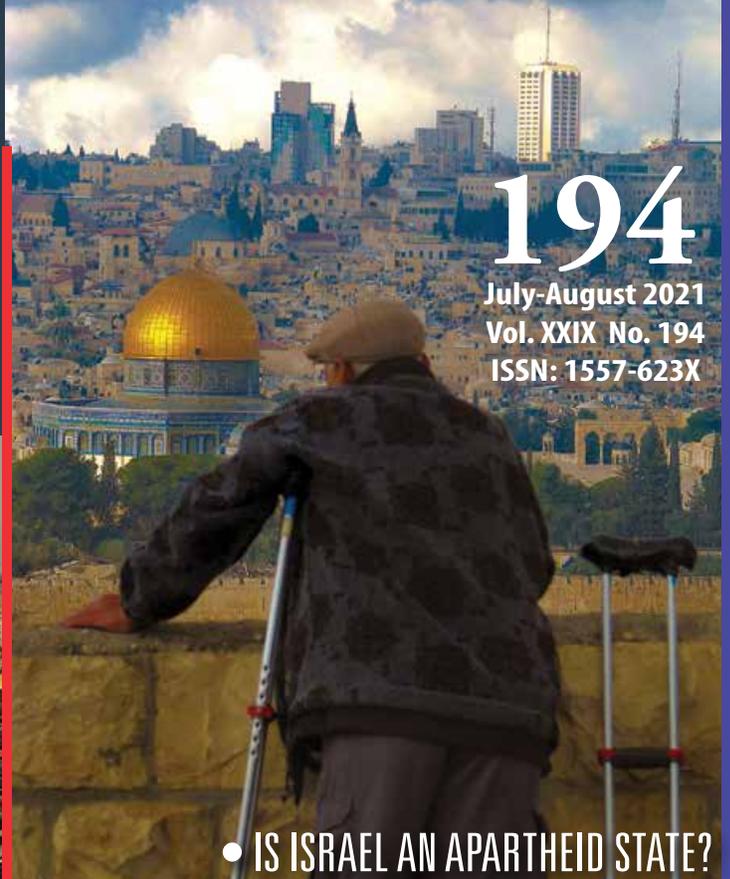


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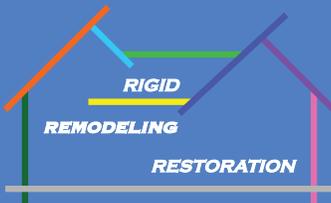
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وکیل تصادفات
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Shaghayegh Hanson



DO NOT FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Approximately 14 months ago, we took refuge in our houses from the tornado of a pandemic raging outside. We bore the twists and turns, the pulls and tugs of the storm, and now we have landed. It's time to open the door, peek outside, and see if the wicked witch is dead. And even if she is, how do we find our way back home? That's where the fairy tale* analogy ends, because there are no good witches with magical wands, all-knowing wizards, or a yellow brick road to guide us. Besides, do we really want to go back to our lives as we knew them? For some, especially those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 or have lost a business, there is no choice in the matter, their circumstances have changed forever. For many of us, the pandemic has imparted some enlightening and useful lessons about changes we should implement in our lives and our institutions going forward. As other commentators have observed, we should press the reset—not the return—button.

For example, working remotely from home is now something both businesses and employees have found to be effective, and even preferable in some cases. For working parents, particularly mothers, who need the flexibility of working around school drop offs and pick-ups, baby nap times, and doctors' appointments, this is good news. On the other hand, we have also learned that human contact is necessary for our well-being, no matter how introverted we are. Even the slightest rituals of saying hello to the barista at the coffee shop or exchanging a few words at the water cooler make us feel more connected to our communities, and less lonely. After all, humans are—by nature—social creatures. Striking a balance between being chained to our desks at the office and, at the same time, not feeling imprisoned in our homes, will be different for everyone, but employers should be more adaptable to flexible schedules going forward.

We also have a new appreciation for service industry workers who cannot work remotely. These "essential" workers compromised their own safety and that of their families, which ensured that the rest of us continued to meet our basic survival needs. My hope is the importance of their roles will lead to higher wages and benefits. The same is true of those who work in the healthcare industry, not just doctors and nurses but also nursing assistants, phlebotomists, home health aides, housekeepers, medical assistants, cooks, and the list goes on. These frontline heroes displayed dedication, skill, and courage in the face of enormous stress; their jobs are hard at the best of times, but they are often underpaid and undervalued. According to the Brookings Institute, there are approximately 7 million people in low-paid health jobs, earning a median wage of \$13.48, far below what is considered a living wage.

Crucially, we have learned that instead of stigmatizing mental health issues, we need to address them as seriously and routinely as physical health issues. According to the Pew Research Center, one in five adults in the U.S. is experiencing high levels of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety. Not surprisingly, physical health concerns, financial distress, and loneliness have been major contributing factors. Most distressing, however, has been the effect on our children. Recently, Children's Hospital Colorado declared a state of emergency regarding the number of patients arriving in emergency rooms exhibiting acute behavioral problems. Suicide is currently the leading cause of death in children over the age of 10 in Colorado. I recently spoke to a pediatrician friend in San Diego who confirmed there is a second pandemic of psychological issues among teens that is prompting practitioners to undergo specialized training to obtain certification in diagnosing and treating patients in this area.

The entire country—and the world—is beginning to understand that mental health issues do not exist in some netherworld where "crazy" people live, but are in fact prevalent in our day-to-day lives, and must be given as much priority as physical health. Even insurance companies and employers are finally turning a corner in their attitudes towards coverage for therapy and more favorable work environments.

While we are not out of the woods yet, the road ahead looks promising, as long as it is not the yellow brick road to how things used to be, but to how things should change for the better.

**The Wizard of Oz*

Resources:

<https://www.pbs.org/video/state-of-emergency-1622668997/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/16/many-americans-continue-to-experience-mental-health-difficulties-as-pandemic-enters-second-year/>

<https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/8-lessons-covid-19-pandemic>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/essential-but-undervalued-millions-of-health-care-workers-arent-getting-the-pay-or-respect-they-deserve-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

Persian Cultural Center's Bilingual Magazine

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July-August, 2021 Vol. XXIX

Persian Cultural Center

A non-profit national corporation

Established in 1989. San Diego, California

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PCC NEWS

PCC's Board Meetings

Persian Cultural Center's board of directors holds its meetings every second Wednesday of the month at the Iranian American Center (IAC). The last two meetings took place virtually on May 12 and June 9, 2021.

Virtual Movie Discussion Series—June 24, 2021

Capharnaüm (2018), directed by Nadine Labaki and winner of the Jury Prize of the Cannes Film Festival, was the movie selected for the June virtual movie discussion. Mahmoud Reza Pirouzian hosted the discussion. Tania Ahmadi, *Peyk's* film reviewer, was the guest of the program and reviewed the movie.



Three Chefs in the Kitchen—May 8, 2021

Three Chefs in the Kitchen was held virtually on May 8, 2021. Sima Kashani, Zhaleh Shayan, and Venus Safaie were the three chefs in this program. In this session, the three chefs had Kourosh Taghavi and his eleven-year-old daughter as guests. The topic was about how to prepare delicious *Tah chin* and crunchy *Tah dig*.



Three Chefs in the Kitchen—June 19, 2021

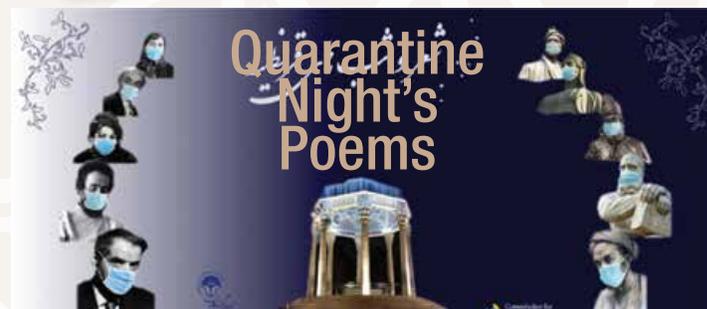
Three Chefs in the Kitchen, again hosted by Sima Kashani, Zhaleh Shayan, and Venus Safaie, was held virtually on June 19, 2021. The menu for the June program was "*Layered Stuffed Cabbage, Lettuce Borani & Pear Tart.*" The guests of this program were Mrs. Mahnaz Khazaieian and her son Barzin Khazaieian.

Quarantine Night's Poems—May 19, 2021

In this virtual event hosted by Farshad Babakhani and PCC's Poetry & Literature Committee, poems from *Farrokhi Sistani* were read and attendees also read their own selected poetry.

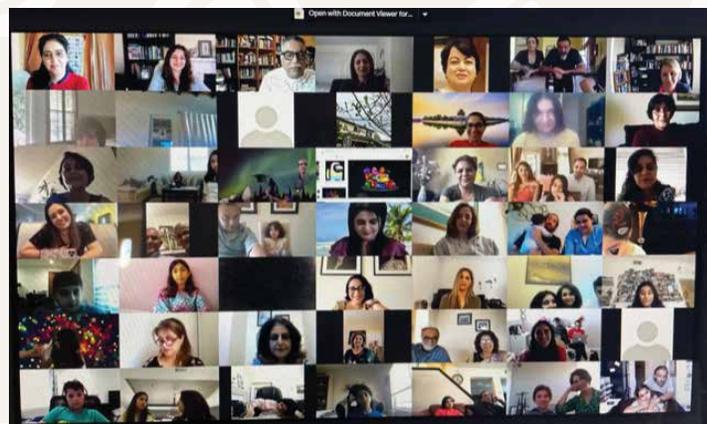
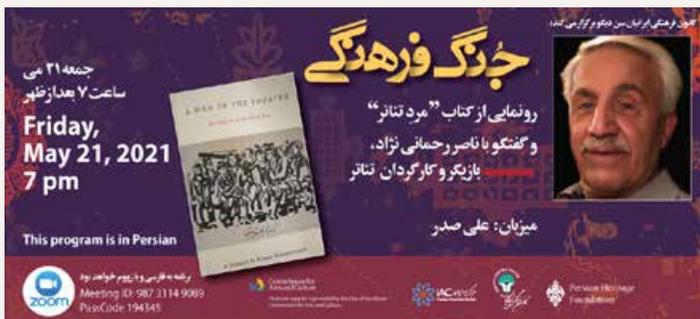
Quarantine Night's Poems—June 16, 2021

This virtual event was hosted by Farshad Babakhani and PCC's Poetry & Literature Committee. The subject was "Daghighi, the tenth century poet." The attendees also read their own selected poetry.



Jong-e Farhangi—May 21, 2021

May Jong was an online event hosted by Ali Sadr. Guest Naser Rahmaninejad, a prominent theater actor and director, introduced his latest autobiography, *A Man of Theater*. The interview centered on the history of theater in Iran. A question and answer period followed the discussion.



