Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani
Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies
Annual Review 2021-22
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Letter from the Director

We just ended another year in which our events and projects were deeply affected by pandemic restrictions. Although we have made major gains in containing the worst consequences of the disease, we continue to feel the short- and long-term results of the pandemic in our work. COVID has directly touched countless communities and devastated many families with the loss of loved ones and the struggles of those who have survived. We remain mindful of these circumstances as we continue to do our best to move forward with our projects and responsibilities.

Like the previous year, we held our events virtually, with great success. Our weekly Wednesday webinars have become an important occasion that now draws audiences not only from our immediate community, but also from around the country and the world. I need to reiterate that none of these events or the other operations of the center could have been possible without the ease and professionalism with which the members of our staff navigated these uncharted territories. The center manager Femke de Ruiter and our creative events coordinator Becky Parain deserve most of the credit for how smoothly plans and projects unfolded at the center this past year; we were also fortunate that Pete Nowak, our IT guru, joined us weekly to ensure that the virtual events happened without a glitch. I am grateful to be working with such a dedicated and collegial group.

One of the goals of the center’s fellowship program is to offer younger scholars time to develop their projects and publish their scholarship. We hope that this opportunity will help them advance their careers as scholars of modern Iran and the Persian Gulf. The success of this fellowship can be measured by the paths our fellows follow. This past year was a successful year for our fellows. Maryam Alemzadeh has accepted a position as the Associate Professor of the History and Politics of Modern Iran at the University of Oxford School of Global and Area Studies. In fall 2022, Peyman Jafari will join the College of William and Mary as an Assistant Professor in their prestigious Department of History. Amy Malek, who was with us for two years, 2019-2021, will join the faculty of Global Studies and Partnership at the Oklahoma State University as the Director of the Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies program. Arash Davari, a visiting scholar during the spring semester of 2020, will start his new position as the Assistant Professor of political theory at the University of Minnesota. Congratulations to all our former research scholars and fellows. I certainly hope that we will continue to sustain this network of amazing scholars and maintain a meaningful intellectual connection with all of them.

We are also eager to welcome three new researchers. You can read about their research projects and amazing scholarship on pages xx-xx. Dr. Beeta Baghoolizadeh (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2018), will join us as an Associate Research Scholar from Bucknell University where she was an assistant professor of history. Dr. Marzieh Tofighi Darian will join us as a Postdoctoral Research Associate from Harvard School of Law where she just earned her S.J.D. Sheraqim Jenabzadeh will join us as a Postdoctoral Research Associate in November after defending his dissertation at the University of Toronto’s esteemed history department. All three new appointees will present their work during the 2022 fall semester.

This summer we also welcomed Gilda Mojtahedi, our new librarian working at Firestone. Princeton University’s library has one of the world’s largest collections of primary research documents in Persian. These documents include a variety of newspapers, magazines, and many different forms of ephemera such as posters, political pamphlets, fliers, etc. One of the major long-term projects I envisioned for the center has been the creation of an Iranian digital archive that would eventually serve as the “go-to” resource for scholars of modern Iran to search for primary material. Gilda will be laying the foundation for this project and has begun by creating an inventory of the library’s available material. We are very excited about this project and look forward to working with Gilda and our Firestone colleagues to make this important project a reality.

We also had the pleasure of hosting Professor Jennifer Jenkins starting in the spring term and through the summer of 2022. Professor Jenkins is one of the most respected historians of German international diplomacy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in German History at the University of Toronto, she is working on two book manuscripts: “The Persian Question: Germany and Iran in the Age of Empire, 1895-1914” and “The German Orient, 1905-1979.” Professor Jenkins gave a stimulating presentation on “Iran and the New Nazi Order, 1933-1941.” You can access her presentation on the past events page of our website.

We continued our Wednesday series of amazing conversations with scholars of varying disciplines, including the introduction of new scholarly books on Iran and Persian Gulf studies. The recordings of these events are also accessible via the center’s website.

We continued to fund the Iran Protest Data initiative that was spearheaded by Peyman Jafari and a number of his colleagues and collaborators in the Netherlands. The Iran Protest Data project is a collaborative endeavor that gathers detailed data on civil and political protests in Iran based on reports from three news agencies inside the country. The project’s goal is to create a large database that shows with accurate empirical data the primary characteristics, including causes and consequences, location, demands of protestors and whether their demands were met, and how many people participated. The plan is to host a user-friendly webpage that accesses the above information, which will be continually updated as new data becomes available. It will also offer a search engine for scholars of social movements and politics to follow the events in Iran without distortion and misgivings. Stay tuned for a presentation on the project, expected in spring 2023.

