2019 – 2020
YEAR IN REVIEW
There was no COVID-19 in Charles Dickens’ time, but for our program this was possibly the best and worst of times. Over the past year, our world, our communities, and our families faced new and daunting challenges. A global pandemic led to much loss, agony and disruption. Social upheaval caused by race, gender, and economic inequalities in the U.S. created new traumas, and reignited old grievances. The people of Iran, too, faced unparalleled crises including mass arrests, unjust executions, and a crumbling economy, compounded by a woefully mismanaged public health crisis. These myriad and formidable challenges thus made this the worst of times.

But in spite of the enormity of these challenges, the determination, encouragement, and unwavering commitment to the best values of our country that emanate from our students, our community, and our colleagues, have made this no less the best of times. We can celebrate our success in offering our classes, supporting our faculty and student research, and continuing not just our lectures, but our concerts and film screenings. The magic of Zoom helped make all of this possible and additionally allowed us to reach a larger and more global audience. We even increased our normal range of activities to address the new urgent needs of our global community. In particular, we organized talks by some of the Iranian diaspora’s most acclaimed scientists dealing with diseases like COVID-19. Along with such sobering programs, we also organized less-tasking events like a concert by masters of Persian classical music.

In the spring, we planned to celebrate the arrival of a new important archival collection at Stanford with an international conference. Shahrokh Meskoob has emerged as one of contemporary Iran’s most acclaimed and posthumously celebrated public intellectuals. His papers, covering more than six decades of intense intellectual pursuits, are a critical new addition to our already substantial archival collection on modern Iran’s literature, politics and diplomacy. Although we could not host the original iteration of the conference, we are pleased to be able to offer it this fall, reformatted for the virtual world. To celebrate another remarkable collection, the Zahedi archive, Hoover Press published A Window into Modern Iran, a handsome commemorative text offering a glimpse into the rich array of documents available in the collection.

Later in the year, we launched a new series of conversations focused on the women’s movement in Iran. Our attempt to address this critical aspect of modern Iranian culture and politics dates back to the commencement of our program, and the first Bita Prize given to Simin Behbahani, the grand dame of women’s poetry in the post-revolutionary years. The new conversations featured diverse perspectives from political figures and journalists inside Iran to scholars and feminists in the Iranian diaspora. It continues to be our hope to represent the full range of views on this important aspect of modern history. In this spirit, we are screening a new acclaimed film
on the life and struggles of Nasrin Sotoudeh, an iconic figure in the Iranian civil and human rights movement.

Our effort to stage another of Professor Beyzaie’s never before performed plays, *Dash Akol According to Marjan*, at Stanford has, sadly, been delayed by the on-going pandemic. Happier news is the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Professor Beyzaie’s productive presence in our midst. We hope to soon share the good news that his plays staged at Stanford and *Dash Akol* have been published as a collection.

We look forward to this year’s Bita Prize (reimagined as a virtual celebration), to be awarded to Ebrahim Golestan, one of modern Iran’s most influential writers, film makers and critics; in addition to further virtual film screenings, performances, and discussions.

Even in the domain of support for our program, in spite of overall economic difficulties brought about by COVID-19, two of our endowments—the Zahedi Family Endowment and the Hassan and Mahvash Milani charitable remainder trust—saw increases in the course of the last year. Our work would not be possible without the generous support of Hamid and Christina Moghadam, Bita Daryabari, and Shidan and Mehran Taslimi—this year in particular, their support has been indispensable.

As we all hope for better days in the coming year, we are encouraged by your sustained support of our program and we hope in next year’s annual report, we can simply say it is the best of times.

Abbas Milani
Hamid & Christina Moghadam
Director of Iranian Studies

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Event Highlights

The challenges of the 2019-2020 academic year resulted in a new landscape of events. Speakers discussed a wide array of topics including: early Iranian poetry, Iranian cooking, world history, international relations and economics, and the COVID-19 impact, among others. Collaborations this year included programming with the Freeman Spogli Institute, Stanford Global Studies, the Persian Student Association, Taube Center for Jewish Studies, the Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages, as well as off campus groups like the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans and Pars Equality Center.

