Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies
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Cover
Taraneh Hemami, image from a multidimensional art project called Hall of Reflections. Drawing on Persian and Islamic designs and structures, Hall of Reflections creates a unique archive of personal photographs and narratives to explore themes of loss, preservation, displacement and belonging, specific to the historical experience of Iranian immigrants.

Above
Taraneh Hemami, image from Sacred Spaces—Layered Stories
Letter from the Director

We just ended a year marked by a pandemic that took the lives of millions and which has crushed economic livelihoods around the globe. Although major steps have been taken toward containing the pandemic, the world community is far from surmounting this ongoing tragedy. Many of us have been directly or indirectly touched by the adverse effects of COVID-19. Our home region has borne its share of pain, and we mourn the tens of thousands of people lost in New Jersey and New York City. So, before I remark further on the center’s activities during the past year, I hope that your families, friends and community members have found ways to cope with the hardships of the pandemic and remain optimistic that we will overcome its dreadful presence.

Like many other institutions, Princeton University, and the center specifically, quickly switched our activities to an online platform for the entire academic year, and maintained a robust schedule of talks and book launches. To accommodate continued health and travel concerns among members of our community, we will continue our online programming as we head into fall 2021, but we are excited to welcome our fellows and the staff back to the center in person, to conduct their research and other responsibilities on campus. Here I must highlight with gratitude the tremendous efforts that the center staff, Femke de Ruyter and Becky Parnian, have put into shifting our work seamlessly to accommodate the changing restrictions imposed by the state of New Jersey and Princeton administration.

One unanticipated, but welcome, result of the online format was a newfound potential to welcome audiences from all over the world to our events. As part of its mission, the center brings together leading scholars of different disciplines from around the world, including those focused on history, architecture, art history, anthropology, film studies, sociology and religious studies, and who offer creative and novel approaches to the study of the region. This year we organized 15 book launches introducing audiences to the newest work in Iran and Persian Gulf studies, a list of which you may find on pages 5-7, as well as a number of major events on issues of contemporary importance, including panel discussions on U.S.–Iran relations under the Biden administration, Iran’s relation with the China–India–Russia trio and a lively roundtable on the year 1400 and Iran stepping into a new century. Although the online format lacks the lively interactions that a scholarly exchange requires, it helped us to show the breadth and the depth of new scholarship in our fields of studies and provided a valuable forum for community amid a year of enforced isolation. Please visit our webpage for links to these amazing presentations under the virtual conversations link.

Unfortunately, all our fellows had to work remotely this year, either fully or partially. Dr. Maryam Alemzadeh and Dr. Milad Ostadaei, whose fellowship term began under pandemic restrictions, could not join us in Princeton and continued their work remotely. Dr. Peyman Jafari and Prof. Amy Malek remained in Princeton with limited access to their offices and archival material at the library. Despite these challenges our fellows have been hard at work. Dr. Jafari’s co-edited volume called “Worlds of Labour Turned Upside Down,” in which he has a chapter on the formation of workers’ council in revolutionary Iran, was published last year. I had a wonderful conversation with Dr. Jafari last April about his contribution and the significance of the book. Dr. Malek published an important article called “Clickbait Orientalism and Vintage Iranian Snapshots” in the International Journal of Cultural Studies about the nostalgic depiction of pre-revolutionary life in Iran through the circulation of digitized family images in diasporic networks.

One of the highlights of last year’s events was the workshop organized by our Visiting Research Collaborator Professor Jo-Ann Gross. Professor Gross has been a member of our community for several years, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that has made possible her Badakhshan manuscript digitizing project. In this project, which is now available through Princeton’s Firestone Library, Professor Gross and her colleagues at the Institute of Humanities and Academy of Sciences in Tajikistan and Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan have transformed rare genealogical texts into accessible digital documents. The workshop in April brought together scholars from around the globe to discuss the documents’ significance in rethinking the history of West and Central Asia. We are grateful to Professor Gross and for her dedication to this project that was also made possible by contributions from her home institution, the College of New Jersey. We also continued our collaboration with the Princeton University Library in creating an Iran Studies digital archive. Although COVID restrictions temporarily slowed our pace, we continued to make progress toward that end. Our new Middle Eastern Studies librarian, Deborah Schlein, has been an important advocate for this project. Moving forward, we will be working closely with Schlein in order to identify resources and build our collection.

