

What Is So Special About Field Research in Iran? Doing Fieldwork in Religiously Charged Authoritarian Settings

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Doing field research in the Islamic Republic of Iran is usually considered to be challenging for social scientists. Islamic precepts, security issues, regional political instability and tight control over the population are elements that constrain the researcher's activities, apparently leaving little room for investigation and critical inquiry. This chapter identifies the factors and the dynamics that make field research in political and social sciences difficult in Iran by challenging the received wisdom that Iran is a difficult field because of Islam. Although religious rules play an important role in Iran's public sphere and constrain the researcher's behaviour to some extent (i.e. the compulsory veil for women or limitations to male-female interactions in public), the chapter argues that it is the state authoritarian intervention that limits researchers' freedom of inquiry. Such limitations are examined and suggestions are offered as to how to get around them.

The chapter has two objectives. First we aim to discuss what is the specific impact of authoritarian interventionism on the field researcher's activities and, second, we want to engage with the ethical and security challenges we encountered in the field. The latter will help the two authors single out what is specific in conducting fieldwork in an authoritarian country. It was rather difficult to identify what obstacles to research are peculiar to our experience of doing research in the Islamic Republic, as colleagues who conducted research in Europe for instance seem to share many of our difficulties. In fact, when facing practical issues in applying research methods, the two "fields" seem to be quite similar, although assessments on the researcher's personal security and others' security may change because of the broader setting. It follows that it is important to refrain from essentialising Iran or the Middle East in order to offer findings for comparative analysis beyond the boundaries of Area Studies. With this aim, the chapter also elaborates on the relationship between Area Studies and broader social sciences. We aim to contribute to other disciplines and methodology conversations, as the objective of Area Studies should be similar to that of other social sciences, namely the development of generalisations that contribute to our understanding of human experience and behaviour.¹ Area Studies of the Middle East should have a bearing on the development of interdisciplinary questions, ideas, and methods.²

The chapter relies on the two authors' experience with conducting fieldwork in Iran and benefits from the gendered perspective of two young women. One author is a non-Iranian researcher while the other is a dual national, Iranian citizen who grew up in the US. Both lived and worked in Tehran for years. Author 1 (A1) lived in Iran between 2005 and 2009 for one and a half year. She tried to return to Iran in 2012 and 2013, but her visa application was turned down. While a visa was issued for her again in 2014, she could not return to Iran because of security considerations. She could eventually travel back to Iran in December 2015. Author 2 (A2) carried out a several months of fieldwork in Iran during 2007-2008. She moved to Tehran in 2012 and lived there until late 2014. The differences which exist between the authors enrich the understanding of how the dynamics

connected to doing fieldwork in Iran unfold, sometimes in a different way, sometimes in a surprisingly similar fashion for Iranian and non-Iranian citizens.

An Intersectional Approach to Islam, the State and Authoritarianism

There are very few states that do not adopt a securitarian approach to research. Although the majority of them are liberal democratic systems, it does not mean that all liberal democracies shy away from securitising critical inquiry. It follows that it is important to discuss what is so specific about the way in which Iran and authoritarian systems in general approach researchers, considering that democratic states too may adopt a securitarian approach. For instance, many cases of censorship of on campus scientific initiatives and events related to the campaign of Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions Israeli business and universities have reportedly been censored,³ with the case of Steven Salaita, who lost his position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign over criticism of Netanyahu, becoming the symbol of heavy securitisation of research and academic labour.⁴ James Fitzgerald, a lecturer at Dublin City University, provides a testimony of how research is being policed by reporting on his experience of being temporarily detained and questioned at Heathrow airport for possessing some academic books on terrorism.⁵ Amory Starr, Luis Fernandez and Christian Scholl offer an analysis of how critical inquiry and activism are discouraged in Western Europe and the United States, and major obstacles stand in the way of researchers who decide to engage in political and social issues independently, especially if those issues are related to protest policing and surveillance of activists.⁶ These testimonies echo Olivier Dabène, Vincent Geisser and Gilles Massardier's work, which critically review Juan Linz's classical distinction between democratic and non-democratic systems, pivoted around the notion of "limited pluralism" that authoritarianisms allow.⁷ The three authors observe that this kind of pluralism is no longer a distinctive marker, rather the most diffused type of pluralism in contemporary regimes, with democracies possessing a series of "non-pluralist spaces."

