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Department of English

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Biography

Dr. Rezaei is an assistant professor of English at Utah State University. Her research focuses on the intersections of gender, folklife, religion, and politics, particularly in the Middle East and its diaspora in the US. Her research interests include vernacular religion, folklore and new media, and feminist folklore/anthropology.

Academic Positions

Aug 2020— Assistant Professor, Department of English (Folklore Program)
Affiliated Faculty, Religious Studies Program
Utah State University

Education

- 2020 **Ph.D. in Comparative Studies; Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Folklore**
Department of Comparative Studies, The Ohio State University.
Dissertation Title: “Agency Between Narratives: Women, Faith, and Sociability in Irangeles”
- 2014 **M.A in Folk Studies**
Department of Folk Studies and Anthropology, Western Kentucky University.
Thesis Title: “Political Jokes in the Iranian Social Media”
- 2010 **B.A in English Language and Literature**
Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

Book Projects

Recasting Vernacular Islam: Iranian Women’s Religious Folklife in the U.S (manuscript in progress; under contract with the University of Wisconsin Press).

An ethnographic work at the intersection of folklore studies and anthropology of Islam, investigating how the notions of Islam and Muslimness are produced, reframed, or countered in the diasporic context through the lens of women’s everyday expressive genres.

Peer-Reviewed Publications

- 2023 “Conspiracy Thinking as Political Boundary-Work: COVID-19 Rumors and Conspiracy Narratives in Iran,” Forthcoming in *Journal of Folklore Research*, special issue on “Conspiracy Thinking in Tumultuous Times,” ed. Andrea Kitta and Jesse Fivecoate.
- 2022 “The Halfie Predicament in the Ethnography of Religion: Fieldwork with Iranian-American Muslim Women in the U.S,” *Ethnography*. [Access Link](#)
- 2022 “The Ritual Fusion: Individuality, Tradition, and Sensory Memory in Iranian Women’s Islamic Gatherings in Los Angeles.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* vol. 18, no 2: 216-37. [Access Link](#)
- 2017 “The Superman in a Turban: Political Jokes in the Iranian Social Media,” *New Directions in Folklore* vol. 14, no 1/2: 89-132. [Access Link](#)

Under Review/In Progress:

“Narrative Negotiation of Religious Observance in Women’s Vernacular Islam,” submitted to the *Journal of American Folklore (JAF)*.

Guest editorial, “Theorizing Vernacular Islam” (co-authored), in preparation for *Western Folklore* special issue on “Vernacular Islam.”

“Meme-ing Vernacular Islam” (single-authored manuscript), in preparation for *Western Folklore* special issue on “Vernacular Islam.”

“In Defense of a Digital Accent: The Inadequacy of Nativist Terminologies in the Discussion of Digital Culture” (single-authored manuscript), in preparation for *Journal of American Folklore*.

Creative Activities and Multimedia Projects

- 2022 **Multimedia Digital Exhibit: Talking To America: Iranian Communities in Southern California** (with Ehsan Estiri). Utah State University Special Collections and Archives *Presents audio-visual fieldwork data about Iranian immigrants’ cultural, religious, and political events in the US.* [Access the Exhibit](#) or [Read more](#)
- 2019 **Photo Exhibit: “Irangeles Close-up: What Does it Mean to Be Iranian in the US?”** (with Ehsan Estiri). Ohio State Global Gallery, Columbus, OH, August 20-November 1, 2019. *Explores Iranian immigrants’ (re)negotiation of their cultural and religious practices in the US.* [Global Gallery](#), Columbus, Ohio, August 20-November 1, 2019.
- 2018 **Ethnographic Film: *The Taste of Samanu*, 45 minutes** (with Ehsan Estiri). *Explores the dynamics of Iranian immigrants’ folklife through the lens of a New Year’s charity bazaar in Palos Verdes, CA.* [Read more](#)

Screenings:

- Center for Folklore Studies Ethnographic Film and Discussion Series, Columbus, OH, November 9, 2018.
- American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Buffalo, NY, October 19, 2018.

Invited Contributions

- 2022 Guest Editor, *Western Folklore* special issue on Vernacular Islam(s)
- 2021 Keynote speaker, Folklore Society of Utah
“Vernacular Islam in Tehrangeles: Women’s Rituals and Ethnographic Dilemmas”

Selected Awards, Grants, and Fellowship

Utah State University

- 2022 **International Faculty Recognition Award**
Office of Global Engagements and International Students Council, Utah State University
- 2022 **Summer Faculty-Graduate Student Funding for Collaborative Research**
College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
- 2021 **Creative Activity and Research Enhancement (CARE) Grant**
College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Utah State University
- 2020 **Faculty Research Innovations Grant**
Center for Intersectional Gender Studies and Research, Utah State University

