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*Iranian Identity in Iranian-American Autobiographical Writing in English Since 1980:
A Review of Sanaz Fotouhi's The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora*

Sanaz Fotouhi, *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora: Meaning and Identity since the Iranian Revolution*, I.B. Tauris, 2015, 256 pp., \$99.00 US (hbk), ISBN 9781780767284.

The New York Times Magazine for 12 May 1996 was “A Special Issue” called “True Confessions.” In the lead article, called “Confessing for Voyeurs: The Age of the Literary Memoir Is Now,” James Atlas reports that some 200 memoirs got published in America in 1995 and that two dozen more were being published in the spring of 1996, among them Abbas Milani’s *Tales of Two Cities: A Persian Memoir*.¹ Atlas describes memoir writing in the mid-1990s in these words: “It’s a democratic genre—inclusive, a multi-culturalist would say. The old and the young...; the famous and the obscure; the crazy and the sane.... Everyone can be an autobiographer.”

Abbas Milani (b. 1949) acknowledges the Americanness of his *Tales of Two Cities* in this statement: “Memoirs are all but absent from the rich Iranian literary legacy.... In fact, when talking to Persian friends, I still refer to this narrative as a collection of essays about modernity. I beat around the bush. The word ‘memoir’ makes me uncomfortable. With American friends, my discomfort dissipates.”² Milani’s story starts from his birth and narrates his life up to the time of writing *Tales of Two Cities*, gives readers a feel for the times and events in which he participated, and offers a remarkably frank and un-Iranian record of the author’s individuated personality. But Milani is very Iranian in stating that, “Persian...is the language of poetry” and “a language of many subtle means, almost all related to an elaborate system of honorifics.”³ Those two views suggest a tension that may parallel other tensions in the book. The author highlights one of them in his final characterization of himself in the book as “an exiled, often nostalgic Persian.” That he chose the word “Persian” rather than “Iranian” and that he uses the word “Persia,” for which no equivalent exists in the Persian language, instead of “Iran” may signal a desire to be from somewhere

¹ Abbas Milani, *Tales of Two Cities: A Persian Memoir* (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1996). James Atlas’s article can be found online at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/12/magazine/confessing-for-voyeurs-the-age-of-the-literary-memoir-is-now.html?pagewanted=all>>, (accessed on December 27, 2015).

² Milani, *Tales of Two Cities*, 224-225.

³ *Ibid.*, 253.

that exists in mind and heart because of how difficult it is to be from the place that exists on maps. Earlier in his book, when he writes that Americans at Berkeley in the late 1960s “were smitten with Persia and Persians,”⁴ he’s writing about people for whom the words evoked a distant, romantic place and people, heirs to the culture of the Persians in high school and college Ancient History courses and part of an Orient that Westerners have long had good reasons to want to visit or escape to. But Pan American Flight 1 never went to Persia. It went to Iran and landed at a city whose history is not much lengthier than that of Austin, Texas. For me, Iran and Iranians are better than Persia and Persians. But for Abbas Milani, identifying with the latter may make the difficult business of being Iranian in today’s world less difficult. The same may hold for his view of himself as an “exile” rather than as an “immigrant.”

Seven years after the publication of *Tales of Two Cities*, Iranian-born Firoozeh Dumas (b. 1965), who harbors no feelings of alienation or exile and relishes her immigrant and hyphenated self, wove stories of her life and stories she heard from her father into a humorous autobiography called *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir on Growing Up in America*.⁵ Dumas’s love of America and Iran, which are worlds apart culturally and spiritually, attests to the existence of salutary dualities in the cultural make-up of her personality. In contrast, there is the case of her fellow Californian and UC Berkeley alumnus Richard Rodriguez (b. 1944) and his *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*,⁶ the autobiographical essays of an unhappy immigrant who strives to assimilate into mainstream American culture.

