Theories and Methodologies

From Daneshvar to Damahi: New Formulations of the Persianate

ATEFEH AKBARI SHAHMIRZADI

In his introduction to *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Assef Ashraf invokes Marshall Hodgson's conception of the "Persianate zone" as a region that was "defined primarily along literary and cultural lines." He continues, "But for a region whose defining feature was supposed to be language, it is curious that there was no Persian-language equivalent for the term 'Persianate.' The peoples living in the so-called Persianate zone did not call themselves 'Persianate,' even if they may have been dimly aware of a shared cultural space" (1). There is still no Persian-language equivalent for this term. The Persianate, in essence, is a translational term. And in this essay I explore how translation, broadly conceived as linguistic translation as well as the intercultural transference of forms and narratives, is central to the extension of the Persianate framework—typically understood as an early modern, transregional, imperial ecumene that eroded if not collapsed after the rise of the nation-state—to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I show how one of the key ways the transregional scope of the Persianate finds its way into mid-to-late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century Iranian cultural production is through crucial acts of interlingual encounter and exchange.

My essay could thus be read as an extension of the methodology in Nile Green's edited collection *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, which, as part of a broader aim to decenter Iran—or more specifically, the Persian language—as the focal point of the Persianate framework, looks at "languages in contact" (Green 3). Though my focus here is indeed on works of Iranian cultural production, I adhere to Alexander Jabbari's recent conceptualization of Persianate modernity, which draws out the inherent multilingualism of Iran (3) and presents Persian modernity

ATEFEH AKBARI SHAHMIRZADI is term assistant professor at Barnard College in the English department. She is working on a book manuscript tentatively titled "Missed Connections: Staging Literary Conversations from the Caspian to the Caribbean," a cross-cultural comparison of twentieth-century Iranian and Caribbean fiction and poetry.

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as a "connected framework left over from the bygone cosmopolis" (7). The period covered in this essay (1969 to 2019) roughly picks up where Jabbari's book leaves off (1850s to 1940s). My contention is that this "connected framework" persists while it simultaneously expands and is transfigured, historically and geographically, at critical junctures in Iranian modern and contemporary history.

In what follows, I read pivotal moments from three Iranian works of art—Simin Daneshvar's novel سووشون (1969; *Savushun*), Bahram Beizaei's film باشو، غریبه‌ی کوچک (1986; *Bashu, Gharibeh-ye Kuchak*; *Bashu, the Little Stranger*), and Damahi's music album در من برو شکار (2019; *Dar Man Boro Shekar*; *In Me Go Hunting*)—that I see as operating on a continuum in a few respects. First, by virtue of the narratives in these works, their collective audience travels from the Iranian south to the north and back down to the south again (Daneshvar's novel is set in the south, the majority of Beizaei's film takes place in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea, and Damahi's music chiefly evokes the Persian Gulf area), traversing the distance between the two bodies of water that enclose the modern Iranian nation-state; in fact, Beizaei's film enacts the south-to-north journey at the level of the narrative. Second, Beizaei's film was produced and released by کانون پرورش فکری کودکان و نوجوانان (Kanoon Parvaresh Fekri-e Koodakan va Nojavanan; Center for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults) during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution; its intended audience, therefore, was my generation, which includes Damahi's band members: the Iranian children of the 1980s, commonly known as the "burnt generation." Excerpts from Daneshvar's novel were included in the national curriculum, and we had been introduced to *Savushun* in one of our high school textbooks as an emblem of anti-imperial (and anti-British) nationalist resistance. Third, then, these works were created during—and in response to—watershed moments in the development of Iran as a modern nation-state along with its moments of crisis, starting with the revolutionary decade in Iran, galvanized by global anticolonial movements, and ending within a period of ongoing antigovernmental demonstrations in Iran that began in 2009 in the aftermath of contested presidential elections (concomitant with the Arab Spring) and continue to this day.