This year we will say farewell to Amy Malek as she will return to her position at the College of Charleston in the international studies program. We were so fortunate to have Professor Malek with us as a research scholar. I am grateful for her contribution to the scholarly life of the center and for her thoughtful and collegial presence in our community. I am confident that our collaboration with Professor Malek will continue and hope she will visit us again in the near future.

We were fortunate this year, however, to be able to offer fellowships to three wonderful emerging scholars of Iran and the Persian Gulf. Sheida Dayani will be joining us from Harvard. Dayani is a historian of theater and ritual performances who received her Ph.D. from the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. She will be working on an exciting new project that focuses on conversion plays in Ta’ziyeh for the social assimilation of Hindu and Koli migrants from Gujarat. Naveed Mansoori is going to join us after an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Emerging Voices Fellowship at the University of Virginia. Mansoori is a political theorist with a Ph.D. from UCLA. He is working on a timely project on truth and political propaganda. We are also very pleased that Lindsey Stephenson accepted our invitation to join us to work on her new project on material cultures and modernity in the Persian Gulf. Stephenson earned her Ph.D. in 2013 from the University of California, Los Angeles. She has been an important contributor to the center’s activities during the past year, I hope that your families, friends and community members have found ways to cope with the hardships of the pandemic and remain optimistic that we will overcome its dreadful presence.

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We have a very exciting lineup of fall events, beginning with our welcome reception. Please check our website for details, which we hope to have posted by mid-August. We are optimistic that we will resume our in-person events in early 2022, pending public health safety and University guidelines. Stay safe, remain curious and follow our programs.

Yours,

Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi
Director, Shamin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies, Professor of Near Eastern Studies
Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center Lecture Series

The Mossavar-Rahmani Lecture Series is a robust interdisciplinary seminar series addressing issues related to Iran and the Persian Gulf in the 19th–21st centuries, with a focus on the region’s role and significance in the contemporary world.

October 14
Anahita Ghazvinizadeh, Assistant Professor of Cinematic Arts, University of Iowa
“Filmmaking in a Foreign Land”

February 3
Trita Parsi, Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and Co-founder and former President of the National Iranian American Council;
Ellie Geranmayeh, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations;
Negin Mortazavi, Iranian-American Journalist and political analyst covering Iran
“Biden & Iran”

February 17
Fatemeh Aman, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council’s South Asia Center; Ghoncheh Tazmini, Visiting Fellow, Middle East Center, London School of Economics; Zakiyeh Yazdanshenas, Research Fellow, Center for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran
“The Eastbound Iran?”

February 20
Azadeh Kian, Professor of Sociology, University of Paris; Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, Professor of Economics, Virginia Tech University; Nasrin Rahimieh, Professor of Comparative Literature, UC-Irvine, in conversation with Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi
“Iran 1400: Challenges & Prospects”

April 21
Setrag Manoukian, Associate Professor, the Institute of Islamic Studies and Department of Anthropology, McGill University; Milad Odabaei, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies
“A Virtual Conversation on Anthropologies of Knowledge in Iran”

April 28
Peyman Jafari, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies
“Labor, Revolution, and the State: Iranian Experiences in a Global Perspective”

Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center Seminar Series

The center seminars introduce emerging scholarship and artistic and cultural productions to a wide audience at Princeton and around the world. During the pandemic year, we primarily focused on introducing an interdisciplinary series of discussions with authors following the release of a new book as a virtual book launch.

Sep 16
Laleh Khalili, Professor of International Politics, Queen Mary University of London, in conversation with Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi
“Forgiveness Work: Mercy, Law, and Victims’ Rights in Iran”

Sep 23
Sima Shakhsari, Associate Professor of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota, in conversation with Milad Odabaei
“Politics of Rightful Killing: Civil Society, Gender, and Sexuality in Weblogistan”

Sep 30
Aoor Osanloo, Associate Professor of Law, Societies, and Justice, and Director of the University of Washington Middle East Center, in conversation with Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi
“Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula”
October 7
Manata Hashemi, Sociologist and Farzaneh Family Assistant Professor of Iranian Studies and International and Area Studies, University of Oklahoma, in conversation with Maryam Alemzadeh “Coming of Age in Iran: Poetry and the Struggle for Dignity”

