

## Iranianness in Flux: Iranian Identities Revisited

Conference

4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> of June 2025

Harvard rom, Kristiania University College, Oslo

### Program

**Day 1: Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> of June**

**Kristiania University College**

**Live Stream Access:** <https://kristiania.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=2246fb16-4aba-442a-ba3d-b2d70076a48d>

15.00-15.30 Mingling

15.30-15.45 Introduction

15.45-17.15 Session 1: Iranian Collective Memories, Identity, and Belonging

*Chair: Azadeh Kian*

- Firoozeh Kashani Sabet
- Saeed Paivandi *The crisis of collective memory and protest movements in Iran*
- Sharam Alghasi *Iranian Identities in Flux: Political Ideologies and Diasporic Fragmentation*

17.15-18.45 Session 2: Islam in Iranian Society

*Chair: Sharam Alghasi*

- Roja Fazaeli
- Mojtaba Mahdavi *Rethinking the Dialectics of Islam and Iranian Identity: A Constructivist Approach*
- Farhad Khosrokhavar *Iranian Youth: Non-Religious Citizenship through a Free Body*

**Day 2: Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> of June**

**Kristiania University College**

**Live Stream Access:**

<https://kristiania.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=9d700ec6-4f73-4767-ab6e-b2d7007db02f>

10.15-12.00

**Session 3: Iranian Nationalism**

*Chair: Kamran Matin*

- Ali Ansari
- Iqan Shahidi *Reimagining Iran's Decline: Javad Tabatabai's Prescriptive Historiography and its Impact on Iranian Nationalism and Identity*
- Hadi Miri Ashtiani *Revisiting Nationalism and Authoritarianism: A Critical Study of Emerging Opposition Discourses in Iran*

12.00-13.30

**Session 4: Contested Identities and Sociopolitical Movements in Contemporary Iran: Gender, Ethnicity, and Ideological Dynamics**

*Chair: Kamran Matin*

- Sara Kermanian *Gender and the Inter-Subaltern Geopolitics of Iranianness: Challenging Dualist Imaginaries through the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Journey from Kurdistan to Iran*
- Mahtab Dadarsefatmahboob *Jin, Jiyan, Azadi and Difference: How Diasporic Iranian Feminists Approach the Question of Diversity*
- Muhammad Rigi *Perspectives of Intellectual and Social Movements in Balochistan on Identity in Iranian Policy-Making*

14.15-15.45

**Session 5: Contesting Identities: Gender, Sexuality, and Resistance in Contemporary Iran**

*Chair: Azadeh Kian*

- Shirin Khayambashi *Sexualized and tabooed Iranian women: An in-depth analysis of the Iranian queer experience*
- Mahdis Sadeghipouya (online) *On the consideration of the intersectionality of oppressions in sociopolitical movements in contemporary Iran. How Iranian queer activists got on stage?*
- Zahra Bagheri-Shad *Everyday Resistance of Women in Iran, and Advancing Against the System of Domination*

15.45-17.15 Session 6: Digital Dynamics and the Reconfiguration of Iranian Identity

Chair: Mojtaba Mahdavi

- Amir Salehi *Disrupting the Sacred: Gen Z, Digital Dissent, and the Reconfiguration of Authority in Iran*
- Nastaran Saremy(online)
- Ali Akbar Mousavi *Peace-Tech and the Shaping of Collective Identity in Iran's Oppositional Tendencies*

17.15-18.45 Session 7: Iranian Left

Chair: Saeed Paivandi

- Afshin Matin-Asgari1 (online):
- Homayoun Sirizi (online):
- Amir Kianpour *Two Contradictory Visions of Iran: The Iranian Left's Unresolved Dilemma*

20.00 Conference dinner

**Day 3: Friday 6<sup>th</sup> of June**

**Kristiania University College**

**Live Stream Access:**

<https://kristiania.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=59d4414c-83ab-475a-a2e3-b2d7007e350a>

10.15-12.00 Session 8: Redefining Unity and Justice: Pluralism, and Transitional Frameworks in Future Iran

Chair: Saeed Paivandi

- Raha Bahraini
- Pooyan Aslani
- Zohreh Abdollahkhani *Will Sport Win the Competition in Uniting Iranians?*

12.00-13.30

Session 9: Reimagining Iranian Identity: Nationalism, and Sociopolitical Movements in the Post-Women, Life, Freedom Era

*Chair: Sharam Alghasi*

- Kamran Matin *The Interactive Universal: Democratising Iran's National Identity*
- Azadeh Kian *The Impacts of Women, Life, Freedom Movement on Gender, Ethnic, Class and Religious Social relations*
- Mehrdad Darvishpour *Multiplicity of Identity and Active Anti-Discrimination Politics*

14.15-15.45

Round-table session

Participants: Azadeh Kian, Mojtaba Mahdavi, Saeed Paivandi, Kamran Matin, Sharam Alghasi

## Participants



**Zohreh Abdollahkhani** is a PhD research fellow at the University of South-Eastern Norway and a board member and Co-Lead of the working group on Teaching and Career Development within the European Association for Sport Management (EASM). Zohreh holds a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering from Iran and a master's degree in sport management from South Korea, where she studied the representation of female Iranian athletes in Olympic coverage. A former professional athlete, she was a member of Iran's national ice climbing team for a decade and became the first Iranian woman to win a medal in ice climbing at the 2014 Asian Championships.

### **Abstract: Will Sport Win the Competition in Uniting Iranians?**

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, politicians have taken control of all societal arenas, including sport. The takeover of sports by the Islamic Republic regime has unique characteristics compared to other arenas, given sports' special platform both nationally and internationally. Women's sports have been banned for over a decade, while men's sports have been dominated by the regime. This takeover extends beyond occupying clubs and their facilities; it also involves appointing regime affiliates to managerial roles within each club to ensure the political agenda of the Islamic Republic is implemented and to capture potential financial benefits. These controls extend to every practical aspect of club operations, including fan management. Nevertheless, stadiums remain one of the few arenas where, despite extreme controls, opposition groups' activities, including political chants, are reflected. Conversely, the regime's agenda, including extremist

chants, has been heavily promoted by appointing extreme leaders within clubs, including radical fans as cheerleaders, to lead fandom behaviors, such as the so-called Ultra chants. This ensures that the chants do not channel a sense of unity among Iranians, nationalism, or criticism of the regime increasingly since the women life freedom uprising.

