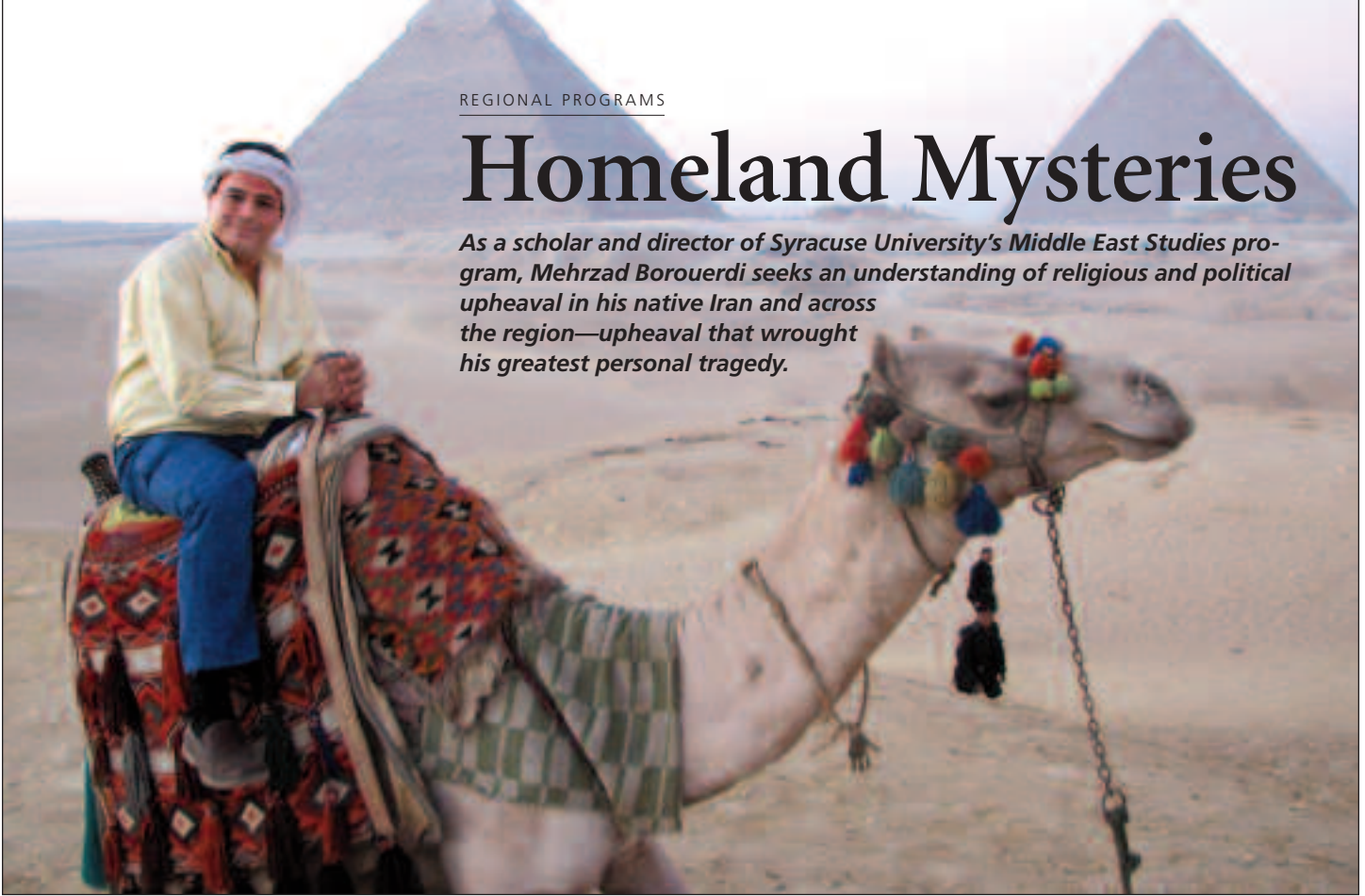


Homeland Mysteries

As a scholar and director of Syracuse University's Middle East Studies program, Mehrzad Boroujerdi seeks an understanding of religious and political upheaval in his native Iran and across the region—upheaval that wrought his greatest personal tragedy.



Middle East scholar Mehrzad Boroujerdi at the Giza Pyramids near Cairo, Egypt, in December. Boroujerdi was in Egypt to take part in a conference of former participants in the SU-based Leader for Democracy Fellows program.

Mehrzad Boroujerdi was 16 in August 1978 when his father, a high-ranking petroleum engineer in Iran, arranged for him to attend high school in Boston. Neither could have anticipated the cataclysmic events about to unfold. “I was brought up in a secular household and wasn’t close to religious circles,” Boroujerdi recalls. “Indeed a week before I left, I came out of my house one day and saw graffiti on the wall saying, ‘Long live Ayatollah Khomeini.’ I turned to my father and said, ‘Who is Ayatollah Khomeini?’”