Voices of Dissent

Journalists Jila Baniyaghoob and Bahman Ahmadi Amouee spent time in Iran’s infamous Evin prison. On June 9, 2020, they discussed their prison memoirs and their ongoing work in a talk titled “Voices of Dissent.” Jila spent her career reporting on issues affecting women and children, particularly on the impact of war. Imprisoned several times, she discussed her book Women of Evin: Ward 209 and the on-going challenges journalists face in Iran. Bahman wrote a definitive book on Iran’s political economy and became a target of the regime during the 2009 Green Movement. Through a series of hidden letters addressed to Jila, he wrote a rare and detailed account of his years in Evin that shaped his recent book Life in Prison. At great personal risk, Jila and Bahman agreed to speak to Dr. Abbas Milani, director of the Iranian Studies Program, live from their home in Iran.
Discussions of the women’s movement in Iran have been a part of the Iranian Studies Program since its founding and continue to be an essential part of the program. Past conversations with Simin Behbahani, Ziba Mir-Hossaini, Farzaneh Milani, Shahrnush Parsipur, Mahshid Amirshahy, and Masih Alinejad are just a few of the speakers who have discussed this topic over the years. This year, a series of talks with prominent women activists presented a diversity of thought and experience and helped further the discussion of the ongoing struggle for women’s rights in Iran.

Mahnaz Afkhami, a leading activist for women’s rights and former Minister for Women’s Affairs in Iran before the 1979 revolution, discussed her pioneering work in diplomacy, women’s literacy, and the importance of helping women gain economic independence.

Jila Baniyaghoob, an activist, journalist, and author, spoke live from her home in Iran and discussed her work, time spent in Iran’s Evin prison, and the ongoing challenges women journalists face in Iran. A founding member of the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality, she spoke about the fight to alter the discriminatory laws against women in Iran.

Mehrangiz Kar, a human rights lawyer from Iran, writer, speaker and activist, discussed the history of the women’s movement in Iran, missed opportunities for advancing women’s rights under the Shah, the perceived risks of compromise, and the broader challenges of working within an existing system to make lasting change.

Faeze Hashemi Rafsanjani, a women’s rights activist, former member of the Iranian parliament, the founder and publisher of Zan magazine, and daughter of a former president, spoke live from Iran. She discussed a culture of patriarchy, discriminatory laws, and insincere efforts of reformist men as some of the barriers to equal rights for women; and argued for an Islamic feminist interpretation of the Quran as a remedy.

Mansoureh Shojae, a prominent activist and the founder of several programs related to women’s rights, discussed prominent women activists and the long struggle for women’s rights in Iran, the complex dynamics between various parties and perspectives, and the changes and challenges from pre-revolutionary to post-revolutionary movements.
Kayhan Kalhor, an internationally acclaimed virtuoso on the kamancheh (spiked fiddle), was awarded the 12th Bita Prize for Persian Arts at Stanford University on November 20, 2019. The award ceremony included remarks by Iranian Studies director Abbas Milani, Ms. Bita Daryabari, Professor Bahram Beyzaie, Stanford Provost Persis Drell, and concluded with a moving solo performance by Kalhor himself.

“[Kayhan Kalhor] has used the universal language of music, one that does not broach geographic or linguistic borders, to show our common humanity...He is certainly and proudly Iranian, but music, too, is his home. And using a most traditional of Iranian instruments, he has the capacity to make sublime sounds that touch the heart and mind of every lover of music, everyone who appreciates and celebrates humanity,” said Bita Daryabari in her speech.

Through his many musical collaborations, Kalhor has been instrumental in popularizing Persian music in the West and is a creative force in today’s music scene. In his efforts at popularizing and advancing Persian traditional music, Kalhor has already left an indelible mark in musical and cultural spheres worldwide.

A Grammy-award winner, he has released more than 20 albums, has composed music for Iran’s most renowned vocalists, including Mohammad Reza Shajarian and Shahram Nazeri, and has performed and recorded with many of Iran’s greatest artists. Kalhor is an original member of Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble with whom he continues to compose for and tour with.

“I am deeply moved and honored, for several reasons, not just because this is a precious award but also because this same award has been in many great hands that I love and respect a lot,” said Kalhor when accepting the award.
The Stanford Festival of Iranian Arts hosted three concerts, two film screenings, a workshop, and several lectures with more than 1,200 attendees.

