Transcript

Maryam Alemzadeh

Wow, what a turnout. Thank you, everyone, for being here. My name is Mariam Alimzadeh. I'm an associate professor, and I do history and politics of contemporary Iran. It is my absolute pleasure to welcome Dr. Shehda Dayani as our first guest for the Tuesday seminar series here at the Middle East Center. Before I introduce her properly, I wanted to say Happy new academic year to all of you, and we look forward to seeing a lot of you in the many exciting events that we have lined up this term. But without further ado, let me introduce our very esteemed guest for tonight, which I have the pleasure of having been a colleague of back in Princeton University. Shayda is a social historian. of Qajar Iran and a scholar of Persian literature. Her first monograph, Making History with Theater in Modern Iran, Juggling Revolutionaries, is currently under review and forthcoming by Edinburgh University. Our very own Stephanie Croning is editing. Her research integrates social and political history, comparative theater, Persian literature, and theories of translation, performance, and identity formations. She has published on theatricality in Qajar publications, the use of theater for political ideology, the social psychology of mourning traditions, and the theatrical roots of contemporary visual arts. Before this, Shayda has been a research associate at Princeton University, where I mentioned I had the pleasure of being her colleague. And she's also been a teaching faculty at Harvard University. She currently teaches at Rutgers University. And she received her PhD from the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at NYU. If you thought that's all, just buckle up, there's more. Because she has a whole life outside of academia as well, which very few of us manage to do. She has been a consultant and simultaneous interpreter to a number of prominent film directors, again, hold your breath, including the late Abbas Kiarostami, Asghar Farhadi, Mohammad Rasulov, and most recently Jafar Panohi. whom she accompanied to numerous film festivals and award ceremonies, including the Golden Globes and the Oscars. You thought Francesca Albanese was the celebrity. Shayda's Persian poetry and translations have been published in literary journals, including Bukhara and Negahano and Taj Rubel. And her English poetry has appeared on Jedalia and featured by NPR Boston. If you remember, we had a little bit of poetry reading last year when Salab Eigner was here talking about his book on Arab art, was it? Yeah. And I recited some poetry which was translated by Sheda, Chambedu poetry that was translated by Sheda. I won't take up any further time. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Sheda.

Sheida Dayan

Hello. Thank you, Marianne. Thank you, everyone, for being here. This was quite a humbling introduction. And I'd like to also give my sincere thanks to the Middle East Center at Oxford for their kind invitation, and also to Vicky Lee for doing the very smooth logistics arrangements. As Maryam said, my work on the Iranian theater as a social phenomenon began when I was a PhD student of history at CUNY Graduate Center. And back then, I was studying legal and political history under the Qajars, and that's when I first realized that, in fact, theater and playwriting have had a colossal role in the promotion and the establishment of the rule of law and in the secularization of law in Iran. But it is a rule that has seldom been acknowledged, unfortunately. Since then, I've done research both on the relationship between history and theater, but also on the history of theater itself and how it developed from traditional performance genres religious genres and non-religious comic genres into European-style modern playwriting. The result is the book that Maryam mentioned, which is currently under review. But I continue to find new angles that show how theater and politics have interacted throughout Iranian history, especially in the Qajar era, which is my period of research. And one of those new angles is how theater and politics have interacted through Sufism. And so what I'd like to achieve in this talk this evening is to explain this reciprocal relationship between political activity and the institutionalization of theater in medieval and modern Iran. And what I mean by reciprocal is how institutionalizing theater by the social and political organizations in pre-modern and modern Iran helped the development of theater as a form of art, and likewise how theater helped social forces and political organizations in attracting the public to their agendas. While searching for that question, I discovered that a philosophical code of ethics that originated in the 11th century and was developed both by rationalist philosophers and by Sufi theologians played a crucial role in forming theater as a social institution in the medieval period and as a social and political institution before and during the 1905 to 1911 constitutional revolution in Iran. I'm therefore going to discuss the involvement in politics of exemplary theatrical groups in late 19th to early 20th centuries, both in terms of their members' political positions and in terms of the contents of their cultural production. Very often in order to diffuse state surveillance, these theater groups gave their political activities a theatrical front. This does not mean that theater was only a means to an end for their members. as it was the case, for instance, in the agitprop theater of the Soviet Union. In the case of early 20th century Iran, group members were in fact invested in advancing theater as a form of art, as it is evident in the writings on playwriting. Most members had state positions, it's true, but also wrote and translated plays. Most were interestingly involved in theater, not just in writing or translating, but in the practice of theater as actors, scenographers, and even prompters. To give just one example, this is at a time when acting was perceived as a job of the lower class, but we had Ali Akbar Dawar, who was at the time Tehran's district attorney, and later he founded the modern judicial system in the first Pahlavi period. He in fact acted for a group called Shirkat al-Miyeh Farhang, or the Farhang Educational Institute, during his