October 21
Mana Kia, Associate Professor of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies, Columbia University, in conversation with Purnima Dhavan, Associate Professor of History, University of Washington, and Milad Odabaei “Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism”

October 27
Paola Rivetti, Associate Professor of Politics and International Relations, Dublin City University, Ireland, in conversation with Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi “Political Participation in Iran from Khatami to the Green Movement”

November 4
Eric Lob, Assistant Professor of Politics and International Relations, Florida International University, in conversation with Maryam Alemzadeh “Iran’s Reconstruction Jihad: Rural Development and Regime Consolidation after 1979”

November 18
Nilofar Haeri, Professor of Anthropology and Program Chair for Islamic Studies, Johns Hopkins University, in conversation with Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi “Say What Your Longing Heart Desires: Women, Prayer and Poetry in Iran”

November 25

December 2
Pouya Afshar, Associate Professor in the Department of Art & Design, University of Massachusetts-Lowell, in conversation with Sandra S. Williams and Arash Saedinia. “In Character: A Conversation with Iranian American Artist Pouya Afshar”

February 23
Nazanin Shahrokni, Assistant Professor of Gender and Globalisation, Department for Gender Studies, The London School of Economics and Political Science, in conversation with Rachel Rinaldo, Associate Professor of Sociology, Graduate Chair, University of Colorado Boulder “Women in Place: The Politics of Gender Segregation in Iran”

March 3
Rosie Bsheer, Assistant Professor of History, Harvard University, in conversation with Fahad Ahmad Bishara, Rouholah Ramazani Associate Professor of History, University of Virginia “Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia”

March 10
Marc Owen Jones, Professor of Middle East Studies, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Qatar, in conversation with Staci Strobl, Professor in Criminal Justice Department, University of Wisconsin-Platteville “Political Repression in Bahrain”

March 31
Fatemeh Shams, Assistant Professor of Persian Literature, University of Pennsylvania, in conversation with Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi “A Revolution in Rhyme: Poetic Co-option under the Islamic Republic”

April 14
Pamela Karimi, Associate Professor of Art Education, Art History & Media Studies, University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, in conversation with Todd Reisz, Architect and Writer “Showpiece City: How Architecture Made Dubai”

Co-Sponsored Events
(Organizing department is in parentheses)

March 19
Jo-Ann Gross, Professor of Middle Eastern and Central Eurasian History, The College of New Jersey, and Visiting Research Collaborator, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies “Connected Histories in Century Asia: 18th to 20th Centuries” (Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies)

March 22–24
Jo-Ann Gross, Professor of Middle Eastern and Central Eurasian History, The College of New Jersey, and Visiting Research Collaborator, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies “Genealogical History in the Persianate World: An International Symposium” (Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies)
Center Initiatives

Genealogical History in the Persianate World: An International Symposium

The center held a virtual international symposium—rescheduled from April 2020 due to the pandemic—on “Genealogical History in the Persianate World.” Co-sponsored with The College of New Jersey and supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, it was organized and directed by Jo-Ann Gross in collaboration with Daniel Beben of Nazarbayev University, and Umed Mamadsherzodshoiev of the Institute of Humanities, Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan in Khorog.

Engseng Ho of Duke University and the National University of Singapore presented the keynote address titled, “Genealogies and Partial Societies.” Fifteen global scholars of genealogical materials across the Persianate world in local, regional and transregional contexts shared methodologies; interrogated the validity of blood and biology in the study of kinship as expressed in genealogy; considered geography and space; and discussed family and state archives, metonymic and metaphoric articulations of genealogy, the interconnectedness between materiality, orality and textuality, and genealogy and the processes of Islamization and conversion. They considered political genealogical discourse and the imagined past as well as organizational models, structural elements, genealogical imagery and the impetus for preservation.

One senior scholar wrote of the tremendous success of the conference: “A remarkable symposium and I think a kind of breakthrough moment.” The papers will be published as a co-edited volume on the previously unstudied comparative history of genealogical documentary culture in the Persianate world. A three-part video of the symposium is available for viewing on the center’s website.