The fandom behavior of Iranian fans has recently gained attention; however, current studies tend to follow Western norms in examining the economic aspects of fandom, while the political dimensions remain largely unaddressed. This study aims to fill this gap by shedding light on the political nature of sports under the Islamic Republic regime at micro level. It seeks to answer the following questions: How are current political diversities reproduced in stadiums? How are diverse ethnicities among Iranians reflected in stadium chants? How are these connected to chants and actions outside stadiums? What is the role of the Islamic Republic in this? To answer these research questions, we developed a database of new forms of political expression that emerged during the women's life freedom uprising since September 2022, using social media and online news databases. These critically-loaded fandom expressions have been countered by dictated expressions that encourage divisions and focus on extremist agendas followed over the last forty-five years of the Islamic Republic's establishment, countering unity and nationalism, and igniting conflicts among different ethnicities. Through semi-structured interviews with former national football players, coaches, referees, fans, and game officials from different groups of the Iranians, we seek to understand the behind-the-scenes dynamics of these chants and how they direct political discourse within and beyond the stadiums.

**Keywords:** Inclusive citizen participation; "Woman, Life, Liberty" movement; decentralization and pluralism



**Professor Sharam Alghasi. Kristiania University College, Norway.**

Sharam Alghasi is a media sociologist focusing on the relationship between media and society, particularly the media's interaction with the multi-ethnic, cultural and religious Norway. His research includes a wide range of issues linked to migration in Norway and Europe. In particular, he is preoccupied with the question of migration in relation to media. His PhD dissertation from 2009 deals with the relationship between Iranian-Norwegian media consumption and their construction of identity, and strategies of adaption in Norwegian society. In this regard, Alghasi focuses as well on the questions of the religion of Islam, and nationalism in identity work among migrants with Muslim background.

### **Abstract: Iranian Identities in Flux: Political Ideologies and Diasporic Fragmentation**

Following the death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini in September 2022, Berlin witnessed the largest Iranian political gathering in the diaspora, with nearly 150,000 Iranians from various countries uniting to protest against the Islamic regime in Iran. This event marked a rare moment of unity for the Iranian diaspora, which, despite its internal divisions and differences, demonstrated significant strength in confronting the regime in Tehran. However, since the Berlin gathering, the political activities of

the Iranian diaspora have revealed substantial divisions, hindering the establishment of a common ground in their fight against tyranny. The Iranian diasporic landscape is characterized by considerable fragmentation, reflecting a wide range of political and cultural ideologies, choices, and preferences.

This paper aims to explore why a unified Iranian collective remains elusive. It argues that the diasporic condition reflects a battle of identities among diverse Iranian individuals and groups. To understand this interplay of diasporic practices and identity conflicts, the paper will first provide an account of the dominant political ideologies in modern Iranian history, namely Nationalism, Islam, and the Political Left. A central theme will be to investigate what Iran and Iranianness mean within these different ideologies. Subsequently, the paper will rely on data collected from the Iranian diaspora to demonstrate how historical forces continue to shape and influence Iranian political culture both within the diaspora and beyond.

**Keywords:** Iranian diaspora, political ideologies, identity conflict, collectivity, modernity, nation-building



**Ali Massoud Ansari** is a professor of modern history with a focus on the Middle East at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. He is also the founding director of the Institute for Iranian Studies. Born in Rome in 1967, he has written extensively on Iranian history and politics, including books like *Iran, Islam and Democracy* and *Modern Iran Since 1921*. His work has appeared in publications such as *The Guardian* and *The Independent*.

Discussant



**Hadi Miri Ashtiani** is an independent researcher in the field of social sciences. I hold a master's degree in social science research from the University of Tehran and a second master's in social studies from Iran Academia. My academic interests lie at the intersection of power relations, social movements, migration, and political sociology. My research is particularly concerned with the dynamics of domination and resistance, as well as the sociopolitical conditions that shape collective action and discourse.

### **Abstract: Rethinking Nationalism and the Authoritarian Strong State: A Critical Analysis of the Political Projects of Ghoochani, Mardiha, and Pahlavi**

In parallel with the intensifying legitimacy crisis and the deepening political, social, and economic turmoil in the Islamic Republic of Iran, new discourses have taken shape within the Iranian opposition. These discourses are organized around key concepts such as the authoritarian strong

state, centralized nationalism, Iranshahri idea, economic development, and technocratic order. This article focuses on the views of three influential figures from different ideological currents - Mohammad Ghoochani, Morteza Mardiha, and Reza Pahlavi—and, through the lens of critical discourse analysis, seeks to explore the shared elements and ideological divergences within their political projects. The findings suggest that despite their apparent discursive and rhetorical differences, these discourses converge at a deeper level in reproducing a form of nationalist strong state. This discourse, rooted in an authoritarian strong state, centralization, skepticism toward participatory democracy, and elite-oriented governance, carries the latent risk of perpetuating cycles of repression and exclusion. The article critiques these convergences and stresses the urgency of developing alternatives based on participatory democracy, the decentralization of power, and the empowerment of civil society institutions.