PCC Youth Committee

During the first week of June, the PCC Youth Committee hosted a food drive, which was very successful. Thank you for all your donations. The members of the committee are also continuing to provide free remote tutoring to people of all ages for a variety of subjects, and are helping many kids in school. The committee is planning to host an outdoor game day consisting of fun activities with the community, as well as a monthly hike. More details to come in the future. If you have any questions or are willing to join, please contact pcc@pccsd.org.



Annual Meeting and Election—June 3, 2021

The annual meeting and election of new members to the board of directors of PCC was held virtually via Zoom on June 3, 2021, at 7 p.m. Maz Jobrani was the special guest of this event who received honorary membership of PCC. In the beginning, Ms. Shahla Salah, the president of the board, reported on PCC's annual activities. Mrs. Babakhani-Ghazi presented the annual report of ISSD. Then Mr. Ali Sadr gave reports on ISSD's activities and *Peyk* magazine and Mr. Hamid Rafizadeh gave the financial report. At the end of the session, the election was held. The complete report of this event is presented on pages 6 and 7.







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A Special program for PCC members

Maz Jobrani

at the Annual Assembly and Election of PCC
 Thursday, June 3, 2021, at 7 pm

This program is via Zoom and exclusively for PCC members
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Annual Meeting and Election Persian Cultural Center of San Diego June 3, 2021 33 Years of Service

PCC's Annual General Assembly took place on June 3, 2021, at 7 p.m. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual meeting was conducted online via Zoom. At the assembly, the annual report was presented, followed by the election of the new board members.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Maz Jobrani, the famous comedian, actor, and honorary member of PCC, was the guest of the program and opened the meeting.

After calling the meeting to order, PCC's 2020-2021 president, Shahla Salah, reported last year's activities. Hamid Rafizadeh presented the financial report and Ali Sadr presented the reports for the Iranian School of San Diego (ISSD) and *Peyk* magazine. A summary of last year's activities is listed further below.

2020-2021 Board of Directors and Committee Assignments

PCC's board of directors and committee members for the past year were Shahla Salah (President), Amir Farshad Babakhani (Vice-President), Hamid Rafizadeh (Treasurer), Nikoo Atefi (Secretary), Parnian Badii, Hamid Beikzadeh, Hossain Hajimowlana, Ali Sadr (ISSD Principal), Venus Safaei, and Mahmoud Reza Pirouzian. The advisory board consisted of Shahri Estakhry, Saeed Jalali, Rosita Bagheri, Shaghayegh Hanson, and Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi.

The PCC board of directors held monthly meetings over the past year, while committees held meetings as needed. At its first meeting, the board of directors elected its executive committee members and established the following committees:

Arts and Culture: Hossain Hajimowlana (Head), Ali Sadr, Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Farshad Babakhani, Parnian Badii, Anahita Babaei, Abdy Salimi, Mahmoud Reza Pirouzian, Sohile Bigdeli, and Nikoo Atefi

Membership: Farideh Fazel (Head), Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Sara Alagheband, Parnian Badii, and Shahrzad Julazadeh

PR: Mahmoud Reza Pirouzian (Head), Sara Alagheband, Ali Sadr, Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Farshad Babakhani, Nikoo Atefi, Farideh Fazel, Hossain Hajimowlana, and Shahrzad Julazadeh

Grant and Finance: Hamid Rafizadeh (Head), Shahla Salah, Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Shahrzad Julazadeh, and Cheryl Encine

Fundraising and Nowruz: Nikoo Atefi (Head), Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Farideh Rasouli Fazel, Shahla Salah, Venus Safaei, Parnian Badii, Hamid Rafizadeh, Bahar Bagherpour, and Mohammad Ayari

PCC Charity: Venus Safaei (Head), Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Shahla Salah, Parnian Badii, Nikoo Atefi, and Shahrzad Julazadeh

Education: Ali Sadr (Head), Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Parisa Amini, and Shahnaz Ahmadian

ChaharShanbeh Soori & SizdeBedar: Hamid Rafizadeh (Head), and Hamid Beikzadeh

Building: Hamid Rafizadeh (Head), Ali Sadr, Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, Hamid Beikzadeh, Shahla Salah, and Shahrzad Julazadeh

PCC Youth: Farideh Fazel (Head), Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi, and Venus Safaei

Peyk: Ali Sadr (Head), Shahri Estakhry, Aria Fani, Saeid Noori Bushehri, Shahrzad Julazadeh, Shaghayegh Hanson, Reza Khabazian, Ali Sahebolzamani, and Rachel Tait

Governance: Ali Sadr (Head), Shaghayegh Hansen, Nikoo Atefi, Shahla Salah, Farideh Fazel, Mahmoud Reza Pirouzian, and Shahrzad Julazadeh

Summary of Persian Cultural Center Events and Activities

During 2020-2021, PCC was active in organizing traditional celebrations and programs for the Iranian American community. PCC also collaborated with other organizations to reach out to the community at large. Due to the limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, all these programs were virtual.

PCC sponsored or co-sponsored the following programs:

- 1- Mehregan celebration in collaboration with San Diego Museum of Art, a virtual concert by Damsaz Ensemble
- 2- Collaboration with Pacific Art Movement for the 21st Asian Film Festival
- 3- Virtual Yalda celebration, a virtual concert by the Velshodegan Band
- 4- Virtual screening of *African Violet* and Q&A session in collaboration with Venera Film
- 5- Virtual screening of documentary *Coup 53* in collaboration with Amirani Film (twice)
- 6- Virtual writing workshops with Hossein Mortezaeian Abknar
- 7- Dornab Electric Quartet virtual live concert
- 8- Virtual City of San Diego Nowruz celebration
- 9- Presentation of Haft-seen along with literary, cultural, and historical exhibits in four public libraries throughout San Diego County
- 10- Virtual PCC Nowruz celebration with Rastak Band
- 11- Four virtual Nights of Poetry and Literature (on the third Wednesday of the month)
- 12- Six virtual Film and Discussion series on every last Thursday of the month
- 13- Virtual Jong e Farhanghi with guest Hooshiar Afsarzadeh with Racism Awareness Project
- 14- Virtual Jong e Farhanghi with guest Dr. Aria Fani of the University of Washington
- 15- Virtual Jong e Farhanghi with guest Dr. Dominico Ingentino of UCLA
- 16- Virtual Jong e Farhanghi with guest Hossain Mortezaeian Abknar
- 18- Virtual Jong e Farhanghi with guest Naser Rahmaninejad
- 19- Virtual cooking sessions with "Three Chefs in the Kitchen" on every second Saturday of the month (3 events)
- 20- Collaboration with DocuNight to virtually show documentary movies followed by Q&A sessions
- 21- Panel Discussion "Immigrant Rights & Racial Justice, Past & Present" collaboration with Professional Organization of Iranian Americans, PCC of Atlanta, and Racism Awareness Project
- 22- Collaboration with Pacific Arts Movement on 10th Spring Showcase

PCC's virtual Yalda and Nowruz programs were watched by thousands in the U.S. and abroad.

ISSD:

The academic year 2020-2021 was the Iranian School of San Diego's 33rd year of operation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all ISSD classes and events were held virtually via Zoom. With 160 students, ISSD had a total of 18 classes on Sunday mornings and Thursday evenings, which were separated into six levels, including two classes for kindergarten and pre-kindergarten and two Persian classes for adults. Extracurricular classes such as Dance and Setar were offered as well. Because of the virtual nature of our classes, we had students from other cities in the U.S. and even from Europe. ISSD is planning to continue with the online classes in the future, as the cooperation of parents and students in coping with virtual classes has been exemplary.

ISSD's Persian language program is accredited by all local school districts as well as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which means that high school students can fulfill their second language requirements by taking Persian language courses at ISSD. PCC's Education Committee has completed 6 textbooks for teaching Persian as a heritage language. In addition, audio versions of the textbooks were also made available to students. Several Persian schools around the country are using our textbooks and our curriculum.

During the past year, ISSD organized two photographic competitions for students, entitled *COVID-19 and I* and *Haft-seen*. The winners were announced and their pictures were printed in *Peyk* magazine. The school's virtual *Nowruz* program was held on March 21, 2021. The virtual *End of the Year* event and graduation for the Class of 2021 took place on May 23, 2021.

ISSD has a website (issd.pccsd.org) and is also active on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Persian Dance Academy:

The Persian Cultural Dance Academy met virtually on Sundays. The 20 dance students performed at the PCC Nowruz event, ISSD's Nowruz program, and ISSD's *End of the Year* program.

Building:

The Iranian American Center (IAC) typically hosts a variety of cultural activities for the Iranian community (such as the Iranian American Scholarship Fund and Dollar a Month Fund, San Diego State University, and University of California San Diego). The IAC has a library with more than five thousand books. During the past year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings and events were held virtually via Zoom.

Peyk Magazine:

Peyk, PCC's bilingual cultural publication, is one of our most successful outreach instruments—it is registered with the Library of Congress and recently received a grant from the Persian Heritage Foundation. Every two months, *Peyk* is mailed to thousands of subscribers in San Diego and other parts of the country. Typically, thousands are distributed through business and cultural centers in San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles Counties, the Bay Area, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Maryland, Dallas, Atlanta, and many other cities.

Peyk is also available online at peykmagazine.com. This site is interactive, and readers can directly communicate and leave comments for the editorial board. The past issues of *Peyk* are still available at the *Peyk* archive, pccsd.org/peyk.

Outreach Programs:

PCC has continued its joint programs with local organizations, such as San Diego city libraries, San Diego Museum of Art, UCSD, Dollar a Month Fund, Iranian American Scholarship Fund, Iranian American Bar Association, PAC Art, Amirani Film, Dornab, Persian Cultural Center of Atlanta, Professional Organization of Iranian Americans, and the Racism Awareness Project.

PCC has worked with SDG&E's "Energy Solutions Partners" campaign. As an "Energy Solutions Partner," PCC has joined other nonprofits and environmental groups in a collaborative effort to make all of California's consumers aware of how they can save energy and money through energy efficiency. PCC was chosen as a partner because of our ability to target a specific demographic and translate important emergency news alerts into Farsi, as necessary.

Membership:

The PCC continued advertising and inviting members of the community to join. PCC provided new online membership software via Join-it and issued membership cards. Members receive a special discount for PCC events and to various Iranian American businesses.

Public Relations:

Thousands of people all over the world view the PCC's website (www.pccsd.org), Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, and YouTube platforms. PCC issues a weekly electronic newsletter that reaches thousands of community members. The PCC website provides quick access to *Peyk*, ongoing programs and activities, as well as other cultural information and events. People can refer to the website to read about PCC's many activities, to renew their membership, and to make tax-deductible contributions online.

In the past year, several PCC events were featured on KPBS radio in San Diego, KIRN Radio Iran in Los Angeles, Chekhabar.com, Kodoom.com, and on the San Diego Arts and Sol website. These programs not only reached out to the Iranian American community,

but also other communities who attended our featured programs.