It follows that it is important to acknowledge the existence of a similarity when it comes to conducting fieldwork in authoritarian and democratic countries, which are also present in terms of methodology dilemmas researchers deal with. Issues such as obtaining the respondents' trust and the researcher's positionality in the field,⁸ the reliability and validity of interviews,⁹ and dealing with emotional involvement¹⁰ are indeed common challenges that researchers face when engaged in fieldwork. However, although methodological and systemic similarities exist, there is a variation of degree according to the way in which power circulates in an authoritarian political system, and this has an impact on research-related activities.

According to Asef Bayat, while it is true that power is coercive in all types of regimes, what characterises authoritarian regimes is the "unevenness of power circulation". In some countries, state power is "far weightier, more concentrated, and 'thicker,' so to speak, than in others,"¹¹ thereby increasing the likelihood of a more securitarian approach for researchers. In fact, echoing Bayat, securitisation depends on how power is distributed among the institutions that compose the constellation of players that are in a relationship with the researcher in Iran. The ministries of culture (Ershad), information (Etela'at), single universities and their governance bodies, and security and disciplinary forces are all influential in the research process. Crucially, all these actors

can establish a radically different relationship with the researcher. A researcher may be welcome by some institutions, while other organs will be reluctant to cooperate. However, the “uneven” distribution of power among various actors places this structural fragmentation into a distinguishable hierarchy. Additionally, security and disciplinary forces enjoy a more substantial and unaccountable power and as such the fragmentation of power gains a systemic form, and lessens the capacity of political actors to garner personal and collective power. Uneven power circulation and distribution, which benefit security forces, create a research-unfriendly environment, in which researchers, both dual citizens and foreigners, may be the object of securitised measures.

This resonates with the findings of other scholars who pointed out how factors such as Islam are less relevant than state institutions in standing against research activities. Goli Rezai-Rashti tells us about the significant obstacles she encountered, all of which were of political-bureaucratic nature¹² rather than cultural-religious. Research institutions and Iranian universities opposed her research project on women and higher education in Iran because, crucially, they feared that her findings would be used to propagate a negative image of Iran abroad. Rezai-Rashti addresses the bureaucratic permissions she was forced to obtain, and the commissions and committees she had interviews with. She does not, however, mention that the institutions and universities where her research was carried out feared that her findings may undermine religious principles or Islam. This also resonates in Arang Keshavarzian’s account of his fieldwork in Tehran’s bazaar¹³ where his religious faith was never asked or tested and where, he reports, he never saw any expression of that fanatic religiosity bazaari are often accused of displaying. This marginality of religion is consistent with our experience, too. More than Islam, what constrains research is the securitarian approach that state institutions have *vis-à-vis* researchers who, in a hostile geopolitical environment, have often been accused of being spies or plotting against national security.

In most instances, this securitarian approach is activated when researchers are believed to transgress their social categorisation. While the way in which the state classifies the Iranian population is not a topic discussed often in Iranian studies, a clear social hierarchy within the public sphere exists. As Arzoo Osanloo wrote,¹⁴ the 1979 revolution and the post-revolutionary state have activated Iranians politically, making them subjects that bear rights and, as such, that are involved in a social contract with the state. Not only the 1979 revolution, but the Iran-Iraq war too, have had a crucial role in demarcating citizenry categories, with the formation of the notion of belonging to the state and to whom the state belongs.¹⁵ By virtue of such a mutual recognition, citizens are allocated a specific status within state structures and society, from which they can make demands to the state. Foreign and dual-citizens that visit Iran to conduct research are also placed into political categories based on conclusions drawn from national, personal and local profiling techniques. Generally speaking, their status is quite low on the social and political ladder, and the category they occupy determines how much access and what “rights” they have as researchers.

In this sense, the role of Islam is “ancillary” to the power of the state because it served the purpose of concentrating power - whatever form it may take, from repressive and military strength to the self-arrogated right to interpret religious texts - within state structures. Islam bent to the political necessity of establishing a strong state in the post-revolutionary period. This is also evident in the case of limitations to men-women interactions or the Islamic garment for women: people are asked to respect the legislation of the state, not Islam, which, according to alternative interpretations that

Iranian authorities consider unlawful neither segregates men and women, nor imposes the *hejab* on women.

