MAPPING THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS IN IRANIAN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Saturday, 1st December 2018

Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS University of London

Conference Conveners:
Ramin Jahanbegloo & Hassan Hakimian

PROGRAMME

SPEAKERS AND CHAIRS:
ABSTRACTS & BIOGRAPHIES
CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

09:00-9:30 am: Registration

9:30-9:45 am: Opening Remarks
Professor Ramin Jahanbegloo (Jindal Global University – India) and Dr Hassan Hakimian (London Middle East Institute, SOAS)

9:45-11:15 am: Panel I
Iranian Intellectuals and the West: from Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period
Chair: Professor Haideh Moghissi (York University – Canada)
- Professor Saeed Paivandi: (University of Lorraine – France): “Amir Kabir: A Reformist and Pioneer of Modernisation in the Traditional State”
- Professor Ramin Jahanbegloo: (Jindal Global University – India): “Muhammad Ali Foroughi and the Rise of the Modern Iranian Intellectual”

11:15-11:45 am: Coffee Break

11:45-1:15 pm: Panel II
Nationalism and Modernity in the Mirror of Iranian Intellectuals
Chair: Dr Massoumeh Torfeh (SOAS)
- Professor Homa Katouzian (St Antony's College, University of Oxford): “Sadeq Hedayat: Iranian Fiction and the Experience of Modernity”
- Professor Ali Ansari (St Andrews University – Scotland): “Iranian Nationalists and the Perils of Whig History”

1:15-2:15 pm: Lunch

2:15-3:45 pm: Panel III
Iranian Intellectuals and Modern and Anti-Modernd Social Engineering Projects
Chair: Dr Hassan Hakimian (SOAS)
- Professor Haideh Moghissi (York University – Canada): “Rethinking Women’s Rights in Iran’s Modern and Anti-modern Social Engineering Projects”
- Professor Farhad Khosrokhavar (Studies Director at EHESS – France) & Dr Mohsen Mottaghi (Sociologist – France): “Shariati and Jalal Al Ahmad: the Iranian Third Worldist Intellectuals”

3:45-4:15 pm: Coffee Break

4:15-5:45 pm: Panel IV
Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Iranian Intellectuals
Chair: Dr Parvin Alizadeh (Boston University, Study Abroad, London Program)
- Professor Farzin Vahdat (Vassar College – USA): “Islamic Thinkers and Modernity in Iran”

5:45-6:00 pm: Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks
SPEAKERS AND CHAIRS: ABSTRACTS & BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Parvin Alizadeh: Chair, Panel IV
Parvin Alizadeh is Subject Area Coordinator and Lecturer, Study Abroad, Boston University, London Program. She worked as a lecturer in economics at Keynes College, Kent University, UK between 1988 and 1990 and was subsequently a principal Lecturer of Economics at London Metropolitan University where she worked for 17 years. Parvin also taught as an Associate Professor of Economics at Denison University, Ohio, USA from 2000 to 2003. Since 2009 she has been teaching at Boston University, Study Abroad, London Program. Parvin has also worked as a consultant for a number of international organisations including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank. Her main research interests are in the fields of women’s empowerment and the economic development of the Middle East, with a focus on Iran.

Professor Ali Ansari: Speaker, Panel II
Ali Ansari is Professor of Iranian History and Founding Director of the Institute for Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews and a Senior Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute. In 2016 Professor Ansari was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In 2018 he was elected Honorary Vice President of the British Institute for Persian Studies. His publications include Iran: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2014, The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran Cambridge University Press, 2012. He is also Editor of the Cambridge History of Iran Vol 8 (The Islamic Republic).