**Keywords:** Authoritarian Strong State, Centralized Nationalism, Opposition, Critical Discourse Analysis, Technocratic State, Participatory Democracy



**Pooyan Aslani**

**Abstract: From 'Woman, Life, Liberty' to a Republic Without Domination: A Roadmap Manifesto for a New and Pluralistic Social Contract in Iran**

**Issue and Objective:** This article aims to demonstrate how, following the 2022 uprising, a social contract can be established in Iran that centers on the principle of "freedom as non-domination" while simultaneously recognizing the plurality of nations and genders. **Theoretical Framework and Method:** By integrating Philip Pettit's modern republicanism, Danielle Allen's participatory equality, and Sofia Näsström's dynamic legitimacy theory, the research employs normative analysis and a case study of the "Woman, Life, Liberty" movement. **Innovation:** The author introduces the ten-part series "Manifestos of Woman, Life, Liberty" as a roadmap for institutional transition; the first three manifestos—popular legitimacy, non-dominating freedom, justice, and plurality—have been published, and the fourth manifesto focuses on decentralization. Each manifesto offers specific mechanisms for institutionalizing non-dominating freedom, from popular legitimacy to polyphony to federal/confederal models. **Findings:** The analysis shows that combining the principle of non-domination with inclusive participation and dynamic legitimacy can reduce identity gaps and structural inequalities in Iran and prevent the reproduction of centralizing domination. **Significance:** The proposed model, in addition to its applicability to Iran,

presents a "woman-centered and multinational social contract" model for regional democratic movements.

**Keywords:** Non-dominating freedom; new social contract; modern republicanism; inclusive citizen participation; "Woman, Life, Liberty" movement; decentralization and pluralism



**Zahra Bagheri-Shad**

**Abstract: Everyday Resistance of Women in Iran, and Advancing Against the System of Domination, PhD Researcher in Gender Studies, Sweden**

James Scott, a prominent American anthropologist, discusses "forms of everyday resistance" in his book "Weapons of the Weak" and explains how poor Javanese peasants engage in everyday forms of resistance against the powerful ruling class. They mock them, defy them, delay or sabotage their work, and by persisting in these actions, they sometimes force the ruling class to change their ways or abandon certain transgressions. According to Scott, everyday resistance is a form of resistance based on the actions of individuals in their daily lives. It is considered the most common form of resistance against oppression. This particular form of resistance is a way to undermine power that is dispersed, quiet, and seemingly invisible, with the aim of redistributing control over assets. Activities that take the form of everyday resistance are often considered safe and do not require much coordination or organization. Oppressed individuals and groups demonstrate their agency and weaken the ruling power through forms of everyday resistance. In recent years, the subject of women's agency and political activity has been at the center of attention for the media, politicians, and public opinion. However, attention to this issue, both in the media and in the political arena, is still limited and almost entirely focused on Western countries and the "Global North." On the other hand, the focus on figures such as Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, and other well-known personalities has led to the neglect of many everyday forms of political activity by women in various societies. Women adopt diverse and multiple ways of resisting dominant discourses, which are not necessarily organized. In this article, I aim to explore the everyday resistance methods of women in Iran since the inception of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement and evaluate these methods from an intersectional approach. I will also draw on the theories of Asef Bayat, an Iranian sociologist, regarding women's activities in countries with authoritarian regimes; activities that Bayat refers to as everyday resistance and emphasizes their effective power.



**Raha Bahreini is an Iranian-Canadian human rights lawyer and researcher.** She works with Amnesty International, focusing on human rights violations in Iran, including wrongful imprisonment, torture, the death penalty, and discrimination against women and minorities. She has also contributed to reports addressing issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. She studied Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto and later earned her law degree from York University in Toronto. She also holds a master's degree in International Human Rights Law from the University of Essex in the UK. Before joining Amnesty International, she worked as a senior researcher at the University of Essex, assisting the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran.

Abstract:



**Mahtab Dadarsefatmahboob is an Iranian feminist activist, and researcher at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany.** Her research explores the intersection of migration, class, race, and gender, focusing on the experiences of Iranian migrant mothers in Germany. Through a critical examination of integration policies and discourses and deploying a biographical method, she investigates how racialization and mothering shape migrant identities and belonging. Her research interests include narrative research, intersectionality theory and identity, decolonial feminism and ethnographic and community based research methods."

**Abstract:** This research explores how diasporic Iranian feminists in Germany conceptualize and practice diversity in their activism, particularly in relation to the radical intersectionality of the Jin, Jiyan, Azadî (Woman, Life, Freedom) revolutionary movement. The WLF revolutionary movement originated in Kurdistan and later spread across Iran. The slogan 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' is deeply rooted in the Kurdish freedom movement, and the "Kurdish Question" is arguably a key element of the WLF movement. As such, the approach of diasporic Iranian feminists to Kurdish political demands could serve as a critical lens for assessing their commitment to diversity and solidarity. Due to the pivotal role of the Berlin-based Woman\*, Life, Freedom Collective in co-organizing the largest ever anti-regime rally of Iranians abroad in October 2022, I shall focus on this Collective and ask how their approach to diversity was received and negotiated within their group. Drawing on a critical reading of the concept of intersectionality as both an interdisciplinary perspective and a methodological approach, this research explores how these feminist activists engaged with overlapping systems of power — including those around "race", ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and exile — in their discourse and practice. I will therefore attempt to demonstrate whether and how the feminist principle of solidarity in difference (in this case concerning the Kurdish

demands for national recognition as well as gender diversity) has shaped their approach towards diversity in general.

**Keywords:** Feminist Solidarity, Intersectionality, Gender Diversity, Kurdish Question, “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi”, Discourse Analysis



**Dr. Mehrdad Darvishpour** is an Iranian-Swedish sociologist, senior lecturer, and associate professor at Mälardalens University in Sweden. At the beginning of the 1990s, he was one of the leaders of the national anti-racism union Stoppa Racism. Since the student movement in Iran in 1999, he has focused his activities more on human rights by founding the Solidarity Committee with Iranian People. In both the Green Movement in 2010 and the Movement of Woman, Life, Freedom, he organized the largest demonstration in Stockholm to support the Iranian people's struggles for peace and freedom. He is a well-known figure of the Iranian republican movement. Since the 1990s, Darvishpour has published several books and academic articles on Iranian women, gender issues, ethnicity, discrimination, and integration.