Other Institutions

- 2019 **Don Yoder Prize for Best Graduate Essay in Folk Belief and Religious Folklife**
American Folklore Society Folk Belief and Religious Folklife Section
- 2019 **Six-month Graduate Fellowship**
Center for Humanities in Practice (CHiP), Ohio State University
- 2018-19 **Career Development Grant**
Council of Graduate Students, Ohio State University
- 2017 **One-year Fieldwork Fellowship**
Center for Folklore Studies, Ohio State University
- 2017 **Coca-Cola Critical Difference for Women Dissertation Research Grant**
Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Ohio State University
- 2016 **Polly Stewart Travel Award for Emerging Scholars of Gender and Folklife**
American Folklore Society Women’s Section
- 2014 **Bill Ellis Prize for Best Graduate Student Essay in Folklore and New Media**
American Folklore Society New Directions in Folklore Section
- 2014-19 **Arts and Humanities Small Research Grant**
Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences

Selected Conference Presentations (Double-blind refereed)

- 2022 **“Conspiracy Belief and Political Identity: COVID-19 Conspiracy Narratives in Iran,”**
American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Tulsa, OK, Oct 12-15
- 2022 **“Vernacular Authority and the Reformulation of Religious Observance,”** Middle East
Studies Association, Denver, CO, Dec 1-4.

- 2021 **“New Directions Forum: Opportunities and Challenges in Digital Folklore Research”**
American Folklore Society, Harrisburg, PA, October 21-24.
- 2021 **“The Seventh S is Syrup from Costco: Continuity and Change in Iranian Women’s Nowruz Bazaar in Los Angeles”** Western States Folklore Society, April 15-17.
- 2020 **“Intersectional Marginalities: Iranian-American Women’s Vernacular Islam”** Middle East Studies Association, Washington, DC, October 10-13.
- 2019 **“Framing and Affect in Faith-Based Gatherings of Iranian Women in Southern California”** Middle East Studies Association, New Orleans, LA, November 14-17.
- 2019 **“Enacting Dreams: Exploring the Concept of ‘Dream Ostension’”** American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, October 16-19
- 2018 **“Navigating the Halfie Position: Fieldwork with Muslim and Christian Iranian Communities in the US”** Middle East Studies Association, San Antonio, TX, November 14-17.
- 2018 **“The Ritual Fusion: Iranian-American Women’s Faith-based Gatherings in Los Angeles”** Western States Folklore Society Meeting, Los Angeles, CA, April 12-14.
- 2017 **Invited Presidential Panel: “Her-Story II: A Feminism and Folklore Retrospective”** (discussant), and **“Teaching Folklore in the Age of Trump”** (forum member)
American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, October 18-21.
- 2016 **“Codes of Conduct and Negotiation of Community in the Iranian Domestic Rowze”**
Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, November 17-20.
- 2016 **“The Iranian Domestic Rowze: Negotiated Community and Competitive Reputation”** (paper presentation), and **Invited Presidential Panel: “Her-Story: A Feminism and Folklore Retrospective”** (discussant), American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Miami, FL, October 19-22.
- 2016 **“Beyond Religious Devotion: The Complexities of Women's Rituals in Iran”** OSU Department of Comparative Studies Lecture Series, April 11.
- 2015 **“My Stealthy Freedom’: Gender, Power, and Repositioning of the Self in Women’s Narratives of Public Unveiling in Iran”** American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Long Beach, CA, October 14-17.
- 2014 **“Political Humor in Trying Times: The ‘Thanks Rouhani’ Joke Cycle and Its Conflicting Interpretations”** American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Santa Fe, NM, November 5-8.
- 2013 **“Inverted Religious Orders and Hierarchies in Two Iranian Muslim Women's Rituals”**
American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Providence, RI, October 16-19.

Panels Organized:

- 2021 **“Dynamics of Belief and Practice in the Ritual Context: Five Cases from Contemporary Iran,”** Sponsored by the Folk Belief and Religious Folklife Section, American Folklore Society, October 21-24.

- 2018 **“Irangeles Close-up: Iranian-American Networks, Communities and Traditions in Southern California”** (Media Session), American Folklore Society, October 17-20.
- 2016 **“Networks, Cooperation, and Competition in Women's Ritual: An International Comparison,”** Sponsored by the British Folklore Section, American Folklore Society, October 19-22.