This year, we also inaugurated our first Mossavar-Rahmani Book Award in Iranian Studies. We have received a competitive collection of books nominated for the award. A committee composed of Maryam Alemzadeh, Peyman Jafari, and Milad Ostovari carefully examined the scholarly merits of these books and awarded the prize to Azooz Osanloo’s “Forgiveness Work: Mercy, Law, and Victims’ Rights in Iran” (Princeton University Press, 2020). The committee also recognized two honorable mentions: Talinn Grigor’s “The Persian Revival: The Imperialism of the Copy in Iranian and Parsi Architecture” (Penn State University Press, 2021); and Mikiya Koyagi’s “Iran in Motion: Mobility, Space, and the Trans-Iranian Railway” (Stanford University Press, 2021). I would like to thank the committee members’ meticulous work and offer congratulations to all three colleagues for their impeccable scholarship. Prof. Osanloo will receive her award at the end of August during the biennial conference of the Iranian Studies Association in Salamanca, Spain.

We have a very exciting lineup for the fall, beginning with our Fall 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 the fall, depending on public health safety guidelines from the state and University administration. Stay safe, remain curious, and follow our programs.

Yours,

Bebrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi
Director, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies, Professor of Near Eastern Studies
Center Events

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 to 21st centuries, with a focus on the region’s role and significance in the contemporary world.

September 8
Sheida Dayani, Lindsey Stephenson, Naveed Mansoori
Postdoctoral Research Associates, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies
“Meet the New Fellows”

September 15
Ali Banuazizi, Professor of Political Science, Boston College and Research Fellow, M.I.T.
Farhad Kazemi, Professor Emeritus of Politics and Middle Eastern Studies, New York University.
Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Professor of History and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto
“Celebrating Ahmad Ashraf: Lifetime Contribution to Iranian Studies”

January 26
Maryam Alemzadeh, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Princeton University.
AzrOO Osanloo, Professor of Anthropology, University of Washington.
Nazanin Shahrokni, Assistant Professor of Gender and Globalisation, London School of Economics.
Nahid Siamdoust, Assistant Professor of Middle East and Media Studies, The University of Texas-Austin
“The Forgotten Mundane: Contemporary Iran Beneath and Beyond Politics”

February 2
Lindsey Stephenson, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Princeton University.
“Narrating Injustices: Iranian Women’s Petitions at the British Political Agent’s Court in Bahrain, 1930-1945”

February 23
Javad Heiran-Nia, Director of the Persian Gulf Studies Group, Center for Scientific Research and Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran;
Mahmood Monshipouri, Professor and Chair, International Relations Department, San Francisco State University
“The U.S. Sanctions and the Collapse of the Iranian Reformist Movement”

March 9
Jennifer Jenkins, Visiting Scholar, Princeton University
“Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933-1941”

March 20
Esmail Haddadian-Moghadam, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Research Fellow, Universiteit Leiden;
Milad Odabaei, Associate Research Scholar, Princeton University;
Hosna Sheikholeslami, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Denison University
“Formations of Translation in Contemporary Iran”

March 27
Milad Odabaei, Associate Research Scholar, Princeton University;
Arshin Adib-Moghadam, Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies, SOAS;
Jason Mohaghegh, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Babson College
“Iran as a Space of World Thought”

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.

September 22
Shaul Bakhsh, Robinson Professor, George Mason University in conversation with Naveed Mansoori
“The Fall of Reza Shah: The Abdication, Exile, and Death of Modern Iran’s Founder”

September 29
Mikiya Koyagi, Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas-Austin in conversation with Peyman Jafari, Postdoctoral Research Associate
“Iran in Motion: Mobility, Space, and the Trans-Iranian Railway”

October 6
Stephanie Cronin, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford in conversation with Milad Odabaei
“Social Histories of Iran: Modernism and Marginality in the Middle East”

April 6
Naveed Mansoori, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Princeton University
“This is the Voice of Iran: Insurgent Sounds, Subversive Silences, and the Popular Voice”

April 20
ESmEAl hAddAAdiAN-MoGhAddAm, Marie SkłodowsKa-curie ActiOns reseaRch FelLOw, UniveRsiTeit leiden;
MilaD OdAbaei, AssociAte reseaRch schOLAR, PrincetoN UniverSiTy;
HoSNa SheikholeslamI, AsSistenT ProFeSSor of AnthropOlogy and socioloGy, DeNiSon University
“FoRmAtiOns of TrAslation in ContemPorAry Iran”

April 27
Milad Odabaei, Associate Research Scholar, Princeton University;
Arshin Adib-Moghadam, Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies, SOAS;
Jason Mohaghegh, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Babson College
“Iran as a Space of World Thought”
October 13
Rose Wellman, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, University of Michigan-Dearborn; Nazanin Shahrokni, Assistant Professor of Gender and Globalisation, London School of Economics
“Feeding Iran: Shi’i Families and the Making of the Islamic Republic”

October 27
Maryam Ghorbankarimi (editor), Lecturer in Film Practice, Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts in conversation with Sheida Dayani
“Refocus: The Films of Rakhshan Baniyemad”

November 3
Laetitia Nanquette, University of New South Wales; Jairan Gahan, Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts – History & Classics Department, University of Alberta
“Iranian Literature after the Islamic Revolution: Production and Circulation in Iran and the World”

November 10
John Ghazvinian, Executive Director of the Middle East Center, University of Pennsylvania; Mohsen Milani, Executive Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, University of South Florida
“America and Iran: A History, 1720 to Present”

