THIS ISSUE: SECULARISM

- Secularisation and fundamentalism
- The persistent challenge of 'Islamic exceptionalism'
- Secularism in the caliphate?
- Turkish secularism revisited
- Tunisia’s revolution: beyond the Islamist-secularist divide
- The Farron Affair and secularism in the UK
- Towards a better understanding of Muslims
- PLUS Reviews and events in London
The Middle East in London

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Recent times have witnessed the increasing role of religion as a political force in many parts of the world. It is now widely believed that the rise of various forms of Islamism worldwide, the New Christian Right in the USA and the BJP in India are all symptoms of a ‘post-secular’ age.

The chaotic aftermath of the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State are also seen by some as particularly acute symptoms of the crisis of the secular state in the ‘Muslim World’. These developments in particular have revived ideas of ‘Islamic exceptionalism’, especially the view that Islam and secular liberal democracy are incompatible. Likewise, in the West the question of religion-state settlements, something thought to have been resolved centuries ago, has been posed anew especially in connection with Muslim minorities. This has been a particularly contested issue with relation to Sharia and to what extent it should be accommodated by national legal systems in Europe and the United States.

Increasingly, the conventional understanding of ‘secularism’ as fostering pluralism and religious freedom is being questioned, and it is argued that some forms of secularism have not been as neutral as they purport to be and have discriminated against religious minorities rather than encouraging pluralism and equality (for example the debates surrounding laïcité in France). This has led to attempts to rethink secularism in more pluralistic and democratic forms.

In Insight in this issue Sami Zubaida discusses the nature of ‘fundamentalism’ and argues that it should be understood as a reaction against the outcomes of cultural and institutional secularisation. Hadi Enayat outlines the basis of ‘Islamic exceptionalism’ and the ways in which it has been challenged or reaffirmed in light of recent events. Philip Wood discusses certain practices in the Abbasid Caliphate that might be considered ‘secular’ by today’s standards. Sevgi Adak writes on the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) in Turkey and the expansion of the religious sphere during the AKP era. Corinna Mullin explains why the political turbulence following Tunisia’s first election post-revolution cannot be attributed to a simple clash between the country’s secular past and its Islamising present. Simon Perfect analyses how leading contemporary figures in the UK have attempted to address the competing demands of faith and party, citing the resignation of Tim Farron to show how toxic religion can be for the ambitious politician. Meanwhile, Sham Qayyum reminds us that the very term ‘religion’ is often a crude shorthand for the interplay of faith, praxis and culture.

Finally, this issue includes our usual brief review of recently published books as well as more in-depth reviews of Hadi Enayat’s monograph Islam and Secularism in Post-colonial Thought, Rana Abdulfattah’s Tiger and Clay: Syrian Fragments and Reza Zia-Ebrahimi’s The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation.
The term ‘fundamentalism’ was first applied in the early 20th century to evangelical Protestantism to indicate its adherence to a literal reading of the Bible as the word of God. It acquired its special potency in its contentions against the challenges from secular and rationalist quarters and liberalised religious trends that compromised with science. Creationism against evolutionary science was and continues as a dominant theme in fundamentalist discourse. Social conservatism – especially on issues of gender and sexuality – is an equally potent commitment of fundamentalism, citing Biblical examples and prohibitions. Again, it is the contestation of liberalised, secular society as well as revisionist religion which give this element of fundamentalism its rationale. It may be argued, then, that secularisation is one important – though not the only – condition for fundamentalism in the modern world.

By ‘secularisation’ we don’t necessarily mean the decline in religious beliefs and practices, though that is possible, but the structural differentiation of religious institutions and authorities from other social functions, such as law, education and culture. In the process of modernity religion can be said to be ‘disembedded’ from many other social functions.

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The Middle East (that is the Ottoman world and Iran) was transformed by the processes of modernity and capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Tanzimat reforms and their ideological concomitants, the Arab nahda (renaissance) of culture and society and the Iranian upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries culminating in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 all posed challenges to traditional religious institutions, authorities and customs. Religious reformers like the Iranian Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and the Egyptian Mohammad Abdulh presented re-readings of canonical texts and histories to make Islam compatible with emerging political and social transformations and with their conceptions of ‘progress’ against ‘backwardness’. Crucially, legal reforms departed from the sharia (however conceived) both in form and substance. Law became state law and not that of the ulama and the religious institutions. Elements of the sharia, namely those to do with personal status and some civil transactions, were retained in many countries but codified into state law. These transformations were, of course, resisted by conservative ulama and their supporters. The call for the restoration

Islamic fundamentalism inherited the label from its Christian predecessor and contemporary
of the *sharia* continued to have a potent resonance in conservative and traditional circles, as well as in modern political ideologies of Islamic nationalism, none so vociferous as in the last few decades with the rise of political Islam. Fundamentalism, then, can partially be understood as a reaction against the results of institutional and cultural secularisation.

The other part of the story is social conservatism and identity politics. Patriarchal, familialistic and communalist authorities and regimes are challenged by the measures of social and cultural liberalisation that accompany socio-economic transformations. The emancipation of women and their participation in activity outside the household proceeds not just in legal and political terms, but in social and economic spheres. We know, of course, that this emancipation is partial and qualified: legally where some *sharia* provisions continue to apply to family matters, and socially in the form of continued restriction and oppression especially among the poorer classes. Nevertheless, in most countries measures of liberty and participation were real for many sectors of society. Reactions and resistance to these processes by patriarchal and communal authorities worried about a loss of control are always buttressed and expressed in terms of religion and its moral and ritual codes. This is true as much for US evangelists, Catholic conservatives and Orthodox Jews as it is for Muslim Salafis.

The cultural sphere witnessed far-reaching departures from and challenges to religious orthodoxy and social conservatism. The cinema, the radio and then television had profound impacts on social consciousness, pleasure and dreams throughout all sectors of society during most of the 20th century, to be augmented spectacularly by social media in the 21st. It is true that religious and conservative advocacy constitutes a large element of these media, but, crucially, it exists alongside profane entertainment, political and social contentions, and artistic expressions – the proximity thus banalising the sanctity. Popular films were the dream world of all social strata, and the songs were on every lip. Hollywood and Bollywood tickled the fancy of all, with much sexual content. TV dramas, serials and entertainments then entered every home. Qur'an recitals and stern sermons co-existed with these forms of entertainment.

Widespread consumer culture plays a crucial part in shaping mentalities and outlooks. The shopping mall and the mosque coexist, and piety does not seem to hinder material acquisition. Yet, consumer preoccupations, the spaces of consumption, venues and personnel pose many diversions and opportunities, especially for the young, which challenge and worry social conservatives and their religious buttresses. Studies in many parts of the Arab world demonstrate these subversive tendencies. Even in highly controlled and repressive Saudi Arabia, it seems that the air-conditioned malls attract throngs of young men and women in separate gangs but with symbolic interaction. In less repressive settings these milieus present many opportunities. Retail outlets also offer employment opportunities for women in more anonymous settings.

We now witness a furious patriarchal/masculinist reaction to these processes of institutional and mental secularisation and their attendant measures of partial liberation and weakening of controls, all articulating with populist authoritarian regimes riding on these sentiments. Turkey is the clearest example of how such a regime resorts to religious affirmations of social conservatism to attempt to reverse a history of secularisation and social and legal reforms. Note that these trends are not confined to Muslim contexts: witness the parallel developments in Poland and Hungary, and, of course, Russia, the former bastion of official atheism.

Interwoven with all these factors are identity politics, defined in various ways as Muslims vis-à-vis the 'West'. This is particularly notable in Muslim diasporas in the West. There are discourses of difference asserting the virtues of Muslims in contrast to the looseness and dissolution of the West, with sexuality and alcohol as prominent themes, but also with regard to finance and the morality of interest on loans. These seem to ignore the common elements in the history of both Muslim and Western contexts. Sexual liberties and women's rights in the West are mostly recent products of liberationist social struggles, even revolutions, and not intrinsic to Christianity or some Western essence. Equally, the practices of drinking and homosexuality were/are prevalent in historical and modern Muslim contexts. Wine and the love of boys are celebrated in poetry, folklore and popular cultures, and widely attested in practice in historical and modern Muslim contexts. Their prominence in the discourses of difference are devices of modern identity politics. The institution of personal liberties and open cultural spaces in the 'West', as well as in some parts of the Middle East, is the product of political struggles and social reforms, not of some religious or cultural essence.

These themes and arguments are fully developed in my book, *Beyond Islam*.
The persistent challenge of ‘Islamic exceptionalism’

The notion of national or civilisational ‘exceptionalism’ was first used in connection with the USA to explain everything from its propensity for democracy to its apparent resistance to secularisation. The concept of ‘Islamic exceptionalism’ has a more recent pedigree dating back to the 1990s with the publication of Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*. Yet the idea that something sets ‘Muslim societies’ and politics apart has an intellectual genealogy which arguably goes back to 18th-century Orientalist scholarship identified by Edward Said. While this exceptionalism is often cited by critics of Islam as the main reason for its failure to adapt to secular modernity, it is simultaneously celebrated in Islamist discourse as a manifestation of an ‘alternative modernity’. Indeed, proponents of Islamism have enthusiastically endorsed the notion that Islam is exceptional in being a total system in which religion and politics are inseparable, thus reaching the same conclusions as Islam’s detractors. It is mainly for this reason that they regard secularism as a harmful form of cultural imperialism imposed by the West.

Broadly speaking, the notion of ‘Islamic exceptionalism’ is based on three overlapping premises. Firstly, in civilisational terms it is argued that the emergence of Islam constituted a sharp break from the past producing a culture which was in religious and political terms unique compared to those which had preceded it in late antiquity and thus lacking any commonality with other civilisations such as Byzantium, Persia and/or medieval Europe. Of course, this account compliments the traditionalist Muslim vision of the emergence of Islam that emphasises its sudden appearance as a miraculous event which owed nothing to the *Jahiliyya* (ignorance or barbarism associated with pre-Islamic Arabia) which preceded it. Moreover, this vision assumes that this religion/culture is determinatively scriptural and essentially self-referential. This ‘scriptural determinism’ meant that philology was the main tool of analysis of ‘Islam’ for almost two centuries. Again, we should note the parallel with contemporary ‘fundamentalists’ who are also effectively scriptural determinists in their understanding of a pure Islam stripped of foreign cultural accretions and based on the literal word of God.

A second dimension of exceptionalism is asserted in the realm of imperialism and violence. In this sphere, it has been argued that the novelty of Islam resided in the synthesis of a universal empire with a universal religion. Whilst there had been

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universal conquerors before (e.g. Alexander the Great), they did not bring a religion; and whilst there had been universal religions before (e.g. Christianity), they were not connected to the idea of a universal empire. Thus *jihad* was a form of missionary warfare. In some of the more conservative critiques of Islam, as well as in Salafi-Jihadi ideology, Mohammad’s example of a warrior who engaged (according to some accounts) in over 80 military campaigns during his lifetime is seen as a model for a warrior-religion which glorifies violence and imperialism.

The third sphere of exceptionalism is located in the realm of politics and law. Here it is argued that Islam is unique in the ways that it relates to politics because of the status of Mohammad as both Prophet and statesman. Moreover, it is asserted that the *sharia* is not simply a religious law, but one which represented a set of social, economic, cultural and political practices which governed every aspect of life. These features prevented an autonomous space for politics and law to operate and have often been cited to account for the failure of secularism as well as the ‘democracy gap’ in the ‘Muslim World’.