Within a week of Boroujerdi’s arrival in the U.S., martial law was declared in Iran, and the teenager tracked developments from afar as the Shah’s seemingly unshakeable power began to crumble. And just a few months later came the most shocking news of all. On the day before Christmas, Boroujerdi read in the *Boston Globe* that in the midst of an oil-industry strike called by Khomeini, an American engineer had been assassinated, along with his Iranian counterpart. The latter was Boroujerdi’s father, forced to be on the job because of his high position, and caught between the dictates of martial law and the demands of the striking workers.

“They say all products of the mind contain some elements of autobiography, even if deeply buried. That’s certainly true in my case,” reflects Boroujerdi, now an associate professor of political science specializing in the contemporary intellectual and political history of the Middle East. “I’ve been trying to make sense of the revolution and the rise of this type of Islamic sentiment, and what it has meant for Iran and the entire region.”

Boroujerdi began this scholarly and personal quest as an undergraduate at Boston University, where—instead of pursuing his original plan to become an engineer like his father—he studied political science and sociology. He received a Ph.D. in international relations at American University and joined the Maxwell faculty in 1992. His first book, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, explored the ideology behind the Iranian revolution. His current research is a far-reaching endeavor to document the country’s “revolutionary elite.” Using an \$80,000 grant from the United States Institute of Peace, Boroujerdi is compiling a database with detailed background information on nearly 2,000 people—from cabinet and parliament members to religious authorities, military leaders, prosecutors, presidential advisors, and the Supreme Leaders themselves.

Since arriving at SU, Boroujerdi has become not only a top scholar in his field but a

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Miscellaneous photography courtesy of SU Photo and Imaging Center; STEVE SARTORI, manager and chief photographer.

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—Mehrzad Boroujerdi

leader in building the Maxwell School into a hub of Middle Eastern studies. In 2003 he became founding director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program, which offers an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor exploring subjects that range from literature and language (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew) to culture, religion, and political systems. As a regional center in the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, the program sponsors a full slate of conferences and events and has received several major grants for building partnerships with the Middle East. In conjunction with Executive Education, for instance, the program has secured \$2 million from the State Department to bring democracy leaders from

across the Middle East and North Africa to Maxwell for training and development sabbaticals. A second, \$3-million grant will fund year-long visits by academic fellows from the same region, beginning next year.

All this growth in Middle Eastern studies at SU, Boroujerdi says, has been greeted with “immense student interest.” Enrollment in his own courses on Middle East politics has doubled in recent years, nearly 300 students have completed Arabic I through IV, and many are taking advantage of opportunities to study in Israel, Egypt, Palestine, and Turkey, where Boroujerdi recently forged a connection with Bogazici University. The ranks of Middle East specialists at SU are also growing. Middle East historian Amy Aisen Elouafi joined the faculty this year, and in the fall SU will have its first full-time professor of Arabic language and literature. The Middle Eastern Studies Program plans to expand beyond its minor, too, and is on track to introduce in 2009 an undergraduate major as well as a certificate of advanced study for graduate students.

Boroujerdi’s research also informs his work with the Program on Religion, Media, and International Relations, which he co-directs along with Tazim Kassam, chair of SU’s religion department, and Gustav Niebuhr, who teaches on religion and the media. This program, which is supported by a \$370,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, “intends to inform the next generation of journalism, religion, and IR students about the significance that religion plays in international relations,” says Boroujerdi. “International relations seems to be a secular discipline, but religion is becoming more and more important.”

Boroujerdi’s native country, of course, remains a compelling example of why it’s essential for leaders to understand the interplay of religion, politics, and international relations. “Iran has been the Bermuda Triangle of successive American administrations starting with Jimmy Carter and then Reagan with Iran Contra,” says Boroujerdi, “At a time when Islamic revivalism is such a potent force, a study of the Iranian case can give us some clues as to how a modern theocratic state is controlled and run. It’s crucial in this day and age that we get to know who these people are and how they think.”

—JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Information about the Middle East Studies Program is available online at middle-eastern-studies.syr.edu.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Walter Montgomery

Leon Levy Foundation provides \$5 million to help continue the legacy of one of America’s great policy visionaries, who was also a faculty member and long-time friend of the Maxwell School.

At a June 14 event in the U.S. Capitol, friends, family, former colleagues, and other devotees of former U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan gathered to celebrate the creation of a senior faculty chair in his honor at the Maxwell School. The chair is made possible by the New York City-based Leon Levy Foundation, which has given \$5 million to establish what will be known as the Daniel Patrick Moynihan Chair in Public Affairs.

Moynihan began his academic career as a junior faculty member at Maxwell, 1959-61. During his long career in public service, including four terms as a U.S. Senator, Moynihan remained a close friend of the Maxwell School. Upon his retirement from the Senate in 2001, Moynihan was named a University Professor, the highest faculty rank at Syracuse University, a post he held until his death in March 2003.

Dean Mitchel Wallerstein said the chair will be filled by a “leading national figure in the domestic policy arena.”

“Future generations of faculty and students at the Maxwell School—and elsewhere—will be reminded of the important role that the Senator played in elevating debate and understanding on critical domestic public policy problems,” he said.

Walter Montgomery



—D.C.