Between the mid-1990s and 2003, autobiographical writing in America by Iranians burgeoned. Writing in *Persian Heritage* magazine (and reprinted by the Iran Chamber Society online in 2004⁷), Farideh Goldin, author of *Wedding Song: Memoirs of an Iranian Jewish Woman*,⁸ reviews what she calls “an explosion of memoirs by Iranian women writers since the Iranian Revolution of 1979...published not inside Iran...but abroad—not in Persian, but in English and French.”⁹ Therein she references views expressed in Afsaneh Najmabadi’s *Women’s Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran*¹⁰ about the dearth of (auto-)biographical writing in Iran, culture-specific factors including: (1) literary conservatism and no tradition of autobiographical writing; (2) an authoritarian, patriarchal environment that discourages stories and reports of lives other than those of approved figures (e.g., governmental and religious leaders) in which case didactic aims encourage laudatory, panegyric, and hagiographic accounts; (3) the lack of a longstanding tradition of prose fiction, whose techniques (auto-) biography uses or adapts; (4) censorship and self-censorship, candor either dangerous now or, if a regime change occurs, in the future; (5) the existence of private and public spheres, with the former not disclosed in the latter, and confessional or other modes of candor almost always inappropriate; (6) notions of friendship that preclude frank depictions of friends and friendship issues; (7) notions of family that preclude frank depictions of family

⁴ Ibid., 255.

⁵ Firoozeh Dumas, *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir on Growing Up in America* (New York: Random House, 2003).

⁶ Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Dial Press, 1982).

⁷ Farideh Goldin, “Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs,” Iranian Chamber Society, 2004, <http://www.iranchamber.com/culture/articles/iranian_women_contemporary_memoirs.php>, (accessed on December 27, 2015).

⁸ Farideh Goldin, *Wedding Song: Memoirs of an Iranian Jewish Woman* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 2003).

⁹ Goldin, “Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs.”

¹⁰ Afsaneh Najmabadi, ed., *Women’s Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

members and issues; (8) the significance of reputation and the people at large as an inhibiting force (e.g., if you do that, what will the neighbors think?); (9) a tradition of male protectiveness of females; and (10) ambiguity about the value of individuality. An implication here may be that such factors at play in Iran are not at play in the English and French-speaking worlds where a significant number of Iranians write autobiographical narratives. The student of autobiography might here ask about the Iranianness of the models that these Iranian writers found for their autobiographical narratives.

Goldin quotes Dumas as saying: “We need to preserve our culture by preserving our language and literature. Speak Persian without all the English words thrown in and...write your stories.”¹¹ Goldin, who notes the irony “that Dumas herself...to preserve her culture...wrote her story not in Persian, but in English,” continues: “Can the language of the west that has preconceived notions of the Iranian culture and the Iranian woman, a language that is based on western patriarchal construct that views the east, views Iran through distorted lenses, be used as the medium to define and defend Iranian culture and thoughts?”¹² Goldin’s answer: “These Iranian women write in a language with which they are probably the most comfortable.... Additionally, two decades after the Iranian Revolution, the Iranian children have grown in the west, comfortable with their adopted languages and cultures, speaking English or French without or with little Iranian accent. It is, therefore, natural for them when they write to adopt the language of the countries that have adopted them.”¹³ The student of autobiography may here wonder for whom these Iranian writers are writing. African-American critics, for example, complained that Zora Neale Hurston was writing exclusively for a white audience in her 1942 autobiography called *Dust Tracks on a Road*.¹⁴

So Goldin wonders: “...is it natural or even acceptable to consider these memoirs Iranian? Can a writer be Iranian if she doesn’t write in Persian, or worse yet, when she doesn’t know how to?”¹⁵ The prominent, later Pahlavi-era essayist and writer of fiction Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969), who asserted that (1) the experience of growing up in Iran, (2) experiential familiarity with Shi’ite Muslim culture, and (3) using the Persian language are necessary ingredients in Iranianness would perhaps say “No” to Goldin’s question.

And, now Sanaz Fotouhi has surveyed the subject of recent Iranian autobiographical writing in English comprehensively, stimulatingly, and adroitly in *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora: Meaning and Identity since the Islamic Revolution*, which also features a handy Appendix of “Books Published by Iranian Writers in English as of Mid-2014” in which she identifies 90 or so books as “autobiography,” many of them self-published. The list unfortunately offers only the first initial of authors’ given names, which means readers cannot discern the gender of the authors. Inclusion of the dates of birth of authors would also have helped the reader.

Fotouhi’s book’s “aims are to introduce and situate diasporic Iranian literature in English, and to examine its significance for the diasporic Iranian communities in the maintenance, reconstruction and negotiation of their identities” (3). The book clearly achieves these two aims and then some. *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora* “divides the

¹¹ Goldin, “Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006).

¹⁵ Goldin, “Iranian Women and Contemporary Memoirs.”

emergence of diasporic Iranian literature in English into three waves that coincide with significant social, political and historical events in the last three and a half decades. It traces the origins of the first wave back to the 1979 revolution and the ensuing American hostage crisis in Iran. It associates the beginning of a second wave with the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, and it identifies a third wave, which began to emerge after the controversial 2009 Iranian presidential elections” (7).

Now, this reviewer (a student of world lyric poetry, the Persian literature of Iran from 1941 to 1979, and American autobiography) is not expert in Iranian diasporic “fiction and memoirs” in English. For example, when Fotouhi referred to the “famed G[ina]. Nahai,” I had to Google a name that I had not heard before and learned that Nahai’s first autobiographical narrative appeared in 1995 when she was 35 years of age. That autobiography could feature nostalgic memories of Nahai’s childhood before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. But if a member of the Iranian diasporic community in America is the same 35 years of age in 2015 as Nahai was in 1995, would or could such nostalgia figure at all in his or her dealing with Iranian identity? After all that 35 year old would not have any memories before 1984 or 5 and then 3 or 4 years of memories of the Iran-Iraq War. All of this means that the matter of shared identity issues among Iranian memoirists would differ from Iranian to Iranian. In Nahai’s case, as a Jewish Iranian, she may have childhood memories of non-nostalgic treatment of her family and Jewish acquaintances in Iran where, according to Fotouhi, thousands of years of persecution took place, which meant that diasporic communities of Jewish Iranians in Israel and California and their issues with identity long antedate the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Fotouhi asserts that her book “draw[s] on theories of post-colonial literature,” from Bill Ashcroft’s notion of “post-colonial utopianism” and the “junction of [Elleke] Boehmer’s definition of colonialism and [Homi] Bhabha’s interpretation of ‘post’” in viewing “the unifying and totalitarian pre- and post-revolutionary regimes of Iran, as quasi-colonial...forces that have rendered many Iranians marginal both in Iran and abroad...” (15). At the outset, Fotouhi addresses the issue of the use of English in Iranian autobiographies: “In this context, language can be seen as a tool that can be adapted and used to resist and negotiate.... In post-colonial criticism, the use of...the dominant language of the colonizer is often one of the greatest strategies for transformation, critique and negotiation of recognition.... This is why the employment of the dominant language is such an important strategy for post-colonial writers” (17).

While not questioning the utility of employing notions of post-colonialism in Fotouhi’s reading of autobiographical writing in English by diasporic Iranians, readers familiar with Iranian history may wonder about the validity of the characterization “quasi-colonial” of the home-grown and traditional Iranian governments since the emergence of the Twelver Shi’ite Muslim Iranian nation state by the end of the seventeenth century insofar as Iran never faced colonial rule or rule by the Ottoman Empire, and English, which did not become the country’s chief foreign language until after World War II, has never constituted a “a dominant language.” Readers unfamiliar with Iranian history might take a look at *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century from the Constitutional Period of Reza Shah*¹⁶ and judge for themselves the extent of colonial or quasi-colonial elements in that history. Moreover, even a cursory reading of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the foreign policy stances of the IRI government since its establishment in early 1979 speak to the determination not to allow Western

¹⁶ Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, ed., *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*, A History of Persian Literature XI (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

colonialist influence into the country's life. In other words, the Iranian context or backdrop for most of the life stories that Fotouhi cites and discusses may not obviously fit a colonial or post-colonial model.

In Chapter 1, "History – Remembering and Narrating the Past," Fotouhi cites and offers brief characterizations of upwards of forty-five autobiographies and novels in subtitled sections called "Historicisation and maintenance of identity," "Pre-revolutionary nostalgia," "Revolutionary disconnections and exilic connections," "Dangerous nostalgia and fantasies of unhappenings," "Appropriation and interpolation of history," "Appropriating a new language," "The vessel of flight to vast possibilities," "Recounting alternative histories and reconstructing identities," and "Tapping into the past and negotiating the future." Fotouhi contextualizes her discussion here in light of Stuart Hall's views on the importance of history to identity in his "Who Needs 'Identity?'"¹⁷ and devotes special attention to Azadeh Moaveni's "return memoir" *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran*.¹⁸ And in Chapter 3, "The Memoir – 'Double-Edged' Narratives," Fotouhi organizes her discussion in subsections called "Why so many memoirs?," "Memoir as scriptotherapy," "Reconstructing the self: Bearing witness to trauma and silences," "Return narratives: Therapeutic negotiations of belonging," "Is there a market for all those books?," "Captivity narratives," "American Orientalism and Iranian women's memoir," "Paratexts," and "New modes of reading," paying special attention to Reza Kahlili's *A Time to Betray: The Astonishing Double Life of a CIA Agent in the Revolutionary Guards of Iran*¹⁹ and Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tebran: A Memoir in Books*.²⁰

Far and away the best-known book of the Iranian diaspora is Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tebran*, which, according to Fotouhi, "sold over a million copies worldwide and remained on *The New York Times* best seller list for over 70 weeks" (126). She observes: "One of the most recurring arguments by scholars is that the book generalizes the position of all Iranian women as static and oppressed, only able to be saved and freed through Western intervention (in this case Western books), conforming to American Orientalist discourse" (129).

Fotouhi parallels her discussion of *Reading Lolita in Tebran* with Fatemeh Keshavarz's *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More than Lolita in Tebran*,²¹ which, according to Fotouhi, "tries to reframe the position of Iran.... This self-consciousness is reflected in the content of her book...which she wrote...as a critique and response to Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tebran*, which she views as New Orientalist" (137). Fotouhi also asserts that Keshavarz "hopes for her book to offer a glimpse of the ordinary Iran, the one that smiles with the hope of offering more human understanding between various cultures..., her own life...counteracting many assumptions about life in Iran" (139). As for "the ordinary Iran...that smiles," Ramita Navai's *City of Lives: Love, Sex, Death, and the Search of Truth in Tebran* (2014), which aims to "help an outsider understand life in this city of over twelve million people," offers a narrative that markedly contrasts with both *Reading Lolita in Tebran*

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity?'" in *Questions of Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds. (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

¹⁸ Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

¹⁹ Reza Kahlili, *A Time to Betray: The Astonishing Double Life of a CIA Agent in the Revolutionary Guards of Iran* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2010).

²⁰ Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tebran: A Memoir in Books* (New York: Random House, 2003).

²¹ Fatemeh Keshavarz's *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More than Lolita in Tebran* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

and *Jasmine and Stars*.²²

Chapter 4 is titled “Mothers and Daughters – Writing ‘Beyond the Homeland.’” This chapter’s subsections include: “Mothers and daughters in Iranian literary history,” “Polyphonic narration,” “The journey,” and “Magic and dreams.” Fotouhi contextualizes her discussion in this chapter thusly:

Iranian literature, through to the second half of the twentieth century, as [Farzaneh] Milani writes, “has long possessed a predominantly masculine character.”²³ In this tradition women have been “conspicuously absent...as writers or critics, as makers of literary tradition.” As Azar Nafisi also observes,²⁴ Iranian women’s lack of presence in the literary tradition stems historically from Iran’s “highly hierarchical and masculine society.” (143-143)

Hence, the first Persian Iranian novel by a woman did not appear until 1969—*Savushun* by Simin Daneshvar (1921-2012), which has been translated into English twice.²⁵ And the first Iranian women poet in the 1,100-year old tradition of Persian lyric poetry, whose verse presents identifiably female speakers, was Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967), who began publishing her poems in the mid-1950s. These two facts and Fotouhi’s characterization of the absence of women writers from the Iranian literary scene until the 1950s can lead to a reframing of an earlier question about the models for Iranian women autobiographers writing in English: Do they mostly share the experience of a western education at an English-speaking college or university?

In “Iranian Masculinities – ‘Hypervisibility/Invisibility,’” the fifth chapter of her book, Fotouhi asserts that Iranian men today are hypervisible as a (negative) type and invisible as individuals and that while “many books by Iranian women have become part of the popular English literary discourse, the same applies to very few of the men’s accounts” (160). Consequently, Fotouhi devotes this chapter to a review of writing in English by Iranian men, paying special attention to Manoucher Parvin’s *Avicenna and I*,²⁶ Morteza Baharloo’s *The Quince Seed Portion*,²⁷ Siamak Baniameri’s *The Iranian Dream*,²⁸ Saïd Sayrafiezadeh’s *When Skateboards Will Be Free*,²⁹ and Mahbod Seraji’s *Rooftops of Tebran*.³⁰ She also cites Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (b. 1940 in New York City) and his *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*,³¹ which she discusses in some detail earlier (45-47). She might also have cited *No god but*

²² Ramita Navai, *City of Lies: Love, Sex, Death, and the Search for Truth in Tebran* (New York: Public Affairs, Perseus Books Group, 2014), p. xii.

²³ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

²⁴ Azar Nafisi, “Images of Women in Classical Persian Literature and the Contemporary Iranian Novel,” in *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, Mahnaz Afkhami, et al., eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

²⁵ See: *Savushun: A Novel about Modern Iran*, trans. M.R. Ghanoonparvar (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1991) and *A Persian Requiem*, trans. Roxane Zand (London: Peter Halban, 2002).

²⁶ Manuchehr Parvin, *Avicenna and I: The Journey of Spirits* (Bethesda: Ibex Publishers, 2007).

²⁷ Morteza Baharloo, *The Quince Seed Portion: A Novel* (Bridgehampton, NY: Bridge Works Publishing, 2004).

²⁸ Siamak Baniameri, *The Iranian Dream* (Virtual Bookworm.com Publishing, 2004).

²⁹ Saïd Sayrafiezadeh, *When Skateboards Will Be Free: A Memoir of a Political Childhood* (The Dial Press, 2009).

³⁰ Mahbod Seraji, *Rooftops of Tebran: A Novel* (New York: New American Library, 2009).

³¹ Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran: Second Edition* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008). Fotouhi references the first edition published in 1987.

God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam: Updated Edition by Reza Aslan,³² a Muslim Iranian American who is as visible as any Iranian American as an individual, as well as being a professional writer. Parenthetically, although Fotouhi notes “an increase in self-publishing and digital or e-publication” of Iranian American memoirs and “a definite and visible decrease in the literary merit and presentation of some of the books” (220), she does not distinguish between published and self-published books or between professional and other sorts of writing, or between good and not-so-good writing in the books she cites and analyzes.

Taking a cue from Nasrin Rahimieh’s “Overcoming the Orientalist Legacy in Iranian Modernity,”³³ Fotouhi sees some of the hypervisibility and invisibility of males as types and individuals, respectively, in Iranian writing as a consequence of “the process of self-Orientalization...of...diasporic...[Iranian] women writers,” which impacts “their representation of Iranian men and forms of masculinity” (185). Judging from the evidence in Joanna Russ’s *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*,³⁴ one can suppose that at least one major, male-dominated Western society does not need self-Orientalized women for their plausible characterizations of many of their men in their writing. After all, how many good men appear in Sylvia Plath’s autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*³⁵ or in Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?³⁶ And does a self-Orientalizing process lie behind the woman’s world and the depiction of men therein in novella by Shahrnush Parsipur (b. 1948) called *Women Without Men*, presumably written before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in early 1979?³⁷ For that matter, the indigenous and time-honored treatment of women by Iranian officialdom during the 1979-2015 period, the setting for most of *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora*, and the forced acquiescence of the Iranian population to that treatment is as Iranian as *cheloakabob*. As for life before the Islamic Republic of Iran, those Iranian women writers who feel nostalgic about women’s lives outside the home and family there then might read Oriana Fallaci’s famous interview with Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi ([mis]ruled 1941-1979), the then father of the Iranian family available online.³⁸

All in all, *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora* should be required reading for anyone casually or academically interested in its subject. It also should interest students of autobiography for another reason, the fact that it itself is also an exercise in autobiography. As Fotouhi states in her Introduction:

Although this book approaches diasporic Iranian literature in English from a scholarly perspective, it is also the manifestation of my own personal experiences as a young diasporic Iranian woman. That is why...I want this book to be accessible to readers who share similar experiences to my own. It

³² Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, Updated Edition (New York: Random House Trade Paperback Edition, 2011).

³³ Nasrin Rahimieh, “Overcoming the Orientalist Legacy in Iranian Modernity,” *Thamyris/Intersecting* 10 (2003): 147-63.