**Cooking in Iran: Regional Recipes and Kitchen Secrets**
Najmieh Batmanglij
November 21, 2019

**Secret Tale of the Tanbour**
Ali Akbar Moradi, with Arash Moradi, Kourosh Moradi, and Mehdi Bagheri
January 31, 2020

**Rereading the Ten Nights**
Mandana Zandian
March 5, 2020

**Virtual Concert: Distant Harmonies**
Ali Akbar Moradi, with Arash and Kourosh Moradi
May 12, 2020

**Film Screening: Chicken with Plums**
Followed by Zoom conversation with Marjane Satrapi
September 2, 2020

**Writing to Save Memory, Myth, and Ritual?**
Moniro Ravanipour
February 4, 2020

**Workshop: Rhythm in the Early Stages of Persian Poetry**
Mohsen Namjoo with Yahya Alkhansa
February 6, 2020

**Iranian Visions of Modern and Contemporary Art**
Fereshteh Daftari
December 5, 2019
Congratulations to the newest graduates of the Iranian Studies minor program, Amirah Goldberg and Persiana Saffari! We wish them the very best in their next endeavors.

**Amirah Goldberg** decided to pursue a minor to add an interdisciplinary perspective to her studies. “For someone whose mantra is ‘the personal is political,’ political science was an obvious choice. It wasn’t as easy as that though, as my scholarly interests are interdisciplinary,” she said. “That’s where global studies came into the picture.”

In the fall, she is starting a master’s degree program at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. “My Iranian Studies minor has opened a variety of intellectual doors through intensive language training, and the opportunity to study Iranian cinema and politics,” she said. “It is through these doors that I will be moving onto my graduate studies, where Persian literature and film are likely to be front and center.”

“While I was eager to study engineering to learn how to design breakthrough technologies, I was equally driven to have an interdisciplinary education,” said **Persiana Saffari**, who graduated with both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in electrical engineering, as well as minors in biology and global studies, with a concentration in Iranian studies.

In the fall, Persiana is excited to be starting medical school. She believes her minor program has played an important role in preparing her for the future. “Minoring in global studies gave me the invaluable opportunity to study Iranian politics, culture, language, and public health. The unparalleled instruction I received will last me a lifetime; and I feel eager and equipped to use the lessons learned from my classes to effect meaningful change in medicine and policy.”

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**Fall 2020 Featured Courses:**

- U.S. Relations with Iran (POLISCI 118P), Abbas Milani
- The Iranian Cinema: Image and Meaning (GLOBAL 249A), Bahram Beyzaie
- Iranian Cuisine (GLOBAL 104), Abbas Milani

**Minor in Global Studies with a Specialization in Iranian Studies:**

- Examine a pivotal country in the critical region of the Middle East.
- Prepare for careers in policy, government, business, research, and teaching.
- Learn Persian—the language of poets like Rumi.
Undergraduate and graduate students received student grants from the Iranian Studies Program to further their research related to Iran.

**Student Research**

**Alexandria Brown-Hedjazi**, a Ph.D. candidate in art history with a certificate in Iranian studies, worked on a cartographic research with the David Rumsey Map Center at Stanford in order to prepare an exhibition on “Mapping Early Modern Iran” in the coming academic year.

**Daniella Farah**, a Ph.D. candidate in Jewish history, conducted interviews and archival research for her dissertation on the Jews of 20th century Iran, focusing on the themes of education, national belonging, and the press among Iran’s Jews from the mid-1940s to the early 1980s.

**Cameron Mirhossaini**, a senior studying math and computer science and minoring in Iranian studies, explored questions of assimilation, class, immigration, and family history amongst the Iranian diaspora of the Washington metro area in a project titled “The Way to the Bread.”

**Student Internships**

During the summer Iranian Studies minor, **Matin Mirramezani**, interned with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Due to COVID-19, the internship took place remotely but Matin worked diligently to assist senior scholar Karim Sadjadpour on research related to U.S.-Iran relations.