Since the 1980s, the assumptions outlined above have been critiqued by scholars who have tried to promote a more nuanced understanding of Muslim-majority societies from a broadly materialist perspective. Fred Halliday, Sami Zubaida, Roger Owen, Aziz al-Azmeh and others have argued, in different ways, for an approach which sees the ‘Muslim World’ first and foremost as part of the Third (or non-European) World and subject to the same world historical processes from colonialism to the era of socialist planning to the much more eclectic contemporary combination of crony capitalism and rentierism, both of which are seen, from these perspectives, as the main factors accounting for the persistence of authoritarianism. Other critiques have exposed serious flaws in the scriptural/philological based approach – especially its reliance on the scholastic traditions of the *ulama* as a privileged, at times exclusive, source of knowledge about Islam to the detriment of less scriptural expressions of the faith and culture. These critiques led to the partial demise of the notion of Islamic exceptionalism, at least in academia, though it continued to persist elsewhere – especially in the world of US-based think tanks and in the discourse of the far right.

The 9/11 attacks saw a revival of Islamic exceptionalism and the notion of a ‘clash of civilizations’, which was eagerly adopted by the far right in Europe and the USA. This trend was boosted by the chaos after the Arab uprisings and the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS), both of which seemed to confirm the ‘democracy-gap’ and ‘violence’ theses outlined above. ‘Maybe the Orientalists were right in the first place!’ a friend morosely quipped to me a few years after the uprisings began, by which time several countries had either reverted to authoritarianism or descended into brutal civil wars. Indeed, this period saw a number of publications which have, implicitly or explicitly, revived the notion of Islamic exceptionalism. These include: Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (2008); Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule* (2004); Michael Cook, *Ancient Religions, Modern Politics* (2014); Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State* (2012); and Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism* (2016). These studies have restated – in a more sophisticated and updated form – some of the premises of Islamic exceptionalism summarised above, often with great intellectual force and analytical clarity. Moreover, they cannot simply be written off as illegitimate forms of Orientalism having often been produced by scholars who see themselves as working outside (and sometimes against) that tradition. These works are important in that they have emphasised some of the distinctive features of ‘Muslim politics’.

But it remains debatable how cogent, empirically or philosophically, an approach which emphasises the difference of Islam to the point of ‘exceptionalism’ is. Such an approach discounts the complexity and diversity of Muslim-majority societies both historically and in the contemporary world. Indeed, recently published empirical studies of secularism in these societies – such as one edited by Akeel Bilgrami, *Beyond the Secular West* (2016) and another edited by Mirjam Künkler et al, *A Secular Age Beyond the West* (2017) – show that they have exhibited a range of religion-state arrangements and multiple secularities which defy essentialist notions of typically ‘Islamic’ religion-state relations, often inspired by the view that Islam knew no separation between religion and state. The revival of the notion Islamic exceptionalism has, nevertheless, underlined the challenge of forging approaches to understanding the politics of the ‘Muslim World’ without sliding into cultural essentialism on the one hand or reductive ‘difference blind’ materialist analysis on the other.

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In recent years the term caliphate has become synonymous with the regime of IS (the so-called Islamic State) and its aspiration to create a Muslim super-state. The central tenets of IS include the enforcement of a version of the sharia and its military campaigns against Shi’a ‘apostates’, unbelievers of various kinds and Sunni ‘tyrants’. These objectives are rooted in a particular reading of early Islamic history, which privileges the era of expansion in the early 7th century, when Mohammad’s Companions conquered lands from Morocco to Iran.

Even readings of Islamic history that do not share IS’s horrific attitude to violence or to human rights would see the caliphate as a time of piety. The argument runs that this was manifested in political terms in a stable and well-managed state that generated great civilisational achievements in astronomy, mathematics and medicine. In this schema, which is followed in many history curricula in the contemporary Middle East, piety is rewarded by civilisation. The notion of ‘secularism’ seems to fit this version of history very poorly.

The problem here is that, as Hugh Kennedy has observed, there have been many ‘caliphates’. Caliphs claimed to rule universal states, to which all Muslims owed allegiance, at least in theory. And they claimed succession from the state established by Mohammad and his Companions. But the precise relationship between the caliph and religious institutions and ideas varied markedly from century to century.

The precise relationship between the caliph and religious institutions and ideas varied markedly from century to century.
The caliphate of the 9th and 10th centuries, a vast empire that encompassed many different cultures, languages and religions. I discuss the latter here, as an example of how religion, politics and society were combined in Abbasid Baghdad.

Firstly, and most importantly, the Abbasid caliphate was home to many different religious groups. There were sizeable Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian populations, and Christians were probably a majority in much of the western caliphate (Syria and Egypt) until the period of the Crusades. Many of these non-Muslim populations provided the intellectual manpower for the translation of philosophy and medical knowledge from Greek into Syriac and Arabic, as well as for the subsequent development of these ideas in Abbasid Baghdad. Some Christians also found roles of political leadership in the Abbasid vizierate.

The position of non-Muslims in the caliphate could often be fragile and was a point of controversy. The Muslim intellectual and polymath al-Jahiz (d. 868) complained that Christians were dressing in the same way as Muslims and adopting Muslim names, so that they could not readily be told apart. This was dangerous, he argued, because Christians could introduce impressionable Muslims to sceptical ideas that they had learned from pagan philosophers or criticise hadiths attributed to Mohammad. For the hadith scholar Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), contact with Christians and Jews presented the danger of corruption for Muslims: where social contact could not be avoided, Muslims should maintain their superiority by refusing to address Christians by name, enter their homes or attend their religious gatherings.

However, the very fact that some Muslim elites needed to make such arguments showed that many Muslims actually had close social relations with their co-citizens. Likewise, al-Jahiz complains that the prestige of Christians in this period stemmed from their importance as translators of Greek learning that was valued by elite patrons (both Christian and Muslim). Thus there was a strand of Muslim thought that wanted to restrict Muslim-Christian contact to mere toleration and co-existence, but a common reality, at least in Baghdad, was one of overlapping social worlds and mutual intellectual influence. We might describe this kind of social atmosphere as secular in the sense that it allowed citizens of the caliphate to deploy their skills irrespective of their religious inclination.

We might also employ the word ‘secular’ in a second way, to describe the strands of sceptical thought that circulated in the Abbasid caliphate and the possibility of moral argument that did not proceed from a religious starting point. Al-Jahiz accused Christians of importing the modes of thought used by ‘pagan’ philosophers, but such ideas readily found a home among philosophers from Muslim backgrounds. One famous example is the critic of Islam (and religion in general) Abu Isa al-Warraq (d. 994), who argued that prophecy is unnecessary since all men ought to be able to figure out morality for themselves.

A sign of the tolerance expressed by some Baghdadi intellectual circles was the decision not to admit any arguments that were rooted in religious scripture, since not all participants followed the same scriptures or gave them equal weight; instead participants were to rely on arguments that proceeded from human reason in an Aristotelian manner. Garth Fowden observes that we often refer to Judaism, Christianity and Islam as Abrahamic religions, which privilege their use of scripture, but that we might also describe them, at least in a context such as 9th-century Baghdad, as Aristotelian cultures, linked by a shared respect for the use of logic in interpreting scripture or providing moral insight.

However, we should remember that not all Baghdadis were at ease with this kind of cosmopolitanism. The 9th century also witnessed the birth of Sunni legal schools in the city, whose rulings were based on the hadith, the sayings attributed to Mohammad. And it is striking that, for later generations, it would be specialists in the hadith, and these alone, who were known as `ulama, a noun that literally means ‘learned men’. Historians, astronomers, philosophers and doctors do not qualify; ‘knowledge’, in this construction, is restricted to knowledge of the hadith. One of the effects of this intellectual turn was to underplay the importance of studies that were grounded in pre-Islamic thought (both religious and secular) or where Muslims needed to cooperate with non-Muslims.

The modern slogan ‘Islam is a complete way of life’ is anti-secular, in the sense that it presumes that Muslims can order their whole lives by reference to ‘Islamic sources’, without needing to have recourse to ideas rooted in other religious or intellectual traditions. It is a slogan that is rooted in these medieval debates in which real knowledge has to be located in the statements Mohammad, in the Qur’an and in hadith.

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In June 2017, the Transfer, Liquidation and Redistribution Commission of the Mardin Governorate in Turkey decided to transfer authority over numerous Syriac churches, monasteries and cemeteries to the state treasury. The commission was established in Mardin, as in many other provinces, after a major administrative reform introduced by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) government in 2012. One result of this decision was the transfer of the control of some Syriac churches to the Diyanet, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Turkey’s chief religious authority in Islamic faith and practices. The head of the Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez, denied that the institution had an interest in the assets and referred to news about the decision in the international media as ‘dark propaganda.’ Although the decision to transfer Syriac churches to the Diyanet was suspended following the appeal of the Syriac associations, uncertainty still remains regarding their ownership.

This was the latest episode in a growing dispute over the Diyanet’s increasing power in Turkey. The institution has become particularly active in public discussions in recent years. It proclaims its opinion not only on religious matters but also on political and social matters, especially through its often-controversial fatwas. Since its establishment in 1924, the Diyanet has in fact been one of the most controversial institutions in the country. The existence of an exclusively Sunni Muslim bureaucratic apparatus in a state that constitutionally defines itself as secular has been a dilemma for those who tend to see the Turkish case as a successful model of secularism.

However, the Diyanet’s standing has been significantly strengthened under the rule of the AKP. This happened as a result of the institutional restructuring the Diyanet has undergone during the AKP’s 15 years in power. The Diyanet attained a higher and more autonomous position when its status was elevated to the level of undersecretariat within the prime ministry. After the introduction of a new law in 2010, its duties and area of authority were extended and the number of its head offices, departments and personnel increased.

Under the AKP, the services and activities the Diyanet organises for women have mushroomed, resulting in a remarkable expansion of its capacity to penetrate the private sphere.

**Sevgi Adak on the Diyanet and the expansion of the religious sphere during the AKP era**

*Taken from ‘Social Welfare and Family’ (Toplumun selameti ve aile), an episode of a TV show for women that runs on Diyanet TV. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDv4QvsYe0M*
The Diyanet has become a key agent in the shaping of social and political life under AKP rule

The Diyanet has been supported by the new roles it has envisioned itself as the representative of a particular Islamic tradition, the ‘true and moderate voice of Turkish Islam’, in regions the AKP has assumed is in the implementation of the government’s family policy and guidance. In fact, the Diyanet’s role in religious and moral guidance has also been supported by the new roles it has assumed in the AKP’s foreign policy. The Diyanet has envisioned itself as the ‘strengthening the family’ policies, gave the Diyanet a new role alongside the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The Diyanet has become a key agent in the shaping of the religious sphere as predominantly male spaces. In addition, female preachers also work at the fatwa offices of the Diyanet and answer religious questions. Paralleling the Diyanet’s new policy of increasing its reach beyond the places of worship, female preachers give sermons outside the mosques and organise other activities, such as house visits, group meetings at tea houses or cultural centres as well as visits to hospitals, women’s shelters and student dormitories.

The second institutional channel created within the Diyanet apparatus consists of the Family Guidance Bureaus, which were established in 2003 with the aim of protecting and strengthening the family through religious counselling. With at least one Family Guidance Bureau in every provincial and district capital, the total number climbed to 315 by the end of 2015. The majority of the personnel at these bureaus are women who receive special training in rhetoric and communication skills. These bureaus are defined as ‘active’ centres by the Diyanet, meaning that they do not wait for people to come and consult them but rather they go out and reach people, especially women (80 per cent of the people seeking consultation are women, according to the Diyanet’s own statistics). The primary message conveyed by these bureaus is the importance of marriage and family, for which they organise special activities, including ‘marriage schools’ for engaged couples.

