

Reflections on A Persian Jewel: Damavand College, Tehran

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Abstract: *This paper describes the author's reflections on a personal and professional experience he had 35 years ago in Iran as President of Damavand College, Tehran, Iran from 1975-1978 to lead this young liberal arts college for Iranian women. The author decided to reflect on its mission (it had had a religious heritage), what he had hoped to accomplish, its possible role in the women's movement and Islamic Reformist Movement, what had happened to its graduates, its teachers, and its friends and supporters. As he reflected on their achievements, he realized that their growth and advancement served as metaphors for his own personal and professional growth into an intercultural person. Because of that experience in Iran, he has dared subsequently to live in other countries and do research and teach in different cultures. He realized that Damavand, named for the highest mountain in Iran, was a symbol of reaching higher heights. Damavand College now had become a living symbol of what had developed as his research agenda in intercultural communication, leading him to years ago in Iran. He recently began his journey*

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back in time.

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I had served as president of Damavand College, Tehran, Iran from 1975-1978 to lead this young liberal arts college for Iranian women. I reflected on its mission (it had had a religious heritage), what I had hoped to accomplish, its possible role in the women's movement and Islamic Reformist Movement, what had happened to its graduates, its teachers, and its friends and supporters. I realized that their growth and advancement served as metaphors for my own personal and professional growth into an intercultural person. Because of experience with Iran, I realized that Damavand, named for the highest mountain in Iran, was a symbol of reaching higher heights. It now had become a living symbol of my research agenda in intercultural communication, leading me to many different cultures and into leading intercultural journals and into the leadership of international associations of intercultural scholars.

I. Reflecting on Damavand College

My reflections on Damavand College began while we were studying issues of the Middle East. I had kept up my interest in and research on Iran since we returned from there in 1978. That started my thinking about the college again and initiated my reflections on the institution that was such an important part of our lives. But just as going to a new country means one doesn't always know what one will find there, or in embarking on a research project one doesn't know what one will discover, so with beginning the process of reflecting on my previous experience, I couldn't predict what I would find that it would become another journey all of its own.

Damavand College was one of Iran's jewels, a unique college for

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women, offering a two-track intercultural curriculum—a Persian civilization curriculum and a Western civilization curriculum and supported by visionary Iranians who wanted a good liberal arts college for their young women, by Americans who loved Iran and who wanted to help advance higher education in that country, and by the imperial government of the Shah who had ordered the Iranian National Oil Company to give 18 acres of prize real estate on the northeastern edge of Tehran for building a new campus as part of his modernization program for Iran. The new campus was designed by the Frank Lloyd Wright Associated Architects with its typical rich blending of the building materials and the design blending with the local physical environment.

My involvement began in 1975, seven years following the founding of the College. When I arrived as the second president, I served for three years and returned to the United States in July 1978, for the sake of our three sons approaching high school age, a month before the Islamic Revolution broke out. But first, when one hasn't seen a place for thirty years, one wonders what changes there might be. "What did it really look like now?" I wondered. When I read that an Iranian colleague in intercultural communication from Tehran would present a paper at a US 2006 conference, I emailed him, asking whether he could take some photos at the College. He wrote back immediately that he would take pictures and send them to me right away (Shaghasemi, 2006). When I received them, I was excited. There were the same buildings, the classrooms and administration building, the library building, and even the guard house at the entrance. But the amazing difference was that the little saplings planted at the opening of the new campus were now, after 35 years, large shade trees and many more trees adorned the campus. Also, a new Islamic entrance had been built. The other difference, of course, was that all around the College were now streets, traffic lights, buildings, high rises, apartment complexes, offices and other evidence of a growing, sprawling city ever creeping upward against the edges of the Alborz

Mountains. My goals in accepting this mission of international service had been a continuation of the original purpose of the College to provide a liberal arts discipline, with an intercultural curriculum, an international faculty, and more Iranian full-time faculty, and an expansion of the studies at the graduate level to prepare students to be able to teach English as a second language. I also wanted to enlarge the desire for more student participation in their society along with their becoming intercultural persons and to enlarge the concept of faculty governance by establishing more involvement in the decision-making process of the College.