In a 2022 special issue they guest edited for *Iranian Studies* titled *Persianate Pasts, National Presents: Persian Literary and Cultural Production in the Twentieth Century*, Aria Fani and Kevin L. Schwartz lament the field's focus on "the formation of the nation-state and its attendant features as a process that constricts phenomena into nationally prescribed cantons of territory, language, ethnicity, and literature," a focus that has gripped scholars who work on the so-called post-Persianate. Their aim is to resist this dependency "on the apotheosis of the nation-state on the one hand, and East-West engagements on the other," which they believe "overlooks the crucial role and enduring resonances of Persianate heritage and traditions outliving the environments in which they first took shape" (606). In the issue's afterword, Rebecca Ruth Gould refers to the "cosmopolitan ethos intrinsic in the idea of the Persianate" (788) and writes, "Where Persian is singular, the Persianate is plural" (789). The modern and contemporary Iranian works I examine here expand and transfigure the "connected framework" of the Persianate and Persian modernity in ways that attest to Gould's remarks: these are pluralistic artworks, organically weaving multiple literary, linguistic, and musical traditions. They are, I argue, inherently inter- and intralingual and translational, while also pushing against national and linguistic borders both real and imagined. Love, loss (and the grief to which it leads), cross-cultural solidarity as an antidote to grief, and finally an ethics of hospitality are all components of this translational framework of the Persianate, lending itself to comparative readings that move beyond the originating environments of the Persianate as it gets extended into the era of the modern nation-state.

Savushun

Daneshvar's debut novel *Savushun*[1] remains an Iranian bestseller, having sold half a million copies

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and undergone twenty reprints. The majority of the narrative is told from the viewpoint of Zari, a woman in her thirties educated in a British schooling system and therefore fluent in English. She lives in Shiraz (Daneshvar's hometown) in southern Iran, at a time when it was essentially occupied by the British.[2] The novel takes place between 1943 and 1944, when Allied forces (specifically English, Scottish, and Indian soldiers) camped in Shiraz. Yusof, Zari's husband, an anti-imperial landowner and a person of high moral character, refuses to sell his goods to the soldiers, as his fellow countrymen are experiencing the worst case of famine and disease in modern Iranian history. In a conversation with the novelist Houshang Golshiri, Daneshvar explains that she made a conscious decision to write her novel in Persian, زبان رسمی مملکت ("the country's official language"), and not Shirazi (a dialect of Persian), since she would not have been able to connect to readers up north otherwise (Golshiri 215). But Shirazi words are peppered throughout the novel, so much so that the book has a glossary of Shirazi words at the end, short vowels included, so that the reader can learn their pronunciation. Effectively, then, the novel is teaching its Persian-language readers components of another Iranian language, inviting them into another linguistic territory and resisting the idea of a monolingual nation-state. And the novel's title is a Shirazi pronunciation of the term *Siyavashun*, a mourning ceremony for Siyavash, a beloved hero and benevolent ruler who was unjustly killed by former allies and whose story is recounted in the Persian epic شاهنامه (*Shahnameh*; *The Book of Kings*) by the tenth-century Persian poet Firdawsī.

The novel also contains translated English prose; that is, there are conversations with characters who are speaking in English, but the reader is reading them in Persian translation. There are British characters who speak "broken" Persian and Indian soldiers who speak "broken" English (transliterated into Persian). Zari's British education allows her to navigate complex relationships between the British occupiers and her husband, and to act as both a literal translator and a cultural intermediary. Yet Yusof uses every opportunity he can to disavow the British education his wife has received. While visiting tribal leaders, their friends Malek Sohrab and Malek Rustam, Zari and Yusof come across some images, one of which is

> نقش سر بریده ای در یک طشت پر از خون . . . دور تا دور طشت پر از خون، لاله روییده بود و یک اسب سیاه داشت لاله ها را می‌بویید . . .
> زری گفت: ". . . شرط می‌بندم این یحیای تعمید دهنده باشد."
> [ملک سهراب]یوسف را صدا کرد و نقش را نشانش داد و . . .
> گفت: "خانمتان می‌گویند این یحیی تعمید دهنده است."
> یوسف تبسم کرد و گفت: "ببخشیدش، زن من از سر کلاس یکراست به خانهء شوهر آمده. هنوز سرش پر از داستانهای انجیل است که هر روز صبح در مدرسه مجبور بوده بخواند."
> زری گفت: "حالا فهمیدم، سر بریدهء امام حسین است . . . آنهم اسب . . ."
> یوسف گفت: "بیشتر از این خجالتم نده جانم، این سیاوش است."
> (Daneshvar, *Savushun* [1969] 44)

> the picture of a severed head in a basin full of blood. Tulips had grown around it, and a black horse was sniffing them. . . . Zari said, "I bet this one is John the Baptist. . . ."
>
> [Malek Sohrab] then called Yusof and showed him the picture. "Your wife thinks this is John the Baptist."
>
> Yusof smiled and said, "Forgive her. My wife has come to her husband's home straight out of school. Her mind is still full of the Bible stories she had to read every morning in school."
>
> "Wait, I know," Zari said. "It's the severed head of Imam [Hossein][3] . . . and that horse. . . ."
>
> "Don't embarrass me more than you have, dear," Yusof said. "This is Siyavash."
>
> (*Savushun* [2001] 58)