years at the Ministry of Justice. I'll say more about this group at the end of the talk. The involvement of modern theatrical groups and publications in politics was very often accompanied by, if not cloaked in, a code of ethics known as tahzib akhlagh, or moral refinement. which was historically passed down from philosophical and theological treaties in the Islamic Golden Age through two major strains. One with secular genealogy that dates back to Ibn Miskaway, philosopher, historian, and chancery official, and the other strain with Sufi genealogy that dates back to Al-Ghazali, jurist, theologian, and Sufi scholar. Ibn Miskawi's Tahzib al-Akhlaw wa Takhir al-El, translated as the Refinement of Morals or as the Treaties on Ethics, was a late 10th or early 11th century Arabic manual of ethics philosophy. His Platonic Aristotelian categorization of ethics left an irrefutable mark on al-Ghazali almost a century later. According to Majid Fakhri, Lebanese philosopher and scholar, al-Ghazali took Miskaway's structure of moral refinement and Islamized its rationalist classifications in a way to balance the extreme aesthetic practices and disciplines of Sufi theology. So basically spiritualized Sufism for everyday people. And it is for this reason that he's credited for somewhat moderating Sufism with spiritual nuance. When we get to the 15th century, The Sufi strain of moral refinement is adopted from Al-Ghazali and further spiritualized by Hossein Bais Kashifi Sabzevali. In two of his books, Akhlar al-Mohseni, or the Mohsenian Ethics, and Fotovat Nami al-Sultani, or the Royal Book of Fotovat. I'm sure a lot of people here are familiar with these works. As Maria Soptelny has argued, instead of the dry philosophical jargon of Al-Azali and Ibn Miskawais, Kashafi used accessible didactic anecdotes, historical stories, and poems to popularize moral refinement into a practical and socially engaged system for secular civilian environments. The development of these two secular and Sufi strains of Moro refinement was not always parallel. At least twice in the medieval to modern history of Iran, the secular and Sufi strains converge, and in both historical periods, their convergence appears in Persian texts that have theatrical dimensions. And here I don't actually just mean texts with performance dimensions like the poetry of Hafez as Dominic Brookshaw has shown. I actually mean theater dimensions and we can get into the distinctions in the Q&A if anyone is interested. As far as it pertains to theater, The convergence of secular and Sufi strains of moral refinement happens once in the 15th century in the writings of Qashafi and once in early 20th century in the activities of theater groups, publications, and assemblies with pro-constitutional and democratic aspirations. And here is the gist of my talk. I argue that one, the convergence of its Sufi and secular strains helped integrate moral refinement as a code of ethics into Iranian theater, both in medieval performance genres and in modern European-style Persian playwriting. Two, I argue that it was this very convergence of secular and Sufi ethics that drew social and political organizations to theater and enabled them to reach and attract the public. In that engagement, the concept of moral refinement became a social vessel that transmitted political messages wrapped in a code of ethics to the general population. By becoming a conveyor, moral refinement also left a didactic ethical mark on Iranian