The PCC Foundation-A Charitable Organization:

The foundation continues to raise funds for the following projects: helping members of our community who are facing many challenges with layoffs and furloughs due to COVID-19; supporting a young woman by paying for one month of food and rent; helping others with food; and continuing to support two young students who lost their parents and need help (this is a long-term project).

Youth:

This committee has been behind the planning of many PCC events, both for members of the center and for charity. It is responsible for organizing Family Fun Night, hosting baking events, and working on the logistics and promotion of other events every month. The committee's board has also spent time helping different charity organizations raise money, and the student board has organized fundraisers for PCC, collecting hundreds of pounds of food for the San Diego Food Bank. In addition, the Youth committee has offered free remote tutoring to any student who needs help while attending classes from home. The committee continues to have the following activities: food and toy drive, fundraising at different restaurants, virtual baking classes, virtual family game night, and free remote tutoring.

Special Thank You: We would like to take this opportunity to thank the board members who are leaving us. We are grateful for the time, energy, and talents they generously gave to PCC and our community. We look forward to having them back on the PCC Board again. The following members have served their terms and are leaving the board: Hossain Hajimowlana and Venus Safaei. They can run for re-election.

We are continually looking for volunteers to join our committees and subcommittees. Please step forward and GET INVOLVED with various groups to HELP US better serve the community.

2021 PCC Board of Directors Election: After the Board of Director's report, candidates to fill the vacancies in the Board introduced themselves and presented their plans for joining the Board. Mr. Mohammad Ayari and Mrs. Sholeh Dadkhah observed the election, which was performed by secret ballot. After counting the ballots, including the absentees and electronic votes, the results were announced.

The following were elected as voting members of the Board of Directors:

Fariba Babakhani-Ghazi and Sara Taghavi
Soheil Bigdeli and Venus Safaei were elected as alternative board members.

These new members will serve along with the current board members: Shahla Salah, Nikoo Atefi, Parnian Badii, Ali Sadr, Hamid Beikzadeh, Hamid Rafizadeh, Farshad Babakhani, and Farideh Fazl.

The general assembly adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors was held on June 9, 2021. Subsequently, the Board elected members of the Executive Committee, who will serve PCC for one year:

President: Shahla Salah
Vice President: Amir Farshad Babakhani
Treasurer: Hamid Refizadeh
Secretary: Nikoo Atefi

Other members of the Board of Directors will be leading various committees such as Arts and Culture, Education, PCC Charity, Building, Grant and Finance, Nowruz and Fundraising, PR, PCC Youth, ChaharShanbeh Soori & SizdeBedar, and Membership.

If you are interested in joining any of the committees, please contact PCC by phone at (858) 552-9355 or email at pcc@pccsd.org.



Aria Fani

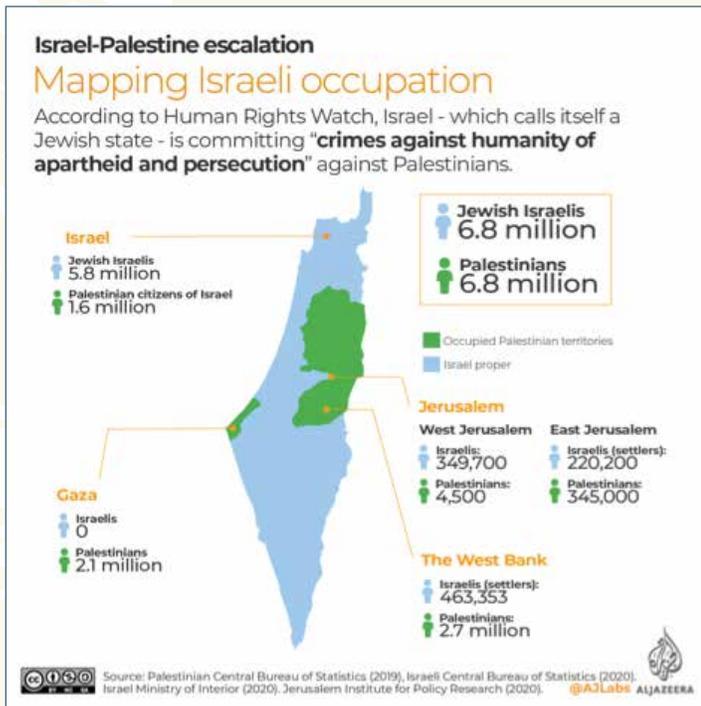
IS ISRAEL AN APARTHEID STATE? ON THE GROUND IN THE WEST BANK

“Apartheid refers to the implementation and maintenance of a system of legalized racial segregation in which one racial group is deprived of political and civil rights.”

—Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School

Is Israel an apartheid state? Some of you will find the question itself to be deeply offensive while many of you will find it entirely uncontroversial to call Israel an apartheid state based on current realities in the West Bank and Gaza (and even within Israel). I do not seek to debate this question. I am not versed in international law; I will leave up to legal scholars the task of debating the merits of applying apartheid as a legal and historical category to Israel.

Instead, I will offer you a deeply personal account of my experiences on the ground in Israel/Palestine. I have been studying this conflict out of personal interest for ten years and have visited Israel/Palestine twice, the last time in summer 2013 when I lived in the West Bank for two months to study Arabic language and literature at Birzeit University. What compelled me to return to the diaries that I meticulously kept that summer was the fact that the ground conditions in the West Bank and Gaza are rarely—if ever—mentioned in any detail in most media coverage of Israel/Palestine



in the United States. This pattern is disheartening and unacceptable. The episodes that I will share with you here are by default anecdotal, but they point to policies and actions that have been widely documented and commented on by human rights organizations, both Israeli (e.g., B’Tselem) and international (e.g., Human Right Watch). There is also no shortage of similar personal accounts shared by international journalists and human rights activists on the ground, also widely available in print and online. Ultimately, my aim is to educate my readers. Regardless of what label you deem most

appropriate for the status quo in Israel/Palestine or how you choose to justify it, it is absolutely imperative that we arrive at a shared understanding of what life looks like for Palestinians and Israelis on the ground. Without an accurate understanding of the facts of daily life, all that would be left of any debate on this contentious issue is fried air, aria fritta, as the Italian expression goes.

Arrival: Monday, June 10, 2013

After three long flights, I arrived at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. Once an immigration official inspected my U.S. passport (and saw the word “Iran”), I was escorted to a medium-sized room where I was held for 8 hours (food and water were provided periodically). During this uncertain time, I was interviewed three times by three different officials. The questions were similar. “What do you do in the U.S.? What’s your connection to Iran? Why are you here in Israel?” After looking around the room, I realized that this section was primarily reserved for Palestinians and non-Ashkenazi Jews (though the latter would wait significantly less time). The room was mainly full of Palestinians who were returning to their homeland to see their families. Bear in mind that American Jews who have never set foot in Israel can “return” to Israel either as tourist or permanent resident at any point of their life. A similar rule does not exist for the Palestinians who were displaced in the wake of Israel’s founding in 1948. After 8 hours, an Israeli official woke me up and gave me back my passport with a separate permit inside it. And off I went to Jerusalem to catch my orientation at Birzeit University.

Upon returning to California two months later, many friends would casually ask me, “Which airport did you fly to in Palestine?” They were surprised to learn that the West Bank and Gaza have no airports or control over their borders. The West Bank borders Jordan, but Israel has total control over who gets in and who gets out. Gaza’s borders are controlled by Israel and Egypt. Palestinians who need to travel abroad for personal, medical, or academic reasons need to acquire a permit from Israel. I saw this first hand when my Palestinian roommate, Mohammad, had to travel to Jerusalem in order to get a permit to travel to Europe to see his fiancée. Obtaining a permit is particularly difficult for Gazans.

No water, no shower

In our apartment, we often had no water to take a shower. We would fill a bucket during times when there was water and wash our bodies using water as conservatively as possible. Even my hippie lifestyle in Berkeley could not have prepared me for the lack of showers in Birzeit! Locals told me that the water shortage was due to the fact that Israel controlled the West Bank’s water resources. Beit El, a Jewish-only settlement near Birzeit, where I resided, controlled our water. International organizations have reported on Israel’s role in creating water insecurity in the West Bank and Gaza. Amnesty International has an article on this issue under the title “The Occupation of Water.” Effectively, Palestinians have an unelected entity that controls crucial aspects of their life, from access to drinking water to daily movement.



Refugee Camps: Wednesday, June 19

Students of Arabic at Birzeit had the option to volunteer at a refugee camp nearby called Jalazone. I will never forget the first time I saw Jalazone: built in 1949 as a temporary camp for displaced Palestinians, more than seventy decades later, it had now become a site of permanent exile. And you can sense this everywhere: from the tense atmosphere in the camp to its congested streets (more than 14,000 residents living in 0.10 square miles) and haphazardly-built homes. I began to volunteer at the children's center in Jalazone and got to know some of the residents. I learned that Jewish settlers at the nearby Beit El settlement at times attack the residents in Jalazone and that some kids have been maimed or killed only by accidentally getting close to the settlement. Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank are considered illegal by the international community.

Curtailing everyday movement

Living in the West Bank, it was impossible not to notice two clearly-segregated paths of movement everywhere. Jewish settlers living anywhere in the West Bank have freeways that connect settlements directly to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Palestinians have to take dirt roads and side roads with tons of potholes in order to arrive at military checkpoints where they have to present permits to get to Jerusalem. The trip from Birzeit to Jerusalem would normally take under an hour, but living under military occupation meant fear and uncertainty. The construction of the wall has effectively sealed off many Palestinian communities like Abu Dis from Jerusalem, a city of huge economic, cultural, and religious importance to all Palestinians, Muslims, and Christians alike.

Under military occupation, there is no such thing as an ordinary activity. One must always be ready for violence, in all its forms: verbal, physical, and collective. On July 5, I was on my way to Jerusalem via Ramallah with my roommate. At the Qalandia crossing, our taxi van was stopped so that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier could check all permits. My passport didn't have a stamp in it because my visa was given to me on a separate card. The soldier saw my passport and began to ask me questions in Hebrew, which sadly I don't speak. So the driver stepped in and asked me the soldier's question in Arabic, which I partially understood but could not answer (I tend to do better when a gun is not pointed at me).

In the middle of the hubbub, one of the passengers, an older lady, asked me, "¿Hablas español?" Her question was music to my ears since she was not yelling or pointing a gun at me. I explained my situation to her in Spanish, she translated it into Arabic, and then the driver translated it into Hebrew, and back again. This method seemed to be working until the soldier grew impatient and instructed me with his gun to get out of the van. My roommate, who also got off the bus, and I did not know how long we were going to be held. Luckily, the encounter was very brief. I explained that I was a student from California studying in the West Bank, and they let us go. It was a deeply terrifying experience—or, as Palestinians call it, Friday

morning. My Arabic-language partner at Birzeit University told me how many times he had been physically and verbally humiliated by IDF soldiers at crossings.

