


for freedom that took place in both countries. Chapters three and four provide a cogent and compelling summary of the dramatic and eventful struggles for liberation from brutal autocracies. Khatib recalls the multitude of acts that facilitated the changes few dared to imagine before they happened, as well as the numerous actors behind these developments. She underlines the ideal of freedom that motivated them and analyzes the huge challenges they faced. Today, those struggles seem remote and almost unreal. Yet, as Khatib reminds us, they were real, both in the objectives they upheld and the actions they took. The aim was an end to despotism and, with it, the end of human rights violations, corruption, and social injustice. The demand was for freedom, dignity, and democracy. Khatib depicts the weaknesses and failures of liberal individuals and organizations in taking appropriate courses of action to attain these objectives and achieve these demands, due to many reasons, including the lack of political experience, the power of opponents, and the fluidity of ever-moving situations.

The fate of the 2011 revolts and the thwarted processes of democratic transition have had tremendous consequences for people in the Arab region. They are still unfolding today and constitute a central item on scholars' research agendas. The history of liberalism documented by Khatib is part and parcel of a tormented quest for democracy, and, in this sense, is essential to understanding the reasons behind the present failure of that transition. In this regard, the book is a valuable contribution to ongoing efforts at probing the upheavals. Even though the revolts for freedom and dignity did not yield their promises, and instead ended up, painfully, in human and political disasters, they undoubtedly transformed the region in profound ways. These events strongly shook the region's liberal yearnings, as well as all those who carried or struggled for them. *The Quest for democracy* will help readers measure and better understand these transformations.

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Transnational Culture in the Armenian Iranian Diaspora

**Claudia Yaghoobi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).
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In *Transnational Culture in the Armenian Iranian Diaspora*, Claudia Yaghoobi makes the case that Armenians in Iran and Iranian Armenians in the US “have occupied a liminal space that has impacted and shifted their consciousness,” and “they have transformed it [this consciousness] from nationalism to transnationalism” (p. 6). Yet, the title does not fully encompass Yaghoobi's purpose, as she describes it, nor how she carries out her project. Simply put, the key phrase in the title—transnational culture—better applies to both the subject matter of art, film, and literature that Yaghoobi analyzes as well as the personal experiences she cites to develop her theoretical framework.

Outwardly, *Transnational Culture* consists of a prologue, introduction, five main chapters, a conclusion, and an epilogue. There is another organizational structure behind Yaghoobi's arguments besides this obvious one, however. Specifically, in *Transnational Culture*, Yaghoobi relies on three modes of writing to put forward and support her arguments. The first utilizes passages of personal reflection aimed at generating a theoretical framework. In the acknowledgements, Yaghoobi distills her intention in incorporating personal



reflection: “Throughout the writing process, the one and only cultural historian Gloria Anzaldúa became my muse via their concept ‘autohistoria’, giving me the courage to explore my own voice and history, as well as my cultural history, and to include them in the chapters” (p. viii). Yaghoobi thus deliberately transgresses the boundaries of genre. To illustrate, in framing the Introduction, “From Nationalism in Exile to Transnationalism in Diaspora,” Yaghoobi recounts “muster[ing] the courage” (p. 1) to order an Ancestry DNA kit. Yaghoobi then transforms her conclusions about her DNA results—that they point to her ancestors’ “movements” and that her “ethnicity involved three different regions/countries” (p. 2)—into material to emphasize her claims, or to borrow her wordplay, the “genes (and genetics)” (p. 2) of the book. Each chapter begins in a similar manner: personal history serves as the springboard for Yaghoobi to lay out her arguments. Understood in this way, one finds in *Transnational Culture* not only an author who turns to literature and art to address questions of transnational identity negotiation and cultural belonging, but also an author who turns to the pages of that same book to document how and why she takes up writing about the subject matter in the ways she does.

Second, the research-based sections of each chapter cover such topics as longing for home and home-making as immigrants and diasporic subjects, assimilation and the transformation of cultural practices in dispersion, language and its function in identity negotiation, memories of collective trauma (especially in reference to the Armenian Genocide), and the condition of having had a multiple consciousness multiplied moreover. At several points, Yaghoobi raises topics that can serve as inspiration for further discourse in the study of the Armenian Diaspora. These include the experiences of living through the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War as formative events for collective identity formation in dispersion, minoritization and racialization processes for Armenians in respective host nation-states, and the subtle phrasing of Iranian Armenian American which complicates the label of Armenian American—a categorization that does not encompass real practices of kinship-making. That is, as a lived condition, one may—as an Armenian American—identify with both the US and another nation-state that one or one’s family has called home. Those shared national histories of diasporic belonging elsewhere can in turn serve as the substance for Armenian internal communal relations in the US.