II. The Women's Movement in Iran

People's lives have consequences, engaging in larger circles of influence. My mind went to the question of the women's movement in Iran. I wondered what impact Damavand College and its graduates and teachers may have had on this movement? My readings included the writings of Iranian women who had much to say about the women's movement in Iran. As a women's college that boasted a Damavand College Women's Institute for the study and research of Iranian women's issues and problems in their development, the College felt fortunate to have Mrs. Mahnaz Afkhami, address the graduates in 1978 as the highest ranking woman leader representing the government. One of Afkhami's most important publications has been *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran* which she edited with Erika Friedl (1994). In it, ten women contributors write on and for "Iranian women," whose "voices are rich with intellectual vigor, and impassioned in their search for a self-defined reality" (Morgan, 1994, x).

Beyond Afkhami's work, however, one of the important accounts of the women's movement is Eliz Sanasarian's, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran* (1982). In a history that covers 1900 to Khomeini, she examines the women's rights movement in Iran from a theoretical

model perspective and finds enough evidence to call it a “movement,” even though it did not have the earmarks of what is usually meant by a success. She looks at the roots of women's involvement, the rise and decline of the movement in the first half of the twentieth century, the co-optation and legitimization of the movement under the Shah, women's involvement in the anti-shah campaign. Sanasarian argues that the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI) was a major force between 1966, when it was formed, and 1978, in advancing the cause of women's development. Its goals included the defense of women's equal legal rights, “extending women's education” (as Damavand was doing), “preparing women for active participation in Iran's national development,” assisting women in their individual responsibilities, and “establishing family welfare centers” (Sanasarian, 1982: 83).

Another major work is *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, edited by Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (1994). It covers three major periods—the Qajars, the Pahlavis, and the Islamic Republic. Most important for our consideration is the review of events during the 1970s. The contributors claim that the women's movement in the early period was successful in terms of its demand for education, but that it “lost its impetus” when it “was taken over and controlled by the government” (Ettahadieh, 2004, 101). Under the Shah, the WOI “was a link in a chain of events that began with the first progressive impulses in Iran's recent history” (Afkhami, 2004, 107). Afkhami claims that within ten years after WOI was created “women were working as judges, diplomats, cabinet officers, mayors, governors, and policewomen and in the health and education corps” (131). One WOI success was its “learning from the grass roots” by establishing the family welfare centers. By 1975, it “had built a network of 349 branches and 120 centers and had reached an understanding of the problems and demands of different groups of women” (Afkhami, 2004: 117). As part of the grassroots work, Damavand College established in 1975 a Women's Institute, under the direction of Mina Riahi, one of the former college graduates and then current teachers. The aim of the

Institute was “to promote women's role in social development in Iran” by engaging in research projects to obtain more data about women's issues, and by raising awareness among Iranian women of the importance of their development in social, educational, and political areas of life (Sharma, 1977: 9). The Institute also established a course in women’s studies that was “used as a model for introducing similar courses in other Iranian universities” and an interdepartmental minor in women’s studies (Heisey, 1983: 88).

Riahi and I flew together to attend a conference of these women's institutes held in Tokyo and Seoul in May 1978. Flying over India on our way to that conference, she apprised me of some of the more subtle and undercover political developments in Iran as we were safely out of reach of the Savak surveillances. She was greatly troubled by the events unfolding under our eyes. She was quite aware of the emerging concern being raised by the Islamic clergy as modernization by the regime was challenging traditional mores. One example of how this emphasis on women's advancement in Iran came into conflict with the traditional values represented by the rising fundamentalist Islamic movement may be seen in an event that occurred at Damavand College in February 1978. The Damavand College Women's Institute held a celebration of the unveiling of women instituted by the Shah's father in 1936 by holding a conference of workshops and lectures by prominent leaders in Tehran. There was a demonstration for the students of what the old-fashioned chador looked like on a current student. They invited the founder of Iran Bethel School for Girls, Jane Doolittle, to speak about how far the advancement of women had come in the fifty years that she had been in Iran and to show the young women how the chador in previous years had looked. A photograph appeared in the local paper the next day of the event. My Iranian assistant received a phone call the next day from a mullah who threatened to close down the College if an apology did not appear in the paper for what he had interpreted as an insult to religious values. As the College was supported by the

government, we contacted the office of the Minister of Science and Higher Education, under whose auspices we operated, to get advice. They did not want any apology given to the religious leaders because it would make the Shah's regime look like it was caving in to the fundamentalists. The threat was not idle, however, because in other cities unrest and violence had also been going on between the government and the religious leaders. We had to go back and forth with government officials on the sensitive matter in order to get agreement on language that would satisfy both sides. We finally arranged to use language that apologized for the misinterpretation that had occurred in relation to the publication of the photo that was celebrating the role of women in society.