Oh, why did the old lady assume I knew Spanish? This occurred to me when my heartbeat had slowed down: I was wearing a shirt with Peruvian embroidery. And the Palestinian lady recognized it because her son lived in the Dominican Republic, like thousands of Palestinians who at some point find their living conditions insufferable (as designed) and are forced to seek a better life elsewhere. Today, the header in all my syllabi at the University of Washington reads: "language learning saves lives."

Protest at Nabi Salih: Friday, June 28

My roommate told me he was going to a local protest at Nabi Salih, a small village northwest of Ramallah. Since 2010, the village has become a site of weekly protests led by locals and joined by Israeli conscientious objectors (who come from Tel



Aviv), international activists, and journalists. The protest was about increasing dispossession of land and restricted access to water, particularly at the hands of Halamish, the neighboring Jewish settlement. Every Friday, after prayer, locals gather under an oak tree; after a speech, they peacefully walk down where they are confronted by the IDF.

Almost immediately after we peacefully marched down the hill, the IDF began to launch teargas canisters at us, putting U.S. taxpayers' money to good use. Once the IDF trucks came toward us, many of us began to disperse. My roommate and a few others ran up the hill where we suddenly saw a Palestinian woman who rushed us inside her house. She then closed all her doors and windows. After ten minutes, we saw a separate Israeli truck coming through the street. Even though by then there were no protestors, the truck began to spray "skunk" water from its cannon at houses and cars parked outside. Skunk water is a liquid invented by an Israeli firm called Odortec. It is more pungent than raw sewage and any amount of it would ruin your clothes (why shoot water at peaceful protestors when you can spray them with an experimental chemical?). Locals told me that it has burnt their skin. Locals thought the IDF's response that day was relatively restrained! An American woman had been blinded by a rubber bullet a month earlier and on other occasions tens of protestors had been shot and injured.

When leaving the woman's house, we saw an older Palestinian man who was helplessly trying to get the stench off his front yard and car. When he saw us, he began to shout at us in Arabic.

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IS ISRAEL AN APARTHEID STATE? ON THE GROUND IN THE WEST BANK

I did not need an interpreter or dictionary to understand his anger. I felt absolutely gutted. Here I was, a naive foreigner, whose presence had helped draw out the IDF to spray skunk water at this poor man's house. What did our protest achieve? We were headed back to Birzeit and he was left on his own to cleanse his house of lingering stench. If you are interested to learn more about Nabi Salih's struggles, the Oakland Institute has a great article on the Nabi Salih protests, titled "You Cannot be Free Without My Freedom."

Touring the West Bank: Sunday, June 30

On a tour organized by Birzeit University, we visited the home of Hani Amer whose residence in Salfit has been completely sealed off from the rest of his community by the Israeli wall. He is essentially a prisoner in his own house. Drawing on humor to deal with his living situation, he has declared an autonomous state!

The road from Birzeit to Mr. Amer's house was filled with road blocks, standalone watch towers, military posts, and electric barbed wire. At one point, our tour guide asked the driver to stop so he could tell us about the international companies that sell Israel the building block that makes its military apparatus.

On the way to Birzeit, we made another stop to see how Ariel, Israel's biggest settlement in the West Bank, pours its waste water into parts of Salfit, ruining the ecology of Wadi al-Matawi, an area between Salfit and Ariel. According to B'Tselem, Israel has prevented Palestinians from opening a wastewater-treatment facility in Salfit. You can see this report by searching for "Ariel settlement fact sheet" on B'Tselem.

Hebron (Al-Khalil): Sunday, July 14

Visiting Hebron was very intense. It is the only Palestinian city, to the best of my knowledge, where Jewish settlers live inside the city. The city is sliced into different zones with a heavy military presence guarding each. Most of its shops were closed and those that were open looked impoverished. Hebron's scars of history have not been allowed to heal—in 1994, an Israeli far-right terrorist entered the Ibrahimi mosque, killing 29 and injuring 125 Palestinians. One moment that really stood out to me was when our Palestinian guide was giving us a tour of one neighborhood: a Jewish settler passing by shouted in perfect American English, "Don't believe a word of what he says!"

Visiting Hebron made me realize that there is no unified reality in the West Bank. Each city lived its unique version of the occupation. This disparity was grotesquely visible. For instance, Ramallah and Qalqilya are only an hour or so apart, but the former feels like a vibrant city and the latter is one of the most depressing towns I have ever visited in my life. Qalqilya is completely surrounded by the Israeli wall—it's an open-air prison. It stands only half an hour away from the Mediterranean sea, yet we met kids who had never seen the sea in their life. Conditions within the same city can be radically different as well. The Church of Nativity in Bethlehem attracts a lot of tourists and in its surroundings there are some cute shops, but if you walk 10 minutes away in a different direction, you come across businesses that have been utterly ruined by the construction of the wall (with anti-Palestinian graffiti written on the doors). Refugee camps have a reality of their own; they depend on international organizations for basic aid and are in poor shape. And Gaza is a world of its own which I did not visit: it is under Israeli military blockade by land, air, and sea. It has an obscenely high unemployment rate.



The J Street Tour: Friday, July 19

J Street is an American non-profit organization that advocates for a peaceful end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They organized a tour in Israel that shows how people suffer from the conflict. They took us to Sderot, a city less than a mile from Gaza in Israel. We heard of Israelis who had lost loved ones to Hamas rocket attacks. We also met a member of Gisha, a legal center that advocates for more freedom of movement for Gazans. The tour ended on the bus with a lively discussion of what we had learned and the types of solutions that J Street supported. The moment that I most vividly remember from that day is looking at Gaza City from what must have been a 1,000 yards away: it looked densely populated, most of it hidden behind a terrifying wall.

Protest at the Negev: Thursday, August 1

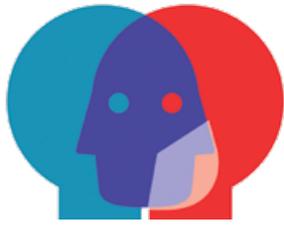
After taking my Arabic final exam, my roommate and I ran to catch a bus to Jerusalem to attend a protest in the Negev, close to the city of Be'er Sheva, a desert region in southern Israel. The gathering protested Israel's plan to destroy a Palestinian village and displace its inhabitants. Israel has destroyed tens of Palestinian villages in the Negev. Like the protest in Nabi Salih, there was a mix of Palestinian, Israeli, and international protestors. Unlike Nabi Salih, instead of the IDF, the police who showed up were not violent, probably due to the fact that the protest took place inside Israel.

Final words

I did not return to the United States with a settled understanding of this conflict. In fact, I only discovered the depth of my historical ignorance and the importance of having difficult conversations. During my time in Israel/Palestine, I had conversations with right-wing Christian Zionists, Israeli leftists deeply critical of Israel, Palestinian refugees, Israeli victims of Hamas' terrorist attacks, international activists and aid workers, children of Holocaust survivors who objected to the occupation, and Palestinian academics. It was truly a privilege to be able to listen to so many different perspectives and engage them in conversation. While there was no consensus over the history of the conflict or viable solutions to end it, there was at least a shared understanding of objective reality, a factor often sorely missing from media coverage of Palestine/Israel in the U.S. It is harder to negate the realities of military occupation when they are unfolding before your eyes (yet some still did!). So, is Israel after all an apartheid state? I won't answer that question. I only insist that when discussing this conflict, we recognize and foreground the facts on the ground and the disparate realities of people who live in Palestine/Israel.



All photos were taken by the author. You may reach Aria via ariafani@uw.edu



INTERESTING TAKES ON MASK WEARING

By Shaghayegh Hanson

“We are all niqabis now: Coronavirus masks reveal hypocrisy of face covering bans,” is the title of an article written by Katherine Bullock, a lecturer in Islamic Politics at the University of Toronto.¹ Noting the face-covering bans in Quebec and France, she asks whether, having become used to covering their own faces, people in the West will become less prejudiced against Muslim women who observe the niqab.

Bullock states that, prior to the rise of western liberalism, sometimes European women covered their faces or hair, “but when they did so, it was not associated with something negative.” When Muslim women do the same, whether under colonial rule in the past or in the West today, the practice is seen as “tribal,” “anti-women,” a tool to hide one’s identity, or a barrier to communication. When juxtaposed with the lack of such labels for medical or pandemic-related face covering, the prejudicial nature of western attitudes to the niqab becomes clear—“face politics,” as Bullock refers to it.

Ironically, as Bullock states, “[a]t the same time, we grow up learning our face is something to be manipulated,” such as “‘putting on one’s face’ with make-up,” “‘facing the world’ through our education and personal grit,” and “cultivating ‘poker face’ to deceive people in cards or lying to parents and teachers.” In learning to “compose” our faces in certain circumstances, “[t]he face is often a mask of our real selves.”

Another article picks up on this thread: “Why some people like wearing masks,” by Alice Robb,² writing for the BBC online, discusses the reduction in “emotional labor” that some people have derived from mask wearing. From the introvert who no longer worries about bumping into friends and family while shopping (thereby avoiding awkward interactions) to restaurant servers and retail workers no longer feeling the pressure to “fake-smile” at customers, mask wearing is “freeing up valuable cognitive resources.”

Quoting Ramani Durvasula, a clinical psychologist and psychology professor at California State University, Los Angeles, the article states, “Anonymity carries power. . . . It can feel like trying on a different ‘role’ and the associated expectations of that role, perhaps freeing us of what can feel exhausting and insincere about smiling (especially when we aren’t having a good day).”

However, for people who enjoy mask wearing as a reprieve from stressful social situations, a better long-term solution lies in overcoming the anxiety, not avoiding it.

These articles are definitely worth reading. You will find the links below.

¹ <https://theconversation.com/we-are-all-niqabis-now-coronavirus-masks-reveal-hypocrisy-of-face-covering-bans-136030>

² <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210115-why-some-people-like-wearing-masks>



Pandemic Stress and Self-care

By Lily Mojdehi

Communities all over the world have been impacted by the pandemic for over a year. Collectively, people are experiencing intense emotions such as grief, loss, isolation, anxiety, and fear. The uniqueness of these times has made it almost impossible for people to ignore the conversation of mental health and wellness. This past year has shaken the ground underneath our feet. All that was familiar, comfortable, normal, and safe was destabilized. The intensity of this past year opened many people’s most vulnerable wounds—wounds that have been covered up and patched over. This isolation has given time and space for many people to consider what is going on inside themselves, emotionally. This time of reflection has almost forced people to confront their emotions and past traumas.

As a mental health advocate, my hope is that this year helps us recognize how necessary it is to stay diligent about our physical and mental wellbeing. It can be helpful to think of our overall wellness holistically. In order to prevent major physical or mental health challenges, I suggest we look at our overall health as a balancing act. I would recommend reflecting on how you balance your health mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Mentally, ask yourself: How are you stimulating your mind? Try taking a social media or news break, practice deep breathing, or stick to a daily routine.

Physically, consider: Are your basic needs met? Are you eating nourishing foods and moving your body in a way that makes you feel alive?

