



The UCL Mellon Programme Presents
Lecture Series: Iranian Modernity and the West
Organized by Dr Saeed Talajooy
(ADMISSION IS FREE AND ALL ARE WELCOME)

Friday 14th May (5.30pm)

Nationalism, History and Modernity in Modern Iran

Professor Ali Ansari (Director of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews)

(VENUE: CHADWICK LT, CHADWICK BUILDING, UCL, GOWER STREET, LONDON, WC1E 6BT)

Abstract

Nationalism as understood in Iran has largely been driven by and defined against a normative frame of reference established by European intellectual and political culture. That is, that the grand narrative of progress, and the role of the 'nation' in articulating that progress, has been defined by Europe. Many of the myths which have permeated nationalist ideologies - decadence, decline, progress, feudalism, despotism, race and the role of religion - have been appropriated from a European model of development. Moreover, in the Iranian case, not only aspects of the *meta*-narrative, but the grand narrative, have been appropriated from Europe. This logic of the West has been pervasive not only in the way in which states have reacted to the challenges posed by European powers, but more crucially in the way that intellectuals, of whatever political hue have been vehicles of ideological dissemination. This is not to articulate an 'orientalist' argument about the intellectual colonisation of native elites, but to state the reality that whether integrated or opposed most intellectuals related in some manner or form to the ideas which emanated from Europe. Nothing exemplifies this better than the influence of Marxist thought in Iran, or indeed the reaction of religious intellectuals to the challenges posed by the West. As a succession of Iranian intellectuals have argued, to greater or less effect, it is only by engaging with these ideas and building an indigenous knowledge base, that the terms of reference can be gradually changed. It is this process which has gathered momentum in recent years and which is beginning to change our understanding of Iranian nationalism and the narratives it has engendered.



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