### **Abstract: Multiplicity of Identity and Active Anti-Discrimination Politics**

National and ethnic identities are social constructs stemming from a "sense of belonging" rather than objective concepts. These identities can become more or less prominent depending on the context. Today, ethnicity is defined by "shared cultural characteristics," while relying on "biological characteristics" to create racial distinctions has been used to justify racial superiority. In ethnology, "shared culture" strengthens intra-group relations. The question is to what extent we can emphasize a shared group sense of belonging without highlighting the boundary between "us" and "the other." Additionally, culture is not static, and ethnic and national groups are not homogeneous entities defined solely by shared culture. A common language may be the only objective element in defining most ethnic identities, playing a significant role in maintaining intra-group relations, although some view it skeptically. In defining a nation, geographical boundaries and the presence of a national government are more objective concepts. Even "shared history," whether in defining a nation or ethnicity, is influenced by shared beliefs and a sense of belonging, yielding different interpretations across time and groups.

Essentialist perspectives reduce ethnic relations to the "cultural characteristics" of a specific group in contrast to "the other," often used in cultural racism. Emphasizing national and ethnic identities based on shared culture risks creating a homogeneous image through myth-making and a static understanding of culture, which does not align with the reality of cultural multiplicity and transformations. The dynamic nature of culture and the existence of dominant culture, subcultures, and alternative cultures within national and ethnic groups cannot be denied, making the overlap of cultural concepts with both nation and ethnicity highly problematic.

With this account as a point of departure, I explore dimensions in the Iranian political landscape that I believe are major obstacles to fundamental changes in Iran, focusing on how the political right employs various concepts to shape and reshape narratives about Iran's past, present, and

future. The basis of my proposed policy, which both strengthens pluralistic national solidarity, provides a platform for multiple identities to flourish, and most importantly, eliminates the inequalities of ethnic power relations, is an active anti-discrimination policy.



**Mohammad Rigi Derakhshan is a graduate in International Relations from Istanbul Medeniyet University**, who defended his doctoral dissertation titled "The Perspective of Sunni Muslims in Iran (Kurds and Baluchis) on Iran's Foreign Policy" in 2020. He has published the books "Media and Politics in Iran" (Chizegi, Istanbul, 2021) and "The History of Political and Social Developments in Baluchistan (1971-1989): The Leftist Movement in Baluchistan" (Ketar Arzan, Stockholm, 2023). Additionally, a book titled "The Political History of Baluchistan (Defenders of Sarhad)" is currently being published by Baran Publishing in Sweden.

### **Abstract: Perspectives of Intellectual and Social Movements in Balochistan on Identity in Iranian Policy-Making**

The foundation of policy-making in Iran is built upon identities such as Iranian nationalism and Islamic (Shiite) ideology. These identities, which are prominent in policy-making, can be analyzed through the lens of constructivist theory, as this theory considers identity to be a determining factor in policy-making. Today, the issue of identity and its nuances has become a major topic among intellectual and social movements in Balochistan. This study aims to explore the perspectives of Baloch elites on the dominant identities in Iran, namely Iranian nationalism and Islamic ideology, within the context of policy-making. Additionally, the researcher seeks to outline the feedback from Sunni Islamist movements, Baloch nationalism, and progressive (leftist) movements in Balochistan regarding these identities. This paper is based on field interviews with intellectual and social movements in Balochistan, conducted before and after the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. By analyzing the views of these movements on Iranian nationalism and Islamic ideology, the researcher examines the need for a redefinition of Iranian identity during the democratic transition period in Iran, one that encompasses inclusive pluralism.

**Keywords:** Iranian Identity, Islamic Identity (Shiite Ideology), Sunni Identity, Baloch Identity



**Professor Roja Fazaeli. University of Dublin, I-reland.** Roja Fazaeli is Professor in Islamic Civilisations and Fellow at Trinity College Dublin. Roja has published widely on the subjects of Islamic feminisms, women religious authorities, women's rights in Iran, and the relationship between human rights and religion. She is the recipient of a European Research Council Consolidator grant to lead a five-year project (2023-2028) "BILQIS: Building Conceptual and Methodological Expertise for the Study of Gender, Agency and Authority in Islam." She is also a Principle Investigator on NETHATE, a Marie Skłodowska-Curie

Actions funded project investigating the nature of hate in society. She is currently the chairperson of the board of directors of the Immigrant Council of Ireland and a member of the board of directors of Front Line Defenders, Scholars at Risk Europe and Iran Academia. Roja has been the Scholars at Risk representative at Trinity College since 2009 and was previously on the boards of the Irish Refugee Council, Azadi Andisheh (the Association for Freedom of Thought) and Amnesty International Ireland.

Abstract:



**Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet is a prominent scholar of Iranian and Middle Eastern history.** Her research addresses issues of national and cultural formation and gender concerns in Iran, as well as historical relations between the U.S., Iran, and the Islamic world. She is the author of highly influential works including *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946*, which analyzed land and border disputes between Iran and its neighboring countries. These debates were pivotal to national development and cultural production and have significantly informed the territorial disputes in the region today.

*Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran*, a wide-ranging study of the politics of health, reproduction and maternalism in Iran from the mid-19th century to the modern-day Islamic Republic, received the Book Prize from the Journal of Middle East Women's Studies for outstanding scholarship in Middle East gender relations.

Abstract:



**Sara Kermanian is a PhD candidate in the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, UK.** Her research lies at the intersection of international relations and political theory, with a particular focus on world-ordering praxes, especially as they intersect with questions of time in world politics, international imaginaries, gender and geopolitics, inter-subaltern interactions, and imaginaries of in/justice and resistance. Seeking to explain the roots of world-ordering praxes and imaginaries without resorting to dualist methodologies, she

critically engages with postcolonial theory, historical sociology, Marxism, and post-structuralism. Her regional focus is on the Middle East, particularly Kurdistan, Iran, and Turkey. Her PhD thesis develops a framework for understanding the entangled formation of international imaginaries, with a particular emphasis on the co-constitution of democratic confederalism and neo-Ottomanism, highlighting the significance of entangled inter-subaltern interactions and intersocietal paternalistic relations.