One particularly novel role the Diyanet has assumed is in the implementation of the government’s family policy and policy towards women. The AKP’s new family politics, officially characterised as ‘strengthening the family’ policies, gave the Diyanet a new role alongside the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The services and activities the Diyanet organises for women have mushroomed, which resulted in a remarkable expansion of its capacity to penetrate the private sphere and to reshape gender relations in line with new conservative ideals. Two institutional channels were created with the Diyanet apparatus to equip it with the necessary resources and human power to accomplish this task.

The first was the employment of female preachers as part of its attempt to reach more women through religious practices and guidance. In fact, the Diyanet had begun employing female preachers in the early 1990s, but their number remained mainly symbolic until the AKP came to power in 2002. Characterised in official discourse and publications of the institution as ‘reaching women through women’, the Diyanet’s new policy resulted in a dramatic increase of the number of female preachers, from only 51 in 2001 to 724 in 2015. In addition to employing more female preachers, the Diyanet has been incorporating themes related to family and women – such as ‘Family life’ and ‘Women according to Islam’ – into sermons.

One important aspect of the feminisation of the Diyanet personnel is the spatial dimension. Female preachers give sermons to women-only groups in the mosques, and this can be seen as a radical departure from the traditional understanding of the mosques as predominantly male spaces. In addition, female preachers also work at the fatwa offices of the Diyanet and answer religious questions. Paralleling the Diyanet’s new policy of increasing its reach beyond the places of worship, female preachers give sermons outside the mosques and organise other activities, such as house visits, group meetings at tea houses or cultural centres as well as visits to hospitals, women’s shelters and student dormitories.

Moreover, the female religious personnel and the family bureaus have been part of the Diyanet’s dissemination of a new conservative agenda, which significantly expands the religious sphere in Turkey. Religious and moral guidance now enter people’s houses through a state institution. As such, the new Diyanet of Turkey appears to be the key agent in a potential process of desecularisation in Turkish society even though the secular character of the state remains intact in the constitution.

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Many scholars and political actors approached the tensions and political violence that followed Tunisia’s first post-revolution election through the lens of an alleged Islamist-secularist divide. Focussing on the rise of the country’s self-declared Islamist party, Ennahda, analysts oft en ignored the particular (geo)political conjunctures and ongoing class struggles underpinning Tunisia’s political landscape. Instead, they highlighted questions of (primordial) culture and de-contextualised identity. Expressing a shared concern with how political Islam, or Islam full stop, would shape and be shaped by Tunisia’s newfound political opening, dominant narratives focussed on (political) Islam’s (in)compatibility with democracy, with Tunisianité (Tunisia’s purportedly unique culture of secularism, liberalism and openness to the West), and/or with the aspirations of the revolution.

Yet the narrative of Tunisia’s secular past clashing with its Islamising present missed the mark. As would become increasingly clear, Ennahda was a religious party in the ‘post-Islamist’ sense, characterised by its pragmatism, as well as conservative, pro-West and neoliberal policies. Though the party had often been attributed with a radical agenda to transform the state, its later alliance with the ancien régime-linked party, Nida Tounes, signified a more status quo agenda.

Additionally, Tunisia’s history of state formation is far more complex than the oft-imagined linear path towards laïcité. In fact, Tunisia’s modern history can be read as an oscillation between secular and religious forms of power. This includes the period of French colonial rule, when French dual jurisprudence institutionalised religious courts under the rule of qaids (Muslim local administrative officials) for the indigenous population, except in criminal cases or cases involving foreigners.

1956 saw the country’s first president, Habib Bourguiba, dismantle Tunisia’s religious courts and the historic Al-Zeitouna Mosque – home to one of the first and oldest universities in the world – lose its privileged institutional place and become incorporated into the University of Tunis. However, it would be a mistake to see this development solely through the lens of secularisation. For Bourguiba, any alternative centre of power was a threat to his singular rule, regardless of whether it came from so-called religious or secular quarters. The issue was not religion per se, but rather religion practiced in unauthorised ways outside of Bourguiba’s purview. Indeed, there were several facets of the state that maintained a ‘religious’ orientation. Article 1 of the 1959 Constitution declared Islam the state religion. Bourguiba also established a Ministry of Religious Affairs to oversee religious trusts (awqaf) that became state properties and clerics who became state employees – a trend that continued under Ben Ali, who also added the task of training imams at Al-Zeitouna University to the mandate of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Rather than asserting a clear separation of religion and state, Bourguiba’s policies represented the extension of state control over religion, with a particular version of Islam promoted at the expense of alternative religious expressions and interpretations that could potentially undermine ‘public order’. This approach resulted in the criminalisation of ‘deviating’ practices in public and political spaces.

State attacks on unauthorised forms of religious practice have taken many forms in the post-revolution state. With the

Corinna Mullin explains why the political turbulence following Tunisia’s first post-revolution election cannot be adequately explained as a clash between its secular past and Islamising present.

*Tunisia’s revolution: beyond the Islamist-secularist divide*
backing of Western states, Mehdi Jomaa’s ‘caretaker’ government, appointed in January 2014, evoked the threat of ‘religious extremism’ to (re)assert state control over religious institutions. The government closed numerous mosques and religious organisations deemed to be ‘outside of government control’ via executive decree. Jomaa’s government also closed several religious media outlets, claiming they had ‘turned into platforms for takfiris and jihadis’, despite warnings from the independent media regulatory body that doing so would violate the constitution.

With the December 2014 elections, ‘religious fundamentalism’ resurfaced as a central concern within official discourses. Soon after his appointment in February 2015, Prime Minister Habib Essid of the ruling Nida Tounes party said he would close an additional 187 mosques, designated ‘beyond the control of the state’ by the Ministry of Interior. In March 2015, Tunisian authorities ‘regained control’ of the historic Al-Zeitouna Mosque.

The contradiction between representations of secularism on the one hand, and the actual juridical framing of the relationship between state and religion on the other, in particular as articulated in public spaces, came to the fore once again in a recent debate over the right to publicly consume food and beverages during Ramadan. The sentencing of four men to one month in prison for eating in public during the holy month provoked outrage among certain sectors, including an ad hoc group calling themselves Mouch Bessif – Arabic for ‘Not against our will’. Though many pointed fingers at the state’s alleged Islamisation, it seemed increasingly difficult to sustain such an argument in light of the Ennahda-Nida Tounes governing coalition and post-revolution constitutional guarantees protecting freedom of belief and conscience.

Considering the turbulence of the last several years with ongoing mass mobilisation around questions of structural inequality, the (re)distribution of wealth, and sovereignty over and governance of natural resources, one might ask why it is the nature of the relationship between religion and state in Tunisia that has generated such extensive concern both inside and outside the country. This concern centres around the notion of Islam as a ‘problem space’, which Hussein Ali Agrama explains is ‘constituted by a historical ensemble of questions and stakes and characterised by continual contestation’. Analyses based on this notion reduce otherwise complex questions concerning Tunisia’s historical legacies and their impact on the institutions and discourses of the state and the way the relationship between religion and politics is understood and contested in the country while simultaneously obscuring some of the central structural blockages undermining the Tunisian revolution.

The Tunisian scholar and journalist Sadri Khiari pursued this point in a recent article examining the saga of the Ramadan protesters in which he contextualises the judicial decision to charge the four men. ‘Even if the judges concerned have acted as mediators of a concerted political will’, he argues, ‘they have been able to take the decisions they have taken only to the extent that the system forged by decades of police and judicial despotism gives them all the freedom to do so.’ In other words, the issue is not Islamisation but rather the failure of the post-revolution state to structurally address the issue of ‘police and judicial arbitrariness’.

Approaching the question of the Tunisian state’s complex relationship with both ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ through a comparative and historically grounded analysis – rather than a binary lens that sees the two concepts as diametrically opposed – allows us to understand the modes and mechanisms through which claims to both have allowed power to penetrate increasing realms of human life at different points in time (both colonial and post-colonial). This approach also shines a light on the concerns that are obscured by an overwhelming focus on the question of the correct relationship between religion and politics, many of which informed and continue to inform past and current social mobilisations across Tunisia and the region more generally.

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Minaret of the Al-Zeitouna Mosque in Tunis, Tuniisia. Photograph by Citizen59

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The 2017 UK General Election was extraordinary in many ways. Dominating the finale was the resignation of Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats and an evangelical Christian. It raised a most unexpected question: can a convinced religious believer be a leading British politician?

Farron’s election campaign was beleaguered by scrutiny of his views on abortion and same-sex relationships. Journalists asked him repeatedly whether he believed that ‘homosexual sex is a sin’, and whether he still supported past statements that ‘abortion is wrong’. Farron insisted he supported the current laws on abortion and same-sex marriage and pointed out he has generally voted for pro-choice and pro-same-sex marriage bills. But he refused to clarify his views, saying only that they were not a public matter and that ‘we are all sinners’. Under pressure, he finally said he did not think that gay sex is a sin. But his evasiveness cost him. Announcing his resignation, he declared the scrutiny had made him feel ‘torn’ between being a leader of a ‘progressive, liberal party’ and living as a ‘committed Christian’. He ended with a warning: ‘we are kidding ourselves if we think we yet live in a tolerant, liberal society.’

What went wrong for Farron, and what does the episode tell us about British politicians and faith?

Talking God

Few current British politicians are as candid about their religious convictions as Tim Farron. A born-again evangelical, he has confidently discussed his faith and quoted Bible passages in several interviews and speeches. On these occasions he challenged the idea that high-profile politicians in liberal democracies should keep their religious beliefs private.

But he is also an ‘institutional secularist’, for example backing his party’s policies on the Church of England’s disestablishment. Moreover, he insists a politician should never try ‘to impose one’s beliefs on others’. Liberalism, in Farron’s understanding, is not about promoting particular moral doctrines but about ensuring that people have as much freedom as possible to live according to their beliefs without harming others. This depends on a firm distinction between the private and public spheres, and, according to Farron, on politicians ‘separating faith from politics’.

In tension with his enthusiasm for talking publicly about faith, then, is his insistence that he is ‘personally secular’. There are two kinds of personally secular politician: the ‘We don’t do God’ kind (to use Alastair Campbell’s phrase), who

The Farron Affair pushed to the centre of political discussion the narrative that secularisation makes it increasingly difficult for Christians to express their beliefs publicly

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Tim Farron in 2008. Photograph by Keith Edkins

Simon Perfect on the resignation of Tim Farron and what it demonstrates about the acceptability of politicians ‘talking God’ in a secular society

The Farron Affair and secularism in the UK
want to keep personal religious views out of politics (where ‘doing’ is both talking publicly about and acting politically upon those views); and the ‘We can talk God’ kind, who want space for those views in politics as long as they do not become dominant motivators for politicians’ actions. At heart Farron wanted to be the latter kind. But when faced with criticism of his views, he retreated to the ‘We don’t do God’ position. Unfortunately this was taken as proof that his views were too ‘illiberal’ for a supposedly ‘liberal’ party.

**Learning from Farron**

The Farron Affair highlighted several issues about politicians and religion. Firstly, it pushed to the centre of political discussion the narrative that secularisation makes it increasingly difficult for Christians to express their beliefs publicly. Christian commentators and various (mainly Conservative) politicians have long argued that Christians are marginalised in public life. Farron chose to galvanise this perspective, offering himself up as its most high-profile victim. His departure will force all political parties to take the issue seriously, rather than dismiss it as mere Conservative rhetoric, and demonstrate that they can accommodate conservative religious beliefs.

