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**Oral History Project
Interview Transcript**

**Kristen Ghodsee
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius
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- Linda Arntzenius:* Recording. There we go. Yes I'm very cognizant of the time so I'm going to jump right in. I think you've probably done your homework, but before you launch into what happened here, what did you know of the Institute before you came here?
- Kristen Ghodsee:*¹ Absolutely nothing.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Right.
- Kristen Ghodsee:* Yes, but I was very junior. I came here as an assistant professor. I was only in my third year on the tenure track.
- I had another fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. And all of the fellows there shared a printer. So I was going to get something that I had printed out and I saw somebody's application to the Institute for Advanced Study. And I thought, "Ooh, I wonder what that is?"
- Linda Arntzenius:* Well, that answers my next question: what prompted you to apply? That's amazing!
- Kristen Ghodsee:* So I, you know, got back to the office, Googled it and said, "Oh, this sounds like a good thing." And there was a School of Social Science and so I applied.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now I don't know if you were aware at the time. You were a Member in the School 2006 to 2007, which was a time of transition because Clifford Geertz² passed away that fall. Did you sense that it was a time of change?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* No. I mean, I was pretty heartbroken. When I got to the Institute – I'm Ghodsee so my office – Geertz and Ghodsee were right next to each other. So I was so excited at the possibility of being able to talk to him and have him be an interlocutor for my scholarship. But yes, by the time I got here he was already in the hospital and then he passed away. So Joan Scott³ stepped in for "The Third World Now," which was the seminar theme that year. And you know she just did a really brilliant job.
- I did not feel at all as if there was any kind of instability. But it may be because I was doing gender and Joan *is* Gender. So it was very easy for me to feel welcome and –
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, the School has a very strong female presence with Joan Wallach Scott.
- Kristen Ghodsee:* Absolutely.

¹ Kristen Rogheh Ghodsee (1970-), Member in the School of Social Science, 2006-2007.

² Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), Professor in the School of Social Science, 1970-2000; Emeritus Professor, 2000-2006.

³ Joan Wallach Scott (1941-), Member in the School of Social Science, 1978-1979; Professor, 1985-2014; Emeritus Professor, 2014- .

Linda Arntzenius: Did you have anything to do with Historical Studies, Patricia Crone,⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum?⁵

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, I mean I was part – Caroline Walker Bynum actually organized – well, she was part of a gender lunch that we had once a month. Quite a few women from Historical Studies and visitors – so the wives or partners of fellows in other schools who were interested in gender; we got together, I think it was once a month. Maybe it was more frequently. And we talked about gender issues at lunch with her. And then I did, in fact, have a bit of contact with Patricia Crone because I was doing a book about Islam. And so I think we had lunch a couple of times.

But yes, it was really wonderful to have these senior academic superstars around, especially because, as I said, I was a very junior assistant professor. I didn't have tenure. My book⁶ had come out in 2005 but I was furiously at work with my second book⁷ and I had a four-year-old. I was here by myself with a four-year-old. So I had a lot on my plate.

Linda Arntzenius: Well, as a scholar of gender studies I have to ask you if you could talk a little bit about the Institute with respect to gender issues, through that particular lens that you have.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes. Well, so I'll say as a Member I was so relieved when I found out that there was childcare. Because when I got the fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center they did not provide any kind of childcare. My daughter was three, turning four and it was just terrible, everything hinged on whether or not I could find a place for her. So when I got accepted to the Institute I remember thinking I would have to hock a kidney or something to find a place for my daughter to go while I was doing my work.

When I called Donne Petito I remember her saying – Well the first thing was, "Yes, yes, I'm so excited that you accepted me. What are the child care options available?" It was my first concern. It was my biggest concern.

And she said, "You're guaranteed a spot in Crossroads." And I said, "What? There's not like a two-year waiting list? I don't have to pay...?" It was amazing. So from the perspective of a mother, it was brilliant. I will say, though, it's noticeable that there are so few female faculty, right? And

⁴ Patricia Crone (1945-2015), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 1997-2014; Emeritus Professor, 2014-2015.

⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum (1941-), Professor in the School of Historical Studies, 2003-2011; Emeritus Professor, 2011- .

⁶ *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Postsocialism on the Black Sea*, Kristen Ghodsee (Duke University Press, Durham, 2005; ISBN: 978-0822336624).

⁷ *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe, Ethnicity and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*, Kristen Ghodsee (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009; ISBN: 978-0691139555).

Social Science and Historical Studies obviously have more female Members. Natural Sciences and Mathematics less so. But the Faculty imbalance was very noticeable. So it's a question.

Linda Arntzenius: Did it impact your work in any way?

Kristen Ghodsee: You know I don't –

Linda Arntzenius: It's hard to say. *[laughter]*

Kristen Ghodsee: It's hard to say because I was just so overwhelmed with trying to do the life, work, family balance thing that I – Joan Scott was an amazing mentor. She really took me under her wing and helped so much. And I had a few very close colleagues here who were also Members who were sort of women a little bit more senior to me, who really kind of showed solidarity and supported me and helped me. And so it's hard to say. But I think, for me, Joan was a real role model and it made a big difference to have her be here.

