



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

ANNUAL REPORT

*Report of activities from June 2022 – June 2023
prepared for the 2023 Annual General Meeting of the
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)*



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Introduction

Amidst a cost-of-living crisis, ongoing industrial disputes, and unrelenting attacks on academic freedom in the UK, Europe and the MENA region, BRISMES Officers, Committee Members and dedicated Council Members have continued to develop the association, undertaking new activities, enrolling new and returning members and working to promote interest in Middle East Studies. BRISMES Manager Amy Brickhill has been working tirelessly to ensure the charity's smooth operations and that activities set out by Council are accomplished, while Rosa Sansone, BRISMES Conference Coordinator, has spent many hours working to guarantee a rich, intellectually stimulating and diverse conference programme.

This coming July, Professors John Chalcraft and Tim Jacoby will be ending their three-year tenure as BRISMES Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. John and Tim have dedicated much time over these years to the charity's daily operations as they led BRISMES's democratisation process, extending full membership rights to students, instituting elections for committee posts, and amending the association's constitution so that it better reflects the new BRISMES spirit. John also chaired the 2022 annual conference, oversaw the incorporation of the Society ensuring a stronger and more sustainable organisational structure for BRISMES and was the major force behind the creation of BRISMES Campaigns – an independent subsidiary of our Society – that can legally implement the boycott resolution that passed with an overwhelming majority at our 2019 AGM. The charity that John and Tim began managing three years ago is very different from the charity they are leaving behind in terms of character, range of activities, and visibility. These changes would not have been possible without their insight, leadership and contributions. The BRISMES they pass on as they hand the reins to José Ciro Martínez (Secretary) and Waseem Farooq (Treasurer) is a strong and vibrant association. We would like to thank the outgoing officers for their vision, dedicated service and guidance and congratulate the new officers on their elections, wishing them all the best over the next three years.

BRISMES activities over the past 12 months fall into 5 main categories:

1. Developing the Society;
2. Events to Promote Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Support Early Career Researchers;
3. British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies;
4. Academic Freedom and Advocacy;
5. BRISMES Campaigns.

Developing the Society

We have continued our concerted efforts to democratise internal processes and procedures, while bolstering existing activities and introducing new ones. As part of these efforts, a working group was created to discuss the role and election process of the BRISMES President. In November 2022, Council approved a proposal about how this position could be modified so that it is more aligned with BRISMES's democratic values. A resolution outlining this change will be brought to members for consideration at the 2023 AGM. If approved, this will be an additional step in the democratisation process within the association, which has included the incorporation of students as full members and the elections for members of different committees. Although elections might seem to be an obvious procedure in the workings of a charity, they were not practiced consistently in BRISMES before 2020. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all BRISMES members who have engaged with the calls for nominations and elections thus far and to encourage members to put their names forward as a range of positions will open in the 2023-24 academic year.

BRISMES currently has almost 500 members, for whom we continue to create and develop initiatives to share research (beyond the annual conference), and to advocate on issues that are relevant to our work to encourage and promote interest in Middle East Studies.

Events to Promote Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Support Early Career Researchers

The Annual Conference

The annual BRISMES conference is the most important event of the BRISMES calendar. This year's conference 'Ecology, Crisis, and Power in the Middle East' held at the University of Exeter (July 3-5) is rich, vibrant and diverse. Please look at the [conference website](#) to view the programme. We have 390 delegates registered, over 85 panels and roundtables, an excellent line-up of [keynote speakers](#) and some exciting mentoring events. Many thanks to all those involved in organising the conference: the conference coordinator Rosa Sansone; the conference chair Neve Gordon and the programme committee from the University of Exeter, Christina Phillips, Sabiha Allouche, and Ella Gao as well as Rebecca Howarth and the student volunteers. In addition, BRISMES contributed over £9,000 for the Solidarity Fund, which helps low-paid and precariously employed members to attend the conference. In comparison to 37 requests for financial assistance received in 2022, this year the number of requests soared to just under 100. Many thanks to all those who generously donated to the fund and if anyone is interested in volunteering to help establish a Solidarity Fund endowment then please [contact BRISMES Manager Amy Brickhill](#). In response to feedback received at last year's conference, we have also introduced a Childcare Bursary to support members with children to attend the conference.