But Farron’s martyrdom will also be co-opted by other agendas, including by those who see secularisation as leading to ‘Islamisation’. Commentators on YouTube videos of interviews with Farron repeatedly ask whether Muslim politicians would similarly ‘get grilled’ over their views. The narrative that Muslims receive ‘special treatment’ due to their minority status has significant public traction. Public suspicions (perhaps well grounded) that the Farron Affair would never be repeated with Muslim politicians will only strengthen this narrative.

It should be emphasised, however, that Muslim MPs are unlikely any time soon to be publicly quoting the Qur’an as often as Farron quoted the Bible. Caught between suspicions of supporting Britain’s ‘Islamisation’ and accusations from within their communities that they are not ‘true’ Muslims, these MPs have less freedom than Christian ones to choose whether to talk publicly about their religious views.

Secondly, the Affair showed that journalists play critical roles in constructing the secular public sphere. They can act as moral arbiters determining which values are acceptable for public figures to hold, and as enforcers of politicians’ personal secularity. One wrote that Farron can believe what he likes ‘so long as it doesn’t translate into policy’; but added ‘he should be watched like a hawk’ for ‘discriminatory lawmaking’. Whether this journalist would demand that socially liberal religious politicians should separate their views from public action is unlikely. By falling on his sword, Farron sparked debate about the media’s moralising role, providing evidence for those who believe the media is increasingly intolerant of views outside the liberal mainstream.

Thirdly, the Affair showed the fragility of the very notion that politicians can separate their personal views from their public activity. We expect politicians to be personally secular, but also want them to be ‘authentic’, saying what they think. Farron was caught between these demands. He was criticised both when he tried to talk openly about his faith and when he tried to move the conversation on by insisting on his personal secularity.

Beyond this, the media scrutiny of Farron’s faith was underpinned by scepticism that a religious politician can be personally secular at all. It was assumed his beliefs would affect his actions no matter what he said to the contrary. One commentator argued that journalists must probe politicians’ beliefs, since ‘Beliefs and actions are bound together.’ This reasoning is logical, but problematic for politicians with socially conservative views. If journalists regularly argue that politicians cannot separate their personal views from their public actions, people with minority views will find it harder to enter politics, since they will be accused of wanting to translate personal views into policy. While it may be a fragile fiction that politicians can truly be personally secular, it remains an essential one for ensuring that diverse views can be represented in the legislature.

So can religious people become leaders of mainstream parties in the future? Yes, though not if they hold personal views that differ significantly from the liberal mainstream. Among socially conservative religious politicians, some will decide that Farron’s problem was his failure to be ‘authentic’ consistently. Recently Catholic Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg openly stated his belief that abortion is always ‘morally indefensible’, but insisted that if he was prime minister the law would not change. Unsurprisingly he was widely condemned. Others will conclude from Farron’s fate that if they wish to rise to power, they must listen to Alastair Campbell and keep schtum on God.

**While it may be a fragile fiction that politicians can truly be personally secular, it remains an essential one for ensuring that diverse views can be represented in the legislature**

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For a long time Islam has been seen as an existential threat to European character. In this mode of thinking Islam is presented as intrinsically different from other cultures, inflexible and monolithic, culturally inferior yet paradoxically threatening. What is new, though, is that the rise in terrorism – especially involving ‘home grown perpetrators’ – has deepened anti-Islamic discourse that in turn feeds the narrative of ‘the other’ as a community that simply cannot be assimilated or integrated. Often and increasingly asked to demonstrate their roles as active citizens and to subscribe to ‘British values’, which are unhelpfully left largely undefined by policy makers, Muslims continue to be seen by many non-Muslim Britons as an ‘alien wedge’ or even the ‘enemy within’.

One reason why such negative views have taken root is because of the intense ideological preoccupation of some members of the British media with the claim that Muslims pose a threat, or that they are a menace. Tabloid newspaper reporting of Muslims often collocate negativities like associating Muslims with descriptions such as ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘extremists’, with generalisations that amass Muslims into a homogeneous group such as ‘Muslim youth’, or ‘Muslim gangs’. Other recurring ideational framing includes the suggestion that all Muslims aspire to ‘impose sharia law’ and, even more disturbingly at the extreme, that they are ‘terrorists’ or ‘terrorist sympathisers’.

Media representations of Muslims shaped by the categorisations above do not just occur; they often result from the ‘manufacturing of news’. The way that the Muslim veil, for example, has been portrayed reveals the extent to which

Islam is presented as intrinsically different from other cultures, inflexible and monolithic, culturally inferior yet paradoxically threatening

Towards a better understanding of Muslims

This photograph is part of the ‘Don’t judge don’t label’ campaign by Anti-Tribalism Movement, a charity in west London. Courtesy of Anti-Tribalism Movement
Muslims are engaged in a vigorous process of acculturation in Britain, which is leading to a great variety of eclecticism and personal patterning of identity and values.

It is these networks of reciprocity that provide the framework for most group member's everyday lives. Understanding the relevance of tribal customs enables us to view the roots of practices that are often conflated with sharia—such as female genital mutilation, caste or clan discrimination, forms of gender inequality and so on. Yet, unlike sharia, the relevance of customs in the legal lives of Muslims in Britain and elsewhere in Europe has received much less research attention. To borrow Goffman's vocabulary, this commitment appears 'on the stage' while the attachment to custom remains hidden 'behind the scenes' (The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 1959), making Muslim practical attachment to custom much more difficult to apprehend.

Besides ethnicity, language, culture and skin colour, there are many other dimensions of difference including gender, masculinity, class, generation, education and profession, and religiosity. New scholarship is unveiling the impact of emerging Muslim youth sub-cultures including the highly macho 'rude boy', the 'Asian gang', fashion conscious 'muhajababes', 'heavy metal taqwacores', 'believing queer Muslims' and even 'atheist Muslims'. It appears that these 'Muslims' have moved away from ordering their lives strictly according to textual or scholarly Islam, but do they still come within the outermost borders of lived or everyday Islam? To this list we can also add 'secular Muslims',

narratives are manufactured. Presented as evidence of Islam's backward patriarchy and the victimhood of Muslim women, often the diversity of reasons why British Muslim women wear the veil is ignored. More recently, however, the veil's figurative use has been transformed. It is now used symbolically to represent the failings of multiculturalism, and a threat to the British way of life. Previous depictions of Muslim women as 'victims' have been erased and instead the image is used in a sinister fashion to illustrate what is described as 'a rising tide of fundamentalism'. Such forms of uncritical framing are contributing to the increasing demonisation of Muslims more generally.

Though the recurrent homogenisation of Muslims and the priming (using specific words to activate associated memories) of negativities around Islam is very difficult to dismantle, these discourses need to be interrogated, not least because they create communitarian walls rather than multicultural bridges. Unpacking, for example, the idea of a 'Muslim community', often bandied around in public discourses, reveals why the idea is misleading if used uncritically.

Aside from the question who has the authority to speak in the name of Islam, to render someone in so that they become part of the Muslim 'us' rather than the non-Muslim 'them', for persons who refer to themselves as 'Muslim' this does not mean that they do not identify themselves in other ways, or that 'being a Muslim' is the primary source of their identity and even if it is, this may not be uniformly expressed. Similarly, the idea of a 'Muslim community' can also be misleading since there are many and diverse communities who happen to also be Muslim. From being a homogeneous community, Muslims are ethnically diverse and heterogeneous in language, culture, and skin colour. The internal diversity has important, sometimes unexpected, outcomes. For instance, Somali Muslims at times highlight their religious identity and, as part of this affirmation, their ties to (non-Somali) Muslims. On other occasions they seek to highlight sharp distinctions even within their own community—distinctions of clan and tribe in particular. Rather than sharia

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In this short monograph in the Palgrave Pivot series, Hadi Enayat provides an exposition and a critique of ‘Asadian’ post-colonial sociological literature. The label refers to a tradition of thought on secularism, liberalism and Islam whose most influential figure is Talal Asad and which includes, according to Enayat, Wael Hallaq, Saba Mahmood, William Cavanaugh and Elizabeth Shakman-Hurd. In the book, Enayat delineates seven main themes that run through this body of thought and devotes a chapter to each. Distilling and outlining these themes – Christianity and imperialism, violence, Islam as a discursive tradition, secularisation theory, pain and the body, religious freedom and minority rights – generates a roadmap of Asadian thought which is useful to both the initiated and the uninitiated reader.

The aim of the book is to critique Asad and his followers, but to do this Enayat first needs to convey to the reader their main ideas. This is no easy task because, as anyone who has ventured into this literature will know, it can be impenetrable and opaque. Asad, in particular, as Enayat points out, quoting Robert Hefner, has a ‘typically exploratory style’ which does not clearly endorse or reject arguments. It is another important contribution of Enayat’s book that it summarises the main ideas of this literature in clear language and teases out their implications. Whether one agrees with Enayat’s critique of Asadian thought or not, one emerges from reading the book with a better understanding of what it is about.

Asadian thought, according to Enayat, aims to problematise the religion-secular binary and argues that there is a will to power at the heart of secularism and Western liberal democracy. Secularism is not neutral but an aspect of Western power; it is also ‘a narrow ideology of power and state-building’ (94). As such, it is alien to how Muslims experience themselves, society and the world.

Enayat appreciates aspects of Asadian thought. For example, he states that Asad’s work constitutes ‘an important rejoinder to Orientalist arguments about the irrationality of Islam and its intrinsic incapacity to allow public criticism’ (41); it also undermines the Orientalist linking of Islam and violence (21). Asadians, furthermore, have a point in emphasising the limitations of formal legal equality. However, Enayat brings in Marxian analysis to argue that ‘formal rights and liberties’ may not be a sufficient condition for freedom and democracy but they are a necessary one (82).

The thrust of the book, nevertheless, is critical. For instance, Enayat decodes Asadian thought for claiming that a chasm separates Muslims from liberal/secular Westerners and for erecting a binary between Westernised and non-Westernised Muslims ‘with the former embracing secularism and the latter embracing a more public or political role for religion’ (14). What explains this view, Enayat concludes, is that Asad, Mahmood and Hallaq in particular tend to see Muslims as pre-eminently and determinatively religious’ (92). In some ways they essentialise Islam in that they see it as having one core set of characteristics, allegedly profoundly different from the West. In their view, the Enlightenment idea of a common humanity, underpinned by a shared capacity to reason, is not only untrue but constitutes a colonialist encroachment.

What are the political implications of Asadian thought? What would Asadians see as the better alternative to the imperialist liberal secularist system which they castigate? They would probably respond that they are not dealing with this issue but are unmasking the power impositions and hypocrisies of liberal secularists and offering an indispensable insight into the world of Islam. Whether this is a legitimate response or not is a major ethical dilemma pertaining to any body of political thought. Enayat does not spell out the political implications of Asadian thought but his book has performed the invaluable service of bringing us closer to wondering about them and discerning what they might be.

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Tiger and Clay: Syria Fragments

By Rana Abdulfattah

Palewell Press, February 2017, £8.99

Reviewed by Rami Abu Zarad

Rana’s Tiger and Clay: Syria Fragments swings back and forth between home and exile, shedding light on the mental anguish that accompanies the process of turning an exile into a home, of never fully belonging. The book’s main character is depicted as decorating an exile into a semblance of the lost home that was once paradise.

Fragments presents an intimate journey, but the journey is not Rana’s alone. It is intimate in so much that we, as readers, have already accepted the author’s invitation for engagement. We share in the existential angst, the expectations, the disappointment and the incurable nostalgia.

