise undertaking language training which facilitated a period of intensive fieldwork on land reform and the agricultural transition in Iran. In Iran he also extended the range of his expertise on the political economy of the region. He began to research the oil and gas resources of Iran and then of the Middle East and North Africa more generally. For the next four decades he was a prominent commentator on the energy resources of the MENA region.

In 1965 Keith was a founder member of the SOAS Geography Department with Charles Fisher, John Lebon and John Sargent. He was an inspiring lecturer and supervisor and enjoyed generating debate and constructive controversy.

He was a founder member of the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies at SOAS in 1968 and of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies in 1971. He was an active chairman of the SOAS Centre from 1975 to 1978. He also made continuous contributions to the national profile of contemporary Middle Eastern studies. His participation was especially strong in the affairs of the British Institute of Persian Studies [BIPS]. He served for many years on the Council of BIPS.

He published continuously and made a number of key contributions such as his 1988 analysis of the Iranian agricultural sector in a highly regarded book - The Neglected Garden: politics, ecology and agriculture in Iran. In parallel with his academic writing he generated a huge volume of high-quality specialist regional analysis on political, commercial and environmental risk. He initially developed these skills in working with the Economist Intelligence Unit. For over 30 years - including after his retirement from SOAS in 1996 - he channelled these contributions through MENAS Services, a provider of consultancy and publishing services, which we founded in 1980. Keith’s regional expertise has always underpinned the reputation of MENAS Services. The widely recognised SOAS expertise on international border studies stemmed from Keith’s experience in advising on many off-shore and on-shore cases at the International Court in the Hague.

Keith will be remembered as a major analyst of the contemporary Middle East. Over 50 years, as friend and colleague, one constantly admired and benefitted from the power of his intellect and the integrity of his professionalism. One has valued even more his sense of unstinting personal loyalty and of his wider sense of social justice. They have underpinned his relations with family, friends and all the individuals and institutions with whom he engaged so successfully.

Tony Allan is Emeritus Professor at KCL and SOAS. He was an undergraduate at Durham University with Professor McLachlan. Over the next 50 years he researched and worked alongside him at SOAS.
HE EVENTS and organisations listed below are not necessarily endorsed or supported by The Middle East in London. The accompanying texts and images are based primarily on information provided by the organisers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the compilers or publishers. While every possible effort is made to ascertain the accuracy of these listings, readers are advised to seek confirmation of all events using the contact details provided for each event.

Submitting entries and updates: please send all updates and submissions for entries related to future events via e-mail to mepub@soas.ac.uk

BM – British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG
SOAS – SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG
LSE – London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2 2AE

DECEMBER EVENTS

Monday 2 December
5:15 pm | Ibn al-Muqaffa’, a Double Agent between Iran and Islam (Seminar) István Kristóf-Nagy, Exeter. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Part of the Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. G3, SOAS. E bf7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/

6:15 pm | On looking at Late Babylonian seal impressions (Seminar) Christopher Walker, BM. Organised by: London Centre for the Ancient Near East. Convened by: Mark Weeden, SOAS. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. T 020 7898 4328 E mw41@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/ane/lcane/seminars/

6:30 pm | US foreign policy and the Iranian revolution: the dynamics of engagement and strategic alliance (Lecture) Christian Emery, University of Plymouth. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Emery will discuss the main findings from his new book US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution: the Cold War Dynamics of Engagement and Strategic Alliance and will show that, contrary to the claims of Iran’s leaders, US diplomats tried in good faith to build bridges with the new regime. Chaired by: Roham Alvandi, LSE. Admission free. Wolfson Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE. E s.masry@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

7:30 pm | Couplings Fireworks (Reading) Organised by: Exiled Writers Ink. Exiled Lit Cafe. Includes works by the Iranian short story writer and novelist, Navid Hamzavi, and the Iranian writer, The fire ordeal of Siyavosh, Son of Key Kavus

Friday 13th December
Kings, heroes and Zoroastrianism in Persian literature

Narguess Farzad, Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart will read extracts of stories related to Zoroastrianism in ancient Persia from the colourful collection of Persian literature. These include myths from the Shahnameh or Book of Kings of Firdowsi, completed in AD 1010, and Gurgani’s Vis and Ramin of the mid-eleventh century. The readings in original Persian and English translation will bring to life kings and heroes of pre-Islamic Persia and their role as defenders of the Zoroastrian religion. Heroes such as Esfandiyar and Siyavush, who are revered both in the Avestan literature as well as the Shahnameh, will be included in this poetry session.