Linda Arntzenius: You mentioned that you were at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in D.C. You also were a fellow at Radcliffe. Max Planck Institute, you spent some time there. I want to ask you how the Institute compares in terms of scholarly resources, environment, atmosphere, with those other places that you've been a fellow at.

Kristen Ghodsee: Right. You know I think hands down the best thing about the Institute is the residential nature of the fellowship, the fact that for anyone who wasn't from Princeton that we all lived in that housing together, because at Radcliffe people are dispersed all over the greater Boston area. Max Planck also had housing, but people were dispersed as well. It didn't have a kind of cohesive feel. And for instance, here AMIAS provides a lot of family activities, a lot of field trips to New York, picnics, and all of that stuff just made me feel, as a single mom, so welcome and comfortable.

So on that level I think the housing is without compare. It's so important. The food, fantastic, of course – much better than anywhere else. But then I think the really big thing is in terms of scholarly resources. Firestone is a great library, but Widener is really good too. But the access to Faculty here – when I was at Radcliffe when I tried to meet with Harvard faculty I really got the sense that they were just kind of too busy. Whereas here, I mean we were having seminars every week. We had lunches together – the Social Sciences. So there was really a sense of active connection with the permanent faculty in a way that is not the case at other institutes.

Linda Arntzenius: You mentioned Joan Scott. Who else did you work with would you say?

Kristen Ghodsee: Primarily Joan Scott. I also got to know Michael Walzer⁸ a little bit because, of course, he was – I think he retired that year. I can't remember exactly if he was still on the Faculty or not. But he was around all of the

⁸ Michael Walzer (1935-), Professor in the School of Social Science, 1980-2007; Emeritus Professor, 2007- .

time. You know for a bizarre, convoluted set of reasons I also got to know Freeman Dyson⁹ very well. But really my primary scholarly engagement was with Joan Scott and the other Members in my community.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you find that there were – you mentioned a lot of activities that you appreciated - but did you find that there were any distractions to your work?

Kristen Ghodsee: Distractions? Well, you know I had a four-year-old, so yes a huge distraction. But that was not anything to do with the Institute, right?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes.

Kristen Ghodsee: But to the extent that I was really [focused on my work] – and I wrote a book here from pretty much start to finish. I had my research done. I came back from the field and I got here in September with almost no writing done. And that manuscript went to Princeton University Press in August. So I was really focused – I was probably uniquely, uniquely focused.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, and you'd come with the plan to do that presumably.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: It has been said that people come and they outline their plans and then they come and they are told, "Well, that's great. Do that. But if you do something else or change your mind that's fine; that's what this year is for."

Kristen Ghodsee: Right.

Linda Arntzenius: That didn't happen in your case.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, but I was not – I didn't have tenure. I didn't have the job security. I mean, when I was at Radcliffe, which was after tenure, I did that. I had the freedom to say, "Oh, I came in with this project. I don't really like this project. I'm going to do something completely different." Here, I really knew I wanted to get that second book done and I was very self-disciplined.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you find that you were an anomaly then in terms –?

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes. I think a lot of the senior people who were here when I was here, I really felt that they had a lot more intellectual freedom and self-confidence in terms of that. But there were a few of us that were junior. And we formed a reading group. There were three of us, in particular, that formed a reading group together. We were all very nervous worrying about tenure and things like that. And so we tried to keep each other on task and really

⁹ Freeman J. Dyson (1923-), Member in the Schools of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1948-1950; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 1953-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994- .

focused and everything like that. I would have loved to have been here as a more senior person because I can imagine how it would've been –

Linda Arntzenius: There's time yet.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes that's right. That's right. But I think if you come very early in your career things are a lot more planned out for you.

Linda Arntzenius: Programmed, yes. Could you say something about - you must have come here when Peter Goddard¹⁰ was Director and through your work with AMIAS you must have gotten to know Robbert Dijkgraaf.¹¹

Kristen Ghodsee: Right. That's pretty recent though. I felt as though I knew Peter much better. You know I had dinner at his house and we sat at a table together (I can't remember) at the Winter Ball or whatever. With Robbert Dijkgraaf it's been just the AMIAS meetings.

Linda Arntzenius: Okay. I don't suppose you could comment on differences in style that you perceived or –

Kristen Ghodsee: No, I can't really. Peter, to me, always felt so accessible as a human being because he just seemed so willing to chat with everybody. So that's my memory of that time.

Linda Arntzenius: How does that compare with other institutions that you've been associated with?

Kristen Ghodsee: Peter was definitely the most accessible director, by far, who really spent time with the fellows. I think if I remember correctly, Joan would remember, we have to give a seminar. And I was so incredibly nervous. Peter came to mine, which just made my anxiety go through the roof. But he was great. He really seemed to take an active interest in the lives of the fellows in a way that I was surprised given that he's director. But as I said I've had very, very limited contact since he stepped down.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. I see that you were educated on the West Coast¹².

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes.

Linda Arntzenius: But now you're working on the East Coast and you had a year abroad studying in Ghana. I wondered if there was a difference in East Coast/West Coast style or scholarly mindset that you could comment on.

¹⁰ Peter Goddard (1945-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1972-1974; Member in the School of Mathematics, 1988; IAS Director, 2004-2012; Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, 2012-2016; Emeritus Professor, 2016- .