theater, one that is still visible today. To understand how this convergence helped shape the didactic characteristics of Iranian theater, we also would want to look at how Sufism, politics, and theater historically interacted with one another. I'm going to alert you once I get into each of these sections so we can follow the line. The secular strain of moral refinement was revived in mid-19th century by Mirza Fatali Akhumzadeh. the most influential Iranian thinker, critic, and playwright of the time. In addition to his critical writings on law, politics, culture, and society, Akhunzadeh revolutionized Iranian drama by writing the first European-style plays in Azeri Turkish, supervising the Persian translations, and mentoring Mirzaba Tabrizi, who took the writing of the first modern plays originally in Persian. A quintessential secular Europeanist with blatant anti-Islamic and anti-Arab sentiments, Akhunzadeh borrowed his concept of moral refinement from Ipmis Kawai's Arabic Treatise, The Refinement of Morales. Significantly, the subtitle of Akhunzadeh's most acknowledged work, meaning his Tamzilat, or the collection of plays or comedies, is in fact Ketaba Tahziba Akhlar, or the Book of Moral Refinement. In his introduction to his plays, Ahmed Zadeh focuses on the necessity of comedy for educating the nation, establishing reforms, and implementing moral refinement of the co-religionists. As he said in Persian, Now, this is when I'm getting into theater and politics and how they intermingled. Following Akhundzad, the Persian and Azeri European-style playwriting and later modern theater became the forefront of cultural modernization and political reform for several reasons. One is theater's inherent quality of gathering an audience for a shared experience, hence mobilization. Two, theater's ability to reenact and mirror the society back to itself, which has allowed revolutionaries in different times and places of the world to mobilize masses of people against autocratic rule. And I have many examples, if anyone's interested, from around the world. The third factor that helped make theater the torchbearer of political change in 19th century Iran was the critical and political nature of traditional Iranian theater itself, both the Islamic passion plays of Tazier as well as the non-religious comedy of Tahlid in their opposition to religious and political hierarchies. And of course, we can discuss further. The fourth reason was the exchanges with the Caucasian, Russian, and European cultures and literatures through direct individual contact, for instance, between Ahumzadeh Lermontov, Merlinsky, and Belinsky, as well as cultural exposure to European teachers and the curriculum of the Dar-ul-Fonun School, which was the first modern institution, higher institution in higher education in Iran. The theatrical assemblies, organizations, and periodicals that formed from the last two decades of the 19th century until the end of the first Pahlavi period in 1941 typically banned political activities on paper while their publications, plays, and performances were explicitly political and critical of the establishment. Examples are first and foremost Musa Malcolm Khan's Qa'anun periodical from the early 1890s. Then there is the Okhovat Society, to which I will return with details, followed by Musa Reza Khanataba Taba'i Na'ini's theatrical publication called Ruzameh Tiyat, or the Theatre periodical in 1908, the Farhank Educational Institute established in 1910, and Fekri-