The setting is Istanbul, where some of the events take place and wherein the narrator looks back on other settings, mostly Syria. The significance of Istanbul, as an actual location, is therefore reduced in this home-exile binary, for the city could very well be Cairo, Berlin, Amsterdam, or Malmö, or any other city that the Syrian diaspora has set foot in, unwillingly more so than willingly.

The book covers a wide range of feelings and states of mind – nostalgia, disillusionment, xenophobia – in addition to the effort for social integration on the part of someone who is fully aware of her weak position in the host society. The narrator mentions how the host’s perception of the refugee community seeps into her own subconscious and informs her own self-image; the concepts and images that the media and the political discourse inundate her with are internalised. The author brings attention to this complicated undercurrent, an under-discussed socio-psychological process. This is evident when she talks about accepting her ‘refugeeness’, which comes across as nothing more than an acquired identity entailing ‘weakness, vulnerability’ and being ‘a burden’ in the new country.

The narrator’s relationship with Damascus is no less heartwarming and paradoxically – soul-shattering in its essence than that of James Joyce’s Dublin or Edward Said’s Jerusalem. Rana’s ‘Dublin’ exists solely as an idea, because these days even those living in Damascus pine for the very Damascus those in exile miss. Her journey appears to be one without end, so long as the dark clouds continue to block the sunrays from her remembered ‘Jerusalem’.

We sit shoulder to shoulder with Rana on the stairs in an Istanbul neighborhood while she smokes her cigarettes, then join her at the table of the Syrian family she visits; anyone who has been an expatriate for the better part of their lives knows too well what it means to sit at a table serving homemade national food in exile. We are reminded of what it means to be a migrant, and the ambivalence this ‘being’ entails in the host society: to be unwanted and ‘wanted’ at the same time, to be sometimes scapegoated.

The author indulges in the free expression of emotion over the ‘correct’ and even ‘macho’ behaviour dictated by her home culture. She mentions that Syrians are brought up to contain their feelings and that public displays of affection are frowned upon. This book, however, is a public display of affection, not towards a person, but towards the country, and the author balances this infusion of feelings between the personal and the public, the private and the national.

What is more laudable is the author’s capacity to convey the migrant experience in a passionate language in which reality and symbolism are intertwined. For what Syrian abroad doesn’t feel that his/her days are stamped with ‘the stillness, the uncertainty, the routine, [and] the lack of movement’? Are these not universal feelings that anyone living abroad, who cannot return home for a multitude of reasons, can feel and sympathise with?

Without my making darkness darker, Fragments blows fresh air from Istanbul that reaches the last corner of our planet with the author’s determined statement, ‘we are made to survive’, and survive we shall, Rana dear.

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Reza Zia-Ebrahimi has chosen an important yet controversial topic to present in this book. It is important because there are very few scholarly books about modern Iranian nationalism. Students of Iranian studies have always felt that a critical approach to this subject has been lacking. Like other critical approaches to nationalism, this work touches the core of modern Iranian national identity – a subject that is itself hotly debated.

In this book Zia-Ebrahimi brings modern Iranian nationalism – which he terms ‘dislocative nationalism’ – into question. As an ideology that emerged towards the end of the 19th century, it is characterised by four central ideas. First, Iran is an ancient nation with an uninterrupted history of 2,500 years or more. Second, Iran’s most glorious time was during the pre-Islamic era. Third, every failure should be blamed on Islam and the Arabs. Fourth, and this is the key idea for his study, Iranians are of the Aryan race and therefore belong to the European family. He claims that Iranian intellectuals of the late 19th century borrowed the idea of racial superiority and the Aryan-versus-Semite dichotomy directly from European sources. This has no precedent in local traditions or narratives, according to Zia-Ebrahimi, which is one reason why he calls it ‘dislocative’.

Although, he argues, no definition of European civilisation includes Iran, a generation of Iranian intellectuals, historians and politicians used the ‘Iranians are Aryans’ hypothesis to make the connection between the two. It gave them a way to distinguish Iran from the Arab majority nations and a pretext to share some of Europe’s achievements. It also provided a scapegoat to take the blame for Iran’s backwardness: the Arabs and everything related to them, including Islam.

Zia-Ebrahimi traces the emergence of this dislocative nationalism back to two Iranian intellectuals between the 1860s and the 1890s, namely Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani. Akhundzadeh imagines ancient Iran as some sort of a ‘Garden of Eden’, a place where people lived under benevolent kings and wise viziers. This was the case until the ‘Arab invasion’ when the Muslims supposedly burnt down libraries and spread Islam by the sword. According to Akhundzadeh, they then ruled as despots through a set of superstitious ideas called Islam. Kermani, an heir to Akhundzadeh’s ideology, propagated his ideas about pre-Islamic Iran in a simplified and more radicalised way with a harsher language against Arabs. He is the first Iranian writer to directly refer to the Aryan race in his works, influenced by 19th-century racial doctrines formulated by Europeans like Gobineau in his Essay on the Inequality of Human Races (1853-1855).

The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism is particularly successful in showing that this dislocative nationalism has continued to influence a wide range of Iranians, from the former President Ahmadinejad to the political opposition to the Islamic Republic and the Iranian diaspora. This includes Mohammad Reza Shah who called himself Aryamehr, the Light of Aryans, and the opposition that sometimes calls the 1979 Revolution the ‘second Arab invasion’. Even today in the Islamic Republic, it is quite acceptable to talk about removing Arabic loanwords in the Persian language.

Zia-Ebrahimi portrays dislocative nationalism as a ‘quest for dignity’, ‘akin to a medication’ (215) to treat the pains of the traumatic encounter with European modernism, like the one Iranians experienced in the humiliating defeats during the Russo-Persian wars of 1804 to 1813.

Dislocative nationalism as the ideology adopted by the Pahlavi dynasty still stubbornly persists in the minds of some Iranians, including intellectuals, without any critical review or revision. For this reason Zia-Ebrahimi’s work to debunk the Aryan myth is a novel, brave and much needed text for today.

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Qatar plays a crucial part in the Middle East today. With the second greatest natural gas resources in the region, Qatar's economic clout is considerable. At the same time the Qatar story is replete with paradoxes: the state hosts the Al-Jazeera media network, an influential expression of Arab nationalism and anti-Americanism, while also hosting the principal US naval base in the region. Its leaders, like Saudi Arabia's, adhere to the Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam, yet Qatar eyes its Saudi neighbours with suspicion. It is a fervent champion of the Palestinian cause, yet welcomes the Israeli Foreign Minister to present the Jewish state's case in its capital, Doha. In this book Allen Fromherz presents a full portrait which analyses these paradoxes and Qatar's growing regional influence within a broader historical context.

April 2017, IB Tauris, £12.99

A Concise History of Sunnis and Shi’is

By John McHugo

In this layered and engrossing account, John McHugo reveals how the great divide in Islam occurred. Charting the story of Islam from the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammad to the present day, he describes the conflicts that raged over the succession to the Prophet, how Sunnism and Shi’ism evolved as different sects during the Abbasid caliphate, and how the rivalry between the empires of the Sunni Ottomans and Shi’i Safavids contrived to ensure that the split would continue into modern times. Now its full, destructive force has been brought out by the struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran for the soul of the Muslim world.

September 2017, Saqi Books, £20.00

The Kurdish Question Revisited

Edited by Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef

In Turkey, where the Kurdish question is an issue of national significance, and in Iraq, where the gains made by the Kurdistan Regional Government have allowed it to impose its authority, moves are afoot to answer ‘the Kurdish Question’ once and for all. In Syria, where the Kurds have borne the brunt of the Islamic State’s onslaught, and in Iran, where they struggle to express their cultural distinctiveness and suffer disproportionately at the hands of the Islamic Republic’s security and intelligence services, the picture is less positive. Yet the situations in both countries remain in flux, affected by developments in Iraq and Turkey in a manner that suggests we may have to revise the notion of the Kurds being forever divided by the boundaries of the Middle East and subsumed into the state projects of other nations.

July 2017, Hurst, £25.00
Palestine: The Reality
The Inside Story of the Balfour Declaration 1917-1938

By J.M.N. Jeffries

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British foreign minister expressed his support for a Jewish state in Palestine, was a document that profoundly affected the Middle East for the next 100 years. *Palestine: The Reality* is a vivid and personal account of the birth and significance of the Declaration, by a journalist, J.M.N. Jeffries who was intimately familiar with the dramatis personae in the story and with the relevant documents, some revealed in the book for the first time.

2017, Skyscraper Publications, £25.00

The Great Game in West Asia:
Iran, Turkey and the South Caucasus

Edited by Mehran Kamrava

*The Great Game in West Asia* examines the strategic competition between Iran and Turkey for power and influence in the South Caucasus. These neighbouring Middle East powers have vied for supremacy and influence throughout the region – especially in their immediate vicinity – while contending with ethnic heterogeneity within their own territories and across their borders. Turkey has long conceived of itself as not just a bridge between Asia and Europe but in more substantive terms as a central player in regional and global affairs. Iran’s parallel ambitions for strategic centrality and influence have only been masked by its own inarticulate foreign policy agendas and the repeated missteps of its revolutionary leaders. But both have sought to deepen their regional influence and power, and in the South Caucasus each has achieved a modicum of success.

July 2017, Hurst, £25.00

The Impossible Revolution:
Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy

By Yassin al-Haj Saleh

Yassin al-Haj Saleh is a leftist dissident who spent 16 years as a political prisoner and now lives in exile. He describes with precision and fervour the events that led to Syria’s 2011 uprising, the metamorphosis of the popular revolution into a regional war, and the ‘three monsters’ Saleh sees ‘treading on Syria’s corpse’: the Assad regime and its allies, ISIS and other jihadists, and Russia and the US. Where conventional wisdom has it that Assad’s army is now battling religious fanatics for control of the country, Saleh argues that the emancipatory, democratic mass movement that ignited the revolution still exists, though it is beset on all sides.

July 2017, Hurst, £12.99
Arab Migrant Communities in the GCC

Edited by Zahra Babar

Long a recipient of migrants from its surrounding areas, the Arabian Peninsula today comprises a mosaic of communities of diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious origins. *Arab Migrant Communities in the GCC* is based on in-depth fieldwork focusing on the earlier community of Arab immigrants within the GCC, who are among the politically most significant and sensitive of migrant groups in the region. The book presents original data and provides analyses of the settlement and continued evolution of migrant Arab communities across the GCC, their work in and assimilation within host societies and labour markets, and their political, economic, social and cultural significance both to the GCC region and to their countries of origin.

*July 2017, Hurst, £25.00*

A Quiet Revolution?
The Rise of Women Managers, Business Owners and Leaders in the Arabian Gulf States

By Nick Forster

An irreversible transformation is taking place in the lives of many thousands of university educated professional women in the United Arab Emirates, Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Drawing on 8 years of participative research and extensive secondary sources, this book documents the emerging economic and political power of women, and how they are beginning to challenge ancient and deeply-held beliefs about the 'correct' roles of men and women in conservative Islamic societies and in public and private sector organisations. It also describes the vital role that women could play in the economic development and diversification of these countries, and the broader MENA region, in the future.