The Brunei Gallery will close at 5pm and re-open from 7-9pm.

Organised by the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS, University of London.
Venue: Brunei Gallery Suite, SOAS
Time: 6-7pm
Tuesday 3 December


5:45 pm | An Historical Overview of the Iranian Presidency: 1979-2013 (Lecture) Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, University of Manchester. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI) and the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Randjbar-Daemi will provide an overview of the genesis and evolution of the presidency in the Islamic Republic of Iran and will argue that the three decades under consideration have witnessed a continuous struggle, by successive presidents, for recognition of their constitutional authority and its augmentation. Tea and biscuits available from 5:15pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 4 December

5:00 pm | Libyans, Sea Peoples and Egyptians: the mystery and myth of Libyans in the Late Bronze Age (Lecture) Robert Morkot, The Society of Libyan Studies. Organised by: The Society for Libyan Studies. Admission free for Society members and guests. British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH. E GenSec@societyforlibyanstudies.org W www.societyforlibyanstudies.org

6:00 pm | Protest and Revolution in the Arab World: Reflections Three Years On (Discussion) Madawi Al-Rasheed, LSE, and John Chalcraft, LSE. Chaired by: Toby Dodge, LSE. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Admission free. Hong Kong Theatre, Clement House, LSE. E s.masry@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

6:00 pm | All Change in the Middle East: Implications for the Palestinians (Panel Discussion) Ahmad Khalidi, St Antony's College, Oxford, Oroub El-Abed, SOAS, Ahmed Ziat, Oxford University. Organised by: Olive Tree Middle East Forum. What will be the fate of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip now that the Egyptian authorities have reclosed the border and most of the tunnels? How has the Palestinian situation been affected by successive new flows of refugees? What is the future of the Palestinian refugees in the Arab host countries? And supposing that John Kerry’s initiative produces a ‘two-state’ formula for them and the Israelis – what would that actually mean? Chaired by: Rosemary Hollis, Olive Tree Programme. Admission free. To register see contact details below. A130, College Building, 280 St John Street, London EC1V 4PB. E olivetree@city.ac.uk W www.city.ac.uk/olivetree

Thursday 5 December

6:30 pm | The Renaissance and the Ottoman World (Book Launch) Organised by: Royal Asiatic Society. Event to mark the publication of The Renaissance and the Ottoman World (edited by Anna Contadini and Claire Norton, Ashgate, 2013). Admission free. Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 020 7388 4539 E ac24@soas.ac.uk W www.royalasiantociety.org

Friday 6 December

12:00 pm | The AKP Government at Home and Abroad: A Bundle of Contradictions (Seminar) William Hale, SOAS. Organised by: SOAS Modern Turkish Studies Programme (London Middle East Institute, SOAS) and sponsored by Nurol Bank. Part of the Seminars on Turkey series. Convened by Benjamin Fortna, SOAS. Admission free. G3, SOAS. T 020 7898 4431 E bp@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/olivetree

Monday 9 December

5:15 pm | The Unique Necklace by the Andalusian Ibn Abd Rabbibli Arab Identity in the Making? (Seminar) Isabel Toral-Niehoff, AKU-ISM. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Part of the Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. G3, SOAS. E bf7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/

6:00 pm | Archaeology and Bar Kokhba since 1870: A Non-Archaeologist’s Impression (Lecture) William Horbury,
Tuesday Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East Spring 2014

The Middle East - Changing Economic and Political Landscapes

21 January

Qatar and the Arab Spring: Policy Responses and Consequences
Kristian Coates-Ulrichsen, Baker III Institute of Public Policy at Rice University in Houston

28 January

Lessons and opportunities in researching dress in Saudi Arabia: insights from the Art of Heritage Project
Aisa Martinez, LMEI

4 February

Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran
Elaheh Rostami-Povey, Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS
Organised jointly with the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS

11 February

Reading Week

18 February

The myth of Perfidious Albion: Anglo-Iranian relations in historical context
Ali Ansari, St Andrews

25 February

Falafel King: culinary customs and national narratives in Palestine
Zeina Ghandour, Birkbeck College
Organised jointly with the Centre for Palestine Studies, SOAS

4 March

Prospects for Inclusive Growth in the MENA Region
Hassan Hakimian, LMEI & SOAS

11 March

An Historical Overview of the Iranian Presidency: 1979-2013
Siavush Ranjbar-Daemi, University of Manchester
(Re-scheduled from 3 December 2013) Organised jointly with the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS

TUESDAY 5:45 PM (unless otherwise stated)
KHALILILU LECTURE THEATRE, MAIN BUILDING, SOAS

The Lectures are free and open to all. Tea and biscuits are available from 5:15 pm.

For further information contact:
The London Middle East Institute at SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG
T: 020 7898 4330 E: lmei@soas.ac.uk W: www.soas.ac.uk/imei/
multilateral and unilateral sanctions levied against Iran may not be compatible with international law and international human rights standards. Tea and biscuits available from 5:15pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/  6:30 pm | Alan Hall Memorial Lecture – The leopard changes its spots: recent work on societal change at Çatalhöyük (Lecture) Ian Hodder, Stanford University and British Academy. Organised by: The British Institute at Ankara (BIAA). Hodder discusses recent evidence that demonstrates that Catalhoyuk was not a stable entity as has often been supposed and will look at the complex ritual and symbolic world that has become so well known. Tickets: £10 (available online W www.biaa.ac.uk)/Admission free for BIAA members. Pre-registration required. British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH. T 020 7969 5204 E biaa@britac.ac.uk W www.biaa.ac.uk

Wednesday 11 December

4:30 pm | Saudi Arabian foreign policy after the Arab Spring (Talk) Adel Al-Toraifi, The Majalla. Organised by: LSE Kuwait Programme and LSE Middle East Centre. Admission free. NAB.1.04, First Floor, New Academic Building, LSE. T 020 7955 6639 E i.sinclair@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/programmes/middleEastProgramme/kuwait/events/Home.aspx  6:00 pm | Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East (Book Launch/Panel Discussion) Adam Hanieh, SOAS with Gilbert Achcar, SOAS, Jamie Allinson, University of Westminster and Brenna Bhandar, SOAS. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Drawing upon extensive empirical research, Adam Hanieh’s Lineages of Revolt tracks the major shifts in the region’s political economy over recent decades. Hanieh explores the contours of neoliberal policies, dynamics of class and state formation, imperialism and the nature of regional accumulation, the significance of Palestine and the Gulf Arab states, and the ramifications of the global economic crisis. Admission free. DLT (G2), SOAS. T 020 7898 4490/4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/  6:45 pm | Contemporary Egyptian Literature (Reading) Ayman El-Dessouky, SOAS. Organised by: Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies (CCLPS) and P21 Gallery. Part of the CCLPS Reading Group. Admission free. P21 Gallery, 21 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. E kkl19@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/cclps/cclps-reading-group/  7:00 pm | Hijazzkar Maqam Concert Organised by: Ed Emery. Featuring players and singers from the various ‘national’ traditions - Mohammed Antar (ney) from Cairo, Najib Coutya (oud) from Lebanon, Peyman Heydarian (santur) from Iran, Cahit Baylac (violin) from Turkey and Pavlos Carvalho (bouzouki) from Greece. Plus guest singers and instrumentalists. Tickets: £10/£6 conc. Pre-booking advised. Cocktail Theatre, Gateforth Street, Marylebone, London NW8 8EH. E ed.emery@thefreeuniversity.net / ed.emery@soas.ac.uk  7:00 pm | Collecting from the Past or Appropriating the Present: The Dilemma in Contemporary Iranian Art (Lecture) Hamid Keshmirsheskan, LMEI & University of Oxford. Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. Part of the Islamic Art Circle at SOAS Lecture Programme. Chaired by: Doris Behrens-Abouseif, SOAS. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 0771 408 7480 E rosalindhaddon@gmail.com W www.soas.ac.uk/art/islac/