Abstract: Iranian Nationalists and the Perils of Whig History
This presentation will look at the ways in which British Whig narratives of progress informed Iranian intellectual opinion from the 19th century. Although ideas of the 'nation' are believed to have been drawn from the French experience, concepts of governance and progress were adopted and absorbed with some enthusiasm from the British model, and the Whig narrative in particular, which was translated and disseminated, albeit initially with limited reach, within Iran's emerging republic of letters. Evidence will be drawn from the first travellers to Britain in the 19th century before turning to the high tide of British influence during the Constitutional Revolution. The paper will argue that Iranian intellectuals, from a variety of political perspectives, proved to be much more enthusiastic advocates of the Whig narrative than the British themselves, ultimately turning these views on their head by using the narratives to feed negative stereotypes of the British.
Professor Touraj Atabaki: Speaker, Panel IV

Professor Atabaki is an Honorary Research Fellow at the International Institute of Social History and Emeritus Professor of Social History of the Middle East and Central Asia at Leiden University. He first studied theoretical physics and then history at Birkbeck College, University of London and then obtained his PhD in 1991 from University of Utrecht. Atabaki subsequently worked at Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam and Leiden University where he held the Chair of Social History of the Middle East and Central Asia. Atabaki’s earlier research interest encompassed historiography, ethnic studies and the practice of authoritarianism in Iran, the Ottoman/Turkey and everyday Stalinism in the Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, in the last ten years his research interest has focused more on the history of labour and has coordinated a project on the hundred years’ social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. Professor Atabaki has written extensively on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of Iran, Turkey, the Caucasus and Central Asia. For his research and publication see: https://socialhistory.org/en/staff/touraj-atabaki

Abstract: The Perplexity of the Iranian Marxist Intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s

Iran saw rapid, albeit uneven, economic and social development during the last ten years of Pahlavi rule (1966-1976), juxtaposed with a move from milder forms of autocratic governance to a more repressive kind of political dictatorship. If, at the beginning of this period, the degree of political exclusion for both right and left of the political opposition differed, by the end of the period almost all sides of the political spectrum were subject to insistent repression. The Iranian left, in all its diversity, adopted different positions in the face of political dictatorship, from passive propaganda to armed encounter. But for both the radical and reformist factions of the left, the Iranian working class was the object of a sustained campaign. In this way, the self-appointed vanguard endeavoured to subject the latter to ‘enlightenment’ and mobilisation so that it might assume its historical agency on the road to revolutionary transformation.

This paper intends to revisit the Iranian left’s perceptions of the working class and labour movement within the context of the social and economic changes during the decade prior to the revolution of 1979.

Dr Hassan Hakimian: Convener, Opening Remarks and Chair, Panel III

Hassan Hakimian is Director of the London Middle East Institute and a Reader in the Economics Department at SOAS, University of London. Dr Hakimian's research focuses on the MENA economies, specifically human resources and demographic change, labour markets, inclusive growth and the economics of Arab uprisings. He is the author of Labour Transfer and Economic Development (1990), co-editor with Ziba Moshaver of The State and Global Change (2000), with Jeff Nugent of Trade Policy and Economic Integration in MENA (2003) and with Parvin Alizadeh of Iran and the Global Economy: Petro Populism, Islam and Economic Sanctions (2014). Dr Hakimian is a founding member and currently the President of the International Iranian Economic Association (IIEA) and a Research Fellow and member of the Advisory Committee of the Economic Research Forum (ERF) in Cairo. He is the founder and series editor for the Routledge Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa series, which he launched in 2003.
Professor Ramin Jahanbegloo: Convener, Opening Remarks and Speaker, Panel I

Professor Jahanbegloo is the Executive Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Nonviolence and Peace Studies and Vice-Dean of the School of Law, Jindal Global University, Delhi, India. He is a political philosopher. He received his BA, MA and PhD in Philosophy from the Sorbonne University. From 1993 he taught at the Academy of Philosophy in Tehran and from 1997 to 2001 at the University of Toronto, before moving to the Cultural Research Centre in Tehran and, in 2006/07, to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi, India. In April 2006 Dr Jahanbegloo was arrested in Tehran Airport and was placed in solitary confinement for four months before being released on bail. He returned to the University of Toronto from 2008 to 2012 before becoming Associate Professor of Political Science at York University in Toronto from 2012 to 2015. He is a member of the advisory board of PEN Canada and the winner of the Peace Prize from the United Nations Association in Spain (2009) for his extensive academic works in promoting dialogue between cultures and his advocacy for non-violence. He has published 28 books in English, French, Spanish, Italian and Persian, the most recent of which is The Global Gandhi (Routledge 2018).

