

Zohreh Rastegar is founder of Accent Productions, a non-profit Radio and Television organization and the producer and host of Accent weekly talk show in the Washington, DC metro area. Zoe has been an independent media personality in our community for more than a decade. Feeling the effects of the Iran/US conflicts and its backlash on the Iranian community she has been able to reflect Iranian-Americans quest for personal identity on many occasions and most recently at the annual International NATO and South East Europe seminar held by Atlantic Council of Croatia in Sipan. Living in the US for many years, Zoe recognizes very well that identity is an issue for many immigrants when they move from their mother country. Read my interview with Zoe, who truly speaks from the heart.

Milad Molavi: *How did you get invited to the Atlantic Council of Croatia annual Seminar?*

Zohreh Rastegar: Some Croatian intellectuals are familiar with my television talk show and the mission of the Accent program. They have been the liaison with the Atlantic Council of Croatia to extend the invitation for my participation in this program.

MM: *What was the topic and point of your speech?*

ZR: The title of my speech was "Iran/ US conflicts and its backlash on the Iranian community: Iranians quest for their Identity." I tried to discuss this issue on different levels. First, identity is an issue for all immigrants. The constant self-searching of where we belong trying to adapt and to reconcile the two cultures. The constant question of who we are and how can we tame our opinions, affections, resentments and contradictions regarding the two cultures. How can we belong to both cultures and contribute to both cultures in a positive and productive way and to be successful as an immigrant.

Then, there is another level of our identity. The Iranian identity when it comes to our national pride versus Islam, the religion of majority. Iranians resent to be confused with the Arab nations and to be identified as Middle Eastern with no recognition and respect for their Iranian culture. This leads to another level of frustration for Iranians.

The third level of identity crisis has come after the revolution of 1978 and especially in the recent years and months as the conflict between US and Iran has escalated. The question of "where are you from?" has become a problem for many Iranians who are trying to hide behind the word, "Persia", and just discard the name "Iran" because of its association with the revolution and the post events in the region. In a way we are struggling for a better image while constantly trying to justify our place in the history and in the world.

These were the issues that I tried to expand and the audience was quite receptive and interested learning about the Iranian psyche and how the present environment is affecting our perception and behavior.



MM: *Is there any publication about this seminar?*

ZR: Yes. The Atlantic Council of Croatia publishes a Year Book following each annual seminar. All the speakers have the choice to send their paper to be published under their name.

MM: *Are you planning to participate in this seminar again?*

ZR: I am invited by the president of the Atlantic Council of Croatia to join them again. Hope I can make it. We will see.

MM: *You have been an independent media personality in your community for more than a decade. How these events affect your work and you as an Iranian living in this country for many years?*

ZR: Obviously, as Iranians, these events and conflicts affect all of us in many ways. Personally, I am grateful to have a forum such as my talk show, Accent, to contribute to my culture and to my homeland by having a voice in the Iranian-American community.

Hope that such seminars and discussions on programs like Accent expedite the public awareness about Iran and true Iranians. I feel proud to be part of this educational process.

MM: *What are your goals and dreams regarding Accent program?*

ZR: I like to be able to have a national media voice to promote Iranian heritage, to

provide a forum for our younger generations to be promoted for their contributions to this society as well as educating them about their rich and magnificent history. We are the only ones responsible for earning our international respect and the first step is to know who we really are?

MM: *How people can learn more about Accent and its role in the community?*

ZR: They can visit www.accentproductions.org.

MM: *Thank you for sharing your thoughts and your experience with us.*

ZR: Thank you for your interest and your time.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Milad Molavi currently lives in Tehran. He writes articles and also conducts interviews for PersianMirror in the cultural field. His mission in this world is to have a positive effect on society and to make difference in the world. His welcoming attitude and hard work have a great effect on whatever he puts his mind to, as he is an expert in many areas.

This article was contributed by **MILAD MOLAVI**, *Senior Contributor* for PersianMirror.



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