¹¹ Robbert Dijkgraaf (1960-), Member in the School of Natural Sciences, 1991-1992; Visitor, 2002; IAS Director and Leon Levy Professor, 2012- .

¹² Professor Ghodsee attended the University of California, Berkeley (Ph.D., 2002; M.A., 1997) and the University of California, Santa Cruz (B.A., 1993).

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh, absolutely. I mean California is a whole different ball of wax. The East Coast – especially the Northeast. We're talking about Princeton north and I really notice it at a place like Harvard where intellectualness is so performed. Erudition is so built into the fabric of the place, whereas in California everybody wants to sort of be cool. They want to be in their labs and then go surfing. You know you don't try to be intellectual and that was really hard for me at first when I moved out to the East Coast. I'm sorry to say this, but it struck me as kind of pompous.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you encounter any of that here? There are quite a few Harvard-trained scholars here.

Kristen Ghodsee: When I first got here I was definitely very intimidated by people – absolutely, especially because I was junior, right? A lot of people were senior to me. There were some people in my class that I was terrified to speak to.

Linda Arntzenius: Really?

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh yes.

Linda Arntzenius: Can you mention? *[laughter]*

Kristen Ghodsee: I don't want to say any names because in some cases I became friends with those people. But there were definitely – especially in that "Third World Now" seminar, it was the first time – it's a very formal thing. Everybody's sitting around the table and we're supposed to be having these really intellectual conversations. Everybody's asking good questions and trying to impress everybody else with how much they know. I can just remember sitting in that room gripping the arm rests.

Linda Arntzenius: Were there participants from Princeton University here too?

Kristen Ghodsee: No, it was all of Social Sciences. It was very intimidating.

Linda Arntzenius: How did you find the dining hall? Did you –?

Kristen Ghodsee: So the lunch conversation was much – and in fact that was how I eventually became friends with those people. I think I started out not wanting to talk in the seminar. But then after the seminar, you know, I would have lunch with the people and then I would feel comfortable talking to them. One of the Members that year, an anthropologist from Columbia, said, "You should really say that in the seminar." She was senior to me, right. "You should really speak up. You have good ideas too. You're here just like we are."

I remember thinking, "Yes, but eh, eh, eh." But I think slowly over the course of the year I remember feeling much more confident.

Linda Arntzenius: So for you those dining hall – those lunches really –

Kristen Ghodsee: They were essential.

Linda Arntzenius: Invaluable.

Kristen Ghodsee: Absolutely. And then back then – I don't know if they still do this, but there was a Wednesday cocktail hour. And that was also – I mean I didn't always go because I was trying to work but the few times that I went – that was really helpful. And then it was through those cocktails that I started to make social friends with people in Historical Studies. And then the big thing about my year is – and apparently – I talked to Joan about this a couple of times, which was very atypical.

Because I was a single mom I lived on Oppenheimer in a two-bedroom unit. There was another woman, Susanna Hecht¹³ who was from UCLA who was just across the grass from me. And we started a dinner club every Tuesday night. There were four of us that would get together for dinner in the fall. And then that expanded. And we started inviting more people. And before you knew it we were essentially having parties at my house. And it was always my house because that way my daughter could go to bed and I didn't have to get a babysitter and everything like that.

That to me was invaluable because I could talk to people outside of the scary seminar or the official talks and actually feel like, "Okay I feel like a part of this community. People are accepting me. It's not as intimidating as it seems." And that sociality was essential – absolutely essential.

Linda Arntzenius: And that's really a function of the fact that it's a community of scholars in residence.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, it's residential. Absolutely, and that doesn't happen at a place like Radcliffe.

Linda Arntzenius: That's interesting. The reason I was asking about the difference of style is, and I wondered if you could speak to this – we also talk a lot about the international aspect of the Institute. Is that something that you would mention to people if you were describing the place to someone?

Kristen Ghodsee: Absolutely. The big thing is that all of my work is in Bulgaria. And you know there aren't a lot of people who are interested in Bulgaria. I just found this place so welcoming in terms of my research interests, which have nothing to do with the United States, and it was okay. That was really great. And then yes, I mean there was a wonderful group of international scholars in my year. In my fellowship year, the Members of the School of Social Science, we all became very close friends. It was wonderful.

I'm still in touch. In fact I'm going to Berlin in February to give a talk at the institute of one of the scholars that I met here. Yes, so those international connections are still very robust for me, which is wonderful.

¹³ Susanna B. Hecht, Member in the School of Social Science, 2006-2007.