Finally, Yaghoobi weaves analyses of primary texts throughout each chapter, developing these analyses based on her concept of “*verants’ughi* (վերսնցուղի),” which is “derived from the Armenian phrase *verap’okhakan ants’ughi* (վերսպիտիսական սնցուղի)”. The latter, she tells readers, “literally means a transformational passageway” (p. 8). In her own application, Yaghoobi uses “*verants’ughi* to refer to the liminal space, the bridge, or the threshold to shifting consciousness, border-crossing and perspective transformation for diaspora Iranian Armenians” (p. 9). Authors and artists who feature prominently in Yaghoobi’s analyses include Leonardo Alishan, Vartan Gregorian, Zoya Pirzad, and Arby Ovanessian, while those who feature less prominently include Marcos Grigorian, Andranik Madadian (Andy), and Emmanuel P. Vardanyan. Yaghoobi’s archive thus consists of poetry, fiction, memoir, documentary film, music, and art of different media. In taking up both primary texts for analysis and providing readers extensive descriptions to understand historic and contemporary lived experiences of the Armenian diaspora in Iran and the US, Yaghoobi offers breadth and coverage to her audience. The three modes of writing illuminate and complement one another at times, while they are woven together less seamlessly at others, in a way that allows readers to draw clear connections between the piece of autohistoria shared and the primary texts analyzed. Drawing on memories from within a “marginalised” community during “those tumultuous post-revolutionary and wartime days” (p. 66), for example, Yaghoobi illustrates how work by Edward Said on an insider versus outsider or us versus them conceptualization of identity construction in a host nation is relevant to an exploration of “isolation or liminality,” alongside “transformative growth,” depicted by Iranian Armenian diasporic authors and artists (p. 67). In contrast, however rich and eye-opening the details of language instruction and acquisition in Iran Yaghoobi shares, the broad

theme of language prompts discussion of several subtopics and a chapter in which unequal weight is given to revealing the invocation of language as a theme in primary texts versus close readings of the craft employed by writers. To step back from the book's structure, Yaghoobi seems to say overall that to study the Iranian Armenian diaspora, one must speak in terms of multiplicity—of multi-sited homemaking, of sociocultural interactions and intercommunal relations, and of transformations through contact points.

Transnational Culture appears in the moment when the foundational intellectual history of the study of the Armenian Diaspora—or better yet, the study of Armenian diasporas—is in the midst of being revisited. This thought-field's taken for granted methodologies are being expanded, and the parameters of asking and seeking answers to questions are being redefined. Recent publications include *We Are All Armenian: Voices from the Diaspora* (2023) edited by Aram Mrjoian, *Stateless: The Politics of the Armenian Language in Exile* (2023) by Talar Chahinian, and *The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power: Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century* edited by Talar Chahinian, Sossie Kasbarian, and Tsolin Nalbantian (forthcoming November 2023). Yet in situating the book's appearance within the recent history of a thought-field, I risk providing a misleading picture of the extent to which Yaghoobi engages that very field. Yaghoobi references Trinh T. Minh-ha, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha, among others. When asserting that the concept of *verants'ughi* "builds upon Gloria Anzaldúa's theories in *Borderlands/La Frontera*," Yaghoobi notes that "it also departs from them extensively, as it acknowledges that the condition of Iranian Armenians in Iran and in the US differs from that of the Chicax community" (p. 8). The move to engage outside the field and the move to acknowledge difference are welcomed due to the larger stakes for doing so: bringing Armenian Studies in conversation with other fields while holding sight of nuance in applications of theory.