Thursday 12 December

Organised by: Department of the History of Art & Archaeology, SOAS. Research Seminar in Islamic Art. During the preparations of bringing part of the Mshatta Façade to Berlin, a number of figural fragments of limestone were found within or in the vicinity of the audience hall. In 1962 further fragments were excavated. The study will present the sculptures and look into some art-historical implications. Convened by: Anna Contadini, SOAS. Admission free. Room B111, Brunei Gallery, SOAS. E ac24@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/art/events/ressemislamicart/ 6:00 pm | Cathay at Court: Far Eastern Inspirations in some Post-Mongol Persianate Drawings (Lecture) Ladan Akbarnia, BM. Organised by: Royal Asiatic Society. Admission free. Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 020 7388 4539 E cl@royalasiaticsoociety.org W www.royalasiaticsoociety.org

Friday 13 December

6:00 pm | Kings, heroes and Zoroastrianism in Persian literature (Reading) Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. Narguess Farzad, Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart will read extracts of stories related to Zoroastrianism in ancient Persia from the colourful collection of Persian literature. These include myths from the Shahnameh or Book of Kings of Firdowsi, completed in AD 1010, and Gurgani’s Vis and Ramin of the mid-eleventh century. Readings in original Persian and English translation. This event is in connection with two exhibitions: The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in history and imagination, and Wise men from the East: Zoroastrian traditions in Persia and beyond (see Exhibitions). Admission free. Brunei Suite, Brunei Gallery, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490/4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cis/events/ 6:00 pm | On Palestine, G4S and the Prison Industrial Complex: an evening with Angela Davis and Gina Dent (Talk) Angela Davis, University of California, Santa Cruz, Gina Dent, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Rafeef Ziadah, War on Want. Organised by: War on Want, School of Law at SOAS and the Russell Tribunal on Palestine. Discussion on Justice for Palestine and the Stop G4S campaign. Chaired by: Brenna Bhandar, SOAS, and Frank Barat, Russell Tribunal on Palestine. Tickets: Suggested donation £8. Tickets available at W waronwant.org/AngelaDavisBruneiGalleryLectureTheatre, Brunei

6:00 pm | Sheikh Imam Concert @ SOAS In a gesture of solidarity with the Egyptian revolution, the SOAS students’ union voted to elect the blind Egyptian oud player Sheikh Imam Issa (d. 1977) and the Egyptian poet Ahmed Fouad Negm as joint Honorary Presidents of the SOAS Student Union. The songs of Sheikh Imam and Ahmed Fouad Negm will be performed by Najib Coutya (oud and vocals), Mohammed Antar (ney and vocals), and Cahit Baylav (violin). Admission free. Pre-registration required. SOAS. E ed.emery@thefreeuniversity.net / ed.emery@soas.ac.uk 6:00 pm | Iran-UK Sonic Residency (Performance) Organised by: Six Pillars, the London College of Communication – University of the Arts London and Southbank
Centre. Collaboration between the final participants in a two week residency in London for emerging Iranian sonic artists and digital music producers living in Iran or the wider Middle East, North Africa or South Asia region. Tickets: TBC. Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX. W www.sixpillars.org/IranUK

Saturday 14 December

10:00 am | A Conference on Maqam Music Organised by: Ed Emery. Keynote contribution by Owen Wright, SOAS. Admission free. Pre-registration required. SOAS. E ed.emery@thefreeuniversity.net/ ed.emery@soas.ac.uk

7:00 pm | Yalda Night Festival of World Music (Concert) Organised by: Peyman Heydarian and the SOAS Iranian Music Society. Celebrate the longest night of the year with Persian, Kurdish, Russian, Greek, Turkish, Sephardik (Jewish music from Spain), Italian, English, Irish and Scottish music. Tickets: £15/£10 students and the unwaged/£6 SOAS students. Advance booking required W www.thesantur.com. DLT (G2), SOAS. E events.santur@yahoo.com

