Negotiating Boundaries: Sectarianism, Nationality, and the Ja'fari Shari'a Courts during the French Mandate

Talk by
Linda M. Sayed

In this talk, Dr. Sayed examines how the creation of Ja'fari shari'a courts and their usage by individuals both complicated and reinforced the legal, political, and national categories of citizenship that were instituted by the Lebanese nation-state during the French mandate. Although the recognition of Shi'as as a sect, and the creation of the Ja'fari shari'a courts, endorsed new state categories of collectivity along sectarian and national lines (as citizens of the Lebanese nation-state) within the domain of the family, cases from this period highlight how individuals contested and antagonized such categories of collectivity. An examination of the Ja'fari shari'a courts records reveals how categories of sectarian and national identification were practiced and defined in the most intimate affairs of people’s lives.

Linda M. Sayed is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies department at New York University. She is a historian of the contemporary Middle East who earned her PhD from Columbia University in 2013.

Rola el Husseini (Research Associate Professor at MEMEAC) will be discussant. She is the author of Pax Syriana: Elite Politics in Postwar Lebanon.