## **Abstract: Gender and the Inter-Subaltern Geopolitics of Iranianness: Challenging Dualist Imaginaries through the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Journey from Kurdistan to Iran**

This article challenges dualist understandings of Iranianness that define it in opposition to the colonial West, arguing instead that the vanguard role of the Kurdish region of Iran (Rojhelat) in the Women, Life, Freedom movement must be understood through the entanglement of inter-subaltern colonialism and the strategic reconfiguration of patriarchal gender norms in Iranian nation-building. The reliance on a West–Rest binary in postcolonial frameworks obscures how these internal dynamics shape national identity, failing to account for the role of gender and inter-subaltern relations in non-Western nation-building processes. The article proposes an inter-subaltern turn in understanding the gender–geopolitics nexus, examining how colonial and gendered hierarchies have shaped Iranian national identity both before and after the 1979 revolution. It argues that anti-patriarchal tendencies within the Kurdish left in Rojhelat emerged as a response to these processes, making it particularly receptive to the slogan Women, Life, Freedom, which originated in the Kurdish freedom movement in Turkey and Syria. The Islamic Republic’s gendered geopolitical discourses further amplified the slogan’s significance as a tool of opposition and cross-group mobilization. By foregrounding these historical dynamics, this study situates Iranianness not as an identity formed in contrast to the West but in interaction with non-Western others, opening new avenues for exploring its contested and evolving construction through struggles over gender, ethnicity, and political power.



**Professor Farhad Khosrokhavar** is a retired professor at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. He has published about 26 books, some of which have been translated into various languages. His two recent English books are *Jihadism in Europe* (2021) and *Family and Jihadism*, a socio-anthropological study of the French experience (2022) in collaboration with Jérôme Ferret. Khosrokhavar’s last publication is “Iran: la jeunesse démocratique contre l’Etat prédateur”, Editions Fauves, Paris, February 2023.

## **Abstract: Iranian Youth: Non-Religious Citizenship through a Free Body**

In my article I attempt to show that in Iran the period of building a nation through Islam that began in 1979 is close and a new era emerges in which the young generations intend to build a new society, a new nation in reference to freedom. This freedom begins with the body that is secularized and rejects religious restrictions and ends up with the denunciation of theocracy and the aspiration for political freedom. In this movement, women play a major role. A new subjectivity is at stake with the younger generations, in particular women who reject the veil and mingle with men, expressing the aspiration toward a secular, democratic society. The 2022-2023 movement, Woman, Life, Liberty shows women as full-fledged citizens in a new nation that rejects religion as shaping social and political relations, the youth demanding a new, open society.



**Shirin Khayambashi** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Toronto Metropolitan University. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from McMaster University exploring in-group contestation of Iranian communities. She is a qualitative researcher specializing in immigration studies and identity development through an intersectional perspective. Her publication explores qualitative research methods, immigration settlements, and restructuring of social identity post-migration among Iranian and Muslim communities. Her recent project, funded by the competitive grant offered by the Brandon University Research Committee, explores the opportunities and challenges of settlement in small Canadian cities, focusing on Brandon, MB's international migration patterns.

### **Abstract: Sexualized and tabooed Iranian women: An in-depth analysis of the Iranian queer experience**

Discourse of female sexuality has been a tabooed topic among the Iranian communities. While the current women, life, freedom movement is raising international awareness about gender apartheid in Iran, freedom of sexuality has not received the same level of attention. Nika Shakarami's sexuality, who was only 16 years old at the time of her martyrdom, became a source of contestation on various social media outlets. The discursive dissonance regarding Shakarami's sexual orientation indicates a conflicting location of sexuality and queerness among Iranians. As suggested by Shakhshari (2012), the discourse of queer tolerance is politicized among global Iranians as a mode of resistance toward the Iranian government while still maintaining a dominant cultural narrative of gender and sexuality. In other words, this cultural narrative forces transgressors to negotiate their communal belonging by becoming culturally tolerable queers. I would however argue that discussion surrounding female queerness stems from the taboo female sexuality. This presentation explores the historical and cultural narratives of gender and sexuality to understand the foundations of the modern conception of sexuality in Iran and abroad. In this presentation, I will ask two interrelated questions: how have female sexuality and queerness explored in Iranian culture, and how does the dominant Iranian discourse of gender and sexuality govern sexual and gender politics? To address these issues, this presentation explores the history of sexuality of Iranian women and queer folks to examine the politicization of gender and sexuality and its related patterns with the politics of belonging.

**Key words:** Iranian Queers, Female sexuality, Iranian sexuality, History of sexuality



**Professor Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud. University of Paris, France.**

Azadeh Kian is a Professor of Sociology and Gender studies, Director of CEDREF and Les Cahiers du CEDREF (<https://journals.openedition.org/cedref/>), at the Université Paris Cité. Her recent books include *Femmes et pouvoir en islam* (Women and Power in Islam), Paris, Michalon, 2019. And *Rethinking Gender, Ethnicity and Religion in Iran: An Intersectional Approach to National Identity*, London & New York, I. B. Tauris. Bloomsbury, 2023, the Winner of the Latifeh Yarshater Book Prize, Persian Heritage Foundation, Association for Iranian Studies 2024. It was reprinted in 2025.

**Abstract: The Impacts of Women, Life, Freedom Movement on Gender, Ethnic, Class and Religious Social relations**

Iranian nationalism/Islamism made use of male-dominant discourse to stabilize a hierarchal social order along with the supposed “natural” stability of gender categories. Indeed, in addition to ethnicity, nation-state building reformulated social relations in terms of gender.

Women’s role in the national community has been defined first and foremost that of a mother; they are sacralized and understood as a “genetic resource” for the national community. As mothers, they ensure the future of the nation through their reproductive capacity. Since they give birth to future members of the nation, they also symbolize the honor of the nation and the community. Mothers are then associated with notions of purity, chastity, authenticity, and morality. Maternal female bodies are also used as an allegory of the nation/Islamic nation.