November 17
Amelie Le Renard, National Center for Scientific Research, Centre Maurice Halbwachs, Paris; Neha Vora, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Lafayette College
“Western Privilege: Work, Intimacy, and Postcolonial Hierarchies in Dubai”

December 1
Andrea Wright, Associate Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Anthropology in conversation with Lindsay Stephenson
“Between Dreams and Ghosts: Indian Migration and Middle Eastern Oil”

February 9
Arzoo Osanloo, Professor of Anthropology, University of Washington; Shirin Saedie, Assistant Professor of Politics, University of Arkansas
“Women and the Islamic Republic: How Gendered Citizenship Conditions the Iranian State”

February 16
Natasha Iskander, Associate Professor of Urban Planning and Public Service, New York University; Andrew Ross, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, New York University
“Does Skill Make Us Human? Migrant Workers in 21st-Century Qatar and Beyond”

March 16
Talinn Grigor, Chair and Professor of Art History, University of California-Davis; Madhuri Desai, Associate Professor of Art History and Asian Studies, The Pennsylvania State University
“The Persian Revival: The Imperialism of the Copy in Iranian and Parsi Architecture”

March 23
Kaveh Askari, Associate Professor of English, Director of Film Studies, Michigan State University; Golbarg Rekabtalaei, Assistant Professor of History, Seton Hall University
“Relaying Cinema in Midcentury Iran: Material Cultures in Transit”

March 30
Annie Tracy Samuel, Assistant Professor of History, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga in conversation with Maryam Alemzadeh
“The Unfinished History of the Iran-Iraq War: Faith, Firepower, and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards”

Co-Sponsored Events
(Organizing department is in parentheses)

October 28
Shivan Mahendrarahajah, Research Fellow at the Institute of Iranian Studies, School of History, University of St. Andrews; Meigan Massoumi, Teaching Fellow, Civil Liberal and Global Education, Stanford University; Jawan Shir Rasikh, Visiting Research Associate with the Shafique N. Virani Research Team, University of Toronto; Annika Schmeding, Junior Fellow, Harvard Society of Fellows; Moderated by Jo-
Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Book Award

Established in the 2021 academic year, the book award will be given every two years to the author of the best scholarly monograph on topics in history, society, politics, economics and cultures related to modern Iran and the Persian Gulf, broadly defined. The first recipient will be honored this year at the annual meeting of the Association for Iranian Studies (AIS).

Following a thorough review of this year’s submissions by the award committee, the Mossavar-Rahmani Book Award was given to Arzoo Osanloo for her book “Forgiveness Work: Mercy, Law, and Victims’ Rights in Iran” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Arzoo Osanloo’s “Forgiveness Work” is an exceptional anthropological study that revises and reshapes the study of Iran within and beyond the discipline of anthropology. It is customary for anthropological works to locate themselves in a specific subfield such as the anthropology of law, Islam, Iran, etc. While “Forgiveness Work” indeed contributes to conversations in several subfields of anthropology and brings them together, it uniquely challenges disciplinary compartmentalization by tracing social and legal phenomena to their condition of possibility that precede the disciplinary definition of objects and formulation of theories. Osanloo mobilizes ethnographic research and her unique writerly craft to elaborate on the cultural determinants and sociopolitical consequences of Iran’s Islamic criminal codes and its foregrounding of victims’ right. In Iranian studies, the politics of the Iranian state is often analyzed through the lens of ideology and independently of Iranian society as well as various religious and cultural traditions. “Forgiveness Work” offers a complex theorization of interdependency and dialogue between the Iranian society and state that nonetheless addresses the limits of political dissent in the Islamic Republic. The book’s methodological and theoretical intervention exemplifies the contribution of generous and patient scholarship. “Forgiveness Work” will continue to inspire a new generation of scholars of Iran.

Iran Protest Data

The Iran Protest Data project gathers data on social and political protests in Iran from 1994-2019, maps and codes it, and then prepares it for online access and interaction.

Recent years have witnessed a wave of protests in Iran, which draws considerable global attention to the internal political dynamics of the country. This attention, however, is often accompanied by hasty conclusions and misconceptions that reflect a lack of comprehensive attempts to understand the rise and demise of protests in a non-Western context. Therefore, there is little understanding about the roots, organizers, demands and participants of the protests, mainly due to the lack of protest event data (PED) in Iran. PED helps address four main questions on protests: when, where, what (form) and who (organizers/participants)? Moreover, such data provides a broader and historical view of protests and will therefore make it easier to study the prevalence and nature of protests in Iran, in order to further apply this information to address such questions as: how have protests developed over time? Is there a relationship between this development and major indicators such as inflation and relative openness of the political system? Has the demographic and geographic
spread of the protests changed? Which claims are made by these protests? Has the form of protests changed? Do we see a routinization of protests or are protest rare events with an insurrectionary nature?

The project’s data has been gathered using semi-automated content analysis and data mining of three main Iranian news agencies: ISNA, IRNA and Tasnim, and will provide a comprehensive, longitudinal illustration of the development of protests in Iran. Researchers, journalists and others will be able to search the data and gather information on protests according to the issues and/or demands, size, duration, location and target. The first findings of this project will be presented in spring 2023, and the results will be made available to the public by early 2024.

