

Lobat Asadi: Borders Tell Stories

"Borders are more than lines on maps"

Defining the geographic **borders** of the Middle East requires more than simply viewing a map. While lines provide representations of borders they rarely tell the whole story. In fact, borders drawn almost a century ago continue to affect the people of the region. This was true of the experiences of the Asadi family.

Iran, located in Southwest Asia, is considered the second largest country in the Middle East. Though Iranian, the Asadi family



have traced their heritage to their tribal origins. The Asadi's are members of the nomadic Bakhtiari tribe which is a

subgroup of the Lor. These identifications provide a much more accurate picture of the ancestry of the Asadi family.

Borders are highly problematic for **nomadic** people. Because climate influences the migration patterns of nomads and weather changes require movement; all types of borders affect where nomads can settle. As the availability of crop sources changed, and as animals migrated, nomadic people moved.

Fareed Asadi was born in a tent in a mountain range called Sofreh. His family decided to settle in a nearby urban area called Esfahan when Fareed became old enough to go to school. This was because there was no formal school setting in the mountains. The inflexible borders of the area restricted the nomadic people like the Asadi's ability to live and go to school.

When Fareed was an adult, he entered the military. In the 1960's, Fareed was being treated for a gunshot wound he had sustained. While being treated for a gunshot wound, Fareed met Fatimeh, a nurse, in a hospital. In 1969, Fareed and Fatimeh married. Lobat, their daughter, was born in 1971 in Esfahan, Iran.

How can
borders
limit access
to resources
for nomads?

"Borders provide new opportunity"

While Fatimeh cared for her new child, Lobat, Fareed worked as a ranger for the Iranian government in Karaj, near the capital city of Tehran. While a ranger, he managed a variety of wildlife. This made him interested in biology and led him to pursue an education in wildlife management. In 1976, Fareed was awarded a scholarship to study for his Master's degree in the United States.

Though Lobat's memories of her childhood in Iran are limited, she remembers the

significance of her father's scholarship.

The opportunity to study to the United States was exciting. Even in Iran, U.S.

influences were strongly felt. Lobat recalls her parent's love for American TV, music, food and

fashion. A move to the United States meant that Lobat and her family could pursue their own American dream. Leaving the borders of Iran and entering into new borders offered a valuable new educational experience.

In 1976, Lobat and her family settled in Littleton, Colorado. Though eager to adapt to the American way of life, the family struggled to **assimilate**. Lobat remembers the difficulty her

In what
ways to
borders
influence
politics?

parents experienced as a result of their accent when speaking English. While living in the suburbs seemed to promise a safer living environment, the lack of diversity caused her family to stand out.

The difficulty increased in 1979, when Lobat's family and other Iranian-Americans faced challenges as a result of the Iran-Iraq war and the Iranian Revolution. Lobat remembers **discrimination** and how the war made it difficult for her family to adopt the American way of life.



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"Borders showed me we aren't alone"

After graduating from high school, Lobat attended Metropolitan State University and, in 2000 graduated with a degree in Journalism. As a journalist, her **worldview** expanded as she began to look for opportunities to experience cultures from around the world. Lobat traveled to the United Kingdom, India, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Her travels made borders less concrete and more flexible.

Cultural diffusion meant that borders, while necessary for political purposes, did not divide the spread of cultures.

In 2004, Lobat moved to Saudi Arabia to pursue a teaching career. In Saudi Arabia, Lobat taught English as a Foreign Language. Her time teaching in Saudi Arabia also allowed her to teach about some of the different experiences of western women. Lobat recalled the difficulties that Saudi women had in understanding and adapting the freedoms enjoyed by western women.

Lobat remembers some interesting cultural characteristics about her time teaching in Saudi Arabia. For example, because of **segregated** schooling, Lobat was only allowed to teach women. Also, it was against the law for any woman to drive. Women were required to wear

the traditional garment called the abaya. While this seemed very uniform, Lobat remembers how her students found ways to make their abaya unique. They used sequins and patches to express their own personal style. Though the women she taught weren't able to

embrace western views regarding gender roles, their individuality was expressed within the boundaries of their culture.



How can individuality be expressed in more restrictive cultures?

"Borders don't define me"

Lobat Asadi's life experiences contributed to the realization that one's self and one's place are not defined by borders. While borders serve political purposes, these lines are overcome by culture and especially by history. Lobat's awareness of her cultural roots continue to inspire her as she continues her education.

Today, borders, both natural and man-made, define and control the space in which people

live. They are also defined by the government under which a society lives. Lobat's life experiences have helped her realize the importance of **acquiring** an understanding of the history of a place. By understanding the history of a place we



are able to understand the history of the people from that place. Her own family history, for example, sheds light on the fact that borders, when looked at historically and in present day, reveal that they are much more flexible than maps allow us to see.

How do borders affect your perception of place?

Through continued education and, as a future researcher and professor, Lobat Asadi hopes to point people to an understanding of the history of various world cultures. In this way, she believes people will come to a greater appreciation of the interconnectedness of all the world's civilizations.

