

Despite the theoretical and literary sophistication of this book, however, some of its most fundamental terms require more thorough explanations and contextualization. *Arab Jew* and *Israeli-Palestinian*, particularly, have generated controversy among some of the very people whom they purport to designate. Hochberg herself relates the case of Memmi, who railed against the concept of an “Arab Jew” already in 1974. Moreover, the category of Mizrahim (Arab and African Jews in Israel) as such rarely arises, though the book is firmly grounded in the context of Zionism and in the effects the Israel/Palestine conflict has had on the relationship between Jews and Arabs. The Mizrahi and the Arab Jew are conflated repeatedly, presumably because of Hochberg’s (legitimate) criticism that the term *Mizrahi* hides the “hyphen connecting and separating the Jew and the Arab” (39). Nevertheless, the terms *Mizrahi* and *Arab Jew* designate two distinct, though sometimes overlapping, categories of identity. A brief comparison of the two, and perhaps also a mention of the familiar and oft-misused term *Sephardim* (descendants of Spanish Jews), would have been helpful. Similarly problematic is the term *Palestinian Israeli*. While it is clearly meant to salvage the Palestinian component of these people’s identity from erasure, it warrants at least a footnote explaining that not all of them desire to be thus differentiated and that some even resent that differentiation (which they interpret as exclusion), as well-intentioned as it may be. In two pages, Shammās is discussed as a “Palestinian,” “Christian-Israeli-Palestinian,” “Arab-Israeli,” and “Israeli” (75–76). While this wavering or blurring between identities may be precisely the point, it does not lessen the need for a brief explanation of each term, its usage, and its implications.

On a technical note, this book would have benefited from more rigorous proofreading. Inconsistent transliterations, misspellings of names and words, and grammatical errors detract from what is otherwise an elegantly written work. For example, *Sabras* (Hebrew: native Israelis) is spelled “Sabres” and “sabers” (95). Theodor Herzl’s name is spelled “Hertzl” (82), and Mahmoud Darwish’s name is rendered “Mahmud” (93, 171). These are minor flaws, but they disrupt the book’s flow and dull some of its polish.

These points do not diminish the overall richness and importance of this study. *In Spite of Partition* is significant not least because it strives to attain something more than the hope for coexistence expressed in the opening epigraph by Said. Situating itself firmly against the grain of the predominantly separatist accounts of the relationship between Arabs and Jews, this book makes an important contribution to the study of literature written

by them. Moreover, it forces us to acknowledge the intimate and inextricable bonds between Arabs and Jews, who, Hochberg compellingly shows, are not only writing about each other but also writing about themselves through each other and about each other through themselves. Ultimately hopeful but never naive, this book accomplishes at least the beginning of the liberation of Arabs and Jews from enforced and unquestioned separation.

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### **Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-revolution Iran**

Roxanne Varzi

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In the year 2000, I was invited to a conference in Shiraz. The organizers arranged for a car with a driver to take me back and forth during the conference since I had many people to see in various places in the region. It is my custom, even in New York City, to engage a driver in conversation. My trip to Shiraz was no different. I wanted to find out whether my driver had participated in the “Imposed War” between Iran and Iraq. He was very hesitant in answering my question. Finally, he said, “Yes.” I said, “Thanks be to God, you are well and seem to have survived with no major injuries.” He rebutted, “Unfortunately.” I was confused. I asked him to explain his comment. He paused again and then finally opened up and told his story.

It appeared that he and his brother, Rasul, both enlisted in the Basij Volunteer Corps when they were in their late teens. However, they did not serve in the same unit. After a year, Rasul had a few days leave and went to Shiraz to visit his parents. He bought tickets for himself and his mother to fly to Mashhad for a pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Reza. Upon arrival in Mashhad, they hastened to the Haram, and once there, Rasul asked his mother to petition the imam to grant her son the glory of martyrdom (*shahadat*). His mother was shocked and distressed and refused to make such a prayer. The two left the shrine and went to their inn, and during the whole evening Rasul tried to convince his mother to pray for his desire to become a martyr. The next morning, they returned to the shrine, and under Rasul’s relentless pleading, his mother gave in. However, she could not bring herself to pray out-

right for the death of her son, so she instead prayed for the fulfillment of Rasul's wishes. In late afternoon, they returned to Shiraz; Rasul stayed with his parents for a few more days and then returned to his unit at the front. Within five weeks, his prayers were answered, and he was killed in action and became Shahid, or "martyr."