Selected Professional Service

Inter/national

- 2022— Vice President, Folklore Society of Utah
- 2021— Reviews Editor, *Western Folklore* Journal
- 2021 Panel chair, “Dynamics of Belief and Practice in the Ritual Context: Five Cases from Contemporary Iran,” American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, sponsored by the Folk Belief and Religious Folklife section.
- 2021 Manuscript Reviewer, *Journal of Folklore Research*
- 2021 Sensitivity Reader for *Invitation*
- 2020— Editor-in-chief, H-Folk (H-Net Network on Folklore and Ethnology)
- 2019 Panel chair, “The Supernatural Driving Belief,” American Folklore Society Annual Meeting.
- 2018-19 Ohio Field Schools Advisory Committee Member, Ohio State University Center for Folklore Studies
- 2018 Translator, “Tajik Folk Theater” by Roshan Rahmoni, in Regina F. Bendix and Dorothy Noyes, eds. *Terra Ridentis, Terra Narrans: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Ulrich Marzolpb.* Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des islamischen Orients. Band 44.2. 2 vols, 649 pp 25-32. Dortmund: Verlag für Orientkunde. 2018. ISBN 978-3-936687-44-6.
- 2017-18 Award Committee member, Polly Stewart Student Travel Award, Women’s Section of the American Folklore Society (two-year term)
- 2017 Reviewer, *Ethnologies* (Journal of Folklore Studies Association of Canada).
- 2016-20 Co-founder and coordinator, “Columbus Folklorists’ Circle” Professional group for Folklore (affiliated) students and scholars based in the greater Columbus area
- 2016 Organizer and panel chair, 9thIU/OSU Student Conference in Folklore and Ethnomusicology

Department/University

- 2022 Guest Speaker, “International Heroes Night,” USU International Student Council
- 2022 Guest lecturer, LING 2500: Language and Religion
- 2022 Guest lecturer, ANTH 3180: Peoples of the Middle East
- 2022 Hiring Committee member, Postdoctoral teaching fellowship, English Dept.
- 2022 Reviewer, Summer 2022 URCO Grants, USU Office of Research
- 2021 Reviewer, Intersections Faculty Research Fellowship, USU Center for Intersectional Gender Studies and Research
- 2021— Member, Admissions Committee for Masters in Folklore and American Studies, English Dept.
- 2020— Member, Graduate Advisory Committee, English Dept.

- 2020— Member, Postdoctoral Mentoring Committee, English Dept.
 2020— Member, Folklore Program Committee, English Dept.
 2020— Member, The Digital Folklore Project, English Dept.

Community Outreach

- 2022— Interpreter/Translator for Afghan asylum seekers; Expert opinion writer about lived Islam in Afghanistan, Cache Valley Immigrant and Refugee Connection (CRIC)

Teaching Experience

Utah State University, Logan, UT

- Introduction to Folklore Studies (Theories and Methods)—Graduate (Fall 2020, 21, 22)
 Folk Art and Material Culture—Graduate/Undergraduate (Spring 2021; Fall 2022)
 Introduction to Folklore—Undergraduate (Fall 2020, 21; Spring 2021)
 Regional Folklore: Foodways—Undergraduate (Spring 2022)
 Digital English Studies—Undergraduate (Spring 2022)
 USU1010: University Connections (Academic year 2022-23)
 Directed Graduate Study (Fall 2022)

The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

- Introduction to the Humanities: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (Fall 2015, Spring 2017, Spring 2020,)—Undergraduate
 Introduction to Folklore (Fall 2016)—Undergraduate

Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY

- Urban Folklore, Teaching Assistant (Fall 2012 to Spring 2014)—Undergraduate

Student Advising

- 2022— Major Professor, Emma Crips (English) *Omen-Seeking Narratives in American Protestantism*
 2022— Committee Member, Millie Tullis (English) *Magic, Marriage, and Lost Livestock: The Logan Peepstone Woman in Mormon Family Folklore*
 2022— Committee Member, Danny B. Stewart (English) *The Great Cache Valley Ghost Tour*
 2021— Committee Member, Carla Murillo (English) *Journey Towards Spirituality: Coessence of Latinx Women's Spirituality Through the Use of Altars*
 2021— Committee Member, Holly Vasic (English)
 2020-22 Committee Member, Alexandria Ziegler (English) *Making The Old New: The Recontextualization And Traditionalization Of Tree Spirits In Video Games*
 2020-21 Committee Member, Alex Bullock (Reese) (History) *Don't Get Me Started About the Water: Food in Juvenal's Satire V*
 2020-21 Committee Member, Victoria Jaye (English) *In the Presence of Evil: Demonic Perception Narratives*
 2020-21 Committee Member, Maygan Barker (English) *A Marvelous Work And A Trauma: An Examination Of Narratives Among Latter-Day Saint Sister Missionaries*

Professional Memberships

- 2012— American Folklore Society
- 2016— Middle East Studies Association
- 2017— Western States Folklore Society
- 2020— Association for Middle East Women's Studies
- 2020— Folklore Society of Utah

Languages

English: Fluent

Persian (Farsi): Native

Arabic: Advanced reading and writing, intermediate speaking and listening proficiency

German: Intermediate reading proficiency