That Damavand College was caught in the middle between the forces of modernization and the pressures from the traditional religious movement is not surprising. One of the works that deals head on with the Iranian women's apparent paradox is *Women and Revolution in Iran*, edited by Guity Nashat (1983). That paradox was the fact that women were the beneficiaries of the Pahlavi progressive policies, but "women in general, including the most Westernized individuals and groups, came out strongly against a regime that purportedly was helping free them from the bonds of oppression" (Nashat, 1983, 1). Nashat explains this by arguing that the raised consciousness of women encouraged by the social and economic development under the Shah was a key to their inspired view of participating in the movement to obtain freedom from political oppression. But the Islamic regime in Iran, in the opinion of some thoughtful observers, has not been good to women. Nashat claims that one of the goals of the leaders of the Islamic Republic "has been to restore women to what they consider women's primary role in society: domestic responsibility" (1983: 195). She concludes at the end of her book, "The self-interest of the present regime would mandate a reconsideration of its policies toward women, even aside from moral considerations. Many women helped overthrow the previous [the

Shah's] regime, and they look back to their involvement with pride. Their involvement in the social process has become an important asset to the present regime. Probably women will continue their commitment to the regime if they are treated as equal citizens and not as inferiors who must leave important matters to men" (289).

Damavand graduate, Dr. Sheida Shirvani, has contributed to the literature on women in understanding Islam and democratization in an article on the politics of hijab, in which she argues for "the compatibility of Islam with the extension of women's rights" (2007: 107). Damavand's women have contributed in many unseen and in visible ways to the understanding of women's role in Iranian society. In this, I take great satisfaction that the College has helped fulfill its mission.

III. The Islamic Reformist Movement in Iran

The area—that grows naturally from the women's movement—that my reflection centers on was the reform in Islam that has been gaining a foothold in Iran. This is epitomized by the intellectual philosopher, Abdolkarim Soroush, who views Islam having two foci. One is that "religion is of the heart. A faith that is genuine and internal does not change because it is based on immutable truths." The other is that "religion is practiced externally" and thus it can be interpreted differently by different people as they see the light. For Soroush, "freedom is at the heart of religion. Religion is, by definition incompatible with coercion" (2006: 253). Some have referred to Soroush as the Martin Luther of Islam. Robin Wright, a leading American journalist, has publicized his views in what she calls "Iran's New Revolution" (2000).

My discovery of the reformation in Islam being spearheaded by Soroush led me to a remarkable finding that one of the major proponents of his philosophy is a highly renowned graduate of Damavand College, Dr. Forough Jahanbakhsh (class of 1980), who

completed her Ph.D. degree at McGill University, is currently Professor of Islamic Studies at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario and author of *Islam, Democracy, and Religious Modernism, 1953-2000* (2001). She had one more year to finish when the Revolution broke out, finishing her year during an intensive summer session in 1979 and then graduating in 1980. She returns to Tehran from time to time and writes "Once I went to see the campus, it is all surrounded by residential buildings and can hardly show itself as beautifully as before" (Jahanbakhsh, 2006, email to the author). As an expositor of Soroush's writings and philosophy, Jahanbakhsh has become an advocate of his interpretation of Islam, concluding that for laying the foundations for this reform movement, which she calls "irreversible," Soroush should be given more credit than anyone, because for "two decades through his prolific intellectual activities, he has constructed a non-ideological understanding of Islam that promotes rationality, pluralism, democracy, tolerance and recognition of human rights" (Jahanbakhsh, 2001: 177). This new understanding has implications for religious communication with the West in the present era of globalization (Heisey, 2010). In this sense, Soroush becomes potentially an important religious figure in the improvement of uncertain relations between the United States and Iran.

IV. Reflections on the Impact of the Damavand College on the Graduates

My reflections went from the place to the people. What had become of the students? What were they doing now? How had their lives been impacted by the College? When my thoughts turned from the physical remains of Damavand College, now called the Message of the Light University, to the intellectual and spiritual dimensions in the graduates, I became more excited. They had grown like the trees had. Their contexts had enlarged just as the College's physical environment had. My reflective approach was neither scientific nor systematic, but

by personal connections, discovering graduates who had completed graduate study with advanced degrees in Islamic studies, in communication, literature, and teaching. They shared their stories their reflections on what their own education at Damavand College had meant to them, and how they had adapted as citizens in other countries as well as in their own. Just as the College campus had changed, so too their lives and careers had changed and grown, truly becoming intercultural persons.