Thus, field researchers occupy a specific place in the social hierarchy that various state institutions in Iran concur to create, which corresponds to a specific code of conduct. In general, as mentioned above, field researchers coming from abroad, both foreign and dual-nationals, occupy a low position on the social and political scale and are required not to interfere with national Iranian current and political affairs.¹⁶ Formal structures of power do not explicitly address this categorisation, but often the information is conveyed to the researchers when they arrive in Tehran. For example, during A2's tenure as a volunteer lecturer at the University of Tehran, a PhD student provided "advice" to A2, and openly told her she worked for the Intelligence Ministry, even going as far as to explain the type of "marks" she had seen on her case. This student would often tell A2 indirectly what her boundaries were. For instance, during the 2013 presidential election, this PhD student would repeatedly tell A2 not to attend any rallies or gatherings and if there were any unrest, she would definitely be arrested for inciting it. A2 was also told the same during an interview with officials at the Ministry of Education, so she had reason to think this was an important issue to the state's intelligence apparatus.

There does seem to be some overlap between the limits Iranian and non-Iranian researchers face with respect to the state's intention of keeping them out of potentially unstable spaces. This stems from the state's general insecurity in the public sphere. In 2005, a journalist friend invited A1 to the annual conference of the Iranian press association. Somehow surprisingly, the wife of a well-known dissident journalist, Akbar Ganji, was invited to speak. She gave a very emotional speech and, as the public burst into tears, many attendees went closer to the stage in order to take pictures of her. A1 did the same but, as soon as she got close to the stage, where many other photographers also gathered, a security guard immediately caught her and locked her into a room. The episode ended some 20 minutes later, when A1's friend entered the room with the chief of the security service at the conference and freed her. This episode showed how easy it is to stand out as a foreigner, regardless of the garment and physical appearance, and reminded A1 that she was not supposed to mingle too much with local people and involve herself in local affairs.

Limits can be conveyed in explicit manners too to dual national researchers. In 2012, A2 had just arrived in Tehran and went to buy an Islamic *hejab* at Haft-e Tir shopping area, which is a well-known shopping center for women's *hejab*. Unknown to her at the time, her shopping trip coincided with an anniversary of the 2009 election unrest, and some opposition media outlets had suggested that people protest in the area. When A2 entered the area, plain-clothed security agents harassed her, followed her closely and surrounded her at every turn. The message was given that she should go home, and she did. From then on, she understood that she was not welcomed in spaces where protests were supposedly to take place or sites where the opposition may meet. However, she was allowed to teach and research in the universities of Tehran, and the state permitted and at times facilitated her research, which explores the making of socially embedded forms of citizenship among Hizbollah activists that work on the Islamic Republic's cultural projects. It is best for researchers to pay attention to the personalised limits the state has assigned them, and understand they do not necessarily mean that you are not allowed to carry out research.

However, it would be problematic to “remove” Islam from conducting research in the Islamic Republic. In fact, religion is relevant to the field researcher, beyond garment and behavioural rules, both in positive and negative ways. Little respect for religious practices or moral rules can indeed serve as a reason to target a field researcher and his/her presence in the country. Having extra-marriage relations, for instance, can be a source of problems for the researcher because his/her behaviour would make him/her visible to the authority as “morally deplorable”. On the contrary, adherence to morality and shared cultural and religious background can relax securitarian and suspicious attitudes. For example, in the introduction to her book *Marriage on Trial*, Ziba Mir-Hosseini¹⁷ stated that being a *sayyid* or descendant of the prophet and an Iranian helped her greatly in carrying out research in Special Civil Courts in Tehran during the mid-1980s. A2 has also felt that being a practicing Muslim allowed her to defend women’s rights in the different spaces she was in, including the University of Tehran as a lecturer, as well as a researcher in Hizbollah cultural institutes in Tehran. Her religious beliefs and identity had a central role in helping her build relations with decision-makers. Similarly, A1 also found the elite members she interviewed sympathetic towards her Catholic background, and this personal information often was remarked with appreciation. The fact that she was familiar with some academics who participated in initiatives of religious dialogue, and the fact that she worked for a period in a Catholic education institution, helped build trust with the elite. Therefore religions, and not exclusively Islam, may also be a factor helping the researcher who, to the eyes of the elite and the decision-makers, may be considered as “culturally closer” because of a recognition of his/her religious identity.