Modern Iran Digital Archive
We are enthused that Gilda Modjtahedi joined us last spring, joining our colleagues in Firestone Library to work on the center’s digitization projects, it is the director’s vision to make Princeton’s rich source of Persian periodicals and ephemeral materials broadly accessible to scholars of Iran and the Persian Gulf. Gilda will work closely with Near Eastern Studies and the Gulf. Gilda will work with a technology development team on the development of the publicly accessible "Modern Iran Digital Archive" for the center’s website.

Center Funding Awards

Course, Culture & Student-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)
• Hassan Soljou is a senior producer for BBC World Service and the editor and host of a film showcase for BBC Persian TV. Soljou studied cinema in Iran and the UK, and has produced more than 10 films, mainly Iran-related documentaries. He’s won awards at both national and international film festivals. Professor Amineh Mahallati's students watched his film "Persian New Yorker Stories," followed by Q&A with Mr. Soljou.
• Amineh’s students participated in three yoga classes, conducted in Persian by instructor Aghdas Lotfzadeh.

Princeton Iranian Students Association
This year the center helped the association with administrative support and funding for its fall gathering, the production of t-shirts for members, and a Persian New Year’s celebration (Nowruz).

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:

Navjit Kaur
Near Eastern Studies

Jamie O’Connell
Near Eastern Studies

Abrar Alshammari
Near Eastern Studies

Research Reports

Postdoctoral Research Associates
Maryam Alemzadeh

After almost two years of working remotely, spending the 2021-22 academic year in the company of brilliant colleagues at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center was a true blessing. I felt privileged to have the opportunity to engage in intellectually stimulating conversations, learn more about my amazing colleagues’ work, and become further motivated to advance my work with my colleagues’ friendship and professional expertise. Through the rich lineup of the center’s virtual events, I was able to explore new fields in Iranian Studies, and various social gatherings strengthened the sense of belonging that we had all missed for so long.

In the past academic year, I worked on journal articles, thought pieces, book reviews, and a book manuscript. I published an article titled “The Attraction of Direct Action: The Making of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in the Iranian Kurdish Conflict” (British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 2021). I prepared another article manuscript, “Boundaries of Expertise: Revolutionary Guards’ Selective Professionalism During the Iran-Iraq War,” which is now under final revisions for submission to a Middle East Studies journal. I also published a review of Mohammad Mateo Farzaneh’s book, “Women and Gender in the Iran-Iraq War,” in the International Journal of Middle East Studies, and am currently working on a think piece on the IRGC and Iran Nuclear Deal negotiations, commissioned by Foreign Affairs. Most importantly, I have been working on my book manuscript, tentatively titled Perpetual Flux: Revolutionary Guards and State Building in Iran, and plan to complete and workshop its first draft by August.

I have also had the pleasure of leading two of the center’s virtual events. I moderated a panel discussion, titled “The Forgotten Mundane: Contemporary Iran Beneath and Beyond Politics,” where panelists discussed various complications of studying social life in a highly politicized setting like Iran. I had organized a similar panel at the 2021 MESA Annual Meeting (held virtually) in December, which then flourished into the rich conversation at the center’s virtual event. In addition, I discussed Annie Tracy Samuel’s book, “The Unfinished History of the Iran-Iraq War,” with her at one of the center’s book talk events. I was invited to present my own work at a panel on new scholarship on the IRGC at the University of Pennsylvania, and to serve as a discussant for a book event held virtually at New York University’s Iranian Studies Initiative. Finally, I organized a panel on new approaches to studying revolutions at the 2021 Social Science History Association Annual Meeting, where I presented a chapter of my book manuscript.

In September, I will be joining the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies and the Oxford Middle East Centre as associate professor in history and politics of modern Iran. I will be leaving the Mossavar-Rahmani Center with lots of gratitude and the
The presentation of my book chapter “Ta’iyyeh and Social Jouissance: Beyond the Pleasure of Pain in Islamic Passion Play and Muhrarram Ceremonies” (in “Losing Our Minds,Coming to Our Senses: Sensory Readings of Persian Literature and Culture,” Leiden University Press, 2021) at the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies (contracted by Edinburgh UP) while working on the manuscript, I explored several collections at the Princeton University Library, mainly the Pre-1979 Persian periodicals and newspapers. Going through the library collections has both informed my current manuscript and provided me with new research material for future articles.

The main arguments about the necessity of studying modern playwriting in the context of pre-existing traditional theatre, as opposed to limiting ourselves to the familiar and conventional framework of political history. A portion of the talk revolved around supporting my argument that a 19th-century play by Mirza Aqa Tabrizi is based on the life and rule of Fath-Alì Shah Qajar, itself supporting my argument for the significance of theatre as a source for social and cultural historiography. Through a close reading of a play, I demonstrated how the Qajar and Constitutional plays may be read as historical texts with attention to the geopolitical, religious, and commercial significance of the place and time in which each play is set.