The Stanford Global Studies (SGS) Division offers Stanford students an opportunity to extend classroom learning to immersive, cultural and professional experiences through the Global Studies Internship Program. Applications open in fall 2020.
New Course on French-Persian Cooking

In the fall of 2019, the Iranian Studies Program and the French and Italian Department offered a new course titled French-Persian Cooking. Over the course of eight weeks, students developed basic culinary skills, learned about traditional ingredients, and explored the rich culture of two regions of the world through food. The Persian-themed classes were taught by Najmieh Batmanglij (considered the “grande dame of Iranian cooking”), Naz Deravian, Hanif Sadr, and Faz Poursohi.

“I was doubly excited to take this class when I learned of its Persian component because I’m a quarter Persian, and I was brought up in a household that embraced Persian culture.”
– Jonathan Seymour (Mathematics and Management Science & Engineering ’20)

“I am from Iran, and this class is one of the ways for me to reconnect with my culture, learn more about the ways cuisine shapes culture, and learn how to cook.”
– Matin Mirramezani (Economics ’21, Minor in Iranian Studies)

Building off the success of this cooking class, in the fall of 2020 a new course entirely on Iranian cuisine is offered (Global 104). The course will feature guest chefs from around the U.S. and will teach students how to make Iranian stews and braises, appetizers and salads, soups, desserts and more.
The Stanford Iran 2040 Project launched in 2016 to conduct in-depth and interdisciplinary research on Iran’s future through the year 2040. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an uncertain domestic economy, and increasing international tension keep Iran in the spotlight. The research team, led by Dr. Pooya Azadi, continue to publish analytical reports on the state of Iran’s future.

Co-sponsored by the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at Stanford’s Freeman Spogli Institute, the Stanford Iran 2040 Project published three papers this year:

- “Migration and Brain Drain from Iran”
  Pooya Azadi, Matin Mirramezani, and Mohsen B. Mesgaran
  February 2019

- “Iran’s Large and Growing Financing Gap”
  Pooya Azadi and Matin Mirramezani
  September 2019

- “The Structure of Corruption in Iran”
  Pooya Azadi
  August 2020

Deficits and deviations from normal conditions for sustainable growth and gross foreign reserves (from “Iran’s Large and Growing Financing Gap”)
News & Publications

Selection of Recent Faculty Publications

_Mahi_, Bahram Beyzaie, Bisheh Publishing, 2020

_The Master and Margarita_, revised, annotated, and expanded 25th edition (translated by Abbas Milani), Mikhail Bulgakov, Farhang-i Nashr-i Nū, 2020

_Life in Prison_ (introduction by Abbas Milani), Bahman Ahmadi Amouee, Mazda Publishers, 2020


“The Post-Suleimani View from Iran,” Abbas Milani, Project Syndicate, January 5, 2020

“What the Soleimani killing means for the Iran nuclear deal,” Abbas Milani, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, January 5, 2020


“Occupation of the US Embassy; Turkmenistan II for the survival of the Islamic Republic (translated from Persian),” Abbas Milani, BBC Persian, November 4, 2019

“100th Anniversary of the Last King of Iran: Historical or Imaginary King? (translated from Persian),” Abbas Milani, BBC Persian, October 26, 2019

Celebrating Professor Beyzaie’s 10 Year Anniversary at Stanford University

Professor Bahram Beyzaie, one of Iran’s most acclaimed filmmakers, playwrights, and scholars of the history of Iranian theater, joined the Iranian Studies Program at Stanford in 2010. In the past decade he has taught thousands of Stanford students through courses on Iranian cinema, Iranian theater, and Iranian cinema in diaspora; written and directed six feature plays; given numerous lectures and workshops; and continues to teach, write, publish, and direct. A series of events will take place in the coming year to celebrate this important moment. Details about these events will be forthcoming. We are honored Stanford has been his home and look forward to the next decade of collaboration.
Thank you for your continued support of the Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies at Stanford University. The year ahead may continue to look different, but we are committed to continuing our mission and hope you will join us. In the 2020-2021 academic year, plans are under way for the 13th Bita Prize for Persian Arts; the Meskoob archive launch conference will go online; and the lecture series will continue in a virtual format.

If you missed any lectures or events, join our email list; follow us on Facebook; subscribe to our YouTube channel; keep in touch with us on Instagram, Telegram, or Twitter; download audio recordings from our SoundCloud account; or explore our website.

We look forward to seeing you in person soon and wish everyone health and safety until then.