A new [Conference Policy on Land or Territorial Acknowledgment](#) will be implemented for the first time this year and applies to participants from occupied or colonised land. Participants will have to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the institution to which they are affiliated is located, and/or the traditional owners of the land on which research was conducted.

Annual Lecture

BRISMES held an online annual lecture in autumn 2023. Professor Nadjé Al-Ali delivered a fascinating talk on 'Feminist Dilemmas and Ambivalences: Gendered and queer perspectives on the Middle East'. Professor Al-Ali's lecture is available to watch on the [BRISMES YouTube channel](#).

Prizes

The Early Career Development Scholarship and the Conference Student Paper Prize were awarded for the first time in 2021 and will continue to support new voices in the Middle East Studies community. In addition to promoting innovative scholarship, both prizes have been designed to support the first stages in one's academic career.

Events to Promote Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Support Early Career Researchers

The ECR Development Scholarship was devised to support opportunities for colleagues to do research, during the initial years after the PhD when they are working towards their first permanent positions; the Student Paper Prize incorporates extensive mentorship and the opportunity to waive desk rejection for *BJMES*. The prize amount for both awards has been increased this year and BRISMES would ultimately like to create an endowment for these prizes to ensure their sustainability in the years ahead. We also continue to administer and co-fund the Leigh Douglas Memorial Prize – for which we received 20 incredible submissions this year. We would like to recognise and thank our Prizes Committee and external reviewers for the time and effort they have dedicated to these prizes.

Graduate Section Activities

During the academic year 2022-23, the BRISMES Graduate Section, led by Marral Shamshiri-Fard and Lucy Garbett, has expanded its outreach activities aimed at graduate students, PhD students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs). In September, the Graduate Section hosted a joint event with the Balfour Project for postgraduate and undergraduate students regarding the Balfour Project Peace Advocacy Fellowship. The Graduate Section also supported the organisation of the event 'What is Transnational Feminist Solidarity Today? A dialogue with and of Iranian feminists' and together with the Outreach and Pedagogy committee and the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL), it held a series of workshops and skills events for students and ECRs. In January 2023, the series concluded with its third session on 'Conducting Fieldwork in the Middle East'. A session on 'How to get published in an academic journal' will be held during the BRISMES annual conference. A list of the Graduate Section's previous events can be found [here](#), where there are also video links to many of our former webinars.

The Graduate Section continues to invite members to collaborate.

Outreach and Pedagogy

BRISMES would like to thank Teodora Todorova who chaired the Outreach and Pedagogy Committee for three years working with John Chalcraft, Hanem El-Farahaty and Malaka Shwaikh to offer our community a series of fascinating events and activities throughout the period. In January 2023, Todorova was replaced by Paola Rivetti, and new Council members Sophie Chamas and Nazanin Shahrokni joined the committee.

Events to Promote Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Support Early Career Researchers

During the past year, the Outreach and Pedagogy Committee hosted an event to discuss Alaa Abd El-Fattah's *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*; a dialogue with and of Iranian feminists 'What is Transnational Feminist Solidarity Today?', co-organised with the Graduate Section; a conversation with essayists, playwrights, translators, editors and scholars on 'Contemporary Arabic Literature and Literary Translation'; an event on the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, 'Post-disaster State, International and Bottom-up Responses'; a question and answer session with Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur for Occupied Palestinian Territories; and an event to mark the anniversary of Sarah Hegazi's passing. In 2023, the committee will also continue its seminar series on statehood and IR 'Rethinking the Empirical Reality of Statehood in the MENA Region' and is planning an event on feminism and revolution in the arts.

Our outreach events are currently free to attend and open to all. Many thanks to those who have volunteered their time to speak at our events, which are listed [here](#) and [can be watched](#) via the BRISMES website. Finally, BRISMES welcomes suggestions for collaborative events with other research centres and academic organisations.