The conversation between Golbarg Rekabtalai and the author Kaveh Askari about his monograph, “Relaying Cinema in Mid-Century Iran: Material Cultures in Transit” (University of California Press, 2022) was an MRC event that I moderated in spring 2022. Reviewing articles for Comparative Literature and Culture and Iranian Studies journals, as well as currently writing a book review for The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature, have been among my other spring 2022 activities.

In August 2021, I co-authored an article “Labor Organizing on the Rise Among Iranian Oil Workers” for the Middle East Report Online. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Middle East Report, I published the article “Putting Workers on the Map” in the fall 2021 issue, analyzing its coverage of labor and working-class history in the Middle East and North Africa. My chapter on “Labor in the Making of the International Relations of Oil: Resource Nationalism and Trade Unions,” will be published this fall in the “Handbook of Oil and International Relations,” edited by Roland Dannreuther and Wojciech Osowski (Edward Elgar Publishing).

I also had the pleasure to give a number of talks. In June 2021, I gave a virtual talk on “Iran in the Region” for the Atlantic Youth Association. As part of the center’s virtual events, I led a conversation in September 2021 with Dr. Mikya Koyagi about his recent book “Iran in Motion: Mobility, Space and the Trans-Iranian Railway” (Stanford University Press, 2021). Last March, I gave a virtual lecture at Boston College on “History and Theory of the Iranian Revolution.” I have organized two panels on “New Histories of Developmental History in Iran” for the Iranian Studies Conference, which will take place in September at the University of Salamanca, from August 30 to September 2.

From September 29 to October 1, 2021, I attended the Oil History Symposium in Pittsburgh as a member of its jury, tasked with selecting the best paper. More recently, I was invited to join the editorial board of the book series “Work Around the Globe: Historical Comparisons and Connections,” published by UCL Press, London.

At the center, I have developed two new research projects. In April, the Dutch Research Council awarded me a VENI Talent Program grant ($355,000) for my second book project, “OIl Frontiers in the British and Dutch Empires: Land, Labour and Environment in the Making of an Imperial Oil Regime, 1890-1940.” This global history project compares and connects two case studies, southern Iran while under the influence of the British Empire and the Dutch East Indies. It offers a bottom-up perspective on how oil frontiers transformed the countryside in these regions and integrated them into a global system through the movement of people, ideas and technologies. I also started working on the Iran Protest Data project with the financial support of the center (see Center Initiatives). Thanks to a grant ($4,500) from Princeton University’s Humanities Council, I will be able to expand this project and improve its public outreach.

At the end of my fellowship, I am grateful to the staff and other fellows, without whom my time at the center would have been less productive and far less pleasant. While leaving is bittersweet, I look forward to continuing the collaborations, conversations and friendships begun at Princeton in my new position as Assistant Professor in History and International Relations at the College of William and Mary beginning in fall 2022.

Naveed Mansoori
My first year at the center was wonderful. I could not have asked for better colleagues, with whom I have learned and grown as a scholar, and with a healthy dose of joy and laughter, to boot. Our weekly events (and lunches) were a welcomed respite from scholarly monasticism.

This year was spent revising my book manuscript, tentatively titled “After Prophecy: Propaganda and the Politics of Truth in Contemporary Iran.” My book takes contemporary Iran as a productive conceptual landscape to theorize political activity during legitimation crises. When states fail, is civil war inevitable? When institutions fail, how do political actors adapt? The book examines propaganda, conspiracy, dual power, and solidarity in “abnormal” times. It argues that the Second World War occasioned a reevaluation of the “crisis of modernity” through the history of modernization, conceived as “renewal [rejuvenation].” It frames propaganda, conspiracy, dual power, and solidarity as both weapons of the weak and means of innovation. Through making that...
argument, I offer an account of “media” during crises of legitimacy. I argue that media is a pseudo-environment that serves as a space for collaboration in chaotic situations. With the time and resources afforded to me by the center, I wrote two works. “Students of Revolution: An Essay on Ali Shariati’s Counter-Pedagogy,” forthcoming in Philosophy & Global Affairs, which takes Shariati’s meditations on pedagogy to theorize mediascapes as spaces for collaborative learning. There, the curriculum of a people becoming, the history of struggle, and its instructors, those who modeled it, pivoted around refusal. I frame the “collaborator” as distinct from the autodidact and the apprentice. “The Dialectical Utopianism of Ali Shariati,” forthcoming in Globalizing Political Theory, introduces Shariati as a utopian thinker for whom utopia is unimaginable. I offer a reading of his lecture, “Return to the Self,” in conversation with renewed interest in globalizing political theory. Caught in the maelstrom of domestic and foreign crises, Shariati could not but work through the world, in lieu of enjoying “global” citizenship.