Where else to begin but the Internet? I got references to professional people listing their background from Damavand College. In their web sites, I saw that some were now teaching in the US while some were employed in other countries or were still in Tehran. The opportunity now presented the telling of a story consisting of many stories. As I re-connected with former students, I discovered amazing personal achievements, realizing that our small efforts over 30 years ago have grown into substantial accomplishments. Were they symbols/reflections of my own growth as well as that of my colleagues? I also found a website listed as the Damavand College Alumni Club, created by Joan Valenajad, who directed the Office of Career Development. I found scores of names, addresses, and vocations of the college graduates who had responded to her invitation to join the club. Nodokht Eftakhar (class of 1975) worked for a time at the Pasteur Institute in Tehran before moving to Oklahoma. Joan Valenajad (class of 1975) is actively involved in community organizations. One 1976 graduate who went to Sweden, remaining anonymous, wrote, "I think Damavand College helped me to be prepared for the life in a foreign land, both in language and character," and "helped me in adjusting my new identity and I tried to transfer it to my family too" ("Fatima," 2008). Sheida Shirvani (class of 1976) earned an M.A. and a Ph. D. (North Texas State University, 1987) and is now a Professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University-Zanesville and currently vice president of the Ohio Communication Association following a successful term of service as

its executive director. In 2007, she received the Distinguished Service Award for her service to the Association as executive director. She commented on her education at Damavand College and later told a reporter that when she came to the US after graduation, she “saw the importance of cross-cultural relationships” which “gave me something new to research” (quoted in Garmon, 2007). A graduate who earned the doctoral degree and now lives in Brazil wrote, “I still keep your note of congratulation for the high honor I earned as salutatorian of the 1978 senior class” (Latifi, 2008). Another Damavand graduate earning a Ph.D. is Ali Ebrahimi (M.A. in TOEFL, 1979) who teaches at the University of Aligarh in India. Though Damavand was a women's college, it offered a co-educational program at the Master's level in Teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Another MA graduate was Gholam-reza Tajvidi. He received his BA in English Language Translation and then his MA from Damavand in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in 1980. His thesis was on the “Reliability and Validity in English Language Tests Administered in Tehran High Schools.” He completed his Ph.D. from Allameh Tabataba’i University in Tehran in 2000 where he served as chair of the English Translation Studies Department from 2004 to 2006 and is now an Associate Professor in the same department. Shamsi Shahrekhi (Hessami) (class of 1983) became an artist and is currently established in Ontario with a studio of artistic work.

One graduate who remained in Tehran and now teaches in a pre-university high school is Mansoureh Sharifzadeh. I recently became re-connected with her when I received her email address. I invited her to submit a paper to be presented at an international conference.. After learning that she would not be able to come to the US, I invited her to send me a video clip of her presentation that I would offer for her at the conference. Her accepted paper and video were entitled “Using Imagination in Teaching English as an International Language” (Sharifzadeh, 2008b). For her excellent work in translating the book, *Lots More Tell Me Why*, she received special

awards in 2004 from Iran's Minister of Education and from Iran's President Khatami (Sharifzadeh, 2010). Subsequently, I invited her to do a research project with me on how teenagers perceive people of another culture by inviting her high school girl students to draw their perceptions of Americans and I invited an American school teacher to have her students draw pictures of Iranians. Then we engaged in a written dialogue about what these drawings represented. Both groups of students showed drawings that reflected the influence of the media in depicting the people of the other culture. Our collaborated paper (Heisey & Sharifzadeh, 2010) was presented at the national conference of Phi Beta Delta, the national honor society for international scholars in 2010. Since she did not receive a US visa, I presented it. She and I continue our joint research collaboration. Her Damavand College experience, she writes, helped "improve my self-reliance and confidence. My method of teaching is a reflection of what I have been taught at Damavand" (Sharifzadeh, 2008a).

V. Reflections on the Damavand College Teachers

My reflections on the international teachers who had taught at the college led me to wonder. How had they grown and developed? I had kept contact with some of them, but the Internet also put me in touch with some teachers who taught there before my arrival and who had taken higher positions, such as Dr. Robin Rafe, a lecturer in history at Damavand most likely from 1970-1972 before her graduate work and getting involved in the diplomatic world. She was appointed by President Clinton to be Ambassador to Tunisia and was also his Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia. She later served the US State Department as the director of reconstruction in post-war Iraq. She started her career start by teaching history at Damavand College.