BRISMES Comms

The committee has launched a new social media campaign with a focus on videos and interviews with various BRISMES members showcasing their work and how BRISMES has helped them with their careers. Members interested in posting similar videos or interviews featuring their work are invited to contact the committee. In addition, we have been active across our social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) sharing and promoting relevant cultural and academic events. We currently have over 8,200 followers on Twitter with an increase of 1000 (~17%) over the past year and 7,700 followers on Facebook with an increase of 250 over the past year. We have also teamed up with the Middle East

New Videos from the Comms Committee

- [A short video featuring Prof Nicola Pratt](#) about her academic and political engagement with the Society and the community of MENA academics she has been able to work with.
- [A 25-minute Interview with BJMES Editor, Dr Lloyd Ridgeon](#), providing an overview of the history and the scope of the journal as well as invaluable tips for first-time publishers.
- [A short promotional video by Dr Feras Alkabani](#) highlighting, at a glance, the benefits of BRISMES membership. The video has been embedded on the membership page on the BRISMES website.
- [A sample of a video presentation of a member's research profile](#) (Dr Feras Alkabani), which can be used as a prototype to feature fellow members' work in the future.

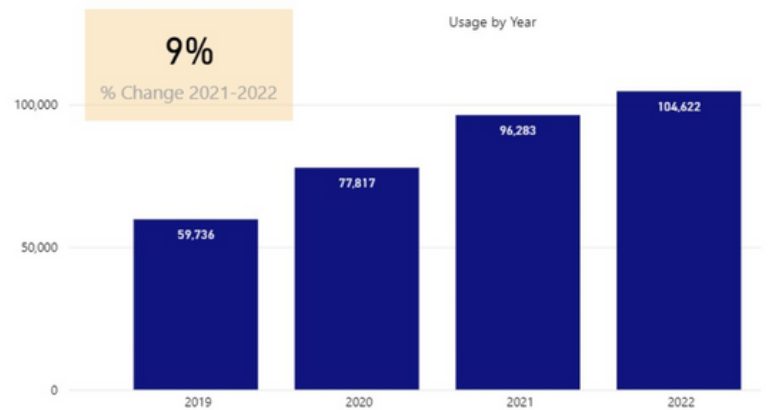
Events to Promote Research in Middle Eastern Studies and Support Early Career Researchers

and North African Centre at Sussex to share and retweet relevant events and announcements and would be happy to collaborate with other MENA programs. Over the past year, we have continued to feature research and publications from members in the BRISMES Newsletter, on the website and on social media.

Our [online calendar](#) lists external MENA-related events taking place in the UK and online and the [Opportunities](#) page of the website details calls for papers, vacancies and other opportunities related to Middle East Studies. Our plan for the future is to launch an Instagram campaign featuring cultural monuments from the MENA region as well as members' relevant academic or artistic collaboration on these. The aim is to attract potential members from the general public who may be interested in MENA culture/history and might want to learn more about the region academically.

The *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, under the leadership of General Editor Lloyd Ridgeon, Book Reviews editor Alam Saleh and a strong [editorial board](#), has continued to publish cutting edge research and expand its reach and impact. Full-text downloads increased this past year by 9%, continuing a healthy trend that has led to an increase of 75% in downloads over the past four years. The editorial board has now introduced a plan to reduce the journal's two-year backlog, initially by adding a few articles to every issue and then, beginning in 2024, by publishing an extra issue each year. In an effort to introduce

BJMES article usage via Taylor & Francis Online



changes due to the climate crisis, BRISMES has also initiated an 'opt-in policy' for receiving print copies of the journal, and as of next year about 95% of our members will begin receiving an electronic version of the journal instead of a printed one. We would like to thank Professor Noha Mellor for her services on the editorial board and to express our gratitude for all of her hard work. She has been replaced by Dr Ibrahim Halawi of RHUL, who has fitted in seamlessly.

Academic Freedom and Advocacy

Committee on Academic Freedom

The Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF), chaired by Neve Gordon, was set up to monitor and defend academic freedom in the research, study and teaching of Middle East Studies in the UK and anywhere in the world, including in academic institutions in the Middle East and North Africa. During this past year, we carried out elections among interested BRISMES members and as a result have broadened the membership to include several people who do not sit on BRISMES Council.

