

*Conference Tuesday November 8 2022, 14 – 17 pm*

## **Islam, Gender & Society in Contemporary Iran**



**Asghar Seyed-Gohrab** (Utrecht University) *Opening and Welcome*

**Nacim Pak-Shiraz** (University of Edinburgh)  
*Violence against Women's Transgression in Iranian Cinema*

**Zhinia Noorian** (Utrecht University)  
*The Political Hijacking of Female Poets' Gender Transgression: the Case of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī'*

**Pooyan Tamimi Arab** (Utrecht University)  
*Are the Iran protests against the compulsory hijab and the Islamic Republic nationwide?*

**Location: Utrecht University, Sweelinckzaal, Drift 21, room 0.05 or online**

**Please register** ([d.farhosh-vanloon@uu.nl](mailto:d.farhosh-vanloon@uu.nl))



European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

ERC Advanced Grant  
**Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam**  
[www.beyondsharia.nl](http://www.beyondsharia.nl)



**Conference**  
**Islam, Gender & Society in Contemporary Iran**

**Tuesday 8 November 2022**

14.00 **Asghar Seyed-Gohrab**  
*Opening and Welcome*

14.10 **Nacim Pak-Shiraz**  
*Violence against Women's Transgression in Iranian Cinema*

15.10 **Zhinia Noorian**  
*The Political Hijacking of Female Poets' Gender Transgression: the Case of Parvīn Iṭiṣāmī*

15.45 **Pooyan Tamimi-Arab**  
*Are the Iran protests against the compulsory hijab and the Islamic Republic nationwide?*

16.30 **Drinks**

*Violence against Women's Transgression in Iranian Cinema*

**(Nacim Pak-Shiraz)**

How does theocracy impact spatial patriarchy, contracting the spaces for some and expanding it for others? How has cinema engaged with these questions, enabling us to study both the gendered rules on space, and their defiance? Through the study of Iranian films, this talk will examine women's transgressions and resistance against the established borders and boundaries and the role subversive methods of cultural production play in both highlighting the challenges and the resistance. How are the visible and invisible spatial boundaries defied? Where violence is used to regulate the movement of genders, who are the perpetrators and how is the violence justified and carried out?

**Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz** is Personal Chair of Cinema and Iran at the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses on cinema and visual culture in the Middle East, particularly Iran. She has published in the fields of visual cultures, constructions of masculinity, and the engagement of religion and film, including *Shi'i Islam in Iranian Cinema: Religion and Spirituality in Film* (2011& 2018), and *Visualizing Iran: From Antiquity to Present* (ed. 2017). Professor Pak-Shiraz is also the curator of several film festivals in Edinburgh and has been as a jury member and speaker at several international film festivals in the Czech Republic, Turkey and Iran.

*The Political Hijacking of Female Poets' Gender Transgression: the Case of Parvīn I'tiṣāmī*

**(Zhinia Noorian)**

Parvīn I'tiṣāmī has remained a luminous star in the firmament of Persian poetry as she praised herself in her epitaph: 'Parvīn, resting in black dust/ is the star in the firmament of literature'. The combination of her prowess in exploiting the

classical style of Persian poetry and her gender brought her both admiration and abomination. When Parvīn entered the masculinist literary tradition of Persian poetry with the publication of her poems, she was praised, but as a rarity. Because of being a female poet, she was patronised, ostracised, disbelieved and accused of literary fraud. Although Parvīn wrote a short poem and asserted that she was ‘not a man’, her femininity remained a controversial issue. Parvīn and her poetry continued to be perceived as ‘miraculous’ in the masculinist Muslim-Iranian culture. The prominent literary critic, Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī (1939-present) asserts that no contemporary or classical poet after Ḥāfīz (d. 1390) has achieved Parvīn’s popularity, which he characterises as ‘Parvīn’s miracle’. In his own words, Shafī‘ī-Kadkanī is one among the hundreds of thousands of Parvīn’s ‘enchanted’ readers. Apparently, Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran (r. 1989-present), is also enchanted by the mystery of Parvīn’s poetic talent. In this presentation, I analyse Khamenei’s use of Parvīn’s poetry. With this analysis, I demonstrate how the transgressive aspects of Parvīn’s poetry, which provoked harsh criticism in the masculinist Iranian-Muslim culture, are the reason for Khamenei’s fascination with her work, and her identity as an Iranian-Muslim female poet.

**Zhinia Noorian** is a Postdoc candidate for the ERC-Advanced Grant Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam, working on the project Feminising Masculinity: Negotiating Gender Norms. In this project, she investigates the homoerotic aspect of the Sufi saints better known as the qalandars. In her research, she focuses on examining how and why the qalandars assumed a feminine voice and transgressed the strict gender norms regulated by the sharia law in Islamic societies. Her research aims at explaining the sexual embodiment of the concept of ‘blame’, which was used by these saints as a means to attain union to the Divine. For her PhD dissertation, Zhinia studied the poetry and reception of Parvīn I‘tiṣāmī (1907-1941), as an Iranian female poet. She

investigated the enduring mark that I<sup>c</sup>tiṣāmī left on the literary and religious culture of Iran in the early 20th century through transgressing the socio-cultural norms of her patriarchal society. Her research demonstrated I<sup>c</sup>tiṣāmī's prowess in using the classical genre of Persian debate poetry and Persian mystical tradition as safe spaces to express her thoughts on the socio-politically sensitive issues of her times.

*Are the Iran protests against the compulsory hijab and the Islamic Republic nationwide?*  
**(Pooyan Tamimi Arab)**

Traditional surveying methods like face-to-face interviewing and telephone polling can lead to invalid results in authoritarian countries. That's why GAMAAN – the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran – researched the politically sensitive topic of declining religiosity in Iran with methods that guarantee respondents' anonymity: online multiple chain-referral sampling combined with the mass spreading of surveys through nationwide popular VPN software. Our aim was to extract uncensored data on Iranians' views about their religiosity and their country's theocratic political structure. In this presentation I will focus on the results regarding the compulsory hijab and respondents' views of the Islamic Republic as a political system. These results shed light on what the different demographic groups in Iran think about these key issues. What GAMAAN found is that amongst those who do not support the Islamic Republic, differences between age groups, education levels, sex, and geographic distribution are less pronounced than what might be expected given the current media coverage of the protests.

**Pooyan Tamimi Arab** is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Utrecht University and a member of the Young Academy of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is the author of *Amplifying Islam in the European Soundscape* (Bloomsbury, 2017), a case study of political secularism

in the Netherlands, and *Why Do Religious Forms Matter?* (Palgrave, 2022), about the role of material religion in the political philosophies of Spinoza, Locke, and Rawls. Tamimi Arab is also the secretary of GAMAAN, the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran, and a board member of the Amsterdam Spinoza Circle.