

Forum für interdisziplinäre Religionsforschung (FiReF)

Forum for Interdisciplinary Religious Studies (FIRSt)

Mark Farha, PhD

Religion, State and Society in Lebanon: Consociational Curse or Blessing?

Lebanon's pluri-communal state has received its share of champions and critics. To its antagonists, the political system serves as the ready scapegoat for all grievances, from corruption to civil strife. By contrast, defenders of the confessional system and its sectarian quotas have dismissed secularism in the sense of absolute state neutrality vis-à-vis religious and ethnic identities, claiming such an ideal remains an untenable, and indeed dangerous, mirage. In pluralistic societies such as Lebanon, they contend, a consociational democracy is necessitated to avoid the peril of sectarian hegemonies and the resultant alienation of excluded parties. Nonetheless, the question persists: Why has Lebanon, a country with traditionally high levels of literacy, education and vibrant civic activism, not proceeded further down the path of legal and constitutional secularization? The talk addresses this question, while cross-examining the cumulative effect of key social and (geo)political strains on the Lebanese state that also underlie recent popular protests in the country.

Speaker Biography

Mark Farha obtained his PhD in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University in 2007 where he also served as a Head Teaching Fellow with distinction. He was a Senior Associate Member at St. Anthony's College, Oxford in 2013, an associate fellow of the University of Bielefeld, and most recently a contributing member of the working group on "Citizenship in the Middle East" with the Century Foundation, New York. From 2008-2015, he was an Assistant Professor of Government at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Doha, Qatar, and from 2015-2018, Professor of Politics and IR at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. His most recent publication is entitled *Lebanon: Rise and Fall of the Secular State under Siege* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Thursday, 5 December 2019, 14:00-15:30

Historic Observatory, Green Hall

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Matthias Koenig (Institute of Sociology) & Prof. Dr. Dominic Sachsenmaier (Department of East Asian Studies)

The Lecture is open to the public.