Still, possibilities arise that can be answered through the additional engagement of Armenian Studies scholarship. How might the concept of *verants'ughi* travel to the study of creative production by other Armenian communities across the globe and beyond Iranian Armenians? Indeed, in developing the definition, Yaghoobi writes: "*Verants'ughi* refers to an Iranian Armenian diasporic existence that retains a transformative power to move beyond nationalism into the realm of transnationalism". A succeeding statement implies the potential broader application of this concept. Yaghoobi clarifies, "*verants'ughi* is the threshold, or phase, during which a diasporic individual holds no social power, remains invisible and conforms to prescribed social norms within the liminal space of the passageway, or diaspora". At the same time, "this individual is open to change, growth and transformation while typically retaining parts of their core identity" (p. 9). More questions arise, then, given the phrasing of "diasporic individual" here and not "Iranian Armenian diasporic existence." Could this framework developed in reference to a marginalized community apply to those from the majority culture, meaning Iranian artists living in diaspora? Or even other minorities in Iran who also find themselves in exile? To be clear, Yaghoobi does cite Khachig Tölölyan, Houri Berberian, Razmik Panossian, Sebouh Aslanian, Eliz Sanasarian, and especially James Barry for contextual information on Armenian history and the Iranian Armenian community specifically.

Nevertheless, a claim like the following can be seen as a foundation for future inquiry: "Within the context of *verants'ughi*, I highlight the despair that diasporic Iranian Armenian authors and artists endure in the diaspora, yet delineate how they simultaneously move towards transformation, growth and possibility" (p. 9). How might this notion of possibility despite despair in the aftermath of collective violence relate to arguments by Talar Chahinian, Rubina Peroomian, Marc Nichanian, and Walter Kalaidjian, for instance, who all address aesthetic representations of the Armenian Genocide by Armenians in diaspora? Might the concept of *verants'ughi* apply to those internally displaced, meaning Armenians who remained in what is now the Republic of Turkey? That question applied to the study of literature and art for the Armenian community in Turkey may find interesting synergy with—or offer comparisons to—work by Melissa Bilal, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, Talin Suciyan, and Hakem Al-Rustom. Finally, I should note that at one point, for a discussion on the origins

of the Armenian language, Yaghoobi cites *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (1988) by Esat Uras—likely unaware that Uras has been identified as producing denialist writing.

Readers may very well find one aspect of the book's content about transnational culture—engagement of primary sources versus personal narrative—as more relevant over the other for their own research needs. Additionally, *verants'ughi* may see its own transformation as the rubric's scope is tested and its lineaments refined through future applications. The final definition of *verants'ughi* Yaghoobi provides is based on the notion of sharing stories to “empower” others (p. 221). In that spirit, let readers ultimately feel empowered to continue the worthwhile conversations that Yaghoobi sets forth in *Transnational Culture*.

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Voices That Matter: Kurdish Women at the Limits of Representation in Contemporary Turkey

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Representation is not always the liberating force that it is heralded to be. Representation comes with conflicts, disappointments, complications, as many anthropologists and feminist scholars have shown. Yet still, raising one's voice is often sutured to acquiring rights and representation, taken as conditions of progress. Anthropologists alike have been invited to raise our voices, reflected in the theme of the annual American Anthropological Association meeting in 2020. In her wonderfully written and theoretically rich book, *Voices That Matter*, Marlene Schäfers disrupts the *a priori* valence often given to voice, drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2012. Voice, she argues, is not the universal pathway to representation unequivocally valued in contemporary liberal governance, especially when women are concerned.

Kurdish women *dengbêjs* in Wan, Northern Kurdistan—artists who write, perform, circulate a genre of storytelling through singing and spoken word—lead us through what voices *do* and how they *come into being* rather than what they *are*. Schäfers treads a very careful balance portraying women within very rich Kurdish oral traditions, which are often seen as the domain of men, neither as victims of a patriarchal culture nor as perfect liberatory figures whose voices render them so. With her interlocutors, Schäfers prudently attends to voice itself as a source of political potential and disappointment. Voice is both enabler and culprit. Social and even financial recognition can become available to Kurdish women through voice. Voice can also engender new conflicts and vulnerabilities. Both ring true in Schäfers' nuanced ethnographic account, demanding attention to both the gendered form and content of Kurdish artists' voices. We see this complex picture unveiled through five lines of thought that shape this review: voice as form, voice as affective technology, voice and self-making, voice as property, and voice as object of disappointment.

Schäfers first introduces us to voice as form: how voices sound and resonate, as well as how they are articulated and mediated. Rather than merely providing a background that represents a monolithic Kurdish collectivity, the forms that voices take on are manifold. Voices move to bring out certain kinds of emotions, which both constitute and are constituted by