In my capacity as a scholar of propaganda, I was invited to deliver the keynote lecture at the 24th annual Environment Across Boundaries symposium, titled “A Post-Truth Environment” at Lewis & Clarke College. There, I framed the categorical imperative against propaganda in the context of the Cold War. I narrativized a history of propaganda as a weapon of the weak. I presented my research on propaganda and conspiracy at the annual conferences of the American Political Science Association and the Western Political Science Association, respectively. I was also invited to present my research at Rowan College and Amherst College. Finally, through the center, I participated in a book talk with Shaul Bakhhash and delivered a talk, “This is the Voice of Iran: Insurgent Sounds, Subversive Silences, and the Popular Voice.” My talk presented the emergence of political non-participation as an active refusal of the state. Lindsey Stephenson

Since joining the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies as a postdoctoral fellow in September of 2021, I’ve been primarily working on editing my book manuscript, tentatively titled, “The End of Oceanic Mobility: Migration, Law, and the Remaking of the Persian Gulf.” I have also prepared one article from the manuscript for publishing in an academic journal.

In addition to working on the manuscript, I have given two talks this year. The first talk was for the center, titled, “Narrating Injustices: Iranian Women’s Petitions at the British Political Agent’s Court in Bahrain, 1930-1945.” This talk gave an overview of some of the records I am working with and some of the big questions I explore on ontology and the British colonial archive. I am using the material presented in this talk for an article in progress on the British Political Agent’s Court in Bahrain.

The second talk was for the Middle East Center at the University of Pennsylvania: “British Power and the Shaping of Iranian Identity in Early 20th-Century Bahrain,” where I presented a portion of my research that addresses the impact of British policies on how Iranian migrants identified and represented themselves as they crossed into and out of Bahrain.

I served as a discussant for a MRC book talk given by Andrea Wright on her recent book “Between Dreams and Ghosts.” Building on the talk, I have been invited to write a book review for the same book for South Asia Journal of South Asian Studies to be published next year.

During the summer, I will travel to London and Kuwait for research and also finish edits on my manuscript. In August, I will join many of my colleagues at the Iranian Studies conference in Salamanca, Spain, where I will present on a panel titled “Crossing the Gulf — Migration, Materiality, and Spirituality.” This panel builds off of a session I organized in May of 2020, “Under the Sails: Maritime Conversations on Trade and Seafaring — Perspectives from Iran and Kuwait,” which brought together Kuwaiti and Iranian historians and nakhodas. This event can be viewed on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuUgZPjX9-Q8

In addition to my research, I have been involved with the resettlement of more than 10 Afghan refugee families in the Princeton area. I lead a volunteer team that works with a range of Princeton community nonprofits. To further support these efforts and my interest in the everyday struggles and generate my interest in the everyday struggles of post-revolutionary generations and are creatively engaged in the cultural and intellectual movements such as the turn to translation. I drew on this work for an invited lecture at the Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture at the University of California-Irvine, and for a contribution to a special collection of the journal Critical Times on the themes of loss and destruction, which is presently under review.

This year, I also completed the revisions of two essays that contribute to debates about the relationship between colonialism, human sciences and translation by reflecting on the history and politics of human sciences in Iran. “Modernity from Elsewhere: Psychoanalysis, Ethnography, and Speculative Horizons of Self-Assertion” and “Burning Translations” are forthcoming in Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, respectively.

In the winter, I delivered a guest lecture at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, in a graduate seminar on Minorities in the Middle East and served as discussant at a graduate conference, ”Translating Within,” hosted by the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of California-Irvine. In the spring, I contributed to a workshop hosted by the Political Theology Network. That contribution will appear in the edited volume “Critical Theory for Political Theology,” which will be submitted to Duke University Press.

Mirdad Odabaei

While I concluded my first year at the center remotely, I was able to spend my time in Princeton this year. Though the pandemic continued to disrupt campus life, I found in-person conversations most rewarding. The center’s weekly events and lunches were especially appreciated. They were an opportunity to engage scholars of Iran and the Persian Gulf, while benefiting from conversations with colleagues. The return to campus also provided me with an opportunity to benefit from library resources and meet scholars in Anthropology and Near Eastern Studies, my cognate disciplines, as well as the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

My focus continues to be on my book manuscript. Titled “The Outside/Kharij: Translation and Iranian Travails of Learned Politics,” my book offers a historical and anthropological reflection on the translation of European social thought in post-revolutionary Iran. This year, I began to incorporate into the manuscript part of my ethnographic research that pertains to the generational experience of political violence and loss in the wake of the revolution. This writing helps demonstrate the historical and political predicaments that animate everyday struggles of post-revolutionary generations and are creatively engaged in the cultural and intellectual movements such as the turn to translation.

I served as a discussant for a MRC book talk given by Andrea Wright on her recent book “Between Dreams and Ghosts.” Building on the talk, I have been invited to write a book review for the same book for South Asia Journal of South Asian Studies to be published next year.

During the summer, I will travel to London and Kuwait for research and also finish edits on my manuscript. In August, I will join many of my colleagues at the Iranian Studies conference in Salamanca, Spain, where I will present on a panel titled “Crossing the Gulf — Migration, Materiality, and Spirituality.” This panel builds off of a session I organized in May of 2020, “Under the Sails: Maritime Conversations on Trade and Seafaring — Perspectives from Iran and Kuwait,” which brought together Kuwaiti and Iranian historians and nakhodas. This event can be viewed on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuUgZPjX9-Q8

In addition to my research, I have been involved with the resettlement of more than 10 Afghan refugee families in the Princeton area. I lead a volunteer team that works with a range of Princeton community nonprofits. To further support these efforts and my interest, I, together with two other Princeton scholars, received a flash grant through the Princeton Humanities Council that will allow us to develop an art curriculum to address mental health in Afghan teenagers.