Monday 16 December

7:00 pm | Tree of Seeds (Reading) Organised by: South Asian Women’s Creative Collective (SAWCC) London. Staged reading of a play-in-progress by Emmy award winning American writer Kayhan Irani. Directed by Zachary James. A narrative of migration, memory, and the Zoroastrian community -- set in Iran, Yemen, and India: A young woman and her brother sail from Iran to India. Found on the docks in Yemen, they are taken in by a local Indian family on the eve of an anti-British uprising. Evolving embroidery traditions weave a tale of two communities bound by religion yet separated by culture. Admission free. Pre-registration required E sawcc-london@sawcc.org The Actors Centre, 1A Tower Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9NP. W www.sawcc.org/community/sawcc-london/

Thursday 19 December

7:00 pm | The Iran Society Christmas Party Organised by: The Iran Society. Iradj Amini will speak on Napoleon and Persia. Tickets: £30. St Columbas Church Hall, Pont Street, London SW1X 0BD. T 020 7235 5122 E info@iransociety.org W www.iransociety.org

3:00 pm | Syria: Freedom versus Death (Reading) Organised by: Exiled Writers Ink and The Syrian Writers Association. Exiled Lit Cafe. With the Syrian writers Iyad Hayatleh, Maram al-Masri, and Husam Eddin Mohammad. Tickets: £4/£2 EWI members. Poetry Cafe, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX. E jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk W www.exiledwriters.co.uk

January Events

Wednesday 8 January


Monday 13 January


Saturday 18 January


Sunday 19 January

Iran’s Natural Heritage: A Catalyst Symposium to Spark Measurable Change (Two-Day Symposium: Saturday 18 - Sunday 19 January) See listing on Saturday 18 January for more information.
The Hadassah and Daniel Khalili Memorial Lecture in Islamic Art and Culture

A Battle of Books: ‘Abbasid Patronage and Qur‘anic Manuscripts

Professor François Déroche
Director of Studies, École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences Historiques et Philologiques, Paris

7.00pm
Wednesday 8 January 2014

Khalili Lecture Theatre, Main Building, SOAS, University of London
London WC1H 0XG

Admission Free – All Welcome
Organised by the Islamic Art Circle at SOAS and the London Middle East Institute, SOAS, University of London

Enquiries: E-mail vp6@soas.ac.uk or Telephone 020 7898 4490
An intensive five-week programme which includes two courses: an Arabic Language Course (introductory or intermediate) and another on ‘Government and Politics of the Middle East' or 'Introduction to Arab Culture'.

Beginners Arabic (Level 1)
This is an introductory course in Modern Standard Arabic. It teaches students the Arabic script and provides basic grounding in Arabic grammar and syntax. On completing the course, students should be able to read, write, listen to and understand simple Arabic sentences and passages. This course is for complete beginners and does not require any prior knowledge or study of Arabic.

Beginners Arabic (Level 2)
This course is a continuation of Beginners Arabic Level 1. It completes the coverage of the grammar and syntax of Modern Standard Arabic and trains students in reading, comprehending and writing with the help of a dictionary more complex Arabic sentences and passages.

To qualify for entry into this course, students should have already completed at least one introductory course in Arabic.

Government and Politics of the Middle East
This course provides an introduction to the politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It gives on a country by country basis, an overview of the major political issues and developments in the region since the end of the First World War and addresses key themes in the study of contemporary Middle East politics, including: the role of the military, social and economic development, political Islam, and the recent uprisings (the 'Arab Spring').

Introduction to Arab Culture*
This course examines the major cultural patterns and institutions of the Arab world. It is taught through a study of some lively topics such as religious and ethnic diversity, impact of the West, stereotyping, the role of tradition, education (traditional and modern), family structure and value, gender politics, media, life in city, town and village, labour and labour migration, the Palestinian refugee problem and Arab exile communities, culinary cultures, music and media, etc.

* (subject to approval)

FEES
Session (5 weeks) Programme fee* Accommodation fee**
23 June-24 July 2014 (two courses) £2,500 from £300/week

* An early bird discount of 10% applies to course fees before 31 March 2014.

** Rooms can be booked at the Intercollegiate Halls which are located in the heart of Bloomsbury: www.halls.london.ac.uk.