Iran Social Survey

Providing short-term ongoing support for the Iran Social Survey (ISS), the past year’s contribution to ISS supported a second wave of polling, which had not yet taken place at the time of the production of this Annual Report, given the raging COVID pandemic in Iran in late 2020 and the June 2021 presidential election. Delaying the polling until after the election allows for the collection of important data on voting patterns, COVID-related variables, as well as other interests.

Kevan Harris and Rasmus Elling published a major article using previously collected ISS data, however, in the well-regarded general sociology journal Ethnic and Racial Studies, which was positively received. Harris and Elling plan to write a more public-facing brief on the issue in the fall.

Iran Protest Data

Protests are an important indicator of the political, social and economic developments in Iran. The Iran Protest Data project gathers data on protest events in Iran after 2000 through a semi-automated system, which is
Center Funding Awards

Course-Related Support

The Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies provides support to student- and course-related activities to help spread understanding and appreciation for Iranian language and culture.

Extracurricular Support for Persian Course(s)

To enhance students’ study of Iranian mosques and their structures in Persian 107, Professor Mahalatti brought in Mr. Mujtaba Khaliq to walk through and discuss a newly built mosque in Florida. While his intention was to feature two famous mosques in Shiraz, the city was in lockdown. So instead, Khaliq took the class on a virtual tour of the FL mosque by camera (and Zoom). Students were pleased with the virtual experience and asked many questions, all in Persian.

Graduate Funding

The Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies provides summer grants to graduate students pursuing research and intensive language training primarily related to the scholarship of Iran and the Persian Gulf. The following students received grants:

Jamie O’Connell
Near Eastern Studies

Abigail Schoenfeld
Near Eastern Studies

Research Reports

Postdoctoral Research Associates

Maryam Alemzadeh
Starting my time at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center in the midst of the lockdown and continuing the work remotely for the academic year could have been a disappointing experience. Writing, revising and rewriting can be a lonely business without the usual collegial conversations and thought-provoking academic events. Luckily, this was not so at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center this past year. I feel fortunate to have been able to participate in the center’s virtual conversations and events, connect virtually with my new colleagues regularly, talk to them about everything from daily matters to the future of Iranian Studies, and exchange our work in progress for valuable feedback. Even though I only got to meet the center’s amazing scholars and staff at the end of the academic year, I feel I have spent a fruitful year in their company.

This past year, I have relied on the fellowship to revise existing article manuscripts and produce new ones on the formation of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). I have worked on three articles specifically, each covering a certain aspect of the IRGC and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s early history: Informal roots of state building in Iran; the IRGC’s consolidation during the Iranian Kurdish conflict (1979–80); and the IRGC’s maneuvering around the classic dilemma of balancing revolutionary passion and dedication with expertise and professionalism. All three are under initial review for publication in area studies and sociology journals. In addition to the articles, I have finalized a book chapter in an edited volume titled “The Global 1979: Geographies and Histories of the Iranian Revolution” (forthcoming).

I have also published a book review at, and written another one for, the International Journal of Middle East Studies. Finally, I have been working on a prospectus for my book manuscript, tentatively titled “Perpetual Flux: Revolutionary Guards and State Building in Iran,” the first draft of which I plan to complete by the end of the next academic year.

I have had the pleasure of leading two of the center’s virtual conversations in the past year. In a conversation with Manata Hashemi on her new book, “Coming of Age in Iran,” we talked about her refreshing social scientific take on how Iranian youth deal with poverty. With Eric Lob I discussed the pathways that his first book—“Iran’s Reconstruction Jihad”—opens for the study of institution building in Iran under the Islamic Republic. These were only two among a stunning lineup of conversations and webinars held by the center on contemporary Iran and the Persian Gulf throughout the past year, which I found engaging and thought-provoking.

Outside the center, I presented a (virtual) talk on the revolutionary character of Iranian government today in a joint presentation with Siavosh Randjbar-Daemi at the University of Oxford. I also organized two conference panels that I look forward to participating in during the next academic year—one on new approaches to the study of revolutions, for the Social Science History Association meeting, and one on the study of the “non-political” in the politicized context of Iran, for the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting.