Emotionally, check in with yourself: Do you feel safe enough to express what is going on inside you? Try writing in a journal or listening to music you love.

Spiritually, nourish yourself: Are you connected to your higher purpose, spending time in nature, and maintaining cultural traditions?

Different areas of our lives need more attention at different times. Our health will never be perfect, but it is up to us to nourish ourselves and sometimes that will mean asking for help or extra support from a therapist, mentor, or friend.



An Interview with Neda Iranpour of CBS8, San Diego

Neda Iranpour is an Iranian American anchor/reporter at one of the major local television networks and a familiar face of morning news in San Diego. She also has been covering major Iranian cultural events such as Charshanbehsoori and Sizdebedar for several years. I have been looking forward to conducting an interview with her for a while. Finally, I got a chance to have this chat with her about her personal life, family, background, Iranian-ness, and the effects of COVID-19 on her life and work.

-Ali Sadr

AS- Neda, I am grateful for this opportunity. I am sure many of our readers are familiar with you and have seen you on TV. Can you please introduce yourself?

NI- HI, I'm so honored to be in your magazine—thank you so much for this opportunity. I am a weathercaster, news anchor, and reporter at CBS8 and The CW in San Diego. I've worked in many cities like Yuma, Reno, Sacramento, and San Francisco covering major news stories and I'm so happy to be here in San Diego with my family now.

AS- Tell us about your family.

NI- I have a wonderful husband, Chris Rice, and a 2-year-old daughter, Roya Iranpour Rice. My mom also lives close to us and we are so lucky to see her almost everyday! She watches Roya every day while we go to work, so we owe her the WORLD! She's even teaching Roya Farsi and her favorite food is khoresh t e bamieh, thanks to my mom. They are best buddies!

AS- Are you a native of San Diego?

NI- I was born in Northern California in Los Gatos, but I grew up in Los Angeles until my mom's company moved to Texas (when I was in high school.) While we lived in LA (Woodland Hills), my Mommon Joon lived in La Jolla. So we would visit her many, many times a year. We were lucky to spend summers in San Diego with her and I even lived with her for a while after college. I attended the University of Texas at Austin after going to high school in Lewisville, Texas. As soon as I graduated, I had a strong desire to drive west to San Diego to be with her. She passed away at age 90 and I miss her every day. Rooheshan Shad.

AS - Why did you choose to be a journalist?

NI- I always felt it was important to provide people opportunities to be the best they can be. But I knew there were huge populations where their opportunities are not equal. So I felt an ongoing purpose to help share their stories. I wanted people to be aware of what's happening inside and outside of their neighborhoods. Perhaps seeing that not everyone is as fortunate might make people want to reach out to help. I also have a strong sense for truth. I want to be there as history unfolds so I could see it and share the real story. The truth is the only way we'll be able to make the right choices.



AS - Why did you choose TV?

NI - TV was something I always watched as a young child and I still remember being impacted by major news stories and the live footage or videos on the screen. I think articles have a huge impact, too, of course, but I also think watching something unfold is memorable and impactful. Plus, since I'm now on a morning show, I'm able to add a lot more of my personality and hopefully share my own experiences to help brighten people's day, make them laugh, or teach them something new.

AS - I have seen parts of your morning show (sorry, I am not a morning person), but I usually watch your posts on Facebook. Can you explain to me how it works and what's involved?

NI - I'm actually the morning weathercaster, but I wear many hats. I anchor and cover weather from 4:30-5 a.m. on CBS8, then I cover weather from 5-7 a.m. on CBS8. I also cover weather and anchor from 7-9 a.m. on The CW San Diego. I also often cover special reports. So after 9 a.m., I often go on shoots. I work the super early morning shift, and I love it because our show is informative but also entertaining. I am always going to be a reporter at heart, I'm constantly curious, so I have a lot of news stories that I like to cover.

AS - When did you become an anchor?

NI - I started reporting, covering weather, and anchoring in Yuma, Arizona, back in 2004. So I've had nearly 20 years of experience doing multiple jobs and moving around the West Coast to work at different stations. Most people are anchors and reporters or weathercasters, but it's rare for someone to do all three jobs. It wasn't part of my initial plan, but it has worked out well for me to be versatile and interested in many subjects like politics, health, and the environment.

AS - As they say, you are "very Iranian" and cover "Iranian news." (Actually, the first time I met you, you had come to cover Charshanbehsoori several years ago when your leg was in a cast.) Do you get any resistance or resentment from your co-workers or higher-ups?

NI - I don't think so. I have tried to incorporate some of our beautiful culture in the news. But I wish I could share more than Charshandbehsoori and Nowruz. Obviously, we have so many lovely aspects of being Iranian; so anytime there's a special news story, please let me know and I can try to add it to our local coverage.

AS - How has being an immigrant and an Iranian American affected your career?

NI - I think it has helped me greatly. Being a daughter of immigrants is a gift. I understand the special sacrifices it takes to move to a new country and learn a new culture, but still try to keep what you love from back home. I am so grateful to my parents for sharing our culture, language, food, and dancing so that I can also share them with people I meet. Also, I think it's always important to approach news stories through open-minded eyes, and I learned that because of my parents and background. I can empathize with people of various backgrounds because mine came with its own set of unique challenges.

AS - The current pandemic forced everyone to change everything, from lifestyle to work. How did it affect your life and your work?

NI - I had to work a lot harder during a scary time. I was reporting during the first 6-8 months of the pandemic before they allowed me to come in-studio to anchor and cover the weather. So every day, especially at the beginning, I was worried I would get COVID-19 and bring it home to my family. The main goal for me and my husband was to NOT get COVID-19, so we could protect my mom and daughter. Since my mom is a part of our household, her health became my top priority. I wiped everything and wore a mask if there were people around us. I remember always smelling like Lysol wipes. I also remember this constant stress and worry. I no longer traveled with our photographers, so I would drive to reports on my own and work out of my Prius which turned into my office. It would get lonely, but I had the best photographers and editors and producers who I could turn to in the early morning hours. We all cared about each other's health and safety. At times, if I was covering a protest or the arrival of a cruise ship, I would go home so worried that I was bringing COVID-19 back. So I would try to keep my mask on at home, too. But that's really tough with a toddler. I would also get the COVID-19 test often, to be sure I didn't have it and perhaps was asymptomatic. I did my best, but I hope to never worry about the virus in that way again.



AS - I myself—and I am sure our readers, too— appreciate your professionalism and sacrifices. I certainly hope we don't have to go through another pandemic. It appears that we are coming out of this pandemic in a couple of months. Do you think that everything will go back to “Normal”?

NI - I hope we all learn positive lessons from the tough times we just endured. I hope our new “normal” includes continued enjoyment of the outdoors. I hope we appreciate and respect each other more. I would also love to see less traffic and less pollution, but that will require major changes. I hope we see less waste and fewer single-use plastics since people may not order food to-go as much. But I love outdoor dining and having picnics at the beach, so I think enjoying nature will keep going. I also enjoyed surfing more often during the pandemic and I think a lot of people picked up new healthy hobbies.

AS - How do you think the return to “Normal” will be for you, your family, and your work?

NI - I am so, so happy that my family is vaccinated and we can see each other. We are mostly going to parks instead of people's homes, which is lovely! I'm also traveling a little more to see friends and family and that is so good for my heart and happiness. We used to travel and get together all the time, so I'm looking forward to more of that in our future. I also plan to keep surfing and doing outdoor activities—we're so lucky to live in such a beautiful place.

I think work will continue to be very busy since news is always evolving and relevant. I'm part of a wonderful morning team at CBS8/The CW San Diego, so I am so grateful to have a job that I love! I don't even mind waking up at 2:45 a.m. because this pandemic has especially taught me that people are counting on us. I don't want to let our viewers down. I hope to continue to share the truth and help people make good choices for their lives; whether it's related to weather or news, I'm here for you!

AS – Thank you, Neda, for your time. I wish you and your family all the best. Good luck with your work and stay safe. Paydar baashi!



Soccer Struggles in the Fight Against Racism

By Danial Golphoroush



As I was contemplating which topic to pursue in my next article on soccer, it became apparent that racism within soccer was the timeliest topic. Not only because May 25th was the first anniversary of George Floyd's murder, but because it felt like we are not moving into a better future—especially in soccer. On May 26th, I was just looking to spend a quiet day as my team, Manchester United, suffered an unexpected loss against Villarreal, a team with a tenth of our resources. However, hearing that Marcus Rashford and other players of color were being racially abused online made the loss in the Europa League final feel irrelevant.

The world of soccer is no stranger to racial abuse and discrimination on and off the pitch, but the increased popularity of various social media platforms has given more direct access to individuals of color within the game. While this issue is not anything new, it has received a lot more exposure since Raheem Sterling's viral post in 2019; the Manchester City forward/English international star's post compared the coverage that black and white teenage players receive from the media. The differences were shocking. Since then, major soccer broadcasting channels and podcasts have routinely dedicated special segments, additional discussions, and special programming to racism and its effect on football and vice versa (although it's arguable how effective those programs really are). The Premier League and other leagues and federations have also attempted to fight racism on and off the pitch for many years now.

As players, teams, leagues, and federations continue to struggle to introduce a new concrete, preventative, and constructive plan to tackle racism in football for good, multiple different methods have been proposed—each with its own strengths and weaknesses. The latest method has been to raise awareness and demonstrate support by kneeling before the kick-off of each game in the Premier League; however, in the past few months, some activists and players of color have spoken against this practice as they believe it has become part of the “routine” and lost its meaning. Famously, Queens Park Rangers was the first team to stop taking a knee in England as the club saw kneeling as a pure PR move from the league. In addition, Wilfred Zaha of Crystal Palace F.C. announced that he would no longer be taking the knee. In mid-February, Zaha discussed his decision during an episode of the *On The Judy* podcast, saying “The whole kneeling down—why must I kneel down for you to show that we matter? Why must I even wear Black Lives Matter on the back of my top to show you that we matter? This is all degrading stuff.” He continued by mentioning that these actions have a more “tick the box” quality rather than a constructive reason behind them.

This issue has become a point of contention recently as more teams, football associations (FAs), and leagues have been accused

of using racial justice as a PR and marketing campaign. Recently, Patrick Bamford shed light on the way that the leagues and FIFA handled the proposal of the biggest teams of Europe creating their own separate league versus the handling of racism in the game. In an interview after their match against Liverpool F.C., the British striker of Leeds United said “It's amazing the amount of uproar that comes into the game when somebody's pockets are being hurt. It's a shame it's not like that when all the things that go wrong with things at the minute, racism and stuff like that.” He was referencing the announcement of a new “Super League” by twelve of the top European soccer teams; in a matter of days, FIFA took a strong stance against such plans with heavy and unprecedented economic sanctions and the threat of exclusion from international tournaments. On the other hand, players have been facing online, on-field, and off-field racial abuse since soccer was only a local sport in England—and the problem is nowhere close to being solved.