This has been a busy year for the committee and we have written both public and private letters to an array of authorities. The public work of the committee has included five letters sent to the Coordinator of the National Dialogue in Egypt, to express our deep concern about the ongoing detention of Dr Ahmed Al-Tohamy Abdel-Hay, Dr Elsayed Hassan Shehabeldin Abo Zaid, Professor Dr Essam Hashish, Dr Mohamed Ali Beshr and Dr Salah Soltan. We also sent letters to the University of Edinburgh and LSE urging them to clarify and restate their commitment to academic freedom in light of their partnerships with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) whose annual conference, COP27, was hosted by Egypt in November 2022. In the lead up to the climate conference we sent an open letter to COP27 attendees providing essential information regarding the state of academic freedom in Egypt.

We also issued a statement of solidarity with academic staff and students in Iran who were protesting following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini and wrote to Leeds University and to the UK government to express alarm at the conviction and jailing of Leeds University PhD student Salma al-Shehab. In addition, we sent letters to the Bahraini authorities expressing concern about the ongoing imprisonment of Bahraini academic Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace and the violations of his academic freedom; issued a statement from the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom in response to the Rebecca Tuck KC report on alleged antisemitism in the National Union of Students; wrote to the UK Foreign Secretary requesting him to urge Saudi authorities to ensure that the death penalty against academics Awad Al-Qarni, Salman Alodah and Hassan Farhan al-Maliki is dropped and that they are immediately released from prison; and published a statement of support for the Centre for Lebanese Studies, which abruptly had its partnership with the Lebanese American University terminated due to its criticism of the way the government has treated refugee children.

Academic Freedom and Advocacy

Finally, BRISMES has recently signed a joint letter from 104 organisations strongly urging the United Nations not to endorse or adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism which has been used to suppress criticism of human rights violations by Israeli authorities. This ties directly to the report we have authored together with the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) on the chilling effect of IHRA working definition of antisemitism following its imposition on UK universities. The report will be launched in September 2023.

BRISMES Campaigns

BRISMES Campaigns is our independent subsidiary, with a mandate to engage politically and socially in promoting egalitarian education in Middle East Studies, including the endorsement and implementation of the call to boycott Israeli academic institutions voted by BRISMES AGM on 24 June, 2019. Our Directors are currently Anne Alexander, Jamie Allinson, Miriyam Aouragh, John Chalcraft, and Mezna Qato, with Ala'a Shehabi acting as an Advisor. We also have a number of Volunteers, who we would very much like to thank.

We have met regularly over the last year, engaging in various campaigning activities, including in relation to: the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) led coalition protecting the Right to [Boycott](#) against contemporary government legislation; in relation to USS Divest, seeking ways to bring about pension fund divestment from companies complicit in illegal settlement activity; and in relation to UCU Congress and local branch activities relevant to international and Palestine solidarity. We aim to take forward these and other campaigns, including in relation to opposing the use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, in the coming year. If you would like to get involved, join our volunteers, sign up to our mailing list, or make a donation, please visit the BRISMES Campaigns [website](#), or come and meet us in person for tea (4 pm, Wednesday 5 July) at the BRISMES Annual Conference (location TBA at the AGM).

Priorities for the Future

In the coming years, we will continue to consolidate the developments that have been initiated over the past three years, to increase our membership and expand our activities to promote the teaching and study of the Middle East. We also seek to expand our support for early career scholars and PhD students and in addition to a series of events and workshops that aspire to assist them, we will aim to establish a number of endowments for the Solidarity Fund and BRISMES early career prizes.

The question of academic freedom will undoubtedly remain vital, not only in the MENA region but beyond. We anticipate that the imposition of the IHRA definition on universities in the UK and other countries will continue to be an important part of BRISMES advocacy in the coming year.

We would like to encourage members to become more active within BRISMES, for example, by standing to serve on the Council and Committees when there are elections. We also welcome suggestions for events and other initiatives to promote Middle East studies and support our community.

Neve Gordon, BRISMES Vice-President

On behalf of BRISMES Council

22 June 2023



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