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**Guest Editor's Introduction**

**Iranian Diaspora Studies**

While Iran looms large in daily international media headlines, Iranian subjects both in and outside the country question Iran's future and their relationship to it. The continuous tensions between Iran and the United States, between Iran and several Western European nations, and between Iran and some of its regional neighbors, particularly in the past decade, pose economic and political challenges to the government of Iran as well as to its population as a whole. As with earlier decades, Iranians with significant educational and economic resources are leaving the country and migrating to Western Europe, North America and countries in Asia in significant numbers. Naturally, this trend has been particularly pronounced among a younger, educated generation who lack significant employment opportunities as well as opportunities to participate in the civic life of their nation. Since the 2009 contested presidential elections, Iran has continued to experience a considerable "brain-drain," and worsening social and economic conditions as a result of more severe sanctions will surely augment this process. While Iranians continue an earlier pattern of migration to metropolitan centers in the United States and Europe, they find themselves identifying with what is now more widely identified as "the Iranian Diaspora," a concept that is more transnational and unfixed in one identity and location than it was in previous Iranian migrations and resettlements.

While the term "diaspora" is currently used in many circles to represent the significant population of Iranians (and second-generation children of immigrants) living outside Iran, not all scholars in the academy employ this term with the same understanding, nor do they assign it the same weight. Many of us working at the boundaries of Iranian Studies, however, now recognize the importance of "Diaspora Studies" to our work in this field, and in our specific disciplines, and, despite this, we employ the term with the knowledge that sometimes terms like "exile," "refugee," "migrant" and "transnational" are concomitant with the term "diaspora" and need to be adequately accounted for and defined. With this special section of *Iranian Studies*, we hope to identify and inaugurate an important conversation within the International Society for Iranian Studies that is undergirded by significant political and academic challenges: that as scholars committed to working on Iran and manifestations of Iran's rich cultural and historical heritage in a wide number of disciplines, we have increasingly felt the limitations of financial resources, access to documents and archival resources, and difficulties in traveling to and from Iran, particularly from countries like

the United States that have had a continuously tense relationship with Iran over the past four decades. In seeking to understand the varieties and expressions of Iranian Diaspora experience, we also have an occasion to recognize and share the innovative and dynamic ways that our research and our fields of study are brought into conversations with other disciplines and are shaped by the realities of migration. In essence we now recognize that Iran's migrant, immigrant and, now, second-generation populations constitute part of the field of Iranian Studies.

My own role in the field of Iranian Diaspora Studies began when I was a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin over twenty years ago. There, I began to meet other young scholars who had a personal connection to Iran through their experience of migration to the West after the revolution or who, like me, were the children of immigrants. It was during my own graduate experience that I came to understand how important it was to collect, document and share the stories of Iranians who had been scattered across the globe and the ways that their expressions found new voice and relevance in literature. When I began collaborating with my colleague Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami on *A World Between: Poems, Short Stories and Essays by Iranian-Americans*,<sup>1</sup> there was little vocabulary for the experiences of those who came to the West in the immediate aftermath of the revolution but were reconciling their stories exile, displacement, and alienation. By the time *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been: New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora* was published seven years later,<sup>2</sup> a change in the vocabulary had taken place and many Iranians saw themselves not exclusively in their localized host countries and communities, but as part of a global community of Iranians who were moving away from the traumas of exile, war and revolution, towards a new recognition of themselves as diasporic Iranian subjects in multiple locations with multiple identities. In editing a special section of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*<sup>3</sup> with my colleague, Babak Elahi in 2011, I discovered how many young scholars are now building research careers that include the Iranian migration experience in film, literature, anthropology, sociology and anthropology, as well as a number of other fields. Those essays, and the ones you will find here, represent a framework for understanding how "diaspora"—a term that historically has been associated with Jews of the ancient world—has become part of the complex network of associations and affiliations with which we understand "home" and "away"; instead of thinking of these terms in essential ways that assign them to static and resolute spaces of existence, we can instead think of them as fluid, transnational and capable of negotiation. This, in itself, makes for an open field of inquiry and research that presents tremendous opportunities to put Iran and its diaspora into conversation with other national, cultural and political locations.

<sup>1</sup>New York: George Braziller, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>See "Iranian Diaspora," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 381–505.

This special section of *Iranian Studies* presents the work of a younger generation of scholars now working within Iranian Diaspora Studies to document, study and analyze new cultures and new fields of inquiry that are shaping our notions of what constitutes the Iranian Diaspora. In all cases, the authors in this volume are either currently working on their PhD research or are recent graduates of PhD programs, and as such they have fresh approaches and visions about this subject. The first article in this collection, by Sam Fayyaz and Roozbeh Shirazi, "Good Iranian, Bad Iranian: Representations of Iran and Iranians in *Time* and *Newsweek* (1998–2009)" makes a contribution to understanding how Iranians have been represented over a decade of media representation in two major American news magazines which have wide circulation internationally. Fayyaz, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in political science and Shirazi, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Minnesota, articulate the ways that Iranians have been collapsed into a dichotomy of thinking that invokes Orientalist ideas about the Middle East, generally, and about Iran specifically. They suggest that media representations over the past two decades both from American and Iranian-American journalists have been employed to distinguish "good" from "bad" Iranians who serve the interests of US foreign policy that disallow any nuanced understanding of Iranian experiences of culture and politics. Refining Mahmood Mamdani's critical articulation in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), Fayyaz and Shirazi suggest that Iranians are caught in a cycle of representation that delimits our understanding of how Iran can be better understood in its larger geopolitical context and how diasporic Iranians themselves are cast into a static media representation that undermines their own agency and effectiveness.

This issue also features an essay about a novel by one of Iran's most important literary figures, Shahriar Mandipour, who has been living in the United States for the past three years. This essay by University of Virginia PhD candidate, Marie Ostby, makes an important contribution to Iranian Diaspora studies as it reflects the complex writing, editing and publishing processes of an Iranian writer who writes against the confining censorial environment that exists in Iran today. Ostby's essay, "De-censoring an Iranian-American 'Memoir': Authorship and Synchronicity in Shahriar Mandanipour's *Censoring an Iranian Love Story*" situates this particular writer and his work in this meta-fictional narrative about the necessity of crossing borders and boundaries, whether national, linguistic or literary, as part of what Iranians face today in attempting to render their experience in the marketplace of memoirs that have to a great extent defined Iranian narratives outside of Iran.

Conducting her doctoral ethnographic field work in Los Angeles, California, (often referred to as "Tehrangeles"), Donya Alinejad, a PhD candidate in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands, investigates the ways that second-generation Iranian Americans engage with internet media as part of their process of identity formation. Her research is based on the interfaces of physical home, the streets of Los Angeles, and the internet-mediated world that constitutes another kind of home, which all contribute to new identities and are particularly poignant for

the children of Iranian immigrants whose relationship to Iran and Iranian culture is both fluid and, at times, tenuous, but are deeply embedded in aspects of Iranian-ness that are unique to the city of Los Angeles and its younger generation of Iranian Americans.

The final essay in this issue, "Coffee Shops and Cigarettes: On the Return to Tehran of Young Diasporic Iranians" by New York University PhD student Leili Sreberny-Mohammadi offers a glimpse into a community of young hyphenated Iranians living in Tehran between 2007 and 2009 and whose experiences reflect the complex psychological, political and cultural affinities that have defined Iranian diasporic subjects. Sreberny-Mohammadi's auto-ethnographic documentation of this small community and their multiple national and cultural identifications with both Iran and their home countries (such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and other countries in Europe), provide insight into the way that we understand the transnational contours of diaspora today and the ways that Iranians returning to live inside of the "motherland" can manifest incongruities between native and foreign, insider and outsider notions of Iranians even while they might consider Iran a kind of home.

While these essays represent only a fraction of the interesting and innovative scholarship on the Iranian diaspora today, these scholars' work is important to understanding how Iranian Studies can expand to accommodate a new generation of scholars whose research enriches the field as a whole, and offer new ways to think about Iran beyond its current national and political boundaries. They further generate discussion about how Iran's cultural resonance has tremendous global and local impact. In reading these works by emerging young scholars, I hope you will identify with their efforts to define the field and to articulate new vocabularies of engagement between Iran and its diasporic communities that break down some of the disciplinary boundaries that keep us from having a larger and more meaningful conversation about Iran and Iranian subjects in the twenty-first century.. We should read these young scholars and consider how their approach and research adds to the expansive notion that Iranianness is no longer based on a singular national concept, but one that is being redefined through the processes of migration, return and, now, internet mediation—all of which influence how we grapple with questions about who Iranians are *becoming*, both in and outside that nation.