Associate Research Scholar

Mirdad Odabaei

While I concluded my first year at the center remotely, I was able to spend my time in Princeton this year. Though the pandemic continued to disrupt campus life, I found in-person conversations most rewarding. The center’s weekly events and lunches were especially appreciated. They were an opportunity to engage scholars of Iran and the Persian Gulf, while benefiting from conversations with colleagues. The return to campus also provided me with an opportunity to benefit from library resources and meet scholars in Anthropology and Near Eastern Studies, my cognate disciplines, as well as the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

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I participated in the center’s weekly events. In the fall, I participated in a talk with Stephanie Cronin where I responded to her book “Social Histories in Modern Iran.” I published my comments as a book review in International Journal of Middle East Studies. In the spring, I organized two conversations with scholars who work at the intersection of anthropology, translation studies, critical theory and Iranian studies. With the mentorship of Director Behrooz Shahrani-Tabrizi and the support of the center’s staff, my aims in these conversations were to expand the range of debate in Iranian Studies.

With the support of the center, my application for a project on “incapacitations” received a $15,000 grant from the Religion and the Public Sphere Program of the Social Science Research Council. This project aims to study the epistemological limit and historical incapacitations of various discursive traditions to make sense of novel circumstance that their practitioners face. It will also consider manifestations of violence and destruction as the social and political effects of incapacitation of tradition. The project is conceived as a year-long reading group that I organized two conversations with scholars in Berlin. With its unique level of detail, this book covers a 20th-century political and economic project. It took shape from the late 1920s and 1930s through Reza Shah’s building of the Trans-Iranian Railroad.

The second book project, “The German Orient 1905-1979,” analyzes what was called Germany in Asia, which Germans called the new orient as a 20th-century political and economic project. It took shape from a series of encounters between German institutions and nationalist and anti-colonial intellectuals across the Middle East and South Asia, Iranians foremost amongst them. My well-attended research talk, given as part of the center’s webinar series, drew from this research. Titled “Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933-1941”, it explored the relationship between Nazi Germany and Reza Shah’s Iran by analyzing Iran’s place in the New Order devised by Reich Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht. Focusing on the state economic initiatives between Germany and Iran that were the basis of their relationship during the 1930s, I argued that Nazism’s drive to the east, which required war to obtain, was built on an extensive program of global economic outreach. I analyzed Schacht’s trade policies vis-a-vis Iran in the context of the 25 bilateral clearing agreements signed between the Third Reich and industrializing nations. In the last part of the talk I spoke on the “other” Germans who lived in Iran in the 1930s, a group which included several thousand “Russian-German” refugees, who fled into Iran from the Soviet Union after 1930 and provided labor for the building of the Trans-Iranian Railroad.

Germany’s primary interest in Iran was economic — its diplomats wished to extend trade into Iran, and to make Germany into the European partner for Iranian industrialization. My research shows how this project, which was grounded in the years of the Constitutional Revolution and extended through the First World War (bringing the Koveh group to Berlin), achieved moderate success in the late 1920s and 1930s through Reza Shah’s relationships with both Weimar and Nazi Germany. All of my work highlights the relationship between German and Iranian nationalists in the conception and realization of these economic and infrastructural projects.

My time as a Visiting Scholar has been invaluable by providing me the time, space and support to draw together years of research into completed books and articles.

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 Persian world at all stages of their careers and thus to strengthen the field of Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies in the United States and abroad.

Incoming Fellows

Sheragim Jenabzadeh will join the Mossavar-Rahmani Center in the fall as a Postdoctoral Research Associate. He is expected to earn his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in November and will develop his dissertation, “City of Aspirations: Iranian Student Activism in Interwar Berlin” into a book manuscript. The project titled, “Youthful Revolutionary: The Transnational Networks of Iranian Students in Interwar Germany,” will contextualize early 20th-century Iranian intellectual history within a global framework. Sheragim takes a historical, anthropological approach and uses archival sources to highlight lived history of a diasporic community of Iranian revolutionaries. Sheragim’s work with German archives sets his research apart from all other works in the field on the same topic. He brings a distinct approach to the global context of Iranian history in the 20th century. He will have a good number of interlocutors in the Departments of History and German.

Marzieh Tofiqhi Darian will join the center as a postdoctoral Research Associate in September. Marzieh is a legal scholar who received her LL.B. and LL.M. from Tehran University Faculty of Law and Political Science; an LLM from both New York University School of Law and Harvard Law School, and she is expected to receive her S.J.D from Harvard in May. Marzieh’s research on constitutionalism centers on textured analysis of the primary opinions of the Guardian Council, the Iranian equivalent of the American Supreme Court. Rather than analyzing these opinions in reference to their political significance, she examines the Council’s rulings from the legal perspectives of Islamic jurisprudence. Marzieh is a scholar of law and society and her legal background offers an important distinction to her work in comparison to others who have written on the same topic. She will be able to build important connections with the Department of Religion and the Center for Culture, Society and Religion (CCSR).