Zari's perceived lack of knowledge of Persian folklore embarrasses Yusof. He also feels that he must apologize for Zari's command of the Christian Bible and her having been brainwashed, presumably, in school. But what is lost on Yusof in this particular encounter is Zari's ability to connect these different narratives, to see junctures across sociopolitical borders that others are not able to. What is construed as an error on Zari's part is in fact an articulation of the correspondence between different secular and spiritual revolutionary figures in world literary traditions; as Daneshvar points out in her interview with Golshiri, they share the same fate

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(Golshiri 174). Herein is a model of the possibilities for comparative, transnational, and translational readings as well as for the plural histories and geographies that a connected framework of the modern Persianate can entail. The image of the severed head is quintessentially Persian in that it draws from the Persian national epic. But it could just as easily stand in for a quintessential, iconic Shia or Christian image. In this way, a symbol of the Persianate expands beyond its intended horizon and reaches out to include other literary and cultural traditions.

In the opening pages of the novel, readers are introduced to an Irish photojournalist, MacMahon, as Yusof's friend. He's a lover of poetry who desires freedom for his land (and for Iran, which he sees as politically analogous to Ireland). He also has an unexpected intimacy with Zari. After Yusof's politically motivated murder, Zari decides to hold a Siyavashun mourning ceremony in his honor. But his burial proceedings are transformed into a spontaneous uprising by the villagers, which is immediately and violently repressed by the local police. Zari and her immediate family are merely permitted to bury his body at night, without anyone present. Back home and feeling hopeless and destitute, Zari reads messages of condolences she has received and is affected deeply by MacMahon's, which she reads out loud for Yusof's sister and her son, in translation. The novel's final sentences are thus effectively in English, but they're being recited in Persian by Zari, who is simultaneously reading and translating:

> "گریه نکن خواهرم. در خانه ات درختی خواهد رویید و درختهایی در شهرت و بسیار درختان در سرزمینت."
> "و باد پیغام هر درختی را به درخت دیگر خواهد رسانید و درختها از باد خواهند پرسید: در راه که می‌آمدی سحر را ندیدی؟"
> (Daneshvar, *Savushun* [1969] 303)

> Do not weep, sister. In your home, a tree shall grow, and others in your city, and many more throughout your country. And the wind shall carry the message from tree to tree and the trees shall ask the wind, "Did you see the dawn on your way?"
> (*Savushun* [2001] 306)

It is in the English note of a marginal figure in a British convoy—a counterpart of sorts to Zari, who is seen as marginal in the project of anticolonial nation-state formation—that Zari finds solace. MacMahon's note, an antidote to state repression, signals an opening, an approaching dawn, that carries with it the opportunity for a new beginning for Yusof's struggle for justice in Zari's dwelling, which MacMahon sees as ever-expanding: her city, her country. One can see the culmination of these openings in Beizaei's film and Damahi's music, as well as the imagined futures of this interlingual message of hope in the face of death, Persian and otherwise, as they expand on Daneshvar's world-making practice through examinations of the intersection of race, ethnicity, and language.

Bashu, the Little Stranger

About a quarter of the way into Beizaei's film, there is a breakthrough in communication between the two main characters, Bashu and Na'i. Bashu is a young boy who has fled his home in the war-torn province of Khuzestan in southwest Iran after having witnessed his mother, father, and sister being killed by Iraqi rockets. While escaping the rockets, he surreptitiously hitches a ride on a truck that, unbeknownst to him, is headed to the northern province of Gilan, where he meets Na'i and her two children leading an impoverished life tending to their paddy field (Na'i's husband is away fighting in the Iran-Iraq war). Na'i speaks Gilaki, a northern Iranian language, and Bashu speaks Khuzestani Arabic, a minority language in Khuzestan inflected with Persian grammar and vocabulary (Matras and Shabibi). Though viewers later learn that they both know how to speak Persian, the official state language, neither of them has used it yet in the film, Na'i having tried and failed multiple times to communicate with Bashu in Gilaki.