Re-thinking Security and Research Ethics in Authoritarian Environments

Generalisations can be drawn from the Iranian case as to how the state assigns researchers their “place”, a reflection relevant to researchers engaged in various fields. It follows that challenges such as building trust and winning the attention of the respondents are common issues to field researchers when it comes to the practicality of conducting fieldwork. What changes in the case of Iran is what, as noted earlier, Bayat called the “uneven circulation of power”, which makes the power the security forces exert much thicker than the power that, for instance, the Ministry of Culture exerts, a condition that securitises directly and indirectly the work and the presence of the researcher in the field. In such an environment, researchers need to be mentally flexible and ready to change research strategies, reviewing methods as well as decisions. This is valid for research ethics practices too, as broader security concerns can, for example, bring the researcher to obscure local people’s contribution or interrupt contacts, although theoretically research ethics posits the opposite. It follows that field researchers have to deal with interconnected security and ethical challenges.

When it comes to security issues, field researchers face two kinds of challenges: the first type is their own personal security, while the second is protecting those who are involved in their research activities. Field researchers, especially if foreign, expose the people they work with. Not only Iranians linked to foreign researchers may be accused of collaborating with dubious foreigners, but they could even face the threat of being used to extract information about the foreigners and then accused of being in touch with them.

Researchers of political or social issues who spend a long time in the field are regarded generally as suspicious and, especially if foreigners, *fuzul*, nosy or “interfering”. They need to be mindful of their own personal security, as a variety of means are used to target their presence and work. Bureaucratized religious morality, meaning state-sanctioned religious morality, is one of those means. Often, suspects of “immoral behaviour”, whether real or made, such as having extra-marriage relations, can be used as a justification to target them, weakening their self-confidence, with the ultimate goal of hampering their research. At a conference in Tehran, A1 met a young man, a lawyer who studied in Canada and worked for a think-tank in the city. A1 and this man exchanged their email addresses for professional reasons and when he invited her out to the cinema, she declined the offer. However, upon his insistence, they went to the cinema with a group of A1’s girlfriends. During the following weeks, the man contacted A1 several times. She repeatedly tried to stop any contact, being very explicit about her discomfort for his insistence. Some friends suggested that he might be from the security services. He started then to be aggressive, and even when A1 asked her male friends to tell the man to stop calling her, he never stopped. When A1 left Iran, after few months, he called her on her foreign mobile phone, something that shocked A1. It is likely that he was someone from the Information Ministry, although A1 would not be able to confirm this. However, this is an example of how the researchers’ personal life is appealing to the security forces, which may use the researchers’ personal relationship (real or imagined) for penetrating into the researcher’s private sphere and target her/his sense of security and comfort. Similarly, A2 was approached by a PhD student at the University of Tehran who argued that her ideas and activism inspired him and that he wanted to talk more. Other students, especially female students, warned A2 that this person was suspected of working with the Information Ministry and was generally a shady character. However, A2 did not want to securitize her world and decided to ignore the warnings, concerned that these accusations were made against him because of his lower economic status and rural background. However, after a few meetings she noted that the conversations were mostly about her personal beliefs and practices, so she stopped meeting with him. The male contact then began showing up at her place of work, stating that he suspected her to be a spy. He went on to argue that if he made public this suspicion, A2 could get into considerable trouble. When A2 told him that she would turn him into the university security forces for harassment, she never saw or heard from him again. Although male researchers can also be targeted, there does seem to be a strong gendered trend to the harassment of female researchers. According to our experiences and the ones of other female colleagues, it seems that individuals who are likely to become abusive through threats related to professional activities, more often approach women. It follows that female researchers should be suspicious of individuals who insist on meetings and exchanges that seem unnecessarily prolonged.