Another teacher before my arrival was Zohreh T. Sullivan, teaching English there from 1970-1972 while Dr. Frances Gray was still

president. She earned her Ph.D. also and now teaches English literature at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, recently publishing *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora* (2001), a compilation of the stories of 44 informants, all of whom experienced exile from their home and country. One of her interviewees was a student in her class that she taught at Damavand whose own daughter later studied with Sullivan at the University of Illinois. She writes, "In the polarity between 'here,' where one does not belong, and 'there,' the romantic point of departure and return, lies the imagined territory of exilic identity and of all identity formation." The stories of how they were forced to leave, or why they chose to leave their home country, and what happened to them once they had left, "became the charged spaces that constitute 'identity' and 'culture' recognized by memory in exile" (Sullivan, 2001: xiv). It is a remarkable collection of memories of despair, courage, and hope that adds to our understanding of what Iran means today. It is interesting to note that in Professor Sullivan's preface, where she accounts for why she is writing the book, she begins by remembering her teaching at Damavand College and the unusual student she had at that time who was now sitting across the table from her in Illinois, telling her her story. She opens the preface with a quotation from the student and then says, "Spoken at my dining table in Champaign-Urbana in July 1989, these words were part of one woman's meditations on exile and on her resistance to diasporic assimilation, part of a conversation with me, now her closest Iranian friend, who had once been her teacher in Damavand College, Tehran, Iran, from 1970 to 1972" (Sullivan, 2001: xiii). How many of Damavand's graduates may be in exile, like she, engaged in constituting their new identities and cultures? What interests me about these last two former teachers is their pride to list that they had started professionally at Damavand College. Fred Brock, who taught at New York University's School of Journalism after Damavand, is now department chair of Journalism at Kansas State University and Mary Beckett Davis, now head librarian at the Huntington Free

Library in the Bronx, was the 1995 recipient of the Denali Press Award for publishing *Native America in the Twentieth Century*. Dr. George C. Fry taught at Damavand College in 1973-75 and has published *Teaching the Bible as a Cross-Cultural Classic in a Middle Eastern Society: The World Literature Curriculum at Damavand College in Tehran, Iran* (2005), thirty-six years later. In it he describes Persian culture, life in Tehran, life at the old campus, his experiences in the classroom, and in great detail the contents, structure, and method of his course in the Bible as literature. Finally, he provides insight to the reader from the lessons he learned as a professor there and as a guest in that culture and how it impacted his life. Fry concludes after forty-five years of teaching in a variety of institutions, "It remains my abiding impression that at Damavand College I found the least amount of strife, the most amount of cooperation between students and faculty, between colleagues on the staff." Fry attributes this quality of relationship to several factors: "the missionary legacy of the college," "a self-select factor at work—because only a certain type of teacher or student would want to be part of such an institution," and "the cross-disciplinary nature of the two majors—World Cultures and World Literatures—which brought together a mix of specialties in each department" (Fry, 2005: 85).

One of the values of Damavand's location in the capital of Tehran was that it could benefit from the city's academic and educational resources. Professors serving at other institutions could lend their expertise as part-time professors. One Iranian expert was Dr. Abbas Amirie, founder and first Executive Director of the Institute for International Political and Economic Studies in Tehran which was established at the request of Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda so that the Shah would have an independent research center for political, economic and foreign policy affairs. Formerly a colleague of mine, Amirie and partially responsible for my appointment as president of Damavand College, his specialty was international relations and political issues of the Middle East. He taught a course at Damavand

College in this area, and his wife, Susan, a teacher in the English department became an editor, teacher, and administrator in her husband's Civil Service Academy in Los Angeles. My wife still remembers the dangerous ride with them from Tehran up over the treacherous Alborz Mountains as our driver made his way at a fast pace around the steep corners with no guard rails. Cynthia Helms, wife of the American Ambassador to Iran while we were there, wrote in her memoirs that on one of their trips to the Caspian Sea, the security people made them fly back to Tehran because "the trip from the Caspian to Tehran is so dangerous, with high mountain passes and narrow winding roads" (Helms, 1981: 113). After the Revolution, Dr. Amirie settled in California and later became an adviser in the Reagan Administration for Middle East foreign policy, wrote papers on US relations with Iran, and established a successful Academy for Civil Service candidates. He has recently completed an outstanding autobiographical account of his fascinating life, having lived in two countries and serving them both with distinction *Unparalleled Journey: From Raising Lambs to Advising World Leaders* (2008). He describes in his conclusion, the reason he wrote his life's story which "proves that against all odds, you can realize your dream providing that you persevere and never lose hope" (260). This motto is consistent with the symbol of Damavand College which was reaching the heights of Mt. Damavand for which the college was named.