For more information, please contact Louise Hosking on LH2@soas.ac.uk. Or check our website www.soas.ac.uk/lmei
Matar will discuss her new book which explores how gender and gender relations of power in Gaza are renegotiated to develop material mechanisms of coping or resistance against the livelihood crisis. Chaired by: Sumi Madhok, LSE. Admission free. Room 1.04, New Academic Building, LSE. E s.masry@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

5:45 pm | Lessons and opportunities in researching dress in Saudi Arabia: insights from the Art of Heritage Project (Lecture) Aisa Martinez, LMEI. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Martinez will elaborate on studying traditional dress and adornment in Saudi Arabia. She will compare methodology using archival records of European travellers to her fieldwork visits to the Kingdom in 2012. Using these research methods in addition to studying the Art of Heritage Project dress collection, there are lessons and opportunities to gain from the interdisciplinary approach to studying dress in the Arabian Peninsula. Tea and biscuits available from 5:15pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

7:00 pm | Silver and steel: highlights of Safavid metalwork (Lecture) James Allan. Organised by: The Iran Society. Admission free for Society members and one guest. Marlborough Suite, The Army and Navy Club, 36-39 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JN (Dress code calls for gentlemen to wear jacket and tie). T 020 7235 5122 E info@iransociety.org W www.iransociety.org

8:30 pm | Present and past: the role of gender in the Levant in the history of Europe (Seminar) Benjamin White, Birmingham. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Part of the Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Seminar re-scheduled from 28 October. Admission free. G3, SOAS. E bt7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/

Tuesday 21 January

5:45 pm | Qatar and the Arab Spring: Policy Responses and Consequences (Lecture) Kristian Coates-Ulrichsen, Baker III Institute of Public Policy at Rice University in Houston. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. In only a decade, Qatar has been catapulted from a sleepy backwater to a regional power with truly international reach. Coates-Ulrichsen will assess Qatar’s startling rise to regional and international prominence, describing how its distinctive policy approach to studying dress in the Mediterranean cities, Beirut, Alexandria and Izmir. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. E ionisthompson@yahoo.co.uk W www.thefbsa.org

Monday 27 January

9:00 am | Middle East and North Africa Energy 2014: New Uncertainties and New Opportunities (Two-Day Conference: Monday 27 - Tuesday 28 January) Organised by: Chatham House. The conference will look at the key concerns for energy producers in the MENA region and will explore how political, economic and market factors are reshaping the energy sector. Tickets: Various. T 020 7957 5729 E conferences@chathamhouse.org W www.chathamhouse.org/Mena_energy14

5:15 pm | Grudging Rescue: The French Withdrawal from Cilicia and the Exodus of Armenians, 1921 (Seminar) Benjamin White, Birmingham. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Part of the Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Seminar re-scheduled from 28 October. Admission free. G3, SOAS. E bt7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/

Tuesday 28 January


EXHIBITIONS

Until 14 December | The Everlasting Flame: Zarathushtanism in History and Imagination

Ayse Erkmen: Intervals. Installation shot by Jane Hobson, 2013. Courtesy of Barbican Art Gallery (See Exhibitions, page 38)
The first exhibition of its kind to provide a visual narrative of the history of Zoroastrianism, its rich cultural heritage and the influence it has had on the major world religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The exhibition takes you on a journey from the earliest days of the religion to its emergence as the foremost religion of the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian empires of imperial Iran. Admission free. Brunei Gallery, SOAS. T 020 7898 4046/4023 E gallery@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/everlastingflame/

Until 15 December | Siah Armajani: An Ingenious World The first major UK survey of Iran-born, American artist, artist Siah Armajani traces his early works on paper, made in Iran during the late 1950s, to his present day public sculpture commissions. Admission free. Parasol Unit, 14 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW. T 020 7490 7373 E info@parasol-unit.org W www.parasol-unit.org

Until 15 December | In the City Graphic design and sound art exhibition providing a rare glimpse into four Arab cities - Alexandria, Algiers, Baghdad and Nablus - and showcasing a series of works from a line up of established and emerging Arab designers, illustrators, video, and sound artists and explores each city's panorama through their streets, landmarks, people, signage, and sounds. Admission free. P21 Gallery, 21 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. T 020 7121 6190 E info@p21.org.uk W www.p21.org.uk