Ershart's theater group and newspaper, both called Ershad, also from 1910. Historically, theater's penchant for mocking authority and engaging with politics has inevitably affected realms that have theatrical capacities or performative qualities, namely religion, education, and the law. Within the realm of religion in the Iranian context, Sufism is a prime example that put its performative qualities to pragmatic political use. Al-Ghazali's mark on Sufism also, and not accidentally, helped grow its performative potentials. And you probably can tell that this is where I'm getting into the relationship between political resistance and Sufism. Historically, Sufism's popular social authority gave it the power to both legitimize rulership and to challenge it. This created tensions with the rulers and allowed Sufism to present itself not just as a religious alternative to the ulema, but also as a religious and political alternative to the state. According to Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banu Azizi, by the ****** period, organized Sufi orders had become a major form of popular religion among the urban and rural classes, giving Sufi leaders substantial social networks and presenting them as the new interpreters of Islam in lieu of the ulama. The famous dichotomy of the Safavid dynasty was that it began as a Sufi movement, which made its ruler, Shah Abbas I, both the political sovereign and, in the earlier period, Mosheda Kamal, or the so-called perfect spiritual head of the Safavid order. According to Roger Savory, Shah Abbas I consequently repressed those Sufis who challenged his political authority. And in 1589 to 90, this resulted in the Sufis' last serious challenge to the authority of the Shah, and it got them crushed. Limitations by the states together with the ulama's condemnation of organized Sufism, even when they approved of its theoretical dimensions as irfan or mysticism, continued into the Zand, Afsharid, and Qajar periods and resulted in a general decline of Sufism as a social organization, but also it resulted in a decline of its khanaqah, meaning the institution and the physical establishment where the Sufis would reside and gather to study, pray, sing, dance, and listen to music as a group. The decline continued up until the reign of Muhammad Shah Qajar in 1834 to 48, who was himself a Sufi sympathizer. According to Boehring and Melvin Kushki, by late 19th century, the clerical backed anti-Sufi policies of the state had significantly diminished, partly thanks to Muhammad Shah's sympathies and partly due to the impact of the Sheikhi and Babi movements. An institutional Sufi culture was thus revived throughout Iran by the last decades of the 19th century. Hanaqas began to reemerge as places of gathering, discussion, and performance, and during the constitutional period, quote, Sufi sheikhs became prominent in civil society as political activists, and in the second-half of the century, they forged strong ties with the Pahlavi royal and intellectual elite. Sufism's political engagement was reinforced by its method of gathering groups directed by a leader, therefore always containing an audience even when that audience was an audience of insiders. This characteristic also expanded Sufism's theatrical potential, which was further solidified by its practice of rule playing as master and disciple at all levels, even in its most aesthetic form. And here, I'm getting into the relationship between Sufism and theater. At least since the 10th century, which is

when, according to Jawid Mujaddidi, Sufism began to be identifiable with a compilation of its manuals and biographies. Its performative rituals, such as musical audition with bodily movements known as samaa, were being recorded in the early manuals. Sufism's theosophy relied heavily on performance, even though samaa in particular was not established as a regular group practice until the 17th century, and it definitely was not the theatrical commodity that it is today. The development of Sufism's ritualistic, thus theatrical qualities and their incorporation into its theosophy also helped establish theater as a serious form of religious practice rather than mere entertainment in the medieval period. In fact, It was through Sufism that Iranian theater found its medieval sociopolitical dimensions prior to the development of tahziyeh passion plays in the 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, at least since the 15th century, the Sufis themselves typically worked in the entertainment profession as actors and entertainers for their means of livelihood. non-religious Iranian spectacle, known as Bazi, was historically in the hands of Sufi dervishes, and before them it was performed by Javan Mardan, Fetiyan, Ayaran, loosely meaning men of chivalry, truth, and justice, with Robin Hoodish characteristics who joined the order of Photovat. They engaged in entertainment and had hedonistic lifestyles since the 8th century, according to Mahjud, Mamad Jafar Mahjud. Al-Nasr al-Din al-Lah, the 12th to 13th century Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, whose domain extended to Persia, also joined Jawan Mardan and their social order of because he was aware of their social influence. He favored their activities, such as performing spectacles in public baths, or , or . Fotovat, at times synonymous with Jawan Mardi and later with refers to a wide variety of rituals and codes of conduct associated with social, organizational, and ethical implications of courage, virtue, and unworldliness, primarily in the eastern regions of the Islamic world. One form of Jawan Mahdi or Ukhobvat was attributed to Sufis as well as to merchants and soldiers in the 11th century Persian text, Qabusname. With the end of the Abbasid Caliphate and the fall of Baghdad in 1258, a decline of patronage for Futobvat brought its end as an official sociopolitical order supported by the state. In early Mamluk, Egypt and the Levant Kotovat had the reverse development, and it actually gained popularity in the mid-13th century. In Iran and Iraq, however, Sufism, which until then was a philosophical school of thought, adopted Fotovat in order to gain popularity among ordinary people in line with Al-Ghazali's spiritualization of its practices. Subsequently, Fotovat became a branch of Sufism for the everyday lives of the commons, and its spectacles and performances became recognized as Sufi practices. What has been passed down from Fotovat to Sufism through its members performances and rituals is in fact best documented in Kashifi's Fotovat Nameer Sultani or the Royal Book of Fotovat. The book lists the required traditions for entering the order and incorporating its practice in an array of professions ranging from traditional athletes to butchers, smiths, carpenters, minstrels, and storytellers. Just as in Sufism, every aspect of life is a representation of the truth, with capital T, and the Sufi must go beyond the surface in order to seek the inner meaning, Kashafi gives mystical explanations behind the rituals of each