I am excited to be joining the Mossavar-Rahmani Center in person next fall to make further progress on my work and, more importantly, to be a part of the actual intellectual community there, after a whole year of virtual membership.

Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Book Award

In line with its mission, the center has inaugurated a book award, given every two years for the best scholarly monograph on topics in history, society, politics, economics and culture related to modern Iran and the Persian Gulf, broadly defined. Curtailed by the pandemic, a call for submissions for the premier book award will be announced in fall 2021. The award will be granted by a committee of scholars of Iranian studies who will be appointed by the director of the center.
Peyman Jafari

The 2020-21 academic year was inevitably framed by the restrictions imposed by COVID. Nevertheless, it started with a pleasant surprise in August, when my dissertation “Oil, Labour and Revolution in Iran: A Social History of Labour in the Iranian Oil Industry, 1973-83” received the Biennial Mehrdad Mashayekhi Dissertation Award from the Association for Iranian Studies, and I am honored by the award committee’s generous endorsement.

Combining history from above and history from below, this is a groundbreaking dissertation inserting social history into political analysis of labor in the oil industry and its contribution to the 1979 revolution. By engaging in archival research, fieldwork, and interviews with oil workers and employees, it combines both secondary and primary sources and relocates oil workers from the margins of Iranian labor history into the spotlight. Its approach provides a perspective for understanding the specific nature of the capitalist development in Iran and the transformation of state-society relations.

The negative impact of COVID on my work as a historian became very tangible as archives remained closed. Thanks to the support of my colleagues and the center, however, I was able to continue research and publishing. I wrote an article for the Middle East Report on the documentary “Big Village” about the Dutch–Kurdish journalist Beri Shalmashi in August, when my dissertation appeared in German translation.

During the last year, I gave several online talks. I participated in a panel on “Global Uprising: Protest Cycles and Repression in Iran,” hosted by the Haggio Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at New York University. In the spring semester, I participated in a panel conversation “Global Europe Centre Webinar: Iran after Trump,” organized by the Brussels School of International Studies. The Persian website Meidaan.com hosted an Instagram live event on my book project “Oil and Labor in the Making of the Iranian Revolution: A Social History of Uneven and Combined Development.” At home, I gave a talk on “Labour Relations, Revolution and the State: the Iranian Experience in Global Perspective” for the center’s seminar series. As co-chair of the Labor Network of the European Social Science and History Conference, I was involved in the organization of its March 2021 edition (online). I am looking forward to the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual meeting in the fall, at which I will be presenting a paper on oil magazines and petro-culture in Iran—hopefully in person.

Milad Odabaei

My first year as a postdoctoral research associate did not start as expected. However, the support of the center, as well as the encouragement and refeqat (camaraderie) of my fellow postdoctoral colleagues, mitigated the challenges of remote working during the pandemic. Weekly virtual events at the center, along with the fellow’s writing group and co-working sessions, facilitated scholarly conversations and stimulated growth and also helped me maintain a writing routine and meet deadlines. I look forward to further developing the conversations and friendships that began this year in the years to come. Over the course of the year the focus of my research has been my first book manuscript titled “The Outside/Kharij: Translation and Iranian Travails of Learned Politics.” My book-in-progress offers a historical and anthropological reflection on the translation of European social thought in post-revolutionary Iran. It is based on two years of ethnographic and archival research in the Iranian academy, the research centers of the Shi’i seminaries, and private translation circles in Tehran and Qom. “The Outside” argues that after the 1979 Revolution and the war with Iraq (1980–1988), amidst cycles of revolt and suppression as well as international regimes of isolation and sanction, translation has become at once a manifestation of a historical crisis and an attempt to produce a discourse of “learned politics.”

Based on this research, my article “The Slip of A Philosopher and the Sinking of the Ship: Translation, Protest, and the Iranian Travails of Learned Politics” appeared in HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory and Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (CSAAIME) forthcoming.

Associate Research Scholar

Amy Malek

Despite the difficulties and restrictions due to COVID-19, my final year as an associate research scholar at the center was nevertheless an enriching and invaluable one. Through the wonder of Zoom, I benefitted from the continued camaraderie among my fellow Iran scholars, and our weekly virtual writing group meetings and co-writing sessions were a bright spot in an otherwise difficult year. This focused attention enabled me to continue work on my book project, a transnational comparative ethnography of the Iranian diaspora based on fieldwork in Sweden, Canada, and the United States.

