



# **An Iranian Narrative of COVID-19**

By Mehri Yavari

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Today is a warm, sunny day in Texas, the sun is coming through the window, dancing hand in hand with the shadow of the leaves on the wall. I am laying down on my love-seat, my laptop on my laps, trying to write my narrative of COVID-19. Hold on! I forgot to introduce myself, give you a hint of whose lens is on this narrative, and where my epistemology stands in the wild world of epistemologies: Hey, my name is Mehri, (Meh-ree). You could use she and her for me. I am a Ph.D. student in Texas from Iran. Iran is my first home, the US is my second home. I love both the same amount, the one I was born in, the one I chose to live in. I spent my childhood as well as teenagehood in Qom, in the Iranian city that is the epicenter in the COVID-19 era; the city of holy shrines, seminaries, the house of Shia Armageddon, and clergies. Iranian people call Qom as a Clergy factory or Iran's Vatican. I spent my youth, however, in Tehran, Iran's most secular city, which is two-hour away from Qom. This is my positionality, living two extremes, seeing opposite values, tasting them, loving the difference, loving not to fit-in. Back to the COVID-19! Do not ask an Iranian how they feel about COVID-19! I warned you! LOL! COVID-19 is a joke to the one who was born in a war-torn country and raised under global imposed sanctions. COVID-19 and hoarding is a joke for someone who has lived in the country of increasingly high inflation, and used to see

every day that the prices are higher from the day before, that the smallest things are scarce not just for a time being, but every day; one day Tide is scarce, the next day pampers, and God knows what would be the day after. In Iran, every day seems like a COVID-19 day. When the pandemic came to the US, I cried the first time going to grocery stores, seeing the hoarding and empty shelves. It all reminded me of my life in Iran when every day there was a reason to get ready for the bad on the way, the new sanctions, the rumors of US imminent attack, or maybe Israel's, there was always something. When lockdown happened for COVID-19, I thought, well I am ready for this. I remembered the time we were living in the basement because of the bomb attacks, and my elder sibling used to take their lessons from the black and white TV because the school was closed. We could not go out, the same as now. We could not even go upstairs in our house, because at any moment it was the sound of emergency sirens from a radio asking people to shelter in the basements. When Governor Abbot ordered sheltering in the house, I felt cold. Sheltering?! No more sheltering! I do not want to go under the blanket my mom used to hide us all under, thinking that bombs would be defective because of that thin layer. The next day we would have known which house was chosen to fall victim to the dirty game of politicians. COVID-19 is not human-made. That is what most media say. Still, COVID-19 is the pandemics because of us, humans. When the virus found its way to Iran, Fox News was belittling Iranians because two videos went viral of the guys who were kissing, licking the shrine in Qom and inviting people to not be scared of the disease, the guys had difficulties accepting the narrative that their shrine who used to cure their disease, is the epicenter for

disease now. Fox News was mocking and describing them as against global health. A few weeks later that the virus went viral in the US, the same media were against closing the country. So far, we have lost more than 80 thousand Americans and the numbers do not seem to stop anytime soon. I write the paragraphs down and look at my wall. The sun is down. There is no more dancing of leaves. It is time to go for a walk in the empty city of College Station.