The abuse sometimes has been so apparent and direct that some players and teams have walked off the pitch. Harry Kane, captain of the English National Team, has famously said that he would walk the English team off the pitch if players faced more racism. Kane's teammate, Raheem Sterling, has contested this idea and has alternatively advocated for point deduction. Sterling believes that by walking off the pitch, the team is allowing the racists to win. “To win the game would hurt them even more,” he said. “They're only trying to get you down.”

Sports fans' actions are often written off as banter and harmless talk, but it is important to remember that these “fans” are members of our communities who could and do have a bigger impact on our society than we may realize. In response to the racial abuse received through social media after the loss on May 26th, Marcus Rashford tweeted: “At least 70 racial slurs on my social accounts counted so far. For those working to make me feel any worse than I already do, good luck trying.” However, more importantly, he followed up this tweet with another: “I'm more outraged that one of the abusers that left a mountain of monkey emojis in my DM is a maths teacher with an open profile. He teaches children!! And knows that he can freely racially abuse without consequence...”

While there is discussion around various methods of confronting racist behavior in soccer, none of them recognizes racism as an issue deeply rooted in our society, instead treating racism as an isolated, self-contained phenomenon in football. Most of the campaigns and solutions surround the act of racism within the match and the federation or club's diplomatic reaction to it. Any long-lasting solution then must necessarily come from within—

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fan-led and grassroots-initiated programs alongside education and equity programs.

Each FA must appoint a board of experts and critics of not only football, but race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, to be able to tackle this systematic issue in a prepared and planned manner with qualified individuals. Anti-discrimination programs, such as mandatory workshops and classes for grassroots and youth teams, will establish and begin such discussion within the younger football players and consequently help to create a more inclusive space for all. Football possesses an extraordinary international reach which surpasses cultural, linguistic, and physical borders and boundaries, and federations and football associations must take advantage of such a platform to create long-lasting positive systematic change.

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Saturday, August 14, 2021, at 11 AM

Jong e Farhanghi

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Poetry Night

Wednesday, July 21, 2021, at 7 PM
Wednesday, August 18, 2021, at 7 PM



Movie and Discussion

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Thursday, August 26, 2021, at 7:30 PM

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Monday, August 30 to Friday, September 3, 2021
Online only: issd.pccsd.org/registration Classes start on Sunday, September 12, 2021, 9:30 AM to 12 noon. For more information, see ISSD pages in this issue.



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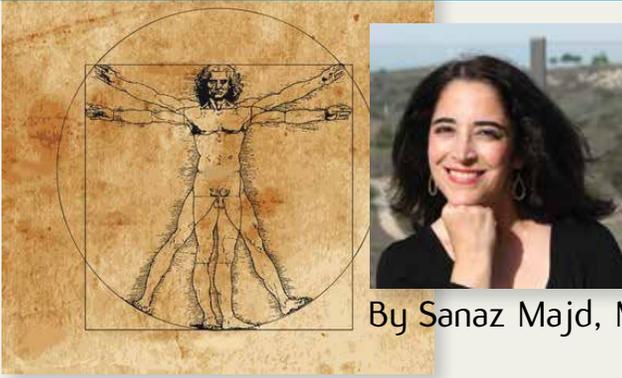
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By Sanaz Majd, MD



MENOPAUSE

As many women in their 40s and 50s can attest to, menopause is by no means a picnic. Beginning in a woman's early 40s, estrogen levels begin to gradually decline. This progressive decline is eventually sufficient enough to shut down the ovaries. It is the body's message that the fertile, child-bearing era has culminated in a shift towards a new phase of life. It is a life-changing rite of passage—a milestone of sorts that women unfortunately cannot escape—and it certainly can be a physiologically challenging one for many.

WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

Blood tests are often unnecessary to diagnose menopause, as menopause itself is defined as 12 consecutive months without vaginal bleeding in menopausal-aged women. The average age of menopause in the U.S. is 51.

Menopause can yield a myriad of potentially unpleasant and sometimes even debilitating symptoms, including:

- mood changes
- weight gain
- scalp hair loss
- facial hair growth
- acne
- vaginal dryness

But by far, the symptom which wreaks the greatest havoc is hot flashes, experienced by 80% of menopausal women and lasting up to 10 years (or even more in few unlucky women). Hot flashes typically occur at night, interfering with sleep. But many women experience them during the daytime as well, causing an even greater disturbance in daily functioning as a result. Imagine unpredictably breaking out into a sweat on the job as a sales rep while speaking to a customer, as a teacher presenting to students, or as a lawyer in the middle of a court case. Hot flashes can certainly impair quality of life.

HORMONAL REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT):

With the increasing evidence against the wide use of hormonal replacement therapy, many women are reluctant to embrace it, and with good reason. Risks of HRT are not for the faint of heart (no pun intended), as they include a slight increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, and breast cancer—potentially very serious outcomes.

Which is not to say that HRT is not a viable option for some—the pros of the treatment really must be carefully reviewed against the

cons, because truthfully no other treatment is quite as miraculously effective as HRT. For those with severe hot flashes without cardiovascular risk factors, HRT can be a consideration.

But, for everyone else, there are other alternatives to explore.

BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION:

Those with mild hot flashes do not necessarily need treatment, and may only need to make certain behavioral changes such as turning on a fan, lowering the room temperature, using cool bed sheets, losing weight, dressing in layers for greater temperature control, and avoiding known triggers. These triggers may include stress and anxiety, spicy foods, and consuming a high carbohydrate diet. Obtaining regular exercise has also been suggested to help combat hot flashes.

OTHER TREATMENT OPTIONS:

If the dominant menopausal symptom is anything other than hot flashes, then consider yourself very fortunate compared to women who cannot escape the incessant, unpredictable sweats. Treatment can be tailored to simply address non-hot flash symptoms; for example, there are antidepressants that can treat mood changes, estrogen vaginal suppositories that address vaginal dryness, and even prescription and non-prescription options to treat menopausal facial hair and acne.

But if hot flashes are the dominant symptom wreaking havoc on your life, here are some other alternatives. The goal is to not necessarily strive for a cure-all, but really to reach enough efficacy to improve quality of life and a more tolerant degree of functioning.

Antidepressants

Antidepressants are the preferred first-line group of non-hormonal drugs used to treat hot flashes. For those with a mood component to menopause, antidepressants may serve as an extra added benefit as well.

One antidepressant, paroxetine, has been FDA approved for hot flashes at a very low dose of 7.5 mg. However, it is currently available only in brand name at this particular dose, marketed only for hot flashes and is, hence, costly. The good news is that it is available as a very inexpensive generic dose of 10 mg that is marketed as an antidepressant. It's the same drug, but just a smidgeon higher in dose (7.5 mg vs 10 mg). However, it should not be taken by women who get hot flashes due to tamoxifen (a chemotherapy drug used to treat breast cancer).

Other antidepressants have also been studied for this purpose and used to alleviate hot flashes. Examples include citalopram, escitalopram, and venlafaxine—all available as inexpensive generics. One trial of 339 women found that venlafaxine 75 mg extended release was as effective as low-dose oral estradiol in relieving hot flashes. I personally have seen some patients do very well with venlafaxine in my practice while treating menopausal women. But it can raise blood pressure levels in those who are prone, so make sure to monitor that. The other listed antidepressants are also good options.

Gabapentin

Gabapentin is originally an anti-seizure drug that is used for multiple other neurologic indications, such as diabetic neuropathy, restless leg syndrome, and neuropathy due to shingles. Although second-line, it may be considered first-line in those who experience hot flashes only at night as it can be taken as a single bedtime dose. It may be taken during the daytime as well, although sedation may limit its use.

Oxybutynin

Oxybutynin is an anticholinergic agent, which means it blocks certain chemicals in the brain that regulate certain functions, one of which is involuntary muscle activity. It has been predominantly used to treat urinary incontinence, by controlling bladder muscle spasms. One of its side effects has been diminished sweating, and further research has shown that it may actually reduce hot flashes in menopausal women as well. Side effects may include dry mouth and headaches.

Clonidine

Clonidine is a prescription drug that calms down the nervous system and has been used to primarily treat hypertension. It is a third-line non-hormonal option, as its side effects make it more difficult to tolerate, including dizziness, constipation, and dry mouth. Its skin patch version may be better tolerated since it produces a steady level of the drug. Also, be warned that clonidine lowers blood pressure.

Complementary/Alternative Therapies

There are some available complementary/alternative therapy options including both supplements and non-supplements. Supplements have surely brought great financial gain to the vitamin industry throughout the years. However, there is very limited data available regarding their efficacy and the placebo effect is thought to be their predominant mechanism of action. Also, because they are not FDA approved, we do not have an accurate risk profile. Note that just because something is marketed as “natural” does not mean it is actually safer. Take great caution if you do decide to explore these options.

- **Phytoestrogen:** This is the term for the naturally-occurring plant hormone that is structurally similar to estrogen and is present in numerous plant-based foods, such as soybeans, flaxseed, lentils, chickpeas, fruits, and veggies. Isoflavone is one example, contained in various dietary supplements marketed for hot flashes. However, most studies have not shown significant benefit.
- **Herbal supplements:** Black cohosh is perhaps the most promoted herbal supplement marketed for hot flashes, but again studies have not shown it to contain any greater benefit than placebo. Its risks of liver toxicity and its effects on breast tissue in women with a history of breast cancer have been controversial.

Evening primrose oil is another alternative, but with even less data to confirm its efficacy.

- **Low dose vitamin E:** Beware, as vitamin E does have a toxicity level at high doses.

Other alternative options, with some evidence of possible efficacy, but which still require further investigation, include:

- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Hypnosis
- Mindfulness techniques

Bioidentical Hormones

Bioidentical hormones are perhaps the latest menopause fad to gain media attention. But we do not know how safe or effective they are. The term “bioidentical” refers to customized compounds that appear structurally similar to estrogen and likely bind to the same receptors and function similarly. They are labeled as “natural” because they are derived from plants or animals. However, they must still be processed to some degree in order to be utilized in this way. Expert groups argue that they very likely pose the same risks since they mimic estrogen, and hence are not necessarily any safer. Bioidenticals are also not FDA approved, and we do not have sufficient evidence to back up their safety or understand their risk profiles.

In summary, HRT is not the sole option to treat the distressing hot flashes of menopause that many women experience. Although HRT may be the most effective option available to date, there are various alternatives available to help mitigate hot flashes and yield a more tolerable, improved quality of life.

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Health Benefits of Spices

By *Mohammad Ahrar, PhD*

Introduction

There are more than 100 common spices used in cooking around the world. Spices not only enhance the flavor, aroma, and color of food and beverages, but they can also have some health benefits due to their bioactive constituents such as flavonoids, polyphenols, and antioxidants. This article highlights potential health benefits of three commonly used spices.

