

Monograph Synopsis

Tabriz between Socio-Political Struggles and Imperial Violence: The Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

My dissertation project contributes to the urban and social histories of Iran. I examine urban violence from five different angles: the socio-political angle, the socio-economic angle, the question of gender during violence, the imperial/colonialist angle and the transnational revolutionary perspective. Based on international archives, historical documents and existing literature, the project both illustrates the historical context of this violent period of transition in Iranian history and reconstructs the process of transformation, on a domestic and on an international level.

This study reconstructs of the historical context of Tabriz in order to adequately to address its subsequent urban transformations and developments. I define urban transformation as the process of physical, as well as socio-political, restructuring that expands over various grounds.

Research Interest

The German Factory *Persische Teppich-Gesellschaft* (PETAG): A Laboratory for Technological Intervention in Early Twentieth Century Iran

The discovery of a new scientific method for synthetic dying in Europe was a turning point for the intervention of science in the global carpet market. After four decades of chemical research in British laboratories and the application of the new discovery within the European dying industry, this new technology was introduced to Persia, first by British entrepreneurs, and then by their German counterparts. The key element that enabled the invention of this new technology was aniline colour extracted from coal tar mines. This brought German investors to the city of Tabriz, in Persia, as at the start of twentieth century they were informed of the existence of three coal mines near the city that had been opened by the British in the mid-nineteenth century. The German entrepreneurs of PETAG discovered the use of chemical alizarin colours extracted from the local mines, a process which sped-up the production of carpets. At the same time, the product was no longer based on domestic demand, but rather on the taste and demand of a new generation of the European middle class. The coal mines did not come to the attention of the locals because of lack of technology and of proper roads to transport the coal to the city. In this way, the *Persische Teppich-Gesellschaft* (PETAG) became a laboratory factory for the dye industry, and would later introduce this industry more widely to Persia.

The project will address the key intervention of PETAG into the carpet-weaving business, made by importing six indigo colours to Persia, besides the synthetic production of the colour or dye alizarin. I will look at how the process of transformation from natural dying to chemical dying was negotiated between the German investors, the Qajar state and the Iranian colour/dye merchants. Archival material indicates that it took a decade for the factory managers to stabilize the chemical dying colour as new process, which would lead to profound effects on the global market. First, the project aims to investigate how this intervention affected the lives of the labourers. Second, it seeks to reconstruct the ways in which the new technology altered the traditional production process, as well as the appearance and quality of Persian carpets.

The German PETAG, in competition with Russian, British and Italian carpet manufacturers, sought to reduce manufacturing costs by importing synthetic colours, such as indigo dye, to Persia from 1906 onwards. Previously, the natural and organic dyes used had been produced locally. The new, imported synthetic aniline was much cheaper and faster to use than the natural colours. However, the low-quality synthetic colours created problems for the traditional coloured designs of the carpets. Foreign merchants benefited from using these German synthetic colours which led to higher production rates and greater profits for the European manufacturing companies.

I will work on PETAG's records, collected in the German archives (Bundesarchiv and Landesarchiv) in Berlin, which contain resources on the carpet-making industry in Tabriz. I will also draw on a collection of the Tabrizi local merchants' correspondences with the Qajar state on colouring recently received from Sazman-e Asnad Va Ketabkhane-ye Melli-ye Iran (National Iranian archive and archives at the Iranian Parliament) and correspondences with the Persian Custom office from the Foreign Office archive in Tehran. I have recently gathered British records on PETAG from the Middle East Centre Archive, held by St. Antony's College Oxford that is also pertinent to the current project. Finally, using the unique archives of Professor Tavakoli, the unique Qajar collections, periodicals, rare archives and documents based in University of Toronto stand to further enrich this project. Drawing on this range of archives, I will be able to compare and analyse how different European archives (German and British), as well as Iranian archives, perceived and contextualized PETAG's activities in Tabriz and throughout Persia.

This study of German, British and Persian records of the German carpet industry contributes to the broader scholarly discussion about the crucial role of politics in science,

technology, and natural resources in the intersection of the European and Middle Eastern contexts. This project deals specifically with socio-ecological transformation processes. In particular, this study engages with the current debate on the Anthropocene as a colonial discourse on modernity, capitalism, science and politics that can be traced back to the middle of nineteenth and early twentieth century Iran: the new scientific discovery of dying technology used by the British and German entrepreneurs created natural hazards and threatened water, human lives and livelihood and other natural resources in the city of Tabriz and Azerbaijan. Following this, the project will ask how this synthetic chemical technology was perceived by the locals, by the merchants, by the state and by the European entrepreneurs. Furthermore, how was the market fractured by synthetic chemicals, which brought it under the values and fast products in at a global scale? In other words, what was the politics of coloring for carpet in the late Qajar?

During my postdoc fellowship, I will publish my dissertation as book, hopefully in Routledge Iranian studies series, as well as publishing in article on this project in a peer-reviewed North American journal in a year.

I deeply appreciate your consideration of this application and I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Fatemeh Masjedi