

RESEARCH SEMINAR
SR11, Wednesday,
March 23, 2022, 14:00

Dunya Habash (University of Cambridge)
'Do like you did in Aleppo': Negotiating Space and Place Among Syrian Musicians in Istanbul

The experiences of displaced musicians and the socio-cultural practices connected to them are marginalized in the study of refugee movements, subordinated to explorations of economic and political structures affecting refugee mobility, structural integration into host communities and emergency settings like the refugee camp. Concurrently, explorations of identity, sentiments of belonging and the reimagining of homeland are common theoretical frameworks applied across the literature. I argue that studying the resettlement experience of refugee musicians can offer a fresh perspective on how identity, belonging and homemaking are renegotiated in displacement. I explore this argument through a particular case study of displaced Syrian musicians in Istanbul because of its transformation into a new cultural centre for Syrians in Turkey. Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Syrian musicians in Istanbul during the summer of 2018, I reflect on how the unique experience of musicians can illuminate various conceptual frameworks related to agency, space, and place. asks how competing forms of authority were performed by the Ottoman Empire and European states in the context of the Tribunal and Commission.

Mohammed I. Ahmed (University of Cambridge)
The literary role of Jews in early Islamic texts

There is much speculation as to the nature of the 'early Muslim-Jewish reality', the 'true' events of Medina and Islam's relationship with the main monotheistic group living in the city. I advocate for a literary approach to Islamic sources, whereby one can analyse the language used in Islamic sources in order to determine Muslim-Jewish relations. For instance, assessing the language of the Constitution of Medina and Qur'anic verses leads one towards an image of largely conciliatory early relations between Muslims and Jews, which subsequently broke down afterwards. By analysing later Islamic sources, such as Qur'anic commentaries of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, one can see these negative attitudes harden, creating a de facto negative presentation of Jews in the Muslim imaginary - leading to a retrospective negative interpretation of the original Muslim-Jewish encounter. My thesis therefore posits that Muhammadan (i.e. the prophetic era) relations with Jews were largely positive - but that later texts depict this era as conflict-driven due to the hardening of attitudes that took place over the centuries.