Abstract:  
Muhammad Ali Foroughi and the Rise of the Modern Iranian Intellectual

M.A. Foroughi may be considered as one of the earliest intellectuals and statesmen in Iran to pay serious attention to modern philosophy and to issues of rationality in modern Europe. If we take a close look at two of Foroughi’s books, Andishey-e Dur va Deraz (Distant and Lengthy Thought), which is a short essay published in 1927 while he was serving as Iran’s ambassador in Kemalist Turkey, and Seyr-e Hekmat dar Urupa (The Course of Philosophy in Europe) written in 1922, as a long introduction to his translation of Descartes’ Discours de la Methode, we can see Foroughi’s special interest in the founding principles of modern Europe and his dialogical role in accommodating the Iranian worldview with the rational mode of thinking. As such, for Foroughi the work of ‘enlightening’ Iranians goes hand in hand with the process of ‘informing’ them with concepts of modern philosophy.

Professor Homa Katouzian: Speaker, Panel II

Professor Katouzian is the Iran Heritage Research Fellow, St Antony’s College and a Member of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford. He has taught and published on economics for 18 years but his recent and current research interests are in Iranian history and politics and Persian literature. He has worked, as a permanent member of faculty or as a visitor at several academic institutions, including the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies. He has published widely and his recent books include, Khalil Maleki, The Human Face of Iranian Socialism; Sa’di in Love; IRAN: Politics, History and Literature; The Persians; Sadeq Hedayat, His Work and His Wondrous World; Iranian History and Politics; State and Society in Iran; Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer.

Abstract:  
Sadeq Hedayat: Iranian Fiction and the Experience of Modernity

Hedayat was born in 1903, a couple of years before the Constitutional Revolution, a revolution that was supported by the modern intellectual community – including poets and writers – and brought much hope for a constitutional and modern society. The revolution was, however, followed instead by chaos and, by the time Hedayat was 15, many of the erstwhile revolutionaries had begun to regret it. Hopes for constitutionalism were replaced by the desire for a strong government which would bring order and security to the country. This aspiration was
accompanied by the rise of romantic nationalism to which most modernists, including Hedayat, adhered. Modern Persian fiction had emerged from the close of the 19th century and, by the time Hedayat began his writing career, it had become established by the publication of Jamalzadeh’s *Once upon a Time* in 1921. This was the same year as Reza Khan’s *coup d'état*, which brought order and stability, but also led to dictatorship followed by arbitrary rule. Hedayat had by then written many of his works, which comprised nationalist, critical realist, satire and psycho-fictional stories. Meanwhile, romantic nationalism had begun to subside, and most intellectuals turned leftwards, first represented by the Tudeh party, then resembling an anti-fascist popular front in the wake of World War II, the Allied occupation of Iran and the abdication of Reza Shah. Hedayat became a fellow traveller, but revolted against the Tudeh after the Azerbaijan fiasco. Jamalzadeh was no longer fashionable, and younger elite writers began to emerge, while many others wrote near-commercial stories. Hedayat’s anti-Tudeh stance led to his total isolation and in 1951 he committed suicide in Paris.

Professor Farhad Khosrokhavar: Speaker, Panel III

Farhad Khosrokhavar is a Professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris and Director of the ‘Observatoire de la radicalisation’ at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme. His main fields of study are social movements in Iran (mainly after the Islamic Revolution), Arab societies, focusing on their radical Islamic movements, the Arab revolutions and Jihadism in Europe with a particular focus on France. He has published some 20 books, six of which were either translated into English or directly written in English with some others translated into other languages and more than 70 articles, in French, English and, occasionally, Persian.