occupation, about people in the entertainment profession, such as dice players, puppeteers, and tricksters or magicians, he explains that dice playing is a metaphor of the ever circling and changing world. This, by the way, I have encountered in the poetry of Abu Said Abu Khair, and I have an excerpt of it translated here in case we have time later on. Like the dice players, puppeteers engaged in puppetry themselves that in, I'm sorry, puppeteers engaged in puppetry to remind themselves that in the material world anything that appears as playing or has is truthfully reality or jet according to Kashefi. He gives the following example. Someone sits under a veil with two masks in his hands and pretends that the two masks are in dialogue with one another by alternating his voice between the two characters who first fight then reconcile. Kashefi writes quote Do you assume that the play is a play? No, it is real, and the real person is veiled as an actor. Thus, puppetry is a reference to the oneness of deeds, or tawhid aaf al. By performing this spectacle as an occupation, Day after day, the Sufi would learn and internalize that there is only one source that speaks for two masks behind the veil, just like in the Sufi outlook to the world. The truth appears in various spaces, but when the veil is gone, there is only one source and that is the truth. The same explanations and mystical teachings applied to box puppetry or tent puppetry and its tools, which later developed into the tent or the veil or is a metaphor for the human body, which at any moment could find a new puppet or head or face that would want to do and say various things, but the underlying acting and speaking source is only one. The hiding box is a metaphor for the human heart, which is a container of the occult And at any moment, its moods and changes, its moods and changes can vary because it is controlled by these turning hands. Similarly, magic or trickery, or Hubda Bazi, teaches the Sufi not to rely on the world as anything that appears to be something can be something else in the blink of an eye. until mid-20th century, and in some parts of Iran until today, Sufis would perform spontaneously in public spaces, and a crowd would gather to watch. You might actually, if any of you have seen Jafar Panohy's film, The White Balloon, there is a scene that the little girl is going after with some money to buy goldfish, and she encounters a crowd of Sufis that are doing the snake plays. That's what I'm talking about. It's been captured in that film. And by the way, those are real Sufis doing real spectacles. I know he told me that it was not acted at all. He saw them and filmed them.

Maryam Alemzadeh

With consent. Oh boy. He doesn't need consent.

Sheida Dayan

Now, in the urban areas of Iran, the relationship between Sufism and theater found new institutional dimensions at the turn of the 19th century as the society underwent structural changes. A number of theatrical organizations had ties to Sufi brotherhood and were either active under the umbrella of their respective orders or were offshoots of them. The significance of this cultural continuity is not just the milieu of the performers,