Researchers, both dual nationals and foreigners, can also be exposed to internal infights between the regime’s factions. An example is the case of F., a dual national scholar based in Europe, who has contacts with the pragmatic/reformist faction that was instrumental in the achievement of the 2015 nuclear deal. Notorious hard-line media outlets, critical of the nuclear deal, identified F. as an “American spy” with the goal of targeting the opposite political faction, favourable to the deal.¹⁸ This example not only shows that the state is internally fragmented, with factions fighting one against the other, but also that researchers can be at the centre of such political fights. The practice of *siaah namaai* (slander), namely when foreign researchers and dual-nationals are called spies or accused of being at the service of foreign powers, has the goal of targeting rival factions by

exposing a researcher. The “pulse” of international politics is critical to such occurrences. In fact, strained diplomatic relations between Iran and the rest of the international community can affect field researchers, complicating their access to the field or reinforcing securitised approaches to them. In unstable geopolitical conditions, conservative media has depicted foreign and dual-national researchers as part of an international plot to overthrow the Islamic Republic¹⁹.

Apart from personal security, field researchers also have to be mindful that local people can be victims of arrest, intimidation and harassment. For several months during her research stay in 2008, A1 had been in contact with an activist from a local student group. His role was crucial in helping A1 gain a deeper understanding of student politics. One day, he disappeared. A1 was worried but did not call him or try to get in touch to avoid damaging him further. Few days later, A1 received a call on her cell phone from an unknown number. A man was on the other side of the phone and told her that he was her friend-activist. He told A1 that he was brought to Rajay-e Shahr prison, drugged and abused. He insisted that they meet. A1 did not recognise his voice and feared that a friendly reaction could have been used to find him guilty of having contacts with a potentially suspicious foreigner. They did not meet, and for the rest of her research stay, A1 cut all contacts. He contacted her a few months later, thanking her for not showing up and not contacting him again. The intelligence and security forces monitor activists regardless of their contacts, but connection to a foreigner may provide the justification to target them. It is not in the interest of the researcher or the researched to make an already unstable context more volatile during fieldwork, and these moments should be avoided for they obstruct the production of knowledge²⁰.

Approaches to Iranians involved in a field researchers' activity may vary. Security forces approached A2's contacts at times to ask their impression of her. In some instances they were asked to give their thoughts on A2's level of religiosity and even *savad*, or knowledgeability. For instance, a student was asked to comment on A2's scholarship. Intelligence agents asked several contacts if A2 wears the Islamic *hejab* outside of Iran. One interviewee, who A2 spoke with during her PhD research on war martyrs' widows, was asked at her workplace through the *herasat* security forces what A2's questions aimed at revealing. In A2's experience, interviewees which the regime trusted were contacted to profile A2, but not harassed for collaborating with her on projects. However, such exposure told the contacts that they were being watched too, reminding them that it is good practice to avoid connections with foreigners and to recognize the boundaries granted by the state.

Given these security concerns, ethical practices should be reviewed consequently. Ethical challenges exist for all researchers engaged in fieldwork, as researchers need to avoid treating people on the ground as “native informants” whose role is to supply them with data for publications. However, it may be problematic to acknowledge the contribution of local people and activists because this might expose them. A1's research project deals with the dynamics of political activism in authoritarian settings, with Iran as a case-study. She discussed her research with the activists she was working with, and many asked her to refrain from making it explicit that she was in a conversation with them. This request not only came from activists based in Iran, but also from Iranian activists outside of Iran, who were concerned for the security of their families and friends back home. This does not only mean that they asked A1 to anonymise their interviews, which A1 was going to do anyway; but also that A1's presence was a source of anxiety. In order to respect such exigencies and even discomfort, A1 at times did not carry her research through, at others she

obscured the existence and contribution of activists, and at others still she suspended interactions during periods of time or for good.

However, although field researchers need to be mindful of limitations and stick to the level of freedom the security forces grant them, it is possible to circumnavigate restrictions. Two useful coping strategies can be deployed: one is what can be labelled the “politics of ambiguity,” the other is the ability to turn into one’s advantage the fragmentation of state structures.

