ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a labour of love characterised by my own multiple consciousnesses, diasporic position and transnationalism. As an Armenian who was born and grew up in Iran and moved to the United States in her early thirties, my understanding of socio-cultural identity moves beyond the national and the nation-state. This is because my diasporic story departs from my ancestors’ forced relocation to Iran and the pressures of assimilation into a new host culture. I trace my roots back to the seventeenth-century forced displacement of Armenians to New Julfa by Shah Abbas. History shows that many within this population later moved to the central province of Arak, Iran. My great-grandparent, my grandparents and my parents were all born in Kazaz, Arak, in Iran. To accomplish this project, therefore, I drew wisdom and guidance from the wellspring of my ancestors on my trajectory. I dedicate this book to my ancestors as an act that honours their experiences and thanks them for being a part of the web of intent that gave me life.

Having lived for thirty years in Iran, I moved to the United States not because of direct forces of resettlement but due to the indirect impacts of globalisation, the global economy and the problematics of living on the margins of a host nation that will never accept others as one of its own. The impact of my relocation on my identity formation and consciousness was naturally different from what my ancestors experienced. In my current location within the United States, I identify as someone who is twice a stranger with multiple
homes. In this way, my transnationalism challenges earlier interpretations of assimilation to the mainstream society, a process usually intertwined with borders, territories and nation-building. My assimilation process is a transnational one that extends beyond the delimitations of one unified nation, geography, language, or territory. Today, I live in a liminal space where borders are blurred, identity is fluid, categories are malleable, and growth and transformation are possible and almost mandatory. And just as I live in this liminal space, I explore Armenian artists and authors who similarly live(d) in this transitory diasporic space of potentials and possibilities; within this fertile space they create transformative works that do not conform to any conventional frameworks.

To complete this book, I drew inspiration from (in addition to my ancestors) two women-of-colour scholars and activists whose courage in the world of academia, and in the world generally, inspired me in various ways. 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. After finishing the first draft of this book, I came across the work of the fabulous Nadine Naber whose ‘Liberate your Research’ project provided me with the tools to offer a unique perspective and ultimately theorise a new concept for the Iranian Armenian diaspora. I have no words to thank these two women enough.

The idea for this book emerged out of my lived experiences; however, it received academic attention when I wrote to the Iranian Armenian author Zoya Pirzad to discuss her works in 2012. It took further scholarly shape in 2014 when I taught a course on the topic of diaspora at GCSU, in 2016 and 2018 when I presented (and consequently published) two papers on Pirzad’s works at the Association of Iranian Studies conferences in Vienna, Austria, and Irvine, California. I taught my diaspora course twice at UNC, in 2017 and 2021, and in 2022 I taught a graduate seminar on ‘Minorities in the Middle East’. My conversations with my students in these classes became the cornerstone of this book; I am grateful to them and their vibrant discussions. I presented various parts of this book in different venues such as at the UCLA, UC Irvine, UC Santa Barbara, the University of Toronto, the University of Virginia, the University of Chicago, the University of Maryland
and Australia's Iranica lecture series, among many others. I owe tremendous gratitude to all the colleagues in these venues who provided me with their insights and feedback.

However, the work would not have been possible without the support of the many colleagues and friends who in one way or another helped me formulate my thoughts, challenged me and aided me in editing/revising it, sending me books from Iran and Armenia, or acquiring images and their copyrights. Special thanks go to James Barry, Pamela Karimi, Rolando Longoria, Pamela Haag, Nasrin Rahimieh, Houri Berberian, Eric Hogglund, Esha Momeni, Alireza Korangy, Janet Afary and Lior Sternfeld, as well as many other colleagues, for reading the full manuscript, chapters, or excerpts. I would also like to thank Shakeh Amirian Petrossian, Sonia Balassanian, Edward Balassanian, Anoush Hovsepian, Sato A., Anne Der Hacopian, Garnik Der Hacopian, Linet Akbari, Marish Gevorgyan, Vanik Nazari, Argin Nazari, Azadeh Shams, Maryam Zehtabi, Marzia Milazzo, John Bechtold and Ronald Williams II, who have helped me in so many different ways to complete this book, including sending me books from Iran and Armenia, taking photos and acquiring copyright permissions for the images. Without their support and encouragement, this book would not have existed. For that, I am indebted to them. I would also like to thank my colleagues at UNC-Chapel Hill, especially the UNC Institute for the Arts and Humanities Faculty Fellowship programme, which provided me with a full semester of research leave in spring 2021, and the IAH Faculty of Color and Indigenous Group grant, as well as the IAH Publication Support Grant which allowed me to complete this book. Similarly, I offer my regards to the Edinburgh University Press editorial board, series editors, external reviewers and administrative staff.

As with everything in my work and life, this project was inspired by my family, my ancestors, my roots. Here I bow to them in the hope that I have fulfilled a mission delivered to me through their lineage.