but the medieval mark that derives spiritual meaning from entertainment, equates acting with reality, and attributes divine austerity to play. The connections between Sufi plays and traditional theater in Iran are multifaceted and need separate investigations in the social context of each period. In the following section, I'm going to focus on the theatricality triangle between society, performance, and politics from late 19th to mid-20th centuries. The extraction of spirituality from acts of entertainment is not specific to traditional performance. Nor is the relationship between institutional Sufism and theater exclusive to the medieval period. The Sufi organization, Ukhobat Society, or Anjumana Ukhobat, literally meaning society of brotherhood, was founded in 1899 to 1900 as an offshoot of the Nematologi Sufi order with a quasi-Masonic color, but also as the first modern theatrical assembly of Iran. A statesman, writer, poet, playwright, and player of violin and piano, was a Renaissance man who founded the Akhabat Society in his home in Tehran with permission from Muzaffar al-Din Shah. This is needlework by Zahi Rabdollah. On top, we have an Arabic saying. This is the translation. And at the bottom, we have Safa Ali's signature. I'll read the translation of this line right here. There is no man of chivalry other than Ali, and there is no sword other than his sword, Zulfar. And then at the bottom, Safa Ali's work in the year 1330 after Hijra or 1912. So A steadfast constitutionalist, Zahir al-Doleh, was a later follower of the Safa Ali Shah Brotherhood and was known in his Sufi order as Safa Ali and Misbahul Velayeh himself. Modeled after Masonic societies, in particular Ihfan al-Safa, Ukhovat published a bi-weekly titled Majmu'ei Akhlagh, or the Collection of Morales. I believe this is the. You'll see the logo here. And this was in 18 issues in 1905 to 1906. For the society's logo, this is it up here, Zahiru Dolik chose a triangle of hatchet, begging bowl, and rosary, the three objects readily recognized for their significance to Sufi dervishes. He assigned the number 110 to the society, modeled after the number of members in European Freemason organizations, and matching the Abjat letters of Ain Lam Yeh, after Imam Ali's name. The 110 members were all appointed by Zahir al-Dullah himself, and many had connections to the court. The society's bylaws described it as secret. The first mission was practicing the six goals of the Okhobat, order through teaching and inculcation. I have the six goals if you want them. To no surprise, the second mission included moral refinement or Tahsiba Akhlaq. It is somewhat right here. Yeah, Tahsiba Akhlaq. Okay. And as I mentioned earlier, the BIVT was titled The Collection of Morals. We have this right here, Majmoya Akhlaq or The Collection of Morals. was also Nasser al-din Shah's son-in-law, the court minister of Nasser al-din Shah and Muzaffar al-din Shah, and the governor of Hamadan, Mazar and Daran, Tehran, Ghilan, and Kerman Shah under Muzaffar al-din Shah. I just want to put in parentheses here. This is the first person who founded a modern theatrical organization. It's this person who's the governor's governor of all these places, who's the founder of the first theatrical ascendment. Together with Mirza Malcolm Khan, Zair-e-Doleh is one of the two influential statesmen in the Freemasonry of Iran. Nonetheless, as Lloyd Regin contends, the Okhovat Society was neither subsidiary to European Freemasonry nor

serving the interests of the Western powers. Unlike the secret nature of European Freemasonry, Ukhovat had a strong public performance dimension rooted in its Sufi activities, including lamentation ceremonies, poetry recitations, and Maharram rituals for the commemoration of Shiite saints. Another thing I'd like to mention about it is that it's just assumed that it was men's only, but we know from this one document and I haven't seen this argued anywhere, but it speaks for itself we know from this one document here that women were also allowed because this is a membership card for Zahir-ud-Dolleh's daughter when she was only 20 years old. And here is the translation of whatever is written here. Zahir-ud-Dolleh also staged plays with explicit political messages that suggest the development of the nascent modern Iranian theater hand in hand with political activity. The society convened at Zahir al-Douda's home for meetings, plays, concerts, talks, quote-unquote garden parties, and most intriguingly, regular political pantomimes about the constitutional revolution. One of their political mimes, titled Fantome, coming from Phantom, was about the despotism of the Russian-backed and clerical-backed Mohammad Ali Shah, and was performed by Ukhbak society. It opened with a body lying on the ground with the word Iran written all over it, and while the body was lying down on stage, Muhammad Ali Shah would agree to in secret, this is the character playing Muhammad Ali Shah, would agree in secret to the request of a character representing a British ambassador. The British man would grab the hat of the body, and in Persian that has meaning. In Persian, it's an expression to take someone's hand means to swindle somebody. So the British man would take the hat of the body. Then the Russian ambassador would come. He would leave with the bodies or with Iran's shoes and jewels and medals. And then the same act would repeat. It would repeat with several other foreign representatives and local officials until Iran would be stripped naked. And then other characters would enter the scene. They were representing the patriots. They would start alerting the Shah, and at that point, the body would awaken. Iran would awaken and rise and shake hands with the Shah. Together, they would beat up the next villains and force them out with a series of punching and kicking. Yes, you laugh, and it's not subtle, but it actually perfectly shows the strains of traditional Iranian comedy, the punching and kicking at the end, comes directly from Tahlid comedies into this sort of European-style play. I mean, it was European-style. It's not clear if Zairud-Doleh wrote the play or Like the other mimes and plays of Akhabat society, it was written both by him and by Habibullah Shahdur, known as Mosheer Umayyul. But according to Iraj Afshar, the play's message of unity against foreign forces brought Zahir-ud-Doleh much fame. However, when its news reached Muhammad Ali Shah, of course, he became very spiteful and he penalized the attendants and held a grudge against Zahir-ud-Doleh until in 1908, he bombed and looted Zahirudole's home together with the Majlis that he bombed. Okhovad members made great use of the dramatic spirit of the time, and not just in the contents of the place, but this time for that political mind that I just described. He started they started performing it in the actual degrees left of the bombardment of Zahirudole's home. And