While trying to get access to the National Archives for research, A1 was repeatedly invited for “informal meetings” with management. Given the nature of her research project, focused on contemporary social and political issues, she did not want to provide the details of her work. Furthermore, a foreigner wishing to access archival information could be considered “interfering” with national affairs. However, the very fact of being a foreigner, in this context, played out as an advantage. A1’s ambiguity when talking about her research was interpreted as incompetence, and therefore not suspicious. Likewise, when policy-makers asked about her research, A1 could work around those questions by referring to her research interest as *Iranshenasi*, namely Iranian Studies, a field often perceived as academically shallow and Orientalist in Iran and therefore not worthy of further attention. On the contrary, by engaging with the state through clear and concise conversations, a foreign researcher becomes more suspicious not only to state agents but also wider society because no one speaks this way. Indirect, unclear and evasive forms of talking are often described as *pechundan* or negotiation. It has crucial political functions not only because it grants the researcher some room to “work out” and “adapt” to unknown circumstances, but also because it leaves enough space for authorities and listeners to process the researcher’s words, to ponder ideas and demands as they wish. State employees value the construction of this space in-between words, thoughts and people for it reinforces their right to remain unresponsive to citizens. During her time teaching in Iran, A2 found that this technique also entered the academic writing-style of students, posing major obstacles for the knowledge production process. It also takes some time getting used to this type of communication, particularly for researchers educated in the West, where explicit self-expression is highly praised. For A2, one of the most difficult aspects of living and working in Tehran for three years was learning this new language. This form of self-censoring that includes cutting sentences short, avoiding language that clearly places political responsibility on state agents, and maintaining a disengaged demeanour that suggests you are not invested in what is happening, was so debilitating that for the first few months she was either speechless or incoherent in the public sphere.

Researchers can cope with constraining pressures and carve out room for investigation also by exploiting state fragmentation and internal infights. R. participated for years in inter-religious dialogue initiatives reaching out to state institutions in Tehran but also single clerics and clerical institutions in Qom. This allowed him to strengthen relationships with a variety of institutions and individuals who protected him when, in 2010, he travelled to Iran even though the local embassy warned him that he was not welcome because of his Green Movement-friendly declarations.²¹ This example illustrates that other players beyond constitutional institutions and security forces are part of the constellation of actors involved in the process of knowledge production and transmission. In fact, religious centres and clerical institutions are part of it and may be much more effective in protecting their contacts than, for instance, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs or Education in person. In such conditions, only well-protected individuals with a diversified network of personal contacts,

be they family members, clerics or even members of the security apparatus, can conduct research in Iran because they can negotiate protection from different sources, regardless of the broader security situation.

Conclusion

The chapter reaches two conclusions. Firstly, we found that, contrary to conventional wisdoms about Iran, Islam and religious limitations in every-day life do not constitute an obstacle to the field researcher's activity, even when the researcher is a young woman. The presence of religion in the public sphere does not impede research-related activities, unless state authorities turn it into a control device on the basis of their self-arrogated right to interpret religion. It follows that it is the state's authoritarian practices that pose major obstacles to the researcher's activities. Researchers need to remain within the political boundaries granted by the regime. They need to be as invisible as possible, and not to mingle in Iran's internal affairs, a condition that *de facto* may limit the scope of one's research-related activities. Secondly, we found that our reflections from the field are relevant to researchers engaged in other settings as well, beyond the geographical limitation of the MENA region. In addition, when it comes to applied methods, field researchers deal with common challenges such as winning the trust of respondents and dealing with the latter's expectations and frustrations, regardless of geography and broader political regimes. It follows that Area Studies should contribute more forcefully to methodological debates in the social sciences.

¹ Charles Wagley, *Area Studies and Training: A Conference Report on the Study of World Areas*. Columbia University and Social Science Research Council, 1948; Timothy Mitchell, "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," in *The Politics of Knowledge. Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 50-73.

² Lisa Anderson, "Politics in the Middle East: Opportunities and Limits in the Quest for Theory," in *Area Studies and Social Science*, ed. Mark Tessler, Jodi Nachtwey, Anne Banda (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1-10.

³ Ruba Salih, "Academic Freedom, Ethics, and Responsibility: The Silencing and Censoring of Palestine in Western Liberal Academia," *Jadaliyya*, 19 May 2015 (accessed 11 March 2016). See also the statement of Academic for Palestine Ireland, which called on Italian university authorities to stop censoring BDS-related events: Stop censorship of BDS on Italian campuses. A letter of solidarity from AfP, available at <https://academicsforpalestine.wordpress.com/>, accessed 11 March 2016.