**Abstract:** **Shariati and Jalal Al Ahmad: The Iranian Third Worldist Intellectuals**
(with Dr Mohsen Mottaghi, Sociologist, France)

Al Ahmad and Shariati are two major intellectuals, both might be called ‘third-worldist intellectuals’. The first was secular in the sense that Islam did not play a significant role in his major critical essay, ‘Westtoxication’ (*gharbzadeghi*), whereas the second based his entire vision on a re-visited Islam. Al Ahmad had strong Marxist leanings but in the end he came to the conclusion that the mobilisation against the authoritarianism of the Shah could only be achieved through Islam and, in particular, the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

They did, however, share many ideas. The first was the Marxist view of a classless, anti-imperialist society. Shariati put it into Islamic words, talking about the ‘Islamic classless society’ (more accurately the Unity-classless-society, Unicity of God being the hallmark of Islam, *jame’eye bi tabaqeye towhidi*), whereas the Al Ahmad took a cultural view asserting that the West sought to intoxicate the Third World through its cultural machinery in order to crush any resistance to its domination. ‘Westernised’ men and women were therefore alienated and dispossessed of their true identity, this artificial identity making their domination by the West all the easier.

Shariati was more sensitive to the ‘sacred’ dimensions of domination. For him, the dominating world-view displayed a deviant form of religiosity he called ‘Safavid Shiism’, whereas genuine Shiism, that inspired by Ali (*tashayyo’e alavi*) had been marginalised after the period of the four rightly-guided caliphs. Imperialism was somehow in continuity with this view of Shiism that was eschatologically oriented towards the advent of the Hidden Imam (the Twelfth Imam) whose coming would be accelerated if Muslims acted in a revolutionary manner. In this respect, Shiism did not need communism to fight against imperialism; it was essentially revolutionary when considered from the genuine point of view, of Ali-inspired Shiism.

Shariati and Al Ahmad were both eager to fight against the authoritarian rule of the Shah but not in the name of democracy. Both rejected the West, Shariati because the latter was a domineering power structure that supported class-based society, the second because the West alienated the mind and soul of the Third World, in particular, Iran. Both were anti-democratic if we
accept that democracy is the rule of law and the majority and tolerance towards otherness. Shariati and Al Ahmad were both ‘inconsequential’, that is, they did not possess a coherent framework and a systematic view of society; their attitudes were dominated by passions and feelings of humiliation and malaise rather than based on a rationalised idea of social systems. Both had multifaceted ideas, in many respects contradictory and marked by lack of coherence. This incapacity to formulate a rational view paradoxically increased the intellectuals’ attractiveness to new generations of modernised youth who felt ill at ease in a society in transition, a society in which they were frustrated in their attempts to express their new-born citizenship ideals politically given the authoritarianism of the Shah. For the Pahlavi regime, in its two last decades, was beset by a major contradiction: it greatly contributed to the birth and expansion of the new middle classes and simultaneously, it closed down the political arena: the more society modernised, the more authoritarian the regime became. This was its swansong.

Professor Haideh Moghissi: Chair, Panel I and Speaker, Panel III

Professor Moghissi was a founder of the Iranian National Union of Women and member of its first executive and editorial boards, before leaving Iran in 1984. Her publications in English include seven monographs and edited volumes and articles in books and journals. Some of her works, including her award winning book, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 2000 and Zed Press, 1999) have been translated into multiple languages. She was awarded a Trudeau Research Fellowship in 2011 and the Status of Women Award of Distinction from Ontario Confederation of Faculty Associations (OCUFA) in 2015.