there, they were making it an emblem of Iran in ruins, and this new performance space was drawing an analogy between the Iranian society in shambles, it was juxtaposing the building's public sector, known as Biruni in Iranian architecture, with whatever was left of the glory of the building's private sector, known as Andaruni, and it symbolized the challenges that the civil society and intellectual community had to face in finding foreign penetration and executing reforms. Now these events in turn led Zahir al-Dolla to write a fierce poem addressed to Mohammad Ali Shah about freedom. This was in 1908. The society reassembled when the revolution dethroned the Shah in 1909, and after the death of Zahir al-Dullah in 1924, it continued to hold meetings at least until 1949. This was in Tehran, but it also had other branches in Rasht and Kerman Shah throughout Iran. Although some scholars, such as Abdullah Anwar, have deemed Ukhovat as non-political, there is evidence to the contrary. For instance, encouraged members of the organization to engage in political activity. He wrote in July 1911 to an Akhovat member, Political parties today seem non-habitual and extraordinary to us Iranians, and the public does not know the aim of engaging with politics. But the public must know, and with knowledge and awareness, it must get involved in public affairs. May the esteemed brothers or members of Okhovat realize that it is the members of other ideologies that must come in agreement with them, as opposed to us becoming a part of others. Now, besides the members' political status and analysis of Okhovat's revenues and expenses from the events, donations, charity, and decorative objects, suggests that the circulation of money was tied to the society's political engagements and served purposes other than entertainment, Sufi rituals, and traditional commemorations. According to the society's documents, the ticket sales of Akhovat events went both to the political activities of the group and to charity for the medical expenses of the wounded Mujahideen and the families of the murdered Mujahideen. including the Mujahideen of Caucasia. After the constitutionalist forces conquered Tehran and toppled the government of Muhammad Ali Shah in 1909, Okhovat organized a three-day national victory celebrations known as Jashneh Nusrat al-Melgi. A list of donations to Okhovat for tickets purchased for the national victory celebrations is available with names of purchasers and ticket liaisons and the ticket amounts. While most tickets were purchased for 10 to 25 two months, the two highest donations amounts stand out. One for 3,002 months, compare that 10 to 25 is the regular amount. This is 3,002 months by Shokat al-Mulk, followed by 502 months by Tehran's Imam Jomeh. Amir Mohammad Ibrahim Khanchokat al-Mulk was the governor of Qa'anat, the Viceroy of Fars, and later the Minister of Post and Telegraph in four cabinets. Mehdi Bamdat describes him as a naturally open-handed man, famous for his generosity and large tips. Both ticket amounts are unusually large and they sound questionable simply for donations, especially because they are in two months while the donations of other individuals and the expenses of the same event are recorded in the lower fractions of clerons and dinars. A report of the celebrations in September 1909 sent to Zahir al-Doleh states that a medal with the name of Ukhovat was minted and given to the