In this particular sequence, Na'i pauses at a tree with a scythe buried in its trunk, pulls the scythe out, and takes it to Bashu. She sits in front of him and tells him what they call a scythe in Gilaki; then, using hand gestures and emphatic speech, she asks him what they call it in his language. He finally understands what she is trying to do, opens up,

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and the two go through different objects one by one, as Bashu smiles and laughs for the first time since viewers have been introduced to him. An egg. A doll. A tin bucket and canister. A fistful of rice. Na'i's children are watching with excitement and joy, and at one point her son picks up a tomato and gives it to his mother. She says they call it پامادور (*pomodor*), to which Bashu responds طماطا (*tamata*). Each of them repeats the new word they are learning in the other language, in addition to naming it in their own. Finally, Na'i points to herself and says her name, and Bashu says his name; along with Na'i, viewers hear Bashu's name for the first time. The weight of this moment of recognition is evident in Na'i's stunned facial expression. Bashu has been named; he has become more human in her eyes.

In this northern climate, the questioning of Bashu's humanity happens on two fronts: his language (which is, in effect, the language of the Iraqi enemy) and his skin color. Bashu is dark-skinned, and the light-skinned residents of this village presumably have never seen someone of his complexion. For example, a young girl in the village rubs her finger on Bashu's face while he is sitting in a corner, minding his own business, and then checks her finger to see if his color has come off.[4] Early on, Na'i genuinely wonders if Bashu has come out of a coal mine and is convinced that this is his true skin color only once she scrubs him in the lake with soap and realizes that he is not going to turn white.[5] Beeta Baghoolizadeh writes, "After abolition in 1929, nation-building projects in Iran prioritized a Persian, Aryan ethno-racial identity as the ideal Iranian, erasing those communities who did not fit in the national discourse" (445). Interestingly, then, neither Bashu nor Na'i fit in the national discourse; for, while Na'i would fit in terms of her light skin, given that her mother tongue is Gilaki and she is unable to read and write in Persian, she is quite distant from the "ideal Iranian" too.

Indeed, the film is emphatically expanding what Persianness entails—especially since it turns out that Bashu is the one literate in standard Persian. In a pivotal scene, Bashu is attacked by some schoolboys. Na'i tries to protect him from these attacks and pours water on the boys. Bashu is thrown to the ground and begins crying. In front of him, we see two objects: a stone and an elementary textbook in Persian. Bashu first reaches for the stone, but he hesitates, and we see his outstretched hand reach for the book instead. In the midst of this commotion, viewers suddenly hear Bashu's voice reading out loud from the Persian book:

> ایران سرزمین ما است، ما از یک آب و خاک هستیم، ما فرزندان ایران هستیم. (Beizaei 00:58:32)
>
> Iran is our land, we are from the same land and water, we are the children of Iran.[6]

The boys and Na'i all stand in shock, listening to him read. Up to this point, he had not yet spoken a word of Persian, and the assumption was that he did not know how to speak it. The boys come up to him and start speaking to him with curiosity and tenderness, wanting to know more about him. While this momentary use of Persian seems necessary for Bashu's humanization in the eyes of his peers, the content of his message supersedes its modality, because the moments of Persian utterances in the film are few and far between. In other words, there is a lapse in what Nasrin Rahimieh calls the film's insistence on "linguistic defamiliarization" (275), which leads to a momentary and arresting instance of "partial comprehension" (276). The gravity of Bashu's message of inclusion in an environment hostile to his otherness—an environment arguably perpetuated by the film's general audience—requires that it be conveyed in a maximally shared language. However, viewers immediately return to the film's altogether non-Persian setting and its "cross-breedings" of languages that in their heterogeneity and imperfect translations between linguistic communities "can make possible revisions of the categories of race, ethnicity, and national identity" (Rahimieh 275). Underscoring that defamiliarizing heterogeneity, the film does not have subtitles for its intended Persian-speaking audience. According to Hamid Naficy, "In this bold move, the dominant-language spectators are forced to experience the linguistic deprivations

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and frustrations of the film's protagonists" (36). When Na'i and Bashu are sharing their language with each other in the process of naming objects, they are not only teaching each other—and the audience—their language, they are also demonstrating the porousness of languages and borders within and beyond Iran, since both Gilaki and Khuzestani Arabic are indeed Iranian. This is Bashu's message when he reads from the Persian textbook. Even if viewers do not accept their exchange as intralingual, it is an intimate and invitational translation, which paves the way for Na'i's ultimate act of hospitality, of accepting the little stranger as her own son and subsequently declaring him, naming him, as her son in letters she sends to her husband. In one of those letters, toward the end of the film, she says that little by little, out of every six things that Bashu says, she understands three.