Therefore, the control of women and their sexuality is crucial to the process of national, religious and ethnic (re) construction, as women are supposed to reproduce the boundaries of national (religious and ethnic) groups. The womb becomes the predominant biopolitical space where states (and leaders of ethnic communities) practice sovereignty. The naturalist ideology reduces gender to biological sex, and limits social practices to gendered social roles. However, like ethnicity, gender and gendered performance are social constructions, themselves the result of social relations.

The Women, Life, Freedom Movement has had a number of intersectional, transformative impacts one of which is that women (activists) refused to be subjected to the neo-patriarchal authority of men. Through acts of resistance and civil disobedience or what Gayatri Spivak called “enabling violation”, a growing number of women reject binary thinking, and social institutions that have been working for a long time to fabricate gendered bodies through differential socialization. They try to take control of their destiny, including their bodies and sexualities. Through performative acts, those who believe that sexual and bodily freedom cannot be separated from fighting the Islamic regime transgress the Islamic norms, unveil and refuse to hide their bodies, sing, dance, and utter the urgent need for freedom. Against the cult of mourning thus

emerged the cult of joy, against division, unity and a new inclusive definition of Iranianness founded on equal rights to citizenship of all Iranians regardless of their gender, class, religion or ethnicity. Also a consciousness has stemmed from the emerging revolutionary practice according to which democracy, freedom, secularization and social justice are closely intertwined with gender, ethnic, religious, sexual or class equality. Women and other minorities, as major agents of change need to be beware not to be betrayed again by the return of nationalist and ethnicist discourses both inside the country and within the diaspora which need to be scrutinized and criticized.

**Keywords:** Gender, Nationalism, Religion, Ethnicity, Women's Movement, Intersectionality.



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### **Abstract: Two Contradictory Visions of Iran: The Iranian Left's Unresolved Dilemma**

This paper examines the role of leftist forces in shaping and perpetuating two distinct conflictual conceptions of Iran. Since the early 20th century, the Iranian left—despite its historical ruptures and ideological diversity—has been shaped by a persistent internal tension: on one hand, its foundational commitment to anti-imperialism; on the other, the empirical reality of its political subjects, who have been multiethnic and multinational. This tension has created a lasting bipolarity in the left's imagination of Iran, oscillating between the vision of a singular, unified nation and that of a plural, heterogeneous entity.

Communism in Iran emerged under the banner of anti-imperialism. Around the time of the October Revolution, anti-imperialism became the ideological cornerstone of all communist and socialist organizations—and even some nationalist ones. In key moments following waves of repression and defeat—most notably after the 1953 coup and at the crossroads of the 1979 Revolution—this discourse played a constitutive and fundamental role in organizing leftist forces. However, despite its internationalist aspirations, this form of anti-imperialism paradoxically contributed to the reproduction of Iran as a monolithic entity.

Although the Iranian left consistently opposed the Persian ethno-nationalist state-building project institutionalized by Reza Shah, the homogenizing logic of its anti-imperialist discourse—framing the struggle as a binary opposition between two monolithic and internally undifferentiated camps, namely Iran's progressive national sovereignty and Western imperialism—ultimately reinforced a singular, centralized vision of Iran. Conversely, throughout the 20th century, Iran's communist and socialist movements evolved in a centrifugal direction,

becoming increasingly aligned with national minorities. This is evident in the Azerbaijani-Turkish origins of the Edalat (Justice) Party, which became the Communist Party of Iran in 1920, the predominantly Kurdish composition of the Communist Party of Iran in 1983, and even the Jewish members of the Tudeh Party in the 1940s. Paradoxically, the pioneers of the Iranian left—the Social Democrats of Tabriz, among the first to raise the issue of foreign capital and imperialism—were Armenian. This mosaic composition of leftist forces laid the foundation for an alternative, pluralistic vision of Iran. By tracing these two historical trajectories, this paper investigates the dilemmas emerging from their intersection, with particular attention to some paradigmatic responses formulated at critical historical junctures.

**Keywords:** Iranian Left, Anti-Imperialism, National oppression, Communism in Iran, 1979 revolution, Internationalism



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**Abstract: Rethinking the Dialectics of Islam and Iranian Identity: A Constructivist Approach**

*What is the place of Islam within Iranian identity?* This presentation, informed by a constructivist and phenomenological approach and in contrast to cultural essentialism, explores this question in three interconnected parts. First, it argues that Islam is not a fixed essence but a lived and evolving reality shaped by Muslims themselves. *Islam is what Muslims make of it!* By situating Islam within the everyday lives of ordinary Iranians, it highlights how the *intersectionality* of class, gender, generation, ethnicity, and non-religious culture contribute to the diverse ways in which Islam is practiced and experienced. This constructivist lens reveals the fluid and contextual nature of “Muslimness” in contemporary Iran. Second, the presentation examines Iran’s hybrid cultural identity, rooted in three intersecting traditions: national, religious, and modern Western. These traditions are embodied in the intellectual and political movements of nationalism, socialism, and Islamism, each reflecting a complex interplay of ideas. Iranian nationalists have absorbed Islamic and Western influences; socialists draw from both nationalism and religion;

and Muslim forces have engaged with both nationalism and modern Western socialism. Key figures such as Mohammad Mosaddegh, Khalil Maleki, Mohammad Nakhshab, Mostafa Sho'a'iyān, and Ali Shari'ati exemplify this syncretic legacy. Third, it contends that the failure of Islamism in power, along with postrevolutionary structural and discursive transformations, has led to a shift toward *post-Islamism*—marked by the decline of Islamist discourses of exclusivism and the Islamic state's legitimacy. Yet Islam persists as a civil and cultural force.

In conclusion, in the age of *post-Islamism* and *post-secularism* we need to celebrate diversity and foster constructive, *agonistic* dialogue across identities and sociopolitical groups for the cultivation of an inclusive *Iranniat* and a democratic Iran. Iran's post-Islamist transformation embraces a pluralistic, inclusive identity, rejecting rigid religious interpretations in favor of a "*khoda-ye rangin kaman*" (rainbow god) – a metaphor gained significance during the *WLF* movement, embodying beauty, plurality, inclusivity, ethics and spirituality beyond state Islamist orthodoxy.

