



Research Interests

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I am broadly interested in comparative literature with an emphasis on dramatic literature, theater historiography, Middle Eastern theater, and literary translation. In particular, my research interests lie in the area of Iranian dramatic literature and theater. With a focus on the cultural history of contemporary Iran, my study attends to the questions of how Iranian theater reflects the socio-cultural ambiance of post-revolutionary Iran by navigating and negotiating with its cultural, political and social demands.

My doctoral research at the University of Maryland, *The Development of Theater in Post-Revolutionary Iran from 1979 to 1997*, examines the development of Iranian theater after the victory of the Revolution in 1979 through the Cultural Revolution years, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the two presidential terms of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997). Grounded in post-positivist theater historiography, this research studies the post-revolutionary dramatic literature, and productions in connection to their socio-political ambiance. The primary focus of my study is on the ways social structures inform the function and formation of texts/ productions in the 1980s and 1990s. From a broader perspective, my research argues the critical role of reformational discourses and inter-textual determination operating on the theatrical materials.

This study is grounded in extensive archival research. During my two visits to Iran in 2018 and 2019, I conducted four-month archival research at the National Library and Archive of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Library of Tehran City Theater Complex (Te'atr-e Shahr) where I accumulated 200 plays and more than 2000 relevant documents from magazine excerpts, to bulletins, posters, photos, reviews, interviews, and speeches from the 1980s and 1990s. Conducting this research was a transformative experience in acquainting me with a wider range of cultural resources and capacities.

The book project I am at the present engaged with is another contribution to Middle Eastern studies. In collaboration with my colleague Dr. Ali-Reza Mirsajadi, Assistant Professor of Theater Studies at DePaul University, we are co-editing the translation anthology, *The Dance of Mares and Other Plays from Post-Revolutionary Iran* which will appear from Seagull London Limited, Chicago University Press. Professor Carol Martin the director of the In Performance series at the University of Chicago Press, described the anthology book as “a tremendous asset to the field of theater studies” and hoped that it would be “a boon to international productions of Iranian theater.” I have translated three of the plays in this collection: Bahram Beyzaie’s *The Immolation of Senemar*, Mohammad Charmshir’s *The Dance of the Mares*, and Hamid Amjad’s *Oblivion*.

My proposal is based on my dissertation project at the University of Maryland. I intend to revise my dissertation into a book manuscript on the history of the Iranian theater from 1979 to 1997. Having been involved with the professional theater in Iran between 2012 and 2017, I realized the scarcity of scholarship on the rich post-revolutionary Iranian theater among the cultural studies on Iran. With the hope of bringing more visibility to the development of Iranian theater and drama, I started my archival research on the subject at the University of Maryland. In my dissertation, *The Development of Theater in Post-Revolutionary Iran from 1979 to 1997*, I examine the development of Iranian dramatic literature and theater after the victory of the Revolution on February 11 to the beginning of Reform era marked by the presidency of Mohammad Khatami. Grounded in post-positivist historiography, this archival research studies the post-revolutionary dramatic literature, and productions in connection to their spatial context. Based on Michel Foucault’s concept of “space of representation” the primary focus of my study is on the ways spatial structures, inform the function and formation of texts/ productions generated within those structures. My

proposed project argues the critical role of reformational discursive and inter-textual determination operating on the theatrical materials. I argue for example that the Cultural Revolution, the establishment of the Art Seminary (Howzeh Honari), and the Unit of the Evaluation of Dramatic Productions at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance shaped not only the trajectory of propaganda and agitprops but also affected the negotiating language of alternative playwrights like Beyzaie, Sa'edi, Charmshir, and Rahmanian among others.

In line with McConachie's "reading formation," this study explores the dramatic texts/ productions as "social events" that are in dialogue with the discursive influences shaping them, intrinsically from within. My project helps unsettle the ways historical surveys of literature or theater in Iran, study the texts and productions in isolation from each other and their historical context-- a familiar method in classical literary/theater historiography. From Bahram Beyzaie's highly classical *Death of Yazdgerd* (1981) to Mohammad Rahmanian's socio-political commentaries in *The Confidential Report of Octavio Valdez* (1987), Sadegh Hatefi's revisiting of indigenous theatrical forms in *Mourning for Siyavash* (1990), Charmshir's poetic readings of contemporary social issues in *Fatemeh Anbar* (1994), and Pari Saberi's epic opera *The Seven Cities of Love* (1995) I read these texts and their productions as "symbolic action" by exploring them in their discursive formations.

Studying Iranian drama and theater as one of the pivotal conduits for cultural engagement opens the door to the understanding of alternative ways of realizing and articulating democratic demands in contemporary Iran. A history of Iranian theater is a cultural study that navigates the profound social transition in modern Iran. This study is particularly important because in societies run by an authoritative ruling structure, the sites of dissidence and defiance transition to the symbolic domains of art where negotiating with socio-political codes of conduct are more effectively facilitated. Without such knowledge, we are left with inadequate analysis of historical shifts and continuities in Iran's cultural practices and their impact on the evolution of modern Iranian identity.