



PERSPECTIVE

spring 2019

university of california, berkeley

FORTY YEARS AGO,

one of the most transformative revolutions of the twentieth century dramatically shifted the trajectory of Iran and the lives of its people. For many of us, affect, ephemera, and memory comprise a sort of archive and serve as evidence of a revolution to which we otherwise have no immediate material relationship. We situate ourselves within the legacy of the Revolution in ways that are multifarious, expansive, and often contingent upon our families' political orientations and relationships to both the Revolution and the formations of the Iranian state which preceded and followed it. Embedded in this legacy, we understand revolution to be not a singular moment but rather an ongoing project which began long before 1979 and continues to this day.

We do not simply honor the Revolution's legacy but engage it dynamically and critically in ways that allow for new formations of identity, community, and politics.

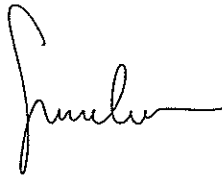
We not only evoke the archive but also make entries into it.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Redesigned and reimagined, we present to you the special edition of *Perspective Magazine* Spring 2019, dedicated to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Forty years later, we examine the Revolution and present aspects of it to you as young Iranian-Americans who grew up hearing and reading about a phenomenon for which we were not physically present, yet one that has been paramount in shaping our identities to this day. This issue is to commemorate all the revolutionaries who fought, sacrificed, fled, and died for the love of Iran.

By touching on the many dimensions that revolution can embody, *Perspective* holistically explores the political, historical, social, and artistic layers that transcend typical understanding of the Islamic Revolution. Across time periods, this issue provides you with a narrative that is still being written today. Interviews with loved ones and scholars who were active in the Revolution offer analysis and reflection. Beyond writing, the artistry of Iranians, past and present, established and emerging, immerses you in visual experiences that are both concrete and conceptual. The multifaceted narrative aims to represent the variety of emotions attached to the Revolution.

We hope this issue is educational and challenges the tainted idea of the Revolution fabricated by the West for decades. There is much more to the Revolution that we cannot convey because of our limited scope as young Iranian-Americans, but we see this as our contribution to ensuring such a transformative movement goes unforgotten. Rather than polarizing the Revolution by praising or mourning it, this issue exists for you to remember it.



Saalar Aghili
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EXPANDING ARCHIVES & BUILDING DISCIPLINES:

The San Francisco State University Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies

by Mana Javadi

Neda Nobari saw a problem in the way that Iran was being studied and discussed at universities. In her view, political and socio-economic conflicts between Iran and the US, for example, often obscure the rich and colorful culture of Iran and its people, and she felt a need for something different. Having seen the same voices, perspectives, and approaches be recycled for years, Nobari believed it was time for the new generation of Iranian Americans to reclaim their narrative and create a more accurate sense of *their* culture as immigrants and second-generation Americans. Nobari summed up her forward-looking mindset saying, “We’ve been looking in the rearview mirror for too long; it is time for the second and third generations of Iranian-Americans to have a voice in their history, too.” Younger generations of Iranian Americans identify with their culture in vastly different ways than Nobari did, who arrived in California in 1979. Nobari noted this shift and decided to support it with a \$5 million endowment to San Francisco State University, her alma mater, to establish the The Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies.

To Nobari, San Francisco State University was the perfect institution for pioneering this new area of study because of the academic legacy of social, racial, and economic justice, which are central to that the university’s vision. “As the first university to establish a College of Ethnic Studies, SFSU has always valued diversity and the study of racial and ethnic histories of the US,” she said.

Dr. Persis Karim became the inaugural director and the Neda Nobari Chair of the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies in 2017 and is now in her second year in that position. Previously, Dr. Karim was the founding director of the Persian Studies program at San Jose State University, where she also taught English and Comparative Literature. Her passion for the subject and commitment to the development of Iranian diaspora studies originated with her own interest in capturing the voices of Iranian immigrants and second-generation Iranian-American writers. She is the editor of three anthologies of Iranian diaspora literature, which, in her words, “help identify and share the unique stories and experience of Iranians who are part of the diaspora.” Nobari and Karim place great importance on the fact that the center is not a place simply to study Iranian history and

culture but to create a fresh approach to researching Iranian diaspora communities, their impact on Iranian identity, and their contributions to host societies.

The center’s vision is to employ an interdisciplinary approach, allowing students from all fields to contribute, learn, and grow through its research and projects. The center seeks to collaborate and engage with new research in many fields including political science, sociology, and American studies. The center is also a platform for public lectures, collaborative opportunities, and other programs that allow diverse diaspora communities to participate in important conversations. “We want to engage in complex topics such as race, gender, sexuality, and identity—and to situate it outside of Iran and also in the context of other fields than Iranian Studies.”

Using the perspectives of scholars who utilize the center, Karim hopes ultimately to pursue projects such as an archive that will document and share the stories of real people to educate others about Iran’s recent history and also about the history of Iranians in the U.S. Karim recently was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Common Heritage Grant to pilot a Bay Area archive of Iranian-American history. Karim believes that ordinary people’s everyday stories can tell us so much, not only about moments in history such as the Iranian Revolution, but about the human experience as a whole, including those stories of survivors, immigrants, and their children. “These stories need to be collected while we can still access them,” because as Karim says, “if you do not contribute to our history, to claiming it, and naming it, it will disappear.”

The Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies is working on several projects this year. Along with SFSU’s Doc Film Institute, the center is producing the first-ever documentary focusing on the Iranian community within the Bay Area. The film, *We Are Here, We Have Always Been Here*, showcases the personal stories of Iranians who migrated to the Bay Area over the past five decades and focuses on the contribution and challenges of those who have made the Bay Area their home. The film will be completed in March 2020. The center’s biggest effort of 2018 is an international conference marking the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and examining the past 40 years of diaspora. “Forty Years & More: International Conference on

Diaspora Studies” will foster important conversations regarding Iranian diaspora that have largely occurred in isolation. The goal of the center is to make these conversations more inclusive and transnational, and in doing so, complicate the narratives of the Iranian diaspora globally. “The conference will help us understand the effects of the revolution, not as a singular historical event but as the cataclysm for global events that situate migration in an under-studied field.” Karim sees the revolution as a clock—and 1979 is just 12 o’clock. The 40 years after are just as rich in untold stories. The conference will analyze the entirety of the clock through presentations, keynotes, and panels in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. It will showcase new research from various perspectives by distinguished researchers including Dr. Neda Maghbouleh, Dr. Amy Malek, and Dr. Beeta Baghoolizadeh.

“Forty Years & More” highlights the role of art in Iranian culture and how it has thrived and reinvented itself in the diaspora through its sponsorship of two exhibitions of Iranian

diaspora artists’ work at the San Francisco Art Commission and the Minnesota Street Project—both curated by Bay Area artist Taraneh Hemami. “Because art has been instrumental to Iranian identity at every point in its history, we need to recognize the ways that art speaks to our dynamic and changing experiences,” said Karim, who admires artists of the diaspora for their ability to show how their community is “far more than what you’re seeing in the media.” The exhibits will not only showcase the ability of the art to complicate the narrative but also relay the dynamic nature of the Iranian experience. “The arts are our salvation. They are wellsprings of knowledge and self-understanding that show how rich our culture is,” Karim adds.

According to Karim, there is no homogeneous Iranian diasporic experience. It is a beautiful manifestation that should be celebrated and shared—and this conference aims to do just that. The Iranian diaspora community finally has a space to say what Karim believes is overdue: “We are here, we have always been here, this is our story, and we deserve to tell that story.” ❖

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