*September 2017, Cambridge University Press, £34.99*

The Making of Selim:
Succession, Legitimacy, and Memory in the Early Modern Ottoman World

By H. Erdem Cipa

The father of the legendary Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, Selim I (‘The Grim’) set the stage for centuries of Ottoman supremacy by doubling the size of the empire. Conquering Eastern Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt, Selim promoted a politicised Sunni Ottoman identity against the Shiite Safavids of Iran, thus shaping the early modern Middle East. Analysing a wide array of sources in Ottoman-Turkish, Persian, and Arabic, H. Erdem Cipa offers a revisionist reading of Selim’s rise to power and the subsequent reworking and mythologising of his persona in 16th and 17th century Ottoman historiography. In death, Selim continued to serve the empire, becoming represented in ways that reinforced an idealised image of Muslim sovereignty in the early modern Eurasian world.

*February 2017, Indiana University Press, £24.99*
October – November 2017

The Middle East in London

Events in London

The 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, Wornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG
LSE – London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2 2AE

Octobre Events

Wednesday 4 October

Until 15 October | 61st BFI London Film Festival This year’s festival features a diverse selection of 242 feature films from both established and emerging talent showing at various venues across the capital. Films from the MENA region including Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Tunisia, Turkey and the UAE. See website for programme, tickets and venue details. T 020 7928 3232 W www.bfi.org.uk/lff

5:00 pm | Aleppo’s Historian Ibn Al-‘Adim and his Great history on Aleppo (Lecture) Organised by: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation. Lecture in Arabic by Al-Mahdi Eid Al-Rawadieh, editor of Al-Furqan’s latest publication Bughyat al-Ṭalab fi Tārīkh Ḥalab: Th e History of Aleppo by ʿUmar ibn ʿAḥmad ibn Ḥibat Allāh Kamāl al-Dīn ibn al-ʿAdim (660 AH / 1262 CE). Admission free. Pre-registration required. W https://historyofaleppoaihf.eventbrite.co.uk Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 22A Old Court Place, London W8 4PL. T 020 3130 1530 E info@al-furqan.com

W www.al-furqan.com

6:30 pm | Tombs of Achaemenid Kings and Queens: the Persian funerary cult and its Elamite background (Lecture) Wouter Henkelman (École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris)). Organised by: Iran Heritage Foundation. New light on the complex relationship between the Elamites and the Persians has been cast by information contained in cuneiform tablets in the Persepolis Fortification Archive, some of them still unpublished. Henkelman provides an updated survey and makes a case for a Persian connection with Elamite royal funerary cults. Tickets: £10. Asia House, 63 New Cavendish Street, London W1G 7LP. T 020 7651 2121 E astrid@iranheritage.org W www.iranheritage.org

Thursday 5 October

7:00 pm | Reclaiming the Caliphate (Lecture) Hugh Kennedy (SOAS). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Lecture by Hugh Kennedy on contemporary discussions of caliphate, how they relate to the history on which they claim to be based and whether a revived caliphate is a viable

Pascal Hachem, back to square one, 2017. Irons, flour, metal structure, step motor and electrical board. Photograph by Andy Stagg, courtesy of The Mosaic Rooms. The show has a long title that I don’t recall anymore: Pascal Hachem (see Exhibitions p. 34)
proposition in the contemporary Middle East. Chair: Hassan Hakimian (LMEI). Admission free. Pre-registration required. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events

Friday 6 October


Saturday 7 October

7:30 pm | Tafahum and the New Divan (Concert) Organised by: Gingko Library. Tafahum unveils a two-year project uniting music and poetry to celebrate Goethe’s West-Eastern Divan and combines traditionally Western styles into newly composed works, absorbing the ideas of the spiritual bridge that connected Goethe to the East. Tickets: TBC. St John’s, Smith Square, Westminster, London SW1P 3HA. T 020 7838 9055 E office@tafahum.org / gingko@gingkolibrary.com W www.tafahum.org / www.gingkolibrary.com

Monday 9 October

5:10 pm | Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History (Seminar) Beshara Doumani (Brown University). Organised by: Department of History, School of History, Religions & Philosophies, SOAS and the London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Near & Middle East History Seminar. Based on a wide range of local sources spanning two centuries (1660-1860), Beshara Doumani’s new book Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History (Cambridge University Press, 2017) argues that there is no such thing as the Muslim or Arab family type that is so central to Orientalist, nationalist, and Islamist narratives. Admission free. Room 34, BM. See Exhibitions for more information. Admission free. Room 34, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E eck17@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar/

Tuesday 10 October

5:30 pm | Communities and Peoples in Western Tripolitania: the Landscape of the Jabal Nafusah (Lecture) Anna Leone (Durham University). Organised by: Society for Libyan Studies. Leone’s primary research focus is the end of the pagan religious tradition in North Africa (modern Libya, Algeria and Tunisia) from the 4th to the 6th centuries AD. Her research considers how urban communities changed, why some traditions were lost and some others continued. Admission free. Pre-registration required. British Academy, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH. T 020 3174 2412 E gensec@societyforlibyanstudies.org W www.societyforlibyanstudies.org

5:45 pm | A Quest for Significance: Gulf oil monarchies’ international ‘soft power’ strategies and their local urban dimensions (Lecture) Steffen Hertog (LSE). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Lecture by Steffen Hertog based on his paper A Quest for Significance in which he documents how the GCC oil monarchies have been using their oil wealth to buy the accoutrements of ‘good citizenship’ and ‘progressiveness’ in the international arena through costly policy projects that involve urban interventions – urban enclaves with an audience that is almost exclusively international. Chair: Hassan Hakimian (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Admission free. Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 11 October


6:30 pm | Trump and the Middle East: Personality, Ideology and Militarisation (Lecture) Toby

Sufi procession at festival in Cairo, Egypt © Tim Coleman. 

Fairgrounds of the Faithful: Moulids: The Sufi Festivals of Egypt (see Exhibitions, p. 34)
TUESDAY LECTURE PROGRAMME ON THE CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST AUTUMN 2017

10 October
A Quest for Significance: Gulf Oil Monarchies' International 'Soft Power' Strategies and their Local Urban Dimensions
Steffen Hertog, LSE

17 October
A Concise History of Sunnis and Shi’is
John McHugo, Centre for Syrian Studies, St Andrews University

24 October
The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic
Veli Yadirgi, SOAS

31 October
Political Challenges to Diversity in Both Nature and Society in Palestine: Role of Colonialism and Role of Civil Society
Mazin Qumsiyeh, Bethlehem and Birzeit Universities
Organised jointly with the Centre for Palestine Studies

7 November
Reading Week

14 November
King Salman, the US and the Rest
Madawi Al-Rasheed, LSE

21 November
Kennedy and the Middle East: The Cold War, Israel and Saudi Arabia
Antonio Perra, Birkbeck, King’s College London & MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development)

28 November
Yemen in crisis, Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State
Helen Lackner, LMEI

5 December
TBC

TUESDAYS 5:45 PM
Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS

Admission Free - All Welcome

For further information contact:
London Middle East Institute, SOAS University of London, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA. T: 020 7898 4330 E lmei@soas.ac.uk W: www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/
Dodge (LSE Middle East Centre). Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Toby Dodge examines the Trump administration’s approach to the Middle East, specifically its policy towards Iraq, the fight against the Islamic State, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Admission free. Pre-registration required. Wolfson Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE, 54 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London WC2A 3LJ. T 020 7955 6198 E s.sfeir@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre

7:00 pm | The Palace of Pedro I in Seville, ‘very much like the residence of the Muslim kings?’ (Lecture) Tom Nickson (The Courtauld Institute of Art, London). Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. Chair: Scott Redford (SOAS), Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 07714087480 E rosalindhaddon@gmail.com W www.soas.ac.uk/art/islac/

7:30 pm | The Three Disappearances of Soad Hosni (Film) Organised by: The Mosaic Rooms. Egyptian film legend Soad Hosni died in mysterious circumstances in 2001 in London. This film montages archive footage in a compelling portrait of her life. Director Rania Stephan will be in discussion after the screening. Tickets: £6.50. The Mosaic Rooms, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7370 9990 E info@mosaicrooms.org W http://mosaicrooms.org

Thursday 12 October

6:00 pm | Reorienting the PKK: Rojava and the political thought of Abdullah Öcalan (Lecture) Joost Jongerden (Wageningen University). Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. In its 1978 manifesto, the PKK declared the establishment of an independent state to be the most important political goal of any national liberation movement. Twenty years on, the party’s leader Abdullah Öcalan changed this when he developed an ideological framework based on the idea of self-governing, stateless societies. Chair: Robert Lowe (LSE Middle East Centre). Admission free. Pre-registration required. Room 9.04, 9th Floor, Tower 2, LSE, 2 Clement’s Inn, Mobil Court, London WC2A 2AZ. T 020 7955 6198 E s.sfeir@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre

6:30 pm | The Battle of Algiers (Film) Dir Gillo Pontecorvo (1966), Italy/Algeria, 121 min. Based on true events that took place during the Algerian War, the film blurs the lines between fiction and reality with a black and white newsreel style and non-professional actors bringing to life the conflict. Tickets: £10.50. Barbican Cinema 1, Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS. T 020 7638 8891 E tickets@barbican.org.uk W www.barbican.org.uk


7:30 pm | Homayoun Shahjarian (Concert) Homayoun Sharajian, son of the legendary Persian singer Mohammad-Reza Shahjarian, showcases his blend of traditional and modern Persian music as he performs music from acclaimed albums Nasim-e Vasil and Ba Setareh ha. Tickets: £40-£100. Barbican Hall, Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS. T 020 7638 8891 E tickets@barbican.org.uk W www.barbican.org.uk

Saturday 14 October

1:15 pm | Ivories and Tulips: Arts of Islamic Medieval Spain and Ottoman Turkey (Gallery Talk) Hilary Ruttle (independent speaker). Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 34, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org

Tuesday 17 October

5:15 pm | Redefining the Political: The Ultras Football ‘Movement’ in Egypt (Seminar) Rabab El-Mahdi (American University in Cairo). Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Social Movements and Popular Mobilisation in the MENA Seminar. El-Mahdi examines the tumultuous path of Egypt’s revolutionary process through the lens of the Ultras football fan groups. Chair: John Chalcraft (LSE Department of Government). Admission free. Pre-registration required. Room 9.04, 9th Floor, Tower 2, LSE, 2 Clement’s Inn, Mobil Court, London WC2A 2AZ. T 020 7955 6198 E s.sfeir@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre

5:45 pm | A Concise History of Sunnis and Shi’is (Lecture) John McHugo (Centre for Syrian Studies, St Andrews University). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Lecture by John McHugo on his latest book A Concise History of Sunnis and Shi’is (Saqi, 2017) in which he provides an understanding of the genesis, development and manipulation of one of the major schisms that has come to define Islam and the Muslim world. Chair: Madawi Al-Rasheed (LSE). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Admission free. Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490

Fatma Bucak, A border view, 2015, from the series A Study of Eight Landscapes 80x62.9 cm. Digital archival pigment print from large format film. Originally produced by Artpace San Antonio. Sticks and Stones: Fatma Bucak (see Exhibitions, p. 34)
Thursday 19 October

5:45 pm | A Return to Arabian Art and Architecture in Cairo at the Beginning of the 20th Century: the patronage of Prince Mohammed Ali Tewfik (Lecture) Sami de Giosa (Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford). Organised by: MBI Al Jaber Foundation and the British Foundation for the Study of Arabia (BFSA). Away from the modern Cairo of Khaled Ismail on the island of Rawda Prince Mohammed Ali Tewfik's Manial Palace in Cairo (1909-1929) is a vivid representation of patrons and architects reviving indigenous aesthetics lost with the advent of European colonialism. Part of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation Lecture Series. Admission free. Pre-registration required. MBI Al Jaber Seminar Room, London Middle East Institute, SOAS, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA. E info@mbifoundation.com W www.mbifoundation.com