Dr. Mary Catherine Bateson, a noted faculty member and our director of graduate studies, helped to establish during my tenure there the graduate program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Her academic and experiential credentials added considerable prestige to our faculty in the graduate studies program. Her husband, Barkev Kasarjian, was head of the Harvard-connected Tehran Institute for Management Studies. In addition to her administrative duties, Dr. Bateson taught cultural anthropology. Her mother, Margaret Mead, visited her daughter in 1975 on her way to Africa to attend the International Year of the Woman Conference. Dr.

Mead favored us with a lecture in our yet unfinished auditorium donated by the United States AID program. Mead spoke to the Iranian women about the importance of their role in the fast-changing Iranian society. During one of her memorable and insightful conversations at her daughter's home with faculty and students attending, she talked about the great advantage these young women had in attending such a good liberal arts college, but then she paused, looked up at me standing in the back of the room and said, "But why shouldn't a women's college have a woman president?" Dr. Bateson's contribution to the College was considerable. Her knowledge of culture, especially the Persian culture and language, her understanding of women's issues and the need for women's development, and her extensive educational experience in institutions of higher learning, including graduate education, all made her a valuable asset to Damavand College. Her sensitivity to the problems of being a woman has been prominent in her numerous writings since her service in Tehran. Her book, *Composing A Life*, 1990, is "about life as an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar compositions in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic" (3). Bateson modeled for the young women at Damavand the role of how a Western woman with a husband and daughter, demonstrating family values, can at the same time successfully pursue the professional life of a teacher, researcher, and writer.

Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, a Damavand professor of sociology from 1977-1979, interestingly enough, participated herself in the Islamic Revolution. She and her husband, Ali Mohammadi, wrote an excellent account of the Revolution from the communication dimensions, especially the media, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (1994). As participants in the Revolution, they had a unique perspective to bring to their analytic story that is also a story of their lives during this volatile period, closing their book with an interesting confession.

Stressing that their two daughters, born during the revolution, are “new hybrids, [who] feel at home in many locations in the global cultural ecumene,” they conclude: “But for us , the wandering Jew, the Iranian exile, we two grow old and sometimes wear the bottoms of our trousers rolled, and echo along with so many participants in the revolution, 'No, that is not it at all; that is not what we meant, at all'” (Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994: 193). Professor Sreberny-Mohammadi, while at Damavand College, edited from 1977 to 1979 the English-language quarterly journal, *Communications and Development Review*. She now is Professor of Global Media and Communication in the Centre for Media and Film Studies in the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies. She lists among her research interests, globalization theory and the political economy of media industries, and media, gender, and social space in the Middle East. The next time I met Professor Sreberny-Mohammadi, after I left Damavand College was in the pages of her writing in 1999 when her manuscript was one of a number of chapters for a book in a *Series, Advances in Communication and Culture*, which I was editing. I received the book manuscript shortly before becoming a Visiting Professor of Intercultural Communication at Peking University and I noticed that her chapter was very personal and subjective, coming at the end of 15 other very academic chapters: “Globalization and Me: Thinking at the Boundary.” I could see that the connection was obvious between her account of the Iranian Revolution and her chapter in which she wrote, “I want to press for a radical subjectivity that not only tries to account for why I, the articulating academic, find a certain issue of value to explore but more importantly, how my subjectivity resonates with and through the subject matter as I analyze it” (Sreberny, 2002: 294, 295).

Her 1994 book on the Iranian Revolution was a forerunner of her most recent work where she is interested in exploring the process of individuation. Her “radical subjectivity” or “reflexive modernity,” as she calls it in another place, expresses a hope “that takes seriously and

reflexively one's own identity-affiliations, their bases, their shifting valences, their mutative centrality in one's own life, [so that] one might gain a certain humility in the study of 'others' and certainly in an encounter with the Other's claims" (Sreberny, 304). Her account has helped me understand my present exploration of Damavand College as a research practice of reflection.

Mark Carassi, teaching there from 1976-1979, has built a successful career in the field of advertising and public relations, now head of Caspian International, a public relations, advertising and film production company with international headquarters in Toronto, Tehran, and Dubai. With excellent work for some of the largest multinational corporations in the world. he has left his original Muslim name at Damavand College of Mohammad Abdoli for his new name. He confirmed what an important opportunity he felt it was that I had given him to teach at Damavand College as a young instructor in journalism (Carassi, 2006) when he was at a crossroads in deciding which direction to take, whether in practicing journalism or in teaching. As a successful teacher, it helped build his self-confidence. Carassi contributed to the intercultural experiences of the Damavand students and has now gone on to contribute internationally to a successful international media enterprise. Most recently, he has entered a doctoral program in international communication at Michigan State University (Carassi, 2008).