This past year, I published two peer-reviewed articles: the first, in the International Journal...

I was invited in spring to participate with esteemed colleagues in the emerging field of Iranian diaspora studies on a panel for Northwestern University’s Colloquium for Global Iran Studies. I also presented a virtual paper for the International Conference of Europeanists on Iranian-Swedish Anti-racism in Film & Theater. With conference activities curtailed during the 2020–2021 year, I optimistically shifted attention to organizing sessions for next year, including the organization of a roundtable with scholars whose work focuses on visual materials from across the Middle East, entitled, “Picturing the Middle East and its Diasporas: Memory, Migration, and Archives in New Digital Landscapes,” for the Middle Eastern Studies Association meetings.

As part of the center’s robust schedule of virtual events with scholars and artists near and far, I organized two of its events. First, I hosted ethnomusicologist Farzaneh Hemmasi for a talk on her book, “Tehrangeles Dreaming: Intimacy and Imagination in Southern California’s Iranian Pop Music.” I also published a review of Hemmasi’s book for the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. Second, alongside my colleague Arash Davari, I co-organized a panel discussion on the work of Iranian-American artist Pouya Afshar preceding the publication of his book, “In Character, Pouya Afshar: Selected Works 2010-2020.” Our guided conversation between editor and curator Arash Saednia, curator Sandra Williams, and Afshar himself included discussion of art and artistic practice in the Iranian diaspora and of Afshar’s new projects, including a screening of his latest short film, “La Dolce Vita.”

As the 2020 election cycle further intensified tensions between the U.S. and Iran, I gave several interviews on my research on Iranian Americans, including for the Los Angeles Times. I also was honored to have my work on experiences of exclusion and insecurity for Iranians with dual citizenship featured in the popular “Ajam” podcast by Ajam Media Collective. And leading up to our second virtual Nowruz during this pandemic, I offered a video tutorial, “Nowruz in America,” in conjunction with the Orlando Museum of Art and their exhibition “A Boundless Drop to a Boundless Ocean,” simultaneously exhibited at American University in Cairo.

As the final weeks of my fellowship come to a close, I am grateful for the time I was able to spend at the center and look forward to continuing the ongoing collaborations and conversations begun at Princeton.

**Visiting Research Collaborator**

**Jo-Ann Gross**

This past academic year was a challenging one for all of us, personally and professionally. Looking back, I am amazed at how much we accomplished despite the difficulties we faced. The center’s numerous virtual events—including book launches, lectures, seminars and lunchtime gatherings with colleagues—kept us connected, as well as intellectually stimulated, despite our physical isolation.

As a result of COVID-related delays and the cancellation of a planned international symposium last year, my three-year National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Collaborative Research Grant, “Ismailism in Badakhshan: Genealogical and Documentary History” was extended. Continuing my work with research collaborators Dr. Daniel Beben and Umed Mamadshershodzhoeh, my first goal was to publish the document corpus of rare genealogical documents (nāmahs) from Badakhshan in Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the digital collection at Princeton University’s [Firestone] Library (PUL). Previously, the images of 65 genealogical documents had been uploaded and the metadata stored in Firestone’s digital repository. In the fall, we finalized the MARC records, designed the browse categories and added final corrections and additions to the metadata. I worked closely with library staff and am pleased that the digital collection, “Badakhshan Genealogical Document Collection: Transforming Rare Texts into Accessible Digital Resources,” is now publicly available and freely accessible via the digital PUL homepage. I am especially grateful to my colleagues in Firestone, without whom this project would not have been possible. I plan to add documents to the digital collection in the coming years.

The second goal was to complete a draft of our co-authored book manuscript based on our close historical study of nāmahs (nāmahs) from Badakhshan in Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the digital collection at Princeton University’s [Firestone] Library (PUL). Previously, the images of 65 genealogical documents had been uploaded and the metadata stored in Firestone’s digital repository. In the fall, we finalized the MARC records, designed the browse categories and added final corrections and additions to the metadata. I worked closely with library staff and am pleased that the digital collection, “Badakhshan Genealogical Document Collection: Transforming Rare Texts into Accessible Digital Resources,” is now publicly available and freely accessible via the digital PUL homepage. I am especially grateful to my colleagues in Firestone, without whom this project would not have been possible. I plan to add documents to the digital collection in the coming years.