³⁴ Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

³⁵ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2013, first published in 1971).

³⁶ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009, first published in 1969).

³⁷ Shahrnush Parsipur, *Women without Men*, trans. Kamran Talattof and Jocelyn Sharlet (New York: Feminist Press, 2004); idem, *Women without Men*, trans. Faridoun Farrokh (New York: Feminist Press, 2012).

³⁸ Oriana Fallaci and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, “The Shah of Iran: An Interview with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi,” *New Republic*, November 30, 1973, <<https://newrepublic.com/article/92745/shah-iran-mohammad-reza-pahlevi-orian-fallaci>>, (accessed December 28, 2015).

is for this reason that each chapter...begin[s] with a personal anecdote... [T]his approach...is...a way to showcase the fact the issues I deal with are real issues with which many Iranians living abroad have had to deal with [sic] at some point during their migratory lives. (19)

Appreciating *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora* as an autobiography accounts for why I haven't offered a brief critical review of the contents of Fotouhi's Chapter 2, entitled "Sufi Poetry – 'Universal and Profound,'" which presents views popular to many Iranian intellectuals about Persian mystical poetry; e.g., that its roots can be found in pre-Islamic Iran, that Hafez's poems are mostly Sufi in content, and that "Persian Sufi poetry [can be fruitfully read] as a symbol of cultural resistance" (63). According to Franklin Lewis, the leading American expert on Jalaloddin Rumi (1207-1273), the leading Persian Sufi poet in history, Rumi both observed the rules and regulations of orthodox Islam and also had good relations with and supported Seljuq rulers in Anatolia. According to Mohammad Este'lami and Baha'ollah Khorramshahi, leading scholars of the poetry of Hafez (c.1320-c.1390), the leading Persian lyric poet in history, fewer than a third of Hafez's five hundred or so ghazals are Sufistic, and many of those may be stylized performance texts. In short, Fotouhi's Iranian perception of medieval Persian Sufi poetry and its significance may be telling autobiographical points as opposed to academic characterizations.

As for Fotouhi's statement of her autobiographical intent in writing *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora*, it seems revealing in two regards. First, Fotouhi suggests that a primary audience that many Iranian autobiographers writing in English have in mind are other Iranians with similar diasporic experiences. Second, when Fotouhi refers to the lives of "many Iranians living abroad" as "migratory," my anecdotal experience of dealing with young Iranian-American adults since the late 1970s tells me that something about their lives differs from Fotouhi's. That something may be a possible uniqueness in how America talks to and behaves toward its Iranian immigrants in contrast to how the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand introduce themselves to and treat their Iranian immigrants.

America encourages its Iranian immigrants to buy into its myths of the American dream and American exceptionalism. American television cable news shows and the politicians on them proclaim that America is the greatest country in the world throughout the day and evening; American higher education, the American health system, American technology, American democracy—there's a long and tantalizing list of what America says it's best in the world at. The American national anthem and the American flag figure in all sorts of public occasions, especially sporting events at all levels. America promotes patriotism, following Theodore Roosevelt's call to do so, on the part of its Iranian immigrants. Then there are: American football, American capitalism, the American Civil War heritage, American competitiveness, American cultural Christianity, the American frontier spirit, the American government as a partner with and not an adversary of individual Americans, American gun culture, American individualism, American odes to multiculturalism, American youth culture (backed by plastic surgeons who'll help keep people in it), the best New Year's Eve in the world, the enticing July 4th celebrations, the it-grows-on-one Thanksgiving, Christmas trees, self-congratulatory industriousness (the British being seen as slackers), Hollywood feature films, inattention to history because American tomorrows will be better than today's that become yesterdays—tomorrows that will offer Iranian immigrants an Apple car integrated with their Apple watches, iPhones, iPads, Apple tablets, and Apple computers. In short, the American side of Iranian-American identity may differ essentially from the post-hyphen

identity of other Iran-born residents in the English-speaking world who write about their countries of origin and exile, the latter state rarely invoked by Iranian-Americans of my acquaintance to describe their lives in America. America's public relations campaign has been doing its number on Iranians since the late 1950s when Iranians first began coming to the States for college with half of them never returning to Iran.

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