My driver finished his story by saying, "And I remain." I could hear the regret in his voice that he had not died on the battlefield like his brother. For the remainder of the trip, he did not say another word. Neither did I.

Had Roxanne Varzi heard this story, she would have included it in her book *Warring Souls* and analyzed it from the Karbala paradigm and Sufi mystical point of view, as well as from many other perspectives. Yes, she wears many hats in her research, or should I say many hijabs. She is fascinated with the mechanism of martyrdom. The chapter on the subject is a tour de force. She writes, "I tell the story of the many young martyrs who died and then were seen later in the murals covering the city walls" (7).

During the eight-year-long bloody war against Iraq (1980–88), hundreds of thousands of young men died and were immortalized in murals. At that time, Iran could be likened to an artist's atelier, as walls everywhere provide endless surface space for murals, posters, and graffiti. The traditional Iranian dwelling is surrounded by adobe or brick walls, and very often the surface of these walls are whitewashed. During the war, this space was used to the utmost to depict what Rumi calls "the bleeding martyrs." Rumi says:

Don't wash the blood upon the martyr's face  
It suits a martyr better that he bleeds,  
and that's worth more than countless  
pious deeds.<sup>1</sup>

Since the conclusion of the war, a rapid demographic surge and an accelerated migration from villages to towns have changed the urban design of Iranian cities. Now cities grow vertically at the expense of the traditional horizontal dwelling, but the taller buildings provide new surfaces for expression. Since building orientation in Iran is usually toward the south, a several-story-high space is usually found at the east-west axis at the end of a row of buildings. These huge surfaces are now covered with gigantic murals visible from a great distance, and most of these illustrations are devoted to the martyrs. Further, the martyrs have been immortalized on posters, postage stamps, book illustrations, and even banknotes. In addition, streets, avenues,

squares, parks, sport complexes, schools, highways, and other public facilities are named after the martyrs. In the 1980s, I counted more than fourteen hundred streets carrying the name of a martyr. This is a martyrdom culture.

Ever since the Shi'i faith became a state religion in the sixteenth century, the slogan "Every day is Ashura and everyplace is Karbala" has been instilled in the minds and hearts of the Iranians. The passion and death of Imam Hussein on the Ashura Day in the plain of Karbala (AH 61/680 CE) is considered by the Shi'is to be the greatest suffering in human history. This notion was exploited by Ayatollah Khomeini during his speech in Qom on Ashura Day in 1963. This speech is now considered the beginning of the Iranian revolution, which in 1979 transformed Iran from a monarchy to the Islamic Republic. Most Iranians believe that participating in Karbala rituals commemorating the suffering and death of Hussein will facilitate their salvation through his intercession. The supreme occasion on which Hussein may intercede for a man's salvation is at the moment of a combatant's death on the battlefield. Using archival material, including film clips, the last wills of soldiers, and personal interviews, Varzi describes the psychological makeup of the Iranian fighters within the Karbala paradigm. It is moving reading.

It is an extraordinary book written on many levels by an anthropologist who acts sometimes as a psychologist and sometimes as a sociologist. And when the described reality sounds too harsh for the reader, she balances it with a poetic prose narration. What Varzi promises in the introduction she delivers in the eight chapters that follow. In the introduction, she writes, "This book is a journey through the various veils or curtains of reality to meditate on the many possible meanings of reality for the young Iranians in post-revolution Iran who were the targets of the Islamic project that attempted to construct a specific Islamic reality" (5).

The use of Sufi terminology outside of the Sufi brotherhood to describe reality is very risky and daring since many believe that mysticism implies self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought. Two paragraphs farther down on the same page, she notes, "Like the mystic journey as a movement in time and space that is neither linear nor monochronic, this book moves through different moments and themes in post-revolution Islamic Iran to look at how the Islamic Republic was constructed, sustained, consumed, and transformed. In this work, I aim to narrate the political poem of the Islamic Republic

1. Rumi, *The Masnavi*, trans. Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), bk. 3, 103.

through the lens of anthropology, framed by the mystical allegory of the journey” (5).