- Linda Arntzenius:* You joined the AMIAS board I believe in 2007, so pretty much –
- Kristen Ghodsee:* Right afterwards, yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And you were vice president 2010 to 2013?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* I don't think I'm vice – was I vice president? I don't know what I was. I'm not really sure. I know that I'm now an officer.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Secretary.
- Kristen Ghodsee:* I'm secretary, yes. I think that there is no vice president.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Okay.
- Kristen Ghodsee:* They called me vice president but then they made me secretary because the bylaws – it was a bylaw issue.
- Linda Arntzenius:* But you're on the board.
- Kristen Ghodsee:* I am on the board and I'm an officer of the board, yes. And I've been on the board consecutively since 2007.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What prompted you to participate in that way?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* Well so first of all I think Linda asked me, which was really instrumental.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Linda Cooper?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* Yes, Linda Cooper. Back then she was Linda Geraci right?
- Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.
- Kristen Ghodsee:* But for me the really big thing was that the stuff that AMIAS did for families was so crucial. I did the yoga class. I did ballroom dancing. There was a way in which I felt like they humanized what could otherwise be a very austere atmosphere at the Institute and I really thought that was important. So my primary motivation was because I really wanted to support the mission of AMIAS. But then of course, very selfishly, I loved the idea of coming back here twice a year and seeing Freeman Dyson. And I just had a long chat with Joan Scott and it's wonderful.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Imagine yourself – you're at a dinner party and someone hears you've been at the Institute and they say, "What's it like there?" What's your anecdote? Everyone has an Institute story. *[laughter]*
- Kristen Ghodsee:* An Institute story? You know I'll tell you mine. This is a good Institute story actually. I told you I had these dinner parties quite regularly at my house. You know, it did not start out in any way formal, but it became a kind of semi-regular thing because everybody said, "Oh are we all going to Kristen's tonight?" Because we would be hanging out together. There's

nowhere really to go. So it seemed like it was, it just sort of became a fun thing – very, very fluid, people coming in and out.

So one night I invited Joan Scott because I thought, "Why not?" I mean we're doing these things. I extended the invitation as a courtesy. I did not think she would come. Not only did she come, which was fantastic - we all sat around the table, we were all having dinner, Susanna had cooked, we were drinking wine, we were talking about politics, it was brilliant, just absolutely idyllic - but then at the end of the night, I just have this clear memory, Joan started clearing the dishes.

She took them to the sink and started washing dishes in my house and loading up the machine. And I thought, "Wow."

Linda Arntzenius: This doesn't happen at Radcliffe? *[laughter]*

Kristen Ghodsee: No. Oh my gosh.

Linda Arntzenius: Or the Wissenschaft College?

Kristen Ghodsee: Exactly. And I said, "Joan, no, just stop it. I can deal with this later." And she said, "What? We can help. Everybody can pitch in. We're all imposing on your hospitality." And I just thought this is amazing. It's an amazing place in the sense that there is a kind of – even though it can kind of be aloof - there is this sort of really deep egalitarianism here which I really appreciate. And that has to do with all the furniture in the houses being exactly the same.

Everybody has the same dishes and glasses. You go into anybody's house and it feels exactly like your own. And just the fact that everybody on the Faculty gets exactly the same salary no matter how many bloody Nobel Prizes they've won. Yes at the beginning you're really kind of aware of the hierarchy. I was coming from a small liberal arts college in Maine. Most of the other members were Ivy League, Harvard, Stanford.

I was young. I was from a liberal arts college. I studied Bulgaria. I was so marginal. I had a kid, right? But people really made me feel equal, which to me – that's the thing that I think is amazing about this place. It's so elite in one way but then within that it feels like a place where everybody is nurtured and encouraged to sort of flower intellectually in the best way that they can. I think that's really rare.

Linda Arntzenius: Oddly enough, or perhaps not oddly enough, the original founder thought that it was necessary for scholarship to be in a location such as this – a little apart from the world.

Kristen Ghodsee: Right.

Linda Arntzenius: As well as take people away from teaching duties. Do you think that's still true? Because there are institutes all over the world now.

- Kristen Ghodsee:* Right. And I'm going to the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Study next year. I'm going to another one.
- Linda Arntzenius:* But this idea –
- Kristen Ghodsee:* But this idea of – yes absolutely, because you know when you're teaching, your brain just dies. I mean it doesn't fully die but it feels like it dies. It's so hard to get sustained research and writing done. But I also think that the world apart thing is really important because you need the time. I mean this is – coming back to something that you asked me earlier about people who come here with one idea; they have a plan and then they abandon the plan and they do something else.
- The spirit of encouraging intellectual curiosity for curiosity's sake is really unique to the Institute. I feel like whatever you do here is okay as far as they're concerned. And that really – I mean it's a beautiful privilege to have that ability. To just say, "I'm just going to read this year. I'm just going to think about this thing. Maybe something will come out of it. Maybe something won't."
- Linda Arntzenius:* People have responded to that in two ways. Some have said, "Ach, people can come here and do whatever they like. They can sit around and do nothing if they want." So one question I have for you is did you ever see anyone sitting around doing nothing? *[laughter]* I mean literally abusing the privilege?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* No, not in my year.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And the other response to it is, "Well, that kind of intellectual freedom can be very stressful for someone who's self-driven." So my next question is did you observe any of that?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* Yes. I don't think anybody – anybody who gets to the Institute is going to sit around and do nothing. There's a selection bias there. But the other, yes. I think that people – I can think of one or two people got paralyzed, yes, absolutely paralyzed.
- Linda Arntzenius:* Now do you know whether there are any resources to help them, is there a way out of that?
- Kristen Ghodsee:* That I don't know. I mean I don't think so. The Institute is such a fluid, open place that – I mean I think the funny thing about intellectual paralysis is that it can be a kind of productive thing or it can be completely just shutting down. And it's just hard to tell right? I mean, I do think that – maybe I shouldn't say this, but I think that I will because I'm trying to get at the root of your question, which is that I came here very junior, as I said, from a liberal arts college and studying Bulgaria. I had something to prove at a certain point. Like, am I really equal here? Should I have really –? Was it a fluke that I got in, right?
- And that idea of having something to prove – I have to write this book – it gave me drive. It forced me to do the best work that I could. I used the

resources here. I asked my colleagues to read my chapters. I asked Joan to read my book proposal. I took advantage of people. And when they told me, "Oh you need to rewrite this," or "Oh this isn't very good," I took, I think I was – I was sufficiently open to criticism and I thought, "This is just going to make me a better scholar."