**Keywords:** Rainbow god, Muslimness and Post-Islamism, Hybrid identity, Constructivism, Intersectionality, Agonistic dialogue



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Kamran Matin is an Associate Professor of International Relations at Sussex University (SU), UK. His research interests include, uneven and combined development, non-Western experiences of modernity, modern state formation, nationalism, and the modern history and politics of Iran and Kurdistan. Matin is the author of *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change* (Routledge, 2013) and numerous articles and op-eds on Kurdish and Iranian politics, and co-editor of *Historical Sociology and World History: Uneven and Combined Development over the Longue Durée* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016) and Palgrave's *Minorities in West Asia and North Africa (MWANA)* series. He is also the director of Centre for Advanced International Theory (CAIT) at Sussex University.

Uneven and Combined Development over the Longue Durée (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016) and Palgrave's Minorities in West Asia and North Africa (MWANA) series. He is also the director of Centre for Advanced International Theory (CAIT) at Sussex University.

**Abstract: The Interactive Universal: Democratising Iran's National Identity**

Iranian nationalism constructs Iran's national identity based on the Persian language and culture, which it claims to be the common denominator binding, since time immemorial, a multiplicity of collective identities inhabiting the Iranian plateau. It defines each component of this multiplicity of collective identities as a *qowm* ('ethnicity' or 'ethnic group') that has a merely 'local' identity lacking any universal quality that could serve as the basis for national identity. Iranian nationalism therefore de-historicises Iranian national identity—evidently a modern phenomenon—and obfuscates, or even denies, the existence of the Persian as a 'particular' identity. And yet, at the

same time, Iranian nationalism universalises Persian identity into the national identity. The result is a conception of Iranian identity as an undemocratic cultural and political hierarchy, at the top

of which sits the Persian, structurally poised to homogenise its others through assimilation and/or politically exclude them through domination. This paper fundamentally challenges Iranian nationalism's account of national identity by demonstrating the substantive synergy between its notion of the 'national' and the Hegelian conception of the 'universal' as a self-sufficient, self-legislative, and self-transcendent particularity. It argues that the construction of a democratic national identity in a multicultural and multilingual context such as Iran requires a conception of the 'universal' that, instead of being internalist, is 'interactive'. I develop this two-pronged argument through a critical reading of Hegel's discussion of the 'universal' in his Introduction to

the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, showing how his internalist construction of the universal involves the violent homogenisation of 'difference'. Drawing on the works of Seyla Benhabib and Leon Trotsky, I then demonstrate how the 'universal' can be recast as plural and interactive, and therefore fundamentally amenable to cultural difference and gender diversity. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of this argument for the ongoing contestations around Iranian national identity instigated by the revolutionary movement of Jin, Jiyan, Azadi (Woman, Life, Freedom).

**Key Words:** Hegel, Internalism, Iran, National Identity, Uneven and Combined Development, Universal



**Afshin Matin-Asgari**, Distinguished historian, specializes in 20th-century Middle East, modern Iran, and modern Islamic political and intellectual movements. In 1993, Matin-Asgari received a doctoral degree in Middle East history from UCLA. His dissertation was published in 2001 as the book, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*. At Cal State LA, he teaches courses in Middle East history, world history, Islam, and comparative religion. Matin-Asgari has published 20 articles and book chapters.

Abstract:



**Seyed Ali-Akbar Mousavi** is a senior advisor and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at CRDC. His focus is on peace tech, which is the development of information and communication technology (ICT) for peace and conflict resolution/management in order to tackle the drivers of conflict, promote stability, and build peace. Peace tech also aims to reduce violent conflict by developing and using technology, media, and data.

## **Abstract: Peace-Tech and the Shaping of Collective Identity in Iran's Oppositional Tendencies**

In the wake of the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement, the question of Iranian collective identity has become increasingly contested, with diverse oppositional forces seeking to redefine Iranianness beyond traditional ideological frameworks. This paper explores the role of Peace-Tech—technologies and digital platforms designed to promote conflict resolution, dialogue, and civic engagement—in shaping a new Large Group Identity among Iran's opposition. By examining how digital tools facilitate communication, foster solidarity, and bridge ideological divides, this study highlights Peace-Tech's potential to transform political discourse and identity formation. Through an analysis of social media activism, encrypted communication networks, and online forums, this research demonstrates how Peace-Tech mitigates fragmentation within Iran's opposition by enabling decentralized organization, knowledge-sharing, and consensus-building. Additionally, it considers the challenges posed by state surveillance, digital repression of all stakeholders, and algorithmic biases that may reinforce divisions rather than unity.

By situating Peace-Tech within the broader historical and sociopolitical context of Iranian opposition to the movements, this article argues that technology is not merely a tool for resistance but a transformative force in shaping a Large Group Identity that transcends factionalism. Ultimately, this study contributes to discussions on how emerging digital infrastructures can foster an inclusive future for Iran, where diverse political and cultural narratives coexist.



**Professor Saeed Paivandi, University of Lorraine, France.** Saeed Paivandi completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology at the University of Tehran and his doctorate in the sociology of education and educational sciences at the University of Paris. He was a researcher at the Student Research Center from 1992 to 1997 and an associate professor at the University of Paris 8 from 1997 to 2011. Payvandi has been a professor at the University of Lorraine since 2011 and is a member of the French National Center for University Research and is the academic director of the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences (Iran Academia).

## **Abstract: The crisis of collective memory and protest movements in Iran**

In recent years, Iranian society has been engaged in divergent and tense debates about the historical events and political figures of the country's 20th century. Different interpretations of past history show that social groups within Iranian society do not judge the recent past in the same way. The debate is not about history itself or historical facts, nor about academic research on history, but about the way social groups perceive and understand these events. In a work dedicated to Bergson, Gilles Deleuze examines the relationship between time and memory from his perspective. Deleuze argues that two forms of memory should be viewed together: the surface formed by Remnants and the depth related to the perception of the moment. These two aspects,

concerning the past and the present, are like slices of different times that have merged together (Deleuze, 1996, p. 45). If we define collective memory in the simple framework of the tangible and intangible perspective of a society or social groups at a specific time period of the historical past, then from a sociological perspective, we can speak of a crisis of collective memory in Iran.

