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Familiar and Foreign: Identity in Iranian Film and Literature, Manijeh Mannani and Veronika Thompson (eds.), Edmonton: AU Press, 2015, paperback, ISBN 978-1- 927356-86-9, 264 pp.

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In the introduction to the book, the editors set their aim as providing a “diversity of voices and perspectives ... and a more nuanced depictions of Iranian society” for the West wherein Iran is monolithically represented as a “repressive, profoundly patriarchal, and politically intractable nation full of religious fanatics imbued with a hatred of the West and prone to terrorism”. (3) To realize this lofty aim, they have selected various articles written about various Iranian writers who have two main common features: first, they are women fiction writers; second they mostly focus on the experience of Iranian diaspora in the West. Of course there are a few exceptions.

Safaneh Mohaghegh Neyshabouri in *The Development of the Artistic Female Self in the Poetry of Forough Farrokhzad* argues that Farrokhzad’s can be categorized as “confessional poetry” through which she records the gradual development of herself/identity as an independent woman. Mohaghegh Neyshabouri holds that Forough does not believe in the possibility of the reconciliation of discordant identities. The only way for a woman to be free, forough reportedly believes, is to break away with all the traditionally predetermined social identities such as mother, wife, etc. For Forough, Mohaghegh Neyshabouri argues, identities must be dismissed in

favour of a true, free self. Whether Forough believed so or not is yet to be explored. However, it seems that Mohaghegh Neyshabouri's argument is under the influence of the essentialist discourse which advocates the possibility of a subject's absolute freedom regardless of the restraining forces and discourses coercing her into certain positions.

Drawing on Irigaray and Cixous' ideas that language is inherently patriarchal, that it denies women's voices, Farideh Dayanim Goldin in *Overcoming Gender: The Impact of the Persian Language on Iranian Women's Confessional Literature* tries to trace the Iranian women's lack of voice and power in Persian language. She introduces a number of words both with Arabic roots and of Persian origin that build up to the discursive suppression of women. Then, she relies on the Faucauldian thesis that "where there is power, there is resistance" to demonstrate that Iranian woman has used such linguistic potentialities as allegory, symbolism and vague writing to express their feelings through poetry. The final section of the article addresses the emergence of a new genre of writing among Iranian diaspora writers i.e. "confessional writing- perhaps the most self revealing and direct form of literature" (44). Mostly written in English (not in Persian), Dayanim contends, these works undertake to "show the familiar, friendlier aspects of [Iran]", to send the West the message that "we are more like you than you think ..." (49). Dayanim tries her best to reduce the diversity of Iranian society to the binary of Islam versus the West where the former stands for exotic, irrational fundamentalism and the latter for familiar and friendly civilization. The problem with her outlook is the inability to explore the diversity within the Muslim culture of Iranian society beyond the stereotypical binary opposition of West-Islam.

Manijeh Mannani in *Autobiomythography and Self-Aggrandizement in Iranian Diasporic Life-Writing Fatemeh Keshavarz and Azar Nafisi* claims that *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is a "bold and Truthful" portrayal of "all sides of our country" (79) whereas Keshavarz's *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More than Lolita in Tehran* "mythologizes and distorts"(79) contemporary Iranian history. Although Mannani's assertion about Keshavarz's work might or might not be true, her outright defence of Azar Nafisi's book as "simply

describing reality” or “*factual accounts*” (70, my emphasis) is subject to partisanship. What are Mannani’s criteria to verify the truth of Azar Nafisi’s memory and “distortion” in that of Fatemeh Kashavarz’s? The question is left unresolved.

Mostafa Abedinifard in his article *Graphic Memories* argues that Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is more an autobiography than a life memoir because she has transgressed many of social taboos relating to women. Therefore, he contends, a major theme of the book is veiling/unveiling, and its practical repercussion for women i.e. imposition of “cultural schizophrenia” (91) on them. Trapped in ideological presuppositions, Abedinifard mistakes fiction/narrative for fact/reality. He looks at *Persepolis* not as a representation of reality but as a true, mimetic, “graphic” divine testament of reality whereby one can testify to the cruelty of a political system. Abedinifard’s article does not consider *Persepolis* a text but as history, even not *a* history but as the only history of the post-revolutionary Iran.

Madeleine Voegeli in *Mr. and Mrs. F the Woman: Personal identities in Zoya Pirzad’s Like All the Afternoons*, though not within the scope of the book’s objectives, discusses how both female and male protagonists in selected stories are deprived of their personal selves under the pressure of their social identities. The article may be deemed as the most objective as well as the least ideologically motivated one. However, it disregards a necessary theoretical sub-framework i.e. distinguishing between self and identity.

The last two articles concern Goli Taraqi’s fiction and the way it portrays the life of the people in exile. Latitia Nanquette in *Persian Literature of Exile in France*

Goli Taraqi’s Short Stories argues how diasporic life permeates all the structural, thematic, and generic aspects of Taraqi’s fiction. As far as the theme is concerned, Taraqi’s stories deal mainly with exile as both damaging and empowering. In terms of structure, it is contended that Taraqi’s fiction is formed around special metaphors. However, what makes her fiction distinctive is its use of tale as an appropriate genre to “reinforce discourse on the ‘Other’”, i.e. the western people.

Goulia Ghardashkhani *Farang Represented the Construction of Self-Space in Goli Taraqqi's Fiction* investigates the way Taraqi manages to portray “the West” as a geographical space. This creative strategy allows her to depict a complicated picture of Iranian diaspora’s view of the West. When in Iran, they look at West as a desirable ... space” (190) which is expected to provide them with satisfaction. However, after they tangible experience life in the West, the sense of desirability turns to disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and disorientation.