But I could completely see that I could've also come here and just been so afraid that they're going to find out that I'm not that smart, that they made a mistake, right, that they shouldn't have let me in, and how that could've prevented me from doing anything. And I think if you find yourself in that circumstance, I'm not sure that there are resources for you. Where if you just get so bound up in being afraid that they're going to find out that you're really not as smart as you think you are or that they thought you were.

And that happened a couple of times. There were a couple of people who gave talks and they were kind of not the greatest talks in the world and you go, "Well, okay," you know? But I felt like people were pretty forgiving. But I remember before my talk. I mean I was apoplectic. I was tipping over the edge.

Linda Arntzenius: You mentioned a lot of interaction with Members in Social Science and –

Kristen Ghodsee: Historical Studies.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes Historical Studies. What about Mathematics, scientists? Was there any –?

Kristen Ghodsee: Not really, I mean other than this personal connection that had to do with Bulgaria with Freeman Dyson who I just – I kind of worship and adore. And then Peter because he's director and it just felt like we saw each other fairly often for whatever reasons. I was involved. I gave a couple of fundraising speeches for the –

Linda Arntzenius: Friends?

Kristen Ghodsee: Friends, exactly, about my research which as I said was about Islam in Eastern Europe. There were a couple – I remember there was a French mathematician who came to a lot of my parties. So we were open. We would invite people. There were some that came. The French mathematician didn't speak very much English so he just stood around. It was kind of weird that way. But yes I would say that it did feel like Social Sciences and Historical Studies were pretty tight.

I think the other thing was that at least my sense of the natural scientists was that they were younger than we were. We were an older crowd. They were a younger cohort. So there was a weird divide in that respect. It wasn't only disciplinary. It was also generational.

Linda Arntzenius: How do you think the Institute is going to come by more women on the permanent faculty? How is that going to happen?

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh boy, that's a big one. Not easily, is the answer to that question. You know I've been thinking a lot about this because there was a recent *Scientific American Mind*, which is a special issue of *Scientific American*, in 2012 they did a really interesting special issue – on genius. And in that issue there was an article titled "*Where Are All the Female Geniuses?*"

I don't know. Did you see that article?

Linda Arntzenius: No.

Kristen Ghodsee: It's a really interesting rumination on the subject. And what I remember from that article – of course I read it a little while ago – was that genius can mean two things. Genius can mean just the raw score of intelligence testing right? But it's also attributed to exceptional amounts of productivity in artistic or scholarly work. It has these two meanings. What the article was saying was that at the very young age when they're – these are studies that go back to the 1920s -when they're testing boys and girls they find that exceptional intellectual ability is pretty evenly distributed. But this other thing, of exceptional productivity, is completely skewed male. For instance the article talked about – so part of this is just basic sexism that when – sometime in the '70s when people were auditioning for orchestras they finally decided to put up screens so that the juries would be on the other side of the screen from the musician. Did you hear about this?

Linda Arntzenius: A little bit, yes.

Kristen Ghodsee: And the percentage of women who made the final cut increased by 50 percent or something like that. It's just sort of sexism in the sense that people just assume that men are better.

Linda Arntzenius: It's engrained or unspoken.

Kristen Ghodsee: Unspoken, right. The second thing that the article talked about is how anybody with exceptional intellectual ability doesn't necessarily translate into exceptional productivity. You need to have the right combination of factors. You need to have wealth, privilege, education, freedom from cares, from daily toil to support a large family. And there was a quote in the article that said in most of history those conditions for men were rare and for women nonexistent.

So in some ways this is a self-perpetuating problem which is that because genius has historically been gendered male that means the vast majority of geniuses that we know of are men. There are so few women. And I'm not saying that everybody at the Institute is a genius. But they are somehow beacons of exceptional ability. And I think it's really hard for women to overcome what is a kind of deeply engrained, gender bias against the female mind so to speak. I think that's really difficult.

Linda Arntzenius: Have you battled this yourself in connection with, not with your studies, but in connection with the fact that you have a small child?

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh boy. I can't even tell you. I mean I wrote a whole book (*Professor Mommy*) about trying to find work/family balance in academia where we did a substantial literature review about the problems that women with children face in academia. You are just not taken seriously in the same way. I mean it starts – I've got a 12-year-old daughter who is precocious intellectually and it starts so early – the gendering of girls – of boys as geniuses and girls as good girls who do well in school.

Even though my daughter is really kind of quirky and weird and she's just actually been tested and she's just been put into a gifted program after huge delay and only because I was that obnoxious pushy parent. Because somehow even at our youngest elementary school level, boys who are kind of weird and quirky and geeky and dorky get kind of coded as, "Oh they must be really smart." And girls who are that way are just kind of socially awkward or something. They're not perceived as being smart – it's a weird thing.