This partial incomprehension as a result of linguistic defamiliarization is akin to what R. Radhakrishnan calls "necessary reciprocal defamiliarization" in music (82), when instruments from disparate musical traditions (for example, the sitar and the violin) are brought together in "dialogue" (87). Damahi's music stages such a dialogue and can be read as an aural culmination of the ideas hitherto explored.

Damahi

On their *Spotify* page, the members of Damahi explain their music as "integrating . . . melodies and lyrics [from southern Iran] with certain features of Jazz, Rock, Reggae, Pop, Afro music and Indian music," as they try to "renovate and maintain the aural heritage of the South" ("Damahi")—indeed, many of their (quite popular) tracks require wholesale translation for Persian-speaking listeners. When asked in an interview about the influence of jazz in particular on their music, Reza Koolaghani (vocalist) and Dara Daraee (bass player and band leader) insist that the incorporation of jazz elements happens organically, without the band members' forcing it in any way ("Mosahebeh ba Damahi"). This kind of organic coalescence speaks to how Radhakrishnan's theorization of "necessary reciprocal defamiliarization" generates "a mode of surrender to the radical unknowability of aurality" (87), as well as to Susan Stanford Friedman's use of this theory for a comparative literary framework. "This reciprocal defamiliarization," Friedman writes, "unravels the Self-Other opposition that reproduces systems of epistemological dominance. Politically speaking, a defamiliarizing comparison can enhance reciprocal understanding and coexistence" (42).

In the same interview, Koolaghani mentions seeing a verse from their most popular song, دیوانه ("Divaneh"; "Madman"), written on the wall of a dilapidated building in Shiraz: می ترسُم از اینجا بری و خونه بُرُمبه ("I'm afraid that you'll leave and the house will collapse"). This song debuted as a single in 2016, after their self-titled first album came out in 2015. It was later included in their second album, *Dar Man Boro Shekar* (2019). Koolaghani tells the interviewer, بهت قول می‌دم اگه اونو فارسی می خوندیمش، اصلاً هم هیت نمی‌شد. ("I promise you, if we had sung this track in Persian, it wouldn't have become a hit";[7] "Mosahebeh ba Damahi"). Technically, this song is in Persian, but it is sung in a southern Iranian accent (which is why, similar to the glossary included in *Savushun*, the song lyrics in the album's liner notes include short vowels to indicate the accent with which certain words must be pronounced). And there are a few southern words in the lyrics that are not Persian per se, though their meaning can be understood based on context and their proximity to their Persian equivalents. "Divaneh" is a love song that reflects on the madness of being in love at a time of continuous mass exoduses from Iran; in fact, madness becomes a condition for staying in love and at home, in one's country. It is, then, also a song about immigration and the meaning of home, containing casual references to Persian literary and Islamic cultural traditions (that are either incorrectly translated into English in the liner notes or ignored altogether). Yet, after the first two verses, at 02:26 comes a bridge that introduces rhythmic clapping, or "*palmas* . . . one of the older percussive features of flamenco" (Martin 34), to the assortment of instruments, after which Koolaghani starts wailing and the poetic speaker seems to be on the verge of falling apart. The clapping continues until right before the last line of

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the final chorus: during the second hemistich of the song's penultimate line, at 03:29 when Koolaghani sings, می‌ترسُم از اون لحظه که دیوونه نباشی ("I'm afraid of that moment when you'll no longer be mad"), listeners no longer hear clapping. At this point Koolaghani's voice gradually returns to lower registers, and before the track ends, at 03:33 there is a brief return to the track's opening melody, though the rhythmic pattern is slightly disordered here. With this gesture toward a flamenco tradition of music (as well as toward the jazz elements in their music), "Divaneh" aurally opens up the track's framework of home, and by invoking a history of itinerant living and the violent hostility it conjures,[8] perhaps it is inviting listeners to expand their sympathy toward the displaced everywhere through a pained meditation on a most universal feeling: the fear of losing one's beloved. And the track manages to evoke an affective response regardless of the accent with which it is sung—or, as Koolaghani believes (and Friedman would agree), this response is precisely due to the defamiliarizing effect of accented song.