**Abstract:** *Rethinking Women’s Rights in Iran’s Modern and Anti-modern Social Engineering Projects*

This paper concentrates on the diverse but closely interconnected influences in the success or failure of Iran’s experiment with modernity, to illustrate the reasons for what women could and could not achieve in terms of legal and socio-political parity with men. These include the obstructing role of the religious establishment, the effects of colonial interventions, the political positioning of the intellectuals and the limitations of social engineering strategies.

Professor Saeed Paivandi: Speaker, Panel 1

Professor Paivandi has worked in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lorraine, Nancy, France since 2011. Prior to this, he was Associate Professor at the University of Paris 8 (from 1996 to 2011). He obtained a masters in Sociology from the University of Tehran and a PhD in the sociology of education from the University of Paris 8. His areas of research and specialisation are the sociology of education and the sociology of intellectuals. He has worked on the experience of the Islamisation of education in Iran and has published several articles on the Iranian curriculum, a book on the Islamisation of education in Iran (2005) in French and a book on the critical analysis of Iranian textbooks in English (2008).

**Abstract:** *Amir Kabir: A Reformist and Pioneer of Modernisation in the Traditional State*

Research on the Qajar period in Iran shows the existence of two elite movements that marked the process of modernisation of Iran in the 19th century. The first movement represented reformist statesmen who attempted to modernise Iranian society. These state-led reforms
targeted the economy, state administration, the army, education and the judicial system. The second movement (from bottom to top) included intellectuals who largely contributed to spread the ideas of modernity. If Abass Mirza was the first eminent figure of state-led reforms, Amir Kabir was to become the most important reformist personality of this period. With over 20 years of political practice within the state apparatus including three years as prime minister, Amir Kabir represented a model of modernisation. A unique embodiment of honesty, patriotism and efficiency, Amir Kabir represents an exceptional figure in the Iranian collective memory. He is also perceived as the founding father of emerging Iranian nationalism and modern education in Iran. Despite this very positive image, some critical questions remain about his conception of power and the modern state.

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**Dr Massoumeh Torfeh:** Chair, Panel II

Massoumeh Torfeh is a Research Associate at SOAS and LSE specialising on Iran and Afghanistan. She has done extensive research on the causes of failure of democracy in Iran. Her PhD in political science from the LSE is on the same subject. She has co-authored two books on Iran, one on the role of BBC Persian Service in three periods of major political transformation in Iran, and the other on contemporary popular culture in Iran. Dr Torfeh, was formerly the UN Director of Communication and Spokesperson in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and before that a BBC journalist.

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**Professor Farzin Vahdat:** Speaker, Panel IV

Farzin Vahdat is a sociologist working on conditions and notions of modernity and their applications to Iran, Islam and the Muslim world. He is the author of *God and Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity and Islamic Ethos and the Specter of Modernity*, which was published in June 2015. In the latter book he analyses major elements of contemporary Muslim thought in relation to the modern world. Vahdat has just completed a book manuscript entitled *Cinema and Social Change in Iran*. He is also author of numerous articles, some of which have been translated into different languages. Vahdat has taught at Tufts, Harvard and Yale Universities, as well as Vassar College. He currently teaches sociology at the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities, an online university, for Persian-speaking students.

**Abstract: Islamic Thinkers and Modernity in Iran**

In this presentation Farzin Vahdat will analyse the discourses of some of the key Islamic thinkers in Iran with regard to the notions and conditions of modernity. Modernity is conceptualised in terms of a critical mass of the individuals in a given society acquiring a sense of subjectivity and agency. Since the late 19th century a number of Iranian Islamic thinkers have addressed this issue from different angles and with different degrees of accommodating and or rejecting the principal of human agency. Often, many of them have both posited and negated this principal, virtually simultaneously. Vahdat will discuss the thoughts of some Iranian Islamic thinkers in relation to the discourse of modernity. They include Jamal al-Din Afghani, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Mottahari, Abdulkarim Soroush, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari.