Genres Without Borders: Reading Globally Between Modern Iran and the West

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

University of Virginia
December 2015

Abstract

"Genres without Borders: Reading Globally between Modern Iran and the West" challenges familiar associations between national culture and literary genre to show how twentieth-century experiments with genre and form in exchanges between Euro-American and Persian literary culture have enacted their own tangible and non-hegemonic forms of cultural globalization. While the centrality of Middle Eastern texts has been generally downplayed in scholarship and teaching on world literature, I focus on Iran because it has existed in a politically and diplomatically volatile climate for most of the twentieth century. This isolated position has made modern Iranian literature and its hybrid global adaptations especially alert to the task of border-crossing. By working across genres, the authors and artists I examine—from activist poets to experimental filmmakers to contemporary graphic novelists—deploy the flexibility of new literary forms to address new global reading audiences.

I first examine the transnational adaptation of the *ghazal*—a classical Urdu-Persian poetic form consisting of autonomous couplets with a rhyming refrain—in protest poetry by Adrienne Rich in the wake of the Vietnam War and by Simin Behbahani during the Iran-Iraq War. I argue that the *ghazal*'s formal flexibility made it adaptable to free-verse and open-form tendencies in 1960s American poetry in many of the same ways that the ancient form has been modernized by contemporary Iranian poets writing against censorship and human rights abuses. In the second chapter, I identify global and gendered palimpsests of experimental film in the work of early Iranian New Wave directors such as Dariush Mehrjui and Forugh Farrokzhad, whose work was intertwined with the work of

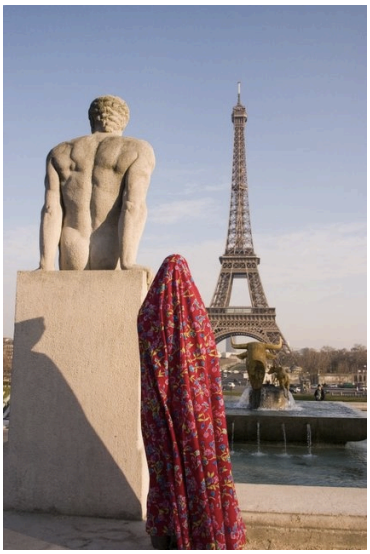
French New Wave directors including Alain Resnais. I juxtapose two world-oriented contemporary cinematic counterpoints that both explore notions of spatial and temporal belonging, one filmed in Iran (Ashgar Farhadi's *Jodā'i-e Nāder az Simin*) and one produced in diaspora (Shirin Neshat's *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān*). In the third chapter, my examination of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* reveals that the graphic memoir form does more than merely hybridize text/image and Western/Iranian culture based on long transnational histories of intergenres such as miniature painting and newswriting. *Persepolis* marks the creation of a new genre, the global graphic novel, that engages with readers across borders through multiple modes of perception.

Through the interwoven modern histories of Persian and Euro-American literature, art, and film, the project demonstrates how often the crossing of national boundaries is mirrored and embodied in the crossing of genre boundaries. Locating Iran's impact on world Anglophone literature and culture might help, ultimately, to reconceive the global turn in terms of genre and form, turning the malleable containers that literary forms inhabit into live translators who enable active and evolving forms of cross-cultural dialogue.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

The journey to this project began with a painting by my mother's friend Naz, given to me by my parents as a high school graduation present. Reproduced on the left below, this fluid and multi-perspectival painting has always fascinated me because of how it simultaneously depicts and transgresses stereotypes, dichotomies, and boundaries—the abstract figures of women seem to be stepping not only in and out of their *hijab*, but in and out of the literal brushstroke boundaries that define them. This painting still hangs on my wall, along with the image on the right from the Iranian photographer Haleh Anvari's *Chador-Dadar*—a beautiful series that illustrates both the global travels of Iranian women and the rich and multicultural history of the *chador*, which is too often thought of as a symbol of oppression.



First and foremost, I am thankful to my family for the gift of a global childhood that was saturated with images like these—along with a world of experiences that inspired me, challenged me, and expanded my horizons. It was my father's work with the United Nations that first brought me to Iran. In his boundless desire to help others and to move beyond fear and bias into cooperation and understanding, he taught me never to judge, and to always be kind. From my mother, who has an extraordinary way with words, I inherited a never-ending fascination with cultures and their stories, and a deep and abiding love of language. To my sisters, who partly grew up in Tehran and grew to love it fiercely, I am deeply grateful for the love, humor, and companionship that has gotten me through the best and worst of times.

I am grateful to the artists, scholars, and activists who graciously agreed to be interviewed by an undergraduate student during my research for my senior thesis at Yale, on Iranian women's literature and censorship—Shirin Ahmadnia, Haleh Anvari, Shirin Ebadi, Goli Emami, and Amirreza Moradi. I am also so thankful to my Persian language teachers and tutors: Marina Omar, Fahimeh Gooran, Mahshad Mohit, and Kathy Saeb.

It was at Yale that I first came across the book *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, the field-defining work on Iranian women's literature by Farzaneh Milani. Opening that book almost a decade ago changed my life. Farzaneh is the reason I came to the University of Virginia, and she is the primary source of inspiration for every word in this dissertation. Studying under her wisdom and her grace has brought me clarifying moments of truth about the profession, the world, and the human spirit that I know could have come from no one else. I didn't know what a mentor could be until I met her, and no statement could ever repay my debt of gratitude to the wisest, kindest, most intellectually and personally generous human being I have ever known. When everything else falls away, *tanhā sedā-yesh ke mimānad.*

Jahan Ramazani is, without hyperbole or qualification, the perfect dissertation director. He is a source of endless warmth and positivity, and a true visionary—both scholarly and pedagogical—in every part of academic life. This project and my doctorate would never have neared completion if not for his formative class on contemporary poetry, his generous mentorship in the Society of Fellows and beyond, and his extraordinary thoroughness and flexibility in guiding my writing, including many line edits written on airplanes at odd hours while traveling around the world. He is a pillar of the community in the English department and beyond at UVA, in and out of the classroom. In six years, Jahan did not once take longer than 24 hours to respond to an email, and not once did it take him more than a week to read a new chapter draft. Moreover, he and Caroline Rody always provided a home away from home full of comfort and peace for me in Charlottesville. I still don't know how he does it all in just twenty-four hours a day—there is no one like him in our field and I am indescribably fortunate.

Jennifer Wicke reads with a thoroughness and a discerning eye like no other. Endlessly encouraging, she puts her commitment to graduate students first and foremost. Through years of dedicated advising and her Global Novel course, she taught me so much about how and why literature is political—and in so doing, taught me about the urgency of this work, this field, and this profession.

Sandhya Shukla's course on Time, Space, and Encounter, which I took my first year of graduate school, taught me to think beyond those three boundaries in my own work, and our conversations have continued to change and challenge my intellectual parameters since then. She is a truly interdisciplinary thinker, and a warm and generous intellectual presence.

As important as my dissertation committee are my academic friends—Rebecca Strauss, my lifeline throughout graduate school, assigned as my GESA mentor and still dispensing priceless advice six years later. Living through every step of the Ph.D. with her by my side and always my shoulder to cry on, greatest supporter, and sounding board of total honesty on every aspect of the profession is the reason I made it to this point. Also at UVA, Anuj Kapoor and the other members of Poco Group expanded my horizons about postcolonial and global thought with each meeting, which stimulated the project at every turn. Molly Fox and Madeline Blount, each in her own way and in disciplines completely different from my own, have expanded my academic horizons, supplied a decade of laughter, sympathy, and comfort, and helped me see how our scholarship has interacted with and enriched our lives since our time at Yale.

Thanks to the English department and the Graduate School of Arts and Science at the University of Virginia for their generous support of several summers of research and a weeklong intensive course with the British Institute of Persian Studies at the University of St. Andrews. The International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam and the Adrienne Rich papers at Radcliffe both provided invaluable archival material for this project. Poets House in Battery Park City provided a tranquil sanctuary of a workspace in which many of these pages were written. I am grateful to friends and colleagues from the 2013 Institute for World Literature at Harvard for a transformative summer, especially Nirvana Tanoukhi, Anna Ziajka Stanton, Emily Modick, Gabriel Garcia, Martyn Bone, Melis Menent, and the amazing clarity of the Charles River. Co-panelists at the conferences of the Modern Language Association, American Comparative Literature Association, and International Society for Iranian Studies provided thoughtful and generous comments on my work.

My gifted teacher and friend Jasmin Darznik lovingly encouraged my growth as a fellow scholar in the interstices of English literature and Iranian Studies. Persis Karim, as guest editor of a special issue of *Iranian Studies* on diaspora, encouraged and improved my work through the publication of an article on Shahriar Mandanipour's *Censoring an Iranian Love Story*.

The SSRC DPDF group in Gender and Migration Studies led by wise and open-minded shepherds Donna Gabaccia and Katharine Donato was hugely important in shaping the early phases of this project—they taught me to constantly recast my sometimes myopic readings within larger questions of cultural production. The nourishing writing group with my colleagues Sarah DeMott and Erin Collins that grew out of the DPDF program got me through the crucial years of solitary writing—these two extraordinary thinkers and friends taught me so much in cultivating a feminist praxis of collaborative scholarship. Sunny walks around Washington Square Park and long conversations over tea with Sarah in the cold New York winters nurtured this dissertation into a fruitful spring, and I am so grateful to her for her intellectual companionship.

Finally, I am grateful to my husband and partner, Jonathan Buccola, who has supported and continues to support this dream. My biggest cheerleader and proudest advocate, he has shown unconditional love through many moments of insecurity. We have grown together through applying to graduate programs in those early buzzy summer days of Manhattan, on the Starlight Express to Charlottesville and the lonely landscapes of I-78, in lonely hours on Skype across the Mason-Dixon line, and through a joyful homecoming to making our life in the city and in the world. The only home that matters is at the end of the day, knowing you'll be there. Thank you for believing in me.

Introduction

"Making Genre its Mark, A Text Demarcates Itself": The Worlding Capacity of Genres

In the first stanza of the Iranian poet Simin Behbahani's 1995 ghazal "Zamin Kuravi Shekl Ast" [The World is Shaped Like a Sphere]," the speaker casts immediate doubt on the division of the world, and perhaps literature, into Western and Eastern spheres by pondering the visual relativism of a globe (trans. Milani and Safa, *A Cup of Sin* 57):

You have heard it. You know about it. The world is shaped like a sphere.
It has no left or right, the way you see it.

You can't take your bearings from a globe,
if with the flick of a finger you can make it turn this way and that.

It was our agreement to call this the East,
though we could push it westward, with ease.

Don't speak to me of the West, where the sun sets,
if you always run after the sun, you will never see a sunset.

The world divided by a line is a dead body cut in two
on which the vulture and the hyena are feasting.

You sit on the corpse with a crowd of flies
in self-contentment imagining you are the host and patron.

A hyena snarl, the vulture flapping its wings
set the flies dancing in the air.

All that remains for you to do,
is to raise your hands to your head like a fly and pray the prayer of stomachs.

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زمين كروي شكل است شنيدي و مي داني
يمين و يسارش نيست چنين كه تو مي خواني

جهت نتواني جُست ز اطلس جغرافي
به زخم سرانگشتش جهت چو بگرداني

قرار تو شد با من كه شرق بخوانيم اش
اگرچه توان راندش به غرب، به آساني

مگو سخن از مغرب!غروب نخواهي ديد
اگر ز پي خورشيدهميشه به تک راني

جهان به خطِ تقسيم دو پاره مُردار است
كه كركس و كفتارش نشسته به مهماني

تو با مگسانْ بسيارنشسته براين مردار
به شاديِ اين پندار كه مُنعِم اين خواني!

به جنبشي ازكركس به خورنِشي از كفتار
گروه مگس خيزد به كار پرافشاني

تو را چو مگس اين بسكه شُكرِ چنين خوان را
دو دست به سرگيري دعاي شكم خواني

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"Mocking the artificiality and arbitrariness of dividing humanity into East and West," as co-translator Kaveh Safa writes (137), this poem suggests how porous and flexible national and cultural borders ultimately are. Treating national borders as barriers is not only arbitrary and relative, but also incredibly destructive. Polarizing the world and erecting barriers to cultural exchange wreaks damage tantamount to murder—"a dead body cut in two." Moreover, the smug satisfaction of those who try to divide the world

and stay within their own provincial confines is associated with images of death and decay, and the outcome that the final couplet provides for its hypothetical xenophobic addressee is an inevitable state of hunger, exasperation, and powerlessness. At the same time, the poem insists on resistance to cultural hegemony, specifically that of the West. The speaker embraces neither imperialist importation of Western thought—"[running] after the sun"—nor the bitter schism of "the world divided by a line," but rather a space in between, in which ideologies can find common ground without needing to coincide at every point.

Behbahani's poem relies on two extended metaphors: the hopeful image of the world as spinning globe, and the sinister figure of the world as stinking corpse. These exist side by side to suggest that the same object, in two different sets of hands, can be a source of creativity or of destruction. That object, of course, is in this case the whole world, whose fate is left in the hands of those who wield representative power, whether through politics (which can "divide" the world with military, religious, and so many other lines) or through language (those who "agree to call this the East"). Paradoxically, the process of world-making through ideology can be either unifying or divisive. As Eric Hayot reminds us in an interrogation of the category of "world literature," "world" can indicate both the *whole* world in question (planet, humanity, cultural world, city, community) and individual worlds within that world (continents, regions, nations, subcultures, neighborhoods, subgroups) ("On Literary Worlds", 135-6).

Imaginative world-making is a complicated and often contradictory process, and as a discipline, English literary studies is just beginning to catch up with the speed and direction of the global flows of world-construction in the literary culture in which we

have always lived. The profession's areas of specialization are most often defined in terms of period, geographical region, and genre, which can prevent crucial insights about cross-cultural literary histories that transcend these categories and often engender new ones. In addition, some regions often receive more focus than others, at least in U.S. academic circles. In the past several decades of growing research and pedagogy about world literature, the Middle East—and in particular, the Persian literary sphere—has often been underrepresented on syllabi and denied its complexity in criticism. Meanwhile, Iran and the United States constantly constitute the headlines of each other's news media, and as I write this, historic diplomatic relations are being reasserted between the two governments.

"Genres Without Borders" endeavors to trace a network of connections between Persian and Euro-American literary cultures that has only grown richer since the early twentieth century. I argue that this network is sustained and expanded by experimentation with genre and creation of new literary forms. I focus on Iran as a site of particular inspiration for, dialogue with, and literary refraction of key moments of non-totalizing, globally oriented social reform in the West because, for much of the last century, it has existed under extreme conditions of either Westernization or anti-Westernization, globalization or anti-globalization. Iran has not experienced a linear and gradual evolution of Arjun Appadurai's "global flows"—the development of its "mediascapes" and "ideoscapes" has been arrested by censorship from many sources at many historical turns—nor has it undergone a Fanonian progression from anticolonialism to postcolonialism. With a sedentary history, it stands apart from the pan-Arabism and the Bedouin origins of the Arab countries to its west, and not having been directly colonized,

it has not gone through the radical imperial border redefinition of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to its east.

In many ways, nation has remained a rigid category in the dominant discourses of modern Iranian intellectual life, as in Jalāl Al-e-Ahmad and Ali Shariati's notions of *gharbzadegi* ["Westoxification"][1] and "red Shi'ism." On the other hand, the transnationalism of Iranian cultural identity, of which I identify several key counterpoints in Western literary modernity, has been evident at all ends of the political spectrum. This ranges from the dazzling multiculturalism of Mohammad Reza Shah's revamped Persepolis at his (heavily criticized) 2,500-year-celebration of the Persian Empire, to the multifaceted uprisings against the Shah just a few years later, which eventually came to center on Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership but was originally sparked by a wide range of dissidents including constitutionalists, Marxists, feminists, atheists, and a range of Islamists. Iran, whose post-1979 international renown mainly rests on its ultraconservative Islamic leadership and atrocious human rights record, was pre-emptively modern and urban in many respects while also having a powerful traditional culture.

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[1] The title of Jalāl Al-e-Ahmad's influential 1963 treatise, often translated as "Westoxification" or "Occidentosis." From the dawn of Islamic civilization, Al-e-Ahmad states, "mā hamīsheh beh gharb nazer dāshteh-īm [we have always looked Westward]" (11). He argues that the "contagion" of Western influence has reached its apex in modern industrial society, and attacks Westernized Iranians for having no affiliation with their national culture. Al-e-Ahmad's vocabulary of contamination, corruption, and disease suggests a vulnerability that complements the classic Orientalist tropes founded on the West's own notions of power, superiority, and rights to conquest.

[2] For other early examples of the ghazal's influence on German poetry, see Friedrich

Debates surrounding the tension between modernism and Westernization in Iranian literature have been ongoing for nearly a century. The most influential early twentieth-century Iranian writers, such as Nima Yushij, Sadegh Hedayat, and Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, who were early adapters of what many perceived as "Western" forms—the free verse poem, the modernist novel, and the short story respectively—were uninterested in Iranian nationalism, and many of them even permanently left Iran for Europe. Their work, however, must also be understood in the context of "Persianism," a cultural movement to which Kamran Talattof ascribes "several immediate purposes":

> …to reduce the use of Arabic terminology; to work toward the purification of the Persian language; to promote a language closer to the common parlance instead of the formulaic style; to link ancient Iran to the present time through diverse linguistic structures; and finally, to promote modernity by presenting new literary genres. (71)

Modernist brevity and a newfound independence from classical forms associated with Arabic, then, were alternatively seen as indications of an insidious Westernization, and as empowering gestures that reclaimed a national Persian heritage. Iranian culture thus presents a unique point along the imaginative spectrum of Orientalism. Following the Islamic Revolution, its writers do not simply "write back" after the ebb of colonialism, engaging in—to borrow Said's term—a "rhetoric of blame," but instead continue a long-standing project of writing around and beyond postcolonial affect in a complex dialectic with the intellectual trajectory of not only Western but also Arabic modern literature.

The primary answer to my question of *how* the content of this literary dialogue has been created, sustained, and developed despite the hostile political climate of the past several decades is: through its *form*—namely, through a ceaselessly evolving, self-reflexive, and interactive formation of new literary genres. I work from the critical premise of world literature, well established by Said, Jameson, Bhabha, and others, that genre (like all cultural constructs) is inherently hybrid—the result of a millennia-long history of global cultural flows. Building on their insights, I trace a long twentieth-century story of transnational genre-creation radiating from modern Iranian literature and cinema, a canon frequently overlooked in departments of English and Comparative Literature. In our increasingly complex field of world literature, as David Palumbo-Liu writes, "form is the meeting-place of a number of aesthetic and psychic investments, both the common ground and vehicle for planetary thinking" (196).

In the Behbahani example above, thoughtful experimentation with form in fact makes the poem even more globally oriented than its content already suggests. Not only is the ghazal a form with rich transnational history, its contemporary identity is shaped by influences from fifth-century Arabic to twentieth-century American ghazal poets. To convey the dual notion cited above (that the imagining of worlds can be either constructive or destructive) through the rhythm of variations on a theme, Behbahani relies on the actual formal restrictions of the ghazal—namely, the end-rhyme of each couplet known as a *radif*—to render the language of the poem more participatory, more communal, and thus more global. Although the radif is fixed, Behbahani's chosen consistent rhyme scheme ends on the syllable "*ī*", which is the typical suffix of Persian verbs in the second person. This means that the poem continually circles back to an

emphasis on placing action and responsibility upon the poem's addressee: "midānī" ["you know"], "mikhānī" ["you read"], and so on. The poem, like so many of Behbahani's other ghazals, reaches outward—from a form that is traditionally so autographic that it is signed in the final couplet with the poet's name—to ask its readers what their responsibilities might be in the project of defining our globalized reality.

The question of what defines a literary genre or form—whether genre is singular or multiple, fixed or dynamic—has been debated by some of the most influential scholars in the past several decades of literary criticism. Derrida, in "The Law of Genre" (1980), explains how intrinsic the notion of sociocultural genre-categorization is to the study of literary texts: "A text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text" (212). Genres, as Jameson points out in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), can function as established social agreements that provide us with formulas for how to read a text within a foreign cultural contexts: "Genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (87). Literature itself, of course, does not adhere to such social and critical norms of what a novel, poem, or play "should" look like anywhere in the world.

As Derrida continues, however, he draws an important distinction between passive and active categorization:

> There is always a genre and genres, *yet such participation never amounts to belonging*. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself, because of

> the effect of the code and of the generic mark. *Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself.* (212, my emphasis)

In other words, a text can actively situate itself within a genre, self-reflexively commenting on its place within that genre and its tensions with other works in that category—and in so doing, can redefine the boundaries of the genre as a whole.

My argument about the globalizing impact of open forms and intergenres proceeds from this early indication in Derrida that, by playing in the spaces between genres and by hybridizing genres to create new, constantly evolving forms, texts create new literary and sociocultural places of exchange. Starting with Ralph Cohen, who argued in 1986 that the openness of genre is based in "the human need for distinction and interrelation" ("History and Genre," 204), and building on the Saidian premise above that all cultural constructs are inherently hybrid, many contemporary genre theorists (Perloff; Beebee; Devitt) agree that all literary genres contain a degree of multiplicity and that new genres are formed recursively, from the evolution and interaction of existing genres.

First, the constant nature of this evolution and hybridization means that there is no such thing as a fixed genre with set qualities. Like Behbahani's globe, a genre or form is a concept without fixed definitions—its shapes and orderings depend on how the given reader of the literary landscape decides to look at it and move it around. But second, and more importantly, "Genres Without Borders" investigates what the flexibility and dynamism of literary genre can do, and has in fact done, for the members of literary communities reaching across particularly fraught political and cultural borders in today's world. Shape-shifting formal containers, I argue, can and do help authors, artists, and

audiences who live in climates of xenophobia, demonization, and cross-cultural stereotypes simply talk to each other in ways that resonate in global parallels across borders—yet they sensitively adapt to cultural specificities of local places, and do not flatten unique historical particulars.

Throughout "Genres Without Borders," I identify moments of cross-cultural synchronicity between Iranian, British, French, and American writers and artists that reveal a different side of the Orientalist/Occidentalist imaginary, one that is often dependent on intergeneric works—texts that employ multiple registers and engage multiple modes of reading simultaneously. Far from being merely static *containers* for new representations of diversity and hybridity, intergenres and open forms encourage the movement of literature across borders by acting as dynamic *vehicles* for the production of new scales, worlds, and audiences, blurring the boundaries between visual/verbal representations and national/global acts of reading. I offer contrapuntal readings of texts with a wide range of relationships to Persian culture to illustrate how contemporary global aesthetics are bound up in genre-bending, exploring not only the impact of contemporary Western literary and visual culture on Iranian authors and filmmakers, but also the adaptation and circulation of texts and images from Persian culture in the West.

This project aims to demonstrate that, while political and cultural relations between Iran, Europe, and the United States have been trapped in a stalemate of circular, reductive, and xenophobic rhetoric for the past several decades, moments of exchange between Persian and Euro-American literature that specifically pivot around the creation of new genres continuously embody the overlapping, intertwined processes of globalization. Adrienne Rich, for example, immerses herself in the transnational history

of the Persian *ghazal* through the works of Ghalib, then adapts the form to meet the situation of political protest in response to the Vietnam War. Like Rich, all the authors and texts I examine reveal the particular efficacy of specific literary genres and tools for particular types of cultural exchange.

In the three chapters that follow, I examine three nodal literary sites of transnational exchange in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: the transnational *ghazal* and its adaptation in wartime protest poetry by Adrienne Rich and Simin Behbahani; the global and gendered palimpsests of experimental film in the work of Iranian New Wave directors from Dariush Mehrjui to Shirin Neshat; and the emergent genre of the global graphic novel with Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* as a pivotal text in the growing worldwide combination of visual and textual culture. The dissertation's coda begins to suggest that online intertextuality will play a crucial role going forward in both Iranian and global cultures as the concepts of "nation" and "culture" are increasingly complicated and redefined in world literature. The connective tissue between these chapters is my analysis of how the innovative creation of new, globally oriented genres facilitates transnational literary culture. Building on critical theories of hybridity developed by Said, Roland Robertson, Paul Gilroy, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Paul Jay, I argue that intergenre and open-form works of literature and culture serve as active, border-crossing agents and, in so doing, comprise a long-standing field of intercultural contact.

In a recent article, Aamir Mufti cites Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000) and Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (2003) as milestone clarion calls for a new, urgently anti-Eurocentric approach to comparative literature methods

now quite widely known as planetarity. He insists:

> Humanistic culture is saturated with this informal developmentalism—a "first in the West, and then elsewhere" structure of global time, as Chakrabarty puts it (*PE*, p. 6)—in which cultural objects from non-Western societies can be grasped only with reference to the categories of European cultural history, as pale or partial reflections of the latter, to be seen ultimately as coming late, lagging behind, and lacking in originality. In literary studies, the problem is symptomatically visible, for instance, whenever we use the categories of Western literary history—such as romanticism, realism, modernism, or postmodernism—in non-Western contexts (as we constantly do) or of genre to speak of the "Arabic novel" or the "Urdu short story." (474)

Rather than Eurocentrically referring to "Iranian cinema" or the "Middle Eastern graphic novel" as if they were somehow limited subcategories or derivations of their Western "parent genres," I argue for a focus on intergenres that are—and have always been—continuously molded by various cultures around the world simultaneously and often collaboratively, as opposed to set genres based in unequal historical and cultural power dynamics. I first turn to the *ghazal*, which has a fragmented cultural lineage but whose earliest history can be found in the Arabian peninsula; I then discuss the evolution of avant-garde cinema, a relatively new form that has developed synchronously in Iran, France, and elsewhere; finally, I challenge the notion that the graphic novel is a "Western" form, positing that it has been forever changed by an Iranian author into a globally evolving form, especially when its circulation interacts with the online space.

The project of "Genres Without Borders" is to demonstrate a continuous historical correlation between cross-cultural dialogue and formal experimentation, arguing that literary works that transcend conventions of genre both reflect existing sites of transnational exchange and continually forge new ones. In so doing, each intergeneric work examined here becomes a "worlding" text, an active producer of globality. As a complex node in global literary circuits, Persian literary culture has long merged the transnational and the intergeneric through unconventional textual encounters and global interstices of aesthetic confluence, whether this takes place through the re-appropriation of poetic forms, the redefinition of verbal and visual vocabularies in film, the diasporic re-presentation of subjects in comics, or the digital refraction of authorship.

The cross-cultural and genre-bending works I examine also intersect with the global circuits of postcolonial literature in unexpected ways. The texts I examine do not usually operate through the revisionist aesthetics of reversal that characterize the best-known classics of postcolonial literature and their challenges to the master narratives of Orientalism—such as *Things Fall Apart*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, or *The Satanic Verses*. Through an alternative model of intercultural exchange, Iran has long been in a fascinating dialectic with crucial cultural transformations in the US, UK, and Europe that does not fit the mold of many postcolonial problematics. Neshat's film *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* [*Women Without Men*], set during the American and British-led coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953, is one such illustration of Iran's complex relationship to colonial power and discourse. While Iran provides key postcolonial insights in both literary studies and a range of other disciplines, as indicated earlier it was not ever a "colony" per se, and Iranian writers were never

colonial "subjects." Ultimately, the rhetoric that Homi Bhabha, in his foreword to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, describes as "the critical language of duality—whether colonial or global—[that] is part of the *spatial* imagination" of "colonial compartmentalization, or Manicheanism" has never been available or applicable to Iran, because the political content of its key historical moments in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries has always insisted on multiplicity (xiv). To explore this multiplicity, I maintain a terminological pluralism, acknowledging that the frameworks "transnational," "transcultural," "translocal," "cosmopolitan," and "global" each have their advantages and limitations.

As many of this dissertation's primary texts are authored by women and represent different versions of transnational feminist aesthetics, gender provides an open-ended but crucial subcategory through which this prefiguration of the "global turn" takes shape. In an attempt to "gender" the global turn, this project also explores one specific circuit of cross-cultural communication for what I consider global feminism—as opposed to a transnational, postcolonial, or pan-Islamic feminism—through Judith Butler's notion of "provisional unities" and through the cross-cultural adoption of genres and forms to tell stories about the subjugation and solidarity, oppression and empowerment of women. Under Western eyes, the Muslim world has often come to be represented by its women, from the harem or *zenana* as a central source of Orientalist fantasies to Fanon's discussion of Algerian women opposing the "cult of the veil" to the colonial offensive against *hijab*. In the global history of feminism, Iran is a unique cultural site that has gone through both unveiling *and* veiling by national mandate in the period I describe, and the hijab is just one contested symbol of Iranian womanhood that is demystified by Satrapi,

Neshat, and other authors I examine. Furthermore, it boasts a long history of early participation of women in both literary and political spheres. In the moments of literary convergence and exchange between women writers from Iran and the West, a rooted cosmopolitan dialectic ultimately emerges whose women's rights concerns are no more generalizable than its views on Islam or its relationship to national identity. Instead, the specificities of cosmopolitan ethics and aesthetics I investigate rely consistently on both the adaptation and hybridization of genre, and the incorporation and interrogation of gender in the debates surrounding globalization and world literature.

In embodying cultural identity as what Stuart Hall calls "not an essence but a *positioning*" (395), the dissertation explores several models of cultural interaction between Anglophone, Francophone, and Persophone literature in modernity: appropriation (in the *ghazal*), palimpsest (in New Wave cinema), re-presentation (in memoir), and refraction/fragmentation (in online texts and multimedia art). Given this framework of investigating different situations of cross-cultural genre-formation, my project takes as its point of chronological departure a post-World War II moment of decolonization, a transnational call for pacifism, and the clear indication that Anglo-American authors have been engaging with particular genres and forms from Iranian literary history for decades, even centuries. I argue that Iranian authors and artists, despite domestic and foreign censorship, sanctions, and intellectual embargos, have always viewed their work as part of the circuits and networks of world literature, and continue to do so today.

Sharhnush Parsipur's 1989 novella *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* [*Women Without Men*], upon which Neshat's 2009 film is based, follows five Iranian women from various

walks of life as they flee their respective situations of crisis or despair—including widowhood, prostitution, and political subterfuge—and escape to a house in a mystical garden in Karaj, outside Tehran, which becomes a kind of feminist utopia. One of these five women is a magical-realist character named Mahdokht who "turn[s] into a tree" (11) and eventually scatters herself "all over the world" in the form of seeds (122). Parsipur's introduction of Mahdokht's voice is an overt nod to the possibilities of a global genealogical context for Iranian feminist writers, as Mahdokht longs to escape her forced silence after witnessing an act of brutal sexual violence towards a fifteen-year-old girl and realizing there is no recourse to report it:

> She would become thousands and thousands of branches. She would cover the entire world. Americans would buy her shoots and take them to California. They would call the forest of Mahdokht the forest of Mahdekat. Gradually they would pronounce her name so many times until it would become Maduk in some places and Maaduk in others. (11)

Parsipur's "globalization" of Mahdokht's name and the fragmentation of her body acts as a proffered substitution for the sexual patriarchy that perpetuates violence against women. As Nasrin Rahimieh writes, "her desire stems from the need to reproduce herself without resorting to human sexuality" (223). The adaptation of her name, that most simple and primary of literary genres, across cultural borders is ultimately an empowering vision for Mahdokht, and for Parsipur. In fact, most of the novel conveys a sense of "timelessness," Nasrin Rahimieh argues, "that obliges the reader to go beyond the image and condition of Iranian women in the post-revolutionary era" (224). This spirit of cross-cultural ethical reckoning that is manifested through such new formal and

generic categorization appears throughout modern Iranian literature and many of its Western counterpoints, in feminist writing and beyond.

As literary forms are developed and hybridized in the contemporary period, national boundaries grow more porous due to the unstoppable forces of globalization in its many forms. That the two trajectories are closely intertwined is essential to my argument, but it is not my ultimate intervention in this work. A crucial reason for including Iran as an important locus of articulation in the conversations of world literature today is that, more vocally and resolutely than most other cultures with such a long and rich literary history, its political leadership has spent the past several decades determined to cut off cultural exchange with a significant portion of the world. Equally important is the extreme extent to which Iran—primarily its government and religious leaders, but its culture and its people by extension—has been demonized and stereotyped by popular culture in the Western world since the Islamic Revolution and even earlier. My main observation in the following series of contrapuntal readings is that, under the radar and unhindered by the forces of silence and violence, literature has served as a double agent of cross-cultural dialogue *because of* its ability to shape-shift across genres and languages. Iranian literature is global as much as it is national and local, and it has circulated in America and Europe to create more profound impressions of a rich and complex cultural heritage that has been globally attuned since its inception.

Chapter One

Protest through Transgressive Form: The Global Life of the "Bastard Ghazal"

"Poetry," Adrienne Rich writes in one of her most widely quoted lines, from the poem "North American Time," "never stood a chance of standing outside history" (*Your Native Land* 33). In reflecting on the complicated, even paradoxical, closeness and distance between poetry and politics at moments of dissent and upheaval, and the poet's simultaneous senses of singularity and collective identity, this chapter takes as its starting point the coexistence of personal and public forces that politicize the ghazal as a poetic form. The dialectic of local and global is present throughout the history of the ghazal, which has in recent decades gained solid footing as an American poetic form. I argue that the linguistically and culturally multi-directional capacities of the form, first popularized in the West by Goethe, made it adaptable for free-verse 1960s American poets as well as contemporary Iranian poets writing against censorship. These revisionist gestures hark back to the form's ancient trans-linguistic history in Urdu, Persian, and English. While the influential ghazal poet-critic Agha Shahid Ali has criticized such formal "sloppiness," I propose that such formally "loose" versions of the ghazal adapted by politically conscious poets in the late twentieth century have democratizing potential and transnational reading appeal. In particular, I explore Adrienne Rich's relationship to Ghalib's verse and Simin Behbahani's harnessing of syntactical openness in the Persian language to illustrate how, in contemporary poetry, the ghazal is still a politically potent contradiction in terms: both formally fragmented and internally coherent, both self-reflective and cross-culturally communicative, both national icon and transnational literary vehicle.

Especially beginning in the twentieth century, poets are often exiles—and their cross-cultural adaptation of poetic forms reflects Said's insistence on the globally concurrent formation of cultural identities as "contrapuntal ensembles." Jahan Ramazani hints at the centrality of the aesthetic realm to those formation processes when he insists that the exile's "plurality of vision" can lead to "prismatic perspectivism" (*Transnational Poetics* 138). The ghazal has proven surprisingly adaptable to radical transformation by poets worldwide, who often do away with the strict *qafia* (rhyme scheme) and eliminate the *takhallos* (speaker's "signature") in the final couplet to challenge social conventions of subjectivity and depolarize power dynamics. The technical flexibility inherent in the ghazal, I argue, provides a rich arena for expressing this plurality of vision, even in translation. With all the self-contained precision and the infinitely dazzling reflections of a sharply cut diamond, the form is prismatic in and of itself.

Paul Gilroy suggests that Adrienne Rich's invocation, in "Disloyal to Civilization," to the U.S. women's movement that women must stop believing what they've been told, that "from difference we each must turn away; that we must also flee from our alikeness," has tremendous contemporary relevance for sympathetic translocal identifications of the globally oppressed in the twenty-first century (Rich *On Lies* 310; Gilroy 79). In this chapter, I demonstrate how Rich's arrival at this feminist ethics of cross-cultural solidarity finds a significant aesthetic locus in her early embrace and significant development of the ghazal as a particular poetic form. Using a contrapuntal methodology, I examine a similar global affect in the twentieth-century ghazals of a major Iranian poet, Simin Behbahani, to challenge the idea that the form's "local" development in Persian literary culture is in any way isolated from its life in translation,

in the United States or elsewhere. Finally, I turn to the "ghazal games" of Roger Sedarat, a contemporary Iranian-American poet, for a more recent look at how the form survives not only cultural and linguistic changes, but is potentially translatable into new media and new, globally oriented ways of envisioning the relationship between language and political protest.

The prehistory of the ghazal can be traced back to the Arabian peninsula in the fifth century. From Arabic, it followed three major linguistic/literary branches of development: towards the Urdu literary world, towards Persian and Turkic, and towards German and eventually Russian. Some of the best-known ghazal masters, such as the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Rumi and Hafez, stem from the Persian branch of this three-way trajectory. The third, "Western" branch of the form's global spread occurred many centuries after the other two, and only crystallized within Goethe's all-encompassing project of *Weltliteratur*. In Germany, Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, inspired almost entirely by the work of the classical Persian poet Hafez, became "the starting point for the whole of the 'West-Eastern school' of German poetry" (Bauer and Neuwirth 16). As if a cultural pluralist ahead of his time, Goethe was always hesitant to use the form in any directly imitative way, and the German school of *Ghaselen* that followed him very quickly grew away from Oriental references and direct emulations.[2]

Goethe, in his first introduction of the ghazal form into Western literature, was concerned with the anxiety of influence behind the form as a historical monolith: his *West-Östlicher Divan* is filled with opening couplets such as "Hafiz, I as great as you? /

[2] For other early examples of the ghazal's influence on German poetry, see Friedrich Rückert's *Ghaselen* and *Kindertotenlieder*; August von Platen's melancholic *Ghaselen*; Dingelstedt's satiric *Ghasels*; Heinrich Leuthold; and Max Bruns.

That could never be!" (Birns 420). By the time of his later "meta-ghazal" *Nachbildung*, however, Goethe's verse had evolved into a new kind of precedent for Western poets. Dismissing the formally stringent requirements that the same *radif* must recur at the end of every couplet's second line, and that the ending syllable of every couplet's first line must also rhyme, he writes to Hafez beyond the grave: "I'll find no sound a second time inviting / Unless thereby the meaning it's refining / As, gifted one, in all your peerless writing" (Birns 423). This "anti-formalistic postulate" (Birns 423) demonstrates that, in Goethe's work, the most influential early transmission of the form to Western literature and thus Rich's precursor for her adaptation of the form, there was a great degree of formal flexibility.

As with all genealogical models of history, though, the three-branch model proposed in recent ghazal scholarship (Bauer and Neuwirth) flattens and oversimplifies the reality of how the form spread across space and time. The development of the ghazal in the West did not follow a straightforward, isolated trajectory but was instead rhizomatic, periodically drawing from various moments in the form's history. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the ghazal's popularity among German poets gradually gave way to broader Orientalist stereotypes about Rumi and Islamic mysticism, as Aijaz Ahmad writes: the "image of the Persian and Urdu poets which is hard to undo: that of an amoral, epicurean poet eternally sitting under a tree with his woman, his loaf of bread, and his jug of wine" (xx). In the late twentieth century, Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali would completely renovate this image and become the predominant champion of the ghazal form in American poetry. By the time of his 2000 publication of *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English*, the most influential collection of

American ghazals, however, the form had already witnessed over three decades of development in the American literary community, beginning with the pioneering, exploratory adaptations of Adrienne Rich in the late 1960s. Rich's ghazals directly and immediately identified the form's political potential by filling it with her fraught and complex experience of the United States' military involvement in Vietnam and the general sense of political upheaval that was so pervasively felt in the *annus mirabilis* of 1968.

In tracing the ghazal over the *longue durée* of a planetary scale, Wai Chee Dimock argues that as a poetic form, it is "supple in a way as to constitute a separate genre" (46). This versatility, she claims, arises from the tension between its multi-tonality—because of the extreme antinomy of its couplets—and the memorable musicality of its mono-rhyming format. In the wake of various radical formal experiments from the Black Mountain School to the Language Poets, Rich's adaptation of the ghazal into American poetry was something different from the formal transgressions of her contemporaries—a much more circumscribed, cautious, selective transgression of Western formal norms in a culturally sensitive exploration of an ancient, multifaceted poetic tradition from the Middle East and South Asia. It was also something different from her broader leap into free verse and her by-and-large abandonment of Western poetic form, the liberation from "writing with asbestos gloves" that she announces in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (*On Lies* 37). Many of the centuries-old fixed Western forms she had studied, such as the sonnet, came with a patriarchal heritage that could seem harsh and oppressive. The ghazal, for Rich, was a counter-vision of what poetic form can provide—a transculturally shared resource,

a structure that conveys affective resonance without being a source of historical bitterness or political privilege. Rich's ghazals did not, however, strictly comply with two key fundamental formal restrictions related to rhyme and signature, which ultimately prevented her inclusion in Ali's belated canonization of American ghazal poets.

The subtitle of Ali's celebrated anthology, *Real Ghazals in English*, suggests a subtle jab at the "free-versifiers" he lambasts in his introduction, underscoring his insistence that only those Anglophone ghazals that adhere to certain formal conventions may be considered "real" adaptations of the form. Although Ali does not include Rich in this anthology, he in fact describes her ghazals perfectly in his definition of the form:

> The ghazal is made up of couplets, each autonomous, thematically and emotionally complete in itself: One couplet may be comic, another tragic, another romantic, another religious, another political. (There is, underlying a ghazal, a profound and complex cultural unity, built on association and memory and expectation, as well as an implicit recognition of the human personality and its infinite variety.) A couplet may be quoted by itself without in any way violating a context—there is no context, as such. One should at any time be able to pluck a couplet like a stone from a necklace, and it should continue to shine in that vivid isolation, though it would have a different lustre among and with the other stones. In less exotic terms, the poet must have no enjambments between couplets. (Ali 2)

While the two poets did not see eye to eye on the stringency of formal requirements, they had a remarkably similar understanding of the form's paradoxical nature – consisting, as it does, of couplets as isolated as islands that nonetheless form a thematic archipelago.

Reflecting on the relevance of the ghazal to the twentieth century, Rich wrote in a letter to Aijaz Ahmad on the potency of the form's elusive dual nature:

> I've been trying to make the couplets as autonomous as possible and to allow the unity of the ghazal to emerge from underneath, as it were, through images, through associations, private and otherwise … For me, the couplets work only when I can keep them from being too epigrammatic; what I'm trying for, not always successfully, is a clear image or articulation behind which there are shadows, reverberations, reflections of reflections. (Ahmad xxvi)

Rich only uses enjambment between couplets *twice* in both of her complete ghazal sequences. Even in these cases, though, the forbidden enjambment only serves to add additional possible interpretations—as discussed below, the couplets still work as standalones; the enjambment merely allows them to be legible together as well.

> Ali's formal guidelines read further:
> Some rules of the ghazal are clear and classically stringent. The opening couplet (called *matla*) sets up a scheme (of rhyme—called *qafia*; and refrain—called *radif*) by having it occur in both lines—the rhyme IMMEDIATELY preceding the refrain—and then this scheme occurs only in the second line of each succeeding couplet. That is, once a poet establishes the scheme—with total freedom, I might add—she or he becomes its slave. What results in the rest of the poem is the alluring tension of a slave trying to master the master. (3)

Ali's Hegelian implications about the relationship between form and poet are illuminating and invite further interpretation. The modern ghazal poet is not merely

engaged in a subversive process of trying to overthrow the form as "master"; rather, the two are mutually constitutive in a dialectical relationship that makes poets like Rich adapt their thematics to the form while the form is expanded and modernized in turn. If the ghazal poet is a "slave" to the *qafia* and *radif*, we should also remember that in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the slave's mentality paradoxically both effaces and extends the scope of the self: "First it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for it does not regard the other as essentially real, but sees its own self in the other" (105). More than an "alluring tension," this is the kind of dually formative dynamic that Ramazani argues constitutes so much of twentieth-century poetry, in which the cross-pollination of models through literary globalization has sped up the circulation and cross-cultural adaptation of forms previously thought of as culturally specific.

In the action of sublation, Hegel writes, "the middle term is self-consciousness," and Rich's dialectical poetics reveal an acute self-consciousness of the politics of adapting the form for the politically charged poetry of the 1960s United States: she is wary of the potential of veering into the archaic or anachronistic, but also highlights the potential for these couplets to frame and juxtapose a torrent of new beliefs, opinions, movements, and historical events in a newly revealing way. The ghazal, she writes, allows for "both concentration and a gathering, cumulative effect … I needed a way of dealing with very complex and scattered material which was demanding a different kind of unity from that imposed on it by the isolated, single poem: in which certain experiences needed to find both their intensest rendering and to join with other experiences not logically or chronologically connected in any obvious way" (Ahmad

xxv). Rather than feeling "enslaved" to the ghazal's conventions, Rich turns to the seemingly constricting form in a moment when she otherwise largely abandons poetic form in order to engage in an intersectional and transhistorical dialectic in search of mutual elevation and cooperation, and to find a fluid but structured expression for the tumultuous and unprecedented times in which she wrote her first ghazals.

In contrast to Ali's strict formalism, one may counterpose the Canadian poet Andy Weaver's notion of the "bastard ghazal," which retains the idea of freestanding-yet-associated couplets but dispenses with the necessity of the *radif*:

> Unlike Ali, I don't believe that the lack of [*radif* end-rhymes] invalidates most English language ghazals. I base my belief on one simple fact: when the classical ghazals are translated into English, the rhyme schemes are always lost, and yet the results are still breath-taking. To completely agree with Ali is to admit that the works of Ghalib, for example, are not really ghazals once they're translated. Maybe this is true, but the distinction seems unimportant to me — when we read Ghalib in English … the lack of rhyme scheme doesn't affect our understanding or enjoyment one bit (especially to a 20th century readership that is more accustomed to free verse). But, to be a stickler, I should state that almost all English-language ghazals (John Thompson's, Adrienne Rich's, Phyllis Webb's, Douglas Barbour's, etc.) would have to be described as "free verse" ghazals. However, since this is an extremely dull name … I suggest that we should call them "bastard" ghazals. (n.pag.)

Adrienne Rich's perennial love for the so-called "bastard ghazal" began with her personal and political identification with the nineteenth-century Urdu poet Ghalib. It was intensified by the particular utility of the form for Rich in the initial context in which she used it—expressing the mood of widespread dissent in young, liberal America surrounding the Vietnam War. And ultimately, it gave her a poetic form with a transnational history and circulation that literalized a non-totalizing global spirit of solidarity among marginalized communities. By critiquing the strident nationalism and the cultural hegemony of the U.S. military effort in a transnational and transhistorical form—as opposed to "borrowing" a sampling of "Eastern" cultural references in a more limited, essentializing way—and by largely adhering to the spirit of the ghazal's formal restrictions except for two—the elimination of the *radif* and the erasure of the *takhallos*, the speaker's name, from the final couplet (the *makhta*) in favor of an implied collective authorship—Rich's ghazals contribute to a cross-cultural aesthetic of anti-war dissent. This aesthetic remains true to the ghazal's concurrent life in twentieth-century Persophone poetry, and echoes into the twenty-first century as world-oriented poets and their poetry increasingly explore the fractal nature of hybridity and the infinite hyphenation of cultural identity.

I. "Your Grief, Resurrected in Pieces": Transhistorical Connection and Formal Fragmentation in Adrienne Rich's American Ghazal

> "Go back to the ghazal then what will you do there?
> Life always pulsed harder than the lines.
>
> Do you remember the strands that ran from eye to eye?
> The tongue that reached everywhere, speaking all the parts?"
>
> --Adrienne Rich, "Late Ghazal" (1995)

When Rich became the first ever person to turn down the National Medal of Arts in 1997, she explained in a letter addressed to the National Endowment for the Arts and President Clinton: "the very meaning of art, as I understand it, is incompatible with the cynical politics of this administration." The letter continues:

> There is no simple formula for the relationship of art to justice. But I do know that art—in my own case the art of poetry—means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage. The radical disparities of wealth and power in America are widening at a devastating rate. A President cannot meaningfully honor certain token artists while the people at large are so dishonored. (*Arts* 99)

It is precisely the "relationship of art to justice"—this bridge between the artist and the public, between poetic and political language, between those who set the standards of cultural hegemony and those who suffer from them—that Rich's work has become known for. And it is a literary bridge that was always built simultaneously through content and form. Referencing her work from the 1960s, she elaborated in the letter: "I believe in art's social presence—as breaker of official silences, as a voice for those whose voices are disregarded, and as a human birthright" (*Arts* 99). Critical reflection on the personal and intimate material in Rich's poetry, seen as akin to the "confessional" poetry of Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell, is well-trodden territory, and critics have associated phases of Rich's career with various aspects of her politics—*Leaflets* (1969) with her radical anti-war activism, *Of Woman Born* (1977) with her coming-out as a lesbian, *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986) with her Jewish-American identity. But the formal side of her exploration of the relationship between literature and

politics—that is, why she chose the various forms of poetry or prose that she did at various points in her oeuvre—is less explored. I argue that one of those forms, the Urdu-Persian *ghazal*, is particularly suited to her poetics and politics of conjuncture in a time of war and protest.

The ghazal is not a one-time exploration for Rich; it is a form to which she devotes two lengthy sequences in two of her most groundbreaking volumes—the poems of "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)" in *Leaflets* (1969) and those of "The Blue Ghazals" in *The Will to Change* (1971)—and which she revisits much later in her career. From her initial sequences in the late sixties to her eventual return to what she in the 1995 poem "Late Ghazal" calls the form's haunting "thickets of abstraction," the solitary and self-contained couplets of the ghazal prove so durably versatile for Rich because they ironically forge a sense of interconnection—between ideas, between poets, and between cultures. Initially, the ghazal form became Rich's active expression of the struggle for cooperation between marginalized communities, and it bolstered the images and allusions of her poetry in a moment of such radical political fragmentation among the young American left. Her particular alterations to the form served as gestures of intercultural translation that conveyed its latent openness into the language and political climate of 1960s American poetry. Ultimately, Rich brought the ghazal to American poetry as a globally oriented aesthetic of wartime protest, and the form continued to serve her—and dozens of other American poets influenced by her early ghazals—because of its inherent openness and flexibility.

"Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)," a series of seventeen ghazals dated from July-August 1968, was originally published as part III of *Leaflets* (1969), Rich's fifth book of

poetry. Much of the volume is driven by intertextuality, as Rich experiments with different degrees of translation, adaptation, and derivation not only of ghazals but also of poems in Dutch, Yiddish, and Russian. Her dense web of allusion and virtual collaboration spread far and wide, transnationally and historically. For instance, in "Charleston in the 1860s," which the *Harvard Advocate* called "a better anti-war poem than most of the poems being written about Vietnam," Rich weaves together snippets from the diary of Mary Boykin Chesnut, a woman from the South Carolina plantation elite whose diaries reveal contradictory anxieties about the Civil War:

> So we fool on into the black
> cloud ahead of us.
> Everything human glitters fever-bright—
> the thrill of waking up
> out of a stagnant life?
> There seems a spell upon
> your lovers, —all dead of wounds
> or blown to pieces … Nitrate!
> I'm writing, blind with tears of rage.
> In vain. Years, death, depopulation, fears,
> bondage—these shall all be borne.
> No imagination to forestall woe. (*Leaflets* 25)

The fast-paced breathlessness of free verse is integral to Rich's rhythm and meter here, as the em-dashes and ellipses literally do violence to the lines that describe the bodies of soldiers "blown to pieces." But just as essential is the direct borrowing of lines from Chesnut's diary: "So we fool on into the black cloud ahead of us"; "As I wrote I was blinded by tears of rage"; "No imagination to forestall woe" (Chesnut 30, 353, 62). Insistently incorporating another writer's voice into the poem keeps the experience of war at bay and keeps the speaker from laying claim to the direct ownership of a testimonial act of witnessing. Certainly, Rich identifies striking parallels between historical moments of 1860 and 1968, when war lurked on the horizon for both writers, but the comparison

only goes so far. The furious tears Chesnut shed are in the context of imagining Yankee generals being her future "masters"—yet Rich does not shy away from echoing this line to describe her own, radically different "rage," separating affect from political affiliation. This amalgam of visceral immediacy and the detachment that inevitably results from incorporating other speakers' voices led the *Advocate* to conclude: "The usual Vietnam poem is tainted with insincerity since it implies a close personal experience by the poet of a war that is actually causing him little inconvenience … [Rich's] condemnation is without a false note." The poem insists on a distance between the speaker's words and the experience of the war—a distance from a perspective the poet cannot possibly understand, that of a Southern woman defending the Confederacy even as she grappled with questions about its inequalities and violence.

In "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)," Rich achieves a similar distancing effect through the notable absence of the *takhallos* in the poems' last couplets, which nonetheless often elicit a more nuanced moment of introspection. As noted above, Rich's ghazals are generally characterized by two main formal innovations: the obfuscation of the *radif* or end-rhyme in favor of individualized endings of couplets, and the elimination of the *takhallos*, the invocation of the poet's name in the *makhta*. In the former gesture, she makes already separate couplets read as even more fragmentary. The latter is a more modest gesture, disclaiming ownership of the form as a borrowed thing, or even a shared resource. Along with dedication, allusion, and intertextuality, these two renovations pull the ghazals in two simultaneous directions, towards the intimate and towards the international. These may seem contradictory, but the combination makes for a balanced

treatment of the war poem—a lyric that is vivid and immediate, but without biographical interference by the speaker or poet.

For example, the first ghazal in the series ("7/12/68") reads:

The clouds are electric in this university.
The lovers astride the tractor burn fissures through the hay.

When I look at that wall I shall think of you
and of what you did not paint there.

Only the truth makes the pain of lifting a hand worthwhile:
the prism staggering under the blows of the raga.

The vanishing-point is the point where he appears.
Two parallel tracks converge, yet there has been no wreck.

To mutilate privacy with a single foolish syllable
is to throw away the search for the one necessary word.

When you read these lines, think of me
and of what I have not written here.

The penultimate couplet suggests a self-aware commentary on the poet's disobedience of the *radif* convention, since the repetition of a "single foolish syllable" would be too restrictive for her project of finding the "necessary word" to end each couplet—it would be a violation of "privacy" for the war's victims, whose stories deserve to be specifically named and individually documented. There is, however, still a large-scale end-rhyme and a larger symmetry between lines four and twelve. The intimate echo of "what you did not paint there" and "what I have not written here" forms a meditation on inaction on the part of both speaker and object, whose despairing circularity creates the sort of melancholic "cry of the gazelle" that Ali notes is essential to the ghazal form (3).

The poem's opening pulls the reader in the other direction, towards the global: a panoramic view of clouds and a landscape from which one would have to zoom out to see the burnt "fissures" made by the tractor's momentary ride. The ravaged field is depicted

as scorched earth, literally bearing the markers of the fiery nature of political protest. By contrast, the public silence of the blank wall and the private reticence of the incomplete poem both suggest a hesitation to mark communal space with images or words that can be divisive or destructive. The poem seizes upon this easy slippage between the local and the global to explore a more profound convergence between personal and public speech. In place of a *takhallos*, the pairing of "you" and "me" in the *makhta* forges a meaning-making collaboration between poet and reader, rather than the self-referential signature-effect of the usual convention. Here, the speaker clearly alludes to the *takhallos* as she addresses the reader, while keeping it at bay. One might say, in fact, that this implicit dialogue *is* Rich's signature, as she reaches toward an intercultural community of other poets, activists, and readers to acknowledge that her own experience of the war and the world is necessarily limited, curtailed, open-ended, and ever-searching.

In fact, many couplets from Rich's ghazals meditate on open vistas and sprawling landscapes that hint at reaching beyond the circumstances of the poems themselves, such as these from "7/13/68," "7/14/68," and "7/17/68":

> The ones who camped on the slopes, below the bare summit,
> saw differently from us, who breathed thin air and kept walking.
>
> In Central Park we talked of our own cowardice.
> How many times a day, in this city, are those words spoken?
>
> When the ebb-tide pulls hard enough, we are all starfish.
> The moon has her way with us, my companion in crime.

The careful charting of how human bodies are positioned—together, apart—in relation to geographical time and space in all these couplets suggests a version of Ramazani's "geopoetic oscillation," in which transnational poetics use rhythm to intertwine disparate

spaces in a translocal movement of "shuttling between" (*Transnational Poetics* 58). Rich writes in a later essay:

> Subjective, emotional experience everywhere lives and converses in poetry. Yet subjective emotions exist of necessity in dialogue with objective conditions. Poetry springs from a nexus of individual and shared experience, above all an experience of *location*—geophysical realities, visible landscape, spaces marked out by religion, education and politics, poverty and wealth, gender and physiognomy, subordination and independence … And it is often written in a desire to change the composition of the very soil from which it grows. (*A Human Eye* 8)

The tension between the subjective and objective experience of war often converts Rich's final couplets into dialogues, rather than the monologic signatures that the *takhallos* is conventionally meant to impose upon a ghazal. "Don't look for me in the room I have left," one final line challenges in a concluding positioning of poet and reader in the architecture of the same conceptual house. Other closing couplets use the final meditative lines to challenge legends and heroes of American history, from the military to the literary: "And you, Custer the Squaw-killer, hero of primitive schoolrooms— / where are you buried, what is the condition of your bones?" "You were American, Whitman, and those words are yours." Rich's transhistorical adaptation of form works simultaneously with the prismatic approach to history in these dialogic lines—1968, for the poet, is haunted with faded dreams of patriotism and disillusionment with a national legacy of violence done to women and racial, cultural, and sexual minorities. Rather than "signing off" with an introspective flourish, these *makhtas* reach simultaneously back in time and

outward across borders, encouraging a much-needed sense of national and cultural self-interrogation in a time of increasing political fracture.

In her introduction to "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)," Rich cites her dedication of a whole sequence to this difficult, technical poetic form that was relatively obscure in American poetry at the time to a presence of "Ghalib in my mind." The colonial Urdu-Persian poet, she writes, struck a nerve with her because despite being surrounded by the hegemonic structures of British imperialism, he was self-educated, learned, and owned his own property. Like her, he was "writing in an age of political and cultural breakup" (*Leaflets* 59). Furthermore, most of his career was founded upon a transnational approach to form—while his mother tongue was Urdu, he did not primarily regard Urdu poetry as his area of expertise. In a form of exile from his own literary culture, he felt more at home in the act of composing the classical Persian ghazal, as he declares in one verse: "Look at my Persian; there you see the full range of my artistry / And leave aside my Urdu verse, for there is nothing there of me" (*Letters* 85). The choice to write his ghazals in a foreign language was in accordance with the paradoxical affective range of the form, which combines "an aching interplay of desire and loss" with reflections on "community, both intimate and cultural" (Goodyear and Raza 112). Like Ghalib, Rich found a new spectrum of possibilities in the ghazal, a form that was "foreign" to her, but which became an integral part of her sociopolitical self-positioning as an American poet.

The interweaving of the personal and the global became the driving force of Rich's ghazals, as she drew her inspiration from Ghalib. The typescript of *Leaflets* reveals that to Rich, the intimate and immediate nature of each ghazal was paramount. Many of the ghazals have dedications to some of her closest friends, one to "A.F.C.," her

husband Alfred F. Conrad, from whom she was becoming estranged at the time thanks to her increasingly radical politics. Rich's editorial pen in the typescript literally and consistently pushes these dedications closer to the titles, as if the interpersonal backgrounds that inspired the poems were part of the titles themselves. As David Kalstone later observed in the *New York Times Book Review* about the ghazals in *Will to Change*, the specific dating of the poems (in place of titles) provides "a way of limiting their claims; they try to be faithful to their particular moment." Like the self-containment of each ghazal couplet, the poems are not over-reaching; they are "instruments of self-scrutiny and resolve in the present." Many of the ghazals' couplets contain contextually dependent allusions that evoke the specific multiculturalism of Rich's world. Still others contain direct communications to her personal acquaintances, as in the ghazal "8/8/68: II", which is dedicated to Conrad, vulnerably welcoming the reader in to witness an intimate act of address:

> A piece of thread ripped-out from a fierce design,
> some weaving figured as magic against oppression.
>
> I'm speaking to you as a woman to a man:
> when your blood flows I want to hold you in my arms.
>
> How did we get caught up fighting this forest fire,
> we, who were only looking for a still place in the woods?
>
> How frail we are, and yet, dispersed, always returning,
> the barnacles they keep scraping from the warship's hull.
>
> The hairs on your breast curl so lightly as you lie there,
> while the strong heart goes on pounding in its sleep.

Here, Rich's images of diffusion and multiplicity in nature—the roaring forest fire and the persistent barnacles—stubbornly interject themselves between stanzas two and five, which might be read as couplets from a much more straightforward love poem if read one

after the other. By alternating between the political and the personal in this disorienting sequence, however, Rich challenges readers to question which allegiance is more important: to one's partner, or to one's sociopolitical group. The prismatic nature of the isolated couplets allows for a sharp and dramatic tonal oscillation between community and intimacy, exploring how the two radically different notions of togetherness are necessarily "woven" together in times of conflict. Poems like this one, which filter the political through an intensely personal lens, encapsulate Rich's refusal to generalize about the landscape of a war she did not personally witness. That cautious refusal is analogous to her partial and circumscribed adaptation of the ghazal form, which she acknowledges as "personal and public, American and twentieth-century" (*Leaflets* 59).

On the other hand, Rich's turn to the ghazal had a great deal to do with the aspiration towards community. The history of the Persian ghazal is rooted in "songs that were composed for and performed at community gatherings" (Bauer and Neuwirth 327). In the Urdu-Persophone tradition, a ghazal poet prepares his couplets, known as *shers*, for recitation at a communal gathering called a *mushaira* for public response and critique, a tradition that is historically heavily male-dominated. The audience actively responds and contributes to the individual *shers*, vocally applauding or critiquing the poet and anticipating what should come next. The ghazal "was never intended as a fixed, immutable text; rather, it must be viewed as a 'textual representation of a performance occurring in a specific context drawing on a nexus of genres and expectations, themselves in flux'" (Bauer and Neuwirth 341-2). While Rich's ghazals were never meant for performance in a literal sense, they were in search of a poetic community in a time of severe fragmentation based on differences in identity politics.

1968 was a time of infinite potential for artists and activists to collaborate and unite in their political efforts against the Vietnam War, through initiatives such as the 1967 Writers and Editors War Tax Protest signed by Rich along with poets Allen Ginsberg, Robert Bly, Robert Duncan, and hundreds more prominent names on the literary scene ("History of War Tax Resistance"). Rich and Conrad had moved to New York in 1966, and both were active in anti-war activism, hosting fundraising parties at their apartment for the Black Panthers and other radical dissenter groups. In the world-historical moment of 1968, political projects that would ultimately fail were closely intertwined with cultural revolutions that would often succeed. In retrospect, this made the *annus mirabilis* difficult to navigate for poets like Rich, who saw their language and their genre as inherently and necessarily political. 1968 was also a global moment of insurrection, its spirit of upheaval tying together disparate events from student riots in Paris to ongoing decolonization across Africa: "the committed internationalism of the movements … indispensably multicultural in orientation and transnational in aspiration" (Watts 167).

To Rich, immersed in this cross-cultural collage of resistance and thinking back to Ghalib's 1857, the ghazal form acted "as a gesture of affinity, likening Ghalib's desperation to the turmoil Rich experienced in 1968, amid the year's riots, assassinations, and war" (Caplan 44). Faced with Vietnam in 1968 as an alarming harbinger of American neo-imperialism, Rich sought inspiration from a critical moment in the history of imperialism, in Calcutta in 1857, by way of the life and poetry of Ghalib, who faced a similar convergence of unity and conflict in his time's "moment of change." For Ghalib, who "[held] all mankind to be my kin and look[ed] upon all men—Muslim, Hindu,

Christian—as my brothers," there was an awareness of "grades and degrees of affinity" (*Letters* 167) that oscillated with the social and political dynamics of the times. Deeply committed to political collaborations with other poets, Rich would nonetheless come to wrestle with questions of affinity and solidarity as well.

In 1971, following the centennial of Ghalib's death, the literary critic and theorist Aijaz Ahmad published a unique amalgam of a volume entitled *Ghazals of Ghalib*. In it, he provided the Persian originals for some of Ghalib's most famous ghazals, along with his own literal translations and free-form "adaptations" of the poems by a wide range of contemporary American poets including Rich, W.S. Merwin, William Stafford, and Mark Strand. This collaborative volume—a hybrid of homage, technical translation studies, and original poetry—was instrumental in Rich's own turn to the form, which persisted throughout her poetic oeuvre, often interwoven with other variants of adaptation, translation, and derivation from different languages and cultural or historical contexts. In the 2003 essay "Iraqi Poetry Today," Rich reflects:

> My life would be unthinkable without poetic translation …To carry the intrinsic nature of a poem from one language to another can mean to make another poem; unweave strands into a new texture; experience the expressive limits of one's mother tongue; make love with a new person, in a different body; work with an unfamiliar medium—to feel the material contradictions of art. (*A Human Eye* 7)

Ahmad introduces the Ghalib volume by insisting that translation should not be a dry, clinical enterprise but a "labor of love": "It was part of our original purpose to get a multiplicity of responses" to Ghalib's work "with the premise that there is no one right

way of translating a poem … translation is approximation" (xviii-xix). Ahmad avoided relegating any explanatory context to footnotes because: "The intention is… to demonstrate a process, to let the reader see for himself precisely what went on in the process of collaboration" (xxviii). This spirit of collaboration surrounding Ghalib's verse is something Rich came to associate closely with the ghazal form at large, as evinced by the *makhta* of "8/4/68" (which is dedicated to Aijaz Ahmad): "When they read this poem of mine, they are translators. / Every existence speaks a language of its own" (353). Rich was developing her own ghazals and producing her versions of the Ghalib ghazals for the Ahmad anthology at the same time, and the two projects synchronously proved the broad capacity of the open and flexible form for exploring ethical questions across national and linguistic borders.

Ghalib's life and writing were inspiring to Rich and her contemporaries in the American "moment of change" of 1968 for a number of reasons. "In its material dimensions," Ahmad writes in his introduction to the volume, "Ghalib's life never really took root and remained always curiously unfinished" (xi). The poet never owned a house; he never owned books and read only borrowed ones; he never had a regular source of income. His work is, therefore, "the poetry of a more than usually vulnerable existence" (xi), and the fragility of the ghazal form epitomizes that vulnerability. Of course, this precariousness is amplified when we recall that Ghalib lived through the worst violent days of British imperialism in India. It is difficult to establish definitively what Ghalib's attitude towards the British conquest of India was—as Ahmad writes, because "nationalism" meant something very different in nineteenth-century India than it does now, and because India had a long history of invaders including the then-reigning

Moghuls themselves, "Ghalib had many attitudes toward the British, most of them complicated and often quite contradictory" (xii). In his correspondence, however, he presents "some of the most graphic and vivid accounts of British violence" that exist, and it is undeniable that his ghazals were written in a period of immense societal turmoil—as Rich writes, "in an age of political and cultural breakup."

1857, the year of the Indian Rebellion that would mark a decisive turning point for British imperialism in India and across the world, shares some common ground with Rich's 1968. Each was a moment of conjuncture that shattered faith in institutions, both cultural and political, for the two poets. That year, Ghalib came to realize that Calcutta under British rule, which had deeply fascinated him as the "first modern city in India," had developed a "brutal and brutalizing mercantile ethic that was to produce not a humane society but an empire." Ahmad continues: "Whatever admiration he had ever felt for the British was seriously brought into question by the events of that year … It was obviously impossible for him to reconcile this conduct with whatever humanity and progressive ideals he had ever expected the British to have possessed" (xiii-xiv). As a result, Ghalib's "complex and moral" ghazals embody "a poet who … lived at a time in the history of the subcontinent similar to the present in America, in the sense that a whole civilization seemed to be breaking up and nothing of equal strength was taking its place" (xxi). In the growing violence of colonial rule, Ghalib foresaw "much suffering" ahead, which precipitated "an intense moral loneliness, a longing for relations which were no longer possible, and a sense of utter waste" (xxii). In their more despairing lines, such as "For the work undoes itself over and over: / the grass grows back, the dust collects, the

scar breaks open" ("7/14/68: I", 342), Rich's ghazals echo this sense of futility and circularity and what should be, and could be, an eye-opening "moment of change."

In a 1967 letter to her teacher and mentor Margareta Faissler, Rich describes her and her fellow poets' motivation for participating in an anti-draft demonstration outside the Whitehall Induction Center in New York City: "We have become increasingly disturbed, not only about the war itself and its escalation and the possible outcome, but about the effects of it on the country at large, the lack of candor, to put it mildly, on the part of the press, the loss of faith in the best of the younger generation in the normal processes of government." As she was developing her ghazals, Rich regularly participated in demonstrations and other acts of symbolic dissent, publicly registering concern about wartime barriers to political transparency and freedom of expression. In light of the media's distorted account of the peaceful, orderly demonstration at Whitehall as violent and rebellious, Rich writes, she began to "think even harder about what we are told about Viet Nam and what is withheld or played down. There has never been a time when the hard, dirty facts were so needed by the citizens of this democracy, and we aren't getting them" (*Papers*, Box 4, #112).

Faced with media whitewashing of a messy and complex reality, Rich realized that to retaliate in poetry, she could not turn to a monologic form. To gather up and crystallize as many stifled voices and censored opinions as possible while avoiding claims to all-inclusiveness, the ghazal provided a fruitful synthesis of formal reticence and cross-cultural flexibility. In the ambiguity of the ghazal form, Rich "[tried] to find through dialectical logical discourse on her own feeling a way to live correctly in the midst of a 'defenseless' history" (Torgoff n.pag.). The open form serves as a nexus of the

personal and the political for Rich, a reflection of the successes and failures of trying to coexist with others in a political and literary community.

Rich's own ghazals to Ghalib became a project not of literal translation or simple historical reflection, but a careful reconstruction that considers how and what we might learn from his mournful and meditative verses about colonialism, a cataclysmic cultural and historical crossroads. From "8/4/68":

> How is it, Ghalib, that your grief, resurrected in pieces,
> has found its way to this room from your dark house in Delhi?

In the cautious project of resurrecting that grief, somewhere in the space between translation and adaptation, Rich wrote her own versions of eighteen of the volume's thirty-seven total ghazals. Surprisingly, her contributions are more formally strict than some of the other contributors', notably David Ray and W. S. Merwin. Still, her adaptations of Ghalib are in some ways even looser formally than her own original ghazals, which, despite the lack of *takhallos* and *radif*, are actually strict about the self-containment of two-line couplets. Consider the following example from one of Rich's contributions to the collaborative volume:

> I too, like the other boys,
> once picked up a stone to cast
>
> at the crazy lover Majnoon;
> some foreboding stayed my hand. (Ghazal III, 15)

In her adaptation, Rich extends one of Ghalib's original couplets into two; the original (in Ahmad's literal translation) reads:

> In my boyhood (boyishness), Asad, I had once lifted a stone (to throw) at Majnoon;
> But, immediately, I remembered my own head.

Why does Rich break this couplet up into two here, committing the formal transgression of enjambment? One reason is for legibility by an Anglophone audience—the easy reference to "Majnoon" for Ghalib's audience needs a quick contextualization, "crazy lover," for readers who might not be familiar with the Persian epic poet Nizami's archetypal figure of infatuation, taken up in much subsequent Persophone poetry including Rumi's. In a letter from 1862, Ghalib insists that he never intended to emulate the conventions of Persian ghazal poets who wrote centuries before him: "poetry is the creating of meaning, not the matching of rhymes" (*Letters* 209). Ahmad, too, takes a different position than Agha Shahid Ali's later insistence that "real ghazals in English" must follow a strict *radif* end-rhyme pattern. In contemporary English, he argues, forcing such rhymes would have a "restrictive rather than enlarging or intensifying" effect. "Inner rhymes, allusions, verbal associations, wit, and imagistic relations," he believes, "can quite adequately take over the functions performed by the formal end-rhymes in the original Urdu" (xix). The main thrust of Ahmad's project—and Rich's role within it—is less the formal preservation of a tradition in an anachronistic context, and more the thoughtful globalization of Persophone literature and culture through demystifying and deconstructing Orientalist stereotypes surrounding Persian poetry.

The other effect of creating two separate couplets and therefore moments of articulation for the speaker's stone-throwing and subsequent introspection is perhaps one of ethical affiliation. For Ghalib, Ahmad explicates, these lines "[draw] attention to the further implication that lovers recognize each other as of the same community and that

he, too, had a premonition that he was going to be another great lover and that others would be stoning him just as they once stoned Majnoon" (14). Rich's speaker seems to live in a more complex world of violence and consequence, where the pacifist gesture is merely summoned by an ambiguous sense of "some foreboding." The expansion into enjambment across stanzas here allows Rich to meditate on the impulses of violence and reticence separately, since both sentiments were part of her poetic and political climate in the late 1960s—and thus her modernization of Ghalib for a contemporary American audience.

Compare this to the following two couplets from one of Rich's original ghazals, "7/16/68: II":

> When they mow the fields, I see the world reformed
> as if by snow, or fire, or physical desire.
>
> First snow. Death of the city. Ghosts in the air.
> Your shade among the shadows, interviewing the mist.

In these couplets, Rich adheres much more strictly to the classical ghazal's mood of fragmentation, rather than the mini-narrative of the stone-throwing boy above. Both of these couplets describe sudden transformations of landscape—a mowed field and a city blanketed in snow—but they not only conjure up entirely separate images to achieve similar effects, they also accomplish these separate iterations through a contrast in style. The first couplet is a continuous sentence solidly positioned in the first-person perspective, as if uttered by a speaker from a farmhouse window. The second, by contrast, is disjointed, its sentence fragments in search of an elusive addressee among several narrative layers and "shadows." Yet the couplets are linked by the figurative representation of snow, which transforms from a simile on a summer day in the first

stanza, to the dominant image that sets the mood in the second. These couplets thus embody Ali's directive that, in a "real" ghazal, "one should at any time be able to pluck a couplet like a stone from a necklace, and it should continue to shine in that vivid isolation, though it would have a different lustre among and with the other stones." The simultaneous separation and connection between couplets carries a cultural symbolism—very different statements on historical events expressed in different tones nonetheless find a provisional unity of perspective in a shared image from the natural world.

Unlike Rich's adaptations of Ghalib's ghazals, her original ghazals mostly adhere to the "ghazal rule" that there should be no enjambment between couplets. As mentioned above, they do, however, break with this imperative on two specific occasions. The first of these is in "7/23/68," about midway through the "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)" sequence in *Leaflets*. The poem, which meditates on the rapaciousness of intellectual power, reads as follows:

> When your sperm enters me, it is altered;
> when my thought absorbs yours, a world begins.
>
> If the mind of the teacher is not in love with the mind of the student,
> he is simply practicing rape, and deserves at best our pity.
>
> To live outside the law! Or, barely within it,
> a twig on boiling waters, enclosed inside a bubble
>
> Our words are jammed in an electronic jungle;
> sometimes, though, they rise and wheel croaking above the treetops.
>
> An open window; thick summer night; electric fences trilling.
> What are you doing here at the edge of the death-camps, Vivaldi?

If one reads couplets three and four as enjambed, it is "our words" that are trapped in Rich's image of a bubble—implying the frustrated and unheard protests of the students

and anti-war activists who were being fed misinformation by their government and other authority figures. This poem was, one should remember, written in the wake of the My Lai massacre in March 1968, but before the news had broken to the public—but mass public suspicion of the war and President Johnson's strategic intentions was widespread long before the cover-up of the massacre disintegrated in the fall of 1969. As My Lai became public knowledge, Rich's extension of military and cultural hegemony into the realm of sexual violence comes to seem all the more prescient—the event represents a double silencing, since even as Americans were faced with news of the brutal mass murder, it took much longer for its dimension of sexual assault to become known or publicly accepted. When "our words" are read as extending across the enjambed space, they are associated with both the privileged isolation of the "bubble" and the blocked communication across borders of the "electronic jungle," the airwaves controlled by the U.S. government and the thickets of misinformation that it took so many years of national shame and reckoning to wade through.

If, however, the couplets are considered as standalone "stones" in Ali's necklace metaphor, the gravity-defying twig—plucked from the rooted, genealogical foundation of a tree as if to indicate the abandonment of national tradition—becomes the object enclosed in a bubble, as the formal restrictions of the ghazal enclose, for Rich, the vehement and confusing rush ("boiling water") of radical politics and dissenting communities in which she was herself taking part during the height of the anti-Vietnam War protests—in the fragmentary form of a couplet's temporary clarity. The nation—and with it, the notion of a national poetic tradition—was, for Rich, by this time as far from a comforting structure as it could get. Ultimately, the lack of punctuation between lines

opens the ghazal up to two possible interpretations—first, the couplets as separate meditations on lawless, rootless existence and transnational communication respectively, and second, through "our words," the disparate voices, background and priorities of anti-war activists united through a shared belief in the political potential of poetry.

The dates of Rich's second major sequence of ghazals, published in *The Will to Change* (1971), pick up right where "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)" left off, running from September 1968 to May 1969. These poems, "The Blue Ghazals," thus continue her poetic-political documentation of that crucial explosive summer and its descent into a heartbreaking fall. Their imagery, tone, and syntax are more intimate, urgent, and clipped than those of the ghazals published two years prior—these poems present a more troubled vision of aesthetic community and ethical interconnectedness, informed by the latest revelations about the Vietnam War's crucial year of 1968 and by the dissent within the anti-war community in the late sixties.

As much as 1968 united poets on the American left, it was also a time when the historical convergence of feminism, civil rights, the Vietnam War, and the decline of New Criticism often made their collaboration difficult, if not impossible, fraught with clashing allegiances. Beyond their historical connectedness to an earlier master of the ghazal form, David Caplan writes: "Rich's cagey, anguished poems searchingly investigate America's difficult racial politics, seeking to forge a cross-cultural poetry of witness, a poetry of reconciliation and cross-racial identification ... her efforts to construct a cross-cultural poetry of witness confront this strategy's painful limits, its thwarted hopes arising from the age's troubled contradictions" (44). As she despaired in a letter to Faissler in January 1968: "There is a terrible divisiveness in this crisis." In 1968,

Rich added onto her graduate poetry course at Columbia University a teaching position in the Seek program at the City College of New York, which sought to provide affordable education to a more diverse, often underprivileged student body (O'Mahoney n.pag.). This made her more attuned to nuances and internal conflicts of race and class within the anti-war movement as she became more assertive about the relationship between political and poetic language. "When the Civil Rights movement came along in the late fifties, early sixties," she says in a 1991 interview, "and I began to hear Black voices describing and analyzing what were the concrete issues for Black people, like segregation, like racism, it came to me as a great relief. It was like finding language for something that I'd needed a language for all along. That was the first place where I heard a language to name oppression. And it was an enormous relief, even as it threw up a lot of questions for me as to where I stood with all this" (*Poetry and Prose* 263).

The question of extremity in poetic language—the rhetoric of manifesto, identity politics, and calls to action, sometimes to the point of the directly aggressive or radically offensive—becomes a more vibrant issue for Rich in "The Blue Ghazals." In a letter to David Kalstone, she wrote: "The question of whether one *can* do without a radical rhetoric … Whether a radical, or revolutionary, rhetoric may not be akin to poetry in its relationship to hope—an exploration of the possibilities … I believe that phrases like 'Black is beautiful' or 'Power to the people' have actually opened up possibilities of thought and experience for people" (Papers, n.pag.). In the wake of the Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination in the spring of 1968 and the subsequent riots followed by white anxiety and guilt, two of her ghazals addressed her fellow poet Amiri Baraka. A ghazal's couplets are more oblique and contemplative than slogans, but since its formal flexibility

allows for an "exploration of possibilities," as Rich writes to Kalstone, it has a comparable "relationship to hope." In search of solidarity despite differences, then, the ghazal form was an especially useful medium through which Rich could articulate her tension with Baraka and their mutual interests in social justice across cultures and communities.

Written at the beginning of his career, during his embrace of Black Nationalism, Baraka's volume *The Dead Lecturer* (1964) "forcefully turned from writers such as [Rich], regardless of their seemingly radical political commitments" (Caplan 44). In 1968, he had recently founded the Black Arts School that would become a defining legacy of the poetry of the sixties; he had also just converted to Islam and changed his name from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka. Rich and Baraka's worlds intersected when his life and poetry were at their most radical; he would soon denounce Black Nationalism in 1974. The title of "The Blue Ghazals" can be read as an attempt at identification through an allusion to Baraka's struggles with marginality—he had recently published *Blues People* (1963), his powerful meditation on race and music in America, and his poetry continued to interweave the rhythms of the blues with the lived experience of black Americans throughout his career.

In a 2008 essay, "'Knowing What City You're In, Who to Talk To': LeRoi Jones's *The Dead Lecturer*," Rich reflects on how important Baraka's poetry was to her in understanding the paradoxical unity and disunity of the Left in those years. "Taken, unsettled" by his poems in *The Dead Lecturer*, she writes, they convinced her that "intimacy is never simple" in their "searches for an ever-escaping mutuality" (*A Human Eye* 149). Baraka's poems, she continues, document "experiencing the American color

line—that deceptively, murderously, ever-shifting, intransigent construct—as neither 'theme' nor abstraction, but as disfiguring all life, and in a time when 'revolution' was still a political, not a merchandising term" (154). Because he frequently endured racial profiling even by his complimentary critics, such as one endorser on the back cover of *The Dead Lecturer*, whom Rich quotes as describing Baraka as "sardonic or sensuous or slangily knowledgeable"—just one example, she writes, "of the cultural clichés into which apparently well-intentioned criticism can sink"—Baraka's anti-war poems are inevitably different from her own, contending with "the limits of poetic community, the contradictions of his assimilation by that community, his embrace and rejection of it: searching what possible listening, what possible love or solidarity might exist out beyond those contradictions" (157).

In one of her early field-defining studies of the political intersectionality of race and gender, Kimberlé Crenshaw writes: "The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women" (1252). This symmetry of limited understandings is applicable to the dynamic between Rich's feminist poetics and Baraka's Black Arts, its animosity amplified by the political turmoil of the 1960s. In Baraka's poem "Black Dada Nihilismus," Rich identifies anti-Semitism, misogyny, and "rank homophobia, which the poet has failed to disentangle from class (and racial) rage" in radical-rhetorical lines such as "Rape the white girls" and repeated derogatory references to "jews" and "faggots." She acknowledges the poet's situatedness "within conditions that continue to disfigure the American, human, scene of which he

was, and is a part," and laments the fact that the use of lines as "familiar, still poisonous code names for class enemies disfigures the poet's achievement" (*A Human Eye* 164).

Wistfully viewing Baraka as a potential leader she might follow if his poems didn't directly discriminate against her, Rich dedicates her ghazal "9/29/68" to the name he previously went by, LeRoi Jones, as if explicitly rejecting the past few years of Baraka's politics:

> Late at night I went walking through your difficult wood,
> half-sleepy, half-alert in that thicket of bitter roots.
>
> Who doesn't speak to me, who speaks to me more and more,
> but from a face turned off, turned away, a light shut out.
>
> Most of the old lecturers are inaudible or dead.
> Prince of the night there are explosions in the hall.
>
> The blackboard scribbled over with dead languages
> is falling and killing our children.
>
> Terribly far away I saw your mouth in the wild light:
> it seemed to me you were shouting instructions to us all.

The opening couplet here inevitably invokes Dante's pilgrim at the beginning of the *Inferno*, ominously portending a descent not only into the hell of war but also into irreparable discord between anti-war dissidents stuck in a "difficult wood" who paradoxically hear each other less and less even as they grow "more and more" aware of each other's voices. The couplet is also an allusion to Baraka's then-recently published experimental novel *The System of Dante's Hell* (1965), which critics have considered a "transitional text" that represents his break from the Black Mountain School and other white-majority poetic movements of his time, and his increasing identification with black nationalism (Schryer 145). The novel does so by reinforcing his authority through male

heterosexuality at the cost of some notably homophobic passages. Caplan reads Rich's direct confrontation of Baraka in the last couplet of "9/29/68" through the indirection of an ancient Persian form as a "triangulation of otherness," through which Rich "invok[es] the authority of a poet and a form outside what she considers 'traditional Western order.'" In so doing, she "uses the ghazal to mitigate the more immediate pressures of contemporary American literary and political culture" (49). Each couplet represents a synchronous, genuine unification of two thoughts, but just as alliances such as Rich and Baraka's could only go so far, the couplets do not coalesce into a symbiotic whole.

The world of the twentieth-century American lyric was fraught with historical barriers for women, lesbian, and African-American poets, but those barriers often produced more internal conflicts than alliances between the poets trapped behind them. Her initial embrace of the ghazal was a reach for a form out of context, a form that might be used as a forum for poetic and political communication among contemporaries who, after all, shared so much in common. It was, in effect, an attempt not to "flee from our alikeness," as she had encouraged her contemporaries not to do in "Disloyal to Civilization." Perhaps a more hopeful contrast to Baraka's disconnection from Rich is this testament from her close friend, black feminist poet Audre Lorde, in a letter from 1973:

> I read you whenever I can find you: your poetry makes me feel *alive*, it gives me often hope—or reassurance—or a recurring sense of an *articulate* strength in the center of me that sometimes it is easier to forget … When I feel your poems I am reminded that I am in truth more whole than circumstance or echo would have me

> believe I am, and thus reminded I become more whole, more strong, more myself. (*Papers*, Box 3, #132)

Despite her differences from Rich, Lorde here conveys an intersectionality made possible through form. Judith Butler writes: "Without the presupposition or goal of 'unity,' which is, in either case, always instituted at a conceptual level, provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions … without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, and agreed-upon identity" (21). Lorde's letter suggests that this kind of paradoxical wholeness can be achieved through another's words—a sense of provisional unity between poets in individual lines, stanzas, and poems through a poetics that contains both the simplicity and the complexity of politics. Among other experiments in intertextuality and allusion throughout *The Will to Change*, the call-and-response rhythms of the ghazal form's couplets are crucial to achieving this dialectic.

The only other possible enjambment in Rich's two original ghazal collections is in "12/20/68," whose third and fourth couplets read:

> (Refuse even
> the most beloved old solutions.
>
> That dead man wrote, grief ought to reach the lips.
> You must believe I know before you can tell me.

Rich never closes the parentheses at the beginning of these lines, suggesting an open-endedness of interpretation and an invitation to read beyond the poem into the contemporary world. Although she punctuates the second line after "solutions," these lines can still be read as enjambed if we interpret the first couplet as a directive written by

the dead man, sending a message of unsentimental revolution from beyond the grave, rather than a standalone declaration directly from the speaker's mouth. By giving us this flexibility, the poem is announcing that the couplet is like any other cultural unit: inevitably self-contained and inevitably interconnected to the voices of others.

Along with the potentially enjambed words inside the "bubble" of "7/23/68," the dead man's words in this key moment of enjambment are notable not because Rich is stretching the formal boundaries of the ghazal too far, with the kind of appropriation that does violence to cultural memory. Rather, these two sets of enjambed lines are deliberately placed at crucial moments of ambiguity—and since she so rarely violates the ghazal's primary formal rule, they stand out as two deliberately political openings between lines that retain the form's long-standing flexibility while gesturing towards the possibilities of cross-cultural opening through translation.

Within a poetic repertoire "unthinkable without translation," the ghazal proves particularly fertile ground for Rich, whose version of the form incorporates a wide range of allusions and intertexts. Its succinct couplets allow for an intense concentration of images, and for a triangulated debate with a fellow revolutionary—a debate in which both sides use the ghazal's lyrical beauty to articulately and sensitively confront their disagreements. Its paradoxical relations between part and whole permit an ambiguous use of enjambment that invites multiple interpretations and collaborative meaning-making. And its *takhallos* convention, through which the poet traditionally "signs off" and defamiliarizes him- or herself with the speaker's world, allows her to situate her "I," "you," and "we" within dazzling geographic imagery to suggest the global ramifications

of the tumultuous times she lived through. The two final couplets of *the Blue Ghazals* read:

> *The moment when a feeling enters the body*
> is political. This touch is political.
>
> Sometimes I dream we are floating on water
> hand-in-hand; and sinking without terror.

This buoyant moment of joining hands despite knowing collaboration can only be temporary, even knowing its legacy is destined to drown—the moment of simultaneously intimate and global suspension between possibility and change—is the quintessence of the ghazal for Rich. As for centuries of ghazal poets before her, the ghazal is performative, contingent, and ephemeral, sometimes cryptic, but with a prismatic range—in all these qualities it finds an openness that transforms it into a worlding vehicle, steered through the *longue durée* of world literature by poets of many cultures and historical epochs.

II. Simin Behbahani: Revising and Politicizing the Ghazal Inside Iran

In post-Revolutionary Iran, poets often describe a feeling of exile from their own national literary tradition. Written in 2012, an open letter from Iranian poets and writers states that the climate of extreme censorship has created a pervasive sense of "hostage taking of freedom of expression, creativity, and the livelihood of writers by the government in order to impose its ideas on authors" (quoted in Esfandiari n.pag.). Earlier in the twentieth century, too, Mohammed Reza Shah's persecution of dissident artists and political figures led to a widespread mood of alienation among writers, which found its expression in the modernist *she'r-e no* ["new verse"] movement, led by Nima Yushij and

his contemporaries. From the 1950s and into the twenty-first century, one iconic Iranian poet held an especially prominent position in Persophone literary culture because she consistently returned to the ghazal instead of abandoning classical form for free verse. That poet is Simin Behbahani, a signatory of the 2012 letter and a national poetic matriarch often called the "Lioness of Iran." In many ways, she is the Persian counterpart to the role Adrienne Rich played in American poetry and the public sphere, both as a dissident political voice and as a poet whose embrace—and radical renovation of—the traditional ghazal form opens up her work to a global audience. As populist a poet as Rich was, Bebhahani's verse is in some ways woven into the fabric of everyday life even more widely and profoundly—despite heavy censorship of her work—because of the more central role poetry plays in Iranian public life, in both cultural and political spheres, vis-à-vis its frequent cultural marginalization in the United States.

Rich and Behbahani had similar lifespans—they were born two years apart, in 1927 and 1929, and passed away two years apart, in 2012 and 2014. In their long lives and prolific careers, both witnessed historic revolution, lived through terrible wars, and were deeply involved in political protest. Both wrote poignantly about living as a woman, a mother, and a daughter in patriarchal societies that they often found oppressive. Both were national literary matriarchs who dug deep into the social and cultural psyches of Iran and the United States respectively, telling both love stories and hard truths about their respective countries. But beyond that, they both grappled, in poetry and prose alike, with what it means to be a responsible global citizen in the modern world. It was in the ghazal that both poets found the most incisive yet broad-minded way of infusing literary expression with political sentiment.

In her prolific decades of work, Behbahani employed transnationally accessible imagery even when describing her particular national political climate. Censorship and persecution under the Shah's regime and the threat of his secret police had grown into such a pervasive climate of terror that in one poem, "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man" ("My Small World"), she figures political oppression as a physical shrinkage of the world, as seen in this translation by Farzaneh Milani and Kaveh Safa:

When silver rules, when gold is God
when the lie is the measure of all events,

When the air we breathe and live
becomes a lid suffocating hundreds of voices,

When we wag our tails in frenzy waiting for a bone
when the smell of food from a neighbor's table

Makes your mind and brain lose control
and change into a stomach,

When under the sun, men of reptilian constitution
change colors, again and again,

When the womb of honor gives birth
only to prostitutes and coarse men—

In this enormous cesspool of despair
let my world shrink to the point of seclusion.

وقتی که سیم حکم کند زر خدا شود
وقتی دروغ داور هر ماجرا شود

وقتی هوا، هوای تنفس، هوای زیست،
سرپوش مرگ، بر سر صدها صدا شود

وقتی در انتظار یکی پاره استخوان
هنگامه ای ز جنبش دم ها به پا شود

وقتی به بوی سفره ی همسایه، مغز و عقل
بی اختیار معده شود، اشتها شود

وقتی که سوسمار صفت پیش آفتاب
یک رنگ، رنگها شود و رنگها شود...

وقتی که دامن شرف و نطفه گیر شرفرم
رجاله خیز گردد و پتیاره زا شود

بگذار در بزرگی این منجلاب یلس
دنیای من به کوچکی انزوا شود!

Published in 1973 in the volume *Rastakhiz [Resurrection]*, in the decade leading up to the Islamic Revolution and thus during a period of rising dissatisfaction with the Shah, "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man" depicts a political climate so corrupt and mistrustful that even the most basic biological functions are inverted and distorted. Accordingly distorting the building blocks of the ghazal form, Behbahani's dystopia is bred of a seemingly uniform, ubiquitous violence that nonetheless breeds many destructive dualities as well. In this

surrealist landscape, the "brain … change[s] into a stomach" (lines 7-8) and the "womb of honor" (line 11) mutates the typical mother/child binary as it gives birth to fully grown sexually active women and physically violent men (line 12).

In Persian, where standard syntax requires the verb to be placed at the end of the sentence, the restriction of the *radif*—that, in a ghazal's *qafia*, the same word must be repeated at the end of each couplet—has a slightly different effect than it has on the ghazal in English, because it leads to a freezing of action in a cyclical return to the same verb throughout the poem. A key difference between the ghazals of Behbahani and Rich is that Rich largely dispenses with the end-rhyme of the *radif* altogether. Behbahani for the most part retained it, but this does not make her or any of her poems' speakers "enslaved" to the form by any means, as in Ali's Hegelian metaphor. Anyone vaguely familiar with either poet knows that they were not interested in being tethered to convention. Instead, they made it their mission—to quote the title of one of Rich's most famous poems—to dive into the wreck of literary history and breathe new life into the materials at hand—to find the beauty in antiquated forms and to democratize them for a contemporary audience.

Behbahani's *radif* in "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man" is "shavad" [becomes], and in choosing the verb of *change* as an ironic constant, she fixes the poem into a moment of perpetual *becoming*. This anticipation is heightened by the repetition of "vaqti" [when] at the beginning of most of her couplets, perhaps a pre-Revolutionary gesture as the poet anticipates the upheaval to come. As the ancient form of the ghazal is radically re-harnessed to accommodate new content. Behbahani's diction moves between "archaisms" and "neologisms," as co-translator Safa suggests in his afterword to the Behbahani

collection *A Cup of Sin*: from "sim" and "zar," old-fashioned words for silver and gold, to "patyara" and "rajjala," modern words for "prostitute" and "coarse men" in a much more modern register (143). Safa insists that the referential "scope" of Behbahani's poems is "encyclopedic, unlike any other contemporary Iranian poet, and requires a corresponding engagement of the heart and mind and soul of the reader, which sometimes can be hard work, even if pleasurable" (145). The "interweaving" of both ancients (Rumi, Hafez) and moderns such as Akhavan Sales and Nader Naderpoor "is all the more remarkable for being interspersed in the same book with references to, and poetic engagements with, real and consequential historical events" in Iran (146). The insistence on allusion throughout Behbahani's oeuvre of ghazals only reinforces her gesture in the last two lines of "Dunyā-ye Kuchek-e Man," which individualistically perform the poet's artistic work of first revealing and vilifying social and political corruption around her, then retreating into "seclusion" (line 14) so that same "work" becomes necessarily twofold, its burdens and rewards passed along to her audience for political action.

Adrienne Rich, in her Vietnam War ghazals, often shuttles between microscopic and panoramic natural imagery to echo the simultaneous concentration and expansiveness of the ghazal form. Here, Behbahani's "shrinkage" of the speaker's world into the "seclusion" of the poem's "you"—an individual tormented human body, its brain under extreme starvation and its airways stifled by censorship—stands in similar contrast to the "enormous cesspool of despair" that "suffocat[es] hundreds of voices." Injustice, the ghazal suggests by alternating between singular and plural form within and across couplets, affects both the individual and the community in a cyclical, destructive pattern.

Behbahani, like Rich, includes no *takhallos* invocations in the *makhtas* of her ghazals. In her recent work on Behbahani, Farzaneh Milani views the radical transformation of positionality as an incisive gesture of gender depolarization that is crucial to Behbahani's ghazal renovations: "By desegregating this predominantly masculine form of literature, Behbahani has democratized the ghazal to an unprecedented scale. Through her work, women can now be the producers as well as the consumers of this literary genre; they can be its authors as well as its objects" (*Words not Swords* 257). The voice in "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man" is not gender-marked, and becomes explicitly collective in line 4 and beyond as a result of communal "suffocation." Just as Behbahani subverts gender norms throughout the poem—"reptilian" men "change colors" (lines 9-10) and the "womb of honor" refuses typical female biological function (lines 11-12)—so she refuses to employ the ghazal's final couplet in its traditional dualistic mode as *envoi* from (implicitly male) poet to either God or (implicitly female) beloved. Safa maintains that working in the ghazal form has "contributed to [Behbahani's] survival by camouflaging [her poems'] potentially 'dangerous' content, at least in the eyes of adversaries too blinded by generic expectations" (140), and the poet's refusal of *takhallos* can be read as an extension of that subversive camouflage. While Rich chose this depersonalizing gesture in order to render her ghazals more participatory; in Behbahani's context, eliminating the *takhallos* also reflects a necessary concern over censorship and political repression—there is a kind of safety in the universality of the anonymous final couplet that would turn precarious by loudly marking the poem with Behbahani's own name.

The notion of disguise, however, seems ironic given Behbahani's real and prominent position in the public sphere. Despite the transnational resonance of poems like "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man," she can also seem like the most nationalist of poets. Widely revered as the country's poet laureate, she wore her patriotism on her sleeve in both her poetry and her life. She had this in common with Rich, though the latter was not directly persecuted by the government—both paradoxically occupied the simultaneous identities of dissident political radical and national poet. Despite being subject to interrogations and long periods of country arrest even into her mid-eighties as she suffered health problems, Behbahani vehemently refused to leave Iran for the safety and comforts of life in the literary diaspora, insisting that poets must take part in the movement for change from within.

One of Behbahani's most popular poems, often recited during anti-government protests in Iran, is the patriotically titled ghazal "Dobāreh Misāzamet, Vatan" ["My Country, I Will Build You Again"]. The poem opens by fusing corporeal and architectural imagery in an extended metaphor that implies a deep structural unity between person and nation (trans. Milani and Safa):

> My country, I will build you again;
> if need be, with bricks made from my life.
>
> I will build columns to support your roof;
> if need be, with my bones.
>
> I will inhale again the perfume of flowers
> favored by your youth.
>
> I will wash again the blood off your body
> with torrents of my tears.

Once more, the darkness will leave this house.
I will paint my poems blue with the color of our sky.

The resurrector of "old bones" will grant me in his bounty
a mountains splendor in his testing grounds.

Old I may be, but given the chance, I will learn.
I will begin a second youth alongside my progeny.

I will recite the Hadith of love of country
With such fervor as to make each word bear life.

There still burns a fire in my breast to keep
undiminished the warmth of kinship I feel for my people.

Once more you will grant me strength,
though my poems have settled in blood.

Once more I will build you with my life,
though it be beyond my means.

دوباره می سازمت وطن!
اگر چه با خشت جان خیش

ستون به سقق تو میزنم،
اگر چه با استخوان خویش

دوباره می بویم از تو کل، به میل نسل جوان تو
دوباره می شویم از تو خون، به سیل اشک روان خویش

دوباره، یک روز آشتا، سیاهی از خانه میرود
به شعر خود رنگ می زنم، زآبی آسمان خویش

اگر چه صد ساله مرده ام، به گور خود خواهم ایستاد
که برذزم قلب اهرمن، زنعره ی آنچنان خویش

کسی که « عظم رمیم» را دوباره انشا کند به لطف
چو کوه می بخشدم شکوه، به عرصه ی امتحان خویش

اگر چه پیرم ولی هنوز، مجال تعلیم اگر بُوَد،
جوانی آغاز می کنم کنار نوباوگان خویش

حدیث حب الوطن ز شوق بدان روش ساز می کنم
که جان شود هر کلام دل، چو برگشایم دهان خویش

هنوز در سینه آتشی، بجاست کز تاب شعله اش
گمان ندارم به کاهشی، ز گرمی دمان خویش

دوباره می بخشی ام توان، اگر چه شعرم به خون نشست
دوباره می سازمت به جان، اگر چه بیش از توان خویش

This most nationalist of poems is, in some ways, emblematic of Behbahani's oeuvre. For decades, she was the literary-matriarchal icon of patriotic resistance against an oppressive regime, insisting on the centrality of poetry to Iranian cultural identity in its struggle to survive under censorship. In a 1997 speech at the Ministry of Guidance in Tehran, she attempted to begin enumerating what she cites as "the harassment, the censorship, the oppression that had been inflicted on Iranian writers for eighteen years" when her microphone was suddenly cut off halfway through her speech (Milani, *WNS* 202). Much of Behbahani's poetry evokes the violence of this primary form of censorship.

It would be impossible to discuss Behbahani's career without acknowledging her reputation as a nationalist poet, defined by her politically local rootedness and a preservationist approach to classical Persian poetry. The ghazal was her preferred form for most of her career. She cited transporting the ghazal to "zabān-i-ruz"—the "language of today"— as the main achievement of her career (Brookshaw 76). She was the first

Iranian poet to integrate modern political and social concerns and informal conversation into the ghazal. Many of her ghazals make minimalistic use of *radif*, and while her couplets include self-contained images, they are also often interrelated in both syntax and theme, weaving couplets into a poem's larger narrative, setting, or mood. In telling *stories* through the ghazal, Behbahani forged a political opening of the poetic form in Persian, not only making it accessible for contemporary Iranian readers but also infusing it with vivid imagery that translates well outside the rhyme scheme, extending the 20th century Persian ghazal into the field of world literature. Behbahani imbued this ancient form with modern stories: stories of state violence and censorship; stories of social justice rebuilding a nation; stories of women transgressing social norms. Alongside this modernization of the ghazal, though, Behbahani performed an equally important internationalization of the form, which is ironically clad in an intensely national thematics in "Dobāreh Misāzamet, Vatan." A paradox emerges in both the form and content of her poems, in which it becomes clear that Behbahani is not just revising a national tradition in her embrace of the ghazal form, but posing a series of transnational questions, interested in a geographically comparative and transhistorical approach to her most common thematic questions surrounding gender, violence, and censorship.

As with her use of the neutral verb "shavad" in "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man," the *radif* Behbahani chooses for this ghazal is utterly minimalistic. The end-rhyme "khish" merely means "self," which is used in possessive constructions to mean both "my," "your," and "his." In this way, the end-rhyme does not circle the poem back upon its speaker—or a single repeated subject or theme—but instead unifies disparate voices using one consistent grammatical construction. When Behbahani evokes the phrase

"Hadith of love of country" in the eighth couplet, and especially the transnationally charged word *vatan* ["homeland"], she references a series of complex questions about identity-categories, belonging, and contingency.[3] In Persian, *vatan* is a borrowed word from Arabic that can carry strong associations with the Palestinian struggle—it is, for example, a central theme in Mahmoud Darwish's poetry—but is also used in slogans and verses by poets and political parties alike across the Muslim world. *Vatan* does not mean "nation" in the sense of blind allegiance to the current powers that be in government, religious authority, or elsewhere. It means rootedness in a more durable, more profound allegiance to your history; it means finding identity by way of trust in your chosen community.

In the nationalism of this well-known ghazal, Behbahani also reverses the gender dynamics of the ghazal's conventions as a love poem, usually centered on the figure of the beloved, because her early political poetry revolved around the self—particularly the self's reactions to and struggles with inequality. After 1979, it is the *vatan* that becomes the beloved; in her post-Revolutionary poetry, the main subject is often the nation. Behbahani's poetic persona does not distance itself from the inequality in her poems; instead, she immerses herself in the fight against injustice. In doing so, her definition of *vatan* grows broader than geospatial, historical, ethno-linguistic, or religious boundaries. It is, ultimately, the notion of justice that becomes the figure of the beloved in various metaphors and expressions in Behbahani's ghazals.

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[3] These questions were further reinforced by their utterance in the mouth of a U.S. president when, in March 2011, President Obama quoted the fifth and sixth couplets of this poem as part of his congratulatory message to the Iranian people on the occasion of Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

Behind and beyond Behbahani's most well-known patriotic lines is an extensive oeuvre filled with more complex meditations on the local/global terms of art-as-protest, most of which depend on the nuances and ambiguities of her chosen form: the endlessly adaptable ghazal. In Iranian poetry, one of the most typical representations of the transgressive, uninhibited female is the gypsy woman, whom Behbahani approaches as an archetype in a series of poems entitled "Gypsiesques," published during the height of the Iran-Iraq War in *Dasht-e Arzhan [Plains of Arzhan]* (1983). The devastating conflict, which lasted from 1980-1988 and would be the longest conventional war of the twentieth century, came on the heels of the Islamic Revolution and inspired a new wave of fear and turmoil among an already-upturned urban population, as Iraq began its terrifying air raids over Tehran. Essentially a complex series of border disputes, now also notorious for Saddam Hussein's chemical attacks on the Iraqi Kurdish population, the war was a formative period in Iranian contemporary history that both spurred a long campaign of nationalist propaganda and made many citizens, especially artists and intellectuals, question the identity of Iran itself. During this time, Behbahani's ghazals take an unexpected turn to a compelling figure of transnational artistic expression: the gypsy woman.

According to Milani: "To say that someone is a Gypsy, Kowligari, is far from a compliment in the Persian language, and to call a woman 'Kowli' (Gypsy) is a downright derogatory remark." And yet, the gypsy woman becomes a key cross-cultural figure of insight, expression, and reconciliation in Behbahani's wartime ghazals, since she "reject[s] geographic frontiers as well as traditional notions of femininity" (*WNS* 177). Since the ghazal tradition is rooted in the performative tropes of the *mushaira*, yet this is

a venue not historically accessible to female poets, Behbahani turns her ghazals into vibrant political conversations through a shift in tone. As her speaker in the "Gypsiesques" directly addresses the gypsy woman, the ghazal couplets take on the role of individual envois—rhetorical questions in a time of terrifying political uncertainty, posed to a border-transcending figure who represents a multicultural readership:

> O gypsy, my heart is torn.
> Take me with you from this land, if there be a place in your tribe for a stranger.
>
> Gypsy, you asked a friend, what signifies truth.
> Her profound answer was: perpetual silence.
>
> Gypsy, to stay alive, you must slay silence.
> I mean, to pay homage to being, you must sing.
>
> (from "Gypsiesques" (1), (14), and (13))

Just as Rich used the ghazal to triangulate her questions of allegiance and solidarity to Baraka, the form provides a similar structure of address for Behbahani in these couplets. The political and global reach of her poetry is inextricable from the flexibility and performativity of the ghazal form—since the Revolution, many of Behbahani's poems have been sung and set to music. The gypsy figure ultimately allows her ghazals to exist in the liminal space between a national and a global audience.

Written in 2009, the contemporary Behbahani ghazal "Digar Savar Nakhāham Shod" ["I Will Not Ride Again"] confronts a very different political climate than early ghazals such as "Dunyā-e Kuchek-e Man," after three decades of seeing the country change under various phases of the Islamic Republic's development and leadership. It reads:

Not to be, you want me; but to be—I will. You can't tear me from my country.
While arenas endure, I won't stand on the sidelines.

I have poems and songs vast as meadows, nourished by breathing this air
The lithe gazelle of the *ghazal* I am, not easily made captive.

Speaking out has been my life's work, undaunted, unafraid of sticks and stones,
I am the flood that refuses to be harnessed.

Why should I play Gordafarid? Covering my hair with deceit?
I am not she who resorts to treachery to flee the battlefield for the safety of fortress walls.

I am the lightning bolt, silence ill befits me, after I flash.
I won't seize or desist, thunder rumbles on in my wake.

The arrow wounding my eyes has failed its aim to kill me
I will not fall like Esfandiar, my head bowed in the saddle.

What will be will be, I will protest and I will cry.
I know "Only the voice remains" and I have not long to go.

In old age and decrepitude I hang fast to a horse's mane.
I'm rearing to gallop though I know I will never ride again.

خواهی نباشم و خواهم بود دور از دیار نخواهم شد

تا "کود" هست، میان دارم اهل کنار، نخواهم شد

یک دشت شعر و سخن دارم حال از هوای وطن دارم

چابک غزال غزل هستم آسان شکار نخواهم شد

من زنده ام به سخن گفتن جوش و خروش و برآشفتن

از سنگ و صخره نیاندیشم سیلم، مهار نخواهم شد

گیسو به حیله چرا پوشم گردآفرید چرا باشم

من آن زنم که به تامردی سوی حصار نخواهم شد

برقم که بعد در خشیدن از من سکوت تمی زیید

غوغای رعد زپی دارم فارغ زکار نخواهم شد

تبری که چشم مرا خستی ست بر گشتنم به خطا جسته ست
"بر پشت زبن" ننهادم سر اسفندیار نخواهم شد

گفتم از آنچه که باداباد گر اعتراض و اگر فریاد
"تنها صداست که می ماند" من ماندگار نخواهم شد

در عین پیری و بیماري دستی به یال سمندم هست
مشتاق ناختنم، گیرم دیگر سوار نخواهم شد

As in "Dunyā" and "Dobāreh," the *radif* here is minimalistic—"nakhāham shod," a basic grammatical construction meaning "won't be." The ghazal is filled with natural imagery that suggests its own thematic and geospatial expansiveness: "poems and songs vast as meadows"; "the flood that refuses to be harnessed"; "thunder rumbles on in my wake." The subtlety of "nakhāham shod," by contrast, keeps the poem's range of imagery and syntax from being constrained by a one-note refrain, while its mood maintains a dignified note of refusal at the end of every *sher*. The end-rhyme is the reflective, wise, yet defiant answer to the ominous portents about the future examined by the repeated "shavad" ["becomes"] of "Dunyā."

Behbahani's reference to "Gordafarid" in the fourth couplet is a rich evocation of the medieval Persian epic *Shāhnāmeh*, and the famous battle when a legendary Iranian woman named Gord Afarid donned warrior's clothes to fight against a man—Sohrab, son of Rostam, who is one of the epic's central heroes—and delay the invasion of Persia. As the story goes, Gord Afarid's home, her father's castle known as the Sapid Dezh [White Fortress] is situated in the borderlands between Turan, which represents the nomadic lands to the East, and Iran, the sedentary civilization to the West. Sohrab easily defeats

the guardian of the castle, and Gord Afarid emerges from the fortress. She immediately springs into action to confront Sohrab, who laughs and quickly accepts the challenge, never suspecting that he is facing combat against a woman. A dizzying battle scene follows, in which she fights "like an experienced horseman" thoroughly intimidating Sohrab—"no bird could escape her well-armed arrow." When she eventually splits Sohrab's lance in two, he rides closer and seizes the moment to "snatch her helmet from her head," revealing her identity as a woman. Once the fearsome Sohrab has clearly met his match in the cross-dressed Gord Afarid, the crucial climactic moment arrives when the warrior-heroine adds her rhetorical prowess to her battle skills upon Sohrab's attempt to capture her, slyly urging: "O lionhearted warrior, two armies are watching us, and if I let them see my face and hair, your troops will be very amused by the notion of your fighting with a mere girl; we'd better draw aside somewhere" (192). When he acquiesces, she seizes the moment to slip inside the castle gates and slam them shut in his face. With this, Gord Afarid has made a ferocious, nearly successful attempt to defend her military borders, and she has triumphed in maintaining her autonomy by shaming Sohrab out of taking her as his prisoner of war.

If Gord Afarid is emblematic of the female hero who is irreducible to a single national affiliation, why does Behbahani's speaker distance herself from this legacy? The answer has to do with both historical connotation and strategic affect. In the *Shāhnāmeh*'s place in Iranian cultural life, Gord Afarid is a liminal figure, admired for her bravery and intelligence, but marginalized and associated with the borderlands. Sohrab, by contrast, is the pre-national hero of Iran. Why, Behbahani asks here, should the figure of the cunning, eloquent warrior woman on the borderlands be forced into a narrative of disguise and

escape? Implicitly, the poem instead makes a case for the dissident poet as Sohrab—the epic's central figure and the standard-bearer of Persian cultural heritage, which was always multicultural and always allowed for women's agency and creativity. This couplet ultimately suggests that women poets, and poets who do not fit neatly into national or cultural categories, should not have to hide behind "fortress walls."

From an ancient to a modern feminist predecessor, the poem's second-to-last stanza alludes to a well-known line by Forugh Farrokhzad, the iconoclastic twentieth-century Iranian poet and filmmaker who was a contemporary of Behbahani, but whose life and career were cut short by a tragic car accident in 1967. Like Behbahani, Farrokhzad was a frequent adapter and combiner of genres, and her stark, often shocking free-verse poetry transgressed social norms and parameters. Forty years later, "Digar" is separated from Farrokhzad's legacy by unimaginable historical developments and the vastly different path that Behbahani's own poetic career has taken, but the speaker here identifies a common thread of dissent in the "voice" that still drives her contemporary Iranian ghazals.

The poem ends on a seemingly depressing note. "I will not ride again," however, is not a simple resignation but, as Behbahani's career nears its end, a gesture of passing on her legacy to a new generation—both of Iranian youth and of world readers. As in the last stanza of Yeats's "The Circus Animals' Desertion," Behbahani's speaker here performs a disavowal of all but the voice, "shedding" earlier metaphors and different figurations of the Beloved explored in previous ghazals. In a form so reliant on the addressee, she does this in order to be able to reveal the figure of herself: an ultimate

"outsider" in Iran who nonetheless defines the voice of its generations who have protested by artistic and political means in the name of social justice.

Behbahani, as a poet who made her insistence on staying and working in Iran the centerpiece of her public persona, nonetheless identified and deeply empathized with Iranians in exile (*Cup of Sin* xxii-xxiv). A return to Ghalib's notions of postcolonial subjectivity seems timely here. Said's ultimate problematic is perhaps best encapsulated in this question about postcolonial cultural signification from *Culture and Imperialism*: "Are there ways we can reconceive the imperial experience in other than compartmentalized terms, so as to transform our understanding of both the past and the present and our attitude toward the future?" (17) There are many ways to feel confined, oppressed, and robbed of one's cultural heritage or one's political voice, and the ghazal's couplets can act as variations on this theme of postcolonial melancholia. Lisa Lowe argues that "de-essentializing female identity" makes space for "the notion of a subject who represents the juncture of a multiplicity of social contradictions, and allegorizes the possibility of a site across which counterhegemonic movements may be affiliated" (197). If marginalized and counterhegemonic voices in radically divergent biographical, political, historical, and geographic situations may be provisionally compared, then, it should perhaps come as no great surprise that the dissenting Rich and the persecuted Behbahani have both succeeded in working through the formal restrictions of the ghazal to express the tenuous connections between the personal, national, and global realms of political protest, in very different contexts.

Within Iran, Safa sees "the formalism of traditional ghazal assimilated in a countercurrent: of genres on the margins, poets who for a variety of reasons … are

unhappy with the freedoms of free verse" (*Cup of Sin* 173). Behbahani and Rich exemplify very different kinds of dissident voices, but both find an "anchor" in the ghazal form, which provides a structural vehicle for encapsulating both poets' paradoxical experience of being both patriot and dissident, both icon and iconoclast, in times of international war and domestic persecution. Through her metrical flexibility, Behbahani writes, she hopes to have created a "new container for new contents" (xxiii). Safa argues that in contemporary iterations, the ghazal often displays "a liberating disconnectedness, in the relative thematic autonomy of its lines" (173). It is the oxymoronic nature of this "liberation" through "disconnectedness" that has driven the deliberate blurring of cultural, historical, and identitarian lines through Behbahani's poetics, and her innovative exploration of dichotomies has endowed the ghazal form with new transnational accessibility and clarity.

III. Global Ghazals Today: The Politics of Hyphenation

With "Digar Savar Nakhāham Shod" and many similar ghazals, Behbahani played a vocal role in Iranian counterculture, speaking up against government brutality and advocating for social reform. In 2009, for example, she wrote a tribute poem to the young peaceful protester Neda Agha-Soltan, who was shot dead by paramilitary police in the Tehran uprisings. Up until the end of her life, she wrote prolifically about the state of the current protest movement, and more often than not, the ghazal remained her chosen vehicle for conveying the alternating waves of hope and frustration felt among those protesting the regime.

However politically complex the fallout of the past several years' uprisings across the Middle East have been, initially they were marked by an enormous, rapid galvanization of youthful protest that was largely nonviolent and remarkably organized. In the footage from Azadi Square in Tehran in 2009, Tahrir Square in Cairo in 2011, or Taksim Square in Istanbul in 2013, the role of music, chanting, and poetry was prominent: musicians and poets often became the affective touchstones around which protesters united, re-energized, and centered themselves.

New progressive media alliances such as Zanān TV, founded by Iranian activist Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh in Zuccotti Park as part of the Occupy movement, used a mix of online and broadcast television, in and out of Iran, to represent "a history of online spaces created by the Iranian women's movement, and seeks to provide an online space for feminist discourse and alliance formation between activists organizing around seemingly different goals" (Schuster n.pag.). Writers and artists such as Shahriar Mandanipour, Shirin Neshat, and Shoja Azari gravitate increasingly towards the use of mixed media and multiple time-scales to suggest the intricate nature of collaboration between the dissident group-in-flux that can no longer be bifurcated into "home" and "abroad" categories.

One of these mixed-media poets is the Iranian-American Roger Sedarat, whose collection *Ghazal Games* (2011) embeds a classical Persian miniature painting within a Gameboy console on its cover, in a nod to the digitization of Persian literature and culture. Sedarat explores the commonalities between ghazals and games, both of which are simultaneously pre-programmed and interactive. Both exist within a framework of

expectations governing their visual layout, but both also allow for individual adjustments, workarounds, and even "upgrades" to the mechanics of the systems that contain them.

Sedarat's work demonstrates that the ghazal is still a politically potent contradiction in terms: both united and divided, both a national icon and a transnational device, both self-referential and universal. In the following ghazal, his use of the second person and the imperative mood enact a return to the interactive scene of ghazal performance, the tradition of the *mushaira*, but here as venue for protest. Entitled "V.," it reads:

> Now open your mouth, Iran, and guzzle
> The imperative tense in this ghazal.
>
> Sold oil, thick enough to choke a poet,
> Censors by spilling across the ghazal.
>
> The "glug glug" of booze in Muslim countries
> Echoes through most mosques (the devil's ghazal).
>
> In case you haven't noticed, I'm turning
> Over forms. I'm starting with the ghazal.
>
> My Uncle N— led SAVAK for the Shah,
> A dead letter left inside this ghazal.
>
> Most Persians worship "Hafez," but Hafez
> Transcended his ego in the ghazal.
>
> Double double boiling some trouble:
> Eye of Khomeini plopped into a ghazal.
>
> My Father's Buick, a real gas guzzler,
> Backfired, and wrote its own kind of ghazal.
>
> You're not supposed to be so post-modern
> By saying, "Look, this poem's a ghazal."
>
> We drank fizzy *doogh* on our road trip
> Out of the bottle. It hurt to guzzle.

Behind the new nuclear power plant
Two lovers like two lines in a ghazal…

I will not put myself in this ghazal.
If you want me, you've read the wrong ghazal.

The self-conscious referentiality of the *radif* Sedarat chooses here—*ghazal*—is true to the historically playful and self-referential tone of many ghazal poets, but serves a more political purpose. In the quick glimpses of imagery that the brevity of a *sher* allows, Sedarat includes concerns both global—"sold oil" in line 3, and the "nuclear power plant" in line 21—and local: "SAVAK" in line 9, and the "eye of Khomeini" in line 14. Much like Ali, then, Sedarat finds a paradoxical exilic sociality intrinsic to both the form and the political responsibility of the poet. His speaker uses the *makhta* to explicitly refuse the *takhallos*, just as he refuses to be associated with the various incarnations of despotism and censorship that have, to him, corrupted and co-opted Iranian culture and society.

In the third-to-last couplet, Sedarat uses an alternate English spelling that would suggest the Urdu pronunciation of the word—*ghuzzle*—rather than the Persian *ghazal*. Although his poem is uniquely Iranian in many ways, this bespeaks the transnationalism of the political protests that swept—and continue to sweep—across the Middle East most notably in 2011, but beginning with the Iranian Green Movement in 2009. Sedarat presents a nuanced critique of univocality and unilateralism in both political and poetic discourse—and, like Ali, does so from a politically engaged exilic perspective.

Sedarat has used the flexibility of the ghazal form to embody the interstitiality of his hyphenated (Iranian-American) identity. But to him, cultural identity is less a bifurcated hyphenation, and more of an exploration of heritage in an age of extreme mobility permitted by technology and travel. Rich used the ghazal to embody an earlier, more complex stage of globalization through poetry—the "hyphenation" of poetic communities across the world, when American poetics first discovered the ghazal in a period when the discipline of "world literature" was just starting to take shape. This was also, as described earlier in this chapter, a period of intense international political turmoil, and both Rich and Behbahani also show the utility of the ghazal form as a vehicle for navigating the complex, productive, and overlapping space between political and literary language.

Because of the long and diverse waves of emigration and repatriation that have characterized post-Revolutionary Iran, particularly among its artists and intellectuals, Iranian literary networks have developed not just "at home" and in diaspora, but span the space between the two. The online proliferation of literary magazines and journals as well as unofficial publications of poems on websites of all kinds has enabled a globalization of the Iranian literary resistance movement. Unauthorized translations of a wide range of world literary works are readily available online, unencumbered by embargos or sanctions. Sedarat, then, writes his ghazal with much more ready access to contemporary Persophone literary culture, including the evolution of the ghazal in Iran, than was available to Rich in the 1960s. These open lines of communication enable a key difference in the circulation of the form. Rich's adaptation can accurately be called "transnational," an adaptation of Ghalib's oeuvre of ghazals once they had been

transmitted to American poetry, while Behbahani's ghazals mark the continuation of the form as an effective medium of protest from within the country. Sedarat's work, while filtered through an American perspective, can easily engage in a continued conversation with current events in Iran—and its multiple diasporic sites—that makes the term "global" more appropriate.

One might ask whether the notion of "protest poem" is not, in some ways, itself a paradox—a lone speaker with the omniscience and omnipresence of the lyric "I," aiming at the timeless in an archaic form, but somehow engaging in the collective, ever-changing, urgent, active and reactive rhetoric of political protest. For Behbahani, the "I" is strikingly generalized as the ghazal speaker embodies the voice of a nation. For Rich, the "I" is often more particularized, juxtaposing personal responsibility in political protest with the personal/political configurations of the speaker alongside lovers, fellow poets, and political allies and adversaries. The first-person voice of the ghazal is capacious and allows for all these valences to exist concurrently. Because of this, I propose that the ghazal is perfectly suited as a protest poem because it speaks to the paradoxes of global identity—and it does so because of its transnational and performative capacities, as illustrated in the ghazals of Rich and Behbahani, separated by historical and cultural contexts but united by form and in their engagement with the dialectic between politics and poetry.

From its fifth-century roots in the Middle East to its influential echo through American poetry in the 1960s and 70s, the ghazal form has always existed in a multi-national poetic playing field. The form's propensity toward cross-cultural poetics is reinforced by both Ahmad's *Ghazals of Ghalib*, which carried Ghalib's Persian

sentiments across the centuries into multiple interpretations for an Anglophone audience, and Ali's *Ravishing DisUnities*, which insists on a certain neo-formalism but whose contributions are nonetheless stylistically diverse, from John Hollander's playful, contemporary "Ghazal on Ghazals" to Andrew McCord's non-end-rhyming translation of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's somber, nostalgic "A Southern Ghazal." Sara Suleri Goodyear, in her afterword to Ali's volume, explains the ghazal's paradox of cultural interconnection despite inevitable disconnection as follows:

> The cultural moment that surrounds the moment of poetry … may always remain untranslatable. There are poems in this collection that touch upon precisely that point of translation that converts a simple imitation of form into an opening, one that even Ghalib could admire. Cultural transitions take place. (180)

Suleri's "opening" finds an uncanny echo in Rich's 1997 essay "Arts of the Possible," in which the poet reflects: "The movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States were openings out of apertures previously sealed, into collective imagination and hope. They wore their own blinders, made their own judgments" (*Arts* 154). But long after some of those revolutionary sparks had been extinguished and others had been fanned into lasting flames, Rich continued to experiment with the ghazal as a potent expression of liminality and perhaps as an antidote to all the forms of hegemony and absolutism her poetry sought to undermine.

Persophone ghazals have undergone similar "cultural transitions" in the work of Behbahani, whose removal of the *takhallos* and radical simplification of the *radif* renders her poetry more translatable and removes a necessarily national or cultural positioning

from the final couplet. As more and more poets cease to think of themselves within singular national or cultural categories, forms diversify alongside them, if not before them. As David Palumbo-Liu writes: “Form is the meeting-place of a number of aesthetic and psychic investments, both the common ground and vehicle for planetary thinking” (196). By critiquing their individual political contexts while innovating rhythm and rhyme scheme and tempering the autobiographical in the particularly flexible, adaptable form of the ghazal, transnational poets such as Rich and Behbahani, who “bastardized” the ghazal in the 1960s and 1970s, set the stage for poets like Sedarat, whose ghazals have opened up new horizons for the globality of an archaic form.

Chapter Two

The Persian World Cinema: Global Palimpsests of the Iranian New Wave

The New Wave of Iranian cinema, closely intertwined with the aesthetic revolts of the French New Wave and Italian neorealist cinema, began to make its mark in the 1960s. Its experimental, nonlinear approach to film has since been a crucial component of the global vocabulary of Persian culture ever since. In the twenty-first century, with increasingly transnational collaborations by both local and diasporic filmmakers, the Iranian New Wave remains profoundly intertwined in bidirectional cultural exchange with Western cinema, though the vast majority of its stories and subjects still usually turn a multifaceted eye inward onto Iranian society. Both commercial and avant-garde films produced in the Islamic Republic today cleverly frame their shots and scenes around extant strict government censorship governing the visual and the voyeuristic to portray a modern, multifaceted society that constantly interrogates the importance of militarism, capitalism, nationalism, and traditional gender roles.

This chapter compares two moments in the history of Iranian cinema—one quite early, the 1960s, and one very recent, around 2010. In between these periods, major Iranian New Wave directors such as Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and Jafar Panahi established themselves as prominent figures on the international film circuit starting in the 1980s and 1990s, defying the strictures of the Islamic Republic while remaining household names in Iranian popular culture. Earlier pioneers during the Pahlavi era of Iranian experimental cinema, however, had paved the way for their success with a blend of national and global cinematography in the 1960s—when political dissent was sweeping across the world in many forms, from decolonization to the women's rights

movement. The Iranian New Wave, this chapter argues, paradoxically set up a national cinematic tradition with an inherently global foundation. Given the longtime pressures on Iranian directors to make films in the service of nationalist propaganda, it is remarkable how globally influenced, themed, and circulated their work has always been.

In what follows, I demonstrate how the globalism of Iranian film has a great deal to do with its open and flexible approach to the cinema genre, incorporating symbolism and storylines from other cultures through an intergeneric convergence with poetry, religious scripture, political speech, music, dance, and other art forms. While the ghazal's globalism rests in the openness of its formal elements, such as rhyme scheme, to adaptation by poets from many languages and cultures, the film genre is open to transnational influence and circulation for a different reason—because of the capacity of the moving image to overlay several mediums and modes of cultural speech at once. A powerful interculturally connective force through decades of Iran's growing political isolation from the West, the palimpsestic aesthetic of Iranian experimental cinema—superimposing the local and the global through artistic devices and collaborations—continues today in a dialogic network of local and diasporic Iranian cinematic production that connects films across cultures through a common symbolism and thematics.

Iranian cinema was profoundly transnational in operation from its artisanal beginnings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Hamid Naficy explains in his authoritative compendium *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, despite sixteen years of attempting to culturally homogenize, propagandize, and glorify a rapidly modernizing Iran, and despite strict monitoring of film studios and cinema houses, the first Pahlavi monarch, Reza Shah, failed to turn cinema into an instrument of the state

during his reign from 1925 to 1941.[4] The first feature-length Iranian films, simultaneously explored both the openness of Iran's borders and the socially critical value of film as a medium, were often produced in other countries.[5]

When Reza Shah abdicated and his son Mohammed Reza Shah came to power, Iranian cinema and performing arts moved back to the home country but were heavily influenced by foreign actors. Naficy relates the story of Nilla Cram Cook, an American woman jointly hired by the U.S. government as "assistant to the press attaché" and by the Iranian regime as head of the NEFC (National Educational Film Circuit) from 1941 to 1947. In this role, Cook served as the primary government official in charge of censoring films and signing release forms for all cinematic and theatrical productions in the country. Cook was herself deeply immersed in and knowledgeable about Persian culture, and she led her first-of-its-kind Iranian ballet troupe on tours around the world, performing dances based on stories from the Persian epic, the *Shāhnāmeh [Book of Kings]*. Nesta Ramazani, one of the troupe's star dancers, describes how Cook led the company with a heavy directorial hand as she took advantage of a relatively liberal period

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[4] "Only one silent feature film was produced domestically," Naficy reveals, "while all sound features were produced by an Iranian expatriate in India … [showing] Iranian cinema's transnational nature from the start" (vol.1, xxii).

[5] The immensely popular *Dokthar-e Lor [Lor Girl]* (1934), directed by Ardeshir Irani, features the sizeable community of Iranian expatriates in Bombay, which was a refuge for the leading couple during post-World War I turmoil and the end of the Qajar dynasty. Created by a bicultural director— the Armenian-Iranian Ovanes Ohanian—the film *Haji Agha, Aktor-e Cinema [Haji Agha, Cinema Actor]* (1933) features a stubborn, religious man opposed to cinema. A director films him without his knowledge, and by the end of the film, after seeing his own life narrativized and relativized, he realizes the critical and perspectival value of cinema. In portraying this transition, film critic Mohammad Tahaminejad argues, Ohanian "argues cinema's case eloquently … by show[ing] Iranians their world, setting up a dialogue between them, their thought, and the world outside" (*Iran: A Cinematographic Revolution*).

of free expression in Iran to spread global awareness of Persian culture in what was nonetheless a culturally imperialist mission designed by President Roosevelt "to restore Iranians' sense of pride in their own culture—an endeavor that would also advance American influence." Interestingly, Ramazani also points out that the dance repertory she developed became globally oriented through its integration of *several genres* from Persian culture: "dance forms, literary motifs, and music" (7). As unimaginable as this heavy-handed cultural colonialism seems now, Cook was only one of dozens of foreign heads of numerous Iranian ministries and departments in this period, from tax to customs to the postal service to branches of the military. In the 1950s and 1960s, *Iran News*, *Iran-Washington Report*, and the United States Information Agency itself produced a constant stream of propaganda films showing the Shah on his world travels as a glorified advocate of Westernization, as well as idealized portraits of American history and everyday life. In addition to foreign involvement in domestic film production, foreign films themselves were also massively popular among Iranian spectators.

On the other hand, cinema—both as art form and as physical space—also became a notable meeting-place for Iranian political dissenters starting in the 1940s. The membership of the Tudeh (Communist) Party, one of the most prominently outspoken anti-Shah groups until the Islamic Revolution, contained a long list of prominent filmmakers and often took advantage of the "darkness and anonymity of movie houses" for meetings of the political opposition (Naficy vol. 2, 23). Not only Communist groups but a range of social and political critics of authoritarianism and global capitalism in Iran have since turned to the camera and the screen, both to obliquely express individual protests against despotism and fundamentalism and to forge communities of

sociopolitical dissent and resistance. Filmmakers such as Ebrahim Golestan, who was contracted to produce films for the National Iranian Oil Company—in response to Orientalist propaganda films espousing Iran as a barren land of secret oil riches such as Ralph Keene's *Persian Story* (1952)—used allegory and symbolism to critique Western capitalism around the watershed historical moment of 1953, when Iran's first democratically elected prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, was overthrown in a U.S.- and British-led coup d'état directly after he nationalized the oil industry, threatening a priceless source of revenue for those governments.

As the national film industry expanded and flourished under Mohammed Reza Shah against this heavily internationalized backdrop, most remarkably in the 1960s, two distinct categories emerged: the bulk of commercial *filmfarsi* productions, which combined Iranian traditional culture and Westernized modernity to comic or melodramatic effect; and the New Wave films, which received accolades on the international film festival circuit and paradoxically retained state sponsorship despite their piquant social criticism of the Shah's increasing authoritarianism on the eve of the Revolution. This chapter focuses on the second category: the avant-garde minority of globally oriented and socially dissenting films that eventually came to define mainstream Iranian cinema in the contemporary period.

I propose that for world-oriented Iranian directors since the New Wave, the screen has functioned as a palimpsestic canvas, a powerful space for both historical memory and social commentary because of its ability to overlay events and compare disparate spatiotemporal realities within one intergeneric medium. Due to censorship in its many forms, the circulation and availability of Iranian New Wave films has been severely

curtailed. Still, certain transnational themes, motifs, and storylines not only continually recur, but re-emerge time after time in a very particular way—through experimentation with intergenre, and through the ability of cinema to juxtapose and overlay in its simultaneity of multiple images and sounds.

Through certain paradigmatic motifs, the directors whose work I examine explore the triangulation of genre, globality, and a third category that is constantly being interrogated and redefined in Iranian cinema—gender. Not just in the twenty-first century, but even in the 1960s, women were central to the work of Iranian experimental film, on both sides of the camera. I first examine two pivotal early New Wave films from the 1960s that redefined expectations of the cinema genre because of their radical blending of genres: Dariush Mehrjui's *Gāv* [*The Cow*] (1969) and Forugh Farrokhzad's *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* [*The House is Black*] (1962). Shifting to a contemporary counterpoint, I then examine the diasporic filmmaker Shirin Neshat's retelling of a pivotal moment in Iranian history in her filmic adaptation of Shahrnush Parsipur's novella *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* [*Women Without Men*] (2009), which reconfigures body, sound, and space around a multicultural cast and crew in order to question aesthetic and ethical paradigms surrounding war, peace, and freedom. Finally, I turn briefly to *Jodā'i-e Nāder az Simin* [*A Separation*] (2011), a socially palimpsestic film whose nuanced portrait of contemporary Iran's intergenerational and cultural struggles won the country's first Academy Award, to argue that the multi-layered techniques of New Wave cinema since the mid-twentieth century has brought nuance not just to art-house and experimental cinema, but even to the storylines and sociopolitical dynamics in more conventional narrative and commercial movies made in Iran today.

I. The Animal and the Outcast: Private and Public Dehumanization in Dariush Mehrjui's *Gāv*

Often cited as one of the most important early films of the Iranian New Wave, Dariush Mehrjui's masterpiece *Gāv [The Cow]* was banned by the Shah's censors for its unflattering images of Iranian rural society. The film was smuggled into the 1971 Venice Film Festival and became a sensation there—despite being a last minute addition to the program and lacking subtitles. It received the Critics' Award in Venice and continued to circulate around the world. Most major Iranian directors since then—Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Panahi, and Farhadi—claim it has been a major influence on their work. The screenplay of *Gāv* was written by the prominent dramatist and novelist Gholam Hossein Sa'edi, an ardent activist against government controls on publishers and filmmakers' work. Just five years after the film's release, Sa'edi was imprisoned and tortured by SAVAK, the Shah's secret police force. He remained in Iran for a short while after the Revolution, but ultimately became part of the Iranian diaspora in Paris, as so many other prominent figures in Iranian cinema have done. Iranian filmmakers have long had to negotiate the heartbreaking and vexing conundrum of whether to direct films from within the "real" Iran—but under the restrictions of censorship, both pre- and post-Revolution—or whether to direct an imagined, diluted vision of Iran represented from diaspora, but relatively unhampered by political restrictions.[6] *Gāv* walks a fine line on the

[6] Jafar Panahi's *In Film Nist [This is Not a Film]* (2011) provides a particularly incisive portrait of this dilemma. Panahi plays himself, a well-known filmmaker confined to house arrest in Tehran as he awaits the result of his appeal of a six-year prison sentence and a twenty-year ban on filmmaking. His apartment effectively becomes a place of exile as well as an ad hoc film set, and alternatively using a mounted tripod and his iPhone camera, he draws up and records plans for shots and blocking on his living room carpet in lieu of being able to produce his own planned film about an Iranian girl's life. He jumps back and forth between constructing his imaginary film set and obsessively re-watching

beginning of that historical razor's edge that has characterized Iranian cinema for over forty years since then.

While *Gāv* embodies this local/global dilemma as it pushes the boundaries of appropriate visual representation, the film simultaneously challenges the boundaries of genre as it overlays visual collage, slow-motion, freeze-frame shots, and other techniques of experimental cinema with other genres such as music, dance, and mime. Its layering of genres owes much to the close collaboration between Mehrjui and Sa'edi and their mutual construction of what Hamid Dabashi calls a "psychedelic realism, through its evocation of the supra-normal and the creative use of superstition, hallucination, and delusions, [that] effected an acute intensification of a literary awareness of reality" (109). It is clear that the collaboration between playwright and filmmaker allowed Mehrjui access to a literary imagination, while it armed Sa'edi with the deep space of the screen as well as the ability of cinematic devices to distort narrative time and space to great psychological effect. The portrait of Masht Hassan and his village that emerges is one that asks questions of deep global resonance, and one that operates beyond the usual confines of cinematic diegesis.

Ultimately, *Gāv* ushered in a decade of 1970s films by directors such as Amir Naderi, Abbas Kiarostami, Bahram Beyzai, and Sohrab Shahid-Saless that unflinchingly portrayed the realities of lower-class and rural Iranian life. The village Mehrjui depicts is typical in many ways, but it is also a strange dystopian world. In an early scene that depicts a group of children mocking and chasing the village idiot away, it is children who

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his old films on his DVD player, attempting to connect his present ideas to his past work. Meanwhile, the odd foreign presence of his pet iguana skulking around the disjointed shots echoes his inevitable drift away from contemporary Iranian cultural life.

are the threatening bullies, the tyrants of the community. The most important reversal of expectation, however, which is the central subject of the film, is the transgressed taboo of love between animal and human—and ultimately, the blurred line between those two categories, as the protagonist Masht Hassan's grief upon his beloved cow's death effectively transforms him into the deceased animal.

One repeated shot in the film is of a tiny cutout window in the central house in the village—the house of the village chief. The film frequently features a disembodied hand reaching out through the wall of the house giving tea to the men outside: the woman's hand, a constant silent presence of domestic support. This is the traditional view of marriage: the woman, silent, confined, in private, in servitude to the husband and the home; the man, vocal, free to move around, in public, engaged in dialogue and debate with other members of civil society. Masht Hassan and the cow are in some ways an alternate vision of this partnership. From the beginning of the film, their relationship represents a human-animal symbiosis: to him, the cow is clearly more than a piece of property. He caresses her and talks lovingly to her. He buys jewelry for her rather than his wife. As he literally goes to bed with her in the stables at night, she is illuminated by romantic moonlight. The cinematography of one scene, in which Masht Hassan and the cow bathe together in the river, employs a technique of accelerated collage that transcends the typical vocabularies of cinema of the period. In

contrast to the fixed visual dichotomy described above as imposed by the wall, in which men are foregrounded and women remain in the background, Masht Hassan and the cow constantly switch positions in this scene as the camera shoots them from all angles. This blurring of power lines occurs through sound as well—Masht Hassan speaks to the cow to a whimsical background soundtrack of music as their voices blend, and the genres of mime and dance interweave to make this a playful, carefree, yet graceful and almost edenic scene.

Gāv was filmed in the 1960s, when the women's rights movement was on the rise in the West and its reverberations could be felt around the world. Implicitly, even in Masht Hassan's remote, provincial village, the notion that a man's wife was his domestic property was coming to an end. Women could no longer be considered possessions, and Mehrjui alludes to this fact through the sudden loss of the cow. The first time viewers see a long, sustained shot focused in on a woman's face, it is that of Masht Hassan's wife grieving and wailing to announce the cow's death. In a subtle way, the release of the cow (in death) has thus enabled her to step into a public presence. Farzaneh Milani argues that a large part of the social impact of cinema in

Iran, and a tremendous source of frustration for filmmakers facing censorship restrictions, is precisely its ability to convert spaces and scenes from private to public. "Filmed spaces," she writes, "according to the laws governing the Iranian film industry, are public spaces. Whenever and wherever the eye of the camera is present, spectators can be assumed" (*WNS* 81). The presence of a videocamera in Iran is thus always-already political, putting private scenes on display for the public eye.

Dichotomies of power in *Gāv* can thus be read as existing on both of these levels, private and public. While boundaries are negotiated and tested internally, both in the family and in the village, there is also the shadowy omnipresent reality of the intruders whom the film implies are responsible for the cow's death. While they are never shown speaking or interacting, their foreignness is highlighted by silhouette-like shots such as the frame reproduced here, where they are positioned in the background of the shot atop a hill to amplify the sense of their ambiguous yet inevitable greater power. The film employs a black-and-white aesthetic: it uses darkness and shadows to great effect when these strangers invade the village by night, spreading fear and panic in the literary dystopia of a town whose morgue is located next to its central pool and meeting square. In a climate of terror both domestically and internationally—the villagers mistrust each other as much as they fear the threat from outside—there is little or no room for individual expressions of emotion such as the particular relationship of both love and mourning that Masht Hassan has with his cow. "In films such as Mehrjui's *The Cow*,"

Khatereh Sheibani writes, "society is signified as the decisive element in predetermining behaviour" (101).

Towards the end of the film, when Masht Hassan is living in his barn and has completed his behavioral transformation to effectively become the cow, the camera shows a repeated window-frame view out of the barn onto the villagers. Masht Hassan's psychological ostracism has reached its lowest point, and the viewer's perspective is no longer from outside looking in as in the first frame reproduced above, but from inside looking out from the domestic sphere.

Because Masht Hassan is disempowered and disgraced as a lunatic, he can no longer be considered part of the village community—but then again, the film implies, perhaps he never really was. He was defined by his animal—his purpose in life, the recipient of all his attention, his genuine partner and collaborator, which sustained him as he sustained her. When he is robbed of this equal partnership and must go on in the conventional inequality of his real human marriage, he very quickly goes insane. Chewing hay, shutting himself up in the barn, he wants to be confined to the domestic sphere, and prostrates and victimizes himself as the "cow" while he endlessly, desperately calls out to a fictional version of himself to "come save your cow." Separated from the community as

the villagers literally pull him on a leash to take him to a doctor, the protagonist dies on a remote mountaintop, a fully metamorphosed symbol of an outcast's disconnection from a brutally judgmental community. This is the ultimate disempowerment and demise of a male head of the household in Mehrjui's provincial village, and Masht Hassan's frailty reveals just how vulnerable patriarchal structures of family, power, and property can be—not just in rural Iran, but in any community across the world.

The suggestion that alternative domestic partnership structures are considered a threat to society echoes through several other masterpieces of world cinema, but in one such example, the ending scene directly echoes that of Masht Hassan's despair. This scene is

the final moments of Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*, released just a few years earlier in 1965. Like Masht Hassan, the main character Griffon defies the conventional expectations of the nuclear family by leaving his wife and children in favor of life as a fugitive on the run with Marianne Renoir. This challenge to society ultimately necessitates a dehumanization of the main character, as with his Iranian counterpart —while Masht Hassan becomes a cow, Griffon becomes "Pierrot," a sad clown whose exaggerated performative façade he fully embraces by the end of the film, when he paints his face and performs an act of mime that ultimately becomes unstoppable reality when he unintentionally blows himself up with dynamite. Mime functions as a transnational intergenre for Mehrjui as he makes Masht Hassan's parodic behavior echo that of Griffon, a palimpsestic image in response to the global and intractable problem of the changing family in provincial, judgmental

communities. Both films also amplify local judgment through the shadowy presence of foreign invaders, in Godard's case through the Algerian hitmen that constantly threaten Marianne and Pierrot's safety.

Several of Mehrjui's later films adapt the work of Western authors for the screen using stories and characters set in Iran: Saul Bellow's *Herzog* becomes *Hamoun* (1990); Henrik Ibsen's *A Dollhouse* becomes *Sara* (1994); and J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* becomes *Pari* (1995).[7] These marital and familial dramas are multiculturally oriented not only because they adapt literary works from other countries and cultures, but also through the experimental devices and themes they employ. In *Hamoun*, the title character's shock and disbelief at being spurned by his wife is portrayed through distorted visuals in dreamlike scenes often compared to Fellini. In *Pari*, the protagonist turns to the transnational texts of Sufi mysticism to overcome the anger and depression brought on by her brother's death. While Mehrjui's dialogue with the international film community is more visible in these later films, *Gāv* set a thematic precedent for the rest of his oeuvre by exploring a series of cross-culturally accessible themes: the difference between animal and human, the conflict between individual and society, and the dehumanization of those who do not conform to community standards.

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[7] According to Mehrjui, *Pari* was intended as an adaptation that would encourage transnational dialogue between filmmakers, but the movie was not warmly received by the author of its American literary precursor. The film was successfully screened in Iran due to a lack of copyright agreement between Iran and the U.S., but Salinger had a planned screening at Lincoln Center blocked citing intellectual property theft (http://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/21/movies/iranian-film-is-canceled-after-protest-by-salinger.html). Mehrjui responded: "This reaction is really quite bewildering. I don't want to distribute the film commercially. It's a kind of cultural exchange. I just want to let the film be seen for the critics and the people that follow my work."

II. The Genres of Empathy: Narrative Fragmentation and Cinematic Ethics in Forugh Farrokhzad's *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*

Seven years before *Gāv* was made, a young female poet, out of her depth in directing her first and only film in a location saturated with shame and taboo, made a film that is even more socially critical, even more intergeneric, and even more global: Forugh Farrokhzad's *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* [*The House is Black*] (1962). In just twenty-two minutes of running time, Farrokhzad's landmark documentary portrait of a leper colony in northern Iran operates through jarring audiovisual juxtapositions and moments of unconventional thematic layering as it quickly cuts to the heart of complex global ethical questions of suffering and justice. Unyielding close-ups of disfigured leprosy victims play against a voiceover background of a man coldly detailing medical symptoms, continually intersected with Farrokhzad's own voice, which invokes poetic Biblical verses on beauty and death accompanied by sweeping views of natural landscapes. The film overlays sequences of documentary, montage, and biography with a voiceover of Scriptural quotations and poetry to transcend the centrality of master narratives through unconventional combinations of form.

Known in her lifetime for her sexually explicit and dissident poetry, the divorced adoptive mother who embraced art as social criticism in several genres famously transgressed a range of social norms in both her work and her life. While chiefly known for her poetry, Farrokzhad made an indelible mark on Iranian New Wave cinema with *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*. The twenty-minute filmic poem brings humanity to its portrayal of a stigmatized segment of society, the Bababaghi leper colony near Tabriz, by employing a radical interweaving of genres—documentary, religious scripture, poetry, scientific

discourse, and historical reckoning—that ultimately endows the film with its global resonance. In simultaneously eliciting empathy through several visual and auditory modes, Farrokhzad's documentary project appeals to its viewers on multiple registers as it sets the stage for a globally oriented humanism in Iranian New Wave cinema, one that identifies transnational questions about compassion, suffering, equality, and dignity in a range of voices and discourses.



In a series of cinematic portraits of everyday life in Bababaghi, Farrokhzad unyieldingly portrays the leprosy patients with their disfigured faces and amputated limbs in full view without objectifying, pitying, or ridiculing them in any way. From its opening moments in darkness, the voiceover narration challenges the viewer to interrogate the standards of physical beauty that insidiously inform our very concept of the human. "On this screen," the calm narrative male voice explains, "will appear an image of ugliness, a vision of pain no caring human being should ignore." Although these initial disfigured subjects do not directly address the camera, the humanizing frontality of these shots bridges the gap of rumor, shame, and stigma normally associated with leprosy and breaks the spectator's reliance on voyeurism from a hidden and privileged vantage point. The characters' neutral, untangled and unbroken eye contact with the camera invites an equality of the gaze as it insists on audience engagement with their lives and stories.

The intergeneric strands woven throughout the film stem from the director's background in a multi-genre film production company. She learned the craft of filmmaking from studying with her mentor, lover, and long-term collaborator Ebrahim Golestan, who, as Naficy writes, "ensured the independence of his company by assembling a self-sufficient group of creative and dedicated film technicians and aficionados, most of whom lacked any film experience but would become prominent in cinema, literature, and journalism. Their work would lead to the creation of a workshop house style, namely, poetic realism." (vol. 2, 78). It is Golestan himself who delivers the clinically calm lines of the male voiceover—the only other voice who speaks words in the film besides Farrokhzad herself—but despite technically being listed as the film's producer, he played no decision-making role in the film besides contributing two individual shots. Farrokhzad shot the film in just twelve days, and completed all the editing herself, while he played a supporting role. Golestan was known for his flexible, improvisational approach to the translation of text onto screen, and reportedly never finished a script until a day or two before shooting began. He referred to his studio (Golestan Film Workshop, GFW) as a "workshop"—*"kārgāh,"* literally meaning "place of work" in Persian—as opposed to "studio" or another term with commercial overtones. To him, and to Farrokhzad, cinema was an experimental, flexible, and above all collaborative form as well as an instrument of social criticism—one whose combination of historical time with narrative diegesis and the spaciousness of the screen could unify several genres and their various strengths of articulation.

Farrokhzad was initially hired as a secretary, but soon became involved in many parts of the production process at GFW films, and her knowledge of the film industry was

both regional and international. She traveled to the UK for training in stock shot library archiving, and subsequently played a key production role in several GFW films: she edited *Yek Atash [A Fire]* (1958-61), with its populist images of Iranian farmers working in fields, and co-directed *Āb va Garmā* [*Water and Heat*] (1961), about the devastating heat wave in Abadan, and parts of the documentary series *Cheshmandaz [A View],* which documented the poor working conditions of laborers in the oil industry. She briefly appears on screen in a silent but crucial role in one of GFW's most groundbreaking films, *Khesht va Ayeneh [Brick and Mirror]* (1965), in which she plays a mother who abandons her infant in a taxi, leaving the driver and his female companion to care for the child throughout the film.[8]

As crucial as the visual dimension is in *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*—in its critique of different dynamics of the gaze, from fascination to admiration to voyeurism to disgust—the importance of sound in the film should not be overlooked. As a poet and a filmmaker, Farrokhzad sought to stretch the capacity of narrative sound to expand the restrictions imposed by a single language and seek unconventional languages that could connect viewers with her films' subjects—not just across social boundaries, beyond the leper colony and into the rest of Iran, but even globally. In *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, a disjuncture between the auditory and the visual is established from Golestan's opening lines that echo in darkness, warning the viewer about what will soon appear "on this screen." This

[8] An incisive critique of patriarchy, *Khesht va Ayeneh* portrays the woman as resolute and resourceful in navigating the unexpected and socially stigmatized situation in which they find themselves, while the man remains weak, panicked, and indecisive. The film also echoes *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* in its implicit embrace of an expanded definition of "family" based in empathy and humanism, with a powerful final scene that depicts the woman walking around an orphanage full of children who must rock themselves to sleep, since society has proven itself unable to care for them.

warning to remain alert puts the viewer in a state of sensory unease that keeps him or her from settling into cinema's usual lull of matching sound to image—the content of the lines delivered by the film's sequence of calm, detached narrators infrequently matches up to what is shown on screen in a direct or literal sense.

Naficy defines "poetic realism" as "a style through which filmmakers subverted the official style of the documentary and its direct, propagandistic force by various lyrical and symbolic uses of indirection, by contrapuntal strategies of sound and image editing, and by poetic narration" (vol. 2, 76). While he criticizes other poetic realist films as "word-driven films, weighed down by wall-to-wall, flowery voice-of-God voice-over narration, for which the images served only as symbolic illustrations," he praises *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* as an exception to this "authoritarian lyricism" (vol. 2, 88). Although there are few direct narrative connections between sound and image in the film, Farrokhzad's primary identity as a poet keeps the film's aural layers from seeming like detached commentary. Each contrapuntal assemblage of voiceover and image is carefully matched in mood and tone, as if Farrokhzad were reading aloud the emotional content of the screen in verse.

In the film, Farrokhzad's own voiceover of Biblical quotations tells a story of suffering and charity in the face of leprosy, a disease accompanied not only by extreme suffering but also by stigma and social ostracism. In a border-crossing contrast that challenges the kindness and justice of God and questions the internal logic of religious discourse in any cultural context, this voiceover also places the tyranny of Jeremiah 25:10 in dialogue with the anti-authoritarianism of John 19:11. The figure of God in the former verse says he will "take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness," but

Farrokhzad confronts this silencing authoritative tone with the latter verse's citation of Jesus, who declares: "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." With this contrast, *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* challenges the use of religious doctrine to pass judgment on others, and it is the separate nature of the genres Farrokhzad employs in video and audio that allows the film's statements about religion to carry beyond their immediate subject on screen. Because it operates through allusion, the voiceover is read both with the characters in the film, empathizing with the social ostracism they face, and beyond their plight, as a commentary on the moralizing climate in which Farrokhzad lived. It is the layering technique of voiceover, in this case, that situates the historical particularities of the Bababaghi patients within these larger global and interfaith questions about judgment and inequality, crystallized in the border-crossing voice of a Muslim woman working exclusively with references from the Bible.

Oddly enough, while the film relies on this disjuncture between the auditory and the visual registers, *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* was also the first Iranian film to use direct sound, in which the music, noise, and speech present at the moment of filming are recorded in the film. Unlike the more common sound editing technique of postsynchronization, in which sound is overlaid on top of silent image in the editing process, the use of direct sound forges a sense of realism and immediacy. Direct sound is one of the film's most journalistic aspects, and its impact is most profoundly felt in two instances: the repetitive chanting of one of the colony's patients, and the classroom scene that concludes the film.

A repetitive chanted song that echoes through a long sequence in the film first occurs through direct sound as the camera carefully captures the patient singing it by slowly and consistently panning from his dancing feet to his mutilated hands to his

impassioned face. Because the sound is live, the chanting seems to infuse his whole body, which is painstakingly scanned in detail, and he becomes inextricable from the music as his chosen language. Then, after this gradual panning portraiture, a series of striking still-life shots of more disfigured faces follow in quick succession as the chanting continues to echo in the background. Since the camera maintains frontality, it is unclear whether these faces are observing the chanting man in performance, or whether the chanting man has become a temporary narrator for the performance stills that follow, providing a musical storyline that vocalizes the pain-filled existence of the still-framed subjects' everyday lives. The chanting is cyclical, and it breaks with both perspectival and temporal conventions of spectatorship as it disturbs viewers' conceptions of character, dialogue, and story. It is reminiscent of the ululation characteristic of Iranian weddings—the repetitive power of a sound, repeated theoretically ad infinitum, to stop the passage of time in a Benjaminian sense, to halt the ruthless march of human history toward "progress." It makes the viewer pause and imagine alternate possibilities—not least, given the uniquely humanizing window into the normally dehumanized world of the leper colony that Farrokhzad gives viewers here, an alternate vision of community without oppressive hierarchy. Thanks to the careful combination of sound and image, the image of the man's dancing feet need only briefly flash across the screen later in the film to evoke this aural memory of community.

Although many physical deformities of the leprosy patients are confronted with empathy rather than stigma or shame throughout *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, Farrokhzad maintains a particular focus on one body part with deep cross-cultural and symbolic resonance: the hands. Before leprosy patients were confined to leprosariums cut off from the rest of

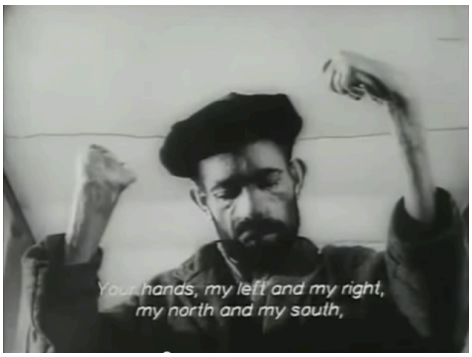
society, they often avoided contact with the hands of those who shunned them by using beggar's bowls such as the one portrayed in the image on the right below. The symbolism of hands cuts across myriad cultural contexts. Hands can mean friendship, but they can also mean violence. Hands can pray, they can bless, they can serve, they can strike and wound, they can caress, or they can meet to seal a truce. They can write, and their creative potential is certainly of central importance to Farrokhzad, who was primarily a poet. But hands also mean empowerment; they symbolize action.




As a marker of community, both local and transnational, the symbol of the Alam with the handprint of Hazrat Abbas is prominent in several scenes of both *Gāv* and *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*. This is a quintessential Shia symbol, and it shows the omnipresence of faith in two

very different kinds of communities—a provincial village and a shunned leper colony.[9] It also, however, subtly alludes to the transnational history of Islam. The use of the silver *panja* handprint on the top of an alam is equally (if not more) common in India and Pakistan. It also echoes the five-fingered hand symbol of the *hamsa*, which is central throughout the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in Judaism. From the very first moments of these films, the rituals present thus allude to deep and complex transnational histories.

In one *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* scene that depicts several patients in a mosque in supplication, the patient leading the prayer recites the words: "I leave my fate between your hands." Up unto this point in the prayer, the camera has panned steadily across the space of the mosque's interior, but once the word "hands" is uttered, the following images flash across the screen in quick succession, beginning with the mutilated hands of the man praying aloud:

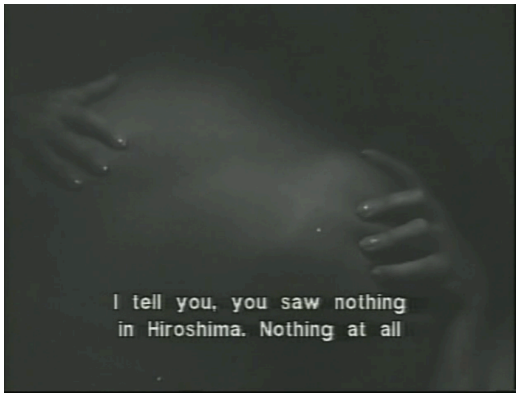


[9] Iranians' primary association with Hazrat Abbas is as the brother of Imam Hossein, the Third Imam of Shia Islam, who is said to have had his hands cut off by the enemy before he was ultimately martyred in the Battle of Karbala. Lacking hands, he is said to have brought water to a group of dehydrated children by carrying the jug with his teeth. It is because of Imam Hossein that hands are thus intimately associated with empathy, charity, and martyrdom for many Shiites.

Although the text of the prayer refers to reliance on divine authority, Farrokhzad pairs this spoken declaration of vulnerability with these images that illustrate varying degrees of human hands caring for others and caring for themselves—through medical attention, through holding a book, and through raising a fist up in defiance. The symmetry of these juxtaposed portraits strongly suggest a dependence not of prostrate supplicants on an invisible and unquestioned divine authority, but of questioning, suffering, and flawed human beings on each other—in Farrokzhad's case, as it turns out, she would play a personal role in alleviating a small part of that suffering.

The symbolism of hands evokes the practice of ethically responsive filmmaking—in which the actions of a real film crew might help remedy the seemingly untreatable pain featured on a movie screen—which extends to many global iterations of the New Wave aesthetic, not least Farrokhzad's investment in her subjects' lives during and after the

making of *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*. The film's use of hands as a symbol of human fragility, connectivity, and mutual dependence is also in subtle dialogue with a pivotal film from the French New Wave: the cross-cultural and intergeneric film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), directed by Alain Resnais with a screenplay by Marguerite Duras. The film, whose transnational questions have resonated with many prominent Iranian New Wave directors, opens with an extended closeup on a pair of woman's hands caressing her lover's skin, but the visual comfort of intimacy is immediately shattered by the stark denial of the repeated voiceover dialogue, in which the man rejects the woman's capacity to truly witness and comprehend a tragedy that happened in a different cultural context: "You saw nothing in Hiroshima." "I saw everything." Yet the hands on screen keep probing, as if searching for answers, and suddenly they are depicted as covered in a fine layer of dust, the dust of memory scattered by the ruins of atomic devastation.



By the last scene in the film, the Japanese man and the French woman who become the film's unnamed but central characters have not only confessed their respective secrets and traumas to each other—including his loss of his parents in the atomic bomb attack and her imprisonment in and brutal ostracism from her hometown, Nevers, after a love affair with a German soldier who ends up killed. Since their intimacy

has opened up old wounds, they have also become fresh sources of pain and trauma for each other, yet the couple seems magnetically drawn together as they attempt to say goodbye before her airplane leaves for France. Once again, it is their hands that provide the crucial catalysts of action in these final frames:

"Hi-ro-shi-ma," she slowly enunciates. "That's your name." He responds with his hand covering her mouth: "Yes, that's my name. Yes. And your name is Nevers. Nevers in France." Despite the tremendous intimacy they have shared, the two characters are still ultimately defined by their nationalities and their respective places in history, and the film's intense attempts to bridge the cataclysmic gap between them come to a tragic end in the raw, personal nature of postwar trauma.

The final moments of Farrokhzad's film similarly provide a sobering reckoning with the fate of its subjects, which is to be quarantined and ostracized on the outskirts of society. The camera keeps a steady frontal focus on the patients gathered in a crowd as the gates of the leprosarium close on them slowly—gates emblazoned with the words "Jezām Khāneh" ["House of Leprosy"]. The physical fact of the leprosarium thus not only literally encloses the patients and predetermines the course of their lives, but the patients are, through the motion of the closing gates, gesturally labeled as literally overlaid and thus defined by Bababaghi, their place of isolation.

The parallels between *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* are striking, not just because of the use of hands as a central motif and because they both conflate identity and traumatic site, but because of their common meditation on action and inaction, healing and reconciliation across seemingly intractable social and cultural differences. Like Farrokhzad's clinical scenes from the doctor's office in the leprosarium, a montage of conventional notions of "healing," Resnais features a series of horrific images from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum: replicas of missiles, diagrams of the mushroom cloud, melted steel railings and twisted bicycle frames, and matted clumps of shed human hair. The building, erected in 1955, and its artifacts catalog and historicize the facts of the atomic bombing in a memorial museum's usual efforts to document and come to terms with the violence and tragedy of the past. Released only a few years after the museum was built, the film refuses such compartmentalization of the past, just as Farrokhzad's complex portrait of the leprosy patients' humanity and suffering rejects the doctor's matter-of-fact claims that "leprosy goes with poverty" and "wherever lepers have been adequately cared for, the disease has vanished."

As she describes the artifacts in the museum to her Japanese lover, the French woman in Resnais' film insists, "I saw myself." He rejects her shallow attempt at empathy with one of the film's best-known lines: "You are not endowed with memory." Eventually, however, she is able to approach empathy—if only temporarily—not by taking in the pre-arranged sights of the museum, the hospital, political demonstrations or any of the other detached visual observations in which she engages, but through taking part in an active reconstruction of the events herself. As it turns out, what brings her to Hiroshima is her participation as an actress in an "international film about peace," and some of the most constructive and productive sections of dialogue between the two lovers take place on the set of her film. Resnais insisted on mirroring the bicultural relationship onscreen in the circumstances of the movie's production, filming *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in both Japan and France with film crews of both nationalities. Although, in a postwar historical moment of 1959, it would have been disingenuous to portray a French-Japanese love story that was not shot through with the tragic remnants of wartime, the very circumstances of the film's production infuses it with a small glimmer of hope.

Hiroshima Mon Amour also had a significant impact on other Iranian directors whose films grappled with cataclysmic historical events that divide cultures. Among them is Fereydun Goleh's *Zir-e Poost-e Shāb [Under the Skin of the Night]* (1974), which features an impossible love affair between an impoverished young man in Tehran and a female American tourist, who is scheduled to depart the following day. The movie again suggests that the film industry is a source of refuge and of possible cultural connectivity, as the man makes his living peddling movie tickets and sleeps under the cinema seats by night. More recently, director Bahman Pour-Azar collaborated with the

Japanese-American writer Jun Kim on *Where or When* (2008), which is entirely created by intercutting sequences from *Hiroshima Mon Amour* with the film's own scenes portraying two modern-day bicultural relationships that are saturated with the guilt and trauma of larger political violence.

In the classroom built for the children in Bababaghi in *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, the following scene unfolds: When a young boy is asked what is ugly, his reply is "Hand, foot." Although his classmates giggle and the teacher's face is merely filled with pity, the boy's response is actually very telling about the difficulty of finding values to consider "universal" or "global." The leprosy patient's hand is only "ugly" because it does not conform to societal standards of beauty, one of many ways in which humanity is self-isolating and self-crippling. The house is black not with disease, but with isolation. Another young boy in the class is then asked to name four "beautiful things." While three of the "beautiful things," to the boy, are neutral natural features—"moon, sun, flower"—it is the fourth item he lists that is most revealing. While the hands and feet used in games are "ugly," the playfulness of the fourth word, "game," is itself considered by the children to be beautiful—perhaps because it implies communication, relationships, and togetherness. Through this one brief but instructive line, a microcosm of Farrokzhad's entire cinematic portrait of Bababaghi Leprosarium, Farrokhzad implies that even the most isolated members of Iranian society yearn for and value expanding their horizons beyond the local and the national.

One of the most well-known paratextual stories about *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, and the subject of its own documentary (*Moon, Sun, Flower, Game* (2008)) is its biographical context: how the empathy Farrokhzad portrayed on screen spilled out of this classroom

scene and permanently changed the course of her own life. The young boy who utters the lines "moon, sun, flower, game" in the film, Hossein Mansouri, was the child of two leprosy patients who was not himself afflicted with the disease. At the wishes of his parents, and after becoming attached to the boy over just twelve days of filming, Farrokhzad adopted Mansouri, and raised him as a single mother for the next five years before her tragic death. Knowing the mother-child intimacy that was developing between subject and filmmaker as the classroom scene was being shot, it is difficult to watch this scene without keeping in mind Farrokhzad's personal stakes in expanding the genre of documentary film. Her involvement, as a director, in her subjects' lives translates into an empathy of technique, and turns the camera's typically blank eye into an engaged spectator, a lens that allows for ethical encounter.

Negar Mottahedeh writes: "For feminist film theory, the possibility of producing a counter-cinema by 'combating form with form,' by disrupting point-of-view constructions and frustrating narrative unity, suggests … investment in the malleability of vision and the possibilities of sensorial reconstitution through film technologies" (*Displaced Allegories* 156). Through reconstituting the relationship between viewer and subject in *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*'s palimpsests of image and sound, in its symbolic use of hands, and even in the configuration of her own family, Farrokhzad set a wide and daring precedent for other feminist New Wave filmmakers who have imagined alternate futures for Iran through the symbolic distortion of time on screen. This ranges from the two girls whose childhoods are put on pause as they are kept under house arrest in Samira Makhmalbaf's *Sib* (1998), to the female driver's taxi that acts as a temporary confession booth for her passengers across all segments of Tehran society in Abbas Kiarostami's

Dah [Ten] (2002), to the magical-realist garden established as an alternative feminist community based on Sharhnush Parsipur's novella in Shirin Neshat's *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* (2009).

Beyond the world of the leprosarium, international critics of the film have read Farrokhzad's cinematic call for cross-cultural understanding between those on the inside and outside of this particular disease in a more global light. Jonathan Rosenbaum, cinema critic and co-translator of the film's English subtitles, credits *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* as the primary film that set not only the aesthetic but also the ethical tone for the Iranian New Wave, a commitment to socially conscious cinema that still characterizes Iranian cinema today: "While Iranians continue to be among the most demonized people on the planet, Iranian cinema is becoming almost universally recognized as the most ethical, as well as the most humanist" (260-261). Through experimenting with the aesthetic and ethical limits of the documentary film genre, Farrokhzad set a precedent for New Wave directors to question a range of social, cultural, and national norms through the unconventional blending of genres.

III. Shirin Neshat's *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān*: The "Grassroots" Spatial Practice of Diasporic Cinema and the Benjaminian Moment of Tehran, 1953

The Iranian New Wave flourished in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, but because of the fraught relationship between filmmakers and the government, the film industry in Iran had fallen into a deep financial and artistic crisis by 1978. This was the year of the single most destructive event in the history of Iranian cinema: the fire at Cinema Rex in Abadan that killed hundreds, set by four arsonists whose identity was in doubt for decades after the event, with speculations that they could have been either anti-

Shah religious extremists or agents of the Pahlavi regime. Trial proceedings long after the Khomeini regime was established proved their links to anti-Shah clerics, but by then the outrage surrounding the event had long since done its damage in fueling popular anger against the Shah and the "corruptive" nature of Western-influenced mainstream cinema in Iran, which had become gradually sensationalist in its sex and violence onscreen while the New Wave films unfolded along an entirely separate trajectory of allegory and social critique.

The early years of the Islamic Republic, Naficy writes, brought a "reconceptualization of cinema from a despised agent of corruption and othering to an agent of nation-building and selfing" (vol. 3, xxiv). 1979 to 1981, the years in which Ayatollah Khomeini ascended to power and during which the hostage crisis at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran brought a violent and decisive rupture to diplomatic relations between Iran and America, brought a nationwide purge that shut down one-third of Iran's movie houses and imposed bans on importing foreign films. The bans actually increased domestic film production to fill the void, but the filmmaking process remained heavily state-controlled. Directors, actors, and screenwriters who were considered too closely affiliated with the Shah became victims of this purported purification process—often charged with corruption, but sometimes on fabricated counts of pornography, prostitution, or political dissent, they were thrown in jail, had their possessions confiscated, and some, such as Mansur Baqerian and Seth Petrosiants, were even executed (Naficy vol. 3, 35). This group of persecuted artists included Sa'edi, the cultural icon and screenwriter of *Gāv*, who famously declared at a press conference in New York

City that "harsh and stifling censorship in today's Iran has destroyed all utterances of opinion and all freedoms of the pen and of expression" (Naficy vol. 2, 430).

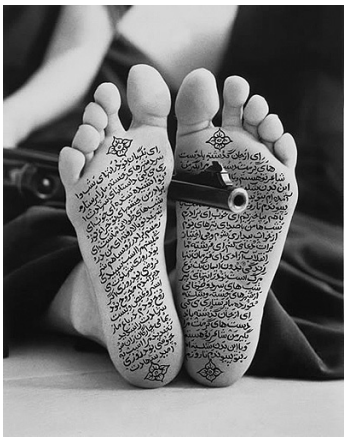
Notably, and surprisingly, the presence of women increased tremendously on both sides of the camera under the new Islamicate cinema. By the 1990s and early 2000s, a new generation of female directors such as Rakhshan Bani-E'temad, Samira Makhmalbaf and Tamineh Milani had risen to prominence in the industry. These women forged their distinctive styles and voices in Iranian cinema despite the legal stigma that women now had to bear under a constitution that explicitly valued their lives as worth half that of men's, and despite aesthetic limitations on film that prevented women from appearing without *hijab* or in a variety of types of mise-en-scène alongside men that might be deemed inappropriate and un-Islamic. Farrokhzad had paved the way for this new generation of feminist filmmakers, who have won awards at major international art house film festivals from Los Angeles to Cairo to Cannes.

Persecution, however, remains a fact of life for many of Iran's most gifted filmmakers, and while some, such as Jafar Panahi, have remained in Iran with careers curtailed by prison sentences or bans on future work, others have felt compelled to emigrate and continue their filmmaking careers from diaspora without the constant threat of censorship and criminal punishment. As an Iranian artist who left Iran before the Revolution and whose entire career has unfolded in diaspora, but for whom the self-described "controversial" nature of her work would in any case prevent her from filming in Iran, Neshat's work has played a particularly powerful role in interculturally translating the paradoxes of Iran's history and society to a Western art-house audience despite never shooting on location in Iran. As Neshat's work pairs local details of Iranian

politics and literature with natural and urban scenery that could be anywhere in the world, and places her intimate portraits of human bodies and lives against this fluid transnational backdrop, it is the thoughtfully assembled mosaic of genres including music, dance, radio, still-life painting, and large-scale visual installation in her work that allows her to speak in local and global registers simultaneously, as a third-culture citizen of world cinema.

In her 1990 photography series *Women of Allah* and the 1998-2000 short film trilogy *Turbulent/Rapture/Fervor*, Neshat provides highly stylized assemblages of local Iranian spaces and bodies, calling upon Farrokhzad's poetry as literary "muse" and endowing spatial narratives with a stark timeless simplicity that can be read as a consequence of the nostalgia that often characterizes diasporic art. Neshat frequently makes use of herself as a model in still photography, and her *Women of Allah* images are restricted to a repetitive minimalist vocabulary of the veiled body, the weapon, and the text of Farrokhzad's poems among others.





Lindsey Moore scrutinizes the romanticized undertones of *Women of Allah*, citing Neshat's acknowledgment that "'the first group of work that I produced … was a way of

reconciliation with a lost past.' Her 'self-investment,'" Moore argues, "nostalgically re-enacts the performative role of martyrdom, and attempts to collapse her individual (in)experience into an idealized communal subjectivity" (8). The photo series thus enacts a stark iconographic reclamation of the corporeality underlying female martyrdom, not through a gratuitous "unveiling" but through intimacy with instruments of violence and physical inscription of Farrokhzad's poetry onto the subjects' skin. The interstitial nature of Farrokhzad's poetry permeates the project and its additional intergeneric acts of layering, since the poems conflate classical ghazal imagery with modern tropes of mechanization to depict post-Edenic spaces. Farrokhzad thus supplies a literary and historical point of access for Neshat as the artist in diaspora attempting to convey the language of Iranian women in their everyday existence to the primarily Western audience of her photography.

Neshat's first full-length feature, *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* [*Women Without Men*] (2009), is based on the 1989 novella of the same name by Shahrnush Parsipur, but historicizes and politicizes the plot against the backdrop of the CIA-sponsored 1953 *coup d'état* against Mossadegh. In entering the full-length motion picture genre while insisting on each frame of the film as "a piece of a poem," as she did during an April 2010 talk at the School for Visual Arts (SVA) in New York, Neshat develops an ability to accommodate different forms of affect beyond the capacities of ethnographic-mimetic or nostalgic-diegetic modes often ascribed to diasporic art. Despite the relative youth of Iranian diasporic cinema as a genre, Neshat's insistence on "grassroots" as a spatial metaphor for her recent work suggests the potential of a new *verticality* expressed in dialectic artistic production and political commentary vis-à-vis new, decentered,

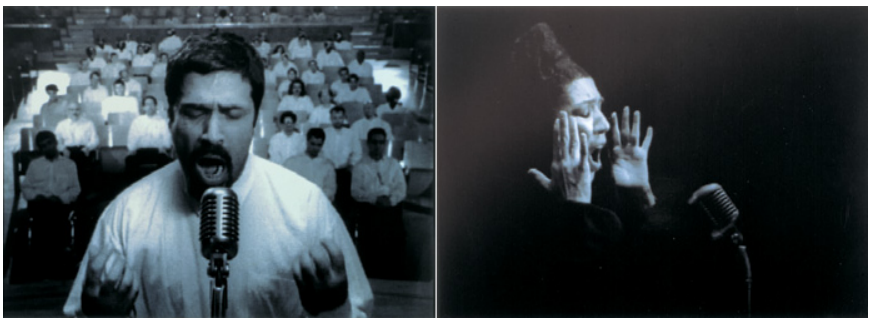
transnational resistance movements based in new media. In the post-Revolutionary era, Neshat has effectively harnessed Farrokhzad's ethos of documentary activism and applied it to a global network of Iranian avant-garde cinema that explores questions of authority, community, and belonging. Through her explicit dialogue with Parsipur's novella and the anti-voyeuristic multiplicity of women's bodies implied in her camera work, Neshat participates in a dialogic continuum of performative "surrogation," in Joseph Roach's terms, between Iranian exilic and local politics.

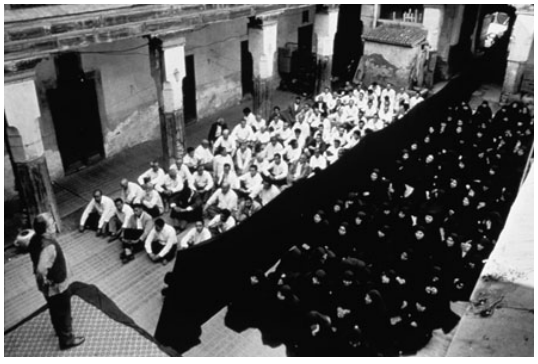
To explain the distance and minimalism that characterizes much of the post-Revolutionary Iranian film aesthetic, Mottahedeh proposes a historical argument:

> In an effort to produce a national cinema against the voyeuristic gaze of dominant cinema, the post-Revolutionary film industry was charged with reeducating the national sensorium and inscribing a new national subject-spectator severed from dominant cinema's formal systems of looking. The industry was asked not only to represent another world, a purified Shiite world, but also to produce a new national body unhampered by the conventions and codes that habitually render time and space continuous and hence realistic in dominant cinema's scopophilic and voyeuristic procedures. (2)

In an apparent diasporic response to this national religious directive, Neshat's video installations *Turbulent*, *Rapture*, and *Fervor* employ the device of the split screen to simultaneously concentrate and diffuse the polarized, scopophilic gaze. The three pieces, respectively, depict extremes of performative, natural, and religious spatiality to imagine three sensory reclamations of feminist spatial practice, while their black-and-white

aesthetic emphasizes a growing divide between genders in Iran as well as between "home" and diaspora. Just as the standalone "statement" images in *Women of Allah*, the separate screens of *Turbulent*, *Rapture*, and *Fervor* traffic in visual extremes: white-clad men singing or speaking in public spaces; black-*chadored*, silent women in private spheres.





In each film, the split screen ironically positions contemporaneous images of men and women face-to-face, and yet renders them unobservable by a single spectator in the same moment. As Neshat's diegetic, once-removed interpretive response to the "negative aesthetics" Mottahedeh argues emerged due to Khomeini's "purification" codes (7), this technique serves a quintessential example of "responsive" diasporic cinema. The series is also immersive and multi-perspectival—in installation form, the videos play simultaneously on loop on opposite walls of the screening rooms while the viewer sits in between, necessitating a choice of where and what to look at first. This technique of auditory and visual overload engages the viewer in the project of assembling representations of Iran from these various vantage points, and denies the possibility of passive spectatorship.

In a marked insistence on "grassroots" production that exemplifies a dialectic *with* the local, Neshat's recent cinematic adaptation of *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* ironically escapes the distancing historicism of the diegetic mode and instead resists the dominance of univocal narrative that is typical of feature films. This dialectic mode, engaging with both Parsipur's novella and the specific historical moment of Tehran in 1953, enables Neshat's local/diasporic enactment of a Benjaminian historical "awakening" through a consistent scopic multi-perspectivalism. Through the ordering of key historical and sociopolitical fragments by imbuing an Iranian magical-realist literary work with an insistently transnational and modern aesthetic, Neshat's use of cinematic palimpsest tells a global story that is multivocal without becoming cacophonous.

Part of the crucial utility of 1953 for this purpose is that it marks a moment in the national consciousness prior to the formation of Iranian diasporic culture around 1979

and onwards. In 1953, when Prime Minister Mossadegh had just nationalized Iran's oil industry, the country found itself on the cusp of an economic and political reality independent of colonial interests. The coup that would foreclose this possibility, however, operated not as a colonial invasion or occupation, but instead under the counter-nationalist guise of the highly Westernized but ultimately Iranian Pahlavi monarchy. Naficy explains Iran's complex position within the field of colonial discourse as follows:

> Iran was never colonized by the West directly, and Iranian exiles cannot accurately be called postcolonial. Although colonialism was brutal and unjust for the colonized subjects, the shared experience of colonialism and the imposed colonial language ironically produced certain positive side effects for the postcolonial subjects who emigrated to Western metropolitan centers. The most important of these is, in Gayatri Spivak's words, 'access to the culture of imperialism,' which allowed postcolonials to 'critique, yet inhabit intimately,' that culture (1993, 60). This access created the necessary distance that also positioned them to critique their own native culture and to create counterhegemonic identities … Iranians, who had not experienced direct colonialism and its imposed language and culture at home, could not benefit in exile from the collective identity, the ease of communication, and the intimate access and cultural mastery that these vestiges of colonialism offered. (*An Accented Cinema* 74-75)

From the emigrated Iranian artist's position, this lack of access to any kind of pan-diasporic postcolonial revisionist aesthetic was compounded by the American government's uniquely strained relations with Iran and the prevalence of conspiracy

theory throughout the 1980s, which began with the hostage crisis and continues today. The Iranian-American diaspora still feels relatively *recent*, separated more by the high drama of still-relevant political violence than by generational and cross-cultural divides. As a result, Naficy argues that the "interstitial" mentality of Iranian diasporic artists is characterized by the "liminal space of exile more than the settled niche of ethnicity" (*AAC* 76). This contingency due to the lack of diaspora-space makes for a greater intimacy with the multifaceted Iran Neshat depicts in her moments of visual and aural, historically inflected palimpsest. The film continually layers and reconfigures contemporary aesthetics with mid-twentieth century politics and timeless magical-realist elements.

As discussed above, Farrokhzad's *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* operates through jarring audiovisual juxtapositions: the close-ups of the disfigured leprosy victims; the sweeping views of natural landscapes intercut with painfully intimate scenes of medical procedures and personal grooming; the cold, clinical tone of Golestan's voiceover; the impassioned chanting and prayers of the patients; and the soothing and dirge-like voice of Farrokhzad herself, invoking poetry as well as Biblical verses on beauty and death. Neshat echoes this aesthetic of contrast and tense juxtaposition in *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* by constantly juxtaposing "documentary" historical-political scenes such as demonstrations, police raids, and radio broadcasts with spatio-temporally transcendent slow-motion sequences, such as the careful sequence of frames that follows the character of Munis as she falls from the roof at the end of the film. "All that we wanted was to find a new form, a new way. Release," Munis's eerily calm voice narrates from behind the camera, and Neshat

pointedly disassociates her death from the macabre voyeurism of a single viewpoint by filming the fall in a series of decelerated shots.




In this multi-perspectival sequence, Munis's contemplative face is first shot in close-up from below; then, she is removed from view and replaced by the same corner of the stone roof that was shown in the film's opening frames; then, the sideways body is shown falling down the screen from top to bottom; finally, a bird's-eye-view of Munis lying still on the ground zooms out to contextualize the image of her dead body at a respectful distance.

Jasmin Darznik hints at the utility of this invocation of Farrokhzad's techniques as a diachronic link between local and exilic elements in Neshat's work: "When Iranian exiles deploy [Farrokhzad's] life and art to tackle such subjects as social justice and human rights, they are writing not just to America about Iran, but sometimes also to America about itself … to consider with fresh attention the long-running and storied entanglement of America and the Middle East embodied in the art and literature of the

Iranian diaspora" (115). In her transition from the conceptual and figurative sphere of art photography, audiovisual installations, and short films to the more necessarily narrative realm of feature filmmaking, Neshat nonetheless disavows any claim to political "representativeness," insisting that "the artist and the activist can coexist in one person. If you only look at the work as a statement on Islam or on the question of woman," she continued, "the work will fall flat" (Neshat, SVA).

Since her collaboration with Parsipur, Neshat describes her work as a "monologue grown into a dialogue": "I'm never able to see anything in totality," she has remarked. "I can never completely 'speak the truth' about Iran *or* about the United States" (Neshat, SVA). While Farrokhzad's audiovisual vocabulary may thus provide one point of contact between Iran and its diaspora, Neshat's work employs a multiplicity of spatio-temporal techniques that avoids both the mimesis of documentary and the diegesis of narrative fiction in her political adaptation of Parsipur's *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* and its four heroines: Munis the political revolutionary, her unmarried best friend Faezeh, Zarin the prostitute, and the divorcée Fakhri, wealthy patroness of the arts. In the novel, the spatial practice of Parsipur's characters unfolds through a revisionary feminist aesthetic of performative funereal ceremony, resisting the static, "timeless" national culture of memorialization and martyrdom that Tehran's Shiite clerics attempt to instill. The author employs a hybrid of Islamic shrine-pilgrimage tropes on one hand, and transnational magical realist techniques on the other, to "resurrect" her female protagonists from various symbolic psychological "deaths"—such as widowhood, prostitution, or political radicalism—and allow for their migration to a house in a mystical garden in Karaj as a space of feminist utopian exile.

Parsipur's novella contains many more "magical" elements than Neshat's film version, including the fifth woman named Mahdokht who, as discussed in my introduction, "turn[s] into a tree" (11) and scatters herself "all over the world" in the form of seeds (122). Neshat felt Mahdokht was "too magical" a character for the film version, and instead chooses to render the historical context of Tehran, 1953, with its U.S.-orchestrated coup against Mossadegh, much more explicit than Parsipur does. Only two of the episodic, single-narrator chapters in the book explicitly mention 1953—the respective first chapters written in the voices of Faezeh and Munis. In line with Parsipur's subversive invocation of a historical setting prior to the post-Revolutionary regime she arguably aims to critique, Neshat avoids a directly critiquing position as "diasporic" or notably divorced from Iran's historical continuum. She instead invests in the process of national imaginary-creation, acknowledging by her camera work the different visual vocabularies that censorship has compelled local artists to employ for the past thirty years, and exploring how those vocabularies have evolved in spatio-temporal terms.

Like Benjamin in his *Arcades Project*, Neshat's appropriations of Iranian historical "fragments"—such as hand-painted "British Go Home" banners, royalist army uniforms, or Communist flyers distributed by Munis and Ali—articulate a distinctly diasporic and detached, yet carefully curated form of historical commentary. Her ordering of those fragments operates neither through heavily ideological appropriation of standalone historical "facts" that selectively recall events from history in order to produce a simplistic narrative; nor through unordered "collage" that would lose meaning in its inaccessibility. Despite its visual distortions and repetitions, there is a dynamic plot progression in *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān*—Munis falls to her death in an act of desperation;

Ali is killed as a result of his revolutionary activities; Zarin dies, presumably of her wounds or diseases from years of being subjected to sexual violence. Crucially, however, the varying speeds and angles of Neshat's camera, coupled with the film's careful layering of voiceover and dialogue, allow viewers of the film to perceive the forces of narrative as multi-dimensional.

A close reading of one specific type of spatial practice projected through women's bodies in Neshat's film—that of death as a process beyond the static historicization of martyrdom—may help illustrate the pivotal force of this multi-perspectivalism within the film's overall effect. As previously noted, Mottahedeh explains that theocratic prescriptions governed by rules of "modesty" led to the post-Revolutionary Iranian cinema's near-universal deployment of "negative aesthetics" such as eschewing "shot-reverse shot" constructions, meant to deny the spectator a "Western" voyeuristic gaze on female bodies (16). This led to an embrace of the "modest, averted gaze" for filmmakers such as Kiarostami. For Neshat, a dialogic response to this directive has meant creating an *excessive* gaze that supplants voyeurism rather than denying it, through the use of close-ups, multiple angles, and consistently non-dramatized unveiling. Neshat's camera obfuscates the role of the desiring gaze because it refuses the one-dimensional stability of the object. Thus removing the basic premise of visual objectification, it instead turns the female body into a multi-directional *subject*. Through the notable recurrence of female corpses in the film, Neshat adopts a fluid multiplicity to problematize simplistically "victimizing" corporeal expressions of bodily pain and death. The female body cinematically endowed with *agency*—political in the case of Munis, sexual in the case of Zarin—receives unmediated scopophilic sympathy in multiple reversals of angles,

ultimately refusing both a one-dimensional martyrdom aesthetic and a limited, one-dimensional view of these women's stories in the way that Iranian women's stories are so often told to Western audiences in reductive terms.

The film's opening lines are spoken by Munis in omniscient narration, as a freeze-frame close-up of her face dominates the screen: "And I thought, the only freedom from pain is to be free from the world." The camera pans slowly around behind her windblown hair, which is fixed as in mid-flight, to reveal her backdrop of gray roof and blue sky. With a row of self-consciously out-of-place pyramids in the background, Neshat indirectly "confesses" from the first moment that the film could not have been shot in Tehran. (Palm trees, also not native to Tehran, later appear in the forest scenes in a confirmation of this visual place-dissociation between the subject and circumstances of the film's production.) In contrast to the immobilization of Munis's body, the *chador* that would enable her movement through public space falls to the ground in real-time speed in the next frame.

The dissonant combination of freeze-frame, slow-motion, and real-time cinematic temporality in just these few opening moments set the tone for the film's persistent questions about time, history, and progress, hinting at the diachronic, interwoven relationship between an exile's static historical portrait of lived experience in Iran and the dynamic nature of engagement with ongoing political events.

When we next encounter Munis, the camera narrows its focus on the young woman as she sits on her bedroom floor with her legs folded beneath her, leaning intently against the radio that broadcasts news of rising tensions between Mossadegh and the British. When her brother Amir-Khan enters to demand that she cook dinner and threatens to "break both her legs", the camera shoots him from below, equating the spectator's perspective with that of the angry but powerless younger sister in a seemingly "victimizing" move. At this moment, Munis turns on the radio and momentarily drowns out the stifling nature of the on-camera dialogue through the interjection of another genre, that of the public broadcast that connects her to the outside world. Notably, however, Munis's sudden and mysterious death in the film is not dramatized in the violent stabbing scene with Amir-Khan that is central to Parsipur's novella and its symbolic "martyrdom" of Munis. Instead, in Neshat's film, her corpse simply appears by their swimming pool in Tehran with no narrative explanation, and Faezeh despairs to discover it. The violence that has killed her thus appears systemic and implicitly part of a global epidemic of violence against women, not demonized in the form of a specifically Iranian male character.

Later, in perhaps the most explicitly magical-realist carryover from the novel, Faezeh hears the ghostly whispers of her buried friend and proceeds to unearth her still-living body in awestruck silence. The trajectory of camera shots is explicit in this moment of resurrection: after violently jerking herself up from the ground, Munis immediately walks towards the pool and plunges in, hands grabbing the sides as if assuring her control over the extent of her escapist submergence. The camera enters slow-motion mode in this liminal moment between resurrection-from-murder and self-

administered “baptismal” rebirth, echoing the film’s opening shot of Munis on the precipice of falling—or perhaps jumping?—from the roof.

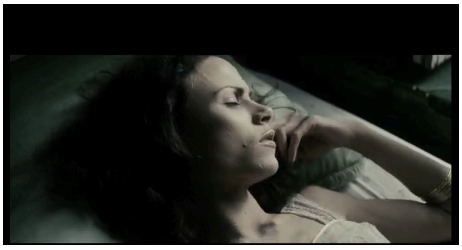
The next time Neshat halts the camera on Munis’s face, she has entered a specifically political context.

Freed from Amir-Khan’s restrictions now that he believes her to be dead, she has donned a black *chador* and finds herself on a busy street corner amidst a convergence of two demonstrations comprised of white-clad men—one pro-Mossadegh, the other pro-Pahlavi. Neshat shows Munis’s face sharply outlined against the blurry sea of men in two consecutive close-ups, in both of which her gaze is averted as if to refuse a direct appeal to the spectator for “identification” as a traditional protagonist, which would limit and shepherd the audience’s sympathies. In one shot, the crowd faces the same direction as Munis; in the other, only the backs of their heads are visible. In this surrealist shot/reverse shot construction, Neshat omnipotently “spins” Munis’s body around to

indicate that her identification with either political side would be untenable. This reversal also illustrates another double impossibility: that of artistically depicting revolutionary scenes within either the hierarchical Othering of the Western cinematic gaze, on the one hand, or the separatist "negative aesthetic" solitude of the Shiite "purism" Mottahedeh describes, on the other. Munis's voice echoes in the background, possibly suggesting a third hope for political efficacy in diasporic, post-exilic "death" through the aforementioned vertical dialectics of Neshat and Parsipur: "The will that moves all things had come back to me," she narrates, "not just to be, but to act."

Neshat's camera shows Munis from several angles to add nuance and complexity to her political identity, and thus refuse the lack of choice she is given as a female character. The combination of intimate frontal shots and shots with greater depth of focus serve not only to visually empower Munis as the protagonist, but also to highlight her character's insistence on a nuanced, flexible, and mobile positionality in male-dominated spaces from her family home to political demonstrations in the street. While Neshat's shots of Munis revolve mainly around her face, a counterpoint to this multi-perspectival portrait is found in the character of Zarin, the prostitute whose representation is both socially and aesthetically determined by her body. Neshat's camera work somberly acknowledges the tremendous burden that Zarin's physical body represents to her, but the constant shifting of angles and distances as she films Zarin does serve to challenge tired yet persistent and demeaning trope of sexual objectification through the cinematic gaze. Ultimately, however, there is no form of corporeality that can fully liberate Zarin as she undergoes symbolic death after symbolic death in the film. Capturing the young woman's despair through a combination of closeup, gesture, portraiture, and allusion, Neshat

conveys the multiple factors in the complicated destructiveness of the social fabric that caused her death.




One of the film's earliest images of Zarin is a close-up of her face as she lies on the bed midway through a routine coital act, her hopeless and bitter gaze fixed out into the room as the bed rattles and creaks and her body is violently shoved up and down by her off-camera customer. Utterly divorced from her corporeal reality in this initial frame, Zarin's first "death" in the film thus occurs within a male-determined scene of sexual violence.

In a graphic scene soon afterwards, Zarin is pictured naked in the bathhouse, her muscles gradually tensing up as she crouches downwards, scrubbing her skin raw with increasing ferocity to the point of bleeding. The camera's next extensive full-body shot of Zarin occurs once she has climbed through a hole in the wall to the escapist garden, and her body lies outstretched as it floats unconscious in the pond. The image of Zarin floating on water certainly alludes to Tennyson's Lady of Shallot and the iconic John William Waterhouse painting it inspired, as well as to Shakespeare's Ophelia. In so

doing, Neshat invokes a transnational interrogation of the mystification of female beauty, especially in a passive state, pictured as one with nature. Zarin's passivity, from the first closeup to her outstretched body in the pond, shows the powerlessness of women trapped in the tyranny of various domestic prisons even after they escape, even in the mystical liminal space beyond national identity that Parsipur's novella creates for her. Fakhri finds her and saves her from this second "death," adopting Zarin "as her own daughter," and the two live a quiet, solitary existence along with Faezeh for a while. This adoption is another potential allusion to Farrokhzad's off-screen empathetic engagement with her subjects in *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, as well as other New Wave directors' narrative challenges to traditional family structures.

Once Fakhri announces her intent to host a garden party with guests from Tehran, Zarin's bodily tension rapidly returns.

Neshat's wide-lens camera pictures her crouching down just as she did in the bathhouse, tensely planting a row of oddly unnatural-looking metallic flowers in the soil at the outer edge of the garden, spatially dwarfed by the arid landscape. During the party, Zarin meets her final mysterious death, but this time, her prostrate body is not "shrouded" by a ghost-faced, sexually violating force but instead fills the frame until enveloped by a

mourning maternal presence, as Fakhri leaves her guests to come upstairs and weep over her body.

As with her alternate freeze-frame views of Munis in the demonstration, Neshat suggests a liminal restlessness of Iranian female sexuality, which seemingly only finds its resolution when Zarin loses her corporeality through death.

Sunlight immediately pours into the room following Zarin's "last death," and the next scene cuts to an unveiled Faezeh walking back towards the camera on a country road, followed by a shot of Fakhri walking out of her house against a gust of wind, the camera zooming away from her.

In this striking progression, Neshat's camera not only removes itself from a potential fetishism of Zarin's corpse, and avoids a martyrized exploitation of the body of the prostitute who was sexually exploited for much of her life. It takes the multi-perspectival visual technique of anti-victimization even further in refracting its distancing effect onto

multiple *subjects*, namely Fakhri and Faezeh, the two suffering bodies who survive at the end of the film.

Through this intricate work with angles and temporality, Neshat echoes the de-objectification of *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, which encourages a more respectful and nuanced cinematic gaze upon the leprosarium informed by the multi-perspectival self-narration of its inhabitants. She also opens her film up to the previously mentioned "possibilities of sensorial reconstitution" that Mottahedeh invokes in reference to a feminist "counter-cinema" that fragments point of view and insists on a multiplicity of perspectives. Neshat, when her film *does* operate through a chronological "narrative," is actually attempting to *deny* the possibility of a "purified" scopophilia within the contemporary Islamicate cinema, even one that reclaims the timeless and globally oriented space of Farrokhzad's Edenic garden as a revisionist construct that would posit the messianism of Shiite "imamology" and its "eternal return" as remedial and feminist.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin presciently suggests that closeups and slow-motion, the very cinematic techniques Neshat uses at key points to "explode" the spatiality of her adapted characters' historical moments, "reveal entirely new structural formations of the subject … The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (236-7). Even in her transition to the Hollywood-sized screen, Neshat's ethos of vertical diasporic dialogism, coupled with her insistence on de-objectification of women's bodies, seems to enable a Benjaminian "explosion" of individual historical moments by not *de*-contextualizing fragments in collage but constantly *re*-contextualizing them in a careful *montage* of subjectivities, exploring a multiplicity of chronologies. For instance, Munis,

after being literally unearthed midway through the film, cannot enter the garden with Faezeh but seems driven by an unexplainable political impulse. She narrates: "I remember, I saw a light, like a thought spinning in the air. It was telling me: If I let go, I may find my way". The cinematically "exploded" temporality of the ghostly Munis's insistent politics, combined with the spatial circularities of Parsipur's unconventional emplotment, seemingly open up the possibility for Neshat to harness the Tehran, 1953 moment as a refractive Benjaminian fragment, which could bear within it the pre-existing "haunting" and the future promise of the locally/diasporically interactive Green Movement in today's Iran. As with Sa'edi's pivotal role in the literary assemblage of *Gāv* and the inextricability of *Khāneh Siyāh Ast* from its poetry, other textual discourses, and musical elements, the transnational nature of Neshat's cinematography relies both on her visual layering of bodies, colors, and light, and the historical-literary palimpsestic canvas provided by Parsipur's novella.

To briefly return to a few spatio-temporal specificities of Neshat's film production process bolsters the investigation of dialectic possibilities between the local and diasporic as they exist beyond the camera's gaze. The film's dialectic work might be further contextualized by evoking Joseph Roach's notion of intercultural performance as "surrogation," through which "culture reproduces and re-creates itself" in the constant interplay between local, diasporic, and globalized iterations (2). On the most literal level, Neshat's production process has long embraced an international Islamic geospatiality in order to substitute for local specificity, filming in countries such as Morocco, Egypt, and Turkey—locales she described at her SVA presentation as "places we go to pretend it's Iran." In *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān*, this transnationalism is reinforced by her use of a

multinational cast: while Munis and Fakhri are played by Iranian actors, "Zarin" is ethnically Hungarian, and "Faezeh" is of Iranian descent, but born and raised in Germany.

Neshat's film explores a liminality of both genre and medium—playing in the spaces between image and sound in a blend of historical documentation, magical realism, and allusion—and in their close collaboration, Neshat and Parsipur subtly mine the richness of this distinction through several devices. Most obviously, the film is produced in Farsi, and thus most directly geared toward an Iranian audience. These symbolic artistic "surrogations" are extended by Neshat's collaboration with Parsipur, who is recently immigrated to the United States and whose work remains largely untranslated from Persian. Parsipur's own appearance in a cameo role as the madam of Zarin's brothel underscores this two-way investment that seemingly gives diasporic artists a role in not just responding to, but transforming and revitalizing, the themes and messages of quintessentially "Iranian" works like *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān*.

In her artistic and political turn to an aesthetic of engagement, Neshat's film envisions an Iranian diasporic cinema that is not mere displaced nostalgia or a misplaced sympathetic vision of "helping" Iran's cinematic subjects enter into a globalized discursive field of world cinema. Instead, the director envisions diasporic film in a vertical dialogism with the local, and posits the ecological space of the Farrokhzad-inspired garden as post-political "safe space" alongside the political spatial practice of revolution as a non-chronological phenomenon in Iran, particularly in the temporally distorted sequence that depicts Munis in the demonstration, as examined above. Ultimately, *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* employs a blend of post-Edenic and neo-Edenic

spaces, as envisioned in Farrokhzad's poetry, but rearranges various fixations on the female face and body in space in the Benjaminian temporality of dialectic montage, each "poem-piece" frame containing its own political future and an infinitely collapsible historical past.

Today, Farrokzhad is revered in modern Iranian literature and her work is embraced by a new reformist generation through evocative and regenerative lines such as the following, from "Tavalodi Digar" ["Another Birth"] (trans. Javadi and Sallée, 113):

> I plant my hands in the garden
> I will grow green, I know, I know, I know
> and in the hollows of my ink-stained fingers
> swallows will lay eggs

دستهایم را در باغچه می کارم
سبز خواهم شد می دانم می دانم می دانم
و پرستوها در گودی انگشتان جوهریم
تخم خواهند گذاشت

Such lines subtly and obliquely politicize the power of language by tying poetry to space and place as well as to history, and their magical realism foreshadows later developments in both Iranian literature and cinema—such as Parsipur's novella and Neshat's subsequent film.

The additional aspect of Neshat's global production process as deeply dialogic evokes Roach's further description of how performative "surrogation" works: "In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the work of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss … survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates" (2). In

a revisionist iteration of Tehran, 1953 as a pre-Revolutionary and pre-diasporic historical moment, this kind of "surrogation" occurs whenever Neshat's work is discussed in Iran or brought into the "Iranian canon," as it inevitably is. In her open-ended interpretation, *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* thus acts as a significant artistic deepening of the lateral post-Revolutionary relation between the cinema of Iran and its diaspora, uniting the multi-layered nature of intergeneric film with a global interaction across literature and cinema that works through sedimented layers of historical time, rather than on the surface of one momentary point of transnational connection.

IV. On the Global and Generational Cusp: Motifs of Mobility in Ashgar Farhadi's *Jodā'i-e Nāder az Simin*

A brief return to the contemporary films being produced inside Iran helps bring the argument about the intergeneric and global nature of Iranian cinema full circle, by examining how these long-standing avant-garde New Wave techniques are starting to translate not only into art-house cinema such as Neshat's films, but into commercial cinema that is widely seen by global audiences. To point out this recent and remarkable expansion into the mainstream, I will briefly turn to Ashgar Farhadi's *Jodā'i-e Nāder az Simin* [*A Separation*] (2011)—the film widely known for its status as the winner of Iran's first Best Foreign Film Academy Award. Despite its more linear, twenty-first century and novelistic approach to narrative, unlike *Gāv* and *Khāneh Siyāh Ast*, this modern film adds to the tracing of a global palimpsest that has existed among world-oriented directors since the 1960s—most strikingly since *Jodā'i-e Nāder az Simin* uses hands as central and recurring motif. While in many ways much more conventional and understated—and more commercial—than the other films examined in this chapter, Farhadi's film is also in

some respects an intergeneric work. Its themes are both public and private, both modern and traditional—it is at once a family drama, a love story, a coming of age story, and a legal battle.

The film is also based on a fundamentally global premise: that there is always an option for transnational mobility—at least for those in the upper classes like Nader and Simin. Diaspora is an ever-present option for Simin throughout the film, and although she is bound to Iran by her refusal to abandon her daughter Termeh, Simin's opening premise is that national identity comes second to other values like safety, choice, and freedom. In contemporary Iranian society, the possibility of joining the diaspora is an ever-present fact of life. To reflect the constant exodus that Simin exemplifies, Farhadi's opening credits are set to a background of a series of Iranian identity cards being scanned.

The event that sets off the film's avalanche of disastrous consequences occurs when Nader's elderly father wanders out of the house. Notably, he is going out to get a newspaper, to reach out of the domestic—perhaps even national—sphere to get the news of the world outside his current purview placed in the palm of his hand, the globalism of which is swiftly curtailed when the housekeeper Razieh, terrified that he will wander off again, ties his hands to the bedpost.

Hands can be our reach toward freedom, Farhadi implies, but they can also chain us to our domestic prisons.

The frightening power of hands to injure or kill our fellow human beings emerges as central to the plot of *Jodā'i-e Nāder az Simin*. The universal specter of domestic violence emerges in the central frustrated investigation of the film—*how* exactly did Nader touch Razieh right before she lost the baby? Did he shove her, hit her, throw her, or merely slam the door in her face? Or is it her husband Hojjat's hands that should be held responsible? The fact that, when the truth finally emerges, it is the mechanical force of a car that has caused Razieh's miscarriage, is Farhadi's subtle way of redeeming the actors on all sides of the film's social, political, and gendered spectrum—simply because they are human, these characters of both genders, various ages, and diverse social classes have an infinite capacity to relate to each other, and ultimately to change.

Farhadi looks forward into a new kind of family configuration that is paradoxically both conventional and groundbreaking in the scene when the old man takes

Simin's hand, and the camera pauses on this embrace of their hands reaching across generations, the young repaying the old, the wife nurturing the husband through taking care of his aging parent. This is a conventional role, but for Simin, it represents a radical reversal of the traditional family because, as Farzaneh Milani has noted, it is the old man who reaches out for Simin's hand in genuine vulnerability and need: In this moment of the frail patriarch reaching out for the independent young

woman, the father "is incapable of sustaining his familiar and familial world" (Decherney 210). The patriarchs of old have fallen ill and sick in Iran, no longer able to ignore the shift of balance that is permeating society as the voices of change and reform are increasingly young, female, well-educated and cosmopolitan. Old Iran needs the strength, the dignity, the independence of a Simin—and this moment of joining hands represents that worldly transition in the making, as Milani calls it, a "reallocation of space, a redistribution of resources, a rethinking of roles" (*WNS* 244).

This rethinking is taking place on a global scale in the world of visual media—whether in films like *A Separation*, multimedia installations like those of Shirin Neshat and her partner Shoja Azari, graphic novels like *Persepolis* and *Zahra's Paradise*, or in citizen journalism like that of the Internet-based *Zanān TV*. There is an inherent globalism, a reach towards humanity outside of the confines of nation-based or culturally stereotyped categorization, in all these films. This is true of genre, of which the new wave pushed the boundaries in spellbinding ways, and it is true of gender, in the unexpected and empowering development of female filmmakers and female characters alike—which, in turn, reflects the active and diverse participation of women in Iran's political and intellectual public sphere. As pens and cameras pass from one hand to another in a global palimpsest of screenplays and images that grow out of each other rhizomatically, we are reminded that film is a highly collaborative art form, well-suited to intercultural production and global distribution. Iran plays a unique role in world cinema: the ongoing dialogue between the local and the global is an integral part of Iranian cinema today, as it was in the 1960s.

Chapter Three

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*: The Global Graphic Novel and a Transhistorical Iranian Aesthetic

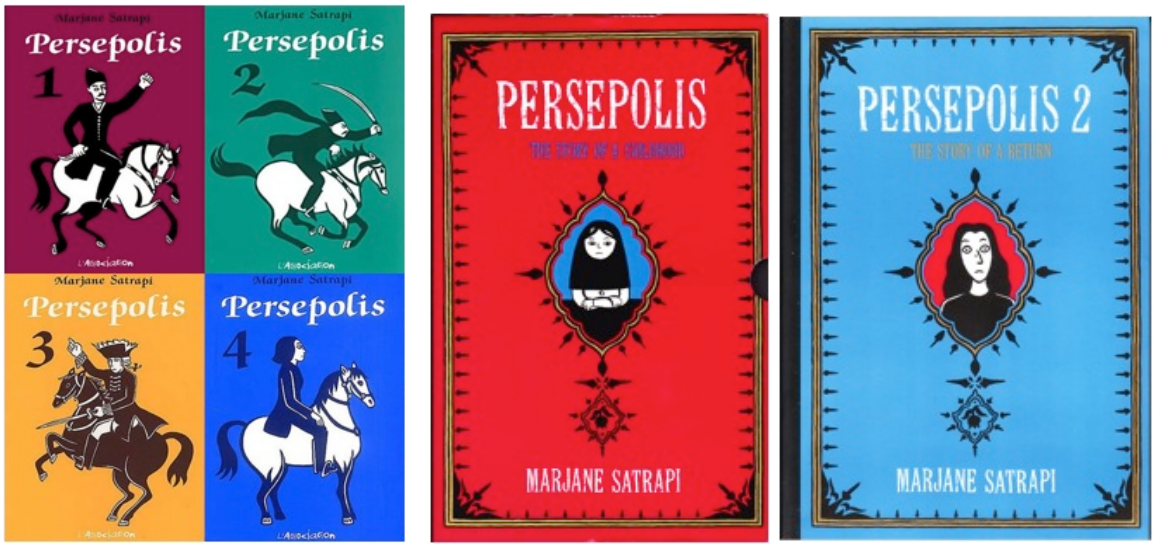
Over the past decade, Marjane Satrapi's landmark graphic novel *Persepolis* has grown into an unexpected worldwide phenomenon. Equal parts personal memoir and national history, the graphic novel and its filmic adaptation conjure up what the *New York Times Book Review* has called a "wildly charming" narrative of cross-cultural self-representation and misinterpretation that has proved both entertaining and instructive for both academic and popular readers of its original French version as well as English, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Swedish and other editions. Early on, critics such as Hillary Chute, Nancy Miller, and Gillian Whitlock suggested that the convergence of multi-generic and transnational content in *Persepolis* makes its formal container—the graphic novel—uniquely suited to Satrapi's stereotype-defying project as she "re-presents" Iran, a country shrouded in negative preconceptions for the Western reader, using deceptively simple drawings and captions of her own childhood in Tehran and Austria. In recent years, others including Typhaine Leservot and Joseph Darda have come closer to suggesting a *reason* for the causality in which multiple aesthetic registers can produce a unification of readers across borders. They have done so by theorizing the universality of the drawn face in graphic narrative, which necessitates an ethical confrontation with the Other in Levinasian terms (Darda 40).

The publication of *Persepolis* marked an opening of the comics genre to world-oriented stories, characters, and audiences. In what follows, examining the surprising factors upon which the graphic novel's globalism depends, I look closely at a few of

Persepolis's key intertexts that range widely in formal and historical scope—the twentieth-century Western comic book, the ancient Persian miniature painting, and the contemporary graphic novel—to argue that these intertexts are imbued with always-already global stories of creation and circulation. These narratives in turn transform *Persepolis* itself, as a globalized and globalizing graphic novel, into a "worlding" text, an active producer of globality. Drawing on the critics above and theorists including Edward Said, Roland Robertson, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Paul Jay, who insist we view "globalization" not as a relatively new, technologically based phenomenon but rather as a process that has been ongoing for many centuries among and beyond societies that never had any self-contained cultural "purity" to begin with, I maintain that *Persepolis*'s concurrent production of local, national, and global scales is inseparable from its work in several genres and across numerous media, engaging its audience through multiple modes of perception in protest of monolithic regimes and ideologies—Iranian, American, and French.

The intertexts of *Persepolis* reflect the historical and technical openness of the graphic novel form, but *Persepolis* is transformed into a "worlding" text not merely as a sum of their parts. The text, I argue, becomes an active producer of globalism through drawing on a history of graphics as dissent: by challenging preconceived notions about comics as a mass culture form, memoirs as limited confessionals, and Iranian women as silenced victims of an oppressive fundamentalist state. The worldly accessibility of *Persepolis* exists not in spite of, but because of porous categories of genre and culture, which are at once integral to its narrative structure and secondary to the global aesthetic of protest that it ultimately embraces.

Persepolis first appeared in the United States in two volumes—published in 2003 and 2004 respectively by Pantheon Books, an imprint of Random House, the world's largest trade-book publisher. In its original publication in France, however, the work appeared in four separate volumes (2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003) in the minimalist style of L'Association, a comparatively tiny independent press. Satrapi's origins in a French comic tradition, outside of the political economics of the US publishing industry, is key to situating the publication of *Persepolis* as a crucial moment of binary-breaking cultural exchange between Iran and the West.



The front cover images of the French editions involve none of the bordering and enclosure, ornamentation, or portraiture that dominates both of their US equivalents. Ultimately, the abridged American cover design is the result of oversimplification and misreading, and encourages further misreadings by obscuring the long history of transnationalism that the book contains.[10] By contrast, the first two volumes of the French

[10] Critics have read the American covers as a "metaphorical unveiling" that "others" and "evokes difference," the heroine Marji "beckon[ing] the reader" in from an "open

Persepolis bear images of warriors on horseback, clearly associated with Iranian legends and national heroes such as the medieval Persian *Shāhnāmeh*'s Zal, Rustam, and Sohrab. Volume 3 features a Napoleonic figure with European features who is facing left—Westward, perhaps—in contrast to the other three, who are turned to the right as if facing East, or following the linear progression of graphic narrative into the next comic panel.

The image on the French *Persepolis 4* is almost exactly the same as the other three; the only difference is that the woman warrior on horseback here bears the recognizable caricatured face of Satrapi's own graphic avatar. Marji's face is markedly devoid of feminized characteristics, and in a reversal of expected gender stereotypes of male-female Iranian depictions, she is the only one of the four without a covered head. Indeed, she echoes, as I will argue, depictions of Gord Afarid, a legendary cross-dressing female warrior from Ferdowsi's eleventh-century epic *Shāhnāmeh* [*Book of Kings*]. This image is Satrapi's first of many gestures of identification with her national literary foremothers.[11] But it is also a challenge to the very genre that Marji inhabits, suggesting that Satrapi's globalized version of the graphic novel is not an exclusively modern or Western form, but instead draws on many centuries of textual-pictorial play in the transnational (and gender-bending) tradition of the Persian miniature aesthetic. Furthermore, it does not subscribe to the cultural or gender-based stereotyping, historical flattening, or caricature-based humor often associated with "comics."

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window" surrounded by "oriental" tapestries (Costantino 436, Naghibi and O'Malley 230).

[11] As Farzaneh Milani argues, Iranian women writers have long been at the forefront of transgressing social taboos and defying restrictions on freedom of movement (*WNS* 6).

But the most notable difference between Marji and the previous three cover images is simply her lack of affect—while the warriors on volumes 1-3 charge ahead in battle, her horse stands still and she appears frozen in time, staring blankly straight ahead. Her vacant look might invoke the political climate of discord and mutual misreading into which the fourth volume was published in France, in the wake of worldwide post-9/11 Islamophobia, and in the lead-up to the crucial headscarf-banning year of 2004. But the sense of arrest on Marji's face also reflects a more enduring dilemma: the disjointed bewilderment of the prematurely global subject confined to a national framework. Satrapi's self-portrait on the fourth cover is not the culturally hybrid cosmopolitan as an empowered and flexible agent described in early field-defining studies of globalization and subjectivity (Appadurai; Bhabha; Clifford). Nor is it characterized by the elitist, postnational self-distancing of an exiled or émigré cosmopolitan figure who finds a new authorial home at a safe distance in the Western metropole in which to reassemble impressions of "home" for Western consumption (Gikandi; Krishnaswamy). This cover image encapsulates what the global graphic novel does as a nascent genre: simultaneously locates and alienates, embraces and interrogates the author, character, and reader who each considers herself a "global citizen." Far from being merely a static container for representations of diversity and hybridity, *Persepolis*'s confluence of the intergeneric and the transnational transforms it into a dynamic vehicle for the production of new scales, worlds, and audiences, blurring the boundaries between visual/verbal modes of representation and national/global acts of reading.

In her introduction, Satrapi announces *Persepolis* as a nationalist, even nostalgic recovery project: "As an Iranian who has lived more than half of my life in Iran, I know

that this image [of fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism] is far from the truth … This is why writing *Persepolis* was so important to me" (vol. 1, p. 2). The transparency of this stated authorial intention—simply to represent diversity, to dispel negative stereotypes about Iran—metonymically links the seeming simplicity of her words to official narratives of state supremacy and power. In an age when, despite the election of Hassan Rouhani in 2013, fear-mongering stereotypes about the country as a violent, fundamentalist nuclear renegade obstinately persist, it is hard to argue that this project is not a crucial one. Still, despite its child protagonist and black-and-white simplicity, there are myriad ways in which *Persepolis* avoids becoming an easily digestible memoir that serves simply to culturally "translate" Iran to the West in the kind of one-directional cultural representation project Graham Huggan calls "strategic exoticism" (32). Gillian Whitlock argues that many Iranian-American memoirs partake in a larger socio-cultural "economy of affect" that confirms Western stereotypes about women in the Muslim world (77). By contrast, what becomes important about the nation-centered framework of *Persepolis* is that the Iranian story Satrapi tells through contemporary fusions of French, American, and Iranian aesthetic conventions is paradoxically yet thoroughly global in both creation and circulation.

One of the ways *Persepolis* conveys Iran's long history of globality is through the palimpsestic interplay of various genres such as the comic book, the novel, the diary, the travel narrative, the Persian miniature painting, the caricature, and the newspaper—genres which all were, of course, shaped in and between different parts of the world. Furthermore, it is through the technical and contextual aspects of the graphic novel—its uses of mixed media, its roots in serialization, and its configurations of sequencing and

spatial renderings of alternative personal/national histories—that it reclaims the narration of historical time in a way that is very different from text-only memoirs and autobiographies by Iranian women authors who also grew up during the Revolution.[12] The narration of the history of the Iranian Revolution is not merely "taken back" in Satrapi's voice in an anti- or postcolonial gesture of reversal, but it is refracted from a would-be censoring authority (whether the Iranian regime or the market forces of American consumerism) onto *many* voices—Iranian readers in and out of diaspora, French readers, American readers, and others—and into just as many chronologies. This global reading experience is deepened by the long history of the intergenre in all her cultural contexts, from the French comics reader familiar with the internationalism of Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées* to the Iranian reader who associates Persian miniature painting with the multicultural reach of the *Shāhnāmeh*. With its long and transnational history of intertexts and images, the multiple and intergeneric vocabularies of expression in *Persepolis* can even be read allegorically, as a portrait of the multiple, simultaneous registers in which the processes of globalization have always taken place. As Paul Jay writes in arguing for the necessity of historicizing globalization, insisting that it is by no means a "modern" phenomenon or the result of a "rupture" in the mid-to-late twentieth

[12] The best-known example of these is Azar Nafisi's roundly criticized *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), which Hamid Dabashi famously accused of "systematically and unfailingly denigrating an entire culture of revolutionary resistance to a history of savage colonialism" and doing so as an "ideological service to the US imperial designs globally" (Dabashi n.pag.). For other examples of what Farzaneh Milani dubs a new "mutant category" of "hostage narratives" ("On Women's Captivity," n.pag.), see Roya Hakakian's *Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran* (2004), Zahra Ghahramani's *My Life as a Traitor: An Iranian Memoir* (2007), Marina Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran: One Woman's Story of Survival Inside an Iranian Prison* (2007), and many others.

century: "Globalization is not separate from but rather encompasses the history of colonization, decolonization, and postcolonialism" (96).

Satrapi does not portray post-Revolutionary Iran as a reactionary fundamentalist culture that resulted from militant postcolonial nationalism after the US-sponsored coup of 1953. Wary of Orientalist and neo-Orientalist stereotypes in depictions of Iran and Iranians across the West, her images do more than merely revise those stereotypes; they also, as Typhaine Leservot argues, "reveal how the West in Iran is constructed by Iranians themselves rather than imported from abroad." Leservot provides a helpful history of how Iranian scholarship on Western culture (as far back as Rumi) "predates (post)colonial relations with the West (and therefore predates Orientalism)" (118)—in short, Occidentalism in Iran has never simply been "Orientalism in reverse" (120). She argues that after 1979, a trio of Occidentalisms emerged: (1) the "pro-western discourse of the deposed government," 2) the "anti-western discourse of the new Islamic regime," and 3) the "ambivalent discourse of intellectuals" (126-7). All three, but particularly the last two, are engaged in a dialectic within the pages of *Persepolis* and its portrayals of Western culture as a non-homogeneous, multi-directional force. Satrapi's graphic novel manages to stand in for and textually/visually depict the local/global origins of Iranian culture altogether. Iran, she insists, cannot be defined in the West's Orientalist/neo-Orientalist image, nor can it be reduced to a nationalist/inward-looking paradigm, because it has always been in contact with, shaping and shaped by, other cultures—both Western and non-Western.[13]

[13] This historicized bi-directionality is, of course, a global phenomenon and a symptom of the long history of globalization: Jay agrees with Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of

Exploring how the intergeneric and the transnational are intertwined, the multiplicity of cross-cultural vectors at play in Marji's childhood—and, implicitly, the globalization of Iran as *Persepolis* portrays it—results from Satrapi's multiple rootedness in French and American comic traditions and Persian aesthetic forms. One need look no further than Marji's transcultural/counterculture teenage wardrobe—a headscarf coupled with a punk denim jacket adorned with a Michael Jackson button—to understand that even within the pervasive, xenophobic language of *gharbzadegī* in Iran, there have always been multiple registers of influence and conscious, deliberate, even playful adaptation of Western ideas and styles.

Since the globalism of the text works through a perpetually dual representative vocabulary of image and text, its representations of both self and culture emerge on very specific terms, orchestrated in deceptively simple drawings and language. Bruce Robbins writes that politically engaged worldliness "requires a certain disassembling of the self." In Satrapi's case, the "disassembling" into one textual self and one pictorial self means forgoing solidarity with contemporary Iranian-American memoirists whose books primarily self-identify in terms of diasporic oppression-and-liberation narratives, and it certainly means forgoing identification with heavily clichéd, historically decontextualized representations of veiled women from the Muslim world. Marji is very precisely

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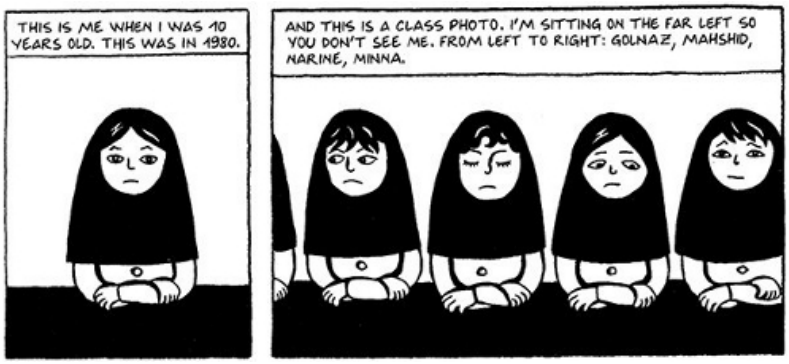
"contamination" and when he argues that, after millennia of intercultural mixing and hybridization in every facet of life, there is no such thing as a "pure" or "authentic" cultural artifact: "Cultural purity is an oxymoron" (Appiah 113).

situated—at a certain age, in a certain time, in a certain Tehrani, upper-middle-class environment. The religious authorities governing her surroundings are not vague ideological forces of "Islamism," but specifically those of Ayatollah Khomeini's immediate followers articulating his nationalist version of Twelver Shi'a Islam.

This is perhaps why Satrapi only pauses momentarily on that endlessly overread and oversimplified symbol of the Iranian Revolution—the imposition of the mandatory *hijab*. In Satrapi's opening chapter, entitled "The Veil," the first panel dates the story and situates Marji in the pictorial center of this moment in Iranian history with a headscarf appropriate to the Revolutionary era. In the second, however, she pushes herself outside the frame with the suggestive caption: "I'm sitting on the far left so you don't see me" (3). All we see of Marji here is her elbow, suggesting that her story doesn't quite fit within a nation-centered frame, as if she resists being displayed within a stereotypical portrait of Iranian girlhood alongside identically veiled peers. Although Marji and her female relatives resent the forced imposition of the *hijab* that accompanied the arrival of the Khomeini regime, Satrapi immediately introduces nuance to her treatment of the *hijab* theme in order to resist both the oppressive uniformity of its all-pervasive intrusion into daily life and the stereotypical nature of its association with Iran and the Islamic world at large. As Emma Tarlo details in a thoughtful "sartorial review" of the graphic novel, veils and veiling make various appearances throughout Marji's long and complex story of



gradual growth into a complex global consciousness, but never in the service of a simplified polemic.

As with Marji's explanation shown here of how the image of a veiled woman can be "read" differently from different angles, Whitlock argues that comics require many types of interdependent and concurrent reading: simultaneously interpreting art and literature; following conversation and anecdote while reading character, sound, and emotion through limited information in speech bubbles; and translating frames and gutters into narratives of space and time. Whitlock thus concludes that the graphic novel is not merely a hybrid genre, but that it transcends both graphic arts and prose fiction—and that "comics require reader to become a collaborator" in a much more active and therefore cross-culturally aware reading practice ("Autographics" 970).

In the careful interweaving of text and image throughout *Persepolis*, Satrapi is engaged in a simultaneous process of familiarization and defamiliarization. Culturally, she is familiarizing readers with the ethnic, political, religious, and social diversity even within Marji's limited sphere of experience within Iran and framing it with an introduction that invites cross-cultural dialogue. The dual text/image register helps to diversify the representation of Iran without glorifying or demonizing even the Iranian characters who are, from Satrapi's vantage point, most susceptible to caricature. For example, during the "ideological" portion of her university entrance exam, after admitting to the mullah-examiner both that she did not veil herself while living in Austria

and that she does not know how to pray in Arabic, Marji is sure she is doomed to fail. The cleric, who—like other religious authorities and moral-police officers in the book—is only illustrated in anonymous black silhouette during three panels from the exam scene, is given another opportunity to express his political flexibility through the letter of admission that arrives two weeks later, much to Marji's surprise. She later learns from her university department chair that the mullah "had really appreciated my honesty. Apparently, he'd even said that I was the only one who didn't lie. I was lucky. I had stumbled on a true religious man" (130). The combination of three verbal mediums—conversation, letter, and retrospective caption—represent three different points in time mapped onto one graphic sequence, and help present a nuanced portrait of what might otherwise be the stereotyped image of a fundamentalist.

Satrapi's combination of familiarization and defamiliarization proves her new iteration of the graphic novel to be both culturally and aesthetically global, because it relies not only on the long and complex histories of her intertexts, but on the transnational reach of her (often seemingly national) narratives. Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner point out that "the need to distinguish *representation* and *articulation* and to pay constant critical attention to their discursive construction derives from the fact that with representation enter forms of othering that have a tendency to fix the qualities of the supposed Other as permanent or indeed essential" (viii, my emphasis). Whether Satrapi is turning a work of world literature graphic, or infusing a graphic novel with a global sensibility, the effect is that the global graphic novel turns representation into articulation—a situated but flexible, rooted but globally mobile work that depends

equally on an age-old history of combining words with pictures and a contemporary engagement with a transnational, multilingual audience.

Questioning the teleological assumptions we tend to make about life narrative, Paul de Man proposes an alternative: "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?" (920) The medium of the graphic novel, with its convergence of text and image and its simultaneity of narrative levels that are visually juxtaposed and integrated in ways that a prose memoir would not allow, is crucial for Satrapi's innovative approach to issues of representation in autobiography. It is, however, only one among many genres that figure into the genesis of the work, and the thoroughly intergeneric nature of *Persepolis* both reveals unexpected histories of cross-cultural exchange and opens up the text to a global readership.

The interstitiality and multivocality that are so integral to *Persepolis* have enabled its accessibility to a wide range of audiences across the world and its adaptation across multiple media in many reading contexts, but this porosity has also made it politically controversial and particularly vulnerable to censorship both in the West and in the Muslim world. Ultimately, it becomes impossible to categorize Satrapi as either an "Iranian author" or a "Western author" or even a "French author"—just as *Persepolis* cannot be easily categorized in terms of genre or national origin. Satrapi's embrace of a profound globality in genre and subjectivity complicate issues of origin and teleology throughout the text, for a revelatory undoing of the expectations we as readers bring to

life narrative as well as the other genres *Persepolis* inhabits, expands, hybridizes, and deconstructs.

I. *Persepolis*, *Bandes Dessinées*, and the Global Duality of Text and Image

In its two-volume, American format, the architecture of *Persepolis* is roughly structured as follows: in volume 1, the young Marji lives through the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. As the regime becomes increasingly restrictive and she becomes an increasingly rebellious teenager, her parents send her off to school in Austria for four years. Volume 2 follows Marji's life there and the obstacles she faces as an immigrant, culminating in her decision to return to Tehran as an adult. It then chronicles her life back in Iran from 1988 to 1994, including art school, marriage, and divorce—ending on her final departure from Iran for France.

Persepolis has been extensively discussed in terms of what Gillian Whitlock calls "autographics"—a study of comics that draws attention to "specific conjunctions of visual and verbal text in this genre of autobiography, and also to the subject positions that narrators negotiate in and through comics" (966). This school of thought maintains that comics is not merely a hybrid form, but transcends both graphic arts and prose fiction. Marianne Hirsch employs the term "biocularity" to discuss how the graphic novel's dual text/image register "[reveals] the visuality and thus the materiality of words and the discursivity and narrativity of images" (1213). This defamiliarization, in turn, makes the doubly engaged reader more attuned to nuance in Satrapi's representations of self and culture(s). The visual and the verbal are not merely juxtaposed in comics to produce a "hybrid" form, but interact to produce an entirely new genre with different qualities than

those of a novel or a series of drawings. As a "self-reflexive practitioner" of cartooning, "Satrapi "actively engage[s] with the conventions of comics" through her autobiographical avatar (Whitlock, "Autographics" 971). This transcendence of its seemingly traceable hybrid origins can be productively examined in terms of Said's observation that "every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid" (*Culture and Imperialism* 58), and in reading *Persepolis*, we grow simultaneously wary of two forms of unilateral thinking: of genre and culture alike.

The graphic novel's insistence on multiplicity, Whitlock seems to suggest, makes the form uniquely suited to Satrapi's stereotype-defying project, uniting readers across borders. Drawing on Levinas, Joseph Darda proposes the drawn *face* as the site of ethical encounter for readers of globally conscious comics: **"**Whereas national frames often restrict ethical relations, differentiating the human national from the inhuman or absent non-national, autographics denaturalize this representational practice and press us to recognize the precariousness and complex personhood of someone made unfamiliar" (Darda 49). I agree, but suggest that *Persepolis*'s global legibility goes beyond its depictions of faces, even beyond its depictions of personhood and subjectivity. In Satrapi's complex representation of cultural spaces, communities, and historical events, she reveals how many elements of the graphic novel form itself are thoroughly infused with a long history of transnational encounters. *Persepolis*'s comic intertexts are *themselves* permeated with always-already global content, and comics artists, working in a mixed medium with a broad spectrum of possibilities for balance between text and image, have long been interested in representing and engaging with multiple cultures simultaneously through the slippery register of the visual/verbal.

When Jay, mentioned above, insists on the long history of globalization as an important context to bear in mind for world literature, he builds on Said's assertion of the pre-existing hybridity of all cultural forms. Said's basic premise in *Culture and Imperialism* is that, to avoid essentializing and devaluing the experiences of Others, we must "acknowledge the massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences … of national states and cultures" (32). Ultimately, Jay looks to Roland Robertson for an even longer historical view of globalization that precedes and supersedes the world-redefining project of imperialism. Robertson maintains that the "overall processes of globalization … are at least as old as the rise of the so-called world religions two thousand and more years ago" (7). It follows that literary genres, even in their most incipient forms, should reflect those processes of globalization.

Long before the twentieth century, attitudes and misconceptions between Iran and the West have oscillated between extremes, from mutual admiration and harmonious cooperation to rancorous fear-mongering and hostility. The current perception of Iran can be traced back to a long history of Orientalism: examples from modern popular culture like the angry, violent crowds of fundamentalists depicted in the Hollywood films *Not Without My Daughter* (1991) and *Argo* (2012) are based in centuries of xenophobia and reductive stereotypes. One of Said's earliest examples in *Orientalism* is Aeschylus's play *The Persians*, in which ancient Persia is chosen to represent the most extreme version of "a very far distant and often threatening Otherness" and is, in turn, "made into a symbol for the whole Orient" (21). Negative stereotypes running in the other direction have an equally long and complex history. On the Iranian side, the national discourse of *tahājum-*

e farhangī ["cultural invasion"]—the insidious ways in which Westernization is said to have cemented networks of control over Iranian society—has been an integral part of Iranian political rhetoric since the mid-twentieth century (Khosravi 21). Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has demonstrated how, despite the "assumed silence and lack of scientific curiosity among the Orientals" that cemented Orientalism as a discipline, Al-e-Ahmad's *Gharbzadegī* is only one example drawn from a lengthy tradition of Iranian study, admiration, and critique of the West which can be thought of as "Occidentalism or Europology," evident in a wide transhistorical range of Persian texts (20).

Leservot helpfully points out how the graphic novel medium is especially useful for the *specificity* of Occidentalist cultural references that its multiple registers and intertexts enable: in just one simple caricature, for instance, Satrapi marks the difference between British and American colonizers and the popular stereotypes associated with each. Leservot is right to suggest that recognizing multiple Occidentalisms is crucial to understanding Satrapi's graphic novel not as a "superficial stunt to improve relations between East and West," but a careful historical tracing of how, gradually, the dominant cultural paradigm in Iran evolved after the 1979 Revolution. Written in the twenty-first century phase of globalization, though, in a historical moment of stalemate between Iran and the West, and situated within a relatively modern genre, the greater challenge Persepolis faces is to articulate the long history of its own globality, and in doing so, speak to readers at a variety of cultural interstices. Taking a closer look at the

transnational stories of the comic tradition that are latent within the pages of *Persepolis* helps provide a historical context for the graphic novel's simultaneous production of scales such as local community, national culture, and global citizenship.

It is clear that Satrapi does not fit neatly into a single national comic tradition. As a child, she read and was fascinated by American comic books including *Dracula*, but she attended art school in Tehran. After emigrating from Iran in her mid-twenties, Satrapi's first few years in France were spent at the Art Deco school in Strasbourg, but she quickly abandoned her plans to become a graphic designer upon her arrival in Paris in 1997. Paris has historically been an important cosmopolitan site for Iranian literary figures in diaspora. In interviews, Satrapi has claimed that she "didn't come from a culture of comics" and was entirely self-educated, though she acknowledges the influential mentorship of fellow cartoonist David Beauchard (who publishes as "David B.") and has often spoken publicly alongside other major comic artists—most notably Art Spiegelman, with whom she has a close friendship and to whose work she vocally relates her own. The combination of her art school training in Tehran, briefly illustrated in volume 2 of *Persepolis*, and her education in the Francophone comic tradition, however, clearly marks her work as distinct from the fraught twentieth-century politics of American comics and situates her within a small but crucial group of Iranian exiled artists working in Paris since the Revolution. In *Persepolis*, Marji's parents briefly consider escaping the city in the early days of the Iran-Iraq war, but ultimately decide to stay so that Marji can continue her French education, which she can only get in Tehran. This Francophilia in the face of political terror is reminiscent of Shapour Bakhtiar, Mohammed Reza Shah's last prime minister, who led his National Resistance party

against the Islamic Republic from Paris until he was assassinated there under mysterious circumstances in 1991. Satrapi's fusion of French and Persian culture echoes that of politically dissident Iranian-Parisian writers from Sadegh Hedayat to Goli Taraghi, while simultaneously drawing on Iranian pre-Islamic history and folklore as well as Western literary and artistic movements.

Upon her arrival in Paris, Satrapi was introduced to the innovative comic artists working at L'Atelier des Vosges, including Cristophe Blain, Emile Bravo, and David B., who quickly drew her into their reformist approach to Franco-Belgian comics, or *bandes dessinées* [BD]. Appropriately situating Satrapi's work within the BD tradition can fill a marked gap in the criticism that has been published on *Persepolis*. The BD genre is, first of all, Franco-Belgian and thus bi-nationally split in origin, and there is no automatic association with the comic or humorous in the Francophone graphic novel. Compared to American comics, captions and dialogue underneath frames were originally more common than the speech bubbles that later grew in popularity, suggesting a more dominant narratorial presence.

From the 1980s, the development of the graphic novel in France was largely a response to increasingly "stale" adult comic books in a male-dominated industry, with repetitive depictions of sex and violence, closely followed by an early 1990s revival of small, independent publishers including L'Association—Satrapi's publisher, co-founded by David B.—who sought a forum for more culturally informed, self-reflexive work and often targeted rising female comic artists. L'Association fostered three breakthrough political graphic memoirs around the turn of the millennium: Satrapi's *Persepolis*, David B.'s *L'Ascension du Haut Mal [Epileptic]*—a personal and national reckoning with the

spectre of the Algerian War—and *Cambouis [Sludge]* by Rénald Luzier, the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonist widely known as "Luz"—a scathingly critical but also deeply personal comic essay on the presidential election crisis in 2002, which left despairing liberal voters with a choice between conservative incumbent Jacques Chirac and far-right ultra-nationalist Jean-Marie Le Pen. Satrapi describes her entry into the world of BD in this revisionist moment as being embraced by a supportive community of socially conscious, multiculturally minded colleagues: "L'Association m'a fait entièrement confiance, ils ont une façon de voir les choses qui correspond exactement à la mienne [L'Association has completely trusted me/reassured me; they have a way of seeing things that exactly corresponds to my own]" (Interview with *BD Sélection* n.pag.).

In terms of style, Satrapi's work is more reminiscent of the *ligne claire* aesthetic, characterized by stillness and "slow" drawings, than the "comic-dynamic" style of the Marcinelle school, which features "agitation" and speed-lines to illustrate action, slapstick humor, and violence—though *Persepolis* contains elements of both. In terms of publication format, French comics in "album format" (after World War II) were usually all-color and larger in size, more like art books than the mass-market paperback style of American superhero comics. The commitment to a more naturalistic aesthetic also meant that from the early days of *ligne claire* comics, artists were faced with the dilemma of how to depict cultural Others within the limited space of a comic panel. Early volumes such as *Tintin in Africa* are particularly known for offensive depictions of non-European characters, which were satirized by a new wave of *ligne claire* artists in the 1980s and 1990s. *Persepolis*, ultimately, forgoes simple satire for a more nuanced, multi-step representation process that relies on at least two narrative levels at all times, as well as

the interweaving of image and text. Adapting *ligne claire* for the global multiculturalism of the twenty-first century, Satrapi uses simplicity to her advantage by seeking universal figures when possible, balancing her frames with a mostly realistic use of perspective and proportion (with some notable exceptions), and making extensive use of the caption as a counterpoint to, and commentary on, the text in speech bubbles.

It is nearly impossible to discuss the idea of a global graphic novel, or even the history of cultural representation in comics altogether, without a mention of the precedents set by Hergé's *Tintin.* The much-beloved foundational character of the *bandes dessinées* world embarks on numerous international voyages throughout the *Adventures of Tintin* series, and the representation of cultural Others thus quickly became part of the development process of Hergé's signature style (and, as a result, in the BD world overall). Tintin travels through both real and fictional countries, and his surroundings often reveal common preconceptions about other cultures grounded in the international politics of the moment. While the *Adventures of Tintin* series has an array of Orientalist stereotypes scattered throughout its volumes, one that particularly showcases Western fantasies and anxieties of its time about the Muslim world is *The Land of Black Gold* (1950). In this story, Tintin is discharged to the fictional Middle Eastern state of Khemed to investigate a series of vehicle explosions suspected to be a result of someone in the Arab world tampering with Western oil supplies. In the aftermath of World War II, the plot traffics heavily in Orientalist stereotypes while reflecting a postwar antipathy towards Germany: the hero is held hostage by a gross caricature of an Arab insurgent named Bab El Ehr, but the real villain found to be sabotaging the pipelines turns out to be Tintin's old German nemesis Doctor Müller.

Today the most commonly found book version of *The Land of Black Gold* was published in English in 1972 with Hergé's approval, and significantly revises earlier drafts, the first of which was published serially in *Le Petit Vingtième* magazine in 1939-1940, then in book form in 1950—with some notably political alterations. Among other changes, the text of the hostage-takers' letters was transformed from indecipherable squiggles to script identifiable as real Arabic, thus honing in on a specific linguistic "enemy". In other ways, however, the Arab world was increasingly demonized in later editions, mostly to replace references to Zionists as villains in a post-World War II climate. For instance, Tintin was originally kidnapped by a group of Jewish thugs in the first version, while the hostage-takers in the later edition are racially marked as Arab. There are many other changes to the drawings and captions, but in short, it is clear that Hergé's depictions of Otherness in his fictionalized Middle East reflected the inflammatory and rapidly changing international political stage immediately following the erasure of Palestine from the world map. Since the prolific and influential Hergé was mentor to so many other BD artists, this set a problematic precedent for the conflation and demonization of the Muslim world as a whole. In short, at its very roots, the BD tradition was heavily plagued by prevalent Orientalist stereotypes.

In contrast to the problematic notions perpetuated in stereotype-conflating images from *The Land of Black Gold* such as those shown above, when Satrapi conflates cultural archetypes and historical periods into a mass collage, it is most notably to describe Europe, not Iran. In the wake of the hostage crisis, the Satrapis take a family trip through Europe since, in Marji's words, "such things would no longer be possible" now that Iran's diplomatic ties with the West were quickly disintegrating (vol. 1, p. 77). The entire journey is conflated into one whole-page panel, with open windows framing one side and

the tower of Pisa leaning into the frame, as a flamenco dancer surrounded by curlicues provides a fluid, Occidentalized backdrop for the Satrapis, an enraptured audience of fascinated tourists zooming through on their flying carpet. In this layout, Europe appears as a dazzling panorama of fleeting sights and sounds, much like the Orient did to European travelers. Readers of the first volume of *Persepolis* are left with just this one single pictorial impression of Europe as it existed in the fantasies of ordinary Iranians, whose politicians at the time were rapidly closing their country off from the Western world. The fact that the Satrapis' Occidentalist vantage point is from a quintessentially Orientalist fantasy-object—the flying carpet—is both a tongue-in-cheek jab at the cultural stereotyping of previous *ligne claire* artists such as Hergé and a powerful reversal of Orientalist tropes beyond the comics genre. Armed with the caption's narrative about how abruptly and desperately the trip was planned, the reader of the comic image has historical and political context for the

broad brushstrokes and impressionistic shadows of Satrapi's style in this panel. The intergeneric, once again, has situated and explicated the globality of the story.

At the beginning of *Persepolis* volume 2, when Marji moves to Austria and the story thus allows readers a more detailed look at the West "on the ground," depictions of European characters as cultural Others move gradually from stereotypes more well-rounded characters. The first person readers encounter in Vienna is Marji's roommate Lucia, whom she first imagines as the storybook character Heidi in a pastoral setting in the Alps, surrounded by farm animals and sunshine. As soon as the two meet, however, this romanticized ideal is quickly replaced by a series of negative stereotypes associated with the German-speaking countries. Marji is increasingly irritated by Lucia's inelegant physicality (towering in the doorframe; hair protruding from her armpits), militant morning routine (waking up to a blaring 6:30 alarm clock; loudly blow-drying her hair), bland taste in food (making soup from a Knorr powdered mix), and hackneyed attachment to Tyrolean folk music and dance. When Marji accompanies Lucia to her parents' house for Christmas, the stereotyping grows even more extreme at first: Lucia's mother is depicted with a thick mustache, and her father wears leather *lederhosen* and a feathered cap. After a warm and convivial family dinner in which the Tyroleans "never touch on war or death" and instead prove genuinely interested in Iranian culture, however, Marji starts to radically reconsider

her experience of Austria and calls Lucia her "sister", a sudden reframing of notions of family that is emphasized by a literal frame-within-a-frame.

This interweaving of domestic intimacy with cross-cultural understanding recalls Paul Ricoeur's notion of linguistic hospitality, "where the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language is balanced by pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house" (10). *Persepolis* thus enacts a gradual breakdown of Marji's Occidentalism that reveals how Iranian preconceptions about the West have operated in a similar way to their Orientalist equivalents, but are easily complicated and broken down by travel and cross-cultural dialogue.

In her graphic memoir's convergence of autobiography with historiography-as-graphic-narrative, Satrapi refashions a troubled tradition of Orientalist cartooning and bridges the radical distance between the judgmental, invisible Western comic narrator, who guides the reader through the story, and the stereotyped "Oriental" comic character who is not afforded the diegetic perspective of the caption-space. The "clarity" of Satrapi's *ligne claire* is found not only in her simple, stark drawing style but also in her introduction's straightforward statement of authorial intention. Still, the simplicity of her representations avoids being reductive, polarizing, or didactic through the ever-present

tension between the privilege inherent in the autobiographical first-person voice and the de-privileging that occurs when the self is a "clear-line" cartoon character drawn so simply that it almost becomes caricature. The visceral nature of the images that the young Marji occupies lets her perpetually retain readers' sympathies in a certain way—which counterbalances the augmented wisdom and hindsight of the older Marji's autobiographical narration in the captions. Through this bi-medial, dialectical approach to first-person narrative, the graphic novel provides a counterpoint, even a model, for the breakdown of stereotypes about Iranian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim characters in *bandes dessinées* as they enter the twenty-first century.

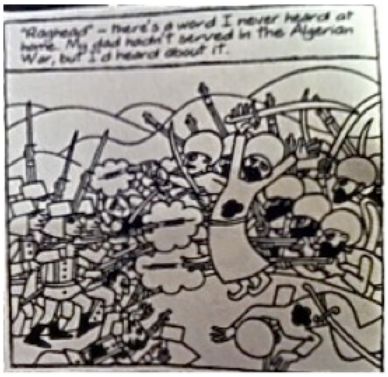
The sense that the task of representing a marginalized and demonized culture is both a burden and a privilege for Satrapi is carried forward by the use of her real name as an author, unlike Hergé and David B., who both use pen names. As Marji discovers early on, she is a descendant of the Qajar dynasty's kings and her family history is thus intertwined with the national history of Iran. In key moments of self-assertion, the

growing visual dominance in the frame of Marji's speech (as image) reflects the growing claim she is staking to her own identity as an Iranian "cultural representative" abroad. For instance, in one frame from her early days in Austria, the font used when Marji begins to describe the Persian New Year—her attempt to introduce multicultural discourse about holidays alongside her friends' conversation about Christmas vacation—is cramped and lower-case. Months later, in a café in Austria, the

teenage Marji overhears a snide classmate doubting her status as a witness to Iranian historical events, and immediately confronts this with a close-up image of her own scowling face yelling in bold, oversized font: "You are going to shut up or I am going to make you! I am Iranian and proud of it!" Taken together, these two instances of speech-as-image show how the space of the comic panel can be a space of non-hierarchical transnationalism, where multiple monologues and dialogues can exist side-by-side in comic speech bubbles, captions, and unframed instances of speech that often vividly collapse different temporalities and diegetic levels upon each other.

Satrapi simultaneously takes up this responsibility from a different cultural perspective, by stylistically distancing the violence she has personally witnessed from the violence of family hearsay and history books. Imagined deaths are pictured abstractly, as identical faces and bodies arranged in geometric patterns with narrative captions reflecting on the horror, while violence Marji has directly witnessed brings with it the

image of blood, as well as the insertion of her own image as narrator with a comic-dynamic speech bubble inside the frame.



Similarly, David B.'s *Epileptic* (published serially by L'Association between 1996 and 2003), reflects on Beauchard's lifelong artistic struggle with how to ethically depict the violence and racism of the Algerian War, while recognizing that his purview in doing so is limited, as a first-world child who has never directly witnessed the violence done to racial and cultural Others.

While David B.'s depiction of the Algerian War is that of one inaccessible story seen through the lens of a first-world narrator, the older Marji's narration effectively juggles two visual vocabularies: the action-oriented panels that capture moments when the younger Marji encounters violence firsthand, and the distorted, surreal panels that symbolically imagine violence she has not personally witnessed, but to which she is culturally and nationally bound. This distinction between witnessed and imagined violence conveys a commitment to local specificity and a resistance to generalization as a means of distinguishing between different ways to represent scales—the personal and the communal. Both graphic articulations of scale connect with a global readership, but in different ways; neither invokes stereotype for its intended effect. As readers, we simultaneously rely on the conventions of both autobiography and comics to decipher

these representations; it is, ultimately, only due to the interweaving of the transnational and the multi-generic that this layering of *types* of cross-cultural violence can take place.

To illustrate this distinction, we might look at Satrapi's representation of a scene of massacre—the 1978 fire in Cinema Rex in Abadan, Iran, which killed hundreds and added massive amounts of fuel to the revolutionary fire.

A multicultural outlook is needed to fully grasp the symbolism of the ghoulish faces in this image. The tragedy in Abadan was a cause of significant controversy in the lead-up to the Revolution, not least because its perpetrator was unknown. Some thought Islamist revolutionaries had started the fire in a symbolic statement against *gharbzadegī* and the Western influence of cinema, while others blamed the Shah since the police reportedly prevented bystanders from trying to break into the cinema to save the trapped victims, and firefighters arrived on the scene to find limited water supply (Kuehnert n.pag.). The Islamist arsonist behind the 1978 fire finally came forward two years after the event, and was executed by the newly established regime. But the murky, incomprehensible circumstances surrounding the initial horror story of Cinema Rex demand, to Satrapi, a

different register of representation for this violence for which no clear responsibility was taken, and no clear explanation could be found.

The victims' faces in Satrapi's panel produce a tessellation effect similar to those reproduced above: unable to naturalistically depict the violence and unwilling to jump to conclusions about a non-witnessed scene of horror, Satrapi's ghostly silhouettes of the victims symbolically evoke the dehumanization that characterized the brutality of the event. The bilingual yet obviously futile Exit sign depicted on the side of this panel—"Exit" in English, "Khoruj" in Persian—also implies that translation in the most literal sense provides an insufficient explanation of this history of violence. Monica Chiu suggests that this panel speaks to readers through the "sense of detachment" that Will Eisner insists is so essential to the moments when comics, a form so closely associated with slapstick simplicity, is used to portray scenes of unimaginable violence. Satrapi's use of a more abstract, culturally non-specific style in this moment "shifts [the reader's perspective] from that of an observer to that of a dwarfed citizen, a potential victim of the police's impending violence" (Chiu 108). Satrapi, through the universal horror of the Cinema Rex she inspires in her readers' imaginations, seeks a potentially transnational community of sympathy. This, Satrapi seems to be suggesting, was not merely an Iranian tragedy, but an event with far-reaching global causes and implications.

The interstitial anxiety of being caught between two political causes lies at the heart of the Cinema Rex episode, and the stakes involved in representing Cinema Rex are high, since the event represents, in Hamid Naficy's words, a tragedy with "both local and global" repercussions. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the tragedy became a pivotal turning point after which the hugely innovative and influential Iranian New Wave was

transformed into an "Islamicate cinema," a transition period in which, over the course of less than a year, almost half of the country's cinemas were closed or demolished (Naficy 20-22). The terror that Satrapi invokes in this panel, then, is not specific to Iran in 1978—it represents a cross-cultural fear of sudden, brutal censorship and silencing in which the state or other bastions of authority violently prevent ordinary, peaceful routines such as going to the movies. This fear of violent authoritative figures—in the form of individuals or social constructs, whether physically or emotionally brutal—permeates the whole of *Persepolis*, in Marji's life in both Iran and Austria.

In her reading of *Persepolis*, Hillary Chute agrees that the simple style Satrapi uses to represent trauma "justifies a flatness of composition to intensify affective content … The narrative's force and bite," Chute writes, "come from the radical disjuncture between the often-gorgeous minimalism of Satrapi's drawings and the infinitely complicated traumatic events they depict: harassment, torture, execution, bombings, mass murder" (99). In panels such as the Cinema Rex image, there is no attempt at realistic depiction of violence and death through archival material; instead, events are regularly depicted as the child Marji imagines them. In Satrapi's work, then, the "flat" simplicity of *ligne claire* does not always mean reinforcing stereotype. When combined with captions and when the "flatness" of images leaves space for readers to associate them with numerous transnational histories, *Persepolis* shows how comics can provide an illuminating, incisive form for illustrating the histories and destructive potential of stereotypes while refracting those images through caption-narration and alluding to the complexity that lies behind them.

Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a globally inflected graphic novel published shortly after *Persepolis* (2004), is largely devoted to the cartoonist's quest for obsessive naturalistic representation of another scene of horror—his failure to draw or paint the images of 9/11 that haunt him, like "the looming north tower's glowing bones just before it vaporized" and the falling bodies that he saw with his own eyes (Spiegelman n.pag.). The back cover of the giant volume features glossy black falling cartoon bodies scattered all over a matte black background, an evocative exploration of the title's resonance. Spiegelman and his post-9/11 readers suffer the paradoxical simultaneity of no longer having a shadow to hide in—whether it is the towers themselves, or the safe comforts of American capitalism—and of becoming shadows themselves. The black-on-black aesthetic demands, as we gaze at the flattened images of bodies and towers: Which is in the shadow of which? Which is the foreground and which is the background? Are individuals' lives overshadowed by history, or is the grand narrative of history overshadowed by the individuality of pain? Ultimately, this aesthetic recalls de Man's question about author and medium, and renders visible one of the central questions posed by the autobiography genre in both graphic and non-graphic form: is a community, culture, or history the background for the author's personal life narrative or is the author (as case study) a shadowy background for the story of that culture, community, or history writ large?

In a chapter entitled "The Shabbat," towards the end of *Persepolis* vol. 1, the young Marji runs home in a panic when she hears that a missile has exploded in her neighborhood. She finds her neighbor Neda Baba-Levy's home destroyed by a missile attack in the Iran-Iraq War. Before the ruins are depicted, Marji's mother points out that

the Baba-Levys are Jewish, and since it is Saturday, they are likely to have been home for the Sabbath. As the shock of identifying Neda's corpse among the rubble washes over Marji, Satrapi shifts from the ruins to a white background, then removes the caption, and finally replaces the subject (the image of Marji) with a panel of solid black. She thus gradually allows for more negative space around the subject, sharpening the reader's focus on Marji's expression before abruptly blacking it out.

In the last two panels, text and image are separated, as if Marji's usual assertive mode of self-representation in concurrent picture and caption—the "This is me" that labels the square-faced self-portrait in the book's first panel—is no longer possible here. Not only do we know what the final caption tells us—"No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and anger"—but the blackness also implies that visual representation is as

inadequate as vocal expression. The cartoonist is powerless to effect "true" representation of such horror even through her dual aesthetic register, so Spiegelman and Satrapi both rely on stark uses of negative space, and strike a dissonant chord between visual and textual registers, to represent powerlessness in the wake of violence.

In addition to its depictions of culturally marginalized characters—both Iranians in the West and minorities within Iran—*Persepolis* thoughtfully engages with transnational debates surrounding the depiction of women in graphic narrative. Ann Miller writes that the "immense success" of *Persepolis*, bolstered by the supportive community of L'Association, made enormous and transnational strides in overturning the gender imbalance in the world of BD. Satrapi, to Miller, "[became] the highly recognizable face of the newfound legitimacy of the medium as a whole" as "the cultural visibility of *Persepolis* … served to increase awareness of the work of Satrapi's contemporaries." Miller further notes that Jeanne Puchol, president of the women graphic artists' association Artemisia, categorized *Persepolis* as "un tournant" for young female comic strip artists around the world ("Eluding the Frames" 50).[14] Miller reads Satrapi's development of Marji the comics character as a gradual process of empowerment: "It is her ability to represent her experience [through her training in art school] which eventually gives Satrapi the liberation and emancipation to which she aspires" (*Reading Bandes Dessinée* 240). It is also, however, important to remember the visual/verbal

[14] Although L'Association was founded by all male artists, one of its main endeavors became the publication of women's comic books such as those of Julie Doucet and Debbie Dreschler in response to the increasingly "misogynistic portrayals of women" in the French comics industry and the 1970s and 1980s censorship of BD magazines that dealt with themes of radical feminism or homosexuality (50). As Miller points out elsewhere, *Persepolis* was originally published within a feminist redefinition of autographics, a movement of women authors reclaiming the graphic novel as a form.

flexibility of the form of the graphic novel, which provides Satrapi with a larger toolbox for self-representation and lets her avoid presenting identity as teleological. Through a combination of feminist, intertextual, and intergeneric approaches, Satrapi gives readers a nuanced, bi-medial, revisionist portrait that is not meant to stand in for the "average" Iranian woman, but rather tells a specific story about one Iranian woman (stereotypically associated with traditional, restrictive values) working in a "modern" European aesthetic form and community.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is a formative intertext in Satrapi's own gender determination as well as her relationship to her mother in terms heavily mediated by the processes of reading and writing. Living at a boarding-house in Austria, feeling both culturally alienated and homesick for her family, Marji "throws herself into reading" *The Second Sex*, "her mother's favorite book." Satrapi does not pause to comment on the fact that this important French feminist text was widely available in Persian translation in Iran—another piece of evidence for the early globalization of Iran's modern intellectual sphere. The flashback panel to her mother reading is the only one on the page to include Persian script, which, to the Western reader (Francophone or Anglophone), literalizes how inaccessible the text, and the notion of an adult feminist reading practice more generally, was to Marji as a child. Although the book is not in Marji or her mother's "mother tongue," it was one of the most important texts in her mother's

library. As Nancy Miller points out: "The scene of reading connects mother and daughter through memory across geographical and temporal separation" (19).

The dual text/image register and the non-teleological narrative in the *Second Sex* episode emphasizes the multiplicity of global feminist self-definition; that is, Marji's ideas about feminism are not passed on from mother/motherland in a culturally or nationally univocal way. Marji's early association of the book with a specific context of transnational (French-Iranian) feminism, mediated by the intimacy of reading—first with her mother in Iran, then in Austria alone—opens up the text to a much more individual interpretation. To Marji, De Beauvoir's second-wave insistence on challenging biological

essentialism is less important than the other ways in which she must "learn to become a liberated and emancipated woman" (vol. 2, p. 21). This emancipation takes a culturally specific form as one that refuses to accept xenophobic stereotypes: she rebels against one of the boarding-house nuns who insists that "Iranians have no education" and curses in Persian script as she leaves the boarding-house for good.

In another remarkable graphic novel, Satrapi dispenses with frames and panels altogether to propose a variation of Marji's self-formation through feminism that is even less teleological—and thus even less solipsistic than the already multivocal autobiographical narrative in *Persepolis*. *Embroideries* (2005) does not primarily concern itself with individual identity-construction, but instead proposes an aesthetic of simultaneity through which to tell multiple generations of women's history at once.

Embroideries was written concurrently with *Persepolis* and published shortly afterwards, in 2005, which means that the two projects were orchestrated by Satrapi simultaneously. For a full depiction of the Iranian female community of Marji's childhood, one must read both graphic tales, experiencing both the only-child solitude of *Persepolis*, which features the mother and grandmother as primary female antecedents and judges of Marji's behavior, and the patchwork of lives, opinions, anecdotes, histories, and future visions invoked by the women in *Embroideries*. The co-existence of Marji as graphic avatar in both the periodized travel narrative of *Persepolis* and the multi-generational Iran of *Embroideries* offers two points of access for cross-cultural identification with the narrator.

Unlike the initial "framing" (literally and narratologically) at the beginning of *Persepolis*, *Embroideries* begins with a speech bubble extending off the left side of the page, implying that the book's contents are a response to a conversation already begun. The effect is one of generational continuity and insertion into a feminist tradition right away, and ultimately, readers also come to perceive the multiplicity of identity in a very different way than in *Persepolis*. *Embroideries* tells a non-linear story of Satrapi's emergence into womanhood as a collage, both of other definitions of "womanhood" around her and of moments in which collecting, filtering, and preserving those stories

became fundamental to her own sense of herself as a woman. Satrapi has insisted with respect to *Embroideries*: "There was no way I could put frames around the people because the conversation was open and fluid."[15] The dialogue in this graphic novel often attains a separate visual existence, apart from and beyond the individual speakers, and even speech bubbles and/or their corresponding faces disappear altogether when anecdotes veer into taboo or secretive territory.

On the page reproduced here, responses to the story appear just as important as the initial telling, part of a circle of women who are both speakers and audience in a flattened, non-perspectival, and non-framed communal space on the page. Jennifer Worth, drawing on the scholarship of renowned Iranian folklore scholar Sayyīd Abū Al-Qāsim Anjavī-Shīrāzī, relates the all-female gathering that forms the present time of *Embroideries* to the custom of Iranian women's *bazihā-ye namāyeshī* [theatre games], characterized by "initiatory functions, eroticism, and a transgressive quality in both content and form" (158).[16] For the drawing-as-performance depiction of this individualistic yet symbiotic community of women that comes to life in the pages of

[15] Satrapi and Spiegelman, PEN American Center conversation, 2005.

[16] Kaveh Safa-Isfahani argues that the usual context of *bazihā* is both "characteristically egalitarian" in its well-rounded casts of characters and transgressive, "focusing on sex roles against the context of traditional norms and institutions of courtship, betrothal, marriage, family, and divorce" (37-8). Representing women as "autonomous subjects rather than objects" through the genre's malleable scripts, ambiguous gender roles, and flexibility between monologue and chorus parts, he concludes that the *bazihā* tradition represents a "complex system of identifications … contained within a wholly female 'we'" (51).

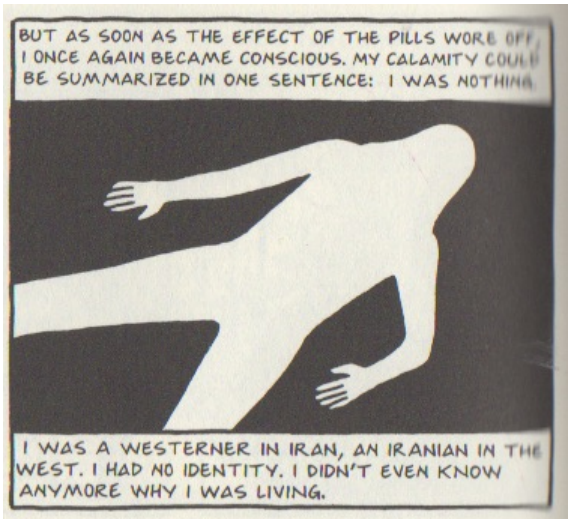
Embroideries, the conventional frame-and-panel structure of Western comic art proves too rigid for Satrapi in its teleological implications and its constant refraction of events through a first-person narrative lens.

In *Persepolis*, by contrast, since the primary project is the vexed and multifaceted articulation of a self, Satrapi embraces and experiments with frames in search of Scott McCloud's two stated purposes of frames in comics—to "isolate important moments in the story" and "create spaces necessary for the story to move forward" (7). Worth notes that Satrapi "frames herself literally and repeatedly in her graphic novels … through all her physical and ideological veils—as a would-be prophet, as a young Marxist revolutionary, as a punk, as a girlfriend, as a stoner and eventual drug dealer, as a homeless person, as a student, as a daughter, as a wife, as an Iranian, and so on … [and this] serves as a constant reminder of Marjane's subjecthood in all of its objectified manifestations" (157). In contrast to *Embroideries*, the burden of subjecthood conveyed by the sometimes restrictive, sometimes empowering definitional power of frames in *Persepolis* is that the Iranian female self, although composed of myriad particularities and idiosyncrasies, is always perceived as political. And for an Iranian woman, especially in the polarized years immediately following the Revolution, the personal and the political were intertwined and inevitably reflected in the subtle choices she made in her dress and appearance, as with the complex layering of fashion statements self-represented by Marji in the image with the denim jacket above. Reading *Persepolis* and *Embroideries* side-by-side thus reveals that the restrictions as well as the possibilities latent in the graphic novel form parallel the cultural and political limits of representation Satrapi is trying to illustrate.

Reading *Persepolis* alongside several of its intertexts that are also committed to the visual/verbal narrativization of marginalized perspectives, it becomes clear that *Persepolis* is an articulation of global simultaneity in the comics world that contains notable parallels and echoes of contemporary American comics, while responding to a specifically Francophone history of stereotypes in comics and maintaining its distinctive Iranian-ness at all times. *Persepolis* is the story of Marji's gradual growth into a global consciousness, but along the way, she faces two major crises in cultural belonging: a despairing period of illness and homelessness in Austria and, back in Iran, a profound period of depression after hypocritical old friends (despite their own embrace of Western pop culture and beauty ideals) reject her as a "decadent Western woman" based on her sexual experience (vol. 2, p. 116). This alienation carries such weight that it ultimately leads her down a path of self-isolation, severe depression, and a suicide attempt. At her lowest point, Satrapi can only illustrate Marji through a simple panel of a blurry, anonymous white silhouette of a person against a black background, notably making use of negative space to depict her heroine as an anti-subject. In Iranian literature, social taboos make it exceedingly rare to depict or even mention suicide, so this inclusion alienates both character and author even further from their national affiliation.[17] Highlighting the negative space of an image's background to divert the viewer's attention from an object in the foreground is a classic technique of Expressionism, and its anonymity leaves room for echoes of the multicultural and even universal. In this stark

[17] This taboo, however, is gradually falling away in Iranian literature of the twenty-first century. Satrapi is preceded by a few other key female Iranian authors who also discuss thoughts of suicide, including Goli Taraghi and Forugh Farrokhzad.

portrait, Marji could be anywhere, at any age, in any culture—and of course, a complicated collage of cultural factors have led her to this point.



The silhouette image, as a climactic panel of the protagonist's despair, is captioned with the aforementioned suggestion of a deep identity crisis: "I was a Westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity. I didn't even know anymore why I was living" (vol. 2, p. 118). This, of course, is an irresolvable paradox, but Marji finds a way to accept and move beyond her internal contradictions. The suicide attempt, which is immediately followed by her self-proclaimed transformation into a "sophisticated woman," can be read as an attempt to frame herself and her feminism/femininity (vis-à-vis that of her judgmental, now "typically Iranian" friends) as transnational.

It would seem that, in attempting to articulate a "global" feminism in the twenty-first century, adapting and hybridizing genre is a remarkably effective technique. In the case of *Persepolis*, the graphic memoir form allows for a kind of synthesis of several diverse genres that have been important for women authors translocally and

transhistorically: from comics to newspapers, from ancient Persian miniatures to contemporary diasporic memoirs. The triangulation of nationalism, Westernization, and exilic alienation in *Persepolis* hinges on gender as an axis, and so does the cross-cultural understanding that this triangulation brings to readers. A helpful notion in articulating the book's disruptive potential as an interstitial intervention in the women's memoir genre is that of "transversalism," defined by Lisa Botshon and Melinda Plastas as the "very gendered process … by which people designated as enemies or *others* form new understandings of each other," a process that depends on Marji's complex combination of pro- and anti-Western leanings as well as the third aspect of Satrapi's exile status, "at home nowhere" (2-3). Satrapi harnesses the intergeneric form of the graphic novel to create an "understanding of the constructed, co-constitutive, flexible, and dialectical nature of identities and the attendant possibility of creating spaces in which new and potentially more liberatory or transformative experiences of the self, other, and community can be experienced" (3).

In contrast to the identity crisis brought on by exile in the silhouetted suicide panel from *Persepolis*, the real-life Satrapi embraces her transnational point of view as a locus of political enunciation. Representing Iranian women in terms legible to readers across the world, however, does not mean robbing them of cultural specificity. Whitlock argues that Satrapi refuses to "dehumanize veiled women" through details such as the red socks that Tehrani women in *Persepolis* wear under their chadors as a tiny act of resistance—refusing to perform exhibitionist acts of unveiling "for the West" but still insisting on "singularity and agency" against the forced restrictions of Khomeini's regime. We must be attuned to nuance in how we read the concept of feminist resistance

across borders, Whitlock insists: "The art is to read for small difference. Satrapi's comics insist on it" ("Autographics" 975).

In Satrapi's work, Iran is not represented, but *articulated* to the West in Emig and Lindner's sense of the term—implying a community with a diverse population that has agency and fluidity, an author with personal stakes, and an engagement with contemporary politics as the real possibility of war between Iran and the United States has continued to loom large at regular intervals since the early 1980s. Despite the problematic history of representing Otherness in the early days of BD, Satrapi's globally attuned convergence of text and visual imagery reinforces the notion that there are no such things as "national" art forms.

II. *Persepolis*, Persian Miniatures, and the Ancient Transnationalism of the *Shāhnāmeh*

I now turn to Satrapi's contemporary adaptations of a frame-breaking aesthetic that dates back to the eleventh century to describe a contrapuntal process of defamiliarization, in which Satrapi's visual vocabulary both in and out of the frame compensates for some of the limitations of verbal language. Persian miniatures themselves exist within a web of thoroughly transnational origin and circulation stories, and some of *Persepolis*'s stylistic elements can be read as a contemporary continuation of its aesthetic features. As is perhaps over-exaggerated by the borders, flower imagery, and ornamental curlicues on the cover images of the American edition of *Persepolis*, many of the books' panels are constructed like carefully balanced, self-contained miniature paintings. Others, however, notably distort, break, or dispense with frames as narrative devices, a transgressive pattern that finds a wealth of counterpoints in Persian miniatures.

Harnessing the power latent in the reinforcement between painting and caption, on the one hand, and the telling discrepancies between the two, on the other, Satrapi imbues the graphic novel—as the most contemporary, mass-culture version of the miniature painting—with a transhistorical affect that both arrests the eye in its usual reading of graphic sequence and speaks to the multiculturalism of Iran's history. In so doing, the infusion of multimedia graphic novel design with a Persian miniature aesthetic both politicizes and globalizes the project of *Persepolis*.

The aesthetic of enclosure is central to Persian miniatures, which isolate individual moments, interactions, and scenes like couplets in a ghazal, which must be able to exist independently although they are part of a longer whole.

Satrapi's chapter title boxes, which run throughout the two volumes, are composed of stylized rectangular boxes with a simple icon or drawing corresponding to each simple chapter title, prefiguring the climactic moment of realization or development in the chapter to come: "The Veil" when mandatory hijab is introduced at Marji's school; "The Wine" when the moral police nearly discovers the Satrapis' secret inventory of alcohol in their home; "The Exam" when Marji gains admission to art school, and so forth. These slender boxes suggest a wealth of multicultural perspectives, just as tiny details in miniature paintings often did.

Pauline Uchmanowicz describes the first chapter heading ("The Veil") as a "polyphonic epigraph," the eye in its "heavily-inked, coffin-shaped box … doubling as an

insinuated chador" (368). This eye, she argues, which "both 'sees' and 'reads' the adjacent printed word provides meta-discursive instructions, alerting decoders to the necessity of para-literacy, that is the ability to parse juxtaposed words and images in relation to each other, a skill that extends to interpreting ancillary or additive texts embedded in a central narrative" (368). In other words, because comic readers are constantly attuned to the synthesis of image and text, they are more likely to be receptive to intertexts and inter-images as well. To Uchmanowicz, the veiled eye in miniature also suggests a bifurcated perspective aimed at Western readers—the panoptic vantage point of the "occidental gaze" paradoxically combined with the chador as "mechanism of bodily closure and control" (368). The dual register effectively complements Satrapi's commentary on being doubly "boxed in": by both the surveilling gaze of the regime and the reductive gaze of the Orientalist, by both visual covering-over and verbal stereotype. If the reader's eye is thus enclosed in a miniature box, both individualized and limited by the bicultural perspective Satrapi provides for us, the graphic avatar of young Marji pushes the boundaries of this constricting framing tradition from the very first page of *Persepolis*, in the aforementioned opening panels when Marji nudges herself out of the frame in the veiled "class picture." Characters and objects in the book are often shown half-in/half-out of the frame, as if Satrapi is only partly committing them to the narrative conceits of a given subplot, cultural construct, or power dynamic.

Satrapi plays on the transnational suggestiveness of frame-altering *Shāhnāmeh* paintings when she constructs panels whose content is deeply ironic or filled with hidden meanings or, in representations of shock or grief, when she does away with frames altogether. *Persepolis*'s most striking parallel to the Simurgh's multicultural opening of

visual narrative, however, is associated with a moment of narrative rupture when the narrator's historical vantage point supersedes the characters' self-knowledge. Here, the Shah's recent departure from Iran has given the Satrapis a false sense of liberation and security, suggested by the shifty eyes of the snake-devil who forms the new border of the frame. In a comic artist's version of dramatic irony, the usual "clear lines" of neutral framing are replaced by an ominous serpentine figure, ornate but not culturally specific, circling the scene. This is one of a few key moments in which David B.'s surrealistic "dream art" style seems a prominent influence on domestic scenes Satrapi portrays—personal conversations that are inevitably overshadowed by lurking social, political, and historical demons.

In many miniature paintings such as the two depictions of the *Shāhnāmeh*'s story of Zal and the Simurgh reproduced here, artists literally break or push the boundaries of the painting's frame to indicate the momentous or unusual nature of an event. Zal, the infant abandoned on a

mountainside who will eventually become one of the epic's most important warrior figures, is rescued and nurtured by the bird Simurgh in its nest. When this mythological creature—who, it is worth mentioning, has a range of parallels in world-mythological figures such as the phoenix, the griffin, the roc, and the homa—appears in Persian miniature illustrations of the *Shāhnāmeh*, it is almost always associated with a breaking of the frame. The Persian miniature style—where everything is enclosed, compressed, and carefully laid out in rectangular space—often allows for this extra transgressive flourish when the Simurgh is involved. This extra-narrative power might stem from the fact that its mythology spans wider than the distinctively Iranian project of the kings in the *Shāhnāmeh*.

The stark simplicity that Satrapi uses to convey moments of non-witnessed violence and trauma, like the Cinema Rex image discussed above, can also be traced to the "flatness" of Persian miniature painting. The question, once again, as with the inability to depict the death of Neda Baba-Levy, becomes how to move beyond the artificial beautification of dead bodies into patterns as well as the historical glosses that turn violent crimes into nationalist victories. Satrapi hints at an answer by occasionally shifting the focus away from and beyond these scenes, by disturbing the eye. When illustrating the storylines of tragic characters who do not fit the mold of anonymous revolutionaries, martyrs, and the like, and whose suffering the young Marji hears about in more explicit detail, *Persepolis* pushes the boundaries of conventional comics layout by experimenting with panels and frames.

The newspaper headline pictured here is how readers first learn of the death of Marji's beloved Uncle Anoosh, who has been sentenced to death on charges of espionage. Instead of being enclosed in a frame, the newspaper is weighed down by two bread swans—a poignant symbol of Anoosh's special love for his niece. (During his time in prison, he was only allowed one visitor, and he requested Marji, surprising her with a swan made of breadcrumbs which he had saved up from his rations in jail.) When Marji hears the news of his death, the event is beyond her comprehension of the normal, logical sequence of events. It is thus figurally "framed" in terms of these affective, resonant objects rather than narratively "framed" by the borders of a panel as part of the graphic storyline. This way of dispensing with the black lines that the genre and its readers usually think of as constituting a "frame" makes us pause and recognize the traumatic significance of the death by mere virtue of the jarring juxtaposition of genres, no matter our geographical or historical positionality.

In its transgressive forms, then, Persian miniature painting provides an alternative Iranian artistic context for Satrapi when she occasionally does away with the strict framing of the French *ligne claire* aesthetic. In the context of Islamic art, moreover, Persian miniatures are closely associated with representing the taboo or unrepresentable, since restrictions on depicting human forms, especially that of the Prophet, were less strictly enforced in the case of miniatures because they were circulated privately in book

form rather than being displayed as public wall art. This opens up possibilities for a number of unexpected depictions of other cultures and races, as well as surprising portraits of women. As the Metropolitan Museum of Art's extensive Islamic Art collection reveals, many miniature depictions of the *Shāhnāmeh* seem to be associated with the presence of female or gender-ambiguous figures (such as the Simurgh) who render the epic's male warrior-hero figures transfixed, spellbound, or otherwise momentarily powerless.

In the second volume of *Persepolis*, one of the last experiences Marji has as an adult artist working in Iran revolves around precisely this question of representing the unrepresentable. A frequently illustrated scene from the *Shāhnāmeh* is the famous battle described in Chapter One, referenced by Simin Behbahani in her 2009 ghazal "Digar Savar Nakhāham Shod," in which a legendary Iranian woman named Gord Afarid donned warrior's clothes to fight against Sohrab. As recent art school graduates in Tehran, Marji and her husband Reza have been commissioned to design a "theme park based on Iranian mythological heroes" (174). The couple seizes this rare opportunity for contemporary artists to take part in a process of national self-definition that is so dominated by military and religious

discourse at this moment, and they propose a theme park illustrated by the full-page panel shown on the next page. One of the focal points of their vision is a re-enactment of the Gord Afarid story, and this becomes the final and unyielding point of contention with the censorship authorities in Marji's attempt at an artist career in Iran. The censor's objections to Marji and Reza's "impossible" drawings notably include two of the most striking features common to *Shāhnāmeh* illustrations across regions and periods—the previously discussed frame-breaking mythic animals, and the revelation of the warrior Gord Afarid as female.

The Berlin Staatsbibliothek collection of Persian miniature illustrations from the 17th century Isfahan school contain several manuscript pages that focus entirely on the encounter between Sohrab and Gord Afarid. These reveal a much more equal and balanced aesthetic than that of other *Shāhnāmeh* illustrations of men and women within the same frame. Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh, in a study of women in the *Shāhnāmeh*, refers to Gord Afarid as "the first Amazon in the Iranian national epic," and like her Greek counterparts, she is every bit as fierce and loyal a warrior as her male equivalents (42). In this, she stands out as an extreme against the majority of women in the epic, whom Khaleghi Motlagh describes as "lively figures with warmth, courage, intellect, and even a certain degree of independence," yet "not knowledgeable, given no rights, and perceived as servants to men" (19-20).

There are dozens, if not hundreds, of Persian miniature depictions of the moment in which Sohrab snatches the helmet off Gord Afarid's head to undo her cross-dressing disguise. These illustrations, of which two examples are shown above, are notable for the fact that Gord Afarid and Sohrab appear remarkably equal in stature, physical position, and size—he does not outmatch her physically, and their horses and battle gear appear remarkably similar.[18]

Early on in *Persepolis*, when the young Marji declares herself a prophet, she bears no visibly gendered markings. A Zoroastrian (distinctively Iranian) sun-god mane crowning her head removes her hair, her only obviously feminine aspect in Satrapi's simple style, and this coronation puts her on the same level as male

[18] This equivalence remains true across various geographic regions in the period, including artists from the Timurid, Turkman, Isfahan, and other schools. In the image on the left, note that Sohrab's elbow is still being slightly "nudged" out of the frame—as if by the presence of Gord Afarid?—but that the encounter also seems balanced in terms of size and proportion between the two warriors. As we move forward in time, Gord Afarid becomes even more masculinized, as in the nineteenth-century Qajar-era painting on the right, in which she even sports a moustache.

prophets before her—Mohammed, Jesus, and others. The brief dubious question "A woman?" is only afforded a half-size panel and does not elicit a response, but is instead followed by a series of panels illustrating the reasons why Marji wants to be a prophet—a series of small class-related injustices with transhistorical relevance: "My maid did not eat with us," "My father had a Cadillac," "My grandmother's knees always ached" (vol. 1, p. 6). Role models later in Marji's childhood also inspire cross-dressing as, for example, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. During this phase of her childhood political development, she dresses the same, learns the same Marxist slogans, and plays alongside her male peers. In search of a female warrior aesthetic, much like the one represented by Gord Afarid, Marji proclaims to conclude the first chapter: "I wanted to be justice, love and the wrath of God all in one."

The floral pattern on Marji's nightgown here is identical to that of Gord Afarid's warrior tunic in the amusement-park illustration above. This implies an articulation of female warriors on par with their male counterparts, both in the *Shāhnāmeh* and in Satrapi's version of Iranian history.

Since Gord Afarid lives in the borderland between Turan and Iran that marks a division between Eastern and Western civilizations from the *Shāhnāmeh*'s point of view, her story is also bound up in the transnational, often misunderstood nuances of Iran's history. But while the trope of the damsel-in-distress figure in a fortress to be conquered is also a transnational archetype, it is one that Gord Afarid challenges with a different kind of model for multicultural women's stories. Khaleghi Motlagh points out that her father King Gustahem deems her free to marry whomever she wants (109), and this proto-feminism in the family translates to her own sense of autonomy when she evades capture by shaming Sohrab in the dialogue quoted above. From Marji's self-placement on horseback on the cover of Volume 4, to the geometric patterns in representing scenes of death that Uchmanowicz notes is similar to arabesque tessellation in Islamic art, *Persepolis* is full of traces and symbols of the globality of the Persian miniature aesthetic. The ancient art of Persian miniatures often combined the visual and the verbal in ways that allowed for a greater range of expression in portraiture and more nuanced aesthetic interpretations of historical events, something the adult Marji is literally trying to design in placing Gord Afarid front and center and contextualizing her within the theme park's signs that point to the multifaceted "glories" of Iranian history as attractions. The connection is also personal, as Satrapi portrays both Gord Afarid and Marji as active agents in rather than passive recipients of culture and history. The symmetry between patterns on Marji's nightgown and Gord Afarid's tunic suggests that the cross-cultural vantage point of the epic heroine, both proud of her nation and (as a resident of the borderland Sapid Dezh) cognizant of the slippery definition of "nationhood" itself, is literally woven into the fabric of her childhood.

Unlike Satrapi's globally inflected feminism, Gord Afarid's version may be bound up in simpler notions of cultural essentialism, as well as anxieties about nomadic Eastern civilization. It is, however, a feminism that will soon be deconstructed and made aware of its obvious multiculturalism, and that self-examination is part of Satrapi's project in *Persepolis*. The Gord Afarid-Sohrab encounter in the *Shāhnāmeh* represents a pivotal moment of latent cultural self-awareness, which is inextricable from the kind of feminism that Marji comes to symbolize. By turning the spotlight onto Gord Afarid in her imaginatively reconstructed Persia, Marji—and, by extension, Satrapi—has recovered a powerful indigenous archetype that directly contravenes assumptions made by both the Islamic Republic and Western readers about timeless female disempowerment in Iran. That is why, as an adult artist, Marji's version of Iranian history (in order to truly represent reform from within) would need to show Gord Afarid unveiled. As even the censor understands: "a Gord Afarid in a chador"—one whose hair is the object of allure and seduction, whose unveiling will invite enemy invasion and whose concealment will reinforce patriarchal seclusion rather than invoke the powers of gender-deconstruction and even gender-ambiguity to defend the homeland—"is no longer a Gord Afarid" (vol. 2, p. 177).

In the next few pages after this disappointment, Marji and Reza amicably decide to get a divorce and Marji decides to finally leave Iran for Paris: "Not having been able to build anything in my country," she narrates facing forward in a standalone panel, "I prepared to leave it once again" (vol. 2, p. 185). The "building" she references is perhaps not just a question of carving out a personal space in a marriage founded on gender equality and an art profession that welcomes women. She is also, perhaps, referring to the

current censorship laws that keep her from preserving, and extending, the tradition of feminism that is latent in Iranian history and culture—from the ancient stories of the *Shāhnāmeh* through its centuries of pictorial depiction—into the twentieth century (with the amusement park design) and even the twenty-first (in the graphic novel, were it to be published in Iran). It is not the social restrictions placed upon her by the *hijab* or the moral police; not the fear and trauma of years of violent revolution and nearly a decade of war—but this sequence of events, this bittersweet coda, this portrait of the artist unable to portray—that causes the autobiographical Marji to finally leave Iran for good. Gord Afarid cannot be represented, which ultimately means that Iran's history as Satrapi has experienced it cannot be represented from within. The heroine of Persian miniatures thus marks the limits of female textual self-representation within the boundaries of a single nation and its politics.

The *Shāhnāmeh* and *Persepolis* can both be considered examples of world literature—not just because they engage with multicultural content, but because their combination of text and illustration challenge the boundaries of nationhood and nation-centered narration. As Daniel Grassian writes, Satrapi correctly surmised that "were she have tried to become an artist and writer in Iran, her works would, by and large, have been censored or banned—as indeed they have been." He also, however, notes that her work "notes (and has portrayed) how the freedoms promised by the West can sometimes be more like chimeras" (44). Despite her repeated insistence that *Persepolis* was not written with political motivations but merely as a "humanistic" appeal for a more well-rounded view of other cultures through the multifaceted narration of one Iranian

character's multicultural life[19], the act of writing *Persepolis* inevitably becomes a political act because it illustrates the insufficiency of national boundaries for the complete understanding of such a work. More recent comic graphic novels have seized upon this notion that an intergenre work unifies the political and personal nature of life stories told through comics. *Persepolis* marks a watershed moment in the global history of the genre, after which reading across registers goes hand in hand with a necessarily multicultural reading experience.

III. The Global Graphic Novel as a Continuation of the *Persepolis* Project

Stretching across the centuries, the frame-breaking transgressions of Satrapi's multimedia aesthetic in *Persepolis* continue to reflect the political paradoxes of modern-day Iran. Nearly a decade after its publication, the momentous and unresolved anti-Ahmadinejad uprising in Iran dubbed the Green Movement—a 2009 precursor to the anti-dictatorship "Arab Spring" revolutions that swept across the Middle East starting in early 2011—began to make its mark on the graphic novel genre as well. Many incisive and influential comics that have emerged from the region in recent years are indebted to *Persepolis* for its multicultural, intergeneric precedent, as well as its multivocal approach to life narrative. The graphic novel as a global mode of circulation has been an extremely

[19] In *ListFilm* (2008), on the filmic version of *Persepolis*: "I think that people who see the politics [in it] need to find an answer – and they want to give me a responsibility that I don't have to have … I didn't want it to become a movie with the pretensions to become this lesson of history, politics, sociology. I'm not a sociologist. I'm not a politician. I'm not a historian. I'm one person." In *Foreign Policy* (2010): "I did *Persepolis* not as a political act, but because I had enough of all the nonsense that was being said about my country, and I thought I would tell my story as a part of the truth about my country."

productive genre for artists and authors in the wake of the Green Movement and the Arab Spring, in writing for multi-site audiences, because it hovers between the testimonial weight of words and the representational burden of images—using or eschewing one or the other as it sees fit—and often plays with contradictions between the two vocabularies. In the past few years, there has been a surge of interest in the graphic novel as a highly adaptable cross-cultural form of representation for the twenty-first century Muslim world beyond the borders of Iran: recent examples of massively popular cartoon narratives have also surfaced in the wake of the Arab Spring, such as Tarek Shahin's *Rise* in Egypt and Nadia Khiari's *Willis from Tunis* in Tunisia. To focus, however, on the most directly related descendant of *Persepolis* in the contemporary graphic novel context, *Zahra's Paradise* (2011) proves the lasting legacy of Satrapi's attempts to open up a genre in many cultural, gendered, artistic, and political directions.

Zahra's Paradise was published by two anonymous authors using only their first names (Amir and Khalil), who started their account of the Green Movement as an online comic strip. The self-described "Persian writer and Arab artist working with a Jewish editor," who have chosen anonymity for political reasons, represent a contemporary continuation of the project Satrapi began: *Zahra's Paradise* is committed to portraying Iran as multicultural and its current reform movements as manifold and multi-directional. The entire graphic novel is driven by women's narratives, women's losses, and women's outcries against censorship, particularly by the title character Zahra Alavi, whose name corresponds to that of the Prophet's daughter and that of Tehran's major cemetery (to which the title refers). Her search for her missing protester son Mehdi is the book's main narrative engine, an allegory for a larger social quest since Mehdi, the Twelfth Imam in

Shi'a tradition, is a justice-bearing figure whose title many Iranian political and religious leaders have claimed over the years to legitimize their claims to authority (*Zahra's Paradise* afterword, 236). While most of the active searching is carried out by Mehdi's brother Hassan, the investigation is also crucially helped by other female characters who act as key negotiators across boundaries of religion (Zahra's best friend, Miriam, is an Armenian Christian), sexual propriety (thanks to the wily Sepideh's affair with a prison guard, the Alavi family uses spyware to hack into the files of Evin Prison), and class (through the upper-class Mrs. Ardalan, whose connections in the judicial council enable the Alavis to overcome bureaucratic obstacles to their search). Far from depicting twenty-first century Iranian women as confined to the domestic sphere, the female characters in *Zahra's Paradise*, just like the women protesting on the streets and in cyberspace as part of the Green Movement, are mobile, action-oriented, well-educated, and integral to both the story and the paratext of the graphic novel.

As *Zahra's Paradise* expanded into print form in 2011, the authors sought a way to harness the newfound materiality of the text in distinctly political terms. They began to cooperate with a female human rights activist named Roya Boroumand, and included a powerful appendix to the book called the "Omid ["Hope" in Persian] Memorial Project." This list is a catalog of 16,901 names of victims of the Islamic Republic's tortures and executions since 1979, in microscopic text: both illegible and unfathomable, it is an anti-image and an anti-text that seems to acknowledge

the limits of even graphic-and-textual representation together. In their afterword, the authors announce this appendix as "history as an act of love if there ever was one" (240). As wide and eclectic a cast of characters as Zahra's story contains, just as in *Persepolis*, there is a clear warning against reading the story as straightforwardly "representative" by insisting that there are thousands of other unique stories adjacent to it. Actually including those names in this appendix keeps the story from claims to an easy cultural translatability, since the sheer volume of names imposes clear limitations on a culturally relativist approach to the text. This is a tragic depiction that, while multicultural and multivocal, is in many ways unique to Iran. And like Satrapi's simultaneous connections to a distinctly local Iranian aesthetic (from ancient Persian miniatures to modern Tehran newswriting), *Zahra's Paradise* was also compiled with an explicitly non-Western methodology in mind. The afterword begins with an explanation of Amir and Khalil's narrative approach as based in Muslim historiography, specifically Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah, espousing the need for a critical eye to accurately report events in time (238).

Still, the young protesters' project of reforming Iran from within requires not only global technology but also a global frame of mind. Each chapter opens with an image of a date-stamped computer screenshot from Hassan's blog, chronicling the search for Mehdi online for the world to read. Spyware smuggled in by Sepideh on a fake CD of photos from Dubai provides a crucial turning point in the search, enabling Hassan, a skillful hacker, to access

internal records from Evin Prison. In short, several types of ingenuity and several sites of resistance are necessary in order to circumvent the Regime's increasingly tyrannical and tech-savvy forms of censorship. For Amir and Khalil, the overused term "Twitter Revolution" is far from a casual label—in their story of the 2009 events, technology is an integral part of making resistance global. In their afterword, the authors refer to the cell phones that became life-or-death tools for the protesters as "mirrors for witnessing each other's presence" (239). The crucial nature of this multimedia approach draws directly on the precedents set by Satrapi's interweaving of newspapers, radio, and TV from around the world, filtered through Iranian media, and simply on the power of the simultaneous visual/verbal register that they are granted as comic artists.

Although it did not itself emerge from online roots, *Persepolis* has laid the groundwork for another convergence between the intergeneric and the transnational: a national/global dialectic between online news and comics whose creation and circulation are inevitably multinational. Saskia Sassen describes global digital networks as "a new spatio-temporal order" that "is beginning to inscribe specific components of the national" (378). Globalization, she writes, is taking place "inside the national to a far larger extent than is usually recognized," with the nation as an enabler and enactor of the global scale (1). Just as the Internet allows us to cover much more space in instantaneous time, the comic book's dual register allows for a greater richness of exposition in less narrative time.

Although Zahra is a symbolic name and the facts of Mehdi's case are supposedly fictional, the authors explain: "We can't pretend there is no connection between fiction and reality … fiction can open a window into reality when reality is too painful, distant,

silent, or hard to reach" (239). In the same way that Satrapi willingly shoulders the immense representative burden that it is to remake the maligned image of a nation and culture in the world's eyes, of keeping Iran from being "judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists," Amir and Khalil take up her ceaseless project of making global representations of Iran more multivocal through underground channels, insisting that "these facts are not established cheaply. They were and are being purchased at grave risk every day. The stories that are constructed out of them—what is remembered and what is forgotten—matter" (239). Taking full advantage of two registers, the textual and the pictorial, to craft more accurate and more complex cross-cultural representations is one way to combat the stereotypes that so frequently loom over Iran, its women, and the Muslim world as a whole. The capaciousness of intergeneric art allows for a less nationally entrenched form of political commentary—one that can, and does, leave room for the paradoxes of Satrapi's modern-day Gord Afarid.

Conclusion: The Frames of Censorship

On the morning of March 14, 2013, news broke that all principals of public schools in the city of Chicago had been given urgent instructions to remove all copies of *Persepolis* from their school libraries and confirm with all their teachers that the book would not be taught in any classrooms until further notice. After a few days of media frenzy, the announcement was followed by a more detailed statement by Chicago Public Schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett that the book was being reconsidered for use in grades seven through ten because of its "graphic language" and "powerful images of torture", and the directive to remove the book from libraries was rescinded (Wetli n.pag.). But the book, which has been commonplace on US middle and high school curricula

since its publication in English, is still being newly considered as inappropriate for seventh and eighth grade use.

The events in Chicago are not the first time that *Persepolis* has encountered censorship. Unsurprisingly, the book has been banned in Iran since its publication because of its less than favorable depiction of the Islamic Republic's government. The film version of *Persepolis* was banned in Tunisia shortly after the Tunisian Revolution in 2011, presumably because of some of its lighthearted references to Islam, such as Marji's self-declaration as a prophet and her long, irreverent conversations with God, who is depicted as a benevolent, bearded old man. But what is so suddenly "threatening" about this book in the United States, especially now that it has already been read in schools for nearly a decade? It is worth pausing to reflect on why an Iranian-French female comic book artist whose work, as demonstrated, encompasses a wide range of cultural references (some of them American)—an artist who vocally opposes the current Iranian regime, and whose stance is by no means anti-American—is being cracked down on at this moment. Kristine Mayle, a representative for the Chicago Teachers Union, refused to accept the claim that the book was banned because the depictions of torture and violence are too graphic. In an interview, she referred to the overall volatile climate surrounding the ongoing closing of 54 public schools in Chicago, primarily in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods, due to budget constraints: "The only thing I can think of is they don't want our children reading about revolution as they're closing our schools down" (Horng, n.pag.). Should we take this implication seriously? Is *Persepolis* a "dangerous" book? Can literature foment revolution? What is it about this story, set in Tehran in 1979, with a child narrator who has political leanings and opinions but certainly does not

actively partake in the Revolution, that the Chicago Public School board fears might be harmful to a seventh grader?

What disparate groups from Tehran to Chicago to Paris find so "dangerous" about globally and politically oriented comics might just be the elusion of definition that takes place when *Persepolis* and other comics refuse to reify binary categories of nation, culture, gender, religion, historical period, or literary genre. When Satrapi responded to the Chicago ban, it was because of her commitment to dialogism with her readers: "The only reason I answered is because the kids asked me" (Wetli n.pag.) Dismissing notions that certain violent or sexually explicit scenes in the book are too "immoral" for the seventh-grade curriculum, Satrapi's last words to date on the Chicago ban are faithful to this paradigm of global access: "Immorality," she succinctly says, "is the banning of a book" (Wetli n.pag.).

Since the film version of *Persepolis* was released to widespread acclaim in 2007, Satrapi has been primarily focused on her filmmaking career, and she has recently taken an interesting turn back to her art school roots, exhibiting her first collection of paintings at the Gallerie Jerôme de Noirmont in Paris in spring 2013. In other words, her embrace of the intergeneric grows ever wider. As a text, however, *Persepolis* has spun far beyond its authorial origin in terms of the possibilities for cross-cultural representation it has opened up for the graphic memoir genre on a global scale. This is now a genre that draws on and critically engages with some features of life narrative, some features of comics, some features of Persian miniature painting, and some features of newswriting for a complex but extremely effective globally "open" form of self-representation.

Shortly after the publication of *Persepolis*, in March 2004, came President Jacques Chirac's now-infamous banning of religious garb and symbols in French public schools. In an interview shortly thereafter, Satrapi vocally opposed the ban and expressed solidarity with young second-generation French Muslim girls now embracing the veil as a means of resistance to state intrusion into individuals' lives. The backlash from these young women was reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's well-known celebration of women's veiling as anticolonial resistance during the Algerian War, but transposed to a global context of resistance against the French state's decision to tout "secularism" as an excuse to enforce a culturally homogenizing version of globalization that infringes upon individual freedoms and cultural specificities. "The height of irony," Satrapi remarked, "is that the veil has become a symbol of rebellion." (Tully n.pag.).

The graphic memoir, like the veil, is a vessel that can embody multiple statements, discourses, narratives, and cultural identities all at once. Satrapi's embrace of the global resonance of the intergeneric graphic novel makes for a revelatory undoing of the expectations we as readers bring to life narrative and comics, as well as the many intertexts and intergenres *Persepolis* inhabits, expands, hybridizes, and deconstructs. It is the simultaneous resistance to singular categorization in terms of both culture and genre that makes politically engaged comics capable of reflecting on and responding to injustices in a multifaceted world by creating a multifaceted world of their own.

Coda

"Face to Face, Street to Street": Borderless Genres, Flexible Forms, and Digital Futures

"Genres Without Borders" has shown how some of the most progressive and iconic literary intellectuals of the past fifty years in Anglophone, Francophone, and Persophone spheres have been deeply engaged with each other's work through their mutual and synchronous experimentation with genre and form. In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to illuminate a continuous historical correlation between cross-cultural dialogue and formal experimentation, arguing that literary works that transcend conventions of genre both reflect existing sites of transnational exchange and continually forge new ones. In so doing, each intergeneric work examined here becomes a "worlding" text, an active producer of globality. As a complex node in global literary circuits, Persian literary culture has long merged the transnational and the intergeneric through unconventional textual encounters and global interstices of aesthetic confluence, whether this takes place through the re-appropriation of poetic forms, the redefinition of verbal and visual vocabularies in film, or the diasporic re-presentation of subjects in comics.

As a final meditation on the mutual processes of genre-formation in Iran and the West, I would like to end with a few observations about how transnational genre-creation works today, and how it is likely to proceed into the future. When one moves through the streets of twenty-first century Iran, it is hard not to think of how the physical and intellectual landscape is being slowly reshaped by the freedoms of expression afforded by the digital sphere. Most roofs have covert satellite dishes; most young people are glued to

their iPhone screens. Although the phrase "Twitter revolution" has become severely overused, it is difficult to imagine how the massive 2009 uprisings in Iran following President Ahmadinejad's heavily contested re-election—widely known as the Green Movement, which served as a model for the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011 and 2012—would have unfolded at such speed and magnitude without the on-the-ground documentation and instantaneous speed made possible by the new genres and forms constantly being generated by social media in the digital sphere.

As genre-creation moves online, it moves into a more dynamic realm where no text, it might be said, is ever really complete. From constantly updated Tumblr pages and Facebook statuses, to trending topics on Twitter, to YouTube videos generating endless comments and spoofs, the digital sphere of genre-formation lives and breathes—crossing national borders so fast it is often hard to tell where they once existed. Mark Poster argues that the "assemblage of human and information machine" has now become a global agent, "introducing new configurations of the binaries of space and time, body and mind, subject and object, producer and consumer, indeed all the constituents that form cultures" (19). I would like to propose that we might think about the new forms of art and literature emerging from recent years of protest and upheaval in Iran, increasingly embedded in digital storytelling methods, as a culmination of the literary global travels that have been taking place throughout the twentieth century by way of experiments with intergenre.

Digital narratives use the inherently individualistic experience of reading and the faceless political commons of social media in many of the same ways that authors and artists combined their particular stories with the openness of older liminal literary forms:

in order to harness both halves of the "human-machine" digital "author." As a result, what we think of as *dis*-embodiment (both the technological and the literary) actually provides new avenues and possibilities for embodiment and the telling of new kinds of life stories.

In the wake of Ahmadinejad's re-election in 2009, there were massive outpourings of protest among Tehran youth—remarkably peaceful, moderate, and articulate reactions from a generation sick of extremist and polarizing ideology in any form. While the support centered around opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, protesters ranged from feminists to socialists to moderates—just as they had initially done in the 1979 revolution. This movement, clearly, was not just about Ahmadinejad—it was the manifestation of a secular, reformist foundation of Iranian society that had been in place for a long time. A diverse range of songs and poetry, both old and new, were integral to the rhetoric and methodology of these protests, which used the openness of literature and music to varying interpretations to galvanize unprecedented crowds under simple, open-ended slogans such as "Where is my vote?" and "Face to face, street to street."[20] The brevity of these slogans made it easy to integrate them in multimedia assemblages made possible in various ways on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other

[20] The latter motto was drawn from the One Million Signatures campaign, a grassroots campaign for social justice launched in 2006 that sought to challenge discriminatory laws against women in Iran. As Farzaneh Milani points out, "face to face, street to street" is a quotation from a poem by the nineteenth-century poet Tahirih Qurratul'Ayn, who "refuse[d] to be trapped by the stereotypes foisted upon her by tradition and [became] her own public interpreter" (*WNS* 123). The Green Movement, like the One Million Signatures campaign, draws on this literary reference to emphasize the grassroots nature of the movement's connectivity across class, gender, religious, generational, and cultural divisions in Iranian society.

platforms, and digital media thus became an integral element of the movement's rhetoric and aesthetic.

From the corporeal vulnerability in Neshat's *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* to the frustrations surrounding the hijab in Satrapi's *Persepolis*, "Genres Without Borders" has noted the limitations of the physical body for authors and artists restricted by political and cultural censorship, especially for women. This is one important reason why the (dis)embodiment of textuality on Facebook, Twitter, and other digital and social media has featured so prominently in the global dissemination of young Iranians' cultural identities and political aspirations, especially since the 2009 Green Movement uprisings. Digital media, which are the ultimate venues for border-crossings today, constitute an instantaneous form of travel and are made possible by the constant reconfiguration of existing forms and the invention of new genres.

I would like to suggest that a contemporary, constantly evolving intergenre—that of digital life narrative by way of various forms of social media—is anonymizing and collectivizing authorship on a global scale, allowing the Persian literary sphere, which has always been open to transnational exchange through genre and form, to connect with other literary cultures at a suddenly rapid, empowering pace. In the political and artistic climate of the Iranian Green Movement of 2009, the material reality of revolutionary bodies in the streets formed many different kinds of intertexts with their self-representations on Facebook and Twitter, producing more globally responsive, communicative, and articulate revolts while maintaining local specificities through the translocal and the subnational. An intertext, of course, is a text that depends on, revises, refashions, and re-conceptualizes a previous text—breathing new life into its form and

genre while interrogating its old themes and concerns. To bring the far-reaching observations of "Genres Without Borders" to a contemporary point of culmination, I enumerate two of the many possible models for human-digital intertextuality that have emerged from the Green Movement and its global reverberations: first, the new "martyrdom" of Facebook; second, the new logic of intervention on Twitter and YouTube.

Through its profile picture assemblages and through its insistent rhetorical revival of the phrase "We are all," Facebook has provided a new space for dialogic martyrdom that directly responds to a martyrdom culture of a much more traditional kind. Tehran, for one, has an urban aesthetic dominated by martyrdom: the city's public murals of young *shahids* range from the photographic to similar images painted and romanticized, beautified to render the martyrdom aesthetic both collective and timeless. After the Islamic Revolution, as well as during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, many street names were also changes to honor martyrs, as the everyday language of the city increasingly became a discourse of memorialization. As with the government's strategy of publishing photo galleries of "Today's Martyrs" in the daily newspaper throughout the war, the portrait format of the martyr murals glamorizes wartime death and presents it as a path to individual fame and a historical glory based in altruism and self-sacrifice. These thousands of murals are visual biographies that dominate the streets of the city, haunting the citizens who traverse the spaces of contemporary Tehran with incessant reminders of the sacrificial role models they should aspire to honor in living and writing their own lives. The state's commitment to modernizing the martyr discourse is so prevalent that

even Ali Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader, has been referred to as a *shahid-e-zendeh*, meaning "martyr who is still alive."

Arguably, the locus of memorial expression where this transformation from biographical to archetypal, from mimetic to symbolic, takes place is the massive burial ground at Behesht-e-Zahra, with its exhibitionist layout of gravesites and their inhabitants. This enormous cemetery serves all of Tehran's inhabitants – but there is a section devoted solely to the massive numbers of fallen soldiers from the Iran-Iraq War.

The gravesites are pictured here: on top of the vertical pedestals are glass boxes bearing relics or keepsakes in small cabinets along with portraits of the fallen soldiers on display—notably, the *shahids* are often pictured as corpses on the battlefield, not as they were in life—indicating that for mourners, it is more important to valorize the circumstances of a martyr's death rather than to remember his living persona. This is especially striking because, in Islam, it is very unconventional to have an image of the face on a tombstone at all.

Neda Agha-Soltan, the young Iranian woman who became an international icon of the young, largely female resistance in 2009 and was named one of TIME Magazine's

"People Who Mattered" that year, was killed on June 20th by sniper fire on a street corner in central-western Tehran. Agha-Soltan's violent death documented in a sixteen-second viral YouTube clip instantly made her a national icon honored by slogans, songs, poems, graffiti, and thousands of Facebook profiles graced with her commemorative image. She was a mostly non-political student and above all a traveler, who had considered emigrating to Turkey. Ultimately, the importance of a rhetoric of martyrdom in the regime's engagement with the Iranian people became clear when the government tried to silence Agha-Soltan's grieving mother's criticism of the regime by offering her financial assistance, if she would agree to re-narrate the story of Neda's death and publicly proclaim her a "martyr" for the Islamic Republic (PBS). This offer of "blood money" was refused, and the refusal symbolized a watershed shift in who gets to "own" the discourse of martyrdom: the dissidents now had their own martyr, who died not for the Islamic Republic but whose blood was on its hands.

In the days and weeks following Neda's death, the image of her face was widely used in Facebook profile pictures as a gesture of solidarity among supporters of the uprising. As interrogations and arrests of bloggers began to rapidly multiply, though, many of those with Facebook profiles bearing Neda's face and messages of solidarity

with the protesters changed their Facebook "surnames" to "Irani." Spontaneously, this evasive gesture created a sudden and patriotic sense of community as tight-knit as it were literally a family name, surrounding this overwhelmingly emotional cause which was worth effacing one's identity in the online space in order to participate in the collective narration of a life that captured the urgency of this historical moment. I read this widespread online impulse as an intertextual and intergeneric move that is deeply culturally indebted to Tehran's visual public culture of martyrdom, but also obviously relies on the real-time responsiveness of embodied dissidents made anonymous with the help of technology. The Neda YouTube video was both a searing document of historical witness and a groundbreaking new genre profoundly interconnected with other genres: it would not have been the same text without the comments section that defined its form based in collective authorship, nor would it have had the same impact without the context of thousands of personal tributes to Neda through Facebook or the urgent immediacy of the reporting on surrounding protests provided by Twitter. As the definition of a "fallen solider" expanded in the national Iranian vocabulary, the genre through which her story of martyrdom could be told necessarily expanded as well.

Juxtaposed with the ancient trope of martyrdom, Twitter provided a crucial digital medium that allowed for a second form of intertextuality—that of intervention. In June 2009 in Iran, technology enabled a new kind of intervention that sometimes turned tools of mobilization and communication into renewed means of censorship; and sometimes suggested new venues for corporations to move in. But it also sometimes forged new and productive bonds between local, subnational, and diasporic communities. Between June 7 and 26, an estimated 480,000 Twitter users exchanged over two million Tweets about

Iran, with a peak rate on election day (Friday, June 12th) of about 200,000 tweets per hour and clusters of trending hashtags such as #IranElection and #WhereIsMyVote (Howard 8).

The initial popularity of the much belabored expression "Twitter Revolution" has a great deal to do with the fact that Twitter, as a medium, is perhaps a more accurate rendering than Facebook of how human interaction actually works in contemporary everyday life. We communicate in short snippets (if not always 140 characters); we constantly cite the opinions of others and refer to events we have not personally witnessed; and we latch on—if briefly—to the local and global concerns of the day, echoing their iconic images and catchphrases as we process their meaning within our own lives. It is worth examining, then, how dialogue on Twitter served as an indirect extension of revolutionary bodies in the streets during the early days of the Iranian Green Movement and the Egyptian Revolution, expanding their sphere of mobility and, eventually, reversing that power dynamic to actually direct where those masses of bodies would go.

Traffic congestion—literally, in the streets, not just online—is a crucial, and under-examined element of the historic moment of June 2009 in Tehran, as the city planned with the maximum capacity to hold 1 million cars is now reported to contain more than 3.6 million. As protesters and police poured into the streets in such concentrated formation, this pre-existing tension immediately led to absolute gridlock for large crowds on foot, Tehrani cars, and shared taxis. With their ability to plow through crowds, official vehicles including helicopters had a sudden and ruthless advantage, as did the *basij* on motorcycles weaving in and out of traffic. Literalizing the online

metaphor of intervention, the disadvantaged protesters received unexpected support from the Tehran metro system, which is nascent and quite limited for a city of its size, but provided a key technique by which protesters could flee the most violent retaliations by providing free rides at all stations. This renewed underground access is, in some ways, a perfect metaphor for the role of "underground" and multi-directional networked digital media in the Green Revolution—when reformist newspapers were shut down, Iranians turned to Facebook. When Facebook was shut down, they turned to Twitter. Even in periods of internet blackout, the instant mobile dissemination of cell phone camera photos replaced the limitations of conventional journalism and provided a new transparency and global access, through the protesters' incessant migration to new platforms, new patterns and systems of traffic—new forms of digital media and ultimately, new genres.

Twitter, and the new genre of the tweet, has led to an elaborate network of social connections in the online space, one where relationality can flourish without the need for explicit personal identity. For over a decade, bloggers have embodied a spirit of subversive authorship in Iran, for one, despite the threat of violence that accompanies any anti-government rhetoric. As old servers are shut down, new mirror sites are established and bloggers' readers follow them to their new "identities." Bloggers thus do not always rely on identity as the basic atom of community, unlike those with Facebook profiles, and now tweeters are a more extreme version of this. The simple 140-character Tweet—and, just as often, the retweet—becomes part of a new architecture that allows for as much individuality as each tweet chooses to reveal, and as much collectivity as each tweet chooses to hashtag.

As Poster puts it, the digital technology boom in global media has turned consumers into producers because "the internet multiplies voices so that every node in the network is a position of speech" (18). Consequently, we are now seeing new kinds of political biographies and autobiographies emerge, stories about selves that are inseparable from—physically, digitally, and textually linked to—the stories of others. The new mode of authorship and creative commons enabled by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media lies in the infinite configurations and reconfigurations of space and time enabled by the digital—both on the part of the artist and the audience. The texts generated by revolutionary bodies en masse (and their slogans, speeches, and banners in the streets) form an intertext with their malleable individual autobiographies on Facebook and Twitter, merging the digital and the embodied versions of life narrative.

Genre-formation exists in a globally shared space, and online spaces elucidate this process more clearly than ever before, since they so radically abbreviate the restrictions of space and time on cross-cultural contact. All of the models of revolutionary intertextuality presented in rapid succession in this coda—human-and-digital, street-and-online, visual-and-verbal, local-and-diasporic—can be understood as new kinds of life biographies and autobiographies. These are new genres that propose new solutions to some of the problems of the existence of fact and fiction on a slippery scale, which usually plague life narrative no matter the genre it inhabits. Authors and artists who work in the digital realm are constantly creating new forms of communication, which allows for new types of content in a constantly evolving global conversation.

At the time of this writing, diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran have just begun to thaw in the aftermath of a historic nuclear deal and the long-

awaited lifting of sanctions, which were met with joyful celebrations in the streets of Tehran. There are decades of mutual demonization and paranoia to undo, and such cultural paradigms do not shift quickly or easily. But as our web-enabled devices increasingly become natural extensions of ourselves and how we articulate our everyday lives, I believe we will continue to see this intertextual and interpersonal mode of life narrative prevail in the news as well as in art and literature. Moving beyond overwrought phrases like the "Twitter Revolution," new kinds of life stories help us remember the bodies behind computers as well as the computers behind the bodies, whether that takes place through digital, dialogic redefinitions of "martyrdom" on Facebook, the multiple possibilities for intervention through Twitter or YouTube, or a new, digitally enabled approach to transnational multimedia art.

Ultimately, digital media is the latest genre frontier in a complex network of interaction between Persophone, Anglo-American, Francophone, and other literary and cinematic worlds that has been formed over centuries by authors and artists who have explored global ethical questions through flexible, porous genres. As Hamid Dabashi suggests in his recent book *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, a transhistorical examination of Persian literary history over the past 1,400 years that proposes a counter-narrative to the idea that humanism originated in the West, the transnational questions of humanist ethics evolve alongside the genres through which they are communicated: "In its varied and evasive forms, literary humanism keeps dodging power and metamorphosizing itself, from one genre to another, so that no *ruling regime* would be able to lay any claim to it" (305). Digital media such as Twitter are able to evolve at a pace that is unprecedented, perhaps bringing us one step closer to the evolving and

multifaceted nature of those questions themselves. As tweets spread across the world at the click of a button, they integrate other forms such as photos, videos, and quotations to increase the immediacy of their aesthetic, interpersonal, and intercultural acts of connection—"face to face, street to street."

In *Forms*, her recent book exploring the relation between artistic forms and sociopolitical institutions, Caroline Levine invokes the notion of *affordance*—the suitability of a given material or design (such as glass) for its intended purpose (such as the transparency of a window)—to assert that "each shape or pattern, social or literary, lays claim to a limited range of potentialities" (6). But just as materials and objects can exceed their intended purpose in the hands of a creative user (who might use a water glass as a bug-trap or a stencil), Levine continues: "shapes and patterns are iterable—portable. They can be picked up and moved to new contexts" (7). Rich, for instance, found in the nineteenth-century ghazals of Ghalib a "way of dealing with very complex and scattered material which [demanded] a different kind of unity from that imposed on it by the isolated, single poem" (Ahmad xxv)—but for her Anglophone audience and her literary-political climate of American free verse, realized that the effect of returning to the same end-rhyme would not carry the same weight as it does in Persian. Her ghazals thus preserve the spirit of the *radif* without being constrained by the technicalities of the form in its strictest definition. The capaciousness of such open forms results not in a homogenizing network of literary exchange, but in a constantly evolving and diversifying cross-cultural polysemy of genres.

In addition to the malleability of forms, it is important to remember their *multiplicity*. Levine insists, "in any given circumstance, no form operates in isolation …

Literary form does not operate outside of the social but works among many organizing principles, all circulating in a world jam-packed with other arrangements" (7). When Neshat's film *Zanān Bedun-i Mardān* was released, the rising Green Movement in Iran was a historical context as important as the story's setting in 1953. Neshat's aesthetic of interwoven poetry, painting, and montage aesthetics makes space for viewers to hear the historical echoes between both moments of political crisis, and more. Similarly, the visual monument and anti-monument that is Amir and Khalil's Omid Project appendix at the end of *Zahra's Paradise* urges readers to remember the simultaneous interconnectivity and incommensurability of the stories of the victims of human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic. For each text discussed in this project, the distinct affordances of separate literary genres are as important as their ability to open up to influence and hybridization with other genres—and as Said reminds us, this is the case for all cultural forms, which should not be collapsed in totalizing narratives of universality but should be viewed through the lens of our shared global history, which has never quite allowed for culturally purist self-containment in any form.

As a final illustration, I return to Marjane Satrapi's tongue-in-cheek use of the flying carpet in *Persepolis*, in the full-page panel that depicts Marji's vacation through Europe with her parents shortly after the 1979 Revolution, when political ties between Iran and the West were quickly approaching total severance. Satrapi's surprising assemblage of a few key symbols in this panel seems to encapsulate something of what the continuous and productive interaction of authors and texts, across politically and culturally erected barriers of fear and stereotype, has shown to be true. First, the affordance of forms can be imaginatively stretched—a carpet, the communal centerpiece

of a home or an individual prayer rug, can be creatively repurposed as a means of travel. Second, the symbolic and historical associations of certain forms with certain notions and expectations, as in Jameson's claim that forms are both literary and social institutions, can be undone and reversed—as Satrapi so cleverly does here, turning a potentially Orientalist trope on its head as the family uses the carpet to fly as tourists among flattened caricatures of Occidental sights and sounds. Finally, like the magical flying carpet, the literary form is mobile—not a container meant to impose conventional boundaries upon stories and reinforce ideological lines, but a *vehicle* that can allow those stories to travel into new contexts, new audiences, and new homes in the world.

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