6.00 pm | Adventures in Archaeology: Flinders Petrie at the 'Mound of the Calves' (Lecture) Rachael Sparks. Organised by: Anglo Israel Archaeological Society and the Institute of Archaeology. Admission free. Pre-registration required. MBI Al Jaber Seminar Room, London Middle East Institute, SOAS, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA. E info@mbifoundation.com W www.mbifoundation.com

7:00 pm | The State of Arab Men (Talk) Organised by: The Mosaic Rooms. From head of state to head of the family, men are pillars of patriarchies across the Arab region. Sheereen El Feki, author of Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World, and panel discuss the first international study of the personal lives of Arab men to explore how these roles are changing. Admission free. Pre-registration required E rsvp@mosaicrooms.org W www.mosaicrooms.org

House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7370 9990 E info@mosaicrooms.org W http://mosaicrooms.org

Saturday 21 October

10.00 am | Homeland? Exploring the heritage of the Balfour Declaration (Conference) Peter Shambrook (Balfour Project), Sir Vincent Fean, Clare Amos. Organised by: The British Trust for Tantur. Tickets: £20 (cheques made payable to The British Trust for Tantur and forwarded to The Right Revd John Went, The Rectory, Latimer, Chesham, Bucks HP5 1UA). Reduced charge of £10 for Tantur Alumni and theological and other students. University of Notre Dame London Centre, 1 Suffolk Street, London SW1 4HG. T 01494 765586 / 07502315960 E johnswent@gmail.com W www.tanturbritishtrust.org.uk

1:15 pm | Egypt under the Earliest Pharaohs (Gallery Talk) George Hart (independent speaker). Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 4, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org

7:00 pm | Culture in Crisis: At Home in Syria (Lecture) Organised by: V&A in association with Gingko. Artist Zahed Tajeddin and author Diana Darke describe their battles to save their historic courtyard houses – his in Aleppo, hers in Damascus – from theft, shelling and looting, giving a rare first-hand glimpse of how people and cultural heritage survive inside a war-zone. Tickets: £15 (including wine reception). The Lydia & Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre, Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL. T 020 7947 0500 E gingko@gingkolibrary.com W www.gingkolibrary.com / www.vam.ac.uk

Tuesday 24 October

5:45 pm | The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic (Lecture) Veli Yadırğı (SOAS). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Veli Yadırğı on his book The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic (Cambridge University Press, 2017) in which he analyses the socioeconomic and political structures and transformations of the Kurdish people from the Ottoman era through to the modern Turkish Republic. Chair: Gilbert Achcar (SOAS). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Admission free. Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 25 October

1:15 pm | Ancient Egyptian Gods, Goddesses and Sacred Animals (Gallery Talk) Carol

Pascal Hachem, the stone in my pocket, 2017. Trousers, stones, metal cast of stone, mirrors, metal cables, metal structures, step motor and electrical board. Photograph by Andy Stagg, courtesy of The Mosaic Rooms. The show has a long title that I don’t recall anymore: Pascal Hachem (see Exhibitions p. 34)

Thursday 26 October

12:30 pm | Seminar with Khalid Abu-Ismail (UN-ESCWA) Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Khalid Abu-Ismail (UN-ESCWA) is Chief of the Economic Development and Poverty Section at UN-ESCWA and Faculty Member of the Economics Department of the Lebanese American University. Admission free. MBI Al Jaber Seminar Room, London Middle East Institute, SOAS, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B SEA. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

1:30 pm | The Mouth of Kemet: Ancient Egyptian Language and Script in their African Setting (Lecture) Stephen Quirke (UCL). Organised by: BM. Quirke examines how, for at least 3,500 years, down to the 5th century AD, people in the lower Nile Valley used a hieroglyphic script to write one African language – Egyptian. Admission free. Pre-registration required. BP Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 W www.barbican.org.uk

6:00 pm | The Balfour Declaration, One Century After (Panel Discussion) Avi Shlaim (University of Oxford), Karmen Nabulsi (University of Oxford), Gilbert Achcar (SOAS). Organised by: Centre for Palestine Studies, SOAS. Chair: Dina Matar (SOAS). Admission free. Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cps/events/

6:30 pm | Chronicle of a Disappearance (Film) Dir Elia Suleiman (1996), Palestine, 88 min. The loss of Palestinian collective identity is woven into this critical account of filmmaker Elia Suleiman's return to his beloved homeland after living in New York for many years. Tickets: £10.50. Barbican Cinema 2, Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS. T 020 7638 8891 E tickets@barbican.org.uk W www.barbican.org.uk

Saturday 28 October

7:30 pm | Sacred Unity (Concert) Join the Light of Music Symphony Orchestra for a unique evening of Persian symphonic music celebrating poems by the 10th-, 13th- and 14th-century Persian poets Ferdowsi, Rumi and Hafez in collaboration with the Ishirini Choir, under the baton of Babak Kazemi. Tickets: £15-£30. Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace, London SW1X 9DQ. T 020 716 46961 / 020 7730 4500 E info@lightofmusic.com W www.lightofmusic.com / www.cadoganhall.com

Monday 30 October

5:00 pm | Transforming Terra Incognita with ‘Colonial Science’ in Italian Libya (Lecture) David Atkinson (University of Hull). Organised by: Society for Libyan Studies. Following the Society’s Forty-Seventh Annual General Meeting. Admission free. Pre-registration required. British Academy, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH. T 020 3174 2412 E gensec@societyforlibyanstudies.org W www.societyforlibyanstudies.org

7:00 | Egypt (Book Launch) Robert Springborg (Italian Institute of International Affairs). Event to mark the publication of Robert Springborg’s Egypt (Polity, 2017) which looks at how deteriorating economic, environmental, and political conditions are undermining Egypt’s national community. Caught in a downward spiral in which poor governance is both cause and consequence, Egypt is facing a future so uncertain that it could end up resembling neighbouring countries that have collapsed under similar loads. Chair: Hasanam Hakimian (LMEI). Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Tuesday 31 October

5:45 pm | Political Challenges to Diversity in Both Nature and Society in Palestine: Role of Colonialism and Role of Civil Society (Lecture) Mazin Qumsiyeh (Bethlehem and Birzeit Universities). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI) and the Centre for Palestine Studies, SOAS. Lecture by Qumsiyeh in which he will argue that movements towards uniformity such as Zionism have threatened the crucial diversity found in the landscape. His talk will be framed by three points of focus: the plants and animals of the Holy Land and the status of nature conservation; the role fulfilled by establishing museums and botanical gardens; and the perspective of a Palestinian Christian on Islam, peace studies, and conflict resolution. Chair: Gilbert Achcar (SOAS). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Admission free. Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

NOVEMBER EVENTS

Wednesday 1 November

5:00 pm | Lecture by Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi (San Francisco State University). Organised by: Centre for Palestine Studies, SOAS. Admission free. Room 116, SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cps/events/

Thursday 2 November

4:00 pm | Remote Sensing and Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (Lecture) Robert Bewley
The Middle East in London


Monday 6 November

6:30 pm | And Then God Created the Middle East and Said 'Let there be breaking news and analysis' (Lecture) Karl Sharro. Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. From the Arab Spring to the rise and decline of ISIS, Sharro, aka Karl reMarks, discusses how his online alter ego tackled those delicate topics in tweets, blog posts, memes, animations and badly-drawn cartoons. Admission free. Pre-registration required. Old Theatre, Old Building, LSE. T 020 7955 6198 E s.sfeir@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre

Thursday 9 November

9:00 am | Faces of the Infinite: Neoplatonism and Poetics at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe (Three-Day Conference: Thursday 9 - Saturday 11 November) Conference intended to generate the first comparative overview of the extent to which Neoplatonist philosophy has permeated poetic forms, styles, themes and figurative language as well as poetic theory in seven principal languages of the greater Mediterranean region, from late antiquity to the modern period. Convenors: Stefan Sperl (SOAS), Trevor Dadson FBA (Queen Mary University of London), Yorgos Dedes (SOAS). Tickets: £20-£95 (Thursday 9 & Friday 10 November); £20/£10 full-time students (Saturday 11 November). Pre-registration required. British Academy, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH (Thursday 9 & Friday 10 November) & SOAS (Saturday 11 November). T 020 7898 4893 E centres@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/events/

Friday 10 November

7:30 pm | The Songs of Songs – A Musical Triptych with Texts by King Solomon, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and St. John of the Cross (Concert) Sponsored by: Iran Heritage Foundation and the AHRC Project Language Acts and Worldmaking. Triptych with voices, songs and music based on: The Song of Songs attributed to King Solomon in the Bible (Old Testament), The Spiritual Canticles of St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) and The Odes on Mystical Love by the Persian poet Rūmī (1207-1273). Music score composed by Renaud Garcia-Fons. With Leili Anvar (The female Beloved), Frédéric Ferney (The male Beloved), and Solea Garcia-Fons (The Choir). Coincides with the conference Faces of the Infinite: Neoplatonism and Poetics at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe (see above event listing). Admission free. Pre-registration required. Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/events/

Saturday 11 November

9:30 am | Faces of the Infinite: Neoplatonism and Poetics at the Confluence of Africa, Asia and Europe (Three-Day Conference: Thursday 9 - Saturday 11 November) See above event listing for more information.

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DESTROYING A NATION

The Civil War in Syria

Nikolaos Van Dam

Syria was once a richly cultural, historical and seemingly peaceful country. Today it is a violent, fractured warzone; a breeding ground for new terrorist groups and the root cause of the greatest refugee crisis in modern history.

Nikolaos van Dam was Special Envoy to the Netherlands for Syria from 2015-6. In this groundbreaking eyewitness account, he examines the years before 2011, asking: could the War have been avoided?

Van Dam addresses the global community’s failed attempts to bring about an end to the conflict, suggesting which factors must be prioritised in order for peace talks to have any lasting effect. Thorough yet lucid, this is an indispensable guide to the world’s biggest human crisis since the Second World War.

‘Nikolaos van Dam is simply one of the top experts on Syria... This book is a sophisticated, yet accessible and readable analysis of a highly complex situation’

— David W. Lesch, author of Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad
Tuesday 14 November

5:45 pm | King Salman, the US and the Rest (Lecture) Madawi Al-Rasheed (LSE). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Al-Rasheed assesses the prospect for new directions in Saudi foreign policy, highlighting its continuities and discontinuities under the new leadership of King Salman and his son Muhammad and draws tentative conclusions that amidst a series of foreign policy failures, winning the US under President Donald Trump has been the major achievement of King Salman and his son Muhammad. Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Admission free. Wolfson Hall, SOAS on the Contemporary Middle East Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East Programme.