Chili Peppers

Chili peppers are the fruits of a plant with the botanical name *Capsicum annuum*. The main bioactive compound in chili peppers—which is responsible for their unique, pungent, hot taste—is called capsaicin. This compound is mostly concentrated in the seed coat and dispersed in other parts of the fruit. Besides capsaicin, there are other chemicals in chili peppers that have powerful antioxidant properties. Capsanthin is the main carotenoid found in red chili peppers, violaxanthin is the carotenoid found in yellow chili peppers, and lutein is the most abundant carotenoid in green (immature) chili peppers.

Nutritional Value

Studies show that chili peppers are rich in various vitamins and minerals. They are high in vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant which is important for tissue repair and immune function. They also contain vitamin B6, which plays a role in energy metabolism; vitamin K1 (phylloquinone), which is essential for normal blood clotting, healthy bones, and kidney function; potassium, which reduces the risk of heart disease; copper, which is important for strong bones and healthy neurons; and other small amounts of major nutrients such as proteins, carbs, and fats.

Red chili peppers in particular are also high in beta carotene, which the body converts into vitamin A. Cayenne peppers and jalapeño peppers are varieties of chili peppers that exist in the market and have similar nutritional value. Powdered red chili pepper mixes are known as paprika. Because peppers are normally eaten in small amounts, their contribution to the daily intake is minuscule.

Uses

Besides the flavor and nutritional value of the chili pepper, it has been used for some medicinal purposes. Reports indicate that chili peppers have been used as pain relief for headaches. When chili pepper is smelled (not recommended), the chemical capsaicin can numb the cranial trigeminal nerve from which some pain—such as that associated with migraine headaches—starts.

Health Benefits

Reports from the European Association for the Study of the Liver indicate that chili peppers hold the promise of preventing liver damage. Similar results were found in a study conducted at the International Liver Congress, which shows daily consumption of capsaicin, the active compound of chili peppers, has beneficial effects on liver damage.

Animal studies at Johns Hopkins University indicate that capsaicin helps reduce ulcers formed by ulcer-causing bacteria (*Helicobacter pylori*). The actual role of spices for protecting against the development of chronic diseases in humans needs additional research.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon is normally made from the inner bark of trees known as *Cinnamomum camphora*. The inner bark is finely ground and used in cooking and baking. Cinnamon can also be extracted from leaves, flowers, fruits, and roots of the cinnamon tree. There are different types of cinnamon—the darker-colored cassia cinnamon and the Ceylon cinnamon, also known as true cinnamon. Cassia cinnamon is a more common variety today, and it is what people generally refer to as “cinnamon.” The main active ingredient in cinnamon is cinnamaldehyde, which is responsible for its distinct smell and flavor. It may also be responsible for some of cinnamon’s possible health benefits.

Nutritional Value

Cinnamon does not provide enough of the major nutrients such as protein or fat and will not play a big role in your overall nutrition. However, a teaspoon of ground cinnamon does include small amounts of carbohydrates, fibers, calcium, beta carotene, and vitamin A.

Health Benefits

Cinnamon is a good source of polyphenols antioxidants, which are known for preventing body cells from oxidative damage caused by free radicals. Research suggests that cinnamon has anti-inflammatory properties and helps with stomach and intestinal problems. Cinnamon may also provide relief from indigestion, the common cold, diarrhea, poor blood circulation, and tension during menstruation. However, more scientific research is needed to substantiate those claims.

Cinnamon has been linked to a reduced risk of heart disease as it reduces levels of total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and

triglycerides, while HDL cholesterol remains stable. Cinnamon also provides heart-healthy benefits, such as reducing high blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels. That is especially important for people with diabetes who are at greater risk for developing heart disease.

According to a Johns Hopkins report, cinnamon may be beneficial for some people who have high blood sugar. It lends a sweet taste to food without adding sugar and can lower blood sugar levels in people with Type 2 diabetes. Reports also show that cinnamon may be able to dramatically reduce insulin resistance. For people with Type 2 diabetes, 1 gram or about half a teaspoon of cinnamon per day has been shown to have beneficial effects on their blood markers. Cinnamon is not a replacement for diabetes medication or a carbohydrate-controlled diet, but it can be a helpful addition to a healthy lifestyle.

Cinnamon is normally consumed in very small amounts, so it is unlikely to cause any health problems. Heavy use of cinnamon, however, can irritate the mouth and lips, causing sores. Some people may even be allergic to it. Animal studies show that excess amounts of cassia cinnamon could be toxic, although its toxicity in humans is yet to be studied. Some experts suggest 1/2 to 1 teaspoon (2-4 grams) of cinnamon powder a day is enough to provide benefits without side effects. Given the lack of evidence about its safety, children, pregnant women, and women who are breastfeeding should avoid cinnamon as a treatment.

Turmeric

Turmeric is a spice that comes from the turmeric plant, belonging to the ginger family. Its rhizome (underground stem) is finely ground and used as a culinary spice and traditional medicine. Ground turmeric is a major ingredient in curry powder. When turmeric is combined with black pepper, the absorption of curcumin is increased drastically. Because turmeric is a fat-soluble powder, it is a good idea to have some fat in the diet when turmeric is consumed. The main use of this golden powder is for its color and flavor in traditional foods such as in Iranian dishes and Indian curries.

Nutritional Value

While turmeric contains small amounts of the major nutrients (proteins, carbs, and fats), plus minerals such as manganese, iron, potassium, and vitamin C, its main benefit is its powerful antioxidant properties.

Health Benefits

Turmeric contains compounds called curcuminoids, the most important of which is curcumin, the main active ingredient in turmeric. Curcumin is strongly anti-inflammatory, which can help fight chronic inflammation. Although acute, short-term inflammation is the body's natural immune response, it can become a major problem when it becomes chronic. Scientists now believe that chronic inflammation plays a major role in heart disease, cancer, metabolic syndrome, Alzheimer's disease, and various degenerative conditions. Therefore, anything that can help fight chronic inflammation is of potential importance in preventing and even treating these diseases.

Research suggests curcumin may reduce inflammation in the brain which has been linked to Alzheimer's disease and depression.

Because of the anti-inflammatory qualities of curcumin, it may be effective for reducing pain and swelling of joints in people with arthritis. Turmeric is also used as a dietary supplement to treat inflammatory arthritis, as well as stomach, skin, liver, and gallbladder problems.

Oxidative damage of the cells and tissues is believed to be one of the mechanisms behind aging and many diseases; this damage involves free radicals that tend to negatively react to some important organic substances in the cells, such as fatty acids, proteins, and DNA. Curcumin is a potent antioxidant that can neutralize free radicals, and also stimulate the body's own antioxidant defenses.

Studies show that many common brain disorders have been linked to decreased levels of a growth hormone-like substance in the brain. Curcumin can increase brain levels of this hormone-like substance which may be effective in delaying or even reversing many brain diseases and age-related diseases. It may also improve memory by increasing the growth of new neurons and fighting various degenerative processes; however, controlled studies in people are needed to confirm this. In another study, it was found that a combination of curcumin and a chemotherapy drug was more effective at shrinking drug-resistant tumors than using chemotherapy alone.

When it comes to heart disease, curcumin can play a major role in improving the function of the endothelium, the thin inner lining of blood vessels. It is well known that endothelial dysfunction is a major driver of heart disease, atherosclerosis, and the inability of the endothelium to regulate blood pressure, blood clotting, and various other factors. Several studies suggest that curcumin leads to improvements in endothelial function. In addition, curcumin reduces tissue inflammation and oxidation which play a role in heart disease. Preliminary studies found that curcuminoids from turmeric may reduce the number of heart attacks in patients who had bypass surgery.

Summary

Spices are mainly used for their coloring, flavor, and aroma in culinary and traditional diets. Most spices have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties which makes them useful for health purposes. Since the health benefits of spices are not proven by the government, it is always a good idea to consult with your physician before taking any spice as a supplement as they could affect the way antibiotics, diabetic drugs, blood thinners, and heart medicines work.

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A Dogon Figure from Mali: Bridge to the Spirit World

Ladan Akbarnia, *Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art,*
The San Diego Museum of Art

In 2019, The San Diego Museum of Art acquired a carved wooden sculpture made by the Dogon peoples in what is now Mali. It represents an androgynous male figure raising an object above his head. A gift of the late Valerie Franklin, a prominent California-based collector of African and Oceanic Art, this work forms the focus of a single-object exhibition, *A Dogon Figure from Mali: Bridge to the Spirit World*, on view through January 9, 2022. In the absence of a curator specializing in African art, I was honored to collaborate on this project with Dr. Denise Rogers, Professor of Art History at San Diego Mesa College, whose interest in this subject, along with the support of the Museum's African and Pacific Arts Council (APAC) and the acquisition itself, inspired the show.

The Dogon people live mainly in the Bandiagara escarpment or central plateau region of Mali, alongside lofty cliffs running parallel to the Niger River. Located east of the Malian capital of Bamako, the area is known as *Pays Dogon*, or Dogon country. Migrating here around the fifteenth century for protection against potential invasions, the Dogon have maintained their heritage, religious traditions, and diverse languages over time. Yet Dogon culture also embodies the syncretism of coexistence with and conversion to other faiths, such as Christianity and Islam, the predominant religion of Mali.

The Dogon are known for their complex cosmology, architecture, and elaborate masked performances and figural sculptures. Masks and sculptures like the SDMA figure are made by male blacksmiths born into a special class and distinguished by special powers according to Dogon myths. The Dogon foundation story describes one of the *nommo*, or eight sacred primordial ancestors of humankind, as a blacksmith stealing fire from Amma, the supreme deity and creator, to bring to Earth; this, in turn, resulted in the creation of all natural materials and life forms. Blacksmiths are revered for their power to use and transform earth, fire, and water. Their expertise in these materials enables them to produce everyday as well as ritual objects, and to oversee ritual ceremonies.

When used for sacrifice, Dogon sculptures are known as *dege*, or protective figures, and serve multiple functions as representatives, intermediaries, and altars. *Dege* have been reported to represent sacred and immortal ancestors or deceased family members. Dogon figures may also represent the people using them to pray to Amma or to invoke spiritual guidance. When activated by the life force of the plants or animals sacrificed to them, *dege* become intermediaries for communication between the living and Amma. This life force transfers from the figures to the being invoked as well as to the person performing the sacrifice. When they have fulfilled their purpose, *dege* must be discarded or hidden until discovered by descendants, usually after the original owner's death. At this point, the figures are no longer imbued with ritual power, but may represent the deceased.

Although the identity of the SDMA figure remains unconfirmed, the patterning of his body scarification recalls geometric patterns in scars adorning male and female Dogon sculptures. Raised arms are believed to channel prayer through vertical lines of communication to Amma, but the vessel has not been securely identified. While it resembles Dogon drums with bulging hemispheres, most Dogon sculptures representing musicians are shown playing their instruments. Other Dogon figures hold stools or containers over their heads, but those differ in shape. Shown in action, these works distinguish Dogon from other African art, where figures appear sitting or standing.