Visiting Fellow

Jennifer Jenkins

I write on Iran from the perspective of global history, focusing on diplomacy, political economy and the country’s place in the international system.

As a specialist on modern Germany, my research is based on a voluminous archive on Germany and Iran held at the Archive of the German Foreign Office in Berlin. With its unique level of detail, this source base provides a new archive for the exploration of Iranian history, particularly as many of the documents focus on the country’s economic, political and social transformation from the 1890s to the 1950s. Germany’s place in the development of Iranian industrialism and capitalism from the Constitutional Revolution through the Reza Shah period is a central topic in my research.

At the Mossavar-Rahmani Center I have worked successfully on two large book projects. I have written three chapters for the first, and completed new research for the second. The first, “The Persian Question: Germany and Iran in the Age of Empire,” investigates Iran and Germany in the international system before 1914, analyzing the entanglement of German, British and Russian policies. It highlights German diplomatic support for the Iranian and Turkish nationalist movements, and the changes brought to international diplomacy in the lead-up to the war in 1914. Through the invaluable support of primary and secondary sources on Iran, Germany and international politics available at Firestone Library, and the center’s vibrant scholarly community, I am on schedule to complete this manuscript by the end of summer 2022.

The second book project, “The German Orient 1905-1979,” analyzes what was called Germany in Asia, which Germans called the new orient as a 20th-century political and economic project. It took shape from a series of encounters between German institutions and nationalist and anti-colonial intellectuals across the Middle East and South Asia, Iranians foremost amongst them. My well-attended research talk, given as part of the center’s webinar series, drew from this research. Titled “Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933-1941”, it explored the relationship between Nazi Germany and Reza Shah’s Iran by analyzing Iran’s place in the New Order devised by Reich Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht. Focusing on the state economic initiatives between Germany and Iran that were the basis of their relationship during the 1930s, I argued that Nazism’s drive to the
Beeta Baghoolizadeh will also join us in the fall, as an Associate Research Scholar. She is a historian of visual culture, with an interest in public scholarship. Beeta received her bachelor’s degree in international development studies and Iranian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles; her master’s degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her Ph.D. in history with a certificate in Africana studies from the University of Pennsylvania. Baghoolizadeh comes from Bucknell University, where she is an Assistant Professor of History and Critical Black Studies. Baghoolizadeh’s first project at Princeton will be completing her book: “The Color Black: Enslavement and Erasure in Iran.” Her project uses an interdisciplinary methodological approach to analyze textual, visual and spatial sources to unearth an intentionally hidden history of enslavement and race. She employs an in-depth analysis of race and racial constructions across a broad variety of media in the Black Middle East. Her second book project, “The Blurring of Myth, Memory and Modernity,” examines how shifts often attributed to “modernity” can be directly traced to the abolition of enslavement in Iran. Baghoolizadeh’s work pushes for more inclusive scholarship, both in terms of methodological approaches as well as recognizing the importance of diversity and inclusion within the Iranian community, in Iran and its diaspora. Baghoolizadeh hopes to collaborate with the Department of African American Studies and the Center for Digital Humanities while in residence at Princeton.
Christopher F. Chyba  
Professor of Astrophysical Sciences and International Affairs, Princeton School of Public and International Affairs

Michael A. Cook  
Class of 1943 University Professor of Near Eastern Studies

Julia Elyachar  
Associate Professor of Anthropology and the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies

Michael A. Flower  
David Magie ’97 Class of 1897 Professor of Classics; Chair, Department of Classics

Molly Greene  
Professor of History and Hellenic Studies

Bernard A. Haykel  
Professor, Department of Near Eastern Studies; Director, Institute for Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia

Stephen Kotkin  
John P. Birkeland ’52 Professor in History and International Affairs; Co-Director, Program in History and the Practice of Diplomacy; Director, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies; Director, Fung Global Fellows Program

Satyel Larson  
Assistant Professor, Department of Near Eastern Studies

Michael A. Reynolds  
Associate Professor, Department of Near Eastern Studies; Director, Program in Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies

Daniel J. Sheffield  
Assistant Professor, Department of Near Eastern Studies; John Witherspoon Bicentennial Preceptor

Sharmin Mossavar-Rahmani  
Chief Investment Officer, Consumer and Wealth Management, Goldman Sachs

Moulie Vidas  
Associate Professor of Religion and the Program in Judaic Studies

Muhammed Qasim Zaman  
Robert H. Niehaus ’77 Professor of Near Eastern Studies and Religion

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Executive Chairman, DNO ASA; Executive Chairman, RAK Petroleum PLC, Chairman, Foxtrot International LDC

Sharmin Mossavar-Rahmani  
Chief Investment Officer, Consumer and Wealth Management, Goldman Sachs

Michael M.J. Fischer  
Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities; Professor of Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Amaney Jamal  
Dean, School of Public and International Affairs; Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Politics

Elaine Sciolino  
Author; Contributing writer, former Paris Bureau Chief, The New York Times
Fall Events 2022

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 Bakhhash, 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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