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Looking Ahead

The Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies promotes interdisciplinary approaches to advancing understanding of Iran and the Persian Gulf, with special attention to the region’s role and significance in the contemporary world. The goal of the program is to support outstanding scholars of Iran and the wider Persianate world at an early stage of their careers and thus to strengthen the field of Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies in the United States and abroad.

Incoming Fellows

Sheida Dayani is a theater historian currently working on the social and cultural history of Iran in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her research utilizes theatrical documents as historical sources and examines the development of Iranian theater from performance rituals to European-style playwriting. She has written on various genres and subgenres of Iranian theater ranging from slapstick comedy, women’s plays, and Shi’i passion plays of Ta’zieyeh to the productions of Molâtre by street entertainers and political mimed performances by governors in support of the 1905–1911 Constitutional Revolution. Her research includes Taqîlîd improvisatory comedy, Persian translations and trans-creations, identity formation through language “reform,” theater in the migration of Roma and Godar communities, and comparisons between Iranian comedy and the Commedia dell’Arte. She traces theatrical transmissions in Iran through the waves of migration to and from the Balkans and Anatolia on the one side, and the Iranian plateau, Greater Khorasan, Transoxiana, and western and northern India on the other side.

Informed by her recent fieldwork in Iranian cities and villages, Dayani’s forthcoming book, “Making History with Theatre in Modern Iran: Juggling Revolutionaries” (contracted by Edinburgh University Press), explores a transitional stage in the development of Iranian drama in the 19th and 20th centuries and offers a new social history of Iran based on theatrical primary sources.

Before joining Princeton, Dayani taught at Harvard University for six years, including courses on Iranian theater and film and Persian playwriting; literary and historical texts in Persian; and Persian language and literature. She received her Ph.D. from the department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at NYU. Her dissertation was recognized with the Honorable Mention of The Mehrdad Mashayekhi Dissertation Award from the Association for Iranian Studies and the Honorable Mention of The Best PhD Dissertation of the Year from the Foundation for Iranian Studies.

Dayani’s Persian poetry and translations have been published in Iranian journals, including Tajrobeh, Buchara and Negâh-e No. Her English poetry and translations have appeared on Jadaliyya and featured by Open Source on NPR Boston. For a period of 12 years, she worked as a simultaneous interpreter for several Persian-speaking filmmakers, including the late Abbas Kiarostami and Mr. Asghar Farhadi at the Academy Awards and other ceremonies.

Naveed Mansoori is a political theorist interested in media, religion and dissent, focusing on the intellectual history of modern Iran. He received a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California—Los Angeles. His current book project, “After Prophecy: Propaganda and the Politics of Truth in Contemporary Iran,” examines how literary, aural, cinematic, televisual and digital media ecologies have emerged as informal pedagogical spaces and as sites of subject-formation. “After Prophecy” begins with Shi’i intellectuals in the interwar period, who popularized a narrative of decline where modernity signaled the culminating end of the prophetic tradition. Shi’i intellectuals saw propaganda and the potential to revive prophecy. The book project tracks the afterlife of this discourse through the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the founding of the Islamic Republic to the 2009 Green Movement. It demonstrates that in moments of crisis concerning national identity, propaganda restored faith in the world and enacted it anew. Broadly, “After Prophecy” contributes to our understanding of political theory and practice in aberrant times when the circumstances prerequisite for the empirical unity of consciousness have disintegrated. Specifically, the book demonstrates how utopian spaces emerged and endured, during critical moments in contemporary Iranian history that elicit despair. His article, “Things Unheard: Popular Silence and the Popular Voice in Revolutionary Iran,” published in Theory & Event, theorizes the silent and shared collectivity that later erupts in noisy rebellion against the Pahlavi State. The article traces this argument to our present to enrich understanding of shared silence in political life. Mansoori’s research situates the
contemporary history of Iran in a conceptual landscape that encompasses postwar French and German political thought as well as anti- and de-colonial traditions of political theory in the Third World, including but not limited to the Middle East. Mansoori is co-editor of Jadaliyya’s Iran page online. He has also published work in Comparative Islamic Studies and in Society & Space. He has a forthcoming contribution to E’spririt and Liberation: An Ali Shari’ati Reader, and is co-editing a handbook on the lived experience of ideology for “The Routledge Handbooks on Political Ideologies, Practices and Interpretations” book series. From 2017-2019, he held the Elahé Omidyar Mir Djalali Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies. Before coming to Princeton University, Mansoori was an ACLS Emerging Voices Fellow in the Religion, Race, & Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia.