Collecting Dogon

The history of collecting Dogon material is intertwined with that of colonialism and ethnography, beginning with expeditions led by French anthropologist Marcel Griaule (1898–1956). Studied and collected by Europeans and Americans in the last century more extensively than any other culture on the African continent, Dogon material culture is associated with the founding



of modern ethnography and an important aspect of African studies. Yet the differing interpretations of these works, particularly regarding Dogon myths and cosmology, also reflect the biases of those who study them. Both in and out of their original context, these objects carry complex meanings associated not only with their origins and functions, but also with the people who engage them—whether to revere, exploit, collect, or admire them.

Standing figure holding object above head. Dogon peoples; Mali, Bandiagara escarpment, 19th–early 20th century; carved

wood. The San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Valerie Franklin, 2019.27. © The San Diego Museum of Art



From Persian cuisine blog *Turmeric and Saffron*

Khoresh Rivas (rhubarb stew)

“Rhubarb stew is pretty much prepared the same way as celery stew (khoresh karafs). The main difference is that in celery stew you add lemon/lime juice to bring out the flavors and make it tastier whereas in preparing rhubarb stew there’s no need to add more acidity to the dish. In order to balance the tart taste of rhubarb, sugar is added to bring about a perfect sweet and sour consistency.”

Ingredients:

Serves 4-6

8 stalks of rhubarb—washed, dried, and cut into small bite-sized pieces; 1 1/2 pounds of meat (lamb or beef), washed and cubed; 1 large onion—peeled, finely chopped; 1 bunch of parsley—remove the thick stems, wash, and chop (makes about 2 cups, packed); 1 bunch of mint, leaves only, wash and chop (makes about 1 cup, packed); 1/2 teaspoon turmeric; salt and pepper to taste; 2-3 tablespoons sugar or to taste; oil; water

Method:

1. In a pan, heat 2-3 tablespoons of oil and saute chopped onions until translucent. Add turmeric, stir, add the meat, and brown on all sides. Add salt and pepper to taste. Pour enough water to cover the meat. Cover and cook for an hour on medium to low heat.
2. In a medium-sized frying pan, saute the chopped parsley and mint together in 2 tablespoons of oil over medium heat. Combine the parsley and mint mixture with the meat sauce half way through the cooking. Add water if necessary.
3. Lightly saute sliced rhubarbs in 2 tablespoons of olive oil for 2-3 minutes on medium heat. Add the rhubarb to the pot, lower the heat to a gentle simmer, and cook for an additional 15 minutes.
4. Taste and add 2-3 tablespoons of sugar (or to taste), gently stir, and cook for an additional 5 minutes.

Serve warm with basmati Persian rice.



Public Announcement

GET HELP PAYING YOUR RENT AND UTILITY BILLS Article 2: NEED HELP WITH YOUR SDG&E BILL?

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Online applications are easy, fast and convenient. To learn more about SDG&E’s assistance programs, visit sdge.com/assistance.

An Immigration Story:

Jesus and the Super Bowl

Reza Khabazian

Leaving your homeland and residing in another - with a totally new culture, language and set of laws and regulations - is very challenging and requires a lot of adaptation that, in most cases, is also very frustrating.

But, looking back at those challenges many years later makes some of them look funny, some amazing, and some, of course, sad. The truth is, no matter how we feel about them, the challenges are, for sure, part of the history of immigration that needs to be documented for use by our grandchildren or simply by historians to picture the hardship that first generation Iranians had to go through to meet those challenges.

The main purpose of this column is to encourage our readers to start telling their stories so we can present a diverse documentary. The first of this series--"How I Met A Dime"--was published in the last issue of *Peyk*. This is the second part of Mr. Khabazian's story.



The title of this part of my story may be funny to you, but please wait so I can explain.

One week after landing at JFK, we found ourselves in San Antonio, Texas, visiting my wife's cousin en-route to our final destination—Kingsville, Texas—where my college was located. Razi, my wife's cousin, was going through his graduate studies in San Antonio. He was married to his cousin (!!) and they had a baby boy. Therefore, I felt I was almost in a similar situation with him—with the exception that my wife was not my cousin!

Razi was nice enough to take me around town, giving me a chance to taste Mexican food as well as fried chicken (which I loved very much), learning what ketchup is, on top of helping me get my driver's license and making me familiar with the new land.

Because it would be difficult to get situated in our new destination—renting an apartment, gathering the basic furniture, purchasing a car and, more important than all, registering at college—we decided that my wife and our son would stay with her cousin for a few more days and I would travel to Kingsville alone.

The bus was packed with passengers. The only spot I could find was almost at the rear of the bus next to a black gentleman, probably in his late 40s.

Good morning, I said, while taking my seat.

How D!, he replied, and turned his face toward the window.

What was that? I thought. *Isn't the answer to good morning also good morning?* Suddenly, I remembered Rahim, my friend in Iran who told me: "In Aamrika, black PEEPLE don't like white PEEPLE, white people don't like black people." I hoped "How D" wasn't a bad word. Even if it was, what could I do other than just wait and see?

After just a few minutes getting on the road, the gentleman turned back to me and said:

Where you heading?

ESCUSE me??

Where you going, I mean?

To Kingsville.

For vacation?

No. To study in college... getting my master's degree in Horticulture.

How nice. Where you from?

San Antonio.

I mean originally.

Oh.... Originally... from New York.

(Now with a big smile on his face) Which country are you from, where were you born?

Oh... sorry.... My country, IRAN.

Hum... I, Ran... Shah of I, Ran... . Lots of problems over there these days.

Unfortunately, yes. Now, we have Military Government... very bad... very bad.

Military Government? You mean Shah is gone?

No, no, he is still in the country.

But you said there is a military government in place.

Ya. Shah is there but people cannot stay out at night, no more than three people can walk together. Is a sad situation.

Oh... I see... there is Martial Law in place. (Now trying to change the subject) You must be Moslem, right?

EYYYYY... my parents are.

And you?

Love all religions.

That's good... that's nice.... What do you think about Christianity??

Good, I love them, too!

(Another big smile on his face.) What do you think about JESUS?

Jesus? I don't know... what that is!

JESUS... the messiah... the prophet.

Oh.... Sorry, sorry, you mean MASIH.... We call him Eisa...

E... Sa! He was a very good person. I like him very much.

Very good indeed, have you studied the Bible?

Bible?? I don't think I did... I am sorry, I don't know what it is!

Bible is the holy book of teachings of Jesus.

Oh my God, I am sorry... we call it Engil... N... Jil.

How nice. Have you studied the Bible?

No.

You should, you see, all the problems we have these days in the world...



He went on and on talking about how all the problems we see in the world are mainly because people do not follow the teachings of Jesus. With my very limited knowledge of the conversational side of the English language, I was trying hard to pick up some words here and there to get what he was trying to convey to me. He reached his destination way before I did. We shook hands and said goodbye while he was wishing me good luck in my studies. Now, I was certain that “How D” was not a bad word; something else for me to figure out what that really meant.

The bus stopped at many other destinations and, at each stop, some passengers departed to the point that I became the only passenger sitting at the end of the bus. The bus driver happened to be a black man. Looking out at the scenery, I realized we were at the heart of a desert, with huge cactuses that I had seen only in Western movies.

“I hope the driver is also as nice of the black man that I had such a nice conversation with and does not drop me right in the middle of this desert getting bit by rattlesnakes that are underneath all these huge cactuses!”

Seeing some greenery was an indication of approaching a town or a city until I saw a sign that read: “Welcome To Kingsville, For a Day or a Lifetime.”

Reaching into my wallet to make sure I had Mehdi’s phone number, I thought: *“I hope he picks up the phone and comes to the station and picks me up, unlike what I faced in New York!”*

The bus stopped in front of a rundown building. The driver, looking in the mirror while opening the door, cried “Kingsville!” I could not believe that this one-story small and old building could be a bus station. Unlike what I saw in San Antonio, this building was far from being a bus station.

I got out and the bus left, leaving me standing in front of a closed door with an old sign saying “Greyhound.” To find a phone, I walked around the building without any luck. I looked at the street on the right side of the building—it was a long, empty street with absolutely no sign of any person walking or any car coming toward me. I turned my head to the left side of the building and did not see any sign of life.

“Which way should I walk? Right or left? How do I know? No sign of life in any direction. But, I can’t stay here. I have to find a phone. How about going to the left side of the building? At least I see a traffic light in the far distance.”

I walked through the empty street that was surrounded with two-story buildings on both sides with short balconies overlooking the street. It was about 4 p.m. A gentle breeze was blowing, having fun pushing a tumbleweed in many directions.

“I remember seeing this scenery in Western movies... tumbleweeds, empty streets, balconies. Anybody living in this town? If yes, where are they? That’s why the sign reads for a day or a lifetime. People either leave this ghost town after a day or get shut from the balcony and stay here for a lifetime!”

As I approached the traffic light looking for a pay phone, I saw the neon of a movie theater. Looking closely, I thought I saw a person sitting in the box office. Slightly relieved, I approached the window and saw the first person in Kingsville.

Hello, I started.

Hi.

Is there a pay phone around here?

We have one in the lobby.

Can I use it?

Sure, come on in.

Mrs. Randall was a lady in her 60s. Her short blond hair was groomed very nicely in a way that fit her just fine. To my surprise, Mehdi did not pick up the phone.

I just came to your town and need to go to Texas A&I University. But my friend who was supposed to pick me up doesn’t answer the phone. I need to wait a few minutes to call him again.

No problem, you can stay here.

Thank you, can I ask you a question?

Sure, go ahead.

I did not see any car running or any person walking in the street. Is this town always quiet or because today is Sunday?

This is a busy town....

But I was very surprised that I did not see anybody.

Well, because today is the Super Bowl.

Super Bowl... excuse me... what is Super Bowl?

(With great shock) You don’t know what the Super Bowl is??

Sorry, I am in your country only one week.

Oh... Ok... so you haven’t watched football?

Yes.... A lot.... I love football. In our country everybody loves football!

Which country is that?

Iran.

I... Ran... ok... I am talking about American football.

No... no Amerikan type.

Ok... the Super Bowl is....

After listening to Mrs. Randall’s description of an event I didn’t understand, second and third calls were made with no luck of talking to Mehdi.

Did you talk to your friend?

No. He is not home!

My shift is almost over. You are more than welcome to stay here and try again.

No. Thank you. I like to rent a room in a hotel if you tell me where I need to go!

You can’t find it. Why don’t you wait a little more so I can drop you at one?

Mrs. Randall dropped me in front of a motel, gave me her business card, and asked me to call her anytime I needed help. That was the exact picture of America that I had in my mind: kind, educated, and helping people.

Luckily, there was a *Mac Doonald* right across the street from the motel where I could proudly walk in and order myself a Big Mac, a medium Coke and, of course, french fries with lots of ketchup!

[The story will continue in our next issue!](#)

[Please help us to document our experiences of migrating to America.](#)