

## About the Authors

### **Indrė Balčaitė**

Indrė Balčaitė is a SOAS Politics PhD student specialising in Thailand and Burma/Myanmar. As fieldwork for her doctoral research project, she has spent over one year in South East Asia interviewing Karen migrants from Myanmar. She holds a BA in Political Science from Vilnius University in her native Lithuania and an MA in Political Theory from the University of Nottingham. Before embarking on a PhD, she has worked in the public service, for NGOs, conducted policy analysis for the European Union institutions and translated academic texts.

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### **Eva Bentcheva**

Eva Bentcheva is a PhD researcher in History of Art at SOAS. She holds the Saraswati Dalmia Scholarship for Modern and Contemporary Indian Art (2014-15) for her doctoral research on *Performance Art and the Idea of India in the Diasporic Imagination, 1960-90*. Her broader academic interests include the effects of migration on identity and representation, as well as conceptual, live and multimedia art from Asia and Africa. In 2013-14, Eva was a Senior Teaching Fellow at SOAS for the course 'Diaspora Contexts and Visual Culture'. She is currently curating the exhibition *Tokens of a Time Gone By: Reanimating History as Art in the Work of Noel Ed De Leon* (Philippine Embassy of London, June 2014).

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### **Carol Ann Boshier**

Carol Ann Boshier is a fourth year mature student in the History Department. Her paper is an excerpt from a much larger study of the Burma Research Society (1910-1935), the subject of a thesis by the author to be submitted later this year. This thesis examines the Burma Research Society as a boundary-crossing social organisation, whose mixed-race membership was drawn from both sides of the colonial divide. At a time when there were few opportunities for discursive activity concerning Burma's history and culture, the BRS provided an effective site upon which to work out new conceptual and moral bases for Burma. Following the demise of the monarchy in 1885 and the imposition of colonial rule over the whole of Burma, the country was annexed as a province of the British Indian Empire in 1886. The thesis examines the role played by key members, who used the research opportunities offered by the Society to frame a discourse of cultural nationalism based on a dominant Burmano-Buddhist identity. It also considers the ways in which other members, like Leslie Fernandes Taylor used the BRS to challenge this hegemony in an effort to enlarge the perspective and complexity of Burma's national identity.

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### **Laura Hassan**

Laura Hassan studied Arabic and Islamic Studies with Syriac at Pembroke College, Oxford and in Fes and Alexandria, before beginning her post-graduate studies at SOAS. Her PhD research, supervised by Dr Ayman Shihadeh, focuses on the reception of Avicennian philosophy in the philosophical and theological

works of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233). In particular, her research focuses on al-Āmidī's responses to Ibn Sīnā's Physics and Metaphysics on the one hand, and his interactions with classical Ash'arī physical theory and theology on the other. Broader research interests include the Avicennan heritage in Islamic philosophy and theology, *kalām* cosmology, and *kalām jadīd*, the modern manifestation of speculative rational theology within Islam.

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### **Janine Nicol**

Janine Nicol's undergraduate degree (Chinese) and Masters (Oriental Religions) were completed at SOAS. She is now a third year part-time PhD candidate in the Department of the Study of Religions working under the supervision of Dr Antonello Palumbo. The working title of her dissertation is 'Daoxuan and the Creation of a Buddhist Sacred Geography of China: An Examination of the *Shijia Fangzhi*.' Aside from the development of sacred geography in China, she is interested in Buddhist apologetic texts and what they reveal about conflicts between Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Her Masters thesis, supervised by Professor Timothy Barrett, comprised a translation of He Chengtian's 何承天 (370-c.447) *Daxing lun* 達性論 (*On Apprehending Human Nature*), and an analysis of the subsequent correspondence between He and the renowned poet and lay Buddhist, Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456).

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### **Violeta Ruano**

Violeta Ruano is a second year PhD candidate at the Music Department at SOAS, currently engaged in carrying on fieldwork research on Saharawi music and youth. Her passion for Saharawi music started when she was struck by their stunning desert voices during her MMus Ethnomusicology, also at SOAS. Her research interests focus on music in conflict situations and music as peaceful resistance, having been researching Saharawi culture and politics for the past three years. Throughout this time, Violeta has visited different Saharawi communities in occupied Western Sahara, Spain and the Saharawi refugee camps, in SW Algeria, where she has just spent the past 6 months. Her belief in cultural advocacy and music for social change has led her to get involved in a diversity of projects in support of the preservation and development of Saharawi culture. Violeta has extensively collaborated with London-based charity Sandblast and their music empowerment project Studio-Live, which aims to develop and promote a professional music scene in the refugee camps. Her involvement has ranged from project administration and fundraising to field coordination. During her fieldwork, she has also led the field recordings project 'Portraits of Saharawi music' in collaboration with the British Library and the Saharawi Ministry of Culture, creating the beginning of a Saharawi music archive in the British Library that can also be accessible to the Saharawi population locally in the camps. Besides, she has been involved with the Saharawi youth union in the organisation of cultural festivals and events.

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