7:00 pm | BP in Iran from 1902 to the 1950s: documentary film and discussion (Lecture) Organised by: The Iran Society. Doors open 6:30pm. Film from the BP archive presented by Austin Vince and discussed by Dr Mohammad Ali Ala. Admission free for Society Members plus one guest. Pall Mall Room, The Army & 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 / www.therag.co.uk

6:00 pm | Demographic Challenges for Sustainable Development in the Middle East (Lecture) Valeria Cetorelli (LSE, Middle East Centre). Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. The population of the Middle East is expected to double in size during the first half of the 21st century. Cetorelli explores the scale and nature of demographic change in different Middle Eastern countries, and looks at key policy implications. Chair: Tim Dyson (LSE Department of International Development). Admission free. Pre-registration required. Room 9.04, 9th Floor, Tower 2, LSE, 2 Clement’s Inn, Mobil Court, London WC2A 2AZ. T 020 7955 6198 E s.sfeir@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre

7:00 pm | Reviving Islamic Architecture in Khedivial Cairo, and Beyond: a Collector’s Passion (Lecture) Mercedes Sfeir (LSE). Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. Enquiries: T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 15 November


9:45 am | The Idea of Iran: The Turko-Timurid Intermezzo (Two-Day Symposium: Saturday 18 - Sunday 19 November) Shahzad Bashir (Stanford University), Michele Bernardini (University of Naples “L’Orientale”), Elaheh Kheirandish (Harvard University), Beatrice Manz (Tufts University), Elena Paskaleva (Leiden University), Eleanor Sims (independent scholar), Maria Subtelny (University of Toronto), Marc Toutant (EHESS-Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales), Daniel Zakrzewski (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg), John Woods (University of Chicago). Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS, the Department of Religions and Philosophies, SOAS and the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge. Sponsored by: Soudavar Memorial Foundation. The thirteenth programme in The Idea of Iran annual series. Enquiries: T 020 7898 4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cis/events/

Saturday 18 November

9:30 am | Urban Planning and Civic Design in Modern Iran (Conference) Organised by: Iran Heritage Foundation and Dr Dariush Borbor. A conference on the evolution of urban planning and civic design in Iran from traditional to modern, with discussions and critical evaluations of the shortcomings, failures and successes of the process. Two major civic design projects of the period will also be presented and discussed: the ‘Shahestan Pahlavi’, and ‘Urban Renewal of Mashhad City Centre’. Tickets: £20. Asia House, 63 New Cavendish Street, London W1G 7LP. T 020 7651 2121 E astrid@iranheritage.org W www.iranheritage.org

9:45 am | The Idea of Iran: The Turko-Timurid Intermezzo Saturday 18 November

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS University of London, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG


Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, the Department of Religions and Philosophies, SOAS and the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

Sponsored by: Soudavar Memorial Foundation

Enquiries: T 020 7898 4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk

Wednesday 15 November

evolution. Tickets: £3/£2 conc. The Gallery, 70/77 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ. W www.mondediplofriends.org.uk

Tuesday 21 November
5:45 pm | Kennedy and the Middle East: The Cold War, Israel and Saudi Arabia (Lecture) Antonio Perra (Birkbeck, King’s College London & MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development)). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Lecture by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA. T 020 7898 4315 E nm46@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cis/events/

Wednesday 22 November
6:00 pm | Muhammad Ali Foroughi and the Foundations of Iranian Aufklärung (Seminar) Ramin Jahanbegloo (Jindal Global University, India). Organised by: Department of Near and Middle East Studies and the Department of Politics and International Studies in collaboration with the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. Admission free. MBI Al Jaber Seminar Room, London Middle East Institute, SOAS, 35 Mile End Road, London E1 4SU. T 020 7898 4315 E nm46@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cis/events/

Thursday 23 November

Tuesday 28 November
5:45 pm | Yemen in Crisis, Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State (Lecture) Helen Lackner (LMEI). Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Since 2015, Yemen has been plunged into its most severe crisis ever. The struggle for power in the Arab world’s poorest but strategically vital nation has serious implications for the region and beyond. While Egypt and Saudi Arabia fear that a Huthi takeover would threaten free passage of oil through the Bab al-Mandab strait, western governments fear a rise of attacks from al-Qa’ida and IS as the country becomes more unstable. Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East. Admission free. Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Paul Webley Wing (Senate House), SOAS. T 020 7898 4330/4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 29 November
6:30 pm | Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel (Talk) Ian Black (LSE Middle East Centre). Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Talk by Black to mark the publication of his book Enemies and Neighbours: Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917–2017, in which he traces how, half a century after the watershed of the 1967 war, hopes for a two-state solution and an end to occupation have all but disappeared. Admission free. Pre-registration required. Wolfson Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE, 54 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London WC2A 3LJ. T 020 7955 6198 E s.sfeir@lse.ac.uk W www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre

Thursday 30 November
5:00 pm | On Libya: Constitution Making and Sustaining Rights Movements (Talk) Elham Saudi (Lawyers for Justice in Libya). Organised by: Centre for Gender Studies, SOAS. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. Chair: Awino Okech (SOAS). E genderstudies@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/genderstudies/events/

EVENTS OUTSIDE LONDON

Wednesday 8 November
6:00 pm | Britain and Palestine: 100 years of promises and
abstract canvases, finishing with spanning over 40 years – from drawings and sculptures bringing together paintings, training as an artist in Istanbul, first women to receive formal of Fahrelnissa Zeid, one of the Modern, Bankside, London, SE1 in life. Tickets: £10-£12.50. Tate her return to portraiture later Zeid

**EXHIBITIONS**

**Sunday 1 October**

Until 8 October | **Fahrelnissa Zeid** The UK’s first retrospective of Fahrelnissa Zeid, one of the first women to receive formal training as an artist in Istanbul, bringing together paintings, drawings and sculptures spanning over 40 years – from expressionist works to immersive abstract canvases, finishing with her return to portraiture later in life. Tickets: £10–£12.50. Tate Modern, Bankside, London, SE1 9TG. T 020 7887 8888 W www.tate.org.uk

Until 22 October | **Living Histories: Recent Acquisitions of Works on Paper by Contemporary Arab Artists** Display highlighting the Museum’s recent acquisitions of posters, prints, drawings, photographs and artists’ books. Many of the artists come from Syria, their work produced following the uprisings that began in 2011 that have since resulted in full scale civil war. Gallery talk on Wednesday 11 October (see October Events). Admission free.

**October Events**). Admission free. Pre-registration required. John Henry Brookes Main Lecture Theatre, John Henry Brookes Building, Headington Campus, Oxford Brookes University. Oxford OX3 0BP. T 01865 484864 E events@brookes.ac.uk W www.brookes.ac.uk/about-brookes/events/

Until 29 October | **Cartoon Art from the Arab World: Works from the British Library Collection** Explore the art, history and significance of Arab comics, cartoons, caricatures and graphic novels through original examples taken from the British Library’s collections, from 19th century Egyptian satirical press, to mid-20th century children’s comics and contemporary graphic novels. Admission free. British Library, Treasures Gallery, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB. T 0330 333 1144 W www.bl.uk

Until 4 November | **Pop Art from North Africa** In the style of one of the 20th century’s most influential movements the works on display tackle the social, political and cultural environments unique to North Africa. Through paintings, digitally manipulated images, animation, music and street art, the show will take the audience on a voyage through urban landscapes, exploring the human condition and the clash between tradition and modernity. Admission free. P21 Gallery, 21-27 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. T 020 7121 6190 E info@p21.org.uk W http://p21.gallery/

Until 21 November | **Sticks and Stones: Fatma Bucak** In her first solo exhibition in the UK Fatma Bucak addresses two of the most pertinent struggles of our times: for freedom of expression and freedom of movement. Through her photographs, videos and installations she shows how these two liberties are inextricably intertwined. Admission free. Pi Artworks London, 55 Eastcastle Street, London W1W 8EG. T 020 7637 8403 E london@piartworks.com W www.piartworks.com

Until 2 December | **The show has a long title that I don’t recall anymore: Pascal Hachem** New work by Lebanese artist Pascal Hachem composed of new sculptural installations in which Hachem interrogates his experiences of his home city of Beirut. Through these installations he offers timely reflections on what it is like to live through situations of political and social unease. One off performance on Thursday 5 October (see October Events). Admission free. The Mosaic Rooms, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7370 9990 E info@mosaicrooms.org W http://mosaicrooms.org

**Thursday 12 October**

Until 16 December | **Surrealism in Egypt: Art et Liberté 1938 – 1948** The UK’s first comprehensive exhibition about Art et Liberté, a radical collective of artists and writers based in Cairo. The exhibition tracks the history of the group and explores the socio-political motivations that drove the collective, presenting more than 100 paintings, photographs, drawings, archival documents and film. Tickets: £10/£8. Tate Liverpool Albert Dock, Liverpool Waterfront, Liverpool L3 4BB. T 0151 702 7400 W www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-liverpool

**Friday 17 November**

Until 18 March | **Surrealism in Egypt: Art et Liberté 1938 – 1948** The UK’s first comprehensive exhibition about Art et Liberté, a radical collective of artists and writers based in Cairo. The exhibition tracks the history of the group and explores the socio-political motivations that drove the collective, presenting more than 100 paintings, photographs, drawings, archival documents and film. Tickets: £10/£8. Tate Liverpool Albert Dock, Liverpool Waterfront, Liverpool L3 4BB. T 0151 702 7400 W www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-liverpool

SOAS, University of London, is pleased to announce the availability of several scholarships in its Centre for Iranian Studies (CIS).

The Centre, established in 2010, draws upon the range of academic research and teaching across the disciplines of SOAS, including Languages and Literature, the Study of Religions, History, Economics, Politics, International Relations, Music, Art and Media and Film Studies. It aims to build close relations with likeminded institutions and to showcase and foster the best of contemporary Iranian talent in art and culture.

**MA in Iranian Studies**

In 2012/13 CIS members successfully launched an interdisciplinary MA in Iranian Studies, the first of its kind, which will be offered again in 2017/18.

Thanks to the generosity of the Fereydoun Djam Charitable Trust, a number of Kamran Djam scholarships are available for BA, MA and MPhil/PhD studies.

**For further details, please contact:**

**Scholarships Officer**
E: scholarships@soas.ac.uk  
T: +44 (0)20 7074 5091/ 5094  
W: www.soas.ac.uk/scholarships

**Centre for Iranian Studies**
Dr Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (Chair)
E: aa106@soas.ac.uk  
T: +44 (0)20 7898 4747  
W: www.soas.ac.uk/lmei-cis

**MA in Iranian Studies**
Dr Nima Mina (Department of the Languages and Culture of the Middle East)
E: nm46@soas.ac.uk  
T: +44 (0)20 7898 4315  
W: www.soas.ac.uk/nme/programmes/ma-in-iranian-studies

**Student Recruitment**
T: +44(0)20 7898 4034  
E: study@soas.ac.uk
An intensive five-week programme which includes a choice of two courses: a language one (Persian or Arabic, the latter at two levels) and another on the 'Government and Politics of the Middle East' or 'Culture and Society in the Middle East'.

Beginners Persian (Level 1)
This is an introductory course which aims to give the students a reasonable grounding in the basics of Persian grammar and syntax as well as to enable them to understand simple and frequently used expressions related to basic language use. They will be able to hold uncomplicated conversations on topics such as personal and family information, shopping, hobbies, employment as well as simple and direct exchanges of information related to familiar topics. By the end of the course they will also progress to read simple short texts.

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 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’).

Culture and Society in the Middle East
This course examines the major cultural patterns and institutions of the MENA region. 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.

Timetable
Courses are taught Mon-Thu each week. Language courses are taught in the morning (10am-1pm) and the Politics and Culture Courses are taught in two slots in the afternoon (2:00-3:20 and 3:40-5:00pm).

FEES

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<th>Session (5 weeks)</th>
<th>Programme fee*</th>
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<tr>
<td>18 June-19 July 2018 (two courses)</td>
<td>£2,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>(one course)</td>
<td>£1,400</td>
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* An early bird discount of 10% applies to course fees before 30 April 2018. A discount of 15% applies to SOAS alumni and 20% to SOAS students.

A limited number of partial tuition fee waivers of up to 50% off the fee are available for SOAS’s current students on a first come, first serve basis (please enquire).

For more information, please contact Louise Hosking on LH2@soas.ac.uk. Or check our website www.soas.ac.uk/lmei