Our teachers, I discovered in my reflections, illuminated by their cultural identities, had engaged the world, just as I have done in the intervening years. My own identity can be seen emerging from their identities as the dimensions unfold from the students and teachers and now in their new contexts was like experiencing a professional and personal rebirth.

VI. Reflections on Important Friends of the College

In addition to the graduates and the former teachers of the

College, my mind reflected on other important persons who had connections with the institution. Cynthia Helms, the wife of the American Ambassador to Iran, Richard M. Helms, who served from 1973 to 1977, was on the College Board of Trustees for those four years as it was customary for the wife of the American ambassador to do so. Three recollections disclose her character and commitment. The first is the time that she and Ambassador Helms invited my wife, Susanne, and me to lunch at the Embassy soon after we arrived in Tehran in 1975. We were late to our appointment as we had been meeting with Paul Walter, chairman of the Damavand Board who kept us too long. We hurried to the Embassy; he parked his car a distance from the ambassadorial residence and we had to scurry across the field to get to the residence. The Ambassador and his wife were waiting for us. We had an interesting conversation about Kent State University because I had been a faculty member there in May 1970 when the four students were shot by the National Guardsmen in the anti-war protests on the campus when the Ambassador headed the CIA. The second time was when the Ambassador and his wife stopped in unexpectedly at the new campus of the College to check on our progress after we had made the difficult decision to move onto the new campus even before the construction was finished, which showed their interest in the College. That she took her position seriously is noted in her book, *An Ambassador's Wife in Iran* (1981). She writes: "Frances Gray, the American head of Damavand College for Girls, came to me with a delegation of Iranian educators and asked me to join the Board of Trustees of the American-supported college. I hesitated, as I knew it would be time-consuming, but I was so impressed by the Iranian women that I agreed. They became my good friends and serving on the board awakened me to Iran's many education problems, particularly the education of women" (Helms, 1981: 122).

The third memory is of Mrs. Helms participating in the formal activities of the College, such as at commencement when she and her husband would sit in the front row in the audience as the young

women filed across the stage to receive their diplomas. This was an outstanding symbolic act of support for the young institution from the highest American government official and his wife.

The Episcopal Bishop in Iran, Hassan B. Dehqani-Tafti, an Iranian, served on the Board of Trustees of Damavand College and contributed greatly to the integration of Persian and Christian values in the oversight of the College. This was appropriate in light of the fact that the College had a Christian heritage. He has written two accounts of his life—one before the Revolution and one after. The first one, *Design of My World* (1968), is an account of his “spiritual pilgrimage in the faith in the Christian God,” having been born into a Muslim family. Due to the influence of his mother who was converted to Christianity because of the influence of the missionaries who worked at the Christian hospital where she was in training, he was converted as well, as a boy of ten. His second book, *The Hard Awakening* (1981), a title taken from a line from the famous Persian poet, Hafez—the Bishop was a lover of classical Persian poetry, provides a story of how his church and his family personally were persecuted following the coming of the Islamic Revolution. He writes that though his church was free to practice its Christian faith during the Pahlavi regime, the church was aware of the oppression under the Shah and thus, as he says, “welcomed” the Revolution when it came. “But it was not long,” he hastens to add, “before we found that we had exchanged one form of oppression for another even more severe” (Dehqani-Tafti, 1981: 35). He and his wife both experienced threats on their lives, even physical and violent attacks, but the real test came later when he suffered the loss of his only son, Bahram, “who gave his life for both of us and for many more” (Dehqani-Tafti, 1981: v). His son was teaching at Damavand College and also served as a translator and interpreter for the foreign news reporters who converged on Tehran following the Islamic Revolution. He had accompanied the reporters to Qom when they went there to interview Ayatollah Khomeini and also in Tehran to interview the new president, Dr. Bani-Sadr. On May 6, 1980, over a

full year following the arrival of Khomeini, the Bishop's son was accosted by two men while he was driving home from his teaching at Damavand College. They drove him near to the entrance of the infamous Evin Prison and later a nearby witness saw them talking but then heard some shots and saw the car go quickly away. The boy called the police who came and took the body to the hospital. The Bishop believes the men were trying to get his son Bahram "to testify against his father or even deny his faith. Of course, Bahram would have refused" (77).

