

With the Support of the Jahangir and Eleanor Amuzegar Chair in Iranian Studies

Bilingual Lecture Series on Iran

present

Persian Women and Other Lies: Story-telling as Historical Retrieval



A Book Talk by Bahiyiyh Nakhjavani
Author of *The Woman Who Read Too Much*

***Lecture in English**

Tuesday, March 31, 2015

3:00 PM

6275 Bunche Hall

Plots. Political intrigue. Treachery. The high-handed actions of omnipotent rulers. Death by decree.

That's the world that Bahiyiyh Nakhjavani plunges readers into with *The Woman Who Read Too Much*: Persia in the mid-nineteenth century, a society that clings to the old ways even as the world around it is rapidly transforming. A young Shah, personally and politically weak, sits on an uncertain throne, fascinated by modernity even as he fears the Western powers that would deliver it to his nation—for a price. When a female poet, based in part on Tahirih Qurratu'l-Ayn, a historical figure who was also a theologian and revolutionary, dares to reject the veil and begin agitating for female literacy, her campaign shakes the very foundations of Persian society. Nakhjavani tells the story of the poet's campaign through the eyes of the women of Iran—officially excluded from power, yet finding unexpected, secret ways to exercise it nonetheless. Through these women, we see a society on the brink of change—and the deadly political maneuvering and violence that will accompany it.

Rich in drama and political intrigue, this novel spins fiction around history to reveal the past as it was lived, as people, tested by their times, are forced to make terrifying choices: to risk their security, even their lives, for the sake of abstract principles of justice, equity, and rights, a struggle that continues today in Iran and throughout the world.

Bahiyiyh Nakhjavani grew up in Uganda, was educated in the United Kingdom and the United States, and now lives in France. She is the author of *The Saddlebag* and *Paper* as well as nonfiction works about fundamentalism and education. Her novels have been published into French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Greek, Turkish, Hebrew, Russian, and Korean.

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