Collective memory is not only about the past, but also, in a way, combines the three tenses of the present, the past, and the future. At the same time, collective memory has an identity dimension and resembles a shared belief that binds individuals together and creates a kind of collective spirit (Halbwachs, 2013; Bouchat, Klein, 2019). For this reason, collective memory has a social function due to the role it plays in structuring and giving meaning to the group identity of individuals. The main objective of this discussion is a critical reflection on the role of collective memory in shaping the present and future, especially in the context of protest actions. At the same time, examining the key features of collective memory, such as multiplicity (ethnic, gender, ideological, political aspects...), and fluidity, allows for a critical analysis of its dynamics and relationship with collective imaginary, as well as its sources.



**Mahdis Sadeghipouya** was born in Tehran, Iran. After completing her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Economics, Women's studies, and Critical and social movement studies in Iran and the Netherlands, she completed her doctoral thesis in Gender and sexuality studies and Sociology, entitled "Revolutionary sisters. Transformative praxis of Muslim lesbian migrants and/or descendants of Muslim migrations in France" at the Laboratory for Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis. Her thesis focuses on the formation of activism among racialized lesbians in contemporary

France and their involvement in various social struggles: LGBTIA+, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-Islamophobia and Muslimophobia. She is a member of the scientific committee of the Dictionary of Gender in Translation, IRN (International Research Network) World Gender, and is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Sociological and Political Research in Paris.

**Abstract: On the consideration of the intersectionality of oppressions in sociopolitical movements in contemporary Iran. How Iranian queer activists got on stage?**

Although each sociopolitical context and each social movement has its own characteristics, and no two social movements experience the same evolutionary process, we can identify certain turning points in the history of contemporary social movements in so-called modern societies: one of these major elements that have marked the evolution of current social movements, including in Iran, is undoubtedly the expansion of knowledge around the theory of "Intersectionality". Indeed, the creation of a term to explain intersectional situations that had long been part of analyses of structures of domination, resulting oppressions, and resulting struggles prior to this proposal likely contributed to the advancement of analyses within or on (Iranian)

social movements, including women's rights/feminist movements, labor rights movements, and the queer non-movement.

Iranian queer people, as they have testified at least since the 1979 revolution and in the context of the struggle of the Iranian diaspora, have experienced exclusion from their comrades, just like those who came from far away from a "center" inhabited by the middle-class, Persianspeaking and Shiite population, and who have felt excluded over the years. Through this communication, I wish to share a sociological reflection on how queer activists have found their place within the current Iranian women's/feminist movement and how they have participated in the leadership of "Women\*, Life, Freedom" since September 2022. What strategies have been used to introduce intersectionality within this modern movement?



**Amir Abbas Salehi** is a PhD student in Religious Studies at McMaster University, working on the intersections of Gen Z, digital technology, jurisprudence, and religious authority in Iran. His broader research interests include political theology, Ethics, AI, and contemporary Shi'a thought. He previously earned a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Tehran.

### **Abstract: Disrupting the Sacred: Gen Z, Digital Rupture, and the Reconfiguration of Authority in Iran**

In recent years, Iran's Gen Z has deployed digital media — especially meme culture and performative dissent — to mock, destabilize, and reject the symbolic scaffolding of religious authority. This paper explores how sacred vocabularies such as shaheed, velayat, and umma, once central to the Islamic Republic's political-theological grammar, have been rendered hollow through repetition, contradiction, and ironic subversion online. A vivid example of this rupture is the viral phenomenon of turban dropping, where youth physically remove clerics' turbans in public — an act of memetic dissensus that challenges not just authority, but its very conditions of visibility. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's theory of dissensus, Jodi Dean's critique of communicative capitalism, and recent debates on epistemology and AI, I argue that Gen Z's digital politics constitutes a profound ontological shift rather than a reformist demand. These decentralized, affect-driven acts do not aim to propose an alternative theology; they signify the evaporation of shared horizons of sacrality and meaning.

The essay concludes by reflecting on the paradox of viral resistance: while these acts rupture traditional religious legitimacy, they risk being absorbed into spectacle culture, leaving transformation uncertain. This paper situates Iran's digital dissent within a broader crisis of authority in the algorithmic age, where sacredness dissolves under the weight of irony, speed, and circulation.

**Keywords:** Iran, Gen Z, religious authority, meme culture, dissensus, communicative capitalism



**Iqan Shahidi is a PhD candidate in Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge, UK.** He earned his undergraduate degree in Sociology from the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE). He then pursued a master's in social and Political Thought at the University of Sussex, followed by an MPhil in Intellectual History and Political Thought at the University of Cambridge.

**Abstract: Reimagining Iran's Decline: Javad Tabatabai's Prescriptive Historiography and its Impact on Iranian Nationalism and Identity**

This presentation explores Javad Tabatabai's theory of Iran's decline, focusing on its prescriptive dimension and its role in reshaping Iranian intellectual history. While his historical analysis has been widely discussed, Tabatabai's unique approach to historiography remains underexplored. He argues that Iranian historiography must be grounded in political philosophy to address the intellectual and political stagnation that led to national decline. In contrast to other Iranian intellectuals, who offer descriptive accounts of decline, Tabatabai posits that the decline of Persian political thought is both a cause and a consequence of broader societal degradation. This theory calls for a historiographical framework distinct from Western models. By examining key works such as *Ta'moli Darbāre-ye Irān*, *Mellat*, *Dollat va Hokumat-e Qānun*, and *Zavāl-e Andishe-ye Siāsi Dar Iran*, this presentation analyses Tabatabai's intellectual evolution. This study situates Tabatabai's ideas within broader debates on nationalism and Iranian identity, using methods from the Cambridge School of intellectual history to critically evaluate his historical contextualisation and the development of political thought.