Mahnaz Afkhami, noted earlier, who served as the first Minister of State for Women's Affairs in the Pahlavi regime was also secretary general of the Women's Organization of Iran and was on the Board of Trustees of Kerman University and Farah University for Women. In exile now in the United States, she has published nine books on women's rights and development, has founded and led several non-governmental organizations such as Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development. I received her at the College in 1978 to address the College graduates as the commencement speaker for the approximately 200 graduating young Iranian women. This was one of the last official gestures of support from the Pahlavi government for the young liberal arts institution advancing the cause of women in the country and just months before she was removed from office as part of the effort by the Shah to conciliate the rising opposition. As she spoke to the young women about taking their place in society and using their talents to advance the role of women in a nation dominated by males, she might have challenged them with the words that she would write twenty years later about her own exile which she was soon to enter. "Exile in its disruptiveness," she writes, "resembles a rebirth. The pain of breaking out of our cultural cocoon brings with it the possibility of an expanded universe and a freer, more independent self.

Reevaluation and reinvention of our lives leads to a new self that combines traits of the old society and characteristics acquired in the new environment” (Afkhami, 1994: 12). The “reevaluation and reinvention” of which the famous woman Iranian leader was to write were processes precisely that Damavand College was attempting to establish in the minds of its students in the pre-revolutionary period. My reflection asks, “How many of the graduates of that 1978 class have thought back since then about Mrs. Afkhami and her leadership in the women's movement to recognize the 'new self' that she has constructed along with the new selves that they have constructed, as well?”

A husband and wife team, Arthur Gregorian and Phoebe Gregorian of Massachusetts were very strong supporters of the College in many ways, most importantly in the ways they were connected to other important people in the US where they had many friends and in Iran because of his business as a very successful buyer, seller, exhibitor, and lecturer on Persian carpets. Born in Iran, he was the chairman of the Damavand College Foundation Board of Trustees with headquarters in Washington, D.C. whose mission was to assist in supporting the college financially and in helping to recruit the College's faculty. These special friends of the College left their bright image of endorsement on this Persian jewel.

VII. The Epilogue

My reflective thoughts went from this development to the possibility of the Islamic reformation in Iran being sustained or gaining momentum. If so, it offers some hope for those who want to see the nation change to a more open society. This would make it possible for traditional Persian cultural expressions to be shared once again with the world, with an intellectual openness, something that Damavand, a small women's college, attempted to do. Were there now “a thousand [jewels] of light” from Damavand's ten years that

enlightened the graduates' spheres of influence both within and without Persia? My mind and heart said yes. In fact, one of these graduates living in Tehran wrote that she still remembers the days of Damavand: "I dream a lot about those peaceful days which I had at Damavand.. That's why I imagine the repetition of Damavand days" (Sharifzadeh, 2009). What she meant in imagining "the repetition of Damavand days" was something different from what my mind reflected on in this reliving of my Iran experience. But maybe not, for it may have created in my mind a virtual reality of Damavand in which one imagines the future by creating a mindset that changes reality. Perhaps this is what these Damavand graduates are doing in their own ways as they seek to "adjust the new identity," which the College helped them construct, as one graduate put it. Indeed, their college experience may have assisted in developing an adaptation process that resulted in "an intercultural identity [that] is not bound to a specific culture" but "extends beyond perimeters of one's original culture to include multiple cultural perspectives and assume greater human interconnectedness" (Pitts, 2009). I know that my experience at this Persian jewel developed in me an open mind, an intercultural attitude and an international perspective that grew into a professional career of teaching and researching intercultural communication not only in Iran, but England, Sweden, Estonia, and China. This intercultural personhood allowed me to travel to The Netherlands, Finland, Russia, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, and to China, at least nine times, for sharing my intercultural research. It eventuated in publishing many journal articles, in editing intercultural books, and in presiding over two intercultural communication organizations in international contexts (St. Clair & Honna, 2005: 1-8).

The personal stories emerging from these reflections would not have come to light had I not been challenged to share from my own experience of what is going on in Iran today. This may serve as a model for other teachers to construct out of their past the ready stories

that need to be brought to light for illuminating the identities they have helped to form. The primary hurdle in accomplishing this is identifying the ways of reconnecting, but that is what is so exciting about this journey of discovery. The journey resulted in learning that Damavand College was still held in high esteem by its graduates that it had helped the graduates and faculty prepare for the lives that they would live, whether at home or abroad, that it had helped them discover who they were, and that it had helped them create space for belonging. What is remarkable is that I discovered that my reflecting on this Persian jewel helped me to see that these same benefits had been accomplished in my life as well.

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