⁴ Malihe Razazan, "Uncivil Rites: An Interview with Steven Salaita," *Jadaliyya*, 7 January 2016 (accessed 11 March 2016).

⁵ James Fitzgerald, "Why Me? An Autoethnographic Account of the Bizarre Logic of Counterterrorism," *Critical Studies of Terrorism* 8 no. 1 (2015): 163-180.

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- ⁶ Amory Starr, Luis A. Fernandez, and Christian Scholl. *Shutting Down the Streets: Political Violence and Social Control in the Global Era*. (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
- ⁷ Olivier Dabène, Vincent Geisser, Gilles Massardier eds. *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires au XXI^e siècle*. (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).
- ⁸ Ian Maxey, "Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research," *Area* 31 (1999): 199-208.
- ⁹ Jeffrey Berry, "Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing," *Political Science and Politics* 4 (2002): 679-682.
- ¹⁰ Laura R. Woliver, "Ethical Dilemmas in Personal Interviewing," *Political Science and Politics* 4 (2002): 677-678.
- ¹¹ Asef Bayat. *Life as Politics. How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2010), 44.
- ¹² Goli Rezai-Rashti, "Conducting Field Research on Gender Relations in a Gender Repressive State: A Case Study of Gender Research in Iran," *International Journal of Qualitative Research in Education* 26 no. 4 (2013): 489-502.
- ¹³ Arang Keshavarzian, "Mutual Comprehension and Hybrid Identities in the Bazaar: Reflections on Interviews and Interlocutors in Tehran" in *Persian Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. Kamran Talattof (London: Routledge, 2015), 239-257.
- ¹⁴ Arzoo Osanloo. *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- ¹⁵ Shirin Saeidi, "Creating the Islamic Republic of Iran: Wives and Daughters of Martyrs, and Acts of Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 14 no. 2 (2010): 113-126.
- ¹⁶ Exceptions exist if foreign/dual national researchers are interested in working closely with a particular political faction in Iran. In general, this makes a relatively moderate involvement in local affairs acceptable.
- ¹⁷ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial. A Study of Islamic Family Law* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993).
- ¹⁸ Testimony collected by A1, Summer 2015.
- ¹⁹ Clément Therme, "La diplomatie française à l'épreuve de l'Iran." *Revue internationale et stratégique* 85 (2012): 28-38.
- ²⁰ Pamela Nilan, "'Dangerous Fieldwork' re-examined: The Question of Researcher Subject Position," *Qualitative Research* 2 no. 3 (2002): 363-386.
- ²¹ Testimony collected by A1, Winter 2012.

Doing fieldwork in religiously charged authoritarian settings' Paola Rivetti, Shirin Saeidi (2018) 'What is so special about field research in Iran? Doing fieldwork in religiously charged authoritarian settings' In: Janine Clark, Francesco Cavatorta (eds). *Doing Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Details].

Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have never been at a desirable level. Iran's 1979 revolution, the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Arab Spring in turn increased the disagreement between the two regional powers. This article examines the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East between 2011 and 2017. After this victory the Shia revolutionary ideology was established in Iran which was in contrast with the Sunni-Wahhabi ideology of Saudi Arabia. In addition to the outbreak of the religious revolution in a monarchy kingdoms of the region, and Saudi Arabia as one of them, were aware of the possible danger of their own security. So, the relations between the former and current.

Althunayyan, H. (2017). The U.S.-Saudi relations in the Trump era. In Iranian society, martyrs are greatly revered, including martyrs from the distant past as well as those from the contemporary time. The exemplary example of a true martyr in Shia Islam, particularly the Twelver branch (Iran), is Imam Hussain known by the Shia population as the master of martyrs (Arabic and Persian: Sayyid al-Shuhada (سید الشهداء), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. By now after so many years of dealing with gasht e ershaad and forty years of hardliners in power, Iranians have learnt that members of the morality police enforce harsh inspections during certain times in a year. For example, a high number of arrests is recorded during the milder spring season and summers.

Doing fieldwork in religiously charged authoritarian settings. In: Clark, Janine and Cavatorta, Francesco, (eds.) *Doing Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, pp. 35-45. ISBN 9780190882976. Full text available as: Preview. PDF - Requires a PDF viewer such as GSview, Xpdf or Adobe Acrobat Reader 191kB. Item Type