donors and supporters of the national victory celebrations. Anyone who contributed more than 300 tumons would receive a gold medal, anyone who gave about 300 would receive a silver medal, and anyone who gave 110 tumons would receive a copper medal. The report says that it was decided that three pieces with the society's logo be jeweled with diamonds and gold, and on the last night of celebrations, when the respected constitutionalist commanders are invited, be handed to them on behalf of the society. And the commanders who received these were Mohammad Ali Khan Khalat Bali Ton al-Qabuni, known as Sebasol al-Azam, and Sadar As-Ad Golgani. They were two of the most known constitutionalist commanders who conquered Tehran. And then we read that Sardar Azam, who was one of the people who got a medal, gave 3,002 months to the Mujahideen who conquered Tehran because the intentions of the supporters of the Akhobat Society aligned with his goals, he therefore said to give a 3,002 month gift to the society so that the society can spend it with its own income as seen fit, and he did as promised. And I just want to recap here, what I just read is a document that's admitting to giving diamonds and gold to military men by a society that claimed to be dedicated to the promotion of culture, theater, and the arts and Islamic ethics, but was in fact a half-Sufi, half-Masonic organization with a political agenda. In line with Asif Ashaf's work on politics of gift exchange in earlier Qajar Iran, We see here that this form of donation was not simply a social custom or a gesture of generosity, as suggested by Mehdi Bondard, but a fundamental instrument of political power and state building. Now, there are other reports that show the expenses when we compare the net profit to the stage cost, which is really minuscule. Stage cost was 329, net profit 9,500. we see that these national victory celebrations were more, really more about victory than they were about the celebrations. So this is something we can get into later. But now I'm going to end my discussion of Okhovat, and I want to very quickly get to another theater group called Shirkate El-Mei Farhang before I wrap up the talk. This group The Farhank Educational Institute was co-founded in 1910 by the graduates of Madrasi Siyasi, or the political academy, including Mohammad Alif Farooghi and Abdullah Mostoufi, both of whom wrote and translated plays for the group. The group's line of thought can be traced to the secular and rationalist incorporation of moral refinement into theater and politics, modeled after the teachings of Akhm Tadeh. Just to give you a quick tour, Faroukhi was a scholar statesman who was wearing many hats, including Parliament Deputy of Tehran, Speaker of the Parliament, Minister of Finance, President of High Court of Appeal, and of course, a three-time Prime Minister. He was writing plays, staging plays, working as a stenographer, and working as a prompter on stage. Mostafi was a scholar and diplomat. skip his roles. He was governor of Azerbaijan, among many other roles. And as I mentioned earlier, Ali Akbar Dovar, Tehran's district attorney, would show without any disguise during his years at the Ministry of Justice. He would show as an actor without any costume or makeup as himself. And it is known that he had mentioned that people need to come to terms with theater as a respectful art. These are exactly the teachings of Akum Zadeh. Now, in

conclusion, I just want to say that whether it is Sufism, European Freemasonry, or an amalgamation of the two, social movements in pre-modern and modern Iran have been commonly tied to politics through theater and theatricality. Especially in societies in which ritual and performance are traditionally part of daily life, political involvement and social activism tend to be expressed with stronger performative dimensions. The effect is mutual. Politics and social movements alter theater and performance as much as they are influenced by them. In medieval to modern Iran, the code of ethics known as moral refinement developed with the two distinct but not entirely separate strings. The convergence of these two strings of Sufi and secular helped the integration of moral refinement in theater, and theater's political penchant for the rule of law and constitutionalism in the modern period therefore entered. Now this is how political and social movements have historically altered Iranian theater. At the same time, when you divide the world between morality and immorality, anything, especially in politics, can be justified as moral, while its opposite could be equally true in another interpretation of morality. Theater made it all possible by making what was imagined real and what was real moral, as theater can make anything possible. Perhaps what theater and reality have most in common is the belief that anything that appears to be something can be something else in the blink of an eye. Thank you.

Maryam Alemzadeh

Thank you so much, Shayda. That was fascinating. You were just like absorbing and absorbing a lot of cool bits of information and like analytical new looks to this part of history. Thank you so much. Please join me in thanking Shayda.