



# **The Pearl of Dari: Poetry and Personhood among Young Afghans in Iran (Public Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa)**

By Zuzanna Olszewska

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The Pearl of Dari takes us into the heart of Afghan refugee life in the Islamic Republic of Iran through a rich ethnographic portrait of the circle of poets and intellectuals who make up the "Pearl of Dari" cultural organization. Dari is the name by which the Persian language is known in Afghanistan. Afghan immigrants in Iran, refugees from the Soviet war in Afghanistan, are marginalized and restricted to menial jobs and lower-income neighborhoods. Ambitious and creative refugee youth have taken to writing poetry to tell their story as a group and to improve their prospects for a better life. At the same time, they are altering the ancient tradition of Persian love poetry by promoting greater individualism in realms such as gender and marriage. Zuzanna Olszewska offers compelling insights into the social life of poetry in an urban, Middle Eastern setting largely unknown in the West.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

"Zuzanna Olszewska's virtuoso study explores how young progressive Afghan intellectuals use the writing and performance of poetry as a prestigious discourse, to sustain community and claim dignity in exile. Her work makes an essential new contribution in Persian literary studies, ethnolinguistics, and refugee cultural studies worldwide." ?Margaret A. Mills, Professor Emerita of Persian and Folklore, Ohio State University

"Well beyond its focus on a community of Persian-speaking Afghan intellectuals living in exile in Mashhad, Iran, over the past three decades, The Pearl of Dari offers the reader the precious pearl of a genuine reading and learning experience. Zuzanna Olszewska combines solid scholarship with uplifting sensitivity to create a lively narrative replete with joyful discoveries of genuine personhood, agency, and humanity in the midst of multiple marginalities, an account of growing up amid layer upon layer of tension, bravely defying overwhelming odds." ?Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, University of Maryland

### About the Author

Zuzanna Olszewska is Associate Professor in the Social Anthropology of the Middle East at the University of Oxford.

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