And then in my own personal life absolutely I feel as though I fight this all the time – all the time. It's very, very difficult to be taken seriously as a scholar. You'd think that it [sexism] would be gone but it's not.

Linda Arntzenius: I sort of asked this before, but when you describe the Institute to someone, or when people ask you about it, is there a most commonly asked question about the Institute that you've come across?

Kristen Ghodsee: Most commonly asked question?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes, a question that's most frequently asked of you about the Institute.

Kristen Ghodsee: No, not really – not that I can think of. I mean people have different interests. A lot of people who ask me about the Institute want to know, "How did you get in?" That might be the most common one right? But some people ask you, "How was your experience there?"

But it's a funny thing. Once you're – I mean if you're a Member at the Institute there's a kind of social cachet that comes along with that. Sometimes people are a little intimidated to ask specific questions. Or ask, "What was it like to work with So-and-So?" Yes I don't know. I think that for the most part people just sort of want to know how you got in. *[laughter]* "Any tips on the application process?"

Linda Arntzenius: So you'd come back if you had the chance?

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh definitely.

Linda Arntzenius: Is there a question that you expected me to ask that I haven't asked?

Kristen Ghodsee: No. I mean I think that – I mean I guess yes the impact that it had on my career was huge. It was a game changer on some level.

Linda Arntzenius: Really?

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, partially because the book that I wrote here was so much better for having been here. I mean this is probably my most successful academic book in terms of external recognition. It won four book awards. It's a really substantial piece of scholarship and it's totally informed by my time at the Institute.

Linda Arntzenius: What did you learn about *writing* when you were here? Because apart from being scholarly, you've got to have a book that's readable.

Kristen Ghodsee: Absolutely.

Linda Arntzenius: So what did you learn about writing when you were here?

Kristen Ghodsee: I learned about rewriting. Which is maybe an even more important lesson than about writing. As I said I was pretty tireless in seeking out help from my peers and the Faculty here and getting critical feedback. And then I wanted to get it right. I kept going back to chapters and rewriting them. I remember Joan read my book proposal and gave me comments and I rewrote it. I was constantly – as I said it provided a kind of drive, encouragement, for me. I could see very clearly how for other people it might shut them down.

And it also gave me a kind of confidence, especially, as I said, because I don't come from an Ivy League school, a fancy research university. I come from a private liberal arts college in Maine. I was very insecure when I got here about – I don't know – fitting in, or do I really belong here? Over the course of the year I just so much, kind of by osmosis, understood that in a community like this what people respect are your ideas – not where you come from, not who you are.

And that really made a huge difference to me. To really live the life of the mind means to respect other people's minds as minds. And everything else gets stripped away. Now I'm not saying that there still weren't hierarchies and petty jealousies. There's always going to be stuff like that.

But for me that was really deeply transformative in the sense that I left here and I thought, "Okay, I can handle it now. I can do this. I get it. I'm not afraid to play with the big dogs." I was when I got here and I left here totally transformed.

Linda Arntzenius: Did you have much interaction with people at Princeton University?

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes. The anthropology department asked me to come give a talk and there was a big symposium at Princeton organized by somebody in Slavic Studies. I was on the program committee for that. And I used Firestone. I went to some talks – not a whole lot 'cause as I said I was really trying to write. I didn't want to dilute my concentration in any way. But yes, it was really great to be able to just pop over to the library and get stuff and to have some colleagues.

But for the most part I really felt as though my center of gravity was here because I wanted to. I didn't have a car. That's the other thing. I had a four-year-old and no car.

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. You were stuck here.

Kristen Ghodsee: I had a bike. And so that made life kind of – I was very rooted here.

Linda Arntzenius: What's your daughter's name?

Kristen Ghodsee: Kristiana.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh nice. And how did she get on at Crossroads?

Kristen Ghodsee: She loved it.

Linda Arntzenius: How did you find Crossroads?

Kristen Ghodsee: It was wonderful. It was the best thing that ever happened. I mean my house was right across the street. And there was something so nice about being able to just walk there, drop her off, walk into the office, work, come back, pick her up. She was happy. She was well-adjusted. There were all these other little kids in the Institute housing that she could go and have playdates with. Dan Ariely.¹⁴ We were fellows the same year and his son and my daughter – “got married.”

Linda Arntzenius: I misheard you there. Who was it?

Kristen Ghodsee: Dan Ariely.

Linda Arntzenius: Oh yes. Ariely, yes.

Kristen Ghodsee: His son Amit and Kristiana “got married” in preschool. And if I had to go to New York for some reason or something, Sumi, who was Dan's wife, helped me with Kristiana in the evenings. It just really felt like a community where people were really generous with their time.

Linda Arntzenius: Some people have suggested that there really is no need for a permanent faculty at a place like the Institute. What's your take on that?

Kristen Ghodsee: I don't agree. I don't agree.

Linda Arntzenius: Why? Have the other institutes you've been at all had permanent faculty?

Kristen Ghodsee: No.

Linda Arntzenius: So could you compare and contrast?