Lindsey Stephenson received her Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University. Her dissertation, “Rerouting the Persian Gulf: the Transnationalization of Iranian Migrant Networks, c1900–1940” won the Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Dissertation Award.

Stephenson is a historian of the Middle East and Western Indian Ocean. Broadly, her work focuses on Iranians and the transformation of Gulf society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her work brings together untold histories across the South of Iran and draws them into a broader Indian Ocean narrative. Thematically, her work is located at the intersection of law, geography and material culture.

While at Princeton, she will be working on her first book manuscript, “Oceanic Mobilities and the Iranian Everyday in the 20th-century Persian Gulf”. Her work explores the role of Iranian mobility in the formation of conceptions of citizenship and territory in the region. From governmental archives to private family collections, her work draws from a wide range of Persian, Arabic, and English language sources.

She is particularly invested in public scholarship and is currently the host and co-producer of the Indian Ocean Series podcast with the Ajami Media Collective. Lindsey is often involved in local Gulf conversations on the preservation of architectural heritage. Her research has been published in the Journal for Arabian Humanities, Journal of Arabian Studies, Foreign Policy Online and Jadaliyya, among others.

**People**

**Administration**

**Behrooz Ghahrami-Tabrizi**
Professor of Near Eastern Studies; Chair, Department of Near Eastern Studies (Effective July 1, 2021), Director, Sharmi and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies

**Femke de Ruyter**
Center Manager, Sharmi and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies

**Becky Parnian**
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**Jo-Ann Gross**
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**Satyel Larson**
Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies

**Muhammed Qasim Zaman** (Sits with Committee)
Robert H. Niehaus ’77 Professor of Near Eastern Studies and Religion; Chair, Department of Near Eastern Studies (through June 30, 2021)

**Affiliated Faculty**

**Divya Cherian**
Assistant Professor of History, Philip and Beulah Rollins Bicentennial Preceptor

**Christopher F. Chyba**
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Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies
In January 2020, via Twitter, the President of the United States threatened to destroy 52 cultural heritage sites throughout Iran, stating “if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets,” the U.S. “has targeted 52 Iranian sites—some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture.” The image above is one of a collection by artist Nazanin Moghbeli, depicting those targeted historical sites that represent the diverse history of Iran.
Fall Events 2021

WEBINARS

September 8
Meet the New Fellows: Sheida Dayani, Lindsey Stephenson, Naveed Mansoori

September 15
A Celebration of Ahmad Ashraf: Lifetime Contributions to Iranian Studies Joint Event with Iran Nāmag Quarterly

BOOK TALKS

September 22
Shaul Bakhash, The Fall of Reza Shah: The Abdication, Exile, and Death of Modern Iran’s Founder

September 29
Mikiya Koyagi, Iran in Motion: Mobility, Space, and the Trans-Iranian Railway

October 6
Stephanie Cronin, Social Histories of Iran: Modernism and Marginality in the Middle East

October 13
Rose Wellman, Feeding Iran: Shi’i Families and the Making of the Islamic Republic

October 27
Maryam Ghorbankarimi (editor), Refocus: The Films of Rakhshan Banietemad

November 3 (This event will be at 5:00 pm)
Laetitia Nanquette, Iranian Literature after the Islamic Revolution: Production and Circulation in Iran and the World

November 10
John Ghazvinian, America and Iran: A History, 1720 to Present

November 17
Amélie Le Renard, Western Privilege: Work, Intimacy, and Postcolonial Hierarchies in Dubai

December 1
Andrea Wright, Between Dreams and Ghosts: Indian Migration and Middle Eastern Oil

(All events start at noon unless indicated)
For more information contact iran@princeton.edu

Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies

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