Until 20 December | Hanieh Delecroix & Keyvan Saber: Lifeline First solo exhibition in London for Hanieh Delecroix & Keyvan Saber, the two Iranian artists based in Paris. Signing their paintings Hanieh & Keyvan, their works involve Hanieh painting abstract images as a stage on which Keyvan performs his writing, abstract calligraphy of his own poetry or texts by contemporary and classical Persian writers. Admission free. Room 69a, The Mosaic Rooms, A M Qattan Foundation, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7942 2000 E info@mosaicrooms.org W www.mosaicrooms.org

Until 10 January | Ayşe Erkmen: Intervals Interspersed throughout the 90-metre space Turkish artist Erkmen presents a series of scenic backdrops that are slowly lowered and raised by an automated fly system. Responding to the Barbican as a leading venue for all the arts, Erkmen brings an element that is normally in the background to the forefront, as if these backdrops were performers in their own production. Admission free. The Curve, Barbican Centre, London UK Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS. T 0845 120 7550 W www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Until 19 January | Pearls Organised in partnership with the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), the exhibition explores the history of pearls from the early Roman Empire to the present, and is a highlight event of the Qatars UK 2013 Year of Culture. On display are over 200 pieces of jewellery and works of art showcasing the extraordinary variety of colour and shape of natural and cultured pearls. Tickets: £10. Victoria & Albert Museum, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL. T 020 7942 2000 E info@vam.ac.uk W www.vam.ac.uk

Until 20 January | Adel El Siwi: An Exhibition of Works Exhibition of works by El Siwi which are characterised by two significant themes: the first is human faces with Pharaonic and African features alongside an attempt to deal with the Oriental Regality and the second theme is focused on fables, revealing the artist's passion animals. Admission free. ARTSPACE London, 7 Milner Street, London SW3 2QA. T 020 7589 5499 E info@artspace-london.com W www.artspace-london.com

Until 27 April | Wise Men From the East: Zoroastrian traditions in Persia and beyond On display are a variety of ancient and modern objects and coins which highlight the importance of Zoroastrian traditions in other religions. It will touch on the concept of the Three Kings of the Christian tradition, described in the New Testament as Magi from the east – Zoroastrian priests in the Persian tradition – and modern objects will show the ongoing legacy of this ancient Iranian religion and its significance as a symbol of national identity. Admission free. Friday Room 69a, BM. T 020 7323 8299 W www.britishmuseum.org

Wednesday 11 December

Until 21 February | Threads of Light & Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here Two-part exhibition featuring paintings by Iraqi artist Abu Zaydun Hanoos and a selection of art books and broadsheets from the project Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here. Hanoos's exhibition Threads of Light includes paintings inspired by the Iraqi poet Abdel-Wahab Al-Bayatti. Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here features responses by artists and writers to the 2007 bombing that destroyed Baghdad's cultural and intellectual hub: Al-Mutanabbi Street. Admission free. The Mosaic Rooms, A M Qattan Foundation, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7370 9990 E info@mosaicrooms.org W www.mosaicrooms.org

Friday 17 January

Until 21 February | Jameel Prize 3 Launch in 2009 and held every two years, the Jameel Prize is in its third edition, see the works by the 10 short-listed artists and designers, ranging from Arabic typography and calligraphy to fashion inspired by the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, and from social design and video installation to delicate miniature drawings. Admission free. V&A South Kensington, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL. T 020 7942 2000 W www.vam.ac.uk/jameelprize

‘Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here’. Threads of Light & Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here (See Exhibitions, page 38)
Based in central London, the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations two-year MA Programme:

- Offers a distinctive way of understanding Muslim civilisations as they have evolved over time.
- Stresses the plurality and complexity of past and present Muslim cultures, studying them as part of world cultures.
- Employs the tools of the social sciences and humanities as a framework for learning.

Within the disciplines of social sciences and humanities our students study a number of subjects including anthropology, development studies, economics, political science, art, architecture, history, literature, comparative religion and law; students are also required to study either Arabic, Persian or Turkish and undertake an intensive four-week language course abroad.

Financial assistance is available.

For further information and to register for the open day visit: www.aku.edu/ismc