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, as I said earlier with Harvard there were no permanent faculty at the institute. To the extent that you wanted to create linkages and get

¹⁴ Dan Ariely (1967-), Member in the School of Social Science, 2005-2006; Visitor, 2006-2007.

mentorship – and this was important for me because I was junior - if I was more senior maybe it wouldn't matter. But I reached out to a few of the Harvard faculty and I really felt like they just blew me off. And at the Wilson Center there is no permanent faculty but there are directors of the research centers. They're not really academics quite. I mean some of them are and some of them aren't. Most of them were academics but have become policy advocates. They're directors of these research centers. And that was good but it was very different from having an intellectual interlocutor of Joan Scott or Michael Walzer where you could go down and... Or I remember a conversation with Eric Maskin.¹⁵ I was really interested in how American economists thought of post-communist, or the economics of post-communist transition. I had this kind of burning question and I was able to walk down the hall and ask him, "When you were working in the '90s and you had these colleagues in Hungary –?" And he knew the answer. That's amazing. You get a burning question like that, that you can't Google the answer to, to have somebody that you can actually ask.

Linda Arntzenius: So if you were setting up your own multi-million dollar institute you would have a permanent faculty?

Kristen Ghodsee: Absolutely. I think the permanent faculty adds stability. I think they add continuity in a way that's really important. And I think they add mentorship, which is really important for the junior people because the junior people are just – you know it's really hard when you're junior especially 'cause – I can't remember the year that I was in Social Sciences. Maybe there were 18 members. And I think four of us were assistant professors. And that was so it was intimidating. Maybe there were five of us that were assistant professors – and of the five two were at Harvard, one was at Princeton, no two were at Princeton; two were at Harvard, and me.

Linda Arntzenius: Ooh.

Kristen Ghodsee: Right? *[laughter]* So yes, I remember that really well. I thought, "Okay I'm definitely, one of these things that's not like the other." So it was great [that they included me].

Linda Arntzenius: The other thing I'd like you to comment on is the length of your tenure. You came for a year. You've pointed out that some of the members in Natural Sciences come for longer periods. Can you see a value in having those longer periods for historians or for humanists or social scientists?

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh absolutely, but I mean most universities won't give more than a year of leave. So yes I think – I mean I think the thing about the post-docs in the natural sciences and mathematics is they're younger. So for those of us who are actually on the tenure track or even with tenure; most research universities don't let you go for longer than that. Yes I definitely see the value of it but I just think that practically one academic year is a good unit, because it's practical.

¹⁵ Eric Maskin (1950-), Faculty in the School of Social Science, 2000-2011; Visitor, 2012.

I don't think that a semester is enough though. I know a lot of the people that come to Historical Studies only come for a semester. And I always felt sorry for them. I feel like they just sort of got their stride and they had to leave whereas I really – it took me a while, as I said, to get my footing and figure out the lay of the land. And then by November I thought, "Okay now I'm getting it." Whereas if I was just here for a semester I'd have to leave in December and so much for that, right?

Linda Arntzenius: Yes. Well I've come to end of my questions.

Kristen Ghodsee: Great.

Linda Arntzenius: I want to take a minute and see if there's anything you want to add or –

Kristen Ghodsee: No.

Linda Arntzenius: Something that we didn't touch on that perhaps happened during your year that you wanted to mention. We've covered a lot of ground I think.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, I mean I think that the one thing that was maybe a little bit atypical of my year was the sociality. I've heard from others that it wasn't [like that for them], that people felt lonely or isolated and that it was just sort of a kind of a weird, serendipitous quirk that I was here alone and Susanna and there were one or two other – there was a guy, both were in social sciences – one a single dad who had a son. And then there was a scholar from the University of Michigan who was on her own.

And we were the ones who initially formed that Tuesday night club, which was just sort of a dinner club because we were all kind of – we called it the Lonely Hearts Club because we were all just sort of single – you know? And that became the basis for this much, sort of, livelier – I mean in the end we were throwing huge parties, with barbeques. We rented out the pool – the Princeton pool. It was fun. And I don't know if that happens every year. So that may also color my impression of the Institute because it was just so socially fulfilling for me.

Linda Arntzenius: Susanna's last name was –?

Kristen Ghodsee: Hecht. Yes, at UCLA. And she had a dog and I had a dog, which I think is how we initially –

Linda Arntzenius: Oh you had a dog?

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, I had a dog here who died here unfortunately. Yes, but that was a big thing was that we both shared – we started walking our dogs together. That's how we became friends.

Linda Arntzenius: I think that's quite unusual that you can bring your dog.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes, which I have to say was amazing. You could bring your dog and your kid and there was child care. I mean it was so humane. But this is

what I'm saying. I felt as though we were here as real, full human beings, not just performing in a kind of intellectual erudition all the time. We were actually – I mean I had friends here. I still do – Amy Borovoy¹⁶ who was another junior professor my year; we published an article two years ago together. We've collaborated. Susanna and I have kept in touch. Roz Morris¹⁷ at Columbia and I have kept in touch. So it was unique in the sense that it wasn't only an intellectual kind of collaboration but it was friendship. I come back and every time I'm here I spend an hour – I'm always running late because Joan and I are always [chatting].

Linda Arntzenius: Speak a little bit about AMIAS and your involvement there and the value to you, apart from just coming back here.

