

Synopsis of Monograph and Research Agenda

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My proposed monograph builds upon my doctoral dissertation, which critically examined housing for marginalized groups in Iran through the lens of spatial justice and the dialectical relationship between the state and disenfranchised communities. Grounded in extended ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, my dissertation focused on two distinct case studies:

1. ZoorAbad, an informal, self-built settlement near Tehran, established by low-income residents in the absence of state-provided housing, and
2. Roshankouh, a Baha'i village in northern Iran, targeted for expropriation and demolition by the Islamic Republic.

Although geographically and demographically distinct, both communities share a common experience of dispossession through state-led planning, revealing the Iranian government's use of speculative and confiscatory strategies to seize common and private resources under the guise of formal development.

The primary focus of my dissertation was ZoorAbad. There, I argued that in the absence of social or public housing in Iran, self-built settlements must be recognized as legitimate alternatives to state housing. I further introduced the concept of the *squatter government* to describe how the Islamic Regime, rather than adopting a custodial role, exploits urban planning and policy tools to confiscate common and private resources. I use the term *squatter* metaphorically – as an adjective – to highlight how governments and their affiliated institutions can seize public lands and resources without the consent of their rightful owners: the society and communities to whom these spaces belong. This includes not only low-income urban dwellers but also religious minorities such as the Baha'is, whose properties have been expropriated under the Islamic property regime.

My secondary case, Roshankouh, exemplifies this process of spatial erasure. The village has been subjected to expropriation, land confiscation, and the criminalization of its residents, reflecting how the state uses spatial policy as a tool of persecution. While my dissertation concentrated primarily on ZoorAbad due to the constraints of scope and scale, the postdoctoral fellowship will allow me to center Roshankouh and further develop the manuscript into a book-length study.

While my dissertation laid the groundwork for these insights, this monograph aims to broaden the temporal and conceptual scope to include both the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic eras. Specifically, it aims to deepen two key areas of inquiry:

1. **The Islamic property regime after the 1979 revolution** and its role in enabling the systematic spatial persecution of Baha'is and other marginalized groups.

2. **The historical foundations of modern land governance in Iran (1940s–1979),** exploring how the modernizing Pahlavi state transformed property regimes and reorganized space through legal and bureaucratic means.

While my doctoral work primarily focused on post-1979 developments, the monograph will also undertake a deeper historical analysis of the Pahlavi era (1940s–1979)—a period marked by rapid modernization, land reforms, and the centralization of power. During this time, the state redefined categories of private, collective, and common property through cadastral surveys, rural resettlement schemes, and comprehensive urban planning. The 1960s White Revolution, in particular, played a pivotal role in dismantling customary land practices and imposing standardized, state-administered tenure systems.

Drawing from political geography, critical legal studies, and historical sociology, the monograph will ask:

- How did the Iranian state reconfigure understandings of property and ownership, before and after the Islamic Revolution?
 - This question investigates the shift from Pahlavi-era modernization policies to post-1979 Islamic legal frameworks and explores how both regimes sought to redefine the legal, social, and spatial meaning of ownership. It also considers how these reconfigurations impacted different groups – particularly rural populations and religious minorities – whose traditional or customary land rights were often undermined.
- What normative ideals underpinned its land governance strategies?
 - This question examines the ideological foundations – whether modernization, Islamic legal system, or revolutionary populism – that justified state-led interventions in land use and ownership. It seeks to understand how these ideals translated into policies, legal reforms, and planning practices that legitimized dispossession and centralized control over land.
- How were common resources and collective landholding traditions transformed or erased?
 - This question focuses on the transformation of communal forms of land tenure and the appropriation of shared spaces – such as forests, or village commons. It also considers the long-term implications of these transformations for social cohesion, rural livelihoods, and the spatial marginalization of vulnerable communities.

Methodologically, I will integrate archival research—including legal texts, planning documents, cadastral records, human rights reports, parliamentary debates, and bureaucratic correspondence—with selected case studies of rural and urban areas where tensions between the

Islamic state and Baha'i communities have been most pronounced. Where possible, I will also incorporate oral histories and ethnographic material to document the lived experience of spatial persecution and resistance.

This dual historical-ethnographic approach allows the monograph to bridge formal institutional analysis with the grounded realities of dispossession and survival.

This research is deeply informed by my own trajectory. As a Baha'i in Iran, I have personally experienced multidimensional forms of discrimination—spatial, educational, economic, and social. My family's land and property were confiscated by the state, and I was denied access to higher education due to my religious identity. I pursued my undergraduate studies through the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), an underground university established for Baha'i students. Later, I earned an MA in Urban Planning and a PhD in Urban Studies at the University of British Columbia.

My lived experience has shaped a scholarly commitment to spatial justice, the defense of community land rights, and the political significance of the urban commons.

Outside academia, I am co-founder of *Diyar Common Matters Society*, a non-profit organization in British Columbia dedicated to equitable urban development and inclusive access to shared spaces. My academic and community work are mutually reinforcing: both are committed to understanding and transforming the power relations that shape land, housing, and belonging.

The postdoctoral fellowship in Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto offers an ideal intellectual home for developing this monograph. I believe my work will contribute to interdisciplinary debates in Iranian studies, critical urban theory, and property studies by offering a historically grounded and conceptually rich account of land governance in modern Iran and the spatial persecution of the Baha'i community. More broadly, in an era of widespread displacement and housing injustice, this research offers valuable insight into how authoritarian and neoliberal states use space as a mechanism of control—and how marginalized communities resist, reimagine, and reclaim land and belonging.

Ultimately, this project challenges dominant narratives of modernization and development in Iran by centering the voices and struggles of the marginalized. It envisions a future in which property regimes are rooted in justice, plurality, and democratic participation.