"Divaneh" is the second track in an album with thirteen tracks. At the very center of the album, the seventh track is بی امان ("Bi Aman"; "Relentless"). If "Divaneh" reaches toward a world outside the Iranian nation-state only aurally, "Bi Aman" places its lyric subjects physically both inside and outside Iran. Throughout the song, listeners hear slightly different iterations of a refrain about a third-world person stepping and sleeping on a landmine; first it is این جهان سومی ("this third-world person"), followed by یک جهان سومی ("a third-world person"), alternating between the two references in each of the four verses. On the one hand, the lyrics could be referring to the human costs of the Iran-Iraq war, since in the southern provinces of Iran, undetected landmines placed by the Iraqis would kill or maim residents for decades after the war. On the other hand, however, it could be a nod to the more recent devastations in Syria in particular and in the Middle East in general; in a recent conversation with Koolaghani, he mentioned coming across a picture of a small Syrian boy in the middle of a desert holding a plastic bag filled with his belongings while trudging to a refugee camp. After this encounter, Koolaghani spoke to the band's poet-lyricist, asking him to write a song around this image (Koolaghani). The track starts with a simple piano note, followed by the oud. With each additional verse, more instruments are introduced until there is a brief silence at 04:21. Right before this moment, Koolaghani sings, بی تو خاورمیانه چاه بی نفته ("Without you, the Middle East is an oil-less well"; Damahi, "Bi Aman"). In the middle of this line, all the instruments go silent. Following the brief moment of silence, one by one, the instruments are picked up again, and with less than a minute left on the track, drums are introduced. The marching-band cadence of these drums recalls a military procession, signaling more death and destruction, as well as the rhythm played in public mourning ceremonies on the anniversary of Imam Hossein's death. The song's geopolitical concerns preclude a strictly romantic reading, but it is indeed a love song addressed to an unnamed addressee. As such, it is reminiscent of "the New Orleans parade for the dead, that extraordinary combination of funeral and festival . . . a necessary self-defense mechanism of a society living on the brink" (Gioia 34).

Perhaps while pointing to the impossibility of love in these war-torn circumstances, the song is reinforcing the necessity of love. That moment of silence could be read as the silence of the international community in the face of mass death in the Middle East; yet the track's multiple aural modalities and simultaneous irreducibility to a single origin could translate to an invitation to collective mourning, the space for which is offered by the following track. Once again, despite—or better yet, because of—the track's linguistic defamiliarization for a non-Persian-speaking audience, the track suggests reciprocal understanding and coexistence to be possible, even inevitable.

After "Bi Aman" is an instrumental track composed by Ebrahim Alavi, the band member who plays the oud, guitar, and percussion and hails from Bandar Abbas, a southern port city on the Persian Gulf. The title of the track, هوچراغی ("Hocheraghi"; "Phytoplankton"), in a southern dialect, roughly translates to the light of water. The

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effect of the percussion calls forth the sound of water, as if lapping against a boat. A song titled after microorganisms that are the source of life itself is a salve for the heaviness of the previous track, transporting the listener to the waterfront, imagining a beach alight with these microalgae, these drifters, wanderers,[9] carried by currents. If "Divaneh" and "Bi Aman" expand the geographic borders of the nation-state and offer a more capacious understanding of a home and its constituents, "Hocheraghi" can further expand the Persianate by taking us to this body of water at the south of Iran, where bioluminescent phytoplankton can be seen at night. Yet while the Persian Gulf is a central gateway to the world, the ethos of this track transcends the geopolitical. In the absence of language, its music creates a pluralistic experience that invites the listener to this body of water, or to any body of water that contains such life, for that matter. Moreover, quite literally, the track allows the listener to take a breath, providing the space for the aforementioned collective grief by taking a break from language. Subsequently, and finally, it allows the listener to imagine unconstrained, natural movement beyond constructed borders.

Notes

1. In his translation, M. R. Ghanoonparvar kept the novel's original title and added the subtitle *A Novel about Modern Iran*. Roxane Zand translated the novel's title as *A Persian Requiem*.

2. Though Iran was never formally colonized, given the fateful concessions that Iranian monarchs would periodically grant to the British (as well as to the French, Russians, and, later, Americans), Iran is sometimes characterized as having been "semicolonized" or "quasicolonized."

3. The third Shia Imam and a symbol of martyrdom and political resistance.

4. The scene recalls a moment in James Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village," where Baldwin writes of his experience visiting a small Swiss village, which I offer as an example of the comparative readings that become possible upon expanding the disciplinary framework of the Persianate beyond area studies.

5. Other villagers keep referring to him as "coal," offering another comparative reading possibility: Audre Lorde's *Coal*.

6. From this point forward, all translations are my own.

7. Koolaghani uses the English word "hit."

8. For an account of flamenco as the music of Romani people, see Washabaugh 136–39.

9. The word *plankton* comes from the Greek word *planktos*, which means drifting or wandering ("Planet").

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