Kristen Ghodsee: I think for me – I mean yes the connection to the Institute is that I really feel like I have a stake in this place. It was really instrumental in my career and I want to give back in a way that I don't quite feel the same way about the – don't say this now – other places.

You know I mean I'm a reviewer for Radcliffe. I've reviewed for the Wilson Center. So I try to –

Linda Arntzenius: But you feel, perhaps not an obligation, perhaps obligation is too strong a word, but some kind of feeling to give back and contribute.

Kristen Ghodsee: Absolutely and for all of the affiliations that I've had, in terms of fellowships where they've given me money and time, a year off away from my regular duties. Yes, I think that's a privilege and everybody who benefits from that should in some way endeavor to help that institution perpetuate that mission for others – pay it forward so to speak. This is crazy making. I mean it's totally crazy making. I was just on a huge ACLS panel which took years off my life because of a grant that I got from them. And I felt I should [give back].

But my commitment to the Institute is larger than to any other organization because I think partially I had such a really, really good time here. It was so intellectually informative and because I think that I'm not alone in having had that experience. So I really want that experience to happen for other people. And AMIAS is a really important part of that in terms of, as I said earlier, the social programming that gets done at the Institute out of Linda's office. It's really, really important. I don't know. It was humanizing to be in a room with a whole bunch of really smart people doing yoga.

It sort of shifted the terms of our relationship in a way that was really – again it's that *egalitarianism* that I really, really enjoyed. Susan Neiman,¹⁸ the one I'm going to see in Berlin; we did ballroom dancing classes together. And there weren't enough men so we were each other's partner.

¹⁶ Amy Borovoy, Member in the School of Social Science, 2006-2007; Visitor, 2016-2017.

¹⁷ Rosalind Carmel Morris (1963-), Member in the School of Social Science, 2006-2007.

¹⁸ Susan Neiman (1955-), Member in the School of Social Science, 2006-2007.

It was great. I had a lot of great conversations with her. I got to kind of know her through those peripheral things that are not the main core mission of the Institute. That's why the AMIAS thing for me –

Linda Arntzenius: That's very interesting to hear that because a lot of people have said, "Ah, too much. Well that's too much activity. We're here to work. All these are distractions." I mean that's an attitude that some people have –

Kristen Ghodsee: Really? I mean but they're not compulsory so –

Linda Arntzenius: No, no, not at all.

Kristen Ghodsee: There were tennis lessons. I remember really wanting to do the tennis lessons but I couldn't because they were after daycare and I didn't have anybody to help me with Kristiana. But no I loved the fact that those were options. I mean I did yoga. I did ballroom dancing. I went on a couple of the museum trips that Linda organized. I certainly did the picnics. I mean I didn't do everything but I did enough. I just liked having the community of other people.

Linda Arntzenius: Anything you would like to improve upon?

Kristen Ghodsee: The website. We've just been talking about that. So I think that the – yes the website.

Linda Arntzenius: You mean the AMIAS part of the website or the entire website.

Kristen Ghodsee: No just the entire website.

Linda Arntzenius: Why?

Kristen Ghodsee: It doesn't work very well. I mean the discussion that we've just been having is that all of the other institutes that I've been affiliated with have a much more aggressive web presence than this Institute does and I think that's a real problem, given that this is "The" Institute. And obviously it would be great if there were more female faculty. I don't know how you do that. I mean I really don't know how you do that. But especially now that Joan's retiring, it's scary to me.

Linda Arntzenius: How was the application process?

Kristen Ghodsee: I don't really remember. I think it was pretty straightforward. I apply for a lot of grants so I felt like it was. I was one of those people who knew nobody here. I had no affiliation with Princeton. I had no affiliation with anybody here at the Institute. I was from a small liberal arts college in Maine. They picked me out.

Linda Arntzenius: Were you surprised when you got in?

Kristen Ghodsee: Oh hell – I'm sorry. Yes. Oh I couldn't believe it. When I got the acceptance letter I was flabbergasted, absolutely flabbergasted.

Linda Arntzenius: So what do you think made –? Why did you make the cut?

Kristen Ghodsee: I have no idea. It's still a mystery all these years later you know? I don't know.

Linda Arntzenius: Here I'm asking the question that you were horrified to ask yourself.

Kristen Ghodsee: Yes that's exactly what I was. "What's she doing here? How did she get in?" Oh my God, yes. No I was so totally stunned, totally stunned. And then I would tell people and they would say, "Really? How did you get in?" *[laughter]* It was really – That's why I'm saying it was so formative for me in a way because I came here – I mean, being at the Wilson Center was fantastic. Don't get me wrong. I mean it was a wonderful experience but the Wilson Center is right in the heart of Washington, D.C. It's down the street from the White House. It's very policy-oriented. It has a different model that's not residential. It feels more kind of almost corporate.

Whereas the Institute feels – it almost feels like a kibbutz. You know what I mean? Everybody's living and working together. You're doing your laundry together over in the laundry room. Nobody's got a TV. Everybody's got the same furniture. There's something about it that the lunches – everybody's eating together. There's a real camaraderie here that is not true of other institutes.

Linda Arntzenius: Excellent. Well, listen, great. We've had 52 minutes. And I think that we've covered a lot of ground.

Kristen Ghodsee: Perfect.

Linda Arntzenius: And I thank you very much for participating.

[End of Audio]