In order to use the mystical allegory throughout the book, the author must be very well versed in Sufi doctrine—and she is. In addition to her knowledge and understanding, she has an innate feeling for mysticism. The cover page does not indicate the mystical dimension of the book. But the reader gets an inkling of it in the prologue in which Varzi provides a one-page summary of Attar’s great mystical work *The Conference of the Birds*. There are two Sufi terms that Varzi constantly and skillfully employs: *batin* and *zahir*. *Batin* means “inner, hidden, esoteric.” It is the opposite of *zahir*, which means “external,” “apparent,” “exoteric.”

This book is not only about the war with Iraq but also about the war for survival in contemporary Iran. Iran is a very old country with a young population. The number of people under twenty-five years old is staggering, and a great many of them are unemployed. The daily code of behavior for both sexes is very strict, and there are very few outlets for venting frustration. In her description of boy-meets-girl in Tehran (or maybe more accurately, boys-and-girls-attempt-to-meet-one-another), Varzi is at her best. A vignette titled “Traffic Jam, Summer Night 2001” is dramatic and hilarious at the same time. Here, with the well-trained eye of the anthropologist, the author paints a dramatic picture with words. Young men and women take advantage of weekly Thursday night traffic jams on a popular stretch of a major thoroughfare to flirt from inside their cars. Thursday is the last day of the workweek, and both sexes driving on Jordan Street are coifed and made up with extra care, and also segregated. Girls toss slips of paper with their phone numbers out of their cars to boys they fancy and then drive off. The boys hang out the windows and even open the car doors to catch the papers, playing loud music all the while. As the traffic jam subsides, both boys and girls become more restrained and serious. The music is turned off, makeup is wiped away, and everyone is in his or her own seat. No one wants to be detained by the Basij, who have set up a checkpoint farther down the boulevard.

In the introduction, Varzi writes, “This book is about the intersection of religion, vision, and power and whether the individual ultimately has the power to turn an image on or off” (7). Most of the pages of her book are infused with mysticism. Metaphorically, the warring souls are Attar’s birds on a journey. The book ends when the journey of the birds ends. Thirty birds out of several thousand reach their destination, only to find out that they are the Simorgh, the “thirty birds.” In her epilogue, Varzi concludes, “At the end of *The Conference of the Birds*, we see that

power is not outside the individual in the *zahir*, but rather within the self in the *batin*” (214).

Thank you, Roxanne Varzi, you are a very good Hoopoe.

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### **Of Irony and Empire: Islam, the West, and the Transcultural Invention of Africa**

*Laura Rice*

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How are we to arrive at a fully postcolonial world? This would be a world in which the legacies of nineteenth-century European empire—racism, orientalism, the myth of the West as the vanguard of History—are disabled. It would be a world able to overcome barriers to mutual recognition across cultures, where ideologues justifying imperial aggression would not get away with denying their victims’ humanity. More positively, we would have the means to appreciate how we are all products of transcultural invention, reflected and defined by our relations with one another. Perhaps we will never arrive, but Laura Rice suggests that we can move toward this state through awareness of how irony marks and makes our age.

Other historical periods have been called ironic. But Rice posits that Europe’s imperial nineteenth century was an age of “stable irony,” in which relations between cultures were marked by “disdain, superiority, and detachment rather than empathy” (17). The First World War violently shook this stability, opening gaps between pronouncement and practice further shaken by the long crumbling of European empires. Our irony emerged from the incongruities of our global and contradictory age: from the tensions between modern progress and malaise, from observing the dehumanizing effects of the civilizing mission. It thrives because the multiple alternative modernities that have been built outside the West both universalize and provincialize the West, a situation that an ironic sensibility engages as familiar certainties collapse. “The formula in stable irony, moving from false to true, from rotten to solid, becomes dialectical in unstable irony, a movement from same to other and back” (9). Unstable irony, then, “is able to translate the relativity of our epistemologies, and by that very fact, opens the way to new understandings” (2).