

Farsi Shekar Ast?

The Language(s) of Belonging in Iran and its Diaspora

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While a good deal of historiographical scholarship in Iranian Studies has emphasized the role of language politics in shaping Iranian national identity, very little research has examined the aesthetic and affective dimensions of this linguistic consciousness as it plays out in modern Persian literature. This panel proposes to put existing studies of cultural history into dialogue with close readings of literary texts so as to probe not just the politics, but also the *poetics* of Iranian linguistic identity. Papers will explore how national and diasporic authors represent the felt experiences of belonging to a collectivity defined in large part by a common Persian language, considering the ways in which such communities of feeling are reflected in--and shaped by--particular literary forms.

Some of the questions that may be addressed include the following:

- How does the Persian language circumscribe the discursive terrain of national and cultural belonging, serving as a bridge between individual identity and collective identifications? How do modern literary texts of Iran and its diaspora cultivate or challenge this intellectual and affective 'sense' of home-in-language?
- In what ways does the elevation--and even fetishization--of the Persian language as a privileged site of identity and belonging reinforce gender hierarchies and exclusionary nationalist paradigms?
- Given the double status of Persian as both mother tongue—a primordial site of subject formation—and paternal Logos—the language of Law and hegemonic state power—how do minorities and other marginalized groups in Iran negotiate their ambivalent relation to this literary language? For instance, how do women writers mobilize a language of writing that is overdetermined by patriarchal laws, androcentric gender ideologies, and other socially and culturally-ingrained codes of discursive propriety?
- In what ways might an uncritical attachment to one's native language and its literary traditions exacerbate existing anxieties of influence that inhibit formal and generic experimentation? In other words, how might it be aesthetically disabling for a writer to feel too "at home" in the Persian language?
- How do first-generation Iranian emigrants evoke their physical uprooting from the homeland in terms of an experience of linguistic exile? How does their estrangement from both a national Persophone readership and the literary community of their adoptive home impact the thematic and formal development of their work? To what extent do their dis-placed and un-homed texts resist linguistic and cultural translation?