



### Venue

Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33  
14129 Berlin

## ZMO-Colloquium Summer Term 2018

Thursday, 31 May 2018, 5 pm

### The Ecumenical Frame: Coexistence and Sectarianism in the Modern Middle East (till the 1950s)

Lecture by **Ussama Makdisi** (Rice University, Houston)

The talk provides a historical perspective on the contemporary sectarian tragedy that is unfolding in that part of the world. But it also delves into a complex, and now obscured, modern culture of coexistence in a region rich in religious diversity, but which today encompasses several war-torn countries including Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. In particular, the lecture disputes two narratives that have traditionally dominated the story of diversity in the Middle East. The first stresses a continuous history of either latent or actual sectarian strife between allegedly antagonistic religious communities; the second idealises coexistence and communal harmony between Muslims and non-Muslims. Rather than taking sectarianism or coexistence for granted, or assuming either of them to be age-old features of the Middle East, I am interested in historicising both notions. Above all, I emphasize how the struggle to define the contours of modern society in the Middle East has been multifaceted and contradictory. It has received its fair share of setbacks, in our own age perhaps more obviously than in others. But as I see it, this struggle has nonetheless raged uninterruptedly for a century. This history deserves an empathetic telling.

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**Dr Ussama Makdisi** is Professor of History and the first holder of the Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair of Arab Studies at Rice University. In 2012-2013, Makdisi was an invited Resident Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin). In April 2009, the Carnegie Corporation named Makdisi a 2009 Carnegie Scholar as part of its effort to promote original scholarship regarding Muslim societies and communities, both in the United States and abroad. Makdisi was awarded the Berlin Prize and is spending the Spring 2018 semester as a Fellow at the American Academy of Berlin. Professor Makdisi is currently working on a manuscript on the history of coexistence and anti-sectarianism in the modern Middle East to be published by the University of California Press.